Elizabeth Perkins and Jefferds Tavern: A Example of the Influence of the Colonial Revival Upon Museums

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ELIZABETH PERKINS AND JEFFERDS TAVERN:
AN EXAMPLE OF THE INFLUENCE OF THE
COLONIAL REVIVAL UPON MUSEUMS

A Thesis
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The Faculty of the American Studies Program
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In Partial Fulfillment
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Master of Arts

by
Melissa Beth Mosher
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ABSTRACT

The colonial revival movement began sometime in the middle of the nineteenth century and continues today. Since people began looking back over the early history of America, each generation has developed its own image of the colonial past to fit contemporary needs. Among the principal media through which people express their ideas about the past are the architecture they choose to preserve, the artifacts they collect, and the statements they make about the past in relation to these material survivors.

Elizabeth Perkins was an active participant in the colonial revival in York, Maine from the 1900s to the 1950s. A study of Jefferds Tavern, one of her historical restorations, explores how one person created a usable past for herself and her town. For thirty years after Elizabeth's death, the interpretation at Jefferds Tavern remained relatively unaltered. More recently, Old York Historical Society members and staff decided they had to change the interpretation of Jefferds Tavern and other sites in York. The history of the interpretation offered at one museum provides some insight into the changing nature of the colonial revival.
Elizabeth Perkins, in full 'colonial' costume, on the front steps of the Piggin House.
ELIZABETH PERKINS AND JEFFERDS TAVERN:
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COLONIAL REVIVAL UPON MUSEUMS
INTRODUCTION

In 1941, Elizabeth Perkins opened her newly-restored Jefferds Tavern in York, Maine and told stories about colonial times and travelers. Today, one can still visit the Tavern, but its appearance and the stories told are much changed. Both treatments are part of an ongoing movement known as the colonial revival. This thesis places Elizabeth Perkins and her restoration activities into the larger context of the colonial revival and seeks to answer questions about why Elizabeth restored the Tavern and told stories one way and why today we give our restored buildings another appearance and tell our stories differently.

York, Maine has a wealth of historic buildings and sites. While many buildings and sites in York have dated markers or plaques commemorating them, there are roughly ten historic museum sites in the town. Some of them, such as the Old Gaol, the McIntyre Garrison, and Sewall's Bridge, are often referred to in architectural texts as outstanding examples of architectural design. Others, such as the Emerson-Wilcox House, the Sayward-Wheeler House, the Old Gaol, and John Hancock's warehouse, are significant historical buildings because of their local or national importance. Still others represent important collections of colonial and colonial revival memorabilia. Of these historic
'sites of interest,' as one Chamber of Commerce pamphlet calls them, Elizabeth was directly responsible for at least seven.¹

The colonial revival movement can be traced to the late 1800s; it includes any subsequent period in which the American public "became fascinated with things colonial and took up a [colonial] fashion in domestic architecture and furnishings."² The movement grew out of tensions created by industrialization, increased immigration, status anxiety, and a resurgence of patriotism during the Centennial celebration of 1876. Although the general movement can be regarded as part of the "evolution of national identity," for purposes of study, scholars divide the colonial revival into three periods: approximately 1876 to the mid-1920s; from the mid-1930s to approximately the mid-1950s; and from the 1960s to the present.³ Each reconsiders the nation's past from its own perspective.

Prior to the mid-1920s, the colonial revival movement was concentrated in the private sector. This period of rapid change in America's industrial, social, and political history caused despondency in many Americans. The apparent decadence in society contrasted vividly with the recent Centennial's patriotic and romantic portrayal of the colonial past as a purer, more simple time. The movement reflected a 'Whig' approach to history. Great men and their great deeds were the primary targets for colonial revivalists during this first
phase. A 'modernizing' America destroyed many colonial objects, buildings, and sites associated with great men. Rescuing and preserving those physical reminders of the past was of prime importance to the early colonial revivalists. For the most part, little attention was paid either to research or to presenting it accurately. The threat of losing the physical ties with America's heritage appeared too imminent to encourage attention to detail. The result was a movement which emphasized preservation of buildings and the collection of objects.

With the onset of the Depression and the start of the New Deal, the colonial revival entered a second, more nationally public phase. The founding of Colonial Williamsburg, the opening of the American exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and the activities of major collectors such as Henry Francis DuPont, Henry Ford, and Electra Havermeyer Webb heightened awareness of the movement. Since its founding in the 1800s, the National Park Service had preserved sites of natural significance across the country. From the mid-1930s, with the creation of a historic division of the National Park Service, the colonial revival underwent a period of organization and authentication. Through its advisory board, in 1937 the historic division of the National Park Service promoted historical truth in restoration. It set up "procedures which provided for full research before a restoration began," and which focused on accuracy with
"broad historical importance." Having learned from earlier mistakes, the advisory board created very particular and detailed guidelines. They emphasized "exhaustive research and the careful presentation of cultural context" with an eye to the "development of a coherent restoration philosophy" and the creation of a chain of parks which demonstrated "major trends" in America's growth as a nation. These guidelines reflected the consensus history approach to the past. Historical presentations focused on architectural detail and promoted a sense of group rather than individual history. With government involvement and the establishment of research guidelines, the second phase of the colonial revival placed more emphasis on organization and research.

During the 1960s, historians began to emphasize aspects of history previously ignored. They expressed a concern with the masses in addition to the elite and asked questions about slaves, factory workers, women, and children. Many earlier historians had overlooked these topics and people in their pursuit of traditional political and economic explanations of the past. This 'new social history' offered historians the possibility of developing a total history of all people in a society. At the same time, as historians' view of society was widening, so was their standard of admissible evidence. Arguments about the use of architecture and artifacts as historical sources began to appear. With the surge of interest in the 'new social
history', and the use of material evidence, the colonial revival became a valid topic of interest. Thus, by the 1970s, the movement entered a third phase of scholarly inquiry and explanation.

During the third phase of the colonial revival, historians also began to recognize the relevance and importance of the more recent past. The persistence of colonial revival terms, beliefs, and ideas generated by the two earlier phases of the movement marked the colonial revival as a vehicle for learning more about the people of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As a continuing phenomenon, the colonial revival and its evolution became worth studying as part of the effort to understand the present. Scholars could draw on the findings of the new social history to explore the connections between an earlier era and the recent past.

In The Colonial Revival in America, a collection of essays stemming from a 1984 conference, Alan Axelrod provides the generally accepted current scholarly view of the movement. He states:

the colonial revival cannot be dismissed as a mere byway of popular culture, the province of the idle rich, or the fantasy of the acquisitive parvenu. It emerges instead as a multifarious and often urgent response to social stress and crisis; war, urban rootlessness, mass immigration and economic depression.
Within this general view, historians interested in the history of the movement focus on one of three related topics: authenticity, cultural hegemony, or American values. The first topic involves the dilemma of whether to create an atmosphere of nostalgia or myth or to preserve historical accuracy within the museum and history professions. During the first two stages of the colonial revival, some colonial revivalists emphasized the presentation of a colonial atmosphere in their restorations. Although they cared about the authenticity of each object, they were not concerned with how authentic the room itself was or the authenticity of their arrangement within a room. Today, presenting a re-creation of the colonial past involves consideration of the definition and interpretation of accuracy. Knowledge of past furnishing schemes and the use of authenticated pieces as substitutes for missing or irreplaceable pieces play significant roles in determining the accuracy of a presentation. Additionally, when original furnishings or objects are too fragile or are not available, the use of reproductions makes presentations more complete.

The working museum kitchen at Old Sturbridge Village offers several examples of these concerns about accuracy. Some of the utensils and furnishings may date from the depicted time period, but many are not original to this particular kitchen and some are reproductions. The Dutch oven used in the kitchen is a replica of one from the
period, yet it is a reproduction and thus can be used and handled without fear of damaging an artifact. It contributes not only to the historical presentation of the kitchen but also to the atmosphere of the period. Scholars recognize that these accuracy problems are new ones within the colonial revival movement. In an effort to study the impact earlier presentations have upon present ones, they compare the former emphasis on atmosphere to the present emphasis on historical accuracy.

The second topic which interests scholars about the colonial revival is the way it manifests cultural hegemony. Some scholars see the colonial revival as a response to industrialization and modernization; some see it as a reaction to World War I and the Red Scare; some see it as an expression of nationalism; still others attempt to encompass all these interpretations into an overall explanation. The cohesive theme in these various interpretations is that the movement served as elite society's way of strengthening their 'Old Guard' position in a rapidly changing environment. Of particular interest to this thesis is William B. Rhoads' approach in *The Colonial Revival*. He posits that elite society used the colonial revival to Americanize immigrants by indoctrinating them with patriotic images.

