The Evolution of the Nineteenth-Century American Dining Room: From Sitting Room to Separate Room

Leslie Susan Berman

University of Pennsylvania

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THE EVOLUTION OF THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY AMERICAN DINING ROOM: FROM SITTING ROOM TO SEPARATE ROOM

Leslie Susan Berman

A THESIS

in

Historic Preservation

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

MASTER OF SCIENCE

1997

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Acknowledgments

The process of researching and writing this thesis has been long and rewarding. Several people have helped to make this a pleasurable as well as educational experience. I would like to thank Gail Winkler for her sage advice, encouragement and unwavering confidence in my ability to complete this task on time. Elizabeth Laurent was kind enough to offer her editing abilities as well as advice.

I would also like to thank Roger Moss and the staff at the Athenaeum of Philadelphia, for maintaining a remarkable collection of architectural books and for making me feel at home for the past year while I did my research. I would especially like to thank Bruce Lavert, who designated me his “low maintenance” researcher and extended me all of the privileges that rank afforded.

My parents and my family have been an unending source of love and support. Without them few of my accomplishments would have been achieved. With them in my corner, I know nothing is impossible.

Finally, I would like to thank my two cats, Cezanne and Sasha who seem willing to endure anything I put them through with good humor. Cezanne is credited with making me take breaks by sitting in front of the computer screen when he felt I had had enough, and Sasha, for his valiant attempt to sit only lap through the writing of this paper. My legs and arms will never be the same.

This paper is dedicated in loving memory of Seriozha, feline family member, who’s short life was a model of courage and determination in the face of adversity. He brought me great joy.
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To Dine, dine. v. n. [diner, French.] To eat the chief meal about the middle of the day. *Clarendon*

Dining-Room, s. [dine and room.] The principal apartment of the house. *Taylor*

*Dr. Johnson’s Dictionary, 1805*
Chapter 1

Introduction

In researching the evolution of the American dining room from 1790 to 1855, it is necessary to look at the architectural development, the social influences that effect the architecture and actual accounts of how people lived during the time period. Architectural developments can be traced through the architectural literature being published in America during the study period. The social influences can be traced through literature describing social etiquette and domestic economy. Finally, to understand how people lived in and used their houses, diaries, travel accounts, paintings and actual household inventories can be consulted.

Chapter Descriptions

The second chapter will address the architectural development of the dining room from 1790 to 1855. The evolution of the dining room in America can be traced by reviewing the different forms of architectural books available during the study period. The influence of England will be addressed, and the chapter will show how the concept of a specific room set aside for dining migrated from its beginnings in France in the 1630’s to England in the early eighteenth century and finally to America in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This chapter will also address the evolution of the dining room concept from the Upper to the Middle Class as money was more widely distributed

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1 While the wealthiest members of society often where importing books directly from England, and therefore had access to the most current fashion, these books were not widely available to the building trade.

2 All household inventories used for this thesis were taken from residential estates.
due to the Industrial Revolution. The chapter will also focus on the influence of John Claudius Loudon in the 1830’s and the subsequent influence of Andrew Jackson Downing in the 1850’s.

The third chapter will use a variety of different types of books, such as social etiquette manuals, domestic economy books, travel accounts and diaries to depict how dining rooms were used during the study period. Domestic economy books and etiquette manuals are forms of prescriptive literature primarily written by women for women. These books offer insights into what women were being told about how to run and maintain a proper household. The role of domestic servants will be described peripherally as they were pivotal to the dining experience. When dining was a decentralized function, servants moved the dining furniture throughout the house, setting it up for meals and storing it after the meal was complete. In the nineteenth century, servants became important players in the rituals surrounding formal dining, especially in the gradual shift from dining English style (family style today) to “à la Russe”, where food was presented from the sideboard.

Different dining styles will be addressed and travel accounts, a valuable form of descriptive literature, will be used to show how dining style changed over the study period. This chapter will also briefly discuss specialized forms of dining furniture.

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3 Prescriptive literature describes what something, such as a dining room, ought to be. Architectural guides, house pattern books, etiquette manuals, books on domestic economy and magazines are forms of prescriptive literature that will be consulted for this thesis.

4 Descriptive literature tells what things actually were. Travel accounts, diaries, paintings, and household inventories are the forms of descriptive literature that will be consulted for this thesis. These household inventories were gathered and transcribed by students in the Preservation Program, Graduate School of Fine Arts, University of Pennsylvania and are in the collection of the Athenaeum of Philadelphia.
including dining tables and sideboards. The details of dining room decoration will be covered in a very general context only, as this is not the focus of the topic.

The fourth chapter will focus on another descriptive source, namely 146 household inventories recorded between 1794 and 1855. The inventories had to meet two requirements for inclusion in this study. First, each inventory had to list the contents by individually labeled rooms so room designations could be documented. Second, the decedent had to have lived in an urban setting such as Philadelphia or New York City. Suburban areas around Philadelphia, such as Germantown, were used but inventories from more rural Bucks county and Chester county were omitted.

The inventories will be used to test the evolution of the dining room through room designations and furniture placement. The economic levels of the decedents combined with the room designations of the inventories will suggest the rate at which the specialized dining room was adopted by urban Philadelphians. Appendix ‘A’ contains a chronological list of the inventories used, including the former residence and occupation of the decedent, the value of the household goods, and when available, the total value of each estate.

The final chapter contains a brief summation of the findings from each chapter along with recommendations for the interpretation of dining rooms for museum curators. The suggestions include where to locate dining room furniture within the house as well as what additional furniture forms should be placed within the dining room.
Chapter 2

Architectural Development: 1790 - 1830

The first step was to review builder’s guide books and house pattern books as the two prevailing types of literature available to craftsmen and their clients. There is a distinct difference between the two types of publications. Builder’s guides contained discussions of the history of architecture, the five orders of architecture and the geometry required to construct a building. Guides were mainly illustrated with plates showing the five orders of architecture and details of buildings both structural and ornamental. Guides also contained plans and elevations of houses but these were clearly of secondary importance. This type of handbook was the earliest used in America, appearing prior to the Revolution in 1775.6

The second type of handbook was the house pattern book. This publication provided a graphic guide to house design and was primarily composed of plates and descriptions of house plans and elevations.7 These pattern books became very popular during the 1840’s and were the dominant form of architectural book during the second half of the nineteenth century.8

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6 Hitchcock, American Architectural Books, iii.
7 Hitchcock, American Architectural Books, iii.
8 Hitchcock, American Architectural Books, iii.
Architectural handbooks and builder’s guides arrived in eighteenth-century America with the new immigrants. Since Britain was the major source of immigrants as well as the world’s wealthiest nation, most of the handbooks were English. The first architectural book published in America was printed in Philadelphia in 1775; it was The British Architect by Abraham Swan, first published in England thirty years earlier.9 Reprints of English guide books dominated in America well into the nineteenth century; typically, these books were anywhere from ten to thirty years old before being printed in America, which naturally left most Americans stylistically behind Europe and England.10

For the purposes of this study, the earliest builder’s guide examined was published in 1792. During the last decade of the eighteenth century, William Pain and Asher Benjamin produced the most important architectural books.11 Pain was a prominent Englishman and writer of books on architecture and joinery.12 Pain’s first book to be reprinted in the United States was The Practical Builder; or Workman’s General Assistant published in Boston in 1792. This reprint was taken from the fourth edition, originally published in London in 1787.13 This book contained information on

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9 Hitchcock, American Architectural Books, iii.

10 Not only can the time lag be seen in the reprint of The British Architect by Abraham Swan but also in books by William Pain and others. The Builder’s Pocket Treasure by William Pain was published in America in 1794 from the original edition published in England in 1763.


the history of architecture, the five orders of architecture and details of construction for both structure and decorative elements. Along with the plates illustrating the technical information, six plates of house plans were included. Three plates were identified as “Plan and Elevation of a Gentleman's House” while the other three were “Plan and Elevation of a House for a Large family,” “Plan and Elevation of a Dwelling House,” and “Plan and Elevation of a Farm House, Barn and Stable.” The plans illustrated in this book range from the fairly simple, containing only four rooms and a center hall, to very complex design with twenty-five rooms. Each plan contains either dimensions for the rooms or a graphic scale but none indicate actual room use. This characteristic is common to all the builder's guides of this period.

The second book by Pain to be published in America was The Builder's Pocket Treasure reprinted in Boston in 1794. The original version of this book had first been published in London in 1763. Of the fifty-five plates in this book, there was only one house plan; its rooms were dimensioned but not labeled as to use. In both Pain books, great attention was given to the design of facades and general exterior appearance but negligible information regarding the interior layouts.

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14 William Pain, The Practical Builder; or, Workman's General Assistant (Boston: John Norman, 1792), plates 75 - 81.

15 All of the Builder's Guides published between 1792 and 1800 were consulted with one exception, The British Architect by Abraham Swan published in 1794. None of the plates found in these books indicated room use.

16 See Note No. 9. According to Hitchcock this was “the first architectural work issued by William Norman, q.v. The English editions of Pain had been popular and influential in America since before the Revolution.”
The Practical House Carpenter by Pain was published in Boston in 1796. In this book Pain altered his approach to house plans by clearly labeling and dimensioning the rooms for most of the plans included in the book. Of the eight separate house patterns provided, only one lacked room designations. This book also differed from Pain’s earlier work by including more house plans and by showing very large and sophisticated house designs. Only the smallest house plan, containing ten rooms on the principal floor, had no room designations. The other seven plans each contained many more rooms on the principal floor and each had at least one designated breakfast or dining room. Of these, five plans contained both a breakfast room and a dining room. While each plan was labeled separately, they were given vague labels such as “Plan and Elevation of a Gentleman’s House” and “Plan of a Large Grand House.” These designs were clearly meant for the English gentry and aristocracy who could afford such elaborate houses and the architects to build them. People of these classes could also afford the large staff of servants needed to operate and maintain such dwellings. It is not surprising that house designs of this type contained designated dining rooms for the English Upper Classes had been using specific rooms for dining since early in the eighteenth century.17 For many Americans, Pain’s book was their introduction to specific rooms for dining.

In 1797 Asher Benjamin published The Country Builder’s Assistant, the first architectural handbook written and published in America for Americans.18 Benjamin

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18 Hitchcock, American Architectural Books, iii..
(1773 - 1845) was an architect and author from Greenfield, Massachusetts.\textsuperscript{19} According to the Dictionary of American Biography, “through his books “late Colonial” details and designs were broadcast throughout New England, as English ideas had been broadcast by English books in colonial times.” Although Benjamin included many of his own ideas in his architectural books, he also drew heavily on the designs of Peter Nicholson, a British architectural and technical author who published from 1792 to 1841.\textsuperscript{20}

The books published by Pain and Benjamin devoted a very small number of plates to house plans. The Country Builder’s Assistant contained only two plates, one for a two story house and the other for a three story house. While each room was dimensioned on the plans, none of the rooms was labeled by function. A second edition of the book was published in 1798. The only difference in the two editions was the inclusion in the later book of a third plate entitled the “Plan of a Palladian House.”

