

# The Transformation of British Culture in the Eastern Cape, 1820 - 1860<sup>1</sup>

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While a more objective accounting of the past is of great importance for the understanding of any society, the value of a critical history of any aspect of the South African past is immeasurable. As Martin Hall stated in *Archaeology*, "the way in which South Africa's past is written, or rewritten, has profound implications for the politics of the present" (Hall 1988:62). In the last few years historical archaeology has become an important tool in the delineation of many aspects of South African history and promises to provide a more objective, less value-laden account of the past.

In South Africa, highly significant events took place in the Eastern Cape Colony in the early nineteenth century. During the first half of the 1820s, this area was transformed by the arrival of five thousand British immigrants. As they attempted to make themselves a home in an alien land, they radically transformed the cultural and physical landscape and came into sustained contact with the indigenous people as competitive occupants of the land. It is our intention to arrive at an understanding of this colonial process, of those Europeans involved, and of the impact of indigenous peoples and the frontier situation on their world.

The intensity of the settlement made the 1820 settlers a powerful and loaded symbol of the British contribution to the culture, tradition and society of South Africa. Popular folklore, mythology and history all tell of the hardships the settlers faced in the new land, and of their eventual successes and achievements. In time, the settlers' story was elevated to the status of heroic legend which has tended to obscure historical fact. Through an analysis of the surviving material culture of the settlers, we hope to reach an understanding of their world view, attitudes and cognition. This research is part of a larger project on material culture and archaeology in the Eastern Cape which is currently underway and will continue for some time in the future. Our study employs approaches developed by American folklorists and archaeologists in which material culture is used as a powerful indicator of changes in the attitudes of the people who made and used those objects (Deetz 1977; 1988; Glassie 1975; St. George 1986; Upton 1986; Yentsch 1989). When properly used, such an approach provides access to deeper levels of people's thought and perception in the past, areas of human experience that rarely find their way into the written record. It is this "recovery of mind" (Leone 1982) that permits one to understand how people perceived each other, and the world in which they lived.

In his excellent analysis of the folk architecture of the Virginia Piedmont, Henry Glassie uses the methods of structural anthropology and Chomskian linguistics to analyze and explicate the profound changes worked on the world view of Virginians between the later eighteenth and the early nineteenth century (Glassie 1975). In simple terms, structuralism holds that the forms of any cultural expression result from the mediation of a series of binary

oppositions that structure thought. Cultures differ one from another in the manner in which the mediations are effected in each instance and in which set of binary oppositions are primary. Mediations of oppositions, such as those between emotion and intellect, public and private, corporate and individual, open and closed, symmetry and asymmetry, male and female, or inside and outside, can shift over time from one extreme to another, and in turn, dictate the form of all that a culture produces, be it food, housing, music, art, refuse disposal, burial practices or any other objectification of culture.

Culture itself is here considered a mental construct, a set of shared concepts and plans used by a society to organize its world. Culture then can only be studied through its objectifications in the outside world, but when these objectifications exhibit evidence of the same oppositional mediation in quite dissimilar cultural categories, it becomes possible to say something about the underlying mental organization responsible for those objectifications. For example, in seventeenth- and earlier eighteenth-century Anglo-American material cultures, houses were open and public, food was consumed with the same utensils being shared by two or more people, and portions of the landscape were designated as common land. By the end of the eighteenth century, houses were closed and private, divided into many specialized rooms, food was taken from individual services, and land was individually owned, for private use. These differences are indicative of a shift in oppositional mediation from public to private, and from corporate to individual.

Other changes were at work as well. One can also demonstrate a shift from emotion to intellect and from asymmetry to symmetry in the material record. In the decoration of memorials to the dead, gravestone art shifted from highly emotional skulls to ethereal angels, and finally to sterile urns and weeping willows; epitaphs changed from the use of first person to third person (public to private), house faces became severely symmetrical, and refuse, formerly broadcast over the landscape, was consigned to pits specifically dug for that purpose.

Henry Glassie (1975) sees whiteness as yet another signal of the shift from natural to artificial, from emotion to intellect, and as a sign of democratization. Pointing out that boats and houses of the eighteenth-century Chesapeake were "gaudily bedaubed," he goes on to state that later, "as another marker of the segregation of man and nature, the house was always covered in some color that denied the wood of which it was built, picking it out from its setting. The nearly invariable whiteness of the nineteenth-century farmhouse not only marked a contraction of the traditional palette, and the most abrupt possible separation from the natural tans, greens and clay reds that environed it, but also it was a democratizing sign; little homes of red and big ones of white spoke of strict class distinctions" (1975:156). During the time in question, not only houses became uniformly white. The varied, natural hues that characterized ceramics in the households also were replaced predominantly by whites and blues, and in like manner, the multi-hued stone from which gravestones were carved - green, red and black slates, gray schists and red and brown sandstones - was replaced by uniformly white marble by the 1820s.

The physical world thus became more ordered, more under cultural control, and intellectual solutions replaced those based more on emotion. This transformation of world view had run its course by the early nineteenth century. By the time the 1820 settlers went ashore at Algoa Bay, their British and American contemporaries inhabited a world of isolated individually owned farmsteads, lived in houses with central hallways that served as an entry passage which separated their private rooms from the world beyond, were taking their meals from individual dinner plates and were burying their dead beneath gravestones of uniformly

white marble. Yet, when one examines the material record from the Eastern Cape in the mid-nineteenth century, it becomes quite clear that the settlers had organized their world in a way quite different from that seen in contemporary England or America, even though the people in all three nations shared a common cultural heritage and had only become separate during the prior half century, a scant two generations at most.

## **Historical Background**

A brief historical outline will place our material in perspective. In England serious economic depression and widespread unemployment resulted from the termination of the Napoleonic Wars. Six thousand miles away at the Cape Colony, Lord Charles Somerset's frontier policy was in a state of chaos. The Fish River was intended as the boundary between the colony and expanding groups of Southern Nguni. The pattern here, in contrast to colonial frontiers elsewhere, was one of two expanding frontier zones, English and Xhosa, competing with each other and encroaching on the shrinking hinterland. A chain of British forts was centered on the military post at Grahamstown in an attempt to enforce the boundary. It soon became obvious that the military posts were both inadequate and too expensive. In 1819, 10,000 Xhosa attacked Grahamstown and threatened the colony. The solution was to settle the Zuurveld as a buffer zone, using immigrants from England. The government offered 50,000 pounds to assist nearly 5000 immigrants to the Cape, killing two birds with one stone; assisting in the relief of the unemployed in England and providing a buffer population on the insecure frontier, alleviating expensive military deployment.

Parties of settlers began to arrive in the Albany District early in 1820. Each party was under the direction of a designated leader, and all were some form of joint stock company with members holding shares, although there were certain organizational differences between parties. The plan, imperfectly realized, was for the various parties to disperse across the landscape and settle in different areas. Some parties settled contiguous to others, while others were more separate, not abutting the land of other parties.

For our study, the village of Salem, south of Grahamstown, was chosen. Salem was established by a party of some one hundred Methodist families from the Great Queen Street Chapel in London, led by Hezekiah Sephton. On arrival, each adult male in the Sephton party was granted one hundred acres of land (Figure 1). While not necessarily "typical", Salem was chosen since it stood apart from settlements of other parties, was settled in a relatively short period of time, and was subject to only limited outside influences. Moreover, many early houses still stand in the isolated village. Our studies began with an analysis of architecture and landscape in Salem, and later incorporated data on other material culture categories from elsewhere in the Albany District.

