

# **An Examination of the Stephen Loomer House Habitant, Kings County, Nova Scotia<sup>1</sup>**

Daniel E. Norris  
Heritage Officer  
Department of Tourism and Culture

## *INTRODUCTION*

In Debra McNabb's study, *The Landscape of Eighteenth Century New England Settlement in Kings County* (1985), a large tract of land was identified as a culturally distinct element in the geography of the province of Nova Scotia. The tract of land encompasses a large number of sites which share one common feature: all of the sites were part of the eighteenth-century landscape of Kings County, and surprisingly, all remain today as part of the present twentieth-century landscape. Though many of the sites identified are part of the geographical district known as Horton Township, many are also found in the neighbouring historical district of Cornwallis Township. Such is the case with the Loomer-Goodwin house, a provincially registered heritage property located near Canning, Kings County, Nova Scotia.

A preliminary investigation of the Loomer-Goodwin House was conducted in July 1986 at the request of the owners, Olive and Ron Goodwin. The house is located in the present day community of Habitant approximately one half mile east of Canning (see Figure 1). The house displays many of the characteristics associated with an early New England Colonial form (the Dutch-Colonial House). It is a one and one-half storey gambrel-roofed house, low in the post, with a central chimney plan. The preliminary investigation of the house (see Figure 2) identified a number of interesting characteristics; notably, a fieldstone foundation, replete with a 6 foot by 8 foot chimney base; the use of post and beam construction with mortise and tenon joints; the location of the house on a well-established route within a Planter settled area; and two printed documents provided by the owners. The documents were particularly interesting because they identified two original owners who were both believed to have immigrated

---

1 I would like to acknowledge: first, the assistance of the Heritage Inventory Co-ordinators for Shelburne, Wolfville and Yarmouth, and my supervisor, Brian Cuthbertson; second, interested and informative members of the public, including David Burton and Art Pope, for technical assistance and access to information, drawings and genealogical research; third, the kind assistance of the Kings County Registry of Deeds, Kings County Museum, and Nova Scotia Department of Lands and Forests, Mapping Division; and most importantly, the home owners involved, especially Ron and Olive Goodwin, for their kind assistance and hospitality throughout my research.

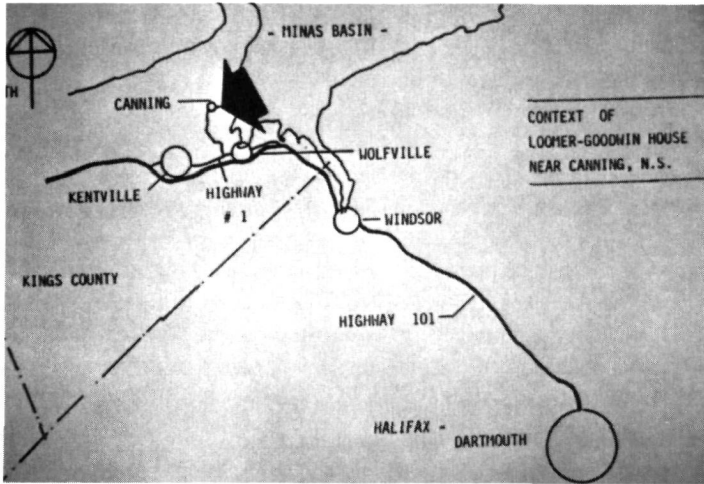


Figure 1



Figure 2 (a)

to Nova Scotia within the Planter period of settlement between 1760 and 1765.

Stephen Loomer is identified as the original owner by the present owners Ron and Olive Goodwin. They in turn based their opinions on that of the late Ira Cox, an early historian of Kings County. Mr. Cox maintained that the Loomer-Goodwin House was the oldest house in Cornwallis Township. According to Cox, the house was built by a Mr. Loomer, the materials being brought from New England by schooner and landed at the creek to the south of the property (Goodwin, 1986). A second

possible owner/builder, a Mr. Hamilton, is noted in *Old Times: Canning and Habitant* (Bickerton, 1980, 172). According to this second source, Hamilton is believed to have immigrated to the area in 1761. Interestingly, this source also reports that the house was brought from New England to Kingsport.

