

A New York Architect Visits Philadelphia in 1822

WHAT WOULD A MATURE ARCHITECT notice on a six-day visit to Philadelphia in May of 1822? Two sketchbooks belonging to John McComb, Jr. (1763-1853), preserved at the New-York Historical Society, provide some answers to this question.¹ The fifty-nine-year-old architect was then near the end of a distinguished career that had begun about 1790 and included the designs for Alexander Hamilton's country house, the Grange, 1801-02; New York City Hall (with Joseph Mangin), 1802-12; St. John's Chapel, 1803-07; and a host of other public and private work in and around Manhattan. His reputation by 1817 was such that he—with Bostonian Charles Bulfinch, his exact contemporary who eventually received the appointment—was thought of as a possible joint successor to Benjamin Henry Latrobe as architect of the federal Capitol.²

Damie Stillman has characterized McComb as a “colonial-Adamesque” stylist, and most of his early work fits that label. By 1822,

Thanks to Jeffrey A. Cohen for a critical reading of a draft of this paper

¹ John McComb, Jr., Papers, Manuscript Room, New-York Historical Society. The smaller, 6¼ × 3¾”, contains ink and graphite sketches and notes (Figs 1-3, 5, 14) on five sheets of heavy paper folded to produce ten pages sewn between marbled covers. A typed label pasted to one cover identifies it as an “AN ARCHITECTURAL MEMORANDUM BOOK mentioning Thomas Sparks & Geo [sic] Beck.” It obviously rode in the architect's pocket and preserves his on-site observations. One inscription reads “Jno McComb was at Philadelphia between 11 & 16 May”, the year is easily established by the contents and their context. The other, 13 × 8”, contains ink and graphite drawings and notes (Figs 6, 7, 9-12) on many sheets of laid paper within marbled covers, one of which has affixed to it a label with the architect's signature. Many folds are broken and the original arrangement is not everywhere certain. It contains drafted plans, elevations, and details, as well as notes, relating to the Philadelphia works he had studied as well as current and subsequent New York works by him: his 1822-23 alteration to the Brick Church on Beekman Street and his design for the 1822-23 Youle shot tower on the East River. There are also miscellaneous notes on European buildings and other memoranda. This booklet was apparently kept in his New York office.

² Samuel Damie Stillman, “Artistry and Skill in the Architecture of John McComb, Jr.,” M.A. thesis, University of Delaware, 1956. See also, Damie Stillman, “New York City Hall Competition and Execution,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* (hereafter, *JSAH*) 23 (Oct. 1964), 129-42, and Damie Stillman, “McComb, John Jr.,” in Adolf K. Placzek, ed., *The Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects* (2 vols., New York, 1982), 1:134.

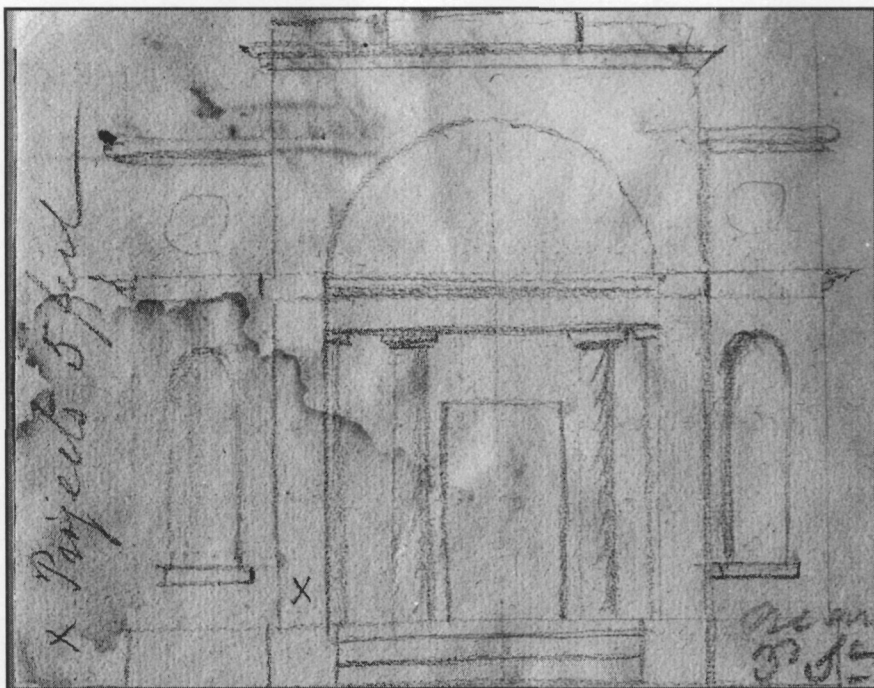


Figure 1

John McComb, Jr., elevation of William Strickland's St. John's Church, Philadelphia, May 1822. Graphite on paper. Courtesy of New-York Historical Society.

however, Anglo-Roman classicism was largely outmoded in Philadelphia. There he would encounter works on the cutting edge of a new architectural era, works dependent upon Grecian design, works that were to have an impact upon the few remaining structures he would design before his retirement in 1826. McComb's sketchbooks provide us with new information about the origins of his late work, and—perhaps even more important—new information about the Philadelphia buildings that inspired it.³

³ Also in the Manuscript Room of the New-York Historical Society is the small (roughly 4 x 7") sketchbook of a second New York architect that records another visit to Philadelphia, perhaps in the mid-1830s. The architect was one William Vine who is listed in New York directories from 1827 to 1834. The dates 1830 and 1839 appear in the sketchbook, which otherwise contains graphite (with some ink) drawings for buildings in New York (presumably), Philadelphia, and points in between (such as Trenton and Bordentown). The details are predominately Greek although Gothic does appear. The Philadelphia works range from eighteenth-century monuments, such as the State House and Christ Church, to more recent works, such

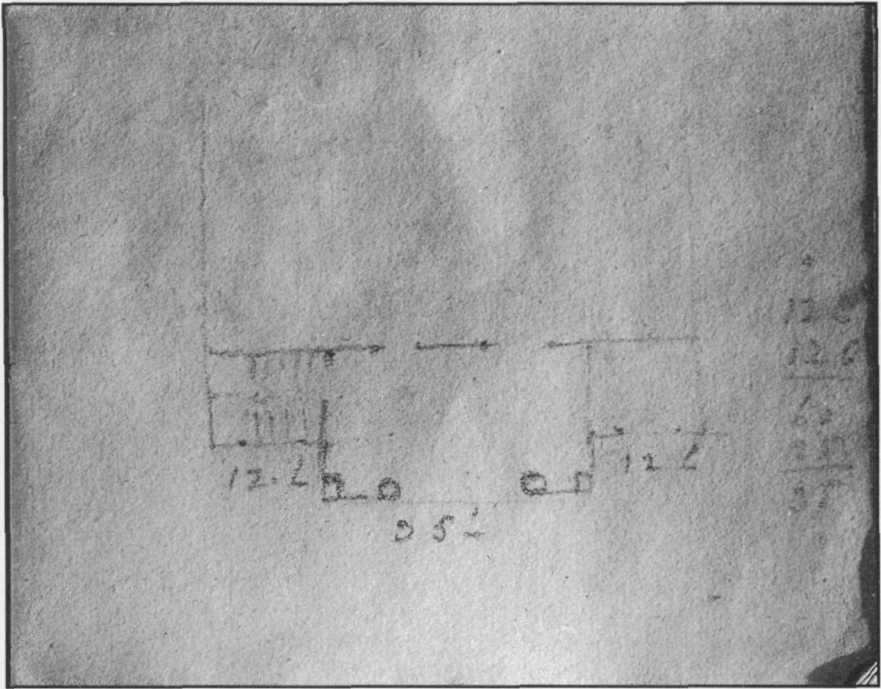


Figure 2

John McComb, Jr., partial diagrammatic plan of William Strickland's St. John's Church, Philadelphia, May 1822. Graphite on paper. Courtesy of New-York Historical Society.

Although Philadelphia had lost much of its political preeminence at the turn of the century, it was still the cultural, and especially the architectural, leader of the nation.⁴ The works of Latrobe and his followers, as well as those of new English immigrants, established robust Grecian classicism as the successor to delicate Adamesque Romanism. McComb's trip requires no justification other than that he wanted to see what was happening at the center of architectural development, but he may well have traveled with a specific agenda in mind. His sketches and scattered

as Latrobe's Gothic Bank of Philadelphia (pulled down in 1837) and Strickland's Greek Second Bank of the United States. Vine's career remains sketchy; neither the reason for the selection nor the purpose of these visual notes is at present apparent. My thanks to Jeffrey A. Cohen for telling me of the existence of Vine's sketchbook.

