

**HOMEMADE MAGIC:  
CONCEALED DEPOSITS IN ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXTS  
IN THE EASTERN UNITED STATES**

**A THESIS  
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE SCHOOL  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS  
FOR THE DEGREE**

**MASTER OF ARTS IN ANTHROPOLOGY**

**BY**

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**MUNCIE, INDIANA**

**DECEMBER 2012**

## **ABSTRACT**

**THESIS:** Homemade Magic: Concealed Deposits in Architectural Contexts in the Eastern United States

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**DEGREE:** Master of Arts in Anthropology

**COLLEGE:** College of Sciences and Humanities

**DATE:** December 2012

**PAGES:** 473

The tradition of placing objects and symbols within, under, on, and around buildings for supernatural protection and good luck, as an act of formal or informal consecration, or as an element of other magico-religious or mundane ritual, has been documented throughout the world. This thesis examines the material culture of magic and folk ritual in the eastern United States, focusing on objects deliberately concealed within and around standing structures. While a wide range of objects and symbols are considered, in-depth analysis focuses on three artifact types: witch bottles, concealed footwear, and concealed cats. This thesis examines the European origins of ritual concealments, their transmission to North America, and their continuation into the modern era. It also explores how culturally derived cognitive frameworks, including cosmology, religion, ideology, and worldview, as well as the concepts of family and household, may have influenced or encouraged the use of ritual concealments among certain groups.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis truly would not have been possible without the continuous love and encouragement of my family, especially my amazingly supportive parents, Michael and Mary Manning, and my sister, Becca, my rock, who's always there when I need her, night or day. Most of all, this thesis is dedicated to Spencer, who has put up with so much and yet still remains smiling. I also owe a big debt of gratitude to my incredible friends and church family who have supported me in every way possible. Thank you, Laura and Jeff, Markie and Eleanor, Kristina, Mary, Nina, Carol and Phil, Bea and Lynn, Crystal and Eric, and everyone else who has been there to cheer me on and lift me up. It means so much to me.

I would also like to thank the members of my committee for their guidance and suggestions, for pushing me to explore new avenues of investigation, and for providing constructive feedback. I especially want to thank my advisor, Dr. Mark Groover, for suggesting I do a little research on house spirits.

And lastly, I would like to express my appreciation to the many colleagues who assisted me during my research, fielding questions, listening to my ideas, helping me track down obscure sources, and alerting me to new finds. This list could go on forever, but I would like to especially thank Ian Evans and Megan Springate for their continuing intellectual and emotional support. I would also like to thank Jessica Geisler Costello,

Timothy Easton, D. A. Saguto, C. Riley Augé, Brian Hoggard, Chris Woodyard, and many, many others for their assistance. And last but not least, I want to say thanks to Shirely Bateson for her research on “Frank’s Shoe,” which initiated my own interest in ritual concealments.

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## **Chapter 1: Introduction**

In 2003, while completing renovations on the Carnegie Library in Muncie, Indiana, a man's worn leather boot was found concealed on a ledge behind a gas fireplace mantle. Inside the boot was a short note giving the name of a workman who helped erect the structure in 1903. According to a local newspaper article, the hidden boot was part of a folk ritual whereby "leaving a shoe in the wall of a building was believed to help hold it together and protect those within it from harm" (Carlson 2003). This single boot launched the author's research into what are commonly known as concealed shoes, or concealment shoes, which consequently led to research on other artifacts hidden within or around buildings, including witch bottles, the preserved bodies of cats, garments, horse skulls, poppets, iron objects, written charms, and ritual marks. It soon became apparent that although substantial research has been conducted on concealed deposits in Great Britain, Ireland, and northern Europe, significantly less attention has been paid to the topic in North America.

Although historical archaeologists have actively sought ritual deposits in domestic contexts associated with African Americans (Cochran 1999; Leone and Fry 1999;

Bankoff et al. 2001; Cruson 2008; Springate 2010), the possibility that similar deposits may exist at European American sites is seldom considered. In fact, the substantial body of work on the archaeology of African American magico-religious ritual further emphasizes the comparative lack of similar studies of European American traditions. It is this author's opinion that archaeological investigation of magic and ritual among European Americans has been largely ignored due to the assumption that ritual and magical belief—and thus deposits of artifacts associated with magic—were not widespread among these populations past the mid-18th century (Thomas 1971; Butler 1979; Godbeer 1992). This thesis seeks to remedy this situation by studying one particular type of ritual that leaves a material trace—deliberately concealed deposits in standing structures—in order to explore the extent to which a European tradition of magic and ritual persisted in the New World.

The tradition of placing objects and symbols within, under, on, and around buildings for supernatural protection and good luck, as an act of formal or informal consecration, or as an element of other magico-religious or mundane ritual has been documented throughout the world and over the course of much of human history (Merrifield 1987; Gebel 2002; Jarvis 2003; Knapp 2005:116-118). It should not be surprising then that in North America, numerous deposits with possible ritual associations have been recovered from sealed voids in standing structures dating from the colonial period through the early 20th century. At first glance these deposits may appear to be the result of ordinary depositional processes such as discard or loss, particularly because the artifacts in question are often worn, broken, or otherwise beyond usefulness. As the number of reported finds has increased, however, scholars from various disciplines have

begun to recognize these deposits as the result of deliberate concealment with a possible ritual function.

The primary objective of this thesis was to assemble the available data on deliberately concealed deposits in standing structures in the eastern United States and to compare and contrast that data with that of deposits from similar contexts in the British Isles and northern Europe. This data was then used to identify patterns in ritual concealments in order to better understand the function of concealment and to offer recommendations for locating, recognizing, documenting, and interpreting deposits through context, artifact associations, artifact typologies, and ethnohistorical analysis.

This thesis also addresses theoretical and methodological issues relevant to the archaeology of ritual and to the broader discipline of historical archaeology. The theoretical issues can be grouped into two core themes: the processes of cultural change and cultural continuity; and, the interrelated concepts of family, household structure, and domestic religiosity and ritual.

The following study also examines evidence for cross-cultural interaction in colonial and post-Revolutionary America, specifically, how religious and magical worldviews from northern and western Europe blended with those of other cultural groups to create a uniquely American, syncretic, and multivalent body of magical belief and folk ritual. In particular, it explores how different cosmologies, concepts of witchcraft and non-human beings, and household structure may have influenced domestic ritual among different groups. This thesis also explores the ways in which cultural stereotypes and Eurocentric interpretations have affected how historical archaeologists currently study and interpret material evidence of ritual and proposes ways to develop a

more sophisticated and relevant archaeology of European American magic, religion, and ritual in the eastern United States.

### **Magic, Religion, and Ritual**

The complex themes of magic, religion, and ritual have long interested anthropologists. Greenwood (2009:102) has astutely observed that, “Magic is dynamic and situationally adaptive; it refuses neat categorization.” Magic has often been perceived as either dichotomously opposed to religion or as part of an evolutionary continuum of supernatural belief. For example, English anthropologist Edward Tylor (1889) viewed magic as an inferior survival of more primitive forms of religion. Frazer (1920) also defined magic from an evolutionary perspective, classifying it as an early stage of more “civilized” religions. Durkheim (1915:47), on the other hand, concentrated on organization, arguing that while formal religion is communal, embodied by “one single moral community called a Church,” magic is individualized. Similarly, Evans-Pritchard (1929:641) focused on the social role of magic, concluding that “the form of magic depends upon the structure of society as a whole.” Malinowski (1955) emphasized function, associating religion with long-term broad objectives and relegating magic, “the specific art for specific ends,” to the realm of the immediate and explicit (Malinowski 1955:85).

Many modern anthropologists do not differentiate between religion and magic. For example, Hammond (1970:1355) argues that magic should be viewed as neither separate from religion nor a more primitive form of religion, describing it instead as “a

form of ritual behavior and thus an element *of* religion [emphasis added].” Stein and Stein (2008:140) define religion as “the domain of human interaction with the sacred supernatural,” and magic as “the methods that somehow interface with the supernatural and by which people can bring about particular outcomes.” In view of these anthropological definitions, magic could be summarized as the ritual actions, behaviors, or methods employed exclusively within the construct of religion to interact with and influence the sacred supernatural world. The crux of this argument hinges on two assumptions: that all ritual is religious, and that magic, as a ritual and thus an element of religion, interacts exclusively with the supernatural.

The first assumption is that all ritual is religious. Indeed, ritual is defined by the Oxford Dictionary as “a religious or solemn ceremony consisting of a series of actions performed according to a prescribed order; relating to or done as a religious or solemn rite” (Stevenson 2010:1534). Some scholars argue, however, that in the past, ritual was a part of everyday life and not necessarily associated with religion (Brück 1999; Bradley 2005; Fogelin 2007; Herva and Ylimaunu 2009; Chadwick 2012), rejecting what Fogelin (2007:55) describes as “a clear dichotomy between religious and nonreligious action or artifacts.” For example, Chadwick (2012:283) suggests that in past societies, “there was a continuum of practice from formal and ritualized events through to small-scale, informal acts undertaken on a routine basis, including everyday refuse discard.” The notion that ritual can exist outside of religion is pertinent to the study of concealments in standing structures.

The second assumption states that magic, as a type of ritual, is an element of religion and thus the domain of the sacred supernatural. The term supernatural, as defined

by Stein and Stein (2008:18), “refers to things that are ‘above the natural.’ Supernatural entities and actions transcend the normal world of cause and effect as we know it. In the supernatural world wondrous things occur. Supernatural beings defy the basic laws of nature.” The association between magic and the supernatural makes sense in our modern Western worldview, where the natural world (that of the ordinary and everyday, of cause and effect) and the supernatural world (that of magic and religion, of the mysterious and unexplained) are separate entities. However, this worldview is not universal for all cultures and probably did not exist in the past. Just as ritual can be either religious or secular (or both), magic can call on supernatural powers or on the natural properties of things. In fact, in the Middle Ages the term natural magic was used to describe ritual actions that attempted to directly influence the natural world, or which harnessed the natural properties of objects that God had invested in plants, animals, and stones to help people combat evil forces (Watkins 2007:133-140). Natural magic was also employed to influence the more mundane aspects of daily life without attempting to draw on or otherwise interact with the supernatural.

Clearly, the boundaries between religion and magic, sacred and secular, ritual and routine are largely dependent upon the culturally subjective worldview and cosmology of a specific place and during a specific period in history. Magic and religion in particular are tightly entwined; thus, the term magico-religious ritual is used throughout this paper to indicate methods that attempt to influence or interact with the supernatural, whether they conform to an accepted religious doctrine or not. On the other hand, variations of the terms mundane ritual, secular magic, and natural magic are used to indicate ritual behavior and action that cannot be clearly associated with the supernatural. Magic is used

by itself to refer to the actions and methods employed to directly influence and interact with both the supernatural and natural worlds.

### **The Principles of Magic**

If magic is understood to be the methods used to directly influence and interact with the supernatural and natural worlds, the next step would be to understand why and how it is used. Malinowski (1954:116) famously argued that magic is more likely to be used in risky or uncertain endeavors:

We find magic wherever the elements of chance and accident, and the emotional play between hope and fear have a wide and extensive range. We do not find magic wherever the pursuit is certain, reliable, and well under the control of rational methods and technological processes. Further, we find magic where the element of danger is conspicuous. We do not find it wherever absolute safety eliminates any elements of foreboding.

Without the benefit of scientific rationalization, reason, probability, and chance (themselves modern forms of magic in that they offer methods for interacting with and understanding the world), risk and uncertainty defined the lives of people living in the past. This was undeniably true for medieval and early modern Europeans as well as for colonial Americans. Each day was filled with risk and uncertainty. Would the weather be favorable for a productive crop, and would that crop survive the assault of vermin, disease, and unpredictable weather in order to sustain the family and livestock through the year, or would all go hungry? Would a baby and mother both survive childbirth, and would that child live to adulthood or die of some unforeseen and unexplainable illness?

According to Malinowski's argument, in a world filled with uncertainties such as these, magic would have been commonplace. Magic, whether supernatural or natural, offered a method for influencing and negotiating the world in order to increase one's chances of success, love, health, and happiness.

Certain aspects of magical thinking, whether secular or religious, natural or supernatural, are universal. By understanding these basic principles it may be possible to identify and explain material manifestations of magic and ritual in the archaeological record. The overriding principle guiding magical thinking is the Law of Sympathy, first proposed by James Frazer (1920). The Law of Sympathy is based on the idea that a magical association or connection exists between two or more objects or substances. The Law of Sympathy can be subdivided into two parts: the Law of Similarity and the Law of Contagion. The Law of Similarity states that "like produces like, or that an effect resembles its cause" (Frazer 1920:52). Image magic is a form of similarity that involves "making an image to represent a living person or animal, who can then be killed or injured through doing things to the image, such as sticking pins into the image or burning it" (Stein and Stein 2008:143-144). One example of image magic can be seen in the use of dolls or poppets that, when pierced with pins, are believed to cause pain or injury to the victim. Similarly, when a representative image of a person or animal is drawn on a surface, anything done to that image is also done to the victim.

The Law of Contagion holds that "things which have once been in contact with each other continue to act on each other at a distance after the physical contact has been severed" (Frazer 1920:52). In contagious magic, body effluvia, excreta, and exuviae—urine, fecal matter, menstrual blood, semen, sweat, saliva, locks or strands of hair, teeth,

and clippings from fingernails and toenails—are very potent sources of power (Frazer 1920; Hand 1980:221). Items of clothing, particularly those that are worn next to the body and absorb sweat or those that retain the shape of the wearer—shoes, socks, undergarments, and hats—are also frequently used in contagious magic. Items with a more indirect association, such as common household objects or personal belongings, are sometimes employed in contagious magic as well. A modern example of this principle can be seen in the almost cult-like status mundane objects may be assigned if they were used by or otherwise in contact with a famous person. Transference is a form of contagious magic in which disease and misfortune are transferred to an object that has been in contact with the afflicted person (Hand 1980). The affliction is then removed as the object decays or is carried away, or the affliction is transferred to the next person or animal to come in contact with the object of transference. Similarity and contagion are found in both religious and secular magic and serve as guiding principles in the interpretation of architectural concealments.

### **Related Concepts and Terminology**

Throughout the following chapters, a variety of terms will be used that may need explanation. One of the more common terms associated with concealment research is apotropaic, originating from the Greek word *apotropaios*, meaning “evil-averting” or “to turn away evil.” The Oxford Dictionary (Stevenson 2010:75) defines apotropaic as “supposedly having the power to avert evil influences or bad luck.” Following this more inclusive definition, apotropaic is used in this thesis to refer to actions, words, images,

substances, or objects intended to repel evil, witchcraft, mischievous or malignant non-human beings, disease and injury, fire, lightning and hailstorms, infertility, bad luck, and general misfortune. Conversely, apotropaia also attract prosperity, health, wealth, happiness, fertility, and good luck. Using this broad definition, apotropaic can describe a wide range of sacred and secular rituals and artifacts. Some of the more common apotropaic materials and motifs found throughout Europe include specific parts of the human body such as the eyes, feet, hands, and sex organs; metal, particularly iron and silver; specific colors and numbers, most notably the numbers three and nine; salt and bread; bells and other loud sounds; and certain plants and animals. The Jewish mezuzah and the Christian cross are examples of apotropaic materials or symbols found in mainstream religious traditions.

Related to apotropaic is the term luck, defined as “success or failure apparently brought by chance rather than through one’s own actions; chance considered as a force that causes good or bad things to happen” (Stevenson 2010:1051). The word first appears in English in the late 15th century and comes from the Middle Low German *lucke*, related to the Dutch *geluk*, meaning “happiness or good fortune.” Luck is most commonly used in the context of mundane magic, where it does not imply interaction with the supernatural or divine.

Dowden (2000:2) has astutely observed that, “Superstition is in the eye, and religious code, of the beholder.” In the modern Western worldview, the only legitimate interaction with the supernatural occurs in the realm of the sacred and religious; behaviors and beliefs that claim to interact with the supernatural outside of the sacred are deemed superstitious. The word comes from the Latin *superstitio*, to stand over or stare at

in awe, and was originally used to describe excessive religiosity, particularly in reference to early Christians (Janssen 1979; Stevenson 2010). In medieval and post-medieval Europe, “Superstition was usually defined as the worship of the true God by inappropriate and unacceptable means” (Gilchrist 2012:214). The modern definition of superstition has a somewhat different connotation. The Oxford Dictionary (Stevenson 2010:1787) defines superstition as “excessively credulous belief in and reverence for the supernatural; a widely held but irrational belief in supernatural influences, especially as leading to good or bad luck, or a practice based on such a belief.” Since the modern definition of superstition has negative connotations of irrationality, fear, and a flawed perception of cause and effect, it is not used in this thesis.

### **The Archaeology of Magic, Religion, and Ritual**

According to Fogelin (2007:59), “archaeologists have long referred to any artifact or feature that was strange, aberrant, or inexplicable as religious, the assumption being that religion consists of those things that have no functional value or are just plain odd.” As a result, American archaeologists have been reluctant to interpret the material culture of religion, magic, and ritual, preferring instead to offer mundane explanations for unusual deposits. This reluctance can be traced to at least the mid-20th century, when Hawkes (1954) first proposed his “ladder of inference.” The premise of Hawkes’s argument, which still held sway among many archaeologists less than two decades ago, was that “archaeologists can investigate economy readily, and political and social

systems to a lesser extent, but for the most part, prehistoric symbols and ideas must remain a closed book” (Robb 1998:331).

In the 1980s and 90s, archaeologists such as Colin Renfrew (1982, 1994) began to challenge Hawkes’s premise, establishing the subdiscipline of cognitive archaeology, or an “archaeology of mind.” Renfrew (1994:3) defined cognitive archaeology as “the study of past ways of thought as inferred from material remains.” Flannery and Marcus (1998:36-37) expanded this definition, describing cognitive archaeology as

the study of all those aspects of ancient culture that are the product of the human mind: the perception, description, and classification of the universe (cosmology); the nature of the supernatural (religion); the principles, philosophies, ethics, and values by which human societies are governed (ideology); the ways in which aspects of the world, the supernatural, or human values are conveyed in art (iconography); and all other forms of human intellectual and symbolic behavior that survive in the archaeological record.

According to Flannery and Marcus’s definition, cognitive archaeology encompasses four key elements of culture: cosmology, religion, ideology, and iconography. Religion has already been discussed, and while ideology and iconography are certainly applicable to the study of ritual concealments, the concept of cosmology is the most relevant to this study. Flannery and Marcus (1998:37-38) define cosmology as “a theory or philosophy of the origin and general structure of the universe, its components, elements, and laws, especially those relating to such variables as space, time, and causality.” According to Chadwick (2012:285), cosmology also refers to “how societies understand and organize their world, including implicit, unconscious ideas about ‘right’ and ‘wrong’ and where and when to undertake social practices—the ‘structure’ of societies.” Understanding the cosmology or “structure” of a particular group of people in

a particular time thus enables the archaeologist to better understand other aspects of cognition such as religion and ideology and the ways that cognitive processes may be reflected in the material remains of mundane aspects of life, such as birth and death, health and healing, household structure and family life, agriculture, and perception of and interaction with the natural environment.

Cognitive approaches to archaeology have received widespread criticism. For example, Hill (1994:90) remarked that, “even though we can in some instances ‘recover mind’, and this may make archaeology more interesting for some people, it is not something that archaeology will ever be very good at, and it is most certainly not where archaeology will make its most significant contributions.” Even proponents of cognitive theory caution that “cognitive approaches can only be used when conditions are appropriate; that is, when the body of supporting data is sufficiently rich” (Flannery and Marcus 1998:37). Other criticisms of cognitive approaches have been less judicious. Renfrew (1985:15) points to the “old joke that when an archaeologist finds something whose function he does not understand, he ascribes to it ... a ritual purpose.” Some historical archaeologists argue that the archaeology of magic and ritual suffers from what Merrifield (1987:xiii) describes as “an aura of sensationalism that has discouraged investigation,” resulting in a widespread “ritual phobia” among archaeologists (Merrifield 1987; May 2001; Gilchrist 2012).

Curiously, cognitive archaeology—and the archaeology of religion, magic, and ritual in particular—has tended to focus on prehistoric societies (see for example, Renfrew 1985). The relative lack of archaeological analysis of the cognitive aspects of culture in the historic period is puzzling, particularly because of the availability of written

documents and rich ethnohistorical data to assist with interpretations. But it may be the very availability of these sources that has resulted in the relative neglect of a historical archaeology of magic, religion, and ritual of European Americans. It can only be assumed that archaeologists see no need to explore these issues in historical contexts when written documents or oral history are available.

However, it is widely acknowledged that historical documents do not describe every aspect of past lifeways, as archaeologists continually demonstrate. As Merrifield (1987:1) points out, religion, magic, and ritual have certainly “produced immense activity that must have left almost as many traces in the archaeological records as any of the basic human activities that are concerned with satisfying hunger, constructing shelter, or providing defense against enemies.” And if historical archaeology can offer insights regarding these aspects of the past, why should it not do the same for cognitive elements of culture such as religion, magic, and ritual?

The following questions then arise, as put forth by Osborne (2004:7): “How do we recognize a ritual deposit? Second, how do we account for what is ritually deposited? ... Third, how can we explain why those who made the deposit chose to make it in that particular place? Why do some places attract ritual deposits and others not? And what does receiving a ritual deposit do for a place?” Some scholars have tackled these questions. For example, Renfrew (1985:18) identified four archaeological correlates for recognizing religious ritual or “cult.” The first states that religious ritual is “attention focusing;” that is, religious ritual is usually focused on special places at well-defined times and attempts to engage the senses. The second correlate states that religious ritual focuses on the “liminal zone,” where the supernatural or divine can be encountered.

Third, in order for religious ritual to be effective, “the deity or transcendent force must in some sense be present,” usually represented by some symbolic form such as an effigy or material object like a crucifix. And lastly, religious ritual requires active participation and frequently involves propitiation of material objects to the deity or transcendent force.

Even if ritual can be recognized in the archaeological record, archaeologists still struggle with how to describe it (Bradley 1998:xviii-xix; Osborne 2004). In Europe, the term *hoard* has been used to describe some ritual deposits (Bradley 1998; Osborne 2004; Yates and Bradley 2010), perhaps due to the fact that many of the first deposits to be identified as “unusual” or ritual consisted of large quantities of valuable artifacts, particularly coins, weapons, and assemblages of fine metalwork in copper, bronze, gold, and iron, sometimes interpreted as an offering to a deity (Aitchison 1988). Osborne (2004:5) notes, however, that the use of *hoard* “simply draws attention to a quantity of similar items being found together, and makes no connection with any particular sort of action by an individual or group.” The use of *hoard* is also problematic due in part to its definition outside of archaeology. The Oxford Dictionary defines a *hoard* as, “a stock or store of money or valued objects, typically one that is secret or carefully guarded; an ancient store of coins or other valuable artefacts” (Stevenson 2010:832). Thus the use of the term *hoard* has connotations of treasure and wealth. To get around this problem, Bradley (1998:10-11) distinguished between votive hoards (ritual) and utilitarian hoards (non-ritual), arguing that utilitarian hoards “should occur in locations from which they could be recovered, but votive finds would be impossible to retrieve” (Bradley 1998:10).

In North America, the term *cache* is more commonly used to describe archaeological deposits with possible ritual, religious, or magical associations,

particularly in reference to prehistoric deposits and deposits associated with the African Diaspora (Leone and Fry 1999; Leone et al. 2001; Deller et al. 2009). A cache is defined as “a collection of items of the same type stored in a hidden or inaccessible place; a hidden or inaccessible storage place for valuables, provisions, or ammunition,” and as a verb to mean “store away in hiding or for future use” (Stevenson 2010:243). Like hoard, the use of cache necessitates that a distinction be made between ritual and non-ritual deposits. Thus Rathje and Schiffer (1982:114-115) define a dedicatory cache as “a set of objects deposited in order to dedicate a construction site” and a banking cache as a deposit of valuable artifacts or raw materials buried in a secure location for future retrieval. According to Schiffer (1987:79), in order for an archaeological deposit to be classified as a ritual cache, “it must be a reasonably discrete concentration of artifacts, usually not found in a secondary refuse deposit; in addition, ritual caches generally contain complete artifacts, sometimes unused, that are intact or easily restored.” Archaeologists now acknowledge that ritual deposits can in fact contain artifacts that could be interpreted as mundane refuse, particularly when they are well-worn, broken, or otherwise damaged and beyond apparent usefulness. Like hoard, cache introduces subjective assumptions regarding the function and form of deposits. As a result, some scholars have recommended against its use (Gebel 2002:120), and it is not used in this thesis to describe ritual deposits.

Other scholars have adopted the terms votive deposit, offering, and dedication or dedicated object to describe ritual deposits (see Osborne 2004 for discussion). Osborne (2004:2) describes a votive or dedicated object as an object that is “employed in an exchange with supernatural powers.” Votive objects, then, are gifts given to deities or

other non-human beings with the hope or expectation that the act will be reciprocated in the form of health, wealth, and good fortune. The problem with the use of votive, argues Osborne (2004:5), is that it “claims a connection between the object and some prior vow or prayer.” Likewise, the problem with the use of dedication and dedicated object is that the word “emphasizes that what is important about the object is that it has been given and implies confidence in identification of the recipient as transcendent and some permanence to the gift” (Osborne 2004:5).

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries (less so in the past few decades) the terms foundation sacrifice, foundation deposit, and cornerstone deposit have been employed to describe ritual deposits associated with structures (see for example Burdick 1901; Hartland 1914; Ó Súilleabháin 1945). According to Hukantaival (2009:350), “Building deposits have been called foundation offerings/sacrifices/deposits, because archaeologists encounter deposits made in the foundation more often than elsewhere in the building (naturally).” However, the term is problematic for two reasons. First, it excludes deposits found elsewhere in the structure of a building, such as in the wall, ceiling, roof, or chimney. The second problem, as Osborne (2004:7-8) has pointed out, is that “there is a tendency to think that classifying something as a foundation deposit is the end, rather than the beginning, of an analysis.” Labeling an artifact a foundation deposit describes where it is located, but says nothing about why it is there. For that, additional analysis and interpretation are needed.

Many researchers have moved away from using these problematic terms in lieu of more neutral terminology (Hukantaival 2009:350). Some archaeologists in Europe have adopted the terms special deposit or structured deposit to reference deposits with possible

magico-religious or secular ritual significance (Cunliffe 2003:145-149; Hamerow 2006; Groot 2009; Herva and Ylimaunu 2009). According to Hamerow (2006:1), special deposits “often occur in association with buildings, have generally been regarded as the remnants of a ritual act and are conventionally referred to as ‘foundation deposits,’ implying that they were deposited during the construction of a building and were intended to protect it and its occupants.”

Hukantaival (2009:350) prefers the term building deposit, which she defines as “an object (or several objects together) *deliberately* concealed in or under a building” [emphasis in original]. In doing so, she distinguishes between ritual deposits that are associated with architectural contexts from ritual deposits in other locations. It is this type of ritual deposit with which this thesis is primarily concerned. Building deposits have a long history. Hukantaival (2009:350) explains that, “The custom of concealing something in a building appeared already in Neolithic times, as soon as buildings were made more permanent ... But the meanings of the deposits have probably changed many times during the long history of this custom. The tradition has not been fixed; it is very dynamic both in the sense of meanings and practice.” Building deposits are usually located at the borders or liminal spaces of a structure, especially at vulnerable openings such as doors, windows, and chimneys. Other deposits are found in the foundation, particularly the corners of buildings, while some are found in the walls, under floors, and in roof spaces. In prehistoric contexts, building deposits are frequently found in postholes (Hukantaival 2009:350-351).

The term concealment is used in this thesis for several reasons. First, it indicates deliberate deposition, with or without the intent of retrieval, and denotes an artifact or

deposit that has been hidden or placed out of sight (Stevenson 2010:360). Considering the secretive nature of these deposits and the fact that few historical records describe the practice of placing objects within the fabric of houses and other buildings, the use of the term seems appropriate. Thus, for the purpose of this thesis, a concealment is defined as a deposit of one or more artifacts deliberately placed within or adjacent to the structure of a building, usually within a sealed void under the floor, in the foundation, within the walls or ceiling, in roof spaces, or around the hearth and chimney. Concealments are thought to be the result of a wide range of magico-religious or secular rituals.

### **The Archaeology of Magic, Religion, and Ritual in the United States**

May (2001:3) has argued that when it comes to the material remains of religion, magic, and ritual in the United States, “Anthropologists have largely ignored European and British immigrant groups, while focusing on Native American and African religious devotions.” It is true that while historical archaeologists have done a commendable job identifying and interpreting the material remains of African American magico-religious ritual in the archaeological record, there have been few attempts to address similar research questions regarding the material culture of European Americans. This is a serious deficiency. Not only would a better understanding of the magico-religious beliefs and rituals of European Americans contribute greatly to our understanding of these groups in the colonial and early National periods, but ignoring them has prohibited archaeologists from fully understanding the magico-religious traditions of African Americans and the complex interactions between whites and blacks who shared,

borrowed, and adapted elements from different cosmologies and worldviews to construct a syncretic body of folk ritual that is uniquely American. In order to determine the scope of interaction and cultural exchange of magical knowledge between African and European sources, it must first be determined how European magic manifested in the United States. Leone (2008) recently stated, “It’s intriguing to speculate how English and African spirit beliefs may have interacted and borrowed from each other.” It is time to move beyond speculation and begin to seek answers.

Fortunately, there has been some notable progress in this area in the past decade, with archaeologists such as Fennell (2000, 2007) and Davidson (2004, 2010) addressing the multivalent nature of folk magic in the United States. Fennell (2000:282) in particular stresses the importance of considering “whether the artifacts of past folk religion practices can be interpreted as having been meaningful to members of an array of ethnic groups.” He argues that the rituals, symbols, and material culture of one group may have been easily recognized and understood by others, and in fact may have been used in similar ways. In his study of shoes in African American mortuary contexts, Davidson (2010:642) observed that “seemingly solid 19th-century boundaries as race and culture actually exhibit surprisingly porous borders, allowing transference and adoption of belief and practice.”

## **Existing Research on Architectural Concealments**

Ralph Merrifield's (1954, 1955, 1969, 1987) work was one of the first attempts to synthesize the existing archaeological evidence of western European religion, magic, and ritual in the prehistoric, Romano-British, medieval, and early modern periods. His initial research has inspired more recent studies of the archaeology of ritual, particularly related to the post-medieval past. The material in this thesis focuses on both magico-religious and mundane deposits and symbols concealed in and around standing structures in the eastern United States. Numerous studies on this topic have been conducted in the British Isles and throughout Europe (Ó Súilleabháin 1945; Howard 1951; Merrifield 1954, 1955, 1969, 1987; Annable 1955; Buchanan 1956; Smedley and Owles 1964; Brown 1966; Swann 1969, 1996, 1998, 2005; Farley 1978; Maloney 1980; Rushen 1984; Pennick 1986; Walker 1987; Easton 1983, 1988, 1997a, 1997b, 1999, 2004, 2011; Hooper 1988, 1989; Garrad 1989; Dixon-Smith 1990; Sheehan 1990; Winzar 1995; Copson 1996; Armstrong 1998; Pitt 1998; Volken 1998, 2005; Hoggard 1999, 2000, 2001, 2004; Harte 2000; Massey and Edmonds 2000; Eastop 2001, 2006, 2010; Darwood and Sherriff 2003; Dew and Eastop 2003; Eastop and Dew 2003, 2006; Meeson 2005; Montembault 2005; Munford 2005; Schad 2005; Williams 2005; Bennett 2006; Hukantaival 2007, 2009; Herva 2009; Herva and Ylimaunu 2009; Atzbach 2012), as well as in Australia (Evans 2005, 2007, 2009, 2010). However, significantly less attention has been paid to the study of concealments in standing structures here in the United States.

Several studies of ritual concealments in European American contexts have examined witch bottles, concealed footwear, written charms, iron objects, and other

deposits (Becker 1978, 1980, 2005; Painter 1980; Alexandrowicz 1986; Saeger 1994; King 1996; St. George 1998:188-195; May 2001; Augé 2006, 2007, 2008, 2009; Baker 2007:24-25; Milnes 2007:175-181; McKittrick 2009; Springate 2011; Costello 2012; Manning 2011, 2012). However, with the notable exceptions of Geisler's (2003) thesis on concealed footwear, Becker's (2005) research on witch bottles, and McKittrick's brief study of the material culture of magic in the Mid-Atlantic, few attempts have been made to assemble, analyze, and interpret data from multiple sites.

Furthermore, although historical archeologists and architectural historians regularly investigate standing structures, such investigations have generally been concerned with documenting a structure's evolutionary development and physical changes (Davies 1987). In this approach, the building is viewed as an artifact that can reveal something about the historical development of building materials and technologies and the cultural use of space. As a result, artifacts found within the fabric and voids of buildings—embedded or concealed in the walls, ceilings, chimneys, fireplaces, attics, eaves, and cornices—are seldom documented in a controlled excavation employing standard archaeological methods. Careful control of context is crucial for understanding and interpreting ritual concealments, and lack of such control has significantly hindered research.

Due in part to an increasing awareness of the potential for ritual deposits in architectural contexts, archaeologists have actively sought such deposits in spaces associated with free and enslaved African Americans (Cochran 1999; Leone and Fry 1999; Bankoff et al. 2001; Cruson 2008; Springate 2010; Springate and Tomkins 2010), even claiming to have identified such deposits in structures inhabited primarily by

European Americans (Leone and Tang 2011). The possibility that these deposits are the result of European folk ritual is almost never considered. Similar approaches to the investigation of architectural spaces associated with European Americans have been largely ignored due to the assumption that magical belief—and thus deposits of magico-religious artifacts—is not widespread among these populations past the mid-18th century. This thesis is concerned with rectifying this deficiency.

### **Culture Change and Cultural Continuity**

Culture change in some form or another—particularly in regards to the interaction between populations with different cultural origins, such as can be found in the eastern United States—is one of the most popular theoretical approaches in American historical archaeology. Studies of culture change and related concepts such as globalization, colonialism, creolization, acculturation, hybridization, syncretism, and ethnogenesis have dominated archaeological debate for decades (see for example Deetz 1996; Davidson 2004, 2010; Fennell 2007). Indeed, culture change is one of the major themes running through this thesis, particularly the ways in which magic and ritual were adapted, reimagined, and modified over time and in different contexts and environments. In particular, the following study examines how major shifts in worldview—the decline of pagan religious beliefs and the spread of Christianity in the Romano-British and early medieval period; the development of a Christian cosmology and mythology that included the concepts of the Devil and morally ambiguous non-human beings in the central and late Middle Ages; the intense focus on diabolical witchcraft in the early modern period;

and the rise of scientific rationalization in post-Enlightenment colonial America— influenced the material culture of religion, magic, and ritual. The intersection of European and West African cosmology and ritual in the eastern United States is also examined, highlighting an area where further research is needed by American historical archaeologists.

On the other side of the theoretical coin is the concept of cultural continuity, perhaps best summarized by the term *la longue durée*, or deep time. The term was coined by Fernand Braudel (1958) of the French Annales School of historiography, which emphasized the influence of innate cognitive patterns and the *histoire des mentalités*, the history of attitudes and worldviews, of a particular geographic region and the ways in which they have shaped both the past and the present. The concepts of cultural continuity and deep time may be unsettling to some archaeologists, particularly when the current trend in scholarship emphasizes change and transformation. However, some aspects of culture are more resistant to culture change than others, persisting in recognizable forms over many centuries. These include cognitive aspects of culture such as cosmology, ideology, and religion (Fogelin 2007:58). According to Garfinkel (1994:159):

Observations of the best-known contemporary religions (Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism and others) clearly show that their roots go back thousands of years. This is despite the fact that there have been enormous changes in almost every aspect of human life: economy (from agricultural to industrial), society (from agrarian to urban), politics (from monarchy to democracy), and material culture (from traditional to modern technology). These factors emphasize that long-term comparison is an important tool when studying subjects such as cult and religion.

As Garfinkel points out, long-term cultural continuity can clearly be observed in Western Christianity in ritual actions and symbols. For example, the cross as a symbol associated with the followers of the religion of Jesus Christ can be traced back to the 4th century, with some evidence of its use a century or two prior (Finney 1997:304). Another example of ritualized material cultural associated with Christianity that similarly exhibits a long history includes the use of strings of beads in repetitious recital of prayers such as the Pater Noster (the Lord's Prayer), and later, the Holy Rosary. Historians and archaeologists have determined that the Pater Noster ritual was in use by the 7th century, with material evidence of its use in Great Britain appearing by the late 13th century (Gilchrist 2012:157).

Likewise, it is highly likely that similar long-term time depth should be found in the use of other magico-religious and secular objects and symbols. Indeed, some scholars of European magic have argued that certain symbols and rituals, at their essence, can be traced back hundreds of years, or even a millennium or more (Thomas 1971; Wilson 2000). This argument does not, however, presume that the meaning of a particular ritual or symbol has remained constant over time, just that the outward manifestation has continued in a recognizable form.

In an anthropological theory first put forth by Lévi-Strauss (1955, 1963), structuralism seeks to identify the underlying patterns of thought, or deep mental structures, that influence all human action and interaction. Lévi-Strauss (1955) successfully employed this approach in the study of myth and the cross-cultural influences found in myth. More recently, Ginzburg (1991) employed a structuralist approach in his study of the myths and rituals surrounding shamanistic ecstasy in Europe.

Like Lévi-Strauss, Ginzburg's method involved a "morphological approach," in which he identified common motifs in the myths and rituals of "heterogeneous spatial and cultural environments." He argued that the widespread similarities found in some myths are the result of deep mental structures and shared pre-Christian origins and not of cultural borrowing (Ginzburg 1991:16-21). Ginzburg stressed the importance of identifying the "intermediary links," or the connections between separate concepts with similar motifs. While such a morphological approach may appear achronic, Ginzburg argues that in actuality, it establishes a long-term chronological time frame by filling in the gaps left by strict chronological analysis of the elements of one particular culture.

This thesis has adopted a similar morphological approach by exploring the connections and common motifs found among pre-Christian household religion and ritual, the myths and folklore of fairies and house spirits in medieval Europe, the concept of demons and witches' familiars in the early modern period, and the widespread European tradition of concealing objects in domestic structures. This paper will argue that due to a close association with cosmology, ideology, and religion, domestic ritual is one of the most conservative elements of European culture.

### **Domestic Religiosity and Ritual**

As previously stated, one of the core themes of the following research is the repeated association between religiosity, magic, and ritual and the concepts of family, household structure, and domestic space. Following Stone (1977) and Fleming (2001:2), kin is used in this thesis to describe all those related by blood, including members outside

the nuclear family unit; family consists of all the members of the same kin who live together in one dwelling; and household is used to describe all those who live together in one dwelling, whether they are related or not. Family and household structure certainly vary throughout history and between different cultures. Among the Romans, the family was seen as “the foundation of the city and the seed-bed of the state” (Hunter 1997:421). Although Roman households were not strictly familial, often containing a range of non-kin inhabitants such as slaves, the nuclear family was nonetheless an important component of the Roman household, particularly after the introduction of Christianity (Hunter 1997; Fleming 2001).

The modern Western concept of the nuclear family, however, can be traced back to the Middle Ages, when the Church emphasized the importance of the matrimonial bond (Sudarkasa 1999:61; Fleming 2001:4). With the formal end of slavery in the 12th century, English household structure began to change. Although serfdom continued as a modified form of servitude, serfs were not regarded as part of the manor household and were permitted to marry and form their own households on land owned by the nobility (Fleming 2001). The social structure of medieval serfdom was complex and highly varied; in general, however, although serfs did not own their small houses or the land they worked, the right to occupy those houses and to work a particular plot of land for their own support and that of their lord was inheritable and thus resulted in some measure of familial and household continuity over multiple generations. Serfdom gradually declined in the late Middle Ages—aided by the Black Plague in the mid-14th century, which decreased England’s population by as much as 40%—and was finally abolished in the 16th century (Fleming 2001:3). It is during this same period that some of the first

evidence of concealment rituals discussed in this thesis appears in domestic structures in northern Europe and the British Isles, suggesting a possible correlation between concealment and changes in household composition and structure.

Many of the motifs found in western European folk ritual revolve around the nuclear family unit, the household, and the daily activities, challenges, and pleasures of domestic life. Rituals involving love and courtship, marriage, sexuality and reproduction, childrearing, food preparation and consumption, the prevention and treatment of disease, and death are ubiquitous. Religion, magic, and ritual were interwoven into all aspects of domestic life. Gazin-Schwartz (2001:267) suggests that “small-scale, personal or family rituals” may actually “enhance and reinforce normal everyday structure.” In this model, a ritual artifact and a mundane artifact may be one and the same:

Metal tools, stones and pebbles, nails, bowls, pieces of wood or whole trees, food remains, animal bones, beads, and knives are all objects that archaeologists would not be surprised to find in a domestic site. . . . It is not that the objects have inherently ritual properties—knives surely were used for cutting meat; animals and grain for food; nails for building structures or furniture. When the objects are brought into use, right in the house, byre, or farmyard, to protect, heal, or bring good luck they take on ritual meaning. Streams are good places to get water; they are also good if you want to seal a bargain. Everyday things are sometimes useful for rituals. Further, ritual becomes enmeshed with everyday activities (Gazin-Schwartz 2001:274-275).

Gazin-Schwartz concludes, “In the context of daily, household, and subsistence activities, everyday items were invested with meaning that was not simply utilitarian or functional, but that expanded into the spiritual world. It is our own modern, Western understanding of the world that separates quotidian and supernatural realms” (2001:277).

## Scope of Research

Having reviewed the interrelated nature of religion, magic, and ritual; some existing approaches to the archaeology of magic and ritual, and to ritual concealments in particular; the theoretical concepts of culture change and cultural continuity, especially deep time; and the role of household religiosity and domestic ritual in everyday life, the specific research objectives and methodology of this thesis, which will guide the analysis presented in the following chapters, are now presented. As previously stated, this thesis looks at the material culture of ritual concealments in the eastern United States, which for the purpose of this study is broadly defined as the region east of the Mississippi River. There is a strong geographic emphasis on New England and the Mid-Atlantic. Although examples of architectural concealments were obtained from across the country, few deposits were reported from southern and western states, as seen in Figure 1.1.

The emphasis of the following research is on certain types of ritual deposits that have been previously identified in the British Isles. Evidence from northern Europe, particularly Germany, Scandinavia, and the Baltic, is also included in the analysis, especially when exploring broad trends in concealment rituals and related mythology and ethnohistorical evidence; however, no attempt has been made to systematically study the rituals of German Americans or any other European group in North America. Temporally, this thesis adopts a diachronic approach by including evidence from the late prehistoric period through the early 20th century. This broad temporal scope was deliberately chosen in order to track both change and continuity in European and European American domestic religiosity and ritual over the *longue durée*.

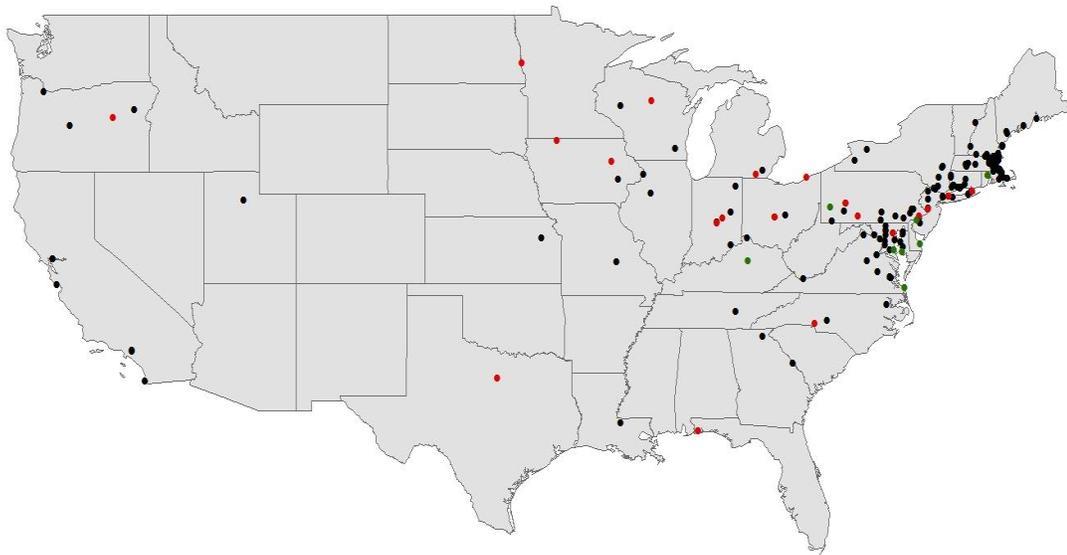


Figure 1.1. Locations of concealments reported in this study. Map by author.

Although the artifacts and symbols found in architectural concealments vary considerably, the following analysis concentrates on three of the more prevalent artifact types: witch bottles and other bottle charms (Chapter 3), concealed footwear and associated deposits (Chapter 4), and concealed cats (Chapter 5). Data were collected on other types of concealments as encountered, and this material appears in Chapter 6. The decision was made to forego detailed analysis of individual case studies in favor of compiling as much data as possible from a wide variety of sites with the intent of identifying relevant geographic, temporal, and spatial patterns in order to explore the themes discussed above. The three classes of artifacts selected for in-depth study were chosen in part because they have been the focus of considerable research in the British Isles, northern Europe, and Australia, thus providing data for cross-cultural comparative analysis.

An attempt has been made to maintain a focus on deposits found in and around domestic structures, specifically those associated with Anglo Americans. The data in the following chapters come from more than 300 sites scattered throughout the United States, but are concentrated primarily in the eastern half of the country. Although this thesis includes examples of architectural concealments and magico-religious rituals associated with the African Diaspora, it is not intended to serve as a complete survey of those traditions and their related material culture, as there are numerous studies that do so already (Brown and Cooper 1990; Singleton 1991, 1995:130-131; Ferguson 1992:109-117, 1999; Wilkie 1995, 1997; Samford 1996; Stine et al. 1996; Young 1996; Chireau 1997, 2003; Russell 1997; Cochran 1999; Leone and Fry 1999; Jones 2000; Bankoff et al. 2001; Leone et al. 2001; Ruppel et al. 2003; Davidson 2004, 2010; Anderson 2005; Leone 2008, 2011; Orser 2008; Springate 2010).

## **Research Objectives**

Based on a review of the existing literature on architectural concealments and the current state of the archaeology of religion, magic, and ritual in the United States, the following research questions were developed to guide the analysis:

- 1) What types of concealed deposits are found in architectural contexts in the eastern United States? What is their geographic, temporal, and spatial distribution? How does the data for American concealments compare to existing data on architectural concealments in other parts of the world, specifically the British Isles and northern Europe?

- 2) What role do magic and religion play in architectural concealments? Can these deposits be identified as religious, magical, or secular ritual?
- 3) What can the data and resulting patterns tell us about the act of ritual concealment in the United States, its function(s), and those who engaged in it? How can ethnohistorical data from European, European American, and African American sources help in the interpretation of ritual concealments?
- 4) What do the material and ethnohistorical data tell us about the processes of culture change and cultural continuity as they relate to household religiosity and domestic ritual? To what extent can deep time and underlying patterns of thought be identified in concealment rituals? How do cognitive constructs such as cosmology, ideology, worldview, and mental structures regarding family, household structure, and social organization and interaction affect the ways in which concealment rituals were employed?
- 5) How do race, ethnicity, and related mental constructs such as cosmology and worldview influence the presence of ritual concealments in domestic contexts?
- 6) How can the methods used in this study and the resulting analysis help archaeologists investigate the material culture of magic and folk ritual in other contexts?
- 7) How can analysis of the archaeological and the ethnohistorical data help develop useful typologies of ritual concealments, and how can this data be

used to offer recommendations for locating, recognizing, documenting, and interpreting concealed deposits in the future?

## **Research Methods**

In order to answer the above research questions, an interdisciplinary method was employed that compares and contrasts archaeological and ethnohistorical data from the British Isles and the eastern United States.

### *Archaeological and Material Data*

Archaeological and material data used for this study were obtained through a variety of methods. Data on American concealments were gathered from published and unpublished sources, including journal articles, monographs, theses and dissertations, conference papers, and cultural resource reports (gray literature). In addition, an informal search of online resources was conducted in order to identify concealments contained in museum collections and described in organizational newsletters and websites, newspaper articles, popular magazines such as *Old-House Journal*, personal blogs, discussion forums, social networking sites, and image-hosting websites. Additional data were obtained through direct correspondence with dozens of organizations and individuals, including historical societies, historic sites and museums, archaeologists, historians, historic preservationists, homeowners, and members of the building trades, as well as through collaboration with concealment scholars in Europe and Australia, many of whom

are mentioned in the Acknowledgments. These methods resulted in an extensive dataset of ritual concealments in the United States that was used in the analysis. Whenever possible, the following data were collected for each deposit:

- the complete contents of a deposit, including all artifacts and their relationship to each other;
- the location of a deposit within a structure (spatial context);
- the type of structure;
- the approximate date of construction for the structure and any relevant additions or renovations;
- the approximate date of a deposit, particularly when it appears to post-date the structure in which it was found;
- unusual positioning or manipulation of artifacts;
- the address, city or county, and state where the concealment was found;
- any available historical information on the structure and its former occupants.

For concealed footwear, additional data were gathered based on the research of previous scholars (Swann 1969, 1996, 1998, 2005; Pitt 1998; Geisler 2003) and the author's own research questions and hypotheses regarding shoe concealment. This data included:

- the number of shoes in each deposit;
- whether the shoes were single(s) or pair(s);
- whether the shoes were for a male or female;
- whether the shoes were for an adult or child;
- whether the shoes were worn on the right or left foot;

- any evidence of wear, alteration, or deliberate manipulation;
- any associated artifacts found with the shoes.

### *Ethnohistorical Data*

Ethnohistory is a cross-disciplinary approach to the study of the past that draws largely from the fields of history, anthropology, folklore, ethnography, archaeology, literature, art history, and iconography (Barber and Berdan 1998). The types of sources used in ethnohistorical analysis are varied and can include primary documents and secondary sources; visual materials such as maps, paintings, illustrations, and photographs; ethnography and oral history; and myth and folklore. Information derived from these sources can then be used in creative ways to explore the history and culture of populations typically underrepresented in traditional historiography. As Barber and Berdan (1998:15) note, “Ethnohistorical facts do not speak for themselves; rather, they have to be put together in plausible ways to try to explain something about human activity in the past: how something happened and why it happened.”

Written documents are useful tools for identifying and interpreting artifacts and with a possible ritual function and also give some indication of the extent (both geographic and temporal) of their use. A variety of written sources from the medieval and early modern periods were referenced in this thesis, including medieval penitentials (books of church rules that prescribed penance for sinful transgressions); laws and edicts related to religion, magic, and witchcraft; court proceedings and testimony from English, Scottish, and American witch trials transcribed in secondary sources; medieval and early

modern accounts of supernatural activity, witchcraft, and non-human beings described by Gervase of Tilbury (Banks and Binns 2002), Reginald Scot (1584), King James I of England (Stuart 1597), I. Barnes (1619), John Aubrey (Buchanan-Brown 1972), and Richard Chamberlain (1698); and essays and religious treatises written by notable theologians and philosophers such as Increase (1684, 1693) and Cotton Mather (1691, 1692, 1693), Joseph Glanvill (1700), and astrologist Joseph Blagrave (1671). These sources illustrate how magic, witchcraft, supernatural beings, and folk ritual were conceptualized by members of the educated elite in medieval and early modern Europe and colonial North America. However, when read critically, these sources also reveal information about the use of magic and folk ritual among the lower classes that may otherwise be absent from the historical record.

Visual sources used in this thesis include works of art, woodcuts and other illustrations, historic photographs, and postcards from the early 20th century. Paintings portray idealized scenes of everyday life as well as seasonal household rituals. Woodcuts and illustrations from historical works show how witches and non-human beings such as demons, familiars, and domestic spirits were conceived of in the past. Photographs capture scenes that may not be well described in historical sources and can verify that a particular artifact or ritual was in use during a specific point in time. Stylized images from early 20th century postcards can help establish symbolic associations between objects and ideas in the more recent past. These visual sources appear throughout the following chapters.

Perhaps the most significant source of ethnohistorical data employed in the following research includes collections of folklore, folk belief, and oral tradition. Orser

(2002:245) defines folklore as “a body of stories and tales that are orally transmitted and that have some antiquity.” In the 19th century, these are often found in regional histories that describe “quaint traditions” and local myths, or in more systematic compilations of the oral traditions of a specific group of people. Folklore and folk beliefs, when used appropriately, can reveal cosmological constructs and ideologies and can effectively demonstrate the ways in which people related to the world around them and to material things (Orser 2002; Osborne 2004:6; Herva and Ylimaunu 2009). These stories and tales, advice and warnings, remedies and charms can draw attention to the kinds of beliefs that are likely to have existed in the past among a particular population (Herva and Ylimaunu 2009:237). Folklore and folk belief can also help archaeologists of religion, magic, and ritual identify symbolic associations between objects, special properties, physical spaces, and supernatural beings.

Most of the folklore and folk belief reviewed for this thesis was collected in the mid- to late 19th and early 20th centuries. Scholars in Europe have demonstrated that some types of folk belief and ritual exhibit considerable time-depth (Ginzburg 1991; Jeay and Garay 2006:11; Herva and Ylimaunu 2009). For example, in their study of Finnish concealments, Herva and Ylimaunu (2009:237) observed that folklore collected in the 19th and 20th centuries conveyed concepts about the world that also existed in the early modern period, as evidenced by historical data. They assert that folklore from the 19th and early 20th centuries, “preserves elements of the early modern, and even pre-Christian, understanding of the world” (Herva and Ylimaunu 2009:237).

American folklore and folk belief from the 19th and early 20th centuries was crucial in developing interpretations for the material evidence of ritual concealment and

for identifying patterns of culture change and continuity. For example, folklore collected in the Midwest in the early 20th century was in many instances nearly identical to the folklore collected in the British Isles in the mid-19th century, which in turn can be connected to myths and rituals of the Middle Ages, demonstrating a continuity of ritual across both space and time. In this thesis, the qualitative data embedded in folklore and folk belief have been used to understand how certain objects and symbols were perceived in the past and to identify patterns in the use of mundane objects in ritual contexts.

Using folklore and folk belief to formulate interpretations of material objects in ritual contexts is a common method employed by historical archaeologists in Europe (Gazin-Schwartz 2001; Fogelin 2007:63; Herva 2009; Herva and Ylimaunu 2009). In the United States, scholars have employed a similar method for interpreting magico-religious artifacts associated with the African Diaspora (Wilkie 1995; Leone and Fry 1999; Leone et al. 2001; Davidson 2004, 2010). Orser (2002:246) noted that, “Historical archaeologists investigating sites inhabited by African slaves or by peasant farmers quickly realized that they could develop new insights by paying attention to the stories and tales recorded among such peoples.” Leone and Fry’s (1999) method included the review of first-hand narrative accounts of conjuring practices and magico-religious beliefs described by African Americans in the early 20th century, which they then compared to archaeological data from slave sites in the American south in an attempt to answer research questions neither source could answer alone, arguing that, “the resources of folklore and archaeology are greater when worked against each other” (Leone and Fry 1999:375).

A similar method has been employed in this thesis: the physical evidence from architectural concealments has been compared to descriptions of magico-religious belief, secular folk ritual, and folktales in the early modern and modern periods. Numerous sources from the British Isles and continental Europe were consulted, as well as works that document the folk traditions of European Americans. Ethnohistorical sources associated with African Americans were also examined, anticipating that these sources may help interpret the folk rituals of European Americans. Works consulted include Puckett's (1926) *Folk Beliefs of the Southern Negro* and Hyatt's (1970-1978) monumental five-volume work, *Hoodoo—Conjuration—Witchcraft—Rootwork: Beliefs Accepted by Many Negroes and White Persons These Being Orally Recorded Among Blacks and Whites*, as well as his considerably smaller but still impressive *Folk-Lore from Adams County, Illinois* (1935), and other sources that document folk magic and ritual among African Americans.

While several scholars have used collections of oral tradition such as Puckett's and Hyatt's work to interpret archaeological evidence of African magico-religious "survivals," these same materials have seldom been examined for what they can reveal about how objects may have been used in European American folk ritual and how non-Europeans may have adapted elements of European ritual to conform to their own cosmology and worldview. By doing so in this thesis, the assumption has been made that African American folk rituals are not exclusively African-derived but include a significant amount of European influence (Anderson 2005). Hyatt himself acknowledged that European Americans both believed in and practiced "hoodoo" or conjure, a form of syncretic folk magic found primarily in the southern United States. Some of his African

American informants estimated that 40% to 50% of whites in the southern United States believed in folk magic and witchcraft in the early 20th century (Hyatt 1970-1978[1]:i-iv). Examination of the aforementioned sources indicates the presence of a multivalent system of magic and conjuring in the United States that scholars have only recently begun to explore (Wilkie 1997; Fennell 2000, 2007; Davidson 2004, 2010).

### **Summary of Analysis and Results**

The archaeological and ethnohistorical evidence presented in the following chapters demonstrates that objects were deliberately concealed in and around standing structures in the eastern United States as part of a complex of rituals that can be traced to medieval and early modern Europe, with analogous practices (if not direct antecedents) in earlier periods. Although the function of concealment rituals may have changed over time, there is also surprising continuity, particularly in the material manifestations of those rituals, suggesting that the act of concealment is influenced by deep mental structures and underlying patterns of thought that reflect a northern European cosmology and worldview.

Concealment rituals in the United States are particularly complex due to the cultural interaction and exchange that took place among diverse populations with different mental structures and cosmologies. This is particularly evident in the ethnohistorical data, where a blend of European, West African, and Native American influences can be detected in varying degrees. In some cases, it appears African Americans adapted European rituals to conform to their own cosmology, which included

different concepts of the supernatural world, conjure and witchcraft, the afterlife, and family and household structure. This cross-cultural interaction is only cursorily explored in this study but promises to provide an avenue for future research and lively debate.

The following discussion also illustrates how depositional context, special properties of artifacts, relationships between multiple artifacts in a single deposit, and comparative analysis of a variety of ethnohistorical sources can be used to identify and interpret the material remains of folk ritual. The results indicate that although artifacts found in ritual concealments may on the surface appear to be part of the same tradition (usually described as apotropaic in nature), the data suggest that concealed deposits are the result of a wide variety of ritual behaviors enacted by different groups with different motivations.

This research is an important addition to the ongoing development of a historical archaeology of European American religion, magic, and ritual. Concealment research is also critical to understanding the ways in which magico-religious beliefs and rituals were shared among different cultural groups—including various European populations, the African Diaspora, and Native Americans—to create a syncretic and multivalent tradition of magic and ritual in the eastern United States.

## **Chapter 2: Cultural-Historical Background**

In order to study ritual deposits concealed in buildings in the eastern United States in the 17th through the early 20th centuries, it is necessary to understand the cultural origins and corresponding cosmology, ideologies, and magico-religious traditions of the European populations that immigrated to North America during this period. While it could be argued that the worldview of the first colonists was essentially English (Fischer 1989), English culture itself was highly varied and was the product of centuries of interaction among various groups, including the Celts, Romans, Norse, Anglo-Saxons, Normans, and Germanic peoples. Consequently, magic, religion, and ritual among the early modern English population was heavily influenced by that of other regions, particularly northern and central Europe, and incorporated elements from medieval, Romano-British, and pre-Christian ritual (Thomas 1971; Flint 1991). This is not to suggest that paganism “survived” in any real sense more than a century or two past the introduction of Christianity; instead, this chapter argues that many of the folk rituals found among early modern Europeans and European Americans were heavily influenced by those of the distant, pre-Christian past, particularly in the realm of domestic religiosity and ritual and interaction with non-human beings.

Therefore, in order to explore cultural change and continuity over the *longue durée*, a general overview of domestic religiosity and ritual from the late prehistoric period through the early modern period is presented. The following discussion summarizes the transition from paganism to early Christianity; the role of magic, religion, and ritual in the medieval and post-medieval home; the development of a Christian mythology and cosmology inhabited by benevolent, demonic, and morally ambiguous non-human beings; and the emergence of the concept of diabolical witchcraft in the late medieval and early modern period. In addition, the following discussion will examine how these concepts were transferred to the New World; the supposed decline of magic in the second half of the 18th century; and evidence for the continuation of ritual and magical thinking in the present day.

## **The Old World**

According to Dowden (2000:2), prehistoric European paganism was a polytheistic form of religion that relied more on ritual action than absolute faith. The term pagan was first used in the 4th century A.D. to describe people with religious traditions outside of Christianity and Judaism. Following this definition, all European religions preceding the arrival of Christianity can be defined as pagan (Dowden 2000:15). Pre-Christian paganism was not a uniform religion but a complex and diverse collection of local and regional beliefs and rituals found throughout the Old World. The word itself is derived from the Latin word *paganus*, translated as “villager” or “the people of the place,” in

reference to those who preserved local pre-Christian customs after the introduction of Christianity (Dowden 2000:3).

Before the arrival of Christianity, Bronze and Iron Age Great Britain, Ireland, and northern Europe were populated by various Celtic-language tribes who practiced polytheism. Religious devotions focused on offerings to gods and goddesses associated with the land—particularly watery environments such as bogs, rivers and lakes, springs, artificial wells and ditches—as well as caves, pits, hills and mountains, trees, and stones (Merrifield 1987; Hutton 1991; Davidson 1993:128-130; Bradley 1998; Dowden 2000; Yates and Bradley 2010). Numerous deposits of whole or partial animal and human remains, particularly dogs and horses, as well as “hoards” (see Chapter 1) of coins, weapons, and other metalwork have been found in these locations and are usually interpreted as offerings to deities (Merrifield 1987).

Wells (1994:153) argues, however, that in late prehistory, “ritual activities were not restricted to isolated locations removed from settlements, such as springs, groves, and cliffs, but often took place within settlements ... suggesting that ritual was a regular part of everyday life.” Unfortunately, while there is some archaeological evidence for domestic ritual in the Near East and central Europe (Makiewicz 1987; Garfinkel 1994; Gebel 2002), relatively little is known of household religiosity and ritual in the British Isles during the late prehistoric period. It is almost certain that ritual was embedded in every aspect of domestic life, from the selection of a site and the erection of walls, to the nightly banking of the fire, the preparation and eating of meals, the celebration of births and the mourning of deaths, and in every other aspect of the life of the household (Bradley 2005).

Dowden (2000:230) offers an overview of pagan household religiosity and ritual in pre-Christian Europe that is worth repeating here, for it introduces concepts that are relevant to the study of domestic ritual in medieval and early modern Europe and North America:

Great state or tribal occasions may be happening three times a year or once every eight or nine years or whenever, but day in, day out, each family unit is a religious state in miniature, its head of household the chief priest, worshipping incessantly, at every meal and on every occasion of any importance. This relentless domestic worship, so taken for granted that we rarely see it, is the true basis of pagan religious sentiment. Central to it was worship at the hearth fire, tended perhaps by the daughters of the household. Offerings from each meal were placed here by Romans and doubtless by many other Indo-European peoples. Other, less technically and materially advanced, nations may not have had little idols like the Romans, though they might have made them of dough or rags, ... or they might have had humble wooden figures such as the Norwegians kept into the nineteenth century to bring fertility and luck to their houses. Northern European pagans called them by a plethora of diddy names, often taking care, for instance, to leave them a saucer of milk.

Although much is unknown about pre-Christian domestic ritual, there is evidence that deities were associated with the home and with the wellbeing and prosperity of the household and its holdings. For example, in Scandinavian paganism, the *Dísir*, female deities often associated with warfare, were also considered “family guardian spirits, closely associated with particular localities, to whom sacrifices were made for luck and fertility of the land and those owning it” (Davidson 1993:113). In Ireland and Scotland, the Celtic goddess Brigid (known as Brigantia to the Romans) was closely connected to the hearth and home and was associated with the processes of weaving and dyeing; the brewing of ale; care of the livestock; the production of milk, butter, cheese, and bacon; and other aspects of the life of the household and community (Ó Catháin 1992; Davidson

1993:98,112, 1996). The pre-Christian world was also inhabited by a host of lesser spirits and supernatural beings frequently associated with the land (Davidson 1993:117-121). Some of these, such as the *Cucullati*, are depicted on stone carvings found in Great Britain and elsewhere in Romano-Celtic Europe as diminutive beings wearing hoods or cloaks, often barefoot (Davidson 1989, 1993:120-121). Such spirits are believed to be precursors to the fairies and house spirits of the Middle Ages.

### *Pre-Christian Roman Religion and Domestic Ritual*

In southern Great Britain, the Iron Age ended with the Roman invasion in A.D. 43. They named this new province “Britannia,” and the native people “Britons,” although they were in fact composed of numerous tribes. Most of Scotland and Ireland, although impacted to some extent by war and trade with Roman Britain, continued to be inhabited by Celtic tribes employing Iron Age technology and practicing pre-Christian Celtic paganism.

The Roman presence in Great Britain brought Roman religion, which, like other forms of paganism found throughout Europe and the British Isles, included a vast assortment of divine beings. Salway (2000:33) describes Roman Britain as, “a religious kaleidoscope, ranging from the formal rites of the Roman State ... through a wide range of religions imported both from the neighbouring West and from the East, to the local Celtic cults.” As a general rule, Roman authorities were tolerant of native religions, even integrating some of the deities of the places they conquered into their own pantheon (Salway 2000:33-35). As a result, Celtic cosmology, particularly the vast assortment of

local deities and non-human beings associated with the land, was largely unaffected by Roman occupation (Salway 2000:34).

Much of what is known about pre-Christian European religion and domestic ritual comes from the Romans, as it is generally assumed that similar cosmologies and rituals would have been found among other Indo-European peoples (Dowden 2000). Like other polytheistic pagan traditions, Roman cosmology included a vast array of divine beings:

To the Romans, every grove, spring, cluster of rocks or other significant natural feature had its attendant spirit. Generally the locals gave such entities personal names, but a stranger ignorant of these would refer to each simply as *genius loci*, 'the spirit of the place.' ... In addition to individual spirits attached to places and person, there were throngs who inhabited districts and buildings. The Fauni were found in the woods, and the farms and houses had the *Lares* and *Penates* (Hutton 1991:202).

Evidence of offerings to the deities of land and water has been recovered archaeologically and gives some insight into the nature of pre-Christian Roman devotion. One notable assemblage was recovered from Coventina's Well at the Roman fort at Carrawburgh along Hadrian's Wall. Although the precise role of Coventina in the Roman pantheon is unclear, she appears to have been a water goddess associated with healing and may have been brought to Britain by Roman soldiers from the German provinces (Allason-Jones and McKay 1985:5-6,10; Davidson 1993:131). Substantial deposits of votive offerings have been recovered from inside Coventina's Well, including as many as 16,000 coins and objects made of bronze, lead, ceramic, glass, jet, shale, bone, and leather (Allason-Jones and McKay 1985:6). Among the leather objects recovered from the well were four shoe soles, two of which belonged to children. Allason-Jones and

McKay (1985:10,37) suggest the shoes may have had ritual significance, perhaps “in the nature of *ex votos*, thrown in as a request to Coventina to cure some malady of the foot.”

Similar deposits have been discovered at Stoke-on-Trent in Staffordshire, where a large deposit of shoes was recovered from a Roman well; at Camelon, Scotland, where 120 shoes and sandals were found in a ditch at the entrance to a 2nd century defensive fortification; and at Trimontium, another Roman fort in Scotland, where a variety of objects, including the skulls of both humans and dogs, the beak of a raven, bent swords, armor and helmets, querns, and numerous shoes were recovered from wells and pits (Evans 2010:158-163; Stoke-on-Trent Museum Archaeological Society 2010; Owen 2011).

Van Driel-Murray (1998) suggests that shoes were deposited in wells and other locations during this period either as part of a rite of commencement or as contractual pledge with a specific deity, with one shoe deposited as an offering and the other retained by the devotee. Interestingly, there seems to be a preferential selection for left-footed shoes in Roman votive deposits. Van Driel-Murray (1998:136) has suggested that the right shoe was retained by the person making the pledge and the left was offered to the deity. Clearly the purpose of such pledges will never be known for certain, but they may have included a plea for protection, healing, or prosperity.

Roman deities took many forms. Those that are of most interest to the study of household religiosity and ritual are those “localized spirits of hearth, home, family, and ancestors,” described by Salway (2000:35) as, “the heart of Roman religion.” According to Bodel (2008:248-249): “In the Roman *domus*, personal piety found expression in familial and household worship through the two standard sets of household gods, the

*Lares* (shared by all in the household but a particular focus of attention for the slave staff), and the *Penates* (personal, inherited—and thus familial—images and tokens cultivated by individuals).” The *Lares* and *Penates* were closely connected to the ancestors, the property, and the pantry and were charged with guarding the wine, food, and other provisions, as well as ensuring the wellbeing and protection of the entire household (Dowden 2000:229; Bodel 2008:258).

The *Lares* and *Penates* resided in or near the hearth and were offered a portion of the family’s evening meal, which was thrown into the fire or poured on the hearth (Hutton 1991:202; Rose 1996:193,257; Dowden 2000:177). Henig (1984:169) also suggests that foundation deposits found under the floors of houses in Roman Britain, such as the ceramic vessel and bird bones found under a villa in Hertfordshire, were intended for the *Lares* and *Penates*. Particular attention was paid to the household deities during the *Compitalia* festivities in late December or early January, when heads of garlic or poppies were offered at crossroads (Henig 1984:268).

Hundreds of household shrines, or *lararia*, dedicated to the *Penates* and *Lares* have been discovered at Pompeii and Herculaneum, and to a lesser extent in Roman Britain (Hope and Fox 1896:237-240). Although they could be located throughout the house, *lararia* were most often found in the kitchen (Bodel 2008:255-256), where they took the form of a wall niche, painting, or small shrine (Dowden 2000:177). A small cupboard or *sacrarium* located near the *lararia* held idols and personal amulets that were employed in the worship of the *Lares* and *Penates*. The contents of *lararia* and *sacraria* assemblages were “idiosyncratic and eclectic,” consisting of objects such as small figurines in metal and stone, portrait busts, images of public deities, small bronze

utensils, commemorative tokens, and perhaps most significantly, personal and household objects (Bodel 2008:258,261). Bodel (2008:261) argues that these assemblages “suggest the personalized, in some cases individualized character of the collections, in which each object seems to have had intrinsic value, regardless of its representative function.”

According to one account, one homeowner even kept the cuttings from his first beard in a box stored in the *laraium* (Henig 1984:170; Smith 2009:27). Smith (2009:48) has pointed out that despite their rather visible shrines, rituals and supplications associated with the Roman household deities were largely shrouded in secrecy, noting that, “the range of evidence connecting the *Lares* to silence and concealment seems to indicate that these features ... were enduring qualities of the *Lares*.”

Although the *Lares* and *Penates* were connected to the house, they were also portable and could be relocated if the family should move:

The implication seems to be that the *Lares* were more closely tied to the concept of ‘home’ than to ‘house’ and more closely associated with the idea of community than with place. When jurists needed to define where a man who owned several houses kept his home, they decided it should be “where [he] established his *lar* for marriage” (Bodel 2008:264-265).

The proper method for relocating the domestic deities required that the head of the household first request permission. According to an account from the beginning of the 3rd century A.D., “when private persons wished to free a *sacrarium* (a storage place for sacred objects) in their home from the bonds of religion, they would ‘call forth’ (*evocare*) the sacred objects housed within it, ... If the deity did not accept the invitation, it would not allow its statue to be relocated” (Bodel 2008:253).

The Roman household deities are associated with a wide range of concepts that are relevant to the discussion of household religiosity and ritual in later periods: the kitchen and hearth as the abode of the spirits and the focus of ritual, regular supplication with food and drink, attachment to the family, concealment and secrecy, and special devotions in the winter months (Smith 2009). In short, the household gods were responsible for the well-being and protection of the entire household and its daily activities. There is also some indication that the *Lares* and *Penates* may have served as guardians of hidden treasure (Henig 1984:168; Smith 2009:51-52), a trait that is found among the household and nature spirits of medieval Europe. Given these characteristics, it is likely that the protective *Lares* and *Penates* of the pre-Christian Romans belonged to the same class of household deities and ancestral spirits found among the Celts of the British Isles and in other pagan traditions throughout northern Europe (Henig 1984:169).

### *The Conversion Period*

Dowden (2000:5) has called the Roman Empire “the vehicle by which Christianity conquered Europe.” In A.D. 312, Constantine became the first Christian Emperor of Rome, and in A.D. 380, Rome adopted Christianity as the official state religion (Hutton 1991:248; Dowden 2000:6). Christianity differed from pagan religious traditions in that it required practitioners to renounce all other gods in favor of one God, although this rejection did not necessarily mean that Christians did not believe in the existence of other deities or non-human beings. In many places, Christianization only occurred on the surface, particularly at the outer edges of the Roman Empire. In Great

Britain, although Christianity was being practiced by the 3rd century, paganism largely continued among those outside the ruling class.

As Rome became more Christianized, however, tolerance of non-Christian rituals decreased. Throughout the 4th century, Rome released a series of edicts against native pagan religious devotions, including sacrifices of humans and animals, offerings to trees and wells, and the wearing of amulets (Hutton 1991:256-257; Dowden 2000:6). Animal sacrifice was banned in Roman Britain as early as 337; in 394, all pagan temples were required to close (Hutton 1991:257). An edict in the last decade of the 4th century specifically included a ban on worshipping household cults, apparently aimed at deities such as the *Lares* and *Penates* (Dowden 2000:6). In the eyes of the Christian authorities, pagan deities and other supernatural beings were considered demonic and in opposition to the one true God (Hutton 1991:204).

In the 5th century, missionaries such as Saint Patrick introduced Christianity to Ireland, which had been largely unaffected by the Roman occupation of neighboring Britain. The conversion was gradual and peaceful, and by the mid-6th century, Celtic paganism had all but disappeared (Hutton 1991:262-263). Although there was no formal attempt at conversion in Scotland during the Roman period, there is evidence of Christianity among some Celtic tribes by the 5th and 6th centuries. Again, conversion was slow and relatively peaceful, and by the late 6th century, Christianity was firmly established in western Scotland, spreading throughout the remainder of the country within the following century (Hutton 1991:263-264).

While its influence in Ireland and Scotland was strengthening, Christianity was losing its foothold in southern Britain (Hutton 1991:264). When Roman legions withdrew

from Britannia in 410 prior to the collapse of the Western Empire in 476, they left the island unprotected and vulnerable to attack. As a result, during the 5th and 6th centuries, Britain was inundated and subsequently conquered by pagan warriors from the Germanic tribes—the Angles, Saxons, and Jutes—who crossed the North Sea from present-day Germany, Denmark, and the Netherlands (Hutton 1991:264; Dowden 2000:xx). By the end of the 6th century, two-thirds of England had fallen under the control of the German invaders, known collectively as the Anglo-Saxons, the predecessors of the modern English (Hutton 1991:264).

Having never been under Roman rule, the Anglo-Saxons were entirely pagan. Relatively little is known about Anglo-Saxon religion in Great Britain, although it is clear that, like the Celts and pre-Christian Romans, they worshipped a diverse pantheon of deities and made ritual deposits of both animals and humans in building foundations, pits, boundary ditches, and ditched enclosures (Hall 1960:72; Hutton 1991:268,274; Dowden 2000:229; Hamerow 2006). Similarly, very little is known about the way in which household religiosity and ritual were expressed among the pagan Anglo-Saxons; the best evidence exists in the form of linguistic clues surviving in Old English (Hall 1960:72; Dowden 2000:229). Like the Roman *Lares* and *Penates*, the Anglo-Saxons had their *cofgodas*, or “room-gods” (*cofa* refers to “the inner recess of a house”), and their *dēorling*, “darling, favorite, minion” or “household god” (Conway 1881:232-233; Hall 1960:85). Dowden (2000:229) has suggested that the *cofgodas* were related to the *kofewalts* or *kobolds*, household deities of the Germanic tribes on the continent. According to the 8th-century scholar Bede, the most important religious occasion in Saxon paganism was the winter solstice, which marked the start of the New Year (Hutton

1991:272). Known as *Modranicht*, the “Mother Night,” the festivities were part of the winter Yule season and involved offerings to the household deities comparable to those that occurred during the Roman festival of *Compitalia*.

By the mid-6th century, the Anglo-Saxons in Britain were surrounded on all sides by practicing Christians (Hutton 1991:279). Around 600, Pope Gregory sent Augustine of Canterbury, a Benedictine monk, on a mission to Britain to bring Christianity to the Anglo-Saxons, instructing missionaries to convert pagan religious structures to Christian use (Hutton 1991:271). The Anglo-Saxon conversion was swift, lasting less than a century, and largely peaceful (Hutton 1991:279-280 Dowden 2000:10). However, in the late 8th and early 9th centuries, the Vikings, Norse raiders from Scandinavia, began launching a series of attacks on monasteries in the northern lands of the British Isles. By the mid-9th century, they had founded permanent settlements and established the Danelaw in southeast Britain. Hutton (1991:280-282) argues that the Norse had little impact on the religion of the British Isles, as their beliefs were nearly identical to those of the pagan Anglo-Saxons; indeed, it can be difficult to distinguish one from the other in the archaeological record. Like the Anglo-Saxons, pre-Christian Romans, and Iron Age Celts, the Norse made offerings of weapons in watery places and practiced animal and human sacrifice, especially in association with structures. At Skerne in Yorkshire, England, a ritual deposit discovered beneath a bridge abutment at the River Hull included the remains of cattle, horses, and dogs, as well as an adze, a spoon, and a sword dating to the 9th or 10th century (Hutton 1991:283). The Norse presence in Great Britain was relatively short-lived and had largely faded by the mid-11th century, taking with it the last vestiges of formal paganism in the British Isles.

Hutton (1991:247) describes the Christianization of Europe as, “the replacement of a very heterogeneous polytheism with a single faith acknowledging one deity and relatively uniform in its theology, architecture, organization and ritual.” Naturally, the transition to Christianity occurred at different times in different parts of Europe (Dowden 2000:4). The gradual Christianization of Eastern Europe occurred primarily in the 9th and 10th centuries, with some areas remaining largely pagan into the late Middle Ages (Dowden 2000:12). In Scandinavia, home of the so-called “Northern Germans,” conversion did not occur until the 11th century (Dowden 2000:12-11), while in Lithuania, the last holdout in the European continent, conversion was not completed until the 14th century (Hutton 1991:247).

#### *Development of a Christian Cosmology*

As Christian influence expanded in the early Middle Ages, Christian beliefs and rituals became more standardized, aided by an increasingly centralized religious authority in Rome. One of the most important figures in medieval Christian cosmology was the persona of the Devil. According to Christian tradition, God created the Devil as “the highest angel of the highest order, second in the cosmos only to God himself” (Russell 1984:246-247). When God created the universe, he gave all angels free will; all remained loyal to God except Satan. God saw Satan’s pride and envy and cast the rebellious angel and his celestial followers from his grace where they descended to earth as demons (Russell 1984:174).

Many important characteristics and symbols associated with the Devil emerged during this period that are relevant for understanding medieval and post-medieval religious ritual, witchcraft, and folk magic. For example, although the physical appearance of Satan is not described in the Bible, Russell (1984) argues that the traits of pagan deities were incorporated into the image of the Devil. His appearance in medieval iconography often resembles that of Pan, “horned, hooved, covered with goathair, with a large phallus and a large nose” (Russell 1984:68). The Devil was also depicted as “monstrous and deformed,” with bat-like wings, a tail, tusks, and dark coarse hair covering his body (Briggs 1957:284; Russell 1984). He was believed to possess the ability to change shape into any number of animal or human forms, but was most frequently associated with the serpent or dragon, the goat, and the dog (Russell 1984:67). The Devil also appeared as a black animal or wore black or red clothing, “the color of blood and fire.” He was associated with certain places, directions, and times of day, particularly north, “the domain of darkness and penal cold,” and left, representative of the sinister and dangerous (Russell 1984:71). This association with north and left manifested in various aspects of European ritual and custom. For example, medieval churches were built facing east toward the rising sun, which placed the north on the left-hand side as one entered the building (Russell 1984:71). Because the Devil was believed to lurk on the north or left side, that section of the churchyard was reserved for the burial of criminals, suicide victims, and unbaptized children.

In European folklore, the Devil is often interchangeable with his minions, the lesser demons. Russell (1984:66) notes that the division between the two has always been vague. For example the Old English word *deofol*, “devil,” was used as a synonym for

“demon” as early as the early 9th century (Russell 1984:65). In the minds of medieval peasants, the Devil and his demons posed a very real threat:

Lucifer and his followers are active everywhere and at all times. They obsess us, attacking us physically and mentally. They cause physical and mental illnesses; they steal children, shoot arrows at people, attack them with cudgels, or even leap upon their backs. They enter the body through every orifice, especially the mouth during yawning and the nose during sneezing (Russell 1984:72).

As a result, many magico-religious rituals and charms of the Middle Ages were aimed at repelling the Devil and his many minions. Sacred symbols and substances such as the cross, the Eucharist, holy water, sacramentals, church bells, the names and titles of Jesus and Mary, the words of the Bible, or lines of prayer from the Pater Noster were used to protect homes, persons, crops, and livestock. Secular protections against the Devil included spitting and other rude or obscene gestures, iron, fire, garlic and onions, salt, and magical words and phrases (Russell 1984:90). Many of these materials and symbols appear time and time again in the ritual material cultural and ethnohistorical descriptions of apotropaic magic in the Middle Ages and early modern period.

### *Domestic Religiosity, Magic, and Ritual in the Middle Ages*

Religion, magic, and ritual were important aspects of daily life in the Middle Ages (Thomas 1971; Flint 1991; Wilson 2000; Gilchrist 2012). Although paganism had largely disappeared from Europe by the 11th century, certain rituals and customs with pagan roots remained popular, particularly at the local level, and were either adapted to Christian doctrine or manifested as localized folk ritual (Flint 1991; Dowden 2000:11;

Gilchrist 2012:215). Flint (1991) argues that during the Middle Ages, the Church recognized the emotional need that magic—as a method for interacting with and influencing both the natural and supernatural worlds—fulfilled in the lives of early Christians and sought to meet that need with approved Christian rites that mimicked, and in some cases appropriated in their entirety, elements of pre-Christian ritual. Gilchrist (2012:215) points out, however, that the continuation of these “pararituals” was not indicative of the survival of pagan belief. Although the rituals themselves had antecedents in pre-Christian paganism, the worship of pagan deities was obsolete.

Fortune telling and divination, magical attempts to protect and heal, and charms to ensure mild weather, a good harvest, and a well-stocked larder were widely employed by the laity. Unless explicitly branded as “superstitious” or “demonic” by the local clergy, folk rituals not adopted as Christian rites were usually permitted (Gilchrist 2012:215). In particular, the Church tolerated natural magic, which “intended to harness the power of nature, which was God’s creation.” Cursing and other forms of manipulative or image magic intended to influence, control, injure, or kill, or rituals that enlisted the aid of demons or other supernatural non-human beings were also prevalent, although explicitly condemned by religious authorities (Gilchrist 2012:214).

As in the pre-Christian era, much of the magic and religious ritual of the Middle Ages was focused on the home, agricultural production, and village life. As described in Chapter 1, in the central Middle Ages, peasant families were closely tied to the land and often inhabited the same small cottage for several generations (Wilson 2000:3-4). The construction of a house was a momentous event in the life history of a family, and, as in most things, was accompanied by ritual:

The foundations might be consecrated by the clergy or via the burial of animals. Once built, houses carried magical protection in the form of decorative devices and images. So did the rooms within the house and the activities taking place within them. Of special significance here was the hearth, where a fire had to be kept burning, and the culinary processes, particularly making bread (Wilson 2000:xviii).

In addition to the hearth and foundations, clergy also paid special attention to the threshold, which “connected the house to the external and potentially hostile world” and where the priest might trace a cross or sprinkle holy water (Wilson 2000:5; Gilchrist 2012:171).

In the home, secular magic and ritual were interspersed with Christian rites (Gilchrist 2012:167). The assistance of clergy was regularly sought to consecrate and protect the house and its occupants from harm, particularly on holy days associated with Christmas and the New Year (Wilson 2000:5), when, “Parishioners paid a fee to the parish clerk for bringing water to be sprinkled on the hearth, over livestock, tools, crops, kilns and even in the marriage-bed, to promote fertility and exorcise evil” (Gilchrist 2012:171). More secular magical amulets such as horseshoes, objects of iron and silver, twigs of rowan, and other objects and symbols with apotropaic associations were also employed for similar purposes (Wilson 2000:6).

As with the *Lares* and *Penates*, much of medieval household religiosity and ritual focused on the hearth, the physical and spiritual center of the home. The fire symbolized the life of the household, thus, “when the fire in a new house was lit for the first time, it would be kindled with embers taken from the fire in the old house, symbol of the continuity of family life” (Wilson 2000:6). At night the fire was banked for safe keeping

until the morning, for it was considered bad luck to let it go completely cold (Wilson 2000:6). Crucifixes and religious figurines of the Blessed Virgin or local saints, sacramentals obtained during religious feasts and ceremonies, badges and souvenirs acquired during pilgrimages to saints' shrines (including such mundane objects as shells and stones), and a variety of apotropaic amulets were kept either on the fireplace mantle or in nearby domestic altars, wall niches, or cupboards reminiscent of the *lararia* of the *Lares* and *Penates* (Wilson 2000:5; Gilchrist 2012:156,158,161). Meals, taken around the hearth, were preceded by prayers or blessings accompanied by the sign of the cross (Wilson 2000:5). Salt and other substances were thrown into the fire and bits of food and drink were set out for visiting saints as well as for the fairies and house spirits (Wilson 2000:7-9).