The third topic is closely related to that of cultural hegemony. Scholars explore the significance of the colonial revival as a means of perpetuating certain
values and beliefs vital to an American way of life. They focus on the movement as a continuing search for motives which may have formed the basis of a coherent national style. Indirectly, the essays by different authors in *The Colonial Revival in America* suggest possible motives and central beliefs which may make up a national style or identity. Yet determining a national identity has nebulous results, since each generation uses whatever pieces of the past fit its needs, and in a sense, negates earlier definitions of a national identity. None of these topics are mutually exclusive; instead, they operate within a framework of interrelated ideas. Overall, they emphasize the need to recognize history as an "accumulated record of past change which we use to fashion our strategies for coping with the present and future."\(^{10}\)

It is important to study earlier phases of museum presentation so that scholars might gain a better understanding of the antecedents of recent historical presentations. The concept of 'colonial' shifts with changing preferences; each definition has a contextual meaning in time as well as an effect upon future definitions. This thesis explores the ways the interpretation in one museum reflected cultural influences, how those values changed, and the subsequent re-evaluation of that museum's program.

This study has three parts. The first section focuses on Elizabeth Perkins and her colonial revival
projects in the town of York, Maine. The second section examines Jefferds Tavern; the third analyzes Elizabeth Perkins and the Jefferds Tavern project within the earlier phases of the movement and evaluates her work by today's standards. The "saving of historic structures...was an American response to an American need"--how that response and need developed at Jefferds Tavern may shed some insight onto the colonial revival in America.
Endnotes

1 The sites Elizabeth was involved with are Jefferds Tavern, the Old Gaol, the John Hancock warehouse, the schoolhouse, the Maud Muller spring, the 'snowshoe' rock, and Sewall's Bridge. After her death in 1952, her home became a museum. Through her involvement, other historic buildings in York were discovered and marked with plaques.


6 Ibid.; 129.

7 Ibid., 127; 131; 129.

8 Schlereth, 73.

9 Axelrod, ix.


11 Hosmer, 25.
CHAPTER I
ELIZABETH BISHOP PERKINS

On November 20th, 1879, the Reverend Joshua Newton Perkins and his wife Mary Sowles Perkins had their first and only child—Elizabeth Bishop Perkins. Reverend Perkins was the minister of Saint George's Chapel of Free Grace, an Episcopal church in New York City, and the family spent the first three years of Elizabeth's life there. In 1882 Elizabeth's father became one of several ministers at the Church of Reconciliation and the Mission Chapel of Incarnation, located on Broadway and 10th. As minister at the Mission, Reverend Perkins was heavily involved with charities. He passed his desire to care for others on to his daughter. After his retirement in 1895, Reverend Perkins indulged another interest, the study of the past, and wrote several church histories. Elizabeth inherited his love of history. His practical wife Mary managed the household, followed world affairs, and pursued the study of secular history. Together, they tried to raise Elizabeth as a model minister's child, to instill in her a social conscience and an appreciation of the past.

Elizabeth became a fascinating strong-minded individual. Her significant role in the history of York, Maine and her involvement with the colonial revival came from interests she inherited from her parents. They also
arose out of a need to establish a purpose in her own life. By stimulating York residents' interest in their colonial heritage, Elizabeth gave meaning to her life.

A general picture of her background emerges from several sources. Rose Howe, a close friend, wrote Elizabeth Bishop Perkins of York. Unfortunately, this biography lacks footnotes and general bibliographical information, and the text is full of subtle contradictions that make one suspect its reliability. Although newspaper articles and Elizabeth's own writings provide additional information, only a general outline of her life is known.

Joshua and Mary Perkins came from respected families with some degree of social prominence. The Reverend Perkins earned a good salary as a minister and drew income from real estate in New York City. Over the years, Elizabeth's mother received several inheritances which she invested carefully. Elizabeth had the best of life that her parents could provide, and she finished her Long Island schooling knowing, even if she did not always practice, the social accomplishments of the times. Her mother capped Elizabeth's education with a 'grand tour' of Europe, a frequent custom of wealthy society families of the time.

Two brief events suggest the social prominence of the Perkins family. In 1895, Elizabeth attended the Richmond, Virginia wedding of Charles Dana Gibson, the artist of Gibson Girl fame. Later, in their Maine home
in 1905, Elizabeth and her mother sponsored a fund-raising fete for the York hospital and the local Improvement Society. In nearby Portsmouth, New Hampshire, third Assistant Secretary of State Herbert Pierce was leading negotiations between Russian and Japanese delegations to reach a peace agreement to end the Russo-Japanese War. Members of both delegations and Secretary Pierce attended the party.5

In the early 1880s, the Perkins family began vacationing. Because of Mary's avid interest in national affairs and trends, the family gravitated to southern Maine, a well-known resort area for popular literary and artistic figures such as Samuel Clemens, Sarah Orne Jewett, and Alice Morse Earle.6 Personages like these would later have a great effect upon Elizabeth. After visiting relatives who summered in nearby towns and meeting some of the celebrities throughout the region, the family made York their favorite summer haunt.

The Perkins enjoyed their summers in York so much that the family purchased their own house in 1898. It was a rather run-down structure on the banks of the York River with a magnificent view of the distant harbor. Although over the years the house had evolved into a multi-room dwelling, the original structure had consisted of one room and a fireplace. Mary and Elizabeth referred to their new home as the 'Piggin House' because the shape of a single room with a projecting fireplace and chimney
resembled the single-handled container known as a piggin. They liked the colonial associations of the name. The acquisition of the Piggin House stimulated both mother's and daughter's interest in colonial things, and they immediately began to restore and furnish the building to what they called "its original Beauty (sic)" by frequenting antique shows and sales and buying old pieces to create an old-time atmosphere.

Both Mrs. Perkins and Elizabeth were antiquarians and vigorous participants in the exploration of the past that the first phase of the colonial revival fostered. With the purchase of a house with a vague colonial history and increased exposure to resident summer celebrities, Elizabeth and her mother rapidly plunged into a frenzy of colonial renaissance that would eventually affect the entire town.

Over the years, the Piggin House provided Elizabeth with a "stage and props" with which to beguile her guests. Strong-willed and independent, she dressed flamboyantly in costumes and beads and was aggressive to the point of offensiveness in her search for 'appropriate items' for the household.

Mary Perkins, although less flamboyant, was very active in local history and preservation. In late 1899, she organized a group of other summer residents to save the town's original jail from decay. The gaol, the oldest surviving public building in British North America,
had declined from provincial prison to local lock-up, and finally to low-income housing in the middle of York. Mary Perkins and her peers established the Old Gaol Society to preserve the building as tangible evidence of York's heritage. Elizabeth, then twenty years old and recently returned from a bicycling tour of France, began with other summer folk to build a museum of Americana in the gaol.

Mary recognized Elizabeth's need for independence and constructive purpose. When she received some additional legacies, she deeded Elizabeth a family property on East 52nd Street in New York. Penny-conscious like her mother, Elizabeth invested her money and eventually became quite wealthy in her own right. Knowledgeable in world affairs, languages, politics, and history, Elizabeth was an extremely good organizer and a social leader. These two characteristics would later stand her in good stead. Her healthy respect for money was tempered by the belief that those fortunate enough to have wealth were obligated to aid those less fortunate, an attitude which her parents cultivated.

In 1900, Mary Perkins helped organize another historical group, the Old York Historical and Improvement Society. The earlier Old Gaol Society aimed specifically to preserve a single building. The new society had broader objectives. A memorial association for the "serious pursuit of local history and village improvement," its mission was to "save a shared
heritage," its scope was broad enough to promote York's past and to include whatever made York as a town a desirable place to live or visit. Consequently, members of the Old York Historical and Improvement Society became involved in town improvements such as the removal of billboards, acquisition of garbage cans, establishment of parks and scenic areas, and repainting the town buildings colonial white. They also began to prepare a series of celebrations of York's history.

Elizabeth, a charter member, helped prepare for the town's 250th anniversary in 1902 by preserving and publishing historical facts and local legends. The celebration was a great success. A week of pageants, concerts, and speeches emphasized the "romantic evocation of a pre-industrial age in which man battled the elements... and the importance of a shared heritage and American identity." These two ideas were important characteristics of the first phase of the colonial revival.