⁴ See George B. Tatum, *Penn's Great Town* (Philadelphia, 1961), 57 et seq.

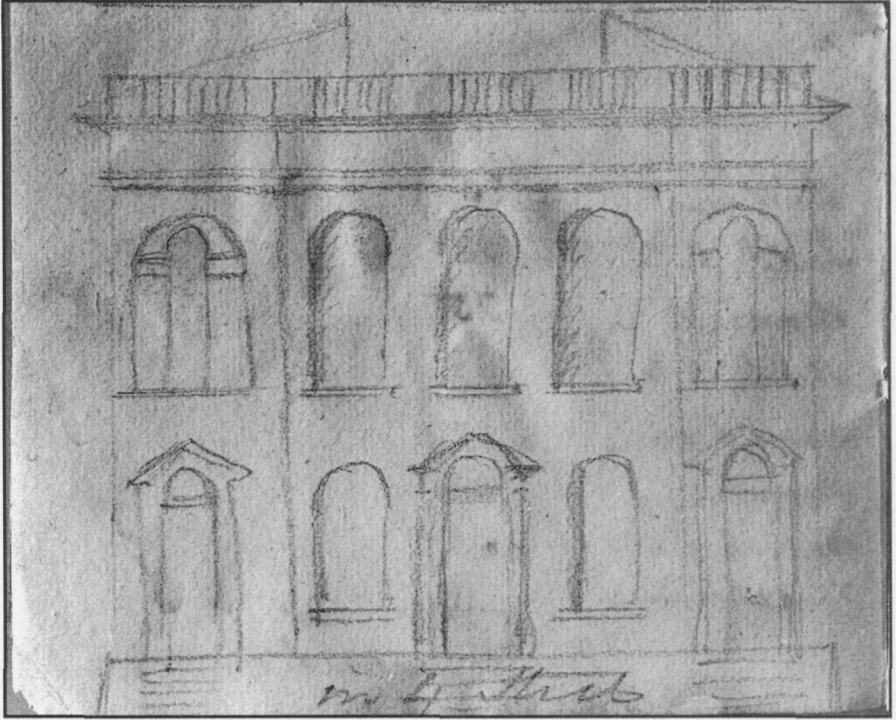


Figure 3

John McComb, Jr., elevation of St. Augustine's Church, Philadelphia, May 1822. Graphite on paper. Courtesy of New-York Historical Society.

notes record only two types of buildings: churches and shot towers. The works he designed after returning to New York include one of each type. How else do we explain the absence of notes on, or drawings of, any work by Latrobe or of William Strickland's Second Bank of the United States, 1818-24, a Greek Doric temple inspired by the Parthenon and easily the most important new building in the city (although, at the time of McComb's visit, still in construction)?⁵ It should be pointed out,⁶ however, that Latrobe's Philadelphia works were then a decade old and might have looked somewhat dated in the context of the newest work of

⁵ There is no suggestion, either, that McComb took an interest in the other major work then in construction in that part of the city, John Haviland's crenelated Eastern State Penitentiary.

⁶ As Jeffrey A. Cohen reminds me.

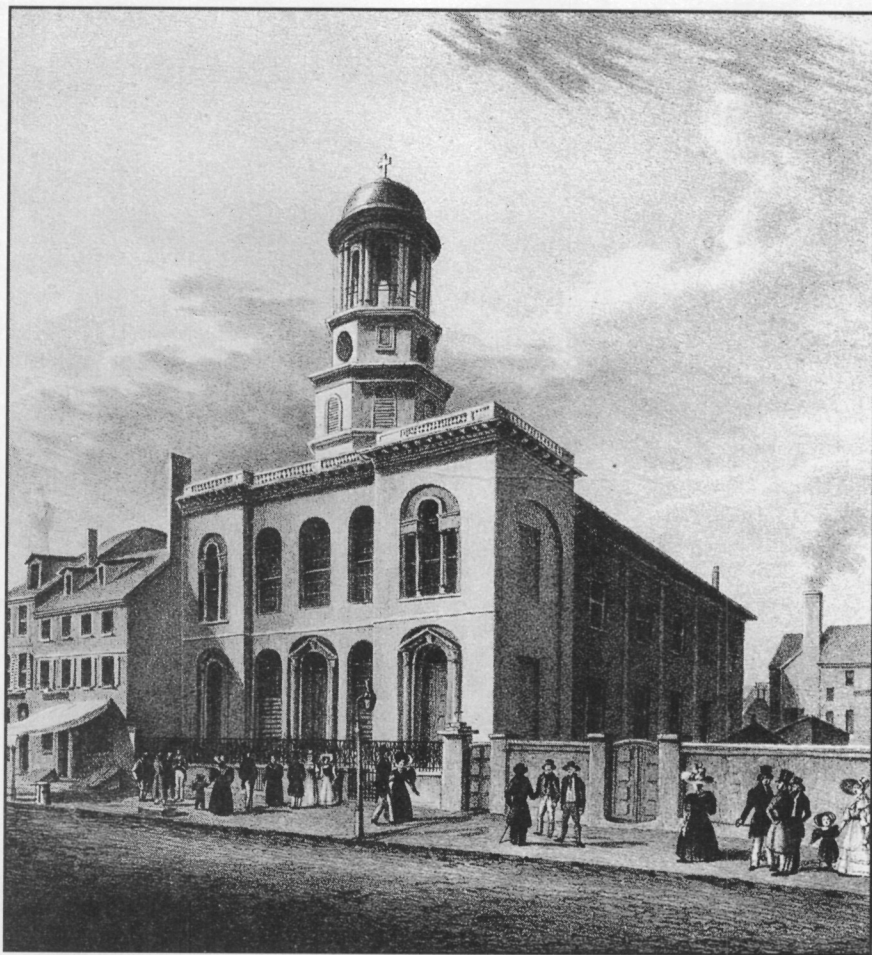


Figure 4

George Lehman, "St. Augustine's Church," 1830. Lithograph by C.G. Childs. Courtesy of Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

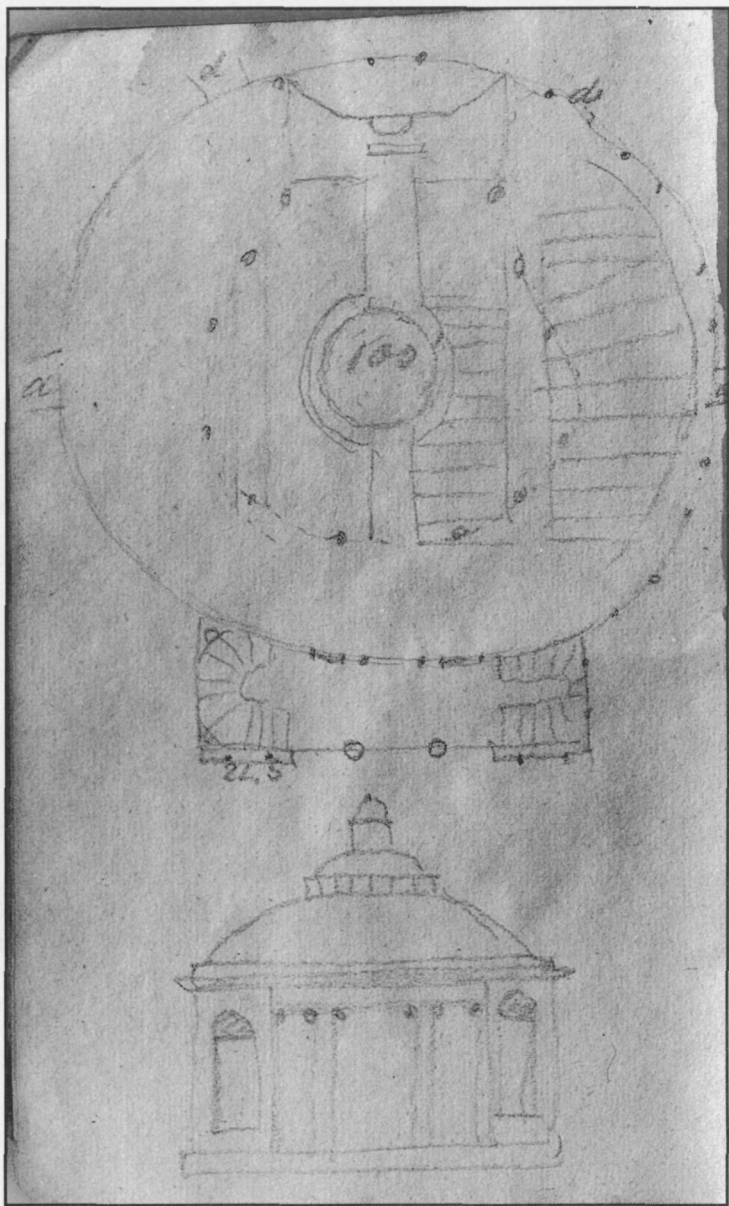


Figure 5

John McComb, Jr., diagrammatic plan and partial elevation of Robert Mill's Sansom Street Baptist Church, Philadelphia, May 1822. Graphite on paper. Courtesy of New-York Historical Society.

