A HISTORICAL SURVEY OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY COLONIAL INTERIOR DESIGN AS EXEMPLIFIED BY INTERIOR WALLS OF HOUSES IN WILLIAMSBURG, VIRGINIA

By

Sandra Feldpausch Goran

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ABSTRACT

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Photographs of the fireplace walls of fifteen rooms of Williamsburg, Virginia, houses were used to study and determine the characteristics of Colonial design. The findings of this study correspond with descriptions presented as background information of the decorative interior details from the literary sources. An examination of representative rooms of Williamsburg houses confirms the particular styling of the interior design details known as Colonial.

The rooms of the Williamsburg houses can be divided into three groups, progressing from the simple to the more elaborate: (1) rooms with combinations of a cornice, chair rail and baseboard, (2) rooms with a dado, and (3) rooms with fully-paneled wainscotting. The treatment of the over-mantel on the fireplace wall was determined by the amount of paneling and moldings used. There were no examples of walls finished with wallpaper or fabric. Fireplace moldings were composed of three materials: marble, stone and wood. Marble fireplace moldings were used in the less elaborate room interiors and in houses having fully-paneled walls. Wood was painted and plaster was treated with whitewash.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to acknowledge the invaluable help given me by Mr. Paul Buchanan, Supervisor of Architectural Research and Records and Colonial Projects Designer, Williamsburg, Virginia. He suggested the list of houses used in the study as being representative examples and permitted the use of the Progress and Research Photograph Albums in his office.

I wish to express gratitude to the members of my committee, Dr. Mary Gephart, Mrs. Stephania Winkler, and Mrs. Mabel Cooper Skjelver, for their guidance through this research problem. The personal interest in my study by my advisor, Dr. Elinor Nugent, gave me the desire to continue when time seemed to be unavailable. Her patience and kind manner is envied by the author of this study. I wish to extend sincere appreciation to her.

The encouragement of my parents and understanding of my husband was needed and always welcomed. They helped me find the answer to my concern for care of Lynette and Jamie so I could continue and complete this study. Too, I thank my children for their good behavior and ready love.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In this mid-twentieth century there is an increased interest and use of architectural details and interior furnishings to capture the essence of our Early American heritage. The houses of the eighteenth century offer to contemporary designers and builders a source of inspiration and detail which is expressive of the ideals and standards of a new and vigorously developing country. It is perhaps the desire to acquire the strength and stability as well as the beauty of the past that contemporary architects and interior designers turn to the Colonial period.

The restoration of Williamsburg, Virginia, in the late 1920's[1] brought the merits of Colonial design to the attention of twentieth-century designers and builders. The restored houses and public buildings created not only a source of inspiration, but also a basis for the study of the design of a past era. Through a utilization of this source, it is possible to determine and summarize the characteristics of the design which is known as "Colonial."

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[1]A. Lawrence Kocher and Howard Dearstyne, Williamsburg: Its Buildings and Gardens (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1961), p. 45.

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to determine the characteristics of Colonial design as expressed in the details used in the interiors of houses built in America during the eighteenth century. By examining and summarizing the treatment used for fireplace walls in the living rooms of a selected group of original and restored houses in Williamsburg, Virginia, it is possible to identify the characteristic interior design style of the Colonial period. The assumption guiding this study is that the interior design details found in the houses of Williamsburg, Virginia, are examples of the eighteenth-century Colonial period in America.

Details of interior design are compiled and summarized as an aid for those interested in creating furnishings and interiors for contemporary homes using adaptations of eighteenth-century Colonial design. The use of such details can assist in capturing the spirit and feeling evidenced in the houses of Williamsburg where the furnishings were in harmony with the basic structural and architectural qualities.[2] It is hoped this study will contribute information for the use of designers of interiors, whether professional designers or interested homemakers.

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[2]"The Williamsburg Tradition," Williamsburg Reproductions, May, 1965, p. 7.

Methodology

This is an historical and descriptive study of eighteenth-century colonial interior design. In addition to literary sources, it is possible to utilize the actual structures of this period which have either been maintained or reproduced in the restoration of one of the most important towns of the eighteenth-century Colonial period in America. Williamsburg was the capital of the Commonwealth of Virginia from 1699 to 1780. The town became a political and social metropolis and reflects this role in its architectural development.[3] Ideas and ideals of the nation were focused in Williamsburg as the great statesmen verbally and physically fought for and won their independence from England.[4] Williamsburg offers an authentic and unique source for study because of the efforts since 1926 to reproduce exactly the structures of the Colonial era.[5]

After examining the available literature pertaining to interior wall treatments of houses in Williamsburg, Virginia, photographs of fifteen rooms of fourteen houses were selected and used during a visit to the restored city. These photographs formed a basis for a description of eighteenth-century Colonial wall treatments and interior design details found in the fireplace walls of the living rooms.

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[3]Kocher and Dearstyne, op. cit., p. 3.

[4]Kenneth Chorley, Williamsburg in Virginia (Williamsburg, Virginia: Colonial Williamsburg, Incorporated, 1963), pp. 1-14.

[5]Kocher and Dearstyne, op. cit., p. 45.

A representative list of living rooms was taken from Part II of Whiffen's book, The Eighteenth-Century Houses of Williamsburg.[6] Marcus Whiffen was a member of the staff of Colonial Williamsburg as an architectural historian from 1954 to 1959. Part II of his book is a pictorial survey of thirty-two of the eighty-three original houses in Williamsburg's restored area. These photographs were from the Progress and Research Photograph Albums[7] of Colonial Williamsburg.

Photographs of representative living rooms for this study were selected and permission for this use was granted by Paul Buchanan, Supervisor of Architectural Research and Records and Colonial Projects Designer, Williamsburg, Virginia. Buchanan has been associated with the restoration program since 1950, a period of sixteen years. These rooms were chosen according to information relative to this study which was found in the Progress and Research Photograph Albums. These albums collected at Williamsburg contained pictures taken during various phases of the restoration or preservation of each building from its start to its completion.

Incorporating the suggestions of Buchanan, fifteen rooms of fourteen houses were selected for this study. These rooms included a fireplace wall which was considered

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[6]Marcus Whiffen, The Eighteenth-Century Houses of Williamsburg (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1960), pp. 89-185.

[7]Progress and Research Photograph Albums. Williamsburg, Virginia: Colonial Williamsburg, Inc.

representative of eighteenth-century colonial interior design.

From literary sources an outline compiling the details of the interior design was developed for use in studying these photographs. The details studied include: (1) the divisions of the wall--paneling (wainscot or dado), moldings (cornice, chair rail, baseboard), fireplace (mantel or over-mantel, molding), and (2) the decoration of the wall--actual materials (paint, whitewash, wallpaper, fabric).

The details gathered from literary sources were described and some illustrations were included to identify the Colonial details. The outline of the compiled interior design details of the fifteen rooms presents further identification of the characteristic interior design style of the Colonial period, and the characteristic features which express the qualities of eighteenth-century colonial design are summarized.

Definition of Terms

Various terms are used in the description of eighteenth-century architectural details. These need to be defined to promote an understanding today of the meaning of these terms as used in the eighteenth century.

The term Colonial Williamsburg designates the time when Williamsburg was the capital of Virginia from 1701 to 1779.[8]

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[8]"The Historical Background," The Architectural Record (December, 1935), pp. 160-61.

The restoration program restored the architectural details by using new materials to duplicate the original or preserved the object by retaining the original through the use of ordinary repair.[9]

The living room is that part of the house used to entertain acquaintances.[10]

The terms wainscotting and dado are used to refer to types of paneling that are wood coverings applied to the wall area in varying amounts.[11] Paneling that extends from the baseboard molding to the ceiling is referred to as wainscotting. Paneling extending from the baseboard molding up three to five feet ending with the finishing molding, dado cap, is referred to as wainscotting or dado.[12]

The terms cornice, dado cap, chair rail or surbase, and baseboard refer to types of moldings of wood applied horizontally to various areas of the wall.[13] The cornice is applied to the area at the angle of the wall and ceiling.[14] The dado cap is applied to the wall as the finishing molding at the top of wainscotting or dado.[15] The chair rail or sur-

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[9]William Graves Perry, "Notes on the Architecture," The Architectural Record (December, 1935), p. 370.

