

The President's House in Philadelphia: The Rediscovery of a Lost Landmark

I

FOR MORE THAN 150 YEARS there has been confusion about the President's House in Philadelphia (fig. 1), the building which served as the executive mansion of the United States from 1790 to 1800, the "White House" of George Washington and John Adams. Congress had named Philadelphia the temporary national capital for a ten-year period while the new Federal City (now Washington, D.C.) was under construction, and one of the finest houses in Philadelphia was selected for President Washington's residence and office. Prior to its tenure as the President's House, the building had housed such other famous (or infamous) residents as proprietary governor Richard Penn, British general Sir William Howe, American general Benedict Arnold, French consul John Holker, and financier Robert Morris. Historians have long recognized the importance of the house, and many have attempted to tell its story, but most of them have gotten the facts wrong about how the building looked when Washington and Adams lived there, and even about where it stood.

I am indebted to John Alviti, Penelope Hartshorne Batcheler, George Brightbill, Mr. and Mrs. Nathaniel Burt, Jeffrey A. Cohen, William Creech, David Dashiell, Scott DeHaven, Susan Drinan, Kenneth Finkel, Jeffrey Flaherty, Marsha Fritz, Kristen Froehlich, Roy Harker, Sharon Ann Holt, Sue Keeler, Roger G. Kennedy, Bruce Laverty, Edward Lawler, Sr., Jack and Alice-Mary Lawler, Joann Lawler, Andrea Ashby Lerarif, Mark Frazier Lloyd, Barbara A. McMillan, Jefferson M. Moak, Howell T. Morgan, Gene Morris, Roger W. Moss, C. Ford Peatross, Charles E. Peterson, Ian Quimby, Joan Roberts, George and Jacqui Shambaugh, Carol W. Smith, Karen Stevens, Doris Z. Taylor, Suzanne Snell Tesh, George E. Thomas, Mary V. Thompson, Anna Coxie Toogood, Dee-Dee Wanamaker, Quincy Williams, Rebecca Yamin, William Allen Zulker, and the research staff of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (HSP) for their assistance with this article.

Beginning around 1850—fifty years after Washington's death—a dispute arose over the size, the exact location, and the appearance of the building during his presidency. Most of the house had been demolished in the 1830s, and since there seemed to be little physical evidence of it remaining, the disagreement boiled down to the conflicting boyhood memories of two antiquarians: John Fanning Watson and Charles A. Poulson. Each man was well-intentioned and relying on what he thought was the truth, but their visions of the house seemed irreconcilable and neither proved his case definitively. Both men had adherents who carried on the debate after their deaths, and the controversy continued without a final resolution for more than a century. In the 1930s, a team under the Works Progress Administration spent close to two years researching the house and constructing an elaborate scale model of it,¹ but their work was based on a theory that has proven to be specious. The long controversy caused considerable confusion—fiction almost triumphed over fact—and a trail of misinformation about the house developed which has continued to this day. The ultimate casualty of the confusion was the building itself, portions of which survived into the middle of the twentieth century, only to be demolished because they were not recognized for what they were. The purpose of this article is to correct the century and a half of misinformation, to put an end to the confusion, and to present an accurate and documented portrait of the President's House.

The President's House stood on the south side of Market Street between 5th and 6th Streets, less than six hundred feet from Independence Hall, on land which is now part of Independence Mall. The soon-to-be-demolished Liberty Bell Pavilion is at the center of the block; the site of the President's House is about forty-five feet west of the pavilion, and about sixty feet east of the old building line of 6th Street. Sixth Street has been greatly widened,² but one can see where the old building line was and the relative widths of the sidewalks and roadway by looking at Congress Hall—a block away at the southeast corner of 6th and Chestnut Streets. All of the buildings on the

¹ The WPA model of the President's House (hereafter, PH) was on display at the Atwater Kent Museum, the history museum of the City of Philadelphia, from 1939 until about 1981. It still exists, although it is greatly deteriorated and is now in storage.

² The old right-of-way of 6th Street (the sum of the widths of the roadway and both sidewalks) had been fifty feet. The current right-of-way (November 2001) is eighty-four feet. Harbeson, Hough, Livingston and Larson, *Preliminary Studies for Independence Mall, Philadelphia City Planning Commission* (Philadelphia, 1952), 1.

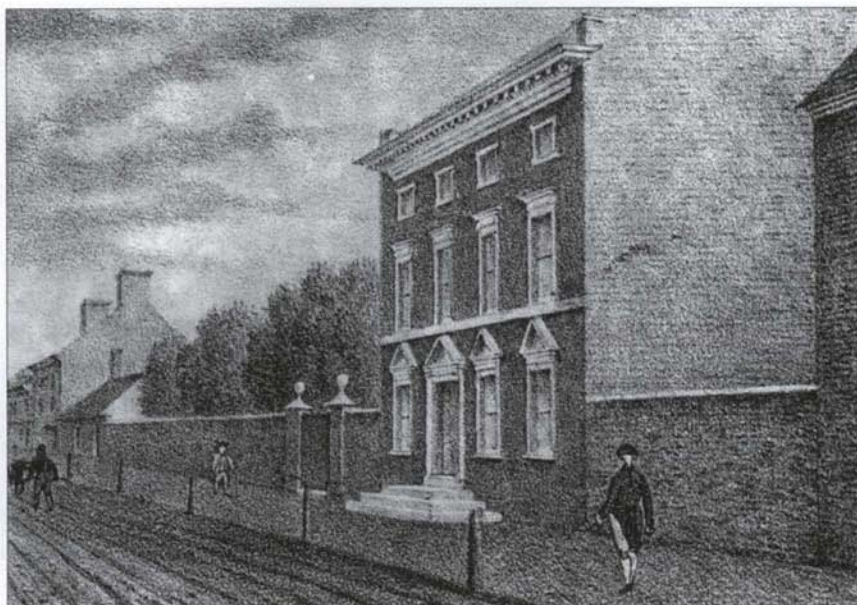


Fig. 1. "Washington's Residence, High Street." Lithograph by William L. Breton. From John Fanning Watson's *Annals of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1830), pl. facing p. 361. Library Company of Philadelphia. Some copies of the 1830 edition of the *Annals* have the other Breton lithograph of the President's House.

land bordered by Market, Chestnut, 5th and 6th Streets, "the first block of Independence Mall," were demolished in the early 1950s. By modern numbering, the address of the President's House would have been 526–30 Market Street.³

The house has been given many names: the Masters-Penn House⁴ (after its first two owners), 190 High Street⁵ (its first eighteenth-century address), the Robert Morris House⁶ (one of at least seven Philadelphia houses associ-

³ Throughout this article twentieth-century street numbers will be used to identify the various plots of land which made up the PH property and the surrounding properties.

⁴ Nicholas B. Wainwright, *Colonial Grandeur in Philadelphia: The House and Furniture of General John Cadwalader* (Philadelphia, 1964), 64–65, 149–50.

⁵ Harold Donaldson Eberlein, "190 High Street: The Home of Washington and Adams," in *Historic Philadelphia*, ed. Luther P. Eisenhart (Philadelphia, 1953), 161–78.

⁶ Constance M. Greiff, *Independence: The Creation of a National Park* (Philadelphia, 1987), 53, 56.

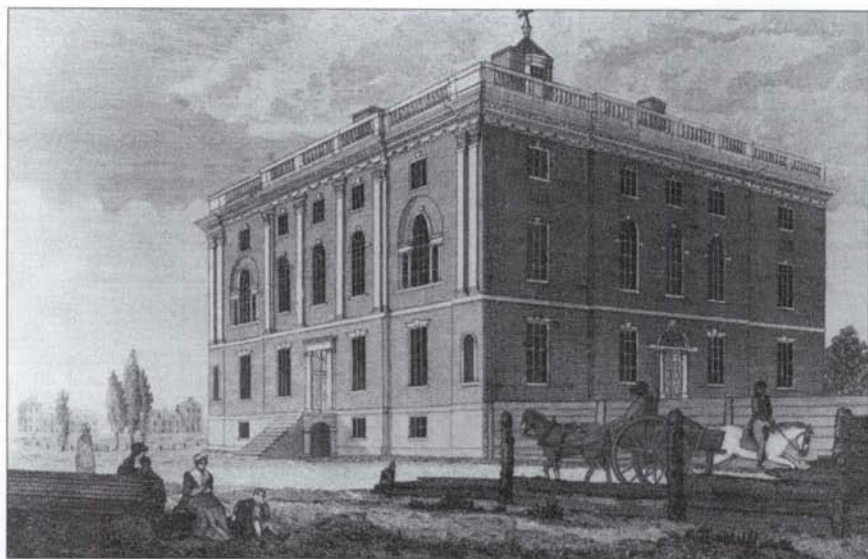


Fig. 2. "The House intended for the President of the United States, in Ninth Street, Philadelphia." Both Presidents Washington and Adams declined to occupy this mansion. Engraving by William Russell Birch and Thomas Birch. From *The City of Philadelphia . . . As It Appeared in the Year 1800* (Philadelphia, 1799), pl. 13.

ated with him), the Washington Mansion⁷ (which gives short shrift to Adams who lived there as president for more than three years), the Executive Mansion, the Presidential Mansion, and multiple variations on the latter two. The name most often used by eighteenth-century newspapers, diarists, and letter-writers—and the name used by Washington and Adams in their formal correspondence—was "President's House." Later, this was the name given to what we now know as the White House in Washington, D.C., but that should not cause confusion.

What *has* caused considerable confusion is mistaking the house for the mansion shown in plate 13 of what has come to be known as "Birch's Views" (fig. 2)⁸—or, to give the book by William Russell Birch its correct title, *The*

⁷ Thompson Westcott, *The Historic Mansions and Buildings of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1877), 250–71.

⁸ This Birch view can also be seen at "Places in Time: Historical Documentation of Place in Greater Philadelphia": www.brynmawr.edu/iconog.

City of Philadelphia, in the State of Pennsylvania North America; as It Appeared in the Year 1800. The mansion shown in Birch was erected in the 1790s by the city as part of an unsuccessful attempt to induce Congress to change its mind, abandon the District of Columbia, and name Philadelphia the permanent capital of the United States. This mansion was enormous, its main building about one hundred feet square and standing on the west side of 9th Street between Market and Chestnut Streets. Both of the first two presidents declined to occupy the building—in Washington's case, even once it was substantially completed, because he wanted to discourage Philadelphia's efforts to keep the national capital, and in Adams's because he claimed he could not afford to live in the mansion on his presidential salary, and he would not be subsidized by the State of Pennsylvania.⁹

The house the presidents did occupy—Washington from 1790 to 1797, and Adams from 1797 to 1800—was one of the two or three largest private residences in the City.¹⁰ Although their contemporaries may have used the name "President's House" interchangeably for both the house and the never-occupied mansion,¹¹ throughout this article it will refer only to the Market (or High) Street house in which Washington and Adams actually lived and worked.

The original house was built by Mary Lawrence Masters, the widow of William L. Masters, for herself and her two daughters, Mary (nicknamed Polly) and Sarah. A descendant of Mrs. Masters claimed—in 1913—that the building had been erected in 1761,¹² the year the widow obtained the land, and subsequent authors seem to have accepted this date uncritically. However, the site is open land on the Clarkson-Biddle Map of 1762,¹³ and tax records indicate that the house was built six to seven years later. In 1756, "William

⁹ Adams also may have wanted to discourage Philadelphia's efforts to keep the national capital. His modest circumstances did not prevent him (three and a half years later) from moving into a building 50 percent larger than the Presidential Mansion on 9th Street—the White House.

¹⁰ From 1768 until the building of the Bingham Mansion (ca. 1787), the house which became the PH probably had been the largest private residence in Philadelphia. It was larger than most of the villas in the Libertylands and Germantown, which were then outside the city limits.

¹¹ Diarist Jacob Hiltzheimer called the house occupied by Washington and Adams "the President's house on Market Street," and the never-occupied mansion, "the President's house on Ninth Street." Jacob Cox Parsons, ed., *Extracts from the Diary of Jacob Hiltzheimer* (Philadelphia, 1893), 171, 213.

¹² William Masters Camac, *Memoirs of the Camacs of County Down* (Philadelphia, 1913), 236. I am grateful to Jeffrey A. Cohen for suggesting this source.

¹³ See Martin P. Snyder, *City of Independence: Views of Philadelphia Before 1800* (New York, 1975), 63.

Masters Esquire" was recorded as living in the Lower Delaware Ward,¹⁴ the boundaries of which were the Delaware River, Market Street, Front Street, and Dock Creek. His residence, the Bank House, stood at the southeast corner of Front and Market Streets, opposite the London Coffee House. He died in 1760 and his widow was listed as living in the same ward in 1765 and 1767, presumably in the same house.¹⁵ In December 1767, Mrs. Masters was taxed on a "*New House and Lot in M. W. [Middle Ward]*,"¹⁶ but it is not until 1769 that the tax records list Mrs. Masters as living in the Middle Ward—the boundaries of which were Front, Market, 7th, and Chestnut Streets. The names of the owners of adjacent properties on Market Street between 5th and 6th Streets are adjacent to Mrs. Masters name in the tax ledgers, making it almost certain that her new residence was the building that became the President's House. It is likely that the house was under construction in December 1767 and it may have been completed in 1768.¹⁷

On May 21, 1772, Mrs. Masters's daughter Polly married Richard Penn, a grandson of William Penn, Pennsylvania's founder, in Philadelphia at Christ Church. Richard Penn was the lieutenant-governor of the colony. With his elder brother John, the governor, in England, Richard was acting governor. Two days before the nuptials, Mrs. Masters conveyed the title of 526-30 Market Street to Polly as a wedding present.¹⁸ Richard Penn moved into the house with his bride, mother-in-law, and then thirteen-year-old sister-in-law. The following year, he had the building insured by the Philadelphia Contributionship. The 1773 insurance survey provides a detailed description of the house:

Surveyd March 1, 1773, Governer Penns dwelling house Situate on the South Side of high Street between 5th & 6th Streets—

¹⁴ "Philadelphia Tax Records—1756," Lower Delaware Ward, 37. Microfilm reel XR 696, HSP.

¹⁵ "Watch and Lamp Tax 1765," 9; "Pavement Tax—1765," 59; "Poor Tax—1767," [no page numbers]; all on microfilm reel XR 696, HSP; and "Proprietary Tax—1767," 210b, MS Coll. 84, University of Pennsylvania Library (UPa.).

¹⁶ "Proprietary Tax—1767," 210b, MS Coll. 84, UPa.; "Proprietary Tax—1769," Middle Ward, Pennsylvania Archives (3d ser., 30 vols., Harrisburg, 1894-99), 14:160.

¹⁷ In December 1767, the tax valuation of Mrs. Masters's "new" house was only one third that of Alexander Stedman's (smaller) house next door. "Proprietary Tax—1767," 176, MS Coll. 84, UPa. Five years later, the tax valuation of Mrs. Masters's house (with the addition of the lot at 524 Market Street) would be 60 percent *more* than the Stedman house. "Provincial Tax—1772," Middle Ward, 64. Microfilm reel XR 697, HSP.

¹⁸ Philadelphia Deed Book I-14, 459, May 19, 1772. This and all subsequent deed books cited in this article are at the Philadelphia City Archives.

