

The Evolution of Woodford, an Eighteenth-Century "Retirement"

WOODFORD, A HOUSE MUSEUM IN PHILADELPHIA'S East Fairmount Park, has long been known for its beautiful architectural woodwork and for the wonderful collection of furniture installed there in the 1920s by the Naomi Wood Foundation. The documentary history of the house and its owners has been established, although its architectural evolution has not been elucidated. The present article extends and corrects the documentary history of Woodford; dates the house firmly for the first time; reconstructs its original form; and, finally, places Woodford in the evolution of Philadelphia colonial country houses.¹

Woodford's purported building history is unusual: a one-story villa raised to two, with a stair hall and kitchen wing added at the rear. Such a fundamental enlargement is uncommon among Philadelphia country houses of the colonial period, and careful investigation was needed to confirm or discredit this story.² If the story is true, then other questions arise. Is the

¹ The analysis of the physical fabric of Woodford owes much to the comments and observations of Peter Andrew Copp, of Martin Rosenblum and Associates, Philadelphia. Lawrence Berger, Martha Moffat, and Martin P. Snyder were very helpful in opening Woodford to us and encouraging our research. Thanks also go to graduate students from the University of Georgia, Jill McClure and Jay Womack, who helped carry out field work in the summer of 1994. Research for this article was supported by a grant from the Office for the Vice President of Research of the University of Georgia.

June Avery Snyder and Martin P. Snyder, *The Story of the Naomi Wood Collection and Woodford Mansion* (Wayne, Pa., 1981), is the definitive documentary history of the house and the families who owned it. This book has been extremely helpful to us and allowed us to concentrate our research on the physical fabric of the house.

² Belmont (circa 1742-50) was enlarged in the early 1760s with the addition of a stair tower and flanking dependencies. Whitby Hall, originally a farmhouse, had a substantial formal, two-story block added in the 1750s; this, in turn, received a stair tower, probably in the 1760s. Substantial enlargements of country houses in the Federal era were more common: Lynfield was built in the 1760s by Surveyor General Lynford Lardner as a two-story, single-pile block along the Delaware River in the Northern

present second-floor framing the original garret framing, or was it replaced when the second floor was added? If the latter, how were the first-floor interiors affected? Where were the original stairs? What other changes were made to the plan to accommodate the enlargement? And what about the nature and dating of the outbuildings and the rationale behind the north wall of the mansion, with its glazed brick headers?

Woodford (fig. 1) was built by William Coleman (1704-69), a merchant and judge, on a twelve-acre parcel bought in 1756 from the estate of Thomas Shute, who had owned approximately 200 acres in the immediate vicinity, east of the Schuylkill and west of Wissahickon Road. Shute had developed several farms on his land (his will mentioned "messuages"). Woodford was one of six country houses that would eventually be built on this land.³ Shute had been a yeoman, or farmer, and this breakup of his land and its conversion from farmland to rural retreats was part of the gentrification of the Northern Liberties that began in the mid-eighteenth century. Coleman paid ninety-six pounds for the land, a price of eight pounds per acre that suggests unimproved or only marginally improved land at that time.⁴

The small size of Coleman's parcel implies that he intended no agricultural enterprise at Woodford, merely a country retreat or, in the parlance of the time, a "gentleman's retirement."⁵ Coleman represents the upward social mobility that Philadelphia offered in the mid-eighteenth century. His father was a Quaker house carpenter, but William apprenticed

Liberties but was enlarged to a double-pile house in the Federal period; other examples include Andalusia (1790s, enlarged 1809 and 1830s) and Loudon (built circa 1790 and enlarged in the 1820s).

³ Woodford (1756-58), Laurel Hill (1760s) by Francis Rawle, Bellville (1760s) by Joseph Galloway and later Edward Burd, Rockland (1811), Ormiston (1810). The Shute property history is traced in the archives of the Fairmount Park historian's office, in files on "Edgely Farm," which was the name of Shute's plantation. The name Edgely came from Edgely Point, a designation predating the Penn settlement of Pennsylvania.

⁴ Among many other deeds that lead to this conclusion, the following can be cited: ten pounds per acre for a tract of unimproved land in Passyunk, Joseph Turner to Joseph Sims, 1752, deed H3:374; £18.75 per acre for improved land in Passyunk, Francis Manny to John Pole, 1753, deed D13:298; £8.5 per acre for unimproved land at Richmond in Northern Liberties, Samuel Holme et al. to Joseph Lynn et al., 1740, deed G2:274. All deeds are Philadelphia County, Philadelphia City Archives, and Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁵ For example, the term was used by William Peters, who, beginning in 1742, developed Belmont as a retirement across the river from the Woodford site; Thomas Penn to William Peters, Aug. 22, 1743, Penn Letterbooks, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.



Fig. 1. Woodford, 1757–ca. 1800. (Photo, Fairmount Park Commission)

with a merchant and did well in trade. In 1751 he was appointed a justice of the peace, an appointment that began a long rise through the colony's judiciary. He was also well known for his intellectual activities, and Benjamin Franklin called him one of Philadelphia's "ingenious men." He was a founding member of Franklin's "Club of Mutual Improvement," or Junto, which evolved into the American Philosophical Society. Coleman was also a member and first treasurer of the Library Company of Philadelphia.⁶

⁶ Biographical information on Coleman from Snyder and Snyder, *Story of . . . Woodford*, 25–29.

Coleman's obituary, in 1768, noted his love of "study and retirement,"⁷ a trait no doubt specifically emphasized by his construction of Woodford. The eighteenth-century concept of "retirement" involved a temporary retreat to nature from the cares of business, in order to facilitate re-creation and self-improvement. Literature, the fine arts, music, and gardening were appropriate activities for a retirement. Coleman joined a large number of his fellow traders and men-at-law who, at midcentury, were establishing retirements in the Northern Liberties, particularly just north of the city of Philadelphia and up the Schuylkill.⁸ The land evidently had a house on it at the time of Coleman's purchase in 1756 (the deed calls it "a messuage or tenement and piece of land"), probably one of the farmhouses of Thomas Shute.

