William Birch: His "Country Seats of the United States"

William Birch, the English artist who arrived in Philadelphia in 1794, where he lived until his death forty years later, is widely known today for his American historical prints. His reputation in that field should, however, rest not only upon his Philadelphia Views, published in 1800, but also upon a later book he published in 1808 and 1809.¹

Known as The Country Seats of the United States, this second volume comprised twenty plates and dealt with an aspect of living which had become well established in America—a place in the country not for the purpose of farming but for the enjoyment of rural life. In the estimation of a local historian of Birch's day, country seats had already passed their zenith and were beginning to decline when Birch pictured them.² This opinion has not, of course, been borne out, for today the United States not only preserves a number of historic

¹ See Martin P. Snyder, "William Birch: His Philadelphia Views," The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography (PMHB), LXXIII (1949), 271, for an account which in many ways provides background important to the Country Seats.

² Thompson Westcott, History of Philadelphia (extra-illustrated by David McN. Stauffer, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania [HSP]), XXI, 1587, states that after 1800 country seats went out of fashion because improvements in travel and the development of attractive watering places removed the "absolute necessity of supplementing the town house with a country seat."
country places as shrines, but witnesses the constant building of new
country show places as diverse in style as desert homes, resort
mansions, and restored southern plantations.

Birch was the first to depict by pictures and text the country way of
life as it was in the formative years of our nation. Superficially, the
result is reminiscent of English copperplate books which show the
ruined castles and still-occupied manors of the nobility. In 1791
Birch himself had published a book devoted partially to such sub-
jects, *Delices de la Grande Bretagne*. But now, instead of picturing for
the general public a life unattainable except by accident of birth,
Birch’s *Country Seats* presented an American outlook, a way of life
within reach of all, and tried to create an appreciation for the artistic
combining of a home with its surroundings. In its way, Birch’s
*Country Seats* is as unique as his *Philadelphia Views*. The volume
should interest not only the owners of today’s magnificent country
estates, but the suburbanite as well, for modern suburban life is a
compromise—a mixture of Birch’s fondness for what he termed
“rural retirement” with the proximity of other people, achieved in
such a way that the illusion of country life is not lost.

While his *Philadelphia Views* was inspired by a burst of civic pride
and enthusiasm, the *Country Seats* was much more a work born of
Birch’s individual background, ambitions, and failures. It was, in
fact, the product of a desire to raise the prevailing levels of taste in
homes and of a desire to identify himself with the leisurely and
wealthy life externally portrayed in his pictures.

Beyond his interest in “estate” life arising from his years in
England, Birch had a special qualification for conceiving and pre-
senting a work of value in this field. Although the fact has never been
stressed, he was a qualified and practicing landscape and residential
architect. He had a knowledge superior to that of many of his

---

3 Birch’s incomplete autobiography shows that in England he spent much time at the
country estates of friends. Typescript copies of the autobiography are available at HSP
(Society Miscellaneous Collection) and elsewhere. Excerpts quoted from the autobiography
have been transcribed with modernized spelling and punctuation.

4 Birch’s designs were made as the occasion demanded, in some cases for landscape improve-
ments and in others for homes. See Autobiography, II, 8, for mention of two plans for the
arrangement of grounds at Wilmington, Del. See also the *Country Seats* descriptive pages for
Birch’s having designed Montibello, Maryland, the subject of Plate No. 13, and Note 67
below for his design of a Gothic house.
American contemporaries of how to combine house and grounds for gracious country living. In his *Country Seats* he wanted to show the wealthy but youthful United States examples of the best in "the American Country Residence." As he put it in his single-page introduction: "The Fine Arts are, as to the American Nation at large, in their infancy; to promote them in propagating Taste with the habit of rural retirement, supported by the growing wealth of the Nation, will be to form the National character favourable to the civilization of this young country, and establish that respectability which will add to its strength."

Birch's architecture was, in a sense, quite modern, concerning itself with the over-all location of the house quite as much as with its design. Of the two, he was perhaps more interested in what he referred to as the "situation." His own words describing incidents during a trip to Virginia will best convey his opinions on the subject:

I then paid my second visit to General Ridgely at Hampton [*a Maryland mansion, Plate No. 4 of the Country Seats*]. . . . The situation of Hampton is beautiful and richly deserved the adoption of Art in its improvement. I made several designs for that purpose which were approved. . . .

Finding my business upon a close in Baltimore, I called upon my friend Judge [Samuel] Chase. He asked me if my route led me on Eastern Shore. I told him I meant to return that way. He told me I must not forget to call upon his friend Mr. [William] Pinckney . . . to whom I could be of great service building a splendid and elegant house. He gave me a letter to him which I reserved, and made my way to Bladensburg to see Mr. Staer. I found him busily engaged in finishing a large and commodious house on a situation capable of great improvement upon an extensive plan, an object he seemed to dwell upon, and treated largely upon it with him. It appeared he had intended to settle in this country but found he had to return back for his property. . . . He requested Mr. George Calvert to consult me in the arrangement of the grounds before he went. . . . Mr. Calvert sent for me upon the subject of a plan for the grounds but I believe very little was done. . . .

I spent a very pleasant time at Mount Vernon with Mr. and Mrs. Lewis on that portion of Mount Vernon left them by General Washington. It was a more beautiful situation than that of the General's [*Plate No. 7 of the Country Seats*] and a very healthy spot. Mr. Lewis was then building a house upon a very extensive plan. He had built the two wings, which were hand-

---

5 Autobiography, II, 9-11. For still another such incident, see *ibid.*, 11.
6 Charles Ridgely (1762–1829) was three times governor of Maryland and brigadier general of the Maryland militia.
some elevations, but was at a stand whether to go on with the mansion or not, from a defect in the plan of the architect placing the buildings too much upon the precipice of the bank—an error often committed in this country. . . . But fortunately in this case from the rocky basis of the situation and the advantage to be taken in the descent before it, we found a remedy against the wash it would have been subject to; and Mr. Lewis continued the building. . . .

Before I left Alexandria I could not but repeat my visit to Mr. [George Washington] Custis who seemed anxious to proceed upon his plan at [Arlington] which I had dissuaded him from, from the difficulty of attaining comforts upon its spot. The scene around it was splendid and elegant—overlooked the principal property left him by General Washington. . . . He had built the two wings of his house which with the hill they stood upon was an ornament to every elegant situation within the City of Washington. If anybody's taste and perseverance can surmount the difficulties of rendering its spot comfortable, it must be his own.

While Birch possessed professional qualifications for a project like his Country Seats, his travels never extended very far from Philadelphia so that his knowledge of American country estates was limited to those in the area between New York and Washington. Only the fact that he contemplated much more travel and hence a much larger book than actually appeared justifies his undertaking the work on what purported to be a national basis. As it was, Birch's limited horizon made the volume, despite its title, a regional undertaking at best. Its principal value was for those interested in life on the Schuylkill and, to a lesser extent, the Delaware rivers.

