



FRONTISPICE. DETAIL OF TEMPLETON-TYPE BELLTOWER, 1823, added to the Jaffrey, N.H., Meeting House, 1775. (Photograph by the author.)

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The Templeton "Run" and the Pomfret "Cluster": Patterns of Diffusion in Rural New England Meetinghouse Architecture, 1647-1822

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One of the more salient characteristics of New England's early meeting houses is the regional variety that thrived within a broader pattern of architectural uniformity. Serving simultaneously as schools, as town halls, and as places for religious assembly, meeting houses¹ conformed to architectural codes that were common to New England as a whole. We know from survivals that they were aligned on an east-west axis, and that the pulpit was placed against the north wall. Documentary sources tell us that they were built in the late seventeenth century with high-gabled hipped roofs, and in the eighteenth century with end-to-end gabled roofs. Our own eyes tell us that early nineteenth-century structures were given pilastered facade porches, and that their interiors were rearranged along a "church plan" in which the entryway and pulpit faced one another across the long axis.

Within these norms, however, existed clear regional differences. After 1770 cen-

tral Massachusetts and western New Hampshire towns favored a twin-porch meeting house with gallery stairwells enclosed in the porches. At this time the Massachusetts and New Hampshire coastlines, including Cape Cod, favored a single-stairwell porch located on the front (meaning long) side. We know, too, that earlier in colonial history the Plymouth Colony area and eastern Connecticut favored vertical plank construction over studded walls.

In a typical year, some fifteen to twenty public meeting houses were raised in New England by established tax-supported Congregational or Presbyterian societies.

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The same year saw one or two Baptist or Quaker houses of worship raised at private expense. This rate of construction provided constant opportunity for the introduction of new architectural ideas such as roof design, interior finishing, and exterior decoration. But the impulse to follow the Protestant "plain style"² was deeply rooted, and these opportunities were often ignored. In 1787, two years before Pittsfield and Taunton, Massachusetts, decided to build a meeting house on a church plan and to include a facade porch, the second society in Andover, Massachusetts, specified "nothing superfluous" for its new meeting house. It was to be

plain and neat, not have any medallions, dentals, or carved work, but to have the window frames and sashes painted, and the ground pinning as good as that of the north parish.³

The existence of conflicting viewpoints such as these raises a number of questions. What told a community that it was time to use dentils or to replace its diamond-paned casement windows with square- or rectangular-paned sash windows? Or to build a single stairwell over the front main entry rather than twin porches on the side entries? Or to build a standing belltower rather than a turret and belfry? Moreover, who made the decisions?

Related to these questions are those concerning the origin and diffusion of innovations. As part of the Atlantic community, New England towns were presumably in touch with centers of English fashion through important coastal and urban points such as Boston, Newport, and Portsmouth. Having gained a foothold on the New England coastline, new architectural ideas filtered into rural areas by newspapers, by design books, and by travellers' accounts. Punctuated by highly visible urban models such as Christ Church in Boston (1723),

Trinity Church in Newport (1726), the Old South Meeting House in Boston (1729), and the Brattle Street Church in Boston (1772), highstyle innovations such as the church plan, the standing belltower, and Georgian modes of decorating steeples, pediments, and doorways penetrated into rural areas in direct ratio to the accessibility, aesthetic disposition, and financial means of the towns in those areas. But what do we know about architectural features outside the highstyle mode? Exterior colors, framing, pew plans, pew designs, and exterior porches probably were derived from local or vernacular sources, and probably spread in a different manner.

Enough nineteenth-century meeting houses and churches still survive to permit us to trace the spread of architectural ideas in federal New England. Because most seventeenth- and eighteenth-century communities saw their meeting houses as makeshift structures, however, opportunities to formulate diffusion models in these earlier centuries are limited. Only one out of an estimated 216 seventeenth-century structures still stands, or less than 0.5 percent; for eighteenth-century structures the survival figure is about 5 percent, most examples having undergone major renovations which have obscured their original appearance. At the same time, because one town commonly used the meeting house of another town as a model for the dimensions, style, or workmanship of its own⁴ — and, more important, because some towns left a record of such imitations — we have available a body of documents which has been largely overlooked by architectural historians, but which goes to the heart of diffusion studies because these records simultaneously reveal the intentions and stylistic vocabularies of the builders. Examined in conjunction with such meetinghouse survivals that still retain traces of their original features, these

documents suggest the existence of two kinds of architectural dispersal patterns during the period that ecclesiastical buildings were constructed to municipal specifications. One was a long-range pattern, or "run," such as followed the erection of an Elias Carter and Jonathan Cutting meeting house in Templeton, Massachusetts, in 1811. A second is a "cluster" pattern such as took place after the town of Pomfret, Connecticut, voted to paint the exterior walls of its new meeting house "orange" and the doors a "chocolate color" in 1762. Taken together, these documents offer us a new picture of the manner in which architectural innovations were perceived, who perceived them, and how they were transmitted. They also give us an unusual insight into the cultural horizons of early New England communities.

I

Altogether eighty-six instances of meetinghouse-related imitations made between 1647 and 1822 have so far been uncovered from town and church records and from builders' contracts (see *Appendix*). These cite exterior features such as "form," dimensions, roof type, and exterior colors; they also cite interior appointments such as pews, pulpits, deacons' benches, gallery railing, wainscotting, inside colors, and communion furniture. Major additions such as porches, galleries, belltowers, steeples and spires were sometimes borrowed by one town from another, even seating arrangements and the rules governing the "dignity" of pews. The eighty-six structures on which some form of documentation of this type is available represent approximately 4 percent of the estimated two-thousand or more meeting houses and churches built during this period. However, the insertion of these specifications into a contract or into the minutes of a town or church meeting was presumably a rare event, and done only when a particular

argument or discussion needed resolution. Imitations were probably taken for granted in most instances, and the 4 percent we know about are likely to be representative.

The earliest of these imitations dates from 1647 when Wethersfield, Connecticut, contracted with Joshua Jennings to build seats in its new meeting house. According to the town records of April of that year, Jennings was to furnish the seats with "wainscot according to the seats in the Hartford Meeting House." He was to be paid

three shilling a yard for the said worke,
being sufficient and well wrought, and
good stufe, according to the pattern of
Hartford seats.

A payment made to Jennings two years later reveals that he was also contracted to build the minister's desk.⁵

Wethersfield's imitation of Hartford's seating specifications is typical of numerous other known imitations in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Westfield, Massachusetts, in 1672 voted to build its new meeting house after the "form" of the Hatfield meeting house. Norwalk, Connecticut, in 1678 directed that its "Rofe" be built following the style of nearby Fairfield. Thompson, Connecticut, in 1733 designed its gallery seats after those in Woodstock.⁶

At the same time, however, the pattern seen in the documentary records is confirmed inferentially by the known dimensions and dates of specific structures. No fewer than five of approximately twenty Connecticut River Valley and New Haven churches established before 1700 built fifty-foot square meeting houses similar to the one erected by Hartford's First Church in 1638.⁷ Three eastern New England towns erected meeting houses similar to the forty-foot square design Cambridge built in 1650.⁸ The only documentary evidence linking either group is a 1656 vote which records Watertown's vote to build "after

the pattern of the Cambridge meeting house." But we can fairly assume that committees and builders followed earlier examples as models to make their work easier. Some even made a habit of it: Hartford's Second society imitated Hartford's First's dimensions in 1673; it did so again in 1749.⁹

