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The Early House in Northeastern Vermont: Typical and Atypical Forms, 1770–1830

Vermonters wanted their structures to look more like public buildings than like the cottages of farm folk that most of them were.

By Jan Leo Lewandoski

The landscape of northeastern Vermont in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century would surprise present-day observers who traveled back in time to see it. The extent of cleared land and the number of rural farmsteads were at least as great as they were today but the appearance was somewhat different. There was more cropland and less pasture. Fences were of wooden rails, stone, or roots and had a stronger visual presence than today's nearly invisible wire. The remains of the virgin forest persisted with its giant trees, while homes had smaller young trees planted near them or no trees at all. Today the larger trees are in the villages and house yards while the forest is young. The large dairy barns and connected farm buildings so often associated with Vermont do not date from this period, but came later, generally after 1850. Instead, a farmstead in 1810 might have a thirty-by-forty-foot barn and several smaller outbuildings on the property, neither connected to nor in a rectilinear relationship with each other or the main house. [1] While many houses of familiar appearance to the modern observer would be

present, mixed among them would be other dwellings of primitive, archaic, or now obsolete form. The early house forms that are still with us today, such as the one-story gable-roofed cottage known as the Cape Cod type, strongly influence our current image of the early built environment.[2] Today, other forms from the first decades of settlement are rare, generally altered, or virtually nonexistent, but were much in evidence then.

The purpose of this essay is to discuss house form in northeastern Vermont from 1770 to 1830, the period of pioneer settlement. These dates were chosen because it is probable that no surviving house in the region predates 1770 and because the initial settlement of the region was completed by 1830. By approximately 1830, also, major changes in house form and style began to take place under the influence of the Greek Revival and the widespread availability of iron stoves. The region of northeastern Vermont includes all the towns north of Bradford and east of Montpelier. Northeastern Vermont constitutes a cultural unit only to the extent that it was settled almost entirely in the watershed period of national growth and change following the Revolution. (Much of northwestern Vermont, northwestern New Hampshire, and central and northern New York were also settled in this period, and these regions share many characteristics, particularly in terms of construction technology.) This essay will offer a more comprehensive view of the built environment, at least in terms of dwellings, for these early decades than has previously been available.[3] It is a view that reflects considerable economic and esthetic diversity.

House Form

It is the form of a house that an observer usually notices first. Exterior form is composed of height, width, depth, pitch of roof, and placement of doors and windows. The interior form is defined by the floorplan or layout of rooms. After form the observer might notice a house's decorative details and, upon closer inspection, the materials with which its various parts are constructed. The particular combination of forms, specific details, and decorative motifs produces what we call a style.

For rural northeastern Vermont between 1770 and 1830 house form is more useful than style in distinguishing among buildings. With a few high-style exceptions, and those largely in villages, most dwellings of the time had a sparse amount of late Georgian or Federal detail applied to a wide variety of house shapes and sizes. Exclusive attention to stylistic detail reveals a repetitiveness in the buildings, and the towns as well. A study of their building forms, however, shows that a variety of housing traditions were in operation simultaneously. Form can tell us about available square footage in a house, number and size of rooms, and the number of rooms that were heated. Form also indicates how much daylight

entered the house, what its traffic patterns were, and how basements and wings were used. Knowing these things reveals something about a family's wealth, domestic economy, and whether, for example, privacy was possible or valued.

A View of the Past Based Upon Surviving Forms

The present-day Vermonter's view of the early built environment is strongly influenced by the types of houses that have survived. In northeastern Vermont the two dominant survivors are the one-story, two-room-deep "Cape Cod" type, and a rather similar two-story, two-room-deep type.

The one-story, two-room-deep cottage (Fig. 1) is the house more often built by settlers in northeastern Vermont than any other, based on the number of survivors. A massive chimney serving at least three fireplaces usually occupies the center of the house and the floor plan is organized around it. Dimensions vary from thirty-two feet by twenty-four feet to forty-two feet by thirty feet. The house has a gable or, rarely, a gambrel roof (as in the Lowell-Sullivan House, 1787, in Danville) with a pitch or slope of roof that may vary from eight-over-twelve (McLeod House, c. 1820, Greensboro) to nearly twelve-over-twelve at the Dominicus Gray House, 1794, in Groton. Its facade is usually described as five bay, i.e., window-window-door-window-window, evenly spaced. Some, however, are better described as three bay, with a door near the center and windows grouped in pairs, although the window trim does not

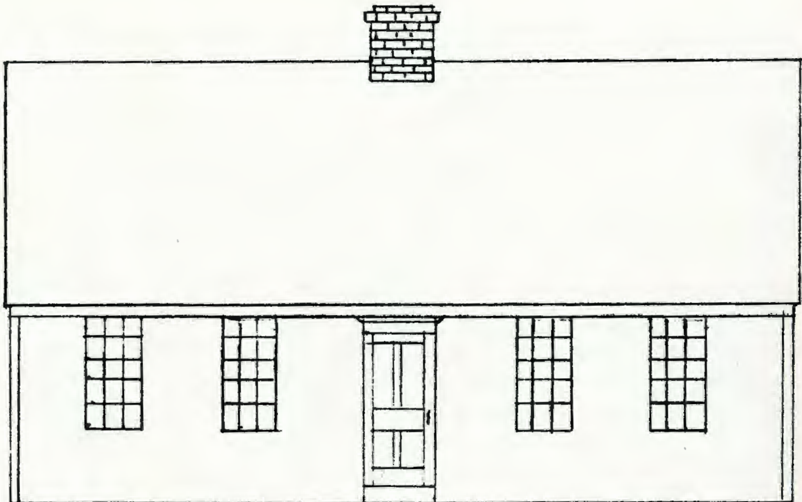

Fig. 1. Cape Cod type.

actually touch. Both the Jack Hill House, 1796, in Calais and the Dominicus Gray House are examples of this type. The front door, while usually centered may be slightly off center, particularly in older examples less influenced by notions of classical balance. The center of the door in the Dominicus Gray House is seventeen feet from one end of a thirty-nine-foot facade.

