

## ROOM 112

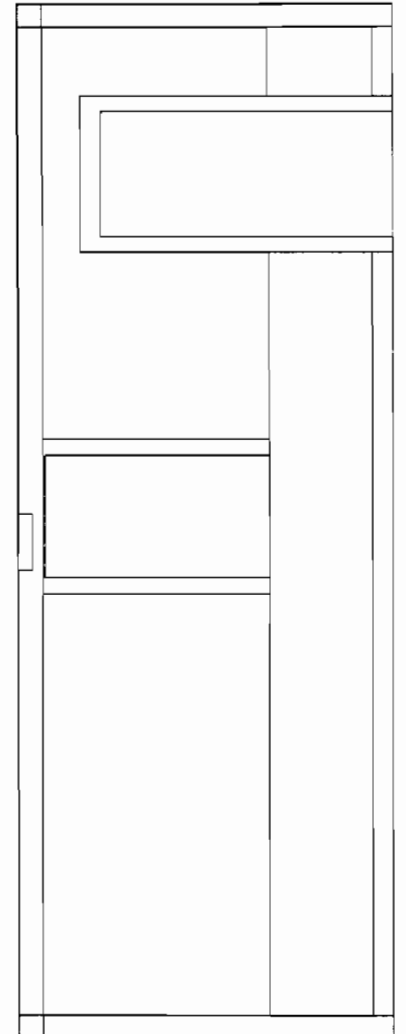
### A Parlor or Chamber

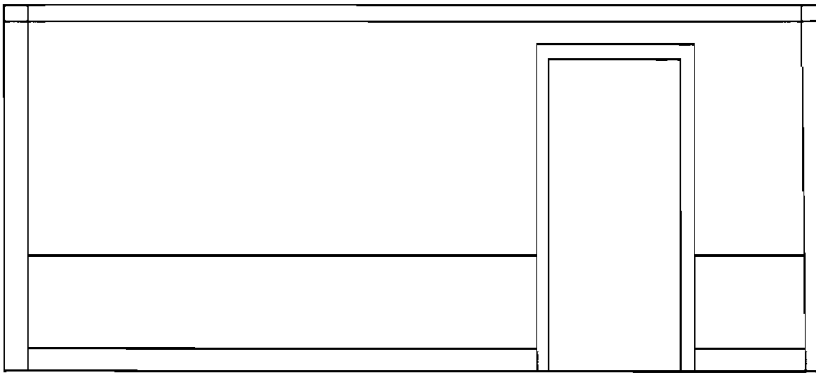
One of the two finished rooms in the earliest section of the house, this space was apparently plastered from the beginning and clearly served as a best room (either a parlor or chamber). The plaster, thin chair rail, and baseboard, all progressive for this period and place, co-existed with diamond-paned casement windows and an exposed, chamfered summer beam and ceiling joists. We have no evidence of how the fireplace wall was originally finished.

In the Federal-period remodelling, the windows were converted to wooden sash (the multi-casement opening on the west wall being greatly reduced), the walls re-plastered in some areas and skim-coated in others, the ceiling plastered, and a panelled wall created around the fireplace opening. The present wainscot, doors, surrounds, cornices, and other woodwork all date to the same period.

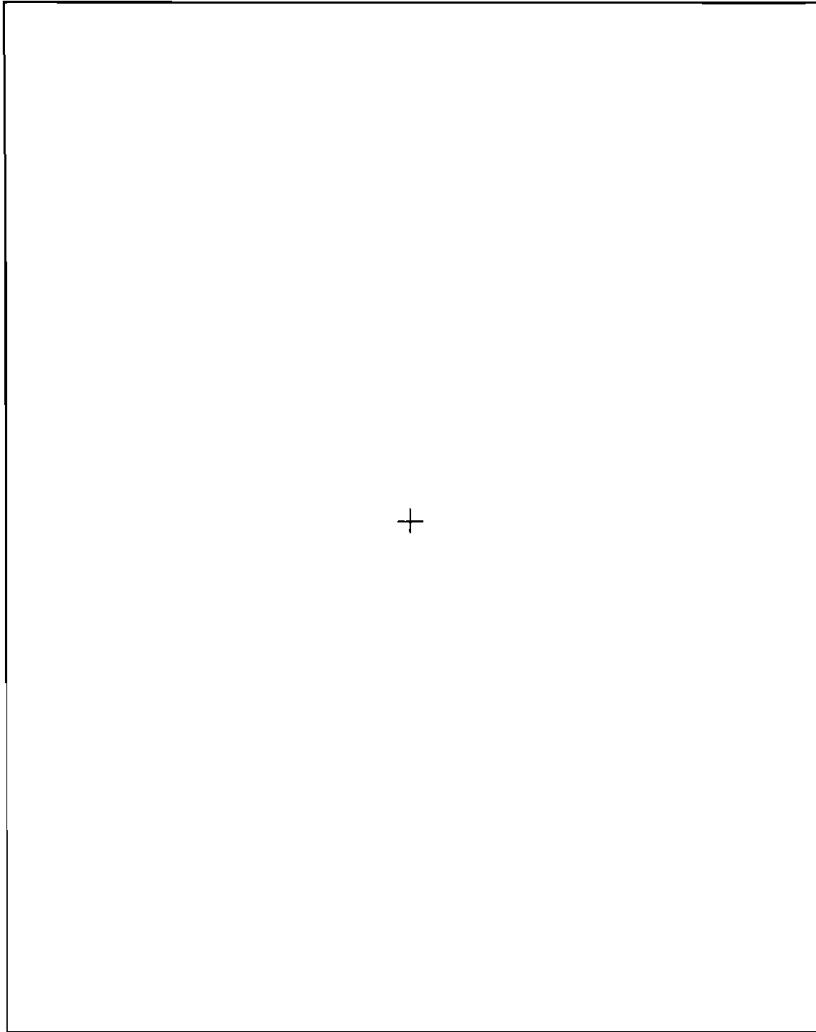
The door opening through the north wall had been added even before the Federal remodelling, when the lean-to was raised.