For more than a decade the family pursued its annual routine, wintering in New York, summering in Maine. Occasionally, Reverend Perkins remained in New York to research and write another church history. Elizabeth and her mother occupied themselves with their house, the Old Gaol museum, and the Improvement Society. They spent many hours collecting colonial relics for themselves and both organizations.

Her father's death in 1915 and the outbreak of World
War I provided Elizabeth with new outlets for her energy. As catharsis for grief, she immersed herself in the American Committee for Devastated France and the American Fund for French Wounded. Her time, money, and talents for publicity were put to good use in these volunteer organizations run by women of wealthy families. Elizabeth eventually went to France where she drove ambulances, worked in field hospitals, and served as a publicity agent. Her biographer and friends wrote that Elizabeth used reports to create stories that would arouse American sympathy for France. Unfortunately, none of those stories have survived. Her valuable services were officially recognized when the French government decorated her with the Medaille de la Reconnaissance Francaise, and made her a Chevalier of the French Legion of Honor. Six years in France changed her; her many responsibilities had made her domineering, tactless, and totally self-reliant. With her high energy and enthusiasm, the forty-two year old Elizabeth needed new projects.

Yet somewhat paradoxically, the very independent Elizabeth seems to have chosen distractions which merely extended her mother's historical efforts and her own earlier activities. She seems to have stepped easily into the role of a devoted unmarried daughter and became her mother's companion. Mary and Elizabeth began travelling; they took yearly excursions all over the globe and returned with trunkloads of souvenirs. At the
same time, they maintained their interest in the Old Gaol Society and the Old York Historical and Improvement Society.

With her mother's death in 1929, Elizabeth, now fifty, had for the first time a chance to set her own direction. She continued her former pattern of activity. She immersed herself in charities which spanned a wide geographical and categorical range. Her charity work included a frontier nursing service in Appalachia, homes for alcoholics, cancer centers, welfare meals, educational aids, fresh-air farms for city children, and more. She urged her wealthy New York friends to contribute to all of these causes.

In addition to her charity work, Elizabeth belonged to many historical societies, subscribed to major historical magazines, and founded several historic and improvement groups. She was a member of two New York social clubs, the Colony Club and the Cosmopolitan Club. Her interest in the colonial revival was expressed through membership in the Huguenot Society, the Colonial Dames of America, and the Mayflower Society. Furthermore, for a short time, she ran a motion picture theater in New York. Set up as a tavern and organized along the lines of the little theater movement, the theater aimed, through the movies it showed, to evoke patriotic sentiment and a nostalgic feeling for the past.

During this period she continued writing. According to her biographer and to notes in the York Historical
Society archives, she belonged to the Women's Press of New England, and she published several articles in various magazines and newspapers. Her publications probably were not numerous. I have traced only two articles, a drama in Harper's Bazaar and a touring story about her trip through France in American Cyclist.

At the same time, her interest in Maine intensified. She made York her permanent residence around 1930. Although no evidence survives to explain her move to Maine, perhaps she thought as a resident of the town she could more effectively promote her historical presentations and the activities of historical groups among local residents. It is certain, though, that her increased financial support and personal interest necessitated Elizabeth's presence almost year-round. Her primary concern was the York residents would not realize the importance of saving their heritage. Fearing its loss, she launched a full-scale resuscitation of York's past by taking a more active role in York's historical life and launching a writing campaign to arouse the town's awareness.21 Her writings and projects document an important aspect of the colonial revival mentality.

Elizabeth recognized that the fate of the Improvement Society and history in York depended "more largely upon the interest of permanent residents...."22 Accordingly, she emphasized the significance and sadness of the loss of local heritage if residents refused to respond to the
challenge. She worked hard to create programs and pageants designed to "arouse curiosity and to excite the imagination" of both viewers and participants, and she encouraged summer and year-round residents to participate. The activities were loosely based on tales recounted in the local histories she wrote and were intended to honor residents' ancestors. Elizabeth also played a major role in the preservation of many of York's colonial buildings--her own home, the Old Gaol, the schoolhouse, the John Hancock warehouse, Sewall's Bridge, the Emerson-Wilcox house, and Jefferds Tavern. Her work on the last will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

In promoting historical pageants and preserving architecture, Elizabeth called attention to local sites featured in American literature. The spring in John Greenleaf Whittier's poem "Maud Muller" lies close to town. In 1942, Elizabeth placed a monument by the spring and wrote a pageant for the dedication ceremony. The pageant recreated the following scene from Whittier's poem:

The Judge rode slowly down the lane,  
Smoothing his horse's chesnut mane.  
He drew his bridle in the shade of apple trees, to greet the maid,  
And ask a draught from the spring that flowed  
Through the meadow across the road.
She stooped where the cool spring 
bubbled up, 
and filled for him her small tin 
cup, 
and blushed as she gave it, looking 
down 
on her feet so bare, and her 
tattered gown. 
"Thanks!" said the Judge; "a 
sweeter draught 
From fairer hand was never 
quaffed."

Elizabeth knew that Nathaniel Hawthorne visited the York area during the time he was writing *The Scarlet Letter*. She believed that the Old Gaol was the site for the scene in which Hester, wearing the scarlet letter 'A', emerges from confinement with her daughter. The Old Gaol had held several women who gave birth during their confinement, a number of whom were not married. She also believed another Hawthorne work, *The Minister's Black Veil*, referred to the First Parish Church across the street. One of its ministers had worn a mourning veil for several years.

Elizabeth spent approximately fifty years of her life studying, promoting, and participating in the history of York, Maine. As Elizabeth undertook more restorations and historical celebrations, local enthusiasm and interest in the past grew. Because of her wealth, leisure time, and single-mindedness, she dominated York's historic preservation and restoration projects, and she was constantly in the public's eye. Many residents believed her New York and Boston ties were particularly helpful to her and to the rescue of York's past. When Elizabeth
died in 1952, she was remembered as the creator of projects vital to the telling of York's history.

As a single, rather odd woman, Elizabeth and her activities would be interesting subjects for a psychological study in women's history. However, this thesis concentrates on Elizabeth within the context of the colonial revival movement. Before focusing on one of her restoration projects, it may be helpful to set the background for Elizabeth's approach and attitude to the past.

Elizabeth was intensely committed to the colonial revival. She was enraptured by its romanticism and impressed by its significance in the creation of a national identity. Elizabeth wrote her romantic histories and restored sites to promote the ambiance which she felt matched the colonial revival view of the past. Often she appealed to the patriotism and imagination of York residents and visitors through her pageants. Further, she set the standard for what was colonial in York by acting and dressing in a manner she believed evocative of colonial times.

Her goal in York was to "imprint history so firmly... that never again would [it] be allowed to sleep..."26 Unfortunately, almost everything she restored or wrote was historically inaccurate and a figment of either her imagination or the imaginations of those authors she read. Elizabeth's participation in the colonial revival reflects
the romanticism which shaped the early colonial revival. Although her restorations, writings, and actions were often flamboyant, they were all supported by her fin de siècle idealization of the colonial period and her conviction that atmosphere was more important than anything else. Elizabeth merely adapted the colonial revivalist view of the colonial period as an "idealistic representation of an imaginary past with the projection of unfulfilled desires" to her needs and York's resources.²⁷

Basically, Elizabeth's ideas grew out of books and magazine articles she read. Authors such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Sarah Orne Jewett, and Henry Wadsworth Longfellow had romanticized colonial life. They created idealistic characters and situations in their stories. Popular magazines featured articles about early New England legends and daily habits; Elizabeth may have borrowed some of their ideas and simply invented others. Like many early colonial revivalists, Elizabeth envisioned the past as an agricultural idyll. To this basic picture she added an obsession with mood. Atmosphere became the key word in describing what Elizabeth attempted to achieve through her restorations and writings. She believed that the most important aspect of history to communicate to the public was an imprecisely defined but heavily felt emotional response to a past environment.

While her works certainly created atmosphere, it was mostly myth and nostalgia. Elizabeth paid little heed to
historical accuracy. Although as a member of various historical groups, she preserved and published historical manuscripts and factual information, Elizabeth did not take advantage of the materials she saved. Her research methods were slipshod. She found a building or heard a legend, and checked quickly through secondary sources for general information. If she developed an enthusiasm for certain subjects, such as schoolhouses or taverns, Elizabeth devoted tremendous energy to obtain general information from all over the nation. Unfortunately, she failed to examine records, letters, or other primary sources pertinent to York to determine whether a general story had relevance to southern Maine or to York in particular. Often she ignored historical facts, fabricated data, and borrowed ideas from popular novels. The history of Jefferds Tavern, which she repeatedly published over the years, demonstrates her research methods and the nature of her historical imagination. Although the story is patriotically stirring, it is incorrect, as will be discussed later. Many early colonial revivalists shared her lack of regard for historical accuracy and her preference for eye-catching and emotive detail.

