

Symbol of Social Change:
The Archibald Alexander House

For centuries historians have been relying on written documents to help them reconstruct an accurate picture of the past, but these self-conscious historic records have inherent biases. Too often, written sources overemphasize elite history and underemphasize common folk and everyday life. By examining material culture, students of the past can begin to fill in the gaps left by the written records and, perhaps more importantly, raise new questions about the way in which we used to live, as well as the way we live today. The material object most central to the daily life of average people is their home. Our homes are signs of our most basic perceptions about ourselves, our families, our communities and the time in which we live. It is the purpose of this paper to examine one home, the Archibald Alexander house, to better understand the complex community of early Federalist New Castle, Delaware and the generation that followed.

A double house located at 26 and 28 Third Street, the Alexander house is a product of its owner, its community, and its era. Before we can fully understand the meanings which the structure communicates, we must examine these contexts.

Built around 1800, the construction of the house occurred during a political and economic heyday in New Castle. The community's first incarnation was as Fort Casimir in the early seventeenth century. The town was shuffled from Dutch to Swedish

to English control until 1682 when it was included in William Penn's grant, under which it remained throughout the colonial period.¹ The town was the major commercial port on the seaboard until the third quarter of the seventeenth century when it was superceded by New York. New Castle continued as the seat of New Castle county and served as the regional judicial center. When Pennsylvania's Three Lower Counties separated to become Delaware, New Castle became the capital. The town continued to grow throughout the eighteenth century but was outpaced by Philadelphia and eventually Wilmington. Its port, like its size, also became overshadowed by the two cities to the north, but its livelihood and importance was buoyed by the 1775 creation of a packet line between Philadelphia and Baltimore, for which New Castle served as the sea to land transfer point.²

The Revolution created great fervor in the town, but the proximity of the war brought the geographic vulnerability of New Castle to everyone's attention. Soon after the Revolution, New Castle lost its role as state capital to the safer and more centrally located Dover.³ Despite this and the economic depression which followed the war, by the turn of the century and the first decade of the next century, New Castle was experiencing

¹Constance Jean Cooper, "A Town Among Cities: New Castle, Delaware, 1780-1840" (Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 1983), 2-5.

²ibid., 6-33.

³ibid., 34-49.

a healthy economy and population growth.⁴ It was during this time that many of New Castle's hopeful citizens turned toward building new homes and improving their town. Archibald Alexander was prominent among these civic leaders.

Born in 1756 in the town of Staunton in Augusta County, Virginia, Alexander served as the first sheriff in neighboring Rockbridge County before moving to Delaware. During the Revolutionary War, he was a member of the New Castle County Militia and a surgeon in the 10th Regiment in the Virginia Line, serving in the Battles of Brandywine and Trenton and reportedly dressing Lafayette's wounds.⁵ After the war, Dr. Alexander resumed his civic activism. In 1784, Alexander was one of seven prominent local leaders entrusted with raising funds to improve New Castle's harbor--a vital, albeit tenuous, part of the town's economic well-being.⁶ When the Delaware Medical Society was established in 1789, only the third such organization in the young nation, Dr. Alexander was a founding and influential member.⁷ At the center of the division between Federalist and Anti-Federalists, Archibald Alexander served as the Democratic-

⁴ibid., 58.

⁵Archibald Alexander Genealogical File, Historical Society of Delaware.

⁶J. Thomas Scharf, History of Delaware, 1609-1888 (Philadelphia: L.J. Richards & co., 1888), 866.

⁷John A. Munroe, Federalist Delaware: 1775-1815 (Newark, Delaware, 1954; reprint, Newark, Delaware: University of Delaware under licensing agreement with Rutgers University, 1987), 177-178.

Republican party candidate in the 1795 gubernatorial election. Although he lost the election, Alexander carried the New Castle County vote.

By 1797, Dr. Alexander was firmly ensconced in the workings of the community of New Castle. In January, he purchased the plot of land on which he would build his Third Street double house. In June, Alexander cemented his investment when, as part of legislation establishing New Castle's boundaries, he was appointed one of five commissioners assigned to administration of the statute.⁸ Their first act was to select Daniel Blaney to survey "so that street and building lines could be fixed, streets graded and paved, and gutters laid out."⁹ The commission eventually hired Benjamin Latrobe to survey the town in 1804 (fig. 1).¹⁰ Although unique to the state, New Castle's survey found precedents in planning efforts in Philadelphia, New York and Washington, D.C. The survey, which focussed on potential community growth, was indicative of the citizens' community commitment and ambitions for the future of New Castle.¹¹

About the time of the Latrobe survey, the names of New Castle's streets were changed (fig. 2). The Strand, formerly

⁸Scharf, History of Delaware, 862.

⁹ibid., 862; Anthony Higgins, New Castle, Delaware: 1651-1939, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1939), 22.

¹⁰Higgins, 22.

¹¹Cooper, A Town Among Cities, 203.

Front Street, had long been a locus of the community's commerce due to its proximity to the harbor. The street, along with Fourth Street, formerly Beaver, was first laid out by Peter Stuyvesant when he built Fort Casimir.¹² The Strand served as the setting for many of New Castle's early elite homes.

Originally short cuts across the Green, Second and Third Streets were later formally platted bounding the public greenway.¹³

While secondary to The Strand as an elite thoroughfare, Third Street seems an appropriate location for Alexander's home. Never engaging in commerce for his livelihood, Alexander achieved his prominence in the community through civic and political activism. Across from the Green, the Alexander house is proximate to the Courthouse, a symbol of New Castle's importance as a government center. Also, with an eye toward expansion, Alexander surely saw the Green as a center of increasing importance.

It was in this hopeful atmosphere of community planning that Dr. Archibald Alexander constructed his house at 26 and 28 Third Street. Alexander's vision of a more urban New Castle is manifest in his stately brick home. By the time of the Latrobe

¹²ibid., 5.

¹³Jeannette Eckman, "Third Street," from "New Castle Restoration Notes," Unpublished Research Notes accompanying Perry, Shaw, and Hepburn Architectural Survey of New Castle, 1953, Historical Society of Delaware, Wilmington, Delaware. While the Historical Society of Delaware houses the most complete collection of Eckman's research notes, the section on Third Street is missing. A copy of this section was located in the possession of Mr. F. Lytton Patterson III, the current owner of 28 Third Street.

survey in 1804, the house was, in area, one of the two largest on the street, and, in elevation, the tallest house (figs. 1 and 3). The physical dominance and appearance of the house is a symbol of Alexander's importance in the community and his elite status.

The great height of the Alexander house is also a result of siting the double house on a relatively tight lot. Measuring less than 44 feet across, the structure is narrow for a New Castle double house. This is probably, in part, due to Dr. Alexander's image of a more urban New Castle. The proportions of the building are not the only physical sign of Alexander's cosmopolitan vision. The northeast side of the house (#28) is built directly abutting the lot line¹⁴ with no windows on the lower three floors and illumination only in the attic. Alexander seemed to be expecting a dense, urban settlement pattern for Third Street, but intended for his home to continue to physically dominate in such a setting, as his fourth floor fenestration indicates.

The southwest side of the residence (#26) is fully fenestrated, with the exception of the first and floors nearest the street. The current owner of 26 Third Street has indicated that there was a carriage drive leading to a side entrance (fig. 4).¹⁵ This seems very possible, for there is ample space for a

¹⁴This is evidenced by the 1804 Latrobe survey.

¹⁵Personal communication with Miss Dorsey Fiske, October 31, 1991.

carriage. Both of the current owners have reported that an interior passage existed running the length of the house from the street to the yard at 28 Third Street.¹⁶ Though there is no such covered passage in the 1804 Latrobe survey, physical evidence clearly indicates that such a passage existed or was almost completed before it was decided to enclose the space. There are several clues on the facade which attest to the existence of this passage.

