Chapter I

The Early American Saltbox

The Saltbox is an architectural design steeped in the American heritage of our earliest English settlers. It consists of more than one story in the front and only one in the back with a peaked roof and an elongated catslide rear slope. Although the earliest settlers built this style one room at a time, adding to the structure as time and finances permitted, by 1680 new houses were being built as all one complete unit with a familiar cat slide roof over the single story in the back. By the end of the 18th century, settlers began to experiment with other designs. The term saltbox was not applied to this design until the resurgence of its popularity in the 19th century.

Our saltbox was an authentic reproduction of the Richard Dole-Little house in Annisqualm, Connecticut. It was originally built in 1670 and remodeled in 1795 to upgrade the windows and entrances and is still lived in today. The four fireplaces are authentic Rumford design, which provides the most efficient heating capability with a minimum use of fuel. The Rumford design claimed little popularity in the new world during the revolutionary years since Count Rumford was considered to be a Tory. And, indeed, he was commissioned by the Crown to redesign the fireplaces in the government buildings of London, while in the new world, an American hero, Benjamin Franklin, was occupied with the development of the Franklin stove.

The two main front rooms of our house had the traditional blue raised paneling on the fireplace walls. The room used as a dining room had a punched tin witches hat chandelier with candle-lit arms. A wall in the library had built-in cabinetry with raised panel doors below and open shelving above for displaying books and prized collectibles.

The kitchen is housed in the keeping room where a functional cooking fireplace has a hand-wrought crane fashioned by a local blacksmith and a bake oven with a separate ceramic flue. Custom knotty pine cabinetry cleverly conceals the Sub-zero refrigerator and a high-tech dishwasher. A walk-in pantry off the kitchen provides additional storage behind a board and batten door. Additional board and batten doors conceal a front entry closet while another opens into the back stairway which leads to the second floor bedrooms.

Throughout the house you will find varied width, varied length eastern white pine flooring shipped from Massachusetts and secured with common cut nails in the traditional 17th century pattern. Reverence for the past is evident, not only in the architecture, but in the use of sinks and a tub rescued from salvage yards and refinished. Copper and tin light fixtures are replicated from museum sconces and lamps, and the plumbing fixtures and door hardware are especially reproduced for old house renovation. Necessary modern conveniences and energy saving devices are strategically situated to complement the gentle ambiance of a simpler, more tranquil era.

We were living in Phoenix, Arizona when we bought our first period house It was a small two story cape cod style in the traditional blue color. That was in 1987. After deciding the house (about 1100 sq. feet) was too small and we wanted more room, we started learning more about primitive furniture and early colonial houses with the catslide roofs (saltboxes). We decided right away that we liked the simple look of Shaker furniture and the other simple primitive 18th century furniture. So, we started collecting.

We liked the saltbox style house so much that we decided this was what we should buy. We wanted to buy an old house from the late 1700s and fix it up, but there were none in Phoenix. I even tried, unsuccessfully, to get a transfer with my company to the Boston area. So, we decided the next best thing was to build a new house and make it look old. In 1988, we did what we called a research trip to the new England area to learn first hand about saltbox houses and primitive furniture. We lined up B&B stays for 17 nights starting in Boston and continuing to Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, Connecticut, Rhode Island and back to Boston. This was a very successful trip and we took plenty of pictures of every old house we liked and made pages and pages of notes. The details of old houses we were interested in were the types of windows, moldings, baseboard, doors and door hardware, lighting fixtures and appliances. Also the type and color of the paint and contrast between walls, doors and door trim.

The more we studied and learned, the more we wanted to learn. And before you knew it we were experts on how the American middle-class people

lived in the period of 1700-1880. We thought. We certainly knew a lot more than our friends and thought we knew as much as we needed to build our dream house. But, we continued to learn and took another research B&B trip to the midwest. After ten days of old houses, historical theme parks and many, many antique stores, we decided it was time to start putting something on paper. But first, we had to decide where the house would be located and buy a lot. We found a suitable place in north Phoenix and purchased a 3/4 acre lot. The research continued and so did the collecting of antique furniture.

