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The Design and Dating of the Thomas Batchelor House at Beech Grove Plantation in Amite County

by Douglas Lewis

More than two dozen day-books, account books, and ledgers of mostly antebellum dates from 1809 onward that have been preserved for years at the Thomas Batchelor House at Beech Grove Plantation in Amite County (once part of the Old Natchez District) are being donated to the Mississippi Department of Archives and History. The property, a once-substantial cotton farm, was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1975 and designated a Mississippi Landmark in 2019.¹ These documents constitute the often day-by-day records of the owners of the plantation property, which has been in the same family since it was pioneered in 1803. The earlier items in the collection document in meticulous detail the building of several structures, especially the 1827 “mansion house” (see Figure 1) in which they were found. The records exhaustively document the genesis of one of the best surviving examples of Federal architecture in Mississippi, and they even record that ultimate rarity, the builder’s preparation of detailed measured drawings in the months before the Batchelor House was built.² A descriptive analysis of Beech Grove’s architecture and a survey of its East Coast sources are presented in this article, together with the documentary evidence for its construction date. The accounts also have been canvassed for contemporary domestic structures built by the same family at the

¹ On December 11, 2019, the present writer donated eleven ledgers from the Natchez firm of Buckholts & Richards (active 1816-1833: see note 107) to the Mississippi Department of Archives and History (MDAH, Z/2381). At the same time, the Beech Grove Papers (Z/2380)—accounts of the writer’s great-great-great grandfather, and successors—had a small initial deposit, but the remainder of that archive is scheduled for future donations. This paper is based on its two earliest components: Item 1, Thomas Batchelor’s personal accounts, 1809-1842; and item 2, Beech Grove “RECEIPT BOOK,” 1842-1869.

² See notes 15 and 16.

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Figure 1. South facade of Batchelor House with archaeologically reconstructed central porch

Amite County seat in Liberty and in the neighborhood of the Thomas Batchelor House (though among all such buildings, only Beech Grove itself survives today).

The protagonists of this saga are an interrelated group of pioneer families in the then extreme southwestern frontier of the United States, at the time that it was dramatically augmented by the Louisiana Purchase of 1803.³ That band of settlers originated in the Virginia Tidewater, although probably in the turmoil leading up to and following the Revolutionary War, they moved successively into that state's Piedmont region, then into upland North and South Carolina, before emigrating to the Mississippi Territory.⁴ Their eldest leader was George Gayden (1739-1819), who was born near the Rappahannock River in

³ American ministers in Paris consummated the Louisiana Purchase on April 30, 1803. This news reached America by July, and at a ceremony in New Orleans on December 20, 1803, the territory of Louisiana was officially transferred to the United States.

⁴ The Gayden and Collins families had evidently reached the piedmont area in Orange County, Virginia, by 1772, from which they moved to Granville County, North Carolina, by 1776/77. They are later documented in the Lancaster district of South Carolina in 1787, where they were listed in the Census of 1800.

the ‘Northern Neck’ and married near Orange, Virginia, in the early 1770s. Gayden was eventually the father of nine adult children.⁵ A close associate of Gayden during latter decades of his life was Thomas Batchelor (1775-1842), whose grandparents (and ancestors of at least two generations) were natives of Norfolk, Virginia. Batchelor’s parents had migrated to the piedmont section of North Carolina, where he was born.⁶ Batchelor must have profited from a remarkably solid schooling (or even a stint at college), for he was trained in the law, and was adept at four languages—Ancient Greek, Latin, French, and English.⁷

In 1803 Batchelor, together with the Gayden and Collins families, set out from the Camden district of South Carolina by wagon train through the foothills of the Appalachians, and thence by flatboat from Muscle Shoals down the Tennessee, Ohio, and Mississippi rivers to Natchez.⁸ They followed the tide of American settlement southward, crossing the Homochitto and Buffalo rivers into the newly-founded Wilkinson County, in the extreme southwestern angle of the Mississippi Territory.

⁵ George Gayden, a native of Farnham in Old Rappahannock [now Richmond] County, married 1st Nancy Ann Waddell (or Wardell) in Orange County before June 1773, since his eldest daughter Rebecca—the future Mrs. Thomas Batchelor—was born there on February 27, 1774, (according to her tombstone at Beech Grove). Gayden’s other children, in birth order (according to their naming in his will of May 29, 1819, preserved in the Amite County Courthouse), were: Cadesby (c. 1775-1841), married December 13, 1806, Polly Lea Collins; Agrippa (July 21, 1778-January 17, 1845, according to his tombstone adjoining Beech Grove), married July 31, 1821, Margaret Muse Lea; Martha [“Patsy”] (born c.1780/81 in North Carolina), married May 12, 1808, Lewis Perkins. George Gayden married 2nd December 4, 1782, Lois Collins in Granville Co., NC; their children: George L. (c. 1783-c. 1845), married January 31, 1808, Sally Evans Dunn, married 2nd Martha Scott; Elizabeth [“Betsy”] (c. 1785-1853) married 1804, William Morgan; Diana (c. 1787-after 1819), married 1806, George Davis; Griffin (c. 1788/9-1830), married December 20, 1818, Dorcas Wade, married 2nd (after 1826), Mary Ann McClendon; and Nash (c. 1790-1812), married June 6, 1811, Hannah Howard.

⁶ Thomas Batchelor (December 23, 1775-April 11, 1842, according to his tombstone at Beech Grove), apparently born in Franklin County, North Carolina (adjoining the Gaydens in Granville County on the west, and Nash County on the east—to whose Deep Creek Township his grandparents and parents had moved from Norfolk in the first half of the eighteenth century—as aligned from west to east along the Tar River), would have joined these emigrant families in the later 1790s.

⁷ One of Batchelor’s anthologies of ancient Greek texts, the *Analecta Græca Majora* (Cambridge, MA, 1824), survives at Beech Grove. A measure of its rarity is that among the 1,000 books collected by Anson Jones, the last governor of the Republic of Texas, were (alongside titles similarly in English, French, and Latin) only two books in Greek: Eugene D. Genovese, *The Sweetness of Life; Southern Planters at Home* (Cambridge, UK, 2017), 25.

⁸ Contemporaneous copy (at Beech Grove) of letter of May 30, 1923, to Mrs. Clark H. Rice of New Orleans from Margaret Rowena McLean Smiley (1842-c. 1925), granddaughter of Parthena Davis (1792-1840s/50s—see note 10), transmitting the latter’s firsthand account of this trek: “[Parthena] was born in South Carolina and I heard her say that her cousin Fannie Wren came a days’ journey with her when they moved to Mississippi. [Wiley] Collins was killed by the Indians on his way here.” Wiley (c.1757-1803) was the youngest of the Collins family.

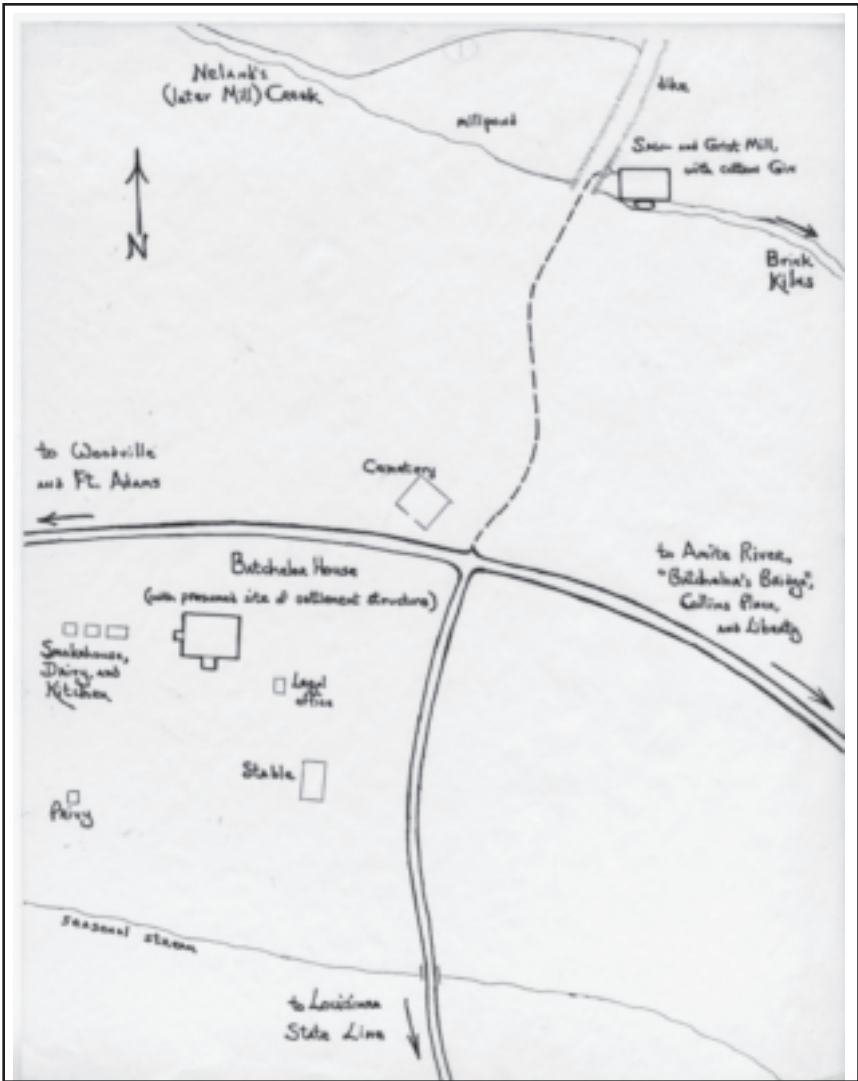


Figure 2. Site plan of the center of Beech Grove Plantation, 1842

There they entered into virgin lands watered by the West Amite River, a bit more than forty miles east of newly-christened Fort Adams, a military outpost that General James Wilkinson had established on the Mississippi six miles above the 31st parallel's Line of Demarcation across the international frontier from Spain's Nueva Feliciana. They settled permanently along a Federal post road leading east from Fort Adams, just before it forded the west branch of the Amite, at a point crossed in 1832 by "Batchelor's Bridge" (see Figure 2). They carved out

landholdings distinguished from those of their immediate predecessors on the river-oriented tracts of British and Spanish grants immediately to their west by the newly-ordained Jeffersonian grid of townships and ranges. Their first formal purchases of Federal lands in the area were recorded in 1807.⁹

Meanwhile Thomas Batchelor had married George Gayden's eldest daughter Rebecca (1774-1836) on December 26, 1805, and presumably on that date moved into her existing "settlement structure" on the Beech Grove site, where according to the 1805 census she already maintained a substantial household. Though barely thirty, Rebecca was already twice a widow. At her traditionally first-eligible age of about sixteen she had married Ebenezer Leith of Virginia, an offshoot of the famous Lee family with whom she had borne one daughter, Parthena (1792-1840s/50s).¹⁰ After Dr. Leith's death in the early 1790s, Rebecca had married the wealthy Francis Wren of South Carolina (c. 1770-1805), and by him had had four children. In fact, Francis's testament of March 21, 1804, affords the earliest officially recorded date for the Mississippi arrival of these families. His will was registered in Woodville (the River Amite settlements were contained within Wilkinson County until 1809) and was probated upon his death in October 1805.¹¹

Design

The "settlement structure" occupied by Rebecca Gayden [Leith/Wren] and her children was a roughly-finished log or plank building

⁹ Each member of Beech Grove's migrating families registered these preliminary land purchases on the same day, August 14, 1807—in each case for the standard unit of sale, of 320 acres. The land-surveying grid of 'townships' and 'ranges' was introduced into the Northwest Territory by the Ordinance of 1787, and throughout western lands generally by the Land Bill of 1796, passed by an Act of the U.S. Congress: Samuel E. Morison and Henry S. Commager, *The Growth of the American Republic*, vol. 1 (New York, 4th ed., 1953), pp. 362-367. On the pivotal date of March 3, 1803, the Act of 1796 was extended also to the Mississippi Territory (est. 1798): May W. McBee, *Natchez Court Records, 1767-1805* (Greenwood, MS, 1953), p. 351 ff. See note 94 one of the preceding 'irregular sections.'

¹⁰ Parthena Leith married October 20, 1816, another early Amite County planter, Charles Davis, Esq. (c. 1780s-1834); their daughter Victoria Caroline Davis (1824-1881) was named for the Batchelors' eldest daughter, Victoria Caroline Batchelor (1806-1858), mistress of Beech Grove 1846-1858. See also note 8, for Parthena's trip to the Mississippi Territory.

