IDENTITY THROUGH DETAIL: ARCHITECTURE AND CULTURAL ASPIRATION IN MONTAGU, SOUTH AFRICA, 1850—1915

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The anthropologist Robert Thornton has suggested that tradition and culture are used by groups within a society to create identity and status boundaries. Such activity occurred in the development of the South African colonial town of Montagu. By the mid-nineteenth century the small-farmer elite of the area had marked out a clear status hierarchy on the landscape through the form of their residential architecture. This architecture relied on British patterns of space making and British-inspired systems of detail that connoted the concept of progress that was important to their self-image. But the architectural symbolisms chosen by this first generation represented only a transitional phase in the overall development of the architectural form of the town. As Montagu changed from an agricultural settlement to a more complex town by the end of the century, old symbolisms were replaced by a new order whose distinctions were more subtle. This new order, which was influenced by much more far-reaching architectural developments, in many ways represented an inversion of the previous tradition. In the case of both styles, however, the deployment of architectural form in the interest of social boundaries involved both “basic form” and “style and detail,” a pattern described elsewhere in the work of Henry Glassie.

This paper studies the architecture and cultural landscape of a settlement called Montagu located about 200 kilometers north of Cape Town in South Africa. It argues that two phases can be identified in the urban history of the town. During the first, from 1850 to about 1885, Montagu was primarily an agricultural settlement; during the second, it acquired more complex commercial and industrial functions and a correspondingly more complex social structure. In each phase a distinctive and
different architectural system was developed, with different building types and details. The paper concentrates mainly on the first phase, when local ideas from eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century traditions of urban and rural building were combined with British-inspired practices to accommodate and represent the new form of social organization and the new cultural aspirations of village residents.

We begin by establishing the context for Montagu's early buildings. The paper discusses the urban history and urban form of the settlement and the range of building types which it originally contained. Following the theories of anthropologist Robert Thornton, we argue that tradition and culture should be seen as resources which can be used to create boundaries and identity. We show how the interaction of traditional and imported types, technologies, space arrangements, and details in Montagu's buildings contributed to the definition of status boundaries. We then illustrate, referring particularly to high-status houses, how English-influenced concepts of spatial arrangement and English detailing changed the character of local building. We argue that "Englishness" in architecture came to represent the idea of progress, which had recently emerged as an explicit discursive concept in the farming sector. We then briefly contrast the characteristics of pre-and post-1885 architecture in Montagu to illustrate the complete transformation of the architectural system that accompanied its change from an agricultural settlement to a town.

THE ORIGINS, FUNCTIONS AND POPULATION OF EARLY MONTAGU

As late as the end of the first decade of the nineteenth-century colonial settlement at the Cape had produced no more than four tiny villages outside Cape Town. Fifty years later, however, the landscape of settlement had been transformed by the appearance of the country dorp. From about 1820 onwards, and particularly between 1830 and 1860, large numbers of gridiron settlements were established, spaced at regular intervals throughout the Cape countryside.

The first problem which confronts a would-be analyst of the buildings in these settlements is that the historical context of their construction is far from clear. Although the 42 "municipalities and villages" enumerated in the 1865 census are often recognized to have been among the first signs on the land of far-reaching social and economic change, historians have paid relatively little attention to the processes that brought them into being, or to the composition of their populations, their functions, and their character. Assumptions have been made, but in the case of Montagu these are difficult to reconcile either with the documentary or the material evidence.

Among architectural historians, the construction of churches in rural Cape farming communities is often cited as the most important cause of their urban development. Once churches were built, or so the argument goes, the regular weekly patronage of churchgoing farmers provided the opportunity for commercial expansion. Alternatively, social historians and cultural geographers have suggested that what the growth of Cape villages and towns primarily reflected was the spread of commerce to the countryside. These proposals contain a common thread: both assume that from the moment settlements began to appear, "urban" and "rural" could be clearly distinguished both functionally and environmentally.

Our research seems to indicate that this image of settlement is too simplistic. It also makes it impossible to explain the characteristic cultural landscapes of mid-nineteenth-century "urbanization." The case of Montagu suggests a different raison d'etre than those above, one which may not have been universal, but was certainly not unique. As in most nineteenth-century Cape settlements, the physical presence of the church in Montagu was commanding, and the church did play an important role in social, political, and even economic affairs. But the settlement was not established around a church built by local farmers; nor was it primarily a commercial center established around a nucleus of shops. Montagu came about through the agency of a speculator-farmer from the Wellington district, a certain D.S van der Merwe. The commodity which van der Merwe offered for sale when he subdivided a farm he bought for the purpose was agricultural land suitable for intensive cultivation of market-oriented agricultural products such as wine and dried fruit.

The success of van der Merwe's venture was due to demand which had arisen as a result of contemporary land shortages, price rises, and an increasing need for capital to farm competitively. All these factors reflected structural changes in the nature of agriculture in the western Cape which followed the emancipation of the slaves and the increasing absorption of farming into a developing capitalist economy. The result of these forces was that many aspiring young farmers could no longer acquire land in established arable areas and had to choose between cultivating a village erf (lot) or migrating to a stock farm on the distant frontier. Montagu thus began as a transitional form of settlement with a clear economic rationale based on commerce and agriculture, but where agriculture remained the predominant land use until about 1885.