To ascertain which of the two sources was correct, reference was first made to Esther Clark Wright's book, *Planters and Pioneers* (1982). Wright identifies Stephen Loomer as one of the two Loomers who immigrated to Cornwallis Township in the period between 1761 and 1765. No reference to any original Planter by the name of Hamilton can be found for Cornwallis Township (although a Mr. Hamilton is found in Horton Township). Deed research was subsequently conducted by Brian Cuthbertson, Head of Heritage, Department of Tourism and Culture, to attempt to determine the history of ownership and the original owner/builder of the Loomer-Goodwin House. According to the deed search undertaken, Mr. Hamilton is likely to be the second or possibly third owner while either Simeon (Stephen's son) or Stephen Loomer are likely to be the original owners. With preliminary deed sources exhausted, a secondary line of investigation was started, an examination of site, location and genealogy.



Figure 2 (b)



Figure 2 (c)

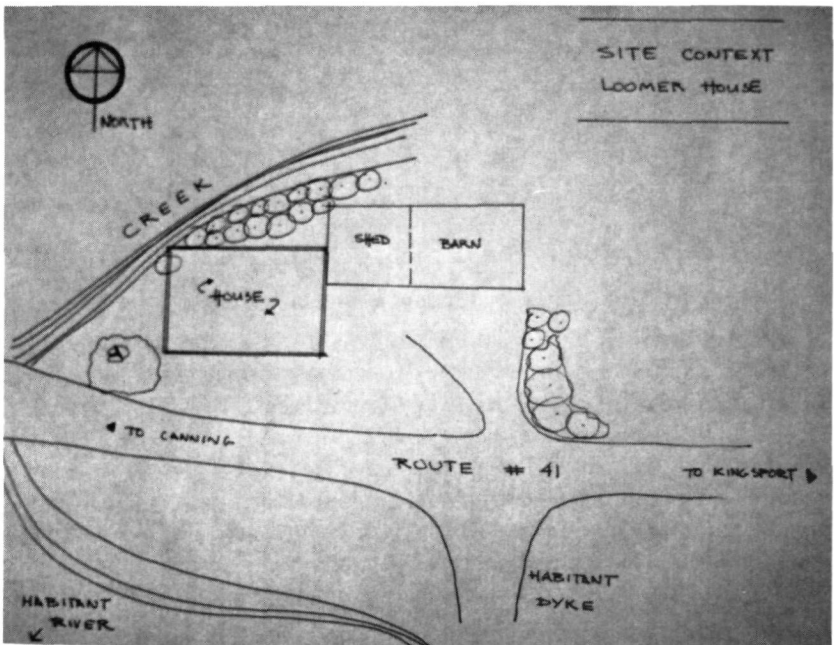


Figure 3

*HISTORY OF OWNERSHIP*

Loomer-Goodwin House  
 Habitant, Kings County, Nova Scotia

<i>DATE</i>	<i>GRANTOR</i>		<i>GRANTEE</i>	<i>Book:Page</i>
1812	Simeon and Mary Loomer	to	Oliver Hamilton (Shoemaker, Tanner)	5:309
1849	Charles Hamilton	to	John White Eaton (by mortgage)	_____
1873	J.W. Eaton	to	Frederick Eaton	33:493
1892	John Eaton	to	W.R. Porter	60:750
1900	W.R. Porter	to	George Morey	75:446
1918	George Morey	to	Fletcher McBride	19:650
1953	Fletcher McBride	to	Verge Porter	182:190
1967	Verge Porter	to	Ron and Olive Goodwin	260:695

SOURCE: Kings County Registry of Deeds, Kentville, Nova Scotia.