In all these examples, earlier meeting houses served as a convenient model. Rather than going to the trouble of writing specifications with resulting ambiguities, the men responsible for overseeing new construction simply instructed builders to follow the workmanship of a structure which was familiar to builders, committeemen, and townspeople alike. We are given a close view of this in Haverhill, Massachusetts, when the town voted in May of 1696 to replace its 1647 meeting house with a new one. Its first act was to appoint a committee "to look and view some meeting houses for dimensions." On July 28 of that year, the committee reported that it had "been abroad at several towns, taking dimensions of several meeting-houses, and taking an account of the cost of them." They had also engaged with "divers workmen" to build a structure fifty by forty-two feet whose interior was to be finished "after the pattern of the Beverly meeting-house," and whose exterior sides were to be finished "after the style of the Reading meeting-house."¹⁰

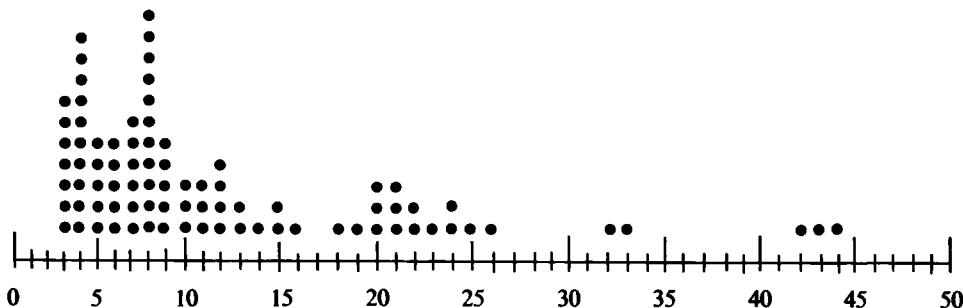
By drawing from *two* models, the Haverhill committee went beyond mere convenience, and used the Beverly and Reading meeting houses on a selective basis. Alternatively, Haverhill's new meeting house could have been patterned wholly after one or the other of the two. Or it could have been patterned after the forty-six by forty-four foot structure in nearby Rowley which had been erected the same year.¹¹ This kind of selectivity is found throughout the seventeenth and

eighteenth centuries. In 1708 the first parish in Andover, Massachusetts, stipulated that its new meeting house have a roof "like Salem-Village" and its seats "like Bradford." In 1739 the second parish in Killingworth, Connecticut, voted its meetinghouse dimensions to be fifty-eight by thirty-eight feet with posts "two feet shorter than those in the First Society"; in 1743 it voted "that the seats and pews in our meeting house shall be dignified by the same rules that East Guilford hath dignified the seats and pews in their meeting house."¹²

That an awareness of fashion or new style played a major part in these selections can be inferred from the language of the records. When Sudbury, Massachusetts, voted to erect its third meeting house in 1689, the town chose to make it "just like the new one in Dedham," and hired the Dedham builder to do the work. Forty years later when Sudbury built its fourth meeting house, the town this time voted to make it "as near as they can like the new house in the West Precinct."¹³ Specifically style-conscious phrases such as "after the present fashion," "comely canopy," and "handsome jeyht" (jet or cornice) are only rarely applied to meetinghouse architecture in town and church records. But they occur regularly enough to suggest that community interest in new styles ran high; at times these descriptions went into some detail. In 1730 Stepney parish in Wethersfield, Connecticut, first voted that the gallery stairs in its eight-year-old meeting house "shall have one turn and not two anything said to the contrary notwithstanding." However, a month later, the parish changed its mind and determined "That the galerie stairs shall be made in the newest moad as they are now begun."¹⁴

The question we must ask is just where and in what manner towns perceived "the newest moad." As shown in Table 1, well over half of the eighty-six imitations voted

Table 1. The distance in miles of eighty-six known meetinghouse-related imitations in New England, 1647-1822. Not shown are two imitations that took place at 90 and 104 miles, respectively.



in the years 1647 through 1822 specify a model located under ten miles distant, and many just three, four, or five miles distant. Typical among these is the 1714 decision by Middletown Upper Houses (Cromwell, Connecticut) to have the interior of its new meeting house finished like that of the "South Society" (Middletown) or the 1719 vote by the town of East Haven, Connecticut, to have its pulpit and seats finished in the form of the nearby Branford meeting house.¹⁵ Only a handful of imitations cite models located over forty miles distant, and these are accompanied by a clear indication of special circumstances. For example, the use of the Grafton, Massachusetts, meeting house in 1738 as a model for Becket (located ninety miles distant) was recorded at a proprietors' meeting held in Grafton fifteen years before the Becket structure was actually built. The Grafton-based Becket proprietors were simply voting for a new meeting house to be built like their own.¹⁶

By contrast, Guilford's vote to build a standing belltower in 1726 after the "Fashion and proportion of the Belfry and Spire at Rhode Island," reveals the special contacts and point of view that had developed in coastal Connecticut. While we do not know this as a certainty, the Rhode Island "Spire" was probably the one erected in 1726 on Trinity Church in Newport. Keeping in mind that just a few years prior to Guilford's vote, two Connecticut ministers had shocked New England by resigning their pulpits and sailing to London to take Episcopal orders, we might see Guilford's selection as part of a larger trend toward Anglican cultural models. Or, we might see the vote as reflecting Guilford's role as an important coastal community in touch with other communities on Long Island, Block Island, and Rhode Island sounds. In any event, the town rescinded its decision the same year and built another design which is not described in the records, but which was probably the first standing belltower in

Connecticut. (During the earthquake of October 29, 1727, it swung back and forth so violently that the bells tolled of their own accord.)¹⁷

The Grafton and Guilford examples are the exception, however, and most New England towns and parishes voted to imitate much closer models. If we were to design a mental map of rural New England on the basis of these votes, we might begin with a hypothetical square of nine towns arranged three by three, in which the centermost town is our starting point. The towns immediately surrounding this central point would figure prominently in the minds of these early New Englanders. The cordon of towns around the basic nine would be of significantly less importance in influencing the values and tastes of the central town. Urban centers, such as Portsmouth, Newport, Boston, Middletown, and Norwich, would scarcely show up at all. England would be off the map altogether. A coastal or river version of this map might place a string of such nine towns along the most travelled water routes, but here too, the town's cultural horizon would be governed by the distance a man and a horse could cover in a day's or half-day's travel time. The models are somewhat larger than the "comfortable communion" seen by an anonymous seventeenth-century commentator whose ideal town was

square 6 miles eury waye. The howses orderly placed about ye midst, especially ye meetinghouse, the wch we will suppose to be ye center of ye wholl circumferance.¹⁸

It corresponds accurately, however, to the known range of activity of Matthew Patten of Bedford, New Hampshire, a farmer and a probate judge whose diary reveals that he spent virtually his entire lifetime within a genealogically interrelated group of four contiguous towns, and only rarely ven-

tured outside of this area to Boston, to Exeter, or to Portsmouth. It corresponds, too, to the range of activity of Joshua Hempstead of New London, Connecticut, who normally visited a handful of towns on the Thames River (Montville and Norwich), and on Fishers Island Sound (Groton, Stonington, and Mystic) which were at somewhat a greater distance than the Patten group but which were accessible by water routes.¹⁹

II

Because rural fashions were perceived second-, third-, or fourth-hand, the introduction of new architectural styles presumably followed a "nearest neighbor" manner of dispersal. The appearance of an innovation in one town alerted its neighbor to consider it, which in turn alerted the next neighbor, and so forth. When we examine specific instances of dispersal, however, we learn that not all innovations travelled at the same rate or even in the same direction. Some, for example, travelled in a linear manner along wellworn settlement paths — from the larger seacoast towns to the interior rural ones. We see this in a succession of similar porch and belltower designs that appear on a group of meeting houses in central Massachusetts and southwestern New Hampshire built in the early nineteenth century. The design originated on the Templeton, Massachusetts, meeting house which Elias Carter and Jonathan Cutting built under contract in 1811.²⁰ From both survivals and documentary sources we know that a series of six imitations followed, which began in Troy, New Hampshire, in 1812, and ended at Newport, New Hampshire, in 1823 (Fig. 1).²¹ In effect, the design moved rapidly northward between 1811 and 1823, covering a linear distance of sixty-four miles without making major lateral moves. If we include the Brimfield meeting house,