[10]Whiffen, op. cit., pp. 46-51.

[11]Norman Morrison Isham, A Glossary of Colonial Architectural Terms (The Walpole Society, 1939), pp. 10-37.

[12]Kocher and Dearstyne, op. cit., p. 25.

[13]Isham, loc. cit.

[14]Ibid.

[15]Whiffen, op. cit., p. 81.

base is applied half-way up the wall or at "chair height" as a protective molding where there is no paneling.[16] The baseboard is applied to the area at the bottom of the wall.[17]

The fireplace molding and mantel or over-mantel are the components of the area around the fireplace and the area above, respectively.[18]

Review of Literature

Interest in the restoration of Williamsburg, Virginia was reflected in the many writings which presented the various facets of the Colonial city. Many articles focused upon the architecture, the gardens, colonial cookery, life in the eighteenth century, and the progress of the restoration program.

Numerous magazines presented the newly restored and rebuilt houses through pictures and descriptions. Two issues of House and Gardens[19] presented articles on the outstanding features of the houses of the restored city; both named and described the fireplace wall and the window detailing. The thirty-one page coverage in the 1937 issue[20] also

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[16]Kocher and Dearstyne, loc. cit.

[17]Isham, loc. cit.

[18]Ibid.

[19]Ethel A. Reeve, "Inside A Virginian Colonial House in Old Williamsburg," House and Gardens (November, 1933), pp. 28-29.

[20]"Williamsburg, What It Means to Architecture, to Gardening, to Decoration," House and Gardens (November, 1937), pp. 37-68.

named proportions of the rooms and furnishings, and the unusual color schemes. It was also pointed out that the Williamsburg houses and public buildings contribute generously to a catalogue of fireplace designs. Two issues of the Ladies Home Journal[21] presented relative pictorial descriptions of the exterior and interior of two houses in Williamsburg. In both articles the photographs depicted the details of the fireplace wall.[22] Interest in the indispensable traditions of Colonial architecture persisted as the restoration progressed.

Many books mention the value of the restoration program and the merits of the architecture of Williamsburg. Gowans, an analyst of the colonial spirit in America, points out the value of Williamsburg as a source of study in his book Images of American Living.[23] Gowan states:

> The Williamsburg buildings mean many things to many people. To some, they mean wealth, the wealth of early Virginia that built them, the wealth of twentieth-century America that restored them. To others they mean a style to copy. But their greatest significance remains historical. They are deliberate dramatizations in America of men's power to organize their environment meaningfully; they are the first works of and for men consciously delighting to feel themselves in command of the world they inhabit.[24]

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[21]"Brush-Everard House," Ladies Home Journal (October, 1952), pp. 46-47.

[22]"Nicolson House," Ladies Home Journal (February, 1955), pp. 50-51.

[23]Alan Gowans, Images of American Living (Philadelphia, New York: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1964).

[24]Ibid., p. 135.

Hamlin, Professor of Architecture, Columbia University, also regarded the buildings as valuable sources. He states:

> Williamsburg, of course, had the most sophisticated, the most elegant capital of them all. Now rebuilt in as close a reproduction of the original as the existing foundations, contemporary engravings and descriptions could make possible,...the reconstructed buildings show a quality in the proportion of window and wall, an originality and daring in the use of carved forms, a dexterity in the handling of arched and square-headed openings which is all unique in America.[25]

Watterson in speaking of the Governors' Palace in his book, Architecture[26] stated: "The interiors, the furnishings, and the very beautiful gardens of this building have made it a shrine in early Americana." Watterson further voices the praises of the colonial architecture of Williamsburg as he writes:

> The restoration of Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia, affords a unique opportunity to see early eighteenth-century Virginia architecture at its best. Not only a few buildings, but an entire portion of the city, about a mile long by one-third of a mile wide, has been restored to its condition before 1810....Along this street are many old houses and taverns, as well as Bruton Church, carefully rebuilt or restored, completely capturing the atmosphere, as the aspect, of the old city.[27]

Kimball, the Director of the Pennsylvania Museum and Historian of the American Institute of Architects, stated: "Williamsburg, at the Revolution, was a town of beauty and

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[25]Talbot Hamlin, Architecture Through the Ages (New York: G.P. Putham's Sons, 1953), pp. 530-31.

[26]Joseph Watterson, Architecture (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, Inc., 1950).

[27]Ibid., p. 301.

of architectural significance; its major buildings were milestones in history of American style, its Palace Garden perhaps the most beautiful in America."[28]

The work of Kocher and Dearstyne, Williamsburg: Its Buildings and Gardens[29] described the restoration. Exterior and interior architectural details found in the houses and public buildings were presented. This book was done under the guidance of the Colonial Williamsburg organization. Also under their guidance the comprehensive presentation of Williamsburg's public buildings entitled, The Public Buildings of Williamsburg[30] was done by Marcus Whiffen, architectural historian. His later book, The Eighteenth-Century Houses of Williamsburg[31] included detailed descriptions of the original houses in the town. Gowans states that Marcus Whiffen's writings have been classical sources on Williamsburg since their appearance. The book written by Kocher and Dearstyne and the work of Whiffen were recommended by Mr. Paul Buchanan, Supervisor of Architectural Research and Records and Colonial Projects Designer, Williamsburg, Virginia. Considered as good representative sources for this study, these writings were the major sources for Chapter II and III of this study.

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[28]Kocher and Dearstyne, op. cit., p. 11.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Marcus Whiffen, The Public Buildings of Williamsburg (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc., 1958).

[31]Whiffen, The Eighteenth-Century Houses of Williamsburg.

The Williamsburg Restoration, Incorporated has periodically published catalogues, Williamsburg Reproductions,[32] of the available authentic reproductions of the interior decor of the important historic city. The organizers of this crafts catalogue attribute the lasting interest and harmonious results in Colonial interiors to the effective use of proportion, detail, and symmetry. The structures, gardens and interiors are based on geometric designs. They state:

> Grace of proportion and rhythm of pattern, honest use of materials, subtle harmony of varied designs; these ancient concepts are as applicable to today's living as they were to towns and homes two centuries ago.[33]

Interior design studies have been very few and none has been completed utilizing the houses of Williamsburg, Virginia. Sisson completed a thesis entitled, "A Study of Architecture, Interior Design and Furnishings of Selected Houses in the United States in the Period of 1890-1920."[34] This study, concentrating upon a period of rapid industrial growth and architecture in the United States, was undertaken to analyze the architecture, interior design and furnishings of selected houses in New York, Philadelphia and Chicago.

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[32] Williamsburg Reproductions (Williamsburg, Virginia: Williamsburg Restoration Inc., 1965).

[33] Ibid.

[34] Marian B. Sisson, "A Study of Architecture, Interior Design and Furnishings of Selected Houses in the United States in the Period of 1890-1920" (unpublished Master's thesis, Drexel Institute of Technology, 1964).

It was also the purpose to determine to what extent, if any, there existed a correlation between the architecture, interior design and furnishings of these houses. A similar study utilized as source materials a group of houses in southwest Georgia.[35] The purpose of Cannon's study was to locate and preserve a record of selected Greek Revival influenced houses in southwest Georgia, together with certain pieces of furniture used by their original owners. It was believed that a partial reconstruction of life in the nineteenth century for a selected number of people might be realized if written descriptions and visual records of the architectural features of their houses and of their furniture were compared with those in standard sources and presented against a background of contemporaneous state, county, and family history.

Although these studies are not concerned with the Colonial period, they do show an interest in interior design. The value of an examination of historic houses was brought out by Kenneth Chorley, the President of Colonial Williamsburg, Incorporated, when he stated: "That the Future may learn from the Past."[36]

General works on the architecture of Williamsburg appear but architectural studies researching for specifics are limited. Therefore, determining the characteristics of Colonial design as expressed in the details used in the

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[35]Margaret Cannon, "Southwest Georgia Houses of Greek Revival Influence and Their Furniture, 1820-1890" (unpublished Master's thesis, Florida State University, 1963).