It was now 1989 and we put together all of our notes and pictures and started drawing the plans for our saltbox house. We tediously hand drew each room, upstairs and down, of how we wanted the doors, baseboards, cabinets, counters, tubs, and sinks in great detail. We decided it would be easier to use the floor plan from an existing old house, rather than design one ourselves. For this, we found an architect in Princeton, Mass and actually went to his office and sat down with him to review all his stock plans. The original house we wanted was a reproduction of a saltbox in Sturbridge Village, Mass, but we wanted 2 sets of stairs and it only had one. We then found the Richard Dole-Little house in Annisqualm, Conn. It was perfect. The only changes we made were to the upstairs, making 3 bedrooms out of four by enlarging the master bedroom and guest bath. The downstairs had only a few minor changes.

I am one who definitely does not like crawl spaces or scuttle holes in the ceiling for attic access. This house had a rather large attic with 7ft headroom in

the center. So, we decided to have a door from the upstairs front hallway that would go up about 10 steps to the attic. There was a small area that I laid down OSB for seasonal storage items and this made for a very nice access for servicing the upstairs A/C air handler. There is a funny story about this access, though. Because of the concern of yet another set of stairs that would have to pass the city inspection, we decided to build the stairs in, but not put the door in until later. So, behind the hallway wall were the stairs and after we moved in, we cut a hole in the sheet rock and installed the door. This worked very well and alleviated the problem of passing another inspection.

We purchased that set of stock plans from the Princeton, Mass architect. Now we had to find an architect in Phoenix that could adapt the plans to meet city code, without changing the ambiance of the great old house. There were many discussions and changes to try to keep the original design of the house in tact, but still meet the modern code. It was decided that the outside would be cedar siding (6 in. exposed) and the roof would be wood shake. I originally painted it with a clear wood finish, but later used a Benjamin Moore translucent stain. The hot Arizona sun dried out the CWF, but the Benjamin Moore withstood much better.

Now the task of purchasing everything for the inside of the house began. Old House Journal was our bible and the process of purchasing mail order began. We wanted to duplicate the period as much as possible, but could not find most of the important items in the city. So, nearly all of the lighting and door/window

hardware had to be ordered through magazines. We ordered reproduction door hardware, HL and strap hinges and thumb latch handles, for the board and batten doors on pantry, backstairs and in the entry. All bathroom fixtures were ordered or purchased at Gnu Tub in Roundrock, Texas. Antique fixtures, a claw foot tub, pedestal lavatories, an old kitchen sink from a schoolhouse and a reproduction water closet were ordered from various parts of the country. We even purchased a reproduction kitchen oven from the House of Webster in Arkansas. It was converted to use electric, but still had the heavy black cast iron door.

We also were interested in fireplaces and the types they used in the late 1700s. This led us to research the traditional Rumford style. We found a paper from 1797 written by Count Rumford himself at the local library. We quickly decided on 4 fireplaces, in the dining room, library, master bedroom and a large cooking fireplace in the keeping room. The only person in the U.S. we could find that knew about Rumford design was Jim Buckley of Buckley-Rumford Fireplace Co, in Columbus, Ohio. Luckily, he had relatives in Tucson, and met with us on one of his visits to the area. We contracted him to build the 4 fireplaces as soon as construction began. We flew him out from Columbus, gave him our pickup and put him up in a local motel for 13 days. We have since grown to be good friends with him and his wife and he was instrumental in giving me the idea for this article. He now lives in Port Townsend, Wash, an hour from our current residence.

The fireplaces were masonry, with approximately 2500 blocks/bricks, 2600 lbs mortar, 150 ft of steel re-bar, and 110 ceramic flue tiles. The keeping room fireplace is complete with a cooking fireplace, bake oven and crane hand-forged by a local blacksmith. The awesome 32 ft central chimney will probably be standing a hundred years after the house is gone.

