DOW GEORGE FRANCIS

EVERY DAY LIFE IN THE MASSACHUSETTS BAY COLONY

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PREFACE

A picture of some phases of life in the early days of the Massachusetts Bay Colony is presented in the following pages; lightly sketched, as much of the detail has become dim or has disappeared with the passage of years, it never having been placed on record even among the traditions. For why keep an exact record of doings with which every one is familiar? It follows that many of the every day happenings, the manners and customs of daily life – much of the intimate detail of existence in the Colony, in the seventeenth century, have been lost forever.

Few realize how modern are the furnishings and comforts of our present-day houses and how different was the home life of our ancestors. Chairs were unknown in ordinary English households until a generation or so before the sailing of the *Mayflower*. Hats were worn at meals and the use of table forks did not become general until the last of the 1600s. Food was placed in the mouth with the knife or the fingers. Washing the hands and face was not considered essential on rising from bed

in the morning and few of the laboring classes in any country in Europe washed their faces every day.

This is a collection of source materials, somewhat digested, rather than a comprehensive, well-balanced narrative of daily life in the Colony – an impossible task at this late day. Moreover, the exact limitations of the Colonial Period have not been observed too closely as it has seemed desirable to include some material from newspapers and other later sources.

CHAPTER I
The Voyage To Massachusetts

"Before you come," wrote Rev. Francis Higginson, the first minister at Salem, "be careful to be strongly instructed what things are fittest to bring with you for your more comfortable passage at sea, as also for your husbandry occasions when you come to the land. For when you are once parted with England you shall meete neither markets nor fayres to buy what you want. Therefore be sure to furnish yourselves with things fitting to be had before you come: as meale for bread, malt for drinke, woolen and linnen cloath, and leather for shoes, and all manner of carpenters tools, and a great deale of iron and steele to make nails, and locks for houses, and furniture for ploughs and carts, and glasse for windows, and many other things which were better for you to think of there than to want them here."[1] Elsewhere the good pastor set down "A catalogue of such needfull things as every Planter doth or ought to provide to go to New England" in which he enumerated the necessary victuals per person for the first year, viz.:

"8 Bushels of meale, 2 Bushels of pease, 2 Bushels of Otemeale, 1 Gallon of Aquavitae, 1 Gallon of Oyle, 2 Gallons of Vinegar, 1 Firkin of Butter; also Cheese, Bacon, Sugar, Pepper,

[1] Rev. Francis Higginson, *New-Englands Plantation*, London, 1630.

Cloves, Mace, Cinnamon, Nutmegs and Fruit."

The household implements listed were: "1 Iron pot, 1 Kettel, 1 Frying pan, 1 Gridiron, 2 Skellets, 1 Spit, Wooden Platters, Dishes, Spoons and Trenchers."

Mr. Higginson listed in detail the food supplies required per person for a year, including a good variety of spices; and also the clothing for a man, which included a Monmouth cap, a suit of canvas, a suit of freize, a suit of cloth, four pairs of shoes, three shirts and three falling bands, a pair of blankets, a coarse rug and seven ells of canvas with which to make a bed and bolster. The settler must also bring with him a complete armor, with a long piece, sword, bandoleer and ammunition, tools for cultivating the soil and for working wood, and also household implements – a limited equipment, comparable with the kit packed by the scout or mining prospector of more recent times.

On looking backward over the span of three centuries, Time lends an enchantment to these Puritan forefathers of present-day Massachusetts. Worshiping descendants have placed halos about their heads and the hardships of life during the early years have been magnified to the extent that these independent-minded Englishmen have become types of suffering fortitude – martyrs to the noble cause of free religion and self-government. That is a long tale, however, carrying with it many qualifications, and cannot be enlarged upon here. In what follows, it should always be borne in mind that aside from the Dutch at New Amsterdam and the small colony of Swedes on the Delaware, it was English

stock that settled the American colonies and that these men and women brought with them a background of generations of English life. Their standards of living, manner of working their trades and natural aptitude for barter and commerce were all modeled upon English life and customs. It was only natural that this should be so. The ships crossed the Atlantic at comparatively frequent intervals and their holds came filled with all kinds of necessities and luxuries required by English standards of living – foodstuffs, fabrics and implements which the shops of London, Plymouth or Bristol could supply and which could not be produced by the American settlements. To obtain these refinements of life the colonists required only money or merchandise. Lumber, raw or manufactured, salted fish, beaver and peltry, plantation-built vessels and other products of the colonies, could be easily converted into the comforts of English life for sale in the shops across the Atlantic.

The Rev. Francis Higginson came over in the *Talbot*, a ship of three hundred tons burden, which was armed with nineteen guns and carried a crew of thirty men. She brought over one hundred passengers. Sailing with her was the ship *George* of three hundred tons, in which came fifty-two passengers and a stock of cattle, twelve mares, thirty cows and some goats. From the original records of the Massachusetts Bay Company in New England we learn what food supplies were shipped on board the *Talbot* for the American voyage. The amount was supposed to be sufficient for one hundred and thirty-five men for three months. As a matter

of fact, the voyage from Gravesend to the anchorage in Salem harbor occupied sixty-eight days.

The ship carried 22 hogsheads of salted beef, 12,000 of bread (biscuits), 40 bushels of peas, 20 barrels of oatmeal, 450 pounds of salt fish, 10 firkins of butter and 1,200 pounds of cheese. To wash down this food they took on board 6 tons of water, 45 tons of beer, 20 gallons of brandy, 20 gallons of Spanish wine (Malaga and Canary), 2 tierces of beer vinegar and 20 gallons of olive oil.[2] During the voyage two died of smallpox, including a blasphemous seaman. A child died of consumption and a dog fell overboard and could not be recovered. The rest came through and reached Salem harbor in a good state of health.

The Massachusetts Bay Company seems to have maintained a "company store," in the modern phrase, at which the colonists might obtain clothing, fabrics, foodstuffs and supplies of all sorts. When Governor Endecott came over in 1628, the Company sent extra clothing sufficient for one hundred men including three hundred suits of clothes, four hundred shirts and four hundred pairs of shoes. Two hundred of the suits of clothes consisted of doublet and hose made up of leather, lined with oiled skin leather, and fastened with hooks and eyes. The other suits were made up of Hampshire kerseys, the doublets lined with linen and the hose with skins. There were a hundred waistcoats of green cotton bound about with red tape, a hundred Monmouth caps, at two shillings each, five hundred red knit caps, milled, at five

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[2] *Transactions of the American Antiquarian Society*, Vol. III, p. 12.

pence each, and one hundred black hats, lined in the brows with leather. This store supplied the natural wear and tear of headgear among the hundred men. The stock contained four hundred pairs of knit stockings, ten dozen pairs of Norwich garters, three hundred plain falling bands, two hundred handkerchiefs and a stock of sheer linen with which to made up other handkerchiefs. Scotch ticking was supplied for beds and bolsters, with wool to put therein. The blankets were of Welsh cotton and fifty rugs were sent over to place over the blankets, while mats were supplied "to lye vnder 50 bedds aboard shippe."[3]

During the ten years that followed the settlement of the Massachusetts Bay, a continuous flow of emigration from England crossed the Atlantic in all kinds of available sailing craft.[4] The passage usually cost £5 per person and this included provisions provided by the ship such as "salt Beefe, Porke, salt Fish, Butter, Cheese, Pease, Pottage, Water-grewell, and such kinde of Victualls, with good Biskets, and sixe-shilling Beere; yet it will be necessary to carry some comfortable refreshing of fresh victuall. As first, for such as have ability, some Conserves, and good Clarret Wine to burne at Sea; Or you may have it by some of your Vintners or Wine-Coopers burned here, & put into Vessels, which will keepe much better than other burnt Wine,

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[3] *Transactions of the American Antiquarian Society*, Vol. III, p. 6.

[4] Between 1630 and 1643,198 ships brought over 21,200 passengers. – Edward Johnson, *Wonder Working Providence*, London, 1654.John Josselyn, coming to New England in 1638, mentions in his journal of the voyage sighting or speaking thirteen vessels between the Scilly Isles and the New England coast.

it is a very comfortable thing for the stomacke; or such as are Sea-sicke: Sallat-oyle likewise, Prunes are good to be stewed: Sugar for many things: White Biskets, and Egs, and Bacon, Rice, Poultry, and some weather-sheepe to Kill aboard the Ship: and fine flowre-baked meates, will keepe about a weeke or nine days at Sea. Iuyce of Lemons well put up, is good either to prevent or curre the Scurvy.[5] Here it must not be forgotten to carry small Skillets or Pipkins, and small frying-panns, to dresse their victualls in at Sea. For bedding, so it be easie, and cleanly, and warme, it is no matter how old or coarse it be for the use of the Sea: and so likewise for Apparrell, the oldest cloathes be the fittest, with a long coarse coate to keepe better things from the pitched ropes and plankes. Whosoever shall put to Sea in a stoute and well-conditioned ship, having an honest Master, and loving Seamen, shall not neede to feare, but he shall finde as good content at Sea, as at Land.[6]

The *Mayflower* shipped 15,000 brown biscuit and 5,000 white, that is, hard bread, i.e. crackers; also smoked or half-cooked bacon, as it came from the smokehouse, which was much liked with the biscuit and when fried was considered a delicacy. Haberdyne (dried salted codfish) was also a staple article of diet; also smoked herring. Potatoes were practically unknown at that

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[5] Anti-scorbutics were very necessary for the long voyage. John Josselyn during his first voyage (1638) writes that a young man, a servant to one of the passengers, "was whipt naked at the Cap-stern, with a Cat with Nine tails, for filching 9 great Lemmons out of the Chirurgeons Cabbin, which he eat rinds and all in less than an hours time."

[6] William Wood, *New-Englands Prospect*, London, 1634.

time and the store of cabbages, turnips, onions, parsnips, etc., soon ran short and gave way to boiled mush, oatmeal, pease puddings, etc. Their beer was carried in iron-bound casks.

When passengers came aboard vessels bound for New England in those early days, how did they stow themselves and their possessions? The *Mayflower* had a length of about 110 feet and measured about 244 tons. It was originally intended that she should carry ninety passengers, men, women and children, but when the *Speedwell* put back, twelve of her passengers were taken aboard, and two boys were born during the voyage. The ship also carried a crew of twenty to twenty-five men, and officers and petty officers, about sixteen in number, would bring the total of those aboard to one hundred and forty or more. Goats, pigs, and poultry occupied pens on the upper or spar deck and in the boats carried there. Small sleeping cabins were provided for the ship's officers and the more important passengers; most of the company slept in narrow bunks, in hammocks, and on pallet beds of canvas filled with straw, placed on the deck beneath the hammocks. The crew bunked in the forecastle. The chests and personal possessions of the passengers were stowed below on the lower deck where the food, water and ship's stores were kept. On the *Arbella*, Governor Winthrop's ship, the male passengers lodged on the gundeck and four men were "ordered to keep that room clean."

The ship *Whale*, in 1632, brought thirty passengers, including Mr. Wilson and Mr. Dummer, all in good health, and seventy

cows of which they lost but two. The ship *Regard* of Barnstaple, 200 tons, arrived in 1634, brought twenty passengers and about fifty cattle. The ship *Society* of Boston, N. E., 220 tons, with a crew of thirty-three men, arrived in 1663, with seventy-seven passengers. A notable example of fortitude is found in the voyage of the sloop *Sparrow Hawk*, that sailed from London in 1626 for Virginia and having been blown off her course was wrecked on Cape Cod.

She was only forty feet in length, had a breadth of beam of twelve feet and ten inches, and a depth of nine feet, seven and one-half inches. Bradford in his *History* records that she carried "many passengers in her and sundrie goods … the cheefe amongst these people was one Mr. Fells and Mr. Sibsie, which had many servants belonging unto them, many of them being Irish. Some others ther were yt had a servante or 2 a piece; but ye most were servants, and such as were ingaged to the former persons, who also had ye most goods … they had been 6 weeks at sea, and had no water, nor beere, nor any woode left, but had burnt up all their emptie caske."[7] And this happened in the month of December!

In those days cooking on shore was done in an open fireplace. On shipboard, the larger vessels were provided with an open "hearth" made of cast iron sometimes weighing five hundred pounds and over. More commonly a hearth of bricks was laid on deck, over which stood an iron tripod from which the kettles

[7] William Bradford, *History of Plymouth Plantation*, Boston, 1856.

hung. More crudely still a bed of sand filled a wooden frame and on this the fire was built, commonly of charcoal. On the ship *Arbella*, in which came Governor John Winthrop and his company, in 1630, the "cookroom" was near a hatchway opening into the hold. The captain, his officers and the principal men among the passengers dined in the "round house," a cabin in the stern over the high quarter-deck. Lady Arbella Johnson and the gentlewomen aboard dined in the great cabin on the quarter-deck. The passengers ate their food wherever convenient on the main deck or in good weather, on the spar deck above. Years later, a new ship lying at anchor in Boston harbor was struck by lightning which "melted the top of the iron spindle of the vane of the mainmast" and passing through the long boat, which lay on the deck, killed two men and injured two others as "they were eating together off the Hen-Coop, near the Main Mast."

The ship supplied each passenger with a simple ration of food distributed by the quartermasters, which each family or self arranged group of passengers cooked at a common hearth as opportunity and the weather permitted. Of necessity much food was served cold and beer was the principal drink. John Josselyn, Gent., who visited New England in 1638, records "the common proportion of Victualls for the Sea to a Mess, being 4 men, is as followeth:

"Two pieces of Beef, of 3 pound and ¼ *per* piece.

"Four pound of *Bread*.

"One pint ¼ of *Pease*.

"Four Gallons of *Bear*, with *Mustard* and *Vinegar* for three flesh dayes in the week.

"For four fish dayes, to each Mess *per* day, two pieces of *Codd* or *Habberdine*, making three pieces of fish.

"One quarter of a pound of *Butter*.

"Four pound of *Bread*.

"Three quarters of a pound of *Cheese*.

"*Bear* is before.

"*Oatmeal per* day, for 50 men, Gallon 1. and so proportionable for more or fewer.

"Thus you see the ship's provision, is *Beef* or *Porke*, *Fish*, *Butter*, *Cheese*, *Pease*, *Pottage*, *Water gruel*, *Bisket*, and six-shilling *Bear*.

"For private fresh provision, you may carry with you (in case you, or any of yours should be sick at Sea) Conserves of *Roses*, *Clove-Gilliflowers*, *Wormwood*, *Green-Ginger*, *Burnt-Wine*, *English Spirits*, *Prunes* to stew, *Raisons* of the *Sun*, *Currence*, *Sugar*, *Nutmeg*, *Mace*, *Cinnamon*, *Pepper* and *Ginger*, *White Bisket*, or *Spanish Rusk*, Eggs, Rice, *Juice* of *Lemmons*, well put up to cure, or prevent the Scurvy. Small *Skillets*, *Pipkins*, *Porrengers*, and small *Frying pans*.

