BUILDING ORDER ON BEACON HILL, 1790-1850

by

Jeffrey Eugene Klee

A dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Art History

Spring 2016

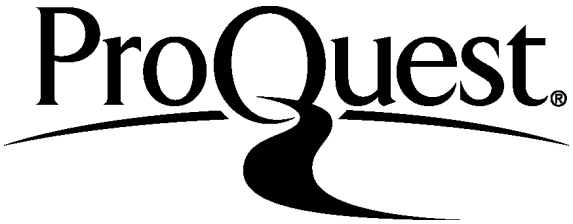
© 2016 Jeffrey Eugene Klee
All Rights Reserved

ProQuest Number: 10157856

All rights reserved

INFORMATION TO ALL USERS
The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send a complete manuscript
and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if material had to be removed,
a note will indicate the deletion.



ProQuest 10157856

Published by ProQuest LLC (2016). Copyright of the Dissertation is held by the Author.

All rights reserved.
This work is protected against unauthorized copying under Title 17, United States Code
Microform Edition © ProQuest LLC.

ProQuest LLC.
789 East Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106 - 1346

BUILDING ORDER ON BEACON HILL, 1790-1850

by

Jeffrey Eugene Klee

Approved: _____

Lawrence Nees, Ph.D.
Chair of the Department of Art History

Approved: _____

George H. Watson, Ph.D.
Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences

Approved: _____

Ann L. Ardis, Ph.D.
Senior Vice Provost for Graduate and Professional Education

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Signed: _____

Bernard L. Herman, Ph.D.
Professor in charge of dissertation

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Signed: _____

Damie Stillman, Ph.D.
Member of dissertation committee

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Signed: _____

Sandy Isenstadt, Ph.D.
Member of dissertation committee

I certify that I have read this dissertation and that in my opinion it meets the academic and professional standard required by the University as a dissertation for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

Signed: _____

Cary Carson, Ph.D.
Member of dissertation committee

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Where to begin? If writing a dissertation were a job, I would have been fired a long time ago. In the dozen or so years that I've been working on this, the debts that I owe to friends, family, and fellow scholars have accumulated to a troublesome degree. First position rightly belongs to Abbott Lowell Cummings, who set me on the path toward a dissertation on Beacon Hill in his undergraduate courses on early American architecture at Yale, which were leavened with memorable field trips to old buildings in southeastern Connecticut. "Uncle Abbott" was a generous, patient, unfailingly encouraging teacher who never let his status as a guru of New England architecture put unnecessary distance between him and his students. Open, approachable, and modest while possessing an astounding depth of knowledge about early building, he is a model scholar and mentor. In gratitude, I dedicate this dissertation to him.

It was Abbott who suggested that I come to Delaware to work with Bernie Herman and Damie Stillman. Bernie took the curiosity about early buildings that I had indulged as a pleasant sideline to an undergraduate design major and refined it into a rigorous and intellectually expansive pursuit, showing me how to use buildings to ask larger questions about culture and history. His lecture courses were inspirational, using a range of material from jokes to duck decoys to farm houses to weave complex, subtle, illuminating stories about the past. His seminars were enormously, delightfully challenging, requiring students to venture far beyond comfortable disciplinary boundaries to find insights in unexpected places and things. Outside the classroom, Bernie showed me how to develop my own insights about the material world through

careful, systematic fieldwork from southern Delaware to the north shore of Boston. He also demonstrated that the pleasures of fieldwork were not only intellectual. If his humor was relatively restrained around the seminar table, he gave freer rein to his affection for wordplay in the cellars and attics of the houses of the Delaware Valley.

Damie Stillman similarly combined field trips with classroom teaching in memorable ways but I am most grateful for his attention to his students' development as professional scholars. Damie reads and listens attentively and patiently, kindly correcting slips of all kinds to help students refine their prose, make their thinking more rigorous, and avoid needless embarrassment in more public and less friendly venues. I am especially grateful for the care with which he edited the manuscript of this dissertation. Other Delaware faculty were important to my development from an undisciplined student but Perry Chapman deserves special mention. Her ability to make Dutch painting and culture a source of endless fascination nearly convinced me to change my major from American art to Baroque. She was an exceptional seminar leader, somehow managing to guide discussions so that the perfect slide to illustrate a student's point seemed to be always at the ready. But her most significant contribution to my life as a historian of architecture was her insistence upon, and demonstration of, respect for the historiography of art history as a rigorous, thoughtful discipline. She did not suffer lazy, ill-informed speculation gladly. More than anyone, she urged us to ensure that our work engaged with the larger problems of our field and that we understood the long arc of its development. Finally, although he arrived at Delaware after I had completed my coursework, Sandy Isenstadt generously agreed to be a reader of this dissertation. His perspective has been invaluable for showing points at which I might address more fully the larger intellectual problems of our field and for

showing ways in which I might make the narrative more powerful and more persuasive.

I am grateful to have had such a skilled group of teachers at the University of Delaware. My fortune was equally good in finding another set of mentors at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, where I began work in 2004. Cary Carson combines a wonderfully mischievous sense of humor with a formidable intellect and an easygoing sociability in a way that is, if not unique, highly extraordinary. As a scholar, his appreciation for clarity and narrative thrust and his impatience for jargon and intellectual fashion is a standard that I aspire to, if I do not always achieve. I am very grateful to have the benefit of his insights as a reader of this dissertation. While Cary encouraged me to become a stronger and more effective writer, Ed Chappell pushed me to become a better fieldworker, stopping at nothing to complete a recording project and always demanding scrupulous attention to the smallest detail of woodwork, hardware, or technology, if it could inform the larger understanding of a building or building culture. His relentless pursuit of answers and his determination to develop a record that can form an enduring contribution to scholarship are evident in the voluminous field records he has created for the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. But as intense and as thorough as Ed is, it is Willie Graham who has shown me just how dogged and how precise a fieldworker can be. In addition to showing me how to refine fieldwork to an empirical science, he also has helped me to see it as an art, a craft that can be practiced with attention to its visual qualities as well as its intellectual ones. He has improved my drawing but above all pushed me to take better photographs, ones that both represent a building effectively and that also are more than just a record of an object. Finally, Carl Lounsbury combines skill in field

investigation with a remarkable depth of knowledge and a farsighted perspective on the practice of history. I am grateful for his including me as part of his summer field school in the College of William and Mary's NIAHD program, in which I have been able to further develop my skills while also enjoying the pleasures of passing those skills to another generation of historians. In working closely with Carl, particularly on the publication of *The Chesapeake House,* I have come to recognize the qualities required of a scholar who seeks to make a lasting contribution to his field, including intellectual rigor, scrupulous research, and persistence. I hope that this dissertation, 12 years in the making, at least demonstrates this last virtue.

It hasn't been easy to study Boston from Virginia but my work has been hugely aided by scholars in New England who have provided encouragement and help from a distance. Keith Morgan regularly checked on my progress, urging me not just to finish but to move toward publication. Laura Driemeyer sent me an early draft of her own dissertation on Charlestown, which provided both useful comparative material and a much-needed model for how to write a richly documented history of Boston-area building. As a resident of Beacon Hill, Martha McNamara took a personal interest in my research and has provided both encouragement and access to key sites. The chapter on domestic service is much a more complete account thanks to her help. Finally, Claire Dempsey has provided extraordinary support from the beginning of my research, offering timely words of reassurance, tips on access to sources, and arranging my visit to record the remains of the John P. Coburn house. She has gone out of her way to help my progress and was one of the first people to read the entire manuscript. Her name does not appear on the signature pages, but she is the fifth reviewer of this dissertation.

Martha and Claire opened many doors for me on Beacon Hill. Early on in my research, I met Elizabeth Owens and Jim McNeely, who each opened many more. Because this research is dependent upon the investigation of standing structures, I have only been able to look closely at buildings with owners willing to let me into the most intimate parts of their homes. That so many have opened their doors to a stranger, and a graduate student to boot, is testimony both to the generosity of the modern residents of Beacon Hill and to the tradition of intellectual curiosity that has long characterized this neighborhood. If anything in this dissertation endures beyond its defense, it will surely be the drawings, photographs, and written assessments of its subject material and this work has only been possible thanks to the present occupants of these houses. My thanks go to Lyn Danforth at the Beacon Hill Friends House, Eve Taylor, Barbara Pike, Todd and Julie Boes, Steve Judge, Elena and John Kingsland, Toni Norton, Susan McWhinney Morse, Belden and Pam Daniels, Peter and Elizabeth Thompson, Mary O'Connell, Sally Hinkle, Elizabeth Owens, John McGillian, Kay Montgomery, Mike O'Herron, Martha McNamara, Andrew Kirk and Apple Stephen, Kitty Flather, and especially Jim McNeely and Bobbie Moore. Many of them have likely forgotten that they helped a young scholar along a dozen or so years ago but I still remember how grateful I was each time one of them invited me into their house.

Having others take an interest in my work has provided the best motivation for me to finish it and one of the great pleasures of graduate school at Delaware was the collegial community of scholars who were working on various aspects of American material life. My friendship with Jhennifer Amundson and Louis Nelson was initially forged through a shared interest in architecture but it became more durable through shared struggle. Renée Stein and Tiarna Doherty welcomed me into the world of

Winterthur and art conservation and were both delightful regular dinner companions. Anna Andrzejewski, Eric Gollankek, Nancy Holst, and Jeroen van den Hurk all navigated the overlapping worlds of art history and historic preservation with me, working with Becky Sheppard and David Ames in the Center for Historic Architecture and Design and enduring Delaware's cruel weather in winter field recording projects. Two fellow students, Ashli White and Amy Henderson, went far beyond the call of friendship and agreed to read parts of the manuscript, offering perceptive and direct criticisms. They have both challenged me to rise to the task I've set for myself of writing a more complete history of Beacon Hill and I appreciate their generosity and their thoughtful comments.

One fellow Delaware student stands out for both personal and intellectual reasons. Cristina Bishop made such an impression on me that I asked her to marry me. She has since lived with my languid writing pace daily, never showing signs of frustration nor questioning whether I would ever finish. That patience has served her well as the mother of our three children, Ellie, Alex, and Henry, who have never known their father as anything other than not-quite-a-doctor. Thanks to them, and to my parents, Timothy and Lois Klee, and to my in-laws, Richard and Sande Bishop, for waiting. At last, our long family nightmare is over.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

ABSTRACT

"Building Order on Beacon Hill, 1790-1850," considers the history of Boston's iconic Beacon Hill neighborhood during the period of its most intensive development. It reconsiders the scholarly and popular understanding of this place as a district of wealth and refinement to show that its inhabitants and their houses reflect a more complete cross-section of Boston's population. It provides a much fuller accounting of this neighborhood's significance by interpreting the residences of a wide range of its population, including the free African-Americans and Irish immigrants who occupied Revere and Joy streets in the 1840s as well as the developers, merchants, and attorneys who built along Beacon and Mount Vernon streets in the 1790s and 1800s. At the same time, it illustrates how houses, whether expensive mansions, speculative rows or tenements, worked to bring order to everyday life, whether by regulating the movement of guests and servants through a gentry house of the 1810s or by providing an arena for polite sociability in the double parlors of the 1830s and 40s. This analysis shows how the residents of Beacon Hill attempted to solve perceived social problems through building.

While it is attentive to built form, recording standing buildings in plans and photographs, it also takes pains to populate Beacon Hill's buildings through careful attention to the documentary record, to show how the significance of architecture is contingent and dependent on use. Several of Charles Bulfinch's remarkable mansions, for example, were demolished within two generations, converted to rows of smaller and more profitable houses in the 1830s and 40s. By considering the changing

significance of the neighborhood and its individual buildings over several decades, it shows the fleeting quality of architectural significance as well as the limitations of any approach to architecture that only considers the moment of its creation.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

In late 1790, a memorial column was quietly raised at the summit of Beacon Hill, a monument to peacetime (Figure 1). Boston had recently endured years of privation that began with the closing of its port in 1774, continued through the Revolutionary War and dragged on through the period of fear and doubt before ratification of the Constitution in 1788. The following year, one month after the election of George Washington, the old wooden warning beacon at the top of the hill fell over, decayed and disused. The proud column raised in its place was designed by Charles Bulfinch, a 27-year-old architect freshly returned home from a European study tour. No longer needed as a means of warning the city of invasion, this was purely a symbolic marker, with a heavy Doric shaft on a high base, and an eagle—the symbol of the new national government—perched on a golden ball above. Contemporary critics were divided on whether it constituted an ornament to the city, testifying to American refinement, or whether it resembled "a farthing candle placed in a large candle-stick upon the altar of some Roman Catholic Chapel."[1] There was greater consensus on the fitness of the sentiments expressed on its plinth, whose inscriptions extolled the virtues and sacrifices of the revolutionary generation and

---

[1] *Columbian Centinel*, June 18, 1791, cited in Harold Kirker, *The Architecture of Charles Bulfinch* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 35; Nathaniel Cutting, *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, 1871-1873* (Boston: The Society, 1873), 61.

encouraged meditation on patriotic themes: "AMERICANS! while from this EMINENCE, scenes of luxuriant fertility, of flourishing COMMERCE, & the abodes of social happiness, meet your view, forget not those who by their exertions have secured to you these BLESSINGS."[2]

It took some effort to be in a position to read those inscriptions. In the years following the Revolution, ascending the hill to take in the panoramic views from its summit was a popular, if taxing, pastime. It was "so steep that one could with difficulty mount its sides…there was a flight of wooden steps, ten or fifteen in number, leading part way up the hill. After that one had to climb the rest of the way by aid of the foot-holes that had been worn in the surface."[3] But the expansive prospect from the top rewarded the climber with broad views of the busy harbor to the east, the city of Cambridge to the west, and the Common and Dorchester Heights to the south, where George Washington had broken the British siege of Boston in 1776. From this elevated vantage, sentimental hikers were encouraged to contemplate lofty themes: patriotism, self-sacrifice, and the role of Boston in the establishment of an independent North American republic. The monument, in 1790, marked a part of the city that was still remote from its densely settled districts as well as from the principal action of the war. But it exploited the panoramic prospect to invest the hill with values that recalled the scenes of revolutionary struggle. From this vantage point, the monument reminded

---

[2] William W. Wheildon, *Beacon Hill, the Beacon and the Monument* (Cambridge: John Wilson and Son, University Press, 1889), 9.

[3] Nathaniel Ingersoll Bowditch, *Fifth Report of the Record Commissioners: "Gleaner" Articles*, ed. William H. Whitmore and William S. Appleton (Boston: Rockwell and Churchill, 1887), 154.

visitors, one could gaze upon sites from Boston's heroic, revolutionary past, as well as its reinvigorated commercial present.

Boston's colonial and revolutionary past had left little trace on the trimountain itself. When the column went up, it was at the edge of the city, a place to look back on Boston from a contemplative distance. At the end of the Revolution, Beacon Hill was believed to be an asylum for uncivilized, ungenteel activities. George Washington, during his stay in Boston, referred to it as "Mount Whoredom," an epithet that is repeated on contemporary maps and early property surveys.[4] In the decade after ratification, respectable building remained sporadic and concentrated on the edges of the hill, near its northeast corner in Bowdoin Square and facing the Common. A cluster of small, wooden houses huddled on the lower slope of its north side.

The reluctance to settle Beacon Hill for most of the eighteenth century, despite its proximity to central Boston, was due to several factors: first, its great height, originally about sixty feet taller before it was trimmed by developers in the 1790s; second, its distance from transportation off the Shawmut peninsula, a deficit only remedied with the 1793 construction of the West Boston bridge; and finally, the persistent presence of small-scale industry.[5] In 1770, it was still remote enough that the powder magazine, infamous for repeated accidents, was moved to near the corner

---

[4] George Washington to John Hancock, March 7, 1776, The Papers of George Washington, Revolutionary War Series, vol. 3, http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/03-03-02-0309.

[5] Walter Muir Whitehill, *Boston: A Topographical History* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), 51–52.

of Myrtle and Grove Streets.[6] Its broad stretches of open land were ideal locations for rope manufacture, which required very long structures in which to wind tarred hemp into strands, and whose stench and flammability discouraged nearby development. In 1798, Jonathan and Benjamin Austin's ropewalk still followed the east-west ridge of Beacon Hill, where it served as a boundary separating its north and south slopes.

Difficult topography, remoteness from transportation off the peninsula and the proximity of noisome, combustible industry kept interest in property on the north slope low before the end of the eighteenth century. As a consequence, through the colonial period, unimproved lots remained within reach of families of moderate means and early purchasers included tradesmen and free African Americans. In 1767, Scipio Fayerweather was the first black man to own land on Beacon Hill, beginning a migration of Boston's African-American community out of the North End and onto the north slope.[7] Despite the presence of a handful of impressive houses near the Common and in Bowdoin Square at its northeast corner, early Beacon Hill was more closely associated with African-Americans and tradesmen than its genteel residents,

---

[6] Annie Haven Thwing, *The Crooked and Narrow Streets of the Town of Boston, 1630-1822*, Second Edition (Charles E. Lauriat, 1925), 208.

[7] Beth Anne Bower, "The African Meeting House, Boston, Massachusetts: Summary Report of Archaeological Excavations, 1975-1986" (Boston, Mass.: Museum of Afro-American History, 1986), 43. With the construction of the African-American Meeting House on Smith's Court in 1806, the Belknap Street neighborhood would become the focus of Boston's black community for several decades. Even before 1806, Belknap Street was a local center of black achievement. Prince Watts, for example, owned two houses on Belknap in 1798 and by his death in 1806 had accumulated nearly $5,000 of real and personal property. He left the largest estate, by far, of any contemporary African-American in Boston. Bower, "The African Meeting House"; James Oliver Horton and Lois E. Horton, *Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North*, Rev. ed. (New York: Holmes & Meier, 2000).

such as John Hancock. This association, surely, was one reason that the painter, John Singleton Copley, was willing to sell his large tract of land along the Common in 1795.[8]

With its classical form and its poetic inscriptions, Bulfinch's column was raised to claim the high ground of Beacon Hill on behalf of both gentility and Revolutionary memory. It was joined in this effort by other writers—in the same year, *The Massachusetts Magazine* published a poem that sought to associate the hill with the Revolution and republican virtue. And in 1797, Sarah Wentworth Morton published *Beacon Hill: A Local Poem, Historic and Descriptive*, which took up similar themes of patriotism and sacrifice to embed the legacy of the Revolution in Beacon Hill through epic poetry.[9] Together, these efforts reveal the degree to which post-Revolutionary Boston was an imagined space as much as an experiential one, in which the entire city, its neighborhoods, streets, and individual sites could be assigned significance. This self-conscious task of place-making has been underway since

---

[8] When he learned that the property would adjoin the lot chosen for construction of the new Massachusetts State House, he tried to invalidate the transaction. Bowditch, *Fifth Report of the Record Commissioners: "Gleaner" Articles*, 185–188; 193–206; Allen Chamberlain, *Beacon Hill: Its Ancient Pastures and Early Mansions* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1925), 61–69.

[9] Euphrosyne, "Description of the Plate," *Massachusetts Magazine: Or, Monthly Museum of Knowledge and Rational Entertainment*, November 1790; S.W. Morton, *Beacon Hill: A Local Poem, Historic and Descriptive. Book I* (Boston: Manning & Loring for the Author, 1797). Morton's poem, as she acknowledged in her introduction to it, said nothing whatever about Beacon Hill itself. Rather, she expected that because her readers would recall that "the great events, which form the subject of the piece, originated within the view of this interesting eminence, the mind, by the natural association of ideas, will be easily led to contemplate every succeeding occurrence of the Revolution," ibid., vii.

Bulfinch's column was erected, and it continues into the present, most publicly expressed in disputes over what Beacon Hill, once and for all, really *is*.[10]

Whether as a topographic feature, a neighborhood, or a metaphor, Beacon Hill has never been far from the public eye. For centuries, it has beguiled Bostonians and charmed visitors, for whom a visit to the city is incomplete without a hike to its summit. In the earliest printed views of Boston, it looms in the background as one of three peaks of the "tri-mountain," "tremont," or "tramont," as it is labeled in period imagery (Figure 2).[11] To antiquaries and pedants, these are Mount Vernon, Beacon, and Pemberton hills, though less fastidious topographers refer to all three by the name of the middle, and highest rise, Beacon. Even before it was crowned with the great dome of the State House, it was the most singular and recognizable landmark in Massachusetts.[12]

---

[10] Such disputes are frequently focused on preservation and land use, such as the demolition of a building thought to be atypical, or the use of a house as a bed-and-breakfast. Donna L. Goodison, "'Spiritual Pain' on Beacon Hill: Church to Sell Building after B&B Fight," *Boston Business Journal*, May 1, 2000; Thomas Grillo, "Storied Beacon Hill House Goes on Market," *Boston Globe*, July 1, 2000, sec. Real Estate; Cristina Silva, "Stop on Black History Trail Is Razed," *Boston Globe*, November 10, 2005, sec. Metro/Region; Meghan E. Irons, "Rare Beacon Hill Demolition Plan Stirs Up Residents," *Boston Globe*, July 14, 2013, sec. Metro.

[11] For a summary of these early views and maps, see John W. Reps, "Boston by Bostonians: The Printed Plans and Views of the Colonial City by Its Artists, Cartographers, Engravers, and Publishers," in *Boston Prints and Printmakers, 1670-1775*, ed. Walter Muir Whitehill, vol. 46 (Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts; distributed by the University Press of Virginia, 1973), 3–56.

[12] William W. Wheildon, *Beacon Hill, the Beacon and the Monument* (Cambridge: John Wilson and Son, University Press, 1889) recounts the history of the hill and its topography at length. The various names of the hill appear in multiple sources but are abundantly revealed in the deeds referenced in Bowditch, *Fifth Report of the Record Commissioners: "Gleaner" Articles*. It was referred to as Centry Hill for its qualities

For two hundred years, Beacon Hill's qualities have inspired both prose and poetry: about the views from its summit, its topography, its architecture, and its inhabitants. Students of architecture know it chiefly as the site of Charles Bulfinch's 1797 Massachusetts State House, the young designer's first major public commission and the work that recommended him to succeed Benjamin Henry Latrobe as architect of the United States Capitol. They may also know it to be the site of several of Bulfinch's designs for private houses, including three mansions for Harrison Gray Otis, another for Jonathan Mason, and three row houses for Hepsibah Swan. The literature on Bulfinch and his work on Beacon Hill is extensive; it is joined by scholarship on the many other builders who helped give Beacon Hill its present form, most notably the builder, pattern book author, and resident of West Cedar Street, Asher Benjamin.

The stories of its architects and builders are a relatively minor, and recent, genre in Beacon Hill bibliography. Initially, in the years after the American Revolution, Boston authors were occupied by two very different themes: the grand views available from its peak, on the one hand, and the doubtful character of many of its inhabitants, on the other. In subsequent decades, as the hill's population of artisans and free African Americans was joined by Otises, Warrens, Holmeses, and Alcotts, the social and literary pretensions of Beacon Hill's scribes evolved. The role of Brahmins and their scholarly neighbors in developing the social and architectural character of the district came to the foreground as Beacon Hill became a metonym for

---

as a lookout over town by 1635, when the first beacon was installed. Bowditch adds to Centry Hill a 1641 reference to "Centinel Hill," "Centurie Hill," and "Center Hill" and finds Beacon still referred to as Centry Hill in 1684, Ibid., 55.

Boston's literary and political culture. Today, for most New Englanders, Beacon Hill evokes grand living, expensive real estate, and a distinguished literary pedigree.[13]

Much modern scholarship on Beacon Hill favors its Brahmin identity and clings persistently to an archaic, consensus view of its past, focusing on the charmed lives of its most genteel and most literate tenants. This is an important part of its story and a beguiling one. Beacon Hill's denizens have been (and continue to be) intelligent, literate leading lights of Boston and the nation. Oliver Wendell Holmes, Harrison Gray Otis, Julia Ward Howe, Louisa May Alcott, William Cooper Nell, and Thomas Bailey Aldrich all called Beacon Hill home for much of their lives. Its literary and political pedigree continues to enchant visitors, who pause at the Club of Odd Volumes or before the Alcott house to wonder at what secrets the buildings hold about their famous inhabitants.[14] The especially curious can climb the stairs at 55 Beacon

---

[13] The Brahmin character of Beacon Hill and its literary *bona fides* were principal preoccupations of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century authors. See, e.g., Wheildon, *Beacon Hill, the Beacon and the Monument*; Oliver Wendell Holmes, *The Autocrat of The Breakfast-Table: Every Man His Own Boswell* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1891); Susan Ellen Bulfinch, *The Life and Letters of Charles Bulfinch, Architect, with Other Family Papers* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1896); Thomas Bailey Aldrich, *The Story of a Bad Boy: The Little Violinist, and Other Sketches* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1897); Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Life and Letters of Harrison Gray Otis, Federalist, 1765-1848*, vol. 1, 2 vols. (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1913); William Appleton, *Selections from the Diaries of William Appleton, 1786-1862*, ed. Susan M. Loring (Boston: Merrymount Press, 1922); Robert Means Lawrence, *Old Park Street and Its Vicinity* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1922).

[14] "Boston Women's Heritage Trail Beacon Hill Tour," accessed December 3, 2015, http://bwht.org/beacon-hill/; Beth Teitell, "An Author Slept Here: Boston's Literary Community Pushes for a 'Literary Cultural District,'" *Boston Globe*, October 26, 2013.

Street, one of just two house museums on Beacon Hill, and step inside the little study where the half-blind William Hickling Prescott completed his *History of the Conquest of Peru*. The well-heeled can purchase a third of the (much altered) house of Charles Sumner and use the same stairs that the orator and abolitionist limped upon after his brutal beating on the floor of the Senate. The story of Beacon Hill's most prominent houses and their tenants was essentially written a century ago, and it is repeated in tours, handsome guidebooks, and scholarly overviews. Much of this material emphasizes the ways in which architecture passively reflects the refined, heroic or virtuous sensibilities of its inhabitants. In this telling, Otis' three elegant townhouses manifest his exceptional taste, his delight in respectable entertaining, and his status as Federal Boston's leading political figure. Louisa May Alcott's childhood home on Pinckney Street demonstrates her modesty and imaginative ability to rise above humble, eccentric beginnings. And the dignified Middleton-Glapion House seems to distance the city from slavery and its history of racism and to testify, instead, to the ability of free African-Americans to attain a modest competence in early national Boston.[15]

But this understanding of Beacon Hill is an interpretive dead end. It regards buildings as illustrations of ideas expressed more perfectly elsewhere, reducing them to reflections of a designer's ingenuity, or a socialite's good taste. Additionally, it is much too limited in scope. Beacon Hill's literary and political landmarks are part of a

---

[15] Recent examples of Beacon Hill guidebooks that re-capitulate old themes include Moying Li-Marcus, *Beacon Hill: The Life & Times of a Neighborhood* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002); Robert E. Guarino, *Beacon Street: Its Buildings & Residents* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2011).

much larger story than the hagiographies of those whom Oliver Wendell Holmes called its “sifted few.” The best houses of Beacon Street are properly understood as part of a trend in house design that transformed eastern cities in this period. Charles Bulfinch was one of the most skillful designers of the Federal era and Harrison Gray Otis his most accommodating client but the pair had their counterparts in New York, Philadelphia, Baltimore, Charleston, and even little Beaufort, South Carolina. No less important is the history of those houses through the rest of the nineteenth century. Some continued to be occupied in grand style by families who resisted the pull of fashion toward the Back Bay, or Brookline; others were converted into tenements or saw their gardens parceled out for building lots; and several were demolished and converted into rows of smaller houses.

The fullest accounting of Beacon Hill comes from considering the great houses after their privileged occupants moved on. It also takes note of those many other streets not named Beacon, Chestnut or Mount Vernon. During the famous wave of mansion building of the 1790s and early 1800s, and especially after it, multitudes of small builders and busy developers filled Beacon Hill's interior with row after row of attached houses—some for Boston’s gentry, some for middling clerks and merchants, and many for rent to Boston’s immigrant and laboring populations. Revere, Hancock, Garden, and Pinckney streets were all covered with handsome brick rows by the middle of the nineteenth century, filled with the burgeoning middle class of Boston. At the same time, the blocks around Joy Street and the many narrow courts off of Revere Street were lined with still smaller, more modest houses, soon packed with Boston's poorer residents: Irish immigrants and African Americans, including fugitive slaves, who found on Beacon Hill committed communities of abolitionists. Many of these

structures were washed away by a great wave of tenement building around 1900, but a handful survive, some of them just barely. The house of John Coburn, a black entrepreneur and abolitionist of the antebellum period, was torn down while I was doing the field research for this study.

This dissertation tells a more generous story of the neighborhood, using ordinary buildings as well as extraordinary ones to portray a fuller picture of domestic life in Boston in the early nineteenth century. This ambition to broaden our understanding of Beacon Hill comes with some significant challenges—principally, one of abundance. This was an era in which material goods were produced at an unprecedented rate, and in which Boston gained fame as a great fountainhead of the written word. What was a source of delight and amazement to the antebellum Bostonian represents a plague to the modern material culture researcher. There is simply too much stuff to assimilate it all—too many buildings; too many letters; too many personal papers; too many paintings, prints, sofas, silver, lamps, tables, chairs, novels, newspapers, lockets, calling cards, account books, pianos, and scientific instruments. And it all survives, or so it seems. So the student of this period must draw boundaries, choosing to focus on this set of artifacts rather than that one—houses, instead of churches; dining rooms, rather than serving silver; parlors, rather than pier tables; Beacon Hill, rather than the North End or the entire city.

The first of these boundaries concerns chronology. This study is confined to the period from 1790 to roughly 1850, the decades in which Beacon Hill was most intensively developed. It is an era defined by speculative building and one that includes the work of Asher Benjamin, Charles Bulfinch, and Alexander Parris. It encompasses its first major phase of construction from 1790 to the 1820s, as well as

the speculative development of the second quarter of the nineteenth century that gives much of the neighborhood its modern character. The second boundary is spatial. I have confined my research to the neighborhood bounded by Beacon Street to the south, Charles Street to the west, Cambridge Street to the north, and Bowdoin Street to the east (Figure 3). Cambridge and Bowdoin streets form the edges of the urban renewal projects that eviscerated much of this part of Boston. Beacon Street is the north side of the Boston Common, and Charles Street was, until the 1810s, the eastern bank of the Charles River. This dissertation does not address "the flats," the Victorian-era development to the west of Charles Street, but it does treat both the north and south slopes of Beacon Hill, from Beacon Street north to Cambridge Street. That part of the neighborhood north of Pinckney Street—poorer, denser, and darker than the south slope—was for many years understood as part of the West End (Figure 4).[16] But topography and the regrettable demolition of the old neighborhood north of Cambridge Street in the late 1950s recommend the inclusion of the north slope in any full consideration of the buildings of Beacon Hill. These boundaries, finally, follow those of the two previous major studies of Beacon Hill: Allen Chamberlain's 1925 *Beacon Hill, Its Ancient Pastures and Early Mansions* and Nathaniel Ingersoll Bowditch's 1855 "Gleaner" essays.

---

[16] See the response to a Gleaner essay by *Urbs Condita*, reprinted in Bowditch, *Fifth Report of the Record Commissioners: "Gleaner" Articles*., p. 4, which notes that the West End neighborhood was, in 1855, considered to extend across Cambridge Street and up the north slope of Beacon Hill. Understood this way, the north slope is the last remnant of the old West End that was demolished as part of the notorious urban renewal scheme that created Boston's Government Center and whose demise was chronicled in Herbert J. Gans, *The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian-Americans* (New York: Free Press, 1962).

Bowditch was the first historian of Beacon Hill, and his breezy articles on property transactions appeared in the *Boston Transcript* in 1855 under the pseudonym "Gleaner." These were compiled and re-published in the 5th *Report of the Record Commissioners of Boston* in 1887.[17] A real estate conveyancer, Bowditch's pieces are as amusing a recitation of title histories as it is possible to conceive. He was not a writer who saw much value in being an impartial reporter of dry antiquarian data. He related with evident amusement, for example, the story of Thomas Urann, who attempted to make several deeds to land on Beacon Hill he did not own. And he was a willing critic of developmental excess in antebellum Boston, as in his description of a row of new houses on Pemberton Square. This had been a famous terraced garden until 1835, when it was laboriously re-graded in preparation for development by Patrick Tracy Jackson, mill owner and treasurer of the Boston and Lowell Railroad.[18] As Bowditch saw it, "[w]e have got the 'almighty dollar' instead of a natural eminence with its terraces…which, like the Boston Common, was a daily gratification to our citizens, and on which strangers stopped to gaze with admiration and delight."[19]

In 1925, Allen Chamberlain drew upon Bowditch's work to produce his own more conventional history of the neighborhood and its architecture in *Beacon Hill: Its Ancient Pastures and Early Mansions*.[20] Like Bowditch, Chamberlain had an ear for

---

[17] Bowditch, *Fifth Report of the Record Commissioners: "Gleaner" Articles*.

[18] Phebe S. Goodman, *The Garden Squares of Boston* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2003), 57.

[19] Bowditch, *Fifth Report of the Record Commissioners: "Gleaner" Articles*., 58, 101.

[20] Chamberlain, *Beacon Hill*.

the charming anecdote and an antiquarian's affection for stories of early settlers. He was interested, principally, in the social life, genealogy, and real estate dealings of Beacon Hill's earliest residents and especially beguiled by Federal-era fortunes and early colonial ancestry. Despite his title, he made little effort to interpret or even describe the mansions of the neighborhood, even those of Bulfinch, and wrote next to nothing about its commoner, more modest buildings. He seems, for example, to have approached the problem of identifying the oldest house on Beacon Hill with some reluctance, perhaps because the principal claimant to that title was not a great brick mansion but rather one of the smallest framed houses in Boston, built for two African American households around 1790. Still, his book remains an important, useful reference for the process by which the hill was developed in the early nineteenth century, especially with respect to the role of the Mount Vernon Proprietors, the development syndicate headed by Harrison Gray Otis and Jonathan Mason.

Those seeking information about Beacon Hill's buildings, as opposed to its property lines and earliest inhabitants, have needed to look elsewhere. Monographs on the architect Charles Bulfinch constitute one important set of resources. His granddaughter, Susan Ellen Bulfinch, produced a substantial biography, *The Life and Letters of Charles Bulfinch*, in 1896. But the first major treatment of his buildings was Charles Alpheus Place's *Charles Bulfinch, Architect and Citizen*, published in 1925, the same year as Chamberlain's book.[21] Place emphasized Bulfinch's activities as a selectman of Boston to supplement the biographical portrait available in *The Life and Letters*. He also made an effort to provide a thorough catalog of Bulfinch's designs,

---

[21] Bulfinch, *Life and Letters of Charles Bulfinch*; Charles Alpheus Place, *Charles Bulfinch, Architect and Citizen* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1925).

with appreciative descriptions of their form. Place treated Bulfinch's public buildings more completely than his private commissions, in line with his emphasis on Bulfinch as a public-spirited designer of Boston's principal civic buildings. He wrote relatively little about the houses of Beacon Hill, with only cursory treatment of his three mansions for Harrison Gray Otis and brief descriptions of rows he designed on Mount Vernon and Chestnut streets.

The lack of thorough treatment of Bulfinch's domestic work was remedied in 1969, with the publication of Harold Kirker's *The Architecture of Charles Bulfinch*.[22] Kirker provided a comprehensive and systematic account of his designs, with several pages devoted to every known building, including those that had been demolished. The descriptions are accompanied by modern and historic photographs and, often, floor plans, including some in Bulfinch's own hand. It is scrupulously researched, with relevant material from family papers, contemporary accounts and public records. More scholarly and sober-minded than either Chamberlain's or Place's books, Kirker's catalog is a useful reference for the dozen or so buildings by Bulfinch on Beacon Hill and an essential starting point for students of its architecture. But Kirker stopped well short of analysis of Bulfinch's work, other than to make the obvious point that he was the most skillful architect of Federal-era Boston.

Interpretation of Bulfinch's buildings and their relationship to Federalist politics and social life was not taken up until 2005, when Thomas Conroy completed

---

[22] Kirker, *Architecture of Charles Bulfinch*. This book was a more focused treatment of Bulfinch's architecture than an earlier book, co-written with his twin brother: Harold Kirker and James Kirker, *Bulfinch's Boston, 1787-1817* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964).

his dissertation, "The Politics of Style: Building, Builders, and the Creation of Federal Boston." Conroy makes the case that Boston's Federalist leaders, including Jonathan Mason and Harrison Gray Otis, used grand buildings as a means of dispensing patronage, erecting banks, houses, and churches to keep the city's large and politically populist community of tradesmen dependent upon them, forming a political alliance of shared economic interest.[23] Conroy takes commendable pains to illustrate the sudden and significant investment in housing on the part of younger Boston Federalists (he lists fifteen who hired Bulfinch to build houses between 1803 and 1807) in a period when the party's future seemed in doubt. However, other than noting the preference of Bulfinch and his conservative clients for modeling designs on English, rather than continental, designs, the relationship of built form to politics is incompletely explored.

In any case, Bulfinch had nothing whatever to do with the majority of what was built in Boston between 1790 and 1850, so the literature on him represents only an introduction to one aspect of one phase of the larger history of Beacon Hill's buildings.[24] The student of Boston's architecture who wishes to learn about the full

---

[23] Thomas E. Conroy III, "The Politics of Style: Building, Builders, and the Creation of Federal Boston" (Ph.D. diss., University of Massachusetts, 2005).

[24] Boston's other principal designer of this period, and the one responsible for more of its buildings, is Asher Benjamin, who merits a dissertation and several scholarly articles but not, as yet, a published monograph. Unlike Bulfinch, most of his work in Boston involved the design and construction of row houses. Abbott Lowell Cummings, "An Investigation of the Sources, Stylistic Evolution, and Influence of Asher Benjamin's Builders' Guides" (Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1950); John Francis Quinan, "The Architectural Style of Asher Benjamin, a Study in Provincialism" (Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1973); John Francis Quinan, "A Chronologically Arranged List of Projects and Buildings by Asher Benjamin," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 38, no. 3 (October 1979): 253–54; Anne Elizabeth Macdonald, "Asher Benjamin: Architect, Author, Teacher and Entrepreneur" (M.A. thesis, Northeastern University, 1993).

range of its surviving building stock on Beacon Hill will come up short in the published scholarship. The best, and virtually the only, source of information on attached row houses in the city is Bainbridge Bunting's 1967 *Houses of Boston's Back Bay*. Because it deals with the fashionable Victorian-era district just west of Beacon Hill, this book is a useful comparative reference, but it picks up the thread more or less where the phase of intensive building on Beacon Hill leaves off, in the middle of the nineteenth century. Bunting, who was principally interested in the work of architects, identified four major phases of development, making his classification according to architectural style, chiefly as expressed in façades. His focus on exteriors is related to his interest in supporting the designation of the Back Bay as a historic district, in which changes visible from the public street might be regulated and a major residential section of the city preserved.[25] In 2006, Bunting's work on the Back Bay was joined by that of Laura Driemeyer on Charlestown, just across the Charles River from the West End. Charlestown developed at the same time as Beacon Hill, but not as densely, and with many more wooden buildings. Driemeyer's study combines original fieldwork on standing buildings with research in deed, tax, and probate records to compile a much more thorough accounting of a place than Bunting's, and is a model for a place-based history of the architecture of Boston.[26]

---

[25] Bainbridge Bunting, *Houses of Boston's Back Bay; An Architectural History, 1840-1917* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967).

[26] Laura Baker Driemeyer, "Rising from the Ashes: The Transformation of Nineteenth-Century Building Culture in Charlestown, Massachusetts" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 2006).

There have been more complete and more interpretive histories of urban housing for other cities in this period.[27] But in Boston—and in particular, on Beacon

---

[27] Mary Ellen Hayward, e.g., has written two careful investigations of Baltimore, including one on its modest houses for workers. William John Murtagh and Bernard Lania Herman have done significant work to classify and interpret the full range of Philadelphia's town houses. Similarly, Herman and John Poston have addressed the history of the quintessential Charleston dwelling, the "single house." London has been a rich vein for research on early urban buildings since the establishment of the Survey of London in 1894 but it was Sir John Summerson who turned serious scholarly attention to the city's 18th-century building stock in 1945, with the publication of *Georgian London*. Summerson's emphasis on the importance of speculation in forming the city's streetscapes was a critical contribution to the history of urban form in England and America. His work has since been refined in significant ways by Elizabeth McKellar, and others, who question Summerson's use of 1666 as a watershed and find more continuity than change on either side of the Great Fire. Critically, McKellar, along with Peter Guillery, observes the importance of so-called vernacular building in the development of the city, critiquing Summerson's assumptions that pedigreed architects, rather than builders and their clients, were the principal form-givers of early modern London. Mary Ellen Hayward, *The Baltimore Rowhouse* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999); Mary Ellen Hayward, *Baltimore's Alley Houses: Homes for Working People since the 1780s*, Creating the North American Landscape (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008); William John Murtagh, "The Philadelphia Row House," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 16, no. 4 (December 1957): 8–13; Bernard L. Herman, *Town House: Architecture and Material Life in the Early American City, 1780-1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005); Bernard L. Herman, "The Embedded Landscapes of the Charleston Single House, 1780-1820," in *Exploring Everyday Landscapes*, ed. AnnMarie Adams and Sally McMurry, Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture 7 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997), 41–57; Jonathan Poston, *The Buildings of Charleston: A Guide to the City's Architecture* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1997); John Summerson, *Georgian London*, ed. Howard Colvin (New Haven: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2003); Elizabeth McKellar, *The Birth of Modern London: The Development and Design of the City, 1660-1720*, Studies in Design and Material Culture (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1999); Peter Guillery, *The Small House in Eighteenth-Century London: A Social and Architectural History* (New Haven: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2004).

Hill—the most comprehensive research on early buildings has been undertaken by preservationists. Kirker's work on Bulfinch coincided with an intensifying public interest in the buildings of Beacon Hill, an interest that was not confined to its grandest or most famous buildings. In 1955, more than a decade before passage of the federal Historic Preservation Act, the Massachusetts legislature established the first two historic districts in New England: one in Nantucket and the other on the south slope of Beacon Hill.[28] Henry Millon and Carl Weinhardt's research to determine the boundaries of the district and to inventory its contents was the first attempt to account, in a comprehensive way, for the full range of buildings in the neighborhood. Because the district legislation proposed to regulate only the exteriors of buildings, Weinhardt and Millon's survey concerned itself principally with the composition of façades and divided the whole of the south slope into six types: Bulfinch mansion houses, Bulfinch row houses, "vernacular row houses," and three sizes of 1820s houses.[29] Broad though these classifications are, and incomplete as any typology based upon elevation must be, they encompass a far greater proportion of Beacon Hill buildings than any previous study.

The establishment of the Beacon Hill Historic District brought new attention to the full range of buildings in the neighborhood, from the row of one-room-deep houses on Acorn Street to the grand collection of bow-fronted houses surrounding

---

[28] "Area Preservation and the Beacon Hill Bill," *Old-Time New England* 46, no. 164 (Spring 1956): 106–10.

[29] Carl J Weinhardt, *The Domestic Architecture of Beacon Hill, 1800-1850,* Reprinted from The Proceedings of the Bostonian Society Annual Meeting, 1958 (Boston: Bostonian Society, 1973).

Louisburg Square. Attention to commonplace buildings was much aided by the arrival, also in 1955, of Abbott Lowell Cummings at the offices of the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities (SPNEA).[30] As assistant director, Cummings brought scholarly bite to the study and preservation of ordinary buildings in New England, and on Beacon Hill in particular, where the society was headquartered in the first Harrison Gray Otis House. Though a more reluctant activist than SPNEA founder, William Sumner Appleton, he became a vocal opponent of the wholesale demolition of the West End, the neighborhood just north of Cambridge Street, and a frequent adversary of Ed Logue, Boston's leading supporter of urban renewal in the late 1950s.[31] In 1963, Cummings opposed a proposal by a Boston architect, Edward Bullerjahn, to demolish a Beacon Hill brownstone from the late nineteenth century and replace it with something new in the Federal or Greek Revival style, a position that pitted Cummings against many community members as well as other scholars, including Walter Muir Whitehill.[32] The success of that effort helped prevent the hill from becoming a caricature of itself and from obliterating those aspects of its past that

---

[30] In June, 2004, the SPNEA was re-named as Historic New England.

[31] At the end of the year in which the old West End had been swept away as part of Logue's plans to turn Scollay Square and the surrounding area into Government Center and a prestigious residential district, Cummings wrote mournfully of the project as a "devastation here unmatched since that of the fire of 1872." Abbott Lowell Cummings, "Charles Bulfinch and Boston's Vanishing West End," *Old-Time New England* 52, no. 2 (December 1961): 31–49.

[32] Jessica Neuwirth et al., "Abbott Lowell Cummings and the Preservation of New England," *The Public Historian* 29, no. 4 (Fall 2007): 73–75. Whitehill was the long-time Director and Librarian of the Boston Athenaeum and, later, the author of *Boston: A Topographical History*.

were not associated with Federal-era grandees. It was the first of what would be many modern controversies over how to define Beacon Hill through architecture.

The 1950s preservation efforts on Beacon Hill were rewarded by its designation as a National Historic Landmark in 1962, as a nationally significant and largely intact early urban environment. The boundaries of the district were originally confined to just the south slope but were extended north to Cambridge Street in 1972. In 2006, this nomination was updated and the period of significance extended forward to 1955 to include 1,349 contributing buildings.[33] These enlarged boundaries were followed in the two surveys of Beacon Hill sponsored by the Boston Landmarks Commission and the Massachusetts Historical Commission in 2001 and 2002. Completed by Ed Gordon, they inventoried and publicized, for the first, time, every contributing building on both the north and south slopes of Beacon Hill. For each building, Gordon worked to determine the original date of construction; assess its integrity; and identify, where possible, a builder, an architect, and occupants. It is the most complete inventory of buildings in the district and encompasses everything from the Bulfinch mansions to early twentieth-century tenements on the north slope.[34] It is, in effect, a printed index to the building stock of Beacon Hill and any new research on the neighborhood's architecture properly begins here.

---

[33] Edward W. Gordon and Pauline Chase-Harrell, "National Historic Landmark Nomination: Beacon Hill Historic District" (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, August 11, 2006).

[34] Boston Landmarks Commission, Edward W. Gordon, and Massachusetts Historical Commission, "Final Report: Beacon Hill/North Slope Cultural Resources Area" (Boston, Mass.: Massachusetts Historical Commission, 2001); Boston Landmarks Commission, Edward W. Gordon, and Massachusetts Historical Commission, "Final Report: Beacon Hill/South Slope Cultural Resources Area" (Boston, Mass.: Massachusetts Historical Commission, 2002).

At the same time, the National Park Service commissioned a more detailed survey of African-American sites on Beacon Hill to support its interpretation of the Boston African American National Historic Site, centered on the north slope. Though it focused less on buildings than their inhabitants, this survey compiled all known material from census and tax returns, city directories, maps, and other primary documents to tell the stories of twenty-six sites that were associated with the history of Boston's African-American community in the nineteenth century. More thorough and more interpretive than the Gordon surveys, it provides a much more complete record of the history of the black community on Beacon Hill, while also incorporating key documentary data, such as building contracts. The report filled a long-standing void in the scholarship on Boston. Although it is the best source of information about the African-American community on Beacon Hill, it remains unpublished, and is accessible principally through guided tours.[35]

This dissertation aims to build upon these efforts at making sense of Beacon Hill by opening select, representative sites to close examination. Fieldwork is at its core. This method involves careful description and documentation of building fabric, including structural and decorative elements, but most crucially a record of a building's plan, with special attention to the use and interrelationship of rooms. It combines this careful physical investigation with relevant material from other sources, including tax records, directories, and census data, as well as diaries and domestic

---

[35] Though written by Grover and DeSilva, it is underpinned by the research of Michael Terranova and Beth Anne Bower, as well as the scholarship of James and Lois Horton. Kathryn Grover and Janine V. DeSilva, "Historic Resource Study: Boston African-American National Historic Site" (Boston, December 31, 2002); Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*; Bower, "The African Meeting House."

fiction, to develop a more complete, richly contextualized portrait of a place. Standing buildings are the central category of evidence for understanding the history of Beacon Hill but they are one source among many.

Though a field-based method for writing architectural history begins with description, if it ends there, it invites irrelevance. To acknowledge the ethical and scholarly weakness of description is to take on the more difficult task of interpretation. As description involves writing *about* architecture, interpretation writes *through* architecture, a distinction that Bernard Herman describes as a difference between "object-centered" and "object-driven" scholarship.[36] Object-centered research begins and ends with the demanding but theoretically uncomplicated task of physical description: making a thorough accounting of the visible properties of a building, including information about its materials, plan, and finish. At its most complete, it draws upon relevant documentary materials, including probate inventories, contracts, and tax records, to enhance physical description and lend credence to interpretation of room functions, for example.[37]

If object-centered fieldwork is focused inward, object-driven research is oriented outward, at the wider material and social world. Object-driven work moves outward to engage in other speculations.[38] In its more expansive instances, object-

---

[36] Bernard L. Herman, *The Stolen House* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1992), 11–12.

[37] The field research files of Historic New England, the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, and the Center for Historic Architecture and Design at the University of Delaware all embody this type of work.

[38] Cary Carson has been a tireless advocate for the necessity of engaging material culture scholarship with other disciplines. See, e.g., Cary Carson, "Material Culture History: The Scholarship Nobody Knows," in *American Material Culture: The Shape*

driven writing amounts to an occasion for a performance, in which the object itself recedes in significance behind the literary qualities of interpretation. Among the earliest proponents of a method in which an object might stimulate wide-ranging discourses is Jules Prown, and a generation of his students and their peers has embraced this approach and brought it to a diverse range of material.[39] More grounded object-driven work aims to embed artifacts more durably in wider discourses. Cary Carson and Dell Upton have been forceful and influential advocates for the use of objects to inform historical scholarship.[40]

Still, two decades after the publication of Carson's *Of Consuming Interests*, the degree to which objects are understood as reliable or useful evidence for historic

---

of the Field, ed. Ann Smart Martin and J. Ritchie Garrison (Winterthur: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1997), 401–28.

[39] David Lubin and Alex Nemerov are two of the most imaginative. See Jules David Prown, *Art as Evidence: Writings on Art and Material Culture* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001); David M Lubin, *Shooting Kennedy: JFK and the Culture of Images* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003); David M. Lubin, *Picturing a Nation: Art and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century America* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994); and Alexander Nemerov, *The Body of Raphaelle Peale: Still Life and Selfhood, 1812-1824* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

[40] Cary Carson, et al., "Impermanent Architecture in the Southern American Colonies," *Winterthur Portfolio* 16, no. 2/3 (Summer - Autumn 1981): 135–96; Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert, eds., *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, Perspectives on the American Revolution (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia for the United States Capitol Historical Society, 1994); Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, Williamsburg, VA., 1982); Bernard L. Herman, *Architecture and Rural Life in Central Delaware, 1700-1900* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990); Dell Upton, "Lancasterian Schools, Republican Citizenship, and the Spatial Imagination in Early Nineteenth-Century America," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 55, no. 3 (September 1996): 238–53.

research remains contested. Ivor Noël Hume's memorable, dismissive quip that archaeology could only ever be a "handmaiden to history," illustrating without illuminating larger questions about the past, still characterizes the perspective of many. Skeptics doubt that the study of creamware can contribute much to an understanding of the War of Jenkin's Ear or the international slave trade.[41] This is fair enough—thoughtful historians always strive to use the most relevant and efficient evidence available to address the question at hand. But for scholars of domestic life, or social relations, the close study of houses is an indispensable component of research.[42]

Likewise for the historian of consumption. As Carson demonstrates, literary minded historians who ignored material remains long missed the essential point that demand for stylish goods preceded, and produced, the industrial revolution, not the other way around.[43] But the historian of material life also makes a claim for the centrality of social life to economic and political structures, and this insight extends the utility of material culture studies well beyond the realms in which they are an obvious subject of research. To insist that card tables, or comical prints, or houses, can reveal more about the past than official documents or the letters of public figures is to

---

[41] Ivor Noel Hume, "Handmaiden to History," *North Carolina Historical Review* 41, no. 2 (1964): 215–25.

[42] Dell Upton, "Architecture in Everyday Life," *New Literary History* 33, no. 4 (2002): 707–23.

[43] Cary Carson, "The Consumer Revolution in Colonial British America: Why Demand?," in *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert, Perspectives on the American Revolution (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia for the United States Capitol Historical Society, 1994).

acknowledge the centrality of culture in political discourse and it is to recognize the role of individual agency, however modestly, in the progress of history.[44]

The manner in which I have conceptualized my data for this study, collected it, and sought to make sense of it, is derived from this tradition of material culture studies and the related field of vernacular architecture scholarship as it has developed in North America since the late 1960s. Henry Glassie and Abbott Cummings, in particular, have cast long shadows over the sub-field of early American architectural history—Cummings for his scrupulous field investigation combined with systematic documentary research, Glassie for the seductive, lyrical qualities of his prose and his sympathetic authorial voice.[45] Two generations of scholars have since aspired to apply

---

[44] Historians of material life record the myriad ways in which, even in the face of oppression, individuals retain the ability to make choices about how they create, consume, and manipulate objects. Bernard L. Herman, "Space in the Early American City," *Journal of the Early Republic* 24, no. 2 (July 1, 2004): 319–26; Leland G. Ferguson, *Uncommon Ground: Archaeology and Early African America, 1650-1800* (Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992).