The axis of symmetry on the house is slightly askew due to the fact that the right side of the house (when facing it) is a full two feet wider than the left. Rather than distributing this extra space within the facade, the excess footage is left on the far end of the house (fig. 5). Under each window bay there is a cellar window, except next to the alleged passage, and the windows on the first floor of the right side of the house have been changed. They are wider than all the other openings and lack the window details present on the left side of the house.¹⁷ There is also a visible horizontal seam in the brickwork where the passage is said to have existed. Inside the house there is further evidence of the passage. In the first floor front room the fireplace is off center and in the back room there is a visible bulge in the plaster where the interior walls must have

¹⁶Personal communications with Miss Dorsey Fiske, October 31, 1991 and Mr. and Mrs. Lytton Patterson III, November 25, 1991.

¹⁷These decorative elements will be discussed later.

previously met. In the cellar there is a noticeable discontinuity in the front wall under the entrance to the passage. Parallel to the corridor, there is a series of six squat brick supporting arches flanking the northeast cellar wall (fig. 6). Designed to bear a significant load, the arches suggest that Alexander intended to use the covered passage to transport heavy goods and support substantial traffic.

It is unclear why Alexander would change his mind about the passageway after its completion, or so close to its completion. An expensive undertaking to construct and to eventually enclose, a retreat from plan must have been mandated by some serious problem. Whether the passage was a victim of structural problems could not be determined from the existing physical evidence. There were no written documents located which refer to the construction or enclosure of the passageway to help understand its fate. Regardless of this, Alexander's interior passage was clearly an urban form reflecting the doctor's vision of an increasingly cosmopolitan New Castle.

Other elements of the house exterior indicate Alexander's perceptions about his community and himself. The bilaterally symmetrical facade is divided into six bays. All sixteen windows are six-over-six, but the surrounding treatment varies from level to level. On the first, and most formal floor, the windows have stone sills and lintels which are capped by highly decorative

keystones (fig. 7).¹⁸ The second floor windows have the same stone sills and lintels but are topped with plain keystones. On the third, and most private floor, windows have stone sills and no lintels at all. The hierarchy of window finishes is indicative of the division between formal, public spaces and private, less formal spaces that occur on many levels throughout the domestic environment.

This visual hierarchy is a part of a series of physical messages communicated between the building and the community. The social hierarchy of New Castle is cemented into the built environment, and consequently the physical world enforces the community structure. The decreasing formality and increasing privacy expressed in the upper level fenestration of the house is not the only message given by the house's exterior. As mentioned, the height and mass of the structure tell passersby that the resident of this house is someone important. The symmetry tells one that this owner respects order and expects social order to be maintained. This is important in any community, but would have been especially important in a commercial and political center like New Castle, where strangers were common.

¹⁸The first floor fenestration of 28 Third Street was drastically altered by removal of the enclosed passageway. This discussion is based upon the window finish found at 26 Third Street.

In his discussion of mid-eighteenth century architecture in western Massachusetts, Kevin Sweeney considers the importance of doorways in communicating the public authority of a house's owner. Sweeney argues that double doors were utilized in cramped "central passage houses to heighten the importance of the front entrance," and signify "the assertiveness of builder and owner alike."¹⁹ The Alexander house puts an interesting twist on Sweeney's thesis. Although there are two distinct doors which lead into the two halves of this double house, they are presented as one unified doorway. A survey of New Castle has shown that the Alexander house is the only double house which combines entries into one unit. This consolidated entry presentation definitely seems to be an effort "to heighten the importance of the front entrance." The urban, vertical nature of the house results in narrow and closely spaced window and door openings. If the doors were treated separately, a crowded and unimpressive facade would result. On the other hand, by combining its doorways, the Alexander house has a grand and impressive formal entrance more in keeping with the proportions of large central passage dwellings like the George Read house and the Nicholas Van Dyke house than with its neighboring double houses.

More than the doorway's size and proportion to the rest of the house communicate to passersby and potential visitors. The

¹⁹Kevin Sweeney, "Mansion People: Kinship. Class. and Architecture in Western Massachusetts in the Mid Eighteenth Century," Winterthur Portfolio (1984) 242-243.

appearance of the doorway gives a clear message of order and formality. Each of the two doors are flanked by Doric pilasters which are topped by a classical entablature. The entire doorway is unified by shallow backboard which rises behind and above the entablature to a barely visible gable. All elements are painted white. The architrave and cornice are embellished by subtle punch and gouge work (fig. 8). While the Alexander doorway is not as heavily ornamented as those of some of the neighboring houses, it acts as an imposing threshold. Clearly forming a temple, the doorway is a symbol of urbane taste and order.

To the visitors entering the Alexander home through the front door, the significance of penetrating the family's domestic temple could not be ignored. A caller first passed from the fully public domain of the street and sidewalk up three stone steps to proceed through the temple threshold into the house's formal hall. In side passage, or two-thirds Georgian, plan dwellings like the Alexander house, the front hall functions as a liminal zone buffering the more private family space from unfamiliar and insuring the proper deference from social subordinates (fig. 10). The decorative finishes of the hall reinforce the formality of this room.

The hall is wrapped by a simple floor molding and chair rail and features a central ornamented staircase (fig. 10). The stairs are mirrored on both sides of the double house. Along the wall, the stairway is bounded by a molding which rises, ribbon-

like, up to the private chambers and is punctuated by stylized Corinthian pilasters (fig. 11). The stair rail consists of turned spindles and terminates in a tapered Doric column (fig. 12). The end of each step is finished by a scrolled spandrel which is further embellished by plaster in #28. The increased stair detail created a greater separation between the semi-public hall and the private chambers above.²⁰ Typical of hallway stairs after the 1750s, they run "nearly the full depth of the passage in a run to an intermediate landing before turning to the second floor," and continue winding up to the attic.²¹ While still in a liminal reception space, a caller may be introduced to the intimate family domain by the image of the stairway which leads to the sleeping chambers above and by glancing through the doorway into the house's front parlour. For the resident of the house, the hall is a staging area, where one determines whether a guest will be permitted to further penetrate the private domain.

The first floor front room is generally the next most formal space followed by the first floor back room followed progressively by the upstairs chambers. As each space decreases in formality, it increases in the level of privacy associated with it. Generally the most formal rooms are characterized by the greatest detail of interior finish. Although almost all of

²⁰Bernard L. Herman, Architecture in Rural Life in Central Delaware, 1700-1900 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 49.

²¹ibid,, 49.

the original panelling and moldings have been removed from both sides of the house, period mantels remain in most rooms. On the first floor, both sides of the house have the same austere Georgian mantel (figs. 13 and 14). In both back rooms, the fireplaces have been enclosed and plastered over. On the second floors, both rooms in #28 and the front room in #26 have the same mantel as below. In #26, the second floor back room and the front room on the third floor have an unpretentious molding mantel (fig. 15). The Georgian mantel is found again in the third floor front room of #28, and fireplaces with no mantels are located in both third floor rear rooms.

In New Castle and elsewhere during this period there is usually a direct correlation between the formality of a room and its degree of finish detail. Although there is differentiation in some of the house's upper chambers, this decorative hierarchy seems to be generally lacking in the Alexander house. There are several possible reasons for its absence. Variations in the original panelling could have signalled the decorative hierarchies between rooms. This would be a feasible method for dividing between front and back rooms, which probably would have been visually if not physically separated. Or perhaps, finish hierarchies never existed. Not far south of New Castle, Bernard Herman has located homes where "despite differences in name and assigned functions, the rooms split by the stair hall were

visually much the same."²² Both of these hypotheses seem somewhat improbable for the Alexander house, since they both contradict common patterns in New Castle at this time, and the example in central Delaware occurred in houses with a different plan in an earlier and more rural setting. It is possible that more elaborate mantels may have fallen victim to the fire reported to have occurred in the house in the early twentieth century and were replaced by millwork complimentary to the house.²³ Although interior finishes can tell us only a limited amount about spacial differentiation in the house, the existing physical fabric speaks volumes about the compartmentalization of domestic service.