45 feet front, 52 feet deep 3 Storys high 14 & 9 inch party walls—3 rooms Entrey & Stair Case in first Story, one Story of Stairs Rampd & Bracketed wainscuted and a twist—wainscut rails and balisters Mahogany, Stair Case & Entery wainscut pedestal high, 2 fluted Culloms, 4 pillasters, 4 arches, 4 pediments, modilion Cornish—front parlor wainscut all round, 12 pillasters, Cornish InRichd with fretts I dintalls &c, also the Bass & Surbass, 3 pediments, tabernakle frame mantle Cornish &c on Brest—west back parlor wainscut all Round, plain duble Cornish with a frett in bedmold, two pediments, tabernakle frame &c on Brest—East Back parlor Chimney Brest Surbass Scerting & plain dubble cornish—dowel floor in first Story—3 Mahogany doors—Mahogany sashes in each Story Glass 16 in by 12 in,—front Chamber in 2d Story wainscut pedestall high, frett Cornish, tabernakle frame &c. on Brest—pasage wainscut pedestall high, 3 pediments, Block cornish—west back Chamber the Same as front, but no tabernakle frame on Brest—East back Chamber Chimney Brest Surbass Scerting & dubble Cornish—3 Story chimney Brests Surbass & Scertings—Garot plasterd 4 Rooms 4 Nich dormers.—Rooff Coverd with Short Shingles—A frontispeice at door, 3 pediments to windows, Modilion Eaves—the whole painted inside & out, a Brick wall Runs north & south in the middle of the house. The Back building 14 by 7 ft & 54 by 18 feet one Story high, 9 inch walls—

£2000 on the House @ 50/ pC£ to be divided in four Parts Viz by the Brick Wall running from Front to Rear and by the Brick Wall running East and West through the Westwardmost Division and an imaginary Line continued from thence to the East Gabel End

On the Backbuildings £300—20/ pC£¹⁹

This survey makes it clear that Mrs. Masters's house had a four-bay, asymmetrical facade—a "bay" being a vertically aligned set of openings. Although a popular type in London, a four-bay city house was unusual for the American colonies, and fewer than a dozen examples seem to have been built in prerevolutionary Philadelphia, none of which survived into the twentieth century. Others included the General John Cadwalader House, the Judge William Coleman House, the Thomas Willing House, and the Edward Shippen House on 4th Street. An eighteenth-century floorplan for a house similar to Mary Masters's house (possibly the Willing House) is in the collection of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania and is sometimes attributed to Samuel Rhoads.²⁰

¹⁹ Philadelphia Contributionship, survey nos. 167–71, March 1, 1773, Philadelphia Contributionship.

²⁰ Norris of Fairhill Manuscripts, Misc., Folio 71, HSP. Detail in Wainwright, *Colonial Grandeur*, 9. Jeffrey A. Cohen attributes most of the drawings in this folio to members of the Norris family rather

The survey states that the main house was 45 feet wide and 52 feet deep, with the standard 14-inch exterior walls and 9-inch interior walls.²¹ On the facade of the first story was a frontispiece or decorative architectural frame surrounding the front door, which, along with the three windows, bore pediments, or triangular tops. There was a cornice molding at the roof decorated with modillions, a series of ornamental brackets. The roof was covered with wooden shingles, probably cedar, which were laid in tight (short) courses.

The house was, in essence, two adjacent rowhouses. On the first story, the western half contained two large rooms or parlors; the eastern half had the entry, stairs, and a smaller parlor. The brick wall down the center of the house may have risen all the way to the peak of the roof to help support the ridgepole (the top beam), and it could have functioned as a partial fire wall between the two halves.

For assessment purposes, the main house was divided vertically on its axes by imaginary lines into four parts, with each quarter assigned a single insurance policy. The policies were for £500 each, so the total coverage was £2000, with a premium of 50 shillings per £100 of coverage. A fifth policy on the backbuilding was for £300, with a premium of 20 shillings per £100 of coverage.²²

By 1775 the political climate of the colonies was changing, and some sort of conflict with the mother country seemed inevitable. Richard Penn decided to return to England with his wife, mother-in-law, and sister-in-law. Before he left, he put his Pennsylvania affairs in the hands of his agent, Tench Francis.

In the late summer of 1777, General Sir William Howe, commander-in-chief of British forces in America, sailed his fleet south from New York City into the Chesapeake Bay, landed in Maryland, and advanced his troops toward Philadelphia. General Washington and the Continental army fought the British near the Brandywine River on September 11, but were beaten.

than to Rhoads (only one drawing is signed by him) in James F. O'Gorman et al., *Drawing Toward Building: Philadelphia Architectural Graphics, 1732-1986* (Philadelphia, 1986), 36.

²¹ A 14-inch wall was three bricks thick and a 9-inch wall two bricks thick. In this case, "party wall" refers to the interior brick wall down the middle of the house which divided the two halves, rather than to an exterior wall shared with an adjacent building.

²² I am grateful to Carol W. Smith, historian at the Philadelphia Contributionship, for her help with this survey, and for providing copies of the minutes of the Contributionship relating to the house.

After some skirmishes and a feint to the north, Howe marched unopposed into Philadelphia fifteen days later. Washington made a surprise attack at Germantown (just north of the city) in early October, but this chance for a patriot victory turned into a humiliating defeat. It was to be the last major action near Philadelphia until the spring. Washington withdrew to Valley Forge, some twenty miles outside the city.

General Howe moved into Richard Penn's house, and made it both his residence and headquarters. Having captured the *de facto* capital of the colonies and occupied it with more than ten thousand troops, Howe sat back and waited for the rebellion to fall apart. With little to do, many of the British soldiers passed their time by playing cards and with cockfights and horse races. Some put on plays and concerts and gave balls for the young ladies of the city. The general became the darling of Philadelphia's loyalists, and the house the center for "high life." The social whirl reached its peak in May 1778 with the *Meschianza*, an enormously elaborate (and expensive) day-and-night spectacle organized by Howe's officers, and held at one of the suburban villas. By this time General Howe had been recalled to England, and this regatta, medieval pageant, casino, ball, and banquet, topped off with fireworks, was a send-off not to be forgotten.

But the rebellion had not fallen apart. Howe was replaced by Major General Sir Henry Clinton, a no-nonsense officer, who probably lived in Richard Penn's house for only a month. Clinton had been given instructions from London that the army should abandon Philadelphia and return to New York City. A twelve-mile-long line of troops and civilians (including more than three thousand loyalists) made the slow journey across New Jersey to New York. The last of the British soldiers crossed the Delaware River on June 18. Philadelphia was reclaimed by the American patriot forces and Richard Penn's house became the residence of the new military governor of the region. A popular but false legend claims that Howe's bed was still warm when taken over by the house's next resident—another lover of high life and arguably the fiercest warrior of the war—Benedict Arnold.

Arnold entered Philadelphia on June 19, 1778, and immediately declared martial law. There is a good deal of confusion about when he moved into Richard Penn's house. Based upon misreadings of nineteenth-century sources, some twentieth-century authors have erroneously claimed that Arnold made his temporary (or permanent) headquarters at the Slate Roof House, the Governor John Penn House (next to the Powel House), and the General John Cadwalader House. The most reliable first-person account of

the reentry of the patriot forces into the city is in a letter found in Watson's notes for his *Annals of Philadelphia*. Deborah Logan states that Arnold initially made his headquarters in the house of Henry Gurney, a retired British army officer.²³ Gurney's house was on the north side of Chestnut Street between 4th and 5th—opposite what is now the Second Bank; it was later numbered 153 Chestnut.²⁴ According to Logan, within a week of Arnold's arrival in Philadelphia he had moved from Gurney's house into Richard Penn's house.

General Arnold lived grandly in the Market Street house with his military staff of ten, hiring at least seven servants, and keeping a chariot and four horses. The French ambassador, M. Conrad Alexandre Gérard, arrived in Philadelphia the second week in July, and he and his suite temporarily lodged at the house as Arnold's guests. On July 12, a reception was held there to welcome the new ambassador, which the wife of the loyalist Joseph Galloway noted in her diary.²⁵ Galloway had bought Alexander Stedman's house, next door to Mrs. Masters, in 1770. Mrs. Galloway remained in Philadelphia after the British evacuation in the vain hope that she could protect the property from confiscation by the Supreme Executive Council of Pennsylvania.

Arnold resigned as military governor on March 19, 1779. That month he bought a villa outside the city, the heavily-mortgaged and already-tenanted Mount Pleasant, to give to his bride, Peggy Shippen, as a wedding gift. The two were married on April 8, but they lived together in Richard Penn's house for only a couple of months. In May, Arnold began his treasonous correspondence with the British.

All told, Arnold occupied the house for just over a year. By September

²³ D. Logan to Watson (no date), in "[Notes for] Annals of Philadelphia," 1829, 2:402-3, John Fanning Watson Papers, HSP.

²⁴ In 1790, Gurney's house (to be combined into a single dwelling with the Allen house beside it at 155 Chestnut) was an early choice for Washington's official residence. When Gurney's tenant, a Mrs. (Oliver?) Pollock, refused to give up her lease, Robert Morris was approached about lending his house on Market Street to serve as the PH. See George Washington to Tobias Lear, Sept. 20, 1790, [Jared Sparks, ed.] *Letters and Recollections of George Washington* (New York, 1906; reprint, Garden City, N.Y., 1932), 10. See also "Report of the Committee for the Accommodation of the President," November 22, 1790, Independence Hall catalogued items, Frank M. Etting Coll., HSP.

²⁵ "... I look out & saw ye Contemptible sight there was eighty two Men drawn Up before the generals & our house on ye oppposite side of the street ... & when they alighted at the Generals there was thirteen cannon fired." "Diary of Grace Growdon Galloway," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (hereafter, *PMHB*) 55 (1931), 39.

1779, he and his wife had moved to a less expensive house owned by her father.²⁶ In the summer of 1780, Arnold requested the post of commander of the fort at West Point in New York, with the secret intention of surrendering it to the British. Washington agreed to his request, with results familiar enough not to need recounting.

The next tenant on Market Street was the French consul John Holker. A merchant and the French-raised son of a British exile, Holker had worked with Benjamin Franklin, secretly providing supplies and money to the Continental army before France officially entered the war. He made an enormous amount of money profiteering and, when later forced to choose between his private business dealings and his official post, chose business. Holker was living in Richard Penn's house when it caught fire on the morning of January 2, 1780.

The fire was recorded by two diarists and a newspaper. Jacob Hiltzheimer wrote: "Early this morning a fire broke out in Mr. Penn's house, on Market Street, occupied by Mr. Holker, the French Consul, which was consumed to the first floor."²⁷ Elizabeth Drinker wrote: "Richd. Penns large House up Market Street took fire last night, and this Morning is consum'd all but ye lower storey."²⁸ And the *Pennsylvania Packet* recorded: "Last Sunday about 7 o'clock in the morning, a fire broke out at the dwelling of the Hon. John Holker, Esquire, in Market-Street, and continued burning for a long time, which did considerable damage, but was happily prevented from spreading any farther . . ."²⁹

There is no precise evaluation of the severity of the fire and the extent of the damage to the house. This uncertainty has led to speculation by historians that the fire was catastrophic, that the house lay abandoned for years, and that subsequently it was drastically altered. The Hiltzheimer and Drinker diaries agree that the fire consumed the upper two floors and garret, but what they say about the rest has been interpreted to mean everything from the first floor surviving untouched, to the exterior walls of the whole house collapsing to the first floor. The fire was severe enough to cause some

²⁶ See letters between Arnold and his sister Hannah, as quoted in Isaac N. Arnold, *The Life of Benedict Arnold: His Patriotism and His Treason* (Chicago, 1880), 234. Trying to resolve the question of where the Arnolds lived during their last year in Philadelphia may have led historians to the logical but erroneous assumption that they moved to Mount Pleasant.

²⁷ Parsons, *Diary of Jacob Hiltzheimer*, 42.

²⁸ Henry D. Biddle, ed., *Extracts from the Diary of Elizabeth Drinker* (Philadelphia, 1889), 123.

²⁹ *Pennsylvania Packet*, Jan. 4, 1780.

damage to the Stedman-Galloway House, thirty-five feet to the west, but, barring additional contemporaneous accounts, the exact extent of the damage to Richard Penn's house cannot be determined, except to say that the estimated cost of repairing it was in excess of £2000.³⁰ The design and construction of the building should have made it especially resistant to fire. The thick exterior walls and the party wall down the center were all of brick, and could have survived the flames. Matching descriptions of the house in the 1773 insurance survey and in first-person accounts from the 1790s argue strongly that the 1780 fire was not catastrophic, and that Robert Morris, who purchased the building after the fire, rebuilt it to essentially the same plan as before, and within the same walls. No evidence has been found to support the often-repeated claim that the house was so damaged that it was necessary to totally or even partially demolish it.³¹

The deed between Richard Penn et al. and Robert Morris is dated August 25, 1785, and most Morris biographers have made the logical assumption that his rebuilding and occupancy of the house must have occurred subsequent to that date. The deed is thousands of words long and written in a hand which is not always legible, but a close reading of it gives a different chronology: (1) The house burns—January 2, 1780. (2) Richard Penn (by letter) directs Tench Francis to sell the house. Penn had previously given Francis power-of-attorney over his American real estate. (3) Robert Morris enters into a contract with Tench Francis to buy the house for £3,750 to be paid to Richard Penn upon perfecting the title—no later than the spring of 1781. (4) Robert Morris takes possession of the house—no later than the spring of 1781. (5) Pursuant to the contract between Morris and Francis, an indenture is drawn up and signed in England in which Richard and Polly Masters Penn, Mary Lawrence Masters, and Sarah Masters convey the property to Tench Francis so he may sell it—June 8, 1781. (6) The indenture is recorded in Philadelphia—December 21, 1781.³² (7) Morris is dissatisfied with the description of the property in the indenture. His legal counsel advises that a deed which better describes the property be executed

³⁰ Minutes of the Philadelphia Contributionship, Jan. 5, 1780.

³¹ Unfortunately, this irresponsible and erroneous claim was made by one of Morris's earliest and seemingly most authoritative biographers: "The house in which Morris lived was not that which had belonged to Richard Penn. That house was burned down in January, 1780. Morris bought the ground and built a new house upon it." William Graham Sumner, *Robert Morris* (New York, 1892), 128.

³² "Letter of Attorney—Book 1," RD 1408, 271–74, Philadelphia City Archives.

by all the parties. (8) The new deed is recorded in Philadelphia—August 25, 1785.³³

The 1785 deed states that the 1781 indenture was drawn up in response to a sales contract between Morris and Tench Francis. This contract has not been found, but in order for it (or news of it) to have reached England by June 8, 1781, it must have been signed in America no later than April 1781. Had the indenture been satisfactory to Morris, it would have become the basis for the new deed, and December 21, 1781, might have been his settlement date on the house. In the more than six months between the time when the indenture was signed in England and when it was registered in Philadelphia, the Siege of Yorktown was over and General Cornwallis had surrendered. It is likely that it was during this same period, perhaps beginning as soon as the sales contract was signed, that Morris had the house rebuilt.

