

Ornament and Economy:  
Case Study of a House on Front Street, New Castle, DE  
27 The Strand

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The 1804 Latrobe Survey of New Castle, Delaware illustrates a commercial and residential waterfront on the east bank north of Delaware Street and south of Chestnut Street. The map indicates several continuous wharves on the stretch of land east of Harmony and Chestnut Streets connecting to Front Street by way of a large warehouse and a smaller building labeled “Bond’s Store.”<sup>1</sup> In 1818, local merchant and New Castle Trustee, James McCullough, Sr. purchases wharf, store, and warehouse from the international import business owned by Bond, of Bond and Lees. In the same year, the house across Front Street is also purchased by McCullough, just a couple of lots away from the Read House, positioning his civic, commercial, and social status at the foreground of New Castle’s nineteenth-century elite (Fig. 10). An illustrated map produced in the mid-twentieth century, rendered from an aerial view that faces the waterfront, envisions The Strand as the locus point of the small borough of New Castle (Fig. 1). By the time the fire in April 1824 destroys much of these properties on Front Street, the commercial and residential properties had been passed to son James McCullough, Jr. As a civic leader in the community, McCullough meets the immediate needs imposed upon him and the greater good of New Castle in the face of the devastating conflagration. He responds by erecting a row of four contiguous town houses within months of the fire so to quickly restore order (Fig. 2). Records indicate that much of the post-fire housing on Front Street serve as “emergency housing,” according to

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<sup>1</sup> Thanks to Bruce Dalleo for allowing me to view the Latrobe Survey Map, 1804, housed at the New Castle Historical Society, New Castle, DE, and for her helpful ideas for this paper.

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Robert Frank Brown's research on the subject.<sup>2</sup> Nearly twenty-five families are left homeless and much of the waterfront activity is temporarily paralyzed. Rebuilding his own home directly overlooking the row, the properties become prudent investments that will produce revenue from rent and sale for the financially weakened McCullough. Why McCullough would build in such haste a number of residential properties onto what was prime commercial real-estate can be answered through an examination of the burgeoning economic and social difficulties endured by local merchants in the three decades leading up to the fire.

This paper will explore these questions in tandem with an inquiry of the architectural decisions employed by the undertaker of the house that now stands at 27 The Strand.<sup>3</sup> The floor plans of the original structure will be used to help decipher *why* the house was built and for whom it was intended. Other floor plans of this period and region will be considered for a comparative analysis for examining these questions.

The current house exhibits a fair amount of evidence that is able to disclose the way the building had originally been constructed in 1824. Protruding seams embedded within the plastered walls serve as evidence for original partitioning found on the ground floor (Fig. 3 and Fig. 4). The second floor however presents another challenge as far as some original partitioning. Although there is no evidence for an enclosed lobby at the stair landing, there are at least two alternatives to be considered for how this space might have been enclosed enabling two separate private chambers with individual access to each (see App 1, Second Floor Plan and Second Floor Alternative Plan). Nevertheless, all

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<sup>2</sup> See more on a detailed history of Front Street in Brown, Robert Frank. "Front Street, New Castle, Delaware: Architecture and Building Practices: 1687-1859." M.A. Thesis, University of Delaware, 1961.

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of the finish is largely untainted, and the cellar is fully intact. Though I will not be searching for intrinsic or essential meanings in either style or form, I will hope that both of these features will suggest and inform a larger system of social interaction compromised by the conditions of an economy. The format and style executed by architect for client should not be taken as emblematic of a certain standard for house-building in New Castle after the fire of 1824, rather I hope that this inquiry gives rise to an understanding of the architectural compromises reflected by the local economic vagaries and social uncertainties.

The 1860 deed granting the sale to the widow, Fidelia Stockton, daughter of Kensey Johns, Sr., from James Crippen mentions in a selection of text the right to collect profit through rent.<sup>4</sup> Fidelia Stockton, listed as “grantee” in the New Castle County Indirect Deed Index is likely the owner and occupant of the house. James Crippen, also, may not have opted to rent the house from the time he bought it in 1848 from William B. Janvier until the time of its sale to Stockton in 1860. Janvier, on the other hand, buys it in 1847 from a sheriff sale along with the properties on both sides, #29 to the left and #25, the dry goods store on the right, which Crippen eventually purchases adjacent to his own house, #27. The sheriff sale of 1847 is the result of the foreclosure of all of McCullough’s properties, including the entire row built after the fire, #27 through #33. Janvier’s sale, then resale, within two years illustrates the feverish real-estate market in New Castle. A list compiled from records from the Indirect Deed Index reveals Janvier’s buying activity

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<sup>3</sup> Thanks to current—and new owners—Martina Kelly and Jeff Davison for entry into their home to research this project and for their insight into architectural features, which led to the transformation of this paper.

<sup>4</sup> For full transcription of Deed and photocopy of original Deed, see Appendix I. Note that some words and phrases are not completed due to illegibility and poor reproduction quality from microfilm and the handwritten script.

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within a thirty-four year period. It is notable, however, that Janvier purchases six houses within an eight-year period, and three within a two-year period, two of which are acquired at sheriff sales. It is likely then, in light of this activity, that not all of these properties were intended for the owner's residence. Because Janvier owns the lot that is sold to Crippen at #27 within a year after its purchase and because Janvier simultaneously owns a number of houses, it can be inferred that #27 would not be a choice for his own residence. During the one-year period of ownership, the house was probably rented out either for single or multiple tenants.<sup>5</sup>

The willingness of real-estate investment exemplified by Janvier might be explained by the nineteenth-century idea of the free market. The idea that the land guides the "invisible hand" dominated the eighteenth-century conception of capitalist gain, as described by economic historian Fred Harrison. Harrison's analysis of Adam Smith's *The Wealth of Nations*, written in 1776, criticizes Smith's interpretation of the role of the landlord. To Smith, the landlord was the chief source for achieving prosperity for all members of a nation within a capitalist system. Because rents could create a surplus for the property owner without labor, the landlord could then pursue personal aims outside of the labor market. Harrison points out that the opposite is true: the landlord isolates himself from the competitive market in the creation of a monopoly. While, according to Smith, the "invisible hand" of the market would benefit everyone, instead, the monopoly created from unrestricted property rights ultimately inhibits economic growth. This model is consonant to the real-estate trends of the local merchants in New Castle, DE at

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<sup>5</sup> See list of buying activity compiled from the New Castle Recorder of Deeds Indirect Deed Index in Appendix I. One table illustrates the buying activity of William B. Janvier and the other, the buying activity of James Crippen. James McCullough's absence from the Indirect Deed Index may indicate that these were the only speculative houses he owned and had not been sold until his foreclosure by the Sheriff in 1847.

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the beginning and middle of the nineteenth century as they face a waning economy. The safe investment and promise of labor-free profit accrual through rent-collection coupled with the expected appreciation in market-value might appeal to businessmen who had already witnessed setbacks from the competitive mercantile trade business.<sup>6</sup>

Histories of New Castle characterize the period after 1808 through a number of disappointments including the loss of the county seat; the building of the Wilmington Bridge, which begins to redirect foreign and local trade to Wilmington; the infiltration of mud on the harbor; and the disappearance of foreign trade, usurped by the recent elevated status of ports in New York, Philadelphia, and Wilmington. The ensuing economic conditions reach an almost crisis by the time of the fire in 1824, and the *Delaware Gazette* newspaper confirms the loss, reporting that, “little is to be seen but tottering walls and solitary chimneys, and this section of the place, which was the theatre of business is now abandoned, and left a solitary heap of ruin and desolation.” Once the principal economic base of New Castle, the foreign import business starts to lose its foundation precipitated by the relinquishment to larger-scale city harbors followed by a number of local calamities, gradually demote New Castle to a town incapable of the kind of optimism needed to rekindle an economy.<sup>7</sup> It is easy to image why a real-estate trend would be adopted in the midst of economic stagnation as a means to stimulate growth, and why, according to patterns in economic history, these might *not* work.

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<sup>6</sup> Harrison delineates a near direct correlation between the peak in land values and economic recessions from the early nineteenth-century to the early twentieth-century. The recession period usually follows one or two years after the peak in land values. See Harrison, Fred. *The Power in the Land: An Inquiry into Unemployment, the Profits Crisis and Land Speculation*. New York: Universe Books, 1983.

<sup>7</sup> See Constance Cooper’s dissertation for a detailed economic and social history of New Castle, DE. Cooper, Constance J. “A Town Among Cities: New Castle, Delaware: 1780-1840.” Ph.D. Diss., University of Delaware, 1983.

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A parallel evolution of expeditious-speculation building contributed to the growth of capital in Philadelphia as noted by Donna Rilling in *Making Houses, Crafting Capitalism*.<sup>8</sup> These early nineteenth-century speculators in Philadelphia, a few of them chronicled in Rilling's text, motivated by "accumulation, mobility, and survival" (54) provided an impetus for increasing infrastructure. The conditions set forth from the speculators systematically produced new industries for organizing the deployment of building materials, widening the labor market for house-carpenters and artisans, and inaugurating legislation to regulate the new, large-scale development. On the downside, Rilling maintains that some speculative projects based on the effects of a soaring market, for instance, would condone speculation without credit. Elizabeth Blackmar describes in *Manhattan for Rent* that New York City, under separate economic conditions, suffered a crisis due to similar market speculations, which instigated a housing crisis in the 1830s, coinciding with the housing boom in Philadelphia.<sup>9</sup> Crisis and triumph in the real-estate enterprises of the nineteenth-century shaped the capitalist economy for better or worse. Rilling's text highlights the visual landscape modified by the compromises of speculation; the landscape is rendered by the irregular circumstances of the economic climate.

The post-fire house that stands at #27 The Strand, built for McCullough Jr., is not listed in the New Castle County Indirect Deed Index until it is sold on foreclosure by Sheriff George Platt to William B. Janvier in 1847. From these records, McCullough is the sole owner of the entire row of four from the time of its construction in 1824 until

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<sup>8</sup> Rilling, Donna J. *Making Houses, Crafting Capitalism: Builders in Philadelphia 1790-1850*. Philadelphia : University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001.

<sup>9</sup> Blackmar, Elizabeth. *Manhattan for Rent*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989.

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1847 when each are sold off in the sheriff sale. McCullough resides in a slightly grander home across from the row.

30 The Strand, McCullough's residence, erected soon after the fire of 1824, resembles, but does not conform to the speculative row across the street. McCullough's residence, three bays wide and two and a half storeys, employs an L-shape ground floor plan with stair and kitchen set in back of the parlor rooms but remaining on the principal floor. This format contrasts to the two-room deep, vertical access format employed in the speculation houses, which is the source of interpretation for this paper. Since there is the same client and presumably the same undertaker and set of contractors, certain assumptions can be made regarding the decisions shaping the speculative row. This L-shape format favored by clients such as McCullough and others of his stature in this period in New Castle, can be compared to the vertical hierarchy of rooms such as this speculative house as well as found in other more prominent residences. This type of comparison furnishes a richer comparison that denotes not just an "inferior-superior" paradigm such as McCullough's Row v. McCullough's Residence; rather it helps elucidate the fact that many more variables contributed to the building of the speculative row.

Other speculative projects, for example, the ones of Robert Mills in early nineteenth-century Philadelphia relied not solely on economic factors for construction but also on aesthetic values. Mills' Franklin Row on South Ninth Street in Philadelphia, like McCullough's Row in New Castle, is composed of a unified row, each unit asserting an individual component to create a rhythmic whole. The composition engages a "grand motif," which alternates on each façade slightly in every unit. Instead of replicating each

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façade to simply duplicate each unit, a more aesthetically pleasing view is assembled.<sup>10</sup> Mills' technique consisting of varying architectural ornament is comparative to McCullough's Row's through the idiosyncratic placement of front doors. A slightly irregular pattern can be seen on McCullough's Row, where some front door entrances are juxtaposed and others sit at opposite ends. This composition as well might be read as individual units that express themselves as unified though not identical. While a pressing economic condition guides the construction at large, aesthetic considerations are still paramount and to be read accordingly.

