

MAILS, RYAN FREDRICK, M.A. "Your Former Selves and Your Present State:"
Identity and Domestic Landscape in Upper Georgia, 1780-1815. (2008)
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This thesis examines the process by which Virginian migrants to the frontiers of Georgia fashioned their particular identity as a planter elite in the post-revolutionary South. Study of this migrant community, is a point of access not only to the culture of the southern backcountry, but the difficult question of how elites mediated the upheavals of Virginian society during the latter half of the eighteenth-century.

This work is structured around the interrogation of artifacts, particularly houses and furnishings, for the ideas that shaped them. While the material culture of the Chesapeake gentry has been extensively explored, the domestic landscape of the Tidewater's backcountry periphery has received little attention. The interweaving of material and documentary sources makes it possible to access the complicated public identities they authored in response to the challenge posed by the encounter with by evangelical ideology, and their efforts at maintaining clear cultural boundaries as a migrant community.

“YOUR FORMER SELVES AND YOUR PRESENT STATE:”

IDENTITY AND DOMESTIC LANDSCAPE IN

UPPER GEORGIA, 1780 - 1815

by

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APPROVAL PAGE

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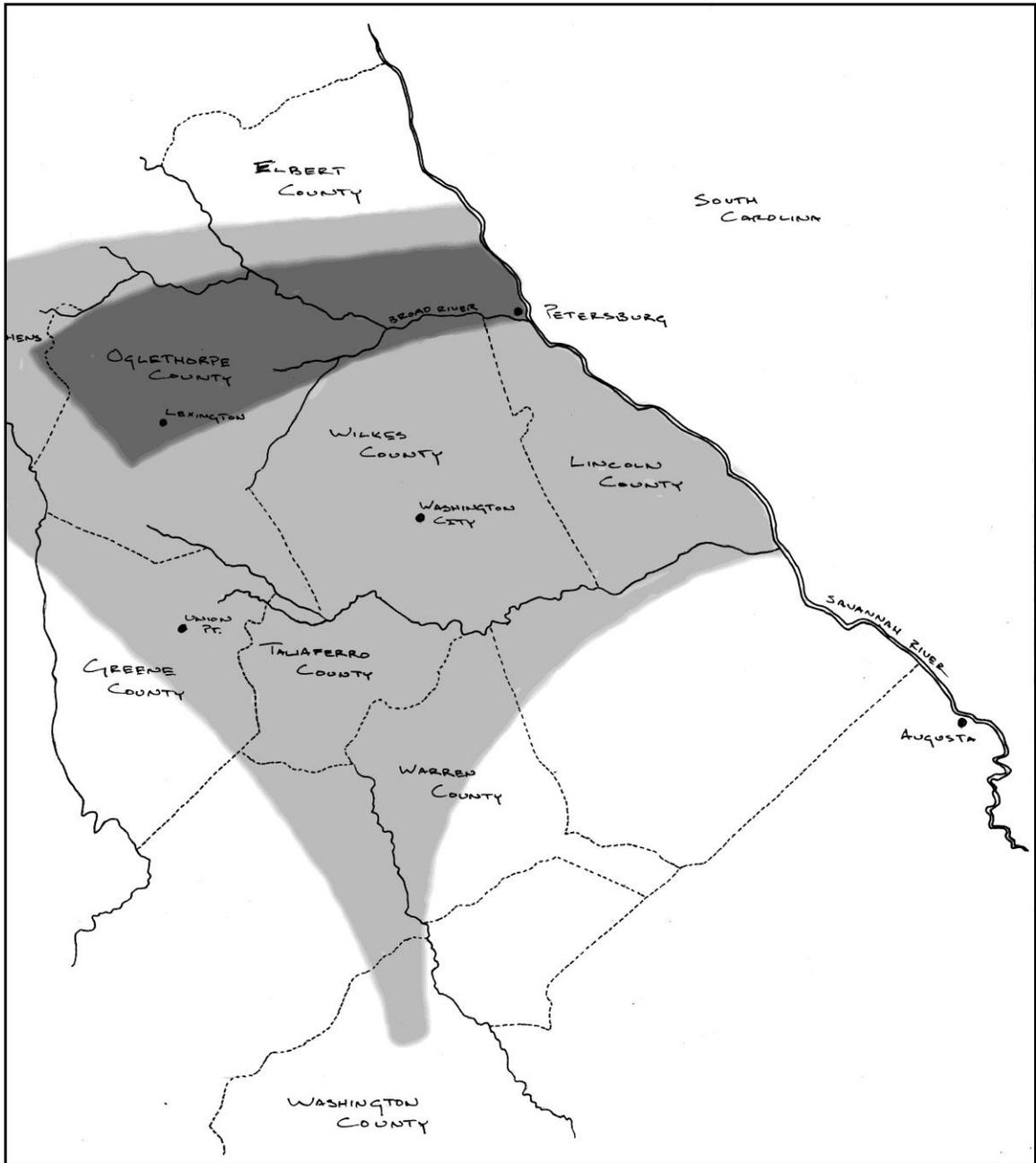
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1. Upper Georgia, ca. 1785. This area was originally encompassed by Wilkes and Washington Counties but was further divided over the course of the 1790s. Light gray shading indicates the area of primary settlement by Virginians. Dark gray shading indicates the core area of Virginian settlement, and corresponds roughly to the map drawn by George Gilmer (fig.2).

INTRODUCTION

I

In February, 1806 the *Monitor* of Washington, Georgia, which had been the sovereign territory of Creek natives a quarter-century earlier, printed a lengthy announcement for a stud horse. The writer made known the “singularly celebrated running horse OLD QUICKSILVER... Whose performance on the turf while in possession of John Tayloe, Esq. of Mount Airy, Richmond County, Virginia, was equal to any horse that ever ran in that State,” would be pastured until Summer near town. His résumé of purses won across the Chesapeake—Bowling Green, Westmoreland courthouse, Tappahannock—and the owners of the horses he had defeated, was a vocabulary of names and places charged with significance. The settlers of upper Georgia were migrants at the periphery of the Virginian world.¹

Those who read the *Monitor* were the nascent gentry of the backcountry. Most were middling planters from the piedmont of Virginia, who went south to Georgia in the years just after the War for Independence. They came in extended family groups and in hopes of establishing a tobacco kingdom along the upper reaches of the Savannah River – the present counties of Wilkes, Oglethorpe, Elbert and Greene. Most had lived at the fringe of the gentry class and, once in Georgia, they established themselves as a political and economic elite that dominated the politics of the state. They achieved this even as

¹ Advertisement by Edward Jordan, *Washington Monitor*, Washington, Georgia, 15 February, 1806.

they sustained a separate, Virginian cultural identity until the Civil War. What follows explores the ways in which the first generation of settlers physically imprinted that identity on the landscape.

They could not, however, recreate the world they had left. As Virginians, they arrived with particular notions of how social order could be established and maintained across the wide interstices of settlement—a model in which society achieved cohesion through reference to the material culture of the gentry. They had also experienced the ways in which the challenge leveled by evangelical separatists exposed the fragility of that order. The evangelical challenge to gentry authority had been articulated not only by withdrawing from the established church, but by formulating an alternative discourse of objects that challenged the legitimacy of the gentry style of life. In the piedmont counties of Virginia migrants to Georgia left behind, cultural authority was slipping away from the economic and political elite at the same time that ideological frameworks for the upward mobility of middling planters were emerging. Georgia afforded migrant planters not only fresh soil but opportunity to sort the alterations Anglo-Virginian society had undergone during the tumultuous latter half of the eighteenth-century. The material world they created offers a picture of their efforts to resolve these tensions and to create the foundation for a durable social order with themselves at the top.

This thesis explores the meaning of things in the construction of identity. Old Quicksilver, as he paced before the crowds on court days that spring of 1806 was an object and a sign, a horse and a go-between their distant outpost of tobacco and the headwaters of the Virginian gentry. He was embedded in a fabric of familiar images woven across the altogether changed world of the frontier, that mediated between their former selves and their present state.

II

The following chapters are structured around the manipulation of objects and images in the process of self-fashioning on a first frontier of the post-Revolutionary South. The transformation of American social relations over the course of the eighteenth-century was mediated by material culture. Not only the dissolution of traditional patterns of social interaction, but the emergence of new economies and increasingly gross disparities in wealth were experienced through the appearance of new sorts of houses and towns, in the reorganization of domestic space, and in new modes of behavior that revolved around the self-conscious use of material goods to stake out new, individual identities. Possessing a set of forks and plates, a teapot and cups, the geometrical coherence of a symmetrical house, reflected and enabled real social mobility within the world of goods. The process of self-fashioning took place through the possibilities of objects.² Those objects which survive, even only in written description, express individuals' perception of themselves and the world around them.

² For the imaginative possibilities of objects in the eighteenth and early nineteenth-centuries, see

By the eve of Independence, even those near the bottom of the early American social order participated in this imaginative exercise. They found ways to articulate political challenges and cultural alternatives through material expression. For those who left little written record of their existence, let alone their self-perception, the objects they made and surrounded themselves with, are a powerful and valuable record.

There are lacunae to this record: the process by which individuals received the legal scrutiny of inventories was capricious and heavily skewed towards those of means; the physical record over-represents the durable possessions of the wealthy. This is certainly not to say that the majority of society is invisible in the record. As this thesis should make clear, the material world of elites records those who were audience for, and, at times, regulators of, their displays and performances; style had utility as a socially unifying force only so long as it remained broadly legitimate.

Chapter One begins with the argument that the material world created by the elite settlers of the Georgia frontier was a choice made within a range of possibilities. Upper Georgia developed rapidly as a commercial frontier offering tremendous economic promise. Even as attacks by natives remained a real threat, planters steadily acquired

particularly T.H. Breen, "The Meaning of Things," in *Consumption and the World of Goods*, ed. John Brewer and Roy Porter (London: Routledge, 1993); Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993); Barbara Carson, *Ambitious Appetites: Dining, Behavior, and Patterns of Consumption in Federal Washington* (Washington, D.C.: American Institute of Architects Press, 1990); Mark Leone, "The Georgian Order as the Order of Merchant Capitalism in Annapolis, Maryland. In *The Recovery of Meaning: Historical Archaeology in the Eastern United States*, ed. Mark Leone and P.B. Potter (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1988).

land, slaves and capital, and enjoyed a remarkably voluminous intercourse in goods with distant commercial centers.

The material expression of this aspirant class reflects the tension between the potential for opulence and the requirement of respectability. Unlike those Virginian counties where evangelicals dominated, elites in upper Georgia retained cultural authority to a considerable degree. They achieved this largely by assuming leadership roles traditional to the organization of the Anglo-Virginian church, but within fledgling Baptist and Methodist communities on the frontier. They secured a voice in the definition of respectability by appropriating evangelical religion.

Planters who settled in Georgia, even decades after settlement, continued to understand themselves to be, in an essential and recognizable way, Virginian gentlemen. Chapter two explores their complex employment of domestic architecture to establish the boundaries of their status-group, and to establish a style that resonated with traditional understandings of genteel behavior, but with social utility on the frontier. Men on the make announced their acquisition of refinement in ways broadly understood in the early-Republic, building large and elaborate houses with spaces intended for the rituals of genteel hospitality. At the same time, they conspicuously avoided imposition of the physical barriers that marked and enforced social privilege in much of the Anglo-Virginian world. While employing architectural devices associated with the gentry establishment, the claims they made on authority and, crucially, on continuity, were phrased in an architecture directly allusive to the folk building traditions of Virginia.

In a period of upheaval, the constellations of symbols with which Virginia's competing status-groups articulated themselves were, in a sense, freed for appropriation. Chapter three presents the argument that the bricolage of the elite domestic landscape could be extended across communities as a unifying style of life. The style assembled by the gentry both permitted a manner of life that made their advancement in the world coherent and which, by virtue of its relative simplicity, could be assumed, at least in part, by the lower orders. This exploration focuses ultimately on a particular elite object, the sideboard, which, by a process of formal reduction, became accessible and desirable across class on the frontier. More so than simple moderation on the part of elites, the extension of moderated notions of refinement into the households of the yeomanry was foundational to social cohesion and comity on the frontier.

CHAPTER I

OPULENCE AND RESPECTABILITY

While still very much a frontier during its early decades, the pattern of settlement along the upper Savannah River produced towns and fortunes almost immediately. Planters who migrated to Georgia brought commercial networks along with them, and the rapid establishment of a tobacco and cotton economy meant access to the world of goods they enjoyed in Virginia. The material world they created must be recognized as the product of choice within a wide range of possibilities.

But if the Virginian planters of upper Georgia readily generated the wealth and infrastructure to emulate the material expression of the Tidewater elite, they recognized that those modes of behavior carried limited utility on the frontier. The moderated style of life they authored in response to their new circumstances was shaped in large part by their appropriation of evangelical religion in Georgia. Having experienced the upheaval of Virginia's piedmont counties during the 1760s, as evangelicals contested the legitimacy of the Anglican establishment, these planters retained cultural authority by assuming roles as patrons of evangelical communities. While moderating their displays, the elite of upper Georgia created space enough to express their aspirations in a familiar language of objects.

In 1773, the colony of Georgia acquired most of what is now the State's northeast piedmont by treaty with the Creek Indians. After the scourges of the War for Independence and at the urging of speculators, the State began to see to the distribution of these ceded lands to white settlers. Beginning in 1783, the legislature offered up to one-thousand acres to settlers willing to pay for the survey. Land was available entirely free to Continental Army veterans who had rendered service to Georgia. By 1790, one in every three residents of Georgia lived in Wilkes County, which initially encompassed all of the Creek treaty concessions.³ The cheap and reputedly fertile land attracted small farmers by the thousands, but the land markets also invited the speculation of large and middling planters from central Virginia on the prospects of better profits growing tobacco further south. The 1760s and early 1770s had been excellent years in the Virginia piedmont for those who had patented land the previous decade. High tobacco prices had enabled the successful to acquire land and slaves; fifty-one percent of households in Albemarle County, VA were slave-owning in 1782, with a median ownership of four slaves. The land became so valuable by the outbreak of the War that only the wealthiest could hope to purchase it in any quantity – the sons of most piedmont planters had few prospects beyond a fractional inheritance. Similar pressure in the coastal counties had driven the settlement of the Virginia piedmont in the 1740s and 1750s, and now it pushed

³ During the early 1790s, Oglethorpe, Elbert, Greene, Lincoln, Taliaferro and Warren counties were carved out of Wilkes. The bulk of the initial settlement by Virginian planters was on the north side of the Broad River valley in what is now Oglethorpe County.

established families like the Gilmers, Lewises, Marks, Meriwethers, Harvies, Thorntons and Taliaferros toward Georgia.⁴

The raw frontier these migrants found in Old Wilkes was rapidly broken by the involvement of upcountry settlers in a commercial economy. This process hinged upon the intensive cultivation of tobacco, grains and, shortly thereafter, cotton by Virginians who imagined upper Georgia as a field for commercial agriculture.⁵ While settlers who came with little struggled to accumulate the capital and slaves necessary to grow tobacco profitably, Virginians who brought numbers of slaves with them generated an export crop immediately. In 1785, less than two years after the beginning of large-scale settlement, planters pressed the State Legislature to authorize construction of a public warehouse for the official inspection of tobacco in Wilkes County to bolster the opinion of the upland crop in Savannah.⁶ When the cotton export trade faltered during the Napoleonic Wars, farmers intensified the development of local markets. John Melish passed through Wilkes

⁴ For the structure of land markets, and their enabling of dominance by large slaveholders see: David Weiman, "Peopling the Land by Lottery? The Market in Public lands and the Regional Differentiation of Territory on the Georgia Frontier," *The Journal of Economic History*, 51 (Dec., 1991) 836; This discussion of economic development in the Virginia Piedmont, as well as Albemarle County's demographics, are derived from Allan Kulikoff, *Tobacco and Slaves* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1986), Ch 4.

⁵ See: Joyce Chaplin, "Creating a Cotton South in Georgia and South Carolina, 1760-1815," *The Journal of Southern History*, 57 (May, 1991): 185-188.

