

## *Powelton: An Unrecorded Building* by William Strickland

**P**OWELTON, the great Greek Revival country house formerly situated on the west bank of the Schuylkill in Philadelphia's Blockley Township, was one of the most important buildings of its period and deserves to be better known in the literature of American architectural history. The seat of John Hare Powel (1786-1856),<sup>1</sup> gentleman farmer, art collector, and amateur architect, the house was one of the earliest private manifestations of the monumental Greek Revival style in America. The core of the house was built by Powel's aunt, Elizabeth Willing Powel, in 1800-1802. The portico and wings, added by John Hare Powel, the inheritor of her fortune, were designed by William Strickland in 1825; the portico was completed in 1826, but the wings took almost forty years to finish. Destroyed in 1885 to make way for West Philadelphia tenements, Powelton was Strickland's first important private commission and, as far as is known, the first private country house near Philadelphia to use a giant stone portico based on a Greek temple front.

Powelton has not entirely escaped the notice of architectural historians, but comment has been brief.<sup>2</sup> "Considering the architectural importance of this fine house," George B. Tatum has written, "it is surprising that it has received so little attention from either contemporary writers or from later historians."<sup>3</sup> Brief accounts or references

<sup>1</sup> Henry Simpson, *The Lives of Eminent Philadelphians now Deceased* (Philadelphia, 1859), 808-819.

<sup>2</sup> William Harbeson, "Mediaeval Philadelphia," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (hereinafter *PMHB*), LXVII (1943), 226, 230. Harbeson mentions the house only in passing and dates it "about 1830." George B. Tatum, *Penn's Great Town* (Philadelphia, 1961), 71-72, 175.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 71-72. I should like to take this opportunity to thank Professor Tatum for suggesting this study. I want also to express my thanks to Mrs. Lydia Bond Powel of New York City, Mrs. Hope Powel Harkness of Providence, John Hare Powel of Seattle, John Harris of the Royal Institute of British Architects (London), Edwin Wolf 2nd, Librarian of the Library Company of Philadelphia, and Mrs. Agnes Addison Gilchrist of New York.

to the house have appeared variously in local histories,<sup>4</sup> social histories,<sup>5</sup> genealogies,<sup>6</sup> diaries,<sup>7</sup> and newspapers,<sup>8</sup> but the single most valuable description of Powelton is found in an unpublished history and genealogy of the Hare-Powel family compiled in 1907.<sup>9</sup> This, together with a number of Elizabeth Willing Powel's and John Hare Powel's accounts and letters concerning the building of the house and some recently uncovered English drawings for "Proposed additions to Powelton Cottage," make up the bulk of the primary source material available on the subject.

The history of Powelton began on November 13, 1775, when Samuel Powel (1738-1793) and his wife Elizabeth Willing (1742-1830) paid £1,675 sterling to her kinsmen Thomas Willing and Tench Francis for ninety-seven acres on the west bank of the Schuylkill.<sup>10</sup> Today this plot would be roughly defined as lying between the Schuylkill River and 34th Street, Lancaster Avenue and, possibly, Hamilton Street. Samuel Powel is said to have erected a country house called "Powelton" shortly after he acquired the land, probably around 1779.<sup>11</sup> Nothing definite is known about the appearance of this house, but there is reason to believe that it might have been quite ambitious as Samuel Powel created one of Philadelphia's finest town houses.<sup>12</sup> In any case, it must have been reasonably commodious, for in May, 1784, a festival of the Sons of Tammany was held at

<sup>4</sup> M. Laffitte Vieira, *West Philadelphia Illustrated* (Philadelphia, 1903), 105, 170; Leon S. Rosenthal, *A History of Philadelphia's University City* (Philadelphia, 1963), 36-44. Rosenthal's information is based largely on Vieira's which was apparently taken from secondary sources.

<sup>5</sup> Nathaniel Burt, *The Perennial Philadelphians* (Boston, 1963), 157. Burt calls Powelton "the most magnificent country house of its time in West Philadelphia."

<sup>6</sup> Robert C. Moon, *The Morris Family of Philadelphia, Supplement* (Philadelphia, 1908), IV, 192-194.

<sup>7</sup> Townsend Ward, "A Walk to Darby," *PMHB*, III (1879), 159; Allan Nevins, *The Diary of Philip Hone 1828-1851* (New York, 1927), I, 125.

<sup>8</sup> Frank Willing Leach, "Old Philadelphia Families: Powel," *North American*, July 5, 1908.

<sup>9</sup> Robert Johnston Hare-Powel, "Hare-Powel and Kindred Families," 1907, typescript in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (hereinafter HSP).

<sup>10</sup> Office of Recorder of Deeds, County of Philadelphia, Deed Book I 17, 137-139 (microfilm copy, reel number 36).

<sup>11</sup> Date given without documentation, Hare-Powel, 197 (pagination at top of page used rather than a variant pagination at the foot of the page).

<sup>12</sup> The famous Stedman-Powel House on South Third Street (1765). See Nicholas B. Wainwright, *Colonial Grandeur in Philadelphia: The House and Furniture of General John Cadwalader* (Philadelphia, 1964), 88-101; Thomas T. Waterman, *The Dwellings of Colonial America* (Chapel Hill, 1950), 162-165; Philip B. Wallace, *Colonial Houses in Philadelphia* (New York, 1931), 178-189.

Powelton, at which George Washington was present.<sup>13</sup> It was still extant in 1793, for in that year Samuel Powel died there during the yellow fever epidemic.<sup>14</sup> The fate of this first Powelton is unknown; whether it was destroyed by fire or was simply rented as a farmhouse after 1800 cannot be determined.<sup>15</sup> At all events, it was not kept as the family country house, for in May, 1800, Samuel's widow and sole heir to the family fortune began a new house called Powelton.

