The John Wiley House

An Urban Case Study in Federal New Castle

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Submitted to Bernard Herman
Vernacular Architecture (H654)
16 December 1988

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Around 1800, John Wiley, a lawyer in New Castle, Delaware, built a house at 18 Third Street in the town of New Castle. In building this house, Wiley was participating in a social process: a process that both shaped, and was shaped by his view of himself as an urban, professional, genteel, and modern gentleman. He chose to build in the residential heart of New Castle, a town which had grown up during the eighteenth century as a governmental and commercial center. New Castle's fortunes were dependent upon its position on the Delaware River, and, although it had been eclipsed in importance by Wilmington, New Castle was a bustling place. It was on the main route between Philadelphia and Washington. Travelers would arrive by packet boat from Philadelphia and would board a stage for Frenchtown, Maryland, on the Elk River. From Frenchtown, the trip by water resumed to Baltimore, and on to Washington and the South.[1]

According to geographer Joseph Scott, New Castle was undergoing a revival of trade beginning about 1790. In 1797, optimism about the town's prospects stimulated the town leaders to appoint five commissioners to survey the town, "fix the boundaries and limits, lay out the streets and alleys by setting stones or posts at the center of the street intersections, lay pavements and gutters for carrying off the surface water,

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[1] New Castle on the Delaware, Anthony Higgins, ed. (New Castle: New Castle Historical Society, 1973), 40.

regulate the building lines and fences on the streets and alleys and the walls and fences erected within the town[2]." The expenses of this survey and the ensuing modernizations were to be paid through property assessments: each property owner was responsible for the cost of the pavements and gutters in front of his house; tenants could deduct the taxes from the cost of their rent.

In 1804, the Commissioners hired architect Benjamin Latrobe to survey the town, recording the "location, size, and elevation" of all properties. At the time of this survey, many of the street names were changed from their original appellations, usually related to early settlers or physical landmarks, to names that were linked to the newly conceptualized spatial organization of New Castle. Water Street was renamed Front Street, Market Street became 2nd Street, Orange Street became 3rd Street, Vine Street was changed to 4th Street, and so forth[3]. This changing nomenclature, along with the efforts to map, chart, and generally make sense of the town as a physical entity, reflects a broader cultural emphasis on rationality and order that pervaded American thought during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. A legacy of the Enlightenment, this new world view was linked to the prevailing ideology of republicanism. In a society that was rapidly turning to commerce, protections were needed against the corruptive power of commerce; virtue--both

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[2] Ibid., 37.

[3] Ibid., 38.

public and private--was a means of combatting corruption, through an emphasis on industry, frugality, and simplicity. The kind of self-regulation and self-examination that can be seen in the actions of the commissioners of New Castle might be interpreted as a means of folding public virtue into the urbanizing process, perhaps of mitigating the extensive commercial activities in which all of them were surely involved[4].

Republican ideology, and the various forms it took, have also been interpreted as a means of social stratification and control. The organized layout of New Castle, with its clearly designated political, commercial, religious, and domestic spheres, would have made it more difficult for deviations from this established order to go unnoticed, which was particularly important because of the extent of commerce. Because of its importance as a trading center, New Castle was frequently teeming with strangers, who were perhaps outside of the immediate control of the prevailing town order.

It was into this milieu that John Wiley brought his family during the waning years of the eighteenth century. Some information about his family background can be pieced together from the will of his younger brother, Robert. Robert, apparently sickly, wrote a will in 1799, identifying as beneficiaries his mother, Elizabeth Wiley, his aunt, Alice Dougherty, his sisters, Sarah Marchbanks, Elizabeth, Margaret, Alice, and Ann Jean, and

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[4] For discussions of republican ideology, see John Kasson, Civilizing the Machine: Technology and Republican Values in America, 1776-1900 (Middlesex, England: Penguin Books: 1976), 3-51.

his brother, John[5]. The Federal Census of 1800 revealed that Robert and John were living next door to one another in New Castle. Robert's household included one female over forty-five years old, probably his mother, a female aged 25-45 (Margaret or Elizabeth?), a female aged 16-25, probably Alice, and Ann Jean, aged 10-16 years old. There are also two young males, between the ages of ten and sixteen, another male aged 16-25, and a third male over 45 years old, as well as one free white person. Since Robert's will indicates that he was a minor in 1799 when he wrote it, he is probably the 16-25 year old male. The identity of the older male in the household is unknown. The crucial piece of information, however, is that Robert's will clearly established John as his brother[6].

The household of John Wiley, Esq. was described in the 1800 census as consisting of a male age 26-45 (John), a female aged 26-45 (his wife Olivia), two girls under ten years old, one free white person, and three slaves[7]. Olivia Wiley's death notice in 1842 listed her age at death as seventy-seven, which would have made her birth date 1765; thus, she was about thirty-five years old in 1800. John was about the same age, or several years

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[5] New Castle County Wills: Robert Wiley, 1799. Delaware State Archives, Dover, Delaware.

[6] Ronald Vern Jackson & Gary Ronald Teeples, Delaware Census Index (Bountiful, Utah: Accelerated Indexing Systems, 1972-1977), 42.

[7] Jackson & Teeples, 42.

younger[8].

The 1800 Census, in combination with a map drawn for the Latrobe Survey of 1804, helps to pinpoint John Wiley's place of residence slightly earlier than had previously been established. The survey map of "Orange Street," soon to be Third Street, identified the house on the corner of Delaware Street as belonging to Kensey Johns. Ann Miller lived next to Johns, according to the survey, and to the 1800 census. The next house on the survey was labelled Sturgis, followed by John Wiley, and Robert Wiley; in the census, however, the household listed after Ann Miller was that of John Wiley (the Sturgis house must have been built between 1800-1804), followed by Robert Wiley[9]. Apparently, then, John Wiley had completed his house by 1800 and was residing there when the census was taken.

Robert Wiley's house predated John's by many years. According to deed records, there was a frame house on the lot as early as 1710. In 1767, the 60' x 172' lot, which ran between Third and Fourth Streets, was purchased by bricklayer Nathaniel Silsbee from Thomas Morton. Silsbee "re-fenced the south side of his 60' lot to leave open a six-foot alley between the two streets [Third and Fourth Streets] (Fig. 1). In his will he

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[8] The death dates of both Olivia and John Wiley were reported in the Delaware Gazette, respectively on 5 November 1842 and 28 December 1842. Genealogical Surname File, Historical Society of Delaware, Wilmington, Delaware.

[9] Ellen Stanley Rogers, 1800 Census of New Castle County, Delaware (Bladensburg, MD: Genealogical Recorders, 1960), 41; Jeanette Eckman, An Architectural Survey of the City of New Castle, Delaware for Perry, Shaw, & Hepburn, Architects, 1953, Historical Society of Delaware, Wilmington, Delaware.

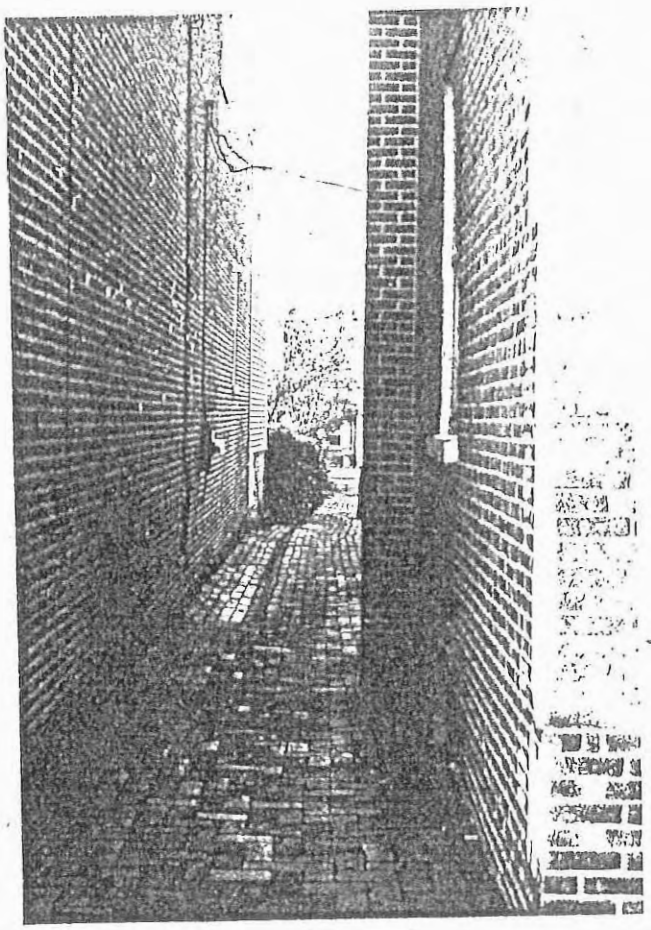

Fig. 1. Silsbee's Alley, between Third and Fourth Streets

provided that the alley be kept forever a public right of way.[10] The parcel passed through Nathaniel Silsbee's will to his son, Dr. Nathaniel Silsbee, Jr., who sold it to "Robert Wiley, blacksmith, for 100 pounds in money of the Delaware State" in 1779.

Robert Wiley, the father of Robert, John, and five other children, as well as husband to Elizabeth, died intestate in 1789.[11] When the Orphan's Court approved the sale of his properties to John Wiley in 1801, they were valued at $1000., and included, in addition to the house on Third Street, a property on the east side of the Strand.[12] The 1798 Tax Assessment List for New Castle Hundred cites "Robert Wiley's est. [estate]" as comprised of a house and lot, valued at $200. Both Elizabeth and John Wiley Esq. were also assessed, Elizabeth for personal property totalling $21.55 and John for property (undescribed)

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[10] Eckman, Folder 11:69. This alley still exists, running roughly through the middle of the block between Third and Fourth Streets.

[11] Unpublished summary of title search for 18-20 Third Street, New Castle, in possession of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Appleby, New Castle, Delaware. The information on Robert Wiley included in this summary was drawn from prior notes made by previous owner, William E. Myers, who purchased 18 Third Street in 1902; also in possession of Mr. & Mrs. Appleby.

[12] In 1790, a notice appeared in the Delaware Gazette announcing that Elizabeth Wiley wished "To let on shares; blacksmith shop, complete. Elizabeth Wiley, Delaware Gazette, 4 September 1799, Genealogical Surname File, Historical Society of Delaware, Wilmington, Delaware.

amounting to $422.50.[13] In the 1803-1804 tax assessment, Elizabeth Wiley was assessed for the lot and house, as well as for $8. worth of livestock. Robert Wiley's listing for lot and house has been crossed out, with the notation "see Bro & Mother." John Wiley, who by this time had built his house on the south half of his father's original lot at 18 Third Street, was assessed for 3.34 improved acres, valued at $65., one lot and one house, valued at $900., $33. worth of livestock, two slaves--one between the ages of fourteen and forty-five and one aged less than eight years or over forty-five, as well as twenty-two pounds of silver plate, valued at $24.42, and $117.42 worth of personal property.[14]

Everything about the house that John Wiley built at 18 Third Street speaks to his position in life as an "Esq.," from the selection of brick as a building material, to its four story height, elaborately decorated doorway, and double-pile, side-passage plan. From across the green, an important center of social activity in Federal New Castle, John Wiley's house dominates the roofscape, rising a story above every other house on Third Street except one (Fig. 2). This distant view reveals a distinct social message that within the community of his block on Third Street, John Wiley stood tall.

The message of power and authority that is so evident from

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[13] Delaware State Archives, New Castle County tax assessments, 1798.

[14] Delaware State Archives, New Castle County tax assessment, 1803-1804.