One example of the syncretic nature of medieval Christian ritual can be seen in the cult of St. Brigit. As previously described, in pre-Christian Ireland and Scotland, the Celtic goddess Brigid played an important role in domestic ritual. Sometime before the 7th century, the persona of the goddess Brigid merged with that of Saint Brigit, the Abbess of Kildare (Davidson 1993:112). Like the goddess, the saint was ascribed the power to increase the household's milk supply, watch over the young livestock, and help with the making of butter (Davidson 1993:112). On St. Brigit's Eve, observed on the first of February and marking the end of winter and the beginning of spring, an offering of porridge, milk, buttered bread, or cake was set out for the saint, who visited each house that night bringing prosperity for the coming year (Ó Catháin 1992; Davidson 1993:116, 1996:98). As might be expected, much of the ritual associated with St. Brigit's Eve, including the celebratory feast, centered on the hearth. Before retiring for the evening, the

ashes were leveled and smoothed so that they could be examined the following morning for footprints or other signs that Brigit had been there during the night (Ó Catháin 1992:12). It was also customary to make a cross woven from reeds, known as St. Brigit's Cross, which was hung in the kitchen or over the door to provide the family with luck and protection, "from sickness, sin and scandal," throughout the coming year (Ó Catháin 1992:23-24). Sometimes a bit of food leftover from the feast was concealed inside the cross as an offering to the saint (Ó Catháin 1992:23).

### *Fairies and Domestic Spirits*

One of the most significant phenomena related to medieval and post-medieval European domestic ritual was the belief in a pantheon of non-human beings collectively identified as fairies (Evans-Wentz 1911; Briggs 1953, 1957, 1961, 1967, 1976). Like the pre-Christian deities before them, some of these diminutive non-human beings dwelled in nature—in lakes and streams, woods and fields, rocks and caverns, mountains and hills (Ripley and Dana 1879:65; Briggs 1957; Russell 1984:78; Davidson 1989, 1993; Wilson 2000:10). These wild nature spirits, although morally ambivalent, tended to be less tolerant of and benevolent to humans and were usually avoided (Russell 1984:78).

The class of fairies relevant to the discussion of household ritual consists of the tutelary fairies, "those which attach themselves to a human family, either as omen-bearers or as helpers" (Briggs 1957:271). Various sources describe these non-human beings as "household spirits," "domestic spirits," "goblins of the hearth," "house elves," "sprites of the house and stable," and a host of other affectionate monikers, clearly associating them

with the home and its environs, including the barn and stables. This class of non-human beings associated with domestic spaces can also be expanded to include certain minor demons, ghosts, and poltergeists that were believed to haunt houses, since their behavior was often identical to that of the tutelary fairies and household spirits, especially the boggarts (Briggs 1957:287).

Descriptions of non-human beings that occupied human domiciles appear as early as the 9th century, when a poltergeist-like spirit was reported near the town of Bingen, Germany (Kittredge 1956:214). According to historical accounts, the spirit threw rocks, started fires, and knocked on walls. There are descriptions of similar “hauntings” in the 12th and 13th centuries, including a case from Suffolk, England, where a spirit with “the voice and shape of a little child” was said to inhabit a house and request food and drink, which the family left out for it nightly (Kittredge 1956:215; Briggs 1957:280).

In the first decade of the 11th century, Burchard, the Bishop of Worms, prescribed penance for the sin of placating domestic spirits with gifts and offerings: “Hast thou made little, boys’ size bows and boys’ shoes, and cast them into thy storeroom or thy barn so that satyrs or goblins might sport with them, in order that they might bring to thee the goods of others so that thou shouldst become richer? If thou hast, thou shalt do penance for ten days on bread and water” (Russell 1972:82; McNeill and Gamer 1990:335). This early account of offerings to fairy-like domestic spirits is notable for its mention of children’s shoes placed in the inner recesses of the house (the storeroom) for the benefit of the spirits, so that they will bring prosperity to the home, albeit, at the expense of one’s neighbor. It is also worth noting that the very minor penance prescribed for propitiating these spirits—10 days on bread and water—indicates that at least in the German

provinces in the 11th century, association with house spirits was not viewed as a major infraction by Church authorities.

One of the most descriptive early accounts of helpful but mischievous fairy-like domestic spirits was written by the English author and statesman Gervase of Tilbury in the early 13th century:

England has certain demons (though I admit that I do not know whether I should call them demons, or mysterious ghosts of unknown origin), which the French call neptunes, and the English portunes. It belongs to their nature to take pleasure in the simplicity of happy peasants. When peasants stay up late at night for the sake of their domestic tasks, suddenly, though the doors are closed, they are there warming themselves at the fire and eating little frogs which they bring out of their pockets and roast on the coals. They have an aged appearance, and a wrinkled face; they are very small in stature, measuring less than half a thumb, and they wear tiny rags sewn together. If there should be anything to be carried in the house or any heavy task to be done, they apply themselves to the work and accomplish it more quickly than it could be done by human means. It is a law of their nature that they can be useful but cannot do harm. However, they do have one way of being something of a nuisance: when on occasion Englishmen ride alone through the uncertain shadows of night, a portune sometimes attaches himself to the rider without being seen, and when he has accompanied him on his way for some time, there comes a moment when he seizes the reins and leads the horse into some nearby mud. While the horse wallows stuck in the mud, the portune goes off roaring with laughter, and so with a trick of this kind he makes fun of human simplicity (Banks and Binns 2002:675-677).

The domestic spirits described in the Middle Ages reemerged in full force in the post-medieval period. John Major described the helpful “brobne” (brownie) in 1518 (Green 1962:93). Englishman Reginald Scot mentioned house spirits and fairy-like demons in *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584). John Aubrey similarly wrote of domestic spirits in his *Remaines of Gentilisme and Judaisme* (ca. 1688):

When I was a Boy, our Countrey-people would talke much of them; They were wont to please the Fairies, that they might doe them no shrewd turnes, by

sweeping clean the Hearth, and setting by it a dish whereon was sett a messe of milke sopt with white bread; and did set their Shoes by the fire, and many times on the morrow they should find a threepence in one of them. But if they did speak of it they never had any again (Buchanan-Brown 1972:203).

The domestic spirit was not unique to England or Germany, however. Rose (1996:155) has observed that this class of non-human beings could be found throughout Europe, from Ireland to western Russia, although it was seldom found outside the continent. These solitary spirits were known by different names, depending on the country, region, locality, or even the particular family. They included the hobgoblin, hob, lob, and dobbie of England (sometimes called Puck or Robin Goodfellow); the piskies of Cornwall; the bwca or bwbach of Wales; the brownie of northern England and the Scottish lowlands; the grogan or grogach of the Scottish highlands and Ulster; the púca and cluricaune of Ireland; and the fenodyree of the Island of Man (Evans-Wentz 1911; Briggs 1976; Rose 1996). On the European mainland and Scandinavian Peninsula, domestic spirits included the goblin of Normandy; the kobold of Germany; the nisse and tomte of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden; the kaukas of Lithuania; and the domovoi of eastern Europe and western Russia (Ripley and Dana 1879; Briggs 1976; Davidson 1993:121; Rose 1996; Dowden 2000:229; Wilson 2000:408). Although there were regional variations among the various house spirits, there were also remarkable similarities in characteristics, many of which closely resembled those of the household deities of pre-Christian Europe.

Like those pre-Christian deities, the domestic spirits were closely tied to the house as well as with the barn and barnyard, although the kitchen hearth—and in more recent times, the stove—was their preferred domicile (Ralston 1872:119,120; Riis 1909:78-

79,81). English dobbies were especially attracted to the heat of the fire, and when the fire went cold, it was said, “they frisk and racket about the house, greatly disturbing the inmates” (Scott 1895:89). In Estonia, the house spirit was “the embodiment of fire” and resided behind or above the hearth or in the oven, although it could also be found under the threshold, in the cracks in the walls, or in the attic or rafters (Paulson 1971:138-139,148). The Russian domovoi was also thought to reside under the threshold or under or inside the stove, preferring an old bast shoe placed in that location in which to make its home (Singleton 1997:24). The German kobold (descendant of the *kofewalt* of the pre-Christian Germanic tribes) resided either in the hearth or oven, or in the barns and stables (Saintine 1862:287-288; Rose 1996:183). Similarly, the Scandinavian nisse could be found in the barn or attic (Riis 1909:78-79,81).



Figure 2.1. A tomte or nisse at work in the barn. Adapted from Olaus Magnus’s *Carta Marina*, a 16th-century illustrated map of Scandinavia.

These helpful spirits came out at night to lend a hand around the house and farm, often doing the more tedious work while the family slept. The brownie was considered the most industrious of all the domestic spirits, cleaning the house and barn, churning butter, plowing and reaping, and grinding grain (Rose 1996:51). The kobold brought in the cooking water, washed the dishes, straightened up the kitchen, cut firewood, fetched beer, and scared away the spiders and mice (Saintine 1862:287-288). The dobbies were known to stack all the hay or harvest the entire crop in one night (Scott 1895:89; Rose 1996). The nisse and tomte helped with the housework but were particularly concerned with the welfare of the cattle and other livestock and saw to their

care, ensuring that they were properly fed and bedded (Figure 2.1) (Riis 1909:81; Cyriax 1923:316). Some of the domestic spirits, like their close cousins the nature fairies, were also skilled in crafts such as shoemaking, spinning, weaving, and smithing (Briggs 1957:275).

In addition to doing odd jobs, many of these spirits also acted as protectors of the family, the home, and the livestock, bringing happiness, prosperity, and good luck (Paulson 1971:142-143). Some of the spirits were particularly protective of the women and children of the household, and they sometimes helped with childbirth or sent for the midwife when the woman of the house went into labor (Davidson 1993:121). The domovoi would fend off intruders as well as other unwanted spirits (Ivanits 1992:57). Singleton (1997:24-25) describes a situation in which “a husband invited the domovoi into a new house after his wife had already done so. As a result, two spirits began to inhabit the house, keeping the couple awake at night with their fighting. The wife was finally able to rid the house of the second domovoi by banging a broom against the wall and calling for the assistance of the original spirit.”

Some of the domestic spirits were also said to bestow not only good fortune, prosperity, protection, and healing, but also gifts of food, silver, and “worthless trifles,” such as rocks and dead leaves, which, if kept, would turn into gold or jewels (Briggs 1957:274). The happiness and prosperity brought by the beneficent domestic spirits often came at the expense of one’s neighbor, from whom they would steal corn or milk and whose horses they might ride to the point of exhaustion, leaving them sweating with tangled manes (Paulson 1971:154-155; Davidson 1993:121; Rose 1996:155; Dowden

2000:229). For this reason, a house spirit was viewed with trepidation and suspicion by those outside the family (Rose 1996:51).

Like the *Lares* and *Penates*, *cofgodas*, and the goddess Brigid, house spirits were propitiated with offerings of food and drink. A bowl of cream and fresh-baked bread or cake was set out at night for the English brownie (Rose 1996:51). The Welsh piskies could be placated with a bowl of milk (Evans-Wentz 1911:164). In Orkney, milk was sprinkled in the corners of the house and ale poured into a hollow stone for the house spirit (Dixon 1915:105). The German kobold was given a portion of the family's supper, preferring porridge or a panade, a thick mixture of flour, butter, and milk (Saintine 1862:288-290; Rose 1996:183). The Estonian house spirit was similarly propitiated with offerings of porridge, bread, milk, butter, or beer, and less commonly, with sacrifices of small animals, particularly chickens (Paulson 1971:139). In Sweden and Norway, special attention was paid to the tomte and nisse on Christmas Eve, when a bowl of porridge or rice and milk was placed in the barn or taken up to the attic for the spirit (Riis 1909:78-79,81; Cyriax 1923).

Although generally benign and helpful, domestic spirits had a capricious streak and liked to play pranks on members of the household, especially the servants (Ripley and Dana 1879:64; Rose 1996:155). Their "impish tricks" might include pulling the covers off the family while they slept, pinching the maids, moving furniture, tangling needlework, banging pots and pans, breaking dishes, scattering the ashes from the hearth, knocking on the walls, throwing stones, rattling the doors, and smearing them with manure (Kittredge 1956:214; Singleton 1997:25). A hob in Lincolnshire, England, was said to have placed a wagon on top of a barn (Duncan 1897:69). Estonian house spirits

were known to torment the livestock and take them for midnight rides (Paulson 1971:147), while the domovoi would harass the chickens and pluck their feathers (Ivanits 1992:57). Much of this behavior is identical to that described in accounts of hauntings by poltergeists, ghosts, and demons (Briggs 1957:287).

Although house spirits appear frequently in folk tales throughout the British Isles and northern Europe, there seems to have been a taboo against speaking of them. According to Briggs (1957:275-276), it was insulting and dangerous to address a fairy by name, or to even talk to it, and it was certainly unwise to betray fairy secrets or to brag of the gifts and prosperity they provided. According to one Welsh tale, there was a cottage that was visited each night by domestic fairies, who left a gift of money for the old woman who lived there. One day, she revealed to a neighbor the secret source of her good fortune and was never visited by the benevolent house fairies again (Evans-Wentz 1911:160). This emphasis on secrecy and silence is reminiscent of the mystery surrounding the worship of the *Lares* and *Penates*.

Although it was not prudent to openly offer the house fairies payment or praise, which might insult them and cause them to leave, some spirits would accept little gifts if they were left out where they might inadvertently encounter them. In Lithuania, peasants made tiny cloaks for the *kaukas*, which they buried in the floor of the cottage (Ralston 1872:122). The domovoi preferred an old bast shoe placed near the stove in which to make its home (a bast shoe is a type of traditional slipper woven from the inner bark, or bast, of a birch or linden tree, once commonly worn by peasants in Eastern Europe) (Singleton 1997:24).

Like the *Lares* and *Penates*, many of the spirits were attached to a specific family, although some, such as the kobold, were connected to the house and would serve the new residents as readily as the old. Others, like the domovoi, could be enticed to relocate with the family. On such occasions, “special care was taken to ‘invite’ the domovoi into the new house with a thrice-repeated incantation and by throwing a new bast shoe under the stove” (Singleton 1997:24). Another method, described by Ralston (1872:120-121), involved transferring the domovoi from the old house to the new by raking the hot embers out of the stove into a jar and transporting them to the new abode, saying “Welcome, grandfather, to the new home!”

As in central and eastern Europe, gifts of shoes and clothes were offered to the domestic spirits of the British Isles; however, for some unknown reason, brownies and hobs were inexplicably offended by gifts of clothing, particularly if the article was too fine or too new or not made of the right material (Briggs 1957:275; Rose 1996:152). Numerous tales of both helpful and mischievous spirits being “laid” with a gift of clothes can be found throughout the British Isles. In Yorkshire, England, a hob attached to a family living near Reeth was inadvertently driven away by the mistress of the house when she gave him a hat and cloak, to which he replied, “Ha! A cap and a hood, Hob’ll never do mair good,” and disappeared (Scott 1895:99). In a tale from Lincolnshire, a family was in the habit of leaving out a clean shirt for their hob every Saturday night, but one night the garment was not to its liking and, offended, it left the house for good but not before scattering the ashes across the floor and calling out: “Harden, harden, hemp / Harden, harden, gear / If you’d have given me linen to wear / I’d have served you faithfully many a year” (Duncan 1897:69). In another story, this time from Ireland, a boy,

seeing how hard the púca worked each night, had a beautiful coat and pair of breeches made for the spirit and laid them out for him to find. When the púca found the clothes, he was delighted but decided he was too fine to work for the family any longer and promptly abandoned the premises (Briggs 1976:326). Similar tales of helpful household spirits laid by a gift of clothing are found throughout the British Isles.

Although these spirits were helpful and protective of the household and the family, they could be mischievous at times and if angered or offended, could become downright malicious and even murderous (Rose 1996:155). If the kaukas was abused or neglected, it was known to set the house on fire (Ralston 1872:122). If the mischievous trickery of a house spirit became too much for the family, or if the spirit had been insulted or angered and subsequently transformed into a full-fledged boggart or poltergeist, there were methods to repel it.

In addition to inadvertently “laying” a domestic spirit with a gift of clothes, there were other methods for repelling an unwanted spirit. “Cold iron” was perhaps the most common method for warding off fairies and other non-human beings, especially in the form of a knife or an open pair of shears (Briggs 1957:275). A stone with a naturally occurring hole was widely used as an apotropaic device against fairies, as well as witches and other troublesome beings, and was employed both in the British Isles and on the continent (Briggs 1957:276). In Russia, a fieldstone containing a natural hole, a piece of broken pottery, and an old shoe could all be used to protect the chickens from the domovoi (Ivanits 1992:57). Other means of protection from fairies and house spirits included sprigs of rowan or elder, milk and crusts of bread (which may have been intended to placate the spirits instead of actually repelling them), the crowing of a cock,

and a coat or other garment turned inside out (Briggs 1957:276). Some accounts allege that holy water, Bibles, holy names and words, the ringing of church bells, and other objects of Christian ritual could repel a fairy spirit (Briggs 1957:275-276; Davidson 1993:121), while other accounts say that such things had no effect on the house spirits because they were not truly evil.

Due to their varying behavior, house spirits were viewed by many as “morally ambivalent” (Russell 1984:64). In his discussion of the supernatural in medieval England, Watkins (2007:61-67) explores the problem of moral neutrality and the consternation it caused some medieval theologians and writers who struggled to define and explain these “ambiguous beings” within the framework of Christianity’s duality of good and evil. To some, Satan and his legions of demons offered a convenient explanation for these problematic pre-Christian spirits of the land and home. Their destructive tendencies, propensity for trickery and mayhem, and other negative attributes were viewed as further evidence of their impiety. Since they could not be of God, they must be of Satan (Russell 1972:52-53, 1984:78; Herva and Ylimaunu 2009:241).

By the late Middle Ages, the morally ambiguous yet largely benign household spirits had been squarely assigned to the realm of the demonic, at least in the eyes of the clergy and members of the learned upper class (Russell 1972:52-53; Wilby 2000; Watkins 2007:64). Many of the laity, however, did not see any problem with continuing a relationship with these non-human beings, which they did not perceive as conflicting with their Christian faith (Herva and Ylimaunu 2009:241), a view that became increasingly dangerous in early modern England and Scotland.

## *European Witchcraft in the Early Modern Period*

Throughout the Middle Ages, witchcraft was accepted as a part of everyday life and a force that could be used to either help or harm (Behringer 2004:33). Although some of the early European witchcraft accusations alleged association with the Devil or minor demons among the charges, most cases involved maleficium, or harmful magic.

Hailstorms, drought, crop failure, famine, death of livestock, human disease, and cases of “poisoning” were all believed to be caused by maleficium (Behringer 2004:54).

In the late Middle Ages and early modern period, however, European witchcraft became more closely associated with diabolism, Satanic worship, and heresy, all of which challenged the authority of the Church (Thomas 1971:438; Behringer 2004:82; Gilchrist 2012:215). It was also during this period that the familiar themes of witchcraft first appeared: covenants with Satan, demonic worship, invoking evil spirits, nocturnal flight, the witches’ Sabbath, and sexual intercourse with demons (Behringer 2004:59). All of these acts went beyond maleficium, into the realm of heresy, an offense punishable by death; it was this element that distinguished European witchcraft of the late Middle Ages and post-medieval period from witchcraft in earlier periods and in other parts of the world (Thomas 1971:438).

Some of the first large-scale witch hunts in Europe took place in France and Switzerland in the 14th and 15th centuries (Behringer 2004:82). The increase in the number of persecutions of diabolical witchcraft in this period was heavily influenced by the Catholic Church. In 1484 Pope Innocent VIII issued a Papal Bull that prescribed severe penalties for diabolical witchcraft and encouraged the systematic persecution of

witches. The publication of Kramer and Sprenger's infamous treatise, *Malleus Maleficarum*, or *Hammer of the Witches*, in 1486 added fuel to the fire (Thomas 1971:438-439). In the period between ca. 1550 and ca. 1650, persecutions of witchcraft intensified, resulting in unprecedented mass trials and executions (Behringer 2004:82). Scholars estimate that between 40,000 and 50,000 people were executed in Europe and its colonies for diabolical witchcraft during this period (Bailey 2007:175). The most significant witch hunts, as far as scale and the number of accused persons condemned to death, occurred in the German-speaking regions of central Europe, accounting for more than half of all known cases.

In the British Isles, large-scale witch hunts were relatively rare, with far fewer trials and executions compared to central Europe, although the region did not escape the witch frenzy (Behringer 2004:105). A series of royal edicts, beginning with the Witchcraft Act of 1542, codified penalties for diabolical witchcraft, which included imprisonment and death. In the first decade of the 17th century, King James I passed the Witchcraft Act of 1604, which repealed and replaced the previous Witchcraft Act of 1563 with tougher penalties:

if any person or persons ... shall use practice or exercise any invocation, or conjuration, of any evil and wicked spirit, or shall consult, covenant with, entertain, employ, feed, or reward any evil and wicked spirit to or for any purpose; or take up any dead man, woman, or child out of his, her, or their grave, or any other place where the dead body resteth, or the skin, bone, or any other part of any dead person, to be employed or used in any manner of witchcraft, enchantment, charm or sorcery whereby any person shall be killed, destroyed, wasted, consumed, pined, or lamed in his or her body, or any part thereof; that then every such offender or offenders, their aiders, abettors and counselors, being of any of the said offences duly and lawfully convicted and attainted, shall suffer pains of death as a felon or felons, and shall lose the privilege and benefit of clergy and sanctuary (Roud 2003:526-527).

Backed by harsher legal repercussions, English witch hunts began in earnest in the 17th century. In 1664-1665, Matthew Hopkins, self-appointed “Witchfinder General,” took upon himself the task of routing evil from the land, resulting in the largest witch hunt in the history of England. It began with a trial against 36 women in Chelmsford in Essex, approximately half of whom were executed (Behringer 2004:132). From there the witchcraze spread throughout East Anglia and beyond, with trials taking place in Suffolk, Northamptonshire, Huntingdonshire, Bedfordshire, Norfolk, and Cambridgeshire. Behringer (2004:132) estimates that at least 250 people were tried for witchcraft during this period, with at least 100 (probably more) ending in execution.

English, and to a lesser extent Scottish, witchcraft included an element that was unique among the witchcraft mythology of Europe—the concept of the witch’s familiar (Behringer 2004:132). In 1597, the mischievous house spirit drew the attention of King James VI of Scotland, who later became James I of England when he assumed the throne in 1603. In his popular work, *Daemonologie*, a treatise on witchcraft, demonic spirits, and witches’ familiars, James identified two kinds of evil spirits: “One sorte that troubles and tormentes the persones that they haunt with; An other sort that are serviceable unto them in all kinde of their necessaries, and omittes never to forwarne them of anie suddaine perrell that they are to be in” (Stuart 1597:64). He pondered, “whither both these sortes be but wicked and damned spirites: Or if the last sorte be rather Angells, (as should appeare by their actiones) sent by God to assist such as he speciallie favoures” (Stuart 1597:64). James made it clear, however, that these spirits, which “haunted divers houses,

without doing any evill, but doing as it were necessarie turnes up and down the house; ... this spirit they called Brownie,” were Satan’s imps (Stuart 1597:65).

The Witchcraft Act of 1563 also emphasized those “evil and wicked spirits,” whom witches were believed to “consult, covenant with, entertain, employ, feed or reward,” as one of the chief indicators of diabolical witchcraft. Many of the trial records reveal that accused witches often admitted to communicating with and propitiating fairies and “familiar spirits” (Briggs 1967:140; Wilby 2000:284).



Figure 2.2. A witch feeding her animal familiars, which she keeps in a chest. From a late-17th century woodcut.

In a study of witchcraft trial records in Scotland, Wilby (2000) points to the many parallels that existed between the witch’s familiar and the helpful house spirits. Like the house spirits, familiars could appear in almost any form, usually diminutive in size. They were most commonly depicted as a dog or other small animal, reptile, amphibian, or insect, or as small person or child (Wilby 2000:287; Demos 2004:179-180). Familiars usually appeared when a human was in need of assistance, often offering an implicit or explicit contractual arrangement, whereby the familiar intervened in the areas of human and animal health, domestic and farming processes, and “the general securing of material prosperity” (Wilby 2000:285). In return, the familiar required payment, usually in the form of regular supplications of food and drink, especially of milk, bread, ale or beer, and less commonly, the sacrifice of a small animal such as a chicken (Figure 2.2) (Wilby 2000:296-297). In later writings and trial testimony, familiars were described as obtaining their meal of milk (or sometimes of

blood) by directly suckling a “witch’s teat” or “witch’s mark” (Wilby 2000; Demos 2004:179-180): “What say you to this? that the witches have their spirits, some hath one, some hath more, as two, three, four, or five, some in one likeness, and some in another, as like cats, weasels, toads, or mice, whom they nourish with milk, or with a chicken, or by letting them suck now and then a drop of blood” (Gifford 1563).

By the end of the 17th century, the mass trials had subsided, with the last execution for witchcraft in England taking place in 1684, although trials and unauthorized witch hunts continued into the early 18th century in both England and Scotland (Roud 2003:528; Behringer 2004:185). By the early 18th century, a majority of the educated elite in England and Scotland had begun to doubt even the existence of diabolical witchcraft. The final Witchcraft Act, passed in 1736, reduced witchcraft to a crime of fraud, since “it was no longer illegal to practice witchcraft because, by implication, witchcraft did not exist” (Roud 2003:528), although, such disbelief was far from universal. Roud argues that, “whole swathes of the population—probably the majority of the ordinary people—continued to believe in witches and the full panoply of supernatural and occult practices well into the nineteenth century.”

One group in particular maintained a strong belief in diabolical witchcraft and demonology. According to Behringer (2004:113), English Puritans were far more intolerant of perceived diabolism than the more moderate and skeptical Anglicans (Behringer 2004:133). He (2004:133) also suggests that it is “psychologically likely that those who aspired to a Godly republic would be more easily tempted to adopt the role of moral entrepreneurship” and abhor a pact with Satan as “an inversion of the covenant with God.” It is no surprise then that Puritan religious authorities were responsible for

publishing all of the major treatises on witchcraft and demonology during this period. In addition, although some Englishmen and women believed fairies and house spirits to be morally neutral, “too bad for Heaven, but too good for Hell,” English Puritans were quite certain all fairies and spirits were demons (Briggs 1967:55,145). According to Briggs (1967:55): “The Puritans of the seventeenth century had no doubt at all ... that Hobgoblins and Brownies, like Ghosts and Black Dogs, were imps from Hell.”

### **The New World**

Thus the English colonists who made the journey to the New World in the 16th and 17th centuries were coming from a complex magico-religious tradition that was firmly rooted in Christian cosmology and doctrine but was thickly interwoven with rituals and localized folk beliefs with pre-Christian roots, including a belief in fairies and house spirits, witches and their familiars, the Devil and his minor demons, poltergeists and ghosts, all overlapping and shading into each other. It seems reasonable to assume that folk magic and belief in non-human beings would have followed the colonists to North America along with other cultural constructs like language, foodways, and methods of house construction. In fact, historical records demonstrate that magic and belief in the supernatural was quite literally carried across the Atlantic by the early colonists. In 1654, a passenger on a ship heading from London to Maryland was blamed for a bout of unfavorable wind and weather and accused of witchcraft. After seizing the unfortunate woman and finding on her the mark of a witch, she was hanged at sea by her fellow voyagers (Demos 2008:81). A similar incident occurred around the same period on a

vessel headed for Virginia in which a woman accused of causing a fierce storm was hanged at sea (Demos 2008:81). It is unclear what particular behaviors or other signs indicated to the passengers and crew that these women were witches, but it is clear that belief in and fear of witchcraft and magic was alive and well.

The first permanent English settlement at Jamestown, Virginia, established in 1607, suffered for years from disease, starvation, brackish water, fire, harsh weather, and a shortage of skilled labor (Nash 2000:54-57). Conditions were so deplorable that despite the fact that approximately 10,000 settlers were shipped to the colony between 1607 and 1622, only about 2,000 still survived at the end of that period (Nash 2000:64). It is not difficult to imagine that these early colonists would have called on both their Christian faith as well as the more secular folk rituals of their homeland to help them negotiate the reality of their situation. In fact, it should be assumed that such was the case.

The first permanent settlement in New England was founded by the Pilgrims (a Separatist group of Puritans that left the Church of England) at Plymouth, Massachusetts, in 1620 (Maxwell 2003). A decade later, a second group of English Puritans, led by John Winthrop, established the Massachusetts Bay Colony, which was to be the most successful English colonization effort in North America. In 1630, 700 passengers set sail from England headed for the Americas (Nash 2000:88). By 1640, approximately 12,000 Puritans had arrived on the shores of New England.

The Puritans were not the only group that settled in North America, however. At least four large waves of English-speaking immigrants came to this country in the 17th and 18th centuries, as shown in Figure 2.3:

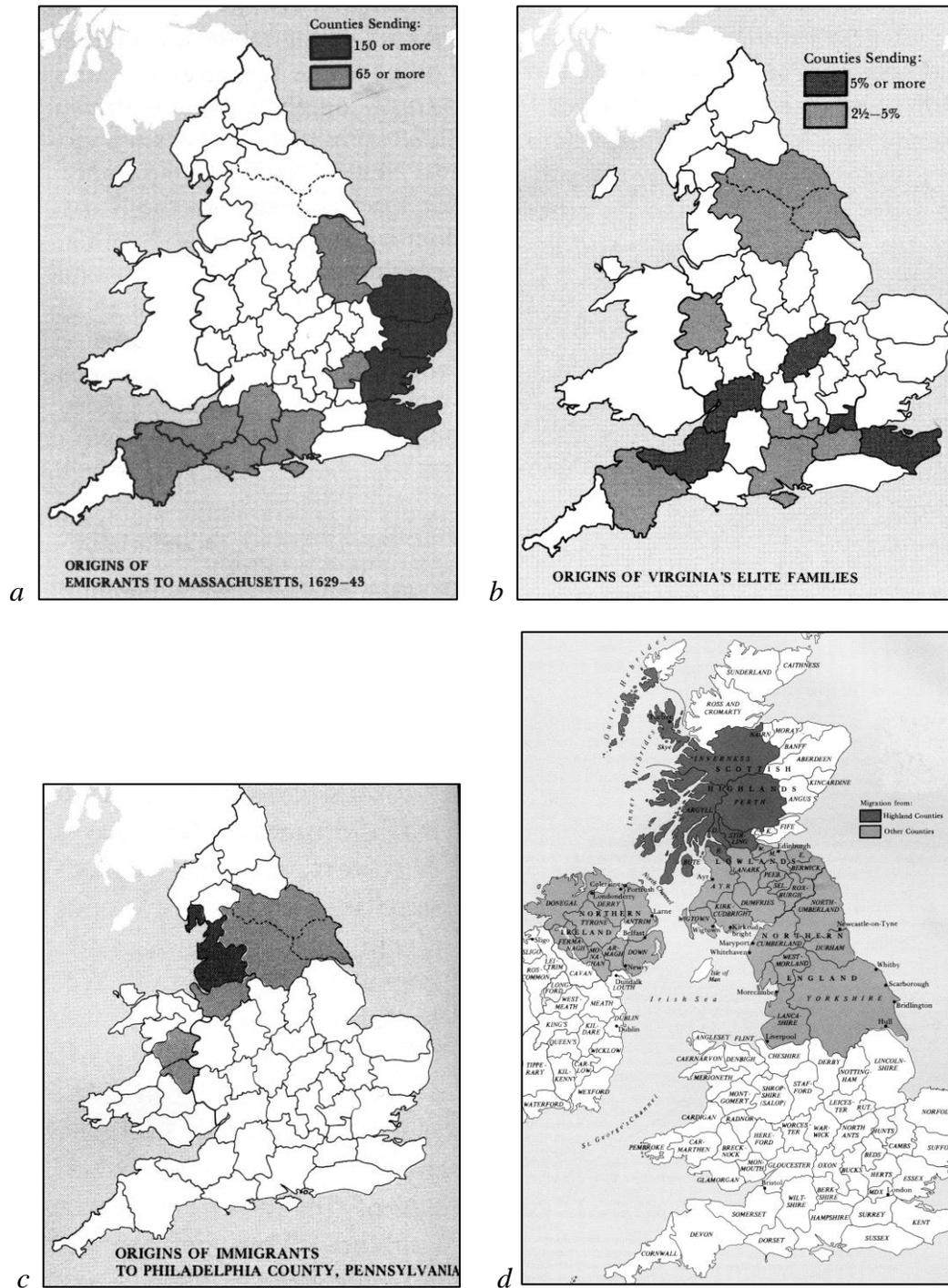


Figure 2.3. Origins of English-speaking immigrants to the American colonies: (a) origins of Massachusetts immigrants; (b) origins of Virginia immigrants; (c) origins of Delaware Valley immigrants; (d) origins of Appalachian immigrants (Fischer 1989:32,238,440,607).

The first was an exodus of Puritans from the east of England to Massachusetts during a period of eleven years from 1629 to 1640. The second was the migration of a small Royalist elite and large numbers of indentured servants from the south of England to Virginia (ca. 1642-1675). The third was a movement from the North Midlands of England and Wales to the Delaware Valley (ca. 1675-1725). The fourth was a flow of English-speaking people from the border of North Britain and northern Ireland to the Appalachian backcountry mostly during the half-century from 1718 to 1775 (Fischer 1989:6).

These four groups “spoke distinctive dialects of English, built their houses in diverse ways, and had different methods of doing much of the ordinary business of life” (Fischer 1989:6). They also brought with them magical traditions and secular rituals that were alike in many ways but which also manifested in subtle differences.

The colonies in New England are probably most remembered for their strong religious beliefs and their fear and intolerance of witchcraft (Nash 2000:88). According to one historian,

their ideological commitment marked them off from the colonizers in Virginia. These were men and women fired by a vision of building a Christian utopia, dedicated to organizing themselves around the concept of a community, and possessed of the belief that industriousness and self-discipline were indispensable parts of worshiping their God (Nash 2000:88).

In particular, the New England colonists were obsessed with what they termed “God’s remarkable Providences” (Fischer 1989:126) and the evil forces they believed constantly threatened their covenanted community. Houses and persons were attacked by diabolical forces both seen and unseen (Figure 2.4) and the Devil and his dark servants—demons, witches, and their familiars—seemed to be everywhere.



Figure 2.4. A 17th-century house under attack by demonic spirits and non-human beings (Glanvill 1700:frontispiece).

On the other hand, while religion and magic played an important role in the daily lives of the Virginia colonists, it was not the motivating force. Instead, economic ambitions and a strong inclination toward individualism were what drove the Virginians, particularly those in the upper tiers of colonial society (Nash 2000:88). Rutman (1978:190) has

shown that in Virginia, although the Anglican Church was the official religious institution of the colony in the late 17th century, a considerable variety of beliefs existed among the colonists, ranging from the occasional Quaker or devout Puritan to what he describes as the “barely religious.”

One of the leading misconceptions regarding the early English colonists is that since many were devout Christians they did not believe in or practice folk magic and associated rituals. Although formal religious authority condemned the use of magic and counter-magical remedies, historical evidence demonstrates that most colonists weren't opposed to employing a little magical assistance from time to time. Rutman (1978:200) describes 17th-century Virginia as “a colony where magic rubbed shoulders with Christianity,” and the same could certainly be said for New England, the Delaware Valley, and the Appalachian backcountry. While countless historians have explored the ideologies and worldview of the early colonists, most, with some notable exceptions (Godbeer 1992; Kittredge 1956; Rutman 1978), have focused on their fervent religiosity and the sociological causes of the infamous witch trials. Far fewer have examined the

system of popular belief underlying the events at Salem and elsewhere: namely, the prevalence of folk magic, ritual, and belief in a world inhabited by non-human beings and the ways in which those elements impacted daily life.

Although the events in Salem are the most well-known, the English colonists were no stranger to witchcraft trials before that period. In New England, 61 prosecutions for witchcraft took place prior to 1692, the majority of which occurred in the 1640s and 50s, with more than one-third ending in conviction and execution (Butler 1979:343; Godbeer 1992:158,177). As in England, New England law defined a witch as any person who “hath or consulteth with a familiar spirit” (Godbeer 1992:158). Godbeer argues, however, that although witchcraft was defined legally in this way, popular belief did not conform to legal descriptions. Most of the individuals who testified in witchcraft trials described maleficium, not diabolism, as the basis for their accusations (Godbeer 1992:158).

Witchcraft belief wasn't the only manifestation of magic in colonial America. Occult practices such as astrology, chiromancy, geomancy, fortunetelling, and divination were widespread among even the educated gentry (Butler 1979:320). The pervasiveness of occult practice in colonial America is evident in the written record: occult books were widely available and part of the personal libraries of some of the most respected members of colonial American society, and almanacs of the period contained astrological guides and other forms of occult belief (Butler 1979:325).

Historians have also shown that professional practitioners of magic were commonplace in both England and the American colonies (Thomas 1971:244-252; Godbeer 1992:30-37). These “wise men and cunning persons found lost and stolen

objects, clothing, household items, cattle, and children ... foretold the best day to sail, to begin a business venture, to marry, and to conceive children” (Butler 1979:321). Several scholars have suggested that some of those accused of witchcraft at Salem did in fact practice white magic (Butler 1979; Godbeer 1992). It is likely that after the unfortunate events that transpired at Salem, cunning folk and traditional healers were more cautious about making their services known to the general public, particularly if they believed their skills or powers were obtained from an association with fairies, familiars, or other non-human beings.

Occult ritual and folk magic were so prevalent in the colonies that theologians such as Increase and Cotton Mather felt the need to repeatedly condemn their use in their writings. Cotton Mather (1692:80) commented on the “little witchcrafts” practiced in colonial New England, observing that, “in some Towns it has been an usual thing for People to cure Hurts with Spells, or to use detestable Conjurations, with Sieves, Keys, and Pease, and Nails, and Horse-shoes, and I know not what other Implements, to learn the things for which they have a forbidden, and an impious Curiosity. ‘Tis in the Devils Name, that such things are done.” In fact, most English colonists probably engaged in some form of vernacular folk magic at least occasionally, if not regularly. Through the use of magic, a colonist:

could account his poor hunting to the spell of another, could hold that only the horseshoe over his door protected his sick wife from the evil intentions of a neighbor woman who perforce passed under it on her way to saying black prayers at his wife’s bedside, could attribute to a witch the death of his pigs and withering of his cotton, and, in court, faced with suits for slander, could insist that “to his thoughts, apprehension or best knowledge” two witches “had rid him along the Seaside and home to his own house (Rutman 1978:194-195).

## *Magic and the Supernatural in the 18th Century*

Although the English continued to constitute a majority of the non-native population in many parts of eastern North America, by the end of the colonial period several other groups had made their way to the American colonies. In the second decade of the 18th century, thousands of German, Swiss, and Ulster Scots-Irish immigrants, as well as enslaved Africans, inundated the colonies (Nash 2000:200-201), bringing with them their own cosmologies, worldviews, and magico-religious and secular rituals.

However, the English still retained an influential presence in eastern North America. Even as late as 1790, more than 60% of the white population of the United States consisted of individuals of English heritage (United States Bureau of the Census 1975:1168). Other European groups represented significantly smaller percentages of the total white population—the Irish (9.7%), Germans (8.7%), Scots (8.3%), Dutch (3.4%), French (1.7%), and Swedes (0.7%)—but these populations were not distributed evenly across the landscape. In Massachusetts, 82% of the population was described as English even in the last decade of the 18th century. In Pennsylvania, however, just over a third of the population was English (35.3%), while the German population was the highest in the nation at 38.3%. Significant numbers of Germans also settled in Kentucky, Tennessee, and Maryland. Scots were found in greater numbers in the mountainous regions of Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia, Kentucky and Tennessee (ranging from 10% to more than 15%), while Irish were found in higher concentrations in Georgia, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, and Maryland (15.3% to 12.3%) and comprised a sizable minority in other states as well (United States Bureau of the Census 1975:1168). These

regional differences resulted in unequal geographic distribution of certain rituals and magico-religious traditions that may be reflected in the archaeological record.

While there is a general consensus regarding the extent of magical belief in the early colonial period, there is less agreement as to when, or if, magical belief and associated rituals declined in North America among people of European descent. Scholars often presume that magic was abandoned during the transition from a pre-modern society to one marked by modern influences such as industrialization, widespread literacy, scientific investigation, and globalization (Thomas 1971; Godbeer 1992). Butler (1979:318,320-321) asserts that magic declined steadily after about 1720, partly as a result of the intense persecution of professional practitioners—wise women, cunning men, and the like—in the previous century. Rutman (1978) proposes that the decline of magic and occult belief was triggered by the transition from communalism to individualism and was further reduced by the spread of Christianity during the Great Awakening in the 1730s.

Mark Leone (2008:6) has observed that in Annapolis, Maryland, in the period before 1750 references to English magic filled the newspapers: “*The Maryland Gazette*, frequently cited many-headed monsters, witchcraft trials in Europe, misshapen babies linked to magic, unaccounted appearances and disappearances and the world of pagan, non-Christian belief. ... English witchcraft in this period existed openly in public and was tolerated” (Leone 2008:6). In the second half of the century, however, such references all but disappeared, reflecting what Leone (2008:6) has described as, “the changing philosophy of the period.” Godbeer argues, however, that even in the last decades of the 18th century:

magical belief and practice persisted in the popular culture of New England. Not only the inhabitants of isolated rural communities but even the merchants and sea captains of coastal ports consulted cunning folk and astrologers. People also wielded magical power on their own behalf as occasion demanded, primarily to defend themselves against occult attack (Godbeer 1992:233).

Although the last conviction for witchcraft in Massachusetts took place in 1692, fear of witchcraft continued (Butler 1979:335-337). Grace Sherwood was examined for witches' marks in Virginia in 1705; the following year, South Carolina debated whether suspected witches could be legally prosecuted (Butler 1979:335). A suspected witch was stoned to death by a mob in Philadelphia in 1776, and additional accusations and deadly public attacks of suspected witches in that city were reported as late as 1787 (Geib 1974). Butler (1979:338) suggests that while colonists continued to suspect their neighbors of witchcraft, in the late 18th century they were less likely to make those suspicions publically known. As a result, it is unclear to what extent folk magic and ritual persisted in the everyday life of the average American.

Archaeologists such as Mark Leone and James Deetz (1974, 1996) and folklorist Henry Glassie (1969, 1975) have argued that a revolutionary shift in thinking occurred in the mid-18th century that resulted in sweeping transformations in behavior and material culture. These changes were reflected in every aspect of life, from architecture, farm layout, and gravestone decoration to ceramics, foodways, refuse disposal, and mode of dress. This change is usually explained as resulting from the rapid and widespread replacement of a "medieval" mindset by a "Georgian" mindset. According to this theory, the medieval worldview was conservative, communal, asymmetrical, organic, and disorderly (Deetz 1974). In comparison, the Georgian way of thinking embraced

innovation, privacy and individualism, bilateral symmetry, science and technology, and order and balance. Citing archaeological evidence from sites in Delaware, Bedell (2001) argues, however, that this mental shift occurred much more gradually than previously assumed, manifesting sooner and more strongly in some aspects of culture while other aspects of life did not change significantly until the 19th century.

In addition, some scholars have argued that certain elements of culture are more resistant to change than others. In a study of acculturation in Latin America, Castro (2003:15) determined that males tend to acculturate more readily than females, but only in behavioral aspects of culture. Castro (2003:15) proposed that those “central elements of culture,” in particular, the “values and behaviors related to the family,” are more resistant to change more than “peripheral aspects” of culture. Following this argument, deep-seated mental structures regarding religion, magic, and ritual associated with the household and the family could be expected to persist even after most other aspects of culture had conformed to the Georgian mindset.

### *Magic and the Supernatural in the 19th and Early 20th Centuries*

In the colonial era, witchcraft and folk magic were viewed as being in opposition to Christian doctrine and religious and political authority. By the 19th century, ideologies had shifted; magical belief and ways of thinking—now dismissed as “superstition”—were condemned, devalued, derided, and otherwise marginalized by institutions of authority eager to embrace rationalism and scientific thought as indicators of American modernity and superiority. No longer signifying involvement with diabolical witchcraft,

folk magic became associated with the uneducated, the ignorant, the primitive, and the inferior (Sederholm 2006). Instead of worrying that the use of magic would land them in court or at the end of a hangman's rope, 19th-century Americans were concerned about appearing superstitious and backward. Magic was relegated to the socially inferior: newly arrived eastern European immigrants (especially Catholics), the poor Scots-Irish of Appalachia, and the blacks of the American South. In essence, magic became the domain of the Other.

During this period anthropologists, historians, and folklorists began to develop a fascination with the continued use of magic among far-flung exotic cultures, simultaneously romanticizing and ridiculing magical belief and so-called "primitive" ways of thinking. In the United States, scholars expressed particular interest in the magico-religious folk beliefs of the African Diaspora, emphasizing their "superstitious nature" (Herron 1891; Bacon 1896; Hall 1897; Puckett 1926; Hurston 1931). Some of these scholars recognized elements of European folk magic in the magico-religious rituals and traditions of African Americans; a few even suggested, with thinly veiled racism, that almost all African American folk belief was of European origin: "Should some weird, archaic, Negro doctrine be brought to his [the white man's] attention he almost invariably considers it a 'relic of African heathenism,' though in four cases out of five it is a European dogma from which only centuries of patient education could wean even his own ancestors" (Puckett 1926:vii). Statements such as these implied that African Americans had no heritage of their own and were reduced to appropriating what the intellectually superior white man had long since abandoned.

What Puckett and others were documenting and describing many scholars now refer to as hoodoo or conjure, a form of magico-religious belief that “was a result of creolization and syncretism, the mixing of multiple African, European, and Native American cultures, which together resulted in a form of magic unique to the American South” (Anderson 2005:25). Leone et al. (2001:143) describes hoodoo as, “an oral tradition practiced largely without professionals, without a named pantheon, and without an articulated theology.” Numerous scholars have studied hoodoo and its West African origins (Chireau 2003; Anderson 2005; Leone et al. 2001). But as Yronwode (2003), Anderson (2005) and even Hyatt (1970-1978) point out, although hoodoo is primarily practiced by African Americans and incorporates a wide range of traditions and beliefs from West Africa, there are and always have been white practitioners and unmistakably European influences and traditions in American hoodoo.

Some mention should be made at this point of some of the other magico-religious ritual traditions prevalent in North America during this period. One of the most influential, particularly in the Delaware Valley, was that of the German-speaking immigrants from central Europe who made up a substantial portion of the population in some areas. Not only did German magico-religious traditions survive the journey to North America, they thrived in certain regions and contexts and undoubtedly played a part in the creation of hoodoo as a syncretic system of folk belief (Hand 1947; Dieffenbach 1976; Milnes 2007). German magical tradition is most noted, perhaps, for its grimoires, or magical texts, that include instructions on how to assemble and use magical charms, amulets, and folk remedies. One of the most well-known grimoires published in the United States was John George Hohman’s *Pow-Wows; or, Long Lost Friend* (1856),

first published in German in 1820. Powwow has been defined by one 20th-century author as, “a type of folk medicine based on charms, incantations, and spells which once was widespread among the Pennsylvania Germans and still is far from dead” (Dieffenbach 1976:30). The term was originally an Algonquian word used to describe a medicine man, shaman, or priest who, among other roles, treated the sick (Aurand 1929; Harper 2001). However, Cotton Mather (1692:62) used it to refer to native practitioners of what he perceived as witchcraft and magic, writing that, “The Indian *Powawes*, used all their Sorceries to molest the first Planters here.” The use of the term to describe European American folk magic, conjure, and healing appeared by at least the 18th century (Ashcom 1953:252), although it was Hohman’s book that popularized the term. Most importantly, Hohman’s work was read not only by German Americans; it was also consulted by African Americans who incorporated many of the book’s charms and spells into hoodoo tradition (Chireau 2003:25).

### *Magic and Ritual in the Modern Era*

Greenwood (2009:45) recently argued that, “far from dying out, magic is very much a part and parcel of modern Western life.” One area of mainstream American culture in which magical thinking still plays an important role is professional athletics. Indeed, some athletes are notorious for the unusual rituals or “sports magic” undertaken in the name of luck (Gmelch 1978; Mowen and Carlson 2003:1049). Dedicated fans have also been known to resort to magic from time to time. In 2008, a Boston Red Sox fan working on the construction of the new Yankee Stadium in New York intentionally

imbedded a Red Sox jersey in the concrete of the structure with the intent of cursing the team with bad luck. When other construction workers, all ardent Yankees fans, discovered what he had done, they spent four hours probing with jackhammers to locate the jersey, eventually retrieving it from under two feet of hardened concrete (Figure 2.5) (Cheema 2008).



Figure 2.5. Red Sox jersey recently freed from the concrete of Yankee Stadium. AP Photo/Frances Roberts.

Athletes and fans aren't the only ones seeking magical assistance when the stakes are high and the outcome uncertain. During the 2008 presidential election, "supporters pressed all sorts of trinkets into Barack Obama's palms as he worked crowds and shook hands. Some voters worried about his chances, his health or his safety; others just wanted to give him something" (Newton-Small 2008). Obama carried many of these good luck charms throughout the campaign, including a bracelet belonging to a soldier deployed in Iraq, a gambler's lucky chit, a tiny monkey god (thought to be the Hindu god Hanuman), and a tiny Madonna and child, seen in Figure 2.6 (Kraft 2008a; Newton-Small 2008). But Obama wasn't alone in his use of good luck charms and amulets. During the election, Hillary Clinton carried a lucky coin and a lucky handkerchief and wore a lucky bracelet given to her by a supporter in Ohio (Kraft 2008b). John McCain carried a lucky penny and a lucky nickel, wore a lucky sweater and a lucky green rubber band around his wrist, and had a lucky hotel room in New Hampshire (Morris 2008).



Figure 2.6. Lucky charms carried by presidential candidates in the 2008 election: (top) Barack Obama, (bottom left) Hillary Clinton, (bottom right) John McCain (Kraft 2008a, 2008b; Morris 2008).

Far from having died out, magical thinking and ritual can be found everywhere in modern American culture (Albas and Albas 1989; Greenwood 2009). For example, many American hotels do not have a 13th floor due to widespread anxiety surrounding the number 13 in Christian mythology (13 was the number who attended the Last Supper, which ended in betrayal)

(James 1961:293; Mowen and Carlson 2003:1046). During the recent real estate crisis, homeowners and realtors buried statues of St. Joseph in yards in the belief that the ritual would increase the chance of a quick sale in an oversaturated market (Haley 2007). In 2005, Gallup released the results of a survey that found that nearly three out of every four Americans (73%) profess at least one paranormal belief (Moore 2005). The survey asked questions regarding belief in ghosts, haunted houses, witches, extrasensory perception, telepathy, clairvoyance, astrology, communication with the dead, reincarnation, and channeling spiritual entities. According to the poll, more than one in five Americans (21%) believes in witches today.

Significantly, the home is still the center of religious and secular ritual. In some households a small shrine or a statue of a deity, saint, or other divine figure may be seen, often in a prominent location, from which the family seeks divine protection and general

wellbeing. Many Americans families still gather in the home during seasonal celebrations, usually held in autumn or early winter, at which time they may offer a spoken prayer of thanks to God before consuming a special meal.

Despite assumptions that magical belief and associated ritual disappeared from mainstream American culture centuries ago, magic continues to thrive. Today Americans generally use the term “luck,” but the motive is the same: to attempt to influence or interact with supernatural forces, or to influence natural forces by supernatural means. Whether it’s a special ritual enacted by a professional athlete, a cursed jersey buried by a rival fan, a lucky coin carried by a politician, a statue of St. Joseph buried in the yard, or just a general feeling of unease regarding black cats, broken mirrors, and the number 13, Americans continue to incorporate magical thought and ritual into their daily lives.

### **Chapter 3: Witch Bottles and Other Bottle Charms**

The previous chapter examined the long and complex history of magic, witchcraft, and domestic and ritual in Europe and colonial North America. This chapter examines material and ethnohistorical evidence for the well-documented custom of constructing a bottle charm to counter a witch's curse or an enemy's hex. The witch bottle as a distinct artifact type appears to have originated in the British Isles—specifically England—and was introduced to North America by English immigrants. While nearly 200 examples have been documented in England, less than a dozen are known in the United States. This chapter discusses these known examples, compares them to witch bottles in England and to conjure bottles in African American tradition, highlights discrepancies between archaeological and ethnohistorical evidence, and argues that the use of witch bottles continued into the modern era in a syncretic form.

Although witch bottles have been discussed extensively by scholars in England, and less so in the United States, their inclusion in this thesis serves several purposes. First, witch bottles are often lumped in with other artifacts found in architectural concealments, such as shoes and cats, without consideration of the significant differences,

even though the evidence suggests they served a very different purpose than that of other concealments. Secondly, witch bottles are an artifact type for which there is significant ethnohistorical evidence in the form of theological essays and collections of folklore and folk belief. This comparative dataset can serve as a control that, when compared with the material evidence, can highlight gaps in our understanding of the custom and its material manifestations. And finally, witch bottles can be traced to a fairly restricted geographic and temporal origin and thus can sufficiently demonstrate processes such as diffusion and culture change and continuity.

English witch bottles can be identified by their contents—most prominently a combination of pins, needles and nails, which are sometimes bent. Along with sharp metal objects, witch bottles often contain substances conducive to contagious magic: primarily urine, but also hair and nail clippings. In some cases, heart-shaped pieces of fabric pierced with pins or needles have also been found, as well as more uncommon ingredients, which will be described later in the chapter.

The effectiveness of a witch bottle relied on the physical connection thought to exist between a witch and her victim. Witch bottles were employed for a variety of reasons but primarily as a magical folk remedy for illness or disease believed to be caused by bewitchment or maleficium. Witch bottles were used to treat an individual suffering from urinary or kidney problems, such as nephritis, bladder infections, or kidney stones, by returning the affliction back onto the tormentor (Kittredge 1956:103; Thomas 1971:543-544; Merrifield 1987). It was believed that by enclosing the victim's urine and other exuviae in a bottle along with pins and nails, the witch would experience sympathetic pain and discomfort and have difficulty urinating (Merrifield 1954:4).

Boiling or otherwise heating the concoction was thought to intensify the efficacy of the countermeasure.

Ethnohistorical evidence indicates that witch bottles were also used in the treatment of other conditions such as epilepsy, or “fits” (Latham 1878:25; Evans 1966:79-80). A witch bottle could also be used to identify the person responsible for the affliction by compelling him or her to appear at the house of the victim, usually in an agitated state, sometimes displaying wounds caused by the countercharm, such as burns or scratches on the face (Kittredge 1956:99; Merrifield 1955:207, 1987:172; Godbeer 1992:46). While some witch bottles were intended to simply cause pain or injury to the attacker or to encourage him or her to reveal themselves, others were intended to kill (Merrifield 1955:195). Lethal witch bottles were those that exploded in the fire or were placed in an inverted position in the ground; the witch’s strength and health were thought to wane as the urine slowly leaked from the bottle, until the bottle was empty and the witch was dead. Witch bottles also appear to have been used as preemptive apotropaic devices to protect and defend houses from supernatural attack (Latham 1878:25-26; Moore 1892; Godbeer 1992:45), although this last use has not been well studied by scholars.

### **Witch Bottles in England**

Recognizable witch bottles have been recovered from archaeological and architectural contexts in England for more than half a century (Lake 1954; Merrifield 1954, 1955, 1987; Dent 1962; Smedley and Owles 1964; Farley 1978; Maloney 1980;

Walker 1987; Winzar 1995; Copson 1996; Hoggard 1999, 2000, 2001, 2004; Massey and Edmonds 2000; Daubney 2003; Orr 2005; Williams 2005; Powell 2008). The first comprehensive study of witch bottles was conducted by British archaeologist Ralph Merrifield (1954, 1955), who identified several possible influences on the development of the English witch bottle tradition.

The practice of boiling the urine of a victim in a pan along with nails seems to be slightly older than the custom of sealing the urine in a bottle along with pins and needles; Merrifield (1955:206-207) traces it back to at least the late 16th century when it appeared in George Gifford's *A Dialogue Concerning Witches and Witchcraft* (1593). In some parts of England, particularly the southwestern counties, one countermeasure against witchcraft involved piercing the heart of an animal—usually a bull, cow, or sheep, but the heart of a pig or other animal could also be used—with pins and needles and suspending it inside the chimney (Hole 1940:115; Merrifield 1955:206-207, 1987:180; Harte 2000). Similar rituals involved the piercing of live animals such as toads (Hole 1940). Merrifield (1987:180) has suggested that this practice led to a variation of the witch bottle in which pins were stuck into the outside of the cork, and it may also be associated with the use of heart-shaped pieces of fabric or leather pierced with pins that are found in some witch bottles.

In central Europe and elsewhere in the British Isles, ceramic jugs—usually empty or containing faunal or botanical remains or written charms, but notably absent of pins and nails—have been found in walls and buried beneath buildings in an inverted or prone position (Merrifield 1954:12, 1969:100-101). Merrifield suggests that these containers were put in place to trap or repel evil spirits, or as a form of building sacrifice, and that

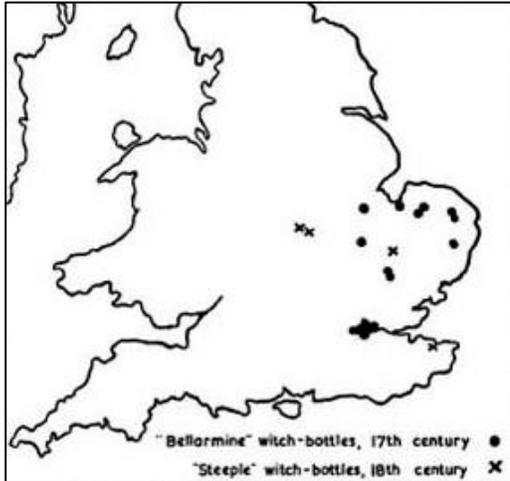


Figure 3.1. Locations of English witch bottles identified by Merrifield (1955:203).

their apotropaic function influenced the English witch bottle tradition. It is likely that the English witch bottle was influenced by all of these rituals, as well as others yet unidentified.

Sealed bottles containing pins, needles, nails and urine, however, seem to be an exclusively English phenomenon and are especially common in the eastern

part of the country. In his 1955 article, Merrifield identified 15 known examples of witch bottles, almost all from London or East Anglia (a region concentrated in the counties of Norfolk and Suffolk but also including Cambridgeshire and Essex), as seen in Figure 3.1. Less than a decade later, that number had risen to 21, with nearly half (n=10) coming from Suffolk, further emphasizing a strong connection to that region (Smedley and Owles 1964). As of 2004, British researcher Brian Hoggard (2004:170) has identified a total of 187 examples of witch bottles in England, most of which are concentrated in East Anglia and the counties south of London, although there have been examples reported from as far north as Yorkshire and as far west as Cornwall (Merrifield 1987:180).

Temporally, English witch bottles date from the early to mid-17th century up through the early 20th century, being in wide use by the late 17th century (Merrifield 1954:11, 1987:170; Maloney 1980:157; Daubney 2003; Roud 2003:524; Hoggard 2004:179). Hoggard's analysis of nearly 200 examples shows that more than half date to the period before 1700, as seen in Figure 3.2. It is probably no coincidence that witch

bottles first appear in England shortly after the first Witchcraft Act was passed in 1542, which was soon followed by even harsher laws, and during the period of mass witch trials in the East Anglian counties of Essex, Suffolk, and Norfolk between 1644 and 1647 (Behringer 2004:105). However, several examples of

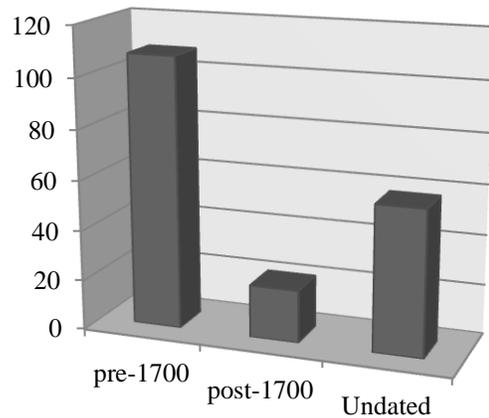


Figure 3.2. Temporal distribution of English witch bottles (after Hoggard 2004:170).

witch bottles have been found that date to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, demonstrating their continued use into the modern era (Merrifield 1987:179-180; Copson 1996; Harte 2000).

Spatially, English witch bottles are found in a variety of contexts that vary from region to region. Hoggard’s (2004:173) research shows that of the examples with documented context, half were found in the area of the hearth, as seen in Figure 3.3.

Several scholars have suggested that witch bottles were buried or concealed near hearths

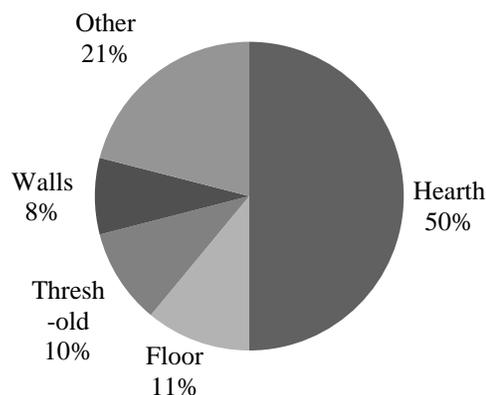


Figure 3.3. Spatial context of English witch bottles (after Hoggard 2004).

and thresholds as an apotropaic device to prevent the entry of a witch into the house (Harvey 1945:270; Evans 1966:74; Farley 1978:635). Latham (1878:25-26) reports that in the late 19th century, when a bottle containing nearly 200 bent pins was discovered under the hearthstone of a house in

West Sussex, England, the workmen revealed that they often found similar objects during construction projects and that, in their opinion, the bottles had been placed there, “for the purpose of protecting the house against witchcraft.” Witch bottles suspended in chimneys may have served a similar apotropaic function (Harte 2000).

Other less common locations for English witch bottles include under the floor, beneath the threshold, and within or beneath walls. Examples have also been found in roofs buried in the thatch (Rushen 1984:35-36). Not all witch bottles are found in domestic contexts, however. Merrifield (1954:11, 1955, 1969:102) has observed that in certain parts of England, particularly near London, witch bottles were deposited in running water in rivers, streams, ditches, and culverts. An example retrieved from the banks of the Thames was found to contain rusty nails, brass pins, and a heart-shaped piece of felt pierced with additional pins (Lake 1954:113; Merrifield 1954). Other examples have been found in ditches (Merrifield 1969; Maloney 1980) and embedded in the bank of an old mill stream (Merrifield 1954:6).

Other less common locations include churchyards, along hedgerows, and in open fields. Bottles of urine buried in an inverted position in churchyards and under the walls of religious structures were intended perhaps to ask for divine assistance in battling malevolent forces. Examples have also been found buried in the ground on the outskirts of town near fields and hedgerows (Merrifield 1954:11; Dent 1962). It has been suggested that witch bottles found in these locations were intended to protect livestock from bewitchment or to ensure the fertility of the land itself (Dent 1962; Evans 1966:78; Rushen 1984:36). A late 19th-century example from Yorkshire, buried in an inverted position at the edge of a field, shown in Figure 3.4, was sealed with a cork and found to

contain lumps of clay pierced with pins, nails, and needles. Due to the absence of animal effluvia and the presence of the lumps of soil, this artifact has been interpreted as a countercharm to preserve the fertility of the land (Dent 1962).

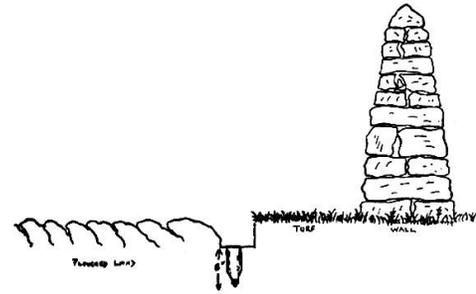


Figure 3.4. Position of an English witch bottle at the edge of a field, probably intended to protect the land (Dent 1962:figure 1).

Hoggard (2004:172) identifies an additional method of employing a witch bottle—heating the charm over a fire or in an oven. Ethnohistorical sources from England confirm that witch bottles were frequently placed over a fire, wherein the contents would boil or explode. As Hoggard points out, examples placed in the fire would in all likelihood have been destroyed by the process or disassembled shortly after use, making their presence more difficult to identify in the archaeological record. Witch bottles in East Anglia are most commonly associated with domestic structures, frequently placed in an inverted position, and often buried or concealed near the threshold or hearth (Harvey 1945:270; Merrifield 1954:11; Evans 1966:74-78). This tendency to bury witch bottles instead of placing them directly in the fire or hanging them up in a chimney, may have resulted in an overrepresentation of witch bottles from this region.

In England, witch bottles generally fall into three taxonomic types: ceramic jugs, glass wine or case bottles, and small glass vials or “steeples.” In Merrifield’s 1955 analysis of English witch bottles, all 16 known examples consisted of imported Rhenish stoneware jugs called *bellarmine*s, *bartmann*s, or “grey-beards,” seen in Figure 3.5 (Merrifield 1955:200). The *bellarmine* is the dominant type of witch bottle in East

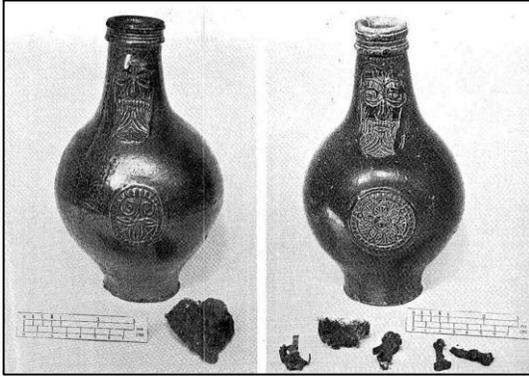


Figure 3.5. Two English bellarmine witch bottles and their contents (Merrifield 1954:9).

Anglia, and several scholars have suggested that the container was selected because the anthropomorphic qualities bestowed by the bearded face symbolized the witch or wizard (Merrifield 1955:207; Evans 1966:77). It has also been suggested that the jug's

rounded shape represented the bladder of the witch (Evans 1966:77). However, Merrifield (1955:202) has proposed that bellarmines were used simply because they were the most widely available container of the appropriate size in London and East Anglia in the 17th century.

Although bellarmines are frequently used for witch bottles in England, glass bottles or small apothecary vials, sometimes called steeple bottles due to their shape, were also used (Fowler 1876:132-134; Merrifield 1954:4, 1955:202-204; Evans 1966:80; Massey and Edmonds 2000; Daubney 2003). Evans (1966:80) notes that the glass vial form is particularly common in Cambridgeshire, where they are “usually discovered concealed in the wattle and daub above the lintel of the door through which the witch was most likely to enter,” although they have also been found buried beside or under the walls of churches and cathedrals (Fowler 1876; Merrifield 1955:203-204). Glass forms are generally later in date than stoneware examples.

Most examples of English witch bottles are not found with any liquid contents remaining, or if such liquid is present at the time of discovery, it is often emptied before the artifact can be properly examined. However, residue analysis conducted on a number

of bottles has demonstrated the presence of urine in nearly all cases (Smedley and Owles 1964; Massey and Edmonds 2000; Hoggard 2004; Geddes 2009; Pitts 2009).

A survey of English witch bottles conducted by Hoggard (2004) reveals that, among bottles with known contents (about half of the

sample), 90% contained iron pins or nails or other iron deposits, suggesting that these materials are a good indicator of a possible witch bottle (Figure 3.6). The number of pins, needles, and nails can vary, ranging from as few as three up to several hundred (Massey and Edmonds 2000:35). One bottle from Suffolk contained approximately 50 iron nails and about three dozen bent pins (Rushen 1984:36). While pins are often bent, sometimes twice, some pins were left straight (Maloney 1980:158,n10; Massey and Edmonds 2000:35). Merrifield notes several examples of witch bottles from East Anglia that contained various combinations of pins, needles, and nails but no obvious evidence of urine or other organic matter (Merrifield 1954:8). While bottles and jugs containing pins could have simply been convenient repositories for mundane household objects, when a bottle containing pins is found concealed in an architectural void or deliberately buried in the ground, the possibility that the artifact served as a witch bottle or similar type of bottle charm should be seriously considered (Merrifield 1954:6-7).

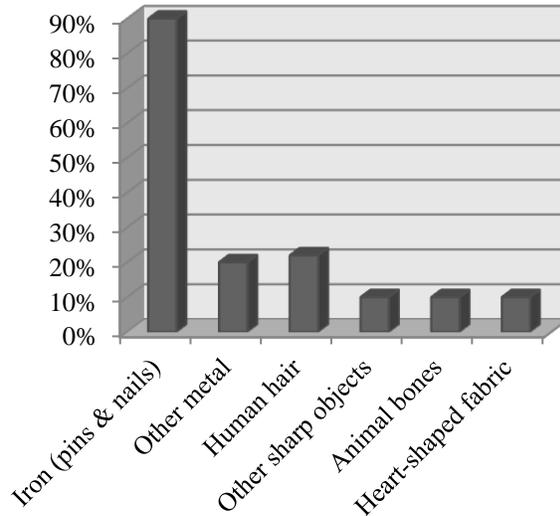


Figure 3.6. Contents of English witch bottles (after Hoggard 2004).

Although ethnographic and archaeological evidence indicate a common recipe for a witch bottle—usually urine along with some combination of pins, needles, or nails—Merrifield (1954:14) notes that numerous examples have been found to contain ingredients that are not mentioned in ethnohistorical descriptions. In fact, examples recovered archaeologically demonstrate that a wide variety of materials were used in witch bottles, probably depending on the nature of the affliction, the materials at hand, and the ingenuity of the person who assembled the countercharm. Some of the materials that have been found in witch bottles include fabric and leather hearts pierced with pins and needles, human hair (from both head and body), fingernail clippings, brass studs, a rusted table fork, the a tine of a rake, glass chips, sulfur, slivers of wood, matches, bone, twisted wire, hawthorn thorns, knotted string, textile fibers, pages from books, and fragments of written spells (Lake 1954:113; Merrifield 1954, 1955, 1969, 1987; Smedley and Owles 1964; Rushen 1984:35-36; Walker 1987:113; Winzar 1995; Hoggard 2004; Pitts 2009). Merrifield has also suggested that the cloth hearts sometimes found in witch bottles were more than just mere scraps of fabric; they may have been cut from the victim's clothing and represent another form of contagious magic (Merrifield 1954:6, 1987:172). Considering what is known regarding the principles of magic, as discussed in Chapter 1, this is a likely interpretation.

In 2004, a sealed ceramic bellarmine jug was excavated from a site in Greenwich, London. The artifact was identified immediately as a possible witch bottle, thus researchers were able to conduct extensive analysis in laboratory conditions, the first such witch bottle to be studied in this way. X-rays, CT scans, and gas chromatography analysis showed the bottle contained metal objects and was partially filled with liquid



Figure 3.7. CT scan of an unopened witch bottle, Greenwich, London. Photo by Mike Pitts/British Archaeology (Viegas 2009).

(Figure 3.7). Upon opening the bottle, it was found to contain eight bent brass pins, twelve iron nails, ten fingernail clippings from a well-manicured hand (suggesting higher social status), a piece of heart-shaped leather pierced with a bent nail, human hair, “navel fluff,” and human urine with traces of nicotine. There was

also chemical evidence of “brimstone,” or sulfur, in the bottle. The position of the oxidized nails and pins in the neck suggests the bottle had originally been buried in an inverted position (Geddes 2009; Pitts 2009; Viegas 2009).

### **Ethnohistorical Descriptions of Witch Bottles in England**

Ethnohistorical accounts of witch bottles are quite common in England from the mid-17th century onward, appearing in both published essays and collections of local folklore (Blagrave 1671; Glanvill 1700; Latham 1878; Wherry and Jennings 1905; Taylor 1929; Rudkin 1934). One of the earliest and most detailed descriptions of the use of a witch bottle appeared in 1681 in Joseph Glanvill’s *Saducismus Triumphatus, or Evidence concerning Witches and Apparitions*, which relates the curious events that occurred in Suffolk, England, sometime in the early 17th century:

For an old Man that Travelled up and down the Country, and had some acquaintance at that house, calling in and asking the Man of the house how he did and his Wife; He told him that himself was well, but his Wife had been a long time in a languishing condition, and that she was haunted with a thing in the shape

of a Bird that would flurr [sic] near to her face, and that she could not enjoy her natural rest well. The Old Man bid him and his Wife be of good courage. It was but a dead Spright, he said, and he would put him in a course to rid his Wife of this languishment and trouble, He therefore advised him to take a Bottle, and put his Wives Urine into it, together with Pins and Needles and Nails, and Cork them up and set the Bottle to the Fire well corkt, which when it had felt a while the heat of the Fire began to move and joggle a little, but he for sureness took the Fire shovel, and held it hard upon the Cork, And as he thought, he felt something one while on this side, another while on that, shove the Fire shovel off, which he still quickly put on Again, but at last at one shoving the Cork bounced out, and the Urine, Pins, Nails and Needles all flew up, and gave a report like a Pistol, and his Wife continued in the same trouble and languishment still.

Not long after, the Old Man came to the house again, and inquired of the Man of the house how his Wife did. Who answered, as ill as ever, if not worse. He askt him if he had followed his direction. Yes, says he, and told him the event as is above said. Ha, quoth he, it seems it was too nimble for you. But now I will put you in a way that will make the business sure. Take your Wive's Urine as before, and Cork, it in a Bottle with Nails, Pins and Needles, and bury it in the Earth; and that will do the feat. The Man did accordingly. And his Wife began to mend sensibly and in a competent time was finely well recovered; But there came a Woman from a Town some miles off to their house, with a lamentable Out-cry, that they had killed her Husband. They askt her what she meant and thought her distracted, telling her they knew neither her nor her Husband. Yes, saith she, you have killed my Husband, he told me so on his Death-bed. But at last they understood by her, that her Husband was a Wizard, and had bewitched this Mans Wife and that this Counter-practice prescribed by the Old Man, which saved the Mans Wife from languishment, was the death of that Wizard that had bewitched her (Glanvill 1700:109).

This detailed narrative is particularly interesting because it demonstrates two different methods for using a witch bottle (placement directly in the fire and burial in the ground), describes the primary contents of the charm (pins, needles, nails, and urine), indicates that instructions for the charm were provided by a travelling cunning-man, and illustrates that a witch bottle was capable of killing a witch or wizard. In his *Astrological Practice of Physick* (1671), 17th-century astrologer Joseph Blagrave recommended a nearly identical method for “causing the evil to return back upon” a witch:

Another way is to stop the urine of the Patient, close up in a bottle, and put into it three nails, pins, or needles, with a little white Salt, keeping the urine always warm: if you let it remain long in the bottle, it will endanger the witches life: for I have found by experience that they will be grievously tormented making their water with great difficulty, if any at all, and the more if the Moon be in Scorpio in Square or Opposition to his Significator, when its done (Blagrave 1671:154).

This account specifies that three nails, pins, or needles be used, a magical number in European tradition, plus the addition of salt, a well-known apotropaic substance (Evans 1966:58). Merrifield (1954:14) has suggested that publications such as Blagrave's *Astrological Practice of Physick* and Glanvill's *Sadducismus Triumphatus* actually helped popularize the use of the witch bottle throughout much of England.

Surprisingly, the practice appears to have continued well after the Enlightenment. Numerous folklorists have recorded accounts of witch bottles in England in the late 19th and early 20th century (Latham 1878; Wherry and Jennings 1905; Hunt 1916; Taylor 1929; Rudkin 1934). The following method was described for treating an epileptic in Sussex, England, who was believed to be under the curse of a witch:

A lady ... observed, upon a cottage hearth, a quart bottle filled with pins; and, on inquiring why they were put there, was requested not to touch the bottle, as it was red hot, and because, if she did so, she would spoil the charm. "What charm?" she asked, in some surprise; "Why, ma'am," replied the woman, "it has pleased God to afflict my daughter here with falling-fits, and the doctors did her no good; so I was recommended to go to a wise woman, who lives on this side of Guildford [Surrey], and she said, if she was well paid for it, she could tell me what ailed the girl, and what would cure her. So I said I was agreeable, and she told me that people afflicted with falling-fits were bewitched, and that I must get as many pins as would fill a quart bottle, and put them into it, and let it stand close to the fire, upon the hearth, till the pins were red hot; and, when that came about, they would prick the heart of the witch who had brought this affliction on my poor girl, and she would then be glad enough to take it off" (Latham 1878:25-26).

Once again, this narrative provides clues regarding the various ways and reasons witch

bottles were constructed and employed. Like other accounts, it demonstrates that a cunning-woman provided the necessary instructions. It also shows that pins alone, with no mention of the supposedly ubiquitous urine, could be used in a witch bottle. And finally, it reiterates the importance of heat in increasing the efficacy of the countercharm.

Knowledge of witch bottles, if not their actual use, continued in England into the first decades of the 20th century. Hunt (1916:411) reports that in Cornwall: “When cattle or human beings have been bewitched, it was very commonly thought that if a bottle of urine from the diseased beast or person was obtained, then corked very tight and buried mouth downwards, that the witch would be afflicted with strangury [painful, frequent urination], and in her suffering confess her crime and beg forgiveness.” In this description, the charm involves only urine, with no mention of pins, needles, or other contents.

### **Witch Bottles in the United States**

Compared to England, relatively few witch bottles have been recovered in the United States. More than half of the specimens have come from the Mid-Atlantic, although isolated examples have also been identified in Rhode Island, western Pennsylvania, and Kentucky, as seen in Figure 3.8 (Becker 1978, 1980, 2005; Painter 1980; Alexandrowicz 1986; King 1996; Morehouse 2009; Barber 2006). American witch bottles differ from English examples in that all identified so far consist of glass bottles or vials instead of stoneware jugs (Alexandrowicz 1986:126). While several bellarmine-type stoneware jugs have been excavated in the United States (Beebe 1981; Kelso 2006:90;

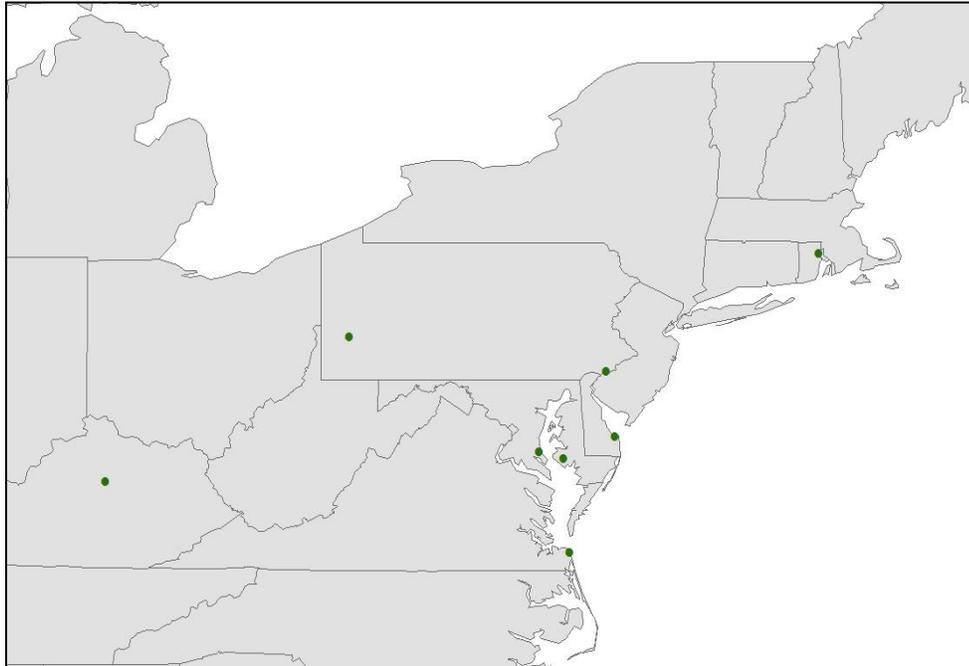


Figure 3.8. Locations of witch bottles or possible witch bottles recovered in the United States. Map by author.

Lisa Johnson 2011, elec. comm.), none have been conclusively identified as witch bottles. Residue analysis testing for the presence of phosphate, found in urine, might, however, reveal otherwise.

Based on variations among documented witch bottles in England, physical characteristics of known American examples, and ethnohistorical evidence, a suggested typology has been created for witch bottles in the United States (Table 3.1). Examples are classified by characteristics such as vessel form, contents, and special treatment. Further classification based on spatial context could expand the typology but is not included at this point. Dividing witch bottles into typological categories may facilitate the identification of more nuanced regional and temporal patterns in future analysis.

**Table 3.1. Suggested Typology for American Witch Bottles.**

Type	Container	Contents	Special Treatment
A-1	ceramic jug		
A-2	glass wine/case bottle	urine	
A-3	glass vial/steeple bottle		
B-1	ceramic jug		
B-2	glass wine/case bottle	pins, needles, nails (with or without urine)	
B-3	glass vial		
B-4	pot, pan, or other open vessel	pins, needles, nails (usually with urine)	boiled over fire
C	ceramic or glass jug, bottle, or vial	cloth or leather heart pierced with pins/nails	
D	ceramic or glass jug, bottle, or vial	any combination of urine, pins, needles, and nails	pins and needles stuck into the cork
E	ceramic or glass jug, bottle, or vial	contents other than urine, pins, needles, and nails	
F	ceramic or glass jug, bottle, or vial	empty or containing only water	concealed in a structure

Examples of type A witch bottles—none of which have yet been identified in the United States, but which have been documented in England and in American ethnohistorical sources—consist of vessels that contain, or once contained, only urine. This type can be further divided by vessel into subtype A-1, ceramic jugs; subtype A-2, glass wine or case bottles; and subtype A-3, glass vials or small steeple bottles.

Type B witch bottles include ceramic jugs (subtype B-1) and glass wine or case bottles (subtype B-2) and small medicine vials (subtype B-3) containing some combination of pins, needles, or nails. These bottles may or may not have contained urine. There are six examples of this type in the United States, with three examples of subtype B-2 and three of subtype B-3. Subtype B-4, consisting of an open vessel such as a pot or pan in which pins, needles, or nails and urine are boiled over a fire, is also

included here, although this form is not a witch bottler *per se*, but is closely related.

Type C is distinguished from type B by the presence of a fabric or leather heart pierced with pins or nails and could, if required, be further divide into subtypes by vessel form. There is one example of this type in the United States. Type D witch bottles are identified by the presence of pins and/or needles stuck directly into the cork, a method that seems to be localized to southwest England , specifically the counties of Cornwall and Devon. This type could also be subdivided by vessel form and contents. There is one known American example of a type D witch bottle in the United States.

Type E witch bottles include all other known examples that deviate from the above described patterns. This would include the bottle containing lumps of clay, previously described, as well as an example from England that was found to contain animal tallow. The final variation on the witch bottle in the United States is type F, which includes jugs, bottles, and vials with no material evidence of urine, pins and needles, or other contents. These bottles can be either corked or uncorked and may be difficult to recognize in the archaeological record. This problem will be discussed later in the chapter.

To date, only eight possible witch bottles have been identified in the United States, summarized in Table 3.2. Archaeologist Marshall Becker was the first to identify an American witch bottle in an archaeological context. Known as the Essington witch bottle, the artifact (subtype B-2) was recovered during excavations on Great Tinicum Island (36DE3) in Delaware County, Pennsylvania (Becker 1978, 1980, 2005). The squat, dark olive green wine bottle, dated to 1740-1750, was tightly sealed with a whittled wood stopper and contained six brass pins (Figure 3.9). The bottle was found in an inverted

**Table 3.2. Witch Bottles Recovered in the United States.\***

Location	Date	Container	Contents	Context	Type
Patuxent Point, Calvert Co., MD <sup>a</sup>	1658-1680	4 glass case bottles (broken)	3 iron nails, pig's pelvic bone, jaw bone of small mammal	pit near domestic structure, "inverted or near-inverted"	B-2?
Great Neck Bottle, Virginia Beach, VA <sup>b</sup>	1690-1750	glass medicine vial, light green	25 pins, 3 iron nails, amber-colored film	near structure (rear door?), inverted	B-3
Lewes Bottle, Lewes, DE	1700-1750	glass bottle	pins	pit near doorway of farmhouse	B-2
Essington Bottle, Tincum Island, PA <sup>c</sup>	1740-1750	glass wine bottle, dark olive green, squat	6 straight pins, wood stopper	hole near base of chimney, inverted	B-2
Horn Point Bottle, Dorchester Co., MD <sup>d</sup>	1750-1760	glass wine bottle, olive green (neck only)	17 pins, straight and bent, stuck in cork (outside and inside)	hearth or chimney of structure	D
Cove Lands Charm, Providence, RI	1780-1820	glass medicine vial, clear	6 straight pins		B-3
Armstrong Farmstead, Fayette Co., KY <sup>e</sup>	1810-1850	glass medicine vial	4 straight pins, sealed with a cork	associated with small structure	B-3
Market Street Bottle, Pittsburgh, PA <sup>f</sup>	post 1824	glass bottle	2 shoe insole patterns, piece of heart-shaped felt pierced with 9 pins and 3 needles, "a murky fluid," sealed with a cork	bottom of brick-lined cistern	C

\*Data from Becker 2005, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>a</sup> King 1996.

<sup>b</sup> Painter 1980.