[36]House and Gardens, LXXII, loc. cit.

interiors of houses built in America during the eighteenth century is the purpose of this study.

Focus of the Study

This study of Colonial design is directed toward a compilation and presentation of the decorative details which are expressive of interior house design during the eighteenth century. Through an examination of the living rooms of houses which were either built in the eighteenth century or restored to their original state, it is hoped that a better definition and understanding of Colonial design may be achieved.

There also seems to be confusion in the use of the term "Colonial" with the term "Early American." "Colonial" has been used repeatedly to explain and discuss interiors that are "Early American." This unintentional misuse of terms causes confusion on the part of salesmen as to what their customers actually want; relatives, neighbors and acquaintances find themselves discussing two completely different aspects of interior design. This study is an attempt to lessen this confusion by trying to establish the characteristics of the Colonial period.

The restoration of Williamsburg, Virginia, has brought the merits of eighteenth-century design to the attention of contemporary designers and home furnishers, and created a basis for study. Through an examination of historic Williamsburg and interior design details, this study will strive to present the characteristics of eighteenth-century Colonial interior design.

[illegible]

[illegible]

[illegible]

CHAPTER II

THE CONTRIBUTION OF WILLIAMSBURG TO EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY COLONIAL DESIGN

Historical Background

Williamsburg was distinctive as the seat of government and as the cultural center for one of Britain's largest and most powerful colonies; its size belies its importance in shaping the history of America. Williamsburg's political significance is intimated in the Capitol; its prestige for the Crown in the Governor's Palace; its cultural role in Bruton Church and the Wren Building of the College of William and Mary.[1]

Williamsburg served as the capital of Virginia from 1699 to 1780. It was during these years that the capital experienced historical and architectural significance. The town was originally settled as Middle Plantation. In 1699, when the capital was removed from Jamestown to Williamsburg, it was renamed in honor of King William III. In 1780 the capital was moved to Richmond and then Williamsburg fell into decline.

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[1]Kocher and Dearstyne, op. cit., p. 3.

[2]Ibid.

During the period Williamsburg was the center of colonial activity, it was a small college town and market place for the major part of each year. Twice a year the town was crowded with people intent upon serious business as well as activities for the fun-loving. Usually this was the time when the legislature met and the courts were in session. The town actually doubled in population and every available space was used for lodging in the taverns, inns, and private houses. Very important people made their appearance at the capital during these "publick times." Banquets, balls, lawn fetes, displays of fireworks, horse races and fairs were held for the amusement of the people as well as to encourage trade. Although Williamsburg was not a large trading center, the skilled craftsmen and the shopkeepers made certain the finest goods of the colony and the latest creations from England were available.[3]

Many manufactured goods were imported from England as late as 1752. When the Stamp Act and other restrictive measures were passed, the tense relations with England led to a decrease in the number of imports and an increasing demand for the home crafts and manufactured goods. Williamsburg produced furniture, candies, coaches, saddles and harnesses, jewelry, shoes, hosiery, and wigs.[4]

The cultural position Williamsburg held in the colony was due in part to the presence of the College of

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[3] Ibid., pp. 3-4.

[4] Ibid., p. 4.

William and Mary. This college was founded in 1693 as the second oldest college in the colonies. The college and the government of the town worked together. Members of the college were even represented in the House of Burgesses. Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Harrison, James Monroe, John Tyler, John Marshall, Edmund Randolph and other men important in America's past were students of this college. George Wythe was one of the prominent members of the faculty. He was the tutor of Thomas Jefferson and founder of the first course in law at an American college.[5]

The site and position of the College was an asset to its students, the townspeople, and the colonists. It was in the center of the social, cultural, and political life of the colony. The students saw and experienced at first-hand the operations of colonial society and government.[6]

Bruton Church also had its part in the cultural role Williamsburg held in the colonies. Between 1711 and 1715 the church was erected so it would be adequate to serve as court church of the colony. This building became the center of religious life in the capital. Students, governors, members of the Council and the House of Burgesses, and aristocracy of the town and nearby plantations came to listen to the sermons. Church events brought people together dressed for the occasion and many came for the purpose of displaying their best attire.[7]

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[5] Ibid., p. 5.

[6] Ibid., p. 6.

[7] Ibid., p. 9.

Restoration

The historical value of Williamsburg was recognized by Dr. W. A. R. Goodwin, late rector of Bruton Church, who became interested in the preservation of an important landmark in the nation's history. He persuaded the late John D. Rockefeller, Jr. to invest in a program of restoration. Originally the project, begun in 1926, was to recover the significant portions of an historic and important city of America's period. This has been broadened to include an interpretation based upon the recognition of Williamsburg's importance in the formulation of American political thought, education, commerce, fashions of the New World, and religion.[8]

This program required a vast staff of experts. Architects, archaeologists, landscape gardeners, builders, town planners, historians, lawyers, engineers, decorators and many others were employed. The entire area of land that originally comprised the city was purchased or controlled. This area was then studied from the very depths of the earth through the construction of entire buildings. Whenever it was possible, the first desire has been to preserve the surviving work by ordinary repair and then secondly, to restore the old forms by new work.[9] As the project continued, new information was constantly being discovered and the buildings were authentically reconstructed as well as more correctly restored.

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[8] Ibid., p. 45.

[9] Perry, op. cit., p. 370.

Summary

Williamsburg served as the capital of Virginia from 1699 to 1780. It was during these years that the capital experienced historical and architectural significance. During "publick times" the legislature met and the courts were in session; the town doubled in size. Banquets, balls, lawn fetes, displays of fireworks, horse races and fairs were held for the amusement of the people as well as to encourage trade. The latest goods from England were on hand as well as furniture, candies, coaches, saddles and harnesses, jewelry, shoes, hosiery and wigs produced by the craftsmen of the town.

The cultural role Williamsburg held in the colony was in part due to the presence of the College of William and Mary. Important men of America's historic past were students of this college. Bruton Church served as court church of Virginia, furthering the town's cultural role.

The historical value of the town was recognized by Dr. W. A. R. Goodwin, late rector of Bruton Church, who interested the late John D. Rockefeller, Jr. in restoring Williamsburg. Employing a vast staff of experts, restoration began in 1926 and has continued up to the present time.

CHAPTER III

DESCRIPTION OF REPRESENTATIVE EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY COLONIAL DETAILS USED IN WILLIAMSBURG HOUSES

The architecture of Williamsburg, Virginia, was based on the mode of building already established in eighteenth-century England. This architecture had been "adapted to the Nature of the Country" by the local builders and craftsmen. It became definitely Virginian.[1] A brick house built in Williamsburg in the eighteenth century would not have looked out of place if the same building had been placed on English soil. This was not true of the frame house. In England the utilitarian structures, such as mills, barns, and cottages were frame; but the Virginians, contrary to the thinking of the Englanders, favored frame houses and believed highly sophisticated designs could be executed in timber.[2]

The working details used by builders of the early eighteenth century for composing their building designs were obtained from builders' handbooks published in London before 1700 and there were not any complete designs for buildings.[3]

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[1]Kocher and Dearstyne, op. cit., p. 10.

[2]Whiffen, The Eighteenth-Century Houses of Williamsburg, p. 85.

[3]Kocher and Dearstyne, op. cit., p. 23.

Very few directions were included of the "orders of architecture."

These eighteenth-century colonists created an environment comparable with that found in England. The exteriors and interiors of their houses proved the colonists' knowledge of the latest decorative practices of England. Furniture, fabrics, finishing materials, and many accessories were imported from the mother country. Also, many of the colonial artisans had been trained in England.[4]

Fireplace and Mantel

The plan of the eighteenth-century house was determined by the placement of the fireplace. Varying from the early placement of the fireplace in a central location, fireplaces were located either outside the room wall or within the room, as shown in Figures 1 and 2, Plate I. The corner fireplace and fireplaces centered in walls on either side of a central hall are illustrated in Figures 3 and 4. Figure 5 shows an early central fireplace plan which was not used during the later period.[5]

Fireplaces were the only means of heat for the house. Corner fireplaces were the most popular in the colonies and Williamsburg. This resulted in the need for only one chimney,

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[4]*Ibid.*, p. 25.