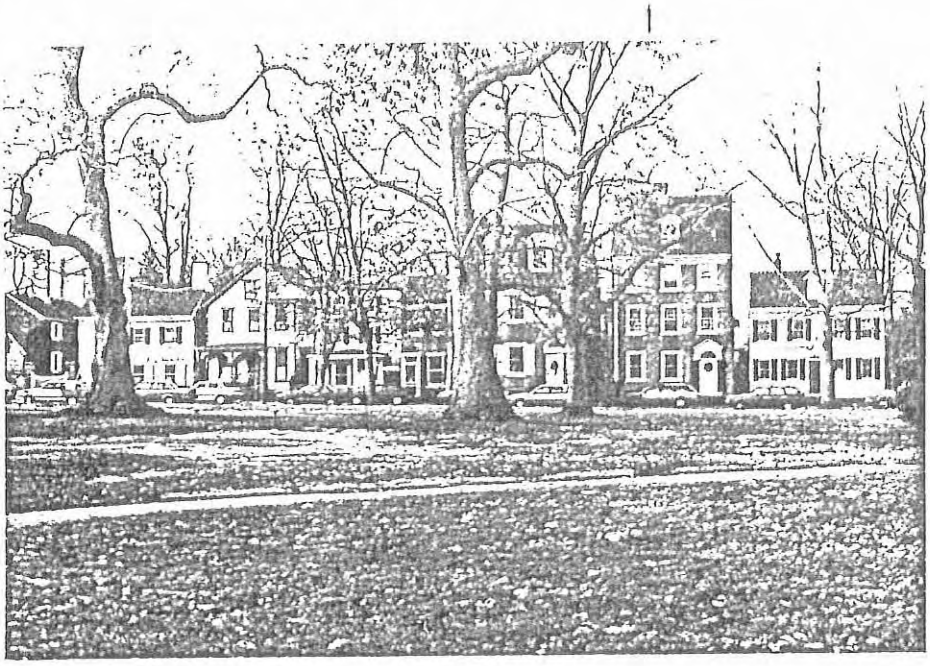

Fig. 2. View of Third Street from across the green. John Wiley's House is second from the right.

afar is equally apparent up close to the house (Fig. 3). The first floor, and front door are elevated twenty-nine inches from the street, which makes the house seem to be raised on a pedestal. This elevation affects access to the interior, and, by implication, to the inhabitants within: in order to enter, one must climb three steps to the doorway (Fig. 4). Even visual access through the front windows is inhibited by the elevated stature of the house. This requirement of ascension seems to be a means of separating those who dwelled within the house from those on the sidewalk below. John Wiley and his family resided in a private, elevated sphere apart from the public, urban sphere of the street and green.

In terms of its mass, the house is an elongated rectilinear block, punctuated at regular intervals by the front door and windows, and capped by a rounded dormer. The facade is organized visually into four registers, defined on the first floor by the door and two windows, on the second and third floors by a band of three windows, and on the fourth floor by the roof and dormer. These registers provide an external articulation of the interior space, and generally reinforce an impression of regularity and order. Both the front door, which is framed in a highly elaborate punch-and-gouge work door casing, and the windows, which are large and carry a significant amount of glass in each sash, make a statement about John Wiley's ability to command luxury. The dormer window is rounded at the top, with a Gothicised mullion pattern identical to the windows in the neighboring Immanuel Church (Fig. 5). Perhaps the selection of

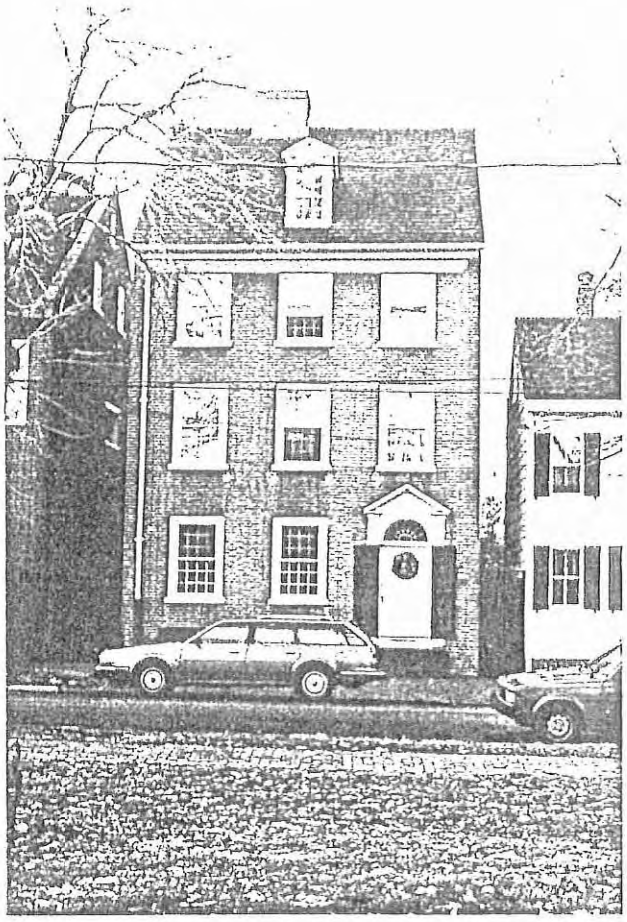

Fig. 3. John Wiley house, 18 Third Street, New Castle

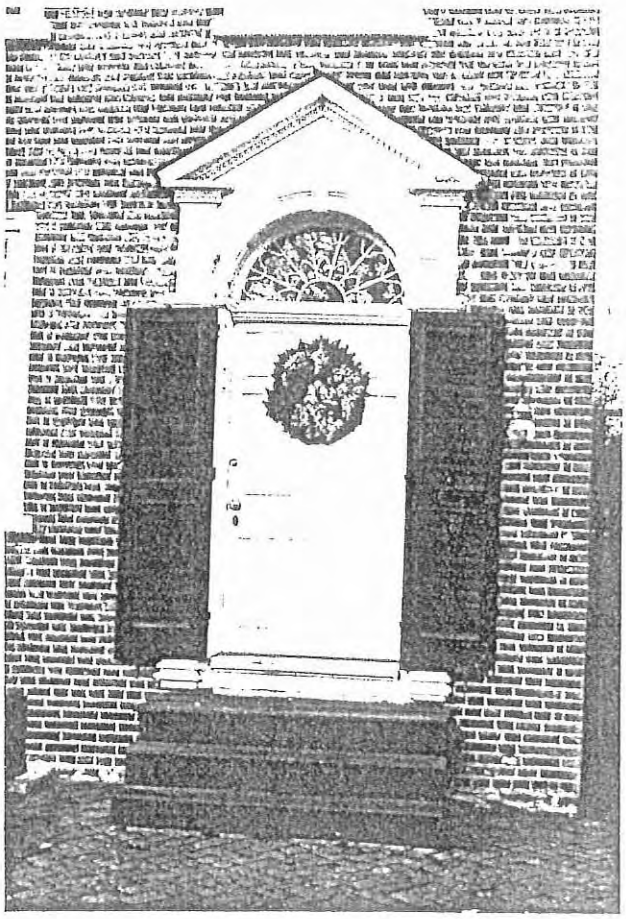

Fig. 4. Front door, Wiley house.

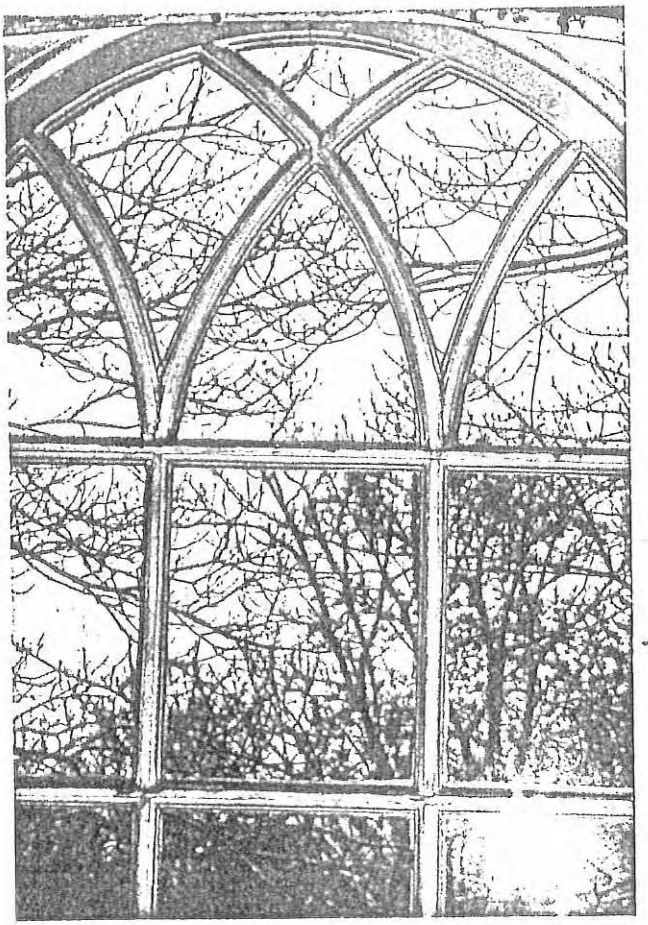

Fig. 5. Dormer window pattern also found in nearby Immanuel Church.

such an explicitly religious form as the highest visible element on John Wiley's house was merely a coincidence, but I doubt it. Its overtones of piety and virtue seem perfectly in keeping with the rest of the house as a physical expression of Wiley's conception of his position in the world.

Entry into the house is possible through two different doors, which represented two levels of formality. At the rear of the house, on the south side, door enters directly into the kitchen. This entry is from Silsbee's alley, rather then from the front sidewalk. Physically, the door is much closer to ground level than the front door, making it more inviting for casual entry. It is a simple, panelled door, with a row of four transom lights above. The front door, by contrast, is elevated, as previously discussed, and is accentuated by an applied classical casing. This door is flanked by a pair of fluted pilasters, surmounted by an elaborate fan light and pediment. Kevin Sweeney, in his discussion of Connecticut River mansion houses, has suggested that classical doorways, which were the predominant distinguishing feature of the facade, proclaimed the owner's level of education, as well as his wealth: "The elaborately carved doorways with classical pilasters and pediments communicated elegance and suggested the homeowner's intimacy with the classical sources of knowledge that formed the basis of a true gentleman's liberal education."[15]

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[15] Kevin M. Sweeney, "Mansion People: Kinship, Class, and Architecture in Western Massachusetts in the Mid Eighteenth Century," Winterthur Portfolio (1984), 242.

Like the exterior, the interior of John Wiley's house presents a complex array of embedded values and functions (Fig. 6). These implicit meanings may be approached through an examination of the social and functional implications of the plan, as well as the evidence provided by the presence (or absence) of specialized forms, and by variations in levels of finish throughout the house.[16]

In plan, the main block of the house is composed of two principle rooms, one behind the other and each with a hearth, and a full-length passage at one side, containing the stair. Behind the passage is a 12' x 12' kitchen wing. The passage, which is wide enough to accommodate several large pieces of furniture, clearly functioned as more than a right-of-way between the front and back of the house (Fig. 7). The walls are divided defined by walnut or mahogany chair rails, which circumnavigate the room and curve elegantly up the stair. The stair itself is further enhanced by panelled wainscotting at its base, punch-worked scroll motifs above, and gracefully turned balusters (Figs. 8-10). The passage is visually divided into front and rear spaces by a curved archway. The front part of the passage is spatially and physically linked to the front parlor, by means of a connecting doorway, as is the rear passage to the rear parlor. In addition, the rear passage contains the stair and connects

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[16] A methodology for considering matters of architectural finish is clearly explicated in Bernard L. Herman, Architecture and Rural Life in Central Delaware, 1700-1900 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1987), 42-50.

