

John and Elizabeth Howland's House: A Rhode Island Stone-Ender in Plymouth Colony?

It started with an e-mail from Ruth DeWilde-Major:

"Dear Craig,

I happened to pick up a copy of the Oct, 2011 "Early American Life" recently and read an article on a 1670s house in East Greenwich, RI that had recently been restored. The feature that attracted me to the article was the large stone fireplace which i believe may have been very much like the one on John Howland's homestead in Kingston. (The home i painted last year for the Howland Society.)

Interesting to note that when the new owners were researching the house, they found that Howlands had some part in the history of the house, though they did not mention which Howlands. i may contact them to find out. The entire back corner of the house is stone. Do you think this could be similar to the one on the Howland homestead?"

I replied that I had heard of stone-enders before (in fact in the town next to me (Fairhaven) has a 17th century house ruin that is one), but that I thought that the tradition didn't start until the later part of the 17th century. I told her that I would check some books I have and see what the architectural historians say. In the big scheme of things, John and Elizabeth's fireplace was so large that it virtually, if not literally, did take up the whole end of the house.

Could it be a stone-ender? What does that mean anyway?

A quick internet search brought up the most basic of information:

"History

Rhode Island was first settled in 1636 by Roger Williams and other colonists from England. Many of the colonists came from western England and brought the prevalent British architectural ideas with them to New England but adapted these to the environment of Rhode Island. The colonists built "stone-enders" which made use of the material that was in abundance in the area, timber and stone. Rhode Island also had an abundance of limestone (in contrast to the other New England states), and this allowed Rhode Islanders to make mortar to build massive end chimneys on their houses. Much of the lime was quarried at Limerock in Lincoln, Rhode Island. Only a few stone-enders remain in the 21st century. Architectural restorer, Norman Isham restored several original stone-enders in the early 20th century, (see: *Clement Weaver House and Clemence-Irons House). Armand LaMontagne, a Scituate sculptor, handbuilt a large 17th-century style stone-ender off of Route 6 in Scituate, Rhode Island in the 1970s.

Description of a Stone-ender

Stone-ender houses were usually timber-framed, one and one-half or two stories in height, with one room on each floor. One end of the house contained a massive stone chimney, which usually filled the entire end wall, thus giving the dwelling the name of "stone-ender." Robert O. Jones, in the Statewide Historical Preservation Report K-W-1, Warwick, Rhode Island, in 1981, noted that the windows were very small "casements filled with oiled paper" and that "the stairs to the upper chambers were steep, ladder-like structures usually squeezed in between the chimney and the front entrance." He points out that a few houses may have had leaded glass windows, but that was very rare.

List of early extant Rhode Island stone-enders (2010)