Two more alterations occurred late in the Federal period (probably before 1830). A door was cut through the west wall to connect with the new west wing, and the bolection moulding around the fireplace was replaced by the present mantel.



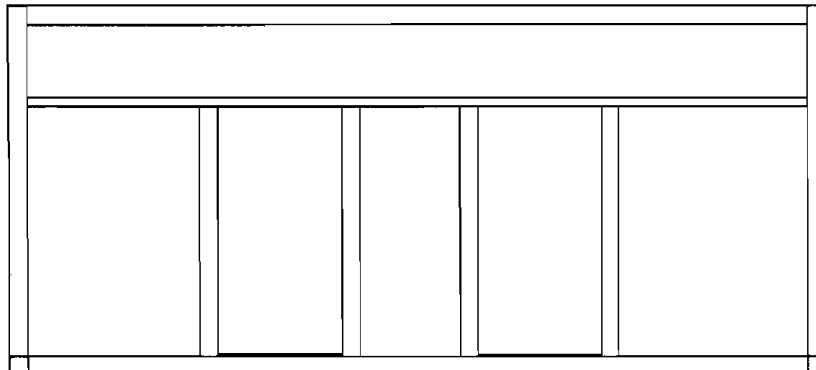


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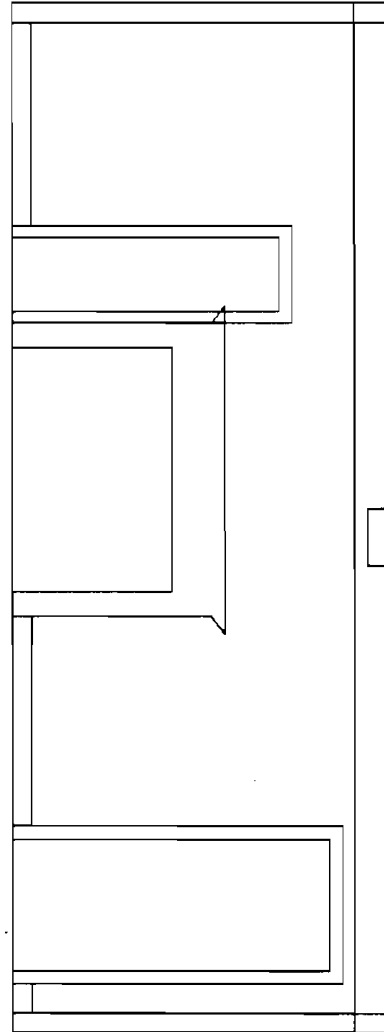


RML 112

112 S



112 E



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### The Room c. 1940

This photo shows the room during the last few years of its occupancy by Anna Bliss. Miss Bliss believed the house to date to the mid-17th century and left it to the Northampton Historical Society as a shrine to Joseph Parsons, a founder of Northampton and its supposed builder. Ms. Bliss' arrangement of the room, and presumably the other rooms as well, was in no way extraordinary for the 1940s, and made little or no attempt at historicism.



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## The Room in 1944

This view was taken shortly after Miss Bliss's death, when the room had been redecorated in an historically-derived style by the Northampton Historical Society. The architectural finishes, the carpeting, and many other contemporary features, such as the drain pipe to the extreme left, remain in place. All of the changes are to the movable furnishings, Miss Bliss's simple rocker giving way to a collection of mostly 18th century furniture, probably donated from area attics.

Table 1700



3"

Parlor. Cornet Joseph Parsons House - 1658 / (Print 1000 Cards)

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## The Room in 1972

By this time most of the furniture was gone, replaced with a few consciously simple pieces, but the architectural finishes had been brought into the interpretive scheme. The woodwork was colored, the walls given an imitation whitewash finish, and carpet stripped away to expose the floorboards. The room has a look consistent with museum scholarship of the time, though, still, neither the furnishings or finishes derive from a physical or documentary investigation of this particular space.







## EXCAVATION 112-A

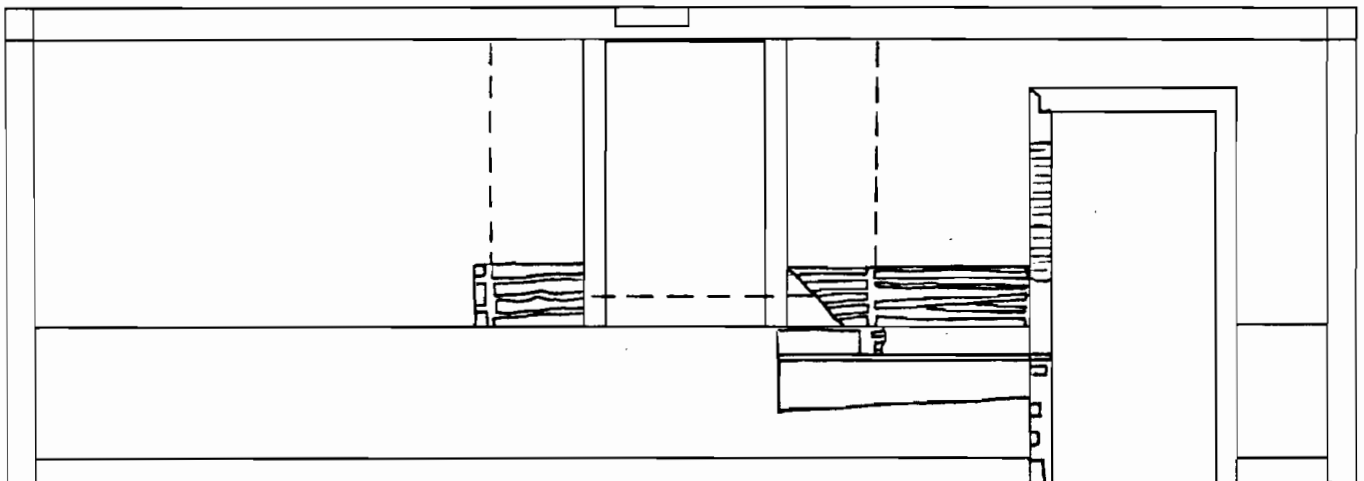
### Early 18th Century Wall Plaster and Finish

