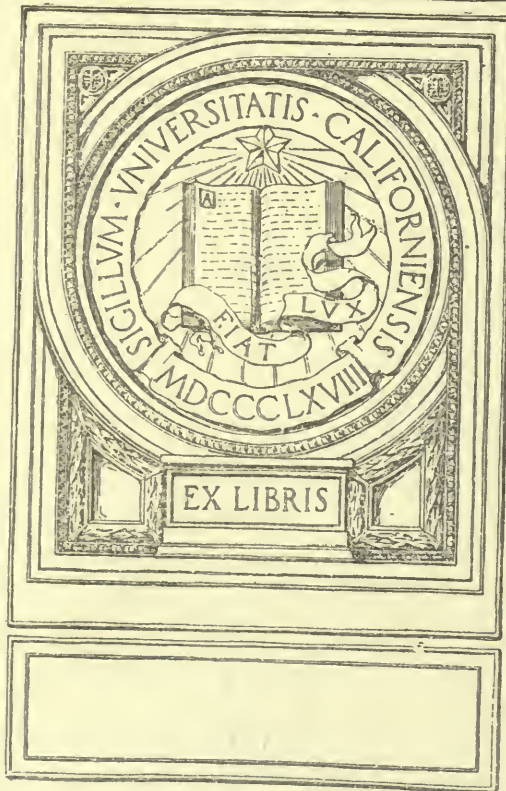


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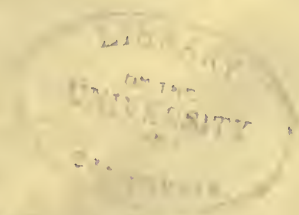


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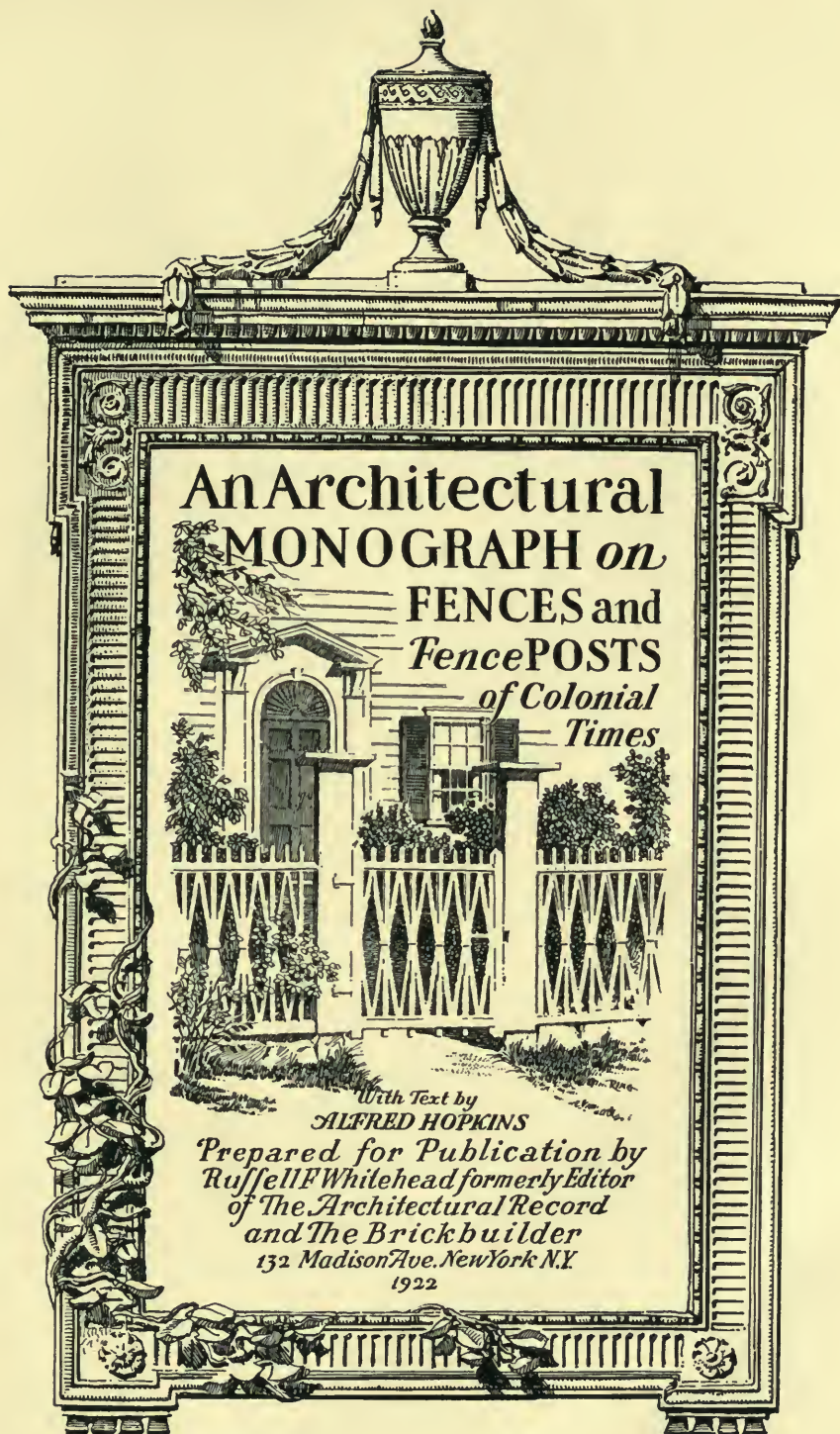
**FENCES &  
Fence POSTS  
of Colonial Times**



