Left: Menokin, the Richmond County seat of Francis Lightfoot Lee and Rebecca Tayloe Lee, exhibited structural damage in the early twentieth century. Below: Verville was built between 1745 and 1750 by James Gordon of Lancaster County. By the time this photograph was taken, the Currie family had owned the house for several generations. Acting on a concern to record and appreciate colonial houses and their history, someone painstakingly scratched the identity of the house and a bit of local lore into the emulsion on this late nineteenth-century glass plate negative.

_Virginia Historical Society_

_Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Ammon G. Dunton, Jr._
Among the tangible remnants of America's colonial past, none have received more sustained and passionate attention than the houses of early Virginia. Although the architecture—domestic and otherwise—of all the former British colonies enjoyed a flush of attention at the turn of this century, only in Virginia has this foundation of colonial revival discovery, description, and adulation matured into an unfaltering stream of engaging and—at their best—original studies that now, at century's end, rolls lustily along.1

The reasons behind the distinctive richness of scholarship concerning colonial Virginia's domestic architecture are numerous and complex. Certainly the Old Dominion's venerable and steadfast reverence for its English origins and upper-class, genteel traditions has played a crucial role.2 Also key was the emergence of the Colonial Williamsburg restoration between 1926 and 1935. Committed from its beginning to the close scrutiny and detailed recording of early buildings, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation has for decades employed and supported the work of many talented architectural scholars.3 Earlier in occurrence but more gradual in

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influence was Fiske Kimball's appointment in 1919 as head of the University of Virginia's new McIntire School of Fine Arts. A restoration architect whose status as an authority on American colonial architecture was secure and growing, Kimball founded the university's school of architecture and became the first official architect of the university. 4 Though his tenure in Charlottesville was brief, Kimball while he was there attached to the study of early American buildings, both for their historical significance and as sources of new design, a prestige that has matured across the century and through many institutional changes. 5

Of course, not all of the buildings that survive from Virginia's colonial past are dwellings; early agricultural, industrial, and especially public structures figure prominently in the modern landscape and represent important topics of study. Yet none of these building types have superceded domestic architecture as a matter of investigation and analysis. The reasons behind this enduring trend range from the century-long popularity of colonial houses as inspiration for new domestic building campaigns to the increasingly perceptible insight that in terms of colonial Virginians' aesthetic concerns, economic imperatives, and social resonance, the dwelling was the most important building type of its era. 6 To this day, the study of colonial Virginia's domestic architecture remains lively and absorbing, as full of promise for the future as it has been fruitful in the past. Thus, to consider the ways in which serious observers have studied and explained the colonial Virginia house is to trace by example the rise of American architectural history, the evolution of scholarly attention to colonial Virginia history, and the emergence of material culture studies as part of new multidisciplinary attempts to understand the past.

The journey begins during the first decades of this century, with writers who drew their purpose from that colonial revival impulse to idealize early America and to find in its architectural remains proof of English-bred sophistication and virtue. Among the earliest publications was Edith Tunis Sale's 1909 book, Manors of Virginia in Colonial Times. In this lavish illustrated text, Sale invoked coats of arms, with their implications of

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established nobility, as well as such terms as "manor" and "domain," with their connotations of expansive hereditary estates, to establish the quality of those individuals who were variously connected to Virginia's finest houses.7 Of still more lasting importance was Sale's drawing into the scope of "colonial times" dwellings that were erected well into the antebellum period but that appear similar in form, material, and details to those built before the colonies broke with England.8 This inclusive, rather than historically precise, approach to early Virginia houses reigns in general parlance and popular architectural histories to this day.

With Interiors of Virginia Houses of Colonial Times, her second book on the topic, Sale made more crucial and enduring points. One was that eighteenth-century Virginians and the twentieth-century Americans who were moved to read about them were very much alike. Moreover, Virginia's colonial houses were admirable prototypes for modern home builders. She supported these themes by writing for each house a detailed but accessibly brief narrative in which "histories and legends" carried equal weight. She also encouraged readers to "give fancy free rein to race back to the days" when the houses were new and life was gracious.9 Plans as well as photographs of individual houses furthered her aim of fostering emulation and adaptation, but these drawings were not measured or fully accurate in proportion, and many substituted modern room names for those a Virginia colonist would have recognized (Figures 1 and 2). In these ways, Sale tacitly collapsed the distance imposed by the two hundred intervening years and rendered colonial Virginia houses at once worthy of veneration and susceptible to instant recognition by any of her taste-conscious contemporaries.

Interiors of Virginia Houses made another lasting contribution to the study of colonial Virginia domestic architecture by devoting new attention to dates of origin. In this exercise Sale introduced the soon-popular notion that the construction dates of surviving colonial Virginia houses are evenly distributed among every decade from about 1620 until the 1780s. With more hearsay than accurate research on which to rely, Sale and her informants chose dates according to an evolutionary sense of how things work: small, plain houses seemed more primitive, so they must be older than large, complex ones.

In 1915 Robert A. Lancaster, Jr., published the culmination of more than three decades of private travel and study in his informal but prodigious

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7 Edith Tunis Sale, Manors of Virginia in Colonial Times (Philadelphia, 1909). England's manorial system, with its hereditary allocations of land based on a feudal system of hierarchical obligations between men of greater and lesser degree, was not transferred to colonial Virginia. See "Notes and Queries: Manors," VMHB 32 (1924): 188–90.
8 Among the post-1800 houses Sale included in Manors of Virginia are Estouteville, Berry Hill, Oatlands, and Sherwood Forest.
9 Edith Tunis Sale, Interiors of Virginia Houses of Colonial Times . . . (Richmond, 1927), pp. x, 176.
Figure 1. Edith Tunis Sale published this plan of Chelsea in King William County in *Interiors of Virginia Houses of Colonial Times*. Because the plan’s delineator relied largely on casual impressions and sketches, the proportions of the house are strikingly misrepresented. The author also assigned to Chelsea room names according to early twentieth-century functions she encountered while collecting material for her book. Both characteristics of this plan articulate Sale’s emphasis on the appealing impressions rather than the precise elements of colonial Virginia houses.

*Historic Virginia Homes and Churches*. A founder and longtime supporter of the Association for the Preservation of Virginia Antiquities, as well as corresponding secretary and librarian of the Virginia Historical Society, Lancaster invested his topic with an agreeable sense of place by sorting his buildings according to region. He also saw no need for Sale’s overt campaigning—Lancaster took for granted that readers understood the superiority of early Virginia’s architecture. Otherwise, *Historic Virginia Homes and Churches* reinforced Sale’s practice of determining architectural significance through association with wealthy old families and accomplished

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Figure 2. Chelsea in King William County was built by the Moore family in two campaigns. It originated as a two-story dwelling with two rooms separated by a central passage and was subsequently enlarged by the rear gambrel-roofed wing. The entire house was standing by 1770, when Bernard Moore advertised it for sale in the Virginia Gazette. This early twentieth-century photograph helps to clarify the actual ground dimensions and proportions of the house.

individuals. As Sale had done, Lancaster also maintained a cavalier attitude toward historical verity, and he waved away the centuries of change that separated his generation from the era he admired. Arguing that he had been doing fieldwork within the buildings’ “psychological time” of origin, Lancaster freely enriched his text with anecdotes of the “old days” that were as colorful as they were impossible to substantiate.

Since the time of Sale and Lancaster, not a decade has passed without the appearance of at least one, and usually numerous, publications that perpetuate their themes, assumptions, and methods. Today, this appreciative style of writing about colonial Virginia’s domestic architecture is still

12 Lindgren, Preserving the Old Dominion, pp. 118, 231, 253.
13 Lancaster, Historic Virginia Homes and Churches, p. v.
thriving in such books as Anne M. Faulconer's *Virginia House: A Home for Three Hundred Years*, Henry Wiencek's *Mansions of the Virginia Gentry*, and David King Gleason's *Virginia Plantation Homes*, not to mention scores of celebratory volumes framed around specific regions and localities as well as individual houses. There are also the periodical equivalents: enthusiastic, admiring essays that appear in such magazines as *Colonial Homes, Southern Accents*, and *Southern Living*.

In terms of establishing significance, these publications keep remarkably faithful to conventions established by *Sale*, *Lancaster*, and their near contemporaries, but they differ in two notable respects. The first is in the location of their publishers: the appreciation of colonial Virginia houses has gained a seemingly insatiable national audience. The second is in their emphasis, because technology in photography and photographic reproduction has made this possible, on large-format, deep-focused, and color-saturated images. In some respects, the texts of these volumes have been transformed into unintrusive enframement for the pictures with which they share glossy pages. Furthermore, the subjects of these images—one or two impressive shots of the exterior followed by an array of interior views—have a way of transforming each house into a loose assemblage of architecturally enriched spaces full of elegant furnishings. In many such publications, the furnishings even usurp center stage. This style of presentation encourages readers to perceive colonial Virginia houses as visual checklists of superior elements, the likes of which they may selectively copy or acquire. In effect, the structures themselves, each with its particular spatial contours and unique history, are robbed of cohesion and integrity. Perceptive readers can see past this fragmentation and commercialization, but for others, the gap between observing for consumption and observing for comprehension is sadly collapsed.

Colonial Virginia's domestic architecture first received attention of a scholarly character in Fiske Kimball's monumental *Thomas Jefferson, Architect*. Published in 1916, this book evolved from Kimball's painstaking examination and organization of Jefferson's architectural drawings. This formidable task resulted in a descriptive and illustrated catalog that occupies about two-thirds of the entire volume (Figure 3). Kimball's preceding synthetic essays attempted first to clarify the number and sequence of Jefferson's design projects and then to rescue Jefferson from

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14 Anne M. Faulconer, *The Virginia House: A Home for Three Hundred Years* (Exton, Pa., 1984); Henry Wiencek, *Mansions of the Virginia Gentry* (1985; Birmingham, Ala., 1988); David King Gleason, *Virginia Plantation Homes* (Baton Rouge and London, 1989). Faulconer was particularly blatant in encouraging readers to think of imitating or adapting the houses she illustrated. Gleason's book is mostly about the photogenic potential of early Virginia houses, but he did revise inaccurate dates of construction to accord with the latest scholarly findings.

the widespread belief that he was a dabbling amateur overlooking the shoulder of more learned practitioners. Kimball succeeded in establishing the primacy of Jefferson’s role and his achievement in the designs of Monticello, the Virginia state capitol, the University of Virginia, and many other projects besides. In an argument paralleling scholarly perceptions of Jefferson’s importance as a political leader, Kimball depicted him as both an authority on American architecture as it existed in his own time and a bold revolutionary who changed its course forever. Jefferson accomplished this task, Kimball explained, by promoting important European architectural texts that explicated the rules from which a builder might derive proper classical compositions. Jefferson himself demonstrated the efficacy of this approach, first as a thoughtful adaptor and gradually as a more original and authoritative designer in the revived classical tradition.16

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16 Fiske Kimball, "Thomas Jefferson, Architect" (Boston, 1916), pp. 13–89. Among the numerous European architectural treatises Jefferson admired and consulted, the most important was Andrea Palladio’s *Four Books of Architecture*, published in 1570. A brief and accessible discussion of ancient Greek and Roman architecture, the fifteenth-century revival of its popularity, and its subsequent
Before Jefferson, Kimball wrote, American architecture was severely confined by "utilitarian considerations" that resulted in "simple forms[,] . . . accidental growth[,] . . . [and] a primitiveness of analysis."¹⁷ Jefferson changed all this by a heroic act of self-transformation into the first American architect. The tone of this narrative is recognizably biblical, for Kimball was in an important sense creating a genesis tale. Like most of his early twentieth-century colleagues, Kimball was vitally concerned with the process of transforming the American practice of architecture into an official, legally defined profession. Drawing on his formidable energy and talent as a scholar, Kimball identified Jefferson as the most exalted of architect-ancestors, the founding father of those twentieth-century practitioners who deserved the protection and status of professional regulation.¹⁸

Kimball was in Virginia when the state legislature voted in 1920 to limit the designation "architect" to individuals who met peer-determined standards of training and experience.¹⁹ Nearly coinciding with this event was his founding of the University of Virginia's school of architecture and the publication of his second book. In Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and of the Early Republic, Kimball broadened and deepened his quest for the origins of his profession and simultaneously asserted for architects the unique insight and authority necessary to explain historical architecture.²⁰ To do this, Kimball softened the exceptional-man approach of his earlier book and acknowledged the existence of significant architecture in the American colonies before Jefferson swept through. The Virginia houses Kimball discussed in Domestic Architecture included structures familiar to Virginia architectural enthusiasts, but he treated them in a new way. For Kimball, these buildings were best understood as aesthetic achievements—or near misses. Praising many for their "general symmetry[,] . . . application of the classical orders," and emphasis on "considerations . . . of pure form," Kimball also assessed some as clumsy and


¹⁹ Brownell, Loth, Rasmussen, and Wilson, Making of Virginia Architecture, pp. 90–92.