Although no primary source material was able to provide names, status, or occupations of the tenants during the years while McCullough was landlord, the house offers several clues that sketch a profile of the occupants the house was intended for, and how these living spaces were imagined. Based on the special social and economic conditions of New Castle in 1824 so far discussed in this paper and the location in which it is situated in New Castle, the question of style and format employed by architect for client gives recourse to the way the house can be interpreted.

The house is side-gabled, two-and-a-half storeys and two-bays in width, crested with two dormer windows, front and back (Fig. 9). The façade is not extraordinary by any means. A decorative fanlight crowns the front door, elevated by a stoop entrance. Classical trim adorns all three shuttered windows. This type is standard throughout New Castle and Philadelphia from the late eighteenth century into the early nineteenth century. A person entering from the street approaches an enclosed corridor with a side and rear entrance to a front-heated room parlor or to a heated, rear-dining room, respectively. The

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<sup>10</sup> A complete discussion on Franklin Row and other speculation rows in Philadelphia can be found in

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winder stair is situated on the north, center wall within the rear room. Ascending to the second floor leads into an enclosed space that was either in the form of a square lobby area or a corridor. In either case, the landing area bifurcates the space into two private, separate and almost equal square-shaped, heated rooms. The winder stair vertically aligns access from the garret space through to the two principal floors and directly below to a service or cellar area (see App I of floor plans). Ground and first floor access areas are concealed by enclosures in both cases. The garrets or attics on both sides of the stair are eclipsed by the closed spaces of the dormer windows (Fig. 22 and 23). An original heating-grate and crawl space remain in the attic found on the east-end or riverside of the house (Fig. 14). At the other end, the stair descends directly into a small cellar, opening to a cooking oven at the immediate left (Fig. 16). A smaller room to the right and behind the stair facing Front Street is also where the house's relieving arch is located (Fig. 16). A small service window for deliveries also discreetly illuminates (and ventilates) this smaller space on the street side, which is separate from the cooking room (Fig. 19). Perhaps used for food storage and food preparation, it may also have been suitable for a servant's living quarters if necessary. Accessible directly to a stair and dining area, a servant may be both available for services and subtly more obscured from sight in this location as opposed to the attic, where more movement throughout the principal floors might provoke greater disturbance.

A. F. Kelsall provides a theory for the location of the side, center stair. Kelsall explains that this location of stair is pervasive in post-fire London of the mid- to late-seventeenth century. His explanation points to the economic variables that might adhere

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Ames, Kenneth. "Robert Mills and the Philadelphia Row House," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 27 (1968), pp. 140-147.

to this kind of format. Rather than building a rear stair separate and coterminous to the core of the house, a more standard format employed before the fire, the stair is instead integrated within the rooms, yet at a cost that compromises the polite spaces of the house. The decision to integrate the stair cuts down cost of the materials and labor for the consideration of efficiency. An alternative model for the rectangular plan employed after the fire is the center-stair format, favored by larger houses of the period. Although this has the same elements of efficiency inherent in a rectangular plan, the format requires an already much larger dimensional width in which to accommodate the spatial restrictions encumbered by the central stair. Side stairs almost invariably dominate in the town houses where efficiency is a critical agency, but it should be emphasized that partitioning is the chief signifier for conferring social status. The more strategic the partitioning adheres to constructing private spaces, the more preferable the design.<sup>11</sup>

The theory of efficiency can certainly be applied to the houses of New Castle built in a hurry after the fire on Front Street. A rectangular, as opposed to an L-shaped format may signify efficiency through simplicity in construction and materials. The position of the side stair in this case, cuts into a formal space, minimizing the restricted spaces and freeing up the amount of open space.

If efficiency is a lens in which to read the house, then the winder stair is also indicative of how the house was arranged for economic compromises. The perpendicular alignment of the stair from top to bottom creates an unimpeded processional space

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<sup>11</sup> See Kelsall's article on post-fire housing in London in Kelsall, A. F. "The London House Plan in the Later Seventeenth Century," *Post Medieval Archaeology*, (1974) 8, pp. 80-91. Also for more comprehensive analysis on the placement of the stair and chimney, Guillery and Guillery and Herman sources were used (see Bibliography attached). Significance of the location of the stair varied in each interpretation, but the Kelsall article served as most enlightening for this paper. The Pevsner London series

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constrained to the north-side wall. Since efficiency is the motive for directing vertical movement within the house, then all points of access to the stair area should also be able to flow with the same kind of efficiency. The streamlined flow is maintained chiefly through corridors. Corridor partitioning is another feature of the house's efficiency, but the distinctions made here between the economic compromises for the location of the stair differs from the compromises made for the partitioning of space. These kinds of issues must address questions of function and sociability implicit in the structure.

Movement and flow within a house are practical concerns dependent on economy, function, and sociability. However, in order for the movement and function to be interpreted, it is necessary to examine how ornament functions as their signifier. As stated in the introduction of this paper, the house in its current state has preserved what can be assumed is most of, or nearly all of the original ornamental finish. There are five locations in the interior of the house where ornament occurs: the fireplace entablatures with flanking columns of the four principal rooms, which are, front and back on the ground and first floors, and the free-standing mantel over the service fireplace in the cellar.

The style chosen to ornament this house is what comes to be known as Greek Revival. A number of publications in the form of manuals that give instruction to the self-taught carpenter and artisan are widely circulated roughly contemporary to this house. The manuals dictate Grecian forms and Orders, give instruction of their assembly, and prescribe utility for their uses in buildings, institutions, and houses.<sup>12</sup> The widespread

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offered less assistance for descriptions of architectural features of townhouses than it did descriptions of ornament, especially classical.

<sup>12</sup> I only looked at Asher Benjamin's manuals for the house-builder. The book listed in the bibliography is his 1830 Greek Revival manual. Benjamin shifts his tastes in this year toward Greek Revival. Significantly,

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dissemination of Greek discourse forged a shared vocabulary amongst builders, artisans, and their clients. Although considered an academic practice, the clear, concise language in the manuals equipped the artisan with skills that were easily accessible. The Greek style is distinguished by bold and simple form. Sturdy, fluted columns and unobtrusive cornices identify the prevailing architectural style. In contrast, the classical, neo-classical, and Palladian styles suggest hybridity and variation. The taste for this purer, unadulterated style of Greek form emerges in the U.S. in the early 1820s, reaching its apex in the 1830s, and then decline in the 1840s and fifties. Greek forms supplanted the more ornate style that defined the earlier mode of Neoclassicism. Mark Reinberger's text describes the rise of fine-crafted compositional ornament in terms of the business practices of designer Robert Wellford. Wellford's ability to self-promote and appeal to an elite clientele helped the style flourish among eighteenth-century and early-nineteenth century bourgeois homes in the mid-Atlantic and Southern regions, which included a commission for George Read II of New Castle. The Wellford composition, defined by delicacy, detail, and garnish, sometimes using allegorical themes and flowery, vegetal motifs, is described by the author as more feminine compared to the Greek Revival's more "masculine" style. The complexity in this workmanship requires a special type of training in order for it to thrive. Although Wellford's success was based on his promise to make things affordable to the client, the type of skill required for the complexity of design work was consigned to a limited market.<sup>13</sup> In contrast, the Greek Revival that follows, requires far less skill on behalf of the artisan. For instance, seams in the molding

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this is published several years after the years we see Greek Revival ornament flourish in New Castle. It is also possible that the ornament was added later; however, it was customary to ornament with something at construction, so the Greek Revival in New Castle, DE may be an early emergence of the style.

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of the mantels at 27 The Strand as well as the repetitive occurrence of paterae throughout the house, New Castle houses, and public spaces of the period might suggest that the molds themselves may have been mass-produced.

Various architectural historians have explained that the reason why the Greek Revival proliferates in America comes out of the need to standardize. The political climate of the early nineteenth century looked for a means in visual culture for asserting conformity. The bold, imposing, and recognizable forms proffered a common language, or more accurately, as emphasized in the Herman and Guillery article addressing these issues, the language expressed in the form itself signified the *knowledge* of classicism.<sup>14</sup> The style fast became a cultural emblem by the simple ways it could be reproduced. As it appears in the interiors of town houses such as the ones erected in the 1820s and 1830s in New Castle, the style resonates with a stately and institutional language. The ornament becomes an idiom for what the Greek stands for: order, restraint, and conformity. The recognizable motifs invoke its subjects through a polite, visual language. If the form is able to invoke cultural values, *per se*, and that is *not* to say that the form *itself* essentially is replete with these values, rather they are a set of symbols for generating a standard, it can be read as a *system* rather than a symbol. In the case of houses in New Castle in general, this house in particular, the system of ornamentation can assist in designating function in rooms and direction of movement. The system implicit in the structure, which

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<sup>13</sup> See Reinberger, Mark. *Utility and Beauty: Robert Wellford and Composition Ornament in America*. Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2003

<sup>14</sup> From Herman, Bernard L. and Peter Guillery. "Negotiating Classicism in Eighteenth-Century Deptford and Philadelphia" *Articulating British Classicism: New Approaches to Eighteenth-Century Architecture*, eds., Barbara Arciszewska and Elizabeth McKellar. UK: Ashgate Publishing, 2004.

directs flow and function, posits a sense of economy of the house. The house can then be read as having its own economic system.<sup>15</sup>

The system of ornamentation of the house deploys ornament in a selective, hierarchical manner. The ornament entablatures with flanking columns on the four fireplaces are identical in design (Fig. 5 through 8). The trim atop the windows of the façade also employ identical designs. Each have sharp, fluted columns reaching from floor to entablature. The entablature corners are decorated with circular paterae, or bull-eye motifs, and crowned with conservative, double-layer, cornice mantels. Three of the four fireplaces are assigned consistent dimensions found on the front room, ground floor, and front and rear room, second floor. The dimension and proportion to the room size in all three cases are the same. Each of these principal living spaces, designated by the system of ornamentation, establishes uniformity amongst the three rooms. The rear, ground floor, on the other hand, contains a smaller fireplace and storage cabinet wedged between it and the exterior, back wall (Fig. 11). On the other side of the fireplace is the winder stair. Clearly, the smaller fireplace, compromised by the storage and stair, designates the space as inferior. The central question becomes why would this system relegate a shared, yet formal space?

One way to address this problem is to examine the architectural compromises exhibited in the room of investigation. A storage cabinet and stair is needed to fit against

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<sup>15</sup> More of a literal reading of ornament and economy, for instance, when the ornament begins to *affect* the housing market in Victorian neighborhoods in Boston, Supplee and Moorehouse write: "To analyze the market response to the variety of architectural features incorporated in the row houses of the South End, we estimate hedonic price indexes for a sample of houses. This statistical technique decomposes the purchase price of a house into a vector of prices, one for each of the house's major characteristics. The estimated prices of the individual architectural features provide a measure of the market response to aesthetic design." From Supplee Smith, Margaret and John C. Moorehouse. "Architecture and the Housing Market: Nineteenth Century Row Housing in Boston's South End," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, 51 (June 1993), pp. 159-178.

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a single wall, thus, compromising the scale of the finished fireplace. It can also be deduced that the storage cabinet served not as a utilitarian component but rather as a cabinet of display. A display-cabinet function would compensate for the inferiority of the fireplace. This reading would fix a perfect hierarchical order in the house, creating a more uniform system that establishes the four rooms as *en suite*, or connecting, creating a dialogue among the four polite spaces in the house. This *en suite* format subordinates the garret and cellar spaces to service or storage areas and segregates movement away from those floors. As described, the quadrant of principal rooms functioning as *en suite* might justify a reading, which might affirm a single occupant, or nuclear family scenario. The partitioning is also consistent for this function, designating private movement and private habitation amongst members of the household and their servants.

Another, maybe more plausible explanation for this problem warrants an interpretation based on the concerns of sociability of a more complex nature, which assumes difference in private and shared space, as it would operate for a multiple tenant situation. As mentioned earlier, flow is maintained through a system of enclosed or corridor spaces. The corridor at the front entrance of the house veils the comings and goings of a second tenant from the shared-room parlor, or the “best room.” An occupant could proceed in a straight path to the stair without disturbing the social functions of the parlor area. If this system were consistent in applying a reading of private mediating spaces, then a second corridor would be added in order to shield the stair from the back room. For this, there is no evidence. If this was the case, and the architect was able to streamline and enclose all points of access from the front door to the stair, it would be at the cost of both back and front room. Instead, in this case, access from the front door

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interferes with the back room and thus it is made less private. Vertical movement is privileged over horizontal movement whereby the spaces of vertical movement are most efficient *and* most private. Movement is least impeded while moving vertically through the house as opposed to the inconsistent deployment of partitions. If partitions create privacy at the expense of, at times, a barrier that slows the movement down, then the price of privacy is exchanged for the need for a larger space.

