1 Coffle, Castle, Deck, Dock

The gleaming white fort rises dramatically from the promontory overlooking the coastal town of Dixcove, Ghana, much as it has for more than three centuries (fig. 1.1). Visitors arrive in town and park at the base of the hill, climbing to the fort on foot. The path wends up the side of the hill and diverts to the west toward the small parade ground that stands between the front of the fort and the sea. Two massive, diamond-shaped bastions stand to either side of a heavily rusticated door, which opens through the solid, unbroken masonry of the curtain wall into the front courtyard of the fort. In the back corner of an interior courtyard is an arched opening into the northeast bastion, accessed by three steps. The small chamber behind is closed not by a door but a heavy iron gate (figs. 1.2, 1.3). No more than two hundred feet square, this was the slave room dedicated to the containment of Africans intended for the Atlantic slave trade. Merely 2 percent of the total square footage of the whole compound, this small cell was a critical component of the sequences of such spaces in forts operated along the west coast of Africa by England and other European powers. It played a vital role in the highly lucrative system of transatlantic slavery that defined the coastline of West Africa and that sustained the sugar production of the British—and French, Dutch, Danish, and Spanish—West Indies for well over a century.[1]

The so-called slave holes of the English fortifications lining the west coast of Africa were and are horrifying.[2] "There was nothing to be heard but the rattling of chains, smacking of whips, and the groans and cries of our fellow men," reported Ottobah Cugoano, an emancipated slave who would later publish an account of his life. But these prisons were not the only spaces experienced by enslaved Africans in the long journey from Africa to Jamaica. While historians have dealt with many dimensions of the slave trade—and this chapter depends extensively on the published scholarship of a number of excellent historians—architectural historians have left the spaces of enslavement largely untouched.[3] This chapter situates the castles of West Africa as the second in a series of four critical spaces experienced by enslaved Africans from the moment of capture to their final sale to a British Caribbean planter: coffle, castle, deck, dock.[4] In this view, the spaces of the slave trade are very much the product of those social and economic relationships governing capture (and resistance to capture), containment,

FIG. 1.1 Dixcove Fort, Dixcove, Ghana, begun 1683.

transfer, and the sale of people. Understood as agents in the economic and social relationships of exchange, these spaces—in canoes, ships, and buildings—are components of a machine of production dedicated to the generation of "the slave," the fuel that drove the sugar plantation, the economic engine of early colonial Jamaica. In tracking sequences of spaces, I do not pretend to suggest that this chapter reports a "typical" experience; variations over space and time and among personal dispositions mean such an attempt is folly.[5] But the telling that follows describes in its component parts the reality for many who traveled against their will from Africa to the Caribbean on British slavers. Based on fieldwork in Ghana and on a careful examination of documentary and visual records in England, Ghana, and the United States, this chapter reconstructs the spatial experience of the enslaved, examining when possible not just the physical spaces but also the spatial experience of the senses, so powerfully captured by Cugoano.

West Africa's coastal forts and their associated spaces are rightly understood as spaces engaged in the economic processes of slave making—transforming a person into a commodity.[6] It is no accident that the definitive study of the Royal African Company—that organization that oversaw England's Africa trade until 1750—was written not by a social or political historian but by a historian of business in a series on emergent international capitalism.[7] The decisions made by Europeans along the west coast of Africa and by their African partners were motivated by economic self-interest, and over time it became increasingly clear that the highest profits lay in the production of slaves. This economic machine matured through the eighteenth century, generating finely tuned processes of exchange and function-specific architecture to support that machine. Understood as an economic process, slave making had a number of important factors that drove the decisions of enslavers. One was valuation; central to this process was the recognition that individuals became

Nelson_1p.indd 10-11 5/18/15 12:30 PM

1 Coffle, Castle, Deck, Dock

The gleaming white fort rises dramatically from the promontory overlooking the coastal town of Dixcove, Ghana, much as it has for more than three centuries (fig. 1.1). Visitors arrive in town and park at the base of the hill, climbing to the fort on foot. The path wends up the side of the hill and diverts to the west toward the small parade ground that stands between the front of the fort and the sea. Two massive, diamond-shaped bastions stand to either side of a heavily rusticated door, which opens through the solid, unbroken masonry of the curtain wall into the front courtyard of the fort. In the back corner of an interior courtyard is an arched opening into the northeast bastion, accessed by three steps. The small chamber behind is closed not by a door but a heavy iron gate (figs. 1.2, 1.3). No more than two hundred feet square, this was the slave room dedicated to the containment of Africans intended for the Atlantic slave trade. Merely 2 percent of the total square footage of the whole compound, this small cell was a critical component of the sequences of such spaces in forts operated along the west coast of Africa by England and other European powers. It played a vital role in the highly lucrative system of transatlantic slavery that defined the coastline of West Africa and that sustained the sugar production of the British—and French, Dutch, Danish, and Spanish—West Indies for well over a century.[1]