This house form had antecedents and contemporaries throughout New England and in England as well, where, in its typical central chimney form, it is referred to as a "baffle entry house" since one confronts a wall (the chimney mass) immediately upon entering the front hall.[4] (See Fig. 2.) Doors on either side of this hall lead to flanking parlors. The kitchen is usually at the center rear or, rarely, in the place of one of the front parlors, as in the Dominicus Gray House. The kitchen may be flanked by one or two pantries on one side and a small room on the other. The staircase is rarely associated with the front wall or chimney, but usually climbs along the midwall as in the Gardner Wheeler House, 1798, St. Johnsbury, or rises from the rear of the kitchen as in the Samuel Bean House, 1806, in Glover. The general flattening of roof pitches during the Federal period is in part responsible for this removal of the stairs from the front hall; there simply is not enough room for a person to stand erect in front of the chimney on the second floor.[5] A full-depth cellar may occupy about forty percent of the foundation area, perhaps with a wood panelled or plastered room partitioned for the storage of food or cooling of milk. The chimney base and crawl space may occupy the rest although complete basements are not unknown.

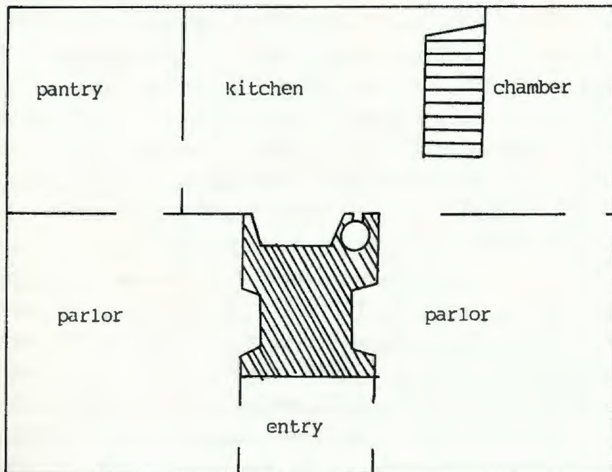

Fig. 2. Cape Cod type.

A number of houses that in appearance and plan are typical Capes are actually slightly more than one story tall; for example, the Cutler-Fisher House in Hardwick, dating from the 1790s. While the one-story Cape has room for only a row of narrow rooms along the midline upstairs, the story and one-half has the potential, though often unrealized during the period, for more rooms.[6]

The two-story house, two rooms deep, is called the "double pile" by architectural historians. This form is similar to two Cape Cod houses stacked on top of each other, although its perimeter may be smaller since there is so much additional room upstairs. More prestigious and therefore more expensive to build, these houses often had a full basement as in the Dow-Webster House, ca. 1790, Danville, and two chimneys that were usually scattered, i.e., located at various places along the ridge, enabling the separate heating of rooms and thus more privacy. With the chimneys moved away from the center of the house, the staircase could be increased in size and occupy the front hallway as in the Patrick House, 1818, in Walden or the Noyes House, 1820, in Morrisville (Fig. 3a and Fig. 3b).

A variety of the two-story form is the hip-roofed house tending towards a square plan, with prominent entries upon adjacent sides. The Peacham Inn, 1805, in Peacham is a good example. This double-fronted hip-roofed form was built as late as 1830, as in the case of the Hall-Herrick House in Brownington Village. In discussing two-story houses it might be noted that the saltbox type house, two stories in front and one in back, a mainstay of seventeenth and eighteenth century domestic architecture in southern New England, is extremely rare in northeastern Vermont.

The one and two-story dwelling types described above survive in great numbers throughout northeastern Vermont. They generally present an orderly and symmetrical facade, expressive of the classical ideals and models of the Georgian, Federal, and Greek Revival periods. It is tempting to believe that all early houses were like them but this was not the case. While these two types compose most of our inheritance from the first decades of settlement, additional house forms were present, and in substantial numbers. Some are still standing and evidence documenting them and others exists in the form of travel accounts, letters, journals, tax records, drawings, paintings, old photos showing yet older houses, and houses sketched on maps and plans. Another source is physical evidence in surviving houses that indicates they appeared somewhat different in the past. For example, many nineteenth century remodelers were not satisfied merely to change a building's decorative motifs, but commonly enlarged window openings and moved them about to give symmetry to the facade. Central fireplace chimneys were removed

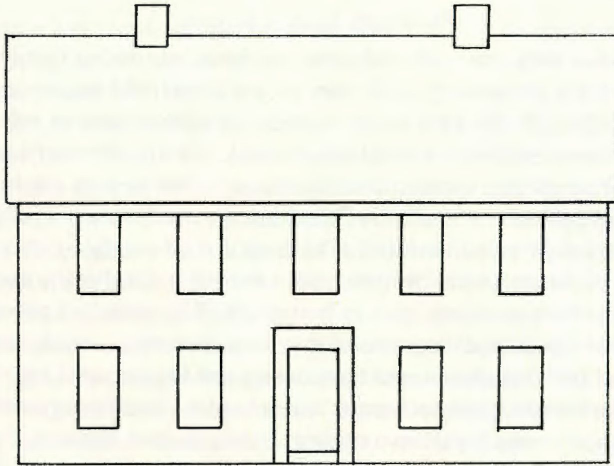

Fig. 3a. Two story, two rooms deep.