Ground floor plans from 1830s New York City (Fig. 29 A and B and Fig. 30 C) demonstrate that a more ideal layout consistently values both efficiency and privacy. In all three examples of floor plans from New York City in addition to the floor plan of an 1804 floor plan in New Castle, DE (126 Harmony, see Fig. 31), the front entrance directly faces the rear stair. Access is provided through a corridor, making it private, but also most efficient. It is significant that in all of these examples, the chimney is never aligned within the path parallel to the entrance. Either in the case of a central stack, as in 126 Harmony Street or as it occurs on the opposite wall away from the stair and entrance, the ideal scenario seems to be to place the stack *away* from the door. Perhaps part of the reason is so that the loss of heat is minimized from the opening of the door, imperative during the colder winter months. Another explanation would be that since it is preferable to have the entrance space enclosed, there is no logic to a fireplace positioned in a space that is enclosed. The conclusion from this observation is *the chimney stack and the front door entrance are coefficients*. The door's necessity to exist in relation to the chimney is more important than its relationship to the stair. In 27 The Strand, the arbitrary placement of the stair in relation to the door signifies the *necessity of the placement of stack*. The placement of the door, as deployed in an irregular, yet aesthetically-pleasing

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arrangement, creating a unified row, may have been a decision driven by economic factors over aesthetics.

McCullough's Row, a row of four houses starting at the northeastern corner with #27 (and terminating at #33) is also adjoined to the commercial site that functioned as a dry goods store (#25). The date for this store is unknown and may or may not have been built at the same moment McCullough's Row was erected. However, because of the store's commercial status, I will exclude the consideration of the store in the following analysis.

Two problems discussed so far occur on the ground floor, which suggest irregularity. First, the inconsistency of corridor partitioning, is anomalous within the other set of floor plans examined, because of the inversion of the stair location in relation to the door. The second problem pertains to the inferior level of finish on the fireplace in the rear room adjacent to the stair. The two problems are underscored by two imperatives that involve an economic consideration: the location of the stack *determined by the amount of stacks* for the residential row and the need to accommodate multiple rooms as chambers. These imperatives condition the ground floor layout of 27 The Strand.

In the conceptual diagrams of McCullough's Row and an alternative to McCullough's Row (see App I) amplify two features: door placement and stack placement. Since the doors need to be diametrical from the stack, there are only two possible arrangements to be considered. The arrangement that is materially more economic involves only two stacks. This way, the stacks optimally are in place to hold the structure and minimize material and labor. It is not surprising that two stacks instead of three is the arrangement of construction chosen for the row. The stacks, clearly

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determined by economy, also dictate the location of the door. If the door and chimney are predetermined, then why not coincide the stair with the door, which would construe a preferable, more “ideal” format? The undertaker apparently did not make this decision, and this might be explained by the deliberate choice to optimize space by the elision of a partition. If a partition were to continue in a straight path from the front door and make private access directly to a winder stair, the room would subsequently be cut in almost a third as seen in the effect of the partition in the front room. Therefore, the stair is placed deliberately away from the front entrance making it adjustable to front-room parlor (or chamber) and back, rear-room dining room (or chamber). Similarly, the stair may be placed where it is in order to conform to other variables concerning the structural engineering of the house. The winder stair, positioned on the north wall, for instance, works in harmony in its ability to interconnect efficiently as *en suite* as well as connecting upwards to a landing in the attic. Also notable is the omission of winder stairs in the models of corridor partition leading to a rear stair. The conventional stair is more conducive to a rear location facilitating an easier and more manageable movement than a winder stair in terms of comfort (climbing in straight gradations v. climbing in a steeper, circular motion) but less efficacious in terms of economy. The winder stair seems to be the product of efficiency, even if it is added as a second stair for service in larger houses.

In terms of the placement of the stair situated on the north wall, as it does in 27 The Strand, away from the front entrance and free of partitioning, it forces a compromise in fireplace finish. The “decoding” of this house is explained partly by a hierarchy. This hierarchy is administered by the grade of finish found on the fireplace ornament. To reiterate, the grade of finish found in the rear room in comparison had been determined to

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Case Study of a House on Front Street, New Castle, Delaware  
27 The Strand

be inferior. On behalf of the limited wall space, the compromise chosen in turn diminishes the scale of the fireplace ornament. In conclusion, I believe that the choice to relegate ornament coincided with the choice to create a room that could be used for multiple functions. This larger room, though less private, yields to a trade-off to function as an extra chamber. This reading might preclude an interpretation of the front room as chamber merely because it is too small. On the contrary, it is possible that the parlor was either reserved as a shared, social space and separate from a rear, ground floor chamber or, if necessity required, an additional, more private chamber for a fourth occupant.

The sacrifice of a private access area to make way for a larger room is articulated through the inconsistencies of the layout. The fact that these distinctions seem negligible only highlights that the house was built with the intent of accommodating more than one condition. The back room, because of the direct access to the cellar, might be distinguished as a dining room under a house with more than one “household.” The dining area would be understood as a shared space whether for a single family or for individual occupants, and for this reason, the undertaker might have chosen it as the site for compromise via ornament and shared access. The compromises performed in the spaces of the house account for an economic system functioning on two levels: flexibility and exchange. The compromise of exchange, where a swapping or negotiating of one virtue for another makes the house commensurable to the standards of a genteel life, and the compromise of flexibility, similarly, allows for more than one condition, but keeps within the standards of gentility for sustenance in the community. If the reality of a multiple family scenario ever existed at 27 The Strand, it would have been at the time immediately following the fire, upon its initial construction. If one could image a family

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Case Study of a House on Front Street, New Castle, Delaware  
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taking up the space of one floor each, or one room each, the notion of privacy is almost inconceivable.<sup>16</sup> However, the renters' sensibilities, especially transient renters, would have been used to these concessions, in light of the proliferation of tenement housing and one-room house plans, which simultaneously existed in other urban centers.<sup>17</sup>

The architectural compromises and inconsistent structural patterns as described in this investigation are congruent with and regulated by the social and economic conditions on a larger scale. The four houses in McCullough's Row, as seen through the economy of this house, is paradigmatic of a type of house functioning in a broader system. The occupants were engaging in the polite society of New Castle but under compromising conditions. These conditions were determined by the recent fire, which destroyed much of the housing on the street leaving a majority homeless. As renters in a multiple or single capacity, they were part of the establishment where social conventions and traditions were carried out in the public sphere as well as within the home. In terms of the multiple-tenant scenario, the occupants would have had to comply with a set of conventions that would sustain both a private and a shared living space, where rules of sociability would need to be observed. There are traces of both of these features in the structure built after the fire. From the documents found on James Crippen, who acquires the lot in 1848, six

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<sup>16</sup> Billy G. Smith and Sharon V. Salinger take up the theme of space and social status in Philadelphia (at least peripherally). Smith writes: "Many families saved on expenses by doubling up in houses. Laborer Martin Summers and his family, for example, resided with cordwainer Henry Birkey, his spouse, and three children and divided the rent...By contrast to these conditions, wealthier citizens frequently occupied three-story brick houses of comparable width but two or three time as long, with such outbuildings as kitchens, washhouses, and stables. Many owned two-story brick kitchens of a size equal to or greater than most of the dwellings of the lower sort." (See Smith, pp. 160-1.). Salinger as well conducts a comparative study on actual square footages fluctuating among demographic groups.

<sup>17</sup> Bernard Herman's chapter on travelers and their souvenirs reveal the environment of the boarding house found in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Atlantic seaports. Architecturally resonant with the unpredictability of the traveler's lifestyle, the boarding houses, specifically, were designed to protect privacy, through, for instance, access to a back stair; however, total privacy could never be achieved. Herman writes, "[...] the etiquette of rapping at doors, the temptation for eavesdropping, and the easy familiarity obtained between lodger and landlady is all but lost to modern sensibilities."

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years after he inherits his father's estate, he and his wife, Sarah, choose the house for their residence while managing the dry goods store next door. Crippen, notably affluent by the extensive probate inventory taken at the time of his father's death, designates son James as sole beneficiary to the estate. The wealth acquired from this inheritance does not leave any question as to Crippen's own status in New Castle's economic strata.<sup>18</sup> The architectural compromises described in this paper should not be read as having low-standards. Instead, the house, modified by ornament, pronounces the way genteel life is constructed.

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<sup>18</sup> Probate and Inventory records of Silas Crippen, 1842, Microfilm no. 3087, role 23. Morris Library, U. of Delaware.

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27 The Strand

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## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX I

#### Contains:

Buyer Activity List for Janvier

Buyer Activity List for Crippen and Stockton

Transcription of Crippen-Stockton Deed

Photocopy of Crippen-Stockton Deed

Ground Floor Plan for 27 The Strand

Second Floor Plan for 27 The Strand

Alternate Second Floor for 27 The Strand

Diagram of McCullough's Row and Alternate comparing stack and door placement

### APPENDIX II

#### Contains:

Fig. 1 through Fig. 31

## APPENDIX I

**Buyer Activity in New Castle County for Janvier, Wm. B. or Janvier, William**

Listed in **Indirect Deed Index**

<u>Grantee</u>	<u>Grantor</u>	<u>Year</u>
Janvier, Wm. B.	John Janvier	1822
Janvier, Wm. B.	Philip Janvier, et. al.	1822
Janvier, Wm. B.	Caleb Darby	1833
Janvier, Wm. B.	Robert Tucker & wf.	1834
Janvier, Wm. B.	Andrew Meson	1835
Janvier, Wm. B.	Thomas Janvier & wf.	1836
Janvier, Wm. B.	Jesse Moore & wf.	1837
Janvier, Wm. B.	Robert Jackson & wf.	1840
Janvier, Wm. B.	John Moody	1842
Janvier, Wm. B.	James Bolton & wf.	1843
<b>Janvier, William</b>	<b>Petition of George Platt, Shff</b>	<b>1847*</b>
Janvier, Wm. B.	Stephen Willis & wf. et. al.	1847
Janvier, William	Petition of Isaac Grumble, Shff	1848
Janvier, Wm. B.	Ann J. Black (widow)	1852
Janvier, Wm. B.	Isaac H. Reg. & wf.	1854

\* Sheriff's sale on property of (current) 27 The Strand from James McCullough, Jr.'s properties on row on Front Street (current The Strand #27, #29, #31, & #33)

**Buyer Activity in New Castle County for Crippen, James**  
Listed in **Indirect Deed Index**

<u>Grantee</u>	<u>Grantor</u>	<u>Year</u>
<b>Crippen, James</b>	<b>Janvier, Wm. B.</b>	<b>1848*</b>
Crippen, James, et. al.	Frederick Banker & wf.	1858
Crippen, James, et. al.	Albert G. Sutton	1858
Crippen, James	N. E. Fredrick M. Bind	1862
Crippen, James	Michael Connolly & wf.	1863
Crippen, James	Lambson & wf.	1863
Crippen, James	Philip Ford	1864
Crippen, James	Thomas Partl___ & wf	1864

\*Sale of (current) 27 The Strand

**Buyer Activity in New Castle County for Stockton, Fidelia**  
Listed in **Indirect Deed Index**

<u>Grantee</u>	<u>Grantor</u>	<u>Year</u>
<b>Stockton, Fidelia</b>	<b>James Crippen &amp; wf.</b>	<b>1860*</b>
Stockton, Fidelia (Mrs.)	Thomas T. Tacker Sr. & wf.	1863
Stockton, Fidelia	John S. King & wf.	1864