⁶ Steven Hahn and J. William Harris, have argued that upcountry planters eyed the economic structures of the black-belt with suspicion, and were defined politically and economically through resistance against perceived threats to individual and community independence from the market. Whatever their ambivalence, Wilkes County settlers consistently sought legislative support for their commercial efforts in the form of infrastructure. Joyce Chaplin has shown the aggressive lobbying by upcountry farmers for the construction of road, canals, and agricultural inspection stations and against the cessation of the slave trade. Upcountry planters in South Carolina and Georgia experienced chronic difficulty in procuring slaves for their expanding enterprises even before the banning of the trade. Most successful Virginian planters in Georgia brought considerable numbers of slaves with them. See: Chaplin, 190-193; Steven Hahn, *The Roots of Southern Populism*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983); J. William Harris, *Plain Folk and Gentry in a Slave Society*. (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1985). For the creation of the Tobacco inspection station at Petersburg, see E. Merton Coulter, *Old Petersburg and the Broad River Valley* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1965).

in 1811 and recorded in his journal that not only did residents of that County wear homespun exclusively, but “In almost every family a cotton manufactory was to be seen, and in some instances they had introduced spinning, upon a pretty large scale.” The reasons were largely pragmatic: Melish estimated the collapse of the cotton trade with Great Britain that began in 1807 drove down incomes in the County by a third, and forced planters to drastically reduce their buying of imported goods.⁷ Homespun became the fashion during the 1812 War as upcountry farmers expanded their capacity for domestic production to meet local demand and buoy commercial cotton agriculture.⁸

This was a market frontier.⁹ In the town of Petersburg, where the tobacco crop was inspected before heading downriver to Savannah, roughly one-hundred buildings surrounded the public warehouse by 1801, some forty of which were mercantile establishments.¹⁰ Cotton and tobacco exchanged as currency in the merchant houses and, before the disruptions of warfare in Europe, the stable or rising prices for cotton and tobacco meant planters enjoyed considerable buying power.¹¹ They had much to choose from. New England investors extended credit to local merchants and, in some cases, established local concerns of their own importing all manner of goods.

⁷ John Melish in *The Rambler in Georgia* (Savannah: Beehive Press, 1973), 33.

⁸ Chaplin, 197.

⁹ Upper Georgia represented what Kenneth Lewis has termed a “cosmopolitan frontier,” in which ready communication and movement of goods makes possible the approximation of conditions nearer the metropolis. See: Kenneth Lewis, *The American Frontier* (Orlando: Academic Press, 1984), 265-277. Elizabeth Perkins’ work on eighteenth-century Kentucky frontier also documents the rapid appearance of retail stores and imported goods. Elizabeth Perkins, “The Consumer Frontier: Household Consumption in Early Kentucky,” *Journal of American History*, 78 (September 1991): 486-510.

¹⁰ Charles C. Jones, *Collections of the Georgia Historical Society Vol. IV, The Dead Towns of Georgia* (Savannah: Morning News Steam Printing, 1878), 237; Coulter, 73.

¹¹ Tobacco Notes, which were receipts for the deposit of tobacco in private export warehouses, circulated widely as currency.

Table 1. Households in Oglethorpe County, Georgia, 1799 and the Northern Neck of Virginia, 1782, Ranked by Acreage.

Acres Owned	Heads of Households		Percent of total		Cumulative percent	
	Oglethorpe	N. Neck	Oglethorpe	N. Neck	Oglethorpe	N. Neck
0	336	1,141	31.6	42.2	31.6	42.2
1-99	49	459	4.6	17.0	36.2	59.2
100-199	197	521	18.5	19.3	54.7	78.5
200-299	187	239	17.6	8.9	72.3	87.4
300-399	95	97	8.9	3.6	81.2	91
400-499	69	50	6.5	1.9	87.7	92.9
500-599	39	45	3.7	1.7	91.4	94.6
600-699	19	30	1.8	1.1	93.2	95.7
700-799	12	18	1.1	0.7	94.3	96.4
800-899	12	10	1.1	0.4	95.4	96.8
900-999	3	12	0.3	0.4	95.7	97.2
1,000-1,499	23	39	2.2	1.4	97.9	98.6
1,500-2,000	7	18	0.6	0.7	98.6	99.3
2,000+	15	20	1.4	0.7	100.0	100.0
	1063	2,699	100.0	100.0		

Statistics for Oglethorpe County, GA were compiled by the author from the 1799 tax list. Data for the Northern Neck of Virginia was compiled by Camille Wells from Land Tax Records for Lancaster, Northumberland, Richmond, and Westmoreland Counties and are taken from Wells, “The Planter’s Prospect: Houses Outbuildings and Rural Landscapes in Eighteenth-Century Virginia,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 39 (Summer/Fall, 1993): 1-31.

In the fall of 1805, Oliver Whyte of Boston made known his services in the “commission line to his friends in Petersburg and the upcountry,” while his agent in Petersburg, Shaler Hillyer, ran a store out of his plantation and organized local planters into a credit-pooling mercantile company to secure better terms with distant suppliers.¹² Merchants Archibald Stokes and his brother Thomas advertised all manner of fine, printed cloth by way of New York.¹³ Francis McGehee stocked Dutch lace and rolls of wallpaper.¹⁴ Within a

¹² Coulter, 130-131; *Petersburg Georgia and Carolina Gazette*, 12 October, 1805.

¹³ Archibald Stokes in the *Petersburg Georgia and Carolina Gazette*, 17 June, 1806.

¹⁴ At the time of his death, Francis McGehee’s store contained over \$55,000 worth of inventory.

decade of settlement, intercourse in Tobacco and goods with Savannah, Boston and New York made it possible for the landed families of upper Georgia to participate in a national culture of refined consumption.

Planters arrived in Georgia confident in the mobility of this commercial system, having already experienced the rapid transformation of the Virginian backcountry as young men and women. Along with tobacco agriculture and wealth in slaves, planters brought connections of kinship, credit, and mercantile relationships creating necessary conditions for the recreation of the material world to which they had been formerly accustomed. Wealthy immigrants to the Virginia frontiers in the 1740 and 1750s had never been divorced from the gentry culture of the Tidewater and, a generation later, planters in the Georgian interior looked to the rapid establishment of similar dynamics.¹⁵ Indeed, though Upper Georgia remained very much a frontier into the early nineteenth-century, it provided an economic basis for strides in refinement equivalent or greater than those ongoing even in the Tidewater counties of Virginia. In the Goosepond militia district of Oglethorpe County, which encompassed much of the immediate post-war settlement by Virginians, eleven percent of householders owned over 1000 acres in 1799. In the County as a whole, nearly half of all taxpayers owned at least 100 acres.¹⁶

¹⁵ John H. Moore, *Albemarle, Jefferson's County 1772-1976* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 1976), 43. In her work on the excavations at Shadwell, Thomas Jefferson's birthplace, Susan Kern has documented the variety of fine goods Peter Jefferson was able to import to Albemarle County as evidence of the "pervasive reach of the gentry." Susan Kern, "The Material World of the Jeffersons at Shadwell," *William and Mary Quarterly* 62 (April 2005).

¹⁶ Edward Chappell and Julie Richter define the threshold of "middling" status for Chesapeake planters in the last quarter of the eighteenth-century as possession of at least one slave and as little as one-hundred acres. By this standard, approximately half the taxpaying residents of Oglethorpe County could be considered "middling." See: Edward Chappell and Julie Richter. "Wealth and Houses in Post-Revolutionary Virginia" Perspectives in *Vernacular Architecture* 7 (1997): 4.

Table 2. Slaveowners in Oglethorpe County, Georgia, 1799, Ranked by Number of Slaves Owned

Number of slaves	Number of slaveowners	Percent of total	Cumulative percent
1	121	28.3	28.3
2	65	15.2	43.5
3-5	97	22.7	66.2
6-10	82	19.2	85.4
11-15	34	8.0	93.4
16-20	17	4.0	97.4
20 +	11	2.6	100.0
	427	100.0	

Of the 1,063 taxable households in Oglethorpe County in 1799, 663 owned no slaves. Statistics compiled by the author from the 1799 tax list for Oglethorpe County.

Thirty-four percent owned ten or more slaves. The early domestic landscapes of Upper Georgia must be considered against the backdrop of this wealth.

Frontier memoirists reflecting on the period of early settlement developed narratives of a thin and precarious frontier, and a culture characterized by thrift and prejudice against luxury. When George Gilmer first went to school, he found

most of the boys occasionally wearing fine clothes, and told [my father] on my return home that I desired to do as they did. His answer was, that boys neither learned more nor were less wicked by being dressed finely, that when I grew up, it would be well enough to attend to dress, because it would influence many persons and increase my capacity for usefulness. After going through school without shoes in summer, or a broadcloth coat at any time, I was immediately upon quitting, dressed in the very best which his merchant's store could supply.¹⁷

Gilmer's remembrance underscores the degree to which the Georgian backcountry was shaped by interaction with a world of goods, rather than detachment from it. Broadcloth

¹⁷ George Gilmer, *Some Sketches of Some of the First Settlers of Upper Georgia* (Americus, GA: Americus Book Company, 1926), 180. George Gilmer, who's father settled in the Broad River Valley with George Matthews, was twice Governor of Georgia. His memoir, originally published in 1855, is the richest narrative record of the Virginian settlement in upper Georgia.

was only as far away as a local merchant. Consumption, however, was circumscribed by layered rules of appropriateness. For Gilmer's peers, fine clothing had its utility in the sphere of public men, where it was consciously manipulated for effect. Outside of that context, the son of a leading man in the County could get by without shoes. Those lines could, however, be drawn closer and sharper still. Evangelical communities dominated religious life on the Georgian frontier as they did much of central Virginia. The Virginian planters who migrated to Georgia traded one contested landscape for another.

Beginning in the second quarter of the eighteenth-century, evangelical dissenters potently threatened the comity of Virginian society by reorienting their communities toward the inevitability of judgment, and away from the social theatre of the gentry. The span of gentry hegemony across their villages of slaves and the far flung settlements of the colony had always been tenuous, dependent on the ability to distribute representations of the social order. Occasions that brought the whole of a community together - ritualized gambling on horse-races and cockfights, fighting, attendance at church and courthouse - were necessary occasions for the gentry to demand and receive obeisance, and to extend a unifying style of behavior amongst lower sorts.¹⁸ Dissenters not only physically absented themselves from the social theatre of parish worship, but recast the rituals of gentry life not only as socially destructive but as sin. It was, then, a crisis of legitimacy.¹⁹

¹⁸ Rhys Isaac, "Evangelical Revolt: The Nature of the Baptists' Challenge to the Traditional order in Virginia, 1765 to 1775." *William and Mary Quarterly*, 31 (July, 1974): 345-368. For the connection between economic development and religious dissent, see Richard Beeman, "Cultural Conflict and Social Change in the Revolutionary South: Lunenburg County, Virginia." *The Journal of Southern History*, 46 (Nov., 1980): 525-550

¹⁹ Dell Upton, *Holy Things and Profane: Anglican Parish Churches in Colonial Virginia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 190; Dee Andrews, *The Methodists and Revolutionary America, 1760-1800* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000): 87-94; Isaac, "Evangelical Revolt," 363.

Dissenting meeting houses, as Dell Upton has shown, gave this challenge physical shape. Anglican elites had knit together society across class and geography through the distribution of a coherent architectural style. Secular power and religious authority were bound together through the stylistic inter-referencing of the courthouse, the parish church, the marketplace, and the great house – each a component in the representation of a divinely authored hierarchy in the chasm between the material circumstances of the poor and the wealthy. Dissenting chapels, by contrast, directly referenced common housing in form and finish, relocating the sacred among the faithful poor. As dissenters gained sway amongst elites in frontier counties, this parallel style was gradually extended across class and acquired new capacity to span the interstices of backcountry geography and society.

Largely because their doctrines were explicitly hostile toward wealth, evangelical converts were overwhelmingly among the poor; few, if any gentry joined the dissenting churches.²⁰ Their appeal, however, was substantive among planters of middling status after the Revolution. These increasingly capitalized men, excluded from the ranks of the Virginian oligarchy were intrigued by the possibilities of the evangelical emphasis on “new birth” and the equality of souls. Casting salvation as a matter of individual initiative made economic and social mobility, in significant ways, intelligible and legitimate. At the same time, the idea that gentry attention to material expression was not only a distraction from the effort towards moral perfection but imperiled the soul, left

²⁰ For quantification of the corollary between wealth and commitment to the Anglican establishment see: Isaac, “Evangelical Revolt,” 355; Beeman, “Cultural Conflict,” 525-550. Steven Kroll-Smith, however, argues that the Evangelical appeal was strong amongst a newly capitalized status-group composed primarily of middling planters. Steven Kroll-Smith, “Tobacco and Belief: Baptist Ideology and the Yeoman Planter in 18th Century Virginia.” *Southern Studies*, 22 (Winter, 1982): 353-368.

economic and social power without a clearly legitimate mode of expression. If the gentry manner of life was depraved - its clothing, its manners, its houses - it was unclear what style should accompany wealth.²¹

Planters living within dissenting communities, at times, simply deferred to the cultural authority of local evangelicals. In Virginia's piedmont, where Evangelicals were a prominent voice by the last quarter of the eighteenth-century, those of means participated in the great rebuilding along with the rest of Virginia's capitalized middling class, but in ways significantly different from men of equivalent means in the solidly Anglican Tidewater. Even Halifax County's wealthiest built houses with simply a well finished hall and chamber, lacking elaborate entertainment spaces and restrictive entry passages. These omitted elements, so much a part of the rebuilding in the Tidewater, became undesirable within a dominant culture shaped in opposition not only to genteel ritual, but to the spatial expressions of hierarchy.²² Planters who desired social power were willing to moderate modes of behavior that were unacceptable to the community.

Many of those Virginians who flocked to Georgia in the 1780s were men of significant means. John Talbot, Esquire, who came to Wilkes County, Georgia in 1783, had served as Sheriff, Judge of the County court, and as a Burgess for twenty-five sessions from Bedford County, Virginia. He bought the staggering expanse of 50,000

²¹ For the character of Evangelical belief and, particularly that of frontier Methodists, see: Cynthia Lynn Lyerly, *Methodism and the Southern Mind* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998); Christine Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Knopf, 1997); Christopher Owen, *The Sacred Flame of Love: Methodism and Society in Nineteenth Century Georgia* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1998)

²² Clifton Ellis, "Dissenting Faith and Domestic Landscape in Eighteenth Century Virginia" *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, 7 (1997): 23-40.

acres in upper Georgia during the 1770s and removed there after the war with as many as one-hundred slaves.²³ When the first County court was organized, he again served as a judge. At the time of his death in 1798, Talbot's goods and chattels were valued at \$13,171.50. An additional \$4,200 was owed him, mostly for blacksmithing services rendered by his slaves. He also held \$13,452 in tobacco bonds, having extended loans against the potential profits of neighbors' crops.²⁴ John Talbot's career and ledger suggests both the degree to which independent Virginian gentlemen could expect to assume similarly central public roles in frontier Georgia, establishing networks of debt and obligation, sustaining whole constellations of planters and farmers with more marginal concerns.²⁵

His fellow Justices, like Edward Butler, were primarily younger men on the make. Butler was a substantial middling planter when he left Hanover County, Virginia in 1784 but grew steadily richer in Georgia. By the time of his death he had acquired 35 slaves, 3,000 acres and the title "esquire." What the men shared, aside from their office, was a complicated public identity.²⁶ Though the church association of Edward Butler whilst in Virginia is uncertain, he became a member the Baptist congregation at Phillips Mill immediately after his arrival in Georgia, as did his friend and neighbor Thomas

²³ In way of perspective, Merton Coulter writes that, taken together, settlers arriving from the Carolinas received a total of approximately 20,000 acres during the decade of the 1770s.

²⁴ William Northen, ed., *Men of Mark in Georgia II* (Raleigh: Edwards and Broughton, 1901), 273-274; Wilkes County Inferior Court Inventories and Appraisals, 1794-1816; Minutes, Wilkes County Inferior Court, 1790.

²⁵ Eugene Genovese has argued that the tenuous nature of backcountry farming made the credit and aid extended by large planters essential to the stability of yeomen communities. A deferential order was maintained through reciprocal obligations. See especially: Eugene Genovese, "Yeomen Farmers in a Slaveholders' Democracy," *Agricultural History*, 49 (1976).

²⁶ This sketch of Butler derives from Melvin Herndon, "Samuel Edward Butler of Virginia Goes to Georgia," *Georgia Historical Quarterly*, 53 (June, 1968): 115-131.

