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## Family Houses and Social Identity: Communicational Perspectives onThe Homes of Ridge County

Christopher Richard Musellor Jr.

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# Family Houses and Social Identity: Communicational Perspectives on The Homes of Ridge County

## Abstract

This study provides an analysis of the communicative use of family homes within the daily life of a rural community. As an ethnography of communicative behavior, the nature and functions of the home as a medium of communication are explored within a specified social context so that the social and cultural influences which shape its use and interpretation may be examined. The study explores the structure of rules, roles, values, customs and beliefs which organize how homes are used, how they are evaluated, and how they come to assume meaning within this frame of reference. It was hypothesized that family homes, as media of social communication, function as artifacts of and instruments for the structure of social relations that prevail within the community that employs them. Research was directed, therefore, to examining the role of family homes in the expression of patterns of association and differentiation through which social identity and the community's system of social status are negotiated, marked and maintained.

The study draws on fourteen months of fieldwork, during which family homes were investigated as complex, multi-modal systems of communicative activity. Patterns of household maintenance, rules and customs in the use of household and community space, comparisons of house size and layout, traditions in the acquisition and use of furnishings, and patterns in taste preferences are each examined as integrated aspects of this system of communication.

In this way a structure of shared values, standards and traditions is described which is shown to regulate the conduct and interpretation of activity in this sphere at a variety of levels. While previous research has emphasized the home's value as an index of social class, this study finds that households are, in this insular community, devoted centrally to the expression of a family's social orientation and moral repute. Processes of status comparison are muted, while homes serve to mark and maintain interdependent networks of kinship and affiliation through which social life is ordered and personal identity is defined. Change and systematic deviations from these common standards are examined and an effort is made to discuss the generalizability of these findings to other socio-cultural settings.

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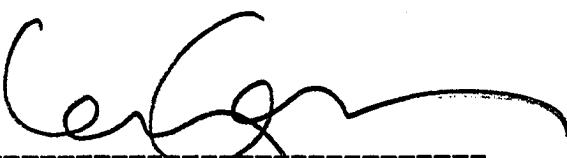
## Comments

FAMILY HOUSES AND SOCIAL IDENTITY:  
COMMUNICATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE HOMES OF RIDGE COUNTY  
Christopher Richard Musello Jr.

A DISSERTATION  
in  
Communications

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

1986



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Supervisor of Dissertation



-----  
Graduate Group Chairperson

To Catherine, who is with me always



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## ABSTRACT

### FAMILY HOUSES AND SOCIAL IDENTITY: COMMUNICATIONAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE HOMES OF RIDGE COUNTY

Christopher R. Musello

Dr. Larry Gross (Supervisor)

This study provides an analysis of the communicative use of family homes within the daily life of a rural community. As an ethnography of communicative behavior, the nature and functions of the home as a medium of communication are explored within a specified social context so that the social and cultural influences which shape its use and interpretation may be examined. The study explores the structure of rules, roles, values, customs and beliefs which organize how homes are used, how they are evaluated, and how they come to assume meaning within this frame of reference. It was hypothesized that family homes, as media of social communication, function as artifacts of and instruments for the structure of social relations that prevail within the community that employs them. Research was directed, therefore, to examining the role of family homes in the expression of patterns of association and differentiation through which social identity and the

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## CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	iv
CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION AND ORIENTATIONS.....	1
Goods in Communication.....	5
The Research Problem.....	15
Methodology.....	31
CHAPTER 2 THE COUNTY AND COMMUNITY SETTING.....	56
Early Settlement.....	57
Ridge County Today.....	61
Peterburg.....	74
Comparative Position in the County.....	75
Overview of the Borough.....	79
The System of Social Estimate.....	88
CHAPTER 3 LOCATING THE FAMILY HOME IN SPACE AND TIME.....	101
Spatial Extensions of the Home.....	103
Temporal Extensions of the Home.....	114
Housing Trajectories.....	116
Trajectories and Interpretation.....	127
Conclusion.....	130
CHAPTER 4 SPACE AND PLACE WITHIN THE FAMILY HOME.....	138
House Size and Social Comparison.....	144
Recent Trends in Home Floorplans.....	152
Pattern and Continuity in Proxemic Behavior.....	171
The Family Center.....	175
Utilization of Space in the Family Center.....	190
Privacy and the Regulation of Interaction.....	194
Conclusion: Organizing Communication in Space.....	210
CHAPTER 5 THE COMMUNICATIVE USE OF FURNISHINGS.....	221
The Furniture Cycle.....	225
Pooling.....	231
Gift-Giving.....	253
Relic Collecting.....	266

Inheritance.....	273
"Value" and the Lineage Object.....	282
Status Dimensions of Lineage Display.....	289
Conclusions.....	299
CHAPTER 6 TASTE AND THE COMMUNICATION OF SOCIAL IDENTITY.....	318
Background Conditions in Exercise of Taste.....	321
Criteria in Furnishing.....	328
Fads and Fashions.....	336
Taste as a Measure of Orientation.....	344
Local Norms.....	346
A Cosmopolitan View.....	351
Conclusion - Taste and Social Identity.....	365
CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION: RACHAEL'S DRY SINK.....	380
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	409

## TABLES

TABLE 1-1: Sample Families According to Status Ranking.....	36
TABLE 1-2: Life-cycle Status of Sample Families.....	37
TABLE 2-1A: Aspects of Population.....	62
TABLE 2-1B: Growth 1970 - 1980 by Section of County.....	62
TABLE 2-2: Income.....	63
TABLE 2-3: Employment.....	64
TABLE 2-4: Education.....	67
TABLE 2-5: Housing.....	69
TABLE 2-6: Geographical Mobility.....	71
TABLE 2-7: Rankings, Age and Kinship Relations of Sample Families...	97
TABLE 4-1: Number and Types of Rooms, Square Footage of Homes.....	145
TABLE 5-1: Rankings, Age and Kinship Relations of Sample Families..	291

## FIGURES

FIGURE 1-1: The Key Sort System.....	50
FIGURE 2-1: Land Use in Peterburg.....	83
FIGURE 2-2: Peterburg Circa 1900; Peterburg in 1980.....	85
FIGURE 4-1: Floorplans of Selected Borough Homes.....	154
FIGURE 4-2 .....	160
FIGURE 4-3 .....	161
FIGURE 4-4 .....	164
FIGURE 4-5 .....	167
FIGURE 4-6: Distances in Two Rooms.....	179
FIGURE 4-7: Seating Distances in Two Rooms.....	183
FIGURE 5-1: Pooling: The "Careers" of Three Pieces of Furniture....	234
FIGURE 5-2: First Floor of Shelly Home with Furniture Sources.....	243
FIGURE 5-3: Stine Livingroom.....	302
FIGURE 7-1: Rachael's Drysink.....	382



CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTIONS AND ORIENTATIONS

This study was conducted in the rural heart of Pennsylvania where miles of fields and forests separate one village from another. Residents traverse this landscape drawing on a traditional pool of informal markers including allusions to topographical features, homes, businesses and pathways that are often not charted on maps or named on street signs. "You go through 'Dog Town', take a right at Shofstall's, and head up the valley over Bailey's hill till you cross the river", is what I was told when I began looking for the borough that eventually became the site for this research. As a newcomer maneuvering without benefit of local knowledge, I managed to find the town but I never found Shofstall's. Retracing my steps repeatedly, I found myself each time standing in an uninhabited intersection, surrounded by nothing other than cornfields and an empty patch of ground. A puzzling start. But in time I learned that the landmark I had missed was a home that had burned to the ground years earlier. The "nothing" I had seen was not "nothing" at all, but rather the place of a home which, though it no longer "existed", still retained its sign-value

in the communicational system shared by the people of this area.

This study has aimed to understand the use of family houses as media of communication. We are perhaps all accustomed to thinking about, examining, and evaluating houses as physical structures, composed of walls, windows, doors, roofing and more. The house assumes a tangible reality for us as it shelters us materially, mediating between our needs as biological organisms and the conditions of the environment that surrounds us. Yet as my early encounter with Shofstall's might suggest, the home is as well a social construct that assumes its properties and, indeed, its significance, from the social environment that employs it. The family home is at once an artifact with fixed components and characteristics, and a social fact whose properties are defined and interpreted by those who inhabit and surround it. Understanding the home as a means of interaction ultimately requires, as in the case of this ephemeral household, that we explore the relationship between the material dimensions of these buildings and the assumptions of the social system that employs them. In attempting to explore the communicative use of family houses, to understand "how" houses mean as well what they may mean, therefore, this study has aimed to explore their functions within the symbolic system of an interacting group, a community, that shares a frame of reference. My intent has

been to understand how the home, and processes of evaluation directed towards it, are organized within a shared system of values, beliefs, customs, and rules of conduct and interpretation. The study will aim to understand the home as a culturally patterned mode of communication. The house, its contents, decoration, and associated activity will all be incorporated as elements of this analysis.'

From the outset, this research has taken a number of associated issues as its focus. Perhaps most importantly, my principal concern has been to understand the functions of the home in the organization and communication of social status and social identity. The aim has been to understand how the home and its contents may be used in establishing, marking, and maintaining the structure of relationships within a human group. How are they incorporated within specified contexts in processes of social differentiation? How do they function in the communication of aspects of social identity? While this research has not constituted a full-scale community study, my interest has been directed to the relevance of the family home to processes of stability and integration in the organization of community life. The study has been centered in this way on the investigation of issues of common interest to social scientists concerned with understanding the organization of social life in human communities (cf. Redfield 1960 and Warner 1941). My

hypothesis has been that the house and the patterns of behavior associated with it, will be exploited as a common symbolic resource through which residents of a community manifest their positions relative to prevailing values, customs, norms and beliefs. In this way (and through direct forms of symbolization), the house is thought to serve in conveying similarities and differences, patterns of association, patterns of status and rank, and ultimately aspects of social identity.<sup>2</sup>

I have chosen to investigate the house here as a social mechanism through which a community orders its relations, on the assumption that communication provides the means through which the social structure of a community is defined and regulated on an on-going basis. For as Birdwhistell has maintained, communication may be viewed as the "active aspect" of social organization:

Communication provides the social mechanisms for the through-time, multi-generational aspect of social organization. Communication is a term, then, relevant to the processes of stability and variability, of continuity and change, which are discoverable through comparison of social organizational forms...Communication might be described as the active aspect of the structure of social interdependence. (1968:7)

At issue from the start in this study will be how the house is actually conceived to function within these processes of communication, and more broadly, what we conceive the nature of communication itself to be. The research problem presented here has been framed from the

perspective of social communication. It makes a number of fundamental assumptions on these issues which bear further specification prior to explaining the plan of study. These assumptions will be discussed in the next few pages. From this groundwork I will then explain the research problem this study took as its point of departure, and show how that focus evolved through the course of the fieldwork.

### **Goods in Communication**

Communication concerns more than the simple transmission of information between some number of individuals. On the one hand, it can be thought to imply a sequence of events whereby bits of information and meanings are articulated and exchanged. This is however, only a limited perspective on its functions. For communication must also be understood to denote a continuous process whereby the conduct and relationships of the members of a society and culture are regulated. "The communication system," as Schefflen has noted, "is a means of regulating transactions of all types and of maintaining social order and social control." (1973:5)

From this perspective, communication has been regarded as an adaptational necessity, critical to the maintenance of society and culture in space and time. Birdwhistell has explained this view of communication in this way:

We are concerned with the transmission system between the members of a social grouping rather than with its

particular mechanism within the organism. Our attention has been redirected toward the process by which the membership of the group makes and maintains contact with his fellows, so that patterned participation is possible... man must engage in significant symbolization - must learn to recognize, receive, and send ordered messages. In other words, the individual must learn to behave in appropriate ways which permit other members of the group to recognize and anticipate his behavior. Society is that way in which behavior is calibrated so that existence is not a continuous and wasteful trial and error. (1970:74)

In defining this aspect of communication, Birdwhistell distinguishes two interrelated levels of communication. The first, termed "new information" communication, involves the transmission of discrete bits of information - what some have called the manifest content of exchanges (cf. Fisher 1978). The second level, referred to as "integrational" or social communication, is considered to serve: 1) to keep the system in operation; 2) to regulate the interactional process; 3) to cross-reference particular messages to comprehensibility in a particular context; and 4) to relate the particular context to the larger contexts of which the interaction is but a special situation (Birdwhistell 1970: 86-87).

Bateson defined a similar duality when he suggested that all communication incorporates both "report" and "command" aspects. This latter aspect corresponds closely to Birdwhistell's conception of the integrational level and has also been referred to as the level of "metacommunication". In explaining this level of communication Bateson points out

that all messages serve at once to shape and regulate the relationship between interactants and to influence how messages will be interpreted. As we engage in communication all messages encode not only their manifest content, but also messages about codification (how to understand the message,) and about relationship (relative rank, positions of dominance and subordination, indications of social and cultural background, and so on). (See Ruesch and Bateson 1951:179-80, Bateson 1972). The kernel of this distinction can also be traced to Malinowski's early notion of "phatic communication" (1923)<sup>3</sup>. Taken together, all have described a vital and continuous function for communication to lie in both, a) marking, maintaining, and adjusting the structure of relations within interacting groups; and b) providing messages about rules and customs that obtain in any particular socio-cultural context. It is this embedded level of social, or "integrational", communication which I will be chiefly concerned with in exploring the communicative functions of family homes.

This is, as Carey has noted, to adopt a "ritual" definition of communication which has its roots in traditional orientations to the process which pre-date the modern mechanistic analogies that have come to dominate our thinking about communication:

In a ritual definition, communication is linked to terms such as sharing, participation, association, fellowship, and the possession of a common faith. This

definition exploits the ancient identity and common roots of the terms commonness, communion, community, and communication. A ritual view of communication is not directed toward the extension of messages in space, but the maintenance of society in time; not to the act of imparting information, but the representation of shared beliefs. It does not see the original or highest manifestation of communication in the transmission of intelligent information, but in the construction and maintenance of an ordered, meaningful cultural world which can serve as a control and container for human action. (1975:6)

Concern is directed from this perspective less to the transmission of information or to attitude change than to establishing and maintaining the underlying order that guides social life. Research is concerned more with communication as an on-going social process than with individual episodes and momentary functions.

In contradistinction to most mechanical or transmission models of the process therefore, communication is not in this perspective investigated as a unilinear sequence of transmissions through which the thoughts, needs, attitudes, or intentions of individuals are conveyed. Rather I begin with a view of communication as a group process and take the rule-governed behavioral system of a social group as my unit of analysis (cf. Birdwhistell 1970, Fischer 1978, and Zabor 1978). Following Mead, this is to view society and the underlying rules and functions of communication as logically prior to the individual and the individual act:

We are starting out with a given social whole or complex group activity, into which we analyze (as elements) the behavior of each of the separate individuals composing it. We attempt that is, to



explain the conduct of the individual in terms of the organized conduct of the social group... the whole (society) is prior to the part (the individual)... and the part is explained in terms of the whole. The social act is not explained by building it up out of stimulus plus response; it must be taken as a dynamic whole - as something going on - no part of which can be considered or understood by itself - a complex organic process implied by each individual stimulus and response involved in it (1974:7).

Thinking in terms of the home and its contents, we would not therefore, examine an object solely as the product of an individual's behavior or intentions. Material goods are to be viewed instead here as cultural artifacts employed within on-going processes of social interaction. Much like language, they are thought to take their form and significance from the socio-cultural contexts in which they are employed.

This research is in this way sharply distinguished from the many studies which, naively or otherwise, adopt psychologically oriented models of the nature and function of communication using material goods. Such models dominate most popular interior design oriented approaches to the house (cf. Post 1930, Pressman and Pressman 1980); but also prevail in experimental or interpretive studies of psychologists (cf. Marc 1978); and in the literature prepared by and for those who design and build housing (cf. Becker 1977, Cooper 1972, 1974, 1975, and Hershberger 1980). The individual is taken as both the source and object of house-related communication in these studies. "Self-expression",

"personalization", "individualization" and personal skill are foregrounded as the messages to be conveyed, and the character and intentions of the occupants are assumed to shape the form that they take. The image provided is one of a unilinear process, minimizing (to varying extents) the impact of social and cultural influences, and focusing on the owner/creator as the source of meanings encoded in the material and transmitted to an audience of receivers.

By taking the idiosyncratic and "personal" as their focus, however, such studies tend to overlook the systematic patterns and variations which characterize the production, acquisition and use of material goods in daily life, as well as the underlying rules and conventions which shape these events. Such approaches leave one ill-equipped to comprehend the ways in which objects are shaped by, and directed to, group and community based processes of social interaction. Rather than examining communicational significance as a dynamic product of the on-going play of relations amongst household members and members of the larger community, meaning is treated chiefly as an artifact of individual intentions. If there truly can be said to be such things as "individual expressions" encoded in the home, however, they can surely only be distinguished after recognizing how these media become meaningful within an interacting community (i.e. how their use and interpretation are socially coded), and how they are organized to serve communal functions. For

this reason, the formal organization of the home; the selection of its component parts; their arrangement and use; and their communicative functions; will be examined in this study as products of group standards, values and expectations.

From the perspective of social communication, communication is also understood to be continuous. Meanings are seen to be conveyed through multiple modalities simultaneously. Communication is multi-modal and multi-referential, engaging participants in a many layered exchange that occurs at varying levels of awareness and intentionality. Such a perspective was refined in the study of social interaction where researchers sought to overcome logocentric models of communication which tend to treat all non-verbal communication as simply "expressive" or supplemental to the verbal (McQuown et al. 1971, Birdwhistell 1970, and Scheflen 1973). This research has established the interdependence of kinesic, proxemic, paralinguistic, tactile, olfactory and linguistic modes of expression, and demonstrated that information and instructions may flow through each of these modalities. As Birdwhistell has noted (1986), communication occurs in the coordinated interplay of these various expressive modes. Research in any single modality for this reason, must be understood to provide for only a partial accounting of communicative processes and significances.

Much research in the field of material culture has nonetheless attempted to treat objects as isolatable articulations communicating solely or principally through their material properties. The present study however, will attempt to understand the communicative use of goods as they are used and come to assume significance within a multi-modal environment. I make the assumption that in the actual contexts of their use, material goods may assume communicative value through a variety of means, in addition to their physical components, and that they may serve to convey a variety of messages simultaneously, not all of which may be conscious or intentional (Musello 1982, 1985). Turner has maintained a similar perspective in his studies of ritual objects, noting in his own terminology that such things should be understood as "multi-vocal" and "polysemic" (1967). Speaking of celebratory objects, for example, he noted:

There is perhaps no need to render into words what the symbols "say" for they transmit their messages in a number of sensory codes simultaneously. Moreover, we are seldom dealing with separate symbols but with clusters made up of objects, actions, sounds, states, contacts - each unit, act, thing, at once itself and standing for more than itself, the ensemble making up more than the sum of its parts. (1984:19)

Research which has focused principally on objects alone have for the most part proven of limited value for those wishing to understand the communicative functions of objects within the processes of daily life. Much folkloristic

research dealing with domestic architecture and household property, for example, has for years applied object-centered archaeological methods of analysis to the homes of groups both living and dead. In this research emphasis is typically placed on description of the phenomenal surface of these materials, notably their form, and methods, materials and techniques of construction (cf. Deetz 1967, Leach and Glassie 1968, and Roberts 1972a & b). The recording of material form, and the delineation of types and classifications, is considered the primary task of analysis with usage and "significance" (often equated with technical purpose) incorporated only secondarily as elements of description (Glassie 1968). Through subsequent analysis of the origins and distribution of the derived forms in time and space, the objects studied may be examined as indices of an owner's socio-cultural background, of patterns of migration, and of the diffusion of knowledge and skills (Kniffen 1965, Glassie 1968, Deetz 1977, and Smith 1969). Objects are in this way understood to have communicative value as indices "of" a culture. Yet without a view of the objects in the contexts of their usage we cannot know how they were incorporated as elements of communicational activities within that culture. We obviously cannot know what the users singled-out for notice, how the objects were evaluated, how distinctions were made and weighed, or how meanings were invested in or exchanged through these

things.<sup>4</sup> Glassie seemed to acknowledge these limitations in a later study when he moved from the structural analysis of objects (1973, 1975) to accounts of their use in the context of a larger ethnography (1982). Speaking of decorative plates displayed in one woman's kitchen he commented:

Judge the kitchen's ornaments on their inherent, particular merit and you will miss the point. Find them lacking as art, and all you have uncovered is an economic fact... No, what individual ornaments appear to be is the least significant thing about them. Their meaning lies less in their manifest content than in their magical capacity to bring events and human beings to life in mind...The art of ornaments does not lie in them, as part of their fabric. They become art in mind and manipulation. (1982:369-70)

Objects will not, therefore, be treated in and of themselves as the locus of communication in this study. Rather they will be regarded as elements of multi-modal processes through which communication occurs. Ultimately it is here, in the processes and contexts of their use and interpretation where their significance will be seen to emerge. In this sense then, meaning will be treated more as a function of context and usage, than of the particular properties of the objects themselves.

Context is understood here as an ordered matrix of socially and culturally defined rules and relationships which elicit, permit and prevent certain kinds of symbolic behavior (Birdwhistell 1968:31). As Bateson has commented, our need in establishing a context is to locate communicational activity with reference to "those events

which tell the organism among which set of alternatives he must make his next choice" (1972:289). In describing the communicative use of material goods therefore the task will be twofold. Objects must be described first with reference to the specific settings of their occurrence (occasions, events, participants, locations, etc., cf. Gumperz and Hymes 1972); and secondly with reference to the broader socio-cultural system (much of it only tacitly understood), of rules, roles, conventions, values and beliefs through which their production, selection, use and evaluation is structured.<sup>9</sup>

#### **The Research Problem**

To be understood as elements of social communication then, family homes must be viewed as social artifacts subsumed at a variety of levels within on-going processes of interaction. The manifest goal of this study will be to understand how the family homes of Peterburg, Ridge County, are implicated in those on-going processes through which the prevailing structure of social relationships in this community is defined, marked, maintained and adapted. In order to understand how homes actually function in these activities this study examines that underlying structure of rules, values, customs and standards which guide the conduct and interpretation of house-related behavior. My aim has been first to understand how these standards of interpreta-

tion are defined, shared and managed within this community. Secondly, I have aimed to examine the ways in which the distinctions defined are applied to processes of social differentiation and the interpretation of social identity. To the extent that I have aimed to understand how the family home serves as both a product "of" and an instrument "for" the transmission of these underlying values and norms, I have also been interested to show how the home serves as a mode of cultural transmission.

Such an effort to correlate standards of evaluation and the management of social relations has its antecedents in a variety of sociological and anthropological studies of property. I have relied on these in specifying the focus of this study further. Mary Douglas has noted for example, that anthropologists have routinely studied material possessions for their "double function". On the one hand their ethnographies have given accounts of the value of goods for subsistence purposes:

But at the same time it is apparent that goods have another important use: *they also make and maintain social relationships*. This is a long-tried and fruitful approach to the material side of existence which yields a much richer idea of social meanings than mere individual competitiveness (1979:60 emphasis added)

Such an understanding of the importance of goods in making and maintaining relationships is, she suggests, "practically axiomatic" amongst anthropologists.\*

In many cases goods are seen to assume symbolic value



in these accounts through processes of exchange. That is, as they are passed between people they are thought to assume value in signifying relationships made or marked by the transfer as well as the various rights and obligations that attend it. As Douglas notes however, goods may, by virtue of their manifest differences and the contrasting values associated with them in different symbolic systems, also come to serve in mapping a wide variety of social distinctions. They are, she says, "good to think with":

The choice of goods continuously creates certain patterns of discrimination, overlaying or reinforcing others. Goods then, are the visible part of culture. They are arranged in vistas and hierarchies that can give play to the full range of discrimination of which the human mind is capable. The vistas are not fixed... ultimately their structures are anchored to human social purposes...Consumption uses goods to make firm and visible a particular set of judgements in the fluid processes of classifying persons and events. (1979:66-67)

These assumptions have from the time of Veblen's original formulations of the functions of conspicuous consumption (1899) also formed the foundation for theoretical and applied studies of fashion, and taste processes. At base most of this research has characterized the selection and use of goods (including especially the house and its contents) as normatively regulated activity which comes, through regular processes of cross-referencing, to serve in marking and maintaining boundaries between different status groups within a population. Key to this interpretation is a recognition of the capacity of goods to

embody differences - differences of quality, type, source, age, size, number and so on - which can be subsumed in the business of marking any number of discriminations human groups may make within and between their memberships. The belief, as Bateson has noted, is that in social life, "every effective difference denotes a demarcation, a line of classification, and all classification is hierarchic" (1972:457).

Fashion processes have, for this reason, long been conceptualized as an expression of class boundaries within societies. Sapir noted this in his early and influential discussion of the functions of fashion in the symbolization of class membership (1931). Simmel expressed a similar view in this way:

(Fashion) is a product of class distinction and operates like a number of other forms, honor especially, the double function of which consists of revolving within a circle and at the same time emphasizing it as separate from others... thus fashion on the one hand signifies union with those of the same class, the uniformity of a circle characterized by it, and *uno actu*, the exclusion of all other groups...Fashion is merely the product of social demands, even though the individual object which it creates or recreates may represent a more or less individual need. (1957:544)

A central element of these interpretations has been the assumption (again derived from Veblen) that goods in consumption will naturally be incorporated in processes of status competition with each group deriving or "copying" its standards from the group ahead of it (see also Barber and

Lobel 1953 and Cheek and Burch 1977). These assumptions have proven "practically axiomatic" to the many sociometric studies which have attempted to use the house as a diagnostic index of social standing (cf. Chapin 1935, Chapman 1955, Gutman 1942 and Mack 1951). They have also typified the descriptions of homes and furnishings included in many sociological community studies (cf. Warner et al. 1949 and Seely et al 1972).

Others have resisted such a narrow perception of the functions of goods in fashion and consumption processes. Douglas has been particularly critical of Veblen's emphasis on "mere individual competitiveness" as the principal guiding the use of goods in social life. Focusing on the events of selecting goods for use, she points out that, "choices express and generate culture in its general sense...consumption choices are needed for making visible and stable the categories of culture" (1979:58-59). Thus she emphasizes their general value in marking social distinctions while also making manifest an underlying structure of cultural values. Similarly, other studies have suggested that taste standards do not necessarily "trickle down", as Veblen and others have supposed from the top to the bottom of the social system (cf. Fallers 1966), but may instead be defined with reference to lateral relationships.<sup>7</sup> Both Bourdieu (1984) and Gans (1974) have demonstrated a strong relationship between taste and education, followed

only secondarily by social background. Gans has also shown that variations in taste standards may, much like a socio-linguistic variant, serve in distinguishing groups by age, gender, or ethnicity.

Taste is regarded in these studies as a conventionalized system of discriminations and preferences, which is organized and classified within socially patterned systems of standards. Rather than being the product of individual wills or aesthetic sensibilities, taste is understood as the possession of distinct status groups within a community. The individual "participates in" or "subscribes" to taste standards, selecting or affecting (at various levels of conscious awareness) from that range of preferences that is associated with those groups he or she is identified with or aspires to. Taste standards thus precede and pattern individual processes of consumption and are ultimately employed in the evaluation and ranking of both the objects and activities which the person consumes, and ultimately the consumer himself. As Bourdieu has commented, "taste classifies, and it classifies the classifier." (1984:6)

The concept of taste is thus used in much the same way that the notion of "values" is used in certain anthropological contexts. It implies the operation of a hierarchically organized structure of preferences and norms through which choices, activities and people are ranked (cf.

Radcliffe-Brown 1952:198 and Redfield 1971). Raymond Firth characterizes values in this way:

All community life involves also a system of standards, giving rating in the choice of activities and judgement on the effectiveness of performance. These social standards represent systems of values in their expression as activity...The notion of value involves judgement on a preference scale, a grading... values do not serve only to express feelings; they stimulate and guide conduct. (1963:42-43)

As socially differentiated standards guiding both the conduct and evaluation of behavior, "values" have been likened by Bateson to a codification system which extends to the full range human behavior:

The value system and the codification system are alike in that each is a system ramifying through the total world of the individual. The value system, as organized in terms of preferences, constitutes a network in which certain items are selected and others passed over or rejected, and this network embraces everything in life. Similarly it was pointed out in regard to the codification system that all events and objects which present themselves are in some degree classified into the complex system of Gestalten which is the codification system." (1951:176)

From this perspective it is assumed that all behavior may be measured against (codified in terms of), and taken as expressions of, the structure of values ramifying through a human group. Values are seen as a basic system of meanings, patterned principles, which give order and direction to the stream of human acts and thoughts (cf. F.Kluckhohn in Kluckhohn and Strodtbeck 1961:9). Where the notion of "values" may embrace the full configuration of preferences and standards expressed through the full range of a group's

behavior, however, the notion of taste has been used principally to refer to the codification of consumption behavior. In each case a system of standards is seen to exist which is manifest in patterns of preferences. These preferences are in turn seen to be differentially ranked in the prestige accorded to them, and ultimately associated with distinct social groupings within a community. Both taste and "values" have been studied for this reason as social mechanisms through which human groups negotiate and encode their internal social divisions. This study took taste as its original point of departure, but eventually expanded its focus to examine a broader range of value-laden activity through which the home assumed significance in the community under study.

Taste was taken as the initial object in order to circumscribe the range of value-laden activities and interpretive processes to be monitored in approaching the family homes of Ridge County. Taste standards were considered to be emergent in, and investigable through, both the pattern of *choices* residents of the community made in acquiring and furnishing their homes and in the patterns of *interpretation* through which they described, evaluated and assigned significance to these objects and activities. As each was investigated, the aim was to understand what rules and values guided patterning and variation in the manifest range of preferences; to determine how these distinctions

were discussed and interpreted locally; to examine the distribution of preferences through the population; and to identify how they correlated with independent measures of social status. Taste was construed narrowly in that my focus was directed principally to patterns of evaluation and classification defined in formal preferences expressed in house decorations and furnishings. Analysis was to be directed chiefly to pattern and variation in the material features of the home, including such things as form, style, color, construction, materials and so on. Also, rather than attempting to outline the full structure of preferences that characterized the community's "taste structure", my aim was to isolate a system of "minimal cues" or distinctive points of contrast through which different status groups and distinct patterns of association and identification could be marked.

My focus was refined and redirected however, as I became increasingly familiar with the social and symbolic life of this community. One key to these adaptations was the nature of the social system I encountered. The other involved early findings on the primary values that shaped the use and evaluation of the home in this community. Through these findings my investigation was gradually directed beyond matters of taste to an analysis of a broader range of activities which seemed to play a more salient role for members of this community in the management of status

relationships and social identity.

To begin with, I found that the communicative tasks to which the homes of this community were directed differed in emphasis from the goals of social comparison and status differentiation that seem so prominent in sociological studies of urban and suburban groups. While one can identify a status hierarchy in this rural county one also finds that social life and social identity are ordered in large part by kinship. Family and the extended network of kindred influence patterns of association and assistance as well as individual reputation and ascribed status. This is a county in which one is surrounded by "familiar" who are intimately aware of the details of one's personal, family and household history. Status is in large measure ascribed through family name and otherwise achieved in the detailed evaluation of one's lifestyle and accomplishments. Status competitions and pretensions are as a result of little value. One also finds a manifest emphasis on demonstrating a commitment to traditional norms, values and activities in this county, especially to the extent that they are juxtaposed to patterns of thought and action imported from the world beyond the county's boundaries. In this sense life in Ridge county tends toward those patterns of social organization classically ascribed to "folk" (cf. Redfield 1972) or "traditional" (Riesman 1951) communities where the cohesiveness and integration of the group is based principally in an



adherence to a common system of values and understandings (cf. Durkheim 1964 and Tonnies 1961). Processes of status comparison do of course exist in this system and indeed the quality of family name and kinship bonds do have a bearing on social standing. As we will see in chapter six, there are also significant variations in the extent to which behavior here is patterned by local value orientations. Nonetheless the primary function of the home lies in defining and maintaining the household's network of lateral relationships and in defining its position with respect to a common core of values. Homes are directed to managing the structure of a household's interdependencies while their function in drawing class and status distinctions is muted by local norms. While this research has aimed to remain sensitive to processes of status definition then, its focus has been directed primarily to the home's predominant role in defining, marking, and managing the network of kith and kinship associations which play so prominent a role in the organization of social life in this county.

As the research proceeded it also became increasingly apparent that taste preferences and formal discriminations were not extensively exploited within this community's symbolic system as a means through which to express aspects of identity or association. Other forms of behavior that included, but were not restricted to, processes of consumption became increasingly salient to me as expressive

devices in the behavior and evaluative activity of residents here. The scope of the study was therefore expanded to incorporate the analysis of this broader range of house-related activities through which residents of this community attempt to demonstrate their value orientations and manage their interpersonal relationships.

In the chapters to follow then, I have attempted to accomplish a number of things. First it has been my intention to provide an understanding of the range of values, beliefs, customs, and norms which shape the use, comparison and evaluation of family houses in this community. Through the selection of chapters presented here I have attempted to construct an interpretation of the major normative and conceptual factors that underlie the interpretive system of these people vis-a-vis the house. Only then have I moved to a discussion of the study's original subject - the implication of formal standards in competitive processes of social comparison. In this way I hope to build an understanding of what one would need to know as a native of this community if one were to attempt to make assessments of a household simply by comparing its contents with those of other homes. I have also aimed by virtue of the variety of house-related activities discussed in these chapters to demonstrate something of the complexity of the house as a medium of transmission. I have attempted to show how behavior may be organized and patterned

simultaneously at multiple levels in the processes of communicating the nature of a family's beliefs and social position. To these ends I will examine aspects of home maintenance, space use, comparisons of house size and layout, customs of decoration, traditions in the acquisition and exchange of possessions, and finally the management of taste preferences.

Following an introduction to the county in chapter two, chapter three will describe spatial and temporal orientations to the home that tend to structure all processes of comparison and interpretation directed towards the domestic sphere. It will be shown that by virtue of an extensive interdependence shared by the households of each family network, individual homes are treated only conditionally by locals as isolated units for evaluation. Using household maintenance as an example, it will also be demonstrated that norms and expectations are commonly temporally coded in this community. My intention will be to show that this in turn makes direct comparisons between homes more complex and, at times, inappropriate by local standards. Chapter four looks at the organization and use of space in the home in order to consider a number of inter-related questions bearing on the rules and values that guide household behavior and local processes of interpretation. The extensive patterning of this largely subconscious realm of behavior became increasingly salient to me as I

participated in the life of this community. Through its description I hope to show how certain major value orientations are embodied and sustained in the use of the home. Custom and continuity in particular were found to assume a pervasive influence in this sphere of activity, and I will attempt to show that much can be understood about the ways in which these people respond to fashion and change generally by examining these influences . Measures of relative house size (a common sociological index of status), will be examined first with reference to actual patterns of status assignment in the community and subsequently in light of local standards of interpretation. This will provide further insight into that set of values which regulates competitive display locally. Turning to patterns of actual usage, it will be shown that customary preferences and behavioral routines are maintained in the use of the home despite continuous changes in house design that have been introduced through the course of this century by national fashions in domestic architecture. It is here that the prevailing orientations towards custom and continuity and their role in mediating local responses to fashion and change will be discussed. Finally I will examine the influence of these proxemic patterns on the organization of interaction and relationships within the home and in the community itself. In this manner I hope to illustrate how patterns of communication and prevailing patterns of social

control and social organization are inter-related within this social system.

In this way, chapters three and four establish some of the primary normative and social structural influences that this study has found to shape processes of communication in this community. Chapters five and six attempt to extend from these understandings to discuss how household furnishings are actually evaluated; how their meanings are negotiated; and how they come to be associated with social identity. Chapter five begins these investigations with a consideration of the activity that surrounds the acquisition and use of household goods. It will be shown that vigorous and normatively regulated traditions of exchange persist in Ridge county which structure all processes of consumption related to the management of household furnishings. The underlying values, rules and customs that guide these activities will be examined, and it will be shown that consumption activities are codified as statements of family values by virtue of these standards. This discussion will also attempt to show that through all of this activity, the people of Peterburg actively employ their furnishings as vehicles of interaction. That is, as they are exchanged and as they are subsequently used and discussed, household objects function as an important communicative resource through which friends and family define their roles, memorialize one another, and extend the bonds of relation-

ship and social control between households.

Finally, turning to the objects themselves, chapter six will consider how the structure of values and practices outlined in the preceding pages serve to shape the pattern of preferences expressed in the selection of household furnishings here. The terms, objects and conditions of local processes of evaluation and interpretation will be discussed at length. From this, a common system of standards which seem to broadly conform consumption choices in this community will be defined. Finally it will be shown through a discussion of one element of the population that systematically violates these standards, that taste preferences may function in this community as an expression of a family's social orientation. Taste preferences will be seen in this way to mark a social division in the population of this community that underlies the whole of its social life. Through the course of each of these last two chapters I will attempt to demonstrate that within the symbolic system of this insular county, furnishings are predominantly invested in the expression of patterns of kinship and association, rather than in invidious processes of social comparison.

I have attempted through this progression of chapters both to outline those factors structuring how residents of this community organize and exploit the home as a symbolic resource; and to discuss some of the ways in which the home

contributes to the on-going negotiation of social identity. A point I have attempted to stress in this discussion and in the study as a whole, is that the form of communicative activity and its meaning must be understood within an examination of the the socio-cultural system that employs it. The model of communicative activity that I will discuss in this study emerged through the course of fieldwork and was adapted and refined in response to findings about the social life of Peterburg and Ridge county, as well as about specific semiotic processes involving the home. The final section of this introduction will detail my methods of research and analysis in order to clarify how the study proceeded and how these conclusions were reached.

### **Methodology**

From the outset, this research has been designed as a field study of family housing. As the work of a single researcher, resources were not available to conduct a full-scale study of the social and economic organization of the county or of its cultural foundations. It is not in that sense a "community study" or a complete "ethnography" but rather an ethnographically informed study of select processes of communication within a particular setting. Research was initiated with Ridge county as its initial frame of reference and in time the focus was narrowed to a single community, Peterburg, in order to establish a more

manageable unit for analysis. The county was selected as the site for this research after being called to my attention by Sol Worth. Worth, along with Jay Ruby (in Worth 1981), had been planning to conduct a comprehensive ethnography of visual communication in this setting. The county had been the subject of an earlier sociological survey for the purposes of an unrelated medical research project (Jahn 1977), and was selected by Worth and Ruby because it seemed, based on these and other findings, to offer a stable population in which to investigate the social organization of communication (see chapter 2). Following Professor Worth's death, plans for the full project were eventually dropped. Since then, the research has proceeded on a piecemeal basis, in part through this study, and in the independent investigations of Ruby (1984) and Aibel (1984), as well as through a combined film project (CVC 1984). The name of the county, its towns and all those assisting with this study have been changed in order to insure their privacy.

The fieldwork on which this study is based was conducted over a fourteen month period beginning in the summer of 1980. During the first three months of my stay in the county I lived in Pattersontown, the county seat. Research at this time was directed to the county as a whole - learning its history, geography, internal social divisions, patterns of settlement, trends in housing and so on. Interviews were conducted with real estate agents, home



builders, owners of furniture stores, local historians, a newspaper editor, and a number of county officials. Perhaps most importantly during this period efforts were directed to establishing a basis on which to choose a particular village or township as my focus. In time, Peterburg was selected as a distinct, "naturally" defined social entity which incorporates elements of each the county's dominant ethnic and religious sub-groupings. As a borough with strong ties to the farmsteads to the west, Peterburg was also thought to provide a clear perspective on the relationship between "town" and "country" dwellers and dwellings. For these and other reasons, the borough was adopted as a site that afforded a relatively balanced perspective on the diverse social forces shaping the social life of this county. (This will be explained at greater length in the next chapter.) With the selection of Peterburg, I moved to the borough itself and over the next eleven months focused my energies on the houses and activities of its 835 residents. The findings of this study are referred most specifically to the life of this individual community. The county as a whole, however, has been retained as its larger frame of reference and, where it has seemed justified, I have attempted at a number of points in this report to generalize to the level of the county as a whole.

My entry here was made slowly. As a stranger with no manifest occupation or purpose for being in the borough I

was initially regarded with some suspicion and was plainly not eligible for access into the private sphere of the family home. As I became known as "a graduate student doing research," my purposes became clearer and somewhat more legitimate in resident's eyes. An interview in the local newspaper helped to broadcast the purposes of my stay and in time, as residents and I reached accord on how best to understand this research, it became generally known that I was studying "the history of houses and customs associated with them". Once this much was known, few expressed any further interest in the research. Ultimately, my identity and acceptance in this community seemed to be established more importantly in terms of the people, and the structure of relationships, with whom I became associated and through which I moved. As a boarder in the home of an elderly and respected widow, I acquired an initial association that was viewed favorably in the town. As I was generously accepted into the daily activities of her four-generational family this basis for my "placement" was extended. I participated in the life of her extended family (comprising five households) on a daily basis and through them was introduced to many other families. Additional contacts were established early-on as I walked through the town conducting a photo survey which had been designed in part simply as a means to meet and talk with residents as I asked permission to photograph their houses. Finally, many other introductions were

gained gradually as I participated daily in the life of this little town.

Gaining entry to residents' homes required that I move through these personal contacts and recommendations. People wanted to know "who" I was by who else I knew, and so this emerging network of acquaintanceships was crucial to the development of observational and interview opportunities. In order to avoid confinement to a single network of friends and kin in the community, an effort was made from the outset to avoid too close an identification with any single clique or social group. The method has nonetheless had the effect of skewing the sample of households treated to systematic analysis towards the middle status groups through whom I had made entry into the community (Table 1-1). A total of twenty eight households (roughly 10% of the community) were eventually the subjects of extensive observational and interview protocols while another ten homes were the subject of shorter procedures. Many other homes were the subject to more casual observation during my extended stay in the town. Households were chosen initially simply on a fortuitous basis. However, as my familiarity with the community grew I worked to stratify this sample along two key dimensions. First, in order to facilitate the analysis of the home's role in processes of status differentiation, it was necessary to structure this sampling of households according to status identity. The system of social estimate through which

these families were ranked will be explained at length in the next chapter. Through it, six status groupings were established ranging from the "old families" at the top (1), to the community's marginals who were located at the bottom (6). The thirty eight families studied here were arrayed as shown in table 1-1:

**Table 1-1: Sample Families According to Status Ranking**

Ranking:	1	2	3	4	5	6
# of Families (n = 38)	3	7	10	10	8	2

As the table suggests, the findings in this study are most firmly established with reference to families located in the upper-lower to lower-upper status groups. My rapport and informal contacts with the "old families" of group one in this community and the county as a whole were sufficient however, for me to feel confident in all conclusions drawn with reference to this strata. The lower group of the very poor proved for a variety of reasons to be impenetrable for my purposes however, and no claim is made that these findings represent their practices or beliefs with any consistency.

Following an interest in the role of time and family age in shaping the values and practices associated with the domestic sphere, the sample of homes studied was secondarily stratified according to family age. Using the three stages of

the domestic (life) cycle developed by Fortes and others (cf. Goody 1958), the array of families eventually included can be characterized as shown in Table 1-2. "Expanding Families" include new households and families with young, dependent children; "transitional" households include those with children moving through teenage years and on their way "out"; and "aging" households are those maintained after the departure of off-spring.

**Table 1-2: Life-Cycle Status of Sample Families**

	<u>Expanding</u>	<u>Transitional</u>	<u>Aging</u>
# of Families (n = 38)	14	9	15

Two unmarried householders (males) and two childless couples were included in the sample. The remaining households all had children and/or grandchildren. Of the "aging" households, five were those of widows, while one was maintained by a widower. Finally as will be charted in chapter two (see Table 2-7), six multi-generational families and their interacting households were incorporated in the sample in order to facilitate the analysis of cross-generational processes of communication.

Through the course of this fieldwork my investigation alternated regularly between a focus on individual families and kin groups and the social life of the encompassing community. In my examination of the borough I aimed especially to understand the components and significance of

personal reputation, family name, and status assignment in this community, both generally and with specific reference to current residents. Patterns of association and the memberships of informal cliques within the community as well as of church and community groups were also traced and evaluated. More generally, a sustained effort was made to elicit and understand elements of the broad structure of values, beliefs, cultural roles, rules and traditions which guided the public life in this community. As an established "guest" of sorts, I participated in church dinners, community fairs, summer sports and a range of other family and community centered activities. Data collected with reference to the value-laden activities surrounding family homes took a number of forms.

Initially, an informal survey of the community's housing stock, accounting for its age, condition, and value, was recorded and specific areas of development outlined. Organized interviews, as mentioned above, were also conducted in a core group of thirty eight households. In families and/or homes targeted for extended analysis, these interviews took the form of a series of three, two to three hour sessions, usually conducted over a three or four week period. The interviews were generally conducted in the evenings and usually included both the male and female heads of household for at least two of the meetings. Males were at times difficult to pin down for "a long talk about the

house". The sequence of successive interviews was relied upon not only to accommodate an extensive interview schedule but also to permit analysis and adaptation of interview materials between meetings. The repeated visits also provided multiple opportunities for the observation of household activity and gradually made families more comfortable with my presence in their homes, providing a basis for future informal visits.

While interviews were informal and flexible enough to follow issues of particular salience in each household, a schedule of questions was completed in each of the twenty eight homes subject to "extended" analysis. Shorter schedules were followed with homes where specific questions or hypotheses were being tested. The full interview schedules covered the following areas:

The first interview. This session began by soliciting a brief history of the family. Following this a housing history was compiled. Where the family had lived before, when they had moved and why; what they recalled of the home, and how they would evaluate it now, were amongst the subjects treated. General house preferences were also explored. Questions included how many rooms the family "needed" or preferred, what kinds of rooms they used and/or wanted, what size, type and style of house they have wanted in the past, would want now, and so on. The history of the present home was also considered, including the full

structure of decisions that accompanied its construction or purchase and its record of repairs, extensions and renovations. Issues discussed regarding maintenance included timing, justifications, the choices made, who made these decisions, what factors (including taste) influenced them, and whether the family had any plans for the future. Decision-making and the division of duties and obligations then constituted the second area of concern in this session. Here the structure of responsibilities in the home regarding the acquisition and maintenance of furniture, cleaning, and the management of major repairs were investigated. Particular interest was directed to determining how rights and obligations might be apportioned according to gender and age. I was also concerned to determine what moral standards residents implicated in the regulation of house-related work.

The second interview. These interviews concentrated on rules and patterns of house use. Couples were asked to draw a floor plan of the home both for diagnostic purposes and for later use in subsequent discussions in locating various activities in the home. Informants were asked to discuss their normal schedule for the course of a week and to explain where they might be in the home during each part of the day. This served as a way to evaluate the siting, timing and coordination of activity in the home, and was interpreted as a first level of data about patterns of use.



A list of specific activities and their siting was then discussed as a further step in determining how different activities were situated in the home. The management of privacy was discussed, followed by questions concerning methods for accommodating visitors, and seasonal and periodic variations in the patterns of usage. Of broad concern in these investigations were issues of change and adaptation in room use as the family aged; whether siting tended toward specialized or generalized patterns of use; what rules and customs regulated usage and the combination of activities; and how proximity, visual and auditory overlap, and the prospect of mutual monitoring were managed within the family.

These interviews were treated initially as data about how people *thought* they did and should behave in the home. Patterns in responses identified throughout the sample were taken as data about underlying normative influences and were used to formulate hypotheses about usage. These were tested through direct observation and the evaluation of indirect evidence such as that provided by the house and furnishings themselves (their location, arrangement, wear and so on). In all of this the aim was to understand how activities and people were organized in space and consider how this might reflect patterns of communication within the family.

The third interview. The final interview schedule focused on furnishing the home. A chronology was established

first by exploring, from the time of marriage, what furniture had been acquired, when and through what means. Timing (cycles of acquisition and replacement), rationales, aesthetic and normative influences and patterns of change and continuity in taste preferences were explored. Acquisitive behavior was then examined in more detail with current furnishings. Questions revolved around such matters as who was responsible for acquiring these things, what sources they relied on for them, and what their intentions had been with each purchase. Rules and customs organizing different methods of acquisition (gift-giving, loans and exchanges, collecting, inheritance and out-right purchase) were all discussed. Finally, the family's preferences and evaluative criteria were explored with reference to each piece of furniture in the livingroom and often the family room as well. Owners were asked to describe their furnishings so that descriptive terminologies and knowledge of materials, construction and styles could be investigated. Principles guiding the arrangement of furnishings were explored as a last element of the topic.

The kinds of value owners associated with their furnishings; attitudes regarding "formal" and "informal" rooms and furnishings; the range of alternatives residents contemplated in making choices; the kinds of discriminations they attended to in thinking about and acquiring furniture; adaptations and changes these considerations underwent

through time; notions of propriety; the structure of a family's expectations and aspirations; and the influence of social comparison; were all subjects for indirect investigation throughout the course of these discussions. The interviews always took the livingroom and family room (if present) as their focus. At some point through the course of these visits, however, a house tour was conducted and these issues were explored in a more superficial way with reference to the full range of furnishings in the house. When the interviews were completed, a "recording" was made of each home's living room, usually during a separate visit. Because of the sensitivity of the subject for residents of this community, these recordings took the form of a quick sketch supplemented by measurements and a written description of the room and its contents. Photographs were taken in a small and unsystematic sample of houses.

Interviews were conducted in an informal and open-ended manner in order to encourage informants to bring material out at their own pace and in their own order. Through the course of these sessions my attention was directed not simply to what residents specifically said about a subject, but also how they approached it. Through their responses and follow-up lines of questioning I sought to understand the kinds of discriminations they made about these subjects, the terminologies they used, what they considered important about a subject or relevant to discuss, what they felt one

could or should say in different contexts, and most generally, how they thought about, shared and compared impressions and evaluations associated with the subjects under study. Their statements were evaluated both for the explicit orders of information they contained and as implicit phrasings of values, beliefs, and methods of interpretation.

Research has shown that informant statements about their own behaviors and evaluations frequently fail to coincide directly with actual activity (cf. Pelto and Pelto 1983:73). A variety of methods were used to compensate for this. During the interviews themselves questions were routinely rephrased, reframed and repeated to check my respondents' comments for internal consistency. The comments of family members were compared to one another's and balanced against statements by others in the community. Interview data was also carefully weighted against information drawn from other sources, most especially observational data. Questions of "veracity" ultimately posed little problem with respect to matters of observable behavior. Where they became more difficult was in the investigation of the standards, norms and values underlying such activity. My concern in interpreting this information, however, lay less in determining how "true" or "false" statements might be than in understanding responses as artifacts of a person's roles and positions in the home and community. For as

Birdwhistell has pointed out, we may use informants as "windows into a culture," however:

The investigator must constantly remind himself that his informant is an adherent, not an objective interpreter, of his communicational system. The report of an informant about his behavior is itself behavior; such reports are data and not evidence. And, the fact that all informants agree does not make their statements true, except insofar as agreement indicates conventional understandings (1970:191).

My method in interpreting these statements has therefore been, as Becker has suggested, to treat them as products of a perspective which is a function of the speaker's position within the community (1970:402). My attempt has been to move through the testimony of my informants, especially to the extent that they have been "placed" comparatively by age, status and gender, to construct a model of how these standards, values, and beliefs are structured and stratified according to these statuses. I make the assumption in constructing this model that, as Williams has phrased it, "most members of a community do not know the full repertory of forms, meanings and functions of their culture," and that the systematic collection of observational and interview data will ideally provide a more complete perspective on these matters than can possibly be articulated by any single member of the community (cf. Williams 1967:28). Finally, in interviewing for norms and evaluations, I have attempted to collect and interpret this data at two levels. On the one hand I have attended to

systematic discrepancies and patterned agreements in direct statements of value as data about conventional understandings and normative ideals. On the other I have attempted to infer the structure of "operant" standards from more indirect statements of value made during these interviews and manifest in on-going activity and naturally occurring conversation. I have regarded both the ideal expressions and the actual manifestations of values and behavioral norms as equally important aspects of this community's culture and attempted throughout to suggest how residents experience and deal with this duality in explaining their own behavior.

Four "key" informants were also relied upon through the course of this research. These included two elected county officials, a bank clerk and a housewife (two men and two women). Each came to fill this role less because of their positions in the community than for the depth of knowledge they displayed about their county and the interest they showed in invoking comparative perspectives on its behavior. I spoke with and socialized with these people on a regular basis throughout the course of this fieldwork. Each became familiar in some depth with the concerns of this study and their perspectives were solicited on many of the issues raised here. Their opinions proved helpful both during and after the fieldwork period as they reflected on my analyses and tentative conclusions, often calling my attention to people, events or perceptions that I had overlooked. As a

group, I found their perspectives to vary somewhat systematically and it therefore proved possible and helpful to correlate their various responses to any given issue in drawing my conclusions. While I sought always to remain mindful of "who" these people were as "sources" in the community, I came to trust each as an articulate observer of county life.

Finally, observational data was collected continually through the course of my stay in Peterburg. General observations on the social life of the community were recorded daily as I visited residents and moved through its public spheres and activities. Systematic attention was focused on naturally occurring conversation. Here data was collected on what people claimed to know about the homes of others and how such information was learned and shared. By listening to others in this way, in homes, in restaurants, at parties and so on, I aimed to understand how the home was discussed in contexts outside the interview situation and how, and in what ways, it might actually be employed as an event of communicational significance in natural settings. Observational opportunities inside family homes were more limited. As mentioned above, the activity of the twenty eight homes of my core sample were monitored during successive evening interviews and occasional visits that followed. The interior life of dozens of others homes was also glimpsed more briefly and fortuitously as circumstances allowed. Many days

and nights were spent in the various households of the extended family with whom I lived for those eleven months, sharing meals, making repairs and renovations, watching television, passing time on front porches and participating in all the "large" and small events that fill out a family's home life. These experiences were studied and recorded as an intensive case study in the life of a multi-generational kin group. Over time they provided a variety of ideas about the nature of household life that were subjected to more systematic examination in the larger sample.

The data collected was recorded in a variety of forms for further analysis. All organized interviews were tape recorded and subsequently transcribed. Written comments and analysis were completed after each interview, and summaries with preliminary analyses were prepared at the conclusion of each family's cycle of interviews. Floorplans, sketches, and written descriptions were also recorded for the houses and furnishings of each family in the sample. A field diary was maintained on a daily basis. These notes incorporated daily descriptions of conversations, local events and other observed phenomena, as well as points in analysis and commentary on my own procedures. Finally, a wide array of materials including photographs, maps, assessment records, census reports, planning commission housing summaries, and newspaper clippings were collected and organized for analysis. With the completion of fieldwork, the interview



transcriptions, fieldnotes, and references to the additional materials were all recorded onto key sort cards where the information was codified according to a system of some sixty-five categories, as charted in figure 1-1. This system allowed for the data to be stored, reviewed, reorganized, and compared by family, age, status or subject matter and permitted repeated analyses of frequency and distribution within the sample.

Analysis of the data collected began while I was still in the community, collecting information and formulating tentative hypotheses. As patterns in behavior, values and interpretive strategies seemed to take shape, my focus was gradually refined and research directed to the systematic examination of a specific range of issues and activities. During this time for example, I became impressed with the importance of the temporal perspective locals maintained and applied in the evaluation of one another's homes. Similarly as the extensive co-mingling of activities between family households became apparent, its communicative implications were subjected to more detailed consideration, as was the relationship between emergent patterns of proxemic organization and the encompassing structure of kinship relations that seemed to organize community life. And, even as data on the formal dimensions of home furnishings was being collected, the importance of the activity that surrounded the movement and use of such things became increasingly



salient in my informants' comments and activity. Issues concerning how objects were obtained and how they were subsequently used were then also foregrounded for study. In this way the outlines of the major conclusions presented in this report took tentative shape during the fieldwork process and eventually became its focus. Many months of analysis followed the fieldwork as all forms of data were codified and compared through the sorting system. The results, as explained above, were finally organized in this report into a form that is intended to guide readers through a broad structure of considerations that are found to regulate evaluative activity and the negotiation of meaning through the family homes of this community.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER I

<sup>1</sup> There is no single term that satisfactorily designates the house, its contents, and associated behavior conducted within and directed toward these objects. This is however, the range of phenomena treated to analysis in this study. For the sake of convenience I will continue to use such words as the "household", the "home", and the "domestic sphere" synonymously. It should be understood from this point on that unless otherwise noted, I mean by them to designate the full range of contents and conduct constituting the family home.

<sup>2</sup> Social identity is understood here as a statement of a person's relative position within the social system of a community. "Identity", as Berger has noted, "with its appropriate attachments of psychological reality, is always identity within a specific, socially constructed world. Or, as seen from the viewpoint of the individual: one identifies oneself, as one is identified by others, by being located in a common world" (1970:378). The term is used here then as Radcliffe-Brown (1965:113), Warner (194 :14) and others have used the term, "social personality", in that it may be described largely by the level at which a person participates in the structure of relations within a community.

As Mead has suggested (1974), social identity is understood to be achieved as the behavior and attitudes of the individual are compared to those of the community. Social identity (and social position) is established and maintained therefore as behavior is organized and evaluated in relation to the structure of norms, standards and customs that prevails in the community in which the individual is located. The task in describing the management of social identity in daily life is therefore to describe what McDermott and Church have called the "relational messages" through which the individual conveys his memberships and relationships:

The problem of describing self-reference or identity systems are no different from those involved in describing any other system of reference... To describe rigorously either meanings of words or the identities of people, we need ethnographies of their relational foundations. The relational messages exchanged in the intercommunication are the source of the self images - the evanescent identities - that people construct from moment-to-moment (1976:124)

As I explore the relevance of the house to social identity there-

fore, it will not be in its role as an "individual expression". Rather it will be examined for its value as a "relational message", as a form of behavior which in the comparative frame of the community aligns, the inhabitants with the values, beliefs, and standards of some segments of the social hierarchy and distinguishes them from others.