Old wood floors also intrigued me, so I started researching the old styles and decided on the varied width, varied length pine boards. I found that eastern white pine was better than southern yellow or western pine. The wide pine flooring was ordered from Craftsman Lumber in Groton, Conn (3000 sq ft) and shipped by truck. I discussed with them the proper method of laying and nailing the floor. Since the house was slab on grate, a sub floor was needed. We decided to first put down 6 mil plastic on the cement as a moisture barrier. Then 2x4 boards went down flat on 16 in. centers. We covered this with ¾ in. OSB and laid the 11to 23 in. wide pine boards using old style common cut nails on top. The nail pattern was alternating 2-3 nails about every 3 feet on every other board. When we were done we had a great looking old floor with a sub floor, that greatly prevented any drywall cracks during the settling of the house. We covered the pine with a mixture of redwood and dark maple Clear Wood Finish (CWF) and had a beautiful looking and sounding floor. This was done both upstairs and down.

Windows were another area that took great studying. We wanted to try to reproduce the old wood sash six-over-six pane windows from a picture we acquired of the Dole-Little house, circa 1795. We also were

concerned about energy efficiency and wanted double pane windows. Low E was another consideration to keep the brutal Arizona sunlight off the delicate curtains. After looking at many different brands, we finally decided on Marvin Windows. They were wood inside with metal clad on the outside and the inside could be painted or stained to match the decor of the room. They were not true divided light panes, but rather lift out 6 section grids in top and bottom. There is nothing more time consuming and difficult than painting and cleaning the muttons on traditional true divided light windows. And, we had 27 windows in this house. One nice feature of these windows was that the top and bottom sash could be tilted and removed easily for cleaning. This was very nice for the upstairs and meant you could clean both sides of the glass from the inside of the house. Since ladders are not our favorite thing, this was a wonderful benefit for us. Several large trees were planted in front of a few downstairs windows that helped. We used Eldarica Pine and Australian Willow as well as some large bushes for this shade.

The house was wrapped with Dupont Tyvek to keep out the Arizona dust. This, together with the Marvin windows, made a very good seal to the house. This seal was very important when it came to keeping the house dust free. I am sure that we dusted far less frequent than the normal stucco home with metal sliding windows. In fact, this seal was so good, that we were told it would be best to run a 6 in. duct from each room with a fireplace to the outside for drawing purposes. As it turned out, the Rumford fireplaces were so efficient that this outside draw was not necessary. The damper and flue design of the

Rumford allowed the draw to come down one side of the chimney, while the smoke went up the other.

We really wanted a traditional basement. In 1989, in this area, there were very few houses with basements, so it was difficult to find someone who knew how to build them correctly. After much studying, we decided on a half basement 15x30 ft. This was plenty large enough, since all we needed was a place to make and store homemade beer and wine. We left the walls unfinished cement, but painted the floor with a good porch and patio paint. There was no egress or ingress, but it did have electric outlets and an A/C vent, so it was considered part of the living space of the house.

We now had a basement, first floor, second floor and an unfinished attic. Attached to the east wall was a three car garage with the same roof material and siding as the house, so it was a formidable looking structure that looked very much larger than its actual 2720 sq ft of living space.

Another area of concern during the architect phase was the dormer on the back of the house. Early homes with the cat slide roof did not have dormers, but later on, after the saltbox was prevalent, you began seeing small dormers on the back side of the house. Usually, it was two small single dormers or one large one. We debated the idea of a dormer and finally decided that in order to have any headroom in the back bedroom and bath, we would have a large one. When the house is viewed from the front or front/side, the dormer could not be seen, so we were able to preserve the saltbox look. Consequently, we

were able to have full 8 ft. ceilings throughout the upstairs rooms.

Chapter II

The basic first floor layout was preserved, almost entirely, from the original plans. The only change we made was the Borning room off the main keeping room. (This is an old term for a warm room where the babies would be born).
The room was split into with half being made into a small 1/2 bath and the other we made a laundry room, with washer/dryer and sink hookups. From the laundry room there were two doors - one to the back yard and one into the garage. We used this as our back door, coming almost entirely into the house from the garage. The front door was usually reserved for company.

The front door entrance brought you into a small alcove. In the alcove there was traditionally a sparking bench and the main stairway to the second floor. Instead of a sparking bench, we opted for a small front hall closet behind a hand made board and batten door. To the left was the library and to the right was the parlor (dining room). Across the back of the first floor was the keeping room/kitchen area. This was the traditional design of almost all houses built from the beginning of the 17th century up to the 1850's, when first floor plans started a dramatic change. There are accounts of many homes starting with just a keeping room and the front two rooms were added as the family grew. In the old days the central chimney was the main item on the first floor and most all of the cooking and bathing was done from the large fireplace opening in the keeping room. We even found a local blacksmith to install a black

wrought iron cooking crane in this fireplace, complete with three burners (hooks), low, medium and high.