[5]Interview with Paul Buchanan, Supervisor of Architectural Research and Records and Colonial Projects Designer, Williamsburg, Virginia, September 3, 1964.

PLATE I

VARIOUS FIREPLACE AND ROOM ARRANGEMENTS

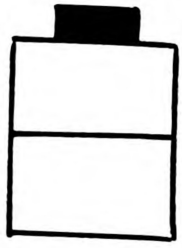


Fig. 1. Fireplace built outside the room wall

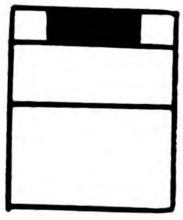


Fig. 2. Fireplace built within the wall

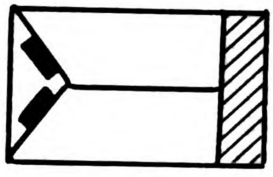


Fig. 3. Corner fireplaces

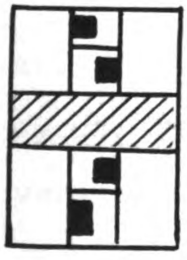


Fig. 4. Fireplaces centered on walls on either side of a central hall

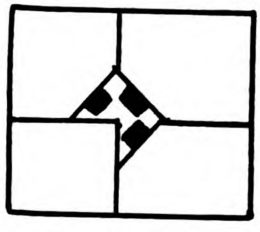
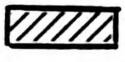


Fig. 5. A central fireplace



.....hall or end passage

.....fireplace opening

since the fireplaces could be placed back-to-back in rooms beside one another.[6]

At the beginning of the century the openings in the fireplace were large, but these openings decreased in size by the end of the century. By that time, wood had become scarce and better construction improved the efficiency of the fireplace.[7]

A variety of materials were used to frame the fireplace openings. In early versions, a beam of heavy oak or a brick arch was over the opening of the fireplace. At the time of the Revolution the iron lintel was becoming more common. Much of the stone used for the mantels was imported from England for suitable materials were not found in this area of the colonies. A native "white stone," found nearby at Fredericksburg, Virginia, was often used as a substitute. Marbles and other stones were commonly used in the private houses. Wood was used for the mantel facings and the same treatment was further carried above the fireplace to provide an over-mantel of paneling. The woodwork was separated from the opening of the fireplace by a plastered brick frame which was of various widths. Brick or the "white stone" was used for a hearth. The hearth was usually flush with the flooring.[8]

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[6]Kocher and Dearstyne, op. cit., p. 27.

[7]Ibid.

[8]Ibid., p. 28.

Usually the space over the fireplace was decorated with paintings of a landscape or a portrait. Maps or map prints were also framed and placed over the fireplace.[9]

Wall Treatments

The walls of the rooms in eighteenth-century houses were usually plastered with a combination of oyster-shell lime, river sand, and animal hair.[10] Today a builder secures the moldings after the plasterer has completed his work. In the Williamsburg houses the woodworking was finished by the carpenter and then the plasterer applied wall covering. The plaster was applied against the trim and reduced the relief or salience of the trim. Hence, there is a subtle transition between the two materials which is a definite characteristic of eighteenth-century interiors.[11]

Plaster was whitewashed and not painted.[12] Whitewash is a water paint that was and still is made by slaking quicklime in water. This lime-wash was often colored by the addition of various pigments: copperas to make the wash green, ocher for a yellow hue, and archil to obtain a deep blue shade. Milk and buttermilk were also occasionally added as vehicles in these washes of color.[13] It was the

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[9] Interview with Paul Buchanan, Sept. 3, 1964.

[10] Kocher and Dearstyne, op. cit., p. 25.

[11] Whiffen, The Eighteenth-Century Houses of Colonial Williamsburg, p. 84.

[12] Interview with Paul Buchanan, Sept. 3, 1964.

[13] Kocher and Dearstyne, op. cit., p. 31.

custom to whitewash once a year and some families did so more often for sanitary reasons.[14]

Wallpaper became a substitute for whitewashed walls during the second half of the eighteenth century. Wallpaper was introduced into the houses of Williamsburg in the mid-sixties. It was first imported into Virginia by George Washington for rooms in Mount Vernon in 1757. Sources indicate a wide variety of papers was available. This item was found in the Virginia Gazette in 1771:

> A NEAT and ELEGANT ASSORTMENT OF PAPER HANGINGS, of various Kinds, and of the newest Fashions, for Staircases, Rooms, and Ceilings; namely, embossed, Stucco, Chintz, striped Mosaick, Damask and common....[15]

In addition to these varied papers, Chinese designs were favored during one period.[16]

Wallpaper was used sparingly. One reason for the sparse use was the presence of arsenic in the paste used to secure the paper to the walls.[17] People were hesitant to use this dangerous material. Another reason for the infrequent use of wallpaper was the condensation which was present because of the structure of the walls. In the frame houses, the plastering was put over the hand-split lathes nailed to the studs. In the brick houses the plaster

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[14] Ibid., p. 25.

[15] Whiffen, The Eighteenth-Century Houses of Colonial Williamsburg, p. 84.

[16] Kocher and Dearstyne, op. cit., p. 26.

[17] Buchanan, Sept. 3., 1964.

was put directly on the brick walls. Hence, the Virginians were troubled with condensation. Only three rooms in the houses of Williamsburg yielded fragments of wallpaper.[18]

Moldings and Paneling

The use of moldings and paneling in the interior room designs can be divided into six stages. These six stages, progressing from the simple to the elaborate and more costly are: plaster walls using a chair board and baseboard; plaster walls using a cornice, chair rail and baseboard; paneling above the fireplace; wainscotting around the room; the whole room paneled; and marble fireplace surround or mantel.[19] Pictorial examples as presented in Plate II, III and IV, show the baseboards, chair rails and cornices in the styles used by the Williamsburg carpenters.[20]

Full-length wainscotting or paneling was used in a few of the houses but was customarily found in the public buildings. It was used as a protection from the condensation on the walls. The "dwarf" wainscot or dado was constructed to the height of three to five feet from the floor. This type of treatment was more commonly used in both the private houses and public buildings. When this dado was used, paneling was sometimes applied to the area over the fireplace--

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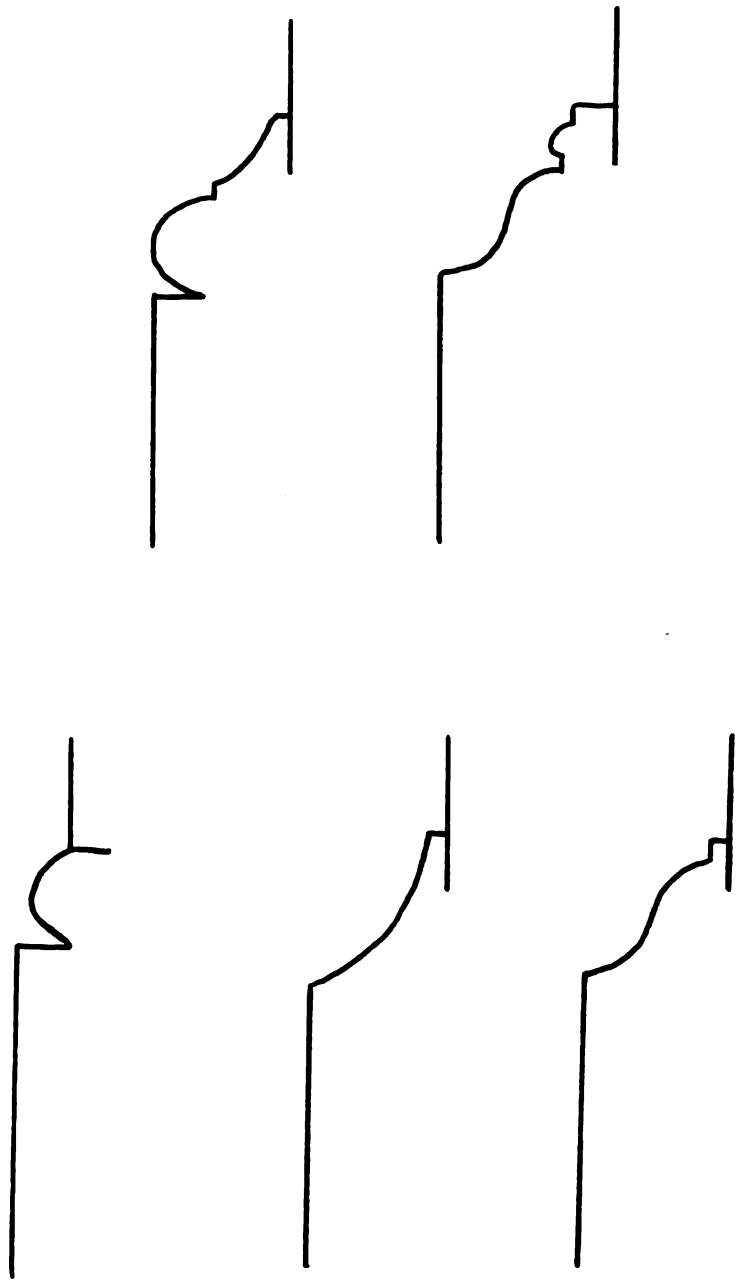
[18]Whiffen, The Eighteenth-Century Houses of Colonial Williamsburg, p. 84.

