

# The Neoclassical in Providence

## The Nightingale-Brown House



By Carissa L. Racca

# History of the Structure

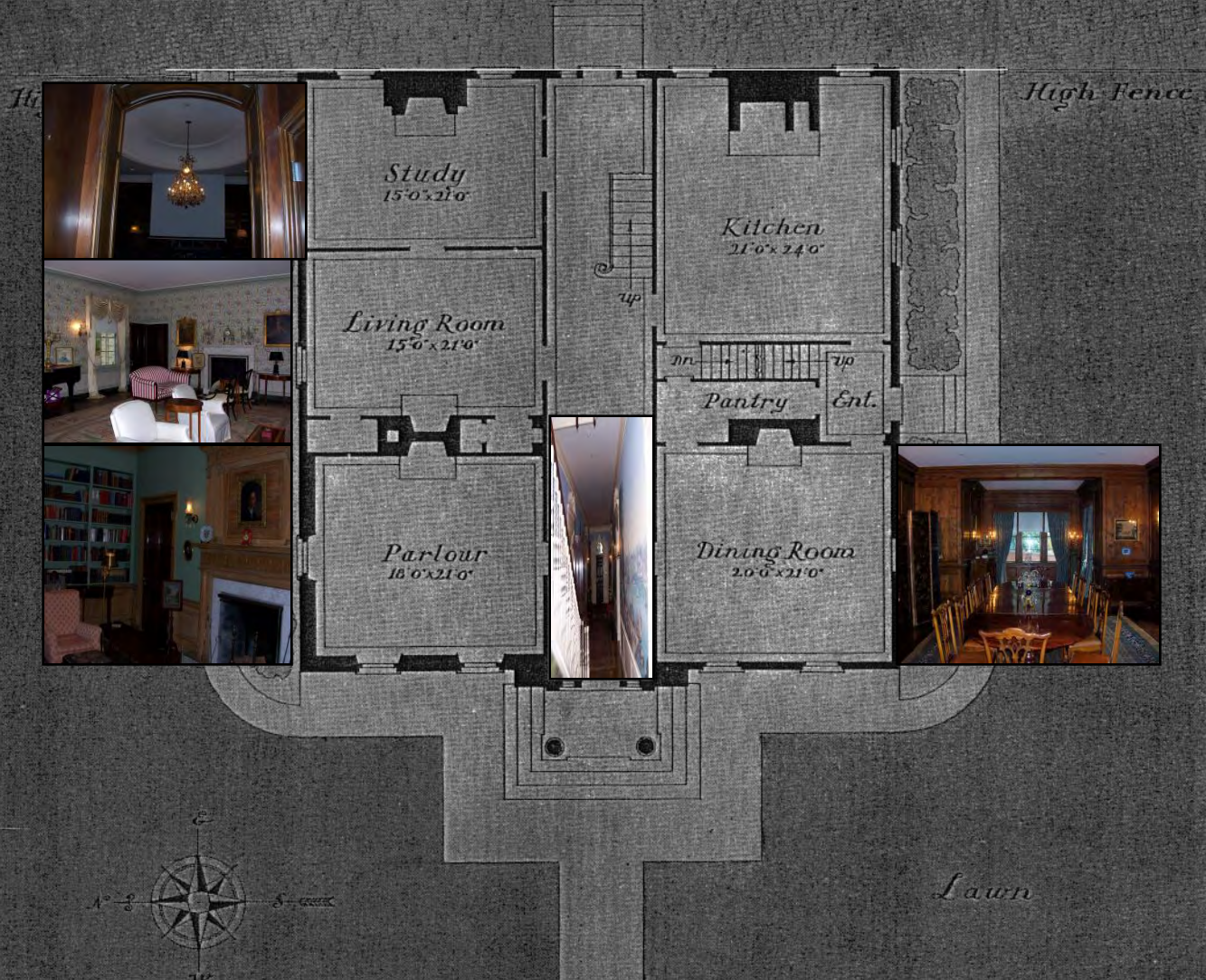
## Implementation of the Neo-Classical Architecture

The Nightingale-Brown House was often referred to as “one of the finest buildings and the largest wood frame house to survive from eighteenth-century America. The structure, constructed in 1792, clearly exemplifies various forms of neo-classical architecture, something which radically transformed the relationship between man and nature.