Even though the colonial administration seems to have had no explicit rules governing the design of such settlements, the village was laid out according to a system that was so common it was well understood by local surveyors. The plan was ordered by three superimposed grids: a grid of roads, a cadastral
grid, and a grid of water (FIGS. 1, 2). The layout of the settlement was determined by the form of the best arable land, and particularly by the optimum distribution of water for irrigation from the perennial Bath River. The plan offered two types of lots. Some were served by a system of communal water furrows and were therefore suitable for cultivation; these so-called watererwe varied in size from one to about five acres. Others, above the line of irrigation, were smaller and were called droeerwe (dry lots); they were about a quarter of an acre in size and were probably intended for artisans and tuishuisie.

It has sometimes been suggested that there was little hierarchy in the social structure of the rural Cape before about 1890. On the one hand, it has been said, there were the dispossessed indigenous population and ex-slaves and their descendants, who lived in conditions of servitude and poverty. On the other, there was an egalitarian colonist society with little poverty and no class differentiation.

Village society was certainly dominated by white colonists, and the majority of the approximately 400 black people and “Hottentots” enumerated in Montagu by the 1875 census were agricultural laborers or domestic servants who did live in poverty. But Colin Bundy has shown that poverty in the villages was not restricted to black residents. Montagu no doubt had its share of unskilled navvies and landless poor whites forced to live in the village because they could no longer survive on farms.

Above these people on the economic ladder came clerks and artisans who owned a droeerf and farmers who worked a landholding just large enough to provide a living of sorts. But most of the wealth and power in the village was concentrated in the hands of small farmers with more substantial landholdings. This dominant group had come with van der Merwe from Wellington and in many cases were his relatives and friends. In the general context of Cape agriculture these people cannot be regarded as particularly wealthy, but in the small pond of village society they were the biggest fish. They served as the onderlinge (elders) and deacons (deacons) on the church committee. They became minor dignitaries, such as Justices of the Peace. Their children were educated in the church school, which offered an educational standard far better than the norm in rural areas. They owned much of the agricultural land, from which they derived substantial incomes. And they inhabited the largest buildings in the town.

BUILDING TYPES AND SOCIAL STATUS, 1850—1885

As Michael Steinecz has shown, fieldwork alone is not a reliable basis on which to reconstruct an architectural context: in Montagu, as in many places, the surviving buildings are mainly high-status houses. However, the full range of building types and their statistical distributions (at least in respect to size) can be reconstructed from documentary sources, comparisons with other villages, pictorial evidence, and the few simpler houses which survive.
The census of 1875, which enumerated buildings by number of rooms in every village and town in the colony, recorded 123 houses in Montagu. There were 12 houses with one room, 37 with two or three rooms, 37 with four or five rooms, 11 with six rooms, and 26 with more than six rooms. A similar picture of stratification is given by property tax records (FIG. 3). Overall, no surviving house belonging to the small-farmer elite originally had less than six rooms, and in 1865 no such house was valued at less than 400 pounds, although many were valued at more than 500 pounds. Even if the smaller droëverwe were excluded from consideration, this placed all houses belonging to the small-farmer elite within the top 27 percent (and most within the top 20 percent) of Montagu's buildings from the point of view of value, and the top 22 percent from the point of view of size.

All high-status houses in the village and on the farms in the surrounding district were one of three types, each adapted from themes current in Cape building for generations: either they were gabled houses with thatched roofs (FIGS. 4A, B), rectangular houses with thatched roofs (FIG. 4D), or double-storied, parapeted houses with flat roofs (FIG. 4C). The houses were usually associated with outbuildings for agricultural use, mainly wine cellars, and their plans were often the same irrespective of type. For the most part these were representative of the double-pile configuration typical of similar buildings of the period throughout the Breede River Valley.

The interiors of the houses were simply finished. Floors were generally boarded, although some had traditional peach-pip floors in the kitchen area. Some had reed ceilings, but most had boarded ceilings on exposed beams. The interior walls were plastered and lime-washed white, although a few had one special room that was wallpapered.

There was an intermediary category of buildings in the settlement that may be discerned from the census, second houses on landholdings. Two examples of these survive, each originally built for a son of a major landholder (they were unusual because they were attached to a wine cellar) (FIG. 4E). But by and large most people in the village lived in modest cottages. These were one room deep, usually with double-pitched, thatched roofs and gable ends (FIG. 4G), although they sometimes had flat roofs and parapets (FIG. 4F). Either form could be built with one, two, or three rooms in a row, or with a fourth room, usually a kitchen, added to form an "L." These buildings could have different dimensions: more substantial houses had an internal width of about 5.5 meters, but others were much narrower. A photograph of Montagu West taken in about 1915 shows a group of such houses which were obviously older than the photograph (FIG. 5). A few of these still remain. They had very modest interiors, their rooms were usually open to their thatched roofs, and their floors were probably of mud or cow dung.