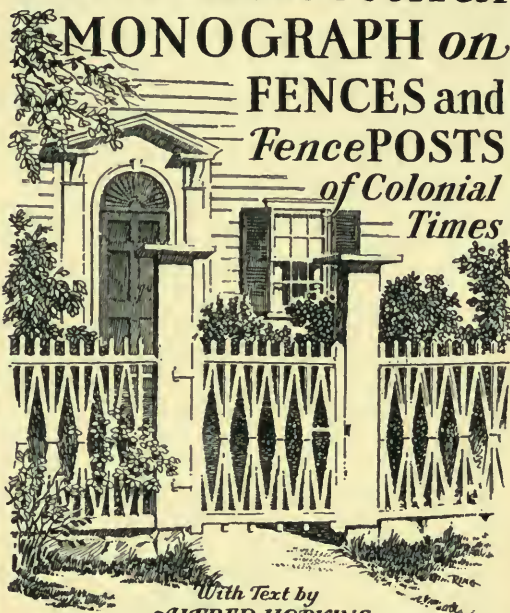
*With Introductory Text by  
Alfred Hopkins*







An Architectural  
**MONOGRAPH** on  
**FENCES** and  
*FencePOSTS*  
of Colonial  
*Times*



With Text by  
**ALFRED HOPKINS**

Prepared for Publication by  
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132 Madison Ave. New York N.Y.  
1922



URN AND FENCE POST, THE PIERCE—NICHOLS HOUSE, SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS,  
Built in 1782. Samuel McIntyre, Architect

# The WHITE PINE SERIES of ARCHITECTURAL MONOGRAPHS

A BI-MONTHLY PUBLICATION SUGGESTING THE  
ARCHITECTURAL USES OF WHITE PINE AND ITS  
AVAILABILITY TODAY AS A STRUCTURAL WOOD

Vol. VIII

DECEMBER, 1922

No. 6

## FENCES AND FENCE POSTS OF COLONIAL TIMES

By ALFRED HOPKINS

*While practising as an architect in New York for many years, Mr. Hopkins has designed public buildings, banks and country houses, and has taken time to make a particular study of agricultural work. He has achieved much success with his farm buildings, for he has given them a proper architectural character. His book on 'Farm Buildings' and his writings on this and other subjects are well known.—EDITOR'S NOTE*