"To prevent or take away Sea sickness, Conserve of *Wormwood* is very proper."[8]

The settler also must take with him a supply of food to answer his needs on reaching Massachusetts, and it was advised that

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[8] John Josselyn, *Two Voyages to New England*, London, 1675.

enough for the space of a year might be required in which case each person should be certain to have in store 8 bushels of meal, 2 bushels pease, 2 bushels oatmeal, 1 gallon brandy, 1 gallon oil and 2 gallons vinegar. Sugar could be had in New England as the Colonial vessels were bringing it from the West Indies in the way of trade, but spices, necessary to the English diet, must be brought from England.

John Josselyn, writing in 1638, listed the following articles as necessary equipment for every family coming to New England, viz.:

Bellows	£0	2	0
Scoop		0	9
Great pail		0	10
Casting shovel		0	10
A sack		2	4
Lanthorn		1	3
Tobacco pipes			
5 broad howes		10	0
5 narrow howes		6	8
5 felling axes		7	6
2 hand saws		10	0
1 whip saw		10	0
1 file and wrest		10	
2 hammers		2	0
2 augers		1	0
Wheels for a cart		14	0
Wheel barrow		6	0
Canoe	3	0	0
Short oak ladder		0	10
Plough		3	9
Axle tree		0	8
Cart		10	0
3 shovels		4	6
2 spades		3	0
2 broad axes		7	4
6 chisels		3	0
3 gimblets		0	6
2 hatchets		3	6
2 frows		3	0
2 hand bills		3	4
Nails of all sorts	2	0	0
3 locks and 3 pr. fetters		5	10
2 curry combs		0	11
Brand for beasts		0	6
Hand vise		2	6

Household implements for a family of six persons, viz.:

1 iron pot	0	7	0
1 great copper kettle	2	0	0
1 small kettle		10	0
1 lesser kettle		6	0
1 large frying pan		2	6
1 small frying pan		1	8
1 brass mortar	0	3	0
1 spit		2	0
1 grid iron		1	0
2 skillets		5	0
Platters, dishes and spoons of wood		4	0

The above prices are estimated costs in England and the freight on the same would be reckoned at the rate of half a ton per person.

The vessels which carried the great emigration to New England between 1630 and 1640 were of small tonnage and the passenger accommodations on board were limited in space and barren of creature comforts. Small wonder that the health of many of the first settlers, shaken by the passage at sea, paid toll to the severity of the New England climate – the biting cold of the winter and the heat of the summer days to which they were unaccustomed.

"It was not because the Country was unhealthful, but because their bodies were corrupted with sea-diet, which was naught,

their Beefe and Porke being tainted, their Butter and Cheese corrupted, their Fish rotten, and voyage long, by reason of crosse Windes, so that winter approaching before they could get warme houses, and the searching sharpnes of that purer Climate, creeping in at the crannies of their crazed bodies, caused death and sickness."[9]

The ship *Talbot*, on which Mr. Higginson sailed, brought over one hundred passengers and thirty seamen. She measured nearly eighty-six feet in length and had a depth of hold of eleven feet. By present-day measurement she was about two hundred tons burden. The space between decks, where the passengers slept and spent much time during the dreary voyage, was so low that a tall man could not stand erect, and whenever a severe storm arose, so that the ports and hatches must be kept closed, the air below deck in time must have become intolerable. Such a storm arose when the *Talbot* was thirty-three days out and "ye wind blew mightily, ye sea roared and ye waves tossed us horribly; besides it was fearfull darke and ye mariners made us afraid with their running here and there and lowd crying one to another to pull at this and yt rope."

These small emigrant ships of the seventeenth century, besides men, women and children, brought over much livestock housed in temporary pens and shelters built amidships. The long boat or pinnace was also carried on board, all of which left little room for movement about the deck. But these three hundred

[9] Wood, *New-Englands Prospect*, London, 1634.

tons ships were traveling palaces when compared with some of the smaller craft that boldly ventured across the Atlantic. Barks, ketches, pinks and other small vessels of less than fifty tons burden were common. In 1635, a "small Norsey bark" of twenty-five tons reached Boston. She was bound for Connecticut, but a stormy voyage had forced her to seek safety in Boston harbor. This vessel, little over thirty feet in length, brought over fourteen passengers, including two women, with their household goods.

CHAPTER II
Their Early Shelters and Later Dwellings

There is a widespread misconception that the colonists on reaching Massachusetts proceeded immediately to build log houses in which to live. Historians have described these log houses as chinked with moss and clay and as having earth floors, precisely the type of house built on the frontier and in the logging camps at a much later period. A well-known picture of Leyden Street, at Plymouth, shows a double row of log houses reaching up the hillside, which the Pilgrims are supposed to have constructed. In point of fact, no contemporary evidence has been found that supports the present-day theory. The early accounts of what took place in the days following the settlement along the coast are full of interesting details relating to day-by-day happenings but nowhere do we find allusion to a log house such as modern historians assume existed at that time. This unique form of construction, however, had been used in Scandinavia since the Middle Ages and also in parts of Germany, but never did it appear in England. It also is well established that the North American Indians knew nothing of this method of construction, even the Iroquois tribe who built a "long house," so-called.

The Swedes and Finns who settled in Delaware in 1638

introduced the log house built of logs with notched ends, with which they were familiar in their homeland. What more natural? Jasper Dankers and Peter Sluyter, Dutch travelers, made a tour of the American colonies in 1679-1680, and while passing through New Jersey, describe the house of Jacob Hendricks, near the town of Burlington, as follows:

"The house, although not much larger than where we were the last night, was somewhat better and tighter, being made according to the Swedish mode, and as they usually build their houses here, which are block-houses, being nothing less than entire trees, split through the middle, or squared out of the rough, and placed in the form of a square, upon each other, as high as they wish to have the house; the ends of these timbers are let into each other, about a foot from the ends, half of one into half of the other, the whole structure is thus made without a nail or a spike. The ceiling and roof do not exhibit much finer work, except amongst the most careful people, who have the ceiling planked and a glass window. The doors are wide enough, but very low, so that you have to stoop in entering. These houses are quite tight and warm: but the chimney is placed in a corner. My comrade and myself had some deer skins, spread upon the floor to lie on, and we were, therefore, quite well off and could get some rest."[10]

These travelers also spent a night at a Quaker's house near where a gristmill had been erected on a creek above the falls at

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[10] *Memoirs of the Long Island Historical Society*, Vol. I.

what is now Trenton.

"Here we had to lodge: and although we were too tired to eat, we had to remain sitting upright the whole night, not being able to find room enough to lie upon the ground. We had a fire, however, but the dwellings are so wretchedly constructed, that if you are not close to the fire, as almost to burn yourself, you cannot keep warm, for the wind blows through them everywhere. Most of the English and many others, have their houses made of nothing but clapboards, as they call them there, in this manner: they first make a wooden frame, the same as they do in Westphalia, but not so strong, they then split the boards of clapboard, so that they are like cooper's pipe-staves, except they are not bent. These are made very thin, with a large knife, so that the thickest edge is about a little finger thick, and the other is made sharp, like the edge of a knife. They are about five or six feet long, and are nailed on the outside of the frame, with the ends lapped over each other. They are not usually laid so close together, as to prevent you from sticking a finger between them, in consequence either of their not being well joined, or the boards being crooked. When it is cold and windy, the best people plaster them with clay. Such are most all the English houses in the country."[11]

The only type of log construction in use in New England in the early days existed in garrison houses built as a protection against the Indians. In every instance the logs were carefully hewed square, to make a close fit against each other, and never notched

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[11] *Memoirs of the Long Island Historical Society*, Vol. I.

at the ends, sometimes halved at the corners of the structure, but usually dove-tailed into each other at the ends in medieval military manner. Several of these garrison houses still exist and although afterwards used as dwellings, at first they were built as forts.

What happened at the Plymouth Colony after the *Mayflower* came to anchor? The wind blew very hard for two days and the next day, Saturday, December 23, 1620, as many as could went ashore: "felled and carried timber, to provide themselves stuff for building," and the following Monday "we went on shore, some to fell timber, some to saw, some to rive, and some to carry; so no man rested all that day."[12] Bradford writes "that they builte a forte with good timber" which Isaac de Rasieres described in 1627 as "a large square house, made of thick sawn planks, stayed with oak beams." The oldest existing houses in the Plymouth Colony are built in the same manner and some half dozen or more seventeenth-century plank houses may yet be seen north of Boston. Moreover, when the ship *Fortune* sailed from Plymouth in the summer of 1621, the larger part of her lading consisted of "clapboards and wainscott," showing clearly that the colonists soon after landing had dug saw pits and produced boards in quantity suitable for the construction of houses and for exportation.

The first settlers in the Massachusetts Bay brought with them mechanics of all kinds, well equipped with tools, and it is

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[12] *Mourt's Relation*, Boston, 1841.

altogether probable that these workmen plied their trades on this side of the Atlantic exactly as they had been taught through long centuries of apprenticeship in England. The houses of that early period, still remaining, all resemble similar English structures. Upon arrival, however, the need for shelter was imperative, and all sorts of rude expedients were adopted. Deacon Bartholomew Green, the printer of the *Boston News-Letter*, related that when his father arrived at Boston in 1630, "for lack of housing he was wont to find shelter at night in an empty cask," and during the following winter many of the poorer sort still continued to live in tents through lack of better housing. When Roger Clap arrived at Charlestown in 1630 he "found some Wigwams and one House … in the meantime before they could build at Boston, they lived many of them in tents and Wigwams."

John Winthrop, in his *Journal*, writes that "the poorer sort of people (who lay long in tents) were much afflicted with scurvy and many died, especially at Boston and Charlestown." He also makes several references to English wigwams. In September, 1630, one Fitch, of Watertown, had his wigwam burned down with all his goods and two months later John Firman, also of Watertown, lost his English wigwam.

Edward Johnson, in his *Wonder-Working Providence*, mentions the rude shelters of the first settlers. "They kept off the short showers from their lodgings, but the long rains penetrated through to their disturbance in the night season, yet in those poor wigwams they sang Psalms, praise and pray their God till they

can provide them homes which ordinarily was not wont to be with many till the earth by the Lord's blessing brought forth bread to feed them, their wives and little ones."

The Rev. Francis Higginson, in his *New-Englands Plantation*, printed in 1630, describes the wigwams built by the Indians living at Salem as "verie little and homely, but made with small poles prick't into the ground and so bended and fastened at the tops and on the side, they are matted with boughes and covered with sedge and old mats." It seems likely that when the English built themselves "English wigwams," they copied the small structures built by the Indians, especially as mats suitable for covering might be obtained from the Indians by barter, and old pieces of sailcloth doubtless might be obtained from the shipping stores. It seems unlikely that an Englishman living in one of these structures during the winter season would be content to allow the smoke from his fire to find its way out through a hole in the roof in the Indian fashion. It is more likely that a fireplace, built of stones or bricks, would be constructed at one end of an "English wigwam." A door in hewed frame, with wooden hinges, probably was installed as a suitable substitute for the Indian mat lifted upon entering. The floors in these English wigwams undoubtedly would be covered with rushes or straw, following the custom in English cottages at that time.

Edward Johnson, the town clerk of Woburn, writing in 1652, relates of the first settlers that "after they have thus found out a place of aboad, they burrow themselves in the Earth for their

first shelter under some Hill-side, casting the Earth aloft up on Timber: they make a smoaky fire against the Earth at the highest side, and thus these poore servants of Christ provide shelter for themselves, their Wives and little ones."

Alonzo Lewis, the historian of Lynn, writing a century ago, states that some of the first settlers in that town made shelters for themselves and families by digging caves into the hillsides. On the bank of the Connecticut River above Hartford, is the Loomis Institute, on the grounds of which is the site where the men from Dorchester, Mass., in 1635, constructed their first dwellings, which were dug into the river bank. The bank itself composed three walls of the shelter and the front was a framing of boards with a door and a window. The roof was thatched with river sedge. The last of these long abandoned dugouts was filled in as recently as 1926.

At Concord, Mass., the early settlers dug cellars in the earth which they spanned with wooden spars and then covered with turf. A more detailed description of such shelters is found in a report made in 1650, by the Secretary of the Province of New Netherlands:

"Those in New Netherlands and especially in New England who have no means to build farmhouses at first, according to their wishes, dig a square pit in the ground, cellar fashion, 6 or 7 feet deep, as long and as broad as they think proper, case the earth inside with wood all round the wall, and line the wood with bark of trees or something else to prevent the caving in of the

earth, floor this cellar with plank and wainscott it overhead for a ceiling, raise a roof of spars clear up and cover the spars with the bark or green sods, so that they can live dry and warm in these houses with their entire families for two, three or four years, it being understood that partitions are run through those cellars which are adapted to the size of the family. The wealthy and principal men of New England, in the beginning of the Colonies, commenced their first dwelling houses in this fashion."[13]

The frequent references to the English wigwam seem to indicate that some such temporary construction was usual among many of the colonists at the outset. Settlers were living at Salem as early as 1626 and Endecott, with a considerable immigration, arrived in 1628. Marblehead, just across the harbor, was settled early and yet when John Goyt came there in 1637, he "first built a wigwam and lived thar till he got a house."[14] The rude buildings also put up by planters at Salem must have been looked upon at the time as temporary structures for they had all disappeared before 1661.[15]

When Governor Winthrop arrived at Charlestown in 1630 with the first great emigration, he found a house or two and several wigwams – rude shelters patterned after the huts built by the Indians – and until houses could be erected in Boston many lived in tents and wigwams, "their meeting-place being abroad

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[13] *Documentary History of New York* (*1850*), Vol. I.

[14] *Essex Co. (Mass.) Quarterly Court Records*, Vol. VI, p. 363.

[15] *Essex County Deeds*, Book V, leaf 107.

under a Tree."

In the summer of 1623, Bradford mentions the "building of great houses in pleasant situations," and when a fire broke out in November of the following year it began in "a shed yt was joyned to ye end of ye storehouse, which was wattled up with bowes." It will be seen that this shed was not crudely built of logs or slabs but that its walls were wattled and perhaps also daubed with clay, in precisely the same manner with which these colonists were familiar in their former homes across the sea. An original outer wall in the old Fairbanks house at Dedham, Massachusetts, still has its "wattle and daub" constructed in 1637.

Thomas Dudley writing to the Countess of Lincoln, in March, 1631, relates: "Wee have ordered that noe man shall build his chimney with wood nor cover his house with thatch, which was readily assented unto, for that divers houses have been burned since our arrival (the fire always beginning in the wooden chimneys) and some English wigwams which have taken fire in the roofes with thatch or boughs."[16] It was Dudley who was taken to task by the Governor in May, 1632, "for bestowing so much cost on wainscotting his house and otherwise adorning it," as it was not a good example for others in the beginning of a plantation. Dudley replied that he had done it for warmth and that it was but clapboards nailed to the walls. A few months later this house caught fire "the hearth of the Hall chimney burning all night upon the principal beam."