²⁰ Fiske Kimball, Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and of the Early Republic (New York, 1922). When he staked out architectural history as a subject best addressed by architects, Kimball also tacitly proposed that any well-trained architect could conduct an accurate restoration of a historic building. This notion fostered the restoration careers of many twentieth-century architects and contributed to Kimball's own success in attracting important restoration projects such as those at Stratford and Gunston Hall.
Because he regarded his houses as entirely self-contained works of art, Kimball ignored most regional variations and matters of historical context. Instead, he grouped his subjects according to approximate dates of origin and similarities of form, then compared them to determine their relative aesthetic value. In this way, Kimball helped to shape the course of American architectural history—including the study of colonial Virginia houses—along the contours of art history, a discipline that already emphasized identification, classification, and evaluative comparison of works executed in identifiable and discrete styles.

In *Domestic Architecture*, Kimball’s major goal was to explain the origins of sophisticated design in early America. He referred to this sort of architecture as “academic,” by which he meant that it was the product of individuals educated in the most respected architectural theories and techniques of design. His text assumed that stylish trends in the American colonies were “reflections” of English fashions, but the matter of transmission across the Atlantic Ocean deserved scrutiny. Kimball acknowledged the documented or probable role of immigrating “patrons” and craftsmen, but he argued that most colonists learned about the principles and motifs of sophisticated design, just as provincial Englishmen did, “through the making of its forms universally accessible to intelligent workmen, or even laymen, by means of books.” Although English pattern books such as

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23 Kimball, *Domestic Architecture*, p. 58. In favoring the term “academic,” Kimball subtly promoted institutional training as crucial to the architectural profession, even though he knew that architectural competence in the eighteenth century was attained through apprenticeships or through exceptionally determined readings of published design treatises and pattern books.


25 Kimball, *Domestic Architecture*, pp. 55–56. Kimball’s use of the term “patron” was based on his conception of stylish and expensive colonial American buildings as works of art. Art historians had established this term for wealthy individuals who furnished sustained financial support in exchange for superior work completed by a promising or admired artist or architect. However vital this practice was in other times and places, no colonist in Virginia or elsewhere in North America indulged in “patronage.” Those elites who commissioned portraits or hired builders thought of themselves as on
Abraham Swan’s *British Architect* and Batty Langley’s *Treasury of Designs* certainly found their way into the hands of colonial gentlemen and artisans, the nature of their contribution, when house-planning day arrived, was not so obvious.26 Finding built copies of published house designs proved a challenge, and Kimball succeeded only in turning up close approximations of door enframements, decorated ceilings, and chimneypieces (Figure 4). This failure did not shake his conviction that Virginians and other colonial Americans were imitating learned English gentlemen when they built elegant houses, but he could not resolve the question of how the colonists learned what they knew.

Of all the historical architects who followed Fiske Kimball to Virginia, Thomas Tileston Waterman was by far the most influential. Waterman took his training, according to the time-honored apprenticeship system, in the office of Ralph Adams Cram, an architect with many entrenched beliefs, two of which were of particular importance in Waterman’s career.27 The first was that a proper architectural education must involve dedicated study of buildings with aesthetic qualities that have withstood the assessment of many generations. Thus, Waterman became adept at minutely detailed and carefully executed drawings of historic structures. Cram also persuaded Waterman that an architect who thoroughly immersed himself in the design sensibilities of a bygone age could literally “regenerate,” rather than simply mimic, the architectural forms and details of the day.28 This notion underpinned Waterman’s confident production of “colonial” designs for new buildings, his assertive restoration of early American structures in Virginia and elsewhere, and the liberties he took in making historically “corrected” drawings of colonial houses that had been subsequently altered or destroyed.

Waterman first brought his training and experience to bear on the study of colonial Virginia houses in a book he executed with his friend and colleague John A. Barrows. *Domestic Colonial Architecture of Tidewater Virginia* was distinguished both by the authors’ devotion to fieldwork among
Figure 4. This design for a decoratively plastered ceiling appeared in Batty Langley’s *City and Country Builder’s and Workman’s Treasury of Designs* . . . (London, 1750) as plate CLXX. In the process of attempting to connect the sophistication of some early American houses to specific English influences, Fiske Kimball identified this as the source for the parlor ceiling at Kenmore in Fredericksburg and the dining room ceiling at Mount Vernon in Fairfax County.
Figure 5. Charles Carter completed Cleve, his King George County seat, about 1747, a few years after he married Anne Byrd of Westover. He chose for his builder William Walker, who subsequently agreed to build the new capitol in Williamsburg. Always noted for its bold stone quoins, Cleve lost many of its original elements, including its steep hipped roof, to a fire about 1800. When Thomas Tileston Waterman and John A. Barrows saw the house, it had burned a second time—and to the point of devastation.

colonial Virginia's largest and most expensively finished surviving houses and by their passion for scrupulously measuring and drawing what they saw.29 In this way Domestic Colonial Architecture introduced and explored the notion that early Virginia houses embody a timeless magnificence worthy of close and correct visual representation. They also tacitly promoted the understanding that this colonial architectural heritage was fragile and likely to diminish. Though their emphasis was, like Kimball’s, on the inherent qualities of the buildings themselves, Waterman and Barrows also embraced the historical importance of their subjects through individual

29 Thomas Tileston Waterman and John A. Barrows, Domestic Colonial Architecture of Tidewater Virginia (New York, 1932). Barrows and Waterman both were working at Colonial Williamsburg when they struck up their friendship. Barrows's contribution to their jointly written book was certainly significant, but Waterman was the older and more experienced of the two. Moreover, Barrows did not live to see the publication of Domestic Colonial Architecture; he died suddenly in 1931. His brief life and career is outlined in Edward A. Chappell, John A. Barrows and the Rediscovery of Early Virginia Architecture (Williamsburg, Va., 1991), a catalog of an exhibit at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation Library of Barrows's photographs and drawings.
Figure 6. Thomas Tileston Waterman and John A. Barrows’s measured drawing of Cleve rendered conjectural elements with authority and precision. The original hipped roof with a decorative flair at the eaves and the fine modillioned cornice are among the elements that Waterman and Barrows felt qualified to restore to the house, although these do not survive in any nineteenth-century photograph. The two young architects based their confident conjectures on their design educations and their close study of colonial Virginia architecture.

house narratives that represented real attempts to extract truth from tradition.\textsuperscript{30} Finally, \textit{Domestic Colonial Architecture} introduced to the study of early Virginia houses the “restored” architectural drawing, in which properly informed delineators might remove later accretions or replace

missing elements with plausibly designed versions of their own (Figures 5 and 6).

Waterman’s subsequent writings on Virginia domestic architecture revived Fiske Kimball’s attempt to trace the origins of architectural sophistication in colonial Virginia. In his 1939 essay “English Antecedents of Virginia Architecture,” Waterman introduced a series of connections between English and Virginia houses that were much more specific than any Kimball had proposed. Waterman argued that Rosewell in Gloucester County, Christ Church in Lancaster County, and several houses built by members of the Carter family closely resembled some contemporary structures in the west of England. Precisely how this “Shropshire School” of houses and public buildings came to be erected in Tidewater Virginia Waterman was unprepared to explain. One potential connection was John Prince, who apparently designed Cound, a Shropshire mansion with distinct similarities, in plan and elevation, to Rosewell (Figures 7 and 8). Waterman
Figure 8. Rosewell in Gloucester County was begun in 1726, shortly after the marriage of Mann Page to Judith Carter of Corotoman. One of colonial Virginia’s most ambitiously scaled and embellished houses, Rosewell was still not ready for habitation when Mann Page died in 1730. Impressed by the sophistication of the house, Waterman attempted to develop an English pedigree for its design by proposing connections of ownership and authorship with Cound in rural England. This photograph was taken shortly before Rosewell burned in 1916.

speculated that Prince immigrated or dispatched architectural drawings to Virginia. In any case, he wrote, eighteenth-century public documents in Shropshire and nearby Herefordshire contained instances of prominent Virginia surnames such as Byrd, Carter, Hill, Lee, and Page. Although he could not force these facts into a plausible narrative, Waterman regarded the “multiple relationships” as sufficient to “indicate that architectural similarities are to be expected.” Though its conclusion inspires little confidence, “English Antecedents” is significant as the first attempt to consult written records in order to explain something new about historic Virginia architecture.

In 1945 Waterman published his most important work. The Mansions of Virginia quickly became—and has long remained—the most influential

32 Ibid., p. 59.
Figure 9. “A design for a gentleman in Dorsetshire” appeared as plate LVIII in James Gibbs’s Book of Architecture, published in London in 1728. Thomas Tileston Waterman, like Fiske Kimball, was preoccupied with the matter of aesthetic origins of colonial Virginia’s fashionable houses. Poring over eighteenth-century pattern books in an attempt to locate the precise means by which English domestic architecture affected that in colonial Virginia, Waterman correctly identified this image as the source for the design of Mount Airy in Richmond County.

treatment of domestic architecture in colonial Virginia.33 No scholar has since attempted such a comprehensive and detailed discussion of Virginia’s colonial houses. Although Mansions of Virginia incorporated two distinguishing characteristics of Waterman’s earlier work—restoration drawings and frequent resort to documentary sources—the book’s defining aspect was a persistent effort to ascertain the design origins of the “pretentious house” in colonial Virginia. Waterman rejected Kimball’s belief that such “mansions were designed by their owners with the aid of design books.”34 He concluded instead that the best houses in Virginia owed their sophistication to skilled English-trained builders or “architects.” Waterman did not guess that this term suffered from broad and irregular application in eighteenth-century England and America, so he felt confident in casting Mansions of Virginia as another contribution to the genealogy of the American architect.

Despite his conviction, the identity of designers at work in colonial Virginia proved hard to come by, and Waterman had no choice but to pepper his discussions with references to the precise plates in eighteenth-

33 Thomas Tileston Waterman, The Mansions of Virginia, 1706–1776 (Chapel Hill, 1945). In his exhaustive review essay, Dell Upton identified Mansions of Virginia as still crucial to the field of architectural history as it is practiced in the Old Dominion (Dell Upton, “New Views of the Virginia Landscape,” VMHB 96 [1988]: 403–16).

34 Waterman, Mansions of Virginia, pp. 27 (first quotation), 29 (second quotation). Among other contributions to the character of Virginia architectural history, Waterman established “mansion” as the proper term for large, expensive, and fashionable houses. During the time when his subject houses were built, however, the term referred to a dwelling of any size or character that was inhabited by the owner of the land on which it stood (Wells, “The Well Appointed House”).
Figure 10. Mount Airy was built by John Tayloe II between 1760 and 1764 to crown his vast landholdings and business interests. Tayloe hired William Waite to execute the stonework and William Buckland to oversee the interior joinery. He may have selected plate LVIII in James Gibbs’s Book of Architecture as the source for his design as early as 1754, when a friend commended him on his “daring scheme for a mansion house.” Mount Airy is the only surviving colonial Virginia house to manifest a clear compositional debt to an English pattern book.

century English pattern books from which Virginia builders shaped and embellished specific houses. He successfully attributed the famous south doorway at Westover in Charles City County to plate XXVI in William Salmon’s Palladio Londinensis, he connected the plan and elevation of Brandon in Prince George County to plate III in Robert Morris’s Select Architecture, and he traced the facade of Mount Airy in Richmond County to plate LVIII in James Gibbs’s Book of Architecture (Figures 9 and 10).35

Waterman also strove to develop apparent similarities between eighteenth-century houses in England and Virginia into firm relationships forged by some unidentified Virginia builder with an English background. He reasserted the strong artistic relationship between Rosewell in Gloucester County and Cound in Shropshire, and he paired the Governor’s Palace in Williamsburg with Ashburnham House in London. In some cases, Waterman enhanced the visual affinities he perceived through drawings in which he “restored” to certain Virginia houses architectural features that may never have existed. His perspective drawing of the Carlyle house in Alexandria included conjectural design features that increased its similarity to Craigiehall, the Scottish country house that Waterman identified as its aesthetic progenitor (Figures 11 and 12).  

In his preoccupation with design origins of Virginia’s colonial domestic architecture, Waterman never abandoned the effort to identify talented personalities behind individual designs. Struggling with but slender proof, Waterman attributed many Virginia mansions to builders known to have been active in the colony. In this enterprise, he was emboldened by the case of William Buckland, the English joiner and carver whose indentured service to George Mason of Fairfax County was already well documented in 1945. Buckland’s designs for the interior of Mason’s Gunston Hall were among the most elegant in Virginia, and when his work there was completed, he attained greater success, first in the Northen Neck of Virginia, and then in Annapolis, where he met an untimely death in 1774. One of Waterman’s beneficiaries was Richard Taliaferro, a Williamsburg resident who may have been the man characterized by a contemporary as “our most skillful architect.” For Taliaferro, Waterman postulated training in England and involvement, based on “certain stylistic mannerisms and

36 Waterman, Mansions of Virginia, pp. 31–32, 106–9, 248. Waterman’s attempt to connect the design of the Carlyle house with Craigiehall was among his more futile exercises. The pattern book in which Craigiehall appeared was not published until 1811. The Carlyle house is dated to 1752 (William Adam, Vitruvius Scoticus . . . [Edinburgh, 1811]; Howard Colvin, A Biographical Dictionary of British Architects, 1600–1840 [London, 1978], pp. 56–59; James D. Munson, Col. John Carlyle, Gent.: A True and Just Account of the Man and His House, 1720–1780 [Alexandria, Va., 1986]).