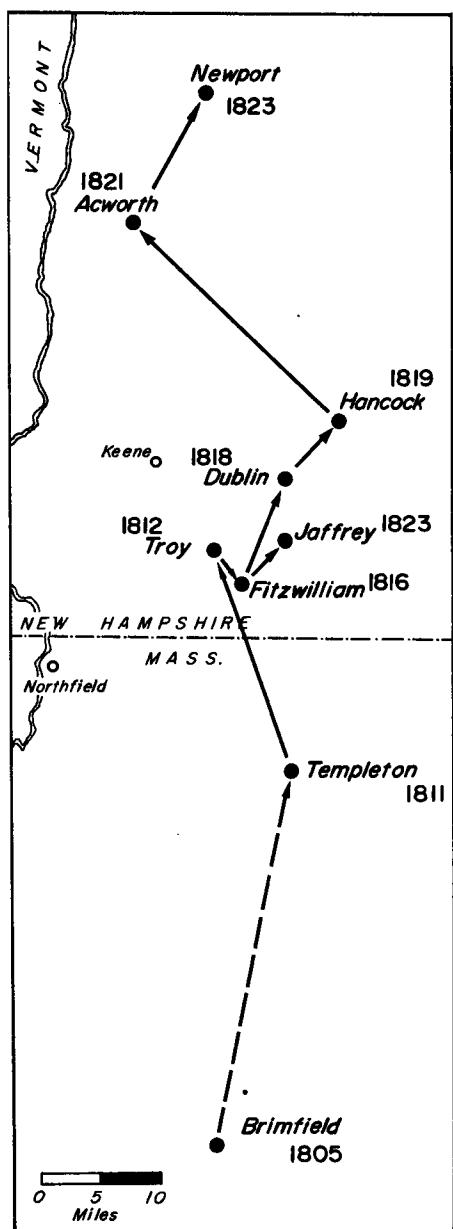


FIG. 1. THE TEMPLETON RUN: Diffusion of Templeton-model belltower and porch designs, 1811-1822. (Drawn by the author.)

built under contract with Elias Carter in 1805 when the architect was only twenty-four years old,²² it covers a total distance of one hundred miles in eleven years. The rate of transmission is approximately six miles per year, which, in cultural or anthropological terms, is relatively fast. By way of contrast, Tate and Brady's *A New Version of the Psalms*, which first replaced the *Bay Psalm Book* in Boston in 1713, covered the forty-five mile distance between Boston and Leicester, Massachusetts, in fifty-two years or an average rate of under one mile per year.²³

As best as we can reconstruct the Templeton sequence, it advanced according to the nearest neighbor model described earlier. Records of Troy, New Hampshire, indicate that in the summer of 1812, when the town was preparing to build its meeting house, two men were directed to examine the Templeton structure. Dublin, on the other hand, voted in 1817 to allow its building committee to build "after the plan of Ashby, or Fitzwilliam, or any other they may think proper." (Even if we did not have contemporary illustrations of the 1819 Dublin meeting house, we might accurately reconstruct the fact that the committee chose the Templeton-style design in Fitzwilliam rather than the design attributed to Asher Benjamin in Ashby. The town hired as masterbuilders the same Jonathan Cutting who had helped build the Templeton structure and "Killburn" of Fitzwilliam who had presumably been involved in building the Fitzwilliam church.) For its part, Hancock voted in 1819 to "build a house nearly the size, construction, and form of the Congregational meeting house in Dublin."²⁴

This tells us the design was transmitted along a chain: Dublin imitated *Fitzwilliam*, not *Templeton*; Hancock imitated *Dublin*. More important, it tells us that building committees charged with supervising the



FIG. 2. TEMPLETON-TYPE STEEPLE DESIGNS. (L.) Fitzwilliam, N.H., Meeting House, 1816; (M.) Dublin, N.H., Meeting House, 1817; (R.) Hancock, N.H., 1819. (Photographs by the author and courtesy of the Dublin Public Library.)

construction of meeting houses perceived new designs in strictly local terms. For each of the three Templeton imitations whose documents have survived, the records cite an earlier Templeton model by location—usually the nearest town where such a model was standing—and not by the name or reputation of the architect-builders responsible for constructing them.²⁵

A comparable linear run took place in a group of meeting houses erected in the Berkshires of eastern Massachusetts and northeastern Connecticut 1789 through 1813. Built by the same individuals (among them John Hulett, Thomas Dutton, and Peter Powell), these structures appear to have been influenced by Asher Benjamin's *Country Builder's Assistant* (1797), but at least two were erected before its publication and may be the work of Charles Bul-

finch.²⁶ The design consisted of a church plan; a substantially pedimented eight-foot-deep porch or portico; a canopied belltower; and a "Venetian," or Palladian, window located in the tower. Beginning with a meeting house executed by Charles Bulfinch for the town of Pittsfield in 1789, the design reappeared with minor variations in eight towns over the next twenty-four years (Fig. 3). Three recorded votes help us follow its progress. Richmond, Massachusetts, voted in 1794 to have its structure "similar to the large meeting house in Pittsfield." Salisbury, Connecticut, voted to imitate the Richmond meeting house in 1798; and Otis, Massachusetts, voted for the same construction as Winsted, Connecticut, in 1813.²⁷ As in the Templeton chain, the design was transmitted as each town imitated a near neighbor rather than the town of origin (Pittsfield). Like

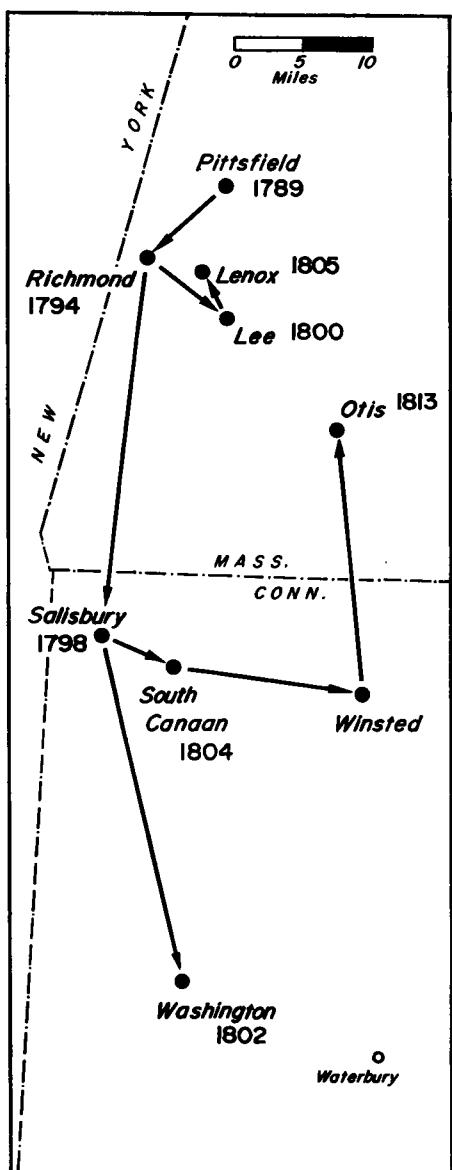


FIG. 3. THE PITTSFIELD RUN: Diffusion of church-plan and deep-porch meetinghouse designs, 1789-1813. (Drawn by the author.)

