

Changes in an Old New Castle Row House

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Vernacular Architecture

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Introduction

Cloud's Row, situated on Delaware Street of Historic New Castle, Delaware has undergone many changes in its 185 years of existence. Unfortunately, little was written or survives concerning Cloud's Row probably because it is not a focal point of New Castle, but it has proven to be an interesting study as many changes have been made through the years to suit its inhabitants. This study will focus on dwelling number 119, currently occupied by the row's longest resident, Mrs. Ann Fulmer.

Harlan Cloud purchased the lot of twenty-five feet by one hundred feet in June of 1803 for \$550 from John Wiley and his wife Olivia (Appendix 1). The property was in an ideal location, situated between the Court House and the wharf. Merchant Harlan Cloud made the land purchase for investment purposes. "Many row houses, like Cloud's Row provided a suitable solution for land speculators building on long, narrow city lots (Natl.Reg. 4)."

The row of five dwellings was built some time between June of 1803 and 1804 when the building appeared on the Latrobe survey (Appendix 2). The Historic American Building Survey notes that the "row is interesting as it is one of the earliest examples of the row idea in Delaware city architecture". Cloud's Row was ahead of its time in New Castle because it was not until after 1850 that many of this type structure were built (Natl.Reg. 4).

Background on New Castle

Between 1790 and 1805, New Castle experienced a high level of growth partially due to its prime location between Washington and Philadelphia (Toro). Much trade was generated from which merchants like Harlan Cloud benefitted. Also, Henry Latrobe was working on the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal plan which, when originally formulated, would have made New Castle a major port city. Later changes made to the planned canal routed it away from New Castle (Toro).

During this period of affluence, many buildings, including Cloud's Row were built. The row's location near the court house was ideal since many court lawyers needed housing. They "profited not only from New Castle's trade, but from Wilmington's expansion and the increasing value of farms (Toro 5)."

In 1881, the Court House moved to Wilmington which had grown much faster than New Castle. Without the benefit of the canal or the Court House, New Castle's growth slowed, but the city continues to maintain its dignity to this day.

Original Structure

Cloud's Row was originally a 3 1/2 story structure built one room deep at sixteen feet with cellar. The exterior of Flemish bond brick work which alternated headers or brick ends with stretchers or long sides of brick, formed an interesting pattern. Stone belt courses appear as bands of cut stone which wrap around the building marking story changes. The exterior materials,

brick walls and slate roof, were used because this style of row house originated in London after the Great Fire of 1666 (Richardson 2). The style was called the Restoration London Housetype which was built of inflammable materials to prevent such fires from occurring again.

Since the lots were only twenty-five feet deep and at an angle to the street, there were only ten feet from the back door to the property edge, and the floor plan had to be laid on a parallelogram. This meant no rooms would have right angles. This has caused slight variations in room dimensions that different researchers have found.

The service passage was accessible along the back of the row unlike today's row houses where service access is located between pairs of houses (HABS).

The interior had four fireplaces located one per floor except the attic level. It is interesting that the second floor mantel is more ornate than the first floor mantel. According to Mrs. Fulmer, many workmen for George Read moonlighted because the Read's had a slow cash flow problem. In order to make more money until payday, the skilled workmen who built the George Read house did projects for other residents of New Castle and created fine mantels in more humble homes such as Cloud's Row.

Changes Made

Many changes have been made to the residence of 119 though few dates of the changes survive. Some were as big as structural additions while others were as small as bricking a window. Because

the changes can not be shown chronologically, this paper will order them from front to back of the house and from basement to attic.

The basement was built with two doors- one inside leading into the first floor parlor and one entry from the street which provided easy access to the kitchen, originally located in the basement. A major traffic flow change occurred when the street entrance into the basement was bricked (Fig. 1 and Fig. 2).

The occupants may have bricked the exterior door when the kitchen was moved to the first floor. Only one house on Cloud's Row has retained the exterior entrance to the basement (Fig. 3). According to Charles Lockwood, author of Bricks and Brownstone, dining as well as cooking was often done in the basement. From travel accounts he found that few people in the social class that lived in this type row house ever held formal dinner parties so there was no need for a separate dining room (Lockwood). Also, the narrow staircase to the first floor prohibited carrying food to a first floor dining room. Dumb waiters were not an option at the time Cloud's Row was built because that feature did not arrive in the United



Fig.1. Interior of bricked doorway, photo from Natl. Reg. p5



Fig. 2. Exterior of bricked entry to basement.

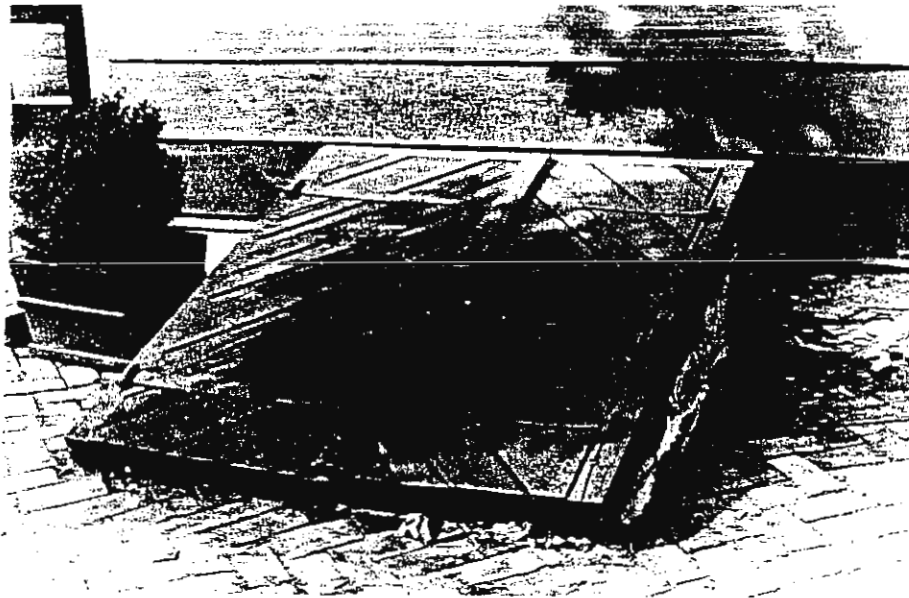


Fig. 3. Only remaining exterior basement entrance on Cloud's Row, photo from Natl. Reg p5.