Architects of the period felt that their motivation was not simply to copy ancient works, but to incorporate certain artistic principles into their own work. In many ways, they wanted to make the style their “own,” something which is reflected at the Nightingale-Brown House. Unfortunately, some of these neo-classical styles have been lost, particularly when the house became the John Nicholas Brown Center for the Study of American Civilization in 1985. For this project, I will further discuss the neo-classical motifs that do remain.



# Nightingale-Brown House Plan



# The Doric Order

## Implementation and Importance

From looking at most eighteenth-century homes, one can gather that the neo-classical movement not only revolutionized society, but it became a common architectural feature seen in many upper-class homes. One of the architectural styles that can still be seen today, is that of the Doric Order. Below, I will discuss further its importance in eighteenth-century America.

The Doric order was one of three organizational systems that made up the Ancient Greek architectural system, two other important column styles also include two other canonical orders, which were the **Ionic** and **Corinthian**. These classical styles also assumed a certain type of prominence in the houses of the eighteenth-century American elite.

At the Nightingale-Brown House these styles are most commonly seen in more public vs. private areas where formal entertaining was carried out.

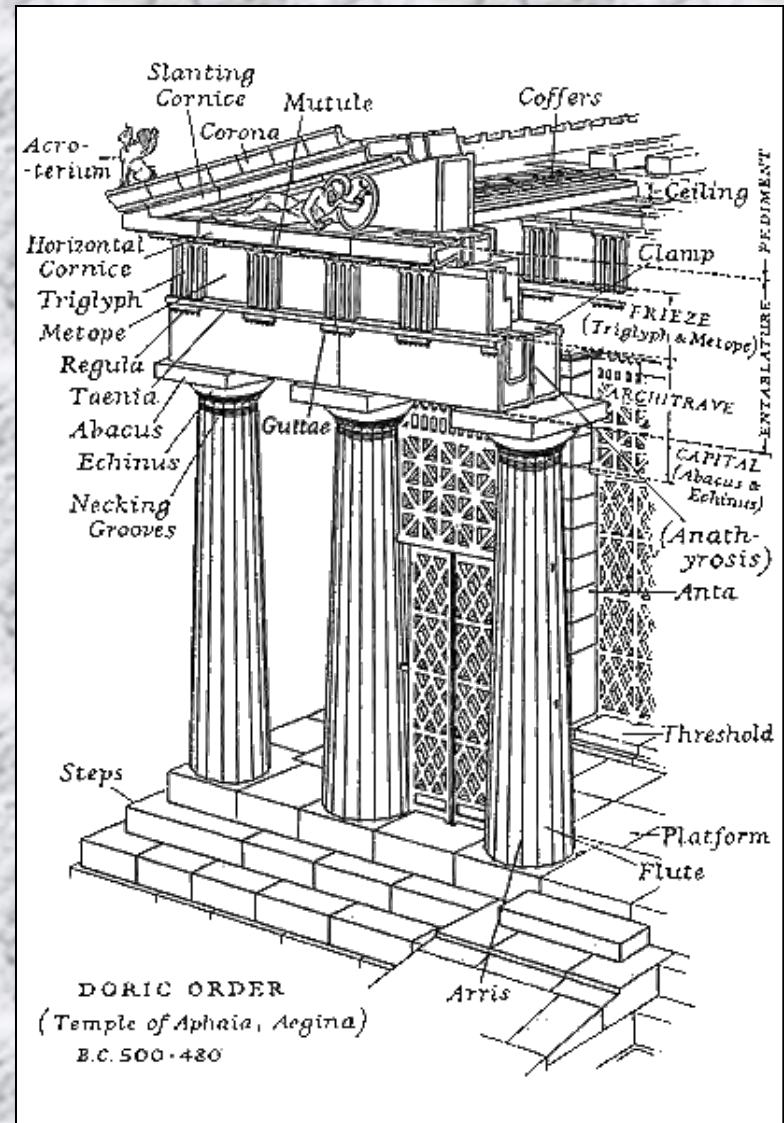


# Doric Order

## Comparison of the ancient and modern design



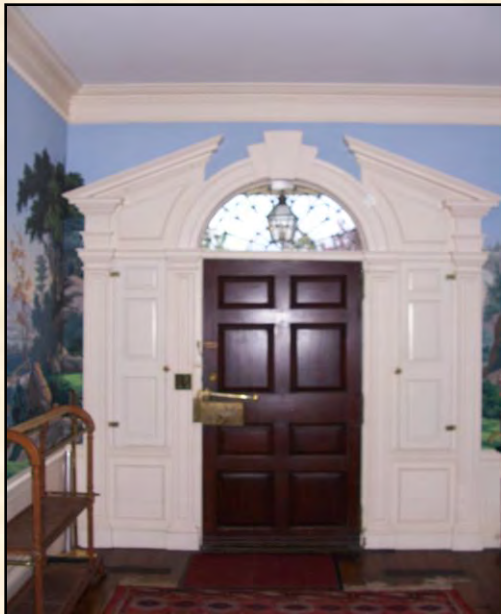
Here we see the Doric order integrated into the wooden mantel frame, which was an extremely important feature in the room.



# The Pediment

Another important feature of Greek Temple design was the pediment. The element consisted of the triangular section found above the horizontal temple structure, which was typically supported by columns.

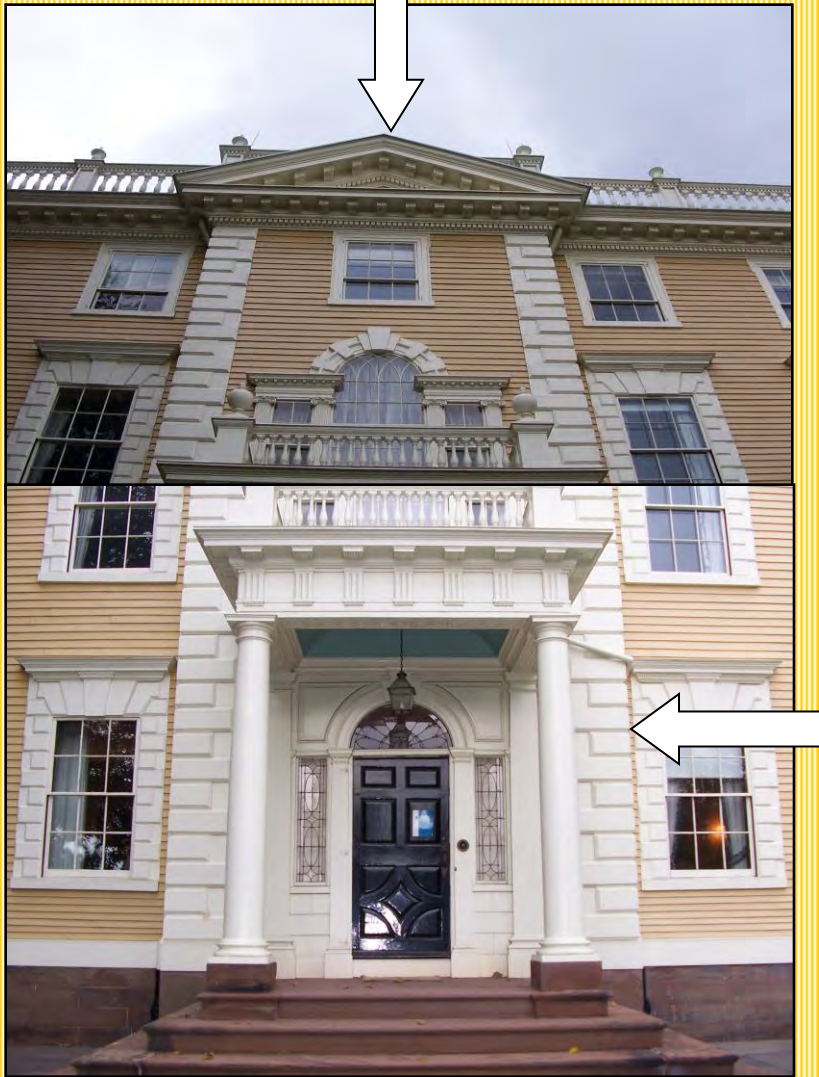
In the eighteenth-century we see the use of the broken-pediment, which had now become a common architectural feature seen on door frames (integrated with the palladian window design below) and the mantel of fireplaces throughout a house.