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[16] *Force's Tracts*, Washington, 1838.

In 1631, John Winthrop entered in his *Journal* that the chimney of Mr. Sharp's house in Boston took fire "the splinters being not clayed at the top" and from it the thatch caught fire and the house was burnt down.

The first meetinghouse built in Salem had a "catted" chimney, that is, the chimney was built with sticks laid cobhouse fashion and the whole daubed with clay inside and out.

Thatch as a roof covering was in common use in the early days. Notwithstanding the Great and General Court forbade its use, it still persisted as necessity arose. At the outset, towns along the coastline set aside certain parts of thatch banks in the marshes, as a supply for thatching houses. Rye straw also was much used. The roofs of these thatched houses were not boarded as the thatch was fastened to slats. Dorchester built a meetinghouse in 1632 with a thatched roof.

The earliest frame houses were covered with weather-boarding and this before long was covered with clapboards. The walls inside were sheathed up with boards moulded at the edges in an ornamental manner and the intervening space was filled with clay and chopped straw, and later with imperfect bricks. This was done for warmth, and was known as "nogging," following the English practice. When roofs were not thatched, they were covered with shingles split from the log by means of a "frow" and afterwards hand-shaved. The window openings were small and were closed by hinged casements, just as the houses in England were equipped at that time. Generally, the casement

sash was wood, but sometimes iron was used, as was common in England.

The glass was usually diamond-shaped, set in lead "cames." Emigrants to Massachusetts were instructed by the Company to bring ample supplies of glass for windows, but the supply ran short and in the poorer cottages and wigwams, oiled paper was in common use. This was an excellent substitute and supplied a surprisingly large amount of light.

A brickyard was in operation in Salem as early as 1629, and everywhere along the coast clay was found and made up into bricks. Chimneys were built upon a huge stone foundation. The brick work began at the first floor level and the bricks were laid in puddled clay up to about the ridge line where lime was used as the chimney top became exposed to the weather.

It has been claimed and denied that bricks used in the construction of certain old houses were brought from overseas. In general the claims may be disregarded. It is certain, however, that the Massachusetts Company at the outset sent over ten thousand bricks, stowed in the ballast with five chauldrons of sea coals for the use of the blacksmiths. At the same time came iron and steel, nails, red lead, salt and sailcloth. Even fourteen hundred weight of plaster of paris, appears in the list, priced at eighteen shillings per hundred weight.

The home of the average New Englander in the late seventeenth century was a wooden dwelling of two stories built around a brick chimney containing large fireplaces. In Rhode

Island and in parts of Connecticut, where shale abounded, the chimney was built of stone and not infrequently the house, in whole or at one end, was also so constructed. The roofs of these houses were covered with wooden shingles usually split from pine logs and shaved smooth by hand on a shingle horse. The outside walls of the well made house were covered with clapboards, also smoothed on the shingle horse. For many years these clapboards were made from oak, but as this wood has a tendency to warp and pull itself free from fastenings, by the year 1700, its use for that purpose had very generally been replaced by pine. Outbuildings and the poorer class of dwellings were not covered with clapboards or only the part next the road, for the New Englander believes in "putting his best foot forward." Such buildings were covered with "weatherboards" or plain boarding that lapped at the lower edge.

The windows in these houses were filled by casement sash containing glass set in lead cames. The glass was usually diamond shaped, but sometimes four by six inch lights were used. This glass was imported from England and came packed in cribs, but much of it came in sheets already leaded and was cut to size by "glaziers" upon demand. Early in the eighteenth century sliding-sash windows were introduced, probably about 1710, but it was a long time before existing casements were entirely given up. One Saturday afternoon in July, 1714, lightning struck the house of Colonel Vetch in Boston. He had bought the dwelling not long before and Judge Sewall records in his diary that at the time

of the storm "the Work of Transformation was not finished" to make the building fit for the occupancy of Madam Vetch. The lightning played various tricks with the house, doing considerable damage, and among other details the Judge mentions that it "lifted up the Sash Window and broke one of the squares" of glass.[17] Colonel Vetch was presumably a man of substance for he afterwards became Governor of Nova Scotia, and he is likely to have "transformed" his recently purchased house into the latest fashion of lighting.

On the other hand, Judge Sewall, the Chief Justice of the highest court in the Province, had casements in his Boston house at a time, ten years later, when his daughter Hannah died, for he records in his *Diary* that "Boston will not have her put into the Cellar [it was in August when she died]; so she is only remov'd into the best Room. And because the Casements were opened for Coolness, Boston would watch all night." This entry in the ancient diary not only preserves the fact that the Judge's house had casement windows, but it also makes allusion to the old-time custom of watching with the dead body and the interest that the town of Boston had in the bereavement of the Judge.

In 1722, Benjamin Franklin in his Boston newspaper, was satirizing the extravagancies of New England housewives in "new Glazing their Houses with new fashion'd square Glass." Diamond glass had seen its day, however, and forty years later "Windows set in lead, suitable for Hot-Beds" were advertised in

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[17] *Mass. Historical Society Colls.* (5th ser.), Vol. 7, p. 10.

the newspapers, a sure sign of discarded sash. On the other hand, a hardware shop was advertising "sheet and diamond glass" as late as 1766, probably to meet the demands for repairing old casements.

The exterior of these early houses was seldom painted, in fact it was well into the nineteenth century before the outside of houses in country towns were usually painted. A diarist who rode into Boston in 1804 comments on the dingy appearance of the houses and the general lack of paint and about the same time a Salem man met with success in business, whereupon he painted his house with the result that his associates rather sneeringly remarked: "Sam is feeling his oats; he's begun to paint his house."

The paint first used on the exteriors of New England houses was usually of a dark red color called, both then and now, "Indian red." Red ochre was used and commonly was mixed with fish oil. The Indians had "paint mines" where they had found red earth and doubtless these "mines" were utilized, particularly in adjacent locations. One of these paint mines was located near what is now Augusta, Maine, and in that part of New England formerly existed, long before the coming of the European, an Indian race that used this red earth so freely that by ethnologists it has been termed the "red paint culture."

So runs the present-day tradition of Indian red in New England. In point of fact, however, red earth was brought from the East Indies long before the settlement of the American Colonies, hence the name "India red," by which it was advertised

in the Boston newspapers in the mid-eighteenth century. In 1766, John Gore, "at his Shop at the Sign of the Painter's Arms in Queen Street," Boston, advertised a stock of oils, paints, brushes, etc., just imported from London. He had linseed oil by the barrel or smaller quantity, boiled oil, nut oil, turpentine oil and turpentine varnish. Among his white colors, were Spanish white and French halk, – whatever that may be. Red was a color that was in demand for he carried red head, Spanish brown, India red, purple red, Venetian red, Vermillian, drop hake, carmine, umber and rose pink. Under yellows, he listed King's yellow, Princess yellow, Naples yellow, spruce yellow, stone yellow, English ochre, Orpiment-pale and deep, Dutch pink and brown pink. The blues were ultramarine, ultramarine ashes, Prussian blue of various sorts, calcined smalt, strowing ditto, verditer blue and powder blue.

Gore also sold crayons in sets and canvas for portrait painting in half-length cloths, kit-kat and three-quarters length. He carried "Colours prepared for House and Ship Painting," best London crown glass for pictures and "Water Colours ready prepared in Shells."[18]

Two years later he advertised chariot glasses, genteel looking-glasses and Wilton carpets and also announced that he did coach and carpet painting in the best and cheapest manner.

At how early a date was paint used on the exterior of a New England house? Who can solve the problem? Undoubtedly it was

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[18] *Boston News-Letter*, Jan. 23, 1766.

on a house owned by some merchant having a direct contact with England. It is an established fact that the Andrews house, built in 1707-1710, in the country town of Topsfield, Mass., was painted Indian red at the time it was built, or soon after, but only on the trim – the window frames, corner boards, etc. The clapboards and weather-boarding at the easterly end, remained unpainted until long years after.

The inside finish of town houses owned by well-to-do people, probably was painted at a comparatively early date, at least, one or two rooms in a house. "A large Fashionable Dwelling-House" in Boston, "about 1¼ miles from Charlestown ferry" was advertised to be sold in 1734. It had eight "fire rooms" – that is, rooms with fireplaces. The entries and two of the rooms were "beautifully Wainscotted and laid in oil" and four were "handsomely Painted."

In 1753, George Tilley, a Boston shop keeper, advertised his house for sale. It contained "eight rooms, seven of them fire-rooms, with a Number of convenient Closets and a good Cellar, four of the said Rooms is cornish'd, and the House is handsomely painted throughout; one of the Rooms is painted Green, another Blue, one Cedar and one Marble; the other four a Lead colour, the Garrets are handsomely plaistered; the House has twenty Sash-Windows to it and is pleasantly situated on Pleasant Street, near the Hay-Market."[19]

But such glory did not exist in other parts of the same town

[19] *Boston News-Letter*, Sept. 13, 1753.

and certainly not in the country. Rufus Choate, the lawyer, was born in a house in Essex, Mass., built in 1725 by an ancestor who was popularly called "Governor Choate." He was a man in comfortable circumstances and built for himself a house of ten rooms having good panelling in four of them. None of the finish on this house was painted until well after 1825 or a century after it was built. This paint has now been removed and the old white pine finish is revealed in all its natural beauty of varying shades of reddish brown, effectively contrasting with the whitewashed walls. Natural wood finish, laid in oil, was quite the common thing in the ordinary New England dwelling, until after the people had recovered from the financial exhaustion of the Revolution.

The plastered walls were usually whitewashed which was quite in keeping with the Puritan character that covered with limewash the beautiful mural decorations of the English churches at the time of the Commonwealth. Families of wealth covered their walls with hangings brought from England. Peter Sergeant died in 1714, possessed of a "suit of Imagery Tapestry hangings" in his cedar room. This house was one of the finest in the town of Boston and afterwards became the Province House, – the residence of the Governors of the Province. Another room in this house was also furnished with hangings. Arras hangings were advertised from time to time in the Boston newspapers and in 1736, Boydell, the printer of the *Boston Gazette*, advertised a house in which one chamber in the first story was "hung with

Scotch Tapestry, the other with Green cheny." The large brick house of the late Isaac Gridley, situated near Fort Hill, in Boston, was sold in 1771. It contained thirteen rooms and three of the lower rooms were "genteelly furnished with Tapestry Hangings."

A three-story house was built in Boston about 1715 by William Clark, a wealthy merchant and member of the governor's council. His death in 1742, was attributed by some, to the loss of forty sail of vessels in the French War. In this house afterwards lived Sir Henry Frankland, Collector of the Port, who fell in love with Agnes Surriage, the beautiful sixteen-year-old maid-of-all-work at the Fountain Inn in Marblehead. Her romantic story is well-known. This house differed but little from the dozen or so of its type to be found in Boston at the time, save in its rich and elaborate decoration of the north parlor, at the right of the entrance hall. Here, the walls were divided into panels by fluted pilasters supporting an elaborate cornice, the whole heavily gilded, and each of the panels was embellished with a landscape or other decoration painted in oils. Painted arabesques and heraldic devices covered all other flat surfaces and the floor was laid in a mosaic of various colored woods. Every inch of the surface of this parlor was the product of the imagination and skill of the painter, gilder or carver. But while this magnificence actually existed in New England, by no means was it typically representative of its culture or artistic development. It merely exhibited the pride of wealth and was largely the product of European craftsmen.

The heavy strap hinges on the doors of the earlier houses and buildings were probably wrought by hand at the forge of the nearest blacksmith, but most of the hardware and iron work was imported from England. Before 1650 there was a slitting mill at the Saugus Iron Works, but the principal product of this forge was cast iron manufactures, such as pots and kettles. At a later date, Parliament, at the instigation of the English manufacturers, prohibited by law the setting up of slitting mills and trip hammers, and it naturally followed that the manufactured iron and brass required by the Colonies was brought overseas from Birmingham and Sheffield.

A word or two as to the varying types of house hardware may not be amiss at this time. At the outset wooden hinges and heavy strap hinges of wrought iron were in common use. These hinges were hung on gudgeons and their points varied in design but the spear-shaped point was most common. In the best houses, at an early date and continuing until the beginning of the eighteenth century, might be found the so-called "cock's head" hinge, an ornamental survival from Roman times. The butterfly hinge was also in use at that time – usually on cupboards and furniture doors. The **H** and **HL** hinges came into use in New England in the early 1700's and lasted until after the Revolution. These hinges were cut out of heavy sheet iron and were made in factories in England. This type of hinge was superseded by the cast-iron butt, still in use, which was invented in England in 1775, and adopted very generally in the United States at the close

of the Revolution.

In some old houses that have been restored and in many modern constructions done in the manner of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the door hinges in painted rooms have been picked out in black making them most conspicuous. This is a modern conceit – an invention of the modern architect. It was not done in the old days, a fact easily established by carefully scraping through the various coats of paint on an old house. Our great-great-grandmothers had no itching desire for contrasts of that sort. They knew nothing of highboys, grandfather's clocks, low daddys, Lady Washington chairs, courting mirrors, fiddle back chairs or donkey-eared spindle backs. These names are inventions of collectors or antique dealers striving for the picturesque. The highboy, it is true, antedates the others, but in the early days this piece of furniture was called a high chest of drawers and the lowboy was called a low chest. Recently the common **HL** hinge has been described as the "Holy Land" hinge; certainly not referring to the English colonies where there were fully as many sinners as saints.

Wooden latches were used on both outside and inside doors in early days and the wooden latch persisted in the back country until comparatively recent times. The iron thumb latch was made by the country blacksmith but more and more it came to be imported from England. The earliest type has spear-point handles. The rounded end comes in after 1700 and is common about 1750. The Norfolk latch, in brass and iron, comes in after

the Revolution and was replaced by the common cast-iron thumb latch, invented by Blake in 1840. In examining old hinges and all kinds of hardware always have in mind that the machine-made pointed screw was not invented until 1846.

A feature of this hardware trade with England, which is of much interest, is the catalogues that were sent over by the manufacturers in Birmingham. About the year 1770 they began to send out drawings of different pieces of hardware, tools, etc., and this soon developed into sheets of engravings on copper which were bound into books and sent to customers at a distance who then could visualize the goods and order accordingly; size, list price and discount were indicated. Seldom was there a title-page or even a label to indicate a source, but the handmade paper bears its watermark and generally the date when it was made. These catalogues are now difficult to find and the Victoria and Albert Museum at South Kensington, esteems them so highly that a descriptive catalogue of its collection has been published. Probably the largest collection of these catalogues in America is in the library of the Essex Institute at Salem.