States until the 1850's (Lockwood). Sometimes, there was a front and back room in the basement, the front used as an office or nursery, but the limited space and single room in this row indicates only a kitchen.

The basement fireplace has been bricked as well, but neighbor Steve Martin of 121 Cloud's Row still has the original open fireplace (Fig. 4). Mrs. Fulmer's basement is currently used as a laundry and furnace room, the heating fuel having changed over the years from wood to coal to oil.

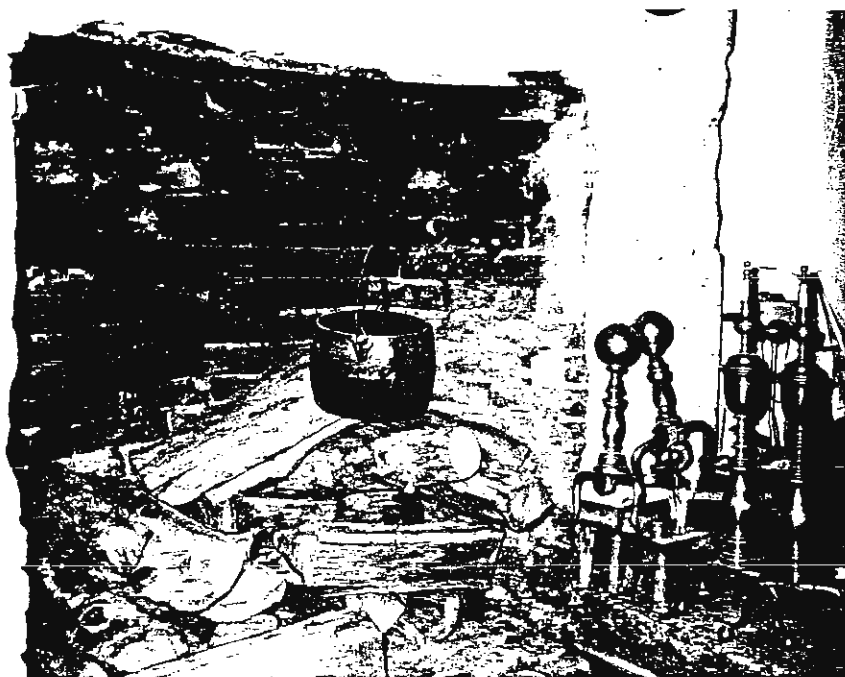


Fig. 4. Original kitchen fireplace in basement.

In the back wall of the basement is a window or possibly a coal chute that has since been covered over and has three metal bars attached horizontally (Fig. 5). Steve Martin of 121 Cloud's Row told of vagrants that had lived in his basement and had nailed the interior basement door shut. The bars may have been added to prevent this from occurring again.

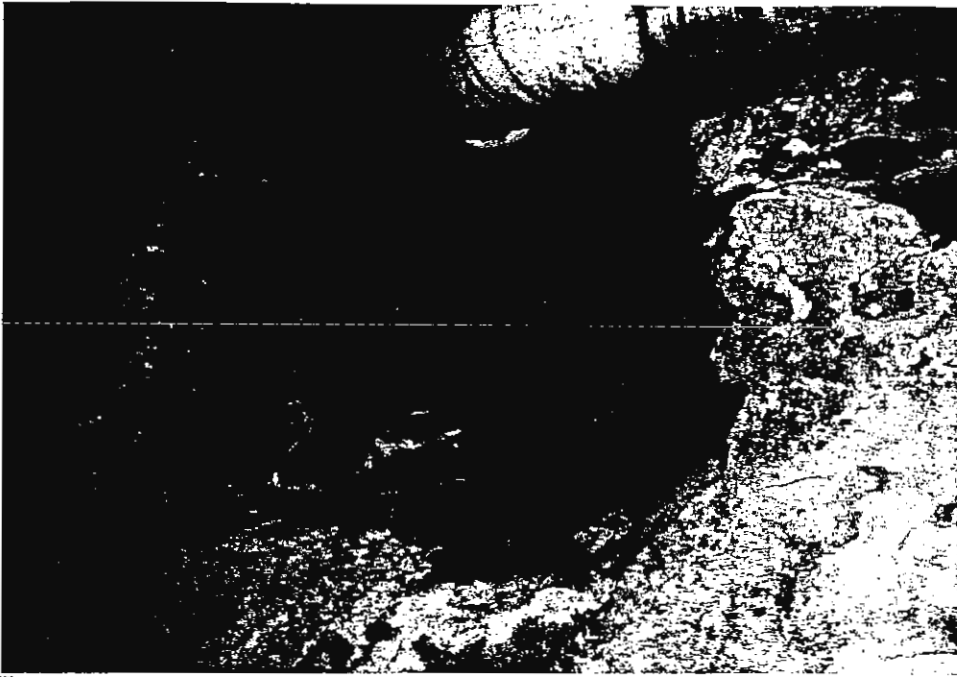


Fig. 5. Barred basement window or coal chute.

Perhaps the biggest transformation due to additions occurred when the row purchased an additional twenty-five feet out back in 1869 (Richardson 2) and another room was added to the first floor. A porch was added to the second floor. It could be considered a drastic change in terms of the room layout because it moved the functional area (kitchen) of the dwelling closer to the social area (parlor). It also shows the increased significance of dining. Adding what could be considered a second parlor to the first floor, it was then divided in half by a pseudo fireplace— one side used for dining and the other for a kitchen and bathroom. The addition changed the organization of domestic life as well as increasing the acceptability of work areas.