Birch’s trips, furthermore, were not for the express purpose of collecting material for his Country Seats. His journeys to Maryland and Virginia were undertaken primarily to deliver copies of the Philadelphia Views and to obtain subscriptions for that book, and more incidentally in his capacity as an architect. His trips to New York were in part bound up with subscriptions and deliveries, but were largely concerned with a projected but never completed volume: "I had nearly completed a set of drawings of that city which I meant to publish as a companion volume to Philadelphia; but found profits of the undertaking were not equal to the expense of traveling and the support of my family." Thus, considering Birch’s travels, it is not

7 Autobiography, II, 8.
8 Ibid., 13.
surprising that of the twenty plates published in his _Country Seats_, the New York area accounted for but two, Maryland and Virginia for only four, and the surroundings of Philadelphia for thirteen.

True, the remaining plate showed a scene near New Orleans, but Birch did not see or draw it. In the spring of 1809, his son George was commissioned in the army, and after a thirty-one-day ocean trip arrived for duty at New Orleans in early May. He, too, had artistic ability, and in June sent his father a water color of the quarters outside that city occupied by General James Wilkinson. George, also stationed there, found it "as hansom an house as any in this country," where Wilkinson "lives in grait stile having a band of music playing all dinner time."9 This scene, which lent an air of geographical authenticity to Birch's book, he engraved on copper from George's drawing, giving credit on the plate to "G. Birch, Cornet of Light Dragoons, U. S. Army."10

To understand fully Birch's motivations in producing his _Country Seats_, another aspect of his life must be comprehended, an aspect keyed to the two plates in his book showing views at his own home, Springland. Here was Birch's means of identifying himself with the wealthy group whose establishments he depicted. It is the story of the failure of his attempt to demonstrate by personal example how to lead a life of "rural retirement," and of living it by the printed page when the actual means of doing so was denied him. It begins with his arrival in America.

Birch naturally wanted to indulge the tastes in domestic surroundings he had acquired from his associations in England. His life in the new world presented an opportunity for doing so. The basic necessity was a country residence located—he being an artist—at a spot which caught his imagination.

His first opportunity for living outside the city of Philadelphia came in 1796, when he summered in Fair Mount (now the vicinity of the Philadelphia Museum of Art) at Echo, one of the estates whose grounds were to appear as Plate No. 6 in the _Country Seats_. "The summer seasons being very hot, Mrs. Birch proposed apartments out

9 George Birch to William Birch, June 3, 1809, Birch Papers, HSP; see commission dated Mar. 23, 1809, ibid.
10 The original water color (5¾ x 2¾ inches) will be found at the New-York Historical Society.
of town. We had fixed upon the house of Mr. Beveridge’s on Schuylkill which was then to let. His Excellency Mr. [Joseph] Jaudennes, Minister from Spain, was then in Philadelphia, and sitting to me for his picture. He asked me if I knew of a place in the country to let. I told him we had been looking at a house in a beautiful situation we had some thoughts of taking. He asked if it was roomy—as our family was small, it might do for both. I told him I thought there was plenty of room. . . . We spent the pleasantest summer I think I ever remember.”

In 1797 Birch moved to Burlington, New Jersey. After his house there was removed from its location, he took his family to the four acres just across the Delaware, on the Neshaminy Creek, which he had purchased in the spring of 1798. This was Springland, where his *Philadelphia Views* and presumably his *Country Seats* were produced.

From Birch’s own record, it is clear that two things combined to bring him to that particular spot. One was his friendship with a most unusual man who built nearby another of the country mansions, China Retreat, which found a place in Birch’s book. While still living at Burlington, Birch wrote:

“It was about the time when that ingenious and accomplished minister from Holland of the name of Van Braam, after spending much time with the Chinese, came to settle on the bank of the Delaware near the mouth of Neshaminy Creek, within sight of Burlington, whose active mind was busily engaged in pursuit of building him an elegant house upon a splendid situa-

---

11 Autobiography, I, 17.
13 Autobiography, I, 18-19. The Van Braam house, China Retreat, is Plate No. 19 in the *Country Seats*. Since it still stands, Birch’s comments on its erection have interest today: “Being impatient to get his house finished, he thought a frame house would be soonest built. He took in timber of all sorts, good and bad, and composed one of the largest frame houses I ever remember to have seen. His water-floor to the frame was of white marble well built. His property was expensive, but the loss of a rich laden vessel from China with furniture for the house and elegant adoptions for his plan threw a check upon his proceedings. The ungenerous and impatient inhabitants he employed, though there was plenty to secure them, threw him into a loathsome jail. . . . He soon found means to settle his affairs . . . but he told me he could never rest where he had been so ill-treated. He moved to England.” Andreas Everardus van Braam-Houckgeest (1739-1801) was Dutch consul to the Carolinas and Georgia in 1783. He became an American citizen in 1784. In 1793 he went to Canton, China, as Resident Director of the Dutch East India Company. The China Retreat property was purchased upon his return in 1796. See chapter on “China Hall,” in Harold Donaldson Eberlein and Cortlandt Van Dyke Hubbard, *Portrait of a Colonial City* (Philadelphia, 1939).
tion. It was often that our sight was enriched from the beautiful green bank on which our house was seated close upon the transparent flood over a clean gravelly bottom, that we saw him for a mile coming up with a rapid tide in his longboat with eight Chinese in white trimming their oars to the water till he reached our bank, giving me his first salute, then attended his orders in the city. We spent a few summers upon that beautiful spot. It having been a frame house we lived in, they moved it away from us. We then moved ourselves upon the bank of Neshaminy, nearer to Mr. Van Braam, with whom I spent much time.

The other influence on Birch's selection of Springland was the deeply appealing natural beauty of its land. Only from the quaint but lyric wording of a portion of the record of his life written at that time can we sense the powerful effect the place had upon him. In a special section, "The Discovery of Springland," he tells at length how he came upon the virgin scene, lying just across the river from his Burlington home. He found the land ascending pleasantly from the waters of the Neshaminy Creek into what must have been a truly majestic forest of chestnuts and other hardwoods—a dense forest with leafy glades and, a hundred feet above the water level, a woodland spring. Here was the crowning feature of the place. To Birch it was a "paradise, . . . as if intended by Nature for improvement." He then and there decided that it would be his and that "Springland must be its name."  

In a spirit almost of wonder Birch settled down with the specific intention to create a rural establishment of his own design which would demonstrate his architectural and landscape theories, in order "to propagate taste . . . as a sample to serve the country." Unfortunately, the fine flower of his plans is not pictured in his book. Although Springland is the only place to be honored by two plates, both show scenes about the grounds, not the house itself. This was justifiable because, as he says in his introduction, "the advantages of a country residence consist more in the beauty of the situation than in the massy magnitude of the edifice." But the real reason for not picturing his model country seat was that Springland was never completed.

Under another heading in his autobiography, "Springland Improved," Birch tells how a "green lodge for shelter" was prepared for

15 Ibid., 14.
The acreage already had upon it the toll house of an abandoned Neshaminy bridge, which became Birch’s studio, and in the new temporary dwelling, which he called “Green Lodge,” he settled his family “till I could form a plan for building.”

Walks, shrubs, flowers and lawns were set out, and ponds were stocked during the first few years.

In Green Lodge he carefully exposed to a northern light his collection of prints and paintings, possessions he considered most important. He referred with approval to the fact that at The Woodlands, a Philadelphia mansion shown in his book as Plate No. 14, “Mr. Hamilton was a man of taste... He had some good paintings.”

In view of Birch’s admiration for Hamilton, it is cheering to note that he had Hamilton’s approval for the choice of his location at Springland: “Wm. Hamilton Esq. of The Woodlands, one of the most useful botanists of that time, having heard I had made choice for a retreat, hastened to see the spot. This he declared was beyond what his place would produce and what he so anxiously wished for.”