[45] Abbott Lowell Cummings, *The Framed Houses of Massachusetts Bay* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979); Abbott Lowell Cummings, "Three Hearths: A Socioarchitectural Study of Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts Bay Probate Inventories," *Old-Time New England* 75, no. 263 (1997): 5–49; Abbott Lowell Cummings, "The Beginnings of Provincial Renaissance Architecture in Boston, 1690-1725: Current Observations and Suggestions for Further Study," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 42, no. 1 (March 1983): 43–53; Henry Glassie, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia: A Structural Analysis of Historic Artifacts* (University of Tennessee Press, 1975); Henry Glassie, *Vernacular Architecture* (Indiana University Press, 2000); Henry Glassie, *Passing the Time in Ballymenone: Culture and History of an Ulster Community* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995).

their insight that much can be learned from looking closely at and thinking carefully about the ordinary buildings of early America.[46]

Though the method described here was developed by scholars of vernacular architecture, only the loosest characterization of "vernacular" embraces buildings as magnificent as those on Beacon Street. It has long been acknowledged that what characterizes the best such work is not a class of building but an approach to artifacts.[47] This approach emphasizes the study of standing buildings, a focus on a community or geographic region, and an expansive understanding of material culture that encompasses the fullest range of human artifacts, from the extraordinary to the commonplace. It is also characterized by a certain pragmatism concerning buildings,

---

[46] The increasing membership of the Vernacular Architecture Forum is the clearest testament to the breadth of their influence. The range of their scholarship, as presented in the VAF journal, is summarized in Anna Vemer Andrzejewski, "'Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture', the VAF, and the Study of Ordinary Buildings and Landscapes in North America," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 13, no. 2 (January 1, 2006): 55–63. For a thorough demonstration of the longstanding significance and continued vitality of vernacular architecture studies to the Chesapeake region, see Cary Carson and Carl Lounsbury, eds., *The Chesapeake House: Architectural Investigation by Colonial Williamsburg* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013).

[47] Camille Wells, "Old Claims and New Demands: Vernacular Architecture Studies Today," in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, 2*, ed. Camille Wells (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986), 1–10; Thomas Carter and Bernard L. Herman, "Introduction: Toward a New Architectural History," in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, 3*, ed. Thomas Carter and Bernard L. Herman (Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1991), 1–6; Dell Upton, "The Power of Things: Recent Studies in American Vernacular Architecture," *American Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (1983): 262–79; Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach, *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986); Camille Wells, "The Multistoried House: Twentieth-Century Encounters with the Domestic Architecture of Colonial Virginia," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 106, no. 4 (October 1, 1998): 353–418.

recognizing the importance of utility, including social utility, for generating architecture. Early houses took the forms they did because they met well the particular needs of their inhabitants. Buildings that no longer fulfill their intended function are re-fitted or demolished. It is a fundamental assumption of material culture studies that form is not arbitrary—that things look the way they do for a reason, and that the reason can be deduced principally from a careful analysis of objects.

A key task, therefore, for the architectural fieldworker is to make sense of plan—why this wall was located here, and that doorway inserted there. Aesthetics, too, must be documented and explained with recourse to their social utility: good-quality trim gets installed in a public room to reflect its high status or to testify to the modish sensibilities of its inhabitant. Such deliberate, expensive work is not undertaken on a whim. Architectural fieldworkers see evidence of people investing in buildings because it is useful to do so. Houses confer social advantage; they can be designed to segregate races and classes; they separate domestic functions, putting walls and hallways between cooking and entertaining and between sleeping and socializing. Asher Benjamin advised prospective builders that the "first thing to be done in planning a house, is to know the wants of the person who is to occupy it."[48]

Investigating layout, use, and acquired meaning focuses attention on material facts rather than theoretical possibilities. It sees buildings as the product not of privileged form-givers imposing their will upon the world but of complex negotiations

---

[48] Asher Benjamin, *The American Builder's Companion : Or, a System of Architecture, Particularly Adapted to the Present Style of Building* (Boston: R.P.&C. Williams, 1827), 109. Recently, scholars of contemporary practice have turned their attention to the importance of use as a critical category of analysis. See Kenny Cupers, *Use Matters: An Alternative History of Architecture* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

between many individuals, with designers, builders, individual tradespeople, boards of directors, bankers, and political agents, all exerting a force on form. And however a building comes into being, once it is occupied, it becomes an arena for spatial negotiation, between workers and owners, servants and their employers, spouses and children. Servants and guests might be assigned one route through a house but choose another. Fugitives exit through a second story window rather than the front door; walls are taken down and put up as new social relations demand new arrangements. A key insight of scholars of vernacular architecture is that the role of a building in social life extends far beyond the intentions of a single designer, or a client.[49] Buildings do cultural work, and documenting that work, recording the ways in which they bring order to everyday life, is an essential component of research on both buildings and bicycle sheds. Put more forcefully, the study of architecture is inseparable from the study of its experience.[50]

Beacon Hill is especially fertile ground in which to explore the relationship between architecture and experience. First, it is a remarkably well preserved urban environment from the first half of the nineteenth century, with a wide range of

---

[49] Its emphasis on agency and individual autonomy makes art historical studies of architects and their intentions a vital strain of architectural scholarship. Intentions, to the extent that they can be perceived, are essential for understanding the individual perspective of a designer. See, e.g., Christian Norberg-Schulz, *Intentions in Architecture* (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1974). For a critique of the view that authorial intention should be a primary focus of architectural scholarship, see Dell Upton, "Gehryism: American Architectural History and the Cultural Authority of Art" (Reconceptualizing the History of the Built Environment in North America, Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History, Cambridge, Mass., April 29, 2005).

[50] Dell Upton, *Another City: Urban Life and Urban Spaces in the New American Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 14.

surviving structures, from small wooden housing to pretentious mansions; from modest tenements to grand row houses. There is much for the fieldworker to discover here. And although there have been some losses—the most vulnerable, most cheaply built houses have been demolished, especially on the north slope, and a few of the great early mansions are gone, as well—city and federal tax records go a long way to filling in the gaps. Those same records, coupled with street directories and census returns, permit individual buildings to be confidently dated and populated with individual households, rather than generic types. Such documentary precision permits assumptions about occupants to be tested, corrected, and refined, while also providing clarity about how densely occupied particular houses and streets were. Alongside such demographic data about who lived where and when, there is much written material to reveal how people thought about their houses—and those of others. This was a period in which architects and critics paid particular attention to the social function and metaphorical significance of buildings and Bostonians had much to say about their built environment. Personal letters, newspaper debates, and even public health records all contributed to a vibrant discourse on the meaning of buildings on Beacon Hill.

Experience itself is, of course, very difficult for the historian to assess. Records in diaries or published accounts are sometimes explicit about how buildings were used but such sources are rare and generally skewed to the singular, the exceptional, and the public. Several visitors, for example, recorded their impressions of the Massachusetts State House and Harrison Gray Otis's Beacon Street mansion. Far fewer made any comment concerning the houses of his north slope neighbors. No one wrote anything about his kitchen. But a material approach to architecture recognizes that people respond to experience both verbally and materially. Beacon Hill's houses became

more regular over the first half of the nineteenth century in response to a widespread perception that cities were places of social disorder and that this disorder could be managed and corrected through careful building. As the directors of Boston's Prison Discipline Society supposed, "there is such a thing as an architecture adapted to morals; [and] other things being equal, the prospect of improvement, in morals, depends, in some degree, upon the construction of buildings."[51] At a smaller scale, individuals manipulated buildings to bring everyday life into better order. The Thaxter family rebuilt the service wing of their Mount Vernon Street house to coordinate the movement of their staff. The residents of 3 Coburn Court inserted a peep-hole in a riser of their front steps in order to monitor the approach of visitors.

But careful analysis of form is often not enough to interpret experience. Buildings did not govern the conditions of their use, and otherwise identical houses were not necessarily occupied in the same way. The same side-passage, double-pile plan might be filled with a family of two married adults, three children, and their two servants on Chestnut Street and a crowd of immigrants nearby on Sentry Hill Place. The arrangement of rooms alongside a stair passage worked equally well for coordinating the movement of family members, guests, and servants as for providing shared access to separate, lockable apartments on two or more floors. The diversity of use that Beacon Hill's houses enabled highlights the ways in which meaning is situational and created through experience.[52] Beacon Hill's buildings meant one thing

---

[51] *Fourth Annual Report of the Board of Managers of the Prison Discipline Society, Boston, 1829* (Boston: T.R. Marvin, 1829), 54-55, cited in Ibid., 278.

[52] Herman, *Town House*, 1–32.

to Harrison Gray Otis, quite another to the fugitive slave Hannah Craft. This diversity of experience produced diverse sensibilities.

Though meaning was generated through experience, it was still expressed in writing. To address how Beacon Hill's builders and residents might have made sense of their built environment requires an examination not only of Boston's many writers on architecture, like Asher Benjamin, William Bentley, and Josiah Quincy; it also demands an engagement with a wide range of contemporary literature, including prescriptive domestic manuals, sentimental fiction, newspaper accounts, trial records, and any other text in which authors recount how they invest space with meaning. Everything from the *American Builder's Companion* to *The Young Husband* makes an interpretive claim on domestic space in Boston.

Though such publications exerted a force on the contemporary understanding of architecture, I do not suggest that the buildings are manifestations of notions expressed more fully in literature. The houses of Beacon Hill exist in dialog with literary materials in a way that, studied together, allows both to be understood more completely.[53] Buildings were active participants in the generation of meaning. Both houses and texts represent attempts to make sense of an emerging cultural landscape of urban domesticity in the first half of the nineteenth century, working to structure changing economic, social, and familial relationships. Town houses were both the field on which those new relations could be acted out and a material response to their fluidity. They were active participants in the discourse about everyday life, making material and permanent notions that are only vaguely and furtively expressed through language.

---

[53] Upton, *Another City*, 1–15.

The object of this dissertation it to show how Bostonians used architecture to structure experience, making sense of the city through building it. The diversity of Beacon Hill's residents, including developers, politicians, attorneys, merchants, abolitionists, fugitives, laborers, and immigrants, produced a correspondingly various understanding of its significance. The chapters of this dissertation reflect this divergence. It is not organized chronologically but rather by the range of organizing impulses that worked to shape urban form—status, money, social life, domestic management, and uniformity.

Chapter two, "Building Meaning," emphasizes how Boston's elites built grand mansions in the Federal era to establish Beacon Hill as a gentry district, producing its enduring association with refined social life and elegant architecture. Their remarkable appearance distinguished them clearly from the nearby ropewalks and insubstantial wooden houses, filled with the families of artisans and free African-Americans, that occupied the hill in the years after the Revolution. The houses designed by Charles Bulfinch for Harrison Gray Otis and his peers set themselves clearly apart from their wooden neighbors, drawing symbolic power from difference. At the same time, mansion-building was a way to associate elite Boston with the refined, mannered world of the Republican Court in the national capital and with the other cosmopolitan centers of the Atlantic World. The mansions of the 1790s and early 1800s were ambitious assertions of their occupants' fitness to govern the young republic, as well as rejections of a modest, provincial culture of building in Boston. While the early Bulfinch houses communicated in an international, cosmopolitan context, they were simultaneously pitched at an entirely local audience. For Bostonians, mansion building was a way to re-define Beacon Hill from "Mount Whoredom" to "Mount Vernon."

Despite the extraordinary investment in luxury architecture made by the post-Revolutionary generation, their descendants calculated that mansions were not worth their considerable cost. Chapter three, "Building Fortunes," illustrates the process by which the Federal-era mansions of the Mount Vernon Proprietors were demolished or transformed by their heirs in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Whatever standing those mansions conferred in the early republic was significantly diminished by the more populist era of Andrew Jackson. This chapter traces how builders on Beacon Hill after the 1820s sought profit rather than prestige. Rather than using the gentry forms brought to Boston by Bulfinch, the smaller speculative houses that they built adapted traditional New England urban plans to the increasing density of Beacon Hill. In this period, mansions lost their ability to signify social and political power and became more useful as property that could be sold and developed, as Bostonians replaced a landscape of privilege, deference, and hierarchy with one characterized by regularity and equivalence. The second generation of Beacon Hill's builders invested in real estate, not architecture.

Chapters four and five explore the ways in which the spatial practices of gentility were enacted in domestic interiors. "Moral Order" considers the principal public rooms of the house, the double parlor, to track the emergence of this space around 1800 in polite houses and its subsequent use for purposes other than gentry entertaining. It combines analysis of built form, including plan and finish, with first-person accounts and prescriptive literature to explain the transformation of the principal public rooms in Beacon Hill houses in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. It closes in the 1840s, with an analysis of a new type in Boston, the tenement, which adopted the side-passage, double parlor form used for polite houses. Though

similar in plan, the way in which the tenement was occupied was significantly different. A pair of connected rooms on Chestnut Street could serve as the principal space for family socializing or a grand environment for polite entertaining; a pair of connected rooms on Rollins Place served as an immigrant family's entire apartment. At a certain level of formal abstraction, these spaces were identical; but the experience they contained was not. An architectural history concerned with form or typology, or authorial intent, obscures such critical differences.

Chapter five, "Domestic Order," deals with domestic infrastructure, focusing on the ways in which service was provided. Here, too, I am concerned with the ways in which buildings manage the ordinary and intimate use of domestic space, negotiating the divergent interests of householders and their workers. Central to this analysis is the location of kitchens and, in houses with servants, service routes and secondary staircases. Builders used houses to negotiate the changing conception of domestic work as cooking and cleaning was increasingly performed by hired laborers with no social or emotional ties to their employers. This transition from "help" to "service" was recorded in diaries, advice manuals, and prescriptive literature but it was negotiated through architecture.

These four chapters all show how Beacon Hill's builders used architecture to bring order to the fluid social world of early nineteenth-century Boston. Chapter six, "Order Contested," shows how its achievement was contingent upon convention, habit, and consensus. Boston's merchants and civic leaders worried continuously about the city's large poor population. Many critics argued that there was a direct relationship between their environment and their moral and social character, claiming that improvements to living quarters would produce improvements to behavior and

quality of life. Large, orderly hospitals and penal institutions are the most visible manifestations of this architectural instinct among reformers in this period.[54] Concerns about the physical environment of Boston's poor reached a head in the late 1840s, when doctors observed that disease ravaged those parts of the city with the most inhumane housing conditions. At the same time, the confusing network of streets and alleys on the north slope of Beacon Hill was becoming home to fugitive slaves, harbored by a community of abolitionists. For them, the narrow alleys, back-lot buildings, and dark passageways that were all targets of reformers were an advantage, their maze-like qualities a way to elude southern slave catchers and their northern sympathizers. In this context, a transparent spatial order served injustice; spatial complexity could be a form of resistance.

In this contentious, fluid chapter in Boston's history, buildings show how individuals took positions on key questions: who should rule the new nation; how its households should be organized and its riches spent; and how the city should respond to the shame of slavery. Like Bulfinch's column, houses made a claim on the imaginative and material landscapes of the city. For their builders, and their inhabitants, they stood for something—a fortune, respectability, standing, a home, a refuge. The variability of that experience and of meaning on Beacon Hill is obscured in the present, behind a haze of Brahmin mythology and guidebook simplification. The durable, empirical qualities of architecture make it an especially potent tool for clearing away the fog. Walls separate domestic space from the street and the yard; fireplaces and windows render some rooms comfortable while others are left unheated

---

[54] Ibid., 242–278.

and unventilated; carefully considered plans open some spaces to guests while secluding others. The material facts of buildings are unambiguous. The reward of their careful, patient investigation is the recovery of the complexity of their meaning and the richness of experience of life in the past.

FIGURES

FIGURES REMOVED FOR COPYRIGHTING

Chapter 2

BUILDING MEANING

In late 1784, Harrison Gray Otis, Hepsibah Swan, Sarah and Perez Morton, and other young, fashionable Bostonians convened a tea assembly, "in order to pass away a few of the gloomy evenings of winter."[55] Dubbed the Sans Souci club, it was little different from other amusements available for sociable elites but was magnified in importance when it was satirized in a farcical play, "*Sans Souci,* alias Free and Easy, or an Evening's Peep into Polite Entertainments," in which its attendees were held up as emblems of moral laxity and civic irresponsibility.[56] A public debate over the propriety of the club followed in the Boston press and neatly captured the cultural divisions among urban elites in the post-Revolutionary period. Republished widely, it caught the attention of George Washington, who bloodlessly summarized it as a dispute between those who sought "to drink Tea in Company, & to be social & gay" and those who wished "to impose restraints which at no time ever were agreeable, & in these days of more liberty & endulgence, never will be submitted to."[57] What the

---

[55] One of a Number, "For the Centinel," *Massachusetts Centinel*, January 19, 1785. For a summary of this episode, see Charles Warren, "Samuel Adams and the Sans Souci Club in 1785," ed. Worthington Chauncey Ford, *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 3rd Ser., 60 (October 1, 1926): 318–44.

[56] *Sans Souci, Alias, Free and Easy, Or, An Evening's Peep into a Polite Circle an Intire New Entertainment in Three Acts* (Boston: Printed by Warden and Russell, 1785); "A New Farce," *Massachusetts Centinel*, January 15, 1785.

[57] George Washington to Henry Knox, February 28, 1785, Founders Online, National Archives, http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/04-02-02-0267.

general missed, but the debates in the papers reveal, is the way in which manners and luxury in this period were ideological. The *Sans Souci* controversy was not principally concerned with personal liberty, as Washington supposed. Rather, it touched a public nerve because it raised significant questions about self-governance, the politics of virtue, and the fitness of elites to rule the still fragile republic.[58] In Federal-era Boston, political discourse was not confined to print. Meaning was embedded in social *and* material life, in the behavior of a handful of elites at a tea assembly and, in time, in the houses that they built.[59]

The Concert Hall on Hanover Street already hosted biweekly dances but the *Sans Souci* club, sponsored by subscription, included low-stakes card-playing and reduced the age of admission to 19 for gentlemen and 15 for ladies (if the customary age limit of 21 for Concert Hall assemblies had been observed, young Harry Otis would have been unable to attend). The watchful Samuel Adams took note of this apparently counter-revolutionary development with alarm. The one-time fomenter of rebellion, now over sixty years old, had been submitting a regular column to the Massachusetts *Centinel*, under the pseudonym Observer, in which he sought to defend

---

[58] David S. Shields, *Civil Tongues & Polite Letters in British America* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1997), 308–328.

[59] For a recent analysis of the relationship between performance, material culture, and national politics in this period, see the special issue of the *Journal of the Early Republic* on the Republican Court, especially David S. Shields and Fredrika J. Teute, "The Meschianza: Sum of All Fetes," *Journal of the Early Republic* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 185–214; David S. Shields and Fredrika J. Teute, "The Court of Abigail Adams," *Journal of the Early Republic* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 227–36; Amy Hudson Henderson, "Material Matters: Reading the Chairs of the Republican Court," *Journal of the Early Republic* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 287–94.

his native city against the insidious evils of luxury, extravagance, and resurgent Toryism. Earlier, he had warned against vice in general, noting that even modest pleasures habituate the unwary and lead to the "monster" of personal depravity and the collapse of self-government.[60] Privately, he worried that "[England's] Emissaries, under the Guise of Merchants, Repenting Refugees, Schoolmasters, and other Characters, unless Care is taken, may effect another & fatal Revolution…A Caution to the Citizens of the United States…to practice the moral and political virtues upon which the very Existence of a Commonwealth depends."[61] In the tea assembly, with its youthful celebration of fashionable socializing, gambling, and dancing, he feared Bostonians were "exchanging prudence, virtue, and oeconomy, for those glaring spectres luxury, prodigality and profligacy."[62]

The organizers of the tea assembly saw their pursuit of social pleasure differently and were no less emphatic in its defense. "One of a Number," responding in the *Centinel*, saw Observer's hard-headed disavowal of luxury and genteel amusements as absurd, even anti-social: "let us break the bands of society, refuse all connection with the arts and sciences which live under the patronage of commerce and retire to the woods; let us learn of the savages *simplicity* of life, to forget humanity, and cut each others' throats without remorse, and even with satisfaction, for the

---

[60] [Samuel Adams] Observer, "The Progress of VICE," *Massachusetts Centinel*, November 6, 1784.

[61] Samuel Adams to Richard Henry Lee, December 23, 1784, Lee Papers, American Philosophical Society.

[62] [Samuel Adams] Observer, "The Observer, No. VII," *Massachusetts Centinel*, January 15, 1785, 1.

inestimable reward of a garland of parsley, or a wreath of pine."[63] "Sans Souci," likely Harrison Gray Otis, quipped that the Tea Assembly would continue, undaunted, "while the Observer in some sequestered corner, broods over the virtues of ancient Republics, and pines upon the contemplation of pleasures which he is not qualified to enjoy."[64] Observer made one more entry into the fray, noting his "satisfaction that what he advanced with respect to the Tea Assembly, was not wholly without effect…his fellow citizens must judge whether its proceedings are of a salutary, or a dangerous tendency, and whether it deserves to be upheld or abolished."[65] The tea assembly was, in the event, discontinued, whether from shame or some other cause, and relocated to the drawing rooms of elite families, where it could proceed outside the scrutiny of the republican press.

The *Sans Souci* controversy highlights the contested cultural politics of post-Revolutionary Boston, in which genteel amusements could be construed as enemies of community, and contagions in the body politic. The principal organizers of this club—Harrison Gray Otis, Hepsibah Swan, and Perez and Sarah Morton—would each commission Charles Bulfinch to design mansions in Boston and its suburbs within fifteen years, each house with enormous parlors designed to host private gatherings. In the scholarly literature on these projects, the buildings have been portrayed, above all, as emblematic of a new style, usually called Federal, that either perfected the late

---

[63] One of a Number, "For the Centinel."

[64] [Harrison Gray Otis] Sans Souci, "The COLLECTION, &c.," *Massachusetts Centinel*, January 19, 1785, 2.

[65] [Samuel Adams] Observer, "The Observer, No. X," *Massachusetts Centinel*, February 9, 1785.

Georgian manner of colonial Boston or inaugurated a new, distinctively American mode of design but in either case demonstrated Bulfinch's skills as a designer and his clients' superior taste.[66] Bulfinch was indeed skilled but his talent was not so much in invention as in his adaptation of the new, trans-Atlantic mode of neoclassical design to conventional forms of elite housing. In this, he was joined by other talented building artisans around the edges of the Atlantic world in the decade or so around 1800, from Bermuda to South Carolina to Wales (Figure 5). These houses combined traditional plans with impressive cosmopolitan ornament, drawing on design trends current in London and Paris and applying them to locally established domestic layouts.

These luxury objects, with their accommodations for polite entertaining, must also be understood as participants in the contested political discourse of the Republican period. They were grand rhetorical devices; durable entrants into the debate over propriety, status, and consumption that vexed early national Americans. If the republic was a fragile one, vulnerable to external attack as well as internal dissension, then every social action and every public utterance needed to be scrutinized and parsed to determine whether it undermined or shored up the polis. Mansion building on Beacon Hill, like the proper mastery of polite manners, was part of a larger effort to define the cultural politics of Boston for the post-Revolutionary generation.[67] The houses designed by Bulfinch for his gentry peers established Boston

---

[66] Hugh Morrison, *Early American Architecture: From the First Colonial Settlements to the National Period* (New York: Dover, 1987), 566–580; William H. Pierson, *American Buildings and Their Architects: The Colonial and Neoclassical Styles*, vol. 1 (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 240–285.

[67] Paul Goodman, e.g., observes that the public pursuit of refined culture was an antidote to the pursuit of gain for Federal-era merchants, who worried that they might be perceived as in thrall to commerce. Paul Goodman, "Ethics and Enterprise: The

as a beachhead of refinement at a time when the public role of manners, taste, and luxury was being vigorously negotiated in private letters and the public press. As arenas for polite sociability and manifestations of genteel taste, Beacon Hill's Federal-era mansions entered this discourse in a very public, permanent way.[68]

Elite Bostonians used mansion-building to create luxurious environments in which to perform refined manners but also to define the landscape of Beacon Hill as a genteel Federalist enclave, a new city on a hill that would make Boston a worthy peer of the other capitals of the Atlantic world—Philadelphia, Paris, and London. They did so in the deeply contentious environment of the early republican period, in which social and material life was intensely politicized. The overheated socio-political climate, in which speech and furniture and behavior were all freighted with existential significance could be a source of astonishment and frustration. Abigail Adams, writing of George and Martha Washington's practice of holding regular receptions during Washington's first term as president, wondered "can there be a more Innocent one that that of meeting at Gentlemens Houses and conversing together? But faction and Antifederalism may turn every Innocent action to evil."[69]

Values of a Boston Elite, 1800-1860," *American Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (Autumn 1966): 437–51. Amy Henderson observes how material culture worked to establish both local and national identity for self-styled elites in Philadelphia's Republican Court in this period. Amy Hudson Henderson, "Furnishing the Republican Court: Building and Decorating Philadelphia Homes, 1790-1800" (Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 2008).

[68] For an analysis of the discursive qualities of material life, generally, see "The Discourse of Objects," the introduction to Herman, *The Stolen House*.

[69] Cited in David S. Shields and Fredrika J. Teute, "The Republican Court and the Historiography of a Women's Domain in the Public Sphere," *Journal of the Early Republic* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 174.

But Federalist mansion-builders were not the only ones working to define Beacon Hill in this period. It was already, before Charles Bulfinch and Harrison Gray Otis arrived on the scene, being established as an extension of the West End neighborhood, principally on the north slope near Cambridge Street, where a small district of wooden houses was taking root along Temple and Joy streets by 1790. Nearby, near the northwest corner of Beacon Hill was the new gentry district around Bowdoin Square, where some of Bulfinch's earliest mansions went up, to the west of the formerly fashionable but increasingly crowded area around State Street. And although Federalists would make the most lasting changes, they were not the first partisans on Beacon Hill. Bela Clap, builder of a pair of wooden houses on Temple Street, was an important leader of the Democratic-Republicans as a ward organizer.[70] Benjamin Austin was the most prominent Republican on Beacon Hill in the 1790s, both as a state senator and as the long-time contributor to the Boston *Independent Chronicle* as "Honestus" and "Old-South."[71] With his brother Jonathan, he owned one of the three ropewalks that ran along the east-west ridge of the trimountain in the 1790s, bisecting it into its north and south slopes. Although the group of young Federalists in the circle of Harrison Gray Otis would make the most lasting changes to

---

[70] Paul Goodman, *The Democratic-Republicans of Massachusetts: Politics in a Young Republic*, 2nd ed. (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 98.

[71] Many of these entries are collected in Benjamin Austin, *Constitutional Republicanism, in Opposition to Fallacious Federalism; as Published Occasionally in the Independent Chronicle, under the Signature of Old-South* (Boston: Printed for Adams & Rhoades, Editors of the Independent Chronicle, 1803). Austin gained fame in the 1780s as a vocal and influential critic of lawyers, a body of professionals that he argued were working to establish an aristocracy in Boston. See Charles Warren, *A History of the American Bar* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1911), 219.

the hill, they were not the first nor the only ones working to define this landscape in the post-Revolutionary era.

In the closing decades of the eighteenth century, a few wooden houses along Irving (Butolph), Joy (Belknap), and Temple streets constituted the beginnings of what would become the Beacon Hill neighborhood. A handful of houses joined them along Beacon Street but, as the 1798 Federal Direct Tax returns indicate, the north side of Beacon Hill was the more densely developed, with 144 houses (Figure 6). That part of the hill south of Austin's ropewalk, around the site of Bulfinch's memorial column, remained mostly open land, with only twelve houses and assorted outbuildings joining the newly completed State House facing the Common. The best houses near Beacon Hill remained at its edges, along Beacon Street and around Bowdoin Square, to the northeast.[72] In 1794, an English visitor thought this was the only district in Boston with any claims to architectural distinction.[73] Here was Charles Bulfinch's family mansion, built a half century earlier, which would soon be joined by Bulfinch's houses for Samuel Parkman and, a little way back along Cambridge Street, Harrison Gray Otis. In 1790, Bowdoin Square was the location of some of the most richly valued property in Boston's seventh ward, which included the West End and most of Beacon Hill. Attorney Christopher Gore's house was taxed at $1,600, the highest residential

---

[72] Cummings, "Charles Bulfinch and Boston's Vanishing West End." While Bowdoin Square was not on Beacon Hill, its proximity affected the early development of the eastern end of Cambridge Street.

[73] Henry Wansey, *An Excursion to the United States of North America, in the Summer of 1794*, 2nd ed. (London: Printed and sold by J. Easton, 1798), 20.

valuation in the ward, while Thomas Bulfinch's house and pasture was worth $1,100. By comparison, the median valuation for this part of Boston in 1790 was just $100.[74]

Merchant Joseph Coolidge's grand new house on Cambridge Street, between Hancock and Temple streets, was at the edge of this established gentry district (Figure 7). Also designed by Charles Bulfinch, Coolidge's brother-in-law, it was completed in 1792. Laid out on a commodious center-passage plan, the Coolidge mansion had over 2,500 square feet on each of three full stories, the largest house in all of West Boston and one of the largest in the city. Bulfinch's elevation distinguished it with a Corinthian temple front and advertised its owners' good taste with a Venetian window in the second floor with neoclassical swags decorating a panel above. The pilastered front on a raised basement drew upon stylish London design, such as Robert Adam's elevation for 20 St. James' Square, but the house followed local practice in plan with two parlors and a drawing room on the ground floor, along with the kitchen.

Inside, the showpiece of the Coolidge mansion was its grand imperial staircase, with two return flights at the back of the passage. This type of dramatic stair, which combined structural derring-do and sculptural theatrics, was new to Boston but was used in fashionable London houses as well as William Bingham's Philadelphia mansion in 1786.[75] Though it was never common on Beacon Hill, it became a fixture

---

[74] Boston Tax Taking Books, Ward 7, 1790, Special Collections, Boston Public Library, Boston. These records were cross-referenced with the city directory for 1789 and the Direct Tax returns for 1798 to establish street addresses.

[75] Damie Stillman, "City Living, Federal Style," in *Everyday Life in the Early Republic*, ed. Catherine E. Hutchins (Winterthur, Delaware: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1994), 140–141.

of the most elaborate houses in Beaufort, South Carolina, soon after 1800 (Figure 8).[76] A smaller secondary service stair was tucked out of sight between the kitchen and a front parlor.

Coolidge's house—massive, brick, elegant, and novel—joins the other Bulfinch mansions in the public imagination, as well as in the scholarly literature, as typical of Beacon Hill. But in its size, material, and level of finish, it was highly exceptional. Though there were other pretentious, masonry houses at the edges of the district around Bowdoin Square, the interior of the hill, along its steepest slopes, was almost entirely wooden. Among these, the Coolidge house was an alien, a clear outlier oriented to Bowdoin Square, not Mount Whoredom. Facing Cambridge Street, it literally and metaphorically turned its back on its neighbors behind it on Temple Street.

The median footprint for houses on the north slope (that part of Beacon Hill behind the Coolidge mansion) was modest, at 630 square feet on a floor, large enough for two rooms and a narrow stair. The range of sizes was wide but most were between 250 and 1200 square feet on a floor. Nine north slope dwellings, including Hamlet Earl's house, were 250 square feet or smaller. Earl, an African-American who was still on Joy Street in 1821, lived in a house that he owned but that was only 165 square feet and one story tall and valued at $300 in 1798. This distribution of quality was mirrored in other, older parts of Boston, such as Ward 1, around Copp's Hill in the North End. There, only sixteen of 138 houses were built of brick. As in the West End, the median house size was 600 square feet, with most falling between 250 and 1300

---

[76] "Even More Early Domestic Architecture in Beaufort, South Carolina and Virginia" (Williamsburg, Virginia: College of William and Mary, Summer 2010).

square feet. Eleven were still smaller. A key difference was the relative density of buildings in the two districts: an average house in the North End covered half of its parcel, and there were few empty lots, whereas on the north slope, houses covered a third of their lots, on average, and there remained much unimproved land. Most lots were small, with a median area of 2100 square feet, and could be cheaply developed.

More typical than Earl's tiny house was that of Matthew Nazro, clerk of the market, and his wife, a mantua-maker. This was a frame building on Temple Street with 420 square feet on each of three floors which the Nazros shared with three other people, perhaps their children. Temple Street was home to several households of tradesmen and their families. Two of the finest houses were the substantial framed pair owned by two merchants, William Hayden and George Homer. These had been recently erected on speculation by Caleb and Bela Clap and were at the large end of the typical range on the north slope, at roughly 900 square feet on each of three floors. Though well finished, substantially built, and relatively large, these, too, were timber framed.

Though they were condemned and destroyed by the city of Boston in 1952, the Clap houses survived long enough to be recorded by the Historic American Buildings Survey (Figures 9, 10). With two rooms arranged on either side of a center stair and the narrow end toward the street, they followed a plan that was common across Boston in the eighteenth century, as it was in contemporary port towns in eastern Massachusetts.[77] 7 River Street in Salem and 33 Middle Street in Newburyport are both arranged on a similar side-entry, center stair plan (Figures 11, 12). One of the

---

[77] Bernard L. Herman, "North Shore Town House Architectural Context" (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Commission, 1998).

earliest surviving buildings in Boston, the early-eighteenth-century Pierce-Hichborn House, follows this layout, as well, with entry from a side yard into a ground floor center stair passage between two heated rooms (Figures 13, 14). At the Pierce Hichborn House, the front of these was originally the hall and contained the cooking fireplace; at the Clap houses, the kitchen was in the rear room, with a formal parlor at the front.

The front rooms on the first and second floor were well finished, with raised panel doors and overmantels in the best chambers and delicate neoclassical ornament on at least one ground floor mantel (Figure 15). The entry to number 44 was fitted with a grand Georgian frontispiece, executed in wood. This type can still be found at the entries to the small wooden houses of Salem and Marblehead but was soon shunted aside in Boston by the attenuated neoclassical entries of Bulfinch and in time, the severe forms of the Greek Revival. Inside number 46, a Solomonic newel, turned balusters, and molded brackets decorated the stair in the entry. Despite the old-fashioned stair, a neoclassical dado and broad double architraves casing the door to the parlor demonstrate that builder Bela Clap was conversant with up-to-date fashions in woodwork. The parlor of number 44 was fitted with an elegant dado and a fine wooden chimney-piece, whose paneled pilasters were decorated with applied neoclassical ornament. The parlor chamber fireplace, above, was plainer but still fitted with a double-architrave surround and a mantel shelf, topped by a broad, raised-panel overmantel and a Georgian cornice. The rear rooms were plainer, with heavy corner posts projecting into the rooms, single architraves for door casings and a relatively simple wooden mantel in the heated chambers on the second floor.

Though dwarfed by the Coolidge mansion, the Clap houses were among the finest on the north slope. In 1798, they each received a valuation of $1,600, making them the second richest properties on Temple Street, though lower-valued than any property on nearby Cambridge Street. Cambridge Street, once a little-traveled route skirting the north side of Beacon Hill, had become the main artery from central Boston to the west after the construction of the West Boston Bridge in 1793.[78] The disparity in value between Cambridge Street properties and those higher up the hill reflects a settlement pattern that emerged by the 1780s and was well established in 1798. Gentlemen and non-laboring professionals preferred the low-lying land extending from Bowdoin Square to the west along Cambridge Street, leaving the steep, uneven topography on the Trimountain's north face to the city's artisans and tradesmen.

The heterogeneous quality of Beacon Hill's residential architecture was related to the dispersed character of its development in the eighteenth century. Land on the hill through most of the 1700s was held by only a handful of large property owners. The boundaries of these early holdings were sketched by the antiquarian Samuel Chamberlain in his 1925 *Beacon Hill, Its Ancient Pastures and Early Mansions* (Figure 16). Though a few parcels were relatively modest, most encompassed multiple modern city blocks. The estates on the southern slope of Beacon Hill, including John Hancock's and John Singleton Copley's, remained undivided until the 1790s.[79] The partitioning of the old north slope estates began much earlier. The

---

[78] Charles Bulfinch was instrumental in the planning and construction of the bridge, which quickly helped to transform the character of West Boston. Kirker and Kirker, *Bulfinch's Boston, 1787-1817*, 190–191.

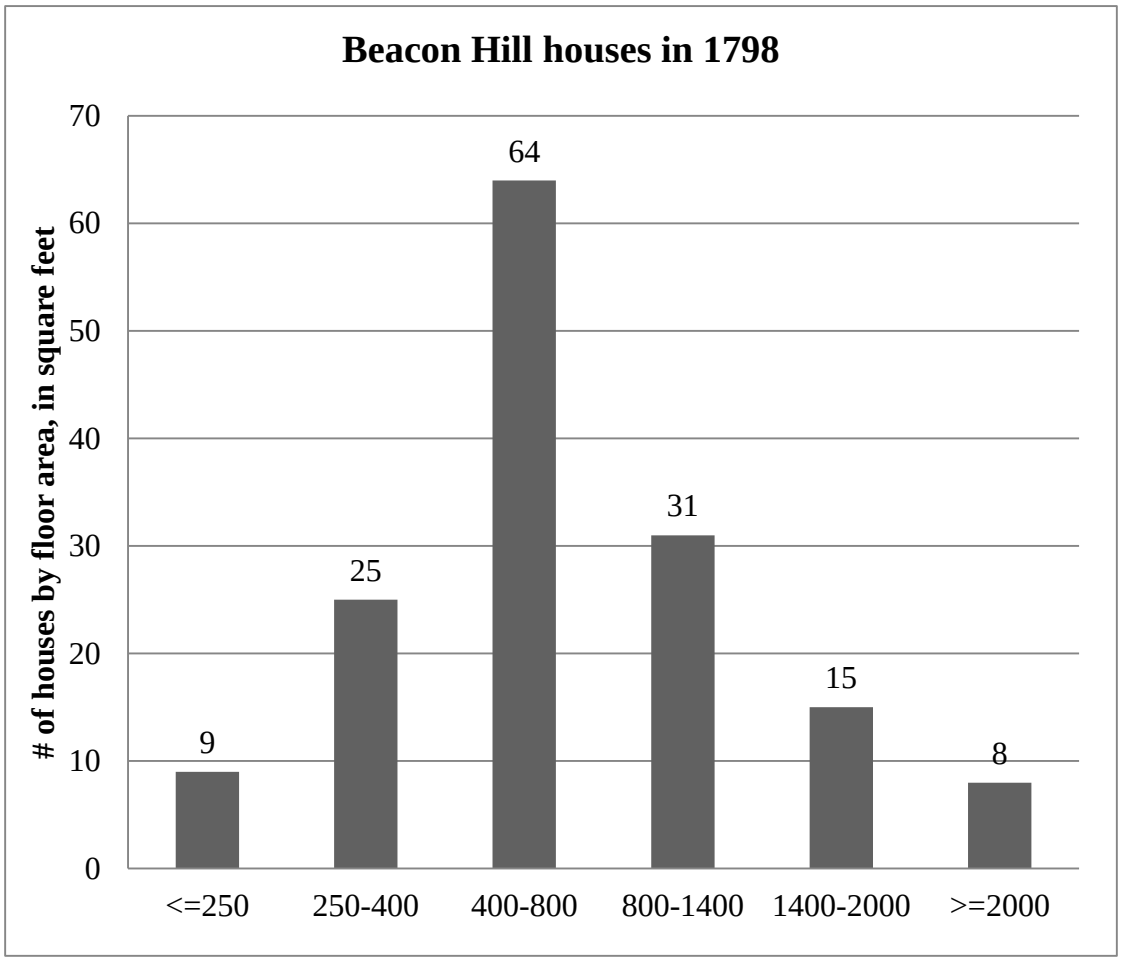
[79] Chamberlain, *Beacon Hill*, 20–26.

subdivision of land that would eventually include the Clap houses began in 1691, when the Scottow family sold their two-acre parcel on Cambridge Street. In 1737, Temple Street was laid out in the middle of this property, bisecting it into two rows of 52 ½ feet deep lots of varying widths. A ropewalk abutted this property until at least 1768 but if the presence of this industrial structure was once an impediment to residential development, its effects were not enduring.[80] By 1790, the west side of Temple Street was the most densely settled block of Beacon Hill.

The smallest lots on Temple Street contained some of Boston's smallest houses (Figure 17). The pair owned by Pliny Hartshorn and Timothy Twist at the top of the street were both one story high and 192 square feet in area and they shared a 168-square-foot barn. Like nearly every eighteenth-century building on Beacon Hill, the Twist and Hartshorn houses do not survive. They must have contained only a single room each. Assuming that a plan with more than one heated room on a floor requires more than 375 square feet of area, the 1798 tax list suggests that at least one fifth of the houses on the north slope were one-room plans of varying size. Even including such exceptional buildings as the Coolidge and Harrison Gray Otis mansions on Cambridge Street, wooden, one- and two-room houses would have dominated the post-Revolutionary streetscape of Beacon Hill (Table 1).

[80] Bowditch, *Fifth Report of the Record Commissioners: "Gleaner" Articles*, 47.

Table 1 Houses on Beacon Hill in 1798, by floor area, from federal direct tax.



At the end of the eighteenth century, north slope residents were predominantly artisans and tradesmen. Though there were many merchants and gentlemen along nearby Cambridge Street and in Bowdoin Square, few lived up on the steep rise behind. The denizens of Temple and Joy Streets earned their living by building houses, making dresses, and baking bread—trades with distinct spatial requirements which could be accommodated close to home. Some craftspeople, like James Sumner, a housewright, carried their livelihood with them, in their tools and their professional

competence. Others worked close to home, like Matthew Bayley, who baked bread in a large commercial kitchen adjacent to his house. And some, like seamstress Mary Box and mantua-maker Mrs. Nazro, used spaces within their homes to sew clothing and meet customers.[81] Unlike Joseph Coolidge, or the West India merchant who daily passed the busy streets of Boston to his office near the waterfront, many of Beacon Hill's tradespeople could spend an entire work day within a single building.[82]

At the house owned by George Middleton and Samuel Glapion on Pinckney Street, over a third of the first floor area was set aside as an unheated barber shop (Figure 18). In 1790, Middleton and Glapion were assessed twenty-five dollars each for this lot, or part of it, with the notation "owns a small house." At 380 square feet on a floor, or roughly 21 feet along Pinckney Street and 18 feet deep, the Middleton-Glapion House is well below the 640-square-foot median footprint of Beacon Hill houses recorded for the 1798 Direct Tax. Inside there are two small rooms on each floor, one on either side of a narrow center stair. The larger, eastern room is heated on the ground floor by a large cooking fireplace. The smaller west room is unheated but has direct entry from the street, and is illuminated by a four-light-wide window, the largest in the house, reflecting the need for light in a workshop. Entry to the domestic part of the house is by means of a tiny lobby at the foot of the stairs. Little is known

---

[81] Matthew Bayley's kitchen was 220 sf, two thirds as large as his 330 sf residence. See 1798 Federal Direct Tax and 1796 City Directory listings for Bayley.

[82] Allan Pred, *Making Histories and Constructing Human Geographies: The Local Transformation of Practice, Power Relations, and Consciousness* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1990); Gayle Elizabeth Sawtelle, "The Commercial Landscape of Boston in 1800: Documentary and Archaeological Perspectives on the Geography of Retail Shopkeeping" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1999).

about Louis Glapion, except that he was a mulatto barber and that he carried on his trade in the shop that adjoined his house. George Middleton is better remembered, thanks to his role as a commander of one of two units of black soldiers in the Continental Army during the Revolution and to his status as a Grand Master of African Masonic Lodge. He was, throughout his time in Boston, a leader in the African American community and was instrumental in the establishment of the Boston African Benevolent Society. Despite this, he was regarded with the condescension that characterized even the most respectful relationships between white Bostonians and their black neighbors in this period.[83]

Some of Beacon Hill's builders expanded the one-room plan to accommodate a shop like Louis Glapion's; others used the additional space to refine their dwellings by segregating cooking from polite socializing. Inside the Clap House, the smaller rear room was a kitchen on the first floor. Separating dirty, work space from more polite, public spaces and buffering them with an area dedicated to circulation, the Clap houses embody a more complex, more carefully articulated way of ordering domestic life than the one-room plan or the hall/shop arrangement of the Middleton-Glapion house. Removing cooking to the rear and inserting a stair passage nearly as large as the kitchen itself divided the house into two distinct zones of service and served. Occupants of the front room were insulated from the domestic labor in the rear, whether performed by a servant or a female family member. This spatial segregation of household work had been a characteristic of larger houses throughout British North

---

[83] Grover and DeSilva, "Historic Resource Study: Boston African-American National Historic Site," 90–91; William Cooper Nell, *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution* (Boston: R.F. Wallcut, 1855), 25–27.

America since the seventeenth century and, like the side entry, it distinguished the Clap houses from many of its smaller Temple Street neighbors.[84]

In its plan as well as its decorative finishes, 21 Pinckney Street, built in 1801, was a further development of the two-room plan embodied in the Clap House (Figures 19, 20). Its narrow end faces the street and its entrance is centered on the long side, facing a shallow court. A generous stair hall separates the front and rear rooms, though here the two rooms are the same size and are repeated on all floors, making the house a uniform, three-story mass. Unlike the Clap pair, 21 Pinckney is a freestanding structure. Although building wooden houses separately worked pragmatically, to prevent the spread of fire, it also operated symbolically, drawing associative power from country estates and urban mansions alike. 21 Pinckney Street represents a compromise between the image of the isolated dwelling house and the requirements of density and proximity in the Federal city. In its articulation of a tension between the individual household and the urban community, it was similar to houses being built all along the east coast of North America. The freestanding center-stair, side entry plan was a common type in cities as distant as Charleston, South Carolina, and as close as Charlestown, Massachusetts.[85] It is a fundamental urban form of the post-Revolutionary period.

---

[84] Cummings, "Three Hearths"; Willie Graham et al., "Adaptation and Innovation: Archaeological and Architectural Perspectives on the Seventeenth-Century Chesapeake," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 64, no. 3 (July 2007).

[85] Poston, *The Buildings of Charleston*; Herman, "The Embedded Landscapes of the Charleston Single House, 1780-1820"; Bernard L. Herman, "Smaller Urban Houses of the North Shore, 1630-1830," in *Building Environments*, ed. Kenneth A. Breisch and Alison K. Hoagland, Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture 10 (Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 2005), 3–14; Driemeyer, "Rising from the Ashes." In his inventory

The house was purchased in 1801 by Susanna Benjamin, retailer and owner of a nearby ropewalk, from James Otis and Joseph Batson, developers of five lots along Pinckney Street. Typical of much of the early small-scale development of Beacon Hill, the original owners were building tradesmen, Otis a carpenter and Batson a plasterer.[86] Miss Benjamin's small household included two non-white servants, probably African-Americans, who labored in a kitchen below the first floor rear room.[87] On this part of Pinckney Street, the slope of Beacon Hill permitted ground-level access to the basement from the outside, as well as natural light through at least one window. The cellar kitchen removed service activity still further than in the Clap houses from the polite parts of the house, minimizing the signs of domestic work from the public, above-ground rooms. The best public room was at the front of the ground floor, where buffets, trimmed with quirked cyma architraves, flank a broad fireplace and a modest cornice decorated with abstracted triglyphs and metopes caps the walls (Figure 21). The showpiece in this room is the fine mantel, with applied composition ornament, punch-and-gouge work, and a fascia treated with stylized triglyphs that match the cornice. Its center panel is decorated with an overflowing kylix, suggesting abundance, a motif appropriate for a dining room. Though not as lavish as the best decorative treatments in Bulfinch's houses, the high level of finish in this room is

---

of early Philadelphia row house forms, William John Murtagh referred to this plan as the "London house type," Murtagh, "The Philadelphia Row House," 9–10.

[86] Chamberlain, *Beacon Hill*, 233–234.

[87] Household information from 1790 census. Note that these servants were not enslaved in 1790, as slavery had been outlawed in Massachusetts in 1783.

probably the reason that it, alone, went unimproved in a mid-nineteenth-century renovation.

Houses like 21 Pinckney Street and the pair built by the Clap brothers represent the upper reaches of wooden building on Beacon Hill in the 1790s. Commodious, sturdily built and well finished, they are similar to surviving houses all around the north shore of Boston. Still, they stood apart from the bulk of housing on Beacon Hill's north slope, most of which was smaller and less refined. For genteel critics of Boston's architecture, like Winthrop Sargent, this environment—wooden, expedient, lacking pretension—was an affront to the safety, morals, taste, and economy of the city. Wooden Boston was a place where

> A pyre of shapeless structures crowds the spot
>
> Where taste, and all but cheapness, is forgot.[88]

In this context, Bulfinch's monument may be understood as an attempt to divert the city's gaze from Mount Whoredom's flimsy, flammable structures filled with tradesmen and African-Americans and point the way to the more durable, polite building culture exemplified by the Coolidge mansion. Bulfinch's work in the early 1790s was an opening salvo in the long struggle to establish an identity for Beacon Hill through elegant architecture.

Federalist mansion-building on Beacon Hill demonstrated the fruits, and pleasures, of a commercial prosperity derived from international trade. In Boston, the everyday culture of Federalism, emphasizing refinement, luxury, and the pleasures of

---

[88] Winthrop Sargent, "Boston: A Poem," *The Monthly Anthology, and Boston Review* 1 (1804): 420–21.

material life, was closely entwined with its politics. The generation of meaning on Beacon Hill through architecture was in this sense a political undertaking. Historian Thomas Conroy makes a similar observation about the relationship between politics and architecture in his dissertation, "The Politics of Style: Building, Builders, and the Creation of Federal Boston."[89] Conroy observes that Harrison Gray Otis' building projects were a means of securing patronage obligations from Boston's tradesmen, whose allegiance he needed to secure a broad Federalist power base in the city. He notes, too, how the preference of Otis and his peers for English architecture suited their Anglophilic policy orientation. For partisan Federalists, populist Republicans were "jacobins," bent upon bringing the tools of Robespierre to North America in the form of universal suffrage. But Conroy understates the case, and he frames the relationship between politics and culture both too narrowly and too literally. Building on David Shields and Fredrika Teute's work on Philadelphia's Republican Court, Amy Henderson illustrates, with more subtlety, just how carefully the leaders of the national government deployed material culture to assert their fitness to rule and secure their place among an international elite in the 1790s. Henderson observes that domestic interiors, including furnishings and architectural fittings, constituted a material form of polite manners, whose proper use was tested and demonstrated through salon culture, a regular series of "drawing rooms" hosted by the Washingtons and their peers.[90]

---

[89] Conroy, "Politics of Style."

[90] For the use of "drawing room" as an occasion, in addition to a space, in this context, see Henderson, "Furnishing the Republican Court," 75–82. Shields and Teute's research was presented as a series of conference papers in the 1990s and 2000s but has been recently published in a special issue of the *Journal of the Early Republic*. See

As in Philadelphia, Boston's Federalists had much greater ambitions than ensuring the dependence of tradesmen. And if Bostonians' architectural preferences were predominantly English, they were not exclusively so. Hepsibah Swan's Francophile tastes, for example, were well known. The Salem diarist and student of architecture, William Bentley, recalled visiting "Mrs. Swan's new seat, said to have been constructed upon the plan of one seen by her at Paris."[91] Henderson observes that whether a chair was made in France or England mattered much less than whether it was from London or Paris; which is to say that, among members of the Republican Court, a trans-Atlantic cosmopolitan sensibility drove consumption, rather than a narrow national allegiance.[92] For example, when Benjamin Henry Latrobe offered a design for a new house for William Waln in 1805, he wrote that it "combines as far as I possess the talent to combine them, the separate advantages of an English and a French town residence of a genteel family."[93] This material discourse sometimes

---

Shields and Teute, "The Republican Court and the Historiography of a Women's Domain in the Public Sphere"; Shields and Teute, "The Meschianza: Sum of All Fetes"; Fredrika J. Teute and David S. Shields, "The Confederation Court," *Journal of the Early Republic* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 215–26; Fredrika J. Teute and David S. Shields, "Jefferson in Washington: Domesticating Manners in the Republican Court," *Journal of the Early Republic* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 237–62; Shields and Teute, "The Court of Abigail Adams."

[91] William Bentley, *The Diary of William Bentley*, ed. Joseph Gilbert Waters, Marguerite Dalrymple, and Alice G. Waters, vol. 4, 1811–19 (Salem: Essex Institute, 1914), 193; Eleanor Pearson DeLorme, "The Swan Commissions: Four Portraits by Gilbert Stuart," *Winterthur Portfolio* 14, no. 3 (1979): 361–95.

[92] Henderson, "Material Matters: Reading the Chairs of the Republican Court."

[93] Benjamin Henry Latrobe to William Waln, March 26, 1805, in *The Correspondence and Miscellaneous Papers of Benjamin Henry Latrobe*, vol. 2, 1805-1810, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 37.

existed in tension with the political discourse about the French Revolution and emerging partisan politics, but it was not governed by it. In any case, English taste did not distinguish Boston's gentry from their colonial-era predecessors nearly so much as their mania for imported luxuries. And it was luxury, as much as style, that animated the debate about consumption in early national Boston. Among elites, the ability to make subtle distinctions—to play the connoisseur of wine, poetry, art and architecture, as well as conversation—was a critical means of establishing standing. At the same time, Matthew Bayley, the Temple Street baker, likely had a hard time determining whether John Joy's new house on Beacon Street was more English than Hepsibah Swan's. But he could tell from across the Common that it was a mansion.