37 Certainly Waterman devoted extensive and respectful attention to Jefferson and Monticello, but he clearly felt drawn to colonial Virginia builders who, like himself, made their living with their craft. See Waterman, Mansions of Virginia, pp. 387–98.

38 Architects’ Emergency Committee, Great Georgian Houses, 1:11–16.

39 Waterman, Mansions of Virginia, pp. 223–24; Kaynor, “Waterman,” pp. 103–47. Buckland’s story probably appealed to Waterman, for he had likewise achieved professional status through an apprenticeship and a sequence of increasingly prestigious opportunities. This similarity explains the almost urgent tone of Waterman’s discussions of Richard Taliaferro and John Arris: he was making his own experience a relevant component of the American architect’s genesis tale.

40 Waterman, Mansions of Virginia, p. 107. The phrase “our most skillful architect” appears in a letter written by Thomas Lee in 1749 concerning proposed alterations to the Governor’s Palace. Although Taliaferro was not named in the letter, he was involved with the addition of the palace ballroom and supper room. This association explains the assumed connection between the builder and the compliment. See Marcus Whifflen, The Public Buildings of Williamsburg: Colonial Capital of Virginia (Williamsburg, Va., 1958), pp. 141–42.
Figure 11. Thomas Tileston Waterman selected Craigiehall in Midlothian, Scotland, as the prototype of the house John Carlyle, a Scots merchant, built in Alexandria in 1752. Although Carlyle probably knew of Caledonian country houses such as Craigiehall, he did not know this image, first published in 1811 in William Adam's *Vitruvius Scoticus*. Craigiehall as built in 1725 also looked significantly different from this idealized depiction. Thus, the most plausible connection between the two houses is one of common origins in a regional design tradition.

Figure 12. This perspective drawing of John Carlyle's house in Alexandria was rendered by Thomas Tileston Waterman. Convinced that the immigrant Carlyle based his house design on a published depiction of the Scots house Craigiehall, Waterman "restored" to the Carlyle house many features, including a double hipped roof, a central pediment, and curving hyphens to conjecturally designed offices, that tended to enhance its similarity to Craigiehall. No evidence survives of any of these architectural components.
derivation,” with the design and construction of fifteen astonishingly diverse Virginia mansions.41

In 1751 John Ariss placed an advertisement in the *Maryland Gazette* announcing his arrival from Great Britain, his design of the house at Bushfield in Westmoreland County, and his eagerness to undertake “Buildings of all Sorts and Dimensions . . . in the neatest Manner, (and at cheaper rates) either of the Ancient or Modern Order of Gibbs’ Architect.”42 From the important but limited evidence in this newspaper notice, Waterman supposed an illustrious career for Ariss that included, after Bushfield, the design and construction of thirteen other Virginia mansions.43 Waterman linked each of these structures to Ariss almost entirely on the basis of perceived affinities in form and details, and he closed this largely speculative account with the astonishing statement that Ariss was the “most important figure in the history of American Georgian architecture.”44

In *Mansions of Virginia*, Waterman emphasized Virginia’s eighteenth-century “era of great houses,” but his term of service with Colonial Williamsburg had taught him that eighteenth-century Virginia houses might also be relatively small and irregular in form.45 For him, the size and symmetry of colonial Virginia houses were matters of wealth and social hierarchy rather than of evolving sophistication. Waterman had a contemporary, however, who doggedly promoted an evolutionary explanation: that small and plain Virginia houses invariably predate large and complex ones.

Henry Chandlee Forman served for a time as chief architect for the National Park Service and in that capacity worked on a number of important Chesapeake dwelling sites. In the 1930s Forman began to write copiously about the colonial architecture of Maryland and, to a lesser extent, of Virginia. Like Waterman, he performed his own fieldwork and made numerous sketches of the structures that interested him. Unlike

41 Waterman, *Mansions of Virginia*, pp. 103, 107, 222.
42 Maryland Gazette, 22 May 1751, as quoted in Waterman, *Mansions of Virginia*, p. 244. “Gibbs’ Architect” is a reference to a pattern book by English designer James Gibbs, although it is unclear whether Ariss meant Gibbs’s *Book of Architecture* or his *Rules for Drawing . . .* (London, 1732).
43 Waterman’s attribution of fifteen houses to Taliaferro and fourteen to Ariss was based on his twentieth-century experience with the mechanized manufacture of architectural materials and modern techniques available to speed building campaigns. More recent research has shown that a colonial structure of any size or elaboration required between four and six years to complete. Many colonial Virginia houses were in the making for close to a decade. Even allowing for projects that overlapped, the completion of fourteen or fifteen major buildings using preindustrial building techniques would have required a career that spanned between fifty-six and a hundred years.
44 Waterman, *Mansions of Virginia*, pp. 243–48 (quotation on p. 243). At least since the beginning of the century, the term “Georgian” has been recognized as the appropriate designation for fashionable eighteenth-century Virginia architecture. It derives not from any substantial source of inspiration for architectural design but rather from the names of the three British kings whose reigns nearly embraced the eighteenth century. For this reason, many scholars of early American architecture now resort to designations that more substantially indicate the origins of this architectural tradition, but none is so succinct or so widely recognized.
Waterman, whose drafting style was crisp and clinical, Forman favored freehand representations in a quaint style that articulated his emotional involvement with the houses he examined (Figure 13). So confident was he of a chronological relationship between small and large houses that he even published a diagram of advancing house size and formality that suggested an all-but-biological explanation for gradual improvement (Figure 14). In Forman's mind, this sequential increase in house size neatly paralleled a change in architectural details from those that seemed innocent of revived European classical precedence toward those that conformed rigorously to classical proportions and compositions. The former he explained as "medieval," even though the Middle Ages had ended in England more than a century and a quarter before the founding of Jamestown. This medieval designation freed Forman from the chore of identifying streams of influence, for the prevailing conviction was that builders of the Middle Ages fashioned structures from a combination of orally transmitted skill and an inherent feel for the integrity of their materials.

Forman continued to publish well into the 1970s, and although he eventually adopted a more rectilinear drawing style, he never questioned or altered his original perceptions. This tenacity had the benefit of keeping current the notion that Virginia in the 1600s was as architecturally rich as it was in the following century, but Forman also entrenched the erroneous belief that relatively small Virginia houses all date from the seventeenth century and represent an anachronistic "medieval" phase in colonial architecture.

In 1960 Marcus Whiffen attempted to modify and balance the assertions made influential by Kimball, Waterman, and Forman with his astringent

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46 The books by Henry Chandlee Forman that discuss Virginia architecture include *Jamestown and St. Mary's: Buried Cities of Romance* (Baltimore, 1938); *The Architecture of the Old South: The Medieval Style, 1585–1850* (Cambridge, Mass., 1948); *Virginia Architecture in the Seventeenth Century, Jamestown 350th Anniversary Historical Booklets, 11* (Williamsburg, Va., 1957); and *The Virginia Eastern Shore and Its British Origins: History, Gardens, and Antiquities* (Easton, Md., 1975). This last book contains measured drawings that revived the now discredited practice of including conjectural restoration and modern room designations. Forman's drawing style was derived from the modes of representation made popular by the arts and crafts movement, a late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century design tradition that romanticized the handcraftsmanship and honest, untutored forms prevalent in medieval and postmedieval England. A good introduction to this movement is Wendy Kaplan, ed., "The Art that is Life": *The Arts and Crafts Movement in America, 1875–1920* (Boston, 1987).


48 Forman, *Virginia Architecture in the Seventeenth Century*, p. 23. European historians would denounce the notion that any "medieval" form or practice could persist into the seventeenth century, but Forman was hardly alone in using the designation for any architectural form or detail that looked archaic, outlandish, and unaffected by Renaissance interest in the architecture of classical Greece and Rome. Fiske Kimball, among others, invoked the term as well (Kimball, *Domestic Architecture*, p. 14).
Figure 13. Henry Chandlee Forman’s drawing of Pear Valley romanticizes the structure in Northampton County. Forman’s virtue was his commitment to recording the small, plain dwellings of the colonial Chesapeake, but he was convinced that such houses as Pear Valley survived from an actual “medieval” phase of design in colonial Virginia and Maryland. This conclusion assumed that seventeenth-century colonists were both able and motivated to recall and duplicate fifteenth-century English housing. 

synthesis of what the architects of the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation had collectively surmised. In The Eighteenth-Century Houses of Williamsburg, Whiffen first dignified smaller Virginia houses—many characterized by asymmetrical compositions and wood-framed construction—with precisely measured plans and elevations of the sort that his predecessors had reserved for more imposing structures (Figure 15). He also complemented
From H. Chandlee Forman, Maryland Architecture: A Short History from 1634 through the Civil War (Cambridge, Md., 1968)

**Figure 14.** This tree diagram by Henry Chandlee Forman shows his understanding of the advancing size and complexity of colonial Chesapeake houses. An abiding interest in one- and two-room houses emerged from Forman’s belief that such unpretentious housing logically predated and gradually evolved into a more advanced species of domestic architecture. In reality, small and grand colonial houses always coexisted and stood as one indication of their owners’ wealth and aspirations.
Figure 15. Not only was Marcus Whiffen the first scholar to discuss at length the tools, materials, and building methods known to colonial Virginians, but he also was the first to publish professional measured drawings of relatively modest structures, such as the George Reid house in Williamsburg. Whiffen further advanced Virginia architectural history by presenting comparably detailed plans and elevations, a strategy that helped focus attention on the spatial aspects of colonial Virginia housing.
the drawings with historical narratives that challenged Forman by confirming the eighteenth-century origins of these dwellings. Although Whiffen acknowledged the "English ancestry" of Virginia houses, he also emphasized and explained, with lucidity and authority, the mitigating architectural influences of such matters as climate, laws, materials, and available craftsmanship.49 Thus, he introduced—though he did not explore—the social and economic realities of house building in colonial Virginia.

In addressing the matter of design origins, Whiffen rejected the assumed significance of any architectural publication floating about the eighteenth-century literary world and confined his treatment of English pattern books to those titles and editions advertised in Williamsburg's Virginia Gazette or present in at least one colonial Virginia library. Whiffen conceded that English architectural publications sometimes formed the basis for certain Virginia designs, but he pointed out that most functioned less directly and established only the general "standards and trends of taste."50 In this sense, he undermined the dictatorial status awarded to English precedents by Kimball and Waterman.

Whiffen nevertheless sustained and advanced the conviction of his predecessors that eighteenth-century Virginians approached the design of their houses as aesthetic problems—that they determined the appearance of their houses through principles and techniques widely understood on both sides of the Atlantic. Indeed, the most memorable section in Eighteenth-Century Houses of Williamsburg details the "geometrical method of proportioning," a system of design that purportedly derives a house plan or elevation from an orderly composition of squares, circles, or triangles with dimensions and proportions that repeat themselves and thus result in the recognizably classical form, scale, and symmetry of many prominent houses in the colonial capital (Figure 16).51


50 Ibid., pp. 56–59; Whiffen, Public Buildings of Williamsburg, pp. 80–82, 157–60. Among other problems, the matter of transmission is critical. Systems of design based on geometric shapes indeed were proposed by ancient and Renaissance architectural theorists, but almost none of this material sifted into English publications of the eighteenth century.
Figure 16. Like others before him, Marcus Whiffen worked hard to explain formal similarities among the houses of colonial Virginia and eighteenth-century England. Whiffen argued that these similarities devolved from a well-known system of overlaying and intersecting geometric figures with proportional lengths in order to determine the dimensions of and relationships between various components of the house design. This diagram shows an example of the way a scheme of geometric proportioning might affect the design of a colonial Virginia house.