<sup>c</sup> Becker 1978.

<sup>d</sup> Morehouse 2009.

<sup>e</sup> Barber 2006.

<sup>f</sup> Alexandrowicz 1986.

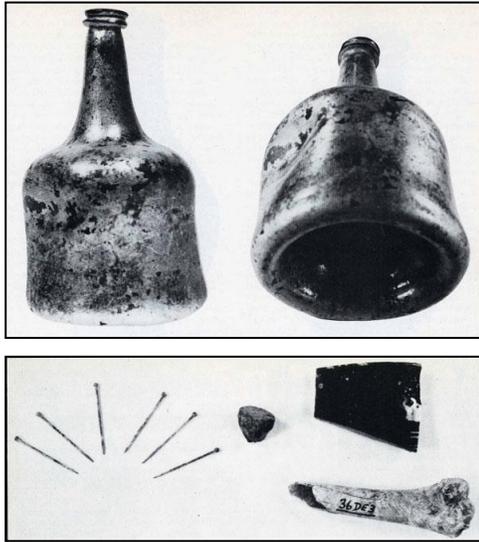


Figure 3.9. Essington witch bottle, Great Tinicum Island, Delaware County, Pennsylvania (Becker 1980).

position in a small hole dug near the base of a chimney associated with a mid-17th-century structure. A sherd of black-glazed redware and the long bone of a bird (possibly a partridge) were also found in the feature, directly under the shoulder of the bottle. According to Becker (1978), the property was occupied by an English family during much of the 18th century and the bottle appears to be associated with their residency. Becker (1978, 2005) has

also suggested that at one time the bottle contained urine and a felt heart, long since decayed. From what is known of English witch bottles, it is possible that the bottle did contain urine at some point, but there is no indication that it ever contained a felt heart, as numerous examples in England have been found without them.

Another example of subtype B-2, known as the Lewes Bottle, was found in Delaware and consists of a glass bottle that contained an unidentified number of pins. The artifact was recovered from the site of a colonial Dutch fort within an intrusive pit feature associated with the doorway of a more recent farmhouse. Becker (2005) dates the bottle to 1700-1750. Unfortunately, this bottle was not well documented at the time of excavation and its current whereabouts are unknown.

Examples of subtype B-3 include small glass medicine vials. The first example from the United States is a hand-blown clear glass medicine vial containing six straight pins that was recovered from the site of an early 19th-century building near Providence,

Rhode Island. Known as the Cove Lands Charm, the artifact has been dated to 1780-1820 and is probably associated with an earlier structure that once stood on the site (Becker 2005:18). A second example of this subtype was discovered at the edge of a cliff near the site of a 17th-century structure at Virginia Beach, Virginia. Known as the Great Neck witch bottle, the small, narrow, light-green glass medicine vial was found buried in an inverted position and contained approximately 25 brass pins and at least three iron nails fused together by oxidation (Figure 3.10). There also appeared to be a light amber-colored film in the lower portion of the vial that was interpreted as human urine but was never tested due to contamination during processing (Painter 1980; Becker 2005:18). The Great Neck bottle has been dated to 1690-1750.

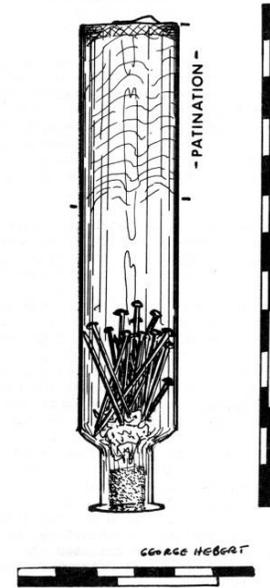


Figure 3.10. Great Neck witch bottle, Virginia Beach, Virginia (Painter 1980).

A third possible example of a subtype B-3 witch bottle was recovered during salvage excavations at the Armstrong Farmstead (15FA185) in Fayette County, Kentucky. Archaeologists recovered a small, hand-blown, glass medicine vial sealed with a cork with four straight pins inside, as seen in Figure 3.11. The bottle, which dates to 1810-1850, is associated with a small structure that once



Figure 3.11. Possible witch bottle from the Armstrong Farmstead, Fayette County, Kentucky (Barber 2006:figure 15.24).

stood on the site (Barber 2006:16-4).

Although it is not identified as a possible witch bottle in the report of excavations, an archaeologist who reviewed the report recognized the similarity to other known examples and brought it to this author's attention (Dan Davis 2011, elec. comm.).

One example of a type C witch

bottle has been recovered in the United States. During excavations at the Market Street Site in downtown Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, an American-made, free-blown, aquamarine glass bottle was excavated from the bottom of a brick-lined cistern, immediately above sterile soil (Becker 2005:18). The bottle was tightly sealed with a cork and contained "a murky fluid" that might have been decayed urine, as well as two fabric shoe insoles or insole patterns wrapped up inside a roughly triangular or heart-shaped piece of felt pierced with nine brass pins and three needles, seen in Figure 3.12 (Alexandrowicz 1986; Becker 2005:19-20). The pins have stamped heads, a process patented in 1824, which

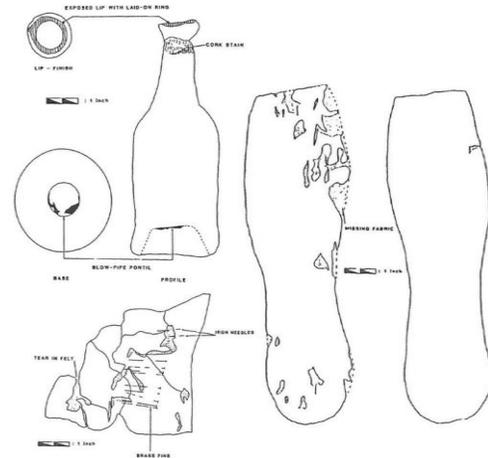


Figure 3.12. Market Street witch bottle and contents, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (adapted from Alexandrowicz 1986).

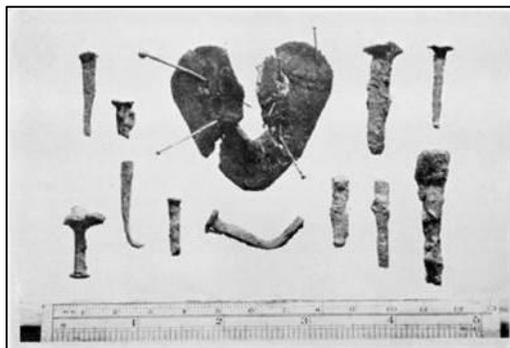


Figure 3.13. Contents of an English witch bottle, including a fabric heart pierced with pins (Merrifield 1955:200).

dates the bottle to the first half of the 19th century (Becker 2005:20). Pierced fabric hearts, as previously discussed, are frequently found in witch bottles in England (Figure 3.13). The presence of the shoe insoles in the Market Street witch bottle is

particularly interesting, as there are no known parallels in either England or the United States. Becker (2005:19) has suggested that “the victim of the bewitchment may have had some type of foot disorder, possibly with bilateral symptoms, and attempted to use these patterns as a means of counteracting its effect.”

One example of a type D witch bottle has been identified in the United States. During excavations of a mid-19th or early 20th-century tenant house at the White Oak Site (18DO129), in Dorchester County, Maryland, the broken neck of an olive green



Figure 3.14. Horn Point witch bottle, White Oak Site, Dorchester County, Maryland (Morehouse 2009).

glass wine bottle dating to the mid-18th century was recovered from the area of the hearth or chimney of an unidentified brick structure (Morehouse 2009).

Part of the stopper still remained in the bottle and a total of 17 nickel-plated copper pins, both straight and bent (Figure 3.14), were stuck into both the inside and outside surfaces of the cork (Becker

2005:17-18; Morehouse 2009). Infrared spectroscopy

analysis (FT-IR) conducted on the bottleneck identified what appears to have been “an animal-based, glue-like substance,” presumably used to keep the stopper in place

(McKittrick 2009:61). Parallels for this type of configuration, in which pins are inserted into the cork, have been found primarily in southwestern England (Hoggard 2004:174;

Merrifield 1987:180-181). For example, a witch bottle dated to the early 20th century,

found in Cornwall, England (Merrifield 1987:180-181), consisted of a cod-liver oil bottle containing decayed urine, with pins and needles stuck into the cork (Figure 3.15).



Figure 3.15. Early 20th-century type D witch bottle from Cornwall, England (Merrifield 1987:figure 58).

Another possible example of a witch bottle was discovered during salvage excavations at the Patuxent Point Site (18CV271), an early colonial site in Calvert County, Maryland, occupied from 1658 to 1680. A pit feature was found to contain “the remains of four glass case bottles which appear to have been placed in the pit in an inverted or near-inverted position” (King 1996:27).

In addition to hundreds of fragments of bottle glass, the pit also contained the remains of three iron nails, a pig’s pelvic bone and the lower jaw bone of a possum or

raccoon, seen in Figure 3.16. Based on the unique nature of the pit deposit, the inverted position of the bottles, the presence of iron nails and animal bones in the assemblage, as well as the feature’s location near a domestic structure, King (1996:28) has argued that the artifacts represent the remains of four witch bottles, probably of subtype B-2. The presence of multiple bottles in a single deposit is rare in the English witch bottle tradition, and other than the three iron nails, there is no evidence of pins, needles, or other sharp materials. As a result, some critics have expressed doubt that these are indeed the remains of witch bottles (Marshall Becker 2011, elec. comm.). Based on the available evidence, both documentary and material, there is some reservation by this author to

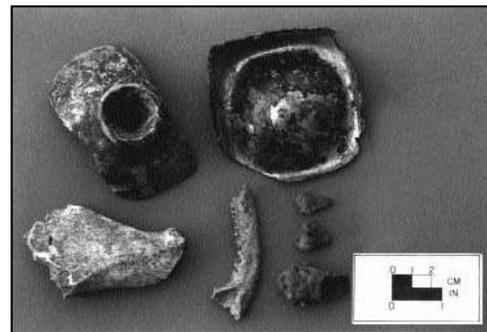


Figure 3.16. Artifacts from the Patuxent Point Site, Calvert County, Maryland (King 1996).

interpret the Patuxent Point deposit as one or more witch bottles, although it is possible that the assemblage represents the remains of a magico-religious deposit of another sort.

### **Ethnohistorical Descriptions of Witch Bottles in the United States**

As in England, descriptions of witch bottles in the United States appear frequently in ethnohistorical accounts from both the colonial and post-colonial periods (Table 3.3). The earliest account comes from Boston, Massachusetts, where in 1681 a healer advised the friends and family of Michael Smith, who was “bewitched,” “to take the water of said Michaell and close it in A Bottell” and lock the bottle in a cupboard (Godbeer 1992:46). Shortly after this was done, the suspected witch appeared at the house and, “As long as the bottle remained there, Goody Hale ‘did not seace [sic] walking to and fro, about the House.’” When the bottle was unstopped, Goody Hale left, confirming suspicions of her guilt (Godbeer 1992:46).

The following year in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, a family of Quakers found themselves under attack by unseen diabolical forces that lobbed stones and other objects at their house. In an attempt to obtain relief from their torment, they resorted to countermagic and “did set on the Fire a Pot with Urine, and crooked Pins in it, with [the] design to have it boil, and by that means to give Punishment to the Witch, or Wizard ... and take off their own, as they had been advised” (St. George 1998:193-195). This example is not a witch bottle per se, but represents a form of countermagic that appears to have slightly predated the witch bottle in England, as discussed earlier in the chapter.

**Table 3.3. Descriptions of Witch Bottles Among European Americans.**

Location	Date	Container	Contents	Context/Action	Result	Type
Boston, MA <sup>a</sup>	1681	bottle	“water” (urine)	close the urine in a bottle and lock it in a cupboard	witch appears and doesn’t leave until bottle is unstopped	A-2
Portsmouth, NH <sup>b</sup>	1682	pot	urine and “crooked pins”	boil on fire	punish witch/wizard; remove bewitchment	B-4
MA <sup>c</sup>	1684	bottle	urine		“unbewitch”	A-2
MA <sup>d</sup>	1691	bottle	urine, nails, pins		torture a witch	B-2
Billerica, MA <sup>b</sup>	1692	pot (earthen)	urine	stop up bottle, place in hot oven and seal up	kill a witch	A-1
MA <sup>e</sup>	1693	bottle	urine	put into a bottle	torment witch; discover witch	A-2
GA <sup>f</sup>	1877	bottle (black)	iron nails	bury under front step	“keep witches off the place”	B-2
Union County, IL <sup>g</sup>	1883	vial or bottle	urine	cork patient’s urine in vial or bottle and hang it in chimney	exorcise evil spirits; gives the witch “strangury,” which lasts as long as vial hangs in chimney	A-1; A-2
PA (PA German) <sup>h</sup>	1889	small vial	empty	placed by bed	nightmare/witch’s familiar caught in bottle and destroyed by burning	F
Watauga County, NC <sup>i</sup>	1915	bottle (new)	empty	“stopped mighty tight,” “hung up to the loft by a string”	“so’s to skeer the witches out of the house”	F
Adams County, IL <sup>j</sup>	1930s	bottle	urine, paper of pins	cork bottle, place in cellar	pinholes in face of witch	B-2
Adams County, IL <sup>j</sup>	1930s	bottle	urine	cork bottle, hang inside chimney, light fire	covers witch in soot; causes kidney pain and inability to urinate; bladder bursts and witch dies	A-2
AL <sup>k</sup>	1954	bottles	water	place into interior of fireplace	keep witches away	F
AL <sup>k</sup>	1954	bottle	urine, pins	place up chimney	reverse a hex (must know who is hexing you)	B-2

<sup>a</sup> Goodbeer 1992:45-46

<sup>b</sup> St. George 1998:193-195

<sup>c</sup> Mather 1684

<sup>d</sup> Mather 1691

<sup>e</sup> I. Mather 1693

<sup>f</sup> Moore 1892

<sup>g</sup> Harris 1946:185

<sup>h</sup> Hoffman 1889:31-32

<sup>i</sup> Brewster et al. 1952:646

<sup>j</sup> Hyatt 1935:543-545

<sup>k</sup> Browne 1958:198, 195

The most frequently cited references to witch bottles in the United States are found in the sermons and essays of Puritan ministers Increase and Cotton Mather. In his 1684 treatise condemning the use of countermagic, the elder Mather wondered “How persons that shall unbewitch others by putting Urin into a Bottle, or by casting excrements into the fire, or nailing of horseshoes at men’s doors, can wholly clear themselves from being witches, I am not able to understand” (Mather 1684:269). During the trials at Salem, he again described a method of identifying a witch that included “putting the Urine of the afflicted Person into a Bottle, that so the Witch may be tormented and discovered” (I. Mather 1693:265). His son, Cotton Mather (1691), also expressed his disapproval of the “Urinary experiment” in which “Urine must be bottled with Nails and Pinns, and such Instruments in it as carry a Shew of Torture with them, if it attain its End.”

Testimony during the Salem witch trials also revealed the use of witch bottles among New England colonists. Roger Toothaker, an English-born, informally trained physician from Billerica, Massachusetts, was accused of witchcraft. During testimony it was discovered that he had taught his daughter, Martha Emerson, how to kill a witch using a witch bottle, which she had successfully accomplished (St. George 1998:193-195). Toothaker described how Martha “gott some of the afflicted persons Urine and put it into an Earthen pott and stopt said pott very Close and putt said pott into a hott oven, and stopt up said oven and the next morning said witch was Dead” (St. George 1998:193-195). The “Earthen pott” may very well have been a bellarmine jug or similar ceramic vessel.

It is clear that witch bottles were regularly employed in 17th-century New England, but it is uncertain when their use waned. In the 18th century, official accounts of witchcraft and magical activity did decline; however, the witch bottle custom appears to have continued, spreading throughout the eastern United States. In the late 19th century and first decades of the 20th century, American folklorists collected numerous accounts of witch bottles and similar bottle charms that employed sharp objects such as pins and nails, urine or other exuviae, and either heat, burial, or concealment. In 1877, a white family in Georgia by the name of Proctor was known to keep a black bottle containing iron nails buried under the front step in order to “keep witches off the place” (Moore 1892:230). Browne (1958[9]:195) also recorded their use in Alabama in the 1950s: “Put your urine in a bottle and put pins in it and put it up the chimney. This will reverse a hex. You must know the person who is hexing you.” In his *Folk-lore from Adams County, Illinois* (1935), Hyatt recorded the use of witch bottles among several local residents:

A man thought an old witch that lived in his neighborhood had bewitched his kidneys, for he was having so much trouble with them. He suffered all the time. So he thought he would get even with her. Someone had told him, that if you wet in a bottle and hang it up where they cannot find it, they will suffer just like you do. So he put a cork in the bottle, so it would stay strong, and hung it way up in the chimney, then started a fire. If you do this, the soot will go right to the person that has bewitched you and will stick all over you (the witch) until you take that bottle out of the chimney. As soon as the fire was burning good, the soot flew right over and just covered this old witch. Her kidneys got to hurting her so she could not stand it. She went to this man and wanted to know what he had done, and begged and begged him to take the spell off. Said she was suffering so she could not stand it, and the soot would not wash off. He said to her, “You old devil, I am going to torment you until you die.” And he did. This woman got so she could not even pass her water. Even got black in the face, suffering so over this bottle being up in the chimney. At last her bladder busted and she died. And this man said she could not bewitch anyone else now (Hyatt 1935:543).

We had a neighbor who we thought was bewitching my son. So I took a bottle and got a paper of pins and put them in the bottle, then put my urine in and cork the bottle up and put it down in the cellar in a dark place. And sure enough, that neighbor came to our house with her face all full of little pinholes. And my son got well after that (Hyatt 1935:544).

In the first instance it is significant that the bottle contained only urine and was hung up in the chimney, a variation on the practice that has also been recorded in England (March 1899:488). In the second example, it should be noted that there is no mention of the pins being bent, and in fact it seems that they were not even removed from their paper packaging. It is also significant that the bottle was concealed in the cellar and not placed in or near the fireplace or chimney. Hyatt identifies both of his informants as being of German heritage, although the practice was primarily an English tradition (Merrifield 1955:204), indicating the existence of a syncretic system of magical belief in the United States combining elements from several magico-religious traditions. The descriptions of witch bottles collected by Hyatt and others also show that knowledge of this English folk custom continued in the United States for more than 250 years.

Finally, two more sources that describe a different form of the English witch bottle will be examined. In the mid-20th century it was recorded that to keep witches away, “put a number of bottles of water into the interior of your fireplace” (Browne 1958[9]:198). And in 1915, an informant living in Watauga County, North Carolina, described the following method for protecting an ill woman believed to be affected by a witch: “Her folks kep a new bottle hung up to the loft by a string clost to her bed and they kep that bottle stopped mighty tight so’s to skeer the witches out o’ the house. If they didn’t keep the bottle stopped up they said she’d git wuss” (Brewster et al. 1952:646).

These two narratives are significant for their omission of the traditional witch bottle elements: pins and needles, urine, etc. They appear to describe more simplified forms in which bottles of water, or simply an empty bottle tightly sealed, were used to ward off witchcraft in a more general, apotropaic manner.

## **Analysis and Discussion**

One of the most difficult tasks historical archaeologists face is accurately identifying witch bottles (or any magico-religious artifact) in the archaeological record. Becker (2005:21) has noted that the relatively few examples of American witch bottles “may reflect a lack of understanding of the artifact type by investigators rather than a paucity of examples,” emphasizing that “it is important to consider the bottle type, contents, location, and placement before categorizing an artifact as a witch bottle.” In his discussion of the Great Neck witch bottle, Painter (1980:70) lists three common attributes among American examples:

- 1) They all contained pins, nails, or other sharp objects.
- 2) All contained or were thought to contain human urine as well as pins, etc.
- 3) They were buried bottom-up in most cases, usually around a home or its outbuildings.

These proposed guidelines for identifying a witch bottle will be compared to the available archaeological evidence (Table 3.2) and ethnohistorical descriptions (Table 3.3) in order to determine what, if any, modifications should be made. The first step is to examine the temporal and geographic distribution of the known cases of American witch bottles.

Temporally, it is interesting to note that with the exception of the Patuxent Point assemblage, all American witch bottles date to the 18th century or later, as seen in Figure 3.17—the period after the New England witch trials and during a period of supposed decline in magical

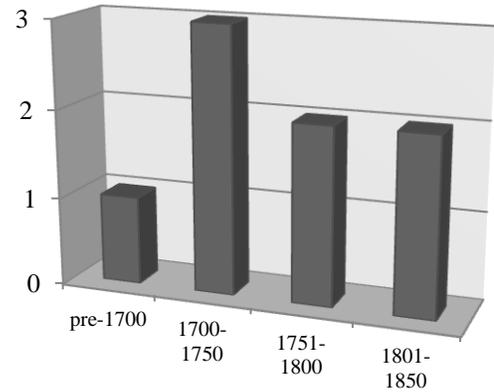


Figure 3.17. Temporal distribution of American witch bottles.

belief in the United States, as discussed in Chapter 2. At least two (possibly three) of the bottles date to the 19th century, demonstrating a continuation of the tradition into the post-Enlightenment period. However, since examples of witch bottles dating from the 19th and early 20th centuries have been reported in England, perhaps it is not surprising that American examples follow a similar temporal pattern.

Geographically, most of the examples in the United States come from the Chesapeake and Delaware Valley region and are notably absent from New England. It is surprising that only one example has been found in New England, which, as described in Chapter 2, was settled primarily by colonists from East Anglia, where witch bottles are most common. Late 17th century descriptions also demonstrate that witch bottles were widely known and used in New England during that period (I. Mather 1684:269, 1693:265; C. Mather 1691; Godbeer 1992:46; St. George 1998:193-195), which makes their absence from the archaeological record even more puzzling. It is possible that the witch bottle tradition in New England more commonly involved placement directly over or into the fire, which would result in destruction of the bottle and could explain why so few examples have been encountered in that region. In fact, of the six available

descriptions of witch bottles from 17th-century New England, two specifically mention heating the bottle. Perhaps phosphate analysis of bellarmine vessels or bellarmine fragments recovered from the area might indicate the use of witch bottles in this manner (Massey and Edmonds 2000; Pitts 2009; Viegas 2009).

Spatially, all existing examples of American witch bottles have been recovered archaeologically from belowground contexts, and three were described as being in an inverted position. Six are associated with structures, while one was recovered from the bottom of a cistern. Of those examples near buildings, two were found near a chimney or hearth, and one (possibly two) was associated with a doorway. These contexts are comparable to known positions and locations of English witch bottles.

The witch bottle found in Pittsburgh is unique in that it was recovered from a brick-lined cistern. Becker (2005:20) believes that the bottle was once associated with a structure that was later demolished and the debris disposed of in the cistern; however, English witch bottles were often placed in both natural and artificial bodies of water such as rivers, streams, and ditches. It is plausible that the Market Street witch bottle was deliberately placed in the cistern for a similar reason and was never associated with a structure.

Most of the major physical variations of the English witch bottle, with the notable absence of the stoneware bellarmine, have been reported in the United States, which is to be expected considering the heterogeneity of the English-speaking populations that immigrated to North America in the 17th and 18th centuries. None of the American examples have been tested for the presence of urine, although the Market Street witch bottle contained “a murky fluid” that was lost during processing (Alexandrowicz

1986:125). However, based on the English examples as well as the ethnohistorical evidence from the United States, it is likely that many of the American specimens contained urine at one time, which either evaporated or drained out before discovery or was unknowingly discarded shortly after excavation.

All of the bottles except those from the Patuxent Point site contained pins. In at least one of the cases some of the pins were bent, but in most they were not. In the case of the Horn Point bottle, the pins were found in an unusual arrangement, inserted into the cork on both the inside and outside of the bottle. As previously mentioned, examples of this type have also been found in southwestern England (Merrifield 1987:180-181). More commonly, pins are found within the bottle, a form that appears to be common in eastern England, particularly near London and East Anglia (Alexandrowicz 1986:126).

Only one example, the Market Street witch bottle, contained fragments that may once have been a cloth heart pierced with pins, although this is a common ingredient in English witch bottles dating to the 17th century. The most unusual ingredient, however, is the two square-toed fabric shoe insoles. Alexandrowicz (1986:127) argues that “there are no parallels for this type of content on either side of the Atlantic Ocean.” However, Hyatt (1970-1978[3]:2603) was told by an African American informant in Savannah, Georgia, that the sole of a shoe could be burned and the ashes put in a bottle of urine and placed in an inverted position in order to break up a marriage. In another example, an insole was to be buried along with nine needles at the left corner of a house (Hyatt 1970-1978[3]:2777). Shoe and foot track magic is common in African American magico-religious tradition, and it is possible that the Market Street witch bottle is actually an African American conjure bottle. However, as discussed in the next chapter, shoes and

shoe soles were also an important element in English folk belief, thus it cannot be determined for certain with which ethnic group this particular bottle charm is associated.

Painter (1980:70) has identified the presence of pins, needles, and/or nails as one of the main criteria for witch bottles. However, numerous examples of witch bottles in England, as well as ethnohistorical evidence in the United States, demonstrates that urine was often the sole ingredient. While some examples are found with liquid still inside, in many cases any liquid that was present has long since drained out or evaporated, although residue may remain (Merrifield 1955:196). Investigations employing chemical analysis and sophisticated imaging technology have been used successfully to identify both inorganic and organic components of several English witch bottles (Massey and Edmonds 2000; Pitts 2009; Viegas 2009). For example, in Essex, a ceramic stoneware bottle sealed with plaster was recovered from an exterior wall behind the wood laths of a building. X-ray analysis showed a cork but no visible iron nails or pins, indicating that at one time the bottle likely held urine or some other non-ferrous organic material (Orr 2005:12, 21). Becker recommends careful excavation or recovery and laboratory handling of such artifacts (Becker 2005:21).

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, a comparison of material evidence of witch bottles and ethnohistorical descriptions of their use may highlight gaps in our understanding of the custom in the United States, as shown in Table 3.4. Several discrepancies become apparent. For example, although no reported cases of bellarmines have been recovered in the archaeological record, their use is recorded in 17th century accounts. Furthermore, seven different sources describe the use of witch bottles containing only urine, with no mention being made of pins, needles, nails, or other

materials. This suggests that archaeologists may have overlooked potential witch bottles simply because they have not contained such materials. As Merrifield points out, “bottles which originally contained urine alone are of course less easily recognized as witch charms, and must often have escaped notice” (Merrifield 1955:196). The same might be true in the United States. It is also significant that while examples of types C and D have been recovered archaeologically, these variations are not mentioned in ethnohistorical sources, demonstrating how archaeology can add to our understanding of the witch bottle tradition in the United States.

**Table 3.4. Material and Ethnohistorical Evidence for American Witch Bottles.**

Type	Container	Contents	Special Features	Material Evidence	Ethnohistorical Evidence
A-1	ceramic jug				2
A-2	glass wine/case bottle	urine			5
A-3	glass vial/steeple bottle				
B-1	ceramic jug				
B-2	glass wine/case bottle	pins, needles, nails (with or without urine)		3	4
B-3	glass vial			3	
B-4	pot or other open vessel	pins, needles, nails (usually with urine)	boiled over fire		1
C	ceramic or glass jug, bottle, or vial	cloth or leather heart pierced with pins/nails		1	
D	ceramic or glass jug, bottle, or vial	may include any combination of urine, pins, needles, and nails	pins and needles stuck into the cork	1	
E	ceramic or glass jug, bottle, or vial	unidentified contents other than urine, pins, needles, and nails			
F	ceramic or glass jug, bottle, or vial	empty, or containing only water	concealed in a structure		3

And finally, the discrepancy in the number of type F witch bottles reported—bottles that are either empty or contain just water—compared to the complete lack of material examples, deserves discussion. In England, empty bottles or bottles containing unidentified liquid are often found in standing structures behind walls, under floorboards, and concealed in cavities in and around the chimney (Evans 1966:80; Merrifield 1987; Orr 2005; Andrews and Hands 2009). For example, two empty late 19th-century soda bottles were found in fireplaces in south Wales (one in each fireplace), “buried in the hearth to such an extent that the heat of years of fires hadn’t cracked them” (Andrews and Hands 2009). One had hair and at least one nail in it but no liquid, and the second was completely empty. According to Painter’s (1980) requirements, only one of these bottles would be identified as a witch bottle. However, the ethnohistorical evidence indicates that bottles concealed in buildings—even when pins, needles, nails, and urine are not present—may represent a more simplified and generally apotropaic version of the witch bottle.

Similarly, in the United States bottles are often found concealed in standing structures. Sometimes they contain unidentified liquid, often described as “dark and murky,” but they are usually empty. When such bottles are found, they are assumed to be either rubbish or accidental loss, perhaps a half-empty bottle of liquor inadvertently left behind by a builder or former resident. However, as seen in Table 3.4, ethnohistorical descriptions of witch bottles that contain only urine, without the presence of pins or other artifacts, as well as empty bottles used apotropaically, account for two-thirds of the available descriptions. Type A and F bottles are described as being locked in a cupboard (Godbeer 1992:46), placed in a hot oven (St. George 1998:193-195), hung up in a

chimney or placed in the fireplace (Hyatt 1935:543-545; Harris 1946:185; Browne 1958:198, 195), placed by the bed (Hoffman 1889:31-32), and hung in the loft (Brewster et al. 1952:646). Limiting analyses to bottles containing pins and nails may also limit the ability to recognize and study potential examples of witch bottles and apotropaic bottle charms in their various forms.

For example, several years ago, while repairing a chimney in a house in Holliston, Massachusetts, workers recovered two glass bottles on a hidden shelf inside a hole they made in the wall above the fireplace (Reed 2005). One bottle was empty and the other had a broken cork “lodged in the top, and a dark liquid [sloshing] around inside,” which was assumed to be 200-year-old whiskey (Reed 2005). It was concluded that the bottles were left behind by the masonry crew who built the chimney two centuries prior, and that the bottle believed to contain whiskey was inadvertently misplaced. It is quite possible that one or both of these bottles represents a witch bottle or other form of bottle charm. Urine, when enclosed in a bottle for two centuries, has been described as appearing dark and murky, although phosphate analysis should quickly determine if the substance is decayed urine. Another possibility is that the liquid is in fact whiskey and represents a folk custom of a different sort—that of making an offering of food or drink during the construction of a house—which has been widely reported in Europe, as discussed in Chapter 2.

Archaeologist Jan Klinedinst reports an unusual bottle she excavated from underneath the hearth in an attached summer kitchen at the Dritt Mansion in Susquehanna, Pennsylvania. The small bottle was corked and contained a dark brown liquid and a wad of hair (Jan Klinedinst 2012, pers. comm.). In another example, an



Figure 3.18. Corked bottle with pentagram on one side. Found in soffit of Raitt Homestead Farm Museum, Eliot, Maine. Photo courtesy of the Raitt Homestead Farm Museum.

empty glass bottle, tightly corked with a large pentagram on one side, as shown in Figure 3.18, was found in the soffit of the Raitt Homestead Farm Museum in Eliot, Maine (Lisa Raitt 2011, elec. comm.). Chemical analysis of the bottle's residue, which has yet to be conducted, may help determine if this artifact was used as a witch bottle or similar charm.

Merrifield (1955:207) has stressed “the importance of recording, not only obvious ‘witch-

bottles,’ but any discovery of pottery [or glass] vessels that appear to have been buried beneath old houses, or are found in other circumstances which suggest that they were deliberately deposited, rather than merely lost or thrown away” (Merrifield 1955:207). Therefore, the author strongly recommends that every bottle found within the fabric or sealed voids of historic structures, particularly if they are corked or contain residue, should be handled as potential magico-religious or secular ritual artifacts and, whenever possible, undergo residue analysis.

### **Syncretic Expressions**

Bottles are also an important element in African American magico-religious tradition, and several scholars have pointed out the similarities between the typical English witch bottle and some African American conjure bottles (Wilkie 1997:88-89;

Fennell 2000:297; Anderson 2005:61). Conjure bottles, as defined by Wilkie (1997:88), include “bottles or preserve jars ... filled with magically meaningful ingredients and buried near doorsteps or houses, or in paths and crossroads. The intended victim, upon passing over the conjure bottle, will be tricked.” Anderson (2005:61) has suggested that conjure bottles replaced the traditional West African conjure bag in those areas in North America with a strong English presence. Like witch bottles, conjure bottles frequently contain human exuviae or other substances conducive to sympathetic magic, including urine, hair, blood, dirt removed from footsteps, and fragments of clothing (Wilkie 1997:88).

Bottles believed to have been used for conjure, or another form of African-derived magico-religious tradition such as Obeah, have been recovered from archaeological sites in the United States and the Caribbean (Samford



Figure 3.19. Possible conjure bottle from Montpelier, Virginia. Photo courtesy of Matthew Reeves.

1996:107-109; Wilkie 1997:88-89; Cochran 1999:28-29; Reeves, in press). For example, Cochran (1999:28) reports an intact perfume bottle containing soil and a single seed recovered from under the floor of the east wing of the Brice House in Annapolis, Maryland, which he believes was used in African American conjure or hoodoo. At Montpelier in Virginia, a small medicine bottle containing crushed charred material (Figure 3.19) was recovered from a sub-floor pit, which Reeves (in press) believes was intentionally placed and hold possible spiritual significance. In addition, Samford (1996:107-109) describes similar objects recovered from spaces associated with free and enslaved Africans and African Americans, including a bottle containing a button found

between the interior and exterior walls of a slave quarter, and several empty bottles, jars, and pots found buried beneath floor surfaces. Containers, when found in such contexts, may have held *minkisi*, or West African religious charms (Samford 1996:107-109; Wilkie 1997:88-89). Wilkie (1997:88-89) speculates that additional examples of conjure bottles have been excavated but not recognized as such by archaeologists.

Conjure bottles appear frequently in accounts of African American folk belief (Puckett 1926; Hyatt 1935; 1970-1978). A perusal of these sources reveals three different forms of conjure bottles: bottles that are nearly identical in both content and context to the typical English witch bottle; conjure bottles that have very little in common with English witch bottles and are presumably derived from West African magico-religious tradition; and accounts of conjure bottles that indicate a syncretic expression derived from both English and West African influences.

For example, Puckett (1926:299) recorded the following method for curing someone who is conjured from an African American informant: “get nine needles, nine brass pins, and nine hairs from your own head. Cork these up in a bottle with some of your urine and set the bottle in the back of your fireplace. ‘Den earnes’ly ax de Lawd ter help yer obbercome dat trick what’s sot agin’ you.’ When the bottle bursts, all your ailments will leave you.” This form appears to be a direct manifestation of the English witch bottle ritual, although the charm is intended to break a trick rather than counter the spell of a witch. The addition of a Christian element in the form of a plea to God demonstrates how magic and elements of more formalized religion were syncretically blended by both European and African American practitioners.

In another example, Anderson (2005:103) describes how an African American conjure doctor instructed a client “to fill a bottle with new pins and needles, his own urine, and several other unnamed materials and then to bury the bottle upside down in his fireplace and cover it with a brick. As the liquid leaked from the bottle, the enemy would pine away. Once it was gone, she [his attacker] would be dead, and his ailment would leave him” (Anderson 2005:103). This example also appears largely derived from English folk tradition, with the inclusion of pins, needles, and urine, and the burial of the bottle in an inverted position under the hearth. Even the explanation of how the attacker would die, her strength waning as the contents of the bottle slowly leaked out, appears to be English.

A third description of a conjure bottle combines elements of from both African and European magic: “Have a vial, put into it nails, red flannel, and whiskey. Put a cork in it, then stick nine pins in the cork. Bury this where the one you want to trick walks” (*Southern Workman* 1899:112). The use of red flannel and whiskey appear to be West African (although red flannel hearts are found in some English witch bottles), as is the placement in the ground where the intended victim will walk and trigger the trick (an element almost never encountered in English folk tradition). This account is particularly interesting because it specifies sticking nine pins into the *outside* of the cork, an element reminiscent of witch bottles found in southwest England (Merrifield 1987:180-181; Hoggard 2004:174).

Other descriptions of conjure bottles have virtually nothing in common with English witch bottles. For example, Puckett relates an instance in which “a bottle filled with roots, stones, and reddish powder [possibly brick dust, a common ingredient in

hoodoo (Leone et al. 2001)] was found under the doorstep, and in the yard more bottles with beans, iron nails and the same powder. The man burned them up and got well again” (Puckett 1926:231). In this example, the contents of the bottle, with the exception of the iron nails (which are found in both European and West African magic) do not resemble known contents of English witch bottles and thus likely derive from West African magico-religious tradition.

One of the primary differences between English-style witch bottles and African American conjure bottles is that the English bottles were concealed so that the witch would not be able to locate the bottle and thus free herself of the counterspell (Maloney 1980). In African American tradition, however, conjure bottles were commonly placed in locations where they would be found, perhaps as a method of publicly stating a personal grievance (Wilkie 1997:88-89). The ethnohistorical descriptions above indicate that while in some areas of the United States the typical English witch bottle can be found into the 20th century, some elements of the custom also intermingled with African-derived elements, resulting in some cases in a syncretic expression unique to North America.

Another possible syncretic expression that may have been influenced by the English witch bottle is the bottle tree, found in some parts of the American South into the 20th century. A bottle tree is an African American folk practice in which bottles and other objects are hung or otherwise displayed on a tree for the purpose of protecting the household from evil spirits, ghosts, intruders, and thieves (Thompson 1983:142-143). According to Thompson, the custom originates among the Bakongo people sometime before the 18th century when a French writer first described the practice:

All, after having cultivated their field, take care, in order to drive away sterility and the evil spells, to fix in the earth, in a certain manner, certain branches of certain trees, with some pieces of broken pots. They do more or less the same thing before their houses, when they must absent themselves during a considerable time. The most determined thief would not dare to cross their threshold, when he sees it thus protected by these mysterious signs (Thompson 1983:142).

Bottle trees were also documented in the West Indies in the late 18th century, where people of African descent displayed “earth from graves hung in bottles in their gardens” (Thompson 1983:142). In the 20th century, bottle trees were reported in South Carolina, Virginia, Arkansas, Mississippi, and Alabama (Thompson 1983:144). Writer Eudora Welty photographed bottle trees in the South in the 1930s (Figure 3.20) and even included a description of them in one of her short stories:

a line of bare crepe-myrtle trees with every branch of them ending in a colored bottle, green or blue. . . . Livvie knew that there could be a spell put in trees, and she was familiar from the time she was born with the way the bottle trees keep evil spirits from coming into the house—by luring them inside the colored bottles, where they cannot get out again” (Welty 1943:156).

At their essence, English witch bottles and Bakongo bottle trees are both used to protect and defend a household from evil and misfortune. Thus it is likely that in the

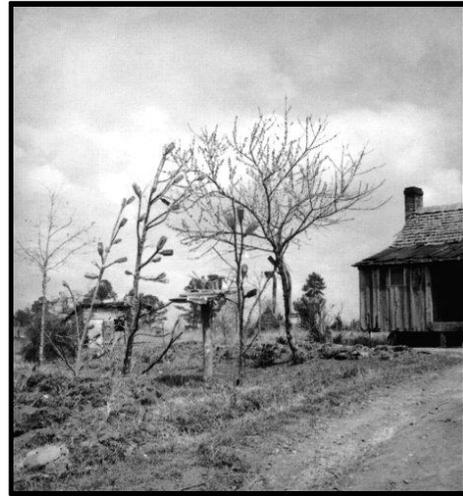


Figure 3.20. Bottle trees in Simpson County, Mississippi. Photo taken by Eudora Welty during her work with the WPA in the 1930s. From the Eudora Welty Collection, Mississippi Department of Archives and History.

United States, where these two distinct traditions convened, bottles (whether empty or containing agents of sympathetic magic) became important objects in a syncretic system of folk magic. This only serves to further emphasize the fact that bottles found in and around standing structures should be treated as potential apotropaic or magico-religious artifacts and not as simple refuse.

### **Modern Reinterpretations**

Some scholars have argued that belief in witchcraft in both Europe and North America declined in the second half of the 18th century, disappearing with the emergence and spread of the Enlightenment (Thomas 1971; Becker 1978:2; Leone 2008:5-6). However, both the physical and historical evidence indicate that witch bottles and syncretic expressions such as conjure bottles and bottle trees continued into at least the 20th century. There is also some evidence that witch bottles, conjure bottles, and other syncretic adaptations of bottle charms continue to be employed by some populations today.

Some parts of Canada in particular seem to have maintained a fairly vibrant witch bottle tradition. Just a few years ago in Ontario, police officers apprehended a man in possession of a plastic bottle containing urine and razor blades, which he explained was “for protection from bad people” (Andrews and Hands 2009). In addition, numerous accounts of the continued use of witch bottles were recorded in the late 20th century among people of English descent in Newfoundland, where the practice is referred to as “putting up a bottle” (Rieti 2008). One informant, who believed he was bewitched, told

the following tale: “So I go and gets the bottle. And I pissed into it. I put the cover on good and tight and I turned the oven on and put it in the oven. I said, ‘You’ll bust, you son of a B, you’ll bust.’ And about two hours later I’d say, or three hours, the helicopter was landed on the other side to pick up this woman who was gone to the hospital piss-bound blocked solid!” (Rieti 2008:31). Similar accounts were reported by other Newfoundland informants, with variations that included heating the bottle of urine with a blowtorch, piercing the cork with a large darning needle, hanging a bottle of urine in the outhouse, placing a bottle behind the stove, and hanging a bottle of urine with 9 new pins stuck into the stopper inside a chimney flue (Rieti 2008:34,36-37,100-101,111,121).

In the United States, there is some suggestion that witch bottles continue to be employed by German Americans, who likely incorporated the custom into their syncretic repertoire of magic (Hoffman 1889). One of the author’s informants, a native of central Pennsylvania, revealed that she had learned about witch bottles from her family and neighbors and had recently employed one herself for assistance in a legal matter. To construct the witch bottle, she “placed nails and urine in a glass bottle along with some written words and buried it on [a] hill” (Vicki Rourke 2011, elec. comm.). Rourke added that witch bottles, “are simply part of the Pennsylvania Dutch cultural milieu—I can’t recall when I first learned about witch bottles” (Vicki Rourke 2011, elec. comm.).

Modern practitioners of hoodoo, rootwork, and Neo-Paganism also construct bottle charms (sometimes called spell bottles), adapting both the ingredients and the context of the charm to fit their particular needs. Some contain “typically African elements such as hot red pepper powder, graveyard dirt, and/or goofer dust [a generic term for any powder used in hoodoo or conjure to harm or kill], plus a piece of paper

containing the intended victim's name" (Yronwode 2000). In 1988, a small plastic medicine bottle containing a halfpenny, a dime, teeth, a wrapped piece of metal, and a small vial of oil, seen in Figure 3.21, was found on the banks of England's Thames River (Powell 2008). And in Louisiana, more than four dozen brown plastic prescription bottles filled with powder and written spells (Figure 3.22) have been recovered from the Vermilion River (Blanchard 2004). Although there are many parallels, modern bottle charms are used for a wider variety of purposes including love spells, money spells, good luck, and as a general apotropaic device.



Figure 3.21. Modern bottle charm found on the banks of the Thames River in England. Photo by Museum of London (Powell 2008).



Figure 3.22. Written spell from a modern bottle charm retrieved from the Vermilion River in Louisiana . Photo by Bryan Tuck (Blanchard 2004).

## Chapter Summary

This chapter has examined the material and ethnohistorical evidence for witch bottles in England and in eastern North America. Like other types of concealed artifacts that are discussed throughout this thesis, witch bottles are often found in and around domestic spaces, particularly near hearths, chimneys, and thresholds, and less frequently, in walls and other structural voids. Although only eight possible examples of witch bottles have been documented in the United States, more examples may be identified if the physical variations and the different ways they were used and deposited can be better

understood. In particular, ethnohistorical evidence indicates that empty bottles or bottles that contain unidentified liquid, when found in concealed in and around buildings, may represent a variation of the English witch bottle tradition that has largely gone unnoticed.

Furthermore, witch bottles are well documented in the ethnohistorical record: the methods of construction, their contents, the reasons they were used, how and when they were used, and by whom, are all known. Thus, they effectively demonstrate the temporal, geographic, and contextual scope of an artifact with known magico-religious ritual significance. This knowledge may assist in the interpretation of other artifacts with possible ritual significance, as demonstrated in the following chapters. In fact, the continuation of the witch bottle tradition into the 20th century makes a strong case for the possibility that other European magico-religious rituals, including those which are largely absent from the historical record, also continued in the New World long past the supposed decline in magical belief in the late 18th century.

And finally, although American historical archaeologists have largely focused on material manifestations of magico-religious ritual associated with African Americans, witch bottles effectively demonstrate the persistence of similar rituals among Americans of European descent. Witch bottles and conjure bottles also offer an opportunity to explore the ways in which European and African magico-religious traditions interacted in North America to create a syncretic and multivalent system of magical belief.

## **Chapter 4: Concealed Footwear and Associated Deposits**

As illustrated in the previous chapter, European (particularly English) folk magic and the material manifestations of folk ritual survived the journey to the New World, where they were adapted to new conditions and mingled with the beliefs and rituals of other cultural groups. It was also demonstrated how ethnohistorical and material evidence can be used to examine the persistence and transformation of ritual over time. This chapter will examine a different type of artifact; one which has literally thousands of physical examples but which, curiously, is not explicitly described in written or oral sources. However, by examining patterns in context, relationships to other artifacts, and a variety ethnohistorical evidence, it is possible to develop several plausible interpretations to explain these deposits.

In the British Isles, continental Europe, and around the world, thousands of shoes and other footwear dating from the early 14th through the early 20th century have been found concealed within the fabric of buildings. Known as concealed shoes or concealment shoes, these deposits have puzzled scholars for decades. The first serious attempt to document concealed footwear occurred in the 1950s. By 1998, more than

1,160 deposits had been reported worldwide, consisting of thousands of individual shoes, boots, and slippers (Swann 1998:2). Today, more than a decade later, the number of concealed footwear deposits is estimated at over 2,000. Although the majority of concealments have been reported from England (Annable 1955; Merrifield 1969, 1987:131-136; Swann 1969, 1996, 1998, 2005; Dixon-Smith 1990; Easton 1983, 1997b; Pitt 1998; Hoggard 1999, 2000, 2001, 2004:178-181; Munford 2005), examples have also been reported elsewhere in the British Isles and on the European mainland (Volken 1998, 2005; Atzbach 2001, 2005, 2006, 2012; Montembault 2005; Bennett 2006) as well as in the former British territories of Australia (Evans 2005, 2007, 2009, 2010), Canada (Swann 1969:8; Cole 1981; Scrivener 2008), and the United States (May 2001; Geisler 2003; Cruson 2008; Manning 2011, 2012; Springate 2011; Costello 2012).

### **The Study of Concealed Footwear**

The first in-depth studies of concealed footwear were published in 1969, although there were a few isolated reports of concealments before this period (Annable 1955; Evans 2010:63-66). In that year Ralph Merrifield introduced the topic in his short article, “Folk-Lore in London Archaeology.” Although Merrifield only briefly mentioned concealed footwear as part of a larger study, citing just six cases known to him at the time, he identified preliminary temporal and geographic patterns and noted that it “is a fairly wide-spread custom that seems to have been quite common for about a century, but of which no written record or surviving tradition apparently remains—except perhaps the vague idea that old shoes are lucky” (Merrifield 1969:101-102). Merrifield proposed that

the practice of concealing shoes started as a builder's tradition along the lines of foundation sacrifice. However, he also suggested that the meaning behind the practice changed over time into a form of apotropaic magic associated with protection from witchcraft. Concealed shoes, he surmised, were placed near chimneys and thresholds to guard the vulnerable openings of a building (Merrifield 1969:102).

The second study of concealed footwear published that year, "Shoes Concealed in Buildings," was authored by English shoe historian June Swann, former Keeper of the Boot and Shoe Collection at the Northampton Museum. Swann's analysis was significantly more detailed than Merrifield's. Beyond noting temporal and geographic distribution, she identified emerging patterns regarding the shoes themselves, their context, and associated artifacts, and noted that similar concealments had also been reported in North America (Swann 1969:8). Unlike Merrifield, however, Swann did not offer any interpretations of concealed footwear. She would later say of this first article, "I deliberately avoided attempting explanations, assuming people would immediately contact me with references in learned journals I had overlooked, or tell me the practice was well known. . . . But there came nothing. Disappointed, I continued to record" (Swann 2005:116). And record she did. To assist in the documentation and ongoing research of concealed shoe deposits, Swann established the Concealed Shoe Index, a registry of concealed footwear reported from around the world, maintained since by the Northampton Museum.

Both Merrifield and Swann elaborated substantially on their first tentative findings in later publications. Merrifield included a discussion of concealed footwear in his seminal work, *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic* (1987), in which he reiterates his

earlier interpretation of concealed footwear as an apotropaic device employed to protect a building from witchcraft or other supernatural attack. In addition, he proposed a late 13th-century or early 14th-century Christian origin for the belief in the apotropaic power of shoes (Merrifield 1987:131-136), which will be discussed in detail in a moment.

Building in large part on Swann and Merrifield's research, other scholars in England have undertaken studies of concealed footwear. Denise Dixon-Smith, Assistant Keeper of the Boot and Shoe Collection at Northampton from 1986 to 1990, presented a paper on the topic in 1990, which largely expanded upon Swann's earlier work and presented new data and developments in the field. She observed that, "the practice of deliberately concealing shoes in buildings is probably the most common superstitious practice of the post-Mediaeval period" (Dixon-Smith 1990:1).

In 1996, in a revised and expanded version of her original article, Swann summarized the data collected in the Index up to that point, totaling more than 1,100 concealments, with cases reported from throughout the British Isles and Europe as well as from Australia, Canada, and the United States. Additionally, Swann documented the reactions and interpretations of individuals who discovered concealed shoes and a few who witnessed the ritual firsthand in the early 20th century. Although Swann introduced several plausible theories regarding the function and meaning of concealed footwear—a good luck charm, a type of vernacular time capsule, a foundation sacrifice, an apotropaic device to ward off evil and witchcraft, even possible associations with freemasonry—she was hesitant to settle on a single interpretation. Instead, Swann suggests that concealed footwear most likely served a variety of functions, many related perhaps to magic and ritual, whose meaning changed over time.

Fiona Pitt also contributed to the developing discussion on shoe concealment in her 1998 article, “Builders, Bakers and Madhouses: Some Recent Information from the Concealed Shoe Index.” Most notably, Pitt presented for the first time quantified data analysis on shoe concealments, including regional distribution in Great Britain, temporal distribution, and the types of artifacts accompanying concealed shoes, which will be examined later in the chapter.

Quite separately from the work being conducted at Northampton, independent scholar Timothy Easton began investigating concealed shoes as part of his broader research on vernacular architecture, apotropaic marks, and ritual concealments. In 1983, he published a short article in which he described several deposits of concealed shoes and other artifacts found in buildings in Suffolk, England. Easton later contributed an entry in the *Encyclopedia of Vernacular Architecture of the World*, in which he introduced the term “spiritual midden” to describe mixed deposits of shoes and other artifacts located in voids near the chimney and hearth. According to Easton (1997b:568), a spiritual midden is created by the “placement of selected objects or animal remains in strategic hidden parts of buildings,” particularly in spaces deemed vulnerable to supernatural attack such as near windows, doors, and chimneys. Besides worn-out old shoes, spiritual middens often contain articles of clothing and other objects of personal significance and magical association. In his article, “The Archaeology of Counter-Witchcraft and Popular Magic,” Brian Hoggard (2004), also investigated concealed footwear, largely summarizing the research of previous scholars and concurring with Merrifield that shoes and boots were probably concealed as a form of magical house protection, emphasizing their placement near vulnerable openings, such as chimneys and hearths.

Swann's most recent research on concealed footwear appeared in an edited volume on building deposits in Europe. In her 2005 paper, "Interpreting Concealed Shoes and Associated Finds," Swann summarized nearly five decades of documentation and research. However in this, her most recent assessment of concealed shoe deposits, Swann (now widely considered the authority on shoe concealment) cautions against making broad "trite interpretations," observing from fifty years of study that "there seems to me something much more profound involved" (Swann 2005:118).

Although England has been the focal point of research on concealed shoes and other concealed deposits, a number of significant studies have been conducted elsewhere in the British Isles and Europe. In Guernsey, a small island located in the English Channel just off the coast of Normandy, deposits containing shoes and other items have been reported by Amanda Bennett (2006), Chief Librarian at the Priaulx Library. In the only known study of French concealments, Véronique Montembault (2005) reported two deposits of late 19th-century shoes concealed in a building in Saint-Benoît du Sault. She laments, "No interest is given in France to old shoes found in buildings" (Montembault 2005:33), citing a woman's silk shoe found in the attic of a neighboring house that was carelessly thrown away without documentation.

Research on concealed footwear has also been conducted in north-central Europe. Rainer Atzbach (2001, 2005, 2006, 2012) has studied deposits of artifacts recovered from the walls and floors of houses in Kempten, Germany, that include shoes, clothing, coins, documents, scraps of leather and fur, and other items dating from the 14th through the early 20th centuries. Another scholar who has contributed to the study of concealed footwear in central Europe is Marquita Volken (1998, 2005), who has presented research

on concealed shoe deposits in Switzerland. In addition, historian Ian Evans recently completed his doctoral dissertation on ritual concealments in Australia, identifying 95 cases of concealed footwear in that country, as well as other types of ritual concealments such as garments, dried cats, and religious objects (Evans 2010:38).

#### **Concealed Footwear in the British Isles, Europe, and Australia**

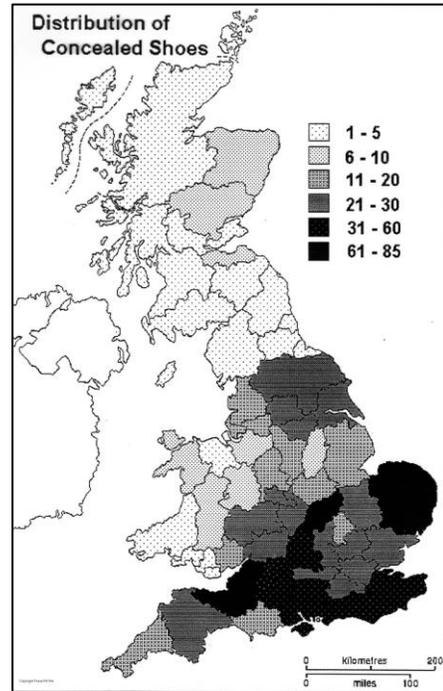


Figure 4.1. Distribution of concealed footwear in Great Britain, showing a concentration in southeastern England (Pitt 1998:figure 1).

Cases of concealed footwear have been reported from all continents except Antarctica, although considerably fewer have been found in Africa, Asia, and South America (Swann 2005:116). Although the practice seems to be most prevalent in southeastern England, as seen in Figure 4.1, Swann (2005:116) points out that the practice is actually quite widespread. According to Pitt (1998:5), the higher concentrations of deposits recorded in the counties of Northampton, Suffolk, and Somerset most likely reflect the research efforts of June Swann and Timothy Easton in those areas.

Most scholars are of the opinion that the practice of concealing footwear originated in England sometime around the early 14th century, peaking in the 19th century, and declining rapidly in the early 20th century, as seen in Figure 4.2, although

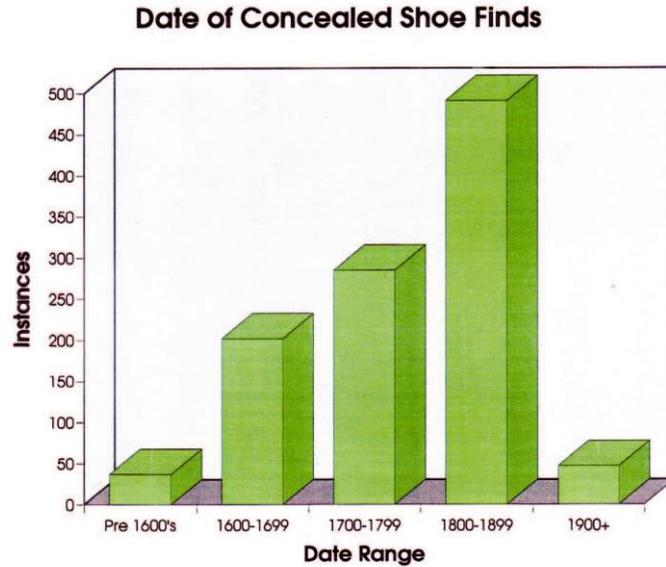


Figure 4.2. Temporal distribution of concealed footwear worldwide (Pitt 1998:figure 2).

some shoes are still being concealed today as part of a revival movement (Pitt 1998:6; Swann 1998:2, 2005:116). Pitt (1998:6) argues that increased deposits in the 19th century reflect the number of buildings surviving from this period compared with earlier periods. Swann (1998:2, 2005:116) has also observed that there tends to be a clustering of concealments in the decade immediately preceding and following the turn of each century.

In some instances, multiple deposits of concealed shoes have been found in a single building, each dating to a different period and associated with various episodes of construction, repair, or renovation. In other instances, a single deposit has been found to contain shoes spanning decades or even a century or more, suggesting that some deposits were reopened and added to by successive generations (Swann 1969:8; 1998:2). For example, a large deposit reported from Switzerland included more than 45 shoes dating from ca. 1790 to the early 20th century (Volken 1998).

## Deposits of concealed

footwear have been uncovered in humble cottages and grand estates, isolated farms and urban townhouses, churches and cathedrals, monasteries, schools and libraries, civic buildings, factories, and military structures. The most common location for deposits is

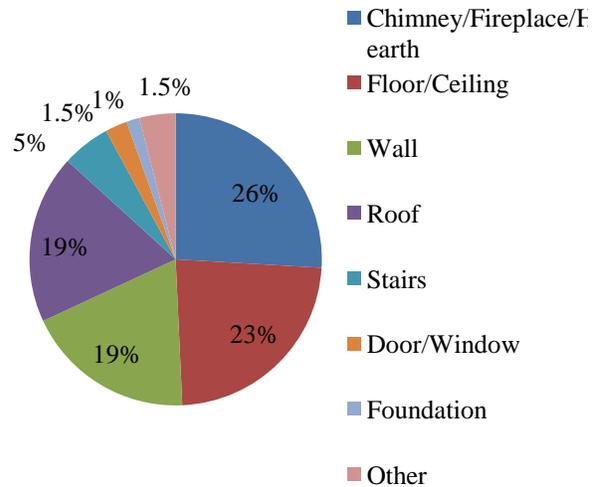


Figure 4.3. Spatial distribution of concealed footwear within structures worldwide (after Swann 1996).

near a chimney or fireplace, accounting for more than a quarter of all reported finds worldwide, as seen in Figure 4.3 (Swann 1969, 1996, 1998:2). Some of the areas near the hearth where shoes and other deposits have been found include inside the base of the flue on the smoke shelf, under the hearth, behind the firebox, and inside shafts or voids on either side of the flue (Figure 4.4). In some cases it appears that special effort was made to accommodate a deposit near the hearth. For example, Evans (2005:7) reports a deposit in a house in Australia in which a brick was omitted during construction of the chimney breast in order to conceal a boot.

The second most common location for concealed footwear is under floorboards or above a ceiling (a space which can be the same when found between stories), followed by deposits within walls, roof cavities, and other voids such as under stairways, above door lintels, and under window sills (Swann 1998). It has also been suggested that the northeast corner of a room or building is preferred, which is considered sacred in Freemasonry (Swann 1998:2), although at this time there is insufficient evidence to

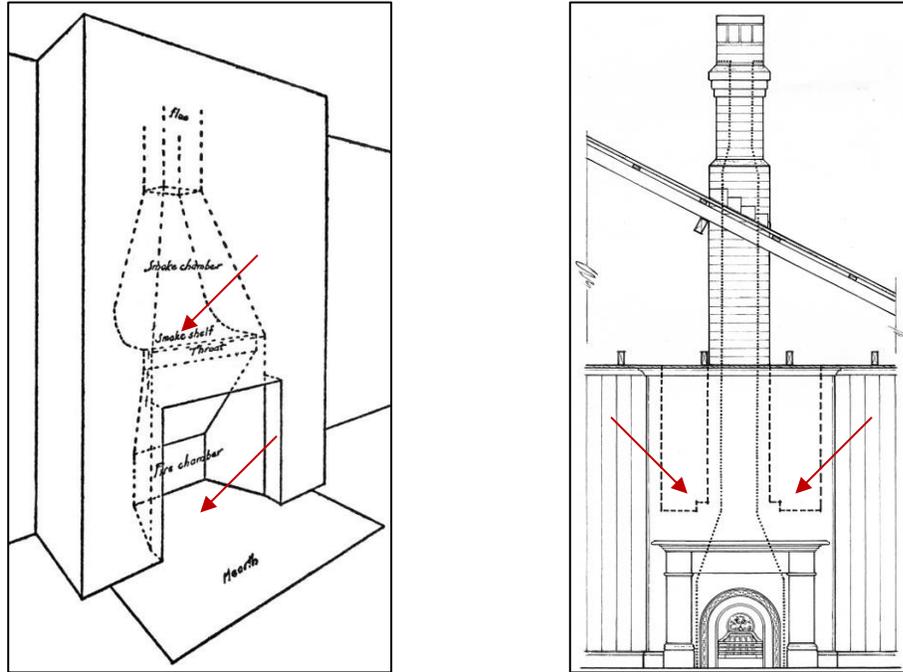


Figure. 4.4. Common locations for concealed footwear deposits associated with the fireplace and chimney: (*left*) on the smoke shelf inside the base of the flue, under the hearth, and (*right*) within voids in the wall on either side of the flue. Image on left adapted from Saylor 1913. Sketch on right courtesy of Michael McCowage (Evans 2010:42).

support this theory. It should be pointed out that shoe concealments, with very few exceptions, are notably absent from building foundations (Swann 1969:8, 2005:116), which indicates they are probably not associated with the tradition of foundation sacrifice or other foundation deposits encountered in the prehistoric, Romano-British, and early medieval periods (Barber et al. 1989; Woodward and Woodward 2004; Hamerow 2006).

Although most reported cases of concealed footwear are found in buildings, there have also been reports of concealments in mines and quarries, possibly associated with rites of termination, as well as in bogs (Swann 2005:116). Numerous deposits of shoes have also been recovered from sacred wells, ditches, and pits dating to the Roman period, perhaps an earlier manifestation of the shoe concealment tradition that has not yet been fully explored (Allason-Jones and McKay 1985:37; Evans 2010:157-164; Owen 2011).

Concealed shoes and boots are almost always old and well-worn, often with holes, patches, or other signs of wear and tear; the footwear has, in essence, “taken on the character of the wearer” (Swann 1969:8, 1998:2, 2005:117). Of more than 1160 shoe finds recorded as of 1998, only about 20 examples were unworn (Swann 1998:2). Swann notes that most of the shoes “look like ordinary working class wear (though they may have started as Sunday best, or belonged to the rich), steeped in poverty, most worn to death, dusty with spiders and rubbish from years of concealment” (Swann 2005:115). Although the vast majority of shoes are made of leather, examples have been found in a variety of materials including cloth and rubber. Shoe-related images such as sole-prints, as well as artifacts associated with shoes, such as buckles, lasts, bootjacks, and shoe-making tools, have also been found, suggesting it is the association with the foot that is important (Swann 2005:116).

Although finds worldwide are distributed equally between right and left shoes, Swann (2005:116) reports that deposits in the Netherlands tend to consist of more left shoes. Pitt (1998:6) reports the ratio of children’s, women’s, and men’s as approximately 50:25:25. The majority of deposits consist of single shoes; pairs are more uncommon but not unknown (Geisler 2003:48; Swann 2005:116). It is quite common to find a deposit containing several odd, unmatched shoes of different styles and sizes. In some instances, it appears that a shoe was deposited by each member of the household, resulting in some combination of men’s, women’s and children’s shoes in a range of sizes, which Swann (1969:8, 1998:2, 2005:116) refers to as “families.” Much larger deposits are not unknown, either. In 2010, nearly 100 shoes, not a matched pair among them, were discovered underneath the hearth of a 17th-century stone cottage in Wales, the largest

deposit of concealed footwear ever documented in Great Britain and one of the largest in the world (BBC News 2010).

There are at least two cases of footwear in which a note was included with the deposit at the time of concealment (Swann 2005; Pearson 2003). Swann reports a pair of boots recovered from the roof of the Savoy Chapel vestry in London that had a scrap of wallpaper folded up inside the bottom of one, on which was written: “William Chapman, B[orn] 3d July 1828, This was don in 1876” (Swann 2005:116-117).

Many shoes have been modified before concealment. Some show signs of having been altered to make them more comfortable to the wearer, such as slitting the throat to enlarge a too-small opening or making a slit or cross-cut over an area of pressure caused by a corn or bunion (Swann 2005:118). Many have had their buttons, buckles, and other embellishments removed before concealment, presumably recycled for later use (Swann 2005:118). There are also numerous instances where pieces of leather have been cut from shoes before concealment, usually interpreted as evidence of salvage.

Some shoes, however, display deliberate modification unrelated to mundane explanations. For example, Swann reports a 17th-century woman’s shoe that had part of the vamp and one quarter cut away: “While the quarter might have been good enough to re-use, it is unlikely that the vamp section with wear creases would have been worth saving” (Swann 2005:118). A pair of shoes from a deposit in Oxfordshire had a cross cut into the vamp of one and another unidentifiable symbol cut into the other (Dixon-Smith 1990:2). Some examples suggest symbolic sacrifice, maleficium, or countermagic. One deposit recovered in England included a mid-18th-century man’s shoe that had been suspended by a length of string strung through the quarters and hung under the

floorboards of Briggate House, near Norwich (Swann 1969:8; 2005:117). Another example consisted of a man's 17th-century leather shoe found in the eaves of an old farmhouse, deliberately slashed into strips (Figure 4.5) (Swann 1969:8; 2005:118). According to Swann, "it would take a carving knife to cut leather that thick and tough. ... someone worked hard to do that" (Newman 2006). Swann (2005:118) has suggested that such examples were intended to curse the wearer, to prevent the shoes from being worn again, or to "stop the wearers' spirit walking."



Figure 4.5. 17th-century shoe slashed into strips, found in the eaves of a farmhouse in England. Photograph by Mitchell Feinberg (Newman 2006).

### **Associated Artifacts**

Some deposits of concealed shoes have been found to contain more than just footwear. These associated artifacts are usually in a similar condition, exhibiting signs of wear and tear, often damaged, broken, or torn, having exceeded their usefulness (Swann 1969:8; 2005:116). Like shoe-only deposits, deposits with associated finds increase steadily from the 1600s to the 1800s, dropping off sharply in the 20th century (Pitt 1998:6). There is considerable variety in the types of artifacts found with concealed footwear. In fact, Pitt (1998:6) reports that more than 200 different types of objects have been found, suggesting "that the choice of items was very personal. Perhaps in some cases these groups [of artifacts] formed a method for people of limited literacy to 'leave their mark', a type of physical graffiti left in places of deep personal significance."



Figure 4.6. Reconstruction of a deposit containing two shoes, four chickens, a broken goblet, and various other artifacts in a house in London (Merrifield 1987:figure 41).

Most of the artifacts, like the shoes themselves, appear to be mundane; however, some are more religious or magical in nature. For example, a bricked-up recess near a fireplace in a 17th-century house in London contained two unmatched shoes along with the remains of four chickens (two which had been strangled and two that appear to have been walled-up alive), an egg, an earthenware candlestick, and a broken glass goblet, all placed in a large basket, indicating perhaps

some form of sacrificial offering (Figure 4.6) (Swann 1969:8; Merrifield 1987:129). In Switzerland, a 16th-century shoe upper was concealed in the wall of a monastery along with a goat's foot (Volken 1998:3). Another discovery in Lincolnshire, England, included a child's boot found with a miniature Bible inside, shown in Figure 4.7 (Viegas 2007). The Bible, believed to be the smallest complete Bible ever printed, was published in 1901, making the deposit one of the more recent examples of concealed footwear.



Figure 4.7. Child's boot and miniature Bible found inside a chimney cavity in Lincolnshire, England. Photo by Portable Antiquities Scheme / Mike Pitts (Viegas 2007).

### Associated Finds with Concealed Shoes

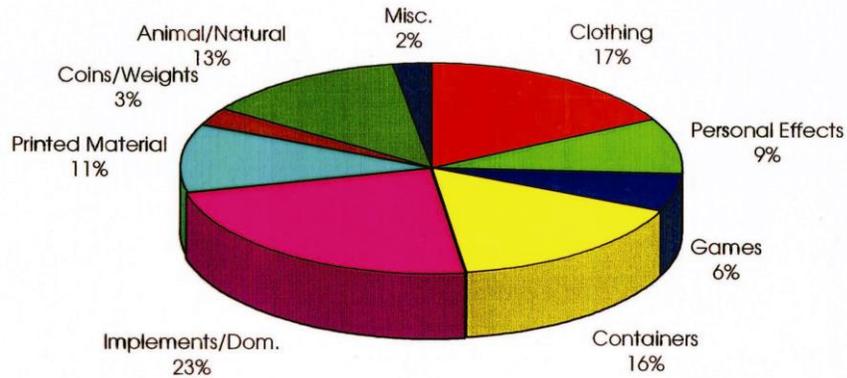


Figure 4.8. Artifacts found in association with concealed shoes (Pitt 1998:figure 3).

While it is not possible to discuss every type of artifact found in associated deposits, it is important to understand the variety of objects and some of their attributes (Figure 4.8). Nearly a quarter of all associated objects (23%) are implements or domestic artifacts such as spoons and forks, knives, knife sheaths, bowls, candlesticks, tools, and broken wine glasses and goblets like the one found in London (Bennett 2006; Dixon-Smith 1990; Pitt 1998; Swann 1969:8, 1996, 2005). A multi-component deposit from Shropshire, England, contained a single shoe, a broken knife, a spoon, part of a purse, and some chicken bones (Dixon-Smith 1990:2). Another deposit, found in a sealed cavity between the roof and ceiling of a building in Bedfordshire, included four shoes dating from the late 17th through the early 19th centuries, fragments of three ceramic bowls, a broken 18th-century clay pipe, a wine glass stem, a late 18th-century small iron file, a hat box, and a small length of corduroy cloth (Annable 1955:304).

The second largest category of associated finds includes garments and textiles, comprising 17% of multi-component deposits (Pitt 1998). In fact, so many garments have been found in concealed deposits *without* shoes that the Deliberately Concealed



broken clay pipe stems, a fragment of glass, and ceramic sherds, seen in Figure 4.9 (Portable Antiquities Scheme 2010).

Printed materials and written documents, such as the miniature Bible shown previously in Figure 4.7, are found in 11% of multi-component deposits. Printed materials can include pages torn from Bibles, prayer and hymn books, or other religious texts, as well as more mundane materials such as newspapers and newspaper fragments, letters, and other documents (Swann 2005:117). In a house in Hampshire, a pair of mid-18th-century girl's shoes and a prayer book, both carefully covered with a stone, were found concealed near a chimney (Swann 2005:117). Another deposit contained the family's brewery account books along with shoes from every member of the family, bits of clothing and furniture, tools, and a bouquet of lavender (Swann 2005:117).

Personal effects have been found in approximately 9% of concealed shoe deposits. One of the more common personal objects encountered include smoking pipes, usually broken, as seen previously in Figure 4.10 (Swann 1969:8). Other types of associated finds include games and toys (6%) and coins and weights (3%) (Pitt 1998).

Many of these items can be viewed as once having had special significance to an individual, which may be relevant to understanding why they were selected for concealment. Smoking pipes, wine glasses and goblets, and eating utensils would have had contact with saliva and may have been intimately connected to a particular individual. Treasured objects that were no longer useful—broken or outgrown toys and dolls, a torn book or Bible, a broken purse—could be similarly associated with an individual or family through the principle of contagion. Swann (2005:117) has also observed that many artifacts such as knives, snapped wineglass stems, and broken

smoking pipes are sharp and jagged, perhaps selected “with the implication of injuring intruders.”

These sorts of mixed assemblages containing one or more shoes and a range of additional artifacts are fairly common. For example, in Guernsey, a deposit found sealed inside the eaves under an upper window in the Priaulx Library contained a young man’s leather boot, a leather purse, a coin dated 1869, leather and metal braces, the bowl of a clay pipe, a broken china dish with the marks VV or VM on the base, a glass fragment with the image of an eye scratched into it, a metal pot lid, a cloth fragment, and fragment of newspaper dating to 1885. According to Bennett (2006:8), “The builder who found the cache said it was clear that the objects had been deliberately placed there, and a piece of plaster had been put on top of them either to keep them in place or to shield them from discovery.” While most of the items appear relatively mundane, two objects stand out; the image of an eye scratched on the piece of glass, which appears to predate the building, has special significance and likely represents an attempt to ward off the Evil Eye, a folk belief common in the Middle East and parts of Europe, Africa, and Asia (Elworthy 1895; Maloney 1976). It is also possible that the symbol depicts the Eye of Providence, or the all-seeing eye of God (Potts 1982:68-78). The broken plate with the letters VV or VM is particularly interesting, as similar marks are often found inscribed on buildings in England, especially on fireplace mantles and timber beams. These marks, discussed further in Chapter 6, are believed to reference Christian themes and invoke divine protection (Easton 1997a:533).

English scholar Timothy Easton (1997b) has proposed the term *spiritual midden* to describe large multi-component deposits of seemingly mundane artifacts concealed

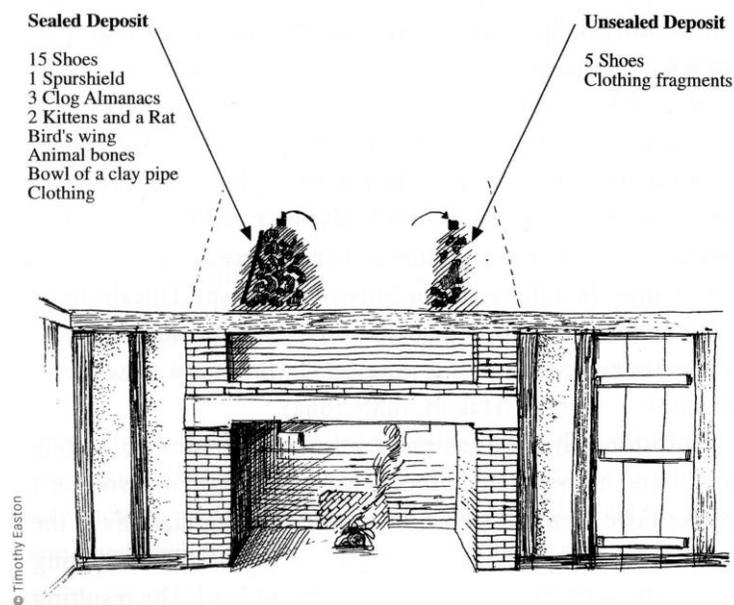


Figure 4.10. Location of concealed deposits or “spiritual middens” found in the walls of a house in Suffolk, England, dating to the late 17th or early 18th century (Easton 1997b:568).

within the structure of a building, predominately in the voids surrounding the hearth

(Figure 4.10). Easton (1997b:568) notes that such deposits:

were accessible from the attic spaces and into them went a heterogeneous series of objects. ... clothing, shoes, household equipment, pieces of furniture, tools and other items reflecting the life and work of the occupiers. With few exceptions, everything found is worn-out and so it was selected rubbish that was positioned to act as a decoy to the expected entry of a witch or her familiars, diverting them from their real quarry, the family of the house.

### **Ethnohistorical Evidence in the British Isles and Europe**

When June Swann first began researching shoe concealments in the 1950s, she was surprised to find no contemporary written accounts describing the practice such as those that exist for witch bottles and other magico-religious charms and countercharms

(Swann 2005:115). She assumed that with time, sufficient contemporary accounts would emerge, but as of yet, few such accounts have been uncovered. However, by examining a variety of ethnohistorical evidence, specifically folk belief and folk tales, the function or functions of concealed footwear and associated deposits may be discerned.

Perhaps the most widely recognized symbolism of the shoe is as a representation of the person who wore it, suggesting that it in some way retains the essence or soul of that person, a direct manifestation of the principles of contagion and similarity. Once worn, the shoe is forever connected to the person, just as are urine, hair, nail clippings, blood, sweat, and other articles of clothing and personal possessions. The shoe's ability to maintain its shape, and thus the shape of the foot of the person who wore it, is a form of image magic that increases its magical potency. It is, in effect, a portable footprint.

Crombie (1895:275-276) explains that, "a person's spirit is believed to be bound up in his shoes," and in 19th-century England, it was "a widely spread belief that a person's ghost, soul, spirit, or life principle exists apart from him in his shoes."

One possible interpretation of concealed footwear is that they represent a form of foundation sacrifice; over time the shoe, representing the person who wore it, replaced humans and animals as a symbolic offering. Merrifield (1987:50) also suggests that the leather of the shoe reaffirmed its connection to a once-living animal, enforcing its suitability as a foundation sacrifice. However, this theory has largely been dismissed since shoes are so infrequently found in foundations (Swann 1969:8). Moreover, as Swann (1969:9) points out, wooden clogs and pattens (protective overshoes), wooden lasts, and even images of shoes scratched onto lead have also been found in concealments, severing the association with leather.

The shoe as a representation or extension of a person may still be relevant, however. According to one English folklorist working in the late 19th century:

the idea that if one could possess oneself of an article that had once belonged to another, the mere possession of that article would give the possessor the most extraordinary power over the original owner for good or evil, ... [This belief] is more common ... among peoples in the lower grades of culture, and is still frequently met with in the necromancy and magic of European peoples of to-day (Crombie 1895:273).

Possession of another's shoe could provide a means of control over a person—to help or harm, to keep them safe, or to compel them to do something. For example, it was believed in Germany, that “if one wanted to fetch a comrade back from a foreign land, one had merely to boil his boots for four days in a pan of water drawn from a stream against the current. At the end of the fourth day the owner is guaranteed to appear” (Crombie 1895:274). It was also thought that, “keeping the child's first shoe protects him from harm” (Swann 2005:118), a practice that lived on in the form of bronzed baby shoes.

Shoes are also associated with travel and with journeys of both a physical and symbolic nature. Common expressions such as “walk a mile in my shoes” indicate the shoe serves as a stand-in for the person and symbolizes their individual journey through life. It was at one time common in England and elsewhere in the British Isles to throw an old shoe after someone leaving on a journey as a token of good luck and success in their upcoming endeavor. In the mid-16th century, John Heywood wrote, “Now for good luck, caste an olde shoe after mee” (Hazlitt 1905[2]:543). One early 19th-century folklorist reported that, “Throwing a shoe after a person setting out on a journey or other enterprise

is still considered as lucky and conducive to success,” noting that this “old Irish custom ... has been handed down through many generations; for on the inauguration of their monarchs in ancient times a shoe or brogue was thrown over them, probably with the like intention. It was an honour conferred on certain ancient noble families to have the privilege of performing this part of the ceremony on these occasions” (Donaldson 1838:76).

Similarly, when a whaling vessel would set sail from Yorkshire, it was said that sailors’ wives would throw shoes after the ship for luck in a ceremony known as “thrashing,” and that, “the older the shoe, the greater the luck” (Daniels and Stevans 1971:496). In Herefordshire, it was considered lucky to burn old boots before embarking on a journey (Hole 1940:30), and in Wales, a method of divination recorded in the early 20th century involved throwing a shoe over your head: “if the toes pointed out of doors, [you] would either quit [your] present abode or die within a year” (Trevelyan 1909:245), suggesting that the shoe was a powerful predictor of travel of both a physical and spiritual nature.

It has also been proposed that concealed boots and shoes are associated with fertility, as demonstrated in the traditional nursery rhyme of the old woman who lived in a shoe. In England, old shoes were thrown after the bride and groom at weddings (Figure 4.11), and later tied to the backs of automobiles (Crombie 1895; Moss 1898:12). In Germany, it was the custom for a woman who was preparing to give birth to wear her husband’s shoes (Crombie 1895:279). Crombie suggests that both the shoe thrown after newlyweds and shoes placed on the feet of expectant mothers are variations of the belief that an old shoe is imbued with the spirit, strength, and experience of the wearer, and that



Figure 4.11. Shoe-throwing at an English wedding, artist unknown (Hole 1940:figure 2).

some of that strength can be bestowed on another by wearing or otherwise coming in contact with their shoes, a interpretation that corresponds to the principle of sympathy. If concealed shoes were, however, intended as fertility charms, they should be expected to be found in locations conducive to reproduction. Indeed, Swann (2005:117) does report several instances of shoes found in the walls of the master bedroom, and the high number of children's shoes might also be connected to fertility symbolism, but the association of concealed shoes as a fertility charm is tenuous at best.

The shoe as a symbol of authority can also be connected to the idea of the shoe as a stand-in for a person. Moss (1898:12) is of the opinion that a shoe thrown at a wedding “is given to or thrown after the bridegroom when he takes the bride from her home, signifying that he is to have the dominion over her.” Gilchrist (2012:94) likewise suggests that “the bride's shoe was presented to the groom by her father, to mark the transfer of male authority over the bride.” Moss (1898:13) also cites the belief that

placing a new husband's shoe at the head of the marital bed proclaims his authority. If concealed shoes were associated with marital authority, perhaps they would, like fertility charms, be more often found in the master bedroom. A more reasonable explanation, and one more aligned with the principles of magic, has been previously mentioned—whoever possesses a person's shoe possesses power or authority over them. The use of a shoe at weddings, however, could be related to several concepts. Instead of symbolizing the transfer of authority, it could also represent the idea that the new wife's journey through life (both physical and spiritual) is now bound to that of her husband's. The physical transfer of the shoe could symbolize the transfer of her "spirit" from one home to another, with the idea that something of the essence of her family of origin is imbued in the shoe, to become part of the family into which she is marrying.

The sixth symbolic association of the shoe, and the one most often cited by scholars of shoe concealment, is the idea that the shoe has the ability to ward off, trap, or distract malevolent forces such as witches, demons, and familiars. This theory is attributed to Ralph Merrifield (1987), who points to a late 13th-century or early 14th-century origin for the belief in the apotropaic power of shoes, which corresponds to the earliest known deposits of shoes concealed in buildings. According to legend, sometime around 1300 Sir John Schorn (sometimes spelled Schorne or Shorne), an Augustinian monk and rector in Buckinghamshire, England, from 1289 to 1314, was said to have forced the Devil into a boot (Bryant 1901). He was also said to have, during a drought, struck the ground with his staff from which a miraculous healing spring emerged (Bryant 1901:38). Knowledge of Schorn's powers to both cure and conjure spread throughout



Figure 4.12. Rood screens at Sudbury in Suffolk (*left*) and at Suffield (*center*) and Gately (*right*) in Norfolk depicting Sir John Schorn forcing the Devil into a boot.

England, and soon pilgrims were journeying to the spring seeking cures for gout and ague (Hooper 1894:341; Bryant 1901).

Schorn's confrontation with the Devil was fairly well known in southern England, as painted rood screens depicting the event have been identified in the counties of Norfolk, Suffolk, and Devon; his image has also appeared on metal pilgrim badges (Bryant 1901:38). The images of Schorn, and the description of those no longer surviving or otherwise inaccessible, are intriguing for both their similarities and their differences. For example, all of the four surviving rood screens, three from the county of Norfolk and one from Suffolk (Figures 4.12 and 4.13), depict Schorn holding a tall or "long" boot in his left hand while using his right hand to command the Devil. The use of the "sinister" left hand to capture and hold the spirit and the use of the right to bestow the holy directive may have symbolic significance. In a deviation from the typical depiction, a painting on glass from Bury Abbey shows Schorn with an open book in his left hand and



Figure 4.13. Line drawings of the rood screens at Gateley (*left*) and at Cawston (*right*), both in Norfolk (Bryant 1901:39).

the familiar long boot in his right (Bryant 1901:40). Other images show the boot on the ground either in front of or beside Schorn.

Another interesting aspect of the images of Schorn and the Devil involve the actual depictions of the creature. In the image from Suffield Church, dated ca. 1450, the Devil is depicted as “a horned imp, with wings and glaring eyes” (Bryant 1901:38). Similarly, the image from Gately, dated ca. 1480, also depicts

what is described by one historian as an “imp” (Bryant 1901:38). A third image from Norfolk, this time at Cawston, dated ca. 1450, shows Schorn with a creature “like a griffin, half hidden in the boot, with wings expanded as if about to fly away” (Figure 4.14) (Bryant 1901:39). A panel from Sudbury, dating to the mid-16th century, shows “a boot containing a devil, either ascending or descending. Here the fiend is stouter than in the other representations, with head bare and hair standing on end, carrying his hands by his sides, the right being outside the boot” (Bryant 1901:39-40). The Bury Abbey painting depicts “a yellow-winged imp, with forked tongue and green horns and fangs; he appears to have almost escaped, and the monk’s face exhibits great wonder and alarm” (Bryant 1901:40). A description of a sixth painting, which no longer exists but was formerly located at Marston Church, describes Schorn “with a boot under his arm, like a bagpipe, into which he was squeezing a moppet, representing the D[evil]” (Bryant 1901:40).