John Joy's 1791 house was one of the earliest of Beacon Hill's grand Federal mansions. The house was demolished in 1843 but Charles Bulfinch's plan and elevation are preserved at the Boston Athenaeum (Figure 22). These reveal a house that is outwardly impressive, with a colossal Corinthian order lending grandeur to what is otherwise a conventional two-story double-pile house. In plan, it follows a form common to port cities on the North Shore of Boston in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, with two formal stairs in a broad center passage flanked by pairs of heated rooms. Back-to-back staircases like these were an idiosyncratic fashion in the rich port towns of Massachusetts Bay. That the rear stair was reserved for family use, and not service, is suggested in the common provision in such plans of a third, less formal service staircase, as in the Bartlett House, in Newburyport. The Joy plan does not include a separate service stair but Bulfinch indicates the rear stair's formality with a curtail step at the bottom tread.

As in most Georgian-era gentry houses, the principal public rooms in the Joy house are on the ground floor, with an enormous, twenty by twenty-four-foot drawing room to the right of the entry and a twenty-foot-square parlor—surely a dining room—to the left. Behind this room, and communicating with it via a small side lobby, is the kitchen. Behind the drawing room is the most private, and smallest, room on the ground floor, a little study, reached only from the back passage. A second floor, not drawn by Bulfinch, was likely given over entirely to bed chambers. In its familiar Georgian layout, with entertaining rooms and a kitchen all on the ground floor, the Joy house conformed to an established New England type. Like Bulfinch's contemporary house for Joseph Coolidge, the design dressed up a conventional plan with a flashy neoclassical façade.

In 1796, with the completion of Bulfinch's first house for Harrison Gray Otis, elite domestic planning in Boston took a significant step in a new direction, clarifying distinctions between public and private space and pulling the sociable rooms deeper into the house (Figure 23).[94] Bulfinch famously modeled its relatively restrained elevation after the William Bingham mansion in Philadelphia, which he admired but whose marble interior he deemed "far *too* rich for *any* man in this country."[95] The visual relationship to the house, and the family, that was at the center of the Republican Court in Philadelphia, made a claim for Otis' parallel stature at the center

---

[94] The most comprehensive account of the house is in Anne Grady and Linda Willett, "Harrison Gray Otis House Historic Structure Report" (Boston, Mass.: Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, March 1998).

[95] Bulfinch, *Life and Letters of Charles Bulfinch*, 75–76. Designed by English architect John Plaw, Bingham's house was, in turn, closely modeled after the London residence of the Duke of Manchester. Stillman, "City Living, Federal Style," 140–141.

of Federalist social life in Boston. It relied for its effectiveness upon an understanding of the relationship between the prosecution of elite social and material life and one's fitness to govern, a relationship in which Otis, political operative, expert host, and builder of three grand mansions in the space of a decade, was especially invested.[96] Though not made of marble, the interior of his Cambridge Street house is nonetheless extraordinary, and was unprecedented in Boston in the quality and quantity of its finishes (Figure 24). Elegant mantels with composition ornament decorate each of the public rooms and the principal private ones and spectacular Adamesque plasterwork by Daniel Reynerd covers the ceilings in two of the three entertaining rooms as well as the stair passage. This plasterwork relates the dining room, on the first floor, to the great stair passage and the second-floor drawing room as a suite of grand public spaces. The parlor, opposite the passage at the front of the house, is well fitted out with a fine composition mantel, a dado, and an egg-and-dart cornice but its lack of ornamental plaster sets it apart from the principal rooms (Figure 25).

With three impressive public spaces, the Otis house expanded the area of entertaining rooms in a private house and more importantly, carried them into the second floor. This new practice of pulling reception rooms deeper into the house, away from the street, was part of a broader effort in eastern cities to privatize domestic sociability. Gentry house-builders in 1770s Annapolis put their best rooms on the rear, facing a private garden instead of a public sidewalk. And the Bingham mansion, like its London model, located its best public rooms on the second floor, up an imperial

---

[96] For a careful analysis of Otis' counterparts in Philadelphia and the ways in which they used material culture to communicate and embody their political philosophies, see Henderson, "Furnishing the Republican Court."

stair made of marble. This separation of the old public functions of the domestic parlor into rooms for entertaining and rooms for doing business sorted guests by social standing, reinforcing distinctions between ordinary visitors and social peers. The old Hancock mansion, still standing on the southeast corner of Beacon Hill, overlooking the Common, embodied the old manner of receiving company. In 1763, John Hancock had famously greeted R.T. Hewes, an apprentice shoemaker, in the grand, paneled parlor of his Beacon Street mansion, the same room in which he hosted George Washington and the Marquis de Lafayette.[97] Hancock's servant initially brought Hewes to wait in the kitchen, according to his inferior status, but when the great man received him, he escorted the shoemaker into his best drawing room, a gesture that simultaneously demonstrated his magnanimity while demanding deference from the awed young tradesman.[98] Hewes would never have set foot in Harrison Gray Otis' second floor drawing room—if he made it past the entry, he would have been dispatched in the ground floor office. Both for the private consumption of his cosmopolitan peers and for the much broader public audience of Boston's diverse population, Otis' building projects of the 1790s left little doubt about where he stood

---

[97] The episode was only made famous in 1834, when Hewes gained some celebrity as an elderly veteran of the Boston Tea Party, and an account of his life was published in James Hawkes, ed., *A Retrospect of the Boston Tea-Party, with a Memoir of George R. T. Hewes, a Survivor of the Little Band of Patriots Who Drowned the Tea in Boston Harbour in 1773* (New York: S.S. Bliss, Printer, for the Author, 1834). Samuel Adams Drake, *Old Landmarks and Historic Personages of Boston* (Boston: James R. Osgood, 1873), 340–341.

[98] The meeting of Hancock and Hewes is analyzed in detail in Alfred F. Young, "George Robert Twelves Hewes (1742-1840): A Boston Shoemaker and the Memory of the American Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 38, no. 4 (October 1, 1981): 562–623.

on the fundamental post-Revolutionary questions of who should rule the new nation and how its riches should be spent.

His architectural ambitions went beyond building refined houses for his family. He sought to remake Beacon Hill not just metaphorically, but also physically, by transforming it into a neighborhood of mansions like his own. In 1794, Otis, with a small group of Boston's leading Federalists, formed the Mount Vernon Proprietors, a development syndicate established to purchase and subdivide land on Beacon Hill for residential development. Their work would dissociate Beacon Hill from its wooden, artisanal and African-American origins and leave behind any lingering traces of republican parsimony. The partnership was initially established with five members: William Scollay, Charles Bulfinch, Jonathan Mason, Jr., Joseph Woodward, and Harrison Gray Otis, each with a one-fifth interest. In 1795, after the town determined (following the advice of Otis) to rebuild the Massachusetts State House at the corner of Beacon and Park streets, the Proprietors negotiated with John Singleton Copley to purchase his eleven-acre estate on Beacon Street, covering most of the southwest part of the Trimountain.[99] Following the sale, Woodward, Scollay and Bulfinch each sold their interest and two new proprietors bought in: Benjamin Joy and Hepsibah Swan. The Mount Vernon Proprietors soon added to the Copley purchase so that their holdings included most of the southwest quadrant of land bounded by Beacon Street, the Charles River, Cambridge Street, and the Hancock Estate. On a modern map of Boston, this encompassed the area from Joy Street west to Charles Street, and from

---

[99] Chamberlain, *Beacon Hill*, 59–60.

Beacon Street north to Myrtle. They later enlarged their holdings to include land on either side of West Cedar Street all the way to Cambridge Street.[100]

The work of the Proprietors was one of many such ventures undertaken after the Revolution, with partnerships formed to purchase cheap land across the new United States. In 1790, for example, the enclosure of Philadelphia's Dock Creek transformed a noxious part of that city into fashionable Society Hill.[101] Federalists and Republicans alike agreed that the expansion of territory was key to national growth and prosperity. While the fever for land speculation raged, great fortunes could be made, but when land claims proved fraudulent, or when the demand for such land proved ephemeral, many investors in such schemes were ruined. William Bentley noted many such failures in his diary, such as this Salem doctor:

He married the d[aughter] of a Baker, alias a Speculator, alias a Bankrupt, & now shares the fate of his Father in law. This is something like a true picture of our habits during the profits of Commerce. While we went before the wind credit was boundless & success followed every adventurer. Since the wind has changed, few have skill enough to navigate troubled seas.[102]

Some speculative endeavors were local but the largest schemes had national significance. The New England Mississippi Land Company was formed by Bostonian Samuel Dexter to purchase eleven million acres (roughly the size of Massachusetts,

---

[100] Ibid., 68–71.

[101] Mary M. Schweitzer, "The Spatial Organization of Federalist Philadelphia, 1790," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 24, no. 1 (July 1, 1993): 31–57.

[102] Bentley, *The Diary of William Bentley*, 1914, 4, 1811–19:46.

Connecticut and Rhode Island combined) of the Yazoo lands in the western reserve of Georgia. When the claims on which the purchase rested proved fraudulent, the tentacles of its crushing failure reached all across New England and into the southeast.[103] Other companies went after property in Kentucky, Ohio, and Maine but such ventures were extremely risky, particularly in distant places where clear title could not be assured.

Schemes closer to home seemed to rest on more secure foundations. Such was the case with the southern part of Boston's tri-mountain, which had remained, throughout the colonial period, largely undeveloped. Though convenient to the center of commerce and government to the east, and long the home of the Hancock and Copley families, it remained at the periphery of the city's elite social geography. But its potential as a genteel residential enclave was significantly enhanced by the construction of the West Boston Bridge on Cambridge Street in 1793 and the construction of the new Massachusetts State House in 1795. In this context, the Mount Vernon Proprietors saw an opportunity to transform the hill from a peripheral, sparsely settled district of Boston into its most fashionable neighborhood.

The leaders, managers, and principal investors in this venture were all members of the rising generation of Boston's post-Revolutionary elite. They each profited from the city's rapid recovery in the late 1700s and worked to strengthen the commercial foundations of its economy through Federalist policies. Whereas Euphrosyne, Samuel Adams, and other Republican critics worried about the pernicious effects of luxury on the political health of the nation, the Mount Vernon

---

[103] Jane Kamensky, *The Exchange Artist: A Tale of High-Flying Speculation and America's First Banking Collapse* (New York: Viking, 2008).

Proprietors and their peers saw the fruits of the break with Britain very differently. For them, international trade, a flourishing culture of consumption, and a lively social life were all key both to the commercial success of Boston and the long-term viability of the United States. In the words of a contributor to the Massachusetts *Centinel*, "To what end do we toil, if not to promote our ease, and to procure an exemption from labour[?]" What was the point of the Revolution if it only meant that sumptuary laws would be imposed by a town meeting rather than a parliament? And what, after all, was the point of earning money, if only to hoard it? "Let misers enjoy the supreme rational pleasure of counting over their hoards of money...Ask the naturally poor, the laborious tradesman and mechanick, whose living depends upon the circulation of cash, of what advantage the existence of such virtuous men is in the world."[104]

At age 44 in 1796, Jonathan Mason was the senior member of the Mount Vernon Proprietors, fully thirteen years older than Otis. An eyewitness to the Boston massacre, he gave the commemorative oration on the anniversary of the action in 1780.[105] Mason was well established in Boston as an attorney and politician and had been a member both of the state legislature and the governor's council in Massachusetts. Trained in law by John Adams, he served as a Federalist in both the US House of Representatives and the Senate. With Harrison Gray Otis, he was one of the managing partners of the group and its two largest stockholders. [106]

---

[104] One of a Number, "For the Centinel"; Shields, *Civil Tongues & Polite Letters in British America*, 309–315.

[105] James Spear Loring, *The Hundred Boston Orators Appointed by the Municipal Authorities and Other Public Bodies, from 1770 to 1852* (Boston: J.P. Jewett, 1852), 139–141.

[106] Chamberlain, *Beacon Hill*, 85–86.

Otis rose to prominence in Boston as a conservative lawyer of exceptional rhetorical abilities and social skills. His association with the dilettantish *Sans Souci* club and its public defense helped to establish his public persona as a wit and *bon vivant*, a reputation he nurtured throughout his political and legal career. While in Philadelphia in the late 1790s, he wrote to his wife of the incessant demands on him to attend social events centered on the Republican Court: "gentlemans dinners and tea parties…are constant, to which I find myself invited at the rate of two or three in a day."[107] Otis the raconteur was inseparable from Otis the orator and Otis the political operative.[108] As the nephew of both the patriot leader, James Otis, and the Republican chronicler of the war, Mercy Otis Warren, Otis' revolutionary *bona fides* were secure but he nurtured sympathies for the British and maintained a long, affectionate correspondence with his exiled loyalist grandfather, Harrison Gray. His financial interest in Beacon Hill began in 1792, when he invested in the construction of the West Boston Bridge, which connected Cambridge Street and his family's neighborhood around Bowdoin Square with Cambridge. His legal and political career was in its infancy in 1796, but his resumé would eventually be even longer than Mason's. In addition to a term in the U.S. Senate and an appointment as the United States District Attorney, Otis would serve for many years in the Massachusetts legislature, including terms as both Speaker of the House and President of the Senate.

---

[107] Harrison Gray Otis to Sally Otis, January 22, 1800, Otis Letters Microfilm.

[108] Morison, *Life and Letters of Harrison Gray Otis*.

At the end of his political career, from 1829 to 1832, he served as the third mayor of Boston.[109]

Benjamin Joy was the son of a loyalist, John Joy, and a speculator in western as well as Boston lands. He was a director of the New England Mississippi Land Company, along with Perez Morton and Samuel Dexter. The unraveling of the Yazoo Lands speculation did not discourage his interest in real estate investment, and he continued to pursue compensation for the principal investors in the NEMLC while he developed Beacon Hill.[110] Dr. John Joy, builder of Bulfinch's first house, was his older brother. Benjamin Joy was George Washington's consul in south Asia from 1792 to 1795, when he returned to Boston and entered business in the China trade. Though he was initially allocated a large mansion lot on Mount Vernon Street, between those of Mason and Otis, he chose, instead, to build and occupy a row house on Chestnut Street.[111]

Hepsibah Swan cut a significant figure in the social life of Federal-era Boston. The wife of the revolutionary, anti-slavery pamphleteer and financier James Swan, whom she married in 1776, and heiress of two family fortunes, her friends included

---

[109] Chamberlain, *Beacon Hill*, 85–86; Morison, *Life and Letters of Harrison Gray Otis*.

[110] New England Mississippi Land Company and United States Congress, *The Memorial of the Directors of the New-England Mississippi Land Company, Citizens of the State of Massachusetts* (s.n., 1814); Perez Morton and Gideon Granger, *Memorial of the Agents of the New England Mississippi Land Company to Congress, with a Vindication of Their Title at Law Annexed* (Washington, D.C.: Printed by A.G. Way, 1804); Kamensky, *The Exchange Artist*, 35–37.

[111] Chamberlain, *Beacon Hill*, 122–123; Kirker and Kirker, *Bulfinch's Boston, 1787-1817*, 161–162.

Perez and Sarah Morton, Harrison Gray and Sally Otis, General Henry Knox, and General Henry Jackson, who was close enough that she interred his remains in the family tomb behind her Roxbury mansion. The profligate James Swan had squandered much of her fortune through land speculation in Virginia, Kentucky, Pennsylvania, and Maine and left Boston for France in 1787, seeking to advance trade with the United States, and profit by it. His success at both brought him to Philadelphia in 1794, where his firm traded American necessities, including wheat, rice, naval stores, and saltpeter, for French luxuries, including silks, wine, and decorative arts appropriated from the mansions of exiled and executed nobles. His wealth, in short, was derived from fostering and then meeting the demand for "tinsel gewgaws," especially French ones, among members of Philadelphia's Republican Court. In 1796, with family fortunes improving, the Swans were both back in Boston, where they began work on a grand mansion in Dorchester, probably designed with the help of Bulfinch.[112]

Mrs. Swan bought a twenty per-cent share in the Mount Vernon Proprietors that year—significantly, under her own name, not her husband's, using Henry Jackson as her agent. In 1797, the Swans' strained marriage and business interests sent James back to Paris, where he spent most of the rest of his life in a comfortable apartment in a debtors' prison. Back in Boston, Hepsibah was anointed Madame Swan, presumably both for her husband's residence in France and for her French tastes. Like Benjamin Joy, she chose not to build a mansion on her Beacon Hill holdings but spent the warm

---

[112] Howard C. Rice, "James Swan: Agent of the French Republic 1794-1796," *New England Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (September 1, 1937): 464–86.

months at the Dorchester mansion and occupied a Chestnut Street row house while in the city, across from the three she built for her daughters in 1806.[113]

The proprietors initially had Charles Bulfinch lay out a plan of streets for their property, with a grand open area at its center in the manner of London's fashionable landscaped squares.[114] This scheme was not executed. Around 1799, the land was subdivided, instead, into an arrangement which included both spacious mansion house lots and smaller plots (Figure 26).[115] But before they could effect their transformation of Beacon Hill socially and architecturally, they needed to shape it topographically. To make their house-lots buildable required a massive operation to cut the peaks of the hills down by about sixty feet, making the terrain more regular and the slopes of the hill less steep.[116] In 1799, the work of cutting down the hills and laying out public streets was begun, with Walnut, Mount Vernon, and Chestnut Streets running through the choicest lots north of the Common. Teams of workers dug away at the hill, shoveling the earth into carts which were rolled down a purpose-built railway and dumped into the tidal flats of the Charles River, west of the present Charles Street.[117] This work of transforming a hilly pasture into a polite suburban streetscape attracted much notice from would-be investors as well as curious tradesmen. Abner House, a

---

[113] DeLorme, "The Swan Commissions: Four Portraits by Gilbert Stuart"; Chamberlain, *Beacon Hill*, 87–92.

[114] Summerson, *Georgian London*, 179–195.

[115] Chamberlain, *Beacon Hill*, 70.

[116] Ibid., 27–41.

[117] Frederick C. Gamst, "The Context and Significance of America's First Railroad, on Boston's Beacon Hill," *Technology and Culture* 33, no. 1 (January 1992): 66–100.

twenty-one-year-old carpenter's apprentice, reported that he and his fellow apprentices regularly cut their dinner break short to watch the progress of the "Big Dig" of the Federal Era. Dumping the material from the hills into the Charles River further enlarged the holdings of the Mount Vernon Proprietors, whose title included several acres of the flats, made newly buildable by the filling operation.[118]

The proprietors subdivided the land and apportioned the lots among them, putting many up for sale and building grand houses for themselves and their children on others. They reserved for themselves the largest lots at the top of the newly graded hill, on the north side of Mount Vernon Street, with the intention of building mansions. On these, they added deed restrictions that required houses on the north side of the street be set back 30 feet, to ensure that it would be lined with mansions with broad, spacious lawns.[119] In 1800 and 1801, Charles Bulfinch provided designs for the Mount Vernon Street houses of Harrison Gray Otis and Jonathan Mason. Mason was living in one of Bulfinch's houses in the Tontine Crescent in 1798 and he seems to have contemplated building his Mount Vernon Street mansion as early as 1799. By 1801 it was assessed as "an elegant new house…unfinished."[120] It was complete by 1802.

Little is known about the plan of Mason's house or its interior. As it was demolished in 1837, the principal source of information about its form is a lithograph

---

[118] Chamberlain, *Beacon Hill*, 78–83; Whitehill, *Boston: A Topographical History*, 79–84; "Deposition of Abner House, Carpenter" 1839, Harrison Gray Otis Papers, Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.

[119] Bowditch, *Fifth Report of the Record Commissioners: "Gleaner" Articles*, 206.

[120] Chamberlain, *Beacon Hill*, 88–89.

made by William S. Pendleton in the early 19th century, which depicts the house set back from Mount Vernon Street on a wide lawn (Figure 27). Three stories high, it has a swelled, projecting front with end pilasters, a composition not used by Bulfinch elsewhere on Beacon Hill. The engraving shows tall windows in this bow on the first and second floors, with openings on the third floor windows replaced by swag panels. The high windows suggest grand entertaining rooms on both floors, possibly a ground floor drawing room with a second floor ballroom.[121] With such an expansive suite of rooms for public entertaining, and with its echo of design trends current in Philadelphia and London, it was well equipped to play a central role in the social life of Boston's gentry.

Entrance to the Mason house was through a small entry off of the northeast corner, well back from the street. In other Bulfinch houses with side entries, this arrangement allows the principal public rooms to consume the entire width of the front of the house. Here, however, the grandest entertaining rooms surely sit behind the center bow, with smaller rectangular rooms to either side. The house was laid out more like a country villa than an urban mansion, and it may have been modeled on Bulfinch's Swan House, built in Dorchester in 1796, and derived, according to William Bentley, from Parisian models. There, a large circular drawing room, two stories tall, is flanked by a bedroom and a library on the ground floor and bedchambers above. Behind it, across a passage that traverses the width of the building, is a large dining room, also two stories tall.[122] Whatever the arrangement of

---

[121] Kirker, *Architecture of Charles Bulfinch*, 156.

[122] The house was demolished around 1890 but not before plans were drawn of both floors by Ogden Codman (ibid., 128–133).

Mason's house, it is apparent that the public rooms were at the center of the plan and distributed across two floors. It was designed for extravagant, multi-room, multi-story entertaining.

Harrison Gray Otis' Mount Vernon Street house was finished soon after Mason's, likely in 1803 (Figure 28).[123] It was the second of three houses designed by Bulfinch for Otis. With the loss of the Mason house, it is outwardly one of the most impressive on Beacon Hill and the last surviving freestanding mansion from the era of the Mount Vernon Proprietors. It is four, rather than five, bays wide, with two large entertaining rooms across the south front of the first floor. Like many of Bulfinch's designs of the 1790s, the front façade is divided into a base, treated with windows set in recessed arches, and an upper register defined by a colossal order of Corinthian columns.[124] Unlike its London models, the largest windows that signify the principal entertaining level are on the ground floor, in the plinth. The colossal order of pilasters that frame the elevation decorate bedchambers, not drawing rooms. The street front is elegantly composed and beautifully executed, with skillfully carved capitals and precisely made rubbed-and-gauged jack arches dressed with carved keystones. The masonry was originally finished with struck joints, painted red and filled with lime putty.

Like the Mason House, and like the little Clap houses on Temple Street, the principal entrance to the Otis House was from the east side yard, off the street. At 85 Mount Vernon, it was originally in the third bay from the front, through a short

---

[123] Ibid., 158.

[124] The use of pilasters was a hallmark of Bulfinch's designs in the 1790s but rarely used after 1800.

passage. Beyond the passage was the principal stair and beyond this, in the northwest corner, lay the kitchen and a secondary staircase. Across the front were the two parlors, one of which seemingly served double duty for dining until the addition of a separate, large dining room off the west side in the 1880s.[125] The ground floor parlors had the disadvantage of proximity both to the kitchen and to the noise of the street outside. Otis' peers in contemporary Philadelphia preferred to locate their principal entertaining rooms on the second floor, in the London manner. At the Otis and Mason houses, however, this weakness was mitigated by being set back on the lot, thirty feet from the sidewalk. Its broad front yard, in other words, was both a symbol of the removal of families and their guests from the urban fray and its enactment.

The parlors were both treated with neoclassical marble mantels, likely produced in London from Italian marble (Figure 29). These are elaborately carved with bucrania, frolicking putti, and allegorical center panels—one of which depicts Apollo being drawn in his chariot. Florid garlands and swags decorate the pilasters and intermediate panels. They are the more worldly and much more expensive counterparts of their wooden, composition-decorated cousin in 21 Pinckney Street (Figure 21). A marble chimney-piece, always an imported item in this period, testified to Otis' wealth, of course, and his good taste, but also to his fitness to govern a nation that could stand on equal footing with established European powers. At the same time,

---

[125] This wildly inventive Colonial Revival room combines elements lifted directly from the Otis house, like the gouged door surrounds, with flamboyant broken scroll pediments. With gilt leather walls, the dining room is a bold, fantastical composition that testifies to a moment of eccentric invention that would be eclipsed by the much more rigorous, scholarly approach to the Colonial Revival in the 1910s and 1920s, as exemplified by the more sober work of Perry, Shaw and Hepburn.

decorated with allegorical figures, it could also serve as a conversation piece. In Boston as well as Philadelphia, such mantels were central decorations in polite parlors, where they could be a stimulant to witty conversation, with didactic themes drawn from classical mythology, illustrated in images of Neptune, Bacchus, Auroura, or Apollo.[126] Other than the mantels, the Otis house parlors are elegant but conventional, with a high dado surrounding the rooms, refined wooden door and window casings, and a fine neoclassical cornice, all similar to the best work in the most pretentious houses in Boston, Salem, or Newburyport.

Unlike Otis's first house, or the neighboring Mason house, the suite of public rooms initially included just the two ground floor front parlors. An impressive oval stair leads to the second floor, where it stops outside the principal bedchambers.[127] A third heated room, over the rear study, seems also to have been a chamber. All three bedchambers on this level were as lavishly decorated as their public counterparts, with elaborate white marble mantels in each that are the equal of those in the parlors below, as well as dados and deep cornices.

The Mason and Otis houses on Mount Vernon Street stood apart from their neighbors in 1801. Set on large lots, built of brick, and with enormous public reception rooms, they were ambitious, optimistic efforts to strike a new course for Beacon Hill, away from its wooden and artisanal past toward a more polite, luxurious, and prosperous era. With their generous proportions and exquisite finishes, they

---

[126] Henderson, "Furnishing the Republican Court," 228–234.

[127] The lack of refined access to the third floor and the presence of closets between the two front rooms both indicate that these have always been intended as chambers and not secondary reception rooms.

participated in the creation of a national material discourse that was locally enacted, in drawing rooms and parlors, while being widely dispersed, through the circulation of letters and the movement of elites between their homes and the national capital. Otis himself typifies the ways in which this culture of polite architecture spread geographically, as he participated in the drawing rooms and levées in Philadelphia, wrote about them to his wife regularly, and brought the new national modes of hospitality home to his Beacon Hill mansion.

In the literature on Federal-era building, and on early national Boston, the mansions of the Mount Vernon Proprietors have cast a very long shadow over Beacon Hill. Their prominence is a reflection of their association with some of the city's richest and most powerful residents as well as their seductive form and finish. They were bold, singular expressions of wealth, cultural mastery, and political ideology. Their builders sought to define Beacon Hill as the social and cultural center of Boston and Boston as the capitol of New England. They were opposed in this effort by Republicans like Samuel Adams, Euphrosyne, and others who sought to inscribe Beacon Hill with virtuous, Revolutionary meaning but whose rhetorical tools were relatively limited by their disavowal of material display. Critics of luxury and polite material life fought persistently with poetry and prose but this was a losing battle. If the pen was mightier than the sword, it was no match for Carrara marble.

Despite their political differences, Federalists and Republicans alike worked, in the 1790s, to redefine Beacon Hill by investing it with significance, distancing it from Mount Whoredom, a district of flimsy and flammable ropewalks and houses populated by tradesmen and African-Americans. The Coolidge, Otis, and Mason mansions were all exceptional, singular structures that stood apart from the wooden buildings on

Temple and Joy streets and sought to transform Boston from a provincial English town to a major cultural, political, and economic capital. However, in the contested context of Boston's early national cultural politics, Otis and Mason's ability to enlist mansion-building followers was limited, particularly after Jefferson's embargo of 1807 and the War of 1812, which had a chilling effect both on Boston's mercantile economy and its form of Federalist politics. Even in the best of times, it took extraordinary wealth to build well on Mount Vernon Street. Bulfinch himself purchased the lot west of Otis in 1805 and began building a large double house, but was forced to sell it, unfinished, just a year later. Though a few more grand mansions would be built on the south slope in the next two decades, they would remain exceptional. By the 1830s, they would be surrounded and far outnumbered by streets of the smaller and denser row houses that ordinary residents of the growing city demanded. Instead of resisting this more populist, middling drift in the building culture of Boston, the Mount Vernon Proprietors and their families would work to gain by it, exchanging architectural prestige for profit.

FIGURES

FIGURES REMOVED FOR COPYRIGHTING

Chapter 3

BUILDING FORTUNES

The observant Reverend William Bentley followed the post-Revolutionary transformation of Boston with amazement. On frequent visits from nearby Salem, he marveled at the changes to the place of his birth, particularly in the area around Beacon Hill: "The improvements are really great in their Buildings, especially in West Boston" (1795); "the growth of West Boston by the new Bridge from Cambridge is very great. Where the population was thin, since my remembrance, & there were fields & marshes, are now splendid houses & crowded Streets" (1802); and finally,

> [t]he increase of buildings in Boston is astonishing. I could hardly know my native place after I left the principal streets…In West Boston the Change is very great. Few houses occupied these grounds which are now covered. And the labour bestowed upon the great hill near which the late powder house has been erected, & which touched the shore of the Charles, is beyond any example in our country…This is a place which promises to be beautiful & is already enriched by elegant buildings.[128] (1804)

Bentley clearly approved of the ambitious schemes of the Mount Vernon Proprietors and other new building projects that were underway around 1800 (Figure 30). While he may have been the most careful chronicler of the changes in Boston, he was hardly alone in marveling at the growth of American cities. The transformation of English colonial towns into great American cities was a trope that animated fiction and

---

[128] William Bentley, *The Diary of William Bentley*, ed. Joseph Gilbert Waters and Alice G. Waters, vol. 2, 1793–1802 (Salem, Mass: Essex Institute, 1907), 127, 270, 426; William Bentley, *The Diary of William Bentley*, ed. Joseph Gilbert Waters, Marguerite Dalrymple, and Alice G. Waters, vol. 3, 1803–10 (Salem: Essex Institute, 1911), 83–84.

non-fiction alike. Old men, returning to the places of their birth for the first time in decades, were impressed and bewildered by what they saw: new street names; new churches, bridges, and state houses; and taller, sturdier, much more numerous houses. A veteran of the Boston Tea Party returned to his boyhood home in 1821 and found himself a stranger in a strange land.

> The house in which I was born was not to be found, and the spot where it stood could not be ascertained by any visible object. The whole scenery about me seemed like the work of enchantment. Beacon hill was leveled, and a pond on which had stood three mills, was filled up with its contents…It was to me almost as a new town, a strange city; I could hardly realize that I was in the place of my nativity.[129]

From across the Atlantic, the English cast a wary eye on their emerging commercial rival. In 1808, a British emissary making notes on American politics and military preparedness noted the growth of new buildings at Baltimore and Boston: "The great number of new and elegant buildings which have been erected in this Town, within the last ten years, strike the eye with astonishment, and prove the rapid manner in which these people have been acquiring wealth."[130]

These changes were taken to be material signs of a transformation in the social and political life of the American city after 1783, changes that were viewed as wonderful opportunities by many but portended an unwelcome redistribution of wealth and power to others. They elicited a range of responses, from delight in novelty and opportunity to anxiety and bewilderment about new social norms and shifting political power. Such expressions of wonderment about the built environment were

---

[129] Hawkes, *Memoir of George R. T. Hewes,* 78–79.

[130] John Howe to Sir George Prevost, May 5, 1808, in John Howe, "Howe to Prevost," *American Historical Review* 17, no. 1 (October 1, 1911): 78.

effective metaphors for social disruptions partly because they reflected real and obvious changes in the physical fabric of eastern American cities. In 1770, Boston, New York and Baltimore were wooden towns, and little more than regional trading centers; fifty years later, they were busy centers of manufacturing and commerce, largely brick, and bursting with new inhabitants. Boston's transformation was especially thorough, as it famously encompassed changes to its land mass as well as its built form. Bentley and Hewes both alluded to the cutting down of the city's hills to fill in its coves, on Beacon Hill and elsewhere. Timothy Dwight thought the transformation of Beacon Hill from "almost absolutely a waste" into "one of the most beautiful building grounds in the world" was unrivaled in North America.[131]

Boston's built environment changed qualitatively as well as quantitatively in this period. Evolving ideas about the role of architecture in social and civic life produced changes to buildings and streetscapes both obvious, as in the creation of landmarks, and subtle, as in the refinement of ornament and an increasing regularity of form and finish. The completion of the domed Massachusetts State House in 1797 gave the city its first major post-Revolutionary monument, one that was immediately celebrated (Figure 31). A contributor to the *Columbian Centinel* proposed that the view from its dome "vies with the most picturesque scenes in Europe, and will bear comparison with the Castle hill of Edenburg [*sic*], the famous bay of Naples, or any other most commanding prospect," adding that "[t]oo much praise cannot be bestowed

---

[131] Timothy Dwight, *Travels in New-England and New-York* (New Haven: Timothy Dwight, 1821), 493. For landmaking in Boston generally, see Nancy S. Seasholes, *Gaining Ground: A History of Landmaking in Boston* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003).

on the Agents who have directed the construction of this superb edifice, for their economy, liberality and patriotism."[132] At the same time, there were major new improvements to public works, most notably two new bridges, both regarded as marvels of engineering: the first, connecting the North End to Charlestown, was completed in 1786 and thought to be the greatest in North America at 1,500 feet long; in a remarkably speedy feat of one-up-manship, the West End bridge, finished six years later, was more than twice that length.[133]

Alongside these changes were some constants. Like their counterparts in other American cities, Bostonians continued to think of architecture as a reflection of, and an influence on, social and civic life. Thumbnail assessments of a city's architecture were a proxy for the character of its citizenry. Was it built of durable materials? Did it contain singular, public-spirited examples of architectural distinction? Was it improving continuously, or stagnant? Bostonians took a renewed critical interest, after the Revolution, in the quality of their buildings and their streetscapes. The *Massachusetts Magazine* published several essays on major new buildings, including the State House. Thomas Pemberton's 1794 *Description of Boston* inventoried the streets, wharves, public buildings and houses of the city, offering critical appraisals and praising the general spirit of improvement in the city. Pemberton thought the city's reliance on wood as a building material was regrettable and singled out new

---

[132] "New State House," *Columbian Centinel*, January 10, 1798.

[133] Whitehill, *Boston: A Topographical History*, 47–52.

brick houses for particular notice.[134] The city ensured that all new buildings in Boston would be brick in 1803, passing an ordinance requiring new structures ten feet tall or higher to be of brick or stone, with non-combustible roofs. Similar laws had been passed in the eighteenth century in response to terrible fires but Charles Bulfinch, in his role as chief selectman, ensured that this new regulation was enforced.[135]

Cultural observers of post-Revolutionary Boston were divided on the meaning of these architectural and social changes. Some perceived an end to the culture of deference and dependence, a leveling of social classes that seemed a natural consequence of the Revolution in the city that had been famous for its active role in splitting with Britain. Richard Bushman and Edward Chappell both observe widespread improvements in the building stock of North America after the Revolution, with houses better built and better finished than their colonial-era predecessors in both urban centers and their hinterlands.[136] Even before the 1803

---

[134] Thomas Pemberton, "Description of Boston," in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, for the Year 1794*, vol. 3 (Boston: Printed at the Apollo Press, 1794), 241–304.

[135] Harold Kirker and James Kirker, *Bulfinch's Boston, 1787-1817* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 40; for an analysis of similar regulations in contemporary Charleston, see Emma Hart, "The Ambition for an All Brick City: Elites, Builders and the Growth of Eighteenth-Century Charleston, South Carolina," in *Investing in the Early Modern Built Environment: Europeans, Asians, Settlers and Indigenous Societies*, ed. Carole Shammas (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 237–62.

[136] Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992); Edward A. Chappell, "Housing a Nation: The Transformation of Living Standards in Early America," in *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert, Perspectives on the American Revolution (Charlottesville: Published for the United States Capitol Historical Society by the University Press of Virginia, 1994), 167–232.

regulation, buildings erected on Beacon Hill after 1790 were more likely to be of brick than wood, and even modest houses were increasingly decorated with neoclassical ornaments, with fancy cornices, casing, and mantels. But alongside these wide-ranging improvements, social boundaries were maintained with renewed vigor. As Alan Kulikoff demonstrates, personal wealth was more concentrated in Boston after the Revolution than before.[137] In Philadelphia, the decades after the Revolution saw an extraordinary rise in mansion-building, with new houses built for the Republican Court towering over their neighbors.[138] Similarly, the Mount Vernon Proprietors sought distinction, above all, in their houses. This pursuit of individual distinction alongside widespread improvement in material life reflected deep cultural and political divides, as Boston transformed from a hotbed of republican radicalism to the national center of conservative Federalism in the 1790s. In this context, men like Samuel Adams, holding out hope that a dutiful republicanism could hold back the seductive tide of imported, indulgent luxury, continued to worry about the corrosive effects of fashion on the city's public life:

> too many of the Citizens thro' the Common wealth…are imitating the Britons in every idle Amusement & expensive Foppery which it is in their Power to invent for the Destruction of a young Country. Can our People expect to indulge themselves in the unbounded Use of every

---

[137] Alan Kulikoff, "The Progress of Inequality in Revolutionary Boston," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 28 (1971): 375–412.

[138] Henderson, "Furnishing the Republican Court," 88–92; Sharon V. Salinger, "Spaces, Inside and Outside, in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 26, no. 1 (July 1, 1995): 1–31. For the general pattern of inequality in North American housing at the end of the eighteenth century, see Lee Soltow, "Egalitarian America and Its Inegalitarian Housing in the Federal Period," *Social Science History* 9, no. 2 (Spring 1985): 199–213.

> unmeaning & fantastic Extravagance because they would follow the Lead of Europeans, & not spend all their Money? You would be surprizd to see the Equipage, the Furniture & expensive Living of too many, the Pride & Vanity of Dress which pervades thro every Class, confounding Distinction between the Poor & the Rich and evincing the Want both of Example & OEconomy.[139]

The generation of wealthy Federalists who formed the Mount Vernon Proprietors thought that the rewards of cosmopolitan material life were worth their considerable cost. For this generation, building well forged connections to a sphere of political and social activity that linked Boston to Philadelphia, Paris, and London and made public (and permanent) one's commitment to shaping the new nation as a powerful, equal partner to its trans-Atlantic counterparts.[140] But their children calculated differently. For the antebellum generation, the path to pre-eminence demanded liquid assets, and their investments in architecture were made with an eye to profit, not prestige. And so this early period of post-Revolutionary transformation was followed by a second major change in Boston's architecture. Beginning in the 1820s, Beacon Hill was again remade—this time, by small-scale, speculative builders along with Federalist developers. This second phase made more lasting changes to the city but attracted much less notice at the time or since. Instead of grand mansions, builders filled streets with rows of two- to four-story brick houses, most of them about twenty feet wide and two rooms deep (Figure 32). This process was underway in the early 1800s, but it was undertaken with new intensity after about 1820, partly in

---

[139] Samuel Adams to John Adams, July 2, 1785, in Harry Alonzo Cushing, ed., *The Writings of Samuel Adams: 1778-1802*, vol. 4 (New York and London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1908), 315–316.

[140] For the close relationship between political vision and material life for elites in the capital in this period, see Henderson, "Furnishing the Republican Court."

response to the rising population of Boston and partly as a result of a changing conception of the role of architecture in social life. One by one, the children of Boston's post-Revolutionary mansion builders sold off their parents' houses so that they could be converted into boardinghouses, quack hospitals, and rows of attached townhouses. And so Beacon Hill was transformed from the polite Arcadian dream of the Mount Vernon Proprietors into one of Boston's most densely settled districts. By the onset of the Civil War, just a handful of its great Federal-era houses remained standing. Though the Arcadian ideal persists in the public imagination, and stubbornly dominates the scholarly literature on Beacon Hill, it is this later, speculative phase that has defined the neighborhood more durably.[141]

By about 1795, the mansions of John Joy, Joseph Coolidge, and Harrison Gray Otis had helped to establish a new formula for a great house in Boston. In scale, complexity of plan, and degree of elaboration, this new type took a significant step beyond its colonial-era predecessors. The new gentry mansion should be set, first of all, on a broad, open lot, surrounded by formal gardens. It should have two large entertaining rooms, with at least one on the second floor and decorated with an extravagant, imported marble mantel.[142] Soon, fitting at least two of these was a

---

[141] Kirker and Kirker, *Bulfinch's Boston, 1787-1817*; Pierson, *American Buildings and Their Architects: The Colonial and Neoclassical Styles*; Grover and DeSilva, "Historic Resource Study: Boston African-American National Historic Site"; Weinhardt, *The Domestic Architecture of Beacon Hill, 1800-1850*.

[142] Richly carved Carrara marble mantels imported from London or Paris were similarly the central decorative fixtures in the gentry drawing rooms of contemporary Philadelphia. Henry and Ann Hill's house had at least seven. Henderson, "Furnishing the Republican Court," 225–241.

requirement for any Boston house-builder making a creditable claim to gentility.[143] The second floor parlor should be reached by a grand stair, usually oval in plan and often dramatically lit from above. Larger houses might include a separate public dining room and most had, as well, a private dining room, an office or study, and frequently, a library. Kitchens were invariably on the ground floor, and at the rear, sometimes with an array of ancillary service rooms, including a laundry and specialized storage closets. An office, too, was on the ground floor, and usually at the front, so that visitors on business calls need not be met in the parlor, whose public role was confined to hosting social equals. The principal sleeping chambers were on the third floor, at the termination of the grand staircase. In the most lavish houses, the best bedchambers might also be fitted with marble mantels but neoclassical models with composition ornament were an acceptable substitute. In houses with a fourth floor, a back stair continued up to secondary and servants' bedchambers.

The third of the houses built by Charles Bulfinch for Harrison Gray Otis embodies this new ideal of a polite Boston house (Figure 33). When completed in 1806, it was the most impressive building on Beacon Street. Its cornice is not the highest, but at three full stories above a raised granite basement, it yielded nothing in architectural pretension to its neighbors, which included the grand, domed State House at the top of the street and, for another half century, the former home of Governor Hancock. A row of five triple-hung windows with enormous panes of glass make it

---

[143] In 1805, Thomas Appleton pleaded with his brother-in-law to facilitate the importation of the Italian marble mantels for the parlors of his new house, noting that the rooms' completion had to be postponed until they arrived, and that until then, he would "anxiously look for them daily." Chamberlain, *Beacon Hill*, 108.

clear that the principal entertaining level was above the street-side fray, on the second floor, in the London manner. Bracketed and hooded surrounds, the most elegant of any house in Boston in this period, emphasize the point. Over the center window, an emblem of a carved eagle behind a shield suggests the national outlook of its builder as well as his Federalist politics. Windows in the floors above are capped with sandstone jack arches with tall, carved keystones. A deep cornice with a balustrade crowns the whole composition impressively.

Like the first two Harrison Gray Otis houses, this one was designed for elaborate entertaining on a state scale. Otis was a skilled host and relished his role at the center of Boston's gentry social life. He famously placed a bowl of punch in a niche on the stair to the second floor, inviting visitors to refresh themselves before ascending to the grand entertaining rooms.[144] According to John Quincy Adams, "[a]mong the lights and shades of that worthy Senator's character, there is none which shows him in higher colours than his hospitality…it has not fallen to my lot to meet a man more skilled in the useful art of entertaining his friends than Otis."[145] The house was as renowned as its occupant. Visiting from New Jersey, Elias Boudinot, the former president of the Continental Congress, was impressed both by his fortune and his means of spending it. "He has a most elegant House directly opposite the Common

---

[144] Morison, *Life and Letters of Harrison Gray Otis*, 1:232.

[145] John Quincy Adams to John Adams, October 29, 1816, Adams MSS., "Family Letters," 7, cited in ibid., 1:224.

well furnished & with great taste…The Suite of Rooms were the best I had seen—the furniture rich and splendid without being tawdry."[146]

If not tawdry, the house was certainly big, at over 11,000 square feet—significantly larger than the first Otis house and over five times the average size of its neighbors (Figure 34).[147] It locates the entire suite of public rooms on the second floor, including two enormous drawing rooms, each of them over 500 square feet. The larger of the two is oval in plan, and originally faced an ornamental garden on the rear and side yards. A slightly smaller room at the front of the house likely served for formal dining, while a fourth room at the rear, above the kitchen, was a family dining room. The ground floor was given over to an office, a library, and the kitchen and service rooms. The three best rooms have been significantly altered but some sense of their opulence is revealed in the quality of the marble mantel still in place in the secondary dining room. With four well ornamented reception rooms on the second floor, this is a house that was erected for a singular purpose—the grand style of domestic entertaining that characterized the elite urban centers of the Atlantic world and especially the Republican Court of Philadelphia.[148]

In Boston, every night of the week might be taken up with "a fashionable rout" like the one described by Samuel Lorenzo Knapp:

---

[146] Elias Boudinot, *Journey to Boston in 1809* (Princeton, N.J.: University Library, 1955), 41.

[147] According to the 1798 Federal Direct Tax list, the average house size in Ward 7 and 9, including all of Beacon Hill, was 2026 square feet across all floors; the median size was smaller, at 1600 square feet.

[148] For Otis' participation in the social life surrounding the Republican Court in Philadelphia, see Morison, *Life and Letters of Harrison Gray Otis*, 1:125–150.

> I was met in the passage by the master of ceremonies who led me into the drawing room, which was lined with ladies...After coffee and cake had been duly passed around, all hands began to prepare for the solemnities of the evening. The rooms were cleared for dancing or spread with tables for such as chose cards...I accordingly took a view of the several apartments:--in one was music and dancing, in others were gentlemen and ladies at whist, backgammon, &c.; here a group of men talking upon political subjects; there, an unbroken file of ladies who did not find partners; in one corner two or three gentlemen talking apparently in private; in another quarter is stationed a corps of observation, taking a survey of the dance, and criticising the looks, dress, dancing, &c. of the rest of the company.[149]

All this moving and shaking and sizing up could get exhausting. Joseph Coolidge, scion of one of Boston's first families and son and grandson of Bulfinch clients, offered the lament of the privileged in this period:

> I believe that we have spent but one evening at home during the last 4 weeks—: all this is wearisome; and, when the hour comes to dress, we sigh that again we are compelled to leave our quiet fireside: yet tis necessary;—acquaintance with persons must be made, houses must be seen, manners criticized…, all in fact which goes to constitu[te] the word Society, which embraces places as well as individuals."[150]

With their expansive scale and provision of enormous rooms for public entertaining, Otis' houses were rarely surpassed in elegance in the Federal period. In 1818, a visiting Englishman, Henry Fearon, recognized in them more than a hint of aristocratic sympathy, and wondered at the degree to which such material pretension had taken root in a crucible of the Revolution:

---

[149] Samuel L. Knapp, *Extracts from a Journal of Travels in North America, Consisting of an Account of Boston and Its Vicinity, By Ali Bey, &c. [pseud.]* (Boston: Printed by Thomas Badger, Jun., 1818), 25–26.

[150] Joseph Coolidge, Jr. to Nicholas P. Trist, October 5, 1825, Nicholas Philip Trist Papers, Library of Congress.

> The state of society in Boston is better than in New York, though the leaven, not of democracy, but of aristocracy, seems to be very prevalent: many of the richer families live in great style, and in houses little inferior to those of Russel- Square. Distinctions exist to an extent rather ludicrous under a free and popular government: there are the first class, second class, third class, and the 'old families.'"[151]

After visiting the house of Otis' Beacon Street neighbor, Daniel Denison Rogers, John Singleton Copley's son wrote to his sisters, "Shall I whisper a word in your ear? The better people are all aristocrats. My father is too rank a Jacobin to live among them."[152]

A few would-be Boston aristocrats built in a form only slightly less impressive than Mason and Otis' free-standing mansions. These include pairs of houses that are, like the second Otis House, four bays wide, and set on large landscaped lots. One of the best, and largest, of these survives at 87 Mount Vernon Street, next door to the Otis House (Figure 35). Originally it formed half of a matched set with number 89, which has been demolished and re-built. As part of a pair, this house seems restrained in comparison to its neighbor at 85 Mount Vernon, as it lacks the colossal pilasters that distinguish the second Harrison Gray Otis house and that once decorated other Bulfinch houses across Boston. Additionally, its entrance is in its street front, rather than a more discreet side yard. Nonetheless, in 1806, the merchant Stephen Higginson

---

[151] Henry Bradshaw Fearon, *Sketches of America, a Narrative of a Journey through the Eastern and Western States of America*, 2nd. Ed. (London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, & Brown, 1818), 107.

[152] Lord Lyndhurst, letter to his sisters, January 22, 1796, in Theodore Martin, *A Life of Lord Lyndhurst: From Letters and Papers in Possession of His Family* (London: John Murray, 1883), 43. John Singleton Copley's son, later Lord Lyndhurst, was sent from London back to Boston to try to rescind the sale of his Beacon Hill property to the Mount Vernon Proprietors in 1796.

spent over $22,000 to purchase and complete number 87, whose interior finishes were just as refined as, and whose plan was more carefully resolved than, its more famous neighbor.[153]

The scale of 87 was similar to Otis' second house, at 42 feet wide and 46 feet deep and on four full stories, one taller than number 85. And its front elevation, while less expressive, retained Bulfinch's ground floor arches with recessed windows and a belt course dividing the ground floor from second (though here it is rendered in sandstone rather than marble), as well as its delicate neoclassical cornice. One enters the house into a small lobby, beyond which is a broad passage containing the principal stair, which rises through the first three stories in a grand, elegant oval. On the ground floor, the passage divides the house laterally. A small heated room sits to the left, likely an office, though family lore identified it as Mr. Higginson's dressing room.[154] Opposite it, on the right, a large dining room is fitted with a fine marble mantel with Doric columns. Like Beacon Hill's best interiors of the period, the room is treated with a high dado, though the bold cornice is probably the work of Ogden Codman, who renovated the house in the 1890s. Like the other public entertaining rooms in the house, the doors and windows are cased with complex double architraves. Behind this room, and separated from it by a pair of service closets, lay the kitchen.

---

[153] Elton Wayland Hall, *The Colonial Society's House at 87 Mount Vernon Street, Boston* (Boston: Colonial Society, 1993), 7. Higginson had lived briefly at the other end of Mount Vernon Street, at no. 43, which he built in 1803. Chamberlain, *Beacon Hill*, 93.

[154] Hall, *The Colonial Society's House at 87 Mount Vernon Street*, 11.

As fine and large as the ground floor dining room is, the second floor was the principal entertaining level. Its status is clear before setting foot inside. As at Otis' contemporary Beacon Street house, the parlor level is signified on the exterior by enormous sash windows cased with elaborate hooded and bracketed surrounds, carved by Simeon Skillin.[155] The ground floor windows are much smaller, with three-over-three sash set in a plain brick opening and topped by stone jack arches with double keystones. Inside, the parlors deliver on the promise of the façade (Figure 36). Equal sized, and with vertiginous ceilings, they together consume the width of the house, and are both accessible from the principal stair. The left-hand room is also accessible, by way of a small vestibule, from the service stair, lending support to its interpretation as a public dining room. Both are elegantly finished and have the dado common to grand public rooms in Beacon Hill houses of this period, as well as the thin cornice favored by Bulfinch. The mantels in both rooms were removed in the 19th century and Ogden Codman supplied the present Gilded Age replacements.[156] They outdo Bulfinch in delicacy and lavishness, like neoclassical frosting on an enormous wedding cake.

The right-hand parlor communicated directly with a large library behind it, which is also accessible from the stair landing (Figure 37). With flattened Doric half-columns supporting a simple wooden five-part frieze, its mantel is inferior to the one in the dining room as well as, presumably, the original pair in the parlors. It is more restrained, in fact, than its mate in the chamber above it. The chief ornament to this room is its enormous built-in mahogany book press, with glazed doors and diamond-

---

[155] Ibid., 7.

[156] Ibid., 40.

shaped panes, a remarkable assertion of the Higginson family's commitment to learning.[157]

The main stair terminates on the third floor, where the three heated chambers are the best finished sleeping rooms in the house (Figure 38). Each can be reached from the principal stair landing and the smaller of the two parlor chambers is also accessible from the rear service stair. The two front rooms above the parlors are fitted with relatively simple marble mantels, with incised panels on the stiles and upper rail.[158] Both chambers, like the parlors and library below, have fine dados and simple cornices. Only the library chamber was not fitted with a marble mantel. Instead, it has a wooden chimneypiece, a more delicately ornamented version of the one in the library below, with swags and garlands flanking a figural center panel. Chambers for servants are on the floor above. These are only accessible via the secondary stair and are considerably less refined than those below.

Grand houses like those of the Higginsons and Otises were, on the one hand, *à la mode*, but on the other, deeply conservative. As they had always been, houses were signs of durable personal wealth—a large, well finished house required massive

---

[157] Higginson's wife, Louisa Storrow Higginson, was a devoted reader, noting in her diary after moving out of Boston, "[b]ooks are my recreation, and, next to my children, my greatest source of pleasure. I read Stewart's 'Philosophical Essays' and the 'Faerie Queene' of Spenser, usually in the evening, which is charmingly undisturbed. This exemption from visitors is delightful to me; it gives me time to think and to read, and I only hope that I shall improve all my advantages." Thomas Wentworth Higginson, *Cheerful Yesterdays* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1898), 11.