The settlers at Salem, like those of other parties, soon found that they had been misled by the organizers of the parties at home. In Britain, the African landscape had been described as verdant, lush, almost like a gentleman's park. In reality, they found it quite inhospitable, with grass often too bitter for cattle, valleys covered with thorny scrub growing in poor, shallow soil, and an exotic flora and fauna. Yet they managed to modify the landscape, making it a familiar, cultural, knowable environment, transforming it from the naturally "raw" to the culturally "cooked", to employ one of Claude Levi-Strauss' more celebrated structural oppositional pairs (Levi-Strauss 1970). In 1860, the Reverend Shaw of Salem wrote:

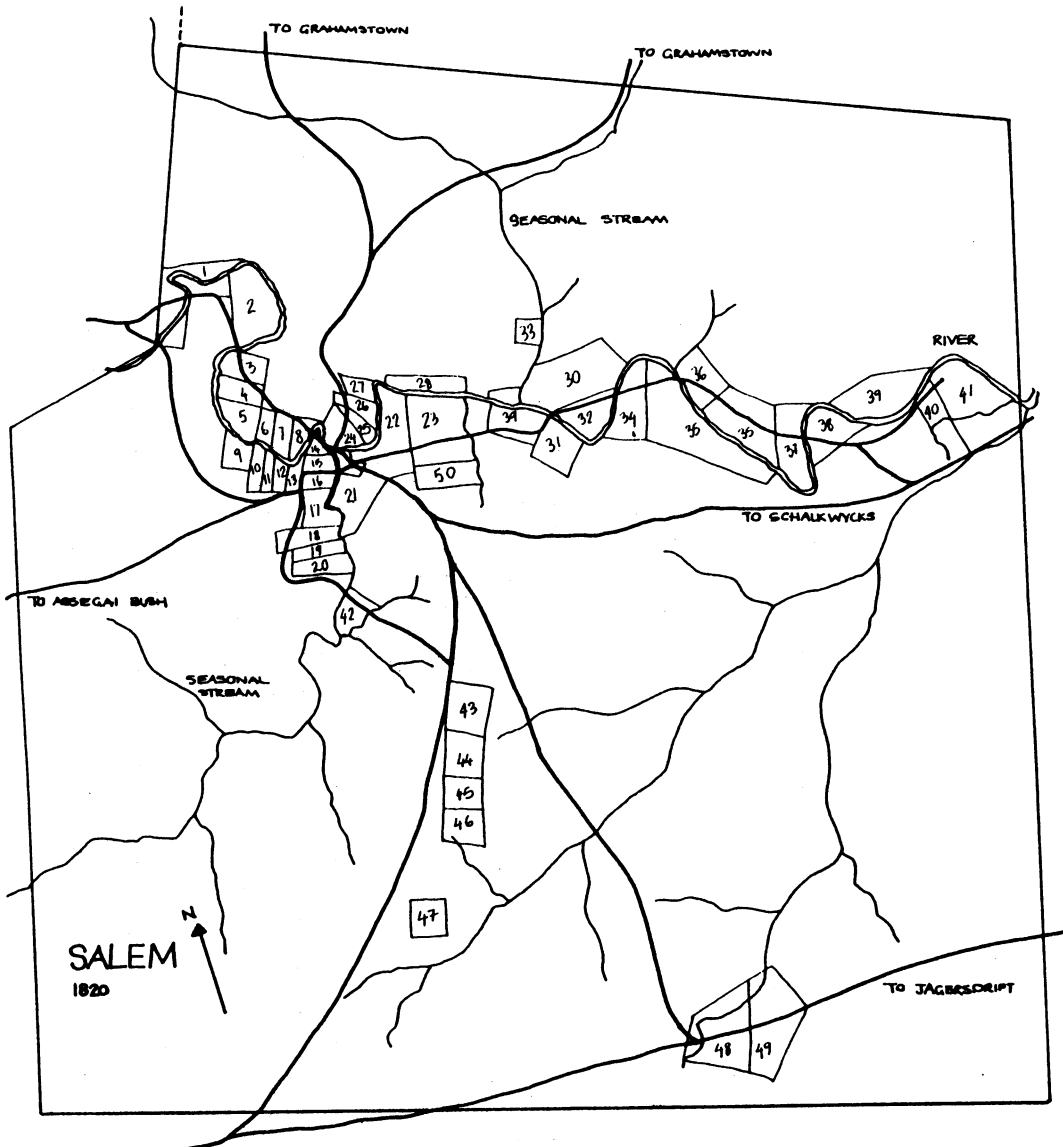


Figure 1: Map of Salem in 1820 showing village layout and land allotments granted to settlers.