Templeton, the innovation moved rapidly—covering the sixty-four mile distance between Pittsfield and Washington in thirteen years, a rate of approximately five miles per year. However, rather than following an unbroken line running along wellworn settlement routes, it divided into three branches all moving in a southerly direction from Pittsfield; and at least one branch veers north back toward Pittsfield.

In contrast to these linear “runs,” other innovations seem to have followed a “cluster” pattern of diffusion, confining themselves to clearly designated pockets, and anchored against the flow of settlement migration. A good example of cluster diffusion is found in northeastern Connecticut after 1762 (Fig. 5). On April 26 of that year, the town of Pomfret, which had just erected a large new meeting house, voted that it

be colored on the outside of an orange color—the doors and bottom boards of a chocolate color—the windows, jets, cover boards and weather boards, colored white.²⁸

The source of this color scheme is not clear, but it is the first known use of this combination on a meeting house and indeed the first known use of orange paint on exterior clapboards.²⁹ It was quickly imitated. In 1768 Hampton, Pomfret’s neighbor to the southeast, ordered the workmen making repairs to its meeting house “to color the same something like the color of Pomfret meeting house.” The same year, Dudley, a town located just north of the Connecticut Colony border in Massachusetts, voted “to Cholour our meeting house with an orange Cholour.” In 1769 Killingly, Pomfret’s neighbor to the south, voted “that the cullering of the body of our meeting house shall be like Pomfret,” adding, on a note of apparent pride, that “the Roff shall be culled Read.” That same year Thompson, Pomfret’s immediate neighbor to the northeast, which was widening its meeting

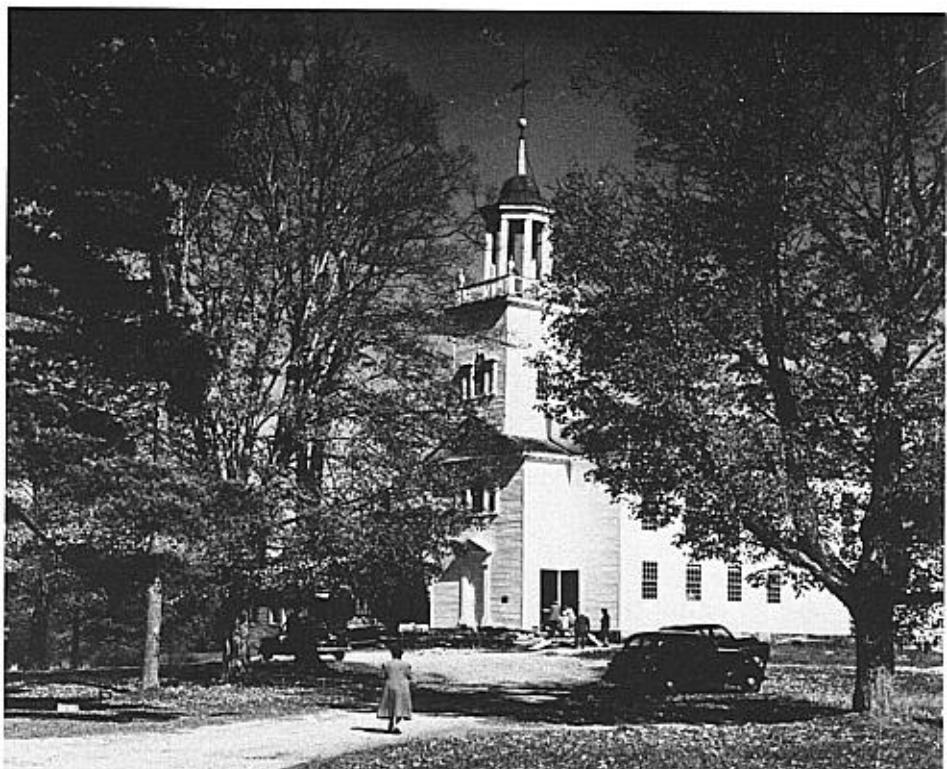


FIG. 4. OTIS, MASS., MEETING HOUSE, 1813, illustrating the Pittsfield-type design. (SPNEA Archives.)

house by inserting a fourteen-foot section, voted "That the culling of the body of our meeting house should be like Pomfret." Like Killingly, Thompson's roof was to be "cullered Read."³⁰

The differences between the Templeton run and the Pomfret cluster are readily apparent. Rather than travelling in a linear direction away from its point of origin, the Pomfret innovation stays close to it. Imitations of Pomfret's orange color scheme appear 16, 10, 14, and 6 miles distant from the town of origin in several directions simultaneously. Moreover, the usual chain linkage is absent: rather than imitating an intervening town, three of the four exam-

ples specifically cite Pomfret as the model.

The absence of sufficient color data prevents any real measurement of how rapidly or how extensively Pomfret's orange spread after 1770. That the color may have been popular in some sections of central and eastern Connecticut and a portion of central Massachusetts is suggested by two additional pieces of evidence, however. The color appears on the meeting house of the town of Holliston, Massachusetts, in 1787. The color again appears in the "bright orring" clapboards and stone-grey doors voted for the meeting house in Gilsum, New Hampshire, in 1791.³¹ Located on a direct line from Pomfret to Boston, Hollis-

ton may have been on the outer fringe of an orange pocket.

The Gilsum vote is doubly important because it provides us with the only documented use of an orange paint outside the Pomfret pocket, and because Gilsum was a cultural transplant from eastern Connecticut. Originally a Wentworth grant set aside under the name of "Boyle" in 1752, Gilsum was purchased and developed by a group of Connecticut proprietors living in Hebron, Bolton, Lyme, and Ashford. Of the forty-nine heads of households known to be residing in the town before 1791, thirteen previously lived in Hebron and six previously lived in other parts of eastern and central Connecticut. The first meetings of the Gilsum proprietors were held in Hebron in 1762. The town's selectmen, officers, and committeemen were largely from Hebron, including those responsible for building the meeting house.³² Again, the data are too weak to support a firm conclu-

sion; but, if we are correct in presuming that a plurality of the town's initial settlers influenced its meetinghouse colors, the reappearance of orange in an offshoot of or colony of the Hebron-Bolton-Tolland area of Connecticut suggests that Pomfret's orange pocket extended southwesterly into Tolland and New London counties. It also suggests that New Hampshire's Connecticut-derived settlers brought with them as part of their "cultural baggage" a disposition to paint their meeting houses the same orange color they had used in Connecticut.³³

A cluster of a different kind is found in Worcester County. Of thirty-two meeting houses known to have been raised in the central portion of this county between 1728 and 1779, fourteen were built (or were voted to be built) to fifty by forty foot specifications, with a stud height varying between twenty and twenty-three feet (Fig. 6); seven were built to other specifi-

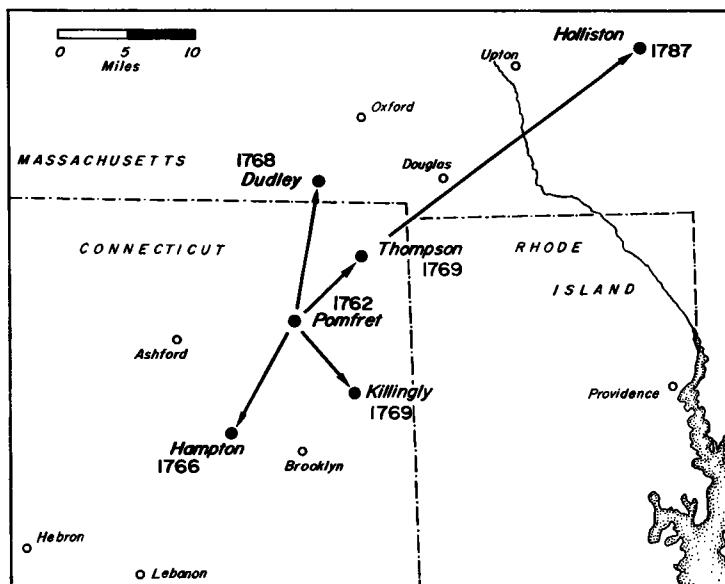


FIG. 5. THE POMFRET CLUSTER: Diffusion of orange as an exterior color, 1762-1787. (Drawn by the author.)