In a final image housed in a private collection, Schorn is depicted kneeling: “The empty boot is before him; the imp has escaped, and is flying away, looking and snarling at the kneeling figure. At the back of him is a running stream, probably representing the one he called forth, and behind is the Devil himself, in human form, winged, with a forked tail, and three claws in lieu of feet” (Bryant 1901:40). This last example, although available only by written description, is the most enlightening because it portrays both the Devil himself, in human form, and an unnamed imp. This suggests that the supernatural creature conveyed into the boot—or perhaps repelled by the boot—was not *the* Devil so much as *a* devil, or lesser demon. The diminutive size of the creature, small enough to fit into a boot, is also noteworthy. While the Devil was usually portrayed as being the size of a human or giant, minor demons, familiars, house spirits, and other non-human beings were frequently depicted as diminutive in size, able to enter a house through cracks, keyholes, chimneys, and other small apertures (Allen 1935, 1936; Russell 1984:131,215,232).

Merrifield (1987:134-136) has suggested that Schorn’s miraculous feat inspired a general belief in the ability of shoes and boots to trap malevolent spirits or to function as a general prophylactic to guard the vulnerable openings of a building, particularly chimneys. However, as Davidson (2010:633) points out, “it is not entirely clear whether or not the use of a shoe or boot as a means to trap evil originated with Schorn, or if he was simply invoking a commonly recognized symbol of the day.” Although his images are found throughout southern England, Schorn was still a fairly local figure. The wide distribution of concealed footwear throughout northern Europe indicates that England,

and thus Schorn, could not be the sole source of the belief in the apotropaic power of shoes.

Other ethnohistorical sources support the idea that an old shoe or boot has the power to repel or trap unwanted spirits. In England, the Devil was sometimes referred to as “Old Boots” (Hazlitt 1905[2]:176). In late 19th-century Scotland, it was thought that a cunning woman could unbewitch a cow that would not give milk by starting a fire in an old shoe and burning it directly under the cow while reciting the following: “May the Almighty [sic] smoke the witch in hell as I am smokin' the coo” (Gregor 1889:282).

Belief in the apotropaic power of shoes seems to have continued for some time. In the 1940s, it was reported in Suffolk that “shoes placed at a door, one going in, one out, will prevent nightmares,” as nightmares were believed to be caused by the nocturnal visits of hags and witches



Figure 4.14. Early 20th-century postcard from England, associating old shoes with horseshoes and good luck. From the author’s collection.

(Harvey 1945:270). In Nottinghamshire, it was reported that burning an old shoe could prevent infection (Hole 1940:30). It has already been shown how illness and disease were attributed to witchcraft, thus the smoke from the shoe would repel any disease-causing malevolent curse. Swann (1996) reports that in the 1960s, “a 93-year old Newcastle woman left a pair of old shoes on a stool outside her flat to keep out intruders,” though whether those intruders were of the physical or supernatural sort is unknown. Old shoes are also associated with general good luck in English folklore. An early 20th-century postcard from England, shown in Figure 4.14, depicts an old worn shoe and a horseshoe

with the words “Good Luck,” signifying a symbolic association between the two objects—most likely a modern interpretation of an earlier apotropaic function.

There also seems to be a connection between cobbler’s tools and other shoe-related objects and the ability to repel or “fix” malignant beings, which may explain their frequent presence in concealments. In the early 20th century in Lincolnshire, it was said that a witch could be fastened to her chair with an elsin, or shoemaker’s awl (Rudkin 1934:249). Briggs (1953) recorded several English folk tales with a similar motif. In one tale a family attempts to rid itself of a brownie that had turned into a troublesome boggart (Briggs 1953:130).



Figure 4.15. Artist’s rendering of a boggart behind the “elf-bore” in a cupboard wall (Briggs 1953:131).

During the day, the spirit hid behind the wainscoting, coming out at night to wreak

havoc. Distraught, the family calls on the services of the village cobbler, who brings with him a book of charms that he uses to lure the boggart out through a crack in the wall. As soon as the imp appears, the cobbler spears his nose with an iron awl, which holds the creature long enough for the cobbler to conjure him into a nearby cask.

In a similar tale from Yorkshire, a troublesome boggart was said to hide behind the wall of a cupboard, peeking out through an “elf-bore,” a hole where a knot of wood had fallen out (Briggs 1953:131). The children of the household persistently taunt the spirit by shoving an old shoehorn into the hole (Figure 4.15), until eventually the spirit becomes so infuriated and malicious that the family is forced to move, but, as in other tales of this type, is followed by the boggart, who hides in the butter churn.

As noted in Chapter 2, late medieval and post-medieval folklore throughout the British Isles and northern Europe consistently associates house spirits and other non-human beings with articles of clothing, particularly shoes, stockings, caps, and cloaks. The leprechaun, a solitary fairy and close cousin of the Irish cluricaune, was said to make or repair shoes (Briggs 1953:210; Winberry 1976:63). Some spirits are said to reside in shoes, like the Russian domovoi. However, in the British Isles, domestic spirits like the brownie and hob (as well as the more malicious boggart) are said to be repelled or “laid” by a gift of clothing (Briggs 1953:117): “Sometimes it is said that he becomes too proud of his finery to work, sometimes that he goes off to fairyland so soon as he is respectably dressed, sometimes that a doom laid on him is lifted if he is considered to have earned a reward, and yet again that he cannot bear to feel himself the hired servant of mankind.” These same house spirits are habitually associated with the chimney and hearth, and less frequently the threshold, attic, or barn, where offerings are made and where the spirits might leave a small gift in return.

Probably the most well-known association between spirits and shoes comes in the form of the many customs found throughout northern Europe in which good behavior is rewarded by some watchful spirit in the form of a gift left in the shoe or stocking. In the British Isles, a dairy maid or servant who had pleased the fairies or resident house spirit might find a six-pence in her shoe (Green 1962:95; Buchanan-Brown 1972:203; Rivers Cofield 2010). The gift left in a shoe for good behavior can be compared to the custom of setting out a shoe or stocking for a visiting spirit at Christmas or similar winter celebration. The spirit, usually portrayed as an old bearded man, an elven non-human being, or an elderly woman, can be seen in a host of traditions including Father Christmas



Figure 4.16. Dutch artist Jan Steen's *The Feast of Saint Nicholas*, ca. 1665-1668. Notice the shoe in the foreground, which was filled with treats for the young girl, and the crying boy on the left whose shoe is filled with switches. Several children look up the chimney, perhaps hoping to catch a glimpse of Saint Nicholas. Rijksmuseum, Amsterdam, in the public domain.

in England and Saint Nicholas or Sinterklaas in the Netherlands (Figure 4.16) (Davidson 1970:183). In Scandinavia, the tomte and nisse, both domestic spirits, are said to fill the same role. Like the domestic spirits, these visiting winter spirits reward good behavior with gifts of coins, sweets, or other small niceties, and may leave ashes, coal, switches, or rods for those whose exhibit unacceptable behavior (Davidson 1970:183). The rituals associated with these spirits consistently center around the hearth and chimney; in some cases the spirit is said to enter the house through the chimney (Davidson 1970:183). As with the various domestic spirits, an offering of milk, cake, bread, cookies, or porridge is usually left out for the visitor.

The preceding discussion has shown that an old worn shoe was a potent symbol in European, particularly English, folk belief. It was tangentially associated with fertility and the transfer of authority; it symbolized a journey, both of a physical and spiritual nature; it was bestowed with the power to harm, heal, or control; it was used in divination; it was employed in a variety of ways as an apotropaic device to repel witches, demons, and the diseases and afflictions caused by these malevolent forces, as well as to attract benevolent spirits who might leave gifts in return; and it was viewed as a general good luck charm.

### **Concealed Footwear in the United States**

In his book, *Devil's Dominion: Magic and Religion in Early New England* (1992), historian Richard Godbeer argues convincingly for the wholesale transplant of a complex system of popular magic from England to North America in the 17th and early 18th centuries. It has already been demonstrated how the witch bottle tradition survived in colonial and post-colonial America; therefore, it is logical to assume that the practice of concealing footwear was also transplanted to the English colonies.

Indeed, numerous examples of concealed footwear have been documented in the United States (Figure 4.17). In her 2003 master's thesis, Jessica Geisler compiled data on 106 deposits of concealed footwear in this country, obtained in part from Northampton's Concealed Shoe Index and from records kept by Historic New England (formerly the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities). Expanding on Geisler's work, research for this thesis has identified more than 150 additional cases of concealed

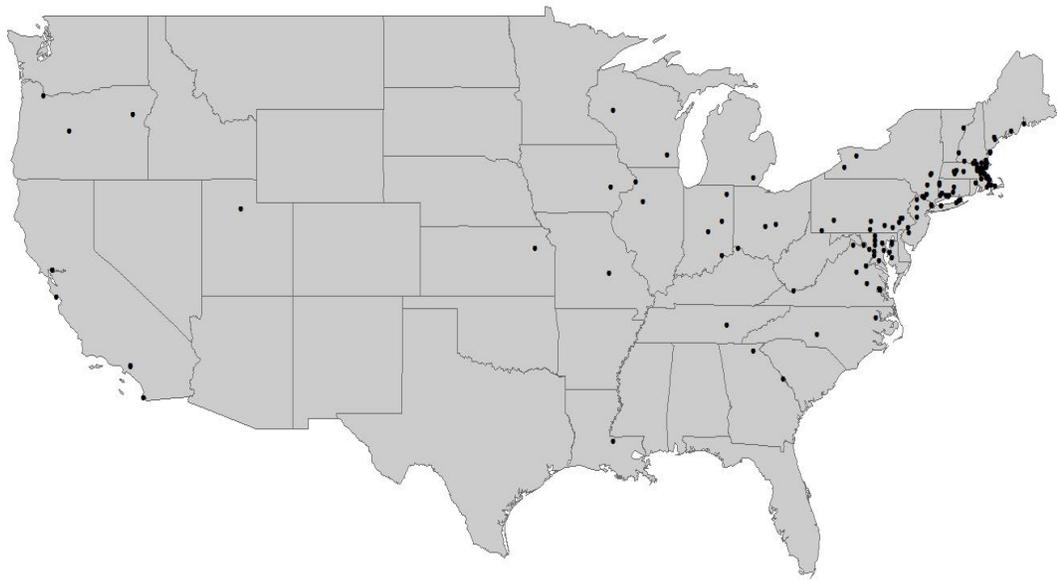


Figure 4.17. Geographical distribution of concealed footwear in the United States. Map by author.

footwear in the United States, bringing the total number of documented deposits to 259, consisting of 568 individual pieces of footwear from 234 sites. Details of individual finds are included in Appendix A.

Using Geisler's database as a starting point, an attempt was made to verify as many cases as possible by contacting historical societies, museums, and individual homeowners. Many of these contacts were able to report additional concealed shoe deposits previously unrecorded. In the process, some of the details of specific cases were amended and additional information added whenever possible. A list of American concealments reported since Geisler's research in 2003 was acquired from the Northampton Museum in England. Finally, additional unreported cases were obtained through a search of online sources that turned up relevant data in historical society newsletters, newspaper articles, magazines, social-networking websites, photo-sharing sites, chat forums, and blogs.

As in Europe, concealed footwear and associated deposits are almost always discovered during major repair, renovation, or demolition of an historic structure; as a result, most examples are poorly documented. A disproportionate number of cases of concealed footwear are reported by organizations that operate historic sites and house museums due to their inherent interest in preserving and documenting anything of historic value that is discovered during repair or restoration.

Frustratingly, the details of previously reported deposits—including the number of shoes, their description, exactly where in the building they were found, and what they were found with—often change depending on the knowledge and memory of the informant. Many of the shoes and their associated artifacts have been thrown away, misplaced, or are otherwise inaccessible and thus not available for detailed analysis. Furthermore, while general awareness of the ritual of concealing shoes has become more widespread, particularly among historical societies and house museums, associated artifacts such as garments and domestic objects are still unlikely to be recognized as potential ritual artifacts and as a result are far less likely to be reported. Overall, it has become all too clear that many more deposits of concealed footwear and related artifacts have been discovered but not documented, resulting in the irrevocable loss of valuable data.

Even when concealed footwear have been preserved, dating such deposits can be problematic since boots and shoes were often worn for years, even decades, before concealment. A date range can often be established by the characteristics of certain features (style, toe shape, construction method, etc.). Al Saguto, Master Cordwainer at Colonial Williamsburg and former student of June Swann, graciously provided

approximate dates and descriptions for some of the shoes based on photographic evidence provided by informants. Many deposits appear to have been concealed during original construction of a building or during a period of major repair or alteration such as the conversion of a wood-burning fireplace to accommodate a stove. Therefore, when a date is not available for a particular deposit, the approximate date of concealment can sometimes be estimated if the life history of the building is known.

Temporal analysis of the 86 cases collected by Geisler for which a date can be assigned shows that one third date to the period 1801-1830, declining steadily throughout the remainder of the century and into the next, as shown in Figure 4.18. Analysis of the 220 deposits of concealed footwear included in this thesis that can be assigned an approximate date indicates a similar temporal distribution, seen in Figure 4.19; however, more cases dating to the mid- and late 19th century were recorded, most likely reflecting a gathering bias in the Midwest, which generally have slightly later dates. These findings are similar to Swann's (1996) and Pitt's (1998) analysis of concealed footwear worldwide, showing a strong temporal pattern and general increase in deposits in the 19th century (Figure 4.20). The cause of this increase, however, is unclear. Swann, Pitt, Geisler, and Evans propose that the relatively low number of cases in the 17th and 18th centuries can be explained by the lack of buildings surviving from these periods, particularly in the United States. While this may certainly be true, continuation of the tradition into the late 19th century, and in such significant numbers and in very specific regions, indicates that the custom had in no way died out by this period and in fact appears to have strengthened (Geisler 2003:89).

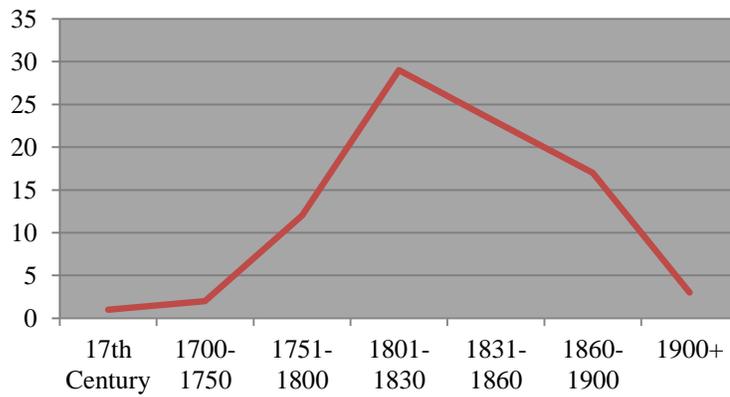


Figure 4.18. Temporal distribution of 86 dated deposits of concealed footwear in the United States (after Geisler 2003:figure 11).

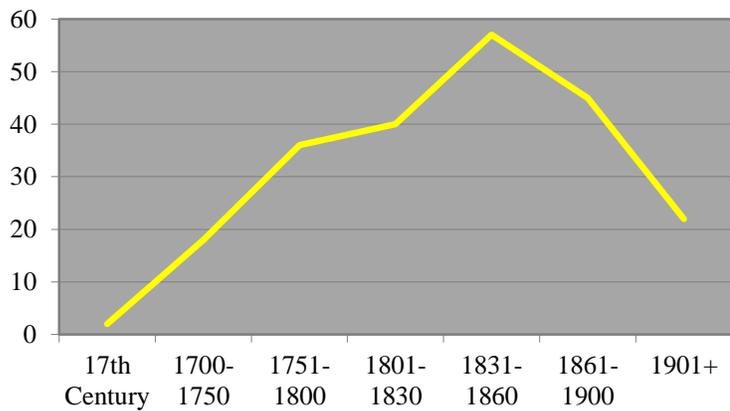


Figure 4.19. Temporal distribution of 220 dated deposits of concealed footwear in the United States, as reported by the author.

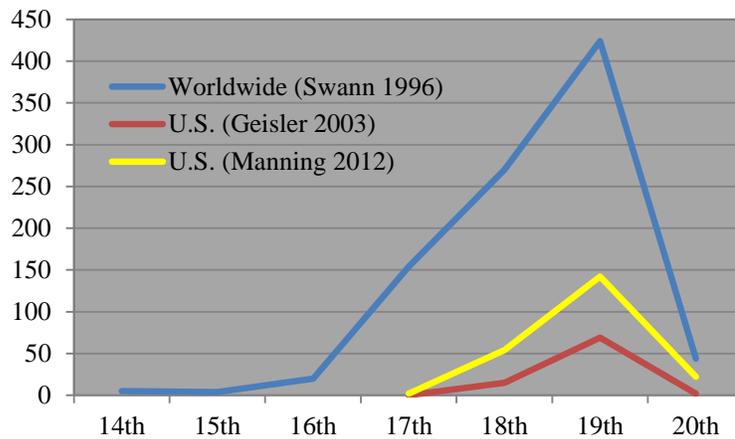


Figure 4.20. Temporal distribution of concealed footwear worldwide and in the United States, as reported by Swann (1996), Geisler (2003), and the author.

pattern and a

While reported deposits of concealed footwear are concentrated in New England, the Delaware Valley, and the upper Chesapeake, as seen in Figure 4.21, examples have been reported as far south as Louisiana and as far west as California and Oregon. Although concealed shoes and boots are found throughout the British Isles and much of Europe, it has already been shown in Figure 4.1 that concealments

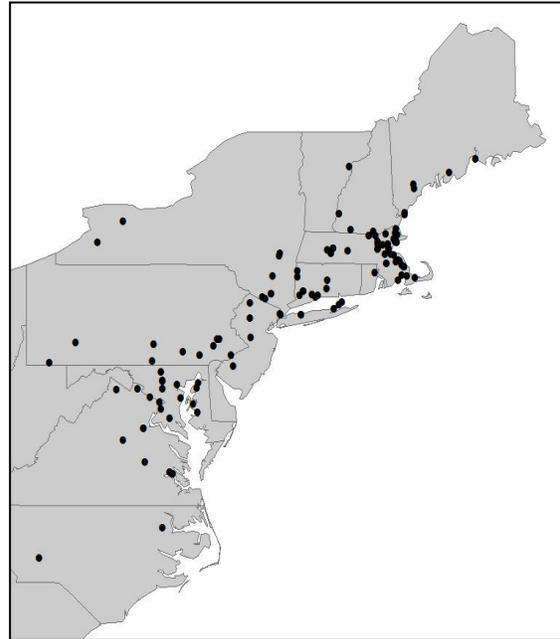


Figure 4.21. Distribution of concealed footwear in New England, the Delaware Valley, and the upper Chesapeake. Map by author.

have been reported in higher concentrations in the southeast of England, the region from which many of the English-speaking colonial immigrants to America originated, particularly those who settled in New England.

Even in far-flung locales in the United States there appears to be a tangible connection to English heritage and tradition. For example, at the Workman-Temple House in Industry, California, four single women's shoes were found concealed together under the floor of a second-story bedroom. The house's first owner, William Workman, was born in 1799 in Westmorland (now Cumbria), England. At the time of the concealment (ca. 1890), the house was owned by Workman's grandson, John Harrison Temple, suggesting the ritual had been passed down through several generations. At U.S. Army Fort Rosecrans near San Diego, California, a single boot and a campaign hat from the Spanish American War were found inside a specially built masonry cavity in the

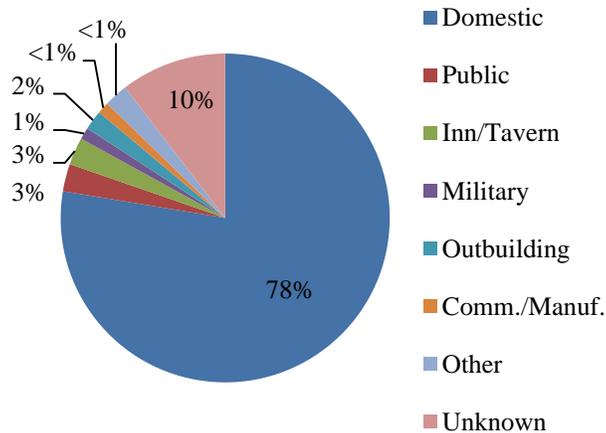


Figure 4.22. Structures in which concealed footwear deposits have been found in the United States.

chimney of an enlisted men’s barracks constructed in 1904 (May 2001). According to May, muster roles for that year report that more than 15% of the soldiers stationed at Fort Rosecrans were born in the British Isles, while another 40%

came from the Eastern seaboard of the United States. He concludes: “Any one of these men who worked for the U.S. Army Quartermaster Corps could have quietly bricked-in the boot and hat during construction of the chimney” (May 2001:2).

By far, the majority of American shoe concealments (78%, n=201) come from domestic structures, as seen in Figure 4.22. That number increases to 87% when deposits of unknown context are removed from the analysis. A few deposits were reported from communal and public spaces such as inns and taverns (n=7), military buildings (n=3), statehouse buildings (n=3), commercial and industrial structures (n=3), schools, libraries, and churches (n=3), and a jail (n=1).

As in the British Isles, Europe, and Australia, concealed shoes and associated artifacts in the United States are more likely to be found in certain locations within a building (Figure 4.23). The most frequently reported locations for concealed footwear deposits are inside a wall (n=62) and within, under, or around the fireplace or chimney (n=61), together comprising nearly half of all reported cases. Other common locations

include attics and roof spaces (17%) (Figure 4.24), within floors and ceilings (8%), and surrounding doors and windows (7%).

While an elegant lady's slipper or gentleman's shoe is occasionally found, by far the majority of the shoes can be described as functional, everyday, working-class footwear:

These are not the shoes that were worn on a special occasion, put away with care, and passed down through generations and into the care of museums and historical societies. These are the shoes, rather, that were worn on a daily basis for work and play: that accompanied men, women, and children as they went about the minutia of their everyday lives (Geisler 2003:44).



Figure 4.24. Location of two shoe deposits concealed behind the box gutter of the Sullivan House, Madison, Indiana. Photo courtesy of Historic Madison, Inc.

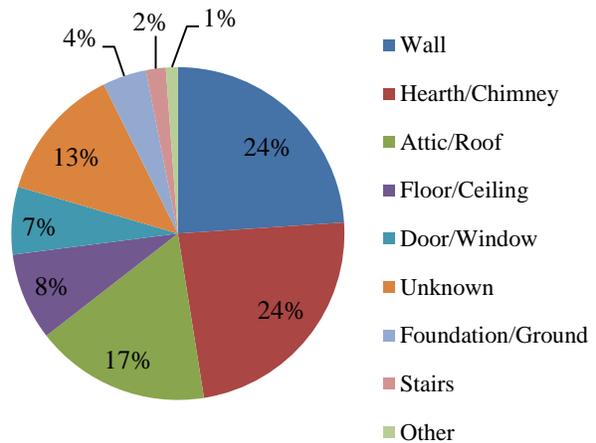


Figure 4.23. Spatial context of concealed footwear deposits in the United States.

Data were not specifically gathered on whether concealed shoes were for the right or left foot; however, 42 examples (excluding pairs) were identified as either right or left in the descriptions provided by informants and other outside sources, and of those, 29 (69%) were for the left foot while only 13 (31%) were right-footed

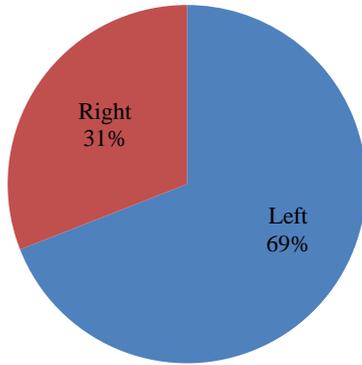


Figure 4.25. Composition of deposits: right-footed versus left-footed shoes.

shoes (Figure 4.25). Swann has noted an unequal distribution between left- and right-footed shoes in the Netherlands, and many ethnohistorical accounts in the United States specify the left shoe should be used in charms, suggesting that a preferential selection for left-footed shoes for concealment may have existed in the United States.

The largest documented deposit found in the United States to date consists of 34 shoes located in cavities on either side of a chimney flue at the John Adams Birthplace in Quincy, Massachusetts (Geisler 2003). However, it has been estimated that a large, mostly intact and unexcavated deposit in the Old Gaol in York, Maine, contains anywhere from 50 to 150 shoes and boots (Cynthia Young-Gomes 2011, elec. comm.).

By far the majority of deposits consist of a single shoe or boot, as seen in Table 4.1. Of those deposits consisting of a single shoe, 57 cases, or 37%, belonged to a child, while 66 were adult shoes (Figure 4.26). Single adult shoes consisted of 29 women’s shoes, 27 men’s shoes, and 10 for which the gender was unknown. It should be noted that in some cases it was difficult to determine if a shoe belonged to a large child (sub-adult) or to a small man or woman, and in other cases the shoes were of a vernacular

**Table 4.1 Number of Shoes Per Deposit.**

1 shoe	152
2 shoes	42
3 shoes	25
4 shoes	10
5 shoes	3
6 shoes	7
7 shoes	1
8 shoes	3
9 shoes	0
10-19 shoes	3
20+ shoes	4
unknown	9

style that was not gender-specific. Overall, these ratios are notably similar to those reported by Evans (2010:135) for Australian finds, as seen in Figure 4.27.

Pitt reported that 50% of concealed shoes worldwide were children’s (Figure 4.28), while Evans reported that 41% of concealed shoe deposits in Australia consisted of children’s footwear. While at first this may seem like a disproportionate percentage, it should be remembered that families in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries were generally larger and thus it should not be surprising that more children’s shoes are found in concealed deposits; therefore, the data do not necessarily reflect preferential selection of children’s shoes for concealment.

Forty-two deposits contained two shoes, of which 21 (50%) were matched pairs, while 17 deposits contained two unmatched shoes and 4 could not be

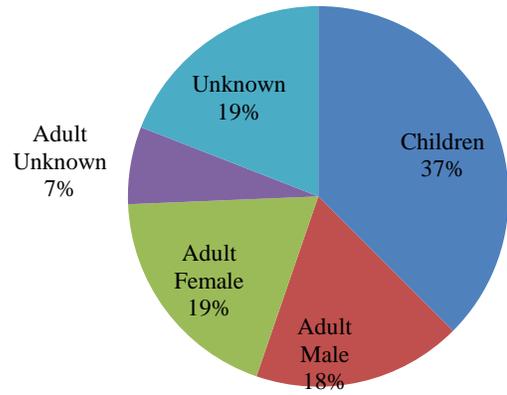


Figure 4.26. Composition of single-shoe deposits in the United States.

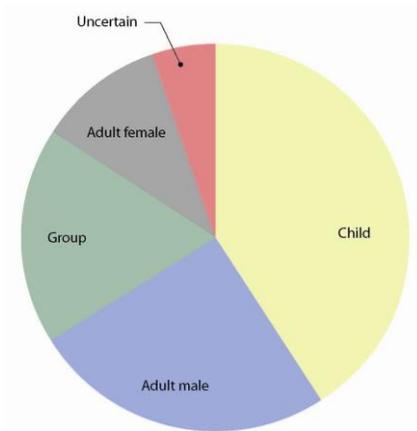


Figure 4.27. Composition of concealed shoe deposits in Australia (Evans 2010:135).

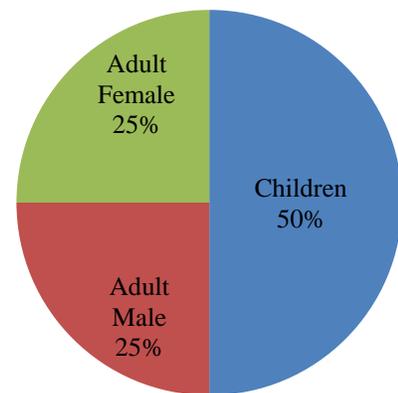


Figure 4.28. Composition of all concealed shoe deposits worldwide (after Pitt 1998).

determined. A total of 203 deposits contained only unmatched shoes (including the 152 deposits which contained only one shoe). Eight deposits included both pairs and unmatched singles, and 24 deposits could not be determined. The point to note here is that deposits containing only unmatched shoes (both single and multiple-shoe deposits) are by far the most common arrangement, comprising more than 78% of all reported deposits.

Many of these groupings of unmatched shoes consist of footwear from different individuals, ranging in size from infant and toddler, to sub-adults and adult men and women. As previously mentioned, this arrangement has been referred to as a “family” of shoes by June Swann. For example, a deposit recovered from the wall of a house in Harpswell, Maine, included three single shoes: a man's, a woman's, and a small child's (Linda Griffin 2011, elec. comm.). In Milan, Michigan, four single shoes, including one man's, one woman's, and two children's (not a pair) were found together in the crawlspace under a kitchen (Jim Saborio 2011, elec. comm.).

Almost all shoes found in concealments are described as old or worn; only three deposits have been described as unworn. Many of the shoes have large holes, evidence of repair or alteration, missing soles or uppers, small pieces of leather cut out, and missing buttons and buckles, as seen in Figures 4.29 and 4.30. Such cases are usually assumed to have been scavenged for useable parts and leather patches before being thrown away, and it is likely that the missing buttons and hardware were removed for just such a purpose. However, examples that display deliberate slashing, have sections of leather missing from otherwise unsalvageable areas of the shoe, or consist of only soles or insoles, should be evaluated for the possibility of purposeful destruction or preferential selection of



Figure 4.29. (*left*) Shoe with buttons removed, presumably for reuse, Workman-Temple House, Industry, California. Photo courtesy of the Workman and Temple Family Homestead Museum, City of Industry, California.

Figure 4.30. (*right*) Man's work shoe with most of upper cut away, Indiana Statehouse, Indianapolis, Indiana . From the collection of the Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites.

certain parts of the shoe, particularly when the parts removed were not useful for patches.

For example, a boot found in a house in Newtown, Connecticut, had part of the toe cut out (Figure 4.31), a relatively unusable part of a worn shoe.

As in the British Isles and Europe, deliberately cut and manipulated shoes have also been documented in the United States. A shoe found concealed in a box cornice in Williamsburg's Brafferton Hall had a hole punched in the back through which a string had been inserted in order to suspend it from a projecting nail (D. A. Saguto 2011, elec. comm.). In a house in Rhode Island, a deposit of three single shoes was found in the back of a chimney, one of which was similarly suspended with string through the back seam (Geisler 2003). Another shoe from Williamsburg, found in Wetherburn's Tavern, "was either 'slashed' (mutilated) or had parts of the uppers salvaged



Figure 4.31. Boot from Newtown, Connecticut with section of toe cut out. Photo courtesy of Jennifer Thermes.



Figure 4.32. (*left*) Concealed shoe deliberately cut in half, John A. Rowland House, Hacienda Heights, California. Photo courtesy of the Workman and Temple Family Homestead Museum, City of Industry, California.

Figure 4.33. (*right*) Concealed shoe deliberately cut in half, Lutheran Theological Seminary, Gettysburg, Pennsylvania. Photo courtesy of B. Bohleke, photographer, and the Gettysburg Seminary Ridge Museum.

before deposit” (D. A. Saguto 2011, elec. comm.). At the John A. Rowland House in Hacienda Heights, California, a man’s single shoe dated ca. 1880-1900 was found concealed between floor joists. The shoe was deliberately cut in half, as seen in Figure 4.32 (Paul Spitzzeri 2011, elec. comm.). Remarkably, a shoe recently discovered at the Lutheran Theological Seminary in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania, was likewise cut in half, with only the front portion remaining (Figure 4.33) (Karin Bohleke 2012, elec. comm.). Like the examples of slashed shoes in England, it would have taken considerable effort to cut through the soles of these shoes in such a manner, and it is difficult to justify such action with a mundane explanation.

At least two cases of concealed footwear can be associated with a specific person. As described in the beginning of Chapter 1, during renovation of the Carnegie Library in Muncie, Indiana, a leather boot (Figure 4.34) was found concealed in a cavity behind a



Figure 4.34. “Frank’s Shoe,” found behind a gas fireplace mantle in the 1903 Carnegie Public Library, Muncie, Indiana. Photo courtesy of Shirley Baston Pearson.

gas fireplace mantle (Carlson 2003; Gentis 2003; Pearson 2003). Inside the boot was a scrap of paper that read, “Frank Garrett, 210 E North Street, 1903.”

Subsequent research determined that Garrett was a “decorator” or plasterer and general laborer who assisted in the construction of the library. Although Garrett was born in Ohio, his surname suggests he

was of English heritage. Additionally, Geisler (2003:25) reports that the name “George Curtis” was written on the lining of a boy’s Wellington boot found concealed in the John Adams Birthplace in Quincy, Massachusetts, connecting that particular deposit to the Curtis family, although it was likely young George’s father or other relative who concealed the shoe and not George himself.

As in the British Isles and Europe, some shoe deposits are accompanied by other artifacts, varying from a single object to a deposit containing a dozen or more objects.

Besides shoes and shoe soles, associated objects found in concealed footwear deposits in

the United States include garments and textile fragments, bottles, books and documents, bones, ceramic sherds, toys and toy parts, and a variety of other items. Often such deposits contain only one or two artifacts, usually mundane in nature. For example, a deposit of six single shoes in Covington, Kentucky, was found with an empty, uncorked bottle, seen in Figure 4.35 (Holly Young 2011, elec. comm.). Another child’s shoe was



Figure 4.35. Four of six shoes found with a bottle in a house in Covington, Kentucky. Photo courtesy of Holly Young.

found with a coffee can in the ceiling of a house in Still Pond, Maryland (Nancy Wyman 2011, elec. comm.). The boot found with a hat at Fort Rosecrans has already been mentioned, while in James City County, Virginia, a hat was also found with a pair of men's leather Wellington boots, cut down to the ankle, in the roof of a ca. 1803 farmhouse (Geisler 2003).

Deposits of children's footwear often include toys or other objects of interest to a child. For example, several marbles were found with a child's shoe in the kitchen ceiling of a house in Weymouth, Massachusetts (Geisler 2003). At the Brintnal-Loker House in Wayland, Massachusetts, a toddler's shoe was found with a sleigh bell, while a single infant's white ankle-high shoe recovered from the Samuel Stone Noyes House (also located in Wayland) was found with several toys, including a wood tree, seen in Figure 4.36 (Joanne Davis 2011, elec. comm.).



Figure 4.36. Wood toy tree found with a baby's shoe at the Samuel Stone Noyes House in Wayland, Massachusetts. Shoes in photo are from a different site. Photo courtesy of the Wayland Historical Society.

Other objects found with footwear are a little more intriguing. An unusual notched stick was found with a woman's single shoe near the chimney of the Ebenezer Pierce House in Pepperell, Massachusetts (Sherrill Rosoff 2011, pers. comm.). In Maryland, a carved wood figure with two faces (Figure 4.37) was found "amidst a pile of boots placed against a chimney flue in the attic" of the Captain's House, the building occupied by the overseer at Wye House Plantation (Leone and Tang 2011). Leone and Tang interpret this object as a "Two-Headed Man" associated with West African spirituality. They argue that, "the placement of this artifact among boots is also important

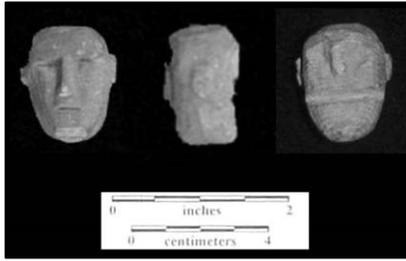


Figure 4.37. Carved wood figure with two faces (“Two-Headed Man”), found with boots at Wye House Plantation, Maryland. Photo by Matthew Palus (Leone and Tang 2011).

because boots are a well-known African American hoodoo item, whose purpose is to trap spirits” (Leone and Tang 2011:19). No mention is made of the ritual use of shoes among European Americans.

In some cases, concealed boots and shoes are found as part of a larger deposit of mostly mundane artifacts, although religious objects are

also found on occasion. A deposit located in the Strong House, Amherst, Massachusetts, included several shoes, a man’s legging, a single glove, and a Bible (Philip A. Shaver 2011, elec. comm.). At the John Adams Birthplace, a large deposit of shoes was found with a page from a prayer book, shoe lasts, some unused wood “Lucifer” matches, and peanuts or peanut shells (D. A. Saguto 2011, elec. comm.).

At the Latourette-Clement House, in Montgomery, New York, three deposits, two which contained shoes, were found in various locations throughout the structure. The largest deposit, found inside a plaster wall above the entrance to the cellar, included five single shoes (one child’s and four adults’ or sub-adults’), pages from a Bible and an almanac, sections torn from other books, two socks, a woman’s single glove, a carving knife, several textile fragments (including the end of a lined sleeve), three sherds of blue transfer-printed whiteware, a small fragment of wood wrapped in a swatch of textile tied with string, several pieces of white cloth rolled up and tied with string, three unidentified animal bones (possibly chicken or turkey), a wood wheel from a toy, a small wood finial (probably from furniture), a wood spool, and a button (Figure 4.38).



Figure 4.38. Some of the artifacts found in a large deposit in the Latourette-Clement House, Montgomery, New York, including a child's shoe and four adult shoes, fragments of textiles, a woman's glove, a sock, a piece of wood wrapped up in a fragment of textile, a small toy wheel, pages from a Bible and almanac, a carving knife, and blue transfer-printed ceramic sherds. Photos courtesy of Lisa Melville and James McIver.

Another interesting example of a multi-component deposit was discovered in a wall at the Hancock-Clarke House in Lexington, Massachusetts. Its contents included six unmatched shoes, a cartridge box, a set of baby's stays, a shoe buckle, a letter dated 1768, and pieces of leather wrapped around an organic substance believed to be part of an animal (Elaine Doran 2011, elec. comm.). Large multi-component deposits have also been recovered from the Rufus Varrell House in York, Maine (Figure 4.39); the Webb House in Orient, New York; the Coverston House in Saltville, Virginia; and in a house in Carlisle, Pennsylvania.



Figure 4.39. Some of the artifacts found in a deposit in the Rufus Varrell House, York, Maine, including pieces of fabric, a book, a woman's bonnet, three shoes (two not shown), and a broken wine glass. Photos courtesy of Museums of Old York, York, Maine.

While at first glance most of the items in these multi-component deposits appear to be random household refuse, closer examination reveals a pattern among the assemblages, as seen in Table 4.2. Most of the deposits contain some combination of shoes, garments or textile fragments, printed materials (particularly Bibles, prayer books, hymnals, and almanacs) and written documents, ceramic sherds or broken glass, and other assorted household items, all worn and well-used, often broken or incomplete. Interestingly, concealed deposits with similar assemblages have been reported in England and Australia. For example, a deposit found in a sealed cavity between the roof and ceiling of a building in Bedfordshire, England, included four shoes dating from the late 17th through the early 19th centuries, fragments of three ceramic bowls, a broken 18th-century clay pipe, a broken wine glass stem, a late 18th-century iron file, a hat box, and a small length of corduroy cloth (Annable 1955:304). Evans (2010:296-302) documented a

deposit in a house in Tasmania, Australia, with a very similar composition. The concealment was found behind the plaster and lath wall in an attic bedroom and contained several shoes, a lady's straw hat, two parasols, gloves, several socks and stockings, and documents.

**Table 4.2. Selected Multi-Component Deposits in the Eastern United States.**

Site	Shoes	Garments & Textiles	Printed & Written Material	Glass & Ceramics	Other
Hancock-Clarke House, Lexington, MA	6 unmatched shoes	baby's stays	letter dated 1768		cartridge box, shoe buckle, pieces of leather wrapped around organic substance
Strong House, Amherst, MA	1-3 shoes	single glove, man's legging	Bible		
Rufus Varrell House, York, ME	3 unmatched shoes	woman's bonnet, several textile fragments, possible wristband	book	broken wine glass	
Latourette-Clement House, Montgomery, NY	5 unmatched shoes (4 adults', 1 child's)	two socks, single glove, end of a lined sleeve, several textile fragments (some rolled up and tied)	pages from a Bible and almanac, pages from other books and documents	3 ceramic sherds (transfer printed whiteware)	carving knife, wood toy wheel, finial from furniture, piece of wood wrapped in fabric, chicken or turkey bones, spool, button
Webb House, Orient, NY	sole of single shoe	petticoat or apron		green glass sherry bottle, sherry glass	girth from canvas saddle
Jacob's Resting Place, Carlisle, PA	2 unmatched shoes	single sock	shreds of newspaper		
Coverston House, Saltville, VA	4 unmatched shoes	2 unmatched gloves, woman's waist, corset, bow-tie	pamphlets	5 bottles	umbrella frame

Some deposits found in the United States consist of a large quantity of shoes and shoe parts, as well as soles and insoles, fragments of leather, broken leather artifacts such as bags and straps, and other shoe-related objects such as lasts, buckles, and tools. For example, at the Gomez Mill House in Newburgh, New York, a single child's shoe was found with a shoe last and a spoon in a second-story wall (Ruth Abrahams 2011, elec. comm.). At the Bridges-Stevens House in North Andover, Massachusetts, a boot was



Figure 4.40. Boot and wood boot jack found next to the chimney in the Bridges-Stevens House, North Andover, Massachusetts. Other shoes, soles, and leather fragments were found in different deposits throughout the house. Photo courtesy of Robert Allegretto and Patricia Robak.

found alongside a wood bootjack (Figure 4.40) in a deep void next to an upper-story fireplace (Patricia Robak 2011, elec. comm.), while a deposit found in Marblehead, Massachusetts, included two shoe insole patterns and several tools that appear to be shoemaker's awls concealed in a first-story ceiling above the plaster and lath (Elliott 2009b). A large deposit from the Enlisted Men's Barracks at Fort Washington,

Maryland, contained a total of 22 shoes and shoe fragments, mostly soles, including several women's shoes—an unexpected find in an all-male barracks (Antonioni 2009). These deposits are often interpreted as cobblers' leftovers, although no one has yet determined why all of these items, some still in usable condition, would have been deposited in a wall or floor (Geisler 2003:1-2). However, the English folk tale ascribing a cobbler the power to conjure or control spirits and witches may explain the presence of

such artifacts. It is possible that these tools and scraps of leather were obtained from a cobbler for their apotropaic association.

### **Ethnohistorical Evidence in the United States: European Americans**

As in the British Isles, in the United States the shoe is often viewed as representing the person who wore it. For example, according to one of Hyatt's German-American informants: "Never accept a gift of old shoes, or you will walk in the former owner's troubles" (Hyatt 1935:164). Another informant recalled the following: "Years ago a man died with the smallpox, and after he was dead five years, they gave his shoes to a man to wear. And that man took the smallpox and died" (Hyatt 1935:164). Shoes are also associated with power and control, and it was commonly believed that, like urine and hair, shoes could be used in malevolent magic; therefore, "If you will burn your shoes as soon as you get through with them, you will never be bewitched" (Hyatt 1935:538).

There are also accounts that associate shoes with journeys. In late 19th-century Massachusetts, it was believed that, to "save the old shoes to throw after the carriage, when any of the family start on a journey ... will insure a safe return" (Bergen 1896:142). The shoe was also employed as a divination device indicating future travel: "On New Year's Eve sit on the floor with your back to the fire and kick off one of your shoes so that it will go over your shoulder. If the toe of the shoe points toward the stove, you will remain in the house another year; if it points toward a door or window, you will move before the end of the year" (Hyatt 1935:405). Here it is significant that a shoe pointing *toward the stove* indicates an individual will stay home, since the fireplace (and later the

stove) were traditional family gathering places and were perceived as the physical and symbolic center of the home.

There is some suggestion that the shoe might be associated with fertility. For example, in Illinois, it was custom to “[s]hower the bride and groom with rice and old shoes for luck” (Allison 1950:316), although an alternate interpretation of this custom has already been presented (Crombie 1895). In the 1860s, a doctor in rural Vermont attending a woman in childbirth reported the following events: “As soon as the child was born, the grandmother brought along one of the mother’s shoes and requested me to place it over the child’s head. Several of the neighboring women were in at the time, and we all were so amused at the request that it was not granted nor repeated. The object of this request I never could find out” (Currier 1891:256). Although it might be assumed here that the shoe symbolizes fertility, it is worth noting that the shoe was requested *after* the birth. Davidson (2010:633) has suggested that this account represents “a probable example of a Euroamerican use of a shoe to protect a newborn,” and furthermore, given the shoe’s power to trap or repel spirits, “it is likely the grandmother was simply attempting to use the mother’s shoe to protect the soul of the newborn, lest it be harmed while still helpless and critically—before the protection afforded the child through baptism” (Davidson 2010:633).

Descriptions of shoes employed in folk remedies were also encountered during research, many of which probably have their origin in counter magical remedies for bewitchment. For example, Hyatt reported that old shoes should be burnt for good luck, to “keep the witches away,” and “to drive away ghosts” (Hyatt 1935:538, 635). Compare this account to the belief in Scotland that burning an old shoe would unbewitch a cow.

As in the British Isles and Europe, there is considerable indication that in North America, old shoes possessed apotropaic qualities, particularly when carefully positioned. For example, it was said that “to cure nightmare, set your shoes at the foot of the bed with the toes pointing away from the bed” (Hyatt 1935:294). Other informants instructed that shoes be turned upside down to cure nightmares (Cross 1919:276; Hyatt 1935:294), while still others stipulated that the toe should face east (Hyatt 1935:294). Even as late as the 1950s, an informant in Alabama claimed that placing your shoes under the bed, one toe turned out and one turned under, would “keep evil spirits away at night” (Browne 1958:195).

In his collection of folklore from Adams County, Illinois, Hyatt (1935:538) recorded from a German-American informant: “If someone comes to your house and you think they are a witch and you don't want them to come in, lay an old shoe in the door; and if she is a witch, they cannot step over the shoe.” Hyatt (1935:538-539) also recorded the following tale from another of his German informants:

A woman came to see a man every night and stayed until twelve o'clock, and when she would leave he would be sick all night and could not sleep. He went and told another man. He said, ‘That old woman has you bewitched. I would fix her. The next time she comes, you put a pair of your shoes down in the door; and if she has you bewitched, she cannot get over those shoes to go home.’ So that night when she came, he put his shoes in the door. She tried to go home but could not go through the door. He let the shoes stay in the door until four o'clock in the morning, then picked the shoes up. She went home but never did come again. The man got well and could sleep fine after that.

## **Ethnohistorical Evidence in the United States: African Americans**

At this point it should be clear that shoes were believed to have some power to ward off evil, witchcraft, and unwanted spirits in both European and European American tradition. There is also a strong association with travel, power and control, and the idea that whoever can obtain the shoe of a man or woman possesses control over that individual, particularly the power to compel them to leave, stay, or return. Still, the evidence is admittedly circumstantial; descriptions of the practice of concealing footwear as part of any of these traditions has yet to be encountered. However, it was demonstrated in Chapter 3 how European folk belief, in the form of a witch bottle, was incorporated into and thrived as part of a syncretic system of belief shared by both European Americans and African Americans. Therefore a survey of African American folklore was undertaken to identify relevant beliefs concerning shoes and shoe concealment, the results of which are presented next.

There are the usual accounts of shoes as general apotropaic devices and as objects of power. African American anthropologist and folklorist Zora Neale Hurston (1931:378), in *Hoodoo in America*, recorded the belief that, “If a man tends to wander, hang one of his shoes behind the door and it will tie him home,” a very typical use of the shoe to control a person. Shepard (1888) reports that, turning “a pair of shoes up on the floor with soles against the walls” acts as a countercharm, suggesting that, “perhaps this faint semblance to a laid-out corpse will pacify the hungry spirit.”

Numerous African American informants reported that burning an old shoe or a piece of the sole inside a house would drive away the haunting spirits of dead folks and

enemies (“dose ole witchcraft people”) (Hyatt 1970-1978[1]:482). Another informant in South Carolina reported a similar remedy for “fits” or convulsions thought to be caused by conjure, which involved burning the sole of an old shoe (Hyatt 1970-1978[1]:481). Several informants recommend that the soles be burned along with some combination of sulfur, brimstone, bluestone, salt, gunpowder, or saltpeter to achieve the desired effect (Hyatt 1970-1978[1]:481-482). For example, Puckett (1926:142) reported that “Demons link arms with human beings in their distaste for evil smells. Burn some old shoes and sulphur, and spiritual visitants will be effectually driven off.” In the 1890s, one folklorist working in South Carolina reported the following method “to drive away ‘sperrits’ that come knocking at the front door or window”: “take some old shoes, put sulphur in them, then set fire to the whole” (Waring 1895:252). These accounts are very much in line with similar beliefs found in both Europe and among European Americans.

But what about shoes hidden within buildings? In an 1896 study of African American folk beliefs, an informant in Chestertown, Maryland, reported that, “Old shoes, particularly the soles, were often buried by negro servants on Monday morning to keep the devil down through the week” (Bergen 1896:142). The most revealing accounts, however, appear in Hyatt’s aforementioned massive collection of African American folklore, *Hoodoo—Conjuration—Witchcraft—Rootwork* (1970-1978), which contains dozens of descriptions of shoes being buried, burned, cut, folded, nailed, thrown into water, and concealed in and around the house. Perusal of the section on shoe beliefs (more than 40 pages worth) reveals several underlying themes that may be relevant to the present discussion.

It appears that while shoes were employed by African Americans in a variety of spells and charms ranging from love and sex magic to attracting luck and wealth, an overwhelming number of Hyatt's informants associated shoes with the familiar theme of travel and control—sending people away, bringing them back, preventing them from leaving, and compelling them to do your bidding. Many of these accounts are closely tied to the concept of home. For example, burying or concealing the shoe of a wayward lover under the front or back steps was believed to ensure his or her eventual return (Hyatt 1970-1978[3]:2761, 2764). An informant from Waycross, Georgia, described putting a shoe over the door to bring someone back, while another claimed that putting a sole over the door would send them away (Hyatt 1970-1978[3]:2765). One informant explained how to cut off the sole of a shoe and bury it under the steps to control a person (Hyatt 1970-1978[4]:2805), while another specified that the shoe tongue should be used in this way (Hyatt 1970-1978[4]:2809), and a third was adamant that only the left shoe should be buried (Hyatt 1970-1978[4]:2807). It was also said that the shoe tongue should be buried under the fireplace along with a strand of hair; the victim of the charm could leave but would eventually be compelled to return home (Hyatt 1970-1978[4]:2809).

Some informants specify that the shoe should be positioned a particular way to achieve the desired effect. For example, pointing a shoe toward the house was generally believed to draw someone home, while a shoe pointing away from the house would send them away (Hyatt 1970-1978[4]:2814-2815), an element seen previously in shoe divination in Europe and among European Americans. One informant specified that the insole should be folded and firmly wedged into a crack in the wall to keep someone at home (Hyatt 1970-1978[3]:2767). In Memphis, Tennessee, it was believed that a shoe

nailed to the underside of a floor plank in the exact center of the house would either keep a lover from leaving or bring them back home (Hyatt 1970-1978[3]:2771).

A more malicious charm could be produced by burying a shoe; as the shoe rotted it was thought that the conjured person would get sick and die (Hyatt 1970-1978[4]:2815). Another informant specified that a piece should be cut out of the center of the insole of the left shoe and buried in order to hurt someone (Hyatt 1970-1978[3]:2767-2768), while another specified taking the sole of the left shoe, folding it in half, and tying it together tightly to keep someone from leaving or to cripple them (Hyatt 1970-1978[4]:2813).

As indicated above, a number of informants specified using just the sole, insole, tongue, or heel of a shoe, or even a just a small piece of leather from these particular locations. Hyatt and his informants attributed the power of the shoe, particularly the insole, to its association with sweat, noting that “Shoes have magic value only if they have been worn” (Hyatt 1970-1978[4]:2801): “When yo’ fool wit a person’s shoe, yo’ know, dat’s de scent from ‘is feet zhoo know. Dat’s de *nature* of ‘im, yo’ see [emphasis in original]” (Hyatt 1970-1978[3]:2779). It is perhaps relevant that many concealed shoes in both the British Isles and the United States are found with pieces of leather missing, deliberately cut away, while other examples of concealed footwear consist of only soles, insoles, or small unidentifiable pieces of worn leather, perhaps removed from old shoes.

Another theme that emerges in Hyatt’s collection is the emphasis on the left shoe, which is said to be more effective for conjure and folk magic because it is on the same side as the heart (Hyatt 1970-1978[3]:2765). In European cosmology, the left is associated with the Devil. The propensity for left shoes in concealments in the

Netherlands (Swann 2005:116) and the preferential selection of left-footed shoes in American concealments has already been mentioned.

There is one more ethnohistorical source that is worth mentioning. In an 1888 article appearing in *Cosmopolitan* magazine, titled “Superstitions of the Negro,” it was reported that, “To have about a house some place of deposit for old shoes, and therein to keep all the worn-out leather of the household, will bring good luck to the family” (Shepard 1888). This account is significant because it specifically indicates a multi-shoe and perhaps multi-component deposit in which old shoes and “all the worn-out leather of the household” should be deposited for luck, suggesting a magical or other ritual function for shoe concealment. It also indicates that regular contributions should be made to the household deposit as shoes wore out.

It might be presumed that African American shoe beliefs such as those presented above are primarily a derivative of West African tradition. However, as part of a recent study of footwear in African American mortuary contexts, Davidson (2010) conducted an extensive survey of ethnohistorical sources among several West African cultural groups, concluding that, although “that the belief in worn-out shoes as potential supernatural objects was by the 19th century well known in Black America, and particularly noteworthy, as a trap for malevolent spirits,” he could find no antecedent traditions in Africa. Nevertheless, scholars have mistakenly “attributed the belief entirely to African Americans and, assuming it to be of African origin, have ignored the true origin of the practice within the British Isles” (Davidson 2010:632).

## **Analysis and Discussion**

Both the archaeological and ethnohistorical evidence regarding shoe concealment in Europe and the United States have now been considered, thus some preliminary conclusions can be drawn based on the information available. It is known that concealed shoes are found in a variety of arrangements, including single-shoe deposits, multi-shoe deposits, multi-component deposits containing a wide range of associated artifacts, and shoes that have been cut, slashed, hung, or otherwise manipulated. Single shoes are by far more prevalent than matched pairs, and although it is more common to find one shoe, deposits of multiple shoes of varying sizes, so-called “families” of shoes, are regularly encountered.

Deposits of concealed footwear have been found in almost every type of building but occur most frequently in domestic spaces, particularly those associated with the working class. It has also been demonstrated that the most popular locations for deposits of concealed footwear are inside a wall, around the fireplace or chimney, and under the floor or above the ceiling. Geographically, although deposits of concealed footwear are found throughout Europe, they are found in greater numbers in England, particularly in southeastern England. Similarly, deposits in the United States tend to concentrate in New England and the upper Chesapeake, both heavily influenced by English settlement in the colonial period. Additionally, although the practice was known by at least the turn of the 14th century, as evidenced by the earliest reported shoe concealment in England, the ritual has continued in some areas into at least the early 20th century.

It is significant that concealed shoe deposits are frequently found near the chimney or hearth. Scholars have generally assumed that this location was favored because the chimney was seen as a vulnerable opening through which spirits and witches could enter a house. The discovery of witch bottles in this location has strengthened the interpretation of a shoe as a trap or repellant for evil. Folklore sources and the historical record, particularly the legend of Sir John Schorn introduced by Merrifield (1987:134-135), also demonstrate that the shoe has apotropaic qualities, particularly when heated or burnt. Indeed, many of the objects found with shoes are also known to have apotropaic qualities, such as bird bones (used against the evil eye), pierced pebbles (“hung by the stable door to ward off evil”), and horseshoes (Swann 2005:117). Magical properties can be attributed to even seemingly mundane refuse. For example, many of the objects found with concealed footwear are sharp, such as knives, broken wineglass stems, and other pieces of broken glass and ceramics. Swann (2005:117) reports the belief in Germany that a broken wineglass stem will “drive out evil spirits.” Bibles and prayer books, with their innate association with divine protection, are easily explained, as are almanacs, which are associated with the occult; however, the presence of other books and documents are more puzzling. Some appear to be intimately connected to the family or a particular person, such as letters and journals. But even seemingly mundane texts may hold magical significance. In North Carolina, it was reported that “a newspaper left close to the door or window will keep the spirits out, for they have to count every word” (Hand 1964:146). Bibles were also thought to function in a similar manner, as witches would be compelled to count every letter “before being able to proceed with their wonted tasks” (Hand 1964:146). Thus it can be safely concluded that some deposits of concealed

footwear and associated artifacts were placed near the hearth to prevent witches and spirits from entering through the chimney. However, the relatively few reports of concealed footwear from doorways and under thresholds, also seen as vulnerable openings and common locations for witch bottles, is puzzling.

Besides their widely accepted apotropaic function, ethnohistorical evidence demonstrates that shoes are also potent agents of power and control employed in both benevolent and malicious magic. A shoe concealed for such a purpose would not necessarily require placement near the chimney or other structural opening, however. There is something unique about the hearth area that attracts shoe deposits and spiritual middens to that location more than almost any other, including other openings.

Swann (2005:118) suggests that like the Jewish *genizah*, deposition of well-worn shoes and other personal objects into spiritual middens was intended, “to preserve good things from harm, and bad things from harming.” In particular, the deposition of an array of seemingly mundane artifacts, all closely tied to the members of the family, their habits, and their daily work may represent an informal consecration ritual intended to tie the family to the building.

It is almost certain that some shoe concealments were part of a more secular ritual. While many cases of concealed footwear appear to have been deposited by the occupants of a building for supernatural protection or manipulative magic, there is considerable evidence to indicate that by the late 19th century, the practice had largely evolved into a builders’ ritual, particularly among the masonry and plastering trades (Easton 1997b; Evans 2010; Geisler 2003:57-61; Swann 1996). In Australia, Evans (2010:39) has observed that several examples of concealed footwear consist of large

men's boots splashed with lime mortar and plaster, suggesting they belonged to tradespersons. Easton (1997b:568) has concluded that, unlike spiritual middens, builders' deposits "usually have only a few objects collected together, which perhaps represent what was [at] hand when the boards of an inserted floor were nailed down. These objects seem to have been deposited out of self-interest rather than for the occupier's well-being." In his conversations with English tradesmen working in small family firms in the mid-20th century, he realized that "this was a tradition passed from father to son, and kept secret from customers and their own labourers" (Easton 1997b:568). Similarly, Swann (1998:2) has proposed that the concealment of shoes "may be a male practice. I have discussed the subject with women but few are aware of its existence," and describes an eye-witness who, as a child, saw his father and a workman put an old boot, "that significantly did not belong to the family," in the rubble floor of a house in Norfolk, England, in 1935 (Swann 1969). Swann reports that the informant had no idea why the boot was concealed, and that his father seemed slightly ashamed of what he was doing.

Geisler (2003:63-67) has concluded in her study of concealed footwear at the John Adams Birthplace that while the large early 19th-century deposit located on either side of the chimney flue was probably created and added to by the occupants of the house, another sealed deposit containing 10 shoes located in the northeast eaves was almost certainly created by tradesmen when a gabled ell addition was added to the north elevation of the building in the mid- to late 19th century. Other deposits that suggest a builders' ritual include Frank's Shoe, which was concealed by a plasterer, and two men's work boots found in different locations in the Indiana Statehouse, one previously shown in Figure 4.34, and the second, concealed in a wall addition around 1920, shown in



Figure 4.41 Single man's work boot found in the Indiana Statehouse. From the collection of the Indiana State Museum and Historic Sites.

Figure 4.41. These two examples, concealed in different locations in the same building more than 30 years apart, were almost certainly deposited by tradesmen working on the construction or repair of the statehouse.

Additionally, concealed boots and shoes have also been found in a sealed void under a staircase in the Kansas state capitol building,

shown in Figure 4.42 (Carlson 2007); in military barracks and officers' quarters in California (May 2001), Georgia (Murphy 2003), and Maryland (Antonioni 2009); and lodged inside a statue on top of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument in New Haven, Connecticut (Roman 2006), further supporting an association with the male-dominated construction and masonry trades.



Figure 4.42. Man's single shoe found in the Kansas Statehouse Photo by Anna Faltermeier / *The Capital-Journal* (J. Carlson 2007).

### **A Suggested Typology**

Too often when concealed shoe deposits are found, there is a tendency to assign generalized interpretations. Popular publications and websites authoritatively proclaim that concealed shoes were “put there for good luck” or “to ward off witches.” However, when both the physical and ethnohistorical evidence are considered, it becomes apparent

**Table 4.3. Suggested Typology for American Shoe Concealments.**

Type	Footwear	Associated Artifacts	Location/Context	Special Treatment	Interpretation
A	single or matched pair from one individual	none	any location, any structure; often found in public buildings; sealed at time of construction or renovation	none identified	good luck charm; builders' ritual
B	single(s) and/or pair(s)	magico-religious	any location, any structure	deliberately manipulated (cut in half, hung, slashed)	personalized charm, remedy, or curse intended to harm, heal, or control
C-1	families (some combination of men's, women's, and children's)	not usual	often near chimney/hearth in domestic structures	none identified	protection; maintain family cohesion; consecrate the home for the family's use
C-2	one or more (sometimes in families)	numerous assorted artifacts	usually near chimney/hearth in domestic structures	added to over extended period of time; often not sealed	protection; maintain family cohesion; consecrate the home for the family's use; attract, repel, or propitiate a house spirit
C-3	one or more (sometimes in families)	numerous assorted artifacts	any location, often at a point of structural addition or repair	deposited in a single episode, usually during construction or renovation; sealed	consecrate the home or addition for the family's use; builders' ritual?

that concealed footwear and related deposits almost certainly served a variety of functions, ranging from an apotropaic charm or a malevolent curse to a symbolic representation of the family, a protective spiritual midden, evidence of a builders' vernacular tradition, or a diluted ritual loosely associated with general good luck.

Based on both the physical and ethnohistorical evidence, a suggested typology has been developed (Table 4.3) in order to help interpret shoe deposits and associated finds, recognizing the variety of both the deposits themselves and the range of possible interpretations. Type A deposits are the simplest form and consist of either a single shoe

or a matched pair from a single individual. This form is the most common manifestation of the concealed shoe ritual in the United States and likely represents a diluted version of an earlier magico-religious ritual. Type A deposits can consist of men's, women's, or children's shoes and can be found in almost any location within any building or structure. It also appears that the single shoe tradition was adopted by members of the masonry and plastering trades as a type of builders' deposit or informal consecration ritual, along the lines of "topping out," or as a general good luck charm. Therefore, Type A deposits are also the type most likely to be found in public structures such as libraries, schools, and government buildings, which are most likely to have employed professional craftsmen in their construction.

Type B deposits include single shoes or small groups of shoes that have been deliberately manipulated, mutilated, or otherwise altered for some purpose unrelated to salvage, or which have one or two magical or religious objects associated with them, such as the miniature Bible found inside the child's boot in a chimney cavity in Lincolnshire, England (Viegas 2007), and the two shoes found deliberately cut in half. This type of deposit may indicate a specific charm, countercharm, remedy, curse, or other form of manipulative magic directed toward a particular individual with the intent to heal, protect, harm, or control.

A probable example of Type B deposit was recovered from the Ebenezer Pierce Homestead in Pepperell, Massachusetts. During dismantling of the structure, a woman's shoe was recovered from a space between the chimney and staircase and was accompanied by a stick carved with four deep notches, shown in Figure 4.43. Although the object was originally interpreted as a tally stick, there are several other possible

interpretations. It may represent an artifact used in a magical folk remedy. In his fieldwork in East Anglia, England, Evans recorded the following practice: “Take a hazel stick and cut notches in it, as many notches as you have warts. Then bury it” (Evans 1966:92). The practice of cutting notches in sticks to cure warts was brought over from the British Isles to the United States. In Hancock County, Illinois, an informant of Scottish descent described the following cure for warts: “Take a stick and cut as many notches as you have warts, and throw it over your left shoulder: whoever picks up the stick will get your warts” (Norlin 1918:205).

In the mountains of Tennessee, it was said that, “To remove a wart, cut a notch in a chestnut switch for each wart; bury the switch and when the switch decays, the warts will disappear” (Farr 1935:328). It is also possible that the notched stick represents a record of prayers or spoken charms recited.



Figure 4.43. Woman’s shoe found with notched stick at the Ebenezer Pierce Homestead, Pepperell, Massachusetts. Photo courtesy of The Restored Homestead, LLC.

The third type of shoe concealment can be divided into three subtypes that appear to have served a similar function related to domestic religiosity and ritual and the protection of the familial unit. Deposits of the C-1 subtype consist of families of shoes, wherein a single shoe, or less likely, a pair of shoes, from each member of a household are concealed together. Subtype C-1 deposits usually have some combination of men’s, women’s, and children’s shoes, all dating to the same approximate time period. They are usually not accompanied by any associated artifacts.

Deposits of the subtype C-2 include spiritual middens or large multi-artifact assemblages that include one or more shoes. In some cases, C-2 deposits appear to have been maintained over a long period of time or were reopened periodically to accept new acquisitions or to “recharge” the deposit’s magical efficacy, particularly upon a change in the home’s ownership (Evans 2010:41). While shoes and other leather items are most prevalent in such deposits, other mundane or magico-religious artifacts are also frequently included. Some C-2 deposits may include a variety of objects with known apotropaic functions such as horseshoes, iron tools and implements, sharp and jagged objects, broken ceramics, religious texts, and the remains of cats or birds, particularly chickens. Deposits of the C-2 subtype appear to have functioned as a protective repository for sensitive and magically-imbued objects that require secure disposal; as apotropaic armor intended to protect a building and its occupants from supernatural attack; or as a deposit or “nest” of items intended to attract, placate, propitiate, or repel a house spirit or other non-human being.

Subtype C-3 deposits are similar to subtype C-2 deposits in that they contain a variety of objects in addition to shoes; however, C-3 deposits are different in that they represent a one-time deposition and were not continuously added to over time. Some C-3 deposits resemble informal time capsules or consecration deposits placed by either the occupants of a house or as part of a builders’ tradition. As such, they may also be related to type A deposits. These deposits can be found anywhere in the house but are usually sealed and date to the construction of the building or to a period of major repair or renovation.

The preliminary typology outlined above may assist in the identification, documentation, and interpretation of concealed footwear and associated deposits by emphasizing the possible variations that may be encountered in the United States. With more than 2,000 documented cases of concealed footwear worldwide, it is no longer adequate to interpret them all as good luck charms, or conversely, to claim that all such deposits were intended to ward off witches and their familiars. This typology should help illuminate patterns that may assist archaeologists achieving a better understanding of the various material manifestations of ritual concealments.

### **Syncretic Expressions**

It has already been shown how in the United States, magico-religious and secular rituals and symbols from a variety of traditions were incorporated into a new, syncretic, and multivalent system of magic comprised of African, Native American, and European elements. This process, which Fennell (2007) has labeled “ethnogenic bricolage,” involves “the creative combination of diverse cultural elements into new configurations” and the integration of new materials into a preexisting cultural grammar of core symbols, “which continue with vigor and are employed in private, individual spaces as part of invocations for healing, self-protection, and prayers for the vitality of loved ones” (Fennell 2007:9). Two examples of this process relevant to the European tradition of concealing footwear will now be considered.

The first example involves what at first glance appears to be a traditional shoe concealment of the Type A variety. During renovations to a house in Fairfield County,

Connecticut, a man's well-worn shoe was found concealed between the floor joists of the kitchen addition. According to archaeologist Daniel Cruson (2007:63), "it had been tucked up under the kitchen floor in an almost completely inaccessible location and it was obvious that it had not simply been lost, but rather placed there intentionally." From the context of the shoe, it might be presumed that the artifact represents a European American concealment; however, this house was built in the late 18th century by newly emancipated slave Cato Freedom and

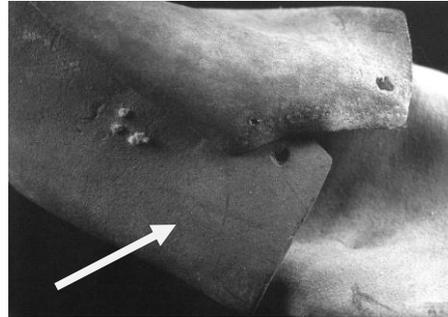


Figure 4.44. Concealed shoe from the Freedom-Davis House, Fairfield County, Connecticut, showing faint "spirit mark" (Cruson 2007:80-81).

occupied by his descendants into the late 19th century (Cruson 2008:1). Furthermore, on the upper portion of the shoe, a cross or X mark had been made with a metallic lead pencil and a straight edge (Figure 4.44). Cruson (2007:61-65) has interpreted this mark as a "spirit mark" representing the Bakongo cosmogram. Similar marks have been found on other artifacts associated with free and enslaved Africans and African Americans, such as colonoware ceramic bowls, spoons, marbles, coins, and other items (Brown and Cooper 1990; Davidson 2004; Ferguson 1992:110-116; Russell 1997; Wilkie 1995; Young 1996). Cruson (2007:80) concluded, therefore, that "the secreted shoe was an English practice, but the spirit mark on the shoe is African," indicating that Cato or another member of his family "combined a European spiritual belief with one of Africa, both relating to the spirit world" (2007:64).

Another syncretic expression of the English shoe ritual has been described by McCarthy (2004:30, 2006:178-179) and Davidson (2010). In three different cemeteries in three different states, single shoes have been recovered from mortuary contexts, resting on the coffin lids (Figure 4.45). At the early 19th-century First African Baptist Church Cemetery in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, single shoes were noted in at least six burials, with evidence for as many as thirteen (McCarthy 2004:30, 2006:178-179; Davidson 2010). At the early 20th-century Freedman’s Cemetery in Dallas, Texas, two burials were found to contain a single shoe on the coffin lid; and at the late 19th-century Becky Wright Cemetery in Crawford County, Arkansas, a single shoe was recovered from one burial (Davidson 2010). While the cemeteries in Philadelphia and Dallas are associated with African Americans, the burial from Arkansas is believed to be European American. The single-shoe phenomenon occurs in the burials of adults, sub-adults, and infants, both male and female (Davidson 2010:622). Furthermore, in one of the burials the shoe of an adult was found on top of the coffin of an infant less than a year old, suggesting that the shoes selected for interment were not necessarily worn by the deceased (Davidson 2010:621).

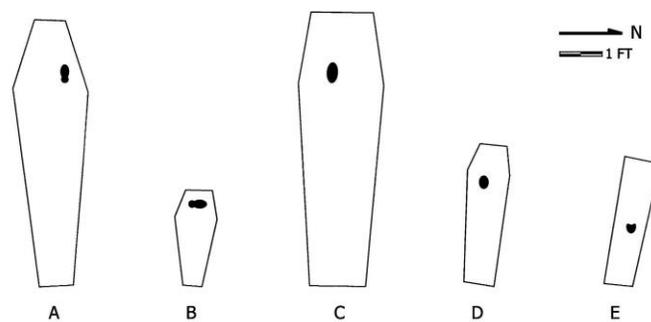


Figure 4.45. Silhouettes representing the location of a single shoe on coffin lids from three different cemeteries (Davidson 2010:figure 1).

While these shoes were originally interpreted as an African-derived ritual in which material possessions were included in the grave for the journey to the spirit world (Parrington 1987:60, cited in Davidson 2010:622), McCarthy (2004:30) later proposed that the practice of placing a shoe on the coffin lid may instead have its origins in European, specifically English, folk belief (Davidson 2010:623). Davidson took this line of inquiry one step further, conducting an extensive survey of ethnohistorical sources in search of two things: “first the presence or use of a shoe or shoes as a material symbol within a spiritual or mortuary context in any of several African cultures, and second (especially if failing at the first), to explore if the belief underlying this practice exhibited within early 19th-century Black Philadelphia may have an African basis or antecedent” (Davidson 2010:624). Upon failing to find even one reference of the placement of a shoe or shoes in graves, Davison concluded, “the single shoe on a coffin lid may ultimately be a creolized practice that combines specific African beliefs regarding the progress of the soul after death, with particular Western European beliefs regarding charms and protection from evil” (Davidson 2010:625, 628). He argues that in the case of a single shoe placed on a coffin lid in an African American burial,

the boot or shoe was viewed as a means to trap or deflect evil. The devil or malevolent spirit, attracted to a newly dug grave, would first encounter a well-worn shoe and might theoretically mistake the shoe for the deceased, in part because the shoe, being made of the tanned skin of an animal, is in one sense a *literal* body or corpse. ... [and furthermore] conforming to the shape of the wearer’s foot, the shoe also picks up a distinctive and unique character, formed in part by the deceased or family members (Davidson 2010:633).

Davidson (2010:641) argues that this interpretation corresponds most closely to the cosmologies and rituals of Western Europe and West Africa. However, he also acknowledges the possibility of an alternate interpretation: “what if the shoe is not there to protect the soul of the deceased, but rather to tie it or ‘fix it’ to the grave?” (Davidson 2010:641). From what can be discerned from the ethnohistorical record, shoes were used as both an apotropaic charm and as a tool of control over an individual. Davidson’s second interpretation, which unfortunately he does not explore further, is just as plausible as the first. If a shoe placed under the floorboards was intended to compel someone to stay or force them to return home, perhaps a shoe placed in a grave was done so with the intent that its owner should soon follow.

### **Modern Reinterpretations**

Shoes and other footwear were concealed in buildings at least into the second quarter of the 20th century. Identifying when the practice died out—or in fact, if it ever did—is a bit more difficult. The publication of Swann and Merrifield’s research and the subsequent research of other scholars has inspired a revival of the practice. Not only are many deposits re-concealed after initial discovery, homeowners often include their own worn footwear as well. When homeowners in Covington, Kentucky, discovered six shoes in their house during renovations, they conducted a little research and eventually decided to reinter the four children’s shoes (two adult shoes had been thrown away due to their fragmented condition) along with two modern shoes of their own, seen in Figure 4.46. A similar situation occurred at the Hammond-Harwood House, an historic house museum in



Figure 4.46. (left) Re-concealment of old shoes and bottle and inclusion of new shoes representing the current homeowners, Covington, Kentucky. Photo courtesy of Holly Young.

Figure 4.47. (right) Modern pair of shoes recently concealed in the Hammond-Harwood House, Annapolis, Maryland. Photo courtesy of the Hammond-Harwood House Association (Titman 2011a).

Annapolis, Maryland. During recent renovations, a woman's black leather calfskin shoe dating to ca. 1835-1860 was found in the cornice of the house (Titman 2011c, 2011d). While the shoe was not put back upon completion of the project, a pair of modern men's shoes was concealed in the cornice as a replacement (Figure 4.47) (Titman 2011a). All around the country, concealed shoes are being reinterred along with modern shoe concealments for future generations to discover.

Oftentimes it is done tongue-in-cheek, as a sort of informal time capsule and ode to a centuries-old tradition. However, some shoes and other artifacts are reconcealed because their discovery makes some people uncomfortable. Swann has noted that when a concealed shoe deposit is discovered in England, "most people instinctively put the shoes back where they were found" (Swann 2005:115), some even become agitated or distraught if the shoes leave the house, feeling that somehow their absence leaves the building and its occupants vulnerable and unprotected. In fact, in several cases, homeowners and others who have found concealed shoes identify them as magical objects. A homeowner in Alstead, New Hampshire, credited a shoe he found hidden in

his house with saving his home from being washed away in a flood (Kippen 2005). And a single black boot found in the wall of a house in South Hadley, Massachusetts, was regarded as “unlucky” by the workers who found it, who “would have nothing to do with it” (Williamson 2006).

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has presented evidence regarding the ritual concealment of shoes and related artifacts in the fabric of buildings in the eastern United States. It has explored the possible European origins of the practice and has compared the geographic and temporal distribution of cases in the United States to those found in Great Britain and around the world. It has also been suggested that there are in fact multiple interpretations for concealed footwear in the United States depending on the context of a particular deposit. The variations in the material evidence and the supporting data offered by ethnohistorical evidence suggest that what has been previously viewed as a single phenomenon is actually the manifestation of multiple rituals with multiple meanings.

Some critics are skeptical that boots and shoes found in standing structures represent deliberate ritual deposits. Carlson (2008) argues that it is unlikely such a widespread custom would leave no trace in the written or oral record, although it has now been shown that this is certainly not the case. Most individuals who discover concealed shoes and associated artifacts assume the objects were lost, perhaps tossed into a wall cavity as rubbish or dragged into place by rodents or other animals—a very common assumption (Geisler 2003:74-75). However, as Jessica Geisler (2003:74-75) has said of

the large deposit at the John Adams Birthplace: “It is difficult for me to believe that a mouse or squirrel collected over thirty shoes and boots and hoarded them in the spaces surrounding a chimney flue over a period of ten or more years.” Merrifield (1987:133) points out that most examples of concealed footwear “have been deposited in places that are normally accessible only at the time of [construction] or structural alteration, or by taking considerable trouble at other times, for example by raising a floorboard.”

While it is easy to dismiss individual examples, Swann (1969:8) remarked more than 40 years ago (when the total number of concealed footwear deposits was only a few hundred instead of the more than 2,000 known today), “There are too many examples for the shoes to have been lost accidentally.” Merrifield (1987:133) concurs: “As always, evidence for a custom becomes convincing only when instances are multiplied, as in this case they are in abundance.” Moreover, the strong patterning—clustering in walls and near chimneys and fireplaces, concentration in New England and the northeast, preferential selection of left-footed shoes, association with similar artifacts—indicates that well-worn items of footwear were deliberately placed within structures to serve one or more specific ritual functions.

While an apotropaic function is widely accepted, there is considerable evidence to indicate it was also part of a builders’ tradition, particularly in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, or that some deposits may be related to manipulative magic. There is also evidence that the ritual use of shoes was adopted by African Americans and modified to conform to their own cosmology and magico-religious traditions. It is likely that these objects served multiple functions and symbolized different things to different people (Swann 1969:8).

Like witch bottles, the study of concealed footwear demonstrates that in the United States, long-established European folk rituals and corresponding beliefs did not disappear with the emergence of scientific thought and enlightenment but were instead maintained for generations, albeit in slightly altered forms and with presumably new meanings. It is almost certain that several overlapping beliefs concerning old shoes were responsible for their concealment within buildings and that those meanings changed over time (Swann 1996). It is anticipated that continued and more thorough documentation of concealed shoe deposits will shed more light on this fascinating folk ritual.

## **Chapter 5: Concealed Cats**

One of the more unusual deposits found in architectural contexts include the articulated remains of cats. Although the term dried cat has been widely employed by scholars (Sheehan 1990:65), examples have also been reported in a skeletal state (Pennick 1986:11). Therefore, the more generalized term concealed cat is used throughout this chapter to account for variation in the practice.

Cats have not received as much attention as other forms of concealments, particularly witch bottles and footwear, in all likelihood because it is rather easy to explain away their presence within structural voids. In fact, this thesis includes the first systematic study of cat concealment in the United States. Concealed cats have been included because, like concealed footwear, they offer a drastic contrast to witch bottles in that they are virtually absent from the historical record. Because there are almost no historical accounts of cat concealment, researchers must rely on physical and more ambiguous ethnohistorical evidence to interpret finds. However, by taking into account physical characteristics of individual deposits, including context, positioning, and

associated artifacts, archaeologists and others may be able to offer reasonable interpretations of this undocumented ritual.

The available evidence indicates that the custom of cat concealment began sometime around the 13th century and continued into the modern era, with documented cases dating as late as the early 20th century. Concealed cats are often lumped together with other concealments assumed to have an apotropaic function, such as witch bottles, shoes, and horse skulls (Hoggard 2004; Evans 2010). Cat concealment appears to have originated in Europe and was brought to North America by immigrants. Like concealed footwear, cat concealments have a fairly wide geographic presence in the Old World, being found throughout the British Isles as well as across much of northern Europe. This widespread distribution suggests that cat concealment has a much different, and probably older, cultural origin than the more geographically concentrated witch bottle. Because of this wider distribution, as well as other traits that will be discussed, the custom of cat concealment offers a different perspective on cultural diffusion, change, and continuity of magico-religious ritual among European and European American populations.

### **Concealed Cats in the British Isles, Europe, and Australia**

Numerous examples of the dried or skeletal remains of cats have been found in standing structures in the British Isles and northern Europe (Howard 1951; Rushen 1984; Pennick 1986; Merrifield 1987:129-131; Garrad 1989; Sheehan 1990; Harte 1997, 2000; Hoggard 1999, 2000, 2001, 2004; de Somer 2003; Schad 2005; Savill 2009). In addition, a number of cases have also been documented in Australia (Evans 2010). True dried cats,

those retaining most of their flesh, are almost always devoid of fur, although whiskers frequently survive as the result of partial putrefaction (Sheehan 1990:65). Most appear to have been either naturally or artificially preserved and are described as “mummified,” “desiccated,” “ossified,” or “smoked” by those who discover them (Merrifield 1987:129; Sheehan 1990:65). The skin, sometimes described as “leathery,” usually remains in surprisingly good condition. A considerable number of dried cats are accompanied by similarly desiccated rats, mice, and birds. Some have been found with associated artifacts such as shoes, household implements, and botanical materials. Others specimens have been found artificially posed, pinned down, tied, or otherwise manipulated, indicating deliberate placement. In some instances the cats have been found in special cavities created specifically for the purpose of concealment.

The first scholarly publication to deal with this unusual topic was Margaret M. Howard’s seminal article, “Dried Cats,” published in 1951, in which she reports more than two dozen examples from the British Isles and elsewhere in Europe. Howard was the first to recognize cats as a form of deliberate concealment with probable secular ritual or magico-religious significance. In her discussion, Howard proposed three possible explanations for their presence in buildings that have been the basis of interpretations put forward by more recent scholars: foundation sacrifice, an attempt to scare off vermin, and the result of accidental entrapment (Howard 1951:149). Howard concluded that although some cases could be the result of accidental enclosure, the context and positioning of many specimens suggests deliberate concealment.

Following Howard’s publication, the topic of cats concealed in buildings was largely ignored by scholars for several decades. Joyce Rushen (1984) briefly discussed

them in an article written for a popular audience entitled, “Folklore and Witchcraft in Tudor and Stuart England.” In his 1986 self-published booklet, *Skulls, Cats and Witch Bottles*, English author and independent scholar Nigel Pennick (1986:8-15) reported more than a dozen examples of concealed cats in England, including several skeletal examples. Ralph Merrifield (1987:29-31) also included a discussion of concealed cats in *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*. Much of Merrifield’s research on the topic was based on the work of Howard (1951), although he did include several previously unreported finds. Like Howard, Merrifield (1987:29-31) conceded that some examples may have been the result of accidental entrapment; however, the majority of cases appear to be deliberate, particularly when specimens are accompanied by dried rats, mice, or birds or in instances where the cats appear to have been artificially posed or manipulated.

The first in-depth case study of a concealed cat deposit was published in 1990 by John Sheehan. In his article, “A 17th Century Dried Cat from Ennis Friary, Co. Clare,” Sheehan described a specimen discovered in Ireland in the late 19th century. The cat was found in a deep recess in a wall that was deliberately sealed sometime in the 17th century (Sheehan 1990:64-65). Although his paper dealt primarily with a specific example, Sheehan summarized existing research on concealed cats and offered some basic observations regarding geographical, spatial, and temporal distribution of known cases.

Brian Hoggard (1999, 2000, 2001, 2004) has also conducted research on concealed cats in the British Isles. In 1999 and 2001, he published two short articles on ritual concealments that briefly discussed so-called “mummified” cats. In 2000, he published an online article on “dried” cats on his web site, *Apotropaios*, and published further results of his study of concealed cats in his 2004 publication, “The Archaeology

of Counter-Witchcraft and Popular Magic.” In his inventory of concealments in Dorset County, England, folklorist Jeremy Harte (2000) reported a dozen cases of concealed cats in that county, including several examples that were artificially manipulated or accompanied by other artifacts.

Petra Schad (2005) has documented more than 50 concealed cats in the German state of Baden-Württemberg, 39 of which were found in the district of Ludwigsburg. She argues that while some of the cats may represent accidental enclosures, the arrangements of others indicate deliberate deposition. Schad provides data on a number of unique and relevant deposits that greatly add to the body of research on cat concealment in Europe.

A few isolated cases of cat concealments have been reported by other scholars as well. In his short article, “Additional Examples of Possible House Charms in the Isle of Man,” Larch Garrad (1989:111) describes an example of a concealed cat from Man: a sub-floor deposit believed to date to the 19th century. Timothy Easton (1997b) reports a large deposit or “spiritual midden” from Suffolk, England, that contained the bodies of two kittens along with a rat, a bird’s wing, and household items such as shoes, clothing fragments, and the bowl of a clay pipe. Independent Belgian scholar Ruben de Somer (2003) has also conducted research on concealed cats, although thus far his publications have been written for a popular audience and tend to emphasize the sensational. In addition to studies in the British Isles and continental Europe, Australian historian Ian Evans (2010) recently completed his doctoral dissertation on ritual concealments, identifying 17 cases of concealed cats in that part of the world.

Unfortunately, there is no reliable tally of concealed cats cases worldwide like that which exists for concealed footwear due primarily to the absence of a centralized

data collection effort such as the Concealed Shoe Index. To complicate matters further, the numbers differ widely among various reports. Howard (1951) reports 25 examples in Europe and the British Isles, the vast majority coming from England (n=17), with considerably fewer originating in Ireland (n=3), Wales (n=1), Gibraltar (n=2), and Sweden (n=2). However, these early tallies appear to be well under the actual number of cases, as more recent investigations have revealed.

Sheehan (1990:65) reports 20 cases in Great Britain and Ireland, most of which were described previously by Howard (1951). In his inventory of concealed finds in Dorset, Harte (2000) recorded a total of 12 examples in that county alone, indicating that the number of cases in England has been seriously underestimated. Hoggard conducted a survey of concealments held by or known to museums, archaeological units, and private individuals throughout England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. In 2004, he published the preliminary findings of the survey results for England, reporting 139 documented cases of dried cats in that country, adding that, “there are anecdotal records for probably over ten times that amount” (Hoggard 2000, 2004:176).