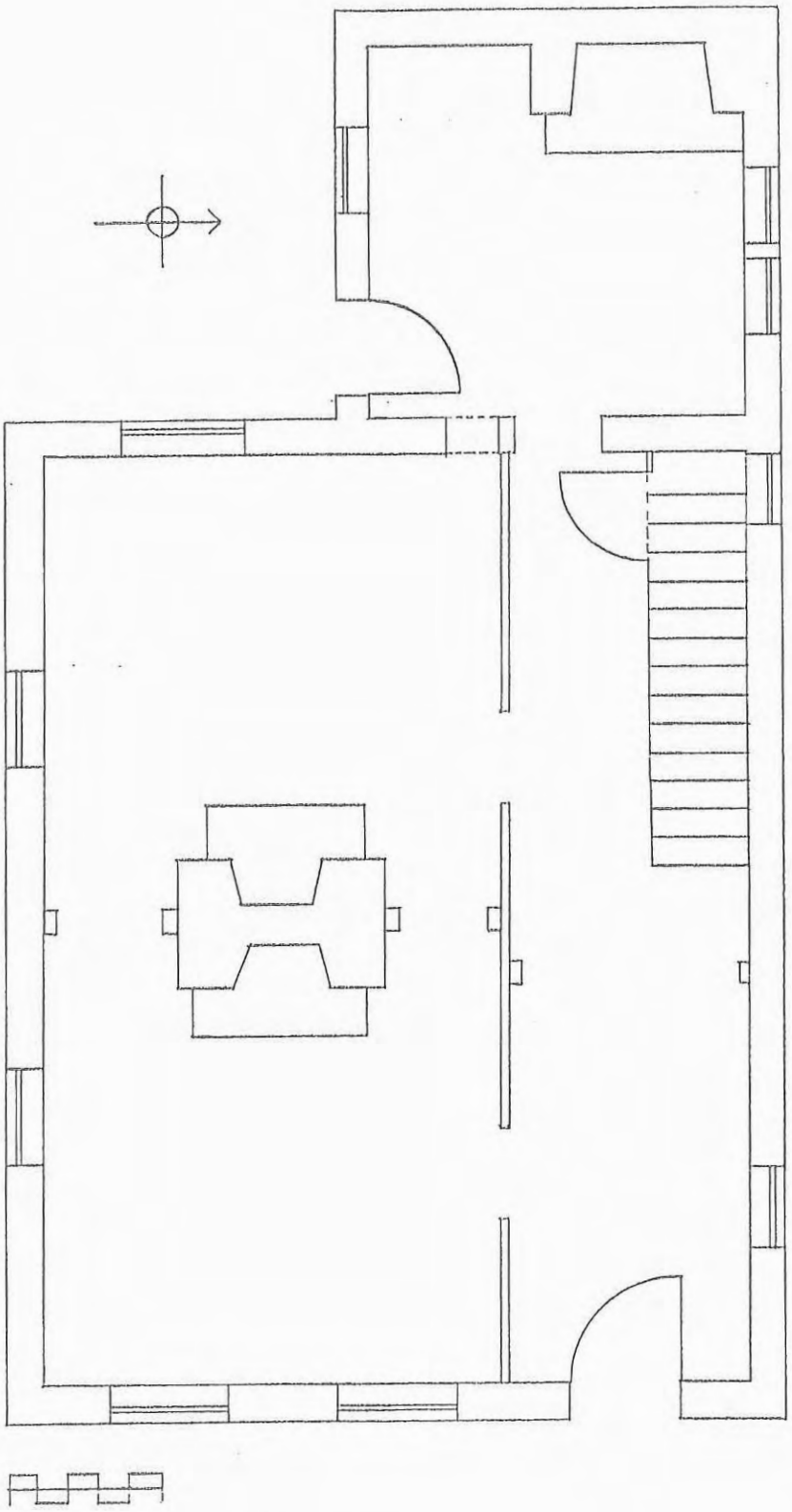


Fig. 6. Plan of John Wiley House, 18 Third Street, New Castle, Delaware

Fig. 7. Passage, rear to front view.

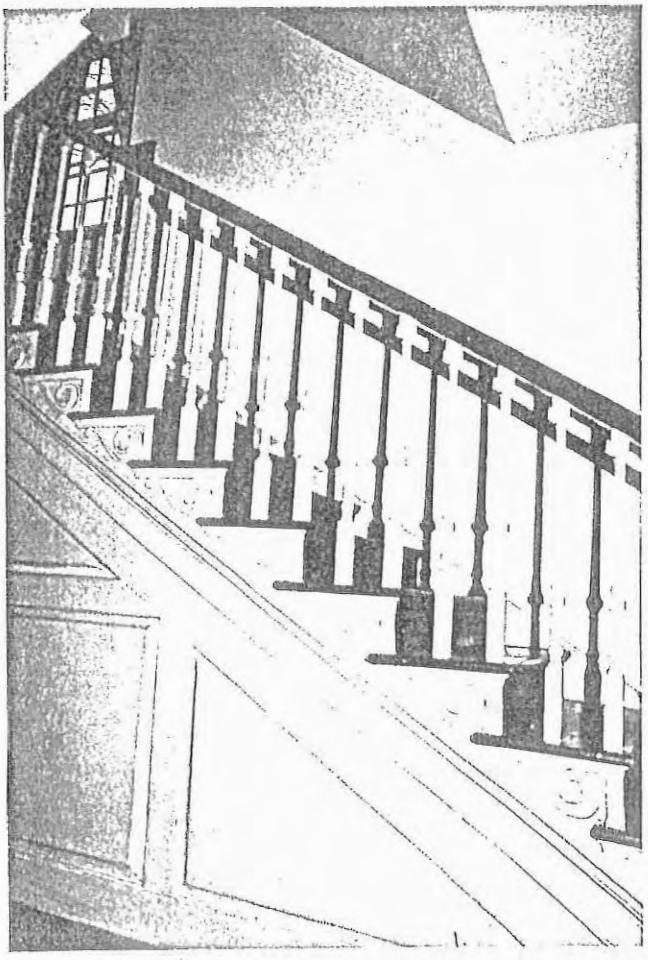
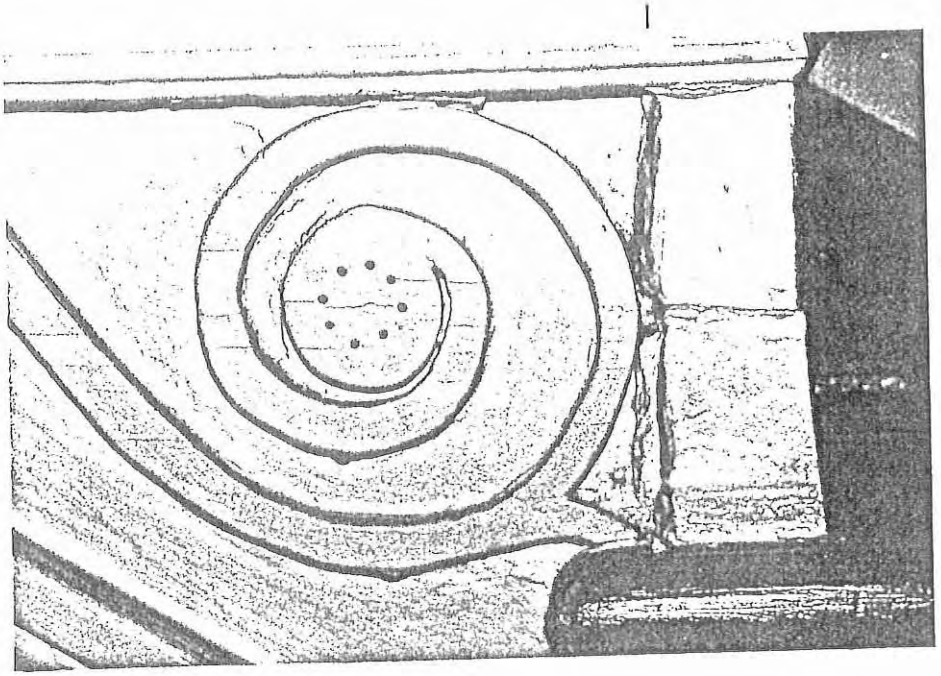
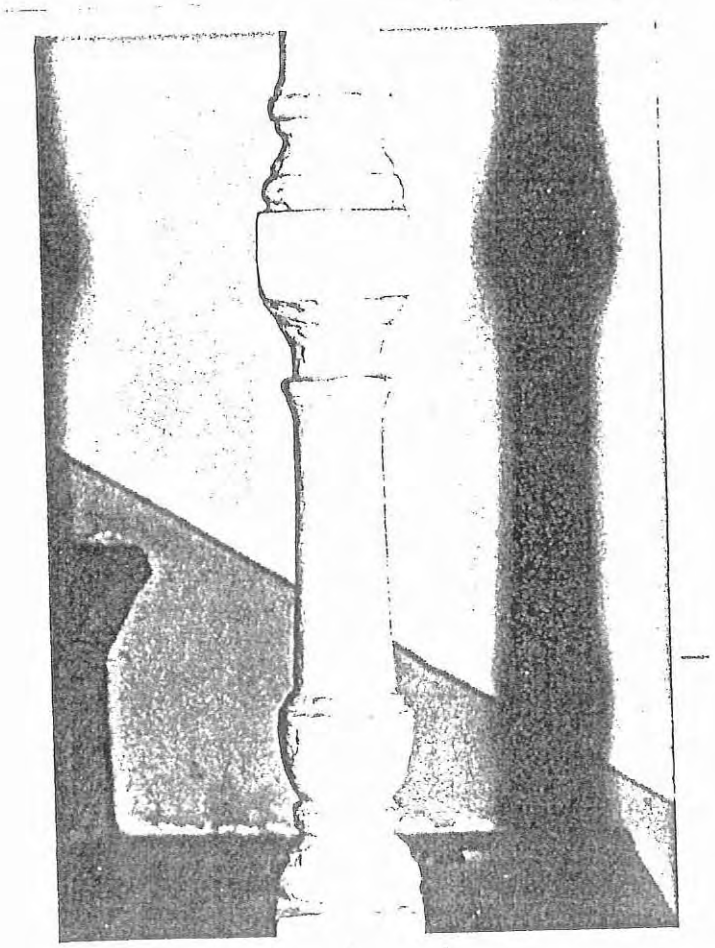


Fig. 8. Stair.



Figs. 9 and 10. Stair details.



with the service areas of the house, the kitchen and the cellar. The importance of the front of the house is emphasized by the highest level of decorative finish. In the passage, the inside of the front door is made a focal point by the flood of light through the fanlight, highlighting its delicate tracery (Fig. 11). In contrast to the elegance of this particular doorway, however, the moldings around the other doors in this space are flat and linear, presenting a much more chaste effect. Kenneth Ames has suggested the importance of the hall as a point of first impression, particularly during the later nineteenth century. I would speculate that this hall, with its rather austere classical detailing, was also intended to communicate a first impression of luxury mitigated by classical simplicity and restraint.[17] Upon entry into the passage through the front door, guests are provided with an immediate view of both the stair and the most highly ornamented room in the house, indeed, of its most impressive feature, the mantlepiece. This pattern is in accordance with the recommendations of Abraham Swan, author of one of the most influential architectural pattern books of the day, The British Architect. "Palladio tells us," Swan reminded his readers,

> "that all care imaginable must be taken in placing the Stair-Cases; that it is difficult to find a proper Situation for them, which will no ways damage the rest of the Fabrick; that the less they are concealed from such as enter the house, the more ornamental they will appear; and that you should have a Sight of the best part of the house before you

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[17] Kenneth L. Ames, "Meaning in Artifacts: Hall Furnishings in Victorian America," in Common Places: Readings in American Vernacular Architecture (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1986), 244-245.

