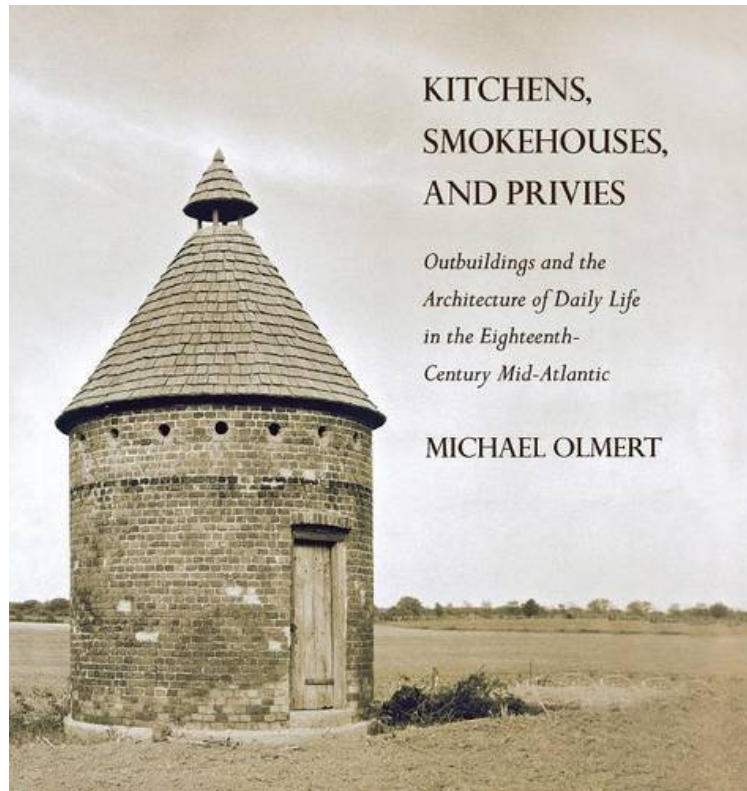


[Free] Kitchens, Smokehouses, and Privies: Outbuildings and the Architecture of Daily Life in the Eighteenth-Century Mid-Atlantic

Kitchens, Smokehouses, and Privies: Outbuildings and the Architecture of Daily Life in the Eighteenth-Century Mid-Atlantic

Michael Olmert

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Michael Olmert : Kitchens, Smokehouses, and Privies: Outbuildings and the Architecture of Daily Life in the Eighteenth-Century Mid-Atlantic before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Kitchens, Smokehouses, and Privies: Outbuildings and the Architecture of Daily Life in the Eighteenth-Century Mid-Atlantic:

13 of 13 people found the following review helpful. Re-cycled, Undocumented, Murky Pictures By R. Parsons Of the 101 illustrations, 24 are of reconstructions or fanciful restorations. An additional 19 are stock/poster shots (i.e. Williamsburg, Mount Vernon, Monticello) or tenuously connected historical engravings (i.e. Drer's St. Jerome in his study; Jean-Baptist Greuze, The Laundress.) Thirty-five are of the restoration at Colonial Williamsburg. Eighteen are of European origin. Of the 101 illustrations, only four are documentary photos of unrestored interiors: the laundry at Green Hill, the privy at Bowman's Folly, the privy at Westover, and the dovecote at Shirley. Some of the material is recycled from Colonial Williamsburg magazine; the entire book is written in the airy style that characterizes that sort of popular lightweight periodical. Although Olmert discusses laundering at some length, he skirts such a basic question as