Reconstruction of the West pediment Temple of Zeus at Olympia.

# The Exterior Structure

The front of the house



One can only imagine how proud the Brown family must have felt when they came home.

Here, the exterior façade depicts a central projecting pavilion crowned by its own pediment on the one story porch, which illustrates the use of the Doric order. The hipped roof is lined with double rows of classic turned balusters split by posts adorned with urns.

The types of motifs mentioned above were classified as “Adam styles.”

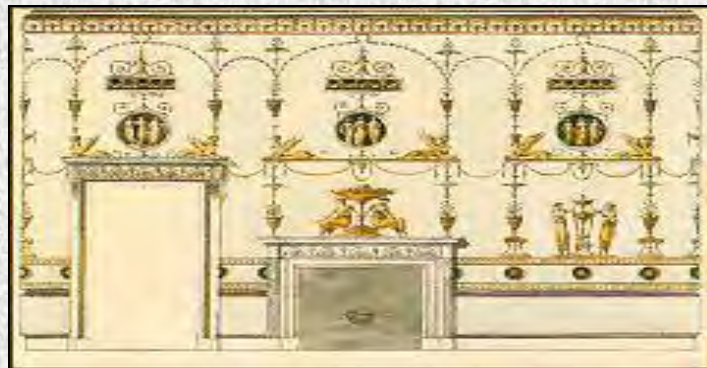


# Adam Style

## At the Nightingale-Brown House

The Adam style is a form of neo-classical architecture designs that were made popular by Robert Adam (1728-1792) and his brothers. The Adam style was often combined with neo-gothic details into Classical architectural frameworks. So-called Egyptian and Etruscan motifs were also popularized.

At the post-Revolutionary war homes in the United States, such as the Nightingale-Brown House, the Adam style is most evident on the mantel in the formal “living room.” Here, we see Roman style decorative motifs are displayed, which include framed medallions, urns and tripods, there is also an emphasis placed on wreaths.