WHEN Mr. Whitehead asked me to write an article on old picket fences for the very interesting and instructive *White Pine Series of Architectural Monographs*, I accepted the task with alacrity, because it gave me an opportunity of venting in public print a view which I have frequently had to repress in private, that of all the various problems submitted by the layman to the architect for his suggestion, the subject of the fence, as it is generally presented, is the most inane and uninteresting. Every architect, I take it, can recall the incident of the smiling and vain-glorious purchaser of a piece of country real estate breezing into his office, and, with a self-sufficient air, saying that he has secured a wonderful site, that he wants to do the perfect piece of architecture, some day,—but not now—and that he is very anxious to discuss just what type of fence ought to be put up in the interim. It is then that I wish breezy people would not think about fences, and would permit me to oc-

cupy my mind with thoughts which better please my fancy.

But, in looking over the Editor's delightful collection of photographs of Early American fences and fence posts, many of which have been selected to illustrate this article, it is very easy to be led into a discussion of them, and a first impulse is to incline one to the opinion that all the possible forms for the American fence have been devised, and that it is only the province of the present-day architect to make a judicious selection; this certainly is the view evidenced by the most casual student of furniture design. We

do not have time in our hurried life to take pains with the little things, and that is the principal reason why so much of our modern architecture is crude and ill-considered.

There is perhaps not so much to learn from European countries with respect to fence design as there is from our own Colonial period, which was rich in this particular. England has given us excellent examples



FENCE AND GATEWAY, HOUSE AT LAUREL, LONG ISLAND



CHESTNUT STREET FROM NO. 10, LOOKING WEST, SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS



FENCE DETAIL  
House in Newburyport, Massachusetts

of the ambitious iron fence, but it has had no very great development here. In rare instances, our architects have designed fine iron fences, but more often they have failed, and the usual flamboyant structure of this variety serves only to enclose the palace of a billionaire, a building usually so turbulent and ill at ease in architectural outline, that one feels it might somehow, wriggle out of its environment, unless the site was securely enclosed in an iron construction.

Once upon a time, when our ancestors spoke of their "defences," they referred to the great walls and battlements which protected them against their warlike neighbors; but, nowadays our neighbors are more neighborly, and the "defences" have dwindled down to "fences." The evolution of the fence has proceeded in accordance with the nature of the marauders to be shut out; the utmost that is required of a fence in this day and country is a stout resistance to little boys, cows or chickens.

The tall solid masonry walls of the Continental estate are not friendly in America, nor are they desirable or necessary here, where we have endless land and comparatively little population. The impulse for privacy on the part of the well-to-do is just as insistent today as ever, or the owner of a newly bought piece of property would not rush into an architect's office and ask for something arresting in the way of fence design. In crowded Europe, however, the solid wall was frequently the only thing which gave privacy, but for America I have always felt, that, as a general principle, a fence which was not absolutely necessary had better be done away with altogether, although, if the conditions actually required such protection, it should not obstruct the landscape, but rather give the passerby as extended a view of Nature's loveliness as is possible. It is astonishing, where, in a rocky country, the farmers have laid the stones into many fences, how much these barriers interfere with the view of the