The kitchen was on one end of the keeping room. We did have all the modern appliances installed, but they were hidden behind wood panels whenever possible. The Sub-zero side-by-side refrigerator and the Asea Brown Bavari (ABB) electronic dishwasher were covered with ¼ in. paneling that matched the cabinets. There was a reproduction cast iron oven (electrified) built into wall cabinets beside a Jennaire Stove top. Hidden behind a door above the oven we installed a microwave. So, when standing in the keeping room, looking into the kitchen, all that was visible were cabinets, hard maple counter tops, wood covered appliances and the wood floor. Off the kitchen was a pantry lined with ceiling to floor shelves. It even had a small window. The vent from the Jennaire stove came through here behind the bottled water dispenser to the outside wall. Because of this pantry, we only needed cabinets on one wall. Also on this wall was a 1946 single hole sink with the traditional drain on the right side and a reproduction deck mounted ceramic handled faucet. This was acquired from a wonderful little new/used appliance store in Round Rock, Texas, called GNU Tub. We also purchased two other pedestal lavs for the master bath from here.

The keeping room had two doors. One modern style door with cross-hatch window panes that led to the back yard and another hand-made board and batten door covering the back stairs entry to the upstairs. There was considerable controversy about this door. It seems as though the local building inspector was

concerned that the fire department may not be able to get through this door when coming down from an upstairs fire. We had to convince him that most fireman could easily get through a thin board and batten door with one swift kick and finally got approval for the door.

The front two rooms, the parlor and library, both had fireplaces. On these fireplace walls we had our finish carpenter build ceiling to floor raised panels, which we had seen in so many of the old saltboxes back east. These paneled walls were almost always painted red or blue, and we choose blue. Towards the end of our stay in this house, we also added ceiling to floor bookshelves on the opposite wall in the library, which we had seen in the library in a house in Townsend, Mass. The original part of this house was circa 1670 and was actually a bed & breakfast that we stayed in on our New England research trip. We got many ideas from this house, including the window and baseboard styles.

The house was only 2720 sq ft (including the basement), and had two Lennox air conditioning units. The compressors were located outside and had two air handlers - one in the garage and the other upstairs in the attic. Energy costs being a concern in this heat, we decided to install a Pensar load controller. This device mounts on the wall and contains a computer controller that will predict energy usage by hour and shed certain devices in the house. You can set a max KW peak limit and the device will not let the total usage in the house exceed that limit. It does this by predicting the usage of certain devices, like dryers, A/C compressors and ovens, and turning

them off and back on again as needed to stay within the limit. Its an ingenious device that pays for itself in the Arizona desert in 1 or 2 summers, depending on the size of your house, the amount of your large demand devices and the desired peak load. Our peaks differed between summer and winter and were about 2KW in winter and 4KW in summer. This device allows you to take advantage of a rate from the power company called ER-1 or EC-1. With this rate, you pay a small amount for KWH usage and a set rate for KW demand. We never had an electric bill in any summer over $150. This is very good for a house of this size in the Phoenix area. Some larger homes, say 3500-4500 sq ft, can have $300-500 monthly electric bills, especially if they are all electric homes. There were very few areas in Phoenix that had natural gas.

Another device on the same wall was the burgler alarm system. There are many different types ranging from window sensor to motion detectors. Because of the style of our house, we were able to put sensors on the doors only. Every room in the house had at least one door and the library, dining room and master bedroom had two doors. So, we put the sensors on each door (except for pantry, closets and stairway doors) and not any windows. The theory here was that if you keep all the main inside doors closed, when you arm the system, the alarm will go off when any door is opened. This way a burglar could enter any room downstairs (we assumed he would not carry a 12' ladder with him) and take anything from that room. The minute he opened a door to enter another room, the giant klaxon horn would be tripped that would awake the

entire neighborhood. This worked very well and only was tripped unintentionally a few times in 5 years and this was because we did not input the disarm code in fast enough. Or, we forgot that it was armed and decided to go in the back yard in the morning.