¹¹ Rebecca Gayden Leith's and Francis Wren's children were John Wren (1795-1818), who fathered a natural child in Liberty; Eliza[beth] Wren (1797-c. 1856), who married 1st Robert J. Lowry, 2nd James Eubanks, and 3rd Christopher Carsner; Francis Wren II (c. 1800-1855), married 1821 Mahalia Collins; and George Gayden Wren (1802-1819), who from infancy lived with his mother Rebecca Gayden Wren and his step-father Thomas Batchelor.

that stood on the Beech Grove site from the last months of 1803 until sometime in the early or middle 1820s (see Figure 2). Only two of its interior doors remain today. Formed of carefully joined vertical planks planed smooth on one side, their reverses are roughly-hewn with adzes and fitted with strap hinges over jamb-mounted iron pins. These doors were re-installed as twin closures to ancillary spaces opening off the master bedroom in the 1827 Batchelor House that replaced the earlier structure.¹²

We know much more, however, about the preparations for Mr. and Mrs. Batchelor's "mansion house." On April 24, 1820, the United States Congress passed an "Act for the . . . sale of Public Lands," and punctually on November 24 of that year Thomas Batchelor paid \$97 to obtain an official Federal grant for the seventy-eight-acre plot on which his new house would be constructed.¹³ His application took fifteen months to process, and on February 20, 1822, President James Monroe signed a permanent patent to this property that is still preserved in the library at Beech Grove. The next four years saw the accumulation, aging, and drying of the heavy timbers needed to frame the house.¹⁴

Then in May 1826 there occurs in Batchelor's earliest autograph account book (recording his incomes and expenses from March 1809 to March 1842) an indebtedness to the mercantile firm of McDowell & Hicks of Natchez for "6 Sheets drawing paper . . . [\$] .75." This discovery is almost unprecedented in Southern architectural history. According

¹² The northern door, to the original nursery, occupies its undisturbed aperture and has never been off its hinges. The door opposite, to an under-the-eave 'cabinet room' (reconfigured as a bathroom in a meticulous restoration of 2003-2004, Figure 13), occupies its rediscovered original aperture in the center of the south wall. Since it had been moved in the later nineteenth or early twentieth century to the eastern end of that same space, only its strap hinges need to be replaced in 2004.

¹³ Albert E. Casey and Frances P. Otken, *Amite County, Mississippi, 1699-1865*, vol. I (Birmingham, AL, 1948), p. 515. Mr. Batchelor's official number for this application, however, is '15,' and all other such remarkably early numbers are connected with applications uniformly dated 'January 1, 1807.' The suspicion therefore arises that Batchelor may actually have applied for a patent to this land even before his, and his relatives,' purchases of their principal properties on August 14, 1807 (see note 9). The seventy-eight acres for which this application was made, in any event, are immediately contiguous (to the west) with Batchelor's original 320 acres documented in note 9.

¹⁴ An index of the time required for such a preliminary accumulation of timber is afforded by the fact that Mr. Batchelor's eventual saw and grist mill with his new gin, of 1833—a structure specified at '54 feet by 34 feet,' or only slightly smaller than the footprint of the Thomas Batchelor House itself, which measures 50 feet 6 inches by 42 feet 6 inches—began having its timbers laid aside on July 7, 1831, though its frame was only built in the summer of 1833 (see notes 95-98). That two-year allowance for the accumulation of the framing timbers for a mill may perhaps easily be doubled in the case of those destined for the 'mansion house' itself.

to a very recent calculation of monetary values, such an amount would approximate at least \$24 in today's prices,¹⁵ or the equivalent of some \$4 per sheet. One can certainly assume, therefore, that Batchelor's drawing paper represented the very best quality available. (Quite possibly, on the analogy of the fine elephant folio paper that John James Audubon was using at this same moment for both the original drawings, as well as Robert Havell's edition of prints for his *Birds of America*, Batchelor's six sheets may also have been supplied by James Whatman's famous paper mills in Kent, in southern England). Their number is also significant. Very probably, again on the analogies of many such sets of drawings, Batchelor's six sheets would presumably have been destined for (1) a main or ground-floor plan of Beech Grove's rooms; (2) a corresponding second or upper-story plan; (3) an elevation of the north or front façade of the proposed Batchelor House; (4) another, of the corresponding south or "plantation" façade; (5) at least one further elevation, of the east or west gable ends of the new house, with a rendering of one of its end chimneys; and probably also (6) a sheet of interior drawings, plausibly including staircase and wainscoting details, as well as renderings of standard and particularized door and window frames, with the various baseboard moldings. Alas, no trace of those drawings survives today; following a centuries-old pattern of heavy use, they were no doubt consumed on the construction site.¹⁶

Their preparation adds yet another talent to the accomplishments of this pioneer polymath—a demonstrable skill at measured drawing, if not of architectural planning writ large. Interestingly, the surviving Amite County Courthouse of 1839-40 in Liberty is close enough in style to the Batchelor House—while retaining the reticent Federal ordonnance appropriate to a public building—to suggest that Thomas Batchelor, as perhaps the foremost legal figure in the county, might at least have been consulted on its design.¹⁷ A possibility that Batchelor may have had architectural experience gains strength from a consideration of Beech Grove's unusually thoughtful plan (see Figure 3).

¹⁵ Genovese, *Sweetness of Life* (cited in note 7), p. xxiv, giving modern equivalents in 2014 dollars.

¹⁶ By this period James Whatman's mills were owned by men named Balston and Hollingsworth (for the variant "Turkey Mill"). The vast majority of construction drawings do not survive, from late Medieval times to the nineteenth century: see for example Douglas Lewis, *The Drawings of Andrea Palladio* (New Orleans, 2000), 15.

¹⁷ Robert G. Huff and Hattie P. Nunnery, *Amite County & Liberty, Mississippi* (Virginia Beach, VA, 2009), 15.

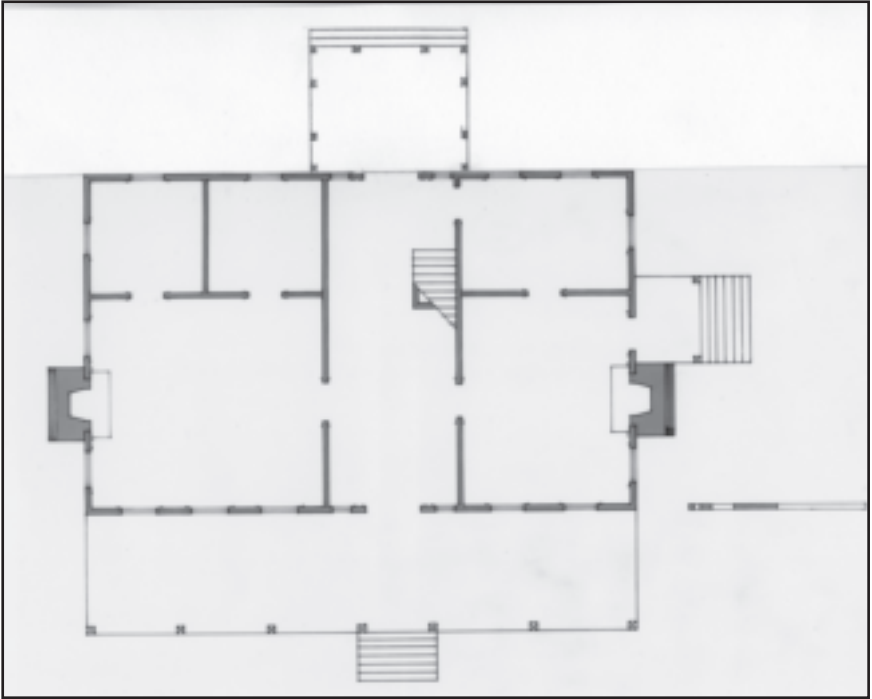


Figure 3. Plan of main floor of The Thomas Batchelor House, 1827



Figure 4. View of Batchelor House from the northwest

The Thomas Batchelor House is a classic American ‘raised cottage,’ a form found ubiquitously throughout the domestic architecture of the early Republic.¹⁸ It shelters a principal story of full height, as well as a lower second story, under a single-pitch roof (see Figure 4).

The front gallery is indented under the same unbroken roof, which also accommodates service rooms at the rear, occupying a space behind the main rooms corresponding to the façade gallery. The central suite consists of a parlor (see Figures 5, 9) and dining room (see Figure 10) on either side of a wide central hall (see Figure 6) that also contains the single-flight stair (see Figure 7). The hall, which runs through the entire width of the house, opens by exactly opposing double doors into both the parlor and dining room. Through those doorways is visible, at right angles, an *enfilade*—or unobstructed axial view—from one fireplace to the other, each served by a twin chimney set outside the centers of the gable ends (see Figures 6, 8). This quite novel arrangement is accomplished by the foot of the stair being placed in proximity to the rear

¹⁸ Hugh Morrison, *Early American Architecture* (New York, 1952), 259-260, 263; Cyril M. Harris, *American Architecture* (New York & London, 1998), 270; Jay D. Edwards, “Origins of Creole Architecture” in *Winterthur Portfolio* 29, nos. 2-3 (1994): 155-189, esp. Map 2, “Principal Routes of Diffusion of the Verandahs.”



Figure 5. Batchelor House, west and north walls of parlor, with three façade windows

doors, while its head rises just beyond the center-line of the house as marked by the ridgepole and the two chimneys, as well as the downstairs *enfilade*.¹⁹ There is thus established an expectation of unusual regularity, for there are not many examples in American domestic architecture of such unbroken end-to-end vistas across the major reception rooms.²⁰

Such an expectation is more than borne out by the trio of service rooms along the rear or south façade. The first, a pantry behind the dining room—originally the plantation office—is an unremarkable 16 by 10 ½ feet (the latter dimension echoing the depth of the north gallery). But the two *chambres de cabinet* behind the parlor (see Figure 9) have the very unusual (perhaps unique) shapes of perfect cubes—each one is exactly 10 ½ feet of all sides. They form in fact a three-dimensional ‘module’ for the whole house. The parlor is precisely four such shapes, arranged as a square; the north gallery is exactly five of these ideal modules, set end-to-end.

This quality of exceptional regularity in the Batchelor House extends, as well, to the second story. Since it is paradigmatic that the purpose of a raised cottage is to appear only as a story-and-a-half in height, a necessary corollary in the vast majority of the type’s examples is that the ceilings of the upper rooms must follow the slopes of the roof (except, of course, in those areas provided with dormers). In the Batchelor House, however, not only the upstairs hall—of the same width as that downstairs, and also running through the entire depth of the house—but also both major bedrooms, have walls intersecting their flat ceilings at regular right angles (see Figure 12). This is accomplished by framing their intersections just barely inside a major beam (called a

¹⁹ Such an arrangement is very highly unusual. An exhaustive survey of the secondary literature suggests that the only Tidewater parallel—which in fact is contemporaneous with the planning of Beech Grove—is the small but ornate c. 1825 raised cottage called Sylvania, in Bradley, South Carolina, where the stair is essentially identical to that in the Batchelor House, Mills Lane, *The Architecture of the Old South: South Carolina* (Savannah, 1994), s.v.

²⁰ Of the examples of such *enfilades* as do exist, several are technically disqualified by lacking a center hall, and/or placing the main chambers against the façade, by omitting a front gallery (e.g. Hanover, c. 1720, Berkeley, South Carolina; William King House, 1763, Windsor, North Carolina [note 31]; Tazewell Hall, c. 1760s [Williamsburg: note 32]; Thomas Person House, c. 1774, Littleton, North Carolina [note 33]; Henry Lane House, c. 1810, Morgan Co., Georgia [note 27]; Propinquity, c. 1810, Washington Village, Mississippi [note 46]; and the Thomas Cheely House, c.1825, Hancock County, GA). The present research has turned up only one true antecedent for the Beech Grove plan (featuring a facade gallery, an open *enfilade* between gable-end fireplaces across a center hall, with cabinet rooms behind): namely, the Harper House of 1794, in Augusta, Georgia: Mills Lane, *The Architecture of the Old South: Georgia* (Savannah, 1986). See note 34.



Figure 6. Batchelor House, view from parlor across hall to dining room, along central enfilade



Figure 8. Batchelor House, enfilade view from hall doors to parlor fireplace



Figure 7. Batchelor House, central hall to south, with main stair; enfilade doors, foreground

purlin), set midway along each pitch of the roof to provide mid-length support for the rafters, which would otherwise be stretched to a length of almost thirty feet.²¹

An inconspicuous asymmetry in the Batchelor House arises from the divergent sizes of the main reception rooms and their corresponding upper bedrooms. The 16 by 20-foot dining room parallels the hall, which runs back through the whole depth of the house (see Figure 10). The 22 by 20-foot parlor, however, is sized so as to accommodate the two cubical cabinet rooms behind it, which serve respectively as gentlemen's and ladies' retiring rooms, opening through twin doors off the parlor/ballroom (see Figure 9). That larger room thus extends the eastern gable-end outward by some six feet, though the front and rear double doors are centered on the hall. The resulting asymmetry, however, is only noticeable in axial views of the north and south façades. The north gallery's six bays are arranged as three in front of the parlor's three

²¹ A useful diagram of early raised-cottage roofing systems is provided in Jay D. Edwards, *Louisiana's Remarkable French Vernacular Architecture* (Baton Rouge, 1988), 4, fig. 5 (of which Beech Grove's 'single-pitch umbrella roof' is of the type illustrated as "Class IIIb").