Having bought the land, Coleman began to build a house within a year. Fragments of his accounts survive at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and those for 1757 and 1758 mention payments on account for the twelve acres of land and expenses for "housebuilding" and "building in the No. Liberties."⁹ The accounts indicate only a few of the artisans involved. William Rush, blacksmith and hardware merchant, was paid ten pounds in November 1757. Richard Leacock was paid nine pounds in the same month and eighteen pounds the following February for "housebuilding & painting." Hardware and painting normally appear late in the construction of a house, so we can probably conclude that by the end of 1757 Woodford, in its original one-story form, was fairly well along. William Shute (a son of Thomas Shute) and David Boone were also paid for building and "work done in the country." Thus Woodford can be confidently dated 1756-58.¹⁰

⁷ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, Jan. 19, 1769.

⁸ Carl and Jessica Bridenbaugh, *Rebels and Gentlemen: Philadelphia in the Age of Franklin* (New York, 1962), 191, deals generally with the phenomenon of Philadelphia country seats, as does Frederick B. Tolles, *Meeting House and Counting House: The Quaker Merchants of Colonial Philadelphia, 1682-1763* (Chapel Hill, 1948), 132-35. The Scull and Heap map of the environs of Philadelphia, published in 1752, illustrates the location of many country seats built by the late 1740s.

For the English (and particularly London) background to Philadelphia's building of villas, see Robert Fishman, *Bourgeois Utopias: The Rise and Fall of Suburbia* (New York, 1987); and James Ackerman, *The Villa Form and Ideology of Country Houses* (London, 1990). The best discussion I have heard of the concept of "retirement" in the eighteenth century is an unpublished paper by John Archer, " 'Retirement' and the Constitution of the Self: The Eighteenth-Century English Bourgeois Villa," at the 1993 annual meeting of the Society of Architectural Historians.

⁹ Ledger accounts of William Coleman, Am 9108, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

¹⁰ This was an unusual period to be building a house, since Pennsylvania's frontiers were then engulfed in the French and Indian War.

The next significant document in Woodford's history is a 1769 Philadelphia Contributionship insurance survey:

Alexander Barclay's [Barclay bought Woodford from the estate of William Coleman in 1769] Country Seat Situate on the Wissahickon Road about 4 miles from this City. House 45 feet front [by] 25 feet deep, one story high. The first floor raised about 4 feet & [a] half from the ground. 14 inch walls. Three rooms on a floor and an entry or Hall. One room [first floor parlor to the east] neatly finished with a Tabernacle frame, pediment mantle & [?] in the [chimney]breast, wainscoted surbase high, pilasters fluted, cornice round and cove above as the other ceilings. Architraves kneed. The greatest part of the floor dowedled board. Newel stairs. Plastered partitions. Garret plastered. A way out on the roof, and iron rails [on the roof].

Stone steps at the front door & Tuscan frontispiece. A piazza [open but covered porch] back extending 10 feet from the house at the whole length of the house, floored [?] & Bannisters from the door to the east end of the same. The house about 10 years old. Painted inside and out. The Piazza Quite new . . . About 150 feet from the above described house is a stone building 16 feet 6 [inches] by 24 feet, 2 story high, 2 rooms on [each] floor, plainly finished. About the same distance is the Stable and Coach House, 16 feet 6 in[ches] by 24 feet. Two story stone.¹¹

This is a presumably accurate, if limited, description of Woodford in 1769. Everything mentioned can be confirmed in the field today except for the distance from the main house to the outbuildings; the survey gave it as 150 feet, while the true distance is 104 feet.

The relationship of Woodford's main house and outbuildings implies a highly formal and sophisticated site plan that must have been present from the beginning (fig. 2). The front (east) walls of both outbuildings—the stable/carriage house to the south and a stone house to the north (the function of which will be dealt with later)—align, being equidistant from the main house, forty-eight feet to each side and ninety-two feet behind the rear wall.¹² Further, both buildings are the same size (24 feet, 6 inches by 16 feet), even though of very different functions, implying that their size was

¹¹ Philadelphia Contributionship archives; copies in Fairmount Park and Woodford archives.

¹² These distances, roughly fifty feet beyond each side of the main house and approximately 100 feet behind, may explain the 150 feet given in the insurance survey.

determined as much by formal considerations as function.

Even more striking, the outbuildings' symmetry extends to the vertical dimension. Although the stable/carriage house is taller from the ground to the eaves than the house to the north, they both rise to the same point in relationship to a horizontal datum (such as the first floor of the main house). The ground slopes down to the south, so that the grade at the south dependency is about three feet lower than at the north building, their difference in height.¹³ Thus the eave and rooflines of the two buildings align when seen from the front of the whole complex (fig. 3). Curiously, the front (east) fenestration of the two buildings differs, implying either a change in design during execution or that the designer cared only about the overall massing and not about details.¹⁴

The sophisticated three-dimensional symmetry of the outbuildings strongly implies that the Woodford building group was designed as a whole. It refutes the idea that the north outbuilding (the stone house) belonged to Thomas Shute and predated Woodford. It seems unlikely that the design of the entire Woodford group would be based on an old house that represented only fifteen percent of Woodford's value (to use the figures of the insurance survey); the actual construction value would probably have been less.¹⁵

The careful placement of the outbuildings also suggests a formal landscaping scheme.¹⁶ An advertisement for Woodford (1769) mentions "12 acres . . . a handsome garden, a thriving orchard of good apple trees, and other fruit, and a well of excellent water. The whole place being under good

¹³ At present the eaves of the two dependencies vary by about half a foot in absolute elevation. Precise measurements are impossible because the roof framing and cornice of the stable have been changed. The measurements are close enough to confirm that the builders intended to make the dependencies align visually.

¹⁴ Cliveden, built by Benjamin Chew, furnishes a good example of the inevitable gap between design and construction in this period. William Peters, a fellow attorney to Chew, developed the design, and Peters' clerk, Richard Tea, drew several drawings that presumably guided the builder, Jacob Knorr, master carpenter of Germantown. Among several discrepancies between the drawings and executed building is the fenestration of the flanking dependencies. The basic form of the symmetrical flankers remains as Peters and Tea designed them, but many details were changed during construction. See "Cliveden: Historic Structures Report" by Martin Jay Rosenblum and Associates, 1994, I-24.

