

The Gradual Transformation Of The Doorways

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The Evolution Of American Architecture

The creation of architectural designs caters to the specifications of individuals and groups; therefore, architecture has evolved significantly over time. Social formations and the influence of the community patron impact architecture, whether domestic, governmental, industrial, or commercial. Domestic architecture is aimed to meet the needs of a social unit, i.e., an individual, family, or tribe. The basic purpose of domestic structures is to provide shelter and security to carry out the daily functions of life. In the United States, numerous internal and external factors have shaped domestic architectural designs. The architecture of today represents centuries of rich, diverse, and innovative tradition. An important feature of domestic architecture, the doorways, have their origin in man's primitive attempts at construction. Connecting the interior and exterior of a house, a doorway is a space that divides the privacy of family life from the public sphere. For long, doorways have been perceived as a symbol of hospitality or hostility depending upon their openness (Ackerman et al., 2021). For centuries, doors have been symbolic of the social and economic factors that influence their development. Various factors impact the design of doors, and this has resulted in great variance – as is observed in the small holes of an igloo and the magnificent portal of warmer areas such as southern Asia. This paper aims to explore the evolution of American doorways on the East Coast between the 17th and 18th centuries. From the small porches in 17th Century New England colonial houses to the Philadelphia Row houses and from the late 18th century Virginia plantation houses to the development of the new nation, this paper discusses the gradual transformation of this mediating space while analyzing the change of people's needs with time.

The Doors And Doorways Of America

The doors and doorways of America have a long evolutionary history. The first American doorways made by primitive men were similar to those found in other parts of the world. The American architectural periods can be divided in different ways. However, for this research paper, the following styles will be focused on:

1. The doorways of the colonial era
2. The doorways of the Philadelphia Row house
3. The doorways of the Georgian era
4. The development of New Nation Architecture

The Doorways Of The 17th Century – Colonial Era

The seventeenth-century doorways are often referred to as the colonial style. With the exception of the Spanish, the colonial styles had a medieval origin as these were influenced by the late European Gothic styles. However, these colonial doorways lacked architectural magnificence, and the foremost concern of these early settlers was the provision of shelter for themselves. Although the Gothic period had passed in Europe, the colonists sought to match the barns and houses of their native European communities (Polino, 1978). They strived to attain this by whatever resources they had at hand and following whatever methods of building they could devise and remember. The styles of these earlier constructions were, therefore, determined to a great extent by the availability of material, with wood being the most common at-hand resource. The other factors included the lack of sufficient tools and the scarcity of skilled workers.

The early colonial settlements of New England were set up around Boston, Salem, Massachusetts, and Plymouth. The most primitive shelters included caves, tent-like structures erected on tree branches, or structures supported by stakes driven into the ground. The first of the English settlers to arrive in America built rudimentary huts that resembled the cabins made for farm labourers in England. The second and third influx of immigrants around 1630 led to the construction of farmhouses in this New England settlement, and brick houses appeared somewhere after the middle of the seventeenth century and were more common towards the farther southern regions (Griffith, 1952).

These early New England houses were entered through a doorway that consisted of a heavy front door constructed with two thick boards, i.e., the outer vertical board and the inner horizontal layer. The two layers were held together with “large-headed hand-forged nails” (Morrison, 1987). Strap hinges made from wrought iron were used. The strap hinges of two feet in length were not uncommon, and these strap hinges remained an important feature of front doors until the later part of the 18th century. The door either had a small ring that was attached through a shouldered peg or a pintle that was driven into its frame. The first-ever latches were made out of wood, and later “wrought iron latches” with “boldly designed latches” were attached to the doors (Morrison, 1987). Knockers made with wrought iron also appeared around the same time. At night, all front doors were fastened with a wooden bar that was placed across the door on the inside. This wooden bar remained in use long after the introduction of the iron shot bolts and was used as a means of providing extra security. The huge front door led to a small porch where a steep winding staircase was located. This porch separated the hall or the parlour from the main entrance.

On either side of the small porch, a doorway led into the parlour and hall. In the Colonial houses, the hall was considered as the main room, serving as the living room, workroom, and dining room. As a centre of family life, this room was separated from the front door through the small porch. Like other interior doors, the door leading into the hall was light and thin and was made up of single vertical boards held together by horizontal battens. Each door had three to four battens on the outer side. This outer side faced the porch, and the vertical boards could be viewed from the inner hall. Virginia

was the first settlement, and the construction of houses in this colony was quite similar to those in New England. The earlier houses were built with wood, while bricks of clay were also used later. The doorway of Adam Thorough-good House, which is one of the oldest Virginia houses, was similar to the primitive doors of New England (Griffith, 1952). The earliest brick mansions had doors made with heavy planks studded with wrought-iron nails. Doorways with a curvilinear head also appeared in the seventeenth century, depicting the influence of Gothic architecture on American doorways (Morrison, 1987).