Her activities and restorations forged a link between the first phase of the colonial revival in York, and all the later evolutions of the same idea. The fascination which history had upon her, and the effect
colonial revival ideas had upon her interpretations and portrayal of her projects, evolved especially through her involvement with the restoration of Jeffersds Tavern.
Endnotes

1 Rose Howe, Elizabeth Bishop Perkins of York (Brunswick, ME: Harpswell Press, 1979), 17.

2 Julie Mofford, "Elizabeth Perkins" Interpreter's Notebook, Old York Historical Society, n.d..

3 Howe, 35.

4 Mofford.

5 The Transcript (Aug 1905). A full citation is unavailable as copies of the paper do not exist.


7 Howe, 19.

8 Ibid., 20.

9 Mofford.

10 Beth Creevey Hamm, Memories of Elizabeth Perkins (York, ME: n.d.), 2.


12 Julie Mofford, "The Old York Historical and Improvement Society," (York, ME: Dec 15, 1982), 17. (Speech given to the Society)

13 Ibid., 2.

14 The Public and the Colonial Revival (York, ME: Old York Historical Society, n.d.).

15 Howe, 25. Elizabeth was also director and third vice president of the Committee for a time.

16 Ibid., 26.
Elizabeth was the founder and associate president of the Society for the Preservation of Historic Landmarks, a charter member of the Women's League and the Piscataqua Garden Club, a member in perpetuity of the Old Gaol Committee, the Old York Historical and Improvement Society, the New England Women's Press, the Huguenot Society, the World Federation of Education Association, and belonged to the Colonial Dames of America. She also held membership or concerns in a vast number of charities, several of which dealt exclusively with children.

Mofford, "The Old York...", 17.

Howe, 61; The Public..., 4.

The Public..., 2.

Mofford, "Elizabeth Perkins". These places were commemorated by Elizabeth through skits and plaques.

Howe, 61.


Although the New York belongings of Elizabeth were lost to York when she died, an inventory of her York library offers some insights as to what she used for resource material. Some of the authors include Mary Crawford, Alice Morse Earle, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Wallace Nutting, Rudyard Kipling, and E.S. Hathaway, in addition to many popular novels and several European histories and biographies. As noted above, the inventory is not comprehensive due to the lack of information on her New York collection, as well as the lack of magazines and other articles.
CHAPTER II

JEFFERDS TAVERN

Elizabeth was not the only colonial revivalist who stressed atmosphere over accuracy; in doing so, however, she established precedent in York for an incorrect understanding of colonial life. One of the principal examples of this was Jefferds Tavern. The Tavern was originally built in 1754 in Wells, Maine ten miles north of York. It was a family business run in conjunction with a farm and a fulling mill.\(^1\) It passed through several generations of the Jefferds family before it decayed and was abandoned by its owners. In the 1920s, William Barry, a local architect/antiquarian from Kennebunk, Maine into whose family the Tavern descended, renovated the building and opened it to the public.\(^2\) After his death in 1932, the Tavern was once again abandoned and left vulnerable to vandalism and weather damage.\(^3\)

In the late 1930s, Elizabeth became interested in Jefferds Tavern because it offered her the opportunity to restore a colonial tavern and present it to the public. However, the Tavern's owners were initially reluctant to sell the building since it had been in the family for so long. Elizabeth wrote a series of letters to the owners and convinced them of the Tavern's historical significance and their moral duty to preserve such "a symbol of
patriotism and challenging inspiration. She emphasized her desire to restore the building as a valuable heirloom of the past. In 1939, the owners agreed to sell the Tavern.

Elizabeth's first plan for the building was to relocate it in York, where she believed its significance would more readily be recognized and it would be closer to her other projects. She believed that a restored tavern in York would enhance the pre-Revolutionary atmosphere of the town, and thought the Old York Historical and Improvement Society would eagerly take on the Tavern restoration. However, its members refused their support because the Tavern had not been built in York. Today, preservationists would argue that the building should remain on its original site. In 1939, the issue was simply that local pride and loyalty to York's history did not include relocated structures. Temporarily defeated by the Society's and town's refusal to accept the Tavern, Elizabeth had to devise another way to restore Jefferds Tavern.

She founded a new organization, the Society for the Preservation of Historic Landmarks, and used her own money to finance the Tavern project. Consequently, she had much more influence over the restoration of Jefferds Tavern than she had had with other projects in which she shared financial responsibility. Elizabeth engaged a local architect, Howard Peck, and commissioned him to take
apart and store the entire structure until such time as
Historic Landmarks could afford to continue with the work.

During the two years which passed before the Landmarks
Society could raise enough money to continue the
restorations, Elizabeth organized a full-fledged fund­
raising campaign and worked toward convincing York
residents that the Tavern belonged in the town. 
According to Elizabeth, the aim of the restoration of the Tavern
was "the resurrection in a spiritual sense, of those
pre-Revolutionary times...to bring the atmosphere of
those days back here to York, where the history of our
forefathers entitle this building to belong." On the
eve of the Tavern's restoration, Elizabeth had
successfully aroused patriotic and proprietary feelings
among the local residents. They came to support the project
morally and financially.

It took Peck just one month to disassemble the
heavily vandalized building. Since Jefferds Tavern was
completely disassembled for moving and storage, basically
it was reduced to its structural components. Most of
the window panes had been broken already, and all
original plaster and interior decoration was destroyed in
the removal process. Peck felt that demolition
accurately described what he did to the Tavern, for "no
feeling of either preservation or respect [prevailed]...
no other single word adequately expresses...removing an
old house from one locality to another in parts."
Despite his misgivings about the techniques employed, when reconstruction began Peck did his best to provide Elizabeth with an accurate account of what he restored and what he replaced. Elizabeth acknowledged his reservations about the project, and gave him free rein to recondition the building with the qualification that "it be reconstructed exactly as it was in its prime."  

Peck's reports on moving and reconstructing the Tavern in York clearly reveal the extent to which Barry's first restoration had altered the building's original form. Some of Barry's replacements, such as new beams and joists which approximated the mortised-and-pinned hewn timbers in the attic, were necessary to keep the Tavern standing. Peck discovered other alterations. The pitch of the lean-to roof had been increased, presumably to eliminate leaks or stress on the roof. Shutters originally exposed had been enclosed behind a thin interior wall to create what colonial revivalists termed "Indian shutters." Peck also discovered that the stairs were not original. To a modern preservationist and probably to Peck, these are serious changes; to Elizabeth, they merely added to the emotive interpretation of the Tavern.

Under Elizabeth's directions, Peck made a number of architectural changes which obscured what little origin and integrity remained after Barry's work. He camouflaged the foundation and cement with stone piers. In the main room of the Tavern, Peck replaced all but two sections of
paneling with doors from a local house that was being torn down and installed a copy of the bar from the famous Wayside Inn in Sudbury, Massachusetts.\textsuperscript{11} He also removed a stencil resign which Barry had invented to decorate the walls with and replastered the surface. In the kitchen, Peck installed modern plumbing facilities and a modern kitchen in what had been the buttery. He used more paneling from local houses, adapted the original swinging dorr to an entire wall complete with grill windows, and relocated the back door. In his final architectural renovations, Peck moved cupboards, plastered walls, exposed beams, stained floors, and painted rooms, all at Elizabeth's behest, serving to obscure the Tavern's original appearance.

After Peck finished the major part of the renovations, Elizabeth furnished the Tavern, employing many colonial revivalist ideas and styles she discovered in books. She began with the main room of the Tavern, the 'tap room'. Since licensed taverns rarely had separate tap rooms, the room is completely a colonial revival fabrication. Elizabeth put in curtains, tables, chairs, rugs, a sofa, and wall sockets with electric candles "for modern convenience."\textsuperscript{12} In the 'waiting room', she discovered blue paint under other paint in a cupboard and painted the room to match it. An upstairs room received a four-wall mural depicting pre-1820 scenes of York, painted by Adele Ells of Maine in the style of Rufus Porter, an
early nineteenth-century artist and decorator. All was designed to suggest a cozy aura of comfort which the colonial traveller would have welcomed, but nearly everything was historically incorrect. Carpeting and curtains did not become prevalent until the mid-nineteenth century; floors were not stained but, especially in a rural tavern such as Jefferds, were left bare. Sofas became popular among the wealthy during the Federal period and none were known to have been part of the Jefferds family's possessions. Tankards and plates were more numerous than would have been seen in a small rural tavern.