Morris's possession of the property as of August 8, 1781, is confirmed by an advertisement printed in two Philadelphia newspapers (*italics added*):

To be Sold by Public Auction,
At the COFFEE-HOUSE on TUESDAY next, the 14th of
August, at TWELVE o'clock noon,
A LOT of Ground. Situate on
the South side of Market-Street, between Fifth
and Sixth Streets, *adjoining the walled lot, lately Richard*

³³ "... Whereas the Capital Messuage erected on the said Lot was on or about the second day of January one thousand seven hundred and eighty for the most part consumed by fire and rendered uninhabitable whereupon the said Richard Penn by Letters under his Hand directed the said Tench Francis (whom he had instituted his Attorney whith Power to sell and Convey all his Real Estate in America) to sell the Ruins of the said Messuage together with all and Singular the Lots of Ground ... and thereupon the said Tench Francis as Attorney to the said Richard Penn contracted with the said Robert Morris for the absolute sale and conveyance of the said Messuage and Lots of Ground for the price of three thousand seven hundred and fifty pounds Sterling Money of Great Britain which Sum the said Robert Morris secured to be paid to the said Richard Penn upon the perfecting the title to the said Robert Morris and thereupon the said Robert Morris received possession of the said ruins and Lots of Ground ... And Whereas in persuance of the said Contract so made by the said Tench Francis and in Order to carry the same into execution an Indenture Tripartite was drawn and executed in England bearing the date the eight[h] day of June one thousand seven hundred and eighty one ... the said Indenture recorded at Philadelphia in Letter of Attorney No. 1. Page 215 &c fully appears which said recitals are not sufficiently comprehensive or certain to assure the same to the said Robert Morris in the full extent of the Contract Wherefore it has been advised by the Council learned in the Law of the said Robert Morris to cause and procure a Deed describing the premises with more certainty to be executed by all the said Parties ..." Philadelphia Deed Book D-15, 118, Aug. 25, 1785.

*Penn, Esquire's, but now Robert Morris, Esquire's, containing in breadth 24 feet on Market-Street, and extending 180 feet in depth to Minor-Street, a new street 40 feet wide. The purchaser may be accommodated at a reasonable price with a lot of ground of the same width to the southward of Minor-Street, opposite to the above, and 86 feet deep; which price may be known of JAMES, PHILIP, or THOMAS KINSEY. August 8, 1781.*³⁴

This auction may never have taken place, for two months later the Kinseys sold the lot to be auctioned (522 Market Street) and the adjacent lot (520 Market Street) together as a single 49 x 180 foot parcel to Robert Morris for £1837/10.³⁵ Over the next few years, Morris also bought 516–18 Market Street³⁶ and 514 Market Street.³⁷ He turned these lots into a walled garden of slightly less than a half an acre. Morris later bought the State House Inn property on Chestnut Street³⁸ (directly opposite Independence Hall), which ran back to Minor Street.³⁹

Morris's possession of the Masters-Penn property in August 1781 can also be confirmed through tax records. In November 1780, the property was listed under Tench Francis's name as Richard Penn's estate, which was taxed £330 on a valuation of £120,000.⁴⁰ In August 1781, it was Morris who was taxed at this location for £40/5/0 on a valuation of £3,500.⁴¹ This valuation is quite close to the £3,750 that Morris offered (and eventually paid) for the

³⁴ *Pennsylvania Gazette and Weekly Advertiser*, Aug. 8, 1781; *Pennsylvania Journal and the Weekly Advertiser*, Aug. 8 and Aug. 11, 1781.

³⁵ Philadelphia Deed Book D-25, 449, Oct. 25, 1781. It is also possible that Morris bought one or both lots at the auction in August, but the sale was not recorded in the deed books until two months later.

³⁶ Philadelphia Deed Book D-18, 128; and D-39, 520, Sept. 23, 1784.

³⁷ Philadelphia Deed Book D-18, 300, Dec. 15, 1786. This property included a building of some sort, possibly the small, one-story structure seen in the Breton views (see fig. 1).

³⁸ Philadelphia Deed Book D-54, 20, Jan. 4, 1794.

³⁹ The lawn of the first block of Independence Mall essentially duplicates the acre-and-a-half of open space at the center of the block from Market to Chestnut Streets that existed until the mid-1790s. The only major building on the land was the inn at the south end—built of stone (ca. 1690), two stories tall, approximately 25 x 18 feet—set amid a grove of walnut trees that predated William Penn's arrival. See [Hannah Benner Roach] *Historical Report: First Block, Independence Mall* (n.p., 1952 [Harbeson, Hough, Livingston and Larson et al., for the Philadelphia City Planning Commission]), 67.

⁴⁰ *Pennsylvania Archives*, ser. 3, 15:199. The £120,000 assessment would have been for all of Richard Penn's (or his wife's) Philadelphia County landholdings.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 15:708.

fire-damaged house. The following year, Morris was again taxed at this location for £31 on an assessed valuation of £6,000.⁴² The change in valuation may reflect both the rebuilding of the house and the addition of 520–22 Market Street to the property.

On August 30, 1781, General Washington, Lieutenant-General Comte de Rochambeau, commander of the French forces, and their troops arrived in Philadelphia on their way to Yorktown for what would become the final battle of the war. Both generals and their officers were entertained that night by Robert Morris at his house on Front Street. Washington and his staff moved into this house, making it their headquarters and lodgings for about a week.⁴³ One of the guests at Morris's August 30 dinner, French general Chevalier (later Marquis) de Chastellux, kept a journal, the first part of which had been privately printed in French earlier that summer in Newport, Rhode Island. A British exile named George Grieve visited America a couple of months after the Siege of Yorktown had ended, and subsequently made an unauthorized English translation of Chastellux's journal. In his translation, Grieve erroneously claimed that Morris's dinner with Washington, Rochambeau, and Chastellux had taken place at the house on Market Street. Although Grieve's assumption about the location of the dinner was wrong, the very fact that he made this mistake would argue that the house was no longer fire-damaged, that the rebuilding had been completed, and that it was, or appeared to be, habitable. Grieve's brief reference to the Market Street house reflects, presumably, exactly what he saw in Philadelphia in early 1782 (*italics added*): "The house the Marquis speaks of, *in which Mr. Morris lives*, belonged formerly to Mr. Richard Penn; the Financier has made great additions to it, and is the first who has introduced the luxury of hot-houses, and ice-houses on the continent."⁴⁴

Grieve's mention of an icehouse and his observation that Morris was in

⁴² *Ibid.*, 16:354.

⁴³ Some Philadelphia historians have erroneously claimed that Washington made his headquarters at the Market Street house. See Joseph Jackson, "Washington in Philadelphia," *PMHB* 56 (1932), 133; and J. Thomas Scharf and Thompson Westcott, *History of Philadelphia* (3 vols., Philadelphia, 1884), 1:414. It is likely that the source of this misinformation was George Grieve's translation of the Marquis de Chastellux's journal. See below, n. 44.

⁴⁴ Marquis de Chastellux, *Travels in America*, ed. Howard C. Rice, Jr., (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1963), 30–31, 300 n. 24. According to Rice, Grieve probably arrived in Philadelphia in December 1781 or January 1782, and stayed until May. Grieve's claim that Morris's icehouse was the first in America is almost certainly wrong, although it may have been the most elaborate and the best designed on the continent.

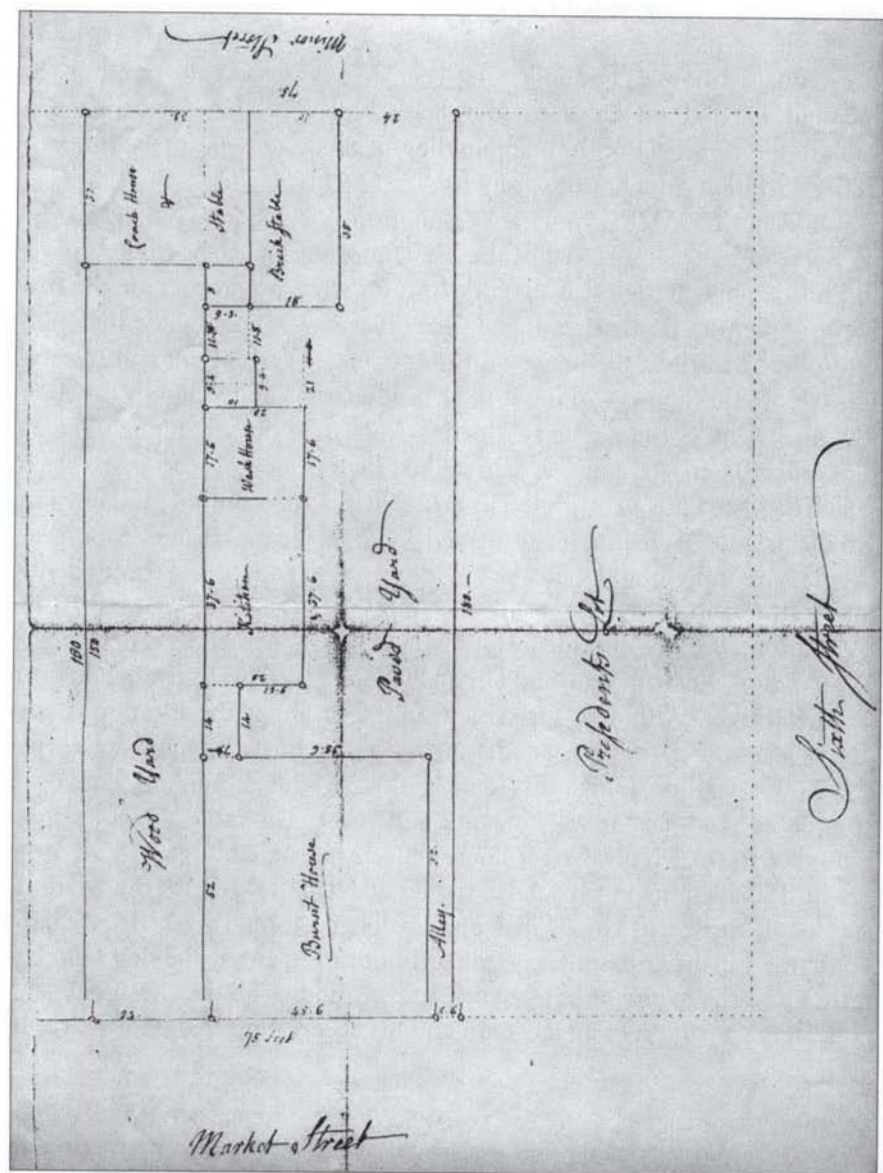


Fig. 3. "Rich^d Penn's Burnt House Lot—Philadelphia." This groundplan seems to show the property as it was in 1781 when Robert Morris contracted to buy it, although he did not obtain full title to the property until 1785. North is toward the bottom. Unknown draftsman, ca. 1785. RG-17 Land Office Map Collection, Pennsylvania State Archives.

possession of the property are confirmed by a contemporaneous entry in Jacob Hiltzheimer's diary (*italics added*): "Feb 12. [1782]—Loaned Robert Erwin a wagon and two horses to assist in bringing ice from the Schuylkill [River] to the ice-house of Robert Morris in the rear of his house on Market Street."⁴⁵ Construction of the icehouse was therefore complete in February 1782 and occupancy of the residence had either begun (as Grieve states) or was imminent (the Morrisses stocking the icehouse in midwinter in anticipation of soon moving into the rebuilt house). Two months later, Morris made arrangements to move his office more than seven blocks (about half a mile) from Front Street, south of Dock—next door to his old house—to the northwest corner of 5th and Market Streets—less than 400 feet from his new house.⁴⁶ None of this pinpoints exactly when the Morrisses moved in, but it does overturn the twentieth-century conventional wisdom that Morris didn't rebuild and occupy the Richard Penn house until 1785 or later.

The August 1785 Penn-Morris deed included a groundplan of the property (fig. 3),⁴⁷ which is consistent with both the 1773 insurance survey and later descriptions of the house from the 1790s during Washington's presidency. The groundplan shows a "Burnt House" attached by a piazza to a backbuilding containing a "Kitchen" and "Wash House." Attached to the south wall of the wash house is the smokehouse. Less than a dozen feet south of this is the cow house, which is attached to a "Brick Stable," and a "Coach House & Stable" (of wood?) on "Minor Street."⁴⁸ To the east (left

⁴⁵ Parsons, *Diary of Jacob Hiltzheimer*, 48. The octagonal stone pit of this icehouse was discovered by archaeologists in November 2000 while preparing for the changes to Independence Mall.

⁴⁶ "We went and agreed with Mr. Jacob Barge at £350 per Annum for his building at Market Street Corner and the House next to it in Fifth Street." April 9, 1782, diary entry, *The Papers of Robert Morris, 1781–1784*, ed. E. James Ferguson et al. (9 vols. to date, Pittsburgh, 1975–99), 4:551.

⁴⁷ I am grateful to Anna Coxé Toogood, historian at Independence National Historical Park, for providing a copy of the original of this groundplan, and for generously sharing her notes on the PH.

⁴⁸ The "Coach house & Stable" may have been built by Mrs. Masters. There is no mention of a stable in the 1773 insurance survey, but that is not unusual since such buildings were often left uninsured. In 1774, Mrs. Masters was listed in the tax records as owning five horses, and her son-in-law Richard Penn, seven. "Provincial Tax List—1774," *Pennsylvania Archives*, ser. 3, 14:253. According to the 1785 (or earlier) groundplan, the "Coach House & Stable" had a combined frontage on Minor Street of 51 feet, with the former building having a depth of 30 feet and the latter a depth of 38 feet. All of the 524–30 Market Street property was insured in 1798 (during Adams's tenancy), and the policies list a compound building of "fifty feet by thirty four feet and two stories high." Mutual Assurance Company, policy nos. 891–95, June 19, 1798, copy in the 500 Market Street/Washington Mansion file, Philadelphia Historical Commission (hereafter, 1798 policies). It is possible that this describes a different coach house/stable

of the house is the walled lot (524 Market Street), labeled "Wood Yard," which was used for storing firewood and making deliveries to the kitchen. The almost-half-acre walled garden (514-22 Market Street) is not shown on the groundplan, but it was adjacent to the wood yard on the east. To the south of the main house is a "Paved Yard" which was used for outdoor entertaining. The Stedman-Galloway property to the west (right) was indeed seized from Mrs. Galloway in 1778, and it became the residence of the president of the Supreme Executive Council—the equivalent of the governor of Pennsylvania (hence the label "Presidents Lot"). Morris bought the Stedman-Galloway House in 1786,⁴⁹ and seems to have made a common back yard for the two properties,⁵⁰ although until this purchase there probably had been a fence or wall between them.

It is likely that this groundplan actually shows the property as it looked in 1781 when Morris took possession of it, since the icehouse and other additions he is known to have made do not appear on the plan. The groundplan also does not show the hothouses recorded by Grieve, perhaps since the logical site for them would have been in the walled garden. A second story was added to the backbuilding some time after 1773, probably by Morris at the same time he rebuilt the main house. He built a two-story addition to the east side of the backbuilding, a bath house—perhaps the first in Philadelphia—which included a bathing room on each story.

George Washington was a frequent houseguest of the Morris in the Market Street house, including a four-month stay in the summer of 1787 during the Constitutional Convention. In 1790, Robert Morris, now a U.S. Senator, was instrumental in persuading Congress to name Philadelphia the temporary capital of the United States for a ten-year period while the new Federal City was being built on the banks of the Potomac. When no more suitable house in Philadelphia could be obtained, Morris agreed to move into the Stedman-Galloway House next door and offered his own residence to

than the one shown on the ground plan, but a more likely explanation may be that it was the same structure and the writer of the insurance policies, being chiefly concerned with its replacement cost, averaged the depths of the two parts of the building.

