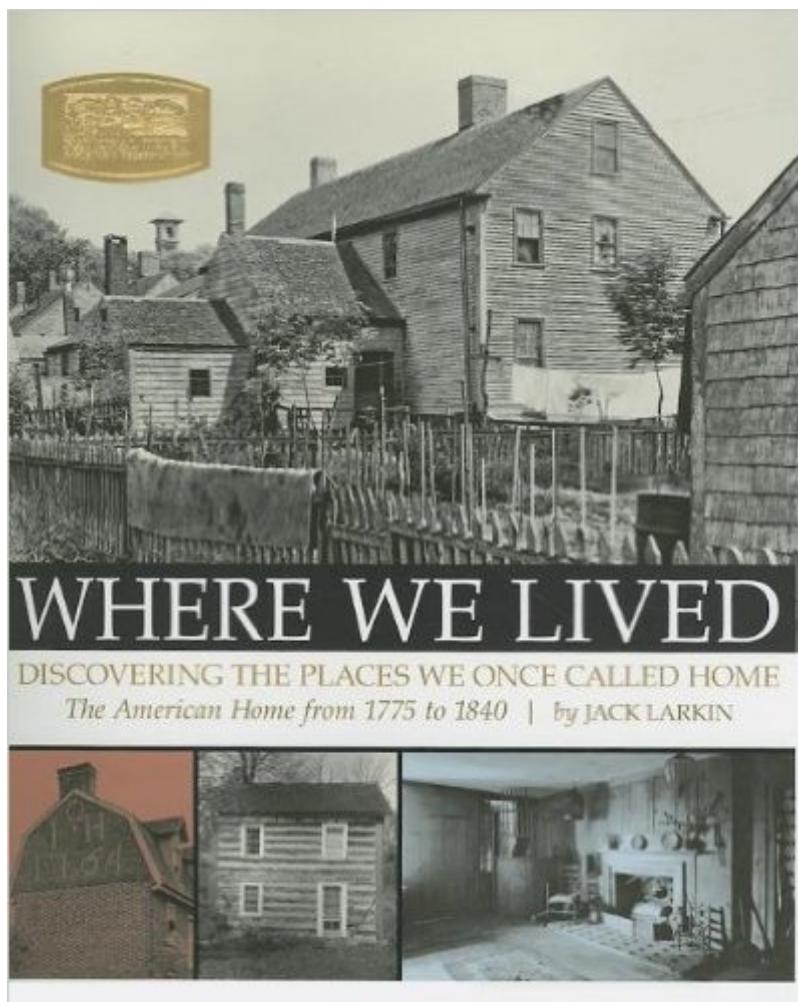


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# Where We Lived: Discovering The Places We Once Called Home



## Synopsis

The past has left behind only scattered clues that, on their own, provide little insight into how the people of early America lived and the details of their daily lives. The photographs in this book, the deeply informed narrative that accompanies them, and the eyewitness accounts of daily life that the author weaves throughout, provide a fresh perspective on our early American ancestors and the places they called home. This book is about how their houses and their life in them, from the wealthy to the impoverished, from New York City to the small farms and plantations of the South, from coastal fishing towns to the Western frontier of Indiana and Kentucky. The stories focus on the remarkably vivid differences from one part of the country to the next, class and culture, and the realities of everyday life for American families. These stories twine around a wide selection of HABS photographs of early houses, covering the variety and evolutions of house styles -- not by labeling the style but by explaining the style in the context of everyday life. Richly illustrated with handsome black-and-white photography of old houses from the Library of Congress Historic American Building Survey (HABS) collection and supplemented with period woodcuts, engravings, drawings, paintings, artifacts, and maps, the book is printed on a 4-color press for a depth of tone. Sidebar excerpts from diaries, journals, and letters inject graphic eyewitness descriptions, adding an additional layer of insight. The book also includes sidebars called Still Standing that traces the history of specific houses, from their origins to the present and includes information on the original family, how the house has evolved over the centuries, and how it's used today.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This is an important new work on the American home for the historian, teacher, and architecture buff. Written for the lay person in mind, Mr. Larkin does a fantastic job covering the American home from 1775-1840. The author used many sharp black and white photos from the Historic American Buildings Survey and keen journal/diary entries from American and European travelers to create a narrative that is heavy in primary sources that dovetail with the photography. The book is not a heavy architectural treatise, but written for the average American home enthusiast. Mr. Larkin divided the book into three sections: New England, Middle, and Southern states. As a teacher, I feel the book is very important in transferring rich primary sources via the journal entries and material culture info not usually found in narrative or university press histories. The book offers some great views of homes that have long gone under the wrecking ball or just fell into disrepair and were torn down. The HABS survey photographs were all taken in the 1930's and for those not familiar they are a rich source. Mr. Larkin's work truly meets the dustjacket's detailed description. A first rate photographic history of the American home from 1775-1840.

The Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) was one of the make work projects of the depression era designed to give employment to out of work architects, draftsmen and photographers. With an office in each state, they documented thousands of houses, public buildings and other structures dating from the earliest they could find to about Civil War time. HABS produced a wealth of information about the way Americans lived in their early days. It has proven so helpful that it was restarted after World War II and again revitalized recently. This book is largely composed of photographs taken by the HABS people combined with an excellent story line by John Larkin, chief historian at Old Sturbridge Village. He has found numerous reports written by people actually living in these buildings at the time, and quotes or summarizes their views. I was struck at the small size of the houses, as I am when I see them in parks or abandoned towns (common out here in the west), and the large number of people that lived in them. It's a most interesting look at houses when compared to what we are building today where four people have eight rooms and three car garages.

For the many of us who have a disconnect between life today and life as it was lived in years past, *Discovering the Places we Once Called Home* is a must read. Jack Larkin very ably takes us back in history in a most intimate way and allows us to witness the homestead of our grandparents with the hardships of daily living without modern conveniences. The photographs and commentary are testament to diligent research and scholarship by the author and I am left with wanting more.

A fascinating account of the homes folks lived in 200 years ago and what each space and room in the home was used for. Mr. Larkin vividly describes by area (New England, the Middle States, the Southern States, and the Western States - as far as what was considered west by 1840), how the people of the past utilized their living spaces. It also describes in detail the many different styles of housing in the geographical areas mentioned, and how the Middle States structures may differ from the, say, New England area. As mentioned in other reviews, it truly is amazing how many human beings could sometimes be squeezed into a small house with, most likely, little complaining. In addition to the lively, well-written text, there are many photographs - most taken 50 or more years ago and are in black and white - to enhance the reader's enjoyment. As an amateur social historian, I can honestly say this wonderful book is a great find to add to any collection. I am thankful we have historians like Jack Larkin to help us in our quest for real American History.

I can barely put this book down. There are so many wonderful photos on each page, and fascinating descriptions on how our ancestors actually lived. What I especially like is how Mr. Larkin describes the reasons behind building homes the way they did. It's an easy read for the everyday person and will make you thankful for what we have now. I am disappointed that I'm reaching the end of the book, and can only hope Mr. Larkin writes a follow-up edition that covers from 1840 on.

You will not regret buying this book, which is stuffed with the little details of life which we so often overlook. Larkin illustrates his books with images from the Historic American Building Survey, a fantastic source. He complements with brilliant language which is easy to follow and understand, unlike most dense history books. I would get this for your old house lovers!

I really enjoyed this book, and read it cover to cover the day I got it. One unfortunate reality is that only well-built houses survive - so we have minimal knowledge of how "the other half lived." But the author did his best to deal with this issue, and I, for one, was delighted that he did not waste pages going over well-trodden ground. Mount Vernon, Monticello, Montpelier, and other grand houses have already been covered in excruciating detail by other authors. In this book, the author concentrates on the homes of the "middling classes," and also on as much of the data as can be found on the huts, hovels, and cabins of the poor. The scope of the book is really the eastern seaboard and the original colonies, so the reader who is primarily interested in the architecture of the Southwest will not find it here. I wish that he had included some coverage of the Native

American dwelling places indigenous to these areas of the eastern seaboard, and also perhaps some discussion of how Native dwellings changed in response to exposure to White ideas and building materials. (But that topic would properly fill an entire book of its own.) This was an expensive book, by my penny-pinching standards, but I consider it money well spent and it will be a permanent addition to my library. *Early American Houses: with A Glossary of Colonial Architectural Terms*  
*How Buildings Learn: What Happens After They're Built*

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