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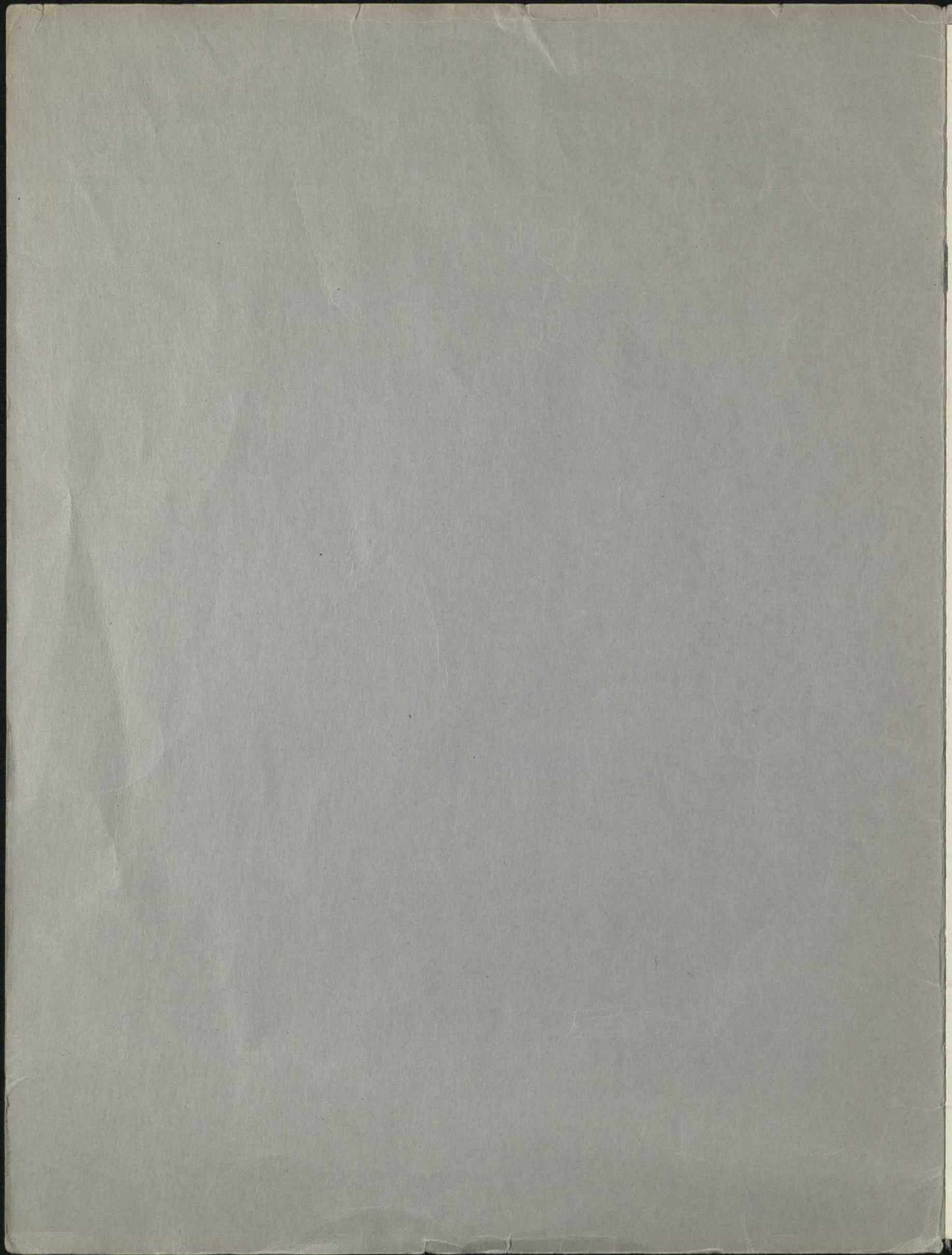
The House of Simon McTavish  
No. 27 St. Jean Baptiste Street, Montreal

by

Ramsay Traquair, M.A. (Hon.), F.R.I.B.A.  
and  
G. A. Neilson

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MONTREAL  
1933



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*By*

RAMSAY TRAQUAIR, M.A. (HON.), F.R.I.B.A.