There is now no trace of the twelve one-room houses which were listed in the 1885 census. Some were probably occupied by those described in the census as "Hottentots." Comparison can be made with nearby settlements, where one source described the typical dwellings of "the colored people" as "... pondoks, and rude huts covered in sods and soil, with merely the opening in the front which serves as the window and the door." Evidence of the presence of houses like these in Montagu, as well, is provided by a single cryptic reference in a newspaper.

**STATUS BOUNDARIES, 1850—1885**

One way of seeing tradition is as a resource which people use to make statements about themselves and their relationships to others. From this perspective, tradition and culture, as the anthropologist Robert Thornton has suggested, can be used to establish identity and to create the boundaries within which people live. Identity can be demarcated by several not entirely coincident boundaries, such as wealth, ethnic background, occupation, language, and color. Robert Ross has suggested that the most important of these in the mid-nineteenth-century Cape was wealth, more important, for instance, than ethnic background or even, in some respects, color. Status was, therefore, a function of economic standing and was a crucial dimension of boundary-making and identity.
As indicated by the diagrammatic sketches of Montagu houses in FIG. 4, the boundaries of status and wealth within the village were reflected in an architectural landscape that was far from egalitarian. There was a clear hierarchy of building, established in part by the obvious fact that some buildings were larger than others. But status hierarchy was also achieved by the existence of a more subtle range of conventions, the adherence to which ensured the visual dominance of the high-status buildings.

In principle, there are several ways in which an architectural system can accommodate economic difference. As Glassie has shown in his discussion of half and two-thirds Georgian houses, a small house can be built as though it were part of a larger house. The same building type can also be built in different sizes: a small house can thus be a large house which has been shrunk. A third option is for there to be altogether different types of houses for people of different economic levels. This approach would seem to be consistent with situations where social distance is great and is accepted by both rich and poor.

In early Montagu it was this last course which was followed. Neither building types nor systems of architectural detail crossed status boundaries. Although similar building techniques were used for houses on different status levels, plan
configurations were different, and modest buildings were marked from their more elaborate neighbors by different plaster and joinery details.

Other than the church, the dominant objects in the village landscape were the houses of the small-farmer elite. Simpler dwellings were readily distinguishable in every respect from these buildings, and even the dwellings of sons were distinguishable from those of fathers. The hierarchy of building in the village retained the clarity of relationships between buildings on the traditional farm opstal—main house, jonkershuis, laborers accommodation—each distinguished by characteristic features, each instantly recognizable.

**THE PERSISTENCE AND EVOLUTION OF TRADITIONAL FORMS IN HIGH-STATUS HOUSES, 1850—1885**

The smaller cottages in Montagu were built with a form and method of construction which had changed little since the early days of colonial settlement. However, the same was not the case with the high-status houses; in these, traditional characteristics were modified considerably by the impact of British taste.

In a major study of the interaction between British and local practices in the first half of the nineteenth century, Lewcock has suggested that two patterns can be identified in the architecture at the Cape, each with distinct geographical boundaries. In Cape Town and in most of the outlying towns, Lewcock found that a constantly regenerating British influence slowly overcame an increasingly moribund local tradition. There was already clear evidence by 1820 of increasing British influence in towns such as Swellendam and Graaff-Reinet, an influence that was pervasive by mid-century. On the other hand, Lewcock found eighteenth-century building methods persisted in small towns and farming districts and carried what he called the "old Cape architectural character" down almost to the present day.

These distinctions between large (outlying) town and small town/country district, and between local tradition and English practice, seem too rigid to us. First, it must be pointed out that, apart from Cape Town and the towns on the eastern frontier, even larger settlements than those cited by Lewcock retained their "Dutch" character until mid-century. In fact, until mid-century there was little difference at all between the cultural landscapes of small settlements and parts of larger towns. Second, when British ideas did have an impact on the larger outlying towns, many small villages, and even some farms, were affected at the same time in a similar way. In these
settlements many traditional features were retained, but the confrontation with British ideas did change the old Cape architectural character considerably. Why this should have happened at this time is a question we shall address shortly.

The characteristics of "Englishness" which were responsible for these changes can be illustrated by a late example of what is sometimes called "the Georgian model": the Zeederberg house in Paarl, built about 1850 (Fig. 6). Although this building was constructed for a "Dutch" doctor, it is an almost ideal statement of contemporary British taste in small-town architecture at the Cape. Apart from its symmetry, two stories, and double-pile plan (with the passage extending from front to back), its important features are as follows: the precise materials in its low-pitched, hipped roof, the pilasters at its corners, its cornice, the molding around its front door, the refined detailing and proportions of its doors and windows, its louvered shutters, and, particularly, the expression of materials used in its walls.

