

## The Mansions of Alloways Creek

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[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

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# The Mansions of Alloways Creek

## I: A QUESTION OF ORIGINS

The hundred or more patterned brick houses of Salem County in southern New Jersey, roughly centring around Alloways township, are not exactly unknown to people interested in American arts and civilization;<sup>1</sup> but they are not exactly famous monuments, either. Although you can find them if you take the trouble to ask, few of them are voluntarily pointed out as landmarks. Yet if you happen to be in that vicinity, they are worth looking for, and at. There is nothing quite like them in North America, at least in such a concentration. What you find are houses with blank side walls, one and one-half to two and one-half stories high, built of bricks set with vitrified headers to form elaborate patterns of zig-zags, diamonds, coronets, figures, and letters. Almost always the vitrified bricks are burnt blue, the regular courses red. When the sun catches them, especially mornings or evenings, it flashes off the glassy surface so that the pattern seems to glow crimson and gold. Worth seeing as aesthetic experience. Worth observing as folk culture. And worth studying as historical

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1. The basic works on the patterned brick houses of Southern New Jersey are Joseph SICKLER, *Old Houses of Salem County* (Salem, N.J., 1934), rev. ed. 1949; and Paul J. LOVE, "Patterned Brickwork in Southern New Jersey," *Proceedings of the New Jersey Historical Society*, LXXIII (1955), 182–208. The earliest reference to them is in 1758, when Israel Acrelius, reporting on the state of Swedish churches in America, remarked that "the houses along the Delaware [in former New Sweden, i.e.] are built of bricks, after the English fashion, without coating, every other brick glazed." (quoted in George BENNETT, *Early Architecture of Delaware* [1912], 16). An 1876 Centenary reminiscence of Thomas Shourds (1805–1891) from a founding family of Salem County, refers to them only to mention that the first patterned brick buildings there were the work of Richard Woodnutt, a Quaker bricklayer who arrived from England via Philadelphia about 1695, and was instrumental in building Salem County's first brick meeting-house on Abel Nicholson's property. (Thomas SHOURDS, *History of Fenwick's Colony* [Bridgeton, New Jersey, 1876], 368).

documents of a particular area and era in American life.

The first Europeans who came to the area now centred around Salem were put there by the New Sweden Company in the 1630s and 40s. They were not all Swedes by any means, but came from all over Northern Europe. They seem to have brought with them a North European folk building tradition of long low cottages consisting of two or three contiguous rooms roofed by what some authorities like to call "Swedish gambrels." Then in the mid-1670s a sizeable English settlement of Quakers arrived, led by John Fenwick. These outnumbered and assimilated the first settlers, and in due course became First Families of the region. At first they seem to have adopted the original settlers' house-type — or more precisely, perhaps, the original settlers helped them get established by building houses for them;<sup>2</sup> John Fenwick's 1678 house in Salem sounds, from descriptions, as if it were just this Northern European gambrel-roofed three-contiguous-room sort of homestead. But there were all sorts of interconnections, personal and business, between the Salem colony and the much larger Philadelphia settlement established across the Delaware River in the 1680s, and soon enough the distinctive Philadelphia town-house type began appearing on farms in Salem county. Devised apparently by Nicholas Barbon (who may have been the first speculative contractor-builder in the modern sense) to meet a need for quickly-built and

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2. In the case of Philadelphia, Swedish participation in early building is documented. Land for the new city was bought from Swedes and they helped with building the first houses. Cf. Amandus JOHNSON, *Swedish Settlements on the Delaware* (Philadelphia, 1911 [reprinted 1969]), II, 113. Hugh MORRISON, *Early American Architecture* (New York, 1952), 505, quotes William Penn's 1684 instructions to his immigrants: "... build, then, a House of thirty foot long and eighteen broad, with a partition near the middle, and an other to divide one end of the House into two small Rooms" as in fact advice to adopt a Swedish-type plan.

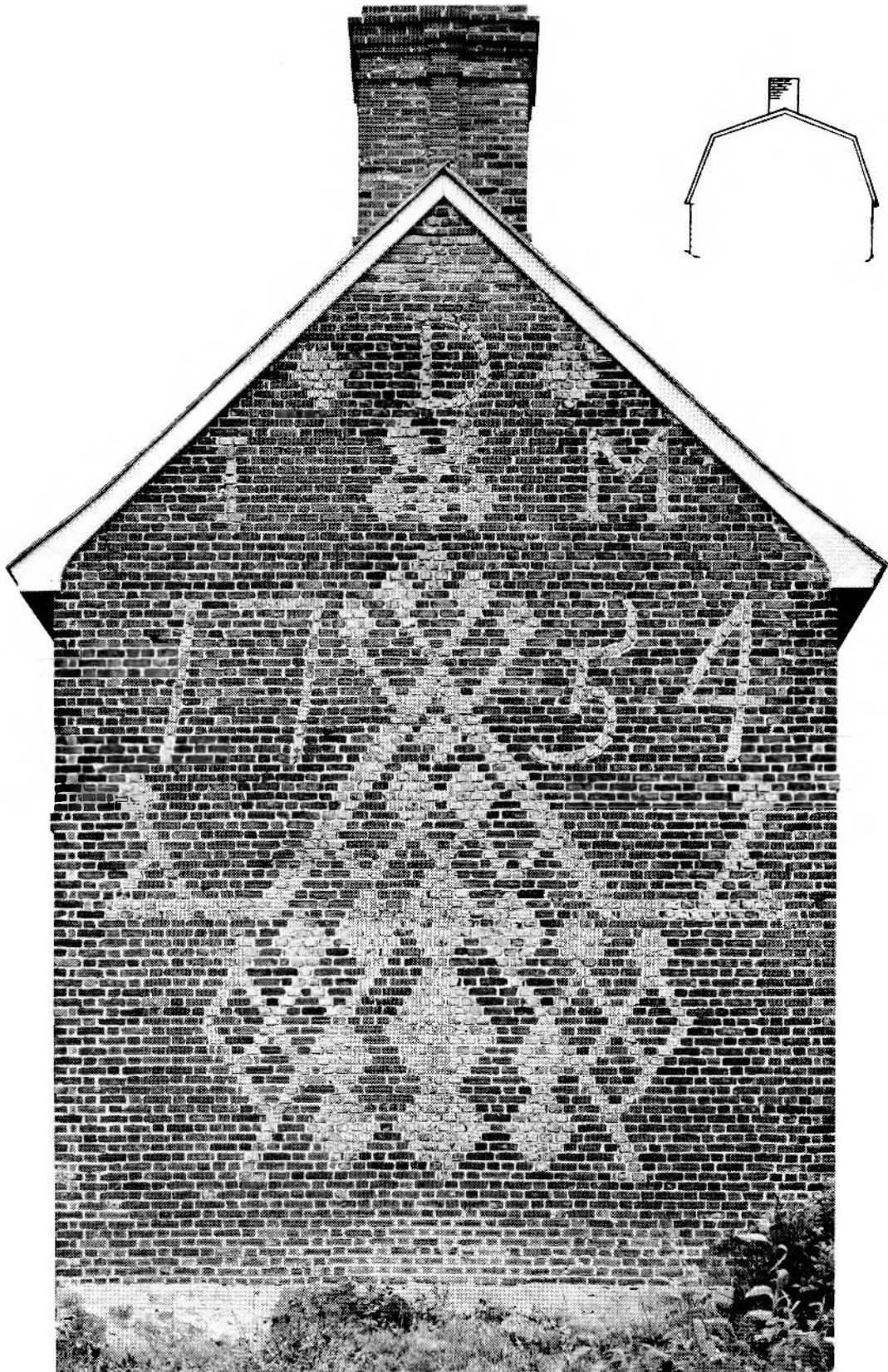


FIGURE 1. West Wall of the John and Martha Dickeson house, Alloways Creek, New Jersey. Modern photo by Jack Boucher, 1970. Inset: original gambrel-shaped roofline.

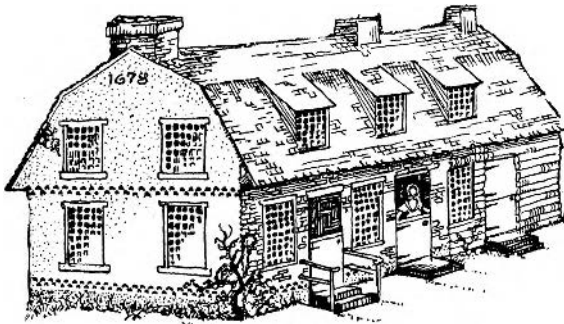


FIGURE 2. Conjectural reconstruction of John Fenwick's 1678 homestead at Ivy Point on Fenwick Creek at the foot of Fifth Street, Salem. Demolished c. 1820. From Joseph SICKLER, *The Old Houses of Salem County* (Salem, N.J. 1939). Original North European house-type of this area.