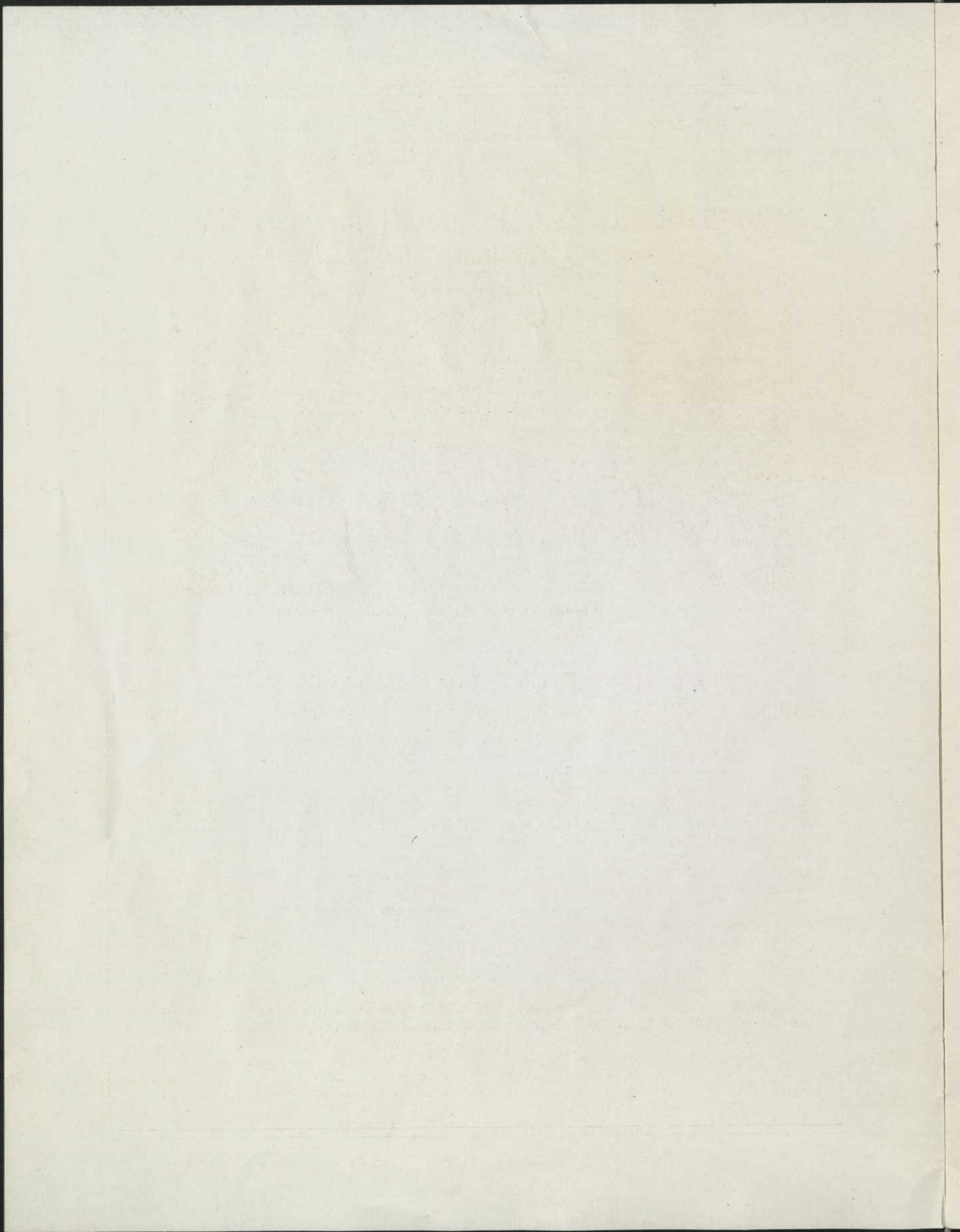
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