The major difference between the books produced by Pain and Benjamin was the scale of the house plans. The plans in The Country Builder’s Assistant were smaller in scale than those in the books produced by Pain. These smaller houses were referred to as villas. A villa was defined as “the country house of a person of competence or wealth sufficient to build and maintain it.”\textsuperscript{21}


\textsuperscript{21} This definition was taken from Andrew Jackson Downing, The Architecture of Country Houses (1850; reprint , with introduction by J. Stewart Johnson, New York: Dover Publications, 1969), 257. Downing added “that a villa is a country house of larger accommodation, requiring the care of at least three or more servants.”
For Americans, the villa or country house, was the home of its most leisurely and educated class of citizens.\textsuperscript{22}

The next American architect to publish was Owen Biddle who, in 1805, issued \textit{The Young Carpenter's Assistant; or A System of Architecture Adapted to the Style of Building in the United States}. Like earlier publications, this book contained only two plates devoted to house plans. Plate number 36 showed a plan for a small house in which none of the rooms were either labeled or dimensioned. Plate number 37 was a plan for a large house where, for the first time in an American builder's guide, the rooms were labeled as to function. Each room was designated by a letter referring the reader to a room description on the adjacent page. This plan contained a dining room, with a recess for a sideboard, in the rear of the principal floor. The plan for the house was illustrated with three more plates showing sections through the house. This book heralded an important change in architectural books. From this point forward room labels became standard information provided with house plans.\textsuperscript{23}

In 1806, with the publication of Benjamin's \textit{The American Builder's Companion; or, A New System of Architecture}, room labels and dimensions were combined for a variety of house types and sizes. Of the forty-four plates included in the book, five were house plans. Of these plans, three were town houses and two were country houses. Four of the five plans indicated either a dining room or a breakfast room, with only the small

\textsuperscript{22} Downing, \textit{The Architecture of Country Houses}, 257-258.

\textsuperscript{23} While this researcher cannot state conclusively that every plan published after Owen Biddle's 1806 edition of \textit{The Young Carpenter's Assistant}, contained room designations, all of the books used for this study contained room designations.
country house Plate No. 37 having no separate dining space. All the plans locate the
dining room on the principal floor and two of the plans show the dining room opening
into the main parlor. This double parlor configuration allows the two rooms to function
either separately or as one large room. In most of these plans when a dining room was
provided, it was located in the rear of the principal floor. This space was typically a less
formal area of the house reserved for family members. Only Plate No. 35 of town house
shows the dining room located in the front of the principal floor. This house is quite
sophisticated as it also contains a “breakfast” room located at the rear of the principal
floor. For this house the breakfast room would clearly be the location of less formal
family meals.

During the first decade of the nineteenth century both Benjamin and Biddle
stressed the need for American architecture. This can be seen in their book titles which
openly state that they are providing a style of building adapted for the United States.\(^2\)
Although both men stressed their independence from English sources, the strong
influence of English style would remain prevalent in the United States until the middle of
the nineteenth century.\(^3\) Evidence of this claim is found in the following observation
made by Robert Sutcliff during a visit to friends living near Washington, D.C., in
September of 1804:

\(^2\) In 1805 Owen Biddle published *The Young Carpenter’s Assistant; or A System of Architecture Adapted
to the Style of Building in the United States* and in 1806 Asher Benjamin followed with his publication *The
American Builder’s Companion; or, A New System of Architecture Particularly Adapted to the Present
Style of Building in the United States of America.*

\(^3\) Hitchcock, *American Architectural Books,* iii.
The family came over early in the settlement of Maryland by Lord Baltimore; and the bricks of which the house is built, they informed me, were brought over in the same ship with their progenitors. The house is constructed upon the plan of our old English mansions; and the garden is laid out in the old English style.\textsuperscript{26} In 1810, Biddle expressed his frustration over the lack of American architectural independence in the preface of the second edition of \textit{The Young Carpenter's Assistant}:

Nothing on Architecture has heretofore appeared in this country, where the field for improvement in every useful art and science is, perhaps more extensive than in any other. Why there has not, appears to me a matter of surprise, whilst we have among us men of talents, fully acquainted with the subject, some of whom are also men of leisure: perhaps they have not viewed the subject in the same light, or given to it the same degree of importance that I have.\textsuperscript{27}

Biddle's comments presaged the growing number of architectural books to be written by Americans in the second quarter of the nineteenth century.

During the years between 1790 and 1829 many changes occurred within the realm of residential architecture. As discussed, the earliest pattern books available to American builders and carpenters were reprints of English pattern books. American builders and their clients were placed in a position of trying to adapt designs intended for upper-class English audiences to the needs of a mainly less prosperous, and certainly less sophisticated American audience. Clearly, these early books were not concerned with advocating interior room usage and no words of advice were given regarding the types of

\textsuperscript{26} Robert Sutcliff, \textit{Travels in some parts of North America in the years 1804, 1805 and 1806} (York: C. Peacock, 1811), 43.

\textsuperscript{27} Owen Biddle, \textit{The Young Carpenter's Assistant} 2nd. ed. (Philadelphia: Johnson and Warner, 1810)
rooms a “gentleman” might require or where those rooms should be located in relation to one another.

As the nineteenth century progressed and prosperity became more widespread, pattern books began illustrating house plans with room designations. Of the thirty-three architectural guide books reviewed for this study, nearly half of those published between 1800 and 1829 contained specific room designations and well over two-thirds of those plans located a dining room. Of the plans with dining rooms, most were located at the rear of the house either as a separate room or in conjunction with the front parlor. Only in 1821, when John Haviland published *The Builder’s Assistant*, did the dining room move to the front of the house in a prominent position equal to the main parlor or drawing room.28

**Architectural Development: 1830 - 1840**

With the decade of the 1830’s came a new group of architectural books. Although Benjamin remained popular, he was joined by the likes of Minard Lafever (1797-1854), Edward Shaw (1784-?), and Chester Hills (dates unknown). These new writers followed in the traditions established by their predecessors by publishing guide books containing similar information on the history of architecture and the five orders of architecture. As with earlier books, the plates used to illustrate the books were primarily of architectural details and not house plans. The typical guide book contained only a few

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28 John Haviland, *The Builder’s Assistant* Vol. 3 (Philadelphia: John Bioren, 1821), plate 109 “The Ground Plan of a Country House.” This plan for the summer residence of M. B. Moody, Esq. located in Haverhill, Massachusetts, is formal enough to contain separate spaces for the dining room and breakfast room.
plates devoted to house plans and some contained no plates at all. Since all of these books were addressing the same audience, one can only speculate that author’s continued to reiterate the architectural background information to give an aspect of credibility to their work.

Of the plans being offered to the American public, most contained a dining room on the principal floor. Examples of this arrangement can be found in Minard Lafever’s *The Young Builder’s General Instructor* (1829) which contained plates for a town house, a country house, a country summer residence, and a farm cottage. The plans for the town house and the country house showed two communicating parlors; in the town house no dining room was designated but in the country house the double parlor was described as “a large room for dining parties.” The plan for the “Country Summer Residence” was larger and more sophisticated, designating both a dining room and a breakfast room.

During the period 1829 to 1839, seventeen books of the general builder’s guide type were published in America. Of these books, ten were reviewed for this study and combined they offered twenty different house plans. Of twenty plans, nineteen indicated

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29 The first book published by Minard Lafever in 1829, *The Young Builder’s General Instructor* contained only four plates devoted to house plans which was more than the typical two plates found in books such as Chester Hill’s *The Builder’s Guide* published in 1834 and Minard Lafever’s 1838 edition of *The Modern Practice of Staircase and Handrail Construction*. Asher Benjamin and Edward Shaw included no plates of house designs in their guide books published during the 1830’s.

30 Minard Lafever, *The Young Builder’s General Instructor* (Newark: W. Tuttle & Co., 1829), plate 44. This plate also shows separate rooms designated as “parlors.”

31 William H Jordy, “Chronological Short-Title List” in *American Architectural Books* by Henry Russell Hitchcock, 2nd ed. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1976), pp. 137 &138. As the list indicates many more architectural books were published during the years 1829 to 1839 than the seventeen that contained applicable topics and were reviewed for this thesis.
a specific room for eating, either labeled for dining or breakfast. Twelve plans designated a dining room, five contained both a dining room and breakfast room, and two designated a breakfast room only. This indicates a much greater acceptance by American architectural writers of the concept of a space set aside specifically for the function of dining. Only a decade earlier dining rooms were less common, occurring in only three quarters of the plans surveyed.

Another change during the 1830's was the sophistication of the house plans being offered. As American authors relied less on the English designs for inspiration and developed their own designs, the types of house plans became simpler. This can be seen in the plans of Lafever and Hills, whose designs were symmetrical and contained only essential rooms.\textsuperscript{32} Another reason for this change in sophistication is that the English plans were for houses much larger and more complex than those required in the United States. Most English country houses were built on large parcels of land and staffed by many servants. Even modified forms of these grand estates were not required in the United States until the second half of the nineteenth century.

**The Influence of John Claudius Loudon (1783-1843)**

One of the most significant contributors to the field of architectural literature during the 1830’s was John Claudius Loudon whose book *An Encyclopedia of Cottage, Farm, and Villa Architecture and Furniture*, was published in London in 1833. This was a new kind of book, literally a compendium that contained information about

architectural and furniture styles, advice for planning both interiors and exteriors, how to situate a house on the property, and design a garden. Both men and women could obtain advice from Loudon on how to build and furnish a fashionable home of varying size and style. Although Loudon included plans for villas, he was actually writing for Middle Class men and women who had recently become prosperous enough to think about architecture and decoration and luxuries of life. As stated in the book:

In countries where all the inhabitants are in possession of equal rights, every industrious individual, not living in a town, will possess a cottage and a garden; and every man who has been successful in his pursuits, and has, by them, obtained pecuniary independence, may possess a villa. A villa we intend, in this Book, to consider as a country residence, with land attached, a portion of which, surrounding the house, is laid out as a pleasure-ground; or, in other words, with a view to recreation and enjoyment, more than profit. According to this view of the subject, it is not necessary that the dwelling of the villa should be large, or the land surrounding it extensive; the only essential requisites are, that the possessor should be a man of some wealth, and either possess taste himself, or have sense enough to call to his assistance the taste and judgment of others, who profess to practice this branch of the art of design.33

For the first time a book gave detailed descriptions of the arrangement of the rooms within the dwelling. As with previous builder’s guides, this “encyclopedia” contained plates showing house plans with room labels and dimensions, but, unlike the previous publications, specific details regarding the room location and appearance were also included. The following is typical of the information one could learn about a particular room:

The Entrance-Hall, in regard to character and size, must depend upon the scale of the principal apartments. If the latter are spacious and elegant, the

hall should be large and handsome: indeed, an old English residence would not be in good keeping without a spacious hall, as it was formerly the dining-room and place of rendezvous for the servants and retainers; and, in a Grecian mansion, a large entrance-hall is necessary for effect.\textsuperscript{34}

The description tells the reader not only what size a room should be but why the size is important and even gives a slight background as to the functional purpose of the room. Loudon also indicated how rooms could be appropriately decorated as indicated by this description of a dining room:

Here I would have double doors. We will suppose the room of the same width as the hall, but six or eight feet shorter. The walls covered with old oak wainscot; the ceiling rising from them with a slight cove to the flat compartment, which, would be formed into panels of various shapes by rather heavy moldings of stucco. Scattered over the whole would be groups of fruit and flowers, shields of arms, and three pendant ornaments to support bronze or gilt lamps.\textsuperscript{35}

For the first time, a householder could, with a single source, be assured of what was stylish and appropriate for his new residence. He could find out what type of furniture was suitable and where to place the pieces within each room. Loudon went so far as to tell the reader how to use specific rooms. In the case of the dining room he recommended that except for a very large house:

...it is usual to take every meal in the dining-room, except tea. A regular breakfast-room is not, therefore, generally necessary in a house of moderate size; and it is desirable, on many accounts, to have no more sitting rooms than those which are in constant use.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{34} Loudon, Encyclopedia, 794.

\textsuperscript{35} Loudon, Encyclopedia, 799.