Garrad (1989) reports one case from the Isle of Man, and Pennick (1986:15) reports one example from Warburg in North Rhine-Westphalia, Germany. Petra Schad (2005) has documented more than 50 dried cats in the German state of Baden-Württemberg, 39 from the district of Ludwigsburg alone, as well as two from Austria. Ruben de Somer (2011, pers. comm.) reports anecdotal evidence of cases in Germany, Switzerland, Austria, France, Holland, and Belgium. Evans (2010) has documented 17 cases of concealed cats in Australia.

While the exact numbers of known deposits are uncertain, the available evidence indicates well over 200 cases have been reported worldwide. Most scholars agree that reported cases of concealed cats are just the tip of the iceberg (Sheehan 1990:66; Hoggard 2004:176). Hoggard (2004:176) has observed that there are countless anecdotal references to concealed cat deposits that were never formally reported, adding that, “dried cats are the most frequently disposed of type of object that can be found in buildings for obvious reasons. From speaking with builders it has become apparent that a very large number of dried cats are discovered but never reported.”

Overall geographic distribution of reported cases indicates that the practice of immuring cats within buildings is fairly widespread throughout the British Isles and northern and central Europe and may have had its origin among the Germanic tribes who invaded England in the early Middle Ages. Archaeological excavations have uncovered the bones of a cat deliberately incorporated into the walls of a Middle or Late Iron Age *broch* (stone structure) in Orkney, hypothesized as a magical deterrent to rodents (Smith and Hodgson 1994:152), although at this time there is no evidence that this earlier and isolated example is related to the immurement of cats in the medieval period.

Hoggard (2004:176) points out the obvious difficulty in dating specimens, as cats possess no stylistic indicators. However, from the available evidence it appears that the practice began sometime in the central Middle Ages and continued into the early modern period, enduring in some areas into the first decades of the 20th century (Sheehan 1990:68). Howard (1951) reports the earliest known example of a concealed “dried” cat, believed to date to the last quarter of the 13th century. The most recent example comes from a building in Sweden constructed about 1921 (Howard 1951:149). In Howard’s

study, the highest frequency of deposits date to the 17th century (n=4), indicating a possible correlation with the witch hunt period. Among the 139 cases in England documented by Hoggard (2004:176), 12% (n=16) date to the period before 1700, 12% (n=17) date after 1700, and the remaining 76% (n=106) could not be dated. In Germany, approximately one quarter of finds date to the Middle Ages, with numerous examples dating from the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries, and at least five cats found in late 19th-century buildings (Schad 2005). It is hoped that as research continues, more precise temporal distribution for the custom of cat concealment will be established.

Although concealed cats have been found in a variety of structures, they are most commonly encountered in domestic contexts (Sheehan 1990:66; Schad 2005; Evans 2010:164-172). Surprisingly, deposits in ecclesiastical structures are also fairly common. Of the four documented cases in Ireland, two were discovered in religious buildings—at Ennis Friary and in Dublin’s Christ Church Cathedral (Howard 1951; Sheehan 1990). In England, examples have been reported from St. Clement Dane’s Church and the Church of St. Michael Royal in London (Howard 1951; Sheehan 1990:66); in the roof of a now-demolished church at Heptonstall in West Yorkshire (Pennick 1986:15); and in the roof of St. Cuthbert’s Church at Clifton, Cumbria (Hoggard 2004:176). In Germany, a cat was found under the floor of a church in Markgröningen (Schad 2005). Evans (2010:167) reports an example from a building that served as a parsonage for the Anglican Church in Australia until the late 20th century. There is also some evidence that cats were concealed in ships. One report describes the dried body of a cat found between the lining and the exterior planking of the British war ship *Menelaus*, constructed in 1808 (*Post-Standard* 1904:30).



Figure 5.1. Cat found in rubble pulled from the walls and floor of Grange Farm Cottage at Stowupland in Suffolk, England. Photo courtesy of Flickr user JulesPhoto.



Figure 5.2. Cat found under a hearthstone in Cheshire, England. Photo courtesy of The Blackden Trust.

No statistics have been published on the location of concealed cats within buildings, but Sheehan (1990:66) and Hoggard (2004:175) both note that specimens, such as the cat in Figure 5.1, are most often discovered in internal and external walls. Other common locations include beneath floors, above ceilings, and in roof and attic spaces (Sheehan 1990:66; Hoggard 2004:175). Examples have also been reported from under or near hearths and fireplaces. At Blackden in Cheshire, England, the compact body of a cat,

seen in Figure 5.2, was found buried under a hearthstone (Blackden Trust 2010). Another cat was found under the hearthstone of the 17th-century Alderman Fenwick's House at Newcastle upon Tyne in Northumberland, shown in Figure 5.3.



Figure 5.3. Cat found under the hearthstone of Alderman Fenwick's House, Newcastle upon Tyne, England. Photo courtesy of Newcastle City Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, England.

Deposits under thresholds or near doorways are less common but not unknown. The most well-known example of a threshold deposit comes from Värmland, Sweden, where a cat was discovered in a

sealed cavity under the front steps of a house as late as 1921 (Figure 5.4) (Howard 1951:149). In Thetford in Norfolk, England, a cat was similarly discovered beneath the doorstep of an 18th-century house (Pennick 1986:14). Schad (2005) reports that the majority of specimens in Germany have been found in the ceiling above the most commonly used living space, perhaps



Figure 5.4. Cat found in a sealed cavity under the front steps of a house in Varmland, Sweden. Photo courtesy of the Museum of Evolution, Uppsala University, Uppsala, Sweden, #PMU 25663.

significant for its proximity to the daily activities of the building's occupants, including food storage and preparation. Examples in Germany have also been found under floorboards, and at least three specimens have been discovered near chimneys, typically within ceiling voids.

As with other types of concealments, skeptics argue that the artifacts—in this case, the preserved bodies of cats—end up in building voids as the result of mundane explanations, perhaps crawling in of their own accord and either becoming inadvertently trapped or dying of natural causes such as illness or old age (Hoggard 2004:175; *New Zealand Herald* [NZH] 2011). It has also been suggested that environmental conditions in these locations may have retarded decay and resulted in furless, naturally preserved carcasses (NZH 2011). Indeed, natural desiccation of animals, given the right conditions, is fairly common. In many instances, when there is no evidence to suggest otherwise, it can be assumed that cats found in buildings are accidental. In fact, Howard (1951:151) accepts that 11 of the 25 examples documented in 1951 “may belong to the accidental-enclosure category, and can, therefore, be given the benefit of the doubt.”



Figure 5.5. Cat found under the floor of Curzon Street Station, Birmingham, England. The legs appear to have been tied or bound at some point. Photo courtesy of Flickr user Booger Benson.

However, while solitary cats found in natural, relaxed poses can be assumed to be the result of mundane explanations, other cases are more problematic. Evidence for the deliberate concealment of cats falls into three categories: artificial arrangement, specially built cavities, and association with vermin or known magico-religious artifacts. Numerous examples have been reported in

the British Isles in which the animals in question appear to have been pegged or nailed into place, artificially posed, had their legs tied, or were otherwise manipulated into unnatural arrangements at the time of concealment. For example, at Pilton in Northamptonshire, a cat and rat were found in the thatch of a cottage, “pegged down with fair-sized wooden pegs” (Howard 1951:149), while another cat was found nailed to the rafters of a house in Dorset (Harte 2000). A specimen found under the floor of Curzon Street Station in Birmingham appears to have had its legs bound at some point (Figure 5.5). In Devon, a cat discovered in the roof of a 17th-century house was found “with its paws pulled apart on each side of its body, perhaps having been tied or fixed like that” (Pennick 1986:11).

Other examples have been discovered in unnatural positions and unusual contexts that indicate deliberate placement at the time of a building’s construction. Merrifield (1987:131) reports the skeleton of a cat found lodged beneath a massive roof timber of a house at Milford, Surrey, and a dried cat from Kettering, Northamptonshire, found with its neck compressed by a roof joist. In Merrifield’s opinion, it is extremely unlikely that

these animals got into such positions accidentally, and therefore must have been deliberately placed during construction activities.

In southern Germany, two cats dated to the early 17th century were found arranged in a cruciform pattern, one lying across the top of the other, in a ground-floor ceiling

near a chimney (Figure 5.6) (Schad 2005). Other concealments with possible magico-religious significance were found in different areas of the same building, including a hymnbook buried in a shallow pit of chaff, located outside the structure next to a chimney, and a wreath made of ears of grain with two ram hooves in the center, found in the ceiling of an upper floor and adjacent to a chimney.

In other instances, cats have been found in aggressive postures as if ready to attack or in other lifelike poses (Merrifield 1987:130). For example, a cat found in the roof of a house in England was described as having “its mouth open in a ‘snarling’ way, and its forepaws raised defensively as if striving to fight off an enemy” (Howard 1951:149). In Gibraltar, a large cat was found “in a stretched running position with mouth wide open” (Howard 1951:150). A specimen from Germany was posed in an unusual hunched position, as if preparing to spring to attack (Schad 2005).

Some examples of have been found in specially prepared cavities or sealed niches that indicate intentional placement (Merrifield 1987:129; Sheehan 1990:66). In the district of Tyseley in Birmingham, England, a dried cat and bird were found in a square



Figure 5.6. Two dried cats found lying crossed over each other in a cruciform pattern in a house in Germany. Photo courtesy of Petra Schad.

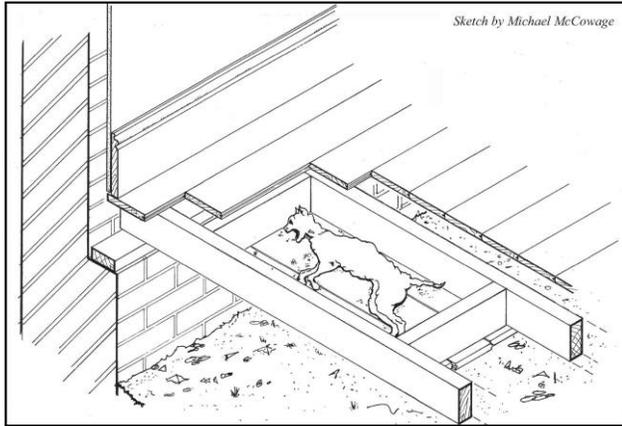


Figure 5.7. View of a cat concealed within a specially built compartment underneath the floorboards of a house in Sydney, Australia. The animal was left in situ in the building. Sketch courtesy of Michael McCowage (Evans 2010:170).

space on their own. At Christ Church Cathedral in Dublin, the desiccated bodies of a cat and rat were found inside a glass case in a niche behind the organ (Sheehan 1990:65). Another cat was found in a sealed niche in the wall of the Franciscan Friary at Ennis (Sheehan 1990). Evans (2010:170) reports that in Sydney, Australia, a dried cat found in a townhouse had been placed in a compartment constructed by attaching boards to the underside of the floor joists, with the kitchen floorboards acting as a lid (Figure 5.7).

Perhaps most compelling are the examples of concealed “dried” cats accompanied by similarly preserved rats, mice, and birds, often posed as if in the midst of an attack or chase or positioned with their prey in their mouths (Sheehan 1990:66). The cat found pegged down in the thatch of the cottage at Pilton was accompanied by a pegged rat located a mere four inches in front of it, giving the appearance that the cat was chasing the rodent (Howard 1951:149). At Salisbury in Wiltshire, England, a cat was found posed bending over a large rat, seen in Figure 5.8 (Howard 1951:150). In London, a concealed cat was found between the wall and the wainscoting of a house with a rat positioned in its

cavity lined with heavy oak  
located between an interior and  
exterior wall (Howard 1951:149;  
Merrifield 1987:129-130).  
According to Howard (1951:149),  
the cavity was completely  
inaccessible, thus it would have  
been impossible for the animals to  
have found their way into the

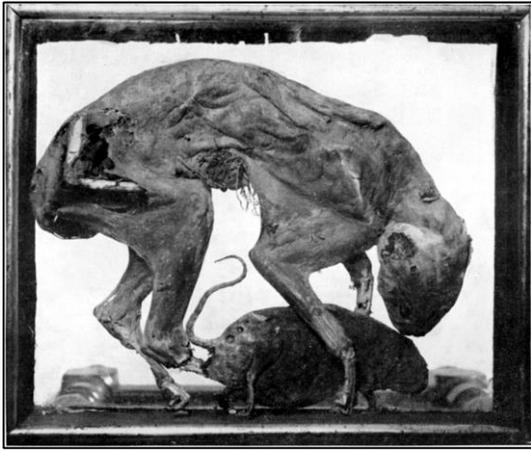


Figure 5.8. Concealed cat found posed bending over a large rat (Howard 1951:Plate Kb).

mouth (Howard 1951:149), and a similar arrangement was encountered in a cellar wall in Cambridge (Pennick 1986:14).

Schad (2005) reports an unusual example from Germany in which a cat was found with a dried rat on its back. However, the most remarkable case of companion

rodents, discovered in London, consists of

a cat found with two rats—one in its jaws, “which appears to be struggling to escape, with its legs extended, its mouth wide open and its tail erect,” and another beneath its forefeet, writhing “upwards as if to bite its captor” (Figure 5.9) (Howard 1951:149). In Howard’s opinion, this remarkable scene was deliberately and meticulously arranged, “since no accident could have killed all three simultaneously in such dramatic attitudes” (Howard 1951:149).

Although far less common than rats, mice have also been found in association with concealed cats. At Tewkesbury in Gloucestershire, a dried cat was found with a mouse in its mouth (Howard 1951:150; Merrifield 1987:129), and a cat was found with the skeleton of a mouse in its mouth in a house in Dorset (Harte 2000). Birds are also



Figure 5.9. Cat posed with one rat in its mouth and another underfoot (*Illustrated London News* 1948:693).

occasionally found. Besides the cat and bird discovered in Birmingham, previously discussed, Hoggard (1999:fn 33) reports a cat accompanied by both a rat and a starling.

There are a few instances in which cats have been found with other artifacts, including mundane household objects. In one case, a cat, a glass jar, a sardine tin, and a horseshoe were found together in a sealed bread oven in a house at Parracombe, North Devon (Hoggard 2004:176). The inclusion of the horseshoe indicates a possible apotropaic or magico-religious function for the entire deposit, since the horseshoe is a well-known charm in the British Isles (Roud 2003:257-259), as described in Chapter 6. In Germany, Schad (2005) reports a cat found concealed with a left shoe, which also suggests a possible magico-religious interpretation, as discussed in the previous chapter. At Blandford Forum in Dorset, a “mummified” cat was found standing on a ledge approximately six feet above the ground, between an exterior brick wall and a plaster-and-lath partition wall (Harte 2000). Lying next to it was a volume of poetry published in 1851. Harte believes that the book, which had a black cover, may have been mistaken for a Bible by someone unable to read or write. A dried cat and rat found in a wall in a building near the border of Cambridgeshire and Bedfordshire was accompanied by a child’s doll (de Somer 2003), which may also hold ritual significance.

As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, not all cats concealed in buildings are of the dried variety; numerous cases of whole or disarticulated skeletal remains have also been reported. At Linton in Cambridgeshire, the skull of a cat was discovered in a house’s chimney brickwork (Pennick 1986:7). In the village of Woodbury in Devon, the skeleton of a cat was discovered in the roof of a cottage and, according to Pennick (1986:11), “it was believed, from the position and attitude of the cat, that it was a

sacrifice.” Pennick reports a second cat skeleton found in a cavity behind the hearth of another home in Devon. Additional skeletal concealments have been reported at Milford, Surrey (Merrifield 1987:131) and at George Nympton, Devon, where a cat was buried under the ashlar-lime floor of Church Gate House (Pennick 1986:11).

Although a few sensationalized accounts of cat concealments claim the animals were walled in alive (Hartland 1914:113; Pennick 1986:11; Harte 1997), the majority of scholars agree that in most cases the evidence indicates post-mortem concealment (Hoggard 2004:176; Schad 2005; Sheehan 1990:66). The artful arrangement of some specimens implies that the animals were positioned shortly after death—before rigor mortis had set in but before the process of decay had begun. Sheehan (1990:65)

proposes that the bodies of dried cats “may have undergone a preparatory process of smoking or partial desiccation” after being posed. Remarkably, no less than five dried cats documented by Schad (2005) were

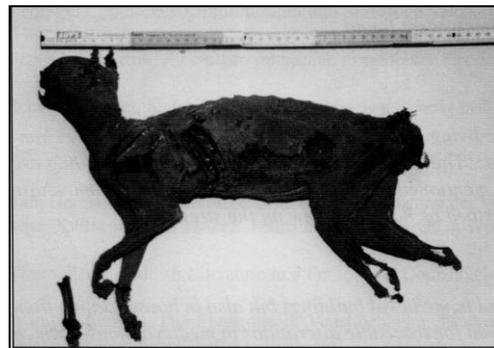


Figure 5.10. Dried cat with severed left front paw found lying next to the body. Image courtesy of Petra Schad (Schad 2005:Figure 2).

found to be missing their left front paw or leg. In one case, the severed limb was found lying next to the dried cat carcass, shown in Figure 5.10. Clearly these animals were either already dead at the time of concealment or were well on their way. In very rare cases, death appears to have occurred at the time of concealment. Hoggard (1999) reports an example in which a kitten appears to have been pinned down and had its stomach cut open, although this is the only such case of which this author is aware.

In most cases, it is unknown whether the animals died of natural causes and were afterwards interred or if they were deliberately killed for the purpose of concealment (Sheehan 1990:66). Schad (2005) reports that the physical evidence indicates that all of the cats found in Ludwigsburg, Germany, were dead when deposited inside the structures, although the exact cause of death is unknown. An archaeozoologist who x-rayed the bodies of two young cats found concealed in buildings in Austria discovered their necks had been broken (Schad 2005:157). It is possible that other concealed specimens in Europe and the British Isles met a similar end.

### **Ethnohistorical Evidence in the British Isles and Europe**

Unlike witch bottles, there is very little historical description of the practice of deliberately concealing cats, either dead or alive, within buildings (Pennick 1986:11). There is, however, considerable folklore concerning cats, in particular black cats. The previous chapters demonstrated how a variety of ethnohistorical evidence can assist with the interpretation of concealed objects such as witch bottles and footwear. Similarly, by examining ethnohistorical evidence—in this case collections of folklore and folk belief—it may be possible to decipher the function of concealed cat deposits.

However, in order to understand the possible reasons for cat concealment, a brief overview of the history of the domesticated cat in Europe and the British Isles is required to establish historical context. As O'Connor (2000:170) has pointed out, although today cats are perceived as companion animals, they have in fact served a variety of roles throughout history. Archaeological and genetic analysis has shown that cats were first

domesticated in the Near East approximately 9,000 to 10,000 years ago for the purpose of protecting harvested grain from mice and other pests (Pickrell 2004; Driscoll et al. 2007). From there they spread to the eastern Mediterranean and down the Nile Valley, where they assumed the additional role of companion animal (Pickrell 2004; Driscoll et al. 2009). Cats also figured prominently in Egyptian religion and were connected with Bastet, a protector goddess associated with war, hunting, and motherhood. To honor Bastet, domesticated cats were regularly sacrificed and mummified (Driscoll et al. 2009).

The Romans are generally credited with introducing the domesticated cat to the British Isles, most likely transporting them by ship, where they were used to control pests (Driscoll et al. 2009). After reaching port, some cats would have inevitably come ashore, established colonies in urban centers, and eventually expanded into the adjacent countryside (Driscoll et al. 2009). Excavations of Roman sites in Great Britain show that by the fourth century A.D., domesticated cats could be found “from Monmouthshire to Kent” and were used, along with weasels, to catch rats, mice, and other vermin (Kirk 1977:30). There is also some evidence to suggest that domesticated cats reached the British Isles before the Romans introduced them, possibly with the Phoenicians in their trade with the Celts in the first millennium B.C. (Smith and Hodgson 1994:152; Driscoll et al. 2009).

Vermin-catcher was not the only role of cats in Europe. Smith and Hodgson (1994:151-152) and O’Connor (2000:170) have observed knife marks on cat bones from Iron Age and medieval sites in the British Isles, indicating the animals were skinned for their pelts, although it is unknown whether the animals were raised for this purpose or selected from the natural population. Prehal (2011) speculates that cat skins were

harvested for their supposed magical properties and used in a variety of charms and amulets.

Ever since their incorporation into Egyptian religion, cats have been perceived as having exceptional or supernatural powers (Howard 1951:150). Significantly, they have been almost exclusively associated with femininity, particularly female sexuality, fertility, motherhood, protective ferocity, and cunningness. This can be seen in the cat's association with Bastet as well as with Freyja, Norse goddess of fertility, feminine sexuality, and war (Prehal 2011).

There is some evidence that cats, particularly black cats, were also ascribed apotropaic qualities, perhaps due to their association with fertility. According to Howard (1951:150), black cats were sacrificed and buried in fields on Christmas Eve, "to prevent evil spirits from harming the crops." In mainland Europe, cats were violently tortured and killed, often in conjunction with the festivities of certain holy days (Howard 1951:150; Darnton 1984; Sheehan 1990:68). In 15th-century France, a cat was believed to protect and defend its owners from werewolves (Jeay and Garay 2006:251).

During the Middle Ages, cats and other symbols of pre-Christian religion became associated with diabolical witchcraft, probably because of their close association with female sexuality and cunning (Howard 1951:151; Darnton 1984:92,94; Clutton-Brock 1993:55). Dale-Green (1963:122) describes an early 17th-century case of suspected witchcraft in which the accused woman was said to have buried a live cat, an ox, and a large amount of salt in a deep hole as a sacrifice to the Devil. A similar correlation between cats and negative stereotypes of women can be seen in late 19th-century Manchester, where it was said that cats,

are looked on as being uncanny and treacherous, the companions of the witches. The ordinary boy detests cats, and if girls are fond of them it is a sign they will probably be old maids, and, as some people would say, the worst sort of old maids. ... The treacherous, deceitful beasts, who prowl about in the dusk with their green eyes and electrical fur, seeking robins and cream, or whatever else they can find to devour, appear to be properly associated with the malevolent witches, and the devout peasant in country places when he sees a black cat in his path involuntarily shudders, or crosses himself, or wishes to kill the evil beast (Moss 1898:101-102).

In the post-Medieval period, cats were widely believed to serve as witches' familiars, perhaps because of their recurrent association with women, particularly old women or "crones"



(Figure 5.11) (Kirk 1977:38, 77-79; Briggs 1980:76-83; Darnton 1984:95;

Figure 5.11. 17th-century woodcut of three witches with their imps or animal familiars, including a cat (Barnes 1619).

Clutton-Brock 1993:51; Roud 2003:64). The first mention of a cat as a familiar appears in trial proceedings at Chelmsford, Essex, in 1566 (Kittredge 1956:177). One early 17th-century author remarked that, "the familiars of witches do most ordinarily appear in the shape of cats, which is an argument that the beast is dangerous to soul and body" (Clutton-Brock 1993:55). A woman accused of witchcraft in Hertfordshire, England, in 1712 was charged with "conversing familiarly with the Devil in the shape of a cat" (Guskin 1981:52).

In some accounts, a cat is more than just a witch's familiar—it is the witch herself in animal form. These transmogrified witches or witch-cats are a common motif in European and American folklore. In the late 17th century, a woman accused of witchcraft

in Northumberland was said to have transformed herself into various animal forms, including a cat, a hare, a greyhound, and a bee (Pennick 1986:11). Rudkin (1934) reports numerous tales of witch-cats in Lincolnshire, often appearing as a black cat. Similar tales were recorded in Lancashire (Harland and Wilkinson 1873:7), Sussex (Latham 1878:25), and in the Kennet Valley in southern England (Salmon 1902:425) in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. One of the more common types of witch-cat folktales involve the severed paw/hand motif in which a particularly troublesome cat is injured or maimed, usually by cutting off its paw (Kittredge 1956:177; Harte 1997). It is later discovered that a local woman suspected of being a witch inexplicably suffered a similar injury, confirming that the cat was indeed the transmogrified witch.

The cat's association with witchcraft and negative stereotypes of women resulted in a general perception that cats are sneaky, malicious, and harmful to humans. In Germany, cats are not to be trusted and are seen as tricksters and liars (Schad 2005). In Cambridgeshire, England, it was said that cats should never be allowed near a dead body, for "they would eat the eyes of the corpse" (Newman 1945:290). In Sussex and Manchester, it was believed that babies and kittens should never live in the same house, for if left alone with an infant a cat would creep in, smother it, or suck its breath (Latham 1878:18, 25; Moss 1898:101-102; Trevelyan 1909:80).

Cats were also thought to bring poor health to a household. In the East Midlands and Yorkshire, it was said that, "it is bad for one's health to fondle cats" (Addy 1895:90). In Lancashire,

the hairs from cats are considered to be very detrimental to health; and these animals are not unfrequently sent away from a house, or destroyed, when any

child, or young person, begins to show symptoms of bad health. ... If a cat sleeps in a child's cradle, or on its bed, it is supposed to inhale the child's life, and disease soon follows (Harland and Wilkinson 1873:219).

It was also believed that humans could catch a cold from a cat (Moss 1898:102; Trevelyan 1909:80). This belief is likely based on the very real allergic reaction some people have to cat dander, which can have symptoms similar to the common cold.

Cats have long been known for their excellent nocturnal vision, acute hearing and sense of smell, and ability to move silently without detection. The supernatural powers of cats could be transferred to humans through sympathetic magic. Thus in Brittany, France, it was said that, "if one wanted to become invisible, one had to eat the warm brain of a freshly-killed cat" (Pennick 1986:9). Cats were also thought to possess a "sixth sense" or "second sight," which gave them the ability "to see things which we generally can't," including supernatural beings such as ghosts, demons, and spirits (Kirk 1977:45-47; Hoggard 2000; de Somer 2003:8).

The superior faculties that made cats so adept at hunting and catching small prey also made them popular in folk remedies. Following the Law of Sympathy, folk remedies employing a cat or parts of a cat would be useful for ailments related to the senses, particularly the eyes (Kirk 1977:45-46). Early 17th-century naturalist Edward Topsell wrote in his *Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes* (1607) that diseases of the eye could be cured with the following recipe:

Take the head of a black cat, which hath not a spot of another colour in it, and burn it to powder in an earthen pot, leaded or glazed within; then take this powder, and through a quill, blow it thrice a day into thy eye; and if in the night any head do thereby annoy thee, take two leaves of a oke, wet in cold water, and bind them to the eye, and so shall all pain flie away and blindness depart,

although it hath oppressed thee a whole year: and this medicine is approved by many physicians both elder and later (Kirk 1977:46).

In the mid-19th century, it was thought that, “in order to be rid of the painful tumour on the eyelid, provincially known as the *west* or *sty*, it is customary for the sufferer, on the first night of the new moon, to procure the tail of a black cat, and after pulling from it one hair, rub the tip nine times over the pustule” (*Illustrated Magazine of Art* 1853:299). Similarly, in western England it was believed that, “little gatherings which occur on the eyelids of children, locally called ‘whilks,’ are cured by passing a black cat’s tail nine times over the place. If a ram cat, the cure is more certain” (Hunt 1916:433). Cats were less commonly employed in other types of remedies. Cat fur was thought to cure toothache, warts, and shingles (Trevelyan 1909:80; Pennick 1986:9). To heal injuries sustained during a fall, it was suggested that the injured person suck the blood from the amputated tail of a cat (Pennick 1986:9).

Like shoes, cats were also used in prognostication. In the East Midlands and Yorkshire, “if your cat sits with her back to the fire it is sure to rain” (Addy 1895:68). In Welsh tradition, “when cats trim their whiskers, guests may be expected. . . . When cats are frisky, wind and rain may be expected. If the cat sits with its back to the fire, snow is coming. When a cat stretches its paws towards the fire, strangers are approaching the house” (Trevelyan 1909:80).

In most parts of the world, including the United States and mainland Europe, black cats are viewed as unlucky. However, despite their association with diabolical witchcraft and feminine trickery, black cats are largely perceived as omens of good luck in Great Britain (Briggs 1980:66; Simpson and Roud 2000:49; Roud 2003:66-68). They

are frequently depicted on early 20th-century British greeting cards and are often shown in association with other good luck symbols such as horseshoes and old shoes, as seen in Figure 5.12. However, the black cat as a symbol of general good luck does not appear until the early 17th century and is not a common motif until after 1800 (Roud 2003:67), perhaps a later interpretation of an earlier association with fertility, hunting, and protection.

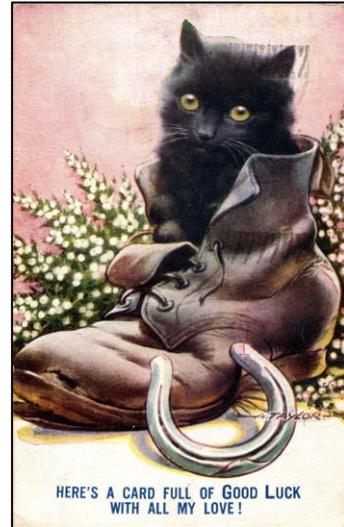


Figure 5.12. Early 20th-century British postcard depicting a lucky horseshoe, an old shoe, and a black cat. From the author's collection.

Black cats were deemed particularly lucky by sailors, who kept them on their ships, and with their wives, who kept them at home to ensure the safe return of their husbands (Briggs 1980:66-67; Roud 2003:67,70). It was said that Suffolk fishermen “take both a black cat and a horse-shoe to sea” for good luck (Hadow and Anderson 1924:352).

Black cats were thought to bring good luck to a household, too. One late 19th-century English folklorist observed that, “the whiskered race are on the whole, however, more loved than feared by our Sussex peasantry” (Latham 1878:25). In early 20th-century Ireland, it was believed that the sacrifice of a black cat was “certain to remove ill-luck from a house” (Wood-Martin 1902:2:6). In Norfolk, Sussex, and Yorkshire it was thought that a black cat in a house would bring good fortune (Latham 1878:8; Addy 1895:68; Taylor 1929:124-125). And in Wales:

Cats were supposed to be endowed with magical powers, and therefore granted many privileges and indulgences. It was not considered lucky for the inmates of a

house to be without a cat. . . . Black cats keep care and trouble away from the house. It is lucky for a black and strange cat to stray into anybody's house. If a black cat is lost, trouble and sorrow will fall upon the house. It is very fortunate to have a purely white and a thoroughly black cat on the premises (Trevelyan 1909:80).

Keeping a lucky cat from wandering, however, could be problematic; thus it was recommended to grease a cat's feet with butter to keep it at home (Harland and Wilkinson 1873:219-220; Roud 2003:70), a belief that seems to have been fairly widespread and of some antiquity. In a 15th-century collection of French folk beliefs, *The Distaff Gospels*, it was said that, "If you have a good cat and you don't want to lose it, you must rub its nose and four legs with butter for three days, and it will never leave the house" (Jeay and Garay 2006:237-239).

Another way of keeping a lucky cat from leaving was to place the animal into a cold oven or cupboard (Roud 2003:71), "for it is said that the effect upon her will be that she will forget her former home" (Latham 1878:8). The association between the cat and the oven or hearth, and thus with the female sphere, is repeated in *The Distaff Gospels*, where it was said that, "if a woman wants to keep her cat or her hen from leaving her house, she must take the cat or the hen and make them turn three times around the pot-hook, then rub their feet against the wall of the chimney—they will never run away from the house" (Jeay and Garay 2006:121). Perhaps it is no surprise that several examples of concealed cats have been found sealed inside abandoned ovens or in voids near chimneys and hearths.

In addition to more circumstantial ethnohistorical evidence for cat concealment, a couple of sources appear to describe the deliberate concealment of cats in buildings. In

1703, in Aberdeenshire, Scotland, a man was charged with, among other things, “burying a cat under the hearth,” which some scholars believe describes the use of folk magic, perhaps to bring good luck to the house or to ward off witchcraft or other misfortune (Maxwell-Stuart 2004:90). In addition, early 20th-century Danish historian Gudmund Schütte (1924:363) claims that in the 19th century, “Jutlandic peasants buried a cat or a viper under the threshold, in order that the soul of the dead animal might become the “wight” [spirit] or *vare* of the house,” which Schütte also associates with the belief in house spirits such as the tomte and nisse. Unfortunately, Schütte does not provide any sources to back up his claim.

Curiously, no folklore accounts emphasizing the role of cats as vermin catchers were encountered in European ethnohistorical sources consulted during research, although the association is otherwise well-established and dates back to the earliest presence of domesticated cats. It does appear, however, that magical amulets and charms were occasionally used to deter pests. One folklorist reports that in Spain, “to free a place from vermin, the figure of the obnoxious animal is made in wax or consecrated metal in a planetary hour and put in the infested spot as a talisman” (Daniels and Stevans 1903:462). In 15th-century France, it was said that if a man “waves bales of burning straw around the trees of his orchard on the first Sunday of Lent, he will rid them of vermin for the whole year” (Jeay and Garay 2006:215). In Scotland, one method to rid a house of rodents involved pasting the following written charm on the wall:

Ratton and mouse  
Leave the poor woman’s house!  
Gang awa’ o’er by the mill  
An’ there ye’ll a’ get yer fill! (Daniels and Stevans 1903:485).

## **Concealed Cats in the United States**

Unlike witch bottles and concealed footwear, which have begun to receive attention from historians and museums, the practice of immuring cats has been almost completely ignored in North America, a fact which is not surprising. According to British researcher Brian Hoggard (2000), dried cats “are perhaps the least likely of all the finds to be properly recorded because of the unpleasant reactions which they provoke in people when they are discovered,” thus the bodies of dead cats found in buildings almost always end up in the garbage and are seldom reported.

When beginning the search for American examples of concealed cats, this author did not anticipate many would be found. In fact, there was doubt that the practice had survived at all in the United States, and if it had, that there would be enough evidence to make a compelling case. However, by following up on leads provided by colleagues in Europe, Great Britain, and the United States, and by searching historic newspapers, blogs, and photo-sharing websites, a surprising number of examples came to light. One major source of data was historic newspaper articles collected by author Chris Woodyard. In the early 20th century, the discovery of strangely preserved cats seems to have been considered newsworthy, and it is from such articles that much of the evidence of American cases has been obtained. Using this information as a starting point, a database of concealed cats was constructed for the United States. Every attempt was made to record as many details as possible, adding new cases to the database as they were encountered. Specimens similar to those found in Great Britain, Ireland, Europe, and Australia were sought in particular. In the end, nearly 40 cases of dried, desiccated,

“mummified,” skeletal, or preserved remains of cats were documented in the United States.

Since cats are perhaps the most controversial type of concealment—with critics emphasizing the cat’s propensity to crawl into tight, secluded spaces where it might easily be trapped—it was important to carefully evaluate the evidence from each case in order to determine if it did in fact represent a deliberate deposit. In about two-thirds of the cases it was not clear whether the deposit was the result of accidental entrapment and natural death or if it was deliberate; therefore, such cases were—in the words of Howard (1951:151)—“given the benefit of the doubt” and assumed to be accidental. Most of these specimens were found under floors and in crawlspaces in relaxed and natural poses, suggesting that the animals crawled into or under the buildings of their own accord. Examples of the accidental/natural category were reported in California, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Michigan, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Wisconsin. It was determined that the remaining 14 cases were likely or highly likely to be the result of deliberate concealment (Appendix B). As with European and Australian cases, these deposits can be classified into several categories: artificial arrangement suggesting post-mortem manipulation and placement, specially built cavities, and association with vermin or known magico-religious artifacts.

Concealed cats tend to be found in the northeastern United States and adjacent Midwestern states; however, unlike concealed footwear, there are no reported cases from New England. Half of the specimens (n=7) come from the Mid-Atlantic region, closely paralleling the geographic distribution of witch bottles. This might indicate that the tradition of immuring cats was brought to the United States by immigrants from other

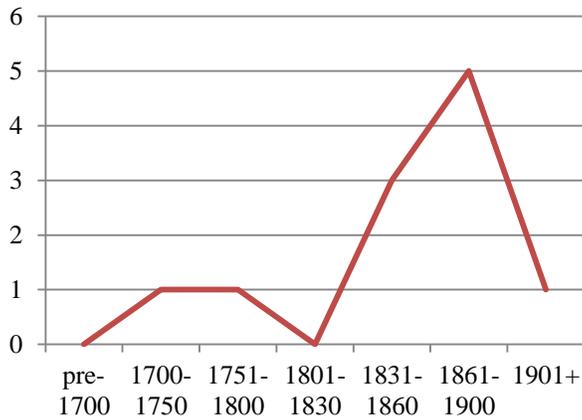


Figure 5.13. Temporal distribution of concealed cats in the United States.

parts Great Britain (not East Anglia, where many of the New England Puritans originated), or perhaps by Irish, German, or Scandinavian immigrants. Unfortunately, the somewhat limited data regarding geographic distribution in the British Isles and Europe, as well as the

relatively few cases confirmed in the United States, makes it difficult to draw further conclusions at this time.

As other scholars have pointed out, dating concealed cat deposits can be particularly tricky. In many cases, however, a date can be assigned based on either the construction date of the building or a known period of major renovation. Most appear to have been concealed during the original construction episode and are found in sealed voids that have not been accessible since that time. Temporal analysis of the 11 cases for which an approximate date can be assigned shows that the highest frequency of cases dates to the late 19th century (n=5), followed by the mid-19th century (n=3) (Figure 5.13). This data resembles somewhat the temporal distribution of concealed footwear, showing a peak in the second half of the 19th century.

The types of structures and contexts within structures where concealed cats have been found are similar to finds in the British Isles and the European continent. More than half were reported from domestic sites (n=8), as shown in Figure 5.14. One example was reported in a church, and a second example was discovered in a domestic structure

affiliated with a religious organization. Almost half of the cases (n=6) were associated with the sub-floor or foundation area, followed by wall deposits (n=4), as seen in Figure 5.15. In several cases, a deposit could be placed in more than one category, such as both the hearth and the foundation.

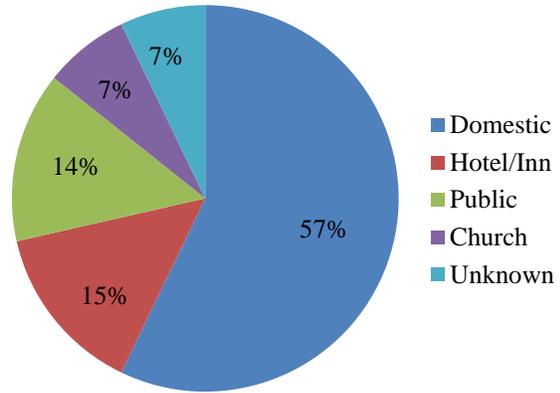


Figure 5.14. Types of buildings in which concealed cat deposits have been found in the United States.

Several cats have been found in unusual contexts that indicate deliberate post-mortem placement. One such specimen was discovered at the Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia’s Germantown neighborhood (Figure 5.16). During repairs made to the mid-19th-century building, the body of a cat was found embedded in the ceiling plaster. As one newspaper article noted, “the preservation of the body is perfect, the ears and even the tail being in good condition” (*Moulton Tribune* 1900:2). The author of the article pondered:

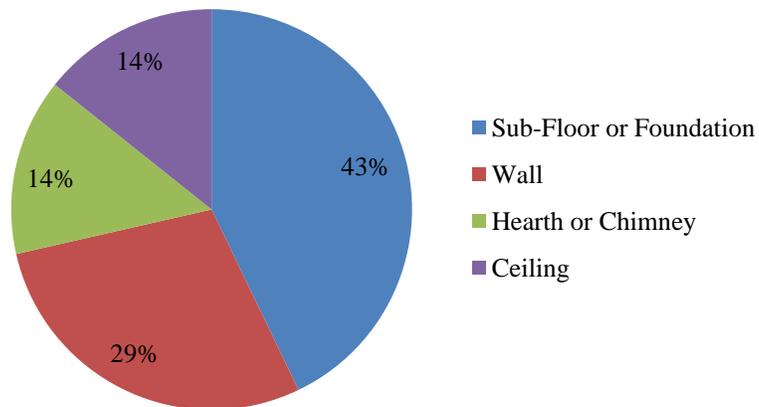


Figure 5.15. Spatial location of concealed cat deposits in the United States.

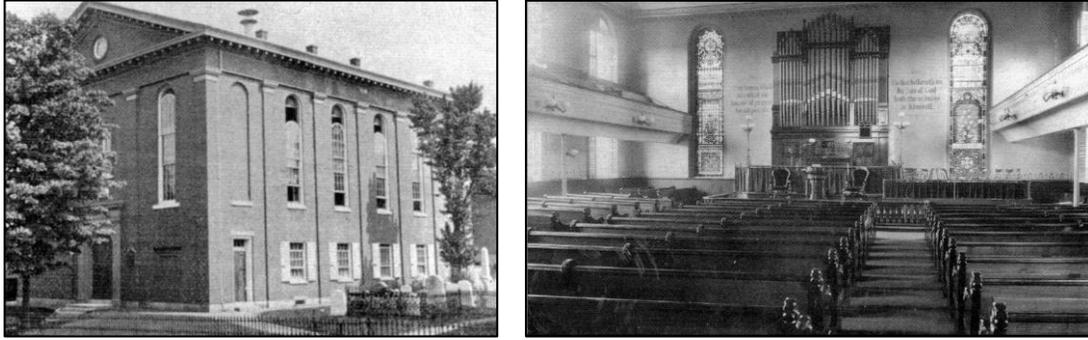


Figure 5.16. The Methodist Episcopal Church on Haines Street in Germantown, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania (Whyte 2007:18). The cat was found imbedded in the ceiling plaster.

How the quadruped got into the interior structure of the ceiling, there to die, is a mystery....The only plausible theory so far presented is that the cat, by some means, got into the ceiling while the original plastering was in progress and tarried until sealed in. The plaster on hardening became air-tight and the cat by exhausting the air in its adopted prison cell unconsciously preserved its body intact (*Moulton Tribune* 1900:2).

The building has since been demolished and the body of the cat has disappeared in the intervening 135 years, thus no further study can be conducted on this particular deposit.

The second specimen found in an unusual context comes from a building in Manhattan, New York. During renovations in 1911, a mason removing stonework from the top of the raised first-story façade of the Episcopal Diocesan House encountered “a dusty object which he dug out with a trowel,” later determined to be the body of a cat (*Daily Review* 1911:9; *Evening Times* 1911). Prior to its use as the Diocesan House, the building belonged to the wealthy Lorillard tobacco family who were responsible for its construction in 1828 and a major renovation ca. 1886 (*Diocesan Bulletin* 1959). Historic photos showing renovations completed on the front façade in the early 20th century indicate the probable location of the deposit, as seen in Figure 5.17. The presence of the cat imbedded inside the stonework at the top of the raised first story, estimated to be

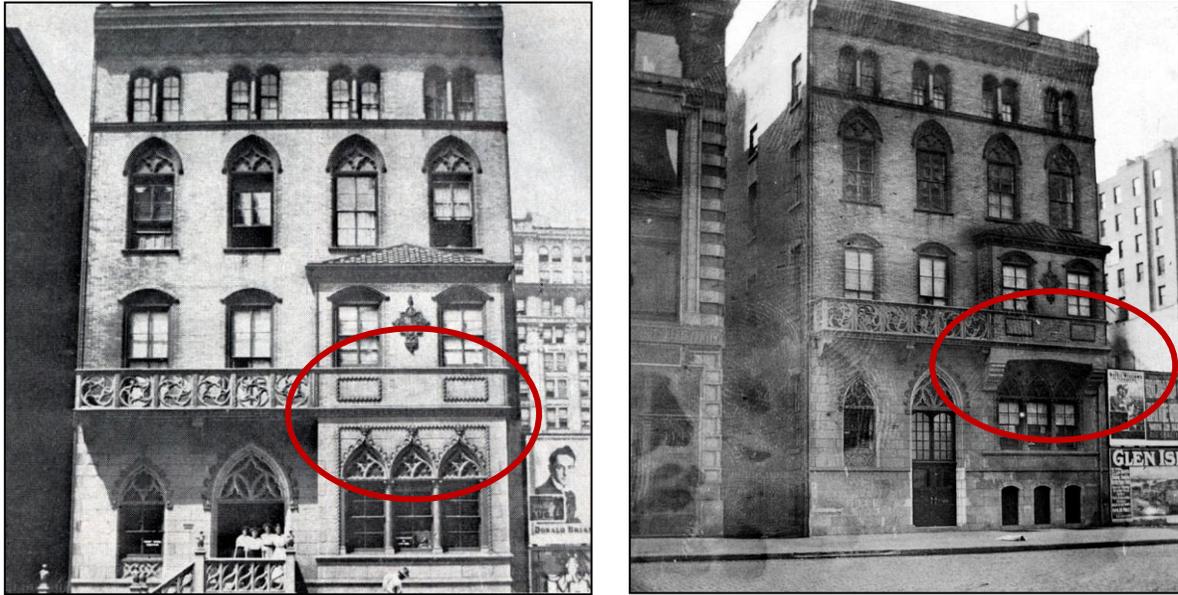


Figure 5.17. 416 Lafayette Place, Manhattan, New York, before renovation of front façade stonework (*left*), and after renovations (*right*), showing possible location of concealment. Images courtesy of the Archives of the Episcopal Diocese of New York, New York City, New York.

about 15 to 20 feet off the ground, suggests deliberate placement at the time of a major façade renovation in the late 19th century.

Another example of a cat found in an unusual context was reported in Indiana, Pennsylvania. In 1938, the preserved body of a cat was discovered inside a joist hole at the Houck Hotel, formerly the West Indiana House (Figure 5.18) (*Indiana Evening Gazette* 1938:3). Workers were puzzled as to how the animal could have accidentally gotten wedged in the joist hole in such a manner. This particular concealment is reminiscent of the two cases reported by Merrifield (1987:131), one in which a cat was found lodged under a roof timber and another that was found with its neck compressed by a roof joist.

In 2006, while installing a new ventilation system in the rotunda of the Ohio Statehouse in Columbus, workers came across an unusual discovery. In the second level

of the rotunda, a hole cut in the plaster wall revealed an old shoe box containing the disarticulated and partial skeletal remains of a cat, seen in Figure 5.19 (Chris Matheney 2011, elec. comm.). A large hole in one corner of the box, believed to have been created by rodents, may have resulted in the loss of some of the bones. The box dates to the late 1800s, indicating the deposit was made a decade or two after the building was constructed, perhaps during a period of repair or renovation.

As in the British Isles, several concealed cats in the United States appear to have been artificially posed post-mortem. A specimen from Smyth County, Virginia, was

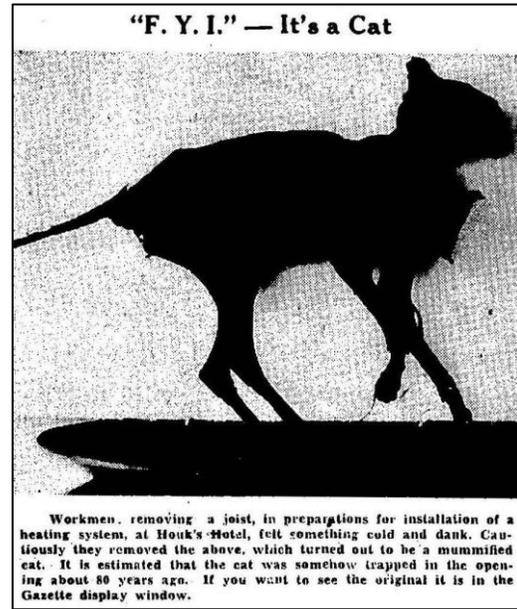


Figure 5.18. The only known image of a cat found in a joist hole in the Houk Hotel, Indiana, Pennsylvania (*Indiana Evening Gazette* 1938:3).



Figure 5.19. Excelsior shoebox containing the partial skeletal remains of a cat, discovered behind a wall in the rotunda of the Ohio Statehouse, Columbus, Ohio. Images courtesy of the Ohio Statehouse Museum Education Center.

found between the interior plaster wall and exterior logs of a house, standing with one front paw raised “as if he was clawing at something” (Janice Orr 2011, elec. comm.). Another case involves the remains of a taxidermied cat that were discovered in a late 19th-century house in Fortville, Indiana. The orange and white feline was found inside the wall above the doorway leading from the front foyer to the living room and was standing upright (Scott Spears 2012, elec. comm.). Like other specimens, the animal was discarded with no documentation. Although this particular case could be the result of a practical joke, given the fact that the tradition of concealing cats in buildings in Europe persisted well into the 19th century, it is likely that this example represents a more modern interpretation of an older custom.

The second category of cat concealments consists of specimens discovered in specially built cavities that indicate deliberate placement at the time of construction. There are two known examples of this type in the United States. The first was discovered at the mid-18th-century John Carlyle House in Alexandria, Virginia (Figure 5.20). During extensive restoration efforts in the 1970s, a stone mason encountered the preserved body of a cat sealed inside the foundation of the southeast chimney (Bartlinski 2005:2). According to the official report, “at first it was assumed that the cat had crawled into the flue and died; but upon further investigation, it was evident that the cat had been interred in a masonry cavity. As the body was partially mummified, with the skin and fur intact, it can be assumed that the cavity was airtight” (Fauber Garbee, Inc. 1980:IX-28).

John Carlyle was born in 1720 in Dumfrieshire, Scotland, where he lived for the first 20 years of his life; therefore, it is likely that either he or one of the workers who built the house was responsible for the concealment. The cat was accompanied by sprigs of what is believed to be rosemary (Helen Wirka 2012, pers. comm.). The significance of the rosemary is unknown, although it may have been selected for its reputed ability to repel insects and snakes (Arrowsmith 2009:214). Long (2001:11) also notes that in European tradition, rosemary was a common magical herb employed “to guard against supernatural attack.” The cat was returned to the cavity a few days later when repairs were completed and is currently inaccessible.

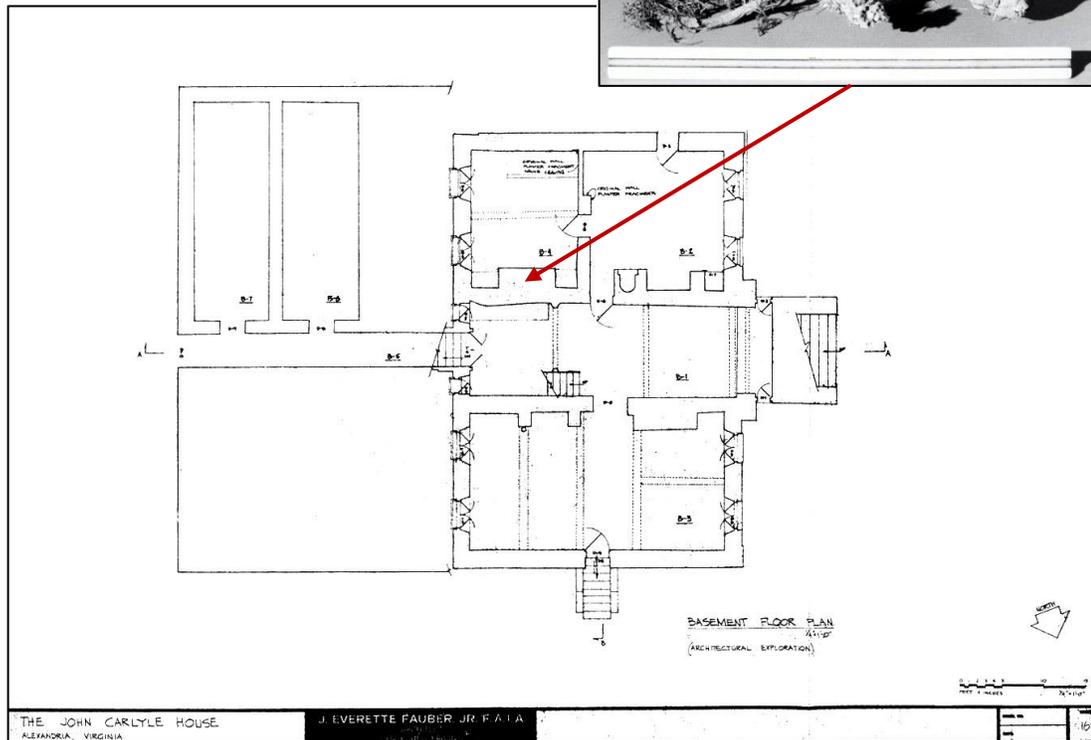


Figure 5.20. Basement floor plan of the John Carlyle House, Alexandria, Virginia (Fauber Garbee , Inc. 1980:Sheet 16). *Inset, upper right*: Concealed cat, photographed shortly after discovery. Photo courtesy of the Northern Virginia Regional Park Authority.

A similar deposit was reported in Berkeley, California. In 2002, the body of a cat was discovered in a small niche in the foundation stones of a house built ca. 1910 by Finnish immigrants (C. Riley Augé 2012, elec. comm.). The cavity was located directly underneath and to the right of the front door; the animal was facing the door, propped in a standing position against the back of the cavity with one front paw outstretched, “as if to scratch someone.” Like the Carlyle House specimen, the cat was later replaced in the foundation by the owner.

As in the British Isles and Europe, several examples of dried cats reported in the United States have been accompanied by similarly preserved rodents or birds. In 1950, a “mummified” cat was found inside the wall of a buggy shed attached to the Davy-Nelson House in Moorhead, Minnesota (Figure 5.21) (*Fargo Forum* 1950). The cat was accompanied by the preserved body of a mouse, which was positioned in its mouth, and an 1876 newspaper, which predates the construction of the house by several years. The house and shed were built by William H. Davy ca. 1883 (Mark Peih 2011, elec. comm.). Davy was born in Bath, Ontario, in 1844 and was a long-time member of St. John’s Episcopal Church in Moorhead. It is possible that Davy was responsible for concealing the cat, mouse, and newspaper in the building. The structure



Figure 5.21. Cat with mouse in its mouth found in Moorhead, Minnesota, (*Fargo Forum* 1950).

was demolished in 1969 as part of an urban renewal project, and the present whereabouts of the cat, mouse, and newspaper are unknown.

A similar find of cat-and-rodent was reported in 1948 in Charlotte, North Carolina, where, during the process of demolishing a late 19th-century rooming house, workers uncovered a cat in the wall of the building, resting directly on top of the foundation (Figure 5.22). They described a “mummified,” hairless cat, “standing on all fours, about to pounce on a mummified rat that it had evidently been chasing when it died” (*Charlotte News* 1948[sec. 2]:1). The discovery was understandably puzzling:

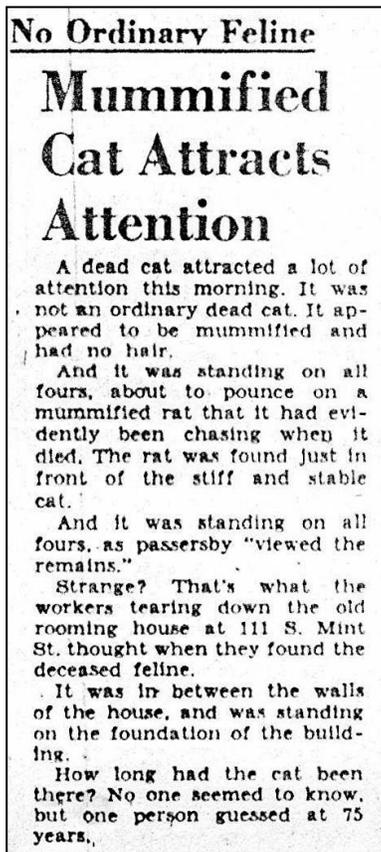


Figure 5.22. Cat and rat found in Charlotte, North Carolina (*Charlotte News* 1948[sec. 2]:1).

“Strange? That's what the workers tearing down the old rooming house ... thought when they found the deceased feline” (*Charlotte News* 1948[sec. 2]:1).

A third case of a concealed cat accompanied by a rodent was reported in Indiana, Pennsylvania, in 1910, where workers uncovered the “mummified” remains of a cat and rat underneath a brick building they were demolishing (Figure 5.23) (*Indiana Progress* 1910:1). Another case was reported in Adrian, Michigan, in 1934, where workers discovered atypically “mummified” cat and woodpecker under school built in 1859 (Figure 5.24). According to a local newspaper article, “no means of exit or entrance were discernible in the

**Mummified Cat and Rat Unearthed**  
 While digging the foundation for the new White building on Thursday workmen found mummified bodies of a cat and a rat, under the old brick building. Both are well preserved. The curiosities are on exhibition at the Indiana cigar store.

Figure 5.23. Cat and rat found in Indiana, Pennsylvania (*Indiana Progress* 1910:1).

stone foundation,” indicating that the animals were interred during the original construction episode (*Adrian Daily Telegram* 1934:1). This is the only

reported case in the United States of a concealed cat accompanied by a bird.

Only two cases of concealed cats accompanied by objects with known ritual associations are known at this time. The first example is from a deposit that was discovered during renovations to the Terry-Mulford House at the east end of Long Island, where a man’s boot and a “desiccated animal form” the size and shape of an adult cat fell out of the wall when paneling surrounding the central chimney was removed (Amy Folk 2011, pers. comm.). Although the shoe was retained, the remains of the cat were discarded without documentation, although it was reported to the Northampton Concealed Shoe Index as a “smoked cat” (May 2001; Geisler 2003). Amy Folk of the Oysterponds Historical Society believes the animal was indeed a cat and appeared to have been preserved in some manner, as it was completely dried and missing all its fur (Amy Folk 2011, pers. comm.). The house’s builder was born in southern England and constructed the house ca. 1639-1655; however, work was done on the chimney between 1720 and 1740, which also corresponds to the approximate date of the shoe, indicating that the cat and shoe were concealed near the chimney during the first half of the 18th

**MUMMIFIED CAT, BIRD FOUND IN EXCAVATION UNDER A RAISIN SCHOOL**

The CWA program has uncovered a tragedy in Raisin School District No. 6.

Workmen in digging for a basement found under the school building the mummified bodies of a cat and a woodpecker. It was believed they had been under the building since its erection in 1859, because no means of exit or entrance were discernible in the stone foundation.

The cat and bird are being kept on exhibit at the school.

Figure 5.24. Cat and woodpecker from Adrian, Michigan (*Adrian Daily Telegram* 1934:1).

century. The preserved appearance of the animal (similar to other examples previously discussed), its association with a shoe, and the location of both artifacts near the chimney indicate that this case is another example of a deliberately concealed cat.

The second case of a concealed cat found with other known ritual objects comes from Susquehanna, Pennsylvania. At the Dritt Mansion, built between 1738 and 1758 by the Meyer family, a dried cat was found in a shaft beside a chimney. Like the “spiritual middens” reported in England and elsewhere in the United States, this deposit consisted of a large assemblage of artifacts, including a woman’s single left-footed shoe, multiple shoe and leather fragments, a large dried and flattened toad, fragments of fishing net, sticks or dowel rods with notches cut into them, and a tobacco leaf skewered by a stick (Jan Klinedinst 2012, pers. comm.).

### **Ethnohistorical Evidence in the United States**

Like their counterparts in the British Isles and continental Europe, Americans in the 17th century associated cats with witchcraft and devilry. Colonial records are rife with testimony in which victims of witchcraft alleged to have been visited or tormented by feline familiars. One witness in a 1692 trial in Ipswich, Massachusetts, claimed to have seen an unusual animal that appeared first as a cat and then as a little dog (Demos 2004:19-20). Another witness declared that she had been harassed by a creature that first appeared as an owl before transforming into a cat and then a dog (Demos 2004:140). Others recalled being attacked by a “great white cat” and meeting a “white thing like a cat” (Demos 2004:141, 147). In one instance, a man claimed to have been attacked by a

feline in his sleep: “as he lay in his Bed, there came in at the Window, the likeness of a Cat, which flew upon him, took fast hold of his Throat, lay on him a considerable while, and almost killed him” (C. Mather 1693:142).

The general association of cats with witchcraft lasted well beyond the colonial period, continuing in some areas into the late 19th and early 20th centuries. In Maryland folklore, black cats were associated with the Devil (Whitney and Bullock 1925:78). In the Alleghany Mountains, it was said that “a witch's familiar, when a cat, is always black, and all cats of this color are more or less possessed” (Porter 1894:114-115). In Tennessee and Kentucky, a girl who owned a black cat would never marry and was guaranteed to be an old maid, reinforcing the negative stereotype that black cats are the companions of crones (Thomas and Thomas 1920:245; Farr 1935:332).

The transmogrified witch-cat is also quite common in American folklore. In the late 17th century, Grace Sherwood, a well-known accused witch from Virginia, was said to have attacked a woman in her sleep while in the shape of a cat: “the said Grace came to her one night and rid her and went out of the key hole or crack of the door like a black Catt” (Davis 1957:146). More recently, witch-cat folktales have been recorded in Illinois (Hyatt 1935:458,482), Kentucky (Thomas and Thomas 1920:278), Maryland (Cross 1919:234; Whitney and Bullock 1925:79), North Carolina (Porter 1894:114-115; Cross 1919:233-234), and Pennsylvania (Starr 1891:324). Cross (1919:233-234) recorded a tale in which two witches “assumed the form of cats before scampering up the chimney.” Witch-cat stories often include the severed paw/transferred blow motif seen in the Old World. The following tale comes from the Alleghany Mountain region:

While kindling a fire on the hearth a brindled cat glided out of the chimney, and without exciting any special attention on his part at this time, ensconced herself in a dark corner near the door. He [the miller] soon had a cheerful blaze, and sat down by a table in front of it to read his Bible. But as time passed a feeling of uneasiness, of which he was conscious from the first, grew upon him, and gradually deepened into a kind of horror. It was utterly unconnected with any definite apprehension, or sense of real danger. Then the cat got up and wailed at the door, clawing to be let out. She rubbed against his legs, and looked up at him. Instantly an awful half-recognition of those eyes shot through his brain, and leaping up he seized the axe and struck at her, cutting off one foot. With a wild woman's scream the creature darted up the chimney and disappeared, while he, thoroughly unnerved, hastened home, and found his wife bleeding to death from a severed hand (Porter 1894:115).

In the United States, cats were widely viewed as “uncanny creatures” in the late 19th century (Brinton 1892:181). As in the British Isles, they sucked the breath of babies and mutilated corpses (Hoffman 1889:27; Brinton 1892:181; Cross 1919:233-234; Hyatt 1935:600; Kittredge 1956:178; Brendle and Unger 1935:21). According to Kittredge (1956:178), a cat would steal the soul of the dead, and Hyatt (1935:600) recorded the belief that the spirit of the recently deceased leaves the body in the shape of a cat. Allergic reactions to felines were common, prompting 17th-century theologian Increase Mather to observe that, “there are some, who if a Cat accidentally come into the Room, though neither see it, nor are told of it, will presently be in a Sweat, an dread to die away” (Kittredge 1956:178).

Cats were also employed in folk remedies, although they appear to have been used differently from those recorded in the British Isles. Instead of healing eye ailments, cats were used primarily in the curing of shingles, the most common method involving applying the blood of a black cat to the affected area (Farr 1935:326; Hyatt 1935:269; Randolph 1947:147). Less common uses for black cats included remedies for

consumption (Starr 1891:322), rheumatism (Cross 1909:255), and warts (Farr 1935:328).

The following excerpt was taken from a Tennessee newspaper in the first decade of the 20th century:

The hide of a black cat dried in an autumn sun and worn around the waist in the form of a belt will keep rheumatism away,” said Mark Duvall, of Alexander, La., at the Hotel Duncan. “Now, don't laugh, and wait until after you've heard the story. For three years I had symptoms of rheumatism—very painful symptoms. I lay awake nights and suffered a thousand deaths—mentally and physically. One day an old negro working on an adjoining plantation told me of the black cat hide remedy. Of course, I didn't believe in it, but like a drowning man grabbing at a straw, thought I would give it a trial, as I knew the old-time Southern darky to be a real good doctor. I had a black cat killed in October and let the hide stay out for about fifteen days to dry. I then cut it up and made a belt about one inch wide out of it. I put on the belt and wore it for eight weeks. Believe me when I say that my rheumatic pains had entirely disappeared the third week. I have never had a pain since and I still have my black cat belt (Cross 1909:255).

In this instance, the use of the cat's hide brings to mind the skinning marks found on medieval cat bones and Prehal's (2011) suggestion that cat's were skinned in order to obtain their pelts for magico-religious remedies and charms.

In the 19th and 20th centuries, black cats were widely considered unlucky in the United States, particularly if they crossed one's path (Norlin 1918:210; Cross 1919:233-234; Hyatt 1935). Killing a cat was also considered unlucky (Brinton 1892:181; Thanet 1892:123; Parker 1907:245; Norlin 1918:210; Cross 1919:233-234; Whitney and Bullock 1925:10; Browne 1958:227), especially by drowning (Hyatt 1935:93). But if one should die, it must be disposed of carefully. Randolph (1947:75) recorded a belief in the Ozarks that, “whatever happens, *never* burn a dead cat; bury it deep in the ground, or throw it into a running stream.”

Some informants reported that it was unlucky if a cat takes up residence at a house (Whitney and Bullock 1925:10; Hyatt 1935:91-92; Browne 1958:226). However, this belief was not ubiquitous in the United States, probably reflecting a variety of perceptions regarding cats in the Old World. Hyatt's (1935:91-92) informants in Illinois thought cats bestowed both good and bad luck. In Alabama, Kentucky, and Maryland, a cat, particularly a black cat, was said to bring good luck to a house (Thomas and Thomas 1920:245-246; Whitney and Bullock 1925:10; Browne 1958:226). However, once a cat took up residence, it was thought unlucky to take it with you if you should move (Parker 1907:244; Norlin 1918:213; Cross 1919:233-234; Thomas and Thomas 1920:246; Hand 1961:383). In Kentucky, the consequence for taking a cat when moving into a new house was three years of bad luck (Thomas and Thomas 1920:134). In North Carolina, an unusual method was devised for avoiding the bad luck that would accompany the relocation of a cat: "It is bad luck to move a cat; but if you pull the cat into the house by the tail, it is all right" (Hand 1961:383).

### **Syncretic Expressions**

As with witch bottles and concealed footwear, in the United States, beliefs regarding cats, particularly black cats, were incorporated into a syncretic and multivalent system of folk magic that drew from various cultural traditions. The most prominent example of this process in relation to cats is the black cat bone. The black cat bone is a charm or amulet common in African American hoodoo. In this form, the sacred and supernatural qualities of the cat, instead of bestowing luck, protection, or fortune on a

building and its occupants, were adapted to a portable personal charm or amulet.

Depending on the source, the black cat bone was said to bestow good luck, invisibility, protection from conjure or witchcraft, immunity from the law, and favorable outcomes in love and fortune (*Journal of American Folklore [JAF]* 1899:228; Wintemberg 1899:49; Hyatt 1935:455,520; Hand 1964:155; Long 2001:83; Anderson 2005:table 3).

The various methods for obtaining a black cat bone are well documented. First, an unfortunate feline was procured and boiled alive. Once the flesh was removed, the magical bone could be distinguished in a variety of ways. Often it was said to float to the top of the pot or to float upstream when thrown into running water (*JAF* 1899:228; Hand 1964:155; Long 2001:83). Another method involved standing in front of a mirror or a companion and placing each bone, one by one, into the mouth until invisibility was achieved, thereby revealing the magical bone (*JAF* 1899:228; Wintemberg 1899:49; Anderson 2005:105). One set of instructions was quite specific:

Put ashes and water into a pot, set it over a fire and let it come to a boil. Have ready a black cat (not a strand of white hair on him), cut his head off, put him in the lye, and let boil until all the flesh has left the bones. Take out every bone. Wash them. Now for finding the luck bone; take up one bone, place it in your mouth, and ask your partner, 'Do you see me?' If he says yes, you will have to try another, asking the same question every time. When you put the witchy bone in your mouth he will say, 'I don't see you.' Then take that bone, put it in your pocket and keep it there, and you can steal anything you want and no one will see. In fact, you can do any kind of trick you want, and no one will know it (*JAF* 1899:228).

Clearly the details of the procedure were open to interpretation. For example, Hyatt (1935:455) recorded the following method in Illinois: "Boil a black cat until all the meat comes off and take the bones to the four corners of the road and you will meet the

devil. Then talk to him and you will have good luck all your life.” Another informant instructed to “burn a black cat up and there will be one bone that will not burn up; that is called the lucky bone, and if you carry that bone you will never have bad luck” (Hyatt 1935:520).

Although the black cat bone is generally associated with African American hoodoo or conjure, the charm was in fact known to both white and black Americans and draws inspiration from both European and West African sources of magico-religious ritual and belief (*JAF* 1899; Anderson 2005:table 3). It is possible that the magical role of cats in Egypt influenced the belief in the supernatural powers of cats in West African, and later African American, culture. Long (2001:15) has suggested that the lucky black cat bone was inspired by the Hand of Glory charm in European folk magic, whereby possessing the severed hand of a hanged man was thought to bestow magical powers, most notably the power to unlock doors and commit crimes without detection.

### **Modern Reinterpretations**

Like shoes, homeowners and builders who find a concealed cat often feel that the animal should not be taken from the building, and if it is, bad luck and misfortune are sure to follow (Pennick 1986:11-13). There are numerous examples of cats being deliberately reinterred in buildings (Pennick 1986). One discoverer in Norfolk, England, is reported to have said, upon finding two dried cats in the attic, “I could never take the cats we have found—which are in perfect condition—out of the house. They have been here for hundreds of years and must stay” (Pennick 1986:13). A similar account of a

concealed cat being reinterred after its initial discovery was documented by Pennick (1986:15): “It was recommended by a local folklorist that it should be replaced—‘Strange things happen when these things are disturbed.’” In Devon, England, the same dried cat was replaced in the wall of a house on two separate occasions (Figure 5.25). The cat was first discovered more than 20 years ago and put back by a prior resident. When the cat was again discovered in 2009, the current homeowner confessed: “I cannot throw it away so we plan to put it back on completion of the building work. But my wife is not all that keen on it, as she says she will have bad dreams” (Savill 2009). In the United



Figure 5.25. Homeowner Richard Parson with the dried cat he plans to put back in the wall. Photo by APEX (Savill 2009).

States, at least two cat specimens have been reinterred in the buildings in which they were found: the example from the Carlyle House in Virginia and the example discovered in a house in Berkeley, California.

Although most concealed cats tend to be either naturally or artificially desiccated, there are numerous examples that have been found in other forms, primarily skeletal. By looking at some examples from the late 19th century, it appears that the traditional process for preserving the cats was replaced by more modern methods. The skeletal remains recovered in a shoebox in the Ohio Statehouse are one example. However, the most intriguing case is the taxidermied cat found concealed in the wall of a house in Fortville, Indiana. In this case it appears that the person responsible for immuring the cat knew that the cat should be preserved in some manner before concealment but, being

unfamiliar with the traditional method of desiccation, resorted to taxidermy. This example likely represents a modern reinterpretation of an older folk ritual.

## **Analysis and Discussion**

As in the two previous chapters, the material and ethnohistorical evidence from the British Isles, continental Europe, Australia, and the United States can be compared to help interpret the meaning and function of concealed cat deposits. The physical data demonstrates that the practice of concealing cats appears to have begun in the central Middle Ages (the 11th through the 13th centuries) and continued to a limited extent into the early 20th century. In the United States, the practice peaks in the mid- to late 19th century, similar to the peak seen in concealed shoe deposits. The majority of reported cases outside of the U.S. come from England and Germany, suggesting a possible Anglo-Saxon origin. The appearance of the custom in Scandinavia also suggests a north-central European origin. In the United States, concealed cat deposits are found primarily in the Mid-Atlantic region and states just to the west. Unlike concealed footwear, cat deposits are noticeably absent from New England.

Concealed cats are most often found in domestic structures but appear frequently in ecclesiastic structures as well, particularly those associated with the Episcopal Church, an American off-shoot of the Anglican Church. There is also some preliminary indication that cats may have been concealed on oceangoing vessels. Within buildings, cats are most often reported as coming from foundation and sub-floor cavities, followed by deposits in walls. This is notably different from concealed shoes and boots, which are seldom found

near foundations and are more commonly associated with the wall or hearth. Other significant patterns include the recurrent presence of preserved rats, mice, and birds, and the arrangement of cats into violent attack or predatory positions. While other associated artifacts are occasionally found (a shoe, a newspaper, sprigs of rosemary), they are the exception and not the rule.

Scholars in Europe and Australia have offered various theories as to why cats were deliberately concealed in buildings. Those theories range from a reduced form of foundation sacrifice, a charm to protect a house from evil spirits and witches' familiars, a method for scaring away pests, an amulet for protection from fire, a folk remedy, and a general good luck charm. The evidence for each theory will now be considered.

The theory that has received the least attention and is the least supported by the material and ethnohistorical evidence is the idea that cats were immured in buildings as part of a folk remedy or cure. De Somer (2003:8) proposes that cats were concealed in buildings as a form of folk medicine, observing that, "a cat's paw was also seen as an amulet to help against rheumatism." Although the ethnohistorical data does indicate that cats were used in folk remedies in both Europe and the United States, most of those remedies involved mutilating the cat and using a part of the body—usually the blood, tail, skull, or hide. With the exception of the handful of cats in Germany that were found with their left front paws severed, there is little indication that cats were mutilated and then concealed as a part of a folk remedy.

Another unlikely explanation is that cats were concealed to protect a house from fire (de Somer 2003:8). There is some evidence for this belief in the ethnohistorical record, but it is infrequent. In addition, while some concealed cats are found near hearths

and chimneys—a logical location for a charm intended to offer protection from fire—deposits in those locations are relatively rare; thus this explanation for cat concealment seems unlikely.

In her original 1951 article on dried cats, Howard put forth three possible theories to explain the presence of cats in buildings: foundation sacrifice, vermin-scare, and accidental entrapment. The third explanation—accidental entrapment—has already been examined and it has been determined that while a number of cases could be dismissed as accidental, it is clear that many specimens were deliberately placed. Therefore, the remaining two theories proposed by Howard will now be considered.

The vermin scare theory is based on the fact that historically cats have served an important role as vermin catchers and pest control in urban areas, agricultural settings, and on oceangoing ships. Howard (1951:151) suggests that because cats were widely valued for pest control, “this appreciation may, later on, have led to the idea that the enclosing of a cat in the walls of a house would protect the building from vermin,” a theory repeated by Sheehan (1990). Evans (2010:164) also proposes that cats were concealed as talismans to ward off rats that carried plague-infested fleas, based on the observation that several cat deposits believed to date to the early 20th century were found near the epicenter of a 1900 plague epidemic in Sydney, Australia (Evans 2010:168-170).

Although no folklore regarding the use of the dead bodies of cats as charms against vermin was encountered during research, the connection between cats and rodent control is otherwise well documented (Figure 5.26). Taking into consideration the laws of magic, it would make sense that the mundane attributes of an object—in this case, the role of the cat as vermin catcher—would influence its use as a magico-religious charm.



Figure 5.26. Medieval illustration of two cats chasing rats (<http://vintageprintable.swivelchairmedia.com/animal/animal-cat/medieval-animal-cat-and-rats/>).

Since magic was used to rid a house of pests (as evidenced by charms reported in Spain and Scotland), it is possible that in the British Isles and northern Europe, the bodies of cats may have been used as charms for a similar purpose (de Somer 2003:8). Furthermore, the fact that numerous specimens have been reported in association with rodents and birds, particularly in cases where the cats and prey are deliberately posed as if in the midst of a chase or an attack, lends credibility to this theory.

Merrifield (1987:129) and Hoggard (1999) have pointed out that the bodies of cats are often found in locations inaccessible to rodents, such as in a sealed masonry cavity, or are otherwise impractically situated for deterring pests, such as in a roof. Hoggard (2004:175) argues that, “the notion that dead cats were used in past times to scare vermin does not seem very likely. Rats in particular are probably more likely to eat a dead cat than run away from it no matter how fierce it looks.” Whether a dead cat in a wall would actually deter pests is not particularly relevant, however. According to Sheehan (1990:68), “That they would not have been visible to the rodents they were meant to deter is unimportant, given the probability that such deposits were essentially viewed as charms.” However, Merrifield also points out that the use of concealed cats as vermin scares “was hardly less superstitious, with its occasional quasi-magical imitation of a hunting cat” (Merrifield 1987:31).

Somewhat related to the concept of vermin control is the idea suggested by Pennick (1986:8-15) and Merrifield (1987:131) and later repeated by Hoggard (1999, 2000, 2004), de Somer (2003:8), Schad (2005), and Evans (2010:171-172) that, due to their longstanding association with witchcraft and devilry, cats may have been concealed as apotropaic charms to ward off malevolent forces, particularly witches' familiars or "spiritual vermin." Hoggard suggests that the presence of concealments in such locations signifies that the cats were not intended to scare away earthly vermin but were instead intended "to act as vermin scarers on a more spiritual plane" (Hoggard 2000): "It is possible, though, that people believed that a dead cat concealed in a building might continue its vermin catching role on a more spiritual plane of existence. Likewise it may be that people immured cats believing that their spirits could ward off other evil spirits (Hoggard 2004:175). According to Merrifield (1987:131), "The great obsession of the 17th century was with witchcraft, and witches were supposed to work their evil by means of familiar spirits, that often took the form of rats or mice. Were the cats intended to repel these rather than flesh-and-blood rodents?" Evans proposes that,

the cats were chosen and concealed for their supposed ability to function in the underworld and, perhaps, to deal with the diabolical forces that may have been considered to be instrumental in the spread of the plague. Lingering fears of the underworld as a source of evil may have influenced the precautions taken by either the builders or the occupants (Evans 2010:171-172).

As Merrifield has pointed out, this argument is problematic for several reasons. In the ethnohistorical record in both Europe and the United States, cats, particularly black cats, are often associated with witchcraft. The cat has historically been perceived as an emissary or companion of evil, not a protector from these forces. Therefore, placing the

body of a cat in the wall to ward off evil creatures appears to be an unlikely motive. Furthermore, although there are plenty of modern assumptions that concealed cats were intended to ward off witchcraft and evil (Howard 1951:150; Pennick 1986:10-11; Harte 1997; de Somer 2003; Hoggard 2004), there is no ethnohistorical evidence to support this theory. The only historical account indicating a possible apotropaic use for cats



Figure 5.27. Witches and their various animal familiars (Hopkins 1647:frontispiece).

was recorded by Trevelyan (1909:80)—“Black cats keep care and trouble away from the house”—which could indicate any number of misfortunes, including illness or injury, financial hardship, fire, marital discord, or just plain bad luck. Even Schütte’s (1924:363) description of cats buried under the thresholds of Danish houses explains that this was done to bestow the house with a spirit, which may have served a protective function but does not directly identify protection from witchcraft as a primary motive.

Secondly, although witches’ familiars frequently took the form of cats, it was not the only animal form that familiars assumed (Figure 5.27). Familiars could manifest as almost any small animal, including foxes, weasels, dogs, cats, hares, owls and other birds, rats and mice, snakes, newts, lizards, frogs and toads, and even insects (Kittredge 1956:179-182; Harte 1997; Demos 2004:140-141; Roud 2003:64). And yet, with a few exceptions, these animals are rarely found concealed in buildings and certainly not in the same numbers as cats (Howard 1951; Harte 1997; Hoggard 1999:fn 33). Harte (1997)

rationalizes the absence of other common animal familiars such as hares by unconvincingly arguing that, “it is much easier to catch a live cat than a live hare.” However, according to Roud (2003:64), “the assumption that a witch’s familiar will necessarily be a black cat is a relatively modern one,” emerging as recently as the late 19th century. In British and New England folk tales, witches were just as likely—some say more likely—to take the form of a hare as that of a cat (Kittredge 1956:179; Harte 1997; Roud 2003:64).

It is not entirely impossible, however, that some cats were immured in buildings as a form of protection from witchcraft. In particular, the examples of cats in Germany found with their left front paws severed suggest that those animals may have been associated with evil (Schad 2005). Tales of witch-cats that include the transferred blow motif often describe the severing of a hand or paw. As described in Chapter 2, the left is often perceived as sinister or unclean; it is the domain of the Devil. Since Germany was a hotbed of witchcraft persecution, one might expect to find stronger associations between cats and witchcraft than in either the British Isles or the United States, which saw significantly fewer mass trials. It is possible that the cats with severed paws were suspected of being witches in disguise and were maimed in order to confirm these suspicions or to injure a distant witch by harming her familiar. Even so, their presence in concealed contexts in buildings is puzzling, since it is difficult to imagine how keeping the dead body of a suspected witch-cat in the house would be beneficial.

Another prevalent theory, although not as popular with scholars as the witch or familiar repellent concept, is that cats were immured in buildings as a form of foundation sacrifice (Howard 1951; Merrifield 1987:131; Sheehan 1990:68; Hoggard 1999,

2004:176). Hoggard (2004:176) reports that while collecting data for his survey, several informants in England suggested that cats were sacrificed “to the building itself, to give it a life so that it will not take one later through some kind of tragic accident.” The idea that concealing a cat will imbue the house with life or “spirit” is further supported by Schütte’s (1924) observations in Jutland. Schad (2005) also reports that in Ludwigsburg, dried cats are believed by the locals to represent building sacrifices.

Indeed, throughout much of the world there is a long and ancient history of foundation sacrifice, consecration rituals, and rites of commencement (Burdick 1901; Hartland 1914:109-115; Ó Súilleabháin 1945; Jarvis 2003). In fact, various manifestations of these rituals—such as topping out and formal time capsules—are still being practiced in the United States today. In Ireland, coins or other objects were placed in the foundations of new buildings as late as the middle of the last century (Ó Súilleabháin 1945; Howard 1951:150).

Significantly, there are several notable cases of concealed cats that appear to have been the work of masons. Howard (1951:149) reports a cat bricked up in partition wall of a home in Gibraltar that she believes was interred by Spanish masons in the late 19th century. There are two cases of cats found in buildings constructed by Sir Christopher Wren: one discovered in the Tower of London and one from the Church of St. Michael Royal in London that included a cat “built into a sealed passage under the roof, behind the moulding of the wall,” both dating to the late 17th century (Howard 1951:149). Furthermore, unlike concealed footwear, in nearly all cases it appears that the homeowner or occupants were not responsible for cat concealment. Instead, the evidence indicates that builders, particularly those involved in the masonry and plastering trades, were

responsible for the deposits. In addition, the presence of numerous cats in the foundation or sub-floor spaces of buildings, where shoes are infrequently found, lends credence to the theory that cat concealments are part of an informal consecration ritual.

Just why cats may have been selected for foundation deposits is unclear. As Hoggard (1999) points out, “this idea of foundation sacrifice seems relatively sensible but you still have to ask why? Is it in the honour of some god or goddess for which there is no obvious evidence?” Howard (1951:150) suggests that foundation sacrifices were intended to be “propitiatory offerings to the gods of the land.” Sheehan (1990:68) proposes that, “as a rite of commencement its aim appears to have been to bind a spirit to the new building for apotropaic and prophylactic purposes,” a theory that is supported by Schütte’s (1924:363) research in Denmark. Perhaps it was the cat’s association with the sacred and supernatural that made it a suitable offering.

Whatever the original function of the custom, by the early modern period, it appears to have been adopted as a general good luck charm. Howard (1951:150) suggests that Wren’s masons “thought of their action as being ‘lucky,’ rather than as a magical propitiation of the Devil.” She concludes that, “the ancient idea of foundation sacrifice, to appease these powers of darkness, could thus, in due course, have become blended with the utilitarian conception of the cat as a vermin-scare and would result in a vague idea that the immuring of a cat in a new building was ‘lucky’” (Howard 1951:151). Indeed, the widespread belief that black cats bring luck to a household may have some relevance to understanding the motive behind cat concealment.

In conclusion, the material and ethnohistorical evidence points to multiple symbolic meanings behind cat concealment. The original and underlying function

appears to be a form of foundation deposit intended to imbue a building with a protective spirit. It is likely that the cat was selected for this honor due to its long-standing association with the sacred and supernatural, and perhaps with fertility and femininity, particularly within the context of pre-Christian religion. As Christianity replaced earlier pagan traditions, the cat became associated with the Devil and with diabolical witchcraft. Although the practice of immuring cats in buildings continued, the meaning behind the ritual changed, manifesting as two different rituals with different functions: a quasi-magical charm to repel vermin and a builders' consecration ritual intended to imbue a building with good luck.

### **A Suggested Typology**

As with witch bottles and concealed footwear, it is important to recognize physical variations in the folk ritual of concealing cats in order to assign an appropriate interpretation to a particular deposit. As described above, cat concealments likely served several different purposes, which may to some extent be identified from the material remains. The following typology has been created to assist archaeologists and others with identifying and discussing the different variations of cat concealments. Type A deposits consist of cats accompanied by dried rats, mice, or less commonly, birds. The use of natural magic employing a cat as a charm against infestation is fairly obvious. As a quasi-magical ritual, the ability of such a display to actually deter rats and mice is unimportant. Clearly, the presence of rodents and birds is the hallmark characteristic of Type A

deposits. There are four known examples of Type A deposits in the United States, including one in which the body of a mouse was found in the mouth of a dried cat.

Type B deposits consist of solitary cats found primarily in sub-floor spaces or foundation cavities, often specially built for the purpose of concealment, and can be described as “foundation deposits.” Such deposits were likely made at the time of construction and almost certainly represent some form of consecration ritual undertaken by members of the building trades, particularly masons, with or without the knowledge of the building’s owners. Such deposits suggest that the concealment was intended as an informal offering to the structure, perhaps intended to imbue the building with a “spirit.” Examples of Type B deposits include the cat found in a foundation cavity at the Carlyle House in Alexandria, Virginia, and the specimen recovered from a similar cavity at a house in Berkeley, California.