<sup>3</sup> Phatic communication as Malinowski defines it is "a type of speech in which ties of union are created by a mere exchange of words...words in phatic communion fulfill a social function and that is their principal aim...language does not function here as a means of transmission of thought." (1923:315) From this then, he generalizes to distinguish two functions of language, that is between language in its instrumental and "technical" capacities. In this way he compares language as a mode of thought and language as a mode of action:

Speech is the necessary means of communion; it is the one indispensable means for creating the ties of the moment without which unified social action is impossible (1923:310).

As a mode of action he saw language to serve in establishing bonds between members of a group, keep them in contact and reassure them on an on-going basis about the nature of the situation and their position in it - in effect to keep the social/communicative system in operation.

<sup>4</sup> For an interesting case study in what can be known from a site first through an examination of "the thing itself" and then through its actual usage see Austin (1976).

<sup>5</sup> The importance of social context to the analysis of communicative activity has been most clearly established in linguistic research. Contextual approaches to linguistic behavior were promoted early-on by Sapir (1933) who emphasized the need to move from the study of language as a fixed system of symbols to view its patterned variation and functions in actual usage. Malinowski's early formulation of the concept of "context of situation" similarly emphasized the implications of the interactional setting for understanding a language. "Utterance and situation," he noted in his 1923 essay, "are bound inextricably with each other and the context of situation is indispensable for the understanding of words...in the reality of a spoken tongue, the utterance has no meaning except in the context of situation" (1923:307). More recently, a ballooning literature from sociolinguists and those conducting ethnographies of communication, has looked at pattern and variation in the form and function of communicative behavior as relative to its socio-cultural context (cf. Gumperz and Hymes 1972, Labov 1974 and Saviile-Troike 1982). Contemporary studies of verbal behavior by folklorists have followed suit, shifting

away from a focus on structural meaning in texts and fixed forms toward the evaluation of their subjects' patterning and variation within "performance" contexts (cf. Bauman 1971, Ben-Amos and Goldstein 1975, Dorson 1972, and Hymes 1975). Similarly Gross (1974) and Worth (1981) have argued for ethnographic analysis of the production, use and interpretation of visual forms, what Worth has called "ethnographic semiotics". While I have chosen to anchor the discussion of this contextual approach in my theoretical understandings of the nature of communication itself, (especially as defined by Birdwhistell 1970, Bateson 1972 and Schefflen 1973), the resultant approach must be understood to mirror these trends in the study of expressive forms.

♦ Douglas cites as one of the clearest examples of this, Evans-Pritchard's writings on the Nuer, for whom cattle were the basic currency of social life (1977). Raymond Firth has similarly described the importance of goods beyond their economic or subsistence value quite extensively. A clear statement of this perspective was offered in this passage from his discussion of the structure and organization of small communities:

Material goods on the one hand, and language on the other, form the social media (of a community). Material objects affect community life in a number of ways. They facilitate activity...crystalize and incorporate expenditure of effort...are the object of property relations, of emotional attitudes. By their durability, they give manifold links with the past, and so are perpetual conditioning factors to activity. Language provides a vehicle for the expression of thought and emotion. As a means of communication it conveys the meaning of action, serves as a substitute for action, and induces action in others. Moreover, as with material objects language acts through memory as a preservation of action and of ideas about action. Language and material goods, then, provide the apparatus whereby social relations are carried on in the community. (1963:42)

7 Riesman (1950) and Riesman and Roseborough (1955) have, for example, maintained that upwardly mobile groups will tend to be the most sensitive to fashion in society. Members of this group will be most influenced in their consumption by *occupational peers* rather than the elite, and they will pursue the prestige associated with fashion while disdaining taste traditions established amongst the upper classes. Similarly Rainwater (1972) has shown that fashion and the expression of taste may only become an issue for families as they enter the middle classes. Studies by Birdwhistell (1951) and Duncan (1981) have also strongly suggested that consumption amongst stable groups may differ substantially from those of geographically and possibly social-

ly mobile populations. For where the consumption patterns of the latter group may be clearly directed toward competitive demonstrations of taste, the former groups, who tend to be situated in stable and interdependent networks of relation, will direct their consumption towards family-centered and tradition-oriented displays.

## CHAPTER II

### THE COUNTY AND COMMUNITY SETTING

When the first settlers crossed the Susquehanna and followed the ridges onto the lands that now comprise Ridge county, they did so against the will of William Penn and the terms of a treaty with the Iroquois and Algonquin peoples who inhabited the region. Penn's agents interceded for a time, driving the squatters out, but they had effectively "opened" this forested frontier and others soon followed to settle the area permanently. It is a county bounded by high ridges that limit access from all directions and largely isolate the county. Yet even so, the few gaps in its mountains, and the river which dissects it provided opening enough to establish the county as a major route for the migrations that carried settlers through the center of Pennsylvania on their way south to Virginia, Maryland, the Carolinas, Kentucky and Tennessee. In many ways, these qualities of the land and its first European settlers established the tenor for present day Ridge County. It remains a place at once outside the mainstream of social, economic and political life, yet still subject to a narrowed infiltration of influences from the state and nation at



large.

Ridge County is a small, rural community of 19,188 people located in the south central portion of Pennsylvania, some fifty miles from the state capitol in Harrisburg. The county's long thin shape is carved out of the ridges and valleys of the Appalachian mountains which vary its north-south dimensions along its fifty five mile length. It is composed of thirteen sizable townships and four boroughs, three of which are clustered together along the river in the county's center. Hamlets, villages and dispersed farmsteads dot the rest of its landscape. Originally settled as part of Spruce county and later Creek county, Ridge was established in 1831. It is now bounded by five counties and while residents possess a firm sense of identity as Ridge Countians, people travel "out" to the small cities in these surrounding counties for major medical and commercial needs and in many cases for employment. Its location in the center of Pennsylvania places it within four to five hours driving time of such major cities as Philadelphia, New York, Baltimore, and Pittsburgh.

### **Early Settlement**

Ridge county's early settlement history continues to exercise a tangible influence on the organization of contemporary social life. This occurs in large measure because the two main groups, the Scotch-Irish and Germans,

who originally settled the area continue to dominate the cultural profile of the county and their historical relationships continue to influence both patterns of settlement and association. The first settlers to reach the region were the hardy Scotch-Irish who spear-headed much of the westward expansion in Pennsylvania from the late 1730's through the 1770's. Many of these were the same lowland Scots who had been encouraged by the English to settle in Ulster in order to subdue the Irish. With their migration to this country, they began to push into Native lands in numbers in the 1740's and eventually moved south into Maryland and through Virginia. The first of these adventurers entered Ridge county around 1735, as part of the first wave of encroachments into treaty lands.

As E. Estyn Evans has explained (1969), these settlers established what became the standard settlement type for much of the region. They established what has been called a "town and country" pattern of settlement (Edwards 1959) with dispersed farmsteads spread around hamlets populated chiefly by non-farming residents, which served the farmers' commercial, religious, and communal needs. "The cultural landscape of a large part of the U.S.," Evans notes, "is characterized by the single homestead and the unincorporated hamlet, and by a system of land-use dominated by a corn-and-livestock economy which was pioneered in the old west mainly by the Scotch-Irish. Among them the claims of family and kin

were stronger than those of community" (1969:73-74). This pattern of settlement is still quite evident in Ridge County and has only been complicated in the last 20 years as residents have begun to build houses in "strips" along the major roads in the eastern half of the county.

Despite their early influence however, the Scotch-Irish did not maintain their hold on the county's best land in the wide valleys to the east of the Ridge river. They came to rest instead on the poorer soils of the hills and narrow valleys of the western sphere while the eastern portion of the county came to be dominated by the German settlers who followed them. As Jahn noted in her survey (1977), the Germans and Scotch-Irish still account for the majority of residents here and the geographical division of the populations is still clearly defined within the county. The relationship is in fact a historical one which characterizes the settlement of much of the state. Leyburn noted this in his 1972 study:

The Scotch-Irish could not have the frontier lands to themselves. Arriving simultaneously with them, as noted, were Germans, now chiefly Lutherans and Reformed in religion. Pennsylvania now became the scene of an alternating and parallel movement of the two peoples which might have resembled a formal dance. The Scotch-Irish went to one part of a river valley, Germans to another... A map in any given year might show a preponderance of Scotch-Irish in one section of the county and Germans in another or a whole county with one people or the other predominant. (p.190)

And as these two groups moved through the landscape in tandem it also commonly happened that the Germans turned up

with the superior farmland. For the Scotch used the Irish "outfield system" in farming (c.f. Evans 1969) whereby they killed a group of trees and farmed in patches. They were not originally tied to a plot of land or a regular system of crop rotation and when the land was exhausted, they simply moved. The Germans by contrast tended to select wide level sites, clear the forest (and stumps), plough fields and consolidate their position. As Leyburn observed this commonly resulted in the Rhinelanders' possession of the best land:

In contrast to the Germans who, once they found a home tended to remain fixed, the Scotch-Irish never seemed satisfied...Long before fertile areas in the Susquehanna and Cumberland valleys had been filled up, scores who had settled here had, for one reason or another - or for no reason at all - moved on down the Great Valley into Virginia and thence into the Carolinas...One result of this mobility was that excellent land in Pennsylvania which had originally belonged to Ulstermen now came into the hands of Germans. Scotch-Irish influence and often their Presbyterian churches, yielded to Germans and their denominations. (p.199)

Historically there were frictions between the groups and they tended to remain apart. By reputation, the Germans were considered orderly, industrious and frugal; the Scotch, quick-tempered and prone to drink. The groups were also divided along religious lines. The Scotch-Irish were ardent Presbyterians who, as Sweet (1950) points out, were the only national group entering the colonies with a uniform religion. The Germans entering Ridge County were chiefly Lutherans, and, in smaller numbers, Mennonite and Amish. And

while the Scotch-Irish in later years split-off from their church in sizable numbers to become Methodists and Baptists, the Presbyterian and Lutheran churches remain dominant in the area, with each assuming the greatest status and influence within its half of the county. These groups have come to mix socially a great deal more in the intervening years, however the economic relationships created originally by the disparities in lands have largely remained and continue to have important social implications. The eastern half of the county (as neatly divided by the river) continues to be predominantly German and very plainly (as we will see below) the most prosperous part of the county. The west is predominantly Scotch-Irish and today still struggles economically.

#### **Ridge County Today**

The population of Ridge county in many ways mirrors trends that are apparent today in the nation as a whole. Its population, with a median age of 31.6 (compared to 30 nationally) is aging, and family size has shrunk in the past decades to an average of 3.25 persons, as compared to a U.S. average of 3.27. As table 2-1 shows, Ridge county grew in size during the previous decade. In both housing and population, its growth outstripped both state and national figures but this growth reflects a nation-wide trend which saw people move to rural areas in high numbers throughout the

1970's. Notice also that the primary growth in the county, as shown in table 2-1A, occurred in its eastern portion. Population growth here was more than double that of the western townships and housing growth was 50% ahead of the west. It should be noted also that county assessment figures suggest the increases in housing in the west are due in large part to the construction of recreational housing by out-of-county hunters and fishermen. These figures should contribute to the picture of the economic discrepancies between resident groups in the two sections of the county.

**Table 2-1: Aspects of Population**

-----	R.C. ----	Pa. ----	U.S. --
<b>% by race:</b>			
White	99.5%	90%	83%
Black	**	9%	12%
Other	.45%	1%	5%
<b>% increase in population 1970-80</b>	<b>15%</b>	<b>.6%</b>	<b>10%</b>
<b>% increase in housing units '70-'80</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>29%</b>

\*\*N = 9

**Table 2-1A: Percentage Growth 1970 - 1980 by Section of the County**

-----	Population -----	Housing Units -----
Ridge County	15%	34%
Eastern Townships	25%	49%
Western Townships	11%	33%
Boroughs	-4%	9%

In terms of race, table 2-1 also shows that the county's population is homogeneous in a way that the state and nation are not. Historically, the county has had few

resident Blacks. Other ethnic and immigrant groups such as Italians and Hispanics have been experienced here chiefly only as transient laborers hired by the railroad or, more recently, by fruit growers. Within the past five years however, a small group of Southeast Asians have made their way into the county to work in a local food processing plant.

The county is also relatively poorer than the state or nation at large and this shows up in data from the 1980 census on income, employment and education. Referring to table 2-2, for example, we can see that the mean household income here falls some 20% below the national average ( 13% below rural averages nationally and 17% below the state standard). More families are located below the poverty line in this county, and, as the income distributions demonstrate

**Table 2-2: Income**

-----	R.C.	Pa.	U.S.---
Mean household income	\$16,279	\$19,701	\$20,306 18,806*
% of families w/ income below poverty level	10.4	7.8	9.6
<b>(Household) Income distributions:</b>			
\$ 9,999 or less	38%	29%	29% / 31%*
10,000 - 19,999	35%	30%	29% / 31%*
20,000 - 34,999	23%	29%	28% / 28%*
35,000 - 49,999	3%	8%	9% / 7%*
50,000 or more	2%	4%	5% / 3%*

\* Figures for U.S. rural population

there are many more low income households and fewer high income homes here than in the nation at large. Fully 73% of

the households here earn less than the national income average.

In terms of employment, table 2-3 indicates that the labor force here nearly reverses the national ratio of white-collar to blue-collar workers. Ridge county's work-force as we will see lags behind the nation in education and training and is predominantly located in skilled and

**Table 2-3: Employment**

-----	R.C.	Pa.	U.S.	---
Unemployment	8%	7%	6.5%	
Occupations of employed persons:				
Managerial/professional/specialty	13%	21%	23%	} 53%
Technical/sales/adm. support	16%	29%	30%	
Service occupations	11%	13%	13%	
Farming/forestry/fishing	9%	2%	3%	
Precision production/craft/repair	16%	13%	13%	} 31%
Operators/fabricators/laborers	34%	22%	18%	

unskilled production work. The county also commonly experiences an unemployment rate that is higher than state or national averages (in the winter of 1985, unemployment stood at some 16.5%, over twice the national average). People in this county tend to feel and claim that they are "recession-proof" because of their modest life-styles and the extensive family network of support they have to fall back on. However, employment has been a high profile problem in this county for the past two decades (c.f. Jahn 1977). For as the employment figures suggest, the work force in this area has been heavily dependent on manufacturing jobs.



In this region that has meant work in the steel and textile industries in the surrounding counties - especially in nearby Harristown and in Harrisburg. As table 2-4 indicates some 24% of the county's work force commutes long distances to these various out-of-county jobs. One of the area's major employers, a textile mill in Harristown closed in 1972 however, and when the steel industry entered an enduring stage of decline in the 1970's many more jobs were lost.

Manufacturing positions assumed their importance in the county's economic life in the 1940's as farming began to decline in earnest. As with the rest of the country, the number of families involved in farming has diminished throughout this century. In 1940, 45% of the working population of Ridge County were employed in farming while in 1980, fewer than 10% of the workforce were involved. In the post-war era, small farms have folded, in large part because of the costs and terrain required for mechanized farming. The barter-system and self-sufficient general farm has given way to capital intensive specialty farms and farm size has doubled while the number of farms has dropped. Ninety four percent of these operations are still family owned and operated, but only 63% of them list farming as their principal source of income.

Nonetheless, the county's agricultural production has increased in many categories during this time period even as the number of farms has decreased. Farm related products

therefore still account for a large part of the county's output. Farm products and food processing account for \$37 million in income. Major products include livestock and livestock products (chiefly milk), poultry, and crops such as corn (for grain and silage), oats, hay, wheat, apples and peaches. Meat and poultry packing (especially U.S. Kosher Poultry, the county's largest individual employer), as well as feed manufacturing are related industries that employ sizable numbers.

Other major employers within the county include nine apparel manufacturing plants - piecework shops employing chiefly women to assemble garments for national manufacturers. These plants together employ 53% of the in-county work force and generate \$12 million income annually. Over 65% of the county's acreage is forested today and lumbering activities including the work of some 18 small sawmills and a variety of wood products shops, generate an additional \$18 million in earnings for the county. Finally, while the state government provides many jobs in and around Harrisburg, the county government serves as a major employer through its school system. The 185 local wholesale and retail outlets also offer additional commercial employment opportunities.

Employment of course is linked by most planners to education and in Ridge County the population's preparation in this regard lags behind national averages. Here the county's 3800 students attend two regional high schools and

nine elementary schools. Those choosing to attend college do so typically at one of the small colleges located in surrounding counties or at a nearby branch of the Penn State University. However, as table 2-4 shows, few students choose this option. On average, 12% fewer of its students complete high school than in the nation at large, and its residents complete four year college programs at less than half the national rate. By looking at the percentage of people enrolled in schools by age, it can also be noted that involvement in education drops off dramatically after the age of 18 here in a way that it does not nationally.

**Table 2-4: Education**

-----	R.C.---	Pa.---	U.S._
Persons 25 yrs+ completing high school	55%	65%	67%
Median years completed	12.1	12.4	12.5
Four or more yrs. College completed	7%	14%	16%
Percent enrolled (by age):			
18 - 19	27%	52%	52%
20 - 21	7%	33%	32%
22 - 24	3%	14%	17%
25 - 34	1%	7%	9%

When compared to figures for the state and the larger nation, housing also seems to fall behind the averages, although residents are likely to claim the margin as one of the advantages of life in their rural homeland. Fully 90% of this housing is non-farm housing and, looking at table 2-5, we can see that it is on average older than that in the rest of the country. Data from the county Planning Commission's report on housing shows that 84% of this is single family

detached. If we add mobile homes, the figure stands at 91%. Over 15% of the county's housing still lacked complete indoor plumbing facilities as of the 1970 census, however, this figure dropped to 5% in the most recent count. Two percent of the housing is regarded as overcrowded according to census standards making 7% of the total of occupied units "substandard", 55% of it being located in the western townships.

While food and fuel costs tend to vary little here from prices in the state's metropolitan areas, housing is substantially less expensive than state or national averages. Homes are valued some 36% below the national median (25% below the rural figure), while mortgages differ by a similar margin. Notice also that the economic discrepancies between the eastern and western townships are again reflected in these figures. There were no condominiums in the county as of 1980 and rental units on average constituted only 21% of the available units. Close to 8% more families in the United States found themselves renting housing in 1980 than in 1970, however Ridge county has resisted this trend to this point, maintaining home ownership near the 80% point throughout the past decade. Rents were also much smaller here, constituting only 54% of the nation-wide median. Finally, occupancy rates have declined for family households throughout the century at a rate quite close to state and national standards.

**Table 2-5: Housing**

	R.C.	Pa.	U.S.
<b>Age of Housing:</b>			
% of housing built 1970 - 1980	22%	16%	26% / 34%*
% built prior to 1939	48%	45%	26% / 27%*
<b>Occupancy rates:</b>			
1900	4.6	5.1	4.8
1940	3.34	3.46	3.8
1980	2.60	2.75	2.37
<b>Median Reported Value (owner occupied housing)</b>			
	\$30,100	\$41,300	\$47,200 40,200*
Eastern Townships	\$32,685		
Western Townships	\$26,266		
Boroughs	\$23,600		
<b>Median Mortgage (monthly costs specified by owner)</b>			
	\$276	\$336	\$366
<b>Rental units (% of total housing)</b>			
	21%	30%	36%
<b>Median contract rent</b>			
	\$108	\$173	\$198/142*

\* Figures for U.S. rural population

Current trends in housing find lot sizes shrinking and development patterns continuing the changes begun in the late 1960's. According to the county Assessor's office, there were approximately 80 property transfers in 1980 and of these at least half were "splits" - sales which divided a parcel that was previously owned as one piece. The assessor found this alarming and worried aloud that "we're just turning into another Japan." As mentioned earlier, development of housing tracts has also begun to shift from farmsteads and villages to single lots developed in a line along the county's major, (chiefly eastern) roadways. While this "dispersed" housing may seem to occur at random it actually tends to develop in clusters, with homes in plain view of

one another and the road. It also generally centers around some other feature on the landscape such as a store, school, church or business. The orderliness of this is dictated in many cases by the way land becomes available. Such development typically occurs as a farmer begins to sell lots from farmland that borders the road. The "line villages" (cf. Edwards 1959) that result are distinct from previous development forms here, yet they do not represent a clear departure from many of the elements (such as the willingness to sacrifice privacy for the comfort and safety of nearby neighbors), which we will see to mark community life (see chapter 4). There are still very few organized housing developments in this county and the construction of new non-farm housing that is isolated from other homes is still uncommon.

A last table, for the present, (Table 2-6) should help demonstrate that in spite of its various economic and employment difficulties, the county population is fairly stable. The population of this county now approximates the level it had reached in the 1880's. During much of this century, especially during and after WWII, out-migrations induced by economic problems had seriously offset any natural increases due to births. Between 1940 and 1950 there was an actual 1% decrease in the population. This trend peaked in the 1950's however and the county now loses residents at a rate of approximately 45 per year. Births

and other sources now counter-balance this to the extent that the county has actually grown in the past decade by about 15%.

As we will see in later chapters, people in this county resist moving from their homes. Once located they tend to stay. As a result, county rates for those families remaining in their homes over a five year period are substantially higher than state or national rates. However, as can also be seen, this intransigence in residential mobility is often bought at the cost of much longer commutes to places of work. As the chart shows a much higher percentage of Ridge county residents commute outside of their area for work than do residents in other parts of the state.

**Table 2-6: Geographical Mobility**

-----	R.C.	Pa.	U.S.
Born in state of residence	94%	81%	68%
In same house 1975-79	70%	64%	46%
Different house, same county	18%	22%	25%
Place of work:			
area of residence	76%	98%	na
outside area	24%	2%	na

For those who stay here then, life is quiet and focused on the regular routines, the people, and events to be found within the small spheres they carve out for themselves within the county. Despite their willingness to commute for employment purposes, residents do not otherwise travel much. They are conservative with their money and generally not much interested in things that occur outside their county's

borders. Eighty seven percent of the county's households for example received papers of local news (the county has two weeklies and receives one daily paper of regional news from nearby Harristown), but only 21% received state-wide papers and fewer than 5% received national newspapers (Jahn 1977). One cosmopolitan woman who moved to the county late in life when her husband, (a son of a prominent local family), chose to retire on the family homestead, expressed her frustrations with the people in this way:

You only have to go out to the golf course and listen to them complain about the cost of a dollar for a tournament to know it doesn't matter whether they have the dollar or not. They'll save money and they won't spend it when they don't have anything else to do... I have friends who don't have any children, who don't have anyone to leave their money to. And yet they get some great chortle out of thinking they've got \$10,000 in the bank. Yet they won't take a trip, and they won't do anything "frivolous" like that... Basically, the people here have had very little experience. They've seldom been out of Ridge county, they have no interest in going out and, they're not well read. They're not curious about the world around them. They're very wrapped up in their own day-to-day life, and that's all that interests them.[D34A:440]<sup>1</sup>

Her impatience is that of an "outsider" encountering an entrenched ethic. Local priorities direct these people to avoid extravagant expenditures or activities and lead them to take their pleasure in saving money and living economically.

Life centers on the family, the community, and activities people participate in themselves. The county has



one bowling alley, a golf course, a drive-in movie theater, three sizable restaurants (and several small local eateries), three bars and a roller skating rink. Beyond these, public life focuses on church and community based activities such as athletic leagues, dances, book and bible study clubs, 4-H clubs, the Grange, Rotary and Lions clubs and so on. Jahn's survey (1977) showed that 50% of the households here belonged to some kind of religious, social or community service group, and noted that of these only 15% participated in any such groups outside of the county.

One's extended network of kin and a small, closed cluster of friends typically form the center of one's daily, social, and religious life here. Family name is perhaps the primary component of an individual's identity. As one man explained it, "We're don't discriminate here if you're black or white or something, we're name prejudice." There are "good" names here and "bad" names whose reputation is taken as a reliable indicator of a person's background, likely behavior, and position in the social system of the county. Names are distinguished by parts of the county (you shouldn't confuse the Peterburg Kepners with the Bear Creek Kepners for example); while others are largely limited to a single part of the county. In many of the county's hamlets it also seems that a handful of names will account for the majority of residents housed there. "Step on one of our toes here," I was once told, "and the Zimmerman's will be yelping

all the way up the valley."

As Leyburn noted in a quote cited earlier, family relations are the object of the individual's main loyalties and responsibilities as well as a key source of his or her identity. Residents nonetheless also associate themselves closely with their village or borough in the course of county life. And because the county's two public high schools index loosely with the east-west division I have described here, high school rivalries call residents' identifications with a section of the county into focus as well. However, most all residents ultimately regard themselves as "Ridge countians". To strangers, Ridge county is where they are "from". I will note divisions and distinctions defined within the county here, yet finally the sense of this county as a distinct social entity with unified customs, traditions and values is tangible in activity evidenced from one end of the county to the next. Many of the generalizations discussed in this report will be referred to the county as a whole for this reason. For the sake of coherence and manageability, however, the study needed a smaller focus and for these reasons, the borough of Peterburg was chosen.

### **Peterburg**

The decision to focus on this borough was justified in terms of its position with respect to certain dynamics of

the county's social life and its comparative value as a sampling of the county's population. As suggested above, the decision to concentrate on the population of one borough was dictated by the need to find a circumscribed social setting that was more or less "naturally" defined in practice in the county and could be comprehended in the research of a single fieldworker. Peterburg was the clear choice amongst the county's boroughs and hamlets because it seems to sit both literally and figuratively in the middle of the county. In this position it offers an example of the convergence of a number of social and cultural forces at play in the county. Lets examine this a bit more before proceeding to an overview of the community itself.

#### Comparative Position in the County

To this point we have seen that various historical factors have provided for social, economic and in effect "conceptual" distinctions to be drawn by locals between the eastern and western portions of the county. In practice the boroughs, particularly the boroughs of Patterson, Patterson-town and Peterburg, which are grouped together along the river in the very center of the county, are distinguished as a third distinct social area. Residents will talk about the eastern part of the county, the west ("up the country") and "the Pattersontown area". The distinction being made in this way is one between "town" and "country" and, when most

grossly drawn, is discussed as an "urban - rural" distinction of sorts.

In the schools, kids from town look down on the country kids as "gappers", while town kids are regarded from the opposite side as snobs. Parents from the more rural townships talk of their children as being over-protected at home in their small villages, and corrupted by drugs, alcohol and cigarettes by the town kids when they eventually go off to the joint high school. People in the boroughs consider the country kids, especially those from the western part of the county, to be less sophisticated or even backward. The boys are thought to be violent ("they'd rather fight than look at you";) and the girls to be of suspect moral character. Friends will joke about the stereotypes and yet the images are pervasive and persistent enough that even a bank officer could comment to me matter of factly one day that if I went to the rural townships I would find the people to be less worldly, to have poorer hygiene, less education, more delinquency, and little trust in "outsiders". In practice I found these differences to be of more interest as data about the way internal divisions are defined within a small population than as a guide to actual social and behavioral differences within the county. Their validity was never systematically demonstrated in my experience, they were no doubt more relevant in the past when transportation and interaction were limited. However

they do offer some insight into social perception here and do still account to significant extent for extant patterns of association. More to the present point, however, the distinction was helpful here because in choosing a research site, I found that Peterburg managed to a large extent to straddle these divisions.

Historically, Peterburg has always competed with the other boroughs as a busy commercial center for the county. The borough had originally vied with Pattersontown to serve as the county seat; until 1968 it had its own high school and sports teams; it is the location for the county Fairgrounds and Speedway; and its railway stations and businesses have all drawn people from around the county into its sphere. The borough has also long maintained strong ties with the farmers and other residents of the western townships. Until 1934 Peterburg was the eastern terminus for the narrow gauge railroad that served the western valleys and linked them to the mainline of the Pennsylvania railroad. The borough in this way served the west's commercial, social and religious needs. Children from these townships were educated in the borough, and farmers traditionally "came to town" at retirement to enjoy the convenience it afforded. The populations of the country and town have long intermingled and they are still heavily interrelated by kinship ties. And finally, while Peterburg is the largest borough in the county today, it is somewhat removed from the major

highways that pass through the county. It maintains, for this reason, much of the look, "feel" and pace of the smaller hamlets.

As the borough draws town and country populations together, so it also provides a population that represents both the Scotch-Irish and German elements of the county. As a magnet for the western townships, the borough is, unlike the three other boroughs, predominantly Scotch-Irish. Its two largest church congregations are the Methodist/Episcopal (erected 1841) and the Presbyterian (established 1852). Nonetheless the town also has a substantial Lutheran congregation which built the first church in town (ca. 1802) and in fact provided a meeting place for the Presbyterians for some twenty years. General opinion associates greatest status to membership in the Presbyterian church, yet both the Presbyterians and the Lutherans claim members of the town's elite as a part of their congregations and it is these two churches which compete for prominence in town. Similarly the town's honor list of prominent citizens, compiled for a history published in 1965, listed residents of both heritages. Members of each group sit on the board of the local bank, direct the local Lions Club and claim the best (and worst) real estate in town. As a result then, the borough offers a microcosm in which to observe the interaction of the county's two main ethnic groups and the convergence of town and country lifestyles. It provides

perhaps the best site from which to understand and generalize to the life of the county as a whole. With this in mind, the remaining pages will provide an overview of the borough.

#### Overview of the Borough

Peterburg is a community of some 835 people housed in 322 housing units compacted into a plot of land that is a little more than a half mile square. It is located to the south of the county seat, nestled between two low ridges along the banks of the Ridge river. The legal boundaries of the town are formed by the river to the east, Stoney Creek and Cripple creek to the south and west, and a surveyor's line to the north. The borough's "sphere of influence" however, incorporates farms and hamlets located within a rough 180 degree arc extending some 3-5 miles to the west of these lines. Residents in these areas have a Peterburg mailing address, and are treated and regard themselves as being closely associated with the town. The area was first settled around 1736 by two brothers from northern Ireland who held a warrant for the land from William Penn. They named the tract including what is now the town, "Armagh", after their homeland, and by 1770 had established it as a small but prominent settlement. From the start, it served as a commercial center for surrounding farms and original businesses included a store, a tavern, distillery, and saw, grist and woolen mills. The borough was incorporated in 1812

and formally laid out in the still prominent grid pattern in 1815.

The arrival of the canal in 1831 figured prominently in the town's development. This canal ran along the Ridge river and was part of the Pennsylvania canal system which joined Philadelphia and Pittsburgh at opposite ends of the state through a series of waterways and rail lines. But where the canal stop escalated the borough's influence as a market center, the arrival of the Pennsylvania railroad, and location of a station in the borough, consolidated its position. During this period the town hosted hotels and a wide variety of businesses which drew a regular stream of travelers into the town and, along with the railroad, provided full employment for local residents. A narrow gauge spur extending service into the western part of the county was built by local entrepreneurs in 1891 and tied the town to these townships until its closing in 1934. The Pennsylvania railroad remained influential here and in the county at large until its eventual bankruptcy in the 1940's. During its reign the railroad had sustained the town's economic and social life, its occupational hierarchy in many ways shaping the status hierarchy of the little community. In the wake of its failure, the rail line left major disruptions in the labor force, and a devotion to the lore and imagery of the railroad which is still vigorous today. The model train winding its way on a course around gifts



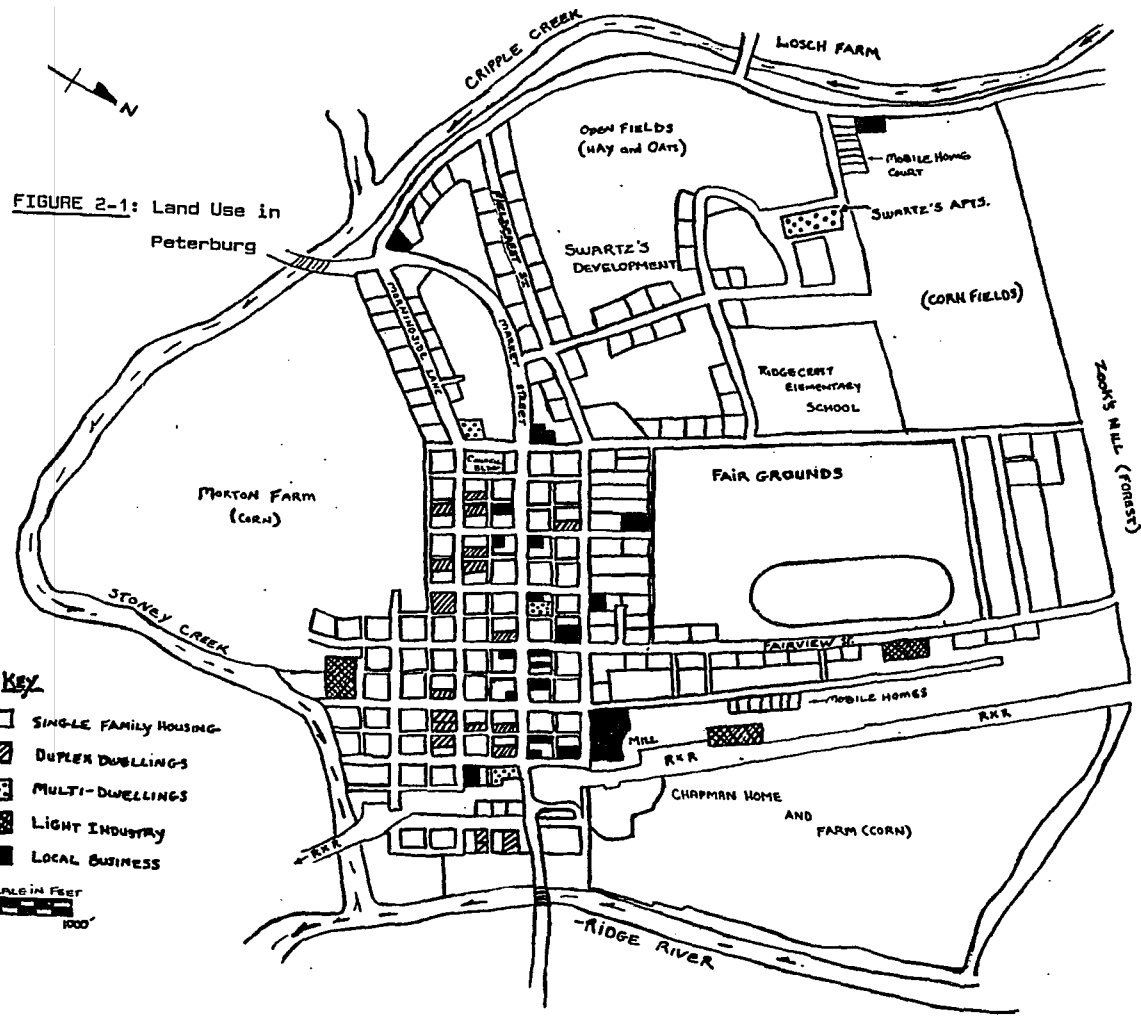
and decorated trees is as prominent a part of Christmas today in many homes here as are ornamental lights or the all-important creche.

Like so many other towns across the state, Peterburg was left to make its own adjustments and since that time has undergone fundamental changes. Many businesses have closed, the vast majority of residents now travel elsewhere in the county or region for their employment and shopping needs, and the borough is now primarily a residential community. As late as 1965, the town still had more than 40 businesses including clothing stores, furniture stores, a dairy, 4 supermarkets, a lumber mill and retail outlet, an appliance store and so on - a diversified array of businesses. Sub-regional centers have become largely unnecessary in the contemporary economy however. The number of businesses in the borough today has been cut in half and they serve a much smaller array of needs. There are two small groceries, two bank branches, a Post office, hardware store, 3 beauty shops and one barber, a gas station and a funeral home. Several larger operations remain, including Blue Hills mills providing heating oil, feed, grain storage, crop spraying and other agricultural services; a small-scale toy manufacturer; a dress-making shop and a welding/drilling company. As Figure 2-1 should suggest, these various businesses are dispersed throughout the town so that even on the once busy "Market Street" that runs through the center

of town, single family homes now dominate the landscape and pace of life.

What one finds today in Peterburg is a quiet village that has lost some of its focus or definition as a community. Other blows to its spirit and identity came with the closing of its high school in 1968 with its incorporation into the regional system; and the closing of its community hall in the late 60's for State building code violations. Residents thirty years and older still describe these events as major losses to the community's pride and cohesion. Nevertheless Peterburg remains a town with a coherent identity in the county. The town still has an elementary school within its borders; it is the only borough with its own newspaper, the Peterburg Times, one of the county's two weeklies; it remains the location for the county Fairgrounds which draws thousands from around the area for the county fair each September, as well as the Peterburg Speedway (which draws crowds throughout the summer for its weekly races); it has its own chapter of the Lions Club; has active, community funded, volunteer fire and ambulance companies; has a Senior Citizen Center; a community park; and has recently re-opened its community building for dances, bingo, exercise classes and the like.

First impressions of the housing in the borough generally dwell upon a prevailing sense of austerity and sameness. An estimate would place the number of white houses



at around 80% - their stark shutterless facades and porches offering the passerby little indication about who lives within. Landscaping is also generally restricted to well clipped foundation plantings and individual trees dispersed through the yards. Fences and border plantings are the exception, and the visual differentiation of property lines is to a large extent minimized. Nevertheless, there are several distinct areas within the borough that are distinguished by local residents.

As figure 2-2A and B indicate, there is first a distinction to be made between the "old" original part of town and its newer areas constructed during this century. This original part of the borough is referred to as "in-town" or "downtown" while the radiating arms of development along Morningside Lane, Fieldcrest, and Fairview streets are still referred to as "out from town", although they are clearly regarded as part of the borough. The housing in this original part of the borough is, not surprisingly, the oldest, most all of it having been built before 1920 and much of it dating back to the 1880's and beyond. The borough was originally settled along the river and many of the houses in this section of town are quite old. Having been built of rough cut logs, many are now covered by several layers of siding which mask their age. Aside from the Chapman estate, to the north of the river bridge, this area, especially Water st., is now considered to be the poor

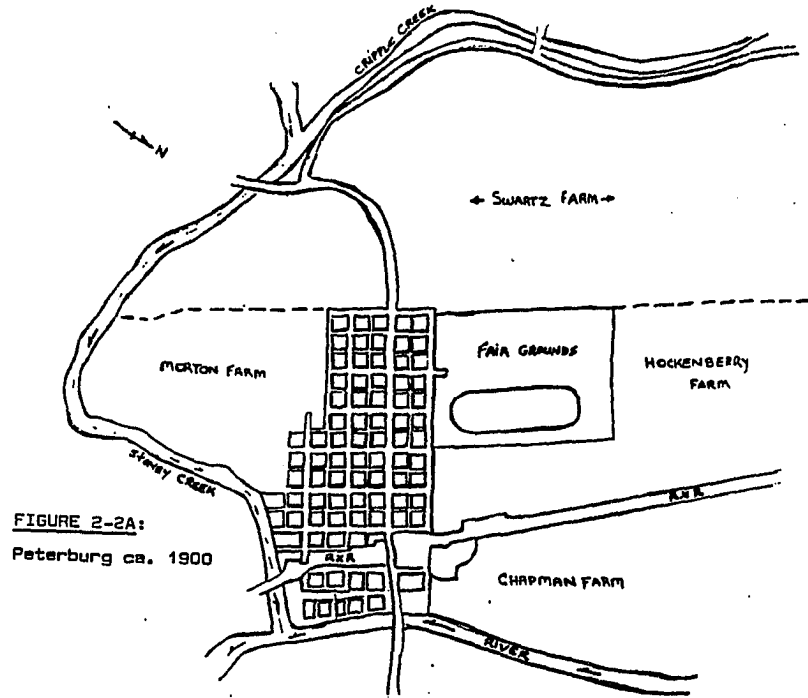


FIGURE 2-2A:  
Peterburg ca. 1900

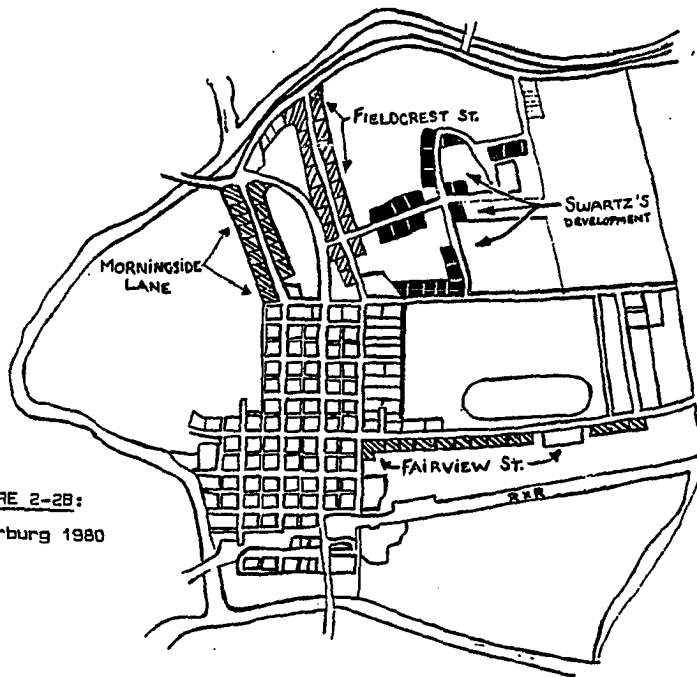


FIGURE 2-2B:  
Peterburg 1980

section of town. Water street is separated from the town by railroad tracks and they effectively isolate it from town. The families here are amongst the town's hard-working poor and so many of them are related by kinship that the street is known locally as the Warner-Kurtz family enclave.

Major development to the borough occurred in waves during this century as surrounding farms were pressed to open land for new housing. The borough has always been surrounded by farmland and the farms shown in figure 2-2A actually located the farmhouse in-town with the farmlands extending-out picturesquely from the borough's backyards. Housing has always been in short supply in the Peterburg and for this reason each new generation in this century has had to coax new land for development from the surrounding farmers in order to remain near home. The first extension came in 1920 when an elderly farmer named Swartz set a lot aside along a dirt lane (now Morningside) for his son. As others requested lots, he gradually developed its entire length. By 1931 this extension was largely complete and land was annexed along Fairview for space on which to complete this period of construction.

The South side of Fieldcrest was then developed in the late '40's continuing on through the mid 1950's. For a variety of reasons (there is no agreement as to why) this area became known alternately as "Millionaire's row" or "Mortgage row" and the appellations remain in use today. In

this case again, the Swartz's had been called upon to develop another farm lane to support a modest post-war wave of building. This kind of development, from farm lands along radiating arms extending out from the original village is typical throughout the county. It is interesting to keep in mind then, that because development like this necessarily required the consent of a prominent farmer, development was highly controlled and contained. Land is sold gradually and by individual lots. The farmers are also quite careful about who they sell to. Family name and reputation were, as always, important, and a clear preference was shown for buyers from the town or its surrounding area.

The latest wave of development began in the early '70's and focused initially on Fieldcrest, this time along the northern side of the street. The grandson of the Swartz who had begun the building in 1919 then decided to develop the remaining farmland to the north of Fieldcrest and opened lots for a new subdivision. Development was halted at its present stage when the town and the land-owner were unable to agree on whose responsibility it was to pave these new roads. The lanes remain unpaved here and no new building is permitted.

The nature of the homes in these areas and their status value in the community will be discussed in chapters to come. As we will see, each of these areas of new development, with their new houses and larger lots, became the

fashionable place to live in their time. For the present however, it can be noted that each area stands for locals as a distinct section of town, their salience defined by the names of those who originally settled them and by the architecture characterizing the homes of each period.

The vast majority of housing in the community (see fig.2-1) is owner-occupied single family housing. Thirty percent of the total housing units are however rented. There are only four "multi-dwellings" or apartment buildings in the community - the largest of these being the Swartz apartments which include approximately twenty five, one and two bedroom units. Most of the community's rental housing therefore is found in single family and duplex homes, most all of which are owned by residents of the borough. Residents of this housing tend to be young couples starting out, the elderly who have sold their homes, or transients who are in the county for a limited period of time. Most full-time homeowners of the community claimed to know few people in the apartment buildings and those not originating from town or related to a resident, were generally regarded as something less than full members of the community. For these and other reasons, this study focused for the most part on owner occupied housing.

#### The System of Social Estimate

When the postmaster opens the doors to the post office



in the morning there are usually three or four retired men waiting for him. These four are joined by two or three more and over the next two hours the affairs of the town and everyone concerned are treated to thorough consideration. This group eventually moves across town to the loafer's benches at "the Point" (the one gas station in town) where they will be joined throughout the the day and into the evening by dozens of other men. One even finds young boys here, hanging around with their friends or brothers, fathers or grandfathers. Men gather or pass through the Point throughout the days and weeks, and as they do, they pass around bits of news and gossip, tell stories, and "keep an eye on things" to the point that little seems to escape their collective notice. The same sort of thing goes on amongst the women in the borough's three beauty parlors.

These settings provide for a constant flow of information about the activities of residents throughout the area, and yet they only represent a formalized fragment of the comprehensive network through which gossip is circulated. Mutual surveillance is a constant part of borough life, as is the devotion to exchanging news about others. Whether one chooses to or not, one hears constantly about the lives of others and they hear about yours with equal interest. As a result, locals share an extensive access to and familiarity with the events and small details of one another's lives. Details of marital and family affairs, financial condition,

school or work problems, achievements, shortcomings, and more. One's status or social standing in the community is therefore based in this depth of information about the events of one's life and one's family. Judgements are based in a long-term "sampling" of your behavior and achievements, and are not limited to such conveniently quantifiable shorthand measures as income, occupation and/or education. When we speak about "status" here, we are referring to the relative esteem in which a person is held, the influence they are thought to exert in community affairs, and as a consequence, the level at which they participate in the social structure of their community (including those boards, committees, clubs, and social spheres to which they have access). This status is defined and achieved within this community through a structure of judgements which I will call the system of "social estimate".<sup>2</sup> Based as it is in an extended familiarity with one's life, it focuses in large measure on the assessment of how "good" and "moral" a person you are. One's family name (an ascribed status), and one's lifestyle, morality, and achievements (achieved aspects of status), are all treated as primary data in this regard.

Perhaps the major factor among my informants for placing an individual, was his or her *family name* and the reputation that it bore. As one women commented, "I think if your name isn't right to begin with, then it doesn't matter

what you do, how much you make, or what you have - the name is it." A "good" name, one with some historical grounding in the area, correlates with privilege and social advantages according to locals - "it opens doors", one judge commented, " in school, in applying for loans at the bank, and so on - you're a known commodity to everyone until you prove otherwise." Amongst the dimensions of family status that are judged, one finds consideration of how each member performs his or her functions. Are they a good "father", or "mother" or "brother"? The contributions of the family to the community are also weighed, and more broadly the general pattern of behavior that is attributed to the full range of a family's lateral and lineal kin.<sup>3</sup> One's reputation does not lie solely with the immediate family but with one's cousins, grandparents, and great-grandparents. "You see," one judge told me, " gossip here is something else because we can go back and pick-over something your grand-daddy did and we might still hold it against you." A family name with a good reputation and a history of two or more generations in the county is essential here if one is to enter the higher status brackets in the community. Similarly, such a name will keep a family from slipping "downward" in difficult times. If you are from outside the county and in effect "have no name", your entry into the borough's, and indeed the county's, social sphere will be slow and limited. You may never be widely known or accepted although your children

may in time gain some standing as a resident.

A person's standing in this system of social estimate will also be shaped by public perceptions of his moral virtue and what he has achieved in life. For as Redfield has explained, a social structure is an ethical system (1960). It provides a set of directives and conceptions to both guide and ultimately evaluate and rank conduct. In this county, public life is guided by a moral asceticism and a strict work ethic which bear directly on a resident's reputation. Does he attend church? Does he drink? Does he work hard, and are the family and home key priorities for time and resources? Is he honest - does he pay his bills on time and can he be taken at his word? These and similar considerations bear directly on the standing of a person's name, his influence in the community, and the sphere's in which he will be accepted.

Of equal importance is what the person has achieved in their lifetime. Have they worked hard? What have they earned? What do they have? (In this respect possessions are taken to bear on status not as reflections of taste or orientation, but rather as measures of what a person has earned. They are viewed in a straight-forward Calvinist way as the fruits of labor.) This "achievement" dimension was quite prominent in the assessment of relative status. It interestingly incorporates an implicit model of progress into the system of status evaluation in that it assumes that

families will and should improve their material conditions with time. Time is also important to these judgements in that young families were referred to repeatedly as "unproven". True worth and character are tested and demonstrated here over the long run, and for this reason the standards of social estimate also incorporate a marked age-bias which places older residents in a given status bracket ahead of younger members, including especially their children.

Finally such considerations as a family's money, source of income, occupation, education, and patterns of association will be incorporated into the evaluation. Just how these factors are weighted however, varies depending on the position of the judge within this system. For class and status are experienced by those in a social hierarchy in ways that are relative to one's position within the structure. Those belonging to the top group emphasized family status, money, and patterns of association *outside* the county in making their assessments. Members of the middle and upper-lower status groups however, tended to discount money as a way of quantifying relative position and emphasized moral character and lifetime achievements in ranking their fellow residents. The different groups were in ready agreement about who was located at the extremes of the community system - the "top" and "bottom" - because these assignments could be based on name and money alone. Differ-

ences occurred around the mass of people in the middle groups, especially those moving between lower and upper middle status group assignments. Nevertheless in working with the specific sample of families in this study a structure of six status groupings was agreed upon and substantive consensus achieved on the placement of families in the sample within these groupings.<sup>4</sup>

The top group is composed of the county's "old families" who continue to retain at least some vestige of economic and social power in the county. They are the county's "elite" families, who have been prominent and influential in county life for many generations. These people still generally owned an ancestral homestead and were the middle group's major exception to the achievement standard, in that it was assumed that they, by definition, did little to earn their positions.

The second group, which I will call "lower-upper" was a mixed transitional group for borough and county residents. Those included here were the new money families, families who had earned a comparative fortune within the present generation but did not have the history of prominence to move them into the upper group. This category also included old families of historical prominence who had "slipped" in some way and no longer had either the resources or influence they once claimed. The Shelly and Swartz names in Table 2-7 were placed in this group for this reason.

Distinctions drawn between the next two groups seem mainly to turn on the age and history of the residents evaluated. The third group, the "upper-middle" status group, is composed of older residents, with good names who have earned a good living and a comfortable home, served the community, and have essentially achieved a stable home and position as one of the community's "solid citizens". Their character has been demonstrated and their esteem earned, through a lifetime of effort. Group four, the "lower middle", by contrast, may have as much or more than group three but they are thought to be still paying for it. Their savings (and security) are limited and they are not thought to have not "proven" their character as yet.

Group five includes those people who will never achieve the goal of middle class stability and comfort but who are thought to be honest and hard-working. These are the "decent poor" whose status may be limited, but whose name may still be considered honorable. This group may also include those who began with a good name but have not lived up to the expectations associated with it. Finally group six includes everyone else, those referred to as the "trash" - the poor who don't work, who have a history of criminal or immoral behavior tied to the name, and so.

In order to facilitate the discussion of status and age-related behavior throughout this report I have selected a core group of sixteen families to refer to for illustra-

tive purposes. Figure 2-7 charts the system of social estimate in this community along with these families's placement within it. We will be concerned with these status groupings throughout the remainder of this report to the extent that we hope to understand how the home and home-related behavior bear on the interpretation and manifestation of relative social standing in the community. My intent is to explain if and how rules of conduct or standards of interpretation vary for different status groups in the community and if and how social standing may be encoded through the home. I have also been concerned throughout this study to chart the influence of family age on house-related behavior and standards of evaluation. As mentioned in chapter one, the sample treated in this study has also therefore been stratified by family age. Table 2-7 illustrates how the reference families were differentiated in this way. All families in the study were arrayed here along a continuum from "expanding families" (families with pre-teen dependent children), to "transitional" families (families with teenage children and older off-spring who are beginning to leave home), and "aging" families, whose children have left and in which one or both of the parents remain. Because I have been interested also in tracing cross-generational influences, three two-generational groupings were included in the demonstration sample. These relationships are indicated in the table by connecting



**Table 2-7: Social Estimate Rankings, Family Age and Kinship Relations of Sample Families.**

S.E. Rankings	Group	Position in Life Cycle		
		Expanding Families	Transitional	Aging
Chapman	1			Chapman
Losch				Losch
Campbell	2	Campbell		
Stine Sr.				Stine Sr.
Swartz			Swartz	
Shelly			Shelly	
Kaufman Sr.	3			Kaufman Sr.
Morton				Morton
Miller Sr.				Miller Sr.
Stine Jr.	4	Stine Jr.	Dave ←	
Kaufman Jr.		Kaufman Jr.	Barb ←	
Kurtz, E.		Kurtz	Carl ←	
Miller Jr.		Miller Jr.	Sally	
			Ed	
		Gail ←		
		Paul ←		
		Alice		
Wagner	5			Wagner
Kurtz, B		Kurtz, Billy		
Farrell	6			Farrell

Note: ----> Broken arrows indicate parent to child relations  
 ———> Solid arrows indicate sibling relations  
 -.-.-> Line and point arrows indicate cousins

arrows. While, as I have said elsewhere, the total sample seems insufficient in its view of the families of the sixth or lowest status grouping, I believe the sample provides an adequate representation of this community's status and age-groupings. In the chapters to follow then, we will monitor patterns in conduct and the rules and values guiding processes of evaluation for all of these groupings.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER II

<sup>1</sup> As a convention in this report, all quotations taken from tape-recorded interviews will be cited in this manner for reference purposes. The first alpha-numeric designation indicates the tape on which the interview is located, the second number indicates the approximate location of the quotation on the tape.

<sup>2</sup> This study did not have the resources to conduct a full-scale community study which could elaborate the class structure of the community in detail. However it was important to delineate criteria and principals by which status is assessed in the community and to be able to locate members of the sample according to their relative standing. The system of social estimate was derived in part through my own analyses of factors affecting identity and position, but was detailed most extensively through the use of a panel of social judges drawn from the community.

Three judges, one each from the upper, middle and upper-lower status groups were relied upon most extensively, with each being asked to rank the group of names presented here and explain their reasoning with each placement. This technique was based on Warner et al.'s method for rating "Evaluated Participation" and determining status reputation (1960). The method is particularly useful to this study because it provides both a means to stratify our specific sample of families, and offers a breakdown of the kinds of traits and behaviors to which status accrues in this community. Because it defines *local criteria* for evaluating behavior in this way, this rating system ultimately offers us insights into the way house-related behaviors will be judged, and how they will come to play in the evaluation of the owner's social standing. We will return to these standards throughout the text.

<sup>3</sup> Barber (1961) draws these dimensions out in sorting through the many factors that are thought to be associated with social stratification. He lists family status with social class and "local-community status" as one of the three types of social ranking which has a tangible bearing on social behavior. While he discusses these forms of rank as having independent functions and spheres of variation, however, I would stress their interdependence in this county.

<sup>4</sup> Warner et al. noted this aspect of the experience of social

structure at the time that they developed their "evaluated participation" rating system. They point out that informant reports are not only helpful in placing others:

At the same time they also help place the speaker because such remarks are often reflexive and must be understood in terms of the social position of the person talking...if the person doing the placing is in the lowest part of the "topography" he often talks differently about someone on the "plateau" than another informant talking about him from the top of a "mountain peak". Although the information gathered about him from the two will sometimes seem contradictory, each is telling the truth, from where he sees his status world, about the social position of the person under discussion. (1960:74)

The comments of my judges were therefore compared and balanced with reference to their own standing within the system that they were describing. The final structure of groupings and placements (which they all accepted) was a result of balancing these various opinions and comparing them with my own observations and ratings derived by using Warner's Index of Status Characteristics. This last system (1960:121-160) combines income, occupation, and house type on a weighted scale to derive its rankings. It is interesting to note that the ISC systematically distorted the placement of all but the polar groups in this setting because of its inability to account for the elements of "social estimate", such as age, family name, and moral character, which we discussed above.

### CHAPTER III

#### LOCATING THE FAMILY HOME IN SPACE AND TIME

We stood on Elmer's back porch after he'd shown me through his home, admiring the view of Herringbone ridge in the long shadows of the late afternoon. I asked him absently about a bi-level about a half mile off on the descending end of the ridge and was struck again by the way he "situated" it for me. "Well, that's Danny Swartz's place, built about 8 years back." Making a long sweep of the ridge towards the east with the back of his hand he added, "his brother built a nice place near Four Stars, and his sister, (he motioned now to the west with the stem of his pipe), is married to a fellow who owns a place by the creek in Tuscarora. They've all got nice places you know, well kept, and of course the parents have the farm over there in Swartz valley," (the pipe dipped with this a little further to the west, nearly over his shoulder). He talked about each of the houses nestled behind him on the ridge in these terms, noting who lived in them, their occupations and kin, and as with this plain white house, he was quick to add which surrounding houses were owned by their relations. Each seemed to stand, not alone, but with reference to the homes of their surrounding family.  
[Field Notes 7/17]

If there is a single main reason why family houses have lent themselves to so many forms of analysis, it may have to do with their manifest qualities as discrete events which are easily defined and delimited as units for study. As Glassie has pointed out, most folkloristic research treats houses as material constructs constituting "relatively simple units with unambiguous beginnings and ends" (1973: 319). Similarly the vast bulk of sociological studies which

have used houses and/or their furnishings as indices of social status, have analyzed distributions and made their comparisons on the assumptions that the homes and their contents stood as distinct and comparable units existing within the same temporal frame (see for example, Chapin 1935, Chapman 1955, and Laumann and House 1970). The sufficiency of these assumptions of course depends on the questions that you ask of the house.

For the present study, such assumptions cannot be made. We are asking how the home serves within a specific community of reference as a mode of communication. It is important, therefore, to understand how the people under study organize the house as a conceptual unit if we are to understand how and under what circumstances, they go about evaluating and interpreting the family home (Sapir 1927, Pike 1954, Birdwhistell 1970, Worth 1981). As Garfinkel has noted, "the member of society uses background expectancies as a scheme of interpretation", (1972:29) and we need to grasp something of this structure of expectations and assumptions which shape these people's perceptions of the home if we are to successfully model their methods of evaluation.