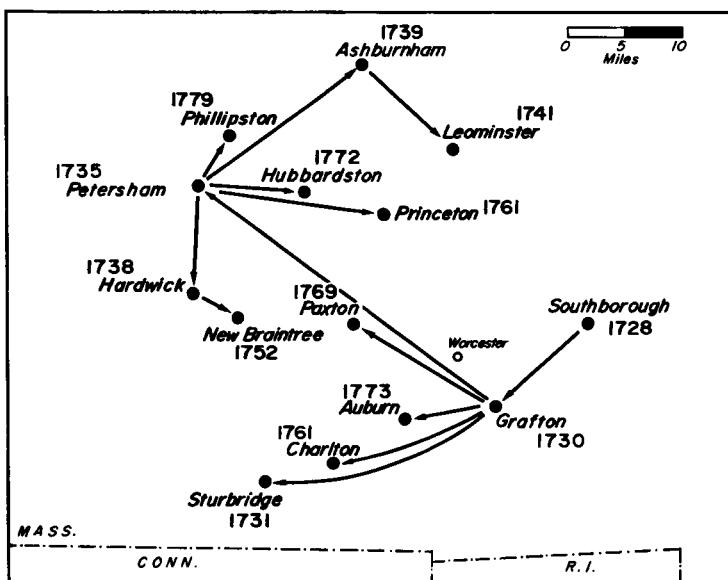


FIG. 6. THE WORCESTER CLUSTER: Diffusion of 50 by 40 foot meetinghouse dimensions in Worcester County, 1728-1779. (Drawn by the author.)

cations; and eleven to unknown specifications.³⁴ Documentation here is incomplete: the only recorded tie among any of the fourteen is the vote taken by Sturbridge in 1731 to finish its meeting house according to the one "at Hassanamisco" (Grafton) with no reference to dimensions.³⁵ Without sufficient documentation, no single town can be identified as an innovator as in the Pomfret example. Nevertheless, the fact that two out of every three Worcester County meeting houses located within a radius of twenty miles reveal identical length and width specifications suggests that their builders were conforming for reasons of economy to known framing or design standards which had become informally identified with Worcester County.³⁶

Another Worcester County innovation was the twin-porch exterior stairwell concept, which solved the problem of fitting more people into the meeting house without undertaking expensive structural en-

largements to the frame. This innovation proliferated in central Massachusetts and southern New Hampshire, but failed to appear in urban or coastal areas. Found first in Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, in 1764, the twin-porch concept reached nearby Spencer and New Braintree by 1772; Leominster by 1774; and Jaffrey, New Hampshire, by 1775. Thereafter, it was probably the dominant meetinghouse design in Worcester County and in southern and central Massachusetts before 1800.

III

Leaving aside the question whether one or the other was more typical of the New England experience as a whole, two distinctive patterns of architectural diffusion seem to be at work during the period 1640-1830 when ecclesiastical buildings were made to municipal specifications. Each pattern was associated with specific architectural features, and each followed a



FIG. 7. COHASSET, MASS., MEETING HOUSE, 1747, showing the single-porch design. (SPNEA Archives.)

particular manner of transmission. High-style innovations, which had their ultimate origin in Atlantic and Anglican urban prototypes, appear to have followed "runs"—long-range linear dispersal routes that paralleled wellworn coast-to-coast and coast-to-interior settlement migration routes. More than half of the models which specify highstyle features such as rustication, pulpit and canopy design, the at-

tached belltower concept, and the church plan reach out further than fifteen or twenty miles.

By way of contrast, vernacular innovations, which had their origin in rural areas, appear to have followed a cluster dissemination pattern that created well-defined, locally-oriented pockets of usage. Specifications for stairwells, pew designs, gallery rails, interior and exterior colors, dimen-

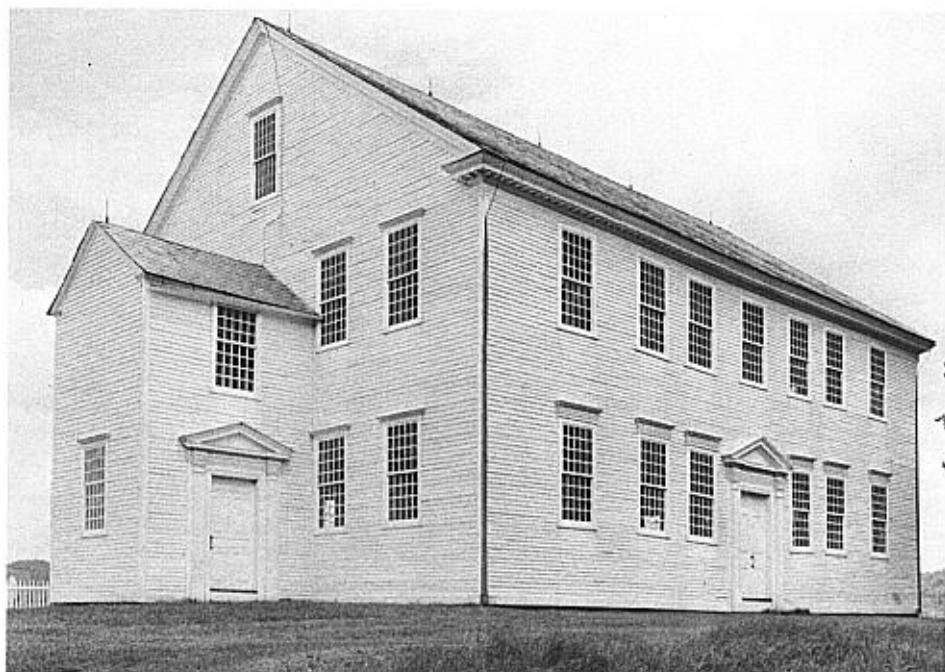


FIG. 8. ROCKINGHAM, VT., MEETING HOUSE, 1787, showing the twin-porch design. (SPNEA Archives.)

sions, and seat benches were usually drawn from models located ten miles distant or under. Although we are unable yet to reconstruct the geographical progress of cluster innovations, the available evidence suggests that in some instances it drifted slowly against the path of settlement migration routes.

In assessing these tentative conclusions, we must keep in mind the possibility that the "running" or "clustering" patterns of transmittal may have been determined less by the highstyle or vernacular characteristics of an innovation than by the longevity of the architectural feature on which it occurs and the level of investment it represented to a community. The frames and exterior shells of meeting houses were renewed approximately once every seventy-

five or one hundred years; the erection of a tower and belfry was an equally rare occasion and depended on securing an expensive bell. The construction of a pulpit was also an infrequent event and was often delayed because of its cost. By way of contrast, galleries and pews were added or renovated almost every decade; windows were reglazed almost every year; window frames were rebuilt at approximate ten or twenty year intervals; a new coat of paint was added every five or ten years. Innovations in pew styles, gallery rails, and exterior color pigments may have been perceived as being such common occurrences that a nearby model would be satisfactory: hence the "cluster." The erection of a bell-tower, or a new shell, was a much more uncommon occasion, and required a con-

siderable investment of time and public resources. A more distant model might be sought: hence the "run."