**THE OLD CAPE ARCHITECTURAL CHARACTER**

By way of contrast with this "English" model of a high-status residence, the old Cape architectural character had been the product of at least three particular "local" architectural features. The first of these was the distinctive block forms that had developed during the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries. During this period, pitched-roofed houses with front and side gables, and double-storied houses with flat roofs and parapets, had become the typical dwellings of the colonial elite on the wine and wheat farms and in Cape Town, respectively. In these places such houses had become well-established symbols of power and prosperity. Both building types were influenced by European practice, but neither had a direct parallel in Europe. A third type of residential structure, a simpler thatched-roofed house without gables, was also common; but in Montagu and the surrounding district several of the earliest farmhouses were gabled, and houses with front gables continued to be built until the late 1870s.

Double-storied houses with parapets only appeared in the Montagu area around the late 1850s (Fig. 7). In the country districts the traditional construction technique for a flat roof was the so-called *brakdak*, a rural version of the Cape Town method of using crushed brick on planking covered with a layer of plaster waterproofed with sea-shell lime or whale oil. In the rural version of this roofing method, round poles or sawn beams supported a layer of reeds on which a bed of puddled clay was laid. Roofs of this type were common in the Karoo,
the driest part of the Cape, but even there they were notorious for leaking. In the Montagu District it seems the advent of flat-roofed houses may have been delayed until technical problems associated with waterproofing could be solved by the introduction of corrugated iron sheeting shortly before 1860. By this time, ironically, double-storied houses in Cape Town were usually built with pitched roofs — flat roofs having passed out of fashion. But it seems flat roofs were revived in the country districts as a symbol of sophistication. In the first two decades after 1850 flat-roofed houses were far more common in country villages than houses like the Zeederberg house.

The second characteristic of the old Cape architectural style was a distinctive pattern of space arrangement. Before the arrival of the British at the Cape, the interiors of most high-status houses, both in town and in the countryside, were centered on the voorhuis and the agterhuis, the main reception room and the family living and dining room, respectively. These spaces occupied the central axis of a variety of plan configurations, most of which were one room deep.

In the Montagu District the original house on Uitvlugt had a “T” plan, as did the main house on Baden farm, built around 1835. The main house on the farm Rietvlei 11 had a late “H” plan. In the town, 20 Bath Street, dated 1854 on its gable, was built with a “T” plan (FIG. 8). But after 1850 most high-status houses in the Montagu District, both in the village and on surrounding farms, were built with plan forms two rooms deep. As is well known, two-room-deep plans predated the arrival of the English, and isolated examples were built throughout the first half of the nineteenth century. However, there seems to be little doubt that the widespread adoption of two-room-deep plans came in response to English criticism of traditional planning, particularly of entry directly into the voorhuis and of the inter-leading nature of rooms. The traditional arrangement was felt to offer too little privacy and to be inappropriate to the rituals of the social call that were so important to Victorian life. These rituals required a defined sequence of entry into the house and spaces that were correspondingly specialized and private from one another.
There were two typical variants of the two-room-deep plan. Each was symmetrical, and each had a passage or small entrance hall. In one form this passage or hall extended from front to back (FIG. 9). But in the more common variant it extended half the width of the house (FIG. 10). The former plan type was perhaps derived from double-storied precedents such as the Zeederberg house. It was the more radical innovation, because it completely disrupted the traditional interior organization of the house by shifting the main spaces off the central axis. This was probably the reason why it never became popular. The half-width passage plan, on the other hand, both addressed the problems of privacy and allowed a large central space to remain at the back of the house. The dining table could be placed here, and this room could still function in much the same way as the old *agterhuis*.

The third development contributing to the old Cape architectural character was the distinctive quality that architectural texture and surface took both inside and outside the old Cape house. In general this was the product of simplicity, understatement, and the use of locally available materials. These materials included mud-brick, mud plaster, thatch, reeds, round poles, wide yellowwood boards, and even peach pips. The character these materials gave to buildings was far removed from the qualities of classical precision that marked Georgian buildings. In the old style, elaboration of detail was restricted to a few telling places, and features of great refinement were often combined with features of great simplicity, even in the buildings of the wealthy. In particular, walls were treated as plain surfaces, with moldings and decoration only on gables and around the front door.

**CHANGES TO THE OLD CHARACTER**

After 1850 these qualities that had defined high-status houses at the Cape for many years were greatly modified, even in gabled houses, the type most solidly rooted in the local tradition. Traditional technology was in part retained: houses were still built with mud-brick walls; the poles of their thatched roofs were still sometimes fixed with wooden pegs and leather thongs; and some houses still had reed ceilings and peach-pip kitchen floors. But a range of new details borrowed from English practice were associated with these features, and they had a marked effect on the visual and tactile qualities of the houses.

The most obvious example of change came in the area of joinery, where the influence of the English pattern book, and sometimes even of the hand of English craftsmen, became evident (FIG. 11). However, English influence was not simply
FIG. 11. Front door of the Joubert house, 20 Bath Street, Montagu. It is an eight-panel door with a semicircular fanlight and molded plaster surround. The lower panels are reeded, as are the verticals of the frame.