Wingfield.²⁷ John Talbot donated land for the Smyrna Presbyterian Church near the town of Washington. Though he was, by reputation, a firm Anglican, he served as ruling elder of the church until he died in 1798.²⁸ And, while the graves of most early planters are found near their homes, Talbot, in some indication of the centrality of the church to his identity as a public man, was buried along with his wife in the meeting house lot.²⁹

The upper Savannah was never organized as an Anglican parish and, though many of the wealthy Virginians who migrated there remained at least nominally Episcopalians, the church had no physical presence north of Augusta. By 1790, twenty Baptist congregations had been founded in Upper Georgia, along with numerous meetings of Methodists and Presbyterians. Several of these first churches coalesced around successful planters. Daniel Grant, a successful merchant and owner of seventeen slaves, founded a meeting near the town of Washington in 1787. In that same year, General David Meriwether built a chapel on his land near Petersburg, as did James Tait on his three-thousand acre tract.³⁰

²⁷ *Phillips Mill Baptist Church Records, Wilkes County, GA 1785-1822*. (Salt Lake City, Utah: Genealogical Society, 1958) microform. Thomas Wingfield, in his will, appointed his “friend” Edward Butler co-executor in 1806. Wilkes County GA, Will Book 1806-1808.

²⁸ See Robert Willingham, *History of Wilkes County*. (Washington, GA: Wilkes Publishing Company, 2002), 37. By associating himself with the evangelical societies, John Talbot was following the path already taken by his brother, Matthew, who became a Baptist prior to the Revolution in Virginia. By the account of his son, Matthew Talbot had been a ‘High Churchman’ prior to his conversion. Matthew Talbot, communicating the 1849 written memorandum of Edmund Talbot, *William and Mary Quarterly*, 9 (April, 1901): 257-259.

²⁹ Concerning her burial, Phoebe Talbot, wrote “[I] request that my body be buried in the Meeting House lot as near the grave of my dear deceased husband, John Talbot, as it can be conveniently placed.” Wilkes County GA, Will Book 1806-1808.

³⁰ The fact that David Meriwether, Edward Butler and Thomas Wingfield all rapidly associated themselves with Georgia Baptists is partially explained by their close personal association. They knew one another before coming to Georgia – Hanover County, Virginia, in 1783, the three men were appointed attorneys for Thomas Wingfield’s father, John. They were likely, at that time, already practicing Evangelicals. “Records of Hanover County,” *William and Marry Quarterly*, 23 (Oct, 1914): 122.

James Marks, of Goosepond, had owned 800 acres in Albemarle Co. Virginia, where he was a prominent militia captain, Sheriff and convert of the itinerant Methodist Bishop Francis Asbury. Though the late 1770s he continued to fulfill his public obligations a member of the Anglican vestry of Fredericksville Parish while practicing as a Methodist. Bishop Asbury repeatedly called on “Brother Marks” after he took his family and slaves to Wilkes County, Georgia, and preached in the log chapel on his property. Five years later, as he was in the midst of building the finest frame house in the district, he shared with Asbury his intention to build a more suitable chapel once he was through.³¹ On the Georgian frontier, a significant number of the economic elite, asserted the notion that the establishment, maintenance, and governance of churches was the responsibility and prerogative of the gentry, as had been the case for generations in their native Virginia. Economic power and social authority, which were increasingly divorced in the Piedmont counties of Virginia, were reintegrated in persons such as these on the Georgia frontiers.

How the powerful interacted with Baptist and Methodist doctrine, particularly the egalitarianism of the new light, remains an open question. If the matter of slaveholding is any indicator, wealthy converts like James Marks were tolerant of significant dissonance. The 1784 resolution of the Methodist Episcopal Church that members emancipate their slaves cut sharply against planters of Marks’ stature. In 1802, he told Bishop Asbury he

³¹ By 1810, most of James Marks closest and wealthiest neighbors were converted in a series of popular Methodist revivals. George Gilmer describes the wave of camp meetings in 1803 collectively known as the Great Revival, and a second revival in 1809 in which his parents were converted. In 1809, the wealthiest planters in the Goosepond district jointly purchased land for the construction of a new Methodist church, of which they would be trustees. The trustees of Mt Zion chapel were: Micajah Clark, Thomas Gilmer, Charles Matthews, James Bradley and Micajah McGehee. See: Harold Lawrence, *Early Societies in Upper Georgia* (Milledgeville, GA: Boyd, 1997), 21.

intended to free his eighteen slaves upon his death, though Asbury wrote of it: “he may change his mind before he dies.” It seems that he did. The only mention of his bondsmen in his will, drawn shortly before his death in 1816, was the gift of a “negro girl” to his great grand-daughter along with a set of silver teaspoons. Having placed themselves at the head of religious life, it remains an open question how planters like Marks shaped those institutions towards their own utility.

In 1803, Jesse Mercer, minister to the Baptist church at Phillips Mill in Wilkes County, sent a pastoral letter to two of his young congregants. He wrote:

I heard a report that you are too florid in you dress, there is not that difference (it is said) between your former selves and your present state, between the world and you as Christians, which should be. Indeed, a difference should visibly appear and be maintained, through the course of your lives.³²

Even as Mercer attempted to guide the dress of the girls, he knew full well the material distinctions that elevated Nancy Anthony and Betsy Lane above nearly everyone around them. By the very fact of his sending of a letter rather than delivering a public reproof, he acknowledged the status of their families, who lived together in what was likely the first brick house built in Wilkes County. At the same time, the intervention of a Baptist minister to shape the behavior of the prominent underscores the degree to which hegemony eluded the planter society of upper Georgia; there was, indeed alteration in

³² Letter, Rev. Jesse Mercer to Nancy Anthony and Betsy Lane, quoted in Willingham, *History of Wilkes County*. 56.

their present state. That tension, as suggested by the preacher, was evident in the material world they constructed.

CHAPTER II

THE OLD VIRGINIA HOUSE

Some eighty years after John Talbot was buried in his meeting-house lot, a local schoolteacher and historian asked to be taken to visit the house he built upon settling in Wilkes County. It was, by that time, nearly a ruin and housed laborers for the cotton fields that still surrounded the town of Washington. Still, the house was a great curiosity. It was “not at all like any typical middle Georgia house,” she wrote.

It struck me as soon as I saw it, how like it was to some of the houses which I saw before the war in Virginia, in [N]ansemond and Isle of Wight counties. It was not a large house, having at first two rooms below stairs, and two above, with a stair case cut off in a dark passage....all the work upon it is of the very best character. One of the rooms is paneled up to the ceiling.³³

In a way that Mrs. Eliza Bowen immediately sensed, John Talbot’s house was not only exceptional in the landscape, but spoke to his identity as a Virginian of the generation that settled upper Georgia. Though, she went on, he later built fine houses for his children, “they are not like the old Virginia house he built for himself.”³⁴

The house Bowen described was demolished before any living memory. A photograph taken around 1890 shows that it was, indeed, compact and remarkably similar to the gambrel-roofed townhouses of the colonial capital, Williamsburg, where Talbot

³³ Eliza Bowen, *The Story of Wilkes County* (Marietta, GA: Continental Book Co., 1950), 52-53.

³⁴ Bowen, 54. One of these houses, indeed still stands outside the town of Washington.

once lived a portion of every year as a Burgess.³⁵ (Fig. 3) When they came to Georgia, men of John Talbot's stature left behind the Anglican parish churches where they worshiped as vestrymen, the courthouses where they sat as justices; left not only established institutions but their physical armature. Arrived on the frontier with his fortune and slaves, Talbot set about the work of re-establishing himself as a public man. He built a house like those he knew as a Burgess, symbolically anchoring himself in the physical center of Virginian gentry authority. It was, though, far from a mansion; the seat of his ten-thousand acres had only two, perhaps three rooms. If his dwelling was vastly better than his neighbors, it was entirely similar in form.

It should be clear from the preceding chapter that the economic elite of upper Georgia had, by the early 1790s, the wealth and the infrastructure to enable the construction of expansive and elaborate houses even by the standards of the Chesapeake. But as the scholarship of the last thirty years has made clear, the material world of the Anglo-Virginian elite was shaped largely by pragmatism. When dramatic display was perceived to carry social utility, it flourished. Without an audience, as in those regions where evangelical communities achieved cultural dominance, it atrophied. In a pattern similar to that seen in Southside Virginia, the elite of Wilkes and Oglethorpe County, Georgia chose to build relatively modest homes. Their assertion of gentry prerogatives within evangelical communities seems, however, to have secured considerable latitude; Talbot's cramped house nonetheless had a room paneled "to the ceiling."

³⁵ The John Talbot house bears striking resemblance to a series of small, gambrel-roofed houses with a chimney stack rising within the wall built in Williamsburg prior to 1780. For examples of these houses, see: Marcus Whiffen, *The Eighteenth Century Houses of Williamsburg* (Williamsburg, VA: Colonial Williamsburg, 1960), 158-161, 177-178, 234-236.



3a. The structure to the left of the image is the dwelling house built by John Talbot in Wilkes County, Georgia ca.1784. (Photograph by Hodson and Goodman, 1890. Georgia Archives.)



3b. John Orrell house. Williamsburg, VA, Built prior to 1800. While the Orrell House is built with a side entrance, its gambrel roof, three-bay façade, and chimney set within the wall are formal similarities to John Talbot's house in Georgia. (Photograph by Laurence Fowler ca. 1917-1926. Fowler Collection, Johns Hopkins University.)

What follows, then, is an assessment of how men like John Talbot manipulated the architectural vernacular they carried with them, what they meant to express, and what they hoped achieve as they marked out the landscape of upper Georgia.³⁶ Their houses were nuanced expressions of the particular identity they authored. As a migrant cultural group, they maintained cohesion by concealing innovation within old forms. As a status-group, they represented their acquisition of wealth and respectability by manipulating the symbolic content of architectural motifs inherited from the Chesapeake gentry. The patterns in which they deployed these symbols, at the same time, reflect the complicated relationship between evangelical ideology and the expression of personal gentility.

Most planters who established themselves in Georgia during the 1780s waited at least ten years before moving from log-walled cabins into more permanent, framed houses. In doing so, they participated in the broad transformation of the Southern landscape that began in earnest following national independence, as an increasingly capitalized middling planters rebuilt to reflect their social aspirations.³⁷

³⁶ Two of the strongest arguments for this semiotic approach to architecture as evidence are to be found in James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life*. (Garden City, NY: Anchor Press, 1977), ch. 5 and Henry Glassie, *Folk Housing in Middle Virginia* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1975), ch. 4. As Dell Upton has, in particular, shown, it is possible to marry this semiotic approach to material culture scholarship was methodologies that making it possible to describe the reasons underlying the deployment of particular signs in particular historical circumstances. See: Dell Upton, "Vernacular Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," *Winterthur Portfolio*, 17 (Summer/Autumn, 1982): 95-119.

³⁷ For the rebuilding that took place across early Republic, see particularly Edward 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 Albert (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1994), 167-217; Edward Chappell and Julie Richter, "Wealth and Houses in Post-Revolutionary Virginia" *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, 7 (1997): 3-22.

Micajah McGehee was just such a planter. He had been a significant landholder before leaving Hanover County, Virginia in 1784, and aggressively increased his property once in Georgia. By 1798, he owned 3,200 acres and twenty-eight slaves, placing him amongst the wealthiest two percent of the county.³⁸ Until he rebuilt, McGehee had probably lived in cabin much like his neighbor, the twice governor of Georgia, George Matthews. That cabin, by the account of a contemporary observer, was built of logs hewn square, with two rooms on the ground floor, and a garret above where the General's daughters slept. While cabins such as these separated the areas where the household slept from where they cooked and received guests, McGehee eventually required not only a more refined house, but a further division of domestic space.

In the settlement of Virginians along Goosepond Creek in Oglethorpe County, McGehee was the first to build a “comfortable, framed house.”³⁹ (fig.4a) Visitors in the threshold of McGehee's new house looked directly into a large, heated room, with interior walls and ceilings of smoothly planned wooden planks. Adjacent to this first room, there was another, still larger. Back of the house were two smaller chambers. Standing in the yard, the house looked very much like the framed and clapboarded houses built across the Chesapeake from the earliest decades of English settlement.

³⁸ Through the 1790s, Governor George Matthews was the only man in the Goosepond militia district of Oglethorpe County who held more land than McGehee. Only two households in Oglethorpe County owned more slaves, with the largest slave-owner holding 32 slaves. Oglethorpe County Tax digest for 1798. In his memoir, George Gilmer wrote that his neighbor, McGehee, paid for his house largely with the profits from the brandy produced from his peach orchard and distillery. Indeed, at the time of his death, he had, in stock 480 gallons of peach brandy. Gilmer, *Georgians*, 128; Oglethorpe County, GA CO, 1817.

³⁹ Early accounts of the Georgia frontier make careful distinction when describing dwellings between those framed— that is, built as a frame comprised of sawn and hewn members—and the vast majority of structures built of stacked logs.



4a. Main dwelling house, Micajah McGehee plantation. Oglethorpe County, GA. Built ca. 1795. (Andrew Sparks Papers, Hargrett Library, University of Georgia)



4b. The John Towles House. Lancaster County, VA. Rebuilt ca. 1710. Though built nearly a century apart, the McGehee and Towles houses are of the same type. Of particular interest is continuity in the visual subordination of third and fourth rooms to the hall-chamber core. (Historic American Buildings Survey, Library of Congress)

Throughout the seventeenth-century, the uppermost of the Tidewater economic hierarchy inhabited single-story houses with a steep gable roofs enclosing large garrets, built around posts sunk into the ground, and covered in riven clapboards—the product of an architectural logic carried from England and the requirements of absolute simplicity imposed by conditions in the colony.⁴⁰ By the early eighteenth-century, the form made its way onto brick foundations and gradually acquired the characteristics of permanence. The so called “Virginia house” acquired permanence in the minds of vernacular builders as well, and was the essential shape of the design competence carried to Georgia by Virginian planters in the 1780s.

The formal continuity extends even to the chimneys. Chesapeake builders made the chimney a dominant visual element of their housing by typically locating all of their mass outside the gable-end walls of the house. The requirement of reducing the mass as it rose independent of the wall, was met as a opportunity for decorative elaboration. Most commonly, builders employed two pairs of shoulders, paved with bricks laid flat. Examples of this pattern, essentially identical chimneys to those built by McGehee, are to be found on houses built in the Tidewater at least a century earlier.⁴¹ (fig.5) Though a stylistic detail, this continuity in chimney form was surely as evident to eighteenth-century observers as a signpost within a pattern of cultural diffusion as it is to recent

⁴⁰ For the development and persistence of this building form, see particularly: Cary Carson, Norman F. Barka, William M. Kelso, Garry Wheeler Stone, and Dell Upton. “Impermanent Architecture in the Southern American Colonies.” *Winterthur Portfolio* 16 (Summer-Autumn, 1981) 135-196; Glassie, *Folk Housing*, ch. 6.

⁴¹ Many settlers in Wilkes County came from Bertie County, NC, where this form had spread from the Chesapeake. Its construction in upper Georgia, however, appears to have been unique to native Virginians. For the English origins of the form and its distribution across middle Virginia and the Albemarle region of North Carolina, see Glassie, *Folk Housing*, 146.



A



B

5. Virginians who settled in upper Georgia built chimneys in a form consistent with some of the earliest documented brick chimneys in the Chesapeake. This pattern persisted into the early nineteenth century. **A.** Chimney, Micajah McGehee house. Oglethorpe County, GA. Built ca.1795. (Andrew Sparks Papers, Hargrett Library, University of Georgia) **B.** Chimney, Bathurst. Essex County, VA. Built ca.1700. (Historic American Buildings Survey, Library of Congress)

cultural geographers and architectural historians. As part of a stylistic ensemble, the chimneys built by McGehee and his neighbors announced their cultural paternity.

McGehee's house expresses one well-tried manipulation of the basic model. When John Towles made additions to a much older house in Lancaster County, Virginia in or about 1710, he wrapped three rooms around the existing single pen. (fig. 4b) The fundamental model readily absorbed one new room, a chamber alongside the hall. Still further rooms were more complicated to locate without disruption. The solution was to

append them to the rear of the house, and capture them beneath the low rear eaves of the roof, the pitch of which was determined entirely by front rooms of the house. The effect was to preserve the legibility of the model within the adaptation. Nearly a century later, McGehee adopted the same form, registering the same tension between the requirement for multiple and discrete interior spaces and the hall-chamber model, which could be described as a deeply embedded aesthetic.

Thomas Gilmer, who settled in what is now Oglethorpe County in 1783, began work on his framed house shortly after his closest neighbor, Micajah McGehee, finished his. Gilmer left Rockingham County, Virginia as part of a migration of intermarried families whom General George Matthews had persuaded to settle on his massive tract in the Broad River Valley. Once in Georgia, they formed a remarkably insular community. George Gilmer, Thomas' son, recalled a time when, as a boy of ten, he had never so much as spoken to anyone who was not a Virginian by birth.⁴² Like many of his neighbors and relations, Thomas fared exceedingly well in Georgia. In 1799, the year he began building his new house, he paid tax on 1,850 acres and fifteen slaves, placing him amongst the wealthiest two percent in his county.