The so-called slave holes of the English fortifications lining the west coast of Africa were and are horrifying.[2] "There was nothing to be heard but the rattling of chains, smacking of whips, and the groans and cries of our fellow men," reported Ottobah Cugoano, an emancipated slave who would later publish an account of his life. But these prisons were not the only spaces experienced by enslaved Africans in the long journey from Africa to Jamaica. While historians have dealt with many dimensions of the slave trade—and this chapter depends extensively on the published scholarship of a number of excellent historians—architectural historians have left the spaces of enslavement largely untouched.[3] This chapter situates the castles of West Africa as the second in a series of four critical spaces experienced by enslaved Africans from the moment of capture to their final sale to a British Caribbean planter: coffle, castle, deck, dock.[4] In this view, the spaces of the slave trade are very much the product of those social and economic relationships governing capture (and resistance to capture), containment,

FIG. 1.1 Dixcove Fort, Dixcove, Ghana, begun 1683.

transfer, and the sale of people. Understood as agents in the economic and social relationships of exchange, these spaces—in canoes, ships, and buildings—are components of a machine of production dedicated to the generation of "the slave," the fuel that drove the sugar plantation, the economic engine of early colonial Jamaica. In tracking sequences of spaces, I do not pretend to suggest that this chapter reports a "typical" experience; variations over space and time and among personal dispositions mean such an attempt is folly.[5] But the telling that follows describes in its component parts the reality for many who traveled against their will from Africa to the Caribbean on British slavers. Based on fieldwork in Ghana and on a careful examination of documentary and visual records in England, Ghana, and the United States, this chapter reconstructs the spatial experience of the enslaved, examining when possible not just the physical spaces but also the spatial experience of the senses, so powerfully captured by Cugoano.

West Africa's coastal forts and their associated spaces are rightly understood as spaces engaged in the economic processes of slave making—transforming a person into a commodity.[6] It is no accident that the definitive study of the Royal African Company—that organization that oversaw England's Africa trade until 1750—was written not by a social or political historian but by a historian of business in a series on emergent international capitalism.[7] The decisions made by Europeans along the west coast of Africa and by their African partners were motivated by economic self-interest, and over time it became increasingly clear that the highest profits lay in the production of slaves. This economic machine matured through the eighteenth century, generating finely tuned processes of exchange and function-specific architecture to support that machine. Understood as an economic process, slave making had a number of important factors that drove the decisions of enslavers. One was valuation; central to this process was the recognition that individuals became

Nelson_1p.indd 10-11 5/18/15 12:30 PM

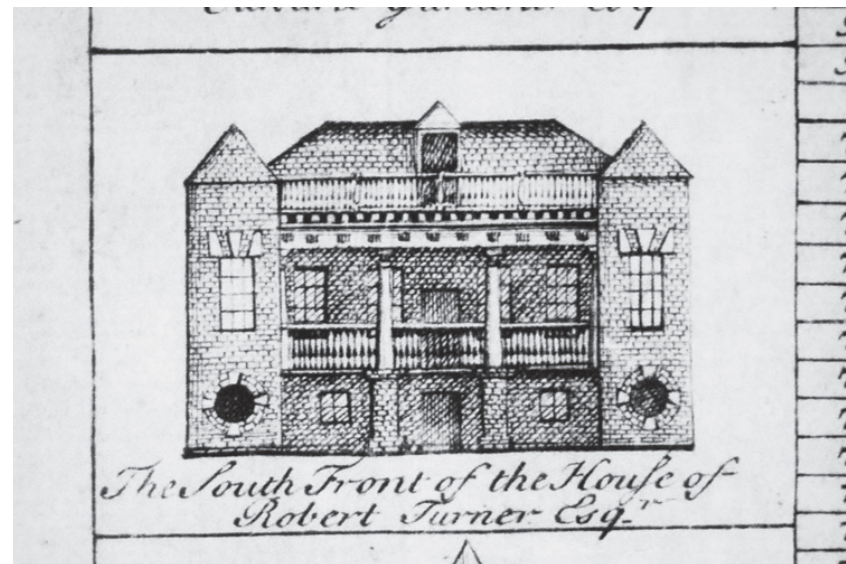

FIG. 2.18 "The South Front of the House of Robert Turner, Esqr." Detail from Michael Hay, plan of Kingston, ca. 1745. Ink on paper, 13 × 16 in. (33 × 41 cm). Library of Congress.

reenactment of chivalric rituals as the prevailing interpretation supposes, they also recalled the elevated social status of the English nobility. Beginning with the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII, England witnessed a massive reorganization of the landscape between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries.[81] Dana Arnold has very effectively argued that eighteenth-century English elite depended on ownership of land and the construction of a great house to establish or preserve membership in England's privileged social circles.[82] The construction of a "country house" on these new estates secured the identity and the authority of the family and its patriarch in and over the landscape.[83]

By the eighteenth century, English monumental houses with four corner towers had been associated with land-based authority for centuries. An excellent late medieval example is the 1434–1446 *donjon,* or central tower, of Tattershall Castle, in east Lincolnshire (fig. 2.21). Built by Ralph Cromwell, the Lord Treasurer to Henry VI, Tattershall Castle was outfitted with large, hardly defensible traceried windows not as a fortification to withstand siege but as a symbol of lordly status.[84] In continuity with the late medieval tradition, many later country houses were also built with corner towers. Perhaps the most abundant evidence for this practice is seen in the many houses of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries designed by Robert Smythson. As Mark Girouard has suggested, these massive new houses were generally built not by England's well-established families or those long associated with the aristocracy but by the wealthy "new" gentry, most newly rich through the acquisition of former monastery lands, profit from law, or success in commerce.[85] These families had a need to demonstrate their wealth, to make clear their claim to substantial landholdings—and by extension, to make claims to an elite social status and to secure rank or political stature. Probably the clearest example is Wollaton Hall, erected in 1580–1588 for Francis Willoughby, whose family wealth depended on extensive coal deposits on their vast landholdings (fig. 2.22).[86] An inscription on the exterior of the house reads, "Behold this house of Sir Francis Willoughby, built with rare art and bequeathed to the Willoughbys. Begun 1580 and finished 1588."[87]