CHAPTER III
How They Furnished Their Houses

It is a lamentable fact that the present generation possesses little accurate information on the every day life and surroundings of the early settlers in Massachusetts. Some of the finer pieces of furniture have been preserved together with a few portraits and pieces of silver and here and there an article of costume of special beauty or unusual association. The newly settled country had no artists to paint pictures of household interiors in the manner of the Dutch painters and the diarists and letter writers of that time when they used a quill pen, devoted little thought to the homely happenings of the household or to the costume and furniture with which every one was familiar. Judge Samuel Sewall's diary[20] throws much light on New England life two centuries and more ago, but many are the questions we would like to ask. In August, 1702, he rode to Newbury to attend the funeral of his sister Mehitable and returned home by way of Andover where he found that the keeper of the ordinary was sick and so went to Mr. Woodman's daughters "and there din'd on Pork and Beans; afterward had Fowls rosted and dress'd very well." It would be interesting if we could know more about that dinner. Did the Judge eat in the same room in which the fowls were "rosted" and

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[20] *Mass. Historical Society Colls.* (5th ser.), Vols. 5-7.

was the table furnished with woodenware or pewter, or both? Had the Woodmans begun to use two-tined forks or did the Judge hold the meat in one hand while he cut it up and conveyed it to his mouth with the knife? Was a roasting jack fastened over the fireplace? Was the dinner served on a table-board? Did all stand while "a blessing" was asked? What was served for dessert? Did the Judge wash his hands at the washbench in the kitchen and if not, where did he find the washbasin? What pictures were on the parlor walls and was there a bedstead in the corner and if so, how was it furnished and how made? A bedstead known to have been used in a New England house of 1702 is almost unknown today. If the Judge had only devoted five minutes, while writing up his diary, to a close description of that bedstead and its furnishings he would have settled many existing doubts.

It seems entirely reasonable that a distinguished guest in the house would not be required in the morning to go to the washbench in the kitchen and use the family basin. The dignity of Judge Sewall and the delicacy of Madam Belcher would rebel at the thought of an exhibition of disheveled attire before the serving maid and the numerous children of the family. In the humblest home, on occasion, it would be a simple matter to place in the chamber of a guest, on a table or even on a chair, a basin and a jug of water with a towel.

In the journal of the travels of Dr. Alexander Hamilton of Annapolis, Md., who rode through New England in 1744, may be found the description of the furnishings of a chamber in an inn.

Doctor Hamilton was accompanied by a negro servant and on a Sunday morning at Marblehead he asked for his portmanteau. "I was told by my man Dromo that it was in his room. I had the curiosity to go and see what kind of a room his room was, and upon a reconnoitre found it a most spacious one, furnished *a la mode de Cabaret*, with tables, chairs, a fine feather-bed with quilted counterpane, white calico canopy, or tester, and curtains, every way adapted for a gentleman of his degree and complexion."

Of course 1744 is many years after the period when oak furniture was commonly in use; yet Reid's tavern, "at the sign of the Dragon," in the fishing village of Marblehead, could not have been the resort of fashion or wealth and if a negro slave was given so well furnished a chamber what may have been the furnishings of the chamber occupied by Doctor Hamilton?

In a farmer's family, in the early days, it was undoubtedly the habit to wash faces and hands in a small tub or keeler on the washbench in the kitchen. In suitable weather it is altogether likely the men of the family may have washed out of doors, beside the back door, in a bucket of water freshly drawn from the well or brought from the spring. The farm hands, on coming in from the fields, for dinner, or at night, always "washed up" at a bench out of doors and this custom persisted until well into the nineteenth century. My mother, when young, for a time lived on a farm (about 1850) and several times I have heard her describe the farm hand who came to the back door one noon, and looking

at his hands remarked, "I guess they are clean enough," and so went into his dinner, without washing.

Henry W. Erving of Hartford, Conn., writes: "A couple of years ago I made a pilgrimage to my great-grandfather's former home in Westford, Conn., in company with a kinsman over eighty years old – the last of his generation. It was a very comfortable house, with four rooms and a leanto, with a stone chimney. My great-grandfather lived there as early as 1750. My cousin called my attention to the old well near the door where, by the curb, there was a large stone hollowed out like a trough. He said the 'men folks' as they came from the field, would fill that trough with a bucket or two of water from which they would 'souse' themselves thoroughly, thus not disturbing the goodwife. And of course in the rustic neighborhoods the old customs existed long after they were abandoned in the larger villages and towns.

"You will hardly believe, when I say it, but I distinctly remember as a very small boy, going to a house in this same primitive town of Westford where we were invited to dinner. The only drinking vessel on the table was one of the quart Staffordshire mugs (would that I had that mug in my collection today) which was filled with water, milk or cider, I have really forgotten which, and passed around the table at the demand of any thirsty one. The family consisted of a man and his wife, an ancient grandmother, and several children with not too clean faces. I couldn't refuse the mug when urged upon me and

selecting a place on the brim at the right of the handle, I drank, when one of the children exclaimed, 'See, mar! He's got granny's place.' Of course that practice in this instance was possibly nearly a century out of period."

One of the standard examples of American humor is the picture of the *Mayflower* loaded to the cross-trees with the chairs, chests and cradles that devout New Englanders now own and claim were brought over on that memorable voyage. It is so easy to attribute age and romantic history to a treasured family relic that it has become possible for a museum in the city of New York to exhibit a punch bowl of Staffordshire ware, as a veritable relic of the *Mayflower*. The bowl could not possibly have been made before 1780-1790. There is another piece of Staffordshire treasured in the china closet of a New England family, which the owner is certain was formerly possessed by an ancestress who died years before the Revolution. Well authenticated family tradition vouches for the fact which cannot be disputed. Yet, the observer will soon discover a steamboat pictured on one side of the pitcher and what is more interesting, the stars and stripes are flying from the masthead and the canton of the flag contains fifteen stars.

It is undoubtedly true that some pieces of furniture were brought over from England by the first settlers and the tradition connected with such pieces can be authenticated by an examination of the chair or chest showing that it is made of English and not American oak. While most family possessions,

for convenience in shipment, came over in bales or bundles, covered with canvas in the true European manner, a custom followed by emigrants of a later day, yet, many articles of fine clothing and the treasured belongings of the better-equipped families came over neatly stowed in chests and cupboards and some of those chests have survived.

It is all a matter of common sense reasoning which can be backed up by an examination of early records and also the furniture itself. Why pay a considerable value in money to transport, in an overcrowded ship, utilitarian pieces of furniture, that could be made in the newly settled colony, by workmen who were going over in the same ship? Timber could be had here for the cutting and until sufficient time had elapsed to permit the making of chairs, beds and other required furniture, one could sit on rudely made stools and boxes and sleep on pallet beds made up on the floor just as many of them would be obliged to sleep while on board ship.

Some estimate of the culture of the New England people during the seventeenth century and of their appreciation of the refinements of life may be reached with a degree of accuracy through a study of the carefully itemized inventories of their estates made at time of death. During that period the Royal Governor from overseas, with his little court of officials and followers, had not introduced London fashions and furnishings to the extent that existed in the eighteenth century. Moreover, the wealth of the colonies had not grown to the point where the

refinements of life were not only esteemed but demanded by loving spouses and by those who had taken ship for England or the Continent and there had observed how other people lived.

Among the early settlements made in the Colony of the Massachusetts Bay was one at Agawam, now the town of Ipswich. The news had reached Boston that the French were pushing their settlements westward along the coast, bringing with them "divers priests and Jesuits," which so alarmed the Governor and the Assistants that it was decided to forestall the French and hasten the planting of new towns north of Boston. The first move was to send the Governor's son John, with twelve others, to establish themselves at Agawam. There were no roads and so they sailed along the coast in a shallop and took possession of the town site in March, 1633. Their families and other settlers soon followed and the increase of population was such that in August, 1634, the Court of Assistants decreed that the place be called Ipswich, after old Ipswich in England, "in acknowledgment of the great honor and kindness done to our people, who took shipping there."

Three months later, in November, 1634, one John Dillingham arrived in Ipswich and the selectmen granted him six acres of land on which to build a house. He was from Leicestershire and with his wife and daughter had come over in the fleet with Winthrop in 1630, and remained in Boston until he removed to Ipswich. Life in the frontier settlement was too severe for him and he died during the next winter. On July 14, 1636,

his widow, Sarah, made her "last will and testament" being in "perfect memory though my body be weake & sick" and a few days later she too was dead, leaving her orphaned daughter to be cared for by Richard Saltonstall and John Appleton, under the direction of the Quarterly Court. And this was not at all difficult for John Dillingham had left a "goodly estate," for the times. This Dillingham home has been selected for analysis because it is one of the earliest estates in the Colony of which we have exact and detailed information, a number of documents relating to it having been preserved among the miscellaneous papers in the Massachusetts State Archives.[21] Moreover, it shows the furnishings and equipment of a settler living in a town of only two years growth from the wilderness.

The Dillingham homestead consisted of a house of two rooms and outbuildings with thirty acres of upland, sixty acres of meadow, i.e., grass land, and six acres of planting ground near the house, of which four acres were planted with corn. Apple trees and other fruits were fenced off in the garden. For livestock there was a mare, three cows, two steers, two heifers, four calves, and four pigs. There was an indentured servant, Thomas Downs, to help cultivate the land and care for the stock, and a maid, Ann Towle, who not only helped with the housework but also worked in the fields. "She hath been a faithful servant," wrote Richard Saltonstall, executor of the estate, "and though she was discharged by her mistress a little before her time was out, yet it

[21] *Mass. Historical Society Colls.* (5th ser.), Vols. 5-7.

may be borne by the estate, considering her diligence." Ann had come over in the ship *Susan and Ellen*, which arrived in April, 1635. Her passage cost £5.

The Dillinghams occupied a good social position in the youthful settlement but their two-room house did not contain any really fine furniture. The parlor was also used as a bedroom, a practice which was common everywhere in the seventeenth century. It had two bedsteads valued at £1. 6. 8.; a cupboard, 10s.; a sea chest, 10s.; two "joyned Chaires," 5s.; a round table, 7s.; a deske, 4s.; and a band box, 2s. There was also a large nest of boxes valued £2. and a small nest of boxes worth only three shillings. The feather beds, boulsters, and pillows on each bed were valued at about twice as much as a bedstead and the coverlets averaged about £1. a piece. There were flaxen sheets for Mrs. Dillingham's bed and coarse sheets for the beds of the maid and the indentured servant. A warming pan bears silent testimony to the cold of the winter season. Another bedstead valued at only three shillings may have been in the garret and occupied by Ann Towle, the maid. A chest stood in the kitchen – more generally spoken of at that time as "the hall," in accordance with the English usage – and two boxes, probably used for storage and also for seats. That was all the furniture listed in the kitchen that was considered of any value. The tables, stools, benches, shelving, or other furnishings seemingly necessary to housekeeping at that time either did not exist or were so crude in construction as to have little or no value in estimating the estate.

We find five cushions, however, valued at fifteen shillings.

Mrs. Dillingham died possessed of a few really fine furnishings – possibly treasured ancestral pieces – for she bequeathed a silver bowl to the wife of Richard Saltonstall, and to the wife of John Appleton she gave a silver porringer. It would be extremely interesting today to know what has become of these two pieces of Colonial silver. No other silver is mentioned but on shelving in the kitchen rested 40½ pounds of pewter valued at £2. 14. 0. As a pewter plate of the time weighs nearly two pounds and a platter much more the supply of pewter for the table was not large. Wooden plates, trenchers, and bowls are not mentioned, but there were twenty-five pewter saucers, six porringers, seven spoons, and five shillings worth of knives. As for table forks, they were practically unknown in the Colony at that time. Governor Winthrop brought over a fork in 1630, carefully preserved in a case, which is supposed to be the first and only table fork in the Colony in the earliest days of the settlements. Knives, spoons, and fingers, with plenty of napery, met the demands of table manners in the seventeenth century.

The large fireplace in the kitchen had its usual equipment of pot-hooks, fire shovel and tongs, gridiron, trivet, and bellows, and beside it was an old dark lantern valued at only two shillings. There were iron pots, kettles, skillets and ladles; a brass pot and a mortar. There was a frying-pan with a hole in it and in a box were kept "bullets, hinges and other smale things." Two beer vessels were listed; a case of bottles, two jugs, three pans, a tray, and

two baskets. Such was the simple equipment of the Dillingham kitchen. There were plenty of table-cloths and napkins but no curtains at any of the windows. If a broom were used it probably was made of birch twigs bound together around a long handle. Candlesticks do not appear in the inventory and the only store of food mentioned (aside from twenty-one new cheeses valued at £2. 16. 0.) was seven bushels of rye, two firkins and a half of butter, a half bushel of malt, six pounds of raisins, and some spice. Our ancestors had a highly developed appreciation of the value of condiments. In a Salem inventory at a somewhat later date appear salt, pepper, ginger, cloves, mace, cinnamon, nutmegs, and allspice.

Mrs. Dillingham's wearing apparel unfortunately is not listed item by item, but given a total value of £5. 8. 4. Her linen amounted to an almost equal sum. Some of her deceased husband's clothing is included in the inventory, such as a coat with silver buttons, a red waistcoat, a suit of serge and a black suit of serge unmade, a jacket of cloth, and an old suit and cloak. Little Sara Dillingham, the orphaned child, when sent to school to goodwife Symonds was supplied with "a stuffe petticoat & waskote" and four "shifts with shewes"; also a gown that cost £2. 10s. Perhaps after a time she may have been able to read and fully appreciate the books formerly in her loving father's chest. They were: "Perkins works in 3 volumes, Seaven Treatises bound in 2 volumes, the Spowse Royall, the bruised reade, & a little new testiment."

Six years later, in 1642, there died in the same town, Richard Lumpkin, who had emigrated from Boxted, in Essex, and became an influential citizen in the new town in the new county of Essex. He was elected a representative to the Great and General Court and was deacon of the Ipswich church at the time of his death. He left an estate valued at £300. In the hall of his house stood a long table, with two forms and a stool beside it, having a total value of only fifteen shillings. The hall also contained three chairs and six cushions valued at four shillings. That was all the furniture in the room that was of any value. There were books, however, valued at £2. 10. 0., a musket and a fowling piece and other small furnishings. In the parlor was a table with six joined stools, three chairs and eight cushions, a bedstead, and a trundle bed with curtains, and a chest, the latter valued at only four shillings. In the chamber over the parlor was a bedstead with its trundle bed, a table valued at three shillings, four chests and two boxes; not a chair or stool is named in connection with the room. The kitchen was in the leanto and while it contained a good supply of brass and iron pots and kettles and also pewter dishes, the table, bench, stools and wooden plates, etc., that must have been in the room were of so little value that they do not appear in the inventory.