*SITE, LOCATION AND GENEALOGY*

The present-day site of the Loomer-Goodwin house is at the intersection of the Canning-Kingsport road immediately opposite the Habitant Dyke (see Figure 3). In the survey plan of Cornwallis Township (Eaton 1981) within the Subdivision of Lands to Grantees is noted a "S. Loomer" receiving lot #9, north of division #1 in 1762 in approximately the same location as the subject site. To determine if the S. Loomer identified by Eaton was either Simeon or Stephen Loomer, a genealogical search of the Loomer family was conducted. Kings County Courthouse Museum genealogy records (manuscript No. 91) traced the development of the Loomer family.

Stephen Loomer was born in Connecticut in May 1721, married in 1749 and removed to Nova Scotia about 1761. The exact date of removal is

Item. Then the other part of my said home farm, I give and bequeath the whole width both above and below the main road up Northward to the Creek Vault, or Land I have given to my son Stephen, Excepting the land I have given to my son Jonathan and the road of two or three rods that I have ordered to be left or laid out to go up to son Stephens Land to, and between my well beloved sons Simeon and Levi Loomers, to be Equally divided according to quantity and quality, Simeon to have the west half with the house thereon standing, and Levi to have the east half with the house standing on that half, no reference at all to be had in the division of said farm to the said houses, and to their heirs and assigns for ever.

Item. I give and bequeath to my beloved sons, Simeon, Levi and Stephen Loomer, all the remainder of the upper part, or North part of said farm that lies above the Land I have given to my said son Stephen, estimated at about thirty five acres, more or less, to be Equally divided between them my said three sons, according to quantity and quality, and to their heirs and assigns for ever.

Item. I give also to my said three beloved sons, Simeon, Levi and Stephen, the whole of my said Marsh, lying at the foot, or South end of my said farm, and thereabout, to be Equally divided between them according to quantity and quality, and to their heirs and assigns for ever.

Item. And my Mountain Lot or Tract of Land, containing three hundred Acres, I give one hundred Acres of the same, to my beloved sons Simeon, Levi and Stephen, to be Equally divided between them, and to their heirs and assigns for ever.

Item. And the other, or remainder two hundred Acres of my said Mountain Lot or Tract of Land, I give and bequeath the whole thereof between my four dear and well beloved Daughters, namely, Rebecca Jackson, Hannah Pinco, Estor West, and Mary Babcock, to be Equally divided between them, and to their heirs and assigns for ever.

Item. I will and require that all my just Debt and funeral Charges, be duly paid out of my personal Estate by my Executor, hereafter Named, and the remainder of my Estate if any, more or less, I give to be divided Equally, between all my said Children, sons and daughters, and to their heirs and assigns for ever.

unknown; however, parish records note the birth of a Stephen Loomer child in Norwich, Connecticut, in 1760, and a subsequent birth of a child to Stephen and Hannah Loomer in Cornwallis in 1762. In the genealogical records a missing piece of the ownership puzzle was identified; the mention of a will probated by Stephen Loomer in 1790 (Kentville, N.S.). In this will Stephen Loomer makes note of the land parcels he gave to his children. Most kindly to present historians, he notes: "Simeon (b 1758) to have the west half with the house thereon Standing (see Figure 4)."

This parcel of land can be subsequently traced to Oliver Hamilton (in 1812) and then through subsequent owners continuously to Ron and Olive Goodwin, completing the history of the property ownership. Clearly, the process of deed searching and then seeking out property mapping, to return to deed and probate documents can be a profitable process.

One can, therefore, with reasonable certainty, conclude that the Loomer-Goodwin House was built between the time that Stephen Loomer arrived in Cornwallis (c. 1761) and the time that he passed on the land and house to Simeon Loomer in 1790. To arrive at a more precise date, our investigation turned to a third source of information, the architectural style and construction of the dwelling.