The house now standing as Bourton House in Gloucestershire is an eighteenth-century rebuilding on the footprint of an early seventeenth-century house. The early building, with a rectilinear core framed by four strong corner towers, was built by Sir Nicholas Overby, a lawyer of increasing prominence in the early seventeenth century.

FIG. 2.19 Colbeck Castle, St. Catherine Parish, Jamaica, third quarter eighteenth century.

FIG. 2.20 Lulworth Castle, Dorset, England, ca. 1607.

FIG. 2.21 Tattershall Castle, Lincolnshire, England, 1434–46.

Nelson_1p.indd 50-51 5/18/15 12:30 PM

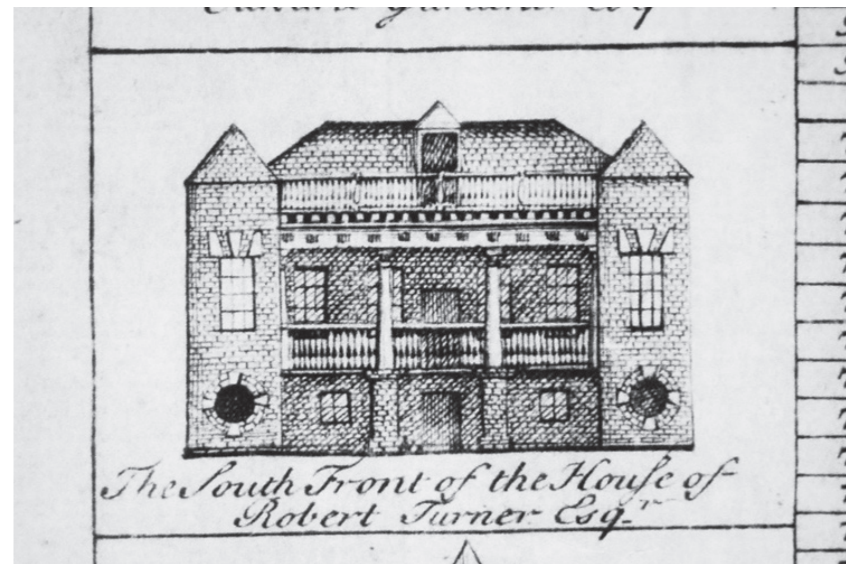

FIG. 2.18 "The South Front of the House of Robert Turner, Esqr." Detail from Michael Hay, plan of Kingston, ca. 1745. Ink on paper, 13 × 16 in. (33 × 41 cm). Library of Congress.

reenactment of chivalric rituals as the prevailing interpretation supposes, they also recalled the elevated social status of the English nobility. Beginning with the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII, England witnessed a massive reorganization of the landscape between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries.[81] Dana Arnold has very effectively argued that eighteenth-century English elite depended on ownership of land and the construction of a great house to establish or preserve membership in England's privileged social circles.[82] The construction of a "country house" on these new estates secured the identity and the authority of the family and its patriarch in and over the landscape.[83]

By the eighteenth century, English monumental houses with four corner towers had been associated with land-based authority for centuries. An excellent late medieval example is the 1434–1446 *donjon,* or central tower, of Tattershall Castle, in east Lincolnshire (fig. 2.21). Built by Ralph Cromwell, the Lord Treasurer to Henry VI, Tattershall Castle was outfitted with large, hardly defensible traceried windows not as a fortification to withstand siege but as a symbol of lordly status.[84] In continuity with

FIG. 2.19 Colbeck Castle, St. Catherine Parish, Jamaica, third quarter eighteenth century.

FIG. 2.20 Lulworth Castle, Dorset, England, ca. 1607.

FIG. 2.21 Tattershall Castle, Lincolnshire, England, 1434–46.

the late medieval tradition, many later country houses were also built with corner towers. Perhaps the most abundant evidence for this practice is seen in the many houses of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries designed by Robert Smythson. As Mark Girouard has suggested, these massive new houses were generally built not by England's well-established families or those long associated with the aristocracy but by the wealthy "new" gentry, most newly rich through the acquisition of former monastery lands, profit from law, or success in commerce.[85] These families had a need to demonstrate their wealth, to make clear their claim to substantial landholdings—and by extension, to make claims to an elite social status and to secure rank or political stature. Probably the clearest example is Wollaton Hall, erected in 1580–1588 for Francis Willoughby, whose family wealth depended on extensive coal deposits on their vast landholdings (fig. 2.22).[86] An inscription on the exterior of the house reads, "Behold this house of Sir Francis Willoughby, built with rare art and bequeathed to the Willoughbys. Begun 1580 and finished 1588."[87]

The house now standing as Bourton House in Gloucestershire is an eighteenth-century rebuilding on the footprint of an early seventeenth-century house. The early building, with a rectilinear core framed by four strong corner towers, was built by Sir Nicholas Overby, a lawyer of increasing prominence in the early seventeenth century.