At a somewhat later date, “Having proceeded thus far in my settlement and adding to Green Lodge a few outhouses, kitchen, stabling, &c, we made it our dwelling, leaving the spot for the principal building, providing timbers, sashes, &c and purchasing two beautiful bas reliefs of painting and sculpture from the ruins of the building erected by L’Enfant for the dwelling of Mr. Robert Morris in Philadelphia, which were well executed in Italy at great expense for the purpose, with which I intended to decorate the front of my cottage, the cottage to be projected by the profits of the Philadelphia Views which by this time were forward enough for delivery.”

While engaged in his labors, Birch reports an incident which gives life and flavor to Springland and shows his friendship with the owner of Hampton, the Maryland estate he pictured: “Having had occasion to cross the bridge at Neshaminy, I was informed that General

---

16 Ibid., 3; I, 20.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid., II, 3.
19 Maj. Pierre Charles L’Enfant, the engineer-architect who planned the City of Washington, was employed by Morris to build a mansion on the block between Seventh and Eighth and Chestnut and Walnut streets, Philadelphia. This building, never completed, was pictured by Birch in his Philadelphia Views as “An Unfinished House in Chesnut Street.”
20 Autobiography, II, 8.
Ridgely was at Bristol races with one or two of his horses upon his usual excursion of amusement. I saddled my horse and rode the three miles to Bristol to invite him to breakfast with me the next morning. The next morning the horses were preparing to start; the General was preparing to visit me. His friends seeing him differently disposed than to the turf exclaimed, 'Why, General, you are not going to leave us?' 'I cannot disappoint Mr. Birch.' His friends, seeing him fixed upon going, declared they would go with him if he did. . . . Fourteen of them on horseback attended him to Springland. Seeing a flock of horsemen at my gate, I ran down. 'Surely,' said I, 'General, you have not brought all these folks to breakfast. They'll fare badly, I fear, if you have.' 'No, no,' said he, 'We have all breakfasted.' My lawn was never so handsomely furnished before with so many fine horses in a group, while the gentlemen went with me to Green Lodge and amused themselves with my pictures. There was a fine light and at that time one of the finest collections of Flemish pictures in the country, many of them from Mr. Hynacas's collection, with others well chosen. The General was fixed in the center of the gallery—they had to shake him. He then exclaimed he had never been so struck with pictures before. The gentlemen then expressed a desire to see my spring. The brandy and glasses were taken up to it and the water pronounced equal to any they had ever tasted before. It was then in full flow one hundred feet above the level of the river. We took a walk around the grounds, when I had the pleasure of listening to a general approbation of them.'

But this visit of General Ridgely's, "with one I received from Mr. Cultock from Charleston, a man of taste who was highly gratified with a day's visit he paid me, was almost the only gratification or encouragement I received for my labors to propagate taste in Springland." Nor was this the worst. In describing the plates in his *Country Seats*, Birch had written proudly of Springland: "This spot chosen by the artist for the exercise of his taste in retirement has peculiar beauties from nature. Art has added much to it, and the cottage is embellished with a small, but very fine collection of paintings by some of the first masters. This volume with his other works may be had at this place." But Springland at the time was no longer Birch's.

21 Ibid., 14.
22 Ibid.
Efforts to build Springland had exhausted Birch's financial resources. After almost seven years of ownership, he "had fitted up Springland and found myself at a stand." Creditors caused the place to be sold to one John Barker early in 1805. Soon the partially completed house was "torn to pieces by its whimsical purchaser" after Birch had remained to superintend and continue the improvements for him, "and for which I was rewarded only by a disgraceful suit at the court of Doylestown." At this dark moment, "instead of projecting the building of the cottage, I had to throw up my plan of settling and think of returning to England." It was in another attempt to spread the theories he could not demonstrate by his "sample" property, and at the same time to obtain funds to repurchase the spot, that Birch turned to the Country Seats.

This does not quite end the story of Springland. Birch's perseverance was rewarded—though certainly not as a result of profits from the new book—when in 1813 he bought back the property for the same amount at which it had been sold eight years earlier. But Birch was now fifty-eight years of age, and instead of beginning again on his original plans, he sold out in January, 1818, at three times his repurchase price.

It seems likely that Birch actually began work on the new book in the first part of 1808. Only the first two plates, designed as the title and subtitle of the volume, bear a date, but they show that year. In any case, it is clear that the first five scenes were engraved by the end of that summer. On September 29, 1808, the following advertisement appeared without signature in Poulson's American Daily Advertiser:

Just Published,

No. 1 OF THE COUNTRY SEATS OF THE UNITED STATES.

23 Ibid., I, 16.
24 Deed Book No. 34, 420, Doylestown, Pa., recites Birch's creditors and the seizure of the land.
26 Although Springland had been sold, Birch undoubtedly continued to live in Green Lodge, since his Country Seats is dated Springland, 1808.
27 Deed Book No. 42, 11, Doylestown, Pa.
28 Ibid., No. 46, 658.
It is the intention of the Proprietor of this Work to pay every attention to a selection of the best subjects, and execute them in the most beautiful style. The Proprietor hopes that as the Work requires much study and attention, Friends to the polish of Society will call at his office, which is at present at No. 73 South Third Street, Philadelphia, and enter their names to the support of the work. In order to bring it under the slightest abilities for patronage, he has put the price very low, and divided the Work into parts, each part consisting of four numbers, forming a work of itself. Subscriptions will be offered for only one part, to be continued as approved. If the work meets with due encouragement, a short historical account of each seat will be given at the end of each part. Each No. will have 5 plates, the price plain 3 dollars, coloured 5 dollars per number.

The identical announcement appeared twice a week for approximately the next month. It was not until January, 1809, that Birch entered the title of the work on the copyright docket of the Federal Court at Philadelphia. Since the title plate bears no reference to copyright in the format first issued to subscribers, although it does carry a printed copyright legend in the later book-form edition, additional proof is supplied that the first five plates actually made their appearance in 1808.

It took approximately a year to complete the book in its four paper-backed numbers issued to the original subscribers. Not until the summer of 1809 did Birch receive from his son the water color from Louisiana which became a plate in the third number. The last two numbers were evidently finished within a few more months, however, because a letter by Birch to his son in the fall of 1809 implies completion of the whole volume: "On my return from the post with the last letter of Oct. 10 I met Mr. McDowner whoe politely told me he would convey aney little matter I wished to you. I have troubled him with the Country Seates and ten drawings with a small Picture which in your retired situation may be some amuse-ment to you."

As was true with the Philadelphia Views, each copperplate of the Country Seats was engraved from a water color. All the plates were

29 Poulson's American Daily Advertiser, Sept. 29, Oct. 1, 4, 6, 8, 11, 15, 18 and 20, 1808.
30 Item No. 265 in the docket, which is now at the Library of Congress. This was apparently done when Birch first became aware of the advantages of copyright registration, for he entered the second edition of the Philadelphia Views at the same time.
31 Birch Papers, HSP.
original productions by Birch from the initial drawing through the engraving of the view, except in the case of the Louisiana subject and one other, the plate for Devon, on the Delaware fourteen miles above Philadelphia. This attractive spot, the home of Alexander J. Dallas, later Secretary of War and of the Treasury, had been painted by Birch's son Thomas as it appeared from the water, and Thomas's painting was used for the engraving.