[19]Buchanan, Sept. 3., 1964.

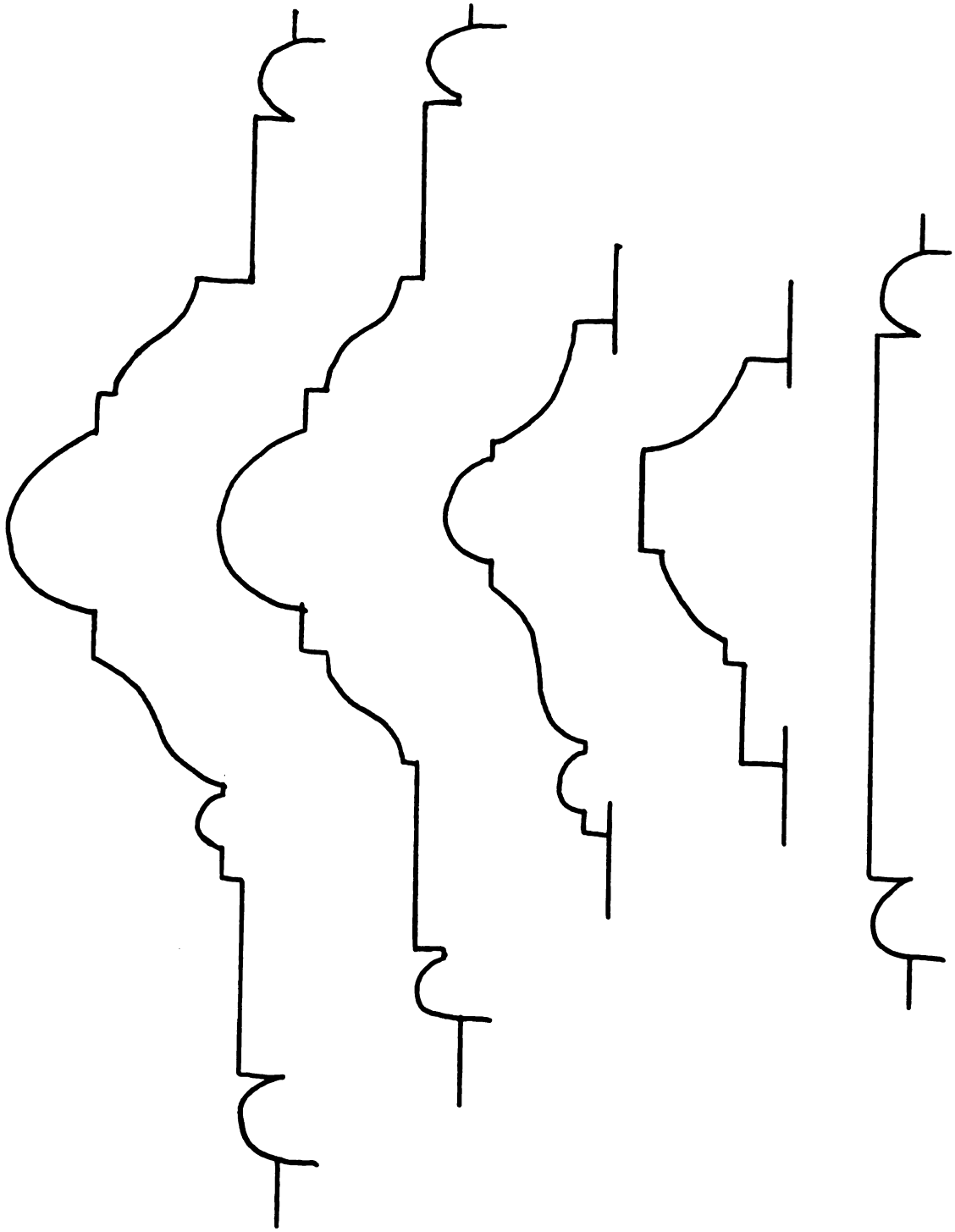
[20]Whiffen, The Eighteenth-Century Houses of Colonial Williamsburg, pp. 78-83.