⁴⁹ Morris purchased it at a public sale on May 3, 1786, for £14,100. "Minutes of the Supreme Executive Council," *Colonial Records* (16 vols., Harrisburg, 1852-53), 15:151. "With the acquisition of this sixty feet, Morris owned a total of 255 feet on High Street [514-36 Market Street]"; *Historical Report: First Block, Independence Mall*, 42.

⁵⁰ See Washington to Lear, Sept. 9, 1790, [Sparks], *Letters and Recollections of George Washington*, 7.

serve as the President's House. While staying with Morris in September 1790, Washington wrote to his secretary, Tobias Lear, describing the house and giving instructions for its enlargement:

The house of Mr R. Morris had, previous to my arrival, been taken by the Corporation [the city of Philadelphia] for my Residence.—It is the best they could get.—It is, I believe, the best *Single house* in the City; yet without additions, it is inadequate to the *commodious* accommodation of my family.—These, I believe will be made.

The first floor contains only two public Rooms (except one for the *upper* Servants).—The second floor will have two public (drawing) Rooms & with the aid of one Room with a partition in it, in the back building, will be sufficient for the accommodation of Mrs Washington & the children & their maids—besides affording me a small place for a private study & dressing Room.—The third story will furnish you & Mrs Lear with a good lodging Room—a public Office (for there is no place below for one) and two Rooms for the Gentlemen of the family [Washington's office staff].—The Garret has four good Rooms which must serve Mr and Mrs Hyde [the steward and his wife] (unless they should prefer the Room over the wash House),—William [Osborne, Washington's valet]—and such Servants as it may not be better to place in the addition (as proposed) to the Back building.—There is a room over the Stable (without a fireplace, but [heated] by means of a Stove) [that] may serve the Coachman & Postillions;—and there is a smoke House, which possibly may be more useful to me for the accommodation of Servants, than for the Smoking of Meat.—The intention of the addition to the Back building is to provide a Servants Hall, and one or two (as it will afford) lodging Rooms for the Servants, especially those who are coupled. —There is a very good Wash House adjoining the Kitchen (under one of the Rooms already mentioned).—There are good Stables, but for 12 Horses only, and a Coach House which will hold all of my Carriages . . .

In a fortnight or 20 days from this time, it is expected Mr Morris will have removed out of the House.—It is proposed to add Bow Windows to the two public Rooms in the South front of the House,—But as all the other apartments will be close & secure the sooner after that time you can be in the House, with the furniture, the better, that you may be well fixed and see how matters go during my absence.⁵¹

The presidential entourage had arrived in the city several days earlier, and was about to depart for Mount Vernon. It is likely that Morris and

⁵¹ Washington to Tobias Lear, Sept. 5, 1790, *ibid.*, 3–4, 6.

Washington spent some of that time going over the house, planning the alterations and additions which would be necessary to convert it into the President's House. Washington was credited as the author of the changes to the building, and although this may have been flattery, he is known to have had a keen interest in and talent for architecture, as demonstrated at Mount Vernon.

The city initially leased Morris's house for two years, during which time a grand mansion for the President was to be constructed (ultimately built on 9th Street) as part of the overall scheme to keep the national capital in Philadelphia. Morris assembled a crew of workmen "to complete the Additions & Alterations pointed out by the President" to the Market Street house, along with any changes to the Stedman-Galloway House made necessary by the Morris's removal there. This was a "sweetheart" deal for Morris—the city advancing him the money to pay for the alterations to *both* houses, plus other expenses, with the total to be deducted from the future rent to be paid on his former residence.⁵² Fortunately for posterity, there were problems with the additions and alterations to the President's House, and a couple of changes in plan, all documented by Tobias Lear in a series of twice-weekly letters written to Washington at Mount Vernon between September and November 1790.

The most dramatic addition ordered by Washington was the construction of a large, two-story bow on the western half of the south facade of the main house. Built by or under the supervision of "Master Mason, Mr. Wallace,"⁵³

⁵² The city advanced Morris £500 Pennsylvania currency (Pa.) (about \$1,333) for construction costs, and it also bought out the lease of Morris's tenant in the Stedman-Galloway House (Gen. Walter Stewart) for £300 Pa. (\$800). When construction went over budget, the city advanced Morris an additional £300 Pa. (\$800), which brought the up-front cost of the President's House to £1,100 Pa. (about \$2,933). Lear to Washington, Nov. 21, 1790, ser. 4, General Correspondence, 1741–1799, George Washington Papers, Library of Congress (hereafter, GW Papers, LC). These papers are searchable at the Library of Congress website or in the microform edition: *George Washington Papers, 1741–1799* (Washington, D.C., Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, 1964).

The city had intended to provide the house to Washington rent-free, but he would not allow it. The president paid an annual rent of £500 Pa. (\$1,333). The rent was not increased during Washington's presidency. Morris is often unjustly accused of gouging the public on the rent by charging \$3,000 per year for the house. This erroneous claim seems to have first appeared in Rufus Wilmot Griswold, *The Republican Court* (New York, 1854), 242, and may be the result of the author mistaking the up-front cost for the annual rent.

⁵³ Probably Burton Wallace, who was listed in the 1790 Pennsylvania census as living on North 5th Street, between Market and Race Streets, west side. Wallace also made Morris's alterations to the Stedman-Galloway House. See Lear to Washington, Nov. 4, 7, and 14, 1790, ser. 4, General

the exterior of the bow was constructed of brick with stonework over the second-story windows, and it had an iron roof. While the interior of this bow was curved or semicircular, no precise documentation has been found as to whether the exterior was semicircular or semi-octagonal.⁵⁴ Bows and semi-octagonal bays were a new and fashionable addition to a building. Congress Hall and the Supreme Court Building (on either side of Independence Hall) had been built with bays, and villas such as the Woodlands (and later Lemon Hill) possessed bows. Other Philadelphia city houses to which bows or bays were added include the Powel House, the Stedman-Galloway House (possibly the following year), and the Stamper-Blackwell House. The bow of the President's House in Philadelphia is considered the progenitor of the oval rooms of the White House.⁵⁵

If the 1773 insurance survey is exact in its description, each of the rooms in the western half of the first two stories was just over 24 feet in length (about 24½ feet north-south from brick wall to brick wall, minus the thickness of the interior plastering or paneling).⁵⁶ The width of the rooms in the western half of the house was just over 21 feet.⁵⁷ According to Tobias Lear: "When the Bow Window is run up it will make the large dining room and the drawing room over it thirty-four feet long."⁵⁸ Assuming that Lear is correct, and that the bow truly was semicircular, this would mean that the bow was about 19 feet in diameter on its interior, adding about 9½ feet

Correspondence, 1741–1799, GW Papers, LC.

⁵⁴ Bows added to other Philadelphia eighteenth-century brick buildings tended to have semi-octagonal or faceted exteriors (perhaps because of the difficulty of laying brick in a curve). In the conjectural plans below, the bow of the President's House has been drawn in this way.

⁵⁵ "There can be little doubt that in Washington's bow can be found the seed that was later to flower in the oval shape of the Blue Room." William Seale, *The President's House: A History* (Washington, D.C., 1986), 8.

⁵⁶ The 1773 insurance survey and the 1785 (or earlier) groundplan agree that the depth of the house was 52 feet. The 1798 insurance policies put the depth as 51 feet. The dimensions of the main house and backbuildings in the 1798 policies are slightly smaller than those in the other two sources, and may reflect estimates based on interior measurements, and the other two, based on exterior measurements.

⁵⁷ There is less unanimity about the frontage of the main house. The 1773 insurance survey puts it at 45 feet, the 1785 (or earlier) groundplan, 45 feet 6 inches, and the 1798 insurance policies, 44 feet. For the plans below, the writer has used a dimension of 45 feet 8½ inches, based on measurements of the foundations taken in 1952. If the party wall between the halves were in the exact center, this would have made the width of the rooms about 21¼ feet east-west from brick wall to brick wall, minus the thickness of any interior paneling or plastering.

⁵⁸ Lear to Washington, Oct. 17, 1790, ser. 4, General Correspondence, 1741–1799, GW Papers, LC.

to the length of the rear rooms of the first and second stories at their centers.

Washington had the bathtubs removed from the second floor of the 15 x 21 feet (probably interior dimensions) bathhouse, and had the bathingroom converted into his private office/dressing room/study. Within a week of his moving in he added a "cast [iron] stove & pipe."⁵⁹ The room must have been hot in the summer, for he later added awnings to the windows.⁶⁰ More details about the room can be found in a letter from Abigail Adams written when she and her husband occupied the President's House: "I find the best time for writing, is to rise about an hour earlier than the rest of the family; go into the Presidents Room, and apply myself to my pen. Now the weather grows warmer I can do it. His Room in which I now write has three larg[e] windows to the South. The sun visits it with his earliest beams at the East window, and Cheers it the whole day in winter."⁶¹ For privacy's sake, the north wall of the former bathingroom may not have had windows. It is the logical place for the copper boiler and the "apparatus of the bath" to have been located, and the iron stove to have been subsequently installed. The large windows on the east and south walls looked out into the walled garden and stable yard. (In winter, Washington would have had a commanding view of Independence Hall, obscured in summer by the walnut trees surrounding the State House Inn.) One entered the room through a door on the west wall. The water supply for the house was stored in cisterns, which may have been located on the roof of the piazza.⁶²

⁵⁹ Household Account Book, Dec. 1, 1790, in Stephen Decatur, Jr., *Private Affairs of George Washington, from the Records and Accounts of Tobias Lear, Esquire, His Secretary* (Boston, 1933), 170. After his presidency, Washington wrote to Clement Biddle that "I am in want of an open stove" for Mount Vernon similar in "the kind and size" to the one which was in "my private study (over the bathing room) in the house I occupied in Philadelphia," with "[a]n Iron hearth and a fender to suit the same . . ." Washington to Clement Biddle, Aug. 21, 1797, ser. 2, Letterbooks, GW Papers, LC. The antique stove now installed in Martha Washington's third-floor bedroom at Mount Vernon was bought in the 1980s. It matches Washington's written description, but it is not original to that house.

⁶⁰ Household Account Book, June 16, 1792, in Decatur, *Private Affairs*, 272.

⁶¹ Abigail Adams to her sister Mary Cranch, March 15, 1800, in Stewart Mitchell, ed., *New Letters of Abigail Adams, 1788-1801* (Westport, Conn., 1947), 238-39.

⁶² Nathaniel Burt II (whose father had demolished most of the PH in 1832) stated that the building had had "large water reservoirs, then a feature of Philadelphia buildings, one of which still exists." Nathaniel Burt [II], *Historical Society of Pennsylvania Address of . . . on the Washington Mansion in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1875), 13. See below, n. 105. Nathaniel Burt V, author of *The Perennial Philadelphians*, is the great-great-grandson of the Nathaniel Burt who demolished the PH. I thank him and his wife for their assistance with this article.

Washington's presidential desk from Philadelphia (now in the collection of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania) was in this room,⁶³ as most likely were the globe, the revolving desk chair, and other furniture now in the library at Mount Vernon. Washington called this room his "study," Abigail Adams and Tobias Lear called it the "President's Room," and John Adams called it his "cabinet."⁶⁴

Washington added a servants hall to the east side of the backbuilding in the enclosed area between the bath house and the wall of the stable yard. This long one-story room, 51 x 15 feet (interior dimensions), was described as "another kitchen" in the 1798 insurance policies, and probably served as a work and eating area for the servants. Washington's intention had been to carve two lodging rooms out of the south end of the servants' hall, but he changed his mind after a suggestion by Lear that two of the rooms in the attic of the main house could be divided to create additional servant rooms. Originally the president had planned to house the stable hands in the hayloft over the brick stable, but the final arrangement was as Lear had suggested: "The Smoke-House will be extended to the end of the Stable, and two good rooms made in it for the accomodation of the Stablepeople."⁶⁵

The "Stablepeople" accommodated in the addition to the smokehouse were slaves from Mount Vernon. Washington generally had a domestic staff in Philadelphia of between twenty and twenty-four—of these, the number of slaves ranged from eight at the beginning of his tenure in the city to four at the end of it.⁶⁶ Mid-twentieth-century historians have sometimes ignored or downplayed this fact, but Washington kept slaves in the President's

⁶³ See Tobias Lear to Mrs. Samuel Powel, March 9, 1797, Society Coll., HSP.

⁶⁴ "[President Washington] made me a very friendly visit yesterday, which I returned to-day, and had two hours' conversation with him alone in his cabinet." John Adams to Abigail Adams, Jan. 9, 1794, as quoted in William Spohn Baker, *Washington after the Revolution* (Philadelphia, 1898), 271.

⁶⁵ Lear to Washington, Oct. 31, 1790, ser. 3, General Correspondence, 1741–1799, GW Papers, LC.

⁶⁶ Christopher (Washington's body servant), Molly (Mrs. Washington's maid), Austin (a stable hand, who was married to Molly), and Hercules (the cook, also called Uncle Harkless), lived and worked in the house throughout Washington's presidency. Hercules's son, Richmond, worked as a scullion in the kitchen during the first year in Philadelphia. Paris and Giles (stable hands and postillions) arrived in November 1790, but were returned to Mount Vernon after Washington's southern tour in 1791. Another stable hand, Cyrus, reportedly spent some time in the city, but this writer has found no evidence of when he may have arrived or of how long he stayed. Oney Judge (Mrs. Washington's body servant) came to Philadelphia in November 1790, but she escaped to freedom in June 1796 and settled in Maine. Hercules escaped in March 1797 (reportedly on the day he was to be returned to Mount Vernon) and settled in New York City.

House for the whole time he lived in Philadelphia. Pennsylvania had enacted a gradual abolition law in 1780—the first former colony to do so—but the provisions in the statute were lax regarding the slave-owning citizens of other states living in Pennsylvania on a temporary basis. Washington obeyed the law, but he argued that he was forced to reside in the city because it was the seat of government, and he maintained that he remained a citizen of Virginia. The slaves who were sent back to Mount Vernon were replaced by German indentured servants. Evidently, it was not uncommon for members of Congress and other government officials from the South to possess slaves in Philadelphia.⁶⁷

In October 1790, Tobias Lear oversaw the moving of the furniture from New York to Philadelphia, and directed its installation.⁶⁸ He was a meticulous and highly-efficient secretary, and his letters to Washington are filled with reports on the progress of the alterations to Morris's house, suggestions about where to place furniture and house people, and confirmations that the president's instructions were being carried out.

From Lear's detailed descriptions, the 1773 insurance survey, the 1798 insurance policies, and first-person accounts, it is possible to assemble a reasonably complete floorplan of the President's House at the time Washington lived in it (fig. 4).⁶⁹

A long passage extended the length of the house from the front door to the back door. The Viscount de Chateaubriand, who visited Philadelphia in

⁶⁷ "[T]he Society in this city for the abolition of slavery had determined to give no advice and take no measures for liberating those slaves which belonged to the Officers of the general Government or members of Congress." Lear to Washington, April 24, 1791, ser. 3, General Correspondence, 1741–1799, GW Papers, LC.

⁶⁸ New York had been the first national capital under the Constitution, and Washington had lived in two houses there: the Franklin House at 3 Cherry Street, from April 1789 to Feb. 1790; and the Macomb House at 39–41 Broadway, from Feb. to Aug. 1790. Both buildings were demolished in the nineteenth century.