Figure 9. Batchelor House, east and south walls of parlor, with cubical retiring rooms behind



Figure 11. Batchelor House, dining room from northwest, with plantation office behind



Figure 10. Batchelor House, upstairs hall, view into south central dormer



Figure 12. Batchelor House, east wall and fireplace of larger bedroom (above parlor)



Figure 13. Batchelor House, southwest retiring room, off master bedroom (above dining room)

north windows,²² and two bays before the dining room's paired windows, with that framing the north entrance doors quite noticeably off-center (see Figure 4). On the south façade, the imbalance is more subtle since its three dormers are more widely spaced, and the two cabinet-room windows are only slightly farther apart than the two in the pantry, behind the dining room (see Figure 1). The design is completed by a one-story projecting, pedimented porch (framing the south doors, and extending the axis of the hall), reflecting at reduced scale the motifs of the north gallery.

The question arises as to where Thomas Batchelor might have encountered comparable designs to the one he developed at Beech Grove. The answer lies decisively in the coastal and piedmont regions of the Carolinas, where he grew up—as of course also (more hypothetically) along the trajectory of his travels in 1803 from South Carolina to the

²² Three aligned façade windows—as are found on the north wall of the Batchelor House parlor—are somewhat rare in American domestic architecture of the Federal period. One comparable antecedent (which also happens to be directly opposite a most unusual pair of square 'cabinet rooms' behind the parlor, again as at Beech Grove) is found at Varennes Tavern, c. 1790, Anderson, South Carolina: Lane, *South Carolina* (as in note 19), s.v. (see also notes 24-25 here).

Mississippi Territory.²³

The simplest form of Beech Grove's two principal rooms with end-wall fireplaces, facing each other across an intervening passage, is of course the vernacular type called the dog-trot plan. There are regional examples of that type from the last decades of the eighteenth century (and just beyond) surviving in the then-pioneer areas of the western Piedmont. A truly striking instance is provided by Varennes Tavern in Anderson, South Carolina, built for John Norris or his son Jesse Ward Norris probably in 1790-91.²⁴ Although expressed vertically as a typical Carolina I-House,²⁵ the ground-plan of Varennes Tavern is so uncannily prescient of Beech Grove's as to suggest that its already substantial foothills town (near the natural highway of the Saluda River, just west of our pioneers' documented starting point) might plausibly have been an early stop on their westward trek. Varennes Tavern not only has a large square chamber to the left of its open passage—with a fireplace centered on its end wall between twin apertures, together with the highly unusual arrangement of three windows on its façade wall, as at Beech Grove—but also the unprecedented symmetrical shapes (exactly re-created at the Batchelor House) of two perfectly square *chambres de cabinet* directly behind it. A single, larger cabinet room stands behind the right-hand chamber, which has two façade windows, and two

²³ The potential prototypes for the Beech Grove plan—as enumerated in the following paragraphs—tend quite generally to cluster in southern Virginia and northeastern North Carolina, within short distances of Batchelor's ancestral Norfolk. See especially Edwards, *Origins*, Map 2, "Principal Routes of Diffusion" for an identical trajectory of the "1790s English Tidewater Cottage." As explained in the final sentence of the following paragraph, it seems most likely that the large caravan of loaded wagons transporting these families from South Carolina to Muscle Shoals might well have avoided the steeper mountain slopes, 'outflanking' the Appalachians by following a more southerly route (which may have brought them into direct personal contact with more western South Carolina and piedmont Georgia towns).

²⁴ It has apparently not been noticed that the very highly unusual name of this inn refers directly to the *Maison de Poste* in the village of Varennes-en-Argonne, where on June 21, 1791, Louis XVI and Marie Antoinette were arrested on their abortive flight from the Tuileries in Paris. It seems quite clear, therefore, that Lane's 'uncertain date' for Varennes Tavern should be corrected to "1790-91." (A contemporaneous engraving of the "*Arrestation de Louis seize à Varennes*" is preserved at Beech Grove. Thomas Batchelor was an ardent Bonapartist, even going so far as to name his and Rebecca Gayden's third son 'Napoleon Bonapart Batchelor' (1815-1850) after the French Emperor—four days before Waterloo.)

²⁵ Which—as at Varennes Tavern—may often share an identical ground plan with a standard 'raised cottage,' but differs in the articulation of its second full story, in which (most typically) two bedrooms flank a central stair hall, with regular windows on all sides, looking out over shed roofs above the façade gallery and the rear 'cabinet rooms.'

flanking its own gable-centered chimney. In fact, the only difference from the eventual plan of Beech Grove is that the passage doorways at Varennes Tavern are not aligned to afford an open vista between its gable-centered fireplaces. Its single-flight stair rises from the entrance end rather than the far end of the central passage and shifts both doors irregularly toward the front. The James Caldwell House, a second dog-trot plan less than twenty miles from Varennes, was built c. 1800 beside the Savannah River near Lowndesville, South Carolina. Its original plan again showed on the left a large chamber with three façade apertures and a pair of windows flanking its gable-centered chimney. Its passage doors were indeed aligned by folding its staircase into a corner of the opposite room, but its incipient *enfilade* terminated only in a blank wall since its second chamber lacked a fireplace.²⁶ A third dog-trot plan distinguishes the Henry Lane House in Morgan County, Georgia, in which folded-corner staircases in both main rooms provide the unbroken vista of a full *enfilade* between twin gable-centered chimneys.²⁷ Its date of c. 1810 may be too late, however, for our travelers, who may not have swung so far south into central Georgia, though the preceding locations might suggest that they may have intended to outflank the Appalachians by heading for the less hilly semicircle of the “Black Belt”—curving away from Columbus through Montgomery and on northward toward Muscle Shoals.

Turning from the often rustic dog-trots to the more finished eighteenth-century buildings that replaced them, in the coastal and adjacent parts of Virginia and the Carolinas (with particular attention to Thomas Batchelor’s ancestral Norfolk and border counties of North Carolina), one encounters many clear prototypes of the Beech Grove plan. Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown in 1781 at the Moore House, which places a large square parlor to the left of a wide front-to-back central hall, opposite a smaller dining room with a chamber behind (though the back wall of the parlor gives only onto a long, narrow “retiring room”). Its chimneys are indeed centered on the side walls, but an *enfilade* across the hall is again blocked by the stair, which once more forces the potentially aligned lateral doors into irregular positions toward the front.²⁸ Another

²⁶ Lane, *South Carolina*, s.v., ‘James Caldwell Cabin, Abbeville County.’

²⁷ Lane, *Georgia*, 32. A still useful earlier work is Frederick D. Nichols and Frances B. Johnston, *Early Architecture of Georgia* (Chapel Hill, 1957).

²⁸ Dell Upton and John M. Vlach, eds., *Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture* (Athens, GA, 1986), 325.

parallel geographically proximate to Norfolk is the Old Brick House of c. 1760 in Elizabeth City, North Carolina, which almost exactly reverses the Moore House plan.²⁹ In 1761, the contract for a similar configuration was drawn up for a new Glebe House in Lunenburg County, Virginia (to the west of Norfolk), specifying “chimneys to be four feet deep, the Hall 18 foot square, the passage 10 foot wide, the Chamber 18 foot by 14 [with] two rooms and passage above.”³⁰ Beech Grove precisely follows this same pattern, while increasing each interior dimension by two feet.

An open *enfilade* between the main rooms was achieved in 1763 at the William King House in Windsor, North Carolina (near the head of Albemarle Sound), but at the sacrifice of a central hall; large cabinet rooms at the size of full chambers stand behind them, balancing the width of a front gallery.³¹ John Randolph II’s Tazewell Hall of the 1760s, originally at Williamsburg, had twin reception rooms with an open vista between their opposing fireplaces, narrow retiring rooms behind, and a wide hall between them, running through the full width of the house.³² That scheme was paralleled c. 1774 at the core of the Thomas Person House in Halifax County, North Carolina (bordering Thomas Batchelor’s and his parents’ Franklin and Nash counties), where the central *enfilade* ran across a parlor, hall, and dining room almost precisely anticipating Beech Grove’s dimensions.³³

At the Harper House of 1794 in Augusta (somewhat farther down the Savannah River, but still just possible as a stop for this family’s westward pioneers), a “perfect” *enfilade* toward the fireplaces of the main rooms was accomplished by placing a curving stair at the back of the central hall, which had three equal cabinet rooms along the rear façade.³⁴ On the South Carolina side of that river, the George Lester House in Saluda County (from the earliest years of the nineteenth century) articulated those three spaces as a central back porch flanked

²⁹ Mills Lane, *Architecture of the Old South: North Carolina* (Savannah, 1985), s.v. See also Frances B. Johnston and Thomas T. Waterman, *Early Architecture of North Carolina* (Chapel Hill, 1941), 28-30, with pl. 55.

³⁰ Upton and Vlach, *Common Places*, 324.

³¹ Lane, *North Carolina*, s.v.

³² Mills Lane, *Architecture of the Old South: Virginia* (Savannah, 1987), 79. See also the monograph article on this building, in *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 14 (1955), 14-17.

³³ Also called Little Manor (or Mosby Hall), in the town of Littleton; expanded c. 1804 by Col. William Person Little: Lane, *North Carolina*, p. 122; also Johnston and Waterman, *Early Architecture of North Carolina*, 38-39, with pls. 105-110 (for ‘1774’ date of original portion).

³⁴ Lane, *Georgia*, s.v. See also Nichols and Johnston, *Early Architecture of Georgia*.

by twin cabinets, but the corner-folded stair in its short hall, however, again blocked a visual *enfilade* between its gable-centered fireplaces.³⁵

Two exact prototypes for the asymmetrical arrangement of Beech Grove's gallery bays occur in Low-country Carolina houses of the end of the eighteenth century and the first years of the nineteenth. As noted above, the heavy chamfered posts of the Batchelor House front gallery are arranged (left to right) as three slightly narrower bays framing the three parlor windows; then a still narrower bay giving access to the north doors; and finally two wider bays to frame the two dining room windows. Around 1790, the demolished house of The Bluff on the Cooper River above Charleston demonstrated an exact reversal of that sequence, with its two, one, and three bays across the façade.³⁶ The contemporaneous Lassiter House at New Bern—until 1794 the capital and still one of the most important towns of North Carolina—bore very precisely the same 3-1-2 arrangement as at Beech Grove, even to the spacing of the columns.³⁷

Another idiosyncratic but charming Tidewater feature of the Batchelor House are the small windows under the eaves of the west gable end, added to light the ancillary spaces to its master bedroom (a nursery and retiring room: see Figure 13). These windows are exactly prefigured, in the same positions, at the Sloop Point House of 1728 in Hampstead, North Carolina, just outside Wilmington.³⁸ They are repeated in many other North Carolina buildings, including (for example) a farmhouse on the Peggy Wright Plantation near Louisburg, the seat of Thomas Batchelor's native Franklin County.³⁹ The progressively "shouldered" main shafts and stepped bases of Beech Grove's exterior chimneys would also be worthy of remark, were they not to be found in these identical configurations on nearly all North Carolina's early domestic designs.

The interior woodwork of the Batchelor House, as well, has abundant antecedents in Carolina architecture. A mantelpiece of c. 1800 in McMakin's Tavern at Lyman in Spartanburg County already has the doubled colonnettes and scalloped oval frieze ornaments of Beech

³⁵ Lane, *South Carolina*, s.v.

³⁶ Samuel G. Stoney, *Plantations of the Carolina Low Country*, 7th ed. (New York/Charleston, 1989), 71, 191.

³⁷ Johnston and Waterman, *Early Architecture of North Carolina*, 60.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 147.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 44.