Nelson_1p.indd 50-51 5/18/15 12:30 PM

FIG. 5.9 Interior of Thomas Hibbert House, ground floor archway and stair beyond.

the front chamber upstairs boasts a soaring tray-vaulted ceiling. Careful investigation of the foundations suggests that the front and rear piazzas were certainly added in a second building campaign, but that might have happened very soon upon the completion of the building core. Outfitted in mahogany throughout, from stair details to flooring, the interior of the house is rich and sumptuous (fig. 5.9).

But the most extraordinary house in Kingston—or more properly in the Kingston suburbs—was the great house erected just outside the city by Phillip Pinnock, another important Kingston merchant.[86] Pinnock's prominence is attested to by his membership as one of the founding members of the Jamaican Association, a collection of eleven of Jamaica's most powerful planters and merchants. This association was gathered together in

1751 as a self-appointed cabinet to advise then Governor Trelawny on issues of internal governance or judicial proceedings. While the association was generally representative of the legally instituted Jamaican Assembly, it had absolutely no legal status, suggesting the remarkable political confidence of Pinnock and other Jamaican elites.[87] Pinnock would later serve as Speaker of the Jamaican Assembly in 1768 and again in 1775.

Pinnock's suburban villa appears in a small detail of a Du Simitière sketch of the plains of Half-Way Tree, likely taken from the tower of St. Andrew's Church in that parish.[88] Almost dropped off the page, had the artist cropped the image differently, the Italian villa stands remade for the Jamaican landscape (fig. 5.10). In his cipher book, Du Simitière reports producing this series of views from and around Pinnock's house outside Kingston.[89] In his *History of Jamaica,* Edward Long reports that the "chief ornament" of Half-Way Tree "is a very magnificent house, erected here a few years since by Mr. Pinnock." In Long's assessment, it vies "in the elegance of design, and excellence of workmanship, with many of the best country seats in England." Long asserted that the stone from the Hope River was "far more beautiful" than Portland stone.[90] Those invited inside would be delighted by the "mahogany work and ornaments," which exhibited "singular beauty." But if its appearance was striking to the average passerby, only a gentleman might recognize the building's inspiration.

Pinnock's house reimagined a mid-1560s villa design by late Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio. The front elevation and ground-floor plan of the Italian architect's designs for a grand house for Venetian Gianfrancesco Valmarana had been published as Plate XLII in his *Four Books of Architecture* (fig. 5.11). In his description of the house, Palladio notes that the house has four towers "in the angles of the house."[91] Palladio describes the loggias, which span double height between the corner towers across the front and rear, as being of the Ionic order. As revealed in the elevation, the ground floors of the front towers have tall, arched openings and the roof is ornamented with classical figures. All of these same features appear also in the Du Simitière sketch: corner towers with a double height portico between, arched openings on the ground floor of the towers, and prominent roof ornaments. Emulating Palladio's villas, of course, was a popular pursuit among England's landed gentry; Chiswick House and Mereworth are but two examples. In directly emulating a Palladian model, Pinnock aligned himself not only with his elite Jamaican peers but, more importantly, with his English peers, among whom he presumed membership. Sadly, Pinnock appears to have overreached. A notice in the *Royal Gazette* for March 20, 1786 announced "that spacious and elegant mansion near Half-Way Tree, built by the Hon Phillip Pinnock, Esq., deceased, and which is supposed to have stood him upward of £25,000 has lately been purchased at a very low rate and is now taking down for the purpose of sending the materials off the island."[92]

Into the 1750s, Jamaica's merchants appear to have outpaced their planter friends in elegance of architecture.

FIG. 5.10 Detail of Pierre Eugène du Simitière, "View in the Island of Jamaica," early 1760s. Private collection.

Nelson_1p.indd 144-145 5/18/15 12:31 PM

FIG. 5.9 Interior of Thomas Hibbert House, ground floor archway and stair beyond.

the front chamber upstairs boasts a soaring tray-vaulted ceiling. Careful investigation of the foundations suggests that the front and rear piazzas were certainly added in a second building campaign, but that might have happened very soon upon the completion of the building core. Outfitted in mahogany throughout, from stair details to flooring, the interior of the house is rich and sumptuous (fig. 5.9).

But the most extraordinary house in Kingston—or more properly in the Kingston suburbs—was the great house erected just outside the city by Phillip Pinnock, another important Kingston merchant.[86] Pinnock's prominence is attested to by his membership as one of the founding members of the Jamaican Association, a collection of eleven of Jamaica's most powerful planters and merchants. This association was gathered together in 1751 as a self-appointed cabinet to advise then Governor Trelawny on issues of internal governance or judicial proceedings. While the association was generally representative of the legally instituted Jamaican Assembly, it had absolutely no legal status, suggesting the remarkable political confidence of Pinnock and other Jamaican elites.[87] Pinnock would later serve as Speaker of the Jamaican Assembly in 1768 and again in 1775.