¹⁵ Charles Peterson came to the same conclusion in a brief 1971 report. Peterson to Martin P. Snyder, Sept. 29, 1971; copy in Fairmount Park historian's files.

¹⁶ The following section on landscaping was written in part by Elizabeth McLean, landscape historian.



Fig. 3. Elevation showing alignment of Woodford mansion house and outbuildings.

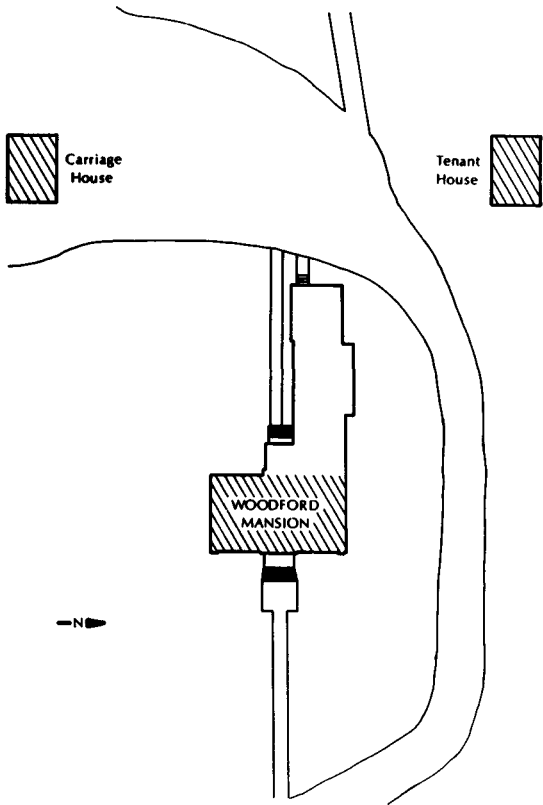


Fig. 2. Site plan, Woodford mansion house and outbuildings. (All drawings by author and Gail Miller)

post and rail and palisade fence."¹⁷ The mention of good fencing, an orchard, and good water is typical for real estate advertisements for rural properties of the period. The size of the property (twelve acres) was not usual for country property in general, as it was much too small for a farm. Other well-known nearby country seats had much more acreage (Belmont had 220 and Mount Pleasant had 160), although Woodford's scale was not unusual for "retirements" in this period. For example, Benjamin Chew started with eleven acres at Cliveden.¹⁸

Post-and-rail fences were used for boundaries of properties, as well as for pastures and orchards. Cedar seems to have been the usual wood for the posts, and oak was often used for the rails.¹⁹ The "palisade" (or paling) was a fence of "split or sawn pieces of wood vertically set in the ground or nailed to a horizontal rail supported by posts to form a fence."²⁰ This kind of fence was used for privacy when a house was close to the road or to enclose a garden. The wood was usually cedar—sometimes so specified in advertisements.

That Coleman had a thriving orchard is no surprise. Nearly everyone, on small property or large, had apple trees.²¹ Apples were more important for cider or apple brandy than they were as dessert fruit. The other fruit trees most often grown were peaches and cherries, followed by pears.

Coleman's "handsome garden" is intriguing. Gardens were usually praised for their productivity, not their aesthetics. "Handsome" implies more than simply the kitchen garden expected as part of a country house property.

¹⁷ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 11, 1769, Supp.; quoted in full in Snyder and Snyder, *Story of . . . Woodford*, 34.

¹⁸ Arriving at the average size of property for an eighteenth-century Philadelphia country house is difficult. However, a quick impression can be gained from the 1767 tax survey (University of Pennsylvania Library's Rare Book Room). For the townships immediately adjacent to Philadelphia—that is, those that contained most of the villas or country seats of city-based residents (Northern Liberties East, Northern Liberties West, Passyunk, and Moyamensing)—there were twenty-one references to "country seats" or "country houses" owned by people taxed within the city. Of these, only four had large amounts of property, respectively 500, 200, 142, and 120 acres. The property sizes for the remainder varied from one to thirty-five acres, with both the average and mean being eleven acres. This and other aspects of the landscape of colonial Philadelphia's environs are the subjects of ongoing research and a forthcoming article by the author.

¹⁹ Peter Kalm, *Travels in North America*, trans. John Reinhold Forster (Barre, Mass., 1972), 80.

²⁰ Carl R. Lounsbury, ed., *An Illustrated Glossary of Early Southern Architecture and Landscape* (New York, 1994), 256.

²¹ Even a small "lot of about 4 acres," in Bucks County could hold "an orchard of upward of 80 apple trees, a number of peach and cherry trees, a nursery of above 1000 young apple trees . . ." *Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 4, 1769.

Estimates on kitchen garden needs vary. Clarissa Dillon estimates that an "average family" would need one-fourth to one-half acre,²² while James Lemon estimates that two acres for "flax, orchard and [kitchen] garden" would provide subsistence for a family of five as part of a larger farm.²³ Coleman was not concerned with subsistence; at least an acre for entertaining and household needs (both for Woodford and his Philadelphia townhouse) would be reasonable.

The 1769 advertisement does not mention two gardens, as did Samuel Shoemaker in a 1769 advertisement of his fifteen-acre property: a "handsome flower garden," and a "large kitchen garden."²⁴ Since Woodford was not advertised as having two gardens, probably it had an embellished kitchen garden with flowers interspersed with the vegetables and the whole laid out in an attractive (and probably geometrical) manner.

Using the 1769 insurance survey and surviving evidence in the house, Woodford's original form can confidently be reconstructed. It consisted of the front block of the present mansion, one-story high, with a (probably fairly tall) hipped roof. The form of the roof can be deduced from the present second-floor framing, which has a system used for hipped roof platforms. This system employs "dragon beams" at the corners to engage the important hip rafters of the roof and to provide for outriggers to receive the roof cornice running all around the house with a hipped roof (fig. 4). That the second floor framing is original implies also that the coes in the first-floor ceilings are also the same ones mentioned in the 1769 insurance survey.