In 1868, resident William Harris owned both 117 and 119 of Cloud's Row. His family was so large that they needed extra space so he made a doorway between the two front parlors forming

one large house (Fig. 6). This is evidenced in Beers Atlas of 1868 which shows the two residences as one unit.

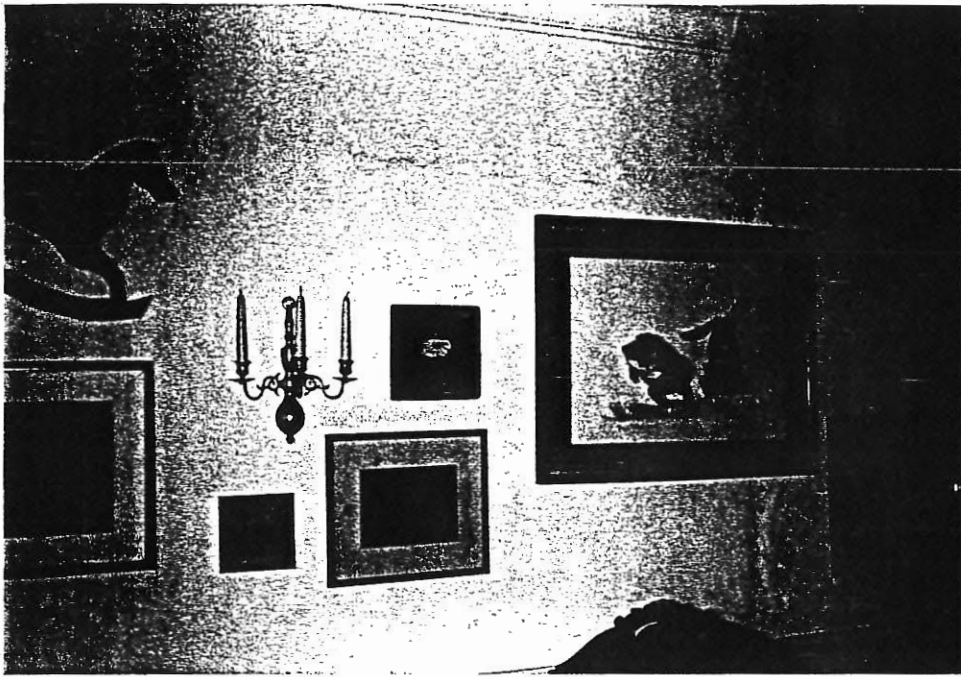


Fig. 6. Doorway cut between two front parlors.

Another change that may be attributed to the combined residences is what appears to be a fireplace situated on the back wall of the kitchen and is partially in both residences. It has since been covered over, but the flue is still visible from the back exterior of the house (Fig. 7).

A question remains, why was a pseudo fireplace built to divide the kitchen and dining room? According to Mrs. Fulmer, its mantel was brought from Odessa and there may have been no other place to display it. Obviously, it is not functional because the fireplace is only one foot deep.

Another previous owner, Albert Brumley installed a floor to ceiling mirror on the back wall of the front parlor to hide the window framing that was still visible from when it was an outer wall. Not only does the mirror aid in increasing the

apparent size of the parlor, it also seems to add further separation between the social and functional space.

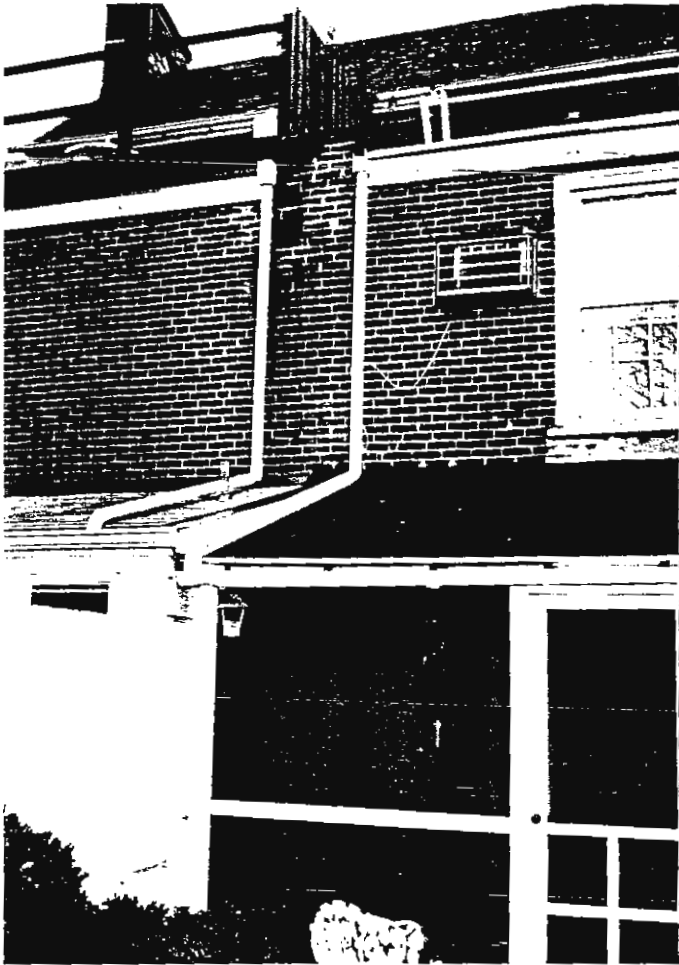


Fig. 7. Exterior of second kitchen fireplace.

The pantry appears to have been built at the same time as the addition. However, Bruce Gordon, a restorer, realized that Mr. Patterson, a previous owner, had obtained platboard and brick from the same period as the dining/kitchen addition and used them to make the pantry (Fig. 8).