Birch did not travel to each location in order to execute on-the-spot drawings especially designed for his new volume. He must already have had drawings from his earlier sales and architectural trips for the New York and New Jersey subjects, as well as for the two from Maryland and the title page showing the National Capitol. These trips seem to have been made not later than 1805. The plate of Mount Vernon was simply copied in reduced size from a drawing made by Birch in 1803 and engraved by his friend Samuel Seymour in 1804. Then, too, Birch had actually lived at Echo in 1796 and had probably painted in oils at that time the woodland scene on its grounds and the other Fairmount Park estates in the vicinity which appeared in the new book. Three more of the scenes were in the immediate vicinity of his own home, Springland. While in this way he was able to make the plates with a minimum of travel and expense, he may have busied himself in the vicinity of Philadelphia in executing a few new drawings at homes he had admired for their situation.

In keeping with his announced plan, four of the pictures were limited to the surroundings rather than drawn to show the houses. In the case of the two Springland plates, this was done for special reasons noted earlier. In that of Echo, Birch thought the house of no consequence, secondary in importance to its garden. The View from Belmont, a mansion which still overlooks the Schuylkill, he made purely because of its entrancing scenery, and the same view is still a celebrated one today.

32 For a later edition of this plate, see "William Birch: His Philadelphia Views," 286 (note 30).
33 Birch's listing of his art collection at Springland includes an oil painting of his own entitled "A landscape—the effect of the Sun upon the Dew—from Nature." These are almost the exact words of the inscription for Plate No. 7, Echo, and there is little doubt that the copperplate was copied from the oil painting. Autobiography, I, 19, shows that Birch visited at Solitude in 1798.
The Mendenhall Ferry scene on the Schuylkill requires separate mention. Here Birch showed the building, but obviously not for its own sake. His intent was to show an interesting stretch of the river and the interrelationship of a number of the homes along it—an aim in which he succeeded admirably. The same approach had been in his mind in earlier years when he drew the York Island subject on one of his New York trips. Others of the engravings adopted a conventional approach in depicting mansions highly regarded as edifices, such as Lansdowne, Sedgley, and The Woodlands on the Schuylkill.

Whether accenting house or scenery, or blending the two, Birch made it clear that, to him, water was an essential part of the best rural life. Two thirds of his subjects included water in the scene.

In making the transfer from water color to copper, Birch used his own individualistic style, which combined the etching of lines with the use of dots, particularly in the sky. The resulting effect is most pleasing and stamps the plates as unmistakably and entirely his production. In this respect the prints differ from the original scenes in the *Philadelphia Views* and seem even more personally to qualify as “Birch prints.”

In only one of the twenty plates is there evidence of a practice much more common in the *Philadelphia Views*—the changing of a picture, once on copper, because of Birch’s dissatisfaction with it. In the case of Mount Sidney (a home in Fairmount Park) two forms of the plate were published. The original subscribers received as a part of the third number a picture of the house surrounded by considerably less in the way of trees and shrubbery than was included in the revised plate supplied in the later trade edition. Further, a most interesting trial proof of the second state has come to light, lacking Birch’s name. This is the only trial proof of a Birch engraving thus far found.

When the time arrived for running off the engravings, Birch was again able to economize. He had amassed considerable stocks of

---

34 A building brought to life by Sidney M. Earle, *Fairmount Park* (typescript at HSP), 182: “Here pleasure parties and fashionable folks came to dine. Blue tableware made by Stubbs graced the tables, each platter with a glazed-in picture of the inn. Gala days and other events were celebrated here. The First Troop of Light Horse paraded from the city to the Inn on July 4, 1809 and again July 4, 1810, where they dined and held a grand patriotic celebration.”


37 This is at HSP.
paper for the second edition (1804) of the *Philadelphia Views* which remained on hand and were now made use of. These were watermark sheets, both native and imported, which he cut to approximately $13\frac{1}{2} \times 10$ inches and which, when bound, made an attractive-sized volume of about $14 \times 10\frac{1}{2}$ inches.

In grouping the twenty plates of "Part the First" into four numbers, Birch realized that his non-Philadelphia views were few indeed, and he seems to have planned consciously to spread them throughout the book so as to preserve the national flavor of the work. For an impressive start, the first number contained three such scenes, but the second had only one, the third contained two (one being the late "windfall" from New Orleans), and the last only one. It is probable that from the start the project never achieved the popularity Birch had anticipated when he produced his first five views. Finding, as a result of his newspaper advertisement, that there was little demand for his work, but feeling that he had to complete the announced twenty plates, he probably abandoned ambitious plans and trips and used what drawings he already had on hand for the remaining scattered scenes away from home.

As the five prints forming each of the four numbers were made ready, they were placed in blue-gray covers of heavy paper, sewed together, and distributed to those who had come to Birch's store and signed their names to his subscription list. Evidence indicates that the group was small. Though he had all the purchasers of his earlier volume of views to solicit for his new effort, nothing points to his having done so. A solicitation by mail would hardly have entered his mind, and he made no trips at this period. Without the separate list of subscribers and purchasers he must have kept, and because of the curious lack of any such list in the book itself, as was customary, not even an approximate figure can be stated for the number of impressions of the plates issued. It would clearly seem to be a much smaller figure than the corresponding number for the *Philadelphia Views*.

---

38 Prints from the subscribers' and trade editions will be found to be watermarked "T. Gilpin & Co Brandywine," "J Whatman 1805," "J Ruse 1804," and "T G & Co."

39 Copies of the printed covers for the separate numbers will be found at the New-York Historical Society and HSP. For their text, see Appendix. Both institutions possess copies of the volume in the form issued to subscribers. Jackson possibly had access to a ten-plate issue and cover not now found, but this may be a reference to the second edition discussed below. Joseph Jackson, *Encyclopedia of Philadelphia* (Harrisburg, 1931-1933), I, 295.
and there can be no disagreement with the verdict of dealers that the *Country Seats* falls into the “rare” category today.\(^{40}\)

In Birch’s first number he included an introductory page stating the purpose of the work: the promotion of the fine arts “in propagating Taste with the habit of rural retirement.” “The man of taste will select his situation with skill, and add elegance and animation to the best choice,” he wrote. “In the United States . . . nature has been so sportive, and the means so easy of acquiring positions fit to gratify the most refined and rural enjoyment, that labour and expenditure of Art is not so great as in Countries less favoured. . . . Such scenes which decorate the grounds, and form the choicest Pictures of themselves, and which cannot be brought into the same Plate with the Villa, will be given separately, as highly necessary to form a full and correct idea of the American Country Residence.”

The introduction and the twenty plates were further augmented by three pages of description issued with the fourth and last number. This material located and gave some of the background for appreciation of each of the scenes presented. Also with the final number there was delivered a printed cover page hopefully labeled to comport with the subtitle plate by describing the work to that date as “The Country Seats of the United States. Part the First. Containing twenty plates.”

The new series was priced at the relatively modest cost of twenty dollars with colored plates, and twelve dollars with uncolored plates—in each case unbound. This compares with thirty-two and twenty-two dollars for the second edition of the *Philadelphia Views* containing a like number of plates but of considerably larger size. Smaller size and reduced price went hand in hand.