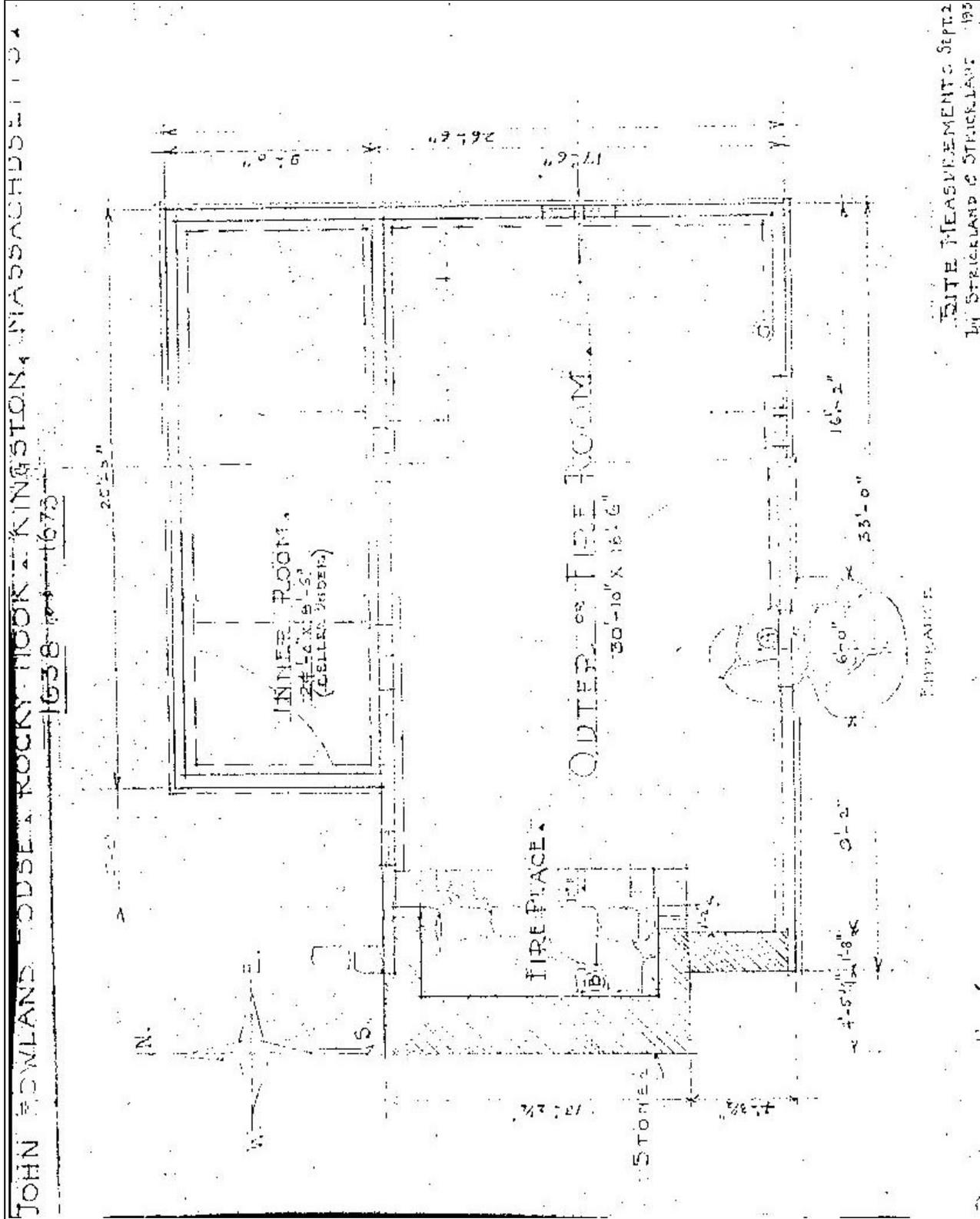
Clemence-Irons House, Johnston, Rhode Island 1691
Clement Weaver House, East Greenwich, Rhode Island 1679
Edward Searle House, Cranston, Rhode Island 1670-1720
Eleazer Arnold House, Lincoln, Rhode Island 1693
John Bliss House, Newport, Rhode Island ca. 1680
John Tripp House, Providence/Newport, Rhode Island 1720
Smith-Appleby House, Smithfield, Rhode Island, 1696 (chimney later modified)
Thomas Fenner House, Cranston, Rhode Island 1677
Valentine Whitman House, Lincoln, Rhode Island 1694"

(Wikipedia [where everyone starts their online research these days. Right?]
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stone-ender> accessed February 17, 2012)

Alright, so stone-enders are common in Rhode Island due to the prevalence of settlers from western England and the natural sources of limestone (which could be burned into lime), which allowed for the tight mortaring of stone. They were timber-framed and ranged in size from one and one-half to two stories high with one room on each floor. The name of course was derived from the fact that one end of the house was a massive stone chimney.

Pretty basic information. The first question now was, how does this match up with the Howland House? As you can see in the following drawing made by the Howland House excavator Sydney Strickland, the western wall of the house is all fireplace and the remainder of the floor plan is one large room (Figures 1 and 2). By gross visual comparison, it looks identical to a Rhode Island Stone-Enders. I know that they were not limited to Rhode Island, as there was one in Fairhaven and another in nearby Westport, and then I found a reference that said that this style was common in southeastern Massachusetts, Rhode Island and Connecticut, so being present in Kingston would be no stretch of the imagination. But what about the date? The houses referenced by Wikipedia from Rhode Island dated to the late seventeenth to early eighteenth century while the Howland House dates as early as 1638 if we say that John built or had it built, and possibly as early as 1633 if we assume that the original owner of the property John Jenney had it built right after he arrived in Plymouth in that year. Is this too early for a stone-ender? Beats me. But let's look at where they came from and why they were built (there is always the possibility that John Howland updated his house later in the century and turned something earlier into a stone-ender but let's leave that alone for now).