Pinnock's suburban villa appears in a small detail of a Du Simitière sketch of the plains of Half-Way Tree, likely taken from the tower of St. Andrew's Church in that parish.[88] Almost dropped off the page, had the artist cropped the image differently, the Italian villa stands remade for the Jamaican landscape (fig. 5.10). In his cipher book, Du Simitière reports producing this series of views from and around Pinnock's house outside Kingston.[89] In his *History of Jamaica,* Edward Long reports that the "chief ornament" of Half-Way Tree "is a very magnificent house, erected here a few years since by Mr. Pinnock." In Long's assessment, it vies "in the elegance of design, and excellence of workmanship, with many of the best country seats in England." Long asserted that the stone from the Hope River was "far more beautiful" than Portland stone.[90] Those invited inside would be delighted by the "mahogany work and ornaments," which exhibited "singular beauty." But if its appearance was striking to the average passerby, only a gentleman might recognize the building's inspiration.

Pinnock's house reimagined a mid-1560s villa design by late Renaissance architect Andrea Palladio. The front elevation and ground-floor plan of the Italian architect's designs for a grand house for Venetian Gianfrancesco Valmarana had been published as Plate XLII in his *Four Books of Architecture* (fig. 5.11). In his description of the house, Palladio notes that the house has four towers "in the angles of the house."[91] Palladio describes the loggias, which span double height between the corner towers across the front and rear, as being of the Ionic order. As revealed in the elevation, the ground floors of the front towers have tall, arched openings and the roof is ornamented with classical figures. All of these same features appear also in the Du Simitière sketch: corner towers with a double height portico between, arched openings on the ground floor of the towers, and prominent roof ornaments. Emulating Palladio's villas, of course, was a popular pursuit among England's landed gentry; Chiswick House and Mereworth are but two examples. In directly emulating a Palladian model, Pinnock aligned himself not only with his elite Jamaican peers but, more importantly, with his English peers, among whom he presumed membership. Sadly, Pinnock appears to have overreached. A notice in the *Royal Gazette* for March 20, 1786 announced "that spacious and elegant mansion near Half-Way Tree, built by the Hon Phillip Pinnock, Esq., deceased, and which is supposed to have stood him upward of £25,000 has lately been purchased at a very low rate and is now taking down for the purpose of sending the materials off the island."[92]

Into the 1750s, Jamaica's merchants appear to have outpaced their planter friends in elegance of architecture.

FIG. 5.10 Detail of Pierre Eugène du Simitière, "View in the Island of Jamaica," early 1760s. Private collection.

Nelson_1p.indd 144-145 5/18/15 12:31 PM

This is 130%, ok?

FIG. 7.12 Arcadia, Trelawny Parish, Jamaica. ca. 1820.

through to the piazza along the rear elevation of the building. The main floor at Arcadia is approached through two exterior stairs that open directly into the hall (figs. 7.12, 7.13). Large central halls survive also in the visual record, as in the central hall at Belle Isle plantation, depicted in an early nineteenth-century watercolor (fig. 7.14).[29] In this view, the large hall with a tall coved ceiling and highly polished floors has chairs and mirrors along the walls and opens into a front gallery enclosed with sash windows and jalousies and likely filled with sofas and more comfortable furniture.

The persistence of the hall as the central living space of the Jamaican house through the eighteenth century is remarkable in light of changing planning practices elsewhere in the British world. Direct access from the exterior into the hall was certainly the most common arrangement for elite English houses through the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, both in the motherland and across the Anglo-American Atlantic.[30] But elites and aspiring elites began to embrace more complex house planning strategies in the opening decades of the eighteenth century, primarily through the introduction and embrace of the entrance hall among the aristocracy in England and the central passage plan among the gentry.[31] In the latter arrangement, the main door of the house opened not into the hall but a central passage, often filled with a stair rising to the upper story. This central passage then gave access

FIG. 7.13 Hall at Arcadia, Trelawny Parish, Jamaica, ca. 1820.

FIG. 7.14 Artist unknown, *Belle Isle House, Jamaica,* ca. 1820. Private collection.

to the sociable spaces of the house, sometimes still called a hall but more commonly called a parlor. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the central passage plan was the recognized preference among merchants in port towns and in rural contexts, from small country houses in southern England to plantation houses along the James River in Virginia. The central passage plan, for example, appears in colonial Virginia in the 1710s, and was a common building strategy among elites there by midcentury. As numerous architectural historians have demonstrated, the introduction of the central passage was an attempt to create greater social distance between elites and others. Architectural historian Mark Wenger recounts a mid-eighteenth-century account from Virginia where a planter engages with one of his slaves not in the hall but in the passage.

> About ten an old Negro Man came with a complaint to Mr. Carter of the Overseer. . . . The humble posture in which the old Fellow placed himself before he began moved me. We were sitting in the passage, he sat himself down on the Floor clasp'd his Hands together, with his face directly to Mr. Carter, & then began his Narration.[32]

As the hall became an increasingly refined space dedicated to the rituals of elite sociability, the introduction of the central passage became a social buffer, a space for engagement across social, economic, and racial boundaries. Significantly, middling and elite Jamaicans seem not to have embraced the central passage, preferring instead to retain immediate access from the exterior into the hall throughout the eighteenth and well into the nineteenth century. To this point we will return.

While Jamaican halls were usually centrally located in the plan of the house and were typically the largest room in that plan, they varied considerably in architectural finish. Some galleries and halls, like those in Mount Plenty, boasted plastered walls and rich architectural

Nelson_1p.indd 196-197 5/18/15 12:31 PM

This is 130%, ok?