Woodford would thus have looked much like the Pemberton mansion, near the Schuylkill in Passyunk Township (fig. 5). This house was built by Judge John Kinsey (sometime before his death in 1750) and later sold to James Pemberton. As Coleman was a judge, he probably would have known Kinsey's country house. An early drawing of the Pemberton mansion shows it as a one-story rectangular structure with proportions similar to Woodford's. It had five narrow bays across the front (as opposed to Woodford's three wider ones) and a projecting pedimented center. Its steep hipped roof was surmounted by dormers, two large chimneys, and a roof railing.

²² Clarissa Dillon, "Eighteenth Century Kitchen Garden," *The Historical Gardener* 2 (1993), 10.

²³ James T. Lemon, "Household Consumption in Eighteenth Century America and Its Relationship to Production and Trade: The Situation among Farmers in Southeastern Pennsylvania," *Agricultural History* 41 (1967), 68-69.

²⁴ *Pennsylvania Gazette*, May 4, 1769.

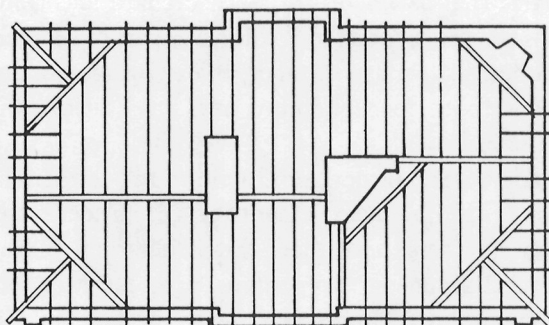


Fig. 4. Second-floor framing plan, Woodford.

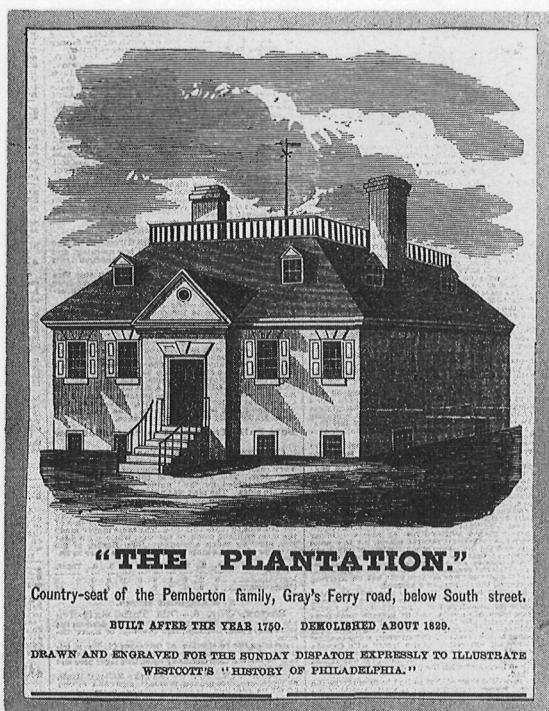


Fig. 5. Pemberton mansion, 1745-50. Engraved for the *Sunday Dispatch* (Philadelphia), ca. 1870.
(Society Print Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania)

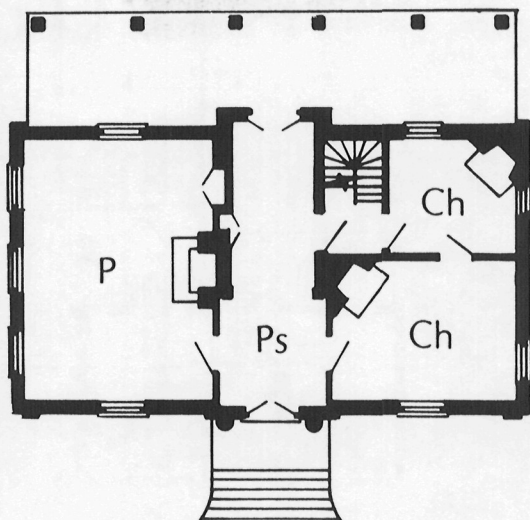


Fig. 6. Floor plan, Woodford, first period, 1757.

Woodford's original first-floor plan (fig. 6) contained the following spaces. The large south room (the parlor) remains as it always was. Its woodwork was painted light blue-green, while the walls were whitewashed plaster, universal in Woodford and most Philadelphia colonial houses.²⁵ On the opposite side of the center hall or passage were two rooms and a stair passage divided by a partition whose location can be seen by breaks in the cornice and top cove molding. A corner fireplace heated the front (northeast) room on this side (as in the room above, fig. 7b). The partition would have intersected the exterior north wall within the present center window opening; this window was a later insertion, as shown by disturbed brickwork on the exterior of this wall. The central hall also remains unaltered. The false doorway on the left side of the hall is original. On the right, the doorway originally

²⁵ Frank S. Welsh, "Woodford Mansion: A Comparative Microscopical Paint and Color Analysis: Phase One," 1992.

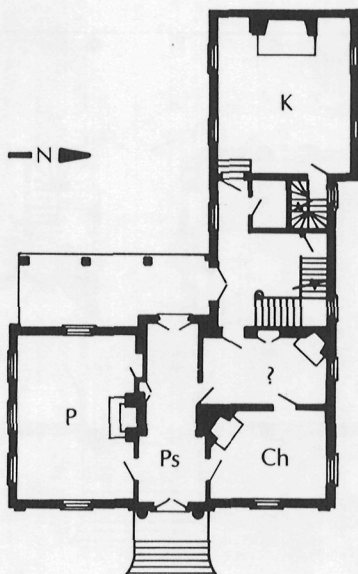


Fig. 7a. First-floor plan, Woodford, second period, 1770.