A question of available skills, because plaster details were used that radically modified the architectural language of the wall in spite of the fact that village plasterers, unlike village carpenters, were not usually English. By the mid-1830s in the larger centers, the taste for unornamented walls, which English-influenced buildings initially shared with the local tradition, had given way to a trend toward increased articulation of surfaces with robust moldings and rustication. By the mid-century this tendency spread to the smaller villages, and plaster details of this kind began to appear even on gabled buildings. Some examples in the Montagu district are the Malherbe house, with its heavy pilasters extending across the entire facade, and Klaasvoogdsrivier 11, with deeply incised rustication on its gable window surrounds and quoins (FIG. 12). The extent to which details such as these transformed the old Cape architectural character can be gauged if one compares them to details of Montagu buildings which remained closer to the local tradition. Among these, one can note the Joubert houses in Long and Bath Streets, both of which have English joinery but more traditional treatments of wall surfaces (FIG. 13).

In light of this analysis, it is difficult to agree with Lewcock that the old Cape character continued little changed in villages and on farms. After 1850 traditional elements such as gables were retained, but in buildings with new plan configurations; traditional technology was still used, but as a supplement to other building methods; and traditional block forms and technology were still evident, but in combination with British patterns of space making and British-inspired systems of detail.

The result was an ambiguous hybrid architecture that resists clear stylistic categorization. This ambiguity was characteristic of all standard house types, even gabled houses. But it was particularly marked in the case of rectangular houses. If a thatched roof were combined with walls that were plain rather
than articulated, a rectangular house of striking traditional character could be obtained (FIG. 14A). On the other hand, the rectangular shape could accommodate detail features like pilasters, plaster moldings, and rustication that could create a convincing “English” character. One such example, 24 Bath Street, had heavy pilasters and rusticated corners, plaster moldings around the windows, and a very up-to-date and superbly made round-headed, two-panelled, vertically divided door—a feature quite different from the eight-panelled doors that were usual in most other Montagu houses of the period (FIG. 14B). Rectangular houses, therefore, could be read in two ways: as gabled houses without a gable, related to the local tradition; or as double-story houses without a second story, related to English practice. Either connotation could be given by the combination of forms and details used.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF “ENGLISHNESS”

The rapid spread of English-inspired plan forms and details in village buildings after 1850 seems less the slow overcoming of a moribund tradition than the rapid abandoning of a self-image that had become obsolete. As Thornton points out, one of the important ways that people make statements about identity is by making choices from the cultural resources available to them. The obvious question, therefore, is what kind of statements about identity did the trend toward “Englishness” in Montagu architecture signal?

Colin Bundy has identified the emergence of what can be called a discourse of progress among farmers in the mid-nineteenth-century Cape. As he points out, there was a distinction, endlessly repeated in newspapers, diaries, and the Blue Books of the Cape Colony, between “progressive” and “traditional” farmers. The former were those who consolidated large farms, built dams and irrigation systems, and bought agricultural machinery. They were opposed to unproductive boers, who were unwilling to abandon outdated practices.

To some extent, this was an English discourse which did not recognize differences in economic opportunity, and it can also be seen as a description of those who had no access to capital by those who did. Jingoistic overtones were certainly strong in writing about mid-nineteenth-century village life by those English people who considered themselves the bearers of modernity and progress in the form of the market economy. To these commentators, the English house represented civilization. However, it is also clear that many “Dutch” people responded to this distinction between modernity and conservatism, particularly the so-called “Cape Dutch” who were likely to be absorbed into mainstream English society from 1850—1880. The partnership between “Dutch” agriculture...
and English commerce on which the village economy was based was enthusiastically supported by Montagu's small farmers, who were very much in favor of the change and of "progress," which their own economic activities as small farmers, shopkeepers, and hotel keepers reflected.

It is thus apparent that by appropriating English architectural forms, the villagers were not abandoning a firmly established cultural identity. According to recent writing by social historians, a specific Dutch/Afrikaner ethnic identity was not constructed until the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Before then, distinctions between well-off "Dutch" and English were less marked than between wealthy and poor "Dutch." This latter distinction was even marked by language: better-off farmers spoke a relatively pure form of Dutch, while many poor whites spoke one of a variety of vernacular dialects assembled from Dutch, Khoikhoi, and the various languages of ex-slaves.

It was not until this discourse of progress became evident in the farming sector that the local tradition of building in the rural areas was much modified by the impact of British taste. Thus, "Englishness" in architecture also seems to have come to represent the urbanity and progress on which "Dutch" village residents believed their future depended.

However, there was a curious twist to the meanings that architectural traditions seem to have had. Some English residents in country settlements such as Montagu admired the character of the local vernacular. What they admired was not "Dutch" planning, which they often explicitly condemned, but the aesthetic character of the "Dutch" village. They admired it because it represented a romantic alternative to the industrialized England from which they had escaped. They preferred the picturesqueness of white walls, gables, and thatch to what they sometimes saw as the mechanistic precision of contemporary architectural models in their own culture. To "Dutch" village residents, however, such romanticism must have been incomprehensible.