⁶⁹ The dimensions of the backbuildings come from the 1785 (or earlier) groundplan and the 1798 insurance policies, but the locations of the windows and doors in them are conjectural. The writer has taken minor liberties with two of the backbuildings: (1) the piazza has been widened by eighteen inches from the dimension listed in the 1785 (or earlier) groundplan to accommodate the addition of the back stairs (explained in detail below); and (2) the servants' hall has been lengthened by one foot from the dimension listed in the 1798 insurance policies to coincide with the length of the kitchen ell listed in the 1785 (or earlier) groundplan. The one major assumption made is that Robert Morris rebuilt the upper stories of the main house after the January 1780 fire to essentially the same plan as before it—that the decoration of the major rooms may have changed, but their dimensions and locations did not. No evidence has been found which challenges or is in any way inconsistent with this assumption.

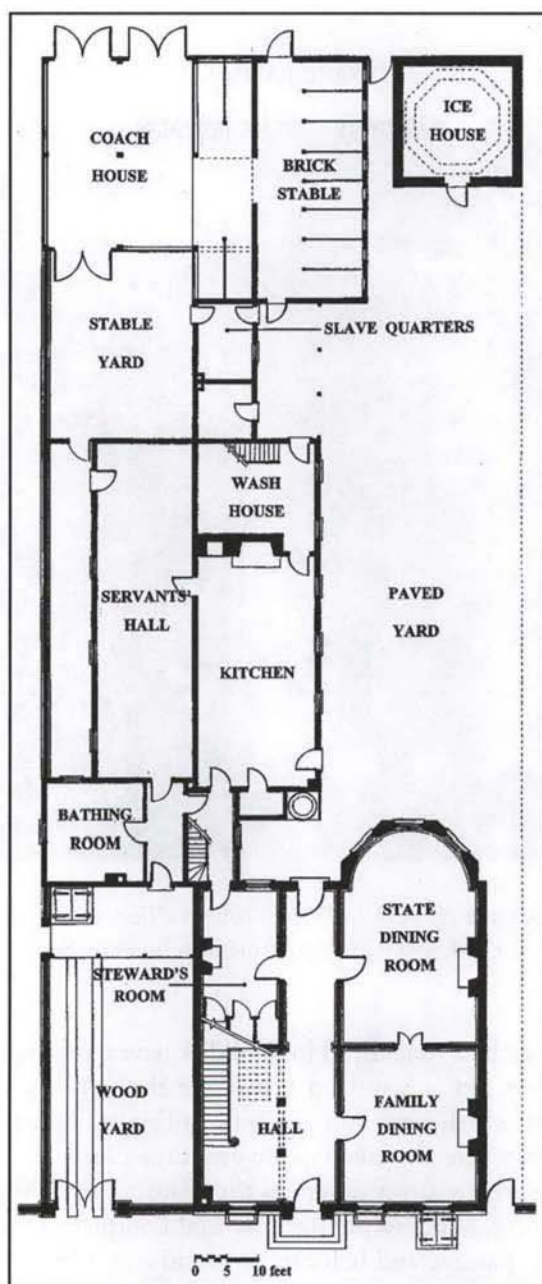


Fig. 4. Conjectural floorplan of the President's House in Philadelphia—first floor. The two-story bow on the south side of the main house, the servants' hall and the slave quarters were all added by George Washington in 1790. North is toward the bottom. © 2001 Edward Lawler, Jr.



Fig. 5. Hall and passage of "Widehall" (ca. 1769) in Chestertown, Maryland. Photo by Albert Kruse, April 24, 1934. Historic American Building Survey, no. MD-550.

1791, sniffed that the President's House didn't have a proper entrance hall: "A young servant girl . . . walked before me through one of those long narrow corridors which serve as a vestibule in English houses; she showed me into a parlor, where she asked me to await the General."⁷⁰

The 1773 insurance survey describes the "Entrey" as having four arches, two fluted columns, and four pilasters. Several floorplans for houses with a similar entrance passage and hall can be found in a 1757 English pattern book.⁷¹ The American house whose entrance passage and hall probably most

⁷⁰ Richard Switzer, trans., *Chateaubriand's Travels in America* (Lexington, Ky., 1969), 14.

⁷¹ Robert Morris, *Select Architecture: Being Regular Designs of Plans and Elevations Well Suited to both Town and Country* (London, 1757), pls. 5, 13, 20, 39. Helen Park List, A55, reel 9, Athenaeum

resembles that of the President's House is "Widehall" (1769) in Chestertown, Maryland (fig. 5). The specific architectural details may have been slightly different, but the Chestertown house gives a good idea of the elegant and dramatic effect of walking through the front door into the arcaded passage and hall of the Philadelphia house.

Widehall's staircase is an open-newel type, ascending in three flights from the first story to the second around a central well of space. The WPA researchers, Harold Eberlein, and others mistakenly concluded that the staircase of the President's House had been of a similar design, but this conjecture is contradicted by eighteenth-century sources, including Washington himself. In one letter, the president complained that his office for public business had to be on the third story (*italics added*): "[Visitors] will have to ascend *two pair of Stairs*, and to pass by the public rooms, as well as private Chambers, to get to it . . ."⁷²

A flight of stairs rising southward along the east wall from the first story to a wide landing, and a half-flight running parallel to the first from the landing to the second story is the only solution which is both consistent with the descriptions of Washington, Thomas Twining, and others and makes sense structurally.⁷³ The staircase continued upward, probably beginning in the same manner with a second flight leading to a landing, but, because of the difficulty of supporting the second half-flight without the addition of a column (there is no column listed in the 1773 insurance survey), it is much more likely that the two flights between the second and third stories were perpendicular to each other than parallel.

This stairway configuration makes the hall and the front half of the passage feel like a single space, and with the arcade and columns, a grand one. An entry from the diary of John Quincy Adams chronicles how this space was used on one occasion:

By the invitation of the President, I attended the reception he gave to *Piomingo* and a number of other Chickasaw Indians. Five Chiefs, seven Warriors, four boys and an interpreter constituted the Company. As soon as the whole were seated the ceremony of smoking began. A large East Indian pipe was

of Philadelphia. I am grateful to Roger W. Moss for suggesting this source.

⁷² Washington to Lear, Nov. 14, 1790, ser. 2, Letterbooks, GW Papers, LC.

⁷³ Thomas Twining, *Travels in India a Hundred Years Ago with a Visit to the United States* (London, 1893), 419.

placed in the middle of the Hall. The tube which appeared to be of leather, was twelve to fifteen feet in length. The President began and after two or three whiffs, passed the tube to Piomingo; he to the next chief, and so all around . . .⁷⁴

One approached the front door by climbing a wide stoop of three white stone (reportedly marble) steps, tapering in size. A knob to the side rang the doorbell. Stepping up another step and over the threshold, one entered the passage which was almost fifty feet in length and carpeted in green, probably bisected by an arch resting on pilasters like the entrances of the Powel House and Widehall. At the far end of the passage was the door to the paved yard, which may have had windows above it, possibly the fanlight reportedly removed from the house by Nathaniel Burt in 1832, and mentioned by his great-grandson.⁷⁵ The front door had an iron lock and several iron bolts on it (which were donated to HSP by the Burt family in the 1950s). The passage had painted wainscoting to a pedestal height, and the walls above it were painted until Washington had the passage papered in October 1796.⁷⁶ There were three mahogany doors with pedimented doorways, one near and on the right leading into the family dining room, the other two on either side of the far half of the passage leading into the steward's room on the left, and the state dining room on the right. The 1773 insurance survey lists a fourth pediment, which was probably over the interior of the front door. The passage had a modillion cornice.

Like Widehall, on the left would have been an arcade of three arches, these resting on two pilasters and two fluted columns. A glass lamp (lent by Robert Morris) hung from above. The green carpeting of the passage continued into the hall and up the stairs. An ornate heating stove (also lent by Morris) was in the northeast corner. The hall was lighted by a single tall, mahogany window on the north wall, decorated with blue damask curtains. The painted wainscoting continued around the hall until the stairs, where it met the mahogany wainscoting of the staircase. At the bottom of the staircase was a "twist"—the mahogany railing and balusters ending in a spiral instead of a newel post. The ends of each step were decorated with an

⁷⁴ *Diary of John Quincy Adams*, July 11, 1794, as quoted in Baker, *Washington after the Revolution*, 279.

⁷⁵ Struthers Burt, *Philadelphia, Holy Experiment* (Philadelphia, 1945), 299 n. More about this fanlight in the second part of this article.

⁷⁶ Entry for Oct. 19, 1796, "Washington's Household Account Books, 1793-1797," *PMHB* 31 (1907), 322.

ornamental scroll, or bracket. The railing and wainscoting of the staircase were "ramped," meaning they curved upward to meet those of the landing. The "house clock," probably a grandfather's clock, stood on the landing. A second flight of stairs ran from the landing to the second story.

To the south of the hall and stair was the steward's room, which had a plain chimneybreast on the east wall, a single window on the south wall, and doors to the cellar and the piazza. There were closets (under the landing?) in which the china, silver, and liquor could be locked. Washington had considered using this room to house servants, but Lear recommended against it.⁷⁷

The family dining room at the front of the house was about 24 x 21 feet, with wood paneling from floor to ceiling all around, including twelve pilasters, and a chimneybreast on the west wall with a mantel and tabernacle frame above it. There were pedimented doorways on the east and south walls, and two tall mahogany windows on the north wall, decorated with blue damask curtains. According to the 1773 insurance survey, the room had a third pediment (which must have crowned the tabernacle frame), with a cornice above it decorated with fretwork. This was probably the most ornate room in the house that Mary Masters built, and it may have had a ceiling of decorative plasterwork.⁷⁸ Washington's "blue furniture" from New York was placed in this room, which included a set of dining chairs (probably those now at HSP), and perhaps a pair of upholstered benches. A pier-glass mirror (lent by Morris, possibly the one now on display at the White House), may have hung between the windows. A breakfast table (possibly the one at Mount Vernon)⁷⁹ stood at the center of the room and was used for all the family's meals but the formal dinners. It was in this room that Washington's guests waited on Tuesday afternoons for his three o'clock levees, or formal audiences, to begin.

An "unfolding door," perhaps a pair of narrow French doors, separated the family dining room and the state dining room. The guests on levee day would pass through the doorway and see Washington—looking much as he

⁷⁷ Lear to Washington, Oct. 31, 1790, ser. 4, General Correspondence, 1741–1799, GW Papers, LC.

⁷⁸ "... the carved work in the [front] dining room cannot be made decent by washing, without the greatest risques, and almost certainty of breaking off all the finer parts—I therefore thought upon the whole that it might be best to have [it] gone over with a coat of paint..." Lear to Washington, Oct. 2, 1791, ser. 4, General Correspondence, 1741–1799, GW Papers, LC.

⁷⁹ See Helen Maggs Fede, *Washington Furniture at Mount Vernon* (Mount Vernon, Va., 1966), 41.

does in Gilbert Stuart's Lansdowne portraits—standing some thirty feet away in the bow at the south end of the state dining room framed by three tall windows decorated with crimson damask. With the sun behind him, the effect must have been striking. According to the 1773 insurance survey, the rear room also had floor-to-ceiling paneling and a chimneybreast with a tabernacle frame but no mantel, a cornice decorated with fretwork, and pediments over the doors to the passage and the front room. The whole ceiling of the state dining room was replaced when the bow was added in November 1790, as was the ceiling of the state drawing room above it, and no evidence has been found that the new one had ornamental plasterwork.

A large carpet with a center medallion of the Great Seal of the United States—made for the room by William Peter Sprague of Philadelphia in 1791—covered the floor of the state dining room.⁸⁰ This may be the carpet which has been in the collection of Mount Vernon since 1897, although recent scholarship suggests that it is not.⁸¹ Down the center of the room was a long table—or rather a series of drop-leaf tables which connected to make a single table, with semicircular end tables, which sat more than thirty. The plateau (now at Mount Vernon), a set of seven low, rectangular, mirrored pedestals (24 x 18 inches and about 3 inches tall) plus two rounded end sections, ran down the middle of the table. Upon this, at state dinners, were displayed a dozen French biscuit-porcelain figurines, along with vases of flowers and candelabra. The furnishings of the room included a pair of “circular” (curved-front) sideboards with large mirrors over them, which probably flanked the chimneybreast. Three large biscuit-porcelain figurine groups, including one called “Apollo Instructing the Shepherds,” stood on the sideboards under glass covers. About three dozen dining chairs, probably upholstered in the same crimson damask as the curtains, normally were in the room. These were removed for the weekly levees, and it is likely that the

⁸⁰ Marion Sadtler Carson, “Washington's American Carpet at Mount Vernon,” *Antiques* 51 (1947), 118–19. Sprague made a similar carpet for the Senate Chamber in Congress Hall in Philadelphia but this does not survive.

⁸¹ See Susan H. Anderson, *The Most Splendid Carpet* (Philadelphia, 1978). Anderson argues that the manufacture of the Mount Vernon carpet is inconsistent with Sprague's presumed method of work, that stylistically it appears to be of early nineteenth-century French origin, and that the seventeen arrows in the talon of the eagle and the seventeen stripes on the shield suggest that it may have been made during a period in which the United States had seventeen states, i.e., between 1802 and 1812. *Ibid.*, 38. Anderson's conjectures about the layout of the PH, including that the state dining room “was located on the second floor of 190 High Street” and that its carpet (hence, the room itself) “must have measured nearly thirty feet square,” are incorrect. *Ibid.*, 34–35.

tables were also either removed, or moved to the perimeter of the room with their leaves folded down for ceremonial occasions.

A famous account of what it was like to attend one of Washington's levees in Philadelphia comes from a book called *Familiar Letters on Public Characters*, published anonymously in 1834:

[Washington] devoted one hour every other Tuesday, from three to four, to these visits. He understood himself to be visited as the *President* of the United States, and not on his own account. He was not to be seen by any body and every body; but required that every one who came should be introduced by his Secretary, or by some gentleman, whom he himself knew. He lived on the south side of Chestnut Street, just below Sixth. The place of reception was the dining room in the rear, twenty-five or thirty feet in length, including the bow projecting into the garden. At three o'clock, or at any time within a quarter of an hour afterwards, the visiter was conducted to this dining room, from which all seats had been removed for the time. On entering he saw the manly figure of Washington clad in black velvet; his hair in full dress, powdered and gathered behind in a large silk bag; yellow gloves on his hands holding a cocked hat with a cockade in it, and the edges adorned with a black feather about an inch deep. He wore knee and shoe buckles; and a long sword, with a finely wrought and polished steel blade, and appearing from under the folds behind. The scabbard was white polished leather.

He stood always in front of the fire-place, with his face towards the door of entrance. The visiter was conducted to him, and he required to have the name so distinctly pronounced, that he could hear it. He received his visiter with a dignified bow, while his hands were so disposed of as to indicate that the salutation was not to be accompanied with shaking hands. As visitors came in, they formed a circle around the room. At a quarter past three, the door was closed, and the circle was formed for that day. He then began on the right, and spoke to each visiter, calling him by name, and exchanging a few words with him. When he had completed his circuit, he resumed his first position, and the visitors approached him, in succession, bowed and retired. By four o'clock this ceremony was over.⁸²

This is the most complete description of a levee at the President's House, but its inaccuracies suggest that it may not have been that of an eyewitness. Its author, William Sullivan (1774–1839), was a Boston lawyer whose

⁸² [William Sullivan], *Familiar Letters on Public Characters and Public Events* (Boston, 1834), 89–90.

anonymous newspaper pieces on American history were collected in the book. According to a posthumous biographical sketch by his son in a later edition of the book, Sullivan's (only?) visit to Philadelphia was as a law student in 1795.

