

CHAPTER FOUR

ARCHITECTURE AND DECORATIVE ARTS:

1700–50

Although its religious, economic, social, and cultural roots clearly lay in the seventeenth century, the eighteenth century had a very different character. A principal reason was that the population of the colonies increased considerably—from a quarter of a million in 1700 to nearly a million and a half by 1750. This was due largely to immigration, not only of English people but of Germans and Scottish-Irish as well. Opportunity beckoned, offering something Europe could not—land. There were places where a family could be given 50 acres (20 ha) just for agreeing to settle it, or buy 640 acres (259 ha) for a few shillings.

Expansion beyond the seaboard was by no means unlimited, though. Almost every advance into new lands brought bloody conflict with the native population. The Spanish checked movement to the south of present-day Georgia, and the French hemmed in the English colonies to the north and west. The French controlled Canada and the Great Lakes region, founded Detroit in 1701, and seventeen years later established New Orleans at the mouth of the Mississippi River. Their plan was to stop English expansion at the Allegheny Mountains and create a French empire in the mid-continent. This would stretch from Canada to the Gulf of Mexico, spanning the broad Mississippi Valley.

By the 1740s the French and Indian Wars had begun. A huge army had to be maintained to secure the frontiers, and Parliament held that the colonists should either provide such forces or pay for a standing British army. When the colonists did neither, Parliament imposed the hated Stamp Act in 1765, and the cry of taxation without representation went up.

But if thwarted by land to the north, south, and west, colonial expansion knew virtually no bounds as the merchant fleet took to the seas. From the prospering plantations of the South were shipped rice and indigo from South Carolina, tobacco from Virginia, and cattle from North Carolina. Wheat and corn were major exports from Maryland and Pennsylvania, while lumber, fish, and rum were sent out of New England.

This was the period when second- and third-generation Southerners created the great plantation houses and began in earnest to imitate the refined lifestyles of the English gentry. In the northern cities, merchants became rich

beyond anything their seventeenth-century ancestors had known, and built fine townhouses in the stylish Wrenian or Georgian mode.

The colonies remained closely tied to England—much more so than to each other. The period around the turn of the century was known as the era of William and Mary, after the monarchs William of Orange and his wife Mary (d. 1694), daughter of King James II. Upon William's death in 1702, Mary's sister Anne became queen and ruled until 1714. At that date the first of the Georges, of the German house of Hanover, was brought to England, and the Georgian era began.

During this period the English monarchy and Parliament assumed a benign neglect of the colonies. Therefore, left for the most part to their own affairs, the colonists developed a spirit that approached selfrule. In the 1760s, when king and Parliament attempted to reassert their authority, conflict naturally ensued. In the course of this period, a slow but definite transformation of people's perceptions occurred—they moved from seeing themselves as English colonists to a new understanding that they were colonial Americans. Nevertheless, most colonists did think of themselves as English, and looked to their country of origin for cultural leadership. This affected clothing styles and manners, music and literature, architecture and painting, and the various forms of religion.

Orthodox, hardline Puritanism had already begun to decline before the new century opened, and even in New England religion was worn with more ease and grace than before. Anglicans tended to be more liberal than others in accepting cultural innovations. For example, the first imported organ was installed in King's Chapel, Boston, in 1714, while the first organ made in America was placed in New York's Trinity Church in 1737. Both edifices were Episcopal. The earliest public concert was held in 1731, in the great room of Mr. Peter Pelham, an Anglican. Four years later, the first opera performance—*Flora*—took place in Charleston, South Carolina, and by 1749 Philadelphia had its first theater building.

Printing presses had long existed in the Boston area (see p. 42), and by the 1720s they were being used in Philadelphia. One was set up in Charleston in 1731, and the first

newspaper in that colony, the *South Carolina Gazette*, went into publication the next year. Newspapers were usually rather small affairs of two to four pages. They proliferated—the *Boston Gazette* (1719) was followed by the *New England Courant* (1721), published by James, elder brother of Benjamin Franklin. The *New York Gazette* appeared in 1725, the *Maryland Gazette* in 1727, and Benjamin Franklin became owner and publisher of the *Pennsylvania Gazette* in 1729. These papers contributed to building up a wellinformed citizenry, for a wide variety of subjects was carried in their pages—from news of the day to scientific information, plus several forms of early American literature.

From the early years of the century, literature blossomed. Religious tracts continued to be published. The Rev. Cotton Mather, for example, was one of the most prolific writers of his day. Everything was considered, from the Salem witch trials to inoculation against smallpox. Secular works such as Robert Beverley's *History of Virginia* (London, 1705) appeared, and social treatises like Samuel Sewall's *The Selling of Joseph* (Boston, 1700)—a New Englander's attack on slavery. There were pure literary efforts like Ebenezer Cook's *The Sot-Weed Factor* (London, 1708), a story about a tobacco merchant. Hugh Jones's *The Present State of Virginia* of 1724 described the increased refinement of life among plantation society. And Benjamin Franklin's popular *Poor Richard's Almanac*, which appeared annually from 1732 to 1757, offered an amusing and sophisticated form of writing that arose from vernacular wit, philosophy, and common sense. By 1727 Franklin and several Philadelphians had

formed the Junto, a learned society which eventually became the American Philosophical Society, an institution that remains active to this day.