Located behind the main block of the house is an attached domestic wing, or flounder (fig. 16). The three story service annex is similar to contemporary Philadelphia structures and would have been built at the same time as the front of the house.²⁴ There is a comparable domestic attachment to the John Wiley house located at 18 Third Street.²⁵ It is not surprising

²²ibid., 53.

²³The fire referred to was related to Miss Dorsey Fiske by Herbert Tobin. A photograph of the blaze is said to exist, but this researcher was unable to locate any such document.

²⁴This discussion of flounders is based upon personal communications with Bernard Herman, November 26, 1991.

²⁵This wing can be seen from Fourth Street. For a discussion of the John Wiley house and its service annex, see Susan R. Williams, "The John Wiley House: An Urban Case Study in Federal New Castle," Unpublished paper, 1988.

that the Alexander family incorporated a service wing. By 1800, the six member family seemed to have four live-in servants, two male, and two female.²⁶

The owners of #28 had surmised that this wing was a free-standing structure constructed in the mid-eighteenth century, but written and physical evidence contradict this theory.²⁷ While Archibald Alexander's 1797 deed to the property does refer to a brick tenement, this structure was standing in 1693, and could not possibly be the service wing in question (see Appendix I).²⁸ While the existence of stone cellar walls underneath the intersection of the two wings could indicate separate incarnations, they are actually load bearing members for the brick walls above. The construction methods and materials in the floor joists and cellar walls of the two sections are identical and confirm that they were raised concurrently.

Like the earlier removal of livestock from the vicinity of the house, and the sequestering of beds in increasingly private rooms, the separation of domestic work from the house's main living quarters represents a process of functionally separating

²⁶Gerald M. Maddux and Doris Ollar Maddux, 1800 Census, Delaware (Montgomery, Alabama) 1964.

²⁷Personal communication with Mr. and Mrs. Lytton Patterson III, November 25, 1991.

²⁸New Castle County Recorder of Deeds, Book W, Vol. 2, Page 337.

household spaces.²⁹ Currently segregated from the main block of the house by only a step down, the flounder was previously closed by a door, as evidenced by wall patching at the end of the hall in #26. The portal also separated basement access from the front of the house. Although they were removed around 1950, fireplaces were located against the central wall on all three levels in both halves of the house.³⁰ Enclosed winder staircases flanked the fireplaces and permitted servants to enter upper chambers without passing through the front of the house. One section of these stairs remains on the second floor of #28, and scars indicating the removal of the rest of the stairs are apparent on other levels.

The theme of separation is echoed by the presence of exterior entrances in the flounder. These doorways permitted servants access to the service realm while bypassing the formal front of the house, and familiars, who no longer need to be sized-up in the semi-public front hall, to enter directly into the more private spheres of the dwelling. The decreased formality of the entrance is reflected in the appearance of the doorway itself. In #28, the entrance, which would have been at

²⁹These precedents are discussed in Robert Blair St. George, "'Set Thine Own House in Order': The Domestication of the Yeomanry on Seventeenth Century New England," Common Places: Readings on American Vernacular Architecture, Dell Upton and John Michael Vlach, eds. (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 336-364.

³⁰Personal communications with Miss Dorsey Fiske, October 31, 1991 and Mr. Lytton Patterson III, November 25, 1991.

the rear of the flounder and now leads to a late twentieth century kitchen, was interrupted by the lot line construction of the house and enclosure of the previously discussed covered passage. In #26, the portal faces the carriage drive mentioned earlier (fig. 17). On this side of the house, it is likely that the first floor of the flounder did not serve a domestic use, but functioned as Dr. Alexander's office. It was typical to have offices located within the house, with a separate exterior entrance into the space. While these offices were usually located in the front of the house, it is not incongruous for Dr. Alexander to position his office in the rear of his home, for surely he had a more intimate relationship with his clients than professionals in other fields, and many of his patients may have appreciated confidential access to the office.

The siting of Dr. Alexander's office did not reduce the amount of service space in the house, because there was yet another domestic attachment behind the flounder at #26. An old one and a half story brick house, which still stands today, served as a kitchen wing to the house (fig. 15).³¹ This skewing of one level of the service area does not preclude its physical

³¹This wing is generally considered to be the brick tenement of Cornelius Derrickson referred to in the 1797 deed as erected on the lot before 1693. When describing the Alexander house in her "Restoration Notes," Jeannette Eckman attempts to discredit this identification, and supposes that the house is not Derrickson's, but, rather, was the home of John Calvert. Eckman's argument for this identification is unconvincing, but this researcher was unable to refute or confirm either theory.

separation from the front of the house and Alexander's office, or the removal of servants from view. Under what is now a bathroom in back kitchen was a stairway which lead directly to the cellar below the flounder, from which servants could access the upper floors hidden by the winder stairs beside the fireplace. A third, least formal, exterior entrance leads into the old kitchen.

The progressive specialization of space and hierarchy of exterior and interior appearances and access are a result of an increasingly complex society and a greater degree of affluence. Social changes in the community have already been traced, but the increased affluence of Archibald Alexander must be considered. Alexander's civic ascendancy began before he came to New Castle and continued throughout his life, but his application to the local gentry was just beginning at the time he built his Third Street house. The first listing of New Castle residents in the new republic was the 1785 tax assessment. Alexander's personal tax is assessed at just above 20 L, indicating either small holdings or no property at all.³² Alexander seemed to begin acquiring property in 1795 when he purchased tracts from John Stockton and the wife of George Perrie.³³ Although he continued to purchase land regularly after this year, it is not until 1804

³²New Castle County Tax Assessments, 1795.

³³New Castle County Recorder of Deeds, Grantee to Grantor Index.

that the county tax assessment refers to him as Archibald Alexander, Esquire, a symbol of his final arrival amongst the local gentry.³⁴ When Alexander built his house, he was consciously striving toward an elite aesthetic which communicated to his neighbors the landed status he was achieving.

By 1810, Alexander was no longer living in the town of New Castle. Although he retained possession of the Third Street double house, he was probably residing at Fairfield, his farm located near the Christina River. He may have maintained a secondary residence in town, but in the 1810 and 1820 Censuses Alexander is counted as a resident of New Castle Hundred rather than the town.³⁵ Alexander seemed to be handing off his role as a ranking town elder to his son-in-law Hugh W. Ritchie. In February of 1810 Alexander conferred Ritchie with the power of attorney over his affairs.³⁶ Alexander appeared to be acknowledging the waning the Federalist era in which he gained his community prominence, and the growing dominance of a new generation symbolized by his son-in-law.

Hugh Ritchie married Archibald Alexander's oldest daughter, Esther, or Hetty, in 1803 at the Presbyterian Church in New

³⁴New Castle County Tax Assessment, 1785, 1786, 1787, 1789, 1796, 1804.

³⁵United States Census Schedule of Population, State of Delaware. Manuscript Returns, 1810, 1820.

³⁶This power of attorney was curiously located in the New Castle County Recorder of Deeds, Book H, Vol. 3, Page 375.

Castle.³⁷ Alexander may have been anticipating the marriage of Esther when he built the double house. Ritchie and Alexander seemed to have had an affinity early on. Both gentlemen supported New Castle's Union Fire Company.³⁸ Alexander and Ritchie must also have been acquainted by Ritchie's capacity as postmaster, and professionally, probably worked closely since Ritchie was a druggist. It is unknown when Hugh and Hetty moved into the double house. The couple inherited half of the house when Alexander died in 1822 (his daughter Arabella and her husband John Peyton Little received the other half)³⁹ and were living there when Ritchie died nine years later.⁴⁰

Written documents tell us nothing about the construction of the house or how the Alexander family used the house. We can uncover significant evidence about room usage in 1831 through examination of the household inventory performed as part of the probate records of Hugh Ritchie's estate (see Appendix II). In her study of house forms in rural Delaware, Beth Ann Twiss-Garrity shows how room-by-room inventories can be used to "create a typology of rooms by furnishing plan." Regardless of period nomenclature, constellations of room furnishings can tell

³⁷Genealogical Surname File, Historical Society of Delaware.