\textsuperscript{36} Loudon, Encyclopedia, 800.
From this description one can begin to understand how the middle-class English audience learned of the dining room as a special use space. Here dining rooms are being advocated for family use at all meals, not just for formal meals with guests. It is important however, to state that dining rooms had been in use since early in the eighteenth century in England. This was not the case in the United States. But the idea of the dining room was gaining in popularity in America and the publication of Loudon’s *Encyclopedia* had a wide-ranging effect in America where the book was widely distributed. The impact of the information contained in this book continued for decades after the initial publication.

**Architectural Development: 1840 - 1855**

During the 1840’s a change took place in the types of architectural books being published. When previously architectural guide books predominated, they were increasingly replaced by house pattern books. These new books contained primarily house patterns and descriptions, devoting less space to construction details and the history of architecture.\(^{37}\) The first of this type of book to be printed in America was *A Series of Select and Original Modern Designs for Dwelling Houses, for the Use of Carpenters and Builders* by John Hall, published in 1840. This book contained twenty house designs, a dramatic increase from previous decades when six house plans were the most provided by any one book.\(^{38}\) Of the twenty plans, six were for suburban or “country” residences, eight

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\(^{38}\) The 1792 and 1796 editions of William Pain, *The Practical Builder; or Workman’s General Assistant* contained six different plates of house designs. The next greatest number of house designs were published by Asher Benjamin in his 1811 and 1820 editions of *American Builder’s Companion*, each book contained five designs.
were plans for row houses, and the remaining six were free-standing city houses. In all six of the “city” house plans, either a dining room or breakfast room was indicated and five plans included both a breakfast room and dining room. In the plans containing both types of rooms, it is clear that the breakfast room was a less formal space. In every instance the breakfast room was located in the rear of the house and typically it was adjacent to the kitchen. The dining room, however, was typically found in the front, formal area of the principal floor usually adjacent to the parlor or drawing room.

Another interesting phenomenon at this time period was the house plan with a breakfast room but no formal dining space. Five of the twenty plans published by Hall had this design feature.\(^{39}\) When only a breakfast room was indicated it remained at the rear of the house.\(^ {40}\) Four plans had a double parlor design with the breakfast room adjacent to the kitchen. It is likely that in these houses formal dining took place in one of the parlors, not the breakfast room. It is evident from the variety of house plans that architects had accepted the need for a separate space for taking meals, whether it be a formal dining room or an informal breakfast room.

Between 1840 and 1846, both Benjamin and Lafever continued to produce architectural guide books. A second edition of The Modern Builder’s Guide was issued by Lafever in 1841; it was identical to the 1833 edition in containing only one house plan with no labels or room dimensions. Benjamin turned more directly towards architectural

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\(^{39}\) This type of design appears in plates 4, 5, 6, 8, and 10 in Hall’s *A Series of Select and Original Modern Designs for dwelling houses,*...

\(^{40}\) The exception appears in plate 10 of Hall’s book which shows the breakfast room in the cellar level underneath the back parlor. Even in this situation, however, the breakfast room is adjacent to the kitchen also located in the cellar.
elements exclusively, publishing Elements of Architecture, containing Tuscan, Doric, Ionic and Corinthian Orders, in 1843. This book contained no house plans at all and became the typical format for all the books Benjamin produced until the end of his career in the 1850’s.

In 1846 Thomas Ustick Walter and Jay Smith published Two Hundred Designs for Cottages and Villas...Original and Selected, issued in four volumes. This was the largest house pattern book yet to be published in America. In the preface Walter explained:

One of the first wants of a person desirous of building an ornamental Cottage or Villa, whether a mansion or even an entrance-lodge to his domain, is a Book of Designs, which shall convey to his eye representations of what is either beautiful or convenient, that have already been executed. From such previously formed ideas he embodies his own conceptions of the ornamental and useful, and learns what will be most suitable...It has been said that the publication of designs may cause those who intend to build to assume the superintendence themselves, and to erect some published sketch which may please their fancy; but we contend, with one of the best writers on the subject, that “the more the public taste is improved, the more demand will there be for the assistance of architects. It is a fact which must have been observed by every one, that when an elegant or tasteful building has been erected in any district, men of property begin to think how they can improve their own residences, and the talent of the architect is called into requisition.”

This pattern book contained both original designs by Walter as well as designs by Alexander Jackson Davis, J. C. Sydney, and W. Russell West. A variety of house plans were offered, from small cottages to grand villas ranging style from Gothic to Italianate. Unlike earlier books, approximately 90% of the plans had room labels, but room

dimensions were found on only three-quarters of the plans. Perhaps dimensions were omitted to encourage perspective clients to employ an architect to assist in the construction process.

Walter placed dining rooms in his designs for all but the smallest "cottages."42 Several new locations for dining rooms were introduced in these plans. First, in a number of designs the dining room was located centrally on the principal floor, typically either opposite the main entrance of the house or behind the "grand" staircase, off the entrance hall. In both these instances the dining room is completely separate from the parlor.

Another new design incorporated an ante-room adjacent to the dining room. This room was usually quite small and located between the dining room and the main parlor or drawing room. The common feature shared by all three plans was to isolate the dining room from the other formal, social rooms on the main floor. Previously, the majority of plans available indicated the dining room connected to the main parlor with wide communicating doors. This allowed the dining room and parlor to be used as one room with either function dominating depending on the requirements of the owner. Thomas Webster and Mrs. Parkes offered the following advice on the proper location for a dining room in An Encyclopedia of Domestic Economy (1844):

Dining-room - This should be placed so that the way to it from the kitchen is easy, and yet so that it is not in the least annoyed by noise or odour [sic] from the latter. If possible, there should be adjoining rooms for servants, and to collect dishes and dining apparatus in, that time may not be lost in bringing them in, and it will be useful to have there a steam table to keep dishes hot. A good deal of ingenuity is requisite in contriving a

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42 According to Andrew Jackson Downing in The Architecture of Country Houses, a cottage is defined as "a dwelling of small size, intended for the occupation of a family, either wholly managing the household cares itself, or, at the most, with the assistance of one or two servants." p.40.
comfortable dining-room, in arranging the approaches to it, and connecting it with the drawing-room.\textsuperscript{43}

Even as a separate room with its own private entrance, the dining room was typically located within easy reach of the drawing room.

The third type of design illustrated in pattern books during this period was that of locating the dining room in the cellar or basement floor near the kitchen. This type of layout is almost exclusively associated with city dwellings of the row-house type where the basement level was partially above grade allowing ample daylight to penetrate these rooms. The principal floor was then elevated well above grade to accommodate the additional rooms below. This design provided a cool space for summer dining and its proximity to the kitchen allowed for convenient access. This arrangement however, was not popular for free-standing houses and is therefore far less commonly found in published designs.

For the purposes of this paper only pattern books published in America before 1855 were reviewed. During this period, architectural books of all types were published in a greater quantity than ever before.\textsuperscript{44} Ten new authors appeared including Andrew Jackson Downing (1815-1852), Samuel Sloan (1815-1884), and Gervase Wheeler (c.1815-c.1872).

\textsuperscript{43} Thomas Webster and Mrs. Parkes. \textit{An Encyclopedia of Domestic Economy} (London: 1844; reprint, New York: Harper Brothers, 1849), 49. Like Loudon’s \textit{Encyclopedia}, this book was originally published in England and directed at a middle-class English audience. However, it was very influential in America and frequently published throughout the 19th. century.

\textsuperscript{44} Hitchcock, \textit{American Architectural Books}, “Chronological Short-Title List” by William Jordy, 139 \& 140.
In 1852, Samuel Sloan of Philadelphia published *The Model Architect* in two volumes. This work was similar to Walter’s book but on a smaller scale. The first volume contained twenty-eight plans and the second volume contained twenty-one plans. Unlike Walter’s book, all the plans provided in *The Model Architect* contained room dimensions and labels and all but four plans contained dining rooms.45

In the same year Edward Shaw (1784-?), of Boston, also published an architectural book, but his *Civil Architecture* should be classified as a guide book rather than a house pattern book. Shaw’s book contained only one “Plan and Elevation of a Rural Villa.” This plan illustrated a large, sophisticated house with six rooms on the principal floor. The dining room was connected directly to the parlor as well as the ante-room and the ante-room was connected to the drawing-room thus making all of the formal public rooms easily accessible. However, by providing an ante-room the dining room could be separated from the formal drawing room to create a less formal family space.

In 1854 Shaw produced another book, *The Modern Architect*, which was a house pattern book containing sixty-four plates.46 In part three of this book Shaw offered the following advice on “the arrangement and construction of dwelling-houses and buildings in general:”47

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45 Samuel Sloan, *The Model Architect* Vols. 1 & 2 (Philadelphia: E. S. Jones & Co., 1852). The four house plans that did not contain dining rooms were for small, inexpensive “cottages”.

46 According to Hitchcock’s *American Architectural Books* fifty-two of the sixty-four plates had been published by Shaw in his 1843 edition of *Rural Architecture*.

Rectangular forms ... are best adapted for houses in general; since, within them, the divisions of apartments may be made with the greatest regularity and least waste. As rectangles are most readily divided into rectangles, this is also the figure which may be employed to the greatest advantage in the rooms themselves. As to the proportions of these, the length may range from one to one and a half breadth. If larger than this, the room partakes too much of the gallery from. The usual rule for the height of a room is, if it be oblong, to make it as high as it is broad; and if square, from four-fifths to five-sixths of the side is a good proportion. With regard to health, however, no room should be less than ten feet in height. It is obvious, that on a floor where there are many rooms, they must be of various sizes, and to regulate them all by architectural rules would be productive of much inconvenience.\(^{48}\)

This is the first time a complete description of room proportions and arrangements was published in a pattern book. The subject of the interior arrangement received little or no attention by the authors of earlier guide books and pattern books.

Also in 1854, in America, Catharine Beecher published *A treatise on Domestic Economy, for the use of Young Ladies at Home and at school*. While this was not an architectural pattern book, it contained several house plans and discussions on the interior layout of houses. Beecher advocated the need for a dining room in even the most modest house, provided the family could afford the help of domestic servants. For those families who could not afford servants, house plans included only a parlor and kitchen. In her chapter devoted to the care of breakfast and dining rooms Beecher wrote:

An eating-room should have in it a large closet, with drawers and shelves, in which should be kept all the articles used at meals. This if possible, should communicate with the kitchen, by a sliding window, or by a door, and have in it a window, and also a small sink, made of marble or lined with zinc, which will be a great convenience for washing nice articles.\(^{49}\)

\(^{48}\) Hitchcock, *American Architectural Books*, 62 & 63. This may offer some insight into why earlier patterns lacked room labels and dimensions.

\(^{49}\) Catharine E. Beecher, *A treatise on Domestic Economy, for the use of Young Ladies at Home and at School* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1854), 306.
While it was common for house plans to show a closet and/or pantry adjacent to the dining rooms, this description explains the purpose of such spaces. Beecher’s book was directed at the women who, by mid-century, had not only taken over the role of organizing and running the household but were also being encouraged to participate in planning the house.

The Influence of Andrew Jackson Downing (1815-1852)

In 1850 Andrew Jackson Downing published The Architecture of Country Houses, in which he described his philosophy of appropriate designs for American houses and their furnishings.50 Downing had been greatly influenced by John Claudius Loudon and The Encyclopedia of Cottage, Farm, and Villa Architecture and Furniture; The Architecture of Country Houses was Downing’s attempt to provide the same type of information for his countrymen. By publishing his own book, Downing was able to capitalize on American’s interest in the subject and address issues specific to his country. In contrast to Loudon’s massive work of 1,138 pages and 2,039 illustrations, Downing offered only 484 pages with 321 illustrations, choosing not to address such structures as schools, country inns, and windmills covered by Loudon.51 Downing hoped to form the taste of Americans regarding domestic architecture and interior fashion.