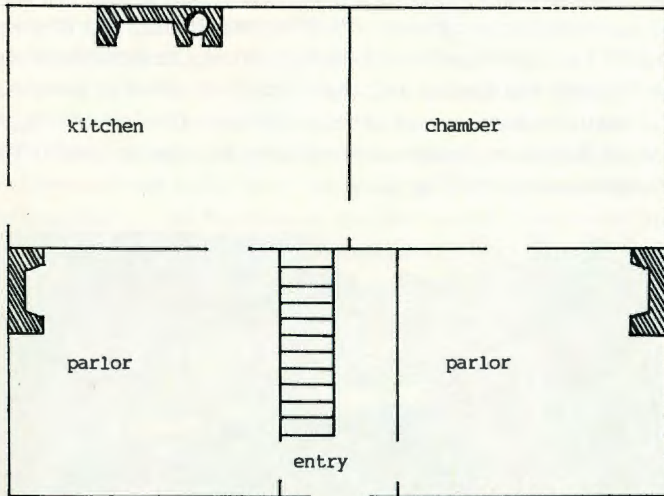

Fig. 3b. Two story, two rooms deep.

and others placed elsewhere in the structure. Second stories were often added to houses, and narrow buildings were doubled in depth and provided with a new roof. Today it is possible to observe the history of these changes when buildings are being demolished or remodeled. Of these rare forms, truly primitive houses, small and often meant to be temporary, are the ones closest to extinction today.

Primitive House Forms

During the early years of settlement in Vermont towns, families lived in small temporary shelters while they prepared to build more permanent homes. In Barton, the first settler is believed to have put up a frame of poles and covered it with branches and bark. Baxter Bancroft, an early settler in Plainfield, reported that "as late as 1804 neither his folks nor any of the neighbors had chimneys" and described a situation where smoke from fires was vented through a hole in a roof made of elm bark.[7] Buildings of this sort were by their nature temporary and easily destroyed, with few surviving more than a few years. The poorly housed early settlers often built another type of dwelling, however, which was more substantial but still considered temporary, the log house. Log refers to a particular construction technique and is used to describe any horizontal assemblage of round logs, hewn square timber, or sawn timbers. Examples of each of these log types exist in the state today. While any form of house could theoretically be built of logs, the form associated with surviving examples in northeastern Vermont is primitive: a small one-story building, perhaps twenty-by-twenty-four feet in plan, with windows and doors of variable size placed wherever convenient. The interior was divided into two rooms, entered directly from the outside without a hallway. Privacy was limited and there was little room to carry out the various domestic industries, such as soap making or food processing, which the multiple fireplaces, basement fireplaces, or attached workshops of larger houses permitted (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4. Log house in Montpelier. Photograph by the author.

We know log houses in Vermont were meant to be temporary because of their rarity today and because most surviving examples, such as the log house on the Webster Farm in Coventry (moved in 1987 from its original site in Montpelier), are constructed of poorly finished logs and flimsy rafters. They were often built in two to four days by a few relatively unskilled laborers, as compared to nearly three months needed for a full-sized and finished frame house. In 1774 James Whitelaw's company at Ryegate was "obliged to build another log house which we began yesterday and now it is finished."[8] A comparison of most Vermont log houses with the substantial and enduring log buildings of Pennsylvania or the Province of Quebec makes their temporary status clear. In fact, this very comparison was made as early as 1819 by a visitor to the Montpelier area who found "numerous log houses of a rude construction, and incomparably inferior to the snug cottages of the Canadian peasantry."[9]

Abundant documentary evidence indicates that the log house was meant to be superseded. An elderly Wolcott resident, writing in 1877, observed that by 1827 "the more substantial frame house had taken the place of the pioneer's log cabin mainly."[10] Timothy Dwight, president of Yale College, traveled through the upper Connecticut Valley in 1797 and told of log houses built by the New England planters that "are intended to shelter their families only until they can erect better habitations."[11] Dwight, setting standards for architectural taste in the new settlements, assured the reader that "the great part of the ancient settlements of New England . . . are handsome, and not one of them in one hundred disfigured by even a log house."[12] A commentator from Pawlet in western Vermont, writing in 1867, outlined a sequence of development that may apply to the Northeast as well. He stated that first there were "log houses" and that after the arrival of the sawmill "better log cabins" and that "in four or five years they were superseded by one story plank houses."[13]

How common were log buildings and how long did they last? Waldo Glover's study of Groton indicates that in 1803 there were five "frame or plank" houses in town and thirty or forty log homes. This ratio was determined from an analysis of the Grand List.[14] In 1811 Jacob Norton of Weymouth, Massachusetts, a prospective settler of Salem wrote to James Whitelaw, Esq., inquiring "for how much could a small log house be erected."[15] Traveling from Montpelier to Danville in 1819, Levi Woodbury reported of Marshfield that "log huts and rough board or timber cabins were soon almost the only dwelling houses."[16] One mile from Danville Green, a town with substantial and elegant capes and two-story dwellings built as early as 1787, Woodbury stopped at "a new log hut."[17] The *History of Ryegate* (1913) assured the reader that in 1865 Ryegate still had some occupied log houses.[18] Finally, Z. E. Jameson,

discussing "Cow Stables" in the *Vermont Board of Agriculture Reports* for 1874, referred, in the present tense, to a cow "stabled in the log and earth cabin of the poor man."[19]

The longer a town was settled, the fewer log buildings appeared to be present. Dwight, traveling between the older towns of Windsor and Middlebury in 1810, was pleased to see only fifteen log houses.[20] Francis Parkman, traveling from Cambridge to Derby in 1842, however, still found log houses around Troy.[21]

The presence of a log house or other primitive building form during the settlement period was linked more closely to the prosperity of the owner than to length of settlement. Certain wealthy pioneers never spent more than a summer in a primitive structure. Others may have spent much of their lives in them. Clearly they were common. Some were newly constructed as late as 1820 and possibly much later, within sight of large, well-established, and pretentious homes.[22]

In contrast to primitive dwellings a number of other house forms existed that were not temporary and did not represent impoverishment. Unlike the Cape Cod and the two-story, two-room-deep house, however, they were seldom built after 1830, being considered old-fashioned and not easily adapted to "modern" living in the mid-nineteenth century. Numerous examples of these atypical forms survive today but it is probable that an even greater number have been altered to such a degree that only careful examination of the fabric of the house can reveal their original characteristics. Following is a discussion of several early forms that were not perpetuated in the later nineteenth century.