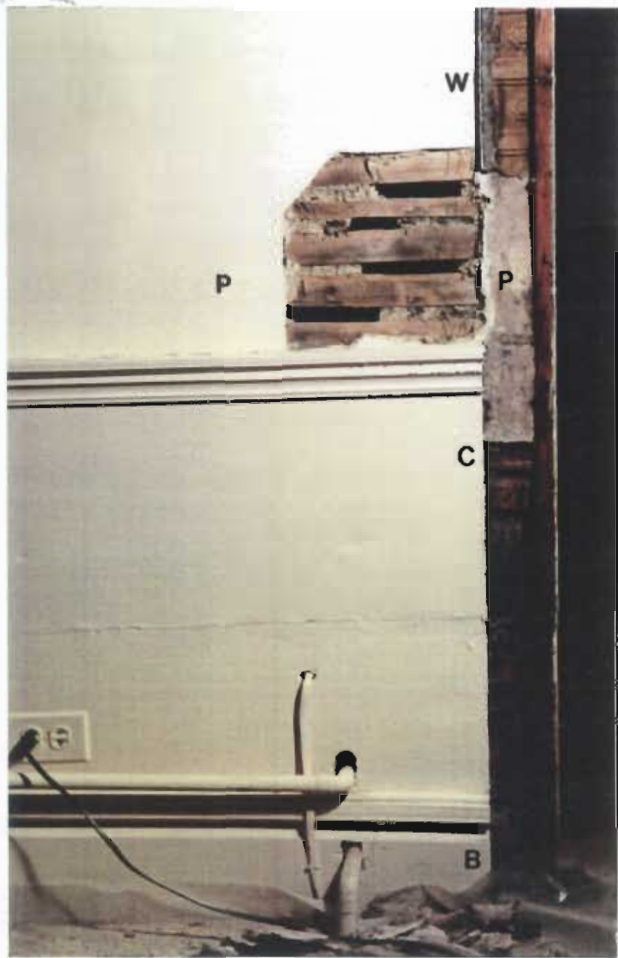
This excavation revealed that large areas of the west wall retain an archaic plaster (P), perhaps as early in date as the house itself (before 1735). Our initial cut into the plaster (photo 4) uncovered riven lath, the standard lath type in New England until the last quarter of the 18th century. We continued the excavation to the left (photo 9), locating wrought nails at the fastening point between lath and studs (R in photo 8). A piece of the Federal-period wainscot was also removed to reveal the surface of the early plaster (photos 9 & 10). Early plaster is presumably entombed behind the wainscot for the whole length of this wall.

This plaster surface presented a number of surprises. The plaster itself is bound together with grass, clearly visible in photo 5, and thin textile fibers, only visible under the microscope. These are very unusual binding materials, with which we have had no prior experience.

The lime in the mix was extremely impure compared to later, Federal-period lime used elsewhere in the house. We recovered the fines from the matrix by dissolving the lime in muriatic acid and collecting the sand in sieves. The fines constituted a larger percentage of the mix, and were noticeably darker, than the fines from the later samples. They may include a soil component, although this observation is preliminary, and was not tested through laboratory analysis.

The surface of the plaster is covered with one layer of a badly-soiled white paint. We were able to clean much of the dirt from this surface using a Wishab sponge, but, to our surprise, the paint layer was not readily soluble in water. This indicates that the paint is not typical, water-soluble distemper

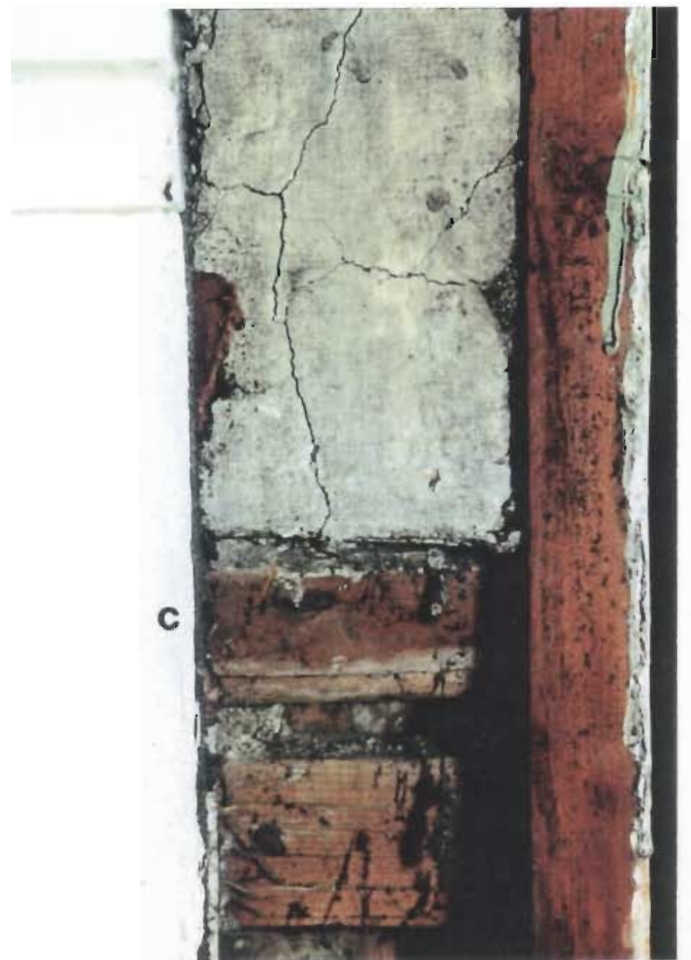




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found in other rooms and in early houses generally, although it may have a distemper component. Further chemical <sup>testing</sup>would have to be done to explain its composition.