\* Sale of (current) 27 The Strand

DEED BOOK L, Vol. 7, p. 23, 1860: James Crippen-Fidelia Stockton Deed

*Beginning at the Northeasterly corner of James Crippen's Store House on the Southeasterly side of Front or Water Street, in the Town of NewCastle; and running with the middle of the dividing Wall of said House and Store to Southeasterly course in a straight line ninety four feet, eight inches to a Fourteen feet wide alley*

This Indenture made the Nineteenth day of May in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty Between James Crippen of the Town Hudred and county of Newcastle in the State of Delaware and Sarah S. his Parties of the First part, and Fidelia Stockton of the same Town, Hundred county and State of aforesaid Party of the Second part. W\_\_\_\_\_ That the said James Crippen and Sarah S. his wife for and in consideration of the sum of Fourteen hundred and Fifty Dollars \_\_\_\_\_ful money of the United States of America \_\_\_\_\_ well and track, f\_\_\_\_\_ by this said Fidelia Stockton at or before the Sealing and Delivery of these Presents, the Receipts whereof in hereby acknowledged have granted, arranged, sold, aliened, enl\_\_\_\_d, released, conveyed, and confirmed, and by these presents do grant, bargain, sell, akin, in full, release, convey and confirm unto the said Fidelia Stockton and to her \_\_\_\_\_, and Assign, All that certain Brick me[f]ssuage, Dual lining House and Lot of Laird, situate, lying and being in the Town and Country of NewCastle in the State of Delaware, and which in Bounded and d\_\_\_\_\_d as follows to Wit; Beginning at the Northeasterly corner of James Crippen's Store House on the Southeasterly side of Front or Water Street, in the Town of NewCastle; and running with the middle of the dividing Wall of said House and Store to Southeasterly course in a straight line ninety four feet, eight inches to a Fourteen feet wide alley (for the use of this and the other Houses). Thence with a new line and with said alley Fifteen feet, seven inches to a line of Samnel P. Truf's land; then with said Truf's line Northwesterly Seventeen feet and nine inches, to the back of a small Brick Building; then still with said Truf's line, and parallel with the first line run, Seventy six feet and eleven inches to the Southeasterly side of the aforesaid Front or Water Street; thence with the side of said Street, Sixteen feet and two inches to the place of Beginning; Containing within those b\_\_\_\_\_ch, are thousand five hundred and six square feet of Land, be the same more or less. With the privilege of this use of the said Fourteen feet wide Alley in common with this err titled thereto forever. Being part of the same Land and premises which William Janvier, by Indenture having date the Fourth day of December A.D. 1848, and Recorded in the office for Recording Deeds at NewCastle in and for NewCastle in and for NewCastle County aforesaid in Book D vol. 6 Page 63. Sold and conveyed into the said James Crippen in fee Reconrse therewithto being had will \_\_\_\_\_full appear. Together with all and singular the Building's improvements, ways, woods, water, water course, rights, liberating privileges, h\_\_\_\_\_ments and aff\_\_\_\_\_tenes whatsoever therewith belonging or in any wise af\_\_\_\_\_g and the r\_\_\_\_\_s \_\_\_\_\_ and remainder, rents, I[f]ssues and profits thereof, and all the estate, right, title, interest, property, claim and demands whatsoever, of them the said James Crippen and Sarah S. his wife in law, equity, or otherwise howsoever of, in, and to the same and every part and parcel therein of to have and to hold the said Brick me[f]ssuage, Dwelling House and Lot of Laird, here d\_\_\_\_\_s and premises hereby granted or \_\_\_\_\_ or in \_\_\_\_\_ so to be, with the appurtenance, unto the said Fidelia Stockton her Heirs and assigns to and for the only proper use and behalf of the said Fidelia Stockton her heirs and assigns forever and the said James Crippen



wife of the said John W. Anthony - being by me privately  
examined separate and apart from said husband, the  
contents of said instrument being by me first made known  
to her she did then declare and say, that she did voluntarily,  
and of her own free will and accord, sign and seal, and  
as her own free act and deed deliver the within indenture  
of conveyance, without any fear, coercion, threat, compulsion  
or fear of her said husband or of her said husband's displeasure  
and all the said grantors desired that the foregoing instrument  
might be recorded according to law. - Witness my hand and  
seal this 10th day of March 1860.

Henry Stilton Justice of N. Y.  
Common Pleas.

State of New York,  
City and County of New York, ss. I, Nathaniel Jarvis, Jr. Clerk  
of the Court of Common Pleas, for the City and County of New  
York, do hereby certify and bear witness, that Henry Stilton  
Justice of the Peace and one of the Justices of the Court of  
Common Pleas, duly elected and sworn, and  
duly authorized to take the same, and that full faith and  
credit are due to his official acts. I further certify, that  
the signature of said Justice, to the certificate of said  
acknowledgment is genuine. In testimony whereof,  
I have hereunto set my hand and affixed the seal of the  
said Court, this 7th day of March 1860.

Nathl Jarvis, Jr. Clerk

Received for Record March Twenty Sixth A. D. and  
thousand eight hundred and sixty  
John M. Edmunds Recorder

Ex.

This Indenture, made the nineteenth day  
of May in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred  
and sixty (Between James Crispen of the Town, Hundred  
and County of Newcastle in the State of Delaware and  
Sarah A. his - Partner, of the first part, and Richard Stockton  
of the same Town, Hundred, County and State of second  
part, of the second part, Witnesseth, that the said  
James Crispen and Sarah A. his wife for and in  
consideration of the sum of fourteen hundred and  
thirty dollar lawful money of the United States of  
America, unto them well and truly paid by

Said James Criffen for himself his heirs, Executors and administrators doth by these presents, covenant, grant and agree to and with the said Fidelity Stockton her heirs and assigns, that he the said James Criffen his heirs, <sup>all</sup> and singular the hereditaments and premises herein above described and granted or mentioned or intended so to be, with the appurtenances unto the said Fidelity Stockton her heirs and assigns against him the said James Criffen his heirs, and against all and every other Person or Persons whomsoever lawfully claiming or to claim the same or any part thereof, <sup>from or under</sup> him, his, heirs or any of them shall and will by these presents Warrant and forever defend. In witness whereof, the said James Criffen and Sarah A. his wife have hereunto set their hands & seals. Dated the day and year first above written.

Sealed and delivered  
in the presence of

James Criffen  
Sarah A. Criffen

Received this <sup>of this date</sup> day of the above Indenture, of the above named Fidelity Stockton full satisfaction for the consideration money above mentioned.

Witness at signing,  
Peter B. Wandover.

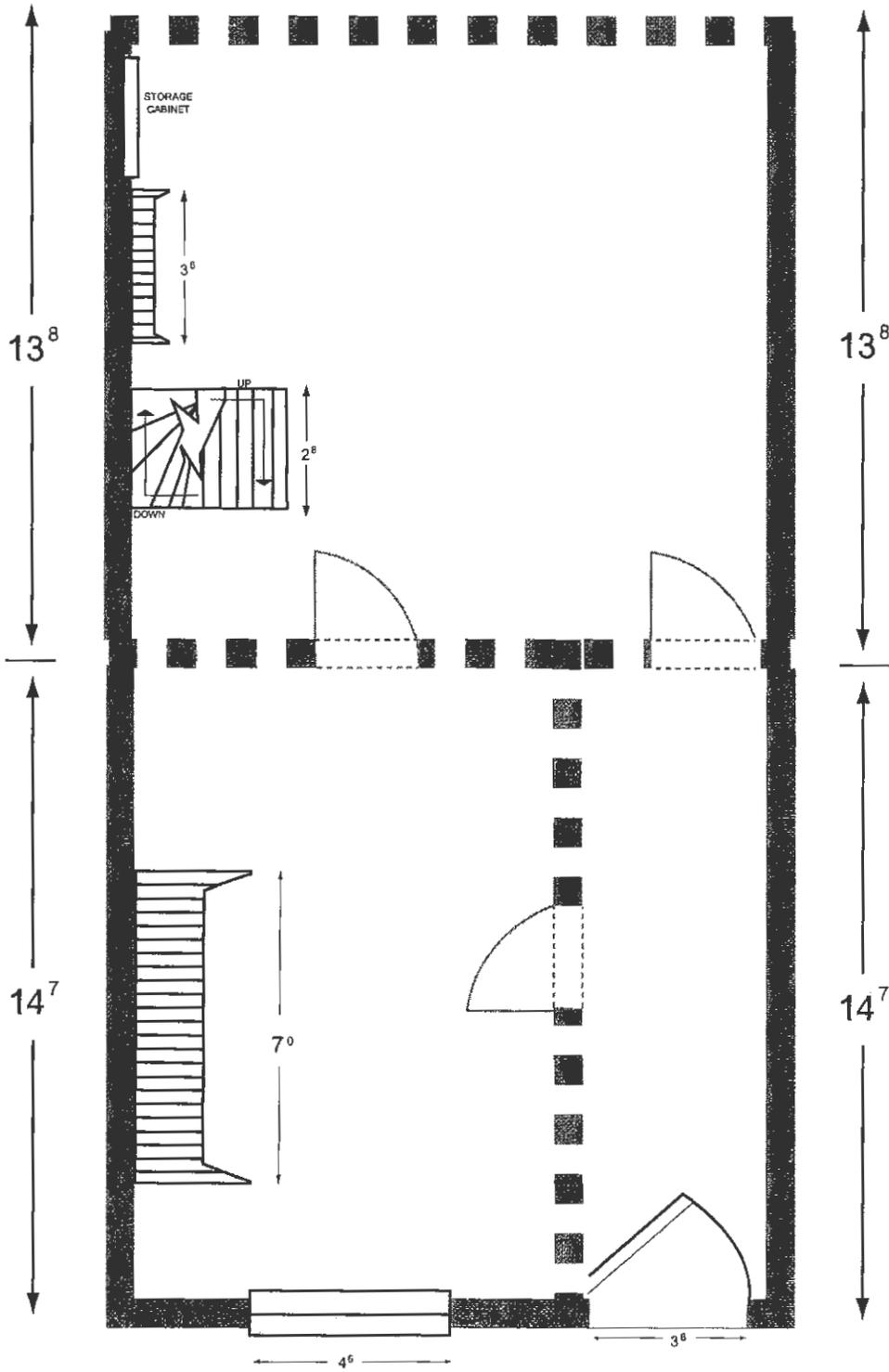
James Criffen

State of Delaware  
Newcastle County, <sup>ss.</sup> Be it Remembered, that on this <sup>thirteenth</sup> day of May in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty personally came before me a Notary Public for the State of Delaware, James Criffen and Sarah A. his wife, Parties to this Indenture, known to me personally to be such and severally acknowledged this Indenture to be their deed and the said Sarah A. Criffen being at the same time privately examined by me, apart from her husband acknowledged that she executed the said Indenture willingly, without compulsion or threats or fear of her husband's displeasure. Given under my hand and seal of office, the day and year aforesaid,

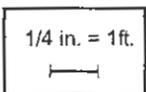
Peter B. Wandover, Notary Public

Received for Record May Twenty Second A. D. one thousand eight hundred and sixty,  
Charles W. Allmon, Recorder