L-Shaped House: One or Two Stories with a Back Kitchen, Ell, or Wing.

It was common, particularly in two-story houses with scattered chimneys, for the kitchen with a massive fireplace to occupy the first part of an ell that was set perpendicular to one rear corner of the house. In most instances these houses were narrower than the usual two-story dwellings since the ell gave space for kitchen activities that normally would be in the main house. Some houses were initially built this way; for example, the Cahoon House, 1802, in Lyndonville and the Johnston-Unser House, 1820, in Hardwick.[23] Others, like the Stone Bottom House, 1794 and 1826, in Walden, combine an earlier, smaller house as kitchen with a larger, new main house.[24] One and two-story examples of this form exist in Wolcott, Craftsbury, Walden, and other towns. The form was not only common in Vermont but it dominated Classical Revival housing in central and western New York between 1810 and 1830. (See Fig. 5.)[25]

A great number of nineteenth century farmhouses in Vermont have wings, an addition with its roofline parallel to that of the main house,

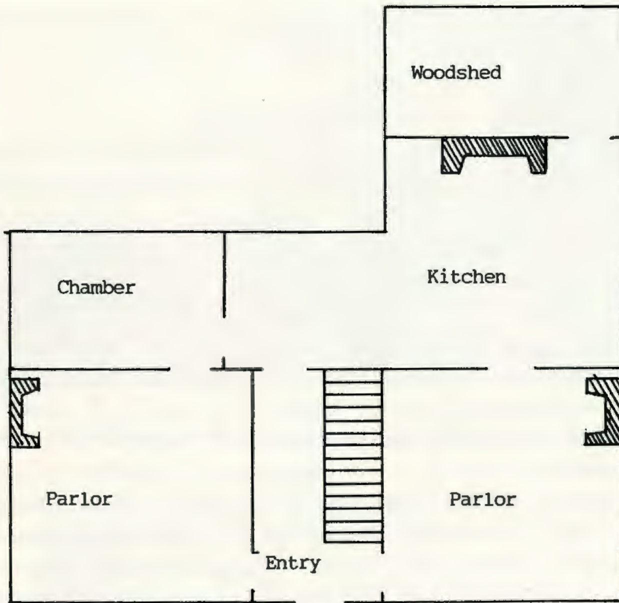

Fig. 5. L-shaped house.

or ells, an addition with its roofline perpendicular to the main house. Some wings and ells are original to the construction of the main house, some preexisted it, and others were added later. What distinguishes the L-shaped form from any house with an appendage, is that in the L-shaped plan an indispensable room, such as the kitchen, is located in the addition.

Another sort of house that may have been L-shaped is suggested by a document entitled "List of Houses in Ryegate with a Value above $100" (1798).[26] Of the ten houses mentioned, four have what are called "additions," generally of small size: twelve feet by ten feet, thirteen feet by thirteen feet, twenty feet by fifteen feet, and a larger one twenty-eight feet by twenty-six feet. The term "addition" is confusing for two reasons. First, these houses were only a few years old at the time of listing, and while the early Vermonters were prolific builders and remodelers, the possibility that forty percent of them needed small additions immediately is dubious. Second, a contemporary surviving house in the neighboring town of Groton, the Dominicus Gray House, still has its twelve foot by eleven foot appendage, which appears, because of evidence in the foundation and sills, to have been constructed at the same time as the main house. The function of the Dominicus Gray addition is not apparent, although one enters it from the kitchen and it may have been another pantry or what we today call a mudroom, since it also has an

exterior door. Since this small ell does not appear indispensable to the functioning of the house, the form is better categorized as a minor variation of the Cape Cod type.

Cross Passage Houses

A number of early houses exist in which a different relationship between chimney and main entrance resulted in a changed elevation and floor plan. Known in England as "cross passage houses" (as opposed to "baffle entry") this form has only recently received attention in American architectural publications, and the surviving examples have been looked upon as local aberrations, or as the result of alteration.[27] The facade of a Vermont cross passage house, going from one end to the other, features a window, the main door, two windows closely spaced followed by another window more distantly spaced (Fig. 6a, Fig. 6b, and Fig. 6c). The floor plan that calls for this fenestration is one in which the massive fireplace chimney is central, but the main door is not baffled by it. Rather, it allows a person to enter to one side of the mass and walk directly back to the rear rooms, effecting a cross passage. One could also turn and enter the main room in front of the chimney or enter subsidiary rooms on the other side of the passageway. If the house was only one room deep, as houses occasionally were in northeastern Vermont, this plan served mainly to remove the doorway from the center of the main living room. Cross passage houses exist today in Greensboro (Akin House, c. 1820) and in Stannard (Blair-Lewandoski, 1808). Both houses were built by (or for) Scottish immigrants, and perhaps this fact accounts for the use of this outdated form in Federal period New England. A two-story cross passage house burned in Walden in 1985 and a photo exists of another, long

Fig. 6a. Blair House, cross passage facade. Photograph by the author.

Fig. 6b. Akin House, cross passage facade. Photograph by the author.

Fig. 6c. Cross passage facade in Scotland. From J. Dunbar, *Historic Architecture of Scotland,* 1966.

destroyed, in Cabot (Fig. 7).[28] Their asymmetrical facades made these houses prime candidates for remodeling during the Classic and Greek Revivals, particularly when stoves replaced the massive central chimneys around which the cross passage was organized (Fig. 8).

Ironically, the cross passage house as it survives in Vermont already represented a step from medieval asymmetry towards Classical balance. Its direct antecedent was the English and Scottish late medieval cottage with a central chimney, offset door, and window size and placement that reflected only interior convenience.[29] R. W. Brunskill identifies cross passage facades of the type found in Vermont as a "late survival" because their windows were of uniform size and set at the same distance below the frieze.[30] Despite this removal of some archaic features the cross passage is probably one of our closer links to medieval house design.