Mrs. Powel's building activities are known through her diaries, account books, and receipt books. On May 13, 1800, she recorded that "ground . . . was . . . broken for the cellar of Powelton House."<sup>16</sup> That same day she paid David Gray, house carpenter, one thousand dollars "to be appropriated to the building and purchasing materials for Powelton House."<sup>17</sup> As if to clarify matters further for future historians, she added, after another similar entry, "N. B. David Gray is the carpenter and undertaker for building my mansion house at Powelton Farm on the Western side of the River Schuylkill."<sup>18</sup> Gray was, in fact, the general contractor and probably also the "architect" of the house as there is no mention of any payment for a plan or design in the otherwise detailed and presumably complete records of payment to all craftsmen and laborers who worked on or supplied material for the house.<sup>19</sup> Her arrangement with Gray was simple and businesslike; she made him regular advances of

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Jackson, *Literary Landmarks of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1939), 298.

<sup>14</sup> Harold D. Eberlein and Cortlandt V. D. Hubbard, *Portrait of a Colonial City, Philadelphia 1670-1838* (Philadelphia, 1939), 373.

<sup>15</sup> This study is complicated by the fact that there were always several buildings on the Powelton grounds and it is not always possible to distinguish between references to lesser farm buildings and the mansion house. It is known that there was a building standing in October, 1799, for during that month Mrs. Powel paid £6 9s 5½d "for 29 panes of glass and glazing the windows at Powelton farm house, and also for erecting a necessary." Elizabeth Powel Estate Account Book 1794-1801, Library Company of Philadelphia (hereinafter LCP).

<sup>16</sup> Pocket Almanack and Diary for 1802, Elizabeth Powel Papers, HSP.

<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth Powel Accounts 1794-1805, May 13, 1800, LCP.

<sup>18</sup> Elizabeth Powel Estate Account Book 1794-1801, Feb. 4, 1801, LCP. David Gray is listed in the Philadelphia directories from 1797 to 1824 as a house carpenter residing at 162 North 5th Street. He was elected a member of the Carpenters' Company in 1801 and died in 1824. *The Carpenters' Company of the City and County of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1962), 59.

<sup>19</sup> Throughout the second half of the eighteenth century house carpenters were expected to be adept at "drawing designs." Rules and Regulations of the Friendship Carpenters' Company (1769), manuscript in the Carpenters' Company library, Carpenters' Hall, Philadelphia (quoted in Margaret B. Tinkcom, "Cliveden: The Building of a Philadelphia Countryseat, 1763-1767," *PMHB*, LXXXVII (1964), 14. See also Fiske Kimball, *Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and of the Early Republic* (New York, 1922), 61-62; Wainwright, 36.

\$1000 with which he was "to purchase all materials in his own name and credit."<sup>20</sup> Gray also agreed "to ask no other recompense for his trouble in providing the said materials and for paying the workmen, being satisfied with the reasonable profit attending the doing the carpenter's work at the old prices."<sup>21</sup> Apparently, however, he did succeed in obtaining an additional fee for his services as "undertaker," for when the house was completed, on January 2, 1802, Mrs. Powel recorded:

I have this day paid David Gray \$1,017.13 the balance of his account in full of all demands for materials and workmanship of every description for the building of Powelton House in Blockley Township and the Necessary belonging to the mansion. Mr. Gray having previously delivered to me the accounts for work and materials paid for by him except his own charge for commission on the undertaking which is now included in the present settlement. N. B. For the payment of these accounts I had at different periods advanced Mr. Gray 11,000 Drs as specified above the whole of my house is now finished amounting to \$12,017.31 without the last coat of paint on the inside.<sup>22</sup>

No positively identifiable views of the house seem to have survived. There is a possibility that the house was similar to that depicted in the central portion of the drawings by the architects Haigh, Franklin, and Haigh, of Liverpool, England.<sup>23</sup> But these drawings, entitled, as previously mentioned, "Proposed additions to Powelton Cottage" are dated 1831 and must be relied on with caution. Since they were drawn in Liverpool, we may assume that the architects had no firsthand knowledge of the actual house and that their rendering of the earlier central portion of Powelton was based on drawings and descriptions supplied them by John Hare Powel. The crux of the matter is whether they correctly represent the central portion of the

<sup>20</sup> Elizabeth Powel Accounts 1794-1805, May 31, 1800, LCP.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, Jan. 2, 1802.

<sup>23</sup> These drawings were recently found in the Library Company of Philadelphia along with other Powel material, deposited there about 1940 by a descendant of John Hare Powel. A note accompanying the drawings (quoted later in this paper) is signed "J. Franklin, Liverpool, June 28, 1831." A Joseph Franklin of Liverpool who designed in the Greek Revival style in the 1830's is listed in H. M. Colvin, *A Biographical Dictionary of English Architects 1660-1840* (London, 1954), 217. The Royal Institute of British Architects, according to John Harris, Drawings Curator, does not have any drawings by this Liverpool firm (letter to the author of Jan. 31, 1966).

original house as it actually looked before the additions, or as the architects remodeled it to look after the additions. Stylistically, there is enough difference between the center of the house and the wings to support the former theory. The wings, as John Harris has pointed out, are in a "rather traditional early Victorian style," whereas the central block is small cottage or "villa" in the style of the last decade of the eighteenth century.<sup>24</sup> It is a rather ordinary design, and sources for it can be found in several English architectural pattern books of the 1780's and 90's.<sup>25</sup>

While one can only speculate about the elevation of the English designs, it is possible to be more precise about their central floor plan as it corresponds with what the documents tell about the house. The six fireplaces shown in the plan (three on each floor) are verified by accounts kept by Mrs. Powel, indicating that six marble chimney pieces were supplied by Adam Traquair at a cost of £77, 2s, 6d.<sup>26</sup> Seven pounds ten shillings were paid to Robert Wellford for "ornamenting four chimneys."<sup>27</sup> The colonnaded piazza shown on the ground floor east front may also have been original to Mrs. Powel's house as it is recorded in her accounts that Thomas Lynch was paid nine pounds for "colums."<sup>28</sup> But these columns could also have been for a "frontispiece" or front door frame. The drawings indicate that the building was of square plan, forty-three feet on a side. This fact is corrobo-

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> John Plaw, *Rural Architecture; or Designs from the Simple Cottage to the Decorated Villa* (London, 1796), and *Ferme Ornée or Rural Improvements* (London, 1795); John Miller, *The Country Gentleman's Architect* (London, 1787).