PLATE II



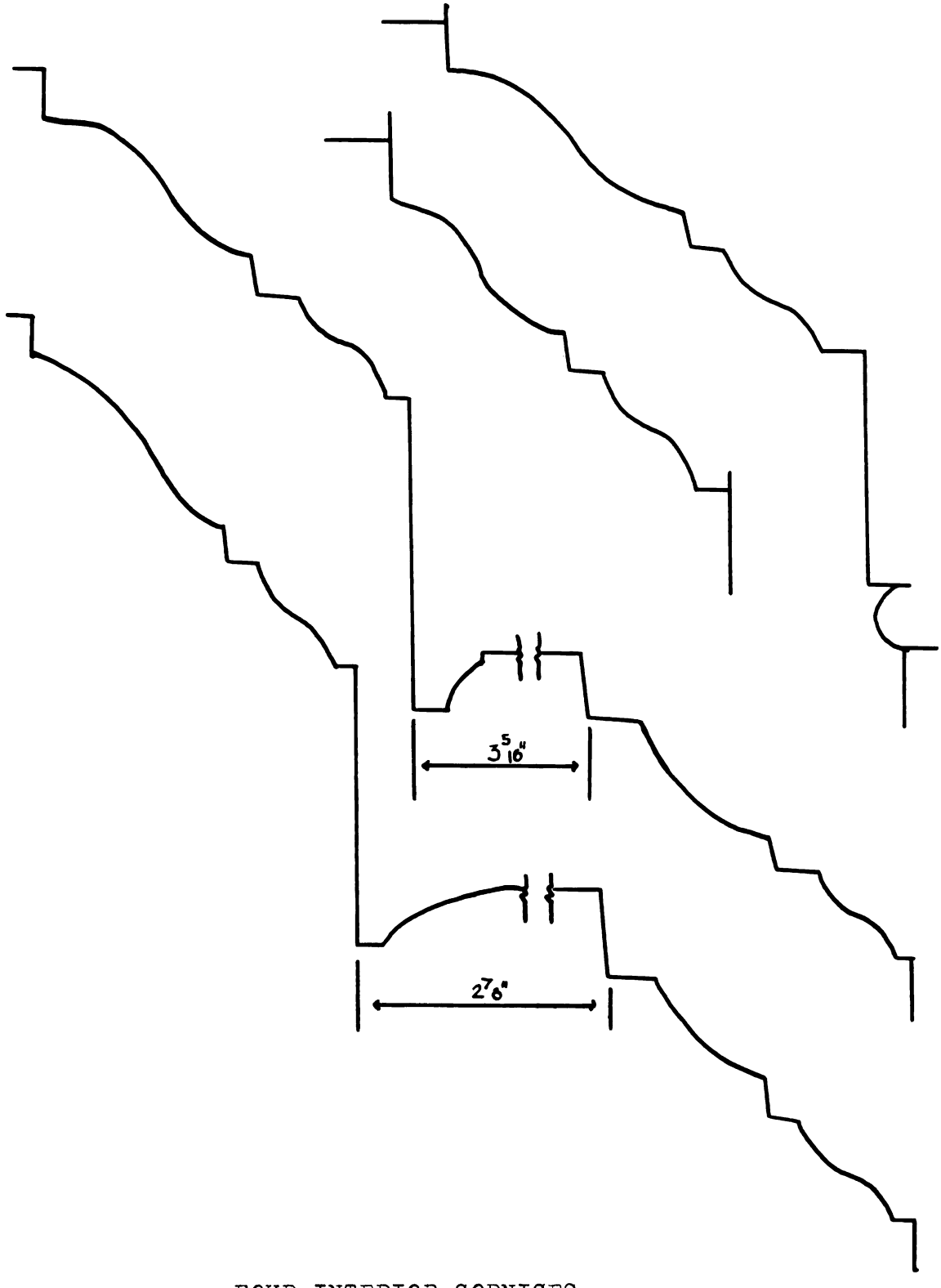
FIVE BASEBOARDS

PLATE III



FIVE CHAIR RAILS

PLATE IV



FOUR INTERIOR CORNICES

the mantel or over-mantel, to the ceiling. This area was then decorated with landscape or portrait paintings or map prints which had been framed. The most common wall treatment was the baseboard, cornice, and a heavy, waist-high protective chair rail.[21]

Whiffen points out an observation of the character of the eighteenth-century trim. The cornice profiles show that the use of the re-entrant right angle and the vertical face was avoided. There was also a tendency to avoid a segment of the circle in both convex and concave moldings. The half-rounds were slightly flattened. Whiffen states: "This is certainly not due to any technical deficiency on the part of the eighteenth-century craftsman, but to his dislike of mechanical effects--and to an eye for detail which our century, in its haste, so rarely develops." [22]

Doors

Doors in the Williamsburg houses were usually no more than one and one-eighth inch thick. The design of these depended on the placement of the panels. The most common types of door paneling had six panels or four panels. The most used six-panel door was arranged, reading from top to bottom, in the following order: two small, two large and two large panels.[23] The eight-panel door was arranged

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[21]Kocher and Dearstyne, op. cit., p. 25.

[22]Whiffen, The Eighteenth-Century Houses of Colonial Williamsburg, p. 81.

[23]Ibid.

with two small panels at the top, two large, two small and finally two large panels at the bottom.

Less frequently used panel arrangements were the eight-panel door arranged with two small panels at the top, two large, two large, and two small panels at the bottom. Two panel doors and four panel doors were popular but the two panel doors were used on cupboards.[24]

Summary

The plan of the eighteenth-century house was largely determined by the placement of the fireplace. The area around the fireplace was treated in a decorative way to make the fireplace wall one of the dominating features of the interior design.

A variety of materials framed the fireplace openings--marbles, a native "white stone," and wood. Sometimes wood was further carried above the fireplace to provide paneled over-mantels. The space above the fireplace was usually decorated with paintings or a landscape or a portrait. Framed maps or map prints were also used.

Six stages of wall treatments, progressing from the simple to the most costly were: plaster walls with a chair board and baseboard; plaster walls finished with a cornice, chair rail and baseboard; paneling above the fireplace; wainscotting around the room; paneling throughout the whole room; and marble fireplace surround or mantel. The plastered

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[24] Ibid.

area of the walls was usually whitewashed, but wallpaper was present in a few of the houses.

The doors were of a paneled design. Four, six, and eight panels were found in a variety of arrangements.

CHAPTER IV

DESIGN DETAILS FOUND IN THE INTERIORS OF SELECTED HOUSES IN WILLIAMSBURG

Fifteen living rooms of the houses of Williamsburg were selected for this study. The specific houses were suggested as being representative by Paul Buchanan, Supervisor of Architectural Research and Records and Colonial Projects Designer. The selected group of houses was taken from those pictured and discussed in Whiffen's book, The Eighteenth-Century Houses of Williamsburg. Whiffen was architectural historian of Williamsburg from 1954 to 1959. With Buchanan's permission, photographs were used from the Progress and Research Photograph Albums in his office at Williamsburg to acquire the necessary data. These albums contained pictures taken during various phases of the restoration or preservation of each building from its start to its completion. The selected rooms were chosen according to the existence of information relative to this study in the Progress and Research Photograph Albums and the inclusion of a fireplace wall.

The rooms used as a basis for study were selected from the following houses located in Williamsburg: Nelson-Galt, John Blair, Orrell, Wythe, Benjamin Waller, Palmer, Brush-Everard, Powell-Waller, Carter-Saunders, Taliaferro-

Cole, Peyton Randolph, Ludwell-Paradise, Tayloe, and Captain Orr's Dwelling.

From literary sources an outline was developed for studying details of the interior design in the photographs. These details were categorized as; (1) the divisions of the walls and (2) the decorative treatment of the walls. Within the wall divisions there were different stylings of paneling, moldings and fireplace areas. Panelings were three and one-half feet high (dado or wainscot) or extended from floor to ceiling (wainscot). Moldings were used as cornices, chair rail, and baseboards. The fireplace areas, consisting of the moldings and the over-mantel, were treated in a variety of ways. Plaster, pictures, paneling, wallpaper and fabrics were used for the over-mantels. Moldings were of wood, marble and stone. The decorative treatment of the walls and moldings included whitewash, paint, marbleized and natural finishes. This outline was to assist in a determination of the characteristics of Colonial design as found in the interiors of houses built in Williamsburg during the eighteenth century.

Looking at the interior design details of the selected group of rooms, five were finished with a wood cornice, chair rail and baseboard. One room had simply a wood baseboard. The fireplace moldings of three of these rooms were of wood which was treated with paint. In one of these examples the wood was carried to six feet from the floor. Two of these fireplace moldings were of marble. One molding

surrounding the fireplace was of stone. The over-mantels of these six fireplace walls were plaster which was treated with whitewash.

Five rooms had a three and one-half foot "dwarf" wainscot or dado of wood on the fireplace walls. The wood material was treated with paint. In each example the room was finished with a painted wood cornice and baseboard. In one room the baseboard was painted to imitate marble. The fireplace moldings of the five rooms were of wood. The material was preserved with paint. Three of these rooms had paneled over-mantels which were painted. Plate V shows an example of a fireplace of this style.[1] One over-mantel was plaster treated with whitewash. The fifth over-mantel contained a picture that covered the entire mantel area.

Four living rooms had fully-paneled wood wainscotting on the fireplace walls. The wood material was treated with paint. In each example the room was finished with a painted wood cornice and baseboard. The fireplace moldings of two rooms were painted wood. Two fireplace moldings were of marble. Plates VI and VII show examples of representative styles of the marble fireplaces.[2]

In the fifteen selected rooms there were no examples of wallpaper or fabric used on the over-mantel. There were no examples of the wood materials treated in a natural color.