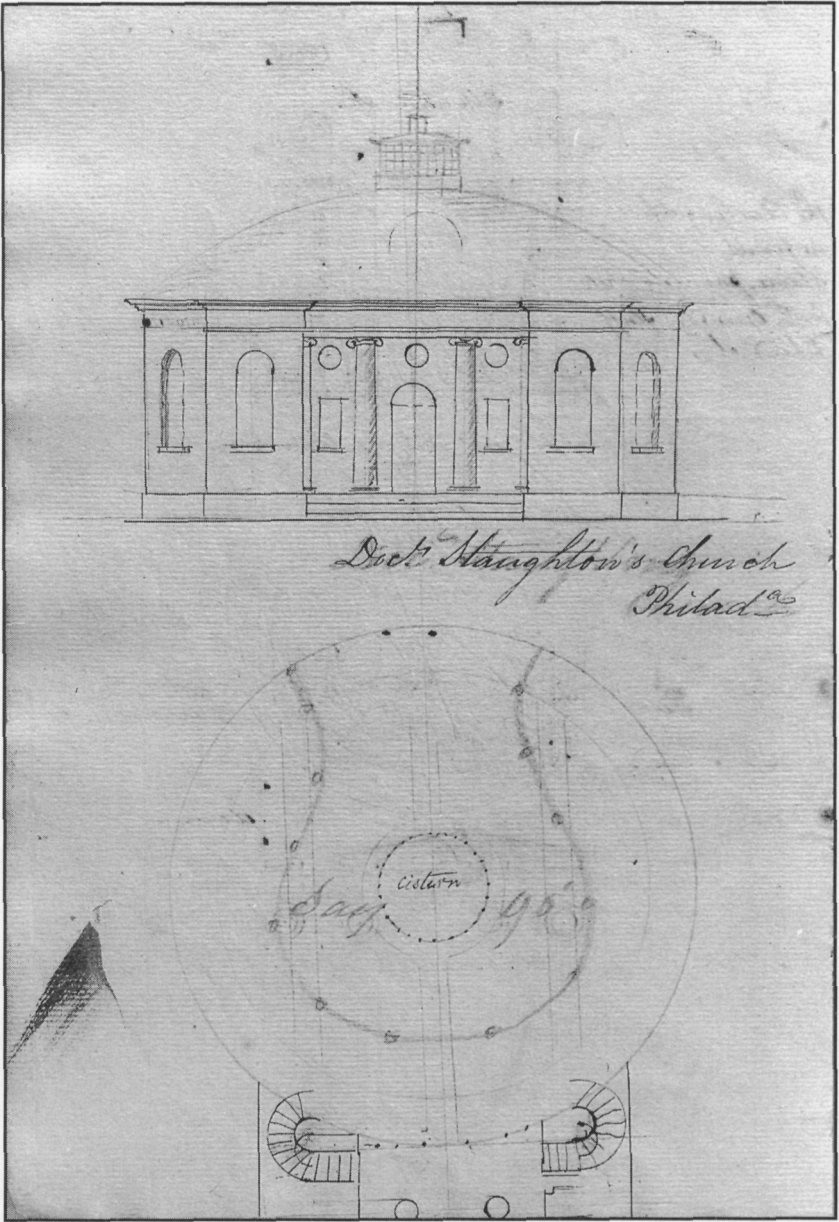


Figure 6

John McComb, Jr., diagrammatic plan and elevation of Mill's Sansom Street Baptist Church, Philadelphia, May 1822. Ink and graphite on paper. Courtesy of New-York Historical Society.

younger men. Probably McComb would have visited such a textbook example of the new style as the Second Bank, but he made notes about only those works of the most important architects of the next generation that fell within his current focus.

The smaller of the two sketchbooks, the one McComb carried along on the trip, lists the names and addresses of John Haviland (1792-1852), Hugh Bridport (1794-c.1868), and William Strickland (1788-1854).⁷ Haviland had arrived from London in 1816, as had his erstwhile partner, the artist Bridport; together they produced the three-volume *Builder's Assistant* (Philadelphia, 1818-21), the first American architectural publication to include the Greek orders.⁸ By 1822 the partnership must have been largely a thing of memory: Haviland was well-launched as an architect in the new style, and Bridport, whose independent architectural work was minimal, was on the road as an itinerant artist. Strickland was building upon the foundation of robust classicism he had inherited from his mentor, Latrobe.⁹ McComb had listed, then, in naming the thirty-year-old Haviland and the thirty-four-year-old Strickland, the leaders of the coming generation of architects; it remains unclear whether he actually met them, although that would seem likely. He was also to look at the work of another Latrobe protégé, Robert Mills (1781-1855), but Mills had already left for the South.¹⁰

A two-page spread from the smaller sketchbook shows McComb recording three local churches. On the upper left is a drawing of the arcuated façade of Strickland's St. John's Episcopal Church, 1815-16, in the Northern Liberties (Fig. 1). St. John's must have been well

⁷ "Haviland & Bridgport [*sic*]/architects/N W Corner of/Chestnut & 7th St", "Jno Haviland architect/No 26 North 5th Street", and "Wm Strickland, architect and engineer/N 14 North 9th Street" These agree with the listings in the *Philadelphia Directory and Register for 1822* Bridport seems to have had his studio at 7th and Chestnut and lived at the same Fifth Street address as Haviland Also listed by McComb was a "Major [John M] Gamble [U S M C]/Navy Yard," and an itemized, but seemingly incomplete and not particularly informative, expense account

⁸ Matthew Bagell, "John Haviland," Ph D diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1965, see also Matthew Bagell, "John Haviland in Philadelphia," *JSAH* 25 (Oct 1960), 197-208 Wayne Craven, "Hugh Bridport, Philadelphia Miniaturist, Engraver, and Lithographer," *The Magazine Antiques* 89 (1966), 548-52

⁹ Agnes Addison Gilchrist, *William Strickland Architect and Engineer, 1788-1854* (enlarged ed., New York, 1969)

¹⁰ John M Bryan, ed., *Robert Mills, Architect* (Washington, 1989), esp 35-72

recommended, for it required a bit of a hike from the center of town to reach this building, which still stands on the south side of Brown Street between American and Third.¹¹ On the lower right of the next two-page spread is a diagrammatic partial plan of the same structure that emphasizes the columnar arrangement—Doric, distyle in antis—at the entrance (Fig. 2). These may be the earliest preserved visual records of this earliest of Strickland's surviving works.

In reaching the Northern Liberties, McComb could have passed St. Augustine's Roman Catholic Church on Fourth near Vine; he recorded its façade just beneath that of St. John's (Figs. 3, 4). St. Augustine's was erected between 1796 and 1801 and demolished during the anti-Catholic riots of 1844. Strickland was to add a cupola in 1829; the façade shown by McComb has been dated 1826, but it existed, either in fact or as a design, in May of 1822.¹² McComb juxtaposes it with the façade of St. John's, either because the two were near neighbors or, perhaps, because it too was the work of William Strickland.

The third structure recorded on the first two-page spread is less expected: "Mr Janeways church," as the sketchy partial section is labeled, was the Second Presbyterian Church at Arch and Third streets. It, too, was handily on the way to, or from, St. John's in the Northern Liberties. The original building was designed and erected by Robert Smith and Gunning Bedford in 1749-50, but their church had been gutted and rebuilt from the plan of an unknown designer in 1809.¹³ It vanished long ago, and this may be the only visual record, however slight, of the early nineteenth-century work. McComb's section indicates an interior with

¹¹ It is now Holy Trinity Romanian Orthodox Church. See Jeffrey A. Cohen, "St. John of the Northern Liberties," unpublished paper, 1982 (copy at the Athenaeum of Philadelphia).

¹² Agnes A. Gilchrist, "Additions to *William Strickland*," *JSAH* 13 (Oct. 1954), fig. 26 (reprinted in the 1969 edition of her book [see note 9]). That McComb laterally compresses the proportions of this façade may suggest that he worked from the building not a drawing.