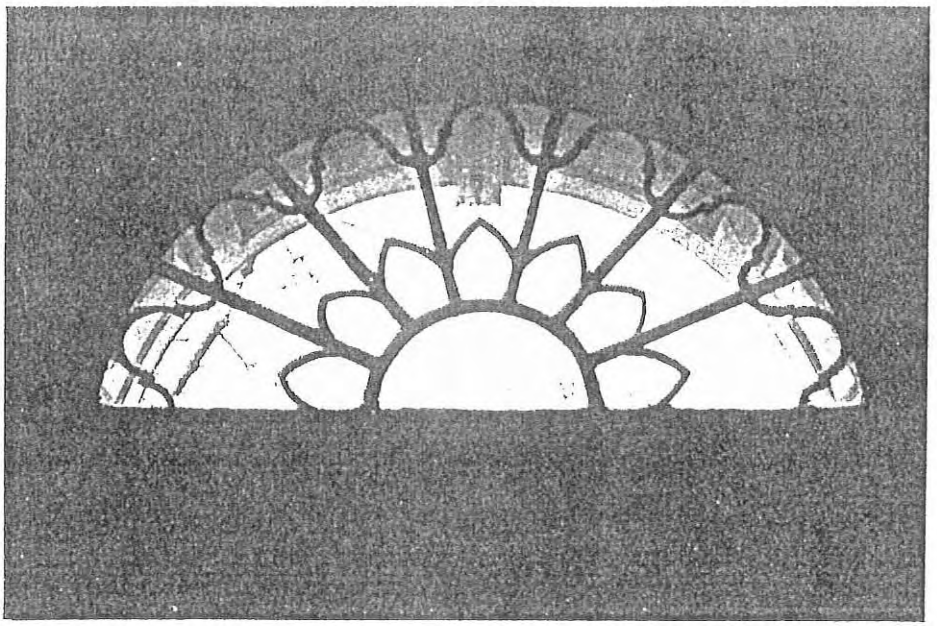

Fig. 11. Fanlight in passage, over front door.

> arrive at them, by which Means the Fabrick will seem larger than it really is."

Swan went on to add that ". . .pretty much the same might be said of Chimney-pieces.[18]

Swan's work might easily have helped to shape the design sensibilities of many late-eighteenth century builders, including Philadelphian Peter Crouding, who was known to have built several houses in New Castle, probably including John Wiley's. Crouding was hired to build the house of George Read II in New Castle, and according to existing documentation, he served as architect and general contractor, providing drawings, procuring materials, and supervising work.[19] The similarities between the Read house and the Wiley house, particularly in the punch-and-gouge work on the doors and mantlepieces, form the basis for the attribution to Crouding.

In any event, Crouding lavished attention on the mantlepieces in all of the important rooms in the Wiley house. In both first floor parlors, the mantlepieces are ornately embellished with punch-and-gouge work, as is the mantlepiece in

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[18] Abraham Swan, The British Architect (London, 1745; Philadelphia: R. Bell, 1775), iii. According to Phillip M. Johnston, A Checklist of Books Relating to Architecture and The Decorative Arts Available in Philadelphia In the Three Decades Following 1780 (Winterthur thesis, 1974), vi-vii, Swan's British Architect was found more frequently than any other work.

[19] Charles T. Lyle, "The George Read II House: Notes on Its History and Restoration," The Delaware Antiques Show Catalog (Wilmington, Delaware, 1986; repr. Historical Society of Delaware, n.d.), 2. For a detailed analysis of punch-and-gouge work in New Castle houses, see Michele McFadden, "Architecture As Evidence: The Charles Thomas House of New Castle, Delaware" (unpubl. ms., University of Delaware, 1987), 4-5.

the front room on the second floor. The mantlepiece in the second floor back room is much less ornate, but is still deemed important enough to be garnished with a garland of punch work.

The front parlor was clearly designed as the fanciest room in the house, and the types of embellishments found on the mantlepiece, chair rail, and baseboard molding would have reinforced an atmosphere of luxury, perhaps even frivolity. The mantlepiece, which is the focal point of the room, is an architectural temple facade surrounding the chimney opening. Crouding embellished it with a whole vocabulary of classical ornament: fluting, rope turning, beading, gadrooning, and an undulating garland across the lower frieze (Fig. 12-13). The band of gear-like motifs below the cornice seem to be a fitting symbol for the American republic, with its mechanistic world view and faith in "the great machine of the government of the state"[20] (Fig. 14). The garland motif on the mantlepiece originally encircled the room on a chair rail; all that remains now, however, is a section of molding under each window (Fig. 15).

A comparison between this and the other mantlepieces created by Peter Crouding for John Wiley, and those found in the house of his neighbor George Read II, helps to put things into an economic perspective. Read's mantlepieces incorporate the same elaborate structure and fine punch-and-gouge work, but they take embellishment one step further in the application of plaster

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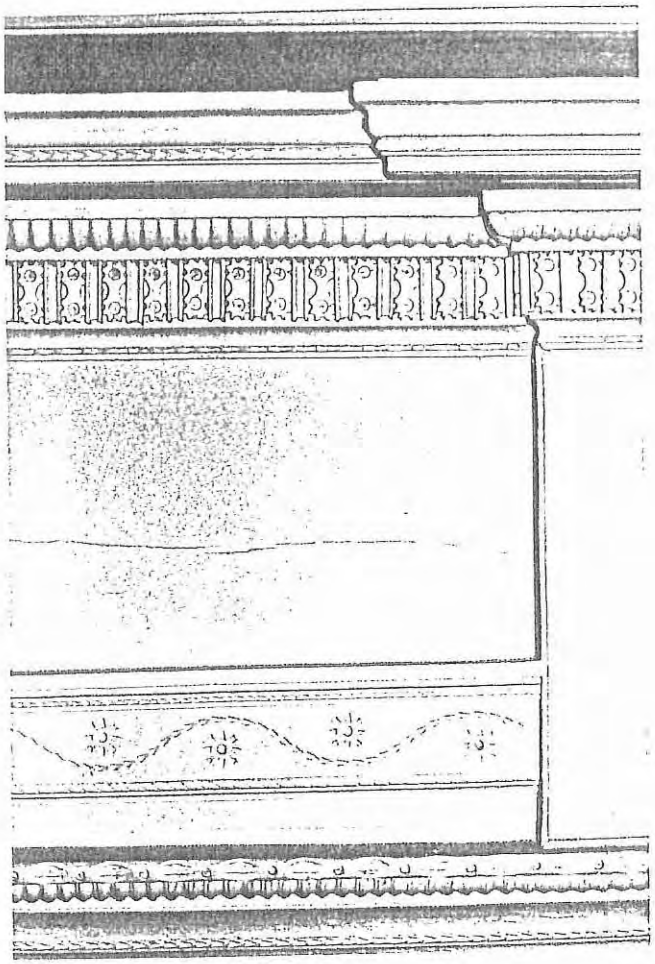
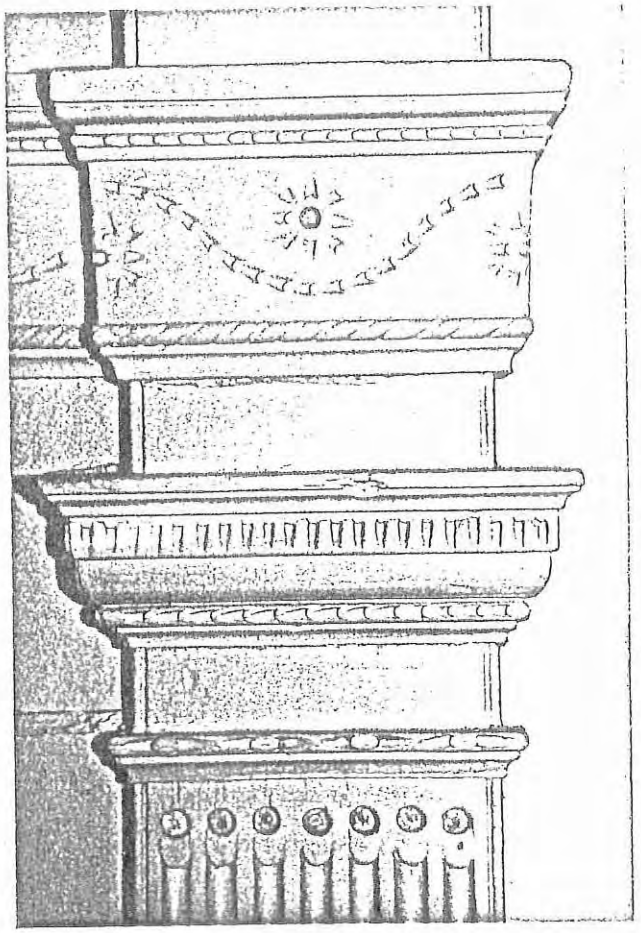
[20] This characterization of the government as a machine was made by distinguished Philadelphia scientist and physician in 1786, quoted in Kasson, 32.





Figs. 12 and 13. Details, mantlepiece in front parlor.

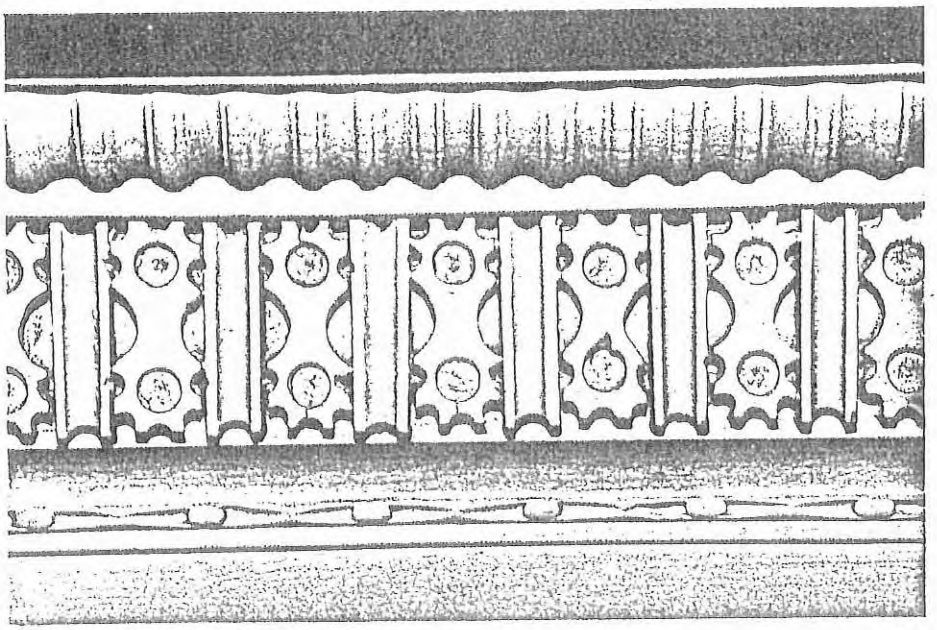


Fig. 14. Detail, mantlepiece in front parlor. The gear-like motifs reflect the mechanistic world view of the early republic.

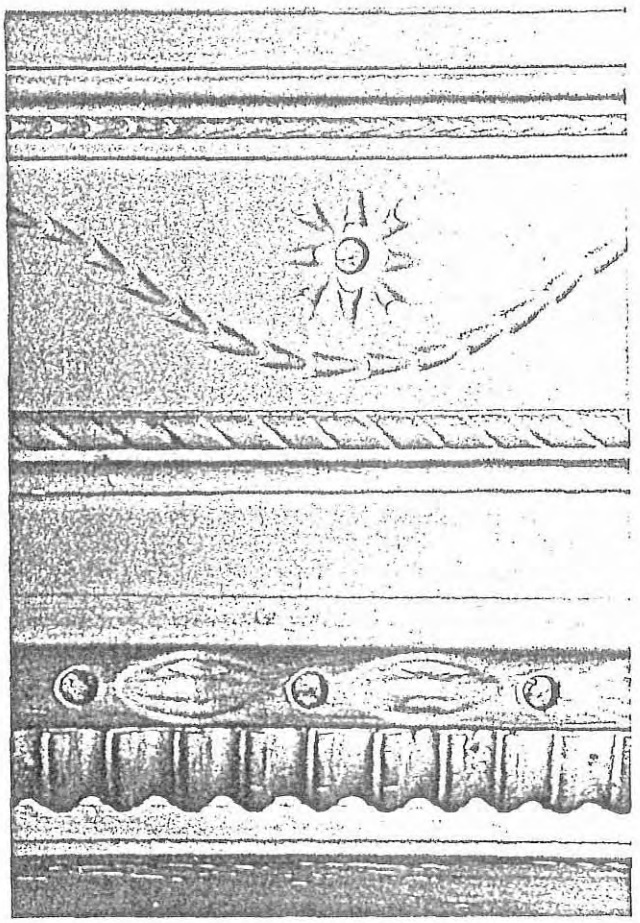


Fig. 15. Chair rail detail, front parlor.

ornaments to the entablature surfaces (Fig. 16). In a sense, this epitomizes the difference between the two houses: both were built by Crouding, but in terms of scale and degree of elaboration, Read's dwelling far surpasses that of Wiley. That is not to say that Wiley did not build a luxurious house, but merely that his house is characterized by a much higher degree of restraint than the Read house, restraint in both visual and economic terms. An examination of the Philadelphia House Carpenters' Book of Prices for 1801 reveals an array of economic and aesthetic choice in the decoration available for mantles, ranging from plain cornice and bedmould for two shillings per foot to the possibility of applied composition festoons, ribbons, human figures, urns, roses, and leaves. Wiley has elevated the impact of his parlor mantlepiece by adding a tablet (priced at two shillings sixpence), but has chosen to leave it undecorated.[21]

Another decorative feature, which would originally have helped to define and unify this space, is currently obscured by paint. According to the current owner, the window sills are mahogany, which suggests that there may have been other mahogany detailing around the room, as in the Read house, and in the passage of the Wiley house. The use of contrasting color as a linear detail would have added another level of visual complexity and sumptuousness to this interior design.