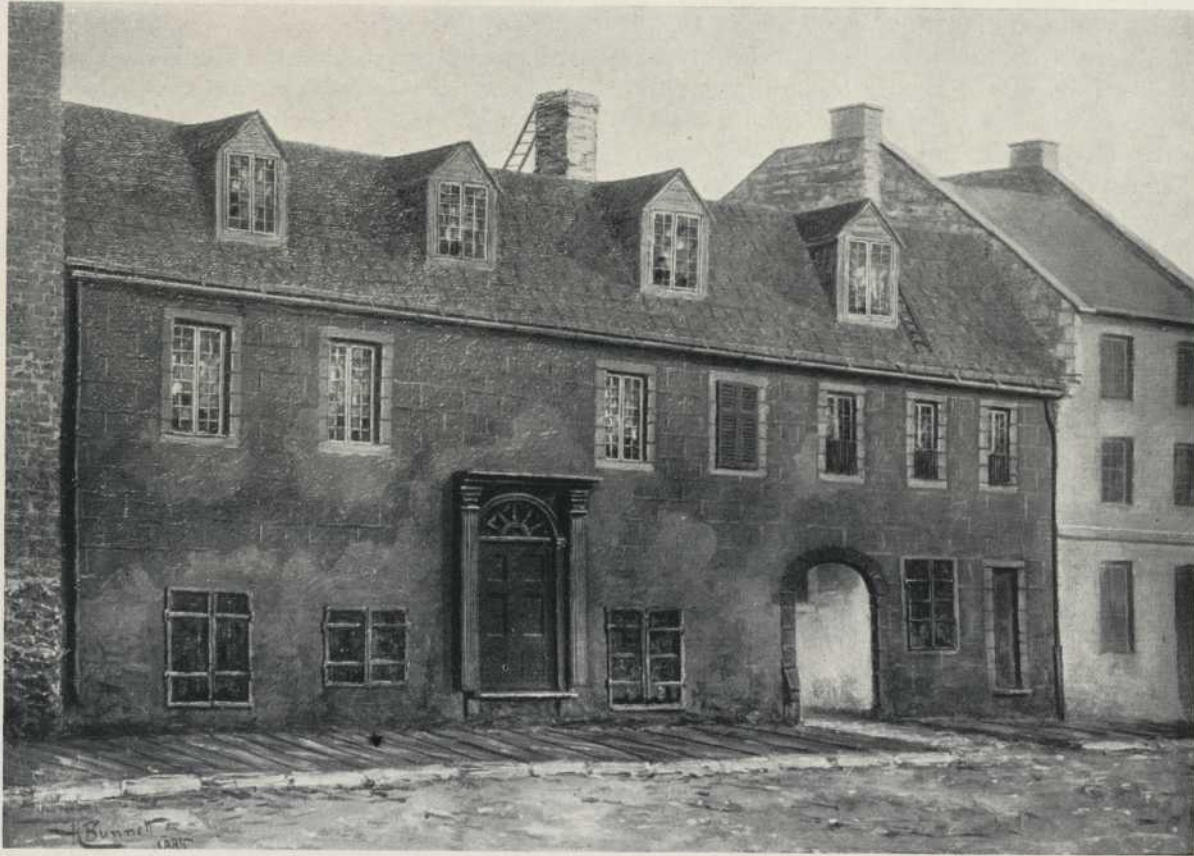
G. A. NEILSON