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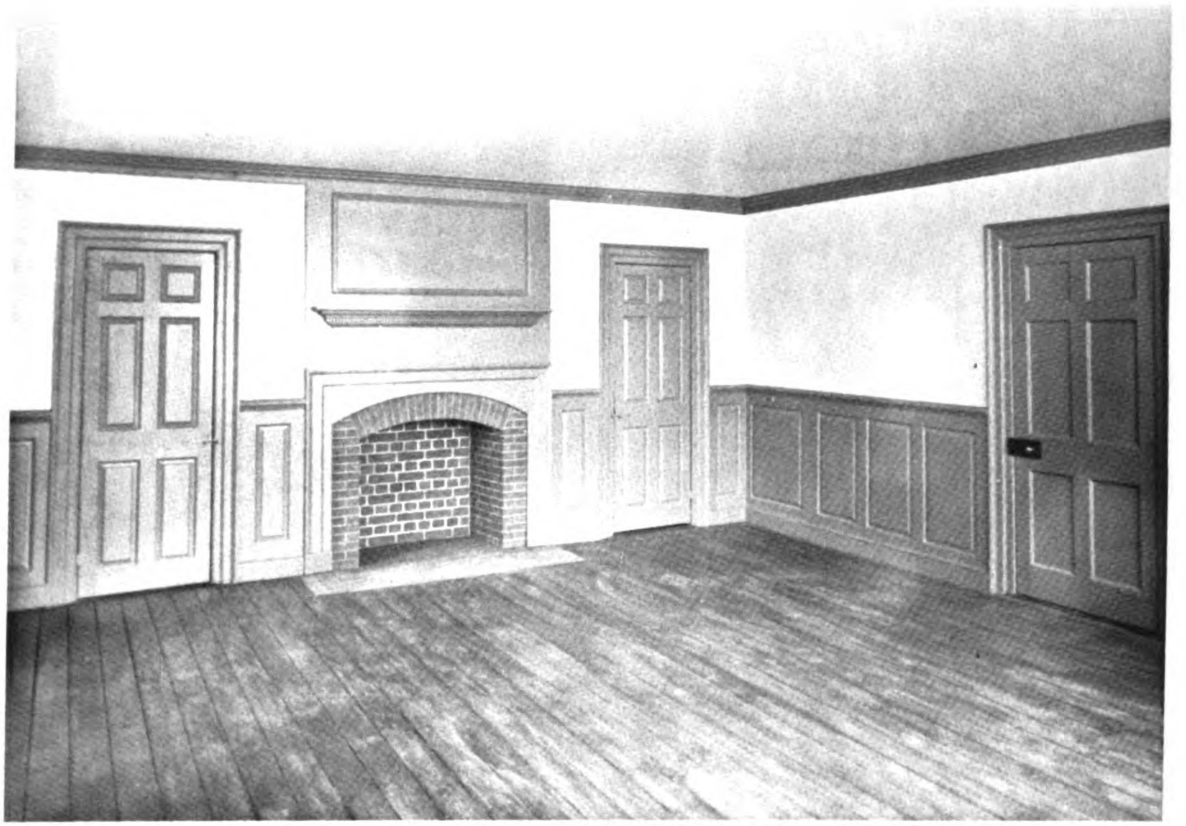
[1] Progress and Research Photograph Albums. Williamsburg, Virginia: Colonial Williamsburg, Inc.

[2] Ibid.

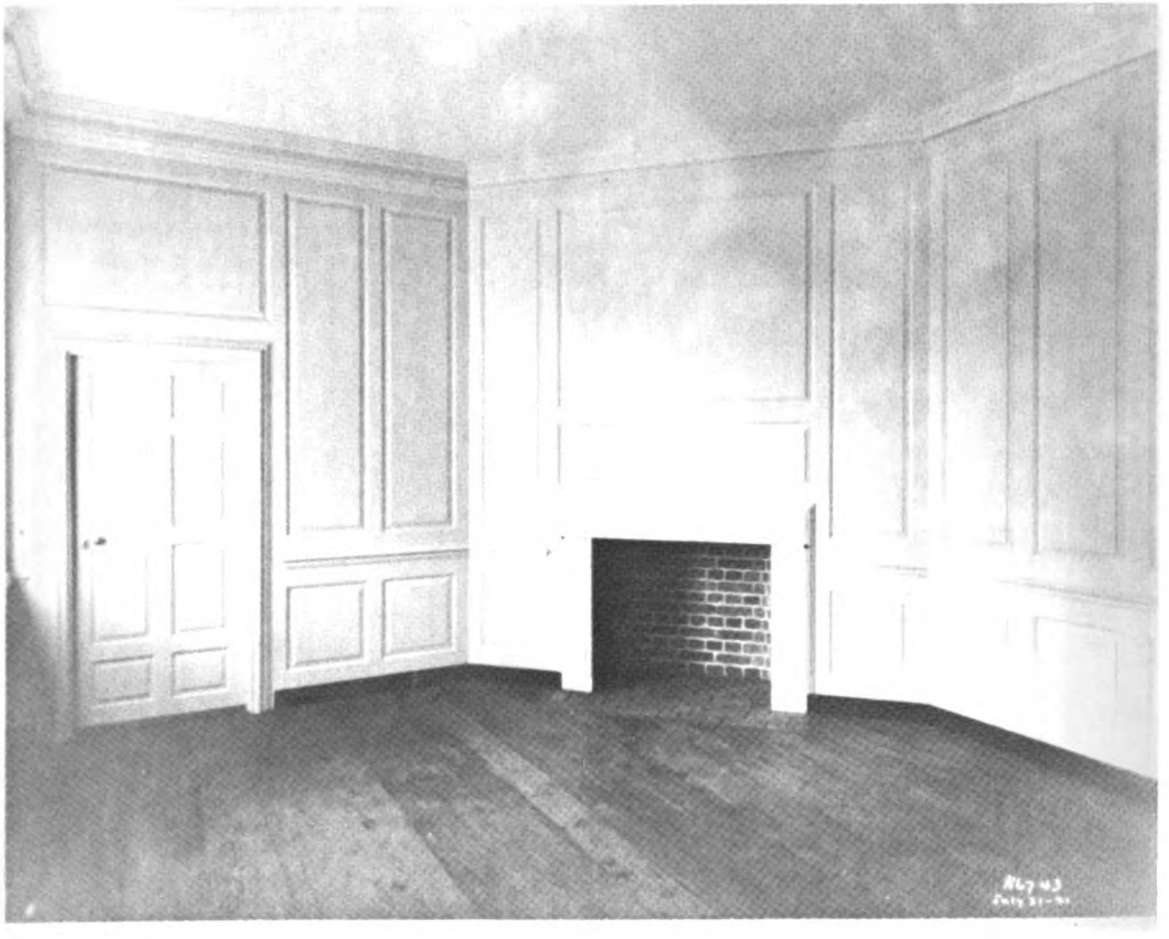
PLATE V



FIREPLACE WALL OF THE POWELL-WALLER HOUSE,

WILLIAMSBURG, VIRGINIA

PLATE VI



FIREPLACE WALL OF THE PEYTON-RANDOLPH HOUSE,

WILLIAMSBURG, VIRGINIA

PLATE VII

FIREPLACE WALL OF THE PEYTON-RANDOLPH HOUSE,

WILLIAMSBURG, VIRGINIA

The findings of the outlined details for studying the photographs were summarized in Table 1. Fifteen rooms were finished with a baseboard and fourteen rooms with a cornice. Five rooms had chair rails, five rooms used a three and one-half foot dado and four rooms completely paneled the fireplace wall. Ten fireplaces had wood molding surrounding the opening, four rooms had marble fireplace moldings while one room used a stone molding. Seven rooms had paneled over-mantels and seven had plaster over-mantels. In every example the plaster was treated with whitewash. One over-mantel was decorated with a picture covering the entire area. There were no examples of fabric or wallpaper on the walls. In every example the wood materials were preserved with paint. One baseboard was painted to imitate marble. There were no examples of wood treated in a natural color.

The findings of this study are supported by literary sources. Whiffen[3] and Kocher and Dearstyne[4] confirm that paneling and moldings are used in varying amounts on the fireplace wall in the living rooms of Williamsburg. Rooms were finished with simply a baseboard or rooms were finished with a baseboard, chair rail and cornice. Other rooms had wall paneling with a dado and wainscotting extending from the baseboard molding to a point three to five feet up the

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[3]Whiffen, The Eighteenth-Century Houses of Williamsburg, p. 81.

[4]Kocher and Dearstyne, op. cit., p. 25.

Table 1. Interior design details of the fireplace walls in living rooms of fifteen rooms of Colonial Williamsburg, Virginia

Interior Design Details	Number of Rooms	Decorative Treatment of Walls and Moldings			
		White-wash	Paint	Marble-ize	Natural
		N	N	N	N
Divisions of Walls					
<u>Paneling</u>					
Floor to ceiling	4	-	4	-	-
3½ feet high	5	-	5	-	-
<u>Moldings</u>					
Cornice	14	-	14	-	-
Chair rail	5	-	5	-	-
Baseboard	15	-	14	1	-
<u>Fireplace Area</u>					
Over-mantel					
Plaster	7	7	-	-	-
Paneled	7	-	7	-	-
Picture	1	-	-	-	-
Wallpaper	-	-	-	-	-
Fabric	-	-	-	-	-
Molding					
Wood	10	-	10	-	-
Marble	4	-	-	-	-
Stone	1	-	-	-	-

wall and ending with the dado cap. Walls of some rooms were paneled with a wainscotting extending from the baseboard molding to the cornice molding.