Chapter III

The lot that the house was built on was purchased several years before construction began. It was in a custom home subdivision 20 miles north of Phoenix and as it turned out, in a neighborhood that had an association that led to many, many problems for us. This will be discussed in great detail in a later chapter. We liked the location of the subdivision and happened to both work with the builders wife. It was a corner lot and was just a little more that 3/4 acre. We put a six foot block wall around the entire backyard and a small 3split rail fence around the front. The garage entrance faced east and the front of the house faced north. It is very important in Arizona to have a north facing house and the west side of the house covered with shrubs and trees, which we did. The late afternoon sun was brutal on an unprotected west side of a house. Ambient temperatures of up to 120 degrees can cause the inside of the west wall to reach 90 or more. Trees, shrubs and extra insulation in this wall prevented most of the heat transfer and kept the kitchen and parlor much cooler.

The Arizona heat was also a concern when we thought about the landscaping in both front and back yards. We knew we were going to have an abundance of trees and shrubs and they had to have plenty of water. The type of watering in this kind of heat must be slow deep watering, especially with citrus trees, so the landscaper installed water lines with low pressure drip heads to each. These were

controlled from a Genie zone watering control panel located in the garage.

The original idea was to have a circular driveway in front, but was ruled out because of subdivision rules prohibiting them. We instead, put pea gravel down in a circular with two small gates in the split rail fence for a walkway to both front doors.

We planted a mixture of Eldarica Pine, Flowering Pear and an Australian Willow trees. There were even twin Plum trees on each side of the front door. Most old houses we visited in the east all had a granite or limestone stoop at the front door entrance. Since it was cost prohibitive to do this, we contracted the landscaper to go to the nearest mountain (about 3 miles to the north) and search for a large rock with one flat side. In fact, we need two, because there was a front garage entrance with matching front doors. On both of these, I installed reproduction boot scrapers, which we had also seen back east. The rock at the front door was v-shaped and went over 4 ft. down into the ground. They both were put in place with a large front end loader.

The back yard seemed immense to us and we knew we were in for a lot of work to complete the landscaping. Since we liked the front very much, we decided to continue the theme to the back. Before we started work in the backyard, we had a backhoe come in and sculpture the dirt. The entire yard was sloped away from the house with a 3 ft. ditch running across the back about 10 ft. from the back wall. From the wall to the ditch the ground was sloped in the opposite direction. This would allow any rain

collected to run into the ditch and avoid large puddles or house flooding. The rains come very infrequent in Arizona, but sometimes come with a vengeance and its always safe to be prepared. Across this ditch, we built two small bridges from 8x8 railroad ties. There was a path laid out that rambled around the entire backyard area. Kathy then used our small pickup truck to haul river rocks, varying from 5-25 lbs each, from the nearby dry river beds and we placed them on both sides of the path. Along this path we installed outside lights about every 10-12 ft. alternating on both sides. Another idea we had seen in a magazine was a sitting area for viewing the stars at night. The back wall of the 6 ft. block fence had the dirt sloping to about 1/3 up the wall. In an area in the southwest corner, I cut out a small area into the bank of dirt.. This left a 4 ft. high vertical bank of dirt and to reinforce the wall, I built two stacks of 5 landscape timbers about 4 ft. high. At the top of each side of this structure I installed two pathway lamps. I then placed bricks down on the flat area and placed a small outdoor garden bench there. With the 14 ft. pine trees around, this made a very nice secluded area from which to sit quietly and star-gaze or just spend quality time together.

I rented a small ditch witch and dug all the lines for the watering system that matched the front. This, of course, meant that we had to layout where we wanted all trees and shrubs ahead of time. We ended up planting 10 Eldarica pines all in a row across the back. The first and second year Christmas trees were planted just off the patio and ended up being over 30 ft tall by the time we left. We had a small citrus grove back in the southeast corner with a

grapefruit, lemon, orange and Minneola tangelo. Later, we added another Australian Willow because the one in front was doing so well. There were also two apple trees beside the vegetable garden. We made applesauce from them one year they did so well. Several other trees were also planted over time, including 2 sycamores, 2 cottonwoods and several Chinese elms. The cottonwood trees also got to 30 ft before we left and were our favorites. The sycamores did not do well, with one eventually dying completely. I think it was just to hot and not enough water for them to survive.