Listening to Mr. Leary on the afternoon described above, it became apparent that he possessed a mental map on which networks of homes, connected in space through the intangible bonds of kinship, were charted. His comments

typify a widely shared perception of homes here which organizes them at many points as components in a network of buildings; as elements located, much as people are, within a structure of kinship relationships. By virtue of this, the family home in Ridge county is not necessarily viewed as a fixed entity isolated in time or space. In addition, one finds in daily conversation and activity that Ridge countians demonstrate a "processual" view of homes which sees each building as an object evolving in time. Residents view homes here as manifestly, if subtly, transitory configurations of features. They share a broadly defined set of expectations, tied to conceptions of the normal course of a family's life in the home, concerning how these features should evolve over time. These understandings of the spatial and temporal boundaries of the home establish primary conditions for their comprehensibility in this county, and have a fundamental bearing on how homes are evaluated. Any consideration of the communicative potentials of the home thus begin with these conceptions and these will form my focus in this chapter.

#### **Spatial Extensions of the Home**

Buildings do have integrity in popular conception in Peterburg as distinct architectural elements, and houses are thought to "house" the homes of individual families. Yet the "households" enclosed within these separate buildings are

not so distinct. Ultimately, they are both functionally and socially linked within interacting multi-generational networks of kin. From a communicational perspective, the distinction is an important one, for in many circumstances it is the resources and behavior of these "extended households" which forms both a primary basis for, and object of evaluation in the normal course of social life.

Contemporary residency rules support this organization of domestic arrangements. As the data presented in the previous chapter has indicated, the vast majority of people in the county and in the borough of Peterburg live in their own detached single family dwellings. Few people live in apartments or multiplex housing, and fewer still live in extended family arrangements within a single household. As is the case for the majority of American households the family home in Peterburg is typically the possession and domain of individual nuclear family units. It is expected that children will remain in the home until they leave for college (in which case they usually commute home on the weekends), and/or until they marry. With marriage, children are expected to establish their own households, however if need be, couples may remain in the home of either set of parents for a time (usually one or two years) in order to save money for a downpayment. According to my data, couples chose this alternative about equally with those who chose to rent until they could buy, although the trend has shifted



away from this solution over the past twenty years. Among those who choose to rent after marriage, many do so with some form of subsidy from their parents. Most members of the parental generation, as the occupancy rate (2.26) suggests, remain in their homes until they are no longer able to care for the building or themselves, or until they die. The practice of sheltering elderly and/or infirm parents in the homes of their children, while once common, seems to have dwindled over the past 40 years, especially with the advent of the county's three major nursing homes which have opened since the early 1950's.

According to the most common definitions of a "household", these arrangements qualify the dispersed houses of individual family members as separate units. Bender, for example, notes (1967) that the most common criteria for establishing a domestic group's identity as a "household" are the presence of: (a) co-resident, (b) family groups, (c) completing the normal range of domestic functions. However while kin groups in Ridge county seldom "co-reside" within single dwellings, moving patterns confirm that those family members who remain in the county tend to stay within ready driving or even walking distance of one another. This is especially true for families raised in the boroughs. Interaction and mutual involvement between homes remains high as a result. In Jahn's county-wide survey (1977) for example, 87% of the families reported relatives within the county,

and over 60% reported relatives living within walking distance of their homes. Cross-visiting was found to be extensive with 31% of her sample reporting daily visits with kin, 77% reporting at least weekly visits and 89% claiming at least monthly visits. Few in my sample of borough residents claimed to visit with family members less than once per week. I would also emphasize that telephone contact is an important supplement to personal visits and my experience has shown that daily calls are often routine.

These interacting networks of closely associated kin, often including very close friends who are essentially treated as family, comprise the basic structure of family life in this community. Most commonly, each household is bound to a network that includes siblings, parents and grandparents of both the husband and wife. Additional kin, such as cousins, aunts, or uncles, seem to be incorporated into these kith and kin nets on the basis of both propinquity and extensiveness of ties. However, the active participation of the latter is not conventionally expected. In practice, these family networks remain substantially dependent upon one another for mutual assistance and as a source of social activity. They share not only one another's regular company, but also a range of duties, obligations, rights and resources which link their homes both functionally and conceptually as "extended households".<sup>4</sup>

Child care, for example, is commonly provided by grand-

parents on a routine basis. Such help, while often relied upon by working couples in order to make a second income possible, may be called upon to meet any number of less compelling daily needs. The frequent movement of children between these homes is, in fact, generally normalized through the presence of toys, juvenile furniture (frequently the same pieces their parents played with), and even separate rooms in the grandparental homes, which are earmarked for the grandchildren. Further, such movement is not limited to infants and young children. One commonly finds that children continue to visit their grandparents on their own as they grow, at times staying for meals or spending the night and in effect using the house as a second home. The teenage children of family I knew, for example, watched television and played cards with their grandparents in the evenings and even used their den as a place to entertain dates.

Labor is exchanged continuously between the homes of these networks. Adult children for example, may commonly be relied upon to perform routine duties at parental homes such as yardwork, trash disposal, assisting with spring and fall cleaning, and making the various seasonal adjustments that may be required by an elder's home. As parents age and/or are widowed such "assists" are taken on as obligations by the children. The work is not all directed one way however. Projects of all kinds may become occasions for the combined

efforts of the extended network. Billy Kurtz, for example, relied on the labor of his grandfather, his father, brother, mother, and father-in-law in renovating his home, in much the same way that Agnes Morton called on her mother and daughter to help when she set out to make new curtains for her home. Special projects as well the normal course of household duties are regularly shared in this way along with whatever vehicles, tools, equipment, advice, or references are needed.

Economic and material resources are also extensively pooled between the homes of these networks. Financial assistance is directed most commonly from parents to off-spring (and occasionally between siblings) during the early years when they "go to house-keeping" and begin to raise their own children. This aid comes in the form of outright grants, offers to co-sign mortgages, loans, or the offer of a second (usually inherited) home owned by the parents for nominal rent. Material assistance is more common and constant within these networks and tends, moreover, to be multi-directional where financial aid was not. Young couples as they set up housekeeping, are staked in their new homes with offers of furnishings and other necessities from all the other households in the extended net. It is, in fact, not uncommon for both financial and material assistance to be extended for as much as ten years into a couple's marriage. The process of pooling however, ultimately continues on a multi-lateral

basis between all the homes of the net throughout their extended life-cycles. Furniture, decorative items, tools, appliances and even houses may circulate between the members of these networks in this way. (See chapter five for a full discussion).

Meals are shared routinely during daily or weekly visits and food will be exchanged within these networks during holiday rounds. Baking and cooking will often in fact be coordinated between the several homes of a family group at Christmas and Easter in order to pool labor and expertise and provide for large and varied assortments of prepared foods. The holidays are also attended by visits and a variety of customary activities which bring the members of these households together under one roof.

Through all of these various devices, then, the conditions for the sustained interdependence of households are established. They remain functionally and interactionally interconnected, and their boundaries intermingle in both behavior and popular conception. This is clearly illustrated for example, in the greeting behavior of members of these networks as they pass between one another's homes.

Historically and cross-culturally the threshold to the home has been treated as a special location warranting certain customs or conventionalized forms of behavior in passage. Both Van Gennep (1960) and Raglan (1964) for example, discuss entrance into the home as a transition from

profane to sacred space, or simply from foreign to domestic worlds, and they survey myriad customs designed to protect the home from evil, mark respect for the owners, or signify the entrant's passage and incorporation into the house. Frake (1975) saw the approach and entry to the home to be a conventional performance context which required certain regularized verbal routines and, as with Kendon's more general study of greeting (1973), saw the behavior of greeting and entering to be important in framing the relationship of participants and the interaction to follow. From both a theoretical and historical perspective it may then be expected that the manner in which greetings and access at the threshold are managed may potentially convey a great deal about how the home is regarded by those involved. (Is it treated as private or public space? Is entry into another's "personal" domain acknowledged? Is some display of respect by the entrant, or of welcome by the inhabitants, required?) Secondly, one might also hypothesize that verbal and non-verbal behavior during entrances and leave-takings may serve in "framing" a visit behaviorally as a visit. That is they may serve in establishing and marking the relationships and respective roles and statuses of those involved (Kendon and Ferber 1973:592).

In Peterburg, one finds that entrances and exits by members of a kin group are largely unattended by greetings or verbal routines when they pass into one another's homes.

Members, for example, are not expected to wait to be admitted to the home when visiting but may instead simply enter without announcing themselves. Sally Kaufman pointed out that this applied equally to those few closest friends who were considered to be part of the kith/kin network that links these households:

We go in and out of each other's houses quite frequently, unannounced, and we don't knock when we come in - that's just family. [D4B:180]

In general, locals indicated that family and intimates could be expected to enter the home as if it were their own. "Good friends" might shout a greeting as they entered and waited near the door, and all others would be expected to knock and remain outside. My own observations have essentially confirmed this stratification of entry privileges.

One finds here that comings and goings may not be attended by any form of overt greeting or acknowledgement. Verbal routines especially tend to be minimized and very often simply omitted. What can be observed quite commonly as kin enter is the rapid exchange of non-verbal acknowledgements (eye contact for example or a smile), and the immediate initiation of conversation. In practice this often assumes the appearance of two people simply continuing a conversation that was momentarily interrupted. One arrives and "enters" a conversation without allusion to the arrival itself.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, leave-taking may be restricted to comments or paralinguistic elements marking the conclusion

of a discussion or else simply be omitted. "Goodbyes" or formalized expressions of closure are commonly left unstated and seem largely to be unnecessary within these groups. This is of course to characterize greeting behavior in a most general way but it should contribute to our sense of the relationship of these households and the status of the extended kindred in one another's home. By virtue of this behavior the homes are manifestly *not* treated as the private and distinct province of each nuclear group. Boundaries are instead permeable for the extended group and all are granted rights of access which effectively accord them status as members of each household. Minimizing those verbal and non-verbal routines which are commonly used to mark passage into and out of the home, serves in particular to mark the status of these visitors as accepted and regular members of the household. Comings and goings are not actively marked and visits are not framed either as discrete events or as occasions necessitating any formal acknowledgement. As Goffman has suggested, engagements "tend to be initiated with an amount of fuss appropriate to the period of lapsed contact, and terminated with the amount appropriate to the assumed period of separation" (1963:102). By not conceptually segmenting the stream of interaction between these households then, the greeting customs of these people seem instead to testify to the "on-going" and continuous nature of the commerce between family homes. As we have seen, life



spills routinely from one home to the other and members treat each other's homes as part of their daily existence.

While the houses of this borough maintain the appearance of separate dwellings, and even while the elderly talk of their ability to remain in their homes as proof of their "independence", the homes of these extended kith/kin networks are functionally and socially interdependent.

Sentiment, memory, shared experience and a sense of lineage all work as powerful and tangible forces in maintaining the bonds between the homes of these family networks. Traditional patterns of mutual assistance tie them functionally, as social interaction connects them experientially, and history binds them as elements of a lineage system in time.

Members of the community are also just as likely to draw these homes, and any patterns that emerge through them, together in their evaluation of the family and the individual member whose reputation is intimately bound to the family's repute. For just as the recounting of lineage information about anyone and everyone is a common topic of conversation in this county, so too is the exchange of household histories and occupancy records for buildings. Who lived in the house before? How did they treat it? Where did those people live before? Where do their siblings and parents live? What are those houses like? All of this is considered a fair subject for talk. Information of this sort is actively exchanged as part of a system of gossip through

which people maintain and circulate a depth of information about the homes of their town and the county at large. As a result of this, social pressure may commonly be felt and addressed to all parts of a family network. Neighbors unhappy with the condition of another's home may bring pressure to bear on the owner's parents if they are contemporaries. Parents will maintain an interest in the condition and conduct of their children's homes and children will always make sure to monitor the needs and conditions of their parents's, siblings's and relatives's homes. In each case they are aware that community disapproval may well accrue to them as to the owner of the individual home.

To summarize then, in practice and by repute the individual family home in this community is understood as part of a larger network of houses joined together by kinship, shared resources, and common experience. The house, much like any individual in the community, does have an identity and integrity as a separate entity for evaluation. However, its material boundaries may not finally fully "contain" the household through which a family and its identity within the community is assessed.

#### **Temporal Extensions of the Home**

Beyond the formidable accumulation of household lineages that most residents of this county seem to possess, there exists a lifetime of direct experience in watching the

homes around them evolve through time. Watching locals inspect the landscape as they drive along roads they have covered thousands of times before, one realizes that the surveillance and the curiosity never seems to abate. People follow one another's homes through time. They are generally aware of a home's past, and of its present circumstances and they can most often recognize or speculate about its future direction. In addition they can correlate this with an understanding of how old the family is, what stage of development it is in, and a rough approximation of the family's resources. Such a depth of familiarity and the perspective on homes it affords, has to be recognized as fundamental to how the people of this county organize their expectations for, and interpretations of, any given home. By virtue of it, all house-related behavior may be recognized as varying systematically through time, and evaluative strategies and criteria conditioned by the perception of where a household is located in the course of its life-cycle. The house is essentially viewed as "process in time", as an object on a trajectory defined by normative expectations for the progress of the family home. The remainder of this study attempts to illuminate this perspective at various points as it applies to different aspects of the home. For the present, however, the nature of this orientation and its communicational implications can be illustrated in terms local orientations to home maintenance and

"improvement".

### Housing Trajectories

A number of inter-related assumptions guide local behavior in buying and maintaining homes as well as planning for, and pacing their repair and elaboration. Perhaps most importantly it is assumed that once a couple has acquired a home they will remain there for life. One doesn't move in order to gain more space, or make money on the home, or "move up" to a "better" or more fashionable neighborhood.<sup>3</sup> The home is not treated as an economic resource to be bargained with or exploited for profit. Nor is it treated as a kind of social dress to be discarded when a more desirable or prestigious form enters the market or becomes attainable. The home is again, conceived as the locus of family life. It is a setting for the growth of the family and for the maintenance of bonds within a network that is generally confined to a circumscribed geographical area. Residential continuity is important to the stability of these traditional networks of affiliation and they in turn are influential in holding family members to specific "enclaves" or areas of the county. The expectation therefore holds among locals that once a family has acquired a home, they will expand and adapt it to meet their needs in subsequent years rather than simply move to achieve the same results. It is equally expected that young couples purchasing a home will buy

conservatively, that is, well within their means to pay. As a result it is assumed that few will start out with a "finished package", a modern, convenient home in good condition and of sufficient size to meet all projected needs. Rather local standards prescribe that an "affordable" home be acquired, that emphasis be placed on paying the mortgage off as quickly as possible (commonly within fifteen years), and that any remaining financial resources be directed to the house and the needs of the children.\*

There is no shame for the young family living in a home that is old or small or needs repair. Substantial criticism in fact accrues to the couple starting out in a sizeable house in good condition that seems to meet all their needs. The assumption commonly made is that they are using their incomes unwisely and probably spending money that is not their own. In practice the majority of couples, even those who build their own homes, do start out with something less than they might expect they will need. Contractors have recognized the prevalence of this ethic and have, in effect, institutionalized it by providing an option in building which provides that the builder frame the house and finish only a portion of the interior, leaving the remainder for the owners to complete at their own pace and largely through their own labor. [Bi-levels, for example, are usually left by the builder with the top floor completed while the first floor is left bare of walls, flooring, or partitions as a

raised cement basement.] The vast majority of new homes built for other than elderly clients are contracted on this basis in the county, and in fact the largest contractor here no longer even provides the option of having walls and woodwork finished by the builders.

The same frugal ethic which locates young families in their homes is expected to guide their efforts to repair and maintain the buildings. The couple, in buying, maintaining, and improving their home are taking on a life-long process. Repairs are to be undertaken in a piecemeal way as money allows. Once again, this is to be done in as economical a way as possible in order that debt be minimized if not avoided all together. As a result emphasis in maintaining the home is placed on the substitution of personal labor for money where possible. Bargains and second-hand materials will be used and accumulated as they become available, and time and patience will replace debt as a course to the home of choice. Carl Kaufman demonstrated this for example, in completing the bottom floor of his bi-level home:

As the buys came up, the bargains came up, we'd buy it. Then we got to the point where we had the paneling, we had the ceiling tile, I'd found some doors on close-out, we had a nice tax return coming to buy the carpet, I'd painted the walls to match the paneling, and we were ready to go.

It was only in this way that after five years in his home, he was able to get his friends together and complete the major living area of his home. His wife Sally, provides a

summary view of how the house evolved in this way, with each step drawing on gifts of materials and labor:

We refer to it as our "ten year plan". We've been in the house seven years now and we of course couldn't afford to do all the things we wanted to at the time we built the house. Such as, the garage which was added two years later; we want to put in a screened-in porch, which we hope to do next spring...; we added a fence; we bought a second (adjoining) lot and did up our yard, which we hadn't done initially when we moved in; we completed the basement two years ago; this year we hope to complete the last room which is the "train room" - that'll be the train room for the time being. When the kids get older it may change as time goes on. We hope to have two more children in which case we may add on bedrooms out back. Again, as the family grows and changes, we hope to be able to change our home if we're in a financial position to do it. [D4A: 163, emphases added]

The home is expected, then, to be an on-going project, both for the sake of financial responsibility and, further, because of the belief that a home should be a family's "avocation". The home and the conveniences and comforts it affords are in a sense to be "earned", to be the product of sustained effort. There is in some part a solemn Calvinist sense that all gains must be justified through work. There is as well a clear pleasure taken from working-on the home and the sense of sustained "progress" that it offers. Notice the attitude of Dave and Barbara Stine, a couple in their middle thirties, after years of extensive work on their home:

- B: If I reach the point where there's nothing else to do with the house - y'know you couldn't get anymore furniture, you couldn't do this, you couldn't do that - well there's nothing to look forward to doing.
- D: If we get to the point where we've lost all creativity

with this home - y'know, we've bought all the pictures and repainted, wallpapered, and - what're you gonna do next?...We enjoy our home and as long as we have something to do here, then we're more satisfied. So, we might just tear the house down and start over just for something to do sometime. I think that's just what any family (would do) - that's just American.  
[D17A:200]

The commitment that this suggests toward the building is the standard here and it is taken locally as evidence of an appropriate commitment of effort and resources to one's family.

Homeowners in this community will plan therefore on a steady progression of improvements to the home and because of it, a family's house may at any given moment be conceived simply as a point along a course - a moment in time. The time-bound sense that this lends to the condition of a home at any given moment is particularly strong in the early years of a household when the most dramatic changes and repairs are being made to the structure. However, as the Stines indicated, families continue to work on their homes, and to the extent that the house's progress is tied to the development of the family, they will also incorporate anticipated needs for the future as part of their plans. The younger Kaufman's for example, chose their house design and basement floorplan once they understood how the home could be expanded to meet the needs of more children. The porch was anticipated not only as a pleasant addition for the family but also as additional space needed for that time



when the children began to entertain dates at home. Plans were made in laying out the basement to provide for their widowed mothers in later years when they might need home care, and thought was given to how the house would meet the couple's own needs when the children were gone and they had retired. In this way the expectation of continuous improvement to the home is coordinated with expectations for its adaptation to the evolving needs of the family. As a result, there is a broad patterning discoverable in the order and pace at which the people of this community make repairs and adaptations to their homes.

Initially, insofar as the timing of acquisition is concerned, the prevailing goal among couples here is to establish their own household before having any children. Those couples in the parental generation of the people I studied (marrying in the late 1940's and the '50's), commonly lived initially with parents for one or two years. Couples marrying over the past twenty years have tended to rent apartments (often from their parents) while both members worked to generate a substantial downpayment for a home. All couples are expected to be quite disciplined about saving at this time, and I found many devoting at least one entire salary during this period to their savings account. It seems clear that contemporary newlyweds have been more concerned (and better able) to delay the arrival of children than were their parents. These couples (principally in the

middle income groups and much less often in the working class), as a result have tended to self-consciously coordinate plans for a home and for a family in order to maximize the resources they have available in acquiring and renovating a home. This kind of advantage has not uncommonly led to complaints by older residents of this county who feel that "young people today" expect too much when they are young and are starting out with better houses than they should have.

Over the past thirty years, a number of broadly shared priorities have been manifest in the pattern of repairs which the new owners have undertaken. Immediate attention is devoted to repairs on damage that cannot wait, and to the "mechanicals" (such as the heating, plumbing and electrical systems), in order to guarantee their dependability. Beyond such requisite repairs, two other aspects of the home are consistently singled out for immediate attention. First, the kitchen and secondly the yard and exterior of the house. "Modernization" of the kitchen is widely regarded as a priority in this county which came so late to indoor plumbing. Without for the present speculating about the import of the kitchen (see chapter 4), we can say that couples seem uniformly to regard improvements to the kitchen (to the plumbing, counters, or cabinets for example), or its simple redecoration as a traditional part of assuming possession of a home. The sense also prevails that the exterior of the home should be attended to as quickly as

possible. The home's exterior condition is taken to reflect on both the owners and the neighborhood in general since it will affect the "look" of the area. How this is handled will therefore be widely regarded as evidence of how responsible a neighbor the new owners intend to be.

During the next five or six years of ownership, efforts are directed to the remainder of the home. Walls, floors and ceilings are steamed, sanded, painted and refinished. Work begins in the public rooms of the house and moves in time to the bedrooms. Any major adjustments to the floorplan required to accommodate the family will also be made in these early years of the household. Most commonly these include the addition of bedrooms and alterations to the living spaces in the home (see chapter 4). Following the initial repairs, necessary renovations and top-to-bottom painting and papering, the homes of this community have tended to enter a more "settled" phase during which available income was more apt to be directed to "filling-out" the home's furnishings. Maintenance work on the house should continue, as will smaller improvement projects. Lawn and gardens are embellished on an on-going basis.

The next patterned occurrence in the course of repairs and improvements emerges some 10-15 years after the establishment of the household. More homes undergo some expansion at this point as families add extra bathrooms, a porch or a den. New painting and papering projects are also

initiated. This resurgence of activity seems tied to developments within the family. Children have reached the age where they are held more responsible and accountable for the care of the home. The children's friends are also brought into the home in greater numbers at this time and they are, by all accounts, regarded as a primary source of information about the interiors of other families's homes. Children will also at this time be approaching their teenage years when additional, private space is needed to encourage them to bring their dates into the family sphere. Many of the parents I spoke to thus plainly gave as their motivation for renovations and changes that occurred during this phase a desire to provide a home their children would be proud to bring their friends to.

Finally, a last round of renovations and changes to the home are often initiated some four or five years after the departure of the children as the parents begin to accumulate expendable income. Changes occurring here may be adaptations that a couple had not been able to achieve in earlier years. However what is seen just as frequently is a round of luxury consumption with new appliances, new recreational features, bathrooms and other embellishments added to the home in order to increase its comfort and convenience. By and large couples entering this stage of renovation have a fairly specific "wish list" of changes which they have developed over the years. This final swelling of attention to the

buildings and grounds tends however, to be of limited duration and scope. Other common alterations made at this time include adaptations designed to help in nursing an ailing parent or mate or simply to cope with the frailties of old age (downstairs baths, ramps replacing stairs, first floor bedrooms and so on). Variations in this pattern occur when retired parents choose to move to smaller housing more suited to their needs or when one parent dies and the survivor remains alone in the home. In this latter circumstance, widows and widowers rarely show any substantial interest in re-decorating or embellishing the home. Eventually, in the latter years of most any household's existence, its layout and component features become fixed. These homes are in many ways embodiments of past labors and aspirations where the homes around them, guided as they are by the shared goal of "on-going gains", are by comparison directed to future growth and improvement.

This is a necessarily loose ordering of events in the maintenance of the house, it embodies the outlines of the progression of the majority of homes in this study however. Not all homes realized the elements of this progression to an equal extent at equal rates - "performance" in this realm was stratified by income. Some mobile upper middle income families are able to achieve the "full package" quickly while their families are young. Others, like the Wagners, lag well behind and their low income working class status in

the community becomes plainly visible to locals simply by virtue of the pace at which their home progresses. Families such as the Wagners find themselves by virtue of their circumstances not only with less available money to invest in the home, but they also often start from "further behind" with their home. The Wagners in fact lived in an apartment for ten years before they could buy a home and when they did, they bought one of the borough's oldest houses. For the past ten years spare income has, as a result, gone almost exclusively into repairs and maintenance. Even as they now prepare to make their first renovations, (adding a den and re-papering bedroom walls for the first time), their "improvements" may be adjudged, by virtue of the prevailing pattern of behavior in the community, to be five or ten years "late".

Nonetheless, one finds here that in their aspirations for their homes, the working classes describe a course in time that matches that of their more affluent neighbors. They share the same ethic of "constant progress". In this patterned approach to the repair and elaboration of the home, therefore, there emerges a normative model of conduct, a code, broadly ratified in practice, which serves as a basis for the evaluation of the progress of all households in this community.

## Trajectories and Interpretation

As the people of this county look at one another's homes they have a set of time-related expectancies which condition their interpretations. First, the home should be in an on-going state of repair and elaboration. Secondly, such housing activities should proceed at a certain pace and in a relative order that is apparent in the prevailing pattern of maintenance activity in their community.

When questioned about their evaluative strategies, vis-a-vis home maintenance, residents of this borough typically outline the need for a clean, orderly and well maintained home. They also commonly refer to this ethic of "on-going progress" as an explicit guide to behavior. These standards are perhaps the most easily articulated and generally applicable for use in evaluating the progress of one another's homes. The patterned trajectory found to characterize the life-course of most households however, is not so readily elicited as a conscious element of their thinking. It forms a pattern of activity of which they are generally little aware, yet to which they are nonetheless responsive. When questioned directly about the import of this normative pattern there was general agreement about its existence and most admitted their concern that they "match-up" to it. Its influence could also be readily observed in the criticisms one heard aimed at others for things they had not done to their homes or for the rate at which they did

them. The comment around town about Horace Shoemaker for example was that "he's been in there ten years and he still hasn't got that yard cleaned up! And to think of his wife still working in that same kitchen!" It is evident that matters of pace and order in maintenance might be treated with equanimity, relative to the personal circumstances of individual homeowners or efforts made in other areas to improve a family's circumstances. However, beyond these conditions the standard home trajectory provided a pattern of activity within regularly structured contexts which served as a standard against which the performance of each homeowner was weighed.

What makes this process of evaluation possible ultimately is the depth of knowledge these people have of one another's behavior in time. As a group, these people are capable of noting *change*, and in the pattern of changes, the *course* of a home. Thus when a family first occupies a building, people watch and discuss what changes are made to a structure whose present and past they are likely to know well. Each adaptation (or the absence of adaptation) is taken as information about what kind of person has moved in, what their priorities are, and what kind of neighbor they will be. Shortly after a young man had bought and begun to work the Book farm just outside of town, for example, my neighbor pointed out that he had cleared out fence rows



where the Books had been losing good ground for years. She also noted that he had laid out his corn rows in a new pattern designed to minimize the drainage problems that had long plagued the Books. "This man," she noted with satisfaction, "knows what he's doing." Similar subtle distinctions are made with respect to all households.

In time the significance of any changes will be assessed against the background of the owner's *own* history of decisions as well as against those of any previous owners. In time, the pattern of activity will also convey to residents a sense of the course a home is on - how timely repairs and additions are likely to be, whether the home will proceed through incremental steps or large scale projects, how comprehensive their efforts may be, whether the owners are moving towards renovation or restoration, and so on. It is in this sense that residents implicitly chart one another's course as they live together year in and year out. Time and a history of behavior is, it should be noted, the most trusted index of character and judgement in this community, whether one is looking at a person's house or the way they raise their children. That they should choose to emphasize time-proven patterns in house related behavior is therefore entirely consistent with prevailing methods for assessing the validity of any impression or judgement.

The family home is by custom then, observed in this community within a temporal frame. Moreover, this temporal

perspective plays a fundamental role in conditioning their processes of interpretation. The result is an essentially age-graded system of evaluation in which the condition and progress of any home is judged as relative to the age of the family within and the duration of their homestead. Finally it should recognize that residents qualify the goal of "sustained progress" that underlies this orientation, with what they considered to be an important proviso: the point of this lifetime of material improvement should not be construed to be either simply to escalate the dollar value of the home, or to "get ahead" of their neighbors. The rule holds that one must avoid the appearance of status display in making these improvements and this need in turn works to limit and conform the kinds of choices homeowners make in repairing, "improving" and (as we will see) in furnishing their homes. The goal should instead be to improve the comfort and convenience of the home and the resources it provides for the family's enjoyment. The point should be to embellish the family's standard of living, not competitive positioning, and this, residents insist, is the object of interpretation when these buildings are brought under scrutiny.

### **Conclusion**

For residents of this county, as with Mr. Leary on his back porch, the home does not exist as an isolate abstracted in either time or space. As a "place", home is the center of

a network of relationships. It is "achieved" through a history of shared labor, resources, and experience which are pooled between the membership of an interdependent network of kith and kin.\* "Home" is, to a significant extent, both functionally and socially coterminus with this grouping and its activity, and not necessarily, or at all times with the material boundaries of a single building which may house it in some part. The home "occurs" instead as an element of a larger entity which functionally defines an "extended household". The home is viewed as well as the setting for the full life-course of a family's existence. It is, as a result, understood as an object on a course in time which changes and evolves in coordination both with the life-cycle of those within and the time-bound conventions and expectations the people of this area hold for it. When these people turn to the home as an object for comparison and interpretation therefore, it is to this sort of social entity - a building whose spatial and temporal boundaries are defined through social activity - that they direct their evaluative attentions.

There are undoubtedly a variety of ways in which to dissect and to characterize the ways in which residents of an area "conceive" of their homes. I certainly have not tried to characterize the range of perspectives people experience in looking at them. My concern however, has been to understand elements of that structure of expectations

which shape the way locals interpret one another's homes. These views of the interpenetration of households and the time-bound perspective employed in evaluating them, have to be considered fundamental to understanding the communicational nature of the home and its contents.

The house may not be conceived to enclose all of the behavior, material elements or participants through which the status and identity of a household are conveyed or assessed. Rights, responsibilities and resources extend between the homes of an interacting, multi-generational network. Households are linked and so ultimately is the assessment of their values, priorities and reputation as a group. As we will see in chapters five and six, for example, furnishing and decorating the home is, to an important extent, a group effort. Standards are achieved at the level of this extended household, and judgements about these elements in any one home are therefore likely to accrue in some part to all members of the larger household. It must be said that each home and each family sustains an identity as a social entity - a communicational unit - but a primary element of each unit's identity is ultimately tied to its position within this larger structure of households.

The temporal qualities of the home in local conception provide perhaps the strongest qualifier to its use as an independent unit for analysis however. Information about its past and estimates of its future are treated as integral to

any image of its "present". Residents as such analyze a home within a "synthetic" present similar in nature to the "ethnographic present" scholars attempt to achieve in describing human activity. As Mary Douglas defines it:

This is a special tense that aims to concentrate past, present, and future into a continuous present. Perhaps not always used honestly, the ethnographic present has more merit than a reconstructed and misconstrued time dimension. It synthesizes into one temporal point the events of many periods, the value of the synthesis lying in the strength of the analysis of the perceived present. Whatever is important about the past is assumed to be making itself known and felt in the here and now. Current ideas about the future likewise draw present judgements down certain paths and block off others. (1979:23)

Similarly residents here view the present moment of a home as a product of its past and future. Their standards for evaluation will assume this perspective and therefore weigh the home against an array of expectations appropriate to the moment in which it is perceived to be located.

As a home is examined here therefore, observations and interpretations are not restricted to the wholly visible - to features available only at any given moment. Homes co-exist in this perspective at different stages, at different points in the temporal frame, and may therefore not always be taken as completely comparable. This is particularly salient when drawing comparisons or making distributional analyses. One would not for example, directly compare the condition of homes owned by a young family starting out or that of an elderly widow with the house of an expanding.

family with teenage children. If one wishes to understand and duplicate local standards and processes of evaluation here you have first, in effect, to ask "what time" each home is and know what is appropriately expected of it.\*

These orientations to the home guide nearly all processes of comparison and criticism. They are based in the stability and continuities that typify social life in this county and they rely heavily on a depth of mutual familiarity which only time and a shared public pool of information about one's neighbors can provide. One might well expect different orders of information and more immediately apparent components of homes to be the focus of interpretive schemas in more transient urban and suburban areas. However, at a theoretical level, I would reiterate that the findings in this county should make it apparent that such assumptions must remain an object for investigation and not simple presupposition.

### NOTES TO CHAPTER III

<sup>1</sup> Various researchers have similarly argued that "propinquity" must be treated as a relative term in assessing the presence and dimensions of a household. Bender provides a comprehensive argument in defining what he calls an "extended domestic unit" (1967 see also Yanagisako's thorough review 1979), while Goody simply discounts the need for co-residence as a factor in defining "extended families":

Whether these larger groups of kin (or non-kin) were all under one roof is of little importance from most points of view. An "extended Family" (in this sense) may consist of domestic groups either linked together in a large compound (household) or living nearby in the same locality; in the latter case it is morphologically a unit of rather the same kind of "extended family" as exists among any small scale community with a relatively stationary population. (1972:110)

Both essentially argue as I have that the sustained interaction and interdependence between family members provide for the functional and conceptual unity of these households. Sussman and Burchinall have suggested that such extensive mutual dependence is a "reality" for the broad cross-section of families in America and they in fact see the "kin family network" to be a more valid model of family organization in this country than the nuclear family model. "The description of the isolated, nuclear American family system, if valid, is " they claim, "most suited to the white, urban, middle class segment of American society." (1962:234) While I cannot generalize beyond the range of this county's stable and stationary population, it seems clear that the nuclear-family model is insufficient here and possibly misleading, especially to the extent that it leads us to treat the homes of this county as independent domestic units.

<sup>2</sup> I have seen much the same behavior here as people make telephone calls to family and friends. When the phone is answered by the person the caller is trying to reach, the caller will simply initiate the conversation, skipping-over any introductory greetings and assuming the listener recognizes the voice of the caller.

<sup>3</sup> In their review of research on decisions to move, Leslie and Richardson (1961) point out that studies have demonstrated variously that either career status or life-cycle position was the most significant determining factor (see also Fredland 1974). They find that the two work in combination: occupational mobility is important as an

inducement to relocate, and life-cycle is important in that families tend to move as they grow and require more space. That their finding contradicts what I have found in Ridge county is perhaps not surprising since they were working in suburban areas where, as Reisman (1950) has suggested, a different ethic may well prevail. Amongst contemporary, suburban, "other-directed" homeowners, he notes, the home is sold and living areas explored, as a matter of consumption. People shop for "nice neighborhoods" both for the status they afford and in order to live and raise their children with "good" people. Amongst the more traditional and "inner-directed" populations, he suggests, the homeplace tends to remain fixed and its stability symbolizes the overwhelming import of the extended family, and of the home as a locus of socialization activity.

Plainly this latter "traditional" ethic approximates the orientation of the people in Ridge county. The home is regarded as a family enclave located within a network of kith and kin relations and its sustained stability is both a product and vehicle of this structure of kith and kin relations. One therefore does not sell the home either to make space for the developing family (you adapt), or to make money or live with a better class of people - you stay in your home.

With this in mind it is interesting to note that after termination of the fieldwork for this study, Carl and Sally Kaufman were forced to sell their home to cover financial problems in Carl's business. Such a loss was regarded as a tragedy by many in the community and prayers were said for the family at their church. What interests us here is that in order to distance herself from this kind of publicity, Sally (a woman raised in the suburbs of the state capital) shifted from the local standard to the more cosmopolitan sort of orientation Reisman outlined in order to redefine the circumstances. They had not "lost" their home she insisted in public discussion, but simply sold it for economic advantage:

You know, the people here buy or build a house and they don't move out until they're going some place six feet under. But I come from a place where I'm used to people selling their houses every three years to make a profit."

Prior to this episode she and her husband fully embodied the standard that you adapt your home rather than move to meet a need. They insisted they would never move. By these standards (those of the community) what she now suggested was unthinkable and so she manifestly referred the attitude to another (suburban) context in which it was suitable. Her comment demonstrates an implicit recognition of the vigor of the local attitude and illustrates one of the ways people who "fall" before a local standard attempt to adjust (see chapter 6).

\* The distribution of priorities differs substantially on farms from



what I am describing here however, and this changes the trajectory of farm homes substantially. As in the case of the Stines (Sr.s), all resources may well be directed into the livestock, farm buildings, equipment, supplies and so on, for the major part of a household's existence, leaving the house with only enough to maintain a basic level of repair. It has been suggested to me by locals that trajectory is otherwise evaluated in the case of farmsteads in terms of the progress of the fields, livestock and farm buildings, but my own research in this area is insufficient to evaluate this point.

• Yi-Fu Tuan has used the term "place" to make the helpful distinction between "space", which may be thought of as physical, abstract and empty; and that kind of space which is composed or defined by experience:

Place is a center of meaning constructed by experience. (152)...Space is abstract. It lacks content; it is broad, open and empty. Place by contrast is the past and present,...place at all scales, from the armchair to the nation, is constructed of experience; it is sustained not only by timber, concrete and highways, but also by the quality of human awareness. (1975:165)

As he develops the concept, he describes it as something realized and composed principally through a history of sensory interaction with an environment. He tends also to treat it as an idiosyncratic or personal orientation. In using the term here I am intending to emphasize that aspect of place which emerges through interaction with others who may also be associated with that space. I am alluding to an orientation which sees a space to be a setting for a set of relationships and understands it to be defined through a history of shared experiences.

• I mean to direct this comment most particularly to those research approaches which compare all homes directly in a community in order to decipher their value as indices of status. People such as Warner (1960), Chapin (1935), and Chapman (1955) conduct their analyses of component features and conditions on the assumption that all the homes in their sample are by local standards equivalent units for comparison and that they exist within the same temporal frame. The lesson I take from residents of this county is that if one intends to understand processes of status assessment and conferral within a particular community of reference, these assumptions must be compared to local standards and methods of interpretation. In Ridge County, their assumptions would effectively mask the subtleties of evaluation which we have discussed here and likely prove misleading.

**CHAPTER IV**  
**SPACE AND PLACE WITHIN THE FAMILY HOME**

The definition and description of communicational significance in the use of space in homes has not been precisely stated. Space is a social resource, yet it could also be described simply as a by-product of other activities of more apparent interest to those studying communication. From a communicational perspective, it can be considered alternatively as an environmental factor which conditions behavior, or as a medium which encodes behavior. Physical space can be examined as an aspect of context, with an array of fixed or variable features which precede human interaction. On the other hand, it may be treated principally as something which takes form (and meaning) through the concerted activity of the people who use it. Space can be treated as a phenomenon whose dimensions are relative to the culture or situation in which it occurs; or alternatively, it can be measured, quantified and studied as property to be owned and compared, much like any other commodity.

Through the course of this field work two broad areas of theoretical interest shaped my initial observations and collection of data. Of first concern was to examine archi-

tectural space and consider if and how the size of homes are compared in the community and how this might serve in the negotiation of status. Many researchers, e.g. Warner (1949), Chapin (1935) Chapman 1955, used homes as material indices. These studies quantify and compare the relative size of houses and/or the number and kinds of rooms in houses in a community sample, in order to evaluate the socioeconomic status of their owners. Warner in particular emphasized house size, in correlation with condition, as the fastest and "most objective" criterion to use as an index of status. In such cases house size is seized upon by researchers as an objective, diagnostic measure which they could apply to the housing of a community in order to map relative class or status. Within the context of this study of localized processes of interpretation and social comparison, however, my concern was to investigate how residents themselves evaluated this dimension of the home, to determine if and how it functioned in their evaluation of social standing.

A second, broader question concerned the nature of actual space use in the home, its relationship to the architectural spaces structured into the building, and the implications that both building and behavior bore for the nature of communication within the domestic sphere. There is a substantial literature devoted to the relationship of building spaces to the behavior of those using them. In the ideal, as Rapoport notes, those working from architectural

data believe "houses and settlements are the physical expression of the *genre de vie*, and this constitutes their symbolic nature"(1969:46-7). The physical structure of the home, in this view, can be taken as an encoding of the methods used for organizing people and activity, and thus as an expression of principles guiding processes of family communication and organization (cf. Clark 1976). Such a correspondence is however, only generally found in "simple" societies and is true only in varying degrees in other societies (Rapoport 1976:24). As a result, the relationship of architectural arrangements and actual patterns of behavior is typically treated as one of "mutual interaction" as custom and convention are thought to intervene and influence actual patterns of usage.'

In either case, the ways in which people and activities are organized in the spaces of a dwelling are regarded as having a major impact on how the flow of communication and the structure of relationships in the household are regulated. Relevant questions in this regard include how activities are sited, how mutual access, privacy and the overlap of activities are negotiated, how different members of a household are combined or segregated, and so on. The ways in which these relationships are managed will, as Smith has demonstrated, control the number, frequency and type of interactions between inhabitants. Thinking of parent-child relations she comments:

The patterning of actual access realized by the spatial usage of a particular household states the effective boundaries and articulations of social control within the family...(1971:57)

As I have examined the spatial organizations of homes in Peterburg and ensuing patterns of usage, my concern has therefore ultimately been addressed to the conditions which organize processes of communication within the home.

In characterizing proxemic behavior and its organizational implications, researchers have repeatedly identified a distinction between dwellings organizing general use areas and those tending toward a differentiation of spaces into special use areas. The former combines activities, supports the communal use of space and promotes group interaction, influence and cohesion. The latter divides activities, isolates household members and diminishes group interaction. Smith has suggested these tendencies in usage need to be followed systematically if we are to understand family organization (1971 see also Altman and Lett 1972). Riesman (1950) has suggested that a historical shift from the first form to the latter has contributed to a coinciding shift away from tradition and the family as primary socialization influences.

Approaching the issue from the perspective of architectural history, Glassie has described a similar progression from "open" plans to increasingly divided and differentiated ones. He identifies this as a fundamental trend in the

history of domestic architecture which has had important social implications:

As I discovered in Virginia and then more richly in Fermanagh, and as I believe to be the case throughout the European tradition, the fundamental change in architectural history entails pulling the Hall away from contact with the external world...simplifying its use through the creation of a separate kitchen that draws its work off and leaves it a center for entertainment. Around the newly polite Hall, specialized rooms...assemble, while over it chambers split and multiply. *The vestibule sets barriers between insiders and outsiders; the fragmentation of internal space...erects barriers between insiders; privacy increases.* (1982p.763 emphases added)<sup>2</sup>.

Deetz (1977) has described a similar evolution in other material artifacts (as well as homes), emphasizing a move away from communal to individualized organizing principles. Both suggest, as with Riesman (1950), that the physical organizations of homes strongly imply a historical evolution in interaction patterns amongst families living in modern dwellings.

As I examined the nature of space use in the homes of Ridge County therefore, my initial interest lay in characterizing usage in terms of this continuum from open/communal usage to differentiated/individualized usage. In trying to understand the communicational implications of spatial behavior I was concerned first with the value of the houses themselves as indices of actual usage. Did the buildings of this county show an evolution similar to that described above? Had behavior adapted with changes in the homes? Finally, I wanted to understand how usage, the

arrangement of activities and the management of interaction, was structured in these homes and to assess their implications for the flow of communication and organization of relationships in the home. The questions seemed particularly pertinent in this isolated and rural community where the majority of housing built in this century has been constructed by professional contractors using standardized designs imported from national sources outside the county.

In time what I learned was that a traditional structure of norms operates in this community which strongly qualifies the symbolic value of house size as a measure of status. The buildings themselves are similarly found to provide an unreliable indicator of patterns of actual usage. Where the buildings of Peterburg encode a record of variability and change, the manner of usage demonstrates a substantial continuity through time. In these continuities the residents of this borough have, to a large extent, minimized the organizational changes their houses have implied through the course of this century. As I will attempt to show, what has been maintained is a pattern of proxemic behavior that regulates processes of communication in a manner that both reflects and supports that kind of interdependent system of relations that marks family and community life here. It will be suggested that the persistence of this largely unexamined structure of preferences demonstrates an orientation to custom and tradition which broadly influences the ways in

which these people respond to, and mediate, fashion and change through the course of their lives.

In the pages to follow we will explore these dimensions of spatial behavior beginning with a look at measures of house size and their relation to status. Following this, a brief overview of the evolution of the major house plans adopted by this borough over the past eighty years will be provided. From this point I will discuss how family activity has responded to these developments in an attempt to understand present day patterns in behavior within this historical context. Looking first at arrangements within the home and then in the settlement pattern of the borough itself, I will examine how these people manage mutual access and privacy. Finally, the implications of these arrangements will be considered as they shape the nature of the home and the community as communicational contexts.

#### House Size and Social Comparison

Were we to enter Peterburg as if it were uninhabited, its buildings would present us with substantial variety of shapes and spaces from which to make inferences about their inhabitants. Looking at the sample from Table 4-1 for instance, it can be seen that the homes in town may vary graphically in size from 644 square feet to over 2900 square feet, and from four to eleven rooms. On the whole, the homes of the county conform to the national average of 5.7 rooms



Name	Room Type:							Total	
	LR/Parlor	FR	DR	KT	BR	Den	Others	Rooms	sq.ft.
Chapman	X	X <sup>1</sup>	X	XX	5	X	1	11	2930
Losch	X	X		XX	4	X	2	10	2142
Campbell	X	X	X-----X		3			7	1980
Stine, Sr.	X	X	X	XX	4		1	9	2120
Swartz	X	X	X <sup>2</sup>	XX	2			6	2112
Shelly	X	X	X	XX	5			9	2256
Kaufman Sr.	X		X-----X		3		1	7	1364
Miller, Sr.	X		X	XX	4		1	8	1782
Morton	X		X-----X		2		1	7	1800
Stine, Jr.	X	X	X-----X		3		2	9	2060
Kaufman Jr.	X	X		XX	3		2	8	2464
Kurtz E.	X	X		XX	3		2	8	2128
Miller, Jr.	X	X	X	XX	3			7	1112
Wagner	X			XX	3		1	6	1476
Kurtz	X			XX	2			4	760
Farrell	X			XX	2			4	644

XX - Designates a kitchen large enough for table and seating  
 X-X - Designates home where kitchen is too small to accommodate meals,  
 necessitating regular combined use with the diningroom  
 X<sup>1</sup> - "Library"  
 X<sup>2</sup> - "Junk Room"

**Table 4-1: Number of Rooms, Room Types, and Total Square Footage in the Homes of the Sample Families.**

per home, but borough homes are larger on average and tend to cluster around six or seven rooms. The presence of these variations provides anyone running a "windshield survey" (cf. Venturi et. al. 1972 ) with comparisons to scale. Yet even though increased size is associated with increases in the assessed value of homes in this community the relationship between size and status is, for telling reasons, not so clear<sup>3</sup>.

As Table 4-1 indicates, room number and house size do correlate broadly with the system of "social estimate" of this community as it was defined in chapter two. Each index points our way reliably to those families located at the top and bottom of the community's status system. However, as with most indices, it is in the difficult middle areas that the sensitivity and relevance of these criteria are tested. In this case, such measures of magnitude prove systematically misleading. For here a complex ethic intervenes. It is an ethic evidenced readily in Peterburg if one directs conversation around to the matter of house size. One will invariably hear testimonies of preferences for large two story houses, but the conversation will be punctuated by stipulations that the place should be "practical". One "dare not", you will be told, waste space by having more than you need, and one certainly should not have more than they can afford. As the conversation moves to more specific comparisons of family houses, it soon becomes apparent that the

value and import of this measure - amount of space - may change substantially depending on who or what is being discussed. The result is that space neither exists nor is employed here as a uniform "event" that is strictly comparable across homes. Measures which do not account for this variability in the sign-value of space will as a result prove misleading.

This can be seen if we compare the homes of the Morton and Kaufman parents with those of their children. Carl Kaufman's house is half again as large as his mother's home, much as Barb Stine's is substantially larger than her parents's postwar ranch. These facts seemed, however, to impress no one in the community on behalf of the children. This was not regarded as mobility. Responses to the comparison essentially attacked its validity given an array of other considerations. The parents, it was argued had bought homes at a time when housing and mortgages were scarce and they had followed the standard trajectory with their homes; improving them, expanding and embellishing over the years or, as with the Mortons, eventually acquiring a convenient retirement home after other financial priorities had been met. Perhaps most importantly it was felt the parents had demonstrated their worth and standing as neighbors and residents of the community *over a period of years* and had earned a measure of respect which their house size could not address. The fact that they had not "stepped up"

into bigger homes when their savings eventually permitted only confirmed local estimates of their good judgement.

The value of house size as a measure of social standing was relativized in local conception, then, by a knowledge of the circumstances under which these homes were acquired. Certain "performance" standards, which balanced measures of what space the parents had against what they needed, how they had lived in the spaces they had, and what they had *done* with to them over a period of years, were also considered. The raw scale of the children's homes, when juxtaposed against their parents's homes and accomplishments actually placed the children in jeopardy of being criticized for having too much too soon. A number were in fact criticized in this way, based in the standard that all things must be earned in time and acquired as measures of effort. Young families who tried to start-off with large and well appointed homes were in local regard, considered materialistic and intemperate. As one middle-aged housewife commented, such a drive for immediate gratification is considered a detriment to their character:

What do they have to live for? It does you good to want for things. I think it really matures you and you appreciate things much more. [D23A:530]

The importance of comments such as this should not be underestimated. For it is just such an ethic, an ethic of hard work and self-denial that is traditional to this county, which guides the interpretation of behavior in

public life here. It was in this light, that Carl Kaufman's spacious home was frequently cited as a premature claim to a status (that of successful businessman) which he had not yet earned. The younger Stines by contrast, were not rebuked because they shared a reputation as frugal hard workers and had also started out with a smaller home which they waited some five years to expand.

Within this local system of evaluation therefore, this purportedly "objective" measure is subordinated to consideration of other "more important" measures, including a knowledge of family history, itself perhaps the key component of an individual's reputation. The large home, provided it is an inherited family place, is an important concomitant of old family status, much as the small sub-standard home is a manifest sign of poverty. However, for the remaining residents, size is only one consideration integrated with assessments of how old you are, how you spend money, how you save, how frugally and fully you use the space you have, whether the home is inherited (and thus not to be lost regardless of size if possible), and an assortment of other ethical considerations that bear on the management of financial and material resources.

Looking beyond size and number to the actual names and functions of the home's articulated spaces, features can be discovered which can guide one to gross distinctions in the population. Referring to Table 4-1 again, a "snapshot view"

is provided of who has what kinds of rooms at one moment in time (1981). As might be expected, the minimum arrangement of rooms typically incorporates a kitchen, some kind of livingroom and one or more bedrooms. In many of the smallest homes, Farrell's for example, the entire ground floor may be experientially continuous with only a staircase or some kind of partial partitioning or furnishing separating the activity sites. In such cases these rooms were effectively only "areas" within a continuous space. To an extent the presence of only this minimum arrangement of rooms distinguishes the homes of the poorest families in this table. However, we should note that this array is also typical of many contemporary ranch homes here, especially when the common kitchen/diningroom area is treated as one room (see for example figure 4-6). The borough's middle class as a result is in many cases not to be distinguished from the poor by this standard.

The basic array is expanded upon with greatest frequency with the introduction of a family room or possibly a diningroom. What becomes distinctive in this sample and the county as a whole, are the specialized rooms included beyond the dominant kitchen/livingroom/bedroom and family room or diningroom configuration. Looking first at what I have labeled as "parlors"<sup>4</sup>, they can be seen to occur only among the old families of the borough or those who make a claim to this status, such as the upwardly mobile elder

Stine couple. The presence of parlors thus seems to mark off the old families and those with contacts and ambitions beyond the county from the remainder of the community. The remaining homes have livingrooms as primary use rooms or the "formal livingrooms" which succeeded the parlor and are subject to reduced usage since their occurrence assumes the presence of a family room. Two other rooms unmistakably associated with wealth were the "den" and the "library". The term, den, appears occasionally in common usage in free variation with "family room" but its application to a room belonging to the male head of the household denotes a chamber which, like the library, strongly suggested the presence of a professional and likely above average income owner to my informants.

Room types may therefore guide the local observer to certain distinctions between owners regarding status. However it must again be recalled that residents will typically apply such standards of interpretation within a temporal frame. As discussed in the previous chapter, houses will be examined in terms of previous condition, what has been done to them, and what sort of "course" they seem to be on under their present owners. Homes are expected to expand and change through the course of a family's tenure. The home is only provisionally isolated as a fixed and comparable index. Its components may be evaluated as relative to the household's age as much as to its member's social position.

Finally, it is necessary to keep in mind in drawing contemporaneous comparisons from a single "snapshot" view of these houses that a marked variability has been built into the county's buildings by the successive "waves" of construction that punctuated this century. Each wave left behind a repetition of a limited range of house forms that had captured the interest of that segment of the population which builds the majority of new homes in each era - the merchants, supervisors, professionals and retirees of the middle class. A quick review of the homes they have built during the past eighty years will help us understand how national fashions have been received here and how floorplans in the borough have evolved with respect to the communal use - specialized use continuum discussed above. In the interaction between these developments and actual patterns of use traced below, we will have a chance to see the relative influence of custom and convention on behavior here and recognize something of the durability of historically established patterns of interaction in the home.

#### **Recent Trends in Home Floorplans**

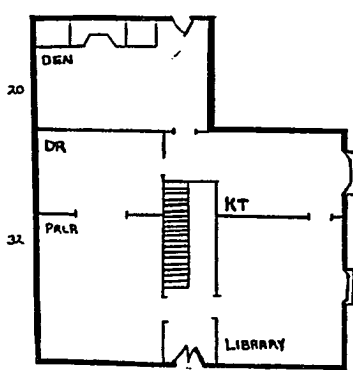
Many residents of the borough now in their 50's or older, recall the rigors their mothers subjected the family to in insuring the proper use of a parlor. While these rooms are nearly nonexistent now, common knowledge has it that before 1920 one wouldn't think of building a home without



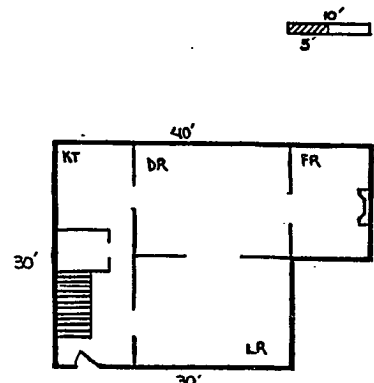
including a parlor. Indeed many of the smallest homes built in this period, both on farms and in the borough, were broken into the appropriate if diminutive array of rooms. The large Georgian farmhouse of the Chapmans incorporates perhaps the most common configuration of rooms in which the parlor appears (figure 4-1A). The smaller homes of the Kaufmans and Millers by contrast were adapted to include these rooms long before the present owners came to them.

With the Kaufmans, the back two rooms actually form the first floor of a small two story building that was turned to the side of its lot in order to accomodate a two story addition that gave it the necessary rooms and the facade of a farmhouse common to the region (figure 4-1G). The Miller home was expanded through the addition of its first new kitchen to allow for a similar division of specialized spaces. Given that the floor space of neither of these homes exceeds 800 square feet, we can see that the four room configuration was achieved at the cost of room size. The Miller's parlor for example was 11' x 14', while the Chapman's is 17' x 17' (see figure 4-1H).

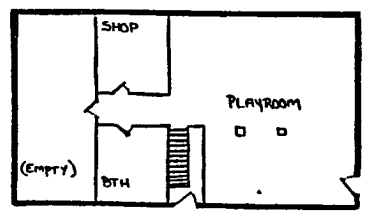
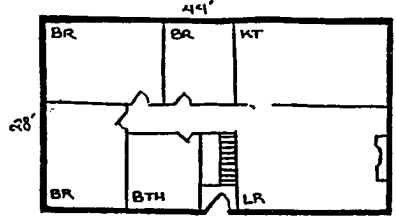
Homes built prior to the 1920's then, were either constructed or "broken up" to include the array of specialized rooms (sitting room, parlor, dining room, etc.,) that Glassie (1975) and others saw to follow an earlier communal house form. This decade however, saw a burst of building in the county that began a trend away from this



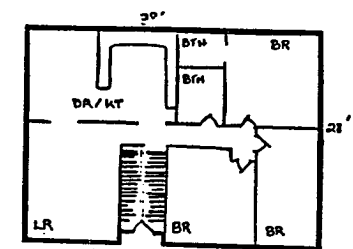
A: Chapman [1st of 2 Floors] 1680sq'



B: Campbell [1st of 2 Floors] 1050sq'

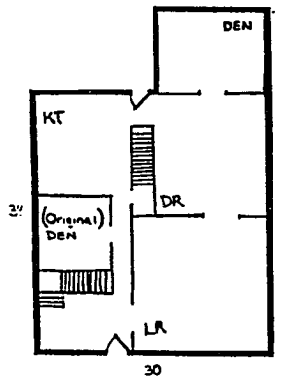


E: Kaufman, Jr. [Top and Bottom Floors] 1232sq'/ea.