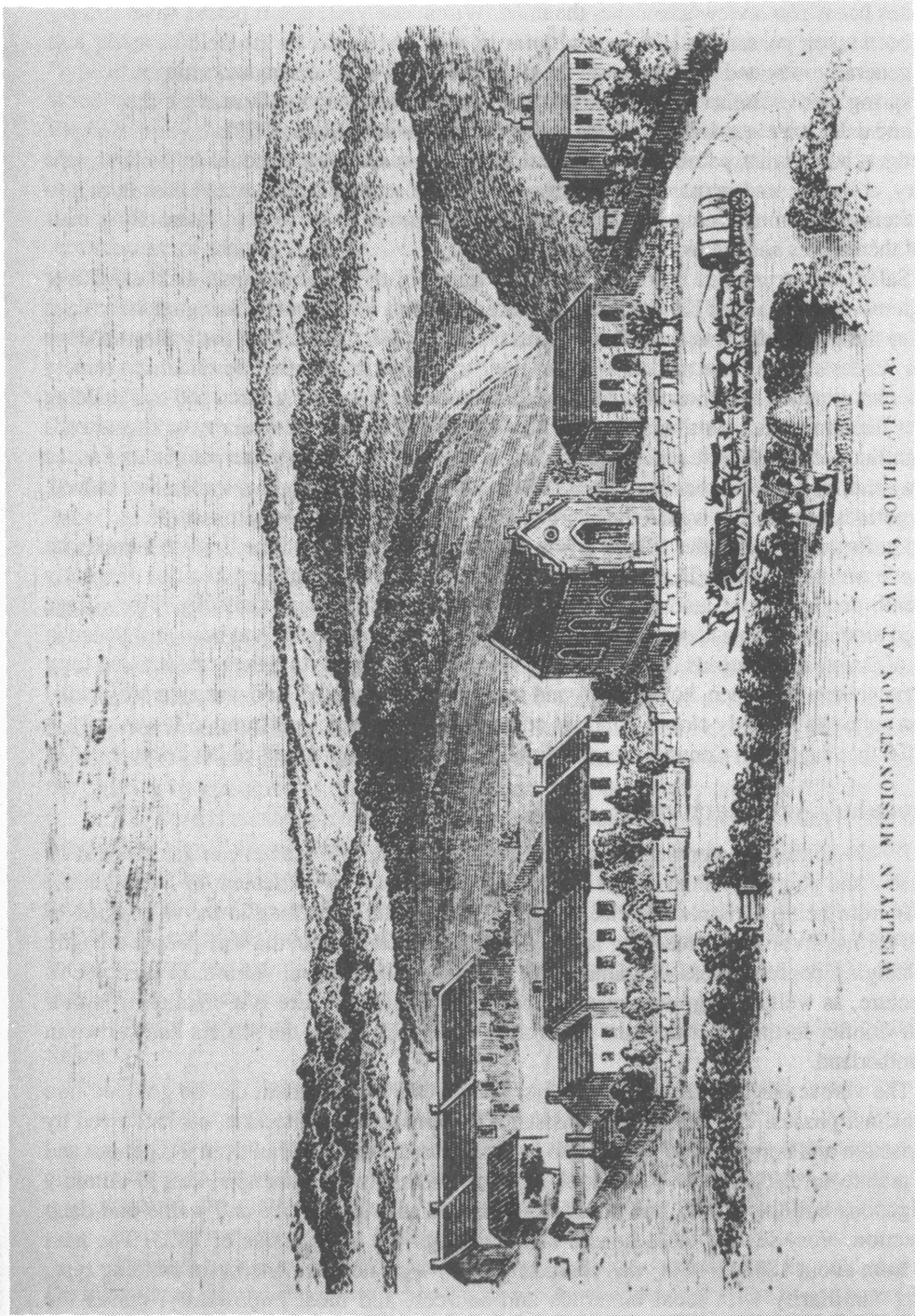


Figure 2: Salem engraving after 1850. This view across the village green (clockwise from right) shows the Methodist Manse; "The old church," the second chapel erected in 1832; "The new church," built in 1850; Salem Academy; and Chatterbox Row, cottages behind the school. Cory Archives, Grahamstown.

This is the anniversary of the day of our landing in Algoa Bay. What a year it has been. The review astonishes the mind. Within one year, desert places have been taken possession of by a multitude of men, the beasts of the field have generally retreated to make room for them, houses have arisen, and villages spring into existence as if by magic; and what is better than all, many hills and dales have resounded with the praises of the Saviour [Shaw 1972].

The hedges, boundaries, paths and buildings that the Salem settlers created made the landscape ordinary, corporate and, most importantly, agrarian. The settlers demonstrated their ability to shape their environment, creating in the landscape a pattern to be read in interpreting their view of themselves and the world that they had made.

Salem lay strung out in a Y on the steep banks of the winding Assagai Bosch River where it meets the Mantjes Kraal stream. It was a dispersed settlement focusing on the village centre at the green, the church and the minister's house. Along the Y of the valleys and up smaller feeder streams, the settlers took up their ten acre allotments. The remaining ninety acres per adult male were consolidated to form commonage for grazing, firewood and building supplies like thatch and wattling. The village was laid out so that the majority of homesteads had sightlines to the church and village green. In many of the houses one could stand at the doorway and look toward the symbols of safety, community and religious leadership. Indeed, during periods of unrest, it was in the church that shelter and protection were sought.

On first inspection, the village layout seems to have replicated the English forms with which we are so familiar (Figure 2). However, it must be remembered that, by the early nineteenth century, rural land-use patterns in England had changed radically. The village clustered around a green and surrounded by outlying common and fields had been abandoned in favour of isolated farmsteads in the center of vast spreads of land. In Salem, the archaic form of central church and green, homesteads, and the peripheral common land was a perfect spatial solution suited to a tightly closed religious community on a dangerous frontier. It was only in the 1940s that the Salem Commonage was finally divided among individual landowners.

## Vernacular Architecture

By examining the vernacular architecture of the Eastern Cape we can gain insight on worldview and cognition in a frontier situation. It seems that the settlement of British in the area, far from being a simple exercise in colonial domination resulting in the re-creation of English forms, involved far reaching and highly complex changes in the way people thought. This changing consciousness is dramatically manifested in material culture, in this case in architecture, as well as in gravestones and ceramics. Restated, there is a creation of a new English frontier form, rather than the re-creation of English forms the settlers had known in their motherland.

The vernacular architecture of the first thirty years of settlement can be grouped into three distinct phases. The first phase consists of impermanent architecture, characterized by improvisation and borrowing of both method of construction and material from indigenous and Dutch architecture. This architecture took the form of hastily built shelters, huts in mimicry of indigenous building forms, sod houses and various attempts at pisé and wattle-and-daub construction. Very few of these houses lasted through the heavy rains of 1823. The next phase, from about 1823 to 1834, was characterized by a greater permanence in building type, growing familiarity with local materials and sources, and most importantly, marks the emergence of a distinctly original vernacular form. Wattle-and-daub houses were proficiently

built and sturdy; those who could afford the labor built with dressed stone or sunbaked brick (in this early period, fired clay brick was exorbitantly expensive when available). Houses in this phase tend to fit a tight pattern; in popular history accounts these are referred to as "typical settler cottages" (Figure 3). The third phase emerged as a reaction to the series of skirmishes and mutual raids carried out by displaced indigenous people and the now entrenched English, particularly the Sixth Frontier War, which left 455 farmhouses sacked and burned. The architecture of this phase shows heavy fortification, walled farmyard areas and other defensive features borrowed in an eclectic manner from various sources.

We have termed these three phases, respectively, the Architecture of Coping, the Architecture of Identity and the Architecture of Fear (c.f. Lewcock [1963], Phase I: 18720-3, Phase II: 1823-34 and finally, Phase III: Post 1835).

This paper focuses on the second phase, during which the settlers moved to higher or more suitable land, assessed the suitability of their materials and set about building permanent structures. Although, in some cases, the settlers had begun to prosper, most were only barely established. The architecture of Salem during this period reflects a lack of disposable income. The houses were simple, almost box-like in form, with little ornamentation or non-utilitarian embellishment. The dwellings are one or two stories high and usually only one room deep, limited in breadth to 12 or 14 feet by the span of the roofing timbers.<sup>2</sup> Piercing (windows and doors) on the front façade shows almost perfect symmetry: the central front door is flanked by balanced fenestration, a single window on each side. The front of the house is ordered in the Georgian style: balanced, bilaterally and tripartite, an embodiment of the builder's search for architectural order, for control over nature and reality.<sup>3</sup>

The symmetry and order is of such importance that elaborate architectural ploys are used to maintain it. Upper Croft, a two-storey house in Salem, appears to demonstrate three-over-three piercing (window-door-window with three windows above) as favoured in Georgian derived vernacular building. The central upper window, at first thought to be merely bricked in and covered, is instead simply a recessed silled niche which performs the function of balancing the piercing by operating as a *sign* of fenestration without actually opening (Figure 4).

The door is another architectural device used to maintain balance in many of the façades. Though conceptually placed in the exact center of the façade, it is in fact several inches towards the left side to facilitate two-room partitioning within the house. This staggered piercing could be incorrectly interpreted as a deviation from symmetry yet is actually a demonstration of the builder's competence in coping with changing internal grammatical forms by using the lack of importance of strict precision measurement, inherent in vernacular architecture, to maintain the design of the façade.

Glassie writes of houses in middle Virginia, but the one he describes could be in Salem:

The house's façade is also its people's façade; it is the mask worn in unsuspected encounter. The mask is a face, bilaterally symmetrical, with its entrance at the lower center, glazed eyes. It is a projection of the human shape - the ultimate paradigm - but it is a negation of self. Blank, composed in total control, the mask divulges no personal information; completely predictable, its predictive utility is nil [Glassie 1975:168]

Through a reading of the façade we, as structuralist or passersby, are told this is who the inhabitants are and this is what they aspire to. Can the interiors of the house be read in the same manner? Still with reference to the Virginian vernacular, Glassie writes:



Figure 3: A "typical settler cottage" of two rooms. From a pen and ink drawing by Frederick I'ons of his home in Grahamstown, 1834.