³⁸Scharf, 863.

³⁹New Castle County Recorder of Deeds, Book F, Vol. 4, Page 510.

⁴⁰Hugh W. Ritchie File, New Castle County Probate Records.

researchers about how the room was used.⁴¹ While the Ritchie probate does not contain a specifically labelled room-by-room inventory, a series of objects are identified as being in the "lower back room" (those listed from Looking glaf to Lott broken Spoons), other items are qualified as "Carpet from Parlour" or "Stair Carpet" or "Red Carpet back Chamber," and at other times object constellations seem to be separated by hash marks in the inventory.

The lower back room is filled with objects related to the dining room constellation. Typical of this constellation the Ritchie dining room contained glassware, queensware, and silver spoons which were probably stored in the sideboard. The dining table had 12 accompanying yellow chairs and was complimented by a green carpet. The clock and case listed in the inventory may have stood in the dining room or the front hall. The location of 2 card tables in the Ritchie dining room was, according to Twiss-Garrity, rare. It is unclear how the family must have used the card tables in this space.⁴² The ownership of specialized tables "paralleled the differentiation in room use."⁴³

The parlour, located in the front room of the house,

⁴¹Beth Ann Twiss-Garrity, "Getting the Comfortable Fit: House Forms and Furnishings in Rural Delaware, 1780-1820," (M.A. thesis, University of Delaware, 1983), 15.

⁴²ibid., 21.

⁴³ibid., 42.

contained objects listed in the inventory from either straw matting or book rack to two spit boxes. These objects are typical of a period parlour, with the collection of books reflecting Ritchie's desire to communicate his status as a learned man to his guests. The inventory proceeds to describe objects used in bed chambers indicating that the second and third floors were used as sleeping areas. This runs contrary to the more urban usage patterns utilized in Wilmington at the time.⁴⁴ The fact that there were eight members in Ritchie's household in 1830 helps to explain the preponderance of bed chambers in the house and the seven beds listed in the inventory.⁴⁵ In the attic were stored linens, books, stoves, a trunk, miscellaneous furniture such as a cradle and a cattail bed which may have been a throwback to when Ritchie owned one slave.⁴⁶ Listed after the attic inventory is a litany of domestic wares probably located in the flounder and used primarily in food production and storage and household industries like soap making.

Twiss-Garrity devotes significant analysis to the changing place of fiber processing in the homes she studies. In the Ritchie inventory there are absolutely no objects that would have been used in fiber processing. This can be easily explained by

⁴⁴Bernard Herman, "Multiple Materials, Multiple Meanings: The Fortunes of Thomas Mendenhall," Winterthur Portfolio (1984), 71.

⁴⁵1830 Federal Census.

⁴⁶1810 Federal Census.

the existence of 318 individually inventoried fabrics included in the probate. Though not referred to elsewhere, Ritchie must have engaged in textile sales. Together, these factors point to the disappearance of household production and the rise of affordable commercial goods.

The inventory of the estate of Hugh Ritchie helps us to understand how his family used their home, gives insight into how the Alexander's might have lived in the same space, and how changes in our surrounding society are manifest in our households. The house itself is a symbol of Archibald Alexander's social ascendancy and the hopeful atmosphere of Federalist New Castle. By passing control to Hugh Ritchie in 1810, Alexander acknowledged the decline of his New Castle and its replacement by new generation. Archibald Alexander carried the symbols of his domestic temple to his grave. The family crypt, located in the Immanuel Church Cemetery on the Green, repeats the four pilasters and entablature temple of the Alexander doorway. Still signaling his stature in the community, the Alexander crypt sits facing the Courthouse, permitting him to continue watching over the heart of the community. Oriented toward Harmony Street, Hugh Ritchie and the following generations are relegated to secondary status, in the final physical symbol of Archibald Alexander's primary place within New Castle.

APPENDIX

"Household furniture" listed in the "Inventory and Appraisement of the goods and chattel which were of Hugh W. Ritchie Esquire late of New Castle, Del. Decd taken this day of June 1831"

Non-household value 237.77 3/4

Sideboard	10.
Dining Table	4.
2 Card Tables	8.
12 Yellow Chairs	4.
Looking Glaf (broken)	2.
3 Waters	4.
Shovel & tongs	2.
3 Table Spoons (Silver)	
10 Tea Spoons (Do)	
Cream Pot	
Lott broken Spoons.....	20.
Lott Queensware	
Lott Glafware.....	15.
Green Carpet	8.
Clockcase	25.
Rag Carpet	.50
21-8 Stair Carpet	8.
Straw Matting	1.
Book rack	.50
3 Volumes ??? Commentary	6.
Lott Miscellaneous Books	1.
Candle Stand	1.
Carpet from Parlour	
Hearth rug.....	16.
9 Green Chairs	4.50
Mantle Glass	5.
1 Picture	.50
Little Matref	3.
Front Parlour Window Curtain	5.
Pair Plate Candlesticks	.50
Snuffers & Tray	.50
Hearth Brush &	
2 Spit Boxes	.50
Circular Bureau	5.
4 ???? Bedstead	4.
Easy Chair	1.
5 Blankets	5.
2 Bed Spreads	<u>1.25</u>
	406.52 3/4
2 Washstands	1.25
1 Toilet Glaf	1.
3 Chairs	.75
Rag Carpet back Chamber	1.
High Post Bedstead & Curtains	
Matref & Spread.....	15.

Looking Glaf	1.50
Wash Table	.75
4 Chairs	1.50
wash Stand	.75
Toilet Table & Cover	.75
Single Bedstead & Cotton	3.00
5 Bedspread & Blanket	5.00
Old Carpet & entry Carpet	1.00
1 Circular Bureau	5.00
1 Drefing Glaf	1.00
Wash Stand & table	1.25
???? Bedstead	4.00
3 Blankets	1.12
4 Quilts	3.00
1 Spread	1.00
Portable Desk	1.00
Tender, Andiron, Shovel & tongs	3.00
4 Chairs	1.00
Small Close horse	.25
Chamber Carpet	2.00
Close prefs containg Sheets	
Pillowcases, Towels &c	20.00
2 Beds 10 Dolls each	20.00
4 Ditto single 5 Dolls ea	
Bedspreads & Pillows included.	20.00
Pine Desk & Toilet Table	1.00
Cat Tail?? Bed	.50
1 Comfort Blanket	1.50
7 Quilts	5.00
Sheet Iron Stove	2.00
Old Desk & Cradle	1.00
Lott of Old Books	.50
	<u>535.39</u> 3/4

Remnants of Matting	1.00
2 Stoves	5.00
Wearing Apparel	10.00
Green? Bedstead & bottom	1.50
Leather Trunk	.75
Knives & Forks	2.00
Crockeryware	2.00
Tin Kitchen	1.50
3 Metal Tea Potts	1.50
1 Queensware	.50
Kitchen Table & 7 Chairs	1.50
3 Glaf Lamps	.75
3 Tin Ditto	.25
Andirons, Shovel & tongs	1.50
5 Iron Potts	3.00
Dutch Oven	.12
Gridle & Gridiron	.75
Lott of Crockery	1.00
3 Tubs & bucket	1.25
Harnefs Tub	1.00

Ash Tub	1.00
5 Small Tubs	1.00
Ironing Table	.50
Frying pan	.50
Lott of Jarrs, Bottles & Crocks in Pantry.....	1.00
Copper Kettle	2.00
Ax & Grindstone	.75
Claso Horse	1.25
Chicken Coop	.50
6 Flat Irons	.75
Kitchen Carpet	1.00
Spade	.25
Chop knife &c	.25