**TRANSFORMATIONS, 1885—1915**

The buildings of the Montagu District illustrate how rural and small-town architecture was transformed between 1850 and 1885 by the interaction between local and British building types, ways of organizing space, technologies, and details. However, the architectural system which developed from this interaction accommodated and represented what was to be a transitional and short-lived village economy and social organization. The development of intensive agriculture in Montagu was just one reflection of the spread of capitalism to the rural areas at the Cape. After about 1880 or 1885 more extensive commerce and industry began to develop as well, and when this happened, it brought a new transformation of the cultural landscape.

Once the process of acquiring urban institutions, urban services, and a genuinely urban landscape began, it gathered momentum rapidly. By the turn of the century Montagu was no longer an agricultural settlement, but merely a town in which agriculture was still practiced. Consideration in detail of all aspects of this phase of Montagu's development is beyond the scope of this paper. However, for the purpose of contrast, we do propose to discuss the changes which occurred to the system of building types and detail.

Prior to 1885 the architectural system in the village had three characteristic features. All of these were literally inverted in the period 1885—1915. It is first possible to speak about the village architecture before 1885 as a regional vernacular inspired mainly by rural models: the buildings in the village were of the same types as those on farms in the district, they accommodated the same functions, and they were arranged on the land in similar ways. But after 1885 the impetus for new building styles came from Cape Town and beyond, as national and even international design ideas and imported components made their presence felt. In most cases these ideas and products no longer provided for agricultural functions. Buildings came to be placed on their sites in one of two ways: high-status houses were placed freestanding, set back within their lots in typical suburban fashion, while smaller buildings were more tightly spaced, and were arranged hard-up on the street. Each of these arrangements produced a new type of streetscape.

The second feature of Montagu's architecture that was changed after about 1885 concerned the apparent hierarchy of the buildings. Before 1885 neither architectural types nor details crossed status boundaries, but after 1885 this situation became much less obvious, and the distinctions between types became more subtle. The new building types reflected the common Victorian distinction between house and cottage, between the "well planned and commodious homes for the more prosperous, . . . [and] the cottage of all shapes for the generality." Tacit prohibitions that had maintained the visual distinction between earlier buildings of different status levels seem to have disappeared.

A few houses continued to take the double-storied, parapeted form — with some new features such as cast-iron verandahs and off-the-shelf joinery, but with the two-room-deep plans more characteristic of the period 1850—1870 (FIGS. 15A, 16).
However, the vast majority of new high-status houses took a form which Cape Victorians described as the "villa" (FIGS. 15B, 17). These were suburban houses which usually had asymmetrical plans, asymmetrical gables, and verandahs — houses similar to those found throughout the British colonial world. They retained nothing of traditional forms, technology, space arrangements, or detail.

Some smaller and more modest houses were built with the same external forms as villas but different plan configurations (FIG. 15C). From the late 1880s and early 1890s, off-the-shelf components such as windows, doors, timber fretwork, and cast iron became available. These provided relatively cheap ways to reflect aspirations other than the reality of social and economic position, and their availability led to the possibility that simple cottages could share similar design features with large buildings. For example, an elaborate verandah could give even a simple rectangular house considerable presence (FIG. 18). The result of this sharing of detail was that visual distinctions between houses became blurred.

The third characteristic change in the architecture of the village after 1885 was the increased range of choice in the design of modest houses and the concurrent restriction of options in the design of high-status houses. Almost every high-status house after 1885 was a so-called villa, built for professionals or merchants — in some cases the children of the original small farmers of the area, who considered the houses they had grown up in inappropriate for their new urban lifestyle in which agriculture played no part.

Inversely, village residents at the lower end of the economic spectrum were now presented with a much greater range of choice in dwelling type. Traditional forms remained a part of the urban landscape: the cottage with a thatched, double-pitched roof, typical of modest buildings before 1885, did
continue to be built; and single-storied, flat-roofed houses with parapets became even more common, continuing to be built until about 1930. But the most usual form that the small house now took was the typical colonial cottage with a corrugated iron roof either with hips or clipped side gables and a verandah (FIG. 15F). Such houses were thought of as "modern." 46

The plans of these houses illustrate two distinct patterns of space making, one which followed mid-nineteenth-century organization and another that departed from it. A plan often taken to be typical of turn-of-the-century cottage design is illustrated in FIG. 19C. Like the plans of most villas, it was asymmetrical, and it usually had four rooms: a kitchen, a living room, and two bedrooms. Such a plan could be used to achieve a variety of three-dimensional forms, including those with either flat or pitched roofs. With the minor modification of a front room (FIG. 19B), an asymmetrical exterior could alternatively be achieved. While this form departed from mid-nineteenth-century models, a number of house plans did still perpetuate the distinctive symmetrical pattern of space arrangement that had emerged in high-status houses four decades earlier (FIG. 19A).