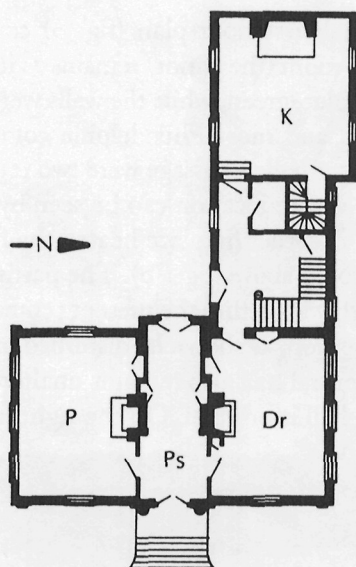


Fig. 8a. First-floor plan, Woodford, third period, ca. 1800.

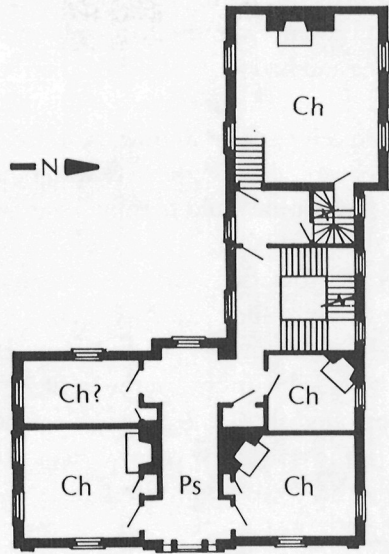


Fig. 7b. Second-floor plan, Woodford, second period, 1770.

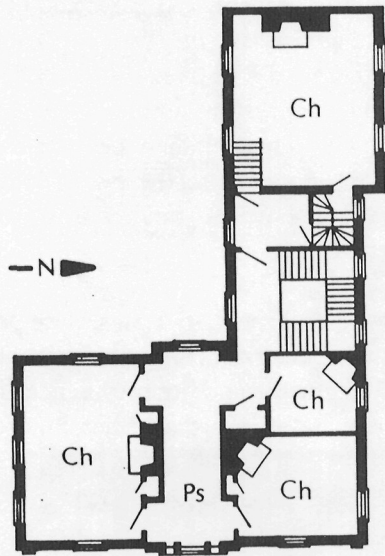


Fig. 8b. Second-floor plan, Woodford, third period, ca. 1800.

gave access to the northwest room.²⁶ This space held the original stair that ran to both the garret chambers and the cellar kitchen (which stretched under both north rooms and had a large cooking fireplace, which is still there).

Of this pair of rooms on the north side, only the front (northeast room) originally had a coved ceiling. The woodwork of this room was painted gray. In addition to the door to the passage, there was, probably, a door to the rear room on this side. The room would have had one window facing front and another facing to the north side. The muntins in the front and front side windows are different from those on the two other side windows of the present dining room, confirming the later change in the north wall.

The northwest (rear) room was nearly square. In the center of the rear wall was a window (aligned with that in the front wall), as can be seen by the ghosts of a higher opening above the present closet doorway. This room had a corner fireplace in the northwest corner, just as the room above still has (fig. 7b). Originally there was a nine-over-nine window in the north wall adjacent to this fireplace (just as there still is above); the later change to the present twelve-over-twelve window can be seen in the disturbance to the exterior of the brick wall (fig. 9). Thus the room had two windows, one to the north side and one to the rear.

The original stairway was probably U-shaped and placed against the west wall of a small intermediate passage off the main hall. The stair was open (the insurance survey described it as "newel stairs"), but it could have had either an open or closed stringer. It might also have had either winders or a landing. To light this space there could have been a small window on a stair landing (about where the doorway to the present stair hall is now) or a dormer window in the roof above. A similar small window now lights the service stair in the back of the house.

Woodford's brickwork deserves notice on several points. First, a careful study and measurement of brick sizes confirms the sequence of construction that is revealed by the documents and other evidence. The first story of the front block of the house has bricks that differ in size from those of the

²⁶ This doorway now opens into part of the brick chimney stack on the north side of the hall, a part that was added as backing for the larger Federal fireplace installed when the room was opened up in the 1790s. The installation of this additional brick necessitated a small cantilever in the first floor framing (seen in the cellar). The top of this added portion can be seen in a mechanical access space in a closet off the second-floor passage.



Fig. 9. North elevation, Woodford. (Photo, Fairmount Park Commission)

second story, the stair hall, and the kitchen back building, all of which were built in 1770 (see fig. 8a for the extended plan, discussed below). The first period's bricks also show much more variation in size than the later ones.

The north wall poses a mystery, as it is the only wall with glazed headers (fig. 9). (The glazed headers were continued in the 1770 sections for unity.) Further, its water table is different from that on the other three sides of the front block, having an extra fillet above the quarter round on the lower course.

Other variations in the brickwork around the mansion relate to a hierarchy of elevations, an extremely important design determinant in Phila-

delphia country houses.²⁷ The front of the house is usually treated in the finest manner (for obvious reasons), but often there are variations (sometimes amazingly subtle) among the other elevations. Woodford displays some of these. For example, the first and second floors of the front block have Flemish bond brick (regular alternation of stretchers and headers). Below the water table the front has Flemish bond but the other elevations have English bond (alternating rows of stretchers and headers), a slightly cheaper and stronger method of laying bricks. All around the front block is a brick string course that functions as the architrave of a classical entablature; it is capped by a wood cornice and pent roof, presumably the remains of the roof cornice on the original one-story house. The front and rear of the main block have pilasters or piers at the corners, around which the string course and cornice break. These elements visually strengthen the corners and respond to the projecting center pavilions. On the front the piers are set in from the corner, allowing them to read as full pilasters. On the rear they are pushed all the way to the corners and appear more as simple buttress piers. The pilasters were carried up into the second floor on the front, but left out at the rear.

The pilasters themselves are very unusual in colonial houses. Colonial public buildings (especially churches) often had pilasters or piers at the corners and to mark external bay divisions, but rarely houses. The well-known agricultural writer, J. Mortimer, writing about rural houses, recommended projections in the brick at corners and where principal beams projected, because the wall between could be thinner and because they made the wall look more graceful.²⁸ The piers on the rear of Woodford may respond simply to this structural imperative.²⁹ Examples of pilasters in Philadelphia include Christ Church, Zion Lutheran Church, the State House stair tower, and (in a crude way) James Logan's country house, Stenton. Their presence at Woodford and the skillful way in which they were used is another indication of the sophistication inherent in Woodford's design.

