

## Housing Styles: From Colonial to Georgian

### Domestic architecture: the influence of the familiar (the vernacular of England)

- timber-framed, one or two stories,
- steep roofs;
- lean-to for a kitchen => saltbox
- clap-board siding over clay and wood

### NEW ENGLAND COLONIAL:

#### Old-Ship Meeting House, Hingham, MA, begun by 1681; expanded later

- outside consistent with area houses
- interior: rafters treated almost as though it's an upside boat (curved braces) (hence, the name);
- square plan with a focus on the pulpit rather than the altar;
- rejection of the Catholic model of worship – the word is more important than the image
- Use of color in interior? Recent research has pointed to the recognition of interior color schemes, certainly challenging the stereotypical belief that Puritans were completely oblivious to the look of their surroundings.

#### Jonathan Fairbanks House: Dedham, MA, 1637 (earliest timber framed house to remain standing in the US);

- Dedham was an agricultural community near Boston; had around 100 houses;
- the original house: **hall, parlor, and hearth: three most important kinds of rooms**; a rear lean-to was added in 1641 for the son and wife;
- in 1654 another lean-to was added for hired workers, which gives us a model of how houses changed – by accretion and according to need; as wealth increases, spatial differentiation increases as well
- in many cases, the lean-to eventually became a planned kitchen area;
- the parlor was initially a space for sleeping, for congregation of family members (combined living room/bedroom); the hall tended to be a place for storage and for woman's work; products made by family members might be displayed in the parlor

#### John Ward house (Figure 1) in Salem, 1684

- steep **gabled** roof and cross gables placed at a 90 degree angle to the roof;
- **jutt** or overhang (very common in New England houses and left over from English traditions developed in order to avoid high land taxes (small "footprint" with more floor space on second floor)
- diamond-paned **casement** (open in the center and push out) windows
- characteristic floor plan with two main rooms
- expansions over time demonstrate the principle of accretion, here in a relatively symmetric fashion, also demonstrating the influence of academic styles and the use of the house as a sign of status

## DIFFERENT REASONS FOR SETTLING THE SOUTH LEAD TO A DIFFERENT AESTHETIC

- the importance of pattern books
- Georgian style eventually replaces the vernacular in both New England and Virginia – this is an image-generated architecture, meaning that the facade probably changes before the interior space changes and further meaning that these houses are not an example of function preceding form

### **Very few examples survive from the earliest southern colonial period of architecture:**

#### **St Luke's Church, Newport Parish, Va, 1632/85,**

- made of brick;
- Evidence suggests that St. Luke's was a typical church in form, structure and plan.
- Buttressed brick walls, single story wall, 3-story square bell tower, west entrance and east window, are all familiar signs of the Romanesque and English Gothic – and are also definitions of the typical Virginian parish church of this period

#### **Bacon's Castle, Surrey County, Va, 1650s**

- modeled on a British country manor house, rather than a medieval or vernacular village house, as we saw in New England
- the placement of the fireplace changes it from being strictly functional to decorative massing
- this house actually has three chimneystacks oriented diagonally, making it a very deliberate ornamental form
- the unusual shaped gables, which your book calls "**Flemish**," were in fact imported into England from Flanders or Holland in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, hence, the name "Flemish"

By the mid 18<sup>th</sup> century, a new style of architecture was taking shape, in both New England and the South: Georgian. Named for the English kings (several Georges), a more accurate or meaningful name would have been Palladian, named for the Italian Renaissance architect, or Renaissance revival, particularly in its English 17<sup>th</sup> century version where three main influences were Inigo Jones, Sir Christopher Wren (Figure 2: Hampton Court), and James Gibbs. Gibbs may have been most important in this development not only because his churches were widely imitated in this country but because he published a book of modified Palladian designs

**British architecture and Sir Christopher Wren's influence:** although it is more superficial than real, it does introduce certain changes to the vernacular:

- preference for brick
- preference for the sash window with rectangular panes
- the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor balcony

**Williamsburg** is the earliest example of these developments and other related developments:

- some interest in reflecting the specialization of use and hierarchy in the layout and the appearance of the building (Governor's house and Capitol are the best examples)
- preference for the low hipped roof and probably a balustrade on top of the cornice
- architectural ornamentation on the interior, often reflected in the furnishings