<sup>26</sup> Adam Traquair was a stonecutter and skilled draftsman, the son of the Philadelphia sculptor James Traquair. He assisted in the design of the Permanent Bridge over the Schuylkill (1798-1806). Tatum, 48, 165. One of his drawings is reproduced by Charles E. Peterson, "Library Hall," *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society*, XLIII, Part I (1953), 140. He is first listed in the Philadelphia directories in 1807 as a "stone cutter" at 10th and High Streets, and subsequently appears variously as a "marble cutter" or "marble mason."

<sup>27</sup> These must have been among the earliest examples of Wellford's composition ornaments for he appears in the Philadelphia directories beginning in 1801 and continues regularly until 1839 as "ornamental composition manufacturer." C. O. C., "Two American Mantlepieces," *Bulletin of the Metropolitan Museum of Art*, XIV (1919), 36-37; Kimball, 258-259. See also photostats in the Joseph Downs Manuscript and Microfilm Library, Winterthur Museum, #PH 181, "Directions for securely fixing Wellford's Composition Ornaments and Moldings," and #PH 182, Wellford's trade card and advertisement.

<sup>28</sup> The price of £9 for four columns is within reason; thirty years earlier John Cadwalader paid John Elmslie £2 for "two colomes turnd for a frontes." Wainwright, 14.

rated by R. J. Hare-Powel, who described the central portion of the house as forty-feet wide inside; he also noted that the west front was always used as the principal entrance.<sup>29</sup> The accounts indicate that the house was constructed of stone, probably stuccoed. The disposition of the interior spaces is more problematic, but for lack of evidence to the contrary, it may be assumed that the Liverpool plan is essentially correct. It is certainly not unusual; the laterally placed stairs, opening off the main hall, were used frequently in Philadelphia houses and can be seen at Mount Pleasant (1761-1762) and Sweetbriar (1797).<sup>30</sup> The stair laid out on a semi-circle was one of the characteristic and fashionable elements of the Adamesque style. When all of these factors are visualized as a totality, it will become apparent that the house was archetypical of the Philadelphia country house of the Federal (or Adam) period.<sup>31</sup>

Such was the property that John Hare Powel decided to improve. His incentive for erecting an imposing portico in 1825-1826 is perhaps not difficult to determine; he was a vain, rich, and socially important man whose prestige would be enhanced by such a monumental addition to his countryseat. His taste, as characterized by his son Samuel, was "stern and severe; in all his feelings he was a republican"<sup>32</sup>; this is nowhere more evident, in a material sense, than in the chaste and pure Greek forms of Powelton. Years later, in a letter to the architect Richard Upjohn, who was then designing him a town house in the Italianate manner, he wrote (in reaction to overly ornate designs): "How different will be the establishment of a plain Yankee gentleman who has lived three score years and more, who hails as a democrat, who covets ample space, high ceilings, a good outline, but who would rather rest his eyes upon a Medici vase or a candelarbrum of Pompeii than feast upon all of the fashionable display of French decorators."<sup>33</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Hare-Powel, 65.

<sup>30</sup> Harold E. Dickson, *A Hundred Pennsylvania Buildings* (State College, Pa., 1954), 33-33A; Joan Church Roberts, "Sweetbrier," *Antiques*, LXXXII (1962), 525-527.

<sup>31</sup> Robert C. Smith has outlined the characteristic features, which include plastered stone walls, cubelike plan and elevation, a rear piazza for viewing the river ("a detail which seems to have been almost as typical of this area as side galleries were of Charleston, S. C."), a curving [stair] wall, and mantles with composition ornaments. "The Houses in Fairmount Park," *Antiques*, LXXXII (1962), 534-537.

<sup>32</sup> Samuel Powel, "Sketch of the Life of John Hare Powel," 1893, Powel Papers, HSP.

<sup>33</sup> John Hare Powel to Richard Upjohn, Sept. 16, 1851, John Hare Powel Letter Book, 1849-1851, *ibid.*

Thus he seems all his life to have been a neo-classicist in his tastes. His correspondence shows that his architectural interests were more than casual; in addition, he had a tolerably good knowledge of architectural drawing, as shown by his perspective rendering of West Point Academy, now in the collection of the Library Company of Philadelphia. His interest in architecture continued throughout his life and in the later house, which he built on Rittenhouse Square, he attempted, rather unsuccessfully, to direct his architect's every move.<sup>34</sup> Perhaps the most accurate way to characterize Powel's architectural interests would be to equate him with the gentlemen amateurs who "dabbled in architecture," a fashion prevalent at that time both in England and, to a lesser degree, in America.

To return to the portico, the importance of this feature is enhanced because of its known authorship. The key document for assigning Strickland as its architect is a letter dated August 19, 1825, from Powel to his builder, Jesse Vogdes.<sup>35</sup> "You have," wrote Powel, "undertaken to superintend and erect a portico on the eastern side of my house at Powelton, in conformity with a draught made by Mr. Strickland. . . ."<sup>36</sup> This "Mr. Strickland" can only be the famous architect and engineer William Strickland (1788-1851).<sup>37</sup> So far, three—and only three—other references to Strickland's work at Powelton have been found, all in letters from Powel to his second builder, John O'Neil, and all written in 1832.<sup>38</sup> The fact that these letters date some six or seven years after the portico was erected suggests that Strickland was the architect of the entire remodelling job, and not simply of the portico. In the earliest, Powel informs O'Neil

<sup>34</sup> Charles B. Wood, III, "The John Hare Powel House: New Material on Hoxie & Button, John McArthur, Jr., and Richard Upjohn," to be published in the May, 1967, issue of the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*.

<sup>35</sup> Jesse Vogdes lived in Hamilton Village and is listed in the Philadelphia directories in 1813 and 1825. His son (or grandson?), Jesse T. Vogdes, born in West Philadelphia in 1858, was Chief Engineer and Superintendent of Fairmount Park, and was responsible, among other things, for the Centennial Concourse at Memorial Hall. Vieira, 130.

<sup>36</sup> John Hare Powel to Jesse Vogdes, Aug. 19, 1825, John Hare Powel Letter Book, 1824-1826, 230, LCP. Strickland's drawing(s) for Powelton unfortunately are lost.