We planned two garden areas, one fenced with 6 ft. wooden (what else) slats and rails and the other a split rail type. One garden contained herbs and the other vegetables. I built raised beds bordered with 2x12s in both gardens. To these gardens, I ran high pressure water lines that had multiple spray heads mounted on 4 posts. In this way we were able to get a mist effect and watered them several times a day. The vegetable garden had mostly swiss chard, tomatoes, radishes, carrots and squash. These things would take the heat better than other vegetables. The herb garden contained the standard rosemary, thyme, sage along with the more unusual lemon grass and curry plants.

We then contracted the original house framer to come in and build the frame for a small shed (10x12). I put up siding that was left over from the house and ran electricity to this shed from the garage for lights and power for the pathway lamps. I built wooden shutters on the 3 windows and reproduced a board and batten door from the ones in the house. The floor

in this garden shed was made with 2x4 boards spaces about an inch apart and about 18 in. above the ground. I built a small workbench inside for gardening work and if any dirt or compost was spilled on the floor, it was easily swept down onto the ground below. I also covered the roof with the same wood shakes that were on the house. We then painted it the same color as the house and it looked like a miniature version of the house. We like to referred to it as the garden house. We put a wooden bench in front of it with a Garden House sign above it. It looked almost as nice as the house.

A tradition we kept up was buying live Christmas trees and planting them somewhere on the property after each holiday. We planted the first one in Jan of 1991 and today it is well over 30' tall. There were two in the back yard and two in the front before we left in 1995. The patio area between the two back doors of the house was laid by hand by Kathy with 3x6 pavers on a bed of sand. The area was about 15 x 25 ft. and consisted of over 450 pavers. It was purposely not even and smooth, so as to give it a weathered old look. A month after it was installed it look 50 years old. On here was placed our patio furniture and a gas BBQ. We entertained often out here and got many compliments on the old brick patio.

Chapter IV

There were many, many things about this project that we really enjoyed doing together. Entertaining was highest among them. Every year at Christmas, we would decorate the house with pine bows, a tree in the library, wreaths and hospitality lights in the front windows and seasonal nick-knacks or wood and pewter all throughout the house. We had a standing invitation to our friends and all the people at Honeywell, where we both worked. There would always be at least 90-100 people through the house in the course of the evening. One of the things that many people really looked forward to was the homemade soup or stew and bread. The fireplace in the keeping room (the traditional name for family room) was very large with a swing-out crane for hanging pots. The opening size was about 7 ft across by 5 ft high. There were three hangers on the crane used for low, medium and high cooking temperatures. This crane was fashioned by a local Phoenix blacksmith and built especially for cooking. The best procedure to use for a party like this was to have the soup or beer stew precooked earlier in the day and just heated up in front of guests. Once I got the logs burning well, I would hang the black 12 gal kettle over the flames on the lowest hangar (highest heat), and in about 15-20 minutes it would be boiling. I would then move it to the highest hangar for simmering. The bake oven was on the right side of the opening and it had its own black cast iron door and separate 8 ft metal flue that went to the top of the 32 ft. chimney. I would transfer some of the red hot coals to the bottom of the bake oven, which was firebrick to hold

the heat. I had a wire rack setting on bricks that kept the pan of bread about 4 in. above the coals. In about 45-60 minutes the bread would be done. Sometimes I had to add more hot coals about half way through the cooking process. You did have to be careful about the amount of coals, as it was very easy to burn the bottom of the bread. When the bread was done, I would serve everybody a small plastic bowl of soup/stew and a chunk of bread, with wine or beer. It was very good and very popular! The rest of the food was laid out on the 7 ft. harvest table in the dining room for all to enjoy, including the baked pumpkin, assorted side dishes (mostly brought by guests) and the mulled cider.

Another feature that all guests looked forward to was the tours. Kathy and I would take turns about every 45 min taking a small group for a walking tour of both the inside and outside of the house. During these tours, we would find other guests in small groups just sitting and talking. They would be in every room, the basement and even outside on the patio. I even found a couple in the front yard, standing among the pine trees, enjoying the front view of the house (we had 5 over 4 windows and each one had a hospitality candle) and the stars...