Grove's principal mantels.⁴⁰ At Marshlands, formerly in the Charleston Navy Yard, a mantel of 1810 shows those same rayed ovals filling the entire frieze area.⁴¹ In approximately that year, at the Eli Smallwood House in New Bern, there also appear those panels of narrow parallel reeding that form so consistent a motif in several of Beech Grove's mantels.⁴² A commission of 1827 exactly coeval with the Batchelor House, at Elgin (the Peter Mitchell House at Warrenton), immediately north of the builder's natal Franklin County, has door surrounds finished like mantelpieces, complete with the multiple cornice moldings also contemporaneously applied to the several mantels in Beech Grove.⁴³

To conclude this survey with a pair of newly-built houses that Thomas Batchelor can definitely be shown to have known intimately well—and which both contributed vital components to his decade-later masterpiece at Beech Grove—we need only recall his service as principal Amite County delegate to Mississippi's first constitutional convention. That assembly of prominent planters and jurists was held in the village of Washington, six miles northeast of Natchez, from July 7 to August 17, 1817, with a five-day recess from the July 17-21.⁴⁴ Over the course of its six weeks' negotiations, no less than forty-eight delegates required local housing, a number far exceeding the exiguous accommodations of that tiny village. Washington had been established as the capital of the Mississippi Territory only in 1802, barely fifteen years before.⁴⁵ Given Batchelor's legal preeminence, together with his length of residence in the Natchez District, and given also the standards and expectations of local hospitality, it is perfectly conceivable that he should have been frequently entertained—if not, indeed, offered long-term lodging—at one or both of the Washington houses of General Leonard Covington, at Propinquity, and/or the future governor of Mississippi, Gerard C. Brandon, at Selma.

Leonard Covington had emigrated from Maryland, through Cincinnati, in

⁴⁰ Lane, *South Carolina*, s.v.

⁴¹ Stoney, *Plantations of the Carolina Low Country*, 77, 214.

⁴² Lane, *North Carolina*, s.v. The consistency of this reeded motif, which appears on all four of Beech Grove's mantels, might argue for their common origin *in situ*. This is dramatically confirmed by the presence in two of the house's mantels (the one in the parlor, and a second in the large bedroom upstairs) of panels decorated with the most highly unusual molding found in the window and door frames of the parlor, apparently shared only by Beech Grove and by the same elements in the 1820-1823 house of Rosalie, at Natchez.

⁴³ Lane, *North Carolina*, s.v.; Johnston and Waterman, *Early Architecture of North Carolina*, 98.

⁴⁴ John Francis Hamtramck Claiborne, *Mississippi as a Province, Territory, and State* (Jackson, 1880; repr. Spartanburg, South Carolina, 1978), 352-358.

⁴⁵ Richard A. McLemore, ed., *History of Mississippi* (Jackson, 1973), I, 197.

1809. He had been appointed Lt. Col. of Light Dragoons at Fort Dearborn, near the town of Washington, and purchased the property at Propinquity in 1810. He was killed during the War of 1812 near Lake Ontario in Canada on November 11, 1813, so his then-finished house at Washington Village certainly dates from 1810 to 1812-1813.⁴⁶ Propinquity is a tall structure with a two-story projecting pedimented square porch on the façade, and rooms almost identical in size to Beech Grove's (a 21-foot-wide parlor, a 12-foot hall, and a 17-foot-wide dining room). The woodwork is quite fine, with the unusual addition of crown moldings, for example, in the hall. Thanks to its unusually deep cabinet rooms that help to absorb the rise of the staircase, Propinquity achieves an unbroken enfilade across facing doors in the hall, from the parlor fireplace to the one in the dining room. Both mantelpieces have paired colonnettes and friezes of prominent rayed ovals; that in the parlor also has pendant swags, and the unusual device of three-dimensional urns in niches above the lateral columns.

Gerard Brandon's exactly contemporaneous house at Selma was also built c. 1812, following the burning of his previous house c. 1811; it may have been finished within the year.⁴⁷ It is a large raised cottage with a seven-bay façade gallery, two small dormers front and back, and gable ends remarkably antecedent to Beech Grove's, save that only one axial chimney projects onto the exterior; a third serves the cabinet room on the same south side. Even the small second-story windows under the eaves are present, at the same positions, on both gable ends. Selma has no hall, but rather a large central parlor, originally opening onto a wide rear porch with corner-folded stairways to the upper floor. Its finish is more restrained than Propinquity's, with mantelpieces showing plain friezes between small vertical panels of reeding.

Batchelor must have studied both these new houses at Washington with unusual care, since Beech Grove, exactly ten years later, is such a creative amalgam of the two. From Selma (and its manifold Virginia and Carolina prototypes), the Batchelor House takes its basic raised cottage shape, with inset front gallery, cabinet rooms at the rear, and a

⁴⁶ Claiborne, *Mississippi*, 259.

⁴⁷ Gerard C. Brandon IV, *Memoir of the Brandon Family, May 20, 1932* (transcript at Mississippi Dept. of Archives and History (MDAH), Jackson); and idem, *Family Record Compiled by GCB IV for his dear granddaughter Mary Jane Smith, 1939* (this transcript also at MDAH), p. 1. The present writer's visit to Selma during 'Bicentennial of Statehood Tour of Washington, MS' led by Mary Warren Miller of the Historic Natchez Foundation, September 16, 2017. I am particularly grateful for Ms. Miller's review of these sources, during our telephone conversations of October 24, 2019 (in which she carefully critiqued the National Register application for Selma compiled by Jack D. Elliott Jr.).

congruent configuration of its gable ends. From Propinquity, together with the memory of still more specific Tidewater/Piedmont antecedents, it derives its classic plan of square parlor-central hall-smaller chamber visually linked through a fireplace-to-fireplace *enfilade*, with cabinet rooms behind, as well as the design of its mantels. Beech Grove shifts Propinquity's projecting square entrance porch to the rear façade, thus gaining the large outdoor living area of Selma's front gallery, while also affording the secondary façade, a feature of centralized importance. And the intervening decade, between the careful study of these houses and their inspired combination at Beech Grove, allows the Batchelor House to exhibit a locally unparalleled richness of interior ornament.

Dating

Thomas Batchelor's earliest surviving account book—amid a plethora of detailed outlays for every conceivable variety of goods and services, as well as incomes from his cotton sales—opens with scattered payments for the construction of the official house that he built in the new town of Liberty, in his role as the first Clerk of Court for Amite County.⁴⁸ Through the autumn of 1811 he took his meals at a local inn (“paid Tavern bill Nov.r term...\$1.12 ½”),⁴⁹ but by June of that same year he had begun to pay William Knight, contractor, to construct a permanent house in the county town. Besides advances of more than \$30.00 over the summer, by the end of that year Batchelor records a comprehensive payment to “William Knight for work done on House in the Town of Liberty \$231.72”.⁵⁰ In the next month, he transitioned to a finishing specialist, William Hogue, who “came to my House to work on Monday the 6th January 1812.”⁵¹ Four months later Hogue “worked on floor on Friday 1st May” and the following week “worked on Galery [*sic.*] floor Friday 8th & Saturday 9th May.”⁵² It was Batchelor's intent to rent his Liberty house to part-time tenants (at least during the long

⁴⁸ Batchelor had been a justice of the peace from very soon after his arrival on the River Amite: in fact the first public record made in the area is his “Docket” of official proceedings as a JP, dated “Beech Grove, 1807” that he himself deposited two years later (1809) among the earliest papers of the newly-founded Amite County in Liberty.

⁴⁹ First page of Item 1, headed “Expenses paid in Cash beginning January 1st, 1811” under date of November 29, 1811.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. headed “Amite, December 24th, 1811,” under that date.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. headed “Amite, January the 21st, 1812,” under date of January 23rd.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. headed “Amite, March 6th, 1812,” on dates cited in text.

periods between his court sessions), for toward the end of the year he notes that “Robert C. Anderson Began to Occupy my house in Liberty 10th February 1812 at 12 doll. per Month.”⁵³ Hogue continued to work “@ one dollar per day” through the end of that year, when Batchelor settled his account for \$126.95.⁵⁴ There are no notes of tenants in 1813, but on January 10, 1814, “Lieut. Samuel Spotts” contracted for “the rent of My House & lot in Liberty at 8 dollars per Month,” and it was presumably he who paid “4 dollars House money” on June 20, 1814.⁵⁵ Several pages farther on, there is an entry that “Thomas Linch and Mark Moore [paid] Twelve months’ House rent in the Town of Liberty commencing the first day of October 1819 and ending the first day of October 1820 at Twelve dollars per Month.”⁵⁶ In the following month, “Doctor Donnell” rented “The two Western Rooms in my house in the Town of Liberty [from] 27 Nov. 1820 at Six dollars per Month.”⁵⁷

Meanwhile there had been an intervening need to expand Rebecca Gayden’s “settlement structure” on the Beech Grove site, into which Thomas Batchelor had moved after their wedding in 1805 because of their growing family. Their first three children were born in 1806, 1809, and 1811, and Mrs. Batchelor had just delivered their fourth (on August 7, 1813),⁵⁸ when the earliest accounts record a substantial shipment of lumber to:

“Beech Grove, Amite, August 9th, 1813:”

| | | |
|----------|------------------------------------|------|
| 6 plank | 12 feet long & 8 Inches wide . . . | \$48 |
| 2 plank | 9 feet long & 8 Inches wide . . . | 12 |
| 12 plank | 12 feet long & 7 inches wide . . . | 84 |
| 14 plank | 12 feet long & 6 inches wide . . . | 84 |

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. headed “Amite, July the 24th, 1812,” undated entry following ‘Octr. 10’ at very bottom of page.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, facing pp. headed “Amite, October 13th, 1812 / Amite, December 30th, 1812.”

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. headed “Amite, November the 4th, 1813,” on dates cited in text.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. headed “Beech Grove, March the 29th, 1820,” under date of October 1.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, same page, under date of November 27.

⁵⁸ Thomas and Rebecca’s children were: (1) Victoria Caroline Batchelor (1806-1858), 1st marr. 1826 Abel H. Buckholts (1801-1833), 2nd marr. 1836 Henry G. Street (1801-1879)—mistress of Beech Grove, 1846-1858; (2) Mary Ann Harriet Batchelor (1809-1830), 1st marr. 1824 Iverson G. Lea (1802-1824), 2nd married 1829 Rev. James W. Smylie (c. 1780-1853); (3) James Madison Batchelor (1811-1866), 1st married 1836 Mary E. Dent, 2nd married 1845 Eliza K. Nutt (1825-1885); (4) Thomas Agrippa Gayden Batchelor (1813-1868), 1st married 1835 Margaret C. Stewart (1819-1843), 2nd married 1844 Martha L. Chandler (1821-1862); (5) Napoleon Bonapart Batchelor (1815-1850), married 1837 Ellen D. Noland (c.1820-1870s).

| | |
|--|----------------------------|
| 1 plank 12 feet & 11 Inches wide . . . | 11 |
| 2 plank 12 feet & 7 Inches wide . . . | 14—\$ 253.00 ⁵⁹ |

This lumber had been anticipated by a neighbor's being paid on January 5, 1813, (when Rebecca was three months pregnant with the Batchelors' fourth child) for "2 ½ days' work hewing," to prepare the framing timbers for the proposed addition.⁶⁰ On January 14, 1815, the local blacksmith provided "one pair Hinges 75 cts."⁶¹ and on January 23 a nearby planter sold the Batchelors "350 brick @ 8 dolls. per Thousand."⁶² Rebecca and Thomas' fifth child was born in 1815, and on May 7, 1816, Rebecca's brother sold them "54 panes of Window Glass @16 cts . . . \$8.64" as well as "6 gal. Spanish Whiting . . . \$.75."⁶³ The same neighbor who had hewn the heavy timbers was given money on October 17, 1816, for the purchase at Natchez of sundry locks, files, screws, vises, and molding planes, totaling \$4.50.⁶⁴ As we know from the building of the surviving Batchelor House itself in 1827, however, these 1816 extensions of the "settlement house" on the Beech Grove site only served their function, at most, for a bit over a decade—or, as will be explained below, perhaps indeed for only as little as half that time.

The patriarch George Gayden died in June 1819,⁶⁵ and his heirs sold two parcels of land on June 1, 1821, to Thomas Batchelor, who on August 20, 1821, bought from one of them "[a] Dwelling House [over the River' at] Collins' old place."⁶⁶ George's second wife was Lois Collins Gayden (c. 1749-1810s). Her brother Edward Collins (c. 1753-1829) had pioneered that tract on the east side of the Amite River in the original settlement, but had left it when three of his daughters married in 1808 and 1809, and he himself had remarried in 1811 to an affluent widow neighbor,

⁵⁹ Item 1, p. headed "Beech Grove, Amite, August 9th, 1813, under that date.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, same page, under date (retrospectively entered) of January 5, 1813, to Matthew Tool.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. headed "Amite, August the 6th, 1814," payment to William Morgan, on date cited in text.

⁶² *Ibid.*, same page, payment to James Lea, on date cited in text.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. headed "Beech Grove, February the 1st, 1816," payment to Agrippa Gayden, on date cited in text.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. headed "Beech Grove, October the 17th, 1816," under that date, payment to Matthew Tool.

⁶⁵ George Gayden's will (made in his 80th year), in the Amite County Courthouse, is dated May 29, 1819; it was probated on June 8, and his estate was evaluated—at the conspicuous figure of \$10,177.75—on June 19, 1819.