Just as had once been the case with high-status houses, a
spectrum of expression was now created for modest houses between local traditional forms and the forms of "modernity." Unlike those who lived in villas, many of the people who occupied cottages were new to the town. They were people who had previously been *putters* (sharecroppers) or who had owned small farms that were no longer economical. When they came to the town for the first time they continued to use traditional models.

**BUILT ENVIRONMENT AND SOCIAL REALITY**

In the context of mid-nineteenth-century “urbanization” at the Cape, distinctions between urban and rural, and between large town and small town/country district, do not always hold up. Towns and villages such as Montagu were initially part of the same world as the farmland within which they were located. They housed similar buildings, accommodated similar functions, and were the sites of similar social conflicts.

At first these settlements were transitional in form, predominantly agricultural and part commercial. Their buildings reflected this ambiguity, as builders employed resources from both the local tradition and English colonial practice to demarcate boundaries of social status and create a range of connotations, from the “progressive” associations of “Englishness” to the “conservatism” of unmodified local tradition. When this context changed after about 1885, the system of representation changed with it.

We believe our discussion has shown some of the ways the built environment can configure changing social realities by drawing on tradition and culture. We think that in such a discussion all aspects of building are potentially significant and should be taken into account — be they types, technology, space configurations, or style of detail.

Subsequent to the work of Henry Glassie, studies of vernacular architecture commonly accepted a dichotomy between “basic form” and “style and detail,” between structure and mere surface, between the concern of the analyst of culture and the concern of the art historian. However, if Thornton’s point is accepted and tradition and culture are viewed as resources with which to create identities and establish boundaries, then this dichotomy must be called into question. Cultural resources obviously include “basic forms,” but they also include the systems of detail from which the visual and tactile qualities of buildings are largely derived. It would seem to be obvious that these qualities cannot be excluded from a discussion of identity making. As recent studies of Palladio have pointed out, buildings are experienced as real sensual objects, not as pale reflections of abstract ideas or as geometric impositions on the subconscious mind.
The University of Cape Town rejects racism and racial segregation and strives to maintain a strong tradition of non-discrimination in regard to race, religion and gender in the constitution of its student body, in the selection and promotion of its staff, and in its administration.

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1. The largest, Stellenbosch, contained a mere 70 houses; the smallest, Graaf-Reinet, was just a single street of mud hovels.
4. See A. Mabin, The Making of Colonial Capitalism: Intensification and Expansion in the Economic Geography of the Cape Colony, S.A., 1854—1899 (Ph.D. thesis, Simon Fraser University, 1984), p. 63. See also H. Ross, “The Origins of Capitalist Agriculture at the Cape,” in W. Beinart, et al., eds., Putting a Plough to the Ground (Johannesburg: Ravan Press, 1986), pp. 64—65. The argument Ross makes about the number of people in commercial occupations in the villages is misleading. Using data from the 1865 census, he claims that more than three-quarters of the 4,000 people employed in commerce were living outside Cape Town, with the great majority scattered throughout the towns and villages. However, Appendix table IX of G-20 1866 gives the total number of people employed in commerce as 3,927. Of these, 1,514 were in Cape Town, 729 were in suburbs which are today part of Cape Town, and 386 were in Paarl and Stellenbosch. Thus, only 33 percent (not 75 percent) could be described as scattered. Moreover, many of these 33 percent did not live in towns or villages. Even in 1875, 24 percent of shopkeepers and 36 percent of traders lived outside towns and villages. “Census of the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, 1875” (Appendix 1, Vol. II: Votes and Proceedings of Parliament, 1877), p. 204.
5. Other settlements with similar landscape characteristics include Prince Albert, Oudshoorn, pares of Graaff-Reinet, and Murraysburg.
6. A review in detail of the evidence for this assertion is beyond the scope of this paper, but it is set out in D. and V. Japha, “The Landscape and Architecture of Montagu, 1850—1915” (Occasional Publication Series, UCT School of Architecture and Planning, forthcoming).
7. Montagu was laid out in two general plans, the first in 1820 and the second in 1834, by surveyors Arnott and Kannemeyer, respectively. SG Ml and M23.
8. Tuishuise were town houses owned by farmers from the surrounding district. They were used when attending church services and communion.
9. Race classification in nineteenth-century South Africa was no less arbitrary a bureaucratic exercise than today. It is far from clear that all the people described in the census as “Hottentots” would have seen themselves as such.
10. The total population was 1,176. See “Census of the Colony, 1875,” p. 15.
11. Bundy, for instance, has suggested that from the middle of the century landlessness and poverty were already prevalent among both white and black people on farms and in the villages. C. Bundy, “Vagabond Hollanders and Runaway Englishmen,” in Beinart, et al., Plough to Ground, p. 104. This suggestion is supported by the range of house sizes recorded in the census return for 1875 for Montagu, reflecting a considerable degree of social stratification in the village. See “Census of the Colony, 1875,” p. 14—15.
12. Their presence in the village is well recorded in death notices, wills, and rates records. For example, David Rattray and Henry Hammond were bookkeepers, as shown in Cape Archives (hereafter CA) MOOC 6/9/320 1867, and CA MOOC 6/9/137 1866. Diederik Pallas was a clerk (CA MOOC 69568 1022). Robert Anderson and William Ashford were carpenters (CA MOOC 6/9/616 1856, and CA MOOC 7/1/188 144). The 1885 rates book shows that many people held watererven of one acre or smaller (CA 488V 7601).
13. P. G. J., “Het Ontstaan van Montagu,” Kerkhoeke Kersmommer, 1921, p. 91. It is important to note that economic independence of each married couple was an important aspect of the “Dutch” concept of the family.
14. P. J. Joubert, the brother in law of D.S. van der Merwe, held this office in Montagu.
15. Many of them consolidated large properties by buying several of the approximately half-morgen (one acre) erven on offer at the first sale. In 1865 F.D. Du Toit, for instance, owned 36 acres within the village boundaries; P.G. Joubert, Sr., and son P.G. Joubert, Jr., owned about 20 acres; Gideon Malherbe owned 8 acres; J.H. van der Merwe owned 7 acres; F. Coks owned 6 acres; and Jacobus Rossouw owned 5