<sup>37</sup> Strickland did have two brothers, John (1791-1835) and George (1797-?), both of whom were in Philadelphia at this time. But John was a carpenter like his father, and George was primarily an artist and clerk, although he is known to have made a few unsuccessful attempts at architectural design. Agnes Addison Gilchrist, *William Strickland, Architect and Engineer* (Philadelphia, 1950), I, 7, 20, 87.

<sup>38</sup> John O'Neil was elected a member of the Carpenters' Company in 1809 and died in 1835. *Carpenters' Company*.

that he and Strickland have altered the fenestration, but the exact changes are not described.<sup>39</sup> Four days later Powel directs O'Neil to follow Strickland's directions in cutting granite for the wing walls.<sup>40</sup> The last reference occurs in a letter of December 1, 1832, when Strickland and Powel made minor alterations, the nature of which are again not elaborated.<sup>41</sup> As brief as they are, these references clarify the role of both Powel and Strickland in the evolution of Powelton. Strickland was in direct charge of the actual *execution* of the work, but in matters of *design* Powel and Strickland seem to have worked together. This arrangement, while probably not wholly satisfactory to the architect, was a common practice.

In addition to the letter which identifies Strickland as the architect of the portico, a receipt book has survived which contains a partial account of its cost, omitting such major items as the architect's fees and the cost of the stone.<sup>42</sup> The stone, however, "for the pillars and pilasters of the portico," was supplied by John Fagan and delivered by November 22, 1825.<sup>43</sup>

The design and construction of the portico can be accurately dated 1825-1826, but the wing additions cannot be precisely dated. They were presumably begun at the same time or shortly after the portico, but for one reason or another, perhaps financial, construction proceeded very slowly and sporadically. The progress of the house as a whole was periodically noted by the diarist Sidney George Fisher; he indicated that it was "nearly finished" by May, 1844.<sup>44</sup> His first comment on Powelton was in September, 1839: "Powel is now building a very large & handsome house. Two immense wings, 3 rooms deep each, are added to the old house, which was a large one, & the whole of the first floor of which is converted into a hall. When

<sup>39</sup> Powel to John O'Neil, June 5, 1832, John Hare Powel Letter Book, 1829-1843, (unpaginated), LCP.

<sup>40</sup> Powel to O'Neil, June 9, 1832, *ibid.*

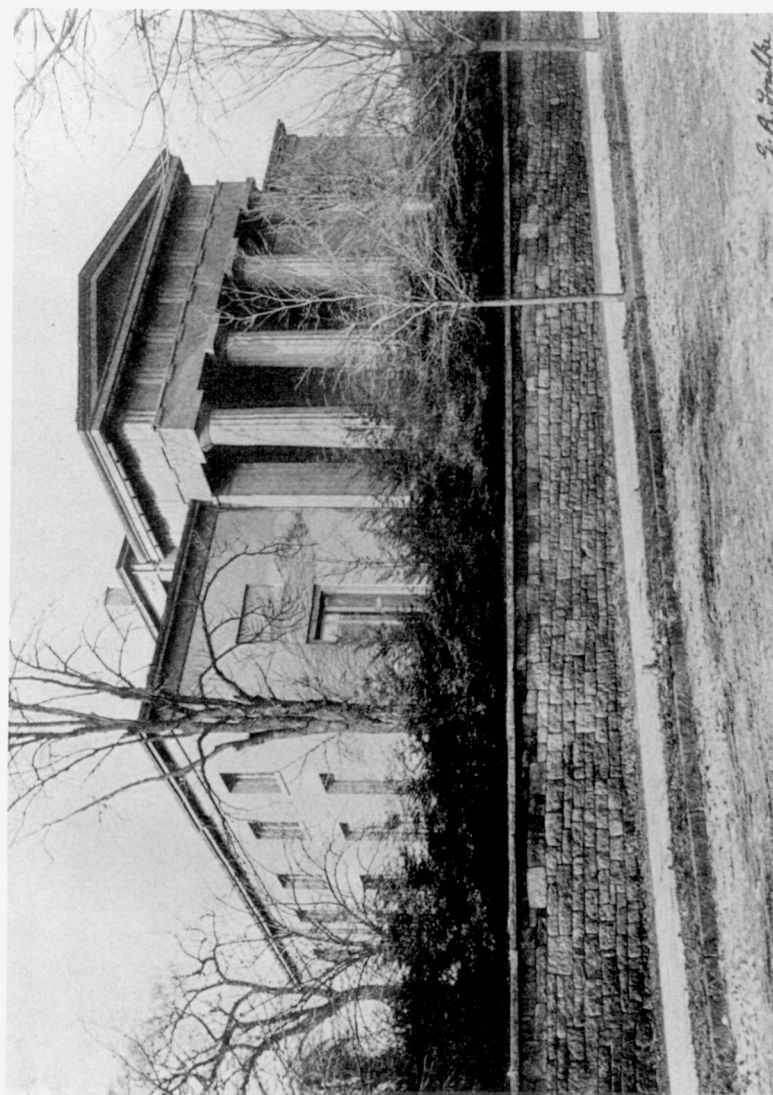
<sup>41</sup> Powel to O'Neil, Dec. 1, 1832, *ibid.*

<sup>42</sup> John Hare Powel Receipt Book (covering period June 24, 1825 to 1830), LCP.

<sup>43</sup> John Hare Powel to Jesse Vogdes, Nov. 22, 1825, John Hare Powel Letter Book, 1824-1826, 272, LCP. The fact that the columns were of stone seems to have impressed later writers; Vieira noted that the house has a "very imposing front adorned with massive columns of gray stone" (p. 170). Rosenthal also mentions "the imposing front of the mansion adorned with massive granite columns" (p. 41).