One year we even dressed in Amish clothes and really played the part. I had homemade beer being served in the basement and most people brought a bottle of wine. In fact, some people that never went to social functions during the year always showed up at this party. One year we even had a contingency of Japanese engineers, here for computer training, show up and had a wonderful time. Many came just

for the social aspect, with so many people to visit. But, some came just to sit by a warm fireplace and sip mulled cider and enjoy the ambiance of the season. All in all, this was a very enjoyable evening for everyone and we always looked forward to this event.

Christmas wasn't the only time we gave tours of the house. Many times people would stop while driving by to take pictures and I would invite them in to see the inside. The most common response was ..its just like in my grandmothers house when I was growing up And, this was exactly the kind of feeling we were trying to convey. We wanted people that live out west to have the opportunity to see just how our 17th and 18th century forefathers lived, without having to take a trip to the east coast. The house was so unique and authentic that most people could not believe that it was sitting in the middle of the Sonora desert.

There is a home in Phoenix that was built around 1910 and is owned by the city today. It has been restored and is open to the public. It even has a group of docents that conduct tours on a regular basis. Since we had toured this home and talked to a couple of the docents, we decided that surley they would love to tour our home. We called them and arranged for all 7 of them to come out and have the grand 3 hour tour. We served them Syllabub (George Washington's favorite dessert) and they all enjoyed themselves immensely and were all amazed at what we had done.

We were published in several different newspapers and magazines. Another funny story I must tell is how the house became featured in the Worcester, Mass Sunday paper. One day I got a call from someone who lived in Sun City, a retirement community about 10 miles away. They said they were visiting their parents and saw the article about our house in the local newspaper that past Sunday. The woman continued to explain that she worked for the newspaper in Worcester and thought the editor would be interested in doing an article on the house. The local article had mentioned that we had purchased some things from Sturbridge Village in Mass and this was close to them. So, after several telephone interviews, the article was printed one Sunday in the Worcester Telegram and we were sent several copies. The outside picture we sent them just happened to have a small amount of snow on the ground (very rare in Phoenix) and I'm sure that most people did not believe that this house was really in the desert southwest.

As I mentioned earlier, there were problems owning this type of house in the area and not everybody liked it. The problems really started during the construction phase of the house, albeit, too late to do much about them. Apparently some of the neighbors in the association got together and decided that they did not like the style of the house. Even though the contractor assured us that the curb appeal of the house was considered, the neighbors wanted it changed. There were some people that had previous problems with our builder before we started building and this may have played a large part in the dissension. Originally, our contractor had applied for

a waiver because of the block, brick or stucco requirement in the association rules. Once this was acquired, he gave final approval for construction to begin.

The neighbors got together and decided to sue the builder, contractor and us for damages. They wanted either removal of the house or compensation for what they claimed was their loss of property value Things then became ugly. And this senseless lawsuit broiled for the next two years in the courts. There were neighborhood confrontations, bickering, harassment and a general dislike for each other during this time. It seems as though everybody was looking for something to pin on somebody else in an effort to not look too bad. Just about every property had some form of association rule breakage, some worse than others. But, they all thought our house was worse than any other infringement. They actually wanted us to tear down our dream house and replace it with a white stucco box with a red tile roof. We vowed to fight to the end!

As it turned out, after a long 25 months of litigation, the neighbors lost the lawsuit. And, on top of that, had to pay our attorney fees to the tune of $5000 each. In the two years that followed the settlement, 3 of the original 6 were divorced and 5 of the 6 had moved out of the neighborhood. We were elated, of course, and would be there today if not for losing our main source of income through a lack of work with my employer. So, a word to the warning: before you spend months and months of investigation, design and building of your dream house, check the area for a neighborhood association. If there is one, get a

copy of the bylaws or association rules and have an attorney read them. Then talk with every one of the neighbors and explain in detail what kind of a house you are building, showing pictures of similar ones. This experience soured us so much, that we will never design and build another house.