⁶⁶ Casey and Otken, *Amite County* 1, 258 (parcel sold to Thomas Batchelor by George L. Gayden and wife, registered in Deed Book 1, 170), and 283 (parcel sold on same date to Thomas Batchelor by Betsy Gayden and William Morgan, registered in Deed Book 1, 169)—see note 5 for these names—and Item 1, p. headed "Beech Grove, July the 6th, 1821," on date cited in text.

who incidentally was the mother-in-law of the Gaydens' youngest son.⁶⁷

The very low price that Mr. Batchelor paid for the former Collins house—only \$50.00—indicates that its structure was both small, and probably also dilapidated. In fact, barely one month later, on September 21, 1821, his accounts record a major purchase from a local sawmill:

Bought of I[saac] H. Wright:

| | | |
|---------------------------|---------|----------|
| 242 feet of floring plank | @\$2.25 | \$5.44 ½ |
| 291 Weatherboarding | @1.75 | 5.09 |
| 71 feet 6-Inch ditto | @ 2.00 | 1.42 |
| 597 Ruff edge | @ 1.00 | 5.97 |

On November 2, 1821, this order was further augmented with the following lumber:

| | | |
|-----------------------------|--------|--------|
| 408 feet Ruff edge | @ 1.00 | \$4.08 |
| 96 feet Inch plank | @ 2.00 | |
| 96 feet ¾ ditto | @ 1.75 | |
| 97 feet Inch ditto | @ 2.00 | |
| 279 feet Inch ditto | @ 1.50 | |
| 119 feet Scantlain[molding] | @ 4.00 | |

And on November 28, 1821, Mr. Batchelor requested from the same mill:

| | | |
|-----------------------------|-----------------------|--|
| 398 feet Inch plank | @ 2.00 | |
| 86 feet floring [sic] plank | @ 2.25 [and] | |
| 17 feet ruff [sic] edge | @ 1.00. ⁶⁸ | |

Over the course of the latter two months, Batchelor records his indebtedness to a slave he had given his daughter for “10 days’ work of Adam before Octr. Court, \$10.00” [plus] “Ditto 15 days after Court, \$15.00” [as well as] “6 Days’ work of Adam ending Thursday 6th Decr. 1821, \$6.00” [or a total of] “31.00.”⁶⁹

⁶⁷ George Gayden and Lois Collins had been married on December 4, 1782, in Granville County, North Carolina. Lois’ brother Edward Collins married (second) in Amite County on December 1, 1811, Jane Terrell (widow of Edward Howard), mother of Hannah Howard, and wife of Nash Gayden (who had married Hannah on June 6, 1811).

⁶⁸ Item 1 (cited in note 1), p. headed “Beech Grove, 21st September 1821,” on dates cited in text.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, same page, under dates of November 2 and 29. See also note 103.

Since the above enumeration conspicuously lacks any mention of the heavy timbers required for framing a good-sized domestic structure, nor yet any specialized materials for roofing nor chimney-building (as well as an evident lack of time to accumulate them), it is virtually certain that these re-workings were focused on the house that Batchelor had just bought at “Collins’ old place” across the Amite River from his own lands. It is perhaps feasible to imagine that such a remodeling of the Collins house might initially have been undertaken with the intention of moving the entire Batchelor family—with Rebecca’s unmarried previous children, as well as their own five—into it, as being at least a couple of miles closer to Liberty. But since we also know, in hindsight, that their existing “settlement structure” at Beech Grove was shortly to be completely replaced with a new “mansion house” in 1827, it seems more likely that matters of taste intervened, and that the provisional restoration of the Collins’ house in 1821 may have served only as a temporary lodging, while the present Batchelor House at Beech Grove was being planned and built. This may well mean that Mrs. Batchelor’s original “settlement structure” of c. 1803 on that same site may only have stood for less than twenty years, before it may have been methodically disassembled, with its salvageable components destined for eventual incorporation into the new house. We know, for example, that such a situation certainly applied to two of the rough-hewn doors in Beech Grove’s present master bedroom. Further, the purchase of fifty-four windowpanes for the previous house on May 7, 1816, demonstrates that at least the window glass, that other infrequent and expensive commodity, must also have been salvaged from its fabric, since the 1827 accounts record payment for only one small box of panes—far short of the number required to glaze Beech Grove’s more than twenty large windows.⁷⁰

In the autumn of 1824 Thomas Batchelor undertook yet another substantial outlay:

Account of Expenses in building Gin:

| | |
|-----------------------------|----------|
| 60 Canvas Wrags[?] & Grates | \$135.40 |
| Hauling Same from Natchez | |
| 100 lb. Iron for Cylinder | 8.00 |

⁷⁰ For the re-used doors, see note 12; for the windowpanes, see notes 63, 74, and 83. As Beech Grove has been accurately restored, its windows require almost 700 panes.

| | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| hauling Same | 1.00 |
| 150 lb. Nails | 18.00 |
| hauling Same | 1.50 |
| Gudgings &c. from Nathan Davis | 11.50 |
| Paid Butler for Running Gears | 100.00 |
| “ Martin for Press | 100.00 |
| “ M for House and other works | 122.00 |
| “ Ben. Graves for Gin head | 175.00 |
| Paid Ben. Hill for Spears & Bixler for lumber | 104.98 ³ / ₄ |
| Paid Wm. Morgan for blacksmith's Work | [Total] \$780.38 ⁷¹ |

Until 1824, Batchelor had been using the cotton gin of his brother-in-law, Agrippa Gayden; and indeed the same spread of accounts has the canceled aide-memoire that “Gayden’s Gin Box is 20 Inches Wide & 4 feet 8 Inches long.”⁷² His use of the Gayden gin may have ended in 1824-25, since evidence of his own new gin being operational is provided by an invoice of:

Bagging & Cordage shipped from New Orleans 31st August 1825:

| | |
|--|----------------------------------|
| 12 ps. Ky. Bagging 624 ½ yds. @ 25¢ | \$156.12 |
| 11 Coils Rope, 806 lbs. @ 10¢ | 80.60 |
| 10 lbs. Baling Twine @ 25¢ | 2.50 |
| paid Drayage | .50 |
| Coms. 2 ½ % on amount | 6.00 |
| Paid Freight on Steam boat ‘Ft. Adams’ | 9.33 |
| Storage & Drayage [from] the above | 3.50 |
| | s [Total] \$258.55 ⁷³ |

The next page of accounts (including May 1826) in fact records the vital entry for the “6 Sheets drawing paper” on which the designs for the new “mansion house” were laid out. The next eight pages all contain notations of supplies and equipment for the construction of the present Thomas Batchelor House, between the very end of 1826 and the twelve months of 1827. Batchelor recopied them in a summary sheet at the end of this sequence, which is expanded here with supplementary details of

⁷¹ Item 1, p. headed “Liberty, [Jul]y the 28th, 1824,” under that date.

⁷² Ibid., facing page headed “Liberty, October 14th, 1824,” following date of October 17.

⁷³ Ibid., p. headed “Liberty, Mar. 12th, 1825,” on Aug. 31; drawing paper *ibid.*, p. headed “Liberty, Sept. 30, 1825.”

each shipment, and specific dates wherever these are given:

Beech Grove, March 1st 1827. Materials for building new House:

| | |
|--|-----------------------------------|
| [1826] 4 Kegs Nails bought in 1826 | \$28.00 |
| [January 1 st -December 29, 1827] Washing [laundry] for yourself [George Seeber, general contractor] & [Thomas] Sellars [assistant] 12 months each at 15\$ each | 30.00 |
| [Early 1827] 600 feet [of lumber from mill of Avery & Chalfant] haul'd by Bob previously [before 8 March], @ 75¢ per hundred | 4.50 |
| 1827 Feby. 24 th . Bought of James Puech 280 lb. Sheet Lead @ 10 1/2¢ | 29.40 |
| “ “ “ “ “ Rogers & Slocum [Hardware Co., N.O.] for building | 40.92 |
| “ “ “ “ “ Field & Morgan | 137.40 |
| March 1 st [for George Seeber] 5 Bead planes as per bill | 6.00 |
| “ “ “ “ “ 1 T-Bevel | 1.00 |
| [March/April], 5 Weeks of 2 hands to saw frame of house @\$20/mo. 1 Mo. & 4 days | 43.50 |
| [pd. April 10] 4 hands 1 Month scoring in to hew @ \$15 | 60.00 |
| March 8 [from Avery & Chalfant mill] 1781 feet Ruff edge plank | 13.35 ³ / ₄ |
| “ 10 “ “ “ 241 Floring [sic] plank 7 Inches wide & 11 feet long [plus] | |
| “ 12 “ “ “ 24 [of same:] 1690 feet | \$25.35 |
| “ “ “ “ “ 143 Weatherboarding 12 feet long & 7 Inches broad | 10.00 |
| “ “ “ “ “ 73 Floring plank 18 feet long 6 Inches wide, 657 feet | 9.14 |
| “ “ “ “ “ 1 Load Ruff edge @ 75 cts. per hundred | |
| [Summarized subsequently as] Avery & Chalfant's bill for lumber | \$111.00 |
| May 4 th Bought of Harvey & Tomkins: | |
| “ “ 212 plank 16 feet long 8 In. broad 5/8 thick, 2261 feet 4 In. @ 8 bits | \$22.65 |
| “ “ 13 plank 15 feet long 14 In. broad 1 3/4 thick, 227 feet | |
| “ 5 113 floring plank 16 long 7 In. wide 1 1/4 thick, 1054 feet | 15.81 |

| | | | |
|----------|-----------|---|---------------------------|
| “ | “ | 10 Barrells lime bought at B. Sarah @ 12 bits | 15.00 |
| “ | “ | 1 Knob Lock at B. Sarah | 2.50 |
| 26 Nov. | | at Natchez 2 Knob Locks \$7, 1 ditto \$2.50 | 9.50 |
| “ | “ | “ 2 Bolts 50¢, Screws 75¢, 1 lb. Lamp black 25¢ | 1.50 |
| “ | “ | “ 1 Barrell [linseed] oil \$24.80, 2 Kegs White Lead \$7.00 | 31.80 |
| “ | “ | “ 2 Barrells Lime \$5, 1 Barrel Plaster Paris \$10 | 15.00 |
| “ | “ | “ Drayage & Commission | 1.67 |
| [Dec.12] | | Paxton Holland, building 3 Chimneys [& Piers] underpinning house | 150.00 |
| 14 Dec.r | [B. Sara] | 1 Barrel [linseed] oil at B.Sarah | 20.00 |
| “ | “ | “ 2 Kegs White Lead at B.Sara | 7.50 |
| “ | “ | “ 3 Bottles Copal Varnish @ 1.50¢ | 4.50 |
| “ | “ | “ 1 Box Window Glass | 4.50 |
| | | Carpenters' Work [Probably includes \$1300 in IOU to G. Seeber, Jan. 2, 1828] | 1645.00 |
| | | Bricklayer [See above, for \$150 paid to Paxton Holland on December12, 1827] | 150.00 |
| | | Painters [“ “ for \$80 on July 31; also \$115 to Clapp & Beatty Jan.17, 1828] | 195.00 |
| | | Plasterer [From Natchez? Not Thomas Sellars, William Hughey, or Wheeler?] | 65.00 |
| | | [Total] | \$2685.65 ½ ⁷⁴ |

Several interesting points arise from this chronology. Measured drawings for the Thomas Batchelor House (now lost) were prepared during the latter half of 1826, but the idiosyncratic “4 Kegs Nails bought in 1826” are almost certain to have been laid in previous to their specific need, perhaps simply as a result of their random availability. A general contractor and assistant were both brought to the site in January 1827, very possibly for the primary purpose of their extended consultations on those same drawings. Batchelor made fundamental purchases during a trip to New Orleans on February 24, including at least many tools, and sheet lead for the roof. But his principal pages for these accounts are both headed “Beech Grove, March the 1st, 1827” (which was a Thursday).⁷⁵ Since from early medieval times in many Continental countries, March 1 was celebrated as the New Year, it seems quite possible that symbolic

⁷⁴ Ibid., full page headed as on this account. Square brackets include material from this and previous pages.