That framed house is one of the handful built by Virginians which stills stands from the period prior to 1810. (fig. 6) As George Gilmer's reference to the insularity of his community would suggest, it is closely tied to the vernacular traditions of middle Virginia. It is one and one-half stories tall, and sits atop a brick basement.

⁴² Gilmer, *Sketches*, 180. For the remarkable insularity and endogamy of the Virginians living in the Goosepond community, and along the Broad River Valley, see Carol Ebel, "First Men: Changing Patterns of Leadership on the Virginia and Georgia Frontiers, 1642-1815." (Ph.D. diss., University of Georgia, 1996): 292.



6. Rear, or riverward, elevation of the dwelling house at the Thomas Gilmer plantation. Originally sited above the Broad River in what is now Oglethorpe County, Georgia. Built ca.1800. (Photograph by the author)

Chimneys built to the same pattern as those at the McGehee house, though of far superior brickwork, rise well above the ridge of each gable end. The windows and off-center doorways communicated a hall and chamber fashion division within; it would have appeared an essentially familiar structure to Gilmer's neighbors. Though quite large, nearly 870 square feet on the first floor, its overall dimensions and those of its interior spaces were products of the generative process of design underlying nearly all vernacular houses built across the Chesapeake from the latter seventeenth-century onward.⁴³

⁴³ Gilmer's house was larger in terms of first-floor square footage than 75% of dwelling houses described in *Virginia Gazette* property advertisements where the dimensions of the house were noted. Camille Wells, "The Planter's Prospect," *Winterthur Portfolio*, 28 (Spring, 1993): 9.

The generative system is discussed at length by Henry Glassie. The dimensions of the house result from the fundamental priority given by English designers to the square, and a system of measurement based

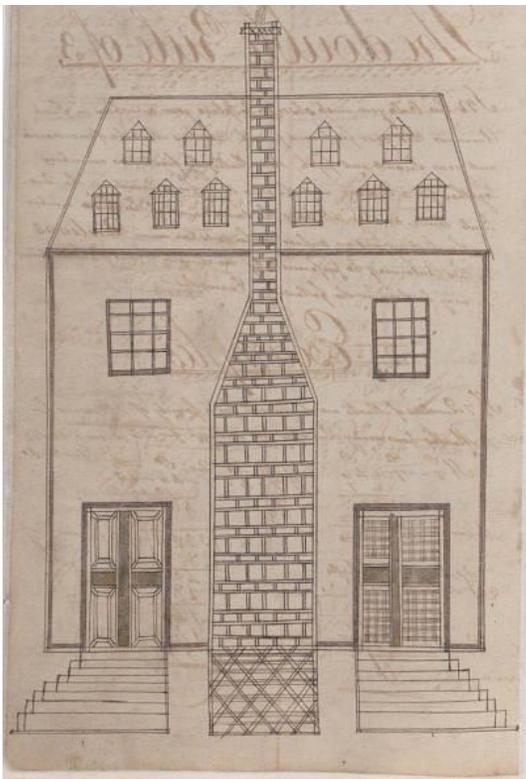
The remarkable durability of English building types originating in the Tidewater has been well documented. Over the course of the eighteenth-century, the Anglo-Virginian hall-parlor house spread throughout Middle Virginia, the Albemarle region of North Carolina, and into the Carolina backcountry. In Upper Georgia, these forms and types were exceptional in the landscape. By 1800, planters who had migrated south from Maryland and the Carolinas had begun building houses in marked contrast to the Tidewater vernacular. (fig. 7) These were tall houses, with narrow gable ends. Most stacked two rooms upon two, but all were marked by approximately symmetrical window and door openings, and single-room depth.⁴⁴ Though variant in the particulars, this same house type was adopted by successful farmers from the Delaware Valley to the lower Southeast by the turn of the nineteenth-century. Several examples still standing in Wilkes County likely date to the middle 1790s, but the type had certainly arrived by the time Thomas Perry Jr., a schoolboy in Elbert County, began his copybook in the spring of 1793. He filled the book with illustrations, among them a drawing of the thin gable end of a two story, one-room deep house—a house he knew at least seven years before Thomas Gilmer rebuilt. (fig. 8) Gilmer, like Micajah McGehee and John Talbot chose to build a strikingly different sort of house.

on yards and cubits (one half-yard). Layout began with creation of the largest, in this case 17.5-foot (8yards, 1cubit), square room. The additional rooms were scaled by subtracting a standard unit (1 yard) from the original square, usually to arrive within a standard series of ratios between spaces. See Glassie, *Folk Housing*, 22-24. See also Carson, Barka, Kelso, Stone and Upton, “Impermanent Architecture in the Southern American Colonies.”

⁴⁴ A description of this form, commonly described by Fred Kniffen’s term “I-house,” and its geographic reach can be found in Fred Kniffen, “Folk Housing: Key to Diffusion” in Upton ed. *Common Places*, 7-10; Michael Southern, “The I-house as a Carrier of Style in Three Counties of the Northeastern Piedmont” in *Carolina Dwelling* (Raleigh: North Carolina State University, 1978), 71-82; for the I-house as component to the transformation of the rural landscape, see Henry Glassie, “Eighteenth-Century Cultural Process in Delaware Valley Folk Building” in *Common Places*, 43-57.



7. Job Callaway House, Wilkes County, GA. Built ca. 1795. Built by Job Callaway, a migrant from Maryland, this is an early example of what would, by 1800, be the dominant house type amongst the planters of upper Georgia. Its plan, massing, and emphasis on symmetry contrast sharply with houses of the same period built by Virginians. (Photograph by the author.)



8. Drawing in the copybook of Thomas Perry, Jr. of Elbert County, 1793. While much of Perry's drawing is abstracted, it is still recognizable as the gable end of an I-house, such as that in the figure above. (Georgia Archives)

The plans of Virginian houses in upper Georgia reflect careful choices made within the vernacular they carried with them. Although vernacular builders in Virginia had widely adopted the passage for large scale houses by the second quarter of the eighteenth-century, planters in upper Georgia clung tightly to the hall-and-chamber form. The hall in the early Chesapeake had been, in a pattern established in post-medieval England, the center of the house, accommodating both the miscellany of domestic life and interaction with servants and guests. In reaction to the sparseness of rural society, the hall increasingly acquired importance as a space for ritual hospitalities. Simultaneously, Virginians expressed a requirement for ordered space, with discrete areas established for sorted categories of persons and behaviors. New rooms were required to absorb the gross domestic functions that were removed from the hall. The further addition of an entry passage offered a way of mediating between these spaces, and of regulating access to them from the outside. Further, it made social hierarchies visible and concrete by privileging access to interior spaces and, by extension, those who inhabited them.⁴⁵

Entry passages were, almost without exception, absent from the houses built by the first generation of Virginians in upper Georgia. Entry into Micajah McGehee's house was made directly into a primary space, and circulation within required passing through one room and into other. This formal openness was mitigated by the organization of spaces in a hierarchy expressed through scale and degree of decorative finish. Both front

⁴⁵ This discussion is much indebted to Dell Upton's analysis of vernacular Virginian housing in "Vernacular Architecture in Eighteenth-Century Virginia," 97-105. See also, Ellis, 139; Mark Wenger, "The Central Passage in Virginia: Evolution of an Eighteenth Century Living Space," *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture*, 2 (1986): 137-149. For the dawning of a concern amongst American colonists for the establishment of social order through the ordering of physical space, see particularly James Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten: The Archaeology of Early American Life*. (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Press, 1977), 92-120; Robert Blair St. George, "Set Thine House in Order," in *Common Places*, 336-366.

rooms were emptied of beds, personal effects, and the gross aspects of domestic labor by the two rear, unheated chambers and the rooms above the stairs.⁴⁶ Paneled wainscoting and a paneled fireplace surround in the larger front room made clear distinction between it and the entry room, with its minimal chair-rail and fireplace surround. In the entry room, finishes were progressive, increasing in elaboration with complex molding surrounding the doorway leading into the hall and the finely paneled underside of the stairs, framing the approach towards the best room in the house. (fig. 9) Visitors, then, moved immediately into a large, carefully finished and heated room which nonetheless served to regulate access to the best room beyond. McGehee had then, even without a buffering passage, achieved the sorting of functional zones within the house that was the groundwork for the representation of gentility.⁴⁷

John Talbot's house functioned in a similar fashion. Though Eliza Bowen described only two rooms within, the arrangement was almost certainly more complex; the location of one chimney stack well forward of the ridgeline, while the other is centered suggests the bay to the right of the front door was two-rooms deep. (fig.3) Like McGehee, then, he employed a smaller chamber to enable the assignment of gentility to the large, front rooms. Those who visited Talbot on the business of court or the solicitation of credit entered directly into a room paneled to the ceiling.

⁴⁶ Variation in the brickwork, particularly in the formation of the chimney shoulders, suggest that the rear chimneys were added later and that the rear rooms were originally unheated. That the house began in this form is supported by George Gilmer's boyhood recollection of the house as having four rooms.

⁴⁷ In his work on Franklin County, MA, J. Ritchie Garrison argues that the creation of "rationalized specialization zones" within the local square houses are analogous to the exterior symmetry that Henry Glassie and James Deetz argue was the primary manifestation of the Georgian watershed. J. Ritchie Garrison, *Landscape and Material Life in Franklin County, Massachusetts 1770-1860* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1991).



9. The interior of Micajah McGehee's house, looking towards the front door. The hall, with its paneled wainscot, is visible through the doorway to the left of the image. That interior walls of both rooms were finished with planed wood boards. (Andrew Sparks Papers, Hargrett Library, University of Georgia)

The pattern is further illustrated by an undocumented house, now ruined, near in Warren County, Georgia. (fig. 10) There, the front door opened directly into the largest of four rooms. The entirety of the hall, and of the somewhat smaller room adjacent to it, was covered with paneling derived from a pattern book, a carved cornice and mantel.⁴⁸ No

⁴⁸ The paneled rooms at the Great Hall house are, in fact, the only documented fully paneled rooms in Georgia. The paneling of the hall has been removed to the Museum of Early Southern Decorative

barrier aside from the front door arrested progress into a space that, in the great Tidewater houses from which its design was derived would have been held apart by a passage.

Thomas Gilmer's house, by contrast, contains four rooms within the core block of his house, although this complexity is concealed from the passerby through the employment of corner fireplaces. (fig. 11) To have built two stacks, one each for the front and rear rooms would have communicated that division to the exterior; corner fireplaces allowed a single stack to heat two rooms.⁴⁹ A chimney ruin related to an unknown house in the same district, built in a fashion similar to Gilmer's, suggests this was a local convention for four-room houses.⁵⁰ (fig. 12)

As they adopted new spaces, Anglo-Virginian builders tended to understand them as discrete units to be assembled and manipulated to meet particular social requirements.⁵¹ Thus, the scope of vernacular building across eighteenth-century Virginia contains wide variance in the manner these units were assembled. Even so, the Gilmer house employs an extraordinarily uncommon plan.⁵²

Arts in Winston-Salem, NC and the remainder of the house is now a ruin. Frederick Doveton Nichols believed aspects of the paneling to have been derived from a pattern book: Joseph Moxon's *Mechanick Exercises*, of 1700. See: Frederick D. Nichols, *The Architecture of Georgia* (Savannah: Beehive Press, 1976), 30.

⁴⁹ It was Dell Upton's observation that one of the various manifestations of Virginian builders ambivalence towards complicating the traditional hall-chamber plan, was a reluctance to announce double-pile depth with a second chimney stack. Upton, "Vernacular Domestic Architecture," 115. While Upton does not specifically treat the subject, this characteristic of vernacular building likely accounts for the tendency for even the largest Virginian houses built prior to 1750, such as Marmion, Mount Vernon and Salubria, to employ corner fireplaces.

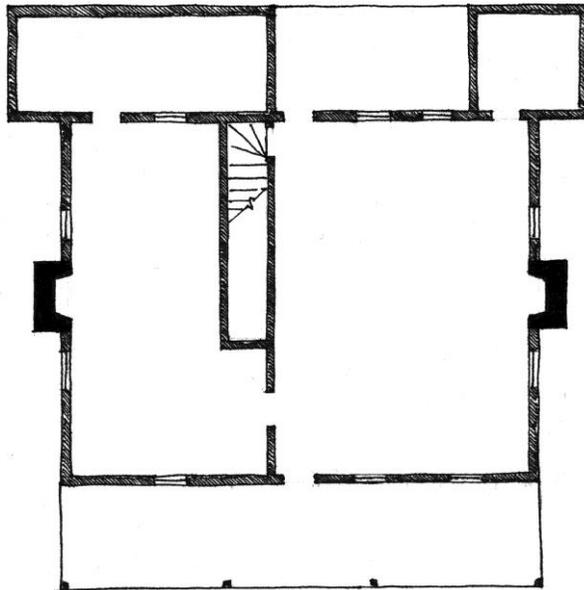
⁵⁰ This chimney ruin, now vanished, was photographed by Kenneth Rodgers in 1967. It was grouped together with a collection of negatives made of the Thomas Gilmer house and graveyard for an article in the *Atlanta Journal and Constitution Magazine*. It seems reasonable to assume the ruin was close by.

⁵¹ Upton, *Vernacular Domestic Architecture*, 98,

⁵² The Historic American Buildings Survey work in Virginia documented only two eighteenth-century framed houses, Wales in Dinwiddie County and Hope Park in Fairfax County, and two monumental brick houses, Kenmore in Fredericksburg and Menokin in Richmond County, that share the



10a. Interior of the hall, Great Hall house. Warren County, GA. Built ca. 1790. (Andrew Sparks Papers, Hargrett Library, University of Georgia) As in the house built by John Talbot in Wilkes County, visitors stepped through the front door and directly into the best finished room.



10b. Plan of the Great Hall house. (Revised by the author after drawing by Frederick Spitzmiller.)

plan of the Gilmer house. The similarity between the Gilmer house and these latter two mansions is tantalizingly close, but no concrete linkages have emerged to connect them.



11. Chimney, Thomas Gilmer House. The chimney, by carrying flues for fireplaces in two rooms, effectively masked Gilmer's elaboration of the hall-chamber model. (National Register of Historic Places Nomination, Thomas M. Gilmer House, U.S Department of the Interior)



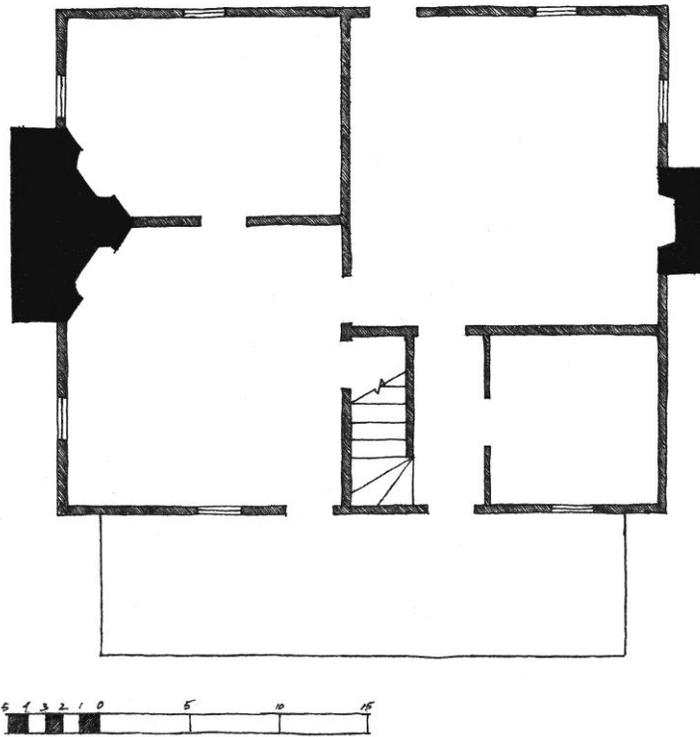
12. Chimney ruin, near Goosepond, Oglethorpe County, GA. The corner fireplaces and the paved shoulder of this chimney, associated with an unknown house at Goosepond, indicate close similarity to that of the Thomas Gilmer House. (Photograph by Kenneth Rodgers. Andrew Sparks Papers, Hargrett Library, University of Georgia.)

