

CHAPTER III

THE PLANS

Four sets of plans exist for the house. Three of them can be identified as to the artist, while the fourth is subject to conjecture. The three sets of identifiable plans bear a great resemblance to the house as it now stands. The fourth, a very sophisticated design, is mainly noteworthy in a study of the house because some of its details were used. The plans have been labelled A, B, C, D, to facilitate their study, and have been studied chronologically in the text.

The first plan (Illustration 16) is little more than a quick sketch, showing the dimensions and room partitions on the first floor. It was apparently drawn by George Read (I) for it is in his hand.¹ This drawing was elaborated into plan B (Illustration 17), a copy of which was sent to Matthew Pearce, who had married Mary, the fifth child of George Read (I).² In 1797 they were living in Philadelphia where Pearce was associated in a mercantile business with William Read, his brother-in-law.³ Pearce's acquaintance with architecture and with persons interested in architecture undoubtedly was the inducement for sending the plan to him.⁴

From these two plans (A and B) it is obvious that Read knew what he needed in the way of a house. From the beginning, the house was planned around a center hall, with two principal rooms to the left of the front

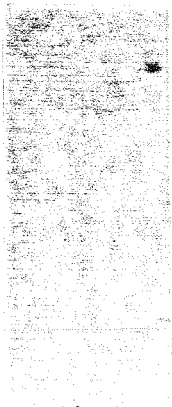
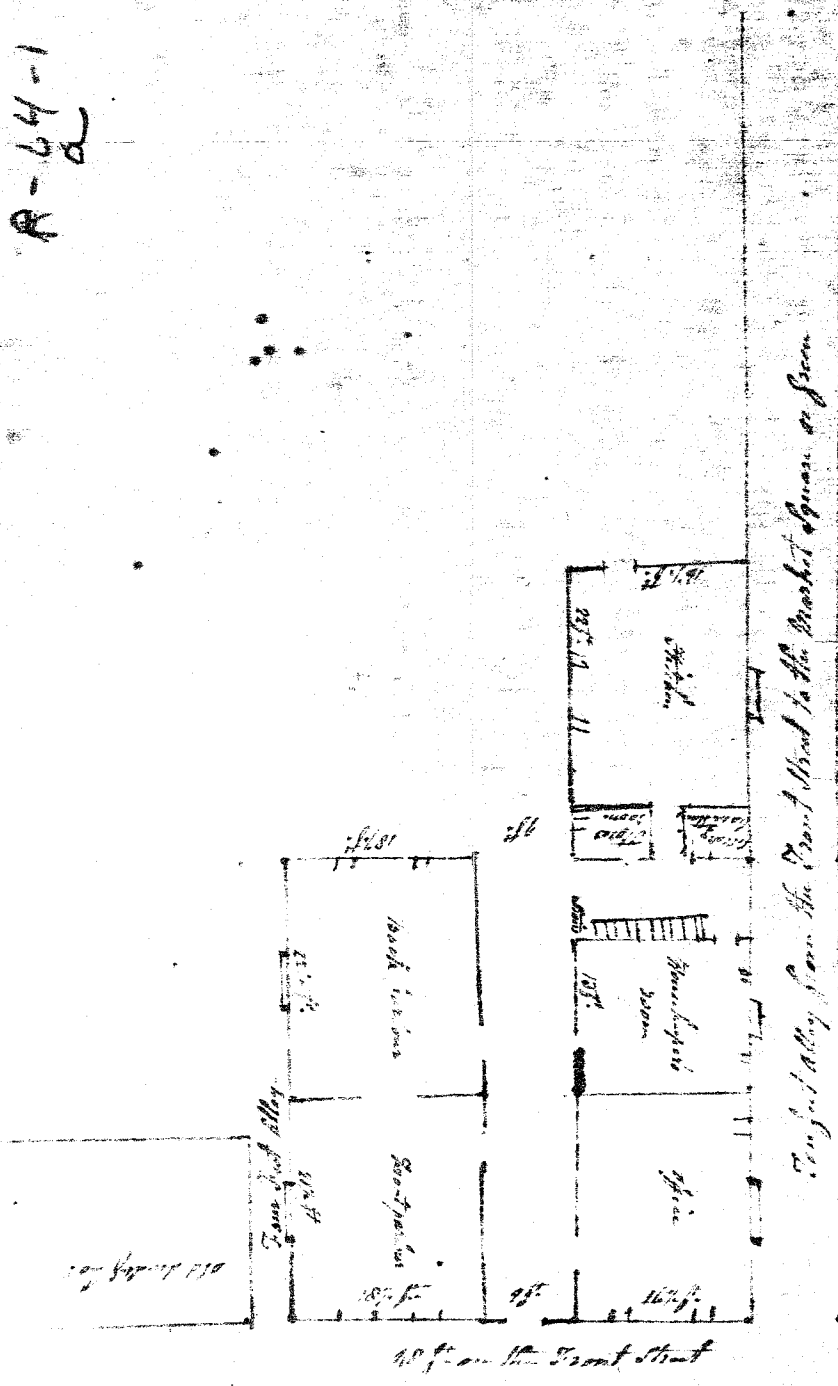