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acres (information compiled from Montagu Rates Book, see CA 3MTU 7/625). Contemporary reports refer to profits of between 50 and 150 pounds per acre per annum from village erven under vines. An artisan in the building trades — even in the unlikely event he worked 210 days a year — could only expect an annual income of about 65 pounds. Even small village erven were, therefore, competitive income producers. Those with larger landholdings were even more well-off.

18. The buildings were built by the brothers-in-law F. du Toit and P. Joubert.

19. The single-storied, paspered house had its origins in eighteenth-century Cape Town and became very common in Karoo towns like Graaff-Reinet in the mid- and late-nineteenth century. In Montagu the form was probably not used much until perhaps 1890 when rapid urbanization began to occur.

20. Montagu West was originally known as the Veldschœndorper, a name that cannot be translated literally but which implies that people could only afford homemade shoes. It was first settled in 1854 by the agricultural laborers who worked in the vineyards.

21. Anon., "The Dwellings of the Poor," Overberg Courant (Feb. 6, 1860). How many of these structures there were in Montagu is impossible to determine.

22. Anon., Cape Monitor (Sept. 1, 1853).


24. For instance, Lady Anne Barnard, writing in November 1797 about a visit to Stellenbosch, commented with approval on the house of the Landdrost. Unlike every Dutch house in the Colony, she wrote, it had "a sort of second floor of rooms behind the first," a fact which in her eyes made it "more airy and spacious" than other houses. A. Barnard, South Africa a Century Ago: Letters Written From the Cape of Good Hope 1797-1801. (London: Smiths, Elder and Co., 1901), p. 111.

25. Mooide, in discussing his brother's eighteenth-century "Dutch" style house near Swellendam, complained about the lack of privacy in Cape farmers' houses. Because the house "did not suit [his] brothers habits," he had erected a partition to separate the living quarters from the domain of the servants and the noise and smell of the kitchen. J. Mooide, Ten Years in South Africa Vol. I. (London: Richard Bentley, 1853), p. 103.

26. Two English immigrant carpenters in Montagu were William Ashford and Robert Anderson, both of whom died in the mid-1860s (CA MOOC 7/1/184 144, and CA MOOC 6/9/116 2865).


29. For instance, when the governor, Sir Philip Wodehouse, visited the village in 1862, they erected a series of arches across the road with the motto "Trade and Commerce through the Cogmanskloof" (the pass leading to Montagu), "Commercial Prosperity," and "Agriculture and Commerce," Overberg Courant (Nov. 26, 1862).


32. In the rates evaluations for 1915 these villas were typically among the highest taxed of properties with valuations between 600 and 950 pounds, which was often as much as 100-200 percent higher than the rates values for smaller houses on similar adjacent sites (CA 3MTU 7/625).

33. Proper country retreats were built near Cape Town throughout the nineteenth century, but the term was also used to refer to freestanding suburban houses such as those in Montagu.

34. Perhaps the best illustration of the changes in ways of life that they accommodated is in the design of their kitchens. The kitchen in an elaborate villa may have been, as Mrs. Betton put it, "the great laboratory of the household," on which its social accomplishments and domestic satisfactions were thought to depend. But in principle the kitchen became a space populated by servants who now had to perform their functions out of the eye of the household, with as little noise and smell as possible. In the earlier houses the kitchen was a space like other spaces, finished in the same materials and thoroughly integrated into the plan. It was a space where the small farmer's wife and children could, for instance, apply the ingenuity for which they were renowned to the making of preserves and pickles. It was also a space where the family sometimes would sit.

35. In the largest villas, on the other hand, the kitchen was a space apart from the rest of the house, finished in Spartan materials, designed to be supervised rather than inhabited by the owner's family.

36. Some examples are the houses of the merchant Joubert and the lawyer Van Zyl.

37. For example, "... we have the cottage ... bearing the impress of being thoroughly modern by its iron roof and veranda." W. Llewellyn, as quoted in Anon., "Coolness of our Dwellings," p. 152.