Despite the efforts of Forman and Whiffen to dignify small colonial Virginia houses, many scholars of domestic architecture in Virginia still limit their attention to the “canon” of imposing and elaborate mansions that Sale celebrated, Kimball evaluated, and Waterman officially approved.\footnote{The contours of this “canon” receive frequent reconfirmation in such substantial but generally accessible surveys as Mills Lane, \textit{Architecture of the Old South: Virginia} (Savannah, Ga., 1987). Virginia’s architectural canon was first so designated by Dell Upton in “New Views of the Virginia Landscape,” p. 405.} Also largely undisturbed are the emphases on aesthetic quality, design origins, and paths of influence that engrossed Kimball, Waterman, and, to a lesser extent, Whiffen. In 1958 Rosamond Randall Beirne and John H. Scarff used Waterman’s attribution game to endow William Buckland with a career far richer in formidable building campaigns than his
short life could possibly have encompassed. Ironically, their enterprise included reassigning to Buckland some house designs Waterman had credited to Taliaferro or Ariss.53 Claude Lanciano made Waterman's esteem for Richard Taliaferro the basis of his book "Our Most Skillful Architect," a painfully stressed attempt to bridge documentary gaps in order to confirm and extend the contributions of a man whom Waterman praised as architecturally prolific.54

The discovery of colonial Virginia's architectural origins in European publications also persisted as an approved scholarly pastime. Notable for its uncritical and undifferentiated reliance on preceding scholarship was William M. S. Rasmussen's 1980 study of Sabine Hall in Richmond County. Following the lead of Kimball and Waterman, he posited pattern book origins for Sabine Hall's design without addressing the matter of timely availability.55 Rasmussen also suggested that the composition of the mansion's facade was based on Whiffen's geometric system, but nineteenth-century alterations to the rooftop rendered his calculations unconvincing.

Both Kimball and Waterman had made respectful gestures toward Andrea Palladio, still widely recognized as the most influential of all Renaissance Italian architects, but they saw his legacy to colonial American design as filtered almost entirely through eighteenth-century English interpretations. During the 1980s, however, Palladio's effect on colonial Virginia's domestic architecture enjoyed new emphasis, with the result that the colony's architectural debt to Europe migrated farther to the southeast and deeper into the past. Rasmussen figured in this scholarly removal of Virginia's architectural origins from England to Italy with his essay "Palladio in Tidewater Virginia: Mount Airy and Blandfield." Calder Loth contributed to the same enterprise in a companionate piece entitled "Palladio in Southside Virginia: Brandon and Battersea." The point of both essays was that what mattered about the Virginia houses in question was their faithfulness to the design principles proposed in Italy some two hundred years before they were erected.56 In the process of exploring the Palladian roots of colonial Virginia mansions, such scholars as Rasmussen

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54 Claude Lanciano, "Our Most Skillful Architect": Richard Taliaferro and Associated Colonial Virginia Constructions (Gloucester, Va., 1981).
and Loth accomplished what no study of Virginia's architectural debt to England had yet done. They highlighted the inevitable result of treating early American architecture as manifestations of distant design trends: the essential meaning of the American buildings was spirited away—resituated in another, and implicitly more aesthetically vital, location.

Palladio now enjoys confirmed status as the indirect author of much that is sophisticated in early Virginia house design, but this association has not diminished the popularity of attempts to connect Virginia houses with confirmable English precedents. In 1987 Gene Waddell elaborated on Kimball's and Waterman's observations about Thomas Jefferson's evolving scheme for Monticello with a connect-the-dots discussion of Jefferson's own drawings and illustrations copied from James Gibbs's *Book of Architecture.* A more inclusive treatment of this explanatory scheme is Daniel D. Reiff's 1989 book *Small Georgian Houses in England and Virginia.* Reiff's study is subtler than most in its attempt to avoid the stark old formula: eighteenth-century England as the architectural innovator and contemporary Virginia as the timid copyist. He also makes an admirable if unsuccessful attempt to identify social and economic origins for architectural results. For the most part, however, Reiff's work does not stray from the conventional issues of design origin and influence, and he perpetuates the old notion that visual similarities are reliable indicators of substantial historical bonds.57

The ensconced ways of thinking about and assigning importance to Virginia houses found their most recent support in *The Making of Virginia Architecture,* a magisterial exhibition catalog by four accomplished but conservative architectural historians. In the essays devoted to Virginia's colonial and early national periods, the authors balance their impulse to emphasize aesthetic issues with Whiffen-inspired attention to logistical matters, drafting conventions, and building practices. Because the catalog was shaped to augment a display of exceptional architectural drawings and models, however, it refreshes the custom of emphasizing large and expensive colonial houses and of establishing their importance through perceived associations with Old World precedents and systems of design.58

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58 Brownell, Loth, Rasmussen, and Wilson, *Making of Virginia Architecture.* The Virginia Museum of Fine Arts in Richmond sponsored this exhibit, which was open from 10 November 1992 through 3 January 1993. William Rasmussen and Charles Brownell are largely responsible for those sections of the catalog pertaining to the early architectural history of Virginia. Brownell wrote an essay devoted to the founding of the European classical tradition in America (ibid., pp. 34–81). Rasmussen's efforts to link Virginia house designs with European pattern books added nothing to the enterprise, but he established new credibility for geometric and mathematical systems of design through his attention to an eighteenth-century drawing—possibly for the elevation of Battersea in Dinwiddie County—with clear and deliberate instances of pricking, scoring, and compass arcs (ibid., pp. 139–40, 150–52, 198–99).
The popularity and authority of *The Making of Virginia Architecture*, both the exhibition and the book, suggest that the long-familiar ways of explaining colonial Virginia houses will probably enjoy respectful repetition and elaboration well into the twenty-first century. Little that is exhilarating to learn or challenging to consider is likely to come of this adherence. Still, these conventional lines of inquiry recently have generated a moderately innovative form of architectural narrative, one that employs the making of a house as a convenient and enlightening means of investigating the motives and actions of a famous individual. In 1988 Jack McLaughlin wrote the first of these serious "architectural biographies." His great man was Thomas Jefferson, and his accomplishment was a detailed account of Monticello's design and construction. This he used as the backbone for a discussion of Jefferson's domestic life and complex character, both matters that affected and were affected by his career as a political philosopher and revolutionary.59

In 1993 Robert F. Dalzell, Jr., published an essay comparing Jefferson's construction of Monticello with George Washington's building campaigns at Mount Vernon. His goal was to demonstrate how these two men, both driven to build and rebuild their dwellings, were using architecture to grapple with the problem of articulating personal independence in a new republican age. With his wife, Lee Baldwin Dalzell, as coauthor, Dalzell recently expanded his study of the Fairfax County estate into *George Washington's Mount Vernon: At Home in Revolutionary America*.60 Impressive in scope, this book is based on the increasingly creditable notion among early American historians that they might profitably explore the life and achievements of a public figure through the surviving remnants of his private world. Nevertheless, the Dalzells' belief in an instantly transparent correspondence between an individual and his house, their assumption that the narrative of a building's design and construction is worth writing only because it helps explain a person of established historical importance, and their general reliance on architectural histories written before 1960 result in a remarkably old-fashioned book.61

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61 As well-trained colonial historians, the Dalzells would never presume the existence of such literal correspondences between a historical figure and the documents with which he is associated, but where drawing connections between a historical figure and his house is concerned, the Dalzells suspend their scholarly sophistication. They are hardly alone; other accomplished historians have made the same mistake. See, for example, John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (New York and London, 1970), pp. 24–51; and Gloria L. Main, *Tobacco Colony: Life in Early Maryland, 1650–1720* (Princeton, 1982), pp. 140–66.
What is most admirable about the Dalzells’ architectural biography of Mount Vernon is its effort to connect an eighteenth-century Virginia house with a larger cycle of ideas about early America. In this attempt the authors are successful, though not entirely original. Since about 1970, an increasing number of scholars trained in a variety of disciplines have been fired by the conviction that close study of old buildings is a promising way to recover and explain the American past.62 The origins of this conviction are complex and interdisciplinary, but those at work in Virginia share with such early writers as Edith Tunis Sale and Fiske Kimball a belief that perceptive discussions of historic Virginia architecture can fundamentally shape both contemporary understandings of early Virginia’s past and contemporary ways of acting on this legacy.

A logical place to begin the chronicle of this fresh approach to the early Virginia house is with the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, which charged each state with certain responsibilities for the identification and preservation of its historic resources. There resulted a proliferation of state historic preservation offices, one of which was the Virginia Historic Landmarks Commission.63 In Virginia and elsewhere, these agencies generated an unprecedented need for staff to roam about the countryside and along city streets in an attempt to record or survey vast numbers of historic structures. Many of these surveyors had some education in architectural history; just as many did not. Most were so young—under thirty and often under twenty-five—that one commentator referred to them as members of a “Children’s Crusade.”64

Whether or not these surveyors enjoyed a background in architectural history, all quickly found the standard architectural texts—books such as those by Kimball and Waterman—powerless to explain the range of buildings they were charged with describing and researching. Most of what they saw was too small, too modestly detailed, and too historically obscure

62 In the days of Kimball and Waterman, the term “architectural historian” often was used interchangeably with the term “historical architect.” In the 1960s, “architectural historian” increasingly meant an individual whose qualifications to study historic buildings did not necessarily originate with training as an architect but rather devolved from advanced study in history or art history with an emphasis on architecture. By the 1970s, scholars for whom historic architecture represented a serious topic of analysis included those with backgrounds as diverse as folklore, American studies, social science, cultural geography, and anthropology. To the extent that all of these scholars have made buildings and landscapes central to their work, however, they rightfully can claim the designation “architectural historian.”


to fit within established architectural historical narratives or classifications. Surveyors determined to find intellectual guidance eventually discovered useful organizing devices and explanatory schemes in the works of cultural geographer Fred B. Kniffen, folklorist Henry Glassie, and archaeologist James Deetz. None of these works dealt in more than a glancing fashion with Virginia, or with many of the other regions where their lessons were put to use, but in their pages surveyors found validation for their attention to structures of local and regional note as well as models for classifying or explaining what they encountered.

It was to this audience of active and guidance-hungry architectural fieldworkers that Henry Glassie’s 1975 book *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia* spoke with greatest resonance. Glassie adopted traditional if excessively generalized distinctions between poor and wealthy Virginia colonists. From them he subtly drew comparable distinctions between “academic” and “vernacular” Virginia housing, but he reversed the customary emphasis on elite Virginians and their “pretentious houses.” Scanning the small farms and plain dwellings of Louisa and Goochland counties, Glassie denounced the skewness of most existing scholarship: “How can you study a society if you attend only to the expression of a small and deviant [elite] class within the whole?” Thus, Glassie boldly claimed architectural history for the counterculture—for those who, during the late 1960s and early 1970s, dreamed about and attempted to create a more just, egalitarian American society.

In *Folk Housing* Glassie carefully recorded, with measured drawings and extensive notes, a set of rural dwellings in one section of Piedmont Virginia. Then he drew on recent scholarship in the field of linguistics to discover the “logic” by which these houses could appear fundamentally similar in form and scale, yet individually distinct in plan and elevation.

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67 Glassie’s scholarly source for this polarized distinction in planter status was Carl Bridenbaugh, *Myths and Realities: Societies of the Colonial South*, The Walter Lynwood Fleming Lectures in Southern History (Baton Rouge, 1952).

68 Glassie, *Folk Housing*, p. 9.

69 Glassie was evasive about construction dates for many of the structures he recorded, but he implied that his study represented the housing traditions of the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

He argued that all of the recorded houses were composed of units of space, just as all words, phrases, and sentences are composed of simple sounds, what linguists call “morphemes.” Some units of space—the fifteen-foot square, for example—functioned like free morphemes: they could stand alone as a one-room dwelling, or they could be linked with other units of space to form a dwelling with a larger and more complex plan. Some other units of space, such as the nine-by-fifteen-foot rectangle, were like bound morphemes: they made their architectural appearance only in combination with one or more other units.\textsuperscript{71}

The shape of architectural space was the issue that concerned Glassie most, but he also examined such dwelling components as door and window openings, framing, chimneys, and roofs in an attempt to account for every aspect of the vernacular building tradition in early Virginia. Once his description of elements seemed complete, Glassie then worked out the set of rules—the architectural grammar—that guided their assembly into houses (Figure 17). Drawing again on the theories of language, he summarized the building components and rules for their combination as the architectural “competence” of middle Virginia.\textsuperscript{72}

Glassie’s next enterprise—the one that occupies the latter sections of \textit{Folk Housing}—was to observe this architectural language as it was spoken by the traditional builders and inhabitants of early Piedmont Virginia. To articulate his perceptions, he employed the structuralist technique of sorting objects and their characteristics according to sets of opposing terms.\textsuperscript{73} He concluded through this method that ordinary Virginia housing gradually became less public and more private, less natural and more artificial, less variable and more repetitive, less extensive and more intensive (Figure 18).\textsuperscript{74} Because architecture is a significant form of cultural expression, Glassie argued, these changes in housing represent a fundamental shift in ways of thinking and living in middle Virginia. Over the course of the study period, he wrote, Virginians evolved from open, trusting members of a close-knit community to isolated, suspicious inhabitants of an impersonal society.