Illustration 16. Preliminary Plan A, The George Read (II) House, drawn by George Read (I), circa July, 1797, The Richard S. Rodney Collection, Historical Society of Delaware.

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1100 ft. by 100 ft.



Transit alley from the front street to the back street as shown

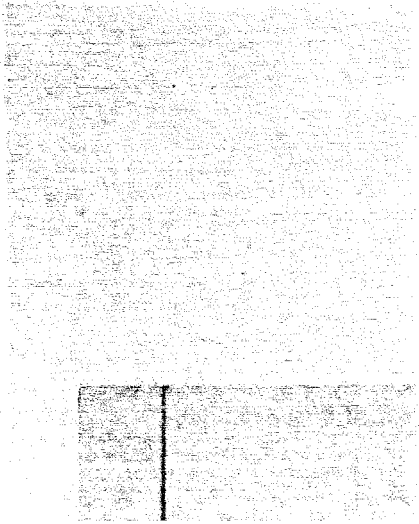
40 ft. on the front street

door and two smaller rooms to the right, one of which was to be used as an office. The "housekeeper's room" behind it was to be included in the kitchen wing which extended at the right rear.

It is immediately evident that Read wanted his house built like a Georgian town house of the type that would have been found in Philadelphia. Philadelphia houses of the late eighteenth century were built on narrow lots with a square or slightly rectangular building on the street, containing the area in which the family lived, and a wing which stretched off at the back for the kitchen and servants' quarters. The type of plan adopted by Read was favored by builders if the house was wide enough to allow for a central hall with large rooms on either side.

Plan B (Illustration 17), dated approximately July of 1797, is again in the hand of George Read (I). A copy of this was apparently the one that was sent to Matthew Pearce, for on the right border are questions requiring answers, to many of which Pearce replied. Basically the plan is the same as that of A; the window arrangement, room placement, and most of the terminology have remained the same. One slight difference may be noted where the small room off the kitchen, called the "Storerroom" in the first plan, has been given the more elegant term of "China Closet".

The questions along the side refer almost entirely to problems immediately at hand. First, Read noted that a cellar door on the front of the house would be objectionable, and that, if possible, it could be placed in the side alley. Two of the problems concern the interior of the cellar: how many division walls should there be and where should they be placed in



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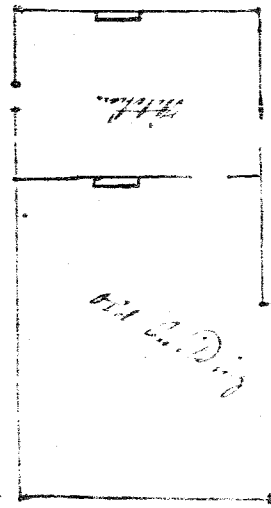
Illustration 17. Preliminary Plan B, The George Read (II) House, drawn by George Read (I), Circa July, 1797, The Richard S. Rodney Collection, The Historical Society of Delaware.