Stone-enders in New England are not a New England creation that just appeared out of nowhere. They evolved to fit the New England conditions from a tradition in Old England. Specifically, they are believed to have derived from traditions in the West of England where there are lots and lots of stone to build with, just like Rocky Nook. Using the locally available materials, builders constructed buildings that had traditional English forms but were made with what they had available. The life of the seventeenth century family was centered around the farmstead, the croft and the toft, much like their Medieval fore bearer's lives were. The croft was the message as it was often called in Plymouth Colony records, the land immediately surrounding the house. This land was often set off from the surrounding land by means of ditches, walls, or hedges. It contained the house, house garden, barn, and outbuildings belonging to the family (Hanawalt 1986: 23). The toft was the house itself. Together, the toft and the croft formed the family's homestead. The house itself could take several forms in Plymouth Colony from the basic cottar/ cot/ cottage which was a one-room/ one bay structure that often measured about 16 x 12' in Medieval times to longhouses of around 33 by 13 feet, to central chimney plan houses common in East Anglia in Old England (Hurst 1972: 104; Hanawalt 1986: 32; Cummings



SITE MEASUREMENTS SET 12
BY STRICKLAND & STRICKLAND 1935

Strickland plan of the John Howland House, as based on his excavations

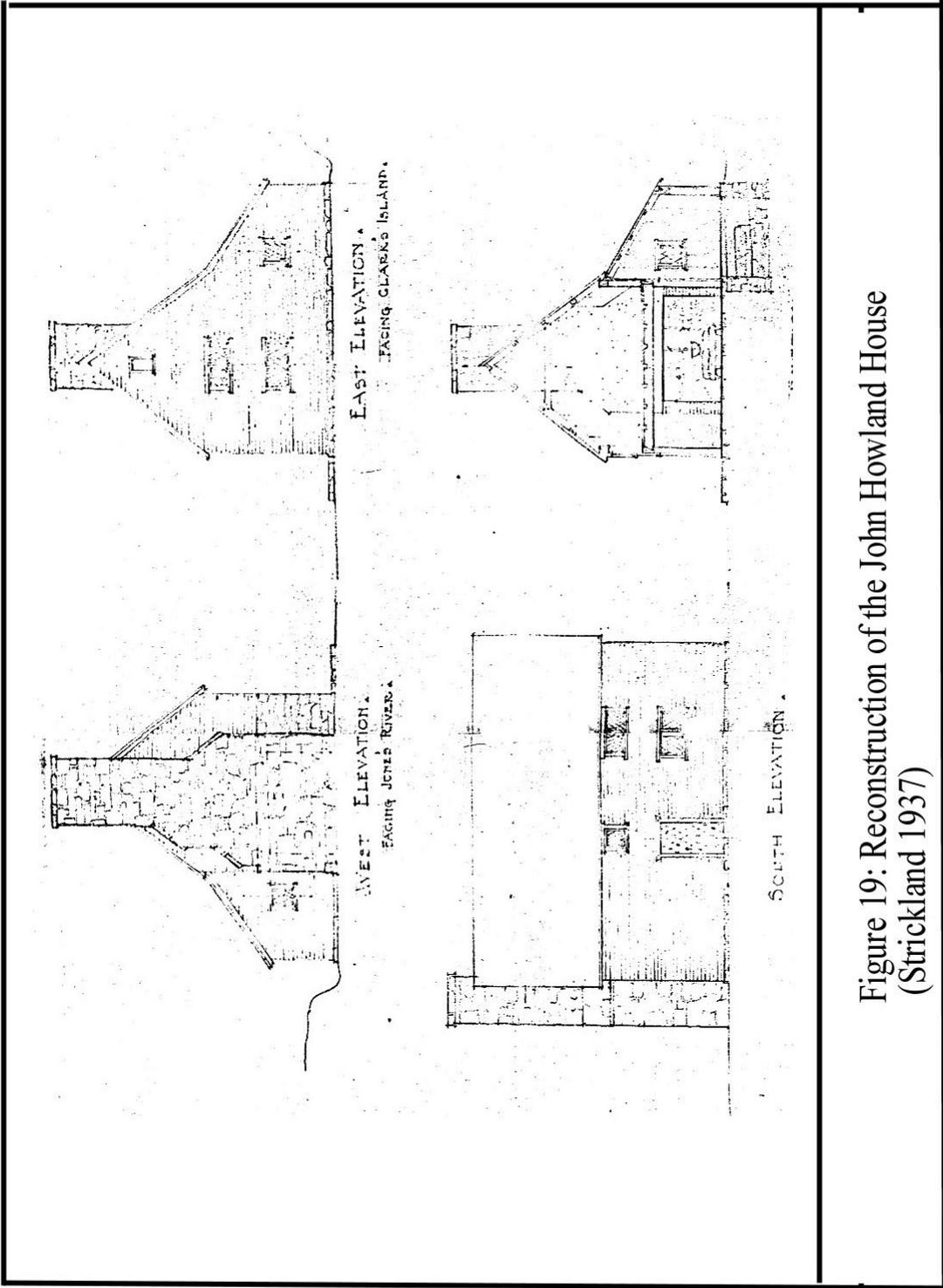


Figure 19: Reconstruction of the John Howland House
(Strickland 1937)

1979). The Cot was typically considered appropriate for those of lower social scale in the Middle Ages, but by the time of the settling of Massachusetts, it was often found to be a “starter” home for colonists. Longhouses evolved out of Medieval houses that sheltered both man and beast, people at one end in the house and animals at the other in a byre, all under one roof. They were typical Medieval peasant housing that were common in many regions of England and absent in the central Midlands, East Anglia and Kent (Hanawalt 1986: 33). The differential distribution has been attributed by some to the latter areas ability to produce abundant amounts of grain which resulted in abundant straw for bedding in crew yards versus