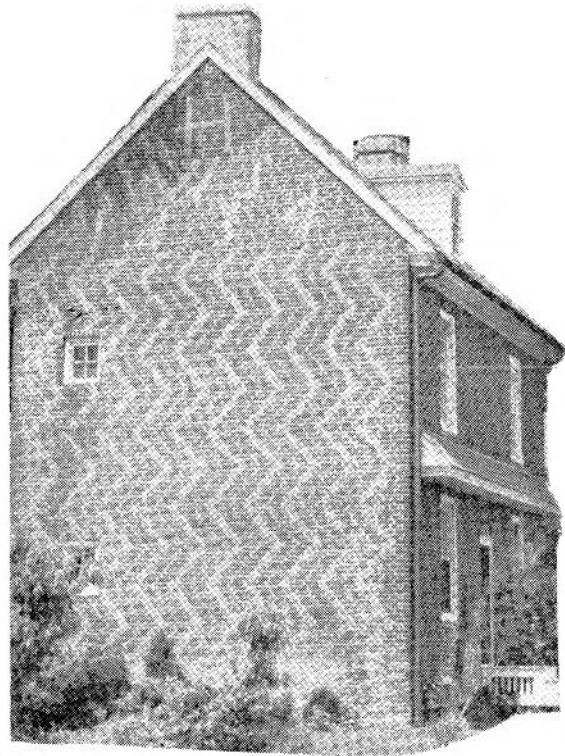


FIGURE 3. William Hancock House, Hancock's Bridge, 1734. The Philadelphia town-house type reproduced in rural Salem County.

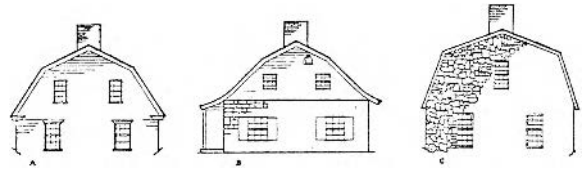


FIGURE 4. Types of gambrel roofs: (A) New England; (B) Dutch; (C) Swedish (Philip White). "Types of Gambrel Roofs," illustration from Hugh MORRISON, *Early American Architecture* (New York, Oxford, 1952).

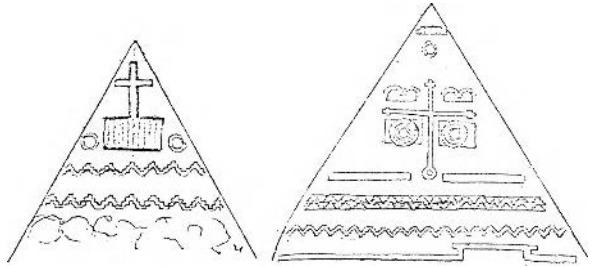


FIGURE 5. Gable decorations in patterned brick, from typical small Swedish churches — Husby Langhundra (left) and Vaksala (right). From Gerda BOETHIUS, *De Tegelornerade grätenskyrkorna* (Stockholm, 1921).

easily repeatable city houses following the Great Fire of London in 1666, this was composed vertically rather than horizontally, on a few standardized plans, of units standardized in size, with standardized details like pent eaves and blank firebreak walls.<sup>3</sup>

That Philadelphia builders should be invited to erect houses in Salem was natural; that they would build the same types there as in Philadelphia was natural too — by the practices of traditional vernacular building, if not ours. Whence the curious sight of Salem county houses standing in the countryside with blank side walls, obviously designed as firebreaks to separate city row-houses. (Of course Salem County is far from the only place you see this kind of house; it can be found all around Philadelphia, notably in Chester and Bucks County, and for the same reasons.<sup>4</sup>) In due course, this Philadelphia house-type was coalesced by local builders with the gambrel-roofed rural type. The

3. On folk architecture generally, a very good study — perhaps the best so far — is Henry C. GLASSIE, *Folk Culture of the Eastern United States* (Philadelphia, 1968). Philadelphia/Restoration London House types are discussed there, 58-59.

4. Cf. the discussion, and illustrations, of the variations on Philadelphia house-types, and the effect of the "Wertembaker line" dividing brick- from stone-building country in the Delaware Valley, in my *Images of American Living* (Philadelphia/New York, 1966), 80-86.

result: a distinctive South Jersey variant of Mid-Atlantic colonial folk building. One-and-a-half or occasionally two stories high, it typically had a "Swedish gambrel" roof, and frequently a so-called "Swedish" three-room plan as well; but its proportions, materials, use of variable standard units, and blank side-walls obviously derived from city house types associated with Restoration London and Quaker Philadelphia.

It was on these blank side walls that the elaborate blue glazed-brick patterns appear, which give Salem County whatever architectural renown it may enjoy.

The precise origins of this tradition of patterned brick has been a subject of considerable speculation, not to say controversy, amongst its small but devoted band of admirers. There is a vague tradition that the patterned brick work was done by persons of Swedish extraction. Reviewing the 1966 Tercentennial picture-book *Fenwick's Colony*, in *New Jersey Genesis* (XIII, 3, 1966, p. 588) Carl Williams wrote that "the identity of the man who fashioned the most elaborate of these [patterned brick] walls has been recovered. It is surprising to learn that he was a native of Salem County, a third generation Swede in America with no known contact at all with English or European techniques and traditions in brick laying. The great west wall of the [Dickeson] house was certainly his personal creation. This craftsman was not old enough to have laid the walls of the earliest decorative examples... but the Samuel Bassett gable [1757] is his work." Only the brick layer's Swedish descent was remembered, apparently, not his name; and for many, that was not enough.

The notion of a Swedish influence is attractive to people who like the melting-pot theory of American culture. It also affords a satisfying demonstration of the principle that the first settlers in any region give a distinctive accent or flavour to its later culture, no matter how totally assimilated they may be. Transmission of a patterned brick tradition from, say, Uppsala (where there are a great many elaborate examples of patterned walls on churches),<sup>5</sup> presumably via patterned hangings

common in Swedish folk tradition, quilts, folk-carved cradles and bedsteads, and the like,<sup>6</sup> is romantic to contemplate. Further, it can be neatly

in *Oberitalien und Norddeutschland* (Leipzig, 1891); F. ADLER, *Mittelalterliche Backsteinbauwerke der Preussischen Staates* (Berlin 1859-1869, 1896-1898, etc). I am grateful for advice on the survival of brickwork in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries from Sten Karling, Professor Emeritus of the University of Stockholm Institute of the History of Art. All around the provinces of Stockholm, Uppsala, or Dalarna — the very provinces, by the way, whence the majority of settlers in New Sweden came, according to Amandus JOHNSON (*Swedish Settlements on the Delaware* I, distribution map. 28) — can be found Swedish brickwork obviously composed in the deliberate manner of the south Jersey examples, rather than like the natural and spontaneous decoration of Tudor England. All the characteristic designs of south Jersey for which Paul Love reported, "no duplicate, no echo found in either America or England," are found there. Most, to be sure, belong to the 14<sup>th</sup> through 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, but there are examples from all centuries up through the 19<sup>th</sup>. Being on such prominent and visible buildings as the churches of villages and hamlets, this Swedish brickwork has kept continuously before the eyes of succeeding generations. Also, it apparently was more than ornamental: it had some symbolic significance that kept the idea of a figured or patterned wall from being dulled through familiarity. A good discussion of this occurs in Dietrich ELLGER, "Der Dom zu Ratzeburg und die Frage nach der Farbigkeit romanischer Backsteinkirchen zwischen Niedersachsen und Seeland", *Nordelbingen*, XXXVIII (1969). Though almost entirely concerned with German brickwork, this study has obvious implications for Sweden, which then, as long subsequent, was in the German cultural orbit. Ellger argues (24-25) that the appearance in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries of "niche patterning" (*jüggennetz*) in brickwork which obviously has no structural origins or connotations, indicates that "symbolic significances" are to be sought. Tentatively he suggests that this symbolism would be in the area of architectonic simulations of ideal proportional systems. I would be inclined to think (1) that symbolic value, perhaps of some prophylactic sort, would be inherent in the shapes themselves — just as this is not modern ornament "in the nature of materials", so the meaning of these shapes was explicit; (2) that the original meaning of these shapes was set in pre-Christian Nordic times; (3) that such an interpretation is strengthened by the existence of Swedish examples of actual figures set into the brickwork, as e.g. at Stora Tuna, in Dalarna where figures of St. Olaf and St. Erik appear, 3 meters high, made of brick and plaster; (4) that there may be some relationship in origin therefore between this Swedish patterned brickwork and external painting of houses (e.g. in Switzerland) and barns (e.g., the Pennsylvania German "hex" signs). But all such matters are beside the point here, as would be any getting into the vexed question of Pennsylvania German "hex" signs, whether they have any antiquity at all, and if so what they mean, or meant. What matters in our connection is that symbolic value would inhibit anyone from covering the brickwork over. Evidence for the visible survival of this brickwork into and beyond the 18<sup>th</sup> century comes from *Sveriges Kyrkor*; also, the fact that some of these medieval churches were later refurbished in Renaissance and Baroque times. The west gable of Oster Lövsta is an example, illustrated by Gerda Boëthius.