\textsuperscript{71} Glassie, \textit{Folk Housing}, pp. 19–40. In identifying and combining his units of architectural space, Glassie was influenced by James Deetz, who compared the components of a language to the attributes of an artifact—and even adapted the linguistic terminology to his own purposes (Deetz, \textit{Invitation to Archaeology}, pp. 83–101).

\textsuperscript{72} Glassie, \textit{Folk Housing}, pp. 17, 19–40. Glassie later modified his stance concerning the usefulness of analyzing buildings as if they were constructed in exactly the same way as a language. He has said, “You cannot build a sentence. You cannot speak a house” (Henry Glassie, “History and the Vernacular House,” lecture presented at the Commonwealth Center for the Study of American Culture, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Va., 9 Nov. 1989).

\textsuperscript{73} Claude Lévi-Strauss is responsible for the proposition that the human mind gropes its way through more and more subtle understandings of the world by sorting phenomena into pairs of opposing ideas or characteristics. Glassie cites, among other works, Claude Lévi-Strauss, \textit{Structural Anthropology}, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf (Garden City, N.Y., 1963).

\textsuperscript{74} Glassie, \textit{Folk Housing}, pp. 8–12, 41–42, 216–17.
From Henry Glassie, Folk Housing in Middle Virginia: A Structural Analysis of Historic Artifacts (Knoxville, 1975); with permission of the University of Tennessee Press

Figure 17. Henry Glassie diagramed the design process manifest in early Virginia houses. He attempted to demonstrate how Virginians began their design process with a set of basic ground dimensions—the designated \( XY_1 \) combination in this case—and advanced them through a set of rules for positioning elements such as chimneys and interior walls. The result was a common house type derived, Glassie argued, from a mental process comparable to the way speakers of a language form sentences.
Figure 18. Another diagram by Henry Glassie demonstrated the means by which early Virginians chose from among familiar options for house composition. For each component of a house—those elements listed above the double line—Virgini ans selected key design characteristics by resorting to a series of opposing concepts. Glassie argued that his process explains how architectural change occurs in a traditional society and makes possible the charting of Virginians' gradual shift from open "extensive" to closed "intensive" houses.

For a while, *Folk Housing* functioned as a kind of manifesto for those young fieldworkers of the "Children's Crusade" who felt themselves to be on the front lines of new architectural investigations with larger social implications. They even drew from his book justification for a kind of edgy hostility toward those who studied grand, stylish buildings while ignoring plain, unpretentious ones. Eventually, however, these surveyors could draw on their own growing expertise in the field to discern the impossibility of duplicating Glassie's "generative grammar" and the significant errors in his assigned dates of construction. It thus became clear that one of the stories Glassie's architectural history was meant to tell was that of the brilliant

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75 Most veterans of architectural fieldwork in the Southeast now recognize that only one or two of the dwellings Glassie recorded were built before 1800—a few were built after 1900. George McDaniel was the first to point out this problem in his review of *Folk Housing*, which appeared in
scholar whose intense work is beyond the comprehension of most readers. Another purpose of *Folk Housing* was to promote Glassie's nostalgic commitment to the inherent integrity—even moral superiority—of old rural and community-centered ways of life. Those fieldworkers who made even cursory excursions into the historical record could testify that the early Virginia past was different from modern society in significant and sometimes astonishing ways, but a pervasively superior moral character was not among these distinctions.

Nevertheless, *Folk Housing* deserves its continuing status as an original and important work. Glassie was the first scholar of Virginia domestic architecture to subject ordinary dwellings to the kind of serious attention architectural historians had previously reserved for houses with stylish, "sophisticated" attributes. He also pressed the study of houses beyond the familiar focus on facades or decorative schemes by demonstrating the value of examining house plans as purposeful enclosures of space. Glassie further transformed the study of early Virginia houses by ignoring conventional concerns for precedence and influence in favor of the capacity of houses to embody unique clues to the ways of life and habits of mind prevalent among the people who built and used them. Finally, *Folk Housing* has never lost its capacity to validate the conviction among a new generation of field-experienced architectural historians that their work is a significant component of a larger attempt to correct social injustices by analyzing the physical circumstances—and thus recovering the material experience—of people whose histories were otherwise neglected.

By the early 1980s, public funding for those intense and exhilarating architectural surveys was beginning to evaporate, and many who began their careers as surveyors or within the ambit of survey-generated issues started filtering into positions that often involved significant distractions from the absorbing substance of architectural fieldwork and research. Those in Virginia who wanted to sustain the importance of their encounters...
with and analyses of historic structures found two sources of inspiration and collegiality.

In 1980 Edward A. Chappell became director of architectural research at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. He quickly began assembling a team of architectural historians and an agenda of architectural fieldwork unrivaled since the days when Marcus Whiffen was integrating and publishing the findings of his Colonial Williamsburg associates.\(^79\) Chappell and his colleagues responded to a growing concern, among those fieldworkers who knew the daunting fragility of early Virginia’s architectural record, by initiating the Agricultural Buildings Survey, an attempt to observe and record thoroughly the colonial and early national outbuildings that still dotted the Virginia countryside. The impetus for this project was the common understanding that the condition and prospects of early Virginia’s surviving agricultural structures were even more dismal than were those for most other early buildings.\(^80\) More than fifteen years later, the project has expanded to include fieldwork among early Chesapeake buildings of every sort. Important as is the resulting detailed record of early and endangered structures, the most significant contribution of this enterprise has been the development of techniques for analyzing and recording early American architecture that are more rigorous, discerning, and articulate concerning subtle details and significant changes than those originated or practiced almost anywhere else (Figure 19).\(^81\)

There was a second event that helped to coalesce and sustain a community of architectural historians with field experience and devotion to the analysis of buildings that usually escaped serious attention. It was the founding in 1980 of the Vernacular Architecture Forum. Now an organization with national scope and membership, the forum was first based in Virginia and Maryland and dominated by a group of scholars, surveyors, and activists whose work, for the most part, was confined to early American topics and East Coast locations. Although members of the forum identified themselves as committed to the study of vernacular architecture, their training, interests, and approaches to architecture were so diverse that by

\(^{79}\) Many architectural historians have worked in the department of architectural research at Colonial Williamsburg, but important mainstays include William J. Graham, Carl R. Lounsbury, and Mark R. Wenger.


Figure 19. When these measured drawings of the dairy and smokehouse at Cherry Walk in Essex County were made, close attention to early Virginia’s humble outbuildings was new and mildly controversial, as was the painstaking depiction of architectural details and the respect accorded even recent additions. With the Agricultural Buildings Survey, Colonial Williamsburg’s architectural historians set a higher standard for building documentation.
the middle of the 1980s the designation seemed overrun. A 1986 essay observed: "[T]hough the term denotes nothing more than a kind of subject matter," it had come to represent a "mixture of evidence, method, and theory" as well.\textsuperscript{82} Still, despite suggestions that the name be replaced by one that better encompasses the range of work completed and under way, "vernacular architecture" continues to connote architectural studies that focus on neglected aspects of the built past and employ multidisciplinary methods and theories to achieve satisfactory results.\textsuperscript{83}

As the role of Colonial Williamsburg's department of architectural research and the origins of the Vernacular Architecture Forum indicate, those who study the housing of colonial Virginia have figured prominently in the general breaking open, since 1966, of the architectural historian's field of play. Although their work is based in large measure on what they have learned from, as well as what they have found unsatisfactory in, the books of Kimball, Waterman, Whiffen, and Glassie, vernacular architectural historians are beneficiaries of important trends in the study of Virginia history and archaeology as well.

Virginia's colonial history and archaeological record, like its colonial architecture, have been the subjects of persistent scholarly and antiquarian attention since the late nineteenth century. Moreover, the preoccupations that have long guided the work of Virginia historians and archaeologists—the English origins of Virginia traditions, the rise of an elite culture, and the emergence of revolutionary ideology—corresponded well to the themes that long dominated discussions of Virginia's early architecture. Yet during the decades when the buildings on which Virginia architectural historians focused and the tools of investigation they used remained static, the topics and methodologies that governed discussions of the historical and archaeological record gradually deepened and improved.

By the early 1960s, Virginia historians were already replacing impressionistic readings of anecdotal evidence with increasingly copious and systematic consultations of the documentary record.\textsuperscript{84} Quantitative analysis—the counting of facts and figures and the close interpretation of the


\textsuperscript{83} "New architectural history" was a term proposed by Thomas Carter and Bernard L. Herman in "Toward a New Architectural History," in Thomas Carter and Bernard L. Herman, eds., Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, IV (Columbia, Mo., and London, 1991), pp. 1–6. Dell Upton suggested the same designation in "Outside the Academy," p. 210. Neither promotion has generated much of a response. Soon, perhaps, vernacular architectural historians will simply recognize what they do as encompassed by the discipline of architectural history as it will be practiced and understood in the new century.

\textsuperscript{84} In addition to Bridenbaugh's Myths and Realities to which Glassie resorted, prominent early twentieth-century studies of Virginia's colonial past include Thomas J. Wertenbaker, Patrician and Plebeian in Virginia: or the Origin and Development of the Social Classes in the Old Dominion (Charlottesville, 1910); Thomas J. Wertenbaker, The Planters of Colonial Virginia (Princeton, 1922); Louis B. Wright, The First Gentlemen of Virginia: Intellectual Qualities of the Early Colonial Ruling
numerical results—made all the difference for historians who wished to press their understanding past the most obvious aspects of eighteenth-century elite culture made manifest in their extensive personal and public accounts. Investigative trends in colonial Virginia history gained fresh intellectual purpose during the 1960s. Paralleling the sense of a counterculture mission that infused the publicly funded surveyors of the time was a growing awareness among historians of deep-rooted and longstanding inequalities in modern American society. A new concern that investigations of the American past were similarly skewed in favor of those with exceptional access to wealth and power motivated historians to frame and execute their research in ways that could emphasize the experience of common people and the character of their everyday lives. These new strategies were intended to correct discriminative treatment of the past, just as newly enacted and enforced civil rights legislation was designed to correct discriminative conditions in the present. For the study of colonial Virginia, this shift meant greater attention to the often-neglected seventeenth century. It also involved closer scrutiny of social, economic, and political forces created by or imposed on Virginians who occupied every level of the colony's hierarchical order, from enslaved Africans to wealthy gentlemen, from indentured children to plantation mistresses.

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Historical archaeology had made comparable progress. Early twentieth-century excavations such as those undertaken at Jamestown, Williamsburg, and Wakefield were conducted much like treasure hunts for the structural remains of significant colonial landmarks. By the middle of the century, however, a more systematic approach to historical archaeological investigation was taking hold. J. C. Harrington’s influential proposition that colonial pipe stems—if carefully collected and closely measured—could accurately date colonial sites and his thoughtful meditation on the archaeologist’s responsibility to the historical record marked the beginning of an era in which Virginia’s historical archaeology increasingly involved painstaking investigation of each site’s stratigraphy and analysis of an entire artifactual harvest. Ivor Noël Hume, who transformed the department of archaeology at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, standardized the thorough and historically responsible new approach to archaeology in Historical Archaeology and A Guide to Artifacts of Colonial America. These two books, which appeared in 1969, became basic texts in the field of historical archaeology as well as inspirations for architectural historians increasingly committed to the careful recovery, systematic analysis, and accurate representation of historic structures.

Noël Hume’s careful methods of archaeological recovery have led him toward the telling of engaging tales, as his 1979 book Martin’s Hundred well demonstrates. During the 1970s, however, other Virginia archaeologists began elaborating on his dictates in ways and to degrees that corresponded closely to the systematic methods and probing questions gaining currency among social historians. These archaeologists shared a determination to use their skills to recover aspects of colonial Virginia’s past that otherwise were entirely lost. Since 1970 Virginia’s historical archaeology has been transformed by such strategies as greater patience in the discerning of ephemeral features and artifacts, more attention to the matter of original

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site formation, increasingly sophisticated methods of counting artifacts and mapping their distributions, and frequent resort to scientific tests that can confirm facts as seemingly beyond recovery as the location of human waste deposits and the species of plants grown in long-vanished gardens. The best of their work provides instances of enriching verity or provocative assertion, and many also qualify as architectural histories, for they often deal with the character and meaning of building remains.92

Virginia's late twentieth-century architectural historians have learned from recent developments in both social history and historical archaeology in several respects. From social historians, scholars of early Virginia architecture have adopted techniques for counting and sorting the quantifiable information often contained in colonial documents. They also have learned how to scrutinize historical sources for evidence of habits, intentions, and perceptions other than those their colonial authors meant to reveal.93

Historical archaeologists have provided Virginia architectural historians with the analytical methods for more discerning forms of architectural fieldwork. Many architectural historians of early Virginia are veterans of


93 One excellent quantitative analysis of colonial documents that pertains—although indirectly—to houses and their furnishings is Lois Green Carr and Lorena S. Walsh, "Inventories and the Analysis of Wealth and Consumption Patterns in St. Mary's County, Maryland, 1658-1777," Historical Methods 13 (1980): 81-104. Rhys Isaac has demonstrated how it is possible to discern the character of Virginia's gentry and the complexity of their relations with their slaves by reading between the lines of such eighteenth-century documents as Landon Carter's remarkable diary (Rhys Isaac, "Ethnographic Method in History: An Action Approach," ibid. 13 [1980]: 43-61).
training or field experience in historical archaeology. As a result, they often approach standing Virginia buildings as if they were archaeological sites with layered manifestations of successive periods of occupation. Assuming that every sort of construction, use, and alteration leaves behind physical evidence, they pay close attention to even small and barely perceptible marks in the form and fabric of a building.94 What still awaits architectural historians are the less accessible but unquestionably important forms of statistical analysis that increasingly characterize the best in early Virginia's historical archaeology.95

By treating their buildings according to methods and theories derived from social historians and historical archaeologists, scholars of early Virginia's architecture have developed new and compelling explanations of the architectural dimensions of colonial Virginia. Moreover, by posing their questions and framing their answers as do historians and archaeologists, the current generation of Virginia architectural historians has achieved a new richness in its thinking and writing. Like social historians and historical archaeologists, these scholars argue for the significance of studies that focus on the domestic life, social practices, economic realities, political maneuvers, and ideological imperatives experienced in different ways by colonial Virginians of every station, gender, and race.