Clearly, the colonists possessed an ardent desire to grow intellectually and to lead a more cultivated lifestyle. This encouraged the patronage of painting and, inevitably, affected architecture and the decorative arts, as they were used to enhance the elegance of life. All along the Eastern Seaboard, Americans shed the last vestiges of styles that had retained medieval and Tudor features. Instead, the wealthy merchants of the North and the great planters of the South turned to a moderate form of the high style of the English aristocracy. Late Baroque, William and Mary, Queen Anne, and Early Georgian styles were adopted to express the new social and cultural ambitions and the new wealth of the emerging colonial aristocracy.

WREN'S INFLUENCE IN VIRGINIA

The architectural manifesto of the new style is first and most fully stated in several buildings erected at Williamsburg, Virginia, between 1695 and 1720. The College of William and Mary had been established in 1693 in Williamsburg, which six years later replaced Jamestown as the capital of the colony. Earlier public buildings throughout the colonies had been little more than modified and enlarged houses. But



4.1 Wren Building, College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, Virginia, 1695–8 (restored 1931, 1968).

now a new style appeared in imitation of the English Baroque as defined by Sir Christopher Wren, whose designs for the rebuilding of London after the great fire of 1666 imposed a new look upon that city. Wren designed over fifty churches for London. The most famous is St. Paul's Cathedral, while among his bestknown secular buildings are Chelsea Hospital, parts of Greenwich Hospital, and the garden façade at Hampton Court Palace.

Many of Wren's buildings were built of brick, with white trim of either wood or stone. Classical principles such as unity and symmetry prevailed, while classical components—pilasters, cornices, pediments—were used for adornment and articulation. The pitch of the roofline was usually lowered significantly or flattened altogether, presenting a classical horizontality as opposed to Gothic verticality. Much of a Wren building's beauty arises from the dignity of its design. The new architecture, as it rose throughout London, differed markedly from the old half-timber Tudor style, in both conception and detail.

WREN BUILDING

At the College of William and Mary the Wren Building—so named because it was once believed that Sir Christopher himself had designed it—introduced the new style into the colonies (Fig. 4.1). Seen from the façade, a simple rectangular horizontal block with a low hipped roof is symmetrically divided by a central pedimented pavilion, which has an open passage on the ground level. Stringcourse and cornice are continuous, uniting the three sections, and six rows of windows on each side line up vertically with dormers in the roof. A cupola completes the central axis. The Wren Building is constructed of red brick, which is set off by the light trim and the white of the window mullions and frames. The new form of the sash window replaced the old casement type, and the geometric grid of rectangular panes superseded the small leaded-diamond panes of the Tudor period. A comparison with the John Ward House or the Old Ship Meetinghouse (Figs. 2.7 and 2.8) shows the fundamental change of style that has occurred.

WILLIAMSBURG'S CAPITOL AND GOVERNOR'S PALACE

The new capital at Williamsburg was laid out in 1699 on a well organized grid plan. The Wren Building of the College stood at one end of a central axis (Duke of Gloucester Street) with the Capitol at the other, and the Governor's Palace was at the end of a perpendicular axis (the Palace Green). The royally approved plan was probably devised in London.

The present Capitol and Palace are both twentieth-century reconstructions, but they were based on archeological research and provide a good sense of the gracious dignity of the town as it appeared in the early eighteenth century. It is not known who designed either building, but



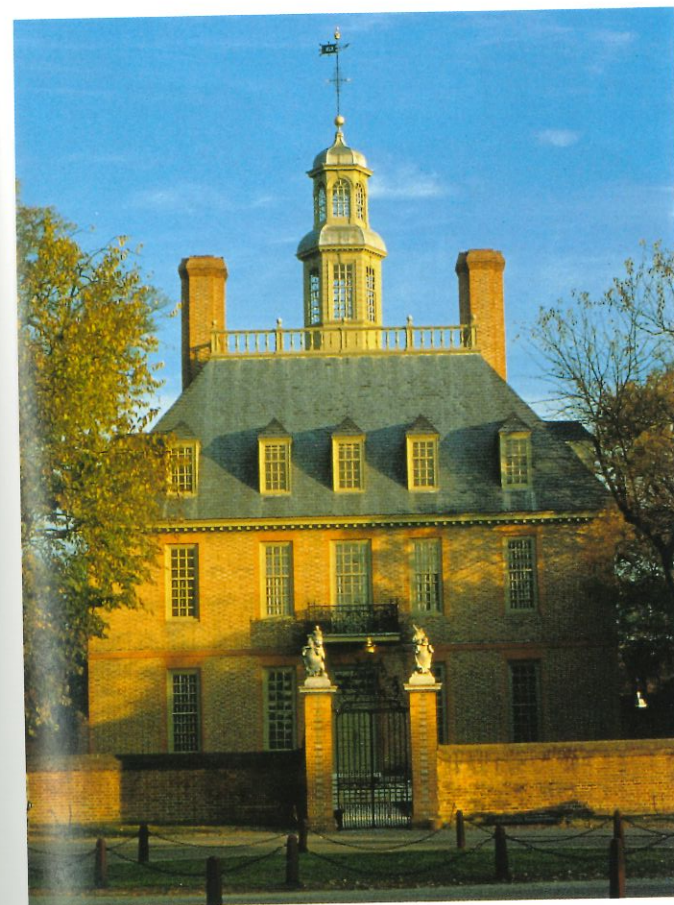
4.2 The Capitol, Williamsburg, Virginia, c. 1705 (rebuilt 1753, restored 1929). Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, Virginia.