FIG. 7.12 Arcadia, Trelawny Parish, Jamaica. ca. 1820.

through to the piazza along the rear elevation of the building. The main floor at Arcadia is approached through two exterior stairs that open directly into the hall (figs. 7.12, 7.13). Large central halls survive also in the visual record, as in the central hall at Belle Isle plantation, depicted in an early nineteenth-century watercolor (fig. 7.14).[29] In this view, the large hall with a tall coved ceiling and highly polished floors has chairs and mirrors along the walls and opens into a front gallery enclosed with sash windows and jalousies and likely filled with sofas and more comfortable furniture.

The persistence of the hall as the central living space of the Jamaican house through the eighteenth century is remarkable in light of changing planning practices elsewhere in the British world. Direct access from the exterior into the hall was certainly the most common arrangement for elite English houses through the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, both in the motherland and across the Anglo-American Atlantic.[30] But elites and aspiring elites began to embrace more complex house planning strategies in the opening decades of the eighteenth century, primarily through the introduction and embrace of the entrance hall among the aristocracy in England and the central passage plan among the gentry.[31] In the latter arrangement, the main door of the house opened not into the hall but a central passage, often filled with a stair rising to the upper story. This central passage then gave access

FIG. 7.13 Hall at Arcadia, Trelawny Parish, Jamaica, ca. 1820.

FIG. 7.14 Artist unknown, *Belle Isle House, Jamaica,* ca. 1820. Private collection.

to the sociable spaces of the house, sometimes still called a hall but more commonly called a parlor. By the middle of the eighteenth century, the central passage plan was the recognized preference among merchants in port towns and in rural contexts, from small country houses in southern England to plantation houses along the James River in Virginia. The central passage plan, for example, appears in colonial Virginia in the 1710s, and was a common building strategy among elites there by midcentury. As numerous architectural historians have demonstrated, the introduction of the central passage was an attempt to create greater social distance between elites and others. Architectural historian Mark Wenger recounts a mid-eighteenth-century account from Virginia where a planter engages with one of his slaves not in the hall but in the passage.

> About ten an old Negro Man came with a complaint to Mr. Carter of the Overseer. . . . The humble posture in which the old Fellow placed himself before he began moved me. We were sitting in the passage, he sat himself down on the Floor clasp'd his Hands together, with his face directly to Mr. Carter, & then began his Narration.[32]

As the hall became an increasingly refined space dedicated to the rituals of elite sociability, the introduction of the central passage became a social buffer, a space for engagement across social, economic, and racial boundaries. Significantly, middling and elite Jamaicans seem not to have embraced the central passage, preferring instead to retain immediate access from the exterior into the hall throughout the eighteenth and well into the nineteenth century. To this point we will return.

While Jamaican halls were usually centrally located in the plan of the house and were typically the largest room in that plan, they varied considerably in architectural finish. Some galleries and halls, like those in Mount Plenty, boasted plastered walls and rich architectural

Nelson_1p.indd 196-197 5/18/15 12:31 PM

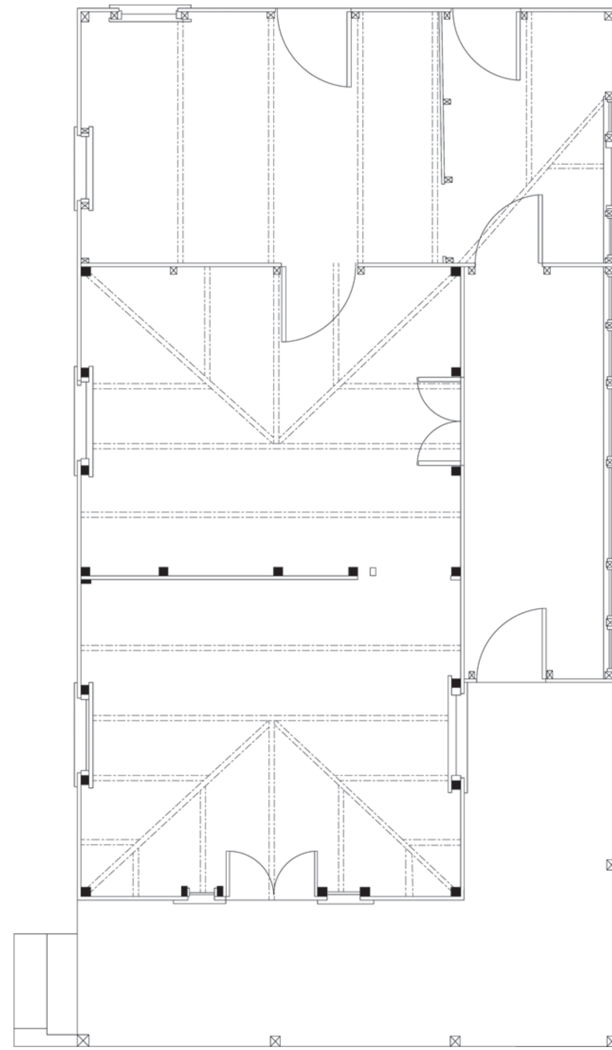

FIG. 8.2 Plan of 8 Trelawny Street, Falmouth, Jamaica.