The two largest rooms and best finished rooms, are not side-by-side, but staggered, creating space so as to integrate the smaller chambers into the main block of the house. Two doors pierce the front of the house. One gains the second-largest room, the other an abbreviated and narrow passage. Stepping into that passage, the stairs wind upward immediately to the left, while the door to the unheated chamber opens immediately to the right. The space served primarily to channel traffic to and from the garret and what was

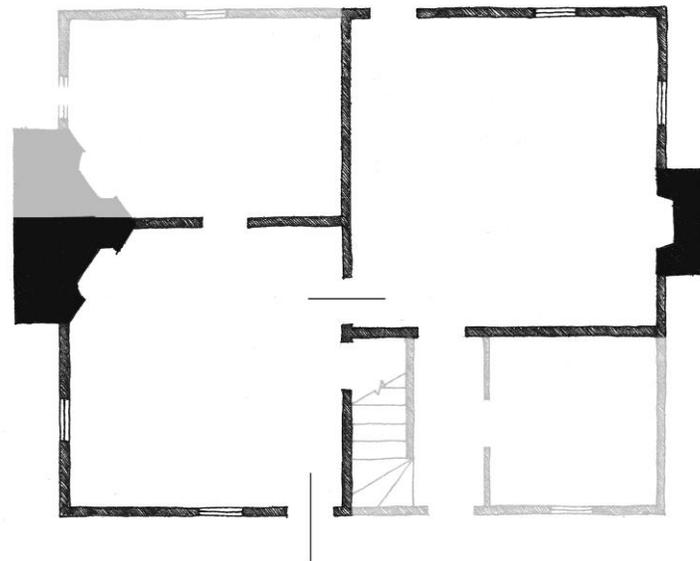
likely either an office or storage room, which communicated only to the passage. Rather than serving as a formal entrance to the public house, the passage defined a functional zone. Because it stops short of bisecting the house, the primary rooms communicate directly with one another. Because of the second doorway, they communicate directly with the outside. (fig. 13) As at the McGehee house then, those who came to socialize with the Gilmer family moved straightaway into the core house.

The key to the generative process behind many of these plans is the pair of houses built by John Jordan in Washington County, Georgia. Jordan built one shortly after arriving in Georgia from Virginia and the second some years later; both still stand adjacent to one another. The first is in the form commonly called a double-cabin. (fig. 14b) Two log pens are connected under a single roof with an open but floored breezeway between. This was, by contemporary accounts, the commonest cabin type amongst those of means in the early days of settlement, and long afterwards amongst yeoman farmers. As a type, the pens generally open towards the center rather than to the front of the cabins. The breezeway, like the passages introduced into hall-chamber framed houses, made it possible to orient rooms inward with the passage to mediate between private space and the exterior.⁵³

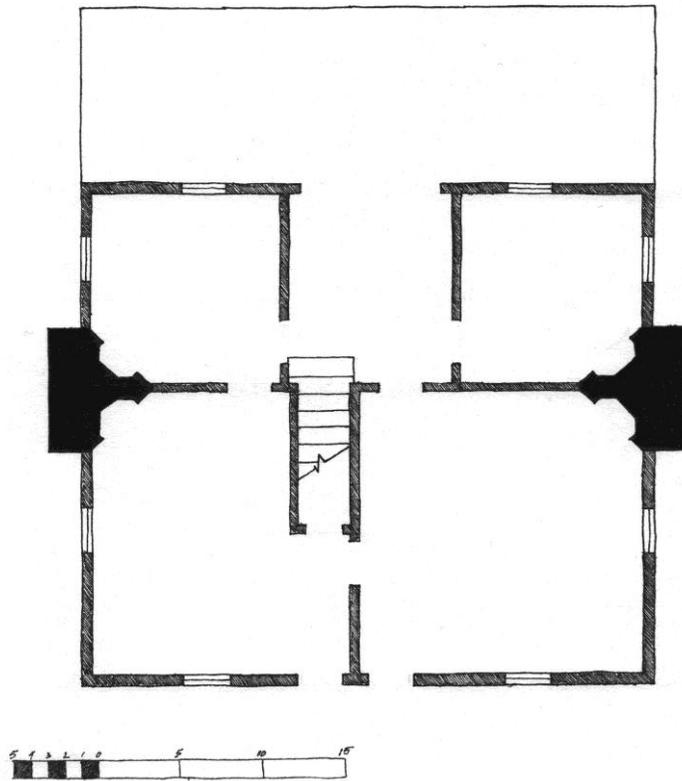
⁵³ This relationship to the hall-parlor house with a central passage was first made by Henry Glassie. Henry Glassie, *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture of the Eastern United States* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1968), 89.



13a. Plan of the Thomas Gilmer house. (Drawing by the author)



13a. Even with the addition of two small chambers and a passage, the two primary rooms communicated with one another, and with the outside, in the manner of a hall-chamber house. (Drawing by the author)



14a. Plan of the framed house at the John Jordan plantation, Washington County, GA c.1800. (Redrawn by the author after John Linley)



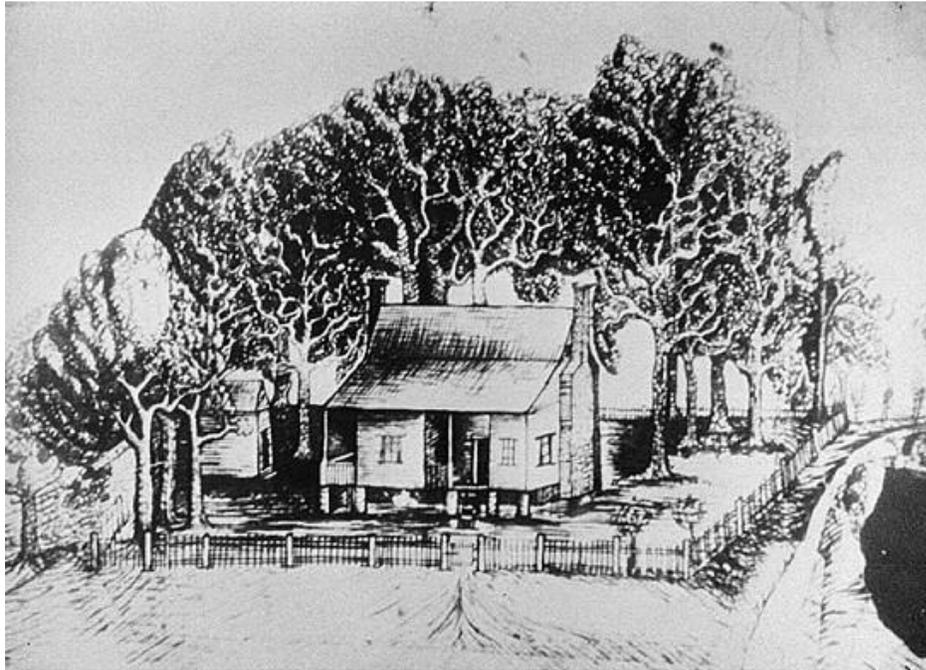
14b. Dogtrot cabin, John Jordan plantation c.1790. (Vanishing Georgia Collection, Georgia Archives)

When planters, like Jordan, built frame houses, they frequently retained a vestige of this dog-trot passage. Years after leaving Georgia, the poet T.H. Chivers sketched the house in which he was born near Washington in Wilkes County as it stood in his boyhood during the 1820s. (fig. 15) It appears as a typical Anglo-Virginian, gable-roofed story-and-a-half structure. Two small chambers, however, project from the core of the house toward the road, framing a section of porch as an entry passage. While these rooms may have been additions, similar rooms appear to have been original to upper Georgian houses.⁵⁴ The Great Hall house employed smaller chambers at the rear corners of the house, set to either side of a narrow porch to facilitate circulation. (fig. 10b) Here, the incorporation of the chamber doorways into the elaborate paneling of the primary rooms suggests they were components of the original plan. The fact that both front rooms of the house are paneled, both conceived with a public spaces, clarifies that the social function of these small back rooms was to enable expansion of genteel space within an outwardly unpretentious hall-chamber model.

John Jordan's frame house is an elaboration of this same type. (fig. 14a) Here, the passage is drawn into the main block of the house and enclosed, but still expresses the same wide, one-room-deep model.⁵⁵ Oriented toward the rear of the house, it serves as the Gilmer passage does, as a meditative space between the yard, upstairs and the two

⁵⁴ Early memoirs and journals, such as that left by Daniel Grant of Wilkes county, make occasional reference to "prophet's chamber's." These were described as rooms dedicated for the use of traveling preachers. It is possible that these references describe a small room such as those found at the Great Hall House. See: Bowen, 33.

⁵⁵ There are numerous and striking similarities between the Gilmer and Jordan houses: similarly scaled rooms, corner fireplaces, overall dimensions, paired doorways. It is tempting to speculate that John Jordan had seen, at some point, Thomas Gilmer's house. Though he settled nearly one-hundred miles to the south, Reuben, Fleming, Josiah and Benjamin Jordan to whom we was likely related, lived in the

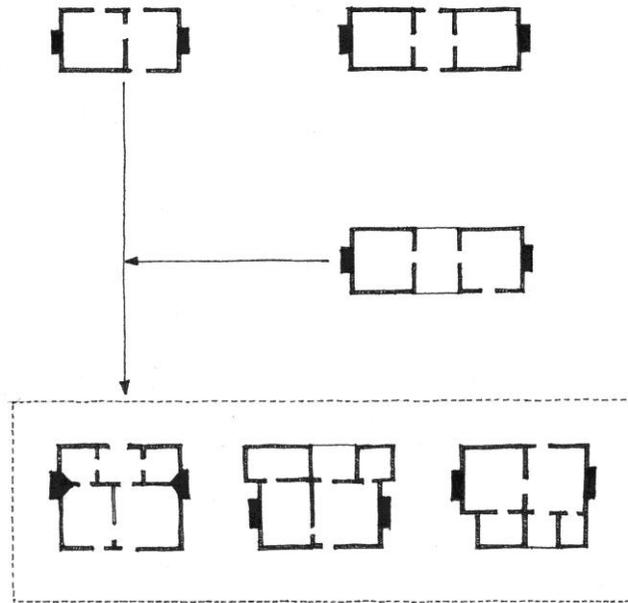


15. Joel Chivers house at it appeared ca.1820. Wilkes County, GA. (Drawing by T.H. Chivers. Georgia Archives)



16. Unknown house. Columbia County, GA. Built ca. 1800-1810. The style of the door opening into the room that projects towards the front of the house suggests this was built along with the house.

Goosepond district of Oglethorpe County. Reuben Jordan lived less than three miles from the Gilmer plantation.



17. Structural development in housing built by Virginian settlers in upper Georgia, 1780-1810.

secondary chambers. The larger and best-finished rooms are positioned at the front of the house, and communicate with the exterior directly. The house is, then, legible as a composite of two vernacular forms: a hall-and-chamber house wed to a single-pile, central-passage house.⁵⁶ (fig.17)

Like the house built by Thomas Gilmer, the Jordan house is pierced at the front by two doors. (fig.18) Side-by-side front doors such as they employed represent a manner of thinking about space unusual amongst those who built large houses. Anglo-Virginians did

⁵⁶ From the from the mid eighteenth-century onward, Virginians did build two rooms houses with two front doors. By the middle 19th century, the framed double-pen house with two front doors beneath a porch was ubiquitous in the rural Georgian landscape. Glassie, *Folk Housing*, 110; Glassie, *Pattern in the Material Folk Culture*, 104-16. Because various hall and parlor types provided the basic module for early I-houses in Wilkes and Oglethorpe counties, this manner of piercing is found on two-story houses as well, though it disappears with increasing scale.



18. Front elevation of the Thomas Gilmer house. (Photograph by the author.)



19. Clover Fields. Albemarle County, VA. (University of Virginia Library) This was the home of Nicholas Meriwether, Thomas Gilmer's maternal grandfather. It was built as early as the 1760s. Beneath its front porch, two doors open into interior rooms.

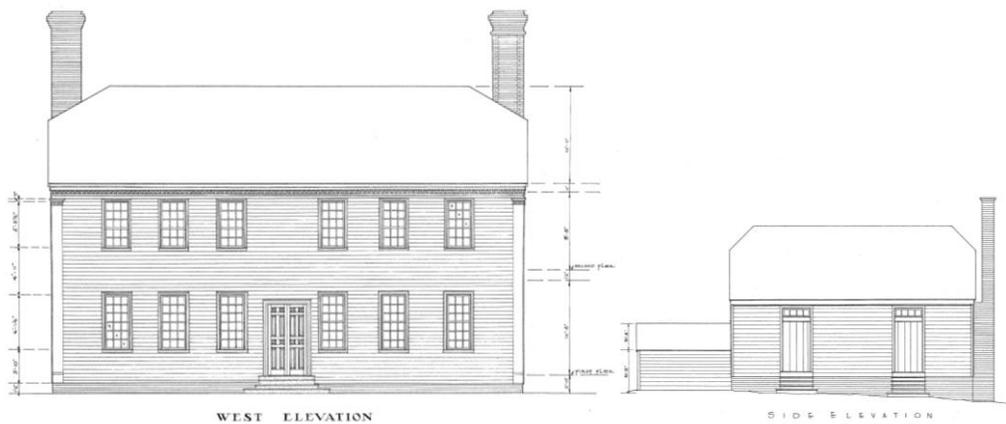
build houses with two front doors beginning in the mid-eighteenth-century, though the type was uncommon, invariably one room deep, and never with a passage.

Paired doorways had a specific place in the plantation landscape. The desire for functional specialization that compartmentalized space within dwelling houses also ordered the arrangement of, and arrangements within, outbuildings. Where multiple operations were housed under one roof, the office and store perhaps, partitions divided one operation from the other, and an exterior door accompanied each functionally distinct space.⁵⁷ The same held true for slave quarters; where multiple slave families were housed together in one building, each family unit typically had its own door. This was an arrangement of convenience, but also served to heighten the distinction between workspace and the private dwelling house. The structures at Marmion plantation in King George County, Virginia illustrate the functioning of the ensemble. (fig. 19) Visitors approached the main dwelling house along a path that led through the orchard and green, through formal gardens and, ultimately into the square yard. The path continues onward to the wide doorway of the main house. To the south, in the corner of the yard, there stands the plantation office and store, with its two identical doorways, side by side. These workspaces, then, were outward oriented and immediately accessible. The main house, with its several closed and inward rooms, would engage the visitor at a single point.

⁵⁷ Broad continuity in these formal and spatial patterns is apparent in John Michael Vlach's survey of plantation landscapes. Vlach also suggests the importance of doorway piercing in making a building intelligible: "When [a dogtrot] was built by white yeoman farmers, the doors into the rooms usually opened off the passageway, so that the building was seen by passers-by as one dwelling." When slaves were housed in dogtrots, each pen held a family and had its own front door, indicating independent units simply sharing a roof. Vlach, *Back of the Big House* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 160.



20. Unknown house, Baldwin County, GA Built ca. 1790-1800. (Georgia Archives and History)



21. Mansion and office of Marmion plantation, King George County, Virginia. (Drawings by F.D. Nichols, 1936. Historic American Buildings Survey, Library of Congress) Visitors approaching the mansion would have seen the office flanking the house to their right.

Thomas Gilmer's house lacks such a transparent sign of exclusivity, though he was well familiar with Virginia's landscapes of power. But if he knew plantations the likes of Tuckahoe, he also knew the houses of the Germans who inhabited the Valley of Virginia where he was born. These Germans frequently pierced the fronts of their houses with two doors, and the practice was adopted by at least a few of those recently arrived from the Tidewater. A daguerreotype made of Clover Fields, built by Nicholas Meriwether, Thomas Gilmer's maternal grandfather, in Albemarle County, Virginia, shows a straightforwardly Tidewater house, but with side-by-side doorways. (fig.19) From amongst all the models with which he was surely familiar, Gilmer retained Clover Fields' pattern of front openings precisely.

Even as Thomas Gilmer's house conformed to a folk tradition, it was conceived to mark the his station amongst not only a Georgian, but a Virginian elite. His relatives served as magistrates and parish vestrymen.⁵⁸ His father, Peachy Ridgeway Gilmer, was the son of Williamsburg's one –time mayor and prominent physician, and had been described as “the most dashing beau of the metropolis.”⁵⁹ His Uncle, Dr. George Gilmer, was a boyhood friend and life-long correspondent of Thomas Jefferson.⁶⁰ Throughout

⁵⁸ Nicholas Meriwether, Thomas Gilmer's grandfather, was a vestrymen of Fredericksville parish. His father, Peachy Ridgeway Gilmer, was never elected a vestryman, though Bishop Meade described his family as founders of the establish church in the Shenandoah Valley. Meade, 43, 50, 324.