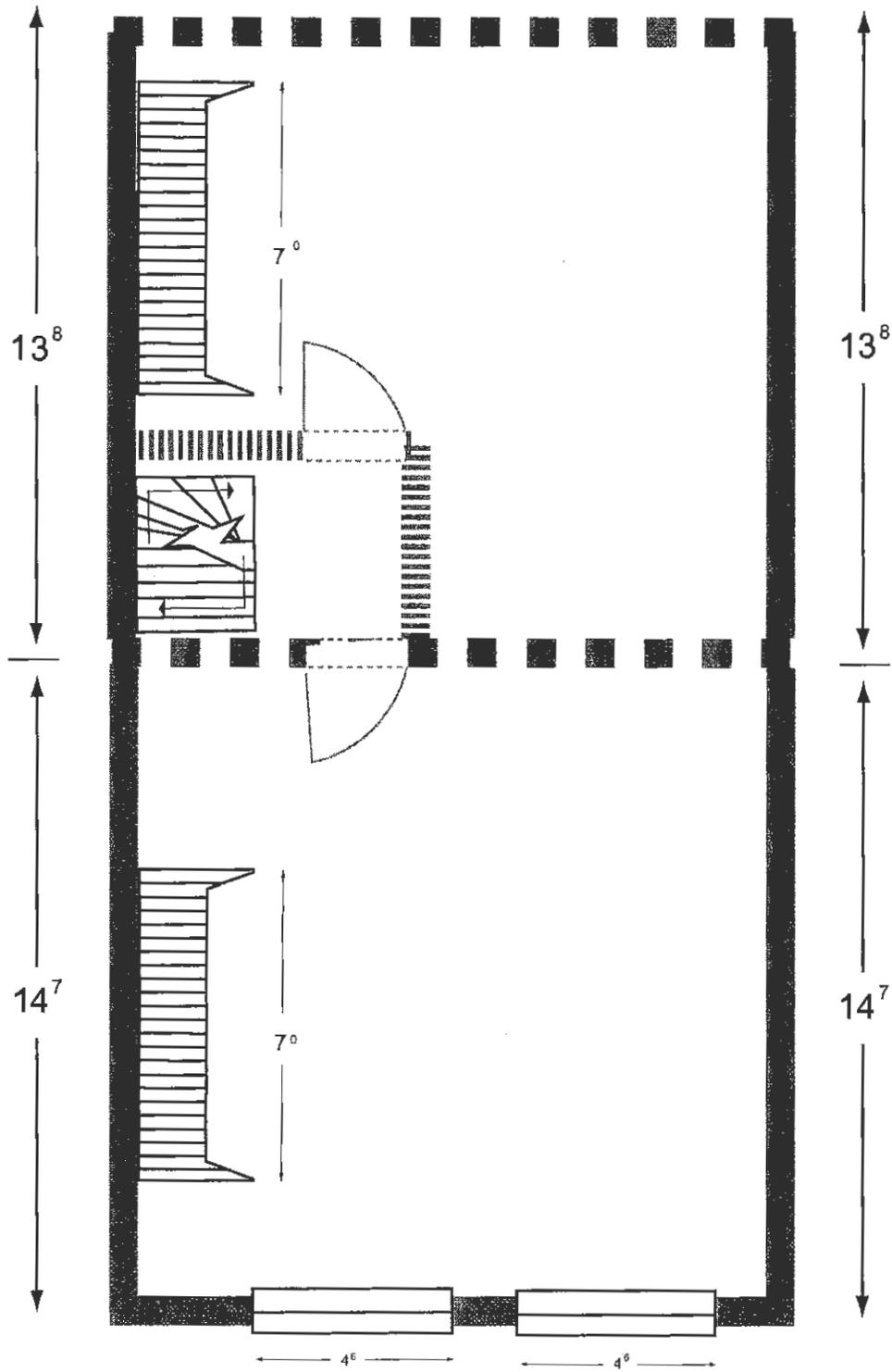
This Indenture made the fourteenth day of June in the year of our Lord one thousand eight hundred and sixty, Between Julia G. Francis, late of Newcastle County Delaware, but now a resident of Saint Louis Missouri, of the one part and James Criffen and Sarah A. Criffen of the other part.



GROUND FLOOR



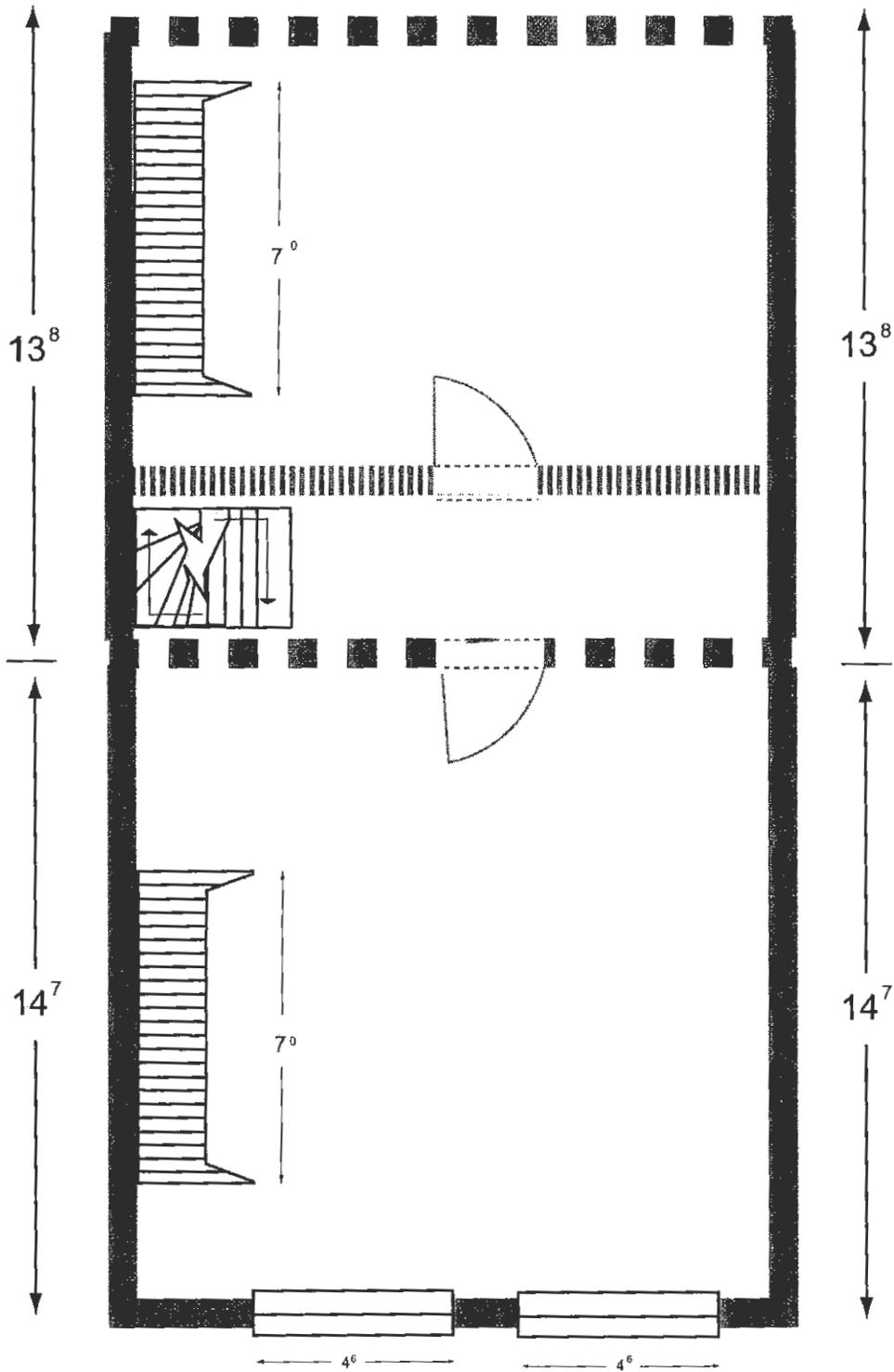
McCullough's Row  
 27 The Strand  
 New Castle, DE



SECOND FLOOR

1/4 in. = 1ft.

McCullough's Row  
 27 The Strand  
 New Castle, DE



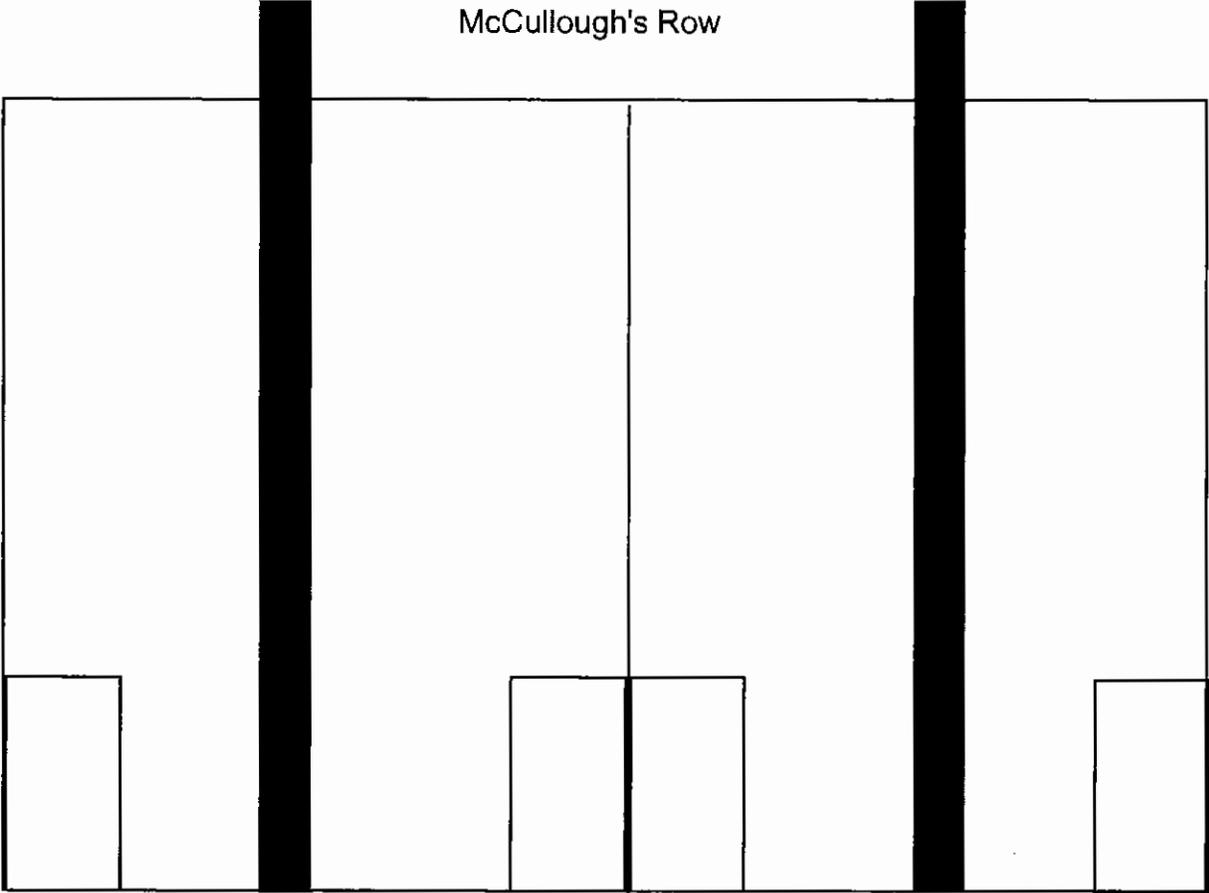
SECOND FLOOR ALTERNATE

1/4 in. = 1 ft.