It is when we meet with joined and wainscot chests and court, livery, and standing cupboards that we find pieces that may have been brought from overseas. When Mr. Thomas Millard of Newbury (note the title of honor), died in 1653, he possessed a

wainscot cupboard, table, chairs and stools. He also left behind him three silver spoons, a silver cup, and a silver salt seller, and among the kitchen utensils were tinned pudding pans, a brazen chaffing dish and a lanthorn and lamp made of latin ware.

The widow of the Rev. Jose Glover married, in 1641, Henry Dunster, President of Harvard College. Among the furnishings of her house were "eleven featherbeds or downe … one of them haveing philop and Cheny curtaines in graine with a deep silke fringe on the vallance, and a smaller on the Curtaines, and a Coverlett sutable to it, made of Red Kersie, and laced with a greene lace, round the sides and 2 downe the middle, also … an outlandish quilt, also to another a blue serdge suite very rich and costly, curtaines and valances laced, and fringe, and a blue Rug to the bed, also a greene sute in the same manner, also another red wrought suite, with a sheet and all things Compleate, also a Canopie bed, with Curtenes, a Chest of Drawers of part of this Chest was filled with rich lenen a dammeske suite seuerall diepere suits a fine hollen[d] suit with a stech: with abundance of flaxen linen for Common use, in another parte of the chest of drawers tape, tafety for Chaire and Stooles … also 29 siluer spones a very faire salt with 3 full knops on the top of it[22] 3 other siluer salts of lesser sorts a great siluer trunke with 4 knop to stand on the table and with suger: 6 porrengers, one small one: 3 bere boules 4 wine cups a siluer grate with a Couer on it: 6 siluer trencher plates: also blankets and Coverletts and Rugs

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[22] This large salt is now owned by Harvard College.

euery[way] Compleat to furnish so many beds."[23]

By way of contrast let us glance at the inventory of the possessions of William Googe of Lynn, who died in 1646, ten years after Mrs. Dillingham had willed that her body be "decently buyried" and her child "religiously educated if God give it life." Googe left a house and twelve acres of land and the total value of his possessions amounted to but £28. 11. 7, with debts of £4. 9. 7. He left a widow and three small children, and though dying in very lowly circumstances he may have known better times, for John Mascoll, the servant of Mr. Googe of Lynn, was fined in 1643, for neglecting the watch. The title of honor, "Mr.," was used but sparingly in those early days and usually indicated a degree of social standing in the community.

Googe had been a soldier, for among his personal belongings at death were a sword and belt, a musket and bandoleers, and also gunpowder. One cow and four hogs comprised his entire livestock, and five bushels of wheat, ten bushels of Indian corn, and flax in the bundle lay in the garret of his house, which was frugally furnished with a chest, a chair, an old chair, a stool, and a trunk. The family probably slept on pallet beds made up on the floor, for bedding is listed but no bedsteads. They had a frying pan, a gridiron, a skillet, a posnet, an earthen pot, six spoons, and the following woodenware, viz.: "3 wood trayes & 3 wood boules & 3 wood dishes, 1s. 9d.; one runlitt, 1s.; paieles & tubs, 3s." Two bags valued at two shillings bring to a close the list of

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[23] *Old-Time New England*, July, 1934.

the earthly possessions of William Googe of Lynn. When the inventory was brought into court it very properly gave the goods to the widow "for the bringing up of her three small children." So reads the record.

Doubtless there were many families in the Colony little better conditioned, judging from the relatively small number of estates settled through the courts when compared with the deaths and estimated population.

Googe's house and twelve acres of land were valued at only £8. This must have been a very simple, thatch-roofed house of not more than two rooms, comparable with the outlying farmhouse of Jacob Perkins that was burned in Ipswich in 1668. And thereby hangs a tale. Master Perkins and his wife had gone to town one summer afternoon leaving the house in charge of Mehitable Brabrooke, a sixteen-year-old serving maid. We will let the ancient document in the court files relate what happened.

"About 2 or 3 aclocke in the afternoone she was taking tobacco in a pipe and went out of the house with her pipe and gott upon the oven on the outside & backside of the house (to looke if there were any hogs in the corne) and she layed her right hand upon the thatch of the house (to stay herselfe) and with her left hand knocked out her pipe over her right arme upon the thatch on the eaves of the house (not thinking there had been any fire in the pipe) and imediately went downe into the corne feild to drive out the hogs she saw in it, and as she was going toward the railes of the feild … she looked back, and saw a smoke upon her

Mistress' house in the place where she had knocked out her pipe at which shee was much frighted."[24]

The wife of a neighbor came running to the assistance of Mehitable and afterwards testified that when she reached the house she looked into both fireplaces and saw no appearance of fire, only a few brands nearly dead under a great kettle hanging in the chimney. She also looked up into the chamber through the floor boards that lay very open on the side where the smoke was.

Could photographs more vividly picture the scene? The thatch-roofed farmhouse had two rooms on the ground floor and a chimney with two fireplaces. An oven was built on the backside probably having an opening inside the kitchen fireplace in the usual manner. The house was of but one story judging from the low roof that the maid was able to reach when standing on the oven, and the floor of the chamber in the loft had wide cracks between the boards so that it was possible to look through from below and see the under side of the roof. In similar homes lived many a family in the early days in comparative comfort.

As for the careless Mehitable, she was brought before the Quarterly Court on suspicion of wilfully setting the house on fire; a serious offence, which as late as 1821, was the cause of the execution in Salem of a sixteen-year-old boy. Among those who deposed at her trial was a young man who said that as he and she were going into the meadow, before the fire, to make hay, she told him that her mistress was angry with her, but she had

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[24] *Essex County Quarterly Court Records*, Vol. IV, pp. 56-57.

"fitted her now" for she had put a great toad into her kettle of milk. As it turned out the Court ordered Mehitable to be severely whipped and to pay £40 damages to her master Jacob Perkins. It now seems incredible that a serving maid of 1668 could ever get together so large a sum of money.

The settlers in the New England Colonies, unless persons of wealth or possessed of large families, during the early years lived generally in houses having but one room and an entry-way on the ground floor. Above would be a chamber – sometimes only a garret. As the family increased in size and became more prosperous another room would be added to the house on the other side of the entry and chimney, making the structure a so-called two-room house. Still later, with the need for more room, a leanto would be built on the back of the house, thereby supplying three additional rooms on the ground floor with a kitchen in the middle. The earlier kitchen would then become a living-room or "sitting room" – in the New England phrase. This earlier kitchen was usually called "the hall" during the seventeenth century and in it centered the life of the family. It was the room where the food was cooked and eaten. There the family sat and there the indoor work was carried on. A loom sometimes occupied considerable space near a window and frequently a bed was made up in a corner, on which the father of the family slept, and there sometimes also he died.

The principal feature of this common room was its huge fireplace in which hung pots and kettles suspended by means of

pot chains and trammels from the hardwood trammel-bar or lug-pole that rested on wooden cross bars and so bisected the wide flue in the chimney. These large fireplaces in the early days were sometimes called "chimneys" in the vernacular of the time. They were generally as wide as eight feet and a ten foot opening is not unknown.

This cavernous opening was spanned by a wooden lintel – a stick of timber sometimes sixteen inches or more square, and when exposed to a roaring fire, piled high with logs, this became an element of danger, the charring wood smoldering all night and setting fire to the house. The trammel-bar in the flue also caught fire not infrequently and gave way, allowing the pots and kettles to fall to the hearth, bringing disaster to the dinner or to the curdling milk and sometimes to those seated near. A trammel stick in the house of Captain Denney gave way from this cause and a large kettle filled with wort[25] fell down and spilt the boiling liquid over four of his children who were sitting or lying on the hearth, some of them asleep, "which scalded them in so terrible a manner, that one died presently after, and another's life is dispaired of" continues the record.

"Here is good living for those who love good fires," wrote Higginson in his *New-Englands Plantation*, and under the spell of the glowing flames, the bare, whitewashed walls, the brown timbers and floor boards of the ceiling, the dress of pewter, and the simple furnishings of the room, enriched by the shadows,

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[25] Beer in the making.

became a place full of cheer – a place where privation and homesickness might be forgotten in the glow of the bright firelight. On cold nights the short bench inside the fireplace was a chosen place and the settle, a long seat made of boards with a high back to keep off the draft, was drawn before the fire and here sat the older members of the family.

The larger kettles hanging in the fireplace, were of brass and copper and some of them were of prodigious size. Hot water was always to be had and these kettles also served for the daily cooking, the cheese-making, soap-boiling, and candle-dipping.

Much of the food of the average New Englander until comparatively recent times consisted of corn-meal, boiled meats and vegetables and stews. Every well-equipped household had its spits for roasting and many had gridirons, but the usual diet of the average family was "hasty pudding" – cornmeal mush and milk – varied by boiled meat or fish served in the center of a large pewter platter and surrounded by boiled vegetables. Baked beans and stewed beans appeared on the table several times every week in the year. Indian bannock, made by mixing corn meal with water and spreading it an inch thick on a small board placed at an incline before the fire and so baked, was a common form of bread. When mixed with rye meal it became brown bread and was baked in the brick oven with the beans and peas.

The brick oven was a feature of every chimney. Sometimes in early days it was built partly outside the house but so far as known the opening was always in the kitchen fireplace. To reach it the

housewife must stoop below the oaken lintel and stand inside the fireplace, taking care that her woolen skirts did not come near the flames. To heat it for a baking, a fire was built inside, usually with specially prepared pine or birch wood that had been split and seasoned out of doors for a short time and then housed. The fire and ashes were then taken out by means of a peel – a long-handled, flat-bladed shovel made for the purpose – and when dusted out with a broom made of hemlock twigs it was ready for the brown bread, beans, peas, Indian pudding, pies, and rye drop cakes which were made with rye meal, eggs and milk and baked directly on the bricks in the bottom of the oven.

Between the years of 1635 and 1655, court records and inventories of estates in the Massachusetts Bay Colony mention the following articles of food:

Bacon, beef, butter, cheese, eggs, fowls, lamb, milk, mutton, pork, suet, veal, wild game, and cod, herring, mackerel, salmon and sturgeon.

Barley, beans, Indian beans, bran, cabbages, carrots, chaff, corn, English corn, Indian corn, hops, Indian meal, rye meal, oatmeal, oats, parsnips, peas, pumpions, rye, squashes, turnips and wheat.

Apples, berries, fruit, honey, raisins, sugar and vinegar.

Biscuit, blewlman, bread, cake, malt, salad oil, porridge, rye malt, yeast, salt and many kinds of spices.

Much of this food was raised on the farm and nearly every family had its garden. Such articles of food as were imported

were usually obtained at the shops in the larger towns by barter, as money was scarce. In 1651, a farmer came through the woods to Salem in his cart bringing twelve bushels of rye. He stopped at a shop owned by George Corwin and from the daybook kept at the time and still carefully preserved, we learn that among other necessaries he carried home sugar for the goodwife, and for the children a doll and a bird whistle.

In the early years domestic animals were too valuable to be killed for meat but game was plentiful and was roasted by being trussed on iron spits resting on curved brackets on the backs of the andirons. This, of course, required constant turning to expose the roast on all sides in order to cook it evenly – a task frequently delegated to a child. A skillet would be placed beneath to catch the drippings. Sometimes a bird was suspended before the fire by a twisted cord that would slowly unwind and partly wind again, requiring some one in frequent attendance to twist the cord. Families of wealth possessed a "jack" to turn the spit. This was a mechanism fastened over the fireplace and connected with the spit by means of a pulley and cord. A heavy weight suspended by a cord which slowly unwound, supplied the power that turned the spit.

In "the hall," usually upon open shelves, but sometimes upon a dresser, was displayed the pride of the housewife – the dress of pewter and latten ware. "China dishes," imported by the East India Company or made in Holland, were used sparingly during the early years of the colonies. There was much earthenware and

stoneware bottles and jugs, but it was wooden ware and pewter that were commonly used. When Lionel Chute died in 1645 he bequeathed his silver spoon to his son James.[26] It was the only piece of silver in the house. Of pewter he died possessed of fourteen dishes "small and great," eleven pewter salts, saucers and porringers, two pewter candlesticks and a pewter bottle. The widow Rebecca Bacon who died in Salem in 1655, left an estate of £195. 8. 6., which included a well-furnished house. She had brass pots, skillets, candlesticks, skimmers, a little brass pan, and an excellent supply of pewter including "3 large pewter platters, 3 a size lesse, 3 more a size lesse, 3 more a size lesse," having a total value of £1.16. She also had a pewter basin, six large pewter plates, and six lesser, nineteen pewter saucers, two fruit dishes, an old basin and a great plate, two candlesticks, one large salt and a small one, two porringers, a great flagon, one lesser, one quart, two pints and a half pint; and an old porringer. She also left "1 silver duble salt, 6 silver spoones, wine cup & a dram cup of silver."

Giles Badger of Newbury left to his young widow, a glass bowl, beaker, and jug valued at three shillings; three silver spoons valued at £1, and a good assortment of pewter, including "a salt seller, a tunell and a great dowruff." The household was also furnished with six wooden dishes and two wooden platters. In other inventories appear unusual items such as a pewter brim basin, pewter cullenders, pewter beer cups, pans, and mustard

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[26] *Probate Records of Essex County, Mass.*, Vol. I, p. 47.

pots. Pewter tankards were common. There were new and old fashioned candlesticks. Pewter salts came in three sizes and the saucers were both small and large. In 1693, best London pewter plates cost the Boston shopkeepers 9½ pence per pound in quantity.

The seventeenth century "hall" must have had little spare room for its daily occupants, for in addition to its table and chairs, its settle, stools and washbench, the long ago inventories disclose such chattels as powdering tubs in which the salted meats were kept, the churn, barrels containing a great variety of things, keelers and buckets, bucking tubs for washing, and the various implements used in spinning and weaving, washing and ironing, cooking and brewing, and the making of butter and cheese. In the chimney hung hams and bacon and suspended from the ceiling were strings of dried apples and hands of seed corn.

It is claimed by some that the floors were sanded. That certainly was true at a later period but there are strong elements of doubt as to the prevalence of this custom during the seventeenth century. Sand, however, was used freely with home-made soft soap, to scrub the floors which were always kept white and clean, and whenever an early house is restored or taken down sand is always found, sometimes in considerable quantity, where it has sifted down through the cracks between the floor boards. The downstairs rooms had double floors but the chamber floors were made of one thickness of boards with here and there a knothole and frequently with cracks between the boards through

which the dust and dirt from above must have sifted down upon the heads of those seated at dinner or engaged in their daily tasks in the rooms below. Not only does the structural evidence show this to be true but a number of instances occur among the papers in Court files, where witnesses have deposed as to what they had seen and heard through the cracks in chamber floors. A grandson of Governor Endecott once fell a victim of two gossiping sixteen-year-old girls who had spent some time on their knees peeping through the cracks in a chamber floor. Capt. Richard More, the last survivor of the company on the *Mayflower*, late in life kept a tavern in Salem. He was spied upon in this manner and eventually brought before the justices of the Quarterly Court to answer for his evasion of the law set forth and maintained at that time.