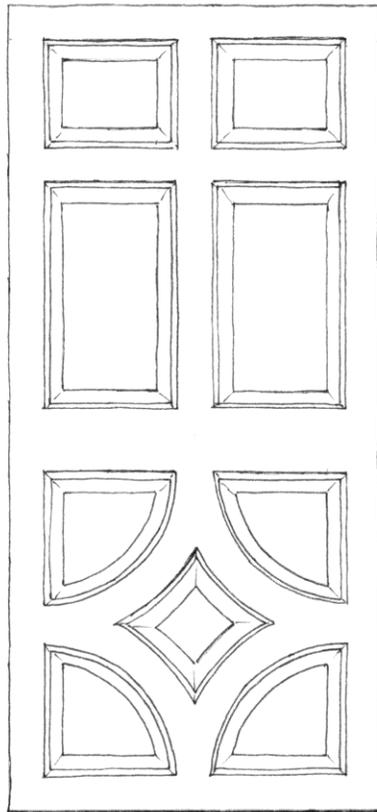
⁵⁹ Gilmer, *Sketches*, 12.

⁶⁰ In a letter written by Thomas Jefferson to Dr. George Gilmer on 11 May, 1792, Jefferson conveys the constant worry shared by himself, James Monroe, and James Madison for the health of Dr. Gilmer. During Jefferson's Presidency and his time in France, Gilmer kept his friend informed of the goings on within a social sphere in central Virginia that included several families who removed to Georgia. Thomas Jefferson's close relationship with the Gilmer family bears further elaboration: Dr. George Gilmer of Williamsburg became the guardian of Thomas Walker after the death of his father. Once of majority, Thomas Walker, left Williamsburg and settled in Albemarle County. After Peter Jefferson's death, Walker became Jefferson's guardian and remained his friend for life. Thomas Jefferson and Dr. George Gilmer's elder son, George Jr. were friends as students at the College of William and Mary.

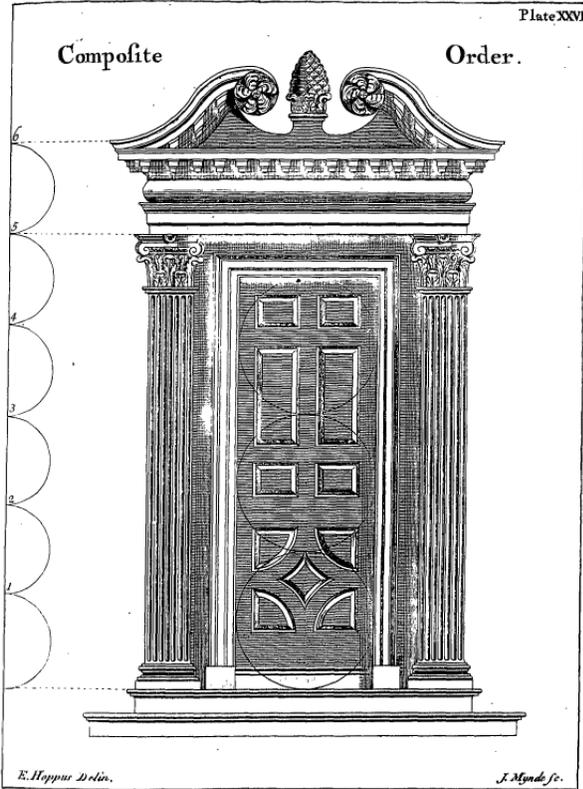
the war and Jefferson's time in France, Dr. George had kept Jefferson apprised of events amongst those in a sphere dominated by families that would eventually move in whole or in part to Georgia. When the youngest George Gilmer was nineteen, he was sent from home in Georgia to personally establish ties with his mother's and father's kin in Virginia. He lived for two months with his aunt and uncle in the great brick house at Lethe, the plantation where his father was born in Rockingham County. He also stayed with John Harvie in Albemarle County – their grandmothers had been sisters. The elder John Harvie, his hosts' father, had been a delegate to the Continental Congress and a hero of the rebellion in Virginia. This was the warp and woof of the Virginia gentry.

The Gilmers did what they could to publicly express their continued participation in these relations. A photograph taken in the 1964 shows an extraordinary interior door in the Gilmer house passage. Its upper portion was framed as a typical six-panel door would be, but with the lowest field joined so as to create a diamond defined by arced quadrant panels. (fig.22) The door was nearly identical in design to the south entry door of the great house at Tuckahoe in Goochland County, VA. Derived from a plate in the academic design book *Palladio Londensis*,⁶² the door at Tuckahoe dates from the expansion executed while Peter Jefferson's family resided there in the late 1740s. Being neighbors, and given the association between the Gilmer and Jefferson families, it is inviting to speculate that Thomas Gilmer had seen it in the flesh. At the least, he knew the sort of house where such a door would be found. A eyewitness described it as having

⁶² The author of the National Register of Historic Places nomination for the Thomas Gilmer house made the association between the missing door and Tuckahoe; Thomas T. Waterman identified the source of the south entrance door at Tuckahoe as *Palladio Londinensis*. Thomas T. Waterman, *The Mansions of Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina, 1945), 151.



A



B

22. A. Interior door, Thomas Gilmer house. (Drawing by the author, based on a photograph by Kenneth Rodgers, 1964) Like a similar door at Tuckahoe in Goochland County, Virginia, this door adapts a design published in *Palladio Londinensis* to the six-panel door. It was, more likely, borrowed from life rather than William Salmon's book. B. Design for an exterior door. Plate XXVI of *Palladio Londinensis*, William Salmon, 1767.

originally hung between the passage and the hall. There, it indicated not only the exclusivity of the room beyond, but the exclusivity of the circles within which its master understood himself to move.

The transportation of gentry motifs was certainly not unique to Georgia. Migrant Virginians built sprawling mansions in Tennessee, Kentucky and Alabama after the

fashion of the Tidewater.⁶³ The housing of the upper Georgian elite demonstrates that the style of the Virginian gentry diffused with migration into the vernacular.

If the strength with which Thomas Gilmer's door punctuated the spare planes of his interior walls is any guide, these motifs clearly remained meaningful. Even as

Anglican elites came to understand that old relational patterns between the gentry and the lower orders had irrevocably changed, that the semiotics of parish church, the courthouse, the great house, could no longer be imagined to represent a permanent and legitimate hierarchy, those forms and arrangements nonetheless retained the capacity to mediate the transformations. The elite could wrap, as Dell Upton has put it, "new ways in old images."⁶⁴ A door, borrowed from a Virginian mansion, could represent continuity not only across geographic space, but across social upheaval, even as its specific content remained ambiguous.

The ordering of space within the Gilmer house makes clear the internalization of a need to not only regulate social interaction with his neighbors and with his increasing numbers of slaves, but to evidence his comprehension of a set of ideas. When Richard Harvie's estate was sold in 1798, Gilmer spent the considerable sum of twenty-eight dollars purchasing copies of *Ossian's Works*, John Bell's *British Theatre*, and Hume's *History of England*.⁶⁵ The house he finished two years later was a public expression of

⁶³ Palladian motifs did make their way westward with Virginians, but typically appear in a monumental context. David Hackett Fischer and James Kelly draw parallels between Palladian architectural forms (Chatham) and decorative motifs (Tuckahoe) in Virginia, Tennessee and Alabama. The transportation of Tidewater mansion types to the west, they argue, was an effort at utilizing the associations of those forms with traditional oligarchies. David Hackett Fischer and James Kelly, *Bound Away: Virginia and the Westward Movement* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2000), 263-265.

⁶⁴ Upton, *Holy Things and Profane*, Ch. 10, esp. 228-232.

⁶⁵ Sale of the estate of Richard Harvie, 1798 Oglethorpe County Court of Ordinary

not only his economic means, but his refined personhood.⁶⁶ The whole of the house is conceived as a representation of his capacity to impose rational order upon the raw world. Outside George Matthews' cabin of squared logs, his adult sons lived in "round log, unscalped, clapboard cabins" arranged around the yard. The visual distinction between the squared log walls of the father's house and the rough, raw logs of the sons' made visible a familial hierarchy, a relationship of dependence and obligation, in clear terms. Gilmer took a further step. A framed house meant the possibility of straight, angular walls, covered with smooth, linear and regularly spaced clapboards – a more perfect expression of rationality.

Most structures in the valley had wooden interior walls of raw logs; a few were finished with wooden boards. Thomas Gilmer purchased lime brought up the river to cover his walls and ceilings with smooth, white plaster. In a flourish that was uncommon even in the Tidewater, the upstairs sleeping chambers were plastered as well, extending the character of refinement even into those parts unseen by visitors.⁶⁸ The massive corner posts of the house frame were chopped into an L shape so that a clean plaster corner

⁶⁶ As Richard Bushman argues, acquisition of the refined goods and behaviors that marked the genteel life was the self-authorship of personal gentility. Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities*. (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 28. Mark Leone makes the point that the creation of Georgian landscapes symbolized an individual's capacity to perceive and express natural law. Mark Leone, "The Georgian Order as the Order of Merchant Capitalism in Annapolis, Maryland." In Mark Leone and P. B. Potter, eds. *The Recovery of Meaning: Historical Archaeology in the Eastern United States*, edited by (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution, 1988) 240.

An example of this house type sits a few hundred yards from the Thomas Gilmer House. The only surviving cabin in Wilkes County built before 1800, it is a clapboarded single cell with attic above. Built of closely hewn logs, with molded beads run along the exposed attic floor joists, it represents the housing of the upper Georgia's most prosperous in the early years of settlement. In contemporary accounts, these are frequently described as puncheon log cabins. See: Gilmer, *Sketches*, 64-66.

⁶⁸ Edward Chappell argues that the extension of what he terms "domestic gentility" into private space was step taken only by the truly rich. For the majority of even wealthy Americans, plaster, molding and the like was confined primarily to the public areas of the house. See. Chappell, "Housing a Nation", 217-219.

might be created, concealing that structure entirely. Molding was applied sparingly, and ran only around the windows, doorways and in a band that capped the pine-board wainscoting. Unelaborated but contrasting sharply with the plaster walls, this wainscoting wrapped around the rooms, capturing the sill of each window. The effect was to unify the wall openings, emphasizing the regular and rational aspects of their shape and placement.⁶⁹

But if the arrival of the *Georgian* mind in America was marked by the desire to reshape open, organic models to represent rational order, Gilmer's house adheres tenaciously to much older design rules.⁷⁰ In no aspect is the house symmetrical; doors and windows break through the exterior walls wherever the internal partitions of the unequally sized rooms dictate. More crucially, interaction with the house through its multiple doorways depended on personal familiarity. The formal entrance of elegant central-passage houses rendered the intended behavior of visitors so readily apprehensible that the architecture served as the silent go-between, imposing the terms of interaction.

With only a handful of exceptions, those Virginians who built permanent frame houses during the first thirty years of settlement in upper Georgia, did without central passages. This was not for lack of wealth. Thomas Gilmer, Micajah McGehee, and John

⁶⁹ As Henry Glassie described in Goochland County, Virginia, architectural detail was used to emphasize the imposition of geometrical order on space. Glassie also treats the subject of guttered corner posts and, though he correctly argues they enabled the construction of thin walls, that step was required only by a desire to conceal the frame. Glassie, *Folk Housing*, chapter 7. Guttering corner posts was, generally, a Chesapeake practice. In New England, vernacular houses more typically have corner posts which, left square, protrude within the finished interior wall.

⁷⁰ James Deetz has argued that the arrival of a Georgian mind, with its fixation of geometrical rigor, transformed organic vernacular architecture in the American colonies. See particularly Deetz, *In Small Things Forgotten*, ch. 5; Glassie, *Folk Housing*, ch. 4.

Jordan were amongst what, by 1800, was a consolidated economic and political elite, the wealthiest very wealthiest fringe of their counties. In the Tidewater and Northern Neck of Virginia, lesser wealth spurred the construction of monumental brick houses.⁷¹ Their decision to build in a manner explicitly allusive to folk housing types is best explained as a means towards the resolution of cultural tensions specific to the upper Georgian frontier. While a few incorporated an abbreviated form of passage, its function was not as a primary entry. Though nearly all employ at least three rooms, they are arranged such that the household met the exterior in a manner unchanged from hall-and-chamber houses. Indeed, they are, fundamentally, only elaborate hall-chamber houses, conceived as a gesture towards the model of social relations articulated by the evangelical communities in which they were enmeshed. Without an audience receptive to the performances of Tidewater gentility, the architectural stages were superfluities.

At the same time, the early emergence of elite leadership amongst Baptists and Methodists meant the evangelical challenge was relatively diffuse. As a result, planters on the Georgian frontiers enjoyed somewhat greater latitude in the manner of their housing. Though adhering closely to the widely acceptable hall-and-chamber form, the general incorporation of additional chambers made it possible to refine both core spaces. While they avoided the pretense of exclusion communicated through formal entrances and passages, local planters employed two elegant rooms in which to display their material advantages and conduct the entertainments that knit their community together.

⁷¹ This mode of comparison was first made by Clifton Ellis. He compared the houses constructed by men of equivalent means in the Northern neck of Virginia and in Halifax County, Virginia during the 1780s, and found that the elite of Halifax consistently built relatively small houses without passageways, while their economic peers to the east built grand and exclusive mansions. Ellis, "Dissenting Faith and Domestic Landscape," 24-35.

CHAPTER III

DANCING IN ONE ROOM, DRINKING IN ANOTHER

In the winter of 1801, Thomas Gilmer invited his neighbors to a party celebrating completion of his new house. George Gilmer, then a boy, remembered:

the young people were all excitement, dancing in one room, and the old drinking and playing whist in another...Charles Matthews, William Barnett, and two others were playing. William Barnett, who was a very active politician of the Democratic party, said something disparaging of the Federalists and the Yazooites. The Irish blood of Charles Matthews was immediately at full gallop. He swore an oath, and made at Barnett. Their partners kept them apart. Every one present became agitated, and most talked as fast as they would have fought. Dancing and whist stopped, and all was hubbub.⁷²

Gentility was a public performance; it required an audience. Gilmer had surely attended the dances held downriver in Benjamin Taliaferro's great framed house, where crowds of exhausted guests were welcomed upstairs to sleep.⁷³ With a great house of his own, he could offer similar displays of hospitality. The boundaries for his guest's performance remained, however, blurry. In George Gilmer's account of his father's party, the rooms of the house go unnamed – the young danced in “one room,” while the old drank “in another,” until the whole affair dissolved.

Few documents describe how Virginian planters in upper Georgia used and thought about the houses they built. No probate inventories with possessions organized

⁷² Gilmer, *Sketches*, 68.

⁷³ *Ibid*, 128.

within named rooms survive to suggest patterns of use within their new houses. A handful of memoirs do offer some indication. Rebecca Latimer Felton described her grandparents' home in Morgan County as a two-story frame house set atop a brick cellar. "In that brick basement," she wrote,

"there were three spacious rooms. The principal room was used for the family meals, with capacious fireplace and safes stationed around the wall. In these safes or cupboards there was storage room for all sorts of domestic supplies. The middle room was the 'loom room,' the third was the kitchen, with wide hearth, cranes in the chimney for hanging pots and kettles... These rooms had brick floors and were well ventilated."⁷⁴

She has nothing to say of the upper, finer aspect of the house. Read as a cognitive map, her account locates the center of the house in the working and, it should be said, gendered space of the basement. Not only cooking, storage, weaving and sewing, but everyday meal-taking were removed from the upper house to the cellar where Felton's grandmother presided over the various labors of her slaves and female family members. And while the basement was clearly understood as a series of functional divisions, the upper house remains, in her telling, blank.

Upper Georgian planters generally detached domestic labor from the finished, main house. Martha Taliaferro described separate buildings in the yard of her girlhood home that served as the kitchen and weaving rooms.⁷⁵ No documented frame house in the

⁷⁴ Rebecca Latimer Felton, *Country Life in Georgia In the Days of My Youth* (Atlanta: Index, 1919) 34. The house she describes, built by William Talbot ca. 1807 near the town of Madison in Morgan County, still stands. Felton describes her girlhood in the 1830s, but the functional specialization within her grandmother's basement was long established pattern.

⁷⁵ Account of Martha Jewell (formerly Taliaferro) in Harold Lawrence, *Early Societies in Upper Georgia* (Milledgeville, GA: Boyd, 1997), 40. She offers a fairly complete description of the outbuildings on her grandfather's plantation in Wilkes County: "On the north end of the house in the yard were two

area had a hearth large enough for cooking, meaning that meal preparation had been removed to an outbuilding. Virginian settlers could also remove domestic functions to the brick basement, which nineteenth-century local historians considered to be a ubiquitous feature of their architecture.⁷⁶ While it is difficult to assess the original layout of the basement of the Thomas Gilmer house, the chimney incorporated a flue for a fireplace there, and the space was accessible both by interior stairs and an exterior door. Like the basement Rebecca Felton described, Gilmer's basement in all likelihood absorbed a variety of domestic functions from above.