[158] The one in the west room has been largely covered by one installed by Codman, though enough remains visible to suggest that it was similar to its partner in the opposite chamber.

investments in labor and materials. More important, a well-designed house made a claim for that wealth being derived from intelligence, personal virtue and honest dealing, not fraudulence, or inheritance.[159] Housing, like facility with dancing and witty conversation, asserted the social worth of the merchant and the manufacturer alongside the minister and the landowner. In a remarkably revealing letter to his son, the ascendant industrialist Jedediah Strutt explained the need for mastery of elite cultural practices in late Georgian England:

> I need not tell you that you are not to be a Nobleman nor prime minister, but you may possibly be a Tradesman of some eminence & as such you will necessarily have connections with Mankind & the World, and that will make it absolutely necessary to know them both; & you may be assured if you add to the little learning & improvement you have hitherto had, the Manners, the Air, the genteel address, & polite behaviour of a gentleman, you will abundantly find your acct in it in all & every transaction of your future life—when you come to do business in the World…I cannot describe to you the awkward figure one makes, the confusion & the imbarrassment one is thrown into on certain occasions from the want of not knowing how to behave, & the Want of assurance to put what one does know into practice—I look on it now as a real misfortune that in the beginning of my Life I had not sense nor judgment enough of my own nor any friend…to point out to me the necessity of any easy agreeable or polite behaviour. Indeed so foolish was I, that I looked on dancing & dress the knowing how to sit or stand or move gracefully & properly as trifles not worth the least expence of time or money, & much below the notice of a wise man.[160]

---

[159] The most extensive discussion of the ways in which material goods became an index of the reliability and trustworthiness of strangers in the Atlantic world is in Carson, "The Consumer Revolution in Colonial British America: Why Demand?" Bernard Herman reflects further on the ways in which urban merchants used material culture to demonstrate their standing and secure advantage in "A Traveler's Portmanteau," in Herman, *Town House*, 231–260.

[160] Jedediah Strutt to William Strutt, August 17, 1774, cited in R. S Fitton, *The Strutts and the Arkwrights, 1758-1830: A Study of the Early Factory System* (Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1973), 145.

In the Federal era, a good house was similarly bound up in the mythology of the "good merchant," whose ethics were above reproach, who was liberal and public-minded in his charity, who made time for his family and his Christian God, and who disdained extravagance while being mindful of the improving effects of art on his family. According to this mercantilist ideology, profit was a sign of careful dealing and intelligent risk-taking, not deception, greed, or dumb luck.[161] A great and stylish house suggested that its occupants were educated, tasteful, and cultured consumers of the building arts and that the household fortune was derived from intelligence and would be spent on improving the culture of one's family and city. A well designed mansion was both a reward of mercantile merit and its embodiment.

But luck did play a role. Stephen Higginson, Jr., occupied 87 Mount Vernon for less than a decade. His fortune was derived largely from foreign trade, and his business was devastated by Jefferson's 1807 embargo on trade with England. His son, the abolitionist Thomas Wentworth Higginson, remembered this period ruefully, annotating a list of Stephen Higginson's goods auctioned in 1815, "after my father's failure—ie, S.H., Jr."[162] In 1816, William Sawyer, a Newburyport merchant, purchased the house at the fire sale price of $13,000, $9,000 less than it had cost Higginson. In 1798, Harrison Gray Otis took careful note of the failure and imprisonment of Philadelphian Robert Morris, builder of the most infamously extravagant house in the city, as "an example of the folly and vanity of human

---

[161] Alexander Young, *The Good Merchant: A Discourse Delivered in The Church on Church Green, March 26, 1837, the Sunday after the Decease of William Parsons, Esq.* (Boston: Hilliard, Gray, 1838); Goodman, "Ethics and Enterprise."

[162] Hall, *The Colonial Society's House at 87 Mount Vernon Street*, 19.

grandeur. But a few years since he was in wealth and honor, and the most considerable man in the United States, & she [i.e., his wife Mary] ruled the world of fashion with an unrivalled sway."[163]

Other merchants fared better during the difficult years of the embargo and the War of 1812 and after 1815 a few continued to build grandly. In 1817, mercantile partners Nathan Appleton and Daniel Pinckney began a pair of houses on Beacon Street after designs by Alexander Parris (Figure 39). Parris was an architect and engineer who made his name in Boston after the War of 1812 by designing some of its most impressive buildings, including the David Sears mansion (1822) and Quincy Market (1826-27).[164] Like 87-89 Mount Vernon, these are outwardly conventional four-bay brick houses, with the additional refinement of swelled fronts in two of the bays. Their marble frontispieces, with Ionic columns and a full entablature, hint at the opulence inside.[165]

---

[163] Harrison Gray Otis to Sally Otis, February 16, 1798, cited in Morison, *Life and Letters of Harrison Gray Otis,* 1:139. For a richly textured reading of Morris' failure, see Ryan K. Smith, *Robert Morris's Folly: The Architectural and Financial Failures of an American Founder* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014).

[164] Pamela Fox, "Nathan Appleton's Beacon Street Houses," *Old-Time New England* 70 (1980): 111–24; Edward Francis Zimmer, "The Architectural Career of Alexander Parris (1780-1852)" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1984); Christopher Monkhouse, "Parris' Perusal," *Old-Time New England* 55, no. 2 (December 1967): 51–59.

[165] They were raised to their present four stories in 1888, and at this time, the middle window was added to the bow in number 39. Alex McVoy McIntyre, *Beacon Hill: A Walking Tour* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1975), 19; "Alteration of Houses for Mr. A.T. Lyman and Mr. M. B. Inches, 39, 40 Beacon St," *American Architect and Building News*, September 8, 1888.

In plan, the houses are similar to 87-89 Mount Vernon, with a family dining room and office on the ground floor and double parlors on the second floor with a secondary reception room. Their interiors are exceptionally fine, with classical dados throughout the second floor and richly carved marble mantelpieces in the parlors (Figure 40).[166] Even the extravagant, scarcely believable, finishes in the entry and the inventive, classicizing door surrounds on the second floor are the work of Parris. The explicitly Greek motifs, including Greek keys, acanthus leaves, and laurel wreaths were, in 1819, without equal in Boston.[167]

Erecting a house that testified articulately to one's good taste and erudition required careful attention, however, to prevent the appearance of extravagance, even in mansion-mad Boston. Nathan Appleton closely supervised the building project, selecting finishes with Alexander Parris, arranging payments with contractors, and negotiating detailed questions of design with contractors, including a dispute with his plasterer, Mr. Richard Walsh. In a record of a lawsuit with Walsh, Appleton notes his desire

> that I should not have any fancy cornices. He [i.e., Walsh] expressed a great disappointment, and a Strong desire to show what he could do…Capt. Paris [sic]…urged the same point, at least for the drawing rooms—and at his suggestion we consented that some patterns should

---

[166] Photographs, taken around 1886, of the interior of 39 are in the collection of Historic New England and views of number 40 are in the collection of the Boston Athenaeum.

[167] Pamela Fox, "Nathan Appleton's Beacon Street Houses," notes Parris' reliance on William Pocock's "Modern Finishing for Rooms," London, 1811, comparing, e.g., the extraordinary Egyptian mantel on the ground floor to its printed model.

> be prepared for our inspection…After some consultation we fixed on one for the two Drawing Rooms in each house of the same pattern. [168]

After Walsh prepared a 3-part cornice for the front room, Appleton changed his mind. "I thought it rather too heavy and asked Mr. Walsh if he had any objection to getting out a different pattern for the back Drawing Room…he assented, and a very simple Shell pattern was selected & put up…Mr. Parker afterwards concluded to have the same."[169] The "simple" shell cornice, the downgraded compromise for the second floor rear drawing room, is nonetheless an elaborate, deeply undercut element that testifies both to the high level of skill of Mr. Walsh and the desire for remarkable, unequaled decorative finishes on the part of Boston's gentry of this period, including those who disavowed "fancy cornices." Appleton's attention to finish shows the painstaking care elites took in this period to decorate their houses in ways that did credit to their good taste, refined sensibilities, and command of the material performance of politeness. Operating on the shifting, invisible line between polite fashion and vulgar extravagance demanded perception, time, and money.[170]

The interiors of 39-40 Beacon Street represent a high-water mark of exuberance and decorative ambition among Boston's gentry. But the great age of the merchant was already passing in the 1810s and '20s. In these decades, the political winds were shifting decisively away from the conservative Federalism subscribed to

---

[168] Citations from Nathan Appleton, "Lawsuit, Appleton vs. Walsh," ca. 1824, Nathan Appleton Papers, Box 12, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston; as cited in ibid., 120.

[169] Fox, "Nathan Appleton's Beacon Street Houses," 120.

[170] For a detailed analysis of how Philadelphia elites, including George Washington, approached this problem in the 1790s, see Henderson, "Furnishing the Republican Court," 66–131.

by Bulfinch's early patrons. This change made the grand drawing rooms and rich, neoclassical ornaments of the Mount Vernon Proprietors' mansions seem outmoded, at best, and a political handicap, at worst. The election of Josiah Quincy as mayor in 1823 augured a new era in which an old, authoritarian Federalism was discredited in favor of a more inclusive populist politics. This was thanks in large part to some spectacular political miscalculations, like the Hartford Convention of 1814, where petulant Federalist delegates infamously discussed secession from the United States out of frustration with the rising power of Virginia planters and the damage done to Atlantic trade by the War of 1812. In such a context, the aristocratic airs of a Bulfinch mansion were a liability, while the land on which it sat an increasingly valuable asset in the expanding city.

At the same time, some began to question the equation of personal merit and great architecture that had justified the great expense of the Federal-era mercantile mansion. Even for the canniest operator, bad luck or unfavorable politics could bring financial ruin. Stephen Higginson's financial troubles were well known but there was no more public demonstration of the fleeting nature of fortune than Uriah Cotting's abandoned mansion at the edge of Boston Common, next door to John Joy's house. Cotting was held up, along with Bulfinch, as one of the principal forces behind the architectural transformation of Boston in the early 1800s. "[N]ature formed him for the accomplishment of great undertakings, and perhaps since the time of Sir Christopher Wren, no man has done more to improve a City by extensive plans, which his talent for business enabled him to execute than Mr. Cotting."[171] Though he had

---

[171] Shubael Bell, "An Account of the Town of Boston in 1817," in *Bostonian Society Publications,* vol. 3, 2nd Ser. (Boston: Old State House, 1919), 64.

little involvement with Beacon Hill, he oversaw the contemporary development of commercial projects on India Wharf, Central Wharf, and Broad Street.[172] On Beacon Street in 1806, he began what was reputed to be the largest and most magnificent house in Boston. But like Stephen Higginson, he was undone by the 1807 embargo, his investments in both real estate and foreign trade crushed. Having built the shell of his Beacon Street mansion as high as the first floor, he pulled it down and sold off the land.[173] In the midst of the development of Beacon Hill by the Mount Vernon proprietors, and just steps from Harrison Gray Otis' third house, this demonstration of the fleeting nature of earthly gains was a material sermon on the vanity of pretension and the risks associated with investing too much of one's fortune in architecture.

Failures were not always so easy to spot. As mass production of clothing, furniture, and building parts made material attainment more affordable, apparently elegant stuff was not the reliable sign that it had been when such fancy things were made locally and by hand. City dwellers everywhere struggled to distinguish dandies from gentlemen, and ladies from prostitutes.[174] Josiah Quincy, soon to be Boston's first mayor, worried about the farmers of Massachusetts being beguiled by the proliferation of inexpensive, mass-produced materials and tempted to build beyond

---

[172] Kathryn Knowles Lasdow, "'Conferred Distinction': The Transformation of the Boston Waterfront in the Early Nineteenth Century" (M.A. thesis, University of Virginia, 2011), 22–48.

[173] Bowditch, *Fifth Report of the Record Commissioners: "Gleaner" Articles*, 176.

[174] Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982); Dell Upton, "Another City: The Urban Cultural Landscape in the Early Republic," in *Everyday Life in the Early Republic*, ed. Catherine E. Hutchins (Winterthur, Del.: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1994), 64–117.

their means. Perhaps thinking of Uriah Cotting's unfinished mansion, he warned of the dangers of the virtuous rural republican being led to ruin by the whims of urban fashion.

> [I]t is true of men, in almost every rank and condition of life, that, when about to build, they often exceed their means, and almost always, go beyond the real wants of their families, and the actual requisition of their other relations, in life. But let not the sound, practical, good sense of the country be misled, by the false taste and false pride of the city; where wealth, fermenting by reason of the greatness of its heaps, is ever fuming away in palaces; the objects of present transitory pride; and too often, of future, long continued, repentance.[175]

At the same time, the proliferation of questionable paper money infamously enabled scoundrels like Andrew Dexter, Junior, to create elaborate, catastrophic frauds like the Exchange Coffeehouse, whose construction was financed and workers paid with thousands of dollars' worth of counterfeit bills.[176] This was only the most spectacular, expensive lesson in the untrustworthiness of material signs.

This crisis of faith in meaning was accompanied by a growing skepticism about the social and economic value of mansion building and recognition that maintaining high social status in early national Boston was an exceptionally expensive undertaking. Joseph Coolidge, in the same letter that expressed his frustration with the demands of Boston's fashionable social life, revealed some misgivings about his perceived obligation to build well and furnish elegantly to participate fully in that life.

> One thing you will be able to avoid in Virginia [w]h[ich]. would be difficult in a city like this.—I mean the almost necessary [ex]penditure

---

[175] Josiah Quincy, *An Address Delivered Before the Massachusetts Agricultural Society, at the Brighton Cattle Show, October 12th, 1819* (United States: s.n., 1819).

[176] Kamensky, *The Exchange Artist*.

> of more money than you wish to spend: here, moving in a [cer]tain sphere, you are compelled to conform…to the habits of [t]hose you associate with; your house, and furniture, and style of living, is . . . [more a] matter of general concern here than with you, where the influence of family, [a]nd political distinction is greater.[177]

Coolidge's contemporary, Fisher Ames, similarly regretted that polite society could not be cast aside lightly—houses, furnishings, and friends demanded a long-term commitment of social and financial capital. "A man may not incline to take a certain degree on the scale of genteel living, but having once taken it he must maintain it."[178]

Still, in 1835, Joseph Coolidge was sufficiently embedded in Boston's genteel social life that he rented from his father his grandfather's house in Bowdoin Square, then 40 years old. Joseph's wife, Ellen Wayles Randolph Coolidge, granddaughter of Thomas Jefferson, was delighted with the place, writing to her sister:

> It is rather a gloomy situation on the north side of the hill and at a distance from the cheerful & more fashionable part of the town, but I prefer it greatly, notwithstanding these disadvantages, to any other house I could have commanded. All my early associations are in favor of space and I so much dislike the cramped and confined houses, with their narrow, dark entries and steep interminable stairs, which it is now the fashion to build in Boston that I rejoice in the prospect of elbow room for myself and play room for my children.[179]

---

[177] Coolidge, Jr. to Trist, October 5, 1825.

[178] Seth Ames, ed., *Works of Fisher Ames*, (Boston, 1854), 1:302-303, cited in Tamara Plakins Thornton, *Cultivating Gentlemen: The Meaning of Country Life among the Boston Elite, 1785-1860* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989), 31.

[179] Ellen Wayles Randolph Coolidge to Virginia J. Randolph Trist, May 24, 1835, Ellen Wayles Randolph Coolidge Letters, University of Virginia.

But just six years later, after Joseph Coolidge's death, his heirs sold the house and lot, and it was covered by 28 of the "cramped and confined houses" that Mrs. Coolidge disdained. Bulfinch himself observed the changes with amazement:

> Mr. Coolidge's noble mansion, trees and all, are swept away, and 5 new brick houses are now building on the spot. The same changes are taking place in Summer street,--Mr. Bussey's, Mr. Goddard's, and Mr. Ellis' houses are giving room to a great number of modern houses,--so that you see, although crowds assemble nightly to hear predictions of a speedy end of the World, still there are enough of unbelievers to go on making earthly habitations.[180]

The demolition also made an impression on the real estate conveyancer Nathaniel Ingersoll Bowditch, who memorialized it twenty years later as an exemplar of the redevelopment of gentry Beacon Hill and Bowdoin Square with row houses:

> This house and garden was altogether one of the most beautiful residences which have existed in our city within my memory. It was laid out into lots in 1834 [*sic*], and no less than 28 dwellings were erected on it; while a large parcel of nearly 5,000 feet, with a fine old tree upon it, was purchased and retained by the late Dr. Shattuck, for air, light, and ornament, for the benefit of his estates on the opposite side of Cambridge street. This, also, has just been covered with bricks and mortar.[181]

The "cramped and confined houses" of the 1830s had their origin with the Mount Vernon Proprietors, who built a small number of terraced rows as the refined satellites of Bulfinch's grand celestial mansions. It was Bulfinch himself who first

---

[180] Bulfinch, *Life and Letters of Charles Bulfinch*, 301.

[181] Bowditch, *Fifth Report of the Record Commissioners: "Gleaner" Articles*, 68. Bowditch, uncharacteristically, had the date of the subdivision of Coolidge's house-lot wrong. He still occupied it in 1835 and died in 1841, when the property passed to his heirs. They, in turn, subdivided it into smaller house lots of about 24' by 100.' See, e.g., Suffolk Deeds L. 472, f. 178, August 11, 1841, a transaction that was proved by Bowditch himself.

showed Bostonians how a seemingly commonplace row of narrow, double-pile houses might be raised in the esteem of the gentry with his design for a crescent on the south side of Franklin Place. In 1795, this remarkable edifice was published and praised in the *Massachusetts Magazine* as an ornament to the city and a stylish model for other urban builders (Figure 41). Unfortunately, he financed the project on a Tontine scheme and the failure of the houses to sell quickly bankrupted him. It was, however, eventually a success and for a time the most fashionable address in Boston, anchored by the Boston Theater, also designed by Bulfinch, and the fledgling Massachusetts Historical Society, housed in the attic of the center pavilion.[182]

The project was praised for several qualities that had not previously been brought together in a North American city. First, it was treated as a singular composition, with a pedimented center pavilion and the pairs of houses at the ends treated as grand, six-bay mansion elevations. The five-part composition and neoclassical details were drawn from Robert Adam's Adelphi Terrace, an icon of urbane English design and the London home to a number of Boston's exiled Loyalist families.[183] In addition, the Tontine Crescent brought a new plan form to Boston: the side-passage, double-pile arrangement that became commonplace in London after the Great Fire of 1666, though it was not popular in North American cities for another century.[184] In a side-passage row house like those in the Tontine Crescent, visitors

---

[182] Kirker, *Architecture of Charles Bulfinch*, 78–81.

[183] Ibid., 78.

[184] Summerson, *Georgian London*; McKellar, *The Birth of Modern London*; Guillery, *The Small House in Eighteenth-Century London*.

could be greeted in a broad entry and sorted according to social quality; the sifted few would be admitted up the front stairs to the pair of generous parlors on the upper level, while domestic workers could remain out of sight in the ground floor rear kitchen and the back stair. The elevated, paired parlors, which consumed almost an entire floor, were designed to accommodate large groups of visitors as well as intra-familial sociability.[185] The back parlor, typically, was the domain of the family; the front, for distinguished guests. In some cases, the rear parlor also served as a principal dining room. Bulfinch's plan for the Ezekiel Hersey Derby house in nearby Salem shows the rear parlor with an alcove for a sideboard.[186]

With his row at 13-17 Chestnut Street for the daughters of Mount Vernon Proprietor Hepsibah Swan, Bulfinch brought the double parlor plan to Beacon Hill in 1804 (Figure 42).[187] These represent a Federal-era Boston row house at its most elegant. Not as extravagant, certainly, than any of the Otis, Mason or Higginson houses, or Bulfinch's grand suburban mansions, they are still very refined and larger, better finished, and more pretentious than most of their neighbors. Like most decent

---

[185] The *Massachusetts Magazine* drawing does not show the parlors in the Tontine buildings to be connected, unlike Bulfinch's other drawings for buildings of the 1800s that do have connected parlors, including the Ezekiel Hersey Derby House in Salem and Park Row in Boston. Although it is true that the *circa* 1821 painting by Henry Sargent known as The Dinner Party depicts an interior with connected parlors and it is also the case that Sargent lived in the Tontine Crescent, it is certainly possible that he invented the arched opening as a framing device for his composition and it is also possible that the wide double opening between the rooms was inserted sometime after construction, as was the case at the contemporary house at 6 Chestnut Street.

[186] Kirker, *Architecture of Charles Bulfinch*, 150–153.

[187] Ibid., 201–202.

houses in Boston, they are brick, laid neatly in Flemish bond with tight mortar joints, with granite foundations below and a brick cornice above. Jack arches and sills are all red sandstone, and a sandstone belt course defines the floor of the parlor level. Like many of Bulfinch's houses, the small ground floor windows are recessed within elliptical arches. Other than the frontispiece, the only decorative refinements on the exterior are shallow wrought-iron balconies in front of each tall parlor window.

Inside, the houses arrange two spacious heated rooms on each floor alongside a generous passage with two staircases. The better, public stair is at the front and lit from above by an oval skylight; the secondary stair runs up behind in a separate enclosure. Entry to the ground level is up just a few granite steps from the sidewalk, through an attenuated neoclassical frontispiece consisting of four freestanding columns supporting a wooden entablature. Inside, the principal stair leads up to the parlor level but on the ground floor, just off the entry, is a well finished front room with a dado and a five-part wooden mantel decorated with neoclassical swags, suggesting some refined function for this space, likely a family dining room but conceivably an office. At number 13, the rear room was long ago remodeled, destroying any trace of a cooking hearth, but this is the likely location for the original kitchen.

On the second floor, two refined parlors open to one another through a broad, elliptical opening, filled at number 13 with a pair of pocket doors, though their original treatment was likely conventional swinging leaves like those next door in number 15 (Figure 43).[188] The plan is completed by a little heated room at the front of

---

[188] The parlors of 15 are illustrated in Place, *Charles Bulfinch, Architect and Citizen*.

the passage, above the entry, while a small service room with a butler's pantry sits behind the rear stair. The Swan houses are deep enough to permit the principal stair to be pushed relatively far back in the passage, allowing it to communicate with both parlors. This refinement allows a free circulation of polite guests through the public parts of the house: the entry, the dining room, and the two upper level parlors. The depth also allows for a small heated room over the entry on the parlor floor, whose modest mantel suggests a private function, such as an office, but whose communication with both the front parlor and the principal stair passage indicates that it might also have been a place to receive visitors.

With their marble mantels and delicate cornices, the parlors are inferior only to those in Beacon Hill's grandest mansions. Delicate symmetrical door and window casings are more elegant, and less common, than the ubiquitous architraves found elsewhere, including at 87 Mount Vernon (Figure 44). The reeding of the casings is carried into the dado, an improvement over its more conventional treatment in the floor below. Called a "fluted architrave," this was the most expensive variety of door casing in the *Boston Carpenter's Price Book* of 1800, at 17 cents per foot. By comparison, a double architrave cost 10 cents, and a double architrave with "extra moulding" was priced at 12 cents per foot.[189] The fine marble mantels in number 13, while less elaborate than the very best imported models on Beacon Hill, are still far more pretentious, and more explicitly neoclassical, than the best mantels in any contemporary house not associated with a Mount Vernon Proprietor. With their freestanding Ionic columns and elegant white marble, they make the parlors the

---

[189] *The Rules of Work, of the Carpenters, in the Town of Boston* (Charlestown, Mass.: Samuel Etheridge, 1800), 20.

showplaces of the house. The mantels in 15 and 17 are of an identical design, differing only in color, with two black mantels in 15, and one black and one white in 17.[190]

The floors above the parlor level follow a similar plan, with two large heated rooms alongside a passage with small secondary chambers at the front and rear. The chamber fireplace in number 15 is decorated with a large, wooden mantel of conventional federal design, with three panels across the center flanked by a pair of pilasters and capped with a deep shelf.[191] It is similar to the mantel in the dining room of 13, though without the applied neoclassical ornaments. Even on this principal private level, rooms are decorated with a dado.

Bulfinch's designs for the Tontine Crescent houses as well as 13-17 Chestnut Street showed how a new form, the side-passage, double-pile row house, could be embellished and appointed for Boston's gentry. But even with such handsome models, the popularity of center stair layouts persisted and was preferred where a side entry was possible. With its delicate cornice and fine, Flemish-bond brickwork, the swelled-front 29A Chestnut Street, built around 1800 as one of the first enterprises of the Mount Vernon Proprietors, has a plan similar to the relatively humble 21 Pinckney Street and its many center-stair ancestors. With entry from a side yard possible thanks to an adjoining open lot, it illustrates the continuing preference for large reception rooms that consume the width of the house over adjoining double parlors. The same arrangement was used at 55 Mount Vernon Street, developed by Jonathan Mason as part of a row next to his mansion house in 1804 (Figure 45). Because of the thirty-foot

---

[190] Place, *Charles Bulfinch, Architect and Citizen,* 180.

[191] Ibid., 183.

setback required by covenant in front of the Mount Vernon Street mansions, this house, the first of a row to the east, also allowed entry from a side yard. Its elegant interiors, with fine neoclassical mantels in each of the principal rooms, and its impressive exteriors, with a marble stringcourse and marble jack arches, all demonstrate that the center stair plan remained acceptable, even preferable, for the most refined town houses of the Mount Vernon Proprietors. Thomas Carstairs' *circa* 1800 plans for a large block of houses on Sansom Street, in Philadelphia, illustrates the persistence of this form even for long rows, where side entries were impossible.

Whether in side-passage or center-stair form, the rows built by the Mount Vernon Proprietors were elegant but relatively small counterparts to the grand mansions with which they sought to set the pattern for future building. Both the freestanding houses and their counterparts in attached rows defined Beacon Hill for the first two decades of development by the proprietors. But beginning around 1820, a second wave of building covered Beacon Hill with smaller row houses. Developers in this period were mad for buildable land, filling the interior of blocks and the rear of lots and finding ingenious and unhealthful ways to fit as many buildings into as many corners as possible. A few of these were large, well finished row houses, like Adam Thaxter's mansion at 59 Mount Vernon Street. Most of them were significantly more modest.

In this period, from about 1820 to the 1850s, Beacon Hill was transformed in a nearly continuous phase of speculative building that gives it its modern character. The first decade was characterized by variety, as builders experimented with ways to build polite houses on narrow, urban lots. After 1830, from the smallest house to the most elaborate, most were laid out on a side-passage, double pile plan, with fronts two or

three bays wide. The largest might be extended with a rear ell, containing a kitchen and dining room, but most people cooked and ate their meals on the ground floor. Though there were slight variations in exterior finish—in the treatment of cornices, door surrounds, and window lintels, for example—the housing of this period was remarkably consistent. Red, machine-molded brick, tightly laid, was the universal choice for fronts, with inferior masonry on the sides and in party walls (Figure 46). Sandstone was reserved for sills and lintels, granite for foundations. Large panes of glass set in tall sash windows illuminated the principal entertaining level.[192] Inside, mass produced Greek Revival mantels decorated fireplaces, with plain, post-and-lintel surrounds for secondary hearths and more refined, black marble treatments in parlors. Although there was some variation in size and degree of elaboration, the range of possibilities narrowed in the second quarter of the nineteenth century compared to the end of the eighteenth, when Timothy Twist's 192-square-foot hovel shared space on Temple Street with Joseph Coolidge's 7,500-square-foot mansion house. In the antebellum decades, the streetscape of Beacon Hill became at once more profitable and more uniform.

The era of speculative building on Beacon Hill began with experimentation, with small builders and developers putting up buildings singly or in short rows. That most of these were variations on center-stair plans demonstrates that the influence of Bulfinch was not nearly so powerful as the appeal of traditional urban forms in

---

[192] Building contracts from the 1820s and 1830s devote particular attention to the size of window panes, specifying different sizes and qualities for windows in the parlors, chambers, and kitchens. See, e.g., Suffolk Deeds L. 296, f. 115, September 27, 1824, a contract for a house on Chestnut Street; and L. 298, f. 221, October 3, 1824, a contract for a house on Beacon Street.

Boston. A few buildings from the 1820s were laid out with a side passage but a great many more set the stair between the principal rooms, in the manner of 21 Pinckney Street, 55 Mount Vernon, and the Pierce-Hichborn House. This decade saw a variety of new solutions to the problem of polite urban building, most of them with highly segregated layouts, with circulation space buffering public rooms from one another.

33 Revere Street, built in 1817 by Atherton Stevens, a brick mason, illustrates how some began to manipulate the traditional center-stair type (Figure 47). With three floors above a brick basement, and three bays wide, it locates the stair in the middle of the house, behind a small entry. A curved wall separates the entry from a small reception room, likely for dining. The parlor is set at the rear of the house, on the ground floor, where it stretches across the entire twenty-one-foot width, compressing the stair in the entry. Though windows in the parlor have straight jambs and those in the front dining room are splayed, the much larger and better-lit rear is clearly the superior of the two ground floor public spaces. In between the two heated rooms on each level, in the location of the stair in the traditional version of this layout, is a small closet. 33 Revere Street is a compact plan, as it places all of the public rooms on a single level, with sleeping above and cooking below. Despite its moderate scale, the large rear parlor, curved dining room wall, and five-part wooden mantel all make plausible claims for this house as a suitable dwelling for a polite family. The public zone of the house did not extend to the second floor, which was reserved for sleeping chambers. This level was thoroughly renovated in the early 1920s, leaving little trace of the original plan, but there were certainly two heated rooms—one over the parlor and one above the dining room, with a little unheated room over the entry, entered from the front bedchamber. With its short ground floor passage and large rear parlor,

the builders of 33 Revere Street sought to accommodate a center-stair layout to a narrow urban lot with a front entry.

More adventuresome is the layout of 28 and 30 Mount Vernon Street, part of a row built for Abigail Joy, widow of John Joy, in 1822 (Figure 48).[193] At 22 feet wide and 44 feet deep, they are just two bays wide on the street, and about the same size as 33 Revere Street. These houses retain the old center stair layout but give curved walls to both parlors, which are reached by way of an elegant circular staircase, giving the passage an exceptional, hour-glass shape. Such extreme volumetric refinement was unusual on Beacon Hill but it illustrates an inventive way to improve this familiar arrangement of rooms through spatial gymnastics. The projecting bow window at the back reveals that here, too, the rear room is the superior of the pair of upper level parlors, placing the principal public space of the house far from the entry and far from the street. As at 33 Revere Street, the ground floor locates what was surely a small family dining room off of a small entry, though here it is served by a kitchen that sits behind it. The size of the dining room is constrained by the width of a short passage but the parlors each consume the entire width of the house. With their second floor, oval parlors, these houses illustrate a more refined solution to the provision of a center stair in an attached row than 33 Revere Street.

14 West Cedar Street is a more restrained, and more common, variation on the center-stair plan (Figure 49). It was built for John Hubbard around 1827, as part of a long row on the west side of West Cedar Street. At the edge of the Charles River through most of the 18th century and removed from the centers of early building on

---

[193] James McNeely, "Beacon Hill's Important Clear Span Houses," *Beacon Hill Paper*, February 16, 1999.

Beacon Hill, West Cedar Street was slow to develop. On the 1814 Hales map, where it appears as George Street, it is entirely devoid of buildings between Chestnut and Pinckney Streets. Further north, there were just a handful of structures near Cambridge Street. The Mount Vernon Proprietors did not subdivide the land they owned on West Cedar until 1826, but in the 1820s and '30s, the southern end of West Cedar Street became the site of a frenzy of building activity, with rows of brick houses rising on both sides from Chestnut to Cambridge Street.[194] Hubbard erected the row from 1 to 16 West Cedar in 1827. At number 14, the ground floor front room is lit by a single sash window, flanked by sidelights, a hallmark of the smaller houses built in this part of Beacon Hill in the 1820s (Figure 50).[195] This window lights a small front dining room. Like the rest of the row from 2 to 16, one enters from the street up just a pair of steps to a small vestibule. Beyond this is a short passage that runs alongside a small front room to a stair. This stair rises in a lobby through all three floors alongside a large unheated closet with access to the passage and the front room. The stair lobby and closet sit between the principal heated rooms on each floor. This arrangement permits the principal rooms to run the entire width of the house, except for the little front room off the entry, which gives up roughly five feet to the passage. Like 33 Revere Street, it is a development of the center-stair plan, with the stair confined to a very small lobby at the back of the entry, while a large, unheated room occupies the

---

[194] Chamberlain, *Beacon Hill*, 188. Tobin Tracey describes the 1836 construction of nearby 13-17 West Cedar on the north side of Mount Vernon Street in detail. Tobin Neal Tracey, "Thomas M. Howard and James Hunt, Nineteenth-Century Housewrights: An Examination of Their Work on Beacon Hill, Boston, MA" (M.A. thesis, Goucher College, 1997).

[195] Weinhardt, *The Domestic Architecture of Beacon Hill, 1800-1850*.

location where a center stair would otherwise sit. Public spaces are confined to the ground floor, with the dining room at the front and a much larger parlor at the rear. Sleeping chambers occupy the two floors above. A cellar kitchen originally sat below the parlor, with outside access achieved by the drop in topography from front to rear. As at 33 Revere, the principal public entertaining room is on the ground floor and at the rear, where it could consume the width of the building.

An extreme solution to the desire for a large entertaining room on a small urban lot is illustrated by the row on Acorn Street, developed by Cornelius Coolidge in the 1820s (Figure 51). By this time, the Mount Vernon Proprietors had given up their scheme of developing a small number of large mansion house lots and embraced the more profitable subdivision of land into row-house lots with relatively narrow frontages.[196] In 1823, the Proprietors subdivided land on Acorn Street into ten house lots, five on either side, fronting on Chestnut and Mount Vernon Streets. The five between Acorn and Chestnut were further subdivided to allow for ten smaller building lots on the south side of Acorn and numbers 1 through 5 were developed by Cornelius Coolidge between 1827 and 1829.[197] At three full stories above a basement, each of these presents an impressive front to the street, masking its relatively small footprint and unusual plan: one large heated room with a small ell behind. Some have supposed these to have been built as servants' quarters, or houses of tradesmen, but the high level of interior and exterior finish, the generous dimensions of the principal room,

---

[196] Ibid., 5.

[197] Chamberlain, *Beacon Hill*, 185.

and an examination of contemporary street directories reveals otherwise.[198] Acorn Street was developed as a row of respectable residences for small merchants and prosperous tradesmen, and the unusual layout of its houses was one further experiment in domestic planning in the 1820s.

3 Acorn Street illustrates a typical layout. Entry is up just two steps into a very small lobby, beyond which lies the stair, winding up through three floors and down to the basement below (Figure 52). To the right of this passage lies the parlor on the ground floor, roughly seventeen feet square. Behind the passage is an eleven by thirteen feet ell, currently unheated. On the floor above, the small stair box serves two rooms: a large heated chamber above the parlor and a very small, not quite eight-feet-by-ten-feet heated room over the entry. The upper floors of the ell were likely added in the early twentieth century—originally, a rear window lit the staircase on this floor but this was converted to a door to connect this new room to the passage. Though the location of the kitchen is obscure, it must have been in the cellar, in which both the front room and the ell are well lit and open onto a service yard. This is a very compact floor plan but one with essential provisions for polite domesticity, including a cellar kitchen, a ground floor parlor and family dining room, and two bedchambers (one of them very small) on each of the floors above. It was, additionally, well finished, with symmetrical door casings and Greek Revival mantels extending into the principal and

---

[198] George F. Weston, *Boston Ways: High, By, and Folk* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1957), 245-246, may be the originator of the idea that Acorn Street houses were servants' quarters. The notion is rebutted in Richard M. Adams, "Some Notes about Acorn Street of Beacon Hill" (Boston, Mass., October 1991).

secondary bedchambers. Original closets serve the principal bed chambers on each floor.

Along with the Mount Vernon Street houses, these types represent a range of possibilities for refined but modestly scaled houses on Beacon Hill in the 1820s and different attempts to accommodate a long-standing preference for center-stair layouts with the increasing demand, even in smaller houses, for a commodious room for polite entertaining. The center stair plan could not accommodate this social program well, as it required the best public room, when it was on the ground floor, to sit at the rear, overlooking a service yard. At Acorn Street, wider lots permitted the parlor to be brought to the street side, with the stair rising in the rear corner.

Acorn Street shows how a respectable house could be made to fit on a relatively compact lot. But as the pace of development quickened in the 1820s, some speculators worked to reduce house sizes still further. The size and finish of 75 West Cedar Street, built around 1828, represent an attempt to plumb the lower limits of decent accommodation on Beacon Hill (Figure 53). Like Acorn Street, it was built at a time when Bostonians were newly concerned with the viability, affordability, and flammability of inexpensive housing. A debate over whether wooden buildings should be permitted in Boston raged in the 1820s, leading to the repeal of the 1803 prohibition on wooden houses as well as the creation of a new political force that challenged the longstanding dominance of the Federalist Party in Boston, called the Middling Interest.[199] Advocates of repeal argued that wooden houses could be built

---

[199] Robert A. McCaughey, "From Town to City: Boston in the 1820s," *Political Science Quarterly* 88, no. 2 (June 1, 1973): 191–213; Andrew R. L. Cayton, "The Fragmentation of 'A Great Family': The Panic of 1819 and the Rise of the Middling

more affordably than brick ones and that such housing was attainable by the city's middling artisans, whereas brick houses, with their higher construction costs, were out of reach.[200] Those in favor of keeping the prohibition intact insisted that brick buildings were only marginally more expensive than wooden ones of a similar size, that they cost less in ongoing maintenance and, more important, that they did not put their occupants or their neighbors at risk from fire.[201] The act's repeal marked the end of the dominance of Federalist politics in Boston and of Federalist building projects on Beacon Hill. Still, though wooden buildings were newly permitted, the district's new building stock remained largely brick in this period, even on its smallest lots. 75 West Cedar Street illustrates one attempt to keep the cost of housing down by building in brick but building small and with modest finishes. It was erected by Richard Roberts, a bricklayer who developed several properties on this block of West Cedar Street.[202]

At roughly 14 feet wide by 26 feet deep, this house is among the smallest surviving structures on Beacon Hill, with roughly 360 square feet on each of three floors (Figure 54). It is a more compact variation of the layout used at 14 West Cedar and 33 Revere Street, with the parlor brought to the front of the house. Here, the stair

---

Interest in Boston, 1818-1822," *Journal of the Early Republic* 2, no. 2 (July 1, 1982): 143–67.

[200] Another Citizen, "Wooden Buildings," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, February 27, 1822.

[201] A Citizen, "Wooden Buildings," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, March 5, 1822.

[202] For Roberts' holdings on West Cedar Street (then called George Street), see Suffolk Deeds L. 327 f. 7, L. 333 f. 147, L. 420, f. 234, and L. 516, f. 41, in which Roberts lost 75 West Cedar (2 George Street in the deed) as settlement of a suit by the estate of Cheney Richardson, carpenter.

is located along a side wall but pushed to the rear and confined to a small stair box on the second and third floors. This arrangement permits the front room to be the larger of the two principal heated rooms, occupying the width of the house on the upper floors. It does so at significant cost to the rear room, which is reduced by the stair box to an inconvenient L-shaped space. This layout also makes it impossible to light the stair passage with windows in the front or rear walls, a handicap that more ambitious houses overcome with a skylight and an open stairwell. Here, a modest amount of daylight reaches the stair by means of a glazed door into the rear room on the second and third floors, forgoing privacy in the back room for the sake of sure-footedness on the stairs (Figure 3.55).

The compactness of 75 West Cedar is compounded by the placement of the kitchen on the ground floor, rather than in a cellar. The location of the kitchen suggests that the front room, likely smaller originally and skirted by a narrow passage, was for dining (a mid-twentieth century restoration replaced all the flooring on this level, removing evidence for original partitions). If this reading is correct, then the only location for a public entertaining room is the second floor front room, the largest in the house. This interpretation is supported by the size of the street-front windows, which are largest on the second floor. The lack of direct communication between the parlor and the rear second floor room, as well as its awkward configuration, suggests that this back space was not suited for public purposes but was, rather, a secondary bedchamber. The principal chamber is the room on the third floor above the parlor. Unlike 33 Revere Street and 14 West Cedar, the best room in the house is at the front on each level.

In 1834, Asher Benjamin, the builder and pattern book author, erected a much larger and better finished version of this plan at 9 West Cedar, the other end of the street, near the corner of Chestnut (Figure 56)**.** Its layout is very similar, but its much larger size resolves the inconveniences inherent in 75 West Cedar to make it better suited to polite urban domesticity. Like most of its neighbors at both ends of the street, and like the majority of its contemporaries anywhere on Beacon Hill, the street front of 9 West Cedar is built of good quality, even toned, red face brick. It sits on a granite foundation and windows are trimmed with painted stone lintels and sills. Like most of the larger houses of the 1830s, it is three bays wide and four full stories tall with an unfinished basement below and a dormered attic above. It has a cast iron balcony at the parlor level and a slightly recessed entry. Interior finishes include fine Greek Revival doors, casings, and mantels throughout.

Though Benjamin advocated using a double-parlor plan for urban housing in his books, 9 West Cedar runs the stair up alongside the rear room in a fashion similar to 75 West Cedar (Figure 57). On the ground floor, entry from the street is up three granite steps to a long passage that runs, on this level, the entire depth of the house to the rear stair. On the ground floor, the passage runs alongside a pair of low-ceilinged but well lit rooms. No indication of the earliest finishes survives in the front room, a family dining room originally, as it is now. This space was refitted in 1925 in a Colonial-Revival manner, following designs of Joseph Everett Chandler. The rear room on the ground floor is currently a kitchen, and this was surely its original function, though direct evidence for this has been covered by modern cabinets and Victorian flooring. There is no evidence for cooking in the very dark cellar below. The stair itself, set at the rear of the passage, winds up through all four floors with a

continuous walnut handrail, with few straight treads. It terminates at the ground level in an elegant scroll.[203]

The second floor arranges a pair of public rooms around a relatively small stair passage. The passage terminates at the rear wall of the front room, allowing the parlor to extend across the width of the building. This relatively modest house (its interior dimensions are roughly twenty-three feet by twenty-five feet, overall) has an exceptionally grand principal entertaining room overlooking West Cedar Street, at fourteen feet, four inches deep and twenty three feet, four inches wide, with a ten foot, six inch ceiling (Figure 58). In addition to being the largest, this room is the best lit in the house, with three 8-foot-high windows along the front wall. Its finishes are likewise superior, with molded corner blocks at all door and window casings, a deep plaster cornice, and a large black marble mantel decorated with the elongated Greek key motif that Asher Benjamin popularized in his *Practical House Carpenter* of 1830.

The rear room on the second floor is constrained by the front parlor and the stair well. Originally only ten feet, nine inches deep by sixteen feet wide, and connected to the front room by a single door, it is a secondary entertaining room, with a smaller mantel, relatively modest cornice and door casings with simple, turned corner blocks. Its location above the kitchen and its easy communication with the stair landing raises the possibility that it was used for public dining, reserving the ground floor front room for family dining or allowing it to serve as an office or counting

---

[203] Arthur Shurcliff, whose family lived here between 1870 and 1915 and who became an influential landscape architect at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, reported that, as a boy, he could slide down this banister from his room on the fourth floor in five seconds. Manuscript notes on 9 West Cedar Street in possession of Kitty Flather.

room. However the rear room was used, the front parlor was clearly the focus of the social life of the house. Removed one level from the street, this was the best finished, brightest and largest room in the house and the one best suited to polite entertaining. While not at the impressive scale of the contemporary parlors at 59 Mount Vernon or those in the Mount Vernon Proprietors' mansions, this room was larger, still, than the front parlors of most of its neighbors along West Cedar Street and as large as the entire footprint of its more modest contemporaries, including 75 West Cedar.

The third floor, given over to bedchambers, also follows an unusual layout, with heated bedchambers in opposing corners, opening directly off the stair landing, rather than aligned front-to-back. This arrangement is a concession to building on a relatively shallow lot, as it removes the closets from between the chambers and locates them in the front right corner of the plan. The lateral partition on this level is moved toward the front, making the back chamber two feet deeper than the rear room below and the front room correspondingly shallower. The thirteen feet, six inch by thirteen feet, ten inch front chamber is the superior room on this level, as below. Both rooms are fitted with cast iron coal grates set in Greek Revival mantels, of black marble in the front and painted wood in the back. Door and window casings in both rooms are symmetrical Greek surrounds with turned corner blocks.

9 West Cedar Street was completed at the end of a period of experimentation in domestic planning on Beacon Hill. Over the next two decades, builders like Asher Benjamin and developers like Cornelius Coolidge would come to prefer, overwhelmingly, variations on a common side-passage, double-pile plan. Many of these houses, including those on Acorn, Chestnut, and West Cedar streets, were built on land subdivided by the Mount Vernon Proprietors as they adjusted their plans for

Beacon Hill to meet the rising demand for modest row houses. At the same time, the 1820s also saw the end of the era of mansion-building. The David Sears house on Beacon Street, completed in 1822, was the last great freestanding house to be erected on Beacon Hill. Beginning in the 1830s, descendants of the Mount Vernon Proprietors sold or pulled down most of the Federal-era mansions, deciding that their value as real estate was greater than any status they conferred on their occupants. Between 1833 and 1853, to count only those Beacon Hill mansions designed by Bulfinch, the Joy House (1833), the Jonathan Mason House (1836), the Joseph Coolidge, Sr., House (1843), the Joseph Coolidge, Jr., House (1846), the Kirk Boott House (1847), and the Thomas Perkins House (1853) were all demolished and replaced with rows of smaller houses. On the Boston Public Library's copy of the only known view of Jonathan Mason's house, an unsentimental inscription suggests a prime motivation for such bald filial impiety. It reads simply: "my father's mansion house, Mount Vernon, built in 1802 + pull'd down in 1837. The land sold for eighty thousand dollars." As small-scale speculative building of row houses came to dominate the streetscape of Beacon Hill, the old houses of the proprietors, with their broad lots and landscaped gardens, were increasingly valuable assets that could be liquidated at a significant profit.

Not all Bostonians saw the conversion of mansions to cash as praiseworthy. Sarah Parsons Morton, author of "Beacon Hill: A Local Poem," was again moved to verse upon seeing the Apthorp house, her birthplace on State Street, converted into a bank:

> MANSION! no more by beauty graced,
> Thee have the spoiler's hands defaced....
> How art thou changed! and mammon's store
> Proclaims the reign of soul is o'er!...
> Thy sons approved in arts or arms,

Thy daughters of transcendant charms
Are gone--and Plutus builds a throne,
Enriched by fortune's gifts alone.[204]

Though Morton gave poetic voice to the social prescription against the pursuit of wealth for its own sake, others thought, in their heart of hearts, that fortune's gifts were pretty satisfying. William Appleton, upheld in Boston as a paragon of mercantile virtue, guiltily confessed in his diary that he could think of little else besides the means of profit: "I find my mind is very much bent on making money, more than securing temporal friends or lasting peace…while in Church, my mind, with all the exertion I endeavoured to make, was flying from City to City, from Ship to Ship and from Speculation to Speculation."[205] Appleton's anxiety revealed the tensions embedded in the ideology of the "good merchant," but soon, the city's rich were able to overcome their embarrassment about the single-minded pursuit of profit, declaring openly their idolatry of mammon. In the 1830s, Michel Chevalier was amazed by this preoccupation with money, seeing money-ism as the root of an emerging American character. "The American is always bargaining; he always has one bargain afoot, another just finished, and several more in meditation. All that he has, all that he sees, is merchandise in his eyes…At the bottom, then, of all that an American does, is money; beneath every word, money."[206] As *Our First Men*, a roster of the city's inhabitants worth over $100,000, reported in 1846, "It is no derogation…to the Boston

---

[204] Sarah Wentworth Morton, *My Mind and Its Thoughts, in Sketches, Fragments, and Essays* (Boston: Wells and Lilly, 1823), 30–31.

[205] Appleton, *Selections from the Diaries of William Appleton, 1786-1862*, 33.

[206] Michel Chevalier, *Society, Manners and Politics in the United States: Being a Series of Letters on North America* (Boston: Weeks, Jordan, 1839), 298.

aristocracy that it rests upon money. Money is something substantial. Everybody knows it and feels it. Birth is a mere idea, which grows every day more and more intangible."[207]

The open enthusiasm for money in the antebellum decades was a decisive shift from the perspective of the Revolutionary generation. Benjamin Franklin saw profit from overseas trade as a species of theft and inimical to virtues required in a self-governing republic.[208] Post-Revolutionary republicans like Samuel Adams and Sarah Parsons Morton similarly saw Boston's devotion to, and dependence on, commerce as worrisome but such voices were increasingly dominated by apologists for mercantilism. Some argued that Christianity provided a sufficient counterweight to the temptations of greed to avoid the perils imagined by republicans. In this way, defenders of profit deflected the question from the ethics of profiting by trade to the morality of the merchant himself. And to remain above reproach, Boston's merchants cultivated their public reputations carefully, through active philanthropy in cultural

---

[207] *Our First Men: A Calendar of Wealth, Fashion, and Gentility, Containing a List of Those Persons Taxed in the City of Boston, Credibly Reported to Be Worth One Hundred Thousand Dollars* (Boston: All the Booksellers, 1846), 5.

[208] Drew R. McCoy, "Benjamin Franklin's Vision of a Republican Political Economy for America," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 35, no. 4 (October 1978): 605–28.

institutions like the Boston Athenaeum and charitable civic causes like the Massachusetts General Hospital.[209]

At the same time, new ideas about the social aspects of building raised serious doubts about the wisdom of investing capital in architecture. Chevalier saw this new attitude expressed in instrumental terms, lamenting what he saw as a lack of sentiment among New Englanders. "The spire of his village church is no more than any other spire to him, and the finest in his view, is the newest, the most freshly painted…an old building is a quarry of bricks and stones, which he works without the least remorse. The Yankee will sell his father's house, like old clothes or rags. In his character of pioneer, it is his destiny to attach himself to nothing."[210] Similarly, Boston architect Edward Shaw put the shift away from elegant architecture in terms of urban mobility: "The people of this age are a transient people, flitting from place to place; each builds a hut for *himself*, not for his successors."[211] Others, like Josiah Quincy, saw choices about building as inflected with moral value, urging would-be builders to shepherd their limited resources carefully and not be tempted by the siren song of fashion into squandering the family fortune. W.H. Barnes made this new, pragmatic relationship

---

[209] Goodman, "Ethics and Enterprise"; Thornton, *Cultivating Gentlemen*.

[210] Chevalier, *Society, Manners and Politics in the United States*, 298.

[211] Edward Shaw, *The Modern Architect; Or, Every Carpenter His Own Master. Embracing Plans, Elevations, Specifications, Framing, Etc., for Private Houses, Classic Dwellings, Churches, &c., to Which Is Added the New System of Stair-Building* (Boston: Dayton and Wentworth, 1855), 61.

between wealth and domestic architecture explicit: "Utility should be the end kept constantly in view. All ornament which mars usefulness is a blemish…Hence every abode…in which convenience is sacrificed to appearance, is an unprofitable investment of capital."[212] A lavish house might reveal a wasteful disposition, a family mansion an unearned and therefore undeserved fortune. The Mason and Coolidge houses, in this context, were a social and political liability. They were also very valuable piles of brick. Beginning in the 1830s, the selling of those luxurious piles and their replacement with rows of side-passage, double-parlor row houses would complete the second transformation of Beacon Hill, a generation after the changes that impressed William Bentley. This phase of development—driven by speculative construction and reliant on a highly adaptable form of urban housing—would be much more enduring.

---

[212] W. H. Barnes, "A Homily on Homes," *Ladies' Repository: A Monthly Periodical, Devoted to Literature, Arts, and Religion*, October 1856, 619. In many ways, this short essay follows the precepts of Downing, arguing that a house should express its purpose as a residence and that it should respond to its situation in a particular place. He differs from Downing in his privileging of comfort over aesthetics, however.

FIGURES

FIGURES REMOVED FOR COPYRIGHTING

Chapter 4

MORAL ORDER

The layout of 9 West Cedar and 75 West Cedar illustrate how speculators of the 1820s experimented with urban forms, working to accommodate long-standing preferences for center-stair plans to demands for the segregation of polite sociability from the street and the noise and smells of the service yard. But when Asher Benjamin completed his West Cedar Street house in 1834, he was already advocating a very different model for urban lots: the double parlor plan illustrated as Plate 52 of his 1827 *American Builder's Companion* (Figure 59). This form was itself derived from the side-passage, double-pile plans used for some of the early rows built by the Mount Vernon Proprietors, although, as the persistence of the center stair plan and its many derivatives illustrates, Beacon Hill's builders and householders preferred other arrangements for the first three decades of the nineteenth century. But beginning around 1830, the double parlor plan became the predominant form for speculators and builders of houses across a wide range of size and quality.

The side-passage, double-parlor row house was a carefully considered solution to three distinct urban demands in the first half of the nineteenth century. At first, it was chosen because it facilitated the kind of stylish entertaining favored by elite Bostonians in the Federal era; later, it saw its widest popularity as the physical container for polite urban domesticity; and finally, it was adopted for its flexibility in building speculative tenement housing. This trajectory, across time and social status, does not reflect declension, or aspirations to gentility, or the kind of reflexive aping of

the gentry that is a persistent trope of too much writing on the built environment.[213] Instead, the history of the double parlor plan illustrates the ordinary, thoughtful ways in which people select and adapt common building forms to suit individual purposes.

The American double parlor had its origin in late 18th century English cities, when gentry builders replaced a single formal parlor or drawing room with a series of rooms arranged along a circuit, all of them elegantly fitted out for entertaining (Figure 60).[214] In London, such houses become common in the late Georgian era and are exemplified by Robert Adam's Derby House of 1774.[215] There, on the ground floor, Adam arranged a series of reception rooms around a central staircase, to bring the style of entertaining developed in country houses into the narrower dimensions of a London lot. Moving directly from one room to the next, privileged visitors and party-goers proceeded from the entry to a small anteroom, from there through a colonnaded screen to a much larger parlor, and thence to the "great eating room." After the meal, fortunate ones might go still further, to the little library which lay beyond.

Bostonians did not quite approach the level of luxury or the scale of urban building seen in the heart of fashionable London. And yet similar, expansive suites of entertaining rooms did find favor among Boston's elites in the decades after the Revolution. This was a significant change from the old manner, which disposed public rooms on either side of a broad passage, without direct connection between them. The

---

[213] See, e.g., the discussion of parlors in Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, 250–253.