Type C deposits are more ambiguous and consist of solitary cats placed in other locations within buildings, such as in a wall or roof. Such deposits may be the result of a general belief that a cat immured in a building conveys good luck to the structure and its occupants. The examples from the Episcopal Diocesan House in Manhattan and the Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia are Type C deposits that appear to have been placed by masons or plasterers. The taxidermied cat found in Fortville, Indiana, and the skeletal remains discovered in the Ohio Statehouse rotunda can also be classified as Type C deposits.

## Chapter Summary

This chapter has presented material and ethnohistorical evidence for the ritual of deliberately concealing cats in buildings in the British Isles, northern Europe, and the United States. While there has been considerable skepticism regarding the deliberate nature of these deposits, the evidence clearly indicates that cats were intentionally immured in buildings, particularly in cases where the animals were artificially posed, concealed in specially built cavities or other unusual contexts, or accompanied by preserved rodents and birds.

There are now well over 100 cases of concealed cats reported from the British Isles and more than 50 from Germany, suggesting a possible Anglo-Saxon or Norse origin for the custom. In the United States, cat concealments tend to be found primarily in the Mid-Atlantic region and the upper Midwest. The practice appears to have originated as a consecration ritual or foundation sacrifice that developed into a quasi-magical charm against rodent infestation and a folk custom practiced by masons and other tradesmen to bring good luck to a building.

Research on concealed cats has been seriously overlooked by scholars, particularly in North America. What little data is available, however, shows some promising avenues for future investigation. In particular, Schad (2005) has demonstrated that a thorough inspection of the bodies of concealed cats can determine cause of death—such as the two cats in Austria that had their necks broken—or reveal other forms of trauma such as broken bones and severed limbs. Evans (2010:164) has suggested using x-ray analysis and forensic methods to identify possible artificial causes of death, including

strangulation, drowning, and poisoning. Pennick (1986:15) has also proposed that analysis be conducted on all specimens “to establish, for instance, whether the cat was buried in salt [for preservation] or whether it had been poisoned before burial. ... [as well as] the exact variety to which each specimen belonged, its general age, sex and condition,” which may have been a factor in the selection of particular animals for concealment.

A more complicated analysis, but one that deserves consideration, involves coat color. There is ample ethnohistorical evidence demonstrating that black cats were believed to possess potent magical attributes, both good and evil; therefore, it seems likely that black cats may have been preferentially selected for concealment. A study published by Todd (1977) shows that the frequency of the nonagouti mutation resulting

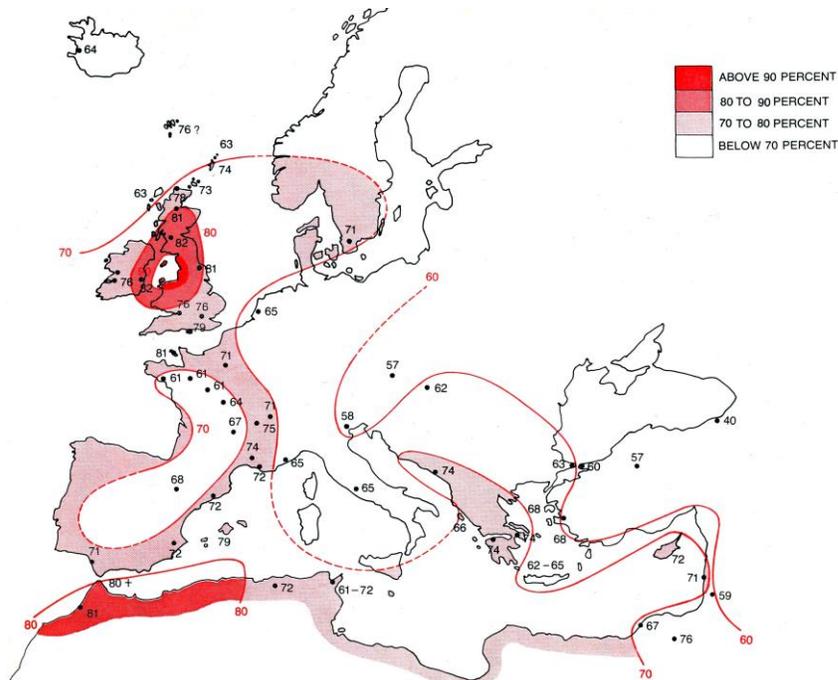


Figure 5.28. Cline map showing the distribution of the nonagouti allele, which results in a uniform coat color, most commonly black (Todd 1977:104).

in domesticated cats with black fur is highest in the British Isles and the northwest coast of Africa (Figure 5.28). The presence of black cats in such high frequencies may explain why black cats are widely perceived as lucky in Great Britain and Ireland and less so in areas with lower frequencies of the allele, such as central Europe. In fact, Todd (1977:106) proposes that, “the high values [of the nonagouti mutation] in Britain stem from the high degree of affiliation implicit in selective migration, reinforced by intensive urbanization.” In other words, black cats were preferentially selected by humans and transported to the British Isles, where their numbers increased dramatically and disproportionately. Unfortunately, most concealed cat specimens are devoid of fur; however, it might be possible to determine coat color by simple observation of the skin. Another possibility is DNA analysis. Recently, DNA analysis has been used to determine coat color variation among Paleolithic horses (Ludwig et al. 2009; Pruvost et al. 2011). Presumably, similar analysis could be conducted on concealed cat specimens to determine coat color and identify any preferential selection based on this characteristic.

In addition to more thorough investigation of cat remains, better documentation of the context of each find is crucial to understanding the motivation behind these concealments. In particular, the precise location of each deposit and distance to the nearest hearth or chimney and door or threshold should be recorded. Other elements of context should be documented, such as the direction the animal is facing or the direction of its head. Specimens should be closely inspected for evidence of tying, binding, or pegging or other indications of deliberate placement and manipulation.

Regarding associated artifacts, the area immediately surrounding cat deposits should be closely inspected for the remains of rats, mice, or birds that may have been

interred with the cats. Such small and seemingly mundane remains may be easily overlooked. Other associated artifacts such as household objects should be noted. Deposits should also be inspected for the presence of botanical remains such as the sprigs of rosemary found at the Carlyle House. Clearly, more thorough documentation and analysis of concealed cat deposits in both the United States and abroad is essential to fully understanding the origin, symbolism, and transformation of this intriguing folk tradition.

## **Chapter 6: Other Concealments**

Material and ethnohistorical evidence for three very different types of ritual concealments have been presented in the preceding chapters. However, witch bottles, footwear, and cats are only a few of the many artifacts that have been found in concealed deposits in and around standing structures in the eastern United States. This chapter offers an overview of some additional ritual concealments and, as in previous chapters, compares them to similar examples found in the British Isles and northern Europe. While in-depth temporal, geographic, and contextual analysis of each artifact type is beyond the scope of this paper, it is anticipated that the following synopsis will give the reader some idea of the broad range of artifacts found in concealed contexts as well as offer additional evidence for the continuation of European magico-religious and secular ritual in colonial and postcolonial America.

## Garments and Textiles

In Chapter 4, the presence of garments and textile fragments accompanying concealed footwear was briefly discussed. In fact, garments and textiles are the second most prevalent artifact type associated with shoe concealments worldwide, occurring in 17% of multi-component deposits (Pitt 1998). Additionally, numerous garments and textiles have been found in deposits without shoes but are far less likely to be reported or properly documented. In Great Britain, concealed garments are so prevalent that textile conservator Dinah Eastop saw the need to establish the Deliberately Concealed Garments Projects (DCGP) to document deposits that might otherwise go unrecorded (Dew and Eastop 2003:22). The DCGP was launched in 1998 with the aim of systematically



Figure 6.1. A selection of garments concealed in buildings in Australia (Evans 2010).

locating, documenting, and investigating deposits of garments and textiles concealed in buildings (Eastop 2006, 2007). As of 2003, the DCGP had identified 80 deposits of concealed garments and textiles in the British Isles, Europe, and North America, with the majority reported from Great Britain (Dew and Eastop 2003:22). Research on concealed garments has also been conducted in Australia, where Ian Evans (2010) has recorded deposits from a dozen sites (Figure 6.1).

Although the type and number of garments found in concealed deposits can vary considerably, some forms appear to be more common than others. Hats, bonnets, caps, and other headwear are prevalent (Figures 6.1, 6.2, and 6.3). Swann (1996) reports that of the 59



Figure 6.2. Man's tricorn hat concealed in a house in Sussex, England. Textile Conservation Centre 2010:Cuckfield Cache.

documented deposits of concealed footwear that contained garments, 19 included hats and caps. Some

examples include a brown felted wool hat found in a buttress of a church in Essex, England, and a man's tricorn hat recovered from a house in Sussex (Figure 6.2) (Eastop 2001; Textile Conservation Centre Foundation [TCCF] 2010). In Switzerland, a knitted cap was found under the wood floor of St. Leonhard of Basle, an Evangelical Protestant church (Eastop 2001). In Fife, Scotland, a velvet hat, folded in half, was found with a



Figure 6.3. Man's folded velvet hat (*top*) and leather work glove (*bottom*) from a cottage in Fife, Scotland. Textile Conservation Centre Foundation 2010:Cupar Cache.

man's leather work glove under the second-story floor of a cottage, directly above the front door (Figure 6.3).

Incidentally, gloves are also commonly found in concealed deposits (Swann 1969:8). Corsets and stays are also in encountered notable numbers. A large deposit found under the floorboards of an attic in West Sussex, England, contained approximately 30 artifacts, including a corset, a hat, and a child's dress (Dew and Eastop 2003:22). Other garments found in concealed contexts include breeches and pants, doublets, jackets and waists,

dresses, undergarments, collars, and pockets (TCCF 2010). Eastop (2001) has suggested that children's clothing may have been selected to protect against infant death or to promote fecundity.

Garments have been found in walls, floors, roofs, and voids or cracks near the hearth and chimney. Like shoes, they are often found in multi-component deposits containing a wide variety of objects. For example, a large deposit found in a hop-filled wall cavity in Surrey, England, consisted of a man's doublet and an 18th-century pocket containing a baby's cap, five coins, a trade token, and document fragments (Eastop 2001).

In addition, almost all concealed garments are heavily worn, with creases, holes, abrasions, and evidence of repair or alteration (Eastop 2007). Eastop (2010:151) has suggested



Figure 6.4. Child's dress found in the Heaume Cache, Guernsey. Photo courtesy of the Priaulx Library, Guernsey.

that worn garments were preferentially selected for concealment, "perhaps because a worn garment retains the form of its wearer's body." Some garments appear to have been purposefully damaged before concealment. Eastop (2006:241) reports a man's waistcoat found near a chimney in a house in Hampshire, England, which appeared to have been deliberately cut and torn before concealment. A child's dress with pieces of fabric deliberately cut or torn away (Figure 6.4) was discovered in a cottage in Guernsey (Bennett 2006). The heavily worn condition of some garments can make it difficult to recognize possible concealments, since they "can be easily mistaken for rags, particularly when mixed with building debris" (Eastop 2010:150).

Unlike concealed shoes, garments and textiles found in deposits within standing structures have received little attention from scholars in the United States. When encountered, they are usually assumed to have a mundane explanation. However, research for this paper identified a total of 28 concealed deposits containing garments or textile fragments, the majority of which were found with shoes or other associated artifacts. A list of American deposits containing garments and textiles is provided in Appendix C. Frequencies of the more prevalent garment types are shown in Table 6.1.

**Table 6.1. Frequency of Garment Types in U.S. Concealments.**

hats, bonnets, and other headwear	6
socks and stockings	5
gloves and mittens	4
corsets and stays	3
pants, overalls, leggings	2
jackets or waists	2
dresses	1
shirts	1
other identifiable garments (bow tie, suspenders, etc.)	4

Similar to deposits in Europe and Australia, the most common types of garments found in American concealments are hats and other headwear, socks and stockings, gloves and mittens, and corsets and stays, with other articles of clothing occurring in fewer numbers. In addition, numerous textile fragments—some clearly derived from sewn garments—have been reported.

Hats and other headwear have been reported from six deposits, all found with shoes or other artifacts. Examples include the campaign hat and Army boot from the barracks at Fort Rosecrans (May 2001); the man’s hat and pair of Wellington boots discovered under a roof in James City County, Virginia (Geisler 2003); a woman’s bonnet found with a man’s boot in a roof at East Hartford, Connecticut; another woman’s bonnet found with shoes and other artifacts in a house in York, Maine (shown previously in Figure 4.39); a leather hat found with a military boot, a woman’s shoe sole, and other

artifacts under a house in Virginia City, Nevada; and a baby's cap found with an unidentified garment in Montgomery, New York (Figure 6.5).

Socks and stockings are also common and have been reported in five concealments in the United States. A large deposit of 29 shoes found under the floorboards behind a wall in a house in Baltimore's Fell's Point neighborhood contained two stockings—one adult's and one child's (CS 2002.34). In Carlisle, Pennsylvania, a deposit found inside a cavity above a



Figure 6.5. A baby's cap and a woman's collar or part of a dress found above a doorway in the Latourette-Clement House, Montgomery, New York. Photo courtesy of Lisa Melville and James McIver.

kitchen fireplace contained two single shoes, some scraps of newspaper, and a repaired sock (Marie Hegglin 2011, elec. comm.). In Cedar Lake, New Jersey, a sea chest concealed underneath a house was found to contain two pairs of ladies' hand-knitted cotton stockings as well as an additional single stocking and an incomplete stocking. The garments were marked with the initials of two different women and all date to ca. 1850.

Gloves and mitten have been found in four deposits, including a pair of mittens found in one of two large shoe concealments at the John Adams Birthplace in Quincy, Massachusetts. Three examples of corsets and stays have been reported in the United States, including a set of baby's or toddler's stays that were recovered from a second-story wall of the late 17th-century Hancock-Clarke House in Lexington, Massachusetts (Elaine Doran 2011, elec. comm.), and a pair of baleen (whalebone) and silk stays found in the attic or roof of the Hammond-Harwood House in Annapolis, Maryland (Figure 6.6) (Allison Titman 2011, elec. comm.; Titman 2011b). A third corset was recovered from a



Figure 6.6. Stays found in the attic or roof of the Hammond-Harwood House, Annapolis, Maryland. Photo courtesy of the Hammond-Harwood House Association (Titman 2011b).

large deposit in Saltville, Virginia, which also included four single shoes, two gloves, a jacket or woman's waist, a bow tie, an umbrella frame, and other assorted artifacts (Eastop 2007; Janice Orr 2011, elec. comm.).

Other notable garments that have been found in concealed contexts include a boy's brown linen jacket dating to 1775-1785, found in the wall of a house in Guilford, Connecticut (Figure 6.7) (Connecticut Historical Society 2008); an apron or petticoat found with the sole of a shoe and other artifacts behind a fireplace on Long Island (Amy Folk 2011, elec. comm.); a child's shirt and overalls found in the attic eaves of a house in Castine, Maine (Paige Lilly 2012, elec. comm.); and a woman's dress and a single shoe found behind a fireplace mantle in Weymouth, Massachusetts. At the Latourette-Clement House, two of the three deposits included garments or textile fragments. One large multi-component deposit, previously described in Chapter 4, contained a woman's glove, a sock, several textile fragments, and the end of a lined sleeve (Figure 6.8).

In some instances, only fragments of garments or textiles have been recovered from deposits; although, even these small pieces may have had ritual



Figure 6.7. Boy's brown linen jacket found in a wall in Guilford, Connecticut. Photo courtesy of the Connecticut Historical Society.



Figure 6.8. End of a lined sleeve found in a large multi-component deposit at the Latourette-Clement House, Montgomery, New York. Photo courtesy of Lisa Melville and James McIver.

significance. In Marblehead, Massachusetts, a piece of striped fabric and a shoe were found together in the first-floor ceiling of a house (Figure 6.9) (Elliott 2009). At the Ezekiel Moody House in Nobleboro, Maine, three shoes and a piece of black wool fabric approximately 10 inches square were found in a partition wall (CS 2003.27; Mary Sheldon 2011, elec. comm.).

The connection between clothing and sweat has already been discussed, suggesting that like shoes, heavily worn clothing may have provided an intimate connection to an individual or family through contagious magic. According to Hyatt (1970-1978[3]:2677), “clothing is a substitute for the human body only if it contains sweat—it must be dirty.” This close association with sweat may be why hats, socks, and stockings are frequently encountered in concealments. It also seems that garments which retain something of the shape of the wearer—hats, gloves, corsets and stays—are preferentially selected.

The ritual significance of articles of clothing such as socks, headwear, and undergarments also appears in ethnohistorical descriptions of folk ritual. While a complete survey of sources describing the ritual use of clothing was not undertaken as part of this study,



Figure 6.9. Shoe and piece of striped fabric found in the ceiling of a house in Marblehead, Massachusetts (Elliott 2009a).

some relevant data was encountered during the course of research. For example, in the early 20th century, Crosby (1927:307) recorded the following account of “modern witches” in Indiana County, Pennsylvania:

The general procedure appears to be that if you desire your enemy to become lame, first steal (the lack of knowledge on the victim's part is essential) one of his shoes or socks, then fill it with hot coals or dip it in scalding water every night, at the same time removing your own shoes and stockings. On the seventh day, you take the stolen object to the witch who retains it until the treatment is effectual. A similar practice can be applied to any part of the body. This custom seems to be extremely popular, and is presumably efficacious, as the enchantress's hut resembles a clothing store and I suppose there must be some results to justify the continued faith.

Crosby (1927:306) relates another account in which a local witch or cunning woman, offended at not being extended a formal invitation to a new baby's naming ceremony, approached the child, snatched off its cap, and pronounced a curse that it would wither away and die upon reaching adulthood. Several years later, Crosby convinced the woman to burn the baby's cap, thus breaking the spell, much to the relief of the child's family. This description of the ritual use of clothing involves manipulative magic or maleficium and employs the principle of contagion.

Other descriptions of the ritual use of clothing involve apotropaic measures intended to keep away harmful non-human beings. For example, Hyatt (1935:80) was told by a European American informant that, “A new silk hat put in your doorway keeps out evil spirits.” A German American informant recalled that when she was a girl, a woman she worked for would have her hang black coats over every exterior door in the evening, “to keep witches out of the house at night” (Hyatt 1935:520). Briggs (1957:276) reports that in England, any of the garments of a newborn baby's father can be used to

protect the child from being carried off by fairies before its christening. This apotropaic use of garments is nearly identical to the description provided by Currier (1891:256), in which a woman in Vermont attempted to place the shoe of a newborn baby's mother above the child's head immediately upon delivery. Similarly, garments turned inside out or put on backwards are frequently cited as an effective way to repel fairies and witches (Briggs 1976:335).

Hyatt also recorded numerous accounts among African Americans that describe the use of garments in conjure and folk magic. For example, an informant from Norfolk, Virginia, provided the following instructions: "Get the shoes or socks of someone, combine them with your underclothes and some pins and needles and bury them." In fact, Hyatt encountered so many references to clothing in the course of his research that he included a separate section for hats and another for socks and stockings in *Hoodoo—Conjuration—Witchcraft—Rootwork*, suggesting that these are the most common garments used in American hoodoo after shoes (Hyatt 1970-1978[3]:2677).

The study of the ritual use of garments and textiles in concealed deposits in the United States is relatively new territory. A critical first step is acknowledging the possibility that worn, torn, dirty pieces of fabric may have been deliberately deposited and likely held special significance for an individual or family. As such, all "rags" found in structural voids should be documented and preserved, following similar procedures for concealed shoe deposits and associated finds.

## Dolls and Poppets

In Great Britain and Europe, figurines or dolls called *poppets* were frequently used in image magic up through the early 20th century (Kittredge 1956:91). Generally, these poppets were constructed of clay, wax, wood, or cloth and were pinched, twisted, stroked, burnt, pricked with pins, or otherwise tortured in the belief that what was done to the poppet would also be suffered by the intended victim (Kittredge 1956:73-91; Demos 2008:98). A late example of an English poppet, dating to ca. 1910, seen in Figure 6.10, is said to have been “created and dressed in a gown fashioned from stolen material from out of the victim's wardrobe”

(Museum of Witchcraft 2012).

Dolls and poppets are occasionally found in concealments. Simpson and Roud (2000:193) suggest that some poppets “could be buried or hidden, causing lingering sickness to the victim.” According to Rushen (1984:34), in England, “Wooden and clay dolls were sometimes secreted into the structure of houses; the motive, one suspects, is linked to witchcraft in many cases.” In some instances the intent of the poppet is quite clear. For example, a late 19th-century poppet found in a crevice in the brickwork of a house in Hereford, England, was accompanied by a handwritten curse tucked into the doll's skirt: “Mary Ann Ward. I act this spell on you from my holl heart wishing you to never sleep the rester part of your life. I hope your flesh will waste away and I hope you will never spend another penny I



Figure 6.10. Early 20th-century English poppet constructed of fabric stolen from the intended victim's wardrobe. Image courtesy of the Museum of Witchcraft, Boscastle, Cornwall, England, U.K.



Figure 6.11. Poppet and written curse found in a house in Hereford, England. Image courtesy of Hereford Museum and Art Gallery, Hereford, England, U.K.

ought to have. Wishing this from my whole heart” (Figure 6.11) (Pennick 1986:7; Simpson and Roud 2000:193; Herefordshire Council 2010). Clearly dolls and poppets were frequently used in maleficium.

On the other hand, when concealed dolls or poppets lack obvious clues such as written curses or evidence of pins or other manipulation, the purpose for their internment in buildings is less clear (Pennick 1986:7). It is possible that anthropomorphic figures may have been used for purposes other than malicious magic. Some may symbolically represent a domestic spirit and were intended to bring good luck to the house. Other’s may have represented a symbolic sacrificial offering to the building or to a troublesome house spirit. In Holland, small doll-like effigies of children in swaddling bands have been found in the roofs of old houses and are said to have replaced actual child foundation sacrifice (Pennick 1986:7). Such figures may also be connected to fecundity magic, to help the woman of the house bear healthy children.

Another possibility is that some dolls and poppets may represent the contribution of a child to a larger deposit representing the family or as part of a builders’ consecration deposit. For example, a multi-component deposit or possible spiritual midden discovered in a plaster-and-lath wall of a house in Anstruther, Fife, Scotland, contained a cloth doll, a page from a Bible, a page of hymns, a George II halfpenny, a small bottle with a broken neck, a piece of stained glass, several wine corks, ears of corn, a few dried peas, a



Figure 6.12. Cloth doll, a page from a Bible, and a page of hymns discovered concealed in a house in Anstruther, Fife, Scotland (Darwood and Sherriff 2003:figure 4).

bobbin, and chicken and pig bones (Figure 6.12) (Darwood and Sherriff 2003). The doll did not display evidence of pins, curses, or other maleficium magic.

Pennick (1986:7) reports a multi-component deposit from the roof of St. Andrew’s Hospital (formerly a workhouse) in Billericay,

Essex, England, believed to have been concealed in the mid-19th century. Pennick (1986:7) interprets the artifacts—which include two 4-inch-long doll-like effigies, a ruminant jawbone and thighbone, a piece of coal, and a notched wooden stick approximately three inches in length (Figure 6.13)—as offerings that represent a building ritual. Pennick (1986:7) argues that multi-component deposits such as those found at Billericay and Anstruther are significant because they symbolically associate doll-like figures with other common ritual artifacts, indicating their use beyond maleficium.

Ethnohistorical accounts indicate that puppets were also common in North America during the colonial period. In 1688, Goodwife Glover, an Irish Catholic living in Boston, Massachusetts, was accused of witchcraft. The authorities ordered her house searched, “from whence there were brought into the court, several small Images, or Puppets, or Babies, made of Raggs, and stuff’t with Goat’s hair, and other such Ingredients”



Figure 6.13. Doll and other artifacts recovered from a building in Essex, England (Pennick 1986:8).

(Godbeer 1992:38-39). In another incident, a woman was accused of torturing her brother with image magic: “there was found with her a Poppet in Wax, resembling him, with a pin stuck into the Head of it” (Godbeer 1992:39). Similar objects were described during the Salem trials, when numerous accounts of the use of poppets emerged. One of the accused witches confessed to harming her victims “by Roling up a handcherchef and Soe Imagining to be a representation of a person” (Godbeer 1992:39). Another was accused of making two poppets and jabbing them with pins “to bewitch the said Children by which one of them dyed, the other very sick” (Godbeer 1992:39). When John and William Blye assisted their neighbor, Bridget Bishop, in knocking down an old wall in her cellar, they discovered “in holes of the s’d owld wall Belonging to the s’d sellar . . . Severall popitts made up of Raggs And hogs Brusells w’th headles pins in Them, w’th the points out ward” (St. George 1998:188).

The use of poppets appears to have continued in the United States into the early 20th century. Randolph (1947:287) reported that some magical professionals in the Ozarks, “prefer to make a little image of mud or beeswax to represent the witch. This ‘poppet’ is covered with cloth once worn by the guilty woman. Then the witch doctor drives nails into the poppet, or beats it with a hammer, or burns it” (Randolph 1947:287). Randolph provides several additional accounts of the use of poppets for maleficium, including the following:

I once knew a man who spent half-an-hour or so every evening playing with a wooden spite doll, which was dressed to resemble a local woman who could ‘do things.’ Time after time he would thrust the little image into the fireplace, until the feet touched the glowing embers, and then snatch it out again. The expression on his face was most unpleasant. . . . I should not care to have that man burning a poppet wrapped in *my* undershirt (Randolph 1947:288-89).

Several examples of possible poppets have been reported in the United States. At the Benjamin Horton House in Cutchogue, Long Island, “three old home-made dolls made of twigs bound together and wrapped with hand-woven linen—and one with a corncob head,” were found concealed behind the original walls of the ca. 1659 house (Figure 6.14) (Brown 1940:19-20; St. George 1998:188). St.

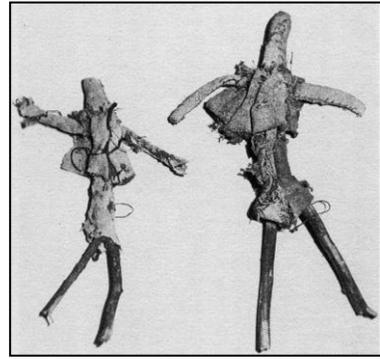


Figure 6.14. Two of the three stick and linen rag poppets recovered from the Benjamin Horton House, Cutchogue, Long Island (St. George 1998:figure 69).

George claims that these dolls represent magical poppets similar to the ones described in colonial accounts.

Another example of concealed dolls or poppets comes from Damascus, Virginia, where a set of six images was found concealed in the wall of a house. The crude dolls are made of muslin rags stuffed with straw and appear to represent a family consisting of two adults (a man and a woman), two children (a boy and a girl), and two infants tied together with string, believed to represent twins (Figure 6.15.) (Janice Orr 2011, pers. comm.).



Figure 6.15. Family of muslin rag dolls or poppets concealed in a house in Damascus, Virginia. Photo courtesy of the Museum of the Middle Appalachians.

Neither of the two deposits of doll-like figures found in concealments in the United States show evidence of pins or written charms; therefore, they may simply represent primitive dolls—the lost playthings of a child. However, both sets of figures were found inside the walls of buildings, which has already been shown to be a common location for

ritual objects. Furthermore, all of the figurines have an appearance that suggests they were not constructed for use as dolls. The clothes are plain rags and there are no facial features or other details to suggest a treasured toy. The fact that the figures are clothed in rags is also significant because poppets were often dressed in scraps of cloth stolen from the intended victim.

Poppets seem to have been used in a variety of magical rituals, including image magic and magic intended to harm (maleficium). However, some doll-like figures found concealed in buildings may have served a less sinister role, especially when there is no evidence of manipulation (pins, burning, etc.) or where the dolls are part of a larger deposit containing a mixed assemblage of ritual artifacts.

### **Horse Skulls**

It is not uncommon for domesticated livestock to acquire special significance among cultures that depend on them for their survival. The horse in particular was an important animal in northern Europe and the British Isles, where its ritual significance extends back to the Indo-European period (Mallory and Adams 1997:278-279).

Deliberate deposition of horse remains was particularly common during the Iron Age and Romano-British periods, where skeletal remains, either whole or partially disarticulated, have been recovered archaeologically in a wide variety of contexts suggesting ritual associations (Merrifield 1987; Green 1992; Moore-Colyer 1993; Cunliffe 2003:146-149; Jones 2005:4131-4136; Monikander 2006; Hukantaival 2009). Horse sacrifices have been discovered in bogs in Germany and in ship burials in Scandinavia (Moore-Colyer

1993:60). Merrifield (1987:47) reports five horse skulls in a 2nd-century Romano-British well deposit at Chelmsford and five additional skulls in a 4th-century well at Wickford, both located in Essex, England. At a 3rd-century Roman temple at Bourton Grounds, Buckinghamshire, a horse skull ringed with oyster shells and topped by a large smooth pebble was found buried under the threshold (Merrifield 1987:54).

In the British Isles, horse remains, particularly skulls and articulated limbs, are also commonly found in pits, often accompanied by the whole or partial remains of dogs, birds, and humans (Green 1992:115-116; Moore-Colyer 1993; Cunliffe 2003:146-149). Additionally, Green (1992:115) has observed that “Horse-gear is also present as pit-offerings, perhaps symbolically representative of the horse itself.” Hukantaival (2009:351) has noted that while Iron Age deposits frequently contain skulls, as well as leg bones and other remains, deposits in the historic period tend to consist primarily of skulls. She does report, however, two cases in Western Finland in which an entire horse was deposited in the hearth foundation (Hukantaival 2009:351).

Regarding their presence in architectural contexts in the post-prehistoric period, Merrifield (1987:117) notes, “The use of part of an animal, particularly the skull or jawbone, as a symbol of its sacrifice, was common in the building deposits of Anglo-Saxon, mediaeval and later times.” In Ireland, Great Britain, and southern Scandinavia, horse skulls are frequently found in architectural deposits dating to the post-Medieval period (Laws 1896; Grove 1901; Trevelyan 1909; Leather 1913; Ó Súilleabháin 1945; Sandklef 1949; Buchanan 1956; Harris 1957, 1958; Brown 1966; Evans 1966; Lloyd 1969; Huws 1978; Mallory and McCormick 1984; Pennick 1986; Merrifield 1987; Hayhurst 1989; Hooper 1989; Moore-Colyer 1993; Hoggard 2000, 2004; Hukantaival

2009). Hukantaival (2009:351) also reports evidence of horse skulls as building deposits in Germany, Latvia, Lithuania, and Finland.

Like concealed cats, horse skulls are not usually accompanied by other artifacts. It is, however, not uncommon for a deposit to contain more than one skull or additional horse bones such as the jaw, teeth, or long bones. Four horse skulls were found in a vaulted space under the flagstone floor of an early 17th-century kitchen in Radnorshire, Wales, one skull positioned in each corner and all four facing north (Leather 1913:110). As many as 20 skulls were found under the floor of a ca. 1600 house in Northern Ireland



Figure 6.16. Lower jaw of a horse found under a threshold of a building in Cheshire, England (The Blackden Trust 2010).

(Grove 1901:348-349); an impressive 35 skulls were discovered under the parlor floor of Thrimby Hall in Bedfordshire, England (Merrifield 1987:123); and approximately 40 were found under the floor of a 17th-century house at Bungay in Suffolk (Evans 1966:198; Merrifield 1987:124).

According to Hoggard (2004), more than 50 separate deposits of horse skulls have been documented in England alone, approximately a third of which can be assigned a broad date of either pre-1700 (20%) or post-1700 (13%). The most common location within a structure for the concealment of horse skulls and long bones is under the floor or within the foundation, often in close proximity to a threshold or hearth (Ó Súilleabháin 1945; Hoggard 2004:177), a pattern that is strikingly similar to deposits of concealed cats. For example, the lower jaw of a horse, shown in Figure 6.16, was found buried under the threshold of a building in Cheshire, England (Blackden Trust 2010). In Cambridge, a leg bone was discovered under the foundation of

the stables of a 16th-century inn (Simpson and Roud 2000:188), while another leg bone was found in the rubble floor of a farmhouse in Suffolk (Evans 1966:198). At Derrylea in County Armagh, Ireland, a horse skull was found buried in a rectangular hole cut into the ground near the threshold of an interior doorway, its forehead facing upwards and the hole tightly packed with small stones (Buchanan 1956).

Less frequently, deposits of horse skulls or other bones are located within walls, inside fireplaces and chimneys, or in roof and ceiling spaces. At Dromora in County Down, Ireland, a horse skull was uncovered in an interior wall approximately four feet up from the floor (Harris 1957). A local informant also recalled the concealment of a horse head “in the gable of the byre” in the late 19th century (Harris 1958:77). At Mauden in Essex, a horse skull was recovered from a sealed bread oven in a 17th-century cottage, while elsewhere in Essex, a skull was found concealed between a chimney flue and two interior brick walls (Merrifield 1987:124; Hooper 1989; Hoggard 2004:178). In Cambridgeshire, a horse’s leg bone was discovered between two courses of brick in a 16th-century cottage (Merrifield 1987:129; Simpson and Roud 2000:188). A stone mason in Denbighshire, Wales, found a horse skull concealed in the ceiling of a structure he was repairing, which he believed had been placed there “to dispel the spirits” (Lloyd 1969:133-134).

A particularly interesting example comes from Ballaugh on the Isle of Man, where a horse skull was found tightly packed inside a joist hole in the wall of an 18th-century house (Figure 6.17) (Hayhurst 1989) The skull faced toward the outer wall of the building and had two boar’s tusks embedded in its jaw. The skull is believed to have been

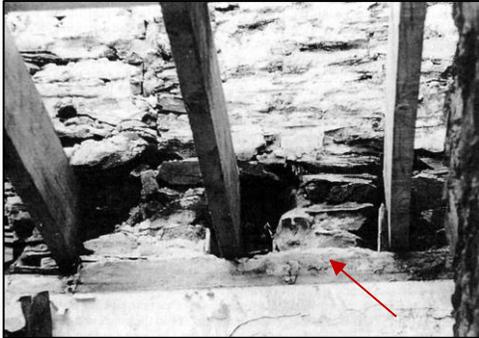
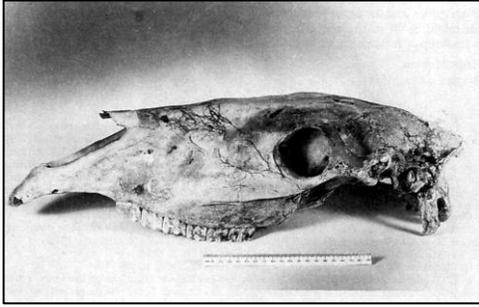


Figure 6.17. Horse skull with boar tusks removed (*top*), and in situ in joist hole (*bottom*) (Hayhurst 1989:108, figures 1, 2).

built into the wall during the original construction episode, “probably as a charm to stop the entry of anything evil” (Hayhurst 1989:106).

Intriguingly, horse skulls are not infrequently found in ecclesiastic structures. Examples have been uncovered beneath the choir stalls at Llandaff Cathedral in East Anglia; under the chancel steps of Steynton Church in Pembrokeshire; under the floor of the Beulah Congregational Chapel in Brecknockshire, Wales; and behind the

pulpit of a church at Kilkeel in County Down, Ireland (Laws 1896; Harris 1958:77; Evans 1966:198; Lloyd 1969:134; Moore-Colyer 1993:62). At Elsdon Church in Northumberland, three horse skulls were discovered in a box in the stone spire of the bell turret (Lloyd 1969:134; Merrifield 1987: 124; Hoggard 2004:178).

There is some argument over why horse skulls and bones were concealed in houses and other structures. Generally there are two camps of thought. The first asserts that horse skulls were placed under the floors of buildings to enhance the acoustics of the room above, particularly in spaces used for dancing, the playing of music, or threshing (Grove 1901:348; Sandklef 1949; Mallory and McCormick 1984; Simpson and Roud 2000:188). The second theory holds that horse skulls and other bones served a ritual function, perhaps apotropaic in nature, to bring good luck to the house (Ó Súilleabháin

1945; Buchanan 1956; Hoggard 2004). There is some evidence to support each theory, including oral testimony from informants in both the British Isles and Scandinavia (Ó Súilleabháin 1945; Sandklef 1949; Harris 1957, 1958).

While numerous informants assert that horse skulls placed in buildings served a purely acoustic function, there are some particularly compelling accounts that also support a ritual function. A stone mason in the small Welsh village of Llangwm in Conwy stated that “it was an old custom to keep horses’ skulls in houses ‘to dispel the spirits’” (Lloyd 1969:134). Trevelyan (1909:78) reports that in Wales during the 18th century, horse heads were nailed above the doors of barns “to keep witches away.” The workers who discovered four skulls under a floor in Wales were of the opinion that they had been placed there “to prevent or counteract witchcraft” (Leather 1913:110). Similarly, Finnish folklore indicates that “the fear of the witchcraft” is the primary purpose for the deposits of horse skulls in buildings (Hukantaival 2009:353).

One informant in County Armagh, Ireland, reported in 1838 that, “the frontal bones of a horse’s head are regarded as being peculiarly sonsie [bringing prosperity and good fortune]; they were often buried in barn floors and under the thresholds of dwelling houses for that reason” (Evans 1957:215). In County Down, an informant recalled that “the bones, or more especially the hoof, of a favourite horse were known to have been kept in the house ‘for luck’” (Buchanan 1956:60). Another informant in the same county related the belief that, “if there was a horse’s skull under the barn floor the barn would always be full” (Harris 1957:70), while an informant in County Antrim, “heard that they were buried in barns for luck or good yield in the corn” (Harris 1958:77). In the last two

instances, there appears to be some connection between the concealment of horse skulls in agricultural buildings and fertility and protection of the crop.

The most detailed account of the ritual concealment of a horse skull comes from Littleport in Norfolk, England, where, as children an informant and his brother witnessed a horse skull being laid in the foundation of a Methodist chapel in 1897:

[T]hey watched the workmen dig the trench for the foundations and then saw their uncle carefully mark the centre of the site by driving into the ground a wooden stake. The men gathered round while the uncle uncorked a bottle of beer, then the horse's head was placed in the bottom of the trench, the first glass of liquor from the bottle was thrown on it, and, when the rest of the beer had been drunk, the men shoveled bricks and mortar on top of the head. It was explained ... that this was an old heathen custom to drive evil and witchcraft away (Porter 1969:181).

Several scholars (Ó Súilleabháin 1945; Evans 1966; Lloyd 1969; Hooper 1989) have proposed that the apotropaic function of horse skulls was the original application, with the practice later rationalized as a method of acoustic enhancement. Many concealment scholars are of the opinion that both theories are valid, although in certain cases, one function may be more likely than the other. For instance, a single skull found in a wall, in a pit tightly packed with small stones, or with boar's tusks in its jaw almost certainly served a ritual or apotropaic function, as must also be the case when only jaw bones or long bones are found. On the other hand, deposits of multiple skulls found under the floor in the center of a room, particularly in spaces used for threshing or dancing, may have primarily served an acoustic function.

Another possibility is that the apotropaic function and the acoustic function are one and the same. Loud noises, particularly the clanging of church bells and the banging of metal objects, were believed to scare away fairies and demons (Thomas 1971:31;

Hukantaival 2009:354-355). Evans (1957:216) suggests that the rhythmic sound made by Irish threshing flails may have been “originally intended to drive away evil spirits from the precious food supply.” It is quite plausible that horse skulls positioned under floors, particularly in spaces associated with agriculture and threshing—and thus sustenance and fertility—were intended to serve an apotropaic function by amplifying repetitive sounds, thereby protecting the crop by scaring away malignant spirits. Several scholars have come to a similar conclusion. Merrifield (1987:125) ponders, “why was it so important that the threshing-flails should ‘sing’?” adding, “It is hard to imagine a deliberate search for a suitable resonator, or any circumstances in which the special qualities of a horse’s skull could be learnt by accident, except through the very common and widespread practice of burying animals’ heads for votive purposes” (Merrifield 1987:125). Moore-Colyer (1993:62-63) asks, “Is it possible, then, that the echo itself was believed to have some magical qualities, or that the mere presence of the skulls was in some way imagined to influence the threshing process?” Hukantaival (2009:354-355) similarly wonders: “Could this [the sound of threshing amplified by horse skulls] have some magic purpose? ... this ‘practical’ custom of acoustic skulls may not be contradictory to magical and symbolic acts at all.”

Why horse skulls may have been selected for ritual concealment is unclear. Moore-Colyer (1993:60) argues that “the essential role of the horse as a link between this world and the world of the dead” influenced its use in ritual contexts. Hoggard (2000) cites the belief that horses possessed the ability “to see things which we generally can’t,” noting that horses “are also seen as particularly sensitive creatures, highly alert ... Perhaps it was hoped that these qualities would be effective in protecting the house”

(Hoggard 2004:178). Simpson and Roud (2000:188) write, “In folk tradition, horses were regarded as very vulnerable to supernatural attack; ... Their tendency to shy or refuse to move on, for no visible reason, was (and still often is) attributed to a psychic awareness of the presence of evil.” According to Trevelyan (1909:79), “Horses were supposed to see ghosts’ apparitions of all kinds quicker than men could. In all the old stories of phantom funerals, and apparitions connected with riders and drivers, the horse sees first, and halts before the obstacle, which then appears to the person holding the reins.” Being associated with supernatural abilities, horse skulls most likely represent another form of protective house charm with origins in pre-Christian ritual.



Figure 6.18. Horse skull and note found in the Bryant Homestead, South Deerfield, Massachusetts. Photo from Elliot 1991:49.

Although hundreds of horse skulls have been found in buildings in the British Isles and Scandinavia, their presence in similar contexts in the United States has not previously been identified until now. While renovating his 18th-century house in South Deerfield, Massachusetts, homeowner Rockey

Foley uncovered a horse skull concealed within the cavity of an interior wall next to a closed-off fireplace (Figures 6.18 and 6.19) (Elliott 1991:49-50; Heinrichs and Wood 2008:4). Wedged inside an eye socket was a rolled-up piece of paper listing the names of Colonel David Mason Bryant, his wife, and their six children, who moved into the house in 1848 (Rocky Foley 2011, elec. comm.). The skull and letter postdate the construction of the house and were likely immured in the wall during a period of structural alteration, perhaps when the house’s fireplaces were modified to accommodate cast iron stoves. The Bryants were descendants of an old Massachusetts family that emigrated to the American

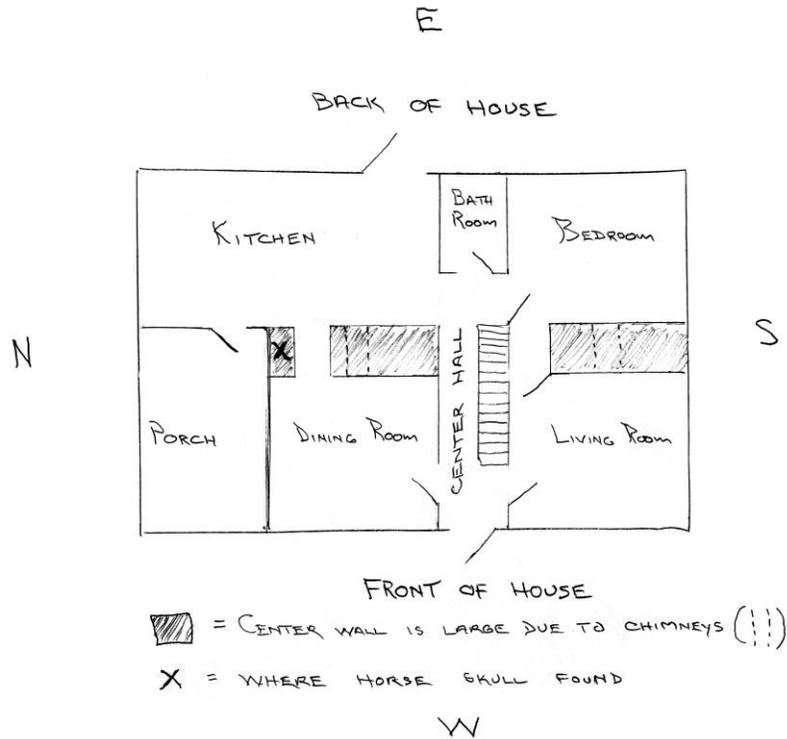


Figure 6.19. Floor plan of Bryant Homestead showing approximate location of horse skull. Sketch courtesy of Rocky Foley.

colonies in the late 17th century (Utzing 2006). The inclusion of a note listing the names of the family and the relatively late date of the concealment indicate that the skull was likely concealed as a sort of ritual time capsule or cornerstone deposit, less so as a form of apotropaic magic, and almost certainly not for acoustic effect. However, the fact that the Bryant family, who were of English heritage, chose to include a horse skull within the walls of their home indicates that the ritual of concealing horse skulls and bones in houses did continue in North America.

A second case of concealed horse skulls has been reported in Cahokia, Illinois, where four skulls were found during restoration of the Nicholas Jarrot Mansion (Illinois Government News Network 2003). The two-story Federal-style house, built for French-born entrepreneur Nicholas Jarrot between 1807 and 1810, is the oldest brick building in



Figure 6.20. Nicholas Jarrot Mansion in 1934. Photo by Joseph Golabowski, Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS ILL, 82-CAHO, 2-1).

Illinois (Figure 6.20). The skulls were recovered from three different locations in the building. The first was found behind a wall in a framed-out cavity next to a first-story fireplace, resting on the floorboards (Molly McKenzie 2012, pers. comm.). A second skull was found directly above an interior doorway, resting on top of the load-bearing interior brick wall. Two additional skulls were found approximately 15 feet away, resting on top of the same load-bearing wall. According to former site manager Molly McKenzie, the men who worked on the construction of the building were a transient group of tradesmen with mostly Anglo-American surnames. Interestingly, when carpenters discovered the skulls during recent renovations, they became excited and purchased lottery tickets on their lunch break, believing the discovery of the skulls was a good luck omen.

A third deposit was discovered at the Utopia settlement at Kingsmill, Virginia, occupied ca. 1660-1710, where the skulls and leg bones of at least three horses were found in the well and cellar fill (Kelso 1984:182). Kelso (1984:183) explains:

The recovery of only the skulls and leg bones of the horses is puzzling, but perhaps the complete absence of other horse bones solves the riddle. Skulls and foreleg bones were traditionally put in new houses in East Anglia in England to ward off evil spirits and bring good luck. Perhaps the bones suggest that the people at Utopia, who otherwise left their identity so in doubt, were immigrants from that region. Or perhaps these bones point to slavery instead. Coins and horseshoes were often used by the highly superstitious blacks, and perhaps they adopted this white superstition as well.

The horse bones might have been simple refuse disposal; however, when the ritual significance of horses in English, Welsh, Irish, and Scandinavian culture is taken into consideration along with contextual information available from other sites in the United States, a ritual interpretation seems appropriate. It should also be pointed out, however, that this particular deposit, while acknowledged by Kelso as having potential ritual significance, was credited to the “highly superstitious blacks,” an unfortunate example of the assumptions many American archaeologists possess regarding ethnicity and magical behavior.

The discovery of concealed horses skulls and bones in North America is a significant development in the study of ritual concealments, in part because it is difficult to come up with any mundane explanation for their presence. After all, while it may be possible to explain the presence of worn out objects such as shoes, garments, and broken glass in the structural voids of a building, Hukantaival (2009:350) has pointed out, “it is obviously not so easy to accidentally loose a horse in your house.”

### **Iron Tools and Implements**

Since its introduction in Europe in the prehistoric period, iron has been viewed as a material of potent power (Merrifield 1987). According to Frazer (1890:175):

the very fact that iron is deemed obnoxious to spirits furnishes men with a weapon which may be turned against the spirits when occasion serves. As their dislike of iron is supposed to be so great that they will not approach persons and things protected by the obnoxious metal, iron may obviously be employed as a charm for banning ghosts and other dangerous spirits. And it often is so used.

Numerous studies have examined the ritual use of iron and iron implements throughout Europe, from the Iron Age through the 20th century (see for example Merrifield 1987). Iron in any form was seen as possessing apotropaic qualities. Objects such as swords, knives, shears and scissors, hoe blades, axe heads, nails, and fireplace pokers were all used for ritual protection (Merrifield 1987:162). According to Howey (1958:103), the Romans would drive nails into the walls of houses to repel the plague. Iron nails were also an integral component in many witch bottles.

Knives and other cutting implements and edge tools were the most common iron objects used to repel witches and fairies. According to Merrifield (1987:162), knives were placed under the doormat to ward off witches in 20th-century Cambridgeshire, as it was believed that witches could not pass over iron (Hooper 1988). In Wales, scythe-blades were placed in the chimney “edge upwards” to prevent fairies from entering (Evans-Wentz 1911:144). Knives and other iron objects could also be imbedded or enclosed within the walls of a house to ensure permanent protection against malignant forces. For example, two iron knives were found built into the wall of a 16th- or early 17th-century house in Kent (Merrifield 1969:103; 1987:162). Similar concealments have been reported in Essex, where builders discovered an 18th-century iron-bladed knife sealed behind a thick layer of plaster covering a chimney breast of 15th-century house in Manuden (Hooper 1988), while at another house in Essex, the blade of a knife was found along with a nail and some fabric enclosed within a wattle-and-daub wall (Merrifield 1969:103).

Similar traditions of deliberate concealment of iron implements have been reported elsewhere in Europe. A deposit from Guernsey included an iron poker, ladle,

and fire iron, along with a boot, hidden inside the chimney breast, four feet up from the ground (Bennett 2006:11). In Guernsey, iron, “was believed to be a powerful witch repellent. In fact, Guernsey tradition (of unknown origin) has it that throwing nails into the dying fire can protect the household for the night” (Bennett 2006:11). In northern Finland, an iron axe head identified by archaeologists as a “special deposit” was found under the floor of a ca. 1700 building (Herva and Ylimaunu 2009:237). Herva and Ylimaunu (2009) report that the use of iron implements, particularly axe heads, for the protection of livestock is well documented in regional folklore.

In the United States, similar iron objects have been found in contexts that suggest deliberate concealment. While repairing damage caused by a flood, the owner of a 19th-century house in Crisfield, Maryland, discovered a deposit of objects inside a wall directly under a window, which included a large knife with English insignia, two horseshoes, a large spent bullet, and a broken salt shaker, all placed within an old sock (Evans 2011:74; Carol Smith 2011, elec. comm.). Salt is a well-known apotropaic substance and bullets, especially silver bullets, are said to be able to kill or maim witches. It appears that these objects were selected for their apotropaic associations and deliberately placed within the structure of the Crisfield house to offer protection to the occupants.

Archaeologist Marty Pickands reports a house in Leeds, New York, that has iron spikes or “witch catchers” inside the chimney flue, canted upward, which the homeowner believes were placed in that location “to prevent witches from flying down the chimney” (Marty Pickands 2011, elec. comm.). This account is notably similar to the Welsh practice of imbedding scythe-blades in the chimney.

Another case of iron objects in a concealed context comes from Danvers, Massachusetts, formerly Salem Village, where a small iron eel-spear trident and an iron horseshoe were found affixed to structural timbers of the Zerubabbel Endicott House (Figure 6.21) (St. George 1998:192). The eel-spear trident was found on top

of a first-story girt directly over a door and near the front chimney post, while the horseshoe was found nailed on the exterior surface of a corner post next to the front door, horns pointing up, hidden underneath the house's original weatherboard siding. The Zerubabbel Endicott House was built ca. 1681, but St. George dates the artifacts to ca. 1710-1730, indicating they would have been concealed during the occupancy of the son of the original owner, Dr. John Endicott. St. George (1998:191-192) also points out that the location of both items under the original weatherboarding, and "in close proximity to both the front door and the hearth," are highly indicative of apotropaic magic.

Another early example of a possible ritual concealment of iron in a European American context comes from the John Howland site in Kingston, Massachusetts, excavated by Sidney Strickland in 1937. Existing field notes describe the discovery of "an iron hoe in front of the threshold, just east of the center and eight inches below the surface, just on top of the subsoil" (Strickland 1937). The location of the hoe directly in front of the threshold suggests deliberate placement, as the threshold is one of the locations where apotropaic iron objects are commonly found. Add to that the fact that John Howland, one of the original Plymouth colonists, came to this country from

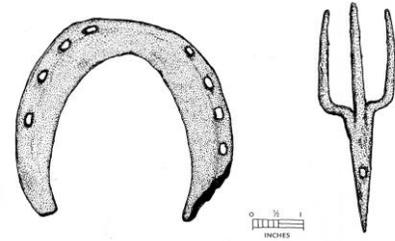


Figure 6.21. Iron horseshoe and eel-spear trident found nailed to the Zerubabbel Endicott House in Danvers, Massachusetts (St. George 1998:figure 71).

England as an indentured servant, it is highly likely that this was a deliberate placement of a ritual object.

Iron was also an important element in West African magico-religious ritual. The Yoruba had a god of iron, Ogún. Among the Igbo of Nigeria, *ikengas* or “personal gods,” were sometimes represented by figures constructed from iron and other materials (Phillips and White 2010). Iron hoe blades and axe heads have also been found in ritual contexts known or believed to have been associated with free and enslaved African Americans. Springate and Tomkins (2010) report an iron hoe blade found deliberately concealed on a beam above the location of a former fireplace at the Cooper-Mann House in Sussex County, New Jersey, which appears to date to ca. 1880-1885, a period of remodeling and structural expansion. A second example of the use of an iron hoe blade in a ritual context comes from Calvert County, Maryland, where the object was discovered in a pit feature located just outside the main doorway of a cabin occupied by African American families from the 1870s through the 1930s. The iron hoe blade was located at the bottom of the pit and was interpreted as a conjure deposit (Springate and Tomkins 2010). At the Thomas Williams site in New Castle County, Delaware, occupied by the African American Stump family from 1887 through the 1920s, an iron axe head was excavated from a pit located inside a dairy structure and was interpreted as an apotropaic device intended to protect the dairy products from taint (Springate and Tomkins 2010).

## Horseshoes

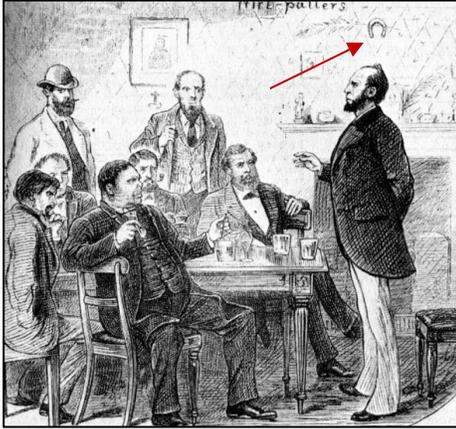
By far the most common iron artifact concealed in and around buildings is the horseshoe. The reason for the selection of the horseshoe as one of the most potent apotropaic symbols is unclear, although certainly its association with iron is significant (Simpson and Roud 2000:189). Some of the theories are little more than speculative imaginings. For

example, Howey (1958:102) has said the horseshoe is representative of the crescent moon associated with a pre-Christian goddess; thus, “It is nailed over doors that it may invoke her protection from bewitchment and the evil eye.” Another origin myth is offered in the legend of St. Dunstan. According to Flight (1871), the Devil approached Dunstan, a blacksmith by trade, requesting a shoe be placed on his hoof. Dunstan proceeded to capture the Devil and inflict so much pain on him in the process of shoeing that the demon promised to never again enter a building where the horseshoe was displayed (Figure 6.22).

Whatever the origin of the horseshoe’s apotropaic power, it was in popular use by at least the 16th century. In *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, published in 1584, Reginald Scot noted that one of the main methods of protecting a home from witches was “to naille a horsse shoo at the inside of the outmost threshold of your house” (Anderson 2005:60).



Figure 6.22. An illustration of the Devil repelled by an iron horseshoe being mounted over a doorway (Flight 1871).



6.23. Late 19th-century Irish political cartoon showing a horseshoe mounted over the fireplace (O'Brien 1972:111).

Horseshoes were also thrown into a pot of boiling urine to cure an ailment and tossed into the churn to help the butter come. In Somerset, they were hung in stables to prevent pixies from riding the horses (Simpson and Roud 2000:189). In Lincolnshire, they were nailed to the bed to prevent ague and “alcoholic delirium” (Simpson and Roud 2000:188-189).

One mid-19th-century writer observed that, “it is a thing very common to nail horse-shoes on the thresholds of doors; which is to hinder the power of witches that enter the house. Most of the houses of the West-end of London have the horse-shoe on the threshold” (Howey 1958:103). In Derbyshire, horseshoes were driven into the ground between two flagstones leading to the front door (Lawrence 1898:105). In Sussex, it was said, “If you nail a horseshoe that you have picked up over your door it will prevent all witches and evil spirits crossing the threshold” (Latham 1878:24). The prophylactic charm was popular in Ireland, too, where it was nailed to the stable door to keep out the “good people” (fairies) and to keep the horses from being “fairy ridden” (Kinahan 1881:102). By the turn of the 20th century, horseshoes could still be seen nailed above doorways, but they were generally associated with good luck than as protection against malignant beings (Howey 1958:103; Simpson and Roud 2000:188).

Historic photographs and illustrations also indicate some of the ways that the horseshoe was used as a ritual object in the home. For example, an Irish political cartoon from the late 19th-century, shown in Figure 6.23, depicts a horseshoe affixed over the

fireplace mantle with the horns pointing down, suggesting that this was a common location for the ritual placement of horseshoes in that country. Similarly, a photograph taken in the vicinity of London in the early 20th century depicts an iron horseshoe nailed over the front door, horns pointing downward (Figure 6.24). Photographs and illustrations such as these are valuable in that they offer visual evidence for the actual ritual use of horseshoes.

Descriptions of the ritual use of horseshoes are also found throughout the United States. In fact, some of the earliest descriptions of horseshoes in colonial America refer to the objects as apotropaic charms. In Jamestown, Virginia, in 1626, testimony regarding an accusation of witchcraft describes how one woman heated a horseshoe red hot in an oven before flinging it into urine to make the witch “sick at the harte” (Davis 1957:140).

According to Chappell (1973:100), in the spring of 1671, Edward Cole of Northumberland County, Virginia, accused Hanna Neale of bewitching his family and cattle. Cole later withdrew his accusation, however, after observing that Neale was unaffected by the presence of an iron horseshoe Cole had nailed to the door of his house. Increase Mather refers to the apotropaic use of horseshoes several times in his *Remarkable Providences* (1684). He describes a situation in Newberry, Massachusetts, where “Another of the neighbors



6.24. Horseshoe hung over the door of a house in London, England. Photo from the collection of Flickr user LovedayLemon.

caused a horse-shoe to be nailed before the doors; and as long as it remained so, they could not persuade the suspected person to go into the house; but when the horse-shoe was gone, she presently visited them” (Mather 1684:110). In the same work, Mather discouraged the use of such countermagical measures, including “scratchings, or burnings, or stoppings of urin, or the nailing of an horse-shoe” (Mather 1684: 191).

Despite the claim of the decline in magic in the mid-18th century (see Chapter 2), apotropaic use of the horseshoe continued in the United States into the 19th and 20th centuries. Currier (1891:255) describes an incident that occurred in the 1840s or 50s in which a blacksmith in New Hampshire nailed a horseshoe over the door of his shop in an attempt to detain a suspected witch. In the Allegheny Mountains, it was observed that among the white population in those parts “a frog's foot drawn upon the entrance will prevent witches from coming into a house, as also a broom laid across the threshold, or a horseshoe nailed upon the wall” (Porter 1894:113-14). Further south in North Carolina, it was suggested that, “To keep the witch away people nailed horse-shoes with the toe up over the stable-doors” (Cross 1909:254).

Among the German American population in Northampton County, Pennsylvania, in the late 19th century, “The belief in witches is very widespread and common. Everywhere one sees horseshoes over doors and on fences” (Starr 1891:323). Recalling his childhood in Chester County, Pennsylvania, in the mid-19th century, one folklorist described how “As a means of avoiding the influence of ‘cunjuring,’ and generally to protect one from maleficent influences, certain charms were in frequent use. The most common of these was the horseshoe. I have seen it nailed over the door of a cabin or

against the wall inside, not in the humorous spirit of our day, but as a serious and needful safeguard” (Brinton 1892:182).

While conducting ethnographic research in the Ozarks in the mid-20th century, Vance Randolph (1947:283) observed that, “Probably the commonest way to keep witches out of the house is to nail a horseshoe over the door; this is regarded as a sort of general prophylactic against witches, bad luck, contagious disease, and other evil influences.” He also noted that a horseshoe, “is frequently fastened in the firebox of the stove rather than in the oven. In the old days the muleshoe was hung up in the fireplace, or even set into the mortar at the back of the chimney” (Randolph 1947:43).

By the early 20th century, however, the horseshoe had transitioned into a symbol of general good luck, its earlier apotropaic function largely forgotten (see Figure 5.12 in Chapter 5). In the Appalachian Mountains of North Carolina, first settled by middle-class immigrants from England and Scotland, Parker (1907) records that it is good luck “to keep a horseshoe tacked over the door, the points must turn up, however, or the luck will spill” (Parker 1907:246). In Illinois in the early 20th century, an informant of Dutch and French origin said to “Put a horseshoe with ends up over a door for good luck: if the ends



Figure 6.25. Horseshoe and a brass spur recovered from the Chadbourne Site, South Berwick, Maine. Photo courtesy of Emerson W. Baker II.

are down, the luck will run out” (Norlin 1918:214-215). In the mountains of Tennessee, keeping a horseshoe in the cook stove was thought to keep hawks away from the chickens in the yard (Farr 1935:336).

In addition to the horseshoe found

nailed to the structural timbers of the Zerubbabel Endicott House in Danvers, Massachusetts, and the two horseshoes found with a knife, bullet, salt shaker, and sock in a wall in Crisfield, Maryland, several horseshoes have been recovered from archaeological contexts that suggest their use as an apotropaic device.

During excavations at the Chadbourne

Site in South Berwick, Maine, an early English colonial homestead dated ca. 1643-1690, two iron horseshoes were recovered near two exterior doorways (Figure 6.25) (Baker 2009:15). Both artifacts are interpreted as having been nailed over or near doorways to protect the occupants from witchcraft.

A second example of a horseshoe that may have been used in a ritual context comes from the John Howland House in Kingston, Virginia. During excavations of the interior of the structure in 1937-1938, an archaeologist “found a horseshoe inside the house 12 [inches] from the south wall and three feet from the inside of the threshold stones” (Figure 6.26) (Strickland 1937). Because this horseshoe was found near the doorway inside an early colonial domestic structure, it is highly likely that the artifact represents an example of apotropaic magic.

European Americans were not the only ones to value the horseshoe for its magical qualities. Horseshoes are known to have been used in a similar manner by African

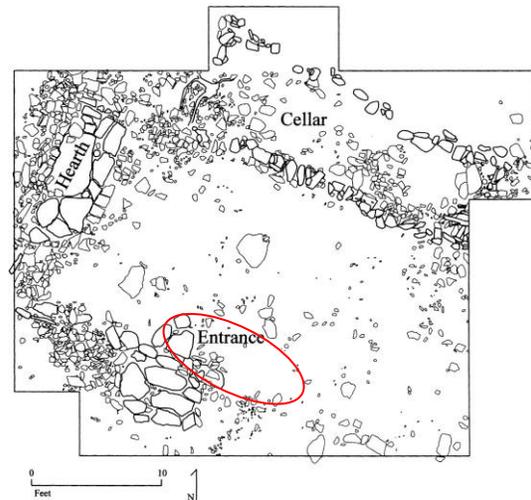


Figure 6.26. Foundation of John Howland House as re-exposed in 1998-1999 by the University of Virginia, with general location of horseshoe found by Strickland indicated. (Adapted from Deetz and Deetz 2000:243).

Americans by at least the mid-19th century and incorporated into an existing system of magico-religious belief. Most scholars acknowledge the European origin of horseshoe beliefs (Anderson 2005:60; Puckett 1926; Wilkie 1995:146). Wilkie (1995:146) argues that the “incorporation of European folk beliefs into the African-American magical belief system illustrates the process of functional substitution that transformed African into African-American culture.”

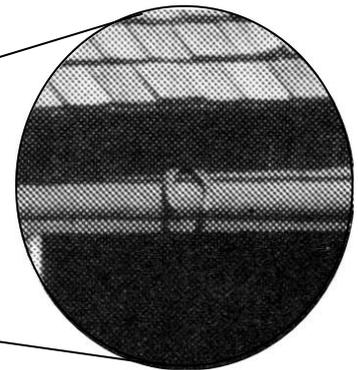


Figure 6.27. Horseshoe hung over the door of the cabin of an African American tenant family in Virginia (Kelso 1984:204, figure 142).

In some instances, the horseshoe seems to have been employed in contexts identical to those in the British Isles. A historic photograph of an African American tenant family in Virginia (Figure 6.27) shows how the English tradition of using a horseshoe over the door was adopted by African Americans. In their survey of slave narratives, Leone et al. (2001:table 9.2) report that horseshoes were mounted over the door by Americans of African descent to protect from spirits, avoid whipping, and bring good luck, showing how an European ritual object was adapted by African Americans to conform to their own experiences and cosmology. Ethnohistorical sources have offered



Figure 6.28. Draft horse shoe found inside the chimney of the ca. 1817 James Brown House, New York City, New York, now displayed on the mantle (Coe 2002:60-61).

additional ways the horseshoe was employed by African Americans. In the late 19th century, Bacon documented the belief that, “A horseshoe nailed over the door or even hidden under the sill will keep out conjurers' spells as well as hags and witches” (Bacon 1896:226). A black informant in Maryland said, “I ain't never seen no witch, but I got a horseshoe up over my do'. Dey say de witch got to travel all over de road dat horseshoe been 'fo' she can git in de house, and time she git back 't would be day” (Minor 1898:76). Another black informant offered this

advice: “Keep a horseshoe—keep it ovah de do' to keep de spook outa dere an' fo' luck, specially a man who does business” (Hyatt 1970-1978[2]:1443). An article appearing in the New Orleans *Times Picayune* in 1918 recounted how “an elderly African-American woman credited the horseshoe on her house, the red string on her bedpost, and the silver dime in her stocking for her surviving yellow fever epidemics” (Wilkie 1995:144).

Archaeologists have also recovered horseshoes from African American sites in contexts that suggest ritual use. When an iron horseshoe was excavated from a ca. 1880-1910 deposit associated with an African-American family at the Oakley Plantation in West Feliciana Parish, Louisiana, Wilkie (1995:146) concluded that the horseshoe likely represented the use of an apotropaic device. At the James Brown House in New York City, New York, built in 1817, a horseshoe was found concealed inside the kitchen chimney (Figure 6.28). Brown was born into slavery, freed at the end of his service as a

soldier in the American Revolution, and built the house in New York with his pension, where he lived until his death (Coe 2002:3). It is interesting that in this case the horseshoe was concealed inside the chimney and not placed on the mantle, a common location for ritual objects in the British Isles.

### **Painted and Inscribed Marks and Symbols**

Another class of ritual artifacts found in buildings in the eastern United States includes symbols, letters, and words. Timothy Easton (1988, 1997a, 1999, 2004, 2011) has conducted an extensive study of such marks in England, which can be found inscribed, painted, or burnt on houses and barns as well as on smaller objects such as cupboards and boxes. Other scholars in England (Darwood and Sherriff 2003; Hoggard 2004; Meeson 2005), Scandinavia (Sandklef 1949:55-61), and Australia (Ian Evans 2012, elec. comm.) have reported similar marks in architectural contexts, including houses, churches, and barns. Ritual marks are found on buildings dating from the 16th through the 20th centuries, including in post-Reformation England (Easton 1997a; Hoggard 2000).

It is widely recognized that these symbols served an apotropaic function, which may explain why they are frequently found around the hearth, doors, and windows (Easton 1997a:533; Darwood and Sherriff 2003; Meeson 2005). Like other types of concealments, these marks are thought to have been employed to ward off witches or other harmful forces. In the early 20th century, Sandklef (1949:55-61) gathered several

examples of the protective use of ritual marks in Scandinavia, including pentagrams and crosses drawn above doors and on wall posts to protect the harvested crop from “Robin Goodfellow” and other “goblins.” While some marks were likely created by the home’s occupants to provide protection from malevolent forces, others appear to have been made by carpenters and other tradesmen, presumably to protect the craftsmen and their work (Easton 1997a:534). Not all marks may be ritual in nature, however. Both Meeson (2005) and Sandklef (1949) caution that some symbols, especially those of a later date, may have been employed as artistic designs with no magical or other ritual significance. Smith (2010) has also proposed that some marks, particularly the “daisy wheel” motif, are the work of craftsmen who employed them in calculations.

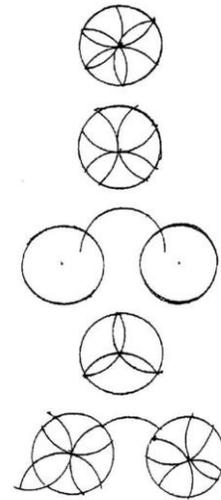


Figure 6.29. Hexafoil marks and overlapping circles, found in a building in Suffolk, England (Easton 1999:figures 16-20).

The most common motif found among ritual marks is some variation of hexafoil design, overlapping circles, or six-petal “daisy wheel,” shown in Figure 6.29. According to Easton (1997a), the hexafoil design is a solar symbol that can be traced to the 6th century B.C. and was still in use in the British Isles in the 20th century. Easton notes that in many cases, hexafoils and other circular marks appear to have been intentionally left incomplete.

Besides hexafoils, other common marks found in buildings include combinations of letters and symbols believed to reference Christian themes and invoke divine protection (Easton 1997a:533). Combinations of V’s, W’s (conjoined V’s), M’s, and R’s—variations on the name and titles of Mary (Maria Regina, Virgo Virginium, and

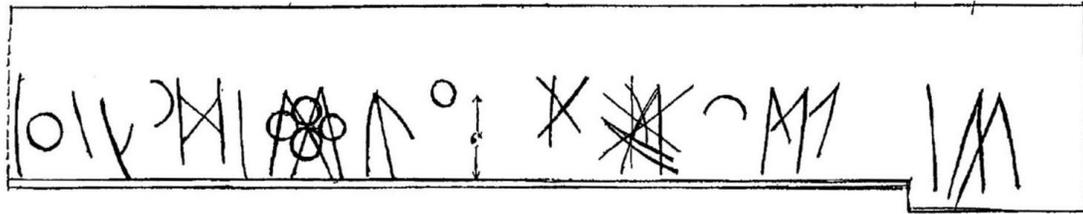


Figure 6.30. Ritual marks on an early 16th-century fireplace lintel in Debenham, England (Easton 1999:figure 23).

Virgin of Virgins)—are quite common (Figures 6.30 and 6.31) (Easton 1997a:534; Hoggard 2000; Darwood and Sherriff 2003; Meeson 2005:46). Other symbols, such as the letters P, B, and K (perhaps short for *Pax* or the names of the three magi: Kaspar, Melchior, and Balthasar), and crosses and ladders have also been recorded. Meeson (2005:46) interprets the ladders as either representing the crucifixion or as a symbolic accent to heaven.

Ritual marks were certainly not unknown to early Americans, as evidenced by the inclusion of the hexafoil symbol scratched on a plank wall in

William Michael Harnett’s late 19th-century *trompe-l’œil* piece, *The Artist’s Letter Rack* (Figure 6.32). In addition, hexafoil symbols are frequently incorporated into so-called “hex signs” painted on the barns of the Pennsylvania Dutch (Figure 6.33). There is a long-standing debate as to whether hex signs, also called barn stars, have a magical or apotropaic origin (see Yoder and Graves 2000). For example, Hand (1954:202) claimed that, “Among the Dutch, the hechs signs, the star, black hands and the like were put on the barns for everyone to be wary of witchcraft. The points of the star being here were

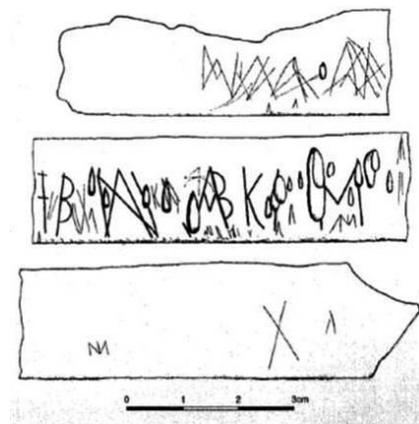


Figure 6.31. Ritual marks incised on a beam above a fireplace in Fife, Scotland (Darwood and Sherriff 2003:figure 3).

supposed to chase the witches and whirl them about when they tried to get in.” Others argue that the symbols are purely decorative or signify German American cultural identity and pride. A similar decorative use of hexafoil symbols can be seen in the Catholic missions in southern California (Neuerburg 1987).

In other cases, marks are found in contexts that suggest a ritual function. Hexafoil symbols have been reported on the exterior surfaces of doors of the Abraham Fuller House in West Barnstable, Massachusetts (Geisler 2003); scratched over the lime whitewash on the interior plank walls of a grist mill near Staunton, Virginia (Figure 6.34) (Cundiff

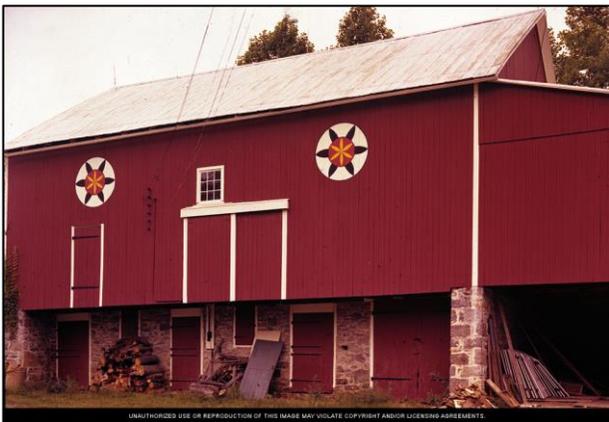


Figure 6.33. A barn in Berks County, Pennsylvania, painted with decorative hex symbols. “Hex Barn (Berks County, Pa.): General View,” Architecture Images Collection, Digital Media Repository, Ball State University Libraries.

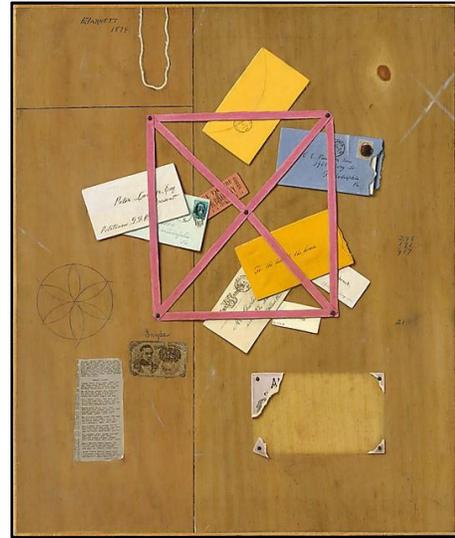


Figure 6.32. Hexafoil mark depicted in *The Artist's Letter Rack*, William Michael Harnett, 1879. Collection of the Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, New York.

2009; Thomas Cundiff 2012, elec. comm.); on the interior of a log house in Henry County, Georgia (Cundiff 2009); at the early 18th-century Drayton Hall near Charleston, South Carolina (Timothy Easton, elec. comm.); and in the Dritt Mansion in York County, Pennsylvania (Jan Klinedinst 2012, pers. comm.). At the



Figure 6.34. Hexafoil symbols on an interior plank wall of a grist mill near Staunton, Virginia. Photo courtesy of Thomas Cundiff.

Dritt Mansion, archaeologist Jan Klinedinst identified a hexafoil mark painted on a first-story interior door, as well as a conjoined double-V mark chiseled on a wall panel in the stairway leading up to the attic. Research on possible ritual marks in the United States is only in the preliminary stages; however, given the prevalence of marks the British Isles and Scandinavia, it is highly likely that additional examples will be found with careful and thorough examination of historic structures.

### **Printed and Written Texts and Charms**

As shown in previous chapters, Bibles, prayer books, and other religious texts associated with divine protection, as well as almanacs, which are associated with astrology and the occult sciences, have been found in concealed deposits containing shoes and other artifacts in the British Isles, Europe, and the United States (Darwood and

Sherriff 2003; Bennett 2006; Viegas 2007). In many cases these artifacts appear to have been deliberately torn apart before concealment. According to Sandklef (1949:64), Swedish folklore includes numerous accounts of the use of the pages of almanacs, hymn books, and Bibles as protection from nightmare, which suggests that such materials in concealments in the United States may have served a similar apotropaic function.

Mundane printed materials and documents such as newspapers, journals, and letters have also been found in concealed contexts and may have been used in similar ways (Atzbach 2006; Bennett 2006:9). For example, in Saltville, Virginia, a cigar box containing papers and pamphlets was found tied to the beam over the front door and may have had a ritual function (Eastop 2006:241-242).

Other forms of the written word with a more explicit magical function have also been reported from concealed contexts. Spoken and written spells accompanied many early magico-religious charms, amulets, folk remedies, and countercharms (Morgan 1895a, 1895b; Grendon 1909; McBryde 1917; Forbes 1971; Davies 1996). These charms and amulets often contain Latin words or phrases; Biblical verses; religious names, titles, words or symbols similar to those found inscribed on buildings; astrological symbols; and patterns of numbers, letters, or words, including number squares, word squares, word triangles, and palindromes. Merrifield (1987:152) describes these charms as “a mixture of prayer and spell, of piety and ritual enchantment.”

Although spoken and written charms were commonly used in the British Isles, Europe, and the United States, material evidence is less common since such charms generally do not survive in the archaeological record. Nevertheless, some written spells have been recorded. Hoggard (2000) has documented approximately 20 written charms in

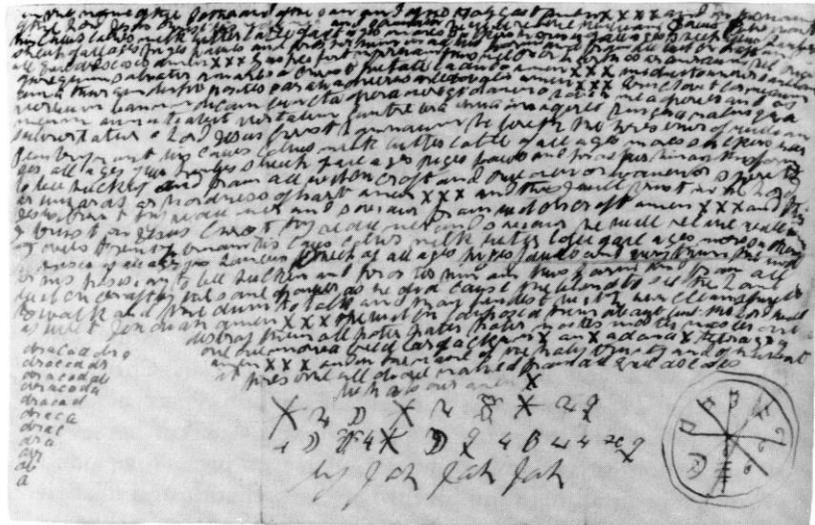


Figure 6.35. Early 20th-century written charm to protect and heal livestock, containing magical phrases, astrological symbols, and an abracadabra word triangle found in a bottle buried in a cowshed in Powys, Wales (Merrifield 1987:figure 48).

England and Wales. An example found in a stable in Dyfed, Wales, was intended to cure a sick mare, and a nearly identical charm was found buried in a bottle in a cowshed in Powys, Wales (Figure 6.35) (Merrifield 1987:153). A late example of a written charm was found in a stoneware bottle underneath a feeding trough in a barn in Montgomeryshire, England. According to Merrifield (1955:197), the charm, written on a piece of notebook paper dating to the turn of the 20th century, was concealed to protect the farmer and his “cows, calves, milk, butter, cattle of all ages, mares, suckers (foals), horses of all ages, sheep, ewes, lambs, sheep of all ages, pigs, [and] sows” from witchcraft.

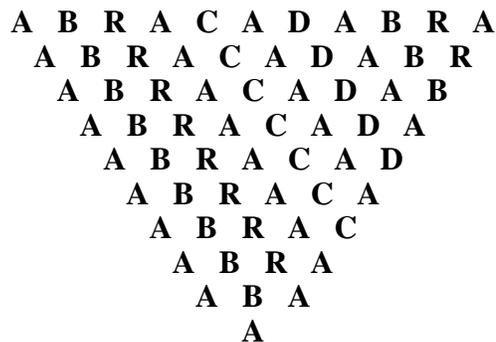


Figure 6.36. Abracadabra word triangle.

In addition to references to Christian themes, these charms often incorporate a variety of different magical words and symbols, the most well-known being the

**S A T O R  
A R E P O  
T E N E T  
O P E R A  
R O T A S**

Figure 6.37. Sator word square.

abracadabra word triangle (Figure 6.36) and the sator square (Figure 6.37). The abracadabra triangle employs a well-known magical word with pre-Christian origins, although its exact meaning is unclear (Ohrt 1922). The sator square is a palindrome in which the same five words (sator areto tenet otera

rotas) appear when read from any direction. Like the abracadabra triangle, the sator square has a long history, with origins in the pre-Christian period (Meyer and Smith 1999). In addition to appearing in written charms, it has been found inscribed on a section of wall plaster excavated from the 2nd-century A.D. Romano-British town of Corinium in Gloucestershire, England (Merrifield 1987:figure 45). Early examples have also been found in Germany, Portugal, and Italy (Merrifield 1987:142-143). In the 19th and 20th centuries, the charm was written on paper and worn around the neck to protect from disease (Forbes 1971:298). It is often found in a corrupted form, in which the order of the words or letters are inverted, or sometimes written out as a sentence. (Merrifield 1987:144-145).

Historical accounts reveal that written and spoken charms and amulets were in use in colonial America. Cotton Mather described how colonists “cure Hurts with Spells,” admonishing that, “‘Tis in the Devils Name, that such things are done” (Godbeer 1992:61). Colonial clergyman Samuel Williard also “lamented that the Devil had ‘taught men to use the name of God, or of Christ, or of some notable Sentence that is recorded in God’s Word, (which is also his name) either for the keeping of Devils out of places, or for the Curing of these or those Maladies that men labour of” (Godbeer 1992:25).

American folklore sources indicate that the sator charm was believed to “stop

fits,” prevent miscarriage, cure arthritis, and if swallowed, could reduce fever and heal the bite of a mad dog (Porter 1894:113; Milnes 2007:178-177). If administered to cattle in their feed, they, too, would be cured of witchcraft (Milnes 2007:177). It was also thought that the charm, if kept in the house, would protect the building from fire and lightning (Porter 1894:113; Milnes 2007:178).

Several examples of written spells and magical charms have been reported in concealed contexts in the United States. While conducting ethnographic fieldwork in a German Appalachian community in Pendleton County, West Virginia, Gerald Milnes

observed and documented numerous examples of occult belief and practice. One informant recalled a particular household known for their involvement in magic and conjuring: “There was brooms over the door. There was something else hanging over the door, I can’t remember what that one was. They had the

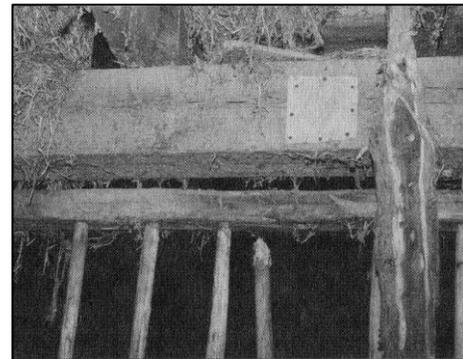


Figure 6.38. Abracadabra word triangle charm found in a barn in Pendleton County, West Virginia (Milnes 2007:178).

little square symbols for protection over every opening, every window, every door of the house, to keep out curses, or bad people, or whatever” (Milnes 2007:176). Upon

inspection of the now-abandoned house, Milnes found a small piece of paper with the

5 10 3  
4 6 8  
9 2 7

sator square glued above every window.

In the barn, Milnes found several more examples of written charms, including another sator square, a triangular abracadabra charm tacked over a cattle manger (Figure 6.38),

Figure 6.39. Number square reported by Milnes (2007).

and a number square in which the numbers add up to 18 whether they are tallied horizontally, vertically, or diagonally (Figure 6.39) (Milnes 2007:177,180). Milnes (2007:180) concluded that, “here in this barn and nearby house in Pendleton County, ancient symbols were used, without question, for apotropaic purposes. They literally were consciously placed for the protection of these buildings and the surrounding property against witchcraft.”

Another documented case of a written charm as a protective amulet was found in Curtice, Ohio. When a ca. 1890 timber frame barn was being dismantled in the early 1990s, workers discovered a charm written on a piece of paper attached to a doorpost under the wood siding (Saeger 1994). The charm was

written in German and included a series of names and abbreviations (Figure 6.40), which a German scholar specializing in medieval magic formulae interpreted as “an amulet in the form of names together with a

**Karius + Kirus +  
Kuprus + Peram +  
Me sta + A-5 + Emanuel +  
E. + Adonae +**

Figure 6.40. Transcription of the magico-religious amulet found concealed in a barn in Curtice, Ohio (after Saeger 1994).

rudimentary incantational prayer, begging for protection for the house and its inhabitants” (Saeger 1994). In addition, Patrick Donmoyer of the Pennsylvania German Cultural Heritage Center in Kutztown, Pennsylvania, has recorded several written charms found in barns in that state, which will be presented in a forthcoming publication (Donmoyer 2012, elec. comm.). Given the preliminary evidence for the ritual concealment of written charms and blessings, archaeologists and architectural historians should keep an eye out for additional examples in houses and other buildings in the eastern United States, particularly in barns and other agricultural structures associated with German Americans.