5. On patterned brick in Swedish churches, cf. *Sveriges Kyrkor: Konsthistoriskt Inventarium*, founded 1912 by S. Curman and J. Roosval, and still continuing under the direction of Armin Tuulse of the Art History Institute, University of Stockholm. Specifically: the standard work on Swedish medieval churches is Gerda BOETHIUS, *De Tegelornerade gråstenskyrkorna* (Stockholm, 1921); comparable churches in Finland are studied by C. LINDBERG, *Om teglets användning i Finlands medeltida gråstenskyrkor* (Stockholm, 1919); there are also a number of older books of a general nature, such as O. STIEHL, *Der Backsteinbau romanischer Zeit, besonders*

6. For examples of folk patterns in textiles and other arts, see Eleanor WHITMORE, "Origins of Pennsylvania Folk Art," *Antiques*, XXXVIII, 3 (1940), 106-110; Albert ESKERÖD, *Swedish Folk Art* (Stockholm, Nordiska Museet,

compared with parallel developments in linguistic studies of dialect. Consult the volume of *New Jersey Archives* from 1664 to 1703 and you will find land deeds and legal transactions abounding with Swedish names, not yet Anglicized.<sup>7</sup> As late as 1753, the celebrated visitor Peter Kalm found Swedish being spoken in this region. Thus the hypothesis of a Swedish tradition behind the patterned brick houses would parallel the principle of linguistics that the earliest speech in any region continues to provide a substratum of accent — unrecognized preferences for what “sounds right”, similar to preferences for what “looks right”, subtly modify later visual culture for generations thereafter.<sup>8</sup> Further, it opens the way for exploration of parallels in this region to community patterns of political, sociological, and ethnographic development, — the sort of thing studied in C. C. Zimmerman’s and R. E. DuWors’ *Graphic Regional Sociology* or C. M. Arensberg’s *American Communities*.<sup>9</sup>

After all this, it is rather dull to consider the possibility that the bulk of these patterned brick houses may represent no more than provincial survivals of English taste for such patterning going back to the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods, still being perpetuated in remote areas of rural England in the mid-18<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>10</sup> And so a controversy

1964–1965); Verla BIRRI, *The Textile Arts* (New York, 1959). Specifically: in her unpublished Winterthur thesis “Textiles Used in Philadelphia 1760–1775” (1960), Ruth Cox illustrates a linen bed-hanging from Hancock’s Bridge, descended from the Ware family, and comments that it is more elaborate than ordinary textiles of the Philadelphia region.

7. Vol. XXI, published in Patterson, New Jersey, 1897.

8. On linguistic patterns in early settlement, see M. PEI, *Language for Everybody* (New York, 1958); the University of Michigan linguistic atlas of the U.S. has not yet reached this part of New Jersey. John GEIPEL, *The Viking Legacy: Scandinavian influence on the English and Gaelic Language* (Newton Abbot, 1971) is a good example of an interrelated study of folk art and language forms, although it deals with the reverse situation — imposition of alien forms on an existing culture. But it does show how, in linguistics and place-names, the influence of Scandinavians as a substratum or overlay, depending on whether they settled empty land or imposed themselves on earlier inhabitants, is decisively demonstrable. That there was a comparable influence on taste for design, proportions, etc., is obvious, but less easily demonstrable because the surviving evidence for it is chiefly in the form of manuscripts, which are moveable, and sculptured ornament, whose makers by their profession move about.

9. Reference to C. C. ZIMMERMAN and R. E. DU WORS, *Graphic Regional Sociology* (Cambridge, Mass., 1952), Basic Regions Maps, I, and C. M. ARENSBERG, “American Communities,” *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 57 (1955), 1143–1162.

10. This was Paul Love’s conclusion. “There was a comparatively large colony of Swedes already located in the neighbourhood of Salem before 1675,” he wrote in

rages — modest enough by *Kunstgeschichte* standards, but raging nonetheless. Behind, and unconsciously fuelling much of it, is an assumption that we may have here in visual arts something corresponding to the “mute inglorious Milton” of Gray’s *Elegy* — some forgotten genius expressing a view of life and an awareness of materials in the simple medium of brick work in his native county, whose origins can be looked for in much the same spirit as Iberian and African influences are traced in Picasso. For this kind of art, no such assumption is valid. Its primary value is not as art in any modern sense, but as historical documentation a record of certain older attitudes towards life which remain significant to us living today, because we cannot escape being to some extent their products.

First, these houses are records of the art of architecture. That is, they demonstrate unequivocally, in a way our Art of architecture cannot, how architecture in most parts of the world and in most ages of the world was constructed. They remind us that our modern concept of the genius creating a great aesthetic experience for artists to enjoy is *not* the way historic architecture came into being.

Second, they are records of basic institutions in Western civilization — specifically, visual metaphors of the founding of landed families and property transmission through marriage.

These are matters worth investigating.

## II: A LESSON IN THE VERNACULAR

No documentation reveals exactly who built south Jersey’s patterned brick houses. But we can get a good idea of the kind of people they must have been, and how they went about it, on analogy with development from early settlement to permanent house-building elsewhere. For what the documentation on early life in southern New Jersey does reveal is its great similarity to frontier life at all times and places. Laura Wilder’s stories of homesteading in Wisconsin in the 1870s and South Dakota in the 1880s hardly differs in any detail from homesteading in New Jersey in the 1670s and

“Patterned Brickwork” (*op. cit.*, 185). “Here we have no evidence whatsoever of brick architecture which might have influenced the English colonists. It is nevertheless of interest to discover that patterned brickwork was also known and used in Sweden during this same period. [But he seems never to have looked at any, to ascertain resemblances.] It is apparent that... in most examples, we can safely assume an influence directly from England.” Glassie (*Patterns, op. cit.*) follows him in this position (150–154).

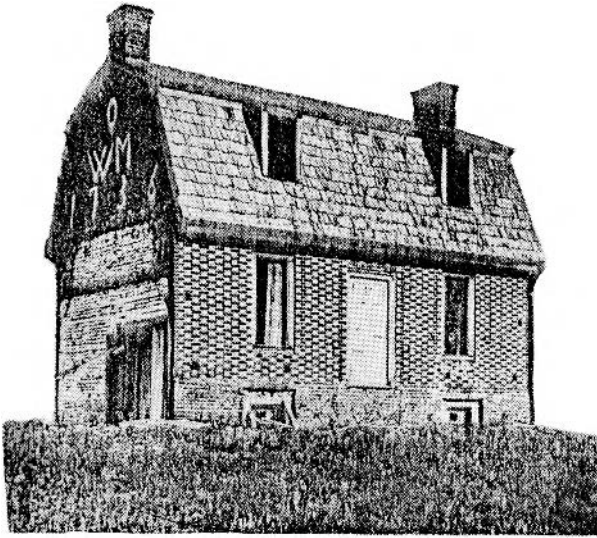


FIGURE 6. A distinctive folk house-type in brick: The William and Mary Oakford house, a mile south of Alloway, New Jersey, built 1736. As it was in the 1930s, before restoration (from *Old Rooflines & Candle Ends*, Salem County Historical Society 1934, revised 1971). This 1½-story gambrel-roofed three-room-ground-floor house is the record of the fusion of descendants of the New Sweden settlement with those of Fenwick's English Quaker colony. The brickwork — checkerboard on the façade, ornate initials and date on the blank side wall picked out by vitrified blue headers set against finely burnt red stretchers — is the special distinguishing feature. The house was built for (and possibly the carpentry was executed by) a grandson of that Wade Oakford who by 1700 had acquired 5 000 acres of land in this country.

1680s; nor were either different from the life of settlers in Vermont or upper New York in the 1780s. Whence it follows that all these cases can profitably be collated in order to discover how a distinctive regional architecture came into existence. A paradigm emerges, roughly as follows:

The first settlers who arrive are in their late twenties or thirties, with young families. They begin by erecting modest shelters of whatever materials are handy — logs in forested area, sod on the prairies; if they have pit-saws, they will shape planks. Thereafter their only building consists of additions and enlargements to their first shelters.

Whatever time is left over from the incessant round of chores frontier families have to do — neatly turned into an asset in the famous promotional blurb for Fenwick's Colony on 8 January 1675: "Here you need not trouble the Shambles for Meat, nor Bakers and Brewers for Beer and Bread, not run to a Linnen-Draper for a supply, everyone making their own Linnen, and a great part of their Woolen Cloth for their ordinary wearing..." — is taken up simply clearing the land,

draining it, and otherwise transforming it from forest or marsh into farm. By the second or third generation, depending on time and place, this basic work is done. Chores remain, but the land is not so demanding; furthermore, it now begins to produce a surplus. So improvements like wharves (if there is a creek or river) and roads can be thought of, to get the crops to market. All going well, cash prosperity ensues. And with this development comes a "proper" house. These permanent houses, coming fifty-odd years after the original settlement, will not be built like the first dwellings, by the farmers or planters themselves. They are now able to hire someone to do it. Whom? Apparently in all cases, a transient team of some kind — the same practice followed in this style of life in every area calling for a distinct degree of specialization beyond the frontiersman's normal jack-of-all-trades abilities.

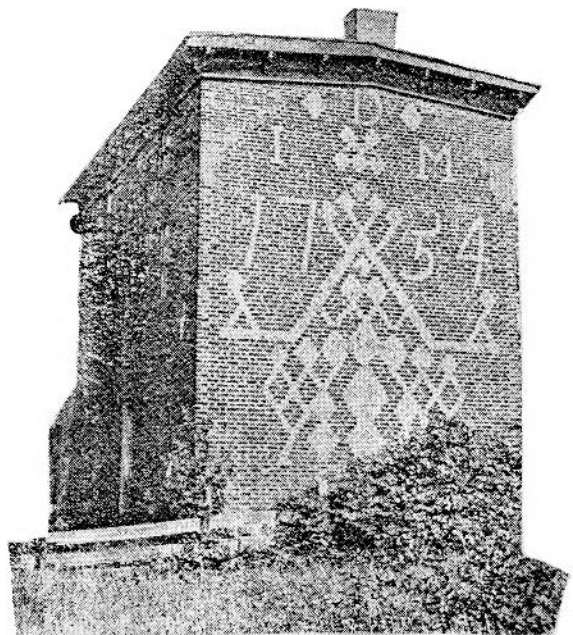


FIGURE 7. Climax of this type was the John and Martha Dickeson (sometimes spelt Dickinson) house, a few miles west of Alloway near the Wistar Glass Works. It was a full 2½ stories high and as is evident from this view c. 1930, originally had the "Swedish gambrel" roofline (enlargement to the fashionable flat Italianate bracketed gable apparently took place c. 1850, and in a restoration of the 1930s it was mistakenly restored to a straight gable on analogy with other county houses belonging to a common "I" type. Its west wall has been called "the most ornate glazed brickwork in all America" and displays almost the full vocabulary of this art: date, initials of builders, and a wealth of geometric designs, diamonds, zigzags, quasi-floral patterns. The first John Dickeson appears in Salem County records as acquiring 100 acres of land from founder John Fenwick's granddaughter in 1702. The builder of this house died in 1768.