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[21] House Carpenters' Book of Prices and Rules for Measuring and Valuing all of their different kinds of work (Philadelphia: R. Folwell, 1801), 19.

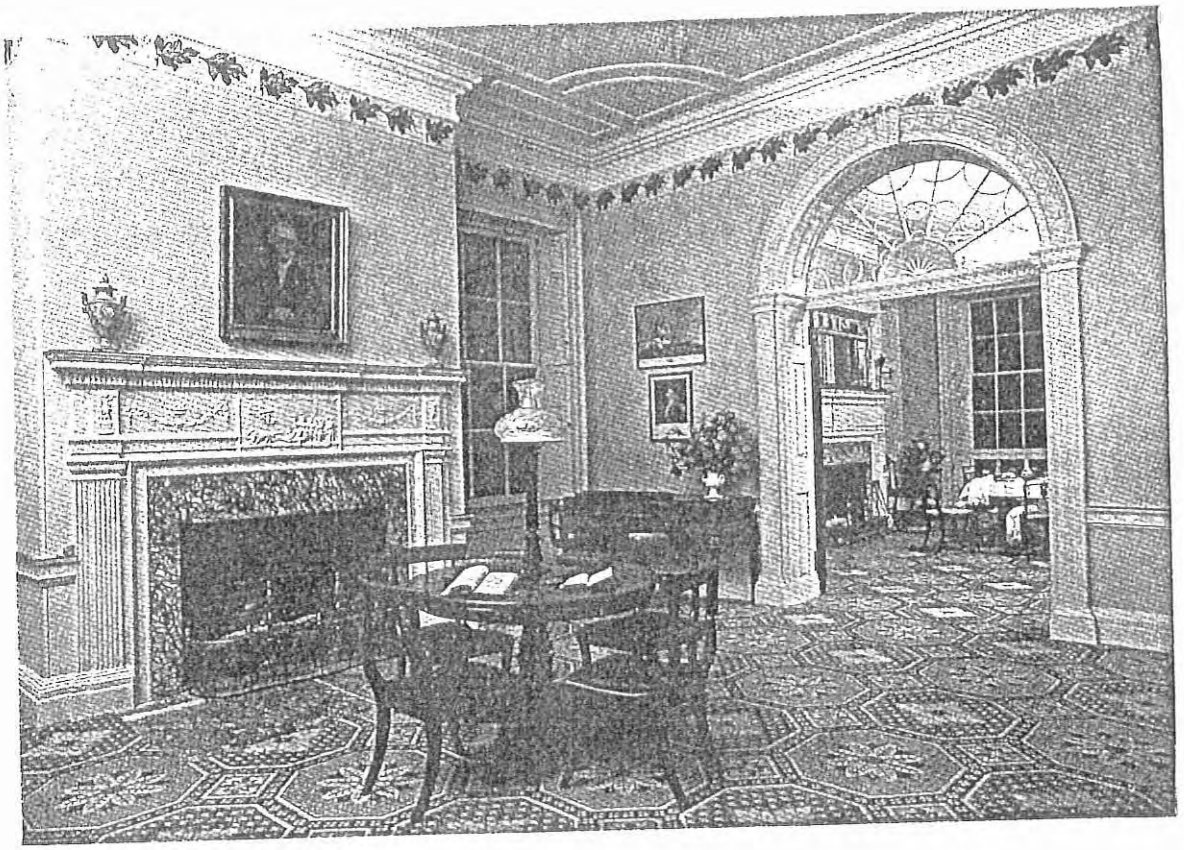

Fig. 16. Front parlor of the George Read II house in New Castle, also designed by Peter Crouding, with applied plaster work on frieze and tablet.

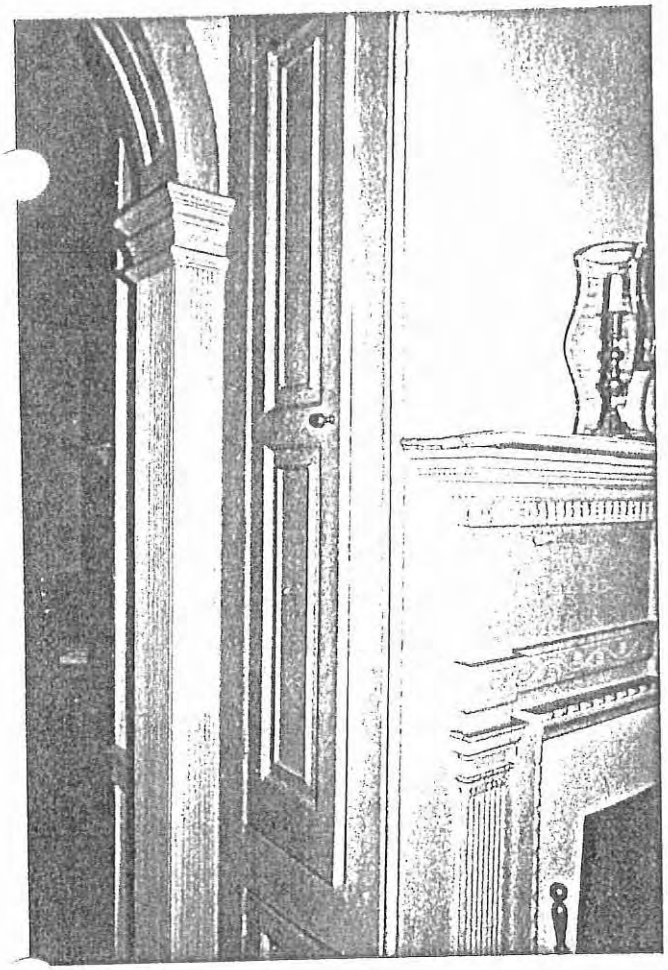

Fig. 17. Front parlor chimney cupboard.

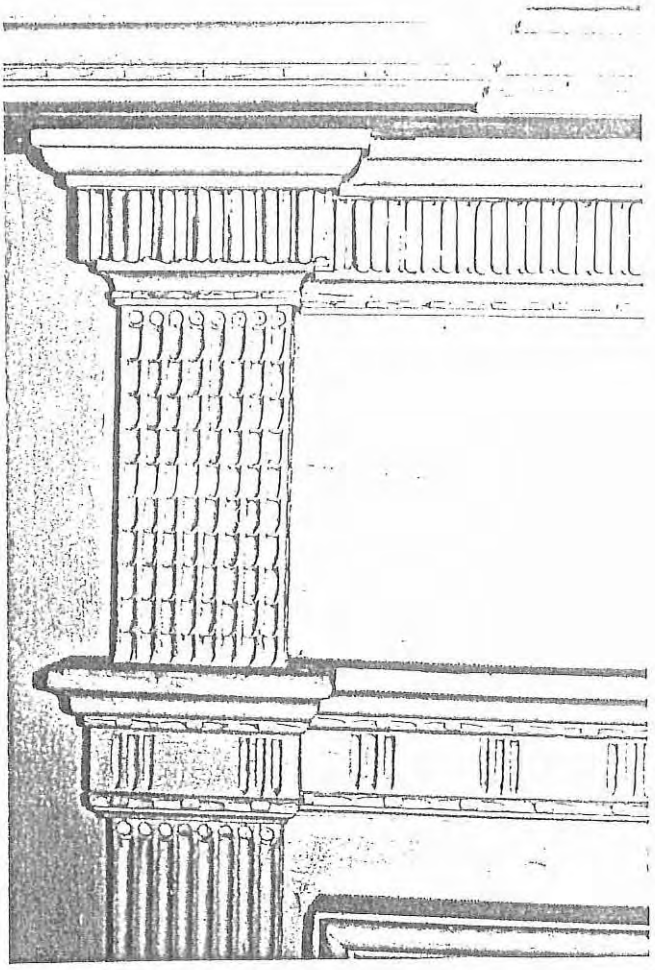

Fig. 18. Mantlepiece, rear parlor.

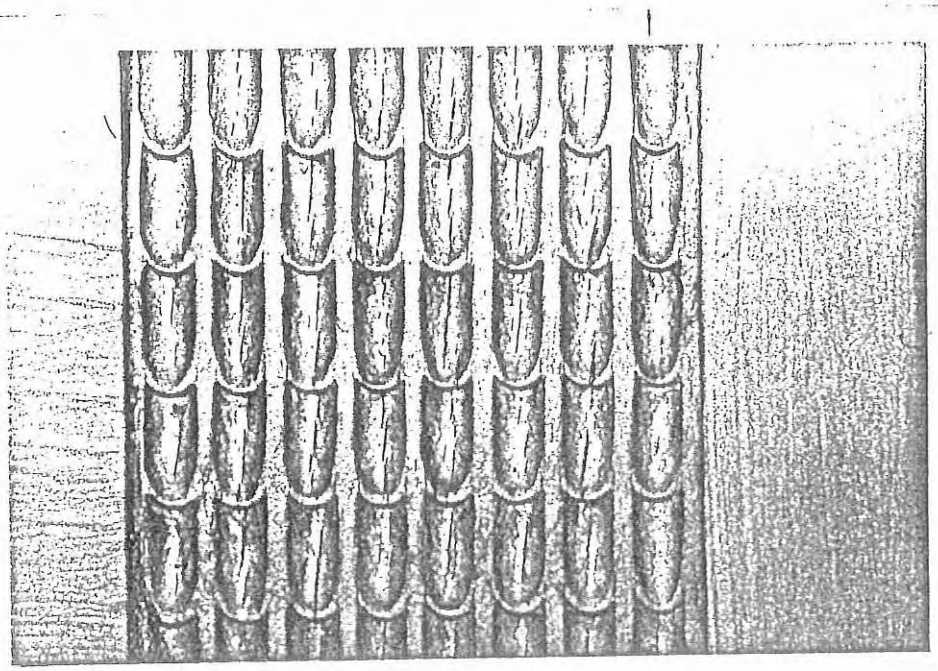

Fig. 19. Rear parlor mantlepiece detail.

A final architectural detail in this room is worth mentioning: there are built-in cupboards on either side of the chimney (Fig. 17). The notion of built-in furniture has been discussed by Bernard Herman within the context of changing concepts of permanence in housing.[22] These cupboards suggest that John Wiley was willing to invest in permanent fixtures in his parlor, rather than in furnishings which he would be able to take with him should he move. These cupboards also reflect a sense of spatial ingenuity that is in keeping with the mechanistic world view of Americans during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

The front and rear parlors are currently connected by means of arched openings on either side of the chimney. Based on paint variation and floor evidence discovered during a renovation, however, the present owners have concluded that these openings were added at some time after the building was constructed, and that the two rooms were entirely separate spaces, accessible only from the passage[23]. The rear parlor appears to be a slightly less formal space than the front parlor, in terms of its decoration. The mantlepiece is more restrained, and the chair rail and floor molding is a plain linear design, without the added punched embellishment found in the front room (Fig. 18-19). This room is larger than the front room, however, and probably was used as a family sitting room, as well as for meals. It is closer to the

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[22] Herman, 54.