¹³ Jacob Jones Janeway (1774-1858) was associate minister of the Second Presbyterian Church from 1799 to 1828. See R. J. Johnson and J. H. Brown, eds., *The Biographical Dictionary of America* (Boston, 1906). For the first structure see Charles E. Peterson, "Robert Smith, Philadelphia Builder-Architect," in Richard B. Sher and Jeffrey R. Smitten, eds., *Scotland and America in the Age of Enlightenment* (Princeton, 1990), 279-84. The extent of the rebuilding may be judged from the "Report on a plan for the enlargement of the Church in Arch Street" of March 17, 1809, that details the object, means, and advantages of the proposal, mentions an accompanying plan (now unlocated), but names no designer (it is signed by Eben Hazard). Records of the Second Church, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, and from the reminiscences of Hugh L. Hodge published in the *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society* 2 (1903), 35-44.

coved ceiling, galleries, and reading desk; his notes call attention to the seating, and to what may have been Grecian fretwork. If the latter stemmed from 1809, it was a precocious use of the style.¹⁴

The next two-page spread in the smaller sketchbook includes, in addition to the plan of St. John's already noted, the plan and partial elevation of Robert Mills's Sansom Street Baptist Church, 1811-12, that stood on the south side of George (now Sansom) Street above Eighth (Fig. 5).¹⁵ This was one of a number of early nineteenth-century centralized churches. It almost certainly stemmed from the ideas expressed in Latrobe's 1803 "Remarks on the Best Form of a Room for Hearing and Speaking," as did two other Philadelphia structures: Mills's First Unitarian Church, 1812-13, and Strickland's Swedenborgian Church, 1816-17.¹⁶ (The latter, as we shall see, also attracted McComb's attention.) The Sansom Street church was circular in plan and surmounted by a ninety-foot-wide dome constructed—like many other domes of the day—according to the system of the sixteenth-century French architect, Philibert Delorme.¹⁷ Worshipers reached the round auditorium with its central font by a rectangular portico with two Ionic columns in antis modelled on those of the Erechtheum.¹⁸

The plan and elevation of the Sansom Street Baptist Church, partially drawn in ink using straight edge and compass, reappear in the larger sketchbook, labeled "Doc./r Staughton's Church/Philad/a" (Fig. 6).¹⁹ That this is the only building to appear in both booklets suggests that McComb took a particular interest in it. As we shall see, he was to

¹⁴ "3 apertures in Ceiling of 2' diam—with flat Grecian ribs—say 8" wide" What McComb noted about the seats has been erased

¹⁵ In this sketch McComb has the dome fit the narthex rather than the body of the church In the later drawing (Fig. 6) he corrects this On the upper right of the first two-page spread is what may be the plan of the cupola, not produced here

¹⁶ Jeffrey A. Cohen in James F. O'Gorman, et al., *Drawing Toward Building Philadelphia Architectural Graphics, 1732-1986* (Philadelphia, 1986), 62

¹⁷ See Douglas James Harnsberger, "In Delorme's Manner" A Study of the Applications of Philibert Delorme's Dome Construction Method in Early 19th Century American Architecture," M.A. thesis, University of Virginia, 1981 (Harnsberger is currently studying the uses of Delorme's method in Philadelphia) McComb here notes a dome of 100 feet (Fig. 5), but his second drawing (Fig. 6) gives the more correct dimension

¹⁸ Rhodri Windsor Liscombe, *The Church Architecture of Robert Mills* (Easley, S.C., 1985), 9-11, and Robert L. Alexander, "The Young Professional in Philadelphia and Baltimore, 1808-1820," in Bryan, *Mills*, 54-55 and note 34 (see also fig. 1.14 on 18-19)

¹⁹ William Staughton (1770-1829) was the Sansom Street minister

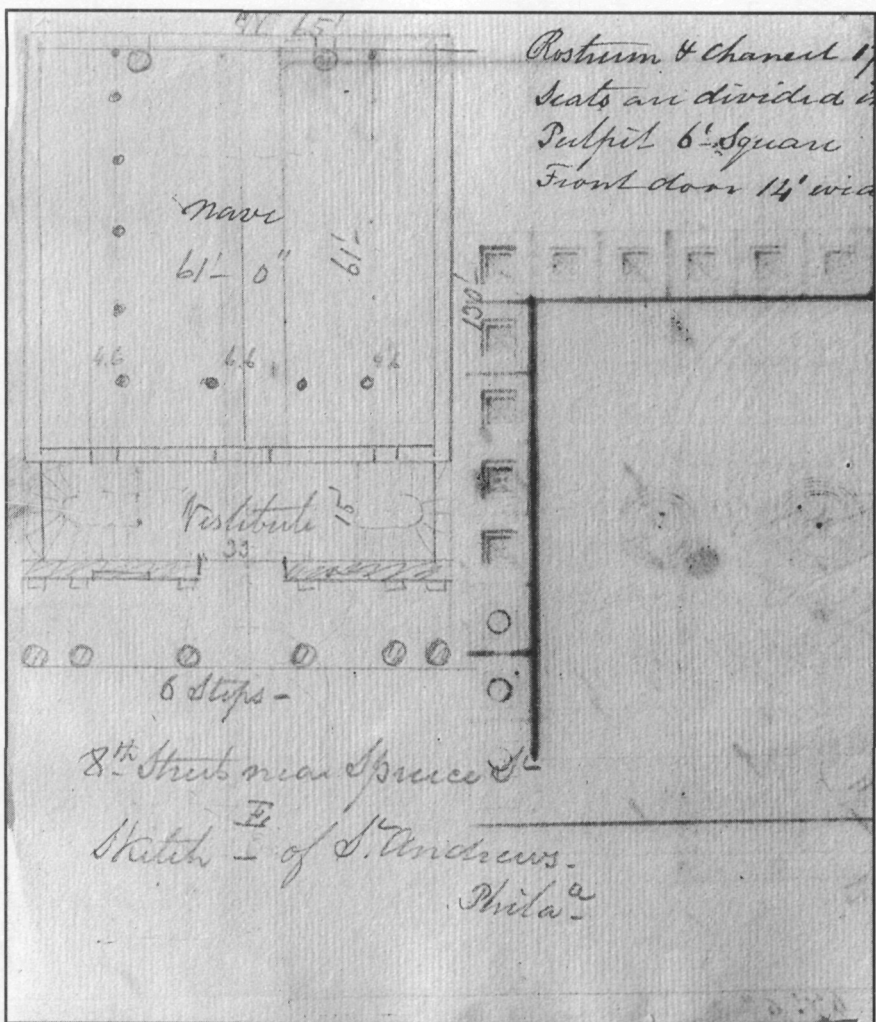


Figure 7

John McComb, Jr., diagrammatic plan of John Haviland's St. Andrew's Church, Philadelphia, May 1822. Ink and graphite on paper. Courtesy of New-York Historical Society.

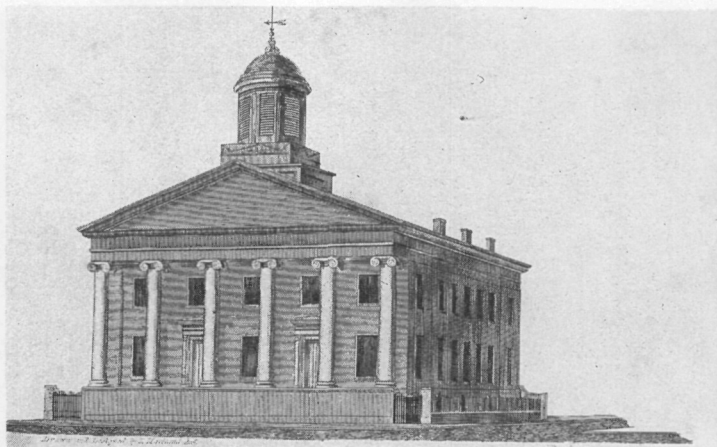


Figure 8

John Haviland, First Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, 1820-22. Engraving by J. Boyd after Haviland's exterior parallel perspective. Courtesy of Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

study the centralized ecclesiastical form after his return to New York. Scholarship now usually focuses on Mills's use here of a domical structural system invented in the Renaissance, but McComb's graphics suggest he either did not know of or was disinterested in the engineering of the roof. His emphasis in both the Baptist church studies is on the arrangement of the plan and the articulation of the entrance façade. The latter would have been of particular interest to him if he were indeed in the city to study the possibilities of Grecian design.