We must remember, too, that coastal and interior New England may have functioned as two distinct cultural worlds in which architectural ideas circulated relatively freely, but which crossed the line into each other only with difficulty. Once a highstyle innovation broke through the perimeters of the coastal New England cultural area, it may have moved rapidly because it was suddenly freed from previous constraints. If this is the case, we are obliged to qualify a common assumption made by architectural historians such as T. J. Wertenbaker, Edmund Sinnott, and Charles Place, who cite Boston's Christ Church, the Old South Meeting House, and the Brattle Street Church in Boston as important urban models which established rural taste.³⁷ These models may in fact have been entirely "off limits" to rural imitation, thus their influence negligible. The important models instead may have been those that evidenced the first rural breakthroughs: Guilford, Connecticut, when it introduced a standing belltower in 1726; Pittsfield and Taunton, Massachusetts, when they introduced a church plan in 1789; Templeton, Massachusetts, when it introduced a Gibbs or Wren style spire in 1811.

We have a very unambiguous picture of the scale on which most new ideas were transmitted, however, whether highstyle or vernacular. The models for the forty-nine out of eighty-six documented meeting-house-related imitations were located at a distance of ten miles or less; only a handful of such models were located at a distance of twenty-five miles or more. Only one, the First Baptist Church of Providence, cites a Boston model. This suggests that rather than being part of an Atlantic community, rural New England towns existed in a narrowly-confined world of their own whose horizons extended no more than ten miles in any direction, and whose cultural standards were formed from those displayed by their neighbors. This narrow horizon, perhaps, explains the simultaneous persistence of uniformity and regional variety in rural New England meetinghouse architecture as in so many forms of rural culture. Because cultural perceptions were arrived at through second-, third-, and fourth-hand imitations, omissions and additions generated variety inevitably and unintentionally. Meeting houses may have been as uniform as rural New Englanders knew how to make them.

APPENDIX

List of meetinghouse-related imitations in New England, 1647-1822

Imitations are arranged alphabetically by town. Numbers after town names designate parishes. Most imitations represent town and parish votes which were culled by nineteenth- and early twentieth-century town historians.

- Abington, Conn.: to use "the same dimensions as that of Pomfret," 1749.
- Abington, Conn.: seats to be "after the form of" Woodstock seats, 1749.
- Amherst 2, N.H.: to build porches after Temple model, 1787.
- Andover, Mass.: roof to be "like Salem-village"; seats to be "like Bradford," 1708.
- Andover 2, Mass.: underpinning to be "as good as" north parish, 1787.
- Antrim, N.H.: meeting house patterned after Londonderry, 1784.
- Ashford, Conn.: pews "like the pews . . . at Union," 1768.
- Barnstable (Centerville), Mass.: to be "painted in the same manner as . . . Yarmouth," 1796.
- Becket, Mass.: to be finished "as well as" Grafton, 1738.
- Bedford, N.H.: pulpit to be "the same color [as] Londonderry," 1767.
- Berlin, Conn.: galleries to be "finished" like Farmington, 1720.
- Billerica, Mass.: to use Reading as a "pattern in most respects," 1693.
- Boscawen, N.H.: to be the "same width" as Rumford (Concord), 1736.
- Bow, N.H.: to build meeting house "as large as" Pembroke, 1786.
- Bridgewater 4, Mass.: dimensions and pew plan to be the "same" as the South Meeting House, 1761.
- Brookline, Mass.: to be "of the same Demensions with" Roxbury, 1713.
- Canaan, N.H.: colors to be like Salisbury; pulpit and canopy to be like Chelmsford, 1792.
- Canterbury, Conn.: to be "rusticated . . . the same as . . . Norwich Town," 1804.
- Chatham, Mass.: dimensions to be the same as Eastham, 1730.
- Dublin, N.H.: to be "after the plan of Ashby, or Fitzwilliam," 1817.
- Dunstable, Mass.: gallery breastwork "not inferior to that" in Tyngsborough, 1774.
- Dunstable, Mass.: pulpit to be like Pepperell, 1767.
- Durham, N.H.: frame and belfry to be "like the new meet house off Hemptowne," 1719.
- Durham, N.H.: to be like that at Amherst, 1792.
- East Windsor, Conn.: to be "the same length and breadth as" the second society, 1753.
- Eastford, Conn.: to be "of equal bigness with Woodstock's West Society," 1778.
- East Haven, Conn.: pulpit and seats to be "in the form of Branford," 1719.
- Framingham, Mass.: roof to be "the same form" as Marlborough; floor, table, and seats "after the same manner and form as in Sudbury," 1715.
- Gilsum, N.H.: pulpit and canopy "to be made like Surry's," 1791.
- Goshen, Mass.: posts "two feet shorter than Chesterfield," 1780.
- Goshen, N.H.: to be "somewhat similar to the Lempster Meeting House," 1816.
- Guilford, Conn.: belfry and spire to be "in the Fashion and proportion of [that] . . . at Rhode Island," 1726.

- Hampton, Conn.: to be painted "something like the color of Pomfret meeting house," 1768.
- Hancock, N.H.: to be "nearly the size, construction, and form of the Congregational meeting house in Dublin," 1819.
- Hancock, N.H.: to be "equal to the frame of Packersfield meeting house," 1788.
- Haverhill, Mass.: seats, pulpit, galleries, windows, doors, floors, and stairs "after the pattern of" Beverly; sides "after the style of" Reading, 1696.
- Hollis, N.H.: copied from the meeting house at Billerica, 1799.
- Hubbardstown, Mass.: pulpit not to be "according to the fashion of" Rutland, but to be "equal to" Shrewsbury, 1781.
- Ipswich 2, Mass.: (Essex) turret "after the fashion, and in the proportions of" Andover, 1719.
- Jaffrey, N.H.: to be "well Compleated, and Collored like Rindge," and pulpit to be "like that in Rindge," 1774.
- Kensington, Conn.: galleries to be made "after the manner of" Farmington, 1720.
- Killingly, Conn.: to be colored "like Pomfret," 1769.
- Killingworth, Conn.: posts to be "two feet shorter than those in the First Society," 1739.
- Killingworth, Conn.: pews to be "dignified by the same rules" as East Guilford, 1743.
- Lee, Mass.: to imitate the Richmond church, 1800.
- Leominster, Mass.: dimensions to be "the same bigness with Lunenburg," 1773.
- Lexington, Mass.: to build "on the plan of the one at Concord," 1713.
- Loudon, N.H.: "to have the house the same size of the Epsom house," 1777.
- Manchester, Mass.: roof "to be of the same form as" Wenham, 1691.
- Middletown (Upper Houses), Conn.: to be finished "after the same manner" as the South Society, 1714.
- Milford, N.H.: dimensions to be "the same as" Mont Vernon, 1785.
- Northfield, Mass.: to be "of the dimensions of Swamfield" (Sunderland), 1718.
- (North) Sutton, N.H.: to copy New London, 1795.
- Norwalk, Conn.: to be "built after the manner of Fairfield," 1678.
- Nottingham, N.H.: pews to be built "in the same manner in fassion and workmanship as" Epping, 1755.
- Otis, Mass.: to be "of the same construction as the one in Winsted," 1813.
- Providence, R.I.: First Baptist Church sends men to Boston "in order to view the different churches and make a memoranda of their several dimensions and forms of architecture," 1774.
- Richmond, Mass.: to be "similar to the large meeting house in Pittsfield," 1794.
- Rockingham, Vt.: to be "Just as Large as Charlestown," 1787.
- Roxbury, Mass.: to be "similar to Newburyport meeting house," 1802.
- Salisbury, Conn.: to be modelled after Richmond, 1798.
- Sandown, N.H.: to be painted "the color of Chester," 1774.
- Springfield, Mass.: (Chicopee) to "seat the Meeting House" after the fashion of the new Meeting House in Springfield, 1753.
- Sturbridge, Mass.: to be finished "according to the articles drawn to finish the meeting house at Hassanamisco" (Grafton), 1731.
- Sullivan, N.H.: to be painted "like the one in Keene," 1822.