The parlor, called "the foreroom" at a later time, was the room where guests of station were received. The best bed hung with curtains and valance and covered with a rug, stood in a corner. In those days rugs were not used on floors but as bed furnishings. Even the baby's cradle had its rug. Carpets, likewise, were too fine for wooden floors and were used as table covers. Of bedsteads there were many kinds – high and low, canopy, close, corded, half-headed, joined, side, standing, inlaid, and wainscot, and slipped under the higher bedsteads during the daytime, were trundle or "truckle" beds in which the children slept at night. Lionel Chute, the schoolmaster, had an "old darnkell coverlet" on his bed while some of his neighbors possessed branched and embroidered coverlets and several had coverlets made of

tapestry.

Among the better families the parlor and chamber windows had curtains hung from rods or cords. In the parlor stood chests in which were stored the family clothing and bedding, for closets did not exist in the seventeenth century house. There were great chests and small chests, long boarded and great boarded chests, chests with a drawer, carved chests, wainscot chests, trunks, and boxes. A few stools and chairs, a looking-glass, a small table, and perhaps a cupboard completed the furnishings of the well-supplied parlor. In Capt. George Corwin's best room there were chairs with leather bottoms and straw bottoms, a clock valued at £2, a screen having five leaves, a napkin press, and a "Scriture or Spice box." White calico curtains hung at his chamber windows and the maid had a "Calico Cuberd cloth" in her room. Parlor walls were whitewashed and bare of ornament. The first families owned a portrait or two in oils and here and there a map in unglazed frame decorated a wall. The Puritan character did not warm to the fine arts and austere living was the aim if not always the achievement of the time.

The chambers in the second story must have been curiously furnished rooms, containing a huddle of stores of all descriptions. Henry Short, the town clerk of Newbury, died in 1673 leaving a goodly estate valued at nearly £2,000.[27] He owned a negro slave and his house was large and well furnished. There was an old parlor and a new parlor containing beds, chests, chairs,

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[27] *Probate Records of Essex County, Mass.*, Vol. II, p. 348.

trunks, and boxes. In the chamber over the new parlor there was a good feather-bed and bed clothing but no bedstead. Wool and yarn were stored in this room together with boxes, tubs, some feathers, and miscellaneous "lumber" – the phrase of the period for odds and ends. The chamber over the kitchen, a comfortable room of course, in winter, had its bed and bedding, also "5 hogsheds, 6 barrels, 5 Iron hoopes, a pair of stockcards, meale trough & other lumber, a parcell of old Iron, a pike, a bed cord & other cordage." Small wonder in such a clutter that the rooms frequently had other tenantry than the human occupants.

When Jasper Dankers arrived in Boston in 1680, the captain of the packet took him to his sister's house where he lodged. "We were taken to a fine large chamber," he writes, "but we were hardly in bed before we were shockingly bitten. I did not know the cause, but was not able to sleep… My comrade who was very sleepy, fell asleep at first. He tumbled about very much; but I did not sleep any the whole night. In the morning we saw how it was, and were astonished we should find such a room with such a lady."[28]

Early in the eighteenth century the walls of rooms in some Massachusetts houses began to be covered with "painted paper" hangings imported from England. These *papier paints* were first introduced into England, from France, about 1634, and probably were brought into New England by Governor Andros and his followers. Michael Perry, a Boston bookseller, who died in 1700,

[28] Dankers, *Journal of a Voyage to New York*, Brooklyn, 1867.

had in his stock "7 quires of painted paper and three reams of painted paper." His successor, Daniel Henchman, dealt in painted papers as appears from his account books commencing in 1712. In 1713 two quires of painted paper cost four shillings, and two quires of blue paper, three shillings. In 1714, Isaac Thomas of Pembroke paid £2. 10. 0 for "6 Rowls Paint'd Pap'r & 2 Q'r Paper."

When Peter Sergeant of Boston died in 1714, the inventory of his estate disclosed "one large gilt looking glass, in the cedar room, £5. One suit of Imagery Tapestry hanging, £20. One suit of red china £5." Two years later the house was purchased by the Provincial Government for a governor's residence and in 1741 we find the Provincial Treasurer paying Daniel Henchman £5. 8. 0. for four rolls of painted paper and shortly another bill was presented for "New Tacking the paper hanging above in the chamber & new papering one roome below stairs."

In 1734, John Maverick, shopkeeper, bought of Henchman, four quires and five sheets of painted paper for £1. 3. 9. In 1736, Colonel Estes Hatch bought 10 rolls painted paper for £16. 5. 0. which was probably used in his mansion in Dorchester, bought after the Revolution by Colonel James Swan.

The painted paper of the eighteenth century was sold at first in sheets, 22 by 32 inches, called elephant size. Later these were pasted together to make 12 yard lengths. In the earlier stages of manufacture the designs were colored by hand. Stencils of pasteboard were used, and in the last half of the eighteenth

century blocks of pear and sycamore wood were used, as in calico printing. One who painted coats of arms and other things pertaining to heraldry, as well as one who painted or stained linen cloth, was known as a "painter stainer." So, also, those who stained colored or stamped paper for hangings were known as "paper stainers."

When Thomas Hancock built his house on Beacon Hill he desired painted paper for some of his rooms. Extracts from his letter to John Rowe, stationer, London, explain his wants:

"Sir: Inclosed you have the Dimensions of a Room for a shaded Hanging to be Done after the same Pattern I have sent per Capt. Tanner. The pattern is all that was left of a Room lately come over here, and it takes much in ye Town and will be the only paper-hanging for sale here which am of opinion may Answer well… If they can make it more beautiful by adding more Birds flying here and there, with some Landskips at the Bottom, Should like it well. Let the Ground be the same colour of the Pattern. At the top and bottom was a narrow Border of about 2 inches wide which would have to mine…

"A hanging done much handsomer sent over three or four years previous was made by Dunbar in Aldermanbury…

"In other of these Hangings are great variety of different Sorts of Birds, Peacocks, Macoys, Squirrill, Monkys, Fruit and Flowers, etc… I think they are handsomer and better than Painted hangings done in Oyle so I beg your particular Care in procuring this for me and that the patterns may be taken care off

and Return'd with my Goods." —*Letter of Thomas Hancock to John Rowe, Stationer, in London*, Jan. 23, 1737/8.

In the eighteenth-century Boston newspapers may be found numerous items showing the use of wall paper and the fact that it frequently was imported from England. But while it is true that it could be purchased in the shops in Boston it does not follow that rooms in every house were papered. Nor is it likely that the rooms of houses in the country had papered walls save when the owner was a wealthy man. London fashions would first be found transplanted into the seaport towns and later would be adopted by the country. Undoubtedly the home of the Governor, or of some well-to-do sea captain, was the first house to be so decorated. On September 22, 1762, died Daniel Starr of Boston, "who has been for many years employed in Papering Rooms." This item appears in the news items of the *Boston News-Letter*. Eight years later the same newspaper prints the following advertisement:

"George Killcup, jun. Informs the Gentlemen and Ladies in Town and Country That he Paints Carpets & other Articles, and Paper Rooms in the neatest manner. He will take English or West India Goods as Pay.

"Said Killcup is ready to pay those he is indebted to, in Painting or Papering Rooms." —*Boston News-Letter*, March 17, 1768.

"Roll Paper for Rooms," with "most sorts of Stationary Ware" were advertised for sale by John Parker, over against the shop of Mr. Dolbeare, Brazier, at the Head of the Town Dock, Boston.

—*Boston News-Letter*, June 3-10, 1736.

J. Boydell, the printer of the *Boston Gazette*, advertised in November, 1736, a house in Boston, to be sold, in which two chambers in the first story were "hung with Scotch Tapestry, the other Green Cheny."

John Phillips, bookseller, advertised "Stampt Paper in Rolls for to Paper Rooms," in the October 26, 1730, issue of the *New England Journal*.

"Sundry sorts of Painted Paper for Rooms" were to be sold at public vendue at the Exchange Tavern in King Street, with other importations. —*New-England Journal*, August 29, 1738.

"Flowered Paper, or Paper Hangings for Rooms, to be Sold; Inquire of the Printer." —*Boston Gazette*, February 2, 1742.

"Beautiful Arras-Hangings for a Room" to be sold at vendue.[29]—*Boston News-Letter*, August 22, 1745.

Against the earlier background of whitewashed walls hung few decorations. Between 1635 and 1681 there were 960 estates probated in Essex County, Massachusetts. The county had several seaport towns and its inhabitants were more prosperous than many other parts of the Colony. In the inventories of these 960 estates, pictures are listed but eight times and maps were found in but three homes. William Hollingsworth, the shipbuilder and merchant of Salem, possessed seven framed pictures. They are the only *framed* pictures mentioned. Hilliard

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[29] Watkins, "Early Use of Paper Hangings in Boston" (*Old-Time New England*, Jan., 1922).

Veren of Salem, who died in 1668, had three pictures in his hall chamber and Robert Gray of the same town had in his parlor a large looking-glass with some earthen dishes and a picture, the whole valued at £2. The Rev. Nathaniel Rogers of Ipswich, had two pictures in his parlor and Thomas Wells of Ipswich, bequeathed to his son Thomas, the new pictures of the King and Queen and the one of the "five sencces." He also possessed maps and paper pictures.

Fifty years later John Smibert, the portrait painter, had his shop "at his House in Queen Street, between the Town House and the Orange Tree, Boston," where he sold "all sorts of Colours, dry or ground with Oyls and Brushes, Fans of several sorts, the best Mezotints, Italian, French, Dutch and English Prints, in Frames and Glasses or without, by Wholesale or Retail, at Reasonable Rates." About the same time the "Royal Waxwork" was to be seen at the House of Mr. Thomas Brooks, shopkeeper, near the Draw Bridge, and Thomas White, the engraver, was living in a house not far away.

Here are a few advertisements from early newspapers bearing on furnishing the house:

Bed Hangings. To be sold by Mrs. Susanna Condy, near the Old North Meeting House, a fine Fustian Suit of Curtains, with a Cornish and Base Mouldings of a beautiful Figure, drawn in London, on Frame full already worked; as also enough of the same for half a dozen Chairs. N.B. The Bed may be had by itself. —*Boston Gazette*, May 24-31, 1736.

Bed-Screws. Mr. *John Barnard* of Boston, having some time since Lent a Pair of large Bed-screws. These are desiring the Borrower to return them again to the owner, as he desires to Borrow again, to avoid the Curse due to the Wicked, that Borrow but never Pay. —*Boston News-Letter*, Oct. 22-29, 1716.

Bedstead. A Coach-head Bed and Bedstead with its Curtains and Vallents, &c., as it stands, being a blew China. To be disposed off. Inquire of the Printer. —*Boston Gazette*, June 16-23, 1735.

Canopie Beds. A Couple of very good Cannopie Beds lately come from England to be Sold on reasonable terms, by Rupert Lord Upholsterer and to be seen at Mr. Ramies House in Corn-Hill the next door to the Post-office, Boston. —*Boston News-Letter*, Jan. 4-11, 1713-14.

Mohair Bed. To be Sold reasonably for ready money, or on good Security, a yellow Mohair Bed lined with a Persian of the same Colour, and six Chairs of the same Mohair, little the worse for wear. Inquire of J. Boydell. —*Boston Gazette*, Oct. 17-24, 1737.

Press Bed. A Very good Press-Case for a Bed, to be Sold. Enquire of the Printer. —*Boston News-Letter*, Oct. 28-Nov. 4, 1736.

Carpets. Just imported from London, in the last ships and to be sold at Mr. Blanchard's in New Boston West End; a large assortment of fine Carpets for Rooms, very cheap for ready Cash. —*Boston Gazette*, Jan. 22, 1759.

Publick Vendue. At 5'o'Clock in the Afternoon will be sold by T. Fleet, at the Heart and Crown, in Cornhill, – Bedding, Several Suits of Curtains and Bedsteads, a fine new Silk Damask Quilt and Quilted Cushions of the same, Black Walnut Chest of Drawers and Desk, Brass Candlesticks, Iron Dogs, sundry Suits of wearing apparel for men, new Castor Hats, China Ware, Rummolds, Druggets… —*Boston News-Letter*, May 18-25, 1732.

Household Furnishings. This Afternoon at 3 o'clock will be Sold by Publick Vendue, by Daniel Goffe, at the Dwelling House of Mr. Jonathan Barnard, over against the Town-House in Cornhill, sundry sorts of Household Goods, consisting of Beds, Bedding, a Couch, Chairs, handsome Japan'd Tea Tables, Walnut and Mahogany Tables, Chest of Drawers, Peer Glasses, Sconces, Glass Arms, China Ware, Metzotinto and other Prints, several valuable large Pieces of Paintings, one handsome large Carpet 9 Foot 6 Inches by 6 Foot 6 Inches, a fashionable yellow Camblet Bed lin'd with Satten, a great easy Chair and Window Curtains, suitable for a Room, a Field Bedstead and Bed, the covering a Blew Harrateen, Kitchen Furniture, as Pewter of the best sort, Copper, Brass and Iron, a parcel of Books and some Shop Goods. —*Boston News-Letter*, May 8-15, 1735.

Furniture at Auction. To be sold by Auction, Household Furniture of the late Mr. Pyam Blowers, including: Fine Sconce Glasses, large Looking Glasses, Leather Bottom Chairs, sundry Mehogany and other Tables, a good Couch Squab and Pillow, a

very handsome Yellow Damask Bed, an Easy Chair, a neat case of Drawers, … two Silver watches, sundry sorts of good China Ware, etc. —*Boston News-Letter*, May 17-24, 1739.

Furniture at Auction. To be Sold by Publick Vendue on Monday next at 3 o'Clock, Afternoon, at the House of Charles Paxton, Esq., the following Goods, viz.: A fashionable crimson Damask Furniture with Counterpain and two Sets of Window Curtains, and Vallans of the same Damask. Eight Walnut Tree Chairs, stuft Back and Seats covered with the same Damask, Eight crimson China Cases for ditto, one easy Chair and Cushion, same Damask, and Case for ditto. Twelve Walnut Tree chairs, India Backs, finest Cane, and sundry other valuable Household Furniture. —*Boston News-Letter*, Jan. 9, 1746.

Furniture. To be Sold, a crimson Harrateen Coach-Bed, Bedstead, and Feather-bed, six small chairs, and one two-arm Chair, with crimson Harrateen Seats, a Table, and two small Pictures, Enquire of the Printer. —*Boston News-Letter*, June 25, 1747.