The original finish scheme included a chair rail (**C in photos 4 & 6**) and a simple baseboard (**B in photo 4**). The chair rail originally had a projecting, molded nosing, which was removed to provide a flat underlayment for the wainscot. The empty nail holes for the nosing are still visible. The woodwork shows no sign of having been painted. The exposed end of the baseboard is clearly without paint. It will be important to examine the entire length of this wall after the wainscot is fully removed (see **Interpretation section**).

The wall cavity behind this early plaster is filled with nogging - bricks laid in clay mortar (visible in photo 9) (see excavation **EXT-W** for a fuller discussion).

## An Original Window Opening, Probably for A Bank of Casements

A bank of casement windows likely occupied the center of the west wall from the early 18th century until the Federal-period remodeling (the dotted line on the elevation drawing). The present sash window is flanked on both sides by split-board lath fastened with cut nails, (**D** in photos 7 & 9). This describes a 5' wide window opening reduced and filled in during the Federal-period remodeling. We did not fully excavate the opening, but infill of the same period was found on the exterior. A similarly sized opening was located in the chamber directly above. (See excavations EXT-W and 210 W for a fuller discussion of the original fenestration.)

The split-board lath infill to the right of the present casing (**C** in photo 8) is re-used exterior window molding, part of the house's original siding scheme (c. 1725-35). Similar material was re-used as lath in other rooms.

The painted board below the window (**N** in photo 8) was installed as a nailer for the wainscot earlier in this century, when the wainscot was temporarily removed and re-nailed. It is fastened with wire nails.

Drawing II describes how the section of wall in photo 10 might have appeared in c. 1725-35. The size and arrangement of the window panes is the only conjectural feature.



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112 - 8

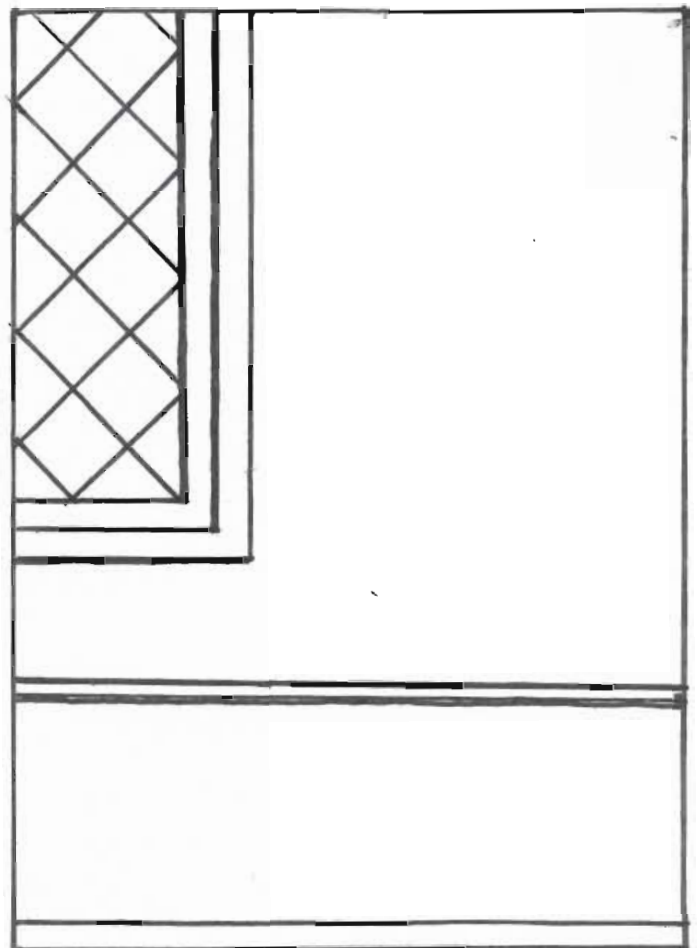




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### A Federal-Period Wallpaper (c. 1800-25)

A strip of Federal-period wallpaper (2½" x 39") was discovered behind the casing of the west wing door. The paper was applied before the west wing was added and the door cut through, an alteration that probably occurred in the first quarter of the nineteenth century.

The paper consisted of 20" wide sheets laid horizontally.