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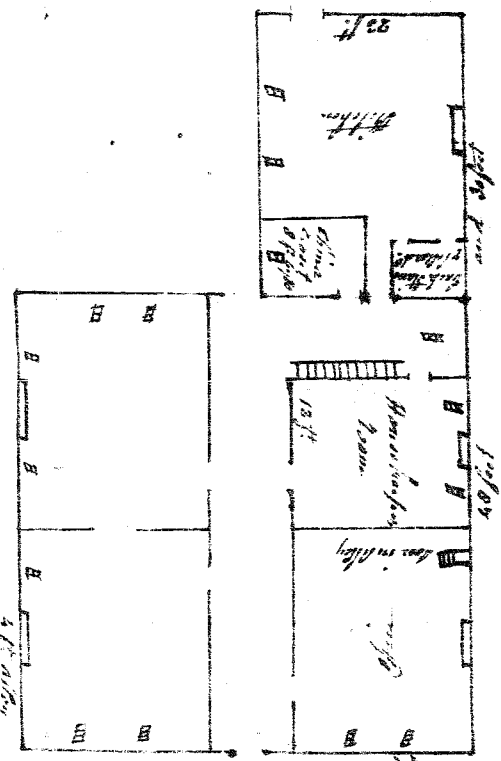
88' line between barn and west lot 20' 8" side, distance to Market Square 300 ft.

Man's House
10' x 10' 6"
to the corner

36' of open yard.



11' 3" built by
10' 5" - the plan
11' 8" for
4' 1" side



1' 6" of 10' 6" side
2' 11" 1/2 depth
Bath
Living Room
Dining Room
Kitchen
10 ft
22 ft
10 ft
15 ft
15 ft

The front part 30 ft wide

Line of alley for roof to Market Square - the property of John J. McNeill & Son

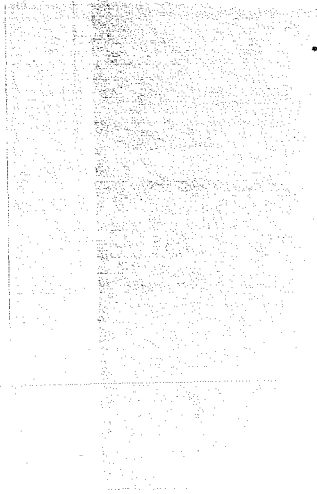
order to support the first floor, which walls would have to be run to the exterior foundation, how many windows should be allowed for lighting the cellar and where they should be positioned. Because the house was to be built on a slight rise, fairly high elevation at the front of the building would be necessary to provide some sort of a step at the back door; the question then was, would three feet eight inches be enough? Finally, there was a small passage between the two closets leading into the kitchen; how should it be lighted?

After receiving this tentative plan, with its questions, Matthew Pearce sat down to draw up his own ideas, which he sent to George Read (I) on August 10.⁵ He was pleased with his results for he says

I have shewed [my plan] to several gentlemen whose Minds seemed turned to [these] Subjects and they say it cannot be better plan'd;

He did not think that he could add anything further at that time, but was sure that many "Conveniences" would be thought of during the construction.⁶ Pearce's drawing has been labelled Preliminary Plan C (Illustration 18). This drawing depicts a much more elegant house than the simple drawing that was executed in New Castle. There is a curved staircase, and an arch leading into a short hallway which borders on the Pantry, a change which conveniently settled one of the New Castle questions. On the whole, however, he has simply taken Plan B and embellished it. His knowledge of the rudiments of light and space are sound, and the rear plan of the house is considerably improved by his additions and changes.

Pearce was concerned not only with the design of the first floor, but with the comfort of the inhab-



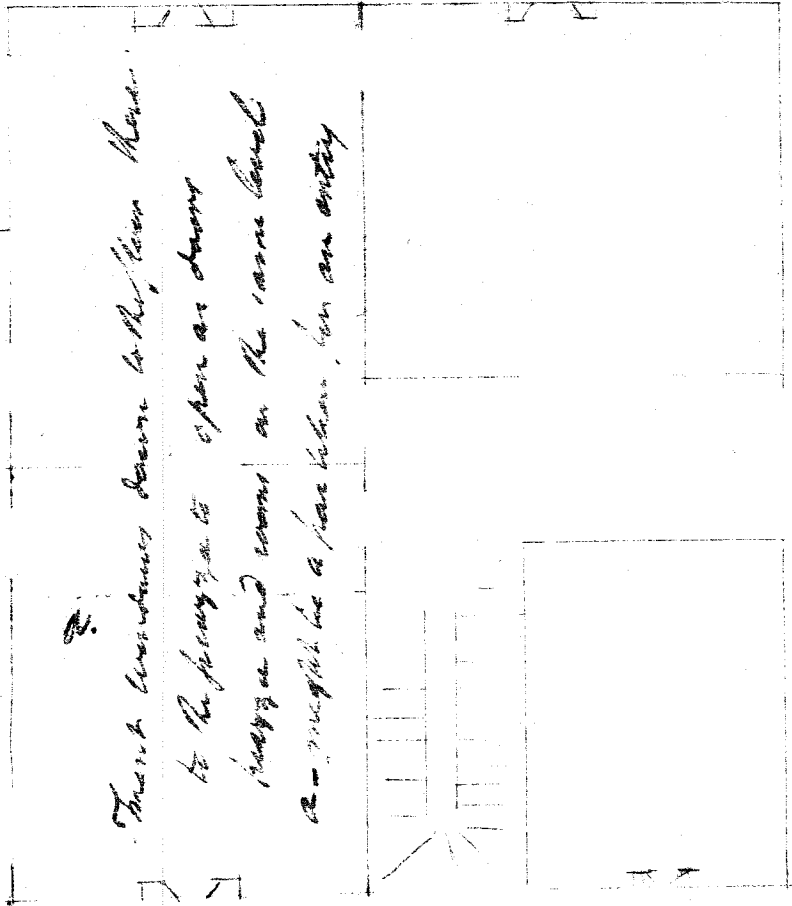
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Illustration 18. Preliminary Plan C, The George Read (II) House, drawn by Matthew Pearce, early August, 1797, The Richard S. Rodney Collection, Historical Society of Delaware.