## **Chapter Summary**

This chapter has outlined some additional artifacts that have been found in concealed contexts in the United States, all with analogous examples in the British Isles and continental Europe. These examples demonstrate that a wide variety of artifacts and symbols were employed in ritual contexts and used for a variety of reasons, including maleficium; protection from witchcraft, conjure, fairies, goblins, demons, spirits, and fire and lightning; and as a general good luck charm. For many of these concealment types, only a handful of examples have been reported in the United States; however, archaeologists and other researchers need to be aware of the possibility of encountering additional examples in a wide variety of contexts by familiarizing themselves with the variety of materials that may be encountered.

## **Chapter 7: Discussion and Conclusions**

The preceding chapters have presented a variety of evidence for the use of religious and secular magic and ritual in the British Isles, northern Europe, and the eastern United States, focusing on artifacts concealed within or around standing structures. By gathering data on a wide range of concealments but concentrating in-depth analysis on three prevalent artifact types—witch bottles, concealed footwear, and cats—an effort has been made to demonstrate both the range of artifacts found in such contexts and the many ways that archaeological and ethnohistorical data can be used to interpret these deposits. Analysis reveals that European, particularly English, immigrants to North America brought with them a complex and vibrant tradition of magico-religious and secular ritual that spread throughout the northeastern United States, intermingled with the beliefs and rituals of non-European populations, and continued in a recognizable form into the early 20th century. The following discussion will examine each of the research questions, as presented in Chapter 1, and offer conclusions regarding the patterns of concealment rituals; their relationship to magic and religion; their various functions; how they illustrate culture change and cultural continuity, particularly as related to domestic

religiosity and ritual, cosmology, and family and household structure; and the ways that race, ethnicity, cosmology, and social organization affect the use of magic and ritual.

### **Geographic and Temporal Patterns**

One of the primary research objectives of this thesis was to assemble a dataset of concealed deposits in architectural contexts in the eastern United States that could be used to identify temporal, geographic, and spatial patterns. In the end, data were collected on 8 possible witch bottles (as well as several bottles that may have served a similar ritual function), more than 250 deposits of concealed footwear from 234 sites, 14 concealed cats, and dozens of additional artifacts, including garments, dolls and poppets, horse skulls, horseshoes, iron implements, written charms, and ritual marks. After analyzing this data, it becomes clear that rituals of concealment were more widespread and lasted far longer than previously assumed.

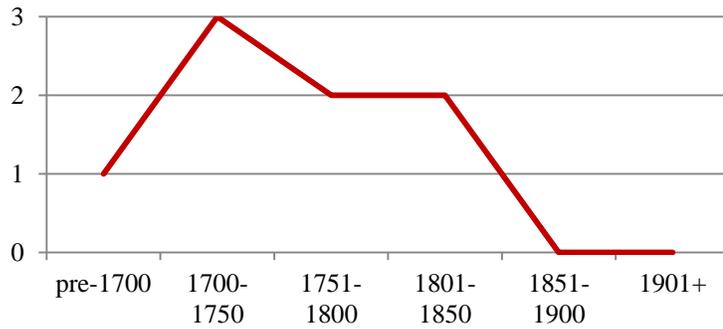
#### *Temporal Distribution of Concealments in the United States*

Historians have long argued over when, or if, magical belief waned in the United States, particularly among European Americans. Many scholars have asserted that widespread belief in the efficacy of magic ended in the 18th century with the coming of the Enlightenment (Thomas 1971; Rutman 1978; Butler 1979; Godbeer 1992; Leone 2008). Ethnohistorical sources indicate, however, that folk magic and related rituals continued to thrive well into the 20th century. One objective of this thesis was to

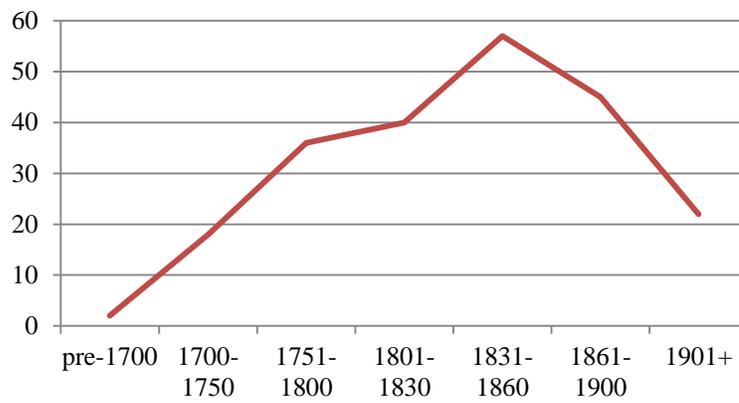
determine the temporal distribution of American concealments. It was anticipated that the range of the dataset would exceed currently accepted temporal boundaries, signifying the persistence of magical belief and ritual well into the modern era.

Clearly this is the case, as seen in Figure 7.1. With only one exception, all American witch bottles date to the 18th century or later—the period after the witch trials and during a period of supposed decline in magical belief in the United States. At least two, possibly three, of the bottles date to the 19th century, demonstrating a continuation of this well-documented ritual into the post-Enlightenment period. The temporal data for concealed footwear are even more convincing, with deposits peaking during the mid- to late 19th century and continuing into the early 20th century. Temporal analysis of concealed cats also reveals that the highest frequency of reported cases occurs in the late 19th century. All of the data support the hypothesis that the use of magic did not die out in the first half of the 18th century. In fact, several folk rituals, such as the practice of concealing footwear and immuring cats in buildings, appear to have actually increased during this period.

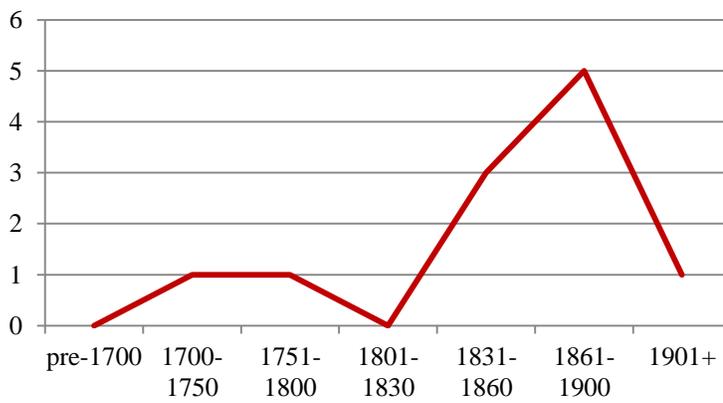
Some scholars argue that the increase in concealed deposits during this period is a reflection of the lack of buildings surviving from the 17th and 18th centuries (Geisler 2003). However, the large number of reported cases of concealed footwear in the 19th century suggests that concealment rituals were more common and lasted far longer than previously assumed. It has still not been determined, however, why concealments continued in such huge numbers into the 19th century. After all, this was a period of



**Witch Bottles**



**Concealed Footwear**



**Concealed Cats**

Figure 7.1. Temporal distribution of witch bottles, concealed footwear, and concealed cats in the United States.

amazing technological advancement brought on by the Industrial Revolution—the steam engine, the internal combustion engine, electricity, and the wholesale replacement of human and animal labor with machine power and automated, mechanized processes—as well as mind-boggling paradigm shifts introduced by Darwin’s theory of evolution and confirmation of germ theory. It was also a period of tremendous political and social change. Centuries of traditional monarchical rule were weakened, and in some cases replaced, by a wave of democratic revolutions, some more successful than others, that rippled across much of the western world. In the United States, this period was also marked by the bloodiest war in American history, and on American soil, which killed hundreds of thousands of its citizens, saw homes and entire cities destroyed, and threatened the very existence of the young nation. All of these events had an incredible impact on daily life.

Chapter 1 discussed the correlation between uncertainty and the use of magic. Felson and Gmelch (1979) argue that even when people do not believe magic will work, they still turn to it for security. Ironically, the period of greatest political and technological change may have brought with it increased anxiety and uncertainty among a population accustomed to doing things the same way for centuries, even millennia. Perhaps folk rituals, whether religious or secular, gave people a sense of stability, security, and control in a rapidly changing and uncertain world.

Some of the evidence of ritual examined in this study clearly demonstrates both culture change and continuity. For example, the tradition of using a bottle filled with pins, needles, and urine to oppose dangerous forces—disease caused by witchcraft, the curse of an enemy, the suit of a legal opponent, or general bad luck and misfortune—has

continued in a recognizable form in both the archaeological and ethnohistorical record from at least the 17th century, when witch bottles first appear in East Anglia, up through the 20th century, where they are described in ethnohistorical accounts from Massachusetts to Illinois to Alabama. Witch bottles convincingly demonstrate that folk rituals found in the eastern United States in the late 19th and early 20th centuries have recognizable origins in early modern European magic. Similarly, concealed cats, which, appear in Europe in the 13th century and in the United States by at least the 18th century, show considerable time depth. Shoe concealment can be clearly traced at least to the 14th century, when deposits are found in both England and Germany. The ritual use of horse skulls likely has an even longer period of use, appearing perhaps as early as the late prehistoric period.

Concealment rituals, therefore, effectively demonstrate *la longue durée*, or deep time. However, these rituals did not continue in a static form through the centuries. Instead, they illustrate complex cultural dynamics in which new elements were continuously being added, influences from other cultures were introduced, and nationalistic attempts to preserve the “traditions” of earlier periods resulted in syncretic forms. As cosmologies and ideologies changed, the rituals were adapted to reflect those changes. Furthermore, in the eastern United States, European rituals influenced and were influenced by the rituals and cosmologies of African Americans and Native Americans. There has been relatively little research in this area, with a few notable exceptions, highlighting an area of study that deserves attention in the future.

### *Geographic Distribution of Concealments*

Another objective of this thesis was to determine the geographic distribution of architectural concealments in the United States. Unfortunately, drawing substantive conclusions regarding the geographic distribution of witch bottles and concealed cats is difficult due to the relatively few reported cases of each artifact type. More than half of the reported cases of witch bottles come from the Mid-Atlantic region, with isolated examples identified in Rhode Island, western Pennsylvania, and Kentucky. It is perhaps most surprising that only one example has been reported from New England, considering that some of the earliest historical descriptions of witch bottles in the world come from that region (I. Mather 1684:269, 1693:265; C. Mather 1691; Godbeer 1992:46; St. George 1998:193-195).

Likewise, concealed cats tend to be found in the northeastern part of the country and in adjacent Midwestern states. More than half of the specimens come from the Mid-Atlantic region, closely paralleling the geographic distribution of witch bottles. Unlike concealed footwear, there are no reported cases from New England. This may indicate that the tradition of immuring cats was brought to the United States by immigrants from other parts of the British Isles, such as Irish immigrants in the 19th century, or perhaps by German or Scandinavian immigrants, since there is substantial evidence of cat concealment in those regions. Unfortunately, the limited availability of data regarding distribution of concealed cats in Europe and the relatively few cases confirmed in the United States make it difficult to draw further conclusions at this time.

Unlike witch bottles and concealed cats, reported cases of concealed footwear, while prominent throughout the entire northeast, are most heavily concentrated in New England and the upper Chesapeake, both greatly influenced by English settlement in the early colonial period. Geisler (2003) has suggested that a concentration in the northeast is the result of the prevalence of older structures that are more likely to contain intact deposits. Alternatively, D. A. Saguto (2012, elec. comm.), Master Cordwainer at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation, has suggested that the relatively few cases reported from Virginia, another area of early English colonial settlement, is a reflection of the lack of houses surviving from the colonial period. His argument is based on the fact that a majority of the early houses in Virginia were impermanent earthfast structures (Kelso 1984:18-23).

However, American concealments, particularly footwear and cats, peak in the mid- to late 19th century. Therefore, the presence of numerous concealments in 19th- and early 20th-century buildings in Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina should be expected, even if few 17th- and 18th-century buildings survive in those regions. On the contrary, a majority of concealed shoes dating to the second half of the 19th century were in fact reported from a concentrated region stretching south from New England along the Atlantic coast to the upper Chesapeake. It is obvious that the cultural heritage of that region is a key factor in the geographic distribution of certain types of concealments. It is perhaps no coincidence that shoe concealments in the British Isles, while widespread, are found in far greater numbers in southern and eastern England (see Figure 4.1 in Chapter 4) (Pitt 1998). There appears to be a direct association with East Anglian, perhaps

Anglo-Saxon, magico-religious tradition, and ostensibly, the rituals and beliefs of northcentral Europe, where the Anglo-Saxon people originated.

### **The Role of Religion and Magic in Concealment Ritual**

Despite more than a century of scholarship exploring the relationship between, magic, religion, and ritual, many scholars still disagree on how to define and distinguish these concepts, let alone identify them in the archaeological record. In the case of artifacts concealed in buildings, the archaeological and ethnohistorical evidence indicate that the boundaries between magic, religion, and ritual were similarly porous and indistinct. Greenwood (2009:45) has observed that, “Notions of magic may exist at different levels of awareness and explicitness, depending on the individual, situational and cultural contexts.” This is certainly true of concealed deposits. In the case of deposits that employ symbols and objects derived from mainstream religious traditions—crosses and crucifixes, Bibles, pages from prayer books and hymnals, Marian symbols, and written or spoken charms that reference the Scripture, God, Jesus, Mary, or the saints—it is probably safe to categorize these deposits as magico-religious in nature in that they seek divine assistance and/or attempt to interact with the sacred supernatural. The function of other concealments, however, is less clear.

For example, witch bottles may be considered religious, magical, or secular (or any combination of these characteristics in varying degrees) depending on the situation and the intent of the individual performing the ritual. In early modern England and colonial North America, ethnohistorical sources indicate that witch bottles were

employed primarily to counter maleficium caused by witchcraft. During this period, witchcraft was viewed by religious and political authorities as diabolical; witches were believed to be in league with the Devil and to work their spells with the help of Satan or minor demons and familiars. Since diabolical witchcraft was recognized by religious and political authority, as codified in the Witchcraft Acts of the 16th and 17th centuries and described in the many religious sermons and treatises of the colonial period, the use of a witch bottle could be considered a magico-religious ritual even if it was in opposition to approved Christian practice. In fact, when the Puritan minister Increase Mather wrote in 1684, “How persons that shall unbewitch others by putting Urin into a Bottle, or by casting excrements into the fire, or nailing of horseshoes at men’s doors, can wholly clear themselves from being witches, I am not able to understand” (Mather 1684:269), he was associating the use of witch bottles and other countercharms with diabolism.

It is unclear, however, if those who employed witch bottles viewed them in the same light. The fact that Increase and Cotton Mather repeatedly admonished their use by the laity, who opening admitted to using them, suggests that many colonists did not think of witch bottles as diabolical. During testimony presented at the Salem witch trials, Roger Toothtaker described how he and his daughter had used a witch bottle to kill a witch (St. George 1998:193-195). Toothtaker’s admission of using the countercharm suggests that the English-born physician did not believe he was using diabolical witchcraft. Instead, he may have seen the charm as a form of healing magic, perhaps even natural magic, which relied on a sympathetic connection between the witch and her victim. There is no indication in any of the ethnohistorical descriptions of witch bottles collected during the course of research that the user directly appealed to God, the Devil, or to any other

supernatural entity to execute the charm. In fact, in his description of the use of a witch bottle, the English philosopher Joseph Blagrave (1671:154) incorporated astrological elements into the countercharm, insisting that the cure would be more effective “if the Moon be in Scorpio in Square or Opposition to his Significator, when its done.” During this period, many of the educated elite dabbled in astrology and occult pseudosciences, which they did not perceive as being in opposition to their religious beliefs (Butler 1979), suggesting that witch bottles were not perceived as drawing on the supernatural for their effectiveness.

In the case of concealed cats, there is even less evidence that the animals were concealed as part of a magico-religious ritual. The religious associations of cats are primarily found in the pre-Christian period (Egyptian and Norse paganism), although they were associated with witches—and thus tangentially to diabolism and religion—during the medieval and early modern periods. As discussed in Chapter 5, however, there is no strong evidence that cats were concealed in buildings in connection with witchcraft or protection from witchcraft. Instead, the available evidence indicates that cats were either entombed as part of a builders’ rite (perhaps with distant antecedents in foundation sacrifice or pre-Christian religious ritual), as a charm employing natural magic to repel unwanted vermin, or as a general good luck charm.

The concealment of horse skulls is similar to that of cats. Given the role of the horse in Celtic and Norse mythology, the deposit of horse skulls in buildings likely has distant origins in pre-Christian religious ritual; on the other hand, all evidence suggests that by the early modern period, horse skulls in buildings served a more secular magic or ritual function, perhaps relating to agricultural fertility or apotropaic magic intended to

keep away witches, ghosts, fairies, and goblins. It is also important to note that the majority of informants interviewed in the early 20th century justified the concealment of horse skulls as a method for amplifying the sound of threshing, dancing, and music, suggesting that the ritual had lost much of its magico-religious significance by this period. In the case of the horse skull found in a house in Connecticut, the artifact seems to have been part of a secular ritual, perhaps apotropaic in nature, but also symbolizing the cultural identity of the family or consecrating the home for their use.

Regarding concealed footwear, a similar argument could be made that the ritual of concealment has no obvious association with religious magic and instead represents a form of natural magic or secular ritual enacted by either members of the building trades or a building's occupants. Similar arguments could be made for concealments that include garments and mundane household artifacts such as broken glassware, ceramics, and bits of broken furniture and toys (a spiritual midden). Deposits of shoes found with religious symbols or objects such as Bibles could certainly be interpreted as magico-religious in nature, perhaps invoking divine protection for the household. Most shoe deposits, however, offer little indication of any religious association and therefore suggest mundane magic or secular ritual. It should also be pointed out that some ritual concealments with no material evidence of the intercession of the divine may have been accompanied by spoken spells or gestures that invoked the sacred supernatural at the time of concealment. For example, a shoe may have been placed in the wall while reciting the Lord's Prayer or making the sign of the cross, evidence which would not survive in the archaeological record.

Other than Bibles and religious texts, written charms and inscribed marks are some of the only artifacts found in and around architectural contexts in the eastern United States that indicate a strong association with mainstream religion. The use of identifiable Christian words, symbols, and variations on the names and titles of God, Jesus, Mary, and the saints, as well excerpts from prayers and Bible verses, all suggest that those using these charms were seeking divine assistance, usually in the form of protection for their family, house, barn, livestock, crops, or food supply.

The study of concealed artifacts in standing structures offers anthropologists and archaeologists an opportunity to explore the porous boundaries and culturally variable relationships between religion, magic, and ritual. In particular, they offer an opportunity to investigate the ways people in the past employed religion and magic in varying degrees and how their actions conformed to or defied those of religious and political authority.

### **The Function of Concealment**

After considering the data from a variety of concealed artifacts in the United States and Europe, it becomes clear that concealment rituals are highly complex and should be viewed as interrelated but separate phenomena manifesting in a variety of forms with a range of functions. Some appear to have utilized religious materials and symbols, presumably to secure divine intercession. Others seem to have employed natural magic to influence the more mundane aspects of daily life. And others still appear to represent a secular ritual that signifies group affiliation or personal agency. In fact, the concealments examined in this study can be subdivided into four broad functions: those

intended to directly affect or control another person, usually through maleficium or image magic; charms deposited by builders that are intended to either protect the building or the workers themselves or are intended to function as an informal consecration deposit; charms deposited in agricultural spaces to protect livestock and the harvested crop; and objects deposited in domestic spaces by members of a household to protect the building and its occupants, to positively influence other aspects of domestic life, or to consecrate the building for the family's use. The function of different concealment types may have changed over time, so that what began as a fertility charm evolved into a builders' rite, and what may have started as a domestic ritual developed into a secular good luck charm. Evidence for each of these broad ritual functions will be discussed in turn.

### *Manipulative Magic: Cursing, Binding, and Maleficium*

Some concealments, particularly witch bottles, poppets, and written charms, belong to a category of manipulative magic that involves binding, cursing, and maleficium. Cursing and binding are very personalized and situational. They have an incredibly long history in Europe and around the world and can be traced back at least to the Classical period, where they appear in the form of lead curse tablets and clay figures pierced with nails (see for example Jentoft-Nilsen 1980; Faraone 1991; Jordan and Curbera 1998). In the first century A.D., the Roman poet Ovid described a cursing ritual in which, "An old hag binds threads together with lead, and then after placing seven black beans in her mouth, mumbles a spell. She roasts the head of a small fish which she

sews up and pierces with a bronze needle. Upon it she drops wine and concludes by saying ‘We have bound fast hostile tongues and unfriendly mouths’” (Henig 1984:166).

Witch bottles are an excellent example of manipulative magic. Roud (2003:524) has pointed out that witch bottles are one of the few active protections from witchcraft (compared to more passive countermeasures such as nailing a horseshoe above the door). It is no coincidence that they first appear in England around the time of the mass witch trials in the early 17th century (Behringer 2004:105). Like other forms of cursing magic, witch bottles (and the closely related conjure bottles of American hoodoo) were directed primarily at specific persons, including suspected witches, conjurers, and enemies. These countercharms functioned to expose, and in some cases alleviate, social discord among neighbors. The construction of a witch bottle was a declaration that one had been wronged by a member of the community. An individual who suspected a witch bottle or other malignant charm had been used against them may have confronted their attacker. This confrontation was a form of social negotiation. If the dispute could be resolved, the counterspell was removed and the conflict ended with the implicit acknowledgment by both parties that the matter was settled. If a satisfactory arrangement and resolution could not be reached by one or both parties, the cursing magic, and thus the disagreement, continued indefinitely, perhaps manifesting in psychological and physical symptoms that resulted in illness or death. The fear of cursing, then, may have been enough to convince members of a community to attempt to resolve conflicts.

Witch bottles are not the only form of manipulative magic found in American concealments. Shoes that have been deliberately mutilated or manipulated, such as the examples that were cut in half or “hanged,” could be interpreted as an attempt to cause

harm to a particular person or to “cripple” them in the sense that they could not leave. Some garments may have also been used in manipulative magic, particularly love magic. Anything involving body effluvia, excreta, and exuviae (hair, urine, fingernails, etc.) or otherwise employing the principle of contagion could be similarly interpreted. This could explain the presence of doll-like figures concealed in houses; perhaps they represent the use of image magic intended to harm or control.

### *Agricultural Concealments*

Some artifact types appear more often in agricultural spaces. In particular, written charms are commonly associated with agricultural fertility and protection of livestock, especially as used by German Americans. In England, some witch bottles were used to protect livestock or fields, although there is no evidence for their use in this manner in the United States. Many concealed horse skulls, especially in Scandinavia, are closely associated with agricultural spaces, particularly threshing barns (Sandklef 1949), indicating that this was probably a male tradition related to fertility or protection of the harvested crop or livestock, although the two cases reported in the United States do not fit this pattern. Interestingly, only one example of concealed footwear in the United States has been documented in an agricultural space (an unworn shoe found on the beam of a barn in North Easton, Massachusetts), indicating that shoe concealment was not widely associated with the processes and protection of the barn, at least in North America.

There seems to be a greater emphasis on the protection of agricultural spaces in Scandinavian and German culture, as indicated by the presence of horse skulls, written

charms, hex signs, and apotropaic marks. This may reflect differences in agricultural architecture and farm layout. Many English farms consisted of a housebarn, in which livestock were housed in an extension of the family's living quarters, or were comprised of numerous smaller buildings, each intended for a specific function such as threshing, storing of grain, housing cows, pigs, or horses, etc. (Vlach 2003:16-17; Noble and Cleek 2007:12-13). In these arrangements, barns and outbuildings were closely associated with the house and were one small component of the greater domestic sphere. On the other hand, Noble and Cleek (2007:13) note that German immigrants to North America were known for "building their barns better than their houses and earlier than their [English] neighbors," suggesting that in Germany, more emphasis was placed on the barn as a space separate from the domestic sphere, which may have influenced the extent to which magic was employed to protect it.

It is surprising that no cases of concealed cats have been reported in agricultural spaces in the United States. Many examples in Europe have been found with dried rats, mice, or birds, often posed in the midst of a chase, which suggests the use of natural magic intended to ward off vermin. Such a charm would be useful in agricultural spaces, particularly buildings used to store grain, which makes their absence all the more puzzling.

### *Builders' Rituals*

Some types of concealments appear to have been deposited by builders either as an apotropaic measure to protect the building and the workers or as an informal

consecration ritual. Like manipulative magic, builders' deposits have a long history and appear in many cultures throughout the world. The remains of animals and humans are some of the most common artifacts found in foundation deposits and are probably related to the idea of a sacrifice to a pre-Christian deity or nature spirit to ensure the stability of the structure. Of the two sites where horse skulls were found in the United States, one appears to have been placed by the members of a family, but the four skulls found in the Nicholas Jarrot Mansion in Cahokia, Illinois, were likely concealed by professional builders at the time of construction.

Similarly, many of the cat concealments reported in the United States are clearly related to builders' rites, particularly because they are found most frequently in foundations or in other spaces that were only accessible during construction or renovation, such as a plaster ceiling or sealed masonry cavity. Due to the lack of evidence that cat concealments in North America and Europe involved religious magic, they could be interpreted as a secular ritual enacted by members of the building trades as a symbol of group identity or as a general good luck charm. Concealed cats also seem to be more closely associated with men in general, who are more likely to be employed as professional craftsmen, although the ethnohistorical data clearly indicates that cats are associated with the feminine, particularly female sexuality—an interesting juxtaposition.

A large number of concealed shoes also seem to have been placed by builders, particularly in cases where a single shoe is found near an area of renovation or in a public building, such as the shoes found in the Indiana Statehouse, the Kansas Statehouse, and the Muncie Carnegie Library (which was clearly placed by a builder, as indicated by the accompanying note). However, not all shoes appear to have been placed by builders. In

the case of large multi-component assemblages containing multiple shoes, garments, and domestic artifacts, as well as deposits that appear to have been added to over several generations, there seems to be a close personal connection to the occupants. Further analysis of these types of deposits will be considered next.

### **Household Ritual and Protection: Concealments in Domestic Spaces**

Much of the focus of this thesis has been on domestic religiosity and ritual and the presence of concealments in domestic spaces. While some artifacts can be more closely associated with manipulative magic, builders' rituals, or protection of agricultural spaces, other types of concealments are more closely tied to the family and to domestic life. The most prominent of these are concealed footwear and garments and large deposits containing mixed assemblages, which Easton (1997b) has identified as spiritual middens.

Geographic distribution of shoe concealments and spiritual middens suggests that the cultural heritage of the northeastern United States, particularly New England, is an important characteristic. Moreover, the relative lack of deposits in the lower Chesapeake and the Tidewater suggests that the European populations that settled those regions did not bring with them a strong tradition of shoe concealment or other domestic concealment, perhaps the result of different cultural or geographic origins (see Chapter 2). Alternatively, the absence or presence of concealed shoes and other ritual deposits associated with domestic spaces may reflect differences in religion or socioeconomic status. It is proposed here that household composition and family structure; belief in

domestic spirits, demons, and familiars that could both protect and harm; and a focus on the hearth as the physical and spiritual center of the home—influenced by the different origins and worldviews of English-speaking colonists—are the primary factors in the distribution of concealed footwear and spiritual middens in the eastern United States.

### *Regional Variability in Household Composition and Family Structure*

Some scholars have observed the repeated presence of artifacts associated with children in concealed deposits, including children's shoes, garments, and toys. These artifacts are often interpreted as prophylactics against child mortality, symbols of fertility and fecundity, or evidence of a belief that "goodness would prevail over evil" (Eastop 2001:80; Evans 2010:136,174,181-182). It is suggested here, however, that artifacts associated with children were not preferentially selected for concealment; instead, the presence of children and a strong nuclear family unit in a household was more likely to influence the perceived need for certain types of ritual concealments.

According to Fischer (1989:68-77), Puritan households in colonial Massachusetts were characterized by a strong focus on the nuclear family, a high proportion of intact marriages based on reciprocal affection (94% of women and 98% of men were married), and a relatively greater number of children per household, characteristics that were similarly apparent in the East Anglia region of England during that same period. In a Puritan household, the nuclear family was viewed as the primary religious unit, the "covenanted family" (Fischer 1989:70). There were also fewer servants and slaves in Massachusetts than elsewhere in colonial America. In fact, on average, a family in

Massachusetts had less than one servant per family, and many households had no servants at all, which is notably different from colonies in the lower Chesapeake (Fischer 1989:71-72). Fischer (1989:72) concludes: “In short, the New England household more closely coincided with the nuclear unit, and the nuclear family was larger and stronger than elsewhere in the Western world.” This focus on the nuclear family also resulted in increased suspicion and distrust of outsiders, even members of one’s own community, particularly if they did not conform to the established mores regarding household and family structure.

In the Virginia colony, household composition was notably different from that of Massachusetts. There was a similar importance on family, but that importance was focused on the extended family and less so on the nuclear family unit (Fischer 1989:274-279). Households still contained a nuclear unit at the core, but those units included fewer children and were augmented by live-in step-relatives, half-brothers and sisters, aunts and uncles, cousins, orphans and wards, tutors and clerks, lodgers and visitors, and servants and slaves, on a scale that did not exist in New England (Fischer 1989:276-278). The relationship between the master of the house and the indentured servant or house slave was also more intimate, with both parties often sleeping in the same room. Furthermore, different households from the same extended family frequently lived in close proximity to each other in what Fischer (1989:275) calls “kin-neighborhoods.” In the lower Chesapeake and Tidewater, as well as in the Deep South, households—particularly the households of the wealthy and upper middle class in the 18th and 19th centuries—were more likely to exhibit porous boundaries in which the white plantation family, domestic slaves (some of whom nursed and raised the family’s children), field hands, white and

black overseers, and slaves who were genetically related to the white family, could all be found.

In his essay on the theory of household religiosity in the Classical period, Stowers (2008:6) made the following observations:

Families in households in which slaves and nurses rather than the nuclear mother do most of the child-rearing *are* different. A household in which there is no distinction between work and home, and in which public and private, insiders and outsiders blur *is* different from the nuclear family that evolutionary psychologists find to be universal. Households in which members of the nuclear family regularly have children with slaves and do not allow slaves to form families *are* different. The examples could be multiplied. The lesson ... is that place and residency must be given their due weight.

Stowers' remarks may be relevant to understanding why certain types of ritual concealments are less common in Virginia and the Tidewater. The typical household composition in this region was different from that of the northeast, which had a more clearly defined concept of the nuclear family and an intense suspicion of outsiders. Thus it might be expected that evidence of domestic religiosity and ritual would be more readily found in New England and the surrounding region, particularly if those rituals involved the strengthening of nuclear family bonds and/or protection from outside forces that threatened the nuclear family unit.

### *Spirits, Demons, and Familiars*

Chapter 2 explored the evolution of the medieval house spirits, with their probable origins in the household deities of pre-Christian Europe and their later

manifestations as demons and witches' familiars. Many of these house spirits expected small offerings—most commonly milk or cream, ale, bread or porridge, and sometimes a chicken—which were thrown into the fire, placed under the stove or in the oven, buried in the floor of the cottage, tossed into the barn, or set in a corner for the use of the spirit. Gummere (1892:359) describes such offerings as “minor superstitions of peasants everywhere in Europe, the bit of food flung into the fire, thrown out of the window, or set upon the roof ‘for the poor spirits,’ the lore of house-goblins.”

With the exception of the domovoi, which seems to have preferred an old shoe near the hearth or stove in which to make its home; the kaukas, which was propitiated with a gift of clothing buried in the cottage floor; and the “goblins” described by Burchard of Worms in the 11th century, which enjoyed “sporting” with boys’ sized shoes, a gift of clothing was a sure method to drive off a house spirit or other non-human being, intentionally or otherwise. Although house spirits in western Russia and Lithuania may seem far removed from the house spirits of the British Isles, it is significant that comparable traditions can be found across all of northern Europe and that there are so many similarities between the different domestic spirits. In particular, house spirits (as well as some nature spirits, such as leprechauns) are closely associated with shoes, shoemaking, and other garments (particularly stockings, cloaks, or hoods); behave similarly; and frequently reside near the hearth as well as in the walls, attic and roof spaces, and under the threshold. This suggests that house spirits are part of a pan-European tradition. In fact, a similar association between spirits and shoes can be found on the Indian subcontinent, lending further support to an Indo-European origin for the ritual and apotropaic use of shoes. According to Abbott (1932:118), in India:

Old shoes are hung on new buildings and in cultivated fields to avert the evil of *drsti* [evil eye], and pieces of shoes are hung round the necks of milch cattle. Shoes guard the threshing-floor from evil-eye and the waving of shoes round the victim of evil-eye is a common practice. A shoe also keeps away spirits. The shoes that protect the threshing-floor from evil-eye also protect from causing bad dreams; water poured into a shoe is given to a man possessed by a spirit; a child whose illness is attributed to spirits is weighed against shoes, or a garland of shoes is thrown round its neck and then thrown away.

Although concealed shoes and garments and related rituals are found throughout Europe, it appears that in England the shoe was singled out for special focus, particularly in the southeastern part of the country where the majority of shoe concealments have been found. Merrifield (1987) has suggested that the legend of Sir John Schorn inspired the use of footwear as an apotropaic device to trap or repel demons. However, given the evidence, it is more likely that Schorn's use of a shoe drew on an existing folk belief that items of clothing could attract, propitiate, or repel non-human beings, including both demons and domestic spirits.

The Burchard of Worms' description of offerings of shoes to "goblins" nearly two centuries prior to Schorn's feat in England further strengthens this argument. In addition, although the oldest concealed shoe, dated ca. 1308, was found in Winchester Cathedral in Hampshire, England, numerous deposits of concealed footwear, clothing, and related objects dating to the 14th century have also been found outside of England, particularly in central Europe (Atzbach 2001, 2005, 2006, 2012), suggesting that the tradition of shoe and garment concealment was widely established throughout northern Europe by the late Middle Ages. It is possible that the Church consciously promoted Schorn's use of a boot to repel evil spirits in an attempt to convert a popular folk ritual with non-Christian

origins into an approved Christian rite by imbuing the shoe with divine power. This would not be unusual, given that the Church regularly engaged in the appropriation of pre-Christian rituals and symbols (Thomas 1971; Flint 1991; Wilson 2000; Gilchrist 2012). It is unclear how successful the Church was in associating the shoe with divine protection, but it does appear that in eastern England the shoe was widely adopted as an apotropaic device against demons and diabolical witchcraft.

Many factors add to this interpretation. First of all, Schorn's "conjuring" of the demon into a boot took place in Buckinghamshire at the turn of the 14th century, just before the earliest reported cases of concealed footwear appear in England. Secondly, according to Pitt (1998), southeast England reports the largest number of concealed shoe deposits, with large numbers also appearing in the northeastern United States, which was settled primarily by colonists from East Anglia. Third, although the British Isles saw relatively few mass witch trials and executions compared to central Europe, East Anglia experienced some of the most intense witch panics in that region. Similarly, the New England region of the United States also experienced a very brief but intense period of witch persecution and it is also the region where the majority of concealed footwear are found. And lastly, the concept of the witch's familiar, which is closely tied to belief in fairies, domestic spirits, and demons, was almost exclusively found in England, Scotland, and the northeastern United States. This evidence suggests that the concealment of shoes, while not isolated to either England or the New England colonies, was concentrated in these areas because shoes were employed as devices to either attract protective house spirits and helpful familiars or to repel demons and witches' familiars.

The Puritans who journeyed to North America and settled in Massachusetts and the surrounding region were deeply alarmed by the evil forces they perceived to be assailing them from all sides. Mather (1692) offers a plethora of evidence that legions of demons and witches plagued the colony, intent on destroying their godly society, blaming the Devil's evil forces for crop failure, storms, earthquakes, fires, calamities at sea, unexplained deaths, "internal maladies" and "wasting sicknesses, especially burning and mortal agues," and the attacks and "soerceries" of the local Native Americans. Mather (1692:38) observed that in Massachusetts, "the Devils are so many, that some Thousands, can sometimes at once apply themselves to vex one Child of Man," proclaiming, "there never was a poor Plantation, more pursued by the Wrath of the Devil, than our poor New-England" (Mather 1692:62). To illustrate his point, Mather employed an allegorical description of a demonic attack that had recently been reported in Germany: "a Witch or Devil, appeared on the Top of a Chimney, Threatening to set the Town on Fire; And at length, Scattering a Pot of Ashes abroad, the Town was presently and horribly Burnt unto the Ground. Methinks, I see the Spectres, from the Top of the Chimneys to the Northward, threatening to scatter Fire about the Countrey" (Mather 1692:75-76). The image of a demon lurking about the chimney, scattering ashes and embers, and wreaking havoc is invocative of the many tales of mischievous house spirits, goblins, familiars, and poltergeists found throughout Europe. Mather (1692:71) even refers to demons as "Sooty Devils."

The Massachusetts colonists must have been dismayed by the undue hardships they experienced in their new home, which likely had some questioning if they were in fact God's Chosen Ones. Mather reassured his flock that these hardships were God's way

of testing the moral fortitude and resolve of his covenanted community. Although he discouraged the colonists from resorting to apotropaic magic or, as he called them, “little witchcrafts,” Mather’s recommended weapons, prayer and fasting, must have left some colonists feeling vulnerable and defenseless (Mather 1692:35). It is likely that they turned to tried and true methods for placating spirits—an old shoe or garment, a bowl of milk or crust of bread, even, perhaps, the body of a chicken—to invite a benevolent and protective spirit or familiar to take up residence in the house to protect the family and fend off the legions of demons and witches, or conversely, to “lay” harmful non-human beings that attempted to enter their houses through the chimney or other small aperture.

Indeed, numerous descriptions of suspected witches who propitiated demons and familiars—which they may have perceived as helpful domestic spirits—are found in the writings of the 17th-century Puritans. Cotton Mather (1692:40) declared that, “Daemons . . . differ not from those baser Goblins that chuse to Nest in the filthy and loathsom Rags of a beastly Sorceress.” Furthermore, Mather threatened, “If it can be proved, that the party suspected hath entertained a Familiar Spirit, and had Conference with it, in the likeness of some visible Creatures; here is Evidence of witchcraft” (C. Mather 1692:29).

One description of familiars explained how the seemingly benevolent brownie that helped its owner out around the house and barn was in fact a demon:

There are others, that have used most wicked Sorceries to gratifie their unlawful Curiosities, or to prevent Inconveniencies in Man and Beast; Sorceries, which I will not Name, lest I should by Naming, Teach them. Now, some Devil is evermore invited into the Service of the Person that shall Practice these Witchcrafts; and if they have gone on Impenitently in these Communions with any Devil, the Devil may perhaps become at last a Familiar to them, and so assume their Livery, that they cannot shake him off in any way, but that One,

which I would most heartily prescribe unto them, Namely, That of a deep and long Repentance (C. Mather 1692:19-20).

Mather's use of the term "livery" is intriguing, since historically the term has been used to describe "a provision of food or clothing for servants" (Stevenson 2010:1034), which suggests that offerings or accommodations of this sort were given to familiars to secure their favor. It is also significant that Mather is reluctant to describe the methods for attracting a familiar for fear that the colonists would learn the techniques and employ them to their own gain. But it is almost certain that the colonists already knew the methods for both attracting protective spirits and defending against harmful ones.

For example, Baker (2007) describes a "haunting" that occurred in 1679 in Newbury, Massachusetts, which exhibited behavior similar to that of mischievous house spirits found throughout the British Isles and northern Europe:

Stones, a box, a board, and even a bag of hops hit them [the family] while they tried to sleep. Ashes flew out of the fireplace to ruin meals. In fact, much of the disturbance took place around the hearth and chimney. Bricks flew about, an apron was thrown into the fire, and, most amazingly, a long staff danced in the chimney. One night, William [Morse] left a shoe downstairs only to have an invisible agent fill it with charcoal and ashes and throw it upstairs after him (Baker 2007:24-25).

Baker argues that 17th-century Puritans would have recognized the placement of a shoe by the hearth as an effort at countermagic. Given Mather's accounts of a community plagued by the machinations of evil demons, witches, and their familiars, it is highly likely that New England Puritans would have sought magical protection. Fortunately, the methods were already known: objects of iron (especially horseshoes, knives, and other edge tools) nailed to the door or hidden around the house; holed stones hung from the

stable or chicken coop; old shoes and worn clothing concealed around the chimney and hearth, surrounding the door, and within the walls, floor, and roof; broken crockery and glass vessels, some perhaps containing milk or alcohol; offerings of small animals such as chickens deposited in the walls and near the hearth; and the use of other small tokens ascribed apotropaic powers.

*The Hearth as the Heart and Soul of the Household*

It is well documented that colonists in New England believed that malignant beings such as witches and demons could enter a house through vulnerable openings such as chimneys, doors, and windows. Therefore, it would follow that concealments intended to protect the household from supernatural attack would be found near such points of entry and in liminal spaces such as attics and roofs, exterior walls, and under floorboards. Symbolically, these areas mark the boundary between the inside and outside world, between private and public, the familiar and the unknown, and between relative safety and potential danger. It is through these openings that friends and enemies alike enter and leave, and which are the target of more mundane security measures such as latches, locks, and alarms.

However, as discussed in Chapter 2, the hearth also served as the physical and spiritual center of the home and was the focus of domestic religiosity and ritual. In European Christian cosmology, it is where house spirits—and in the pre-Christian period, household deities or ancestral spirits—resided. Therefore, the presence of concealed deposits in the area near the hearth may be related to the concepts of domestic religiosity,

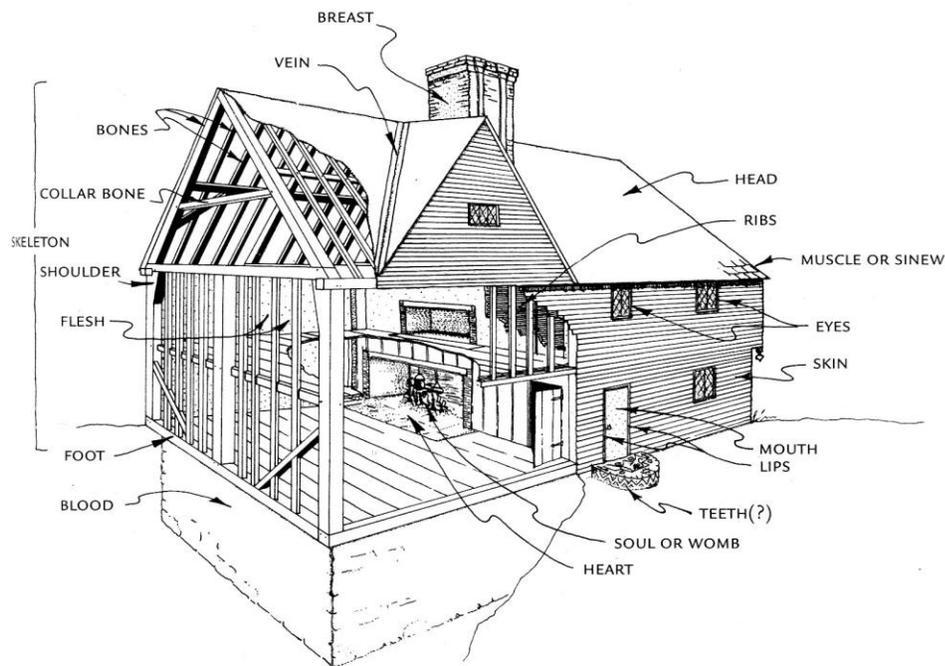


Figure 7.2. Diagram of the metaphoric house-body depicting the chimney, hearth, and home fire as the breast, heart, and soul or womb (St. George 1998:figure 52).

familial cohesion, and general wellbeing.

St. George (1998:137) argues that the colonial home was imbued with anthropomorphic characteristics and that the fireplace and hearth symbolized the heart, soul, or womb of the house-body (Figure 7.2)—in other words, the physical and spiritual center of the home. In colonial New England, the hearth served as the focus of the nuclear family unit, likely taking on additional significance due to its importance in heating the home and preparing meals. The hall-and-parlor plan with massive central chimney, which has its cultural origin in eastern England, became even more important in colonial New England, where it was the preferred method of construction for keeping houses more comfortable during the winter (Fischer 1989:62-68; Steane 2000). In comparison, Virginia houses were more likely to have one or two end chimneys due to

the milder climate (Upton 1986; Fischer 1989:264-274); thus the chimney was less readily identified as the physical center of the home.

One of the conclusions that can be drawn regarding shoe concealment is that although shoes are very frequently found as single deposits, a significant number are part of a larger deposit, often consisting of garments such as hats, socks, and gloves, but also of other mundane artifacts such as broken glass and ceramics, animal bones, printed and written texts (particularly religious texts), pieces of cloth tied up or bundled, fragments of burnt wood, botanical materials, broken toys or pieces of furniture, and everyday household implements such as spoons, knives, and broken tobacco pipes. These objects are all closely associated with the family and the daily activities of the household.

Symbolically, shoes, garments, and other objects concealed near the hearth might, therefore, be intended to keep members of the family close to home in both a physical and spiritual sense. Perhaps they were intended, more specifically, to keep the family safe and intact and bring them security, fortune, and good luck. This would explain the presence of a large number of children's shoes and of families of shoes in concealments. Scholars have contemplated this interpretation of shoe concealment before. Swann (2005:117-118) mentions the English belief that "if a boy's shoe is built into his home, he will not leave." Similarly, Driel-Murray (1998:136) reports that in northern Germany, it was thought that "as long as a child's first shoe was kept, the child would come to no harm."

This could also explain the presence of many of the objects found in association with shoes. Swann (2005:117) commented recently that, "The spiritual middens and a 'family' of shoes make me feel that they claim, almost consecrate, the building to their

use” (Swann 2005:117). In fact, any object, however mundane, could be imbued with magical potency if it was heavily used, valued, or otherwise personally connected with an individual or household. While Easton proposes that spiritual middens and deposits of shoes and garments near the hearth served an apotropaic function, guarding the vulnerable opening or diverting malevolent forces, it is just as probable that these deposits were viewed as secure receptacles for magically or religiously sensitive materials. In fact, it is highly likely that these spiritual middens served both functions simultaneously. Swann (2005:117) has observed that when such deposits are carefully excavated, “you may find a range of all sorts of roughly contemporary material, representing the whole family and their work.” She suggests that like the Jewish *genizah*, deposition of well-worn shoes and other personal objects into spiritual middens was intended “to preserve good things from harm, and bad things from harming” (Swann 2005:118).

Interestingly, it appears that many spiritual middens do not represent a singular depositional act but were added to by subsequent generations who knew of their presence and purpose (Easton 1997b). Swann (2005:117) has noted that some spiritual middens contain shoes and other objects spanning a century or more. Easton has suggested that by the early 20th century, “the habit was becoming more casual; as shoes and clothing wore out, ceiling traps were lifted and the offerings of patently useless objects were strewn over the attic floor” (Easton 1997b:568). This could explain why large multi-component deposits in the United States are also found in areas away from the chimney and hearth, such as in a wall or in the voids between the ceiling of one story and the floor of the next. The belief that objects retain something of the spirit of the person or persons who used

them and treasured them can still be seen today: an attic full of broken toys, a musty old wedding dress, boxes of knickknacks and scraps of newspaper, essentially worthless objects but reluctantly parted with all the same.

The statement collected from an African American informant in the late 19th century—“To have about a house some place of deposit for old shoes, and therein to keep all the worn-out leather of the household, will bring good luck to the family”—could be describing numerous deposits found in the British Isles, Europe, and the United States that contain old shoes and broken and worn leather items (knife sheaths, purses and bags, insoles, scraps cut from mended shoes and clothing, etc.) but also other mundane household items as well as more religiously or magically potent artifacts such as Bibles and prayer books and the remains of animals ascribed supernatural qualities such as birds and cats. It appears that what Shepard’s informant is describing is a spiritual midden.

Herva and Ylimaunu (2009:239) argue that the European house spirit was not a concrete figure that existed separately from the building. Instead, they suggest that objects concealed in buildings were intended to bring good luck to the household and protect it from evil by imbuing the building itself with the special properties of those objects. In this view, the deposition of objects animates the building with a spirit so that it was “perceived and regarded as [a] living person-like being” (Herva and Ylimaunu 2009:240). This interpretation corresponds with St. George’s theory regarding the metaphorical house-body and the hearth as the heart or soul of the home. It also explains the wide variety of artifacts that have been found in concealed deposits, especially spiritual middens. The objects selected for concealment would likely be those that exhibit signs of wear and long-term use, perhaps curated objects inherited from family members

or those which retain the imprint, scent, or mark of the owner (Herva and Ylimaunu 2009:240). Such objects could be simultaneously viewed as gifts *to* house spirits and as gifts *of* spirit.

It is unclear whether such objects were concealed with the idea of repelling evil spirits or of attracting protective ones. Perhaps even those who participated in the rituals were unsure. Were the shoes and clothes meant to attract a friendly spirit or repel a malevolent one? What about the bits of broken crockery and glass, fragments of furniture and toys, unusual stones, faunal and botanical materials, books and documents, broken pipe stems, and hundreds of other seemingly mundane artifacts? Do they represent attempts at warding off evil and misfortune or offerings to benevolent house spirits? Pitt (1998:6) has observed of the incredible variety of objects found in deposits that “the choice of items was very personal.” Maybe these highly personal artifacts represent spiritual devotions intended to consecrate the home for the family’s use? It is likely that all of these ideas motivated the concealment of objects in buildings.

These interrelated concepts—family and household structure, domestic spirits and familiars, and the hearth as the heart and soul of the house-body—are all relevant to understanding concealed deposits in standing structures in the eastern United States. There are many questions still left to explore regarding concealments. Why did the practice continue into the 19th and early 20th centuries? Had it evolved into a secular builders’ rite, or did belief in protective house spirits and malignant demons and familiars continue? Perhaps the ritual was intended to offer general good luck and protection or to consecrate the house for the family’s use? This would explain why some deposits were added to over the course of several generations. Some of these deposits may have been

“recharged” periodically, as Easton suggests, perhaps each winter or upon the transfer of the house from one owner to the next. Perhaps each new inhabitant, each member added to the family through marriage or birth, deposited something of themselves into the house-body as an offering to the “spirit” of the place.

### **Ethnicity, Cosmology, and Household Structure**

Archaeologists recognize that cultural interaction and exchange regularly occurred between peoples of African and European descent in the eastern United States. The issue then is to understand how those interactions played out in the magico-religious and secular rituals of each group and how those interactions may have manifested in the archaeological record. The preceding discussion has emphasized how the cosmology, ideologies, and household structure of European, particularly Anglo, Americans may have affected the use of certain folk rituals in domestic contexts. Similarly, an examination of the cosmology, ideologies, and household structure of West Africa and their transmission to the New World should help shed light on the use of ritual among African Americans. For example, Davidson (2010) has suggested that the practice of placing a single shoe on the coffin lid in African American graves can be interpreted as a syncretic ritual that employs an English charm adapted to a distinctly African cosmology in which the soul remains in a liminal state after death. African Americans would have understood that an old shoe could be used to repel harmful forces, but lacking the mental concept of house spirits and familiars in their own cosmology, they would have adapted the practice to conform to their own worldview. This is supported by the ethnohistorical

evidence, which indicates that African Americans used shoes primarily in manipulative magic and as protection from the spirits of the dead, witchcraft, and conjure.

This interaction between different cosmologies and rituals opens up new possibilities for future study and introduces more questions than answers. For example, how did West African concepts of family and household, community, and personal agency affect African American magic and ritual in North America? It has already been shown how differences in family and household structure among New England and Virginia colonists may have affected how those groups did or did not employ ritual in domestic contexts.

To illustrate this point, a comparison could be made between West African and European household structure. Sudarkasa (1999) has observed that kinship and household in West Africa, and later among African Americans, differed from that of western Europe. While European kinship ties were based on conjugality, in which the bond between a married couple took precedence, West African constructs of family and household are built around a consanguineal core, in which biological kinship ties take precedence over conjugal relationships (Sudarkasa 1999:60). This emphasis can be seen in the presence of large co-resident domestic groups and polygynous marriages. Although African families had conjugally based units consisting of parents and their children, these units did not have the characteristics found in the typical nuclear family unit in Europe (Sudarkasa 1999:61). Instead, families in West Africa formed co-resident extended family groups that occupied multiple smaller dwellings forming a compound. A newly married couple did not form a new isolated household, but instead joined the existing compound of an extended family member (Sudarkasa 1999:61).

This household structure differs considerably from that found in western Europe since at least the Middle Ages, in which the nuclear family, built around the married couple, takes precedence (Stone 1977; Fischer 1989; Sudarkasa 1999:61). Furthermore, “African conjugal families did not have the rigid boundaries characteristic of nuclear families in the West” (Sudarkasa 1999:62). Organization of domestic space was also different; families lived in compounds in which, “husbands, wives, and children did not live in a bounded space, apart from other such units. Wives had their own small rooms or small dwellings, and husbands had theirs” (Sudarkasa 1999:63). Children resided in their mother’s rooms until reaching a certain age, after which they moved to communal rooms for boys or girls (Sudarkasa 1999:63). Polygyny was common, and both men and women engaged in sexual liaisons with more than one partner (Sudarkasa 1999:64). Even so, marriages were relatively stable and usually lasted until death (Sudarkasa 1999:67).

This household structure would have been significantly impacted by the institution of slavery, which often resulted in the separation of spouses and of parents from their children, resulting in more female-headed households. On the other hand, slavery would have magnified the importance of extended families and consanguineal kin (Sudarkasa 1999:68). In many ways, the household and family structure of antebellum African Americans and that of the English colonists who settled Virginia were more alike than either was to the rigid and isolated nuclear family structure found in Puritan New England. Sudarkasa (1999:70) argues: “For scholars interested in the heritage of Europe as well as the heritage of Africa in Afro-American family organization, a study of the operation of the principles of conjugality and consanguinity in these families would provide considerable insight into the ways in which these two institutional traditions have

been interwoven.” A similar analysis of how family and household structure may have influenced the magico-religious rituals of African Americans, and how those compare to European Americans, promises to be enlightening. For example, could archaeologists expect to find more evidence of ritual deposits in structures associated with African Americans in the post-bellum period, as family structure became more stable, focus on the nuclear family unit increased, and the nuclear family became more isolated from the larger community?

Additionally, one could argue that among antebellum African Americans there existed a need for more portable, individualized magical protection in the form of personal amulets worn on the body, such as the well-known pierced coin (Davidson 2004). A focus on more individualized magic could also explain why such an immense body of ethnohistorical data describes the use of manipulative charms directed at a particular person such as a lover or enemy. It could explain, for example, why the witch bottle tradition seems to have been readily adapted into the ritual toolbox of African Americans, manifesting in the hoodoo or conjure bottle, while large deposits associated with domestic spaces, such as shoes and spiritual middens, are significantly less common among African Americans. This is just one example of how the cosmology, ideologies, and worldview of West African culture may have influenced a syncretic and multivalent body of magic and folk ritual in the eastern United States. Future research could examine how differences in cosmology, particularly beliefs in witchcraft and conjure, as well as differing concepts of spirits and the dead, are reflected in folk magic. The potential for future research in this area is exciting.

## **Extending the Model: Unusual Deposits in Colonial Wells**

Understanding architectural concealments and the various ways that cosmology, worldview, and ritual may manifest in the archaeological record reveals other areas of potential research. The following discussion demonstrates how the methods employed in this study and the resulting analysis can help archaeologists investigate the material culture of magic and folk ritual in other contexts.

As indicated in Chapter 2, pre-Christian deities, fairies, demons, and other spirits did not always reside in and around the home. They could be found in forests and caves, meadows and hilltops, and most prominently, in sacred springs, wells, bogs, lakes, streams, and other watery places. The possible connection to Neolithic and Roman water deities should be reiterated here. Many of the wells and springs of the British Isles, once the home of the likes of the goddess Coventina, retained their role as destinations of pilgrimage, devotion, and sacred pledge (Simpson and Roud 2000:385-386). In fact, the sacred associations of watery places continued into the medieval and post-medieval periods. According to Gribben (1992:4), “Well into the 16th century, the European holy well was the center for annual religious rites, such as pilgrimages, well-dressing, and votive offerings.” Much has been written regarding the Catholic Church’s adoption of these sacred places as Christian holy wells, as well as later Protestant attempts to stifle such beliefs, which were viewed as “vestiges of pagan idolatry and Roman Catholic religion” (Gribben 1992:6). Holy wells can still be found throughout the British Isles and Europe and are said to offer healing and answered prayers and wishes to those who visit them, drink or bathe in their water, or offer small votive tokens such as bent pins, rags,

and coins, or less commonly, food, figurines, crystals, or stones. (Hope 1893; Gribben 1992; Brenneman and Brenneman 1995; Simpson and Roud 2000:386; Varner 2002).

In the United States, no European votive deposits in watery places have been identified, although such places holding significance for Native American groups are known (Varner 2002). Hand (1980:124) recorded a cure for warts in Illinois that involved rubbing the warts with string, tying a knot for each wart, and then throwing the string into a well in order to heal the affliction. It may also be relevant that the witch bottle found in Pittsburgh was recovered from a brick-lined cistern (Becker 2005:20). Merrifield (1954:11, 1955, 1969:102, 1987) reports that in certain parts of England, especially in the London vicinity, witch bottles and other votive artifacts, such as bent weapons and coins, were frequently deposited in rivers, streams, ditches, and culverts, perhaps appealing to spirits, saints, or unnamed forces to assist in healing or to answer a prayer.

There are a several sites in the eastern United States that have produced unusual deposits from water-related features. Individually, these deposits appear to be the result of refuse disposal or some other mundane explanation. However, after examining patterns among multiple deposits and considering the ways mundane objects were used in ritual contexts in the British Isles, it can be proposed that some of these deposits may represent material evidence of folk ritual and magic.

For example, at the Utopia settlement at Kingsmill, Virginia, occupied ca. 1660-1710, the skulls and leg bones of at least three horses were found in the well and cellar fill, as described in Chapter 6 (Kelso 1984:182). Additionally, at the Harrop (ca. 1635-1780) and Pettus (ca. 1641-1700) settlements, also located in Kingsmill, Virginia, unusual well deposits such as the 24 iron hoe blades, “most still in perfectly usable

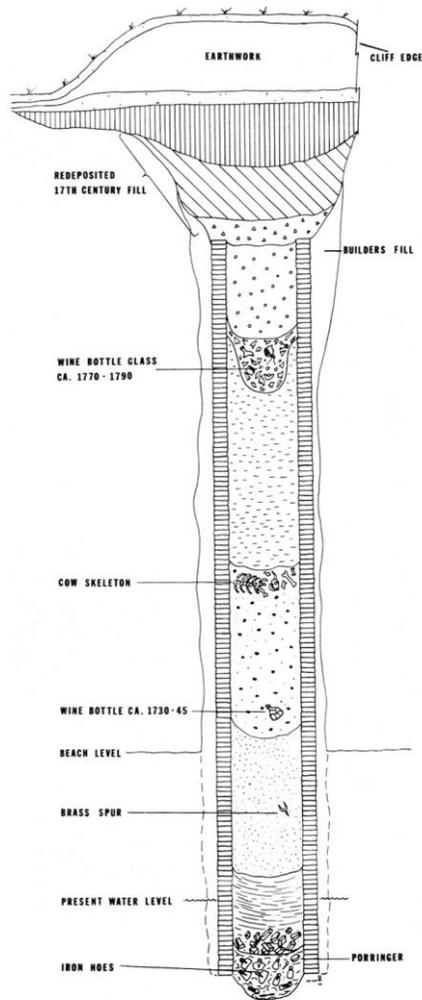


Figure 7.3. The well at Harrop at Kingsmill, Virginia, which included 24 iron hoe blades in the lowest deposit (Kelso 1984:figure 108).

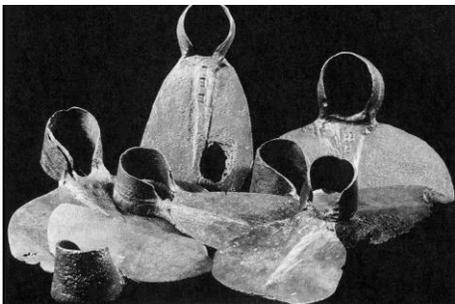


Figure 7.4. A few of the 24 iron hoe blades recovered from the lowest deposit of the Harrop well (Kelso 1984:figure 4).

condition,” found at the bottom of the Harrop well (Figures 7.3 and 7.4), and an unbroken mortising axe and harrow tooth recovered near the bottom of the Pettus well (Kelso 1984:154), suggest the possibility of ritual deposition.

At the Reverend Richard Buck site, occupied in the early 17th century, “an ax head that was nearly perfectly preserved” was found at the bottom of Well II (Mallios and Fesler 1999:29). At the William Drummond site near Jamestown, a number of iron hoe blades and several other heavy iron tools were found at the base of wells (Kelso 1984:195,n9). And at Jamestown proper, the Smithfield well, constructed in 1619 and abandoned ca. 1622-

1625, contained other intriguing artifacts, including arms and armor in good condition, seven iron axes and two hoe blades “in serviceable condition,” and a single child’s shoe recovered from the bottom of the well, shown in Figure 7.5 (Kelso 2006:120-122). Several

leather shoes and shoe soles were also

recovered from another well at Jamestown, dated to 1625-1650, although their exact position in the well is unknown (Cotter and Hudson 1957).

Kelso (1984:154-155) argues that all of the iron hoe blades and other iron objects, many in still usable condition, “must have served as makeshift bucket weights until whatever was used to fasten them to the bucket wore out, leaving them lying on the bottom. Recovery of these and other objects accidentally lost down the deep shafts was evidently too much bother at the time they were lost.” He bases

his interpretation on the fact that at nearby Burwell’s Landing (ca. 1635-1780), a wooden bucket excavated from the bottom of a well was found to have two iron half-horseshoes attached to the heavy iron chain (Figure 7.6), which he argues must have acted as counterweights to tip the bucket into the water. He concludes that these horseshoes offer an explanation for the “relatively consistent discovery of other metal implements, all with holes in them,” in other 17th-century wells in the Jamestown vicinity (Kelso 1984:154).

However, rationalizing the use of horseshoes and still serviceable iron tools as counterweights on well buckets is problematic. For one, the horseshoes were attached to a heavy iron chain that would have served the same purpose, making the relatively lightweight horseshoes redundant. Kelso (2006:121) admits as much regarding the iron axes and hoe blades found in the Smithfield well: “Such counterweights would have been unnecessary baggage, however, if the well bucket came equipped with the massive iron



Figure 7.5. Reconstruction of the lower contents of the Smithfield well at Jamestown. Photo courtesy of Tom Dempsey/PhotoSeek.com, Copyright 2008.



Figure 7.6. Bucket recovered from the bottom of the well at Burwell's Landing, with half-horseshoe attached to the chain (Kelso 1984:figure 104).

handle found near the bottom of the shaft. This handle would not only have acted as a swivel to keep the rope from untwisting but would have tipped the bucket by its own weight.”

Moreover, iron was a valuable commodity in the early colonial period. Worn out and unneeded iron objects were fashioned into useful items whenever possible. In fact, archaeological excavations at Jamestown have shown that settlers were reusing spare armor to make “survival” products such as shot, bullets, iron tools, and implements (Kelso et al. 1999:11). It seems highly unlikely that early Virginia colonists would have neglected to devise alternate methods of counterweighing a well bucket that didn't risk the loss of valuable, still serviceable, and recyclable iron implements.

There is, however, another possible interpretation of these unusual well deposits. The presence of horseshoes, known apotropaic objects, suggests the use of folk magic. The horseshoes may very well have been attached to the bucket not to serve as a counterweight but to protect the settlement's water source from brackish taint, “poisoning,” or going dry (Cohen 2011), similar to the way horseshoes were employed as apotropaic objects on buildings and in other contexts throughout the British Isles during this same period. The other iron objects may have been deposited in the wells for a reason similar to the concealment of iron hoe blades and axe heads in houses and dairies—to protect the occupants or to prevent the dairy products from spoiling and to help the butter come. Alternatively, they may have served as improvised votive objects

thrown into the wells by colonists seeking safety, spiritual protection, good health, fortune, or love. According to Varner (2002:95), metal is the most common offering in sacred wells and watery places in the British Isles and Europe. And after all, the 17th century was a dangerous period in Virginia history, and Jamestown certainly saw its fair share of death, disease, starvation, and conflict. Additionally, the presence of a single child's shoe at the bottom of the Smithfield well is reminiscent of the shoes found in Romano-British wells and may have served a similar votive or apotropaic function.

## **Chapter 8: Recommendations for Practical Applications and Future Research**

The preceding chapters have offered in-depth analysis of a variety of ritual concealments in standing structures in the eastern United States by exploring their geographical, temporal, and spatial distribution and the ways in which the forms and functions of specific artifact types have changed or remained the same over time, focusing in particular on concealment rituals associated with domestic spaces. The final objective of this study was to develop useful typologies for ritual concealments; to develop recommendations for locating, recognizing, documenting, and interpreting concealed deposits in the future; and to offer suggestions for future research. The preliminary typologies for witch bottles, concealed footwear, and concealed cats appear in the previous chapters (3, 4, and 5) and thus do not need to be repeated again here. The remainder of this chapter is divided into two parts. The first part offers recommendations for practical applications of the preceding research and analysis. The second section offers recommendations for future research on the material culture of European magic and ritual in the United States

## **Recommendations for Investigating Concealments in Standing Structures**

The first and most crucial step toward identifying ritual artifacts is raising awareness of the significance of such finds in order to increase the likelihood that relevant deposits are reported (Bennett 2006:10). Scholars of concealments generally recommend that any artifacts found in structural voids, no matter how seemingly mundane and insignificant, be left undisturbed and in situ until they can be properly documented (Bennett 2006:8; Textile Conservation Centre 2002). Ideally, any major renovation, demolition, or repair work in a building predating ca. 1930 should be monitored by an archaeologist or architectural historian familiar with ritual deposits, particularly in the northeastern United States and in domestic structures dating from the 17th through the late 19th centuries.

A key step in this process involves educating and enlisting the help of members of the building trades who are most likely to encounter such deposits. When undertaking any type of demolition, repair, or restoration of a historic building, it is essential that the work crew be made aware of the potential for concealed deposits and ritual marks and instructed how to identify and report any artifacts encountered. Outreach and publicity efforts targeted at trade unions, technical and professional training and licensing programs, trade publications, and similar venues should emphasize the significance of these artifacts and the important role that members of the building trades can play in documenting and preserving our collective heritage.

### *Locating Concealments*

Members of the building trades aren't the only ones who need to be aware of the possibility of encountering concealments. New standards need to be developed for archaeological investigations that take into consideration the possible presence of deliberately concealed deposits at domestic sites dating from the colonial period up through the early 20th century. For example, excavation under brick and stone hearths and thresholds is infrequently conducted, particularly in CRM, where budgets are tight and time is short, unless it is believed that the site was occupied by African Americans. It is generally sufficient that these features be located and recorded, but seldom is it required that the stones or bricks be removed to look for concealments underneath or within a chimney stack or fireplace structure. It should also become standard practice to select portions of any surviving masonry walls, foundations, and foundation piers for controlled disassembly, particularly near hearths, thresholds, interior and exterior doorways, and corners of rooms, in order to locate potential concealments that might otherwise go undiscovered.

Archaeologists should also be involved in locating concealments during the monitoring of demolition or repair work. An example of effective and informed monitoring was recently described by archaeologist Megan Springate (2011:1,3):

In 2009 and 2010, Richard Grubb & Associates conducted archaeological monitoring and recordation at the Historical Society of Princeton's (HSP) Updike Farmstead, Princeton Township, Mercer County, New Jersey. The work was conducted in conjunction with the Updike Farmstead restoration project. ... During the reconstruction project, slats of exterior siding were removed from the exterior western wall just above the stone foundation. A shoe was recovered from

inside the wall cavity near the brick chimney stack. Inspection of the interior of the house indicated there was no access to the interior of the walls near the chimney. ... The shoe recovered from the Updike Farmstead exhibits characteristics common to shoe concealments identified as having apotropaic (evil-averting) qualities (though there is some debate as to the specific meanings of the practice).

Another important aspect of locating ritual concealments involves establishing and field-testing methods of non-invasive or minimally invasive/non-destructive investigations of architectural voids and structural cavities such as those currently employed by historic preservationists, conservators, and building inspectors. For example, a fiber optic borescope, an optical device consisting of a tube with an eyepiece on one end and a lens on the other end, could be used to see behind masonry and plaster walls, in fireplace and chimney cavities, under floorboards, above ceilings, in roofs and cornices, and in other inaccessible locations. Borescopes require only a small hole to be drilled to access a space and can be fitted with a video camera to record images. Selective borescope investigations could be used to investigate areas where deposits are known, suspected, or likely to be found.

Other low-tech devices that may have some limited application for locating potential deposits of artifacts include internal capacitor stud finders, which detect changes in density caused by objects located behind a wall (most commonly a framing stud), and magnetic stud finders and metal detectors, which may be useful in finding concealments that contain ferrous objects. Suspicious anomalies could then be investigated further with borescopes to confirm or refute the presence of concealments.

## *Recognizing Concealments*

After concealed artifacts are located, the next step is to determine what has potential ritual or magical significance and what can be dismissed as rubbish or the result of accidental loss or vermin activity. However, before this can be done, assumptions regarding what constitutes a ritual object must be reevaluated. According to Schiffer (1987:79), in order for a deposit to be defined as a ritual cache, “it must be a reasonably discrete concentration of artifacts, usually not found in a secondary refuse deposit; in addition, ritual caches generally contain complete artifacts, sometimes unused, that are intact or easily restored.” Although Schiffer argues that a true ritual “cache” or deposit should contain intact, unused artifacts, there are numerous examples to the contrary, both in prehistoric and historic contexts. For example, Merrifield (1987) has observed that artifacts in Great Britain were often ritually “killed” before deliberate deposition. Ritual deposits associated with African Americans have been found to include assemblages of broken ceramic sherds, fragments of glass, bent pins, and other partial or damaged artifacts (Cochran 1999; Leone and Fry 1999; Leone et al. 2001). In some cases, the data suggest that the worn, incomplete state of an object is what makes it magically significant. As discussed in Chapters 4 and 6, concealed shoes, boots, and garments are almost always used and well worn. Some have even been deliberately cut, slashed, or otherwise mutilated. Many of the objects that accompany them are similarly broken or worn.

After considering the data and resulting analysis provided in this study, it is clear that empty bottles, old shoes, torn garments, broken ceramics and glass, iron tools and

implements, and dozens of other artifacts that may appear to have served a purely mundane function may in fact be ritual artifacts. While an isolated deposit containing artifacts of this nature would be difficult to recognize and interpret, when compared to similar deposits from hundreds of sites, clear patterns emerge that make it much more likely that future deposits will be recognized and handled accordingly. In addition, by being aware of the types of artifacts found in concealments and their context, researchers are more likely to record details that may not have been otherwise noted and thus will be better prepared to conduct more sophisticated analysis that will make a significant contribution to the study of folk magic and ritual among European American populations.

#### *Documenting Concealments*

After a deposit is located and recognized as having potential ritual significance, ideally the next step would be to record the deposit in situ using archaeological methods. Atzbach (2005) even goes so far as to suggest that architectural deposits should be opened only by professionals. If the space has already been opened, it should be possible to modify standard archaeological field methods to record profiles and plans, piece plotting the location of each artifact and treating the structural cavity as an archaeological feature. No assumptions regarding the value (or lack thereof) of certain artifacts or materials should be made at this point. Even deposits that appear to be the result of mundane depositional processes should be recorded and the contents preserved for laboratory analysis.

Unfortunately, due to a variety of factors, artifacts found within the fabric and voids of buildings—embedded or contained within the walls, ceilings, chimneys, fireplaces, attics, eaves, and cornices—are seldom documented in a controlled investigation such as that recommended above. In fact, it is usually during routine repairs and renovations that most concealed deposits are found, and often their significance is not understood until after they have been removed from their original context. Therefore, the next best option is to document (sometimes through recall) any artifacts inadvertently exposed, their association to each other, and their exact position in the cavity or structure. The location of and distance to the nearest fireplace, chimney stack, door, window, and corner should be recorded, as well as the cardinal direction of the deposit. As Hukantaival (2009:350) has pointed out, “A building deposit is an object *and* its context, meaning it can only be identified as such when accurate information on the find’s context is available. Otherwise it is only an object.”

Investigation and documentation of concealed deposits may be mandated under Federal law. Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 requires federal agencies to consider the effects of federally funded and permitted activities on historic properties, in which “historic properties” are those listed or eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places. In order to be listed on the National Register, a district, site, building, structure, or object must meet at least one of the four criteria for evaluation:

- A. Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Associated with the lives of significant persons in the past.

C. Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction, or that represent the work of a master, or that possess high artistic values, or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.

D. Has yielded or may be likely to yield, information important in history or prehistory.

Currently, Criterion D is almost exclusively applied to traditional archaeological sites and is seldom used to evaluate standing structures. It could be argued, however, that ritual concealments in standing structures have the potential to yield information important in history. In effect, every building or structure built prior to the early 20th century has the potential to contain concealed artifacts or deposits and thus may meet Criterion D. It is certainly an area of practical and professional application that is worth exploring, and one that has the potential to drastically alter the way standing structures are evaluated and documented in the for-profit field of CRM.

### *Interpreting Concealments*

A major objective of this thesis was to demonstrate how ethnohistorical data can assist in identifying and interpreting concealed deposits in architectural contexts. For this thesis, the artifact types selected for in-depth analysis were carefully and purposefully chosen in order to explore how the quantity and quality of both material and ethnohistorical data, as well as commonly held assumptions about what constitutes a ritual object, can influence interpretation. More specifically, an attempt was made to

demonstrate how the two sources can work together to enrich our understanding of ritual concealments.

A comprehensive survey of ethnohistorical data from British Isles, as well as from European American and African American sources, demonstrates that there is considerable overlap in magico-religious and secular ritual among multiple groups. Some of this overlap is the product of prolonged cultural interaction that resulted in a syncretic system of folk magic, particularly in the eastern and southern United States. However, it is clear that certain pan-cultural rules or principles of magic may be found independently among various populations. As previously suggested, by understanding these principles, it is possible to interpret evidence of magical belief in the material record.

For example, personal objects such as shoes, clothing (especially undergarments, socks, and hats), and personal possessions such as smoking pipes, eating utensils, and drinking vessels can all be viewed as having magical significance in multiple traditions. These objects were intimately associated with a particular person. Objects such as broken serving dishes, fragments from furniture, Bibles and books, may be similarly associated with the family.

Sharp and jagged objects such as pins and needles, nails and spikes, thorns, slivers of wood, broken glass, awls, knives, and other edge tools possess an analogous meaning among multiple magical traditions, most commonly intended to cut, harm, snare, or protect (Elworthy 1895:223). If the objects are made of iron, a metal embodied with magical qualities in many cultures (Frazer 1890; Elworthy 1895:220-225), their efficacy is that much stronger. Intricate, flashy, reflective, and complex objects and symbols can also be used to distract or confuse spirits or other supernatural beings. In European

tradition, it is believed witches must compulsively count or trace objects they encounter in their path such as grains of salt or sand, the bristles of a broom, the holes in a sieve, or the letters in a newspaper or words in a Bible. Therefore, complex objects were often hung or concealed near doorways, windows, and chimneys to deter supernatural intruders. In African American tradition, shiny objects such as crystals, mirrors, beads, and glass bottles (particularly blue glass) served a similar function, distracting and trapping spirits and warding off the evil eye. Using such informal “rules,” or principles of magic, individuals could protect themselves, their families, and their homes from malignant and undesirable forces and people. By understanding these same rules, researchers can be more attuned to potential magical artifacts encountered in archaeological and architectural contexts in both European and African American sites.

Fortunately, Riley Augé (2012) is currently developing guidelines for interpreting the material culture of Anglo American ritual as part of her doctoral research. Her partial and preliminary findings, presented at the Society for Historical Archaeology annual meeting in 2012, identify characteristics such as the use of certain numbers with cosmological significance (three, five, seven) and opposing spatial hierarchies such as high/low and left/right. She argues:

Understanding the associated meanings of high/low and right/left, like understanding the numerical correspondences of magico-religious worldviews, may assist archaeologists in both recognizing artifacts as magical material culture and understanding them via the cultural logic of the people who used and believed in them (Augé 2012:9).

An example of how understanding such associations can benefit the study of ritual concealments can be seen in the repeated emphasis on the left in some of the deposits

discussed in this thesis. Augé (2012:8-9) explains that, “the Latin term for left is *sinister*, which underscores the negative connotation attributed to left-ness.” Ellis (2002:60) interprets the left as a “backward” element, implying evil. Chapter 2 discussed how left and north were associated with the Devil in Christian cosmology and how this association affects burial patterns in churchyards. A focus on the left has also been documented in votive deposits of Roman and Neolithic shoes (Van Driel-Murray 1998), the severed paws and limbs of cats concealed in houses in Germany (Schad 2005), and in the preferential selection of left shoes and boots for concealment in the United States. However, according to Hyatt’s (1970-1978[3]:2765) African American informants, the left is magically potent because it is the side closest to the heart, demonstrating how elements of ritual can be adapted to various cosmologies and worldviews. Armed with this information, archaeologists should be particularly sensitive to the presence of other signs of left-ness they may encounter in the material record.

### **Avenues for Future Research**

In the course of conducting research and analysis for this study, several possibilities for future research were identified. Some of the artifact-specific recommendations regarding witch bottles, concealed footwear, and concealed cats were discussed in the preceding chapters and do not need to be repeated here. However, there are more broad-scale areas of scholarship that may prove to be fruitful as well.

For example, there is clearly a need to conduct more controlled investigations and case studies of individual ritual concealments in order to gain a better understanding of

their context and function. It would also be worthwhile to investigate how the magico-religious and secular rituals of other European American populations manifested in the archaeological record. How do the rituals of members of the German, Irish, and Scandinavian Diasporas differ from those of the English? Are German Americans more likely to focus ritual devotions and apotropaic measures on their barns and spaces associated with livestock? Another area ripe for study is the interaction between the ritual traditions of European Americans and influences from African American and Native American traditions such as powwowing and hoodoo. How have these traditions influenced each other in North America and evolved into new forms not found in the Old World?

On a more practical level, it is clear that archaeologists and other scholars need to work together to develop a comprehensive plan for future research in the field of ritual concealments. While an extensive dataset was assembled for this thesis, a more methodical approach to data collection would certainly bring to light previously unreported finds. In particular, a systematic survey of all state and local historical societies, museums, historic sites, and other heritage organizations throughout the United States would not only uncover additional deposits, but would also help publicize existing research efforts so that future finds are more likely to be reported. Similar outreach efforts directed at tradespersons, as previously discussed, and at owners of historic buildings, perhaps through organizations and agencies such as the National Trust for Historic Preservation and the State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs) would also achieve a similar purpose.

Documentation of future concealments should also include the remarks and reactions of tradespersons and homeowners who encounter the deposits. Are they surprised at the find? Are they apprehensive? Do they feel that the artifacts represent something specific or are imbued with a particular meaning? Some may express unease or discomfort in disturbing the deposits and may feel compelled to replace any objects they find, putting them back as close to their original position as possible. It is also important to ask tradespersons about any traditions or informal rituals in which they may currently engage and their reasons for doing so. Such contemporary ethnography may provide valuable insight into concealment rituals in the past.

From talking with other scholars, it is clear that one of the next steps in the study of ritual concealments should involve the creation of a centralized online database of deposits in the United States. Ideally, the database would be hosted by a research institution or established non-profit that can provide logistical support and long-term server space. The database should be searchable and include capabilities for online submission of new finds from both CRM firms and the general public. It should also provide an option for attaching associated documentation to each entry, including digital photographs and digitized sketches, maps, and floor plans. The creation of such a database will encourage communication and collaboration between scholars from multiple fields, including archaeology, architectural history, historic preservation, folklore, museum studies, and shoe and textile conservation, and will also generate publicity and public interest in the research. The creation of such a database should be a major future objective.

## **Concluding Remarks**

This thesis has argued that European magico-religious and secular ritual accompanied colonists to the New World and survived in recognizable forms into the early 20th century, particularly in the form of concealed deposits in standing structures. Furthermore, it has been shown how the function of concealments can be deduced with some confidence when paired with ethnohistorical evidence and by taking into consideration factors such as geographical, temporal, and spatial context, household and family structure, and elements of cognition such as cosmology, religion, ideology, and iconography.

An attempt has also been made to explore the ways in which cultural stereotypes and Eurocentric interpretations have affected how historical archaeologists currently study and interpret material evidence of magic and ritual in the United States. In American historical archaeology, there is a tendency to emphasize conscious cultural resistance and long-term cultural continuity among non-European populations, particularly regarding magico-religious ritual (for example, studies of African American hoodoo in the southeastern United States). On the other hand, there is a similar tendency to deemphasize cultural continuity among European American populations and to assume that they readily abandoned long-held customs and rituals in favor of new, modern, and rational worldviews. This is simply not the case. Ideally, this research has drawn attention to the need for a pan-cultural approach that moves beyond strict racial and ethnic boundaries and explores other relevant factors such as cosmology and religion, complex

social interactions, family and household structure, the importance of agricultural spaces, personal agency and materiality, and the need for portable and personal protection.

Although there have been some gains made in recent years, there still seems to be what May (2001:5) describes as a “ritual phobia” among many historical archaeologists. What has become apparent to those who study concealments and other ritual deposits is that European magical traditions did indeed continue in North America. The author of this thesis proposes that instead of viewing magic and ritual as archaeological anomalies, historical archaeologists should approach *every* site and structure dating from the colonial period up through the early 20th century—and not just those associated with the African Diaspora—with the possibility that they may contain material evidence of magic or ritual. Such an approach has the potential to increase tenfold the body of relevant data and may significantly affect the way in which archaeology is practiced in the United States.

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## **Appendix A: Concealed Footwear in the United States**

The following table includes a list of all deposits of concealed footwear recorded by the author. Data was obtained from Geisler's (2003) master's thesis; records from the Northampton Museum Concealed Shoe Index in Northampton, England, transcribed by Rebecca Shawcross and associates; a database of finds compiled by C. Riley Augé using data supplied by Brian Hoggard; and from dozens of historical society newsletters and web pages, personal and institutional blogs, social networking and photo sharing websites, newspaper and magazine articles, and emails and telephone conversations conducted by the author. Shoes recorded previously by Geisler (2003) are noted. Shoes listed in the Concealed Shoe Index are also noted and the catalogue number assigned to each deposit by the Northampton Museum is listed, when known. Shoes in the collection of Historic New England (HNE), formerly the Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities, are also noted, with the appropriate catalogue number listed. All other sources of data are cited, with complete citations found in the References.

Considerable effort was made to verify data from Geisler (2003) and the Concealed Shoe Index through personal or electronic communication with local historical

societies and homeowners. These communications often resulted in additional cases of concealed footwear, garments, concealed cats, and other artifacts, suggesting that a systematic survey of all local historical societies and museums in each state would uncover many more previously undocumented deposits.