⁷⁵ Adriano Cappelli, *Cronologia, Cronografia e Calenario Perpetuo* (Milano, 1969), 84, 285.

reasons may have underlain his choice of this day.⁷⁶ At any rate, it is on that date that the contractor was paid for his essential tools, the first lumber was delivered to the site (with more by March 8), and the work of hewing the massive beams for the base plates and upper framing was put in hand. The thirty-odd three-foot brick piers supporting the house must of course have been erected simultaneously, although Paxton Holland was only paid for them when he was reimbursed for the two Batchelor House chimneys (added last, between August 19 and December 12); his third chimney had evidently been installed on a separate kitchen.⁷⁷

The two major consignments of lumber arrived from two different mills respectively in early March and early May. They are specified in accordance with the sizes of Beech Grove's various rooms—with the “refuse” flooring and ceiling planks, at considerably less-than-normal cost, quite possibly representing a dismantling of the site's preceding “settlement structure,”⁷⁸ with one exception. There is no provision at all, in these specifications, for the forty-two tongue-and-groove flooring planks, all at the unparalleled length of twenty-two feet, which make up the parlor floor. These boards are all laid at their full, integral lengths, with the very highly unusual characteristic of having no end-joints at all. Furthermore, their full suspended lengths allow a controlled degree of bounce, during the dances of which the Batchelors were evidently fond. Such a “sprung” floor, carefully calculated to serve its primary function of dancing, may be almost unprecedented in this region's architecture.⁷⁹ Its planks (like those of the adze-hewn plates, sills, and posts of the heavy framing timbers) may well have been culled from several months or even years of assiduous husbandry of Beech Grove's virgin forests.

Another quite surprising fact is that after less than five months' work, the entire exterior of the Batchelor House was ready to be painted

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 8-22, esp. 11 (“Stile veneto”), and 16, 18, 20, 21 for this usage in countries other than Venetian dominions. It is also possible that an unknown, esoteric significance might perhaps underlie this choice, for there is some evidence that Batchelor may have been a Freemason.

⁷⁷ Item 2, 20: “Received of Thomas Batchelor one hundred fifty dollars for building three chimneys, under pinning house &c . . . 12th Decr. 1827. [signed] Paxton Holland.”

⁷⁸ Such a dismantling might have occurred at any point between November of 1821, when the Batchelor family apparently moved into their newly-acquired and newly-renovated house at “Collins' old place” on the east side of the West Amite River (note 68), and late autumn of 1827, when Thomas and Rebecca Batchelor's “mansion house” was far enough advanced for its doors to be hung (note 12) and its windows to be glazed (notes 74 and 83).

⁷⁹ One of the only evident functional reasons for the Beech Grove parlor floor's studious avoidance of end- (or butt-) joints might be a wish to prevent the snagging of guests' fragile dancing slippers.

(since payment for that work was already made on July 31, 1827).⁸⁰ The celerity of this operation certainly demonstrates that the exterior siding and weatherboarding had previously been thoroughly dried, through aging in controlled stacks. Beech Grove's early testimony for roof gutters, or eave troughs, reflects a feature omitted from its most recent restoration.⁸¹ Samuel Foster's work through August 19 for making brick was accomplished in two kiln sites on an adjoining property originally settled by Thomas Batchelor himself, a quarter mile down the creek that flows in front of Beech Grove.⁸² The eighteen barrels of lime (for mortar, during the summer's bricklaying of the chimneys) each cost \$2.50 in New Orleans and Natchez, but only \$1.50 at Bayou Sara; plaster-of-Paris for the interior walls downstairs was far more expensive, at \$10 a barrel. The one box of window glass bought at Bayou Sara on December 14 could only have contained some twenty-eight panes (if the 1816 price of 16¢ per pane still was accurate). That same 1816 purchase of glass for the preceding "settlement house" at Beech Grove, however, does demonstrate that it—most unusually for its early date—certainly had glazed windows.⁸³ It is thus feasible that its relatively precocious and expensive window-glass should have been a principal material salvaged from it, since the many large windows at Beech Grove contain almost seven hundred panes.

The latest payments for the construction of the chimneys and the last-minute purchase of final materials for the Batchelor House both occurred in mid-December 1827. One comes thus within easy range of the end-of-year reckoning noted by Batchelor's delivery of a major note

⁸⁰ Item 2, p. 19: "Received of Thomas Batchelor eighty dollars in full for painting House &c...31st July 1827. [signed] Clapp & Beatty."

⁸¹ This is apparently a precocious date for 'eve Troughs'[sic]. It was mistakenly assumed, during the 2004 meticulous restoration of the original aspect of the house, that roof gutters might have been inappropriate in 1827.

⁸² Item 2, 19: "Recd. of Thomas Batchelor nine dollars in full for making Brick . . . 19th August 1827. [signed] Samuel Foster." The locations of Foster's two 'pug mills' are marked by deep circular troughs (worn by paddle-powering mules) beside Mill Creek: compare illustration (p. 230) of a comparable Mississippi system of "Brick Making and Masonry" in J. Frazer Smith, *White Pillars: Early Life and Architecture of the Lower Mississippi Valley* (New York, 1941), 229-231.

⁸³ Their windowpanes, of course, may not (or may not all) have been installed as early as the presumed date of construction of that 'settlement structure' in the latter months of 1803. But the Batchelors' purchase of fifty-four panes in 1816 (note 63) proves not only that their preceding house on the Beech Grove site certainly had at least a few glazed windows by that date, but that their source for this glass, Rebecca Batchelor's brother Agrippa Gayden, was also using it simultaneously on an adjoining property.

of indebtedness to George Seeber on January 2, 1828, and his outright payment to the painters for the completion of their interior work, on January 17.⁸⁴ With its twice-repeated date of actual commencement on March 1, 1827, therefore, the clear evidence of the surviving accounts is that the Thomas Batchelor House at Beech Grove was completed in the astonishingly short time of just over ten months. One striking indication of how this might have been achieved is afforded by the account of September 30, recording that the contractor George Seeber was advanced the considerable sum of \$20.00 “to get Candles at Kiernan’s [tavern]”—by which we learn that the building crew worked day and night, once they were able to concentrate on the interior of the house.⁸⁵

Beech Grove’s detached kitchen had been the subject of a preceding payment of \$9.00 on June 29, 1825, to Young S. Harrington for “600 feet of plank,” which is clearly distinguished from those destined for the “mansion house” two years later, by its lack of specifications as to lengths, widths, or thicknesses (or, in other words, that it was a generic shipment of rough planking, quite evidently intended for such an auxiliary structure).⁸⁶ The bricklayer Paxton Holland was paid in 1827 to provide a third chimney for just such an ancillary building; and indeed one learns from the repeated references to “board” being provided for the Batchelor House workers that a kitchen was certainly functioning at Beech Grove by the early summer of 1827. The third chimney may have been built for it at the same time as the foundation piers, or very early in that year.

On the account-book spread immediately following Mr. Batchelor’s final summary of the costs for his “mansion house,” there occur from 1828 through 1830 his notations of

⁸⁴ Item 2, consecutive entries on p. 21: “Received of Thomas Batchelor his note dated the 2nd day of January 1828 for thirteen hundred and forty three dollars payable the 1st day of March next, or Sooner if he sells his cotton... [signed] George Seeber” followed by “Received of Thomas Batchelor one hundred & fifteen dollars in full for painting House &c . . . 17th January 1828. [signed] Clapp & Beatty.” It was standard procedure for Southern planters to make such New Year’s reckonings: Genovese, *Sweetness of Life* (cited in note 7), 161-2, 221-230.

⁸⁵ That very substantial sum would have bought hundreds of candles. See note 74.

⁸⁶ Item 2, “Received of Thomas Batchelor nine dollars in full for six hundred feet of plank. 29 June 1825. [signed] Young S. Harrington.” It should be noted that this amount of lumber almost exactly parallels those provided in 1837 and 1838 for a legal office at Beech Grove, and a cabin for a neighbor who worked at Batchelor’s Grist Mill, or respectively of 525 linear feet and 680 feet. See notes 120 and 122.

Expenses Laid out in building my out buildings [at Beech Grove]:

| | |
|--|------------------------------|
| Paid [John] Rutledge [\$38.55 in a receipt dated September 12, 1828] | \$40.34 |
| Paid Montague & Jones for plank | 70.95 |
| Paid Doct. Cannon for 2 Kegs White Lead \$6 [and] 2 [Kegs] Brown \$4 | 10.00 |
| 2 Kegs Nails. Rogers & Slocumb [Hardware Co, New Orleans] | 17.00 |
| 1 Gro[ss] Screws 4 bits, 2 Knob Locks \$2.50 | 3.00 |
| 1 Stock Lock | .75 |
| Paid [Castlereugh C.] Atkinson, carpenter, in cash [\$37 on Sept. 18, 1828] | 38.00 |
| Paid [George] Seeber | 50.00 |
| Paid [William] Brundige [\$16.00 in a receipt dated November 9, 1827] | 18.00 |
| Paid [the carpenter,] Atkinson [\$68.25 in a receipt dated October 28, 1828] | 80.00 |
| Paid the painter \$25, paint & oil \$14 | \$39.00 |
| | [Total] 367.04 ⁸⁷ |

Batchelor's direct payments to the workmen offer a bit more information about these "outbuildings." The carpenter Richard Young was paid on June 19, 1829, for "Covering [roofing] Stable & making [its] door, \$11.00; Making Dairy \$15, and [making] Necessary [or privy] \$15."⁸⁸ In September and October 1829, Young was further paid \$94.00 for "22 Pannels fence dressed on both sides @ 10 bits, \$27.50, [then] 14 Pannels plain @ 5 bits, \$14.00" [as well as for] "Making 500 Shingles, \$1.50 [and for building] Gates \$10.00."⁸⁹ Winston Gilmore was paid \$6.00 "for one pair Hinges" on May 17, 1830.⁹⁰ Nicholas Nicholson was paid \$20.00 for "carpenter's work" on August 17, 1830,⁹¹ while the bricklayer

⁸⁷ Item 1, p. headed "Beech Grove, 1828," with receipts on September 12 and 18, October 28, and November 9 registered in Item 2, 19, 22 (twice), 23.

⁸⁸ Item 1, The Beech Grove Papers (Z/2380), p. headed "Beech Grove, June 19th, 1829," on that date.

⁸⁹ Ibid., facing page also headed "Beech Grove, June the 19th, 1829," under date of September 9; Item 2, 24, 27.

⁹⁰ Ibid., 25: "Received of Thomas Batchelor six dollars in full for one pair Hinges . . . 17th May 1830 [signed] Winston Gilmore."

⁹¹ Ibid., 26: "Received of Thomas Batchelor Twenty dollars in full for carpenter's work done for him this 17th day of August 1830 [signed] Nichol. Nicholson."

Paxton Holland received another \$22.50 on August 23, 1830.⁹² Richard Young finally was paid another \$24.00 for “Carpenter work” on October 21, 1830.⁹³ Beech Grove’s kitchen, privy, stable, and dairy, together with their associated fences and gates—none of which, unfortunately, survive today—thus required almost exactly three years to complete, from William Brundige’s initial work in October and November 1827 to Richard Young’s final payment on October 21, 1830.

With that provision of the most crucial secondary structures to surround the Batchelor House, as well as Beech Grove’s new cotton gin of 1824-25, and the 1821 remodeling of the “old Collins place” (which, when the family moved out of it into their new “mansion house,” may well have been assigned to the overseer of the plantation’s eighty-five slaves), there remained two other essential buildings typically found on an affluent estate—a grist mill for the grinding of grains and a saw mill for preparation of lumber. At Beech Grove these were put in hand as a combined structure, which in fact is unique among the plantation’s auxiliary buildings in having left a firm trace, clearly visible today. Just east of the bridge over Neland’s Creek⁹⁴ (aptly renamed, as a result of this construction, Mill Creek) below the Beech Grove family cemetery, a couple hundred yards northeast of the Batchelor House, is still to be seen (at low water) an extensive grid of well-preserved foundation timbers, some feet below the surface of the creek.

Thomas Batchelor’s accounting for this final structure at Beech Grove begins with the note that he “Began to get Mill timber July the 7th [1831] & Began same time to clear Land [for the millpond].”⁹⁵ Several scattered entries of accounts intervene before a summary page, headed: “1833: Amount of Expenses in building Mill.” These might begin with G. D. Parham’s receipt on May 17, 1832, of \$12.00 for “work done on [Batchelor’s] Mill and Ginn.” But the small amount, as well as the specificity of the next entry, suggests instead that Parham’s work may

⁹² *Ibid.*, 26: “Recd. of Thomas Batchelor ten dollars in money & his due bill for twelve dollars & fifty cents . . . August the 23rd, 1830 [signed] Paxton Holland.”

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 27: “Received of Thomas Batchelor Twenty four dollars for Carpenter work done for him . . . October the 21st, 1830 [signed] R. Young.”

⁹⁴ Originally named for John Kneeland (d. August 1817), who settled 120 acres on the upper reaches of this stream (above Bethel Church) in 1802, and obtained a U.S. Government Preemption Certificate for that land (irregular § 7 along the creek, Township 1 North, Range 3 East) in 1806. Kneeland had five children and four slaves in the 1805 census, and six children and seven slaves in the Census of 1810. He was widely respected as one of the original settlers of this area.