Chapter V

There are other things that should be mentioned here that made it difficult to build and live in this type of house in the desert. The problems are many-fold. The main thing we tried to do was reproduce the look of a saltbox style house based on the many homes we toured in New England. This type of architecture does not lend itself to the many environmental issues in the desert climate. First of all, the entire house, inside and outside, was made of wood. Even the 27 Marvin windows were clad covered wood sash. All the floors, stairs and doors were wood. Cupboards, counter tops, pantry and appliance coverings were wood. There are many things to consider when laying down 3000 sq. ft of Eastern white pine flooring and expecting it to last more that a year or two. The cedar siding was 6 in. overlap from Washington state. The roof was cedar shakes acquired locally. All this outside wood had to be protected, stained and painted. We used the best Benjamin Moore 5-year stain we could buy. It was very expensive to purchase and very time consuming to apply. Luckily, my brother was a commercial painter, had a spray rig and lived in town. Some of the other problems we encountered in the short 6 months of construction are explained here:

- Stick framing is a must now days. The idea of a crew coming in to do post and beam is extremely cost prohibitive.

- City building codes to do not lend themselves to the narrow winding stairs that were prevalent in the old colonial homes.

- Rumford style fireplaces and cooking fireplaces are just now being considered in the U.S. Boca codes. They were a novelty in 1990 and not understood.

- If you don't have a full basement foundation, the you must use slab on grate and this leads to problems when laying ¾ in. pine flooring that is up to 23 in. wide!

- Board and Batten doors are not accepted by any city fire department as worthy

- Railings on stairs are code, but are not in keeping with the traditional stairways of the old houses. They have to be removed after inspection.

- Basements have all kinds of ingress/egress rules that add to the costs. And, in order to be considered part of the square footage of living space, must have electrical outlets and heating and A/C vents. The days of root and wine cellars are long gone.

- Detached garages are also a thing of the past. It is a very expensive proposition today.

- In order to reproduce the look of plaster walls, you must find someone that does smooth walls at no extra charge. No rounded corners, canned ceiling lights and several electrical switches in every room.

- Getting the standard door hardware and the pre-drilled round holes eliminated from all doors was difficult. This was needed for our custom thumb-latch door handles.

- Finding a finish carpenter to build an old fashioned pantry with ceiling to floor shelves was also a chore.

- The very idea of **no** formica counter tops and built-in bathroom vanities, lights and monster mirrors is foreign to most modern builders!

- A large walk-in closet with plenty of shelf space is a very expensive custom option. Most builders want to hire a closet company to install wire racks.

- Finding a plumber that knew how to install old claw foot tubs and pedestal lavs was not easy. The first two plumbers whined a lot.

- Mirrors, mirrors, mirrors seems to be the newest game in town. The old colonial homes didn't have any at all. A concept not widely accepted today.

- Air conditioning vents and return air ducts are very unsightly when trying to reproduce a 100 year old ambiance!

- Push button light switches in Victorian bedrooms were not too difficult, but touch-on tin hanging lights (to eliminate more wall switches) presented a major problem for the first couple of electricians.

All in all, I would encourage you very strongly to consider all of these things and more before deciding

to build a colonial or Victorian reproduction anyplace west of the Mississippi River. You might very well run into some of the same problems we did, especially if its in a desert southwestern city of any size. You might be better off, if possible, to find a 100 year old house and remodel.

Chapter VI

This may seem like a lot of problems for one house, but most, if not all, of them were resolved or worked around. You must be very persistent and tactful when dealing with trades people, builders and contractors. Ideally, if you could do all the construction on your own and just sub-contract out the specialty people, like the blacksmith and landscape architect, you would be much better off in the long run. Unfortunately, we do not have these skills, both being in computers for many, many years.

Energy is another area that you must consider. We made the mistake of starting construction in February and finishing at the end of July. The part of the construction that we could do ourselves, painting, cleanup and laying the floors, all came at the END of the cycle. Thus, it was at least 100 degrees IN the house the entire time we were doing our part. This takes a lot of energy to work every night after an 8-hour day and every weekend. We probably should have started construction in September and finished up in February or March. Winters in Phoenix are mild enough to allow this type of schedule. If you are in a cold climate, spring is more than likely the best start time.

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