in byres (Hanawalt 1986: 33). In all cases, wealthier peasants planned their homesteads as farms, one house for people and barns, stables, and ancillary support building set separately and either at right angles to the house or in line with it. Laying out the farm in this way created a yard in front of the house and barn where animals could be cared for and protected. The linear arrangement of support buildings was more common in the north and southwest of England while the L-shape courtyard pattern was common elsewhere with more diversity as one moved south (Smith 1982: 65). The farm was typical of the more prosperous villagers such as the yeomen farmers (Hurst 1972: 107).

In Massachusetts Bay, single bay cottages were common throughout the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth (Cummings 1979: 22). A 1640 contract stipulated that the house to be built was “16 foot long and 14 foote wyde...the Chimney framed without dawbing to be done with hewen timber.” (Cummings 1979: 22). Cummings found that of the 79 dwellings whose dimensions were recoded in documents from 1637 to 1706, 39 were single-bay cottages with only two being less than 15 feet square (Cummings 1979: 22). Seventeen of the measured from 22-28 feet long and 18-20 feet wide (Cummings 1979: 22). These small houses appear to be limited to individuals with limited means with estates ranging from £15-163 (Cummings 1979: 22). This was not always the case though, as deputy to the General Court John Whipple also had a single-bay house (Cummings 1979: 22).

In England it has been found that during the Late Medieval to Post-Medieval period the single chimney/ hearth house was the most common form in much of England, making up to 70% of the houses during this period (Barnwell and Airs 2006). There has also been found a clear relationship between the number of fireplaces and the wealth of the occupants, a trend that continued into the Victorian period when the average laborers cottage measured 12' square (Barnwell and Airs 2006: 76). During the period 1600 to 1637, 40 cottages on Brigstock Little Park, Northhamshire measured 3 x 3.6 m (10 x 12') and cottages built on the waste at Urchfont, Wiltshire between 1606-1639 averaged 3 x 4.25 m (10 x 14') and the simple late 17th and 18th century cottages probably cost between £3-24 to build (Barnwell and Airs 2006: 76).