Nevertheless, there must have been a better reason for the small size of the new pictures than simply keeping the price low in order to attract patronage. Their reduced size (about 6 x 4 inches) contrasts notably with the only one of Birch’s water colors for these plates which has been found and which measures approximately 10 x 6\(\frac{3}{8}\) inches.\(^{41}\) The process of reduction from the water colors, not done

\(^{40}\) *The Month at Goodspeed’s*, XIV (1942), 76–77. The lack of a page listing the subscribers is probably due to the fact that to print it would reveal how very few subscribers there were.

\(^{41}\) This is the subtitle water color, “The View from Springland,” which is preserved in the collection of the Library Company of Philadelphia. It measures 9\(\frac{5}{8}\) x 6\(\frac{7}{8}\) inches and is titled in Birch’s hand. See photographic reproduction in Julius F. Sachse, *Pictures of Old Philadelphia from the Originals in the Collection of the Library Company of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1901), I, Plate XLVIII.
in the case of the earlier American volume, may have presented technical problems. Something specific was in Birch's mind. First, the smaller plates permitted a smaller book and eased the assembling and delivering of the volume. Birch made his own deliveries and was acutely conscious of the difficulties involved in so doing. Secondly, Birch appears to have had a preference for executing a small distillation of a landscape scene. He had done so with success in England in his Delices de la Grande Bretagne, in which some of the plates were much like those now being issued. Birch was an “enamel” or miniature painter, and where detail was not important (as it was in the close-up city scenes) he seems to have enjoyed creating small pictures.

It is self-evident that smallness is not in itself any indication of lack of quality; and the artistic quality of these prints is made startlingly apparent by a comparison, for example, of Birch’s polished and gemlike picture of Lansdowne with Robert Gilmor’s sketch which is the only other published record of it before its destruction by fire in 1854. Study of the Country Seats will show that the scenery is beautiful, the engraving most carefully and delicately completed, and the coloring in each case beautifully done. The result is individual plates of generally higher artistic merit than many of the Philadelphia views.

It was not because of the size of the prints or because they were not considered equal to Birch’s best work that the new venture was not supported by the public. Support was lacking because too few persons cared sufficiently about the subject matter, which was in a field apart from the interests of the ordinary person of the time. Philadelphians (Birch never solicited sales of the book elsewhere as he did with the Philadelphia Views) just did not have enough interest in an expensive book of plates designed to give the purchaser ideas on setting up a country estate of his own. Birch himself ascribed no reason to the commercial failure, saying simply, “I have published a set of country seats the principal plates of which so far as it continued were the seats on the Schuylkill River. The work attained to twenty

42 See a letter written in January, 1803, by Birch to the purchaser of a set of the Philadelphia Views in which Birch describes his difficulties in delivering the prints to Snow Hill, Md. Deer Collection, Painters and Engravers, I, HSP.

43 This sketch is reproduced in Gilmor’s Memorandums Made in a Tour to the Eastern States in the Year 1797 (n.p., n.d.), 592. Gilmor was a Baltimorean.
plates, the only work of the kind yet published, but want of encour-
agement stopped its progress.'

Birch nonetheless proceeded to put his work into book form. After
the issue to subscribers was complete, he reissued the plates as one
volume in 1809 in a trade edition. Very few copies appear now to
exist. The make-up of the plates and letterpress was identical with
the first issue except in three respects: notation of the copyright on
the reverse of the title plate; substitution of the revised version of the
view of Mount Sidney; and correction of the spelling on one of the
plates from “Mendenghall” to “Mendenhall” Ferry. No list of sub-
scribers was included in this edition.

A Birch water color of Andalusia, later the Nicholas Biddle home
on the Delaware near Philadelphia, which is uniform in size with the
one surviving water color for the Country Seats, is evidence that
Birch was prepared to increase the number of plates in response to
the demand which did not materialize. Moreover, his hope of so
doing, as well as his use in most cases of drawings he had already
made, explains his apparent overlooking of homes in his own area
which are treasured today. Strawberry Mansion, Mount Pleasant,
Lemon Hill, Sweetbriar and others on the Schuylkill are missing
from the book, although they were immediately available. Still
others lay only slightly farther afield.

Of course, more impressions were taken from the plates than were
immediately required, and the supply of them lasted a number of
years. Sporadic sales took place, perhaps at reduced prices. Birch’s
accounting records, fragments of which remain, show that as late as
1822 he sold a set of the Country Seats for ten dollars.

It must have been one of the last sets available, because in 1827
or 1828 a new edition of the work was published. After almost
twenty years, and with Birch now past seventy years of age, this
venture was simply a part of Birch’s reissue of all his available

45 A copy will be found at the Library of Congress.
46 To be found at the Library Company of Philadelphia. Reproduced in Sachse, I, as
Plate XLVII and mislabeled “Belmont.” The Library Company collection also contains a
separate undated Birch water color of China Retreat, which, though it now measures 77/8 x 53/16
inches, appears to have been of similar size and was executed on similar paper. See Sachse, II,
Plate XCIX.
47 The only copy of this edition yet found is in private hands. There must have been very
few issued.
engravings in competition with the new series of Philadelphia views announced in 1827 by Cephas G. Childs. From this final venture he derived little, if any, financial gain.

Just as many of the plates for his *Philadelphia Views* had been lost or destroyed by that time, Birch now found that only twelve of the original plates for the *Country Seats* remained at hand. These he republished in two paper covers: a thick gray-blue outer title page headed *Birch's Country Seats in the United States* and a white inner title sheet reading simply *American Country Seats*. Only one change was made in the copperplates themselves—he substantially reduced the size of the plate on which, years before, he had cut the words "Part the First." By cutting away the copper on which these and other words had appeared, he removed the implication that the views presented were not complete, and at the same time brought the plate into a size uniform with the others of the series. Thus did he give formal recognition to the end of his own earlier plans for a large and successful publication. In keeping with the hurried effort to republish what was available, the introduction and the descriptive sheets were not reprinted, and only the inscriptions on the pictures themselves served to give any understanding of the work.

During the few years before his death in 1834, Birch placed on sale the copperplates of the *Country Seats* then remaining in his possession, and all the separate prints from the volume which had not yet been disposed of. A printed sheet in flyer form offered "Nine Copperplates of the Country Seats. . . . A few sets of his Country Seats left, colored 5 dollars, plain 3 dollars—with some odd prints." This material, with six copperplates from the *Philadelphia Views*, a few copies of the last (1827-1828) edition of that book, and some odd prints from it were "To be seen & sold at the apartment of Mr. W. R. Birch corner of 7th & Race Streets Franklin Square. The disposal of his private collection. If there is any article in the inclosed list, Mr. ——— would wish and will express it in a Note W. B. will wait upon him with it." How many of these items, and at what prices, Birch could dispose of today!

49 Both the paper and the style of type used on these printed covers corresponds precisely with those which appeared in the third edition of the *Philadelphia Views*, thus accurately dating this last edition of the *Country Seats*.
50 For a list of the plates which comprised this edition, see Appendix.
51 Printed flyer bearing Birch's handwriting is in private hands.
Perhaps the Philadelphia publisher and print seller Robert Desilver bought the copperplates, since it is known that Desilver obtained some of the Philadelphia Views copperplates. In any case, it was after Birch's death that numerous restrikes appeared. In a few cases additional wording was cut into the plate. This was done either for purposes of identification for a succeeding generation (for it was in the thirties that many of the old countryseats began to disappear or to be used for commercial purposes), or to stress some fact of historical importance. Mendenhall Ferry was labeled as "Opposite Laurel Hill"; Lansdowne was now "Built by John Penn, Governor of Penn a 1763 to 1776."