583.02 3/4

This Indenture made the fourth day of January in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and ninety seven. Between Adam Dyett of the hundred and Conty of New Castle in the state of Delaware, husbandman and Mary his wife of the one part, and Archibald Alexander of the town of New Castle, in the county of New Castle and the State aforesaid Esquire of the other part. Whereas a certain Martin Martinson late of the Town and County of New Castle aforesaid by his Deed Poll? bearing date the twenty third day of march in the year of our Lord one thousand six hured and ninety three, conveyed the same certain John Calvert in fee, who died Intestate leaving one daughter named Elizabeth who afterwards intermarried with a certain Francis Janvier of the Town and County aforesaid, Cordwainer, also deceased leaving ifsue? one son named Thomas who died seized of the said Tenement and lot of Ground with the appurtenances intestate, after whose death administration of all and singular goods and Chattels rights and credits which were of the said Thomas were granted to a certain Joseph Janvier and whereas the said Joseph Janvier having administered the personal estate of the said Thomas Janvier, deceased, at an Orphan's Court held for the County of New Castle the twentieth day of April in the year os our Lord one thousand seven hundred ans sixty two at New Castle aforesaid obtained an order for the sale of the Real Estate of the said Thomas Janvier, deceased of the Town of New Castle, aforesaid for the payment of a balance then due to the said adminisrator according to the directions of an act of assembly on such a case made and provided and whereas the said Joseph Janvier afterwards to wit the first day of June in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and sixty two aforesaid at public auction after the due notice thereof sold and conveyed the same premises unto a certain John Tinney, Practitioner of Physic, in fit? and whereas also there is a certain other lot of land adjoining the aforesaid Tenement and lot of ground situate as aforesaid which said lot formerly belonged to a certain Renee Vanderoutine? and was after on pofsefsion of certain Doctor Patrick Reily after whose death it came to the pofsefsion of a certain Gideon Griffin

Deceased who intermarried with the widow and ??? of the said Patrick Reily after whose death a certain Caleb Pusey became seized htereof and died leaving Thomas Pusey his son and heir at Law, who conveyed the same to the aforesaid John Tinney in fee and whereas the said John Tinney by his last will and testament in writing among the other thing devised the same premises unto his son David Tinney to him his heirs ans Afigns forever and whereas the said David tinney and Ann his wife by their Indenture of bargain and sale duly execueted under their hands and seats bearing date the tenth day of August in the year of our Lord thousand seven hundred and seventy nine, recorded in the Rolls Office of the County of New Castle in Book D Vol 2 fol 187 did grant and convey the said tenement and two lots of Ground unto the said Adam Dyett party hereto in fee. Now This Indenture Witnesseth that the said Adam Dyett and Mary his wife for and in consideration os the sum of Two hundred and twenty Pounds of Gold and Silver coin, lawful money of the State of Delaware aforesaidm to them in hand by the said Archibald Alexander well and truly paid the receipt whereof the said Adam Dyett and Mary his wife do hereby acknowledge, Have granted, bargained, sold, aliened, released, enfeoffed and confirmed and by these Present Do grant, bargain. sell, alien, relaease, enfeoff, confirm unto said Archibald Alexander his Heirs and Afigns. All that Brick Tenement and Two lots of Ground situate and being in the Town of New Castle aforesaid, and bounded as follow towit, to the NorthWest with Beaver Street to the North East with a lot formed of John Silsbee, deceased, to the South East with the Green or or market Square and to the South West with a frame tenement and lot of Ground late of Robert Wiley, deceased, by him in his lifetime purchased of Doctor Nathaniel Silsbee. in breadth ninety feet and in length one hundred and sixty nine feet Together withall and singular the buildings, gardens fences rights liberties, priveleges hereditaments improvements and appurtenances what sower to the same belonging or in any wise appertaining and the revision and reversions remainder and remainders rents ifues and Profits thereof And all the State right title interest property claims and demand whatsoever of them the said Adam Dyett and Mary his wife in and to the same and of in and to very Part and Parcel thereof tpo have and to hold the said Tenement lots and premises hereby bargianed and sold or mentioned or intended so to be with the appurtaenances unto the said Archibald Alexander his Heirs and Afigns To and For the only proper use and behoof of the said Archibald Alexander his Heirs and afigns Forever. And the said Adam Dyett for himself and the said Mary his wife and for his and their heirs executors and administrators and every of them do covenant and grant to and with the said Archibald Alexander his Heirs ans Afigns by these Presents that they rhe said Adam Dyet and Mary is wife all and singular the said tenenment and the two lots of land with the appurtenances hereby granted, bargained, and sold or interested so to be unto the said Archibald Alexander and his Heirs and Afigns, against him the said Adam Dyett and Mary his wife and their heirs and against all and every other Person or Persons whatsoever, lawfully claiming, or to claim, by from or under him her them or any of them whatsoever shall and will Warrant and forever Defend by these Presents. In Witness whereof the said Adam

Dyett and Mary his wife have hereunto set their hand and seals the day and year first above written.

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Figure 4. View of the side of 26 Third Street.



Figure 5. Facade of the Alexander house.

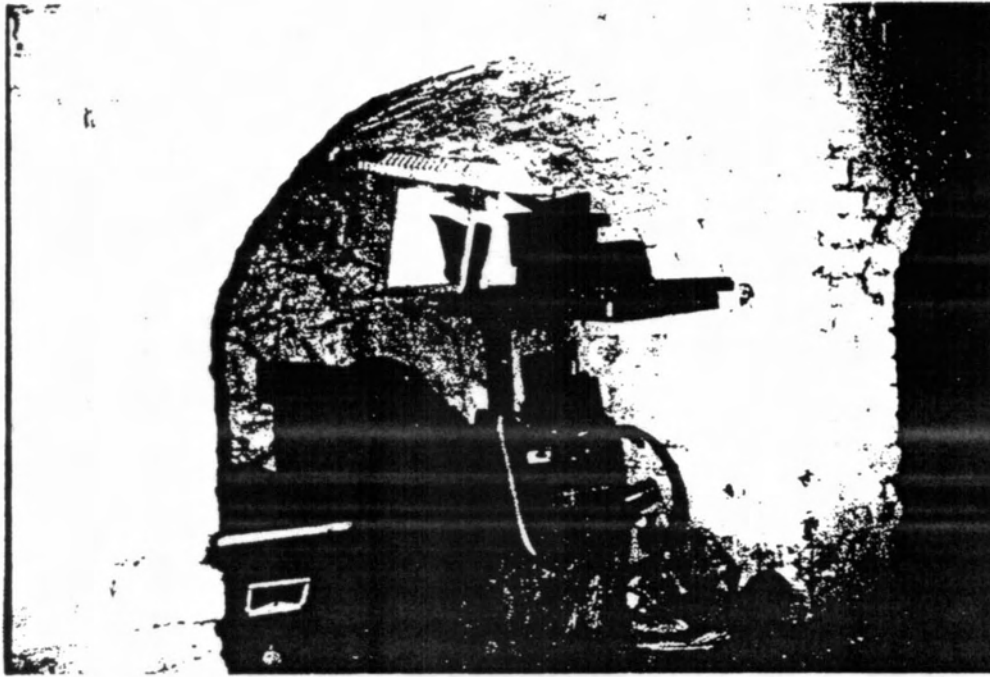


Figure 6. Supporting Arches.