The other contemporary churches included in the larger sketchbook were located, like the Baptist church, toward the west of what was then the center of town. Two were by Haviland and one by Strickland. A plan labeled "Sketch—of S. Andrews—Phila/a" and "8th Street near Spruce St" records the footprint of the Episcopal Greek Ionic hexastyle temple by Haviland that survives under the name of St. George's Greek Orthodox Cathedral (Fig. 7). According to Matthew Baigell,²⁰ the new parish was formed at a meeting held in May 1822, the cornerstone laid in September, and the building consecrated in May of the next year. Given these dates, McComb either studied Haviland's drawings, or the

²⁰ Baigell, "John Haviland," 88-92.

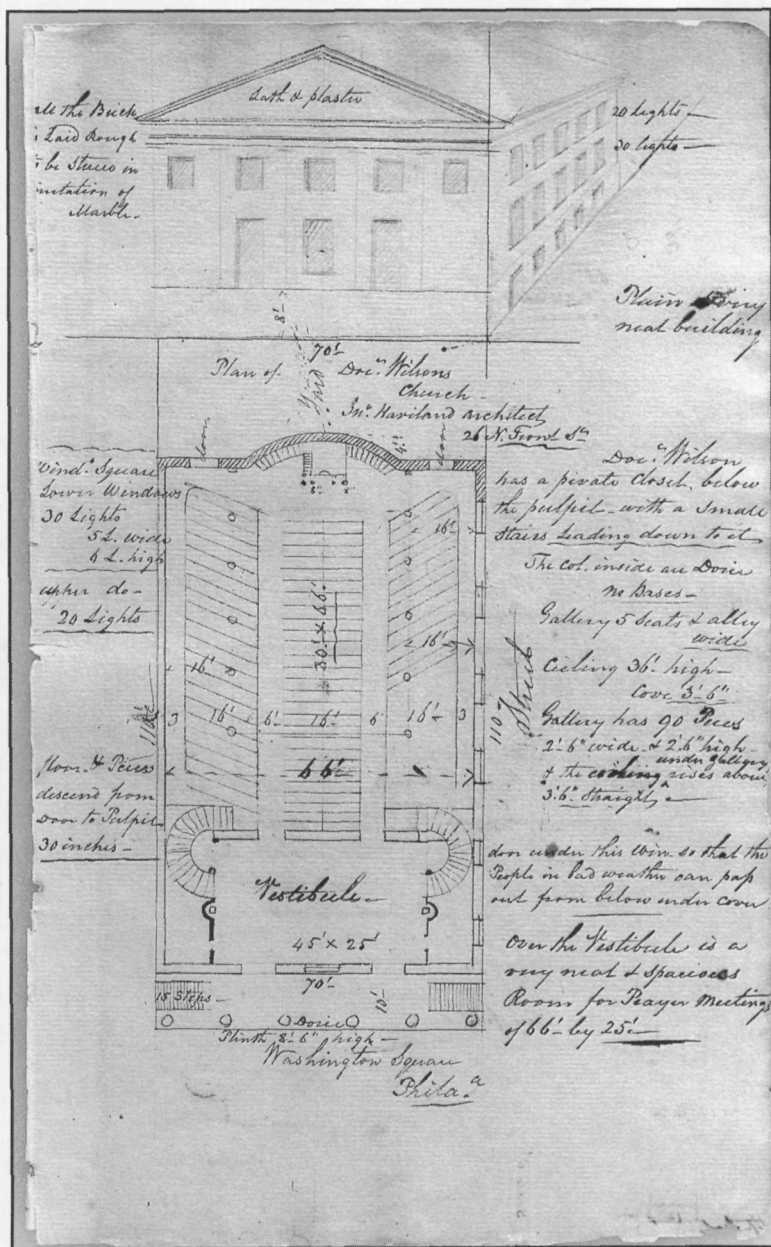


Figure 9

John McComb, Jr., plan and parallel bird's-eye perspective of John Haviland's unfinished First Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, May 1822. Ink and graphite on paper. Courtesy of New-York Historical Society.

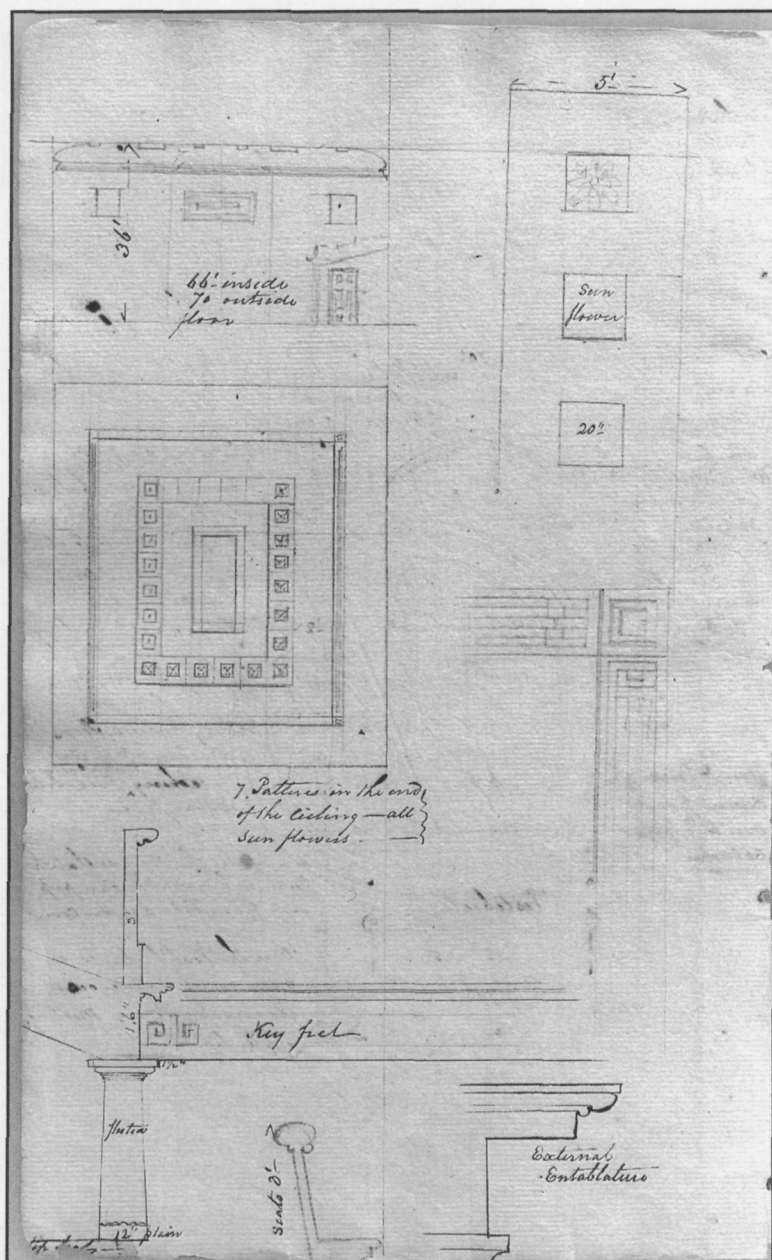


Figure 10

John McComb, Jr., section, reflected ceiling, and interior details of Haviland's First Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, May 1822. Ink and graphite on paper. Courtesy of New-York Historical Society.