The front, then, is clearly the best elevation, but determining the relative

²⁷ For a recent discussion of the principle of hierarchy, see Dell Upton, *Holy Things and Profane: Anglican Parish Churches in Colonial Virginia* (New York, 1986), 206ff, and Bernard Herman, *Architecture and Rural Life in Central Delaware 1700-1900* (Knoxville, 1987), 42-60.

²⁸ J. Mortimer, *The Whole Art of Husbandry* (3d ed., London, 1716), 278 (in Book X).

²⁹ That they were not continued into the second story may also suggest that they did not serve any significant aesthetic function on the rear, as they did on the front.

hierarchy of the rear and two sides is more difficult. Often the drive ran along the better side of a Philadelphia country house, and at Woodford it seems logical that the drive would have run to the south, toward the carriage house/stable (assuming it entered the property off Wissahickon Road and ran straight for the house or slightly off to one side). Examples of this configuration include Cliveden, Belmont, Hope Lodge, and Graeme Park. Indeed the south side of Woodford's original first story was more orderly than the north, having three windows symmetrically disposed, while the north had two windows of different sizes.³⁰ However, the north side had glazed headers, which seem only explainable as an attempt at a finer treatment. Further, on the 1770 stair hall and back building both sides have Flemish bond walls (with Liverpool bond—headers every fourth course—at the base), but only the north wall has a belt course.³¹ Very likely, then, the original drive ran along the north side, as it still does.³² If this speculation is correct, then the front was the best elevation, the north side (with its glazed headers) was second best, stretched along the drive, and the south side and rear were third best. An identical three-fold exterior hierarchy is found at Cliveden and Graeme Park.

Woodford's coved ceilings are also unusual in colonial architecture, although by no means unique (fig. 10). No other examples in domestic architecture survive in Philadelphia, but the long gallery of the State House had a coved ceiling, another way that Woodford parallels this well-known building. The Miles Brewton House (1765-69) in Charleston, South Carolina, and Whitehall (1764-65), near Annapolis, Maryland, also have them. They were very common in English Palladian architecture (especially

³⁰ However, the asymmetry of the north wall was not great (one window pane) and was due to the vagaries of internal planning. The main parlor was to be on the south for better light and cheerfulness. It was not uncommon for the better rooms internally to be on the lesser side externally, examples being the parlors of Graeme Park and Cliveden. From the inside, the view *from* the house was more important than views *of* the house.

³¹ Except at the stair hall where the string course was omitted probably because it would have been interrupted by the landing window. The string course on the 1770 back building is simpler than that on the original house: it is simply three courses projecting the same distance from the surface of the wall; the original string course also had three courses but in two steps. The rear of the 1770 back building had the lowly American bond (headers every sixth course), indicating its lower status. Curiously the rear also had an ornamental diamond of glazed headers in the gable.

³² Shutters are of no help in determining hierarchy at Woodford. They are identical all around the original portion of the house. Second-floor windows in the original house had internal shutters and would not have had external ones as well. Where external ones occur they are a later addition.

when it tended towards the rococo in interior decoration) and were well represented in pattern books. For example, Isaac Ware's *Complete Body of Architecture* (1756), plates 81-82, shows coved cornices very much like Woodford's. The rococo style, which originated in France in the 1720s, often utilized coved ceilings because they blurred the line between ceiling and wall. Visually, this allowed for the rococo's riot of "all-over" light and playful plasterwork, which represented a reaction to the earlier, more pompous style of the Louis XIV period.

Woodford's coved ceilings represent at least a pale reflection of rococo informality by their contrast with the formality of the full Doric order of the



Fig. 10. Parlor, Woodford (from Philip B. Wallace and M. Luther Miller, *Colonial Houses; Philadelphia, Pre-Revolutionary Period* [New York, 1931], p. 98).