### **Key**

In the table below, the following abbreviations are used:

CS = Concealed Shoe Index, Northampton Museum, Northampton, England

HNE = Historic New England collection

M = male footwear

F = female footwear

M/F = male or female footwear (gender unknown)

M+F = both male and female footwear

S = single (unmatched) footwear

P = matched pair of footwear

S/P = single or pair of footwear (unknown)

S+P = both singles and pairs of footwear

A = adult footwear

C = children's footwear

A/C = adult's or children's footwear (unknown)

A+C = both adult's and children's footwear

City, State	Site or Address	# of Shoes	S or P	M or F	A or C	Description of Shoes	Date of Shoes	Location in Building	Date of Building or Addition	Associated Artifacts	Notes & Sources
Foldfields, CA		1	S/P	M/F	A/C	At least one shoe, no description available	1849	location unknown			CS 1995.919
Hacienda Heights, CA	John A. Rowland House, 16021 E. Gale Avenue	1	S	M	A	Man's single shoe, cut in half	ca. 1880-1900	between joists in crawlspace between attic and bedroom	1855		John Rowland b. 1791 in Cecil County, MD. House remodeled in 1898 by granddaughter, Victoria Hudson Dibble. Paul Spitzzeri 2011, elec. comm.
Industry, CA	Workman-Temple House, 15415 East Don Julian Road	4	S	F	A	Four women's single shoes found together: (a) laced, ca. 1880-1900; (b) buttoned with flamboyant "Polish" top-line, ca. 1880-1900; (c) low female shoe, ca. 1880-1890s; (d) button boot, ca. 1880-1890s	ca. 1880s-1890s	under floorboards in 2nd-floor bedroom, at end of space between joists	1890s (bedroom addition)		Paul Spitzzeri 2011, elec. comm.; William Workman b. 1799 in Temple Sowerby, Westmorland (Cumbria), England. House owned by grandson, John Harrison Temple, in 1890s.
Los Angeles, CA	Charlie Chaplin's Studios, La Brea Avenue	1	S	F	A	Woman's single buttoned overshoe, wrapped in 1919 newspaper	ca. 1919	in crack of wall		1919 newspaper	CS 1995.1022; Geisler 2003
San Diego, CA	Fort Rosecrans, Bldg. 139, Enlisted Men's Barracks	1	S	M	A	Man's single Army boot	ca. 1904	inside specially built cavity in the north chimney	1904	found with campaign hat from Spanish American War	May 2001; CS 2002.20; Geisler 2003; Ron May 2011, elec. comm.
Santa Cruz, CA	130 Baldwin Street	1	S	M/F	A/C	Single shoe, no description available	ca. 1980-1992	in wall			Put into wall by Gay Bower ca. 1980-1992 (worked with June Swann on concealed shoe research). CS 1995.966; Geisler 2003
Vallejo, CA	house	1	S	M/F	C	Child's single buttoned boot	1860s	in wall near front door			Geisler 2003
Ansonia (formerly Derby), CT	David Humphreys House	4	S/P	M/F	A/C	Four shoes, no description available	1730s	behind a wall panel	built ca. 1698; rebuilt in 1730s		Home of Congregational minister. Derby Historical Society 2007
CT	house	1	S	F	A	Woman's single shoe, pointed toe		lodged between boarding of wall cupboard and center chimney stack	ca. 1720		C. Riley Augé 2012, elec. comm. (Hoggard database)
Durham, CT	Elias Austin House	1+	S/P	M/F	C	Children's shoes, no description available		wall	built 1745; 1765 side addition		Found while removing a wall. Christie 2004
East Hartford, CT	19 Park Avenue	1	S	M	A	Man's single leather boot, discarded		in roof space	1835	found with woman's bonnet with metal stays	CS 1997.25

Granby, CT	10 Wall Road	2	S	M+F	A	Man's single shoe; woman's single shoe		base of chimney	ca. 1750	found with reading book	CS 1997.29.1-2
Kent, CT	Col. Bull House (demolished)	1	S	M	C	Boy's single boot, small		wedged in the beams and rafters	mid-18th century		McAvoy 2005b; Marge Smith 2011, elec. comm.
New Haven, CT	Angel of Peace statue	1	S	M/F	A/C	Single shoe inside the Angel of Peace statue on top of the Soldiers' and Sailors' Monument	ca. 1880s	inside the Angel of Peace statue	1887	textile fragments	Found by workers clearing out debris inside statue. During the flushing, workers got "rained on by textile fragments" that had been inside the statue, and out popped an old shoe. After conservation, the shoe was returned to the statue along with other items in a time capsule. City of New Haven 2006a, 2006b; Roman 2006
Newtown, CT	28 Great Hill Road	1	S	M	A+C	1st deposit: Boy's whole-cut Wellington boot converted to open front lacing (as outgrown), section of leather cut out of toe	ca. 1870s-1880s	under crawlspace of first-floor room (former porch)	built ca. 1720 with several small additions of unknown date		Thermes 2008; Jennifer Thermes 2011, elec. comm.
Newtown, CT	28 Great Hill Road	1	S	M	A+C	2nd deposit: Man's "slit-vamp" style, machine pegged, ca. 1850+	ca. 1850+	in plaster ceiling of dining room	built ca. 1720 with several small additions of unknown date		Thermes 2008; Jennifer Thermes 2011, elec. comm.
Newtown, CT	Cato Freeman House, 25 Sherman Street, Sandy Hook	1	S	M	A	Man's single brogan, inscribed with an "X"		beneath the kitchen floor between joists	built by Cato Freedman, a freed slave, ca. 1783-1784; kitchen addition slightly later		Shoe inscribed with an "X" or "spirit mark" using a metallic lead pencil. An "X" is also scratched on the front of the fireplace [beehive oven] in basement; possible symbol of African religion. Crevier 2006; Blau 2007; Cruson 2007:62-65,80-81, 2008; Dan Cruson 2011, elec. comm.
Newtown, CT		1	S	M/F	C	Single boot, probably child's		between ceiling of 1st story and floor of 2nd story			Geisler 2003
Redding, CT		2	P	M/F	A/C	Pair of mud shoes		location unknown			Geisler 2003
Ridgefield, CT	house	2	S	M	A	Man's single boot, cut-down, heavily mended; single shoe, no description available		inside main chimney near entry door	1730		C. Riley Augé 2012, elec. comm. (Hoggard database)
Rocky Hill, Hartford County, CT	Pratt Street	1	S	M	A/C	1st deposit: man's or boy's single round toed w/ pegged repairs, waxed-calf with "dog-leg" side seam	ca. 1820s-1840s	behind paneling near upper left side of hall fireplace	ca. 1750		Concealed during period of renovation. Shoe replaced behind paneling next to hall fireplace where it was found. Brush 2009; John Brush 2011, elec. comm.

Rocky Hill, Hartford County, CT	Pratt Street	1	S	M	A	2nd deposit: man's single substantial 'slipper'	ca. 1825- 1850	found behind another hearth on the same floor as 1st deposit	ca. 1750		Concealed during period of renovation. John Brush 2011, elec. comm.
Sharon, CT	62 Upper Main Street	5	S	M/F	A+C	Five single shoes, at least one was likely child's		wall	ca. 1790	1911 newspaper?	Original shoes put back in the wall and each family member of current occupants added a shoe: a high heeled pump, a sneaker, a couple of other shoes, and a copy of the NY Times. McAvoy 2005a; Louise Brown 2011, elec. comm.; Marge Smith 2011, elec. comm.
Stonington, CT	636 Pendleton Hill Road	2	S/P	M/F	C	Two child's straight last shoes (singles or pair)		ceiling of southwest bedroom	ca. 1766		CS 1997.30.1-2
Suffield, CT	house	1	S	M/F	C	Infant's or child's single shoe		in wall of house	1790	glass vial?	C. Riley Augé 2012, elec. comm. (Hoggard database)
West Haven, CT	Ward-Heitmann House	1	S	M/F	C	Child's single right shoe with strap across foot, 7 1/2 inches, leather, hand-sewn, missing outer sole and about one inch of toe	ca. 1800	beneath floor in a second-story closet, next to central chimney	built ca. 1684- 1725; rear addition completed ca. 1800	blue and white ceramic sherd (pearlware) from a pitcher or teapot, manuf. 1780- 1810	Rear addition built by Capt. Thomas Ward ca. 1800. Shoe dated by Rusty Moore. Livingston 2001; Geisler 2003
Washington, D.C.		1	S	M/F	C	Single baby's shoe		in wall			CS 1995.920; Geisler 2003
Augusta, GA	Augusta Arsenal, Officer's Quarters (now Augusta State University Campus)	2	P	F	A	Pair of women's slippers, winged mules, flax needle lace upper, thick plaited sole	1870s-1880s	in north wall behind plaster & lath	built 1827- 1828; probably concealed ca. 1886 during repair work		Property used as U.S. arsenal 1828 to 1955. Slippers likely concealed during repairs made after 1886 Charleston Earthquake. Jessica Geisler Costello assisted with interpretation. CS 2003.23; Murphy 2003; Christopher Murphy 2011, elec. comm.
Greene County, GA	plantation	1	S	M/F	A/C	Single leather shoe, no description available	early 1860s	in ceiling			CS 1995.921
Helen vicinity, Santee Nacoochee Valley, GA	Hardman Farm	1	S	F	A/C	Woman's or girl's single "Polish" (flamboyant top-line cut) front-lace boot	ca. 1870- 1880	in wall	1869		Found by workmen. Description and date provided by D.A. Saguto. Payne 2011
Iowa City, IA	907 E. Davenport Street	2	S	M/F	C	Child's single laced boot; baby's single buttoned boot		in living room wall, NW corner	second half of 19th century	found with child's necklace	CS (no #); Geisler 2003
Iowa City, IA	brick mansion, 602 Clarke Street	1	S	M/F	C	Child's single ankle boot, scalloped top edge, machine- stitched, no heel	ca. 1870s	in wall between kitchen and dining room	pre-1810		CS 1995.1059
Chicago, IL	2424 West Estes Ave.	1+	S/P	M/F	A/C	Shoes, no description available, discarded		wedged under stairway			C. Riley Augé 2012, elec. comm. (Hoggard database)

Fulton, IL	Fay House, 500 block of 15th Avenue	4	S	M+F	A+C	Four single shoes: 2 women's high button boots, ca. 1880; child's single slit vamp ankle boot; men's single slipper, ca. 1870-1885	ca. 1880; ca. 1870-1885	in ceiling	pre-1855	stockings, letters	Likely concealed during early remodel rather than during orig. construction episode. Kolk 2007
Oak Park, IL	Humphrey House	1	S	M/F	A	Adult's single leather shoe	ca. 1919	wall	1919		Humphrey House 2007
Wyoming, Stark County, IL		1	S	M/F	A/C	single "Victorian" shoe, no description available		in library wall next to chimney		buttons, textile fragment, possible piece of a dress, blue velvet trim	GardenWeb 2010
Garrett, DeKalb County, IN	Simon-Heinzerling House	3	S+P	F	A	Pair of women's front-lace boots, ca. 1880-1895; Woman's single stiletto heel, ca. 1950s-ca. 1965	ca. 1880-1895; ca. 1950s-1965	crawl space in attic eaves	built 1837; ca. 1850-1860 addition		Date and description provided by D. A. Saguto. Heinzerling 2002; Gretel Smith 2011, elec. comm.
Indianapolis, Marion County, IN	Indiana Statehouse	1	S	M	A	1st deposit: man's single ankle boot with two-lace closure, machine and hand sewn, nailed heel, square toe, portions of leather upper cut away	1850-1870	under floor in front of window on first story	1888		Bill Wepler 2009, pers. comm.; Indiana State Museum 2009a; Jennifer Hodge 2011, elec. comm.; Manning 2011; Meredith McGovern 2011, elec. comm.
Indianapolis, Marion County, IN	Indiana Statehouse	1	S	M	A	2nd deposit: man's single work boot with leather upper, full-length tongue, layered leather heel and sole attached with nails, five pairs of eyelets, three pairs of hooks, men's size 8 or 9, still in wearable condition	1890-1920	between original wall and wall added ca. 1920	1920 addition		Bill Wepler 2009, pers. comm.; Indiana State Museum 2009b; Jennifer Hodge 2011, elec. comm.; Manning 2011; Meredith McGovern 2011, elec. comm.
Madison, Jefferson County, IN	Sullivan House	2	P	M/F	A	1st deposit: pair of vulcanized rubber shoes	ca. 1840-1850	between roof rafters behind built-in box gutter	built 1818; box cornice added ca. 1840-1850	gourd, shards of glass	John Staicer 2009-2011, elec. comm.
Madison, Jefferson County, IN	Sullivan House	7	S	M+F	A	2nd deposit: woman's single woven house slipper; man's single Wellington-style boot; five women's single shoes	ca. 1840-1850	between box gutter and attic insulation	built 1818; box cornice added ca. 1840-1850		John Staicer 2009-2011, elec. comm.; Main Street Cobbler 2010
Muncie, Delaware County, IN	Carnegie Public Library	1	S	M	A	Man's single work boot, left foot	ca. 1903	in cavity behind gas fireplace mantle	1903		Carlson 2003; Gentis 2003; Pearson 2003; Shirley Pearson 2011, elec. comm.
New Harmony, IN	Dormitory No. 4 (Opera House), New Harmony State Hist. Site	1	S	F	A	Woman's single black leather slip-on shoe, square toe, patched, 1790s, concealed ca. 1830	ca. 1830	attic of 1827 theatre addition	1804; 1827 theatre addition		In private hands, whereabouts unknown. CS 1995.922; Bill Wepler 2012, pers. comm.
Wakarusa, IN	305 W. Harrison Street	1	S	M/F	A	Adult's single shoe, no description available		wall between kitchen and dining room next to chimney in corner of dining room	1940s	found with charred books	CS (no #)

Topeka, KS	Kansas Statehouse	1	S	M	A	Man's single low button shoe, hand-sewn, broad plain toe, porcelain buttons, approx. man's size 8, right foot	ca. 1880	under stairs between 2nd & 3rd stories of west wing	1879-1881	Found by construction workers tearing up stairs between 2nd and 3rd stories of west wing. Description for similar shoe found in A.J. Cammeyer catalog: "Men's low button shoe, hand sewed with a broad plain toe." Retailed for \$4. Carlson 2007
Bourbon County, KY	Ewalt's Crossroads, corner of U.S. 27 and Clay Kiser Road	1+	S/P	M/F	A/C	Shoes, no description available		behind paneling of interior wall	1792 frame house; ca. 1815 stone addition	found with tools, hickory nuts, peach pits and a wicker torch Eblen 2010
Covington, Kenton County, KY	228 Berry Street	6	S	M+F	A+C	Man's single shoe; woman's single shoe; three boys' single shoes, all for the left foot; one girl's single shoe	1870s-1880s	ceiling of either second or third story	ca. 1868	empty bottle found near shoes, no cork/cap, green-blue, possible prescription bottle Found by workers during reno, exact location unknown. Shoes put back in wall under staircase and dry walled over in 2008, along with two new shoes (one man's, one woman's). Shoes dated by D. A. Saguto. Rehab or Die 2008; Holly Young 2011, elec. comm.
KY	commercial building	1	S	M	A	Man's single square toe brogue, five hole front lace, pegged sole, domed shank, unfinished (pegs proud on insoles), unworn	1840s	in interior wall	1840s	CS 2002.33
Bermuda, LA	North Tenant Cabin, Oakland Plantation, Cane River Creole National Historical Park	1	S	M/F	A/C	Single leather shoe, no description available		under collapsed chimney		Larcuente 2011
St. Francisville, LA	Desert Plantation, servant's/sharecropper's house	2	P	M	C	Pair of men's shoes, five pairs of lace holes	ca. 1890-1920s	wedged between rafters in attic	1808	Date and description provided by D. A. Saguto. Willia Perkins 2011, elec. comm.
Amherst, MA	house	2	P	F	A	Pair of women's front-lace, black leather shoes, American made, well worn	ca. 1840s	in wall of entry hall	ca. late 1830s to early 1840s	CS 1995.928; Geisler 2003
Amherst, MA	Strong House	3	S/P	M+F	A	man's single indoor shoe; two (singles or pair) women's buckle shoes	ca. 1770s	inside wall surrounding central chimney	1744	found with a Bible, man's legging, single glove Williamson 2006; Philip A. Shaver 2011, elec. comm.
Arlington, MA	8 Deveraux Street	1	S	M/F	C	Child's single shoe, first walking size, leather with leather knob buttons	mid-19th century	in attic corner behind roof beams	ca. 1826	CS 1997.31

Beverly, MA		1	S	M	C	Boy's single shoe, laced, pegged	ca. 1845	in attic		CS 1995.929; Geisler 2003
Boston, MA	1st Harrison Gray Otis House, 141 Cambridge Street	1	S	M	A	1st deposit: man's single slipper, slit vamp, no heel, oval toe	1810-1830	on top of 3rd story ceiling, under attic floorboards in west central bay	built 1796; attic floor laid after addition of dormers in first half of 19th century	HNE 1997.55; Geisler 2003
Boston, MA	1st Harrison Gray Otis House, 141 Cambridge Street	1	S	M	C	2nd deposit: boy's single boot, blucher, front laced, round toe, stacked heel, leather insole, pegged heel	1820-1840	location unknown	built 1796	HNE 1918.792; Geisler 2003
Boston, MA	George Parkman House(?), 8 Walnut Street	1	S	F	A/C	Woman's or girl's single shoe, open tab/latchet tie, round toe, pegged heel, two pair lace holes, multi-ring stamp on sole	1820-1830	between partition walls		Found in 1905. HNE 1921.279; Geisler 2003
Bourne, MA		1	S	M	A	Man's single leather tie shoe, pegged, two pairs of lace holes, worn, patched upper	ca. 1840s	in chimney	ca. 1630	CS 1995.930; Geisler 2003
Brookfield, MA	17 Martin's Road	1	S	M/F	A/C	Single shoe, no description available		between brickwork and wood paneling above dining room chimney/bake oven, south side		CS 1997.61
Cambridge, MA	Goddard-Watson-Davenport-Simpson House, Massachusetts Avenue (demolished 1921)	3	S	M/F	A/C	Girl's single shoe, slit vamp, round toe, ca. 1805-1825; woman's or child's single shoe, slit vamp, pointed toe, ca. 1795-1810; woman's or child's single shoe, open tab/latchet tie, pegged heel, round/oval toe, ca. 1825	ca. 1795- ca.1825	found in house, location unknown		HNE 1921.197-199; Geisler 2003
Cape Cod, MA		1	S	M/F	C	Single child's clog		under floor		CS 1995.939; Geisler 2003
Carlisle, MA	Bartlett Farm	4	S	M/F	A/C	Two single Wellington boots; two single shoes, no description available	19th century	under floorboards of workshop	ca. 1660s	Geisler 2003; Charlie Forsberg 2011, elec. comm.
Charlestown, MA	Birthplace of Samuel Finlay Breeze Morse, 201 Main Street	1	S	M	C	Boy's single blucher boot, front laced, oval toe, pegged heel and sole, stacked heel	1815-1825	attic		HNE 1942.922; Geisler 2003
Concord, MA		1	S	F	A	Single woman's shoe or boot		second floor wall		HNE 1942.922; Geisler 2003
Danvers, MA	house (demolished 1916)	2	S	M	C	Boy's single front-lace blucher, worn, ca. 1840; boy's single front-lace blucher, worn, ca. 1830	ca. 1830-1850s	location unknown		CS 1995.931.1-2; Geisler 2003

Dedham, MA	15 Westfield Street	2	P	M/F	C	Pair of child's shoes		in kitchen chimney	1865		CS 1997.38
Dedham, MA	Jonathan Fairbanks House	1+	S/P	M/F	A/C	"Old shoes," no description available		found in structural cavities, location unknown	1637-1641		CS 2005.25
Easton (South Easton), MA	16 High Street	1	S	M/F	C	1st deposit: child's single shoe, right foot		inside bedroom wall	ca. 1900	found with marbles, nuts, & medicine bottle	CS 1997.37.1-2
Easton (South Easton), MA	16 High Street	1	S	M/F	C	2nd deposit: child's single shoe, left foot		under small shed	ca. 1900	found with marbles	CS 1997.37.1-2
Easton (South Easton), MA	old store	1	S	M	C	Boy's single Wellington, pegged, leather loop missing, well worn	ca. 1870s	under/ between floors			CS 1995.938; Geisler 2003
Hanover, MA	Hollis House	1	S	F	A	Woman's single shoe, no description available	late 18th century or early 19th century	in hearth			Geisler 2003
Hanson, MA	Vayo Home	1	S	F	A	Woman's single Congress boot, gypsy seam down center, low stacked pegged heel, rounded square toe	1860s	in wall			Geisler 2003
Higgesville, MA	house	1	S	M	C	Boy's single ankle boot, front-laced	ca. 1850s-1860s	in eaves on east side	1822-1823		CS (no #)
Huntington, MA	Lea House, Knighthill Dam Road	1	S	M/F	A/C	Single shoe, no description available		location unknown	pre-1860		CS 1997.50
Ipswich, MA	Sutton-Harris House, 8 Water Street	1	S	M/F	C	Child's single shoe, no description available		inside interior wall	built 1673-1684; ca. 1720 addition (south side); 3rd addition added later		Waters 2007
Kingston, MA	Cushing House	1	S	M	C	Boy's single shoe, two pairs of lace holes, left foot	ca. 1820s	on rafters	1699		CS 1995.995; Geisler 2003
Lexington, MA	Hancock-Clarke House, Hancock Street	6	S	M/F	A+C	Six single shoes: single shoe, woven ecru cloth upper, leather sole, short heel; single shoe, cloth upper, missing sole; child's single shoe, leather upper with 2 folding flaps (for buckle?), leather stitched sole; child's single shoe, similar to previous; woman's (?) single shoe, leather upper with 2 folding flaps for buckle, small elevated heel	18th century	in 2nd story east-facing wall, formerly an exterior wall, about three feet from fireplace	built ca. 1680s-1690s; ca. 1737 addition	found with a cartridge box, a baby's stays, a shoe buckle, a letter dated 1768, and pieces of leather wrapped around possible animal remains	Stays found in wall directly above shoes and other objects. Murphy 2008; Elaine Doran 2011, pers. comm.

Mansfield, MA	Nicholas White House, 87 Hall Street	2	S	M/F	A/C	Two single shoes, no description available	1760 and 1820	in wall	1703		CSI 1997.48.1-2
Marblehead, MA	8 Prospect Street	1	S	M/F	A	Adult's single shoe, no description available		exterior wall of bedroom, east side	ca. 1730		CS 1997.42
Marblehead, MA	house	1	S	M/F	A	Adult's single shoe, laced		ceiling of first-story room (den), between plaster/split lath and beams, near front window	ca. 1750	found with piece of striped fabric	Two shoe insole patterns, hand-stitched cotton bag, pack of Lucky Strike cigarettes, pieces of leather, and tools also found in ceiling of first-story room (den) in different location, near chimney. Elliott 2009a, 2009b
Marblehead, MA	State Street	1	S	M/F	A	Adult's single shoe, no description available		between bedroom wall	ca. 1790		CS (no #); Geisler 2003
Mattapoisett, MA	3 Toley Lane	3	S	M/F	C	Three children's shoes, no description available		above kitchen ceiling, north end	1840s	found with clothespin	CS (no #); Geisler 2003
New Braintree, MA		1	S	M/F	C	Child's single slipper, pointed toe	ca. 1800	between exterior and interior walls			Geisler 2003
Newburyport, MA	house, 37 Warren Street	1	S	M/F	A	Adult's single shoe, Blucher style, well worn		in void on top of beehive oven in kitchen fireplace	built ca. 1740s; oven modified ca. 1800-1820	found with half a coconut	1727 farthing found under bricks in upstairs bedroom hearth resting on layer of sand. Albert Scott 2012, elec. comm.
Newburyport, MA	Johnson-Huse-Murphy House, 43 Federal Street	1	S	M/F	C	1st deposit: toddler's latched-tie shoe, left foot	1840s-1860s	inside bricked up fireplace in second floor room	built ca. 1785; fireplace probably bricked over in early 19th century	found with two combs (one wood, one black synthetic, probably rubber), two wood spindles, a drum stick, and a small wood ball	Randy Murphy 2011, elec. comm.
Newburyport, MA	Johnson-Huse-Murphy House, 43 Federal Street	2	P	M	A	2nd deposit: pair of men's "Balmoral" cut laced boots	ca. 1900-1930	within specially built brick cavity under subfloor in corner of first-story kitchen, under window, approx. 3 feet from fireplace	built ca. 1785		Specially built brick cavity appears to have used slightly larger bricks than rest of foundation, suggesting later construction. Randy Murphy 2011, elec. comm.
North Andover (formerly Andover), Essex County, MA	Bridges-Stevens House, 11 Marbleridge Road (moved to 125 Court Street)	1	S	F	A	1st deposit: woman's single shoe, sole only, leather insole mounted on low linen-covered wood heel, left foot	ca. 1780-1800	under main front entrance, added ca. 1830	built 1680-1690; 1721 addition; remodeled in 1830s and early 1900s		Messenger 2011; Patricia Robak 2011, elec. comm.

North Andover (formerly Andover), Essex County, MA	Bridges-Stevens House, 11 Marbleridge Road (moved to 125 Court Street)	1	S	M	A	2nd deposit: man's single boot, right foot	ca. 1830-1840	in wall void next to fireplace in upper story bedchamber	built 1680-1690; 1721 addition; remodeled in 1830s and early 1900s	wood bootjack	Messenger 2011; Patricia Robak 2011, elec. comm.
North Andover (formerly Andover), Essex County, MA	Bridges-Stevens House, 11 Marbleridge Road (moved to 125 Court Street)	1	S	F	A	3rd deposit: woman's single elastic-gored Congress boot, right foot	ca. 1850-1870	bedchamber (built ca. 1690, remodeled ca. 1830 and ca. 1875)	built 1680-1690; 1721 addition; remodeled in 1830s and early 1900s	various 19th-century bottles	Messenger 2011; Patricia Robak 2011, elec. comm.
North Andover (formerly Andover), Essex County, MA	Bridges-Stevens House, 11 Marbleridge Road (moved to 125 Court Street)	3	S/P	F	A	4th deposit: three early 19th-c. leather soles from women's shoes (two left, one right); other leather shoe fragments from early 19th century, including woman's vamp-to-toe fragment and heel-only leather sole fragment	early 19th century	behind walls near windows and doorways	built 1680-1690; 1721 addition; remodeled in 1830s and early 1900s		Messenger 2011; Patricia Robak 2011, elec. comm.
North Easton, MA	barn	1	S	M/F	A/C	Single shoe, Balmoral boot upper, "Clyde Bannister Brown," unused/unworn	post-1892	on beam of barn			CS 1995.937; Geisler 2003
North Pembroke, MA	Burke House, Barker Road	1	S	M	A	Man's single shoe, open tab/latchet tie, oval toe, stacked heel, two pair lace holes	1800-1825	roof			HNE 1936.1066; Geisler 2003
Northampton, MA	Parsons House	1	S	F	A	Woman's partial single side lace cloth boot, leather toecap, sole and part of upper only	ca. 1860	near fireplace			Fell from near fireplace during repairs in 1981. CS 1995.932; Geisler 2003
Pepperell, MA	169 Hollis Street	6	P	M/F	A/C	Three pairs of shoes, no description available		inside walled-over Dutch oven next to fireplace	1847		Frank Mooney 2011, elec. comm.
Pepperell, MA	Ebenezer Pierce House (dismantled and moved)	1	S	F	A	Woman's single shoe, rounded toe, leather and canvas construction, laced with ribbon tie	mid- to late-18th century	between chimney stack and front staircase		found with a notched stick	Shoe reconcealed in reconstructed house. The Restored Homestead 2011a; Sherrill Rosoff 2011, pers. comm.
Pepperell, MA	Lawrence-Blake-Turner House, 52 Hollis Street (dismantled)	4	P	F	A+C	Pair of women's shoes; pair of children's shoes		near original fireplace	built mid-1700s		Found during dismantling of house. One pair probably dates to original construction episode, other pair likely concealed in 1830s-1840s when chimney was modified. Jones 2011; The Restored Homestead 2011a, 2011b; Sherrill Rosoff 2011, pers. comm.
Plymouth (Manomet neighborhood), MA	Beaver Dam Road	1	S	M/F	A/C	Singe shoe, no description available		in chimney in main room (former kitchen)			CS 1997.49

Plymouth (Manomet neighborhood), MA	Isaac Bartlett House	1	S	M/F	C	1st deposit: Child's single leather shoe, straight	ca. 1800-1820	in chimney	ca. 1780	CS (no #); Geisler 2003
Plymouth (Manomet neighborhood), MA	Isaac Bartlett House	1	S	F	A	2nd deposit: Woman's single leather tie shoe with pointed toe, lowered heel	early 18th century	in chimney	ca. 1780	CS 1995.998; Geisler 2003
Plymouth vicinity, MA		1	S	M/F	C	Child's single leather shoe, right foot	1900-1930	walled in over attic	1880s-1890s	CS (no #); Geisler 2003
Plymouth, MA	15 Salt Marsh Lane	12	S/P	M/F	A+C	12 adult and children's shoes, no description available		pickle room next to chimney		CS 1997.46
Plymouth, MA	155 Sandwich Street	1	S	M/F	A/C	Single shoe, no description available		above ceiling, east side	found with clay pipe	CS 1997.45
Plymouth, MA	58 Court Street	3	S	M	A+C	Man's single boot; child's single shoe, straight; single shoe, no description	1870s	under eaves, south side	1870s	found with marble, bone, cloth CS 1997.66.1-3
Plymouth, MA	John and Elizabeth Creedon House, 250 Sandwich Street	10	P	M/F	A/C	1st deposit: 5 pairs of shoes, no description available	early 19th century	location unknown	built 1660s; altered 1820s	CS 1995.933; Geisler 2003
Plymouth, MA	John and Elizabeth Creedon House, 250 Sandwich Street	6	S+P	M/F	A/C	2nd deposit: Pair of men's shoes, pegged soles, 19th century; four single shoes from 18th century, no description available	18th-19th century	in wall	built 1660s; altered 1820s	CS 1995.992-3; Geisler 2003
Plymouth, MA	John and Elizabeth Creedon House, 250 Sandwich Street	3	S	M+F	A+C	3rd deposit: Man's single indoor leather tie shoe, worn through sole; woman's or girl's single leather tie shoe; child's single leather tie shoe, worn at toe, upper cut down	1840s	under attic floorboards, center of west wall	built 1660s; altered 1820s	CS 1997.44.1-3
Plymouth, MA	Main Street (site of old fire station)	1	S	M/F	C	Child's single first size tie shoe, one latchet broken off	ca. 1700-1720	hall, location unknown		CS 1997.47
Plymouth, MA	Office of Dr. Charles T. Post, Sandwich Street	1	S	M	C	Boy's single shoe, leather latchet tie, three pairs of lace holes, toes out	ca. 1820s	under ground floor	early 18th century	Found during rewiring under ground floor. CS 1995.996; Geisler 2003
Plymouth, MA	Robert Cushman House	1	S	M	C	Boy's single shoe, one pair of lace holes, worn	ca. 1820s	in wall of attic		CS 1995.997; Geisler 2003
Plymouth, MA	White-Winslow-Russell House, Main and North Streets	1	S	M/F	C	Infant's single tie shoe, long, pointed toe, badly worn	ca. 1700-1720	"concealed," location unknown		CS 1995.1051; Geisler 2003

Quincy, MA	John Adams Birthplace	34	S+P	M+F	A+C	1st deposit: 34 shoes, including singles and pairs, men's, women's, and children's; See Geisler 2003 for complete description	ca. 1800-1830	in cavities on either side of central chimney flue in lean-to kitchen, accessible from garret staircase, possible spiritual midden	built in late 17th or early 18th century; late 18th century lean-to addition on north side	(see notes)	Found with part of a Prayer Book page, leather and material scraps, pair of mittens, wheat seed, peapod, paper, leaf, peanut shells, lasts, loves, and some un-used wooden stick "Lucifer" matches. CS 1995.134.1-34; Geisler 2003
Quincy, MA	John Adams Birthplace	10	S+P	M+F	A	2nd deposit: two men's single boots; pair of men's boots; two women's single boots; pair of women's boots; pair of women's slippers; See Geisler 2003 for complete description	1860-1870	northeast eaves of gabled ell addition	built in late 17th or early 18th century; mid- to late 19th century gabled ell addition		CS 1995.134.1-34; Geisler 2003
Rowley, MA	Chaplin-Clarke House, 109 Haverhill Street	1	S	F	A	Woman's single leather shoe, open tab/latchet tie, oval toe, pegged heel	1750-1760	behind fireplace	built 1670		HNE TC-21; Geisler 2003
Salem, MA	Crowninshield-Bentley House, 126 Essex Street	2	S	M	A	Two men's single shoes	1800-1810	under attic floorboards	ca. 1727-1730	marble	Geisler 2003
Salem, MA	house	1	S	F	A+C	1st deposit: child's single shoe, worn	ca. 1804	location unknown	ca. 1804		Deposits #1 and #2 found in different places, but no description of location available. CS 1995.935.1-2; Geisler 2003
Salem, MA	house	1	S	F	A/C	2nd deposit: woman's or youth's single leather tie shoe, worn	late 19th century	location unknown	ca. 1804		Deposits #1 and #2 found in different places, but no description of location available. CS 1995.935.1-2; Geisler 2003
Salem, MA	Museum Offices, Peabody Essex Museum	1	S	M	A	Man's single slouch boot	1820-1840	second story, location unknown			Geisler 2003
South Hadley, MA	40 Woodbridge Street	1	S	M/F	A/C	Single black boot		in walls	1786		Workers during restoration regarded the shoe "unlucky and would have nothing to do with it, until one workman discarded it." The Rawson House was once attached to the back of a house at 40 Woodbridge, but removed in 2005 and returned to original lot; Williamson 2006; Ken Williamson 2011, elec. comm.
South Hadley, MA	Sycamores	3	S+P	F	A	Woman's single boot, metal eyelets, cloth strings, hand-sewn, pegged with wood, left foot, very well worn with small hole in top of toe, ca. 1870; Pair of slippers, uppers cut off, 1890s-1910	ca. 1870; 1890s-ca. 1910	inside exterior wall of back ell, northwest corner	built 1788; 1900-1910 ell addition (where shoes were found)		Half an ox shoe also found in building, but not found with the shoes. Williamson 2006; Ken Williamson 2011, elec. comm.

Stoneham, MA	Daniel Green House, 56 Green Street	1	S	M	C	Boy's single shoe, open tab tie, pointed toe, stacked heel	ca. 1800	between plaster and chimney	built 1720		HNE 1970.37; Geisler 2003
Taunton, MA	house, Bay Street	1	S	M/F	A/C	Single shoe, no description available	ca. 1865	in wall			CS 1997.60
Tyngsboro, MA	Col. Jonathan Tyng House (demolished)	2	P	F	A/C	Pair of women's or girl's tie shoes, hand-stitched, no heel, rounded square toe	1847-1855	inside wall			HNE 1953.31; Geisler 2003
Walpole, MA	291 Plimpton Street	1	S	F	A/C	Girl's or small woman's single shoe		in dining room (possibly former kitchen) wall above window, west side			CS 1997.59
Wayland, MA	Brintnal-Loker House, 36 Loker Street	1	S	M/F	C	1st deposit: infant's single brogan, less than 5 inches long, hand-stitched, turned construction, inner linen lining, rounded square toe, no heel	ca. 1820s-1840s	first floor wall near chimney	ca. 1740 (1860 addition?)	sleigh bell found with shoe, since lost	CS (no #); Geisler 2003; Wayland Historical Society 2003; Joanne Davis 2011, pers. comm.
Wayland, MA	Brintnal-Loker House, 36 Loker Street	5	S	M/F	A+C	2nd deposit: two women's or boys' single slit-vamp leather shoes, turned construction, rounded square toes, no heel, inner linen linings, ca. 1820s-1830s; boy's single brogan, hand-stitched, pegged sole and heel, rounded square toe, ca. 1825-1840; remains of child's single latchet-tie shoe, ca. 1820; remains of child's single buckled shoe, ca. 1800-1820	ca. 1800-1840	second story wall near window	ca. 1740 (1860 addition?)		CS (no #); Geisler 2003; Wayland Historical Society 2003; Joanne Davis 2011, pers. comm.
Wayland, MA	Nathaniel Rice House, 29 River Road	1	S	F	A	Woman's single slipper, discarded		wall near fireplace	ca. 1780		House built by Nathaniel Rice ca. 1780; Geisler 2003; Joanne Davis 2011, elec. comm.
Wayland, MA	Samuel Stone Noyes House (chaise house), 83 Old Sudbury Road	1	S	M/F	C	Infant's single white ankle-high shoe, discarded		wall in "an old chaise house"	built ca. 1750; several later additions	small wood toys (including a wood tree), ears of corn	All objects discarded, including the shoe, with the exception of a wood toy tree. Wayland Historical Society 2003; Joanne Davis 2011, elec. comm.
West Barnstable, MA	Abraham Fuller House, 328 Parker Road	1	S	M/F	C	Child's single black leather ankle shoe, 3-4 inches long		under floorboards of 2nd story bedroom, south side	ca. 1820		All original doors have "hex signs" on outward side; CS (no #); Geisler 2003
West Wareham, MA		1	S	M/F	A/C	Single shoe, no description available		near chimney, north side	ca. 1760-1790		CS 1999.10; Geisler 2003
West Yarmouth, MA	50 South Sea Avenue	2	P	M/F	C	Pair of youth's front lace brogans, straights, half sole repair, one tongue missing	1820s	in a Dutch oven	1829	found with basket and coins	CS 1997.57

Weymouth (South Weymouth), MA	236 Union Street	1	S	F	A	Woman's single shoe		behind fireplace mantle in living room		found with black dress	CS 1997.58
Weymouth, MA	1929 Pleasant Street	1	S	M/F	C	Child's single shoe		in kitchen ceiling, north side	ca. 1840s	found with marbles	CS (no #); Geisler 2003
Annapolis, MD	Hammond-Harwood House	1	S	F	A	Woman's single black leather calfskin shoe with silk-bound edge, whip stitched linen lining, whip stitched side lining	1835-1860s	in cornice, northeast side of wing	1774	found with a broken buckle	Other objects found in voids of house include fragments of newspaper, builder's 20th century folding ruler, wood molding, and broken window glass. A set of women's stays were also found "in a rat's nest" in the attic, boned with baleen (whalebone), made of silk material and thread but patched with coarser linen. Shoe and stays found at different times in different locations. A pair of modern shoes were concealed in the building after renovations were complete. Titman 2011a, 2011c, 2011d; Allison Titman 2011, elec. comm.
Annapolis, MD	Jonas Green House, 124 Charles Street	2	S	M/F	C	Two children's single shoes		in walls	1720 addition		Greens immigrated from Somerset, England, to Massachusetts in 1627. Jonas Green and bride moved into the house in 1738. Titman 2011c
Baltimore (Fell's Point neighborhood), MD	1608 State and Pearl Street	29	S+P	M+F	A+C	29 leather shoes, mostly singles, including men's, women's, and children's; includes tie shoes with one or two lace holes, some slip-ons, some oval toe and a few square toe	1800-1820	under floorboards behind wall adjacent to third floor dormer window, facing NE	ca. 1830	found with leather, dice cup, and two stockings (one adult's and one child's)	CS 2002.34
Clarksville, Howard County, MD	Montrose	3	S	M/F	C	Three children's single shoes, no description available		location unknown	1844		Jonathan Herman 2011, pers. comm.
Flohrville, MD		2	S	M+F	C	Boy's single boot, black leather, left foot; girl's single shoe, soft black fabric, strap across front, left foot	1850s	behind a wall	ca. 1900	found with insurance papers from 1920s	Jiggetts 2010; Evans 2011:75; Errol G. Smith 2011, elec. comm.

Fort Washington, MD	Enlisted Men's Barracks	22	S/P	M+F	A	22 shoes and shoe fragments, mostly soles, a few nearly complete: man's single brogan, extra nails indicating possible repair work; at least three fragments from women's shoes (two were mostly bottom soles, one was a nearly complete boot)	1861-1869	attic behind a low wall under the eaves	built ca. 1863; portion of attic lathed and plastered ca. 1860s	bottles and bottle fragments, cans, oyster shells, one lead ball from canister shot	Presence of women's shoes in the men's barracks is notable. Antonioni 2009
Hughesville, MD		1	S	M	C	Boy's single front-lace ankle boot	ca. 1850s-1860s	in eaves, east side	1822-1823		CS (no #); Geisler 2003
Riverdale, MD	Riverdale House (Calvert Mansion), 4811 Riverdale Road	1	S	M/F	C	Child's single shoe		location unknown	1800-1807		Karin Bohleke 2012, elec. comm.
Still Pond (Chestertown), Kent County, MD	Hebron, 12591 Still Pond Road	1	S	M/F	C	Child's single high button shoe, black		between ceiling of second floor room and floor of attic	built ca. 1780; ca. 1812 addition	small metal tin labeled "Essence of Coffee"	Geisler 2003; Nancy Wyman 2011, elec. comm.
Talbot County, MD	Captain's House, Wye House Plantation (18TA314)	1+	S/P	M/F	A/C	"Pile of boots," no description available		against chimney flue in attic		found with "Two-Headed Man" carved wood figure	Shoes and wood figure attributed to African Americans. Captain's house served as detached kitchen of Great House until late-18th century when converted into overseer's house. Leone and Tang 2011
Trappe, MD	house	1+	S/P	M/F	A/C	Shoes, no description available		wall			Errol G. Smith 2011, elec. comm.
Westminster, Carroll County, MD	Cockey's Tavern, 216 East Main Street	3	S	M/F	C	Three children's single shoes, no description available		location unknown			
Bangor, ME	112 Broadway	1	S	M/F	A/C	Single shoe, no description available		location unknown			CS 1997.55
Castine, ME	71 Pleasant Street	1	S	M/F	A/C	Single shoe or boot with laces		in attic walls			Paige Lilly 2012, elec. comm.
Castine, ME	Abbott House, Maine Maritime Academy	3	S+P	F	A+C	Girl's leather shoe, one pair of lace holes, oval toe, toddler size; pair of women's leather shoes, two pairs of lace holes, silk lace, oval toe	1806-1820s	in crawlspace under ground floor	1806		CS 2003.24.1-2
Castine, ME	house, Perkins Street	3	S/P	M/F	A/C	Three shoes, no description available		behind plaster of central chimney			Paige Lilly 2012, elec. comm.
Harpwell, Cumberland County, ME	46 Wisman's Point Road (moved; new location)	3	S	M+F	A+C	Three single shoes: a man's, a woman's, and a small child's		living room wall	ca. 1770's; remodeled in 1820s	(see notes)	Other objects found in various places in the walls include tools, scrapers, portions of long wooden needles to make fish netting, shuttles, and toys. Linda Griffin 2011, elec. comm.

Nobleboro, ME	Ezekiel Moody House, 531 Upper East Pond Road	2	P	F	A	1st deposit: Pair of women's shoes, cloth lined, low Oxford, very flat heels, pegged soles, thong lace, shabby and worn		in wall near SW corner of first floor room	ca. 1820-1825	found with a piece of black wool fabric 10 inches square	Ezekiel Moody was American-born. Shoes described and dated by D.A. Saguto. CS 2003.27; Mary Sheldon 2011, elec. comm.
Nobleboro, ME	Ezekiel Moody House, 531 Upper East Pond Road	1	S	M	C	2nd deposit: boy's single shoe, no lining, one-piece upper, hand-pegged, left foot, shabby and worn	ca. 1830-1840s	near center of house, probable site of central chimney removed ca. 1900	ca. 1820-1825		Ezekiel Moody was American-born; Shoes described and dated by D.A. Saguto. CS 2003.27; Mary Sheldon 2011, elec. comm.
South Thomaston, ME	Dublin Road	1	S	M/F	A	Adult's single shoe, right foot		roof rafters above knee wall beam, front of the south side	built ca. 1785; late 1950s addition	found with bottle, broken glass candlestick, broken pane of glass	CS 1997.63
Warren, ME	house	1	S	M/F	A/C	1st deposit: Single shoe, no description available		in wall by kitchen door	ca. 1850	(see notes)	Found with plate and note: "to all who inhabit this house may they have enough food for their plate and warmth for their person." C. Riley Augé 2012, elec. comm. (Hoggard database)
Warren, ME	house	4	S	M/F	A/C	2nd deposit: 4 single shoes/boots, no description available		in kitchen ceiling	ca. 1850	found with ax handle, hatchet handle, & metal basin	C. Riley Augé 2012, elec. comm. (Hoggard database)
West Mills, ME	Ely True Home	1	S	M	C	Boy's single buff leather shoe, tie latches	ca. 1845	under floor	pre-1836		CS 1995.926
Windham (South Windham), ME	Parson Smith House	1	S	M	A	1st deposit: Man's single open tab latchet tie shoe, pegged sole, low stacked heel, two pair lace holes	1820-1825	location unknown	1764		HNE 1953.291; Geisler 2003
Windham (South Windham), ME	Parson Smith House	1	S	F	A	2nd deposit: Woman's single boudoir slipper, rubber sole inscribed "Hayward Rubber Co., Colchester, Conn."	1847-1859	location unknown	1764		HNE 1953.515; Geisler 2003
York, ME	Old Gaol Museum, 4 Lindsay Road	3+	S	M+F	A+C	Large deposit of shoes, estimated at 50-100 pieces, found in a wall void adjacent to chimney/hearth. Three single shoes pulled out, remainder left in situ: toddler's, woman's, and man's	ca. 1860s	wall void adjacent to chimney	built 1719; later additions		Baker 2007:25; Cynthia Young-Gomes 2011, elec. comm.

York, ME	Peter Weare House	3	S+P	F	A	Woman's single shoe, brown leather, straight, rounded toe, vamp extends to quarter, leather insole, interior lined with linen, leather sole, slight pegged leather heel, 1840-1850; pair of women's shoes, black wool exterior, vamp extends to quarter, squared toe, lined, cloth insole, leather sole, heelless, hand-sewn, ca. 1830	ca. 1830-1850	wall near back (east) door			Cynthia Young-Gomes 2011, elec. comm.
York, ME	Rufus Varrell House, York Street	3	S	M	A+C	Man's single shoe, left foot, squared toe, separate leather vamp and back, two pairs of lace holes, unlined, low stacked heel, hobnailed with iron tacks, hand-sewn, ca. 1825-1850; child's single shoe, straight, squared toe, lined, flat sole (no heel), hand-sewn, 1825-1860; child's/toddler's single shoe, left foot, lined, smooth sole-no heel, hand-sewn, 1825-1860	1825-1860	inside rafters of the front left southwest parlor chimney	found with a bonnet (ca. 1840s), book (1847), broken wine glass (1800-1850), fragments of fabric (1840-1860 and ca. 1830), and possible wristband (1840-1850)	Found by mason while doing work on the house. Cynthia Young-Gomes 2011, elec. comm.	
Addison, MI	14460 North Adams Road	2	S	M/F	C	Two children's single shoes		inside wall between kitchen and wood shed, north side	ca. 1840	nuts inside one shoe	CS 1997.56
Milan, MI	house	4	S	M+F	A+C	Four single shoes: two children's (not a pair), one woman's flat shoe, one man's shoe	ca. 1884?	crawlspace under kitchen;	ca. 1884		Olen Pepper (1858-1941) built house ca. 1884 when he had two sons: Earl and Henry Clay, ages 3 and 1. Homeowner believes these are their shoes. Homeowner "felt nervous about them being removed from my house." Shoes may have been found by workers and tossed into crawlspace when kitchen and/or bath was remodeled at earlier date. Saborio 2008; Jim Saborio 2011, pers. comm.
Ada, MN	house, 202 W. 3rd Avenue	2	S	M/F	A+C	Adult's single cowboy boot, leather bottom with cloth upper from ankle up, well used, approx. man's size 8; young child's single black leather shoe or slipper		inside wall above first-story window, north end of east wall	ca. 1886-1888	found with pair of boy's suspenders	Chuck Larson 2012, pers. comm.
St. James, Phelps County, MO		1	S	M/F	A/C	Single high top shoe		east wall			CS (no #); Geisler 2003

Albemarle, Stanly County, NC	house	2	S	M/F	C	Girl's slip-on shoe, winged cap; boy's galosh with buckle	ca. 1795-1810	location unknown		CS 1999.9; Geisler 2003
Bertie County, NC		4	S/P	M/F	A/C	4 (possibly 5) shoes, including one high-low		in eaves and knee walls		CS 2002.37
Charlotte, NC	house	2	P	F	A	Pair of women's black leather front lace shoes, closed tab, fairly narrow oval toe, 1 1/2 inch stacked heel, punched top edge, homemade lace, well worn	late 19th century	in kitchen chimney on ledge	1865	found with late-19th century medicine and flavoring bottles CS 2003.28
Alstead, Cheshire County, NH	house	1	S	M/F	C	Child's single straight last shoe, small		wall near chimney (SE corner?)	18th century	Homeowner believes shoe saved his house from being washed away in a flood. Kippen 2005
Concord, NH	125 School Street	1	S	M	A	Man's single buttoned boot	ca. 1907	in kitchen wall, north side, between butler's pantry and dining room	1907	found with fragment of newspaper CS 1997.53
Keene, NH	18 Chestnut Street	2	S	M/F	A+C	Child's single shoe; adult's single shoe		in interior bedroom wall near chimney		CS 1997.70
Manchester, NH	house	1	S	F	A	Single woman's high button shoe, small, black, worn, without laces, wrapped in old paper		within wall next to lower floor window, north corner	1860	C. Riley Augé 2012, elec. comm. (Hoggard database)
Nashua, NH		2	P	M/F	C	Pair of children's shoes		fireplace		Geisler 2003
Rindge, NH	White House, Franklin Pierce University (dismantled)	1	S	M	C	Child's single leather shoe, male "slit-vamp" ankle boot, worn, hole in leather sole	ca. 1840-1860	SE corner of building between first floor ceiling and second story floor	1790s	Original owners: Captain Joshua and Mary Walker. Franklin Pierce University 2008; John Harris 2011, elec. comm.
Chester, NJ	520 Old Chester Road	6	S	M+F	A+C	Six single boots: man's closed tab 12-eyelet; woman's 9-button boot; child's 9-eyelet, pegged; child's front lace; adult 11-eyelet; adult 9 lace holes	ca. 1875-1885	in walls of second floor bedroom (faces west)	1759	CS 2002.35
Glassboro, NJ	Hollybush Mansion, Rowan University Campus	1	S	M/F	A/C	Single shoe, no description available		in rafters	1849	DeEugenio 2009
Martinsville (?), NJ	Baptist Church (possibly Mount Bethel Baptist Meetinghouse near Martinsville)	1	S	M	A	Part of man's single side seam knee boot, well worn	ca. 1860s-1870s	in crawlspace under building	ca. 1735	CS 2000.21; Geisler 2003

Princeton Township, Mercer County, NJ	Updike Farmstead	1	S	M/F	A	Adult's single shoe, stacked heel, rounded square toe, moderate skewing indicating it was made for the left foot, McKay-sewn last	ca. 1865-1875	wall cavity near brick chimney stack	ca. 1865		Springate 2011
Sussex County, NJ	house	1	S	M/F	C	Child's single shoe		inside wall	early 1800s		NJPR 2010
Virginia City, NV	house, 18 North G Street	2	S	M+F	A	Man's single military boot, leather, pull on with straps, side seams, iron horseshoe heel, 1-row pegged forepart, 2-row waist, pierced sole, Civil War era, 10 1/2 inches long, left foot; possible woman's shoe leather with small stitching holes, straight lines deliberately scored in leather with knife	1860-1875	under north central section of house in builder's trench	1860	(see notes)	Shoes found with leather hat with black lining, empty light olive green wine bottle with red wax around lip and neck deposited at slightly downward angle, and iron padlock with heart shaped brass escutcheon. Schablitsky 2002:223-230
Bronx, NY	Edgar Allan Poe Cottage	1	S	M/F	C	Infant's single shoe	post-1870	west side of house on covered beam exposed by removal of shingle siding	1812	(see notes)	Shoe found with fragments of paper, a two-tined fork, pottery sherds, textile fragments, pieces of leather, corncobs, and other items. NewYorkology 2010; The Official Historic House Trust of New York City 2010
Bronx, NY	Van Cortlandt House	1	S	F	A	Woman's single heel-less slipper, 19th century	19th century	over door lintel of attic room	1748		Found in October 2008 by graduate students from Columbia University's Historic Preservation program. Van Cortlandt House Museum 2009
Greenbush neighborhood, Scituate, Long Island, NY	E. L. Clapp House	1	S	M/F	C	Child's single leather shoe, one pair of lace holes, pegged half sole, worn	late 1820s+	under floor	built ca. 1656		CS 1995.923; Geisler 2003
Greenwood, Steuben County, NY	627 Dryden Hill Road	1	S	M/F	C	Child's single button boot, small	mid- to late-19th century	in roof space over summer kitchen, north side	built pre-1849; summer kitchen built ca. 1880		CS (no #); Geisler 2003
Highland Mills, NY	Quaker farmhouse	1	S	F	A	Woman's single front lace shoe, square toe, two pairs of lace holes below and two above, worn out, left foot	ca. 1850	in exterior wall, 2nd story, near window, behind clapboards	ca. 1750		Found when roofers removed clapboards to attach flashing. Reconcealed in house. CS 2002.36; Geisler 2003
Huntington, Long Island, NY	Ebenezer Jarvis House, Park Avenue	2	P	F	A	Pair of women's high boots	19th century	in kitchen wing lean-to	house built ca. 1830; kitchen built ca. 1850		CS 1995.924; Geisler 2003
Huntington, Long Island, NY	Metcalf House, Park Avenue	3	S	M+F	A	3 single shoes: 1 man's, 1 woman's, 1 unknown	18th century	ceiling of NW room, conservatory, 2nd story	house built ca. 1653; ceiling dates ca. 1792		CS 1995.925; Geisler 2003

Le Roy, NY		1	S	M/F	A/C	Single shoe, no description available, discarded		staircase/wall			Geisler 2003
Leeds (Catskill), NY	brick house	1	S	M	A	Man's single shoe, English or Dutch	ca. 1770s	between second story ceiling and attic floor	ca. 1740	(see notes)	Identified as Catskill, NY, in Geisler 2003. Iron spikes or "witch catchers" in chimney flue canted upward "to prevent witches from flying down the chimney." CS 1995.940; Geisler 2003; Marty Pickands 2011, elec. comm.
Lloyd Harbor, Long Island, NY	2 School Lane	1	S	M	A/C	Child's or small adult's single shoe (size 5 1/2)		in wall of 'secret room' off original kitchen, north side of building	1760		CS 1997.52
Monroe, NY	60 Acres Road	8	S	M+F	A+C	8 single shoes: 3 children's, 1 left, 2 right; 2 women's, 1 left, 1 right; 3 men's, 2 left, 1 right		south interior wall behind plaster and lath, facing north; may originally have been exterior wall			C. Riley Augé 2012, elec. comm. (Hoggard database)
Montgomery, Orange County, NY	Latourette-Clement House	5	S	M/F	A+C	1st deposit: one child's single shoe; four adults' or sub-adults' single shoes	ca. 1850s	inside plaster wall above cellar doorway		(see notes)	Other objects found with the shoes include pages from a Bible, a carving knife (1700s), two socks, a woman's single glove, several textile fragments, the end of a lined sleeve, a piece of wood wrapped in a textile fragment and tied with string, fragments of white cloth rolled up and tied (nothing inside), three sherds of blue and white ceramic (1830s), three animal bones (turkey?), a cigar box top, a wood wheel (possibly from a toy?), pieces of turned wood from furniture, pages from an almanac, pages from a school book, and a wood spool and button. Lisa Melville 2011, elec. comm.; Marty Pickands 2011, elec. comm.
Montgomery, Orange County, NY	Latourette-Clement House	1	S	M/F	A	2nd deposit: adult's single shoe, poor condition		roof eaves, 2nd story of addition			Lisa Melville 2011, elec. comm.
New Paltz, NY	LeFevre House, Huguenot Street (?)	1	S	M/F	A/C	Single shoe, no description available		attic	1799		House built by Ezekiel Elting. Shoe credited "with protecting the building from severe structural damage caused by a falling tree." RootsWeb 2006

Newburgh, NY	Gomez Mill House, 11 Mill House Road	1	S	M/F	C	Child's single shoe	ca. 1772	second story wall above front door	built ca. 1714; ca. 1772 2nd story addition	found with a last and spoon	Marlboro mailing address. Possibly concealed ca. 1772 when second story added by Wolfert Acker. Ruth Abrahams 2011, elec. comm.
Orient, Suffolk County, Long Island, NY	Terry-Mulford House	1	S	M	A	1st deposit: man's single boot		behind paneling around central chimney	built ca. 1639-1655; chimney built ca. 1800	found with a "smoked cat"	House built by immigrant from southern England. CS 2000.19; Geisler 2003; Amy Folk 2011, pers. comm.
Orient, Suffolk County, Long Island, NY	Terry-Mulford House	2	P	M/F	C	2nd deposit: pair of infant's shoes		between first story ceiling (parlor) and second story floor	built ca. 1639-1655		House built by immigrant from southern England. CS 2000.19; Geisler 2003; Amy Folk 2011, pers. comm.
Orient, Suffolk County, Long Island, NY	Webb House (moved from Stirling, now Greenport, NY)	1	S	M/F	A/C	Single shoe, sole only, no description available	early 19th century?	behind first-floor fireplace	ca. 1720-1750; moved ca. 1786 and again in 1955; restored in 1990s	(see notes)	House built by Captain William Booth. Shoe found with an early 19th-c. sherry glass, dark green sherry bottle, the sole of a shoe, girth from a canvas saddle, and a petticoat or apron. Amy Folk 2011, pers. comm.
Saugerties, NY	house, 87 Main Street	1	S	M/F	A/C	Woman's single brown leather loafer	ca. 1950-1960	in attic behind plastered wall	1903		C. Riley Augé 2012, elec. comm. (Hoggard database)
Southold, Suffolk County, Long Island, NY (moved to Cutchogue, NY)	The Old Place	3	S	M+F	A+C	Man's single shoe; woman's single shoe; child's single shoe		by chimney	built ca. 1680; 1815 renovation		Built by the Wells family who owned the house until 1965. Amy Folk 2011, pers. comm.
Springville, Erie County, NY	Blackmar-Eaton site (MDS1001), Feature 44	1	S	M/F	A/C	Single leather shoe sole		found in collapsed chimney	1838		Austin 2007:3-4; Derek Rohde 2008, pers. comm.
Warwick, NY	Baird Tavern	3	S/P	M/F	A/C	Three "old shoes," no description available		in walls	18th century		Geisler 2003:9
Warwick, NY	farmhouse	1	S	M/F	C	Child's single black and white button boot	1860s	in wall	ca. 1750		Shoe put back in wall by homeowner. Geisler 2003:1
Woodbury (Highland Mills), Orange County, NY	farmhouse, Ace Farm	8	S	M+F	A+C	8 single front-laced leather ankle boots and low-tied shoes	1830s-1860s	wall			House has Highland Mills mailing address. Geisler 2003; Leslie Rose 2011, elec. comm.
Columbus, OH	State Capital Building	1	S	M/F	A/C	Single shoe, no description available		in dome			Possibly no shoe, just a shoe box? CS 1995.941; Geisler 2003; Chris Matheny 2011, elec. comm.
Knox County, OH	house	1	S	M/F	A/C	Single side-seam ankle boot or knee boot		above exterior back door, north side of house			C. Riley Augé 2012, elec. comm. (Hoggard database)

Newark, OH	248 W. Locust Street	1	S	F	A	Woman's single black shoe, heeled, lace-up	post-1920?	in the wall next to the staircase at the center of the house	1920		Chris Woodyard 2011, elec. comm.
Zoar, OH	tavern	1	S	M	A	Man's single shoe, one pair of holes, pegged	ca. 1810-1820s	in north corner			CS 1997.54
Baker City, OR	Wisdom House, 2035 2nd Street	1	S	F	A	Woman's single button boot	ca. 1910	in attic rafters covered with plywood, south side	ca. 1878	found with 3 broken oak chairs and picture of Ulysses S. Grant	CS (no #); Geisler 2003
Bend, OR	Albertazzi Law Office, 44 NW Irving	1	S	M/F	C	Infant's single leather shoe or boot, worn	early 20th century	Inside wall, second story	built ca. 1908; moved to current location ca. 1911		Found by contractor during remodel. Albertazzi 2009; Anthony Albertazzi 2011, elec. comm.
North Portland, OR	The Purple Parlor, 3560 N. Mississippi Avenue	1+	S/P	M/F	A/C	Old shoes, no description available		found during renovation of house, location unknown	turn of the 20th century		Gottberg 2004:105
Carlisle, PA	California Café, 38 W. Pomfret Street	2	S/P	M/F	A/C	At least two shoes, no description available		between the walls of adjoining buildings			CS 1997.65
Carlisle, PA	Jacob's Resting Place, 1007 Harrisburg Pike	2	S	M	A	Man's single shoe, described as a "gentleman's fine dancing shoe," square toe, badly worn, pre-1750; man's single shoe, "inside out shoe," blunt semi-round toe, pegged sole, badly worn, 1750-1765	pre-1750; 1750-1765	bricked up near the top of the large walk-in kitchen fireplace	1790	found with shreds of newspaper and a repaired sock, both discarded	Other items found in house include iron axe head under the kitchen floor, masonry tool/hammer, a few coins, horseshoes, and animal bones. Jacob's Resting Place 2005; Marie Hegglin 2011, elec. comm.
Chester County, PA	Gerhard Brumbaugh's Tavern, corner of Route 23 and Ellis Woods Road	1	S	M/F	A	Adult's single leather shoe, part of upper cut away		in a chimney	1736		House built by German Americans. Tri-County Heritage Society 2001
Chester County, PA	Harlan House	1	S	F	A	Woman's single side-lacing boot	1825-1830	beneath roof	stone farmhouse built ca. 1724; enlarged ca. 1758; 19th-century frame addition	found with two empty blown glass bottles	Geisler 2003

Christiana, PA	A. L. Tafels House	3	S	F	A	3 single shoes: woman's rubber overshoe marked "Newark Rubber"; 2 women's single front-laced leather shoes (1 with 2 pairs of lace holes, 1 with 4 pairs of lace holes)	ca. 1840s-1850s	location unknown		CS 1998.8; Geisler 2003
Gettysburg, PA	Schmucker Hall ("Old Dorm"), Lutheran Theological Seminary	3	S	M+F	A	Woman's single shoe, 1790-1805; man's single 20th-century shoe, wing tips; man's single shoe, square toe, heeled, front part only (from the toe to part-way up the instep), deliberately cut in half	1790-1805; early 20th century	in walls	1826	Karin Bohleke 2012, elec. comm.
Gettysburg, PA	Shriver House, 309 Baltimore Street	1	S	F	C	Girl's single shoe		in wall	ca. 1860-1861	Shriver House Museum 2012
Greensboro, Greene County, PA	house	2	P	M/F	C	Pair of child's latchet tie leather shoes, pegged, straights, worn	1820s	location unknown	ca. 1750	CS 1995.942; Geisler 2003
Ligonier, PA	house, R.D. 1, Box 245-D	2	P	M	A	Pair of men's leg boots	mid-19th century	under original kitchen floor, southeast side	1851	CS (no #); Geisler 2003
Marlborough Township, Montgomery County, PA	house	1	S	M/F	A/C	Single shoe, low-heeled, square toe, lined with linen, laced, left foot	18th century	found in house, location unknown	1780s	Gehret 2005:210,214-215,245n.35
Mountville, PA	house, Main Street	2	S	F	A	Two women's single ankle boots, 3 and 5 pair lace holes, patched	ca. 1820	in chimney, second floor (attic)	ca. 1800	CS 1995.943.1-2; Geisler 2003
New Hanover Township, Montgomery County, PA	house	3	S	M+F	A	Two women's single latchet tie shoes, pointed toes, lined with homespun linen; man's single latchet tie shoe, pointed toes, lined with homespun linen	1790s	"found together in a crevice," location unknown	18th century	CS 1995.944; Geisler 2003; Gehret 2005:210,214-215,245n.34
Perkiomenville, PA	house	1	S	F	A	Woman's single shoe	1890-1900	near chimney in attic	built ca. 1857; 1895 2nd story addition	Geisler 2003
Philadelphia vicinity, PA		6	S/P	M	A+C	Four children's single front-fastening leather shoes; 2 men's (singles or pair) front-fastening leather shoes	ca. 1850-1860	location unknown		CS 1995.1142.1-6; Geisler 2003
Philadelphia, PA	house, 335 South [?] Street	1	S	M	C	Boy's single ankle boot, front-laced, square toe, spring heel, well worn	ca. 1850	in brick living room fireplace, above damper, S side of house	1830s	CS 2001.30

Susquehanna, PA	Dritt Mansion	1+	S/P	M/F	A/C	1st deposit: Multiple shoe/boot/leather fragments, including a woman's single pointed toe shoe for the left foot		in shaft beside chimney, accessible from attic (spiritual midden)	1738	(see notes)	Found with a dried cat, a very large and flattened dried toad, fishing net, sticks/dowel rods (some with carved notches and one skewered through a tobacco leaf), and lots of leather scraps. Jan Klinedinst 2012, pers. comm.
Susquehanna, PA	Dritt Mansion	4	S	M/F	A/C	2nd deposit: Four shoes: one single left foot shoe; 3 shoes, soles only		scattered in dirt under SE room, 1st story	1738		Jan Klinedinst 2012, pers. comm.
Susquehanna, PA	Dritt Mansion	1	S	M	A	3rd deposit: Man's single boot, metal eyelets, left foot		in left side of wall of staircase leading down to basement	1738		Jan Klinedinst 2012, pers. comm.
Providence, RI	house	1	S	M	A	Man's single mock Galosh boot, tongued vamp	ca. 1800	under crawlspace	ca. 1730-1740		CS 1999.7; Geisler 2003
RI	house	3	S	F	A	Woman's single leather buckle shoe, mid-18th century; woman's single slip-on shoe, pegged, 1820s; woman's single tie shoe, pegged, 1820s, suspended with string through seat and back seam	mid-18th century; 1820s	in back chimney	1740s		CS 1995.1-3; Geisler 2003
Warren, RI	Hoar-Hall House, 172 Water Street	8	S	M/F	A	Eight single shoes: two women's single slip-ons, one with heel, the other a "spring" (wedge) heel, ca 1790-1820; man's single black leather shoe, single latchet-tie, pointed toe and spring heel, ca. 1790-1810; adult's single shoe, only lining surviving, pointed toe, ca. 1790-1810; two "masculine" vernacular single shoes, ca. 1790-1810	ca. 1790-1810	under floorboards in attic, "nicely lined up"	1794		Dead rodent with corn cob stuck in mouth found in different location of house. Built by the Hoar family. Shoes likely concealed when house was built in 1794 or shortly after. John S. Chaney 2011, elec. comm.
Commerce, TN	house	1	S	M/F	A/C	Single shoe, no description available		inside wall	1860		C. Riley Augé 2012, elec. comm. (Hoggard database)
Salt Lake City (Westpoint), UT	adobe brick house	1	S	M/F	C	Child's single shoe	ca. 1905	imbedded in interior adobe brick wall, north side of house	ca. 1905		CS 2001.29; Geisler 2003
Abbs Valley, Tazewell County, VA	log house (demolished ca. 1960-1965)	2	S	M+F	A+C	Woman's single front-laced ankle boot, 11 pairs of lace holes, worn, part of sole missing; boy's single blucher boot, pegged, 2 lace holes, sole and heel missing	ca. 1850s-1860s	attic rafters	ca. 1800-1850 addition	piece of black last inside boy's boot, too large for boot	CS 1997.62.1-2 & CS 1995.946.1-2 (listed twice); Geisler 2003

Alexandria, VA	John Carlyle House	1	S	M/F	A/C	1st deposit: single shoe sole, 10" long		room CH-200, 2nd story stairway/hall (above ceiling?)	ca. 1750-1753	found with scissors, cast iron door hook, and key	Recovered during controlled dismantling of interior of house. Fauber Garbee, Inc. 1980:IX-26, sheet 17
Alexandria, VA	John Carlyle House	3	S	M/F	C	2nd deposit: shoe fragment, 4 1/2" long; child's single shoe sole and upper, 7" long; shoe fragment, 4" long		room CH-203, 2nd story, above fireplace	ca. 1750-1753		Recovered during controlled dismantling of interior of house. Fauber Garbee, Inc. 1980:IX-27, sheet 17
Alexandria, VA	John Carlyle House	3	S	M/F	A	3rd deposit: single shoe, 9" long, undifferentiated, worn on right foot; single shoe, 9 1/2" long, undifferentiated, worn on right foot; single shoe, heel and cloth upper, 9 1/2" long		room CH-204, 2nd story, above wall or ceiling, in corner near fireplace	ca. 1750-1753		Recovered during controlled dismantling of interior of house. Fauber Garbee, Inc. 1980:IX-27, sheet 17
Alexandria, VA	John Carlyle House	1	S	M	A	4th deposit: single man's shoe, leather upper, 9" long		room CH-303, 3rd story, under floorboards	ca. 1750-1753	found with furniture key	Recovered during controlled dismantling of interior of house. Fauber Garbee, Inc. 1980:IX-27, sheet 17
Denville (?), VA	log cabin	1	S	M/F	A/C	Single shoe, no description available		location unknown			CS 1995.947; Geisler 2003
Fredericksburg, VA	Heath Street	2	S/P	F	A	Two women's leather shoes (singles or pair?)	late 19th century	under hearth in chamber			CS 1995.947; Geisler 2003
Fredericksburg, VA		6	S/P	M+F	A	Four men's utilitarian tie shoes, pegged; 2 women's shoes, including one flat	ca. 1785-1820	walled into closet		found with approx. a dozen brass heel plates	CS 1995.948.1-6; Geisler 2003
Great Falls, VA	tavern	1+	S/P	M/F	A/C	Shoes, no description available		location unknown			CS 1995.950; Geisler 2003
James City County, VA	farmhouse of Mrs. Lyall Browning	2	P	M	C	Pair of youth's leather Wellington boots, cut down to ankle, 3 lace holes	1880s	under 19th century tin roof	ca. 1803	found with man's felt hat	CS 1995.973.1-2; Geisler 2003
Louisa, VA	house, Apple Grove	1	S	M	A	Man's single boot, laced, worn through at toe	mid-19th century	"concealed," location unknown	ca. 1740s		CS 1995.95; Geisler 2003
Manasas, VA		2	S/P	M/F	A/C	Two shoes, no description available		location unknown			Keith Gunderson 2011, elec. comm.
Richmond, VA	Putney's Shoe Shop, Main Street	2	P	F	A	Pair of women's white boots, laced, made by Putney, new and unworn	1880s	first story rafters			CS 1995.952; Geisler 2003

Saltville, VA	Coverston House	4	S	M/F	A/C	Four single shoes, no description available	ca. 1890-1900	exterior wall surrounding front door	ca. 1895-1900	found with 2 gloves, a woman's waist/jacket, corset with buttons and pintuck, white bow-tie, umbrella frame, 5 corked bottles, shoe polish tins, and pamphlets and letters	Built for Mathieson, a British immigrant who brought a British architect with him to design and build the house. Eastop 2006; Janice Orr 2011, pers. comm.
Waterford, VA	house in town	1	S	M/F	C	Child's single shoe, open tab, front-laced, 3 pairs of lace holes, pegged	ca. 1850-1860	chimney			CS 1995.953; Geisler 2003
Williamsburg, VA	B. Waller House	2	P	F	A	1st deposit: Pair of women's leather shoes, laced, backs trod in and worn away	late 18th century	found during dismantling of attic			CS 1995.955; Geisler 2003
Williamsburg, VA	B. Waller House	2	P	F	A	2nd deposit: Pair of women's mules	18th century	between the walls			CS 1995.956
Williamsburg, VA	Brafferton Hall, College of William and Mary (former Indian School)	3	S	M+F	A+C	Man's single black waxed calf buckle shoe, buckle missing, square-toed, found with hole-punched in back and suspended by knotted string on a nail inside boxed cornice, 1680s-1690s; woman's single black leather buckle shoe, beaded straps broken, 1680s-1690s; girl's black leather buckle shoe, straps folded and pierced to toe, 1760s	1680s-1690s-1760s	in boxed cornice; hung on nail with string	extensive reno. ca. 1737		Shoes likely concealed by workers converting top floor to library/dorm space ca. 1737. CS 1995.954.1-3; Geisler 2003; D.A. Saguto 2011, elec. comm.
Williamsburg, VA	Colonial Williamsburg	2	P	F	A	Pair of women's mules	18th century	wall			CS (no #); Geisler 2003
Williamsburg, VA	Timson House, Colonial Williamsburg	1	S	F	A	Woman's single shoe, textile upper, high heel	1920s	behind interior curtain wall built ca. 1920	ca. 1715; ca. 1920 curtain wall		D.A. Saguto 2011, elec. comm.
Williamsburg, VA	Wetherburn's Tavern, Colonial Williamsburg	1	S	M/F	C	Child's single shoe, "slashed" (mutilated)	mid-18th century	interior curtain-wall	mid-18th century		D.A. Saguto 2011, elec. comm.
Winchester, VA	Nancy Shepherd House, 618 S. Loudoun Street	1	S	M/F	C	Child's single brogan, 8 inches in length	ca. 1840s-1860's	in a cabinet alongside a closed off fireplace	1812	found with clothing/textile fragments, newspapers, and "bales of trash and animal nests"	CS Arms 2011; David McLaughlin 2011, elec. comm.

Newfane, VT	shed	2	S	M/F	A+C	Adult's single shoe; child's single shoe	inside wall, east side of shed	built 1790; 1830 addition	found with broken clay pipe and jumping jack	CS 1997.64.1-2
South Ryegate, VT	house	1	S	M/F	C	Child's single shoe, side button	in crawlspace behind wall, south side of house	ca. 1850		CS 2003.29
Chippewa Falls, WI	3063 Town Line Road	1	S	F	A	Woman's single high boot	near front door, south side	ca. 1913	found with medicine bottles and 1913 newspaper	CS (no #); Geisler 2003
Delafield, WI	Hawks Inn	1	S	F	C	Girl's single shoe	post-1825 wall	1846	1838 penny	Builder/owner moved to Delafield, WI, from New York state. Geisler 2003

## **Appendix B: Concealed Cats in the United States**

The following table includes a list of deposits of concealed cats recorded by the author. This table does not include cases of cats found in buildings that appear to be the result of accidental enclosure or natural death. Data were obtained from historic newspapers (with research assistance from Chris Woodyard), a database of finds compiled by C. Riley Augé using data supplied by Brian Hoggard, historical society newsletters and web pages, personal and institutional blogs, social networking and photo sharing websites, newspaper and magazine articles, and emails and telephone conversations conducted by the author. Deposits that are not previously listed in Appendix A are marked with an asterisk. All sources of data are cited, with complete citations found in the References.

### **Key**

In the table below, the following abbreviations are used:

CS = Concealed Shoe Index

\* = Deposit not included in Appendix A

City, State	Site or Address	Description of Cat	Associated Artifacts	Date of Artifacts	Location in Building	Date of Building or Addition	Notes & Sources
*Berkeley, CA	house	dried cat propped in standing position against back of cavity, with one front paw outstretched, facing the front door		ca. 1910	in hollow cavity in foundation directly underneath and to right of front door	ca. 1910	House built by Finnish immigrants. Replaced in foundation. C. Riley Augé 2012, elec. comm. (Hoggard database)
*Fortville, Hancock County, IN	house	orange and white taxidermied cat standing on all fours (discarded)		late 1800s	in wall above doorway from foyer to living room	late 1800s	Heidi Monroe 2011, pers. comm.; Scott Spears 2012, elec. comm.
*Adrian, Raisin Township, MI	Raisin School District No. 6 (aka Sutton after annexation in 1950s)	"mummified" cat	"mummified" woodpecker	ca. 1859	under building in sealed stone foundation	ca. 1859	<i>Adrian Daily Telegram</i> 1934:1; Shirley A. Ehnis, elec. comm.
*Moorhead, MN	Davy-Nelson House/Carriage House (demolished)	"mummified cat with a mouse in its mouth"	mouse, newspaper dated March 31, 1876	ca. 1876	wall of "buggy shed" (attached carriage house)	ca. 1883	House and attached carriage house built by William H. Davy, member of St. John's Episcopal Church, born in Bath, Ontario, to Ontario-born Episcopalian parents. <i>Fargo Forum</i> 1950; <i>Racine Journal-Times</i> 1950:1; Mark Peihl 2011, elec. comm.; Chris Woodyard 2011, elec. comm.
*Charlotte, NC	"rooming house" at 111 S. Mint Street (demolished)	"mummified" cat "standing on all fours, about to pounce on a mummified rat" located just in front of it	"mummified rat" also standing on all fours	ca. 1878	between walls of building, standing on the foundation	ca. 1878	<i>Charlotte News</i> 1948[sec. 2]:1; <i>Morning Avalanche</i> 1948:10; Chris Woodyard, elec. comm.
*Manhattan, New York City, NY	416 Lafayette Place (former Episcopal Diocesan House and Lorillard Mansion)	"mummified" cat		ca. 1886	inside front façade stonework at top of second story (actually first story with raised basement)	built ca. 1828; façade remodeled ca. 1886 and again in 1911	Discovered during renovations in 1911. Likely concealed by masons. <i>Daily Review</i> 1911; <i>Evening Times</i> 1911; Chris Woodyard 2011, elec. comm.
Orient, Suffolk County, Long Island, NY	Terry-Mulford House	"smoked" cat or "desiccated animal form" (discarded)	man's single boot	ca. 1720-1740	behind paneling around central chimney	built ca. 1639-1655; chimney repaired ca. 1720-1740	House built by immigrant from southern England. CS 2000.19; Geisler 2003; May 2001; Amy Folk 2011, pers. comm.
Columbus, OH	Ohio Statehouse	disarticulated cat skeleton in shoebox	Excelsior Shoe Company shoebox	late 1800s	inside plaster wall in second level of the rotunda	building completed in 1861; possible later work done to rotunda	Likely concealed by plasterers. Chris Matheny 2011, elec. comm.

*Indiana, PA	Houk Hotel, formerly West Indiana House, Main Street/Route 422	"mummified" cat		ca. 1858	inside joist hole	ca. 1858	Discovered by workers in 1910. <i>Indiana Evening Gazette</i> 1938:3; Chris Woodyard 2011, elec. comm.
*Indiana, PA	brick building replaced by White Building	"mummified" cat	"mummified" rat	pre-1910	under "old brick building"	pre-1910	<i>Indiana Progress</i> 1910:1; Chris Woodyard, elec. comm.
Lower Windsor Township, York County, PA	Dritt Mansion, Long Level Road	dried cat	multiple shoe/boot/leather fragments including a woman's single shoe for the left foot, very large and flattened dried toad, fishing net, sticks/dowel rods (some with carved notches and one skewered through a tobacco leaf), and lots of leather scraps		in shaft beside chimney, accessible from attic (spiritual midden)	1738 or 1758	Constructed by Meyer family (German). Jan Klinedinst 2012, pers. comm.
*Philadelphia, Germantown neighborhood, PA	Methodist Episcopal Church, Haines Street	"mummified" cat		ca. 1858	embedded in ceiling	built ca. 1858; demolished before 1890	Discovered in 1877 during repairs. <i>Moulton Tribune</i> 1900:2; Chris Woodyard 2011, elec. comm.
*Alexandria, VA	John Carlyle House, Fairfax Street	"mummified" or "dried" cat	sprigs of rosemary	ca. 1753	sealed inside the foundation of the structure's southeast chimney	1751-1753	House built by Scottish merchant John Carlyle; born in Dumfriesshire, Scotland; came to North America in 1741. Cat returned to foundation. Fauber Garbee, Inc. 1980:IX-28, sheet 16; Bartlinski 2005:2; Alison Gottlieb 2011, elec. comm.; Helen Wirka 2011, pers. comm.
*Smyth County, near Saltville, VA	log cabin	"mummified" cat in a "scary position," mouth open, standing with one front paw raised "as if he was clawing at something"			between interior plaster and exterior log wall		Janice Orr 2011, pers. comm.

## **Appendix C: Concealed Garments and Textiles in the United States**

The following table includes a list of known deposits containing garments or textile fragments in the United States. Data was obtained from historical society newsletters and web pages, personal and institutional blogs, social networking and photo sharing websites, newspaper and magazine articles, and emails and telephone conversations conducted by the author. Most of the deposits also contain shoes, thus they also appear in Appendix A. Deposits that are not previously listed in Appendix A are marked with an asterisk. All sources of data are cited, with complete citations found in the References.

### **Key**

In the table below, the following abbreviations and symbols are used:

CS = Concealed Shoe Index

\* = Deposit not included in Appendix A

City, State	Site or Address	Description of Garments/Textiles	Associated Artifacts	Date of Artifacts	Location in Building	Date of Building or Addition	Notes & Sources
San Diego, CA	Fort Rosecrans, Bldg. 139, Enlisted Men's Barracks	campaign hat from Spanish American War	man's single Army boot	ca. 1904	inside specially built cavity in north chimney	1904	CS 2002.20; May 2001; Geisler 2003; Ron May 2011, elec. comm.
East Hartford, CT	19 Park Avenue	woman's bonnet with metal stays	man's single leather boot		in roof space	1835	CS 1997.25
*Guilford, CT		boy's brown linen jacket	none known	ca. 1775-1785	in a wall		Connecticut Historical Society 2008 (1981.110.0)
Fulton, IL	Fay House, 500 block of 15th Avenue	stockings	4 single shoes, letters	ca. 1870-1888	in ceiling	pre-1855	Kolk 2007
Wyoming, Stark County, IL		textile fragments, possible piece of a dress, blue velvet trim, buttons	single "Victorian" shoe		in library wall next to chimney		GardenWeb 2010
Amherst, MA	Strong House	man's legging, single glove	man's single indoor shoe, 2 women's shoes, Bible	ca. 1770s	inside wall surrounding central chimney	1744	Williamson 2006; Philip A. Shaver 2011, elec. comm.
Lexington, MA	Hancock-Clarke House, Hancock Street	baby's or toddler's stays	6 single shoes, cartridge box, shoe buckle, 1768 letter, pieces of leather wrapped around animal remains	18th century	2nd-story east-facing wall, about three feet from fireplace	built ca. 1680s-1690s; ca. 1737 addition	Murphy 2008; Elaine Doran 2011, elec. comm.
Marblehead, MA	house	1st deposit: piece of striped fabric	adult's single shoe		1st-floor ceiling, between plaster/split lath and beams, near front window	ca. 1750	Elliott 2009a, 2009b
*Marblehead, MA	house	2nd deposit: hand-stitched cotton bag (pocket?)	shoe insole patterns, pack of Lucky Strike cigarettes, pieces of leather, tools (gimlet or awl, bobbin)		1st-floor ceiling, between plaster/split lath and beams, near chimney	ca. 1750	Elliott 2009a, 2009b
Plymouth, MA	58 Court Street	cloth (?)	3 single shoes, marble, bone	1870s	under eaves, south side	1870s	CS 1997.66.1-3
Quincy, MA	John Adams Birthplace	pair of mittens, leather and material scraps	34 shoes, part of a Prayer Book page, wheat seed, peapod, paper, leaf, peanut shells, lasts, loves, unused wooden stick matches		in cavities on either side of central chimney flue in lean-to kitchen, accessible from garret		CS 1995.134.1-34; Geisler 2003
Weymouth (South Weymouth), MA	236 Union Street	black dress	woman's single shoe		behind fireplace mantle in living room		CS 1997.58

*Annapolis, MD	Hammond-Harwood House	baleen and silk stays patched with linen			attic or roof	1774	Titman 2011b; Allison Titman 2011, elec. comm.
Baltimore (Fell's Point), MD	1608 State and Pearl Street	adult's stocking, child's stocking	29 shoes, leather, dice cup	1800-1820	under floorboards behind wall adjacent to third floor dormer window, facing NE	ca. 1830	CS 2002.34
*Castine, ME	Noah Brooks House, Main Street	child's shirt and overalls			in attic eaves		Paige Lilly 2012, elec. comm.
Nobleboro, ME	Ezekiel Moody House	piece of black wool fabric 10 in. square	pair of women's shoes		in wall near SW corner of first floor room	ca. 1820-1825	CS 2003.27; Mary Sheldon 2011, elec. comm.
York, ME	Rufus Varrell House, York Street	woman's bonnet, fragments of fabric, possible wristband	3 single shoes, book, broken wine glass stem	1825-1860	inside rafters of the front left southwest parlor		Cynthia Young-Gomes 2011, elec. comm.
Ada, MN	house, 2002 W. 3rd Avenue	pair of boy's suspenders	adult's single cowboy boot, child's single shoe		inside wall above first-story window, north end of east wall	ca. 1886-1888	Chuck Larson 2012, pers. comm.
*Cedar Lake, NJ	house	single stocking, 2 pairs of stockings, part of knitted stocking, all ca. 1850	sea chest		inside sea chest concealed underneath house		Indiana State Museum Collection; Bill Wepler 2012, pers. comm.
Virginia City, NV	house, 18 North G Street	leather hat with black lining	man's single military boot, woman's shoe leather, empty wine bottle, iron padlock with heart-shaped escutcheon	1860-1875	under north central section of house in builder's trench	1860	Schablitsky 2002:223-230
Bronx, NY	Edgar Allan Poe Cottage	textile fragments	infant's single shoe, paper fragments, fork, ceramic sherds, pieces of leather, corncobs	post-1870	west side of house on covered beam exposed by removal of siding	1812	New Yorkology 2010; The Official Historic House Trust of New York City 2010
Montgomery, Orange County, NY	Latourette-Clement House	1st deposit: woman's glove, sock, textile fragments, end of a lined sleeve, fragments of white cloth rolled up and tied (nothing inside)	5 shoes, wood fragment wrapped in textile fragment, toy wheel, pages from a Bible and other books, carving knife, blue transfer-printed sherds, pieces of turned wood from furniture, wood spool, animal bones, other artifacts	ca. 1850s	inside plaster wall above cellar doorway		Lisa Melville 2011, elec. comm.; Marty Pickands 2011, elec. comm.
*Montgomery, Orange County, NY	Latourette-Clement House	3rd deposit: baby's cap and woman's collar or part of dress	maps and documents		inside wall over first-floor doorway		Lisa Melville 2011, elec. comm.
Orient, Suffolk County, Long Island, NY	Webb House (moved from Stirling, now Greenport, NY)	petticoat or apron	single shoe (sole only), early 19th-century sherry glass, dark green sherry bottle, girth from canvas saddle	early 19th century?	behind first-floor fireplace	ca. 1720-1750; moved ca. 1786 and again in 1955; restored in 1990s	Amy Folk 2011, elec. comm.
Carlisle, PA	Jacob's Resting Place, 1007 Harrisburg Pike	repaired sock (discarded)	2 single shoes, scraps of newspaper	pre-1750; 1750-1765	bricked up near the top of the large walk-in kitchen fireplace	1790	Jacob's Resting Place 2005; Marie Hegglin 2011, elec. comm.

James City County, VA	farmhouse of Mrs. Lyall Browning	man's felt hat	pair of youth's Wellington boots	1880s	under 19th-century tin roof	ca. 1803	CS 1995.973.1-2; Geisler 2003
Saltville, VA	Coverston House	2 gloves, jacket or waist, corset, bow tie	4 single shoes, umbrella frame, 5 corked bottles, shoe polish tins, pamphlets and letters	ca. 1890-1900	exterior wall surrounding front door	ca. 1895-1900	Eastop 2006; Janice Orr 2011, pers. comm.
Winchester, VA	Nancy Sheperd House, 618 S. Loudoun Street	unidentified clothing/textile fragments	child's single shoe, newspapers	ca. 1840s-1860s	in a cabinet alongside a closed off fireplace	1812	CS Arms 2011; David McLaughlin 2011, elec. comm.