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Changes to include
a door on each room

There is window down to the floor level
to the pergola open as doors
pergola and rooms on the same level
R - might be a partition, for an entry



Whe -

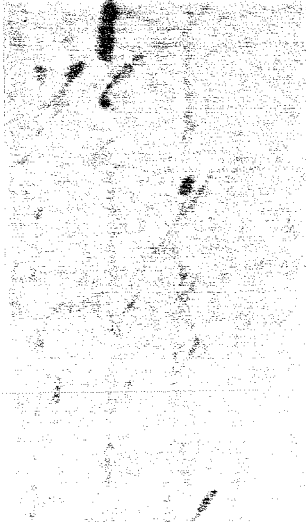
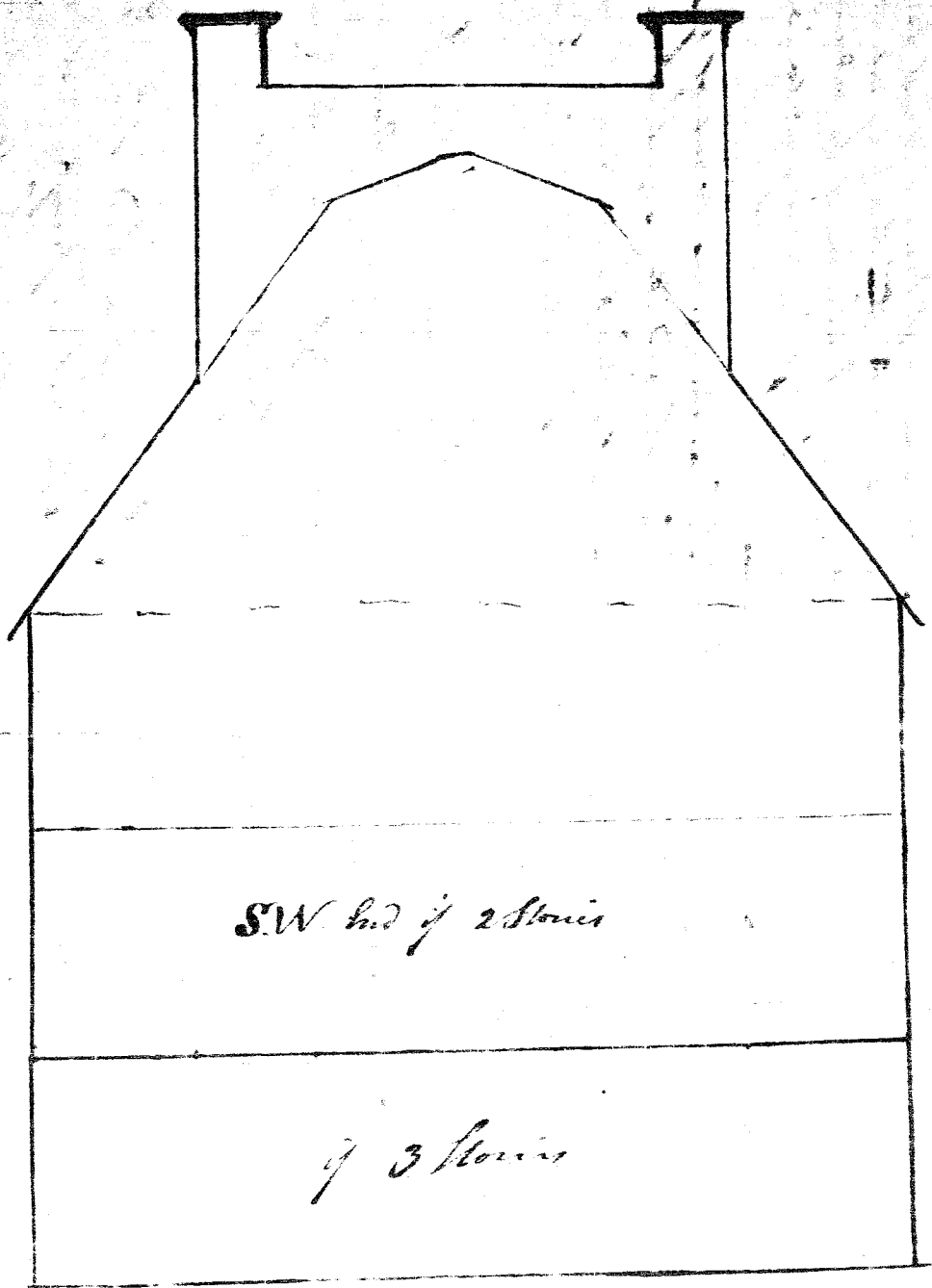