Laura Ingalls Wilder's *Farmer Boy*, for instance, describes the cobbler's visit at Almanzo Wilder's boyhood farm home near Malone, New York. He stayed two or three days, long enough to make shoes for everyone in the family, then moved on to the next place. Similarly with the tinsmith and his pots and pans. Similarly with Sam Slick the clockmaker in Nova Scotia. Or the Yankee Trader of frontier folk legend, with his wagonload of manufactured articles. Houses were specialized artifacts to be acquired in just this way. At a certain stage in any given settlement, houses would be going up all over. A team of carpenter and stonemason (if good stone were abundant) or bricklayer (if clay were available and a brick house preferred) could make their living for a great many years simply going about from one property to another, living on each as many months as construction of a new house required. It was the style of such teams that gave regional character to architecture in most if not all times and places, a character that traditional High Art could build on. It was on just this kind of foundation that Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture was formed. Maginel Wright Barney in *The Valley of the God-Almighty Joneses* (1965, 85–86) tells how

There was, living in Uncle John's house, a Welsh stonemason named Timothy...

He was the stone builder for all the clan. He made the walls and foundations of their houses, their fireplaces and chimneys. He carved their mantels with mistletoe and holly and the family emblem: the old Druid symbol 'Truth Against the World'...

He was a loyal advocate of my brother. If there was a controversy concerning Frank's building, later on when he was becoming an architect, Timothy would nod his old head gently and say: 'Trust the boy, he knows.' It was he who supported Aunt Nell in the belief that Frank's idea for the windmill 'Romeo and Juliet,' a wooden tower of unique construction and design, would be feasible...

'It will stand,' Timothy insisted more than once, and he made the foundations even deeper and more solid than the specifications demanded. He lived to see his faith vindicated, too... Romeo and Juliet still stands, almost seventy years later. It was Timothy also who built the foundations for the beautiful new school building my brother later designed for the Aunts.

Things were surely no different in early 18<sup>th</sup>-century New Jersey. Folk tales (that is the proper word) have even preserved names and racial backgrounds of some of these builders. Joseph Sickler, writing *Old Houses of Salem County* in the early 1930s, recorded reminiscences like Dr. Warren L. Ewen's of his ancestors in the Oakford family:

I was told years ago by my granddad, Jonathan House (formerly Houseman [descended from one of the Germans brought over to run the Wistar Glass Works, a later racial strain in the country]) that the Oakfords, Wade and Charles, built several brick houses of the same design (hip [i.e. gambrel] roofed) on or near the Alloway Creek, and I believe they built the brick Gosling house [originally Richard Smith house, 1729, q.v.] — all of them were similar. One, just south of Alloways Creek — now standing one mile from Hancock's Bridge, another at Fogg's Landing on the Creek and on the first old road from Thompson's Bridge (now Alloway), via Sandy Ridge, to Salem, known as the old "Kentuck" road.

There were also three of the same pattern in Alloway village itself — one located on our (Ewen's) Lake, which was Alloway Creek before the dam; one on Daniel P. Dorrell's farm at the upper end of Alloway; and one in the yard of my previous home on Main Street in Alloway. All three are vouched for also by William B. Willis, Esquire, et als. There is also another, now standing one mile southeast of Thompson's Bridge and owned by Mrs. Frances House Acton, of Salem [illustrated here]...

Sickler went on to add that this team also built the Friends' Meeting House of 1772 in Salem, and that they built ships as well as houses — a combination as old as Western civilization itself, by the way — out of Salem county white oak, floating them down Alloways Creek to the Delaware River.

One need not delve deep into county archives to find hopeless confusion in these reminiscences. There were a Wade and Charles Oakford in the records from the late 1690s, acquiring land, along with a "Wadesamuel" Oakford who may or may not be the same person. That these were the same brothers referred to as builders is possible; if they were of legal age in the 1690s they would have been in their fifties when they built the Gosling (Smith) house, about 60 when they built the Oakford/Acton house in 1736. But to have built the Friends Meeting house they would have been exactly 100... Does it matter? For archival accuracy, yes. To understand how meaningful folk architecture was created, no. For that, we need only realize it was the work of local carpenters, serving needs of their society. And further that they worked in collaboration — Sickler's reminiscence is surely sound that "while the Oakford brothers were undoubtedly carpenters and carpenter-contractors, whether they did their own brick work or had a sub-contractor, the records fail to reveal." They gave the emergent folk house-type its plan and structure, guided in this taste by the taste of the English-descended community centring on Philadelphia. The brickwork, completing the house-type's distinctive character, was done by others, and deserves





FIGURE 8. A visual metaphor of family success in Virginia. "Berkeley" on the James Rivers, Charles City County. General view, including one of the two flanking dependencies; and detail of datestone with initials of Benjamin and Ann Harrison; from flier distributed to tourists.

separate study. To the point here is how the vernacular building process represented by these houses preserves a regional sense for proportions and spaces, consistently through the most extraordinary changes. Henry Glassie, of the Folklore Institute of Indiana University, has written acutely on this subject:<sup>11</sup>

The skins of house, are shallow things that people are willing to change, but people are most conservative about the spaces they must utilize and in which they must exist. Build the walls of anything, deck them out with anything, but do not change the arrangement of the rooms or their proportions. In these volumes — bounded by surfaces from which a person senses rebound to him — his psyche develops; disrupt them and you disrupt him.

This kind of inherent taste is a visual metaphor — albeit unconscious, but perhaps all the stronger for that, of a concept of "rightness", which lies at the bottom of any objective value system. Hence the appearance of the concept of "rightness" at the very beginning of civilization is no accident; on such a concept depends Natural Law and Practical Reason, and on these all civilized institutions ultimately rest. Egyptian civilization starts with *ma'at* — created and inherited rightness, the first premise of all reason and all justice; Mesopota-

mian civilization with *šimtu*, the same.<sup>12</sup> In every Indo-European language, whereas words for "left" or "wrong" differ wildly, the word and the concept of "rightness" remains constant through all millennia: *rita* in Hindu, *ortho* in Greek, *pravda* in Russian, *dharma* in Sanskrit, *rectus* in Latin, *droit* in French, *recht* in German. So understood, folk and vernacular building is a metaphor of the foundations of civilized life itself. But South Jersey folk and vernacular building offers something more — one of our best metaphors of the institution of marriage in western society.

### III: FOUNDING FATHERS AND FOUNDING MOTHERS

The bulk of the elaborately blue-and-red patterned brick houses which give South Jersey most of whatever distinction in early American architecture it possesses, falls in date between 1720 and 1760. Paul Love's "Patterned Brickwork in Southern New Jersey," listed over a hundred examples from four counties. The most remarkable — forty or so of them — clustered in Salem County. Presumably there were others that have been destroyed. Some are still being found, when

11. Henry C. GLASSIE, "Eighteenth-century Cultural Process in Delaware Valley Folk Building," (*Winterthur Portfolio*, VII), (Charlottesville, Virginia, 1972), 29-59.

12. See, e.g., the discussions of *ma'at* in John WILSON, *The Burden of Egypt* (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1951), 48-49, 119-123, *et al.*; of *šimtu* in A. Leo OPPENHEIM, *Ancient Mesopotamia* (Chicago, 1964), 201f., 204f.



FIGURE 9. A visual metaphor of family success in New Jersey: The Richard Smith (Gosling) House as it was in the 1930s. From *Old Roof Trees and Candle Ends*, Salem County Historical Society publication, 1934 (rev. ed., 1971, 46).

sheds or additions built up against them are torn off or fall down for some reason. One of the best examples in Salem County, the Joseph Darkin house, was discovered in this manner. Even supposing that twice as many houses as are now known originally existed, however, that would still mean that one could have been erected in Salem County every eight months over a forty-year period — by no means beyond the capacity of a team of carpenter and brick-layer with some assistance. In fact, such a schedule is just about what might be expected of a building team working during the spring, summer, and fall, but not during the winter.

In other words, all the patterned-brick houses in Salem County and vicinity could have been built by one person or a small team. It follows that a sequence of dates on known houses might give a chronological list of this team's clientele and general movements over a forty year period. In theory, they could have begun working on Joseph Darkin's house in Elsinboro township, completed in 1720. Next, Abel Nicholson's nearby, completed in 1722. Thence to other famous examples: the John Maddox Denn house of 1725, near Hancock's Bridge; the Chambless house in Lower Alloway's Creek township and the Padgett house near Harmersville between 1730 and 1733; the William Hancock house at Hancock's Bridge in 1734; working up to masterpieces — the Samuel Nicholson house of about 1752 in Elsinboro township, the famous John Dickeson house outside of Woodstown in Alloway township of 1754, the Samuel Bassett house in Pilesgrove township out-

side Woodstown of 1757; finally tailing off in the mid-1760s.