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THE McTAVISH HOUSE, ST. JEAN BAPTISTE STREET, MONTREAL

*From a painting by H. Bunnell in the McCord Museum*

## THE HOUSE OF SIMON McTAVISH

No. 27 ST. JEAN BAPTISTE STREET, MONTREAL

BY RAMSAY TRAQUAIR, M.A.(Hon.) F.R.I.B.A. AND G. A. NEILSON

**I**N 1786 Simon McTavish, the fur merchant of Montreal, leased from Richard Dobie, merchant, a new dwelling-house in St. Jean Baptiste Street for a period of seven years at the annual rental of £130. The lease, passed before Edward W. Gray, N.P. states that the house had not yet been lived in by any person and gives an inventory of the finishings. This gives the rooms as, on the first floor, kitchen, pantry and servants room, on the second, four rooms with two marble hearths and, on the third, five rooms with, in addition, stables, "necessary", ice-house and cellar.

In 1795 McTavish bought the house from Dobie. The deed of sale, signed by Joseph Frobisher on behalf of McTavish, gives some particulars. The lot consists of "a stone dwelling-house built in the English taste, stables and out-houses with an ice-house and a small garden." The ground on which they stood had been purchased by Dobie in small

parts from four different owners, added to a lot owned by himself and then redivided. A plan showing the new boundaries and house is appended to the deed and this shows the house and lot very much as it is today.