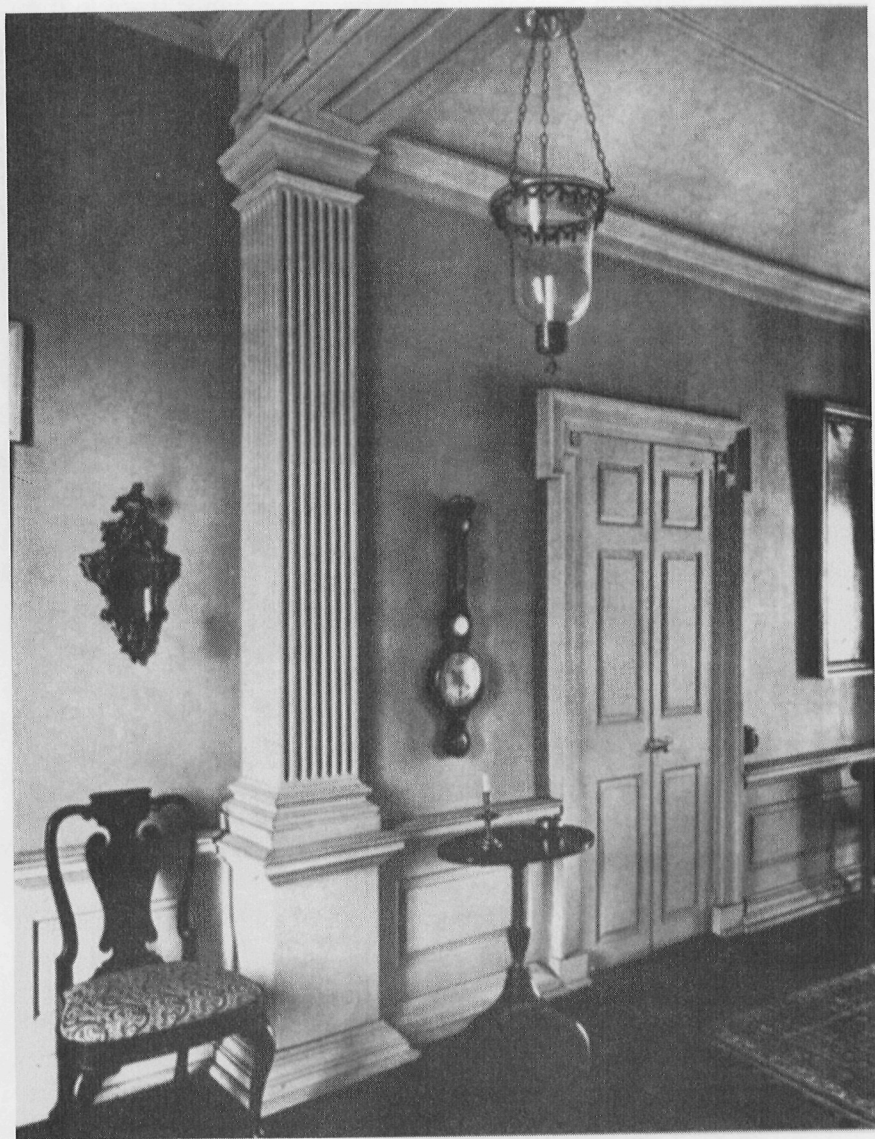


Fig. 11. Hall, Woodford (from Wallace and Miller, *Colonial Houses*, p. 93).

entrance hall (fig. 11). In this space the Doric order creates a "screen" or spatial division between front and back, between the public space in front and the somewhat more private space behind. The hall, the most formal room in the house and the room devoted to the formal manners of entrance ceremony, does not have a cove, the only such space on the first-floor. Undoubtedly, the demands of inserting a full Doric order into this space in part led to this exclusion (behind the screen the cove rests on the pier capitals with only a slender cornice between, a very unclassical treatment). On the other hand, the use of coves in every other major first floor space highlights the deliberateness of the decision to use a full Doric order in the entry hall. The space declared a more than ordinary formality.³³ Woodford's is the earliest surviving Doric screen in a Philadelphia colonial country house. In later years they would become de rigueur in important area houses. For example, Mount Pleasant, Cliveden, Port Royal, and Whitby Hall all have a division between the front and back of the hall marked by a Doric order. The very smallness of the Doric screen at Woodford suggests that such screens in Philadelphia country houses were something like a code for formal entry. The form was used earlier in the State House, and its use by the gentry in houses may represent a borrowing from that public building.

Beyond the formal front hall in any direction, the more informal rococo took over. In the parlor, rococo grace is particularly evident in the delicately carved scroll consoles and cartouche of the overmantel (fig. 10). The parlor also demonstrates another value of the coved ceiling: it allowed a fairly great height to the ceiling but kept the wall's woodwork down to a more domestic and intimate scale. Such intimacy and domesticity were also part of the rococo's reaction to the grandeur and coldness of earlier eras of interior design.

Alexander Barclay, the king's comptroller in Philadelphia and a member of the famous Barclay family, owned Woodford only three years before he died in 1771. His only known work there was the piazza mentioned in the insurance survey as "quite new." However, the inventory taken at his death indicates how the rooms of Woodford were used in the eighteenth century and thus helps bring the house alive.³⁴ It also indicates the essential modesty

³³ For an architectural treatment of social etiquette related to formal entry, see Upton, *Holy Things and Profane*, 206-8.

³⁴ Snyder and Snyder, *The Story of . . . Woodford*, 43, discusses the inventory, the original is Philadelphia County Register of Wills, Inventory, Jan. 20, 1771, no. 26 of 1771.

of the house. The inventory called Woodford's center hall a "passage," the furniture of which suggests a room for limited use, perhaps especially in hot weather when it would have been the coolest room in the house. It contained a couch, a table, several rush-seated chairs, and eight Windsor chairs, the standard seating type for hall and porch in the eighteenth century. Windsor chairs were also the standard lawn chairs in this period and were moved in and out as needed.³⁵ The parlor served for both living and dining; it held four tables for dining, serving, and playing cards. It also contained nine "leather bottom" chairs. Its walls held several prints and two gilt sconces.

The two rooms in the north half of the first floor were bedrooms. The front (northeast) room, called the "chamber," was undoubtedly the master bedroom, as it contained the best sleeping furniture in the house: a mahogany bedstead with red bolster and counterpane and blue-and-white bed curtains, a dressing table, and a bookcase. The northwest room in the rear, called "the little Back Room," held a more modest pine bedstead and walnut couch. Upstairs in the garret there was other simple bedroom furniture.

Almost two years after Barclay's death, Woodford's third owner, David Franks, had the place resurveyed by carpenter Gunning Bedford, also for the Philadelphia Contributionship. Franks had recently carried out extensive enlargements to Woodford and needed to get his policy upgraded. Again, because the document is so important, it is transcribed in full:

Surveyed November 3rd 1772

A house for David Franks situate on the south side of the Wissahickon Road about 4 miles from the City - 45 by 25, 2 stories high. 14 inch walls. 3 rooms & a passage in [the] first story - one room finished with chimney breast, mantle, [and] cornice tabernacle frame and pediment; wainscot pedestal high & double cornice - the other rooms have chimney breasts, surbase skirting and single cornice. The passage wainscot pedestal high; 2 fluted pilasters, double cornice. A piazza back 26 by 10 feet. One story of open newel stairs rampet bracketed wainscot & a twist.