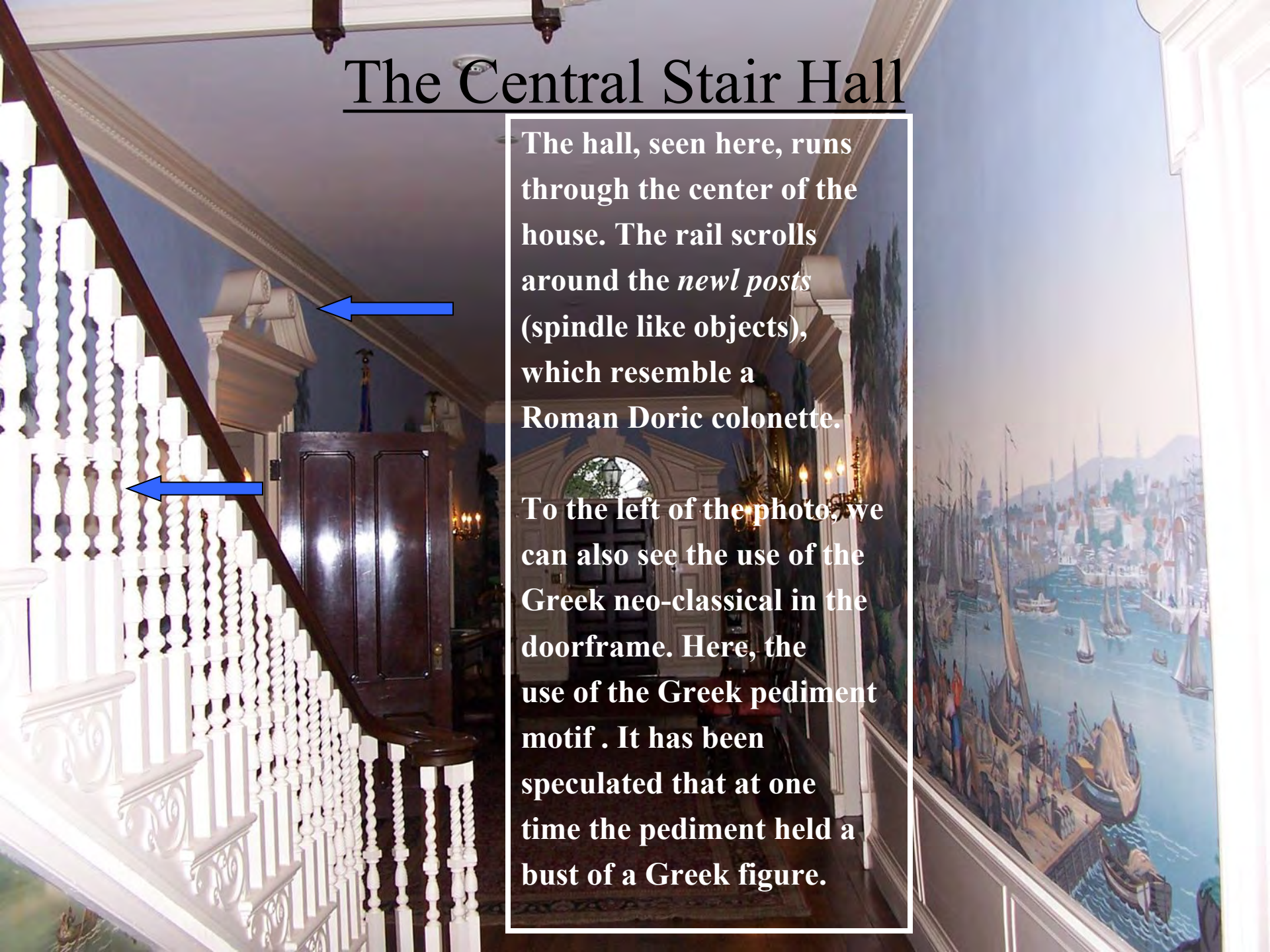








# The Central Stair Hall

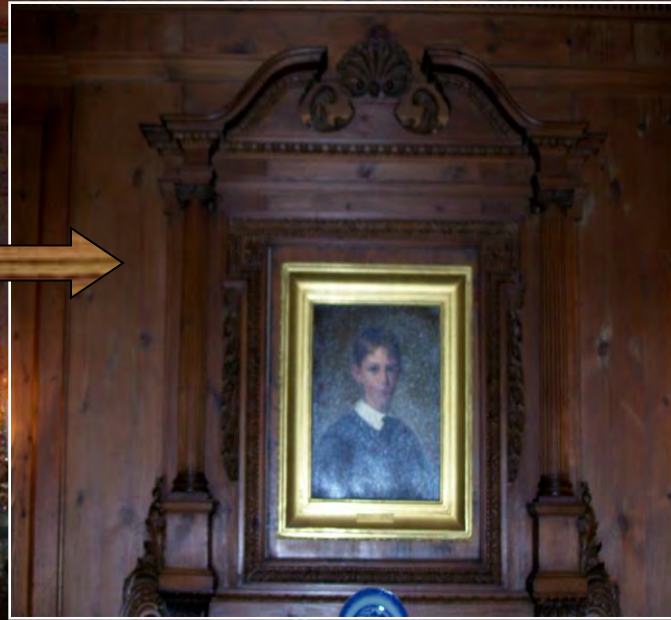


The hall, seen here, runs through the center of the house. The rail scrolls around the *newl posts* (spindle like objects), which resemble a Roman Doric colonette.

To the left of the photo, we can also see the use of the Greek neo-classical in the doorframe. Here, the use of the Greek pediment motif . It has been speculated that at one time the pediment held a bust of a Greek figure.