On Simon McTavish's death in 1804 the house was left to his widow and seems to have been used as a dwelling-house until the end of the century. In 1885 Bunnell made a painting of it, in very minute detail, which is now in the McCord Museum. It was still practically unaltered in 1905 when Mr. D. Hardie and Mr. Roxburgh Smith measured and drew the details of the mantelpieces, stair and front door. About this time the property was acquired by the National Drug Company, for the purpose of a factory. The top floor was removed and an additional brick storey was added, with a flat roof. In 1931 all the fittings had gone excepting one fine mantelpiece on the principal floor and some fragments of the staircase and the

dado panelling. These are now in the McCord Museum.

A survey of the buildings was made in 1930 by the students of the School of Architecture of McGill University. The restored drawings are based on this survey and on the old drawings by Messrs. Hardie and Smith.

The house was in three storeys, a half basement, referred to in the lease as the first floor, a principal or second floor and an attic or third floor. It is in two parts, the house proper to the west and the additional building which contained the stables to the east, separated from the house by the arched entry. The ice-house and "necessary" were in the back yard.

The front door had disappeared in 1931. Bunnett's painting and the old photographs show that it was in the centre of the street front. It had a semi-circular fanlight, with fluted doric pilasters and an architrave. It was measured by Mr. Roxburgh Smith.

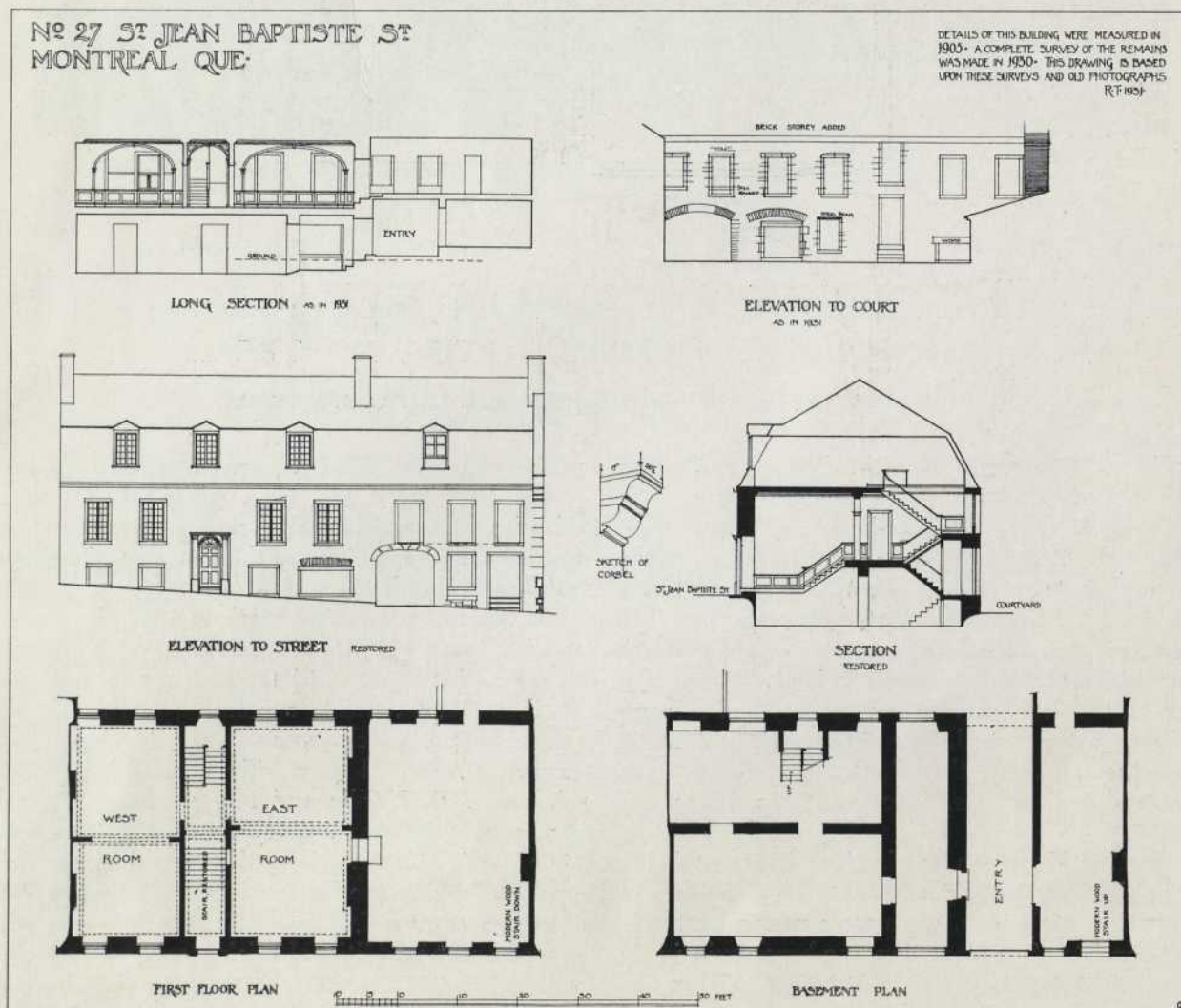
From this door the principal floor must have been reached by a short flight of steps. The side