A recent change occurred when previous resident Ralph Richardson of 117 Cloud's Row stripped interior wood surfaces. He wrote, "The living room floor boards are of special interest

because they have never been sanded, permitting their restoration to an approximation of the original appearance. In 1977 the long leaf yellow pine boards were treated with hot water, chemicals, and hand scraping, to remove at least six coats of paint. Heavy paint accumulation was also found on the fireplace mantel where four pounds of paint were removed in 1978. The large antique kitchen cupboard had approximately ten coats of paint removed (2)."
(Fig. 9)

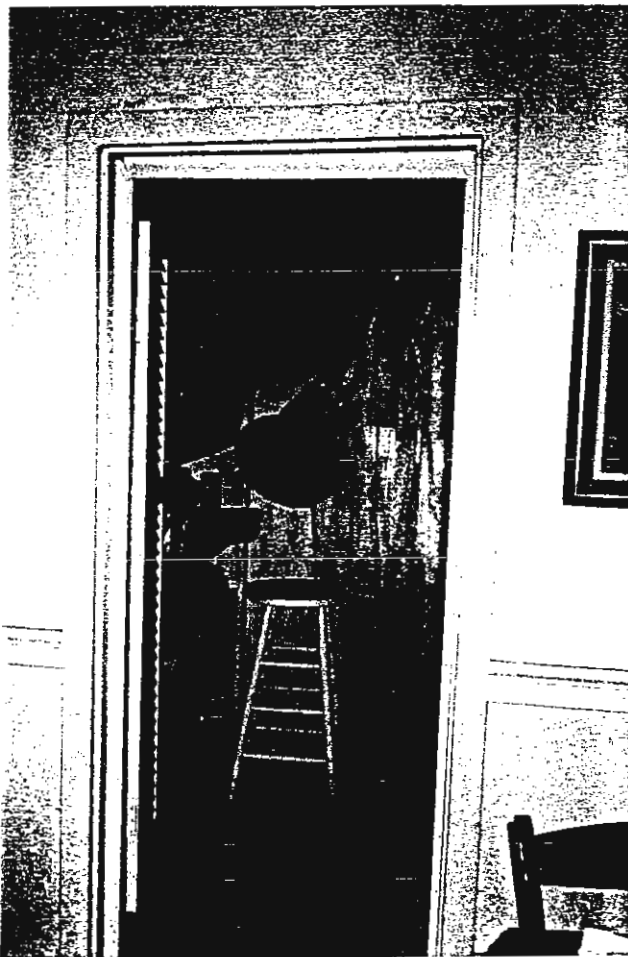


Fig. 8. Pantry addition



Fig. 9. Original first floor flooring after scraping.

Upstairs, another room was later added to the second floor to replace the porch. The addition is especially noticeable through the back bathroom wall where the window framing is still visible, but has been covered with curtains.

At some point in time, the owners changed house illumination from lanterns to electricity. Electrical outlets on the second floor addition are interesting in that they are located on the floor instead of in the wall (Fig. 10) probably due to ease of installation.

The third and fourth floors were replaced due to a fire in the 1860's that started at the railroad building down the street. Though Cloud's Row was modeled after the Restoration London House-type, with fireproof materials such as brick and slate, the roofing material at the time of the fire may not have been slate.

The only other change that has taken place in the attic has been the addition of cabinetry (Fig. 11).

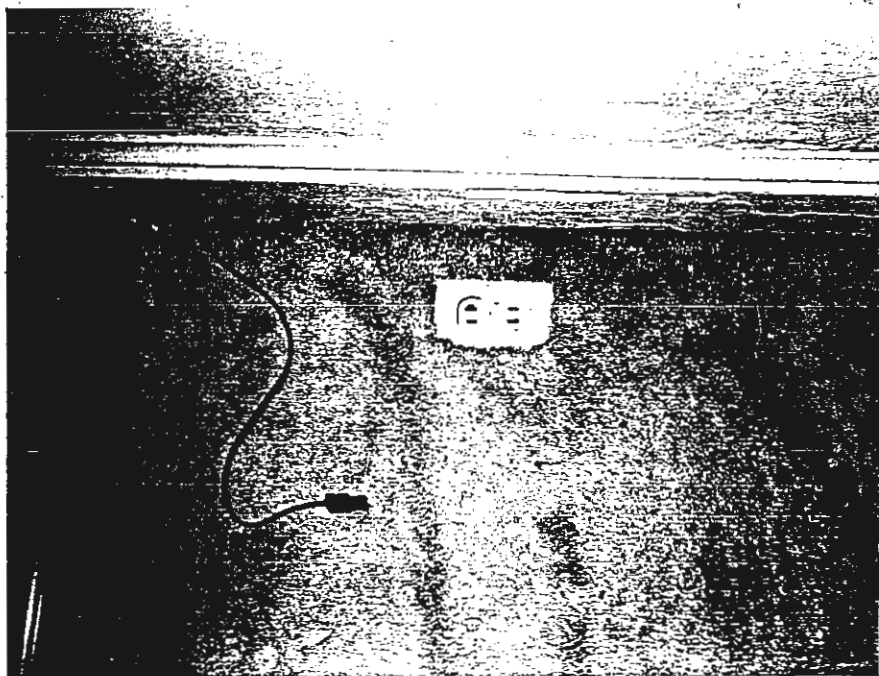


Fig. 10. Electrical outlet in floor.

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to document all the changes that have occurred at 119 Cloud's Row in its 185 years of existence. Initially, the house was compact and affordable housing. It has evolved into a more spacious and functional dwelling yet has retained flavors of its past. The changes are both interesting and of historical importance in that they reflect how society's priorities and needs have changed.