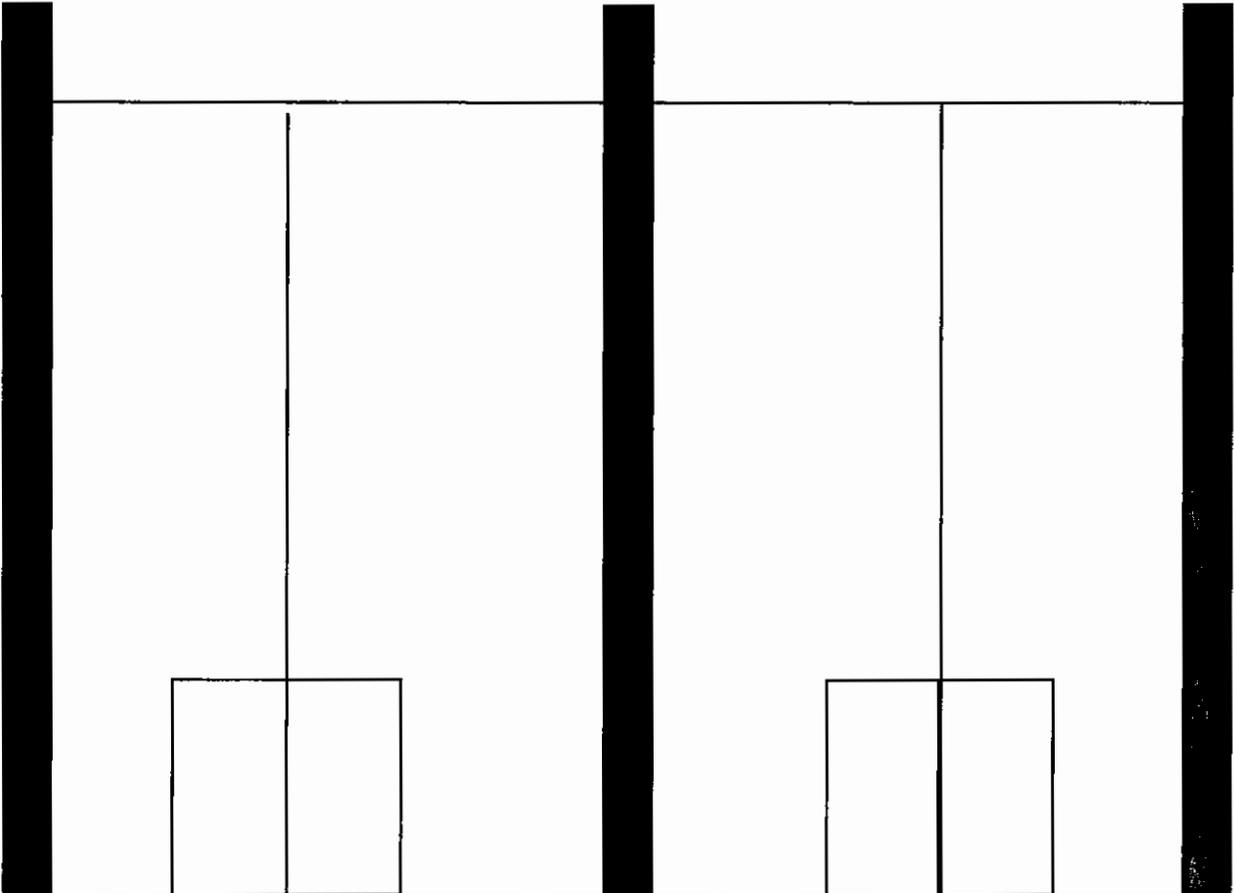
Survey taken on 10/04  
KG

McCullough's Row  
27 The Strand  
New Castle, DE

McCullough's Row



Alternative to McCullough's Row



## APPENDIX II

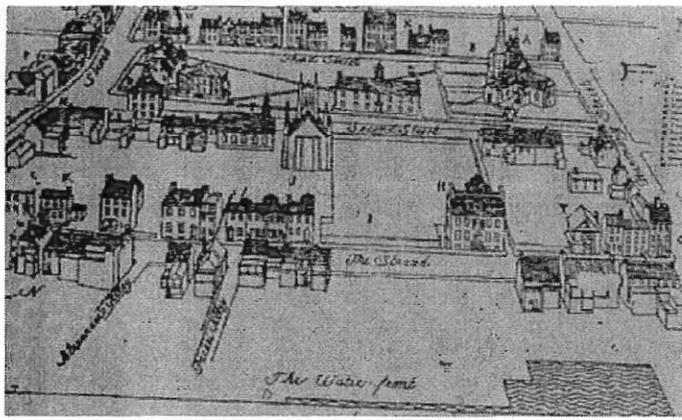


FIG. 1  
New Castle, DE  
20th-century illustration



Fig. 2  
South View,  
McCullough's Row,  
27-33 The Strand,  
October 2004

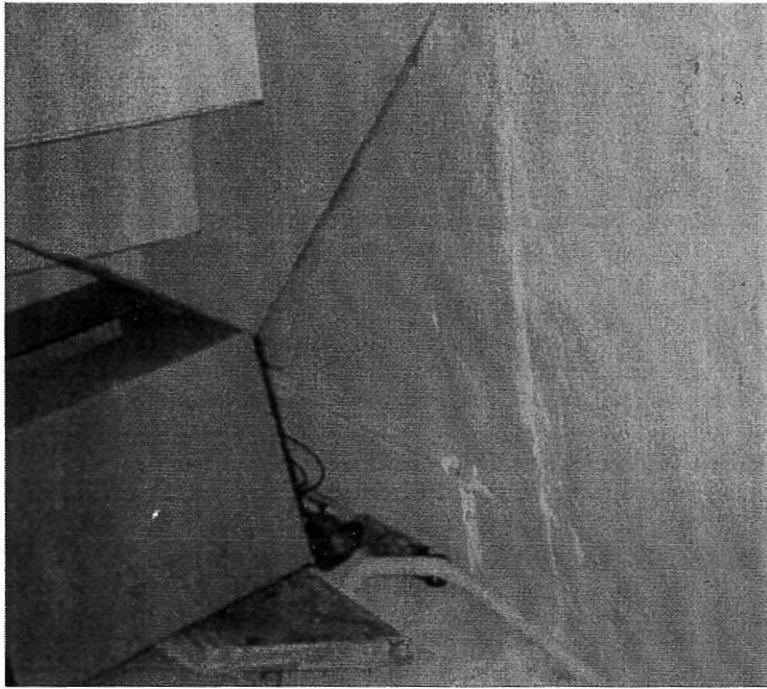


Fig. 3  
Seam from removal of partition found under ground floor stair.

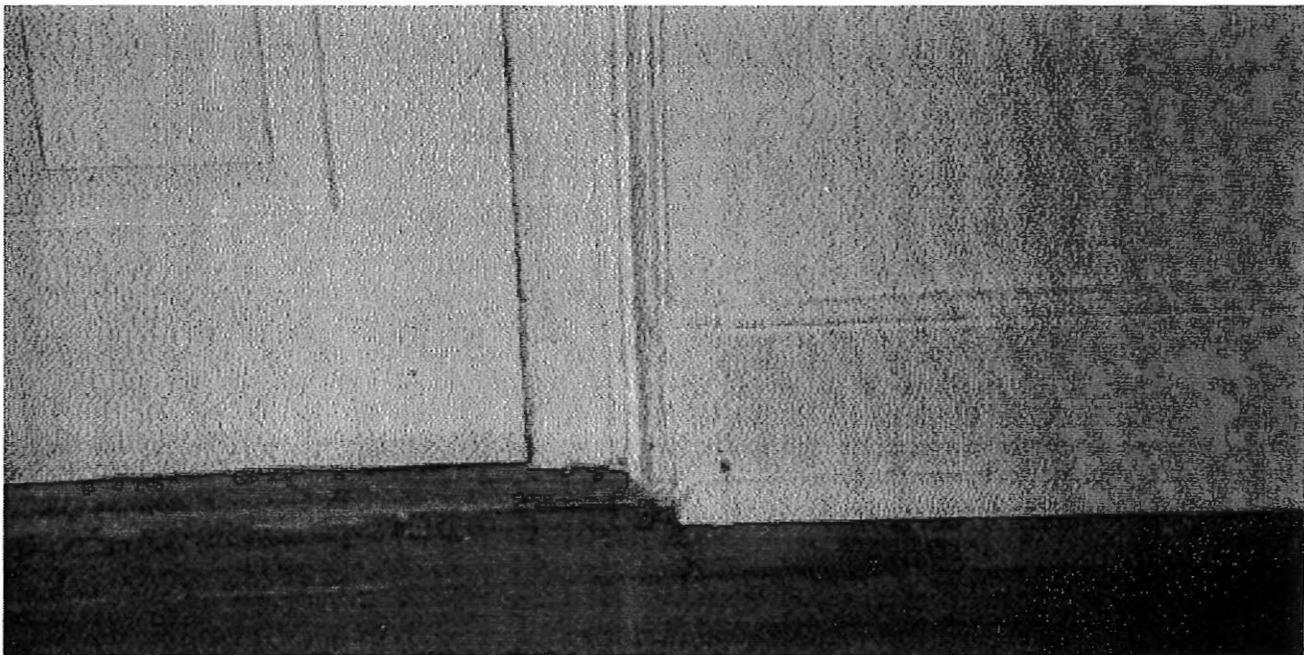


Fig. 4 Seam from removal of partition found  
next to front entrance, ground floor.

Fig. 5 Ground floor, front room fireplace and ornament

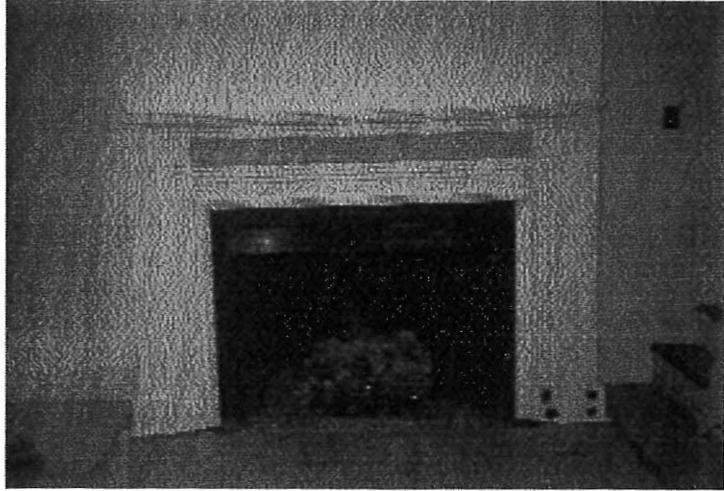


Fig. 6 Ground floor, rear room fireplace and ornament

Fig. 7 Second floor, front room fireplace and ornament

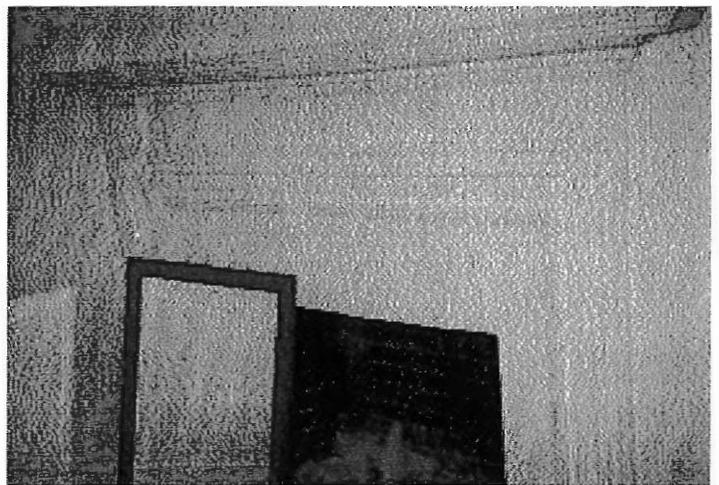


Fig. 8 Second floor, rear room fireplace and ornament

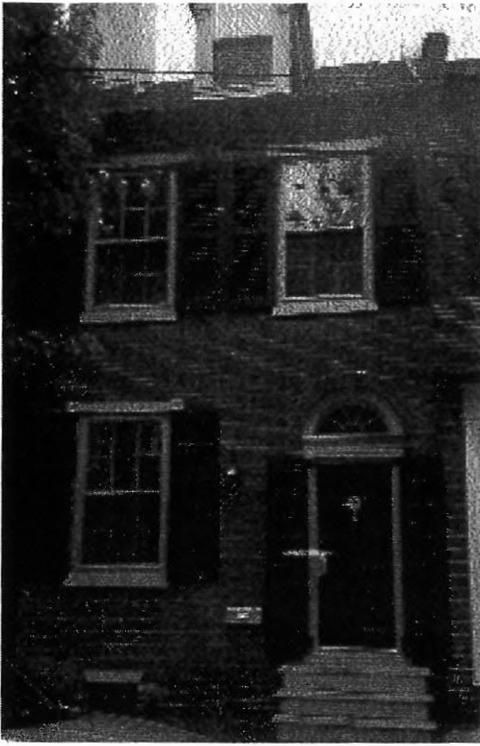


Fig. 9 Façade, 27 The Strand,  
c. 1824, October 2004



Fig. 10 30 The Strand, c. 1824,  
across from McCullough's Row.  
James McCullough Jr's residence

