

What Do We Call It?

A Guide to Maine Houses

by Joyce K. Bibber

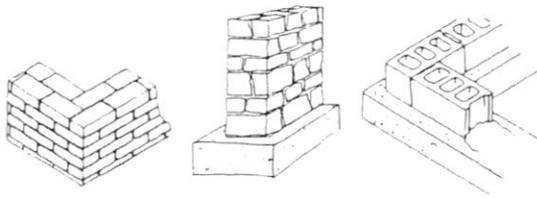
designed and illustrated by Andrea van Voorst van Beest

published by: Center for Real Estate Education
University of Southern Maine
96 Falmouth Street
Portland, Maine 04103

PART I: STRUCTURE

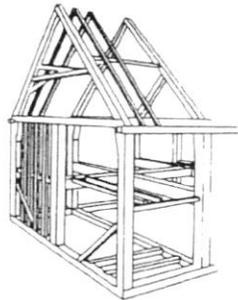
Construction Techniques

There are several factors that need to be considered in the attempt to name or define a particular house. Fundamental to the identification of any house is the technique with which it was constructed—what materials were used, and how they were put together. The five most common techniques are described below. In addition, since one of the most easily identifiable features of a building is its roof, a special section illustrating various roof shapes is also included.



MASONRY: BRICK, STONE, OR CONCRETE

Exterior walls constructed of one of the above heavy materials support the upper floors and the roof. Brick was used frequently in the 19th century; stone was also used locally, but rarely. Concrete blocks, while not common, were sometimes used by the early 20th century.

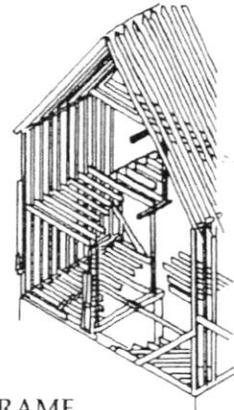


BRACED FRAME (or POST-AND-BEAM)

Framework is constructed of heavy timbers mortised and pegged together, often with corner posts protruding into the rooms. This technique was used from earliest times through the mid-19th century, though frames were somewhat lighter in later years. Post-and-beam construction is currently enjoying a revival in this area.

FACTORY-BUILT

Usually constructed in panels or sections. Some, like mobile homes, are completely assembled at the factory, while others are made of large sections taken to the site and then erected (see *Mobile Homes*, page 26).



BALLOON FRAME

A lighter framework than the post-and-beam, the balloon frame is composed of smaller (2x4, 2x6, 2x10) sawn timbers which are nailed together. Invented in the 1830s, this technique was not widely used in Maine until the second half of the 19th century. It is currently used in a modified form—levels are now framed separately and stud spacing has been altered to conform to sizes of plywood and chipboard, when used.



LOG

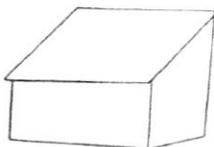
Entire or hewn logs are placed on top of one another to form solid walls. The corners are usually lapped. This technique, too, has been enjoying a revival in recent years.

NOTE: All may not be as it appears—by the early 19th century, beams were often cut out so as not to protrude into rooms, so that a braced frame is well hidden; while 20th century houses may be of frame construction, but with a facing of brick or stone or even half logs!

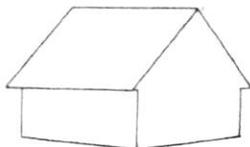
Roofs

Characteristics to look for in roof identification include roof shape (or type), construction technique, style, and specialized forms. The roof is one of the most easily identifiable components of a house and can often serve as a general description of the entire building (see *Mansard or Second Empire Style*, page 18). Some of the most common forms are illustrated below:

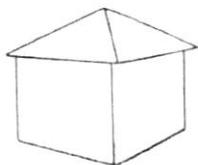
Shed roof
(lean-to or
single-pitch roof)



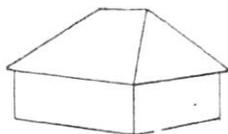
Gable roof
(pitched roof)



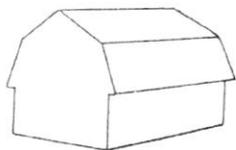
Hip (hipped) roof
(square)



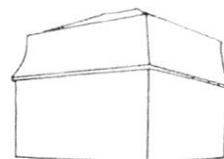
(rectangular)



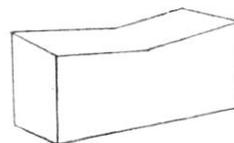
Gambrel roof



Mansard roof



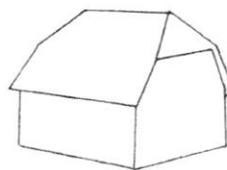
Butterfly



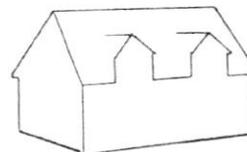
Note that neither this nor the truly flat roof is widely used on domestic architecture in Maine.

VARIATIONS

Clipped Gable—or Jerkinhead—roof. Like a hip roof at the top, a gable roof below.



Dormers—may pierce almost any steeply pitched roof. The dormers will usually have shed, gable, or hip roofs, though a few may be arched. Wall dormers have their own roofs, but are continuations of the house wall on their facades.

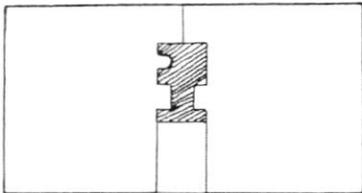


Early House Types

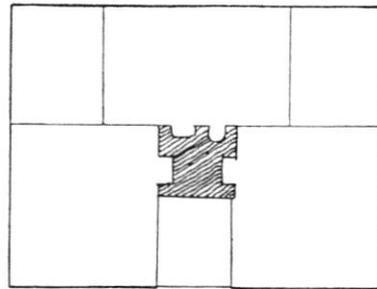
It is important to differentiate between what may be called a "type" and what is known as a "style." The term "style," when applied to houses, refers to what might be called the "essence" of all the characteristics of a given period (sometimes "revived" from the near or distant past). These characteristics include roof shape, floor plan, location of windows and doors and decorative details, as well as materials used. Most "high-style" structures had characteristic shapes or "types," and never did ALL houses get built in the same shape; thus there are numerous house "types" which appear in a variety of "styles."

For example, consider the distinctive octagon house—a fad of the 1840s and 1850s, a time when a variety of styles were in vogue. Among the ten or so eight-sided houses remaining in Maine from that period are some which are distinctly Greek Revival, some which have Italianate details, and one whose windows and porch are definitely Gothic in styling. These were built in a relatively short period of time, but some more common house types spanned centuries:

HALL-AND-PARLOR HOUSE—One room deep, with a single chimney to serve the two rooms on the main floor as well as those, if any, above. The entry is usually in front of the chimney. This type of structure was common through the early 1800s.



CENTER-CHIMNEY HOUSE—Two rooms deep, usually with three fireplaces in the central chimney—one for each of the three large rooms on the main floor. The entry is in front of the central chimney. It is often found in two stories, but one is not uncommon. In the latter—often called a "Cape Cod"—it was possible to finish off one or two rooms under the roof (see *Cape Cod*, page 13). The center chimney house was most often built from the early 18th century through the mid-19th century.



CENTER-HALL HOUSE—Also two rooms deep. Usually the four rooms of the first floor are located with two on either side of an entry/stairhall which extends front to back, with upper floors similarly arranged. Earlier, more conservative versions had two chimneys, one between each set of end rooms. Later homes had a chimney in each room, which was located on the outer wall. This design is found most commonly in houses built from the late 18th century to the mid-19th century.

