

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Built in a small town near the large city of Philadelphia, the George Read (II) House characterizes both the sophistication of the urban architectural fashion and the provincial retention of earlier designs. The builder of the house, a successful lawyer who was related to Philadelphians, would have seen first hand the buildings of that city. When, in fact, he decided to construct a residence, he turned to these relatives for advice and assistance.

The layout of the house was first drawn by the New Castle Reads, although the house, as constructed, followed more closely an improvement upon their basic plan by George Read (II)'s brother-in-law, the Philadelphia merchant, Matthew Pearce. Much used in eighteenth-century Philadelphia houses, the Georgian City house plan for a double lot was the one chosen.<sup>1</sup> The rooms, although of large size with higher ceilings and bigger windows than would have been used earlier, show no influence of the intricate spatial arrangements of straight and curved lines, which were becoming popular with both professional architects and dilettantes of the Federal Period.<sup>2</sup>

While the plan is Georgian in its treatment, much of the decoration was extremely fashionable. Philadelphia workmen were employed to supply most of the materials for the house. The woodwork, plasterwork, iron

work and the marble facings of the window heads and lintels are noteworthy examples of Federal architecture. Although there is no documentary evidence of Read instructing his workmen, he is known to have been concerned with many of the minor details of the house, such as the silver hardware on the first-floor door, and probably gave explicit instructions to all his employees.

Some of the architectural details, while closely allied in style to the Federal Period, have been changed to suit the needs of the house and its occupants. The Palladian windows on the front of the house and at the stair landing on the north side, more commonly found on Georgian houses, for example, are of too large a scale. This enlargement undoubtedly stemmed from a desire or need for extra light.<sup>3</sup> The interior fanlight between the two first-floor parlors was not an unusual feature of Philadelphia houses of the Federal Period. A fanlight of this sort, however, was more commonly found over an interior door between the vestibule and the entrance hall.<sup>4</sup> It is probable that these changes were concessions to the functioning of the house.

The George Read (II) House is the finest example of early nineteenth century architecture in New Castle. The influence that this building had in the town is evident in contemporary construction. The woodwork in The Charles Thomas House (Circa 1801) now known as Immanuel Parish House, The Gemmill House (Circa 1801) on Third Street, and The Academy (1798-1811) on The Green is so similar to that of the house of George Read (II) that these buildings have traditional attributions to Read's contractor, Peter Crouding.<sup>5</sup> Because no documentary evidence has been discovered to support these attribu-

tions, the houses may prove to be merely imitations of the work in that house, and thus a compliment to Read, his wealth and his ambitions.

## FOOTNOTES

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<sup>1</sup>William John Murtagh, "The Philadelphia Row House," Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians, XVI, No. 4 (December, 1957), p. 11.

<sup>2</sup>Fiske Kimball, Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and of the Early Republic (New York, 1922), pp. 146-167.

<sup>3</sup>Plan of George Read (II) House, drawn by Matthew Pearce, undated, RSR, HSD.

<sup>4</sup>Elizabeth McCall, Old Philadelphia Houses on Society Hill, 1750-1840 (New York, 1966), p. 88. The Meredith House (1818-1823) has a vestibule fanlight.

<sup>5</sup>Jeanette Eckman (ed.), New Castle on the Delaware, Delaware Tercentenary Edition, 1651-1951 (New Castle, Del., 1950), pp. 100, 75, 73.