Fig. 7. I-house with cross passage facade in Cabot. Courtesy of Leonard Spencer.

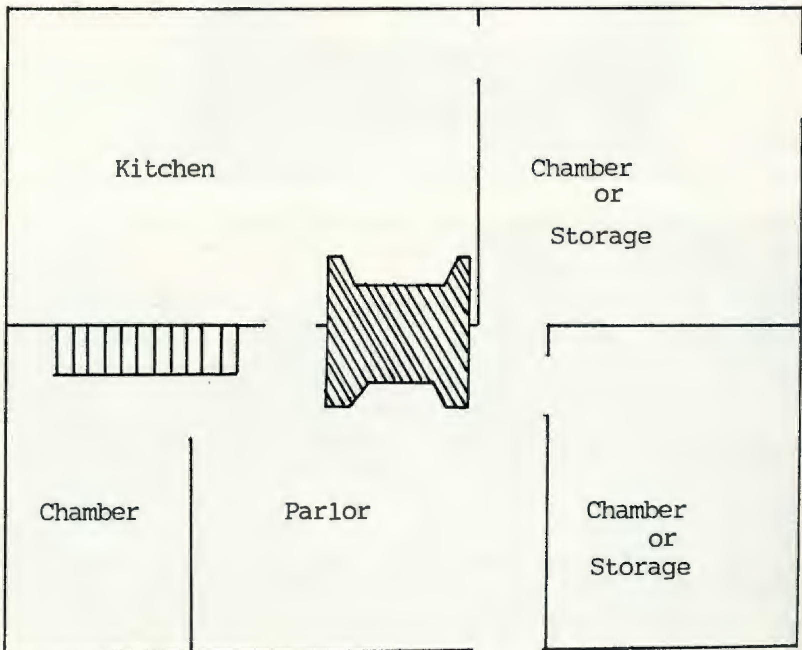

Fig. 8. Cross passage.

Houses with Primary Rooms in the Cellar

A number of buildings survive in which partially exposed basements under conventional appearing one or two-story houses did not contain merely work or storage space, but some of the more important rooms of the house. Five examples of this form, in northeastern Vermont, were all built into slopes so that one or one and one-half basement walls could have full-sized windows and doors. The houses exist today in Craftsbury, Greensboro, and Walden, although their cellar rooms are no longer used as originally designed. This house form was well-known in pre-nineteenth century England, where it is referred to as "house over house."[31] Houses with primary rooms in exposed basements date from as early as 1671 in eastern Massachusetts.[32] There are at least two varieties. One is a one-story Cape at front, rear, and one gable, but is two stories tall on the other gable end where the exposed cellar wall has windows and a door. It is often clapboarded. The Hoyt-Oatman House, c. 1795, in Craftsbury and the Leavitt House, c. 1815, in Greensboro are this type. The second type appears to be a one-story Cape at the rear and both gables, but a full two-story house at the front as in the Amsden-Hempt House, c. 1805, and the Stone Bottom House, 1794 and 1826, both in Walden (Fig. 9a, Fig. 9b, and Fig. 10). The Stone House in Greensboro, c. 1820, has two adjacent two-story walls and two walls of one story and could be said to constitute a third adaptation, of which it is the only known example in northeastern Vermont.

Fig. 9a. Amsden-Hempt House, front (west). Photograph by the author.

Fig. 9b. Amsden-Hempt House, south gable. Photograph by the author.

Fig. 10. Stone Bottom House. Photograph by the author.

It is important not to confuse these houses with the large number of early dwellings that contained basement rooms with working fireplaces and direct entrances from the outside, in which various household manufacturies, such as soapmaking, were carried out. Nor should they

be confused with high style Georgian and Federal houses that had basement kitchens, workrooms and living quarters, which were the domain of servants. Rather, the form under discussion had important rooms, such as the only kitchen, located in the cellar and much of the family's day to day living went on there. Usually only that half of the cellar along the exposed walls was lived in, to take advantage of natural light.

In the Hoyt-Oatman House in Craftsbury the cellar originally contained three fireplaces, including the only cooking fireplace in the house, and at least three rooms, with windows on the interior partitions to spread daylight deeper into the space. These rooms had horizontal wooden wainscoting, a chair rail, beveled window jambs, built-in cupboards with panelled doors, wooden floors on sleepers, and plastered walls and ceilings. The level of finish work was as elaborate as in the rooms above and typical of the period and location. The exterior walls of the cellar were of granite and brick, and entry was through a typical 1790s primary door, a six-panel exterior surface joined to a vertical batten interior. The upstairs of the Hoyt-Oatman House is of frame construction and contains only two small fireplaces, serving rooms that may have been parlors or bed chambers.

The Leavitt House in Greensboro appears to be a one-story Cape when viewed from the front, rear, or north gable, but on the south gable it has two clapboarded stories with full-sized windows and a door at basement level. Inside the cellar are three rooms, all with what was once good quality, painted spruce flooring on now rotten sleepers. The kitchen with fireplace, bake oven, and mantle occupies the western side of the cellar and the dining room with built-in china cupboard occupies the southeast. A plastered and wallpapered windowless room is to the north of the dining room. The dining room has plastered walls and ceiling and a moulded chair rail. Interior doors have four raised panels such as might be found on the main floor of local houses of the period, and all door and window trim in the basement carries Federal style three-step mouldings. Upstairs, only two very small fireplaces existed, suggesting that most waking hours, particularly in winter, were spent in these warmer cellar rooms.

The I-House: One Room Deep

One-room-deep houses were built in limited numbers during the settlement of northeastern Vermont. The earliest frame house for which records exist is an I-house built by James Whitelaw and his associates in Ryegate in 1774. It was thirty-six feet by sixteen feet and two stories tall.[33] While common in southern New England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and from central New York south during the early nineteenth, the I-house was never very popular in northeastern Vermont.