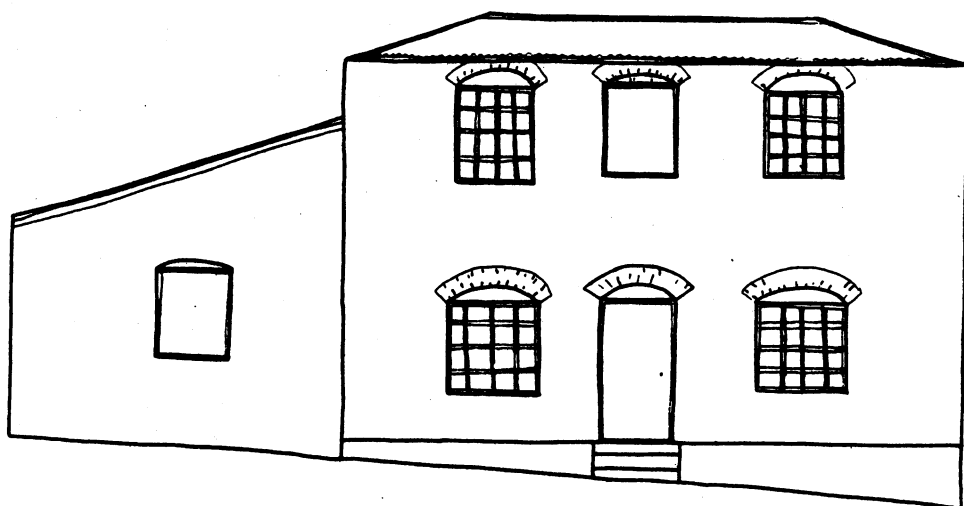


Figure 4: The façade of Upper Croft showing the recessed niche instead of a window in the center of the upper storey.



Like the mask of a Kwakiutl shaman, it (the façade) opens to reveal not the human heart, but another mask. Seeing the house's face, the visitor predicts what lies behind it. He enters and finds his predictions to be correct...The façade carries no oddness and covers no arcane illogic. The house - its front and plan - is the denial of personality and the public presentation of an ethos [Glassie 1975:170].

On entering an American or English house of the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century, our expectations based on the exterior are met. Walking through the front door flanked by matching windows we find ourselves in a central hall, separated from the rest of the house. Further access to the house's interior is through a second set of doors in this hall or passage.

It is through a reading of this kind that the vernacular of Salem can be seen to diverge in a radical and interesting way. The intellectualized geometry of the Georgian façades hides the unexpected. In almost every case, one enters a Georgian dwelling through the central door expecting to find a central hall separating two equally sized rooms. Instead one moves into a very differently ordered space. The interior floor plan is a classic hall-and-parlor layout, two different sized rooms, the hall or kitchen slightly larger than the parlor, both hidden behind the balance and symmetry of the façade. This division of space mirrors communal living and the importance of corporate life; it is an ordering of space long gone out of vogue, one which had been replaced elsewhere by the central hall pattern of rational, intellectualized Georgian building.

In the Salem houses, the ordering is organic, emotional and asymmetrical. Movement from the outside to the inside is not marked by a transition zone or passage to mediate the oppositions of out versus in, of public versus private. To make both a statement of whiteness and modernity (seen as "clean", "improved", "comfortable" and "cheerful") and to disguise the organic nature of the rough stonework, the golden hue to the stone, and the clay and straw chinking between courses, the façades of the buildings were whitewashed or washed with pipe-clay as soon as resources allowed:

After a while those who aspired to neatness and comfort found pipe-clay, and at length limestone, from which they obtained lime, and thus they were enabled to whitewash their tenements, which gave them a more cheerful and greatly improved appearance [Shaw 1972:40].

In contrast to this whiteness, the interiors of the dwellings were tinted with cheap powders of robin's egg blue and green, or with clay slips of gold and tan, colors structurally consistent with the organization of the interior spaces.

In English terms the façade is Georgian and contemporary while the interior is post-medieval and archaic. It would be simplistic to say the settlers had merely regressed, and began building old-fashioned forms for emotional security. It is the choice of mediations that we find interesting: organic, asymmetrical and communal chosen over artificial, symmetrical and private for interiors, vice versa for exteriors. The 1820 settlers were becoming agrarian for perhaps the first time in generations: the ordering of the interior space is a subconscious manifestation of this change. However, the settlers were still very much a part of the outside world. For access to cash, supplies, tools and labor they were inescapably tied into a world system, into a market economy, rapid industrialization and everything else 'modern.' They could not escape this relationship to the present: the façades of their dwellings can be read as signs of this involvement. The house form reflects this ambivalent relationship: the front of

the house faces the world and makes a statement of modernity, yet where it really matters, inside the home, the more emotional hall-and-parlor form prevails. Even the most elegant Georgian façade in Salem, the well proportioned and townhouse-like exterior of Upper Croft, hides an organic interior.

From a structuralist perspective, one might imagine the settlers attempting to mediate the binary oppositions of outside (wild, unfamiliarity, the raw landscape) and inside (tame, familiar family living space, the cooked) by means of an entrance hall, a transitional zone separating one from the other. There appears to be only one dwelling with this arrangement, the schoolmaster W. H. Matthews' house "The Residency," a double storey, several room deep, house of high status (Figure 5). In other dwellings this does not happen. Perhaps this style of mediation was not needed by the frontier pioneer, who was comfortable with this apparent lack of individuality and privacy. Or, as Dell Upton has suggested (personal communication), with the vast stretch of open land from village center to homestead to traverse, any outsider will be visible and acknowledged. The very fields themselves serve as an entrance way to the dwellings, the discourse of public-private now played out in a larger scale across the landscape, the green and commonage becoming the mediation: a communal transition zone.

In considering the evolution of these buildings throughout their use-life, it is important to consider growth through addition of wings, rooms and storeys. Rapoport (1969) uses organic growth of buildings without disruption of form as a criterion of vernacular architecture. Additions or appendages on folk houses in the British Isles are generally added to the ends of the structure, while in Glassie's Virginia study additions are usually tucked out of view behind the house:

Unconfused by lateral appendages the house's symmetry stood out clearly and simply, providing...an image of artificiality and control.

The nonsymmetrical rear additions did not soften the house's geometric impact, for the house was ordered according to one of the great principles of Western folk aesthetic: frontality [Glassie 1975:166].

The Georgian rationale of tucking and hiding additions, or at least balancing them one to each side of the building, seems to have had little value for the settlers in the Albany district, where freeform organic growth prevailed. In the Eastern Cape vernacular traditions, Dutch *stoeps* or verandas were appropriated and ran the length of the house, *stoepkamers* were built to enclose portions of the veranda, lean-to's and monopitch additions were placed without discrimination on both ends and the rear; wings were added to form the letters T or L; and seemingly whole buildings were slapped onto extant structures with apparent disregard for formal arrangement. Indigenous forms of addition emerged as an Eastern Cape vernacular pattern, which bore little resemblance to English forms and even less to American colonial forms.

### ***The Hall***

The Hall, a large and rambling house which underwent several building phases, starting with the original construction before 1832 and continuing probably through the 1850s, is central to a discussion of the process of growth in Eastern Cape vernacular building.