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Downing established a pattern of associating different styles of houses with different economic classes by dividing houses into three categories based on the owners' income levels. These categories were the “cottage,” the “farm-house,” and the “villa.” According to Downing:

The basis for enduring beauty is truthfulness, no less in houses than in morals; and cottages, farm-houses, and villas, which aim to be only the best and most agreeable cottages, farm-houses, and villas, will be infinitely more acceptable, to the senses, feelings, and understanding, than those which endeavor to assume a grandeur foreign to their nature and purpose.

As previously stated, Downing defined a cottage as a “dwelling of small size, intended for the occupation of a family, either wholly managing the household cares itself, or, at the most, with the assistance of one or two servants.” In his description of cottage designs Downing suggested there were as many working-class Americans who desired a small home as there were wealthy Americans who desired large, ornate houses. In his thirteen designs of cottages, most contained only three rooms on the principal floor. None of the designs had a dining room; instead they all had a “living-room” defined by Downing as “the common apartment, the kitchen, sitting-room, and parlor” intended for the family that “takes care of itself.” This design type also appears in the seven plans

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for farm houses. By combining multiple functions into a single space Downing was able to provide an inexpensive house the average working man could afford for his family.

With the villa, however, economy of space was not as important although Downing believed no one should spend more than he could afford in the cause of architecture. The villa, as previously defined, was a country house of the “most leisurely and educated class” and intended for the family that could afford the assistance of three or more servants.\(^{56}\) According to Downing:

> It is therefore in our villas that we must hope in this country to give the best and most complete manifestation of domestic architecture. The cottage is too limited in size, the farm-house too simply useful in its character, to admit of that indulgence of beauty of form and decoration which belongs properly to the villa.\(^{57}\)

He described the interior plan of the villa as containing not “less than three or four apartments of good size (besides the kitchen, etc.) on the principal floor,” adding that “in every villa of moderate size, we expect to find a separate apartment, devoted to meals, entitled the dining-room; another devoted to social intercourse, or the drawing-room and a third devoted to intellectual culture, or the library.”\(^{58}\)

In the chapter devoted to villas, only one of thirteen plans lacked a dining room;\(^{59}\) all the others had a dining room. One plan even had a dining “hall” in addition to the dining room.

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\(^{59}\) Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses*, 276. The plan for a “Small Bracketed Country House” shows a dwelling meant to be something in between a farm-house and a villa. It contains a drawing room
In the chapter devoted to villas, only one of thirteen plans lacked a dining room; all the others had a dining room. One plan even had a dining “hall” in addition to the dining room. About which Downing wrote:

...we like the custom of dining in an ample hall like this, in a large country house, for it enables us to give to the hall itself a character of spaciousness (by thus uniting the uses of two apartments), which dining-rooms rarely have, and it allows a certain breadth of effect and simple grandeur of treatment which makes such a hall the most expressive feature of a country house.  

Towards the end of his book, Downing included a chapter on the “treatment of interiors” for country houses. There he described the most appropriate way to decorate a dining room. He urged “the dining-room should be rich and warm in its coloring, and more of contrast and stronger colors may be introduced here than in the drawing-room. The furniture should be substantial, without being clumsy, but much simpler in decoration than that of the drawing-room.”

His detailed descriptions help us understand the preferences of his time. While his book shows patterns in many different architectural “styles,” it is obvious that Downing favors the “Gothic” style over all others for domestic architecture. This book continued to influence American taste in domestic architecture and interior decoration for several decades.

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59 Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses*, 276. The plan for a “Small Bracketed Country House” shows a dwelling meant to be something in between a farm-house and a villa. It contains a drawing room and library like a villa, but instead of a dining room it has a living room, like the farm-house and cottage designs.


Conclusions

In this chapter the changes in domestic architecture between 1790 and 1855 have been charted through the variety of architectural books printed in America. At the end of the eighteenth century and beginning of the nineteenth century, dining rooms were only presented in plans for large houses belonging to society’s wealthiest members. Typically, these early plans were designed primarily for English audiences who had been using dining rooms since early in the eighteenth century. Americans adopted these plans slowly, at first, in only the grandest of houses. As the nineteenth century progressed and people prospered, they could afford more space and the dining room began to appear more frequently in house plans. By the second quarter of the nineteenth century, the dining room became a regular feature, appearing in nearly all house patterns, except for the smallest of houses. The advice literature suggests that dining rooms had by then become common among the Middle Class especially in urban settings.
Chapter 3

Introduction

When tracing the development of a special use space, such as the dining-room, it is important to look at changes in the social and cultural patterns during the period of investigation. During the period 1790 - 1855, western societies experienced tremendous changes in how people lived and worked. Cultural roles changed for men and women. During the first quarter of the nineteenth century men were central figures in the economy of the home as well as the market place, especially as women were prevented from entering into legally binding contracts.

With the Industrial Revolution and the shift from a commercial to a manufacturing economy, the Middle Class began to grow in numbers and wealth. With men at the office and factory, the work of running the house naturally devolved to women. All of these factors influenced domestic architecture and the way people used their homes. Whereas, the dining room had been a space reserved for the wealthy, by the middle of the nineteenth century a house containing a separate dining room had become a prime symbol of the achieving of middle-class status.62

**Domestic Economy and Domestic Service**

Housekeeping guides first appeared in America in the middle of the eighteenth century. These books may have grown out of early, hand-written collections of “recipes”--remedies for illnesses and formulae for household cleaning--and “receipts”--

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62 Clark, “The vision of the Dining Room” *Dining in America 1850-1900*, 147.
directions for food preparation—previously shared among friends and family members. Housekeeping guides were mainly written by women for women and often contained information on both subjects, a practice followed by many nineteenth-century authors as well. Furthermore, in the nineteenth century these guides were expanded to include additional subjects such as proper education for a young lady, household care, furnishings, and decoration.

One of the most influential books on household economy was *Domestic Duties, or Instructions to Young Married Ladies*, published by Mrs. William Parkes, an English authority on the subject. Her book was widely printed in both England and the United States during the 1820’s and 1830’s. At the same time in the United States, Lydia Maria Child was publishing her book *The American Frugal Housewife*, which had gone through seven editions between 1829 and 1832. In response to the advice offered by her English counterpart Mrs. Child admonished her readers:

Our wealthy people copy all the foolish and extravagant caprice of Europeans fashion, without considering that we have not their laws of inheritance among us; and that our frequent changes of policy render property far more precarious here than in the old world.

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64 Winkler, *Influence of Godey’s “Lady’s Book” on the American Woman and Her Home: Contributions to a National Culture (1830-1870)*, 197.

65 Mrs. Parkes later co-authored *An Encyclopedia of Domestic Economy* with Thomas Webster which influenced middle-class people in England and America.


She felt that “true economy” was a treasure in the service of benevolence and that where they were united, respectability, prosperity, and peace would follow.\textsuperscript{68} She felt it important for people to save money particularly for the unforeseen calamity.

Also during this period, society began to recognize the role of the middle-class woman in the household economy. The first magazine in America to discuss this topic was Godey’s \textit{Lady’s Book}.\textsuperscript{69} In the January, 1836, issue of the \textit{Lady’s Book}, Godey quoted from Parkes’s book \textit{Domestic Duties, or Instructions to Young Married Ladies}, regarding how the marriage ceremony transformed a woman:

She, who a few moments before was without authority, or responsibility, a happy, perhaps a careless member of one family, finds herself, as if by magic, at the head of another, involved in duties of highest importance.\textsuperscript{70}

A similar sentiment was shared by Mrs. Child, who felt women should be raised from childhood learning how to care for home and family so they could “enjoy” it. She chided parents for allowing young girls to spend too much time in the pursuit of a husband, only to find they were unprepared for the duties of a wife, therefore creating problems for the husband.

One of the new responsibilities of the American housewife was decorating and furnishing the family home. This was a direct result of changes in the economy caused

\textsuperscript{68} Child, \textit{The American Frugal Housewife}, 7.

\textsuperscript{69} Winkler, \textit{Influence of Godey’s “Lady’s Book” on the American Woman and Her Home: Contributions to a National Culture (1830-1870)}, 195. Godey’s \textit{Lady’s Book} was a monthly magazine directed at women which contained information on household economy as well as hints on decorating, dress, and social etiquette.

\textsuperscript{70} Winkler, \textit{Influence of Godey’s “Lady’s Book” on the American Woman and Her Home: Contributions to a National Culture (1830-1870)}, 195.
by the Industrial Revolution. House furnishings were directly addressed to the middle
class reader of Child’s *The American Frugal Housewife*. She warned:

> If you are about to furnish a house, do not spend all your money, be it much or little. Do not let the beauty of this thing, and the cheapness of that tempt you to buy unnecessary articles. Doctor Franklin’s maxim was a wise one, ‘Nothing is cheap that we do not want.’ Buy merely enough to get along with at first.\(^1\)

Mrs. Child stressed that a young wife of moderate means would make herself and her husband happy by being frugal in household furnishing expenditures; nothing would be lost in social standing where only unhappiness could be found by over-spending on furnishings in an attempt to impress the neighbors.

Just a few years after the initial publication of Child’s book in 1829, the changing roles of women were further acknowledged in the publication of Godey’s *Lady’s Book*. The *Lady’s Book* was the first American magazine to incorporate both household advice and pattern-book information, recognizing women’s new responsibility in decorating and furnishing the family home.\(^2\)

As previously mentioned in Chapter 2, in 1844 Thomas Webster and Mrs. Parkes published *An Encyclopedia of Domestic Economy*, in London. This book was apparently encouraged by John Claudius Loudon author of his own *Encyclopedia* a decade earlier. Webster and Parkes’s *Encyclopedia* was the most frequently reprinted household

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\(^1\) Child, *The American Frugal Housewife*, 5.

compendia of the nineteenth century. Widely popular in America, it was reprinted five times between 1845 and 1852. Later in the 1850’s, it was reprinted six times under the title *The American Family Encyclopedia*. Like Loudon, Webster and Parkes directed their book to middle-class men and women.

Catharine Beecher published *Miss Beecher’s Domestic Receipt-Book* in 1846, as a supplement to her 1841 *A Treatise on Domestic Economy*. In this later book Beecher explained why she published the supplement:

> The writer has attempted to secure, in a cheap and popular form, for American housekeepers, a work similar to an English work which she has examined, entitled the *Encyclopedia of Domestic Economy*, by Thomas Webster and Mrs. Parkes, containing over twelve hundred octavo pages of closely-printed matter, treating on every department of domestic economy; a work which will be found much more useful to English women, who have a [sic] plenty of money and well-trained servants, than do American housekeepers.

Domestic servants played an important role in upper-class households throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In eighteenth century America, domestic servants were either Black men and women, both free and slaves, or white immigrants who were indentured servants. Dining for the Upper Class, then a decentralized function, was handled by the servants, who were responsible for moving tables and accessories to

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the desired location in preparation for each meal. During this period, tables were stored in many different locations in the house when not in use and relocated to a parlor or best-bed chamber when needed.