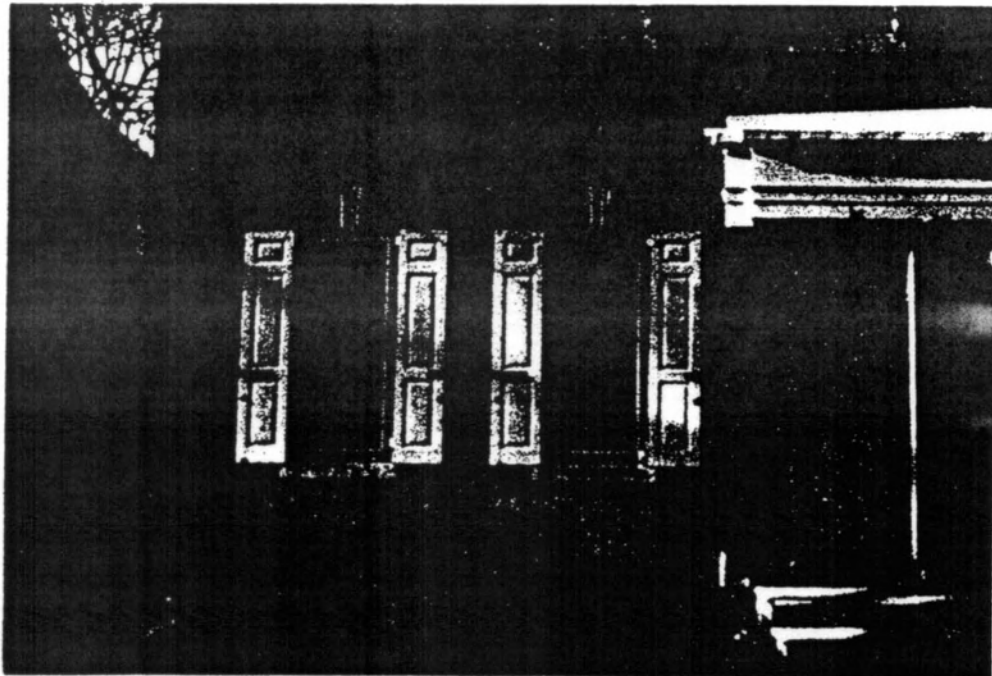


Figure 7. Window feature, #26.

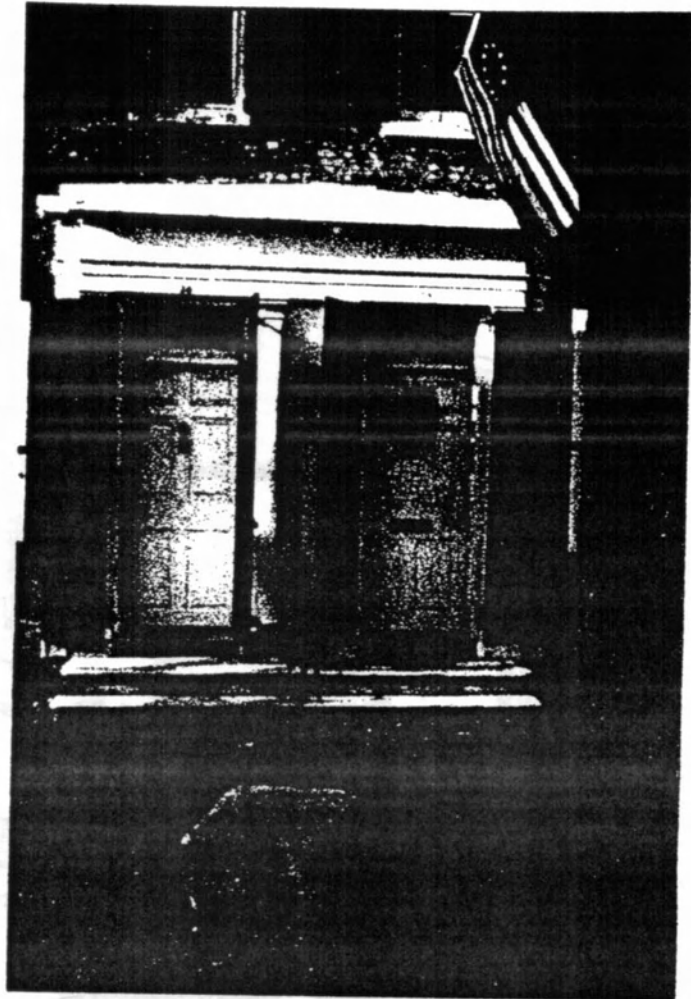


Figure 8. Doorway of Alexander House.

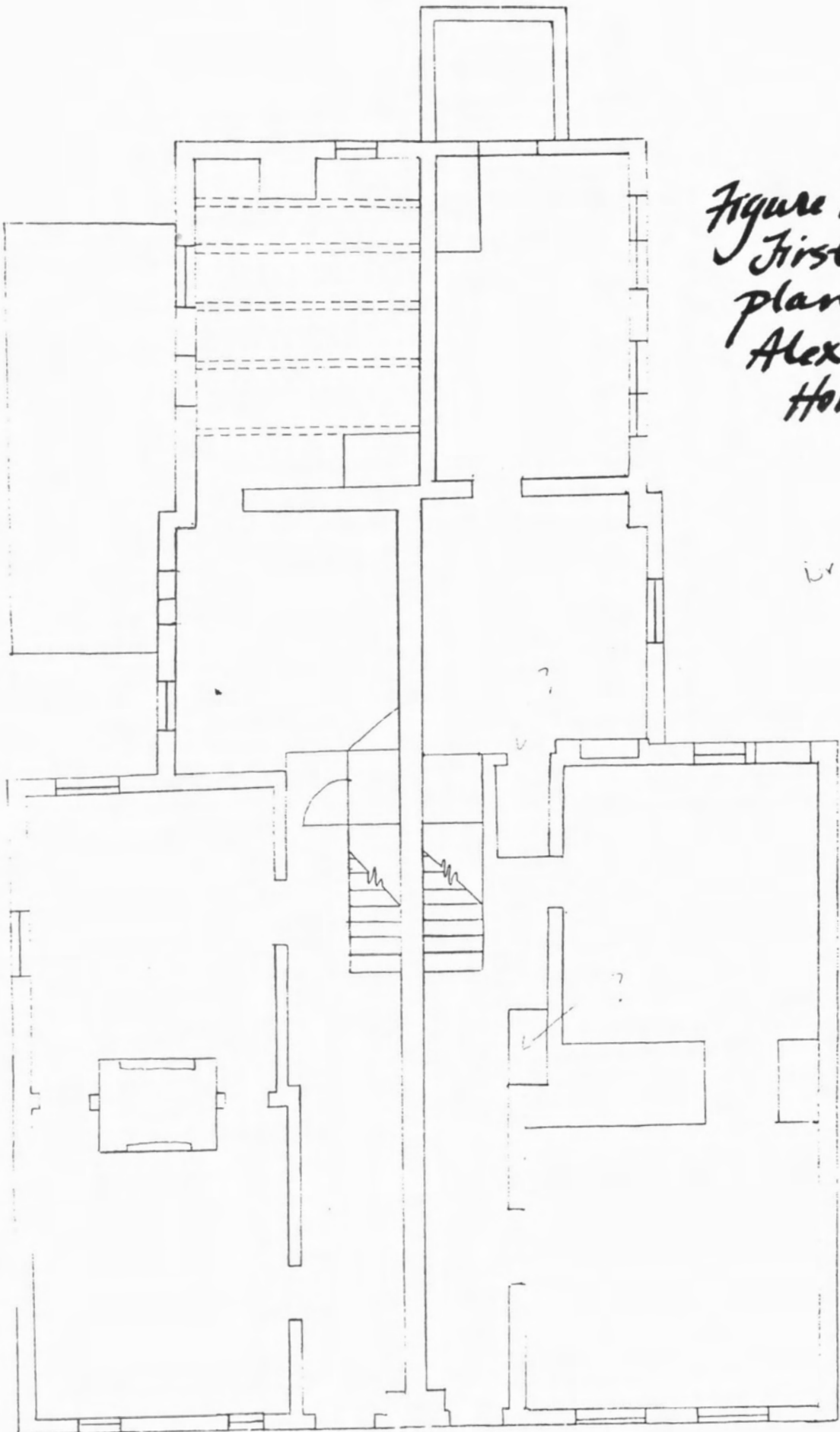


Figure 10.
First floor
plan of
Alexander
House.

by [unclear]

date
[unclear]
[unclear]