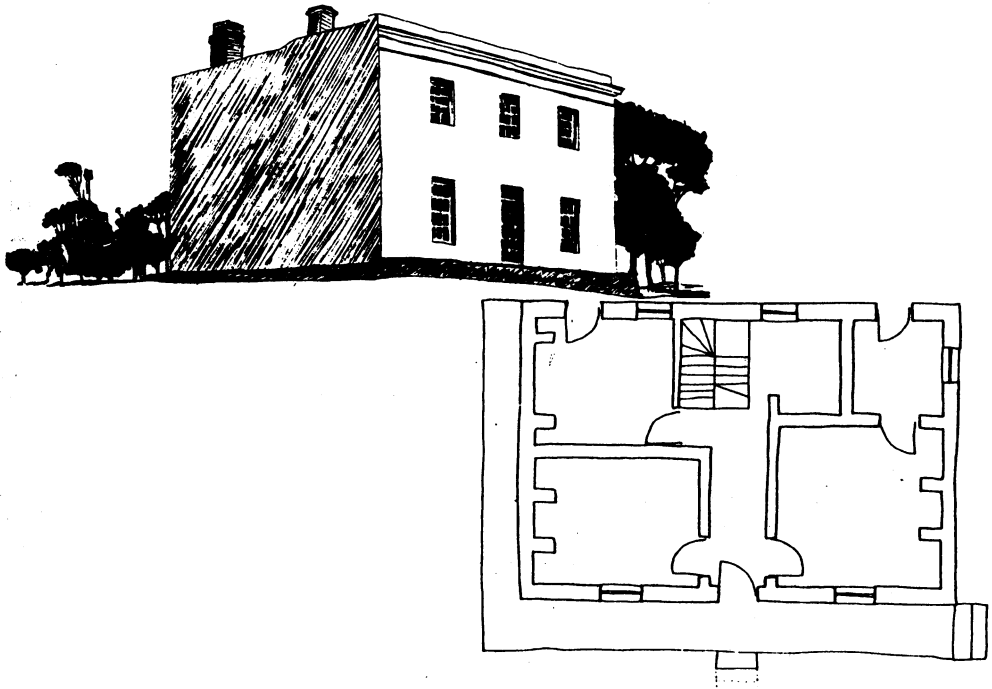


Figure 5: The Residency, schoolmaster and Justice of the Peace W.H. Mathews' house, which has a central hall separating the two front rooms.

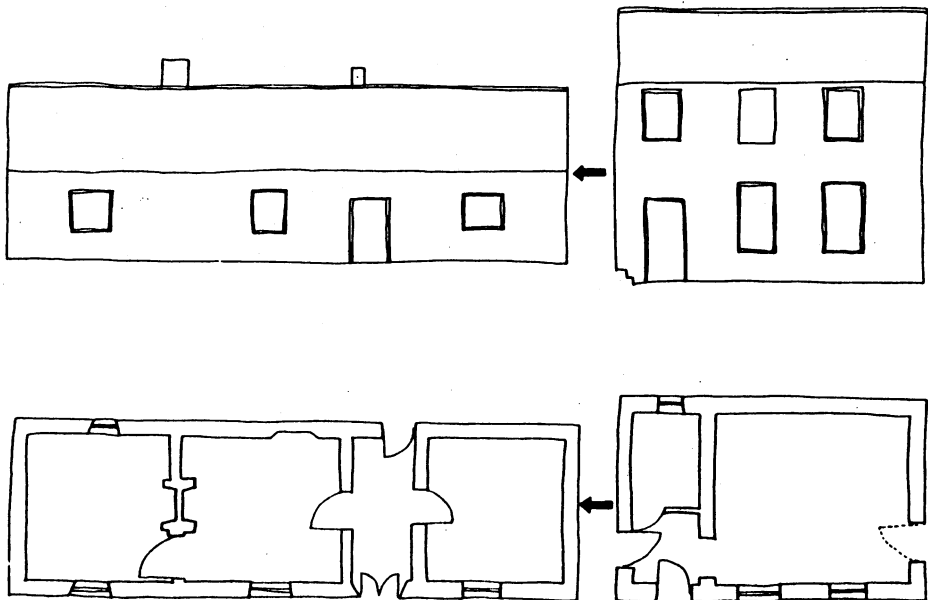


Figure 6: Plan and façade of The Hall showing the initially suggested construction of a Dutch *langhuis* with an English two-thirds I-house addition.

The complexity of the building at first makes a coherent chronology difficult. Initial investigation suggested that the single-storey left portion was the original house, a borrowing of the Dutch *langhuis* or longhouse form, onto which was tacked a perfect two-storey Two-thirds I-House<sup>4</sup> (Figure 6); the nicely tucked rear wing following a Georgian desire for order.

This hypothesis created a rather titillating analogue to the political situation of the early nineteenth century in the colony: the English appropriation of that which was Dutch and the wholesale attempt at Anglicization of material form. The uneasy interaction between two colonial powers seemed amusingly represented in the uneasy form of The Hall. This was not so at all.

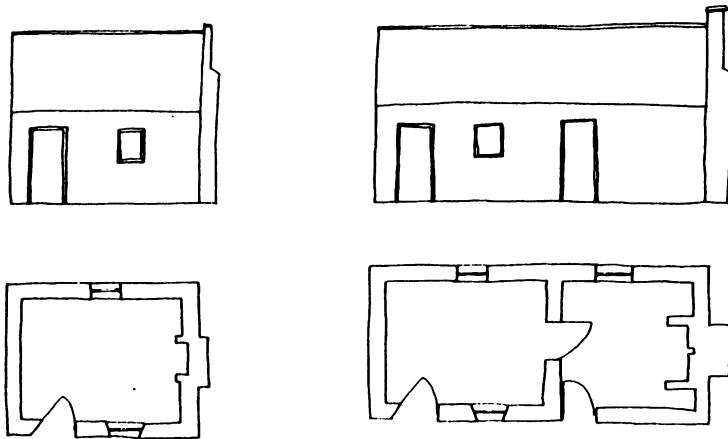
Our next attempt at unravelling the phases of construction was governed by the rules for building and additions which Glassie delineated for Virginia folk building during the Georgian period. According to his generative grammar, the original form would probably have been the right-hand two-thirds of the single storey portion which follows an ordered tripartite form: central door, central passage, a room on either side of the passage, each lit by a single window equidistant from the door. A predictable addition was added to this perfect I-house: a two-room rear wing creating a T form, which did not disrupt the frontal symmetry of the house. From then on the Georgian ideal becomes confused by a single room on the left side of the I-house and a huge two-storey two-thirds I-house butted on the right side.<sup>5</sup> After an examination of the building material (fire and unfired brick and dressed local stone), of joins both in masonry and woodwork, changes in levels and other more ephemeral evidence, we pieced together a telling series of building phases which are applicable to other buildings in Salem.

The Hall grew organically, apparently in response to the needs of its occupants through time. In this pattern of growth, the house is reminiscent of earlier vernacular buildings in the American Colonies, and contrasts with the later, more intellectual, symmetrical tradition wherein the structure tends to yield relatively little to its inhabitants' requirements. After the initial construction phase five more enlargements or construction phases can be distinguished as follows:

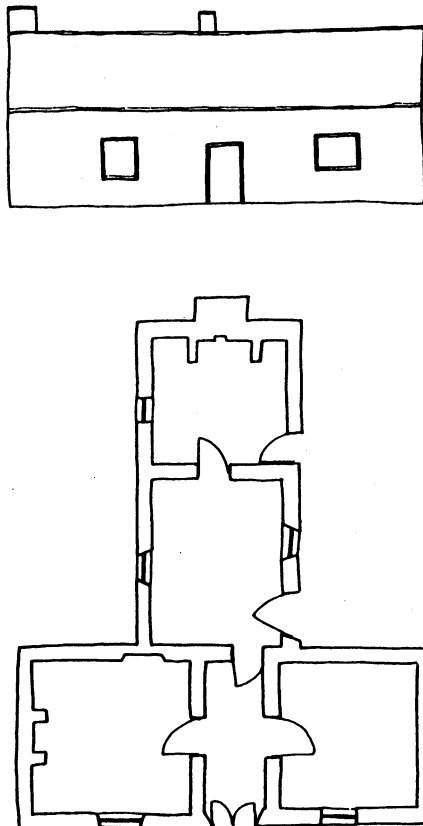
*Phase 1 (pre-1832)* (Figure 7): The Hall began as the most simple form of farmhouse: a single-room dwelling of soft brick with a flagstone floor, a storage loft above a substantial chimney on the northwest gable end, a window and door on the front space asymmetrically, and a single window on the rear. The front door is oriented to insure a direct sightline to the church in the valley. This house is identical to the small farmhouses which made up the majority of dwellings in seventeenth- and early eighteenth century America (Larkin 1988:110).