As the nineteenth century progressed, literary sources suggest domestic servants became problems for employers. With rising numbers of immigrants, the quality and knowledge level of the “service class” declined. In 1827, Robert Roberts, a free Black butler at Gore Place near Boston, wrote *The House Servant’s Directory*, a guide directed toward Black Americans entering “service.” In the “Advertisement of the Publishers” the reasons for such a “directory” were spelled out:

> In school-learning generally our native servants surpass foreigners, but in manners, deportment, and a knowledge of the duties of their station, it must be admitted they are considerably inferior....It cannot be denied that many of our servants, whilst perfectly willing to receive their wages, are either unwilling to submit to the powers that be, by fulfilling the duties for which such wages are stipulated, or from gross ignorance of domestic concerns, are totally unfit for service. An attempt to amend these matters by one from among their own numbers deserves, and we hope will receive the approbation and patronage of all aggrieved, so far at least as presenting a copy of this work to every house servant.\(^{77}\)

The problem of finding and maintaining good domestic servants was a topic of middle-class concern which received much attention in domestic economy publications throughout the first half of the nineteenth century.\(^{78}\)

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\(^{78}\) This topic is covered in detail by Faye E. Dudden in *Serving Women: Household Service in Nineteenth Century America*, and Susan Strasser in *Never Done, A History of American Housework*. These issues fall outside the scope of this paper.
As the century progressed and economy grew there were greater demands for servants and help. At the same time there were less and less “quality” people available. Men and women who were able to find employment in factories preferred those jobs to domestic service. Consequently, those least employable often ended up in domestic jobs. By the 1830’s, domestic advice books included the problem of finding and keeping women as domestic help. This fact is clearly stated by Eliza Rotsch Farrar in her 1837 book The Young Lady’s Friend:

The unexampled prosperity of this great republic makes it so easy for young women to find lucrative employment in the way of trades and manufactures, that the service of private families is less sought than formerly, by the active and industrious; hence arises the scarcity of domestics, and the numerous complaints which we hear from the mistresses of families, whose burdens are much increased by this state of things.

In addition to discussing the increasing difficulty of finding and keeping domestic help, more books addressed the various problems associated with domestic service. Both Farrar in 1837 and Beecher in 1846 discussed the role of the woman as employer, and the proper treatment of servants. According to Farrar it was important an employer give proper consideration to servants by not interrupting their daily work to perform minor tasks which could easily be taken care of by the Lady herself. She also cautioned that “interruption at meals is another great annoyance to domestics, and ought to be avoided if possible.”


80 Farrar, The Young Lady’s Friend, 231.

81 Farrar, The Young Lady’s Friend, 237.
Catharine Beecher cautioned that extremes were to be avoided such as:

...a severe and imperious mode of giving orders and finding fault, which is inconsistent both with lady-like good breeding, and with a truly amiable character. Few domestics, especially American domestics, will long submit to it, and many a good one has been lost, simply by the influence of this unfortunate manner.  

As the formality of life increased and daily activities became more ritualized, domestic service became more important to middle-class households. As wealth increased, so did the size of houses with the inclusion of special use spaces such as dining rooms. The domestic servant played an important role in elevating the social standing of the employer. As Farrar stated:

...in this country, where it is so difficult to procure a sufficiency of household labor, the mode of furnishing a house, and conducting the business of a family, is such as to require more attendance, than the same style of living would demand in France and other parts of Europe.

Dining Times and Dining Styles

Dining times during the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries differed greatly, depending on social class and location—whether urban or rural. In the eighteenth century, upper-class Americans, like George Washington, would usually breakfast between seven-thirty and eight o’clock in the morning and dine at three o’clock, or in the country, at two o’clock. Dinner was followed by tea, and then supper at eight o’clock in the evening. The working class in the eighteenth century followed a similar but slightly different

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82 Beecher, Domestic Receipt-Book, 269.

83 Farrar, The Young Lady’s Friend, 35.

84 Susan Williams, Savory Suppers and Fashionable Feasts (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1996), 144.
schedule, shaped by the demands of their employment: breakfast at seven, dinner at noon, and supper between six and seven o’clock.\(^{85}\)

Breakfast, a term consistently used to refer to the morning meal, was typically an informal occasion which carried few of the social rituals associated with dining.\(^{86}\) The term dining, however, changes meaning over time. According to Dr. John Doran in Table Traits with Something on Them, published in 1855, writing about the historical development of formal “dining,” the “original dinner hour of the midiaeval [sic] ages was, ...ten o’clock, the dixieme heure; hence the name. It was not until the reign of Louis XIV, that so late an hour as noon was fixed for the repast.”\(^ {87}\) In England, during the eighteenth century the dining hour fluctuated from noon in mid-century, to three o’clock in the afternoon by the third quarter.\(^ {88}\)

In the United States, dining times followed the traditions set by England and France. In large cities such as New York and Philadelphia, dining was a mid to late afternoon affair. In a dinner invitation extended by John Van den Heuvel in New York City, in January 1793, to General Gates he requested “the honour of his company to dine with him...at four o’clock.”\(^ {89}\) While upper-class, city dwellers were dining at in

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\(^{85}\) Williams, Savory Suppers and Fashionable Feasts, 144.

\(^{86}\) Williams, Savory Suppers and Fashionable Feasts, 46.

\(^ {87}\) Dr. John. Doran, Table Traits with Something on them. (New York: Redfield, 1855), 121. In the French language unlike English, time is referred to as twenty-four different hours. Hence, the term dixieme heure refers to ten o’clock in the morning. In English, this type of time is referred to as “military”.


increasingly late hour, earlier dining times where still typical in small towns and rural areas. This continued into the nineteenth century as noted in the observations of an English traveler visiting Utica, New York in 1804, “we continued our route and reached T.M.’s to dinner, where we spent the afternoon, and lodged at night.”

In Boston in the 1820’s dinner was served at a somewhat earlier hour than had been noted in New York previously. According to the Duke of Saxe-Weimer Eisenach while visiting Boston in 1825, “I dined at the inn at two o’clock, according to the custom of the place; my seat was at the head of the table, by the side of the host, Mr. Hamilton.” Afternoon dinner can also be observed in the 1820 painting by Henry Sargent entitled The Dinner Party, which depicts a high society dinner in Boston. One can see the meal is taking place in the middle of the afternoon because sunlight is pouring through the partially shuttered windows and only a single candle is lit in the center of the table, for the lighting of cigars. According to the Duke of Saxe-Weimer Eisenach, Boston was not the only city dining at two o’clock in the afternoon. He made a similar observation while visiting Utica, New York, later that same year.

Dining times were gradually altered during the nineteenth century because of the Industrial Revolution. As American’s schedules became more subject to the schedules of

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90 Sutcliff, *Travels in some parts of North America in the years 1804, 1805 and 1806*, 122.


93 Bernard, *Travels through North America during the Years 1825 and 1826*, 65 & 66.
industry, the main meal of the day was moved from mid-day to early evening. That meal, however, was more formal and substantial than supper, which had previously been a relatively light meal similar to “lunch” today.\textsuperscript{94}

In the eighteenth century “supper” was considered the last meal of the day. Typically it was served later in the evening, around nine o’clock and consisted of lighter, hot foods.\textsuperscript{95} Supper usually followed evening tea which in fashionable households was served between dinner and supper. According to one historian of dining practices:

...there seems to have been two types of tea - afternoon tea and evening tea. The eighteenth-century upper-class tradition of taking tea around four o’clock was adopted by middle-class women in the 1840’s. Afternoon tea was specifically a female event, generally lasting about two hours, although men might have joined the party at the end of the workday. Many families expanded afternoon tea into a full meal, usually referred to as high tea or six o’clock supper, while for a few tea mearly [sic] filled the void between lunch or dinner at noon, and supper.\textsuperscript{96}

For the Upper Classes, this ritual of an early morning breakfast, mid-afternoon dinner, early evening tea and late supper persisted well into the middle of the nineteenth century. Sidney George Fisher, writing in his diary in December of 1852, describes just such a routine for his daily life in Philadelphia:

Breakfast at 8, simply tea & toast or bread & butter... After breakfast, the newspaper & talk with Bet for half an hour in the dining room, which is very comfortable & well furnished...Bet then goes up to her parlor, & I have the dining room & office, which communicate by folding doors...Thro [sic] the morning, I read law...till one or two o’clock, unless obliged to go out sooner. Then a walk with Bet, or alone, to visit or on business, with sometimes an hour at the Athenaeum till 5...a little talk with

\textsuperscript{94} Williams, \textit{Savory Suppers and Fashionable Feasts}, 149.
\textsuperscript{95} Williams, \textit{Savory Suppers and Fashionable Feasts}, 148.
\textsuperscript{96} Williams, \textit{Savory Suppers and Fashionable Feasts}, 148.
Bet after dinner, then cigars and a book...till 8, when I am summoned to the parlor to tea. 97

Along with dining times, dining styles began to change during the nineteenth century. At the end of the eighteenth century, the “English” style of dining was preferred with all the dishes for a particular course placed on the table at the same time. The term “course” was defined by an anonymous mid-century cookbook writer as “the number of dishes which are served on the table at one time. A repast of one course comprises all that is served between the soup (if there is any) and the dessert.” 98 Depending on the number of people present, the social importance of the meal, and the amount of food required, the number and size of courses could be increased accordingly. Family dinners were usually limited to two or three courses; company dinners generally had five or often more. 99

This style of dining employed many rules regarding the arrangement of the food on the table as well as the placement of the guests. Robert Roberts gave the following advice in his 1827 Directory:

You should observe to have your side dishes in a straight line, and at a regular distance from one another, and also match in size and colour, cross corners, your four corner dishes should go rather on a square, and to match each other cross corner; as a middling dinner when well served up, and the dishes well matched, and at a proper distance from each other, has a more pleasing aspect than double as large a one, when crowded, and improperly put on table; you should pay the greatest attention to this rule. 100


98 Williams, Savory Suppers and Fashionable Feasts, 151.

99 Williams, Savory Suppers and Fashionable Feasts, 151.

100 Roberts, The House Servant’s Directory, 53.
This type of table arrangement was passed on to middle-class readers by Parkes and Beecher, among others, in their books on domestic economy. These books contained diagrams and “rules” for properly waiting table. Included in the rules presented by Beecher in her Treatise was the proper placement of dishes so the diners could both carve and pass the dishes properly. In it she states that “the host carves the dish before him, the hostess helps the dish opposite to her, and the gentleman guests carve the dishes opposite to them.” All of the dishes, she instructs, were to be “passed to the right.”

By the second quarter of the nineteenth century a new style of dining was becoming fashionable in France and England. The style was referred to as “à la Russe,” and was customary in Russian society. It had been introduced to Paris by the Russian ambassador in 1810. The style included complete place settings with the serving dishes passed by a group of servants instead of placing the courses on the table for diners to serve themselves. Upon arrival from the kitchen, the filled dishes were placed on the sideboard or side-table, and then served by the butler or footman. Webster and Parkes commented on this style in the Encyclopedia:

The general style of the table, in fashionable circles, is lightness and elegance, variety in dishes, and delicacy to the eye and the palate. The table no longer “groans under the weight of barons and sirloins of beef,” nor does it present in one view the same crowded picture of substantial fare as in olden times. The variety and number of dishes which, in the present day, a dinner is composed may not be inferior to those of former

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101 Beecher, Treatise, 239.
days, but they are not exhibited at once; they are presented at different
intervals of the dinner in the form of courses.\textsuperscript{104}

Although upper-class households in England adopted this new dining style earlier
in the century, it was not adopted by upper-class Americans until the 1840’s.\textsuperscript{105} One of
the benefits to this new style of dining was that it required less servants. While the “old”
style had made it convenient to have one servant per guest, with the “new” style of
dining, one servant could attend up to three or four guests.\textsuperscript{106} Another benefit to dining
“à la Russe” was that the table was no longer littered with partially empty dishes and
platters which made more room for table ornamentation.\textsuperscript{107}

As with most societal changes, the Middle Class were slower to adopt the new
style of dining than the Upper Class. One reason for this may have been the fact that the
table looked bare and inhospitable to middle-class diners accustomed to seeing it filled
with various dishes.\textsuperscript{108} Another reason may have been the high cost of the additional
tableware required for the new style of dining.\textsuperscript{109} In 1853, Sara Josepha Hale, the literary
editor of \textit{Godey’s Lady’s Book} in Philadelphia, described the English style of dining as
“old-fashioned” but recommended it as proper for either family or company. It was not

\textsuperscript{104} Webster and Parkes, \textit{An Encyclopedia of Domestic Economy}, 858.