**Drayton Hall:** an example of the Palladian-influenced Georgian; the most visible change is the use of the temple front (much as Palladio did on his villas)

**Mt Airy:** similar to Drayton Hall in its adherence to the Palladian look; the turn to Palladio may have less to do with functional appeal and more to do with its “commodity” appeal; but all the same, Palladio’s designs were intended for a life style which the Virginia settlers were developing

### **Examples in Newport:**

Peter Harrison: an English gentleman architect

- **Redwood library**, 1749-50 – temple front, correct, but made of wood rather than stone and marble
- **Brick market:** 1761 – bottom originally open like a loggia; interior more than 2 stories, heavy corner pilasters, cornice, shallow hipped roof = federal style

### **Mount Pleasant, PA (1761)**

- Mount Pleasant, PA, owned by John MacPhearson, 1761
- almost identical to Mount Airy although noticeably more ornate: the white stone surrounding each window; dormer windows on the hipped roof, larger chimneys
- the five-bay facade, which actually reads as three because of the quoins, enhancing the connection to Palladian style, as does the strong pediment over the central bay
- We might also want to note the balcony-like railing on the roof – generally associated with middle or late Georgian architecture and the Federal style.

### POPULARITY OF PALLADIO IN THE U.S.:

- popular in England; translation of his books
- reconceptualized the nature of the farm
- support wings, symmetry, harmonic proportions
- relationship of plan to exterior

**Thomas Jefferson:** important influence with respect to the use of Palladio, but also believes in the importance of using architecture to communicate ideology; as we will see, he loved the neoclassical romanticism of Boullée and LeDoux, also the Roman temple in Nîmes which is the direct source for the VA Capitol (in Richmond) (with modifications):

with Jefferson, we begin to see a shift from the image in the pattern book to a greater emphasis on function and the meaning of the image [*complete analysis will come later*]

### Slavery and Plantation Housing

[John Vlach is one of the key – and few – writers on this subject]

Ultimately, the architecture of plantations was the architecture of the white landowners. The slaves individualized the indoor spaces to the extent that was possible, but the ways in which they remade the landscape of slavery were generally related to uses made of outdoor spaces and to social connections with and across family groups. Vlach notes that some of the more “disorderly” arrangements of slave quarters may have been deliberate attempts to impose an

aesthetic which was not the aesthetic of the landowner. Yet, as Vlach again notes, it is almost impossible for outsiders to locate the forms of territorial possession exerted by slaves. It has only been in relatively recent years that historians have given any attention to the idea that the architectural and landscape environments of plantation culture may have reflected African-American agendas or dimensions and not just white.

Vlach's starting point is the recognition of "gaps" or "chinks in the armor" as precisely the ways in which alternative procession rituals emerge on the plantation. He raises the issue of these "rituals" as being reactive, rather than proactive. Upton doesn't really take an unambiguous stand on the question of whether the landscape shapes the ritual or the ritual shapes the landscape; Vlach is far less ambiguous but he is focusing on the a population which did not have control over the initial shape of the landscape.

Vlach describes the look of the plantation and its growth from a poor farm to one in which looks count. Here he describes the processions which emerge on the plantation although in Vlach's story, these are individualized for each plantation – he is not concerned as a rule with the social processions which connect the plantation to the larger landscape of Virginia life. He does, however, go on to describe rituals of entry and the approaches made by the owners and by visitors (the "humbling pedestrian access"). An interesting addition he makes to Upton's theme is the suggestion that these processions could also inform the observer as to how someone's status had changed, as their "permission" to enter allowed them access to a greater number of interior spaces. One of the most interesting points which Vlach makes in his writing about slavery and plantation spaces is the idea that the development of "alternative" ritual processions in the landscape did serve to establish or re-establish social connections. What this means is that these ritual processions serve very similar purposes: for the upperclass and middle class white Virginians, the processions coded and reinforced and displayed social status. For the African-American Virginians, the processions were a form of re-encoding social status in order to take control of space for themselves, knowing that this space was always subsidiary or secondary space.