Rather, Federal period wooden buildings here tended towards considerable depth. Few Capes, for instance, were less than twenty-six feet deep and some as deep as thirty-three feet, as in the Blair-Lewandoski House, 1808, in Stannard. At least three examples exist, however, of I-houses doubled in depth sometime after their original construction, and this may indicate a greater prevalence for these narrow dwellings than is apparent now.[34]

An early sixteen-feet-deep cottage survives in Lower Cabot (without an ell and its extra space), and evidence of others exists in photographs. The Cabot house is inexpensively built and dates from the first years of the nineteenth century. Its doors and windows have been moved about to produce a more symmetrical facade.[35] A photograph of a now demolished I-house, also in Lower Cabot, shows a cross passage elevation without much concern for balanced fenestration, and may represent the continuation of a late medieval form into nineteenth century Vermont (Fig. 7).

Gable Entry (Pre-Greek Revival)

An early nineteenth century, pre-Greek Revival, gable entry house form is common in upper Connecticut River valley towns such as Bradford and Newbury in Vermont, and Orford and Haverhill in New Hampshire. Not merely a typical one or two-story house with the door relocated, the facade in terms of length, orientation, entryway, and detail is a gable facing the road. The main door is almost always centered, which also helps distinguish it from the many side-hall, temple-fronted buildings that appeared after 1830. These houses occur in one and two-story versions and, in the case of the Johnson House, 1822, in Newbury, they may be forty feet across the gable and only twenty feet deep. The Nathaniel Mann House, 1809, in Orford, New Hampshire, is an accurately dated example of the form and its Federal styling and construction technique are closely related to a number of other examples on both sides of the Connecticut River in the Upper Valley (Fig. 11).[36]

Conclusion

In 1858 the Reverend N. H. Chamberlain, in his hypercritical address on New England architecture, found the villages, particularly in the three northern states, characterized by "numberless repetitions in building."[37] He stated that "a general want of artistic plan and finish may be considered as the chief right which most of our houses have to be considered as built in the New England style. Approximately, the New England House, as to plan and detail belongs to the Grecian style of architecture: not that it closely resembles any Grecian edifice ever known."[38] Were Chamberlain looking at northeastern Vermont forty years earlier, in 1818 for example, he might not have liked the architecture any better, but he would not have found the buildings quite so repetitive

Fig. 11. Nathaniel Mann House. Photograph by the author.

or so uniformly Grecian. Rather, mixed among classically inspired Georgian and Federal forms, or at least in view across the open landscape, he would have seen numerous log buildings, medieval-appearing cross passage types with their irregular fenestration, and houses in which most family and social life occurred in a partially bermed (below grade) cellar. There would also be more buildings of shallow depth than existed in 1858 or exist today. Many were doubled in depth during the nineteenth century. These house forms have largely been ignored in the twentieth century as surely as, and partly because, they were rejected and altered in the nineteenth.[39]

The time 1770 to 1830 was not without its own evolution, however. It was a dynamic period of settlement on what was then the northern frontier. It was also the period in which the United States began to look for architectural forms and a style to call its own. While Waldo Glover found Groton to be eighty percent log buildings in 1800, this figure was undoubtedly nearer to twenty percent by 1830.[40] John Graham, traveling through the villages of Essex County in 1797, observed "that the most romantic imagination can scarcely conceive of anything more commanding than the scenes many of these settlements present to view."[41] By 1830, northeastern Vermont's settled landscape could hardly be described as wildly romantic, but was moving rapidly towards the dignified and staid.

What does early house form tell us about Vermonters of the time? It tells us that they built buildings of primitive form, often using logs, when

necessity commanded. Their permanent homes were modeled on a variety of forms known in southern New England, England, and Scotland. Some departures occurred in terms of form, notably a general deepening of houses leading them to approach, but rarely reach, a square plan. I-houses were more common than they are today, but still rarer than they were in southern New England. One-and-one-half story houses (usually having a ten-foot-tall front and rear wall) became common. The one-and-one-half-story design increases the useable space upstairs, but the rationale for their construction in the early nineteenth century may have had as much to do with the builder's desire to separate post, plate, and rafter joinery as with the achievement of an improved floor plan.[42] Vermonters building their first permanent houses were often more stylish than pragmatic, leading one to remember Amos Rapoport's statement that architectural form is predominantly "a symbolic statement, only secondarily modified by environment or use."[43] Ironically, the immensely heavy snows of northern New England were carried upon much flatter roof pitches, modelled after Athenian public buildings, than the lighter snows of Connecticut. The early houses of Connecticut, built in a period closer to medieval influence, had generally steeper "gothic" roofs.

The length and intensity of the cold season is significantly greater in northeastern Vermont than it is in Massachusetts, Connecticut, or Scotland, and it is tempting to link increased house depth, basement living, and the prevalent technique of plank framing (which produces a solid wood wall as thick as four inches) with an imperative to conserve heat. Mixed seemingly at random among deep Capes with plank walls, however, are found other houses of similar age, size, and value that feature clapboards applied to the bare studs without even the moderating effects of sheathing boards (Hibbard House, Hardwick, c. 1815). Further evidence of the lack of concern with energy efficiency was reflected in house form. As the first half of the nineteenth century progressed, Vermonters made several emphatic choices that resulted in houses even more difficult to heat, notably their adoption of the one-and-one-half-story Classic Cottage. Appearing in small numbers in the late eighteenth century, the story and one-half form became ubiquitous after 1830, particularly on farms. At this time it grew narrower relative to its length (frequently twenty-six feet by forty feet), window sizes were enlarged, and the height of the first floor ceiling was increased to, typically, eight feet, nine inches (seven feet was a more usual height for farmhouses of similar value around 1800). If these buildings were framed with plank, the plank became increasingly thinner after 1830, reaching one and one-half to two inches by mid-century, partly in response to decreasing supplies of lumber.