Illustration 19. Elevation, The George Read (II) House, drawn by Matthew Pearce, early August, 1797, The Richard S. Rodney Collection, Historical Society of Delaware.



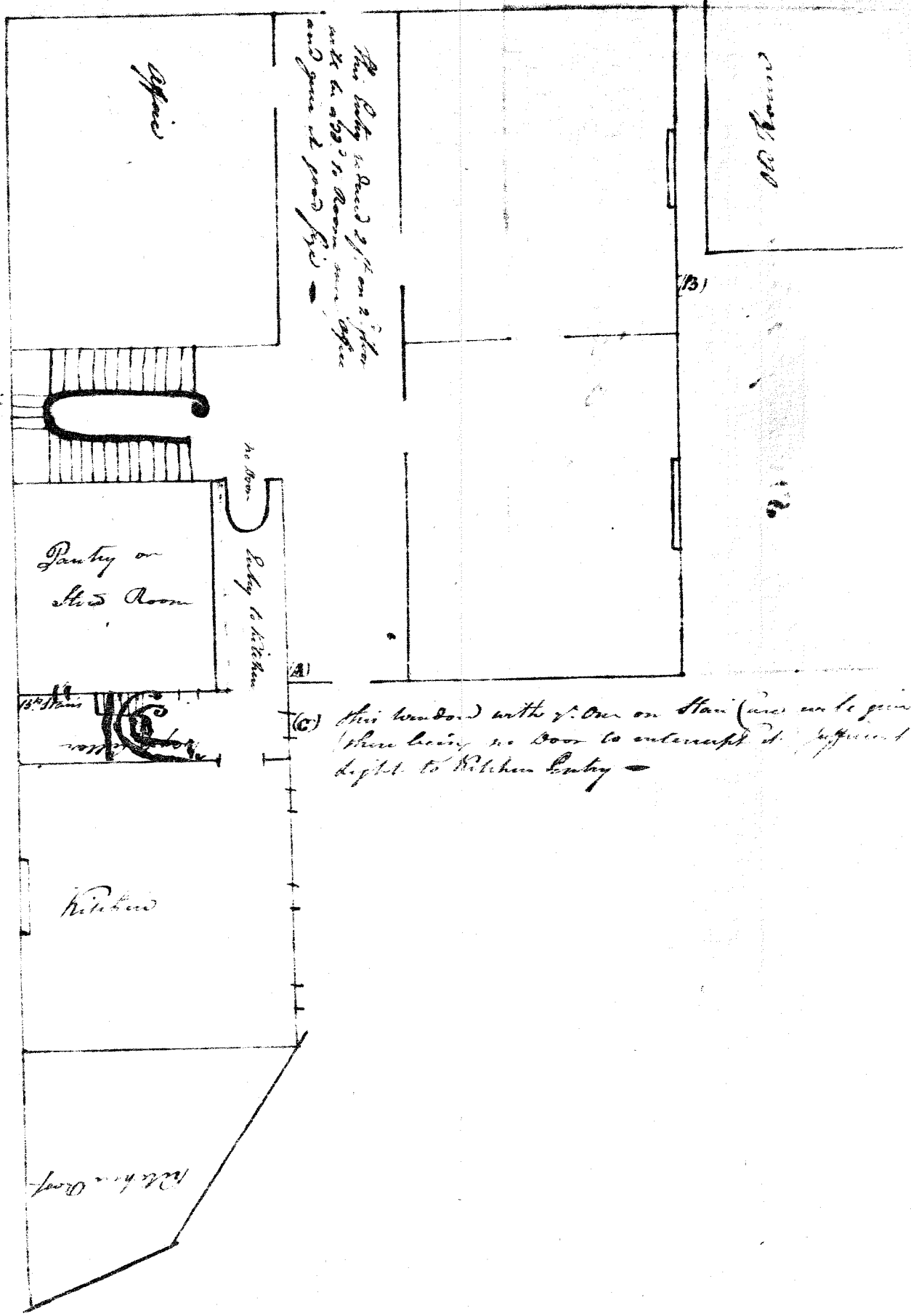
SW. end of 2 stories

of 3 stories

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Illustration 20. Preliminary Plan D, The George Read (II) House, undated, Richard S. Rodney Collection, Historical Society of Delaware.



Office

Old Room

This could be used for a study room with a 2nd door to Room near Office

The Window on Stair Case large.

Partry or Study Room

no door - Partry to Kitchen

14' Stairs

Kitchen

Kitchen Dinet

(C) This window with 4. Over on Stair Case can be gain (there being no door to intercept it) sufficient light to Kitchen Partry -

(B)

B

A

itants. He suggests, for instance, that the house be placed five feet farther back than was originally planned, for that would give more of the cool southwesterly wind to the rooms on the side facing the "old house", something wise to consider in terms of New Castle summers. He also suggested the reason for the placement of the fireplace on the Northeast side of the kitchen; Pearce recommends this because

it will give all the advantages of Light on the fireplace, (an important Consideration as it regards clean Cooking) and it will be much less liable to Smoke.

Added to the above was the economic benefit of being able to build a half-roof, instead of a full-gabled one, an idea which Read would find "less expensive and more durable."

His last comment was to remark, that if the house, was to be for him, he would not build more than a two story house, because he felt that there would be a lot of room, "especially if the Garretts are well finished." To illustrate his point, he drew the side of the house on the reverse of Plan C, (Illustration 19), showing the elevation of the house in both two stories and three. In the letter which accompanied his plan, he added that he would suggest that George give his rooms a thirteen foot ceiling on the first two floors, which would be the same as Pearce's own, at 251 Arch Street in Philadelphia.⁷