By 1941, the restoration was completed and the Tavern was used for fund-raising for Aid to All Allies in World War II. In 1942, Elizabeth opened the building to the public and served tea and cakes. Although Elizabeth's restoration was historically inaccurate, she advertised it as "faithfully restored" with "genuine tavern furniture in the rooms and the floor boards and panelling and sliding Indian shutters as they were in 1750." In interpreting the building's history to the public, Elizabeth spent more time promoting a general sense of her ideas about taverns than giving visitors an accurate idea of the Tavern's history. What history of the Tavern she did recount was incorrect and invented. For example, Elizabeth referred to Samuel Jefferds as a fierce Indian fighter--in reality, it was a forebear of Samuel who was reknowned for his Indian fighting.
vivid romantic detail about John Adams' visit to the Tavern and how while there he learned of the Boston Massacre. The story contradicts Adams' own story. In his autobiography, he clearly says at the time of the massacre he was visiting friends in the south end of Boston. Other details such as the later encampments of the militia around the building are also inaccurate. Her written history of the Tavern, and the oral interpretation she offered to the public, were based largely on her own imagination. Visitors were to learn that taverns were homes away from home, cozy, warm, welcoming, and friendly. Although her history mentions some of the important social and informational functions an eighteenth-century tavern served, Elizabeth chose to ignore the realities of tavern life and purpose in her interpretation. She served tea and cakes from the bar in the taproom and used the modern kitchen in the buttery to prepare the foods. Although primary sources telling about rural tavern life are difficult to find, historians agree that these buildings played vital roles as community centers for social, commercial, and even judicial life. In ignoring those roles, Elizabeth lost any chance of portraying Jefferds Tavern accurately.

Moreover, Elizabeth used many colonial revival terms to describe her interior decorating achievements. Indian shutters were her favorite. Books written during the first phase of the colonial revival stated that the shutters
were made especially to deter 'savages' from attacking a home. For Elizabeth, that was enough. Despite the knowledge that the shutters had been altered, she did no further research. She was also fond of the 'escape plank', a board exhibited in an upstairs room. She claimed colonists would have used it to escape from the upstairs windows. Another revivalist term was the 'parson's cupboard'. It referred to a shelf usually located above the fireplace mantle and enclosed by a sliding door. Ministers were said to have kept valuables and liquor out of sight in these cupboards. In reality, these were storage areas or warming ovens for items that had to be kept dry and free from damp. Practical explanations did not fit easily into Elizabeth's romantic interpretations of colonial architecture.

She also wrote stories about adventures at the Tavern and embellished them with many romantic and superfluous details. Visitors and York residents were unaware of both Elizabeth's incorrect labels and her inaccurately researched restorations. They accepted her stories and terminology as representative of the past. Although residents remembered that the Tavern was not truly a local building, Elizabeth's stories diminished the importance of that fact. Her made-up stories became history for the entire town during the 1940s and 1950s. Elizabeth's death in 1952 did nothing to diminish people's general acceptance of her version of the past and the
stories continued to be told.

In 1959 Jefferds Tavern found its way to a third location. This time it was not taken apart, but simply lifted onto a truck and rolled approximately half a mile down York Street to its present location on Lindsey Road. The move brought the Tavern closer to the other historic buildings in York. Until the late 1970s, the Society for the Preservation of Historic Landmarks, which Elizabeth had endowed in her will, operated Jefferds Tavern in much the same manner as its benefactoress had run it. The interpretation aimed to "show the kitchen, waiting room, tap room, and family quarters as they were in 1767."\(^21\) Although a few changes were made in the interpretation during the late 1970s, for thirty years after her death, Elizabeth's version of the tavern's history survived substantially intact.

In 1982 major changes were initiated. The trustees of the three historical groups in York began to plan merging the groups into one "cohesive, unified organization."\(^22\) By January 1st, 1984, the merger was complete. The Old Gaol Museum Committee, the Old York Historical and Improvement Society, and the Society for the Preservation of Historic Landmarks became the Old York Historical Society, with a directive to "preserve the cultural and aesthetic heritage of York through research, collection, interpretation, preservation, and innovative educational programs."\(^23\)
The merger brought many benefits. Competition for state and federal funds decreased; there was less confusion as to who ran which building; and the resources and knowledge of all three groups were joined under one administration. Under the new operating philosophy, a major re-evaluation of the interpretation of all buildings was undertaken, and the educational program was subsequently revised. The goal was to upgrade and correct the educational content of the interpretation without losing the significance of Elizabeth's work. Meanwhile, the Wells Historical Society financed an archeological excavation headed by Dr. Alaric Faulkner of the University of Maine at the Tavern's original site in Wells. The excavation results posed significant interpretive problems for the tavern in York.

Dr. Faulkner found that Jefferds Tavern served more as an "early industrial textile site than as a tavern." In fact, the owners operated a tavern on the property for only a brief period, and the fulling mill was more significant historically. Thus, an interpretation of the Jefferds site as an important tavern was inaccurate. The Old York Historical Society fully intended to tell the public about Elizabeth Perkins' role in historic preservation in York. Since the Tavern was the least authentic of the buildings and the most misrepresented, the staff decided to adapt it as an orientation center for the history of the town and the interpretation of its
buildings. The story of Elizabeth Perkins and the colonial revival in York would also be told there.

In re-interpreting the Tavern, Elizabeth's overabundance of furnishings were removed. The carpeting, sofa, and carefully laid tables and extra chairs in the tap room were replaced with three tables and some chairs scattered throughout the room, some clay pipes, and measuring cups on the bar. Likewise, the kitchen was stripped of extra furnishings and styled as a working family's kitchen. One upstairs room became a bedchamber, with several beds and a chest of drawers. The mural room was furnished with a loom, similar to one the family owned, to demonstrate weaving techniques and the importance of textile production to the family's economy. With its revised furnishings, Jefferds Tavern now represents "a country inn in coastal Maine in the late eighteenth century." It serves as an educational center where visitors can gain an understanding of the basic social, informational, and living experiences involved at a tavern in a small rural community, and can view an historically accurate interpretation of colonial period taverns. Key concepts such as family and community and historical change serve as the basis for interpreting Jefferds Tavern during the eighteenth century.

However, many of Elizabeth's architectural alterations were left in place. The paneling in the tap room, the modern kitchen and grill wall in the kitchen,
and the mural scene in the upstairs room remain as testimony to "preservation attitudes and techniques of [Elizabeth's] time." During a tour, the background of the Tavern during all stages of its life is explained to visitors. Interpreters carefully differentiate between the furnishings of the rooms and the architectural components, and emphasize that the Tavern does not represent a 'true' colonial building. They explain that the Tavern was left as a composite of two historical periods in order to demonstrate not only a colonial tavern but also a colonial revivalist's idea of what a colonial tavern should be like--a purpose which is necessary to understand many of York's historical buildings. In this manner, the Society surmounts some of the difficulties of including Elizabeth in York's history.

Although Elizabeth highly enriched what little, if any, historical basis there was in her writings, her romanticization of the past was entirely in line with early colonial revival practices. She believed that her way of depicting history was accurate because it established a mood, a sense of what the past was like. York residents accepted her accounts because they appealed to local patriotism and heritage. The stories gave them a sense of who they were and where they came from. In an age of insecurity they provided psychological roots just as the buildings were physical expressions of
the past. Elizabeth's tales and restorations continue
to appeal today partly because they are colorful and
partly because people still seek to identify with their
heritage. Yet in offering a more accurate view of the
past and Elizabeth's part in it, the Old York Historical
Society helps visitors and residents realize the
similarities between themselves and their ancestors and
the value of viewing history realistically at all levels.
Endnotes

1 Jefferds Tavern file, Old York Historical Society, York, ME.


3 Ibid.


5 Rose Howe, Elizabeth Bishop Perkins of York (Brunswick, ME: Harpswell Press, 1979), 66.

6 Jefferds Tavern file, 3.


8 Peck, Sep 1942, 1.


10 Howard Peck, "Restoration of Jefferd's Tavern," York, ME: May 22, 1940, 1. (mimeographed)

11 Kevin Murphy, "A Stroll Thro' the Past--The Career of William E. Barry 1846-1932," (Boston University, Apr 4, 1984), 22.