Here is fuel to fire the coldest art-historical soul! A neat geographical sequence, inviting a neat artistic biography of stylistic evolution. Missing links; doubtful attributions; daring inclusions or exclusions of attributions from far adjacent counties — all the necessary material to emulate Berenson in a small South Jersey way. Postulations of some Maestro di Allovacci, complete with *œuvre*, disciples, *amici*, schools. And *Einflüsse* — Swedish influences, to top it off. Who could ask for more? Alas, the material stubbornly resists. There is no discernible evolution in this style, unless one counts the "climactic moment" from the Dickeson house of 1754 to the Samuel Bassett of 1757. No formal development can be seen. Nor would it reveal anything if there were. The reason is that traditional architecture was never created as personal or cultural self-expression. It was always done in a context of social function. It was always the creation of some kind of Establishment, creating visual metaphors of some established social convictions. And the particular interest of these houses is precisely that in them it is not difficult to ascertain what this Establishment was and its values were.

Where you can see that best, oddly enough — though actually it is not so odd once you realize that the old concepts of what architecture is and does in society have been preserved on the popular level — is in guides and local histories. Consider for example the account of the Richard Smith (Gosling) house in Salem County, from *Old Roof Trees and Candle Ends*, published by the Salem County Historical Society in 1934:

Situated in the South-West angle formed by the juncture of the road leading to Hancock's Bridge from Salem and the Amblebury Road in Elsinborough Township. Richard Smith was the son of David, who was the son of the settler. The gable only remains of the original dwelling showing the blue glazed brick ornamentation and small window which had been raised to a full two-storey and half and windows punched into the glazed brick work. As families grew and became more prosperous this frequently happened.

To go from such a humble dwelling to a grand Tide-water Virginia mansion like Berkeley on the James may seem a jump — but the handout given tourists to Berkeley is substantially the same:

The land on which it stands was part of a grant made in 1619 by King James I to the Berkeley Company... On December 4, 1619, the settlers stepped ashore there and celebrated the first

Thanksgiving Day more than a year before the Pilgrims landed in New England... it was as the home of the Harrison family that Berkeley achieved its greatness. The early Georgian mansion which is said to be the oldest three-storey brick house in Virginia, was built in 1726 by Benjamin Harrison, a leader in colonial affairs. His son, Col. Benjamin Harrison, inherited it. Member of the Continental Congress, Signer of the Declaration of Independence, active in the Revolution and thrice Governor of Virginia, this Harrison was himself enough to bring glory to his house... Further prestige came to Berkeley in the next generation through Col. Harrison's younger son, William Henry... He made his reputation in the Northwest Territory of which he was the first secretary and as a great Indian fighter, he came to be called 'old Tippecanoe'. When he was elected President of the United States [in 1840] he returned to write his inaugural address in the room in which he had been born (despite his supporters having featured in their campaign models of the 'simple log cabin, his birth place'.) The Harrison family was to produce yet another President [1882-1892] in Benjamin, the grandson of William Henry. As the ancestral home of two Presidents, Berkeley has the distinction almost unique, shared only with the Adams house in Massachusetts.

Popular descriptions of architecture like this — like so much else in the popular arts — preserve a principle all too often obscured or neglected by formal arts and architectural study: the history of architecture does not primarily consist of analyzing aesthetics and streams of influences. It begins with, and is inseparable from, the history of the people who had architecture built for themselves. So Joseph Sickler, the local historian, was quite correct in claiming that he “tried to preserve Salem's past in book form” by relating the history of *The Old Houses of Salem County* and their builders together; correct, too, when he observed that he had had two predecessors in that task: Thomas Shourds (1805-1891) who, “spending years in the accumulation of data [about family histories]... finally published, at the age of 71... in 1876 his celebrated *History of Fenwick's Colony*,” and Robert Gibbon Johnson, “the first historian, but Johnson ended his text with the Revolution and made no attempt to trace the great land-owning families and their scions who made Salem...” (68) “The great land-owning families and their scions who made Salem.” Precisely. On such people and their estates Western civilization was founded, and they remained one of its fundamental institutions from the later Middle Ages into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Hear a French scholar, Régine Pernoud, lamenting the dissolution of this foundation of Western society in France, and blaming on it the loss of French influence throughout the modern

world. According to her, family solidarity was “the essential motif” of medieval society — a family all so “united by flesh and blood that their interests are identical”:

This conception of the family rested on a material basis: The family property, generally landed property... the family, stretching across generations, remained in every case the true owner of the patrimonial estate. The father of the family, who received the property from his ancestors, was responsible for it to his descendants... he had the duty of defending, protecting, and improving the lot of all the persons and things of whom he had been appointed the natural guardian... Anglo-Saxon... family institutions were identical with those of the French throughout the middle ages... unlike the French... [they] have continued to preserve them. Here doubtless, lies the explanation of the prodigious Anglo-Saxon expansion throughout the world, for it is in fact in this way that an Empire is founded, as a result of waves of explorers, pioneers, merchants, and adventurers... leaving their homes... without forgetting their native land and the tradition of their forefathers. [La Lumière du Moyen-Âge. 1944, 1.]

These “family institutions” are what all colonial American houses of any pretensions are “about”. Precisely how families were established and perpetuated varied, of course, from region to region within colonies, from colony to colony within British America; and nowhere in the colonies was the process exactly like England. But throughout the colonies, the idea of founding a family with an estate was a common ambition. And a “great house” — great by comparison with its neighbours — was its commonest monument.

Most famous American examples of such houses, perhaps, are the 18<sup>th</sup>-century mansions of Tide-water Virginia. Through them, and their counterparts in South Carolina and Maryland, can be traced a developing “Georgian” taste for restrained, balanced, classical forms — from “Rosewell” through “Stratford”, “Westover”, “Berkeley”, “Carter's Grove”, “Gunston Hall” to the banqueting room at “Mount Vernon”; “Mulberry” to “Middleton” to “Drayton Hall”; “Readbourne” to “Whitehall”. This architecture is conscious High Art, and its formal development has so preoccupied recent scholarly and appreciative writings that these mansions are now commonly thought to be related by lines of descent, as if begotten one by another in a biological sense. Such research has its uses. But it tends to obscure another and historically much more significant set of relationships of these Virginia mansions — to house-types elsewhere which are similar not in outward forms, but in social function. That is, to

houses which had the same kind of "meaning." It is in this sense that famed "Berkeley" is related to the obscure Richard Smith house in Elsinboro Township in south Jersey.

On the side walls of both appear initials of the owners, husband and wife, and the date. In this apparently trivial coincidence is summed up both the differences between these two buildings and their similarities. In the one case, aspirations to English aristocracy implied in the elegant refinement of a classically lettered Georgian plaque, tastefully inconspicuous above a pedimented side door. In the other, simple folk pride displayed in great blue-glazed brick digits sprawling blatantly over a whole end wall. But in both, evidence of how the buildings functioned in their own time and place — and evidence that, in both cases, their social function was the same. They were visual metaphors of family success.

And, of particular interest nowadays, perhaps, *family success* — *not* career success by the Head of the House. These houses were not built by and for Mr. Harrison, or Mr. Smith, with "Mrs." tagging along somewhere obscurely. They were built for Benjamin and Ann, for Richard and Sarah. They are metaphors of the traditional Western concept of marriage, as the founding of a landed family in a *joint* enterprise. To speak of Founding Fathers only is not to speak like the founders themselves. They

thought of both Founding Fathers and Founding Mothers, together.

#### IV: HOMERIC ARISTOCRACIES IN NORTH AMERICA

Everywhere in North America from the 17<sup>th</sup> well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century, erection of a substantial house in some architectural style distinct from a utilitarian log cabin or barn was a recognized mark of successful family-founding. It follows, that differences in house-type or style from region to region, or colony to colony, were heavily influenced, if not dictated, by differences in the way landed families were established and their status understood.

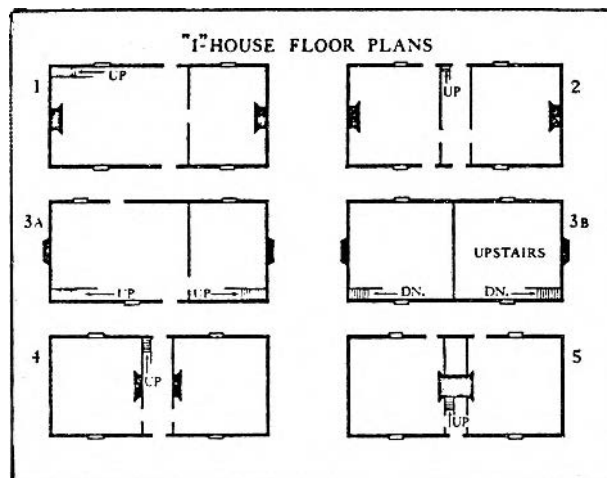
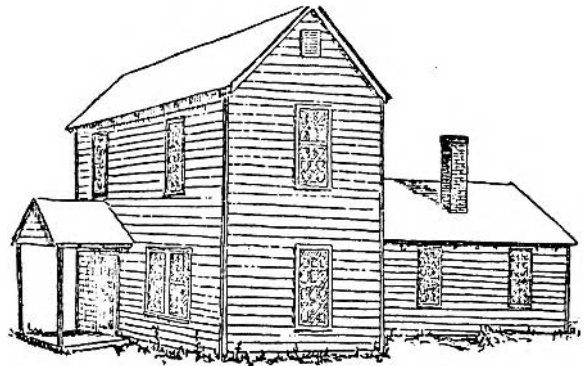


FIGURE 10. Plans and a typical example of the "I-type vernacular" rural homestead identified by Fred Kniffen in "Folk Housing: Key to Diffusion," *Annals of the American Association of Geographers*, LV, 4, December 1965. "The 'I' type," Kniffen wrote "is one of several compounded from the old English unit consisting of one room and end chimney. It is recorded full-blown for the Delaware-Chesapeake section by at least the late 17<sup>th</sup> century... Certain qualities all 'I' houses unfailingly had in common: gables to the side, at least two rooms in length, one room deep, and two full stories in height... the few essentials constitute the basic type, beyond which there are several varieties... Once formed, the 'I' type joined the movement southward along the Appalachian axis, swung westward as far as Texas and northward across the Ohio, there joining a trickle that had come westward through Pennsylvania..."