The fourth plan, D, drawn by an unidentified hand (Illustration 20), has one very sophisticated feature. At the front of the house is a piazza opening into two rooms and an entry. In the rooms were to be

"Front windows down to the floor then to the piazza to open as doors"

This arrangement of piazza and windows was incorporated in the back parlor of the present house.⁸

FOOTNOTES
CHAPTER III

¹The handwriting of George Read (I) and George Read (II) is very similar. After careful study of the characteristics of each man's manuscripts, the letters formed by the elder gentleman are seen to be more cramped than those of his son's. For this reason, Plans A and B are attributed to him. An additional argument is provided when Matthew Pearce directs his plan (C) and letter of explanation to the father. Letter, Matthew Pearce to George Read (I), August 10, 1797, RSR, HSD.

²H.P. Read, p. 70.

³William Read and Matthew Pearce's partnership is never stated directly in a letter, nor is it mentioned in Philadelphia Directories of the period, but is gleaned from a variety of manuscript references. Therefore no direct citation can be given for it.

⁴Letter, Matthew Pearce to George Read (I), August 10, 1797, RSR, HSD.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid.

⁷Ibid.; Philadelphia Directory for 1801, this house is no longer standing.

⁸French windows of this type are found at Sweetbriar Mansion, built in Philadelphia in 1797. That there was a terrace behind the house during Read's occupancy is probable for Mary Read (Mrs. George Read [II]) wrote about the lemon trees behind the house, Letter, Mary Read to Gunning Bedford Read, February 10, [1815], RSR, HSD.