12 Tavern history file, Old York Historical Society, York, ME.; Elizabeth Bishop Perkins, Jefferd's Tavern scrapbook, Old York Historical Society, York, ME..

13 Jefferds Tavern file, 2.


15 Howe, 67.
Letter to Professor Moody, Boston University, from Elizabeth Perkins, Old York Historical Society, York, ME.; Julie Mofford, "Jefferds Tavern," Interpreter's Notebook, Old York Historical Society, York, ME.

Interview with Julie Mofford, York, ME., Dec 9, 1987.

Several tavern historians concur that taverns served important community functions in a variety of ways. For further information, Kym Rice's Early American Taverns: For the Entertainment of Friends and Strangers or Patricia Gibbs' "Taverns in Tidewater Virginia 1700 to 1774" (masters thesis in history, College of William and Mary, also available at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation library) are very helpful.

Actually, shutters simply were an alternate form of keeping the weather at bay; the picturesque idea that colonists struggled against tremendous human as well as natural odds gave this shutter style its name, according to Julie Mofford, former educator, Old York Historical Society, York, ME: May 1984.


Julie Mofford, "Jefferds Tavern," Interpreter's Notebook, Old York Historical Society, York, ME.

Gerald George, "Merger in Maine," History News 41 (Jan 1986), 11. The purpose of the merger was to tie in the history of York and her buildings between the groups, in order to present more accurate and interesting information as well as decrease the number of groups needing contributions from visitors for maintenance. Careful legal guidelines were followed so that the terms and allocations of Elizabeth's will would not be affected.

"York, Maine," pamphlet published by Old York Historical Society; George, 11-12.

Julie Mofford, "Jefferds Tavern".

"York, Maine".

Ibid..
Map

This map of York's center illustrates the location of the various buildings and sites Elizabeth was involved with. (Map of Town of York, York County, Maine, State of Maine. Department of Transportation, 1982).

Map Key

1. Tavern's original location in York, Raydon Road.
2. 1959 (and present) Tavern site, Lindsey Road.
3. Schoolhouse
4. Emerson/Wilcox House.
5. Old Gaol
6. George Marshall Store
7. John Hancock Warehouse
8. Sewall's Bridge—although Elizabeth was instrumental in saving it, she is not mentioned in Charles Hosmer's account of it in his book *Preservation Comes of Age*.
9. Elizabeth Perkins' house
This is the Tavern in Wells circa early 1920s before William Barry's restoration of the building.
Again the Tavern in Wells, circa 1936, soon before Elizabeth's acquisition of the building. Although the tree to the left obscures the roof, the photograph was taken from the same angle as the previous illustration. The Tavern's appearance is much improved, and scarcely looks the 'heavily vandalized' building Elizabeth described in her efforts to save it.
A rough sketch plan of the interior of the Tavern's first floor. Note the interior additions Elizabeth added. (Graphics courtesy of Thawny Soto)
Sketch Plan of Jefferd's Tavern, not to scale.
This photograph, circa 1942, shows the Tavern after its restoration on Raydon Road in York. The stones at the base of the building on the right side disguise the cement foundation and the addition of a basement. At this time, the Tavern was used as the center for the Aid to All Allies program in York during World War II, as the sign above the door indicates.
This photograph illustrates the interior of the taproom after Elizabeth's restoration, circa 1950s. The bar and paneling visible to the left of the picture are not original. Most of the paneling in the room consists of doors taken from older buildings that were torn down while Elizabeth was restoring the Tavern. The only original paneling is directly to the left of the photographer's position, with a small piece above the fireplace. Note the exposed ceiling beams, curtains, flowers, rugs, and tables laid for customers--these are meant to suggest Elizabeth's idea of a proper tavern atmosphere, and conflict with her description of the interior in Illustration 9. Tea was being served at the Tavern to visitors at this point.
This photograph shows the kitchen as Elizabeth had it. Again, note the exposed ceiling beams, and the grill wall, which separates the buttery (and modern kitchen for preparing tea) from the tavern kitchen atmosphere. The parson's cupboard is between the candlesticks in the fireplace mantle. Flowers, the teapot, and benches in front of the fire suggest homeliness and welcome—anomalies, since the kitchen would have been infrequently seen by visitors. It is interesting to note that the ovens to the right of the fireplace are not usable, as Elizabeth did not have the flues rebuilt during her restoration.
This photograph illustrates an upstairs room referred to as the 'mural room'. Elizabeth designated this room as a resting place for women travelling with the stage coach. The mural runs along all four walls and depicts pre-1820 scenes of York. The small white house in the scene above the fireplace (between the two vases) is the Sayward-Wheeler house currently owned and operated by the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities. The chandelier and chairs have since been removed from this room, as have the rugs. Currently, this room is believed to have been additional living space for the Jefferd family or a meeting or court space for the community activities of the Tavern. It now holds a loom which signifies the importance of textiles for the family's economy.
This photograph, circa late 1950s or early 1960s, shows the Tavern at its present site on glebe land of the First Parish Church on Lindsey Road. Note the costume of the hostess, the screen door, and the sign on the corner of the building advertising tea served. Although Elizabeth has died, her influence can still be seen in this picture.
Illustration 9

The following excerpt is one example of Elizabeth's history of the Tavern. Note the tone of the author's writing and the descriptions given of the Tavern's interior. (Excerpt courtesy of Old York Historical Society, York, Maine.)

"It was a favorite stopping-place for all travelers, by coach or by horse-back, from far away Massachusetts to the hinterlands of Maine. Its huge chimney - built of bricks 'laid in clay, and burned nearby if not on the premises' - separated its sole two rooms on the ground floor--'The Hall', or kitchen, occupying the entire rear, and the 'Tap Room' the front. In the former, huge roasts turned on the spit, and mush boiled in the iron pots hanging from the crane, while apples roasted in the ashes, and the appetizing odor of chowder filled the room. In the latter, pine tables stood about upon its sanded floor, and chess, tric-trac dominoes and checkers, enlivened by 'black strap', grog and cider (often boiled and doctored with tobacco), hot foaming flip (sometimes called 'old yard of flannel'), or the milder 'Jack Posset', provided entertainment and refreshment for the Tavern's tarrying guests. It is even said that a hunk of dried salt fish hung temptingly suspended from a convenient hook--to incite 'good appetite'---especially among certain itinerant 'friendly' Indians, not averse to such allurements. A tiny, hand-hewn stair-case led to the two upper chambers--installed for the further accommodation of the more weary women of the wayfarers--and to the unfinished attic above. Here, the townsfolk gathered - to seek from the travelers the latest news of the outside world, to supplement the mail, carried on horse-back and in saddle-bags, or, in winter, by mail-sack, borne by messengers on snow-shoes, and, in some instances, 'by Indian runners, or by dogs with messages athwart their collared necks'. For gallant Captain Sam was the man to whom all news was brought, such was his fame---an Indian fighter, he---and versed and trained in all the arts of war. And doubly to be sought - both for his strength of leadership, and for his skill as taverner.

For trouble was brewing - and excitement filled the air. The obnoxious 'Stamp Act', breeder of rebellion among the colonists, was repealed in 1766 - and news of it was being brought by messenger, express from Boston. Instantly, bells were rung, drums beaten, flags flown and guns fired - and toasts were drunk to their British
friend, 'the great Pitt'. Their joy, however, was but a short-lived one - for, in 1770, came news of the Boston Massacre.

Stout John Adams - later to be our second President journeying far afield, to hold his court at Falmouth, was hailed and overtaken on the way, at Jefferd's Tavern, by an excited rider of the post, bearing the mails astride his steaming mare. 'What news, my hasty messenger?', asked Adams - just as the mare slid to a sudden stop. 'And why the bells of Portsmouth - ringing out, as if to sound some sudden, quick alarm?' 'T is news indeed!', the rider panted, spent. 'A massacre - in Boston - Sir - and you are being sought for - to return at once - as fast as ever horse may stride the road!' 'What say you - pray be more explicit, boy!', quoth Adams, 'an you have the breath!' 'The British soldiery, Sir, have fired upon our Boston citizenry, a few scant hours ago!' Dumfounded, Adams spake, with great solemnity: 'Why that means War - a mad, disastrous War!' 'Yes, War indeed - and I must hasten on - to reach Arundel and to spread the news!' ***And he was gone--his hoof-beats striking sparks from off the flints, in firey foreboding.