# The Dining Room



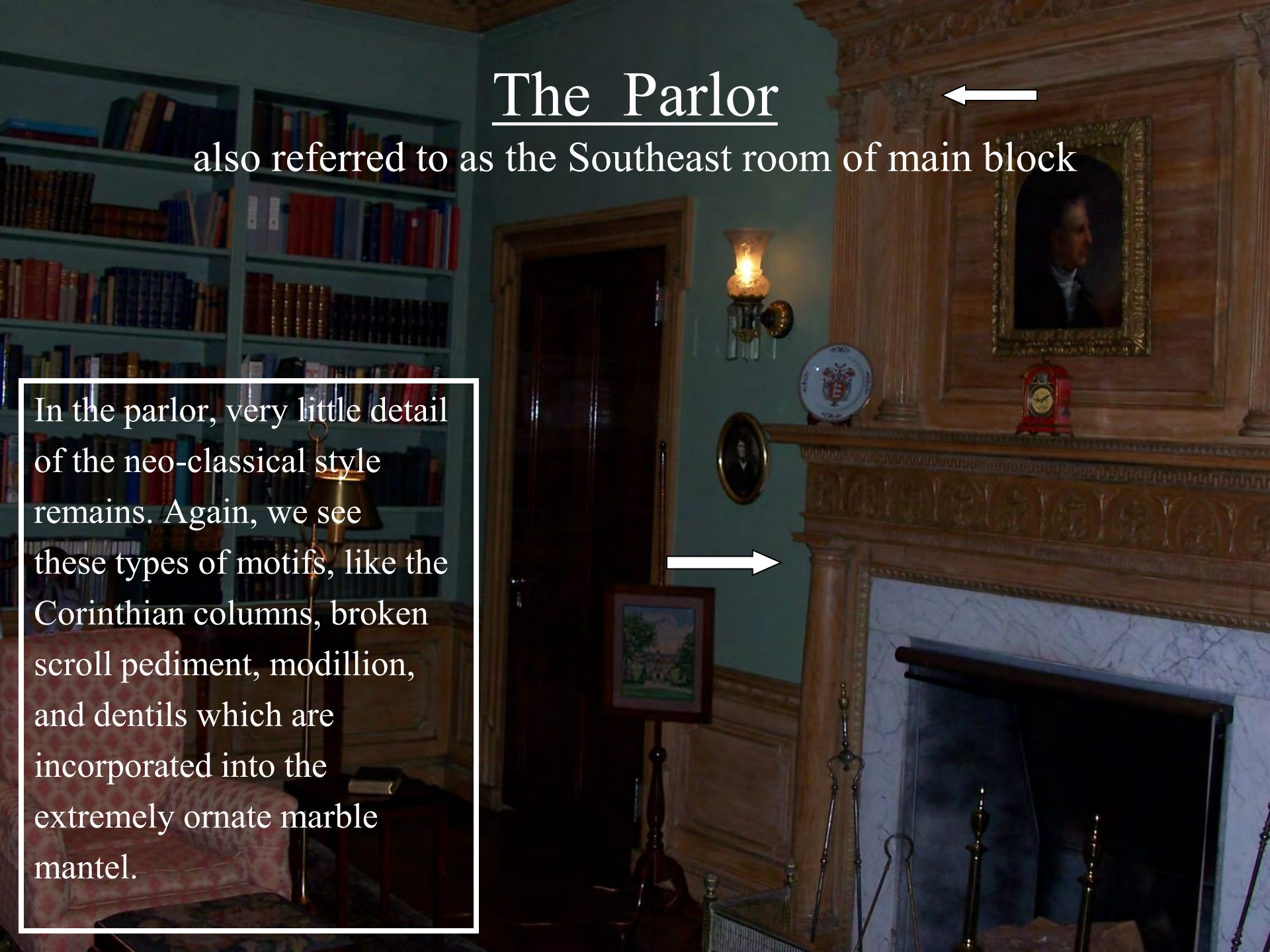
In the dining room area, we see neo-classical architecture expressed in the two story mantel; emphasizing the engaged Doric columns on top, which are supported by brackets.



# The Parlor

also referred to as the Southeast room of main block

In the parlor, very little detail of the neo-classical style remains. Again, we see these types of motifs, like the Corinthian columns, broken scroll pediment, modillion, and dentils which are incorporated into the extremely ornate marble mantel.