⁹⁵ Item 1, p. headed “Beech Grove, June 27th 1831,” on date cited in text. See also note 14.

more probably have been performed on the existing cotton gin, which had been built at Beech Grove in 1824-25.⁹⁶ In fact, the newer gin, grist, and saw mill's principal builder, Thomas Tomkins, only arrived at the creek site on July 18, 1832. He was paid on September 1 the much more substantial sum of \$55.00 for "work . . . on the foundation & frame of a Mill," which was clearly the initial work on this project. Such is fully confirmed by his next appearance, when on February 16, 1833, he earned an additional \$61.90 "for work done on Mill," but noted that "I obligate myself to come when the weather gets warmer (say, May next) & make an alteration in the trunk of said Mill & put the Water wheel lower."⁹⁷ Another workman, Solomon Mangum (offsetting an itemized laundry bill from the staff at Beech Grove from mid-March through August), was paid \$50.00 on April 26, 1833, for "work done on the upper frame of Mill House" for which he also earned \$110.92 on June 1, with the balance (making up Mangum's comprehensive fee of \$415.00) tendered on September 11, 1833.⁹⁸ The blacksmith William G. Tyler also had his total wage of \$18.25 on June 1 of that year reduced by a more modest deduction for seven pieces of washing (costing 75¢), during the month of May.⁹⁹

Thomas Batchelor's eventual summary of his gin, grist, and saw mill expenses lists two one-line entries for the lumber used in that structure, giving only the name of the commercial mill from which he ordered it. A specific itemization is therefore useful. In August and September of 1832 these shipments begin, to be followed in January 1833 with:

125 pieces of Spoilling 16 feet long 12 inches wide, 1900 feet \$28.50
 Sept. 1st [cancelled] 26th 88 Plank of Sheeting 17 feet long, 22 of them

⁹⁶ Item 2, p. 31: "Recd. of Thomas Batchelor twelve dollars on account of work done on his Mill & Ginn, May 17th, 1832 [signed] G.D. Parham."

⁹⁷ Item 1, p. headed "Beech Grove, July the 13th 1832," under date of July 18th; Item 2, (cited in note 1), 31: "Received of Thomas Batchelor fifty five dollars on account of work done for him on the foundation & frame of a Mill, September 1st, 1832 [signed] Thomas Thompkins;" *ibid.*, 32, February 16, 1833; and note 14.

⁹⁸ Item 1, two-page spread headed "Beech Grove, February 9th, 1833," right-hand page, for first four months of laundry account; Item 2, 33: "Received of Thomas Batchelor fifty dollars on account of work done on the upper frame of Mill House, 26th April 1833 [signed] Solomon Mangum" and *ibid.*, 33: "Received of Thomas Batchelor One hundred & ten dollars and ninety two cents on account of work done on Mill, June 1st, 1833 [signed] Solomon Mangum," as well as *ibid.*, 34, for final payment of \$415 on September 11.

⁹⁹ Item 1, two-page spread headed "Beech Grove, February 9th, 1833," right-hand page, for laundry bill during May; Item 2, 33: "Received of Thomas Batchelor Seventeen dollars & fifty cents in full for Blacksmith's work done on Mill Irons & c, June 1st, 1833 [signed] William G. Tyler."

one foot wide, the balance some wider, 420 [feet] 10 [inches] / 136 [feet; totals cancelled]

1833 Jany. 5th 8 plank 17 Feet long 10 Inches wide, 113 [feet, total]

| | | | | | | |
|---|---|----|---|------|---|----------------------|
| 9 | “ | 17 | “ | 17 | “ | 216 |
| 3 | “ | 17 | “ | 14 | “ | 60 |
| 1 | “ | 17 | “ | 16 | “ | 22 [feet] 8 [inches] |
| 6 | “ | 12 | “ | 19 “ | | 114 [total,] 525.8 |

in., \$7.87 ½ [and later]

6 “ 94 feet of Ruff edge @ 4 bits[.]¹⁰⁰

An isolated note occurs ten days later, with a memorandum of heavy timbers provided:

3800 three foot boards 15 Jany. 1833 at 4 farthest trees[.]¹⁰¹

Bill For Saw Mill & Ginn 1833

2 Plates 10 Inches square [i.e. 10” x 10” in cross-section] 34 feet long

6 Corner Posts 12 Inches square, 8 feet long

1 Piece 14 “ “ 18 “

2 Posts 12 by 14 “ Square, 14 “

2 Pieces 8 by 12 30 feet long

14 Braces 8 by 10 6 feet 8 Inches long

1 Piece 10 Inches Square 34 feet[.]

Consecutively below appears a contract for “Work to be done by Mr. Solo. Mangum:”

For framing the Mill house, Gin &c fifty four feet by thirty four, together with the Shed over the bridge & Rafting, Raising &c, calculated to work a Saw, for One hundred dollars (say) \$100.00

For putting one Saw to work by Water complete, One hundred fifty dollars (say) \$150.00

For making the Running Gears of a Ginn [sic], double reverse Screw press, box &c, & putting it in Operation complete \$150.00

¹⁰⁰ Item 1, p. headed “Beech Grove, July the 20th, 1832,” under dates of September 1 and 26, and January 5, 1833.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., p. headed “East half of the S.E. Quarter of Section Twenty One... 1833,” under date cited in text. As will be seen in the final entry of the next account, such timbers were routinely provided by the owner, rather than ordered from a commercial mill.

The timber for the above work to be furnished on the ground [i.e. by the owner].

[Friday] February the 8th 1833.

[signed] Tho. Batchelor

[signed] Solomon Mangum¹⁰²

On the next spread occurs the final, after-the-fact compendium account:

Amount of Expenses in Building Mill 1833

Paid Thomas Tomkins [who was assisted by] Adam [the slave experienced in carpentry, belonging to Thomas Batchelor's daughter], came to Work on Monday 27th Sept. 1832 . . . commenced Work with Tho. Tomkins on Monday 22nd October 1832¹⁰³ \$223.25

There are also separate notes¹⁰⁴ of Tomkins's work December 19-21, 1832 "on bridge, at Mill, 3 days @ \$2.50 per day" and on January 4, 1833, he "Began to work at Mill breast[work, or dike enclosing the millpond] 9th to 11th January "at Mill breast[work] three days @ \$2.50 per day" as well as [on Jan. 22, 1833] a memorandum of "Tho. Tomkins' directions for Mill Irons:

Rag Iron 4 feet 8 Inches in diameter. Rags half Inch apart, the notches square down. The crank 11 ½ Inches long 3 Inches Square. Sawmill Saw 6 feet long, thin on the back and high middle."

| | |
|---------------------------|-------|
| Paid Bates the Blacksmith | 12.00 |
|---------------------------|-------|

| | |
|---|-------|
| Paid [Tyre] Rembert [who] commenced Work 2 nd Octr. @ 1\$ per day ¹⁰⁵ | 12.00 |
|---|-------|

| | |
|-------------------------------|-------|
| Paid Brown & Parker for plank | 67.94 |
|-------------------------------|-------|

¹⁰² Ibid., p. headed simply "1833," under date of February 8th. Mangum's more detailed cash accounts from April through August occur in *ibid.*, p. headed "Beech Grove, June the 12th, 1833," including the final three months of his laundry bills, and documentation of his work on August 6 and 13 in "coupling Rafters and Raising them" and "on the press house," at \$2.50 per day. Mangum was assisted in this work by Abraham P. Boardman, who shared in the laundry expense, and was independently paid \$16.32 on June 1 (Item 2, p. 33), as well as by Tyre [or Tiry] Rembert (*ibid.*, 31, directly paid \$18 on August 18), and by 'Harry' and 'Bill', two slaves, whose 12½ days' work was reimbursed (through Mangum) at \$1 per day. See also note 98.

¹⁰³ These insertions concerning 'Adam' are from Item 1, p. headed "Beech Grove, 29th September, 1832," on dates cited in text. See also note 69.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. headed "Beech Grove, September the 1st, 1832," on dates cited in text. The 'Mill Irons' directions are from *ibid.*, p. cited in note 101, immediately following that entry.

¹⁰⁵ The insertion of Rembert's first day of work is from *ibid.*, p. cited in note 97, on date cited in text.

| | |
|---|-------|
| 3 Kegs cut nails, 300 lb. @ 6¢ | 18.00 |
| 1 Pair Mill Stones [&] Running Gears of a horse grist mill [to] William Sandall, Dec. 28 ¹⁰⁶ | 50.00 |

| | |
|---|--------------------------|
| Paid A.H. Buckholts [husband of Batchelor's daughter V. C. Buckholts ¹⁰⁷] for Adam's hire | 31.00 |
| March 12 th Paid for Mill Irons in N. Orleans, Saw &c | 106.35 |
| Paid William G. Tyler (Blacksmith) for making Mill Irons | 17.50 |
| Paid for Iron in N. O. 484 lbs. | 26.07 |
| Paid Brown & Parker for plank [partly on June 21, 1833] ¹⁰⁸ | 26.00 |
| Octr. 9 Paid John Radford for work done on Press house &c [@\$1 per day] | 16.00 |
| Paid B[enjamin] Graves for Gin head [containing Sixty Saws] ¹⁰⁹ | 290.00 |
| Paid Solomon Mangum | 400.00 |
| [Total] | \$1296.11 ¹¹⁰ |

To this summary is added, on a loose slip of paper, two calls from the family doctor:

| | |
|---|------|
| July[?] 29, 1833 [Dr.] James Perkins' visit for workman | 5.00 |
|---|------|

¹⁰⁶ The 'Sandall' insertion is from *ibid.*, p. headed "Beech Grove, November 4th, 1833," on date cited in text.

¹⁰⁷ Abel Hodge Buckholts (1801-1833), son of pioneer Amite County planters, married Victoria Caroline Batchelor (1806-1858) on December 26, 1826. In 1825, Buckholts provided the capital (and renewed energy) for the Natchez and New Orleans mercantile and cotton brokerage firm of Buckholts & Richards, founded by John Richards (1787-1827) of Virginia and Natchez. Following his partner's death, Buckholts ran the firm alone, until his own premature death in the cholera epidemic of 1833. The eleven Buckholts & Richards account ledgers inherited by his widow and preserved at Beech Grove were donated to the Mississippi Dept. of Archives and History. After Buckholts's death, his widow Victoria Caroline Buckholts married on July 27, 1836, the lawyer Henry Goodall Street, Esq. (1801-1879). See note 120.

¹⁰⁸ Item 2, (cited in note 1), 33: "Received of Thomas Batchelor twenty dollars on account of plank bought by him, 21st June 1833 [signed] James Brown & Parker."

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 34: "Recd. of Thomas Batchelor two hundred and ninety dollars in full for a Gin head containing Sixty Saws, this 9th day of September, 1833 [signed] Benjm. Graves."

¹¹⁰ Item 1, p. cited in note 99, under dates of March 12 and October 9, 1833.

Aug. 11 “ “ “ “ visit and advice for same 5.00¹¹¹

On April 30, 1836, G. W. Ailes was paid “fifty dollars for repairing and Setting to work [the] Grist & Saw Mill.”¹¹² Similar repairs earned John and William Dunckley \$90.00 on March 21, 1839,¹¹³ while \$7.50 was paid on January 20, 1845, to Charles E. Fraley for “one week’s work done on [the Beech Grove] yard paling,” and another \$6.00 covered Fraley’s “work done on Mill” on April 28, 1845, both for Thomas’s son James Madison Batchelor.¹¹⁴

One more structure near Beech Grove for which Thomas Batchelor was responsible was a house for the family of his daughter, Mary Ann Harriet Batchelor (1809-1830). At age fifteen, Mary Ann Harriet had spent three weeks married to a dying husband, Iverson Green Lea (1802-1824), a law school graduate who had been a protégé of Batchelor.¹¹⁵ After her recovery from four years’ mourning, she married on April 7, 1829, the Presbyterian minister Reverend James Smylie (c. 1780-1853), and their son Thomas Batchelor Smylie was born on February 26, 1830. With products from his new sawmill (and motivated by the birth of his namesake grandson—though Mary Ann had died five months later), Batchelor arranged to purvey to Reverend Smylie the materials for a new house. Their estimates for interior finishing supplies are contained in a:

¹¹¹ Item 2, loose slip between 34 and 35. James Perkins (c. 1800-c. 1842) was a nephew of Rebecca Batchelor, whose own sister Martha (‘Patsy’) Gayden had married James’s father, Col. Lewis Perkins (note 5); James himself had married in 1826 Rebecca’s niece Louisiana Emily Gayden, daughter of her full brother Cadesby Gayden (note 5).

¹¹² *Ibid.*, 36, for the receipt cited in text.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 41: “Received of Thomas Batchelor ninety dollars in full for repairing & Setting to work his Grist Mill, 21st March 1839 [signed] J. & Wm. B. Dunckley.”