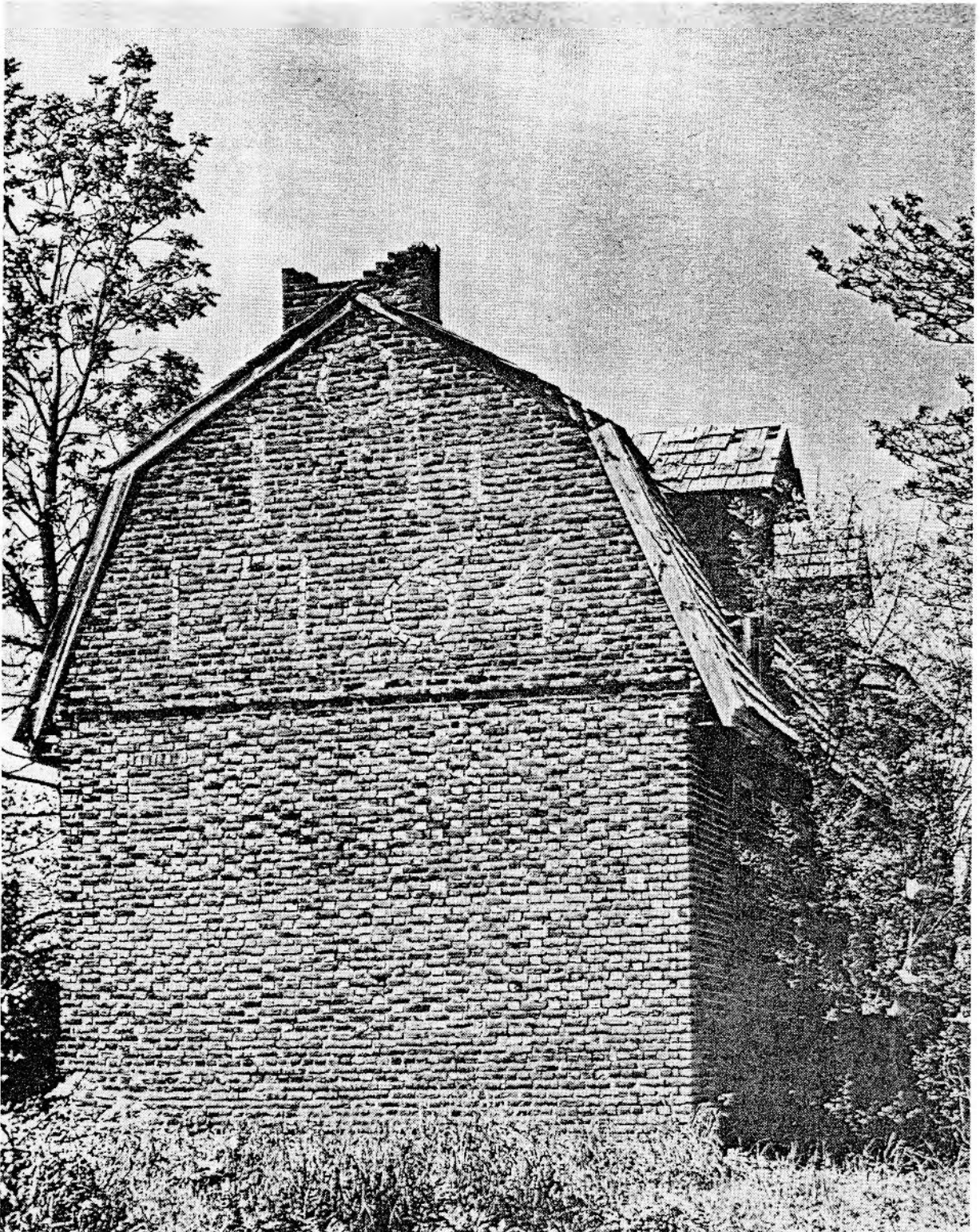


FIGURE 11. With Kniffen's identification of the 'I'-type vernacular in mind, it is easy to recognize how the local south Jersey colonial variant conformed to it. The Dickeson house is only the most famous example of the 1½-story gambrel-roofed type being transformed into an 'I' type by an enlargement which must have been done more to conform to the fashionable 'I' type status symbol than for additional space, since what it adds is hardly commensurate with the expense and inconvenience involved. The John and Hannah Oakford house built in 1764 close to a marsh along the Delaware River south of Hancock's Bridge, preserves its original form.

In "Politics and Social Structure in Virginia,"<sup>13</sup> Bernard Bailyn pointed out how, although Virginia's settlement went back to 1607, its "first families" came considerably later than that:

Most of Virginia's great eighteenth-century names, such as Bland, Burwell, Byrd, Carter, Digges, Ludwell, and Mason, appear in the colony for the first time within ten years either side of 1655. Favored... by circumstance, a small group within the second generation migration moved toward setting itself off in a permanent way as a ruling landed gentry... The establishment of this group was rapid. Within a decade of their arrival they could claim, together with a fortunate few of the first generation, a marked social eminence and full political authority at the county level... By the end of the century the most difficult period of adjustment had passed and there was an acceptance of the fact that certain families were distinguished from others in riches, in dignity, and in access to political authority. The establishment of these families marks the emergence of Virginia's colonial aristocracy.

This social evolution was a result of the introduction of slavery on a great scale, and the consequent practicality of amassing huge blocks of land. Virginia's first settlers, though they had cleared the land, lacked the capital and connections necessary to develop it on a big scale. Possessing both, immigrants of the 1640-1670 wave gained control and took leadership. Thus the famous "mansions of Virginia" that began to appear in the 1720s symbolized the success of families whose progenitors had arrived sixty-odd years before.

It was the same in Salem County, New Jersey. There too the "mansions of Alloways Creek" represented the success of families who arrived in the 1670s. The 1664-1703 volume of *New Jersey Archives* reveals precisely how it happened.<sup>14</sup> First, lordship over the land was directly delegated from the British Crown to substantial gentlemen of the realm, and they in turn secured their grants from the actual occupants, the Amerinds:

16<sup>th</sup> Charles 2d. March 12. Patent. King Charles II. to the Duke of York, for the land from the St. Croix River on the East, to the River Canada on the North and the Delaware R. on the West and South.

1664 June 24. Do. James, Duke of York, to John, Lord Berkeley and Sir George Carterett, Knight, for the land West of Long Island and Manhatas Island, bounded East by the main sea and Hudson's River, West by Delaware Bay or River, extending

South to Cape May and North as far as the Northernmost branch of said river, called New Jersey.

1673-4 March 18. Deed. John, Lord Berkeley, Baron of Stratton, to John Fenwick of Binfield, Co. of Berks, Esq<sup>re</sup>, for one half of New Jersey.

1676-7 March 14. Indian Deed. Mohutt and other Indians to John Fenwick, for the land along Delaware River from Game of fforcus or Fenwick's Creek to Cannahockinck Creek and up the last named creek, then from its head to the head of Allowayes Creek, thence to the head of the first named and down the same to Delaware R.

Then come a long series of deeds recording transfer of land blocks — anywhere from 500 to 10000 acres — to substantial bourgeois and gentlemen:

1675 April 8. Patent. John Fenwick to Edward Wade, citizen and cloth-worker of London, and wife Prudence, for 1000 acres to be surveyed in N.J.

1675 May 6. Do. Same to Thomas Anderson of the Parish of St. James Clerkenwell, Co. of Middlesex, bricklayer, and wife Ann, for 1000 acres in Fenwick's Colony.

1675 May 6. Do. Same to Edward Bradway of St. Paul Shadwell, Co. of Middlesex, lighterman, and wife Mary, for 1000 acres in Fenwick's Colony.

1675 May 10. Do. Same to Richard Hancock of Bromley near Bow, Co. of Middlesex, upholsterer, and wife Margaret, for 500 acres in Fenwick's Colony.

And so on and on. Also there follow a few patents to occupants of Salem County land from the New Sweden settlement; such as:

1679 Oct. 12. Patent. John Fenwick to Matthyas Johnson of West Fenwick Township, N. J., planter, Andrea Anderson, Lawrence alias Lance Cornelious and Annica Henricks, for 600 acres between the mouth of Bastowe Creek on the South, Purling Creek on the North and Fenwick's River on the East.