Sudbury, Mass.: to be built "just like the new one in Dedham," 1686.

Sudbury, Mass.: to be "as near as [it] . . . can like the new house in the West Precinct," 1726.

Surry, N.H.: to be "Glaised and painted like Keen"; to have the canopy and pulpit window finished "Exactly like Keen"; to be plastered and whitewashed "Like Keen"; and the pews painted and numbered "like Keen," 1789.

Temple, N.H.: colors to be "agreeable to Wilton . . . or as near as may be," 1781.

Templeton, Mass.: to be painted "of the color of Leominster," 1792.

Thompson, Conn.: seats to be built "after the form of" those in Woodstock, 1732.

Thompson, Conn.: "body" to be colored "like Pomfret," 1769.

Troy, N.H.: committee to "go to Templeton and examine a model house," 1812.

Watertown, Mass.: to be built "after the pattern of" Cambridge, 1656.

Westfield, Mass.: form to be "like the Hatfield meeting house," 1672.

Westford, Mass.: to build pews and seats "as they are in Medford," 1771.

Westford, Mass.: to build canopy and deacons seats "nearly in the form" of Chelmsford; exterior color to be "neer the Culler of Chelmsford"; belfry to be "the same form as Chelmsford," 1793.

Wethersfield, Conn.: seats to be built "according to the seats" at Hartford, 1647.

Wethersfield, Conn.: (Stepney parish) to be the same as that in Middletown, 1805.

Wilton, Conn.: to "observe the former model that the Prime ancient Society at Norwalk hath done," 1741.

Wilton, Conn.: to be the same "construction" as Norwalk, 1789.

Windsor, Conn.: to be "according to the Meeting House at Springfield," 1684.

Wolfeborough, N.H.: to design a meeting house "like the [one] . . . at Middleton," 1787.

Woodstock 2, Conn.: fore-seats and pews "like those in the first parish," 1747.

Woodstock, Conn.: to be "the size and form of the one lately built in Killingly," 1820.

Yarmouth, Mass.: interior colors and pews to be "in the form and fashion as Barnstable East Precinct have their's in," 1768.

NOTES

¹ A meeting house is usually distinguished from a church by its floor plan—the pulpit and main entry of a meeting house facing each other across the short side of the building. See Charles A. Place, "From Meeting House to Church in New England," *Old-Time New England*, vol. XIII, no. 2 (October, 1922), p. 69. As used in this essay, the term is broadened to include any combined ecclesiastical and municipal structure built at public expense by a town or tax-supported religious society, regardless of its architectural design. This definition includes a building such as the 1817 Fitzwilliam, New Hampshire, meeting house which was built on a church plan, but which was a public structure sharing municipal and ecclesiastical functions. But it excludes almost all Anglican churches in New England except for one or two early examples such as the McSparran Hill "church" in Wickford, Rhode Island. It also excludes structures such as the 1772 Brattle Street Church in Boston and the 1775 First Baptist Church in Providence, Rhode Island, both of which were built by private subscription following a church plan. Under this definition, the only meeting houses built after the legal separation of church and state in New England (1819 in New Hampshire, for example) were those built by Quaker societies.

² Anthony Garvan, "The Protestant Plain Style before 1630," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, vol. 9, no. 3 (October, 1950), pp. 5-13.

³ George Mooar, *Historical Manual of the South Church in Andover, Massachusetts* (Andover: Draper, 1859), p. 32.

⁴ The only known seventeenth-century survival is the Old Ship Meeting House in Hingham built in 1681 and considerably modified on two later occasions. The estimated number of meeting houses built before 1700 is derived from Marian C. Donnelly, *The New England Meeting Houses of the Seventeenth Century* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1968), Appendix B, and from miscellaneous other sources; the most comprehensive checklist of eighteenth-century survivals is found in the Appendix of Edmund M. Sinnott, *Meetinghouse & Church in Early New England* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), though his listing, too, is incomplete. Sometimes a town borrowed more than just its neighbor's style of architecture. In 1720 the new west precinct in Watertown, Massachusetts, bought the town of Newton's old meeting house for £80 and re-erected it in what is now Waltham. In 1735

Tewksbury sent a committee "to view Andover old meeting house frame" for the same purpose and found it "sound except 2 or 3 sticks." See D. Hamilton Hurd, ed., *History of Essex County, Massachusetts*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: J. W. Lewis & Co., 1888), vol. 3, p. 326; *ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 287.

⁵ J. Frederick Kelly, *Early Connecticut Meetinghouses*, 2 vols. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1948), vol. 2, p. 287.

⁶ Alfred M. Copeland, ed., *History of Hampden County, Massachusetts*, 2 vols. (Boston: Century Memorial Publishing Co., 1902), vol. 2, pp. 384-85; Edwin Hall, *The Ancient Historical Records of Norwalk, Connecticut* (Norwalk: Mallory, 1847), p. 71; Kelly, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 305; Ellen D. Larned, *History of Windham County, Connecticut* (Worcester: Hamilton, 1847-80) vol. 1, p. 317.

⁷ New Haven in 1639; Hartford Second in 1673; Wethersfield in 1686; Stamford in 1702; and Farmington in 1709. See Donnelly, *op. cit.*, pp. 122, 128; Kelly, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 157, 205; Elijah B. Huntington, *History of Stamford* (Stamford: The Author, 1868), pp. 134-36.

⁸ Watertown in 1656; Portsmouth, N.H., in 1657; Gloucester in 1698. See *The Records of the Town of Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1630-1703* (Cambridge: City, 1901), p. 85; Donnelly, *op. cit.*, pp. 124, 130.

⁹ Kelly, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 205.

¹⁰ Hurd, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 1947-48.

¹¹ Thomas Gage, *History of Rowley, Massachusetts, 1639 to the Present Time* (Boston: F. Andrews, 1840), p. 17.

¹² Sarah L. Baily, *Historical Sketches of Andover, Massachusetts* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1880), p. 430; Kelly, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 249.

¹³ Samuel A. Drake, *History of Middlesex County, Massachusetts* (Boston: Estes, 1880), pp. 468-69.

¹⁴ Larned, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, pp. 53, 277; William Chauncey Fowler, *History of Durham, Connecticut, 1662-1866* (Hartford: Wiley, 1866), pp. 92-93; Kelly, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 164.

¹⁵ Charles Collard Adams, *Middletown Upper Houses: A History of the North Society of Middletown, Connecticut, from 1650 to 1800* (New York: Grafton Press, 1908), p. 31; Sarah E. Hughes, *History of East Haven* (New Haven: Tuttle, 1908) p. 77.

¹⁷ Kelly, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. 172; George C. Mason, *Annals of Trinity Church, Newport, R.I., 1698-1821* (Newport: Mason, 1880), p. 40.

¹⁸ "Essay on the Laying Out of Towns," *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, ser. 5, vol. 1 (Boston: Published by the Society, 1871), p. 475.