It was in their grappling with the colonial Chesapeake's pervasive and persistent—but long unrecognized—tradition of earthfast construction that Virginia's current generation of architectural historians first distinguished themselves. From their analysis of earthfast construction, these scholars launched lively literature centered on early Virginia's architecture. During the early 1970s, archaeologists in Maryland and Virginia began to comprehend arrangements of dark round or oblong stains in the subsoil of seventeenth-century sites in a new way. These features were all that remained of buildings constructed on posts set directly into the ground.96 At first it seemed that these dark remains of earthfast posts must represent the remains of poor men's shoddy dwellings and rough outbuildings, such as tobacco barns. Gradually it became clear, through documentary as well as archaeological research, that wooden foundations were

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94 This technique of "building archaeology," though not so named, is well described in Dell Upton's "New Views of the Virginia Landscape," p. 417. The results, in terms of descriptive, analytical record drawings, are best outlined in Chappell, "Architectural Recording and the Open-Air Museum," pp. 24–36.


common even for the dwellings of planters whose wealth and influence placed them at the very apex of colonial society. This state of architectural affairs prevailed until the early decades of the eighteenth century.

Scholars who tackled this newly identified phenomenon dismissed as misguided explanations based on the issue of aesthetic sophistication. Instead, they set about identifying the social and economic conditions that made colonists content to build—and continuously rebuild—structures so obviously vulnerable to environmental insults (Figure 20). Writing first in a provocative essay entitled “Doing History with Material Culture” and subsequently at more length in collaboration with four coauthors, Cary Carson explained the “impermanent” buildings of colonial Virginia and Maryland as the architectural manifestations of a society rendered chronically unstable by appalling death rates and of an economy kept perpetually volatile by dramatic shifts in the European market for tobacco. In such an environment, Carson and his colleagues argued, no planter felt sufficiently confident of the future to spend money and labor on an expensive “English-framed” house with secure masonry underpinnings.

By the time Carson’s jointly written article, “Impermanent Architecture in the Southern American Colonies,” appeared in 1981, there was freshly in print an essay that challenged components of Carson’s argument and at the same time deepened the interpretation of colonial Virginia houses as sensitive responses to social and economic conditions. In his analysis of the seventeenth-century Clifts plantation in Westmoreland County, Fraser D. Neiman objected to the presentist quality of the term “impermanent.” He pointed out that the twenty-year life expectancy of the average colonial earthfast house might not be far exceeded by many modern structures. Neiman also rejected Carson’s characterization of post-in-the-ground construction as an architecture of crisis. He argued instead that this relatively quick and inexpensive form of construction made sense for an economy in

97 The capacious earthfast house at Littletown plantation in James City County was the seventeenth-century seat of Thomas Pettus, a member of the governor’s council (Kelso, Kingsmill Plantations, pp. 72–80).

98 Cary Carson, “Doing History with Material Culture,” in Ian M. G. Quimby, ed., Material Culture and the Study of American Life (New York, 1978), pp. 41–64; Cary Carson, Norman F. Barka, William M. Kelso, Garry Wheeler Stone, and Dell Upton, “Impermanent Architecture in the Southern American Colonies,” WP 16 (1981): 135–96. Carson’s “Doing History” essay generated wide discussion among scholars of early American architecture because he argued that in order to be taken seriously, those who focus on material—including architectural—evidence must shape their studies to answer questions posed by historians. Among the flurry of reactions to this assertion was Robert Blair St. George’s. Because buildings and other artifacts represent a different sort of evidence about the past, St. George countered, architectural historians and other scholars of material culture cannot necessarily address the same questions that absorb historians. They can, however, change the questions historians ask. Indeed, they can change the nature of scholarly inquiry into the colonial past. See Robert Blair St. George, “Style and Structure in the Joinery of Dedham and Medfield, Massachusetts, 1635–1685,” in Ian M. G. Quimby, ed., American Furniture and Its Makers (Chicago, 1979), pp. 1–46.
Figure 20. This isometric archaeological plan and artist's reconstruction depict the house at Utopia plantation in James City County. Built about 1660, the house stood on posts set into the ground and was heated with two wood-and-clay chimneys. Only a partial cellar incorporated masonry. Architectural historians' attempts to explain this ostensibly impermanent system of building first led them into the realms of colonial Virginia's social and economic history.
Figure 21. By 1710, the Clifts dwelling site in Westmoreland County was about forty years old and had sustained many changes in the characteristics and juxtaposition of buildings. This archaeological plan articulates some Virginians’ growing impulse to distance themselves from servants and slaves. The residents of the Clifts had closed a passage through the house and relegated their work force to a quarter and several work buildings. Further indications of an impulse to segregate include the clear differentiation of grave sites.

which the wise allocation of capital and labor was crucial to survival. Thus, earthfast construction was but one response to the colonial planters’ need to reserve tools and hands for the labor-intensive and virtually year-long cycle of tobacco cultivation. 99 Gradual changes in the form of Virginia houses such as the Clifts dwelling—the blocking of passages that extended through the house, the addition of protective lobby entrances, and the

relegation of service functions to detached outbuildings chief among them—was yet another response to this same imperative (Figure 21).

In “The Origins of Chesapeake Architecture,” Dell Upton advanced the task of integrating the issue of earthfast construction into more general discussions of colonial Virginia’s houses as material aspects of the colony’s society and economy. Upton described how immigrants to the Chesapeake colonies first transplanted and then rethought the three-room, hall-chamber-kitchen arrangement of the traditional English seventeenth-century house (Figure 22). During the decades when it became clear that the acquisition of labor in the form of indentured servants was crucial to the

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success of the Chesapeake plantation, these three-part houses grew capacious and complex through the addition of numerous lodging rooms for bound English servants. By the third quarter of the seventeenth century, when the swelling population of discontented servants had come to represent a threat to Virginia’s social stability, planters who had been living in these multiroomed houses began to build smaller ones. From their dwellings they subtracted the servants’ lodging rooms, as well as the kitchen and adjacent service rooms where some of the servants worked, and relegated all of these spaces and functions to detached outbuildings. By the time African slaves had supplanted indentured servants in the colonial Virginia labor force, most planters lived in dwellings with only one or two principal rooms—usually a hall or all-purpose living room and, secondarily, a chamber or principal bedroom. Around this more modestly planned house were numerous separate outbuildings among which the planter had segregated most forms of domestic and agricultural work, as well as the domestic and agricultural workers themselves. Upton’s underlying point was that Chesapeake planters stopped wanting to associate domestically with their bound servants once the disparities in their economic interests had crystallized.

In a recent essay, Fraser Neiman developed a more economy-driven interpretation of the same transformation in seventeenth-century site planning. Drawing on his survey of sixty-five excavated seventeenth-century dwelling sites, Neiman argued that Virginia and Maryland planters who removed servants’ work and living spaces from their own houses could significantly lower the cost of bulk agricultural production and labor maintenance while at the same time increasing their capacity to observe their servants’ actions and whereabouts.

Once the connections among earthfast construction, evolving earthfast house forms, and seventeenth-century Virginia’s society and economy

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101 The origins and ultimately violent consequences of this discontent among indentured servants are crucial to Edmund Morgan’s argument in American Slavery, American Freedom, pp. 215–70.


103 Edmund S. Morgan convincingly argued that as tobacco prices declined and the population of indentured servants increased, land-owning Virginia colonists began to regard their own bound laborers as future competitors, for when servants completed their terms of service, they often became tobacco-growing planters themselves. Servants likewise felt alienated by the various strategies for extending their bondage that their masters attempted to impose (Morgan, American Slavery, American Freedom, pp. 215–49).

seemed clear, historians of colonial Virginia’s domestic architecture turned their attention to the architectural traditions of the eighteenth century, for it had become obvious that most standing colonial houses were constructed after 1700.  

Dell Upton initiated this scholarly revision in his 1982 essay “Vernacular Domestic Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Virginia.” Using fieldwork among standing houses and a formidable assemblage of room-by-room probate inventories, he explained a gradual change in the planning of houses during Virginia’s second colonial century. Although one- and two-room structures remained by far the most common, well-to-do Virginians began to modify their dwellings by inserting a passage between the two principal rooms. This change, Upton argued, reflected a growing impulse to separate living from circulation space and to create an architectural baffle, or zone of transition, that could protect the inhabitants and domestic doings of any one room from the casual and unexpected arrival of outsiders. The same impulse to differentiate private household space from that accessible to visitors of various stripe also accounted for the addition of a third room to the customary hall-chamber plan. Increasingly over the course of the eighteenth century, Virginians who could afford to spend money on their houses planned them with a dining room, “a semipublic space that mediated between outside and inside.” This third room also removed the commotion of dining activities from the hall, which Upton identified as “the center of the family’s social landscape.”

Upton used his fieldwork and his documentary research to explain the shape of eighteenth-century Virginia houses in terms of social priorities and domestic conventions. He created a “social molecule,” a diagram of the relationships characteristic among the principal spaces within the Virginia


house, in order to demonstrate how dwellings with very different plans could actually function, as living space, in quite similar ways (Figure 23). Upton further observed that what he termed the "European detached house" form often found favor in eighteenth-century Virginia because its central passage and double file of rooms represented a convenient envelope in which colonists could arrange their four basic dwelling components—the hall, chamber, dining room, and passage.\textsuperscript{107} To the fourth room enclosed within this academic European house form Virginians often assigned no

\textsuperscript{107} The European detached house is discussed in John Summerson, \textit{Architecture in Britain, 1530 to 1830}, The Pelican History of Art (1954; Baltimore, 1969); and William H. Pierson, Jr., \textit{American Buildings and Their Architects: The Colonial and Neoclassical Styles} (Garden City, N.Y., 1970).
special name or explicit function. Thus, Upton concluded, Virginia house builders scrutinized and mentally dissected the forms and details of this prototype and selectively adopted or eliminated components according to their own architectural needs. Key among Upton’s insights was that Virginians might choose to make one set of decisions about the exterior presentation of their house and an entirely different set of choices where its plan and room functions were concerned.

In making this point, Upton argued for a new way of comprehending the process by which colonial Virginians designed their houses. Even when their goal was an elaborate and stylish dwelling, Virginians did more than slavishly copy—and sometimes oafishly misinterpret—European prece- dents. Instead, they evaluated their architectural options as much—or perhaps more—on the basis of social, economic, or domestic concerns than on aesthetic values. Almost always, Upton insisted, local traditions and priorities outweighed international design trends. Each house, however elaborate, was shaped to play a role in the Tidewater countryside where it stood.

Central to Upton’s discussion of eighteenth-century Virginia houses is the matter of room names, room functions, and the interlocking roles they played in the colonial planter’s household. During the early 1980s, Edward Chappell also contributed to the study of space within the eighteenth-century Virginia house with a pair of short but fundamental articles. In “Williamsburg Architecture as Social Space” and “Looking at Buildings,” Chappell described and demonstrated a method for understanding and socially “ranking” the spaces within colonial Virginia houses through close observation of their size, their position, and—most of all—the quality of their finish. These “building hierarchies,” he argued, “reflect peoples’ differing abilities and desires to expend capital on architectural space and its elaboration.”108 Variation in the size and quality of finish between two houses might signal differences in their inhabitants’ wealth. Variation in the level of finish between two rooms in the same house certainly articulated differences in their social importance.

Upton’s and Chappell’s essays have served as points of departure for new analyses of eighteenth-century Virginia housing. By explaining rooms as architectural elements susceptible to ranking and diagraming, rather than as spaces that were shaped for habitation, however, both scholars encouraged a conception of colonial Virginia’s domestic architecture that may be excessively mechanical.