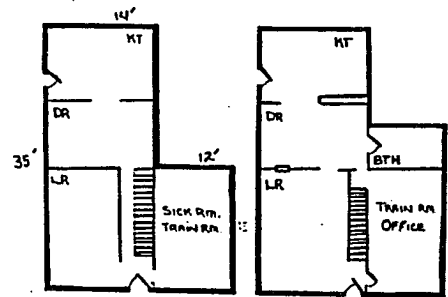
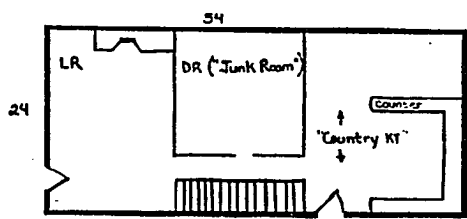


E: Kurtz, E. [1st of 2 Floors] 1064sq'

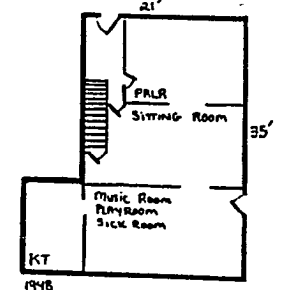
C: Shelly [1st of 2 Floors] 1188sq'



D: Swartz [1st of 2 Floors] 1296sq'



G: Kaufman, Sr. [1st of 2 Floors in two stages] 670sq'/730sq'



H: Miller, Sr. [1st of 2 Floors in 2 stages] 796sq'/1082sq'

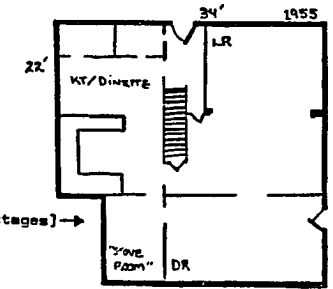
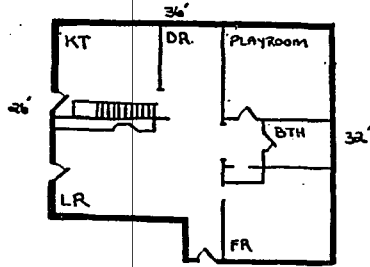
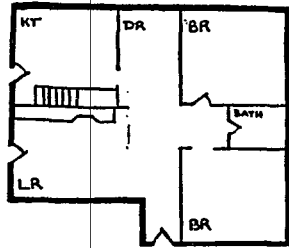
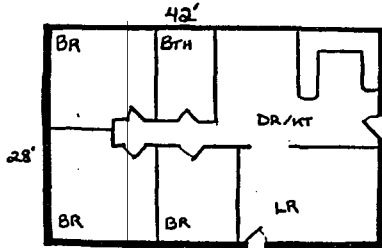


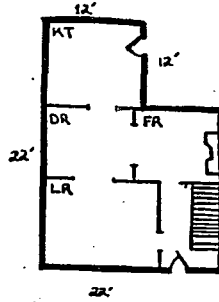
FIGURE 4-1: Floorplans of Selected Borough Homes (cont'd next page)



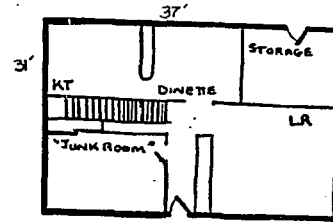
I: Stine, Dave & Barb  
[1st floor before and after 2nd floor  
addition] 1030sq'



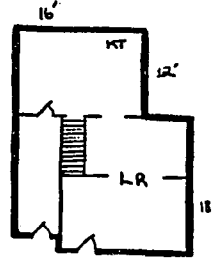
J: Merton 1176sq'



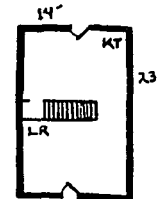
K: Miller, Jr. [1st of 2 floors]  
628sq'



L: Wagner [1st of 2 floors]  
1047sq'



M: Kurtz, B. [1st of 2 floors]  
560sq'



N: Farrell [1st of 2 floors]  
322sq'

FIGURE 4-1: (cont'd)

fractionizing of the home's interior. In Peterburg this expansion occurred along the radiating arms of Morningside Lane and Fairview St (Fig. 2-2). The house of choice for the young Swartz couple, whose home began the wave of development in 1919, was what became known as the "American four-square" (cf. Kahn 1982). This house was a staple of middle class housing in America in this period and there is no doubt that the prestige of the Swartz name contributed to the desirability of the design in the borough. Whatever the reason, this house in its various permutations dominated building at this time.

The foursquare emerged from the expense and ornamentation associated with Victorian architecture as a pointedly simple, practical and economical alternative house form designed to produce the most amount of room for the least amount of money. The bedrooms remained isolated from the business of the house on the second floor while the first now tended toward an integration and "opening" of its living spaces. The parlor was replaced by a livingroom which, rather than being sealed off, was opened to the diningroom through a variety of devices. The kitchen was integrated within the main structure of the building but remained small and isolated in the rear of the home, thereby requiring the daily use of the diningroom for meals. This latter feature rendered the plan a subject for routine alteration in this county as families either stole room from the diningroom for

table space in the kitchen, or else expanded out the back of the building.

Nonetheless, this plan represented an emerging shift away from the fragmenting proliferation of rooms that seemed to typify the homes of the community in the latter part of the previous century. Symbolic or honorary space remained in the form of the diningroom, but the under-utilized symbolic space of the parlor was replaced by a prominently located, general use, livingroom in which the entire family could gather at all times of the day. These changes developed slowly, of course, as the trends in new houses only gradually found their ways into older homes through renovation. And even in the new homes, it was found that elderly couples as well as younger childless ones, maintained the front room as a parlor while carrying out their activities in the kitchen and/or a bedroom-den upstairs.

The fate of the parlor and the changes in house use that its loss suggested were confirmed in the rapid adoption of the ranch house in the late 1940's and 1950's. These homes proliferated throughout the county during the postwar wave of construction propelled by the county's middle and upper-middle classes. Ranch houses entered the town through this group as the "fashionable new homes on Millionaire's row". They were however, also greeted with a certain disdain initially. The ranch house, for one thing, extended the process of contraction begun by the foursquare, bringing the

bedrooms downstairs and progressively collapsing the living-room and diningroom into one continuous space. Many complained that the houses looked too small, spread out as they were on one floor and without any surrounding porches. Others told me the livingrooms were the wrong shape, rectangular instead of square. But the dominant line of criticism, one that remains coupled to the houses today, focused on the location of the bedrooms on the same floor with the living rooms. As one young man commented:

They're just too much altogether... you go to run from the bathroom to the bedroom in your towel and there you are looking at everybody in the livingroom

The first owners probably built these homes in brick in order to enhance their prestige, but what finally propelled the ranch into its dominant position was its low cost. The convenience of these homes was also much admired, as was their relative utility which was readily available for the cautious ascetic to emphasize. Perhaps above all the fact remained that they were *new*, available and affordable and so they proliferated.

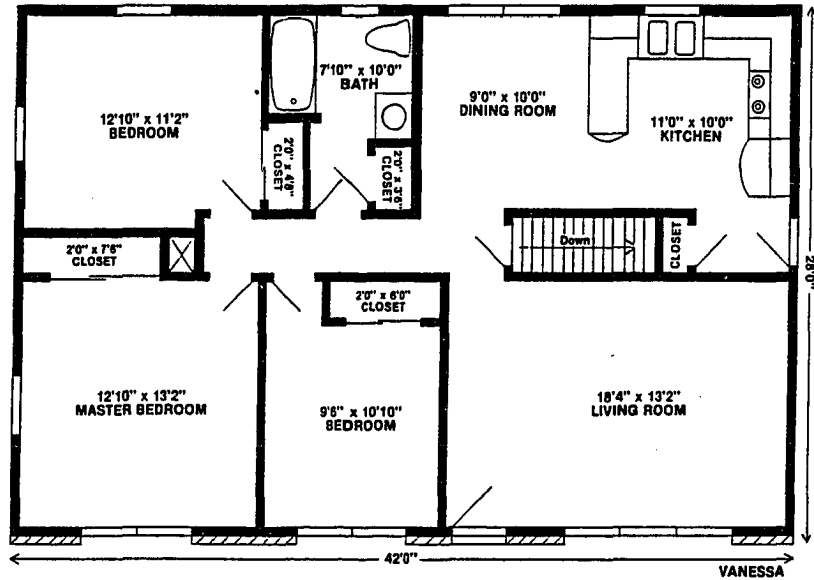
The implications of these plans for the (re)location of people and activities were substantial. The parlor was plainly excluded, and over the next ten years the diningroom was absorbed into the now expanding kitchen or retained as an "area" within the larger kitchen space. The kitchen as a result of these designs was moved increasingly into the family sphere - again a substantial change. For as architect-

tural historians have shown, the kitchen as an innovation in dwellings, had carried the activities of food preparation in disrepute away from the main arena of life in the home into the isolated back regions of the building (cf. Glassie 1985 quoted on page three here)<sup>6</sup>. The floorplans of the homes built prior to WWII had continued that custom, separating the kitchen both from the prepared spaces for hosting guests and the areas of heaviest use for the family. As the floorplans adopted by the ranch owners of this county evolved however, the re-integration of the kitchen into the family sphere was institutionalized in a variety of "open plans" that became popular.

The homes of the Mortons and of the younger Stines (as originally constructed) are examples of the earliest popular ranch homes (see figures 4-1I and 4-1J). As these floorplans demonstrate, the first ranches in the borough maintained the pattern of the foursquare with its small kitchen requiring meals to be taken in the diningroom. These plans were quickly replaced throughout the county, however, by variants which jettisoned the diningroom altogether, allowing more space for the bedrooms and baths. In the most popular forms, the diningroom became part of the "kitchen-dinette" divided only by a counter, often with over-hanging cabinets. Others opted for a large kitchen with room for tables and chairs. (See figures 2 and 3. These plans are provided by the largest builder of homes in this part of the state. The







**FIGURE 4-3**

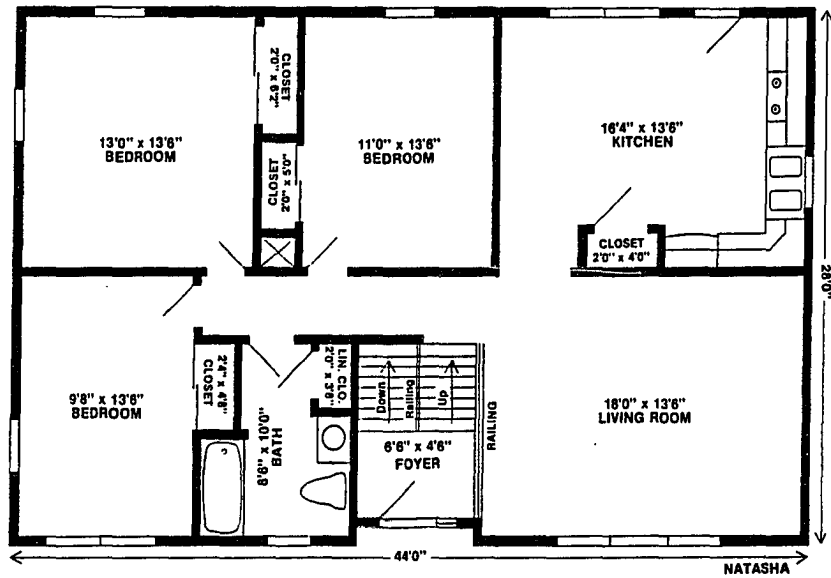
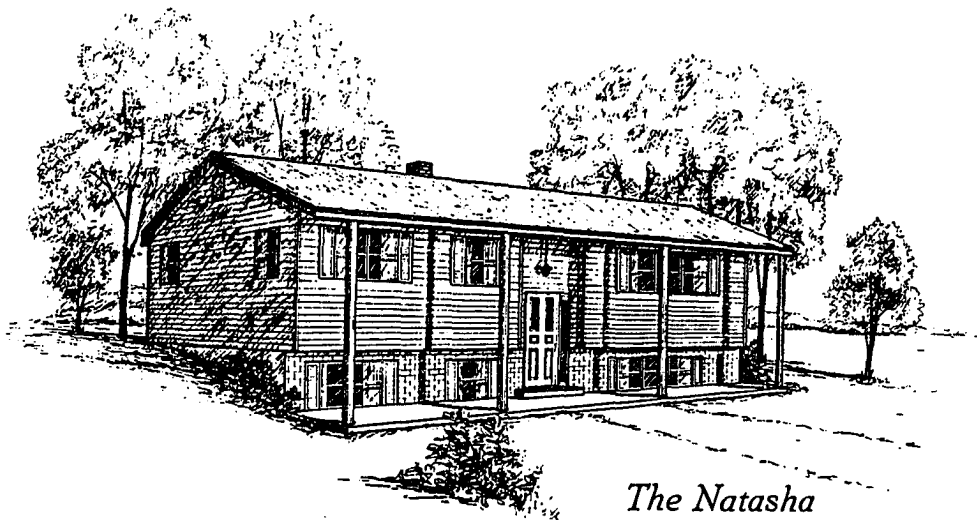
company is based in Ohio, entered the county in 1950, and of the thirty homes they build on average in Ridge County each year, these constitute two of their most popular plans.)

With these developments, the livingroom and kitchen areas were brought into direct association, opening into one another typically through a broad archway providing visual access to the dining area and aural access to the kitchen from the livingroom. The living area now focused around a basic kitchen-livingroom configuration from which the sleeping quarters extended on a line. The entire home could be comprehended simply by standing at the point where the kitchen and livingroom met. It should also be noted that the popularity of these homes and the ideas they embodied were not only to be found in these new buildings. They became models for the majority of couples who were renovating or "modernizing" their older homes during the next two decades. The Kaufman and Miller homes again typify such efforts to adapt to new fashions (recall figures 1G & 1H). The kitchen typically started as the predominant focus of home improvement efforts, but as with each of these homes, concomitant changes were also directed to "opening the house up". In this manner both of these couples achieved the basic expanded livingroom and kitchen configuration of the new ranch houses within their own old homes.

The number of ranch houses in the borough is still expanding. In the 1970's, however, a new wave of building

began and a new form, the bi-level, became "the house to build". Interestingly, this house form seemed designed to offer solutions to problems many associated with the ranch house (see figure 4-4). It also offers another elaboration in the progression from specialized to generalized living spaces in the homes built in this century. As noted earlier, for example, the location of the bedrooms on the same floor as the living area had struck many as unacceptable. The bi-level's solution to this was elegant and economical - it pulled the standard ranch a half story out of the ground, added a brick or clapboard siding to the exposed foundation, and incorporated an open stairway between the building's two floors. In actuality, this was at times achieved by raising the foundation approximately four feet out of the ground, but just as often was accomplished by grading the lot so that a portion of the front of the foundation was exposed ("raised" in the front, ground level in the back).

These homes were made even more accessible through an often exercised option of leaving the ground floor of the Bi-level unfinished until money allowed for its completion. Because of this, many families began their stay in these homes living, somewhat paradoxically, as if they were in a small ranch home - for that typically was just what the top floor of the home was. But when the intended family room was added (and this happened more often than not), a new configuration was achieved. For while many standard ranches



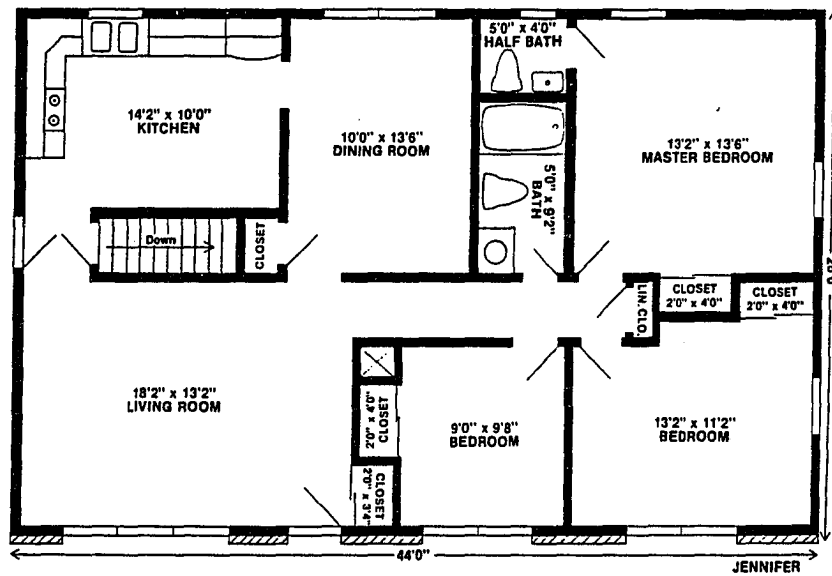
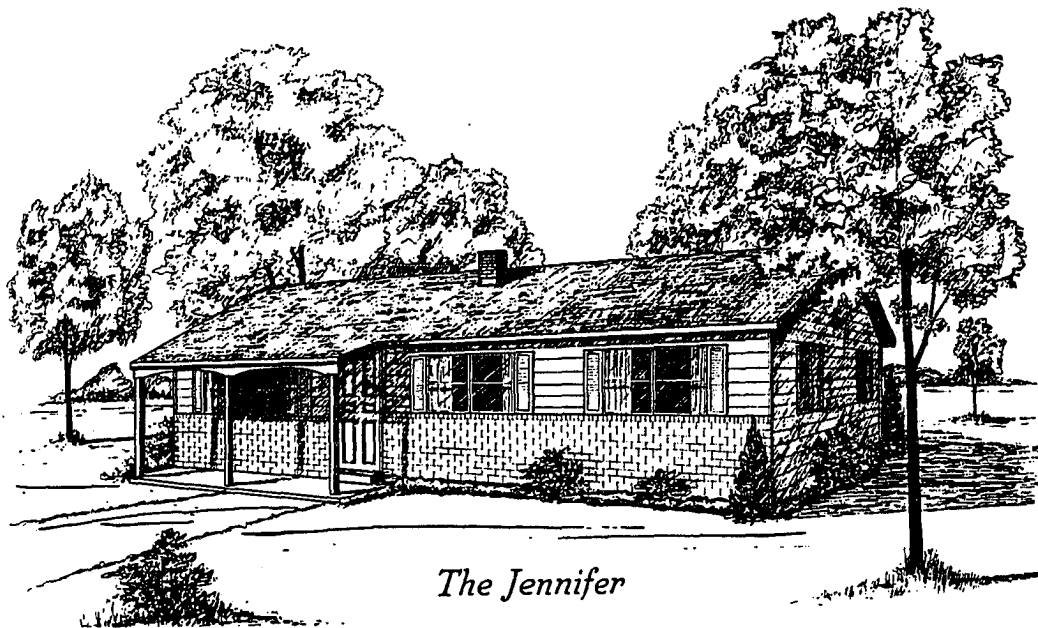
**FIGURE 4-4**

eventually included a family room in their basements, the well ventilated and windowed basements of these bi-levels (which included doorways to the outside) became the ostensible focus of family living. Once again then, this arrangement divorces the kitchen from family activity. The kitchen typically remained, as in the ranches, integrated with an attached dining area and the livingroom. This latter room was now however, a "formal living room" to be spared the rigors of continuous occupation. As such these bi-levels complicate the progression of the previous 70 years of construction by resorting to a renewed proliferation of rooms with specialized functions.

As in previous building eras, these houses were again the homes of the better educated and better paid. Thus as they filled the last fields of the Swartz farm, they in their turn became a model of desirability, the inspiration for a new trend in home layouts. This struck me most plainly on one frozen evening I spent with an unemployed couple in their apartment over a garage located beside the railroad tracks. They were drawing plans of their "ideal" home for me, something they professed to do often. When they finished, what they had created was essentially a duplicate of the floorplan for Carl Kaufman's new bi-level home on the other side of town. Others used these homes as well as models in renovating their older homes. The younger Stines for example, somewhat ironically added a second floor to

their once fashionable ranch in order to provide for a similar array of specialized rooms - formal livingroom, family room, playroom, dining room and kitchen (see figure 4-1J). Similarly the county's largest builder found that by 1981, their best selling home amongst retirees had become the model that included a separate diningroom (figure 4-5).

These bi-levels have thus led a contemporary move towards increased division and specialization of spaces in the new and renovated homes of the borough and county. The newly restored "formal" rooms are generally not achieved without provision for a family room or some kind of general use area. Thus the homes of the late 1970's and '80's show an incorporation of *both* general use and specialized use rooms. This development has been complicated in recent years by a new (old) fashion running through the county, the "country kitchen". The concept for this room combines the kitchen area with a living area that is furnished and used much like a family room (see Swartz floor plan Fig. 4-1D). Remarkably, the design carries these homes all the way "back" to the early farm kitchen where family life centered around the cookstove or hearth. It is an old form applied to a more complex plan, and the appeal of the idea has been quite strong here. Many women spoke of this as *the* improvement they would now most like for their home and they have begun to appear in numbers throughout the county. (More will be said about these rooms below).



**FIGURE 4-5**

This has been a brief historical sketch, but it should provide some indication of the variability that has marked the spatial organization of homes in this century. It has admittedly been focused on evolutions in the housing of the middle income groups, but it is here that we find the main playing fields of fashion in the county. It is as well this housing which constitutes the main bulk of building in any period and the primary source of ideas for those renovating older buildings. The old families here and the poor are, as usual with material fashions and competitions, found together on the sidelines, united in their adherence to tradition and gradual change, whether that adherence be a matter of choice or necessity.

It should be noted that within any given building era, the construction of new homes and the adoption of these various new trends was constrained by a number of factors which tell us something about this community's response to fashion. In the first place it should be realized that the status value accrued by possession of these new homes was restricted. For while these homes were admired, they could not be said to elevate their owners in rank in the eyes of their neighbors. At best they could be seen to offer a "lateral mobility" in the sense that an owner's esteem might be increased while his associations and positions in the community do not change. In addition it was generally recognized that a new home could be a social deficit if it were



perceived as being showy or pretentious according to community standards and the available resources of the owner. And to the extent that these homes were nearly always built in clusters in a new section of town, they were generally always conspicuous and subject to extensive comment amongst the pragmatic people of the town. The social *disadvantage* of the new homes was always potential to them, especially as their construction occurred, for young couples, as an alternative to the more conservative tradition of beginning in a less expensive home and improving it. A result was that those who built new homes in any given era chose from a limited price and style range and effectively established a marked uniformity in the houses of any given period. House-type fashions entered the community's inventory of housing for this reason largely as a matter of group consensus. As "innovations" these new homes tended to encode only minor distinctions, within the prevailing uniformities, between homes of contemporaries. The major "differences" they marked were principally those between "old" and "new" homes. This was a gross distinction which served less to mark status divisions in the community than to accrue prestige amongst lateral relations.

Nevertheless, while community processes have tended within each era to constrain the incursion of new home styles, the borough has still, through time, been invested with a succession of plans. Each has carried with it its own

implications for how activities and families are to be organized within. The movement seen to begin in the 1920's and continue over the next forty years was away from the fragmented interior with its specialized rooms for formal use, and towards homes, often smaller, which combined areas and activities. I was told repeatedly by residents that they were "getting away from formalities" with the homes they set up in the '40's and '50's. The seeming clarity of this progression was however clouded by the time of this study. The 1970's and early '80's have seen a minor proliferation of spaces reserved primarily for ceremonial use, as well as some elaboration of general use areas such as family rooms and country-kitchens.

Each of these shifts has had implications for where people eat, relax, gather, entertain, sleep, read, watch television and so on. The architectural evidence found in the borough would seem to suggest instability and discontinuities in the way the people of this community have lived in their homes. An image comes to mind of people dutifully lifting their chairs and rearranging themselves periodically as each new form prescribes where they should be. Architecture does not predict behavior however, it interacts with it as people adjust their activity and the environment itself to meet their own needs.

Given the historical data provided to this point then, we are perhaps in a better position to examine observable

patterns of proxemic behavior evident in the borough's homes today as they are related to these historical processes of architectural adaptation. What can be seen today, and what is reported about customs of the recent past, suggests strongly that the people of Peterburg have not passively re-aligned themselves with each architectural change. Instead a consistent core of principles and patterns seems implicit to their usage, guiding adaptations to different spaces and sustaining customs and continuities fundamental to the communicational patterns of families here. To understand this better, let us now look at how these people tend to use, and organize themselves within, their homes today.

#### Pattern and Continuity in Proxemic Behavior

Perhaps the clearest, most consistent principle guiding the use of the family home in Ridge County is what I have come to regard as a "functional imperative". This is a law of sorts which forbids waste (or at least its appearance) and seems to require economy and practicality in all things. With respect to the spaces of the home, it prescribes full usage of the home and results in frequent testimonies of the sort:

I mean, when you talk about living in a house, we *live* in our house. We don't have just one place that we use more than the other, we use every bit of our house. (15A:520)

The ubiquity of the phrase, "we live in our house", was astonishing to me, for it seemed to offer the closest thing

to a moral absolute that I encountered in the county. George Wagner, a factory mechanic and life-long resident of Petersburg, offered an explanation that reveals a bit more of what the declaration involves:

See my house gets lived in. This house here is sometimes like Grand Central Station - people just in and out of here all the time...and we live in our home, we don't run it for a showpiece y'know, we live in it. (40A:442)

Not only should *all* of the house be used, but it should also be available and hospitable to your usual retinue of visitors. Note also the invocation of the image of a "showpiece". The usage is quite common in these contexts and is used to suggest that "utility" should guide the home's arrangement as well as its use. The rationale was often used as moral absolution by many, like the impoverished Farrell family, whose frayed and cluttered homes showed the all too obvious wear of children busy living. But it was also resorted to by others, such as the prominent Loschs, to deflect criticism from their expensive and well maintained homes. The Loschs insisted in this regard, for example, that their careful and costly arrangements carried no restrictions for the visitor and that anyone could just sit down and make themselves comfortable there.

While these routine testimonies indicate the presence of a prevailing ethic to guide the use of space, actual behavior nevertheless demonstrates a patterning that differs importantly for the majority of families here. As observa-

tion penetrates explanation, what is revealed are customary routines in usage that sharply focus those areas of the building that are used. In turn, what the persistence of these routines shows us is a consistent approach to space use that has only slowly and selectively been adapted while the architectural outline has changed repeatedly through time.

This discrepancy between the general moral standard and actual practice - between full and focused use - is not a matter of deception however. Rather it demonstrates how one *talks* about space here, and talk about space is after all part of the behavior of space use. In the abstract discussion of behavior, residents by convention resort to the "most appropriate" ethic or standard in framing their own activity, and here standards of pragmatic utility are applied to space as if it were a material resource. And as with other such resources, its full and efficient exploitation is strongly recommended. Observable behavior, however, is responsive to much more than the physical dimensions of the "property". For the patterns of actual usage, patterns largely not organized or acknowledged within conscious awareness, take shape around a number of customs for situating and combining activities, for organizing family members, and regulating their processes of interaction. It is the customary approaches to the use of space, interacting with the forms of the buildings that finally determines a

family's use of its buildings enclosed spaces. We will take these customary responses as our focus in this section.

As has been seen, floorplans - the fixed feature half of this equation - suggest variability in the arrangement of activity over time. The shape of actual usage has not however followed this course and this can be seen most clearly if we focus on family activity in the home during the evenings. Daytime use also showed an extensive patterning of spatial behavior, however the evenings were the time when greatest demands were placed on those processes by which a family negotiates how it will coexist within the home. For these reasons, I will focus on household behavior during the evenings.

Looking at the arrangement of activity in the home during these periods one finds a habitual clustering of family members and activities within a limited portion of the building that I have found to define a regularly occurring territory, or "unit of use" within the home\*. This is a social "place" of sorts which regularly forms as household members assemble to pursue their various home-based activities during this portion of the day. It is a customary arrangement which expands or contracts to fit the given architectural spaces a family may be afforded in a given home, but which retains certain key communicational properties in all instances. I have called this recurring location the "family center" in order to suggest both its status as a

place in which family members cluster and as a "center" from which all activities in the home radiate. Three examples will help illustrate its properties as well as its durability in time and space here.

### The Family Center

Irene Shelly was born and raised in the early part of this century by a prominent family on a farm bordering the borough. In 1931, her father bought Dr. Barton's house, rented the farm out and moved his extended family into town. The pattern of the family's movement through this house over the next fifty years shows us something of the persistence of the spatial patterns operant in the family center and typifies the possible origin of these traditions in the farm household.

All life in the family's old four room ,two story stone farmhouse had centered on the kitchen. Aside from the cook-stove and drysink, the kitchen had held a table, rocking chairs for the adults, a sideboard with drawers for each member of the family, the grandmother's sewing machine, the father's desk and a fainting couch for afternoon naps. The adjoining parlor was saved for visitors and later refurnished when the girls began to bring dates home. This was then, an existence in which all activities and all members were collected in one space during the evenings and even at night when Irene, her sister, and parents gathered to sleep in one

bedroom while the grandparents took the other.

When Irene's father eventually decided to lease the farm and focus his attentions on his business and banking interests, he moved the family to a house in town that was substantially larger than the farmhouse. As shown in Figure 4-1C, the house (ca.1900) had a livingroom, diningroom, and sit-down kitchen in the back and harbored a small room off the hall that had been the doctor's exam room. When the family moved in, the parlor furniture was placed in the livingroom, the diningroom was left with odds and ends for years until a set was bought at auction, and the summer kitchen was used as a "junk room". The new kitchen didn't "feel comfortable" according to Irene, so rocking chairs, couch, sewing machine, desk, and the family came to rest in the 10'x 10' office just off the kitchen. "It was kind of the home center," Mrs. Shelly recalled, "and it was little! We had a lot of house, and here we were sitting in this little den" (34B:160). This was in fact the smallest room on the first floor, yet for the next sixteen years it served as the center for the family's activities. The women sewed and hooked rugs here, naps were taken on the couch, the radio and telephone were located here and the kids played here. Because of its small size, activities did carry members "out" for short periods, but this family room nonetheless remained the point which people left and returned to through the course of the evening.



In 1955 however, television altered the balance of activities and the family's spatial needs. The den was plainly too small to provide for the television or to allow clear viewing, so life shifted to the livingroom with some dramatic results. The personal rockers, worn by years of use were too rough for the livingroom and were left behind. So too was the activity of braiding rugs. It was considered "too dirty" and replaced by the more genteel handwork of piecing quilts. But more importantly, the move had a dissipating effect on the family and its way of relating in space.

The television presented Irene's mother's weakened senses with little more than an irritating background of scratching sounds and flickering lights so she began to spend her evenings in the solitude of the darkened dining-room, listening to the family through the connecting doors. The den remained a space for "social projects" and also drew members off. The space within the livingroom itself now seemed vast and uncomfortable. When the television was introduced, the couch was moved from its position in the bay window overlooking the neighborhood and angled into a corner across the room, focused with the rest of the furnishings, on the box that had taken its place (see figure 4-7B). Moving from a space in which all seats were oriented toward a common conversational and visual center, an arrangement in which members sat within tactile and likely olfactory range

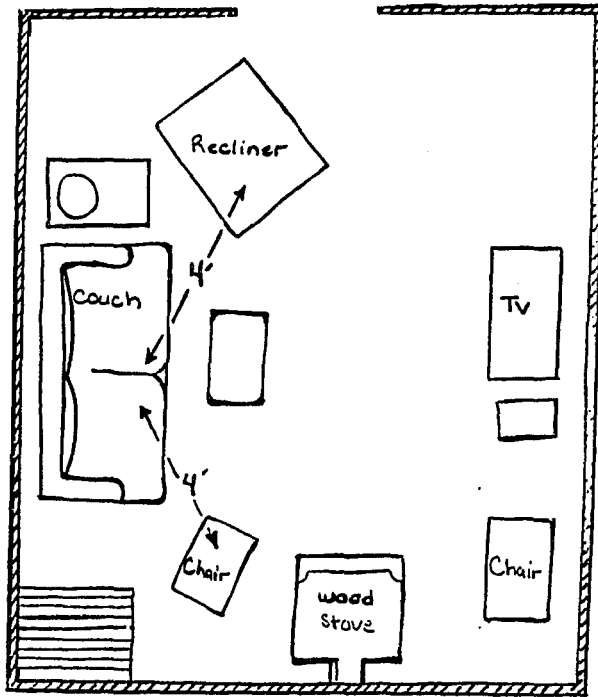
of one another, the family now found itself "centered" on the television at distances of from 8'-13' from one another in the stiff and inhospitable furnishings of the livingroom. It was an arrangement, Mrs. Shelly says, that made conversation difficult and never came to feel "homey" to the family.

In 1968, with the youngest child now ten and only her immediate family remaining, Irene renovated the summer kitchen to add-on a family room and restore something of the comfort she had always associated with the family center in her past. As figure 4-7A shows, this space was a more contained 168 square feet as compared to the 344 square feet of the livingroom. Seating distances shrank to 4 to 5 feet, restoring the proximity that marked the first den and the earlier farm kitchen. As is the case with most family centers here, the furnishings in this room were more durable, comfortable, and "informal" than those of the livingroom. It could also be suggested that when, years later, a wood-burning stove was added to the room, the warmth of the old farm hearth or cookstove had returned as well.

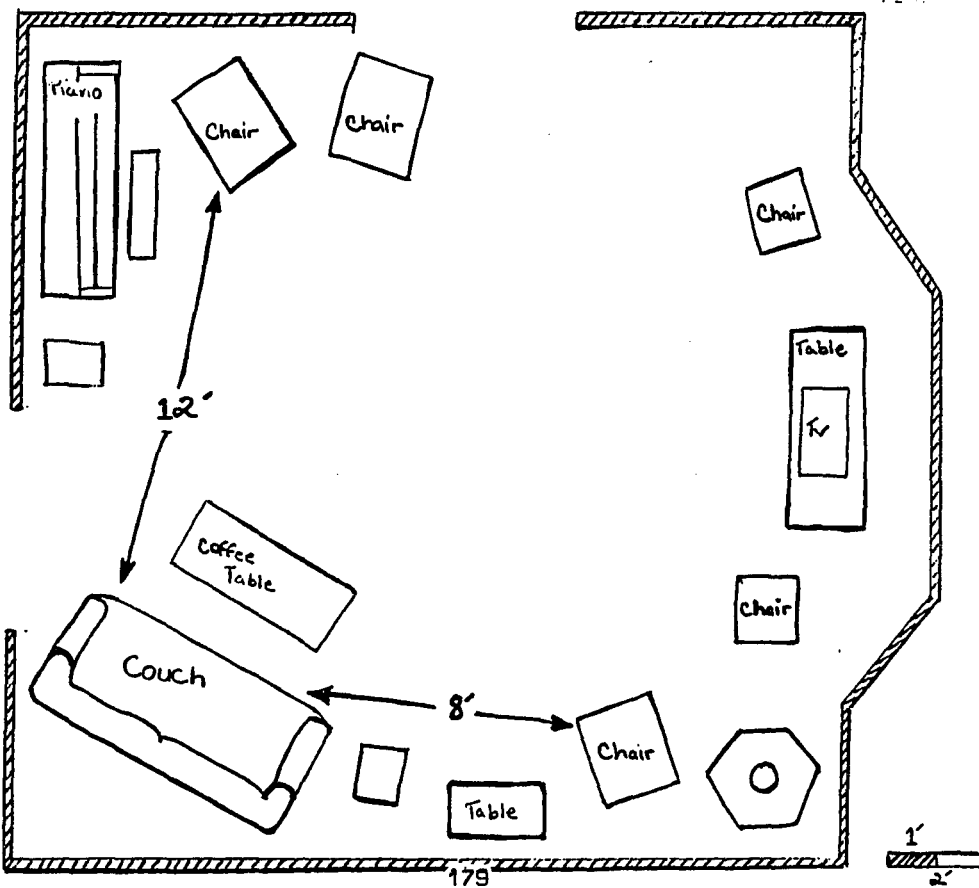
In this abbreviated history then, the life course of a method for organizing family life can be seen. What the family experienced originally in the farm kitchen was a communal style of usage that had combined all the activities of the evening in one generalized region. Their efforts in moving to a greatly enlarged and fashionably fragmented

Figure 4-6: Seating  
Distances in Two Rooms  
of the Shelly Home.

A. Den 12'x14'



B. Livingroom 18'x18'



structure was to minimize its impact on their accustomed arrangements. When expanded needs drew them out into the large spaces of the home during the usual communal hours of the evening, the effect was indeed to fragment the family and its activities and to impose proxemic relations in the gathering place that strongly inhibited the old ways of talking, touching and sitting with one another. What is perhaps most interesting then, is that nearly forty years after leaving the farm kitchen and some sixteen years after leaving the early den, the house itself was altered in order to re-establish a generalized center in which all members and activities could again be combined "comfortably".

Two further examples will help us understand the ubiquity and pliability of this family center unit. The approach it offers to organizing family life in the home is limited neither to farm families nor the homes of a particular era.

When the younger Stines moved into their once fashionable brick ranch, for example, they brought with them expectations shaped by the new bi-levels proliferating across the street. While their savings had restricted them to this twenty five year old single story home with its open plan (fig.4-1J), they bought it hoping to eventually achieve the multiple specialized spaces that were resurfacing in the new homes. Yet while their aspirations were shaped by these contemporary models for the ideal division of spaces, their

actual usage remained substantially the same through the course of changes that followed over the next five years.

At the time that they first settled into their home, they arranged their few "good" pieces of furniture in the livingroom and treated the room as a formal one. For the daily routine, this meant avoiding the furniture and after a short period of sitting "around" it on bean-bags, they adopted their bedroom as their base. Both have talked somewhat sentimentally about how well adapted the bedroom was to their evening routine of simultaneous television viewing, reading, talking and snacking. The proximity of the room to the kitchen and bathroom completed its versatility for Dave, who pointed out that you could even watch the Tv from "the hopper" and commented, "Yeah, everything was lined up, you could get into bed and never miss anything".

This pattern held for the first two years with their newborn son as the couple continued to use the bed or corner chair in the evenings and the baby occupied his playpen or the carpet around them. By 1980 they had torn the roof off the house however, and dropped a second story on it, effectively doubling its size and complexity and achieving the layout they had hoped for. The bedrooms were tucked upstairs, a playroom and family room added and their open-plan ranch was now a diversified nine room home. Neither, however, was really sure how they wanted to use the home now - it seemed cavernous: "the first couple of months we were

in here we kinda bounced around... it took about two months I'd say until we felt at home" (Dave). That feeling of being at home was finally found by admitting that the bedrooms were now too far from the kitchen ("we've kinda found out we don't go up, y'know, until we're ready to go to bed"); and by sequestering all the activity of the evening within the same 143 square foot corner of the building they had used before. The bed was replaced by a couch ("to stretch out on"), and two chairs on which the couple passes the evenings while their son plays around and between them with an army of toys drawn each evening from his darkened playroom.

Here again, then, a contained, overlapping, communal organizational form was achieved by a family group and effectively retained as the house changed around them. (See figure 4-7 for comparisons of proxemic distances in this family's livingroom and family room.)

A similar resistance to specialization of use was also seen with the newer bi-levels built throughout the 1970's and into the '80's. Ed and Gail Kurtz, for instance, are a couple who were raised in old frame houses that had been "opened up" by their parents amidst the post war exuberance for general-use spaces. Yet as Ed advanced in his career and the couple elected to build a new home, they chose the fashionable bi-level and divided it up into an array of "logical" spaces. Figure 4-1F shows that the top floor

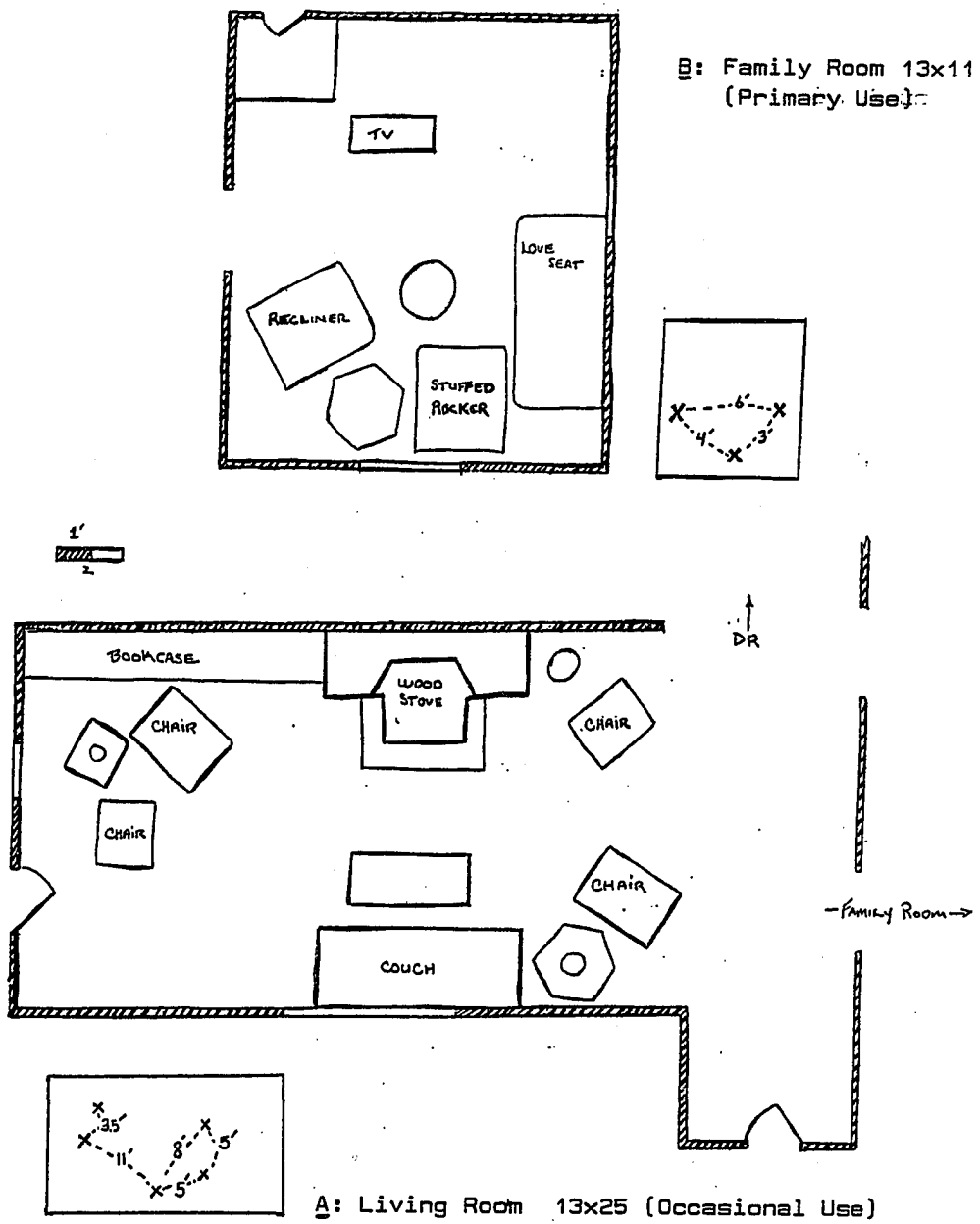


Figure 4-7: Seating Distances in Two Rooms of a Home (See Insets)

retained the typical ranch layout with a kitchen/dining area adjoining the livingroom. The ground floor was broken into an assortment of rooms that seemed ideal for all their different activities - Ed would have his office, the kids a playroom, and the family room with its television, fireplace, and stereo system was designed to be an entertainment center for the whole family. The couple's intentions were to reserve the livingroom as an uncluttered formal room (the new furniture was therefore located here), and use the family room and playroom as the sites for daily living. On moving in, however, they gradually found the family room too narrow and inconvenient for the activity of the kids who invariably avoided the playroom and clustered about them. They also found the separation from the kitchen too frequently isolated Gail from the rest of the group.

The result has been that all life in the home, especially in the evenings, now clusters in that space where all activities can be comfortably and simultaneously accommodated - in the combined livingroom and kitchen area of the top floor. All meals are taken at the kitchen counter, written work and projects are performed at the table or sewing machine located beside it, and the Tv is situated in the dining area so that it can be watched from both the kitchen and the livingroom couch. Reading, conversation and child's play are all combined in the livingroom which also houses a regular clutter of toys, magazines, and the many



evidences of full and unencumbered use. The family room, by contrast, shows no signs of use, the office is now a "junk room", and the playroom is typically only used during the day. The family finally "fit" itself to this house therefore, by gravitating to that part of the building which was least fragmented and where the greatest range of activities could be combined to provide for an overlapping, communal lifestyle. This was a solution which the county tax assessor suggested in another context was common to this county's adjustment to these houses - "you'll find," he told me, "that after one or two years in there, people start coming up out of their basements and living on the first floor again". The bi-level he believed was an idea that had not worked.

As seen in these cases and in the homes of the county at large, therefore, the family center is a kind of customary approach to organizing the activities and members of a household, that precedes and adapts to the architecture that houses it. In its broadest outline, this communal center constitutes a continuous space that encloses the family and many of its activities within ready auditory range of one another, and most often in sustained visual contact. Seating arrangements typically locate people compactly within tactile and possibly olfactory range. It is a "place" which may be co-extant with a certain room (as with the Stine's bedroom/family room) or it may take form at

those times when the family comes together (as with the Kurtzs' "formal livingroom" and kitchen). What marks its existence and boundaries finally, is the continuous location of family members in one another's presence, the high degree of mutual sensory involvement and the regular overlapping of a broad range of activities. People may simultaneously eat, sleep, and talk here, watch Tv, listen to the radio or stereo, read, play, sew, use the telephone, recuperate from illnesses, visit with friends, and so on. While the individualized bedrooms and instrumental functions of other rooms will at times separate and disperse members, the family center is pointedly a circumscribed portion of the building where they all collect as a group ("functional imperatives" notwithstanding), and live-out a major part of their lives at home together.

This communal style of living is not unique to this region of course. I am presenting it through the concept of the family center in this discussion in order to describe how the organizing form is achieved in the diverse spaces of the homes of this community. For what has persisted through time here, what is customary in their use of space, is not a room but a plan or method for organizing activity and relationships in space. The boundaries of the form that result are thus behavioral, experiential, and conventional. And while the form itself - this centering of the family - has been retained in time, where and how it has been fitted

into each home and precisely what activities it has incorporated, has varied with the architectural forms in which it is located. The three examples used here have demonstrated this to some extent. The common point in their adaptations to each of these buildings, as with the vast majority of other homes in the county, is the emergence of a contained area in which family members could combine the largest number of activities within an experientially continuous space.

Before proceeding to a discussion of behavior within these centers, I would like to diverge for a moment to discuss the family center's historical relationship to the kitchen. This factor seems to be particularly salient in determining how and where these centers form, and how satisfied families are with them. As I have suggested (see also Glassie on traditional organizing forms 1975, 1982), the family center seems to persist as a remnant from the times of farm kitchens. People have since this time preferred to incorporate the kitchen as an element of the communal center. Yet the kitchen has been the object of repeated architectural adjustments throughout the course of this century. Its size, location, purposes and status implications have changed repeatedly. Peterburg resident's interest in and adherence to national fashions have at times therefore been sufficient to undermine tradition by separating kitchens from the site for the family center. Fashion has in

this way subverted tradition. Yet through time traditional preferences have been retained, tempering responses to "kitchen fashions". As mentioned for example, many families responded to the foursquares of the '20's and '30's by expanding their kitchens. Others like the Kurtzs eventually ignored the architecturally prescribed divisions of the home to maintain their proximity to the kitchen. Still others, like the younger Kaufmans maintained these interaction rituals by using the kitchen as a secondary, time-bound center for family activities.

This in itself explains the vast popularity of kitchen counters as they emerged in the 1960's not only as a standard in new homes, but also as the centerpiece of most kitchen "modernization" projects. The counter provided not only a gathering place, but in replacing a wall, removed a barrier so that its activities could be integrated again into the family center. The enduring importance of the kitchen seems currently to be borne out in the county in the strong and broad-based popularity of the "new" "country kitchen" idea. In its various manifestations, drawn to a large extent from national women's and home design magazines, the country kitchen defines the kitchen as a primary living space. At base this means chairs may be moved into an expanded kitchen area. But just as commonly these rooms will include a fireplace or woodstove plus couches, loveseats and even recliners within a unified living-eating

area. Families at all levels of this community have claimed such an arrangement as their next renovation. In this popularity I see the adoption of a "new" design which is finally responsive to long-standing customs in actual usage. The "country kitchen" re-integrates family life with the kitchen. And while it is a kind of up-dated consumerist version of the old farm kitchen, it seems to restore the reputation of a long common pattern of organization. Yet it is very much in the nature of this county, in the nature of its struggle between custom and fashion, conformity and change, that it receives this form as a "new idea".

For in the main the community seems not to acknowledge the traditional bases of this kitchen in their own behavior. Nevertheless they have gravitated readily to it. The rush of opinion not only confirms the persistence of their orientation to the kitchen, but also demonstrates how elements of fashion are often adapted fortuitously and selectively by a community to rationalize and facilitate, or possibly rephrase, prevailing practice. Had the organizational implications of the room plan been less familiar, it seems unlikely that it would have been so well accepted. Yet a certain amount of status or at least pride seems to be taken in assimilating what is perceived as the fashion in the cosmopolitan world. It is perhaps for this reason that we see the not uncommon phenomenon of a rural community adopting

sentimentalized and heavily rationalized phrasings of aspects of their own lives as mediated back to them by mass society. As we will see in the next two chapters, the same sort of thing has occurred with their old furnishings which, in recent times, have become "antiques". Regardless of the origins of the rhetoric that frames the installation of country kitchens, however, their popularity demonstrates the continued preference locals have for incorporating the kitchen's activities within the sphere of the family center. It is a traditional preference which has persisted and of necessity adapted to the more varied fortunes of the room as an architectural element.

#### The Utilization of Space Within the Family Center

While traditions for combining activities serve to get people to the common ground of the family center, customary patterns in arranging furniture generally tend to fix them in contained places, often no more than three feet apart. There are a number of largely unstated, yet ubiquitous preferences and principals in furniture arrangement which account for this. The location of the television seems a major influence, as is the accompanying tendency to orient furnishings towards it, and the unshakeable habit of situating furniture along walls.

Most couples in this study told me frankly that the furniture follows the Tv. The younger Millers stated plainly

the "we go where the Tv goes". Many have also treated the Tv as a major factor in renovating their homes, especially in the era following the medium's introduction in the 1950's. Once the television set has been situated here, the furniture is typically clustered on the opposite wall or along all three remaining walls depending on the amount of furniture and the size of the room. The alternative, which is patently missing from this repertoire, is moving the furniture *into* the space to affect multiple areas within it or otherwise diversify the functions of the seating. A major implication is that family sight and talklines have been defined to accomodate viewing rather than conversation and interaction. Spreading furniture along the walls does provide open space in the room's center to facilitate certain activities and movement through the room, however, it also limits options for seating. In contrast to the common pre-Tv arrangements which focused on a shared conversational center (a conceptual point somewhere midway between the assembled group), or which struck a semi-circle around a hearth or stove, these contemporary arrangements frequently inhibit eye contact and face-engagement in conversation.

The television has in this way proved somewhat sociopathic in its effect on spatial arrangements. Nonetheless, numerous compensations are made for its presence. A high degree of proximity in seating arrangements is routinely provided for so that side-to-side conversations and direct

tactile contact can be maintained. As shown in figures 4-6 and 4-7, preferences for arrangements which locate family members within three to four feet of one another in the case of contiguous seating, or within a six to seven foot boundary range for the remainder, are still consistently maintained. The living areas of this borough tend as a body, therefore, to situate the occupants within close sensory range and to function spatially (in terms of orientation, sight and talklines) as an integrated whole.

Conceptual divisions and functional "subspaces" abound within these spaces, however. One could, for example, map an entire house by the way children ground particular games and routines in specific locales, creating their own landscape of places within the building. Within the family center itself, family members here, as elsewhere, adopt or come to be associated with specific seating spaces or chairs. These "domains" (cf. Norberg-Schulz 1972) may constitute a spot on a couch, a part of the floor or a separate chair of some sort which come to function over time as personal territories or "property" within the communal space. In some families these domains even seemed to take on the fixed status of an inherited position that was passed along from one generation to the next. This happened at Irene Shelly's home for example, where a rocking chair located beside a radiator in one of the home's bright bay windows was taken over by successive maternal heads of household. These



domains establish another means then through which space use in the family center is focused, and behavior is routinized. They serve subtly to orient people in their homes, and may to an extent encode the system of rank and deference in the center as their use is negotiated.

Just how they serve in the negotiation of status in the household is a subject for further investigation. The management of these domains requires a kind of subtle diplomacy that typifies dynamics implicit to much of family life in this community. As has been mentioned earlier, explicit statements of rank or privilege run counter to prevailing models of family and community life as equalitarian, democratic and cooperative. As in the public dialogue on status therefore, outright and rigid distinctions regarding privilege in the home and in the maintenance of domains are muted. No manifest claim is made to personal or preemptive ownership or possession of these places. The result is that all can and do use these domains. Their use however, will be orchestrated by implicit agreement, by indirect negotiation, and by sustained group pressure, so that differential priorities and de facto ownership will be acknowledged even as the communal phrasing of their usage is maintained. In each case the rules for the use and possession of these domains, as with the boundaries of self interest in general in this setting, are left largely unstated so that group order relies finally upon cooperative

negotiation.

Specific, articulated rules of usage are difficult to solicit here. Anyone asking about this is usually told, "we don't have any rules, just don't jump on the furniture". Regarding parental control over children for example, one finds that parents may well have explicitly formulated rules concerning a child's behavior in the homes of *others*. The necessary standard, however, seems to require that they subordinate concerns for their own home to the needs and desires of the children. The "functional imperative", it seems, is operant in the family center, if nowhere else. As a prescriptive standard it requires that comfort and utility take precedence over any attempts to constrain the family's activities for the sake of order (or "neatness") or personal interest.

#### Privacy and the Regulation of Interaction

In the retention and transmission of an "open", "communal", "informal" standard for organizing the family, i.e. the family center, we therefore see the cross-generational maintenance of a set of conditions which structure the interactional and regulatory processes of the families of this community. As it has been characterized to this point, the family center is defined by, and specifies what Altman and Lett have referred to as a "socifugal style of environmental behavior" (1972). That is to say that in

contrast to a method of organization which disperses and isolates members of the household, the people of this county tend to adhere to a plan of usage which draws people into contact and promotes interaction and presumably family integration. The family center establishes continuous contact, mutual accessibility and sustained mutual monitoring as fundamental conditions for processes of communication within the home. These are conditions which emphasize an on-going process of mutual adjustment, the restriction of privacy, and the extension of group influence to each member of the household. Preferences and practices in furnishing homes have sustained these conditions through time. The continuous presence of others is therefore a dominant aspect of experience here and regardless of whether communication is "focused" or "unfocused" (cf. Goffman 1963), intended or not intended, it is constant within the communal sphere.

Norms of conduct, as reflected in observable behavioral patterns, seem to subordinate individual rights to the customary needs of the extended household. They discourage any resort to a *priori* rules for regulating access to, or use of the family center. Shared rights and obligations, rather than an imposed order or authority, is favored as the basis of social organization within the home. Unfortunately, this study's view of the precise nature of the rules of interaction that are retained through the persistence of the family center, has been limited due to restrictions on

observational time. The tenor of these communicational rules can be clarified a bit further however, if we look at how the rights of privacy are managed within the home and within the larger settlement.

A first measure of how privacy rights are managed within the home here can be found in the rights and access that are ostensibly extended to all visitors. The domestic ethic which has been described to this point dictates that the home be open to unencumbered usage and that members of the household share a sustained mutual accessibility within the home. The same privileges extend, in principle, to all visitors to the home.

"Hosting" activity is conducted in this community in an overtly "informal" manner that avoids explicit conventions or rituals of greeting and entertaining<sup>7</sup>. Behavior during visits is directed to providing the visitor with the appearance of an "unaltered" household, and the normal behavioral routines of daily life. The guest is welcomed and honored by being treated in effect as a member of the household. Visitors will be told (as I have been), "we don't put on the dog here, you just help yourself and make yourself comfortable." Ritual niceties such as offers to take a coat or offers of a seat or refreshment will often not be extended. No special dress, other than that which might usually be worn, is affected and "manner" (including such things as seating postures and the use of slang or profanity ) will

typically be directed to avoiding the sense of a self-conscious presentation. The home, as with the family center specifically is devoted to unguarded, informal behavior and as hosts, Peterburg residents are constrained to convey the sense that the guest is privy to all the natural activities of household life. As part of this, people told me consistently that they make few, if any, distinctions between public and private areas of the home. The full interior of their home is framed as an accessible "back-stage" area that has not been prepared or adapted for the evaluations of the visitor, yet is open to all who enter.

The key distinction then in regulating access within the home is not which regions are public or private, but who is allowed to enter. In practice, strangers are commonly dealt with outside or possibly just inside the door to the house and access beyond that point is limited. Visitors, such as myself, who do gain entry however, will be treated to the kind of open presentation described above. The largest number of people may gain entry to the home on infrequent ceremonial or celebratory occasions, but again most all of these people will be at least acquainted with the owners. For the greatest part, at-home visiting will be limited to the regular visits of kin, who often "drop-by" on a daily basis, and that small group of very close friends who in this and other privileges, bear an intimate relation to the family. Amongst this group of kith and kin, access to

the home is nearly absolute. The privacy of the family and its individual members with respect to all those who have access to the home is therefore minimized, while the need to interact is maximized. This in turn reflects a general diminution of privacy and rights to privacy that exists in the life of the community generally. And as will be seen below, the pattern of access that marks community life is encoded in the settlement patterns of the town in much the same way that it is encoded in the home.

If we regard "privacy" as the ability to control contact with others and their access to one's behavior or information about it, and by extension the ability to limit the evaluations and influence of others over that behavior; the communal tendencies of the family center must be understood to subvert its attainment. Within the sphere of the family center, the activities of all are available for observation and evaluation by everyone else for extended periods of time. Elsewhere in the home, bedrooms might be used on occasion by children for work or play, but they are generally neither discussed or used as defensible spheres for privacy within the family. Bedroom doors for example, are usually left open during the evenings and through the night. If children do close their doors, they are generally not honored as boundaries and parents or siblings will typically only knock or shout as they pass through them.

Privacy within the home, finally, was consistently

treated as something people neither expected nor generally sought. Questions in this regard were frequently greeted with some puzzlement - "What, you mean privacy against each other?" - and were deflected as "irrelevant" with such frequency that it became apparent that it simply was inappropriate to suggest that family members needed privacy within the home. Some, especially mothers of young children, described the need as something slightly asocial that emerges at a kind of breaking point when they simply "can't take it anymore". In such explanations, the need for privacy in the home is thus treated as something negatively weighted as a personal need that runs counter to the family order. In discussing privacy in general therefore, the response will be couched as one that bears on family unity. One young husband responded without hesitation, for example, by saying that he and his wife just don't have time enough together to go looking for privacy: " When we have our coupla hours here," he commented, "we usually like to spend it together - it may not be in conversation, but we're in the same room."