[214] Mark Girouard, *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History* (New York: Penguin Books, 1980), 194–206.

[215] Summerson, *Georgian London*, 145–149.

Hancock mansion, for example, illustrates the older manner, in which the principal reception room on the ground floor was a single large drawing room, seventeen feet wide by twenty-five feet deep, with fully paneled walls. It was here that Governor Hancock both amazed young George Twelves Hewes and dined with his peers, without the procession through the house that characterized stylish metropolitan entertaining.

Susan Bulfinch Coolidge Lyman, daughter of Joseph Coolidge, Sr., and niece of Charles Bulfinch, described how such old-fashioned parlors were used in the years after the Revolution (Figure 61). Like the Hancock mansion, the Bulfinch house that she knew as a child was a center passage, double pile plan. In 1798, it was one of the largest houses on Beacon Hill, at about forty-two feet square. Mrs. Lyman recalled that at the front of the house, on either side of the passage, were a pair of public rooms. The larger, right-hand room was called the "summer parlor" and shut up for most of the year, except to receive company. It was fully paneled and painted white. On the other side of the passage was the "living parlor," which was well lit by windows on two walls and which communicated by means of a lobby with the larger dining room behind. These two rooms were served by a single, central chimney stack. Opposite the passage from the dining room, and buffered from the summer parlor by a secondary stair, was the kitchen.[216] As in many gentry houses in Georgian-era New England, including the nearby Coolidge and Joy mansions, the four rooms on each floor were separated by passages, stairs, and chimney stacks (Figure 62). Though the function of the public rooms could be flexible, used sometimes for tea, sometimes for

---

[216] Susan Bulfinch Lyman, "My Early Home" April 2, 1893, Misc. Mss., Massachusetts Historical Society.

family dining, and sometimes for formal socializing, such partitioning segregated the house into discrete, distinctively finished spaces so that at any moment, the public part of the house was reduced to a single room.[217] The longstanding preference for internal ground floor kitchens and broad passages precluded the kind of interconnected entertaining suites favored in contemporary London.

Despite this continued preference for partitions and passages in polite houses, beginning in the 1790s, some fashionable Bostonians sought to accommodate the new, interconnected manner of socializing that was favored in London and Philadelphia. In this, Harrison Gray Otis led the way. In his first house, he accommodated the London mode of domestic entertaining in a traditional New England mansion by extending the social circuit across two floors and incorporating the passage. On the first floor of the Otis house, the largest and best finished space is the dining room in the southwest corner (Figure 63). Its elegant plasterwork, composition mantel, and grand scale make it clear that this was a house devoted to a newly lavish mode of entertaining. As at the Hancock mansion, a parlor lies across the center passage from the dining room, though here, it is the less elaborately finished of the two.

Otis' most extraordinary interior, however, was his second floor drawing room (Figure 64). This is the only room in the house to have been fitted with a marble mantel, and its exceptional plasterwork, extensive composition ornament, and mahogany doors make an impressive claim for its position at the top of the house's hierarchy, as well as for Otis' at the top of Boston's. In one sense, the suite of drawing room, dining room and parlor, all separated by a broad passage, may be seen simply as

---

[217] Jane Nylander, *Our Own Snug Fireside: Images of the New England Home, 1760-1860* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993).

an enlargement of the traditional complement of public rooms in a New England gentry house. But the highly decorative treatment of the passage, with its ornamental plaster ceiling and neoclassical cornice, indicates that Otis sought to use the passage to connect, rather than separate, his public rooms. This arrangement both expanded and animated the social sphere of the house. Parlor, dining room, and second floor drawing room all were used concurrently, with silk-gowned guests swishing from room to passage to room over the course of an elegant evening.

If the Cambridge Street house represents an early attempt to accommodate this novel form of entertaining in an old-fashioned plan, Otis' 1806 house on Beacon Street, the third designed for him by Bulfinch, is a more fully realized version of the London model. Like the first Otis house, it is designed for elaborate entertaining. Here, however, the passage is demoted to its more prosaic role as ordinary circulation. It provides access to the principal rooms, but is not a formal component of the circuit through them. The three main entertaining rooms—two parlors and an oval drawing room—are all connected directly and sit on the second floor, elevated above the street (Figures 33, 34).

Eliza Susan Quincy's description of a party in the house, thrown in 1817 to celebrate President Monroe's visit to Boston, captures some of the novelty of this plan, as well as the theatrical qualities that such an arrangement of rooms was meant to facilitate:

> The windows of the house were all open and as we waited in Beacon Street for the carriage to get up to the door we had a view of the apartments--three drawing rooms opening into each other. Mrs. Otis received us at the door of the third, a room with a bow in the garden, toward Mr. Sears's house…The company were assembled when suddenly the door of the bow room was thrown open and Mr. Otis in a loud voice said, 'Ladies and gentlemen, the President of the United

> States… The crowd was great both within and without the mansion. I passed a most amusing evening, walking about the rooms, talking to the beaux and belles and listening to Mr. Monroe's conversation.[218]

Not every Bostonian, of course, needed a house in which to fête sitting presidents. Still, the fashion for connected entertaining rooms took hold in American cities in the first decades of the nineteenth century.[219] Double parlors were the heart of the new arrangement, whose irreducible core was a pair of connected reception rooms with wide double doors between them. In the country as well as the city, they allowed for domestic entertainments like music and dancing on a greater scale than what was possible in older, more segregated layouts. In 1823, an evening in Hallowell, Maine, passed in

> two parlors which opened into one by means of folding doors, when I went in there were about 50 young ladies and gentlemen, after we had been there 1--2 hours the folding doors were thrown open & we were desired to walk into the other parlor, where the carpet had been previously taken up, the other carpet was speedily removed & we commenced dancing to the sound of a violin and clarionet, we danced until 1/2 past nine…[220]

---

[218] M. A. De Wolfe Howe, *The Articulate Sisters; Passages from Journals and Letters of the Daughters of President Josiah Quincy of Harvard University* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1946), 19–20.

[219] For the distribution of the attached double parlor around the southeast in this period, see Willie Graham and Mark R. Wenger, "Battersea and the Double Parlor in Early America" (Vernacular Architecture Forum Annual Meeting, Lexington, Kentucky, 1990). The Ezekiel Hersey Derby House in Salem, Masachusetts, designed by Bulfinch and Samuel McIntire, was one of the first, in 1800, and Alexander Parris included double parlors in his 1811 design for the Virginia governor's mansion in Richmond, overlooking a rear garden. One of the first double parlors in Savannah was at the Isaiah Davenport house, completed in 1821.

[220] Cited in Nylander, *Our Own Snug Fireside*, 257.

Appendix A As important, they also accommodated perfectly an essential quality of fashionable parties in this period, the element of surprise and drama embodied in Eliza Quincy's description of the event in the Otis house: as she put it, "suddenly the door of the bow room was thrown open." Attending a dinner in New Orleans in 1826, the Duke of Saxe-Weimar Eisnach recalled the moment when "after the second course, large folding doors opened and we beheld another dining room, in which stood a table with the dessert."[221] Contemporary accounts repeatedly describe this moment of surprise and delight when doors were opened and some great attraction was revealed: a brilliantly illuminated room set up for dancing; a grand display of desserts; a featured guest; or an outrageous costume, like the one memorably described by another Quincy sister: "[a]t last through the folding doors appears Mrs. Inglis with a thing upon her head which can only be compared to the Egyptian paintings on Sarcophagi."[222]

In the same year that Bulfinch designed the third Otis house, he was also putting up a nearby row which accommodated this style of entertaining in a more compact footprint. The Park Street houses are impressive, at four bays wide and four full stories tall, though they lack the overt classical pretentions that distinguish many of Bulfinch's houses of the 1790s. The interiors have been remodeled extensively, though a surviving set of Bulfinch drawings illustrates the plan on all four levels. In plan and finish, they are similar to the surviving half of the contemporary double house at 87-89 Mount Vernon Street.

---

[221] Cited in Elisabeth Donaghy Garrett, *At Home: The American Family, 1750-1870* (New York: H. N. Abrams, 1990), 91.

[222] Howe, *The Articulate Sisters*, 197.

As at the third Otis house, their width allows the stair to be pushed to the back of the passage and both principal public rooms to be brought forward to face the street—and, in this case, the prospect of Boston Common (Figure 65). On the ground floor are a large kitchen at the rear and a smaller room at the front that Bulfinch designated as an office. The main public reception rooms and the social core of the house are the pair of connected parlors at the front on the second floor. At eighteen by twenty-four feet, these are each the same size as Hancock's best room. The parlors are accessible directly from the principal stair landing and are connected to each other by a wide opening in the partition wall. Neither one is directly accessible from the secondary stair, so domestic workers must have passed through the same doors as the public to serve these rooms. Both rooms are accessible from the principal stair, which winds up in a skylit passage. In the opposite corner, a rob light in the partition illuminates what was surely a pantry to serve the parlors. Bulfinch's plans do not identify a function for the third little heated room off the stair but this is likely a library, as it is at 87 Mount Vernon.

Large houses of the 1790s adapted traditional Georgian layouts to new forms of domestic socializing but after about 1800 gentry builders wanted a suite of at least two connected reception rooms, and this requirement demanded new approaches to domestic planning. In this period, the essential core of a refined town house was a set of double parlors, open to one another and to the stair passage, permitting the free and easy movement of guests during entertaining as well as, with the double doors closed, less expansive accommodations for more intimate socializing. Humphry Repton, the English designer and author, describes the appeal of this fashion:

> In magnificent town houses we expect a suite of rooms, opening by folding doors, for the reception of…large parties…The most recent

> modern costume [sic] is, to use the library as the general living-room; and that sort of state-room, formerly called the best parlour, and of late years the drawing-room, is now generally found a melancholy apartment, when entirely shut up…but if such a room opens into one adjoining, and the two are fitted up with the same carpet, curtains, &c. they then become in some degree one room.[223]

Repton's readers had determined that one large public room, like Hancock's or Bulfinch's, was no longer sufficient for the modern style of polite socializing, with its requirements for surprise and theatrics. And so in Boston and its cosmopolitan Atlantic counterparts, fashionable houses of the first two decades of the nineteenth century were laid out with a richly ornamented, connected suite of reception rooms like those at Park Row and the third Otis house. But double parlors were also fitted into narrower, three-bay row houses by arranging them alongside a long passage, front-to-back. 13-17 Chestnut Street shows how this form was accommodated on smaller lots, with two spacious heated rooms on each floor alongside a generous passage with two staircases (Figure 43). Finishes in these parlors are second only to Beacon Hill's grandest mansions of the period. Significantly, they are identical; unlike at Hancock's mansion, or even the first Harrison Gray Otis House, there is no hierarchical distinction made between the principal public rooms. This equivalence was an important quality of double parlors in the first quarter of the nineteenth century and one which distinguishes such houses from their colonial-era counterparts, whose finely graded differences communicated relative status and appropriate functions for each.[224]

---

[223] Humphry Repton, *Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening* (London: T. Bensley & son for J. Taylor, 1816), 54.

[224] For a thorough examination of the way that refinement and hierarchy were communicated in eighteenth-century houses through gradations of interior finish, see

13-17 Chestnut Street stand as proxies for other stylish double parlor houses in Boston in this period. Though this form was popular, and though it is the type most commonly associated with elite domestic life in Anglo-Atlantic cities after 1800, for many urban dwellers, even among Harrison Gray Otis's peers, old preferences for more segregated layouts persisted. The center stair at 55 Mount Vernon, for example, allowed for spacious parlors at the front and rear of the house, but precluded the direct communication between them that characterized the sort of planning described by Repton. There, a kitchen and dining room occupy the ground floor, with two parlors on the second, and chambers above. Following the old manner of distinguishing the status of public rooms through finish, the finest mantel is in the front parlor, the next best in the rear parlor, while there are plainer surrounds in the ground floor dining room and bed chambers upstairs. Unlike side passage plans, the center stair passage segregates parlor from parlor and parlor from kitchen, controlling access to each room through a single door. In more modest houses of the first decades of the nineteenth century, this continued to be the favored arrangement, consuming relatively little floor area for public circulation and keeping principal rooms separate and visually distinct.

If the side passage, double parlor plan dominates the literature on early urban housing, this is likely because it did indeed become ubiquitous in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the quintessential urban form for polite houses.[225] This

---

Willie Graham's chapter on interiors in Carson and Lounsbury, *The Chesapeake House*, 312–347.

[225] For the importance of this form in England, see Summerson, *Georgian London*. Summerson associates the form with the speculative redevelopment of London after the Great Fire of 1666 but other scholars have revised his chronology, observing that the popularity of older forms of housing long continued, particularly in outlying parts of the city. See McKellar, *The Birth of Modern London*; Herman, *Town House*. The

coincided with the end of the era of mansion building on Beacon Hill, and the start of a more intensive phase of its development, with speculators throwing up streets of attached row houses. The era of speculative construction began in the 1820s with the adaptation of center-passage layouts, followed by the nearly universal adoption of side-passage, double-parlor plans beginning in the 1830s. Double parlors continued to be used for fashionable parties among the gentry but in the 1830s and '40s, as they became more commonplace, their social role changed. Increasingly, a pair of public rooms, open to one another, was understood to be the core of a respectable, middling house. As its importance as part of the machinery for fashionable entertaining receded, the double parlor in more modest houses was becoming the center of urban domesticity—the principal site of middling family life.

This trend was not confined to Boston. The connected double parlor was adopted in major coastal cities from New York and Baltimore down to Savannah. Frances Trollope, visiting New York in 1832, thought it was ubiquitous to the point of tedium. "The great defect in the houses is their extreme uniformity—when you have seen one, you have seen all…In nearly all the houses the dining and drawing-rooms are on the same floor, with ample folding doors between them; when thrown together they certainly make a very noble apartment."[226] 101-105 East Oglethorpe Street in Savannah is a remarkably intact pair from 1822 that illustrates its wide distribution

---

side passage type was called a "town house" in Murtagh's article on Philadelphia, and he noted that this was the only form to have received serious scholarly attention. Murtagh, "The Philadelphia Row House," 12.

[226] Frances Milton Trollope, *Domestic Manners of the Americans*, 4th ed., vol. 2 (London: Printed for Whittaker, Treacher, 1832), 193.

throughout the eastern United States (Figure 66). These houses locate the parlors on the first floor, raised eight steps from the street above a cellar. There are two levels of chambers above. The partially excavated cellar contains a kitchen at the rear and a dark but plastered room at the front, conceivably a laundry or a servants' hall. The parlors are fitted with black marble mantels and open to one another by means of a pair of double doors (Figure 67). The doors are finished with symmetrical casings with carved corner blocks, and the cornice in both rooms is treated similarly, with rosettes in the corners, but made of plaster. Unlike contemporary Boston houses with a similarly high level of finish, there is just a single staircase running through all four floors, and this is pushed to the rear of the passage, allowing a deep entryway to be partitioned off from the stair on the parlor level. This partition conceals private movement on the stairs from view in the entry but it also inhibits the free movement of guests through the principal public rooms. The lack of access to both parlors from the stair passage distinguishes this later phase of development from its earliest manifestations, in which inter-connectedness between rooms and circulation space was critical to their proper functioning.

Beginning in the 1830s, the side-passage, double parlor plan appeared in the countryside, too, even where density did not demand it—Ritchie Garrison describes the double parlor houses built by Calvin Stearns in Northfield, Massachusetts, in the 1840s[227] and similar houses appear throughout rural tidewater, Virginia (Figure 68). Of course the side-passage, double parlor plan functioned differently in these different contexts—the provision of dining and domestic service varied, for example, as did the

---

[227] J. Ritchie Garrison, *Two Carpenters: Architecture and Building in Early New England, 1799-1859* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006), 93–108.

level of finish. But whether urban or rural, northern or southern, such houses are united by a clear and widespread preference for large, flexible, open expanses of sociable domestic space.

Some polite builders of double-parlor houses on Beacon Hill likely valued this plan's associations with Federal-era gentility and with the work of the Mount Vernon Proprietors. Many, like their Federal-era models, were large, finely finished, and well provisioned for domestic entertainments. The largest, like 33 Beacon Street, showed a kinship with their early-national neighbors with elegant neoclassical mantels of carved marble, large second-floor parlors, and two levels of bedchambers above (Figure 69). Such impressive double parlor houses, built on speculation, gave wealthy householders an opportunity to avoid the "pretty troublesome job" that preoccupied Nathan Appleton as he worked with an architect, builder, and subcontractors to get his own house completed.[228]

A very small number of Beacon Hill householders in this period did choose, nonetheless, to enlist the help of an architect to build exceptionally refined double parlor houses. Adam W. Thaxter, Junior, hired Edward Shaw in 1837 to design the large, extravagantly finished double-parlor row house at 59 Mount Vernon Street (Figure 70). Adam Thaxter was a thirty-two-year-old merchant who had established a partnership with John D. Bates in 1830. Like his predecessors in the Mount Vernon Proprietors, he was active in Boston politics, though unlike them, his allegiances were Democratic and he never held public office. In an 1858 profile, he was praised as a

---

[228] Nathan Appleton to Samuel Appleton, June 1809, Nathan Appleton Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, cited in Fox, "Nathan Appleton's Beacon Street Houses," 115.

model merchant—a hard-working "representative man of his class."[229] At over 7,500 square feet on five finished floors, it is one of the largest houses on Beacon Hill and it is fitting that it was built on the site of the demolished Jonathan Mason mansion. With its suite of four spacious reception rooms—a ground floor drawing and dining room and two second floor parlors—it is a house that looks backwards to the era of elaborate, multi-room entertaining practiced by the Proprietors and their peers a generation earlier. But with its narrow end to the street and decorated with elaborate Greek Revival ornament, it clearly belongs to the era of the row house. Like its more modest contemporaries, its front is built of smooth, even-toned face brick, with sandstone sills and lintels decorating the windows. The front is enlivened by three bright marble panels above the parlor-level windows, and is capped by a deep cornice decorated with acanthus wreaths. A shallow projecting bow reveals the location of the superior rooms on each floor and adds a spatial flourish common to the best Boston row houses of this era.

Like the early Beacon Hill mansions on Beacon Street and Mount Vernon, as well as the most pretentious row houses like 13-17 Chestnut, entry from the street is up just four granite steps, here, through an elegant portico. With twin marble Ionic columns *in antis,* this is the most impressive frontispiece on Beacon Hill. Beyond a modest vestibule, a grand, sky-lit circular stair rises through all four finished floors. Just off the entry at the front of passage is the large drawing room, ringed by Ionic pilasters and a full entablature (Figure 71). Its front and rear walls are bowed, with the walls of the closets curved to match the front wall (Figure 72). With its pilastered

---

[229] "Adam Wallace Thaxter, Jr., Esq.," *Ballou's Pictorial Drawing Room Companion*, February 28, 1857.

walls, pedimented door casings and a black marble mantel, the front drawing room is the best room on this level. Behind it sits a nearly square dining room with a smaller bow overlooking the rear yard. Its relatively plain symmetrical door surrounds and modest crown molding suggest that this room is secondary to the one that adjoins it in the front, and its location away from the grand public stair suggests that it was set aside for family dining. The passage off of the dining room, behind the circular stair, constitutes a secondary circulation center for the house. It consists of a passageway, a rear staircase, a now-blocked rear entry, and a door to the kitchen wing. Two doors lead to the dining room from the rear passage: one at the foot of the back stair; the other, adjoining the 1837 kitchen, from the vestibule at the rear entry. From the rear entry, a dark passage led to the rear stables and storage rooms at the back of the lot. Behind this vestibule is the long rear ell, whose dimensions are larger than the entire footprint of 75 West Cedar Street. It contains service rooms on the ground floor and a pair of chambers above. Originally, a large kitchen sat at the front of the ell, near the dining room. Behind it sat a small wash room with a door to the service yard and access to rear privies at the back of the ell. In 1852, this part of the house and the adjoining passage were significantly reconfigured.

On the level above, double parlors, the principal public rooms in the house, occupied most of the finished space (Figure 73). With the drawing room below, they form an elegant suite of three refined public rooms on two levels, similar to the suite of reception spaces at the first Harrison Gray Otis House. These are decorated similarly to the drawing room below, though without the pilaster colonnade along the walls. The full entablature in both parlors, the elaborate door casings, and the mahogany door leaves, also shared with the drawing room below, make it clear that

these rooms were meant to work together as an elegant ensemble. The three rooms are all reached from the front passage and circular stair, which is nearly centered on the partition between the parlors on this floor, allowing for the easy movement of guests between all three rooms. With its exceptional façade and grand interior finishes, 59 Mount Vernon is the most elaborate essay in Greek Revival finish on Beacon Hill and its most impressively decorated row house of any period.

Sharing the second floor with the parlors in 1837 were a series of spaces with a less public purpose: a small library over the entry and a small chamber behind the back stair, both heated. In 1852, with the reconfiguration of the ell and the addition of a second floor above the work rooms, the rear chamber was altered. It was during these renovations that an indoor bathing room was added to the third floor, in the little room behind the rear stair, just four years after the nearby reservoir behind the State House was filled for the first time.[230]

59 Mount Vernon Street is the most elaborate of the side passage, double-parlor houses on Beacon Hill. Though not as outwardly pretentious as the great mansions of the Bulfinch era, it is entirely as large, with equally expansive provisions for domestic service. Its second floor nearly duplicates the parlor levels of Park Row and 87 Mount Vernon, turned ninety degrees to orient its narrow end toward the street. With its addition of a ground floor reception room and a rear dining room, it provides additional public space for entertaining in the style of Otis and Mason. It shows, in short, how one might accommodate Federal-era socializing in a narrower row-house footprint. By 1837, however, there was little demand for such extraordinary housing

---

[230] Michael Rawson, *Eden on the Charles: The Making of Boston* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011), 75–128.

on Beacon Hill. More typical of the polite housing of the 1830s and ‘40s is the row built directly behind 33 Beacon Street on Mount Vernon Place (Figure 74). Half of these were demolished for the enlargement of the Massachusetts State house but 5-8 remain, in altered form. Both the Mount Vernon Place houses and 32-34 Beacon Street were built on land bought from the heirs of John Hancock in 1821 and subsequently subdivided.[231] George Lyman built 7 Mount Vernon Place in 1833. At forty-five feet deep and thirty-two feet across, it is large enough to permit an eleven-foot-wide side passage alongside a pair of generous back-to-back rooms. Unlike the largest double-parlor houses, such as 59 Mount Vernon and 33 Beacon Street, the parlors sit on the ground floor. Entry is up five granite steps into a small lobby, beyond which is the broad passage. From here, a circular stair sweeps up to the second floor, where it stops. A rear service stair, accessible from the back of the passage, winds from the cellar through all three principal floors and to the attic. Three doors lead off the first floor passage: one to the back stair and the little room behind it; one to the front parlor; and the third to the rear parlor. Between the parlor doors in the passage stands a grand, gilt mirror on a marble shelf (Figure 75). It extends nearly from floor to ceiling and is aligned with the staircase, permitting appearances to be checked on the trip downstairs from the best chamber. The plaster cornice is a simple Greek ovolo and the door casings are symmetrical with pyramidal corner blocks.

The parlors have matching, richly veined black marble mantels, with simple pilaster capitals and pyramidal panels in the sides and corners. Both rooms have tall, molded baseboards and deep plaster cornices that are more complex than the simple

---

[231] Chamberlain, *Beacon Hill*, 149–151.

one in the passage. Doors in both rooms are cased like those in the passage, with symmetrical architraves and pyramidal corner blocks. Sometime before 1852, this house was enlarged with a rear ell, permitting the old front parlor to be converted to a dining room and making the large room in the new ell the new best parlor, accessible from the old back parlor.[232] It was improved to provide the house with a polite core of double parlors and a separate dining room.

Though smaller still, 74 Pinckney Street exemplifies the side-passage, double-parlor form that came to predominate on Beacon Hill in the second quarter of the nineteenth century, as it was originally built with all three of the essential polite spaces: paired parlors and a dining room. At twenty-one by thirty-three feet on three full stories, it is large enough to permit generous, full sized parlors on the second floor and a separate service stair (Figure 76). Built in 1829, it lacks the grand scale and pretentious finishes of 59 Mount Vernon or 13-17 Chestnut Street, but it follows a very similar plan, with second floor double parlors above a dining room and kitchen. Outwardly, like even the most refined houses built on Beacon Hill after 1820, it is restrained, with a façade of red face brick laid in common bond, a brick cornice, sandstone sills and lintels, and a cut granite foundation.

Entrance is up three steps into a short passage, with an eleven by fifteen foot heated dining room to the side. Behind the dining room is the kitchen and a rear service passage, though the partition dividing the service stair from the kitchen was removed in a modern renovation. The principal stair rises to a passage on the second

---

[232] The opening between the original parlors is no longer visible in no. 7 but it does appear on floor plans prepared of 8 Mount Vernon Place for the Unitarian-Universalist Association in 1994.

floor, which gives access to the front parlor as well as a little unheated room over the entry. The back parlor was originally accessible from the front room and the back passage, but not from the front passage—an important difference from earlier layouts oriented to entertaining. The second floor extends out over a right-of-way to permit the pair of parlors on this level to be wider than the heated rooms below, making the parlors a relatively generous fourteen by fifteen feet each, roughly half the size, however, of those in Park Row. Both rooms are fitted with identical black marble mantels and lit by a pair of tall sash windows set in splayed jambs (Figure 77).

The building contract for 74 Pinckney Street notes that the house was built by Amos Perrin and Phineas S. Weeks for Hollis Chapin, after a plan by John Kutts. Chapin likely required a plan to be drawn because the house was built in a period in which variants of center-stair plans continued to predominate on Beacon Hill. In addition to its specification of a relatively novel layout, the contract reveals careful attention to the hierarchy of spaces, in broad terms, as well as economy. Most specifications applied to an entire floor, so that parlors were treated alike and chambers all identically. Chimney-pieces, for example, were to be marble in the parlors, "worth 90 to 100 dollars a pair," but "imitation marble" in the dining room and "proper wooden ones in the 3rd story." The specifications say nothing about the shape of molding profiles or the appearance of mantels, except to note their material, dimensions, and something of their relative quality: "fancy architraves" in the parlors and dining room; "single architraves" on the other floors, with "plinths and base to each room to correspond to the other finish."[233]

---

[233] Suffolk County Deeds, "Building Contract for 74 Pinckney Street," October 5, 1829, bk. 341, f. 85.

A more compact version of the double parlor plan was used at 102 Mount Vernon Street (Figure 78). It lacks a separate dining room and locates the parlors on the ground floor; nonetheless, its best rooms are treated with elaborate, expressive Greek Revival ornament. Like 7 Mount Vernon Place, it was built in the early 1830s with three full stories above a basement. Much narrower, at twenty-two feet wide, it is also laid out on a side-passage, double parlor plan with the principal stair pulled to the front of the passage, to allow room for a secondary stair to rise behind. With entry up six steps onto the parlor level, its public rooms sit relatively close to the street but they are very well ornamented. The doors into the parlors are cased with rich Greek Revival surrounds, with Corinthian pilasters supporting a tall entablature (Figure 79). Inside the parlors, deep plaster cornices and tall baseboards surround the rooms, while the windows and the wide opening between the rooms are also cased with pilasters matching the treatment of the doors. As at 74 Pinckney Street, the principal stair is pushed forward in the passage, prohibiting access to the rear parlor from the front passage, making the rear room convenient as a family dining room but less ideal for genteel entertaining. The rear parlor is directly accessible from the back stair passage, which provided access to the kitchen below. Above the first floor, the cornice drops away in the principal rooms, and the elaborate door surrounds are replaced by conventional symmetrical casings. This moderately scaled but well finished house illustrates the widespread adoption of double parlors far beyond the stylish and expensive Swan houses at 13-17 Chestnut Street. At the same time, with a rear parlor that was inaccessible from the front passage, it did not accommodate well the kind of fashionable entertaining held at the Otis House or 59 Mount Vernon, with a circuit of guests processing through the rooms and double doors flung open to announce the

dessert course. Although the expensive, refined finishes at 102 Mount Vernon Street and 7 Mount Vernon Place might imply that the double parlor houses of the 1830s were designed for elegant entertaining, the common location of the principal reception rooms on the ground floor and lack of public access to the rear parlor suggest a new role for these spaces, not one requiring separation from the street and devoted to the easy circulation of guests but one suited to more domestic, private socializing.

One role for double parlors in this period, facilitated by their openness and large scale, was to host private functions, including meetings of social clubs and associations, as well as more leisured events like wedding rehearsals and opera concerts. The Associated Housewrights, for example, convened at the Cambridge Street home of builder Thomas Waldron Sumner. And when a mob drove the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society from their headquarters, they, too, re-convened at Maria Weston Chapman's house.[234] Their expansive scale could provide occasion for comedy, as in a story in *Godey's Lady's Book* in which a country bumpkin used her host's double parlors and passage as a jogging track, taking her morning exercise by running laps.[235] The static character of meetings and concerts that they now hosted,

---

[234] Associated Housewrights Society Records, 1804-1837, in Massachusetts Charitable Mechanic Association Records, Massachusetts Historical Society. Debra Gold Hansen, *Strained Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 4–6.

[235] Miss Leslie, "Nothing Morally Wrong," *Godey's Lady's Book*, July 1849. Many stories in *Godey's* outline the pleasures and vicissitudes of urban living: sisters sit in their parlor window watching a new neighbor move in and tabulating their possessions; a nervous woman is agitated by the noise of a nearby well, until its owners install quieter, modern plumbing; an uncouth guest flings open the sash in the front parlor, admitting great plumes of dust from passing omnibuses. Despite a professed preference for rural or suburban living, much antebellum prescriptive literature acknowledged that its readership remained predominantly urban and well

with seated assemblies ranged in orderly rows, was very different from the more active, animated, and fluid quality of the parties hosted by Otis and his peers, which involved circulating through rooms while conversing, eating, drinking, and dancing. The *Godey's* story draws its humor from a new understanding of the role of double parlors. They were certainly not for making circuits through the house, whether for exercising or socializing. The parlors, and the life they now hosted, had stopped moving.

As this new role was being negotiated, some domestic theorists proposed that old notions of parlor decorum should give way to new attitudes that preferred practical comfort to a waxed and polished formality. Though in 1800, "parlor" might have denoted a best room set aside for receiving guests, by mid-century it was understood as the space both in which guests were entertained and in which the family would pass its leisure time. It was the material heart of the antebellum urban home.[236] For many, the parlor of old had become a place whose rules of personal comportment could be seen as painfully restrictive. "Family Portraits," a story published in *Godey's*, described the tension between a young wife, Mrs. Seth Grovner, and the excessive

---

attuned to the rhythms of life in a city parlor. A regular column in *Godey's Lady's Book*, e.g., followed the trials of a young wife maintaining a modest home in Philadelphia. She and her husband briefly attempt to relocate to a nearby suburb, "at a convenient distance" from the city, but find that any benefits from making such a move are far outweighed by countless irritations—visitors who plunder their vegetable garden, servants who leave to be closer to friends in the city. These were later collected as Timothy Shay Arthur, *Trials and Confessions of a Housekeeper* (Philadelphia: J. W. Bradley, 1859).

[236] Bushman, *The Refinement of America*, 267–272; Katherine C. Grier, *Culture and Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle Class Identity* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 1997).

formality of her ambitious sisters-in-law as they passed the evenings together in the family home.

> It required all her amiability to give up the slippered ease and dressing-gown comfort of her own room, twice or thrice every morning…in answer to a summons from the parlor…Mrs. Seth wearied of…the restraint of evenings passed in the back parlor, with her two sisters, when her husband read the newspapers, or played chess with Miss Sarah…while she, poor girl! who did not play chess, and detested fancy work, was not expected to read, and felt herself 'checked,' whether the players were or not, at any attempt at sprightly conversation.

Mrs. Seth longed instead for "a modern house, in a new street, with furniture that could be moved from one side of the room to the other, if occasion required it, and entirely lacking the hue and the polish of that remote period to which their own claw-footed tables and sideboards belonged."[237]

The author of "Family Portraits" attributed much of the discomfort of the back parlor to the restraint imposed by old-fashioned codes of decorum that demanded sociability. Its protagonist supposed that the problem could be solved with some modern furniture but the source of her trouble was not antique tables. It was being under the gaze of her watchful sisters. In a house with double parlors, Mrs. Seth could not disappear to the library, nor was she at liberty to sit in the front parlor to read in private. The connection of the two principal rooms in a smaller house like 74 Pinckney Street brought the public realm of the house together in a single open space in a manner that made Mrs. Seth resent the "summons from the parlor," where her behavior would be monitored and checked. In a similar way, Ellen Wayles Randolph Coolidge, newly married to Joseph Coolidge, Junior, in 1825, felt acutely the ways in

---

[237] The Author of "Getting into Society," "Family Portraits," *Godey's Lady's Book*, May 1855, 412.

which she was under the scrutiny of her new family. The granddaughter of Thomas Jefferson, Ellen Coolidge found gentry social life in Boston to be very different from that of Virginia and struggled with the adjustment, as a poignant, homesick letter to her mother reveals.

> [W]hen I get into a house of my own I shall then become mistress of my time & no longer live in the state of perpetual constraint which I feel under, here. I fear it will take me a long time to get reconciled to the habits, manners & customs of my new country-men. I move like one who is fettered in every limb. The perpetual fear of violating some established custom rule, of sinning against the rules, laws of propriety as they are established [and] understood here, hangs like a dark cloud over me. I tremble at every look or word which conveys the most distant hint of difference of opinion, & the precision & formality of every thing around me perpetually reminds me that my path is beset with stumbling blocks & rocks of offence over which that I shall stumble or…fall is…my dread by day, my dream by night.[238]

Like Mrs. Seth, she pined for a place of her own where she would be the one setting the rules. The careful monitoring of behavior under which the young Mrs. Coolidge struggled was enabled in the public drawing rooms of Boston's early mansions but the sphere of family management and correction was enlarged through the provision of attached parlors.

Domestic surveillance became an important role for attached parlors in the antebellum decades.[239] But in addition to serving as the theater for polite domesticity, double parlors also operated rhetorically. Like Mrs. Seth, Professor W. H. Barnes thought that the restraint and high formality that characterized older uses of the parlor

---

[238] Ellen Wayles Randolph Coolidge to Martha Jefferson Randolph, August 1825, Ellen Wayles Randolph Coolidge Letters, University of Virginia.

[239] Anna Vemer Andrzejewski, *Building Power: Architecture and Surveillance in Victorian America* (Knoxville: Univeristy of Tennessee Press, 2008).

was lamentable. In his "Homily on Homes," he argued strenuously against keeping a "best room" set apart for occasional use in the manner described by Susan Bulfinch Lyman.

> In order that a building be as useful as it should be, the best portion should be occupied by the family. In many small houses "the parlor" is kept locked week after week waiting for visitors who never come, while the family, for whose convenience the house is supposed to stand, lives continually in a narrow back room or cellar kitchen. The *best room* of some careful housewives is never opened, except to receive its regular weekly cleaning.[240]

Instead of setting aside a formal best room, therefore, Professor Barnes urged his Christian readers to build houses that were "frank and truthful, 'without hypocrisy.'"[241] Opening the best room only for company was not only wasteful, it was hypocritical. Making the best room more suitable for regular use, and open at all times, was a more honest representation of the household to itself and to company. This concern with truthfulness in architecture echoes Andrew Jackson Downing's insistence that a house should represent the status and occupation of its owner but it also illustrates a deep fear of hypocrisy in antebellum America that Karen Halttunnen has described as a "cult of sincerity."[242] As Halttunen points out, polite men and women were urged not only to be sincere but to *seem* sincere—as she puts it, "proper conduct was to demonstrate above all a perfect sincerity or 'transparency' of character." She argues that the urban parlor, with its elaborate rituals, was the

---

[240] Barnes, "A Homily on Homes," 619.

[241] Ibid.

[242] Andrew Jackson Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses* (New York: D. Appleton, 1851); Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*.

principal site in which this transparency was enacted for the effective feminine defense against the onslaught of urban hypocrisy.[243] But the parlor was not only the site where sincerity was performed; the parlor itself, by opening the principal family spaces of the house to public display, enacted this new concern for sincerity.

As the double parlor became an essential component of urban domesticity, it formed the core of even the smaller houses built on Beacon Hill in the 1830s and 40s. The scale and interior finishes of 28 Garden Street are of a lower order than 102 Mount Vernon and a step further removed from the fashionable double parlors of Bulfinch's era (Figure 80). Still, this house shows that Boston's builders continued to prefer such arrangements, even where small lot sizes would seem poorly suited to them. It also illustrates how firmly the new conception of the domestic parlor took hold in the second quarter of the nineteenth century. 28 Garden Street was built in the late 1830s, contemporary with 102 Mount Vernon, with a façade of smooth machine-pressed brick laid in common bond with struck mortar joints. Like many Beacon Hill houses of its era, the sole ornamental flourishes on the exterior are a shallow, cast-iron balcony at the second floor and a brick cornice. Door and window lintels are plain cut stone. With only one full floor of bed chambers, the house is three stories tall, eighteen feet wide and thirty feet deep, with a shallow yard in the rear and no ell.

Inside, the house is the side-passage, double pile plan that forms the core of most of Beacon Hill's antebellum houses (Figure 81). The entry, up a short rise of five wooden steps, opens into a five-foot wide passage. To the right of the entry is a ten by thirteen-and-a-half-foot dining room, behind which is the kitchen. On the second floor

---

[243] Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women*, xvi.

are the back-to-back parlors, which open to one another through a pair of pocket doors (Figure 82). Like both 9 and 75 West Cedar Street, the stair winds through the upper floors at the rear of the house, compressing the back parlor while allowing the front parlor to extend over the width of the house. It is five feet wider than the back room, which is a compact ten feet nine inches by thirteen feet six. Despite this asymmetry in plan, they are open to one another in the manner of larger houses and are the best-finished spaces in the house, with a shallow cornice and identical black marble mantels. These rooms have many of the characteristics of earlier double parlors: wide openings linking them together, fitted with double doors, identical refined finishes, and elevation above the street level. But the relatively small rear parlor, coupled with the constrained size of the stair passage, suggests that the role of the parlors within the house and Boston's social life, generally, has changed. While this is a house with a full complement of respectable spaces—kitchen and dining room and double parlors—its constrained dimensions are not at all equipped for the sort of entertaining that houses like Park Row were designed to accommodate. At 28 Garden Street, the parlors have been thoroughly domesticated.

This new approach to parlors, in which openness, sincerity, and equivalence of finish were the qualities sought, more than sociable drama, was not restricted to smaller houses. The clearest indication that the parlors had a new, more domesticated function comes in one of the largest houses to be built on Beacon Hill in this period, 13 Temple Street (Figure 83). Here, there is no possibility that the double parlor could animate an evening's entertainment with a dramatic flinging open of doors. Its parlors are, as elsewhere, decorated identically, with the same black marble mantels, the same plaster ceiling medallions, and the same door and window surrounds. What is different

here is that the partition between the parlors has been dispensed with entirely (Figure 84). As the center ceiling medallion and the single door centered in the principal stair passage indicate, there has never been a wall between these two rooms. The parlors extend the entire thirty-six-foot depth of the main block of the house, as one enormous, unbroken space. There is no surprise here, no hiding in the parlors at 13 Temple Street. Mrs. Seth and young Mrs. Coolidge alike would have felt themselves uncomfortably exposed to the scrutiny of their new families in this expansive, open room.

Nor was the monitoring of daily domestic life confined within the walls of the parlors. As this house illustrates most forcefully, the quality that most distinguishes the antebellum double parlor plan from its colonial and Federal-era antecedents is its permeability. With multiple doors to the stair passage, an opening in the partition, and windows at their front and rear, antebellum parlors were open to the house and its yard in a way that earlier parlors, such as those at the first Otis House or 55 Mount Vernon, were not (Figure 85). From these rooms, the rear yard may be seen, smelled, and heard, while street life is laid bare in the front. At the same time, visitors in the entry can assess the company in the room above just as readily as their arrival is perceived. Curious neighbors can monitor the traffic to and within nearby houses. In fact, in Beacon Hill's narrowest courts, the alignment of front windows permits a direct line of sight clear across the parlors of opposing houses. Most of all, of course, the front and rear parlors were open to each other.

The experience of this permeability is rendered in contemporary literature through a variety of devices. An exchange overheard in the entry, a strange smell drifting up from the kitchen, or a furtive glimpse caught of a visitor at the front door

all convey a sense of the parlor as a place from which the daily universe of the house is apprehended. The heroine of *Trials and Confessions of a Housekeeper* first learns of a disaster in the kitchen from the aroma of her burnt puddings. A *Godey's* story about the shamefulness of greed opens with a busybody neighbor sitting in her parlor, surreptitiously accounting the flow of gifts into the house across the street: "'Another present for the bride; a large white box, from Glenn's, I should say; but I can't make it out exactly'...'That's twenty-three parcels I've counted.'"[244] The porous nature of this main public space permitted it to be a place from which one monitors the house but, equally, a space open to observation. Although its transparency might enable neighbors, as well as servants, to spy and eavesdrop, the polite, moral household welcomed such scrutiny.

The open double parlor was, in this sense, an architectural performance of sincerity. Combining an informal family room with the best parlor and opening them to one another elided any distinction between comfortable, family living and a gentility performed for polite guests. Even where the back parlor retained associations with family informality and the front with polite, public formality, their spatial linkage suggested that polite behavior was not a public show but the natural state of the family. Indeed, the expansion of the parlor to encompass family living areas only meant that the formal behaviors that might once have been confined to a single room, set physically apart and only performed for company on select occasions, would now be called for everywhere, even in the most "comfortable" part of the house.

---

[244] Alice B. Neal, "Bridal Presents," *Godey's Lady's Book*, June 1855, 509.

In the development of this new role for the parlor, it is possible to see the urban house becoming a home, a locus of early Victorian ideals of domesticity. But another figure embraced the double-parlor plan in this period, one less concerned with the proper deportment of children and husbands, and that is the landlord, putting up rows upon rows of tenements for Boston's poorer residents in the 1840s and '50s (Figure 86). If Harrison Gray Otis and Charles Bulfinch are the presiding spirits of the first, genteel phase of double-parlor construction, and *Godey's Lady's Book* of the second, the third phase was the province of men like George Parkman, whose penny pinching and determined rent-collecting threw his tenant John White Webster into a murderous rage.[245] The landlord loved the double parlor plan, too.

If 102 Mount Vernon and 7 Mount Vernon Place illustrate the middling range of the double parlor plan of the antebellum decades, with large double parlors on the ground floor, cellar kitchens, and separate service stairs, 2 Bellingham Place shows the smallest and most modestly finished version of the type (Figure 87). Built about a decade later, around 1843, it is an important relic of the speculative building boom on the north slope of Beacon Hill that saw developers throwing up short rows on every available scrap of land. The three houses that comprise this cul-de-sac off of Revere Street are less than eighteen feet wide and twenty-eight feet deep each, only slightly larger than 75 West Cedar. They share a common plan, with a narrow side stair passage alongside a pair of heated rooms on two floors and a habitable attic and cellar (Figure 88). Number two adds an eight by eleven-foot frame ell at the rear of the passage on the first floor only. Builders of such small speculative properties, intended

---

[245] Simon Schama, *Dead Certainties: Unwarranted Speculations* (New York: Vintage, 1992).

for rent, cut corners. The Bellingham Place houses are cheaply built, with very simple interior finishes and implausibly thin front and rear walls, just eight and a half inches, or one brick, thick. They also lack amenities that were essential for polite houses of the period, including kitchens.[246]

With its compact plan and modest finishes, 2 Bellingham Place illustrates the minimal requirements for a speculative house on Beacon Hill in the 1830s and '40s: brick walls, however thin; sandstone door and window lintels; a brick cornice; a parlor level raised at least a few steps off the street; at least one black marble mantel; and a side passage with double parlors (Figure 89). This last item is the most significant, as here, the parlors are just twelve feet, six inches wide (even less when allowing for the depth of the firebox and hearth), leaving only four feet, four-and-a-half inches for the passage, with a scant twenty inches to pass by the staircase. Even, in other words, where the lot width would seem better suited to a center-stair layout like 21 Pinckney Street, or one of its variants from the 1820s, by the 1840s, Beacon Hill's builders favored a version of the side-passage, double parlor plan.

Like many small houses put up on the north slope in the 1830s and '40s, the Bellingham Place houses were erected as rental properties for families of modest means. Around this time, Bostonians took renewed notice of the housing conditions of the city's poor residents. In this, they followed urban reformers in other major industrialized cities, including New York, London, and Manchester. Most advocates of this era sought better, much larger tenements for urban workers that could be rented at modest rates but still produce a moderate return on investment, five per-cent or

---

[246] When a kitchen was installed for the first time in the cellar in the 20th century, the owners found no flues rising from that level.

more. Very few of these large, purpose-built tenements were built before the Civil War, however.[247] This problem acquired a new urgency with the great influx of immigrants fleeing the 1845 Irish potato famine and with the 1849 cholera outbreak that claimed the lives of 707 residents of Boston, 509 of them Irish. One contemporary estimate put the overall density of the population of Boston in 1845 at 10.6 people per dwelling, greater than London, Liverpool, Birmingham, or Manchester, cities that were notorious for their crowded, unhealthful conditions and for the increasing animosity between workers and their exploitive employers.[248] The most crowded districts in Boston were in the South End, particularly around Fort Hill, and in the North End in a court called Half Moon Place. Both places were characterized by overcrowding, poor access to clean water, lack of adequate sanitation and sewage, and very high rates of infant mortality. They were also places where poor day laborers concentrated, many of them Irish immigrants, living in wretched conditions in cellars and attics. A physician visiting a cholera patient in Half Moon Place reported finding him in a cellar that flooded during high tide, requiring him to walk across an elevated plank to reach his bedside. When he arrived, the body of an infant, floating in its little

---

[247] Oscar Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants, 1790-1880: A Study in Acculturation* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991), 101–115; Cynthia Zaitzevsky, "Housing Boston's Poor: The First Philanthropic Experiments," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 42, no. 2 (May 1983): 157–67; Sean Wilentz, "Crime, Poverty and the Streets of New York City: The Diary of William H. Bell, 1850-51," *History Workshop*, no. 7 (Spring 1979): 126–55; Friedrich Engels, "Working-Class Manchester," in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, ed. George C. Tucker, 2nd rev. & enlarged ed. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1978), 579–85.

[248] S. H. Perkins, *Report of the Committee on the Expediency of Providing Better Tenements for the Poor* (Boston: Eastburn's Press, 1846), 7.

wooden coffin, was drifting around the room.[249] A map of the 1849 cholera outbreak illustrates this pattern, with most of the victims concentrated in these parts of the city near the harbor. But it also shows that the disease was found on the poorer streets of Beacon Hill, including Sentry Hill Place and West Cedar, Phillips and Revere streets, where doctors found that "the influence of filthy habits, deficient ventilation, &c., in what would be considered as healthy situations" contributed to its spread.[250]

To counteract the unhealthful conditions prevailing in older tenements while keeping rents affordable, reformers sought new structures that combined "the economy of a large establishment, and the separation of several smaller ones," with a "complete separation of each apartment from the others under the same roof."[251] Separation was a key attribute of philanthropic housing, as it addressed two of the reformers' principal concerns: the spread of disease and the influence of vice. Children of poor families were thought to be especially vulnerable to exposure to the myriad social ills of the tenements, including prostitution, gambling, and particularly intemperance. But all inhabitants could be influenced by proximity to immoral behavior and were at risk of being seduced by it. Reformers argued that behavior, like disease, was contagious, and that in crowded conditions, "just as their physical nature becomes blunted, and hardened to the impurities about them, so the moral nature gradually accustoms itself to the sight of evil, and ceases, at last, to be offended, at

---

[249] Massachusetts Sanitary Commission et al., *Report of a General Plan for the Promotion of Public and Personal Health* (Boston: Dutton & Wentworth, 1850), 425–436.

[250] Ibid., 429.

[251] Perkins, *Report of the Committee*, 23–24.

what was originally shocking to it."[252] That the cholera epidemic claimed nineteen lives on Beacon Hill—eighteen of them living on the north slope—indicates the degree to which Boston's poorer residents were accommodated here in the 1840s.[253] Despite the efforts of reformers, most of Boston's poor remained, in the 1840s and '50s, housed in smaller, repurposed buildings. But some speculators met the need for new, inexpensive rental housing through the construction of courts of small houses, like those on Bellingham Place. These adopted side-passage plans because of their ability to separate virtuous households from the vicious and the healthy from the diseased.

In 1844, on nearby Rollins Place, developer John Rollins purchased an eighty-by-one-hundred-foot parcel on the north side of Revere Street and subdivided it into smaller lots, on which he built ten houses, four of them facing Revere and six in the court (Figure 90).[254] With its identical rows of three houses on either side, terminated by its famous Greek revival screen at the back, Rollins Place is one the most picturesque courts on Beacon Hill. The weather-boarded wall, with two rows of Ionic columns forming a loggia, was erected to hide the rear yards of the houses behind Phillips Street below. Painted white, it dignifies what is otherwise a conventional court of very modest two-story brick houses set on raised granite basements. As

---

[252] Ibid., 11.

[253] Count of cholera victims derived from a contemporary map of the disease, as "Cholera in Boston, 1849" (Boston, 1849), http://www.historyofvaccines.org/content/cholera-boston-1849.

[254] Suffolk Deeds, L. 515, f. 283 ff. For comparison, Harrison Gray Otis' mansion house lot on Mount Vernon Street was 100 feet wide by about 225 feet deep, more than twice as large.

distinguished as the colonnaded screen is, the houses on either side are little different from those on Bellingham Place or any of the other little mid-block rows that once crowded the north slope (Figure 91).

Besides the impressive column screen, there is little decorative woodwork on Rollins Place. The finishes in number 6 are among the simplest for principal heated rooms in any house on Beacon Hill, with plain wooden post-and-lintel mantels in the chambers and thin four-panel doors set in plain casings with unmolded corner blocks.[255] Still, the plan of the Rollins Place houses is a familiar double-parlor form (Figure 92). Entry is up several steps from the street to a narrow side passage, just four-and-a-half-feet wide, leaving little room to pass alongside the stair. The parlors are eleven-and-a-half by twelve-and-a-half-feet each, similar to those in Bellingham Place. Since the stair rises near the back of the passage, the second floor chambers are different sizes. The rear room is roughly eleven feet square; the front, which extends across the width of the house, is a relatively commodious twelve by sixteen feet. The cellar of 6 Rollins Place had a dirt floor until the 1940s, when it was finished for the first time and a modern kitchen was installed. Like Bellingham Place, houses in Rollins Place were built without kitchens and intended as rental property. Tenement builders observed that poorer tenants cooked on stoves in their apartments, if they cooked at all, and did not expect a dedicated cook-room.[256] Two of the first purchasers

---

[255] On both floors, baseboards are planed but un-beaded.

[256] Perkins, *Report of the Committee,* 26.

of Rollins Place houses were Amos Lawrence and Samuel Buss, landlords with extensive real estate holdings in Boston.[257]

If Lawrence and Buss were not living in Rollins place, who was? The impressive screen at the end of court may suggest something of the status of the tenants that its developers sought to attract. When the 1850 federal census returns were taken, several houses in Rollins Place were occupied as tenements; in five houses that can be positively identified, the returns list 38 people in 7 households. Many of the court's residents were Massachusetts natives and a few were from northern New England. Those with an occupation listed were professionals and tradespeople, including a seamstress, a painter, two masons, and a carpenter. Number 6 was let to four single women: Ann Guppee, Harriet Weeks, and Sophora and Mary Moore. Significantly, no laborers nor any Irish-born people are listed among the residents of Rollins Court in 1850.[258] Its tenants included both families and respectable single women, but not Boston's poorest or most desperate residents.

Not far from Rollins Place, Daniel Copeland, a mason, put up seven small houses in Sentry Hill Place in 1843, another speculative venture (Figure 93).[259] They,

---

[257] See, e.g., Suffolk Deeds L. 660, f. 136 for 5 Rollins Place and L. 692, f. 106 for 6 Rollins Place.

[258] The 1850 census recorded every known occupant of every building in Boston, including his or her name, age, occupation, and place of birth. When combined with information on street addresses, this register of residents is a vivid snapshot of life on a street, a neighborhood, and a city. The 1849 and 1851 Boston city directory provide an index to some of the residents of Sentry Hill Place, then known as May Street Place, and because the numbers of houses have not changed since the 1840s, it is possible to populate them.

[259] Suffolk Deeds, L. 506, f. 5, and L. 505, f. 7.

too, were immediately sold to investors. Each is laid out on a side passage, double-parlor plan on two principal stories. Small attic rooms were originally lit by dormers and many cellars still had dirt floors into the twentieth century. As at Rollins Place, a tall wooden structure at the end of the court screens the view of the houses below but here, it is also functional, containing a small two-story ell at the front of numbers 4 and 5. Beyond the entry, number 5 places a pair of parlors on the principal floor, just off the stair passage (Figure 94). As with other houses on the court, the partition between the parlors has been removed, but it remains evident in scars in the floor and fireplace wall. Though number 5 is relatively small, at only nineteen feet across the front, it widens toward the rear, enough to permit a relatively commodious side passage.