Ultimately eight of the Country Seats copperplates came into the hands of an early collector of antiquarian material, John McAllister, Jr. McAllister reissued sets of Philadelphia and other views by drawing restrikes from the copperplates he managed to secure. He also supplied a printed list of the plates and cut identifying numbers into them. This material made its appearance in 1860. The identifying numbers appeared as a part of each copy of the prints thereafter drawn from the plates, and they serve as a ready means of detecting the McAllister Country Seats restrikes. Many of them are to be found today, a fortunate circumstance since none of the eight Country Seats copperplates which he carefully placed in the hands of the Library Company of Philadelphia have been found.

This loss of the plates is not surprising, for during a period of many years after the death of McAllister the Country Seats appears to have received but scant attention and to have been almost forgotten except by a few collectors. Today, when such matters have emerged into a fuller perspective, its merit has brought the book out of obscurity and given it a fourfold value.

First, the Country Seats is the earliest pictorial record of an important phase of a storied river—the Schuylkill. Birch himself said that his book related principally to the Schuylkill, and had he had the means, it is probable that for all his having found and claimed Springland, he would have ended his days there. He had lived on its

54 Birch's autobiography, I, 19, shows that in his time there was said to be a set of drawings of retreats for twenty miles up the Schuylkill, made by Mr. Perkins "when he favored this country with his celebrated talents." No trace of such a collection has been found.
lower reaches, and was well aware of its charms as a river which he said “abounds in beautiful situations for retreats.” Many estates bordered the river in the vicinity of Philadelphia, and his plates of such homes in the volume outnumbered those on the Delaware three to one. He seems to have been the first person to grasp the concept of the lower river as a unit possessed of definite characteristics.

Although he visited and commented on other Schuylkill “seats,” his own words about those he reproduced will show both his knowledge and the unity of his outlook. The Woodlands “has a beautiful water scene towards the [Schuylkill]. The ground is spacious and elegant. . . . I spent some pleasant time at this place.”55 Proceeding upstream, Echo occupied “An elegant situation on the bank of Schuylkill, near the suburbs of the city: rich in every wild luxury which nature can afford. . . . The house is of no note, and its scite not well chosen. It derives its name from the reverberations given from the opposite shore—particularly by a rock memorable for having been in the revolution the place of encampment for the British, while Gen. Washington and his army were on this spot.” On the same side of the river, Lansdowne “lies upon the bank of the Pastoral Schuylkill, a stream of peculiar beauty, deservedly the delight and boast of the shores it fertilizes.”56 Although this “was a fine spot, [and] had a good house upon it,” it “was placed too far back from the water.”57 Across the stream at Sedgley, it was the “romantic woods, gently descending lawns and caverned rocks” which pleased him as being “happily graced” by the first Gothic home in America. Next door, toward the city, the “sylvan scene” of Mount Sidney mingled with Sedgley’s “romantic wilds.”58

But despite the charms of these intimate spots, the literal and figurative summit was reached at Belmont Mansion. “It is impossible for the artist, who has fixed his attention upon the various beauties of Schuylkill, to leave the study of its charms. Here you pass from the wild romantic scene . . . to view in open space the world below, the riches of the richest state; the big metropolis in the woods, the chequered country with her merchants’ seats; the bustle of agri-

56 Country Seats, descriptive pages.
58 Country Seats, descriptive pages.
culture, and the verdant banks of the fluid mirror that reflects the sky; and further on to view Mount Holly mingled with the air in Jersey. The whole a soft and visionary scene.”

The second valuable feature of the *Country Seats* lies in its ranking as the first of a parade of color-plate books on American scenery. It must be admitted that the four plates which are purely scenic (omitting Mendenhall Ferry and York Island as partially so) are today probably the least appealing and least significant of the entire volume. But they compare most favorably with the isolated earlier attempts at copperplate scenic views in the United States. They were trail blazers in a unified presentation. Birch's work preceded by twelve years Joshua Shaw's *Picturesque Views of American Scenery*, published in Philadelphia in 1820—announced as a more ambitious work than Birch's, but actually comprising a smaller number of plates, with only two views on the Schuylkill. Again, the *Country Seats* was more than fifteen years ahead of W. G. Wall's much superior *Hudson River Portfolio*, engraved by J. Hill, which appeared in 1824. N. P. Willis' familiar *American Scenery* with pictures by Bartlett was not published until 1840, and J. C. Wild did not turn to a volume of scenic plates until his *Valley of the Mississippi* in 1841 and 1842. It was not until the fifties that books on American scenery began to appear in quantity.

Third, as Joseph Jackson has pointed out, Birch made the first attempt to perpetuate the appearance of the elegant estates which were to be found in this country one hundred and fifty years ago. Only a few scattered views of that type had earlier been made. With

---

59 Ibid. Lest Birch's rhapsodic expressions be regarded simply as the commonplace usage of a generation given to hyperbole, see also William Cullen Bryant, ed., *Picturesque America: or, The Land We Live In* (New York, 1872), II, 25, 32, 38-39, and Eberlein and Hubbard, *Portrait of a Colonial City*, 292. As early as 1924, restoration of the river from its long-neglected condition at Philadelphia was the crusade of a public-spirited citizen. See John Frederick Lewis, *The Redemption of the Lower Schuylkill, Containing Many Backward Glances* (Philadelphia, 1924). Recently the river has been the subject of a full-length portrait in J. Bennett Nolan's *The Schuylkill* (New Brunswick, N. J., 1951), Chaps. 18-20, which describe the locale of Birch's scenes.

60 Compare, for example, in connection with the Schuylkill, J. Hoffman's "Upper Ferry on Schuylkill," *Massachusetts Magazine*, Vol. IV, No. IX.

61 See, for example, T. Addison Richards, *The Romance of American Landscape* (New York, 1855).

62 Jackson, I, 295. In Jackson's opinion, "the engravings were admirably executed, and the compositions always attractive."
many such mansions later burned, torn down, or converted to places of public accommodation, Birch's record is invaluable. Of the Philadelphia subjects, Lansdowne burned in 1854; Fountain Green (next to the existing Mount Pleasant) was made undesirable by the extension of the Columbia Railroad, and became a tavern and picnic site from 1849 until it was torn down in 1871. Sedgley fell into disuse about 1830, was sold to enlarge Fairmount Park, and failed to survive; Solitude remained because it was useful for offices, and The Woodlands because it became part of a cemetery; China Retreat became Bristol College. Of Fountain Green, Mount Sidney, Devon, China Retreat, and even Lansdowne, Birch's is apparently the only print ever rendered. Of Solitude and Mendenhall Ferry it seems to be one of two. In the case of Sedgley, The Woodlands, and the View from Belmont, Birch's view is the earliest.