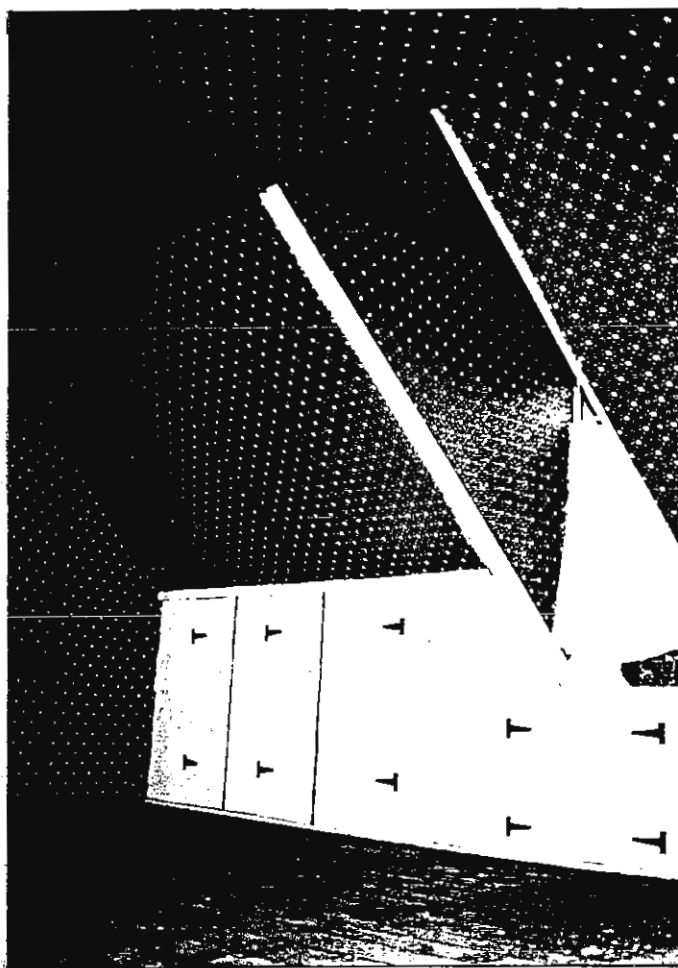


Fig. 11. Attic cabinetry.

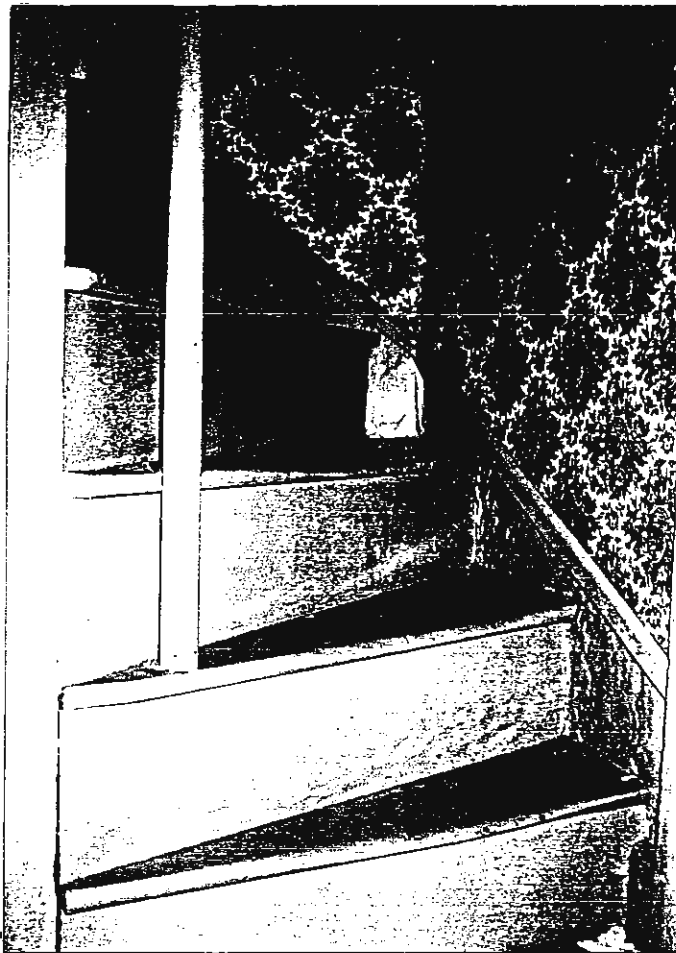


Fig. 12. Worn steps with vertical hand-rail to conserve space.

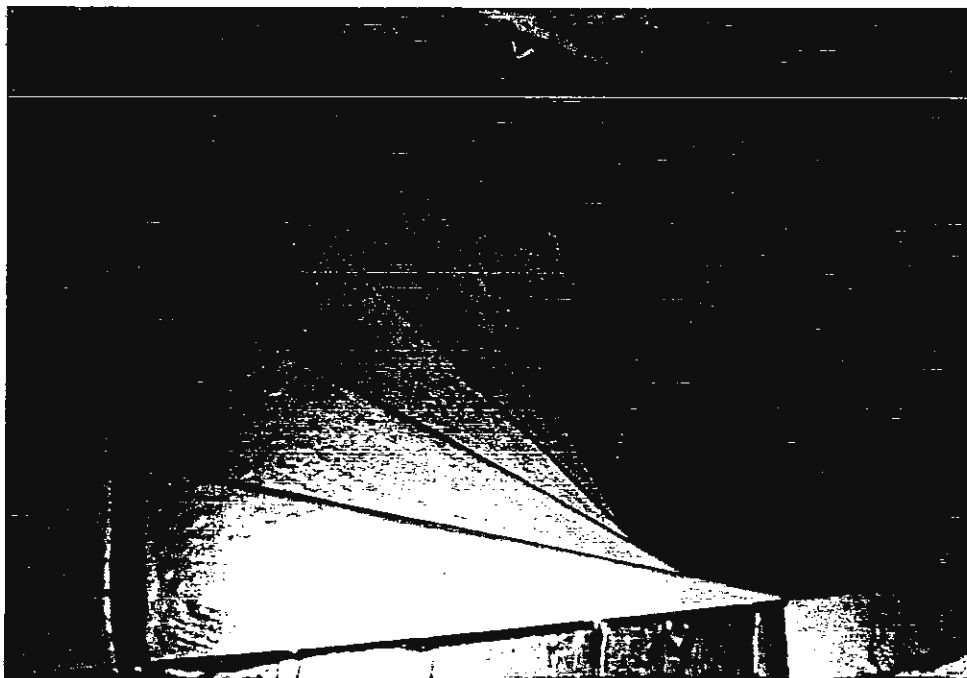


Fig. 13. Steep spiral staircases to access each floor.