Yet in another context the same man told me of a desire to own a motorcycle that he could take out on Sundays "just so I could ride around and get away". The point was evidenced in this and many other ways in this community, that the home is by definition the locus of family life. "Privacy" is something chiefly achieved through "extra-house" means. There are some places institutionalized within

the home that allow for a modest amount of isolation, some men have their workshops, a few have offices or dens, and some women have laundries. But it can be noticed that these "privacy devices" are legitimized by their ostensible purposes, one goes there to work, not be alone. More often, family members leave home to get away - men "run up to the Point", (the local gas station/hang-out) or simply go "out" in their trucks; women might go shopping or "run errands". It would be misleading to suggest that there is no privacy in the home, it comes at intervals for each member, especially when the family disperses for the day. The point here is that privacy in this setting is generally hard to achieve and that it is discouraged as a manifest goal because of its implications. It is something "better" and more commonly accomplished in such a way that the person seeking solitude is not obviously isolating themselves.

An important and consistent exemption is commonly granted to teenagers who are customarily given leeway to be alone. Parents themselves characterize these years as a time of heightened needs for their children and thus observe new prerequisites. Bedrooms become the focus for teenage living and their status as autonomous spheres is supported by the family through its treatment of doors as discretionary boundaries to be breached only with permission.\* In addition, teens will also be given sole use of livingrooms



or family rooms when entertaining friends. Because this heightened degree of privacy (which is not only permitted but even encouraged), isolates the youth, and because it differs so markedly from customary arrangements, new privacy allowances provide a means for the family to negotiate and encode the emerging "autonomy" of the teenage identity by means of the spatial arrangements of the home. This becomes an exceptional period in which the norm is suspended. Yet, consistent with prevailing ideals, the privacy rights which remove the youth from the family group nonetheless keep him or her ultimately within the family sphere - within the home - as much as possible.

Within the home therefore, privacy as a matter of dispersing or isolating members or restricting the need for contact or interaction, is generally quite limited. However, while this interior is open to all who live within the home and those few permitted regular access, the house itself defines the closed and cherished private sphere of the family within the larger community. Kurt Shelly, Irene's married, twenty three year old son, in fact listed this as a primary quality that made a house a "home":

Privacy - I think a home should be more or less [private]...not complete privacy, but I guess when you're raised in an area like this you're prone to be a little nosier than what you should be. I know I am, and I think everybody else in this town is but... still, its nice to have a definite line which is yours. (408:032)

In fact this "line", the boundary between the interior

and the exterior of the home, sharply delimits what might be guarded from public knowledge and what is available to pervasive and continuous public monitoring. As was pointed out in the introductory chapters, the details and history of a family's life are broadly available to large portions of the county as public scrutiny and gossip remain profound elements of daily life. The settlement pattern of the community itself facilitates this penetration of individual and family life and essentially mirrors the conditions that the community within the home experiences.

Situated in the midst of expansive valleys and forests, the borough itself is encountered as a dense clustering of homes "enclosed" by a series of ridges. The main portion of the borough is laid out in a grid. Houses back up to one another on lots that average between one quarter and one half acre. Access to the yards of these homes is extended by the series of public alleyways that run behind and in some cases also alongside the homes. Finally, in the near total absence of fences or yard plantings which might act as screens, the exteriors of these homes are left almost completely available to public view. Such manifest devices for achieving some measure of visual privacy seemed, both by virtue of their absence and by the ways in which residents discounted them as a possibility, to be inappropriate in the same way that privacy mechanisms within the home were regarded as irregular. To construct a fence or screen here

would be to offend one's neighbors as well as to occasion talk and suspicion about what one had to hide.

It is interesting to note however, that when I articulated this conclusion to one of my primary informants in the community, he added an important clarification : "yea, that's true", he told me, "but you have to keep in mind that you also wouldn't want to put a fence up because then you couldn't see out". The point he chose to emphasize was that the monitoring is mutual and motivated by a keen and largely unexamined interest in what everyone else is doing. As Kurt Shelly implied above, privacy may be something each resident craves here yet each, by training and through a cultivated curiosity, is involved in denying it to the other. It is this dynamic which perpetuates the intensive degree of mutual monitoring that marks the social life of this borough.

The notable exceptions to this rule came with the homes of the borough's three most prominent families. The Loschs and Chapmans bordered the town in homes hidden by mature trees. The Coopers were more centrally located in the borough on an acre of land that was self-consciously bounded by dozens of trees said to include every variety known to grow in the state. The privacy needs observed within these families were in general, more highly elaborated both within and outside of their homes. Within the community, their privacy was marked as an aspect of their privileged

position. Yet it was also discussed antagonistically as a metaphor for their "detachment" from the general community. It might also be pointed out here that while part of the appeal of the homes of the "radiating arms" of development, was that they were on larger lots and were thought of as being "out from town", their siting and similar minimal use of screening left them open to public view as well.

In the absence of visual screens, families were open to surveillance in most all of their outside activities. The inevitable result was that the presence of others, whether actual or not, was something these people were acutely, and at times oppressively, aware of. Yet the implications of these arrangements are not limited simply to the way they modified and influenced outside behavior. Of equal significance is the fact that in this county, this *visual access* "opens" the individual to contact with anyone within eyesight and subjects them to all the rights and obligations that guide public interaction. Visual contact *is* contact here, and it requires that one acknowledge the other at minimum, and more appropriately pause and engage in some conversation, however brief. This applied in all pedestrian encounters, as it did surprisingly, even to acquaintances passing in speeding cars. Greetings were considered a necessity not only when eyes met, but even when locals were simply in a position to see one another, and any regular failure to exchange greetings quickly labeled one as

"unsociable". Demands were greatest amongst neighbors. One can wave and shout "hello!" to a neighbor on visual contact, however such distal greetings have to be balanced at regular intervals by some more leisurely conversations in order to demonstrate the appropriate concern and civility of a neighbor who can be "counted on". Dave Stine explained this as a kind of social amenity that generates frequent visiting back-and-forth between contiguous neighbors in the warm weather:

We do that alot - we're out back and their porch [their elderly neighbor's porch] is out back, and I'd say there's very few days if we're in the garden working...if they're out, out of politeness we walk over and say hello to them. I'd consider it very rude if you didn't say hello to them. It's be just like walking past somebody on the sidewalk. (17B:550)

With respect to this last point he emphasized that in Petersburg, you say hello to people on the sidewalk, "whether you've never seen them before". One does not therefore, "civilly disattend" (Goffman 1963) to anyone here.

When visible outside the home, all residents must accommodate the uninvited visits of neighbors "just dropping over". The front porch has, for this reason, long been an institution of summertime socializing. In the past these shaded extensions from the home provided a center for family activities in the summers. Families spent their evenings here looking out on the community and in turn being watched by neighbors and passersby. By the rules of access porches carry families fully "out" into the community sphere.

Perhaps not surprisingly, elderly residents have long relied on this feature of their yards and porches to essentially "entrap" contact with others. In recent years, however, (residents date it to the introduction of the television), porch sitting and visiting have declined and yard use seems to have become quite minimal. Those who have no alternatives still use their front porches to some extent, but others have built patios behind their homes to reduce their accessibility. Still others have added "sunporches" which pointedly screen the family but importantly, do so without it being apparent.

When residents of this borough step outside of their homes therefore, they will find themselves within the communal sphere of the community - opened to varying degrees to observation, and obliged to respond and frequently accommodate themselves to the presence of those around them. Complaints about the resultant near-total lack of privacy are readily evoked here, where they were not with respect to the home's internal community. Yet despite these complaints, people remain. They continue to live under these high-density, high-visibility conditions, "under the eye" as one man put it. The reasons have to do with much more than economics. The tendency to cluster in this way is much too common to the settlement patterns of the county at large to be dismissed on grounds of necessity. All boroughs and villages present conditions similar to those found in Peter-

burg and even what appears to be a new model, the strip development along the major roadways, can be found more correctly to be intermittent "outbursts" of houses grouped around some center as mentioned in chapter two. It also happens most commonly that farmers develop plots of land closest to their homes when they begin selling-off land for income. When multi-lot tracts of land are developed, families will also typically buy and build on lots that are closer to, rather than farther from, existing homes. This was even seen in the case of one developer who built his own home and then began developing the tract in a grid beginning with the lots surrounding his own.

Within the borough itself, the residents ultimately demonstrate a complex set of needs that confounds their complaints and strongly qualify their interests in privacy. This ambivalence is encountered routinely in the "eternal debate" among locals regarding the virtues of town living as compared to "country" living. It is a debate waged in terms whose predictability underscores the reification of the issues. Borough life is life in a glass jar it is reasoned, but it is safe and convenient. Kurt Shelly's comment, made directly after his point on the routine nosiness of neighbors, reflected this standard apology well:

I've been raised in town and I really like being in town...this sounds stupid, but in a way there's that sense of security too - that's where the part about the nosy neighbor comes in, in the respect I think it's important to have neighbors. Not nosy neighbors,

but "concerned"...If you get away and a strange car pulls in or something like that y'know, they'll see what's going on. And if you have a problem or something you can go talk to a neighbor and maybe he'll help you. And you have the store downtown and everything's more convenient in town. (40B:060)

Residents in fact seem so enamored of the two sides of this controversy, that any complaint they may make about privacy is usually followed quickly by some statement of the advantages of this density. Note the comments of this woman, for example, who moved to the countryside one half mile out of the borough before returning one year later:

I always lived in town but when I moved out there I was scared to death of course - I'm used to street lights and its pitch black out there at night. And now I hate the street lights. I always said I was a town person but I'd like living out there again. You could sit out on the porch in the morning in your nightgown in the summertime and have a cup of coffee and no one saw you. There was just so many things that you can't do in town - but its vice versa too. I mean we can walk down the street to the bank or to the post office where we'd have to get in the car before... its just the thing I hated most when I moved back to town was that when you go outside in the morning there are six people there saying "good morning!" and no matter who you see they stop and chit-chat (13A:120)

It is perhaps relevant to note that six months after this, the woman and her husband bought a house in the center of town.

Privacy as an issue thus seems to summon a set of arguments which, stripped to their essence, alternate between the rights and "freedoms" of the individual and the advantages of the group - between "private life" and community life. Residents will express a profound ambiva-



lence about their happiness with this kind of density, yet they will nonetheless stay, or leave and return. The reasons may be sought finally in other contexts where residents speak more fully about who it is that actually surrounds them - about their desire to live near their parents, siblings or children; about the advantage of being able to walk to visit friends; about the comfort of knowing everyone around you. The density and exposure is not shared by disconnected strangers, but by family, friends and acquaintances connected in overlapping networks of relationship. Beside the desire for security and convenience of borough living therefore, there lie strong motivations to remain within this "known universe" of others, the same "others" who are responsible for restricting all possibilities for privacy.

Whatever the needs may finally be that serve to perpetuate the accessible, "open" conditions of this settlement, the fact remains that it has continued to exist and expand in a form that broadly limits the privacy of the family outside of its home. These proxemic conditions in the community thus mirror the conditions within the home. Just as the organization of space within the home, and the rules for its occupation locate the individual continually within the communal family sphere, the arrangements *without* situate the family not in personal space but within the visual and interactional range of the larger community. These rules for

usage do not support or facilitate the isolation of the nuclear household but rather emphasize its status as an element within larger social networks. The rules of access are substantially the same for all members of that extended kith and kin net discussed in the previous chapter. As a result, the rules of privacy, and manifest patterns of usage both facilitate and mark the integration of households and the structure of kinship relationships that typify social life here. While this discussion began earlier, therefore, with a circumscribed spatio/temporal event, the family center, I am generalizing at this point to what I see to be a prevailing tendency in the use of space generally in the borough. There is here a tradition of spatial organization which seems to locate the individual in the presence of the group on a continuing basis. This is the essence of that "free-floating" form that is organized within the home, and it lies at the core of proxemic relations in the settlement itself.

#### **Conclusion: Organizing Communication in Space**

This chapter introduced a series of interrelated questions, each of which approached the potential communicative value of spatial dimensions of the home from different angles. Could the physical specifications of these buildings be found to index the system of social standing in the community in which they reside? Could their material

arrangements tell us how people live in them? How could actual usage be characterized, and what were its implications for the organization of communication and relationships within the home? In each instance it was found that the information or interpretations that could be accessed through the structure of the buildings alone could not reliably lead us to the intricacies of the conduct or processes of evaluation that have characterized the domestic behavior of Peterburg residents.

Initially we saw that the sign value of "scale" was underplayed within this system of evaluation and that as a measure of standing, it could be quite misleading. House size was consistently couched and qualified as a measure within an understanding of a broader array of criteria by which a person is judged, including such things as personal history, life achievements and so on. Mobility was not necessarily enacted through the house in this way and house size, as a result, did not correlate dependably with status in this community.

A definable patterning in the use of space within the domestic sphere was identified however, which bore directly on both the organization of communication within the home and the home's relevance to the assessment of a family's character. Space use was characterized in terms of how activities, and people in the home were located (how combined or isolated), how sensory overlap was regulated,

how mutual access was controlled or apportioned, and what methods and preferences guided the management of privacy and proximity in the home. In these terms a customary patterning of proxemic behavior was defined which provided for extensive contact, mutual access and monitoring between members of the household and ultimately the community. It is an "open", informal style of usage which necessitates sustained interaction with the extended family network within the home, and with the larger community outside of the building.

These paterdings of everyday activity establish basic conditions which subsequently structure all communication within the household. As seen in the previous chapter, conceptual and behavioral orientations towards the home provided for a substantial interpenetration between the households of an extended, multi-generational network of kin. As the rules of access and usage have been examined here, the extent and implications of this intertwining perhaps become a bit clearer. Few boundaries are defined between households and the extended household may participate fully in the workings of each nuclear family's sphere. This organization thus promotes a continuous cross-referencing of behavior. Interaction, contact, and surveillance, within and between homes is constant. Communicative displays are to a major extent, organized first with reference to the surrounding structure of kinship relations before they are organized for competitive or comparative

processes of cross-referencing in the status system of the community. As will be seen in the chapters to follow, these circumstances ultimately provide a context which strongly influences all other processes of communication conducted through the home.

Other studies have phrased the degree of proximity seen here as "congestion" (cf. Lennard and Lennard 1977) and suggested that it tends to increase stress in families along possibly with the incidence of mental illness. My findings here suggest however, that such studies may not account for cultural norms and the structure of expectations and preferences which mediate these conditions within the home. These relations in space have been found in a variety of other settings to function as both products of, and necessary conditions for, the kinds of interdependent relationships I have found to typify family and community relations here. In his study of the "peer-group society" in the densely populated West End of Boston, for example, Gans (1962) found that the close proximity and high density in the population served to support the social structure of this ethnic community. Fried (1972) found that when these people were relocated away from the supposedly "sociopathic" conditions of the neighborhood, they experienced strong emotional trauma and a weakening of social and cultural ties. Much as Young and Wilmot (1960) found in studies of a working class neighborhood in London, their studies seemed to confirm that

these kinds of spatial densities may in fact be necessary to support the maintenance and cohesion of extended multi-generational family networks.

For the residents of Peterburg, their extended exposure to family and the community at large was at times resented, and all seemed to embody a certain ambivalence towards their limited privacy. Yet amongst those who chose to remain in the community this density of contacts and relationships was finally a great source of comfort. It provided a sense of identity and connection which all had accounts of missing on their trips away from the county. Paul Miller Jr. expressed this openly when he returned to unemployment in the county rather than continue to work in the Southwest. People stay here, or return, and the organizational forms charted in this chapter are repeated and retained from one generation to the next.

Within the home, and within the community then, people are not simply surrounded by bodies, but "located" within a network of relationships. The kinds of spatial densities I have found here finally only mirror this density of relationships in which these people are immersed. These open, accessible, communicational arrangements have, as such, to be seen as both artifacts and instruments of the structure of kinship relations which order daily life, as well as important elements in the extension of social control throughout the community.

Beyond the instrumental value of these proxemic traditions in regulating communicational activity and facilitating the play of relationships, there is finally a reserve of symbolic significance that can be associated with the simple persistence of these behavioral patterns. They express something of the importance and durability these people maintain for tradition in the face of fashion, for continuity in the midst of change. For as has been seen, the regular rotation of housing plans in this century has given expression to the variabillites of fashion, and its allusions to "progress", change, and connection with events in the national sphere. It has been a cautious, consensus-driven expression of fashionability in this community, however, and the behavior associated with these homes has changed more slowly than have the encompassing buildings. Thus it seems that the *image* of change seems to long precede the actuality of behavioral adaptation in this community.

This dynamic characterizes much of the social life of this county and it suggests the priority given here to the role of traditions in the organization of social life. Through the traditions of space use discussed in this chapter, residents of this community have demonstrated a primary orientation to continuity. What they have sustained in this way is a customary mode of family organization - a set of methods, rules and expectations regulating how residents will interact and co-exist with one another. To

the extent that they embody community ideals about family organization, these traditions of usage might finally be said to demonstrate each family's sustained membership in the community. For as Tonnies has noted, "custom ever signifies community" (1961). It conveys on a daily basis one's continued participation in the common belief system of the community, at once representing the norms of the community and, as Carey has suggested, "affirming" them:

The projection of community ideals and their embodiment in material form...creates an artificial though nonetheless real symbolic order which operates not to provide information but confirmation, not to alter attitudes or change minds, but to represent an underlying order of things, not to perform functions but to manifest an on-going and fragile social process. (1975:6)

Thus while these people have adopted a shifting array of fashionable floorplans through time, their actual activities in the homes have been organized in a manner that affirms and binds them to the traditional culture of their families and communities. They may have affected the material symbols of alternative plans for living, but the continuities remain and serve signally to demonstrate their origins in the culture of this rural county.



## NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

<sup>1</sup> On the interaction of the built environment and behavior see especially Rapoport 1969, 1976, R. Gutman 1976 and Hall 1969. See also Goffman 1959 and 1963 and D. Smith 1971 on the function of social rules and conventions in structuring activity within homes. Beyond considerations of the relation of floor plans, the "fixed features" of house structure, to behavior there are also numerous studies of the relationship between semi-fixed features such as furnishings and the patterning of communicational activity. See Hall 1969, Schefflen 1971 and 1976, Schefflen and Ashcraft 1976 and Ruesch and Kees 1961.

<sup>2</sup> Glassie characterizes this shift further as embodying a switch from "experiential" to "conceptual modes of order" and points out:

The old house exhibited organic order - conceptual continuity - most clearly in the multiple use of a few large spaces; kitchens for cooking and talking, rooms for sleeping and eating. In time, spaces fragment and constrict, and functions simplify. (1982:379)

Thus contemporary house forms are thought to grow out of this common generalized model of usage to an increasingly "rationalized" differentiation of spaces (cf Hall 1969:14). In making this analysis, Glassie does suggest however that this is a tentative model of change that "awaits improvement and use in different localities" (p.763). This chapter is intended in part to demonstrate some of the model's discontinuities with the experience of the residents in this borough.

<sup>3</sup> It is interesting to note in this regard that county property was last assessed some eleven years prior to this study by a private firm based in Ohio. The assessors they brought to the county used a system of assessment that was designed to be applicable to homes throughout the country. The result is a set of comparative valuations drawn from a code based neither on the range of buildings in the county's inventory or in local evaluations of those buildings. The current tax assessor delights in pointing out what he and others consider inequitable and even bizarre comparative valuations based in this code. He has taken it as one of his goals in the job to "even things up" as the people in the county would see it.

<sup>4</sup> "Parlors" were distinguished from "formal livingrooms" here in a number of ways. Parlors are rooms which, much as in the past, are

specifically prepared and reserved for the display of family artifacts, for demonstrations of money, breeding, and hosting skills. Formal livingrooms are rooms that are set aside for reduced usage although unlike the parlor, they are available for routine usage other than the hosting of guests. These livingrooms will have the better furniture in the home, but it need not be expensive (local standards proscribing "extravagances" will apply here), and furniture will frequently be quite similar, aside from condition, to family room furniture. Also, whereas "mannerly" and "formalized" forms of behavior are the hallmark of the parlor, the formal livingroom as a contemporary device, is not appropriately associated with manifest prohibitions and prescriptions on behavior, even though in practice children are restrained in their use of these rooms.

▫ Lynes phrases this emergence of the kitchen as a national trend, a development he describes as part of a 100 year journey by the kitchen back into the fold:

Since the end of the second world war, the kitchen has assumed a social acceptability that it never had before in the well-to-do classes in America....The open plan by the 1940's had been fairly widely accepted as the means of achieving the illusion of space in the small house. Instead of being chopped into small self-contained segments, cut-off by doors, the livingroom flowed into the dining "area", often an "L" of the livingroom. It was a brief step into the kitchen so that, in effect, they became one,..The factory of the house (the kitchen) and the parlor had finally become one.(1957:136)

As Glassie has shown, he might best have said they "returned" to one. In either case, Lynes explained this increasingly communal organization of household space to be part of a long process of "democratizing the household".

◆ The point should be emphasized that with this phrase "unit of use" I am trying to overcome that sense of location which is anchored in the physical structure of the building. I operate from the premise here that, as Birdwhistell has noted (1971), "the room is not necessarily co-extant with a portion of the building". It is a social place with both spatial and temporal features, that is formed by regular patterns of use, rules for occupation and for inclusion and exclusion. (cf. Goffman 1963 on "conventional boundaries".)

In this sense the unit of use is similar to Schefflen's notion of a "territory" which he defines as a "quantum of space which is marked off for a time by the behaviors of some social unit" (1976:183). By taking the unit of use as our manifest focus then, we look beyond the

organization of the physical form to the conceptual organizations of the building made manifest in the recurring activities of its occupants. These conceptual organizations are I suspect, also what Glassie had in mind when he spoke of the "experiential modes of order" that organized the communal spaces of the hall and parlor plans he discussed (1982).

My point in the pages that follow will be that these forms need not be tied to any given plan but can rather form, disband, and reform in space within the confines of a variety of different physical structures. The task in defining these "floating units" in the pages to follow will be, according to Schefflen's structural perspective (1975), to: isolate recurring patterns of activity and organizations of occupants (a structure of relationships defined in terms of inclusions, exclusions, and who is allowed to be co-present); mark behavioral boundaries, subspace, and the relationship of this area to surrounding areas; and to specify duration - when does this place occur? The description of the family center that follows is directed to an explanation of these features.

<sup>7</sup> In using the term "informal", hosting in this community is contrasted to what Frake describes as distinguishing the "formal":

What makes something formal is not just that it is constrained, but that there is an explicit awareness and overt display of constraint...what is happening is pre-defined, overdetermined, and securely bounded.  
(1981:4)

Hosting in this county (outside the sphere of its old families) is pointedly directed to avoiding the appearance of constraint. A good host instead "opens" his home to the visitor and avoids manifestly altering behavior within.

In practice then I often found early-on in this research that this led to some interesting, if awkward, first moments between my hosts and myself. My own system of etiquette directed me to make formal introductions and acknowledge the generosity they showed by allowing me into their homes with elaborate expressions of thanks. They in turn, deflected my comments, often ignoring them, in order to avoid my phrasings of the "visit" as a visit, and instead framed the situation as one demanding no special behaviors or acknowledgement. I was for a time convinced that these were people with "no manners". I soon learned an appreciation, however, for the manner in which an ostensible "non-response", within a situation (a visit) which is nonetheless implicitly marked as being out of the ordinary (by the sheer presence of the guest), may here function as effectively to honor a guest, as ritually altered forms of behavior.

• Barry Swartz hypothesized that doors might be susceptible to this kind of age graded negotiation in his discussion of privacy. Speaking of the compromises worked out between a parent and child he suggests:

A general temporal pattern might emerge if a large number of cases were examined. During infancy, the door to self is generally fully open; it closes perhaps halfway as a recognition of self-development during childhood, it shuts but is left ajar at pre-puberty, and closes entirely - and perhaps even locks - at the pubertal and adolescent stages when meditation, grooming, and body examination become imperative. (1968:749)

While I admittedly did not have the observational time to confirm his hypothesis such a detailed codification of childhood stages by the placement of doors seems improbable. The more manifest needs for privacy amongst teens do seem to be marked in the treatment of doors in Ridge County - my clear impression however, is that this represents a major and temporary exception to normal practice rather than one stage in a progression of changes.

## CHAPTER V

### THE COMMUNICATIVE USE OF FURNISHINGS

Q: What is that cabinet in the corner?

MM: Its a music cabinet. That's old. I never got that refinished, but I think....it has the original, a little picture on the front of it, a lyre or a guitar or something, I've forgotten what's on the front of it. But that, my mother had gotten that for me at a sale one time, over there at Bishop's - just catty-corner from the printing office, over in that yellow house where Charley Shermer lives there going out Fairview. He was the druggist over there, and they had sale. She got that I think for 50 cents. Oh, I've used it so hard, it should be refinished.  
[15A:480-485]

As I questioned people about their furnishings through the course of this research, my concern was to learn what "meanings" furnishings held for those who used them. I wanted to investigate the significances which came to be associated with them. Further I wondered how they were derived, how shared, and what purposes they served within the family and the community at large. My intent, as explained in the first chapter, had been to approach these issues at the level of form and taste. In the instance recorded above, sitting in Maddy Miller's colonial American livingroom in the midst of a conversation about refinishing furniture, I asked her to identify this imitation French

cabinet. It had seemed to me that the piece clashed graphic-ally with her livingroom. I asked her then, for terminology and was heading towards the matter of "style".

From the beginning of this research I attempted to initiate interview sequences concerning taste and form with a series of indirect questions about furnishings. My hope was to elicit descriptive categories and local discrimina-tions with the minimum of guidance. After some hesitant discussion of the physical features of the cabinet, Maddy moved to a discussion of who gave it to her, who owned it previously, and a little history on where they lived, what they did, and who owns their house now. The kind of informa-tion she related was in many ways typical to the general devotion one sees to discussing and collecting lineages in this county. Such discussions at first seem to be only indirectly relevant to the piece of furniture itself. However, as this research proceeded and I listened to a range of Ridge countians discuss their furnishings, (listened to what they chose to talk about, the order in which they discussed these features, and what they consider-ed to be important about the furnishings;) it became apparent that her approach to the object was an extremely common one. The "provenance" of these objects (their origins, how they came to the home, and who and what events they are associated with), was routinely foregrounded in this way as a key feature of household furnishings. It

seemed to be what owners knew the most about in connection with their furnishings, and such knowledge seemed to be what they considered most relevant to discuss. From the start, therefore, these discussions directed my research away from a premature concern with material form to an examination of the symbolic processes through which a range of allusions to people and events came to be associated with the many "things" of the house.

To understand this dimension of property and its prominence for these people, it is necessary to understand the ways in which furnishings are managed and exchanged here. Things move. They "change hands". And in the course of their natural history they are bought, sold, given as gifts, loaned, exchanged, used, moved, willed and otherwise redistributed again and again. They move repeatedly through the life-cycle of the home and yet it is not haphazard movement. To begin with, consumption, and more pointedly spending money, is an activity with a strong ethical grounding in this community. Normative principles concerning frugality, utility and the need to avoid ostentation and pretense, guide the process and foster an approach to acquisition which encourages a reliance on various forms of sharing and exchange in pooling resources for the home.

As those items which constitute furnishings circulate between homes and owners therefore, they are regularly implicated by Peterburg residents in the management of their

roles and their relationships with one another. Furnishings and the stories about them serve as media, immersed in the on-going events of marking, defining and maintaining relationships for family and community. There is, as well, a regularity to the forms of exchange used, their timing, their conditions, and their interpretation. The result is that the acquisition and exchange of home furnishings constitutes a major mode of interaction in this community. Such uses are immanent to the management of household furnishings here and they define one important dimension of the communicative uses of the many "things" of the house.' As Maddy's impromptu exposition on the music cabinet suggests however, the events of exchange ultimately become part of a process through which a set of allusions to people and events are invested in these objects and passed along with them. It will be seen that by virtue of these processes of symbolic investment, the furnishings of these homes are taken by their owners to encode a dense fabric of references to the network of family and friends that surrounds them.

In the section to follow, I will characterize the principle forms of exchange found here in order to demonstrate how this pattern of references is structured into these furnishings. This will be initiated by some consideration of the way furnishings move through the home in the course of the life-cycle, and the principals that in some part guide the process. This system of activity forms the



broader frame of reference or context within which the various *forms* of exchange, and the individual acts of exchange, are interpreted and understood. Each of the major forms of exchange constitutes a kind of coded activity within the range of exchanges. I will discuss here the patterning of each, the terms and conditions of their occurrence, beliefs which serve in structuring each and their conventions of interpretation (cf. Gross 1974). There is no way within the scope of this study to catalog all the various uses of household furnishings or their implications, and no attempt is made to do so. What should emerge in these notes, however, is some sense of the ways in which home furnishings, as a locus of activity, are implicated in the conduct of social relationships through the course of daily life in the borough of Peterburg.

### **The Furniture Cycle**

The acquisition and management of furnishings in this community is bounded by ethical and temporal considerations. Furniture is rarely acquired in one coordinated effort or through extensive purchases at any one time. Rather it is acquired gradually, in stages, and substantial reliance is placed on used furnishings in outfitting the home. Attention to the repair and re-cycling of furnishings already owned is also important to the maintenance of the home once it is established. As will be seen, a complex array of traditional

orientations towards consumption and the treatment of home furnishings supports this pattern. The frugal-utilitarian ideal, central to this community's public structure of values, is particularly influential in this regard. For consumption in this county is guided by an ascetic ideal which ties these people to the strict Protestantism of both their Scotch-Irish and German ancestors. These ideals, similar to those described by Weber in his analysis of Protestant Asceticism (1958), posit comfort, convenience, cleanliness, efficiency and economy as the "proper" goals for the home. In consumption, they stipulate an emphasis on utility, economy and the avoidance of economic pretense. This structure of values will be described in more detail in chapter six as we consider their interaction with the operation of aesthetic decisions which influence the furnishing of a home. For the present their impact on the way in which furnishings are acquired should be understood if their role in communicational processes is to be comprehended.

The emphasis placed on the public exhibition of economy and frugality in the acquisition of the home's material inventory does much to foster this piecemeal and incremental approach to the furnishings. Such activity greatly discourages resort to credit. All forms of debt are considered undesirable here at least in part because debt incurs additional expense. It is also believed that debt forms a shaky foundation on which to build a stable home life. There

is the sense that hard work and earned resources are the only "right" way in which to gain things. One should earn what one has, and these possessions should reflect one's work. Short-cuts such as credit confound the measure and people who achieve a fine and comfortable home by means of credit will be criticized for having "too much too soon".

Age will be included in this assessment of a family's appropriate frugality. The young, as they start out, are expected to have fewer resources than other families. What resources they do have are expected to be directed towards the early retirement of their mortgage and the needs of their children before any significant investment is made in household goods. There is for this reason an implied model of progress embedded in this notion of frugality which anticipates that expenditures on better furnishings will only finally be earned and justified with time as the owners "achieve" middle age and beyond.

The ethic is discernible throughout public life in this county. Boasts and stories about materials bought used or damaged, or "on the cheap" form a common motif in conversation, as do critical accounts of "squanderous" activities and habits. Auctions are commonly relied upon as a source for household furnishings and no stigma is associated with the use of second-hand goods. "Utility" is the key rationale for judging these furnishings. If a piece is functional and "has any use left in it" then it need not, and generally

"should not" be discarded. As a result, the acquisition of furnishings through direct purchase is generally circumscribed and accomplished gradually over time. Used goods are acquired through various means and all furnishings are used until exhausted or otherwise saved and shared with others as they are needed.

The acquisition cycle which attends the home's own life-cycle is thus marked by a piecemeal, accumulative approach to furnishing which implicates other family members and friends in the process. If we adapt the notion of the family developmental cycle (cf. Fortes 1958) to the stages of acquisition, it can be noted that the house and its "things" follow the family from set-up, through the "expansion" stage when dependent children are raised in the home; through "dispersal" which begins with the movement of the children away from the home; and finally to "replacement" when the parents die or are institutionalized and the home is disbanded.<sup>2</sup> The acquisition, movement and replacement of furnishings follows this developmental sequence in family life and is broadly patterned within it.

In the beginning, the new family receives substantial assistance in setting up their household. This is a period of marked acquisition and accumulation, and a large number of furnishings, most second-hand, are taken from parents and older siblings - frequently in exchange for services or other forms of assistance. Those things which cannot be

gotten in this way will be purchased, quite often through second-hand sources such as weekend auctions. However a very substantial portion of the household's inventory will arrive as gifts and as that which will be defined below as "pooled" items. It is not uncommon for couples to take up to four years through this piecemeal approach to achieve a fully functional home, one which incorporates all rooms in the building.

Once the major furnishings are in place, most couples consider their home to be "set". New furniture will most often only be acquired to replace pieces that are no longer serviceable. A first replacement phase usually occurs six to eleven years after the home has been established and most often focuses on the livingroom. A new couch or possibly an entire "suit" may be acquired and the old furniture moved to a family room. Complete replacement of furnishings was rare, as mentioned, and I saw or heard of only two instances in which a family moved furniture out in order to "re-decorate" an entire room. Rather these resources were carefully managed so that frayed furnishings could be moved to the family room while they still had some use in them. The older furnishings were then given to another sibling or family member or stored. Furnishings are rarely discarded simply because they are no longer in use. From this point forward, most couples begin to amass the collections of used things which will prove so important when their own children or

siblings leave home.

With the major furnishings in place, acquisition becomes a more occasional process, generally focusing upon incidental and decorative objects for the home. Additional lamps and side-tables, wall-decorations, and so on, only begin to accrue in substantial numbers during this period. These "incidentals" now become the object of pooling and gift-giving with-in the family during this period.

At the onset of the "dispersal stage" when children begin to leave for their own places, the flow of goods changes to a predominantly "outward" one. Stored furnishings will be drawn off and items currently in use may be replaced so that they can be pooled to the new homes. Some couples may initiate a new round of "recreational" buying for the home as children leave, acquiring and arranging new furnishings as a kind of shared hobby. Most couples, however, only invest their resources in maintaining their home as it is at this point. While new acquisitions and old furnishings are being directed "out", however, gift-giving and some forms of collecting will continue to bring objects, mainly display items, into the parental house. The flow of goods "out" generally increases as parents near death and begin to give furnishings away. The final movement of household goods occurs at death, when the home is disbanded and its possessions are dispersed to the homes of family, friends and even the larger community.

In contrast to groups, such as the Italian-Americans of South Philadelphia, who acquire new furniture periodically in order to reaffirm their commitment to the family (Musello 1979), the people of Peterburg thus work to demonstrate their commitment to proper priorities through the frugal use and stewardship of existing furniture. The result is that home furnishings circulate through the various homes of each family network, establishing a kind of open channel between them. Gifts, and inheritances are also passed along these channels. And in all of this movement, household goods come to serve as a potential resource to be exploited in the conduct of family relations. This review of acquisition processes, while necessarily broad, should provide some sense again of the frame of reference within which all material transactions among friends and family members take place. In the following sections pooling, gift-giving, relic-collecting and inheritance events will be examined in order to see how the movement of goods is used interactively within these networks. In addition, my intent will be to demonstrate the ways in which such movement provides a basis for the investment of the range of allusions home furnishings are believed to carry in this community.

### **Pooling**

One of the customary ways for families to acquire furnishings in Ridge County is through a family-centered

system of distribution and exchange which will be referred to as "pooling". The term is derived from Sahlin's analysis of primitive exchange and is used to distinguish a system of distribution in which reciprocity is *not* a key concern:

Pooling stipulates a social center where goods meet and thence flow outwards, and a social boundary too, within which persons (or subgroups) are cooperatively related. But reciprocity stipulates two sides, two distinct social-economic interests. Reciprocity can establish solidary relations, in so far as the material flow suggests assistance or mutual benefit, yet the social fact of sides is inescapable. [1965:141-42]

He stresses that it is a form of exchange which is characterized by a "within" relation, collective action within a group. It is, he notes, important to societies "ordered in the main by kinship".

In Ridge County, pooling is focused on, and largely limited to, the extended family. By virtue of its ubiquity, it becomes an important communicational resource to these groups - both as a vehicle through which to sustain and negotiate familial or friendship roles and statuses; and as a means through which to mark or encode these networks of relation. What is involved at base is a vigorous custom of sharing used and "extra" furnishings within the extended family group as a kind of communal resource. The practice is often regarded humorously, and was frequently called to my attention as people set out to tell me "the story" of one of their old pieces. Paul and Maddy Miller offered one such story about an old couch that had been in every house in the



family and had now, after almost 30 years, come to rest in their close friend's hunting cabin (Figure 5-1A traces its course). They generalized from this example to explain it as their normal pattern for handling furnishings:

PM: We'll get something new and bring it in here (the livingroom) and it sorta goes around and out there (the family room) and then right out the door.

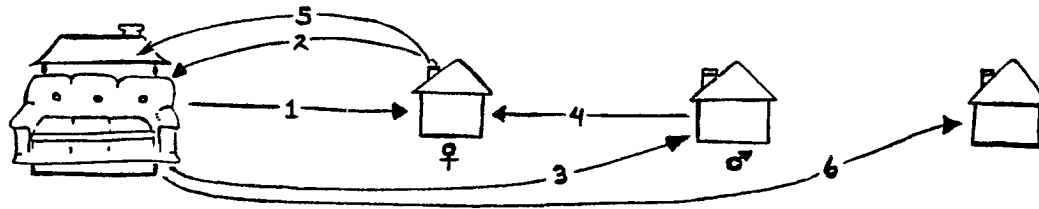
MM: And alot of stuff we've had has gone on to the kids

PM: Oh, they've taken them over there and they've used them, and then they get something and it comes back here again. And, (laughing) we tell them we don't want them back//

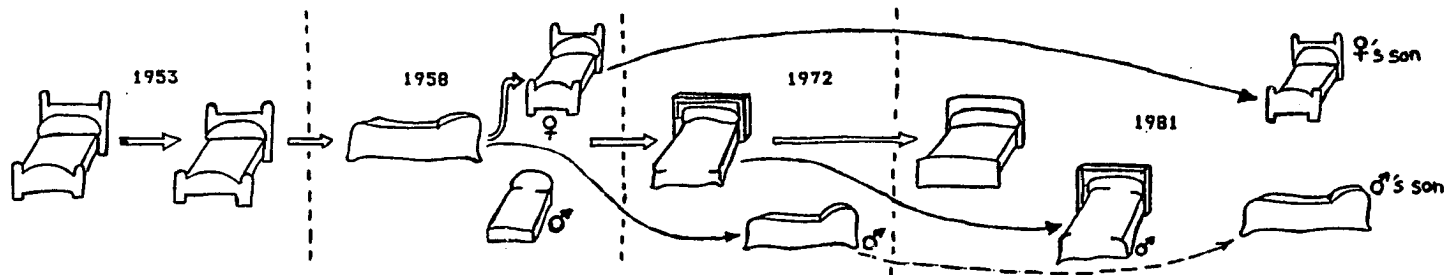
MM: Yeah, we've switched furniture around an awful lot.

What they describe is a common process in which new furnishings enter through the livingroom and move to a family room or den as they age. Such pieces are in some sense stored and become replaceable and "available" for use by other family members who may need them more. In the Miller's case, the couch went out to each kid as they set-up house and came back as they were able to replace it. This provides for a kind of circular flow of goods between family homes.

Figures 5-1B & C, offer two alternative and more linear courses. In "B" we see that an item, in this case a bed, may be used and reused, repaired and restored, until it has passed through many generations of the same family. They are passed along, not as an inheritance or a lineage item, but rather more as a practical item loaned out and passed around from one body to the next. The result in this instance is



**A:** The Miller's Couch: from their home to daughter's (1); and back (2); to son (3); to sister (4); and back (5); and finally, "out to a friend's camp (6).



**B:** Grandma's Bed: goes to the M's in 1953; the M's buy a new bed in 1958, grandma's goes to their daughter, their son uses one of her other beds; in 1972 son marries, M's buy a new bed, give him theirs; 1981, M's buy new bedroom set, old set to son, daughter's son uses his great grandmother's bed, son's son uses his grandparents's bed.



**C:** Jeanne's Mother's Couch: (1) to Jeanne and Dick as "starter couch"; (2) to Jeanne's sister as "starter couch"; (3) to last sister as "starter couch"; (4) to sister's son as "dorm couch".

**FIGURE 5-1:** Pooling - The "Careers" of Three Pieces of Furniture

that little Raymond now sleeps, as his mother and his grandmother once did, on a bed his great-grandmother used; while Danny Jr. uses the bed his grandparents had before they gave it to his parents when they were married.

The Campbell's recited the story of their couch to me one night around a table of coffee and desserts shared with the couple whose son eventually carted it off to school (figure 5-1C). As each of these couples added details of this itinerant sofa's history it became apparent that its course had been predicted by the strength of their ties to one another (they visit almost daily). Its path indexed these pre-existing bonds. All of the sisters in Jeanne's family have been, and remain "close" by their own description, and so the sofa had passed from mother to daughter, and sibling to sibling, charting its way along the matrilineal line of this family.

In these typical cases, the furnishings moved between the generations and through the homes of an extended family. These pieces can be seen to move less often to cousins, and to those few close friends whose status as near or pseudo-kin was marked by inclusion in customs such as these. Usually only immediate family and those relations with whom one socializes are included. The movement of these goods thus provides tangible evidence of bonds of relation here and generally also provides a reliable indicator of kith and kinship distance.

Most furnishings in this channel flow "out" from the parental home to the houses of the children. Thus the sense of a "center" in the pooling process is made tangible and this contributes strongly to the identity of the parental home as a "homeplace". The "flow" may include new items bought by parents for children, but second-hand furnishings are the most common components of this stream of material assistance. The arrival of new furnishings in the parental home provides a common occasion for a round of pooling and, as in the example of figure 5-1C, these purchases may actually be stimulated and justified by the perception of a need in a child's home. In all cases, one calls around whenever extra furnishings are precipitated out of some change in the home. Any change in the inventory of one home is therefore likely to produce a ripple effect through the whole line of a family's homes. Pooling in this way unifies, to a large extent, both the inventories and the acquisitive activities of the extended family network into one system of shared resources.

The tradition of "frugality", e.g. of financial and material conservatism, that underlies the management of property in this county is essential in fueling the pooling process. This is a comparatively poor county and parents typically do not have extensive funds to draw on in aiding their children. Little is thrown away as a result and those things that are accumulated through the lifetime of a house-

hold are saved in an array of "junk rooms", attics, sheds and even "junk houses" maintained by many families. Most commonly, then, the "center" draws its resources from this reserve of things saved. Grand-parental homes also play an important role since some part of these estates will generally be pulled into the communal pool when these homes are dissolved. The material that is drawn-on in pooling therefore may literally be the combined wealth of several generations. Pooling in this way frequently constitutes a multi-generational process of mutual assistance (and inter-dependence) that offers an impressive and literal material continuity in the furnishings of successive generations.

Not incidentally, the "material continuity" provided for families by these storehouses of old things was perceived quite differently by agents of the surrounding metropolitan antique markets. These same attics and basements were plumbed as "goldmines" by the many antique dealers who passed through the county in the 60's and early 70's. And even as they redefined these objects as "antiques", they accepted local definitions of the goods when it came to settling on a price. The "pickers" claimed to be "just buying up people's junk". Much of this antique inventory was, as a result, sold-off for a fraction of its value in the national markets. These events thus provide an interesting example of the clash of two value systems. The goods were defined locally by their role in a customary form

of activity, while the dealers viewed them as commodities valued quite differently in other markets. In many ways, these events can be found to typify the economic relationship between this poor county and the economic interests of the outside world.

Within the community however, and within the extended family network, these accrued pools are regarded as a shared resource to be meted-out at the discretion of the parents. Their obligation is to be "fair and even" about dividing the goods, but most often open and equal access will be granted to the children, who have been led to assume their rights to these goods. The younger Dave Stine, for example, noted vis-a-vis his parents' attic:

Its getting cleaned out now. Everytime one of us goes home and needs something, we go up there and kinda shuffle it out. [D17A:045]

He commented that when his mother ran his four poster childhood bed up to the attic recently:

I went over there and stole it from her...I have two sisters, so before they went and got their fingers on it, I went up and snuck it out of the house. Its kinda like first come first serve in my house. [17A:050]

The result may be, as Dave's parents were quick to point out here, that the youngest kids get little as the oldest go to housekeeping first and take most with them. Some parents assume more active control over the goods for this reason, while in other homes it is left to the children to negotiate the re-distribution amongst themselves. In

either case, the use and circulation of these things at this time inevitably becomes implicated in the larger on-going events through which the family struggles to re-define its relationships during this transitional period.

Reciprocity is neither expected nor evaluated in the operation of this family distribution system. The flow is primarily unidirectional, although the off-spring and grandchildren will begin to contribute to the parental conglomerate as they leave possessions for storage and add gifts after leaving home. If there is a balance to be struck, or a debt to be paid here, it is one which is met by successive generations. Children may never be expected to meaningfully repay their parents' help, but they will be expected to pass the advantage on to their own children.

The question of balance is more sensitive for the relations of families whose children inter-marry. It seems to be overwhelmingly the case that, barring extreme indigence, a couple's paternal in-laws will be expected to shoulder principle responsibility for their material assistance. In this sense pooling serves as an extension of the male's responsibility to provide a comfortable home for his family. If a young husband is unable to provide fully for his home and his parents in turn fail to lend assistance, then public condemnation may fall on both he and his parents. Nevertheless, both sets of parents will feel it important to demonstrate an appropriate concern for the

shape of their children's homes and pooling provides an arena for its expression. Regardless of general expectations then, comparative assessments are implied and parents may feel competitive pressure to maintain some sense of balance in the sources of assistance, especially if the two sides do not get along.<sup>3</sup>

Pooling was found to be important to all families in the community. The prestigious Chapmans found it necessary, for example, ("we were both fortunate enough to have mothers who knew our needs and had extra furniture that they could give us"); as did the chronically unemployed Kurtz boys, who relied on their father to provide their housing and many of their furnishings. Pooling might include any of the full range of "things" to be found in a household including the house itself, and many young couples in fact "rented" houses that their parents had inherited and saved to pool in this manner. Both of the Miller children, for example, rented Maddy's mother's house on their way to their own homes. Others rented income properties that their parents owned, and in still other cases parents donated property for their children to build their homes on.

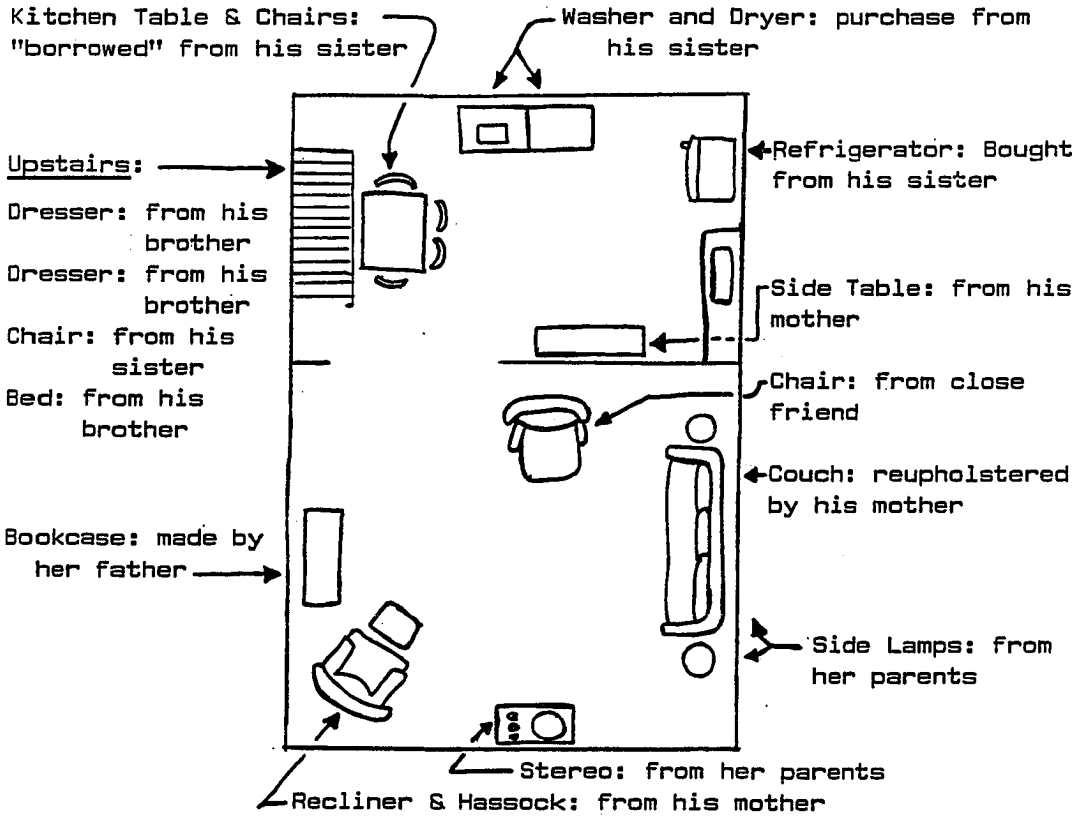
The most common purpose of pooling was to assist the young couple in getting "set-up" when they married and organized their first household. This giving occasions the largest surge of pooling in the family cycle other than at the time of death, and is aimed at providing the couple with



the rudiments of a working household. The "rudiments", of course, is subject to interpretation. In this community this minimal base varied significantly with the social standing and ambitions of the couple and their parents. There was a "standard package" of sorts that parents sought to aid their off-spring in achieving quickly. This includes several chairs and lamps, a table and chairs, needed appliances and so on, essentially enough for a working livingroom, bedroom and kitchen. Most of the families I studied began here. For working poor like the Farrells or Billy Kurtz's family, this was where any sizable aid stopped. Families who counted themselves amongst the community's solid middle class however, were generally anxious to see that the new house soon had the typical "full configuration" of rooms working. This included a family room and possibly a spare bedroom for relatives who might visit from a distance. Once these arrangements have been made, pooling generally becomes an occasional event following the cycles of replacement described above.

The process continues for years thereafter, and in this manner it varies from the practice of offering a dowry or gifts on departure. Pooling is a continuous aspect of the family furnishing cycle for as many as five to ten years after the couple "sets-up". During this period items are offered both to fill-in gaps and to some extent elaborate on the number and quality of furnishings. This is where

families such as the Stines, and others who aspired to maintain a lower upper-class image in the system of social estimate are distinguishable. Dave Stine Jr.'s mother, for example, moved as quickly as possible through her own means to carry her son's livingroom from the "merely functional" stage to the level of a formal livingroom. She did not stop with the fully furnished house, but pooled possessions in order to carry it to a next phase of elaboration. Such elaboration is generally left to the couple's own resources and for the majority of families is achieved much later, if at all. In this way the family's involvement in "pooling-to" their children's homes can in and of itself convey something of a family's sense of its status. Nonetheless, in the majority of cases those items distributed from family sources to the young couple just starting out will tend to comprise a major portion of the new household's furnishings. Figure 5-2 illustrates this in the case of Irene Shelly's son Kurt. It should be emphasized that the extent of their reliance on pooled items is not unusual. Both Kurt and his wife are employed as skilled laborers and they are by no means destitute. Houses may commonly be offered through pooling, along with any of their contents, and the labor needed to repair or adapt them. Indeed, even the elements of the home's landscape, may be drawn from friends and family. "If you ask me about the yard," one housewife commented,



**FIGURE 5-2: First Floor of Shelly Home with Furniture Sources**

"almost every shrub and tree has a story behind it."<sup>4</sup>

It can also be noted that while this is principally a system for distributing practical items, there are a variety of traditional components within the stream for which the necessity seems more a matter of custom than of demonstrated material need. Two items that were particularly salient in this regard were the husband's recliner and the wife's rocking chair. Recliners are invariably associated with the male head of the household here, and they are standard items in all but the most elegant homes. When a son leaves home therefore one of the earliest items to be pooled-along is a recliner, usually a used one from his father. Similarly, a rocker of some sort is considered a necessity for young wives who, it is assumed, will need the chair for nursing and rocking their babies to sleep. Rocking chairs therefore also find their way into the young couple's home at an early date. Each of these pieces carries certain behavioral expectations or images of customary use with them. Kurt Shelly, for example, indicated that his old 1940's recliner was important to him because of the images it carried of his father's routines:

Its special because when I was a little kid, and for years before that, my dad used to sit down there every Sunday morning and read the paper before church. It was just a ritual. Every Sunday morning he'd sit there and read and listen to the radio. And I guess too, because its been there nineteen years before I was born, it was in the same exact place all the years I was in the house...[D40B:590-95]

The chair today sits in Kurt's livingroom where it is now the center for his own routines as the male head of his own home. In the pooling of such objects of traditional use, therefore, we can see the transmission of customary forms of behavior. To the extent that such pieces are also, as with these chairs, closely associated with particular statuses in the home, they may also serve to mark the transition to new statuses that a couple makes in establishing their own home.

The whole process of pooling is conducted as a matter of custom. For the most part it is a cooperative undertaking in which all concerned have a sense of both the utilitarian justifications for the process and of the trajectory they are on in this cycle of aid. In addition to providing a substantive material continuity for these people, and a wealth of allusions to their kith/kin network, however, these exchanges provide a channel of interaction for all who participate. Perhaps as importantly, these objects and their passage afford an entree into the young couple's home which may be exploited in any number of ways.

In spirit, pooling constitutes a communal activity which makes no explicit demands on anyone. As furnishings are exchanged, issues and agreements about ownership and rights and obligations concerning the gifts are generally left unstated. Traditional assumptions, for example that the goods will be taken care of; that they may be kept until exhausted but will be recirculated if they are no longer

needed; that no reciprocation is required; and that this is an on-going process; guide people's expectations. No specific obligations are accrued here. Rather this instance of aid becomes part of a "fabric" of mutual assistance, part of the substance of these families's interdependence. The exchanges serve in essence to evoke and reaffirm a *general* commitment and obligation within the group<sup>3</sup>.

Yet these understandings can be manipulated and they can be misinterpreted. The reactions of Alice Miller to her in-laws' assistance is particularly instructive in this regard. As a woman from the suburbs of Harrisburg who had no experience with these traditions, her reaction to these ways can be understood as an artifact of her cultural distance from the county. The material incursions of the elder Millers into her household are substantial. The house itself is Mrs. Miller's inherited homeplace and is rented by the younger Millers for a nominal charge. The senior Millers have donated many of the furnishings still in the house plus pieces from their own home and others bought as bargains at local auctions. The elders have also invested their own labor in helping the couple renovate and paint. In explaining this, Alice framed all of it as constituting a pattern of interference in her home - as a challenge to her independence and rights as a homemaker:

See, when we do something [re: repair, decoration] they will offer to do something because we're just renting. Well, y'know, we like what we want, but then

his mother says: "Well, this would look nice in your house," and she keeps bugging me about it and bugging me: "Oh, we're gonna pay for it y'know". And we say, "fine, that's good, but if we want something better we'll pay for the extra - right?" Well, she doesn't like that idea because its *her* house. She feels that I should have what *she* wants in it. So, just to make amends and not make trouble in the family, I go along....but this isn't our house, and when she suggests something that's about all there is. I could just scream when I talk about it." [DBA:005-016]

She complained that her husband and sister (both of whom have long received assistance) are "sheltered", and capped her point by noting "I don't know, my parents taught me to be independent." When I left her at this early stage in my research I expected to meet a meddlesome mother-in-law in Maddy Miller.

However, when Mrs. Miller's household history is examined it can be seen that she and her husband rented an uncle's house when they went to housekeeping. They borrowed and later bought a large part of the furnishings there with the help of her father. Throughout their family years, furnishings trickled into the house from both homesteads. Both of their parents took care of the grand-children on a regular basis, and Maddy's mother often walked over in the late afternoons to prepare the family's dinner while she was at work. Finally, throughout the past 20 years, each of their widowed mothers had come in succession to live with Maddy and Paul. When Maddy's mother passed away she kept the homeplace and furnishings as a family resource, first renting it for five years to her daughter, and for the past

six years to Paul Jr. and Alice. The senior Millers have then, always lived their lives within an extended family network that treated extensive interpenetration between households as the norm, and they have long pooled resources within this group.

As the Millers unselfconsciously affected the same involvement in the homes of their own children it was perhaps unexpected that they would be assailed and resisted by Alice. In contrast to Alice's reaction, the Miller's own children were able to interpret their parents's actions and to assess its significance within the local frame of reference. Paul Jr. saw their "intrusions" as assistance and repeatedly rephrased their actions for his wife in this light. His inability to convince her or to understand her resistance clearly left him in the middle with divided loyalties. For her part, his sister, Gail, openly welcomed this kind of help from both her own and her husband's mother. It was for her, a matter of "lightening my load".

What is a burden, an intrusion and an unacceptable measure of "dependence" to the daughter unfamiliar with these arrangements, then, constitutes the workings of "interdependence" to those acquainted with county life. This system of pooling, part of a larger pattern of mutual involvement, does afford - or more accurately is an artifact of and a contributor to - the large measure of access between homes. The extent to which pooling is perceived as a



"burden" or "intrusion" is therefore dependent upon the extent to which one comprehends and subscribes to the customary understandings, or the code, that attends this process.

It is also true, however, that the degree of access that is accepted in Ridge county may be employed by parents and others to influence and essentially socialize young couples starting a home. As she offered her various forms of assistance to Alice, for example, Maddy Miller was also admittedly trying to teach her daughter-in-law an appropriate concern for the opinions of her neighbors, people with whom Maddy had spent her whole life with. (As an outsider, Alice saw this as a cowering concern for social pressure and continued her resistance, again suggesting her lack of fit with local orientations.) Similarly, by pooling more expensive and stylistically elaborate furnishings to her son's home, Sarah Stine was exposing her daughter-in-law, Barb, to her first "formal" livingroom, thereby showing her how she expected her son to live. Again, we have to recognize pooling as both the product and *instrument* of an extensive amount of interpenetration between homes.