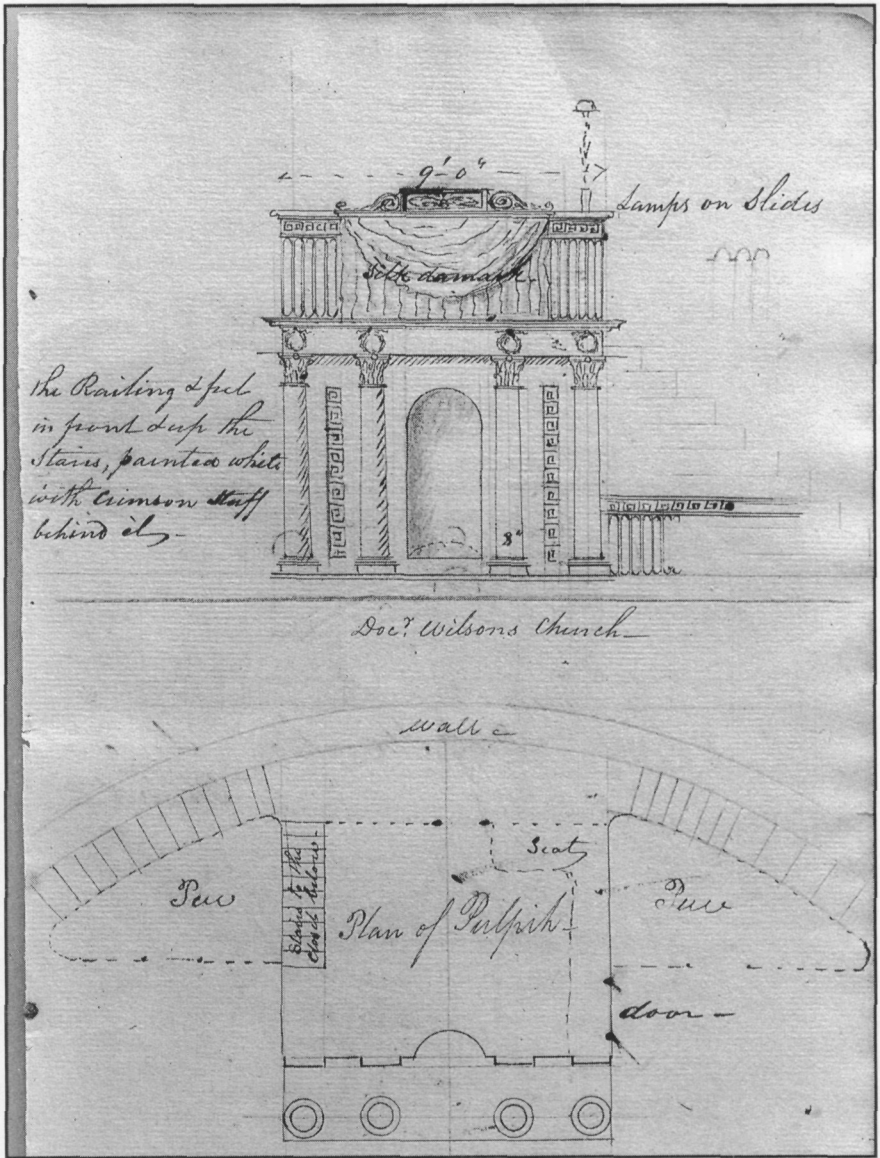


Figure 11

John McComb, Jr., diagrammatic plan and elevation of the pulpit of Haviland's First Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, May 1822. Ink and graphite on paper. Courtesy of New-York Historical Society.

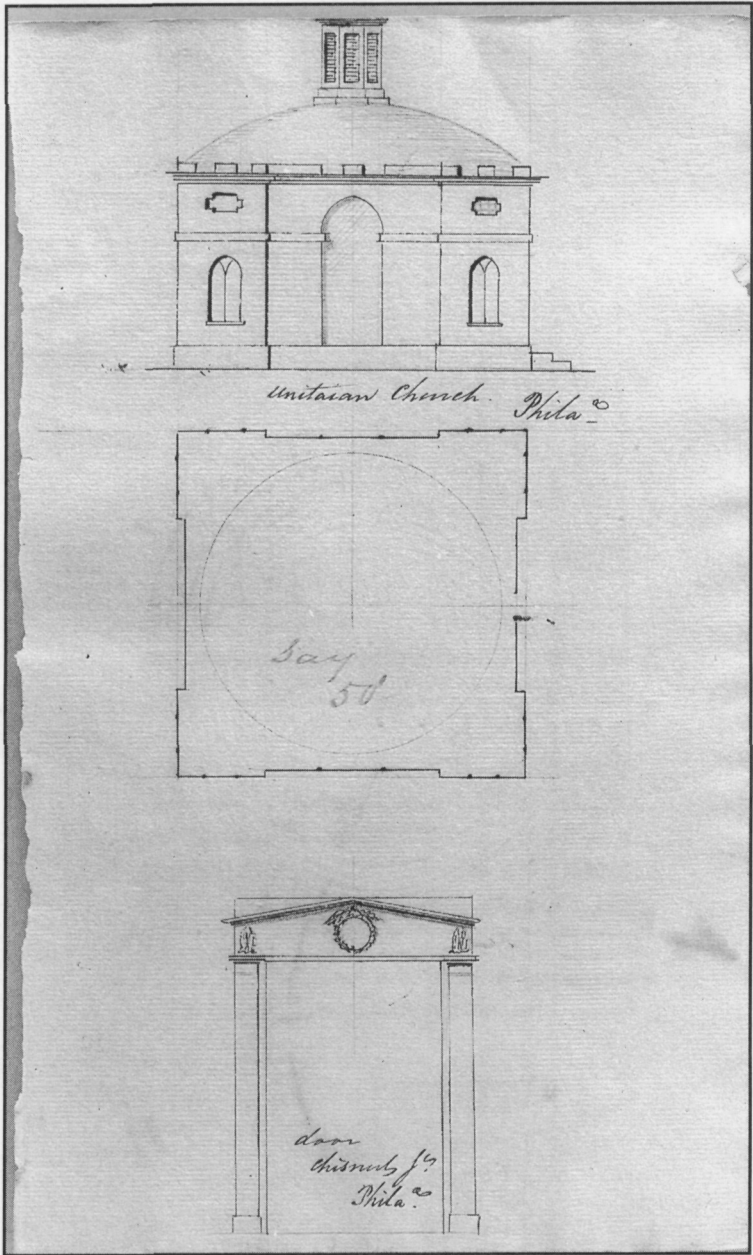


Figure 12
John McComb, Jr., diagrammatic plan and elevation of William Strickland's Temple of the New Jerusalem;
door frame of the James S. Cox house; Philadelphia, May 1822. Ink and graphite on paper. Courtesy of
New-York Historical Society.

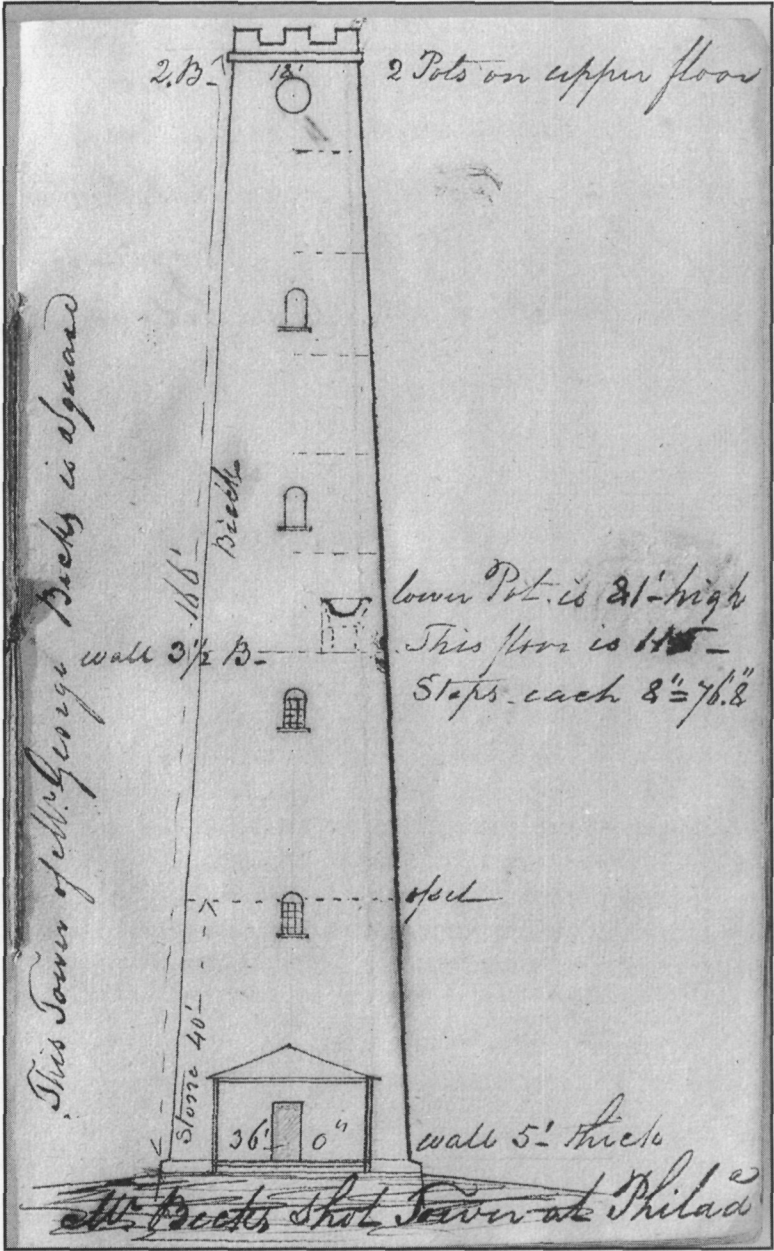


Figure 14

John McComb, Jr., diagrammatic elevation of Beck's Shot Tower, Philadelphia, May 1822. Ink and graphite on paper. Courtesy of New-York Historical Society.