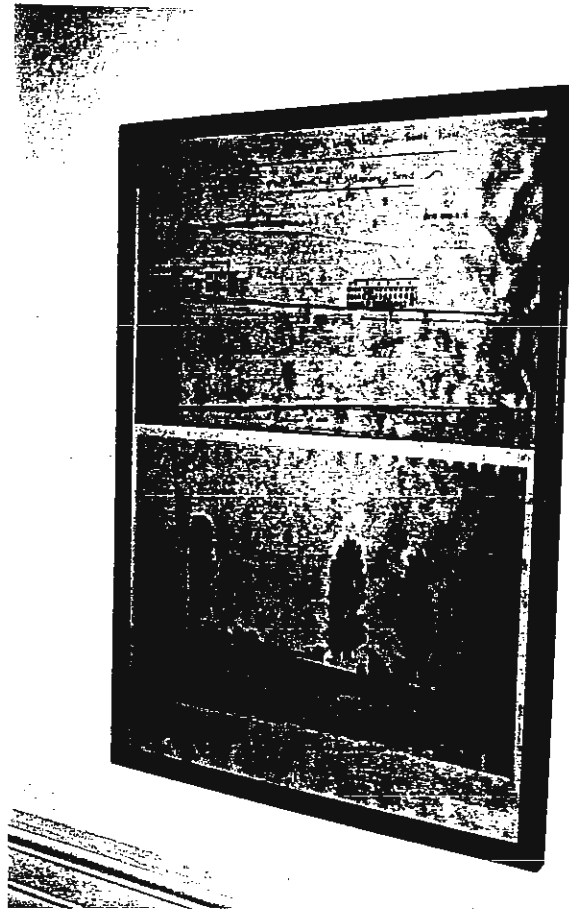


Fig. 14. Mrs. Ann Fulmer's copy of the Latrobe survey.

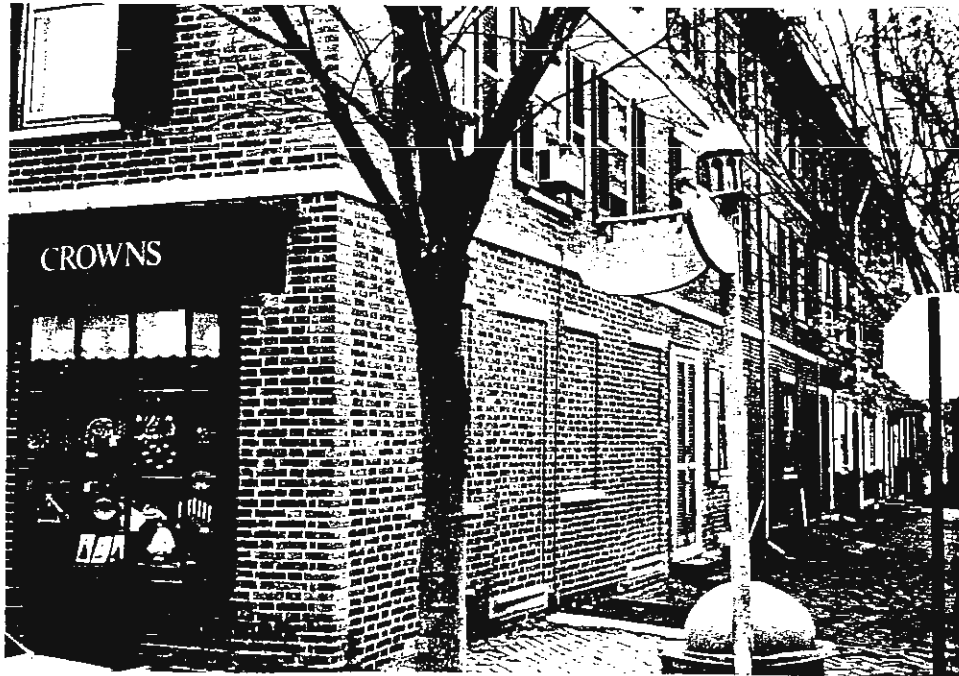


Fig. 15. Cloud's Row today, 1989.

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Appendix

CLOUD'S ROW

The row of five houses was constructed by Harlan Cloud, a New Castle merchant, between 1803 when he bought the land and May 1804 when he pledged three of the "tenements" as security for a mortgage.

According to the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS), Cloud's Row is interesting in that it is one of the earliest examples of the row concept in Delaware urban architecture. Service access to all the houses was by a passageway along the rear; the usual later development in row houses was a narrow passageway common to each pair of buildings in a row.

The row consists of five houses abutting the corner shop and residence; four of the houses survive as homes while the fifth has been converted into an apartment on the upper floors with the ground floor incorporated into the corner shop.

The design of Cloud's Row is that of a Philadelphia rowhouse, with a floor plan known as the "bandbox." The basic design originated in London after the Great Fire of 1666 and was imported to Philadelphia by Penn's settlers. Characteristic features of the floor plan include: structure depth of approximately 16 feet; fireplace and stairway arranged along the party wall farthest from the entrance; and, vertical circulation by "winder" stairs set in an enclosed well with door. All these features are to be seen by standing in the living room of 121 Delaware St.

In style the houses are a mix of Georgian with Federal. Among the Georgian elements are: Flemish-bond brickwork of the facade; cut-stone belt courses; and, symmetrical placement of windows and doorways. Federal touches include a relatively small fireplace with mantelled trim; considerable expanses of plastered walls with relatively little panelling; and, doors hung with butt hinges rather than the older "H" and "HL" hinges.

The original row consisted of the five houses, each essentially one room deep, three and a half stories high, with cellar kitchen, and finished dormer attic. The original lot was only 27 feet deep; thus the living room doorway into the dining room marks where the original back door was located. In the rear living room wall can be seen a bricked-up window. The original houses were equipped with four fireplaces (those of 121 Delaware have flues in an 8-flue chimney shared with #119): cellar kitchen, living room, and main room, second and third floors.