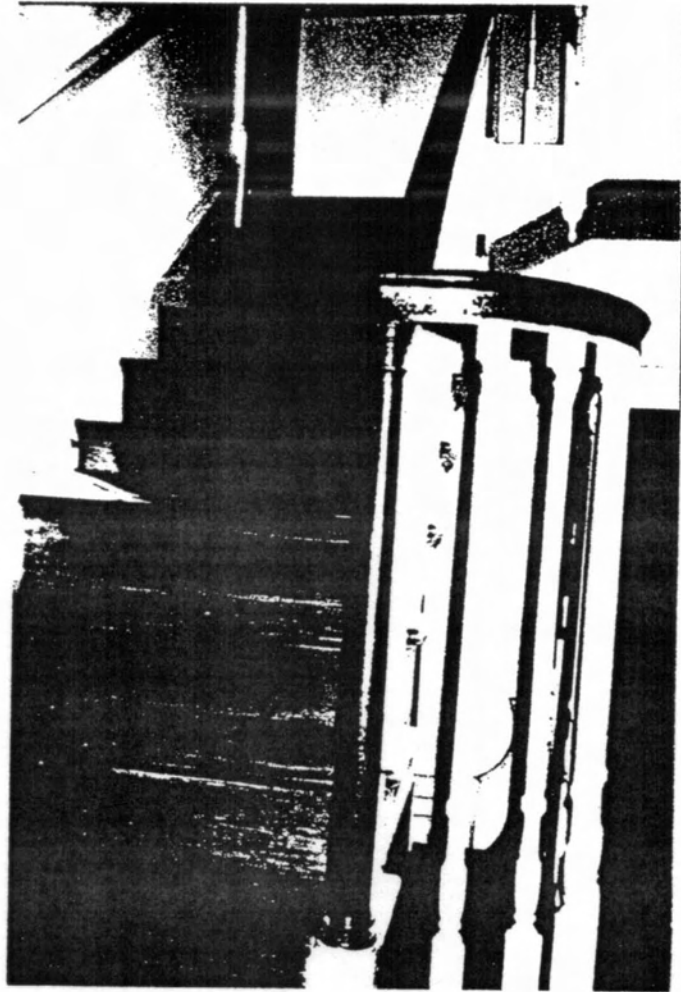


Figure 12. Stair detail, #28

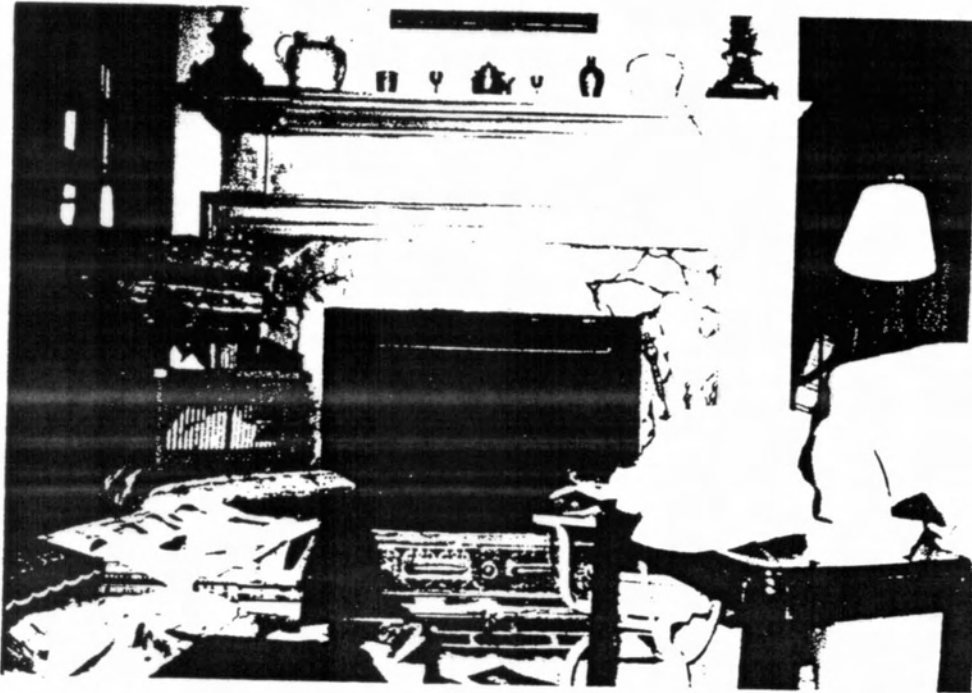


Figure 13. Front first floor mantel, #26

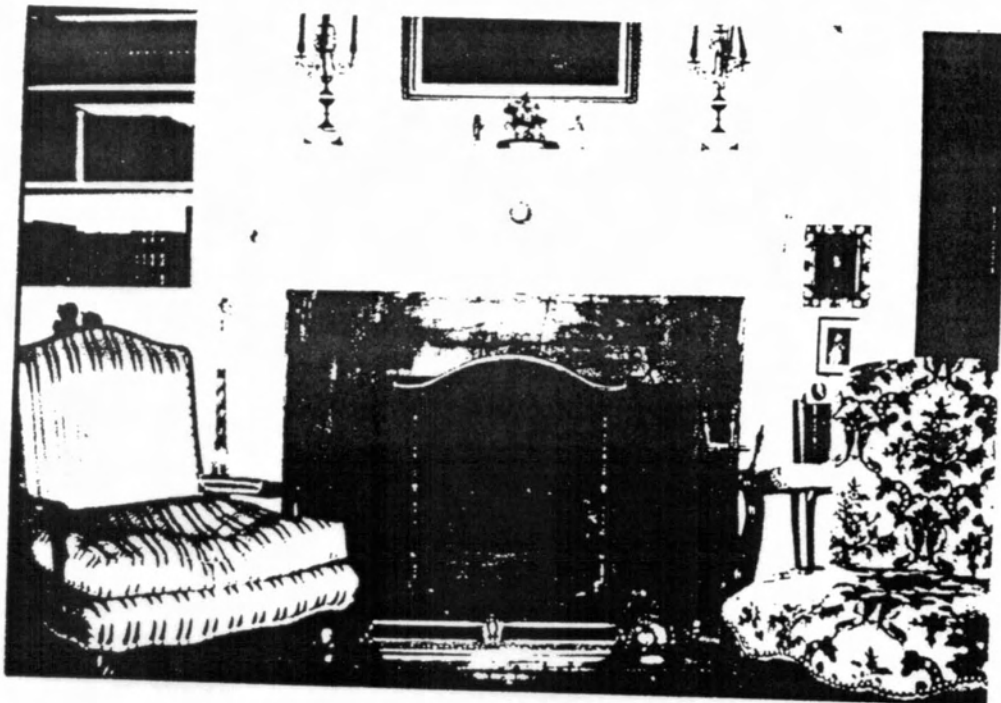


Figure 14. Front first floor mantel, #28.

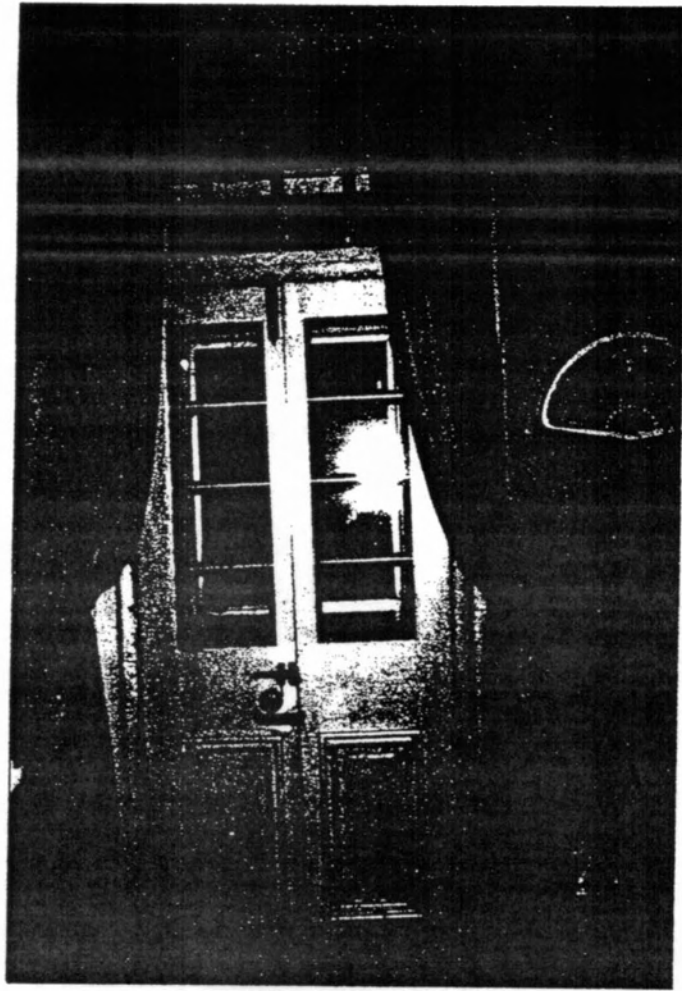


Figure 17. Interior view of door between carriage drive and flounder, #26.