¹⁹ A sampling of five date periods between 1754 and 1779 reveals that Patten recorded business transactions and social visits principally in Amherst (30 visits), Merrimack (15 visits), Litchfield (68 visits), and Londonderry (45 visits), all contiguous to Bedford, and populated by the same Scotch-Irish families which settled Londonderry in 1719. See *Diary of Matthew Patten of Bedford, New Hampshire, 1754-1788* (Concord, N.H.: Rumford, 1903). A sampling of three date periods between 1728 and 1738 in Joshua Hempstead's *Diary, 1711-1758* (New London: New London County Historical Society, 1901), reveals Hempstead travelling and staying overnight in Stonington 28 times; Groton, 20; Norwich, 12; and Montville, 9. In this same period he made five trips to Hartford, two to Long Island, and five to coastal towns such as Saybrook and New Haven. Like Patten, Hempstead was a probate judge and travelled professionally.

²⁰ Edwin G. Adams, *Historical Discourse on the 100th Anniversary of the First Congregational Church at Templeton* (Boston: Crosby, Nichols, 1857), p. 50.

²¹ Sinnott, *op. cit.*, pp. 96-99. Several Templeton models were built outside of the Fitzwilliam-to-Newport chain. An exact replica of the steeple was attached to the Jaffrey, N.H., 1775 meeting house in 1823. A Templeton model in its entirety was erected in Framingham in 1825.

²² On the evidence of Barber's imprecise sketch of the Brimfield church in 1832, the belfry and spire did not conform to the Templeton model; however, the sketch is so small that it does not provide a reliable facsimile. See John W. Barber, *Historical Collections of Massachusetts* (Worcester: Lazell, 1844), p. 277.

²³ Peter Benes, "From Ainsworth to Watts: A Cultural Geography of Psalmody Practices in New England, 1620-1810." Unpublished manuscript in the possession of the author.

²⁴ A. M. Caverly, *History of Troy, New Hampshire* (Keene: Sentinel, 1859), p. 131; Charles Mason, *History of Dublin, N.H.* (Boston: John Wilson and Son, 1855), p. 205; William W. Hayward, *History of Hancock, New Hampshire, 1764-1889*, 2 vols. (Lowell, Mass.: Vox Populi Press, 1889), vol. 1, p. 143. Where Jonathan

Cutting of Fitzwilliam was involved in the building of two of these structures and Elias Carter only one, it is possible that Cutting had more to do with the design of the Templeton model than Carter.

²⁵ Of the seven Templeton-model steeples and porches erected in 1811 through 1822, only the Templeton original is known to have been contracted to the architect-builder Elias Carter. The remaining six were apparently contracted to others at a time when Carter himself had been hired to build meeting houses at Mendon, Massachusetts, and Milford, Connecticut, where he used a different design. See Harriette M. Forbes, "Elias Carter, Architect, of Worcester, Mass." *Old-Time New England*, vol. 11, no. 2 (October, 1920), pp. 60-61.

²⁶ Sinnott, *op. cit.*, pp. 76-77.

²⁷ Katharine H. Annin, *Richmond, Massachusetts, The Story of a Berkshire Town and Its People, 1765-1965* (Richmond: Civic Association, 1964), p. 62; Kelly *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 176; D. D. Field, ed., *History of Berkshire County, Massachusetts*, 2 vols. (New York: J. B. Beers, 1885), vol. 2, pp. 261-62.

²⁸ *150th Anniversary of the First Church in Pomfret, Connecticut* (Danielson: Transcript Press, 1866), pp. 43-44.

²⁹ The first known use of a color pigment in the varnishes and oils employed to preserve exterior clapboarding took place in Petersham, Massachusetts, when Thomas Dick was paid £ 3-10-0 in 1738 "for coloring the meeting house" built in that town in 1735. (Thomas and John Dick were paid for building the Pelham meeting house in 1743.) East Guilford, Connecticut, voted for a "lead" color in 1742; the second parish in Rowley, Massachusetts, paid for "redding" its meeting house in 1744; Hadley, Massachusetts, and East Hartford and Norwich First in Connecticut voted for exterior coloring in 1753 and 1754. See Edmund B. Wilson, *Address Delivered in Petersham, Massachusetts* (Boston: Crosby, Nichols, 1855), p. 26; C. O. Parmenter, *History of Pelham, Massachusetts, from 1738 to 1898* (Amherst: Carpenter & Morehouse, 1898); James A. Gallup, *Historical Discourse, Congregational Church in Madison, Connecticut, 1707-1877* (New Haven: Punderson and Crisand, 1878), p. 24; Gage *op. cit.*, p. 92; Joseph O. Goodwin, *East Hartford: Its History and Traditions* (Hartford: Case, Lockwood, & Brainard, 1878), p. 130; Sylvester Judd, *History of Hadley, Massachusetts* (Springfield: H.R. Hunting, 1905), p. 314; Kelly, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 112.

³⁰ Richard M. Bayles, *History of Windham County, Connecticut* (New York: W.W. Preston, 1889), p. 384; *Dudley Town Records, 1754-1794* (Pawtucket: Adam Sutcliffe Co., 1894), p. 113; Kelly, *op. cit.*, vol. 1, p. xlvii; Larned, *op. cit.*, p. 81.

³¹ D. Hamilton Hurd, *History of Middlesex County, Massachusetts*, 3 vols. (Philadelphia: J.W. Lewis, 1890), vol. 3 p. 435; Silvanus Hayward, *Address delivered at the Centennial of the Congregational Church at Gilsum, N.H.* (Dover, N.H.: Goodwin, 1873), p. 19.

³² Silvanus Hayward, *History of Gilsum, N.H., 1752-1879* (Manchester: The Author, 1881), pp. 18, 188-250.

³³ The leap-frogging of stylistic preferences along settlement lines is found elsewhere in New Hampshire. When the Presbyterian church in Bedford, New Hampshire, was making improvements to the pulpit of the meeting house, it voted to paint it "the same color as the Rev. Mr. McGregor's pulpit is, in Londonderry." See *History of Bedford, N.H., from 1737* (Concord, N.H.: Published by the Town, 1903), p. 328. Like other central Merrimack valley towns, Bedford was founded and settled primarily by Scotch-Irish from Londonderry. The vote, in effect, by-passed intervening towns between Bedford and Londonderry, and rather than being guided by an "immediate neighbor" model, it was guided by the origin of Bedford's settlers.

³⁴ *History of Worcester County*, 2 vols. (Boston: C. F. Jewett, 1879), vol. 2, pp. 120, 196, 217-18,

237, 289, 364; Frederick Clifton Pierce, *History of Grafton, Worcester County, Massachusetts* (Worcester: Charles Hamilton, 1879), p. 165; Wilson, *op. cit.*, p. 25; Lucius R. Paige, *History of Hardwick, Massachusetts* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin & Co., 1883), p. 179; John Cushing, *Half Century Sermon* (Worcester: W. Manning, 1819), p. 9; J. M. Stowe, *History of the Town of Hubbardstown, Worcester County, Massachusetts* (Hubbardstown: The Committee, 1881), p. 123; *Auburn, Massachusetts* (Auburn: Auburn Centennial Committee, 1937), pp. 25-32.

³⁵ *History of Worcester County*, *op. cit.*, vol. 2, p. 364.

³⁶ This data must be qualified by the fact that 50 by 40 meeting houses were common size. The three most common meetinghouse sizes throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were "frontier" dimensions of 40 by 35 feet and 45 by 35 and an "established" dimension of 50 by 40 feet. Literally scores of all three sizes were voted and built throughout New England, and their use is a good gauge of a town's demographic and economic evolution. The frequency of this size in Worcester, however, surpassed that of any other county in New England.

³⁷ Thomas J. Wertenbaker, *The Puritan Oligarchy* (New York: Charles Scribners & Sons, 1947), pp. 113-14; Sinnott, *op. cit.*, p. 43; Charles A. Place, "From Meetinghouse to Church in New England," *Old-Time New England*, vol. XIII, no. 3 (January, 1923), p. 121.