[23] Mrs. Robert Appleby, interview by author, New Castle, Delaware, 7 November 1988.

kitchen, and has an opening or "pass through" in the west wall that connects directly with the kitchen. This was possibly added at some time after the house was built--the molding which frames it is not of the period and the door on the kitchen side is plywood.

A seven-inch step down at the rear of the passage leads into the kitchen wing. This space includes a fireplace in the northwest corner of the room, a double window in the north wall (probably a replacement for a smaller original window, to let in more light), a window and an exterior door on the south wall, and a new opening that leads to a modern kitchen wing at the rear of the house. This room was clearly designed for function rather than display. Its most prominent feature is the fireplace, the place where all cooking activity for the household would have taken place (Fig. 20). The original crane remains in the fireplace, supported by pins set into the brick. Generations of use has left an indentation in the brick where the cooking pot bumped against the left side of the fireplace wall.

As might be expected, the level of finish in this space is much lower than that found in the parlors, since this was a place of work rather than social entertainment. The mantle is a simple face board, ornamented with a narrow band of applied molding echoing the hearth opening, and a mantle shelf across the top. The shelf probably functioned in several ways: as a surface on which place lamps and candles and perhaps a clock--technical items that would have facilitated the work process; as an area for storage and display of a limited number of food service or

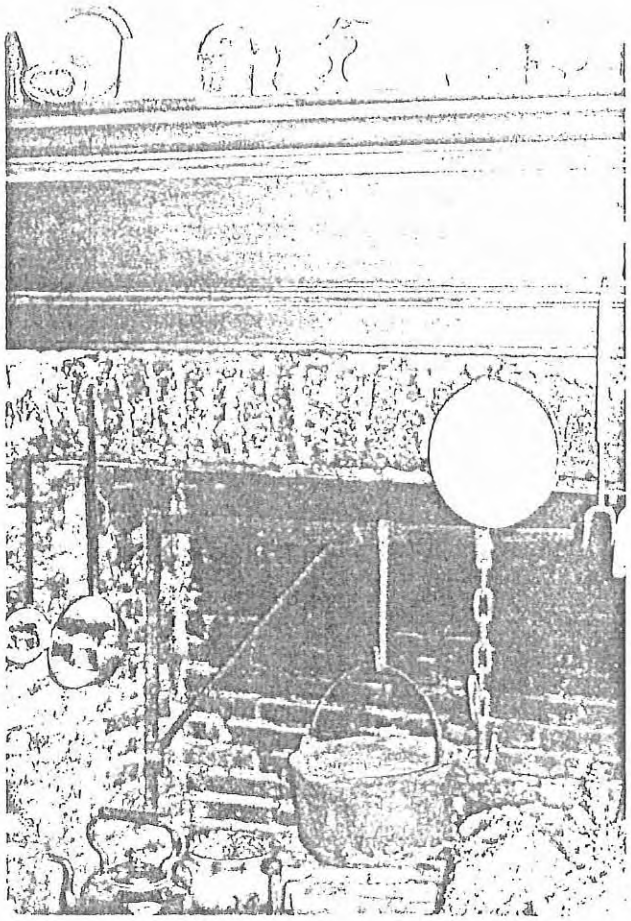

Fig. 20. Kitchen hearth.

decorative items; as an auxiliary work surface which could be used during the cooking process; and perhaps as an impromptu desk--paintings and prints of early nineteenth-century kitchens sometimes depict an inkstand and quills on the mantleshelf.[24]

During a nineteenth century remodelling, this room was sheathed with stamped tin. When the present owners removed the tin sheathing, they discovered evidence of an original winder stair in the southwest corner of the room, as well as evidence of shelves in the northeast corner of the room[25]. The stair may be interpreted in two ways. It would have provided the servants access to sleeping quarters on the second floor above the kitchen, without using the more formal main stair in the passage, maintaining a sense of class separation within the household. Or, the entire kitchen wing may have predated the rest of the house. There is no visible evidence of this in the cellar or exterior foundation, but the difference in height between this wing and the passage, and the thickness of the east wall of the kitchen (which suggests that it might have been an exterior wall), could lead to that conclusion. A fourteen-inch thick wall might have been required, however, to support the weight of the four stories above it.

A third interpretation might be that the kitchen was

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[24] For examples, see Harold L. Peterson, American Interiors from Colonial Times to the Late Victorians (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), pl. 25, 51.

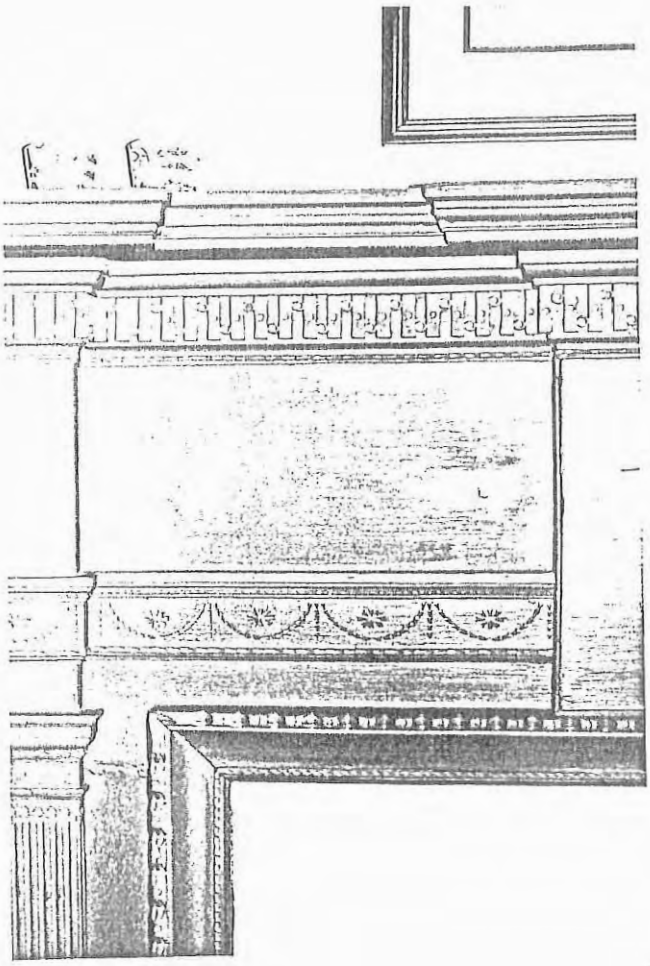
[25] Mrs. Robert Appleby, interview by author, New Castle, Delaware, 7 November 1988. The stair and shelves are documented by photographs in possession of the Applebys.

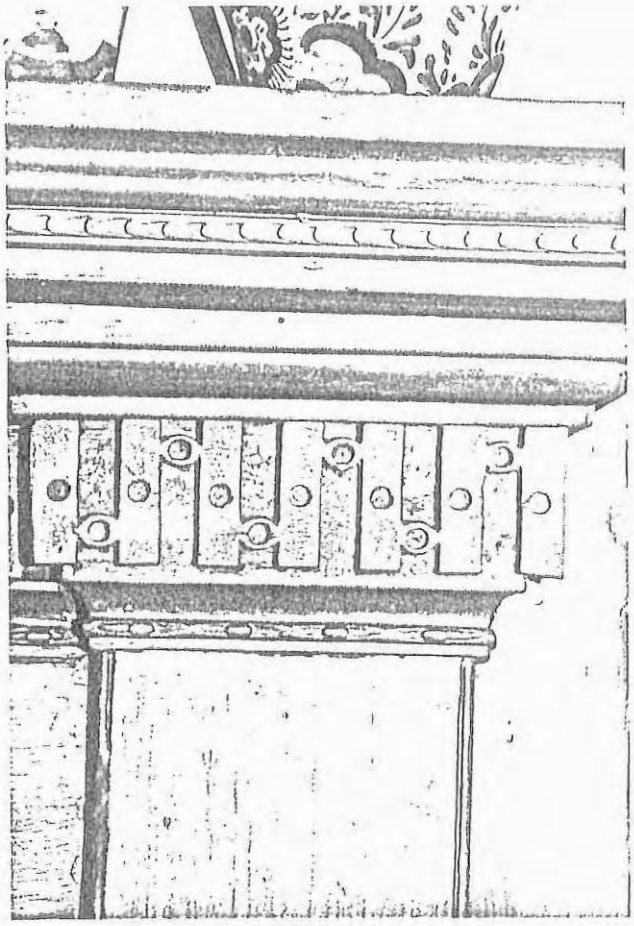
originally in a separate building and was added to the house after it was completed. The remains of a bolt on the inside of the door frame at the rear of the passage, which would have been the original end of the house, supports this thesis. The bolt, however, might also have been used to create a locked barrier between the kitchen/service wing and the main house, which raises an entire different set of questions about concepts of household security and the nature of class relationships in the Federal period.

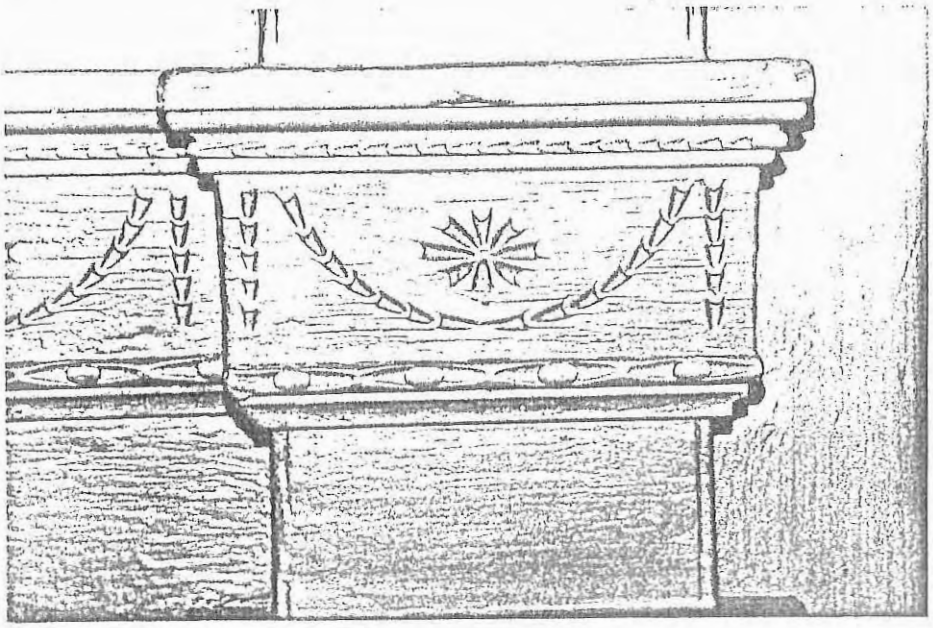
The second floor plan differs slightly from the first floor, in that the front room extends the full width of the house. This room is the largest in the house, and exhibits a level of finish second only to the parlor below it. It has an equally impressive mantlepiece, decorated with a swag and tassel band and a tablet (Fig. 21-23). The chair rail, however, is identical to the less formal example found in the rear parlor. As in the first floor parlor, there are built-in chimney cupboards, which are now enclosed in later closets.

This room, with its three windows across the front of the house, has a commanding view of the green and sidewalks below (Fig. 24). Historian Peter Borsay has identified these outdoor social spaces as important features of the urbanizing process in English provincial towns:

> ". . .the fashionable square. . .made its first appearance in the provinces in the early decades of the eighteenth century. It was social architecture par excellance; not only did it house people in similar houses, but it also







Figs. 21, 22, 23. Mantlepiece, front room on second floor.