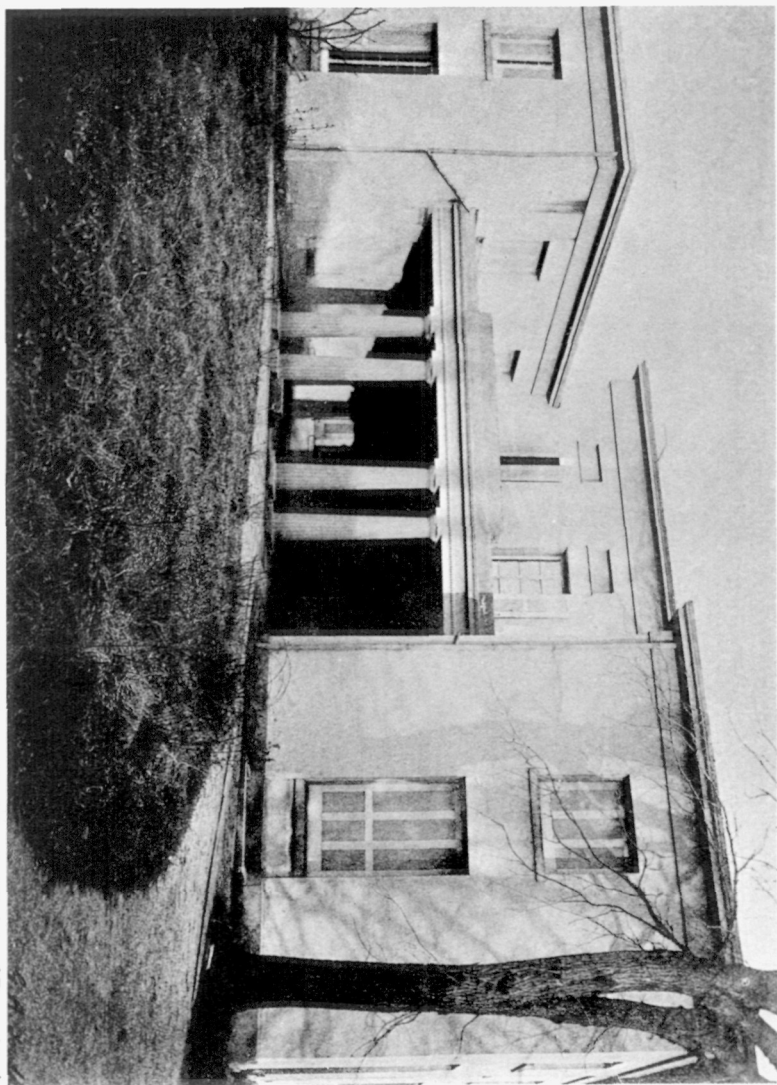
<sup>44</sup> Nicholas B. Wainwright, *A Philadelphia Perspective: The Diary of Sidney George Fisher Covering the Years 1834-1871* (Philadelphia, 1967), 169.





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POWELTON, VIEW OF THE EAST FRONT



POWELTON, VIEW OF THE WEST FRONT

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finished & handsomely furnished it will be a noble establishment. He is going to Europe in the spring & says he will live in it when he returns."<sup>45</sup>

Several years later, on December 24, 1843, the diarist dined with Powel at the Marshall House, which Powel owned and where he was then living. Fisher noted: "He goes to Europe & gets tired, he comes [home and lives] in a sort of bivouac as he says, his plate & pictures & furniture all locked up at Powelton, where he is building a very large and costly house which he will never inhabit."<sup>46</sup> The next spring Fisher again visited the estate: "On Tuesday walked with Clark Hare to Powelton. Went over the house which is nearly finished and will be large and handsome. It is on a scale of grandeur, one might almost say who like myself had never seen anything abroad, equal to any country house I imagine in America. It is seated, too, in a fine park timbered with noble old woods. If it were 10 miles from town it would be a delightful residence, but it looks on the coal wharves and mass of brick buildings on the other side of the river & is so near the city that it is constantly liable to trespass & intrusion. Mr. Powel was foolish to build it, as he will most probably never live there & has not income enough to keep it up in proper style."<sup>47</sup>

Finally, in February, 1848, Fisher mentioned the place once more: "This afternoon walked . . . out to Powelton. Mr. Powel is living there now. It is a beautiful place, the grounds extensive & lying well & grouped over with noble trees. The house is very large & handsome, a hall and five rooms on the first floor, all of great size. It is not quite finished or half furnished, & probably never will be in Powel's life as his income is comparatively small & his family very expensive."<sup>48</sup> Fisher was quite correct in this assumption; the exterior of the house was to be completed between 1860 and 1865 by a subsequent owner, E. Spencer Miller.<sup>49</sup>

The Liverpool plans, drawn in 1831, present the most enigmatic problem in the history of the house. The circumstances which surround them cannot be adequately explained, yet the very fact that

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 84.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 149.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

<sup>49</sup> Hare-Powel, 66.

this set of English plans for a house in America exists is of considerable interest. The plans bear little resemblance to the executed building, save for the one-story back kitchen in the north wing. Why do they completely disregard Strickland's portico? Why were they made as late as 1831? Possibly Powel was dissatisfied with Strickland's portico and wing designs and wanted to see how the English firm would solve his problems. The plans themselves do not provide any clues. They are accompanied by a single manuscript sheet of instructions which gives no further hint of their relationship to the house as it was actually built. The instructions were intended for the sole purpose of explaining the plans and are quoted here in their entirety:

#### Powelton Cottage

The present roof is intended to be taken off, the walls raised about  $2\frac{1}{4}$  feet, to allow height for the rooms in the attic, the upper part to be nearly flat and covered with lead. The principal framing timber will do again for the roof. I have introduced cantilevering under the projection of the east front, to be of wood built in the wall. The staircase may be lighted with a dome light and concealed behind the ridge of the wing roof. A water closet may, with propriety, be placed in the wing as shown in chamber plan, and a cistern form over it, as it is presumed there is a supply of water for the kitchen, the cistern might be supplied with a force pump from the same source. The back kitchen is intended to be kept low, and concealed from view. Liverpool, June 28, 1831. J. Franklin for Haigh, Franklin & Haigh.

The only specific feature of Powelton which seems to have come directly from the Liverpool plans was the back kitchen, and this was not as "low, and concealed from view" as the architects would have liked.