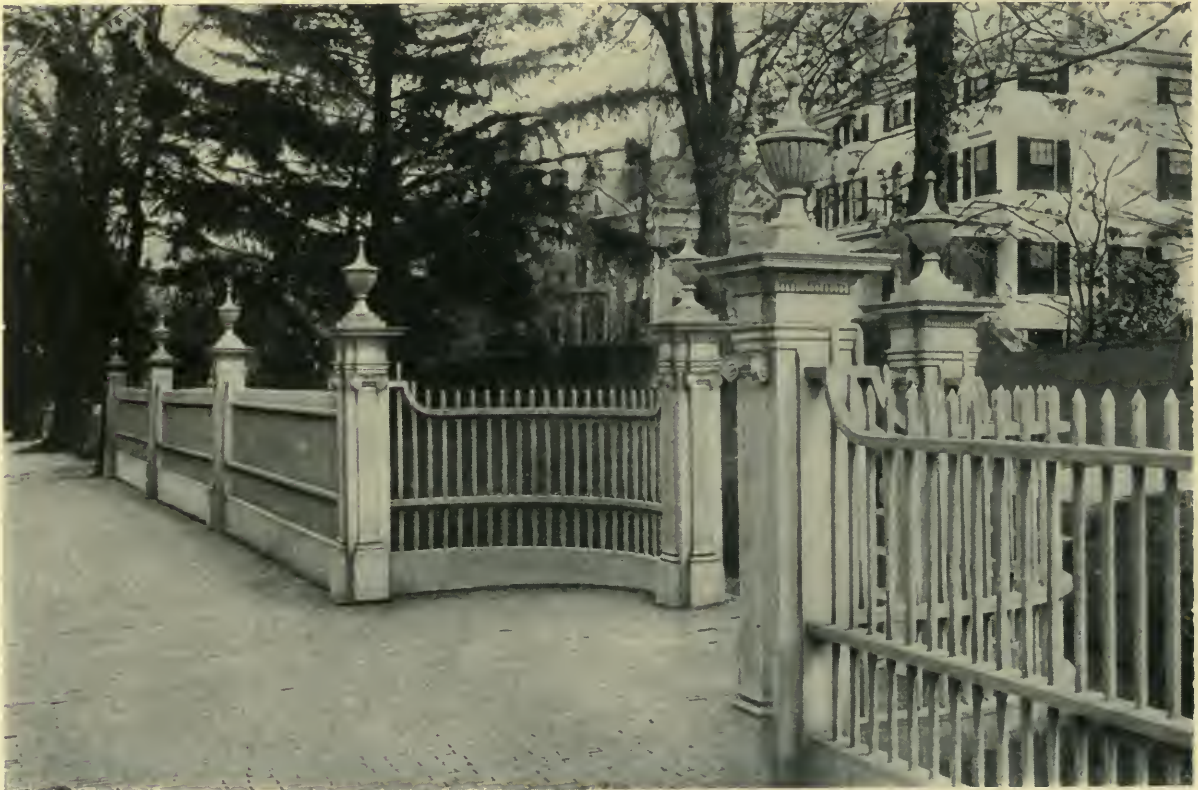
FENCE DETAIL  
House in Newburyport, Massachusetts

landscape. To prove the statement, it is necessary only to take down these crisscross scars on the green-sward, as the author has done many times, to see how the view is opened up thereby, and how the land leaps out in acreage before you. Even on an estate's outside edge, I have always resented the intrusion of a high stone fence as being unfriendly and unneighborly, and usually, I find, that it is better manners and better architecture to do away with such unsightly obstructions. The traveller in Spain will see the gigantic cactus frequently planted in rows as a fence, and it makes a



FENCEPOST, NEWBURYPORT, MASSACHUSETTS

decidedly effective barrier. We have varieties of thorns which will do equally well and in fact the whole idea of using planting as a means of designating boundaries or creating barriers is an ingratiating one, and we hope our *confrères*, the landscape architects, may take it up and develop it. As for ourselves, we have not been very much encouraged by the way the suggestion has been received by the laity. Iron, stone or wood as a material are what drift into the mind of the average man when he is inspired by the thought that the time has come when he must begin to build fences.



FENCE AND FENCE POSTS IN NEWBURYPORT, MASSACHUSETTS

All this, however, has to do with present-day problems, in the great American republic in the year of our Lord, 1922. Let us proceed to a less fatiguing prospect and try to adjust our imaginations to how engaging life may have been in the pleasant town of Salem, as depicted by the photograph of Chestnut Street. Here we have fence design in its most beautiful and appropriate flowering. Here are privacy and a proper regard for one's neighbors, expressed in faultless fashion.