Nor were these spots inconsequential. Belmont's view was many times enjoyed by Washington, a frequenter there. Sedgley was most important for its architecture, and The Woodlands for the prominent Hamilton family. Solitude was built by the grandson of William Penn. Mount Sidney was the home of General John Barker, a multi-term mayor of Philadelphia. And Lansdowne, built by another Penn grandson, was in the 1790's the home of the Binghams and "supposed to be the best country house in America." Its driveway, leading from massive, fancifully wrought iron gates which were "the wonder of the

63 Westcott, XXI, 1594; Earle, 73.
64 As to Lansdowne, the modern photographic reproduction of Gilmor's sketch has been mentioned (Note 43); the HSP has three fine water colors by George Lehman dating from different visits around 1825 and 1830.
65 Solitude was the subject of an engraving in Poems by John Penn Esq. in Two Volumes (London, 1801), II. Mendenhall was pictured in a French print, c. 1821. Édouard de Montulé, Recueil des cartes et des vues du voyage en Amérique . . . (Paris, 1821), Plate 13.
66 An aquatint of Sedgley appeared in The Analectic of November, 1820; a copperplate engraving in Child's Views in Philadelphia (1827), a volume which described the site in glowing terms; and a wood engraving by Gilbert in The Casket, July, 1829. Strickland's engraving on copper of The Woodlands appeared in The Port Folio, December, 1809, and was later reused in The Casket, October, 1830. Beginning about 1860, the view from Belmont became a popular subject for engravings.
67 Generally considered the first Gothic house in America. It is interesting to note that Birch's autobiography, II, 12, tells of his having with him on a trip to Washington (which appears to have taken place in the latter part of 1802) and of showing to a Mr. Forsythe at Baltimore "a design of my own for a small Gothic house" which was presumably built in or near that city.
country around,” was more than half a mile long. “Winding roads about the grounds were illumined on festive occasions with colored lights, placed in the border shrubbery. Vases and fountains, here and there, large green houses filled with rare flowers and tropical fruits, box wood hedge, cut into the formal style of the period, verdure green and nodding flowers, magnificent groves of majestic trees, ravines and romantic dells, natural and artistic beauties of the choicest character made up the delights of this place.”

Lastly, Birch’s book is becoming recognized as significant, and rightly so, in the field of Philadelphia views. Of the original edition, nine of the twenty plates depict scenes which lie within the confines of the present city, and another four are concerned with locations in the suburbs. The second edition is even more heavily weighted in that direction, with six plates in the city, three just outside, and only three not related to Philadelphia. And five of the eight restrikes, which are by far the most available states of these prints, fall into the same local category.

It is unquestionably true that these pictures of tranquil, rural atmosphere have been overshadowed by Birch’s Philadelphia Views. They lack the abundance of figures, costumes, occupations, and unusual details of everyday living which these earlier pictures show in almost every plate. Still, the Country Seats may yet be accorded by common consent the distinction already given to it both by a local and a national expert. Joseph Jackson has placed the country scenes “only second in importance among early American views” to their city counterparts. And Whitman Bennett, in his guide to American color-plate books, has found the Birch volumes to be “the two initial masterpieces of American color plate publishing . . . entitled to the greatest collector esteem.” Together they form almost a unit: the one a mirror of Birch’s adopted city, the other a revelation of much that was Birch himself. Assuredly the Country Seats was very close to his heart.

Villanova

Martin P. Snyder

68 Earl, 127. See also Margaret L. Brown, “Mr. and Mrs. William Bingham of Philadelphia,” PMHB, LXI (1937), 286, 306, 314, which reproduces Birch’s engraving of Lansdowne.
69 Jackson, I, 295.
APPENDIX

This collation of Birch’s *Country Seats* assembles for the first time the details of the First or Subscribers’ Edition of 1808, including its various numbers, the Trade Edition of 1809, the Second Edition of 1827–1828, and finally the known restrikes of the plates. Three printed pages of description which were a part of the 1808 and 1809 editions have been omitted for the sake of brevity. A table relates each plate to the check list numbers assigned below in marginal brackets. From it there can be told at a glance the editions in which each picture appeared, the states of each plate, and whether or not restrikes have been made. Periods beneath superscript letters have been omitted.

**FIRST OR SUBSCRIBERS’ EDITION**
(in four Numbers)

(All plates appear both black-and-white and in contemporary hand coloring on watermarked paper. Plate size varies from 7½” x 6” down to 6⅛” x 5⅜”; color size from 6” x 4½” down to 5⅜” x 3⅛”.)

*First Number*

Letterpress cover page, bluish- or brownish-gray paper:

**THE COUNTRY SEATS**

**OF THE**

**UNITED STATES.**

**NO. 1,**

Containing Five Plates.

Price—Three Dollars.
Coloured—Five Dollars.

Letterpress sheet of introduction as follows:

**AMERICAN SEATS.**

THE Fine Arts are, as to the American Nation at large, in their infancy; to promote / them in propagating Taste with the habit of rural retirement, supported by the growing wealth / of the Nation, will be to form the National character favourable to the civilization
of this young / country, and establish that respectability which will add to its strength.

The comforts and advantages of a Country Residence, after Domestic accommodations / are consulted, consist more in the beauty of the situation, than in the massy magnitude of the / edifice: the choice ornaments of Architecture are by no means intended to be disparaged, they / are on the contrary, not simply desirable, but requisite. The man of taste will select his situa- / tion with skill, and add elegance and animation to the best choice. In the United States the face / of nature is so variegated. Nature has been so sportive, and the means so easy of acquiring po-/sitions fit to gratify the most refined and rural enjoyment, that labour and expenditure of Art is / not so great as in Countries less favoured.

It would be impossible to do justice in a work, such as this is inten- / ded to be, without / appropriating some plates to the sports of wild unregulated nature: the Woods, Lawns, broken / Precipices and Crags: the curious and sublime of the Forest Trees: the Cataracts and Rivers: / the blue Capt Mountains, and the deep, retired, and dark- / some Vallies.

Such scenes which decorate the grounds, and form the choicest Pictures of themselves, / and which cannot be brought into the same Plate with the Villa, will be given separately, as high- / ly necessary to form a full and correct idea of the American Country Residence.

Five unnumbered plates as follows:


[2a] The Country Seats of the United States of North America, / with some Scenes connected with them. / PART the FIRST / Containing Twenty Plates. / (below picture): The View from Springland. / Designed and Published 1808, by W. Birch Enamel Painter Spring- / land near Bristol Pennsylv*

[3a] Hoboken in New Jersey, the Seat of Mr John Stevens. / Drawn En- / graved & Published by W. Birch, Springland near Bristol, Pennsylv*

[4a] Hampton the Seat of Gen¹ Chas Ridgley, Maryland. — / Drawn En- / graved & Published by W. Birch Springland near Bristol Penns* 

[5a] Lansdown the Seat of the late Wm Bingham Esq Pennsylvania. / Drawn Engraved & Published by W. Birch Springland near Bristol Pennsylv*
Second Number

Letterpress cover page, bluish-gray paper, printed as in First Number except for blank space for later insertion in ink of appropriate number, with "2" inserted in ink.

Five unnumbered plates as follows:

[6a] The Sun reflecting on the Dew, a Garden scene. / Echo, Pennsylv* a place belonging to Mr D. Bavarage. / Drawn Engraved & Published by W. Birch Springland near Bristol Pennsylvania.

[7a] Mount Vernon, Virginia, the Seat of the late Gen¹ G. Washington. / Drawn Engraved & Published by W. Birch Springland near Bristol Pennsylvania.