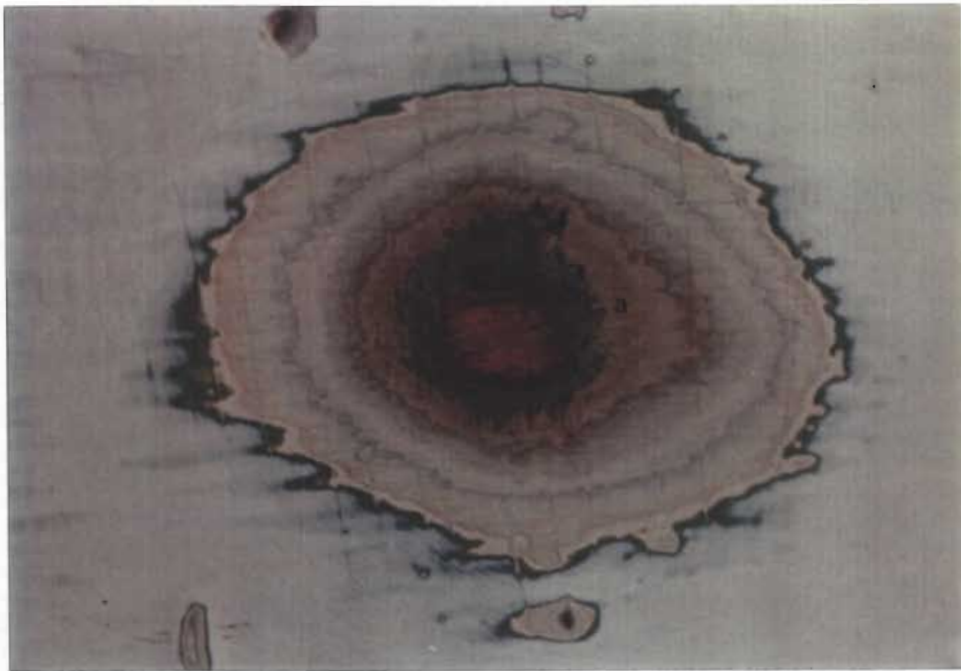
The wallpaper likely accompanied a deep yellow paint layer on the woodwork ("a" in photo 14, which shows a "crater" made in the paint film of the wainscot). This yellow is the third Federal-period woodwork color, and was the first layer on the present mantel.



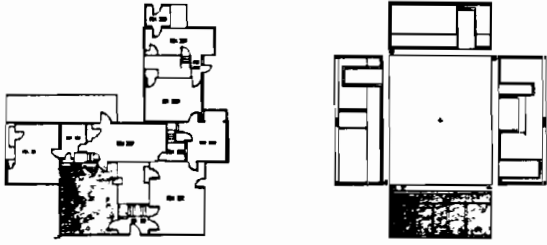
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112 - 14

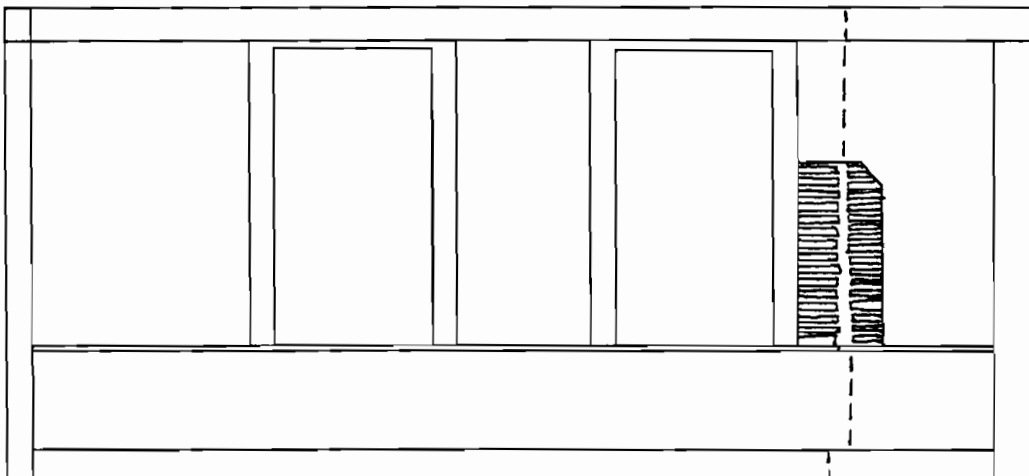


## EXCAVATION 112-S

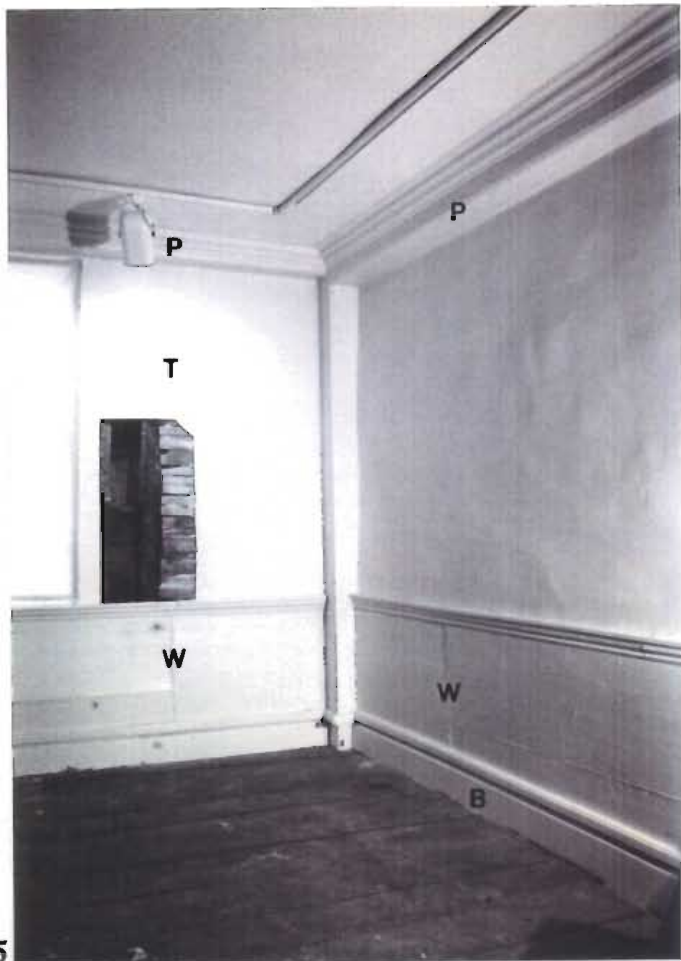
### An Early Corner Cupboard (c. 1800)

There is physical evidence that a triangular cupboard occupied the room's southwest corner for some time after the Federal-period remodeling, i.e.:

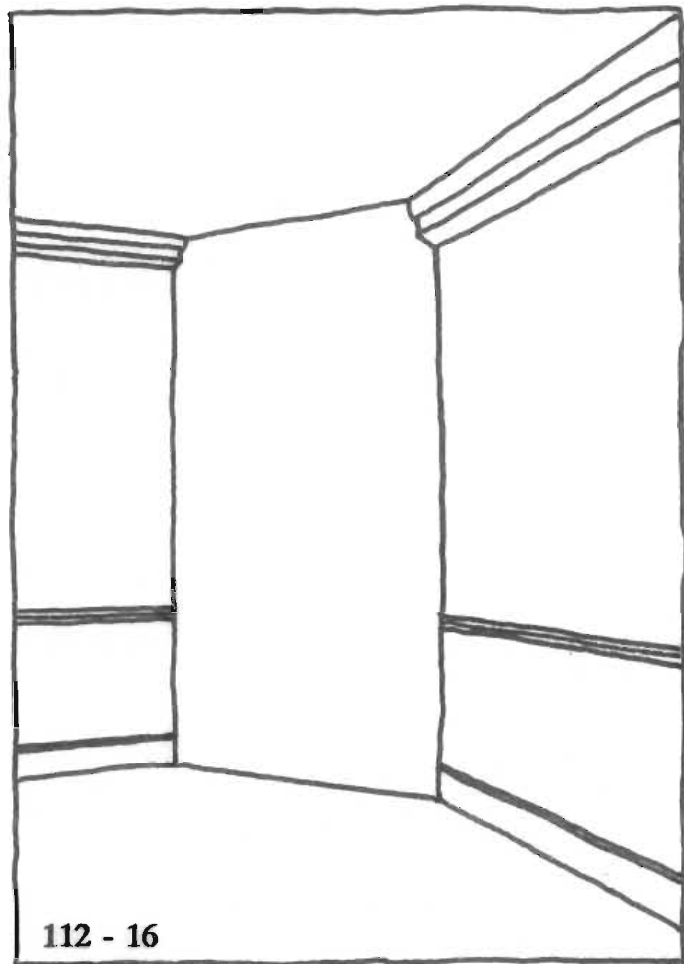
- Fragments of wainscot, chair rail and baseboards have been pieced into this corner on both sides of the post casing (inside of the lines marked W in photo 15). The baseboard on the west wall (**B**) is the exception - this seems to have been removed and replaced when the present floor was laid in the 20th century. Paint analysis confirms that the woodwork closest to the corner is later infill. In other words, the wainscoting did not originally extend into this corner.
- The break in the woodwork on the south wall corresponds with a plaster line (**T**) extending to the girt casing. Our excavation along this plaster line (**photo 17**) revealed two distinct periods of split-board lath, both held (predominantly) by cut nails. The manner in which the two plasters overlapped at the joint indicated that the lath closest to the corner was later infilled, like the wainscot below.
- There are distinct paint lines on the beam casings (**P**) directly above the joints in the woodwork. These indicate that the casings in the corner skipped a number of painting episodes early in the room's history.
- The room's present floorboards are 20th century overlays and the ceiling is covered with canvas and new paint. Other evidence might be found by excavating both of these surfaces.







2 - 15



112 - 16



2 - 17

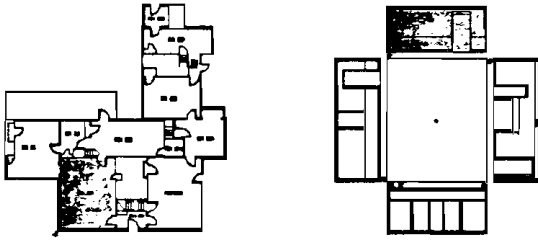


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A corner cupboard would best explain the physical evidence. The feature seems to have part of the first Federal finishing scheme, but was removed sometime in the first half of the 19th century, and the corner filled in with matching material.

The older, split-board, lath (nearest the window) was made from re-used exterior window casing (photo 18).