The Doorways Of The Philadelphia Row House

The initial Philadelphia row houses mirrored the architectural traditions of English colonizers. Impacted by the terrible fire of 1666, these settlers embraced the fire-resisting Georgian construction that was effective in the city's narrow lots. The Budd's Row was the first officially recorded group of row houses. It was a progressive construction of ten buildings that were built around 1691 (Casper, 2021). These were constructed in the present-day Old City, which has since been demolished. These houses used medieval half-timbers for construction, which was banned later. The earliest row houses were two stories in height and two rooms deep. The standard construction material for the later houses was brick. With the development of the city over the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, this speculative expansion increased, and orderly rows of houses filled the streets.

The Philadelphia row houses were generally of four types (Casper, 2021). The most basic form of row house was the Bandbox. Each story of this structure had a single room not more than 16 feet in depth or width. These structures had one entry doorway that was covered with moulding and looked quite ordinary. The London-style row houses were similar to the Bandbox. However, these were two rooms deep and one room in width. The entry to these row houses was via a hall that extended from the main doorway to the dining room that was located at the back of the house. The London house was elaborate compared to the bandbox, and the arrangement of rooms allowed for more formality and privacy. The doorway of the side hall could be closed for the privacy of the front room. The other two types of row houses, i.e., the city and townhouse, were merely an augmentation of the previous designs (Colonial Philadelphia, 2021; Murtagh, 1957). With the addition of a narrow wing to the back for ancillary services such as cooking and laundry, the stairs of the City House Plan were located in the piazza. It also allowed rear access through a doorway between the houses. The entrance doorway of the townhouse was located on one of the front sides, leading into a hall with stairs that may be open or closed. The small front chamber created a parlour that could be closed off for privacy.

The Doorways Of The Georgian Era

The doorways of the eighteenth century are considered the most beautiful. These doorways have influenced the designs of all doorways that have followed since then. The influence of 18th-century doorways is also observed in present times. The arrival of the Georgian style in America was via the

British manuals of architectural building. These pattern books arrived in America around the 1700s. Although the 18th century can be referred to as the Georgian era, it did not necessarily end there. Georgian architectural designs have remained prevalent in the American colonies from 1714 to a quarter of the nineteenth century. Symmetry and proportion are the highlights of this architectural model. In Britain, Georgian architecture overarched the building styles under the rule of the House of Hanover and primarily constituted the neo-Gothic, Chinoiserie, and Palladian designs. The Georgian doorways were European imported styles that were, initially, a modification of the Renaissance architecture of continental Europe. Muted ornamentation, minimalist details, and balanced facades were characteristic of this variation.

An important feature of the doorway designs was the moulded trim that surrounded them. After 1725, doorways with full entablature started making an appearance. These were supported by consoles or pilasters. Various authors have highlighted this feature of doorways. The use of free-standing or engaged columns was introduced in the middle of the century. These led to the entrance porch of the house. Another important feature of the doorway of that era is the construction of pediments. The use of pediments in architecture dates back to the Pantheon in Rome, and these were revived during the Renaissance. This classical European feature of architecture was imported and marked the Georgian architectural era (Craven, 2019). These Georgian pediments were either curved, pointed, scrolled, or broken. Although, until the middle of the 18th century, the actual entrance door remained square-headed, a “semicircular fanlight above the door” started to appear in the latter half (Watterson, 1950). The insertion of glass in the upper part of the door provided a source of lighting for the hall. Rectangular transoms with glass also served the same purpose.

The doorways of the Georgian era were based on a formal style that resembled the characteristics of most of the doorways of the past. However, these doorways provided ample opportunities for innovation and freedom of design. The elements of design could be arranged in various combinations. With the onset of this new design, the first feature of the house that changed was the front door. Georgian houses had a great variation of doorway compositions. The doorway was mostly of a generous width, while the door was panelled in different ways. The doorway led into the hall, which was lighted with “a small rectangular transom” (Morrison, 1987). Frequently, the transom was replaced with glass lights. For a hall that was wider than usual, the doorway had windows on either one or both sides of the door. However, this design became more prevalent in the post-Revolution period. On both sides, the doorway was flanked by a classical order that was diversely designed. Plain or textured pilasters were constructed, which were either full in height or elevated on a pedestal. These pilasters were the most common feature, and in the mid-century, after which engaged columns became more popular. Cornices or pediments were atop these members, and these crowned the composition of the doorway. The simplest form of entablature was flat. However, it sometimes bulged out “as a curved moulding and was topped by a row of small blocks (dentils) and a moulded cornice” (Morrison, 1987).

The scope of variation that these Georgian style elements provided was numerous. Replacing the architrave with a transom window helped in avoiding a top-heavy effect. The use of angular pediment

was most common, and in such cases, the frieze was omitted to create a simpler design. Similarly, segmental or curved pediments were also popular. Also, often, all three elements of design, i.e., architrave, detailed cornice, and thin frieze, were used simultaneously for a classic entablature. The top central section of pediments was occasionally omitted to give the effect of a broken pediment, which signified the ornamental influence of Wren's designs.