One of the attributes of the double-parlor form that recommended it to speculators was its flexibility. A two-room, two-story house like 5 Sentry Hill Place could be easily divided into two units, one per floor, with each household able to move through the building independently via the stair passage. This arrangement suited the reformers' desire for the "complete separation" of one unit from the next, ensuring privacy and minimizing incidental contact between households. By closing the double parlor doors, the house could be split up still further, into as many as five separate rentable units, with one in each heated room and a fifth, perhaps, in the attic. The physical evidence reveals little about how the houses in Sentry Hill Place were originally occupied. But the 1850 census makes it clear that Sentry Hill Place was crowded, with forty-nine people in the four small houses at the end of the court. Twenty-nine of these were either Irish immigrants or their children; another five were

from Scotland or Nova Scotia.[260] In the previous year, one of Beacon Hill's nineteen cholera victims had come from this street.

Number 5 Sentry Hill Place was one of the largest houses on the court and it was also filled with the most people. Sixteen, all of them Irish, were distributed among its two floors, garret, and perhaps in the dirt cellar. The census identified the tenants of number 5 in four separate households: the McDermonts, Donlys, McNorrises, and Donleys. The eight McDermonts included Palen, a forty-eight-year-old laborer; James, a twenty-year-old clerk; Barney, a sixteen-year-old book binder; and Frances, a thirteen-year-old saddler. No occupation was listed for mother Mary or her three daughters. Listed first among the residents of number 5, the McDermonts likely occupied the entire ground floor—the double parlors, in other words, and the unheated room in the ell. Presumably upstairs were the Donly family, first of all, including forty-year-old Patrick, a laborer, with his wife, Dorothy, and two small children. Catherine, at six, was Irish-born but one-year-old Dolly was the lone resident of number 5 who was born in Massachusetts. Following the Patrick Donlys were Elizabeth and Terry McNorris, he a painter, both forty. Last of all were James and Margaret Donley, a twenty-six-year-old clerk and his wife. If the McDermonts took the entire first floor, it is likely that the Patrick Donly family and the McNorrises shared the second, with the James Donleys in the unheated attic. However they were distributed through the building, this was a crowded house on a crowded court in a

---

[260] By comparison, across Boston in 1850, there were 138,788 residents in 13,173 houses, or roughly 10 per dwelling. This figure includes boarding houses and tenements as well as genteel dwellings with a handful of servants. Edward Hartwell Savage, *Police Records and Recollections, Or, Boston by Daylight and Gaslight* (Boston: J.P. Dale, 1873), 89.

part of Beacon Hill that was teeming with Irish immigrants in the 1840s and 1850s. Five households shared four heated rooms through frigid New England winters, warming each other with body heat when coal was not an option.[261]

The developer of Rollins Place chose a plan whose roots lay in the genteel rowhouses of the Bulfinch era but whose constrained dimensions here were poorly suited to polite domestic life. By the 1840s, the side passage, double-parlor form was no longer solely a vehicle for polite entertaining. It had become a preferred form for small tenements, because it permitted free moment of unrelated people though the side passage, while allowing some flexibility in the disposition of the parlor rooms. These could be let as a single apartment for a small family or, conceivably, serve as the principal living space of a small but respectable house. Though the houses on Bellingham, Rollins, and Sentry Hill Place were laid out on a plan that was common along Chestnut, Beacon, and Mount Vernon streets, the texture of daily life that they contained was worlds apart.

The houses on Rollins, Sentry Hill, and Bellingham Place are the poor cousins of the grand row houses on Beacon and Chestnut streets, as well as relatively modest models like 102 Mount Vernon and 74 Pinckney. The finishes of those houses on the south slope are superior, their walls more solidly built, their rooms larger and more numerous. But all of them share, at their core, a pair of connected rooms on the principal level and a side passage that permits the free movement of guests, family members, and servants through the house without passing through the principal rooms. The arrangement of bedchambers, kitchens, and dining rooms around this core of

---

[261] Early reformers felt that adequate light and air were more critical considerations than heat. Perkins, *Report of the Committee*, 25.

parlors and passages typified building on Beacon Hill across a wide range of quality in the three decades before the Civil War. To a degree, this commonality reflected a new insistence on order and regularity in growing American cities. But it also suggests the plan's adaptability for a great range of households. Across the first half of the nineteenth century, double parlors were home to Federal-era grandees, middling antebellum families, and poor Irish immigrants. Its ubiquity in this period was not the result of the diffusion of architectural refinement from elites to their emulators. Rather, the double parlor came to dominate the urban streetscape in this period because the form was well suited to a range of purposes, from hosting fashionable parties to raising virtuous families to housing thousands of immigrants in crowded tenements.

In the first decades of the nineteenth century, houses were understood as both containers of social life and as symbols of that life, representing achievement, mastery of polite manners, aesthetic discernment, and worthiness to govern the early American republic. But by the 1840s, both what they signified and their ability to signify had been called into question, as many early mansions were demolished and replaced with orderly attached rows. For builders of these smaller houses, architecture's symbolic function was still present but had receded in importance. Architecture in the row house era was newly thought to play an active role in urban social life. A new understanding of the moral agency of the environment, for good and for ill, extended from the landscape to city streets to individual buildings.[262] Large, open parlors were now

---

[262] For an analysis of the ways in which republican city-dwellers imagined the relationship between particular spatial structures and behavior, see Upton, "Lancasterian Schools, Republican Citizenship, and the Spatial Imagination in Early

imagined to be settings not just for polite socializing but also to assist in the production of virtuous urban citizens, enabling the regular monitoring and correction of the family. In the same way, the side-passage, double-parlor house was adopted for early tenement construction because it separated households into discrete apartments, preserving privacy in crowded quarters, while limiting, it was thought, the spread of vice and disease among the city's poorest residents. Whether in polite row houses or on Beacon Hill's densest antebellum courts, the urban utopianism of the republican spatial imagination was domesticated in the double parlor.

Nineteenth-Century America"; Upton, "Another City: The Urban Cultural Landscape in the Early Republic."

FIGURES

FIGURES REMOVED FOR COPYRIGHTING

Chapter 5

DOMESTIC ORDER

As important as separation was for tenement builders and reformers, it was much more so for polite families. While public spaces were opened to visitors and showed that their inhabitants valued transparency, work rooms, including kitchen and quarters, were placed carefully out of view. Many Boston households employed domestic help to relieve the physically taxing and incessant work of keeping the house neat and orderly and its residents properly clothed and fed. The management of those workers and the disposition of the spaces in which they worked was a critical component of domestic planning in the first half of the nineteenth century. The relationship of the kitchen to the dining room and the provision of segregated circulation routes for household servants became especially important in elite households, for whom the separation of labor from leisure was a critical component of refined domestic life and polite entertaining. In time, the segregation of domestic work from the polite spaces of the house informed the design of a wide range of houses, not just Beacon Hill's grandest mansions.

Catherine Beecher put this new emphasis on separation in terms of maintaining order: "Domestics use a different entrance to the house, and sit at a distinct table, not because they are inferior beings, but because this is the best method of securing neatness and order and convenience."[263] Order and convenience were high priorities

---

[263] Catherine E. Beecher, *A Treatise on Domestic Economy, For the Use of Young Ladies at Home, and At School, Revised Edition* (Boston: T.H. Webb, 1842), 208.

for urban families. Householders sought to achieve both through careful planning that negotiated the provision of domestic entertaining and the everyday management of the family. The paradox of service, and especially cooking, is that as it took on increased importance for the provision of polite hospitality, the work itself was devalued as a kind of manual labor. As a consequence, domestic work and domestic workers needed simultaneously to be kept out of sight and regularly monitored. The configuration of kitchens and secondary stairs in this period shows how Bostonians worked to negotiate these conflicting imperatives of domestic service.

The primary literature on domestic work includes diaries, personal letters, and prescriptive literature. This vein has been well worked by social historians, especially Nancy Cott, Faye Dudden, and Carol Lassser.[264] Their research on domestic life in New England has focused on the way in which service was organized, in the colonial and early national period, according to an apprenticeship model, in which young girls might be hired out to a family for a period of several months to a few years, in order to earn some money while developing a useful skill. Service as "help" characterized the

---

[264] Nancy F. Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997); Nancy F. Cott, *Root of Bitterness: Documents of the Social History of American Women* (Hanover, N.H. & London: University Press of New England, 1996); Faye E. Dudden, *Serving Women : Household Service in Nineteenth-Century America* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1983); Carol Lasser, "The Domestic Balance of Power: Relations Between Mistress and Maid in Nineteenth-Century New England," *Labor History* 28, no. 1 (January 1, 1987): 5–22; Carol Lasser, "'The World's Dread Laugh,': Singlehood and Service in Nineteenth-Century Boston," in *The New England Working Class and the New Labor History*, ed. Herbert George Gutman and Donald H. Bell (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987), 72–88. This scholarship informs the following discussion of the provision of service in New England between the colonial and antebellum periods.

relationship between employers and servants in both elite and non-elite households. In cities as well as the countryside, families would hire neighborhood girls to learn useful and practical skills in cooking, laundry, and domestic management, in anticipation of marriage and the establishment of their own household.

Often, this arrangement brought the daughter of a family of comparable social and economic status into the house, and she was treated as part of the household, taking meals at the same table and sleeping in the same bed-chambers as members of the biological family. In many cases, she came from an extended family network—a cousin, perhaps, or an unmarried aunt. In nearly all cases, the arrangement was temporary, lasting only while the girl grew to maturity, married, and set up her own house with the skills learned during her apprenticeship.[265]

In the early nineteenth century, this reciprocal model of service as "help" began to give way to one in which domestic servants were construed as household workers, employees of the family performing tasks that had always been physically demanding but were newly regarded as beneath the dignity of polite women.[266] The devaluation of manual labor that characterized urbanizing and industrializing North America applied equally to domestic work.[267] Initially, this perspective was confined

---

[265] Cott, *The Bonds of Womanhood*, 28–30.

[266] For an account of the transition from "help" to "domestics" in this period, see especially Dudden, *Serving Women*, 12–71; see also Lasser, "The Domestic Balance of Power," 5.

[267] For the implications of the devaluation of labor for the building trades, see Dell Upton, "Pattern Books and Professionalism: Aspects of the Transformation of Domestic Architecture in America, 1800-1860," *Winterthur Portfolio* 19, no. 2/3 (1984): 107–50; Lisa B. Lubow, "From Carpenter to Capitalist: The Business of Building in Postrevolutionary Boston," in *Entrepreneurs : The Boston Business*

to elite families, in which daughters preferred to remain at home to develop the skills required to supervise a staff of cooks and chambermaids—domestic management, that is, not the laborious trades of cooking and cleaning. As a contributor to the *Massachusetts Centinel* put it, women should be "more skilled in the theoretick than in the practical part of cookery."[268] By the 1830s, and especially in cities, service was marginalized to the point that even middling families were reluctant to send their daughters out as domestic workers. Louisa May Alcott's description of a short stint as a servant in 1851, undertaken as a lark at a time when her family needed additional money, illustrates how humiliating the role had become.[269] As service shifted from "help" to wage labor, the pool of workers also changed, so that in the 1840s, household staff were increasingly Irish immigrants. The inexperience of these girls, and their perceived unreliability, became a source of great frustration to the wives and mothers who employed them, and laments for the colonial-era model of service as "help" became a commonplace of domestic and prescriptive literature in the antebellum decades.[270]

Community, 1700–1850, ed. Conrad Edick Wright and Katheryn P. Viens (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1997), 181–210.

[268] Solus & Innuptus, "The Mental and Personal Qualifications of a Wife," *Massachusetts Centinel*, April 12, 1788. See also the discussion of the importance of service and hospitality for cosmopolitan merchant culture in Herman, *Town House*, 33–76.

[269] Louisa May Alcott, "How I Went Out to Service: A Story," *Independent*, June 4, 1874.

[270] Dudden, *Serving Women*, 5.

This social compartmentalization was given physical form through the disposition of service rooms within the polite urban house.[271] Despite the rich secondary literature on the history of service in New England, little has been written about how architecture accommodated this shift. The location of kitchens, for example, has much to tell scholars about the changing relationship between families and domestic workers in this period.[272] The removal of cooking from the polite parts of the house in Boston allows historians to recognize, with greater precision, the timing of the shift in the status of service among elites and its relationship to new forms of social life. The relationship of the kitchen to the parlors also reveals how middling families approached the problem of service in the antebellum decades. In smaller houses, whether a kitchen was staffed by employees or family members dictated whether it would be located in the cellar or on the ground floor, and this decision affected, in turn, the location of the parlors and the number of bedchambers that a house could accommodate. Across the full range of houses, the accommodation

---

[271] Separation through building characterized agricultural environments in this period, as well. See Herman, *Architecture and Rural Life in Central Delaware, 1700-1900*, 199–228.

[272] Abbott Cummings considers the late 17th-century movement of cooking from the hall, in a front room, to a purpose-built kitchen in a rear room in Cummings, "Three Hearths." There are few scholarly considerations of cook rooms for the 18th and 19th centuries. Tom Hubka addresses the removal of kitchens to a rear ell in rural New England farmhouses, suggesting that this shift is related to changing agricultural practices, but his evidence is entirely from farm communities, not cities and towns. Thomas C. Hubka, "The New England Farmhouse Ell: Fact and Symbol of Nineteenth-Century Farm Improvement," in *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, 2*, ed. Camille Wells, 1986, 161–66. The timing and nature of this shift with respect to the 1692 Boardman House, in Saugus, Massachusetts are briefly treated in Cary Carson and Abbott Lowell Cummings, "Behind the Scenes: Piecing the Puzzle," *Historic New England*, Summer 2011.

of cooking and cleaning and the provision of service routes was a key component of domestic planning and one which householders undertook with great care.

Though the story of the architecture of service has not been written for New England, it has been richly told for the slave-holding states. Dell Upton, Bernard Herman, and Edward Chappell have all addressed the fundamental question of how domestic slavery informed the construction of housing in the southeast.[273] In the period in which service was being re-defined in New England, the institution of slavery and the manner in which it was accommodated within the house was well established. Kitchens had been removed from houses in the Chesapeake region by the second half of the 17th century, in concert with the adoption of chattel slavery as the principal labor regime for tobacco agriculture.[274] Architectural strategies for the management of this labor force within the house were well in place by the post-Revolutionary period. Of necessity, in the prosecution of their duties, enslaved domestic workers passed through the same spaces as white householders and their guests but in elite houses they were given segregated points of entry to polite rooms. Ordinarily, they did their work and were quartered outside the house but, on occasion, occupied cellars and attics. A few mansion-builders, like Thomas Jefferson, took particular pains to minimize the visibility of black workers in the house but for most

---

[273] Dell Upton, "White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," *Places* 2, no. 2 (November 1984): 59–72; Herman, *Town House*; Edward A. Chappell, "Housing Slavery," in *The Chesapeake House: Architectural Investigation by Colonial Williamsburg*, ed. Cary Carson and Carl Lounsbury (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 156–78.

[274] Graham et al., "Adaptation and Innovation."

residents of Southern houses, slaves were beneath notice.[275] The segregation of spaces in which slaves worked and slept did not remove black bodies from the Southern house, and domestic slavery remained, in the early nineteenth century, more intimate than its Northern counterpart.

A significant difficulty for writing an architectural history of domestic service in the South as well as the North is that such spaces are especially vulnerable to improvement, reconfiguration, and demolition. Very few 18th-century kitchens survive in the southeast, and those that do remain, such as the kitchen at Mount Airy, tend to be un-representative—the best-built support buildings for the richest plantations. Kitchens in Boston, no longer staffed by servants, tended to get improved significantly in the 20th century, with cooking fireplaces and bake ovens replaced by modern refrigerators and ranges, often leaving no trace of their original function except an unusually large base for a hearth in the cellar below. A few early kitchens do survive, against the odds, and a few others are known from contemporary drawings, such as Bulfinch's plan for the John Joy house and Edward Shaw's detailed drawings for the service wing at 59 Mount Vernon Street. Taken together, this evidence illustrates a clear pattern, with gentry families excluding service rooms from their mansions soon after the Revolution and builders of more modest houses working to reconcile the

---

[275] Compare, e.g., Dell Upton's analysis of Jefferson's dumbwaiters and dining room at Monticello to Bernard Herman's reading of Billy Robinson's trial during the Denmark Vesey insurrection in Charleston. Dell Upton, *Architecture in the United States* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Herman, *Town House*, 119–124. Edward Chappell considers service at Monticello further in Edward A. Chappell, "Hardware," in *The Chesapeake House: Architectural Investigation by Colonial Williamsburg*, ed. Cary Carson and Carl Lounsbury (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013), 276–278.

competing demands of separation and surveillance through the second quarter of the nineteenth century. Across the social spectrum, Boston's householders struggled to manage the movement of people that were increasingly thought to be essential but largely untrustworthy fellow inmates in the houses of Beacon Hill.

Across New England in the colonial period, in city as well as country, kitchens and the people that worked in them remained inside the body of the house. The late seventeenth-century removal of cooking hearths from the old hall at the front of the house signaled a new emphasis on the spatial performance of politeness that excluded the smells and heat of cooking but the new, purpose-built kitchens remained within the house, unlike in the contemporary Chesapeake region (Figure 95).[276] In the Georgian era, as elites began building center-passage, double pile houses, they continued to locate their kitchens on the ground floor within the main mass of the house and adjoining a dining room or best parlor. At the Hancock mansion, the kitchen to which George Twelves Hewes was initially brought to wait was segregated from the best rooms by a broad staircase and a secondary passage. This room, and the work that occupied it, was shielded from the sight of polite guests, and its access controlled through a door from the service passage and another in a vestibule under the main stair (Figure 96). Despite its lesser status, it remained close to the principal entertaining rooms.

The 1777 William Johnson Pierce house in Newburyport typifies the continuation of this practice in the Georgian period, even in New England's grandest mansions (Figure 97). Two stories tall, built of brick, and with impressive late-

---

[276] Cummings, "Three Hearths"; Graham et al., "Adaptation and Innovation."

Georgian woodwork in its principal rooms, the Pierce house places the kitchen in the right rear corner of the ground floor, adjoining the rear stair and exposed to view from the dining room in the left rear room. At the end of the colonial period, women in gentry families continued to play a role in the active management and perhaps provision of service, and servants hired to help in the kitchen might still be chosen from the families of peers. Though kitchens in elite houses like the Pierce's were inexpensively finished, with plain door and window casings and ordinary plaster walls instead of more pretentious and costly wainscot, their convenience and relative comfort and their close relationship to the public entertaining rooms of the house suggest that domestic work, in this period, was still undertaken by family members and peers.

The minimal separation between the cook room and the public rooms and the lack of visible provision for segregated service routes at the Pierce house reflects the intimacy of service in New England in the colonial period. This intimacy was sometimes a source of concern, with hired help—often marriageable young women—living and working in the same spaces as the family, including its own young men. For ministers, especially, the possibility of extramarital sexual relationships was a fundamental and deeply worrying aspect of the provision of live-in help. A household swelling with young people vexed the minister Ebenezer Parkman, who, with four unmarried adults in his house, observed that he was "frequently in some Trouble about young people's disorderly night walking: I have now Such a number…of young persons in my own Family that it causes me some Perplexity when my own do walk

contrary to the advice and Counsel which I am frequently giving them."[277] William Bentley, the Salem minister, thought that Boston's influence was especially corrupting, noting that "of all the young girls sent into families to provide their own maintainance [*sic*] those who have gone to Boston have been the most unhappy. Almost all of them have returned heavy laden to their friends in Town. The difference of morals is great, but the force of parental presence & advice is greater."[278]

Reflecting such concerns, Boston's builders continued to rely on "the force of parental presence" to regulate behavior, preferring the convenience of ground floor kitchens to the full separation of domestic tasks. In the post-Revolutionary period, this approach to domestic planning governed the earliest mansions on Beacon Hill. The first house completed by Charles Bulfinch on Beacon Hill, John Joy's mansion on Beacon Street, illustrates the persistence of the old arrangement of cook rooms (Figure 98). Like the Pierce house, there is a grand back staircase but no service stair and the kitchen is located in a rear corner—in this case, behind the dining room and separated from it by a pair of closets. A secondary entrance communicates both with the dining room and the kitchen, allowing the work of service to proceed from the side yard and into the two rooms without passing through the center passage so that, during entertaining, servants and their labor could remain out of sight. But the proximity of the kitchen to the public rooms and the lack of provision of a service stair illustrates

---

[277] Ebenezer Parkman journal for May 23, 1749, cited in Ross W Beales, "'Slavish' and Other Female Work in the Parkman Household, Westborough, Massachusetts, 1724-1782," in *House and Home*, ed. Peter Benes, Jane Montague Benes, and Ross W Beales (Boston, Mass.: Boston University, 1990), 56.

[278] Entry dated January 23, 1797, Bentley, *The Diary of William Bentley*, 1907, 2, 1793–1802:212.

the relative intimacy of the ordinary operation of the house, with servants and family members passing through the same spaces to move between floors and from kitchen to bedchambers.

The larger and slightly later Coolidge mansion, on Cambridge Street, adds a hidden secondary stair, seemingly for the use of household staff, between the dining room and the kitchen. It also takes greater pains to hide the work of cooking, buffering it from public view with a small lobby at the foot of the service stair (Figure 99). In other respects, despite its impressive scale and grand front elevation, this house is similar to its predecessors in its accommodations for domestic work, with the kitchen in the back left corner of the ground floor, sharing this level with two parlors and a large drawing room. Though Boston's elite families were eager to adopt London fashions in entertaining and cosmopolitan forms of stylish material life, their established practice of using family members and peers to staff their kitchens made them relatively slow to adopt the segregated approach to accommodating domestic service that characterized contemporary gentry housing in the British Isles, the Caribbean, and in slave-holding states.

Characteristically, it was Harrison Gray Otis who took the first step toward this more hierarchical, cosmopolitan manner of providing service. In his first house, on Cambridge Street, he put his drawing room, the most impressive public room, on the second floor, far from the kitchen, which was removed to a rear ell (Figure 100). This is the first house on Beacon Hill to locate service in a rear wing. Additionally, it buffers the kitchen from the ground floor dining room with a secondary stair and service passage. This stair provides service access to the drawing room above, while giving servants segregated access to the principal public rooms of the house.

As Beacon Hill's elite builders relocated their entertaining rooms to the second floor, the kitchen could be well insulated from public view at the back of the ground floor instead of in a rear ell, as at the first Otis house. 87 Mount Vernon and Park Row both illustrate the new arrangement, in which a small, secondary dining room sits in front of a large cook room, with large parlors above them on the second floor. The kitchen's position on the opposite side of the passage from the service stair required servants to slip under the principal stair to move between floors and this route is hidden from view in the passage. At 87 Mount Vernon, this secondary stair is the only one that links all levels of the building, from the cellar to the attic chambers where staff slept. The new importance placed on keeping servants invisible in gentry houses affected both the spatial and temporal qualities of service. Secondary staircases became an essential feature of polite houses, along with segregated passages between work yards and service rooms and separate levels for servants' quarters. At the same time, servants were newly expected to complete their tasks early in the morning or late in the evening, while family members slept. In *The House Servants' Directory,* his manual for servants, Boston's most renowned servant, Robert Roberts, enjoined his fellow workers to complete as much dirty work as possible in the early morning, before their employers' awoke and began making their demands.[279] As domestic entertaining became more elaborate and its associated service more complex, the infrastructure and spatial requirements for the provision of service expanded, requiring larger and better equipped kitchens and new ancillary rooms like pantries and secondary staging areas close to dining and drawing rooms (Figure 101).

---

[279] Robert Roberts, *The House Servant's Directory, or A Monitor for Private Families: Comprising Hints on the Arrangement and Performance of Servants' Work* (New York: Munroe and Francis, 1827), 15, 41–42.

Harrison Gray Otis' third house contains the most extensive facilities for service on Beacon Hill in the Federal era. The footprint of its kitchen ell, rear wing, and carriage house are larger, in fact, than the front part of the house. As at the first Otis house, the kitchen is on the ground level but as with its contemporary, 87 Mount Vernon, all of the public rooms are on the second floor, along with a secondary dining room over the kitchen. The kitchen is separated more fully from the polite rooms in its location in a rear ell, behind the service stair and large closets on both levels. The wing behind the kitchen contains a laundry and a large storage room, with privies at the rear; on its second floor are three servant's chambers and a second privy. In 1819, such complete segregation of servants chambers and work spaces from the polite parts of the house was still a novelty outside slave-holding states, as revealed in William Bentley's description of a new house in Salem:

> Last week Mr. [Nathaniel] Silsbee entered his new house eastward of Washington place…The north part of the house may be thrown into one hall for all domestic associations or seperated [sic] by doors for the purpose. The marble round the fireplaces is the first ornament but it is seldom otherwise than rich…The conveniences are many & the apartments of the servants are distinct.[280]

In the 15 years between the Coolidge and third Otis houses, the provision of work spaces for servants, and the coordination of their movement through the house, had shifted decisively in elite houses toward the provision of segregated service routes, separate kitchens, and separate bedchambers. The removal of cook and wash rooms from the body of the house, and the attendant provision of separate passageways and stairs, minimized the incidental interaction of servants and members

---

[280] Bentley, *The Diary of William Bentley*, 1914, 4, 1811–19:624.

of the family or their guests. Passages, doors, and stairs all worked to bring order to the promiscuous movement of unrelated people, increasingly maintaining social boundaries within the house through physical ones.

The clear separation of service rooms from polite ones at the third Otis house depends upon an understanding of servants as reliable, trustworthy employees. In order to sustain their expansive, refined social life, Otis and his peers competed for the most talented cooks, the most experienced laundresses and chambermaids, and the best butlers who could be counted upon to work without supervision. Roberts himself was a prize that was fought over by Christopher Gore and Nathan Appleton. When Gore hired Roberts away, Appleton complained that he had been deceived and sought the return of the most valued member of his household staff. Gore explained that Roberts had approached him to offer his services, suggesting a level of autonomy enjoyed by the most capable urban servants.

> A few weeks since, I received a Letter through the Post Office, from Robert Roberts, Offering Himself, as an House Servant, and his Pretentions to that Character....Some Days after, I put on Paper the Services I wanted...shortly after Roberts appeared and acceded to all that was required and offered the Character He received from Mr. Boott, as Evidence of his Qualifications. He then said, that He was in Mr. Appleton's Family; but…was to quit, when his Time was up, which would be on the 7th. On this Statement I agreed to take Him, considering as absolutely settled that He was to leave your House & with your Consent.[281]

---

[281] Christopher Gore to Nathan Appleton, October 11, 1825, Nathan Appleton Papers, Massachusetts Historical Society, Boston, cited in Charles A. Hammond, "The Dilemmas of Domestic Service in New England, 1750-1850," in *House and Home*, ed. Peter Benes, Jane Montague Benes, and Ross W Beales (Boston, Mass.: Boston University Press, 1990), 66.

But as "help" became low-status, hired staff, the management of domestic labor became increasingly troublesome. Once Bostonians construed service as an inferior kind of labor, even elite families found it difficult to secure and retain help, as a series of letters written by Ellen Wayles Randolph Coolidge illustrate. Ellen Randolph was the fourth child of Thomas Mann and Martha Jefferson Randolph and a favorite granddaughter of Thomas Jefferson. In May of 1825, in the parlor at Monticello, she married Joseph Coolidge, the grandson of Joseph Coolidge, Sr., builder of the mansion on Cambridge and Temple streets. She was, therefore, like Christopher Gore and Nathan Appleton, a member of one of Boston's most prominent and wealthy families. Nonetheless, she struggled constantly with the management of her household. In 1826, her first year of marriage and in Boston, she was sanguine about the possibility of an orderly household. "I am getting my family in better order after dismissing two domestics & supplying their places by, I hope, better ones. My fastidious cook has given place to another, a good tempered old maid, & the honest but drunken Irishman has been succeeded by a Genevan, a genteel capable servant, with not half the good feeling of his predecessor, but a great deal more style."[282] But just five months later, she was in despair, believing that "the curse of domestic life in New England is the insolence & insubordination of the servants & the difficulty of getting any that do not give more trouble than they save."[283] Her letters to her family are filled with frustrated laments about the state of service in Boston, and in her household, with servants coming and going as they pleased, being dismissed for

---

[282] Ellen Wayles Randolph Coolidge to Martha Jefferson Randolph, January 2, 1826, Ellen Wayles Randolph Coolidge Letters, University of Virginia.

[283] Ibid., May 29, 1826.

incompetence, married off to other servants, moving to the country, and generally failing to measure up to the more stable, deferential model of service that characterized her home in enslaved Virginia.[284]

As Mrs. Coolidge's frustrations reveal, by the 1830s, the level of autonomy and trust enjoyed by Robert Roberts no longer characterized the relationship between servants and their employers. Cooks were thought to be especially troublesome, "the veriest torments on the face of the earth."[285] Their special status was a consequence of the centrality of dining to the provision of hospitality. A skilled cook provided a family and its guests with a level of refinement and elegance that did credit to her as well as her employer; but a less experienced or less tractable one could be a source of enormous frustration, particularly when she did her work out of sight, in a rear ell or a cellar. An episode in *Trials and Confessions of a Housekeeper* illustrates what might occur when the mistress of the house busied herself too long on the second floor, insensible to disaster unfolding in a basement kitchen:

Giving all necessary directions as to their baking, and charging Kitty to be sure to have every thing on the table precisely at our usual hour for dining, I went up into the nursery to look after the children, and to see about other matters requiring my attention.

---

[284] See, e.g., Ellen Wayles Randolph Coolidge to Virginia J. Randolph, March 20, 1827, ibid.; Ellen Wayles Randolph Coolidge to Martha Jefferson Randolph, May 29, 1828, ibid.; Ellen Wayles Randolph Coolidge to Virginia J. Randolph Trist, March 13, 1829, ibid.

[285] Timothy Shay Arthur, *Leaves from the Book of Human Life* (Boston: L.P. Crown, 1856), 46.

> Time passed until, to my surprise, I heard the clock strike one. I had yet to dress for dinner.
>
> "I wonder how Kitty is coming on?" said I to myself. "I hope she will not let the puddings get all dried up."
>
> But, I felt too much in a hurry to go down and satisfy myself as to the state of affairs in the kitchen; and took it for granted that all was right.
>
> A little while afterwards, I perceived an odor as of something burning.
>
> "What is that?" came instinctively from my lips. "If Kitty has let the puddings burn!"
>
> Quick as thought I turned from my room, and went gliding down stairs. As I neared the kitchen, the smell of burned flour, or pastry, grew stronger. All was silent below; and I approached in silence. On entering Kitty's domain, I perceived that lady seated in front of the range, with a brown covered pamphlet novel held close to her face, in the pages of which she was completely lost. I never saw any one more entirely absorbed in a book. No sign of dinner was any where to be seen…And, to cap all, the turkey, yet guiltless of fire or dripping pan, was on the floor, in possession of a strange cat, which had come in through the open window.[286]

The description of Kitty as a shiftless, unreliable worker in need of constant supervision echoes Mrs. Coolidge's complaints to her relatives and typifies the portrayal of servants in the popular press of the antebellum decades.

For Catherine Beecher, the challenges embodied in the new system of service needed to be met with patience and gentle correction. Her advice to householders was intended to ease the burden on the women who managed a domestic staff, and she insisted that firm but kind training could overcome any deficit in talent or training. She

---

[286] Arthur, *Trials and Confessions of a Housekeeper*, 25–27. This episode is carefully analyzed with respect to surveillance but also expectations of social class in Anna Vemer Andrzejewski, "Architecture and the Ideology of Surveillance in Modern America, 1850-1950" (Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 2000).

encouraged her readers to treat their domestics with respect and dignity, observing that humane treatment was more likely to encourage more responsible work. Beecher recognized that architecture had a significant role to play in determining the comfort of servants and their relationship with their employers. She placed a premium on the convenience and comfort of domestic workers, as well as that of the polite wives and mothers who might supervise them, over a thoughtless adherence to architectural refinement.

Catherine Beecher's *Treatise on Domestic Economy* was principally addressed to women who wished to or who needed to perform domestic chores by themselves. But she also understood that in households with servants, the convenience of domestic workers remained of critical importance. Though a kitchen might occasionally smell unpleasant, and though a noisy pump might be bothersome, it was better, on the whole, that work spaces not be too distant from the formal rooms they served. A short story by Mrs. A. M. F. Annan used the location of a water pump to illustrate the conflict between elegance and convenience. In "Mrs. Pinkerton's Aversion," a pair of neighbors argue over the sensibility of having such an uncouth appliance within sight, and earshot, of their parlors. The following exchange illustrates the two different views on the importance of economy of labor.

> "Is not the noise of a pump very unpleasant to you?" said she. "Nothing makes me so excessively nervous."
> "Quite the reverse," returned the impracticable Mrs. Newbury; "to me it is always cheerful a sound of industry and comfort."
> Mrs. Pinkerton's patience began to fail.
> "[Your pump] is so close to my windows that I hear it every time the handle moves," she resumed. "Our own is out of hearing. I insisted upon having it on the other side of the house, as far off as possible."
> "But how inconvenient that must be," said Mrs. Newbury; "it must be

> very laborious to your domestics to go so far, and must very much retard their work."[287]

At the end of the story, an improved pump that extinguishes a dramatic kitchen fire settles the question in favor of convenience, a view endorsed by Beecher. "A woman, who has large and airy parlors, with a dark and comfortless kitchen, and a small ill-furnished room for her domestics, will often be left to much labor and perplexity, which she would never have felt, had she taken pains to make her house comfortable to her domestics, as well as to herself and her company."[288]

Though Beecher's view endorsed practices already legible in the careful arrangement of kitchens in middling houses on Beacon Hill, her contemporary, the architect and pattern book author Andrew Jackson Downing, saw this problem differently. Less attentive to the challenges of household management, he thought, like many of his contemporaries, that domestic work belonged in the cellar, out of sight. For him, the only difficulty in this arrangement was that it made the surveillance of workers more difficult.

> [A] family fond of social intercourse, and accustomed to entertain moderately, would greatly prefer, in a cottage or villa of moderate size, to have several handsome apartments, as a drawing-room, library, dining-room, etc., occupying almost exclusively the principal floor, placing the kitchen and its offices in the basement, and the bedrooms in the second story. This arrangement would perhaps be less convenient in a few respects for the family, but it would be more elegant and more satisfactory for the kind of residence intended—each department of the house being complete in itself, and intruding itself but little on the attention of the family or guests when not required to be visible, which is the *ideal* of domestic accommodation. A kitchen on the first floor

---

[287] Mrs. A. M. F. Annan, "Mrs. Pinkerton's Aversion," *Godey's Lady's Book*, November 1847.

[288] Beecher, *Treatise on Domestic Economy*, 273.

> has the advantage of being more accessible, and more completely under the *surveillance* of the mistress of the house, but, on the other hand, it is open to the objection of being occasionally offensive in the matter of sound, sight, and smells.[289]

As some households sought to achieve the ideal articulated by Downing, they created spatial as well as social distance between families and their domestic workers, building the new forms of service as hired staff into the form of their houses. The clearest sign of this shift in polite urban houses was the removal of the kitchen to the cellar, following Downing's, not Beecher's, ideal of domestic accommodation. The movement of kitchens into cellars occurred at different times in different place. In Boston's gentry houses of the early 1800s, the parlors were ordinarily on the second floor, allowing the kitchen to remain on the ground floor and remain segregated from polite parts of the house. But beginning in the 1820s, builders of smaller row houses on Beacon Hill removed kitchens to the cellar. This permitted the parlors to occupy the ground floor and still allow, in a three-story house, two levels of bed chambers above, but it banished domestic work to the cellar, a location only tolerable if it was staffed by servants.

Cellar kitchens survive in a very small number of Beacon Hill houses and are evident in a few more. The cellar kitchen with its large brick firebox remains at 26 West Cedar Street, for example (Figure 102). But in other houses, such 102 Mount Vernon and the row on Mount Vernon Place where the kitchens were clearly not on the ground floor, the presence of a secondary stair that communicates with the cellar is the only surviving material evidence to indicate the location of the kitchen below the

---

[289] Andrew Jackson Downing, *Cottage Residences, Or, A Series of Designs for Rural Cottages and Cottage Villas, and Their Gardens and Grounds: Adapted to North America* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1842), 3.

back parlor. Very few Boston houses followed the Philadelphia practice of placing the kitchen in a rear wing, separated from the main mass of the house by a small stair lobby, but these include two of Beacon Hill's largest houses of the antebellum decades, including 59 Mount Vernon Street and 13 Temple Street. In the latter house, the kitchen was on the ground floor of the ell, with a large secondary dining room above it.

Most commonly, polite houses with ground floor parlors and secondary staircases located kitchens in the cellar, and the slope of most of Beacon Hill's streets permits either a front or rear room on this level to be lit with a pair of windows and, when at the rear, to have direct access to a work yard. This location was the most common for cook rooms in other eastern cities, including New York, Baltimore, and Savannah. At the Humphrey B. Gwathney house, built 1822-1823 at 401 East Broughton Street in Savannah, the rear cellar kitchen survives, remarkably. A key difference between this house and those of contemporary Boston, however, is the lack of provision for a secondary staircase. The main and only stair, which runs from cellar to attic, is pushed to the rear of the long passage, creating a large entry vestibule (Figure 103). Enslaved servants moved through the house along the same halls as their white owners—the need to segregate domestic workers from family members and their guests was felt less keenly in the slave-holding South than in the urban North. Northern visitors to Southern cities were astounded, in fact, at the degree to which black bodies occupied parlors and dining rooms of polite houses. A New York woman, Sarah Hicks Williams, wrote to her parents upon arriving in North Carolina that slaves were "in the parlor, in your room and all over."[290] Frederick Marryat found

[290] Cited in Cott, *Root of Bitterness*, 167.

the differing approach to social intercourse and physical proximity of black and white city dwellers in the North and South to be paradoxical:

> Singular is the degree of contempt and dislike in which the free blacks are held in all the free States of America. They are deprived of their rights as citizens…in the United States, a negro, from his colour, and I believe his colour alone, is a degraded being. Is not this extraordinary, in a land which professes universal liberty, equality, and the rights of man? In England this is not the case. In private society no one objects to sit in company with a man of colour, provided he has the necessary education and respectability. Nor, indeed, is it the case in the Slave States, where I have frequently seen a lady in a public conveyance with her negress sitting by her, and no objection has been raised by the other parties in the coach; but in the Free States a man of colour is not admitted into a stage coach ; and in all other public places, such as theatres, churches, &c., there is always a portion divided off for the negro population, that they may not be mixed up with the whites.[291]

Bernard Herman argues that the ubiquity of black slaves in Charleston helped to render them beneath notice for Southern white city dwellers, and the lack of dedicated service routes in polite townhouses in Charleston and Savannah supports this reading.[292] Bostonians, by contrast, took particular pains to regulate the movement of their servants, whether white or black, Irish or native-born, with dedicated passageways and staircases. The desire for separation that recommended side-passage, double-parlor row houses for tenement construction also affected the provision of service in polite houses, where the management of the presence of strangers demanded architectural solutions.

---

[291] Frederick Marryat, *A Diary in America* (London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1839), 295.

[292] Herman, *Town House*, 119–154. See, in particular, Herman's discussion of the trial of Perrault Stroecker.

Still, a few builders of polite houses adopted the perspective endorsed by Beecher that accommodations for servants should be closer to hand. Though cellar kitchens were increasingly common in the antebellum decades, some kept their kitchens on the ground floor. At 74 Pinckney Street, the framing for a large cooking hearth survives in the cellar, revealing the location of the kitchen on the ground floor, below the second floor parlors. Despite its relatively small size, its high level of finish, its secondary staircase, and location of the kitchen show that this house was intended for a polite family with a small staff of servants, but one that did not relegate that staff to a "dark and comfortless kitchen" in a basement (Figure 104). At just three full stories with a modestly finished attic, this arrangement allows only one full floor of bed-chambers, with two heated rooms, limiting the size of the household that could be accommodated but providing its servants with a relatively comfortable and convenient work environment.

Many New England families, of course, did not have the help of a regular staff of servants. That many of them placed a high premium on domestic comfort and convenience is revealed in the location, in smaller houses that lack service stairs, of the kitchen on the ground floor, at the rear. Though a dining room might occupy the front room, a ground floor kitchen pushed parlors to the second floor. In Boston's grandest republican-era houses, this was their preferred location, away from the bustle of the street, but in its smaller row houses of the antebellum period, second floor parlors were less desirable, a concession to the fact that members of the family, not hired strangers, were staffing the kitchen. For these households, it was preferable to work in a more humane, more convenient location on the ground floor. In small row

houses with first floor kitchens, the common height of three full stories means that they had, like 74 Pinckney Street, only one level of bedchambers below the attic.

28 Garden Street and 75 West Cedar Street both illustrate the way in which compact houses sacrificed bedchambers in order to retain the kitchen on the ground floor, putting convenience and comfort of domestic workers ahead of Downing's ideal of refined accommodation. In both, a ground-level kitchen and dining room force the principal public rooms to the second floor—a genteel location in an earlier, more refined house, but here, simply a concession to the fact that cooking and other household work were undertaken by a member of the family (Figure 105). Their three-story height allows just one level for bed-chambers below the attic, rather than the two full floors of chambers permitted at 102 Mount Vernon, for example. Between 1845 and 1850 75 West Cedar Street was the house of Jonathan Ross, a cabinetmaker, continuing the association of the property with the building trades. Ross' household in 1850 included his wife Elizabeth, 34-year-old Betsy, and Thomas and John Ross, two young boys. It is likely that Betsy helped with domestic work, but as a blood relation, enjoying relatively privileged status as "help," rather than hired staff. The inhabitants of 28 Garden Street are harder to identify but it is very unlikely that any of them were hired servants. The 1850 census lists just four domestics on all of Garden Street, three of them associated with the large hotels at the corner of Cambridge Street. As at 75 West Cedar, the house is divided into three distinct functional levels with two heated rooms on each: a ground floor for cooking and eating; a parlor level for entertaining and socializing; and a third floor for sleeping.[293]

---

[293] The building contract for 74 Pinckney Street makes this subdivision of the house into kitchen, parlor, and chamber levels, explicit. Suffolk County Deeds, "Building Contract for 74 Pinckney Street," bks. 341, 85.

In larger houses with more hired staff, builders sought different solutions to the problems of surveillance and separation of servants. Most of Downing's readers shared his assumption that servants were essentially unreliable, untrustworthy, and in need of regular monitoring and correction. They fretted over servants who, if they were skillful and well trained, might be hired away by a family prepared to pay more. Or they were convinced that their help was not just incompetent but actively dishonest, stealing food or supplies, skimming the milk too thin, or watering down the tea.[294] Cooks, in this context, were especially troublesome. Bad ones were an irritation at best and a source of shame and embarrassment at worst. Both cooks and employers recognized that they were a key component of the provision of genteel hospitality, and skilled cooks had significant leverage to negotiate improved working conditions or better compensation. But whether the object was a cook, laundress, or chambermaid, 19th century domestic managers bemoaned the need for what one called the "severe espionage" necessary to keep a household in proper order.[295] Espionage was work, too, and the kind of house envisioned by Downing, with kitchens segregated from parlors and even from dining rooms, required more of it.

In the 1840s and '50s, the perceived unreliability of servants generally was increasingly aimed at Irish servants in particular. Following the 1845 potato famine, Boston's native Irish population exploded with immigrants seeking work and the jobs allowed to them were, on the whole, the lowest-status, most degrading occupations in

---

[294] Claudia L Bushman, *"A Good Poor Man's Wife": Being a Chronicle of Harriet Hanson Robinson and Her Family in Nineteenth-Century New England* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1981), 110.

[295] The Author of "Getting into Society," "Family Portraits."

the city. Between 1830 and 1850, the proportion of Irish-born residents of Boston rose from 17.1% to 37.7%.[296] Most of these could only find work in unskilled and semi-skilled labor. In 1850, nearly half of all the Irish-born residents of Boston enumerated in the federal census were listed as laborers, by far the highest proportion of any ethnic group. The same census found that 2,227 of the city's 3,107 domestic servants were Irish, about 71%.[297] The Irish had long been viewed with a mixture of suspicion and contempt in Boston, a perspective which had erupted into violence in 1834, when a mob, including a company of fire-fighters, burned a convent in neighboring Charlestown to the ground.[298] In 1837, a company of Boston firemen clashed with an Irish funeral procession in a melee that eventually involved a thousand people and had to be dispersed by military force.[299] Spectacular public events like these encouraged an environment of suspicion that infiltrated domestic space, as well. At an extreme of mistrust, some Bostonians suspected that the ubiquitous Irish serving girl was not just unreliable but also a spy of the Pope.[300] Even before 1845, Irish immigrants were an

---

296 Peter R. Knights, *The Plain People of Boston, 1830-1860: A Study in City Growth* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 36.

297 Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants, 1790-1880*, 253.

298 Ibid., 178–206; Daniel A. Cohen, "Passing the Torch: Boston Firemen, 'Tea Party' Patriots, and the Burning of the Charlestown Convent," *Journal of the Early Republic* 24, no. 4 (December 1, 2004): 527–86; Nancy Lusignan Schultz, *Fire & Roses: The Burning of the Charlestown Convent, 1834* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002).

299 *The Boston Almanac for the Year 1838*, vol. 1 (Boston: S.N. Dickinson, 1838), 39–40.

300 James O'Connor, "Anti-Catholic Prejudice," *American Catholic Quarterly Review*, 1 (1876): 13, cited in Handlin, *Boston's Immigrants, 1790-1880*, 186.

important part of the labor pool for domestic service, though one thought to be untrustworthy and less reliable than native-born workers from rural New England, even those without relevant skills. In 1829, Ellen Coolidge expressed her misgivings about both groups of servants in an especially bilious letter. "I am superintending the movements of a lubberly oaf just caught in the woods of New Hampshire, and whom I am thankful to have in place of an unprincipled impudent lying Irishman, whom we have just dismissed after enduring his knaveries a year and a half rather than undertake the breaking in of such a two legged steer as we have now got."[301]

But as in the Federal era, the wealthiest families could pay for the best servants, hiring them away from neighbors fully trained and thereby limiting the perceived need for monitoring. Beacon Street, with some of the most richly valued real estate in Boston, had a high proportion of servants, with more than 3 per household, on average. It also had a low proportion of Irish-born servants, with roughly half the city-wide average, according to the 1850 federal census returns. Samuel and Mary Appleton, for example, at 37 Beacon Street, employed seven servants, all of them from New England states, to care for their family of three. Next door, at 38 Beacon, Lucy and Fitzhenry Homer, with their young daughter Isabelle, kept five servants busy, three women and two men, all in their 20s, three of them Irish.

Next door at 39 Beacon, Nathan Appleton, then 74, continued to live with his multi-generational family of five along with four servants, all from New England, all between age 20 and 30. And Daniel and Mary Parker lived at number 40 with their adult daughter Emily and four servants, including two middle-aged women (Rebecca

---

[301] Coolidge to Trist, March 13, 1829.

Hour, 60, and Ruth Shavell, 56); Mary Mitchell, 23; and one man, the lone Irish native, Barney Bundy, 30. Other houses facing the Common made more use of Irish help. Elisabeth and Martin Brimmer rattled around in 48 Beacon with six servants between the ages of 22 and 36, three of them Irish, three from New Hampshire. On all of Beacon Street, there were only two black servants. One, Edward Williams, was 28 and worked in the house of Peter and Elisabeth Parker at number 49. Three British women of similar age, two of them Irish, served the Parkers and their daughter Ellen. In this house, and in many others on Beacon Street, the domestic staff outnumbered members of the family. 49 Beacon is distinguished, however, in its reliance on Irish and black labor.

At 54 Beacon, William and Mary Ann Appleton and their children Harriet, Kitty, and Charles, were looked after by a staff of three, including two men, all from northern New England. Louisa, the youngest, was just 18 years old. Number 55 was much fuller, with four servants, two from New England, and two from the Maritime provinces, responsible for the five members of the William Prescott family. Most Beacon Street households had no more than one or two Irish servants, except at its western edge, beyond Charles Street, where buildings were newer and land was cheaper. On the more established, and more expensive, blocks of Beacon east of Charles Street, there were only 29 Irish servants in all, 31% percent of the total servant population and much lower than the city-wide average of 71%. On Beacon and Mount Vernon streets, the longstanding preference for native-born servants persisted well into the era in which the vast majority of people in service were Irish. As Louisa Crowninshield Bacon recalled of this period, "In those days we always had American servants, though already some country girls were beginning to work in the

mills…These maids came from Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine," but "[w]hen no more American servants could be found, like everyone else we had Irish, in fact, they were the only ones available."[302]

In well served mansions like those on Beacon Street, something like Harrison Gray Otis' and Andrew Jackson Downing's ideal could be approached, with a kitchen far removed from public rooms, separate stairs for servants and guests, and separate bedchambers. Adam and Mary Thaxter's house, designed by Edward Shaw in 1837, shows how builders of the grandest houses of the antebellum period continued to prefer refined comfort to the convenience of servants. In its grand scale, its elaborate Greek Revival finishes, its generous provisions for service, and its careful coordination of the movement of servants, 59 Mount Vernon Street embodies the antebellum side-passage plan at its most grandiose and most polite. Its provisions for service are key to its proper functioning as a polite gentry house, with a kitchen and wash room in a rear wing, buffered by a vestibule. The movement of servants, as well as their work, is carefully kept out of sight in this house, with front and rear stairs winding up through all four floors.

Circulation routes for guests and servants are more carefully coordinated at 59 Mount Vernon than in most of its contemporaries, with separate entrances to the principal rooms and separate passageways (Figure 106). Guests and family members alike could avoid using the same spaces as workers, moving from drawing room to dining room or upstairs to the parlors without occupying the same space as a servant or catching a glimpse of one of the work rooms. Despite this house segregating the

---

[302] Louisa Crowninshield Bacon, *Reminiscences* (Salem, Mass: Newcomb & Gauss, printers, 1922), 34, 37.

movement of guests and servants so thoroughly, in 1852, the Thaxters made significant changes to make it still more polite, not by improving the interior finishes but by gutting the service wing and adding a new second floor above it, containing two bedchambers—one opening to the passage in the main block and another that was accessible only from the wash room, up a new rear stair. This rear room relocated a servant's chamber from an upper floor to the ell, where it communicated directly with the work rooms below. The kitchen was modernized with a new stove and other updated fittings and the wash room enlarged, but the most significant change was the addition of a third staircase and a room at the rear of the service wing, labeled "John's chamber" in the architect's floor plan (Figure 107).

Who is John? And why should he be given the seeming privilege of a private staircase? In 1850, Adam Thaxter's household included his wife, Charlotte, two sons, W. W. and Sam, aged 16 and 7, and two daughters, 12 year old M. G. and 9 year old Isabelle. Sharing the house with the Thaxters was a staff of four domestics, Lucinda Newton, Lucretia Marfund, and Mary Mauck, all from New England, and John Cassidy. John was an unmarried 26-year-old man from Ireland, making him a doubly troublesome member of the household, though one apparently valuable enough for the Thaxters to build him a new room. For, aside from their general untrustworthiness, a persistent trope of the literature on servants in this period was the moral danger of having young single men and women, of sexual maturity, living under the same roof. Single women might tempt husbands and fathers to infidelity or be seduced themselves by single men on the staff. John's separate bedroom, in this context, is not as significant as his private stair. This third circulation route, embedded within and separate from those in the service wing, creates an additional path that separates John

from his female coworkers. It is not to prevent him from accidental interactions with polite guests, but to limit his out of sight interactions with Lucinda, Lucretia, and Mary. John could be counted upon, it indicates, to resist the temptations of sloth, indolence, and theft but not, perhaps, extramarital encounters with his fellow servants. This, I suggest, is a prophylactic stair.[303] It is also a stair that provides a rare glimpse of the ability of some servants to assert some autonomy in this period. Carol Lasser finds agency revealed, obliquely, in the repeated frustration of householders like Ellen Coolidge about the intransigence of servants who resist performing additional work and responding to exceptional demands.[304] In a similar way, it is also possible to perceive agency in the material record: in the location of the kitchen, for example, on the ground floor at 74 Pinckney Street, in the improvements to the cooking facilities at 59 Mount Vernon Street, and in the provision of a separate, private stair for John Cassidy. Even in the increasingly oppressive era in which service was re-imagined as wage labor, rather than help, servants found ways to negotiate for improved wages, better working conditions, and more private quarters.

In polite houses like 59 Mount Vernon Street, the provision of service required attention to two things, above all: the location of cooking and cleaning facilities; and the movement of workers between those rooms and the public parts of the house. As long as householders were served by staff who were not family members, the competing imperatives of separation and the surveillance required careful planning.

---

[303] John's private stair anticipates the practice, in Victorian England, of providing country houses with service stairs that were segregated by sex. See Girouard, *Life in the English Country House*, 276.

[304] Lasser, "The Domestic Balance of Power."

For historians, attention to the provision of service shows the diversity of ways in which individuals solved these perceived problems. The study of movement within the house shows how architecture was used to pursue refinement through the exclusion of work.

This chapter describes the architectural manifestation of the shift in thinking about service in Boston from a relationship of mutual responsibilities and mutual obligations to a contractual one, in which servants and householders negotiated compensation independent of any social bonds. In her 1823 essay on servants, Sarah Wentworth Morton captured the patriarchal condescension of this early relationship, mixed with some sympathy and an acknowledgement of interdependence: "If our servants depend upon us, no less do we rely on them; indeed they could generally live without our patronage, better than we without their services, since they can exist without luxuries, and without the attendant aid of others… We may depress those who serve, but not with impunity, for in some way they will certainly recriminate."[305]

In early mansions, elite builders were content for servants and guests to use the same passageways and doorways to move through the house. But beginning in the first decade of the 1800s, builders of Boston's grandest mansions started building wings with separate kitchens and service stairs and setting aside low-status chambers in an attic for quarters. By the 1820s and '30s, even Boston's middling houses were increasingly provisioned with separate passageways, staircases, and doorways for domestic staff. The increasing social and architectural distance between servants and their employers redefined this relationship and required reconsideration of the form of

---

[305] Morton, *My Mind and Its Thoughts, in Sketches, Fragments, and Essays*, 199.

the house, from mansions like 59 Mount Vernon Street to much more modest houses like 74 Pinckney Street. As the prescriptive literature and domestic fiction of the 1830s and ‘40s reveals, redefining the social order of the house to suit the new labor regime was a significant, shared, long-term undertaking. It nearly exhausted Ellen Coolidge.