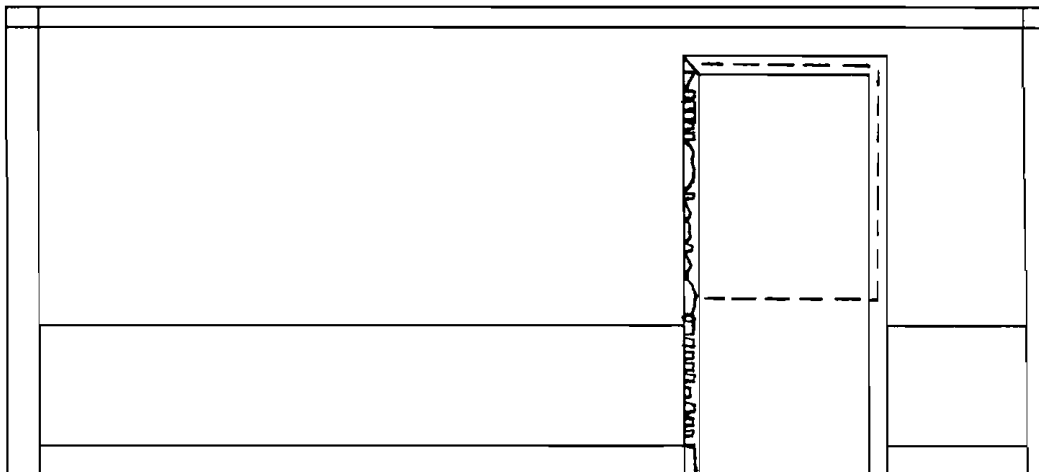
## EXCAVATION 112-C

### An Original Window Opening

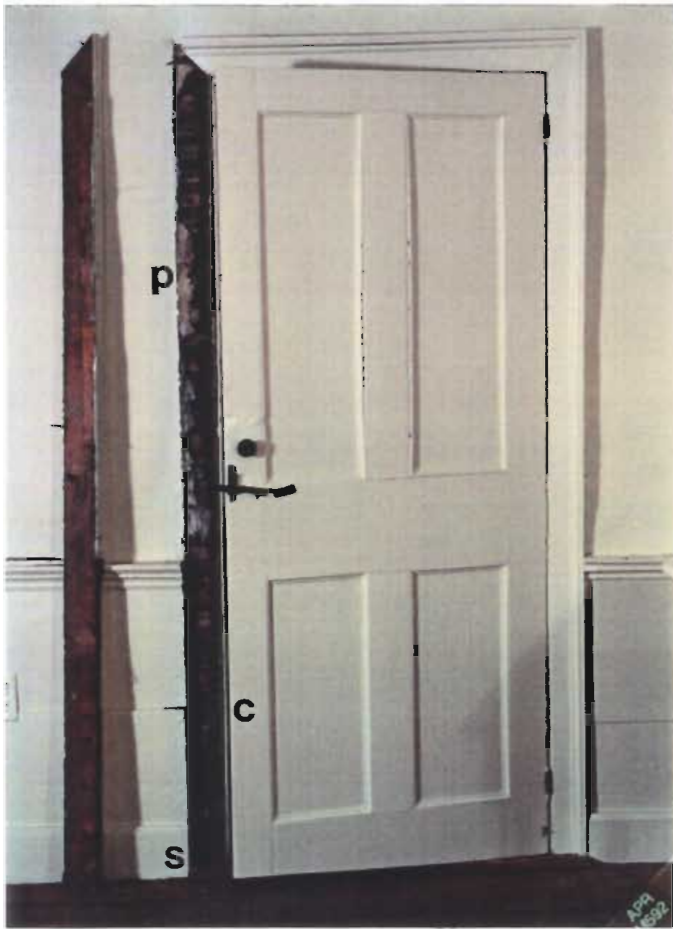
Removing a casing piece from the kitchen door revealed that the opening was originally occupied by a window. Beneath the casing are the ends of early riven lath attached with wrought nails, the same finishing system found on the west wall, and probably the room's first wall covering. Paint lines on fragments of early plaster under the casing (at **P**) indicate that there was a framed opening here before the present door was added. Marks on the lower third of the exposed stud (**C** in photo 22, where position is located in photo 19 is typical) show that lath originally extended across the opening from that point. This evidence describes an early window opening rather than a door.

The door opening probably replaced the window when the lean-to **was added**. Drawing 20 illustrates the original appearance of the area in photo 19 (the pane size and configuration are conjectural). The dotted lines on the elevation drawing below trace the window's approximate dimensions.

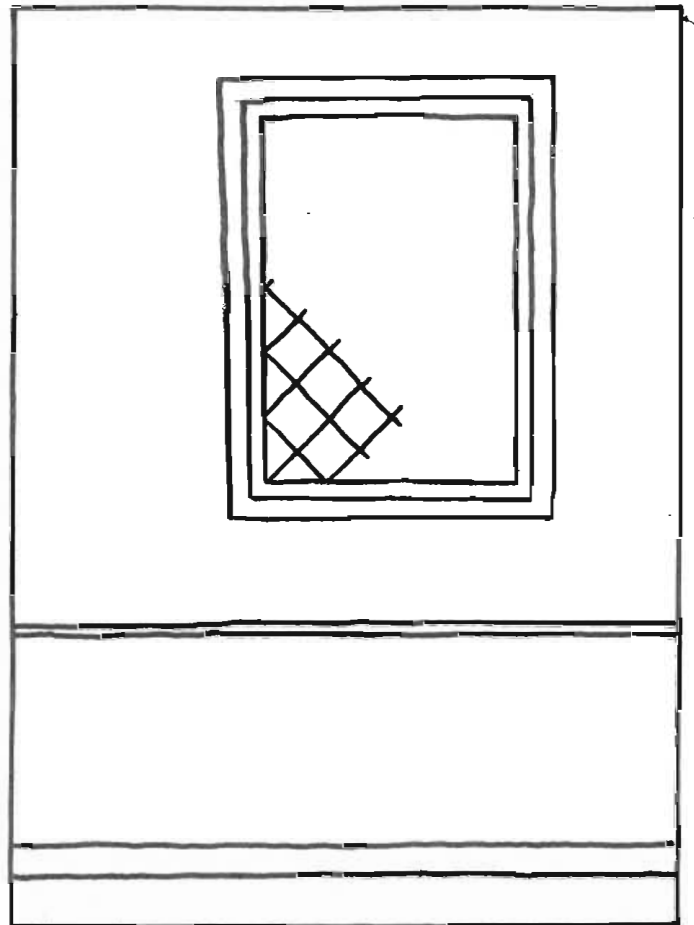
A fragment of unpainted baseboard (**S** in photos 19 & 21) is visible at the bottom of the excavation, further evidence that the room's woodwork remained unpainted until the Federal-period remodeling.