\textsuperscript{105} Winkler, \textit{Influence of Godey’s “Lady’s Book” on the American Woman and Her Home: Contributions
to a National Culture (1830-1870)}, 337.


\textsuperscript{107} Williams, \textit{Savory Suppers and Fashionable Feasts}, 152.

\textsuperscript{108} Winkler, \textit{Influence of Godey’s “Lady’s Book” on the American Woman and Her Home: Contributions
to a National Culture (1830-1870)}, 337.

until late in the nineteenth century that dining “à la Russe” became the standard for middle-class households.

**Dining Etiquette**

By the nineteenth century, matters of social etiquette were widely discussed in etiquette manuals. These manuals generally included such topics as furnishing the home, calling and visiting, serving and conducting meals, manners, and character building. Unlike household guides, written by and for women, etiquette manuals were written by men and women; some were directed at specific audiences such as children, young ladies, and bachelors but most were directed at a general audience. Etiquette manuals, therefore, were part of the greater democratization of gentility in nineteenth century America.\(^{110}\)

The dining room typified changes in society with the advent of complex rituals that became associated with genteel dining. The American Edward Kendall, made the following observation while touring the northern United States in 1807:

> Each individual, as soon as he had dined, carried his chair to the wall, and left the room. The women, every one when she had dined, drew away their chairs to the windows. The servants of the house, in conformity with these manners, which are the manners of the country, carried away the table when they carried away the cloth, and drove away loiterers with an army of brooms.\(^{111}\)


By the 1830’s all aspects of the dining ritual were thoroughly discussed in manuals of etiquette and domestic economy. In The Young Lady’s Friend, Farrar directed young ladies on the ritual of entering the dining room as follows:

On entering the dining-room, you must use your eyes, to discover which part of the table is considered the most honorable; for, in some places, it only that end where the lady sits, in others, both ends are equally honored, and the young folks sit in the middle; whilst there are houses, in which the host and hostess sit in the middle on each side, and take the most honored guests next to them.\(^{112}\)

It was important to know where to sit and one’s position in the social hierarchy of the gathering. Nothing could be worse than taking the wrong seat at the table or having to ask questions on topics assumed to be “understood.” Farrar continued with detailed instructions as to proper behavior during the meal:

If you sit near a dish of vegetables, or a gravy tureen, be on the alert, to help to its contents, when called upon. It must depend on the number of servants in attendance, and on the style in which the dinner is given, whether it is proper for you to pass plates, or not; at some tables, it is a necessary attention, whilst at others, it would be a barbarous piece of officiousness.\(^{113}\)

Farrar also spoke in detail about the proper way to serve tea and the place of the younger members of the household. She stated that the honored guest should be served tea last to receive the strongest cup and the youngest family member of the party should be served first to receive the weakest tea. However, she added that if it were desirable for all cups

\(^{112}\) Farrar, The Young Lady’s Friend, 243.

\(^{113}\) Farrar, The Young Lady’s Friend, 344. Note that the discussion is addressing the difference between the English style and “a la Russe” style as previously discussed. During this period both styles were in use and one needed to be prepared for proper behavior depending on the style presented by the host of the gathering.
of tea be of equal strength, one should pour a little at a time into each cup and continue filling them in order until all cups were full.\footnote{Farrar, \textit{The Young Lady's Friend}, 44 \& 45.}

A dinner party was considered a very different gathering than an evening party. The proper number of guests for a dinner party was ten to twelve while an evening party would consist of forty to sixty people or more. In discussing the proper mix of individuals for a dinner party, Doran indicated that “the guests not exceed twelve, so that the conversation be general; [and] that they be of varied occupations, but analogous tastes.”\footnote{Doran, \textit{Table Traits with Something on them}, 120 \& 121. Though Dr. Doran was writing in 1855, he was describing to an afternoon meal exclusive of women.}

As has been previously discussed, there were two styles of dining in practice during the second quarter of the nineteenth century. While each style had its own rituals, there were commonly held traditions regarding the table arrangement and use of table linens. Both etiquette books and books on domestic economy touted the use and propriety of white linen table cloths. Beecher carefully outlined the use and removal of each cloth stating:

> Soon after all the guests are done eating meats, the hostess directs the waiter, and every article is removed from the table, and the upper table-cloth taken off. Then the dessert knives, forks, and plates are set around, and the dessert is placed on the table....When these are finished, everything is removed again, and the other table-cloth taken off, leaving the bare table, or the colored cloth.\footnote{Beecher, \textit{Treatise}, 240. The colored cloth mentioned was to be used if the wood of the table was not fine enough to be uncovered after the desert course. The use of a colored cloth was for the fruit course only, to avoid staining the good white linen with fruit juices.}
After dinner, it was typical for the men to sit at the table and drink sherry or other liquors, while the women, if in attendance, would retire to the drawing room for coffee. According to Dr. Doran, the tradition of sitting at table to drink was “introduced by Margaret Atheling, the Saxon Queen of Scotland. [Apparently], she was shocked to see the Scottish gentlemen rise from [the] table before grace could be said by her Chaplain, Turot; and she offered a cup of choice wine to all who would remain. Thence the fashion of hard drinking following the ‘thanksgiving’.”

**Dining Room Furniture and Finishes**

Along with the social rituals and etiquette surrounding the act of dining, there were rules governing how the dining room should be decorated and furnished. As previously stated, eighteenth century dining was a decentralized function. As such, pieces of furniture used for dining were kept throughout the house. Dining tables were frequently stored in the entry hall. Since formal dining typically took place in the parlor tables could easily be moved into position by servants.

During the eighteenth century, large extension tables did not exist; instead several smaller tables referred to as “sets” were used. A “set” typically contained a square or rectangular drop leaf table and two half round end tables. These could be used individually or placed together to form one long table—the precursor to the “extension” table. One recurring problem with “sets” was that the tables might not sit evenly resulting from height differences between tables.

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117 Doran, *Table Traits with Something on them*, 123.
By the early nineteenth century new methods were found to extend the length of dining tables. The invention of the “extension” table allowed tables to expand by placing “leaves” in the center of the table, resting on rods or wooden frames mounted under the tabletop. With the advent of specific dining rooms, the need for moving tables from room to room diminished so larger, heavier tables could be used. Henry Sargent's painting of the Dinner Party shows a long, stationary table in an upper-class Boston dining room in the 1820's.

For the Middle Class, Webster and Parkes offered a description of a cottage dining table, which had “a fixed center not above 18 inches wide, to take up as little room as possible when put away.” These drop-leaf tables could be square or round, with a fixed center part, and folding leaves or flaps supported by hinged fly-rails or legs.

Another significant piece of furniture that developed along with the dining room was the “sideboard.” This specialized piece of furniture that had its origins in the second half of the eighteenth century. According to Kenneth Ames:

The basic concept of the sideboard goes back to the cupboards, credenzas, dressers, and buffets of the Medieval and Renaissance periods. The direct ancestor of the modern sideboard seems to have appeared in a design for a sideboard table flanked by two urns on pedestals, created by Robert and James Adam, for Osterley Park in 1767. Shortly afterwards in the work of Thomas Shearer, the pedestals migrated from the sides of the table to underneath it, creating the familiar late eighteenth and early nineteenth-century form.

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118 Webster and Parkes, An Encyclopedia of Domestic Economy, 258.


121 Ames, Winterthur Portfolio 9, 4.
An example of an early sideboard can be seen in Sargent’s *The Dinner Party*. George Hepplewhite, writing about this new form of furniture in 1794, stated: “The great utility of this piece of furniture has procured it a very general reception; and the conveniences it affords render a dining-room incomplete without a sideboard.”

Robert Roberts described the sideboard as a place for the elegant display of plate and glassware with the pieces being arranged in a crescent or half circle form, as this looks the most “sublime.”

During the second quarter of the nineteenth century the sideboard gradually increased in size by filling in below and expanding above to become the premiere piece of dining furniture. By the middle the nineteenth century it was a massive, intricately carved “temple” to the art of dining.

The decor of the dining room was quite different from that of the “parlor.” According to Susan Williams:

The grand opulence that was deemed necessary for the parlors-rooms whose purpose was strictly limited to entertainment - was not appropriate for a room that had to serve not only company but family as well. There the potentially corruptive presence of rich, showy materials was virtually eliminated, replaced instead by materials like ingrain instead of “rich tapestry” carpet, and black walnut instead of imported rosewood furniture. The former, though certainly not inferior in quality or expense, was generally more restrained in character.

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The dining rooms of upper-class families contained the most modern lighting available at the time. Sargent’s *The Dinner Party* shows a type of suspended Argand-burner fixture which was imported and extremely expensive. The fixture has four burners with chimneys but no shades and is supplied from a single font arranged above a shallow glass bowl. In contrast, middle-class dining rooms contained less elaborate lighting than the parlor as the nineteenth century progressed. While the front parlor may have had an ormolu gas chandelier with six to eight globes, the dining room often contained a simpler “gas pendant”. Although the dining room was less resplendent than the parlor, “the lighting, cheerful cleanliness, and temperature of the dining-room [were all] carefully considered.” It should be noted that candles remained a popular form of lighting for social occasions, just as they are today.

Dining room carpets were of concern throughout the nineteenth century. Many writers on domestic economy included advice on the care of carpet in the dining room. Most, like Catharine Beecher, recommended the use of a “table-rug” or crumb cloth to save carpets from injury. She recommended bocking or baize as the best material and suggested to “always spread the same side up, or the carpet will become soiled by the rug.” Brussels carpet, a less expensive, loop pile construction, was preferred over

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127 Doran, *Table Traits with Something on them*, 120 & 121.


129 Beecher, *Treatise*, 306. This is also known as a *drugget*. 
more expensive forms of cut pile carpet for dining rooms because it was easier to keep clean and less costly to replace if a dining disaster should occur.

Conclusions

Many factors effect the development of the dining room. As divisions between work and domestic life became more prominent, they were reflected in everyday life through dining rituals. Social status was elevated not only by a person’s ability to afford the space for a dining room but also by his ability to understand and perform the social rituals surrounding the dining experience. As has been indicated, many books were published during the nineteenth century to assist people with proper behavior in society. Since dining has always been a source of socialization, the accomplishment of a special room for dining became a symbol of social status. The way people furnished their dining rooms, served their meals, and behaved before, during, and after the meal, was one indicator of the social status they had achieved.
Chapter 4

Introduction to House Inventories

One method to understand how people lived during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is to look at household estate inventories. An inventory can tell much about the way a person actually lived and spent his money. When combined with biographical and geographical information, an inventory can help to paint a clearer picture of the social status of the person in question. This study examined inventories recorded between 1794 and 1855. These were compared by decades, to perceive changes in how houses were furnished and used. It was hoped the decade approach would identify both changes in the way people lived and the rate at which these changes occurred.

For the purposes of this paper, 146 inventories were surveyed from the collection of the Athenaeum of Philadelphia. These inventories included a cross-section of predominantly Philadelphia society ranging from low to high income levels. To qualify for inclusion, the inventories had to be broken down by room and taken in urban or suburban areas only.

The following pages graphs and statistical evidence help summarize the findings and illustrate the evolution of the dining room. Previous chapters have discussed the

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130 This paper’s study period has been set at 1790 - 1855, due to limitations of the collection of household inventories accessible for research; the date range for the inventory study was limited to 1794 - 1855.