What is true of Chestnut Street, Salem, is also true of High Street in Newburyport. In both



FENCE POST, NEWBURYPORT, MASSACHUSETTS

of these Massachusetts towns the fence is often an integral part of the approach, an introduction, as it were, to the motifs to be found in the decoration of the porches and of the house itself.

Nothing could be better architecture than the types of fence and fence posts shown in the illustrations on pages five, six and seven. What could be more in keeping than the old house and the fence at Laurel, Long Island, illustrated on page three, though the gateposts have a strong suspicion of the influence of the Victorian Era? This is the simplest type of fence conceivable, but it is

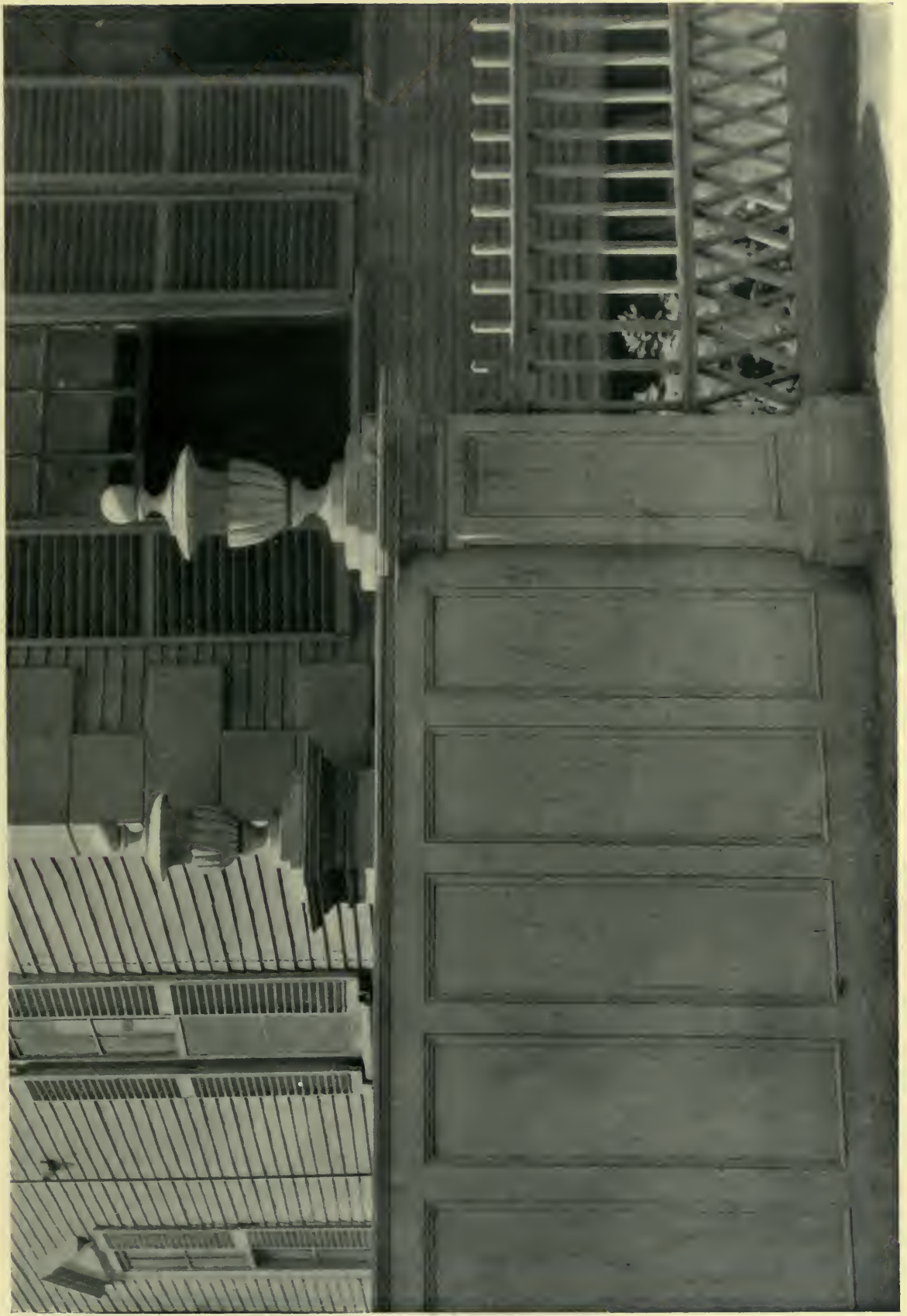


FENCE OF THE HAVEN HOUSE, PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE



THE JUDGE HAYES' HOUSE AND FENCE, SOUTH BERWICK, MAINE





FENCE AND FENCE POSTS, THE WENTWORTH HOUSE, PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE



HOUSE ON OUTSKIRTS OF BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS



328 ESSEX STREET, SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS

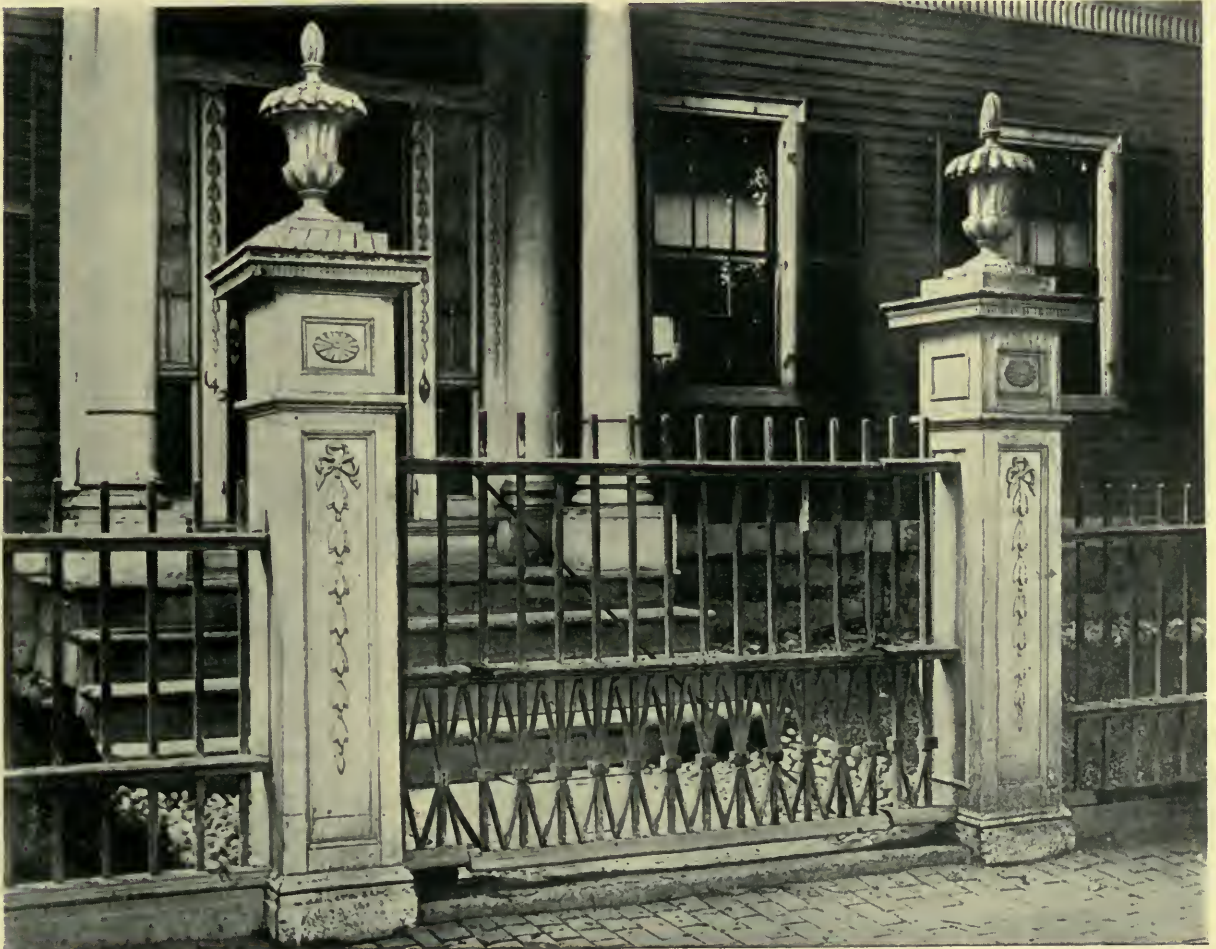
TWO FENCES AND FENCE POSTS OF COLONIAL TIMES

good American architecture, nevertheless, and we cannot help calling attention to Nature's most delightful bit of architecture, shown in the branches of the old apple tree in the foreground.

For a perfect example of a Colonial fence, we call attention to the illustration on the upper half of page ten and the upper right hand corner of page thirteen, showing the fence in front of the Loring-Emmerton House, at 328 Essex Street,

which well illustrates the general principles enunciated above. The horizontal rails of the fence have been moulded, to lighten their effect, and the base has been kept low. The detail of the post is delicate and refined, and the urn on the top is perhaps the only feature which needs to be reduced in the scale of its ornamentation, but that only very slightly.

A type of fence which is both effective and al-



GATEPOSTS AND GATE, THE H. K. OLIVER HOUSE, SALEM, MASSACHUSETTS, BUILT ABOUT 1799  
The Urns and Gateposts were originally part of the palatial home constructed by the mariner, Elias H. Derby.

Salem, Massachusetts. The pickets are exactly right in size, and it is easy for the architect to imagine how much heavier they would be had they been left to modern draughting room methods of detailing. The whole design is of absorbing interest in showing how every part has been treated to conform to the designer's feeling for lightness and grace. Perhaps his thought was to obstruct the view of the landscape as little as possible; at any rate, here is an old-time essay

