

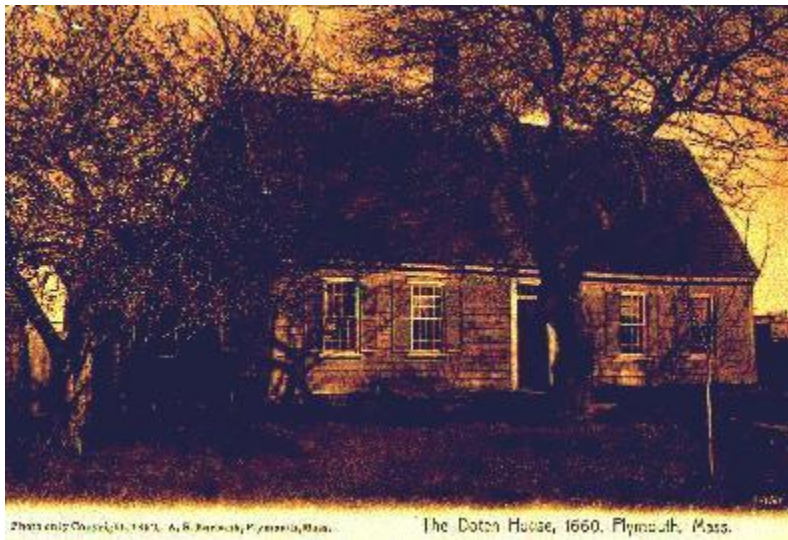
THE ENDURING CAPE COD HOUSE

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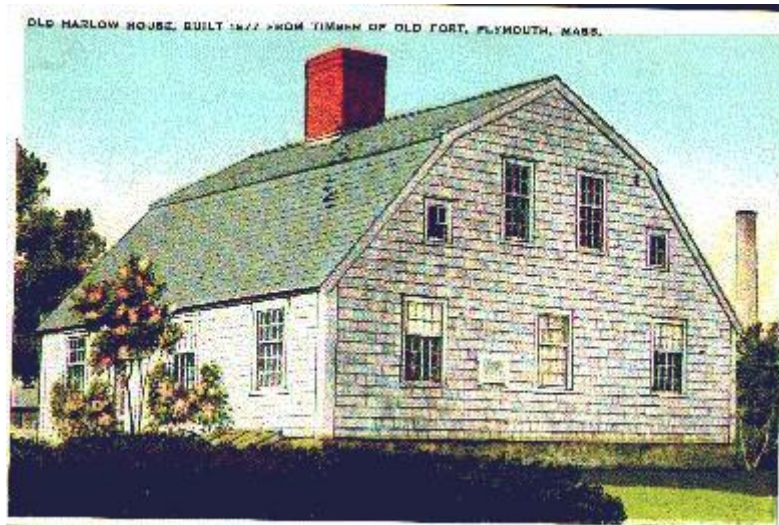
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The Enduring Cape Cod House explores how building technology and living needs have changed over time by exploring one specific house type, the Cape Cod House.

The Cape Cod house is a small, one-story building with a central chimney. The steep roof allows the attic to be used as living space. This folk-style house developed in New England in the late 17th and 18th centuries. There was a resurgence of interest in the 1930s and 1940s, when small, economical houses were popular.

Today they can be found all over America. Do you have any Cape Cod houses in your town?



The Cape Cod House

When English colonists came to America, they built houses that were familiar to them. The half-timbered English house with its hall and parlor was their model, which they adapted to the climate and natural resources of New England. What emerged over several generations was a distinct new development: what is now called the Cape Cod house. This traditional, vernacular house style was built all over New England for more than 250 years, and spread across the country in the 1940s and 1950s to become one of America's favorite house styles. The Cape Cod house is one of New England's most significant contributions to American culture.

The "**Cape Cod House**" got its name in 1800 from Timothy Dwight, president of Yale University. In his book, *Travels in New England and New York*, Dwight describes his visit to Cape Cod, where he saw houses which he felt were a "class."



Dwight described them as having "one storey... covered on the sides, as well as the roofs, with pine shingles... the chimney is in the middle... and on each side of the door are two windows... the roof is straight. Under it are two chambers; and there are two larger, and two smaller windows in the gable end."

Dwight described a "**full Cape**," made by doubling the small house unit or "half Cape" which would have been familiar to early English colonists like the Pilgrims. The "half Cape" could also be multiplied to make a "house-and-a-half" or "three-quarter Cape."



Like the prototypical English houses, early Capes had two basic rooms, the hall and parlor. The hall, or Great Room, was used for daily living. The parlor was used as a master bedroom. Over time, the kitchen moved to the back of the house, often with pantries and small bedrooms at the rear corners.

Over time, people added on to the houses, either doubling the half Cape or adding a wing to the rear. As people's need for space grew, dormers were cut into roofs to add more space, light and ventilation. "Shed" dormers ran almost the entire length of the houses, while "dog house" dormers were just the width of a window. Many old houses had dormers added in the 1920s, when new ideas about privacy and health led people to create more bedrooms.

Early Capes were heated by a massive central chimney with several fireplaces. The central chimney is a feature typical to New England, as it helped keep the heat in the house in the cold northern climate. Houses of similar shape were built in the south, but they almost always have chimneys on the outside walls to dissipate the heat in a hot climate. As people discovered new ways of heating houses with stoves and furnaces, the massive central chimney was no longer needed. New houses were built with smaller chimneys, and many old chimneys were replaced.

Cape Cod style houses were built in New England from the late 17th century. Later houses were often more rectangular. Occasionally the house was turned sideways and the door placed on the short gable end to resemble popular Greek Revival houses.

Architects rediscovered the Cape Cod house in the 1930s, when both the Colonial Revival and the Depression combined to create a desire for small, economical yet old-fashioned houses. The Cape Cod house received national publicity through books like *Houses for Homemakers* by Boston architect Royal Barry Wills. Wills' Capes featured the traditional massive central chimney. Instead of halls and parlors, the modern Capes had living rooms, dining rooms, large bedrooms, bathrooms and attached garages.

The Cape Cod house came into its own in the 1940s and 1950s. GIs returning from World War II were encouraged to buy homes for their growing families. Plans for Cape Cod homes by Wills and other architects were circulated nationally through the "House of the Month" scheme, which distributed plans and models to banks and savings and loans all over America. Planned estates like Levittown, New York, featured Cape Cod houses.

Today, the Cape Cod house appeals to our sense of heritage. House plan names like "Nantucket" appeal to the romance of old New England. There are even paint colors named after Cape Cod! The Cape Cod house, New England's most popular export, has endured through a combination of nostalgia and practicality.