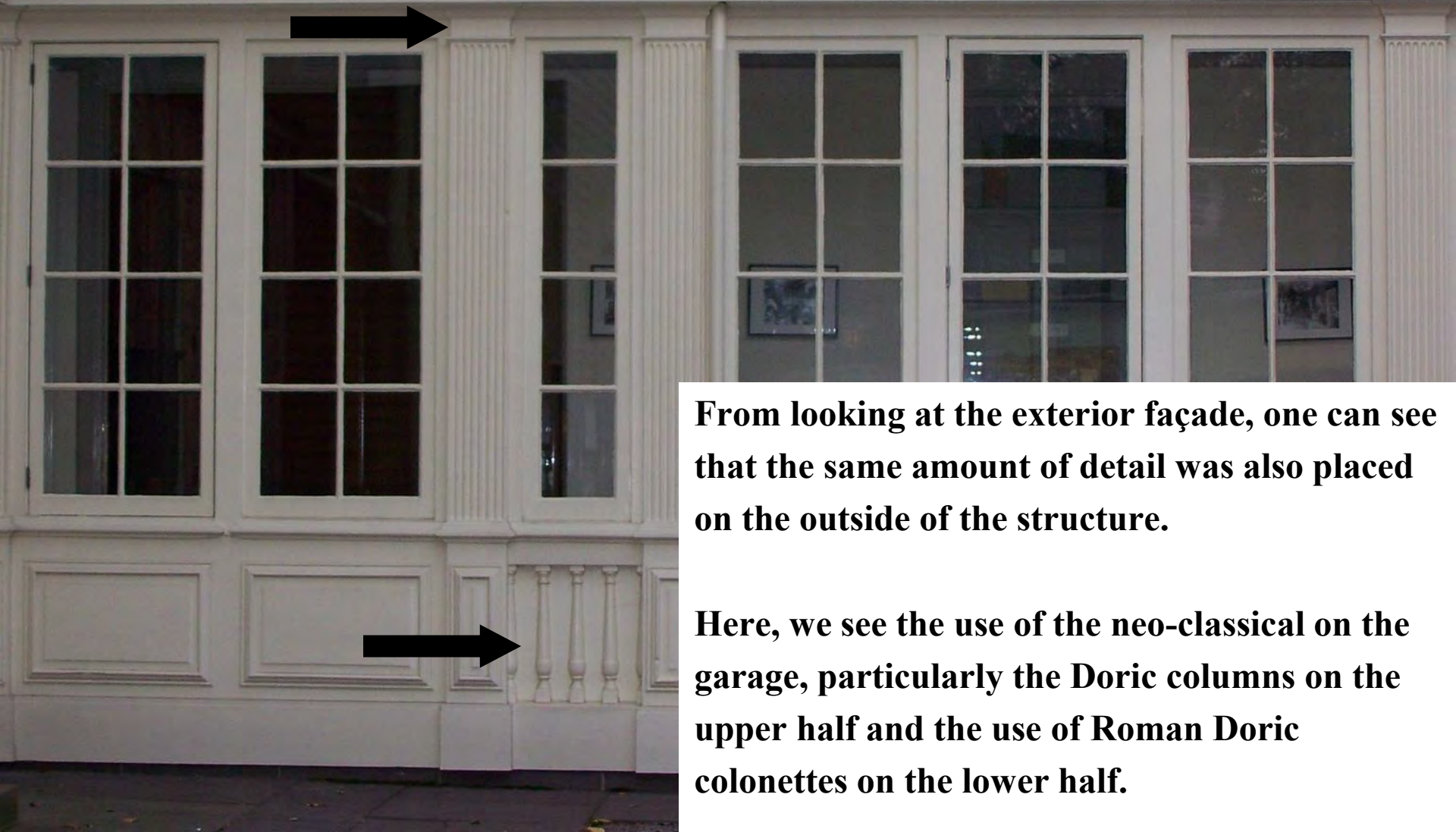
# The Living Room



**In the “south east room” there is little neo-classical detail left, this is partly due to the changing decorum of the room. When entering the room, one’s attentions is immediately focused on the one-story marble mantel where Roman motifs (wreaths and urns) are evident.**



# The Exterior Structure located in the back of the house



**From looking at the exterior façade, one can see that the same amount of detail was also placed on the outside of the structure.**

**Here, we see the use of the neo-classical on the garage, particularly the Doric columns on the upper half and the use of Roman Doric colonettes on the lower half.**