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, unnumbered page headed “Beech Grove, Jan. 3, 1845,” on date cited in text; and on a separate slip of gray paper inserted at that page, “Received six dollars of J. M. Batchelor for work done on Mill this 28 day of April 1845 [signed] Charles E. Fraley.” J. M. Batchelor ran Beech Grove until he was given a plantation at Rodney, Mississippi in 1846.

¹¹⁵ Iverson and Mary Ann were married on September 7, 1824 (Casey and Otken, *Amite County*, vol. III (Birmingham, 1957), p. 238); just three weeks later later his obituary comments that he “died at age 22, as an Attorney-at-Law, in Liberty, at the residence of Thomas Batchelor, Esq.”—J. Paul Mogan Jr. and Kathryn C. Mogan, *Amite County Cemeteries* (Osyka, Mississippi, 1982), 33. Mary Ann’s was the first burial in the Beech Grove cemetery (she died August 8, 1830), followed by Thomas’s wife Rebecca Gayden Leith Wren Batchelor’s, on January 14, 1836; Iverson (d. September 29, 1824) is buried therefore in the original Liberty cemetery, now known by the name of ‘Robert Brown,’ on the crown of the bluff overlooking his early home, 2.5 miles southwest of Liberty.

Memorandum for Revd. Jas. Smylie, Jany. 30, 1834:

700 feet ceiling Plank 15 feet long $\frac{3}{4}$ Inch thick
 2000 ft. Weatherboards, all lengths or 5000 feet
 3000 feet Inch[-thick] plank, 12 or 15 ft. long
 3000 flooring “ “ or 5000 of each.¹¹⁶

Framing timbers had been delivered eight days earlier, according to Batchelor's accounts:

Beech Grove, January the 22nd, 1834—Revd. James Smylie, [by] Waggon:

| | | | | | |
|---|--------------------|-------------------------|--|---------|------------------------|
| 6 Pieces of Scantling [molding] 17 feet long, 4 by 6 Inches [@] 8 bits | | | | | \$2.04 |
| 68 Pieces “ “ 17 “ 3 by 4 “ @ 8 bits | | | | | 11.56 |
| 18 Joists 15 feet long 2 $\frac{1}{2}$ by 8 inches | | | | | 6.75 |
| 18 Pieces 15 “ 4 by 4 for braces | | | | | 3.59 |
| 54 Rafters 9 “ 3 by 4 inches | | | | | 3.06 |
| 4 Gallery Posts 10 “ 6 by 6 “ | | | | | 1.20 |
| 2 Posts 10 “ 4 by 6 “ | | | | | .40 |
| Feb. 11 81 Pieces Weatherboarding | | | | | |
| | 11 $\frac{1}{2}$ “ | 7 Inches broad | | | 5.13 |
| 1 Piece Scantling [molding] | 12 “ | 6 inches square | | | .36 |
| 14 31 Inch[-thick] plank | 16 feet long | 12 inches wide | | | |
| 11 “ “ | 15 “ | 12 inches wide, 661 ft. | | | 6.61 |
| April 10 750 feet Ruff edge plank @ 4 bits | | | | | 3.75 |
| 11 500 feet weatherboards @ 8 bits | | | | | 8.00 |
| 4 “ split | | | | | |
| June 3 40 Plank 16 feet long 7 inches wide, 1 $\frac{1}{4}$ thick, 373 ft. | | | | | |
| @ 12 bits | | | | | 5.59 |
| 14 plank 15 feet long 12 inches Wide, $\frac{3}{4}$ inch thick, 210 ft. @ \$1 | | | | | 2.10 |
| 15 “ 16 “ 12 “ “ 240 ft. @ 8 bits | | | | | 2.40 |
| 15 “ 16 “ 7 “ “ 140 “ @ 8 bits | | | | | 1.40 |
| | | | | [Total] | \$63.94 ¹¹⁷ |

¹¹⁶ Item 1, p. headed “Beech Grove, January the 22nd, 1834” on date cited in text.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., same page, on dates cited in text.

A subsequent account is headed **Revd. James Smylie:**

| | | | | |
|------------------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------------|------------------|
| 22 Plank | 15 ½ ft. long, | 12 inches wide, | 1 In. thick, | 341 ft. @ 8 bits |
| 26 Inch[-thick] plank, | 16 “ | 12 “ | 416“ | @ 8 bits |
| 4 “ | 1 6 “ | 10 “ | 53 | |
| | | | [Total] 810 ft. @ \$1 | \$8.10 |

That reckoning was expanded, later in June or through July 7, by a subsequent account:

| | |
|---|--------------------|
| 529 feet Ruff edge plank @ 4 bits | \$2.64 ½ |
| 93 feet Weatherboards @ 8 bits | .93 |
| 98 feet flooring plank @ 12 bits | 1.47... |
| The balance of J. Smylie’s a/c up to this day Friday the 18 th July 1834 | \$59.58 ½ August |
| 25 28 pieces Weatherboards 7 inches wide & 15 ft. long, 245 feet | |
| 44 “ “ 7 “ 12 “ 308 “ | |
| 553 ft.@ \$1 | 5.53 |
| 160 feet Ruff edge plank @ 4 bits | .80 ¹¹⁸ |

It will be recalled that Thomas Batchelor’s brother-in-law, Agrippa Gayden (1778-1845), had run a local cotton gin that Batchelor had used before his own first gin had been built at Beech Grove in 1824-25. Ten years later, Gayden’s structure and machinery needed upgrading, as reflected in Batchelor’s accounting at:

Beech Grove, July 28, 1834. Agrippa Gayden:

| | |
|--|------------------------------|
| 3 Cants 15 feet long, 17 inches wide, 4 In. thick | 63 feet 9 Inches |
| 3 “ 15 “ 17 “ 4 “ | 63 9 “ |
| 3 Arms 13 “ 12 ½ “ 3 ¼ “ | 40 |
| 2 pieces for press doors 12 ft. long, 18 In. wide, 3 thick | 36 |
| 1 “ “ 12 “ 18 “ 3 “ | 18 |
| | [Total] 221 . 6 @ \$3 \$6.63 |

| | |
|--|--------|
| 100 feet of 1 ¾ - inch plank @ 12 bits | 1.50 |
| 3 Arms for band Wheel 9 ft. long, 10 Inches wide, 3 thick | 22 . 6 |
| @ 3¢ | .66 |
| 4 Plank for Rim 15 ft. long, 12 in. wide, 1 ¼ thick 45 ft. | .56 |

¹¹⁸ Ibid., p. headed “Beech Grove, May the 4th, 1834” on dates cited in text.

| | |
|--|--------------------------------|
| 6 Braces 7 feet long, 6 by 3 In. at one cut, 3 square at the other @ 3¢ | 1.26 |
| 1 Piece Scantling 15 ft. long, 3 by 4 @ 3¢ .45 1“ 8“ 4 by 4 @ 3¢ | .32 |
| | [Total] \$11.38 |
| 7 Plank 12 Inches broad, 15 ft. long 105 feet @ 8 bits | 1.05 |
| 2 Pieces for Stairs, 15 ft. long, 15 inches broad & 3 thick, 97 ft. @ 8 bits . | 97 |
| | [Total] \$13.40 ¹¹⁹ |

A small consignment of processed lumber, totaling some 525 linear feet, was provided on August 14, 1837, (without cost—probably for a legal office at Beech Grove) to Henry G. Street, Esq., second husband of Batchelor’s elder daughter Victoria Caroline Buckholts.¹²⁰ On the same date there is a credit of \$10.00 noted as due to “Mr. Crooms” for “laying the floor of [the Beech Grove] Smoke House.”¹²¹ Since that building had certainly existed for years and since the credit is so low, this presumably indicates only the replacement of its dirt floor with a permanent one. Some 680 feet of lumber were also sold on March 9, 1838, to one of the employees of the new grist mill; but that cabin was almost certainly erected on a separate property, to the north of Beech Grove.¹²² A set of “Arms for the Saw-Mill Gate” were installed on April 6, 1839,¹²³ and new components were provided on the cotton press for the gin on July 6, 1839.¹²⁴ With these modest transactions, Beech Grove’s earliest accounts come to an end. Thomas Batchelor’s last entry is dated March 31, 1842,¹²⁵ and he

¹¹⁹ Ibid., p. headed as cited in text; accompanied by marginal note, “Hauled 5 bales cotton in payment of the above.”

¹²⁰ Henry Goodall Street (1801-1879) of Beech Grove was a younger son of the long-established family owning Santee Plantation near Richmond in Hanover County, Virginia; he and his brother Joseph H. Street emigrated to Woodville, Mississippi by 1833, and established a joint law practice there (Joseph moved to Natchez by the spring of 1840). On July 28, 1836 (Casey and Otken, cited in notes 13 and 115, *Amite County* 3, p. 240) Henry married Thomas Batchelor’s eldest daughter, Victoria Caroline Batchelor (1806-1858)—recently the widow of Abel Hodge Buckholts (1801-1833), for whom see note 107. Henry’s and Victoria Caroline’s two children were Thomas Parke Street (1839-1917) of Beech Grove and Charles Napoleon Batchelor [‘C.N.B.’, or ‘Nap’] Street (1843-1864), Sergeant Major in Co. K, 33rd Mississippi Regiment: killed at the Battle of Franklin (Tennessee).

¹²¹ Item 1, p. headed “Beech Grove, June 18th, 1837” (both entries under date of August 14).

¹²² Ibid., p. headed “Beech Grove, March 9th, 1838.” The beneficiary was James Duck; his Duck descendants still live at the present day on their same property, less than 2 miles north of Beech Grove.

¹²³ Ibid., p. headed “Beech Grove, April the 6th, 1839,” on that date. The new fixtures included the ‘Arms’, a ‘Middle piece,’ and the ‘Gate’ itself, though no prices are given.

¹²⁴ Ibid., next page (lacking the customary header), under date cited in text. The listing is for ten pieces (including two female screws), but again no prices are noted.

¹²⁵ Ibid., p. headed “Beech Grove, October the 1st, 1841,” under 1842: “Began to plant cotton, Thursday 31 March.”

died on April 11 of that year.

In conclusion, this review of the design and dating of the Batchelor House at Beech Grove has provided a well-attested line of descent from Virginia and North Carolina prototypes, and a documented date within the year of 1827, for one of the most outstanding examples of Federal architecture in Mississippi. The account books, from which that documentation is derived, also provide thorough histories for Thomas Batchelor's and his family's residential and service buildings of (1) his town house in the county seat of Liberty (1811-12); (2) a remodeling / expansion of his wife's earlier (c. 1803) "settlement structure" on the Beech Grove site (additions documented 1813-16, house demolished between 1822 and 1826); (3) a major rebuilding of another settlement structure at "Collins' old place" on the Amite River (1821), perhaps as an interim family dwelling (1821-27); (4) a cotton gin (1824-25), closer to home, probably on the builder's original parcel of 320 acres, adjoining Beech Grove; (5) a new [or expanded?] Batchelor House exterior kitchen (1825-26): the bricklaying of its chimney reimbursed, together with two chimneys on the main house, on December 12, 1827; (6) other outbuildings for the Batchelor House, including a privy, dairy, smokehouse, and stable (all 1827-30, with associated fencing and gates [repaired 1845]: the smokehouse refloored in 1837, and the stable/barn surviving into the 1980s); (7) a saw- and grist-mill, incorporating a new cotton gin (1832-33, its site still visible: repaired 1836, 1839, and 1845); (8) a new house (off-site) for Rev. James Smylie, widower of Batchelor's daughter Harriet (1834); (9) the refurbishing of a cotton gin for Agrippa Gayden, Batchelor's brother-in-law, on the latter's property (1834); and (10) a small legal office at Beech Grove for Henry Street, Batchelor's son-in-law (1837). Such a large complement of ancillary buildings attests to Beech Grove's increasing importance as a major cotton and livestock farm, during the last quarter-century of its builders' lives. Its surviving "big house" epitomizes the Natchez District's most up-to-date planning, and a refinement of interior finish rivaling the greatest houses of that Mississippi metropolis.¹²⁶

¹²⁶ It is observed above (note 42) that the highly unusual moldings of the door- and window-frames in the Beech Grove parlor may be matched only at Rosalie (1820-23) in Natchez, designed probably by James Griffin. In addition to that element of quasi-uniqueness, it is further noteworthy that each of the principal downstairs rooms, at the Batchelor House, also has a handsomely differentiated repertory of moldings, culminating in their unusually elaborate wainscoting and fireplace surrounds. Another rare Beech Grove feature, which may truly be unique in the Federal architecture of this region, is the pair of large oval chandelier sockets in the parlor and dining room (see figure 10), each with a sunburst pattern of ridged and scalloped rays, matching the rayed ovals of its mantelpieces.