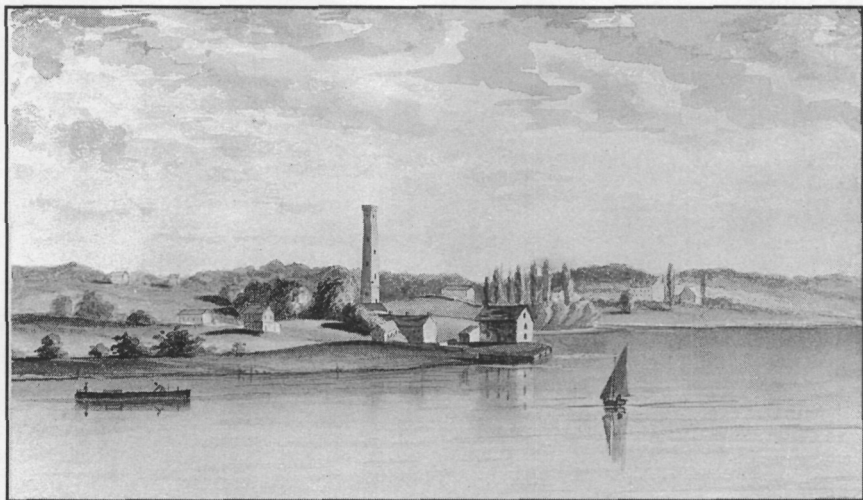


Figure 13

David Johnson Kennedy after Thomas Birch, "N. West view of Mr. Paul Beck's Shot Tower east side of Schuylkill between Arch & Race Sts.," n.d. Watercolor. Courtesy of Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

larger sketchbook contains information about Philadelphia that post-dates his visit. The former would seem the more likely.

A second Haviland temple—once located just one block east of the site of St. Andrew's—also appears, in great detail, in the larger sketchbook. The third building of the First Presbyterian Church was erected from his designs at Seventh and Locust streets, on the south side of Washington Square, between 1820 and 1822.²¹ According to Baigell, it was the "earliest religious edifice in Philadelphia to have a full Greek-temple facade," a feature made evident by the engraved plan and elevation that appears in the third volume (1821) of Haviland's *Builder's Assistant*.²²

²¹ Tatum, *Penn's Great Town*, 174; Baigell, "John Haviland," 82-88. For a view of the church in context, see Robert F. Looney, *Old Philadelphia in Early Photographs, 1839-1914* (Philadelphia, 1976), no. 57.

²² Plates 127-128 ("John Haviland," figs. xiv-xv). Could this publication have spurred McComb's interest in Philadelphia? An engraving after a parallel perspective by Haviland accompanies "A Description of the new First Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia" that appeared in the October 1822 issue of the *Port Folio*, 339-41. Baigell goes on to write that the First Presbyterian "vies, perhaps, with St. John's Cathedral by Alexander Parris, erected in Boston in the same year (and from the same model) for the distinction of being the first [Greek temple front church] in the country." Certainly Baigell meant St. Paul's, Parris's Tremont Street temple of 1819-20, which clearly preceded the First Presbyterian, however slightly, and Haviland tacitly

McComb, however, arrived before the building was finished: before the raw exterior brick had been stuccoed and before the portico—hexastyle Ionic, after the Temple of Illisus at Athens, of wood sanded to imitate stone—was put in place (Fig. 8).²³ He drew the plan of “Doc/r. Wilsons Church”²⁴ and projected a bird’s-eye parallel perspective looking south (Fig. 9), mistakenly indicating that the columns were to be Doric, and noting the want of stucco “in imitation of Marble” and the “lath & plaster” of the pediment. He labeled the church a “Plain & very neat building.” Since the finished exterior was indeed colored to resemble marble, as we know from the *Port Folio* of October 1822, he may have spoken to the architect or the workmen about the finish, if not about the order of the portico.

The First Presbyterian Church was razed in 1939. McComb’s drawings of the plan and unfinished exterior provide important visual information. Even more historically valuable, however, are his other drawings of this church, including details of the interior (Fig. 10), and especially the plan and elevation of Dr. Wilson’s pulpit (Fig. 11). The interior was an open hall with galleries supported by Greek Doric columns (“*No Bases*” McComb emphasizes to the right of the plan) and enriched with fretwork. Haviland himself redesigned the pulpit in 1831, the year after Wilson’s death, so McComb’s plan and elevation may constitute the only detailed visual evidence we have for this most important original focus of the interior.²⁵ The pulpit’s “Railing & fret in front & up the Stairs,

acknowledged this when he referred to St Paul’s—he, too, called it St John’s—in his note on the First Presbyterian in *Builder’s Assistant*

²³ At a meeting of the church trustees on April 30, 1822, it was ordered that “the Carpenter [William Hanse], be directed to conform strictly to the drawings” by Haviland for the portico (“Charter of Corporation and minutes of trustees meetings, 1796-1825,” First Church Papers, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia) It certainly took more than two weeks to complete. McComb also arrived long before Haviland’s intended cupola was erected.

²⁴ James P. Wilson (1769-1830) was called to the ministry of the First Presbyterian in 1806 when it was located on Market Street. McComb here gives Haviland’s address as “26 N Front St,” but this is surely a miswriting of Fifth Street, the correct address he recorded earlier (see note 7).

²⁵ The plan of the original pulpit does, of course, appear on the plan of the church published in *Builder’s Assistant*, but McComb’s drawings provide much more visual and verbal information. McComb also noted the “very neat & spacious Room for Prayer Meetings” over the vestibule, a feature that occasioned much discussion in trustees’ meetings (see note 23). His dimensions of 66 x 25 feet, compared to 71 x 32 feet given in the October *Port Folio*, suggest that he estimated sizes rather than measured them.

painted white with crimson stuff behind," the "Silk damask" draped across the front of the parapet, and the "Lamps on Slides" providing illumination would have held the attention of the congregation even if the rest of the design or Dr. Wilson's sermon did not.²⁶ As the *Port Folio* noted, the interior arrangements "have been successfully studied to promote the most important objects of the edifice, those of hearing and seeing to the best advantage." McComb was also struck by the interior arrangement of the pulpit, noting (next to the plan of the church) that "Doc./r Wilson has a private Closet, below the pulpit—with a small Stairs *Leading down to it*." His remark seems to suggest a personal relationship between Wilson and the pulpit that might account for its destruction so soon after the reverend doctor's death.²⁷

The last local ecclesiastical building recorded by McComb in the larger sketchbook was Strickland's Temple of the New Jerusalem at Twelfth and Sansom streets, 1816-17.²⁸ A diagrammatic plan and elevation (Fig. 12), whose erroneous label, "Unitarian Church," suggests confusion with Mills's domed First Unitarian Church, are slight ruled ink jottings, but they do preserve the outline of the plan—square with corner pavilions and surmounted by an inscribed dome of some fifty feet in diameter—and suggest the Gothick articulation of the façade of this Swedenborgian church.²⁹ This, too, adds importantly to the historical record.

Among the New York designs executed by McComb in the brief period between his return from Philadelphia and his retirement was the

²⁶ The sheets on this church are followed by three pages of details of Greek fretwork. These do not certainly belong to First Presbyterian, although it should be noticed that the two plates in *Builder's Assistant* devoted to this church are followed by four plates of ancient and modern Greek frets. One of the lamps shown in McComb's elevation may be preserved at the Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia.

²⁷ An earlier issue of the *Port Folio* (9 [1820], 501) noted that "his mind [Wilson's] is profoundly stored with classical and biblical learning. His late profession [the law] has perhaps contributed to give to his public discourses an uncommon depth and precision . . . and to these Dr. W. adds, originality of thought."

²⁸ Gilchrist, *Strickland* (1969), 49 and pl. 18A. In 1826 it became the Academy of Natural Sciences.

²⁹ The plan shows only the exterior outline, suggesting that McComb did not visit the interior of the church. Jeffrey A. Cohen identifies the Grecian door frame sketched at the bottom of this sheet as a detail of the James S. Cox house which stood next to Latrobe's John Markoe house on Chestnut Street, c. 1814-17, see illustration in Cohen's entry on the Markoe house in O'Gorman, *Drawing Toward Building*, 54-56.