Bostonians enlisted the blunt instrument of architecture to help manage this shift from service as help to hired labor, reworking stairs, passages, and cook rooms to accommodate changing household relationships. This materialist belief in the power of architecture to shape social life was widely shared. But the ability of buildings to regulate experience, or to define the terms of their habitation, was limited. The presence of a thriving community of free African-Americans and fugitive slaves just steps from Pinckney Street illustrates how some residents of Beacon Hill resisted normative notions of the role of architecture in social and political life.

FIGURES

FIGURES REMOVED FOR COPYRIGHTING

Chapter 6

ORDER CONTESTED

This history of Beacon Hill's principal houses and their inhabitants illustrates how a broad-based desire for a well-regulated social world was achieved through building. The construction and decoration of parlors, kitchens, dining rooms, and passageways all sought to bring into being an ideal antebellum community of fair-trading merchants, moral families, and compliant, industrious domestic workers. But not all Bostonians were committed to this vision of the mercantile city nor shared equally in its benefits. The community of free African-Americans concentrated on Beacon Hill's north slope resisted normative notions of civic order and actively opposed regulations like the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, which affirmed the status of enslaved people as property and permitted Southern slave catchers to hunt alleged runaways in Northern cities. This community, mostly lacking the access to capital necessary for large-scale construction projects, shaped the city through more modest means, occupying streets and buildings in ways that were often in conflict with what Dell Upton calls the systematic landscape of the early nineteenth century city.[306] These small-scale interventions are difficult to perceive through conventional field-based research, as they survive only rarely and often in the interstices between buildings. More problematic, this environment, characterized by small wooden houses and tangled alleyways, has been largely destroyed through twentieth-century development. But attention to this landscape, even in fragmentary form, is critical for assessing one

---

[306] Upton, "Another City: The Urban Cultural Landscape in the Early Republic."

of Beacon Hill's least visible but most important communities and it exposes the limitations of a field-based approach to architectural history that fails to account for experience.

The refined rows of Beacon Hill have been host to many of New England's principal artists, authors, architects, merchants, and lawmakers. Less famed, and less favored, are the inhabitants that occupied the tenements lining its northern streets (Figure 108).[307] In the early twentieth century, these buildings replaced a dense and tangled landscape of smaller structures that accommodated many of the city's artisans and tradespeople, as well as its laboring poor. In the decades before the Civil War, the north slope of Beacon Hill was also the principal center of abolitionism in New England and a refuge for runaway slaves. To critics who believed in a positive relationship between architectural and personal character, and to city-builders who sought to make Boston a model of efficiency and order, this district posed a persistent problem.[308] But many of the qualities that contemporary critics derided—in particular, the irregularity of its streetscape and its buildings hidden in courts and alleys—also made Beacon Hill a northern center of resistance to slavery.

Studies of the relationship between architecture and order have emphasized the role of institutional buildings in bringing prescriptive order to human behavior.

---

[307] The tenement landscape of Boston generally has been treated in Zachary Violette, "The Decorated Tenement: Working-Class Housing in Boston and New York, 1860-1910" (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 2014).

[308] See, e.g., Mayor Josiah Quincy's account of the west end of Boston, a district that included the north slope of Beacon Hill, in Josiah Quincy, *A Municipal History of the Town and City of Boston, During Two Centuries. From September 17, 1630, to September 17, 1830* (Boston: Little and Brown, 1852), 102–105.

Prisons and asylums have been a recurring subject of this kind of analysis but post offices and schools have also been suggested as places where architecture demands discipline.[309] Dell Upton describes how the fabric of the early nineteenth-century American city was inscribed broadly in mythologies of order. Many city dwellers believed that spatial practices could be associated with social ones, advocating forcefully for the separation and classification of citizens through building.[310] In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, Bostonians erected two new prisons, a workhouse, and a public hospital to segregate its marginal residents at the outskirts of the city. In the same period, three new market buildings created a space where commercial transactions could be imagined as transparent, fair, and disciplined.[311] Not every corner of the metropolis could be remade, however, and the "shadow landscape" of oyster houses, brothels, and unlicensed taverns that remained, many of them concentrated on the north side of Beacon Hill, seemed to be a constant threat to a fragile urban order.

Until late in the twentieth century, the north slope of Beacon Hill was one of the poorest, densest areas of Boston. Abutting the elegant, fashionable south slope, it

---

309 Michel Foucault, *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison* (New York: Vintage, 1995); Andrzejewski, "Architecture and the Ideology of Surveillance in Modern America, 1850-1950"; Upton, "Lancasterian Schools, Republican Citizenship, and the Spatial Imagination in Early Nineteenth-Century America"; Carla Yanni, "The Linear Plan for Insane Asylums in the United States before 1866," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 62, no. 1 (March 2003): 24–49.

310 Upton, "Another City: The Urban Cultural Landscape in the Early Republic"; Upton, *Another City*.

311 John Quincy, Jun., *Quincy's Market: A Boston Landmark* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003).

was, in the early 1800s, notorious as a haven for prostitutes, African Americans, and unlicensed drinking houses. Its physical environment seemed as disorderly as its inhabitants. Small, wooden buildings erected on tiny back lots competed for space with more commodious structures on the principal streets. With marginal inhabitants and marginal buildings, the north slope of Beacon Hill would seem to confirm an enduring claim about the relationship between architecture and human behavior: that irregular buildings produce irregular people.

Certainly, Bostonians understood their city in these terms. Contemporary critics of its built form equated architectural order with upright morality, fairness, and plain dealing. Commerce was at the heart of the problem, as the free and fair exchange of goods was thought to require an orderly arrangement of market spaces, in particular, and the city in general. In 1825, Mayor Josiah Quincy demolished several blocks of buildings at the waterfront and filled the town dock to build an imposing granite market house flanked by a pair of brick warehouses, the better to accommodate the city's victuallers (Figure 109). Charles Bulfinch, as architect, selectman, and chief of police, worked to regularize the moral and physical landscapes of Boston, devising and enforcing regulations that required new buildings to be built of brick and sited ten feet back from the street. Thomas Pemberton, writing his *Description of Boston* in 1794, gave architectural durability more ethical weight than most, arguing that wood buildings were a kind of evil; their brick counterparts, conversely, a great gift to the ages.[312]

---

[312] Whitehill, *Boston: A Topographical History*, 95–98; Pemberton, "Description of Boston." For the importance of regularity in the early American urban imagination, see Upton, "Another City: The Urban Cultural Landscape in the Early Republic."

Beacon Hill was barely developed before its north slope was described as a district of dubious character. The crown of the hill itself was a pastoral spot, beloved of romantics and a famed point from which to survey all of Boston. But reformers railed against the profusion of unlicensed taverns and bustling houses of prostitution on its northern and western fringes. In 1784, a wanted thief was tracked as far as Beacon Hill before vanishing into its still sparse streets.[313] More troubling to some, Boston—and Beacon Hill in particular—was reputed to be a destination for fugitive slaves. An advertisement for a Connecticut runaway described a black servant named Fortune who was "supposed to have pushed for Boston."[314] A contributor to the *Massachusetts Centinel* lamented that Boston was becoming "an asylum for them [i.e., African-Americans] from all parts of the continent."[315] And by the 1810s, despite the efforts of the Mount Vernon Proprietors, some called Beacon Hill "Negro Hill" and made it a target for racially motivated mobs.[316] Despite such unwelcome attention, the black community in Boston could, and did, provide sanctuary. In 1824, John and

---

[313] Samuel Sellon, "STOP THIEVES," *Massachusetts Centinel*, May 29, 1784, Saturday, vol. 1, no. 20, p. 2, col. 3.

[314] "Fifteen Dollars Reward," *Connecticut Courant*, June 29, 1784, no. 1014, p. 3.

[315] NOT ADAMS, "For the Centinel," *Massachusetts Centinel*, December 18, 1784, vol. 2, no. 26, Saturday, p. 2, col. 3. Besides Boston, the other two New England centers for fugitives were New Bedford and Berkshire County, in the rural western part of the state. See Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 106–123; Wilbur H Siebert, "The Underground Railroad in Massachusetts," *New England Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (September 1936): 447–67.

[316] Phillip Lapsansky, *An African American Miscellany: Selections from a Quarter Century of Collecting, 1970-1995* (Philadelphia: Library Company of Philadelphia, 1996), 28; Savage, *Police Records and Recollections, Or, Boston by Daylight and Gaslight*, 66.

Sophia Robinson were jailed for liberating a black child from her white guardian out of fear that she would be sold into slavery. The child was never recovered because, in the words of the court record, she had "disappeared into the black community."[317]

Other records suggest that the Beacon Hill neighborhood, specifically, provided refuge, even after the passage of the notorious Fugitive Slave Act in 1850. In the 1850 census, the Phillips Street household of Lewis Hayden included seven African-Americans, including William and Ellen Craft, who listed their places of birth in slave-holding states. The Crafts fled bondage in Georgia in 1848 and, despite being pursued by agents of their presumptive owner, had been living and working openly on Beacon Hill for two years. To cross the slave states, the Crafts had travelled in careful disguise but in Boston they moved freely, conducting business under their own names, he as a cabinetmaker, she as an upholsterer.[318] Nor were black refugees solely from slaveholding states. African-Americans fled racial violence in New York, Philadelphia, and Baltimore, seeking the less hostile environment of Boston. In contrast to other major Northern cities, the black population of Boston remained stable in the decades before the Civil War and in 1860, less than half of Boston's black residents were natives of Massachusetts.[319] Boston was hardly, however, the promised

---

[317] Helen Tunnicliff Catterall, ed., Commonwealth v. John Robinson and Sophia Robinson, in *Judicial Cases Concerning American Slavery and the Negro,* 4 (New York, 1968): 501, cited in Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 106. In 1821, the Robinsons lived in the North End but by the 1820s the geographic center of the African-American community had shifted to the north slope of Beacon Hill.

[318] Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 113; William Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom; Or, The Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery* (London: W. Tweedie, 1860).

[319] Bruce Laurie, *Beyond Garrison: Antislavery and Social Reform* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 245–247. Frederick Douglass was warned, when

land. For African-Americans, it represented the best of several bad choices among North American cities.[320] Despite the persistent hostility of the white population, the Crafts, like other fugitives, were able to live and move relatively freely in Boston—or, at any rate, on Beacon Hill.

The physical setting of this community is glimpsed only in fragments. Though the south slope, developed in the first half of the nineteenth century for genteel families of merchants and professionals, has remained remarkably well preserved, the north slope buildings of the same period have not fared so well. They have been replaced by tenements, police stations, and schools. If nineteenth-century fugitives came to Beacon Hill to disappear, in the twentieth, it was the neighborhood itself that vanished. A *circa* 1900 photograph in the collection of the Bostonian Society shows a row of wooden buildings in a narrow court off the western end of Phillips Street. By 1908, the old, unsanitary wooden tenements had given way to new brick ones. Around the same time, the Peter Faneuil School replaced the row from 56 to 64 Joy Street, along with the tumbledown shanties in their rear yards. In the early nineteenth century, Joy Street had been the center of Boston's black community. Ninety-eight of the nearly 300 entries for African-Americans in the 1821 city directory gave their

---

he arrived in New York, not to linger since it was understood to be a dangerous city for African-Americans in general and fugitives in particular. Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (New York and Auburn: Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1855), 335–340. Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians,* 46–47.

[320] Harrison Gray Otis' sentiments were shared by many. "Negro inhabitants [are] a quiet, inoffensive, and in many respects a useful race, [but our] repugnance to intimate social relations with them is insurmountable." Harrison Gray Otis, *Niles Weekly Register,* 45 (Sept. 14, 1833): 43, cited in Leon F. Litwack, *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 104.

residence as Joy Street, far more than any other street in the city. A generation later in 1850, eighty-four of Boston's taxable black residents lived here. But the physical environment that they inhabited does not survive. Only about a dozen buildings from before the Civil War remain on Joy Street's northern blocks.

Though turn-of-the century tenement builders were responsible for some destruction of the streetscape of Beacon Hill's early nineteenth-century black community, a piecemeal approach to demolition was not for Boston's ambitious planners in the 1950s and 1960s. The entire neighborhood across Cambridge Street from the north slope was infamously cleared in 1958 for an upper-income housing and shopping district.[321] Not long after, the eastern portion of Beacon Hill, from Bowdoin Street to Tremont Street, was demolished to make way for a massive government complex planned by I.M. Pei. Gone here are not just rows of buildings but entire streets. With its edges clipped and its interior considerably trimmed, the north slope of the Crafts remains evident in just a handful of suggestive artifacts: historic maps, early photographs, the remnants of a network of alleyways, and a very few surviving buildings.

The rough partitioning of Beacon Hill into north and south slopes obscures the further subdivision of the north slope into distinctive smaller neighborhoods, organized by block. That part of the north slope that developed first, from South Russell to Bowdoin Street, between Cambridge and Myrtle streets, was, in the early

---

[321] Gans, *The Urban Villagers*. Gans was extremely critical of the prevailing view among Boston's planners that the physical environment of the West End was one of the causes of the relative poverty and apparent social deficits of its residents in the 1950s.

nineteenth century, composed of three distinct sections: along Joy Street, the heart of Beacon Hill's African-American community; on either side of Temple Street, a district of artisans, including bakers, a pewterer, a housewright, a printer, and a mantua maker; and on Bowdoin Street, near genteel Bowdoin Square, a row of houses for members of Boston's merchant elite, dominated by Joseph Coolidge's mansion at the northern end. The houses along Bowdoin Street were the most richly valued, those along Temple more modestly assessed, and the properties on Joy the cheapest. Their values were low enough to be in reach of Tobias Locker, a black laborer, and Scipio, a former slave, two of the earliest purchasers of property on Joy Street. This pattern persisted into the 1820s, by which time the African Meetinghouse had been built on Smith Court. By 1860, the black community of Beacon Hill had become firmly established on the north slope, with the Meetinghouse, four additional churches, a school, and over two-thirds of Boston's black population.[322] It had spread geographically, as well, with high concentrations of African-Americans along Joy, Revere, and Phillips streets. In the same period, the elite residents of the north slope were abandoning it—the Coolidge mansion on Cambridge Street was demolished in 1843 and replaced with two ranges of brick rowhouses.

The twentieth-century erasure of this community echoes a long-standing repugnance among many privileged white Bostonians toward their black neighbors. Northern visitors to Charleston and Savannah were amazed at the degree of mixing between whites and their enslaved servants.[323] In Boston, where less than 3% of the

---

[322] Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 3.

[323] For a vivid account of this racial invisibility in Charleston, South Carolina, see Herman, *Town House*, 119–154.

population was black in the antebellum period, and where a black stranger might be a fugitive from slavery, dark skin made one conspicuous, especially in the fraught years around the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act. For many Bostonians, the presence of a cohesive population of free African-Americans along with some of North America's most strident anti-slavery organizations was a constant annoyance and one that occasionally erupted into mob violence. For abolitionists, however, and for fugitives themselves, having so many residents who had escaped their Southern masters was a source of enormous pride and an opportunity to challenge openly the supporters of slavery. Lewis Hayden, for example, boldly advertised his Cambridge Street clothing store in Garrison's *Liberator* as owned by a former slave.[324]

With so many of its buildings demolished for tenements, government buildings, and parking lots, the evidence for the earliest architectural character of Beacon Hill's African-American community lies in maps and official records, such as the returns of the 1798 Federal Direct Tax. In 1798, most of Beacon Hill's residents lived on one of four north-south streets.[325] Bowdoin, Temple, Joy and Irving streets contained roughly three quarters of all the houses on the north slope (Figure 6). The African-American neighborhood on the west side of Joy Street was well established by that year, as suggested in the deed records and in the 1790 city poll tax returns.[326]

---

[324] Augusta Rohrbach, *Truth Stranger Than Fiction: Race, Realism, and the U.S. Literary Marketplace* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 15.

[325] Nathaniel Ingersoll Bowditch, 1855 notes on Boston land titles, reprinted in Bowditch, *Fifth Report of the Record Commissioners: "Gleaner" Articles*, 39–40; Chamberlain, *Beacon Hill*, 13. Thanks to Claire Dempsey for pointing out the long life of the early-18th-century property divisions on Beacon Hill.

[326] The deed evidence for the existence of an African-American neighborhood on Joy Street in the 1790s is detailed in Grover and DeSilva, "Historic Resource Study:

All of Ward 7, which then included the north slope of Beacon Hill and the West End of Boston, contained only forty-six brick houses, most of which sat on or near Cambridge Street. [327] By far the majority of houses in Ward 7—at least five times as many—were of frame construction. The 1814 Hales map illustrates the high concentration of framed buildings in the older and poorer part of Beacon Hill, north of Myrtle Street, in contrast to the new brick development along the streets to the south that so impressed William Bentley (Figure 30). The tax record further indicates that the early wooden houses of the north slope had a median footprint of 600 square feet, compared with 1,000 square feet for all brick houses in Ward 7. Along Joy Street, the median size was just 432 square feet.

Such statistics say little about how these buildings were occupied, though other documentary evidence suggests that they were densely packed with people. The 1820 federal census lists 347 people in sixty-five households on Joy Street in 1820, in forty-three dwelling houses. Of those, 251 were African-American, spread across thirty of Beacon Hill's smallest buildings, with more than eight people per house. Modern historians and geographers have described in detail the crowded nature of early American cities, in general—Boston packed almost 25,000 people on its 1.2-square-mile peninsula in 1800. Carole Shammas observes that the high cost of urban land

---

Boston African-American National Historic Site.", 24-26. The 1790 tax returns confirm that several black households had been established by then.

[327] In 1798, Beacon Hill was part of Ward 7; by 1820, Beacon Hill was reclassified in Ward 6.

encouraged both richer and poorer residents of cities to cluster together, with the poorest living in small houses on small lots.[328]

The 1790 Boston poll tax and the 1798 Federal Direct Tax records further reveal that this section of Beacon Hill was among the poorest parts of the city, with some of its smallest houses and lots. In 1790, most residents of the area around Joy Street had no possessions of any taxable value.[329] A few were tradespeople; others were African-American laborers; many were invalids or elderly. Lots along the west side of Joy Street were laid out before the Revolution but were slow to develop until the 1790s. These parcels had been subdivided into lots of about 30 feet wide and 120 feet deep, running back to Edward Carnes' ropewalk. Many were reduced still further by the common practice of selling off small corners of the lots, usually at the rear, abutting the ropewalk, and providing access to them by rights-of-way from the public street. Boston Smith and Samuel Bean each owned half of a 600-square-foot wooden house that straddled two lots on Joy Street in 1789. In April of 1793, Smith sold a twelve-by-eighty foot strip at the rear of his lot to Hamlet Earl. Because this tiny parcel was surrounded by private land, the deed permitted Earl "full & undisturbed privilege of passing & repassing with horse, Cart and otherwise from the east end of

---

[328] By comparison, in 1990, the density of New York City was roughly 23,000 people per square mile. In 1800, both Manhattan and Philadelphia contained more than 40,000 people per square mile. Carole Shammas, "The Space Problem in Early United States Cities," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 57, no. 3 (July 2000): 505–42.

[329] The 1790 tax returns do not name streets but correlating the tax list with the 1789 Boston city directory and the 1798 Direct Tax records, which do name street addresses for individuals, make it possible to identify a cluster of residents around Joy Street in the 1790 records.

the premises to and from Belknap [modern Joy] Street."[330] Unusually, this right was not accommodated by means of a passage or a right-of-way but rather by a broadly written privilege to cross Boston Smith's property. In October of that year, Earl sold half of his 960-square-foot lot to Cuff Buffum, and the two households built a small dwelling, roughly 320 square feet in area, that they shared. Next door, Prince Watts filled his 30 by 120-foot lot with four small wooden structures by 1798: his own small house, another that he leased to Peter Bayley and Mrs. Bostille, a workshop, and a barn. Smith, Watts, Buffum and Earl, all African-Americans, achieved a modest attainment by packing small wooden structures onto inconvenient, inexpensive parcels, precisely the sort of residences that Boston's early national critics like Thomas Pemberton found abhorrent. They did so, furthermore, without providing an obvious, delineated means of access. Peter Bayley, Mrs. Bostille, Cuff Buffum, and Hamlet Earl were all permitted to traverse someone else's property to go out to the street, without a right-of-way partitioned at the side of the lot. They depended upon established relationships, informal personal networks and local knowledge of who should and should not be on one's property. Their rights to land they did not own was understood by the participants and recorded in deed, but not rendered in the landscape by boundaries, passageways, or fences. It was opaque to outsiders and remains illegible in the material record.

Further south on Joy Street, white artisans, laborers, and mariners also built on the back lots abutting the ropewalk, usually with access provided by a legally and physically partitioned passageway. Peter Jessamine, laborer, bought a 25 by 30-foot

---

[330] Suffolk County Deeds, L. 175, f. 196, April 18, 1793.

parcel in the middle of Joel Holden's lot in 1796, gaining access to the public street by means of a four-foot-wide passageway along the south side of the front lot.[331] Next door, Stockbridge Josselyn, housewright, bought the back half of blacksmith James Tucker's lot in 1795, along with right to use a six-foot-wide passage across Tucker's remnant to reach Joy Street.[332] By 1798, each had built a small wooden house on his parcel.[333] Back-lot building of this kind persisted through the first half of the nineteenth century, to the dismay of critics who saw densely packed wooden buildings as a threat to the safety, health, and morals of the city.[334]

Building in wood would be outlawed in 1803 but building in the interior of blocks continued, because it met a critical need for inexpensive housing. The scourge of urban reformers because it maximized population densities while minimizing light and ventilation, this practice became more common through the nineteenth century, as back-lot building packed growing numbers of poor city-dwellers in a limited space. By 1900, the practice was positively identified with poor health and began to be strictly regulated in major American cities.[335] In 1850, the most notorious such quarters in

---

[331] Ibid., L. 184, f. 10, August 9, 1796.

[332] Ibid., L. 180, f. 144, May 7, 1795.

[333] According to the 1798 Direct Tax returns, Tucker's was 360 square feet in area; Josselyn's 392 square feet.

[334] Sharon Salinger describes how a similar process unfolded in Philadelphia in Salinger, "Spaces, Inside and Outside, in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia," 11–21.

[335] Richard Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990). For Boston, see Lawrence J. Vale, *From the Puritans to the Projects: Public Housing and Public Neighbors* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007).

Boston were in the North End, such as Half-moon Place, where hundreds of Irish immigrants crowded into noisome tenements.[336] On Beacon Hill, those blocks with the highest concentration of alleys and small building lots were also those with the highest concentration of black households—the west side of Joy Street and the eastern end of Phillips Street.[337] In Boston, Chicago, and New York, late-nineteenth-century reformers targeted such landscapes for demolition and redevelopment, noting their prevalence of disease and the lack of fresh air and sunlight that reached the lower floors. Such environments survive only rarely, but their ubiquity on the north slope is revealed in nineteenth-century maps and property surveys. The houses in the interior of the Joy-to-South-Russell Street block north of Myrtle Street were all demolished by 1883 and throughout Beacon Hill, old sites of back-lot buildings have become leafy courtyards or coveted private parking areas (Figure 110).[338]

Through the first decades of the nineteenth century, such lots were also among the very few *owned* by African-Americans in the city of Boston. Lois and Oliver Horton calculate that less than 4.5% of all black households owned real property in the

---

[336] See "Extracts from the 'Report on the Cholera in Boston in 1849,'" Massachusetts Sanitary Commission et al., *Report of a General Plan for the Promotion of Public and Personal Health*, 425–436.

[337] Ellen Rosebrock, "A Historical Account of the Joy Street Block between Myrtle and Cambridge Streets" (Boston: Museum of Afro-American History, December 22, 1978), 6.

[338] Ibid., 10. In an early twentieth-century example of clearing back-lot buildings to create a small courtyard, the renovation of Primus Avenue was featured in *House Beautiful* in 1926. Elizabeth Russell, "An Alley Reclaimed: Primus Avenue on the North Side of Beacon Hill Progresses from a Slum to an Attractive District," *House Beautiful*, November 1926, 578–581.

1850s, or no more than 25 families across the entire city.[339] The memoir of Chloe Spear makes clear the formidable challenges to and the fragility of financial attainment for black Bostonians. Mrs. Spear, in secret, saved money from taking in laundry long enough to be able to purchase half of a small wooden house—she and her husband lived in an unfinished room and let the remainder to tenants.[340] But if ownership of real property could be a source of pride for some, it was tempered by outright anger at the stark contrast with buildings standing only footsteps away. Maria Stewart reminded her audience at Boston's African Masonic Hall that Mrs. Spear was exceptional and that the vast majority of black Americans were prevented from even such modest achievement.

> Cast your eyes about, look as far as you can see; all, all is owned by the lordly white, except here and there a lowly dwelling which the man of color, midst deprivations, fraud and opposition, has been scarce able to procure. Like king Solomon, who put neither nail nor hammer to the temple, yet received the praise; so also have the white Americans gained themselves a name…while in reality we have been their principal foundation and support. We have pursued the shadow, they have obtained the substance; we have performed the labor, they have received the profits; we have planted the vines, they have eaten the fruits of them.[341]

---

[339] Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 11.

[340] R. W. Brown, *Memoir of Mrs. Chloe Spear* (Boston: James Loring, 1832). Like the black residents of Joy Street, Mrs. Spear purchased a tiny lot, just 16 feet, 6 inches by 30 feet in area, along with rights to a six-foot wide passage leading to White Bread Alley, all for $700. The previous owner was a widow, Martha Hickman. See Suffolk County Deeds L. 190, f. 153, September 5, 1798.

[341] Maria W. Stewart, "An Address Delivered at the African Masonic Hall," Boston, February 27, 1833. Viewed at http://afroamhistory.about.com/library/blmaria_stewart_index.htm on April 24, 2006.

In the first half of the nineteenth century, most of the African-American community on Beacon Hill lived in small, wooden dwellings that they did not own but others, like John P. Coburn and Lewis Hayden, achieved enough financial means to build more substantially—in Coburn's case, with the assistance of Asher Benjamin (Figure 111).[342]

Though some, like Chloe Spear, remained in the older North End, black Bostonians principally occupied three blocks on the north slope, along Phillips, Joy, and Revere streets.[343] At the social and physical center of this community was the African Meeting House on Smith Court off of Joy Street, built in 1805-06. This building housed the first African Baptist congregation in the Northern states and remained a center of worship and social activism for black Bostonians for much of the nineteenth century.[344] Here, international abolitionists like Wendell Phillips and George Thompson could find refuge from hostile crowds elsewhere in Boston and an enthusiastic audience.[345] In 1850, these important civic centers were surrounded by a collection of shops and residences where long-standing black residents of Boston gave comfort, employment, and housing to fugitive slaves and other newcomers.

---

[342] Grover and DeSilva, "Historic Resource Study: Boston African-American National Historic Site," 94–97.

[343] The 1850 tax levied on Boston's black residents found 169 taxable African-Americans on Phillips Street, 84 on Joy, and 56 on May, out of a total of 602 taxables across the entire city.

[344] Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*, 41–55.

[345] Grover and DeSilva, "Historic Resource Study: Boston African-American National Historic Site," 78.

Like their smaller neighbors, Hayden's and Coburn's houses were densely occupied. Lewis Hayden shared his handsome brick house on Phillips Street, for example, with the Crafts as well as Peter Curtin, a tailor from South Carolina, and Harrison Crawford, a cook from Virginia. Hayden's clothing shop and Crafts' cabinetmaking shop were both just a block away on Cambridge Street.[346] Nearby, at 81 and 83 Phillips Street, John Taylor and William Manix kept boardinghouses that were also known havens for fugitives, and, like Hayden's, out in the open, fronting directly on a principal street.[347] At his house at 69 Joy Street, hairdresser George Putnam convened meetings of abolitionists and activists seeking to integrate Boston's schools and schemed with Primus Hall and John Telemachus Hilton to establish a black college.[348] Remarkably, Putnam's house survives, a brick, center stair house that has been raised from two to three full stories (Figure 112). In 1853, Putnam sold it to Robert Johnson, himself a fugitive from Virginia who had been living across the street in rented quarters. These buildings were linked by their association with leaders in Boston's African-American community and, especially, their use in sequestering fugitives from slavery, just as their polite neighbors entertained and visited one another in their parlors, black Bostonians used their houses for socializing, political organizing, and providing sanctuary.

For many former slaves, Beacon Hill was the first place where they could experience the modest liberties accorded African-Americans in the antebellum North,

---

[346] Ibid., 102.

[347] Ibid., 108–109.

[348] Ibid., 51–52.

including property ownership. But to many residents of Boston, the north slope, with its small wooden buildings, its taverns, and its boardinghouses, was a district of exceptional moral decay. This reputation developed from its standing as "Mount Whoredom" during the Revolutionary period and was more firmly established by the 1810s. Reverend James Davis's assessment reflects a common understanding of Phillips Street as particularly vicious:

> Without impropriety it may be said, *there* is the place where *Satan's seat is. There* awful impieties prevail; and all conceivable abominations are practiced; *there* the depravity of the human heart is acted out; and from this sink of sin, the seeds of corruption are carried into every part of town…Here in one compact section of the town, it is confidently affirmed and fully believed, there are *three hundred* females wholly devoid of shame and modesty…Multitudes of coloured people, by these examples, are influenced into habits of indolence.[349]

Davis was appalled at the poverty and depravity on Phillips Street, a part of Beacon Hill that he frequently visited in the hope of extending charity and comfort while upbraiding its more brazen residents and threatening them with damnation.

Reinforcing the notion that this part of Beacon Hill was a landscape defined by dissolution was the seemingly haphazard disposition of the old, wooden buildings that crowded along and behind its streets. In 1810, a committee petitioned the Boston selectmen to continue Myrtle Street, just to the south of Phillips Street, toward the west. Their stated intention thereby was "to remove a number of small buildings which are occupied by persons who bring a discredit on the neighborhood."[350] The

---

[349] James Davis and Dudley Dennison Rosseter, *A Brief Account of the Origin and Progress of the Boston Female Society for Missionary Purposes* (Boston: Printed by Lincoln & Edmands, 1818), 7–8.

[350] Boston Registry Department, *A Volume of Records Relating to the Early History of Boston, Containing Minutes of the Selectmen's Meetings, 1799 to, and including,*

presumed links between environment and behavior were graphically illustrated in 1825, when a mob attacked the Beehive, a notorious house of prostitution in the North End. Accounts of the riots make clear that the target of the action was, above all, the building.[351] As one participant reported, "in less than ten minutes there was not a piece of door or window or furniture left." One of Boston's papers noted that no such careful accounting was made of the women themselves. "What became of the wretched females who inhabited the [Beehive], we have not heard, nor do we wish to hear."[352]

Reverend Davis did not address the role of architecture in civic life but his contemporary, Boston mapmaker and surveyor J. G. Hales, did. His 1821 criticism of Boston could easily be taken to refer to Beacon Hill, in particular:

> Uniformity of system in building seems but in a few instances to have been observed (and those of latter years). Every one hath a notion of his own, so much that even in the principal streets you see one house towering over another, some advanced as though to attract attention, others set back seemingly to avoid gaze or notice…the side walls are interrupted by steps, cellar doors, etc. which not only annoys, but at night even hazards the passenger, and in fact the streets may be said to be uniformly irregular and crooked…[353]

1810, vol. 33, Records Relating to the Early History of Boston (Boston: Municipal Printing Office, 1904), 431.

[351] Ritual assaults on buildings had a long tradition in Boston. Robert Blair St. George emphasizes the metaphoric significance and larger social meaning of such mob actions in Robert Blair St. George, *Conversing by Signs: Poetics of Implication in Colonial New England Culture* (University of North Carolina Press, 1998), 206–295.

[352] Cited in Matthew H Crocker, *The Magic of the Many: Josiah Quincy and the Rise of Mass Politics in Boston, 1800-1830* (Amherst: University of Masachusetts Press, 1999), 144.

[353] J. G. Hales, *Survey of Boston and Its Vicinity* (Boston: Ezra Lincoln, 1821), 21.

In the years following the Revolution, several Boston critics—and merchants, in particular—complained about the bustling, crowded qualities of the city's streets, seeking regulations on buildings, projecting signs, and even temporary carts. In a local echo of the partisanship affecting national politics, mechanics, shopkeepers, and country farmers squared off against merchants and magistrates. A testy notice in the *Massachusetts Centinel* complained that

> while a Vendue Master, who is an inhabitant of the town, is denied the privilege of exposing his goods to the streets…, a countryman is allowed to incommode the whole community, by absolutely…rendering it dangerous to pass. The Shop-keepers in Cornhill and the Main Street are excessively injured by this intollerable [*sic*] nuisance…in short the inhabitants are put to very disagreeable situation to commode or gratify a set of men, where impudence and ignorance are alike conspicuous.[354]

A contemporary complained that "[l]arge projecting *signs* are a real *nuisance*, by obstructing the SIGHT of all those who live in their vicinity—and the removal of which would add much to the uniformity and beauty of this town."[355] Hales emphasized the aesthetic demerits of architectural irregularity, others its hazards for commercial and social exchange but all agreed that a lack of order and clarity in city building was an obstacle to civic order.

What critics like Hales objected to were streetscapes like those of the north slope. Their irregularity, so striking in contrast to the neat brick rows along Chestnut and Mount Vernon streets, was a product of the piecemeal development of this part of

---

[354] Citizens, "For the Centinel," *Massachusetts Centinel*, December 1, 1784, 2, no. 21: p. 3, col. 1.

[355] *Massachusetts Centinel*, March 12, 1788, p. 205, col. 3.

Beacon Hill, which was little regulated during its period of most intensive development. In 1805, an enterprising Mr. Tayler tried to claim property at the south end of South Russell Street by fencing in a section of it, blocking access to Myrtle Street.[356] The practice of back-lot building and the prevalence of alleyways and unmarked passages rendered the built environment opaque to outsiders, its houses and their activities frequently invisible from the public streets (Figure 113). Contrast this with the transparent ideal of the polite double parlor in the same period. The south slope was a much more carefully tended streetscape. In 1820, an indenture was applied to houses along Mount Vernon Street to ensure that no building would ever be erected within thirty feet of the curb—no nearer, in other words, than the Harrison Gray Otis or Jonathan Mason mansions.[357] Deeds for several houses on the south slope include restrictions on height, to preserve desirable views across the city from houses away from the Common. Back-lot building, too, was anathema to south-slope builders. Only lately have nineteenth-century property boundaries on Mount Vernon and Beacon Street been routinely violated: first, to partition disused carriage houses from their associated mansions; and, more recently, to subdivide large row houses into apartments. Nor are the rows of the south slope broken by alleys or courts. The few open passages that interrupt the monolithic blocks of brick buildings on Chestnut Street are private, locked ways that lead to rear yards. Even the seemingly public park

---

[356] Boston Registry Department, *Selectmen's Minutes, 1799 to 1810*, 33:276.

[357] Chamberlain, 89; cf. Suffolk Deeds L. 269, f. 304. See also Suffolk Deeds L. 405, f. 6, which stipulates that houses built on the site of the demolished Mason house, after 1836, would have to conform to this restriction, as well.

at the center of Louisburg Square is kept under lock and key, accessible only to surrounding property owners.

But on the north slope, relics of ropewalks still lined the alley behind Joy Street in 1814, and small wooden buildings sat in the middle of streets. North slope property owners built forward, out into the street, and they also built backward, covering the rear of their lots, erecting buildings without direct access to a public road. The 1852 Slatter and Callan map of Boston illustrates the long-lasting implications of the irregular development of this part of Beacon Hill, where the blocks between Joy and Grove streets, for example, are packed with buildings which only communicate with the main streets by way of a network of tiny alleys (Figure 114). In the early 19th century, there were at least eleven alleys leading to back-lot houses from the west side of Joy Street alone.[358] Physical evidence for the practice on Beacon Hill survives in the narrow intra-block alleys of the north slope and a handful of early 19th-century buildings.

At the back of Smith Court, an eight-foot wide lane runs north to number 7A, one of the earliest surviving houses on Beacon Hill. This short alley is the remnant of a much longer throughway that once extended along a ropewalk from Myrtle to Cambridge Street and was lined with small frame houses. In the early 1800s, Auburn Court was gained from the rear of Smith Court, as today, but also from several narrow passages further north along Joy Street, many of which were established to provide access to small back-lot houses (Figure 115).[359] Like them, 7A Smith Court could not

---

[358] Rosebrock, "A Historical Account of the Joy Street Block between Myrtle and Cambridge Streets," 6.

[359] Ibid., 35–47.

be reached or even seen from a major public street. Instead, a network of rights-of-way, some as narrow as two feet, cut between and along buildings on Joy and South Russell Streets.

At the southern end of Auburn Court is another mid-block house that was built around 1800 (Figure 116). It is accessible from a small alley which opens onto Joy Street as well as from Auburn Court. It may also be reached, via a narrow right-of-way, from South Russell Street. From this house, in other words, one could exit via courts and alleys to South Russell Street, Joy Street, or, eventually, Cambridge Street. The nearby African Meeting house was at the center of this complex network of streets, courts, and alleys that connected dozens of buildings between Joy and South Russell streets, extending from Cambridge Street to Revere Street. This spatial network was complex and highly permeable, in stark contrast to the more transparent order of the commercial city that grew around it. To outsiders, it seemed impassable—a web of unmarked, dark, and twisty passages that connected back-lot buildings to one another and to the public streets. Mayor Josiah Quincy found it, in 1824, to be a center of vice, prostitution, and unchecked crime.[360]

Back-lot building made the north slope hard to fathom by those who favored the more orderly streetscapes of Chestnut and Mount Vernon Streets. Its inscrutability might be troublesome for critics and city officials but its complexity could be an advantage for those who needed to keep their doings secret. This included operators of unlicensed taverns and brothels, as Quincy emphasized, but it also included the

---

[360] For a contemporary account of the apparent dangers of the unregulated city with specific reference to the area around Beacon Hill in the 1820s, see Quincy, *Municipal History of the Town and City of Boston*, 102–105.

community of Bostonians dedicated to supporting and protecting refugees from Southern slavery. The ability of fugitive persons like the Crafts to live, work, and sometimes hide on Beacon Hill depended upon both spatial and social networks: first, in the form of a physical environment that allowed them to move freely and, when necessary, out of sight; and second, an organized community willing to absorb them, centered on black leaders like Lewis Hayden and William C. Nell. In the service of abolition, it is clear that this community was well organized, reliably able to raise support for individual fugitives and tireless in organizing political action to end slavery. Those who did make it to Boston found extensive personal networks of aid ready to feed, clothe, and employ them. They might be met by Austin Bearse on his schooner *Moby Dick*, be given clothes to replace their rough uniform of ozenbrig by John Coburn, or find room and board with Lewis Hayden. For those pushing on to Canada, the safest North American destination after the prohibition of slavery in Great Britain, passage north might be paid by Henry Ingersoll Bowditch, or groups like the Boston Vigilance Committee, the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society, and the Massachusetts General Coloured Association.[361]

Period references do not suggest, for the most part, that fugitives were literally hidden inside houses on Beacon Hill. Harriet Beecher Stowe famously met thirteen of them at once, openly, in the Hayden house, and at least two fugitives (and likely seven) were enumerated in Hayden's household in the 1850 census. This house, however, was exceptional, in many ways (Figure 117). As a prominent brick building

---

[361] This summary is drawn principally from Grover and DeSilva, "Historic Resource Study: Boston African-American National Historic Site"; and Horton and Horton, *Black Bostonians*.

on Phillips Street, and the residence of a bold leader of Boston's Vigilance Committee, it was a well known haven and closely watched by agents of slave catchers. The records of the Vigilance Committee, organized to assist former slaves fleeing along the underground railroad, list seventy-five fugitives who passed through his house in the six years that Hayden lived there. Hayden, himself a fugitive from Kentucky who had been forcibly separated from his family, was determined and courageous in his opposition, famously defending the Crafts by threatening to blow up his house, and their pursuers, by lighting two barrels of gunpowder in the basement.[362] Such dramatic episodes notwithstanding, several references describe people being secreted, in disguise, around Boston in broad daylight. There is no evidence, furthermore, that fugitives crawled through filthy subterranean passages to move from house to house, though this demeaning notion persists.[363] Underground tunnels of the kind imagined by tour guides were hardly necessary in the streetscape of the north slope, where movements could be disguised by passage through the network of alleys, courts, and back-lot houses.

In 1835, the abolitionist himself, William Lloyd Garrison, experienced some of the terror that attended being a fugitive at large when he was pursued by a mob of "gentlemen of property and standing." Having been told, by a spurious notice in the *Commercial Gazette*, that the English abolitionist, George Thompson, would address a meeting of the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society, an agitated crowd of several

---

[362] Stanley J. Robboy and Anita W. Robboy, "Lewis Hayden: From Fugitive Slave to Statesman," *New England Quarterly* 46, no. 4 (December 1973): 593–601.

[363] Ibid., 598; and Grover and DeSilva, "Historic Resource Study: Boston African-American National Historic Site," 106.

hundred men gathered outside the Anti-Slavery Hall at 46 Washington Street, intending to do the speaker violence. Upon learning that Thompson was no longer in the city, they settled for breaking up the meeting, permitting the women in attendance to leave but trapping two men, Garrison and C.C. Burleigh, inside.

> The mob having bravely demolished the anti-slavery sign...next turned their attention to Mr. Garrison, whose place of retreat was easily discovered. "We must have Garrison! Out with him! Lynch him!" they cried. By advice of the mayor he attempted to escape at the rear of the building. He got safely from a back window on to a shed, making, however, a narrow escape from falling headlong to the ground. He reached a carpenter's shop, where a friend tried to conceal him, but in vain.[364]

Garrison's escape was hasty and unplanned but suggestive of possibilities for fugitives on Beacon Hill, who had the advantage of more labyrinthine landscapes in which to flee. Since the mob blocked his exit through the front door of 46 Washington, he climbed through a rear window. He did not, however, get far. Soon surrounded and restrained by a rope, he was rescued by the mayor and taken to prison for his protection.

Though no such evocative descriptions survive for Beacon Hill, there is some material evidence to suggest that its residents understood how to turn the complex geography of the north slope to advantage. The first John P. Coburn House stood until 2006 in Coburn Court, off Phillips Street (Figure 118). Like many early-nineteenth-century houses on the north slope, it was not visible from any main street and only accessible by way of a narrow passage between a pair of tenements (Figure 119). John Coburn was a successful trader and gaming house operator, one of a small number of

---

[364] Oliver Johnson and John Greenleaf Whittier, *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1881), 197.

black property owners in early Boston. A leader of Beacon Hill's African-American community, he was actively involved in helping fugitive slaves as an officer of the New England Freedom Association, a group organized to provide passengers on the Underground Railroad with basic necessities like food, clothing, and shelter. In 1851, he was charged with leading the demonstration at the Boston Courthouse to protest the arrest of fugitive Shadrach Minkins.[365]

Coburn's house was built before 1830 as one half of a pair. It was a side-passage, double-pile plan, with a one-story ell off the Phillips Street side. Its kitchen was in the front room on the ground level, with one or two reception rooms on the second floor and chambers above, similar to many small north slope houses like 75 West Cedar and 38 Garden Street. It was reached from Phillips Street via a four-foot-wide right-of-way whose extents and size were preserved in deed. It was also served by a three-foot-wide passage behind the row on Sears Place, accessible through a door behind the stair on the main level.

In the nineteenth century, the Coburn house was sited in the interior of a dense block and entered by a narrow alleyway with an additional exit at the rear. In its location surrounded by buildings and in the middle of a block and its accessibility via a pair of dark passageways, it was similar to scores of other buildings on the north slope. In this sense, it was typical of the kind of housing that was the target of nineteenth-century urban reformers—dark, poorly ventilated, a crucible of disease, fire, and misery. But it is clear that some occupants of the house understood how to turn its inconvenient, poorly lit situation to advantage. Some nineteenth-century

---

[365] Grover and DeSilva, "Historic Resource Study: Boston African-American National Historic Site," 90–91.

resident took particular pains to monitor the approach from Phillips Street. Coburn himself had operated a gaming house and, despite the efforts of city officials, unlicensed taverns continued to thrive on Phillips Street into the early 20th century.[366]

Barely visible in the top riser of the original wooden entry stairs are a pair of narrow openings, framed in wood, and about two inches high. About six inches behind them, inside and under the stair, are two glazed openings that are framed in part of a re-used sash. These are situated so that a person standing in the cellar could monitor the alley from Phillips Street without being seen (Figure 120). Figure 120 shows the view from a small space under the stair, looking out through the riser. The alley is just visible in the background. As long as someone was at this spot, no one could enter or leave Coburn Court without being observed. These openings clearly show how, in a particular kind of urban landscape, a resident might assert control over some small piece of land by taking advantage of irregularity and limited visibility. How many other of Boston's courts could be monitored so perfectly by a single well placed opening? How many more could be watched openly? A mid-19th-century account described William Craft's Cambridge Street shop as unapproachable "without being seen by a hundred eyes."[367] The stair openings in the Coburn House stand in for countless small decisions made by residents of Beacon Hill who sought to protect themselves and others from seizure, whether by Southern slave catchers or city magistrates. Such decisions are contingent and evidence for them ephemeral but they

---

366 Ibid.

367 *New York Daily Tribune*, October 31, 1850, cited in Gary Collison, *Shadrach Minkins: From Fugitive Slave to Citizen* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998), 98.

allow us to perceive how individuals who did not have a hand in architecture or city-making at large wrought a degree of control over their environment through modest, strategic changes. They also illustrate how a lack of obvious urban order could be turned to advantage.

For Boston authorities and critics like Josiah Quincy and Thomas Pemberton, the north slope of Beacon Hill, exemplified by Coburn's house and the alleys and wooden buildings of Joy Street, was a moral and architectural wasteland—as corrupt as it was unsightly. With its concentrations of fugitive slaves and illicit commerce, it seemed to confirm a common understanding of building as a component of behavior. To architectural critics, buildings were in the first place symbols: of education, attainment, and virtue, all of which seemed lacking in the streetscapes of the north slope. To reformers, they were instrumental in the lives of their inhabitants, able to shape behavior and health for good or for ill. But the complex landscape of Beacon Hill resists such characterizations. It was not a failure of morality, or of imagination, or even of means. The order that north slope residents gave to their environment was not through the design or construction of individual buildings but through the careful appropriation and manipulation of urban space—whether by fencing in a public street or cutting a peep-hole in a stair. As a center of New England's abolitionist movement, Beacon Hill was a highly organized place, with personal networks that provided fugitives with clothing, supplies, and housing. For runaway slaves like the Crafts, the complex tumbledown blocks of Beacon Hill were not haphazard, immoral sites. They were a network of interconnected homes and businesses whose physical properties helped to make them a haven and a community. For Beacon Hill's African-American residents, the hill gained meaning not through poetry or buildings crafted by others,

but actively, through experience, and through the transformation of an inherited streetscape. By the 1850s, Beacon Hill was no longer a Federalist enclave, a locus of republican virtue, nor a site of Revolutionary memory. Still less was its north slope a place of disorder, dissolution, and debauchery, as contemporary critics claimed. For its residents and those they sheltered, it was a refuge.

Although Beacon Hill's builders worked to bring order to the social world through architecture, their ability to govern that order was limited. Buildings' power to regulate everyday life is constrained by convention and custom. Doors are certainly the easiest way to enter and exit a house but in a pinch—when being pursued by slave catchers, say—a window gets the job done; a front stair is a fine way to enter a house but, fitted with a secret window, can also make a lookout for monitoring its approach; a room that a rich household might devote to a bedroom for a single child could be used as an entire dwelling for a poor immigrant family. Both the meaning and the use of architecture is guided by convention as much as form. Habit and custom govern how we apprehend the built environment and move through it. But habits can be broken, conventions disregarded. As Beacon Hill's builders gave way to its residents, its significance mutated. Houses were occupied in ways not anticipated, communities came and went. Tavern-keepers yielded to abolitionists, mansion-builders to tenement-dwellers.

Studies of urban architecture emphasize the ways in which builders of houses, prisons, schools, and government centers have sought to re-fashion cities through architecture. Histories of place, in general, narrate what people build and why. This is reasonable, since buildings map the intentions of their builders. By recording floor plans and studying finishes and construction techniques, fieldworking architectural

historians can recover much about these intentions, to understand how architecture is used to bring order to the social world. We can see how Harrison Gray and Sally Otis established themselves as leaders of post-Revolutionary Boston through the construction of peerless environments for elaborate entertaining; we can read the ways in which more modest houses accommodated domestic socializing in double parlors on Mount Vernon and Pinckney Street; and we can recognize shifting attitudes toward domestic service in the disposition of their kitchens.

Scholars focus on the ways in which people inscribe particular values in their houses through choices about plan, materials, and finish. But histories of architecture that take buildings at face value miss an opportunity to write the story of those who are not designers, builders, and their patrons. Only a tiny minority of people ever build for themselves. And none of us occupy environments that are entirely of our own devising. Bostonians today build on land filled by proprietors, on streets laid out by speculators, according to regulations devised and amended by municipal authorities. Many live in apartments that were once schools or mansion houses and all of us occupy our shared social, topographical, and architectural infrastructure in our own way, adapting our inherited environment to suit particular needs. Fieldworking historians can sometimes perceive such changes in old buildings but material evidence for use and experience is often ephemeral. Its discovery requires careful attention to more than just the location of walls and the disposition of early finish, since plan form is not an index of use but only the structure within which experience unfolds. An embodied history of buildings accounts for both that structure and the ways in which it is manipulated, occupied, and violated by its inhabitants. Architecture is shaped by owners and builders but only acquires meaning through use and experience. In the

same way, Beacon Hill owes its significance partly to the singular products of Charles Bulfinch's elegant imagination but it is equally the result of more prosaic, everyday occurrences: how guests moved through Adam Thaxter's Mount Vernon Street parlors; the way that Irish immigrants filled the tenements of Sentry Hill Place; and how Cuff Buffum pulled his cart across a right-of-way to his tiny house off of Joy Street.

FIGURES

FIGURES REMOVED FOR COPYRIGHTING

Chapter 7

EPILOGUE

In the years after the American Revolution, Beacon Hill was a remote part of Boston with a cluster of small wooden houses on its north slope. At its northeastern edge, a stylish residential district in Bowdoin Square was home to a handful of wealthy families, including Coolidges and Bulfinches, while a few grand houses, including the Hancock and Copley mansions, faced Boston Common. But most residents of Beacon Hill were tradespeople, like the housewright Bela Clap, the mantua maker Mrs. Nazro, and the baker Matthew Bailey. Nearly all of their houses were small and wooden and their property cheaply valued by both city and federal tax assessors. The very low value for most Beacon Hill property in the post-Revolutionary period also enabled a small number of Boston's free African-American population to purchase lots. Some subdivided these into still smaller parcels, lowering their value further and requiring a system of rights-of-way to permit access from back lots to the principal streets. Despite the presence of this community, most Bostonians thought of Beacon Hill in this period as a frontier, "Mount Whoredom," a place of disorder where wanted thieves might disappear.

But in the 1790s, two groups of Bostonians sought to re-invent Beacon Hill, investing it with new significance. The first were Revolutionary memorialists who sought to claim the hill, still steep and largely pastoral beyond its few settled streets, on behalf of republican virtue and heroic memory. Charles Bulfinch's memorial column joined neoclassical design with patriotic sentiments, replacing the old wooden warning beacon with a symbolic marker that celebrated the achievements of the

Revolution. At the same time, Boston's poets worked to associate it with virtuous memory. Sarah Parsons Morton used its prominence and the vistas available from its peak to inspire her reflections on the Revolution in "Beacon Hill, A Local Poem, Historic and Descriptive." And the anonymous Euphrosyne similarly used a printed view of the city from the summit of the hill to oppose rural, republican virtue with mercantile vice, allowing the hill, with its grazing cattle, to offer a quiet rebuke to the values of commercialism that she saw governing the city below. The memorialists made use of the hill's pastoral geography to associate it with an emergent political culture of Republicanism that opposed itself to the commercial and cosmopolitan sensibility of political Federalism in the decades after the Revolution.

But Beacon Hill was not an empty vessel, awaiting an infusion of poetic meaning. The developing neighborhood around its northeast corner had already developed some distinctive characteristics, with African-Americans concentrated on Joy Street, tradespeople on Temple, and Boston's gentry in Bowdoin Square. This cluster of buildings on the north slope was joined, around 1790, by a series of grand new houses built by Boston's younger generation of elites, many of them kin to the architect Charles Bulfinch. Whereas Republicans used poetry to redefine Beacon Hill, Federalists used architecture and their efforts have been more enduring.

The group of real estate speculators centered around Harrison Gray Otis sought to remake Beacon Hill not just metaphorically but also architecturally, topographically, and socially. Following the construction of the Massachusetts State House, the Mount Vernon Proprietors purchased several acres of land on the south side of Beacon Hill and laid it out into large mansion house lots. Between 1790 and 1807, Otis, Jonathan Mason, Benjamin Coolidge, and several others built mansions

with delicate neoclassical ornament, impressive brick facades, and broad landscaped yards to establish models of architectural and social distinction. Like contemporary developments on Federal Street in Salem or High Street in Newburyport, these houses were cosmopolitan in outlook, with expansive suites of entertaining rooms, marble mantels, and extensive provisions for domestic service. More than just exceptional aesthetic objects, they entered in a very public way into the national debate about the ethics of commerce and its role in international politics.