131 These inventories have been collected in a group of student projects done for the Historic Interiors course in the Historic Preservation Program at the University of Pennsylvania.

132 A small number of inventories were taken from New York City and other areas surrounding Philadelphia such as Germantown. Appendix ‘A’ contains the complete list of inventories used, including the former residence and profession of each decedent.
types of architectural and social advice literature available to people during the period 1790-1855. This comparative inventory study tests whether the advice was taken and, if so, the rate at which the dining room was adopted by both the upper and middle-class populations.\textsuperscript{133}

\textbf{Inventories 1794 - 1799}

For this time period, only five inventories met the research criteria of being broken out by rooms and located in an urban setting. The value of the household contents ranged from a low of £103.0.0 to a high of £724.19.7.\textsuperscript{134} Of the five inventories, three record two rooms each containing dining furniture, one records three rooms containing dining furniture and one inventory lists only one room containing dining furniture. (See Table 9). According to Table 8, the first floor front parlor was the most common location for dining. The back parlor on the first floor and the front parlor on the second floor were the second most common locations for dining. However, this information may be deceptive because houses frequently had retail space in the front room of the first floor. For this style of dwelling, the primary social space was located in the front room of the second floor.

\textsuperscript{133} Although every attempt at statistical accuracy has been made, it is important to state the following possible sources of error. First, the data collected was from inventories previously transcribed by students. In most cases the original document was not included with the transcription, so the accuracy of the transcription could not be verified. Second, only inventories broken down by rooms were used for this paper. But because this researcher did not have access to all of the original inventories, it is unknown how many original inventories included were broken down into rooms by the student's transcription, as part of their project assignment, and not by the original inventory taker. Though these sources of error exist, this researcher does not feel they are significant enough to greatly alter the results achieved.

\textsuperscript{134} Total estate values were not available for the inventories of this era so an understanding of the value of household contents in relation to total wealth could not be gained.


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Table 1. Dining furniture locations within the household, 1794-1799.

Table 1 shows that dining tables were kept in many different rooms of the house with the front parlor being slightly more popular. Sideboards and dining accessories were typically kept on the first floor, either in the front or back parlor, indicating that these spaces were probably preferred for formal dining rather than less formal family space on the second floor of the dwelling.

**Inventories 1800-1809**

For this period twenty-four household inventories met the research criteria. Twelve came from the first half of the decade and twelve from the second half of the decade. These inventories were the first in this study to designate a space as a "dining-room." According to Table 8, the primary location for dining shifted during this period from the first floor front parlor, to the first floor back parlor. In 54% of the inventories reviewed, the first floor back parlor contained the majority of the dining related furniture.

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135 This information, while true for this sample, is not intended to imply that designated dining rooms did not exist in America prior to this period.
and accessories. This shows a shift in use of the first floor front parlor for dining from 60% in the previous decade to only 25% in the first decade of the nineteenth century.

For this period the inventories ranged in total value of household goods from $281.71 to $3,200.20 indicating the dramatic difference in the wealth of the population. Furthermore, household goods comprised 16% to 94% of the total value of the overall estates. This percentage did not seem to vary dramatically according to the value of the estate. For Gunning Bedford, a Philadelphia lawyer, 84% of his total wealth of $333.74 was in household goods, not unlike Robert Montgomery, a Philadelphia gentleman, whose total wealth was $3,390.20, 94% of which was in household goods.

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Table 2. Dining furniture locations within the household, 1800-1809.

136 Dining "accessories" refers to all related dining equipment such as china, glassware, tableware, crockery and tea sets. Standard statistical practice prohibits the use of percentages when the total figures are less than one-hundred. They have been used here to ease the comparison of different numbers of groups from decade to decade.

137 See Appendix A for a complete list of all decedents, their occupations, household goods value and total estate value.
As seen in Table 2 there was an increase in the quantity of sideboards owned and their placement around the house. In the previous decade, only 40% of the inventories contained a sideboard as compared to 75% in the current decade. As previously discussed, this furniture form developed specifically to serve the function of dining.

**Inventories 1810-1819**

Twenty household inventories recorded in the second decade of the nineteenth century met the research criteria. As before, 50% of the inventories fell in the first half of the decade and 50% in the last half of the decade. During this period, there was only a slight shift in the primary location for dining. The first floor back parlor was used only forty percent of the time as compared with fifty-four percent a decade earlier. This shift was most likely caused by the increase in the popularity of the dining room. As indicated in Table 8, ten percent of the inventories contained a designated dining room, an increase of six percent from the previous decade.

Along with the increase of the number of dining rooms, came a consolidation of the location of dining furniture within the house. In the two previous decades it was common to have dining room furniture in two, if not three, rooms of the house and the first floor entry was the primary location for storing dining tables. During the second decade of the nineteenth century, 40% of the inventories showed dining furniture in just one room of the house. However, 45% of the inventories continued to list dining furniture in two rooms, indicating the continued popularity of earlier practices. Interestingly, even though two inventories specifically mentioned a “dining-room,” in neither case were all the dining furnishings located exclusively in the dining room.
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Table 3. Dining furniture locations within the household, 1810 - 1819.

In Table 3 it can be seen that the percentage of dining furniture in the dining room was quite low when compared to other spaces. The table also shows that the dining room was not a space reserved exclusively for dining. In 5% of the inventories, a secretary was also located in the dining room. This suggests the room could also function as a household office space or as a library for the family in general.

During this decade, the inventories range in value from $442.15 to $7,185.52 with the average being $1,410.12. The amount of the household goods as a percentage of the overall estate varied widely, from a low of 0.97% to a high of 93%. In an industrial economy, wealth was held in more diversified instruments than found in the commercial economy of the eighteenth century. Where people had previously held wealth in tangibles such as silver tea sets, the results of the Industrial Revolution gradually permitted people to invest their money in intangibles such as stocks, bonds, and banks.
The result was that household goods made up ever smaller portions of individuals’ wealth. For example, the estate of William Hammon, a wealthy Philadelphia merchant, had a total estate value of $143,899.40 in 1816, of which only $3,101.55 or 2% was household goods.\textsuperscript{138}

**Inventories 1820 - 1829**

For the 1820’s, thirty-nine inventories met the research criteria. Of these, 41% fell in the first half of the decade while 59% fell in the last half of the decade. During this period, the use of the first floor back parlor as the primary space for dining stayed relatively stable as compared with the previous decade. Table 8 indicates a 3.5% increase in the use of the back parlor for the dining function from ten years earlier. As an overall percentage, the use of the term “dining room” declined, for only two inventories out of thirty-nine samples contained the designation. In the previous decade the number was two in twenty samples. The greatest increase occurred in the use of the first floor front parlor for the dining function, which was indicated 13% more frequently than the decade before. Another new development of this period was the “breakfast” room.\textsuperscript{139} Two inventories contained breakfast rooms in lieu of dining rooms, and one inventory contained both a breakfast and dining room.

As can be seen in Table 4, dining furniture was overwhelmingly located in the front and back parlors on the first floor. This indicates how common house plans with

\textsuperscript{138} William Hammon, Philadelphia Will 1816:126.

\textsuperscript{139} The term “breakfast” room first appeared in 1796 in William Pain’s *The Practical House Carpenter*. In his plan for a “Large Grand House” the breakfast room is adjacent to the dining room and in his plan for a “Large House” the breakfast room is across the hall from the dining room.
two parlors were during this time. Typically these two rooms were joined by wide doors that permitted these spaces to be used either as one large room for entertaining, or as two separate ones. As previously discussed, the front room was commonly a more formal space for entertaining guests, while the back room was less formal and primarily used by the family.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Entry 1st Floor</th>
<th>Front Parlor 1st Floor</th>
<th>Back Parlor 1st Floor</th>
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<th>Dining Rm. 1st floor</th>
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Table 4. Dining furniture locations within the household, 1820 - 1829.

The value of inventories ranged dramatically during this period, from a low of $144.97 to a high of $5,217.80. There was also a wide range for total estate value, from $1,390.19 to $116,088.16. As with the previous decade, the difference between the value of the total estate compared to the value of household goods continued to increase. Sixteen of the thirty-nine inventories sampled contained both the value for the household as well as the estate; of these, only two had household goods valued at more than 50% of the total value of the estate, with 89% being the highest. Six inventories had goods
valued at less than 5% of the total estate, with .07% being the lowest figure. The rest of
the inventories fell in the range of 10% to 30% of the value of the household goods to the
total estate.

Inventories 1830 - 1839

Fifteen inventories for the decade of the 1830’s met the research criteria. Of those
only three represent the first half of the decade, the rest are from the last half of the
decade. This period saw a dramatic increase in the number of inventories containing
rooms designated as “dining-rooms”. Thirty-three percent of the sample inventories
contained dining rooms as opposed to only five percent ten years earlier. There also
seems to have been an increase in the use of breakfast rooms. Combined, the dining
room and breakfast room designation occurred in 53% of the inventories. It appears that
the shift in room location was primarily from the first floor back parlor to the dining and
breakfast room. In the sample taken for the period 1820-1829, 43.5% of the inventories
listed the back parlor as the primary location for dining. In the 1830’s, this dropped to
only 13% of the sampled inventories. There was a less dramatic decline in the use of the
first floor front parlor for dining. Table 8 shows only an 8% drop for this room from ten
years earlier.

Dining furniture, however, could still be found throughout the house. Nine out of
fifteen inventories had dining furniture in two rooms of the house, while two had it in
three different rooms. Only four inventories had dining furniture exclusively in one
room, and of those four, two were in the dining room itself and two were parlors.
Table 5. Dining furniture locations within the household, 1830 - 1839.

Table 5 shows not only the distribution of dining furniture throughout the houses inventoried, but also the different pieces of furniture used in dining and breakfast rooms. It was common in the eighteenth century to entertain favored guests in the best bed chamber, but this gradually changed towards the end of the century as private and public activities became separated. As dining became a more formal, public ritual, the types of activities that shared the room for taking meals changed. Only one inventory sampled at this period records a bed and cradle in the breakfast room, perhaps indicating that in some households traditions were very slow to change.\textsuperscript{140}

For the first time, rocking chairs and sofas appeared in dining room inventories. It appears that while people wanted to have designated dining rooms in their houses, they

\textsuperscript{140} Thomas Price, Philadelphia Will 1833:177. Price was a hardware merchant in Philadelphia and had an estate valued at $22,138.28.
weren’t quite ready to give up the family parlor activities and their associated furniture. In Table 8, one can see that inventories had dining rooms, but one can also see in Table 5 that most of the sideboards were still being placed in either the front or the back parlor. As a consequence of this placement, most dining “accessories” were also located in the parlors.\[141\] One can infer that people where more concerned with keeping the ornamental sideboard prominently displayed than with the convenience of having dining accessories located in the dining room.

As with earlier decades, the sample of household inventories represented a wide range of household values from $132.00 to $4,117.43; similar to the range in estate values from $2,054.71 to $46,713.77. As has been shown with the earlier decades, the value of the household goods in relation to the overall estate varied from a low of 0.32% to a high of 73%. The average value fell into a range between 9% and 35%. These values vary from the first quarter of the century when household goods typically comprised a larger percentage of the total estate value.