Even if he may not have attended a presidential levee himself, the level of detail in Sullivan's account leads one to believe that he got his information from people who had actually been there. His major error (besides locating the President's House on Chestnut Street) was placing Washington in front of the fireplace, rather than in front of the windows of the bow.⁸³ Sullivan's account was quoted in the 1844, second edition of Watson's *Annals* (and all subsequent editions), Griswold's *The Republican Court*, and dozens of other books.

What is more likely a first-person account can be found in the recollections of Judge John B. Wallace: "Washington received his guests, standing between the windows in his back drawing-room. The company, entering a front room and passing through an unfolding door, made their salutations to the President, and turning off, stood on one side."⁸⁴

The state dining room was also called the reception room or the audience room, since it was the room in the house in which formal ceremonies involving the president took place. Congress met in three sessions each year, and Washington would open each session with a speech at Congress Hall, a building some six hundred feet south of the house. The Senate would return the visit and offer the president its compliments at the President's House, as would the House of Representatives in a separate visit. (This practice of reciprocal visits was ended by President Jefferson.) Formal ceremonies between countries, such as an ambassador presenting his credentials, were also performed in this room. According to the secretary to the British minister, the key to the Bastille given to Washington by Lafayette (now at Mount Vernon), hung in this room, opposite a picture of Louis XVI.⁸⁵ On at least one occasion during the Adamses' tenancy, the rug

⁸³ According to Senator William Maclay, Washington *did* stand in front of a fireplace for the levees held in New York in the Franklin House. See *The Journal of William Maclay*, ed. Charles A. Beard (New York, 1965), 40. Other corrections: Washington generally held his levees *every* Tuesday and the state dining room was 34 feet in length.

⁸⁴ Judge John B. Wallace, as quoted in *PMHB* 2 (1878), 175. This account has sometimes been misinterpreted to mean that Washington held his levees on the second story of the PH.

⁸⁵ Edward Thornton to Sir James Bland Burges, Bart., March 5, 1793, as quoted in Baker, *Washington after the Revolution*, 252.

was rolled up, the tables were removed, and the room was used for a dance for the president's children and their friends.⁸⁶

Open houses were held at the President's House on New Year's Day and, during Washington's tenure, on the president's birthday. On these occasions, there could be several hundred guests.⁸⁷ Abigail Adams predicted that the number of people attending an afternoon open house on the Fourth of July would exceed a thousand.⁸⁸

The second story of the main house had essentially the same floorplan as the first (fig. 6). The upper hall and passage contained mahogany windows and were wainscoted and finished like the story below. These areas provided ample circulation space, plus room for the overflow crowds which sometimes attended the open houses and the evening receptions or "drawingrooms."

The yellow drawing room (over the family dining room) got its name from the "yellow furniture" from New York which was installed here. This room seems to have been altered by Morris after the 1780 fire, since the 1773 insurance survey lists a chimneybreast with a tabernacle frame, and no mention of a mantel; but the Burt family tradition (published as early as 1875) maintains that the mantel that Nathaniel Burt salvaged from the house in 1832 came from this room (fig. 7).⁸⁹

The mantel's pulvinated (pillow-shaped) frieze of banded foliage—in this case oak leaves—was an extremely rare decorative feature in the colonies, probably because of the complexity and expense of the carving. Not many more than a dozen eighteenth-century examples of this decoration are extant

⁸⁶ See Mitchell, *New Letters of Abigail Adams*, 247–48.

⁸⁷ An account of a New Year's Day open house during Adams's administration can be found in Robert C. Smith, "A Portuguese Naturalist in Philadelphia, 1799," *PMHB* 78 (1954), 81–82.

⁸⁸ Mitchell, *New Letters of Abigail Adams*, 199. A description of a Fourth of July reception hosted by Washington can be found in G. W. Parke Custis, *Recollections and Private Memoirs of Washington*, ed. Benson J. Lossing (Philadelphia, 1859), 429–30.

⁸⁹ Burt II, *Washington Mansion*, 34. There seems to be no reason to doubt the Burt family tradition that the mantel and the front door locks came from the President's House. The material of the mantel is "Apparently entirely pine," and "all the ornamentation appears to be hand-carved from the wood itself rather than molded [from gesso or composition material] and applied." "Appraisal—An American Federal Carved and Painted Fireplace Mantel of American Historical Interest," Frisk and Borodin, Appraisers, Ltd., Dec. 29, 1998, 31, Art and Artifact Coll., HSP. The fact that the 1773 insurance survey makes no special notation of so uncommon and expensive a mantel would argue for its being added by Morris when he rebuilt the house in 1781. The proportions of the mantel are also more Federal than Georgian, and its high-style ornamentation is more often associated with the Chesapeake Bay region than Philadelphia. Both Morris and his wife had family ties to the Eastern Shore of Maryland.

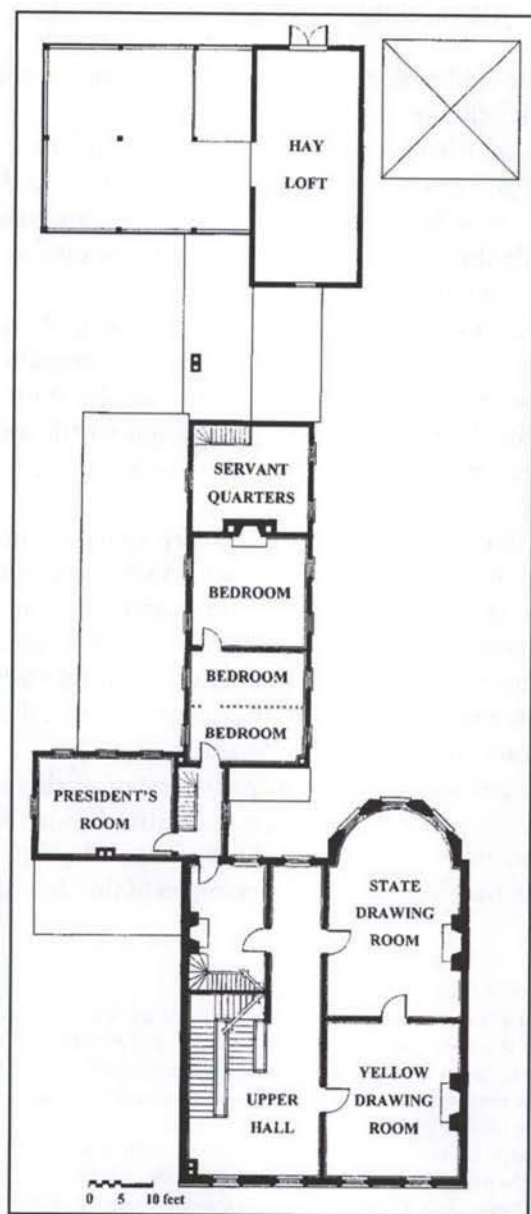


Fig. 6. Conjectural floorplan of the President's House in Philadelphia—second floor. The president's room, formerly a bathroom, served as the private office/study (and probably Cabinet room) for Washington and Adams. North is toward the bottom. © 2001 Edward Lawler, Jr.



Fig. 7. Mantelpiece (ca. 1781) from the President's House at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. It is currently on loan to Mount Vernon. Photo by Jack E. Boucher, ca. 1965. Historic American Buildings Survey, no. PA-1942.

in America. Before the Revolution, the feature is most often associated with the virtuoso carving work of William Buckland (1734–1774), in and near Annapolis.

The mantel is one of two extant examples of a pulvinated frieze of banded foliate used in a Philadelphia house before 1800. The second example, the pediment of the doorway in the library of "The Solitude" (1784–85), the villa of John Penn "of Stoke" (cousin to Governor John and Richard Penn), was probably carved only three to four years later than the President's House mantel. The decoration of the doorway is so similar to that of the Burt mantel that the two look as if they could have come from

the same room and it is possible that they were carved by the same artisan.⁹⁰

The intricately-carved mantel may offer a clue to the level of decoration in the yellow drawing room and indeed perhaps that of the whole second floor of the house. If all of the doorways in the public spaces in this story had similar pulvinated friezes of banded foliage, there would have been a total of seven of them. This feature might also have been used in the chimneybreast or in a mantel in the state drawing room.

Lear wrote to Washington that there were three sets of yellow damask curtains from the New York house, and suggested that if an additional set were made, the four could serve for all of the second-story windows facing Market Street. The household account books indicate that two additional sets of yellow moreen curtains were purchased,⁹¹ which could have freed a set to cover the (presumed) window at the south end of the passage. According to an inventory made by Washington in 1797, a large number of pieces of furniture were upholstered in yellow damask—three sofas, two armchairs, ten sidechairs—and the assumption has been that they were all in the yellow drawing room. (If so, it must have looked like a furniture warehouse.) It is likely that some of this “yellow furniture” would have been spread throughout the upper hall and passage.

Additional furniture in the yellow drawing room included two “fixed side boards” (built-in?) bought from the Comte de Moustier, Nelly Custis’s harpsichord (now at Mount Vernon) which arrived from London in 1793, perhaps the fortepiano which was destroyed at Mount Vernon by souvenir seekers during the Civil War, a tea table, a large china assemblage called the “Pagoda,” and a mirror (lent by the Morrisses?). The room had a carpet which in the summer was replaced by rattan matting. According to George

⁹⁰ A photograph and a measured drawing of the doorway from the Solitude can be seen in Phillip B. Wallace, *Colonial Houses, Philadelphia, Pre-Revolutionary Period* (New York, 1931), 204–5. John Penn “of Stoke” is presumed to have been the designer of the Solitude based on plans in his commonplace book at HSP. He was a close friend of the Morrisses, and it is not unreasonable to think that he could have copied the decoration of their city house for the library of his villa. Penn later became Morris’s tenant and next-door neighbor when he rented the Stedman-Galloway House. See Edmund Physick to John Penn “of Stoke,” Oct. 24, 1788, Penn-Physick Papers, 3:240, HSP. The Solitude has been preserved, although the house is not open to the public. Its grounds became the Philadelphia Zoo.

⁹¹ Household Account Books, March 7, 1791, as quoted in Decatur, *Private Affairs*, 206.

Washington Parke Custis, the walls of the room were papered.⁹² Thomas Twining, who visited on May 13, 1796, described the room: "[I] was shown into a middling-sized, well-furnished drawing room on the left of the passage. Nearly opposite the door was the fireplace, with a wood-fire in it. The floor was carpeted. On the left of the fireplace was a sofa, which sloped across the room. There were no pictures on the walls, no ornaments on the chimney-piece. Two windows on the right of the entrance looked into the street."⁹³

The yellow drawing room was the room into which visitors during the day were generally shown, and the one in which Mrs. Washington served afternoon tea. It is also where refreshments were served for the Friday evening "drawingrooms."⁹⁴

The state drawing room would have been the same size and configuration as the state dining room below it—thirty-four feet from the doorway to the center of the bow. The curtains on the windows and the upholstery of the French-styled furniture throughout the room were green. There was a large carpet (also green?) from Berry and Rogers in New York. At the center of the room hung a large eight-armed chandelier.

There were three categories of furniture used in the President's House in Philadelphia during Washington's tenure: (1) his own private furniture, (2) the government furniture (mostly furniture from the Franklin house in New York) which had been bought by Congress for the president's use,⁹⁵ and (3) furniture Washington bought to supplement the government furniture. Much of the latter was purchased in early 1790 and had belonged to the French minister, the Comte de Moustier, who had been the tenant in the Macomb house in New York before the president moved there. Near the end of Washington's second term in office he made an inventory of most of the contents of the Philadelphia house. Included in

⁹² Lossing, *Private Memoirs of Washington*, 409.

⁹³ Twining, *Travels in India*, 419. The absence of pictures on the walls and ornaments on the mantel seems curious.

⁹⁴ For a description of the etiquette of and refreshments for a Friday evening "drawingroom," see Mitchell, *New Letters of Abigail Adams*, 19. The number of guests attending was usually several dozen. On December 27, 1799, the first drawingroom after the news of George Washington's death reached Philadelphia, Abigail Adams estimated that almost two hundred people attended in mourning. *Ibid.*, 225.

⁹⁵ The government furniture was taken on to Washington, D.C., in 1800, and became part of the original furnishings of the White House. This would have been destroyed when the British burned the capital in 1814.

this was a list of:

Articles in the Green Drawing Room which will be sold.

	Priced cost
A Lustre of 8 lights perfect + in no respect inj ^d by use <u>not at all injured</u>	£ 76-13-0
3 Green silk Window Curtains rich & liner [<i>illeg.</i>] Drapery etc.	78-0-0
2 Brackets oval Mirrors - highly Ornamented	19--
1 Sopha of Green Flowered damask with two Cushions	30--
12 Arm Chairs — Gr. Set [?] D° D°	77-0-0
6 Small D° D° D°	24-0-
6 D° D° D° D°	24-15-0
2 Round Stools D° D°	5-5-0
Carved + gilt flower for lustre	1-5-0
Two Tafsels for d°	15
Chain for D° + gilding	11-3
Carpet	92-8-0

Articles in the above Room Which may be purchased although
the sale of them is not desired

2 large looking glafses very cheap at what they cost—exactly such from enquiry—I cannot get for less than 300 dollars	92-0-0
2 la[rge] brackets + oval Mirrors highly ornamented	19--
1 p ^r of Lustres, two lights each	20-0-0
4 Mirrors + pictures suspended to them for Lamps @ 70/	14-0-0
2 pair real Patent Lamps for Ditto p ^r J ^{os} Anthony's acc. 100 D ⁿ	37-10-0
2 Landscapes—1 Representing a view of the Pafsage of the	52-10-0

Poto^k thro' the bleu mountain, at the confluence of that
River with the Shan^h—The other at the F[federal]. City.
—cost me with the frames 30 Guineas⁹⁶

Many of the pieces listed here still exist, and a number of them are at Mount Vernon, including one pair of oval mirrors and brackets (probably made by James Reynolds of Philadelphia), one of the large looking glasses bought from the Comte de Moustier (the other is at the Smithsonian),

⁹⁶ George Washington, Feb. 1797, ser. 4., General Correspondence, GW Papers, GC.

several of the French armchairs, and the two landscapes (by English painter George Beck).⁹⁷ Another pair of armchairs is in the collection of the White House. The "Sopha" may be the hairy-paw Philadelphia Chippendale sofa which is now at the Deshler-Morris House in Germantown.⁹⁸

Much of the furniture which Washington had bought to supplement the government furniture was offered to the president-elect at cost, but Adams declined to buy it. The pieces which Washington chose not to keep or give away were sold at auction on March 10, 1797.⁹⁹ Some of the items listed above (especially the mirrors, brackets, and paintings) could have been objects moved to the state drawing room expressly for the sale, which seems to have been held in the house. Alexander Hamilton commented upon two large paintings of the Hudson River by Englishman William Winstanley which hung in the room.¹⁰⁰ Two additional Winstanley paintings hung in the house, but it is not known in what room.¹⁰¹

The third story of the house contained "cross-passages" (probably a hallway going east-west, stairs to the floor above, and back stairs to the floor below), the public office of the president, and three lodging rooms. (The public office most likely was the west front room, the largest room on the floor, which would have had the same dimensions as the yellow drawing room below it.) Washington had an office staff of four secretaries ("the Gentlemen of the family") plus his chief secretary, Tobias Lear, all of whom lodged as well as worked on this floor. Lear and his wife, Mary, lived in one of the rooms with their son, Benjamin, who was born in the house in March 1791. Mrs. Lear was an early victim of the yellow fever epidemic, and died in the house in July 1793. When the son of the Marquis de Lafayette came to live with the Washingtons in April 1796, he probably lodged in one of these rooms.