121 Delaware has been expanded with two additions. A two-story brick section was added around 1869-70 and now contains the dining room plus a study on the second floor. Until 1869, a lot 25 feet wide ran behind the row; about that year the row owners apparently were able to buy parcels of that long, narrow lot, thus getting room for expansion. (Until then, there would have been no more than about 10 feet from the original back door to the edge of the property). The second addition, a two-story German siding wooden shed was added ca. 1900 (estimated from construction details). The shed contains the modernized kitchen, plus a bathroom on the second floor.

The original house had a street entrance to the cellar, now bricked up. On the rear wall of the cellar is a small window, fitted with iron bars. On the second floor is a bricked-up window, similar to that visible on the living room wall.

While the house has been occupied continuously as a private residence, it was in serious disrepair by the late 1950's. At that time, it and 123 Delaware (which had been a Chinese laundry for many years) were purchased by a New York antiques dealer, who modernized and restored both properties.

121 Delaware contains extensive original or early features, including "guillotine" windows, trim, and floors. Three of the four fireplaces are in use, with the fourth (cellar) used to vent the furnace. The dining room corner cupboards are made from ca. 1750 chimney breast doors from an old New Castle home. The dining room floor boards were taken from an old farm house near New Castle.

The living room floor boards are of special interest because they have never been sanded, permitting their restoration to an approximation of the original appearance. In 1977 the long-leaf yellow (aka as "red") pine boards were treated with hot water, chemicals, and hand scraping, to remove at least six coats of paint. Heavy paint accumulation was also found on the fireplace mantel where four pounds of paint were removed in 1978. The large antique kitchen cupboard had approximately 10 coats of paint removed.

Harlan Cloud was involved in numerous real estate transactions in New Castle County, 1803-1804, judging from the Deed Books. The row presumably was a speculative investment, well located adjacent to the bustling Courthouse and flanking "Thwart Street" (now Delaware St.), leading directly to the wharf of a major shipping firm, Riddle and Bird. An undocumented story around New Castle is that the row houses were built as offices and residences for law clerks employed in what was then perhaps the town's biggest industry, centered on the County Courthouse.