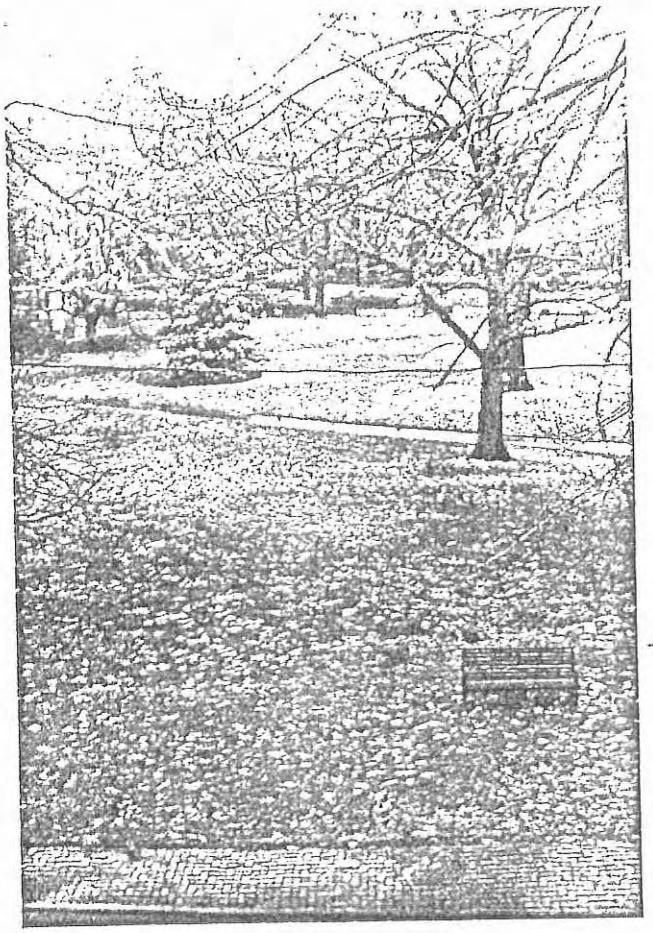


Fig. 24. View of green from windows of front room on second floor.

provided an arena. . .in which they could socialize."[26] From the vantage point of this second floor perch, members of John Wiley's household could participate in the social interactions of the town to any extent they wished, observing unobserved the comings and goings below.

The size and formality of this room suggests that its primary function was not for sleeping. It was probably an upstairs sitting room, where guests would have been received and entertained. The side-passage plan would have enabled the family to maintain privacy when admitting guests into the house: the passage would have facilitated their access, but by closing doors, the family could at the same time control and limit that access.

The room behind this is more clearly a chamber. It was possibly where John and Olivia Wiley slept (unless they used the front room as their chamber), since the decorative details in the mantlepiece imply a higher grade of importance than in the chambers on the third floor (Fig. 25). Closets have been added to this room, on either side of the chimney, but grooves remain inside the closets from shelves that were possibly original. The windows in this room overlook the alley and kitchen door, and would have allowed the occupants to monitor another level of household activity (Fig. 26).

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[26] Peter Borsay, "The English Urban Renaissance: The Development of Provincial Town Culture, c. 1680-1760," Social History, 5 (May 1977), 590.

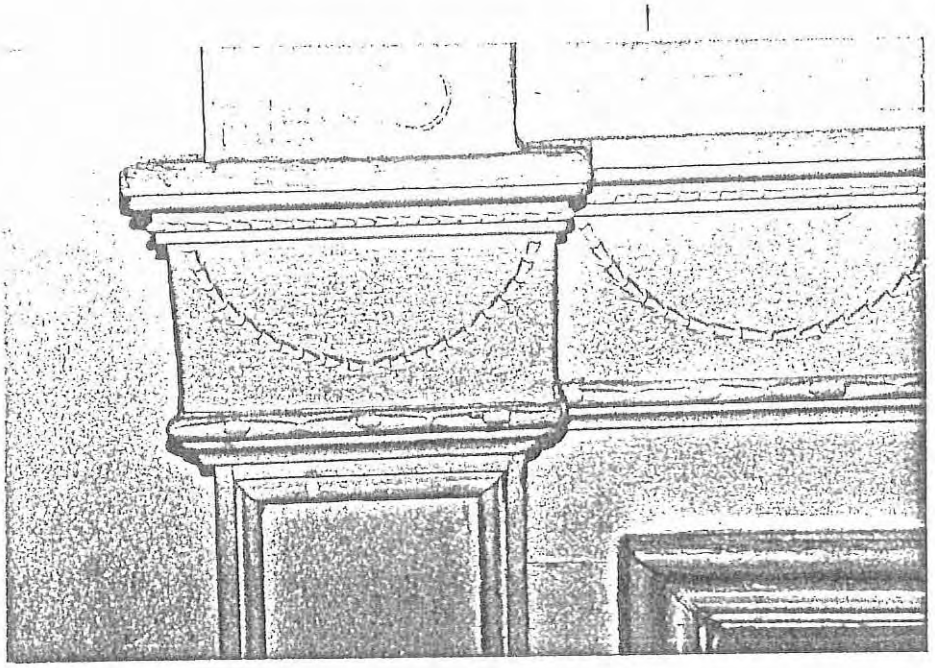

Fig. 25. Mantlepiece detail, rear chamber on second floor.

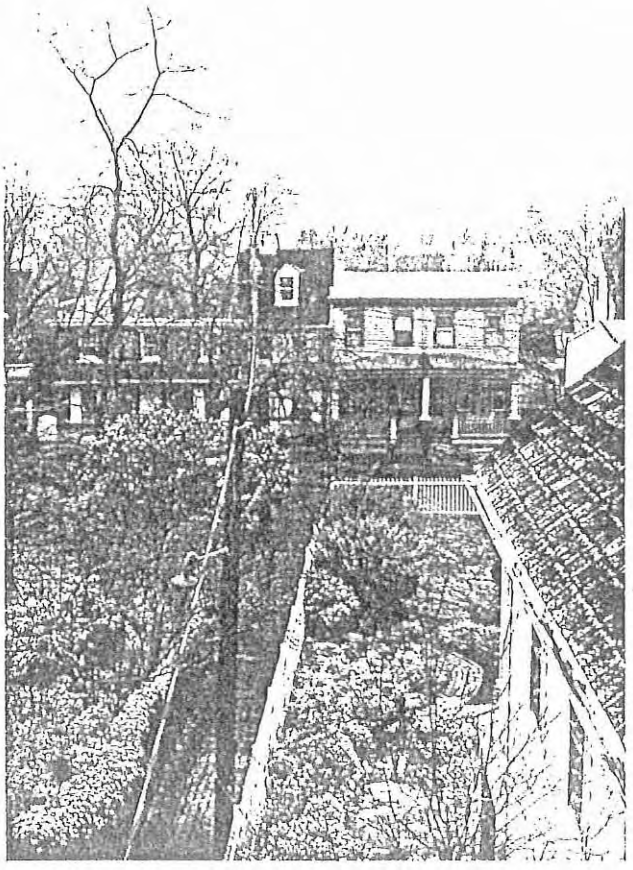

Fig. 26. View from rear chamber on second floor.

The front of the third floor has been divided into two chambers, one the width of the passage (and now a bathroom), and one the width of the first floor parlor. On this floor, as on the first two, the level of decoration recedes from the front of the house to the back. There is no punch-and-gouge work on the mantles of the third floor rooms, only simple classical moldings (Fig. 27).The mantle of the front room, however, is still an architectural form, supported by pilasters, while the mantle in the rear chamber has been reduced to a simple applied shelf, with a band of molding surrounding the chimney opening, as in the kitchen (Fig. 28). The chair rails, as well are highly simplified in comparison with that found in the first floor front parlor (Fig. 29). There are no built-in cupboards in these rooms. Clothing and personal accessories would have been stored in chests, trunks, and toilet or work tables.

An early lock on the door into the front chamber provides further evidence about notions of privacy in this house (Fig. 30). Although it is unknown where this door was originally located (it was found in the attic), it fits this room in size, and style.[27] There is evidence of a lock on the inside of every door in the house leading into the passage (except, as mentioned previously, the kitchen door). Many of these locks are not original and it is impossible to identify which rooms originally had locks, but the existence of an original lock on the door of a less important suggests to me that the ability to lock would have

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[27] Mrs. Robert Appleby, interview by author, New Castle, Delaware, 7 November 1988.

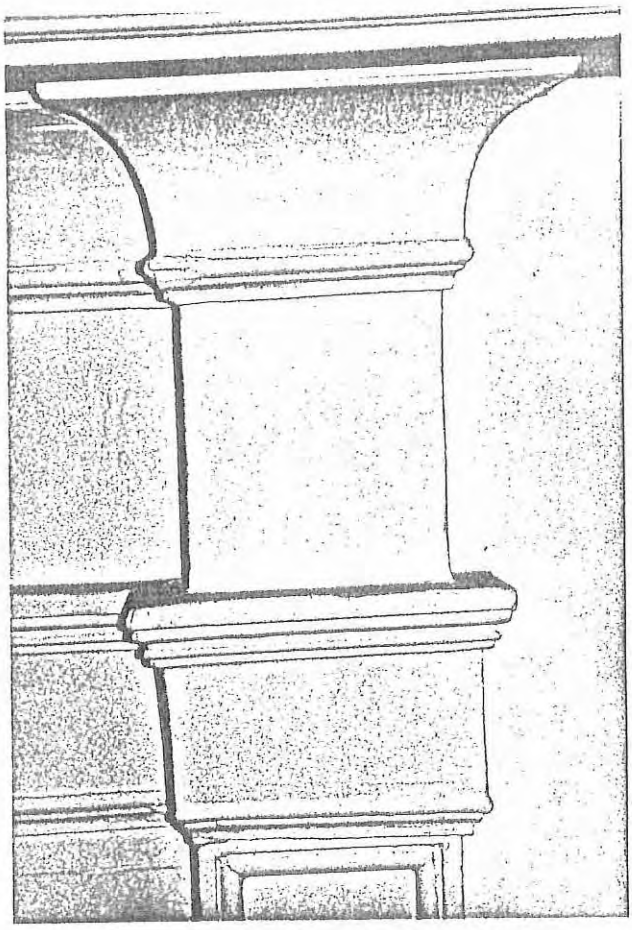

Fig. 27. Mantlepiece detail, front chamber, third floor.

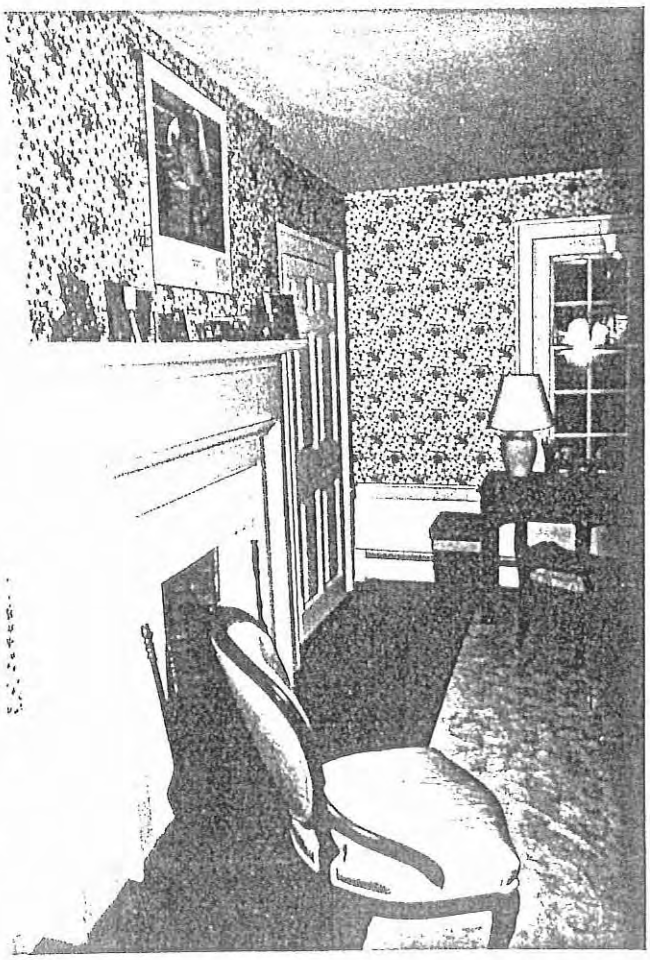

Fig. 28. Mantlepiece, rear chamber, third floor.