[8a] Fountain Green Pennsylv* the Seat of Mr S. Meeker. / Drawn Engraved & Published by W. Birch Springland near Bristol Pennsylvania.

[9a] Solitude in Pennsylv* belonging to Mr Penn. / Drawn Engraved & Published by W. Birch Springland near Bristol Pennsylvania.

[10a] Devon in Pennsylv* the Seat of Mr Dallas. / Painted by T. Birch, Engraved & Published by W. Birch Springland near Bristol Pennsylvania.

Third Number

Letterpress cover page identical with that for Second Number except for insertion of "3" in ink.

Five unnumbered plates as follows:


[14a] Woodlands the Seat of Mr Wm Hamilton Pennsylv* / Drawn, Engraved & Published by W. Birch, Springland near Bristol, Pennsylvania.

[15a] Sedgley the Seat of Mr Wm Crammond Pennsylv* / Drawn Engraved & Published by W. Birch Springland near Bristol Pennsylvania.
Fourth Number

Letterpress cover page, bluish-gray paper, for the full twenty plates:

THE
COUNTRY SEATS
OF THE
UNITED STATES.

PART THE FIRST.
Containing Twenty Plates.

Price—Twelve Dollars.
Coloured. Twenty Dollars.

Five unnumbered plates as follows:

[16a] View from Belmont Pennsylvania, the Seat of Judge Peters. / Drawn Engraved & Published by W. Birch Springland near Bristol Pennsylvania

[17a] York-Island, with a View of the Seats of Mr. A. Gracie, Mr. Church &c. / Drawn, Engraved & Published by W. Birch, Springland, near Bristol, Pennsylvania

[18a] Mendenghall Ferry, Schuylkill, Pennsylvania. / Drawn Engraved & Published by W. Birch Springland near Bristol Pennsylvania

[19a] China Retreat Pennsylvania, the Seat of Mr. Manigault. / Drawn Engraved & Published by W. Birch Springland near Bristol Pennsylvania

[20a] View from the Elysian Bower, Springland Pennsylvania, the residence of Mr. W. Birch. / Drawn Engraved & Published by W. Birch Springland near Bristol Pennsylvania

Three letterpress sheets, printed one side, containing a brief description of certain of the twenty scenes depicted.

Trade Edition
(one volume)

(All plates appear both black-and-white and in contemporary hand coloring on watermarked paper. Plate and color sizes as in First Edition.)

Letterpress sheet of introduction identical with that in First Edition.

Twenty unnumbered plates identical with those of First Edition except:

[1b] (Obverse of title plate identical with that in First Edition, but reverse bears letterpress notation of deposit of the title of the book in the District Court of Pennsylvania, January 20, 1809.)
   [Trial proof, not contained in volume as published, with inscription:
   Mount Sidney, the Seat of Gen' John Barker, Pennsylvn]

[18b] Inscription altered to correct spelling from "Mendenghall" to "Mendenhall" Ferry.

Three letterpress sheets of description identical with those in First Edition.

SECOND EDITION
   (one volume)
   (All plates in contemporary hand coloring in Library of Congress copy.)
   Letterpress cover page, thick bluish-gray paper, 13½" x 9¾":

BIRCH'S
   COUNTRY SEATS
   IN THE UNITED STATES.

Letterpress inner cover, buff paper, 13" x 8¾":

   AMERICAN
   COUNTRY SEATS.

Letterpress sheets of introduction and description lacking.

Twelve unnumbered plates as follows:

[1b] Obverse and reverse of title plate identical with that described in Trade Edition.

[2b] The View from Springland. / Designed and Published 1808, by W. Birch Enamel Painter Springland near Bristol Pennsylvn
   [Plate from First Edition reduced to 6½" x 4½"]

The following nine plates, each identical with that described in First Edition:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Title Plate</td>
<td>1a</td>
<td>1b</td>
<td>1b</td>
<td></td>
<td>1c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subtitle Plate</td>
<td>2a</td>
<td>2a</td>
<td>2b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hoboken</td>
<td>3a</td>
<td>3a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hampton</td>
<td>4a</td>
<td>4a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lansdown</td>
<td>5a</td>
<td>5a</td>
<td>5a</td>
<td>5b</td>
<td>5c</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Echo</td>
<td>6a</td>
<td>6a</td>
<td>6a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount Vernon</td>
<td>7a</td>
<td>7a</td>
<td>7a</td>
<td></td>
<td>7b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fountain Green</td>
<td>8a</td>
<td>8a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solitude</td>
<td>9a</td>
<td>9a</td>
<td>9a</td>
<td></td>
<td>9b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devon</td>
<td>10a</td>
<td>10a</td>
<td>10a</td>
<td></td>
<td>10b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount Sidney</td>
<td>11a</td>
<td>11b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Orleans</td>
<td>12a</td>
<td>12a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monticello</td>
<td>13a</td>
<td>13a</td>
<td>13a</td>
<td></td>
<td>13b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Woodlands</td>
<td>14a</td>
<td>14a</td>
<td>14a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sedgley</td>
<td>15a</td>
<td>15a</td>
<td>15a</td>
<td></td>
<td>15b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Belmont</td>
<td>16a</td>
<td>16a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>York-Island</td>
<td>17a</td>
<td>17a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mendenhall Ferry</td>
<td>18a</td>
<td>18b</td>
<td>18b</td>
<td>18c</td>
<td>18d</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China Retreat</td>
<td>19a</td>
<td>19a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Springland</td>
<td>20a</td>
<td>20a</td>
<td>20a</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Restrikes, probably by Desilver**

(hard white paper)

[5b] Lansdown, identical with plate described in First Edition except for additional line of inscription: Built by John Penn, Governor of Pennsylvania 1763 to 1776.

[18c] Mendenhall Ferry, identical with plate described in Trade Edition except for additional line of inscription: Opposite Laurel Hill.

**McAllister Restrikes**

[1c] Title plate, identical with that described in First Edition except for addition of figure "16" to right of vignette of U. S. Capitol.

[5c] Lansdown, identical with Desilver restrike except for addition of figure "10" at top right corner beyond color line.
The following, each identical with that described in First Edition except for addition of a figure at top right corner beyond color line:

[9b] Solitude, "9"  [15b] Sedgley, "14"
[10b] Devon, "15"

[18d] Mendenhall Ferry, identical with Desilver restrike except for addition of figure "11" as above described.

**Country Scenes by William Birch Not a Part of Any Edition of His Country Seats**

**Water Colors:**

View from under abandoned toll bridge at Springland.
Size approximately 8" x 7\(\frac{3}{8}\)". HSP.

The bridge at Springland.
Size approximately 7" x 5". HSP.

China Retreat.
Size approximately 7\(\frac{3}{8}\)" x 5\(\frac{7}{16}\)". Library Company of Philadelphia.

Andalusia.
Size approximately 9\(\frac{3}{8}\)" x 6\(\frac{7}{16}\)". Library Company of Philadelphia.

**Engraving:**

Bath near Bristol, Pennsylvania.
W. Birch del / Bath near Bristol, Pennsylvania.
(not engraved in Birch's style)
Size approximately 7\(\frac{1}{4}\)" x 5\(\frac{5}{8}\)" plate line; 6\(\frac{1}{16}\)" x 4\(\frac{1}{16}\)" color line. *The Port Folio, V* (June, 1811), 465.