the overseer, or superintendent of construction, in each case was Henry Cary. He may well have contributed to the design of specific details.

The H-plan of the Capitol has two wings, one for the elected House of Burgesses, the other for the general court and the chamber of the Governor's Council (Fig. 4.2). Semicircular at one end, these sections were connected by a hyphen with an arcade below and a cupola above. Like the Wren Building, the Capitol was built of brick. It had eave cornices, sash windows, and dormers in the roof that were aligned with windows below. Handsome large oculus windows on the lower floor echoed the curves of the wings and arches of the hyphen. There was an aesthetically pleasing and intellectually satisfying massing of geometric forms and spaces, and a careful attention to architectural detailing rendered in a restrained classical English Baroque mode.

The Governor's Palace was an especially important building because of the new standard it established for domestic architecture in Virginia (Fig. 4.3). There had never before been anything so grand in the American colonies. Its elegant Wren-style form became the model for many of the wealthy planters. Most of them had served either on the Governor's Council or in the House of Burgesses, and so had seen the splendid new structures of Williamsburg during the periods when those groups met.

The Palace's block form and hipped roof, dormers, balusters at the ridge of the roof, cupola, and perfect symmetry give it great sophistication. While the Thoroughgood House (Fig. 2.1) was built on a plan that called for one room on either side of the entrance, the Governor's Palace effected a significant change by establishing the double-pile plan—that is, two rooms on either side of a large central hall. This became the favorite layout for eighteenth-century colonial homes, and follows the example set by fine English country houses such as Coleshill (1650) and Thorpe Hall (1655).



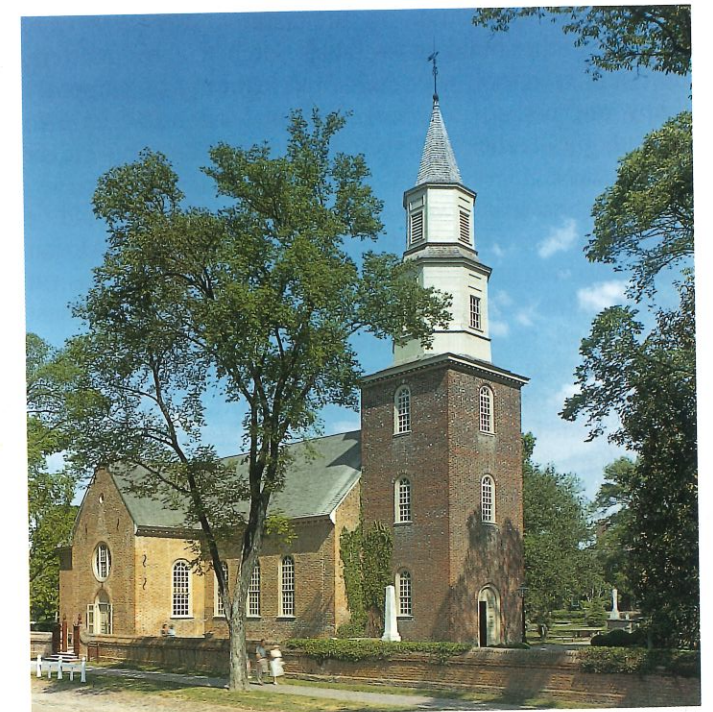
4.3 Governor's Palace, Williamsburg, Virginia, 1706–20 (restored 1930). Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Folk Art Center, Williamsburg, Virginia.

OTHER WILLIAMSBURG BUILDINGS

Other buildings soon graced the new capital. At the College, a residence and classroom building for Native American boys called Brafferton Hall (1723) was erected. It flanked the Wren Building on one side, while the President's House (1732) was built on the other. Both echoed the style of the Wren Building.

Bruton Parish Church—a handsome, large, brick edifice—was erected between 1711 and 1715 as the showplace of Episcopalianism in America (Fig. 4.4). It is the first example in the colonies of the new Wren type of church that already dominated the London skyline. Its Baroque form, classical motifs, imposing scale, and carefully developed proportions were designed by Governor Alexander Spotswood (Fig. 5.14), the first of the gentleman-amateur architects of colonial America. At the western end of the cruciform plan is a large tower base, which had a steeple added much later—in 1770. Bruton Parish Church invites comparison with St. Luke's Church of 1632 (Fig. 2.4) and reveals that the medieval features of the earlier building have been purged from the new style.