Succeeding deeds evidence how the settlers considered themselves to be founding new landed family estates. Over and over there are references to the names of estates, pathetically grandiloquent when one considers that in the late 1670s and 80s they must have consisted mostly of bush and swamp, with a log house set in the middle of a few acres of cleared land. Typically, Hipolit (Hypolitus) Lefevor calls his land "Hollybourne", and the 900 acres his son Hypolitus junior acquires from him in 1687 is called "Lefevors Chase". Samuel Hedge calls his land "Hedgefeild". Widow Ann Craven "late of Lymehouse... Middlesex... now of New Salem" proposed to call the 300 acres she acquired in 1679 along Alloways Creek "Craven's Choice", thus perpetuating a family

13. Reprinted in *Colonial America. Essays in Politics and Social Development*, ed. Stanley N. Katz (Boston, 1971), 138-139.

14. Excerpts from *New Jersey Archives, first series*, Vol. XXI, 1664-1703 (Patterson, N.J., 1897), 559f: "Salem No. 1" (numbers refer to page entries in that register.)

name for her sons even after she married Charles Bagaley and gave the land to him.

Of course substantial images of these aspirations could be built only after the land was cleared, and the inevitable shakedown established which of the early settlers could make a go of the venture and which could not. That means the 1720s — contemporaneously with the Virginia mansions, but earlier than Virginia relative to the founding of the colony because, although New Jersey did have some slavery and (as Jackson Turner Main pointed out) there was a tendency towards larger estates in south than in north Jersey,<sup>15</sup> these never became factors requiring outside resources on such a scale as to upset the evolution of local society, as happened in Virginia.

So in roughly the same decade, mansions serving similar social functions began to rise along Alloways Creek as along the James River. Their difference in outward form was a measure of differing wealth and power resulting from concentration of land and slavery (and other factors of course, such as Quaker principles).

Thus, the image of family success in Virginia was cast in Georgian, a high style whose forms had conscious aristocratic connotations. In the minds of designers and owners of 18<sup>th</sup>-century mansions, whether in Britain or Virginia (or Bombay or Barbados, for that matter), Georgian forms were associated with the aristocracy of Rome; that was

the source of their appeal — with especially powerful logic in Virginia, where powerful slave-owning Roman patricians could be pointed to as exemplars of the benefits accruing from aristocratic rule. Had not the great Roman families taken their nation to world leadership, wealth and power? Would not oligarchic rule do the same for England and Virginia?

The image of family success in Salem and surrounding New Jersey counties was cast in outwardly very different forms. Yet these folk house-types likewise proclaim the convictions of an aristocracy — and quite as validly as the mansions of Virginia. Only the type of aristocracy was different. In essential ethos, it was closer to what is described in the *Odyssey*, for instance, where

... Kings and nobles have a right, of course, to sit sometimes and feast, listen to minstrels singing, watch the young lads toss their balls and dance, or take a hand themselves in a contest of boxing, racing, or pitching weights, but only as a rest between labors. Like any great ranch owners, the more they and their wives possess in the way of practical skills, the more their affairs are likely to prosper. The lady Penelope is renowned not only for her beauty but for her weaving and competence as a housewife. Odysseus has the reputation of having in the past done every job on the place better than anyone else could do it... drive the straightest furrow... mow the biggest stretch of meadow in a day, breed the best strains of oxen and swine. He was adept at carpentry, too. There stand his room and the unique bed he built... he was the surest marksman with his great bow... [Louise Ropes Loomis, Introduction to Butler's translation of the *Odyssey*.]

In social base and outlook, it was like the aristocracy Laura Ingalls Wilder described in her books on pioneer life in the American Middle West during the 1870s and 1880s — where, again, leaders founded families and created estates through demonstrable personal superiority, “the reputation of having in the past done every job on the place better than anyone else could...” So Almanzo Wilder’s mother made the best butter in the State of New York, and his father raised the finest horses; Laura’s father could build everything from a house to a sleigh, and build it to perfection; and her mother, like Lady Penelope, was “renowned not only for her beauty but for her weaving and her competence as a housewife.” In all these households, in Ithaca on the Adriatic or Malone in upper New York, the pre-eminent values were aristocratic local pride and fierce independence:

... Father told her that Mr. Paddock wanted to take Almanzo as a [wheelwright] apprentice... ‘Well!’ Mother snapped. She was all ruffled, like an

15. Jackson Turner MAIN, *The Social Structure of Revolutionary America* (Princeton, 1965), 25, 33. From early times the southern part of New Jersey had a character quite different from the north — a distinctiveness based on a pattern of land use in “West Jersey” much closer to the southern plantation model than to the small holdings typical of “East Jersey” and the central or northern colonies generally:

New Jersey’s tax records for the years 1774-1788 demonstrate clearly the contrast between East and West Jersey... The distribution of land... reveals that the counties near New York (such as Bergen, Morris, Essex, and Monmouth) were occupied almost entirely by small farmers, whereas the southwestern section (notably Burlington and Gloucester) contained many large estates...

The tax lists of Burlington County, New Jersey, reveal a prosperous farm society in the Delaware Valley. A very high proportion — considerably over half — of the men had no land, a fact which indicates the presence of many farm laborers. New Jersey farms were seldom large, but these southwestern communities had many more 500-acre estates than did the townships near New York. Especially striking is the concentration of real estate. Nearly half of the Burlington land was owned by 10% of the taxpayers. The same concentration existed in nearby Salem and Gloucester counties.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, this social pattern produced the disruptive strife and strong pro-Confederate sentiment of the Civil War period in South Jersey. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it made possible that consolidation of great tracts into vegetable farms which gave New Jersey its name of the “Garden State”. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, it was manifested in south Jersey’s distinctive patterned brick houses.

angry hen. 'A pretty pass the world's coming to, if any man thinks it's a step up in the world to leave a good farm and go to town! How does Mr. Paddock make his money, if it isn't catering to us? I guess if he didn't make wagons to suit farmers, he wouldn't last long!'

'That's true enough,' said Father. 'But —'

'There's no "but" about it!' Mother said. 'Oh, it's bad enough to see Royal [their older son] come down to being nothing but a storekeeper! Maybe he'll make money, but he'll never be the man you are. Trucking to other people for his living, all his days — He'll never be able to call his soul his own. [Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Farmer Boy*, New York, 1933, rev. ed. 1953, 1971, 366–367].

A Lincolnesque kind of aristocracy, if you like — “primitive” in the original and good sense of that word; “pristine”, best.

These parallels with archaic Greek aristocracy are, historically speaking, entirely fortuitous; but they are nonetheless real and significant. Wherever found, leaders of “pristine aristocracy” not only work their own lands and run their own households, they help design, build, and decorate their own houses. What they call their houses varies, of course, from “palace” in archaic Greece where every leader called himself king and his wife queen, to the American “home place”, “main house”, or “farm”. No matter; everywhere, in social function and basic character these buildings were similar.

Pristine aristocracies everywhere necessarily hold the conviction that inequality is now and ever has been inherent in society, hence that some families will always be superior to others — but at the same time, that this superiority is not fixed in any order of the universe, hence that family superiority in intelligence, ability, and energy must be re-proven in each successive generation. Consequently, the architectural image of pristine aristocracies everywhere is never too far from folk building. Families who have the same recent origins as their neighbours but believe themselves proven superior, require the visual metaphor of a building similar in type to their neighbours', in the traditional style of their common race and region, but proclaiming superiority by being larger, solidier, and above all, showier.

Showiness is characteristic of architecture functioning to proclaim the convictions of pristine aristocracy. Menelaus's palace in Sparta is “blazing with copper and gold, silver and ivory, like the-mansions of Olympian Zeus.” In 18<sup>th</sup>-century America, brickwork was commonly used to infuse buildings with the required magnificence. The elegant brickwork of Christ Church, Lancaster County — actually, as I have shown in *King Carter's Church*, a mausoleum-chapel functioning

as a visual metaphor of the rise of the Carter family — is an outstanding example; the ruined walls of Rosewell nearby suggest that this may have been the principal means of providing the required meaning to Carter's own mansion, Corotoman. Surely the original owners of south Jersey's patterned brick houses felt comparable satisfactions when a rising or setting sun flashed ruddy off vitrified walls, over broad family acres stretching away on every side.

Once interpret architecture in terms of social function, and you solve all sorts of problems inexplicable by conventional formalistic analysis. For example:

(1) Origins of the patterned brickwork. If you opt for a theory of Swedish origins or tradition, your great problem is that the comparable brickwork occurs on church —, not house-gables, and the comparable motifs on non-architectural forms like textiles, folk carving, and wall hangings. If you opt for English origins or tradition, you have to explain why the best comparable examples come two centuries earlier, c. 1530–1560,<sup>16</sup> and why the only comparable 18<sup>th</sup>-century examples are crude, provincial, and obscure. No logical chain of descent or influences can be established, hence no convincing theory of origins is possible. But the moment you think of how brickwork functioned to dramatize these houses as monuments to successful landed-family-founding, these difficulties melt away. It will be obvious why the most comparable buildings occur in England c. 1530–1560 — that was when new landed families were being founded all over the country following Tudor triumph in the civil wars, redistribution of wealth after dissolution of the monasteries, and so on. Obvious, too, why any transmission of Swedish motifs would be through media like textiles and folk carvings translated into brick in the New World — brick in Sweden was a rare enough material that patterning to set off revered monuments to community values and purposes were usually restricted to churches, whereas in South Jersey, where brick-making clay was better and more plentiful than anywhere else in the world,<sup>17</sup> its use for comparable

16. The building commonly cited for comparisons with Salem County brickwork is Little Leigh's Priory in Essex, c. 1536; thus typically Fenwick's Colony states: “The zigzag designs of the Hancock and Chambless houses are patterned after Leigh's Priory...” without attempting to explain why the 200-year hiatus.