ways satisfactory for use as a street boundary is the one on High Street, Newburyport, Massachusetts, shown at the bottom of page five. Its design is frequently repeated in present-day fences, but often the fine proportions of the old-time one are lost, because the modern tendency is to make it all too heavy.

In the old fence in front of the Wentworth House, Portsmouth, illustrated on page nine, is seen such a pleasant combination of the open and

the closed fence, that in regard to the solid portion, we are quite willing to withdraw what we have written about obscuring the landscape and being unneighborly. Let us hope that something unseemly is kept from the public view, in which case we can stick to our principles, without being embarrassed by having to admit an exception.

The gateway, shown on page sixteen, of the Admiral Cowles House, at Farmington, Connecticut, built about 1790, is very effectively and unusually well designed and would lend itself

the corners, between which is a semi-circular fencing, with the smaller gate posts between them. In the present instance, however, the urns, while generally in keeping, may possibly be revised copies of excellent originals.

The fence shown on page eight of Judge Hayes' House, South Berwick, Maine, is effective in that it accentuates the posts by keeping the fencing between them very light. The elevated position of the house on the terrace, the garden spot to the right, are all very attractive and very



GATEWAY AND FENCE, HOME OF JAMES RUSSELL LOWELL, CAMBRIDGE, MASSACHUSETTS

particularly well to garden gate design, rather than as precedent for a main entrance gate; although here it serves its aesthetic and practical purpose well.

At Stamford, Connecticut, and at Vergennes, Vermont, we have fencing which is more similar to modern methods of design, and the increased weight of the parts is not to its advantage, though the fence posts are well done.