### *ARCHITECTURAL STYLE AND CONSTRUCTION*

Peter Ennals in his article "The Yankee Origins of Bluenose Vernacular Architecture" (1982), argues that: "It is house form that provides the most evident landscape similarity between Nova Scotia and New England." The particular architectural style being examined here — the gambrel-roofed house — also reflects a similarity of style and form within both New England and Nova Scotia contexts. The gambrel-roofed house style, known to have largely developed in New England, was subsequently transported to Nova Scotia. It was my hope that by tracing the origins of the style in New England and its development in Nova Scotia, that I could narrow the potential dates of the construction of the Loomer-Goodwin House to a range of ten or fewer years.

The gambrel-roofed house style first came to this author's attention when illustrations were being selected for the publication of *A Nova Scotian's Guide To Built Heritage* (1985). This publication, produced by the Nova Scotia Department of Tourism and Culture, notes fifteen principal styles of architecture found throughout the province. The inclusion of a gambrel-roof house style, described in the guidebook as an example of the "Dutch-Colonial" style (see Figure 5) created a debate even before the guidebook was published. The style is known to occur in New England in areas settled by Dutch migrants, but is not typical of homes built by the Dutch in Holland (Embury, 1913; Kimball, 1966), nor typical of homes built by the Dutch who came to Nova Scotia. Our in-house debate of the definition and labelling of the style ended when no more appropriate title

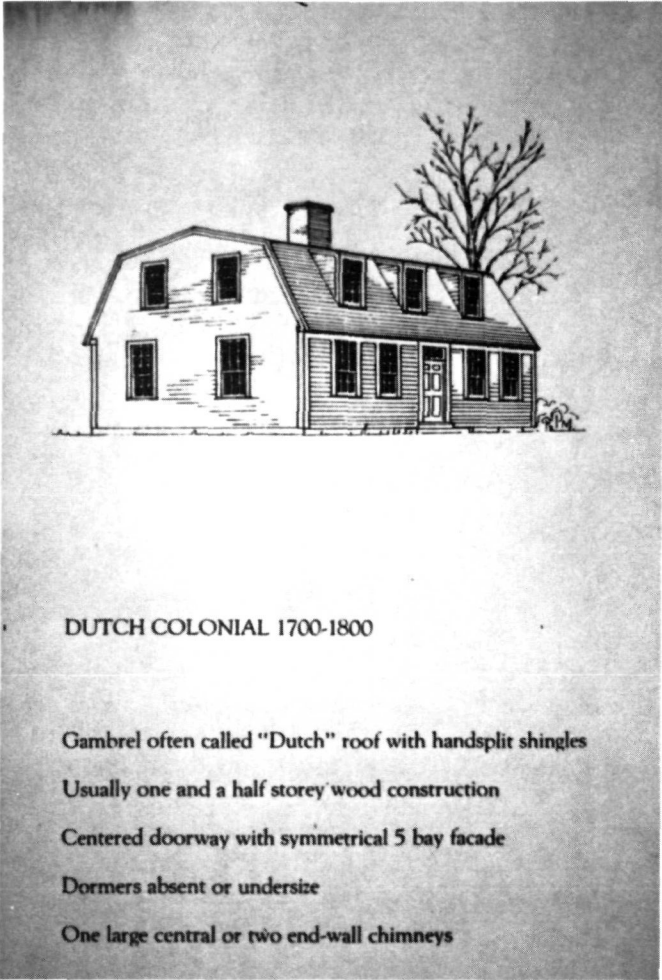


Figure 5

could be found; like other texts (McAlester 1984; Gowans 1986) the name Dutch-Colonial was then utilized in our text. Virginia and Lee McAlester (1984) suggest that there are three principal sub-types of the Dutch-Colonial style: the urban tradition, the rural tradition, unflared eaves; and the rural tradition, flared eaves.