17. Specifically on brickmaking in the Delaware Valley: from Edwin Atlee BARBER, *The Pottery and Porcelain of the United States* (New York, 1901), 47, and John N. PEARCE, “The Early Baltimore Potters and Their Ware, 1763–1850,” (unpublished thesis, University of Delaware,



purposes on houses was natural. Thus the brick patternings on South Jersey houses are products of a double stream of tradition, just as the house-types they adorn are fusions of North European rural and Philadelphia city house-types.

(2) Why the custom of patterning brick walls died out. It became superfluous, along with the distinctive regional folk house-type it adorned, because the social function of that house-type was subsumed by what cultural geographers call the 'I' type vernacular.<sup>18</sup>

Peter Kalm, Swedish traveller of the 1740s,

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1960), comes the famous quote of a Philadelphian writing to a friend in England in 1753:

The greatest vein of Clay for Bricks and Pottery, begins near Trenton Falls [Trenton, N.J.], and extends a mile or two in Breadth on the Pennsylvania side of the River to Christine [Wilmington, Del.]; then it crosses the River and goes by Salem [N.J.]. The whole world cannot afford better bricks than our town is built of.

This claim has been substantiated in modern times by figures from Test Hole #2, Tidewater Oil Company, Delaware; Heinrich RIES and others, *High Grade Clays of the Eastern United States* (Washington, 1822); Heinrich RIES, "Report of the Clays of Maryland," *Maryland Geological Survey*, IV (1902), 397ff. Modern analyses show that in this belt the highest percentage (75%) of kaolinite, principal mineral of Kaolins and other high-quality potting and firing clays, was on the Wilmington-Salem axis; it tapered off to around 60% by the Baltimore area. Illite and illitic mixtures (clay minerals of good quality though not as refractory as kaolinite) were consistent throughout the belt at about 24%. How early this clay was used is attested by a 1683 law in Fenwick's Colony that required bricks to be well-burnt and a uniform 9½ × 4½ × 2¼ inches — dimensions slightly bigger than English statutory size either before 1625 (9 × 4½ × 2¼") or after 1625 (9 × 4⅜ × 2¼") and longer also than the average 8½" bricks used in 18<sup>th</sup>-century Virginia and on the Pennsylvania-Delaware side. For references to 19<sup>th</sup>-century brickwork in southern New Jersey, see Harry B. WEISS and Grace M. WEISS, *Early Brickmaking in New Jersey* (Trenton, N.J. Agricultural Society, 1966). Almost all this book deals with brickmaking after 1750, and much of it with the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The authors have discovered a few early records, e.g. that brickmaker Thomas Kendall built the first St. Mary's Episcopal Church at Burlington, 1702–1703.

18. A vernacular style in building or speech (whence the word was originally borrowed by architectural writers, Sir George Gilbert Scott being first to use it, apparently, in 1857) is flexible in meaning according to situation. Essentially it means an unaffected, unselfconscious way of building (speaking). Like folk building, it has intrinsic meaning so that it functions as visual metaphor of conviction. But a vernacular style shows some degree of influence from High Arts (e.g. formal High Art styles in architecture; foreign or educated ways of speaking, etc.); and it is propagated to some extent by mass media — published builders; guides, lithographs, etc. In type, therefore, vernacular arts could be categorized as midway between folk art and modern mass or popular arts. As cultural expression, therefore, vernacular styles indicate a melting pot of different racial and folk tradition. Whence vernacular styles in North America are peculiarly 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century products, though their folk origins go back to the 18<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries.

records that while Swedish language and traditions were still being maintained in the Swedesboro-Racoon parish of New Jersey, in the other two nuclei of old New Sweden (Christiana = Wilmington in Delaware and Wicoa = Philadelphia in Pennsylvania) it was already well on the way to assimilation by the English majority, and he predicted that Swedish traditions would soon die out in New Jersey too. This process is in fact recorded in South Jersey's patterned brick houses. One after another their gambrel-roofed walls were expanded into regular gable ends, conforming thereby to the 'I' type form. By c. 1770 the practice of patterning brick end-walls was dying out also. Thenceforth only a faint speech accent recalled the early Swedish substratum in that region, just as only imperceptible touches distinguished 'I' types built there from 'I' types elsewhere.

By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the patterned brick houses of South Jersey had long been forgotten, but the 'I' type was still flourishing in Colorado and Louisiana, British Columbia and the Prairies — all over rural North America. Its appeal, according to Kniffen, was its consistent set of proportions and living space, which made it a symbol:

These constant qualities a continuous distribution, still-extant logical evolutionary stages, and an almost exclusive association with economic success in an agricultural society, indicate a common fundamental concept and thus describe a type... Early in its movement southward the 'I' house became symbolic of economic attainment by agriculturists and remained so...

That is to say, the 'I' type vernacular house came into being and was perpetuated as a visual metaphor of pristine aristocracy (or, less pretentiously, of "economic attainment by agriculturists"). The principal means of infusing it with the meaning that enabled it so to function was consistent proportion — the primordial image of "rightness." This broader and more universal kind of symbolism carried the 'I' type across the country, subsuming local folk styles like the South Jersey types, or merging with High Style vernaculars like Georgian or Greek Revival as circumstances inspired. As long as the need for visual metaphors of rural success continued — i.e., as long as farmers continued pushing into new lands, setting up new landed families — 'I' types continued to be built. When that need ceased, a distinctive era in American culture and architecture came to an end. But the kind of impulse that produced south Jersey's patterned brick houses has not entirely ceased yet.

(3) Descendants in Popular and Commercial Arts. It is the popular and commercial arts, not avant-garde Establishment art, that carries on the social functions of traditional arts in modern life. In comic strips like *Thimble Theatre* (Popeye the Sailor) classic High Art theme of utopian visions and social commentary are carried on (cf. RACAR, I, 1); television nowadays tells stories by means of sequential pictures as traditional illustrative arts did; and so on. And here again the principle holds. If you want to find descendants of the patterned brick houses of South Jersey, look in popular and commercial architecture.

Drive across the American Midwest, for example, through rural Minnesota, Nebraska, Iowa; or over the Canadian prairies, for that matter. You

will see all sorts of houses roofed with commercial asbestos shingles in all sorts of fancy patterns, sometimes with owner's names and dates picked out in them. Even more strikingly, you find great silos through all the corn country, built of commercial cement block in elaborate checkered patterns with initials, dates and the like. For what purpose? Such roofs don't keep the rain out any better, or make tastier silage. Their purpose is the same as the old patterned brick walls of Salem County — to proclaim the prosperity and success of the landed proprietors who built them. They are popular and commercial metaphors of latter-day Homeric aristocracy.

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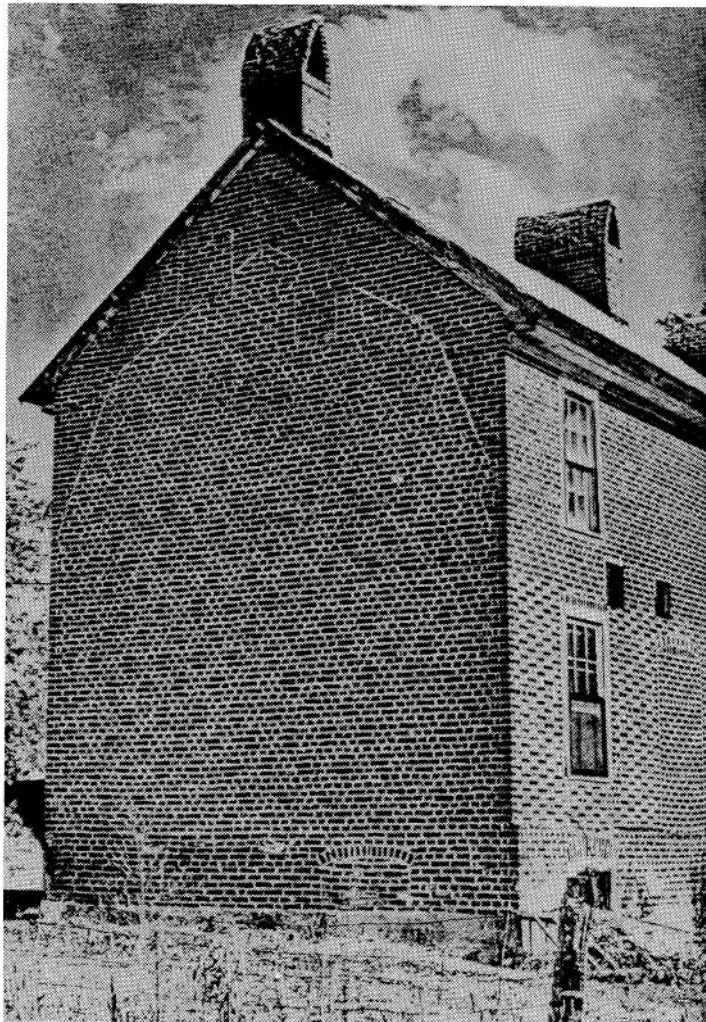


FIGURE 12. The Pakgett/Evans house near Hammersville, originally built in 1733, was enlarged to its present 'I'-type form sometime after 1790.