112 - 19



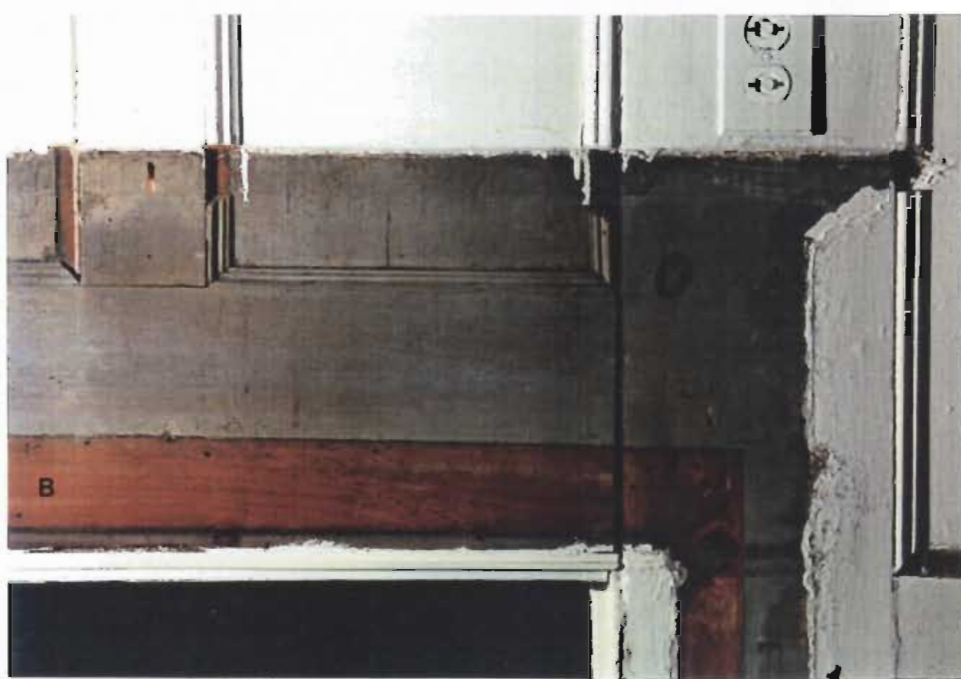
112 - 20



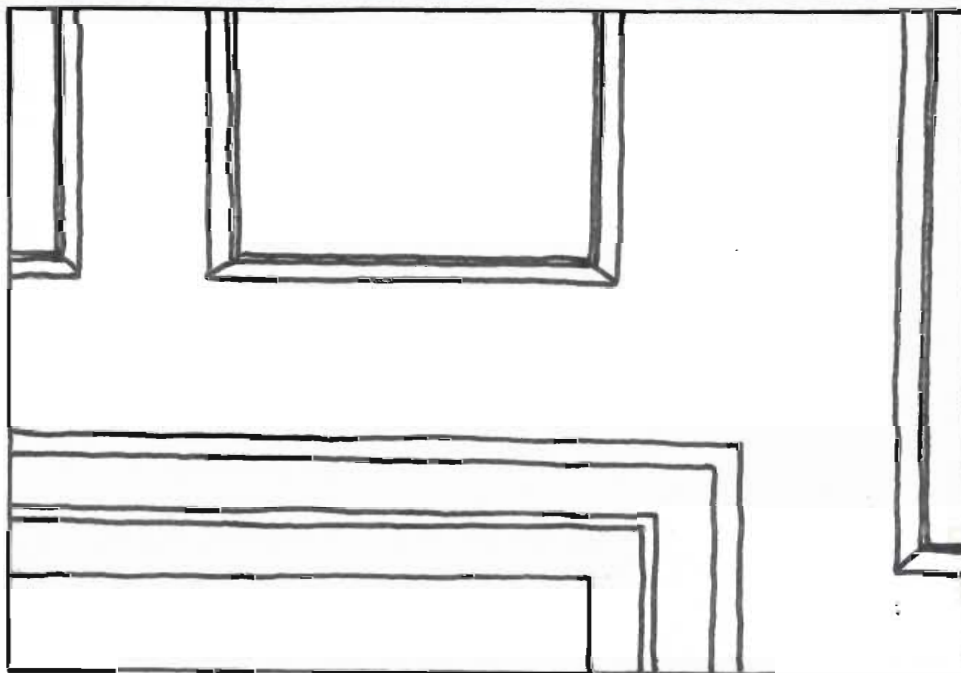
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112 - 24



112 - 25

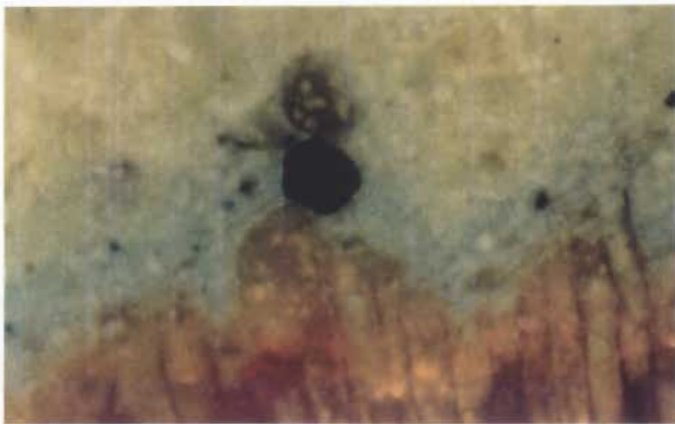


## EXCAVATION 112-E

### Two Generations of Federal Fireplace Surround

In detaching the room's Federal-style mantelpiece, it was found to be a later addition, and not contemporary with the c. 1800 paneled wall behind. Underneath the mantel were two layers of paint, a deep blue (the original color of the Federal-period **woodwork**), followed by a much lighter blue-green (visible in the photos). A paint line through both of these layers describes an earlier, 2 $\frac{3}{4}$ " wide, bolection moulding (located at B in photos 23 & 25), attached with wrought nails. The bolection was removed when the present mantel was added, probably before 1825.

Drawing 24 describes the area of photo 23 as it appeared c. 1800 with the bolection moulding. The dotted line in the elevation drawing shows the location of the bolection paint lines behind the later mantel.



Microphotograph of paint cross-section taken from paneled wall behind mantel. The bright blue layer next to the wood (beneath a green) was not detected elsewhere in the room. The undispersed particles of blue pigment in the center of the photograph is of a shade characteristic of Prussian Blue but this was left unconfirmed.