Here is a comparison of house sizes from a few sites in Plymouth Colony that are similar to the Howland House:

- John Howland House ca 1638 17'6" by 33' for the hall and 9' x 25' ell**
- Ezra Perry II House (Aptucxet Trading Post Museum) ca. 1676
25.3 x 27.6 for hall and 21 x 15' ell
- Isaac Allerton House ca 1632 20 x 22'
- Stephen Wing House ca 1640 20 x 20'

So the Howland House is typical of a seventeenth century English cottage- a one room structure that was one and one half to two stories tall with a fireplace at one end, and especially of a West Country tradition, the same place from where that the Rhode Island stone-ender is believed to have originated. But what about the connection with building traditions in the west of England? John Jenney was from

Norwich, about as far East in England as one can get and John Howland was from Fenstanton, Huntingdonshire (Cambridgeshire), England, north of London, northwest of Cambridge and just west of Norwich, again, the East of England. Both of these areas were known for building traditions based on timber- post-in-ground/ earthfast and timber-framed with sills resting on low stone foundations. Not so much for building whole house walls out of stone. It presumably wouldn't have been something that they were familiar with. Where would a West Country tradition of building have come from in Plymouth Colony?

The first documented carpenter, who survived the first winter anyway, was Francis Eaton. He was from Bristol in the West of England. Ah, a West of England connection! Could he have built the Howland House? No, he died in the smallpox outbreak in 1633. Were there other carpenters (ideally I guess we are really looking for masons not carpenters, but basically I think we are looking for people who would have been familiar with the building traditions of the West of England. Looking at the Plymouth Colony probates, 50 people were found who had carpenter and joiner tools in their inventories:

Carpenter/ Joiner Tools

John Alden
 Roger Annadowne
 William Blackstone
Richard Bowin
 Myles Standish
 James Browne
 Jacob Cooke Sr.
 William Ford Sr.
 Gobert Gobertson
 John Howland
 William Kemp
 James Lindale
 Abraham Martin
 Moses Simons
 Nicholas Snow
 John Sutton
 Thomas Walley
 Thomas Walley Jr
 Will Wright
Francis Eaton
 Peter Browne
Kanelm Winslow
 Martha Harding
 Rich Lanckford
 John Thorps
 Hiller (carpenter)
Walter Knight
 John Briggs
Joseph Holiway
 Richard Church
Phineas Pratt
 Webb Audey
 Goodman Lettice

Origins (West and Southwest origins bolded)

Essex
 ?
 Gibside, Whickham, Durham County
Llwyngwair, Pembroke, Wales
 Lancashire
 Plymouth
 Holland
 ?
 Holland
 Huntingdownshire
 Hampton, Middlesex
 ?
 Essex (related to Christopher Martin?)
 Dutch
 Hoxton Middlesex
 Attleborough, Norfolk, England
 London?
 Barnstable, MA
 Austerfield, York
Somersetshire, England
 Great Burstead, Essex County?
Droitwich, Worcestershire
 Northhampton
 ?
 Polestead, Suffolk
 Sussex and Kent
Staplegrave, Somerset,
 York
married woman from Somersetshire
 Oxford
Salisbury, Wiltshire?
 ?
 Ecclesfield, Yorkshire/ Leighton, Lincolnshire

Francis Godfrey
 Henery Andrews
Joshua Pratt
William Carpenter
 Samuel House sr
James Wyatt
Thomas Lumbert
 Richard Sparrow
 Joseph Wormall
 John Brown Sr
 John Damon
Jonathan Winslow
Joseph Carpenter
 Nathaniell Peck
 Richard Taylor
 John Cole
 John Bartlett

Bath, Somerset
 Northamptonshire
Salisbury, Wiltshire
Amesbury, Wiltshire
 Eastwell, Kent
Priston Somersetshire
Thornecombe, Dorset
 Panfield, Braintree, Essex
 ?
 Great Burstead, Essex County?
 Kent,England
Droitwich, Worcestershire
Amesbury, Wiltshire
 Hingham, MA
 ?
 Plymouth MA
 Plymouth MA

Having carpenter or joiner tools did not necessarily mean that they were house carpenters, many probably used their tools around their farms.