Mark R. Wenger has incorporated Upton's sources, Chappell's methods, and the insights of both into his own perceptive readings of Virginia's documentary and architectural sources. Pursuing a fuller understanding of how Virginians at the very top of the social scale shaped the space within their houses, Wenger also introduced to the study of the colonial Virginia house the notion that both plan configurations and room use evolved over the course of the eighteenth century. In a 1986 essay, Wenger drew on colonial references to the furnishings of and activities in central passages to trace changes in this fundamental component of many eighteenth-century Virginia houses. Acknowledging that the passage was first introduced to channel movement through a dwelling and to buffer access to each of its rooms, Wenger argued that it gradually evolved, on account of the doors positioned at each end, into a light and cool summer living area. After 1750 gentry planters began to widen, bisect, and embellish their central passages to create elegant, well appointed "halls" or "saloons" in which to receive and entertain guests. Challenging the conventional explanations of three- and five-part country houses as unmistakable statements of aesthetic allegiance to the principles of Andrea Palladio, Wenger observed that Virginia houses with advanced, raised, or pedimented central bays gained popularity in Virginia only after the central passage had achieved status as an important social space.

In "The Dining Room in Early Virginia," Wenger traced the emergence of a room that served first, as Upton argued, to relieve the hall of the commotion and traffic associated with meals. Gradually the dining room supplanted the hall as the largest and most socially important room in fashionable Virginia houses. As the accoutrements of gentility became first accessible to and then plentiful within the households of well-to-do Virginians, dining emerged as a social opportunity to display and, in a symbolic way, bestow upon guests costly possessions made of glass, silver, mahogany, and porcelain. Dining rooms became correspondingly capacious and richly appointed spaces in which critical affairs of every sort received lively attention across the dinner table.


Wenger's most recent and closely argued analysis of the colonial Virginia house and its evolution appeared in "Jefferson's Designs for Remodeling the Governor's Palace."113 Scrutinizing Thomas Jefferson's ambitious plans for transforming the Governor's Palace in Williamsburg into a suitable residence for a new republican executive, Wenger explained how, by the end of the colonial era, many Virginians were building houses with extended wings or ells to which they could retire from a formal front or center suite of entertaining rooms. Moreover, they were beginning to think of more elaborate provisions for discreet service to different parts of their houses.114 Wenger identified Jefferson as but the most articulate of Virginia house planners, speculatively sketching his way toward an elite dwelling form that some Virginians had already embraced and many others would subsequently adopt.115 Just why this need emerged to widen the gap architecturally between public and private spheres of activity is not yet clear. Wenger favors the argument that Virginia families, like all others in early national America, were becoming increasingly affectionate and more appreciative of an undisturbed domestic life.116

While Wenger has worked to recover and elucidate the complex and changing roles of spaces within the eighteenth-century Virginia dwelling, other scholars have attempted to explain the Virginia house as one significant aspect of the Tidewater landscape. In his 1985 essay "White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," Upton explained how elite colonists shaped, ranked, and controlled spaces not only within their houses but throughout the countryside as well.117 By situating their own houses on prominent sites and by surrounding them with numerous service buildings, wealthy planters created architectural metaphors for the social and political roles they expected to play. Arranging roads and gates to enhance the drama of approach and admission reinforced their position as dominant players in local and regional society. In this "landscape of power," the quarters—the domestic architecture—of slaves contributed to the visual authority of each planter's house in that they were smaller, cruder, and humbly sited. Thus, with "White and Black Landscapes" Upton

114 The rise of explicit architectural provisions for household service is the subject of Camille Wells, "Accommodation and Appropriation: White and Black Domestic Landscapes in Early Nineteenth-Century Virginia," paper presented at the annual meeting of the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Boulder, Colo., 1 June 1996.
identified the eighteenth-century architectural culmination of a relationship between housing and bound labor that had begun in the seventeenth century.

Upton addressed other aspects of the colonial Virginia countryside in his 1990 essay "Imagining the Early Virginia Landscape." In this piece he differentiated the "articulated" landscape of the wealthy planter from the "static" landscape of poor Virginians—black and white alike. Elite Virginians enjoyed a larger field of vision that encompassed many and sometimes distant points of significant action but that failed to incorporate the subtler components of any one place. By contrast, ordinary Virginians, most of whom never traveled more than thirty miles from their place of birth, saw their landscape as fixed, thoroughly known, and rich in landmarks with multiple associations.

A third discussion of the Virginia landscape was based on an analysis of advertisements in the Virginia Gazette of plantations for sale. "The Planter's Prospect: Houses, Outbuildings, and Rural Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia" drew on quantitative analysis of these and other documents to determine that many affluent planters of the eighteenth century chose to continue living in houses of relatively modest proportions and relatively few rooms. Some even remained content in houses built on wooden support like those of their seventeenth-century ancestors. This was possible in a place where rich men sometimes built costly and fashionable houses, because many Virginians knew how to signal their affluence and status with well-executed, profitable plantation improvements, rather than with "trophy houses" devoid of any certain capacity to generate additional wealth. "The Planter's Prospect" also makes the point that on plantations dominated by grand houses, most of the service and agricultural buildings were constructed of wood, relatively modest in size, and otherwise little different from the small, flimsy houses where slaves and common white Virginians dwelt.

Despite the best efforts of the current generation of Virginia architectural historians, the nature of housing for the generality of colonial Virginia society has proven difficult to recover, for most such structures vanished more than a century ago. Scholars have used descriptions of eighteenth-century travelers, indications from archaeological remains, and analogies drawn from the housing of poor Virginians in the nineteenth century to assemble a composite picture of cramped and uncomfortable wooden

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118 Dell Upton, "Imagining the Early Virginia Landscape," in Kelso and Most, eds., Earth Patterns, pp. 71–86.
120 Ibid., pp. 12–22.
houses with only one or two rooms, a wooden chimney, and almost no interior finish.

Indications are that common white Virginians could expect this much in the way of housing and little more. Enslaved Africans and their Virginia-born descendants experienced a greater range of living conditions. As Edward Chappell has explained, many complied with their owners' expectations that they sleep in the interstitial spaces of buildings made for some other purpose. At the opposite extreme were those few well-positioned household slaves who might be permitted to occupy all or part of a snug, well-built dwelling that would have been the envy of neighboring poor whites (Figure 24).

In between stood a widely variable range of rough dwellings or "cabins," sometimes sited alone, sometimes grouped into quarters, but almost always crowded and uncomfortable. Most scholarly attempts to grapple with the character of these structures and the quality of life within them are descriptive and even speculative, for supporting evidence is fragmentary and scattered. Philip D. Morgan has written a good new summary of available evidence in Slave Counterpoint, and Lorena S. Walsh made occasional references to the material conditions of life in her study of the slave population at Carter's Grove. Interpretive studies of houses for Virginia slaves include Mechel Sobel's The World They Made Together, which, in a compassionate but misguided attempt to discern slave agency in their grim surroundings, suggested that Virginia slave quarters embody significant elements of African architectural traditions. A more successful effort to distill meaning from the surviving evidence of colonial Virginia slave dwellings is Fraser Neiman's "Modeling Social Dynamics in Colonial and Antebellum Slave Architecture," which traced a decline in the quantities of subfloor pits within the houses of quarter sites. He interpreted this gradual change as evidence of a rise in kin-based households. Dell Upton has argued that the owner-controlled quarters of Virginia slaves were of much less importance to them than the plantation landscape of woods,


123 Such well-built and securely finished eighteenth-century slave dwellings survive at Tuckahoe in Goochland County, but they are rare. Two decades of fieldwork indicate that most slave dwellings with these characteristics were built after 1800 (Upton, "White and Black Landscapes," p. 59).


meadows, and waterways, which they appropriated and marked with their own paths and destinations.\textsuperscript{126}

Perhaps it is surprising, given how closely the matter was considered by architectural historians of the early twentieth century, that the practicing generation of scholars has concerned itself so little with design responsibility. Surviving eighteenth-century Virginia houses almost always embody the signs of careful attention to form and detail; it seems important to discover who deserves credit for this quality. The best new discussion of builders in colonial Virginia appeared in Dell Upton's \textit{Holy Things and Profane}.\textsuperscript{127} He explained therein that by about 1725, there was indeed a developed and growing community of skilled builders in Virginia. Most referred to themselves according to their specific trade, and documents pertaining to colonial Virginia's building campaigns are thick with designations such as "joiner" or "brickmaker." Those who had acquired the expertise and confidence to direct entire building campaigns identified themselves as "undertakers" or even occasionally "architects." Some undertakers did not draw on backgrounds in the building trades; they were instead gentlemen who felt sufficiently well versed in the design principles of the day to oversee the construction of a building on their own.

This evidence for elite planters' involvement in specific, and often ambitious, building projects has led late twentieth-century scholars to surmise that the Virginia gentry supervised or heavily influenced the design and construction of their own houses. Certainly they relied on pattern books for general inspiration or detailed instruction in the finer points of composition. Certainly they hired skilled craftsmen and listened closely to their expensive advice. Given the manifest involvement of successful Virginia planters in the close management of their own complex affairs, however, they regarded their deep involvement in fine house building as a prerogative—an exceptionally durable and visible flourish of their taste and expertise.

As Kimball and Waterman discovered long ago, few surviving colonial documents shed light on the concentration or distribution of responsibility for elite Virginia house building, but two discussions of public building projects can confirm, by analogy, that house design and construction were


Figure 24. This eighteenth-century slave dwelling at Tuckahoe, designed to accommodate at least two families, was larger and better built than the houses of most ordinary white colonists. It represents exceptionally fine housing for slaves; most endured very shabby conditions. That slaves had little control over their domestic architecture is manifest even at Tuckahoe, where their dwellings figure in a street of outbuildings, all subordinate to the main house.

matters of intense importance and subjects of recurrent, opinionated conversations among the gentlemen of colonial Virginia. In *Holy Things and Profane*, Upton chronicled the efforts of Anglican parish vestries, all populated by gentlemen, to secure proper and detailed specifications for their new churches. They were equally exacting when inspecting the completed buildings. Upton drew from this intensity of concern and activity two conclusions. The first—the overarching theme of his book—is that Anglican parish churches in colonial Virginia were buildings of deeply resonant social significance. The second conclusion concerns the process of fashionable design in eighteenth-century Virginia: it was a collaborative
one in which the gentlemen who initiated the campaign were active, even
dominant, participants.128

A year after _Holy Things and Profane_ appeared, Carl R. Lounsbury
wrote a brief but astute essay, the purpose of which originated with a
curious discovery. Craftsmen at work on Gunston Hall in Fairfax County
found, on the back of a window soffit, several eighteenth-century architec-
tural sketches (Figure 25). Lounsbury immediately recognized these quickly
executed drawings as plans and elevations for a courthouse, and a long
period of investigation ensued. Integrating the history of county formation
in Virginia, the identity of George Mason's political connections, and the
excavation of the Prince William County courthouse, Lounsbury con-
structed a plausible and lively context for the making of these sketches. In
"'An Elegant and Commodious Building,'" he argued that William Buck-
land, then verifiably at work on Gunston Hall's interior detailing, received
a visit from several gentlemen charged with planning a courthouse for
newly established Prince William County. On a handy piece of uninstalled
paneling, Buckland sketched classical compositions and refreshing juxta-
positions of space. The gentlemen, including George Mason, emphasized
Virginia courthouse conventions and the efficacy of certain customary
architectural components. Buckland attempted to integrate his own vision
with the preferences of his articulate audience, but in the end, Mason and
his associates adopted Buckland's ideas selectively.129 Whether or not
Buckland won the opportunity to oversee its construction, the Prince
William County courthouse owed more to familiar Virginia courthouse
designs than to Buckland's formidable originality.

Both Upton and Lounsbury thus demonstrated that where elaborate
building campaigns were concerned, Virginia elites expected to have their
own way. More recently, Barbara Mooney's dissertation has revived the
assumption, through tenacious reliance on the term "patron," that Virginia
gentlemen were in fact supportive and compliant beneficiaries, rather
than strong-minded activists, in the house-making process.130 This study,
however, is less about the design process than it is about how the building
of stylish houses figured in the lives of their owners. While attempting to
explain the relationship between a gentleman's fortunes and his impulse to

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128 Upton, _Holy Things and Profane_, pp. 23–34. Because vestries included numerous members who
met infrequently and often lived some distance from the church site they had selected, most church
construction in colonial Virginia required an undertaker—usually one of considerable standing in
the region. There is no evidence that undertakers were involved to a similarly consistent degree in
house-building enterprises, and the implication is that they were not so frequently engaged or so
autonomous on a day-to-day basis.