The removal of domestic chores to the peripheries of the house and yard created the possibility of shaping the primary spaces for refined modes of social interaction. George Gilmer recalled that, when Governor Matthews dined his father's house, conversation would stretch long after the meal was finished, through which he was obliged to remain politely quiet. They sat around a pair of birch dining tables. They ate and drank from some of Gilmer's five dozen plates, his china cups, his a dozen silver table spoons.⁷⁷

large rooms. One was the kitchen, the other was a weaving room where cloth was woven by the Negroes. Between the house and the kitchen to the right was a splendid well of water. Under the same shelter with the well was the dairy." This assemblage of outbuildings was characteristic of the southern plantation complex as documented in Vlach, *Back of the Big House*. The removal of laboring processes out of and away from the refined space of the house was not unique to the plantation. This pattern is observed in the architecture of seventeenth century New England. See particularly: Robert Blair St. George, "Set Thine House in Order" in *Common Places*.

⁷⁶ As an example, when the house built by the Virginian settler Gilbert Hay was demolished in 1892, a writer for the *Washington Chronicle* noted that, "like all houses built by the old Virginia settlers, it had a cellar and the brick and masonry were as sound as the woodwork." *Washington Chronicle*, 2 May 1892.

⁷⁷ Appraisal of the estate of Thoams Gilmer, Oglethorpe County Court of Ordinary (CO), 24 October, 1817.

Gilmer was by no means exceptional in his ownership of the goods that enabled respectable entertainment. His neighbor Martha Harvie, widowed from her merchant husband for twenty years when she arrived in Georgia, was a woman of considerable independent means. During the last years of her life, she owned 680 acres and twenty-seven slaves.⁷⁸ Having come from amongst the uppermost circle of Albemarle County, Virginia society, her possessions indicate that she retained a commitment to genteel hospitality on the frontier. She could serve as many as ten at a meal with her large collection of deep and shallow plates, table spoons, knives and forks. She owned not only a tea kettle, but sugar dishes, a cream pot, and a teapot. If the number of her teacups and saucers, one full set plus eleven assorted other, is any guide, tea drinking was, for her, a social activity rather than a private enjoyment.⁷⁹ It was likewise with her son, Richard. When he died in 1798, the surrounding planters arrived at the sale of his estate to carry off his large collection of dining utensils: at least seven dishes and thirty plates, a china bowl, a tureen.⁸⁰

Over the previous century, meal-taking had become a central, status-defining behavior. From the 16th century onward, when it became inappropriate amongst the sophisticated to share utensils, food ways were central to distinguishing those who had achieved the disciplines of bodily regulation. As meal-taking became broadly accepted as

⁷⁸ Oglethorpe County tax digest, 1799. Martha Harvie's husband, John, had been a Scottish merchant living in Albemarle County, Virginia. Her son, John Jr., served as a Virginia delegate to the Continental Congress.

⁷⁹ Appraisal of the goods and chattels of Martha Harvie, Oglethorpe County CO, 1802.

⁸⁰ Appraisal of the goods and chattels of Richard Harvie, Oglethorpe County CO, 1798.

a status-defining behavior, ceramic table wares bloom in the archeological record.⁸¹ By the late eighteenth-century, social aspiration required not only the ownership of utensils and ceramics that enabled regulated dining, but the creation of space within the house dedicated to dining as a public performance.

The dining room had appeared only gradually in Virginia over the middle eighteenth-century. While a passage had created opportunities to control access to increasingly sorted interior space, a “dining” room freed the old hall for ceremonial entertainments by absorbing domestic clutter and interactions with social inferiors. Only in the third quarter of the century did this become a venue for formalized meals and, later still, a space equivalent in elaboration and exclusivity with the hall.⁸²

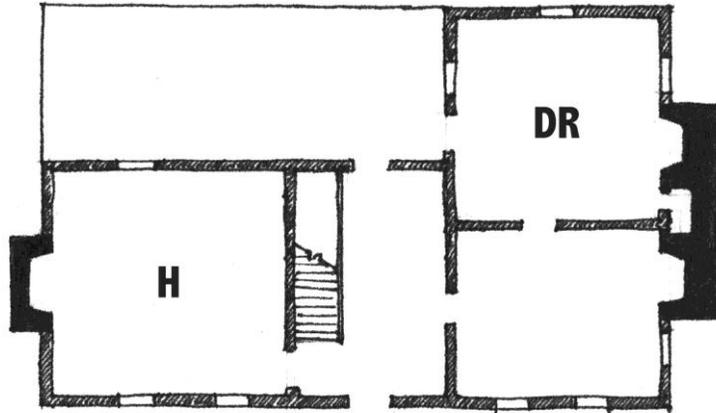
The surviving houses built by Virginians on the Georgian frontier indicate these settlers retained the earlier understanding of this space. Thomas Gilmer’s dining room was located at the front of the house, the room has its own door onto the porch; there is no intermediary space in which to sort out visitors before their entry. The stairs from the cellar workspace rise into it as well. It is, at the same time, the second largest room in the house, and carefully finished. With its plastered walls, its elegant fireplace and mantel, it was nonetheless the intersection of the workspace below and the workspaces outside and remained, as such, markedly ambiguous.

⁸¹ For pattern in the archeological record as an indicator of increased ownership of ceramics, see: Deetz, 46-61. Richard Bushman argues that meal-taking may have assumed particular importance in the American colonies, where the relative abundance of food meant that social distinctions had less to do with what one ate than how one ate. Bushman, 78

⁸² See Upton, “Vernacular Domestic Architecture”; Mark Wenger, “The Dining Room in early Virginia.” *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 3 (1989): 149-159; Mark Wenger, “The Central Passage in Virginia: Evolution of an Eighteenth Century Living Space,” *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture* 2 (1986): 137-149.

Thomas Redman Thornton built a dining room for his house in Greene County, Georgia in about 1795, but left it outside the main block of the house. (fig. 23) The L shaped plan of the house was a relatively common approach taken by Virginian vernacular designers, though it was usually a sleeping chamber removed to the ell to create space in the core house for a dining room.⁸³ Thornton's house is further usual amongst early frame houses in the area by virtue of its central passage. The passage, however, does not communicate with the dining room. To reach it, visitors had to pass entirely through the house and onto the rear porch, then enter through the dining-room's exterior door. The hall and the dining room, then, were physically disjoined in a way that suggests disparate functions. A small closet, open to the both the interior and exterior and tucked into the cavity between the two massive chimneys, suggests the back room was, indeed, intended from meal-taking. Here, food could be passed inside from the kitchen and kept warm. But such niches, usually described as drying-closets, figured in a variety of domestic chores, only further suggesting this to be a mixed-use space. Like the dining room of the Gilmer house, the Thornton dining room functioned as a meditative, rather than an exclusive space. Oriented towards the rear yard and the outbuildings, it served to insulate the more elaborate hall and the chamber from the undesirable persons and processes of plantation life.

⁸³ Upton, "Vernacular Domestic Architecture," 95-119.



23a. Plan of the dwelling house, Thomas Thornton plantation. Green County, GA. Built ca. 1800. (Redrawn by the author after Frederick Nichols)



23b. The dining room, Thomas Thornton house. The door to the right opens into a hot-closet between the chimneys, which could also be accessed from the outside. (Photograph, Frederick Nichols)

Even as the dining room remained a mixed use space, planters intensified the connection between their homes and the goods associated with refined behavior. Garnett Andrews, who was born in Wilkes County in 1798, recalled, even in cabins, pewter plates displayed “on a shelf at the front door, and to visitors in an open cupboard in the principle room of the house.”⁸⁴ A handful of probate inventories make reference to a specialized form of cupboard called a “beaufat.” In the mid-eighteenth century, the term was used to describe shelving built into a wall niche, occasionally with glass doors to enclose it. It was early on associated with the service of beverages, and some incorporated a folding table leaf of sorts, but the form had developed into an elaborate cabinet intended for storing valuable glassware and ceramics where it might be safe but also visible. Thus displayed, these goods were meant to be understood in a particular way. In 1752, Dr. George Gilmer of Williamsburg, Virginia, wrote to his factor in Bristol:

“Mrs. Gilmer is perfectly satisfied with your conduct about her China and desires you will take your own time. I have just finished a closet for her to put it in as agreed on before you left us. I am wainscoting my dining room, which with a handsome marble chimney piece &c with glass over it, will make a tolerable room for an Apothecary.”⁸⁵

Americans’ desire to create clear social distinction through consumption spurred the improvement of housing along with the acquisition of goods that marked refinement, and remarks such as Gilmer’s emphasize the degree to which the affluent understood the connection between architecture and objects to be organic.⁸⁶ The closet Gilmer described

⁸⁴ Garnett Andrews, *Reminiscences of an Old Georgia Lawyer* (Atlanta: J.J. Toon, 1870), 15

⁸⁵ George Gilmer to Walter King, Aug. 6, 1752, quoted in Chappell, “Housing a Nation,” 214.

⁸⁶ Edward Chappell explores this relationship between the ability to purchase prestigious imported goods and the desire to create genteel domestic space in “Housing a Nation,” 167-217.

in his letter was built into the corner of the dining room. Mrs. Gilmer's china was arranged on scrolled shelves behind a glass door. Its lower door repeats the pattern of the adjacent paneled wall and wainscot, making the cupboard clearly of a piece with the house. Mrs. Gilmer's china, as it rested on its shelves, was presented as physically component to the house as well. Prestigious consumer goods and the refined house were assembled together as a coherent statement of personal gentility.

As well as in household inventories, beaufats appear in the records of upper Georgian estate sales. The term could, then, in local usage, describe a piece of furniture that was at least nominally freestanding, such that it might be bought and carried off. The fundamental understanding of the form remained the same. After Thomas Stokes died in Lincoln County in 1813, his brother included in the sale of his household goods a pair of "beaufat sash," meaning glass, doors.⁸⁷ When Abraham Simons built his house in Wilkes County around 1810, he incorporated a beaufat with glass doors. (fig. 25) It reached from floor to the ceiling, where there elaborate cornice molding of the room carried across it, as did the chair-rail at its waist, reinforcing, as the elder Gilmer had, its integrity with the architecture.

Simon's cupboard was exceptional in its degree of elaboration. Most beaufats appearing in the estate records of Greene and Lincoln Counties were valued by appraisers at less than Archibald Stokes asked for his brother's glass doors alone. Most of these

⁸⁷ Sale of the Estate of Thomas Stokes, 15 Sept. 1813, Lincoln County Inferior Court (hereafter IC), Appraisal and Sales.



25. Beaufat cupboard in the house of Abraham Simons, Wilkes County GA. Built ca. 1810. (Hargrett Library, University of Georgia)

were likely open pieces fit in the corner of a room. There was, as Garnett Andrews suggested, no necessary connection between ownership of monetarily valuable goods, like china, and the ownership of furniture intended for display. Henry Ware, of Lincoln County owned a bowfat at the time of his death, but kept only earthenware crockery in it. John Orr, a Lincoln County planter of low middling status, owned four slaves and 190 acres in 1810. He owned no tea equipage, and his only dining goods were a collection of pewter knives and forks, crockery, and assorted glassware. After Micajah McGehee's death in 1811, the appraisers found pewter-ware, utensils, and an assortment of crockery

and glassware that was simply folded into one lot. Both men, nonetheless, owned a sideboard.⁸⁸

By the early nineteenth-century, the sideboard had taken a central place within elite American homes, as the stage on which to display the multitude of plates, vessels and utensils required to stage a proper meal. For those who could afford these goods, and the carefully regulated behaviors they enabled, a sideboard was a culminating acquisition.⁸⁹ Even amongst the Chesapeake elite, sideboards remained a rarity through the end of the eighteenth-century.⁹⁰ They were rarer still in upper Georgia; only a handful of household inventories recorded in upper Georgia prior to 1815 record a sideboard.⁹¹

Upcountry Republican politics revolved around William H. Crawford for twenty years before a stroke forced his resignation as Secretary of The Treasury in 1825. He was also a close friend of Thomas Gilmer, and George Gilmer wrote that “his plain dress, frank manners and decided straightforward way of speaking and acting, rendered him

⁸⁸ Upcountry appraisers used the terms side board, sideboard and slab interchangeably to describe freestanding side tables with drawers beneath for storage. See, Lincoln County IC Appraisals and Sales, 1810; Oglethorpe County CO, Appraisals and Sales, 1811.

⁸⁹ Elizabeth Garrett, *At Home: The American Family, 1750-1870*. (New York: H.N.Abrams, 1990), 87. Garrett describes the arrangement of plate and ceramics on sideboards, and the placement of the sideboard itself, was generally characterized by conscious effort at maximizing its visual impact. Thanks to Robert Leath of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts for the observation that the sideboard, as a highly function-specific furniture item, was typically a culminating purchase. Taking the eighteenth and early nineteenth-century Tidewater South as a whole, the sideboards most always appear as part of an ensemble of furniture items.

⁹⁰ As part of the room-use study conducted as part of the restoration of Gunston Hall, researchers selected a representative group of 325 probate inventories of rural elite households dating between 1740 and 1810. Less than one third of these households contained a sideboard. The room use study and the transcribed inventories are available online at <http://www.gunstonhall.org/probate/inventory.html>.

⁹¹ Prior to 1803, no sideboards whatsoever appear in probate inventories compiled in Greene, Elbert and Lincoln counties. This is pattern is influenced, in large part, by patterns of mortality. Most of the prominent Virginian emigrants to Wilkes in the middle 1780s either died soon after arrival or lived into the second decade of the nineteenth century.

very acceptable to the Broad River people.”⁹² That comfortable plainness seems not to have extended to Crawford’s taste in furniture. A sideboard he owned while living in Oglethorpe County, made locally around 1800, is veneered with highly figured mahogany and elaborated with delicate ellipses of inlay in the manner popular in Charleston. Its stance and massing reflect the contemporary, Sheraton-influenced modes of metropolitan American furniture design. (fig. 26)

Crawford’s sideboard, one of the very few pieces that can be linked to a specific household amongst the upper Georgian elite, gives shape to what the advertisements of upcountry cabinetmakers and furniture retailers describe. “Elegant” mahogany sideboards, dining tables, secretaries and bookcases were shipped complete for sale to Augusta by 1800. Augusta cabinetmakers, some trained in Charleston, advertised mahogany furniture to be built on commission, competing with one another for the size, variety and quality of their exotic lumber stock.⁹³ Further upriver, in Wilkes County, the cabinetmaker Alexander James, advertised his best mahogany work, with “orders from the country, particularly attended to.”⁹⁴ Fine and modish furniture was available to the elite of the Georgian frontiers by the first decade of the 19th century.

Probate inventories, however, make clear how few owned pieces such as Crawford’s. Two sideboards made of mahogany were probated in Green and Lincoln Counties prior to 1815, valued at sixty and seventy-five dollars respectively. Most were valued at less than a third of that figure, and several at fewer than five dollars.

⁹² Gilmer, 98.

⁹³ *Augusta Herald*, 15 January, 1800; *Augusta Chronicle*, 2 December, 1810.

⁹⁴ *Washington Monitor*, 3 March, 1810; *Washington Monitor*, 14, July, 1810.



26. Sideboard owned by William H. Crawford. Built ca.1790-1800 in upper Georgia. (Photograph, Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts)



27. Sideboard. Built ca. 1800-1810 in upper Georgia. (Photograph by Henry Green from Henry Green, *Furniture of the Georgia Piedmont before 1830*. (Atlanta: Conger, 1976).)

If those who received the scrutiny of inventory can be taken as a representative, feather bedsteads were almost invariably the costliest item of furniture in middling and elite households, with appraisers placing their value, on average, between \$40.00 and \$50.00. Most commonly occurring furniture items such as cupboards, various tables and sets of chairs, rarely exceeded \$10. Only rare items approached or exceeded the \$50 threshold – a clock, a couch, a walnut desk, or a mahogany sideboard.⁹⁵ James Cooper, who died in Lincoln County in 1807, owned a pair of looking glasses worth \$20 and a tea table worth \$12, but a sideboard valued at only \$6.70. Thomas Stokes owned, in addition to his beaufat, two birch and one walnut dining table, but a pine slab worth \$1.25. The household of Joel Early, who owned forty-one slaves in Greene County, included four Pembroke tables, a couch valued at \$40, and a sideboard worth only \$16.40.⁹⁶ The large majority of sideboards found in even the elite households of upper Georgia were equivalent in value to utilitarian household furniture.