Each of the buildings at Williamsburg in its own way



4.4 Bruton Parish Church, Williamsburg, Virginia, 1711–15, steeple 1769–70. Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, Virginia.

followed a design developed in England, with Wren as the guiding spirit. But in the process of transplantation, two characteristics set the American edifices apart from their English prototypes. Form and detail are simplified, and scale is reduced. Classical ornament, while often present, is not as rich. Windows are not recessed as deeply into the plane of the walls, so the walls are not as boldly three-dimensional, and plans and spaces are not as complex. These adaptations may have been the result of provinciality, or have been caused by workmen who were unfamiliar with the tasks required of them. Other possible reasons are the need for economy, or a reluctance to be showy, or any combination of these factors. But this simplification, in comparison to English counterparts, was to become part of the aesthetic taste of Americans throughout the rest of the colonial era.

PLANTATION HOUSES OF THE SOUTH

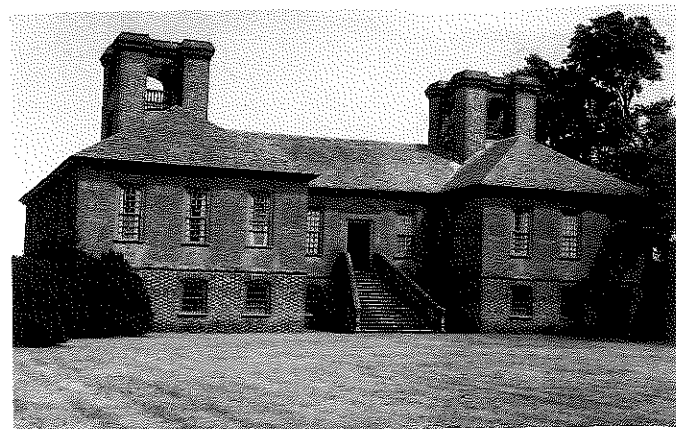
The time had arrived when wealthy planters were no longer content with the modest farmhouses their founding ancestors had built, and the great age of the splendid plantation houses was ushered in. The plantation was the social, economic, often even the judicial unit of the South. In place of towns, the South evolved plantations as nearly independent estates. Each had its own wheat, flax, and barley fields, its own orchards, herb gardens, and vineyards, and a variety

of livestock. In addition to the main house there were numerous other buildings—stables, kitchen, slave quarters, grist mill, tannery, cooperage, blacksmith and carpentry shops, and perhaps a school. Each plantation had its own craftspeople—either indentured servants from England or trained slaves.

Building materials were available locally. Bricks could be made from clay and baked in the plantation's kiln. Mortar was made from ground-up oyster shells, and timber was cut from the abundant forests. Plantation houses were almost always built on rivers because they were the means of communication and commerce with the world beyond. Tobacco was the money crop—at harvest time great bales of it were loaded aboard oceangoing ships at the plantation's own wharf for shipment to London. There it would be exchanged for silver plate, furniture, clothing, fancy fabrics, or any other items that could not be produced on the estate.

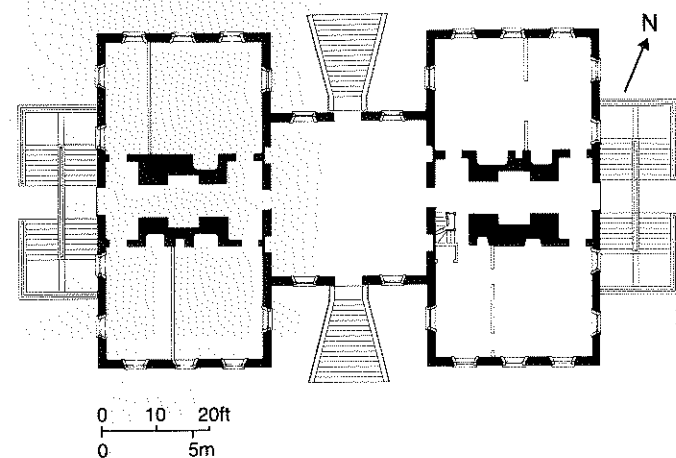
STRATFORD HALL

No doubt encouraged by what he saw at Williamsburg, Thomas Lee had Stratford Hall built as the focal point of his plantation. It is the earliest of the great houses (Fig. 4.5). Its H-plan (Fig. 4.6) is unusual, but there are earlier examples in England, and it was used at the Capitol in Williamsburg. There is a bold simplicity in the Baroque massing of the projecting blocks, and the basic massiveness is seldom disturbed by architectural ornament. Such decoration is limited to a stringcourse, and the pilasters and pediment of the doorway. All of these are merely continuous parts of the brickwork, in relief. A grand simplicity marks the great splayed staircase, and the white-trimmed sash windows on