Doric Bleeker Street Presbyterian church, 1825-26. Stillman noted long ago how this structure differed from the architect's earlier ecclesiastical work: "There is a starkness here that was unknown. . . . Here . . . we can see McComb . . . giving way to the new taste."³⁰ The building does indeed reflect a new impetus, albeit a tentative one. Stillman, in another context and without dating them, also noted the appearance of two central-plan churches among the vast collection of McComb drawings now at the New-York Historical Society.³¹ One has a circular auditorium with rectangular narthex-porch and sacristy attached at either end of the main axis. Although unidentified and undated, it would appear to stem from much earlier in McComb's career.³² The other is the plan of an octagonal church with rectangular narthex and porch attached. It is signed and undated, but the paper and the draftsmanship clearly stem from about 1823. This drawing may or may not be an early study for the Bleeker Street church.³³ McComb's recent visit to the new architecture of Philadelphia bore immature fruit in this last of his architectural designs. The latter drawing especially seems to reflect the Sansom Street Baptist Church of Robert Mills.³⁴ Did he retire—in part at least—because he saw the handwriting on the wall, because he recognized that his generation had been replaced by a younger one with different stylistic goals?³⁵

Ecclesiastical design was only one of the two specific interests that brought John McComb, Jr., to Philadelphia. Shot towers constituted his

³⁰ Stillman, "Artistry and Skill," 59-61

³¹ Stillman, "Artistry and Skill," 63-64 The McComb drawings (other than these sketchbooks) are in the Print Room For preliminary remarks about them see Agnes A. Gilchrist, "Notes for a Catalogue of the John McComb Collection of Architectural Drawings," *JSAH* 28 (Oct. 1969), 201-10

³² Drawing no. 44 The draftsmanship suggests the early date, although the design might depend upon Mills's Sansom Street Baptist Church The McComb drawings await a thorough study

³³ Drawing no. 175, which is on the same heavy gray paper and in the same graphic style as no. 176, the plan of a longitudinal church dated March 31, 1823, and no. 177, another variant plan dated April 3, 1823 None is identified, but all are catalogued as Bleeker Street by the New-York Historical Society Stillman, "Artistry and Skill," 59-61, dates the church 1825-26

³⁴ If not Mill's octagonal First Unitarian Church, which, however, he did not record in these sketchbooks

³⁵ He was, of course, sixty-three in 1826, and fully entitled to retire Bulfinch, who retired four years later, also began to employ Greek details in his last works See his 1825 project for a monument (perhaps for Bunker Hill) in the Library of Congress, and the Maine State Capitol of 1829

second focus. These were tall structures, usually of brick, employed in the manufacture of projectiles; as a specific "building" type, such towers seem to have been overlooked in the history of American (and European) architecture. The "shotting process" consisted of dropping a molten alloy of lead through a screen at various distances above a receptacle of water. The screen separated the lead into droplets whose fall created a sphere and whose size depended upon the distance traveled. The shot hardened in the cooling water and was then polished, sorted, and bagged for delivery.³⁶

There were two shot towers in Philadelphia in 1822, the first erected in the United States. Both were put up in 1808 in reaction to Jefferson's Embargo of that year.³⁷ One, constructed in Southwark by Bishop and Sparks (but usually called simply the Sparks tower)³⁸ on the north side of Carpenter Street between Front and Second and still standing (with some alterations), is a tapered brick cylinder 142 feet high.³⁹ The other, erected by Paul Beck along the Schuylkill at what is now the southwest corner of 21st and Cherry streets and long ago demolished,⁴⁰ was square in plan and rose 166 feet, the bottom forty of stone and the rest of brick (Fig. 13). The smaller sketchbook provides several on-site drawings of each tower (Fig. 14, for example) and brief notes; the larger contains rewrites of these observations. The latter occur in the context of reports on the construction beginning in the fall of 1822 (completed summer 1823) of McComb's own design for George Youle's shot tower on the

³⁶ "Shot Tower at Baltimore," *Ballou's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion*, March 22, 1856, 180-81, which contains a brief description of the process embellished with several cuts

³⁷ Joseph Jackson, *Encyclopedia of Philadelphia* (4 vols., Harrisburg, 1933), 4:1086-87. According to the *Aurora* for October 1808, "Philadelphia now, from the two towers erected for casting patent shot, can, after supplying all America, supply all Asia besides . . ." J. Thomas Scharf and Thompson Wescott, *History of Philadelphia* (3 vols., Philadelphia, 1884), 1:531.

³⁸ The *Aurora* for October 20, 1808, carried the firm's first advertisement for "AMERICAN PATENT SHOT, OF ALL SIZES, EQUALLY AS PERFECT AS ANY IMPORTED." It is said that Bishop, a Quaker, left when the tower was used to produce military ammunition during the War of 1812. Stephen N. Winslow, *Biographies of Successful Philadelphia Merchants* (Philadelphia, 1864), 141 ff.

³⁹ For early views of Sparks's tower, see Nicholas B. Wainwright, *Philadelphia in the Romantic Age of Lithography* (Philadelphia, 1958), nos. 334 and 403, for an early photograph, see Looney, *Old Philadelphia in Early Photographs*, no. 10.

⁴⁰ Jackson, *Encyclopedia*, 4:1086-87; Scharf and Wescott, *History*, 1:531. It disappears from atlases of Philadelphia after 1828, the year of the erection of the taller tower in Baltimore (see note 43), which may or may not be a coincidence.

East River at 53rd Street in Manhattan. The commission for this design was clearly one reason for his trip.

McComb writes of the Sparks tower that it

is a circular Brick Building 140 [*sic*] feet high—30 feet diam/r at bottom & 15 feet diam/r at top— $3\frac{1}{2}$ brick thick at bottom & $1\frac{1}{2}$ at the top—covered with copper[.] The walls are reduced by three of[f]sets on the inside—2 doors & one window in the first Story—& 4 windows in each of the other Stories—The lower furnice [*sic*] or Pot is about 70" high—he has a Well in the centre of 20' to the water—can make good shot from the 70' or lower Pot/ Viz No 3 to No 10/ to the floor—No 3 to No 1 from the upper Pot to the floor—for the B. & other large Shot they make use of the Well. The Storms drive through the Brick work—It is a slight Building—& rocks very much in a gale of Wind—It is Nine Stories high—There is 130 Steps [*sic*] of 12" each to ascend.

This seems to conform in all particulars to later descriptions of the tower.⁴¹

"Mr George [*sic*] Becks Shot Tower," he continues,⁴²

is a square substantial Building—about 36' square at bottom and 18' at top—166' high—carried up of Stone for 40' high—5 ft. thick at Bottom—2 Brick thick at top. The lower Pot is about 81' high—This floor has 115 Steps of 8" each = 76' 8"—where the wall is $3\frac{1}{2}$ Brick thick. Has no well—there is two furnices [*sic*] with Pots above, makes use of two large tubs of 5' diam/r by 4' deep can make use of 3 Pots at one time, employs two men & 5 women below—4 circular windows in the upper Story—the two lower floors appear to have been cut out—This building is thought to be rather higher than is useful.⁴³

These notes add a substantial amount of information about the workings of this long-lost structure, including the division of labor by sexes: the men presumably pouring from above, the women below presumably gathering, sorting, and bagging.

⁴¹ Despite the light construction observed by McComb, the tower survives as the property of the Philadelphia Department of Recreation. There is an extensive dossier at the Philadelphia Historical Commission.

⁴² It was Paul Beck, not George, who built this tower, but it was George Youle who commissioned McComb's in New York.

⁴³ Nevertheless, the Phoenix (later Merchant's) Shot Tower in Baltimore, erected in 1828 and still standing, rises 246 feet. It was said to be the tallest in the world at mid-century: "Shot Tower," *Ballou's*, March 22, 1856, 180-81 (where the unnamed Youle tower is briefly mentioned).

We can assume that McComb found the study of these Philadelphia shot towers helpful in his design for George Youle's, although that was neither round nor square in plan, but a twenty-eight foot octagon, and considerably shorter—he gives its height as 66' 5" in the larger sketchbook—than even Spark's tower. Youle's was pulled down long ago, and only one of the McComb drawings, showing the crenelated top that visually associated it with other types of military architecture, preserves his design.⁴⁴

McComb's visit to Philadelphia in early May 1822 may have been primarily prompted by his desire to study the Sparks and Beck towers, but it may also reflect an awareness on the part of designers from elsewhere of the transition that was occurring in Philadelphia from—to follow William Pierson's handy nomenclature—the "colonial" to the "national" style.⁴⁵ To have that moment so usefully recorded in sketchbooks produced by a mature observer such as McComb is fortuitous indeed. These are rare documents that should now take their rightful place in the history of early nineteenth-century architecture in Philadelphia and the United States.

Wellesley College

JAMES F. O'GORMAN

⁴⁴ Print Room, New-York Historical Society, no. 434, undated and unidentified. The paper and draftsmanship relate to late drawings of church plans discussed earlier (see note 33), and this conforms to no other known late commission. The Print Room has a few rather unsatisfactory views of Youle's tower as erected.

⁴⁵ William H. Pierson, Jr., *American Buildings and the Their Architects: The Colonial and Neo-Classical Styles* (Garden City, 1976).