Stylistically, Strickland's design was in the spirit of the architectural avant-garde of the day, the new Greco-Roman revival of Dance, Holland, Soane and the American, Latrobe, under whom Strickland studied.<sup>50</sup> The archaeologically inspired portico, the austere articulated and crisply linear surfaces and the boldly massed volumes—all recall similar features in the key monuments of the style, both in England and America. Pictures of Powelton convey a feeling of power and monumentality due partly to a lack of human scale but largely owing to the bold and forthright massing and stark and simple forms. The older house, forming the central part, is just

<sup>50</sup> Talbot Hamlin, *Greek Revival Architecture in America* (New York, 1944), 1-45; John Summerson, *Architecture in Britain 1530 to 1830* (London, 1953), 235-275.

visible where it abuts the portico, which is flanked by the two long and low wings, capped by harshly linear cornices which give the composition a solid stability and serve as dramatic foils for the great portico. The fenestration pattern, cutting sharply into the crisp wall surfaces, creates a rhythmic surface which compliments the strongly linear and rhythmic features of the portico.

Inside the house, grouped on either side of the central stair hall and ball room, were three rooms in each wing: on the south side, the library, parlor, and drawing room, and on the north, the dining room, kitchen offices, and servant's quarters.<sup>51</sup> The interior has been well described by the last occupant of the house, Mrs. E. Spencer Miller:

Mr. Miller greatly admired the simple substantial dignity of the house. It was rigidly plain in interior finish. The charm was in elegant proportions and perfect symmetry. The baseboard was twelve to fourteen inches high with a square moulding at the top and there was a similar effect represented by an architrave at the tops of the walls supported by pilasters, thus giving the effect of panels. The outlines of the drawing room and dining room were very handsome, not only because the corners were taken off, but the lines were broken in so many places by pilasters . . . the whole effect of this was very fine. The ceilings of the first floor were very lofty, the doorways very high in the three big rooms, that is, the communicating ones. The mantelpieces were low and deep and not very long, and were supported by a simple heavy scroll bracket. The marbles, I think, were all imported.<sup>52</sup> Each one was different in color; purplish, blueish, reddish, amber, black and white. Over the mantelpieces, between the drawing room and the ball room and dining room were deep high openings filled with sheets of plate glass, so that you could stand either in the drawing room or dining room and look through to the further side of the third room. This effect was heightened by a mirror placed in the shallow panel of the wall, opposite the mantelpiece in the drawing room.<sup>53</sup> The five rooms formed a suite, communicating by two corresponding doors in each instance except in one place where there was a

<sup>51</sup> Hare-Powel, 65.

<sup>52</sup> This is true. On Nov. 17, 1832, Powell ordered from Italy two marble mantles with consoles, two side tables of Sienna yellow marble with consoles, two side tables to match each other for a dining room, one side board of colored marble for the same room, 750 strong marble tiles blue and white "to pave a vestibule," "thirty dollars to be invested in plaister or composition antique vases not less than sixteen inches in diameter," and bronzed and antiqued busts. There is no addressee given. John Hare Powell Letter Book, 1829-1843, LCP.

<sup>53</sup> Nicholas Biddle's Andalusia has very similar features. See Harold D. Eberlein and Cortlandt V. D. Hubbard, *Colonial Interiors: Federal and Greek Revival, Third Series* (New York, 1938), pls. 27, 69, 71-74; Eberlein and Hubbard, "Nicholas Biddle's Andalusia," *Antiques*, LXI (1952), 339-343.

high broad double sliding door.<sup>54</sup> The stair was broad and striking . . . the hall was open to the top of the second floor and was well lighted; the ceilings were high in the central part of the second floor, in the wings only moderately so, with low square windows. All the windows were very large and were peculiar in that both the shutters and glazed parts were opened by sliding into the wall, but in the hall and ball room, however, this was not the case, the windows being hinged at the sides opening outwards and having double shutter and glass doors.<sup>55</sup>

The spacial freedom resulting from the glazed interior wall openings and freely communicating suite of rooms was an important development in American architecture of this period and led ultimately to the free and open interiors of Frank Lloyd Wright in the twentieth century. This spacial freedom, together with the "rigidly plain" and elegantly proportioned interior finish, may be considered a further evidence in favor of Strickland as designer of the entire remodeled house, not only of the portico.

In all probability, the design for the portico was based on a plate entitled "A Doric Portico in Athens" in Stuart and Revett's *The Antiquities of Athens*.<sup>56</sup> Apart from the variation caused by the additional metope in the antique monument, admittedly an important one, the two are unusually similar. Strickland was particularly partial to Stuart and Revett; he is reported to have said repeatedly "that the student of architecture need go no further than *The Antiquities of Athens* as a basis for design."<sup>57</sup> Indeed, one of his students, T. U. Walter, took him at his word and designed the Bank of Chester County (1836, West Chester, Pennsylvania) as a close copy of the same plate suggested as the source for the portico of Powelton.<sup>58</sup> It would be interesting to know if Powel owned a copy of Stuart and Revett and if he, rather than Strickland, was ultimately responsible for the choice of the monumental portico (it will be recalled that such

<sup>54</sup> Strickland created a similar suite of rooms, communicating by a series of doors, in his alterations at Wyck, Germantown, in 1824. Gilchrist, 64.

<sup>55</sup> Mrs. E. Spencer Miller to R. J. Hare-Powel, *ante* 1907, Hare-Powel, 65-66n.

<sup>56</sup> James Stuart and Nicholas Revett, *The Antiquities of Athens* (London, 1762), I, Ch. 1, pl. 3, "A Doric Portico at Athens, supposed to be the Remains of a Temple dedicated to Rome and Augustus."

<sup>57</sup> Gilchrist, 31.

<sup>58</sup> G. Carroll Lindsay, "Athens on High Street" (unpublished M. A. thesis, University of Delaware, 1955), 25-42.

was the case with T. U. Walter and Nicholas Biddle's Andalusia, 1834-1836).<sup>59</sup> There is evidence which suggests that this might indeed have been the case: the family history records that the building was finished "after Col. John Hare Powel's plans"<sup>60</sup> and makes no mention of Strickland. Perhaps Powel wished to have posterity think that he designed Powelton—the wife of a descendant writes "how maddening [for Powel] to have felt that the architect was not important!"<sup>61</sup> But the evidence that clearly establishes Strickland as the architect does not in any way diminish Powel's importance as the patron.