One explanation for the disparity in valuation is that the term “sideboard,” could describe two different sorts of furniture. The more valuable were sideboards in the true sense, of exotic woods and with drawers; the cheaper were simply rectangular serving tables.⁹⁷ Sideboard and slab appear, however, to describe a single essential form in the Georgian upcountry: a rectangular table with at least two drawers beneath for storage.

⁹⁵ Interestingly, the most valuable furniture item found in the probate inventories of Elbert, Greene, Lincoln, and Oglethorpe counties was a clock owned by Thomas Gilmer appraised at \$100 in 1817.

⁹⁶ Lincoln County IC, Appraisals and Sales, 1807, 1811. Greene County IC, Appraisals and Sales, 1807.

⁹⁷ Elizabeth Garrett, for one, suggests this as a possibility. Garrett, 87.

Even the “side table” belonging to Robert Hughes of Lincoln County was listed in his inventory with a content of tin-ware and crockery.⁹⁸

Rather, most sideboards were inexpensive because most were fashioned quickly, out of locally abundant yellow pine. Of the twelve examples appearing in Greene County inventories prior to 1815, only three were noted as being of mahogany or walnut. When a prestigious or particularly desirable characteristic goes unmentioned in descriptions, the object described tends to represent the ubiquitous characteristic; several were described as made of pine, as were, in all likelihood, all those recorded without any descriptor.⁹⁹ Numerous upcountry Georgian sideboards dating to the period prior to 1820 survive that were built straightforwardly of pine but with drawers.¹⁰⁰

A piece generally representative of this body of pine furniture is a sideboard built in the Georgia piedmont, possibly Clarke County, around 1800.¹⁰¹ (fig. 27) It is built entirely of yellow pine, with a central door and two large drawers, each deep enough to hold bottles. While the piece is elaborated with a narrow bead run around the drawer faces, it is otherwise severely rectilinear, with sharply angular legs than narrow towards

⁹⁸ Lincoln County IC, Appraisals and Sales, 1811.

⁹⁹ Camille Wells makes this commonsense but nonetheless significant point: When a prestigious or particularly desirable characteristic is unmentioned in descriptions, the object tends to represent the ubiquitous characteristic.

¹⁰⁰ Furniture made prior to 1820 that can be reliably attributed to Georgia, even to Savannah, is remarkably scarce. Dating pieces, particularly those made in the interior of the State, is difficult, largely because forms and styles persisted from throughout most of the nineteenth century with remarkable continuity. For a survey of the aesthetic of plain-ness in Georgian furniture, see:

¹⁰¹ This attribution owes to Henry Green. Though some pieces have an extensive provenance in a particular place, for a variety of reasons, most scholars of Southern furniture are generally unwilling to attribute with greater specificity than “Georgia piedmont.” This is due, more than anything, to a remarkable stylistic continuity throughout the nineteenth-century. For a survey of the aesthetic of plain-ness in Georgian furniture, see: Atlanta Historical Society, *Neat Pieces: The Plain Style Furniture of Nineteenth-century Georgia*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006).

the floor and without molding to relieve the edges of the top. There is no inlay or veneer, only frank expanses of pine. Comparison with William Crawford's mahogany sideboard, however, reveals two functionally and aesthetically related pieces. They share crisp, tapering legs, the impression of taut-ness in their stance, the opposition of open and closed space within their masses. The plainness often identified with the pine furniture of upper Georgia was, in fact, an essential rendering of an emergent national, neoclassical style that characterizes the modish furniture of coastal metropolises.¹⁰² Even as it was translated into middling households, a clear formal continuity made the type legible whether rendered in pine or mahogany.

A sideboard built ca. 1795-1805, probably near the town of Jefferson in Jackson County, Georgia sheds light on how this stylish, pine furniture was understood.¹⁰³ The piece is strikingly tall by comparison with the mode of the coastal metropolises of Charlestown and Savannah, was made with a walnut frame. The figured walnut drawer faces have been painstakingly elaborated with a lip carved around their edges. A gallery rail of turned and gilt balusters surrounds the top. (fig. 28)

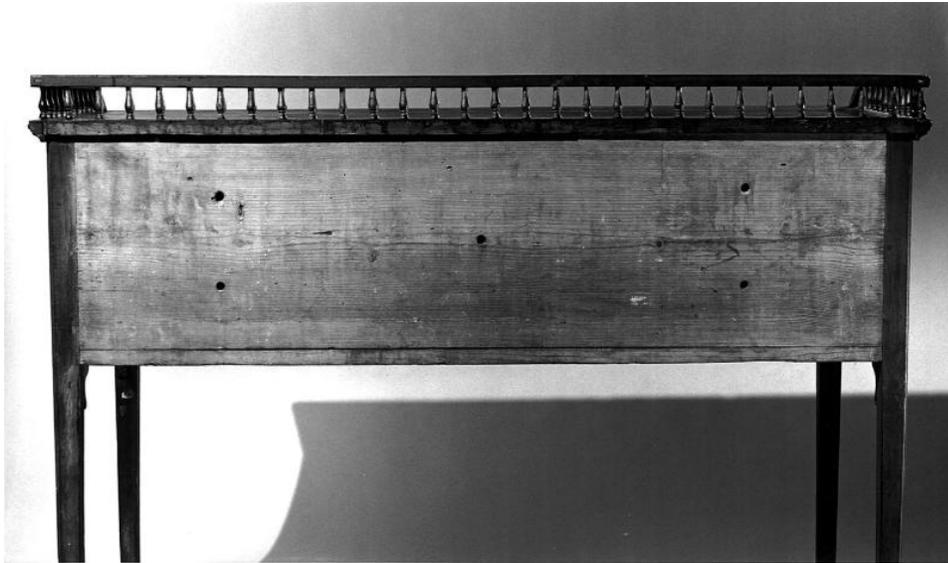
That top is yellow pine, like the coarsely planed yellow pine makes up the back, bottom, and the interior structure of the sideboard. And, it has been simply pegged from above down onto the frame. Cabinetmakers were extremely sensitive to the dynamics of wood, and this governed, in large part their habits of construction. Pegged across its

¹⁰² This manner of furniture is frequently described as the "plain style" and is documented thoroughly in: Atlanta Historical Society, *Neat Pieces: The Plain Style Furniture of Nineteenth-century Georgia*. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006) and Green, H.P., *Furniture of the Georgia Piedmont before 1830*. (Atlanta: Conger, 1976)

¹⁰³ This piece is currently in the collection of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, in Winston-Salem, NC. Field research by MESDA has documented at least one other sideboard by the same maker, also of walnut with a pine top.



28a. Sideboard, built ca. 1795-1805, likely in Jackson County, Georgia. While the legs and carcass of the sideboard are figured walnut, with further walnut inlays, the top is yellow pine. (Collection of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, Old Salem Museum and Gardens)



28b. The maker employed the same material for the highly visible top as for the concealed, structural elements of the case. (Collection of the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts, Old Salem Museum and Gardens)

width so as to constrain the ability of the top to freely expand and contract, it would, and has, split. The question, then, is why would the cabinet maker who elsewhere achieved such a high degree of finish surmount the piece with the same material he had used for the underside of the drawers—the same material as the floor on which it stood. The answer is suggested by the delicate gold-colored balustrade the surrounds the top: this was meant as a stage for dishes and decanters, for trays of food and bowls of punch, and to absorb the scars that went along with it. This sideboard was not simply reduced as it was appropriated by middling households. Rather, it suggests a process by which the sideboard had, while still in the hands of those wealthy enough to afford elaborate walnut furniture, had acquired a utilitarian quality. It was, in this way, manipulated into a object that could be distributed downwards.

During their first three decades on the Georgian frontier, Virginian settlers felt their way towards a style of life that could be legitimated within their constituency, and could, at the same time, express their aspirations. By positioning themselves at the head of nascent Baptist, Methodist and Presbyterian communities, elite Virginians diffused the possibilities for the coalescence of those Evangelicals as an independent status-group. Rather, planters secured their political and economic power by unifying their communities through style assembled from elements inherited from the Anglican gentry and appropriated from amongst the common orders.

When planters, even those in the top percentile of land and slave ownership, built large, permanent houses, they most often avoided central passages, with their connotations of exclusivity and pridefulness. Those who did incorporate a passages, along with other gentry motifs as Thomas Gilmer did, nonetheless carefully phrased their houses within a vernacular tradition. They employed small chambers and basements that made possible the refinement of the a pretentious hall and dining room, without violating the common, hall-chamber aesthetic. Their houses could be, then, stages for the ritual hospitality of tea-drinking, dancing and dining — entertainments that bound their status-group together—while remaining, in crucial ways, formally open. Front doorways, in the case of the Gilmer house, opened directly into genteel space. While many owned the furniture and goods necessary for dining as an entertainment, and well finished rooms in which to do it, dining rooms were not exclusive spaces, but remained open to a mixture of uses and persons.

The furniture that filled these rooms reinforces this sense of a middle way. Gentry modes of behavior still, in meaningful ways, gave shape to the aspirations of middling planters who established themselves in Georgia. The solution seems to have been to participate in the translation of elements of that style into more broadly accessible forms. The transformation of the sideboard, a furniture item closely bound up with the convivial culture of the gentry, into pine took place first in the homes of the elite. While the reluctance to possess elaborate mahogany furniture marked, in a sense, a concession to religious communities' suspicious of luxury, the simplification of elite forms was the groundwork for extensification. From there it rapidly made its way into the front rooms

of poorer households, to hold brandy and side-meat.¹⁰⁴ By the 1820's, at any great celebration, Rebecca Latimer Felton wrote, "there was always a sideboard, where gin, rum and peach brandy held distinction."¹⁰⁵ Garnett Andrews related the story of an acquaintance who's described his father as a "peach brandy Baptist...who kept [brandy] on his sideboard, took a drink before breakfast and dinner, and asked everyone who came to his house to do the same."¹⁰⁶ The groundwork for social deference was the extension of a relatively accessible model of refinement across class.¹⁰⁷

Thomas Gilmer and the Virginians who migrated to Georgia left a contested landscape, in which the evangelical poor and the Anglican gentry vied for cultural authority. A paneled room, an elaborate door, a beaufat cupboard meant differently where the audience was less receptive to the social performances of the elite. The employment of the objects and spaces, however, enabled a continuity of identity for Virginian planters on the Georgian frontier. Further, these motifs continued to give form to their aspirations as they consolidated themselves as a political, economic and familial elite.

All through his political life, George Gilmer wrote, he was "believed to be a Virginian, as all my immediate ancestors had been."¹⁰⁸ By "Virginian," he meant the inheritor a gentry culture, though on its periphery. The symbols of that culture were

¹⁰⁴ For the account of the Jarrell household, of Monroe, Georgia, where the slab stored butter, sidemeat, and whiskey, see: Atlanta Historical Society, *Neat Pieces*, 26.

¹⁰⁵ Felton, 32.

¹⁰⁶ Andrews, 1.

¹⁰⁷ The patriarchal model of yeoman/planter relations is best outlined the Southern interior is found in Eugene Genovese, "Yeomen Farmers in a Slaveholders' Democracy" *Agricultural History* 49 (April, 1975) 331-342.

¹⁰⁸ Gilmer, *Sketches*, 180.

consciously manipulated by those of his milieu, altered and recombined, but in the whole they remained recognizable to their communities and to themselves.

EPILOGUE

At the close of this thesis, it seems appropriate to reflect on the experience of research that produced it. I arrived the first time in Georgia with an embarrassingly vague idea of what I was looking for – some architectural trace of the community of Virginians I had stumbled across while participating in the summer research institute hosted by the Museum of Early Southern Decorative Arts at Old Salem.

I certainly discovered the challenge of distant fieldwork. The blur of detail only resolves into patterns of evidence slowly. As I sat back in my office, the questions that arrived seemed always just outside what I had thought to note or photograph or draw. In truth, only after two years of occasional stretches in the field do I know exactly what I would look for in an exhaustive survey of my research area. I recognize why, when he was in the midst of counting houses for *Folk Housing of Middle Virginia*, Henry Glassie moved he and his family to Goochland County.

It is frustrating to know how much of this fragmentary architectural record remains outside my consideration. Were I continue this research, it would be in the woods, working with the remarkably good maps of early home-sites compiled by local historians. Having arrived at the point of some fluency in the architectural forms employed by the early Virginian settlers, it would be fascinating to see what even the rough measurements taken from foundation depressions might add to and complicate the patterns I have observed.

One of the particular challenges of working with the material culture of a migrant group of considering the center and the periphery. To analyze the houses Virginians built Georgia, one must know the sorts of houses Virginians built in Virginia. For the settlers of upper Georgia, that task was compounded by the fact that the vast majority were already children of Virginia's piedmont frontier of the 1740s and 1750s. The scholarship that has yielded such a remarkably extensive picture of the Tidewater landscape is largely undone for the Piedmont and Southside, and I have struggled throughout the process of research to understand the extent to the material world of Georgia represented the working out of processes begun in Virginia's own frontiers.

This work took the course that it did largely because of the impression reading Henry Glassie's study of the Ulster village Balleymenone made on me.¹⁰⁹ This remarkable book achieves what he had attempted decades earlier in sketching patterns in the material culture of the eastern United States, and in suggesting the possibility of connections between barns, duck decoys, songs and houses. In Balleymenone, those dashed connections carry flesh. This challenge, to consider various categories of objects as part of an organic unity, shaped my decision to work simultaneously with architecture and furnishings. If it is, in places, crudely woven, it is largely because of the challenges of working in the past rather than the present. It is one thing to watch and listen to the living associate cultural materials in their everyday speaking and doing. To perceive that unity in the past requires that things which have drifted apart must be re-associated.

¹⁰⁹ Henry Glassie, *Passing the Time in Ballymenone* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1982).

This process engaged fundamental issues of material culture scholarship, namely, how to set artifacts in dialogue with document evidence, without the objects merely serving to reinforce conclusions? While my approach has, though, been shaped by the idea that it is essential to understand the particularistic context before it is possible to approach the abstract context—to perceive the objects in context before it is possible to perceive their symbolic content.

For this reason, chapter one is built around the analysis of tax-lists, wills, church records, newspaper advertisements, and out of seemingly endless forays down the rabbit-hole of genealogy. A critical aspect of my argument, that Virginians hewed closely to the vernacular traditions they carried with them depended on my ability to establish individual origins. The questions were often far more complicated. My argument that the distinctive patterns within elite material culture can be explained by, and suggest the nature of, the early participation of economic elites in evangelical meetings, depended first on knowing who the economic elite were. Secondly, it required the assessment of individual religiosity. The evidence was frequently suggestive, but rarely clear in this regard. As an example, John Talbot, who figures prominently in chapters one and two, was a Presbyterian by the time of his death in Wilkes County. His brother Matthew, however, became a Baptist before the Revolution while they still lived in Bedford County, Virginia. Did John have a similar conversion experience, or was his patronage of the Wilkes County Presbyterians motivated by some new circumstance of the frontier? It is a question I, ashamedly, can not answer, and it points to one of the broader and

lingering questions prompted by my research: was disaffection from the establish church a characteristic of those planters who determined to leave Virginia for Georgia?

Lastly, I would share one particular challenge of handling mobile artifacts, like furniture, as historical evidence. The bedrock of material culture scholarship is identification – the ability to accurately describe an object, to identify the time and place in which it was made and used. The vast majority of furniture artifacts travel only with attributions – that is, a very educated guess made by one of a handful of experts in a given region and era. Throughout my work, I have been dogged by the disquieting thought that my analysis hung upon the correctness of these attributions. I have wrestled with how to treat those many pieces identified, “Georgia piedmont, 1800-1820,” or the like. I have, in large part, attempted to work primarily with objects that had at least a somewhat reliable connection to a particular county, but this phenomenon of the scholarship almost inevitably forces the frame wider.

On my last day of fieldwork in Georgia, I drove deep into Elbert County to find the house built by Ralph Banks some time during the 1790s. When I arrived, I discovered a note on the door, with a phone number for the owner. I called, and while I waited for the man to appear, I sat behind the house looking over the fields, the scattered copses of trees. The man who greeted me was the direct descendent of the builder. Behind the house, he showed me where the patterns of sapling trees and gullies scored the footprint of each vanished outbuilding into the earth. When the analysis of the various threads of

evidence I have brought together has muddied, as it has frequently has in the process of writing, I have taken comfort in the thought that simply having drawing them into proximity, it may be possible for other eyes to see what I have not.

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