It appears that these increased lengths and heights were designed at

least partly to accommodate large pilasters and massive friezes of a Grecian sort, both inside and outside the house.[44] It was perhaps hoped that the use of iron stoves rather than fireplaces could compensate for any extra heat loss. All in all, the average Vermont farmhouse on its windswept and often barren hillside was no better prepared to resist cold or retain heat than the average house in, for example, North Carolina, at the time.[45]

A look at what northeastern Vermont residents rejected in terms of housing during the first half of the nineteenth century may tell us as much about them as knowing what they continued to build. They continued to build Capes and two-story houses, though generally abandoning the squarish hip-roofed versions after 1830. The Cape raised to one and one-half stories became the ubiquitous Classic Cottage, and the gable-fronted buildings (with their long axis perpendicular to the road) representing Greek temples proliferated. Rejected as apparently unsuitable for mid-nineteenth century living were all buildings of the log sort. A very few were covered over with clapboard or board and batten siding (as in the case of the Montpelier log house now in Coventry, or another located at Campbell's Bay in Swanton). While it is possible to apply stylish decoration to log buildings, it was their form that was undesirable: generally small, squarish, and with windows and doors unsymmetrically placed and difficult to move.[46]

Cross passage houses in which the entry avoids the central chimney lost their rationale as soon as stoves displaced the central fireplaces in the 1830s. The unbalanced facade of these houses guaranteed them no future in the Greek and Roman-oriented architecture of the young Republic.

Those houses in which important rooms were bermed probably suffered from the same problems of darkness and dampness that plague underground homes today. These rooms were abandoned to subsidiary uses at some point in the nineteenth century. In the Hoyt-Oatman House in Craftsbury and the Leavitt House in Greensboro additions were attached to the above-ground parts of the house at a later date, possibly to compensate for the basement rooms no longer in use. The Stone House in Greensboro had its attic story expanded by a shed dormer while the basement became the domain of furnaces, duct work, pumps, wiring, and other equipment for modern living.

Log, cross passage, and bermed houses were not perpetuated in the nineteenth century, perhaps because Vermonters perceived them to be survivals from the late Middle Ages, or, in the case of log buildings, the habitations of rude forest dwellers. As such they were unsuited to expressing the ideals of an economic and culturally progressive citizenry.

The Canadian "peasant" may have been snug in his log building but the Vermonter did not wish to be confused with any sort of peasant, greatly preferring the appellation "planter," "agriculturalist," or "citizen." Consequently, Vermonters wished their buildings to appear suitably dignified, and in the first half of the nineteenth century this meant formal as opposed to rustic, symmetry of facade and plan as opposed to asymmetry, and dwellings that looked more like public buildings than the cottages of farm folk that most of them were.[47]

NOTES

[1] The question of the orderly relationship between the house and other farm buildings was discussed extensively in periodicals such as *New England Farmer* and *The American Agriculturalist* during the 1830s and 1840s. Thomas Hubka's *Big House, Little House, Back House, Barn* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1984) is devoted to this topic.

[2] The term "Cape Cod" house was applied to this type of dwelling as early as 1800. See, e.g., Timothy Dwight, *Travels in New England and New-York*, 4 vols. (New Haven: T. Dwight, 1821-1822), 3:97.

[3] Herbert Wheaton Congdon's *Old Vermont Houses* (Dublin, N.H.: Wm. Bauhan, 1940) is the only published attempt at a statewide survey of house types. Two studies, by county, are *The Architectural History of Rutland County* and *The Architectural History of Addison County* (Montpelier: Vermont Division for Historic Preservation, 1988, 1992). Thomas Hubka's *Big House, Little House, Back House, Barn* contains useful discussions of house form in northern New England. Also helpful are two books by Paul Bruhn, *A Celebration of Vermont's Historic Architecture* Windsor: Preservation Trust of Vermont, 1983) and *A Second Celebration of Vermont's Historic Architecture* (Windsor: Preservation Trust of Vermont, 1985), as well as C. Cain et al., eds., *The Burlington Book* (Burlington: University of Vermont Historic Preservation Program, 1980).

[4] R. W. Brunskill, *Traditional Buildings of Britain* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1985), 52-53. Northeastern Vermont was one of the few parts of the state to experience significant direct immigration from the British Isles through the agency of the Scots-American Company of Farmers. A recent discussion of this group's activities can be found in Bernard Bailyn, *Voyagers to the West: A Passage in the Peopling of America on the Eve of the Revolution* (New York: Knopf, 1986).

[5] The prevalence of front hall staircases, forward of the central chimney mass, in seventeenth and eighteenth century dwellings in southern New England (the buildings most frequently written about in this country) has led to the mistaken expectation of finding them in northern New England, where they are relatively rare. See J. F. Kelly, *Early Domestic Architecture of Connecticut* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1924).

[6] The Blair-Lewandoski House (1808) in Stannard provides an example of this large, although often undeveloped, space.

[7] F. B. Cate, "The Old Houses of Plainfield, Vermont," 1955, Misc. 1092, Vermont Historical Society Collections.

[8] James Whitelaw describes this building in a letter to the Scots-American Company of Farmers dated 14 October 1774, MSS 25, #12, Vermont Historical Society Collections. Other sources describing the shape and erection time of log buildings are John Graham, *A Descriptive Sketch of the Present State of Vermont* (London: Cicero Press, 1797), 161-4; and L. Castiglioni's article in T. D. S. Bassett, *Outsiders Inside Vermont* (Brattleboro: Stephen Greene Press, 1967). Castiglioni suggests it might take two men four days to build a log house.

[9] J. Silliman, *Remarks Made on a Short Tour Between Hartford and Quebec, 1819* (New Haven: Converse Press, 1820), 38.

[10] H. Blake, "Fifty Years of Farm Life in Northern Vermont and its Lessons," *Vermont Board of Agriculture Reports, 1877*, 91.

[11] Dwight, 4:84.