Powelton fits neatly into Strickland's known *oeuvre*. Its Doric portico recalls first and foremost, of course, his superb Second Bank of the United States, designed in 1818 and finished in 1824.<sup>62</sup> It is tempting to think that Powel's impulse for engaging Strickland to enlarge Powelton was a direct result of his infatuation with the bank. Whether or not this was the case is unknown; if Powel recorded his impressions of the bank, they have not come to light. Powelton also has certain affinities with Strickland's later First Congregational Unitarian Church (1828),<sup>63</sup> primarily in its simple tetrastyle Doric portico and severe geometric simplicity. In 1824, shortly before the Powelton commission, Strickland prepared a design for a Masonic Hall in Germantown. This building, had it been erected, would have had a: "facade [of the] Greek temple type with four Doric columns raised on a base with central steps, a Doric frieze, and a fourteen degree pediment ornamented by a rayed rising sun. The front wall behind the portico [would have had] a central door and recessed areas of the same size on either side to break the monotony and to insure symmetry. The upper wall . . . ornamented by three square plaques."<sup>64</sup> This description could equally well describe the Powelton portico (except for the rayed rising sun in the pediment), and in fact there may be a connection between the two. Because he wanted to see his design executed, Strickland might have adopted the Masonic de-

<sup>59</sup> Kimball, 273. The dates given by Kimball are based on "bills in the possession of Edward Biddle."

<sup>60</sup> Hare-Powel, 66.

<sup>61</sup> Mrs. Lydia Bond Powel to the author, Apr. 28, 1962.

<sup>62</sup> Gilchrist, 53-57, pls. 6 and 7.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 77-78, pl. 23A.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 65. This description was made from a drawing which is now lost.

sign for Powel's use, or, indeed, Powel may have seen and liked the Masonic design and, knowing that it would not be built, may have requested it or a similar design for his own use.

It has been pointed out that Strickland designed few private houses.<sup>65</sup> Perhaps his professional relationship with his client, John Hare Powel, might have been something less than satisfactory, and, if so, it could have discouraged him from future dealings with private patrons. By any standard, Powel was a difficult man with whom to deal; his letters to Jesse Vogdes and John O'Neil, superintendents at different times of the work on Powelton, continually reveal his precise and demanding nature. Writing to Vogdes in regard to the latter's contract to erect, superintend, and purchase materials for the portico, he admonishes: "You have utterly disregarded this agreement and have exposed me and continue to expose me to great inconvenience from unnecessary delay and frivolous excuses for which I shall hold you responsible. And moreover, if any of the materials put into the portico should prove to have not been of proper kind of sufficient strength and duly seasoned, I shall hold you responsible for any injury or evil which I shall encounter therefrom."<sup>66</sup>

Important though it is as a major addition to Strickland's works, Powelton's greatest significance lies in its use of the Greek Doric portico. It is the earliest known example of a private country house in or near Philadelphia to use a giant Greek order. What had previously been in the domain of only the most advanced public buildings (Latrobe's Bank of Pennsylvania, 1798-1801; Strickland's Second Bank of the United States, 1818-1824; Haviland's St. Andrew's Church, 1822-1823) had now been introduced to the private dwelling. Powelton's portico assumes additional importance, as a precedent for private houses, because its columns were constructed of stone. Nicholas Biddle's Andalusia, enlarged with a Greek Doric peristylar portico, had hollow columns of wood,<sup>67</sup> as did Hatfield House in Fairmount Park, remodeled with a giant portico "about 1835."<sup>68</sup> George W. Carpenter's Phil-Ellena, designed by

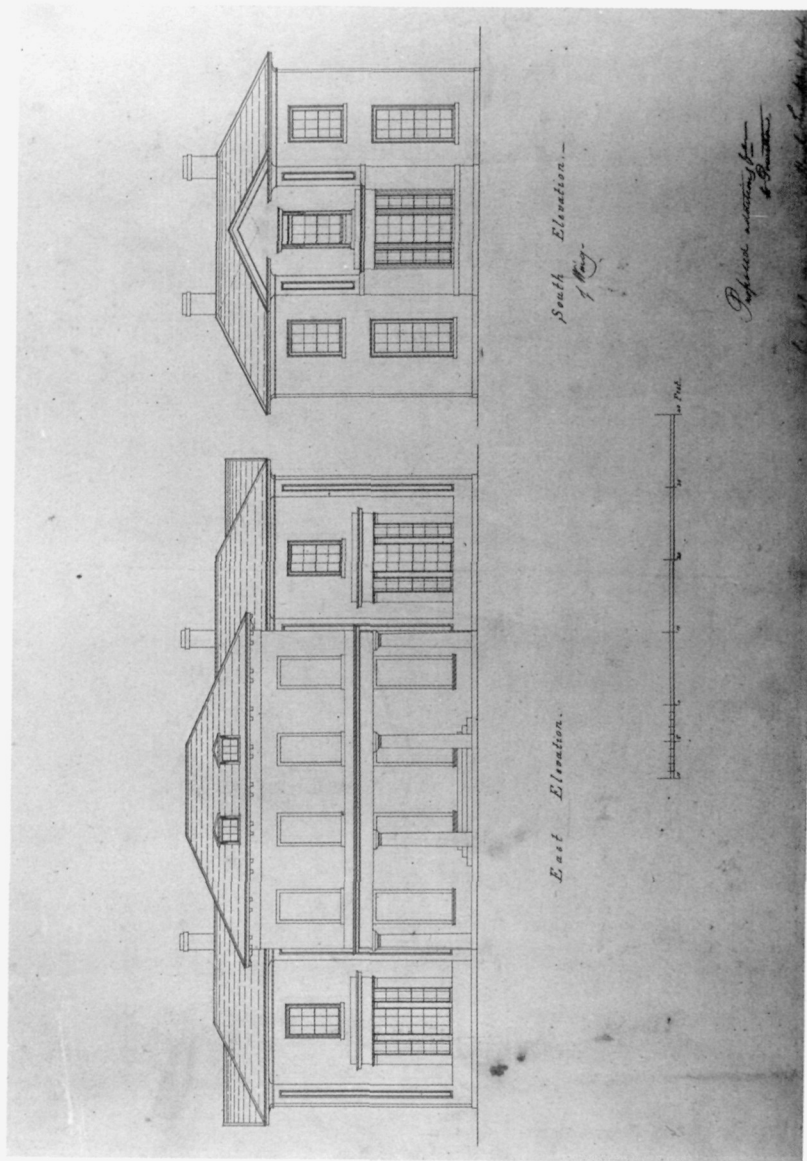
<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>66</sup> John Hare Powel to Jesse Vogdes, Aug. 19, 1825, John Hare Powel Letter Book, 1824-1826, 230, LCP. See also note 34.