The attic or garret was even more crowded, with between thirteen and fifteen people living in it. At Lear's suggestion, the two larger chambers (probably those facing the street) were divided to create a pair of additional

⁹⁷ Wendell Garrett, ed., *George Washington's Mount Vernon* (New York, 1998), 162, 180–81.

⁹⁸ William MacPherson Hornor, Jr., *Blue Book of Philadelphia Furniture: William Penn to George Washington* (Philadelphia, 1935), 99, 152.

⁹⁹ Entry for March 15, 1797, "Washington's Household Account Book, 1793–1797," *PMHB* 31 (1907), 348. See also Lear to Washington, March 15, 1797, ser. 4, General Correspondence, GW Papers, LC. The auction appears to have been a private sale, since none of the four major Philadelphia newspapers contained a public notice of it.

¹⁰⁰ Garrett, *George Washington's Mount Vernon*, 177.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* Three of these four Winstanley paintings are at Mount Vernon.

lodging rooms, making a total of six on the floor.¹⁰² If the initial room assignments were as Lear and Washington anticipated, one room would have been for the steward and his wife (south side), two for the white male servants (one on the south side, one on the north), one for the white female servants not housed over the wash house (north side), one for Mrs. Lear's maid (north side), and the last for the three male slaves not housed in the addition to the smokehouse (north side).

The original four rooms in this story had been lighted by dormer windows—two facing north and two facing south. The eastern and western walls of the house do not seem to have had windows in their first three stories, but if there were windows in the gables each of the six servant rooms could have had one.

It is not surprising that there is much less known about the backbuildings than the main house, since these were spaces not normally visited by the public. The 1773 insurance survey, the 1785 (or earlier) groundplan, and the 1798 insurance policies generally agree on the dimensions of the individual rooms, but, with the exception of Abigail Adams's description of the second story of the bathhouse, little documentation has been found on the number and location of the windows and doors.

The kitchen ell was connected to the main house by a piazza. The 1773 insurance survey lists the dimensions of this one-story passage as 7 x 14 feet, possibly with 9-inch brick walls, which would have made the interior width as little as 5 feet 6 inches. (The 1798 insurance policies do not mention the piazza's dimensions, and by that time it would have been a two-story structure.) It is the writer's conjecture that the piazza was widened when the second story was added to it, and that one story of the back stairs was contained within it.¹⁰³ These alterations may have been done at the same time that the bath house was built; and if, indeed, the cisterns were located on the roof of the piazza¹⁰⁴ (which would have added thousands of pounds

¹⁰² Lear to Washington, Oct. 31, 1790, ser. 4, General Correspondence, GW Papers, LC. Lear noted that each of the divided rooms could "conveniently hold 3 beds if necessary."

¹⁰³ Lear calls the steward's room "the thorough-fare to the Cellar and back stairs." Ibid. Also, Washington initially had planned to house the "upper Servants" in the steward's room. Had the stairs been within the room (and, had Washington not changed his mind), these servants would have had very little space and absolutely no privacy. See above, n. 51.

¹⁰⁴ Cisterns for storing water were not uncommon, although placing them on a roof was rare. The nearby Charles Norris House had cisterns located on the roof of its piazza. See Scharf and Westcott, *History of Philadelphia*, 2:870. The early insurance surveys of the Mutual Assurance Company list more

of weight, and required special buttressing), it seems probable that the bath house and the rebuilt piazza could have been constructed as a single unit. (In the conjectural floorplans, the interior width of the piazza is 7 feet, and its walls are 9 inches thick—a total widening of 18 inches over the presumed dimension in the 1773 insurance survey.)

To the east of the piazza was the first story of the bath house, which consisted of a bathingroom and (almost certainly) a hallway. It is likely that the bathingroom was in use during Washington's tenancy (otherwise it would have been an obvious place to house servants, and neither he nor Lear suggests this). In Burt II's 1875 address, he quotes a March 1795 contract between Robert Morris and Andrew Kennedy (the new owner of the property) listing the items in the house of which Morris retained ownership. Included in this were "the marble and wooden baths, with the copper boiler, apparatus of the bath etc."¹⁰⁵—items which may have been used or stored in the room below the President's study. Among the things that Washington took back to Mount Vernon in 1797 was "one Tin shower bath,"¹⁰⁶ but it is not known if this was in use in Philadelphia.

(It has been assumed that the bath house/piazza was constructed with a cellar—the conjectural floorplan shows a cellarway on the north wall, leading to the wood yard. This will be discussed in the second part of this article.)

Even after the items mentioned in the 1795 contract were removed from the house, at least one bathtub must have remained—Abigail Adams wrote her sister in June 1798: "We have began the use of the cold Bath, and I hope it will in some measure compensate for the want of a bracing Air. The largness and hight of our Rooms are a great comfort and the Nights are yet tolerable, and I have freed myself for the season of any more drawing Rooms. Dinners I cannot."¹⁰⁷

Morris's well was located to the west of the piazza, in the paved yard, near the northwest corner of the kitchen. It seems logical that the well (and the pump which was inserted into it) would have been covered by some sort

than a dozen houses with cisterns—including "a Cistern of about nine Hundred Gallons"—but only one of these was located on a roof. See Anthony N. B. Garvan et al., eds., *The Architectural Surveys, 1784–1794*, vol. 1 of *The Mutual Assurance Company Papers* (Philadelphia, 1976), 106, 262.

¹⁰⁵ Burt II, *Washington Mansion*, 32.

¹⁰⁶ Bill of Lading, *The Salem*, Joshua Elkins, master; March 1797, as quoted in Eberlein, "190 High Street," 176.

¹⁰⁷ Mitchell, *New Letters of Abigail Adams*, 196.

of roof (as shown in the plan), and this may have been the section of the kitchen ell which came, according to Lear, "within 5 or 6 feet" of the proposed "Bow window."¹⁰⁸ Washington mentions a "small room adjoining the Kitchen (by the Pump),"¹⁰⁹ but whether this was some sort of shed attached to the kitchen ell (as shown in the plan between the piazza and the well) or a partitioned area within the ell itself has not been determined.

To the south of the piazza was the kitchen ell, which was 20 x 55 feet (exterior dimensions) and consisted of a large kitchen, about 18 x 36 feet (interior dimensions), and a washhouse or laundry, about 18 x 16 feet (interior dimensions), behind it. The ovens and cooking facilities must have been extensive, since there was generally formal entertaining several times a week, including state dinners on Thursday afternoons at four o'clock, often with thirty or more guests.

Sometime after 1773, a second story was added to the kitchen ell (most likely by Robert Morris in 1781). Two bedrooms (probably the Morris' own bedroom and a nursery) were carved out of the space above the kitchen. Sheltered from the street, with the walled garden on one side and the paved yard on the other, these rooms must have been both comfortable and quiet. If equal in size, each room would have been about eighteen feet square.

Washington and his wife raised two of her grandchildren, Nelly and George Washington Parke Custis, who were eleven and nine in 1790 when the family moved to Philadelphia. The president took one room (most likely the rear one) over the kitchen for himself and Mrs. Washington and had the other divided into two bedrooms for the children. His plan was that the two female slaves in the household would sleep in these rooms with the children. The laundresses (and probably the kitchen maids) were to sleep in the room over the washhouse.

Some of the furniture preserved in the Washingtons' bedroom at Mount

¹⁰⁸ Lear to Washington, Oct. 31, 1790, ser. 4, General Correspondence, GW Papers, LC. There is reason to believe that when Mrs. Masters lived in the house the well may have been located to the east of the piazza; and that Morris's building of the bath house (probably, directly over this first well) necessitated the digging of a new well near the northwest corner of the kitchen ell (possibly as early as 1781). This second well was abandoned in November 1790 when the bow addition was built, and third well was dug in the middle of the paved yard for Washington. The evidence for this will be presented in the second part of this article.

¹⁰⁹ Washington to Lear, Oct. 27, 1790, [Sparks], *Letters and Recollections of George Washington*, 19. Lear describes this as "[the closet] adjoining the Kitchen." Lear to Washington, Oct. 31, 1790, ser. 4, General Correspondence, GW Papers, LC.

Vernon was used by them in the bedroom in Philadelphia. The famous bed in which Washington later died was in this room. The writing desk from the Comte de Moustier, a dressing table mirror, and an easy chair may also have been here.

In addition to building the servants' hall, Washington made several changes to the backbuildings before moving into the house. The smokehouse adjoining the south wall of the wash house was converted into a lodging room, probably for the white coachman. A second room was built between the smokehouse and the cow house for the three male slaves who worked in the stable. The president brought fourteen horses to Philadelphia from Mount Vernon. Ten of these were accommodated in the brick stable and other (wooden?) stable. The cow house was converted into two additional stalls, and the last pair of horses were boarded with Hiltzheimer (the diarist), who ran a livery stable a block away.

Washington's presidential household had four vehicles—the grand, white coach of state for ceremonial occasions (which sat four and was pulled by six horses), a phaeton or open carriage, a cream-colored chariot or light coach (which probably also sat four), and a work or baggage wagon—all of which, apparently, could fit in the coach house.¹¹⁰ Chickens seem to have been occasionally raised on the premises, and were probably kept in the stable yard.¹¹¹ Household pets included Mrs. Washington's parrot and Nelly Custis's dog "Frisk."¹¹²

The President's House was one of the largest houses in Philadelphia (by 1787 the Bingham Mansion was larger), but with thirty or more people living in it, it must have been crowded.¹¹³ Washington received a salary of \$25,000, seemingly an enormous sum in the 1790s, although out of this he was required to pay the rent and all of the expenses associated with the house, pay the salaries of his household and office staffs, feed and clothe his

¹¹⁰ See Decatur, *Private Affairs*, 36, 207–8. See also above, n. 51.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 282.

¹¹² The parrot may have been a Christmas present from Washington to his wife. See entry for Dec. 24, 1794, "Washington's Household Account Book, 1793–1797," *PMHB* 30 (1906), 330; and entry for June 25, 1795, *op. cit.*, *PMHB* 31 (1907), 56. See also Washington to Lear, March 9, 1797, [Sparks], *Letters and Recollections of George Washington*, 115.

¹¹³ An anonymous letter which appeared in Dunlap's *Daily Advertiser* on March 4, 1791, complained: "[T]he President is to continue in a noisy house in Market Street, much too small for his family, serenaded every morning with the music of waggoners . . ."

family and slaves, and—most expensive of all—provide all of the food and drink for the state dinners and the numerous other public entertainments. Not surprisingly, in most of the years he was president, Washington outspent his salary.¹¹⁴

The second part of this article will chronicle the misinformation about the size, location and physical appearance of the President's House, and how confusion over the building led to the demolition of its remaining walls in the mid-twentieth century. The cover of this journal shows a conjectural elevation of the house. The evidence upon which it is based will be presented, along with an estimate of how much of the buildings may remain under Independence Mall.

II

THE PRESIDENT'S HOUSE on Market Street was the residence of the chief executive from 1790 to 1800, while Philadelphia served as the capital of the United States. During these years most of the business of the executive branch of the federal government was conducted in or from this building. Washington and Adams met here with their cabinets, generals, and other advisors; and the public business of the president was conducted in the office on the third floor. The official entertaining of the new nation took place within the house; thousands of people attended the levees, "drawingrooms," open houses, and state dinners. Dozens of accounts of visits to and descriptions of the house exist in letters and diaries, but many of these were not published until the twentieth century, and so were unavailable to earlier historians.

Some of the most important documents about the property—the eighteenth-century deeds, the 1785 (or earlier) groundplan, the 1773 insurance survey, the 1798 insurance policies, and the George Washington-Tobias Lear correspondence—were either unknown to or ignored by early nineteenth-century historians. No view of the house from the eighteenth century is known to survive, and some of the earliest and most accurate views from the 1820s and 1830s remained in private hands and seem to have been unknown or dismissed. The void of information about the house was filled

¹¹⁴ Decatur, *Private Affairs*, 328–32.

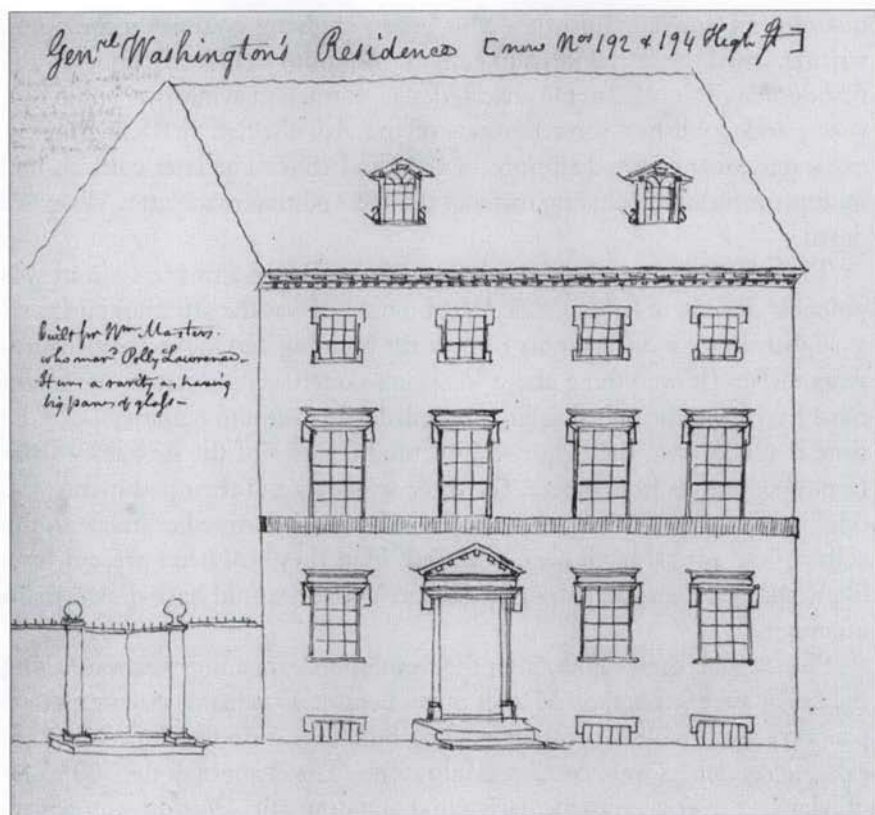


Fig. 8. "Gen^d Washington's Residence [now nos 192 and 194 High St.]." The notations read, "built by—Masters [sic] before the Rev." One of his daughters married Richard Penn, then Gov^r," and "built for W^m Masters [sic] who mar^d Polly Lawrence. It was a rarity as having big panes of glafs ~." Ink drawing on paper by John Fanning Watson from his 1823 notes for *Annals of Philadelphia*, facing p. 236½. Library Company of Philadelphia.

by personal reminiscences, sometimes the boyhood recollections of old men.