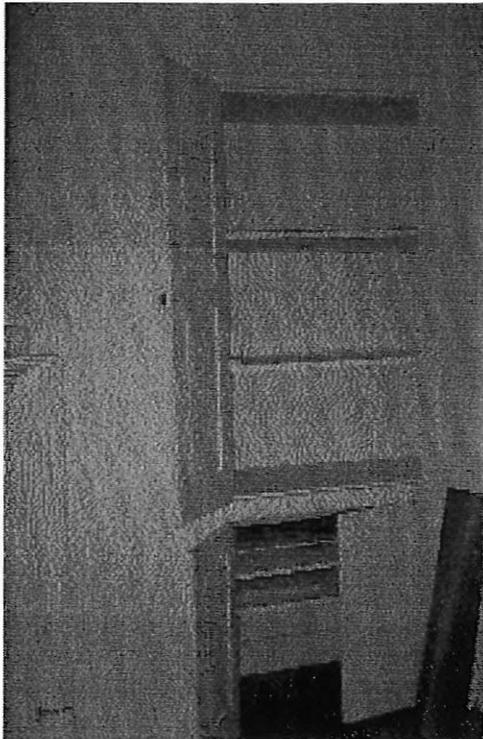


Fig. 11 Jamb Cupboard, ground  
floor, rear room

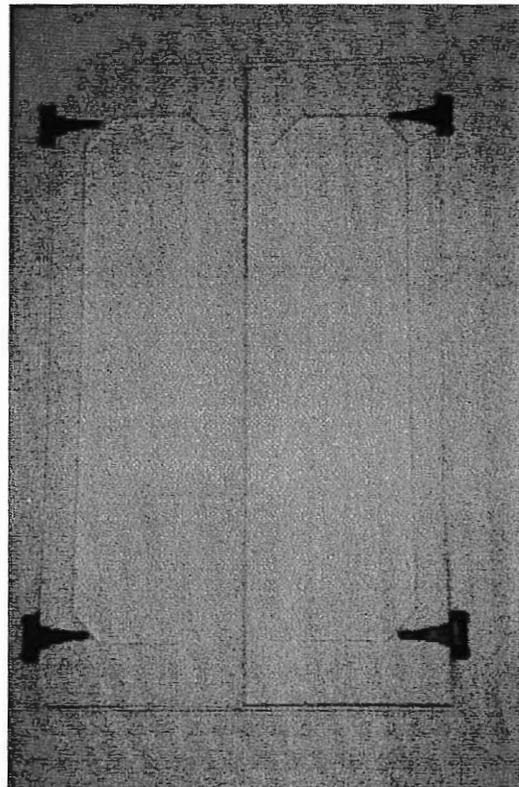


Fig. 12 Cupboard, cellar floor



Fig. 13 Stair leading to attic

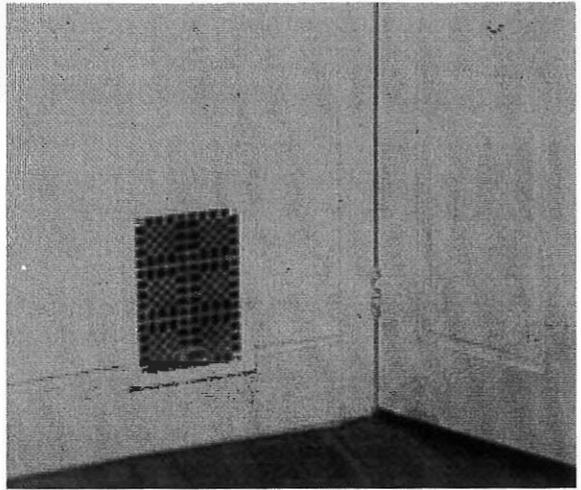


Fig. 14 Heating grate in attic

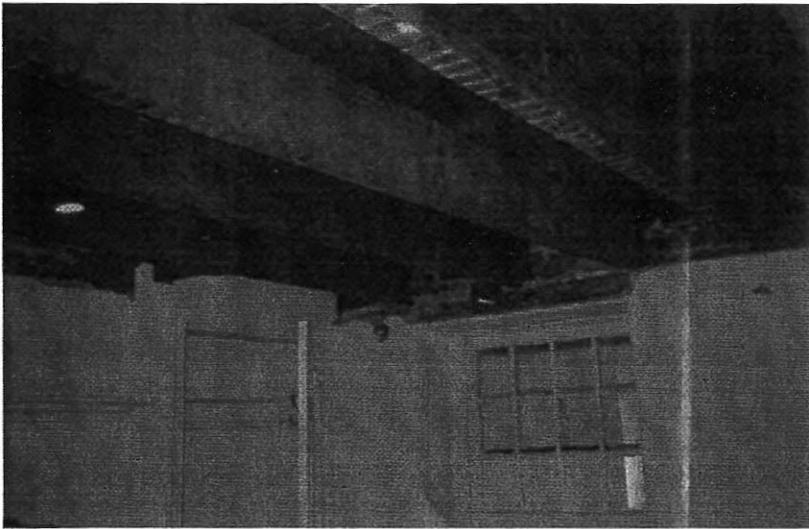
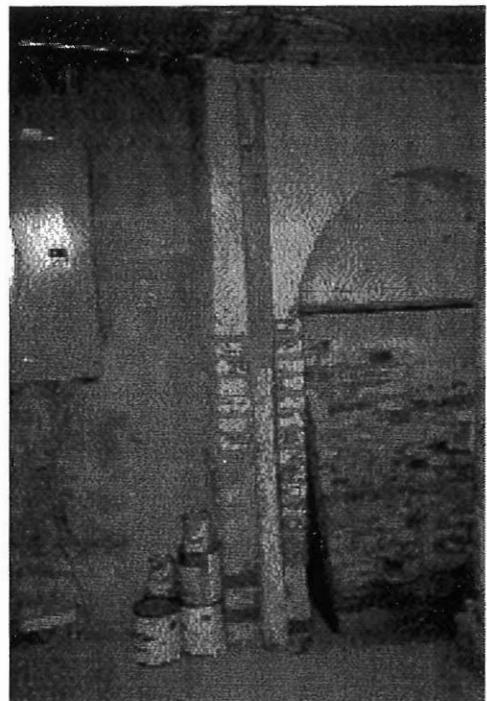