in Kingston suggests that over the course of the century increasing numbers of free blacks had wealth enough to pay the parish tax and to own land.[12] Examination of Falmouth's early land deeds indicates that by the turn of the nineteenth century a number of free blacks already owned lots in town.[13] These included carpenters Samuel Reeves and John Sylvester, brickmason Thomas Love, tavern keeper Thomas Neale, and the spinster Rebecca Lake.[14] Free blacks in Falmouth and elsewhere were artisans, small planters, tavern keepers, shop keepers, and book keepers.[15] Much of the work on black architecture in the early Americas has focused on finding African-derived forms, materials, and technologies.[16] By considering buildings constructed or owned by free blacks in their immediate context, this chapter does something quite different, and argues that these buildings resolved practical constraints while also marking status in a complex racial landscape.[17]

AFRICANS' ARCHITECTURE

One of the questions that has long dominated discussions of the architecture of enslaved Africans asks the extent to which mud-walled slave quarters continued African building practices.[18] This question is even more important given the fact that even as late as the 1770s approximately 75 percent of the enslaved laborers in Jamaica were African born.[19] Put simply, the vast majority of enslaved Africans in Jamaica knew African architecture. And it is certainly true that examples such as contemporary mud-walled Ewe houses now in Ghana have much in common with the African houses described in Jamaica's early written record and those that surface in the archaeological record (fig. 8.4).

FIG. 8.3 Detail of wall plate, 54 Duke Street, Falmouth, Jamaica.

FIG. 8.4 Ewe House, vicinity of Cape Coast, Ghana.

Yet, a number of facts undermine any rigorous attempt to make these connections. The first is that Africans came from a wide swath of Africa, a space encompassing a bewildering diversity of cultures. Since many Africans traveled a huge distance from their point of capture to their point of sale to white traders, even those Africans sold from a single port were not necessarily from similar or related cultures. Secondly, the paucity of surviving eighteenth-century everyday architecture in West Africa means that the evidence available for use consists of written descriptions and twentieth-century buildings, often substituted for their eighteenth-century counterparts. Such substitutions wrongly presume a stability of cultural practice that anthropology has resoundingly demonstrated to be untenable. And, lastly, there is little evidence in Jamaica that Africans were doing anything more than simply building shelter in the most practical and efficient methods available. One period observer notes that there was only "trifling variation" between the house of a new poor white settler and an enslaved African.[20] In his careful examination of the quarters at Montpelier, Barry Higman finds some clear evidence of African architectural practices.[21] There does appear to be a slight preference among African-born slaves for wattled houses—a broadly popular African technology—while Creole slaves appear to prefer board or shingle houses.[22] Furthermore, the installation of the raised platform in House 37 at Montpelier and the construction of family house groups both have African architectural precedents.[23] The search for African connections ends there; the evidence suggests that enslaved Africans enlisted various known and new strategies to negotiate their circumstances. Their houses were not attempts—conscious or otherwise—to recreate an "African" architectural identity.

But if the connections between Jamaica and West Africa are to remain unclear, the differentiation between houses among the enslaved is demonstrable. Over the course of the eighteenth century, some of the relatively privileged among the enslaved—if the reader will allow the solecism—learned marketable skills and used them to their own advantage through jobbing, or hiring out.[24] Justin Roberts has estimated that on a typical sugar plantation, 6 to 8 percent of the enslaved labor—usually tradesmen and drivers—ranked among "the slave elite."[25] Enslaved artisans and tradesmen often had the wherewithal to improve the quality of their housing; especially by the early nineteenth century, visitors to plantations began to note the change. As one observer expressed a fairly commonly held assumption, "the wealth of the Negro was chiefly amongst the tradesmen; in going through a Negro village I could always tell a tradesman's house from its external appearance."[26] Bryan Edwards argued that "tradesmen and domestics are in general vastly better lodged and provided. Many of these have larger houses with boarded floors, and are accommodated (at their own expense it is true) with very decent furniture."[27] In describing his own plantation, Matthew Lewis noted that the houses of the cooper, carpenter, and blacksmith could be "reckoned picturesque," but that many of the other buildings were "ugly enough."[28]