**Inventories 1840-1849**

For the 1840’s, twenty-eight inventories met the research criteria; of these, twelve dated from the first half of the decade, sixteen from the last half of the decade. This period saw the greatest change in the use of dining rooms as the designated space for taking meals. Table 8 shows a 38% increase over the previous decade in the number of inventories specifically mentioning a dining room. This increase relates to the noticeable

\[141\] Though a significant amount of dining accessories were stored in the sideboard, an even greater amount were typically stored in pantries or closets that were either located within or adjacent to the dining room.
decline in the use of the front parlor for dining purposes. Table 8 shows a thirteen percent decrease in the number of inventories indicating dining happening in the front parlor. Another area of decline was with the breakfast room. In the previous decade, 20% of the inventories mentioned a breakfast room but in the 1840’s, only one inventory had a breakfast room in addition to a dining room.

The location of dining furniture within the house saw a shift to the dining room as well. 50% of the inventories sampled still had dining furniture in two different rooms in the house. But, 39% of the inventories had dining room furniture exclusively in one room of the house, an increase of 12% from the previous decade. Of the inventories listing only one room with dining room furniture, 73% recorded it in the dining room while 29% listed parlors.

Table 6 shows the distribution of dining furniture throughout out the houses in the inventory sample and shows an increasing tendency to consolidate dining furniture in the dining room. However, there is also a dramatic increase in the number of sofas or settees located in the dining room. Thirty-nine percent of the dining rooms of the 1840’s included sofas in them while only one dining room had a sofa in it during the 1830’s. Also evident is the increase in rocking chairs in the dining room. Four of the twenty inventoried dining rooms contained a rocking chair in addition to more typical “dining” chairs. One also sees a small number of desks, secretaries, and even a harp is listed.

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142 Dining Chairs have not been addressed as a furniture type in this chapter because during the time period of this thesis, 1790-1855, it was common to have multiple sets of chairs located throughout the house. It should be noted that as dining rooms develop they typically contain anywhere from six to 12 dining chairs. Occasionally, that number may be higher depending on the variety of chair types.
This supports the idea of the dining room as a mixed use space used for other purposes between meals.

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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Entry 1st Floor</th>
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<th>Breakfast Rm. 1st Floor</th>
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Table 6. Dining furniture locations within the household, 1840 - 1849.

The 1840’s show the largest disparity in household values of any sample yet reviewed; the low value being $209.00 and the high value being $13,676.00. Of the fifteen inventories in the sample indicating both household and estate values, the average household value was $1,642.47. This helps to show the increasing wealth of the emerging middle-class in America at this time. The portion of the overall estate value held in household goods continued to decline. Ten of the fifteen inventories sampled, or 75%, showed that the household goods accounted for 20% or less of the overall estate value. Of those ten inventories, 60% had household values at or below 5% of the total value.
estate value. This shows a significant increase in the amount of personal wealth being invested in assets outside of the house.

**Inventories 1850 - 1855**

Although only the first half of the decade of the 1850’s was reviewed, fifteen inventories met the research criteria. For this five year period, Table 8 shows a 2% increase in the number of inventories designating dining rooms within the house. The percentage of inventories showing dining in the front parlor remained constant with the decade previous. There was a 4% decrease in the percentage of inventories indicating dining in the back parlor, and an increase in the percentage of breakfast rooms. For the first time, the number of rooms containing dining furniture changed greatly. Of fifteen inventories, eleven indicated all dining furniture in just one room of the house. Of these eleven, nine recorded the furniture in the dining room and two listed it in parlors. The other four inventories showed the old pattern of dining furniture divided between two and three rooms.

Table 7 shows the continued consolidation of dining furniture in the dining room. Only the sideboard continues to be placed in rooms other than the dining room. This may be due to the storage it afforded or the showiness of this piece of furniture. It must be noted that many of the inventories reviewed for this paper contained more than one sideboard, and it was not unusual for an inventory to have as many as three placed throughout the house. This remained constant for all of the decades of the nineteenth century.
Table 7 also indicates that the dining room continued to be a “mixed-use” space containing sofas, rocking chairs, secretaries, and bookcases. This shows that dining rooms clearly functioned as work rooms, offices and libraries. Interestingly, the number of sofas in dining rooms increased from 39% in the 1840’s to 53% in the first half of the 1850’s—a 14% increase in just a five year period.143

<table>
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Table 7. Dining furniture locations within the household, 1850 - 1855.

Statistically, the difference between the highest valued household inventory and the lowest valued inventory changed little from what has been seen in earlier decades; with the lowest value at $190.00, the highest at $8,037.50, and the average household value was $694.34. Of the fifteen inventories sampled for this decade, only six contained

143 Since only the first five years of the 1850’s were looked at, these statistics may be disproportionately high based on the study sample. Further study is required to verify the actual increase in the placement of sofas within dining rooms of this period.
totals for the household goods and total estate value. (See Appendix A.) The lowest estate value was $3,123.33, the highest was $79,247.39, and the average value of the total estate was $30,339.87. In continuing a trend first seen in the early decades of the nineteenth century, the percentage of the overall value of the estate that was comprised of the household goods dropped to 10% and lower. Only one of the six inventories had household goods equaling at least 12% of the total estate. The majority were at 6% or less with the lowest at .04% of the total estate value.

Conclusions

As has been shown in the decade by decade breakdown, the idea of the dining room as a special use space evolved gradually over a long period, and was not achieved prior 1855. Table 8 clearly indicates the progression of the dining function over a sixty year period from the parlor to a separate space referred to as a dining room. Along with the creation of the space itself, it took just as long to consolidate dining furniture into a single location as indicated in Table 9. There was some fluctuation in the number of rooms containing dining furniture from decade to decade, but the trend toward a separate and special dining room was ascendant by the end of the 1850’s.

By reviewing Tables 1 through 7, one can see the various rooms used for the placement of dining furniture. The entry remained popular throughout the examination period, a remnant of the time when dining was a decentralized function and the tables could be set together in either the front or back parlor.

Architecturally, it is clear that the double parlor house plan was the dominant urban design during the first quarter of the nineteenth century. Because the majority of
the inventories used for this thesis came from Philadelphia, it is difficult to get a sense of the popularity of basement level dining spaces, a plan more popular in New York City than Philadelphia.

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Table 8. Rooms Designated for Dining Function, 1794 - 1855

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<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1790-1799</th>
<th>1800-1809</th>
<th>1810-1819</th>
<th>1820-1829</th>
<th>1830-1839</th>
<th>1840-1849</th>
<th>1850-1855</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Inventories</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Room</td>
<td>1 (20%)</td>
<td>6 (25%)</td>
<td>8 (40%)</td>
<td>9 (23%)</td>
<td>4 (27%)</td>
<td>11 (39%)</td>
<td>11 (73%)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Rooms</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Rooms</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
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</table>

Table 9. Number of Rooms Containing Dining Furniture, 1794 - 1855.
Chapter 5

Conclusion

This paper has explored the evolution of the dining room as a distinct space within the American house from 1790 - 1855. The development has been researched from three perspectives. First, architecturally, through builder’s guides and house pattern books. Second, socially, through the review of etiquette books and domestic economy books. And finally, by reviewing household inventories that show how people lived within their houses.

The architectural literature available to Americans in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century was originally written for the English Upper Class. These guide books were then reprinted in the young republic requiring Americans to adapt English designs for their own needs. Though the guide books were typically ten to thirty years out of date when printed in America, they did introduce the American Upper Class to the concept of the dining room as a distinct space.\(^{144}\)

As the nineteenth century progressed and the Middle Class began to gain wealth due to the Industrial Revolution, guide books began to be written by Americans. As wealth increased, the size of houses increased allowing for separate spaces such as the dining room. By the mid-nineteenth century, the dining room became a middle-class symbol of gentility. According to writers such as Andrew Jackson Downing, the dining

\(^{144}\) Though the wealthiest members of society regularly imported books from Europe and England, and had quick access to the latest fashions, many wealthy Americans, who could afford to build grand houses, relied on books printed in America.
room was reserved for families who could afford at least three servants. People of lesser economic standing required only a “living-room” which served many functions.145

Literature dealing with social etiquette and domestic economy also appeared during the first half of the nineteenth century. Domestic economy books explained how dining rooms should be used and furnished. As with architectural literature, some of the earliest influential books came from England. British authors Thomas Webster and Mrs. Parkes, wrote An Encyclopedia of Domestic Economy which was widely distributed in the United States. However, this book was addressed to the English Middle Class, still economically a cut above their counterparts in the United States. As a result, American authors Catharine Beecher and Lydia Maria Child wrote their own books specifically for the American Middle Class.

Books on domestic economy combined with those on social etiquette and magazines for women such as Godey’s Lady’s Book helped explain the roles American women were expected to fill within their households. These books taught women how to care for, furnish and decorate their houses. They also explained genteel behavior expected of the newly emerging Middle Class.

Central to the idea of dining as a social ritual, was the need to obtain and maintain a staff of domestic servants. The servants were essential to the dining experience because of the need either to organize the furniture or serve the meal depending on the dining style of choice. Many domestic economy books addressed the difficulties suffered by

middle-class families trying to maintain good quality servants when other employment opportunities were becoming available due to industrialization.

The Chapter 4 in this thesis was based on a survey of 146 primarily Philadelphia inventories taken between 1794 and 1855 to verify the evolution of the dining room. These inventories suggest the rate at which the dining room was accepted by the general population and whether people followed the advice contained in architectural and social literature. The inventories prove that many Philadelphians continued to locate dining furniture in various rooms of the house well into the middle of the nineteenth century. The inventories also indicate how dining evolved from a decentralized activity taking place in parlors and best chambers to one performed in a formal “dining” room.

Interpreting the Dining Room

For museum curators it is crucial to properly interpret dining rooms from the period 1790 to 1855. At the beginning of the nineteenth century dining was a decentralized function with the furniture located throughout the principal floor of the house. As indicated by the inventories surveyed, dining tables when not in use were primarily stored in the entry hall, a convenient location for setting up meals in either the front or back parlor. The front parlor was generally preferred for entertaining and the back parlor for less formal family dining.

By mid-century, dining rooms were distinct spaces with specialized dining furniture but the function continued to be mixed with other uses such as libraries, sitting rooms and entertainment spaces. While the dining room held a dining table and chairs, sideboard and dining accessories, it also typically contained furniture not associated with
dining rooms today such as sofas, secretaries, bookcases, and musical instruments, including pianos and harps. It is important for dining rooms of this period to reflect a space that was in continuous use throughout the day, not exclusively at meal time.

As is evident from Tables 1 through 7, museum curators should consider placing dining furniture in rooms other than the dining room. Between 1790 and 1855, dining furniture continued to be located throughout the principal floor even after the dining room was incorporated into the house. It was common for people to own more than one sideboard, and to place the more valuable sideboard in the front parlor with the lesser valued sideboard in the dining room. Dining tables continued to be placed in the front entry as well. It is not clear if these dining tables were being stored or just decorative pieces based on the tradition of having dining tables in the entry.

To accurately present a well furnished house from the first half of the nineteenth century, curators need to place dining furniture in at least two rooms in addition the dining room. While at the same time, furniture representing other functions must be included within the room designated for dining to show it as a multi-purpose space.
Appendix A

List of Household Inventories

The following is a list of household inventories used for statistical analysis in Chapter 4. Brackets [ ] have been used to indicate information that was not available, and an * has been used to indicate the profession of a widow’s husband. All values are in dollars unless otherwise indicated.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Will #</th>
<th>City</th>
<th>Decedent</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Household Value</th>
<th>Estate Value</th>
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<td>John Brinburth</td>
<td>Coachmaker</td>
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<td>£1,024.0.0</td>
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<td>Philadelphia</td>
<td>Josiah Twamley</td>
<td>[ ]</td>
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<td>Thomas Leaming</td>
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<td>Blacksmith</td>
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<td>Gunning Bedford</td>
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<td>333.74</td>
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<tr>
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<td>44</td>
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72
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<th>Household Value</th>
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