The breakdown of where these people originated from is as follows:

East Anglia

Essex	5
Norfolk	1
Suffolk	1
Middlesex	2

North England

Durham	1
Lancashire	1
York	3

Holland 3

Plymouth Colony 5

Central England

Huntindownshire	1
London	1
Northampton	2
Oxford	1

Southwest England

Somerset	5
Wiltshire	4
Dorset	1

West England

Worcester	2
Wales	1

Southeast England

Kent	2
Sussex	1

Unknown	7
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The breakdown of which areas contributed people who knew carpentry or joinery breaks down as:

Region	Count	% of total
Southwest	10	20%
East Anglia	9	18%
Central	5	10%
North	5	10%
Southeast	3	6%
West	3	6%
Holland	3	6%
Plymouth Colony	5	10%
Unknown	7	14%

The southwest of England contributed the most with 20% (26% if you lump the west in with the southwest) while the second largest was East Anglia. Because Francis Eaton was from the West of England, and he was in Plymouth from the earliest days, it would be logical that his vernacular architecture experience would have contributed much to the early architecture of the colony. Another early settler, Phineas Pratt, a man who had fled to Plymouth from Wessagussett and who decided to stay, was also a carpenter from the West Country.

Where else can one look to in order to find information on West Country building traditions and their transference to the New World? Newfoundland of course! The settlement at Ferryland/ the Colony of Avalon, was founded by Devon fishermen and planters and there is speculation that when it was founded in 1622 it has been suggested that the planning and construction of Calvert's colony was inspired by the Devon port of Plymouth and West Country tradesmen carried out the construction (Gaulton 1997: 111-112). The building at Ferryland are overwhelmingly of masonry construction, at least for the chimneys and foundations.

Excavated houses in Newfoundland appear very similar and share several key features with John Howland's:

- dimensions were greater in length than width (Table x)
- house measurements were very similar to the Howland house
- they sit on dry laid stone foundations
- they were timber framed
- the interior space was an undivided open floor plan
- one gable end wall was taken up by a large stone fireplace and chimney
- doors were generally placed in the southwest corner of the house

Table x. Comparison of house sizes at Ferryland Newfoundland and the Howland House

	Length	Width	Hearth size	Door Location
Renews House	20' (6.1 m)	13.6' (4.1 m)	3.6 x 2 m	SW corner
Ferryland Area D	39' (12m)	17'6" (5.4m)		SW corner
Ferryland 2	30' (9 m)	15' (4.6m)	2 x 1.5m	
Londonderry	30' (9 m)	15' (4.6 m)		
Pennsylvania	30' (9 m)	18' (5 m)		
Cupids Cove	36'	12'		
Ferryland Mansion	44'	15' (4.6m)		
Howland	33' (30' 10" without chimney)	17'6" (5.4 m)	3.9 m x 1.5 m (13'2 1/2" x 5 feet)	SW corner

It is believed that the Newfoundland houses were built in a West Country (especially Devon) tradition (Brunskill 1997: 175, 177; Innocent 1916: 118; Beacham 1990). Placing the heat source at the gable end had been common throughout England, and especially in the West Country, since Tudor times and the size and location of hearth is indicative of the household's requirement for cooking and heating and of origin of house's builders and/or occupants (Brunskill 1997:56;, Blades 1981:45;, Barley 1990: 65, 79; Barley 1961: 49, Nixon 1999).

But what about the masonry? While interior portion of hearths and chimneys could be put up with clay, the parts that were outside of the houses needed lime mortar. Local sources of limestone that could be calcined to produce lime, were difficult to find in Massachusetts. Edward Johnson reported in 1650 that "the country affords no lime, but what is burnt of Oyster-shells" (Cummings 1979: 122). As Johnson reported, people burned seas shells to produce lime which was mixed with the clay to produce mortar. Lime was necessary for the mortar to make it waterproof. Without lime, a good rainstorm would wash the mortar out of the masonry and the whole construction would soon come crashing down. The shells that were reduced to lime came from a variety a sources. In 1694 a large storm resulted in a plethora of shells on the beach. Local officials soon declared that none of the shells, nor any of the lime that was subsequently made from the shells, could be shipped out of Lynn under punishment of a fine (Jenison 1976: 22). Shells were also mined from Native American shell middens such as was done in 1667 by Thomas Batt, a Hide tanner in Boston. Batt used a Native shell midden located on the west side of Beacon Hill to create the lime pits he used for dehairing hides (Jenison 1976: 22). Another source of shells were live shellfish beds. This practiced was discouraged due to the harm done to the shellfish, as such was the case in 1728 in providence, Rhode Island where oyster beds were being raided (Jenison 1976: 22). By the early eighteenth century, local lime sources had been discovered and shell lime was less often used, as evidenced by a 1724 decree that mussels in Massachusetts Bay should no longer be used for making lime or anything else except for eating and bait (Fiske 1922: 36). So whoever built the house for John Jenney or John Howland could have put up the chimney and the west wall with shell lime mortar and ,in fact, pieces of shell-tempered mortar were recovered from the Howland site, confirming that this was the mortar used for the walls.