*Phase 2 (1832)* (Figure 7): The first addition to this simple farmhouse, also in soft brick, takes the form of another single, slightly smaller room butted on the northwest gable end. The original hearth became an interleading doorway and a new hearth and chimney were placed on the new north gable end. The resulting building is a hall-and-parlor house with the size ratio of the rooms slightly unbalanced. The joinery techniques in this addition differ from those of the original building: nails instead of wooden pegs, and butted joints in place of mortice and tenon. The frontal orientation is still the same.

*Phase 3 (post-1832)* (Figure 8): The second addition changes the whole nature of the building. Fused onto the southeast gable end of the hall-and-parlor structure is an entire central hall I-house one storey high, relegating the hall-and-parlor to the status of a rear wing. Through this addition the orientation of the building turned ninety degrees when the front door was moved from the old hall-and-parlor portion of the building to the new central hall.



**Figure 7: Plan and Façade of The Hall showing Phase 1: a single room dwelling and Phase 2: a hall and parlor cottage.**



**Figure 8: Plan and Façade of The Hall showing Phase 3: a hall and parlor cottage with an attached Georgian unit made up of a central hall flanked by two rooms. Note that the orientation of the house has changed 90 degrees.**

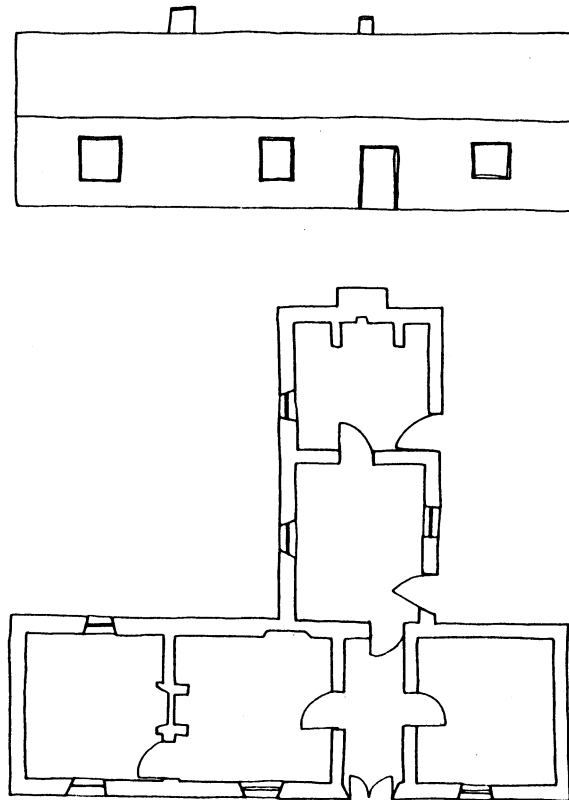


Figure 9: Plan and façade of The Hall: Phase 4 showing a single room addition placed onto the left of the central hall addition upsets the symmetry of the façade.

Despite this reorientation, there is still a direct sightline to the church and green. This new addition is balanced and symmetrical; for a brief period, the Hall epitomized order and balance. This addition is also soft brick with a flagstone floor in the central passage and left-hand room, and plank floor in the right-hand room. The framing is similar to that of the previous addition.

*Phase 4* (Figure 6): A third addition, of a later but indeterminate date, placed on the southwest gable end of the previous addition, managed to destroy the symmetry of the façade by lengthening it on one side by a full room. This addition is of dressed stone.

*Phase 5 (1850s)* (Figure 7): This addition was a huge two-storey two-thirds I-house added onto the northeast end of the central hall I-house addition. The resulting size increase was distinctive, and made a powerful statement of growing prosperity and power.

*Phase 6* (Figure 11): The final addition took the form of a kitchen addition on the northeast corner between the original building and the central hall I-house.

The Hall is an anomaly according to contemporary English and American building rules, but its form is quite prevalent as a regional vernacular pattern in the Eastern Cape.

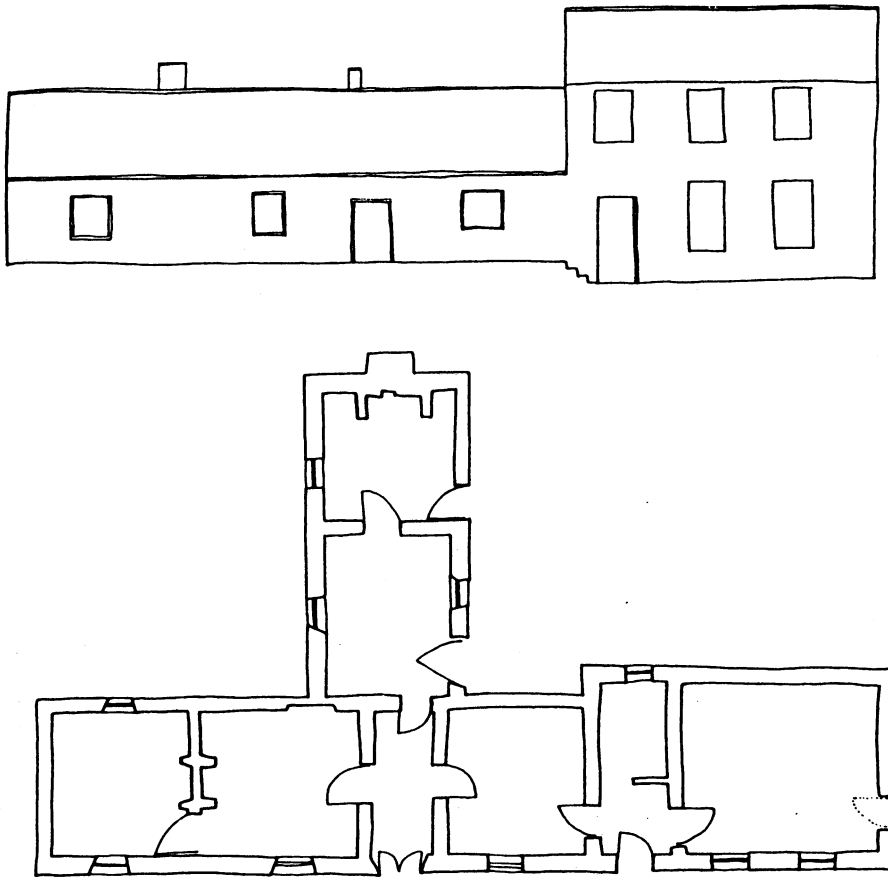


Figure 10: Plan and façade of The Hall: showing Phase 5 - large two storey addition, a two-thirds I-house is added to the right of the building

Several other houses are similar, if less dramatic, examples of this type of organic growth. Yet the components that make up the addition are symmetrical units in themselves. The Hall, in fact, recapitulates the entire development of vernacular structures in early America (from single room farm house through hall-and-parlor form to symmetrical I-house) but, in this case, the separate components are conjoined.