The doorways of the Georgian designs were often characterized as having a masculine quality due to their burly forms and vigorous mouldings. In contrast, the doorways of the Federal period are regarded as wearing more fragile details (Watterson, 1950). The rudiments of the doorways of this period are reflected in present-day architecture. The modern doorways are more or less a simplified replica of those found in the eighteenth century. These doorways were a depiction of wealth, and their first appearance in New England was in the mansions built along the east coast and the inlying towns. In the middle colonies of Pennsylvania, New York, Delaware, New Jersey, and Maryland, the doorways were majorly influenced by the Dutch, Swedes, Germans, and others. The most common building material used was brick and stone. The construction of arched openings was common in these regions, and so were the fanlights. The doorways were wide, had a transom, and were flanked on both sides by narrow windows. These doors are considered the forerunners of doorways with sidelights.

Various examples of Georgian architectural doorways have been described in the literature. The house owned by Benedict Arnold at Mount Pleasant had Palladian influence, which was evident in the windows above a bold Tuscan doorway. Several beautiful Georgian doorways can be found in Annapolis, Maryland (Pratt & Pratt, 1960; Watterson, 1950). One such example is the doorway of the Hammond House, which is a highly admired Georgian structure. It is an arched fanlight doorway that is unusually ornamented with roses and laurels. Many excellent doorways can be found in the State of Virginia as well. The most famous doorway was of William Byrd's home at Westover. The doorways of houses near Williamsburg were simpler than those in Westover. These simpler doorways were constructed completely with brick and had a very simple crowning pediment. In contrast, the Westover doorways had finer details.

New Nation Architecture

The Declaration of Independence was issued by the Continental Congress for the 13 colonies in 1776. After the end of the American Revolution in 1783, the Treaty of Paris acknowledged the United States of America as a new republic. Although this was a political break from the English, the influence of Georgian architecture remained a central element of the buildings constructed. With the extending territory, the public needs began to accelerate. The highlight features of the federal and economic institutions were the construction of domes, columns, and pediments. A reflection of the ancient Roman and Greek architecture, these elements were symbolic of the newfound nation's democracy (Griffith, 1952; Pratt & Pratt, 1960). The doorways of this period are divided into post-colonial, Greek and Gothic Revivals and Romanesque Revival. The post-colonial doorways were influenced by classic

Roman architecture. These entrances were further influenced by the popular Georgian style and the French style of Louis XVI. A famous domestic doorway from this era was the Read House in Delaware. Its unique architectural feature was the magnificent fanlight on top of the wide double doors. Similarly, Strand House was famous for the carving details that ornated the doorway trim.

The 1820 Greek revival was inducted into American architecture by Benjamin Latrobe and others. The entrances of these houses were characterized by a handsomely trimmed and wide doorway (Watterson, 1950). The parlour was located in the front. Sliding doors connected the passageway to the dining hall located at the rear. The distinguishing feature of the Greek revival was the construction of porches that extended on the front side of the domestic buildings. The gable faced the street side of the house. The entrance door had a transom above it and was set between sidelights. Engaged columns were constructed between the sidelight and the door. Square posts were a feature of simple entrances. Heavily moulded trim and pilasters with wide entablature were prevalent in this revival period. The Greek style re-emerged with the pedimented doorways, which was the last feature of architectural design to change. Scroll-sawed wood was a representative of Gothic entrances. Pointed arches and light moulding characterized these doorways, which were usually situated in a tower.

Conclusion

The architectural history of America is greatly diverse. This is due to the influence of settlers who arrived here from various regions of the world. The entranceway is especially an important architectural feature. It connects the inside of the house with the outer world and also provides privacy and security. Additionally, the doorway is symbolic of the country's social life and socio-economic differences. The greatly ornate doors of the 17th and 18th centuries depicted wealth, while a simplistic design was a feature of houses constructed for slaves. The concept of separate entrances for slaves and guests was also symbolic of the hierarchal differences. Today, a variety of materials are available for use in construction. Additionally, efficient methods of building with these materials have also been developed. This functional planning is effective in meeting the needs of the prospective owners. Although wood remains the most common material for building doors and doorways, other materials such as metal, glass, and synthetic resources are also becoming prevalent. The front door designs of the present day are characterized by simplicity of form and ornamentation. The slab doors of today are an example of this simplistic beauty. Sliding doors are also quite common and provide the important advantage of saving space. Glass doors with metal or wood frames and those without a frame are also quite popular. The innovation of the doorway over centuries is a reflection of development in American notions of domestic life and political subjectivity. It is, therefore, imperative that in the architectural design of entrances, other elements of the building structure are made harmonious, thus making doorways an important part of the composition.

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