In the picture of the fence and gateway of the "King" Caesar House, at Duxbury, Massachusetts, is shown a simple, usual and effective way of accentuating the entrance, by main posts at

typical of the hill country, and the house shown is a distinctive example of architecture and planting as exemplified in the American home.

We are happy to draw to a conclusion in the contemplation of so much good taste as was shown by the early craftsman who built this house in Maine, and we do so with an earnest appeal to those interested in early American architecture—White Pine architecture, if you will,—for it was that—to study this illustration well. Here is the perfect piece of architecture which our vain-glorious friend is going to build on his newly acquired parcel of real estate, but never does,



SALEM AND NEWBURYPORT FENCE POSTS AND URNS



FENCE OF THE LEWIS HOUSE, BROOKFIELD, MASSACHUSETTS



FENCE AND GATEWAY—THE "KING" CAESAR HOUSE, DUXBURY, MASSACHUSETTS



GATEWAY, THE JUDGE SMITH HOUSE  
Vergennes, Vermont

and I will venture the statement, as a fact, that this owner did not commence his home-building by surrounding the vacant property with the finely designed fence which has called forth our approbation!

No—by no means did the Colonial architect do his work in that back handed manner. The fence that surrounded the house or at least that shut it off from too direct contact with every casual passerby on the street must have been more than a mere inconsequential detail to him.

It must have been, I have always felt, quite as important a part of the entire design as the entrance doorway, the interior panelling or the exquisitely designed window frames that the Colonial architect used whenever the opportunity presented itself.

Indeed it seems that there is hardly space in one number of this Series to discuss to any satisfactory extent the total possibilities of the "Fences and Fence Posts of Colonial Times."

As a matter of fact, there would be no great risk in suggesting that the entire development of Colonial architecture unfolds itself to a large extent in matters even so small as the general attitude of the designer to the slightest detail connected with the Colonial fence.

One can see how it would be possible to reconstruct from the documents that are furnished us by the matter under consideration at this time an history of all the salient characteristics of Colonial design; just as it is possible for the anthropologist to reconstruct from a few scattered fragments of the skeleton of some pre-historic animal, a complete and accurate model of every detail of that animal's appearance.

If we, as I have said, do not have time in our hurried life to take pains with little things, the Colonial designer, fortunately, had the necessary time and, what is even better, the determination and inclination to do his best in even the smallest and most inconsiderable details in connection with the work at which he was engaged.

If one were placed as Michelangelo was during the building of St. Peter's at Rome, and could say to his client as Michelangelo did to the Cardinals who were determined to dictate to him in matters of design that "your duty, Gentlemen,"—or as the architect would say to his twentieth century client, "your duty sir,"—"is to furnish me with the money to pay for the building; and my duty is to design that building," many things might be more popularly and more successfully managed.

Some one has suggested that we may follow the



GATEWAY  
House Near Stamford, Connecticut

entire economic history of American agriculture in the fences that surround the American farm, just as I have suggested, that we may follow the history of American architecture in the Fence Posts of Colonial times. For is it not true that such primitive and economical fences as that in the house at Laurel, Long Island, are quite as typical of the general process of thought of the back woods farmer as are the splendidly designed gate posts of the Oliver House in Salem, a typical example of what the conscientious architect would wish to produce, even under the most unsatisfactory conditions, and which fortunately he

can produce on those happy occasions when the right conditions present themselves?

One thing at least is illustrated by the examples shown in this issue of the Monograph Series, and that is the happy faculty possessed by the Colonial architect of breaking up the monotony of his work by a few well chosen spots of ornament. The illustrations show us, too, how the Colonial architect heeded the admonition of an early writer on architecture who in the middle of the 17th century expressed the warning to his readers, "to use, and still be sparing of antik ornaments."



ENTRANCE GATEWAY  
The Admiral Cowles House, Farmington, Connecticut









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