4.5 Stratford Hall, Westmoreland County, Virginia, 1725–30.

4.6 Stratford Hall, Westmoreland County, 1725–30. Plan.

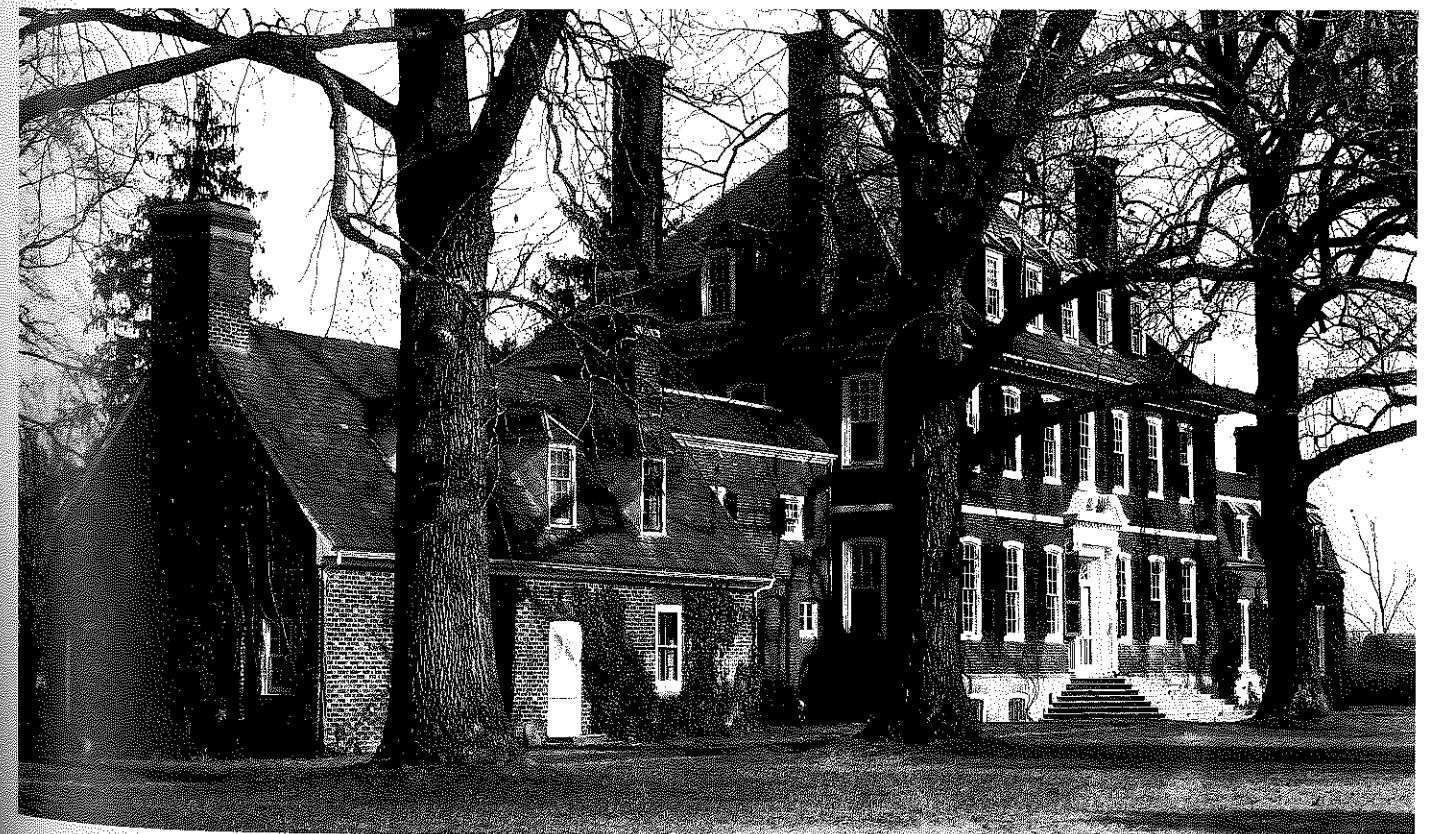


the main floor are of noble scale. The roofline is low, and its forms and planes contribute to the geometric beauty of the structure.

Out of the roof rise the chimney blocks in which the four stacks are united into a single unit by graceful connecting arches. This particular compound chimney arrangement is unique in colonial American architecture, but it is found in several earlier English houses that were designed by Sir John Vanbrugh (1664–1726)—Blenheim Palace (1705–22), for example. The name of the person responsible for the design of Stratford Hall is unknown, although it may have been Lee himself.

If the exterior is characterized by a bold simplicity, the interior (Fig. 4.7) possesses a richness unsurpassed by any house then standing in America, except the Governor's Palace in Williamsburg. The grand staircase on the outside led into the Great Hall, a room that shows the new use of architectural spaces for specialized activities. The desire for a gracious environment for social entertainment saw that a large space (28 feet or 8.5 meters square and 18 feet or 5.5 meters high) was set aside which could be devoted to parties, balls, and concerts. This hall is one of the earliest examples of full-height paneling. A knowledge of the classical Orders is displayed in the elegant pilasters with their richly carved capitals, and a beautifully designed entablature crowns the whole.