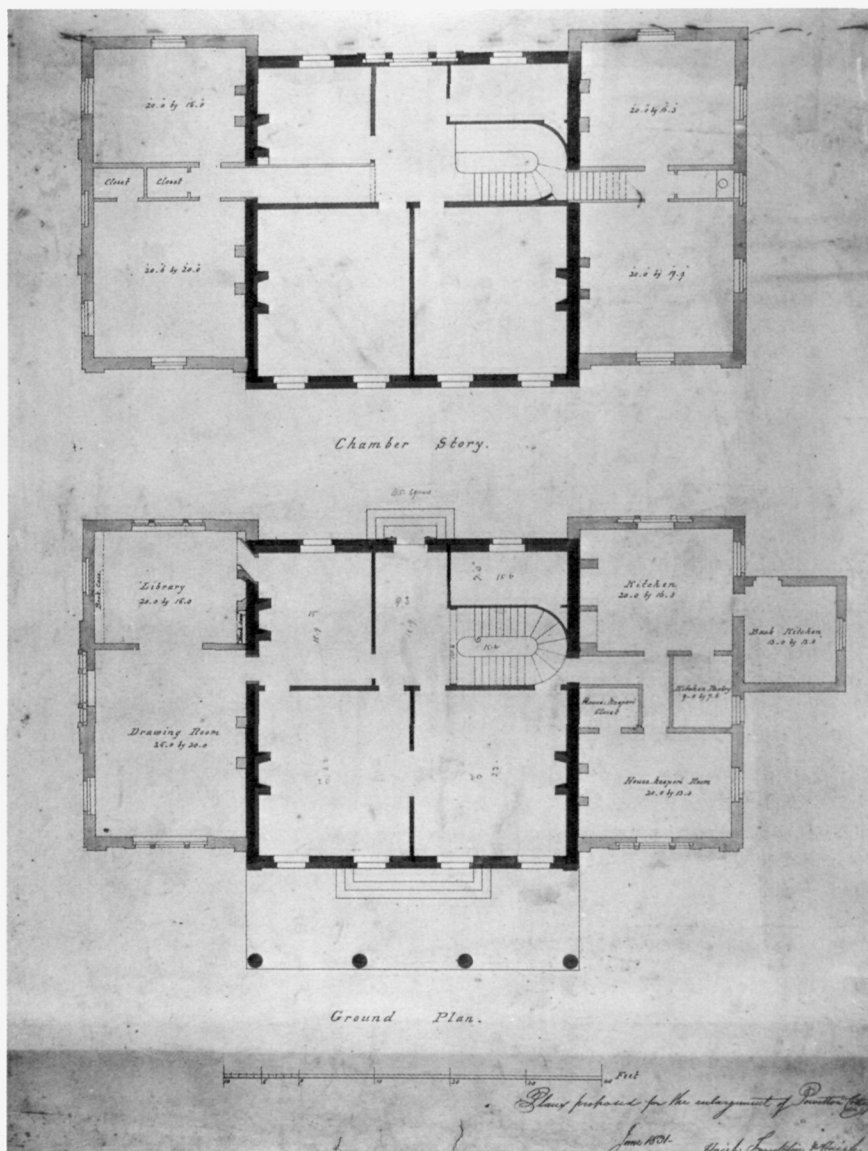
<sup>67</sup> Dickson, 48.

<sup>68</sup> Eberlein and Hubbard, *Portrait of a Colonial City*, 557.





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 AND HAIGH, ARCHITECTS



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PLANS PROPOSED FOR THE ENLARGEMENT OF POWELTON BY HAIGH,  
FRANKLIN, AND HAIGH, ARCHITECTS

William Johnson in 1844,<sup>69</sup> was built well after the Greek Revival style had become established for private dwellings and does not therefore merit comparison with Powelton.

Powelton's later history was not without incident. In 1851 John Hare Powel sold the estate to the Pennsylvania Railroad Company,<sup>70</sup> and immediately began to build himself an Italianate town house on Rittenhouse Square. The railroad company kept only a thirty-acre piece of the low lands along the west side of the river and sold the house and remaining sixty-three acres of uplands for residential purposes. In 1860, E. Spencer Miller (whose wife was Anna Emlen Hare) purchased the house with two acres of land.<sup>71</sup> Apparently, Powelton had been threatened with demolition even before Miller acquired it, and he managed to save the house only by persuading the city council to change slightly the line of 32nd Street, which was then being opened up. The resulting proximity of the house to the street caused 32nd Street to be known for a short time as Mansion Street. The Millers resided at Powelton until 1883, when they sold the place to Evert Janson Wendell,<sup>72</sup> whose building firm of Wendell and Smith demolished the residence in January and February of 1885, an event important enough to find mention in two newspapers;<sup>73</sup> but the emphasis, as usual, was on the former occupants rather than the architecture. After demolition, two streets were cut through the property, Spencer Terrace and Summer Street, and rows of small Victorian houses were put up. Today, the only reminder of the former glory of the house is the perpetuation of its name, Powelton Village, in memory of the Powels and their great Greek Revival mansion house.

*South Woodstock, Conn.*

CHARLES B. WOOD III

<sup>69</sup> George W. Carpenter, *Brief Description of Phil-Ellena* (Philadelphia, 1844); Theo B. White, *Philadelphia Architecture in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia, 1953), 35, pl. 90.

<sup>70</sup> Office of Recorder of Deeds, County of Philadelphia, Deed Book for May 7, 1853, 73, 85.

<sup>71</sup> Hare-Powel, 65n.

<sup>72</sup> Rosenthal, 43.

<sup>73</sup> Thompson Westcott, *Public Ledger and Transcript* (Philadelphia), Jan. 14, 1885; *The Daily Graphic* (New York City), Jan. 6, 1885.