### Emergence of Distinct Frontier Forms of Material Culture

Eastern Cape vernacular building in the early to mid-nineteenth century is thus more related spatially and conceptually to earlier English and American forms than to contemporary versions in both of those nations. While usually maintaining a symmetrical, balanced façade, in the arrangement of interior space and the manner in which houses grew by incremental accretion, Eastern Cape houses are far more similar to the hall-and-parlor buildings of an earlier America and England, houses which typified the pre-industrial agrarian tradition in those places. Yet the houses are not evidence of a regression, or even of an Eastern Cape

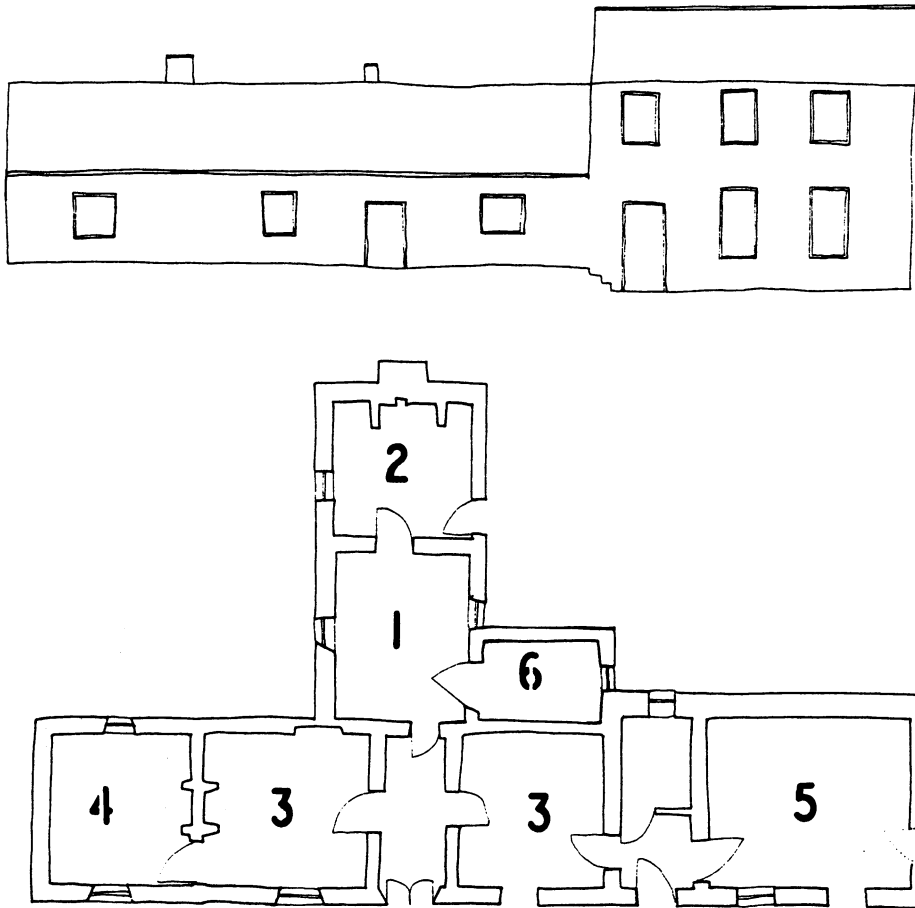


Figure 11: The full construction sequence shown in the plan and façade of The Hall. Phase 6, the final addition to the house took the form of a small kitchen lean-to in the rear.

reversion of form, for if they were, they would be hall-and-parlor houses within and without. Rather, the settlers of the Eastern Cape reworked the existing Georgian-influenced vernacular tradition to suit the remediation of the oppositions involved to produce a form more in keeping with the newly emerging agrarian way of life. The public dominated the private, individualism gave way to higher levels of social interaction and corporate forms, and organic growth in buildings superseded the need for strict symmetry.

The shift in oppositional mediation in colonial America was shown not only by housing, but by ceramics and gravestone art as well. Like housing, these two categories of material culture have been studied extensively since many examples exist and because they relate to two universals of the human experience - foodways and death. If our tentative reading of the forms of Eastern Cape building is correct, then similar mediations should be found in the dishes from which people ate countless meals, and in the cemeteries where they found their



final resting places. One would also expect these two sets of data to show a form more like that of an earlier America and England.

## Ceramics

Unlike houses, which were usually fabricated on the spot, the ceramics used by colonists both in America and South Africa were made for the most part in England, in the Staffordshire potteries. Earlier American ceramics of English origin exhibit a broad range of colors: yellows, browns, greens, purples and black. The variegated palette is consistent with the earlier tradition of public, corporate shared life. When the houses change from hall-and-parlor forms to central hall, Georgian-derived buildings, ceramics show a restriction in the range of colors used in their decoration, largely limited to blue and white. However one who is familiar with the range of Staffordshire pottery colors and decoration seen in nineteenth-century America is struck by the differences these show from examples from South Africa. At this point, only impressionistic conclusions can be offered, based on occasional surface collections from sites of the period. Yet clearly visible and quite genuine differences emerge.

Eastern Cape English pottery is more colorful than its American counterpart during the 1830s and 1840s. One particular type, known as annular ware, decorated in concentric bands of color applied to cups, bowls and mugs (plates were not decorated in annular style), shows a wide range of color used for the bands, including some hues and combinations never encountered in America. During this period, the majority of annular ware found on American sites is decorated in bands of blue, yellow or brown. Eastern Cape annular wares show these colors, but in addition, green, olive, black, red and orange also occur with great regularity. Another type of pottery, known as sponge ware and decorated by applying patterns with cut sponge stamps, is equally colorful, and it is not uncommon to find sponge ware decorated in three or four colors. Again, monochromatic sponge ware in a rather restricted palette is more typical of American ceramics of the time, although an occasional polychrome piece will appear. Similar varieties of color are also encountered in transfer printed wares, and combinations of printing, sponge, annular and hand painting also characterize Staffordshire pottery from the Eastern Cape.

The differences between Staffordshire pottery assemblages in the Eastern Cape and America must in some way be accounted for by differences in preference and taste. We thought earlier that southern Africa might have been a "dumping ground" for unpopular Staffordshire products, but this explanation now seems quite unlikely. In *The Ceramic Art of Great Britain*, published in London in 1883, Llwellynn Jewett notes that certain companies in Staffordshire produced special products for "the Cape of Good Hope," (Jewett might have used the designation as a shorthand for the entire South African market) and such wares almost certainly reached the Eastern Cape. It is also a well known fact that the Staffordshire industry regularly produced specialized ceramics for quite restricted markets, as in the case of so-called "Gaudy Dutch," made expressly for the Pennsylvania German population in America, as well as another type known as "Gaudy Welsh". It, therefore, seems reasonable to suggest that the settlers of the Eastern Cape had some say in what types of pottery were made available to them, if only in that their purchasing patterns shaped decisions made in England of which particular types to export.

What seems to be taking place with the pottery parallels the pattern shown by housing; the creation of a material culture assemblage from new products and forms re-creates a pattern more similar to that of America some half century earlier. While the settlers did not have

access to the same colorful pottery that formed the ceramic assemblage of late eighteenth century America, they were able, through selective adaptation, to assemble a variety of types of pottery that were as colorful *in toto* as that of an earlier time. A further impression one gets from an examination of the Eastern Cape ceramics is that there was little in the way of matched dinner services in most cases. Colorful ceramics, with little matching, seems to have been the rule. This pattern is widespread, and lasts well into the nineteenth century. Similar ceramics have been recovered from Schoemansdal, a site in the Northern Transvaal which was occupied into the 1860s. Finally, the forms of the ceramics in the Eastern Cape strongly suggest a collective foodways pattern still prominently featuring stews and pottages, although individually served food items occurred as well. This pattern of "mixed" foodstuffs is also typical of a more shared, open public foodways complex, in contrast to highly individualized service, which appeared late in the eighteenth century in America and became dominant in the early years of the nineteenth century.