[12] Ibid., 152.

[13] H. Hollister, *Pawlet for 100 Years*, (Albany: J. Munsell, 1867), 108.

[14] Waldo Glover, *Mr. Glover's Groton* (Canaan, N. H.: Phoenix Publishing, 1974).

[15] James Whitelaw, "Letters," July 24, 1811. Whitelaw Papers, Vermont Historical Society Collections.

[16] Levi Woodbury, "Journal of Levi Woodbury's Week in Vermont (1819)," Misc. 1711, Vermont Historical Society Collections.

[17] Ibid. (not paginated).

[18] See E. Miller and F. Wells, *History of Ryegate, Vermont* (St. Johnsbury: Caledonia Co., 1913), 94.

[19] Jameson's comment in the *Vermont Board of Agriculture Report, 1874* is tantalizing since it is the only reference I have found that concerns people and large animals living under the same roof in Vermont (at least after the first few years of settlement). The house-barn was a common form in medieval England and persisted in parts of continental Europe into the twentieth century.

[20] Dwight, 152.

[21] Francis Parkman, *Journals* (New York: Harper, 1947).

[22] Woodbury, "Journal," Vermont Historical Society Collections. When Woodbury stopped at the new log house outside Danville Green in 1819, that town was the economic and cultural center of Caledonia County. Well-framed, stylish, and expensively finished Georgian and Federal period houses had been built there as early as 1787 (Lowell-Sullivan House).

[23] Mabel Hall Walter discusses and gives plans for the Cahoon House in her article "The Cahoon House, Lyndonville, Vermont" in *Old Time New England* 29, no. 3 (1939): 106-120.

[24] In the case of the Stone Bottom House the earlier house-turned-kitchen contains the only cooking fireplace in the dwelling and is small and narrow, suggesting that it may have been constructed with the addition of a larger house in mind.

[25] See J. Landy, *The Architecture of Minard LeFever* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), 10.

[26] "List of Houses in Ryegate with a Value above $100," MS. 29, #9, Vermont Historical Society Collections.

[27] Brunskill, 50. A number of cross passage type houses have recently been surveyed in Barre, Massachusetts, by Nora Pat Small, who has named them "Hemenway Houses" after a family of housewrights who built several, but she adds "the origins and distribution of this plan type are still unknown." See *The Old House Journal* 16, no. 4 (1988), rear cover.

[28] Information concerning the Cabot cross passage buildings was provided by Leonard Spencer of Cabot.

[29] J. Dunbar, *Historic Architecture of Scotland* (London: Batsford, 1966), 239.

[30] Brunskill, 50.

[31] Brunskill, 42.

[32] A house of this sort, the Chaplin-Clarke-Williams House (1671) in Rowley, Massachusetts, was described and pictured in *Old Time New England* 16, no. 2 (1925): 98-100.

[33] Whitelaw, "Letters," Vermont Historical Society Collections.

[34] Examples of I-houses doubled in depth at a later date include the Nathaniel Mann House (1809) in Orford, New Hampshire, and the Sanders House in Halifax, Vermont, the earliest part of which may date from before 1780. Herbert Wheaton Congdon describes the Old Burnham House in South Randolph as a doubled I-house; a twenty-foot-deep wooden rear section was built in 1782 and had a twenty-foot-deep brick front applied to it in 1830. H. W. Congdon Papers, carton 5, folder 86, University of Vermont Special Collections.

[35] This house is owned by Leonard Spencer of Cabot, who brought it to my attention.

[36] Thomas Hubka identifies a cluster of these gable-fronted buildings in the Sturbridge, Massachusetts, area. He dates the form to the early 1800s. See Hubka, 38.

[37] N. H. Chamberlain, *Paper on New England Architecture* (Boston: 1858), 11.

[38] Ibid., 11.

[39] In Herbert Wheaton Congdon's *Old Vermont Houses* there are seventy-four different main facades of houses pictured. Only two of these facades depart from the rigid symmetry of a central doorway and evenly spaced windows on either side. While this is probably a fair reflection of what Congdon saw in the 1930s and 1940s, I believe that a higher proportion of asymmetrical facades and plans existed prior to 1830, and many were later remodeled to resemble what we today consider the traditional early Vermont house.

[40] Glover, 50.

[41] Graham, 166.

[42] A shift from the predominate use of hardwood framing timber to softwood timber occurred in the interior of New England around 1800. It likely was related to the exhaustion of good quality white oak and the increased availability of spruce from northern New England. Spruce is not as strong as hardwood and requires that joinery, such as mortises and tenons, be spaced farther apart. At the same time the exposed frame, a medieval survivor, had fallen from favor as an interior design element, and the subsequent use of smaller, less prominent timbers called for scattered rather than concentrated joinery.

[43] Amos Rapoport, *House Form and Culture* Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1969), 104.

[44] This form was also convenient where softwood framing lumber was in use, which by 1840 was almost everywhere in New England. See note no. 42.

[45] Concern with insulation in Vermont homes appears only to have arisen in the mid to late-nineteenth century. Homemade forms of insulation that I have found in dwellings include sawdust, charcoal, birch bark, newspaper, rags, and corncobs. Cabot's Quilted Seaweed (its trade name) became available around

1900 and was used in at least one instance in Waterford, Vermont (this example was pointed out to me by Wade Treadway of Danville). Brick infill (filling the wall cavities between posts and studs with soft brick and mortar) of frame houses occurred at earlier dates but is usually referred to, in nineteenth century builder's guides, as a means of keeping "vermin" out of the walls rather than conserving heat.

[46] Graham, 161-162. Graham gives a generic description of a log hut.

[47] By 1855 this process had progressed to the remodeling of old barns and the construction of new ones so that they, too, resembled public buildings. In an article entitled "Improvement in Barns" a commentator in the December 1855 issue of *New England Farmer* observes that "nearly every farmer appears to have an academy or meeting house upon his premises" (p. 540).