4.8 William Byrd, Westover, Charles City County, Virginia, 1730–4. Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, Williamsburg, Virginia.

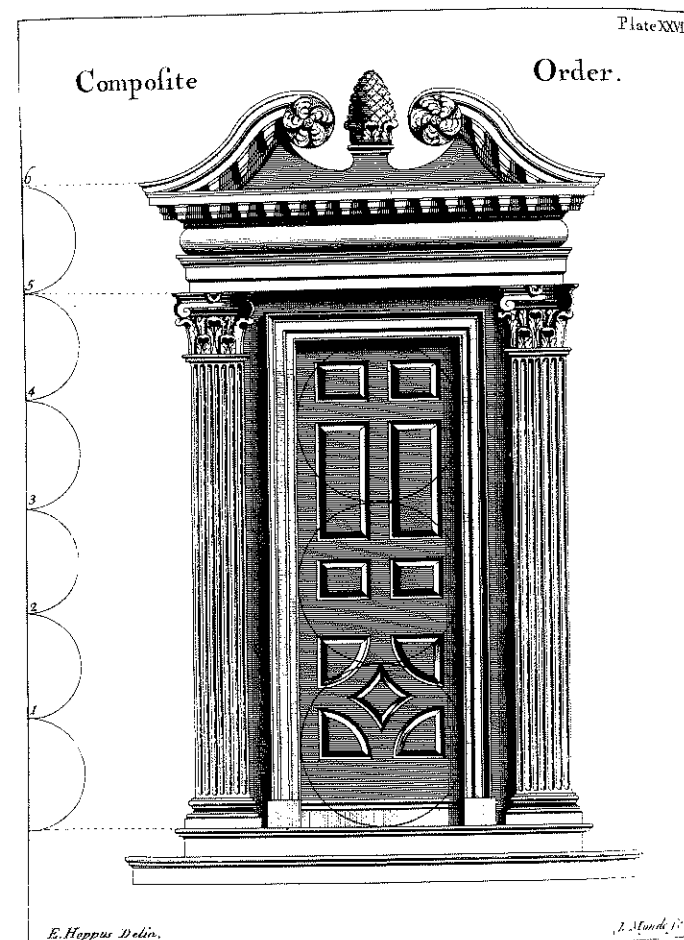


4.7 Stratford Hall, Westmoreland County, 1725–30. Interior, Great Hall.

WESTOVER

Westover (Fig. 4.8), on the banks of the James River, is of the late Baroque style and similar to the English country houses that William Byrd II (Fig. 5.13) saw during the many years that he lived in England. The central block dates from 1730–4, and the wings and hyphens were added later. In plan, Westover is a double-pile house with a large central entrance hall that contains a grand stairway. It is similar in form to the slightly earlier Brafferton Hall and the almost exactly contemporary President's House at the College of William and Mary in Williamsburg (see p. 54). (Byrd, as a member of the Governor's Council, knew both of these buildings well.)

A classical cornice and stone stringcourse give a horizontal emphasis to the façade. Locally produced red-orange brick is set off smartly by the white trim of the sash windows, and the whole façade is meticulously symmetrical, with a fine proportional relationship of window and wall spaces. Rectilinear severity is relieved by the slight but graceful curve at the top of the windows. But the most impressive feature is the classical marble doorway with its swan's-neck pediment and pineapple finial (a symbol of hospitality). No local stonemason could have carved the Composite capitals and other fine details—Byrd imported the doorway from England.



4.9 William Salmon, Plate 26 from *Palladio Londonensis* (London, 1734), design for a door in the Composite Order. Courtesy Winterthur Library: Printed Book and Periodical Collection, Winterthur, Delaware.

A well-educated eighteenth-century gentleman such as Byrd would have been knowledgeable in architectural design and theory. His library would have contained several pattern books with engraved plates, which were standard sources on both sides of the Atlantic. From Virginia, Byrd must have ordered his marble doorway from an English stonemason, specifying that it be taken from a plate in William Salmon's *Palladio Londonensis* (published in 1734, the year Westover was completed) (Fig. 4.9).

DESIGN THROUGH PATTERN BOOKS

Pattern books such as Salmon's provided the means by which the contemporary fashions in architectural design crossed the Atlantic. They offered guidance to people wanting to build fine houses in the colonies in a slightly more modest form than the buildings then being erected in England. By the 1730s several such books were available, filled with engraved plates, essays on architectural theory, and practical advice on construction and materials. Architectural details could be assembled from the variety of choices

they offered. Late Baroque grandeur, Palladian elegance, and a classical architectural vocabulary were introduced into the colonies through such publications as Colin Campbell's *Vitruvius Britannicus* (5 vols., London, 1715), Giacomo Leoni's *Architecture of A. Palladio* (London, 1715), William Kent's *Designs of Inigo Jones* (London, 1727), James Gibbs's *Book of Architecture* (London, 1728), and Salmon's *Palladio Londonensis*.