It can be noticed that in general the "channel-in" that pooling offers is one that is employed by women to exert influences on other women. A more exaggerated, yet instructive example of this was offered by Irene Shelly and her daughter, Ginny, who used the access and the unstated

nature of the agreements that attend pooling to exert pressure on her son's young wife, Debbie. Mrs. Shelly told me Debbie was "like having a 16 year old child around again", and that she was determined to see that she "learned to keep house the way we do." To these ends she and Ginny exploited and stressed the lack of assigned ownership for pooled items which heightened Debbie's uncertainty and anxiety about them. Debbie had no way of knowing how long would they be available? Did she own them? What would happen if they were damaged? It is precisely the nature of pooling in Ridge County that these questions are, at least at the conscious level, mooted by the common understanding that the possessors can treat the furnishings as their own. The Shelly matrons, however, pressed the issues in a manner which invested the newcomer with an anxious concern for the proper care of her furnishings. For her part, Debbie was sufficiently intimidated that she even worried about items they had bought from her husband's family:

The washer and dryer we bought off his sister, the refrigerator we bought off his sister. But yet, she can come here and tell me how - "Now make sure you clean out the bottom of that refrigerator; and don't scratch this and don't scratch that". Now if I wouldn't have bought that off her - if we didn't pay for it - I would have been scared to death to use any of it." [D40B:440]

And, in fact, she expressed great concern about using any of the many things they had not bought.

This entree was furthermore used by Irene to guide

Debbie in exerting what she, Irene, felt was a necessary pressure on her son Kurt. In effect her actions instructed her daughter-in-law in the wife's traditional responsibility for training her husband to domestic priorities. Irene felt her son's financial priorities had not adapted appropriately in marriage, that he had not curbed his devotion to buying and selling cars. Kurt indeed volunteered to me that furniture was clearly his last priority in managing expenses. He said he knew he was "wrong" in this because his wife was pressuring him to change.

The two familial situations exemplify the socialization process which employs the pooled furnishings as its channel of influence. The influence moves primarily through the women in the network, perhaps as a reflection of the traditional status of this arena as the woman's domain, and is extended through them to the men. Debbie's agitated response to Kurt's comment on priorities illustrates these processes:

Debbie: I'm also pressured though too. He [Kurt] doesn't know, I'm being pressured, I've tried to tell him I'm being pressured. His mother will come over and say to me y'know: "Why did you let him buy this and buy that and buy that. Don't you think you deserve a little furniture?" and on and on. I think she's sort of telling me so that I get on him so we can give Ginny [Kurt's sister] her stuff back. That's the impression I get off of his mom. And I try to tell him constantly and, "no, no, no."

His brother's wife told me that she's said the same thing to her: "I don't understand why Kurt didn't start getting his own stuff." So, that's another reason why I think we ought to get our own to make everyone else happy. But [turning to Kurt] you just don't listen. She never tells you anything, she's always going through me.

Kurt: I feel why buy furniture when we don't need it, till we need it. I mean, we're not sitting on orange crates or anything like that...I feel, until we get a bigger place too we wouldn't have to get any furniture. Where would we put any more furniture?  
[D40B:523]

Kurt's complacency is quite typical of a male response in Ridge county. In part because the common division of labor assigns these concerns to his female counterpart, and in part because, again, the bulk of goods seem to come from his own family.\*

Finally, even though the flow of goods in pooling may in practice be largely one-way, it is not a uni-directional channel of influence. Pooled possessions can be used equally by the receiver to make a point to the source. Following an argument with her mother, for example, one middle-aged woman took the old drysink her mother had given to her out of her diningroom, and left it in her laundry room. This was a drysink that came from the mother's homeplace and had been restored and pooled to her daughter along with other furnishings at the time of her marriage. Placing (or perhaps "dumping" is more correct), it in a utility room violated that implied contract to treat it with a certain respect. In response the mother took this treatment as a personal affront. Months later she told me this placement of the drysink showed her daughter lacked respect for the family: "You see," she said, "she just don't know the valuation of things. Everytime I see that there it just takes the heart

out of me."

In other cases I have seen whole families employ furnishings to sustain a kind of on-going warfare. In one instance for example a young man's parents emphasized their displeasure with his decision to buy a house by failing to pool any possessions to the new home. In such cases the *expectations* alone created by the customs of pooling provide the basis for a lack of action to be interpreted as a rebuff. Other examples of this kind of interplay could be cited. The point here, is simply that beyond its critical economic value, pooling offers a medium of interaction for the circumscribed groups whose boundaries it maps. It is a channel through which these people may arrange their roles and relationships. Exactly how it will be used will of course vary with the circumstances since these things will be incorporated into on-going and long-established patterns of interaction. They may be subsumed in the expression of either harmony or discord. In spirit and in common practice this circulation of possessions is more cooperative than it is contentious. Pooling is valued as a form of mutual assistance, and through it a substantial material and symbolic continuity is established within and between the homes of these extended families.

### **Gift Giving**

Pooling maintains a continuous presence in the life of

most households. However, once a home is established and completely furnished, its input slows to an occasional trickle until that time when the children leave and the flow of goods is reversed and becomes a predominantly "outward" one. From a communicational perspective this might seem to suggest that the availability and utility of a communicational resource, one which has been seen to be of extensive use to these families, is largely lost during the middle years of the family's life-cycle. The interplay facilitated through the exchanges of furnishings slows, and the material embodiment of the kith/kin network is depleted or left quiescent as much of the inventory of pedigreed furnishings pooled to them wears-out and is replaced.

As pooling slows, however, gift-giving for the home continues and may in fact increase in salience, contributing substantially to the continuing material and symbolic needs of these families. The notion of gift-giving, as related to the home, is expressed in a range of exchanges. It is not my intention to characterize that range in any complete way at this time. There are, however, certain prevailing patterns and well established customs in gift-giving in this community which will be discussed if only because they often account for a substantial percentage of many homes's furnishings. These forms of giving are also notable in the context of this study because they establish a large reserve of possessions in the homes of this community that are

discussed and valued for their provenance.

Gift-giving by parents to mature children with their own homes is to some extent, a simple extension of the pooling processes by which they share resources to help their offspring set-up. Parents will use the yearly cycle of institutionalized gift-giving occasions (i.e. Christmas, anniversaries, and birthdays), to provide their children with a variety of small, practical items needed for the home. Lamps, end-tables, cushions and pillows, afghans for the couch and other useful furnishings were commonly acquired in this way. An important difference between gift and pool items is that the gift items are generally new, and the receiver is granted full ownership rights to them. The receiver, in fact, is expected to value any gift as a gift sufficiently that he or she will keep it "always" as a memento of the giver and his/her generosity. Gift-giving moreover involves more people, and is characteristically much more of a multi-directional event. Children commonly provide gifts to parent's homes, siblings to siblings, and friends to friends, and even gifts of appreciative students, employers or employees might commonly be aimed at the house.

Apart from the early "pragmatic" focus of parental and sibling giving, most gifts take the form of decorative items and are directed to the walls and surfaces of the family home. This has several interesting implications. To begin with, one is repeatedly struck in this community by the

relative absence of wall hangings, knick-knacks and other decorative items in the homes of young families. This is explained in part by young mothers's claims that their main orientation is towards a home that is easy to clean and safe for and from their children. They state explicitly that they don't want small items laying around that can be broken by children or need additional care in cleaning and dusting. Young couples seemed to give little thought to the acquisition of decorative items. As a result, the elaboration of the purely decorative aspect of the home seemed to occur only gradually as time passed, largely constituted and propelled by gifts from family and friends. This temporal pattern was so marked that young women commonly told me that one could easily tell the homes of older women simply by the numbers of things spread out across their walls and shelves. My own surveys supported their observations to the point that it seemed likely to me that these sites are in fact "reserved" in the young household for the anticipated rounds of customary giving. Thus, while these decorative elements of the household are most often regarded as expressions of a homeowner's personal "taste" or mentality by students of interior decoration, such items have to be couched and understood more carefully in this community. For to a large extent they seem to reflect the decisions of *others* outside the home. They seem as well to "refer" chiefly to the on-going processes of interaction between family and community



members in which the householders are implicated. More will be said about the balance between these functions and personal aesthetics in the next chapter.

Gift-giving between husbands and wives accounts for a substantial number of the furnishings to be seen in homes here. Amongst young couples the need to spend money for some other customary purpose (again usually Christmas, birthdays and anniversaries), is commonly combined with the need to spend money on furnishings for the home. Even if a piece is plainly needed to fill a perceived gap, an occasion may still be required to justify the expense. In this way families minimize demands placed on their budgets and use the occasions to acquire a broad range of practical items - side chairs, lamps, vacuum cleaners, televisions, bookcases and so on. Most couples in this study claimed that they favored "practical" gifts of this sort. Gift-giving, in this way provides another regular expression of the frugal/pragmatic orientation of these people.

More is involved of course, for it was overwhelmingly the case that presents for the house were given by husbands to their wives. Recliners were a common gift to husbands from wives, and it was not unusual for couples to buy something together as a joint present. The predominant direction of gift-giving was nonetheless from husband to wife. Carl Kaufman, for example, bought all the lamps and end-tables in their livingroom for Sally over several Christmases. Dave

Stine bought all of the furniture in their livingroom for his wife, Barb, that had not been given to them as presents (see figure 5-3). Junior Miller bought Alice an antique ice chest in this way and later the family Tv. Most women could be pressed to express some ambivalence about this since it preempted their chance to exert some control in the early selection of furniture. The dominant reaction however, was strongly positive. Alice told me that this kind of giving showed that Paul cared for their home and was committed to the family. Other women offered similar interpretations. Yet even as these gifts may be taken to express thoughtfulness and committment on the part of the husband/giver, the pattern of giving has also to be seen as an affirmation of the traditional position of women with respect to the house here. As each successive generation of husbands and sons provides their wives and mothers with gifts for "her" livingroom, the status of the home as the woman's domain is continually reaffirmed.

As time passes gift-giving focuses increasingly on a restricted class of decorative items devoted more to the symbolic activity of managing relations than to that of outfitting the home. In this way many homes gradually develop what might be called a "gifting site". These sites are most commonly the provence of women, but seem to constitute a communicational resource of importance to the entire extended family network. The activity that surrounds the

generation and use of these sites is ritualized and functions communicatively in a manner that bears further explanation.

"Gifting sites" emerge through time as gifts given to the mother (and occasionally the husband) accumulate in the home. They begin to take shape early in a woman's career as a mother/homemaker/wife, usually when the kids are beyond demolishing all the little things of the house. They are the product of a traditional form of gift-giving in which a certain kind of item becomes *the* thing to give her on almost any occasion. Just how the item is chosen is not always clear. Some women express an interest in a particular kind of collectible, but most will tell you that, "people just started giving me these things". One common item I found serving this purpose was the bud vase. These collections typically began as a woman saved the vases from flowers received as presents. Eventually, a point is reached where the vases are established and displayed as a collection and they themselves become the focus of giving. Various kinds of plates and china, candle holders, salt and pepper shakers or seemingly any sort of knick-knack are likely objects for this kind of giving. Where the giving focuses on men, beer mugs and steins were among the most common objects pressed into service. In each case it was not unusual for the recipient to eventually add a few pieces on his or her own

to fill their collection out.<sup>7</sup>

These gifts came to the woman from husbands, children, parents, siblings, nieces and nephews, and close friends. They arrived on a variety of occasions, including birthdays and those occasions when an individual sought to demonstrate his or her regard, concern or admiration for the woman. They were given to mark achievements, at times of illness, when a person returned from trip away from the county, or simply as "a nice thing I wanted to do for you". Many of the objects assembled in these collections therefore arrive and are displayed as "esteem symbols"<sup>8</sup>. They mark the regard of the husband/son/niece for their wife/mother/aunt, evoking, honoring and confirming their relationship. In some cases, the gifts are received as part of a program of reciprocal exchanges between women, but for the most part there is no specified expectation of a return gift with these kinds of exchanges, and no discussion of balance or quality in giving. The reciprocation comes instead here as the receiver, "completes" the gesture initiated by the giver by displaying the gift in the house (usually the livingroom or diningroom) where it will publically mark and honor the exchange.<sup>9</sup> On the one hand, therefore, these displays serve as manifestations of past demonstrations of esteem for the owner; on the other, they stand as on-going demonstrations by the owner to the supportive network of family and friends. The display both completes an exchange of gestures

and records it. Taken as a whole the two-part gesture ultimately serves to manifest and honor the on-going relationship between the mother (and through her, her family) and the givers.<sup>10</sup>

The tenacity of this tradition of gift-giving was demonstrated most clearly for me in the efforts of Rachael Kaufman to teach her city-bred daughter-in-law, Sally, to provide a space for this kind of collection. While discussing renovations to her house one day, Sally complained to me that her mother-in-law had pressed her repeatedly to build bookcases in the living-room so that she would have some place to display knick-knacks. This baffled the young mother who had no knick-knacks to display and less interest in collecting them. Rachael, who had received the first plate of her collection from her mother some 30 years earlier, persisted on the grounds that a place was needed for gifts. That Christmas she tentatively initiated a custom of giving Sally bells. When these didn't generate any interest, Rachael switched to porcelain music boxes and Sally now receives these with some regularity. I found that a year after our conversation, the younger Kaufmans had built those bookcases in the livingroom.

Rachael had, in this instance, guided her outsider daughter-in-law first in providing the *conditions* for a customary form of activity (an activity appropriate to a mother/housewife), through which people could demonstrate

their affection and esteem. Her second lesson had been to instruct Sally in completing her part in the exchange by displaying the gifts and thereby memorializing the entire interaction. There was no question in Rachael's mind that these gifts would be coming, and for her part she was determined to have such a vehicle to use in her own relations with this new member of the family. In the entire episode, we can see the transmission of a customary form of interaction in which the significance of the particular object is primarily as a medium through which friends and family can carry-out their relationships.

But what of the aftermath - the collection itself? Once received, these gifts will generally be considered important enough to save and pass along in later years. When George Wagner's parents sold off their homestead for example, his mother asked to store her accumulation of plates in his basement:

She don't want to sell these. They uh,..save some memories for her over the years. She has a dish - she'll go through her stuff and she can pick up any dish and tell you who bought it for her and when they bought it...she memorized all of it. There's alot of stuff down there in the cellar that she'll never use but, its memories to her and she don't want to get rid of 'em. [D40A:275-85]

And as this quote suggests, in subsequent usage the displayed objects are used to "embody" and recall references to the events and person(s) with whom they are associated. These significances take shape and are realized in a social

sense (beyond the personal realm) as they precipitate, or become the object of, rounds of talk. Jeanne Swartz, for example, typified the way people go about talking about gifts when commenting on the general value of presents:

That's like different things that aunt Ann gave me. Everytime I go to dust them - now like those two little lights up on top of the desk there, you know, they're lights off a miner's helmet. She found them in her cellar stairway. And she cleaned them all up and she said -(and she even had the helmets that went with them)- she said, "do you want these?" And I said, "yeah, I think they're what they used to have - they're the kind that had carbide in them." She said, "yeah, do you want them?" I said, "I sure would like to have them ." So, everytime I dust these it brings her back to me and I think of her. [D31B:285-295]

We see here, first of all, the invocation of memory, "I think of her", through daily encounters with the objects. In addition, the direction her comment took in this quotation provides a demonstration of how some allusion to the object can precipitate an elaborate recounting of the occasion of its giving. As is typical of the many stories I heard of this sort this one even included a mimetic reconstruction of dialogue.

In time these gift collections are expanded and supplemented through the inclusion of small inherited objects and pieces self-consciously acquired for their value as references to other people important to the family. Maddy Miller's livingroom bookcase, for example, contains bud vases and other gifts from living and past kin, friends, and students. There are relics from her mother's home and her

husband's homeplace and there are items which recall their own home's past. Many came as gifts, some were inheritances, and others were carefully saved or collected and added to the bookcase. What emerges ultimately is a kind of general "Mnemonic Site" through which a range of relationships and shared events are memorialized.

As a woman in her mid 60's, Rachael Kaufman has a variety of these mnemonic devices and sites in her home: a collection of Hobnail glassware spread throughout the livingroom; a corner cupboard arrayed with china and silver; a shelf lined with bud vases; another with her husband's beer mugs; and three walls of the diningroom covered with a collection of commemorative plates. Her mother, as mentioned, started her off with this last collection, and since that time others have continued to arrive from other family sources. Many were brought to her as gifts from others's travels (a way to say they had thought of her), and even the most casual reference to these draws an "explanation" such as this:

Now that one from New Orleans, my daughter and her husband made a trip down there a year ago last spring. She gets, she teaches out in Ohio, and in the spring she has a week of spring break. A year ago last spring they used it for a trip to New Orleans and Texas and they flew from Cleveland to Houston and visited with his brother there. Then they rented a car there and drove to New Orleans and then flew home, and they brought me that one from New Orleans.  
[D15A:030]

Much like other gifts of the sort, the plate recalls the



people, their generosity, and the occasion that brought it to the home and it induces an extended recounting of details of personal histories and connections.

The form and contents of the gifts in these collections may of themselves be largely irrelevant. As Rachael moved "through" a decorative plate from Disneyland, for example, discussing the niece who had given it to her and the girl's visit to a brother, she never made mention of the amusement park. As metonymic devices, the surface of these gifts may be little noted or valued. However, as Glassie noted with gift-giving amongst his Irish hosts, "if ornaments themselves seem trivial, triviality is lost in the associations they contain" (1983:369). The gifts serve as embodiments of those associations, and long after the original exchange has taken place they serve to recall the times of those involved. And importantly, in subsequent usage they are used informally to generate short rounds of story-telling through which relationships and histories are repeatedly mediated.

The presence of these collections was noted in the broad range of homes in the community - from the wealthiest, where there were often costly materials such as silver, and more exotic objects, such as gifts from other countries involved; to the homes of the poorest families where I have seen collections of plastic beer mugs and ashtrays serve the same function. In each instance what was seen in these gifting sites was a communicational protocol

through which family and members of the community could present an offering of immediate and long-term significance. They are the artifacts of a custom through which the wife (most often) as the bearer of the family tradition and heritage accumulates not only a lifetime of gifts to herself, but also displays a record of family and community contacts. In gift-giving generally, we have seen materials shared for both pragmatic and symbolic purposes. It is an important source of continued material support for the home, it facilitates the continuous demonstration of concern and mutual regard, and through time it helps provide the means to record and recall those who surround and support the home.

As mentioned earlier, these sites will be supplemented along the way by objects self-consciously collected for their links and associations to other people. Such gleanings are not isolated events. They are part of an established tradition in Ridge County of collecting relics of others and this activity perhaps best typifies the orientation to property that underlies the methods for handling furnishings that we have been examining to this point.

### **Relic Collecting**

I use the term "relic" here to denote a kind of object which is valued first because it possesses some kind of existential connection to an individual, family, or

community (i.e. that it was owned, produced or used by them); and secondly because it works to call up memories associated with that entity. Such objects are "collected" here in the sense that residents will systematically accumulate a number of these items, typically at the time of each owners' death. It is one among several forms of "collecting" which draws furnishings into the homes of this county (cf. Musello 1982). Unlike most collections, however, the elements of these aggregations do not necessarily possess any material or thematic similarities. What unifies them is the value associated with their origins and their use as mnemonic devices.

To the people of Ridge County, these relics are known as "momentos", "keepsakes", "souvenirs", "remembrances" and "trinkets". Collecting them is treated as a commonplace and estate sales, also common to this county, are relied upon as the principal source.<sup>14</sup> As Geraldine Swartz pointed out, almost any household object can serve in this capacity:

I've gone to sales that I just wanted a little dish or something to remember that person by. Because you often hear somebody say, "Well, I just wanted *something* that when I see it I'll think of that person."...Now, I wouldn't buy just anything just so I could say - unless it's really a special person. Then it really wouldn't matter what you had just so when you would see it you knew, or you would think of that person...Now I think if it was a sale in a large town or city where you didn't know anybody, then you would go because of something you wanted. Where this way a lot of the local sales I think you go because you know that that's the end of that family..."  
[D31B:275]

These auctions are held commonly at the time of a person's death to dispose of their property and as the quote suggests, the events and the objects themselves frequently assume added significance because they mark the end of a family's life-cycle, the end of a household. Women however, will not be the only ones to focus on the sentimental associations of the objects left behind. For while the objects men choose to collect may differ systematically from those selected by women, men nevertheless will show an equal reverence for their relics when discussing them. Ernest Leitzel for example was emphatic in the value he placed on this custom:

I try to, if possible, buy at least one thing of somebody I knew. I'll show you over the place sometime, all the trinkets I have of the people that I knew; a pitchfork, or a rubbing hoe or something like that - everytime I look at it, that's him... Many times I keep the things and the kids come over later wanting something of Pops, and I give it to them... I'd sooner do that, have a remembrance like that, than give a five dollar bouquet when a man dies, for a funeral bouquet. I don't believe in that.  
[CVC 1984 interview by Aibel]

His comment underscores the fact that an appreciation for this dimension and use for goods is something that usually only develops in time. Young people will begin to collect relics of relatives early-on, however it seems to be only as people reach later middle age (as a broader spectrum of known others begin to die) that they become committed to this form of collecting. Ernest, as with other elder residents, does his part to preserve the heritage for the

young and later pass it on to them. Like the symbolic "gifting" directed at gifting sites, an appreciation for this activity seems to develop fully only in adult life. However, unlike the gift-giving custom, which serves chiefly to commemorate relations amongst the living, relic collecting works principally to commemorate those who have passed away. They commemorate a household's relationships in historical depth.

Relics will be sought for family members, relatives, friends and other members of the community who were known to, or respected by, the family. Many I spoke to considered it important to attend sales of the prominent as well as of those they admired or respected in order to garner some remembrance<sup>12</sup>. Perhaps for this reason it was commonly understood in the county that attendance at a person's sale was a reliable gauge of how much they were respected by the community. Billy Kurtz, for example, told me that even in those instances where he was out to buy some practical item for his house, "if its somebody that's hoggish I don't bother going to the sale. And if somebody was greedy, and I knew that, I wouldn't give them any of my money." For this reason these collections extend outward, commemorating family, friends and potentially even the status hierarchy of the community.

The kinds of objects chosen for these purposes may vary fairly widely. There is no presumption that objects of this

order need to be preserved (and therefore decorative), and as a result utilitarian objects are often purchased for these purposes. In some cases people will favor one specific type of object to be acquired on each occasion. This is especially true of those who have collections, such as men with tools or for those with existing gift-giving sites to supplement. Among the women, dishes and glassware of various descriptions are the traditional favorites (as was the case with gift-giving) and the corner cupboard stuffed with pitchers, bowls, salt and pepper shakers and two or more complete table-settings of china is a near standard fixture that serves as the ceremonial center for these acquisitions.

At minimum, all that is required for an object to serve this purpose is that it have some established link to a person. Where possible, however, people will attempt to collect an object that has specific personal associations for them. One somewhat surly older man of my acquaintance, for example, surprised me by buying a small child's rocking chair at his neighbor's auction. He explained later that he had remembered rocking away the summer evenings on the old man's porch in that chair as a child. Geraldine Swartz bought her husband's mother's brother's heavy trunk because she, "remembered him carrying it off on the train with him when they built the stone bridge in Harrisburg". And Mary Snyder bought two pieces of an elderly friend's china because she could still picture them in the woman's home and

recall her using them. For this reason, it is not unusual for friends, especially elderly friends, to eye one another's possessions and plan what they would like to acquire from the other to keep as a relic. I have indeed seen friends on some occasion of good feeling point to an item and say, "Now I want that when you're done with it." The comment being both a way to admire some possession and to compliment the possessor by indicating that you plan to memorialize them when they're gone.

It is also not uncommon to see people self-consciously using a collected object in the same fashion as the person who had owned it before. One woman for example, bought a deceased friend's candy dish and, as with the previous owner, now used the dish on her own coffee table in a ritualized gesture of hospitality to her visitors. There are many examples of this, but it seems to be especially the case with ceremonial objects or furnishings that somehow accommodate a regularized or customary form of activity. Note this man's intentions, for instance, for a loafers's bench he tried to buy when the local general store was sold. These were benches on which the men of his community had gathered since the early 1920's to talk and tell stories:

Well, I was bidding on them mainly because they were of sentimental value to me...I really missed the benches and the store, far's that's concerned. Because you go in there and you'd been in a place like that for all those years, you just don't forget about it overnight....I'd have them when friends come here to the house. We'd have the benches just like we did in

the store...It's a memory for a lot of people. That was the main thing I had in mind for the benches was to bring them here and that a lot of people that came here could still have sat in the benches.[CVC1984]

In this case the benches had become intimately associated with a traditional form of social activity amongst men and he had intended to apply them to the maintenance of that activity. In this sense then, when objects of this type are collected as relics, the *behavior* associated with them is "collected" as well. The object serves to perpetuate a customary form of activity in some form, and the activity itself ultimately serves as a behavioral component of the memorialization of the deceased.

The entire course of acquiring, displaying and using these relics thus becomes a broadly communicative undertaking. As mentioned, *who* appears at auction and who buys, becomes a first level of information for the family and community. The relic, within a collection of relics in the home, provides an index of personal associations and identifications. In use, the relic serves as catalyst for the recollection of the deceased and the play of relationships amongst the living. I recall watching an elderly matron named Lois for a last example, leading a young housewife from next door through her newly painted home. In time, Lois's extensive glassware collection became the object of conversation. Their comments waffled back-and-forth between the glass and china, and discussions of the people who had



owned the pieces and their family lineages. This continued until Lois finally led the woman dramatically to a compote that had belonged to the woman's aunt. As the younger woman responded with a certain pleased surprise, Lois recalled how much she had admired the aunt, how close they had been and how pleased she was to have this dish. In addition to whatever she might have been conveying about the deceased aunt here then, Lois was establishing some common ground with her new neighbor, letting her know that she knew the family and had chosen to "honor" her connections with it in this way. The young woman responded in return with verbal gestures of respect, saying she was pleased that Lois had the compote and she was sure her aunt would be too. It was a brief exchange, centered around an old dish, yet it was the kind of exchange of gestures that is taken in this community to constitute the very substance of "good neighboring".

The generation and valuation of relics in this way probably achieves its highest expression in the acquisition and management of family lineage pieces. They are as well a major source of furnishings for the home and the last to be considered in this chapter.

### **Inheritance**

While the amount of material that is redistributed through inheritance varies from house to house, inheritance is an important and emotionally laden source of property for

all homes in this county. As a process, inheritance implies a great deal of activity that bears on the relationships of all involved. Even prior to the death of a behestor, for example, inheritances will be subject to negotiation and they may be exploited as instruments in the management of relationships among family members.<sup>13</sup> Furnishings acquired through inheritance will be distinguished from others in the home because of their historical kinship connections. They will be treated as symbols of the deceased. Taken as a group, inherited belongings will serve in mapping a family's ancestry, in encoding its network of relations through time, and in the process, in charting a key dimension of personal identity in community life.

As for the community at large, numerous studies have shown that these moments of dissolution are of similar import to the surrounding community which must also provide for and adapt to the loss of a member. How the property of the deceased is managed as a result becomes a matter of communicational significance within the broader sphere of the community itself. (cf. Warner 1959, Fortes 1958, Hertz 1960, Goody 1962, 1974, and Blauner 1977.)

Despite the particular weight given to the transfer of property at this time, however, it should also be apparent from the preceding discussion that inheritance constitutes one among many methods for redistributing property. As indicated to this point, property circulates between the

homes of an extended network of family and friends throughout the course of each household's cycle of existence. Inheritance is that process of (re)distribution which occurs at the end of the cycle, during the "replacement phase" of a household (cf. Fortes 1958). It is a specially marked moment in the pooling of resources, yet its contents arrive in the home as an integral part of this life-long process of exchange.<sup>14</sup> Personal and family estates are dissolved in the process and dispersed to the possession of others. In contrast to the "relics" already discussed, however, these inherited possessions may carry added meaning by virtue of their status as "behests", arriving through the willful (in varying measure) direction of their former owner. They imply a gesture on the part of the "commemorated" as well as a representation on the part of the new owner who displays and interprets them.

In order to understand inheritance in Ridge County, both as a distributional process and a communicational event, it is important to realize that the event usually is in process prior to the death of the parent or grantor. The disposition of family property becomes an increasingly explicit subject for discussion within the family as parents enter their late 50's and early 60's. Subtle, and markedly private negotiation, much of it indirect, about the division of resources (and responsibility for the parents in retirement) becomes increasingly common during this period.

Property also often starts to move out from the homestead at this point, as parents give valuables away or as heirs start to draw off the resources. Taken together, these activities constitute the workings of "in vivo inheritance" and begin the activity that will ultimately dissolve the home.

There is no abrupt starting point for inheritance processes or the communicational activity that surrounds them. The use of the materials of inheritance as media of interaction begins during the life of the owner(s) and often emerges from other on-going exchanges. Much of this near ritual pre-inheritance and inheritance activity is conducted in the form of "joking" between siblings. During a discussion of inheritance, for example, one woman in her mid-40's with parents in their 60's related this exchange:

I can't imagine that we'll [her brother and she] ever fight. We've kidded about it[inheritance]; every once in awhile he'll say "gee,uh, this would look nice in my house - just joking". And I'll come back with, "well I had my eye on that - not really, but...". I just always figured that those things would stay in the family, whether they are mine or my brother's. It doesn't really matter as long as they stay with the family.[D29A:144-150]

This exemplifies the onset of the inheritance "conversation". Such exchanges are very common amongst siblings and serve to provide substantial information within the family about who wants what. The manner of negotiation also reveals something of the values that shape, and are conveyed through, the events of in vivo inheritance. "Joking" is one of the most appropriate message forms for the negotiations

that occur at this time because such encounters are largely regarded as an inappropriate subject for manifest discussion. In the first place, it is not considered acceptable to discuss a parent's death. Phrases such as "when you're done with this", or "if anything happens to you", fill-in in these conversations as allusions to death. Secondly, it is considered unseemly to contest the disposition of property, both because one should not appear to covet a parent's property or to risk conflict with other kin over its division. As with other methods of negotiation of this time, a subtle and indirect process is invoked. Joking involves an initial statement of interest and then an immediate disclaimer. The denial serves to qualify the unacceptable statement by making a joke of it.

As can be seen in the quote above, these denials will frequently appeal in the alternative to the "highest value" in this community - a statement of selfless diminution of personal interest for the interests of the family as a corporate whole. Statements such as these are testimony to the pervasive interjection of group interests over individual concerns in the management of property and relationships. Such invocations of "family", and commitments to its continuity, are especially important and numerous at these times. These exchanges nevertheless still serve as "hints" from heirs about who is interested, how much, and in what, and many parents told me that these

exchanges played an important part in shaping their plans.

Heirs were seen to take a hand in carefully shaping inheritance outcomes in other ways. In some cases, very direct requests were made that some specific item of particular "sentimental" value be "earmarked" for an heir. In other cases, in vivo inheritance was effectively "induced" by the requests of children and grandchildren to draw off items on an ostensibly temporary basis, and, typically, that definition of the taking as "temporary" would be maintained in all discussions of the activity. The timing of these acquisitions was critical in shaping expectations and the *interpretation* of behavior in these circumstances. This was "borrowing" with no expectation of return; it was "pooling" that actually contributed to the dissolution of the "center" that supported it. Yet until the owner dies, conversation will necessarily maintain a definition of the taking that is consonant with one of the other forms of taking more customary to relations among the living. A great deal of work is done in this way in framing the events of vivo inheritance so as to make them acceptable to all.

These first stages of dispersal are marked by parents and other relatives as they initiate the dissolution process through a form of pre-mortem giving that could include heirlooms or other highly valued pieces, as well as furnishings still in use. This distribution of goods that would

otherwise be included in the post-mortem division, allows for a highly selective distribution of property which is not included in the inheritance formula. It provides for an interactive form of bequeathing through which the owner can enjoy and exploit the use of giving in the service of relationships while he or she is still alive. Geraldine Swartz pointed out, for example, that her aunt had wanted to "aim" her behests and be able to enjoy their arrival:

No, It wasn't a matter of thinking she was gonna die. But she had come to that point in her life where she knew she had plenty to get along on and she wanted to give it when she could give it, not because it was in her will...I think that she was sure that way that it went where she wanted it to go.[D31B:036-40]

In this case, the elder aunt began distributing things about six months before her death. She made certain that several very old heirlooms "returned" to the homestead where they "belonged", and selectively rewarded those relatives who "had done for her" in her times of need. Following her death, the will was a model of diplomacy, providing for the equal division of proceeds from the estate to all heirs.

Whether they actually began distributing property in this way or not, most of the elderly residents I met were quietly involved in preparing behests and making various arrangements for their heirs. Many parents for example, readied inheritances by having them cleaned or refinished, or in the case of houses, having needed repair work done. Parents (usually mothers) often took their heirs aside

during this period in order to designate lineage pieces or items they specifically wanted to see "stay in the family". These would be identified for the heirs, their importance noted (if it was not evident), and eventual ownership settled and "earmarked".<sup>18</sup> There were notable instances in which this process was conducted in a way which punished specific heirs. In general, however a clear set of principles, focused on the need to sustain and promote family needs over individual interests, guided this negotiation of property rights. Heirs were implicitly schooled in a familial orientation at the same time they learned how the property should be conveyed.

An example: when Carl Kaufman pressed his mother for an antique train set he had used as a child with his father and grandfather, his mother orchestrated the event self-consciously to illustrate to all the heirs how the transfer of inheritances should be conducted. Initially, she framed the object as an "inheritance" and the "taking" as more than a simple pooling of resources. "If you're going to take something like that," he was told, "then your sister is going to have to get something too." The train set had, in fact, been earmarked for Carl by his father, however if he was to draw off of valued heirlooms, then no appearance of an un-fair or unequal draw would be tolerated. Carl's sister was called in and the two were led through the attic to negotiate a first equal split of behests. The entire episode



was accomplished self-consciously, almost ceremonially, and the mother's approach to the division and her insistence in it was common here. Her concern was that no competition or dissatisfaction be fostered by a potentially divisive undertaking and that the division be perceived as fair and equal. What she sought to make clear above all was that the continuity and cohesion of the family should be the guiding consideration in the process. And this indeed was the principle that guided both the conduct and *discussion* of inheritance throughout the county.<sup>16</sup> In this and similar episodes then, elders can be seen to work at instructing their successors both in what was to be regarded as the family's material heritage and in how its division is to be managed. It is a cross-generational process of transmission through which the *value* of the family's material heritage, and the *methods* for conserving it are communicated.

My data reveals that there is usually a certain display dimension to the "equality" achieved in the division; the event itself is used to foster egalitarian notions of family structure. There is a "rhetoric" of fairness that attends all discussions of inheritance in the sense that broaching the subject will typically induce formulaic testimonies to the "even-ness" of a division (if it induces any evaluation at all). Where there is a clear material discrepancy, an equality of "satisfaction" will be claimed. "Fairness" was the measure here more than equivalence, and this required

that all heirs have equal access and a chance to save something of value to them. Negotiations in division resonated as a result between the need to temper and balance one's take, and the right and desire to draw off all that was personally "meaningful". Whatever action was taken was later discussed and justified in terms of these criteria. In general, what was seen was that heirs exercised a large measure of self-imposed discretion, in many cases even failing to take things promised to them by a parent or grandparent for fear that it be misinterpreted.

In all cases the people of Peterburg seem to consider it unacceptable to admit to dissent over these issues. There is perhaps no other aspect of personal life here that so thoroughly demonstrates the manner in which emotional issues may be contained and even denied by these people. Division at the time of death is given over to the expression, in action and in talk about action, of the importance of cohesion within the family group and the need to retain some material link with the deceased. These considerations shape, if they do not control the transfer of property at this time.

#### "Value" and the Lineage Object

The "value" associated with lineage objects revolves around their role in defining and retaining the identity of the family *through time*. Initially, these things have an

importance similar to that of the relics and other pedigreed items that populate the house. That is they carry associations to known others and assume importance as material links with them. Because behests arrive after the owner's death, however, most people draw a distinction between in vivo inheritances and those received post mortem. The former are regarded on a symbolic level as being comparable to items received as gifts. Those received after death carry significance as possessions "left behind"- as objects which mark the "passing" of the owner and his move from the community of the living to the status of an ancestor. Lineage items serve the survivors as well in making their own adjustments to the departure of the deceased.<sup>17</sup>

The transmission of furnishings through the inheritance process is therefore integral to the maintenance and transmission of the family's "symbolic estate" - the account of its members, their histories and reputations (cf. Farber 1971). As the behests of *known* kin, these inheritances serve as metonyms, recalling people and events within the lifetime and experience of the heirs. "Lineage pieces" accomplish something more. When you ask what constitutes a lineage piece in this county, you will routinely be told that it is something that has "been in the family". Geraldine Swartz for example defined lineage objects this way:

Well its mostly things that have come down through the family. Its not something most of the time that

maybe twenty years ago your mother and dad bought.  
Its something that maybe belonged to your grandmother  
or your great grandmother - that's usually the way it  
is. [D31B:345]

Time and a history of associations with the family is what distinguishes "true" lineage objects. They carry with them existential bonds to multiple generations of kinsmen and they refer not to one or several ancestors, but ultimately to the line of descent along which they passed. They refer to the family as a corporate group that spans time.

A strong sense that these objects "must" remain in the family attends their passage from one generation to the next. Discussions of lineage objects, for this reason, tend to invoke both the past and the future. When Paul Miller, and later his wife, told me of their old grandfather's clock, for example, the first orders of information that each conveyed were: 1) that it had been the property of four Paul Millers before the present owner; and 2) that it would go to the sixth when they passed it to their son. Owners are obliged to contemplate the disposition of these objects - their "next step"- even as they acquire them. Ownership of these symbolic resources is, as a result, implicitly associated more with the family line than with the particular individual who holds them at any given moment. Ownership rights in Peterburg were often regarded as tentative, even troublesome, and owners at times described their position to me as being akin to that of a curator. They were

obliged to care for their furnishings as a trust for following generations. Houses of the wealthier families that were filled with lineal objects offered the most graphic examples of this, but they only exaggerate what is the prevailing tendency in handling and revering inheritances in the community as a whole.

This sense of proprietary rights was given clear expression in the commonly seen custom of "returning" possessions to homes where they "belonged". This occurred usually where the kin group still had a home which was identified as the ancestral homestead, a building "in the family", which was regarded as a material embodiment of the family identity. Lineage objects returned to these homes at times because there was no heir with the family name in the owner's line, but they came as well simply because of a strong association with the home or the name the home perpetuated. An aunt willed Lydia Losch an old side chair and table, for example, because they were closely tied to the family name. Marlin Swartz received a drysink from a great aunt because it had "come from" the house he lived in. Judy Shirk was given a copper apple butter kettle by her brother because she lived on the farm where their grandmother had used it. The brother in this case had "brought this piece back into the family" by buying it at auction 30 years after it had been sold at his grandmother's sale.

The value associated with lineage objects as material

symbols of the continuity of the family line is thus encoded in the objects by means of their transmission through time; through the associations attached to them in verbal accounts; and even finally through the rules regulating their possession and ownership. Their value extends "logically" from the general tendency witnessed in this county to use furnishings as symbols of others, and it is tied directly to the emphasis placed on family heritage as a primary source of individual identity and status.

It is all the more interesting therefore that despite all of this, the "functional imperative" discussed in previous chapters is equally applied to these items, pressing their caretakers for their practical application. Despite age, import and frailty, most owners evidenced a sense that the same standard should be applied to the majority of these objects as is applied to the rest of their furnishings. That is that their presence is justified by practical utility - they are for use and not simply display. Irene Shelly, for instance, looking out on her array of "other people's belongings" illustrated this when she commented:

You're glad to be able to put them to some use. I mean, in themselves they're just taking up space. But if you can find a practical application for something old...that's the best.[D35B:160]

This utilitarianism, as suggested earlier, is important to attest to in every aspect of one's life here. It is a key

element of the asceticism that infuses public life among these people. The importance associated with these symbolic resources has continually to be defined and interpreted therefore with reference to this competing ideology. A purely symbolic object, or one solely for display offers a potential violation of the standard of utility and the need to avoid over-valuing the material things of this world. Thus discussions of these symbolic resources will in this county waver between two poles, addressing two tasks: on the one hand promoting the symbolic allusions saved in these possessions; and on the other demonstrating one's continued participation in the community's standards of utility.

Rachael Kaufman illustrated this when discussing what she hoped would happen with her furnishing after her own death:

I think of things more as being worldly and materialistic rather than - I would never fight over a piece of furniture, I don't think its worth it... [pausing]... There's alot of the furnishings mean alot to me because they have alot of memories to them...[she lists them]...They were things that we bought that were pretty good that we'd like to see kept in the family if the kids want them." [D78:265]

Similarly this young woman struggled with her sentiments following the sale of her grandfather's home and attached store:

When the material things were being sold that wasn't so difficult. When they went to selling the property that kinda made a dent. Laureen and I a couple of times when the property was being sold found ourselves a little teary eyed and, you get maudlin....When you stop and reflect on it...the person is gone and

property is just property - you know, when you stop  
and think about it, it really shouldn't have an  
effect of you like that...but it does, sure it does.  
[CVC:7/5/83:047]

Note the use of the phrases, "materialistic", and "material things". Through them each woman summons a commonly drawn opposition between spiritual values and material wealth. Each woman's statement embodies the clash between the great value these people place on "things" as embodiments of lineages and memories - symbolic value; and the equally great emphasis they place on demonstrating a pragmatic, utilitarian orientation to the things of the material world. Lineage objects, construed as property on the one hand, and symbols on the other, regularly invoke this clash. Such a "wavering between ethics" is fundamental to the way in which the people of Peterburg mediate their use of material symbolic resources. With lineage items specifically, a qualification, based in an ideology with its roots in religious training, is embedded in the transmission and interpretation of an essentially secular process through which possessions are invested with spiritual significance.<sup>18</sup> Understanding this opposition is important to understanding the use and interpretation of all material symbols in this community.

Beyond the significances these objects may acquire with reference to family history and religious ideology, there is the dimension of social comparison. Here these inheritances may assume importance in the negotiation of social status,



but largely through the material dimensions of the objects that are otherwise overlooked.

#### Status Dimensions of Lineage Display

Lineage objects have been shown to this point to have significance in social life in several ways. Prior to the death of their owner, they may be exploited in interaction with close kin and heirs. Following their transmission at death, they serve within the family to embody references to the ancestors and the history of accomplishments that constitute the heritage of the lineage. This in turn has implications in the larger social sphere because, as we've noted throughout, family identity is a key element of any individual's social identity within this community. Lineage pieces accrue status value for a family, therefore, to the extent that they assist in retaining and evoking references to its heritage.

The quality of a family's lineal furnishings may also contribute to their status repute. Given discussions to this point, it should be apparent that a variety of local norms will qualify the extent to which such features are taken as tokens of status here. The formal/material properties of a family's relics for example, are never enough of-themselves to confirm a family's status, the goods must still "contain" some notable references to tangible people and events in the family's history. Prevailing norms of functional utility

also necessitate that these displays avoid the appearance of pretense lest they actually damage a family's reputation. Nevertheless, when the relative "depth" and quality of lineage displays in this community are viewed comparatively, it can be seen that they do indeed serve as rough indices of the community's status hierarchy. This can be seen when the homes of the Loschs and Chapmans, who are regarded as members of the highest status group in the community's system of social estimate (see table 2-7 reproduced here as table 5-1), are compared with those of the Shellys and Swartzs (lower upper status), and those of the Mortons and Kaufman Sr.'s (upper middle status). A survey of the "depth" of their respective lineage displays - including the age, number, comprehensiveness, and quality of inherited possessions - demonstrates substantial differences which seem to distinguish one group from another. There is a "performance" element to the comparison as well, such that what I am comparing finally is both the historical material resources these people have available to them, and the way in which they present what they have.

Both the Chapmans and the Loschs are descendents of a prestigious lineage which has figured prominently in the history of this county. Each Family lives on a large estate that is widely ranked amongst the best in the county and which has historical associations to the agents of William Penn who settled the area. While the Chapman name has only

**Table 5-1: Social Estimate Rankings, Family Age and Kinship Relations of Sample Families.**

S.E. Rankings	Group	Position in Life Cycle		
		Expanding Families	Transitional	Aging
Chapman	1			Chapman
Losch				Losch
Campbell	2	Campbell		
Stine Sr.				Stine Sr.
Swartz			Swartz	
Shelly			Shelly	
Kaufman Sr.	3			Kaufman Sr.
Morton				Morton
Miller Sr.				Miller Sr.
Stine Jr.	4	Stine Jr.	Dave	
Kaufman Jr.		Kaufman Jr.	Barb	
Kurtz, E.		Kurtz	Carl	
Miller Jr.		Miller Jr.	Sally	
			Ed	
		Gail		
		Paul		
		Alice		
Wagner	5			Wagner
Kurtz, B		Kurtz, Billy		
Farrell	6			Farrell

Note: ----> Broken arrows indicate parent to child relations  
 ———> Solid arrows indicate sibling relations  
 -.-.-> Line and point arrows indicate cousins

been affixed to their ancestral home since the early 1880's, the Losch line, extending through Mrs. Losch, has been associated with their land (including the Chapman estate prior to 1880), since the late 18th century. Each therefore owns a sizable ancestral homestead that has been in the family for more than two or three generations - a holding which many locals regard as a requirement for "best family" status here.

The furnishings of these homes demonstrate a similar extended historical continuity. In the case of the Chapmans, this exists largely because of an unwritten agreement within the family that the furnishings of the home never be sold at sale. Apart from the few items each generation has exhausted or otherwise drawn-off, the furnishings have been passed along with the house itself to successive heirs. The Losch home has drawn its furnishings both from preceding inhabitants and the larger family who have "returned" furnishings strongly associated with the family name to the house as a "shrine" of sorts to that name. In each case the furnishings of both homes, if only by virtue of their number, bear testimony to the line's sustained occupancy of the home. In terms of age, a large number of furnishings in each home refer "back" three generations or more including a small number of prized pieces which date from the late 1700's. But what perhaps distinguishes these homes the most is the sheer number and variety, the *comprehensiveness*, of the furnish-

ings which have been inherited and treated as heirlooms. In the vast majority of homes in this county, lineage items constitute a distinct sub-class of furnishings singled-out for display. For these two families they constitute a major element of the furnishings of the rooms of these two homes. Indeed contemporary, non-lineage furnishings stand-out in these homes as visually distinct elements amidst the pattern of older worn furnishings. Here a comprehensive array of objects, i.e. wall hangings, floor coverings, furniture and decorative items, attest to a sustained tradition of material transmission. Major furnishings, as well as such things as daguerreotypes and cartes-de-visites, china, mirrors, lamps, knick-knacks and a vast array of "incidental" elements were all included. In addition, these items were not sequestered as ceremonial objects for display but rather were found throughout the home, constituting a large part of the "working inventory" of each home's furnishings.

No other homes could match this "old family" level or form of display without a similar stability of wealth and habitation. It takes time to accumulate such an array of furnishings, and it takes money to avoid the need to liquidate these inherited assets, as well as to save, store and maintain them. Displays of this magnitude essentially presuppose and encode a *history* of material accomplishment. The Swartzs and the Shellys also come from prominent and

well respected families who have a long history in the county. They had, however, neither the extended mercantile interests nor the extensive connections outside the county that the Chapmans and Loschs had and were not regarded as part of the county's elite. A look at their lineage displays demonstrates some of the considerations which set them apart. Both families have large and locally prominent homesteads. The Swartz's are direct descendents of the man for whom their valley is named and their home is the one he built in the summer of 1801. Their farmstead, however, is the remnant of what was once a much larger holding, and the house itself has only recently been renovated by the current owners after years of steady decay. The Shelly home, while much valued by them as a homeplace was acquired from a local doctor and has been in their family for a comparatively brief forty nine years. Neither home carries the same stability or history of prominence that the preceding homes embodied.

The material inventories of these homes could not demonstrate the same sustained and thorough accumulation of the furnishings as seen above. Their displays fall short on a comparative basis in terms of their number, variety, age and quality. In terms of age, the body of references here are to the preceding two generations, although individual items may trace their origins back to earlier family. Lineage items are fewer in number in these homes and, rather

than being integrated into the main body of furnishings, are isolated and organized for display as heirlooms. In the Swartz home, they are concentrated in the livingroom, a room rarely lighted, heated or used. In the Shelly home, a major display is organized in the "reception hall" for the benefit of visitors. Several other pieces are prominently featured in the livingroom. The type of object reserved to serve the relic function also sets these displays off from those of the homes "above" them. Whereas lineage pieces in the Chapman and Losch homes represented a broad sampling of the "kinds" of things typically used to furnish and decorate the rooms of a home; the range of items in the Swartz and Shelly homes was simply drawn from whatever was available. The fortuitousness of this sampling was apparent. The Shelly display in the entryway for example, included items which might not normally be found in entryways: a maple drop-leaf kitchen table arranged as a side-table; a spinning wheel; a large secretary desk and so on. The "ceremonial center" in the Swartz livingroom was equally haphazard. It included oil lamps, a spinning wheel, an old cigar mold, a pistol, an unmarked stone that had previously covered a family grave, a drysink and a rifle. When I asked one of the sons if these things had all come with the house, he told of finding them in attics, barns and basement and commented, "yeah, well it was all just junk back then."

The Swartz collection, in fact, included objects that

had not descended through the family. They were included simply because they were "old" and contributed to the room's theme of age and history. This, and his comment, illustrate what is often another attribute of lineage display at this level: it is organized with a certain "self-consciousness" not present for the Loschs and Chapmans. "Self-conscious" in the sense that attention is drawn to these objects in a manner not seen in the "old family" homes. They are assembled and organized in the public spaces for maximal visibility; they stand-out stylistically amidst the contemporary furnishings; and they are treated as a conceptual category of "things" such that a reference to one will precipitate a tour through all of the other pieces regarded as "heirlooms". Many, like Mrs. Shelly, deny that the display constitutes a display once it is established; however most families outside the lineage rich, proudly lead the visitor directly to these displays whenever a related subject is raised. The difference seen in their presentation and "performance" here is, therefore, similar to the differences many have described between the taste of the "nouveau riches" which calls attention to itself, and the understatement of old money (see for example Duncan 1976 and Lynes 1949).

These two status groups were also consistently distinguished by the *material quality* of the items saved as lineage relics. The difference can be described generally in



terms of materials and manufacture. For the Chapmans and Loschs the furniture was generally high-style pieces, of woods and fabrics that were expensive at the time of their manufacture. Knick-knacks included much in silver, pewter, and brass; floor coverings included hand-made oriental rugs; and the Losch home included 19th c. oil paintings of ancestors by a well known painter of the time. Below this level the homes of this county overwhelmingly present relics which, while considered valuable now, were generally the common items of their time - oil lamps, pine drysinks, grain baskets, farm implements, press-back chairs and a variety of mass produced oak furniture. These pieces are much valued in contemporary antique markets, but they do not reflect a similar level of economic achievement in the pasts of these families.

Lineage displays for the Kaufman's and Mortons and the remaining mass of families in the county finally revolve around the display of a few isolated and highly prized items. The Mortons for example proudly pointed to an old milking stool, cowbells, a drysink and a clock as reminders they had garnered from the farmsteads of their pasts. Rachael Kaufman had a drysink from her mother's home as well as three plank bottom chairs from a great-aunt and little more from the generations that preceded her. In general the homes of the community enclosed but few possessions that dated to the great-grandparental generation and there was as

a result a comparatively limited opportunity to embody a "line" of descent, let alone a prosperous one. Thus in this arena, where status accrues to the ability to mount a detailed demonstration of history, these people did not possess the resources to compete.

The ability to "encode" "family" diachronically was not the sole means to establish a family's substance, but it was highly valued in the community and considered pre-requisite to movement into the highest status grouping.<sup>19</sup> However, even as they lacked the resources to define their family's character temporally in any extensive way, many relied on the other resources described in this chapter to fill-out a synchronic or contemporaneous image of family identity. Rachael Kaufman, for example, set-out very self-consciously in her later years to begin the process of generating lineage resources for her grandchildren. Furniture was repaired and refinished and a wide range of household objects which she considered "meaningful" or of sentimental value, were earmarked for transmission. They were pointed out to her own children, their history recalled from time to time, and their destination specified. Barring a status lineage display for the present therefore, she had devoted her home to the symbolization of recent family history. Through pooling, gift-exchange and relic collecting, she filled her home with furnishings rife with allusions to family members and events from her own lifetime and she drew

on them regularly to make reference to her family's many connections and achievements. Thus it was through these resources, accumulated and distributed through the manifold life-long processes of exchange, that this highly respected woman suggested her home's commitment to family cohesiveness, and built value with the contemporary, in the absence of the historical.

### Conclusions

Henry Howard once told me of a time some years back when he found himself in a distant hospital being prepared for emergency heart surgery. He was scared and felt quite sure he'd never return home. As he tells the story, he tried to find some comfort in the only way he could at that moment. He turned to the nurse attending him and asked her where she was from. "Why I'm from Peterburg too Mr. Howard on 6th and Milford." Henry is a wiry tall man of eighty and he felt sure he knew everyone in town. After a moment's thought, he realized she had to be the young woman who had just recently moved into an apartment an elderly neighbor had vacated. Her answer, in any case, excited him a great deal (it still does), and as they talked another nurse, who had noticed that H.H. worked for Standard Steel, came by to ask him if he knew her uncle. The man turned out to be Henry's foreman at the plant. "My god it was wonderful!" he told me, "There I was laying there helpless and I was

amongst friends!"

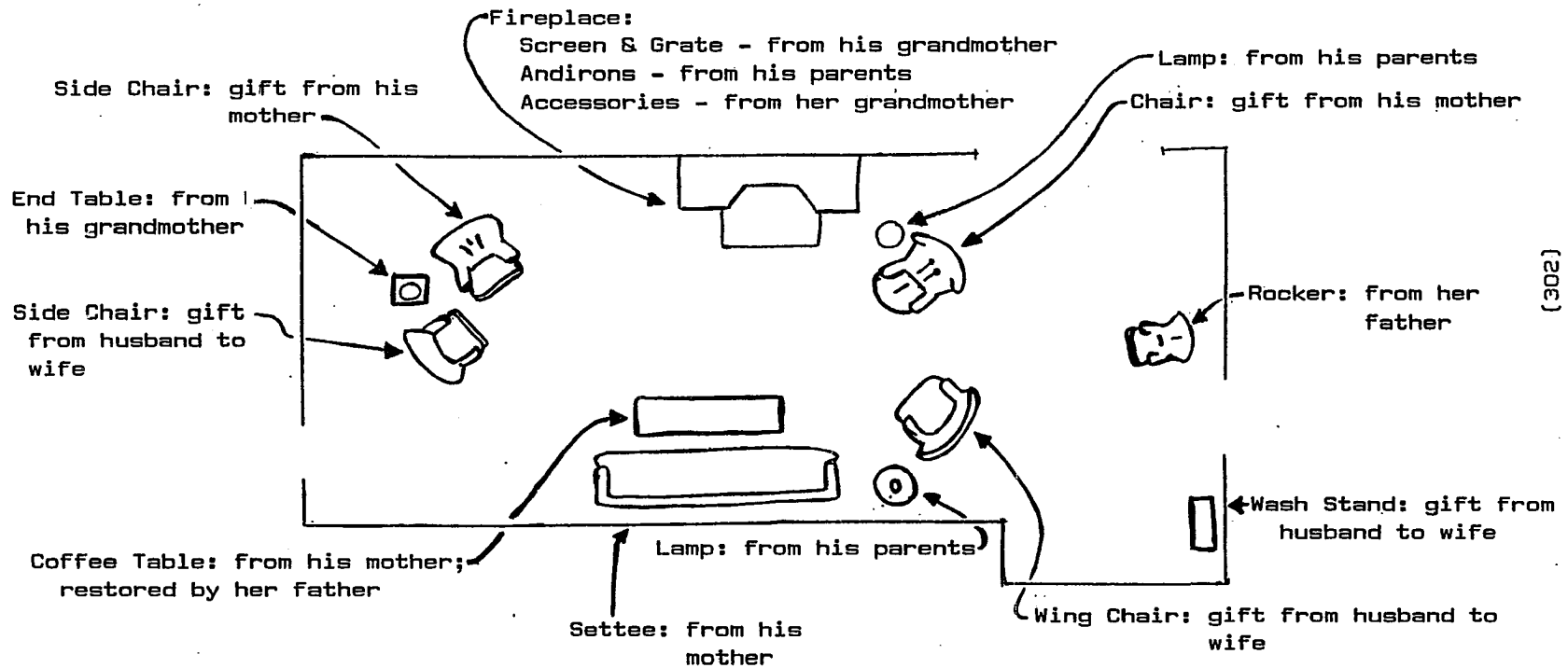
The search for relationship in this community is a continuous and profound one. One's relationships define personal identity in a very real sense here. You "are" who you come from, who you know, who you are associated with. People locate themselves and one another by where they come from and the pattern of their social connections. These connections provide for the unity, mutual support and sense of group identity that constitute the substance of both kinship and community (cf. Schnieder 1979). Stories like Henry Howard's have also reminded me on many occasions that enormous emotional support is also taken from an awareness of these extended connections. They offer a sense of being grounded in a "known universe" which is not easily replaced.

It is perhaps not surprising, therefore, that as this research proceeded my attention was increasingly directed to the manner in which home furnishings were subordinated in Peterburg to these on-going processes of association. Locals used their furnishings extensively to mark and manage that encompassing network of relationships through which their families were identified locally. This was a major communicative task - a primary "conversation" - in which the house and its furnishings were implicated within this social system.