walls of this staircase still remain but the stair itself has been removed.

The basement shows no traces now of its original use but we know from the inventory that it contained the kitchen, servant's room and cellar. The large window next to the arch of the entry is not shown on Bunnett's picture and must be a later insertion.

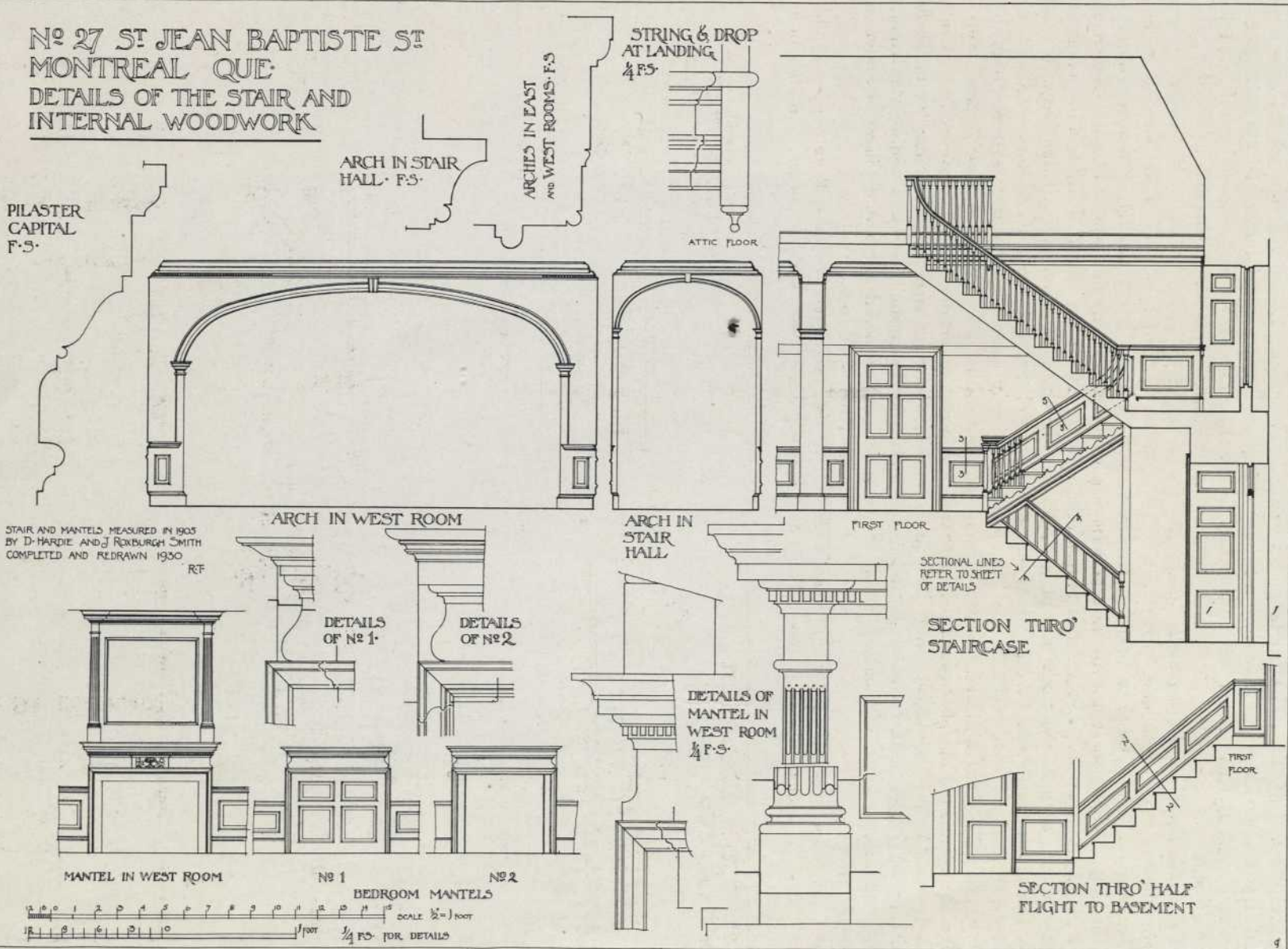
On the principal floor the centre is occupied by the staircase and hall passage. On each side is a large double room, the front and back separated by elliptical arches. Each of these four divisions or rooms has a chimneybreast and fireplace. In the front east room the mantelpiece was still in position in 1930. It is a typical American "colonial" design of the late XVIII century "Adam" type—a cast iron grate with a yellow veined (jaune antique) marble surround; a delicately moulded frieze and mantelshelf with a carved central panel; at the sides tapered and fluted pilasters, above a large panel with side pilasters.

In 1905 the west room still retained an old mantelpiece of very similar design. This has now



PLANS AND ELEVATIONS OF THE McTAVISH HOUSE

NO 27 ST JEAN BAPTISTE ST  
MONTREAL QUE.  
DETAILS OF THE STAIR AND  
INTERNAL WOODWORK



DETAILS OF THE STAIR AND PANELLING

disappeared but fortunately the drawings have preserved a record of it. These mantelpieces correspond to the two marble hearths mentioned in the inventory. How the two other fireplaces were treated we do not know; the inventory mentions a Portland stone hearth with a small piece broken off on this floor.

The whole floor had a low panelled dado and a chair rail.

The general arrangement of the plan conforms to the English Georgian type with the central stair and double side rooms. The arrangement of the entrance door and stair is made necessary by the half basement. It should be compared with the somewhat similar arrangement in the "Fargues" house, No. 92 St. Peter Street, Quebec.

As the attic floor has completely disappeared it is fortunate that the old drawings include the staircase and two of the bedroom mantels. The photograph shows a part of the dado panelling and

handrail, but the latter has been taken down and replaced during the alterations and the balusters are not in their original positions.

The annex to the east shows no trace of its original use, a coach-house and stables. It communicates with the east room of the principal floor by three steps down, since its floor is at a higher level so as to allow the entry to pass under.

The house is of interest as showing the town house of a wealthy citizen of Montreal in the end of the XVIII century. It should be compared with the much more elaborate and larger house at No. 92 St. Peter Street, Quebec. Quebec was evidently a much wealthier and more important place whilst Montreal was already beginning to show strong English influences.