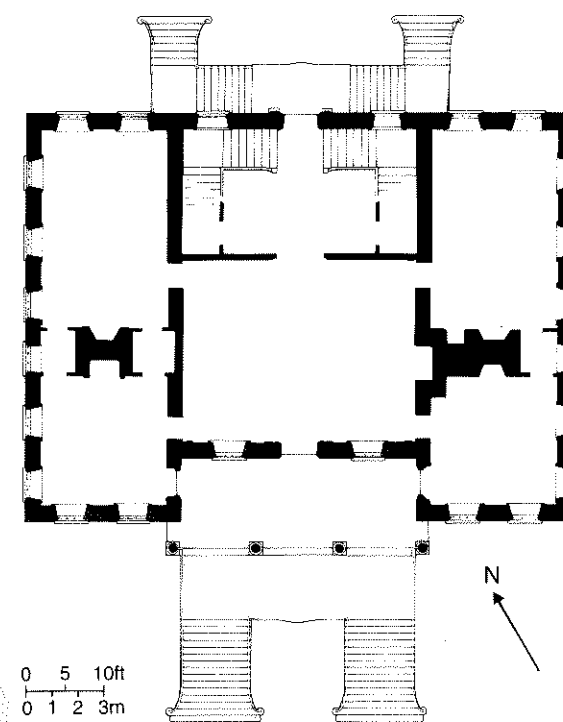
DRAYTON HALL AND PALLADIANISM

In South Carolina, the colonists' desire for refined and substantial plantation houses attained its greatest fulfillment with Drayton Hall, built on the Ashley River near Charleston in 1738–42 (Fig. 4.10). John Drayton, master of Drayton Plantation, may have been responsible for its design. It features the earliest Palladian temple portico in the American colonies, which may have been inspired by Palladio's Villa Pisani in Montagnana, Italy. The designs of the celebrated Italian architect Andrea Palladio (1508–80) had been rediscovered in the early years of the eighteenth century. Through Lord Burlington's circle they had been transformed into a new mode known as English Palladianism, and had been circulated through various publications, including Leoni's English edition of *The Architecture of A. Palladio* (1715). Thereafter, Palladianism became one of the primary standards of taste in England, and as such it inevitably reached the American colonies.

Although it was begun in the same decade as Westover, Drayton Hall represents a more advanced fashion. For the Virginia house took its inspiration from the seventeenth-century mode of Sir Christopher Wren's architecture, while the house near Charleston derives its form from the eighteenth-century Palladian style.

The portico extends from a façade with a recessed central

4.10 Drayton Hall, Charleston, South Carolina, 1738–42. A property of the National Trust for Historic Preservation.



4.11 Drayton Hall, Charleston. Plan.

portion, which is unusual. More usual is the double-pile plan (Fig. 4.11), which includes a large entrance hall—the largest room in the house. A gracious center for entertaining, it has an elaborate chimneypiece taken from an engraved plate in William Kent's *Designs of Inigo Jones*. Jones had been among the first to introduce Palladianism into England, and his own work was greatly admired among Lord Burlington's followers during the 1720s. Thus, through two separate features, Drayton Hall demonstrates the sophisticated knowledge of architectural design and the prosperity of the planter class in the South by the 1730s.

MERCHANT ARCHITECTURE IN THE NORTH

In the North a similar pattern was followed, but the results were different. Even before the turn of the century wealthy merchants had begun to reject the medieval survival style of their ancestors (as found in the Parson Capen House, Fig. 2.5). They had turned instead to the current fashions of the English nobility. A similar social phenomenon was occurring among the great merchants of London, whose forebears had been content to live in rooms above the family shop or store. Now they chose to build fine houses in fashionable sections of the city, far removed from their places of business. New England seaport towns were growing and prospering, and

within them a mercantile aristocracy was ascending. Taste became increasingly sophisticated as the merchants called upon the arts to express and enhance their new mode of life.