Three years later, in 1773, came news of the Boston Tea Party - which so aroused the town-folk's admiration and envy that a band of 'Indians' suddenly descended upon near-by York - and bore away from the sloop 'Cynthia' an 150 pound cargo of tea, consigned to the wealthy local Tory, Jonathan Sayward---'and no further questions were asked'.

Finally, in April of 1775, but a few hours after the firing of 'the shot heard round the world', once again an exhausted post rider reined-up his trembling, foam-speck'd steed before the Tavern, and breathlessly told of a great battle at Lexington - and America was at War!

The Minute Men of neighboring York were massing on their village green - to cross Sewall's Bridge, and hasten to join their compatriots at Lexington and Concord and the men of Wells rushed forth to be of their number. Soon there was a local encampment of the Continental Army surrounding the Tavern - and officers and men sought it as a rallying-point and an unofficial headquarters.

The Tavern, too, was at War!
This photograph shows Elizabeth's house in York. The center section is the house as the family bought it in 1898. On the left is the addition later added for servants and more living space. Note the double gables just visible through the trees on the left—a distinct colonial revival architectural design.
CHAPTER III
THE COLONIAL REVIVAL AND MUSEUMS

One of the motivations behind the original colonial revival movement was the realization that valuable pieces of America's past were being lost or destroyed. During the post-Civil War expansion many colonial sites were preserved through the efforts of individuals or private groups. Some were open to the public and the way they were interpreted varied according to the objectives of the preservationists who restored them. Elizabeth acknowledged the need for preservation and undertook historical restoration projects as a response to that need. An examination of her projects reveals how various ideas inside the colonial revival influenced her.

From the mid-1920s to the 1930s, many restorations were begun in which the desired results ranged from those that provided more historical accuracy to others that presented an idealistic image. Two examples, both White House reception rooms, illustrate the possibilities. Mrs. Calvin Coolidge, during the mid-1920s, appointed an advisory committee of notable collectors and restorers to help her with her redecoration efforts. Their major project was a parlor called the John Adams Green Room. Although Mrs. Coolidge preferred the Victorian style of
decorating, she chose colonial furnishings because of the then current popularity of that form of decorating. She also felt that it was particularly appropriate for the White House. Some of her advisors had previously been involved with the decoration of the new American Wing at the Metropolitan Museum of Art.\(^1\) Their influence on Mrs. Coolidge's project was evidenced by a decoration scheme reminiscent of a museum display. Mrs. Coolidge and the committee members through the colonial style important as a symbol of "more tasteful" times before America became industrialized.\(^2\) In the Green Room they created a patriotic and idealized image of a colonial interior which "symbolize[d] the excellence of an earlier America."\(^3\)

On the other hand, Mrs. Herbert Hoover, her successor, was more methodical and pragmatic in her redecoration of the White House. Her interest in history began with facts and included objects with documented historical associations.\(^4\) Rather than create idealized reproductions of earlier rooms, she began a research program which resulted in a catalogue of early White House furnishings which presented their history of ownership, use, and original location. Her project culminated in the re-creation of an upstairs drawing room as she thought it might have been under President James Monroe's administration.\(^5\) In the Monroe Drawing Room, Mrs. Hoover felt she had recreated history and had touched the past through the presence of miscellaneous Monroe memorabilia, some
authentic furnishings, and reproductions of lost or unattainable items known to have been in place during Monroe's time. Mrs. Coolidge and Mrs. Hoover had both adopted the colonial style, yet each used different decorating schemes that resulted in vastly different portrayals of history. The way the past was evoked in the Monroe Drawing Room through authenticated information contrasted sharply with the vague and nostalgic atmosphere of the Green Room; one had been a part of the history of the White House while the other idealized a place that had never existed--John Adams had never lived in the present White House.

The differences between Mrs. Coolidge's and Mrs. Hoover's redecorating efforts illustrate two and suggest other approaches to historical interpretation which occurred during the evolution of the colonial revival. Elizabeth Perkins' approach contains elements of both women's use of history. She and others shared a disorganized assortment of ideas about how to convey their interest in America's colonial past.

To analyze Elizabeth's position within the colonial revival movement from today's perspective and from her own era, the three phases of the movement and their relationship to each other must be closely examined. During the first phase, which lasted from approximately 1876 to the mid-1920s, colonial revivalists cared most about what an object or building "represent[ed] or could
Relating a particular object or site to society as a whole was not important for followers of the colonial revival at this time—they were more concerned with great men and great deeds in history. The phrase 'George Washington slept here' perhaps best illustrates the thinking of colonial revivalists during this first phase. There was little concern with the accuracy of information or the authenticity of presentation. Consequently, early preservation projects and colonial revival collections are a hodge-podge of objects, ideas, and tastes. The great legacy of the first or romantic phase of the colonial revival was the preservation of important structures and artifacts which otherwise would have been destroyed.

During the second phase of the colonial revival, the mid-1930s to the mid-1950s, major activity shifted from private efforts with objectives and methods that were rarely expressed with clarity to public projects for which goals and procedures began to be articulated. During the Depression, under the Federal Arts Project, the federal government expanded the colonial revival movement by giving it national attention and bureaucratizing research standards. Although some revivalists had always been meticulous in their research, many were not. The National Park Service's development of research guidelines stimulated a desire in the private sector to become more careful and attentive to detail. However, attention was
focused primarily on structures, architectural details, and the history of buildings. Some effort to furnish them with antiques was made, but the arrangement of furnishings followed twentieth century practice rather than documented methods known to be historically accurate. Furthermore, unless the tenants of these buildings were historically notable, the structures were largely ignored.

The third phase of the movement began during the 1960s with the advent of the new social history. This phase might be characterized as an 'everyman's' period. Great men, great deeds, and the physical evidence of sites associated with them continued to be explored, but in addition, other evidence associated with men, women, and children from all levels of social strata began to be studied. Scholars paid great attention to the accuracy of information and to the presentation of that information to the public. Also, during this third phase, scholars began to study the colonial revival movement itself as a means of understanding the more recent past and the present.

While dividing the colonial revival movement into three phases makes it more convenient to study, the phases are not as distinctly partitioned as this outline suggests. The periods overlap, and distinctions are not clear. Elizabeth Perkins' role in the colonial revival is a good example of the way a specific case blurs a theoretical picture.
Some colonial revival scholars analyze its practitioners and products in other ways. In his essay in *The Colonial Revival in America*, Kenneth Ames does not discuss temporal progression. Instead, he looks at the motivation that inspired colonial revivalists. The interest of one group of colonial revivalists stemmed from their persisting fascination with ancestor worship, myths of beginnings, and myths of a golden age. They wanted to eulogize a purer, golden past. National celebrations such as Washington's birthday and the Fourth of July commemorate some of these persisting values. These people used the past to perpetuate myths of a simpler, value-bound time. Their willingness to accept social change was limited, since change would affect their attempts to recapture an idyllic past. To some extent, Ames' first group is congruent with the first phase of the colonial revival, with its emphasis on great men and great deeds.

Ames characterizes the motivations of his second group more specifically. Their interest in the colonial past represents "responses to modernization, expressions of nationalism, [and] ways to deal with social and cultural diversity." In their presentations, these colonial revivalists emphasized family, community, and patriotic themes. They accepted and accommodated change within society or changing colonial revival practices by shaping them to the group's needs. While some colonial revivalists of the first phase fit within this definition,
the people active in the second and third phases of the movement belong in this group because of their increased interest in various meanings of objects and buildings and the people associated with them.

Although Elizabeth Perkins was active in preservation after 1900, she began her own restorations during the second phase of the colonial revival when research and accuracy were important. She was an anomaly in the 1940s. Her activities cannot be neatly placed in any of the three phases of the colonial revival. As the majority of colonial revivalists were becoming more involved in research with an emphasis on accuracy, Elizabeth attached a lesser degree of importance to an historically accurate setting. She was more interested in the atmosphere they evoked. She viewed the colonial past as a special time, the 'good old days' when people and values were 'true blue'. In-depth research would have destroyed this vision by revealing the hardships and harsh realities of colonial life. Her stubborn refusal to progress with changing standards of the colonial revival demands an explanation.

The atmosphere and values she promoted through her stories and presentations are consistent with values held during the late nineteenth century concerning the colonial past as a purer time, when 'democracy' triumphed over what was perceived as degenerate republicanism. The celebrations she organized commemorating York's past are excellent examples of the values expressed by 'golden age' colonial
revivalists. For the "Days of Our Forefathers" celebration in 1938 and the 1942 dedication of Maude Muller Spring, Elizabeth wrote skits and speeches that promoted an image of simpler times and innocence. She relied heavily on hearsay and local legends for her information; research would have, in many cases, invalidated the story and the values it represented.