what exactly was a washtub like (wood staves or copper?). There is much discussion also about the unpleasantness of slave life and chamber pots and privies. Nevertheless, the question of who went where and where the pots were emptied is largely avoided. Although Olmert suggests (p. 125) that pots were carried from the house to the privy by slaves, absent documentation it does not seem likely that slaves were encouraged to carry out their messy work inside a gentry-finished privy. The negative evidence suggests that Olmert has very little experience with his topic beyond the fairy-tale restoration at Williamsburg. The reproduction level of the photographs is very poor, many of them dark and murky. They appear to lack any manipulation of the images in the modern electronic darkroom, to the extent that they are seldom helpful. Anyone interested in American 19C folkways is probably already familiar with the much better researched work of John Michael Vlach. Architectural historians stand in awe of Carl Lousnbury's Illustrated Glossary of Early Southern Architecture and Landscape. In addition to those works, a few minutes of research in the online HABS collection of the Library of Congress will yield much more interesting and accurate material than Olmert's book. 12 of 12 people found the following review helpful. Mis-titled book By Michelle A. Lynch Author Michael Olmert won his reputation writing Emmy award winning documentaries and scholarly, yet readable, books. Copiously illustrated with almost 100 black and white photographs of surviving outbuildings, Olmert's book gives an excellent overview of the various dependencies which served the large 18th century Tidewater or Chesapeake plantation house - their origins, evolutions, and functions. The book focuses on the kitchens, smokehouses, laundries, dairies, offices, icehouses, and dovecotes of large estates and prosperous plantations with little discussion of the types of outbuildings found on the typical small holders' farms. The book's subtitle, "Outbuildings and the Architecture of Daily Life in the Eighteenth-Century Mid-Atlantic" is misleading. The Mid-Atlantic region includes New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Delaware, and Maryland. However, this book focused almost exclusively on the architecture of the Tidewater Virginia and Chesapeake Virginia and Maryland regions. There were absolutely no photographs of the Eighteenth-Century outbuildings constructed by the English and Dutch Colonists in New York and New Jersey, or by the English, Germanic, and Swiss settlers of Pennsylvania, nor was there anything written about these regions. As a resource for Mid-Atlantic architecture, this book is an enormous disappointment, and is not recommended. Had the book been marketed under a different title, revealing its true content, "Outbuildings and the Architecture of Daily Life in the Eighteenth-Century Tidewater Chesapeake Regions," I would have given it a higher rating. Unfortunately, a greedy publisher, attempting to appeal to a broader audience, chose deception in sub-titling this book. If you are looking for a book on interesting outbuilding of Virginia and Maryland, by all means buy this book. However, if you want a good book on the outbuildings of the Mid-Atlantic Region, this is not the book for you. 10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. a coffee table book for small coffee tables! By L. DERRY Although I appreciate having the many photos of these outbuildings and drawings pulled together in this one book, I was a little disappointed. I was hoping for a more in depth original study. It appears to be mostly a summary of the work of other scholars, which is a laudable task, but I find it exceedingly hard to trace the information presented back to the original sources, which is what many of us would like to find and cite. Also, although the format is very attractive, and gives the appearance on line of a large coffee table book, be aware that it is actually only about 7" by 8" in size. Real footnotes would make this volume much better and intellectually transparent. Instead, at the end of each chapter, he just has a "Notes and Further Reading" section.

In *Kitchens, Smokehouses, and Privies*, Michael Olmert takes us into the eighteenth-century backyards of colonial America. He explores the many small outbuildings that can still be found at obscure rural farmsteads throughout the Tidewater and greater mid-Atlantic, in towns like Williamsburg and Annapolis, and at elite plantations such as Mount Vernon and Monticello. These structures were designed to support the performance of a single task: cooking food; washing clothes; smoking meat; storing last winter's ice; or keeping milk, cheese, and cream fresh. Privies and small offices are also addressed, as is the dovecote, in which doves were raised for their eggs, squab meat, feathers, and fertilizer. Often, these little buildings were clustered in such a way as to resemble a small village, knit together by similar design details and building materials: they were all constructed in weatherboards or in brick, for instance, or were arranged in a single file or positioned at the four corners of the yard. In this appealing book, featuring nearly a hundred crisp black-and-white photographs, Olmert explains how these well-made buildings actually functioned. He is riveted by the history of outbuildings: their architecture, patterns of use, folklore, and even their literary presence. In two appendixes he also considers octagonal and hexagonal structures, which had special significance, both doctrinal and cultural, in early America. Archaeologists and historians still have many questions about the design and function of outbuildings—questions that are often difficult to answer because of the ephemeral nature of these structures; they were not documented—any more than laundry rooms and storage units inspire rhapsodies today. Olmert's book, deeply grounded in scholarship, eminently readable, and profusely illustrated, takes these buildings seriously and gives them the attention they deserve.

"In *Kitchens, Smokehouses, and Privies*, Michael Olmert takes readers into the backyards behind the great houses of the Chesapeake. In these spaces behind the homes of the wealthy, Olmert illuminates a world where the sometimes

dirty work of food preparation, the clean work of dairying and laundering, and the necessary work of the necessary was carried out. The book's main argument is that we should take these buildings seriously, because they can teach us about the society that built them. Olmert lays out the reasons convincingly, and with great skill, and in the process provides a valuable service to general readers and scholars alike. *Kitchens, Smokehouses, and Privies* is beautiful, thoroughly researched, and written with grace and humor."Matthew H. Jennings, H-South, H-Net s, February 2010"Michael Olmert offers a wonderfully conversational introduction to the myriad structures that supported the drudgery and business of eighteenth-century domestic life. Olmert marshals the evidence of archaeology, poetry, narrative, art , and most importantly the buildings themselves in an account that explores an intimate world of work in the service of the 'big' house. If the clustered gangs of outbuildings thronged around the dwellings of the Chesapeake countryside have sparked your curiosity, Olmert's book is an excellent introduction to their social, cultural, and architectural histories."Bernard L. Herman, author of *Town House: Architecture and Material Life in the Early American City, 1780-1830*"How were the glamorous seven-course meals cooked? The clothes washed? Or, where did you go to the potty? The backyard had more activity than the actual house. Elegantly written with great insight and accompanied by many photographs and drawings, Michael Olmert's book illuminates how the grand houses and also the more middling actually functioned in the Mid-Atlantic region. This book is essential for any serious student of Colonial America."Richard Guy Wilson, author of *Buildings of Virginia*About the AuthorMichael Olmert teaches English Literature at the University of Maryland. He has won three Emmys for writing documentaries and is a regular contributor to *Colonial Williamsburg* magazine. He is also the author of *The Smithsonian Book of Books* and *Milton's Teeth and Ovid's Umbrella: Curiouser and Curiouser Adventures in History*.