DOUBLE-PILE HOUSES

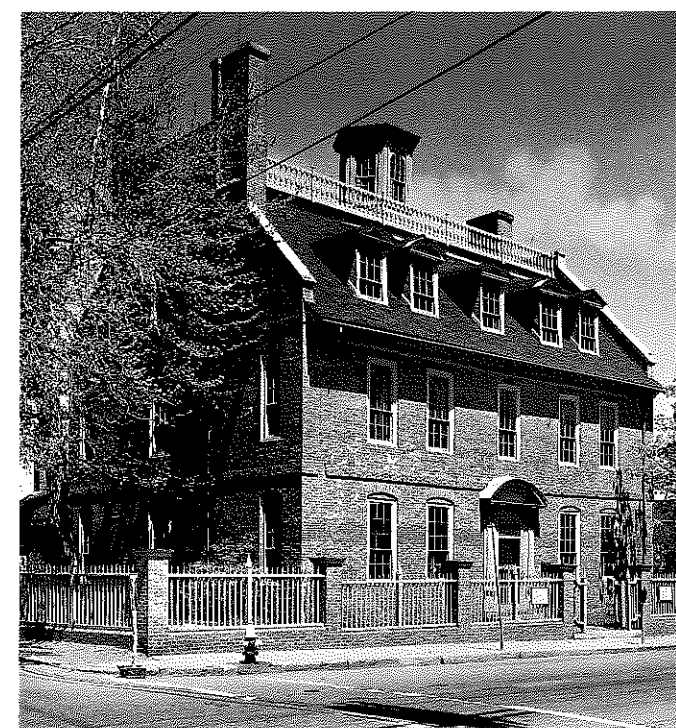
The McPhedris-Warner House (1718–23) is one of the earliest surviving New England examples of the double-pile house in the new style (Fig. 4.12). Its symmetrical façade has a handsome doorway with pilasters, carved capitals, and a segmental-arch pediment. The roof is crowned with a balustrade and cupola. The end wall at the north is nicely articulated to incorporate the fireplaces, whose chimney-stacks rise well above the roofline. This form of the end wall, which became popular, is also found in the Royall House in Medford (Fig. 4.13). The design of the McPhedris-Warner House is a modest provincial version of a great English country house such as Coleshill.

ROYALL HOUSE

In the eighteenth century, with its commitment to classical principles and ornamentation, persons of taste insisted upon an architectural aesthetic based on unity, balance, harmony, and completeness. The decorative vocabulary was composed of the classical Orders. The conscious exercise of these principles is demonstrated in the Royall House (Fig. 4.13).

Isaac Royall, Sr., had already made a fortune in the sugar, rum, and slave trade in Antigua before he settled in Medford, near Boston, in 1732. There he acquired a 600 acre

4.12 McPhedris-Warner House, Portsmouth, New Hampshire, 1718–23.





4.13 Royall House, Medford, Massachusetts, east façade, 1733–7. Courtesy Royall House Association.

(243 ha) estate that had on it an old seventeenth-century farmhouse. He immediately set about remodeling it. The east façade dates from 1733–7, but a few years after Royall's death, the west façade (1747–50) and most of the interior were remodeled by his son—Isaac, Jr., the young man seen in Feke's portrait (Fig. 5.7).

On the east front a vertical unity was attained by inserting white spandrels between the sash windows, which are large and elegant. On the first two floors, each contains twenty-four lights (glass panes). The windowframes have elaborate moldings, and there is quoining at the corners. It is made of wood and painted white in imitation of the stone that was used on English houses. A welldeveloped classical cornice caps the façade, while the roof is barely visible. These features distinguish the upper portion markedly from the complex, medieval roof arrangement of, say, the Ward House (Fig. 2.7). The centrally placed door is flanked by Doric pilasters and topped by a noble entablature.

WILLIAM AND MARY STYLE

Interiors of American homes took on a new appearance with the introduction of the William and Mary style of furniture, beginning in the last years of the seventeenth century and remaining in vogue until about 1725. The change had begun at the English court after 1660, when Charles II and his Portuguese queen, Catherine of Braganza, returned from exile in France and Flanders. The new modes were fashioned at the court by Dutch, Flemish, French, and Portuguese craftsmen whom the king encouraged to settle in England. Eventually they spread to the merchant class, and through it to the American colonies in the era of William and Mary. King William III (reigned 1689–1702) was of Holland's royal House of Orange, and under his rule Dutch fashions and craftsmen were naturally popular in England.

Kings and queens who had long lived on the Continent thus played a major role in redirecting English taste away

from the popular Tudor style. As religious refugees—such as the Protestant Huguenots fleeing Catholic France after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685—sought asylum in England and America, the crafts workers among them transplanted the new style wherever they settled.

WENTWORTH ROOM

The result of the change in interiors is seen in the Wentworth Room at Winterthur Museum, which is in the William and Mary style (Fig. 4.14). Fine paneling enhances the wall, and the furniture is of a very different style from that illustrated in Figures 2.9 and 2.14. The fireplace has been reduced in size since, in a parlor such as this, it is no longer the center of cooking, candlemaking, and other household chores. The heavy, roughhewn beam across the top of the fireplace that is visible in Figure 2.9 is here

concealed by a wellcut molding that blends with the paneling of the wall. To the left is a built-in cabinet for the storage and display of the family's finer pieces of silver plate and ceramics. Fine porcelain, particularly that brought back from the Far East, was especially popular and began to replace pewter for daily use.

The distinctive features of the William and Mary style are seen in Figures 4.15 and 4.16. The turned parts of the chair and the high chest of drawers are more delicate than their counterparts illustrated in Figures 2.11 and 2.13. The armchair has rich floral and scroll carvings in the crest rail and stretcher that are boldly three-dimensional, in contrast to the earlier, rather timid, low-relief carvings.

Finer woods were used in the William and Mary style than in the earlier one. Maple, walnut, and imported mahogany replaced the pine and oak of most seventeenth-century furniture. Joiners and cabinetmakers had increased

4.14 Wentworth Room, early 18th-century interior, as installed in Winterthur Museum, Winterthur, Delaware.