The pattern of sources for furnishings in the younger Stine's home (figure 5-3) offers a relative example. The

chart provides a view of their livingroom after the first replacement phase, some seven years after they moved in. Much of the original furniture has been moved to a new family room and a new livingroom has been established in a form the owners hope will hold until their infant son is grown. Even at this second stage of furnishing, then, nearly all of their furniture is drawn from parents and grandparents. Those pieces which have not been, were acquired by the husband as gifts for his wife. As the furnishings of this home have been "compiled" through extensive, yet relatively common, amounts of pooling, gift-giving, and inheritance, therefore, this young couple has increasingly been located in the midst of an array of objects which recall for them the network of kin that surrounds and supports them. Older households, as discussed, are typically filled with an even larger array of pedigreed possessions provided by exchange traditions which gradually fill their walls and shelves with accumulations of decorative objects. Taken together, the livingroom and diningroom of one retired school teacher, for example, encoded a range of references to her husband's grandparents and parents, her own parents, their children and their spouses, their children's children, the teacher's sister, her closest niece and nephew, her Sunday school class, friends, and an employer.

As the homes of this insular community age, therefore, they come in time to encode a depth of references to past,



**FIGURE 5-3:** Stine Livingroom with Attribution of Sources - Dave Commented: "Why buy furniture?"

present and succeeding generations of family and friends. As we have seen, the entire inventory of the home, from its most mundane to its most revered furnishings, may potentially be implicated in this symbolic process. Through them, the "family", as an encompassing corporate entity that precedes and follows the individual home is represented for the members of each household. The furnishings of these homes thus serve at a symbolic level to encode those same orders of interrelation and interdependence that were "enacted" through the patternings of spatial behavior discussed in chapter four. Where patterns of usage demonstrate bonds of relation between contemporaneous households, however, these furnishings establish the identity of each household within a network of people and events that extend through time. They build an identity for the family in historical depth.

The "meanings" of these home furnishings, as they have been examined in this chapter, have been derived largely from the behavior surrounding their acquisition and subsequent usage. Home furnishings were seen to arrive in the home through pooling, as gifts, as inheritances and as relics self-consciously collected, as well as through outright purchase. These exchanges were seen to occur in some part in fulfillment of the general obligations and commitments that accrue to kinship (and to a lesser extent, friendship) relationships here. They serve pragmatically as elements of mutual aid, yet they also provide a sustained

channel through which friends and families may interact with one another. It was shown that the manner in which these various forms of exchange are conducted was regulated according to a series of broadly shared norms and conventions. Decisions concerning what was likely to be transferred, when, between which participants, with what rights, obligations, and implications were all seen to be codified and potentially meaningful within this community's system of reference. Home furnishings were seen to assume significance as they move between homes and the manner and purposes of their transfer are evaluated according to these local codes. In this way, they assume significance both with reference to the particular moments of their occurrence, and more broadly, with respect to those on-going processes through which interacting networks of family and friends negotiate and sustain their relationships. Finally, because all this movement was guided by an underlying structure of values and traditions which are taken to apply to the management of resources and priorities in this community, this flow of furnishings was also shown to ultimately assume importance as an expression of a household's structure of values.

Once in possession, it was shown that these furnishings, served their owners in commemorating and recalling the people and events from which they were derived. The furnishings discussed here are in this sense tangibly constituted for their owners within the processes of social experience



(cf. Mead 1934:78). Their significance emerges from, and is encoded in, the events of their use more than through their given material features.

It can no doubt be argued that a certain amount of "meaning" is conveyed simply by virtue of the conventions regulating the kinds of objects exchanged and how they are displayed. The location of gifts, relics and inheritances in collections on walls, shelves, and various flat surfaces will convey to all who are conversant with this county's customs that these things are quite likely mnemonic devices of some sort dedicated to the commemoration of family and friends and possibly the symbolization of the esteem of others. An awareness of the ubiquity of pooling customs will also contribute to a local's sense of the background that informs a users evaluations of his own "ordinary" furnishings. These sorts of general inferences are available to local residents who share a competence in their community's customs and conventions in managing and evaluating home furnishings. Locals may distinguish classes of objects and realms of discourse in which they are immersed. They will not however, have access to the specific associations that are affixed to home furnishings without a first hand knowledge of their histories.

As a communicational resource, therefore, these pedigreed furnishings may function to varying extents at a number of levels. As a group, and in general terms, their

numbers and simple presence in the home serves publically to convey the sense that the home is invested in or devoted to the maintenance and display of "Family". This is a proper orientation in this context, an important one to display in terms of the public perception of one's priorities. We have also seen that the number, quality, quantity and manner of presentation for lineage items will assume some significance as an index of status within this community's system of reference. However, beyond these broad public relevancies, the orders of significance discussed here imply that these furnishings function as a more private communicational resource that is shared with a controlled and circumscribed community of communicants. For the kinds of associations I have been describing will be largely dependent on verbal mediations for their comprehension and will typically only be shared among family members and close friends. In these circumstances they may be used variously for illustration when discussing people and events ("that's her drysink right there,") or at other times used to evoke stories and accounts of the past (Musello 1984).

As objects transported through time and space between generations of kin, these home furnishings are important, therefore, not only for the material continuity they establish within these groups, but also for the talk they occasion. In this sense their meanings may evolve and be adapted through time as the goods are employed as elements

of an essentially "oral" tradition. In this multi-modal capacity they are important to the transmission of accounts which constitute or fill-out the record of a family's history. As "stores of meaning" (Firth 1973:81, M.Mead 1964:106), they assist processes of recall and also serve to stimulate the act of recollection among family members. As mnemonic devices, the full array of household goods may serve to preserve the memory of action and, as Firth has suggested (1963:42), of "ideas about action". In this way they may also serve, as cross-generational extensions of the process of socialization, in guiding the behavior of others in the future (see also Rapoport 1982:80). At this level the meaning of these furnishings must be understood to be largely memory-dependent. As with other elements of an oral tradition, (cf. Goody and Watt 1973), their significance is something that is continually emerging within the on-going events of their use as people talk about them, share them, and pass them between one another as instruments of inter-relation. Memory is an imperfect archive, however, and I have found that in time, as the memory of the specific episodes with which these objects are associated are lost or condensed, the objects may come to be valued chiefly as metonyms referring only to more generalized accounts of kin. Yet through the course of their history, the many things of the home have nonetheless been shown to function importantly on a daily basis for the people of Peterburg in the expres-

sion of those aspects of social identity that extend from the assessment of a family's values, their social contacts and historical background.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER V

<sup>1</sup> This chapter assumes a perspective on the communicative use of goods which is closely related to early anthropological and sociological studies of exchange. The significance of household furnishings will be examined here as they are used and moved between friends and family through the course of daily social life. As explained in chapter 1, anthropologists have long characterized the functions of goods as media incorporated in the management of social relationships (cf. Firth 1963, 1973; Douglas 1979; Malinowski 1966). Similarly, sociologists have long studied issues of reciprocity and the obligations invoked by various forms of exchange for their function in the organization of power and relationships. (See for example Mauss' early study of prestation 1967, and see Sahlins 1965, for a review of major research.) As with these earlier studies, my concern is to understand how the exchange and use of these goods is patterned and to characterize how these patterns function with respect to the structure of relationships in the home and community.

My intent in using the term "exchange" should be distinguished however, from that of Blau (1964) and others who, in their discussions of "exchange theory" assume actor-oriented perspectives in the analysis of material transactions. These studies tend to minimize the role of extra-individual factors in characterizing exchange, focusing instead on pre-specified individual motives such as the accumulation of power while treating the exchanges chiefly as economic events (cf. Kapferer 1981:13-19). For the purposes of this study my intent has been to characterize processes of exchange as they are codified within the context of daily family life and shaped by such factors as life-cycle stage, kinship relations, rank, role and so on. Rather than treating individual motives in these exchanges I will be attempting to clarify the shared rules, roles, and customs through which individual behavior is regulated and becomes meaningful.

<sup>2</sup> As with all analytical tools which seek to frame a broad pattern of behavior, the concept of the developmental cycle has been criticized largely for the many variations it does not incorporate in its model. My application of the idea to a life-long pattern through which the acquisition of furniture is regularized, may be similarly challenged. It does not necessarily describe what occurs in homes which are continuously-occupied over successive generations or in the houses of divorced couples or families who move a great deal (not at all common in Ridge County). My effort here is not, however to present a comprehensive model of consumer behavior. Rather I aim to outline a broad

pattern in the location and management of home furnishings which characterize the efforts of most of the families that I observed and was described to me as the normative model against which behavior was measured. It should be noted as well that, as with the application of most standards in this county, personal knowledge of individual circumstances will generally supercede any judgement of a family's behavior against these norms in the management of goods.

<sup>3</sup> It has been suggested in this connection that pooling may be similar to the potlatch custom documented by Boas (1966) among others. Potlatch, like pooling, is a customary system for the redistribution of property which bears on the social organization of kinship, community and clan groups. This is where the similarity between the two customs ends however. As Boas has noted, the potlatch is fundamentally about competition and self-aggrandizement. It is a method for acquiring rank, whose "underlying principle is that of the interest-bearing investment of property" (1966:77). Codere stated its aggressive nature even more bluntly, suggesting that "potlatching was a metaphorical warfare" (1951:119). She continues on to demonstrate how potlatching historically came to replace warfare as a way of fighting with enemies.

Through the potlatch, the Kwakiutl "giver" sought to accrue status through a very public act of giving. The giving in turn imposed a burden on the recipient to repay the gift *with interest*. The act of giving was therefore frequently motivated by a desire to destroy a rival's prestige. Rather than serving to aid the recipient, the gifts pose a threat to both his social standing and his economic well being. Potlatching is in fact so clearly oriented to the giving as a demonstration of wealth and status, that it need not serve the instrumental function of redistributing resources. For not only is it the case that the giver here ends-up with more than he started with, but it is also true that this kind of rivalry "finds its strongest expression in the destruction of property" (1966:93).

By contrast, pooling and gift-giving in Ridge County are chiefly "about" the demonstration of mutual respect, the marking of networks of affiliation and the extension of mutual-aid. It is true that Kwakiutl youth were extended material assistance similar in outline to that received by Ridge County youth when they set-out to establish their own lives. But again, whereas this aid permits no direct reciprocation in Ridge County, the Kwakiutl youth in effect earn their aid through their own earlier distribution of gifts prior to setting-out. The aid provided to them therefore is received as repayment with interest. Where competition and personal, or clan, advantage guide potlatching as a method of re-distribution, pooling and gifting in Ridge County are employed as mechanisms through which members patently invest their resources in mutual-aid and processes of affiliation. Codere (p.118) emphasizes that potlatching, while a matter of individual competition, offers a "binding force" for the

entire numaym, or clan, since the prestige of all is at stake. In this sense both pooling and potlatching can be understood to serve an integrational function for the group. However, where potlatch binds the group by vanquishing those outside the group, [a form of boundary maintenance], pooling is directed "inward" to service the bonds between those within the group.

\* Many families here substitute their own labors for money in order to landscape their home. In order to do so they may dig-up plants that relatives offer from their own property or search out appropriate plantings from fields and forests owned by friends or family. The stories this woman alluded to were tales of the joint efforts of her husband and herself in finding and planting each plant, as well as of the generosity of their former owners. The elements of many homes' landscapes take on a symbolic texture in this way, that is quite similar to that created within the home by its many pedigreed furnishings and decorations.

°This point should be emphasized. These re-distributions are not perceived to spring from or incur obligations in terms of specific gifts or exchanges. Rather, they are interpreted within the pattern of assistance that characterizes these relationships of mutual dependence. Malinowski reported a similar form of customary exchange in his impressive review of Trobriand systems of exchange (1922). He pointed out that in that form of distribution which arose from the mother's brother's obligation to provide for her family, the payments must be seen to spring from and be owed to the relationship. The obligation is incurred generally by virtue of the demands of this kind of relation and the gifts paid serve, he said, "to thicken the ties from which arise the obligations" (1922:182). Similarly in Ridge County, pooling is an expected dimension of familial ties and its significance is framed most generally in terms of its affirmation of these bonds and obligations.

\* Irene Shelly presented me with a consummate politician in, and spokesperson for, the use of furnishings in the management of relationships and roles. The nature of her usage is, however, quite common, although she is perhaps clearer in her motives in the use of this medium than most. As another example, I would note the way she used furnishings in negotiating a transition in the control of the household in her mother's multi-generational home. By her own admission this was a gradual transition, marked initially by her own staged assumption of responsibilities for the upkeep of the house. Furniture and its control became another device in the negotiations. As Irene moved from assisting her mother, to eventual control of the home, she noted:

There also began to be a transition of furniture. I lived here for a long time with what we had - what

was hers. Then I replaced the livingroom furniture; I got new bedroom furniture for myself; and there was no running opposition on her part to doing that. Now some people might have opposed that and wanted to keep that dominant role because the home was still under her ownership. But it was just a transition of personal things - perhaps you might say I was showing her out - which really wasn't evident but that's what you might term it because I was taking over.

[D35A:045]

Interestingly, all the women I spoke to in multi-family households similarly isolated control over furnishings as the arena where "headship" of the house was ultimately negotiated.

<sup>7</sup> The use of the term "collections" must be circumscribed here. These "gifting sites" do not constitute "collections" in the sense in which the term is used with reference to "collectors". These agglomerations are not the product of any concerted effort by the owners and they do not presuppose any extended knowledge of or about the objects. Owners here do not often learn about or apply discriminations concerning age, maker, types, origins, history, and so on, as a collector would, and they don't generally attempt to acquire "examples" in any systematic sense as a collector does.

<sup>8</sup> I am drawing on Goffman's usage of this term in order to pointedly distinguish these displays from what might otherwise be considered as "status symbols". Goffman draws the distinction in this way:

Specialized means of displaying one's position frequently develop. Such sign-vehicles have been called status symbols. They are the cues which select for a person the status that is to be imputed to him and the way in which others are to treat him.... Status symbols designate the position which an occupant has, not the way in which he fulfills it. They must therefore be distinguished from *esteem symbols* which designate the degree to which a person performs the duties of his position in accordance with ideal standards, regardless of the particular rank of his position. (1951:294-295)

Gifting sites and their components bear on a woman's status to the extent that these considerations are incorporated into anyone's public identity here. However, what they honor is less "rank" than the *relationship* of the giver to the recipient in her role as mother/aunt/etc. and the giver's ostensible sense of the receiver's performance in that role.



9 Levi-Strauss, in an often quoted discussion (1974) refers to gift-giving as "a universal mode of culture" and points out that:

Goods are not only economic commodities but vehicles and instruments for realities of another order: influence, power, sympathy, status, emotion; and the skilled game of exchange consists of a complex totality of maneuvers, conscious or unconscious, in order to gain security and to fortify one's self against risks incurred through alliances and rivalry. (p5 emphases mine)

While there is a tendency in many discussions of exchange and reciprocity to think in terms of the return of *like objects*, the "transactional perspective" that Levi-Strauss' attention to the "totality of maneuvers" implies allows a more flexible view of reciprocity. While gift-giving of the sort discussed here does not require a material return, it may well anticipate an appropriate response in the subsequent treatment of the gift.

I see gift-giving as it is directed to the gifting-site therefore to invoke a ritualized series of behaviors that ultimately involves both the giving of the gift and its display as part of one overriding gesture orchestrated between the participants. This is then to assume a Meadian sense of the gesture in which the response is anticipated in the initial gesture and is as integral a part of the exchange and its significance as either the gift or the giving (cf. Mead 1934).

10 It is important to stress that these gifting-sites constitute a communicational resource that is shared within existing networks of affiliation. For this reason, the giving follows the lines of "generalized reciprocity", as Sahlins (1965) has outlined it, where the material flow marks and maintains prevailing or already established relations. Balanced reciprocity, he notes, is more common to relationships in which the material flow is important to establishing or sustaining bonds. Here the gift-giving is symptomatic of the bonds and serves, as Evans-Pritchard (1934:172) has noted in the case of bride-wealth, in "defining, expressing and evoking social behavior," suited to the roles participants engage in with respect to one another.

A second issue of concern here is the matter of what obligation the proffering of a gift may impose on the receiver. Sociologists and anthropologists have traditionally examined the important implications of gift-giving for the organization of social relationships in terms of the manipulation of obligation and the use of gifts to exert control and influence. Boas' work on the potlatch (1966), already mentioned, has been influential, as has been the early study of Mauss, who noted, "The gift not yet repaid debases the man who accepted it..." (1967p.63) Yet as Malinowski noted in his own study of the Kula exchange, gifts

need not always be framed in terms of relative power or the imposition of obligations:

Not in all cases, but in many of them, the handing over of wealth is the expression of the superiority of the giver over the recipient. In others it represents subordination to a chief, or a kinship relation or relationship-in-law. (1966:175)

I find the offering of gifts for display in the gifting site to represent such an act of subordination to the *relationship*. It evokes the relationship and honors it. And, indeed, like the Kula exchange of the Trobriand Islanders, this on-going form of gift-giving precludes any discussion of equivalence in repayment but rather assumes some response in the unspecified future because of the relationship the gift-giving marks.<sup>11</sup> This research was supplemented during, and reported in part in production of "A Country Auction: The Paul V. Leitzel Estate Sale", a 16mm documentary film, co-produced and directed with Robert Aibel, Ben Levin, and Jay Ruby. See film and study guide for additional information on estate sales here.

<sup>12</sup> There is of course much more involved along with the business of collecting relics of the deceased. These auctions also serve the community and family as an institutionalized means for responding to the death of a member of the fold. Family members and then the community, gather for the sale and together recapitulate the person's life, sharing memories, drawing closure. They also use the sale as a final opportunity to look over the person's home and possessions - it represents for both family and community a moment for final inspection, for summary evaluations. This was the subject for "A Country Auction", see film and study guide (CVC 1984)

<sup>13</sup> As Goody indicates for example, this is a process of central importance to family continuity:

The linking of patterns of inheritance with patterns of domestic organization is a matter not simply of numbers and formations but of attitudes and emotions. *The manner of splitting property is a manner of splitting people; it creates (or in some cases reflects) a particular constellation of ties and cleavages between husband and wife, parents and children, sibling and sibling, as well as between wider kin.* (1976p.3 emphases added)

See also Goody 1974, and Thompson and Thirsk 1976, for two useful overviews.

<sup>14</sup> This diachronic perspective on exchange as one continuous process in the life-course has been recognized in earlier studies. It has led researchers to search for alternative phrasings or terms to use in describing familial exchange processes. Goody has preferred the term "devolution", for example, to indicate this sense of a continuum:

Devolution describes the inclusive transactions that take place between the holder of rights in property and those who have continuity interests in such rights... whether the transfer of property between father and son, or father and daughter, takes place on the attainment of adulthood, upon marriage of the heir or upon the death of the holder is not from our standpoint, of crucial importance as far as it concerns the reproduction of the social system (or the continuity of particular social relationships over time). These transactions should be seen as a whole over time; whether a son or daughter receives a "portion" by dowry or by inheritance is from the standpoint of equity of little importance; the fact is that the child of either sex shares in the parental wealth. (1976:1)

See also Sussman and Burchinal (1962a and 1962b) for a comprehensive overview of exchange in the family system.

<sup>15</sup> It should be noted that this "earmarking" often works in the service of traditional, gender-based, patterns of inheritance common to this county. Many objects here are considered to belong most appropriately to one gender over another - bedroom sets for example are "feminine" - and these items will be passed on by the relevant parent to a child of the same sex. In other cases, objects strongly associated with a relative simply by virtue of usage or ownership will be directed to same-sex heirs. "Delayed bequests" from grandparents to grandchildren which pass through parents granted temporary ownership will also usually be passed along according to gender. These items then become part of a flow of objects that pass "down" through the matrilineal or patrilineal lines of descent in the kin group.

<sup>16</sup> The exceptions were found in the case of farms, where one son (either the first or which ever agreed to stay on) inherited the entire property in order to keep the farm operating. This was also seen in the cases of the major estates in the county in which the effort was made to keep the property in the family. In all of these cases it was found that the remaining heirs were compensated in some way - often the heir "bought" the property from the estate; at other times the furnishings were divided equally and an additional sum of money provided for those not receiving land. During the past thirty

years, however, as small farms and farming generally have proved less profitable in the county these farms have increasingly simply been sold-off at sale.

<sup>17</sup> It seems reasonable to expect that by virtue of their association with the death, inheritances become involved in the symbolic work that many, such as Blauner, suggest needs to be done at this time:

Death creates a further problem because of the contradiction between society's need to push the dead away and its need "to keep the dead alive". The social distance between the living and the dead must be increased after death, so that the group first, and the most affected griever later, can re-establish their normal activity without a paralyzing attachment to the corpse... The need to keep the dead alive directs societies to construct rituals that celebrate and insure a transition to a new social status, that of spirit, a being now believed to participate in a different realm. (1977:187)

Hertz (1960) defined a similar process of status transition and also suggested that survivors faced a two-fold need - "disintegration" and synthesis - in letting go of and recalling the deceased. (See Van Gennep 1960, and Warner 1959, for similar analyses). I see these inheritances to be distinct therefore by virtue of their implication in these symbolic activities that surround death. In subsequent use, they serve integrally with other relics, as mnemonics, to "keep the dead alive".

<sup>18</sup> Given this common pull between the secular and the religious traditions, it was especially interesting to follow the progress of a Lutheran minister during the preparation of his father's estate for sale at auction (CVC 1984). In my first conversations and interviews with Pastor Leitzel, during the early stages of preparation, he professed no interest in saving any material relics from the estate. His comments at this time followed the lines that these things had no meaning for him and that if it were not for his sister, he would be throwing a great deal more away. As the sale neared, however, I learned that he had taken a few articles home with him and asked him about it. His answer at this time focused first on pragmatic justification and secondly on sentimental functions:

Its simply a matter that I have need for these items.  
Secondly to have some remembrance, some memento of my father's property - the home and store.

Several weeks later at the conclusion of the entire auction process, I asked him if it would be fair to conclude that his sense of

the value of such possessions had changed during this time:

Yes, that would be a correct impression. Early-on I s'pose I felt that there really were no items of property that would be of a great deal of interest to me. But, later on I felt - I s'pose chiefly because I wanted a memento of the store and my father. So, the typewriter desk which he had in his office and a bookcase, his old typewriter, for example. Those were the three chief things I kept. But I hadn't made that decision at the start. That developed later, near sale-time in fact.

It seems fair to suggest in fact that his participation in this social custom along with the example of his sister had done much to convey to him the value and utility of this traditional use of personal property. Regardless of the forces shaping his change of mind however his progress offers another illustration of the play of these competing ideas.

<sup>17</sup> See Bossard and Boll, 1950 (esp. pp. 128-129), for an earlier analysis of how the presence and use of heirlooms may mark class distinctions.

## CHAPTER VI

### TASTE AND THE COMMUNICATION OF SOCIAL IDENTITY

In the previous chapter, it was shown that extended observations in Ridge county eventually directed this investigation to consider the communicative functions of furnishings as elements of on-going systems of activity. In this arena, household furnishings were seen to function as interactional media through which Peterburg residents managed and enacted their relationships. Meaning was seen to be emergent in those processes through which furnishings were used and shared. In a sense, the formal/material properties of the furnishings themselves were not evaluated or integrated in any thorough way as major elements of the messages being conveyed. Rather, significance was encoded through the movement of the furnishings and the activity that surrounded them. This research was designed originally, however, with the intention of understanding the ways in which the surface features of the home's furnishings are "selected out", analyzed, categorized, evaluated and afforded some comparative significance within a community. I wanted especially to understand how those distinctions that were made might come to be associated with different groups

and thus function in marking social divisions within the community. In this chapter, then, attention will be turned to the material dimensions of the homes and furnishings of Peterburg in an attempt to understand those standards of evaluation and interpretation that are applied to them.

As explained in chapter one, this portion of the research attempts to investigate the nature of "taste" in this community and some of its potential functions within on-going processes of social differentiation. Taste is seen as an indigenous system of discriminations through which homes and possessions are compared and systematic differences described in the standards and preferences members of the community adhere to. As Gans (1975) and others have suggested,<sup>1</sup> these differences may be expected to serve within specific communities of reference, as a means for classifying people and events. In order to evaluate this, taste is explored in the range of choices residents make in selecting and using their possessions; in the standards of evaluation applied to them; and finally in the underlying structure of values and beliefs which guide these processes. In this study, my aim lies ultimately less with eliciting a comprehensive view of the range of taste preferences, (the canons of taste), manifest in Peterburg than in identifying a set of minimal cues or "significant differences" which establish the boundaries between different status groups in the community.

There are, however, a range of factors which limit and seriously proscribe the play of taste and material distinctions in the life of this community. I will begin in the pages that follow by outlining some of these factors. I am concerned to understand these various qualifiers as elements of this community's aesthetic processes. I am especially interested to the extent that these qualifiers help define the contexts in which formal/aesthetic distinctions become relevant and assume significance. As will be seen, these limiting factors not only make it difficult to discern the operation of any system of material discriminations in Peterburg, but they also ultimately restrict the influence taste distinctions might be expected to have on the organization of social life in the borough.

For in broadest outline what this research has identified here is the persistence of marked continuities in the standards of taste that are applied in this community. The major "significant difference" embedded in the furnishings under analysis seemed to bear less on defining status distinctions in the community, than on marking local orientations to continuity and change. To explain this further, I will, in the pages to follow, describe those discriminatory processes that are applied to furnishings in this community, and provide an overview of major criteria used in their evaluation. The chapter will focus principally on major furnishings of the livingroom. Through them I have



attempted to understand the relationship of taste standards and fashions to the general values which have been seen to guide behavior in the county and contribute to the interpretation of one's personal and familial reputation. It will ultimately be shown that there are two, broadly defined, co-extant sets of standards operating here. One set is directed "inward", referencing people, values and authoritative sources within the traditions of the county. The other references "out" to standards and sources defined outside the county's boundaries. In order to illustrate the existence of these competing systems, we will look finally at the organization of preferences for "new" versus "old" furniture, paying particular attention to the use of antiques in these homes and their utility in defining social orientation.

#### **Background Conditions in the Exercise of Taste**

As discussed in the previous chapter, traditional approaches to the acquisition and valuation of furnishings do much to limit both the occasions and range of choices available to residents of this community in assembling their furnishings. Because of the customs of pooling, gift-giving, and inheritance, a substantial percentage of furnishings are acquired from parents, siblings and spouses and these are often second-hand pieces from the giver's own home. This in-itself takes a significant measure of aesthetic control out

of the hands of the homeowners (especially for the wife since she is the chief "receiver" of gifts for the home). It also works to enforce a uniformity in the "look" of a house with the homes of its supporting kith/kin network. In order to understand these phenomena, therefore, we must think in terms of a "group aesthetic" when looking at the homes of the younger families of Ridge county.

The impact of even these early incursions into the home, is generally a lasting one. Consistent with the traditional "piecemeal approach" to receiving and replacing these furnishings new or self-consciously selected pieces are usually only acquired individually, as the need for them arises. Even on those occasions when a "suit" is acquired (generally including a matching couch and side-chair) new furnishings have to be selected to accomodate the presence of the old. Whole rooms of furniture are almost never acquired here. As a result the vast majority of homeowner respondents told me they had never had the opportunity to coordinate the furnishings of a room for a comprehensive visual goal. Because major furnishings, such as couches and side chairs often supported twenty or more years of use, it commonly happened that decisions made decades earlier were still shaping current decisions in buying furniture - especially in terms of color. Few people told me that they had achieved the room they would have if they could completely redecorate. Few even expressed an interest in

trying.

When the aesthetic dimensions of these rooms are investigated therefore, especially if we choose to think in terms of some guiding intention, it has to be understood that their formal features take shape only gradually within the confines of this piecemeal method of furnishing. Evidences of a homeowner's exercise of taste, or aesthetic preferences, "emerge" only through time in these rooms. They are focused on individual acquisitions and *trends* in development over time.<sup>2</sup> In the long run, there tends to be little disjuncture between what a young couple starts out with and the direction they go in when they begin to replace and supplement their furnishings on their own. Preferences regarding colors, materials, types and styles of furnishings remain stable to the point that the "group aesthetic" mentioned earlier maintains a consistent presence in these homes through the full course of their histories.

A second point to be taken from the preceding chapter concerns what might be thought of as the "proper work" of one's furnishings in this community. As has been suggested to this point, furnishings are here involved instrumentally in defining and maintaining family identity. This was seen to take precedence over the display of class or status. The relevance of furnishings to status has less to do with comparative position in the larger community, than with their role in conveying an image of the family as a *good*

family. Because of their ties to kith and kin, then, pedigreed furnishings are likely to be highly valued for their associations and will not readily be displaced for the purposes of aesthetic control. This will also tend to reduce the homeowner's range of control in choosing furniture therefore, by limiting the number of furnishings in the home that can or will be replaced.

An additional consideration the investigator of taste standards confronts here, is a general unwillingness on the part of respondents to apply such standards publically in the judgement of others. If the subject of taste is raised directly, or comparisons are solicited, several ethical considerations and conventions of public conversation intervene. The reticence is, to some extent, referable to a general prohibition against public criticism of others.<sup>3</sup> It may also stem from the necessity or desirability in this context of paying homage to that shared "anti-materialist" ethic which (as mentioned in chapter five) frowns on any judgements, positive or negative, which are based in a person's material holdings. One is obliged in this light to indicate that you don't judge a person by his wealth, or by his possessions, and the result is disclaimers like this one:

What do I look at when I look at a house? The person sitting there. It don't bother me if they're sitting on a cardboard box or a velvet couch, what I care about are the people.  
Testimonies to the anti-competitiveness of community

life are also reliably evoked by such manifestly comparative subjects. This standard of rhetoric is important to the community's democratic and individualist self-image and questions about housing will raise answers like this one from Carl Kaufman:

People don't try to compete...when people do something to their house, its because they wanted to do it that way, not because of anything anyone else did.[D5A:050]

These are not, of course, absolute ideologies in the sense that people faithfully and at all times apply them. They by no means prevent people from making comparative judgements. However, these disclaimers have to be seen to be as integral a part of the operation of a comparative perspective in this county as the taste standards themselves. One has always to make a judgement, based for the most part on who is present, about when and how these provisos should be applied. There is always a need to be cautious in public statements, so comparisons or aesthetic judgements made in public may be framed amelioratively by these anti-comparative disclaimers. Conversations amongst intimates on the other hand, may be noticeably devoid of qualification. These ethical statements as such are implicated as part of the *behavior* of social comparison and their presence or absence is informative as to the contexts of evaluation and the relationship shared by the speakers.

One qualification in the comparative evaluation of

taste which is unvarying in its importance is the personal biography (including especially family name), of the people involved. As was mentioned in chapter two, one's personal history nearly always takes precedence when it comes to personal evaluations. The point bears repeating here because it is an inescapable dimension of all comparative or evaluative processes in this county. You are well known here and personal *history* is not only more readily available but also considered the single most reliable way to know and judge an individual. When we discuss criteria like house form and taste we are, therefore, discussing important, yet clearly subordinate indices of social character and status. Thus, for example, when I asked people about a flamboyant lime green house in the middle of this town of mute white building facades, comments always ran along these lines : "What you mean Art and Marney's house? Well, that's just Art". One woman had to be reminded that his house, one of the few in town that wasn't white, was green and her comment offered a sense of how such data might be called into play:

I never think about what color it is. All I think about is, "Ousley's" y'know, "Art and Marney's place". I don't think of it as the green house, or what color it is... Probably somebody I didn't care for, I would probably notice the color of their home more than I would somebody I liked...I might comment on it then.[39B:210]

Standards could always be elicited and defined in a "vacuum" here, without reference to specific individuals. And opinions and evaluations about material things per se can be

elicited if one uses some version of survey approach. But such findings provide us with little understanding of the dynamics which control if, how, and when such evaluations might actually be made in the course of daily life here.

Consider Marion Love's response, for example, when I asked her who would hang tourist plates on their diningroom wall. She snapped quickly that it would be someone who also wore polyester clothing and hung plaster cast "praying hands" on the wall. The answer was meant to be disparaging, yet it also described the owner of the plates with some accuracy. When she was subsequently asked her opinion of the owner by name, Marion's response was unqualified - "there is a wonderful woman who started with little and has earned the admiration of everyone in town". Thus, when judgement of the tourist plate was made, it was referred to a hypothesized pattern of choices, a pattern of behavior for its explanation. Secondly, its importance as a measure of status was ultimately dwarfed by the information (and lifestyle) associated with a specific person. The episode is typical of the way information is balanced here, and it should be borne in mind when an attempt is made to conceptualize the nature and significance of formal/aesthetic comparisons in this county's communities of known others. Social comparison through these formal media is less relevant here than it seems to be in some urban and suburban settings (cf. Lynes 1949, or Gans 1975). Such comparisons are always cautiously

phrased and are usually regarded as relative to evaluations of family name and personal history.

#### Criteria In Furnishing

Because of these constraints, it is not easy to identify the operation of a system of taste standards in this community. An additional complicating factor for the investigator attempting to elicit exemplary statements about the nature and function of formal/aesthetic comparisons lies in the general absence of a critical vocabulary among homeowners that might be used in describing either their own furnishings or those of others.

In the abstract, it seems that furnishings may be described and compared in terms of types, sources and qualities of materials; methods of construction; design and styles; maker; origin; and so on. In practice, extensive interviewing revealed few residents, male or female, with the ability to reliably name or distinguish kinds of fabrics or woods in their furnishings; to discuss elements of construction; to differentiate elements of design or furniture styles in any consistent way. When pressed to discuss formal considerations in the selection of furnishings in their homes, residents raised the problem of "matching" as the principal formal problem. By this they referred to the need to match furnishings first by color, and second by pattern. When discussing fabrics, key



distinctions concerned color again, strength, stain-proofing and whether they would show dirt. There was general agreement that a fabric called "Herculon" was the best at addressing these last concerns but no one I spoke to could distinguish it without a label, or name its component fibers or readily name and identify other fabrics. There was a wide variation in competencies concerning the identification of woods, but near uniformity in the inability to distinguish components of furnishing styles even though the vast majority of residents claimed a preference for a vaguely defined "Colonial American" furniture.

"Descriptions" of furnishings, as mentioned in the opening to chapter five, most frequently turn to the associative aspects of the pieces, their relations to people and events of the past. As evaluation occurs, it most commonly turns to pragmatic dimensions of the pieces, and on further questioning most residents seem inclined to discount the importance of stylistic considerations when it comes to actually buying a piece. These comments of a sixty year old housewife, for example, were common:

We weren't thinking of early American or anything, we were just thinking of getting a livingroom suit that we thought would be *practical* and we thought would be *useful*. [D7B:230 emphases added]

As was this response by a 34 year old mother of two:

When we went after a bedroom suit, y'know, we were after something that was *sturdy* and *serviceable* rather than waiting to find a particular - like oak or cherry or whatever. We didn't - it wasn't as

important as something that was suitable, looked nice  
and yet wouldn't fall apart.[4B:319 emphases added]

I cite both quotes here in order to demonstrate that what they typify is a uniform, principled and pragmatic approach to furnishing which pervades the thinking of *all* age groups in this community. It is an approach based in the asceticism which I have referred to repeatedly in this research as a guiding influence in the use of the house. Despite Weber's belief that consumption in America was long ago stripped of its ethical and religious implications (1958:182), the moral stance implicit to this approach towards furnishings in Ridge County is still vigorous and ubiquitous. The utilitarian considerations that these women and most other consumers here cite in discussing their acquisitions are essentially ethical considerations which not only form a component of the evaluation of individual purchases, but of the act of "purchasing" itself.

This is a fundamentally conservative standard and in practice what it demands is frugality, honesty and utility. As discussed earlier, the demands for "frugality" imply that a purchase will be judged in relation to one's means, his or her age, and the servicing of other needs which, in the common model of a family's list of priorities, are thought to precede it. This is again, regarded as a matter of "honesty" in representing one's achievements. There is as well a measure of "humility" involved such that even if one

has sufficient means to buy extravagantly, anything beyond what meets conventional standards of utility and quality may be judged as inappropriate. "Frugality" anticipates that the piece should provide the best quality and most utility for the smallest price. The "wise-buy" is always a goal and object of appreciation. The standard of "utility" makes more tangible demands on the furnishings themselves. Furnishings must be "durable", sturdily built, designed to last, and capable of minimizing maintenance needs. New furnishings are especially desirable because of these considerations. Finally, furnishings must be *comfortable*. This criterion was listed by most people as perhaps the single most important feature (next to price) of any piece of furniture. Interestingly, it was consistently opposed in common conception, to "style" and looks as both a feature and evaluative standard. Note Maddy Miller's comment for example on the ubiquitous recliner:

Recliners aren't pretty...but we want things more for comfort than for y'know a showplace. We've used our house hard and its more for comfort than anything else.

The younger Stines betrayed a similar distinction in the process of describing his mother's unusual attention to interior decoration:

B: [my parents] don't worry too much about the style of furniture...just useful and comfortable."  
D: Yeah, their type of furniture's very useful and everyday. My mother is the *other kind*, she likes style - she worries about style.[D16B:600 emphasis added. This distinction in "kinds" of people will

be discussed below.]

Similar distinctions (comfort compared to style) regarding the house were drawn in the earlier discussion of space use. The house is consistently directed to utility, as specifically opposed to "show", or "style", or a decorous presentation. As Carl Kaufman noted, "I can set in just about anything so long as its comfortable." This pragmatic orientation prevails and so it is that comfort consistently supplants formal considerations in both the selection and evaluation of furnishings.<sup>4</sup>

To summarize, then, it has been seen that: because of the difficult economics of this county; because of customary practices in pooling and gift-giving in furnishing a home here; and because of the measured "piecemeal" approach to furnishing and re-furbishing the home; the opportunities for homeowners to exercise control in choosing and coordinating their furnishings are limited. It is evident from the discussion above that there is a general reticence when it comes to the matter of comparing and evaluating the formal dimensions of a person's furnishings in public and that these evaluations will always be relative to direct knowledge of the person. A pragmatic and ethical set of criteria have been seen to structure the selection and evaluation of furniture here, frequently to the exclusion of all other considerations, and especially in contra-distinction to matters of "style" and taste. Furniture is not readily or

immediately framed as a controlled aesthetic presentation or as a matter of taste in this community. Its instrumental functions are very much in the forefront for these controlled and practical people. If we hope to distinguish aesthetic operations here - that is the making and appreciation of choices according to conventional principles and criteria (cf. Gross 1973)- we must, therefore, recognize that the criteria involved are not solely, nor necessarily principally, "formal". My consistent findings in asking people here to list their priorities in choosing and comparing furnishings in fact found that the pragmatically based standards took precedence. Lineage value was, as mentioned, valued first. Following that, residents listed in order: 1)price, 2)comfort, 3)age, condition and durability, and 4)color and the ability to "match" with other pieces in the home, as their primary considerations in looking at furniture.

These standards of frugality and utility thus constitute primary underlying principles or conventions by which judgements in selection and interpretation of furnishings are made. "Appreciative" and comparative processes as a result dwell to a significant extent on the comfort, cleanliness and condition of furnishings; how well they are suited to use; how economically this is achieved; and how well the colors and furnishings are coordinated under the circumstances.\* In effect they dwell on the "elegance" with

which the home combines utilitarian, economic, and (limited) aesthetic needs. These standards of course do not cover the field, and they do not serve to explain all that people are looking at or comparing. However, they do account for a major portion of public *discussions* about furniture - that part of the evaluative process which is explicitly shared with others and thus addresses what is considered to be important about furnishings in the social sphere. These considerations form the backbone of the evaluative process and they need always to be addressed in some form when dealing with the home's furnishings.

Beyond these standards what persists in this county is what might be described as an "uneven" aesthetic process. Uneven, that is, in terms of what its attention is directed to, and in terms of competencies in evaluating different pieces in the home. The vast majority of homeowners here, for example, both claim and demonstrate a preference for what is called "Colonial American" furniture. A survey of the borough demonstrates its presence in the homes of the working, middle, and lower-upper status groups. There is general agreement that this type of furniture as a rule meets the criteria of the pragmatic standards discussed above and this seems to have contributed to its status in Peterburg as the "consensus pick". It should also be recalled that in choosing furnishings here people have not only to meet the community's standards of economy and

utility, but also to "match" furnishings under conditions where, a) much of the inventory will be coming from parents and siblings; and b) where pieces will be acquired individually over extended periods of time. These last two conditions of-themselves press for the derivation of a shared and enduring set of preferences. Once again, "Colonial American" seems to meet these needs.\*

Despite the general agreement on this type of furniture, however, virtually none of my informants could tell me what its constituent features might be.<sup>7</sup> Certain elements were routinely distinguished as typical, i.e. the use of heavy durable fabrics, often in dark colors or plaids; an emphasis on wood; and blocky, solid construction. Attention to these features seemed to have as much to do with the durability of the furniture as with aesthetic distinctions. Most of my respondents' understandings of formal elements and variants within the "style" were limited, therefore, and relied on gross distinctions. Here a general compliance with the "look" and idea of "Colonial American" was sufficient in formulating choices, and people for the most part simply selected furniture similar to that of others around them, or accepted the identifications and suggestions of local furniture stores.

It is also true, however that fads sweep through this community periodically, raising the level of attention a particular object may be treated to. Extensive amounts of

information may be shared about an object of consumption at these times and discriminatory competencies or capacities may also become highly trained in the process. As knowledge about the objects is shared, so too are opinions about their qualities and suitabilities relative to local norms. An informal public "multi-logue" attends the incursions of any new fashion in this way. In these discussions one witnesses a process through which a range of acceptable innovations is defined and consensus on their justification is achieved. It is a process, as discussed in relation to the introduction of housing styles in chapter four, which moves the community towards the achievement of a general consensus in responding to and adopting discrete elements of national trends in household furnishings. This communal response is fundamental to the way in which aesthetic or taste processes are managed in this community and it bears brief amplification.

#### Fads and Fashions

Despite the "narrowed" attendance to fashion that I have described to this point, furnishings or elements of decor do at times become the object of excited attention and competitive buying among groups of friends and kin. The fads will typically focus on individual objects or adaptations to the house since such acquisitions will be attainable within the framework of the prevailing "piecemeal" approach to furnishing and home renovation. Kitchen counters entered the



borough in this way, as have wall-to-wall carpeting, textured plaster, "Peter and Mary" prints, televisions, and alternative forms of heating. Once an object or bit of renovation is selected out for this treatment, the talk that surrounds them will be extensive among males and females, young and old, dependent upon the particular focus. In the process they will typically also become immersed in the on-going competitions family and friends share to have the "nicest" house in the crowd.

When the Kaufmans renovated their home, for example, Rachael said she wanted to achieve a home that the kids could be proud of, yet one in which their friends would be comfortable - it mustn't be too "showy". Note then how she justified installing wall-to-wall carpeting in the mid-1960's:

I used to get so tired of cleaning around the rug and waxing that floor, and it was to the place where people were getting wall-to-wall carpet and we were able to get some too, so we decided we wanted to have the wall-to-wall carpet and it would make cleaning easier. [D7A emphasis added]

This is how one discusses the acquisition of a fashionable item here and it typifies how conditions are set and met for the "play" of fashion in this community. In this case the desire for the carpeting is first phrased as a pragmatic one (to get away from heavy maintenance), and the decision to purchase is framed in the context of general agreement about its acceptability. Her last statement reiterates the

utilitarian rationale that assumed currency in the community at the time for justifying this acquisition.

During my stay in the community, I had the opportunity to watch this kind of activity take place among the men in the borough. Their attention was directed to alternative forms of heating, especially wood-burning stoves and fireplace inserts. All forms of heating came under closer scrutiny here as elsewhere following the oil crises of the 1970's and they constituted a general motif of conversation during my stay. These discussions at times became quite sophisticated, assessing the benefits of kerosene space heaters over wood heaters, comparing relative BTU output by manufacturer and product design, evaluating needs for air-flow and humidity control, and debating issues in placement and installation. Agreement was soon achieved, however, that these things were justifiable and from that point forward they became an outlet for a rush of consumption. The young Dave Stine was quite candid about this in explaining his fireplace insert to me:

Part of it was fad, and I'll admit it. And also it was the only thing I could justify. I couldn't justify buying a new motorcycle (something he very much wanted), I couldn't heat my house with it... I wanted to buy something, so I made up my mind I wanted to spend the money for a stove because I could justify it because it was gonna heat our house, even though I didn't need it to.[D19A:485]

With the way open to buy these "new" products, activity focused of finding acceptable models and approaches for

their use in the home. The custom, long-established in the home-improvement habits of the area, was next to spend time talking to one another about options and visiting homes of others who had already made similar changes. If one installed a stove it was reasonable to expect others (friends or even people with whom you were only slightly acquainted) to come-by for a look. If you were planning for a stove, it was assumed that you would see what others did before taking such a step. One local observer described the high point of this activity to me in this way: "everyone was running around looking at each others stoves and installations to get ideas, and then they'd run home and 'do it their own way', which was usually just a combination of the others."

In this community, one's sense of "individuality" in participating in these fads often remained intact for those involved. Nonetheless it seems clear that what takes place with the introduction of a new fashion item is an active communal process through which the boundaries of acceptable participation are defined. We do see the operation of comparative and competitive processes of consumption in these fads, and in them there is often a subtext of prideful involvement with what is "current" in national, mass market trends. (Recall also here the discussion of the "country-kitchen" fad in chapter 4.) The extent of this activity and the local's participation in it is, however, moderated and substantially conformed through all of the attendant inter-

action that frames and propels it. The processes of consensus-seeking and rationalization which we've seen to be implicit to this activity provide for a "mediation" of these fads through the local setting and their selective adaptation. Ultimately these competitions are most clearly engaged between groups of friends and this is where their main significance is defined. They are regarded chiefly as spirited involvements amongst contemporaries who wish to have a desirable home, and to be current with each other and those they admire as a group. Their social implications are defined therefore, principally in terms of these "lateral" relations rather than one's position or mobility within the community's status system.

Gradations can be defined in the furnishings of the homes of Peterburg which seem to mark rank, even within the confines of the anti-competitive and pragmatic aesthetic described above. These distinctions can be identified most readily by comparing the homes of the upper-lower status groups in the community with those of the solid or mobile middle status groups. The differences are marked and noted in community life chiefly in terms of the age and condition of furnishings, their price, comfort and durability and how well "matched" or coordinated the individual pieces are. In contrast to the changeable and elaborate sets of features marked for comparison through fads, therefore, comparative

judgements relative to status turn here on the broader "pragmatic" standards of condition and utility. All homes are compared, in effect, by how well they match up to the common standard.

Among the homes of Peterburg's middle and lower-upper status groups, for example, one finds again, the sensible Colonial American furniture, situated in both the livingrooms and the family rooms. What distinguishes these from poorer homes is defined in terms of "condition" and "coordination" indices. This group acquires more new furniture earlier than most families; what is not new is more likely to have been reupholstered than in other homes; and the furniture is generally in better condition. But perhaps the clearest measure of middle/lower-upper status homes is that they typically achieve the ideal of coordinating (through time) the furnishings of their livingrooms and in some cases even the dens. This is often accomplished by reupholstering hand-me-downs so that they share the same fabrics, colors and designs, but the end result is still regarded as desirable. There is, as a result, no great disjuncture of style or aspiration between these homes and the homes of the solid working class in the community. The broad range of families (excluding the "old" families of the top groups), in fact described the same ideal for me in furnishing a livingroom: a room that mixed their lineal and pedigreed furnishings with all new colonial

American furniture from a quality store.

In the mainstream of this community<sup>10</sup> therefore, the common ideal is to achieve a high level in comfort and quality, but not finally to be so distinct as to stand-out in the community. As one man put it to me, the intent should appear to be directed to a "better standard of living - not better position". There are some highly visible, expensive and showy homes that have been built in this county in recent years by families with new money. The extent of their "transgression", however, is demonstrated regularly by the overwhelming ridicule these homes incur for their owners. Such homes are actually something of a blot on a family's reputation, and many residents from the community's middle status groups commented to me that they simply could not live in one in this county, "it would be too embarrassing".

The community's material display is pressed in this way to demonstrate qualified gradations and emphasize continuities rather than contrasts in the resources of its population. The result is that even those like Dick Campbell (a bank president) who are aware of the provincial nature of these standards, will abide by them in order to maintain their standing here:

You can't be high key, you gotta be sort of low key, don't play the big roller...If I was in the banking business in Harrisburg, I'd have to live in a nicer house, I'd have to do all this country club bit if I wanted to get ahead y'know. Where in this area, If I

showed alot of wealth or anything, they'd resent it.  
[D39A:060]

A strong element of social control thus persists in the responses of these residents to fads, fashion and social comparison. Gains may be judiciously marked in the material inventory of a home, but as seen throughout, an orientation to understatement and "consensus" seems to shape people's involvements with aesthetic distinctions. This is fundamentally a system in which people watch what one another do in order to define the boundaries of desirablility and acceptability in matters of taste, and achieve a position within those bounds.

The dominant response to aesthetic issues, therefore, demonstrates a prevailing orientation to local norms and sources of standards and authority. As has been seen, these are standards which associate taste standards with the more broadly defined structure of values which underlies and regulates much of community life and the assessment of personal identity. Taste preferences assume significance in this way as statements of one's position relative to the community's shared system of values. An adherence to local phrasings of the scope and significance of formal/material distinctions, as such, ultimately marks an adherence to the authority of the traditional values of the county. Participation in the local system of discriminations and interpretations thus marks an "inward" orientation to the

county itself. There are competing "authorities" however, and competing value systems. The salient alternatives are drawn principally from sources outside of the county, and they introduce consumer habits and taste preferences that may often be distinct from and at odds with local standards. Homes organized by these standards are taken to index an orientation elsewhere, beyond the county, and to many here they represent the intrusion of influences which threaten traditional sources of order and organization. As a result, a second, primary communicative significance of taste preferences in this community lies in their value as indices of an individual's frame of reference. The remainder of this chapter will be devoted to exploring this function.

#### **Taste as a Measure of Orientation**

The distinction between predominantly "inward" and "outward" frames of reference is a salient and important one to be attended to in the county. It is a distinction which bears on the county's struggle to maintain its own identity. Outside sources, especially urban sources, have, for many residents, historically represented a continued affront to the county's social as well as economic stability. Urban, mass market influences have often directly challenged and undermined local customs and such influences are resisted at many points by the locally-oriented, tradition bound majority of residents. Others, however, extend their frame



of reference beyond the local perspective to incorporate the outside world. They consider themselves to be conversant with, if not part of, its sphere and manifest this identity by maintaining outside contacts and an attention to activities, personalities and trends that develop there. The distinction that emerges within the population of this isolated county is thus similar to that drawn by Merton (1968) between "localites" and "cosmopolitans", and its presence in Ridge County has been demonstrated by Aibel (1984) in his study of amateur painting.

In his study, Aibel found that both organizational aspects of amateur painting and certain stylistic features of the work, served to distinguish those who followed local tradition from those who trained their attentions on the cosmopolitan art world. As this might suggest, one's orientation may therefore be marked for local residents through an array of behaviors. With respect to the home's furnishings, the broad range of decisions that are made in selecting arranging and maintaining them may become similarly involved. This "expressive function" became clearest to me however, in exploring the organization of opinion in this county regarding the purchase of "antique" home furnishings. Data on these preferences will be used here to illustrate this embedding of orientations. To comprehend the difference between the cosmopolitan and local on this dimension it is not only necessary to compare the

cosmopolitan's preferences with reference to county standards discussed above, but also to compare the values each group associates with new, reproduction, antique and lineal furniture.

#### Local Norms

In comparisons made between new, old, and antique furniture, the prevailing preference in this county always favors new furnishings. The choice is logically consistent with the priority placed here on clean, durable furniture that is comfortable and in good condition; residents consistently phrase their preferences in these terms. Simply by virtue of the ubiquity of second-hand furnishings in these homes, (again, brought on by the demands of frugality and the custom of pooling), the "new" represents an ideal of sorts. New furniture not only offers the best realization of the pragmatic goals addressed to furniture, but also a hard-won luxury that is only inconsistently realized. All customary orientations resonate with a certain ambivalence in the face of modern alternatives, and while residents here do indeed value the associations attached to their used belongings, there is as well an abiding desire for new, "convenient", and "modern" things. Lineal possessions and pieces associated with the deceased, as always, retain their priority, but the second-hand offerings of contemporaries will probably just as often be susceptible to the appeal of

the new.

Antiques have not readily attracted the mass of people in this county in large part, I believe, because of these prevailing values. They do however, have a widespread *presence* among its residents. Even the most provincial are aware of the idea of antiques. This is probably largely the result of the waves of antique dealers who have passed through the county since the early 1960's buying up large quantities of "old junk" from attics and auctions at bargain prices. Various resident dealers joined the fray in the 1970's and it seems that hardly a family is left in the county that does not have a story about something they sold for \$5 that they now know was worth hundreds. For many, the very notion of an "antique" comes as a concept, and a kind of value, that was imported to the county by people from the "outside" - agents of another market and value system who inflated and now sustain the high prices charged for these old things. In that mass market, antiques are sold as the products of another era, remnants of another life-style. To the people of this county, however, these "remnants" had often still been in use up until the recent past. Popular pieces like the drysink or "Hoosier", which take a fair price on the antique market, are to them remnants of poverty, remnants of the days, only recently passed, before modern kitchens and indoor plumbing.

The "re-framing" of these things as antiques by outside

dealers was, therefore, a perplexing and sometimes intimidating event for many. One theme in conversation about antiques is that the county as a whole has been deceived and exploited for them. Most of the people I interviewed confessed an unwillingness to become involved with them now because they did not understand the criteria for distinguishing values or the vagueries of this market. They were reluctant to be fooled again. There was discussion of antiques, people were aware of them as an alternative approach to furnishing, and most had an organized opinion about them where no other thoughts on matters of style were present. Both men and women expressed the sense at times that they perhaps "should" be involved with antiques for here, after all, was a local resource of value and it was disappearing. Yet to both young and old, the very idea of such furniture contradicts their notions of value too directly.

Old furnishings, for example, are not believed to have the utility value of new furniture. Thus Irene Shelly felt justified in selling an eight foot hand carved oak headboard from her attic for \$25 because it was bulky, and hard to move for cleaning: "I never could see any practicability to it", she told me. Antiques also offer what is for these people the "peculiar" combination of old furniture with no lineage connections. It is old furniture which obviates the main reason locals see for having old pieces. If the idea is

to have furniture simply as a general allusion to the past, most residents would follow Rachael Kaufman's line of thinking:

If I wanted something on the antique line, I'd rather have a reproduction than buy something old and have it refinished - unless it was something in the family and meant something. But to go buy something on the antique line? I'd rather have a reproduction.  
[D7B:365]

Thus where collectors scorn the reproduction as an imitation of construction and design, dominant opinion here dismisses the antique as an affectation of lineage. The antique's value seems artificial in this sense, and "old-like", but new, will do if a general historical allusion is what one wants from their furniture. Mrs. Kaufman again summarized the sentiment:

Antiques don't mean anything to me unless they're from something in particular - like that (drysink) come from my house, and I wanted it done over and made nice that I could put it in here...anyone in my family would take it in a minute now, where once it was going to the dump.[7A:019]

This comment underscores a final point to be mentioned in the "localite" response to antiques. That is that what is taken for historical value in this county is not something that is or can be embedded in the material aspects of the furniture. The value of an old piece is not associated with the aged features marked along its surface, but with the esoteric substance of its historical connections to others.

One interesting outcome of this orientation is that the difference in these conceptions of value is graphically

manifest in the way locals "re-do" their aged lineage pieces in order to honor their value. As Mrs. Kaufman pointed out, her intention with the drysink was to have it "made nice" for display in the home. To do so she had it stripped and sanded, had the top replaced and a drawer added. When the work was finished the piece glistened with the look of a brand new reproduction. To an antique expert, what value this drysink had as an antique had simply been ruined. Original pieces were replaced, the design changed and the all-important patina of the wood destroyed. Yet to its owner the value of the piece was intact, and now perhaps enhanced through its "restoration". That the historical value of lineage items is symbolic, is thus sharply outlined by her disregard for the physical imprints, the material indices, that time and experience had built into the piece.

The treatment of the drysink was a typical occurrence here and could be witnessed in the actions of both the young and old. In fact, this refurbishing may be related to the upsurge of awareness of antiques. For as people became impressed with the increased value of their lineage items they were increasingly motivated to restore them "good as new". The "new" in this way remains the standard for what is of greatest value vis-a-vis the material features of any piece of furniture, including antiques, within this community's system of standards.

### A Cosmopolitan View.

A stark contrast to this normative view of the "new" (as well as the entire customary approach to furnishing the home) was marked in the behavior and preferences of those who collected antiques and furnished their homes from their collections. In this group I encountered lawyers, businessmen, politicians, a local newspaper editor, bank tellers, a janitor, widowed housewives and others. In contrast to the mainstream of the community, these people valued antique furniture and styling as the most prestigious and "tasteful" sort of furniture. For the most part, these were the county's "fashionable" people, if only because they invested their furnishings in the demonstration of "taste" and well trained discriminatory abilities.

Unlike their counterparts, these residents sought furnishings that showed age, wear, and an encoding of time through their materials, condition and design. They worked to accrue a base of knowledge about furniture and develop skills in distinguishing the genuine from the fake. They sought to recognize styles and periods in design and to know makers and materials. They selected furnishings in part as exemplifications of these distinctions. Their homes were arranged for presentation, and the furniture they acquired was placed in the home for its value as testimony to acquired skills as well as for its aesthetic features. Reproductions were unthinkable, and the new was considered

inferior in quality, design and aesthetics. New furnishings lacked the "patina" that only time can invest in an object. The activity of finding these furnishings was pursued as an on-going event and proceeded according to substantially different principles from those of the community norm described above.

Finding furnishings is an avocation among these people. One is always looking for the "exceptional piece" or the good buy, and objects fitting in either category may be acquired whether they are needed or not. Here is another key distinction then. One does not buy simply to replace something that is needed - the desirability of the piece is itself sufficient motivation and justification for its acquisition. Pieces in the home may be replaced as a result, not when "worn-out" but when matched by something more "interesting", more valuable, or simply "different". Change for its own sake is not unthinkable or uncommon in these homes and in the relative context of this community's other homes, change may appear to be continuous to other locals. I was usually told, for example, whenever the subject of Marion Love's well appointed home came up, "it just seems like she's always doing something over there". And indeed, she generally managed three or four acquisitions and some redecorating each year. That represents near-constant change here.