Hand Boards. Lately arrived from London, & are to be Sold by Giles Dulake Tidmarsh at his Warehouse No. 4 on the Long Wharfe, Five Dutch Tea Tables, as Hand Boards and Looking Glasses, new Fashion. —*Boston Gazette*, Nov. 19-26, 1722.

LEONARD HOUSE, RAYNHAM, MASS

This shows typical front-gabled roof and two-story porch

Tradition relates that King Philip's head was deposited in this house in 1676

Printed from the original wood block engraved in 1838

CHAPTER IV
Counterpanes and Coverlets

In the early days our forefathers were dependent upon the open fireplace and during the winter season everyone must wear thick clothing and provide an ample supply of warm coverings for the beds. Those were the days of warming pans and heated bricks taken to bed by both children and grown-ups, and of feather beds, comforters and patchwork quilts.

Bed coverings in the olden times, and even in our day, have a variety of names with distinctions sometimes difficult to classify. Sometimes they are counterpanes, and again coverlets. A *comforter* suggests warmth and comfort not only for the bed but for the neck. The *bed cover* is universal as is the *quilt*.

The patchwork quilt was formerly one of the most familiar and necessary articles of household furnishing and its origin reaches backward into the dim and unknown past. It was brought to the Massachusetts Bay by the first settlers. In cottage and castle it was known in the days of King John, and down through the generations its making supplied occupation and amusement to countless women whose life interests centered in their homes and household furnishings. Its manufacture may well be styled one of the household arts, for artistic indeed are the bold conceptions of many of the designs; while the piecing and the patching provide

ample opportunity for needlework of the finest character.

In the early days the English spelled quilt with a final *e*– quilte – as did the French. It is a cover or coverlet made by stitching together two thicknesses of a fabric with some soft substance between them. This applies to bed covers and also to quilted petticoats so commonly worn in the old days.

What is a coverlet? Originally, any covering for a bed; now, specifically, the outer covering. The word comes from the French *couvre-lit*– a bed covering. The handwoven coverlets of many beautiful designs, in blue and white and red and brown, are well known and formerly were woven everywhere.

The *counter-pane*, formerly a bed cover, now describes a light coverlet woven of cotton with raised figures. The word is a corruption of *counterpoint*, in allusion to the panes or squares of which bed covers are often composed. The counterpane was never quilted.

The *bedspread* and the *bed cover* may be considered as one and the same – the uppermost covering of a bed and accordingly of an ornamental character in general. The *comforter* was a thickly quilted bed cover made of several thicknesses of sheet cotton or wool prepared for the purpose. This was too thick to be quilted so it was knotted at regular intervals to prevent the interlining from slipping out of place. Frequently it was called a "comfort."

There is one other name that was applied to a bed covering in the Colonial times but which is never heard today in that

connection. In the days immediately following the settlement many a New England bed was covered with a *rug*. When William Clarke of Salem died in 1647, in the parlor of his house was a bed with a green rug covering it which was valued by the appraisers at fourteen shillings. The term was commonly in use at the time, in fact, as commonly as the word coverlet. In the probate of Essex County, Massachusetts, estates between the years 1635 and 1674, coverlets are mentioned one hundred and forty-two times and rugs one hundred and fifty-seven times while quilts are listed only four times. These early bed rugs were usually thick woolen coverings with a shaggy nap.

A never-failing source of accurate information as to the furnishings and equipment of the New England household in the olden time is the probate records – specifically, the inventory of the property taken in connection with the settlement of the estate. For many years it was the well-nigh universal custom to list, room by room, the contents of a house and from these painstaking inventories it now becomes possible to reconstruct in mental picture the interiors of those homes where lived and died our Puritan ancestors. In connection with the present subject we learn from these inventories that it was quite the usual habit to set up a bed in the parlor and we also learn of the existence of different kinds of rugs used in the bed furnishings – cotton rugs, English rugs, Irish rugs, cradle rugs, etc. There were worsted coverlets, tapestry coverlets and embroidered coverlets. A darnacle coverlet is listed in 1665; but as darnacle curtains appear in the same

inventory it is safe to assume that darnacle is the name of some long-forgotten fabric. But what is a "branched coverlet?" Mrs. Thomas Newhall of Lynn possessed in 1674 a green rug and a branched coverlet.

Capt. George Corwin of Salem who died in 1684, had a calico counterpane in the red chamber in his house. In the corner chamber was a green counterpane and in the kitchen chamber was a sad colored counterpane, two coverlets, and a quilt of colored and flowered calico.

Let us have a look at a few of these wills and inventories. In 1640, the widow Bethia Cartwright of Salem, bequeathed to her sister, then living in England, her bed, bolster, blanket and coverlet. It is an open question if the value of the property equalled the probable cost of transporting it to that loving sister in distant England.

Mrs. Joanna Cummings of Salem, at her death in 1644, among many other items possessed a feather bed, flock bolster and a green rug, jointly valued at £2. 5. 0.

In the "hall" of John Goffe's house, in Newbury, in 1641, were found "3 bedsteeds, £1; 1 pr. curtains with 3 rods, 18s.; 1 green rugg, £1. 6.; 2 blankets, 15 s.; 1 bed, bolster and 4 pillows, £4. 10.; 1 coverlet, 10s.; and 1 bed matt, 2s."

The next year William Howard, afterwards the first town clerk of Topsfield, was one of the appraisers of the estate of Samuel Smith of Enon, the name by which Wenham was then known. In one of the chambers he found a "bed, blancits & coverlet"

which he valued at £7. 8. Rather a valuable bed, or, may it have been the coverlet? In connection with "cobbard clothes" at £1. he lists a "carpitt" at 15s; and this carpet, curiously enough, he did not find on the floor but on a table. Joanna Cummings owned a "carpet & table" that were valued at 7s. 8d. Joseph Metcalf of Ipswich had "a table & old carpett" worth £1. In the parlor of Governor Endecott's house in Boston were found a "Table, Carpet & 3 stools," valued at 50s. William Bacon's "carpets & qushens" were worth £1. 10s. and in the inventory of the estate of Rev. Ezekiel Rogers of Rowley, appears the following: "a presse and a litle Table with ther Carpets, £1. 10s."

John Whittingham lived in Ipswich and died in 1648. In the parlor of his house was found a "Joyne Table with Five chairs & one ould Carpet, 10s.; one cupboard and Cloth, 10s.; 2 paire Cobirons, 15s.; two window Curtains and curtaine rods, 6s.; one case of Bottles, 5s.; Books, £6. 5s.; Eleven Cushions, £1. 10s.; one Still, 5s.;" and perhaps most important of all – "one fetherbed, one flockbed, two boulsters, one pillow, one p. blankets, one Rugge, Curtains & valients and bedsted, £12." In the chamber over the parlor was another bedstead well supplied with furnishings, including two quilts, a blue coverlet and a trundle bed. This upstairs chamber had wall hangings which were valued at £2. 10s. and in the room were six trunks, a chest and a box, containing stores of bed linen, table cloths, napkins, hose yarn, silver plate and eleven spoons. Two chairs, four stools, a screen, two pairs of cobirons and a pair of tongs completed the

furnishings of the room. It almost stands open before us. And those wall hangings valued at £2. 10s.!

Another parlor chamber in a house in Newbury, in which had lived the minister, the Rev. James Noyes, was more meagerly furnished. Here the appraisers found "2 boxes, 4 hogsheads, a musket and a gun and two swords, £2.; a bolster and a quilt & two blankets and a parsell of Cotton wooll, £3. 10s."

Just one more inventory – the estate of William Clarke who died in 1647 in Salem. The parlor contained a half-headed bedstead with curtains and vallance which was furnished with a feather bed and bolster, a straw bed and flock bolster, white blankets, sheets, and a green rug. In a corner of this parlor stood another bedstead having a mat, canvas flock bed, sheets, old blankets and a red rug, and in the chamber over the kitchen was a low bedstead with a flock bed and bolster, a blanket, a rug and an old quilt.

Here are two kinds of bedsteads mentioned in this house, but there were other kinds in frequent use at the time: high beds and side beds, canopy bedsteads, half-headed, joined, cabin, corded, close, press, standing, truckle and trundle bedsteads and what is strange indeed, not a single example of these early bedsteads has been preserved. All have been worn out or destroyed – supplanted by a newer fashion – and we today can only imagine their various forms and decorations.

In the New England vernacular, materials for quilts were "skurse" in the olden times. The settlers, of course, brought all

their furnishings from England and a few years elapsed before wool and flax were produced here in any quantity. Meanwhile all fabrics were imported and paid for by shipments of salt fish, furs, lumber, corn, etc. A brisk trade soon sprang up with the West Indies and Spain and cotton was brought into the New England ports. Some of the fabrics in common use before 1650 have names that sound strangely in our ears. Darnacle has been mentioned. There were baize for jackets, calico for dresses, linsey woolsey for heavy skirts, serge for various articles of clothing, coifing stuff for caps, linen for forehead bands and many other uses, dimity for bed hangings and petticoats, and a fabric known as "barber's stuff." In time some of these materials became available for quilt making and at a still later time the handwoven, home-dyed fabrics were used and some of these were rudely decorated with tied and dipped patterns or stamped and stencilled designs.

It should always be kept in mind, however, that geographical location largely enters into the production and character of the quilt, and the family that was "well-off" of course would be supplied more abundantly with furnishings and be less dependent upon homely makeshifts and the daily practice of household economy. Those living in the seaport towns, where most of the shops were found, would be likely to follow the simplest course of fashion and buy from the stock just imported from England or Holland. The hand loom was found everywhere but more generally in the country. Weaving was a trade for men

and so practiced, but many a farmhouse had its loom and every country home its spinning wheel. In the larger towns the dame of social position or comfortable means would devote her spare moments to needlework and embroidery, while in the country the housewives would make pieced quilts or patch the clothing of their numerous children.

It naturally follows, that the handwoven coverlet, should be a product of the country rather than the town and usually of the countryside farthest removed from the influences of the shop and of English goods. Even today it is still woven in the remote settlements of Eastern Kentucky and Tennessee, and judging from existing examples the vogue of the handwoven coverlet was greater in New York, Pennsylvania, Kentucky and the Middle West than in New England although many fine examples were produced here. The manufacture of the patchwork quilt as a domestic art also seems to have reached its highest development in the Middle West during the first half of the nineteenth century.

The patchwork quilt of New England is known as the "pieced quilt" when made in the Middle West and more correctly so, for *to piece* means to join together separate pieces of like material into sections or blocks that in turn are united to form the top of the quilt. The pieces usually are of uniform shape and size and contrasting colors are blended to form the design – usually a geometric pattern. These pieces are sewed "over and over" on the wrong side. To *patch* means to mend or adorn by adding a patch or by laying over a separate piece of cloth. The French

word *applique* well describes the patched or laid-on work where the design is cut out and applied or sewed on, in fact, "sewed-on quilts" and "laid quilts" are old terms. This type of quilt is found in New England but infrequently as compared with the "pieced quilt," here commonly known as the "patchwork quilt."

In early times the pieces were nearly always of a woolen fabric, the brighter colored cloth being saved for the more central portions of the design. Every scrap and remnant of material left from the making of garments was saved and the best pieces of worn-out garments were carefully cut out and made into quilt pieces. The historian of the Saco Valley, Maine, relates that a scarlet broadcloth cloak formerly worn by a Lord Mayor of London and brought to Massachusetts by a member of the Merritt family of Salisbury, Mass., after many adventures ended its days as small bits of vivid color in a patchwork quilt made in Maine. Portions of discarded military uniforms, of flannel shirts and well-worn petticoats were utilized and frequently an old blanket would be used for lining.

CHAPTER V
Concerning Their Apparel

In 1630 there were differences in dress even more so than at the present time. The simple, coarse clothing of the yeoman and the worker in the various trades was far removed from the dress of the merchant and the magistrate. Leather clothing was very generally worn by laborers and servants as deerskins were cheap and leather had been in common use for jerkins and breeches in Old England, so naturally it was worn here. Stockings were made of a variety of materials and most shoes had wooden heels.

Higher in the social scale men wore doublets and full breeches and clothed themselves as well as their estates permitted – sometimes even better than they could well afford. Sleeves were slashed. Falling bands at the neck were common and a deep linen collar appears in portraits of the period. A beaver or felt hat with steeple crown was worn, and gloves, sometimes elegantly embroidered, were essential. The accepted idea of Puritan dress should be revised and the Victorian standard of sentimental simplicity be discarded. There was great variety of fabrics available in the shops of London and Bristol as will be noted in the list at the end of this chapter, and as wealth permitted probably much of this material eventually found its way to the shelves of the shopkeepers in Boston and other of the larger

seaport towns.

The following list of clothing each man should provide himself with on sailing for New England in 1629, when the Rev. Francis Higginson came over, is so specific that we can easily visualize the male company that arrived at Salem that year.

> Note. As several excellent books are available that treat exclusively of costume in the colonies, it has not seemed necessary to elaborate on the subject in these pages. The following notes however, are thought to be of interest.

4 peares of shoes.

4 peares of stockings.

1 peare Norwich gaiters.

4 shirts

2 suits dublet and hose of leather lyn'd with oy'd skin leather, ye hose & dublett with hooks & eyes.

1 suit of Nordon dussens or hampshire kersies lyn'd the hose with skins, dublets with lynen of gilford or gedlyman kerseys.

4 bands

2 handkerchiefs

1 wastecoat of greene cotton bound about with red tape

1 leather girdle

1 Monmouth cap

1 black hatt lyned in the brows with lether

5 Red Knitt capps mill'd about 5d. apiece

2 peares of gloves

1 Mandillion [mantle or great coat] lyned with cotton

1 peare of breeches and waistcoat

1 leather sute of Dublett & breeches of oyled leather

1 peare of leather breeches and drawers to weare with both there other sutes.

Fine clothing surrounded itself with fine furnishings, according to the standards of the period, and as the wealth of the Colony increased with the successful exportation of fish, lumber, beaver, and peltry, it supplied them with all kinds of luxuries and refinements. The ships were crossing frequently and the Colony kept pace with the mother country much as the country follows the city at the present time.

In the town of Ipswich, lived Madam Rebecka Symonds, writing in her sixtieth year to her son in London to send her a fashionable "lawn whiske," for her neckwear. In due time he replied that the "fashionable Lawn whiske is not now worn, either by Gentil or simple, young or old. Instead where of I have bought a shape and ruffles, which is now the ware of the gravest as well as the young ones. Such as goe not with naked necks ware a black wifle over it. Therefore, I have not only Bought a plaine one y't you sent for, but also a Luster one, such as are most in fashion."