THIRD STREET

No "Keep Off the Grass" signs warned Indians and settlers to walk only on the public rights of way in the seventeenth century New Castle. Both undoubtedly followed the shortest route to where they were going, and judging from court records, the fences which the property owners were required to build around their plots did not always restrain these instinctive demonstrations of plane geometry. Evidence supports that Third Street began as a short cut and trail across the Green from the site of present South Street to Chestnut, after the Dutch owners had fenced in properties on their "first and second rows", that is, the plots stretching back from the Strand and those along Beaver Street, now Fourth Street. The trail joined at the south end the "Susquehanna Street" or road, and at the north end, the "road to Christina" over the site of the broad dyke, after crossing the "Thwart Street", now Chestnut, which led down to the fort at the river.

The first name for Third Street, Minquas or Susquehanna, came from the tribe of Iroquois Indians, called Minquas, or Susquehannas for the region where they lived, and with whom the settlers traded for furs. Although no deed of record or patents for houses and gardens along the site of Third Street south of Delaware have survived from the Dutch period, a case in court by John Cann in 1683 against Reynier Vanderculen for trespass on his Minquas Street property, west on Delaware Street across from the present Hotel Louise site, brought out the testimony of the oldest settlers, that there had long been a thoroughfare there that people used and that a row of houses had stood on it facing the river, even with the house of Ambrose Backer on the corner of Delaware Street and the Green.

John Cann further strengthened his case, which he won, by producing "an old map of the town" to show that the street was there drawn in and its name, Minquas, set down.

Dirk Albertson and Ambrose Backer are the only two owners of Third Street property under the Dutch mentioned by name in the court case. Dirk Albertson died about 1676 possessed of several valuable plots on the Strand. His estate, part of it in partnership with Martin Rosemont, was not finally settled until 1690. The disposal of his Third Street plot has not yet been discovered in the records.

Ambrose Backer's house was on the northwest corner of present Third and Delaware Streets where the Kensey Johns Sr. house was built at the end of the next century. Backer owned the greater part of the Third Street block, the whole stretch from Wood Street to the plot of the little Dutch House in 1681, when this plot was resurveyed to him as 343 feet on Minquas street and 169 feet deep to Beaver Street. The land adjoining Backer's property to the north was formerly the town lot of Jean Paul Jacquet, the first Dutch Governor on the Delaware after 1655. Jacquet moved to a plantation on the Christina opposite Fort Altena, the former Swedish fort, after the arrival of his successor, Governor Jacob Alrichs in April 1657.

II.

The lot on Third Street was confirmed to him by the English Governor Lovelace in 1671. Whether Jean Paul Jacquet had a house there does not appear from surviving records, but his sons married into the Silsbee and other Third Street families, and his descendants continued to be identified with Third Street properties opposite the Green.

Jacquet's plot in 1678 included the site of the little Dutch house, but whether Jacquet or Jan Head was the earlier owner of the Dutch House site is not clear from the records. It is clear that in 1681, when the survey was made for Ambrose Backer, George Moore's house and lot occupied the site of the Dutch House. The house is not described, but in 1687 an indenture for an adjoining lot refers to it as "the log house of George Moore". Judging from the series of indentures beginning with those to Jacquet, Jan Head, Hans Banssens, and Harmen Reynersen which were confirmations by Governor Lovelace in 1671 for the remainder of the block opposite the Green between Ambrose Backer and Harmony Street, the lot of George Moore in 1681, was at least 62 feet in breadth on Third Street.

A court record of May 1678, concerning the sale of Harmen Reynersen's property which adjoined the Dutch House plot on the north, by Reynersen's widow and sole heir, to John Ogle, describes the Reynersen property as "a certain house and lot of ground lying between the lots of Hans Baensens and Jean Jacquet behind the present fort"(on the Green - site of Immanuel church).

After George Moore, the Dutch House site belonged to the families of John Walker, Paul Barnes, Samuel, John and Joseph Silsbee, well into the eighteenth century. Paul Barnes, son of the widow Walker by her first husband, whose family was naturalized by the English under the name of Barnes, but which in other connections had Swedish spellings, was married to a daughter of Reynier Vanderculen, who in the 1690's owned the adjoining lot to the south. This lot with a brick house on it, part of Ambrose Backer's tract, Vanderculen bought from Cornelius Derrickson in 1693.

There is no record to tell when the brick little Dutch House first appeared among the other small brick and frame houses on Third Street facing the Green. It is not referred to as "brick" in available records until after the middle of the eighteenth century; but a study of all the related circumstances in the existing records warrants a guess that it was built by Paul Barnes, "turner", who secured title to the then existing house and lot in 1701. An indication that it was built after 1700 lies in the fact that all the dwellings along the street existing in the 1690's, whose site can be determined, were set back from the present building line in an approximately even row: Ambrose Backer's house that was "even with" the house on the southwest corner of present Third and Delaware Streets; the back part of present #20, which was Dr. Nathaniel Silsbee's house, built by himself of his father, the back part of the Alexander House, built in the 1690's by John Calvert, wheelwright, and probably, the log house of George Moore.

III.

Owners of the plots sold off by Ambrose Backer and his heirs, before and after 1700, were craftsmen, bricklayers, carpenters, wheelwrights, and others, and, also, by "gentlemen", doctors, sheriffs and merchants. North of the Dutch House by craftsmen, shopkeepers, innkeepers, yeomen, and gentlemen, followed later by the fine house of Chief Justice Kensey Johns, the Rodneys, Gemmill's, Alexander's and Janvier's. North of Harmony Street, early owners were Jan Bisk and John Desjardins.

South of Delaware Street on the west side of Third, stood the house and lot of James Walliams on the corner, where the Kensey Johns Van Dyke house was built by Senator Nicholas Van Dyke more than a century later. The Walliams house faced toward the river, as did that of the Giles Barrett next door, and the house of John Cann further down the street. John Cann, a leading citizen, held many offices in the early Penn period. In 1691, when he had bought the adjoining property to the south of him, he had made a re-survey of his double plot of 60 feet on Minquas Street. The surveyor of the period drew an engaging primitive of John Cann's house on his recorded report, with smoke rising from the chimnies back and front.

Later owners of the Cann plot were Peter Godin, Daniel Mercer and James Armitage. James Walliams sold his corner property in 1691 to Richard Reynolds, whom sold it to Richard Halliwell and Robert French. Owners who followed were Andrew Gravenraet, mariner, George Yeates, the heirs of Major Donaldson, Michael Laughton, sailmaker, Jacobus Williams Neering, sadler, Wessell * Alrichs, gentleman, and George Graham. All these changes took place before 1727. By 1798, John Betson had a small brick hotel on the site facing Delaware Street.

From Minquas Street throughout its length in colonial times, the residents looked out upon the whole of the life, events, and progress of the town.

by Jeannette Eckman