The Loomer-Goodwin house is probably best described as part of the rural tradition, unflared eaves. The knowledge that the Loomer-Goodwin house matched a particular style category introduced a more specific approach for this study: that of isolating only rural tradition, non-flared



eaved gambrel-roofed houses, in areas settled by Planters in Nova Scotia, and then comparing these houses (in terms of construction methods and dates of construction) to the Loomer-Goodwin house.

To isolate one single type of style within an entire province which contains many areas of Planter settlement is all but impossible without a comprehensive inventory. Fortunately, for historians and researchers, Nova Scotia is presently developing such an inventory. This inventory of built heritage, which contains architectural, historical, genealogical and contextual information for over 5000 properties province-wide proved to be an invaluable resource. All of the properties in the inventory date from before 1914, and a surprisingly large number are built before 1800. By referring to this information base, three comparable houses which fit the three independent criteria, eighteenth century, gambrel-roofed, in areas settled by Planters were identified: the de Gannes-Cosby house in Annapolis Royal, the Biggs house in the Gasperaux Valley, and the Clements house in Chebogue, Yarmouth County.

### *CONSTRUCTION*

With this pool of structures, an in-depth study of the Loomer-Goodwin house construction was conducted. The Loomer-Goodwin house is a 24 foot by 28 foot, 4 inch wood frame structure built on a fieldstone foundation with walls measuring approximately 4 feet in height, varying from 18 to 20 inches thick (these fieldstone walls are in turn capped by a 20 inch lift of quarried stone). A number of unusual framing features on the ground floor were noted. First, the beams supporting the eastern half of the house appear to be different in size and orientation from the western half. Second, it is unusual to see two major first floor beams that do not connect to a nearby chimney base. Third, and this is most unusual, there is a stone wall which exists midway through the cellar that does not support any overhead beams or walls (see Figure 6).

These three unusual construction features when taken singularly may simply indicate poorly carried out renovations; however, when these three observations are considered in the context of similar alterations in other eighteenth-century structures that I have observed, they suggest that the house has been constructed in two parts: an earlier eastern section with a later western addition. Additional structural information which might be used to support such a proposal, includes a variation in floor plank from the eastern (up to 20 inches) to western halves (up to 14 inches) and a variation in floor joint sizes from (4 x 5 inches) in the eastern half to (3 x 5 inches) in the western half of the structure.

These types of structural variations in the Loomer-Goodwin house can be compared to the structural variations we found in another eighteenth-century house in this region: the DeWolf house in Wolfville, Nova Scotia. The recognition of unusual structural variations in the DeWolf House led