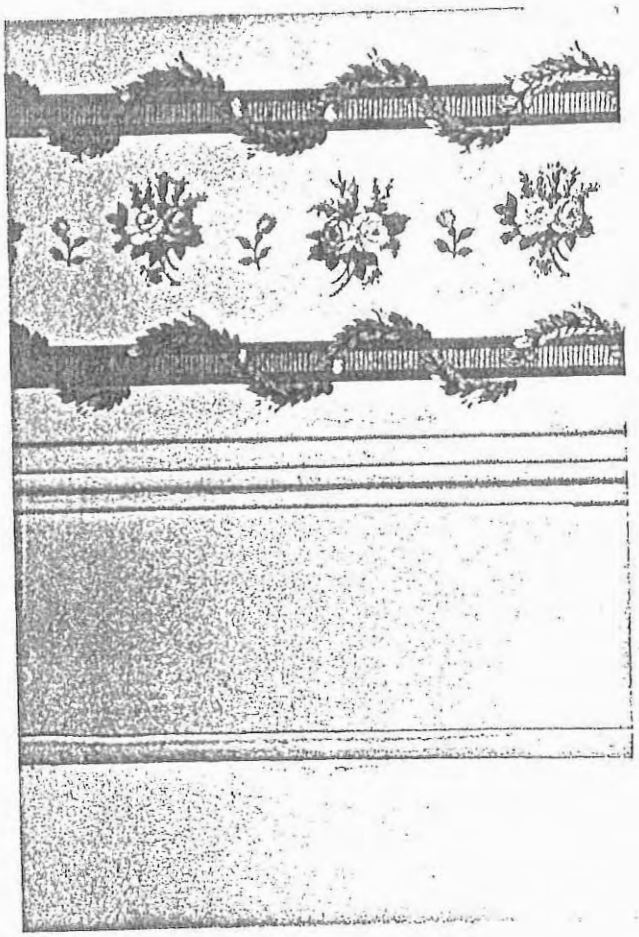

Fig. 29. Chair rail, front chamber third floor.

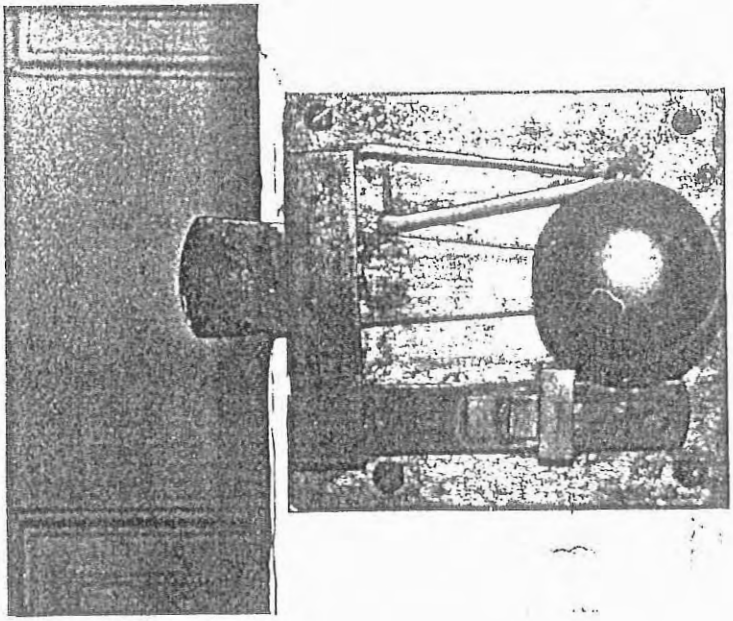

Fig. 30. Lock in front chamber, third floor.

permeated the more important rooms.

The stair winds up to the fourth floor, maintaining the same visual appearance as on the first floor. It was obviously conceived as a comprehensive entity, and not segmented in importance by floor. The passages too, are part of that comprehensive whole: the motif of the dark, contrasting chair rail, and its supporting classical pilasters persists through the entire house, providing a sense of continuity over all four stories of height. The level of finish in the fourth floor chambers, however, drops significantly. The two front chambers have no moldings except along the edge of the dormer. There, however, the molding has been enhanced by a bead rather than left plain. Although these rooms are currently used for storage, there is evidence of other use in the larger front chamber. The floor has been painted around the edge, which indicates that at some time the room was furnished with a rug or oilcloth. Whether this room was used by a family member or a servant is not known; the only heat source would have been from the chimney masonry--there are no fireplaces in any of these rooms. In John Wiley's occupancy period, the room would not have been required to accommodate his family. He had three daughters, all of whom could have slept on the third floor. The only other known occupants were slaves: in 1813, he had three slaves, and in 1816, four.[28] The slaves might all have lived in the room over

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[28] Delaware State Archives, New Castle County tax assessments, 1813, 1816.

the kitchen, or, some of them might have occupied this top floor. It is also possible that there might have been additional quarters in a separate building at the rear of the house. There may have been a structure there to house the horses and cattle Wiley is known to have owned, but there was no record of any additional structures in any of his tax assessments.

In 1811, John Wiley mortgaged his brick house, as well as that of his mother, to Edward Tatnall for $4000. The significance of this structure for him can be viewed, therefore, not only as an aspect of his social strategy, but also as an economic strategy. When he died in 1842, he had not yet paid off the mortgage. The house was assigned by the Court to James Garland, who acquired property and sold it to Jeremiah Bowman. Bowman died intestate in 1849 and in 1902, William Myers, his great-grandson bought the house from his estate for $1000.[29]

The intersection of Jeremiah Bowman and John Wiley provides a pretext for thinking of this house not just as a social emblem for Wiley, but as part of the broader fabric of the community of Third Street. Wiley and Bowman were both part of an larger group of men who were actively transforming their social and economic aspirations into tangible form by buying, selling, and developing property and houses on Third Street. This group included Kensey John, who lived on the corner of Third and Delaware, but who also owned number 8 Third at one time; Nicholas Van Dyke, who lived on Delaware, across from Kensey Johns, who had owned numbers 8, 10,

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[29] Summary of title search, 3.

and 12, and who sold 10 and 12 to carpenter/builders Jacob Colesberry and Jeremiah Bowman. Bowman had also owned lot number 8, which he sold to Ann Silsbee Miller (daughter of bricklayer Nathaniel Silsbee, who had sold to Robert Wiley, and granddaughter of carpenter Samuel Silsbee). Her house was allegedly built by Christian Zimmerman, "a master carpenter of the day," who also owned number 12, where he lived until 1816, when his house was purchased by George Read III. John Sturgis, another neighbor, was living to the north of the Wileys in 1800, according to the census; by 1804, he had purchased a house that was south of John Wiley on the block.

No doubt, a more systematic survey would reveal even more interconnections between this group of neighbors, but these details seem sufficient to suggest that John Wiley's house was shaped by and an integral part of the economic and social nexus of New Castle's élite. In his discussion of American "high-style" culture, Richard Bushman has speculated that middle-class strategies for gentility included "personal refinement," "the assemblage of cultivated persons into select companies," which might be interpreted as neighborhoods or community groups, and "the preparation of environments fitting for such assemblies," environments such as Third Street, with its elegant houses, sidewalks, green, and other accoutrements of social interaction.[30] The world of John Wiley seems to be in accordance

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[30] Richard Bushman, "American High-Style and Vernacular Cultures," in Colonial British America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 358.

with this interpretation. His house, no doubt its furnishings, and his systems of social interaction, seem to have been part of a larger pattern of social control and adherence to an emerging nineteenth century power structure.

WILEY - MYERS SITE NO. 18 & NO. 20

THIRD STREET, NEW CASTLE

BRIEF SUMMARY OF SEARCH

(No grants on the west side of the Green for Third Street in the Dutch Period. The Green Extended to Fourth Street until the English came in 1664. The first surviving record of lots being granted on Third Street opposite the Green is of 1671, when Governor Lovelace confirmed Jean Paul Jacquet in the possession of a lot on the approximate site of the Old Dutch House, Deed Book A-1-17, 1671, next to "Harmon Reynersen", who had the plot to the north at that date.)

First record of ownership of land, including the Wiley - Myers site, is a court case and survey for Ambrose Backer, 1681 - 1682, who owned at that time most of the block--343 feet from Wood Street (Delaware) to the site of the Dutch House. Backer had a house at the site of the Booker house, but facing on Delaware Street, probably the back building of the present Booker house. He said he had bought the land from several persons (New Castle Court Records II, pg. 8). These persons were probably those to whom the English granted lots after 1664, but of which no records survive. So to date, Ambrose Backer is still the first known owner. Ambrose Backer was Dutch and may have been a son of Jacob Backer of the Dutch period, but

Ambrose does not appear in the surviving New Castle County records until 1675, eleven years after the English came and the site of his home at that time is not known, but could have been the same house in which he lived in 1682 at the site of the back building mentioned above.

In 1693 Ambrose Backer sold to Martin Martinson of New Castle a plot between Third and Fourth Streets, measuring 172 feet deep and along Third Street 120 feet, beginning at the north line of the present Rodney house, No. 16. Martinson sold the north 60 feet of his 120-foot lot to John Calvert, but kept the 60 feet that became the Wiley - Myers site. This latter plot came into possession of Adam Hay, Sr., a relative of Ambrose Backer's wife, about 1700. (Hay is so written in copy of his signature. The y was probably ij, pronounced "eye" in Dutch, so English clerks wrote it in various ways from sound or inability to read the elaborate Dutch script--Hyke, Iky, and even Atkey.) Adam Hay, Sr. died 1710. His son Adam Hay, Jr., sold the plot as "house and lot" that had been owned by his father. This house was on the site of No. 20 and if the back part of the present house is the original, then it dated before 1710. This sale by Adam Hay, Jr., in 1765 was to Nathaniel Silsbie, bricklayer, who lived on Fourth Street just north of the present Amstel house. On the south side of his 60-foot plot, Nathaniel Silsbie laid off a 6-foot strip between Third and Fourth Streets, and when he left this property to his son by his will of 1769 (proved 1772), he provided that the 6-foot alley should be kept open as a public right of way forever.

The house , No. 20 frame, and the lot , thus restricted, were left to his son Doctor Nathaniel Silsbie. In 1779, when Dr. Silsbie was living in St. Georges Hundred, he sold this property to Robert Wiley, blacksmith, of New Castle.

Robert Wiley died intestate 1789, leaving a widow, Elizabeth, and seven children, the oldest of whom was John. In 1801 the Orphans Court approved the sale of Robert Wiley's properties in New Castle for $1,000, the one on Third Street with the frame house No. 20 and one on the Strand, east side, to John Wiley on condition that he pay the heirs their shares--his mother's dower rights to remain. After her death, her third share to go to the heirs, also.

It is indicated from the records that John Wiley built the three-story brick house No. 18 and that his mother owned, during her lifetime, the frame house No. 20. In 1811 John Wiley gave a mortgage on his brick house and a lot 25 feet wide on Third Street, extending back to Fourth Street, to Edward Tatnall for $4,000. This mortgage deed is the first indication of division between the property No. 18 and the property No. 20.

John Wiley died before he had paid the full mortgage and the property No. 18 was assigned by the Courts to an assignee of the executors of the Tatnall estate, James Garland, who paid mortgage balance and costs and acquired the property in fee in 1843. He sold it that year to Jeremiah Bowman, who died intestate in 1849. The estate of Jeremiah Bowman was not divided or settled until 1902, when William E. Myers, great-grandson of Jeremiah, petitioned the

Orphans Court for division. That not being possible, the Court ordered a sale at which William E. Myers bought No. 18 for $1,000 in 1902.