→ Carl R. Lounsbury, "'An Elegant and Commodious Building': William Buckland and the

130 Barbara Burlison Mooney, "'True Worth is Highly Shown in Liveing Well': Architectural
Patronage in Eighteenth-Century Virginia" (Ph.D. diss., University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign,
Figure 25. Architectural historians have become increasingly sensitive to the implications of ostensibly cryptic evidence such as William Buckland's designs for the Prince William County courthouse, redrawn from the wooden soffit on which they were sketched. From these drawings, Carl R. Lounsbury developed a perceptive and convincing argument about the negotiated nature of the design process in colonial Virginia.
construct a fine house, Mooney repeatedly demonstrated that doweries from prestigiously pedigreed brides often served as the requisite building fund. Indirectly, then, Mooney suggested that women might be considered the essential force behind elite house construction and, in a formidable economic sense, their designers.

In some respects, Upton's *Holy Things and Profane* is the most powerful recent analysis of the relationship between architecture and society in colonial Virginia. Although Upton identified Anglican parish churches rather than dwellings as the dominant architectural component of the Virginia planters' world, he emphasized that the symbolic importance of these churches devolved in part from such elements as complex paneled surfaces, carefully patterned brickwork, and pedimented doorways. Colonial Virginians readily identified all of these as the distinguishing characteristics of the finest houses in the countryside. The result, Upton argued, was a visual connection between the House of God and the houses of gentlemen that was bold in its manifestation but ambiguous in its implications.131

Other recent scholars have turned their inquiry outward and identified the forms and embellishments of elite Virginia houses as marks of kinship with dwellings in the colonial ports of Philadelphia, Portsmouth, and Charleston, as well as in the lush countrysides of England, Scotland, and Bermuda. Standard explanations for these domestic architectural similarities are thick with notes on diffusion, emulation, and the inherent, widely understood superiority of the language of revived eighteenth-century classicism. Both Cary Carson and Richard L. Bushman have developed explanations for these likenesses among dwellings, which incorporate the complex motives of those who decided to build them.

In a long essay, illustrated with his own perceptive drawings, Carson described how increased mobility among the affluent merchant class on both sides of the Atlantic created a pressing need for visible and convincing signs of peer status. When a gentleman with profitable trade or advantageous marriage on his mind came calling in a locality where he was a stranger, not only his clothes and conversation but also his posture, table manners, and elegant style of dancing assured his hosts that he was as genteel as he asserted himself to be. The same issues preoccupied a gentleman who wished to make connections with suitable business or personal associates arriving from distant parts. For a recipient of potentially important visitors, a fashionable dwelling full of rich furnishings also might

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be a necessity. For this reason—the increasing mobility of people and fluidity of trade around the Atlantic basin—wealthy American colonists and their counterparts on other shores generated an unprecedented demand for stylish goods. Thus, as Carson argued, the great houses of eighteenth-century Virginia were only the largest and least portable of the increasingly numerous trappings their inhabitants used to attract suitable associates with all manner of agreeable social, economic, and geographic connections.132

In *The Refinement of America*, Bushman investigated the same phenomenon, though he settled on a different generative force. The eighteenth-century impulse to become refined, to adopt a genteel manner, originated in the sometimes aged courtesy books of the English aristocracy that were newly available to an increasingly literate middle class. There was, moreover, the eighteenth-century Enlightenment motivation to identify universal standards and systems of analysis through which to organize the world. In time, issues of personal cleanliness and polite deportment radiated outward to create an interest in and demand for objects and structures of comparable neatness and polish. It is even possible to assert, though Bushman did not, that these material aspects of gentility were essential to its very existence. Bushman drew much of his evidence from the Northeast and ventured only a few times as far south as Virginia. Still, his observations were as relevant to the material and architectural expressions of Virginia gentry as they were to those of affluent New Englanders and Philadelphians.133

Though an impressive and intricate study, *The Refinement of America* explained the rise of gentility as driven by a controversial motive: the inherent tendency of every individual to emulate those of superior wealth and status. The current generation of Virginia's architectural historians may have been forced to abandon the counterculture zeal of their youthful surveying days, but none has encountered, in investigations of colonial Virginia's domestic architecture, any sign that Virginians of the lower sort felt driven to imitate the gentry class.134 Indeed, in a recent essay, Clifton Ellis argued that influences advancing up colonial Virginia's social scale often were more discernible than those filtering down. The eighteenth-century gentry of Halifax County deliberately built small and plain houses in order to demonstrate solidarity with their neighbors of lesser means.

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134 If anything is clear, it is that Virginians of different social levels had their own ways of thinking, dressing, and shaping their houses. In *A Place in Time*, the Rutmans hinted at colonial Virginians' differentiated but ostensibly unantagonistic modes of expression. In *Transformation of Virginia*, Rhys Isaac discerned the open contempt of ordinary Virginians for the pretensions of the elite. In *Holy Things and Profane*, Dell Upton has demonstrated how differences in traditional and fashionable styles of living were articulated in deliberately different styles of building.
Their motive, as Ellis perceived it, was to extend across the countryside the sense of community they all had derived from their common involvement with evangelical congregations.135

Trends in the latest published treatments of the colonial Virginia house offer tantalizing clues concerning the way architectural historians will approach this topic in the new century. In 1994 Carl Lounsbury published his authoritative Illustrated Glossary of Early Southern Architecture and Landscape.136 An accurate, thoughtful, and richly documented new resource for the use and meaning of early American terms for building components and techniques, the Illustrated Glossary drew not only on Lounsbury's formidable documentary investigation of early southern architecture but also on findings contributed by almost every other scholar currently at work on some aspect of this topic. Unprecedented in its conception, scope, and detail, the Illustrated Glossary demonstrates with every page full of concise definitions, period quotations, and crisp illustrations that precision—the unsparing discrimination between the verifiable and the supposed—is now fundamental to any reputable study of colonial Virginia's domestic architecture (Figure 26).

Equally significant to the advancing standards for accuracy is the emergence about 1980 of a new and vastly improved technique for using patterns of tree growth to determine the construction dates of historic structures. This statistically based form of dendrochronology was developed by Herman J. Heikkenen, who subsequently set about refining his methods and records of historic tree-ring patterning for exceptionally reliable use in Tidewater Virginia and Maryland, as well as in coastal North Carolina.137 As a result, scholarship of early Virginia housing has, since 1980, advanced through intermittent dispatches concerning verified or revised construction dates for specific Virginia houses.138 A project recently initiated will invoke Heikkenen's method to establish the age of fifteen previously undated


138 Heikkenen has determined construction dates for about twenty colonial Virginia houses, some of which attained their current form in more than one eighteenth-century building campaign. Prominent among these are Bacon's Castle (1665), Stratford (1738–42), and Kenmore (1772) (Herman J. Heikkenen, personal communication with the author, 5 Mar. 1998).
Figure 26. Late twentieth-century scholarship of colonial Virginia’s domestic architecture is incorporating greater concern for the explication of all things architectural, from the design of a six-paneled door to the lost meaning of a colonial builders’ term. Commitment to specificity—to the precise configuration and meaning of things—is one way to keep the study of colonial Virginia’s housing vital for years to come.
colonial Virginia houses.139 This study will not only determine the origins of the individual houses, but it will also contribute to the delineation of a century-long sequence of evolving construction techniques, material selection, and decorative schemes. This enterprise, moreover, is formed to test the inferential methods architectural historians presently use to estimate dates of construction from promising yet inconclusive forms of documentary and architectural evidence.140

A commitment to precision and a willingness to articulate the particular means of achieving it are increasingly necessary as colonial Virginia houses and other historical architectural topics attract attention from a larger constellation of scholars with more diverse and specialized training. Accuracy in statements of fact, however, is hardly enough to keep the study of colonial Virginia's domestic architecture vital in the twenty-first century. Of even greater importance is the quality of the questions a new generation chooses to ask of colonial Virginia housing. Many of the newest publications suggest that scholars will draw on the multiplying techniques of discovery and analysis to revisit questions regarding the architectural experience of Virginians made marginal by their race, gender, and social or economic conditions. Promising indications of what is in store include Audry Horning's reassessment of archaeological evidence for the formation of Jamestown and Linda L. Sturtz's study of women who found ways to act independently in eighteenth-century Virginia.141 Although the first does not privilege housing and the latter does not emphasize architectural matters at all, both demonstrate the efficacy of reconsidering material topics and social experiences about which evidence is scant and misunderstood.

Of considerable importance also will be attempts by architectural historians to draw on what they have learned about the housing of eighteenth-century Virginia to explain matters of related significance in the domestic architecture of nineteenth-century Virginia. One new study that

139 This two-year project, entitled "The Drama of Discovered Origins," has received enabling support from the Jessie Ball duPont Religious, Charitable, and Educational Fund. It originated in the department of architectural history at the University of Virginia as an enterprise intended for completion in partnership with the department of architectural research at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. Working cooperatively with Herman J. Heikkenen are architectural historians William J. Graham, Edward A. Chappell, Carl R. Lounsbury, Camille Wells, and Mark R. Wenger.

140 The techniques favored by the current generation of scholars fall into three categories. There is the quantitative analysis of sources, the reading between the lines of sources to discern telling allusions or omissions, and the triangulation of facts embedded in sources of different types and origins. The characteristics, potential, and fallibility of these strategies are the subject of Camille Wells, "Buildings as Sources, Sources for Buildings, and the Dialectic of Historical Recovery," paper presented at the symposium "The Story of Virginia: Getting to the Sources," Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, Va., 19 Apr. 1996.

takes engaging but inconclusive steps in this direction is Edward Chappell and Julie Richter's jointly written essay, "Wealth and Houses in Post-Revolutionary Virginia," an attempt to explain a glimpsed but still unconfirmed improvement in the domestic architecture of ordinary Virginians. Another likely new study is Henry Kerr Sharp's "Designs for Prospect Hill," a closely reasoned analysis of evolving schemes for the social use of space in a Virginia house built between 1810 and 1814 (Figure 27).\textsuperscript{142}

If future studies of colonial Virginia housing must stand firm on greater concern for verity, they must also take flight through bolder excursions into the realms of the intangible. In this enterprise, architectural history will intersect in increasingly valuable ways with the still-coalescing field of material culture studies. Critical to this interdisciplinary field of inquiry is the attempt to develop plausible means of discovering and explaining the subtle interplay among an object, a structure, or a deliberate arrangement of space, and the significance that accrues to its form, use, and display.\textsuperscript{143}

Recent scholarly attempts to address the discernible but ephemeral aspects of life in and around the colonial Virginia house already have begun to demonstrate how the material world can enhance, invoke, or make visible spiritual, psychological, and ideological aspects of the past. Dell Upton's boldest assertion in \textit{Holy Things and Profane} was that the Anglican parish churches of Virginia physically embodied—and imparted spiritual sanction to—many otherwise unstated notions embraced by elite planters concerning the proper order of colonial Virginia society.\textsuperscript{144} In a pair of studies, Mark P. Leone discussed the processes of seeing and hearing in both their selective and intrusive capacities as critical to the experience of colonial Chesapeake houses and landscapes.\textsuperscript{145} Rhys Isaac has also addressed space on the Virginia plantation as embodying or underscoring


\textsuperscript{144} Upton, \textit{Holy Things and Profane}, esp. pp. 101ff.

Figure 27. Employing such documents as these plans and elevations for Prospect Hill in Spotsylvania County, Henry Kerr Sharp has explained this house built by the Holladay family between 1810 and 1814. His study focuses on the sometimes differing choices and imperatives that motivated clients and their draftsmen. Sharp’s is one of the first scholarly attempts to carry the findings, methods, and theories concerning colonial Virginia’s domestic architecture into the early national period.
metaphors of control and other matters of social and ideological weight.\textsuperscript{146} The value of embracing for serious inquiry the flow of experience, the fleeting impressions, and the chimerical qualities of life within and around the colonial Virginia house received their most challenging treatment in Isaac's essay on Thomas Jefferson's first scheme for Monticello and in his recent presentation "Myth and Story in Old Virginia Landscapes."\textsuperscript{147}

Some of what seems fresh and promising in the latest studies of the colonial Virginia house will certainly ripen and endure. Other aspects of this new work will filter into obscurity, for the future is never very cooperative with the present and its forecasts. Whatever develops, however, it is clear that colonial Virginia houses—those that robustly survive as well as those that waver, obscure and ghostlike, as ruins, documentary notations, or archaeological remains—will continue to engage scholarly as well as popular attention. Perhaps this persistence occurs because these houses offer ready access to the complex nature of the colonial Virginia past and simultaneously confirm its irretrievable loss.\textsuperscript{148} Architectural historians who venture into this realm of extremes encounter both intense struggle and enthralling rewards. For these scholars there is the chance—but not the guarantee—that they will succeed in telling true stories about colonial Virginia houses and the world to which they belonged. For them there is also the privilege of telling something about themselves and their position, their condition in the inevitable course of shifting space and passing time.


\textsuperscript{148} Dell Upton offers his own views on this matter in his bold new \textit{Architecture in the United States} (London, 1998), esp. pp. 17-55.