Nelson_1p.indd 220-221 5/18/15 12:31 PM

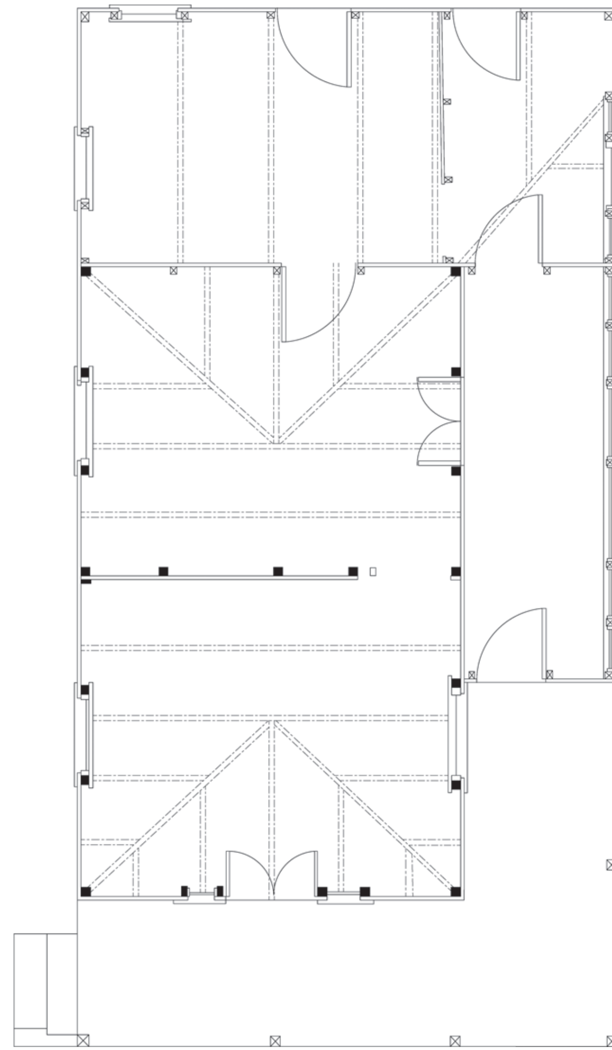

FIG. 8.2 Plan of 8 Trelawny Street, Falmouth, Jamaica.

in Kingston suggests that over the course of the century increasing numbers of free blacks had wealth enough to pay the parish tax and to own land.[12] Examination of Falmouth's early land deeds indicates that by the turn of the nineteenth century a number of free blacks already owned lots in town.[13] These included carpenters Samuel Reeves and John Sylvester, brickmason Thomas Love, tavern keeper Thomas Neale, and the spinster Rebecca Lake.[14] Free blacks in Falmouth and elsewhere were artisans, small planters, tavern keepers, shop keepers, and book keepers.[15] Much of the work on black architecture in the early Americas has focused on finding African-derived forms, materials, and technologies.[16] By considering buildings constructed or owned by free blacks in their immediate context, this chapter does something quite different, and argues that these buildings resolved practical constraints while also marking status in a complex racial landscape.[17]

AFRICANS' ARCHITECTURE

One of the questions that has long dominated discussions of the architecture of enslaved Africans asks the extent to which mud-walled slave quarters continued African building practices.[18] This question is even more important given the fact that even as late as the 1770s approximately 75 percent of the enslaved laborers in Jamaica were African born.[19] Put simply, the vast majority of enslaved Africans in Jamaica knew African architecture. And it is certainly true that examples such as contemporary mud-walled Ewe houses now in Ghana have much in common with the African houses described in Jamaica's early written record and those that surface in the archaeological record (fig. 8.4).

FIG. 8.3 Detail of wall plate, 54 Duke Street, Falmouth, Jamaica.

FIG. 8.4 Ewe House, vicinity of Cape Coast, Ghana.

Yet, a number of facts undermine any rigorous attempt to make these connections. The first is that Africans came from a wide swath of Africa, a space encompassing a bewildering diversity of cultures. Since many Africans traveled a huge distance from their point of capture to their point of sale to white traders, even those Africans sold from a single port were not necessarily from similar or related cultures. Secondly, the paucity of surviving eighteenth-century everyday architecture in West Africa means that the evidence available for use consists of written descriptions and twentieth-century buildings, often substituted for their eighteenth-century counterparts. Such substitutions wrongly presume a stability of cultural practice that anthropology has resoundingly demonstrated to be untenable. And, lastly, there is little evidence in Jamaica that Africans were doing anything more than simply building shelter in the most practical and efficient methods available. One period observer notes that there was only "trifling variation" between the house of a new poor white settler and an enslaved African.[20] In his careful examination of the quarters at Montpelier, Barry Higman finds some clear evidence of African architectural practices.[21] There does appear to be a slight preference among African-born slaves for wattled houses—a broadly popular African technology—while Creole slaves appear to prefer board or shingle houses.[22] Furthermore, the installation of the raised platform in House 37 at Montpelier and the construction of family house groups both have African architectural precedents.[23] The search for African connections ends there; the evidence suggests that enslaved Africans enlisted various known and new strategies to negotiate their circumstances. Their houses were not attempts—conscious or otherwise—to recreate an "African" architectural identity.

But if the connections between Jamaica and West Africa are to remain unclear, the differentiation between houses among the enslaved is demonstrable. Over the course of the eighteenth century, some of the relatively privileged among the enslaved—if the reader will allow the solecism—learned marketable skills and used them to their own advantage through jobbing, or hiring out.[24] Justin Roberts has estimated that on a typical sugar plantation, 6 to 8 percent of the enslaved labor—usually tradesmen and drivers—ranked among "the slave elite."[25] Enslaved artisans and tradesmen often had the wherewithal to improve the quality of their housing; especially by the early nineteenth century, visitors to plantations began to note the change. As one observer expressed a fairly commonly held assumption, "the wealth of the Negro was chiefly amongst the tradesmen; in going through a Negro village I could always tell a tradesman's house from its external appearance."[26] Bryan Edwards argued that "tradesmen and domestics are in general vastly better lodged and provided. Many of these have larger houses with boarded floors, and are accommodated (at their own expense it is true) with very decent furniture."[27] In describing his own plantation, Matthew Lewis noted that the houses of the cooper, carpenter, and blacksmith could be "reckoned picturesque," but that many of the other buildings were "ugly enough."[28]

Nelson_1p.indd 220-221 5/18/15 12:31 PM