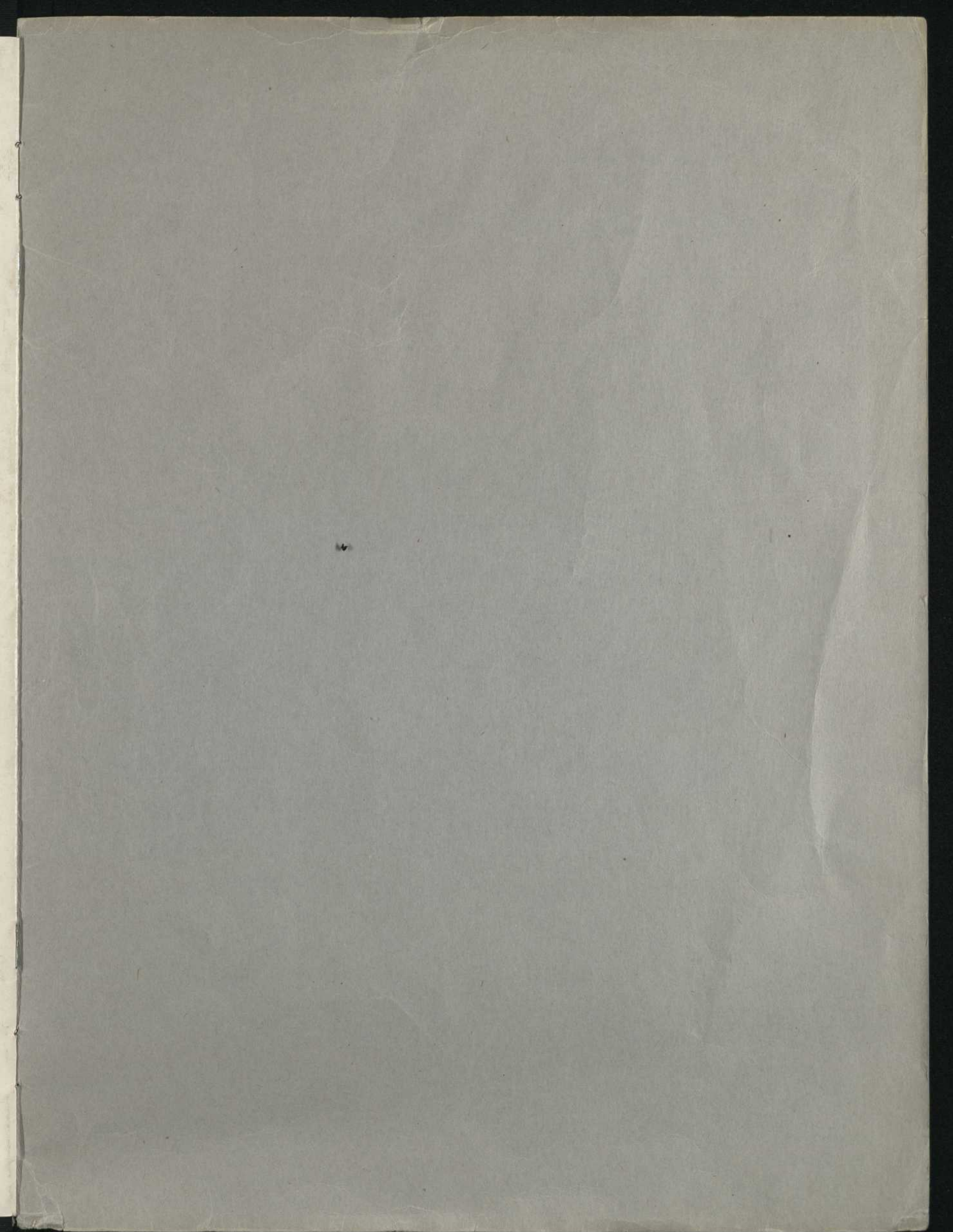
The tradition of this house is American Colonial. It is indeed quite possible that the mantelpieces were imported for they are quite unlike anything



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