However, Elizabeth's writings and presentations also demonstrate characteristics of Ames' second group. Elizabeth placed strong emphasis on patriotism, as can be seen in some of her projects like the John Hancock warehouse or the Old Gaol, and her writings. Whether she consciously intended her stories and presentations to Americanize or acculturize visitors cannot be determined from her personal writings. Yet the persistence of patriotic overtones in her projects suggests that possibility. Perhaps Elizabeth was extremely patriotic; more likely, she was responding subconsciously to the intrusion of strangers into her social sphere.

Elizabeth's unpublished history of the Piggin House offers one of the clearest illustrations of this meshing of characteristics of both Ames' colonial revival groups. Entitled "The Codfish Murder," the history begins with a seventeenth-century husband killing his wife. Elizabeth describes the wife as properly concerned with her household duties, especially with storing food for the winter. When she discovers that her husband has traded her precious salt
cod for an afternoon of drinking, she berates him soundly. Her husband, drunk and feeling guilty, hits her over the head with a salt cod and buries her in the underground storage chamber. He then mysteriously disappears. The house stands abandoned, and ghostly digging noises can be heard on moonlit nights,

The house remains empty until the mid-1700s, when a sea captain and his family move in. Despite the odd noises the captain wants a residence near the river. He discovers the underground chamber (but not the body) and digs a passage to the river, which he uses for smuggling contraband. Unfortunately, on a routine visit to the house His Majesty's shipping inspectors discover his cache, and the captain has to flee for his life. The story hints that he became a Barbary pirate. Once again, the house is abandoned.

The third chapter deals with the nineteenth century occupants of the house, a minister, his wife, and their three daughters. They move in sometime before the Civil War. The middle daughter, whom Elizabeth characterizes as independent and out-spoken, discovers the underground chamber and hides a run-away slave in it. During a meal, father and daughter debate the right to freedom for all men. The minister states he would never hide a run-away under his roof. At this point, the hidden slave groans and the hired girl hears him. Frightened, she interrupts the argument. All is lost until the quick-thinking
daughter remembers the codfish murder and the ghostly digging noises. Later, she helps the slave reach the next station on the Underground Railroad.

In the final chapter a late nineteenth-century family acquires the house. Elizabeth focuses on the care and attention which they lavish on it. They discover a hidden chamber and a box of papers tucked into a chimney crevice. Although the papers disintegrate when the box is opened, the past they might have told about inspires the daughter to write a story about the house.

Elizabeth's chronological tale uses standard colonial revival topics and descriptive terms to reflect her own romantic imagination. In the four chapters, she writes about Indian shutters, secret hiding places, smuggling, the Underground Railroad, and mysterious disappearances. Some parts of her story, such as the smuggling episodes, were based on local legends and folklore which held that infamous pirates, including Blackbeard, had sailed the York River when hiding their ill-gotten goods. Most events, however, originated in her imagination and reflected her view of what a proper colonial house would have experienced in its lifetime.

Although people accepted the authenticity of Elizabeth's account, and she came to believe it wholeheartedly herself, none of it is accurate. No hidden rooms or secret tunnels exist, and the floor plans reveal that Elizabeth and her mother had built many of the features she later referred
to as genuine. In creating stories she deemed appropriate for her house, Elizabeth avoided the realities of history. Probably she never appreciated the similarity between the end of her romanticized tale and her own life.

Elizabeth grew up under her mother's influence during the first phase of the colonial revival. Those early experiences, however, do not explain why, when the surrounding history-oriented activities became more organized and the people promoting them more attentive to detail, Elizabeth retained her out-dated approach. In determining Elizabeth's position within the colonial revival, it is important to consider both the integration of Ames' characteristics in her restorations and her approach in creating those restorations. Many of her projects reflect the characteristics of Ames' 'golden age' group. Perhaps Elizabeth responded to the social changes around her by promoting an idealized image of the past. However, the persistence of patriotic themes in her presentations fits in with Ames' characterization of the second group. The possibility that Elizabeth deliberately used patriotic images to acculturize or Americanize visitors suggests that she was aware of aspects of the second phase of the colonial revival. However, she never produced accurate research or offered full accounts of her restorations. Elizabeth emerges as an early colonial revivalist trapped in a movement that passed her by.
With changes that occurred within the colonial revival movement during the 1970s, it became important to recognize "earlier museum settings as historiographical teaching tools." By studying individuals like Elizabeth and their effect upon their own times, museum staff members and historians can learn much about the "origins, development, and influence of history museums as part of both the history of American museums and American cultural history" as a whole.

Interest in the study of the colonial revival and its influence upon museums emerged during the 1960s, with an increased interest in more recent history. The colonial revival movement provided scholars with a relatively untouched area in which to examine values and ideas of the more recent past. The restorations and lives of early colonial revivalists offered primary evidence of earlier interests, experiences, and effects upon America's self-image. Many colonial sites and museum collections were preserved because of the efforts of early colonial revivalists. Museums therefore became a logical starting point for studying the movement and its effect. The scope of such an examination would determine the size of the museum involved; for this thesis, a small museum seemed best. In a small museum setting, one gets a sharper sense of the individuals both involved with and affected by the movement, as well as the extent of their influence.

Studying the colonial revival can be quite a challenge.
However, the benefit of examining the development of a small museum during the colonial revival outweighs any potential research hazards. In York, Elizabeth's influence is still felt today in many ways. Most noticeable are local real estate ads, which use colonial revival terms she promoted. One example reads as follows:

A wealth of York history is stored in this excellently restored Colonial (sic) home. Indian shutters and tunnel, nine over six windows, six workable fireplaces, one with a Dutch oven, a borning room, a keeping room, a large ell, and a lovely backyard. It also has all the conveniences of 20th Century comfort. One can live here with the best of both times.

(Shanley Real Estate, York Weekly, circa summer 1985)

Indian shutters, borning rooms, keeping rooms, and a Dutch oven as an architectural part of a fireplace are all physical and verbal colonial revival fabrications. Amusing though this advertisement is, it signifies a very real problem in York and across the country. Many people do not realize the difference between the genuine colonial features and vocabulary and those made up during the colonial revival. Today many museum and historical societies think their current presentations must incorporate information about the colonial revival heritage and should explain those inaccuracies. The problems--physical, factual, and psychological--in doing this are
considerable and not easily solved.

Currently, the staff of Old York Historical Society has two objectives. Their goals are to provide residents and visitors with an accurate history of the town and to tell the story of Elizabeth Perkins and her colonial revival efforts to save the town's architectural heritage. Their solution is to interpret Elizabeth's preservation efforts and historical fiction as part of the cultural changes York experienced during the early twentieth century. They use Elizabeth's past inaccuracies as tools to demonstrate the values which she had and which survive through her restorations today. By interpreting Elizabeth's work, the Old York Historical Society helps residents and visitors learn about the colonial revival and about a slightly earlier America.

York's approach to dealing with the colonial revival as a significant aspect of its history is just one example of how museums and historians have come to recognize the movement's importance. Despite their mistakes, early colonial revivalists deserve acclaim not only for their preservation achievements but also for the contributions they made to the search for an American sense of identity. Deciding what America is and what it means to be an American are problems which affect every generation. There are no fixed concepts or symbols. The 'melting pot' may best describe America. But, as "a phenomenon that continues with impressive vitality...as an ongoing part
of our own culture," the colonial revival offers a unique opportunity to explore how America's sense of identity developed and changed over time.\(^{15}\) One way to explore that development is to attempt to gain "an understanding of the ways people in this country made the past into usable history" for their needs and time.\(^{16}\) The study of a particular site and the forces behind it stimulates such understanding. Through this understanding, history may come to be seen as an "accumulated record of past change which we use to fashion our strategies for coping with the present and future."\(^{17}\) The greatest value in studying the colonial revival and its changes comes from its "remembrance of all people, ordinary and extraordinary, and their role in history."\(^{18}\)
Endnotes


2 Ibid., 881.

3 Ibid., 912.

4 Ibid., 908.

5 Ibid., 911.

6 Ibid.


10 Ibid.


14 Ibid., 256.

15 Axelrod, 1.

16 Ibid., 4.
17 Schlereth, 255.

18 Smith, xxiv.
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