The fifteen rooms used in this study can be divided into three groups; (1) rooms with combinations of a cornice, chair rail and baseboard, (2) rooms with dado, and (3) rooms with fully-paneled wainscotting. Furthermore, these groups progress from the simple to the more elaborate or decorative in wall treatment. The simple yet unique use of decorative moldings in the first group can definitely hold its place with the decorative rooms using a dado and the still more elaborate fully-paneled rooms. These harmonious results are attributed to the effective use of proportion, details, and symmetry. The interiors are based on geometric designs. The writers of Williamsburg Reproductions[5] attribute lasting interest to the "Grace of proportion and rhythm of pattern, honest use of materials, subtle harmony of varied designs...."[6]

Kocher and Dearstyne[7] validate the findings that varying treatments were found on the fireplace mantel or over-mantel. A plaster over-mantel was used. Paneling reaching from the fireplace molding to the cornice molding was also evidenced. Kocher and Dearstyne further confirm this finding when they state that in some cases when a dado is present, the area above the fireplace is emphasized by

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[5]Williamsburg Reproductions.

[6]Ibid., p. 7.

[7]Kocher and Dearstyne, loc. cit.

paneling extending to the cornice molding.[8] In one room a picture decorated the over-mantel and confirmed the information learned from Buchanan's interview. He stated that paintings were found above the fireplaces.[9]

When combinations of the baseboard, chair rail and cornice were used, the over-mantel consisted of plaster applied to the wall area. When the dado or "dwarf" wainscot was present, the over-mantels in three of the five examples were found to be paneled. Rooms with fully-paneled walls had mantels that were paneled. It is apparent then that the treatment of the over-mantel was determined by the amount of paneling and moldings present in the room.

Of the fifteen rooms of the houses of Williamsburg there were no examples of walls using wallpaper or fabric. This finding is confirmed by Buchanan, who stated:

> Wallpaper was used sparingly. One reason for the sparce use of it was that people were hesitant to use wallpaper in their homes for arsenic was present in the paste used to secure the paper to the walls.[10]

Whiffen also states:

> In frame houses the plastering was done over hand-split laths nailed to studs. In brick houses the plaster was laid directly on the brick walls. This helps to account for the condensation by which, Jefferson tells us, Virginians were so much troubled; it also accounts, in no small

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[8] Ibid., p. 28.

[9] Buchanan, Sept. 3, 1964.

[10] Ibid.

> measure, for the complete disappearance of early wallpaper in brick houses.[11]

Whiffen accounts that only three fragments of wallpaper have been found in Williamsburg houses, although a wide variety was available. Kocher and Dearstyne have reported only one house evidencing the presence of fabric hangings.

Literary sources confirm the findings that fireplace moldings were composed of three materials: marble, stone and wood. Kocher and Dearstyne support the additional finding that marble moldings were found in the houses[12] and not used only in the most pretentious buildings like the Governors' Palace. Rooms designed with simply a baseboard, chair rail and cornice used marble moldings as well as fully-paneled rooms.

In each of the selected fifteen rooms where wood was used it was preserved with paint. Kocher and Dearstyne confirm this finding with the words: "Interior woodwork was occasionally left in a natural state, but more often it was painted."[13] In every instance the plaster was whitewashed. This use of whitewash is validated from the literary sources and Buchanan's interview.

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[11]Whiffen, The Eighteenth-Century Houses of Colonial Williamsburg, p. 81.

[12]Kocher and Dearstyne, loc. cit.

[13]Ibid.

Summary

Photographs of fifteen rooms of houses of Williamsburg were used to study and determine the characteristics of Colonial design. The findings of this study correspond with descriptions of decorative interior details as presented by literary sources. An examination of representative rooms of Williamsburg houses confirms the particular styling of the interior design details known as Colonial. Paneling and moldings were used in varying amounts on the fireplace wall. The rooms of the Williamsburg houses can be divided into three groups, progressing from the simple to the more elaborate; (1) rooms with combinations of a cornice, chair rail and baseboard, (2) rooms with a dado, and (3) rooms with fully-paneled wainscotting. The treatment of the overmantel on the fireplace wall was determined by the amount of paneling and moldings used. There were no examples of walls finished with wallpaper or fabric. Fireplace moldings were composed of three materials; marble, stone and wood. Marble fireplace moldings were used in the less elaborate room interiors and in houses having fully-paneled walls. Wood was painted and plaster was treated with whitewash.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

Photographs of fifteen living rooms of houses of Williamsburg were selected for study and determination of characteristics of Colonial design. Permission to use these photographs from the Progress and Research Photograph Albums of Colonial Williamsburg was given by Mr. Paul Buchanan, Supervisor of Architectural Research and Records and Colonial Projects Designer, Williamsburg, Virginia. An outline compiling the details of eighteenth-century interior design was developed for studying the photographs.

The interior design details which were utilized in the decoration and finishing of living rooms in houses of Colonial Williamsburg were presented and summarized. All of the selected rooms had baseboards and the walls of fourteen of the fifteen rooms were terminated with cornices. Five rooms were finished with a chair rail, five rooms had a three and one-half foot dado and four fireplace walls were completely paneled. Ten fireplaces had wood molding surrounding the opening, four rooms had marble fireplace moldings while one room used a stone molding. Seven rooms had paneled over-mantels and seven had plaster over-mantels. In every

example the plaster was treated with whitewash. One over-mantel was decorated with a picture covering the entire area. There were no examples of fabric or wallpaper on the walls. In every example the wood materials were preserved with paint. One baseboard was painted to imitate marble, and there were no examples of wood treated in a natural color.

Conclusions

An examination of selected rooms in the houses of Williamsburg, Virginia, built during the eighteenth century has led to these conclusions concerning the characteristics of Colonial design:

1. Paneling and moldings were used in varying amounts on the fireplace walls of Colonial houses.
2. The fireplace walls of living rooms of Colonial houses can be divided into three groups from the simple to the more elaborate and decorative in wall treatment--rooms with combinations of a cornice, chair rail, and baseboard; rooms with a dado; and rooms with fully-paneled wainscotting.
3. Treatment of the over-mantel was determined by the amount of paneling and moldings on the fireplace wall. The over-mantel was finished with:
   a) plaster when combinations of the baseboard, chair rail and cornice were applied to the wall area;

b) plaster or paneling when the wall was finished with a dado;

c) paneling when the wall was fully-paneled.

4. Framed pictures were used to decorate the mantel.
5. Eighteenth-century wall finishes in Williamsburg houses were plaster or paneling, contrary to popular belief that wallpaper and fabric frequently decorated the wall.
6. Fireplace moldings were composed of three materials: marble, stone and wood.
7. Marble fireplace moldings were used in private houses as well as the public buildings.
8. Marble fireplace moldings were used on walls designed less elaborately as well as the more decorative fireplace walls.
9. Wood used in Colonial houses was preserved with paint and sometimes painted to imitate marble.
10. Plaster walls were treated with whitewash.

Recommendations

Investigation for this study revealed little information depicting the details of interior architectural design of eighteenth-century houses has been compiled. Photographs and reliable descriptions were not readily available.

It is recommended that composites of pictorial examples and descriptions would be of value and use. Composites could include details of the Colonial period: the design and

styling of fireplaces, the arrangement of bed-chambers, window treatments, eighteenth-century furniture and furnishings, characteristic colors of paint, wallpaper and fabric, costumes, and life in the eighteenth-century. Private houses, plantations and public buildings could be researched for information important to a knowledge and understanding of the traditions of the past. The seminar devoted to the Colonial period and the restoration of Williamsburg which is presented by the College of William and Mary each summer would offer a basis for further study.

Researching details of interior design of other architectural and historic periods is further suggested. The interior and exterior architectural designs of America would also be of value. Such studies would be a means not only of providing information concerning the design characteristics of the past, but also a means of preserving the nation's architectural heritage.

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COLLEGE OF HOME ECONOMICS
EAST LANSING, MICHIGAN