The dutiful son also purchased for his mother's wear a feather fan; but he writes to her "I should also have found in my heart, to have let it alone, because none but very grave persons (and of them very few) use it. Now 'tis grown almost as obsolete as Russets, and more rare to be seen than a yellow Hood." When the feather fan reached Ipswich it was found to have a silver

handle and with it came "two tortois fans, 200 needles, 5 yds. sky calico, silver gimp, a black sarindin cloak, damson leather skin, two women's Ivorie Knives, etc."[30]

Human nature and human frailities were much the same in the seventeenth century as at the present time, and before long, the magistrates considered it desirable to curb the extravagancies of dress that followed the London mode; and to induce a spirit of economy more fitting to the poverty of a new settlement. The ministers controlled the lawmaking body and sumptuary laws were enacted which are enlightening. Because of "newe and immodest fashions" the wearing of silver, gold and silk laces, girdles and hat bands was prohibited. It was the fashion at that time to slash the sleeves so that a fabric of another color worn beneath would show in an ornamental manner through the slash. The ministers decreed that neither man nor woman should wear clothing with more than one slash on each sleeve and another on the back. "Cutt-works, inbroidered or needle worke capps, bands & rayles," were forbidden.[31] Ruffs and beaver hats were prohibited, as was long hair. Binding or small edging laces might be used, but the making or selling of bone lace was penalized at the rate of five shillings per yard.

But this didn't change human nature and although from time to time offenders were taken into court and punished, the wearing of fine clothing fashioned after the London mode continued and

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[30] Waters, *Ipswich in the Massachusetts Bay Colony*, Ipswich, 1905.

[31] *Records of the Mass. Bay Colony*, Vol. I, p. 126.

a few years later the ministers tried their hand again. Any kind of lace was anathema and "no garment shalbee made with short sleeves, whereby the nakedness of the arme may bee discovered." On the other hand, large sleeves were forbidden, so the maids and goodwives of the time must have been somewhat at a loss to know how lawfully to fashion their clothes.

The minister at Ipswich grew so ill-tempered over the ungodly state of the women in his town that he vented his spleen as follows: "When I hear a nugiperous Gentledame inquire what dress the Queen is in this week, what the nudius tertian of the Court, I look at her as the very gizzard of a trifle, the product of a quarter of a cypher, the epitome of nothing, fitter to be kickt, if she were of a kickable substance than either honoured or humoured."[32]

The minister in the adjoining town, Rowley, actually cut off his nephew from his inheritance because he wore his hair long in the prevailing fashion. Later in the century the offense of wearing long hair was forgotten in the unspeakable sin of wearing wigs. The Great and General Court again took a hand and in 1675 condemned "the practise of men's wearing their own or other's hair made into periwigs." Judge Sewall in his *Diary* alludes to the custom. In 1685 three persons were admitted to the Old South Church in Boston. "Two wore periwigs," comments the Judge.

"1708, Aug. 20, Mr. Chievar died. The Wellfare of the

[32] Ward, *The Simple Cobler of Aggawam*, London, 1647.

Province was much upon his Spirit. He abominated Periwigs."[33]

The Great and General Court at one time ordered that no person should smoke tobacco in public under a penalty of two shillings and six pence, nor in his own house with a relative or friend. But everybody smoked who wanted to, even the maids, and the repressive legislation in time met the usual fate of similar efforts to restrain individual liberty and manners.

It is sweet to fancy Priscilla at her spinning wheel wearing the coif and nun-like garb of the Puritan maiden of the poet and the artist. But the inventories of estate in the early years of the Colony, as well as at a later time, furnish evidence of a different character. The variety of fabrics listed is amazing and holds its own with the modern department store. There are most of the well-known fabrics of today, such as calico, cambric, challis, flannel, lawn, linen, plush, serge, silk, velvet, and many others; and there are also names that sound strangely in modern ears, viz.: cheney, darnex, dowlas, genting, inckle, lockrum, ossembrike, pennistone, perpetuana, sempiternum, stammell, and water paragon.

As for dress – the women wore bonnets, caps, silk hoods, coifs, forehead cloths, ruffs, and whisks. Gowns, cloaks, mantles, and muffs are mentioned frequently; as are many kinds of lace and even fans and veils. Shawls and scarfs were not unknown and there were gold, silver, and enamelled rings. Women possessed masks, and stomachers were not uncommon. Tortoise shell

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[33] *Sewall's Diary*, Vol. II, p. 231.

combs appear; all well-to-do persons wore gloves, and as for shoes – there were shoes with French heels, fall shoes, and those with silver buckles. Even shoe strings appear in the inventories. There were silver, pewter, and steel buttons and those of gympe, thread, and silk.

Laboring men wore leather and coarse fabrics and for others there were suits, doublets, waistcoats and breeches. Trousers are mentioned; also a cane and periwigs. Of caps and hats there were a number of kinds – felt, castor, demi-castor, and even straw. Capt. George Corwin, a Salem merchant, owned a cloth coat trimmed with silver lace, a velvet coat, a tabby doublet, an old-fashioned Dutch satin doublet, four cloaks of various kinds, two pairs of golden topped gloves, one embroidered pair, and a pair with black fringe. He also took his walks abroad wearing silk stockings, with a hat encircled by a silver band and carrying a silver-headed cane or a plate hilt rapier, according to fashion. He possessed two silver watches. Who shall say that the men and women of the New England colonies did not dress well and live well in the early days according to their means?[34]

In the late 1600's, and until comparatively recent times, working men very generally wore frocks, a custom in dress that dates back into the centuries. It was an almost universal custom for farmers and those employed in the mechanic trades to wear

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[34] In the inventory of the estate of Henry Landis of Boston, Shopkeeper, deceased, taken, Dec. 17, 1651, appears his clothing, viz.:– Suffolk Co. Probate Rds., Vol. II, p. 127.

a frock. The farmer generally looked upon the frock as an outer garment – something to put on in colder weather or to slip on to protect underclothing or to conceal an untidy appearance. It was a garment to take off on coming into the house or to put on when going to the village or to market.

Carters or truckmen also habitually wore frocks. Drake, in his "Landmarks of Boston," describes the old-time trucks, not to exceed eighteen feet in length, with their loads of hogsheads of molasses and other heavy merchandise balanced on the one axle and the two horses harnessed tandem, the head horse led by the truckman. With the disappearance of these ponderous vehicles also went "that distinctive body of men, the 'Boston Truckmen,' who once formed a leading and attractive feature of our public processions, with their white frocks and black hats, mounted with their magnificent truck-horses. Hardy and athletic, it would be hard to find their equals on either side of the water. The long jiggers now used are scarcely less objectionable than the old trucks." Drake wrote this only seventy-five years ago but the "jiggers" of his time have now almost entirely disappeared.

The frock was a loose garment slipped on over the head and in length usually reached halfway between the knees and the feet. The opening in front reached from the neckband nearly to the waist and was closed by buttons, though sometimes a gathering string was used. The bottom was cut up eight or ten inches, on the sides, to permit greater freedom in walking. There were long frocks and short frocks, the latter being generally worn indoors.

The frocks worn in workshops by mechanics were short.

One early source of information exists in the advertisements of runaway servants to be found in the eighteenth-century Boston newspapers. During the quarter-century following 1725, the *Boston News-Letter* printed thirty-seven advertisements asking for the detention of white male servants, twenty-one of whom ran away during the cold-weather months. Of the latter, six wore frocks or carried frocks in their bundle of clothing. It is fair to assume that some of these men may have taken with them only their best clothing and left working garments behind, hence the small number of frocks specifically mentioned. This possibly may have been the fact in the instance of an Irish servant, aged twenty-six, who ran away in December, 1741, from his master, James Hunt of York, Maine. He wore a broadcloth coat and jacket of a cinnamon color, a pair of orange colored plush breeches and a good beaver hat. The reward for his detention was £3.

John Davis, a servant of Mr. Okenden of Boston, absented himself from service in March, 1728, and among other clothing he took with him a brown fustian frock, and a pair of striped ticking breeches.

Frocks and "trouzers" were part of the personal effects of William Davison, a tailor, in King Street, Boston, that were advertised for sale at public vendue in November, 1729.

Charles Daly, an Irish boy, who ran away from his master in Boston, in December, 1732, wore a fustian frock and another

Irish servant who ran away from a brigantine at Boston four years later, wore a new frock and trowsers.

An Irish servant of Captain Luce of Boston, a cooper by trade, took with him when he disappeared in December, 1737, a frock and a pair of "trowsers." Ten years later a negro servant who ran away from the North End of Boston, took with him a new ozen-brig frock.

The settlers came provided with English-made shoes it is likely of a quality similar to those provided by John Hewsen in 1629, the contract reading: "To make eight pair of welt-neat's leather shoes, crossed on the outside with a seam, to be substantial, good over leather of the best, and two soles, the inner sole of good neat's leather, and the outer of tallowed backs."[35] In 1651, the stock of Robert Turner of Boston, shoemaker, was inventoried as follows: 23 pairs of children's shoes at 9d. per pair; 29 pairs of No. 11, at 4/4; of No. 12, at 4/8; of No. 13, at 4/10 per pair; 20 dozen wooden heels at 8d. per dozen; 14 pairs boots at 14/ per pair.

In 1672, a committee of the town of Boston, considering that people in low circumstances "will wear no other shoes or boots generally but of the newest fashion and highest price" proposed that a law should be enacted that no shoemaker shall sell to any inhabitant, shoes of 11 or 12 sizes above five shillings a pair and so in proportion as to other sizes.[36]

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[35] *Records of the Massachusetts Bay Colony*, Boston, 1853, Vol. I, p. 27.

[36] Felt, *The Customs of New England*, Boston, 1853.

During the first half century following the arrival of the settlers, red colored stockings were much worn in New England and russet and green colored stockings were also in fashion. Stockings made of wash leather were worn. In 1675 cloth stockings sold at 14/ to 18/ a dozen pairs. In 1675 John Usher of Boston wrote to his principal in London: "Your stirrups and turn-down stockings are not salable here."

The Massachusetts Bay Company sent over in its stock, in 1629, a hundred black hats made of wool and lined in the brim with leather and at the same time came one hundred Monmouth caps, so-called from the place where they were manufactured, and valued at two shillings each. With them came five hundred red knit caps, milled, at five pence each. Beaver hats were also worn at that time and in 1634 prohibited by order of the General Court. In 1651, a shopkeeper in Boston, sold black hats at 14s. 16s. and 5s.; colored hats brought 10s. and others, 8s.; children's were 3/6; black castors, 14s. and coarse felt hats, 3s. each.

In 1675 a Bostonian wrote to a friend in London, that the local market for sugar-loaf or high-crowned hats was dull.

The Monmouth or military cocked hat, for men, began to come into fashion about 1670, with an average width of brim of six inches. Their inconvenient width led to the practice of having one flap fastened to the side of the crown, either before or behind, and then to having two flaps alike secured. During the reign of Queen Anne, the brim was caught up in three flaps, and so the

triangularly cocked hat became the fashion.[37]

Doublets were made of leather, usually red in color, and fastened with hooks and eyes. They were large on the shoulders, having much cutwork showing the linen shirt beneath. Toward the end of the century their popularity waned and they were succeeded by the waistcoat. The jerkin was made of leather and also various kinds of cloth and sometimes is mentioned in inventories. It was worn by laboring men.

Snow Shoes were used after a great storm; "which our People do much use now, that never did before." —*Boston News-Letter*, Jan. 29-Feb. 5, 1704/5.

Stolen or carried privately away out of the house of Capt. John Bonner in Cow Lane, near Fort Hill, Boston, sometime before the late Sickness of his late Wife, or about the time of her decease, which was the Month of January last: the following Particulars, viz.: Of his Wife's Wearing apparel three Silk Gowns, one changable colour, a second flowr'd and the third stript; Three other Gowns, one where of a double gown, one side silk stuff the other russel, a second double Gown of silk-stuff and Petticoat of the same, the third a black Crape Gown and Petticoat of the same; Four other Petticoats, one changable colour'd silk, a second black flowr'd silk, a third plain black silk, the fourth a flowr'd Sarge, one Lutstring Hood and Scarff, three laced Headdresses and one plain, three laced Caps, two laced Handkerchiefs, three under Caps laced, three white

[37] Felt, *The Customs of New England*, Boston, 1853.

Aprons, three pair of laced Sleves, two white Muslin Hoods, one Amber Necklace, one Muff…" —*Boston News-Letter*, Mar. 5-12, 1710/11.

Gloves. Mens Topt fine Kid Gloves, and womans at 3s. 6d. per Pair, fine Glaz'd Lamb and Mittens at 2s. 6d. per Pair, and Rough Lamb for Men and Women at 2s. 6d. per Pair, and further Incouragement to any that buys in Quantity: To be Sold by Mr Daniel Stevens lately come from England, At his House in Pudding-Lane, Boston. —*Boston News-Letter*, Sept. 3-10, 1711.

Man's Muff. Any Person that took up a Man's Muffe, dropt on the Lord's Day between the Old Meeting House & the South, are desired to bring it to the Post Office in Boston, and they shall be Rewarded. —*Boston News-Letter*, Jan. 9-16, 1715/16.

Venetian Silks. Imported from London in the Last Ship, and to be Sold by Mr. A. Faneuil, Merchant, at his Warehouse in King-Street, Boston, flowered Venetian Silks of the newest Fashion, in Pieces that contain enough for a suit for a woman. —*Boston Gazette*, Feb. 8-15, 1719/20.

Wigg. Taken from the Shop of Powers Marriot, Barber, in Boston, either on the 2d or 3d of August Instant, a light Flaxen Natural Wigg; parted from the Forehead to the Crown, the narrow Ribband is of a Red Pink Colour, the Caul is in Rows of Green, Red and White. Whoever will give Information of the said Wigg, so as it be restor'd again, they shall have Twenty Shillings Reward. —*Boston News-Letter*, July 31-Aug. 7, 1729.

Public Vendue. To be Sold, at Publick Vendue, by William

Nichols at the Royal Exchange Tavern, in King Street, Boston, on This Day, beginning (if the Company attend) precisely at 4 o'clock Afternoon, a Variety of Merchandize; which may be seen till the Sale begins, viz:

A curious and compleat double Sett of Burnt China, Broad Cloths, Druggets, Shalloons, Cottons and long Ells, Buckrams, Scots Cloths, Dowlas, Garlixs, Hollands, Chints, Patches, Qualities, FINE NUNS THREADS, Garterings, Mens and Womens fine Hose, Mens superfine Silk Hose, fine Shirt Buttons, Womens superfine Mittens, yellow, blue and Tabby, a sattin Coverlid, curiously embroidered with Gold Lincey for Curtains, &c., some Household Goods, such as Case of Draws, Tables, Paints, Maps, Alabaster Effigies, China, &c. Sundry suits of Mens Apparel, new and second hand; sundry very good Watches, Shoes, Boots, Green Tea, Chocolate, and many other Things. —*Boston News-Letter*

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