But were there masons in Plymouth Colony who could have erected such a wall? Nicholas Snow, who arrived in 1623 aboard the *Anne* or *the Little James* from Shoreditch, London, and Samuell Fuller, both of who died in the 1670s but were in the colony much earlier, had mason's hammers in their probate inventories. This may mean that they practiced masonry and it also means that other people who were mason's were probably also present in the Colony from an early date.

Additionally, archaeological excavations by Strickland recovered fragments of a North Devon oven and lots of fragments of North Devon gravel-free baluster jars, North Devon gravel-tempered milkpans, and North Devon scraffito. This site, in fact, has the only evidence of a North Devon oven in New England and more North Devon gravel-free baluster jar fragments than any other New England site. Many of the red bodied earthenwares which reached New England came from the southeast of England in the West Country (Devonshire and perhaps Dorset) (Hume 1970:102). These included tall black glazed mugs with two or more handles called tygs which were produced from the 1400s to ca. 1650 and slipwares produced at Wrotham in Kent from 1612 to 1700 (Hume 1969:102). Wrotham slipware had a glaze that was darkened and a thinned clay solution, called a slip, was applied in sprig molded pads containing initials and dates (Hume 1969:103).

The West Country of England, mainly around the towns of Barnstable, Biddeford and Great Torrington also produced a type of earthenware that has come to be known as North Devon gravel free ware. This ware is easily distinguished by the color of the exterior versus the interior. The exterior was fired in an oxidizing atmosphere in the kiln and as a result it attains an orange or red. These vessels were fired upside-down in the kilns, with result being the interior having been fired in a reducing atmosphere, free from oxygen. As a result the interior is often a gray fired body with a mottled yellow to olive brown glaze (Cranmer 1992:85). These vessels have long been thought to have only been produced during the late seventeenth century, but their recovery from sites such as the Plymouth trading post at Pentagoet (ca. 1629), Martin's Hundred in Virginia (1622) and from the wreck of the Sea Venture (1609) pushes their dates of manufacture back into the first quarter of the century (Cranmer 1992:85). Their recovery from sites throughout the century shows that they were produced for a long time range. Most of the vessels take the form of baluster jars. These vessels have a constricted neck on which a paper or cloth cover could be tied. It is theorized that these vessels were shipped either empty or filled with pickled fish to the colonies.

Conclusion

Was the Howland House a Rhode Island Stone-Ender? Technically no, but it appears to have originated from the same West Country vernacular architectural tradition that the later Rhode Island Stone-enders did. The floor plan is similar to the traditional stone-ender and to the stone-ended houses excavated in Ferryland, Newfoundland, a place that could be called the West Country in the New World. The West Country origin of the architecture at the Howland site as well as the numerous West Country/ Devon artifacts recovered begs the question of why and how did all this West Country end up in Kingston? One answer may be that John Howland, a man that acted as Plymouth Colony' trading agent at the Cushnoc trading post in Maine, may have established trading connections with the West Country through that position in Maine where he would have come in contact with West Country fishermen and traders. He may have even traveled to Newfoundland or the West Country and liked what he saw, then deciding to recreate it in Kingston. We are not exactly sure when the house that Strickland excavated was actually built. It may have been built by Jenney, who himself could have had West Country trading connections, like the look and practicality of the West Country architecture, or had hired a housewright and/or mason from the West Country (we know that West Country carpenters were here from the start of the colony). The construction of the west wall of the house completely out of stone may have been a practical response by either Jenney or Howland to the stoney nature of Rocky Nook. When given a bunch of lemons, you make lemonade. When given a bunch of rocks, you make a stone-ended house that its on a stone foundation.

Thanks to Ruth DeWilde-Major initial e-mail, this is now an area that we can direct future research towards, especially the why of the choice of this style of architecture and the West Country connections that John Howland may have had. Maybe a researcher across the pond can look into shipping records in

the Devon area and see if John Howland shows up there.

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