CHAIN OF TITLE

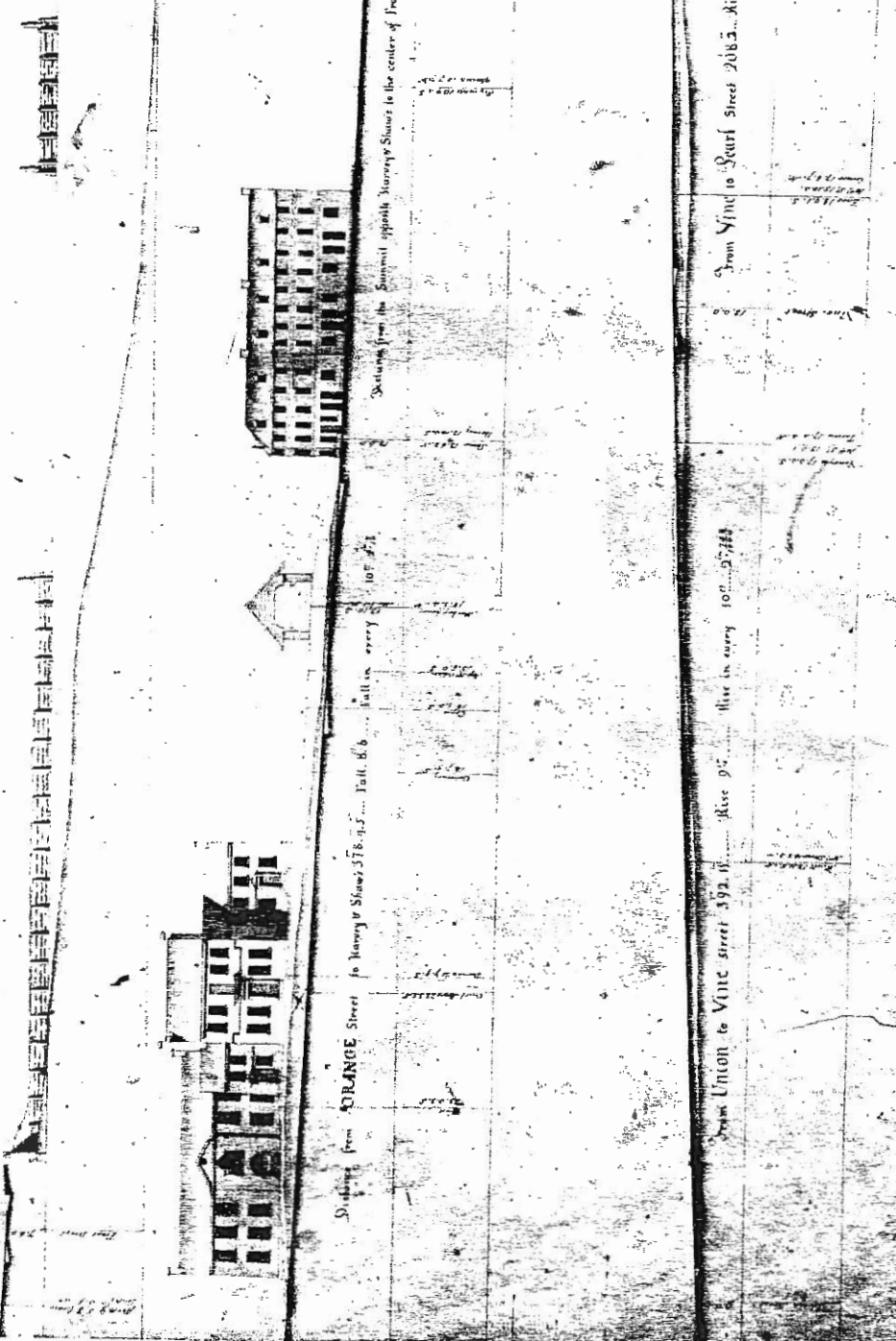
121 Delaware Street, City of New Castle

<u>DEED RECORD</u>	<u>OWNER</u>	<u>DATE OF ACQUISITION</u>
	Ralph W. Richardson Jeanne L. Richardson	1/22/76
PRESENT OWNERS: M-88-96	Paul M. Schwartzbaum Elizabeth B. Schwartzbaum	10/24/73
K-83-410	Kevin W. Free Bobbe M. Free	2/13/70
P-62-449	Charles A. Gibson	9/22/58
P-45-198	W. Leslie Cramer Alma D. Cramer W. Leslie Cramer died: 10/24/57	10/25/45
D-44-468	Rodney Willis Elizabeth Willis Charles H. Willis Charles Willis died: 2/2/45	4/11/44
D-44-468	Jacob Handloff Helen R. Handloff	4/11/44
E-40-174	Charles H. Willis Margaret A. Willis	11/28/36
E-40-173	Stanislaus J. Riley	11/28/36
N-30-306	Margaret A. Willis	6/15/21
Y-22-269	Charles I. Countiss Ethel Countiss	7/8/1910
X-5-281	Elizabeth C. Dalby	1848

AND THEN BY WILL

Streets running North West and South East.

Section of Delaware Street.



From Pearl to Orange 33.3.3
Fall 8.5
Rise 9.5

From Vine to Pearl Street 208.3. Rise 3.3. Rise in every 100 ft. 1.58
Fall 8.5

From Union to Vine Street 392.6. Rise 9.5. Rise in every 100 ft. 2.42
Fall 8.5

From Union to Orange Street 378.4. Fall 8.6. Fall in every 100 ft. 2.27
Rise 9.5

From Union to Front Street 320. Fall 9.5. Fall in every 100 ft. 2.95
Rise 9.5

From Union to Vine Street 392.6. Rise 9.5. Rise in every 100 ft. 2.42
Fall 8.5

From Union to Orange Street 378.4. Fall 8.6. Fall in every 100 ft. 2.27
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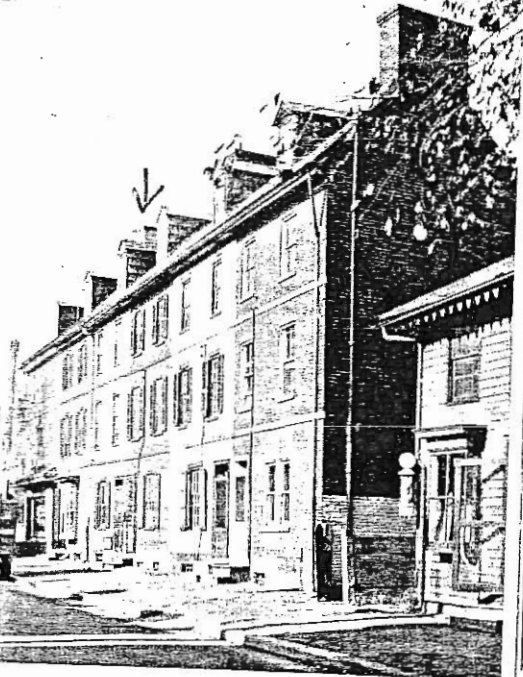
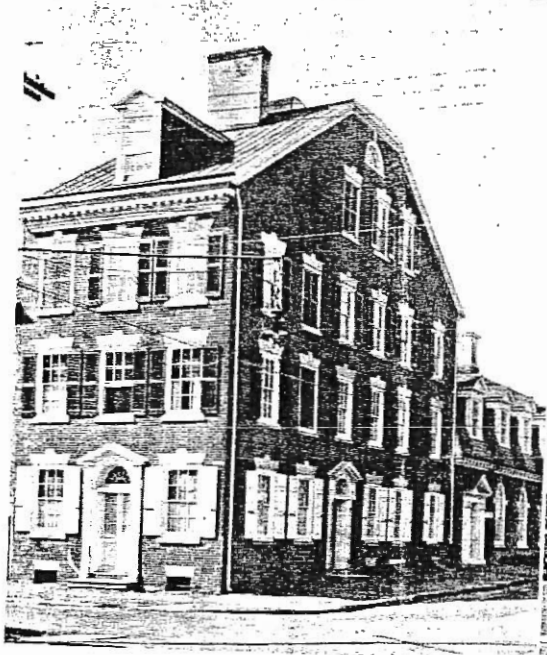
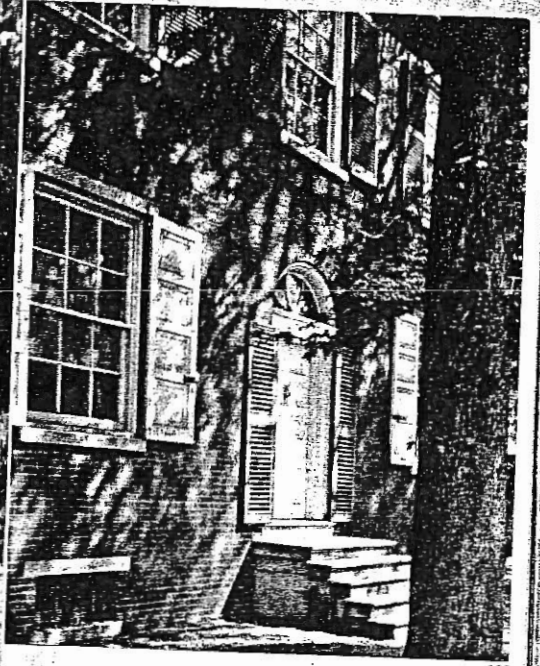
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Rise 9.5

From Union to Front Street 320. Fall 9.5. Fall in every 100 ft. 2.95
Rise 9.5

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Buildings Survey
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Upper photographs by Brooks Studio, Arden
Lower photographs by Historic American Buildings Survey
Above (left)—Doorway of Judge Richard S. Rodney's house on Third Street.
(right)—Doorway of Kensey Johns, Jr. House, Delaware and Fourth
Streets.
Below (left)—Immanuel Parish House on the Strand.
(right)—Cloud's Row.