Fig. 15 Ceiling rafters and exterior back window, cellar

Fig. 16 Relieving arch, cellar



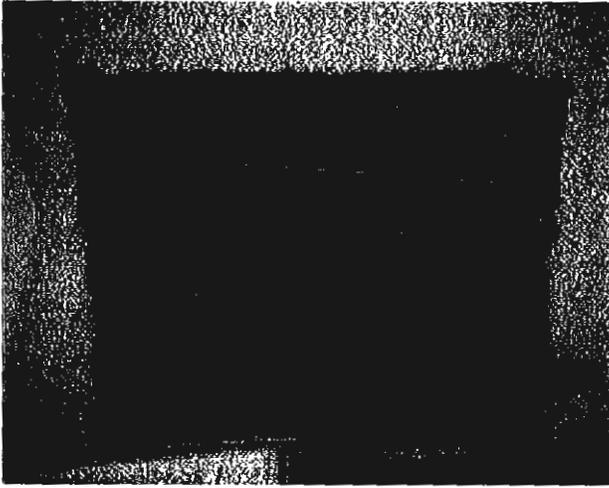


Fig. 16 Fire oven with cooking utensil in cellar



Fig. 17 Greek Revival Mantel over Fire oven in cellar

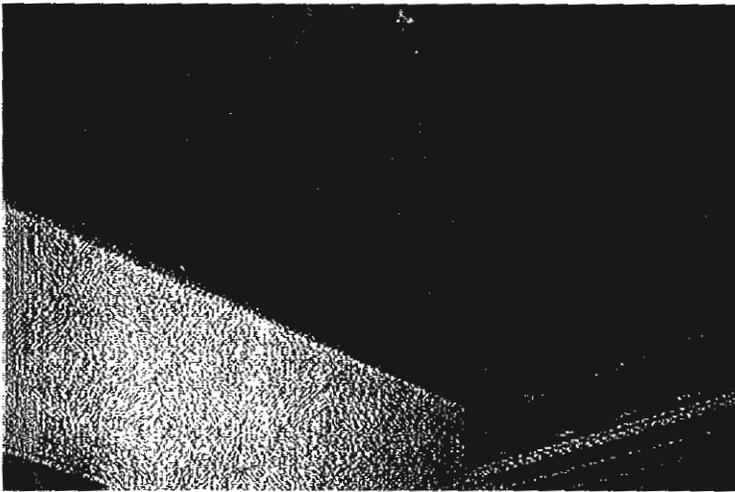


Fig. 18 Detail, brick work and wood rafters in cellar

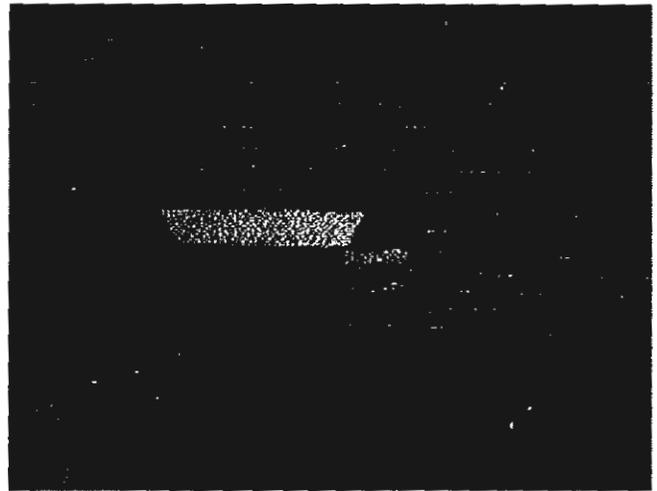


Fig. 19 Cellar service window to street

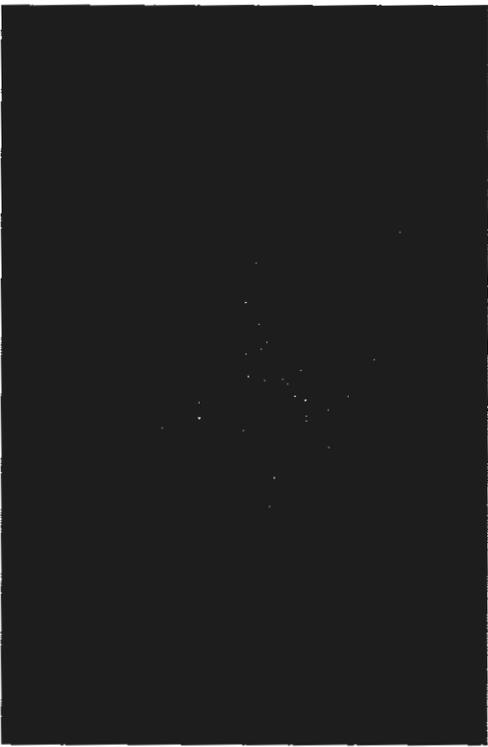


Fig. 20 Paneled door entrance with fanlight



Fig. 21 Second floor, front, street-side room

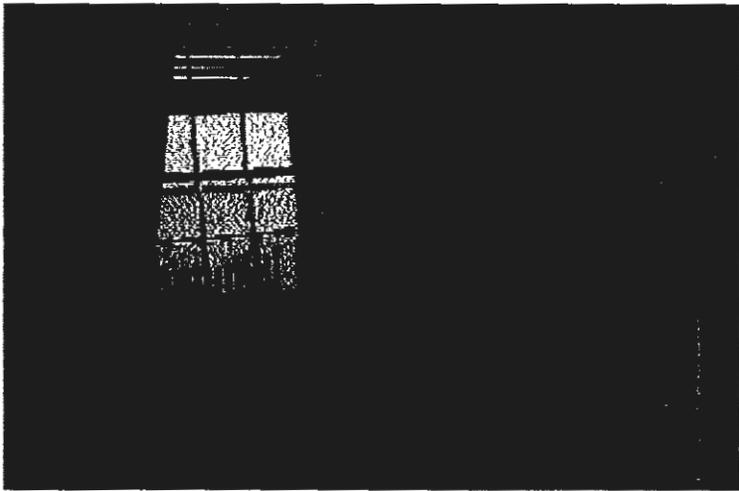


Fig. 22 Attic, east side with view of Delaware River



Fig. 23 Attic, west side with view of street

Fig. 24 Weathered door now used for closet in cellar

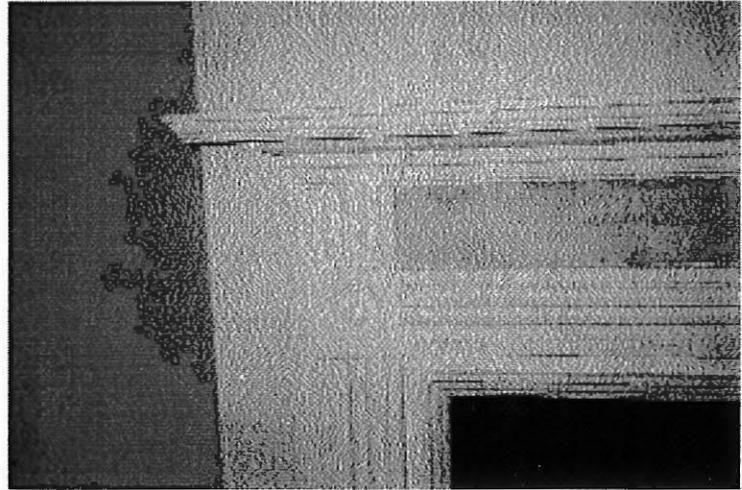


Fig. 25 Detail, entablature and Greek Revival mantel, column with patera corner

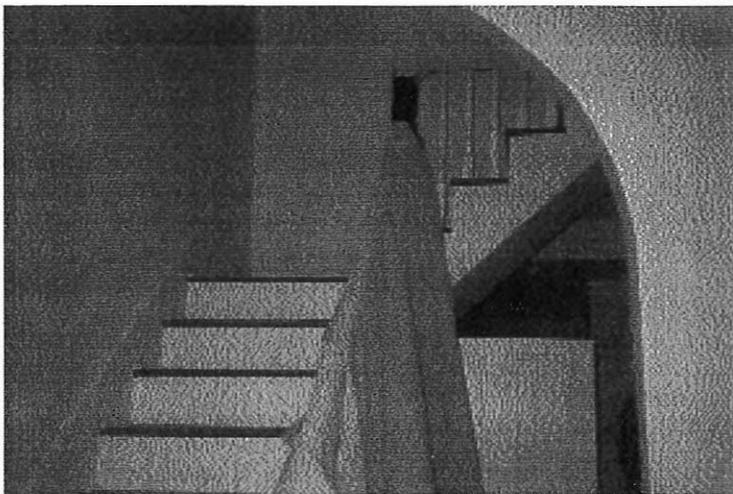


Fig. 26 Existing stair to second floor, Victorian bannister, c. 1860s. (stair not in 1824 construction)

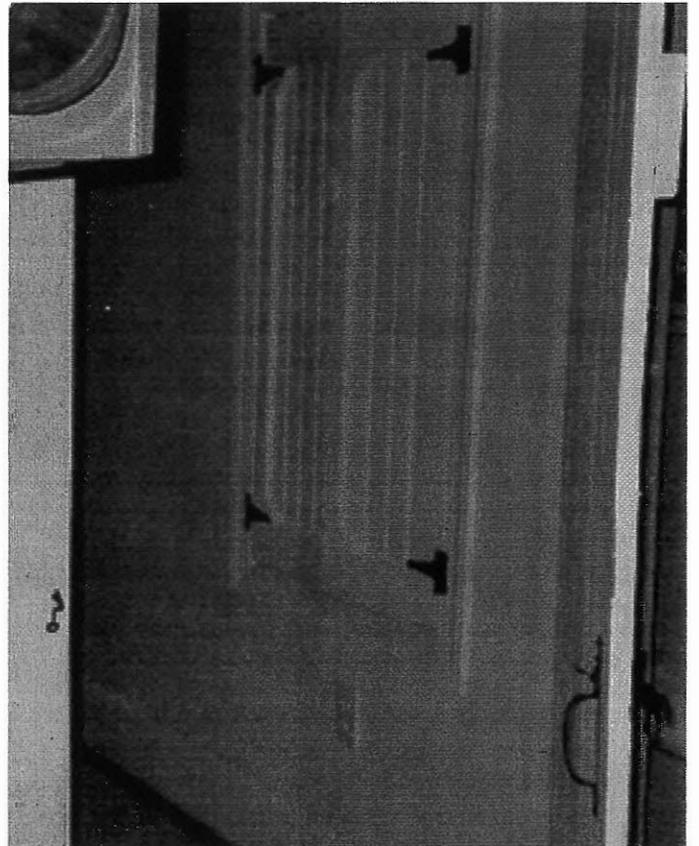


Fig. 27 Hinged cupboard with panels next to door to open to back room, street side, cellar.

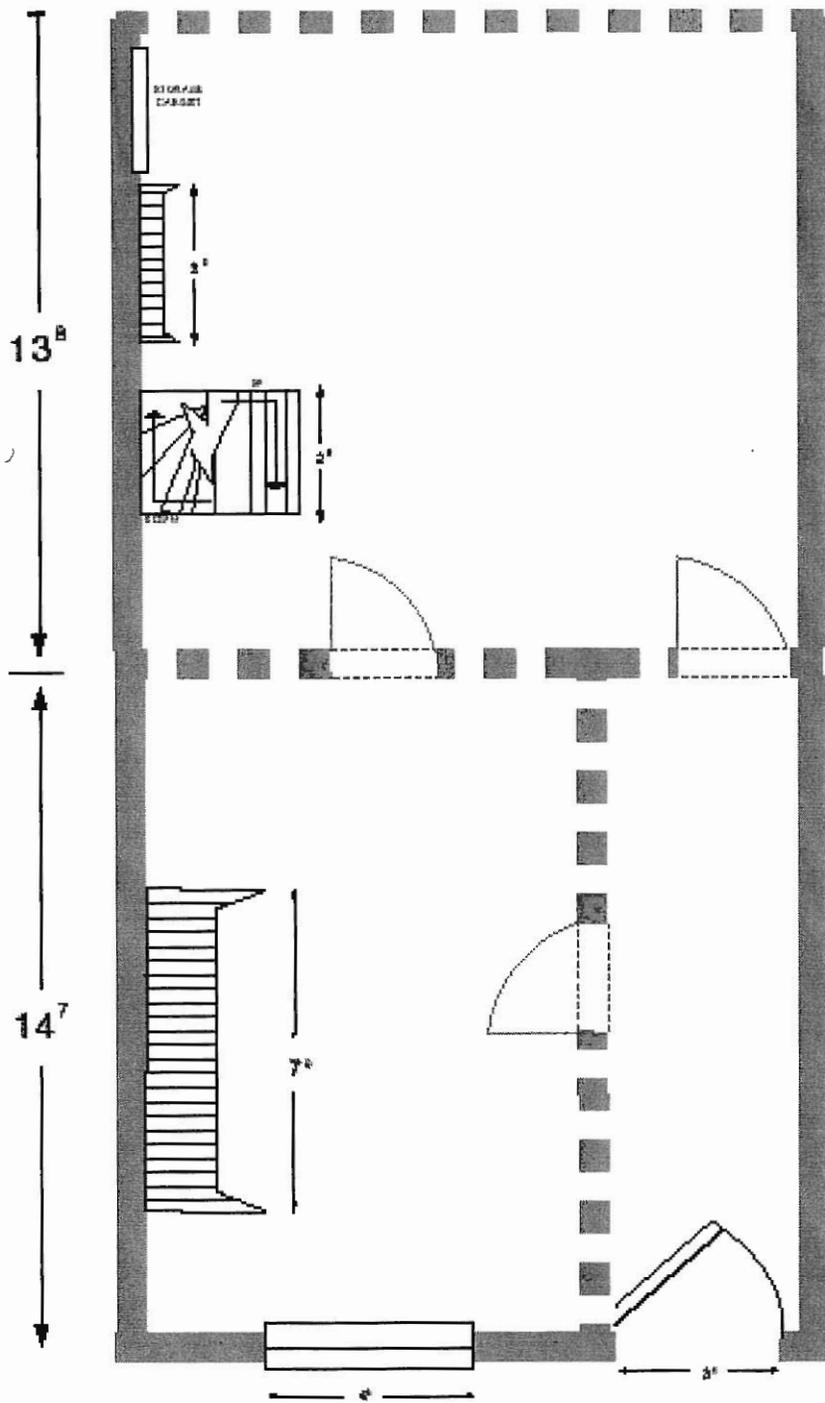


Fig. 28 27 The Strand Ground Floor Plan

Fig. 30 (C) Town House Floor Plan, New York City, c. 1830

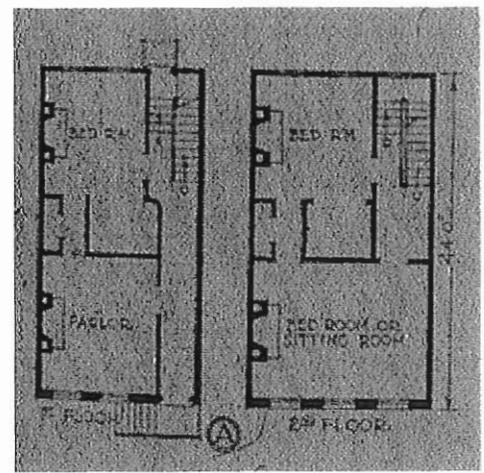
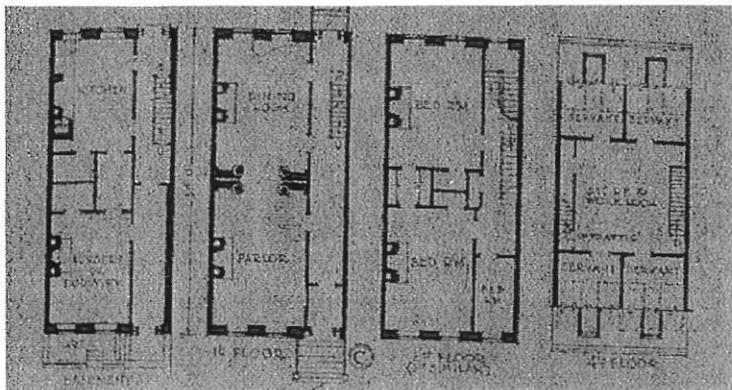


Fig. 29 (A) AND (B) New York City Town House Floors Plans, c. 1830

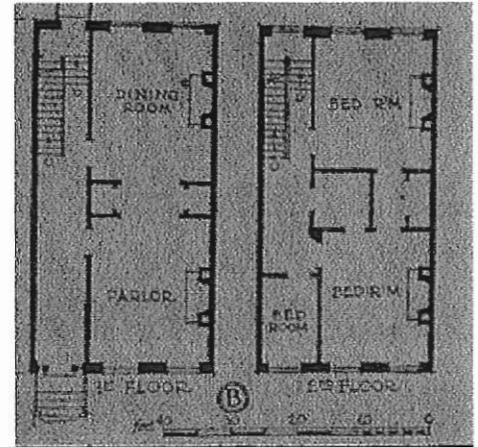
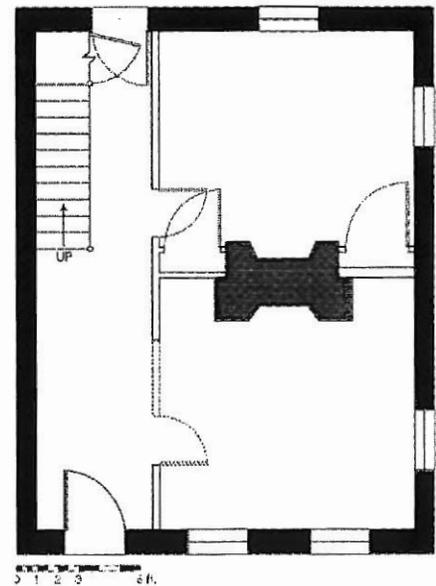


Fig. 31 126 Harmony Street, New Castle, DE, Ground Floor Plan



High Master House  
126 Harmony Street, New Castle, DE  
Built 1639-1834 (compiled by Lettolt's survey)  
First Floor Plan  
Illustration by Rachel DeJoria