## Grave Markers

As with houses, ceramics and foodways, the settlers of the Eastern Cape created a mortuary tradition that conforms to the pattern described above. Cemeteries in Grahamstown, Salem and Bathurst all show a great variety of material used in the manufacture of gravestones, in contrast to the uniform use of marble seen in America during the same period. Slate of various hues (both domestic and imported), shale, marble and sandstone are all used in the making of grave markers. Slate, in particular, remained the most popular material for gravestones. Folk tradition in the area holds that all of this slate was imported from Wales, and while some certainly was, it is probable that most of the slate used was of local origin. It is of interest to note that, until the 1930s, it was generally believed that all slate stones in New England were made from Welsh slate, and it was not until careful research on local stone-carvers showed otherwise that this view was changed. Whatever the source, the prevalence of slate stones in Eastern Cape cemeteries makes them resemble American burial grounds of the late eighteenth century, rather than those of the mid-nineteenth century, when marble was the universal raw material used. Stone shapes are equally conservative. In the Eastern Cape, rounded shoulders on gravestones remained the norm into the second half of the nineteenth century, while by 1800 in America, the shoulders of the stones had been squared off to create a more classical shape. Designs that had vanished from the American scene continue to be used into the 1860s, most notably variations of the Urn motif. Epitaphs often refer to decay and worms, themes that were archaic in America as early as the mid-eighteenth century. The conservative aspect of motifs found on Eastern Cape gravestones continues well into the twentieth century. A popular motif in both England and America in the 1870s and '80s is the clasped hand design, one hand firmly gripping another that appears limp, and probably represents that of the deceased. This symbol of farewell is to be found on Eastern Cape gravestones from the 1820s, fully fifty years after the design has passed out of vogue in America and England. In death as in life, the material culture is consistent, reminiscent of America in an earlier time.

## Conclusions

The material assemblages discussed suggest that the settlers' ordering of their world was in keeping with the agrarian tradition that emerged in the Eastern Cape. Speaking of the

changes in houses in England and America, Henry Glassie describes a process that was delayed in the Eastern Cape, or possibly even re-established after a period characterized by more modern, industrial revolution material culture forms. He says, "Houses help us locate an important point in the evolution of the Western Mind. It is the point where the face-to-face community dies. Individualism becomes loneliness. Unsure of (their) situation, (people) build identical houses with floor plans that suggest withdrawal and façades that suggest impersonal stability. Personal energies are removed from the immediate community, and invested in abstract ideals such as racial superiority, nationalism or artificial symmetrical order" (Glassie 1975:190). Whether this process was delayed in the Eastern Cape among the British settlers, or whether the pattern typical of an earlier English and American culture emerged, Glassie's observation tells us that the settlers participated in a strongly developed community. This is not surprising their position in a hostile and exotic environment, and their commitment to an agrarian life style. The world was re-ordered to serve the needs of the face-to-face community. It was not to die for another half century, if it has yet.

Our study is still in its early stages, and the observations offered here are in some ways preliminary, yet we believe that they provide a fresh and productive perspective on one group of people who contributed to South Africa's history, and also raise some interesting questions concerning culture change in general. By placing the 1820 settlers in their frontier agrarian context, and seeing the ways which this way of life affected their perception of the world, we can avoid imposing our "now" on their "then" in the way we attempt to explain them. As the Critical Archaeologists tell us, there is a real danger in projecting modern values into the past in an attempt to create history (Leone 1982). In doing so, we assume that many things are taken for granted both then and now, and the present is used in an uncritical fashion both to explain the past and justify the status quo.

### Directions for Future Research

Seeing the settlers as more typical of Anglo-Colonial culture of the pre-industrial era helps place them in a context that permits more accurate and useful comparisons. At this time, these comparisons are best couched in terms of a series of questions that should be answerable through the application of the method presented here.

1. How did the English and Trekboer settlers in the Cape differ in terms of world view? While these two groups of Europeans certainly differ in terms of language and religion, it is very possible that, in matters of everyday life, they were quite close. Thus differences between the two groups as they are seen today may well not have existed in the past, and a shared set of cultural responses, arising from similar attitudes and perceptions, might well have prevailed. A structural analysis of nineteenth century Afrikaner material culture would address this question in a most productive fashion.

2. As a people who lived a corporate and communal life on an everyday basis, and who, although a product of the industrial revolution, were at the same time not wholly a part of it, might they have had far more in common with the indigenous Xhosa than is generally believed? When cultures that are outwardly very different come into contact, the process is usually considered in terms of those differences, and similarities are not taken as much into account.

Historians of early New England have commented that the so-called "Pilgrims," who settled Plymouth in the seventeenth century, were in many ways culturally quite similar to the local Wampanoag Indians, in spite of obvious differences in language, religion and genotype. Both groups were simple subsistence farmers, both had a strong religious center to their lives, and both were probably more different from later eighteenth-century Anglo-Americans than from one another. Once again, such comparisons are often made in terms of perceptions conditioned by present-day values imposed uncritically on a very different past.

3. What American frontier group is most similar to the 1820 settlers? Were we to approach this question simply in terms of time - the nineteenth century in each instance - the settlers would probably be compared with homesteaders on the American plains. Yet, in the light of what our study has suggested, they should more properly be compared with those earlier pioneers who moved into the American interior from the eastern seaboard during the later eighteenth century. Given the rising importance of comparative history, particularly as evidenced by George Frederickson's comparative history of the U.S.A. and South Africa (Frederickson 1981), it is vitally important that comparable categories be chosen for comparison.

These three questions, taken as a related set, point to a central consideration. When questions of cultural contact, interaction and conflict are addressed, it is essential that the common ground between cultures be established and delineated as clearly as possible. If only differences are taken into account, the equation becomes unbalanced, and this is exacerbated by using differences perceived from a modern perspective in evaluating their significance in the past. A structural approach, using the material record, holds a promise of balancing the equation, since it provides access to an aspect of earlier people - their thoughts and perceptions - that will not be readily forthcoming from the written record, and in so doing, incorporates large numbers of people into our accounting of the past who otherwise might not have been included.

## Notes

1. An earlier version of this paper first appeared in 1990 in *Social Dynamics* 16(1) pp. 55-75, a journal published by the African Studies Department, University of Cape Town, South Africa.
2. Ronald Lewcock gives an excellent overview of the building materials, construction methods, environmental limitations and solutions to building problems on the frontier in his chapter entitled "The Architecture of the 1820 Settlers: Farmhouses" (Lewcock, 1963).
3. This idea is discussed extensively by Henry Glassie in his seminal vernacular architecture work (Glassie, 1975).
4. I-House is a term used to designate a plan consisting of two rooms flanking a central hall. Thus a two-thirds I-house would have the hall on one side, and only one room per floor, either to the left or right. The term was coined to describe a house form commonly found in the states of Illinois, Iowa and Indiana.
5. The addition of the double storey portion to the hall is interesting, although not entirely unknown in Glassie's study area. It is as if the two-thirds I-house, seen as a whole

grammatical sentence in itself, is so contracted in the vernacular dialect that it is possible, even correct, to use it as a single word, adding it to the evolving building.

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