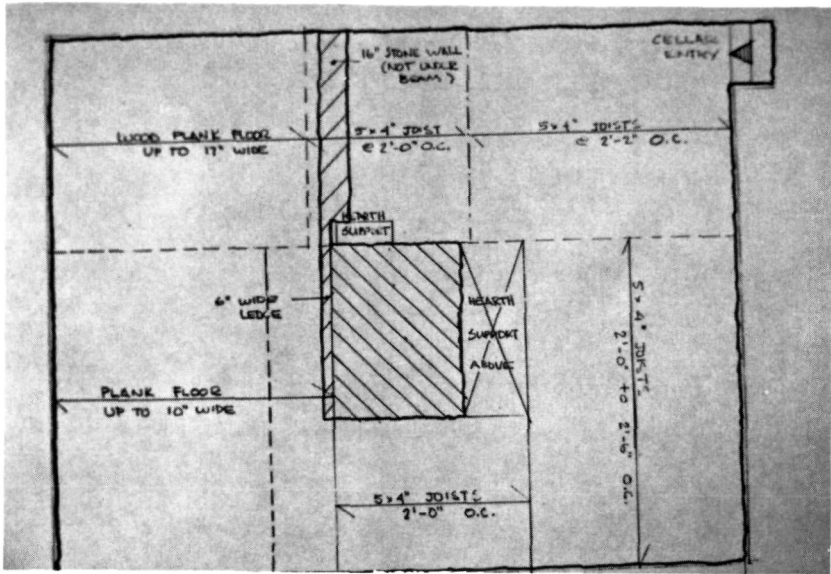


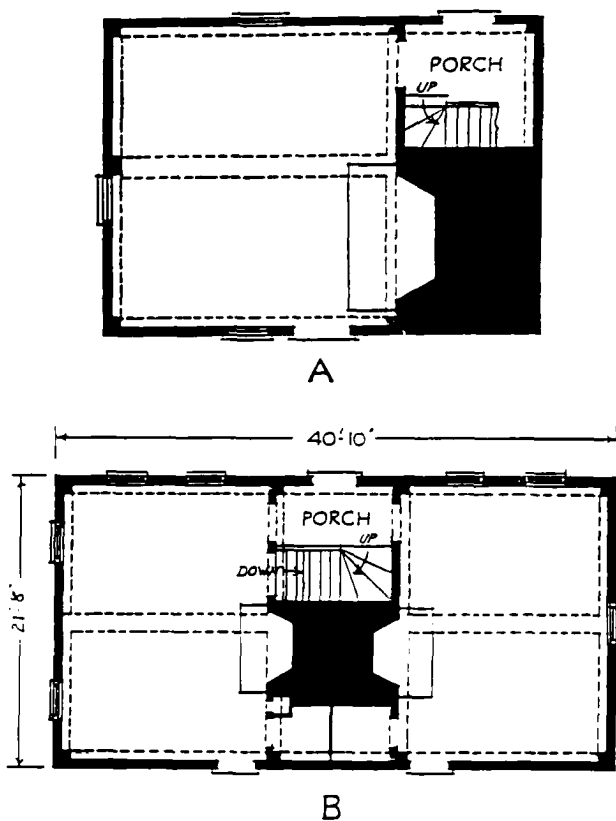
Figure 6

me to propose that the house was constructed in four stages, over time, each reflecting a particular configuration of dwelling and identifiable date.

To assess this evolutionary possibility with reference to the Loomer-Goodwin house, I first examined a number of texts which document early New England building configurations. In particular, the work of Martin S. Briggs (1932) is helpful here, because Briggs illustrates two common seventeenth-century New England house plans: the hall and parlour plan and the central chimney plan (see Figure 7). If one looks for a moment at the hall and parlour plan and then adds a similar living space on the right side of the chimney, the plan could evolve to look like the lower diagram, or a central chimney plan.

A two-bay plan with an addition can therefore look like a five-bay, central chimney plan. With these plan configurations in mind, I wondered if the Loomer-Goodwin house had indeed been built in two stages, each within an identifiable time frame? To assess the possibility I looked at three other rural traditional, gambrel-roofed houses with unflared eaves: the Biggs house in Gaspereaux, the Clements house in Chebogue and the de Gannes-Cosby house in Annapolis Royal.

The four houses identified thus far illustrate a number of basic similarities of construction: all are framed in post and beam construction; all share similarly styled gambrel-roofs; all buildings share similar five-bay



71. Plans of (A) Thos. Lee House, E. Lyme, Conn., before alteration, and (B) Older Williams House, Wethersfield, Conn. (Adapted by permission from J. F. Kelly's 'Early Domestic Architecture of Connecticut')

Figure 7

plans (two with central chimneys and two with end wall); and most interestingly, all three houses displayed varying degrees of structural evidence of being constructed in two stages, over time. That all four houses studied should exhibit similar variations in construction suggested to me that I was dealing with a rather homogeneous group of structures. Returning to the ownership information noted on the site forms, three quite remarkable findings could be noted: first, all four houses have deed evidence which suggests that they were built or enlarged between 1760 and 1769; second, three of the houses (Loomer-Goodwin, de Gannes-Cosby,

Biggs) show clear evidence of being built on or adjacent to Acadian cellars, and third, two of the houses (Loomer-Goodwin and Clements) have local documentary records that suggest that these houses were built in New England, dismantled, shipped to Nova Scotia and rebuilt.