In addition to the great mansions on broad lots, Beacon Hill's Federalist developers also erected smaller houses in pairs and in rows but with similar provisions for polite sociability, centered around a core of attached parlors. With high ceilings, elegant neoclassical ornaments, and spacious layouts, such houses were similar in their accoutrements and their finishes to the best houses being erected throughout North American cities, from New York and Philadelphia to Charleston. This widespread, luxurious building culture well accommodated gentry social life in the 1790s and early 1800s and worked to claim Beacon Hill as a site of fashionable social life for Boston's Federalist elites.

But the buildings of Beacon Hill must be understood as more than just the product of a singular designing mind and his clients. Bulfinch's houses occupied a particular urban environment, one that had been populated by tradespeople and African-Americans living in very different kinds of buildings. And Bulfinch's friends were not the only inmates of those houses. They hosted guests and housed servants and attention to spaces dedicated to the public functions of those houses helps to situate them in another interpretive context, that of the shifting relationship between servants and their employers in Federal-era New England.

Additionally, their leading role in Boston's social life was not long-lived. Jefferson's 1807 embargo and the War of 1812 did significant injury to Boston's commercial prosperity and with it, the fortunes of would-be mansion builders. The response to both of these crises among New England's Federalist leaders did permanent damage to their reputation so that by 1822, the party transformed itself from the agent of an elite and entitled minority to a more expansive, populist political alliance of gentry with the city's large population of tradespeople. The election of Josiah Quincy as mayor in 1822 marked a decisive break with the culture of Federalism that had characterized the post-Revolutionary decades. In this context, the architectural ambitions of the Mount Vernon Proprietors to remake the neighborhood shifted. Their political and cultural loss in the 1820s was turned to economic gain, as they subdivided their property and sold to speculative builders who put up rows of smaller houses. They laid out the tiny Acorn Street and filled Chestnut Street, West Cedar Street, and the south side of Mount Vernon with attached rows to be sold to clerks, minor merchants, and prosperous tradespeople instead of the rich households that the Proprietors had initially hoped would fill the streets of the south slope.

These little resembled the mansions or even the attached rows of the Bulfinch era. Most were relatively small variations on an established Boston type, a center-stair plan that was used for early row houses throughout urban New England. In its most basic form, it included a dedicated kitchen and dining room as well as a formal parlor, the largest and best finished space in the house. By segregating domestic work from sociable space and by separating even public rooms from one another with a stair passage, it extended a Colonial-era form of urban domestic life well into the nineteenth century, segregating functions and preserving subtle decorative hierarchies

between public rooms. At the same time, with their rows of uniform, regular facades, such houses seemed to flatten outward distinctions, communicating social difference less clearly than in an era when Bulfinch mansions shared streets with wooden houses occupied by African-American barbers.

By the 1830s, great mansion houses no longer conveyed status in the way they had in the Federal era. If they had once signified a cosmopolitan outlook, high standing in the community, and a right to rule derived from great wealth and good taste, in Jacksonian-era Boston, they were more valuable as real estate. Many descendants of their builders, therefore, sold them or demolished them outright, trading distinction for cash. In their place, speculators erected still more rows of brick houses, though in the 1830s, these were of a new type, laid out on a side-passage, double-parlor plan. The regularity of their exteriors was matched by a common interior layout, in which pairs of entertaining rooms, connected to one another by a set of double doors, were arranged alongside a broad stair passage.

The largest of these included double parlors, a dedicated dining room, and a kitchen, sometimes in a rear ell but more commonly in the rear of the cellar or the ground floor. They contained the same basic suite of public rooms, in other words, as their Federal-era predecessors but they were used quite differently. The side-passage row houses of Bulfinch, such as those built for Mrs. Swan on Chestnut Street, provided elegant environments for an active social life characterized by movement, surprise, and luxurious hospitality, with guests moving between rooms and servants working out of sight to support elaborate entertainments.

But the double parlors of the 1830s and ‘40s, while similar in layout, were devoted to more homely purposes. They were spaces of family gathering and virtuous,

relatively restrained receptions of neighbors and peers, rather than the boisterous, dazzling parties of the decades around 1800. Double parlors of this latter period were prized not because they enabled elaborate entertaining but because they were well suited to an emergent culture of polite domesticity that depended upon domestic surveillance. While the earlier attached parlors were part of the machinery of elite social life, with its emphasis on theatricality, double parlors of the antebellum period demanded the performance of sincerity by exposing the entire household to view in a way that the segregated, center-stair layouts of the first quarter of the nineteenth century could not. And so in this period, the side-passage, double-parlor plan became commonplace across the full range of attached row houses, from the extravagant, like 59 Mount Vernon Street, to the very modest, like 28 Garden Street. In this period, paired rooms were sometimes used for large public functions but these were relatively static events—concerts, lectures, and meetings of abolitionists and temperance societies. These were a far cry from the livelier, more elegant, more inebriated affairs of Harrison Gray Otis' era.

Rooms open to one another enable certain forms of social life but do not direct them. Architecture is limited in the degree to which it can direct experience. This is further revealed in another type of side-passage house with paired rooms on the principal floor, the speculative courts built along the north side of Revere Street in the 1840s. As a type, they are nearly identical in plan to the double-parlor houses of Mount Vernon and Chestnut streets but with one key difference. They lack a kitchen. The absence of a dedicated room where the noise and smells of cooking could be segregated from social life, such an essential element of polite antebellum domesticity, suggests what contemporary census and city directories affirm, that these houses were

built and occupied as tenements. Some, like the houses in Rollins Place, were the respectable homes of small households in separate apartments, with one person per room. But others, like Sentry Hill Place, were densely packed with the families of Irish immigrants. Both, however, reflected new attitudes about the provision of housing for the poor and the perceived need for philanthropic development that would improve accommodations above the dark, unhealthful quarters available in the North End. The tenements off of Revere Street are similar in plan to more polite houses like 28 Garden Street and 59 Mount Vernon but focusing on plan type alone obscures the vast differences in the way that these buildings were occupied.

Additionally, attention to occupation as a key element of architectural interpretation permits a more nuanced reading of the houses and spaces of Beacon Hill's African-American community in this period. Black Bostonians used the streets and houses of Beacon Hill in different ways from their white neighbors, finding ways to use back-lot buildings and a network of alleyways to make the neighborhood a refuge for fugitives from slavery. To outsiders, its less orderly qualities, particularly on the north slope, were a liability, a sign of moral and architectural failings. But those same qualities could be turned to advantage, allowing wanted fugitives to be secreted from house to house without being seen.

This great diversity of experience of Beacon Hill and its attendant variability of interpretation highlights the scholarly and ethical value of accounting for use as well as form in any full consideration of place. Architectural historians tend to focus on the moment of a building's creation—when a drawing gets handed off to a builder, or a client contracts with a carpenter. But this is only the beginning of the story of architecture. Buildings (and neighborhoods and cities) acquire meaning over time,

with use, occupation, and change. And that significance can be infinitely variable, with a single place acquiring multiple meanings for different interpretive communities. "Beacon Hill," as a neighborhood, rather than a geographic feature, was invented in the 1790s by the Mount Vernon Proprietors as a gentry enclave at the edge of Boston. Most historians have focused their attention on this episode and its social and architectural context, noting how Charles Bulfinch brought a cosmopolitan architectural culture to the city through a remarkable series of houses. But although it is true that Harrison Gray Otis and his collaborators did much to establish the structure of the neighborhood through building, it fell to others to occupy it in their own way, remaking it and reinterpreting it in subsequent generations according to their own needs. This history of Beacon Hill over its first six decades of intensive development allows us to observe how people use architecture to bring order to the social world, adapting and transforming their environments through the ordinary work of building.

REFERENCES

Adams, Richard M. "Some Notes about Acorn Street of Beacon Hill." Boston, Mass., October 1991.

"Adam Wallace Thaxter, Jr., Esq." *Ballou's Pictorial Drawing Room Companion*, February 28, 1857.

Alcott, Louisa May. "How I Went Out to Service: A Story." *Independent*, June 4, 1874.

Aldrich, Thomas Bailey. *The Story of a Bad Boy: The Little Violinist, and Other Sketches*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1897.

"Alteration of Houses for Mr. A.T. Lyman and Mr. M. B. Inches, 39, 40 Beacon St." *American Architect and Building News*, September 8, 1888.

Andrzejewski, Anna Vemer. "Architecture and the Ideology of Surveillance in Modern America, 1850-1950." Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 2000.

———. *Building Power: Architecture and Surveillance in Victorian America*. Knoxville: Univeristy of Tennessee Press, 2008.

———. "'Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture', the VAF, and the Study of Ordinary Buildings and Landscapes in North America." *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 13, no. 2 (January 1, 2006): 55–63.

Annan, Mrs. A. M. F. "Mrs. Pinkerton's Aversion." *Godey's Lady's Book*, November 1847.

Appleton, William. *Selections from the Diaries of William Appleton, 1786-1862*. Edited by Susan M. Loring. Boston: Merrymount Press, 1922.

"Area Preservation and the Beacon Hill Bill." *Old-Time New England* 46, no. 164 (Spring 1956): 106–10.

Arthur, Timothy Shay. *Leaves from the Book of Human Life*. Boston: L.P. Crown, 1856.

———. *Trials and Confessions of a Housekeeper*. Philadelphia: J. W. Bradley, 1859.

Austin, Benjamin. *Constitutional Republicanism, in Opposition to Fallacious Federalism; as Published Occasionally in the Independent Chronicle, under the Signature of Old-South*. Boston: Printed for Adams & Rhoades, Editors of the Independent Chronicle, 1803.

Bacon, Louisa Crowninshield. *Reminiscences*. Salem, Mass: Newcomb & Gauss, printers, 1922.

Barnes, W. H. "A Homily on Homes." *Ladies' Repository: A Monthly Periodical, Devoted to Literature, Arts, and Religion*, October 1856.

Beales, Ross W. "'Slavish' and Other Female Work in the Parkman Household, Westborough, Massachusetts, 1724-1782." In *House and Home*, edited by Peter Benes, Jane Montague Benes, and Ross W Beales, 48–57. Boston, Mass.: Boston University, 1990.

Beecher, Catherine E. *A Treatise on Domestic Economy, For the Use of Young Ladies at Home, and At School, Revised Edition*. Boston: T.H. Webb, 1842.

Bell, Shubael. "An Account of the Town of Boston in 1817." In *Bostonian Society Publications*, 3:15–68. 2nd Ser. Boston: Old State House, 1919.

Benjamin, Asher. *The American Builder's Companion : Or, a System of Architecture, Particularly Adapted to the Present Style of Building*. Boston: R.P.&C. Williams, 1827.

Bentley, William. *The Diary of William Bentley*. Edited by Joseph Gilbert Waters and Alice G. Waters. 4 vols. Salem, Mass: Essex Institute, 1907-14.

Boston Landmarks Commission, Edward W. Gordon, and Massachusetts Historical Commission. "Final Report: Beacon Hill/North Slope Cultural Resources Area." Boston, Mass.: Massachusetts Historical Commission, 2001.

———. "Final Report: Beacon Hill/South Slope Cultural Resources Area." Boston, Mass.: Massachusetts Historical Commission, 2002.

Boston Registry Department. *A Volume of Records Relating to the Early History of Boston, Containing Minutes of the Selectmen's Meetings, 1799 to, and including, 1810*. Vol. 33. Records Relating to the Early History of Boston. Boston: Municipal Printing Office, 1904.

Boudinot, Elias. *Journey to Boston in 1809*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Library, 1955.

Bowditch, Nathaniel Ingersoll. *Fifth Report of the Record Commissioners: "Gleaner" Articles*. Edited by William H. Whitmore and William S. Appleton. Boston: Rockwell and Churchill, 1887.

Bower, Beth Anne. "The African Meeting House, Boston, Massachusetts: Summary Report of Archaeological Excavations, 1975-1986." Boston, Mass.: Museum of Afro-American History, 1986.

Brown, R. W. *Memoir of Mrs. Chloe Spear*. Boston: James Loring, 1832.

Bulfinch, Susan Ellen. *The Life and Letters of Charles Bulfinch, Architect, with Other Family Papers*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1896.

Bunting, Bainbridge. *Houses of Boston's Back Bay: An Architectural History, 1840-1917*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967.

Bushman, Claudia L. *"A Good Poor Man's Wife": Being a Chronicle of Harriet Hanson Robinson and Her Family in Nineteenth-Century New England*. Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1981.

Bushman, Richard L. *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992.

Carson, Cary. "The Consumer Revolution in Colonial British America: Why Demand?" In *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, edited by Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert. Perspectives on the American Revolution. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia for the United States Capitol Historical Society, 1994.

_____. "Material Culture History: The Scholarship Nobody Knows." In *American Material Culture: The Shape of the Field*, edited by Ann Smart Martin and J. Ritchie Garrison, 401–28. Winterthur, Del.: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1997.

_____, Norman F. Barka, William M. Kelso, Garry Wheeler Stone, and Dell Upton. "Impermanent Architecture in the Southern American Colonies." *Winterthur Portfolio* 16, no. 2/3 (Summer - Autumn 1981): 135–96.

_____, and Abbott Lowell Cummings. "Behind the Scenes: Piecing the Puzzle." *Historic New England*, Summer 2011, 2–5.

Carson, Cary, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert, eds. *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*. Perspectives on the American Revolution. Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia for the United States Capitol Historical Society, 1994.

Carson, Cary, and Carl Lounsbury, eds. *The Chesapeake House: Architectural Investigation by Colonial Williamsburg*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013.

Carter, Thomas, and Bernard L. Herman. "Introduction: Toward a New Architectural History." In *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, 3*, edited by Thomas Carter and Bernard L. Herman, 1–6. Columbia, MO: University of Missouri Press, 1991.

Cayton, Andrew R. L. "The Fragmentation of 'A Great Family': The Panic of 1819 and the Rise of the Middling Interest in Boston, 1818-1822." *Journal of the Early Republic* 2, no. 2 (July 1, 1982): 143–67.

Chamberlain, Allen. *Beacon Hill: Its Ancient Pastures and Early Mansions*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1925.

Chappell, Edward A. "Hardware." In *The Chesapeake House: Architectural Investigation by Colonial Williamsburg*, edited by Cary Carson and Carl Lounsbury, 259–83. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013.

———. "Housing a Nation: The Transformation of Living Standards in Early America." In *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, edited by Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert, 167–232. Perspectives on the American Revolution. Charlottesville: Published for the United States Capitol Historical Society by the University Press of Virginia, 1994.

———. "Housing Slavery." In *The Chesapeake House: Architectural Investigation by Colonial Williamsburg*, edited by Cary Carson and Carl Lounsbury, 156–78. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2013.

Chevalier, Michel. *Society, Manners and Politics in the United States: Being a Series of Letters on North America*. Boston: Weeks, Jordan, 1839.

Cohen, Daniel A. "Passing the Torch: Boston Firemen, 'Tea Party' Patriots, and the Burning of the Charlestown Convent." *Journal of the Early Republic* 24, no. 4 (December 1, 2004): 527–86.

Coffin, Levi. *Reminiscences of Levi Coffin, the Reputed President of the Underground Railroad: Being a Brief History of the Labors of a Lifetime in Behalf of the Slave, with the Stories of Numerous Fugitives Who Gained Their Freedom Through His Instrumentality, and Many Other Incidents*. London: Sampson Low, Marston, Searle, & Rivington, 1876.

Collison, Gary. *Shadrach Minkins: From Fugitive Slave to Citizen*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998.

Conroy, Thomas E., III. "The Politics of Style: Building, Builders, and the Creation of Federal Boston." Ph.D. diss., University of Massachusetts, 2005.

Cott, Nancy F. *The Bonds of Womanhood: "Woman's Sphere" in New England, 1780-1835*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997.

_____. *Root of Bitterness: Documents of the Social History of American Women*. Hanover, N.H. & London: University Press of New England, 1996.

Craft, William. *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom; Or, The Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery*. London: W. Tweedie, 1860.

Crocker, Matthew H. *The Magic of the Many: Josiah Quincy and the Rise of Mass Politics in Boston, 1800-1830*. Amherst: University of Masachusetts Press, 1999.

Cromwell, Adelaide M. *The Other Brahmins: Boston's Black Upper Class 1750-1950*. Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1994.

Cummings, Abbott Lowell. "The Beginnings of Provincial Renaissance Architecture in Boston, 1690-1725: Current Observations and Suggestions for Further Study." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 42, no. 1 (March 1983): 43–53.

———. "Charles Bulfinch and Boston's Vanishing West End." *Old-Time New England* 52, no. 2 (December 1961): 31–49.

———. *The Framed Houses of Massachusetts Bay*. Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1979.

_____. "An Investigation of the Sources, Stylistic Evolution, and Influence of Asher Benjamin's Builders' Guides." Ph.D. diss., Ohio State University, 1950.

———. “Three Hearths: A Socioarchitectural Study of Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts Bay Probate Inventories.” *Old-Time New England* 75, no. 263 (1997): 5–49.

Cupers, Kenny. *Use Matters: An Alternative History of Architecture*. New York: Routledge, 2013.

Cushing, Harry Alonzo, ed. *The Writings of Samuel Adams*. 4 vols. New York and London: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1908.

Cutting, Nathaniel. *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society, 1871-1873*. Boston: The Society, 1873.

Davis, James, and Dudley Dennison Rosseter. *A Brief Account of the Origin and Progress of the Boston Female Society for Missionary Purposes*. Boston: Printed by Lincoln & Edmands, 1818.

Dearborn, Nathaniel. *Boston Notions: Being an Authentic and Concise Account of “That Village,” from 1630 to 1847*. Boston: Printed by N. Dearborn, 1848.

DeLorme, Eleanor Pearson. “The Swan Commissions: Four Portraits by Gilbert Stuart.” *Winterthur Portfolio* 14, no. 3 (1979): 361–95.

Douglass, Frederick. *My Bondage and My Freedom*. New York and Auburn: Miller, Orton & Mulligan, 1855.

Downing, Andrew Jackson. *The Architecture of Country Houses*. New York: D. Appleton, 1851.

_____. *Cottage Residences, Or, A Series of Designs for Rural Cottages and Cottage Villas, and Their Gardens and Grounds: Adapted to North America*. New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1842.

Drake, Samuel Adams. *Old Landmarks and Historic Personages of Boston*. Boston: James R. Osgood, 1873.

Driemeyer, Laura Baker. “Rising from the Ashes: The Transformation of Nineteenth-Century Building Culture in Charlestown, Massachusetts.” Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 2006.

Dudden, Faye E. *Serving Women : Household Service in Nineteenth-Century America*. Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1983.

Dwight, Timothy. *Travels in New-England and New-York*. 4 vols. New Haven: Timothy Dwight, 1821.

Ellen Wayles Randolph Coolidge Letters. University of Virginia.

Engels, Friedrich. "Working-Class Manchester." In *The Marx-Engels Reader*, edited by George C. Tucker, 2nd rev. & enlarged ed., 579–85. New York: W. W. Norton, 1978.

Euphrosyne. "Description of the Plate." *Massachusetts Magazine: Or, Monthly Museum of Knowledge and Rational Entertainment*, November 1790.

Farrell, Betty G. *Elite Families: Class and Power in Nineteenth-Century Boston*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993.

Fearon, Henry Bradshaw. *Sketches of America, a Narrative of a Journey through the Eastern and Western States of America*. 2nd. Ed. London: Longman, Hurst, Rees, Orme, & Brown, 1818.

Ferguson, Leland G. *Uncommon Ground: Archaeology and Early African America, 1650-1800*. Washington, D.C: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992.

Fish, Stanley. *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1982.

Fitton, R. S. *The Strutts and the Arkwrights, 1758-1830: A Study of the Early Factory System*. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1973.

Forbes, Abner, and J. W. Greene. *The Rich Men of Massachusetts: Containing a Statement of the Reputed Wealth of about Fifteen Hundred Persons, with Brief Sketches of More than One Thousand Characters*. Boston: W. V. Spencer, 1851.

Foucault, Michel. *Discipline & Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. New York: Vintage, 1995.

Founders Online, National Archives.

Fox, Pamela. "Nathan Appleton's Beacon Street Houses." *Old-Time New England* 70 (1980): 111–24.

Gamst, Frederick C. "The Context and Significance of America's First Railroad, on Boston's Beacon Hill." *Technology and Culture* 33, no. 1 (January 1992): 66–100.

Gans, Herbert J. *The Urban Villagers: Group and Class in the Life of Italian-Americans*. New York: Free Press, 1962.

Geertz, Clifford. *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*. New York: Basic Books, 1973.

Garrett, Elisabeth Donaghy. *At Home: The American Family, 1750-1870*. New York: H. N. Abrams, 1990.

Garrison, J. Ritchie. *Two Carpenters: Architecture and Building in Early New England, 1799-1859*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2006.

Gelles, Edith B. "Bonds of Friendship: The Correspondence of Abigail Adams and Mercy Otis Warren." *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 3rd Ser., 108 (January 1, 1996): 35–71.

Gilje, Paul A. "The Rise of Capitalism in the Early Republic." *Journal of the Early Republic* 16, no. 2 (Summer 1996): 159–81.

Gilman, C.H. *Recollections of a Southern Matron*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1838.

Girouard, Mark. *Life in the English Country House: A Social and Architectural History*. New York: Penguin Books, 1980.

Glassie, Henry. *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia: A Structural Analysis of Historic Artifacts*. University of Tennessee Press, 1975.

———. *Passing the Time in Ballymenone: Culture and History of an Ulster Community*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995.

———. *Vernacular Architecture*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000.

Goodheart, Eugene. "The Text and the Interpretive Community." *Daedalus* 112, no. 1 (January 1, 1983): 215–31.

Goodison, Donna L. "'Spiritual Pain' on Beacon Hill: Church to Sell Building after B&B Fight." *Boston Business Journal*. May 1, 2000.

Goodman, Paul. *The Democratic-Republicans of Massachusetts: Politics in a Young Republic*. 2nd ed. New York: Greenwood Press, 1986.

_____. "Ethics and Enterprise: The Values of a Boston Elite, 1800-1860." *American Quarterly* 18, no. 3 (Autumn 1966): 437–51.

Goodman, Phebe S. *The Garden Squares of Boston*. Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 2003.

Goodwin, Lorinda B. R. *An Archaeology of Manners: The Polite World of the Merchant Elite in Colonial Massachusetts*. Contributions to Global Historical Archaeology. New York: Springer, 1999.

Gordon, Edward W., and Pauline Chase-Harrell. "National Historic Landmark Nomination: Beacon Hill Historic District." Washington, D.C.: Department of the Interior, August 11, 2006.

Grady, Anne. "African Americans in Boston, 1790-1820." Boston: Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, 1995.

_____, and Linda Willett. "Harrison Gray Otis House Historic Structure Report." Boston, Mass.: Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, March 1998.

Graham, Willie, Carter L. Hudgins, Carl R. Lounsbury, Frasier D. Neiman, and James P. Whittenburg. "Adaptation and Innovation: Archaeological and Architectural Perspectives on the Seventeenth-Century Chesapeake." *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 64, no. 3 (July 2007).

Graham, Willie, and Mark R. Wenger. "Battersea and the Double Parlor in Early America." Paper presented at the Vernacular Architecture Forum Annual Meeting, Lexington, Kentucky, 1990.

Grier, Katherine C. *Culture and Comfort: Parlor Making and Middle Class Identity*. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Books, 1997.

Grover, Kathryn, and Janine V. DeSilva. "Historic Resource Study: Boston African-American National Historic Site." Boston, December 31, 2002.

Guarino, Robert E. *Beacon Street: Its Buildings & Residents*. Charleston, SC: History Press, 2011.

Guillery, Peter. *The Small House in Eighteenth-Century London: A Social and Architectural History*. New Haven: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2004.

Gutman, Herbert George, and Donald H. Bell, eds. *The New England Working Class and the New Labor History*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987.

Hales, J. G. *Survey of Boston and Its Vicinity*. Boston: Ezra Lincoln, 1821.

Hall, Elton Wayland. *The Colonial Society's House at 87 Mount Vernon Street, Boston*. Boston: Colonial Society, 1993.

Halttunen, Karen. *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982.

Hammond, Charles A. "The Dilemmas of Domestic Service in New England, 1750-1850." In *House and Home*, edited by Peter Benes, Jane Montague Benes, and Ross W Beales, 58–67. Boston, Mass.: Boston University Press, 1990.

Handlin, Oscar. *Boston's Immigrants, 1790-1880: A Study in Acculturation*. Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1991.

Hansen, Debra Gold. *Strained Sisterhood: Gender and Class in the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society*. Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993.

Harrison Gray Otis Papers, Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities.

Hart, Emma. "The Ambition for an All Brick City: Elites, Builders and the Growth of Eighteenth-Century Charleston, South Carolina." In *Investing in the Early Modern Built Environment: Europeans, Asians, Settlers and Indigenous Societies*, edited by Carole Shammas, 237–62. Leiden: Brill, 2012.

Hartford, William F. *Money, Morals, and Politics: Massachusetts in the Age of the Boston Associates*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2001.

Harwood, Edward. *Causes of Filial Impiety : A Sermon, Preached in St. Paul's Church, New Haven, Conn., Sunday, October 12th, 1856.* New Haven: William H. Stanley, 1856.

Hawkes, James, ed. *A Retrospect of the Boston Tea-Party, with a Memoir of George R. T. Hewes, a Survivor of the Little Band of Patriots Who Drowned the Tea in Boston Harbour in 1773*. New York: S.S. Bliss, Printer, for the Author, 1834.

Hayward, Mary Ellen. *Baltimore's Alley Houses: Homes for Working People since the 1780s*. Creating the North American Landscape. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008.

———. *The Baltimore Rowhouse*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999.

Henderson, Amy Hudson. "Furnishing the Republican Court: Building and Decorating Philadelphia Homes, 1790-1800." Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 2008.

———. "Material Matters: Reading the Chairs of the Republican Court." *Journal of the Early Republic* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 287–94.

Henretta, James. “Economic Development and Social Structure in Colonial Boston.” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 22 (1965).

Herman, Bernard L. *Architecture and Rural Life in Central Delaware, 1700-1900*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1990.

———. “The Embedded Landscapes of the Charleston Single House, 1780-1820.” In *Exploring Everyday Landscapes*, edited by AnnMarie Adams and Sally McMurry, 41–57. Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture 7. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1997.

———. “North Shore Town House Architectural Context.” Boston: Massachusetts Historical Commission, 1998.

———. “Smaller Urban Houses of the North Shore, 1630-1830.” In *Building Environments*, edited by Kenneth A. Breisch and Alison K. Hoagland, 3–14. Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture 10. Knoxville: Univ. of Tennessee Press, 2005.

———. “Space in the Early American City.” *Journal of the Early Republic* 24, no. 2 (July 1, 2004): 319–26.

———. *The Stolen House*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1992.

———. *Town House: Architecture and Material Life in the Early American City, 1780-1830*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005.

Higginson, Thomas Wentworth. *Cheerful Yesterdays*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1898.

_____. *Life and Times of Stephen Higginson*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1907.

Hodder, Ian. *Reading the Past: Current Approaches to Interpretation in Archaeology*. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Holleran, Michael. *Boston’s “Changeful Times”: Origins of Preservation & Planning in America*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001.

Holmes, Oliver Wendell. *The Autocrat of The Breakfast-Table: Every Man His Own Boswell*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1891.

Horton, James Oliver, and Lois E. Horton. *Black Bostonians: Family Life and Community Struggle in the Antebellum North*. Rev. ed. New York: Holmes & Meier, 2000.

Howe, John. “Howe to Prevost.” *American Historical Review* 17, no. 1 (October 1, 1911): 77–102.

Howe, M. A. De Wolfe. *The Articulate Sisters; Passages from Journals and Letters of the Daughters of President Josiah Quincy of Harvard University*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1946.

Hubka, Thomas C. “The New England Farmhouse Ell: Fact and Symbol of Nineteenth-Century Farm Improvement.” In *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, 2*, edited by Camille Wells, 161–66, 1986.

Hume, Ivor Noel. “Handmaiden to History.” *North Carolina Historical Review* 41, no. 2 (1964): 215–25.

Isaac, Rhys. *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1982.

Izard, Holly V. “Hepsibeth Hemenway’s Portrait: A Native American Story.” *Old-Time New England* 77, no. 267 (Fall/Winter 1999): 49–85.

Johnson, Oliver, and John Greenleaf Whittier. *William Lloyd Garrison and His Times*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1881.

Kamensky, Jane. *The Exchange Artist: A Tale of High-Flying Speculation and America’s First Banking Collapse*. New York: Viking, 2008.

Kerber, Linda. “The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment--An American Perspective.” *American Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (Summer 1976): 187–205.

_____, Nancy F. Cott, Robert Gross, L. Hunt, Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, and Christine M. Stansell. “Beyond Roles, Beyond Spheres: Thinking about Gender in the Early Republic.” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 46, no. 3 (July 1989): 565–85.

King, Moses. *King’s How to See Boston: A Trustworthy Guide Book*. Boston: Macullar, Parker, 1895.

Kirker, Harold. *The Architecture of Charles Bulfinch*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969.

_____, and James Kirker. *Bulfinch’s Boston, 1787-1817*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1964.

Knapp, Samuel L. *Extracts from a Journal of Travels in North America, Consisting of an Account of Boston and Its Vicinity, By Ali Bey, &c. [pseud.]*. Boston: Printed by Thomas Badger, Jun., 1818.

Knights, Peter R. *The Plain People of Boston, 1830-1860: A Study in City Growth*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1971.

Kulikoff, Alan. "The Progress of Inequality in Revolutionary Boston." *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 28 (1971): 375–412.

Lapsansky, Phillip. *An African American Miscellany: Selections from a Quarter Century of Collecting, 1970-1995*. Philadelphia: Library Company of Philadelphia, 1996.

Lasdow, Kathryn Knowles. "'Conferred Distinction': The Transformation of the Boston Waterfront in the Early Nineteenth Century." M.A. thesis, University of Virginia, 2011.

Lasser, Carol. "The Domestic Balance of Power: Relations Between Mistress and Maid in Nineteenth-Century New England." *Labor History* 28, no. 1 (January 1, 1987): 5–22.

———. "'The World's Dread Laugh,': Singlehood and Service in Nineteenth-Century Boston." In *The New England Working Class and the New Labor History*, edited by Herbert George Gutman and Donald H. Bell, 72–88. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987.

Laurie, Bruce. *Beyond Garrison: Antislavery and Social Reform*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005.

Lawrence, Robert Means. *Old Park Street and Its Vicinity*. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1922.

Lee Papers. American Philosophical Society.

Lefebvre, Henri. *The Production of Space*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1974.

Levesque, George A. *Black Boston: African-American Life and Culture in Urban America, 1750-1860*. New York: Garland, 1994.

Lewis, J. "The Republican Wife: Virtue and Seduction in the Early Republic." *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 44, no. 4 (September 1987): 689–721.

Li-Marcus, Moying. *Beacon Hill: The Life & Times of a Neighborhood*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002.

Litwack, Leon F. *North of Slavery: The Negro in the Free States, 1790-1860*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961.

Loring, James Spear. *The Hundred Boston Orators Appointed by the Municipal Authorities and Other Public Bodies, from 1770 to 1852*. Boston: J.P. Jewett, 1852.

Lounsbury, Carl and Jeffrey E. Klee, eds. "Even More Early Domestic Architecture in Beaufort, South Carolina and Virginia." Williamsburg, Virginia: College of William and Mary, Summer 2010.

Lubin, David M. *Picturing a Nation: Art and Social Change in Nineteenth-Century America*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994.

_____. *Shooting Kennedy: JFK and the Culture of Images*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003.

Lubow, Lisa B. "From Carpenter to Capitalist: The Business of Building in Postrevolutionary Boston." In *Entrepreneurs : The Boston Business Community, 1700–1850*, edited by Conrad Edick Wright and Katheryn P. Viens, 181–210. Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1997.

Lyman, Susan Bulfinch. "My Early Home," April 2, 1893. Misc. Mss. Massachusetts Historical Society.

Lyman, Theodore, ed. *Papers Relating to the Garrison Mob*. Cambridge, Mass.: Welch, Bigelow, and Company, 1870.

Macdonald, Anne Elizabeth. "Asher Benjamin: Architect, Author, Teacher and Entrepreneur." M.A. thesis, Northeastern University, 1993.

Maibor, Carolyn R. "Upstairs, Downstairs, and In-Between: Louisa May Alcott on Domestic Service." *New England Quarterly* 79, no. 1 (March 1, 2006): 65–91.

Marryat, Frederick. *A Diary in America*. 3 vols. London: Longman, Orme, Brown, Green, & Longmans, 1839.

Martin, Theodore. *A Life of Lord Lyndhurst: From Letters and Papers in Possession of His Family*. London: John Murray, 1883.

Martineau, Harriet. *Society in America*. London: Saunders and Otley, 1837.

Massachusetts Sanitary Commission, Lemuel Shattuck, Nathaniel Prentiss Banks, and Jehiel Abbott. *Report of a General Plan for the Promotion of Public and Personal Health*. Boston: Dutton & Wentworth, 1850.

Matteson, John. *Eden's Outcasts: The Story of Louisa May Alcott and Her Father*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2007.

Maynard, William Barksdale. *Architecture in the United States, 1800-1850*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

McCaughey, Robert A. "From Town to City: Boston in the 1820s." *Political Science Quarterly* 88, no. 2 (June 1, 1973): 191–213.

McCoy, Drew R. "Benjamin Franklin's Vision of a Republican Political Economy for America." *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 35, no. 4 (October 1978): 605–28.

McIntyre, Alex McVoy. *Beacon Hill: A Walking Tour*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1975.

McKellar, Elizabeth. *The Birth of Modern London: The Development and Design of the City, 1660-1720*. Studies in Design and Material Culture. Manchester, England: Manchester University Press, 1999.

Miss Leslie. "Nothing Morally Wrong." *Godey's Lady's Book*, July 1849.

Moats, Sandy. "The Limits of 'Good Feelings': Partisan Healing and Political Futures during James Monroe's Boston Visit of 1817." *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* 118, no. 1 (April 2008): 155–91.

Monkhouse, Christopher. "Parris' Perusal." *Old-Time New England* 55, no. 2 (December 1967): 51–59.

Morgan, Keith N., Richard M. Candee, Naomi Miller, and Roger G. Reed. *Buildings of Massachusetts: Metropolitan Boston*. Buildings of the United States. Charlottesville and London: University of Virginia Press, 2009.

Morison, Samuel Eliot. *The Life and Letters of Harrison Gray Otis, Federalist, 1765-1848*. 2 vols. Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1913.

Morrison, Hugh. *Early American Architecture: From the First Colonial Settlements to the National Period*. New York: Dover, 1987.

Morton, Perez, and Gideon Granger. *Memorial of the Agents of the New England Mississippi Land Company to Congress, with a Vindication of Their Title at Law Annexed*. Washington, D.C.: Printed by A.G. Way, 1804.

Morton, Sarah Wentworth. *Beacon Hill: A Local Poem, Historic and Descriptive. Book I*. Boston: Manning & Loring for the Author, 1797.

_____. *My Mind and Its Thoughts, in Sketches, Fragments, and Essays*. Boston: Wells and Lilly, 1823.

Murtagh, William John. "The Philadelphia Row House." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 16, no. 4 (December 1957): 8–13.

Neal, Alice B. "Bridal Presents." *Godey's Lady's Book*, June 1855.

Nell, William Cooper. *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution*. Boston: R.F. Wallcut, 1855.

Nemerov, Alexander. *The Body of Raphaelle Peale: Still Life and Selfhood, 1812-1824*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001.

Neuwirth, Jessica, Robert Paynter, Kevin Sweeney, Braden Paynter, and Abbott Lowell Cummings. "Abbott Lowell Cummings and the Preservation of New England." *Public Historian* 29, no. 4 (Fall 2007): 57–81.

New England Mississippi Land Company and United States Congress. *The Memorial of the Directors of the New-England Mississippi Land Company, Citizens of the State of Massachusetts*. s.n., 1814.

"New State House." *Columbian Centinel*. January 10, 1798.

Nicholas Philip Trist Papers. Library of Congress.

Norberg-Schulz, Christian. *Intentions in Architecture*. Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1974.

Nylander, Jane. *Our Own Snug Fireside: Images of the New England Home, 1760-1860*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1993.

Our First Men: A Calendar of Wealth, Fashion, and Gentility, Containing a List of Those Persons Taxed in the City of Boston, Credibly Reported to Be Worth One Hundred Thousand Dollars. Boston: All the Booksellers, 1846.

Packard, Mrs. Clarissa. *Recollections of a Housekeeper*. New York: Harper & Brothers, 1834.

Pain, William. *The Practical House Carpenter; Or, Youth's Instructor*. Boston: William Norman, 1796.

Papers of George Washington, Revolutionary War Series.

Parker, Theodore. *A Sermon: Of the Public Function of Woman, Preached at the Music Hall, March 27, 1853*. Boston: Robert I. Wallcut, 1853.

Pemberton, Thomas. "Description of Boston." In *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society, for the Year 1794*, 3:241–304. Boston: Printed at the Apollo Press, 1794.

Perkins, S. H. *Report of the Committee on the Expediency of Providing Better Tenements for the Poor*. Boston: Eastburn's Press, 1846.

Pettit, Eber M., and W. McKinstry. *Sketches in the History of the Underground Railroad*. Fredonia, N.Y.: W. McKinstry & Son, 1879.

Pierson, William H. *American Buildings and Their Architects: The Colonial and Neoclassical Styles*. Vol. 1. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Place, Charles Alpheus. *Charles Bulfinch, Architect and Citizen*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1925.

Plunz, Richard. *A History of Housing in New York City*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.

Poston, Jonathan. *The Buildings of Charleston: A Guide to the City's Architecture*. Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1997.

Pred, Allan. *Making Histories and Constructing Human Geographies: The Local Transformation of Practice, Power Relations, and Consciousness*. Boulder, Colo.: Westview Press, 1990.

_____. "Manufacturing in the American Mercantile City: 1800-1840." *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 56, no. 2 (June 1, 1966): 307–38.

Prince, Mary. *The History of Mary Prince*. Edited by Sarah Salih. London: Penguin Classics, 2001.

Prude, Jonathan. "To Look upon the 'Lower Sort': Runaway Ads and the Appearance of Unfree Laborers in America, 1750-1800." *Journal of American History* 78, no. 1 (June 1991): 124–59.

Prown, Jules David. *Art as Evidence: Writings on Art and Material Culture*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001.

Quinan, John Francis. "The Architectural Style of Asher Benjamin, a Study in Provincialism." Ph.D. diss., Brown University, 1973.

_____. "A Chronologically Arranged List of Projects and Buildings by Asher Benjamin." *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 38, no. 3 (October 1979): 253–54.

Quincy, Eliza Susan Morton. *Memoir of the Life of Eliza S. M. Quincy*. Boston: Printed by J. Wilson & Son, 1861.

Quincy, John, Jr. *Quincy's Market: A Boston Landmark*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2003.

Quincy, Josiah. *An Address Delivered Before the Massachusetts Agricultural Society, at the Brighton Cattle Show, October 12th, 1819*. United States: s.n., 1819.

_____. *A Municipal History of the Town and City of Boston, During Two Centuries. From September 17, 1630, to September 17, 1830*. Boston: Little and Brown, 1852.

Rawson, Michael. *Eden on the Charles: The Making of Boston*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2011.

_____. "The Nature of Water: Reform and the Antebellum Crusade for Municipal Water in Boston." *Environmental History* 9, no. 3 (July 2004): 411–35.

Reps, John W. "Boston by Bostonians: The Printed Plans and Views of the Colonial City by Its Artists, Cartographers, Engravers, and Publishers." In *Boston Prints and Printmakers, 1670-1775*, edited by Walter Muir Whitehill, 46:3–56. Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts; distributed by the University Press of Virginia, 1973.

Repton, Humphry. *Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*. London: T. Bensley & son for J. Taylor, 1816.

Rice, Howard C. "James Swan: Agent of the French Republic 1794-1796." *New England Quarterly* 10, no. 3 (September 1, 1937): 464–86.

Rich, K. H. "Beacon." *Old-Time New England* 66, no. 243 (Winter/Spring 1976): 43–59.

Robbins, Chandler. *Memoir of Hon. William Appleton*. Boston: John Wilson and Son, 1863.

Robboy, Stanley J., and Anita W. Robboy. "Lewis Hayden: From Fugitive Slave to Statesman." *New England Quarterly* 46, no. 4 (December 1973): 591–613.

Roberts, Robert. *The House Servant's Directory, or A Monitor for Private Families: Comprising Hints on the Arrangement and Performance of Servants' Work*. New York: Munroe and Francis, 1827.

Rohrbach, Augusta. *Truth Stranger Than Fiction: Race, Realism, and the U.S. Literary Marketplace*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002.

Rosebrock, Ellen. "A Historical Account of the Joy Street Block between Myrtle and Cambridge Streets." Boston: Museum of Afro-American History, December 22, 1978.

Russell, Elizabeth. "An Alley Reclaimed: Primus Avenue on the North Side of Beacon Hill Progresses from a Slum to an Attractive District." *House Beautiful*, November 1926, 578-581.

Salinger, Sharon V. "Spaces, Inside and Outside, in Eighteenth-Century Philadelphia." *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 26, no. 1 (July 1, 1995): 1–31.

Sans Souci, Alias, Free and Easy, Or, An Evening's Peep into a Polite Circle an Intire New Entertainment in Three Acts. Boston: Printed by Warden and Russell, 1785.

Sargent, Winthrop. "Boston: A Poem." *The Monthly Anthology, and Boston Review* 1 (1804): 420–21.

Savage, Edward Hartwell. *Police Records and Recollections, Or, Boston by Daylight and Gaslight*. Boston: J.P. Dale, 1873.

Sawtelle, Gayle Elizabeth. "The Commercial Landscape of Boston in 1800: Documentary and Archaeological Perspectives on the Geography of Retail Shopkeeping." Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1999.

Schama, Simon. *Dead Certainties: Unwarranted Speculations*. New York: Vintage, 1992.

Schocket, Andrew M. "Thinking about Elites in the Early Republic." *Journal of the Early Republic* 25, no. 4 (December 1, 2005): 547–55.

Schultz, Nancy Lusignan. *Fire & Roses: The Burning of the Charlestown Convent, 1834*. Boston: Northeastern University Press, 2002.

Schweitzer, Mary M. "The Spatial Organization of Federalist Philadelphia, 1790." *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 24, no. 1 (July 1, 1993): 31–57.

Seasholes, Nancy S. *Gaining Ground: A History of Landmaking in Boston*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003.

Sellers, Charles. *The Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

Shalhope, Robert E. "The Anti-Federalists: America's Other Founders." *Reviews in American History* 28, no. 2 (June 1, 2000): 201–7.

Shammas, Carole. "The Space Problem in Early United States Cities." *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 57, no. 3 (July 2000): 505–42.

Shaw, Charles. *A Topographical and Historical Description of Boston, from the First Settlement of the Town to the Present Period*. Boston: Oliver Spear, 1817.

Shaw, Edward. *The Modern Architect; Or, Every Carpenter His Own Master. Embracing Plans, Elevations, Specifications, Framing, Etc., for Private Houses, Classic Dwellings, Churches, &c., to Which Is Added the New System of Stair-Building*. Boston: Dayton and Wentworth, 1855.

Shields, David S. *Civil Tongues & Polite Letters in British America*. Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press for the Institute of Early American History and Culture, 1997.

Shields, David S., and Fredrika J. Teute. "The Court of Abigail Adams." *Journal of the Early Republic* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 227–36.

———. "The Meschianza: Sum of All Fetes." *Journal of the Early Republic* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 185–214.

———. "The Republican Court and the Historiography of a Women's Domain in the Public Sphere." *Journal of the Early Republic* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 169–84.

Shurtleff, Nathaniel Bradstreet. *A Topographical and Historical Description of Boston*. Boston: Printed by Request of the City Council, 1871.

Siebert, Wilbur H. "The Underground Railroad in Massachusetts." *New England Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (September 1936): 447–67.

Small, Nora Pat. *Beauty and Convenience: Architecture and Order in the New Republic*. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003.

Smith, Ryan K. *Robert Morris's Folly: The Architectural and Financial Failures of an American Founder*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.

Snow, Caleb Hopkins. *A History of Boston, the Metropolis of Massachusetts, from Its Origin to the Present Period*. Boston: A. Bowen, 1825.

Soltow, Lee. "The Distribution of Income in the United States in 1798: Estimates Based on the Federal Housing Inventory." *Review of Economics and Statistics* 69, no. 1 (February 1987): 181–85.

_____. "Egalitarian America and Its Inegalitarian Housing in the Federal Period." *Social Science History* 9, no. 2 (Spring 1985): 199–213.

Steinitz, Michael. "Rethinking Geographical Approaches to the Common House: The Evidence from Eighteenth-Century Massachusetts." In *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, 3*, edited by Thomas Carter and Bernard L. Herman, 16–26. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1989.

St. George, Robert Blair. "Afterthoughts on 'Material Life in America, 1600-1860': Household Space in Boston, 1670-1730." *Winterthur Portfolio* 32, no. 1 (Spring 1997): 1–38.

_____. *Conversing by Signs: Poetics of Implication in Colonial New England Culture*. University of North Carolina Press, 1998.

———. "Ritual House Assaults in Early New England." In *Fields of Folklore: Essays in Honor of Kenneth Goldstein*, edited by Roger D. Abrahams, 253–72. Bloomington: Trickster Press, 1995.

Stillman, Damie. "City Living, Federal Style." In *Everyday Life in the Early Republic*, edited by Catherine E. Hutchins, 137–74. Winterthur, Delaware: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1994.

Stoddard, Richard. "Hammatt Billings, Artist and Architect." *Old-Time New England* 62, no. 3 (March 1972): 57–65, 76–79.

Stowe, Harriet Beecher. *House and Home Papers*. Boston: Ticknor and Felds, 1865.

Suffolk County Deeds. Suffolk County Registry of Deeds, Boston, Massachusetts.

Summerson, John. *Georgian London*. Edited by Howard Colvin. New Haven: Yale University Press for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, 2003.

Teute, Fredrika J., and David S. Shields. "Jefferson in Washington: Domesticating Manners in the Republican Court." *Journal of the Early Republic* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 237–62.

———. “The Confederation Court.” *Journal of the Early Republic* 35, no. 2 (Summer 2015): 215–26.

The Author of “Getting into Society.” “Family Portraits.” *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, May 1855.

The Boston Almanac for the Year 1838. Vol. 1. Boston: S.N. Dickinson, 1838.

The Rules of Work, of the Carpenters, in the Town of Boston. Charlestown, Mass.: Samuel Etheridge, 1800.

Thornton, Tamara Plakins. *Cultivating Gentlemen: The Meaning of Country Life among the Boston Elite, 1785-1860*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989.

Thwing, Annie Haven. *The Crooked and Narrow Streets of the Town of Boston, 1630-1822*. Second Edition. Charles E. Lauriat, 1925.

Tocqueville, Alexis de. *Democracy in America*. 2nd ed. Chicago: Encyclopædia Britannica, Inc, 1990.

Tracey, Tobin Neal. “Thomas M. Howard and James Hunt, Nineteenth-Century Housewrights: An Examination of Their Work on Beacon Hill, Boston, MA.” M.A. thesis, Goucher College, 1997.

Trollope, Frances Milton. *Domestic Manners of the Americans*. 4th ed. Vol. 2. London: Printed for Whittaker, Treacher, 1832.

Upton, Dell. “Another City: The Urban Cultural Landscape in the Early Republic.” In *Everyday Life in the Early Republic*, edited by Catherine E. Hutchins, 64–117. Winterthur, Del.: Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum, 1994.

———. *Another City: Urban Life and Urban Spaces in the New American Republic*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.

———. “Architecture in Everyday Life.” *New Literary History* 33, no. 4 (2002): 707–23.

———. *Architecture in the United States*. Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1998.

———. “Gehryism: American Architectural History and the Cultural Authority of Art.” presented at the Reconceptualizing the History of the Built Environment in North America, Charles Warren Center for Studies in American History, Cambridge, Mass., April 29, 2005.

———. “Lancasterian Schools, Republican Citizenship, and the Spatial Imagination in Early Nineteenth-Century America.” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 55, no. 3 (September 1996): 238–53.

———. “Pattern Books and Professionalism: Aspects of the Transformation of Domestic Architecture in America, 1800-1860.” *Winterthur Portfolio* 19, no. 2/3 (1984): 107–50.

———. “The Power of Things: Recent Studies in American Vernacular Architecture.” *American Quarterly* 35, no. 3 (1983): 262–79.

———. “White and Black Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia.” *Places* 2, no. 2 (November 1984): 59–72.

Upton, Dell, and John Michael Vlach, eds. *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986.

Vale, Lawrence J. *From the Puritans to the Projects: Public Housing and Public Neighbors*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007.

Violette, Zachary. “The Decorated Tenement: Working-Class Housing in Boston and New York, 1860-1910.” Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 2014.

Von Frank, A. J. *The Trials of Anthony Burns: Freedom and Slavery in Emerson’s Boston*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998.

Wach, Howard M. “Civil Society, Moral Identity and the Liberal Public Sphere: Manchester and Boston, 1810-40.” *Social History* 21, no. 3 (October 1996): 281–303.

———. “‘Expansive Intellect and Moral Agency’: Public Culture in Antebellum Boston.” *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 3rd Ser., 107 (1995): 30–56.

Wansey, Henry. *An Excursion to the United States of North America, in the Summer of 1794*. 2nd ed. London: Printed and sold by J. Easton, 1798.

Warren, Charles. *A History of the American Bar*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1911.

———. “Samuel Adams and the Sans Souci Club in 1785.” Edited by Worthington Chauncey Ford. *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 3rd Ser., 60 (October 1, 1926): 318–44.

Weinhardt, Carl J. *The Domestic Architecture of Beacon Hill, 1800-1850*. Reprinted from The Proceedings of the Bostonian Society Annual Meeting, 1958. Boston: Bostonian Society, 1973.

Wells, Camille. "The Multistoried House: Twentieth-Century Encounters with the Domestic Architecture of Colonial Virginia." *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 106, no. 4 (October 1, 1998): 353–418.

_____. "Old Claims and New Demands: Vernacular Architecture Studies Today." In *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture, 2*, edited by Camille Wells, 1–10. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1986.

Weston, George F. *Boston Ways: High, By, and Folk*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1957.

Wheildon, William W. *Beacon Hill, the Beacon and the Monument*. Cambridge: John Wilson and Son, University Press, 1889.

_____. *Sentry, or Beacon Hill; the Beacon and the Monument of 1635 and 1790*. Concord, Mass.: Rand, Avery, 1877.

Whitehill, Walter Muir. *Boston: A Topographical History*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968.

———. "Perez Morton's Daughter Revisits Boston in 1825." *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 3rd Ser., 82 (January 1, 1970): 21–47.

Whitehill, Walter Muir, ed. *Boston Prints and Printmakers, 1670-1775; a Conference Held by the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1 and 2 April 1971*. Publications of the Colonial Society of Massachusetts, Vol. 46. Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts; distributed by the University Press of Virginia, 1973.

Wickersham, Jay. "The Financial Misadventures of Charles Bulfinch." *New England Quarterly* 83, no. 3 (September 1, 2010): 413–81.

Wilentz, Sean. "Crime, Poverty and the Streets of New York City: The Diary of William H. Bell, 1850-51." *History Workshop*, no. 7 (Spring 1979): 126–55.

Wood, Gordon S. *Empire of Liberty: A History of the Early Republic, 1789-1815*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Wright, Conrad Edick, and Katheryn P. Viens, eds. *Entrepreneurs : The Boston Business Community, 1700–1850*. Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1997.

Yanni, Carla. “The Linear Plan for Insane Asylums in the United States before 1866.” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 62, no. 1 (March 2003): 24–49.

Young, Alexander. *The Good Merchant: A Discourse Delivered in The Church on Church Green, March 26, 1837, the Sunday after the Decease of William Parsons, Esq.* Boston: Hilliard, Gray, 1838.

Young, Alfred F. “George Robert Twelves Hewes (1742-1840): A Boston Shoemaker and the Memory of the American Revolution.” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3rd Ser., 38, no. 4 (October 1, 1981): 562–623.

Zaitzevsky, Cynthia. “Housing Boston’s Poor: The First Philanthropic Experiments.” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 42, no. 2 (May 1983): 157–67.

Zboray, Ronald J., and Mary Saracino Zboray. “Books, Reading, and the World of Goods in Antebellum New England.” *American Quarterly* 48, no. 4 (December 1, 1996): 587–622.

———. “‘Have You Read...?’: Real Readers and Their Responses in Antebellum Boston and Its Region.” *Nineteenth-Century Literature* 52, no. 2 (September 1997): 139–70.

———. “Reading and Everyday Life in Antebellum Boston: The Diary of Daniel F. and Mary D. Child.” *Libraries & Culture* 32, no. 3 (July 1, 1997): 285–323.

Zimmer, Edward F. “Alexander Parris’ David Sears House.” *Old-Time New England* 70 (1980): 99–110.

_____. “The Architectural Career of Alexander Parris (1780-1852).” Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1984.

Z. [Josiah Quincy]. “Domestic Architecture.” *New England Magazine*, January 1832.