4 rooms & passage in 2nd story with skirting surbase & double cornice. Fret cornice in passage & stairway - garret plastered. A way out on roof & good wooden rails up. Modillion eaves. A frontispiece at [the] door & a venetian window over it. An arch door & frame out of stairway into piazza. The

³⁵ Mark R. Wenger, "The Central Passage in Virginia: Evolution of an Eighteenth-Century Living Space," in Camille Wells, ed., *Perspectives in Vernacular Architecture II* (Columbia, Mo., 1986), 148.

backbuilding 42 ½ by 21 feet, 2 stories high. 9 inch walls. Chimney breast, surbase & skirting in room over kitchen. Outside & part within painted. New.
Gunning Bedford

House £500
Back £300³⁶

Franks enlarged Woodford's main house by raising it to two full stories and adding a large back building containing a stair hall, kitchen, and large chamber above (figs. 7a and 7b). This building program approximately doubled the floor area of Woodford, thereby suggesting Franks's great wealth.³⁷ The changes almost certainly reflect the second generation of retreats or villas built in the 1760s in the Philadelphia area. They were generally larger than their predecessors of the 1740s and 1750s, both in overall floor area and in the area of the building's footprint. Typical of the earlier houses were Woodford (1756-58, 1100 square feet per floor) and Belmont (1743-50, 960 square feet). By contrast, the later generation of villas is represented by houses such as Mount Pleasant (1761-64, 1600 square feet) and Cliveden (1763-67, 2420 square feet per floor).

After David Franks added the second story, the present stair hall, and the kitchen back building, the original stair was removed, the rear north spaces could be combined, and a cove ceiling installed (fig. 7a). The door from the center hall into the old northwest chamber remained, and the south wall (and its cove) shared a partition with the hall (unlike the present false wall). This cove, now abandoned, remains hidden behind the present cove and can be seen in a mechanical space in the closet off the second-floor passage. The present door to the new stair hall was installed, and the original rear window, now blocked by the new stair, was converted to a closet. The door between the front and rear rooms may or may not have remained at this time. The corner fireplace remained. The rear room seems to have remained light ochre

³⁶ Philadelphia Contributionship archives; copies in Fairmount Park and Woodford archives.

³⁷ It would seem to be more, but the original garret at Woodford held habitable chambers, access to which was by a fairly elaborate stairway. By contrast, the present garret at Woodford is reached by a winder stair that would only have been used by servants (or by members of the family who wished to reach the roof). Thus Franks's enlargements did not add as much area to the main block as would be thought. Rather, in terms of area alone, the back buildings were his most significant addition. Aesthetically, of course, raising the front block to two stories had profound effects.



Fig. 12. Woodford. Watercolor sketch by David Kennedy, ca. 1870. (Historical Society of Pennsylvania)

(like the hall), although the front north room was repainted a light blue.

Franks's additions produced a floor plan unusual for Philadelphia country houses and caused a certain amount of awkwardness in the first floor. The original rear north room became a fairly dark intermediate space whose use is uncertain. Pushing the stair hall into the back building also resulted in more steps for both family and servants in traveling from floor to floor. In all other eighteenth-century Philadelphia country houses, the stairway was within or just off the center hall. Indeed, Woodford's new plan seems curiously like that of a large Philadelphia town house, with the stairs and kitchen in a rear ell wing.³⁸

David Franks, a Tory, was forced to flee the United States during the Revolution, and his agents in America sold his property. Thomas Paschall,

³⁸ The plan of the new stairs, with main stairs adjacent but disconnected from winder service stairs, can be found in better Philadelphia town houses of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

also a merchant, bought Woodford. He apparently never lived there, renting it out instead, and there is no evidence that he made any improvements.

In 1793 Paschall sold the property to Isaac Wharton, yet another merchant, whose descendants owned Woodford until it was acquired by the Fairmount Park Commission in 1869 (fig. 12). Isaac Wharton died in 1808, and his inventory reveals the changes he made to Woodford (fig. 8a).³⁹ To create the present dining room, the partition between the original two north first-floor rooms was removed. The brick chimney block was extended westward just over a foot to allow the fireplace to be centered on the chimney breast, and a Federal-style mantel was installed. A new window was added in the center of the north wall, and the original nine-over-nine window to the rear was enlarged to the present twelve-over-twelve, matching the others on that wall (fig. 9).⁴⁰ A closet was added west of the fireplace to balance the door to the passage. The cove was rebuilt to correspond to the room's new configuration. Finally, all woodwork (here as well as elsewhere on the first floor and perhaps throughout the house) was painted yellow-white, a monochrome trim treatment suggesting that wallpaper may have been installed at this time in at least some of the rooms.

The parlor chamber underwent similar changes (fig. 8b). Scars from the former partition can be seen on the cornice to the left of the fireplace, indicating that the partition had created a nearly square front room and a very small rear room. Only the front room would have been heated. Ghosts on the dado on the south wall confirm this location. After the partition was removed, a closet was added to the left of the fireplace, balancing the (presumably) original closet to the right.⁴¹

These changes created the Woodford we know today, a house museum that the Naomi Wood Trust has filled with one of the finest collections of eighteenth-century furniture in the United States. As enlarged, Woodford has a scale and style typical of a colonial country house, even if the plan is somewhat unusual. However, Woodford is just as important in the

³⁹ Presented in Snyder and Snyder, *Story of . . . Woodford*, 93; the original is Philadelphia County Register of Wills, Estate no. 42 of 1808, "Country Residence."

⁴⁰ The exterior muntins on these two windows are narrower than those on the original windows, a characteristic of Federal style that would be expected in changes of this date.

⁴¹ The hardware has been altered on both closet doors, but the woodwork of the front closet doorway matches that in the northeast chamber, suggesting that it is original to the second floor (1770).

architectural history of the Delaware Valley for its original form: a small, mid-eighteenth century retreat or retirement. Its form—one-story brick with a hipped roof—was probably once common but has no other surviving representative examples in the region.

Woodford is also one of the few surviving country houses from the 1750s. The 1740s witnessed a building boom in the Philadelphia countryside, and the 1760s produced a great flowering of high Georgian architecture. The 1750s, however, saw relatively little building, presumably because of the unsettled economic and political conditions during the French and Indian War. Woodford's date makes it an important formal precedent for the country houses of the 1760s. Along with such other mid-century villas as Belmont (1743-50) and James Hamilton's long demolished Bush Hill (1749-52), Woodford helped establish the stylistic parameters for later houses. In particular, its Doric hall screen and the carving in its parlor make it an important progenitor of such houses as Mount Pleasant and Cliveden. In turn, these later, larger, country houses returned to influence Woodford's subsequent evolution.

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