### *SUMMARY*

The comprehensive research approach taken here, which includes reference to deed information, mapping, probate records, genealogical notes *and* architectural evidence, suggests four conclusions. First, the Loomer-Goodwin house was probably built by Stephen Loomer, a Planter, between the years 1761 and 1769. This conclusion, based on documentary and structural evidence supports the local belief that the house was built in 1764. Second, the Loomer-Goodwin house style (gambrel) and sub-type (rural tradition, unflared eaves) appears to be associated with Planter settlement in Nova Scotia. Third, the method of construction (in a number of stages over time) parallels building practices in New England. This finding has significant implications for both our interpretation of eighteenth-century architectural forms in Nova Scotia and pioneer family forms. Fourth, there is a good deal of evidence which suggests that the gambrel-roofed Planter houses in Nova Scotia are built on or adjacent to pre-expulsion Acadian cellars. This finding is not particularly surprising given the small time period that elapsed between the two periods of settlement in Nova Scotia. Rather, the value of the finding rests with the new potential to examine and explore buildings and sites that bridged the material culture gap between Planter and Acadian societies.

The research conducted highlights the need for, and advantages of, a comprehensive approach for the study of built heritage. The comprehensive approach advocated here encompasses architectural, documentary and oral research, analysis and theory building. In particular, I would like to emphasize the importance of studying building construction. For far too long the value of Nova Scotia's built heritage resource has been underrated by the penchant of historical research to examine only documentary sources of information. The most obvious source of information, the building itself, has largely been overlooked. The building, analyzed in terms of its style, construction and design can help the researcher to discover the continuum of historical, architectural and cultural contexts; contexts not evident from documentary references alone. In conclusion, a comprehensive approach is advocated here, for all examinations of built heritage. Such an approach enables the researcher to develop a holistic understanding of a house, its inhabitants and their place in time.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bickerton, A. Marie. *Old Timers: Canning and Habitant*. Canning, Kings County, 1980.
- Briggs, Martin S. *The Homes of the Pilgrim Fathers in England and America*. New York, 1932.
- Crowell, F.E. "F.E. Crowell Scrapbook of New Englanders in Nova Scotia," Yarmouth Microfilm, Kings County Courthouse Museum, Kentville, Nova Scotia.
- Eaton, E.L. "The Survey Plan of Cornwallis Township, Kings County," *The Nova Scotia Historical Review*, 1, 2(December 1981), 16-33.
- Eaton, A.W.H. *The History of Kings County*. Salem, Massachusetts, 1910. reprint Belleville, Ontario, 1972.
- Embury, A. *The Dutch Colonial House*. New York, 1913.
- Ennals, Peter. "The Yankee Origins of Bluenose Vernacular Architecture," *The American Review of Canadian Studies*, 12, 2(Summer 1982), 5-21.
- Goodwin, Olive. Miscellaneous notes, 1986.
- Gowans, Alan. *The Comfortable House*. Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1986.
- Heritage Section, N.S. Department of Tourism and Culture. *A Nova Scotian's Guide to Built Heritage*. Halifax, 1985.
- Kimball, S.F. *Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and of the Early Republic*. New York, 1966.
- Loomer, Addie E. "Descendants of Stephen Loomer of New London, Connecticut," Iowa, 1959. Manuscript 91, King's County Courthouse Museum, Kentville, Nova Scotia.
- McAlester, Virginia and Lee. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. Toronto, 1984.
- McNabb, Debra. *The Landscape of Eighteenth Century New England Settlement in Kings County, Nova Scotia — A Geographical Study*. Halifax, 1985.
- Wright, E.C. *Planters and Pioneers: Nova Scotia, 1749-1775*. Hantsport, 1982.