The furnishings acquired will of course seldom conform to the community's standard of utility because of age, condition and relative frailty. Aesthetic and market considerations, rather than pragmatic criteria, will guide their selection. Greater emphasis will usually be directed in these homes to adapting behavior to the needs of the furnishings rather than to accommodating a full and free use of the home. Owners of these tasteful displays may as a result find themselves openly criticized on these grounds. Irene Shelly for example offered this mixed compliment for Marion Love's home:

I think she has a very attractive home and has an ability to display and arrange - she's always had that ability. But she's one of those persons that you never saw any toys around when her children were growing. [D35B:175]

As the previous chapters have stressed, this last vague reference to constraints placed on her children is actually a damning bit of evidence against the aesthete/housewife. It suggests that the house was not committed to its most important priority (the comfort and enjoyment of the family), but rather subordinated to the needs of its tasteful furnishings. The comment should recall again the way priorities are ranked in this community and how a broad set of criteria may be called into play in judging the home. Marion had a tasteful house, but seemed to fail according to popular standards as a family setting. Its very "tastefulness" was offered as evidence of this shortcoming.

We can also recall in this regard that localite residents consistently opposed "comfort" with "style" as features of furnishings, as they did the "lived-in" family home and the "showpiece" home. Where the community as a whole consistently came down on the side of comfort, these collectors are found to emphasize the aesthetic concerns in each case.

The practice of collecting and using antique furnishings is not, however, solely a matter of differentiating oneself within a normative system regulating the acquisition of furniture. With few exceptions, those who participated in this activity maintained a pattern of social contacts outside the county. They considered themselves to be conversant with the outside world and thus a comparative sophisticate, a "cosmopolitan", in the social system of the county. Antique collecting was regarded as one of many patterns of behavior through which they marked these outside memberships and orientations. Typically, it was pursued with sustained reference to "authoritative sources" originating outside local boundaries. Antique collectors stood out in any community, and for anyone conversant with the county, their preferences indicated the presence of a larger pattern of preferences which made a claim to the possession of "expanded horizons". Two brief examples will help illustrate how all of this fit together. I will refer to Sarah Stine (lower-upper status group) and to Marion Love (lower

middle).

Sarah Stine's devotion to restoring and furnishing her home is well known throughout the county. Many told me she had one of the "loveliest" homes in the county, others called it "notorious"; her husband called it "hers", although he claimed the basement was his. As a woman in her early sixties, Sarah is widely known and respected for her work on county-wide social committees. She comes from a prominent family from the Harrisburg area, and through her charity work in the state capitol she has established many contacts with political and business people in the area. Her reputation and her self-image seem to revolve around this movement in "the wider world". Elements of her dress, her manner of speaking, and her home are directed to this frame of reference. Her aim is for an "elegant" home, modeled after the grand homes she recalls from her urban childhood, and the many fine homes she visits in the Harrisburg area. She reads elite national antiques magazines and arts journals, visits with other collectors and dealers, and, most uncharacteristically for this county, has consulted with interior decorators in redecorating rooms. The lineage pieces she has carried with her from her ancestral home remain in her livingroom and those of her children. However, most of the remaining furnishings in the house have been replaced at least once through her avid collecting. Anna shops for antiques continuously, elaborating on all aspects

of the home's inventory (she even salvaged a marble frontispiece for the main doorway to the home from a Harrisburg demolition). Most recently, she has turned her efforts to the acquisition of examples of historical furniture styles and periods missing from her collection. When we first spoke she had just finished refurnishing one of the bedrooms, changing it from a colonial to a "cottage style" motif.

Marion Love, as noted above, is also known for her abilities in the antique market and the "tastefulness" of her home in Peterburg. While her daily activities, in marked contrast to Mrs. Stine, are rooted in her home and community, her antique-ing habits grew directly out of friendships developed outside the county and with other cosmopolitan's in recent years. She claims that had she not met these people, she would never have begun collecting. The contacts were established when she left her husband, and as she felt the need to distance herself from local friends who she knew would have to limit their connections with her. The friendships and the collecting emerged pointedly from a calculated re-orientation of her social life.

Through these new associations her attentions were reintroduced to areas outside the county where she had not been since her youth. The first and most important relationship was with two men who had purchased a large farm in the county as a retreat and furnished it with an

expensive array of antiques. These men in time had become known to many of the professionals and business leaders in the county and came to serve as authorities ("tastemakers" in Lynes' sense, cf.1949), for many of them on the subject of antiques, decorating and even fine food. Much of the county's community of antique collectors crosses paths, as a result, at this exclusive farmstead. Marion's relationship with Kenny and Robert was a sustained one, and it proved a major source for her increasingly sophisticated understanding of furniture, along with major journals, antiques shows and visits with other collectors. Having reversed an earlier trend towards "modern" furniture, she gradually refurnished her home with many fine examples of American primitives. More recently she has begun to replace furnishings with examples of Queen Anne and Sheridan furniture.

Other collectors are not necessarily as thoroughly involved in the business of finding and replacing antiques as these two, nor are they by any means exclusively women. However, most all collectors conform in outline to this pattern of identification with people and events outside the county and with the specific association of antiques with authoritative sources outside the county's borders. This is not to say that their activity is isolated from the social life of the county, for local collector's constitute a loosely formed and interacting group of their own. Most of

the collectors shared their activities with some few friends and as a group. If they did not know each other well before hand, they generally became acquainted with one another from auctions and flea markets. Stories may pass between these people about bidding competitions at sales, about "finds" by others and most importantly about furnishings to be found in one another's home. Competitions and fashions will run through these groups fueling existing tendencies to continually refine and even alter one's preferred selection of furnishings.

Individually and in concert, then, these collectors appear to violate many of the county's primary norms regulating the acquisition of furnishings. At the heart of this "violation" is a neglect of traditional sources of authority. This defines a distinction between the locally oriented and cosmopolitan groups with potentially profound implications. For authority resides for the majority of residents in this community, in history and the customs of exchange which circulate furnishings between the homes of small networks of kith and kin. It stems from the sustained processes of mutual monitoring reported above as occurring between the homes of family, friends and neighbors. And it comes directly from parents and siblings who most of my informants admitted modelling when it came to selecting their home's furnishings. This last point should be emphasized for it contradicts most models of taste processes

(defined in [sub]urban settings,) and animates a very distinct form of referencing which Pratt (1982), and Riesman before him (1950), saw to typify a traditionalist perspective.<sup>10</sup> These collectors by contrast dismiss the authority of local tradition and separate themselves from it to follow what they believe to be appropriate and fashionable according to "higher" (national) standards of what is "good taste". They do not only turn their attention elsewhere, but in effect reject local social organizing principles in order to adapt and conform to the standards of other groups.

As Simmel (1957) has noted, fashion processes have the double function of marking separation or *dissociation* at the same time that they are calculated to mark membership or association. For some here, and Marion Love was one, participation in this sphere did denote explicitly their withdrawal from a concern for the standards and social life of the county. However a number of the collectors I knew sought to avoid such implications and attempted to qualify or downplay the extent to which their activities could be perceived to contradict local standards or imply any rebuff of them. In effect they attempted an expression of outward association while denying its dissociative implications. These people could be heard and seen to acknowledge and make concessions to local authority in a variety of ways. They

seemed in this way to be establishing a basis for the coexistence of perspectives. Sarah Stine for example, showered local visitors to her home with comments designed to minimize the value or extravagance associated with its belongings. "Its just a plain farmhouse" is what visitors were told. At the same time she sought to align her behavior with prevailing ideals by claiming first, that all was achieved through hard work, and secondly, that she was building value in her home that her children could cash-in on in the future. This was perhaps the most common rationale provided for antique collecting in the county. It was one Anna's son confided to me before I'd met his mother:

She enjoys decorating, that's her hobby. Y'know lately, in the last ten years since the kids are gone, she's had extra money. She buys good paintings and she'll buy good furniture. She doesn't save any money, she'll invest every penny she makes - she buys something that's going to increase in value.  
[D19A:170 emphases added]

Like many collectors, this whole family is sensitive to the criticisms they know follow from the county's ethic and they move quickly to defenses of this sort when discussing their well-appointed home. Notice the values he invokes: she's spending expendable income; she's not denying her kids anything; she buys as an *investment*. To the insider in the county this offers the image of wise economic planning and rephrases the activity as a laudable effort to prepare a behest for one's children.

Local residents to an extent, responded positively to



these apologia. However it must be understood that most non-participants expressed an ambivalence about antiques. This ambivalence was framed in a variety of scantily articulated sentiments. What an antique is, and which ones are valuable, is something poorly understood by many and wildly misunderstood by some. As a result there was a "hidden treasure" dimension to the notion of antiques that appealed to many residents. They could admire those who knew how to capitalize on this sometimes "bizarre" system of economics. The possibility of making money in this way in fact stimulated some with no understanding of this market to participate at a "low level" by collecting inexpensive pieces in the hopes they someday might prove valuable. This untutored sense of potential value seems ultimately to be the greatest stimulus for the piecemeal accommodations (via small collections) that are being made by the local, conservative culture to the notion of antique collecting (cf. Musello 1983).

There was a begrudging respect accorded to antique furnishings and their owners, based it seems in the very associations that made antiques so onerous. Antiques were expensive, they were associated locally with people who had money, and more broadly with the expertise and financial power of the cosmopolitan world. Aibel noted a similar paradoxical response in the county to cosmopolitan painting styles: "they earn(ed) them [the painters] hostility and

ridicule at times, but still grant(ed) them exclusive status" (1984:71). In general, it might be said the localite response to those with social and economic ties outside the county, as well as to the outside world itself, always resonates between these poles of a (quiet) admiration and ridicule and rejection. This uncertainty, coupled with the conciliatory behavior of the cosmopolitans, seems to contribute to the coexistence of these two divergent perspectives. Nevertheless the critique of antique-ing persists in the main currents of social life here as it does for the many other incursions of outside influences into daily life. They represent the intrusion of a system of values which contradicts and potentially subverts local standards and principles of social organization. Many of those I knew to be devoted to antique collecting had at an earlier time been equally as attentive to national trends toward "the modern" in the past. Most of these same people now shifted the focus of their collecting from time-to-time, followed trends in the market and magazines and kept an eye out for what was "new" with the "old". Those who monitored these outside sources for standards of taste were essentially engaged in a fashion process. In the context of the county, they can be seen as devotees of change (despite the conservative imagery of the furnishings they doted on) and they invested time and money in places where the local

ethic chooses instead to conserve its resources.

While examining the effects of industrialization on traditional culture in the earlier part of this century, Tonnies pointed out that fashion promotes an organizing principle in social life which is a product of modern economics and urban processes. Fashion stresses change, and status displays and, he commented, it clearly subverts traditional forms of social organization:

[ Fashion] is modern, cultured, cosmopolitan. It represents new principles throughout; it desires progress...It desires quick movement; it must dissolve custom in order to develop a taste for the new and for imported goods. It figures on individual motives, especially on young people's curiosity and love of finery, and on the desire to barter and to trade in desired goods. Affection and fidelity to tradition, to one's own, to one's heritage, must necessarily give way. Commerce has ever a dis-integrating effect. (1961:133)

Admittedly, I am not describing the kinds of continuous change that is associated with chic urban groupings, but I am identifying a tendency and a set of orientations which offer similar "dis-integrating" influences to the people of Ridge County. Fellow residents who direct their behavior "outward" contribute to the deterioration of principles guiding social life by challenging local customs and influence processes which have long been a force for sustaining cohesion and continuity in the community. To state the point in a more summary way, they introduce influences which threaten county efforts to maintain its own identity, and so they are rejected.

Finally, I am not charting absolute orientations through these distinctions in the principles, sources and styles affected in displaying furnishings in the home. It can be noted, for example, that locals often now proudly refer to their lineage pieces as "antiques". And even cosmopolitan collectors, such as Marion Love, who possess a sophisticated knowledge of antiques still manifest an array of behaviors (such as patterns in proxemic behavior), which are patently provincial and traditional. Nonetheless, this investigation of the acquisition and possession of antiques does tap into an important indicator which, for those within this system of reference, is predictive of a broader range of attitudes and behavior. Preferences of this order quickly imply which structure of criteria the family applies - the standards of frugality and utility that are the norm; or "aesthetic" criteria which are widely conceived to stand in opposition to the "rational" standards of the majority. Preferences will imply one's commitment to the customs and traditions of the county and this in turn will figure in the anticipation of other kinds of behavior. As ever, behavior will be referred to larger patterns of activity for its ultimate interpretation. Thus, when confronted with this "outwardly" directed behavior, residents may well set about verifying its implications by collecting other bits of information about the family involved. Within the normal course of social life however, the taste standards and

attendant consumer behavior we have explored in these pages provide the local resident with a reliable guide to a fundamental division in the values and orientations of the members of this community.

#### **Conclusion: Taste and Social Identity**

Through the course of this investigation the involvement of the people of Peterburg with a system of explicit taste distinctions has been seen to be largely prescribed and relatively limited. Customary methods for pooling, sharing, and eventually replacing furniture, were shown to substantially limit the occasions in which choice and aesthetic control could be exercised. Social proscriptions regulating the contexts and conditions of critical evaluation and comparison, combined with the relative lack of aesthetic terminologies, further limited the relevance such considerations assumed through the course of social life.

The prevailing ethic in this county in fact plainly discouraged any extensive attention to explicitly stated aesthetic discriminations in the evaluation of people or their homes. Formal discriminations were instead subordinated to an alternative set of concerns for economy and utility. Processes of appreciation and evaluation turned on a shared set of "pragmatic" standards which were seen to structure preferences and patterns of acquisition in this

community. These utilitarian standards were themselves seen to be grounded in a broader set of ethical considerations which underlie the conduct and interpretation of most of public life here. Through these standards, then, the evaluation of consumption processes was ultimately directed to the assessment of a family's priorities, of its values as compared to prevailing community norms. Evaluations of the material dimensions of home furnishings thus assumed significance in the communication of social identity principally in terms of demonstrated qualities of character, or moral worth, rather than in terms of socio-economic status.

Taste was negotiated as a collective process in this context. Aesthetic preferences were broadly conformed within families and within the community. And again, the value of this feature of the home was invested more in the expression of association - with family and community - than in differentiating status divisions within those social networks.

Such findings were perhaps anticipated by Thorstein Veblen, who pioneered in the analysis of consumer behavior as a competitive, social-organizational process. As early as 1899, he hypothesized that fashion distinctions might be of reduced import in rural communities:

Consumption becomes a larger element in the standard of living in the city than in the country. Among the country population its place is to some extent taken by savings and home comforts known through the medium of neighborhood gossip sufficiently to serve

the like general purpose of pecuniary repute.  
(1953:72)

And indeed we have seen that one's ability to manage money frugally and provide a comfortable home (as explicitly opposed to a "stylish" one), were central considerations in selecting and evaluating furnishings in Peterburg.

What accounts for the difference however is not something so simple as an urban-rural division. Rather it seems indigenous to the prevailing structure of relations in which these people are located. This supports the contentions of Gans, who has shown that taste and consumption processes may well be directed "inward", away from social superiors and toward a local community of reference, in both urban and suburban communities (1962, 1969). And as discussed in chapter one, other studies have similarly suggested that in contrast to socially mobile groups who use their homes as a competitive resource, socially and geographically stable populations, such as the people we find in Peterburg, will tend to orient their homes most closely to a conformity with kith and kin. (See for example, Birdwhistell 1953, Duncan 1982, Pratt 1982 and Riesman 1950.) Each of these studies drew similar contrasts in ideal social character types, juxtaposing "interdependent", "collectivist", "traditionalist" and "tradition-directed" individuals with "segmental", "individualist", "weak group/weak grid", "other-directed" people, respectively. In each

case it was suggested that for the former, interdependent groups, taste and consumer behavior are largely defined by group standards. Taste, as Duncan suggested, will be directed to demonstrating one's continued orientation to the group:

In such groups, where membership stays constant and loyalty to the group is highly valued, the most efficient type of status-seeking is through group-oriented display... Such displays affirm one's standing in the group and due to the permanent make-up of the group will be remembered by all concerned. (1982:38)

The orientation seen in Peterburg has been quite similar. In this community where personal history is well known, where kith and kin ties and obligations prevail, and traditional values are maintained, one's involvement with fashion and consumption is always framed with reference to the broadly shared norms of the community. Each family and home is located within a structure of interdependent relationships where group standards and mutual interests structure the major part of daily life. Taste is at once an artifact of the structure of relationships in which these people live, and an instrument for its perpetuation. Furnishings are not use here to claim or pretend to status in a hierarchy that divides the community, but rather to define participation in common moral standards which serve to a large extent to unify it.

"Personalization", so often defined as a primary objective of the home (see for example Becker 1977 and



Cooper 1972), is not dominant in this county. As suggested above, the idea is *not* for most residents of Peterburg, to stand out in any explicit way. While the "individual" and idiosyncratic is marked in many small ways in each home, the dominant objective, as Pratt pointed out with "traditionalist" Vancouverites, is understatement and an overall image of consensus" :

The idea of the house as an expression of self was foreign to the Shaghnessy women. One's home should conform to the group canons of good taste - that is enough....To express oneself as a unique personality through one's interior decoration is not a universal need. It is a particular attitude, both towards the self and the home and objects more generally, which has been identified with a specific relationship between the individual and broadly speaking, society. [1982:173]

The uniformities that result in communities like Peterburg are in a fundamental sense symbols of "community" and the individual's participation in it. In the norm, and for the mass of residents, therefore, taste preferences are organized to reflect an "attitude" to self, to home, and to community, which emphasizes the location of the individual within the group.

The "cosmopolitans" I've identified in this research represent a break from this normative orientation which manifests a broader conflict that has long been at the center of the county's efforts to maintain its own values, customs, and standards - essentially its own identity as a socio-cultural unit. This group appears to systematically

violate many of the pragmatic standards and norms of behavior which regulate local consumption activities. The significances they invest in their furnishings do not refer to "community", but to a set of values and a pattern of participation that is identified with the world outside the county. The implications of the divisions encoded in this way extend far beyond taste or its ability to mark local affiliations. For in Mead's sense, the groups to which we orient ourselves provide a frame for self-evaluation - a basis for the formation of the "self" (1925). From reference groups we draw perspectives which order our environments, and provide a structure of norms and expectations which guide our behavior (cf. Shibutani 1972, and Warner 1960). Divisions concerning frames of reference thus suggest potential conflicts within a population over what standards and principals should guide behavior and form the foundations of personal identity. They suggest divisions over the customary bases for social organization. And indeed in Ridge County, the "antique-ing" activity of the cosmopolitans provided an effective demonstration of the impact of an alternative frame of reference. Investment in this form of consumption not only subverts county values but offers participants a set of standards to judge themselves by, which differ substantially from endemic notions of status, self-worth, and how each is organized. Such a set of alternatives obviously can threaten the authority of

local tradition and of local modes of social integration.

The communicational value of the activity and standards of antique collecting in this county can be defined on two levels. On the one hand, such forms of consumption cue a cosmopolitan orientation on the part of those involved and thus in part defines their relationship to the social and cultural life of the community. On the other, it becomes an arena in which the county's on-going struggle to maintain its own identity in the face of competing influences from external sources is enacted and observable as a dynamic representation of its social life. The fact that this division was also recognized in the variabilities of amateur painting in the county (Aibel 1984) suggests that the negotiation of these competing orientations is a major sustained "sub-text" to other forms of social behavior here.

There is much to suggest that this "cosmopolitan" orientation, as manifest in the arena of taste, is possibly a matter of mobility within the county's status system. That is, that the local-cosmopolitan taste differentials actually define class distinctions. To this point the value of consumption activities as an index of social orientation seems well supported, while their status implications have been treated principally only in terms of their "moral" implications. The outward orientation, as a repudiation of local standards, indicates certain deficiencies of character

to locals and has been considered chiefly as a social deficit that detracts from one's status in the community. The implications of this activity for social status however do not stop there. Most of those described here as cosmopolitans are among the best paid and best educated residents of the county. This of itself might recall the correlation drawn by some (cf. Blumer 1969 and Riesman 1950), between an attention to fashion and mobility aspirations. It can also be noted that for many, the Chapman and Losch estates, homes of the area's two most prominent families, offer authoritative models of taste. These families have strong and legitimate ties to both intra- and extra-county spheres of social life. Their lineages establish solid credentials for them at the top of the county's esteem system. Yet their extensive social and economic contacts outside of the county are well known and form a prominent part of their "worldly" identities. Their homes, which carefully coordinate ancestral furnishings with expensive antiques and contemporary furniture, are socially versatile. They have as a result been copied by other cosmopolitans as providing a standard of appropriate status aspiration.

Yet the data presented above illustrate that cosmopolitan credentials are by no means prerequisite for social mobility within the county's esteem system. There are many families who are located amongst the county's lower-upper echelons who demonstrate a fundamental conformity to

the values and norms of the county. Others, such as Dick Campbell, who are plainly socially and economically mobile within this sphere, adhere to the county's standards self-consciously as a means of guaranteeing their continued good standing. Both Campbell and the cosmopolitan Stines were placed on a par in the community status system (refer to table 2-7), and it was clear that Campbell's modest home has by no means detracted from his standing or mobility.

Finally, it should be noted that while a pattern of participation in the values and activities of "outside world" may be clearly repudiated, there is ultimately no assurance on how *isolated* features of an "outward" orientation, such as the use of antiques, will ultimately be weighed by locals in the judgement of another's character and status. With antique collecting, one begins with the largely negative connotations we've discussed, but other factors such as personal history may intervene so that final implications vary. For a man like Fred Bowers, who comes from a good merchant family in the borough, his years of antique-ing seem to offer no obstacle to his relations with locals. For Dave Stine Sr., discussion of his home and its furnishings have lately been interrelated with gossip about debt and poor economic planning in his business. For Marion Love, her collecting stands as the centerpiece in a perceived pattern of behavior which condemns her in public opinion. Resolving the sign-value of these divergent "orien-

tations" will ultimately depend on developing a fuller understanding of how members of this community balance these countervailing frames of reference throughout the full course of their social lives. For the present, however, the status implications of the external orientations discussed here must be said to be ambiguous at best, within the status system of this rural county.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER VI

<sup>1</sup> See chapter 1 for further discussion. On "taste" see especially Cheek and Burch 1976; Gans 1975; Lynes 1949 and Reisman 1950 and Roseborough 1955. On "fashion" see Blumer 1968 and 1969; Sapir 1931; Simmel 1957; and Veblen 1953.

<sup>2</sup> This temporal aspect of room furnishings is distinctive and important. For as many have pointed out, (cf. Tonnies 1961:123), fashion is contemporaneous. It is about change and variation and it spreads through space as *custom* takes shape and is elaborated through time. The pace at which these people operate in acquiring, using, moving and replacing furnishings is by nature so slow and deliberate as to largely preclude their participation in cycles of consumption associated with fashion - especially with durable goods like furniture. Their pacing, their timing is that of people tied to enduring methods and standards for addressing their simply defined needs.

<sup>3</sup> One very tangible reason why people told me they avoided criticisms in public conversation here was because you could never be assured of who was related to who. Nearly everyone seemed to have an embarrassing tale to tell about gossiping to someone who turned out to be a relative of the subject of the gossip.

<sup>4</sup> This orientation to comfort was similarly noted by Weber as a fundamental standard of Christian Asceticism. He explains the rationale this way:

Rational and utilitarian uses of wealth were willed by God for the needs of the individual and the community...the idea of comfort characteristically limits the extent of ethically permissible expenditures...Over against the glitter and ostentation of feudal magnificence which, resting on an unsound economic base, prefers a sordid elegance to a sober simplicity, *they set the clean and solid comfort of the middle-class home as an ideal.*  
(1958:171 emphases added)

<sup>5</sup> Two provisos should be noted in the application of these standards. First it should be recalled that the age of the family will be factored in here because of the implicit "progress" model that shapes

expectations in this community in regard to material gain. As mentioned in chapter 5, this refers to an assumption that one's home gradually improves through time as one "gets ahead" and is able to use "expendable" income on furnishings. Secondly it should be understood that the standards applied to the family room will differ substantially from those applied to the livingroom. If both types of rooms are present in a home it is understood that the livingroom will offer the family's better presentation and the standards we are discussing will be applied most strictly here. Family rooms are by definition to be comfortable and informal rooms where the family can relax with few behavioral proscriptions. It is to be expected that you will have furniture here which is older, in poorer condition and of less concern so that the family need not be so guarded in its use.

\* Because homes are furnished early-on with offerings from a number of different homes and because they will generally only be supplemented gradually over the next 10-20 years, the need for "versatile" furniture that will likely be available for a long time is real. The idea that Colonial American furniture (called "traditional" by the retailers) is a safe and sensible choice for these purposes is promoted by both the furniture manufacturers and the large chains that sell it. The catalog of the retailer, Ethan Allen, states for example:

A current fad is never a safe investment. American traditional design is a gracious and perennial favorite, having a foundation solidly grounded in our history and heritage.

Sally Kaufman echoes these comments, and the sentiments of most in Peterburg in her own justification for the choice:

Early American is most serviceable for us because you can mix almost any furniture with it. You can even mix modern pieces, depending on what they are, with it. If we ever get to the point where we can afford to replace furniture or redecorate, we will redecorate with early American so that we can keep some of the pieces that we already have."

Here again then, long-established traditions in how you go about furnishing, push residents towards a conservative and limited range of choices, and effectively promote a substantial uniformity in the inventories of these homes.

7 Indeed this "style" of furniture is rather vaguely defined even among those who sell it. For the most part it is a composite creation of contemporary furniture manufacturers which makes general references to designs (and themes) of the past. While most of my informants referred to this furniture as "colonial American" it is perhaps most appropriately called "traditional" or "early American", for it repro-



duces popular styles and design elements from the 18th and (more commonly) 19th centuries. In many cases distinct furniture types such as drysinks, hutches, corner cupboards, parson's benches and windsor chairs, trestle tables and secretary desks are reproduced. In other cases, especially with sofas and upholstered chairs, individual design elements from period styles are incorporated into a derivative, "traditional-like" design. The designation is in fact so broad in its application that it is difficult at times to exclude furnishings from the category. In general the pieces found in the homes of this borough tend to be simple reproductions of derivative country designs rather than faithful copies of "high style" Queen Anne, Chippendale, Sheridan or Hepplewhite designs.

• The middle and working classes have been singled-out out here because, as I noted in chapter 4 with respect to trends in housing designs, the lower and upper status groups tend to be found on the sidelines in community life as others strive to define or maintain their position. The standards and values that I am trying to characterize here are those that dominate public life and apply to the broad mass of residents.

It has been pointed out elsewhere however that different classes will compete on different terms (cf. Rainwater 1972). While I am maintaining that there is a general standard that most families are measured against in this county, I will be showing exceptions with reference to the upper and lower-upper status groups in the pages to follow. It should also be pointed out here that the lower strata of the community will emphasize different facets of the standard criteria in their own evaluations. Lower status families in this community, such as the Wagners, and Farrells cannot and do not compare their levels of material achievement. This was in fact enough of a fixed assumption here that one upper-middle status woman could comment to me: "Water streeters aren't trying to keep up with the Joneses. They know their standard of living and they stay with it."

What one finds instead amongst this group is that when the home is placed within a comparative frame, comparisons are redefined in terms of *moral repute*. These families emphasized cleanliness and the fact that their homes were set up for the comfort and pleasure of the family and were therefore above criticism. Dorreen Farrell, for example, who is a cleaning woman, told me disapprovingly that the homes she worked in were too neat: "they're like museums, where my home is lived in. Now, my daughter can take her toys and play anywhere and they usually are spread from one end of the house to the other."

Self-sufficiency, resourcefulness and the "discipline" of avoiding debt are also interposed by this group as standards by which to judge their homes. George Wagner's quote for example, illustrates the terms by which he dissociates his aging and run-down home from any comparisons and defines his own achievement:

The way I do a house is, I get my house and pay for it - like which we did, okay? Then when I remodel, I'll only remodel like one room at a time and pay for it. I don't want to have a big debt hanging on me all the time. Then when I'm done its mine - everything is mine, and its all paid for. And I do alot of my own work. What I can't do, the fella right up the street here is good at and we trade work.[40A:124]

He provided similar examples of economy and resourcefulness in furnishing his home. In framing the "competitions" of the middle-groups it has to be recalled, however, that they do not want to appear to be doing anything substantially different from Mr. Wagner. They want simply to appear to be doing it better.

<sup>9</sup> Goffman draws a distinction in the analysis of status symbols between two forms of significance. The first form, designated "categorical" significance, concerns the symbol's value in identifying the social status of the user; the second, "expressive" form, refers to its value in conveying point-of-view, style of life, and cultural values. (1951p.295) I have tried to suggest to this point that the individual's set of taste preferences do not seem to bear directly on a person's social status in Ridge county, except as they contribute to the image of a family's "practicality", cohesion and morality. The point is now being developed that they will also work to demonstrate a person's prevailing orientation vis-a-vis the values and traditions of this county. Goffman's distinction seems useful here in emphasizing the point that I find the communicative value of taste standards to lie primarily within this latter relm, conveying data chiefly about the owner's identifications, and orientations.

<sup>10</sup> Much research emphasizes the role of peers, especially occupational peers in shaping the individual's consumption habits. Riesman and Roseborough (1955), for example, claim that all we learn from our parents is :

a kind of basic set of domestic arrangements - food as a necessity, furniture as a quantitative rather than stylistic concept, and the need for such durable home furnishings as stoves, refrigerators and Televisions. (1955:3)

While from our peers we learn: "styles and moods of consumption, "affective" consumption beyond and around basic domestic items".(p3) "On the whole," they conclude," in a tug-of-war between the occupational culture and the social-class-and-kinfolk culture, the former is likely to win out."(p.15)

Many other researches have adopted Veblen's assumption of the operation of a "trickle-down" effect through which the majority of

consumers are assumed to model their behavior after the "high culture" of the upper classes. See for example, Barber and Lobel 1953, and Fallers, 1966.

Admittedly most of this work evaluated consumption habits with reference to processes of social mobility and little attention has been directed to rural and/or non-mobile groups. Pratt(1982), by contrast, set out to compare the preferences and aesthetic activities of two groups in Vancouver, one cosmopolitan and upwardly mobile, the other traditionalist. As in the present study, he found the tradition-bound, locally oriented group to draw their taste standards from parents and close friends, while the mobile individuals attended to external "authoritative" sources (refer also to discussions in chapter one). All of this works clearly to confirm my sense that the simple practice of adopting one's parents as a major reference group in the formation of taste preferences strongly indexes ones orientation "away" from social and urban mobility and "toward" tradition and continuity.

<sup>21</sup> This is not meant to suggest a drone-like conformity in the furnishings of these homes. Although you will see many broad uniformities from home to home, the measure of the cohesiveness I am describing is not found in an absolute sameness in furniture and decor but in a uniformity in the levels of consumption (especially cost and amount and frequency), the principles guiding it, and the ends to which it is directed. Attention to fashion, or to the manipulation of taste preferences to affect status differentiations, are as I have said, strongly limited by this set of standards. Investments in "personalization" occur primarily through discrete elements of the home rather than any large scale imagery.

## CHAPTER VII

### CONCLUSION: RACHAEL'S DRYSink

This study began with a general set of questions about the nature of the house, its furnishings and house-related activity as media of communication. The goal described at the outset was to understand what rules, roles, conventions, standards and customs served within a given community to structure the acquisition, use and interpretation of the home and its things. My goal was to explore rules of conduct and interpretation shared within a system of mutual reference; to understand what values and beliefs, defined at the level of social groups and communities, guided house-related behavior; and to examine the implication of the home within on-going processes of social organization and cultural transmission. Emphasis was placed on conducting this research within a specified community so as to facilitate our understanding of how pattern and meaning are defined within the actual contexts of a home's use. What has been learned in Ridge county to this point can be summarized to a useful extent by considering what we are now in a position to understand about the range of significances residents might ascribe to a single piece of furniture, such as the

drysink mentioned in chapter 6 and pictured here in figure 7-1.

It was stated in the introduction that communication is understood to be multi-modal and multi-referential, engaging participants in a many layered exchange occurring simultaneously at varying levels of awareness and intentionality. The point was extended to this analysis of material goods with the assumption that such things come to assume significance within a multi-modal environment. I made the assumption that "things" assume communicative value within the actual contexts of their use, through a variety of means including, but not limited to, the organization of their physical features. It was argued that the house and its contents may, in this way, serve to convey a variety of meanings simultaneously, not all of which are conscious or intentional.

As this research proceeded, and as this report was organized, an effort was made to demonstrate this with respect to the houses of Peterburg. A number of different constituent behavioral patterns were broken-out and their functions in managing and marking the community's prevailing structure of relationships were explored. In chapters five and six we looked at patternment in the ways in which household furnishings were acquired, managed, exchanged and evaluated. In chapter four, house size and layout were examined along with the organization of behavior and



FIGURE 7-1: Rachael's Drysink

relationships in space. And in chapter three we looked at patterns in home maintenance and renovation in order to characterize how these people organize the components and activities of each home for evaluation within spatio-temporal contexts extending beyond their individual, material boundaries. Taken together the chapters provide some sense of how the house, as a complex activity site, functions simultaneously at a variety of levels within on-going processes of communication in this community.

From an analytical perspective, it is important to recall that this view of objects as communicative devices organized at multiple levels within encompassing, multi-layered processes of communication, applies equally as well to a simpler object - such as Rachael's lone drysink - as it does to the home or the cluster of homes within the extended family network. I will for heuristic purposes then, move through this drysink in order to characterize and illustrate some of this study's major findings.

What have we learned about the ways in which residents of this community might look at this cupboard? What significances would they and the owners associate with it? What "meanings" would it represent through the course of daily life and how would these be expressed? As discussed in chapter six, a certain amount might first be gleaned by simply noticing the treatment the piece has received in its apparent restoration. For what we found in this chapter was

that home furnishings are generally not organized first as presentations of an owner's taste. Initially a series of customs and values intervene in the events of acquisition to minimize the control owners can or will exert in selecting furnishings such that formal/aesthetic considerations are minimized. As we saw, both the fact that many of the home's furnishings arrive through communal processes of pooling, and the custom of furnishing homes on a piecemeal basis, provide for a collective influence on the acquisition of furnishings which emphasizes taste as a group product. The importance of furnishings as symbolic embodiments of others, the overshadowing import of personal biography as a measure of character, and the prevailing proscription of critical comparisons focused on material possessions, all also served to minimize the contexts in which the formal features of homes furnishings might be compared as cues to personal status or social identity. Perhaps most importantly however, it was found that a set of "pragmatic" standards were specifically counterposed to notions of taste and "style" as criteria for selecting and evaluating furniture. These standards required that furniture be economical, comfortable, durable and suited to full and unencumbered use. These were treated essentially as "moral" standards for owners to meet, and they provided the backdrop against which furniture was interpreted. They were standards established by custom and handed down along with the furnishings family



members and friends circulated between one another's homes. Adherence to them suggested both the soundness of a person's priorities and their sustained participation in the system of values and norms that regulated consumption within the community.

Within this context then, it was found that taste preferences could be, and were, manipulated to index a broad rift in orientations that underlies the social life of this county. Through their pattern of preferences, residents were likely to either demonstrate a sustained attention to the authority of local standards or to manifest an orientation to people, events, standards and values drawn from elsewhere. As we saw with the example of antiques, those who collected antique furnishings systematically violated local norms in furnishing and evidenced an orientation to external sources of aesthetic authority which ultimately reflected a pattern of actual social participation in the "cosmopolitan sphere" beyond the county's borders. This distinction between an attention to the values and practices of the county and those of the "outside world" was found to be a salient and important one of on-going concern to residents of the county.

As we noted in chapter six then, Rachael's drysink (figure 7-1) has essentially been stripped of its antique market value and refinished according to local preferences to a near-new condition. The sink had been stripped, sanded,

repaired with new wood, painted with a modern stain and covered with a polyurethane gloss. The design had been changed, original materials removed and the original patina of the old wood destroyed - all destroying as well much of the sink's "value" to those looking towards the antique market. The treatment this piece received can thus be found to assume significance according to local interpretive schema, as an encoding of Rachael's orientation to the traditional system of values guiding the management of furnishings here.

In common understanding it would not be supposed, however, that this exhausts this cupboard's significances. For as seen in chapter five, substantial meaning accrues to furnishings through the diverse patterns of activity in which they are incorporated, and indeed this piece is no different. The sink carried a long history for its owners and had come to be highly valued as a mnemonic, encoding important allusions to a number of kinship relationships.

At this level the specific form or contents of a piece of furniture may be of limited import or at times even irrelevant. For what we saw in chapter five was that goods are acquired and circulated through homes through a variety of means, including pooling (a manner of sharing and exchanging resources for the home), gift-giving, relic collecting, and inheritance. Each of these methods was shown to constitute a coded and customary form of activity such

that how each kind of exchange is accomplished, by whom, when and under what circumstances, was subject to interpretation according to an organized array of common expectancies. In all of this activity, (in the management and movement of goods), we saw home furnishings used extensively and skillfully through the course of daily life as vehicles through which people interacted with one another and organized their relationships. The pooling of furnishings from parental homes to the new households of children, for example, was seen to play a role in defining and extending status relations and social control between mothers and daughters-in-law. Gift-giving was shown to be of value in socializing young-housewives to their new roles. And, as with relic collecting, it also provided a means for friends to manage their relationships. Even inheritance was the subject for long-term negotiations between behestors and recipients. A first level of communicational significance was found to accrue to these objects, therefore, as they were exploited in this community as media of interaction.

It was also seen that in subsequent usage, these objects are taken to serve as symbols of the people and events by which they came into the home. In this capacity they serve as "storage symbols" of a sort, embodying historical allusions for their owners, and becoming incorporated in the process of retaining and transmitting the orders of knowledge (about people, events, and

lineages), which are so important to the organization of social life in these rural communities. In time, as we have seen, houses become filled with such "pedigreed" objects and, taken as a group, they come to populate the homes of this community with a wealth of allusions to the encompassing network of kith and kin. This proved to be the dimension of home furnishings that residents knew the most about and considered most important and relevant to discuss when talking about their possessions. Little of this however, is available to us simply by looking at the object, no matter how closely we examine it. These "meanings" are encoded not through any observable characteristics of the furnishings themselves but rather through their patterned and rule-ful incorporation into larger behavioral contexts.

Once in possession, therefore, these furnishings are largely dependent for their interpretation on the rounds of talk they generate and support about the range of references they embody. In conjunction with talk, they are employed to stimulate and facilitate the transmission of historical accounts of people and events. One often finds, in fact, that some pieces are drawn on invariably for standardized illustrative purposes, while others have organized stories associated with them that are routinely "performed" for the benefit of others with only the slightest provocation.

Rachael's drysink was one of these latter pieces. When I asked her one day in the midst of a discussion of

aesthetic issues to tell me about it, she smiled broadly and told me, "well now, you'll have to hear my story about the drysink". She told it as a tale of abandonment and resurrection, followed by a fall from grace and ultimate vindication. Along the way, she used the story to offer insights into the strength of her family's ties. It was plainly a practiced performance. A loose recounting of the story runs this way:

This drysink was for many years consigned to her mother's back porch after it had seemed to outlive its usefulness as an in-house item. In 1959, following the mother's death, they had an auction to sell-off the estate. The drysink was in poor condition and they were unable to get a bid for it at sale. Rachael's brother decided to throw it out. At the last minute, Rachael decided she would take it home and use it in her basement to store canned goods. "Before she knew it", however, Pappy, her live-in father-in-law with whom she had a somewhat difficult relationship, had stripped all its paint off, taken it down to the bare wood, put a new drawer in the front, and had a new top ready to put on. He wanted to stain it like that. Rachael however, wanted it painted white so that she could use it in her kitchen. She recalls incredulously now (with a mixture of admiration for Pappy and embarrassment at her own taste), that he accepted that, and painted it over after having it down to bare wood. He also put a solid top with an in-laid

linoleum surface on it. They used it like that until the kitchen was remodeled several years later and the old sink was once more banished to the back porch. After her husband passed away, however, she decided she wanted the sink restored and "put back the way it was". She brought it to a man "up the country", he stripped it down to the bare wood again, took the top off, put a new back on it, and replaced a board in front. She then brought it into the diningroom, the center of her living space, where it now draws the attention of family and visitors alike. She ends the account noting that while it was once nearly discarded, it now stands as one of the family's most "treasured" possessions.

In this well-worn story then, she lays out for the listener the history of this object and its significance to herself and the larger family. By virtue of its origins it serves as a valued relic of her family's homeplace. Once in the home, the drysink was subsumed within on-going negotiations between Rachael and her father-in-law over the leadership of the household and their relationship. He first stripped and then painted the sink, using it for what she understood at the time to be a conciliatory gesture to her. Finally in contemporary usage it is a device through which she recalls that gesture, and a larger slice of her family's history, and shares them with others.

In this manner, the furnishings of the home thus serve

communicatively both as instruments of exchange in interaction and as symbols of people and events. They function both in managing relationships and in marking them. As shown in chapter four, behavioral patterns in the use of space served in much the same way. There it was suggested that despite decades of continuing change in the floorplans of homes, customary patterns of usage tended to remain fairly stable. Families have continued to organize their activities and define rights of access and privacy within the home and community itself in a way which maximizes mutual surveillance and access, and necessitates mutual adjustment and interaction on an on-going basis. The individual within the household as a result, is continuously situated within the communal family sphere, much as the individual household is incorporated into the "opened" communal space of the community. Privacy is limited, activities overlap, and mutual monitoring is sustained to such an extent that collective influences are routinely brought to bear on all family activities. Traditional preferences in space use were thus found to persist both as artifacts of the kind of extended and multi-generational kith and kinship networks that prevail here, and as instrumentalities for their continued cohesion. It was also suggested that, much as taste preferences may signal orientation, the persistence of these behavioral patterns in the face of housing fashions itself demonstrates an

"affirmation" of community values and customs.

We see here then, that such diverse elements of household activity as the use of space, the exchange of possessions and the organization of taste preferences may be inter-related in the on-going service of a communicational task. And in fact while we may of necessity abstract them for study, no item of furnishing or pattern of activity within the home achieves significance in isolation. If we turn for a final time to Rachael's drysink for example, we can see without even raising our "lens" above the object itself, that it is layered with additional materials of symbolic value that interact with and "embellish" the significance of the sink itself. For while the drysink carries us "back" two generations, the photos on top carry us "forward" to the two generations succeeding Rachael. As Christmas gifts, the photos also mark her children's sustained regard, much as the two flower arrangements (gifts from a Sunday school class and an employer) mark the esteem of others. And if we expand the temporal frame within which we examine this "site", we would find that these decorative arrangements are changed periodically throughout the year as a traditional means for marking the passage of the seasons. The photos remain, but the colors and motifs of the surrounding objects change - toy trains are laid out at Christmas for example; two cotton cardinals on "snow" covered pine boughs in the midst of winter; dried flowers in



browns and yellows in the fall, in yellow and white in the spring, and so on. In all cases the objects used are items provided as gifts from others and many draw on traditional icons to mark the season and/or holiday. This entire "ensemble" then, refers in a number of different ways to time and continuity. It is layered with allusions to the duration of family ties and represents at a variety of levels, the sustained concern these people share for the continuity of local traditions and family identity.

Establishing even this limited extension of our comprehension of the "meaning" of this drysink required ultimately that we expand our frame of analysis to recognize its operation within a larger spatial and temporal frame. As we found in chapter three, the same perspective was required if we were to understand the ways in which the people of this community frame the house itself for evaluation. For here family houses were found to be functionally and socially interdependent. Life was seen to spill between the homes of a family's extended network of kith and kin establishing what were essentially "extended households". While each home might continue to function as a discrete unit for evaluation and comparison, the repute of each was ultimately intertwined with the cluster of other homes in the family network. In this way the local system of evaluation was seen to be responsive to the nature of social organization in this community - homes were understood as

elements of a kin group, much as their owners were. The emphasis placed here on investing household furnishings in the symbolization of the family's encompassing network of relationships, ultimately demonstrates the importance of these relations to daily life. It also suggests the centrality of family heritage to personal identity.

Those processes of evaluation and interpretation which this study aimed to document were at many stages shaped by the social fact of this interdependence between households. As discussed in both chapters five and six, for example, parents, siblings and other family members and close friends provided the main influence in organizing the material elements of the home. Taste preferences were organized in a manner which defined a position for the homeowner with reference to kin and community. Similarly, displays were organized principally for family consumption rather than for the purposes of status comparison.

Time was also central to the interpretive strategies of the people of this community. For by virtue of their residential stability and the extensiveness of their familiarity with one another, residents here were afforded a long-term view of one another's behavior as it unfolded in time. Time and a history of behavior was valued and trusted as the most reliable grounds for evaluation in all things. Houses, as a result, were found in chapter three to be understood locally as objects "in progress". Residents

generally shared a sense of what a house and its contents had been like in the past, where it was now, and where it seemed to be headed to in the future. Houses are expected to change, adapt and improve through the course of a family's occupancy in synchrony with changes and developments in the family, and in general conformity with widely shared normative expectations for the normal "trajectory" of a home. As we saw in the case of home maintenance, how a home or home-related behavior is evaluated will thus depend on perceptions of how old the family and the household are - what "moment" in time they are in. A wide array of standards may be similarly age-graded in many instances and as a result, all homes in the community will not be considered strictly comparable through all processes of evaluation.

This temporal perspective was found in fact to inform the conduct and interpretation of a broad range of household objects and activities. It was seen, for example, that local standards prescribed a piecemeal approach to home repair and renovation such that expectations for house size and condition were considered relative to family age. Elsewhere we saw that the pacing and order of furniture acquisitions were shaped by normative expectations which again prescribed a frugal, piecemeal approach to home improvement. Young people were expected to have less and to embellish their holdings at a measured rate. Much of the criticism directed to the furniture of young families was in fact seen to be

based in these temporal expectations. Similarly each of the forms of exchange discussed in chapter five were regulated in some part by temporal conventions which played a role in how this activity was interpreted. "Appropriate" parental concern for the welfare of their children could be distinguished in part from "indulgence" or "indifference" in this context simply by virtue of when extensive pooling began and when it ended. Status differences, were also indexed in this way. How any objects or activities are abstracted for evaluation and finally judged, then, will always be subject to local norms and expectations concerning pattern, continuity, and change, in time. In order to model processes of comparison and interpretation in this county, therefore, one has to recognize the temporal dimensions implicit to many of its shared standards.

An array of additional values, standards and conventions were also discussed in terms of their role in patterning behavior and guiding interpretation. Perhaps most prominent among them was what I variously called a "functional imperative" or a frugal/utilitarian ethic. The standards implicit to this ethic dominated much of public life in Peterburg and their communicative implications with respect to the house were evidenced at many points. They were seen in chapter three to partially regulate the pace, and to an extent the sign-value, of household repairs and renovations. In chapter four this ethic was found to qualify

the extent to which residents drew upon house size as a relative index of status or even income. And in chapters five and six the value placed on economy and utility were shown to play centrally in regulating processes of consumption and their evaluation. At each step, these standards were interposed in activity as statements of value. They demanded that a resident's behavior, especially with regard to the house, demonstrate a commitment to "sound priorities" - i.e. to the scrupulous use of money and its direction first to the needs of the family, their comfort and convenience. The ethic demanded that residents work hard, save money, and demonstrably earn what they have. It required that residents avoid the appearance of having more than they could afford, or even more than they really needed, and that they not consume material goods for status or competitive purposes. Any of this activity could, by these standards, be labeled "extravagant" and pretentious. These standards applied to the broad range of house-related activities and ultimately constituted a moral standard by which any household and its occupants were judged. Adherence to these standards in anything from how one paid the mortgage, to how the livingroom was decorated or the drysink refinished, was taken finally as a statement about one's relation to a traditional, "core" set of values that has long guided life in this county.

No standard, however, ever functions as a finished

statement of a people's pattern of values or preferences. Thus, perhaps not surprisingly, it was shown that these pragmatic standards routinely clashed with those symbolic goals that were also found to guide the manner in which these people managed their possessions. Conversations, as a result, oscillated regularly in the discussion of belongings, between explanations of their historic and mnemonic value and testimonies to their utility value. It was important to demonstrate and attest to practical utility in all things. And yet the investment of symbolic value in objects (a form of elevation which frequently disregarded the material characteristics of the object), was also pervasive. This wavering between pragmatic standards and symbolic traditions of use and interpretation was, finally, typical to the manner in which these people mediated the significances of their homes and furnishings. It is a fundamental opposition that underlies many of their dealings with their own material culture and again, understanding this has been important in modeling the communicational uses of the home in this community.

The importance of the family home to the people of Peterburg and Ridge county has nonetheless been clear. As with Rachael's drysink, these domestic settings function as complex encodings of a family's history, of family lineages and of its structure of contemporary relationships. They are embodiments of experience, employed in the service of

memory through time and across the generations of family and community members who use these possessions and pass them along. There is a great deal of "practical" work to accomplish with the home - to provide a clean, comfortable and well maintained living environment that is "well suited" to family needs. But even in the seem-ingly mundane activities of managing a household, families have been found here to work at many levels to enact their structure of values and define their positions within their county and community.

Through the course of this research, I have attempted to examine the communicative use of the family home within an understanding of the social and cultural life of one community. Peterburg and Ridge county have offered a distinct sort of social climate, marked by extensive mutual monitoring and emphasizing kinship, continuity, shared values, and customary forms of behavior as key modes of social organization. These organizational features have exercised considerable influence in shaping how, and to what ends, the family home is employed in this setting. This is a community, and indeed a county, of familiars. Residents have access to extensive amounts of information about one another's personal and familial activities and histories. As the findings of this study are summarized, therefore, it should be recalled that activities in and around the family

home are evaluated and weighed here within a consideration of a much broader array of information when it comes to making assessments of social character or status. The house and home life of a family of themselves are by no means treated as self contained or sufficient grounds for evaluating identity in the communicational system of this community.

Yet the family home remains of central importance in the estimation of social identity here. For what the house yields as a communicational resource is a complex activity site, encoding behavior through a wide variety of means, simultaneously at multiple levels. It is a multi-modal event providing fellow residents with an array of behavior, monitored over extended periods of time, from which to form their impressions about how a family lives, what they value, how they organize and manage their priorities, their relationships and more. The result is that the family home provides a medium that assumes significance in this setting chiefly through the *pattern of patterns* it makes manifest in the behavior of the inhabiting family.

The home in Peterburg does not function as a gallery of symbols or cultural icons with fixed meanings. Nor does it necessarily provide a direct index of, or claims to, a particular status within the comparative frame of this community. Rather, through the patterning of its contents and associated activities, it offers an image of its



inhabitants' life-style that can be compared to the core of ideal standards, values, and customs shared within this community. The home's relevance to social identity may be defined less as that of a material symbol marking a family's position at some level in a social hierarchy, than as a multi-layered system of behavior through which a family's "performance" at a given level within the community's system of standards is enacted and evaluated.

The extent to which these findings may be generalized to other settings remains a question for further study. My emphasis throughout this research has been placed chiefly on understanding the relationship between the communicational system which employs these homes, and the socio-cultural life of this county. I would speculate however, that the manner in which the home is exploited as a medium of communication may differ substantially in more transient and anonymous settings where less extensive amounts of information are available about householders. We might expect that in these communicational contexts, the home and its contents may be relied upon to provide a simplified signaling device through which comparative position and certain grossly drawn social attributes can be conveyed in an emblematic fashion. The contrast is between communicational contexts in which a comprehensive pool of shared information about houses and householders may be drawn upon, and those in which relatively little information

is available to those seeking to decipher cues to social identity in the home. In the former cases, as in Ridge county, the data drawn from the home will be treated as one among many indices and interpretational strategies may be directed to a comprehensive range of choices and activities associated with the home. In the latter, perhaps most commonly urban or suburban settings, the cues available to the viewer and the significances associated with the home may be substantially reduced. Here interpreters might be expected to dwell more extensively on manifest features of the home and rely upon more broadly drawn comparisons in distinguishing the level at which its inhabitants participate in their community, while making fewer judgements about their performance in that position or about the nature of their system of values.

The distinction in symbolic processes I anticipate is ultimately not so much an artifact of urban-rural differences as a matter of the social organizational processes that characterize the setting in which the home is evaluated. I would expect to find certain similarities, for example, between house-related practices and values in Ridge county and those of residents in stable urban working class neighborhoods where successive generations of occupants have perpetuated family and community bonds and provided for a high degree of surveillance and mutual familiarity. Yet I would not expect these findings to apply in larger and less

cohesive communities, even if they are located within the same vicinity.<sup>1</sup> I would anticipate, therefore, that the extent to which the findings of this study can be generalized to other communities will vary substantially according to the orders of mutual familiarity that exist within a given frame of reference. I make the assumption that within any given community the home will play a role in on-going processes of social differentiation and identification. However, as the principals of social organization shift, so too will the use of this medium. Future research should be directed to this question in order to determine if and how the communicative use of this medium may vary according to the size and scope of the community of reference in which it is organized and interpreted.

The extent to which the value-orientations discussed in this study can be interpreted within a larger, perhaps national, frame of reference as class-related behavior also remains a question for further investigation. Within Ridge county, the norms I have described were shared broadly by those retaining the county as their principal frame of reference. As normative "ideals", the structure of values discussed constrained and guided, but did not necessarily determine, the behavior of the broad range of families in this study including lower status working families, as well as middle and high status households. Those who isolated themselves socially from the county and directed their

attentions to people and activity outside the county seemed willing to ignore these common norms. Yet those among the "best families" and cosmopolitans who sought to maintain their ties to the social life of the county attempted, at times quite self-consciously, to acknowledge these values and define their own behavior with reference to them (see chapter six). This core of norms were applied, as such, as common ideals and they referred ultimately more to membership in the county's belief system than to one's social class.<sup>2</sup>

Many of the values and practices discussed here have, nonetheless, been identified elsewhere as class related behavior. Bourdieu, for example, characterizes the subordination of aesthetic criteria to utilitarian standards in furnishing homes as a working class ethic (1984). To suggest that such comparisons indicate that the county's prevailing standards are "working class standards" would, however, be to ignore the contexts in which communicational behavior emerges and assumes meaning. The norms and customs discussed in this study assumed their identity, utility and significances principally within the comparative frame of this county's system of symbols and social relationships. The significance of any given item or pattern of behavior identified here may not be comparable to its implications in other social spheres and generalizations of this order may, therefore, be inappropriate. I would also argue that it is

conceivable that the behavior of county residents might well change and adapt in many important ways if they were to move and participate in the symbolic systems of other communities. The "outward referencing" of "cosmopolitan" residents provides some data to this effect, as have my own limited observations in the homes of expatriot Ridge countians. Much has been written to this point about the ways in which family homes evolve as a family moves through a community's status hierarchy. Much could also be learned about the versatility of the home as a medium of communication, however, if we were to examine how a family's behavior and consumption activities change as they move, shift frames of reference, and learn to adapt to the symbols and behaviors of a new social system.

Much more, of course, remains to be learned about the way the home, as well as other forms of expressive behavior, are organized within the culture of Ridge county itself. By grounding this study in the culture of this one setting, I have attempted not only to reveal something about houses, but also to characterize the relationship between one mode of communication and the socio-cultural system that employs it. Future research may effectively enhance our understanding of this relationship by examining the extent to which the findings presented here can be generalized to other forms and media of communication. To what extent do group and especially family influences structure other forms of

expressive behavior? How are processes of comparison and competition managed through them? Can a similar structure of values be found to guide this activity? How do these other forms function in the negotiation of social status, the organization of identity, and the management of relationships? Do they play as prominent a role as the house seems to in symbolizing family history and patterns of interdependence? Our research traditions too often direct us to the investigation of behavior within isolated channels or media of interaction and provide us with limited opportunities to understand their use within a multi-modal environment. By extending future research into other forms of communicative behavior within this same setting, it is my hope that we can learn not only more about the county itself, and about the nature of other expressive forms, but also ultimately about their coordinated use within one complex system of communication.

Finally, a last note about this study's treatment of issues of change and continuity. My investigation has focused for the most part on those processes through which the stability of social life in Peterburg and Ridge county are maintained, and not on issues of change. I have attempted to demonstrate that concerns for custom and continuity form the foundations of these people's behavior, especially with regard to the home. Yet it should not be assumed that this pervading concern for continuity implies a

rejection of contemporary life by the people of this county. These patterns and continuities are not anachronisms. They are not sustained in a reactionary way. Nor is the orientation that underlies them a nostalgic one that isolates these people from their country's present. Rather, it should be understood that these many points of continuity retain their power and significance for the people of this county precisely because they are incorporated into what is perceived to be a "modern" lifestyle, responsive in some degree to developments in contemporary American life. The routines and materials I have discussed stand in constant juxtaposition to the products and activities of the present. Satellite dishes now stand in ancestral farm yards, drysinks house electronic equipment, and European blue jeans now often replace the overalls that shine the seats of old oak plank bottom chairs. Change is apparent, it is continuous. Future research should perhaps attempt to characterize this balancing of influences in greater detail. For the present, however, this study has attempted to show that the family home in Ridge county is a medium whose uses are grounded in, and devoted to, a depth of traditions that are not diverted casually to the needs or fashions of the moment. The family home is an instrument of memory here, as it is a means for ordering the relationships of contemporaries.

## NOTES TO CHAPTER VII

<sup>1</sup> See the discussion on this point in the conclusion of chapter 6.

<sup>2</sup> It should be reiterated here that while this study centered of Peterburg, the county itself was retained as a larger frame of reference during this research. My expectation is that the principles and practices described here can be shown to apply throughout the county as a whole. The culture and social life of Ridge county demonstrates a coherence and consistency at the level of the phenomena explored in this study that extends from one end of the county to the other. Aibel has noted similar continuities in his own research (1984). And, indeed, given the demographic continuities Ridge county shares with its neighboring counties, it is conceivable that the behavior discussed here could be generalized to this entire region of central Pennsylvania.



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