The earliest known view of the President's House (fig. 8) is a crude pen and ink drawing from the 1823 extra-illustrated manuscript of John Fanning Watson's *Annals of Philadelphia*.¹¹⁵ Watson (1779–1860) was an anti-

¹¹⁵ John Fanning Watson, "Annals of Philadelphia . . ." (1823 extra-illustrated manuscript), facing p. 236½, Library Company of Philadelphia.

quarian, an amateur historian who began studying colonial records and writing down the anecdotes and early recollections of elderly people in the first decade of the 1800s. He collected his information avidly over some fifty years, and published three editions of the *Annals*, first in 1830, then in expanded and corrected editions in 1844 and 1857. The later editions had multiple printings, including many of the 1857 edition made after Watson's death.

This drawing is a conjectural view of the President's House and was probably done in or before 1823. Watson himself was the artist, and it shows a (slightly inaccurate) memory of how the building had looked some thirty years earlier. (If everything about Watson's sketch were accurate, the house must have been the only dwelling in Philadelphia without chimneys!) At the time it was drawn, the major architectural features of the first story—the front door and its frontispiece, the three windows and their pediments, the original stone (marble?) front steps, the bulkhead or covered entrance to the cellar—had probably all been removed. Had they still been present, it is likely that even an amateur artist such as Watson would have drawn them accurately.¹¹⁶

Philadelphia grew rapidly after the Revolution, expanding westward along the major streets. Land on Market Street became so valuable as commercial property that the lots between existing buildings were developed and the existing residences were converted into stores. The changes to the 500 block of Market Street were particularly rapid and dramatic. Watson later wrote: "When General Washington and Robert Morris, dignitaries of the nation, lived in the houses in High street, east of Sixth street, only little more than thirty years ago, no stores, save Sheaff's wine store [512 Market, the other side of the walled garden], were near them; and probably not an inhabitant could then have been found to guess that that square, and to the west of it to Broad street, would ever become a street of trade!"¹¹⁷

In the mid-1790s, during President Washington's tenancy, Robert Morris sold off all of his Market Street properties to raise cash for the grand

¹¹⁶ Watson later described his early drawings as "Generally rough sketches, made before it was determined to make accurate drawings." Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia* . . . (3d ed., 3 vols., Philadelphia, 1857; reprint, Philadelphia, 1900), 2:504. The importance of this is that it served as a model for Breton's watercolors and lithographs, drawn five to seven years later. Watson's sketch varies most from the 1773 insurance survey of the house in the details of the windows of the first story. It varies most from subsequent views of the President's House in the details of the roof.

¹¹⁷ John Fanning Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia*, (1st ed., Philadelphia and New York, 1830), 205.

mansion he was planning to build on the block bordered by Chestnut, Walnut, 7th and 8th Streets. The President's House and the wood yard on its eastern side were sold in March 1795 for \$37,000 to Andrew Kennedy,¹¹⁸ a wealthy merchant, who continued to rent the property to the city as the executive mansion. The subdividing of the walled garden to the east of the wood yard caused a problem since an insufficient number of street numbers had been reserved as addresses for the lots between the existing buildings. The street number of the main house and wood yard (524-30 Market Street) had been 190 High Street while Washington resided there, but it appears as 192 High Street on tax records in 1798 during Adams's presidency.¹¹⁹ The yard to the west between the President's House and the Stedman-Galloway House was sold in December 1794 to hairdresser Robert Kid,¹²⁰ and a new dwelling was built there (532-34 Market Street), with a four-foot alley separating the two buildings.¹²¹

The yellow fever epidemic of 1793, in which more than 10 percent of Philadelphia's population died, essentially dashed the city's hopes of remaining the national (or even the state) capital. The cause of the disease was unknown, and, with additional outbreaks following almost annually, many in Congress (and elsewhere) suspected there was something unhealthy about Philadelphia's climate or water.

By the end of Washington's second term, and after an expenditure of more than \$110,000, the Presidential Mansion on 9th Street was finally completed.¹²² The new building was enormous. In terms of square footage it was more than three times the size of the Market Street house and more

¹¹⁸ Philadelphia Deed Book D-46, 298, March 18, 1795.

¹¹⁹ 1798 Federal Direct Tax ledger. Copy in the 500 Market Street/Washington Mansion File. Philadelphia Historical Commission.

¹²⁰ Philadelphia Deed Book D-45, 422, Dec. 22, 1794. Kid's deed gave him the right to use "the Westernmost Wall of the Messuage occupied by the President" as a party wall, "and to Break holes and lay Joists therein and to build thereon Respectively without any Compensation therefor . . ." so long as a four-foot alleyway between the properties was kept at ground level.

¹²¹ Dr. William Thornton, the physician and gentleman-architect best known as the designer of the U.S. Capitol building, joked about the owner of the new house: "Kid has built a fine house too. Cooks and barbers make a great display. I could not but remember when Kid was building his house the passage in the Bible 'and the Kid shall lie down between the Lion [Washington] and the Wolf [Robert Morris]'. The Millenium must be near at hand." Thornton to Alexander White, ca. March 7, 1796, *The Papers of William Thornton*, ed. C. M. Harris (1 vol. to date, Charlottesville, Va., 1995), 1:388-89.

¹²² The best study of the 9th Street Presidential Mansion is Dennis C. Kurjack's "The 'President's House' in Philadelphia," *Pennsylvania History* 20 (1953), 380-94.

than twice the size of Independence Hall. The governor of Pennsylvania somewhat desperately tendered the mansion to President-elect Adams at whatever "the rent for which you might obtain any other suitable house in Philadelphia."¹²³ Adams declined the offer, replying that "I entertain great doubts whether, by a candid construction of the Constitution of the United States, I am at liberty to accept it without the intention and authority of Congress . . ." ¹²⁴ Perhaps to increase the pressure on him to occupy the grand mansion—a move which might have buoyed Philadelphia's sinking chances of remaining the national capital—the city doubled the annual rent on the Market Street house to £1,000, Pennsylvania currency (about \$2,666). The new president stood firm, and moved into the Market Street house in mid-March 1797. The Adamses kept a smaller household staff than the Washingtons and their entertaining seems to have been more modest (Washington outspent his salary most of the years he was president, while his successor managed to save more than 15 percent of his). The Residence Act of 1790 called for the District of Columbia to officially become the national capital on the first Monday of December 1800. After a stay on his farm in Massachusetts, Adams moved to the new Federal City on November 1.

Adams occupied the President's House in Philadelphia until late May 1800. Within weeks of his departure, it was leased to John Francis, the proprietor of a boarding house in which Adams and Jefferson had each lodged during their vice-presidencies, and the former President's House became Francis's Union Hotel. Mrs. Adams actually stayed at the house-cum-hotel on her way south from Massachusetts, following her husband to the new capital: "I arrived in this City last Evening & came to the old House now occupied by Francis as a Hotel. Tho the furniture and arrangement of the House is changed I feel more at home here than I should any where else in the city, and when sitting with my son & other friends who call to see me, I can scarcely persuade myself that tomorrow I must quit it, for an unknown & an unseen abode."¹²⁵

The Philadelphia Directory for 1801 lists the street numbers and occu-

¹²³ Governor Thomas Mifflin to President-elect John Adams, March 3, 1797, *Pennsylvania Archives* (9th ser., 10 vols., Harrisburg, 1931–35) 2:1228.

¹²⁴ Charles Francis Adams, ed., *The Works of John Adams* (10 vols., Boston, 1850–56), 8:531.

¹²⁵ Mitchell, *New Letters of Abigail Adams*, 254–55. The unknown and unseen abode was the White House.

pants of this section of Market Street:

HIGH STREET

180 [512 Market]	Henry Sheaff, wine merchant
184 [518 Market]	Anthony and John Kennedy, merchants [The brothers and heirs of Andrew Kennedy who had died in 1800, now owners of the President's House.]
190 [524–30 Market]	John Francis, hotel [the Union Hotel, occupying the President's House]
192 [532–34 Market]	Robert Kid, copper merchant [no longer a hairdresser?]
194 [SE corner, 6th and Market]	Joshua B. Bond, merchant [the Stedman-Galloway House] ¹²⁶

Over the next decade, there would be changes almost every year in the occupants or the ownership of these properties and those around them.

The Market Street hotel appears not to have been a success, and Francis relinquished the lease after only three years. The once-grand house became a white elephant, out of place on a block which was rapidly becoming part of the commercial core of the growing city. The market sheds down the center of High Street were extended to 6th Street in 1810, and ran directly in front of the house.¹²⁷ In the first quarter of the nineteenth century, the facade of the President's House was stripped of much of its architectural ornament, the first story broken up into stores, and its upper stories converted into a boarding house.

In 1823, John Fanning Watson attempted to recapture his memory of the building from before the changes to its exterior. Perhaps realizing his own limitations as an artist, he hired W. L. Breton to make illustrations for the first published edition of his *Annals*, including a view of the President's House as Watson remembered it.

William L. Breton (ca. 1772–1855) was an Englishman who had come

¹²⁶ Cornelius William Stafford, *The Philadelphia Directory for 1801* (Philadelphia, 1801), 15. Microfiche XMF Wa O1, HSP. Note that the street number of the PH has changed back to 190 High, and that Kid's house is now 192 High Street.

¹²⁷ "The last addition [to the market sheds] from Fourth to Sixth streets, was made in 1810." James Mease, *The Picture of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1811), 117.

to Philadelphia by 1824, an amateur artist who drew dozens of early views of the city.¹²⁸ Breton, often at Watson's behest, recorded buildings which were still standing, sometimes just before their demolition, and buildings which were no longer extant based on the descriptions in the *Annals* manuscript and other sources.

There are three Breton watercolor sketches of the President's House. Two are identical—one in the collection of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania and the other at the Athenaeum of Philadelphia. The third sketch reportedly was in the collection of the Atwater Kent Museum, although at least two recent searches have failed to locate it.¹²⁹ While all these views are conjectural and vary in minor details, the Atwater Kent sketch is probably the most accurate version since it best agrees with a contemporaneous watercolor of the house by another artist (see below), and it was the view copied by Breton for the lithographs which illustrated the first edition of Watson's *Annals* (1830) (see fig. 1).

Lithographs are made by drawing on stone with crayon, a process which gives a more painterly image than a woodcut, but one which is impractical for repeated editions since the stones are usually wiped clean and reused for other illustrations. According to Martin Snyder, one of the lithographic stones cracked while printing the 1830 *Annals*, ruining four illustrations. It is likely that the view of the President's House was one of those ruined, since some copies of the first edition have one Breton lithograph of the building, and the rest have another. Perhaps because of this accident, Watson switched to woodcuts to illustrate later editions of the *Annals*.¹³⁰

While Breton's lithographs were quite elegant, the 1844 woodcut of the house by Thomas H. Mumford which illustrated the second and all subsequent editions of the *Annals* was comparatively primitive, and made what probably had once been the largest house in Philadelphia look small. Efforts to correct the unprepossessing image shown in the Mumford woodcut, and the memory of a much grander building may have led to later, more fantastical, views of the house.

¹²⁸ The best study of Breton is still Martin P. Snyder's "William L. Breton, Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia Artist," *PMHB* 85 (1961), 178–209.

¹²⁹ The missing AKM watercolor is illustrated in Richard M. Ketchum's *The World of George Washington* (New York, 1974), 228. The HSP and Athenaeum watercolors can be viewed at "Places in Time": www.brynmawr.edu/iconog.

¹³⁰ Snyder, "William L. Breton," 194.

Andrew Kennedy, who bought the President's House from Robert Morris, owned it for fewer than five years. He died unmarried in February 1800, leaving most of his estate to his brother Anthony.¹³¹ Anthony Kennedy built a four-story store on the eastern side of the house in what had been the wood yard, probably in 1804.¹³² The deed for this property included 4½ inches (one brick's thickness) of the eastern wall of the President's House, which became a party wall shared by both structures.¹³³ In the *Philadelphia Directory* Kennedy's newly-built store was listed as "next 188 High Street" in 1804, and "190 High Street" thereafter.¹³⁴

By 1805, the south side of this block of Market Street seems to have been entirely built up. The following listings from *The Philadelphia Directory for 1805* show how the area had changed in only four years:

180 High [512-14 Market] [182 High (516 Market)]	Sheaff Henry, wine merchant <i>no listing found, owned by Henry Pepper in 1805]</i>
184 High [518 Market]	Seegar David, confectioner
186 High [520 Market]	Vanuxem James, merchant
188 High [522 Market]	Thomson G. merchant
190 High [524 Market]	Smith Wm. W. merchant [wood yard]
centre 190 High [526-30 Market]	Turnbull William, merchant [eastern half of President's House]
next 192 High [526-30 Market]	Clifford Thomas, merchant [western half of President's House]
192 High [532-34 Market]	Henry Alexander, merchant [Kid House]
SE corner, 6th & Market	Haga Godfrey & Co. merchants [Sted- man-Galloway House] ¹³⁵

Anthony Kennedy died in 1828, and in April 1832 his heirs sold 526-30

¹³¹ Mary Selden Kennedy, *Seldens of Virginia and Allied Families* (2 vols., New York, 1911), 1:392.

¹³² In February 1856, a number of letters to the editor were published in a Philadelphia newspaper debating exactly where on Market Street the PH had stood. One of the correspondents, "Lang Syne, Jr.," (a.k.a. Charles A. Poulson, see below), mentions that the building at 524 Market Street has the date "1804" imprinted on the rain head of its downspout. "Washington's Mansion," *Sunday Dispatch*, Feb. 24, 1856, 2, Microfilm XN 35:3, HSP.

¹³³ Philadelphia Deed Book D-46, 298, March 18, 1795.

¹³⁴ *Philadelphia Directory*, Microfiche XMF Wa O1, HSP.

¹³⁵ James Reynolds, *The Philadelphia Directory for 1805* (Philadelphia, 1805). Note that the PH property now has three street numbers—the wood yard and each half of the main house now have separate addresses.



Fig. 9. "Washington's Residence, High Street, Philadelphia." The architectural features of the first story of the President's House were removed as early as 1804 when the building was converted into stores. This view shows the building just prior to demolition. Watercolor by William G. Mason. Dated May 1, 1832. Private collection.

Market Street to Nathaniel Burt,¹³⁶ an Irish-born merchant who had run a dry-goods store at the southwest corner of 6th and Market Streets during the previous decade. Burt intended to tear down the building which had been the President's House and replace it with stores. This threat of possibly imminent demolition may have inspired William G. Mason to make a watercolor sketch of the house.

William G. Mason (1797–1872) was an artist, drawing teacher, and wood engraver who ran a stationery store on Chestnut Street near 2d. His watercolor sketch (fig. 9) shows him to have been an excellent draftsman. This is the most important view of the President's House (or what became

¹³⁶ Philadelphia Deed Book AM-25, 202, April 12, 1832.

of it), and the closest thing to an elevation of the facade known to exist. It is dated May 1, 1832, two-and-a-half weeks after Burt bought the property. The sketch shows the house in splendid isolation on an open plain. In reality it was part of a crowded row of stores on what may have been the most heavily-congested commercial street in Philadelphia.

Mason's sketch confirms many of the architectural features that one sees in Breton's views—the four-bay facade, the boxed cornice with modillions, the “eared” window frames, the stone belt course coinciding with the sills of the second-story windows, the parapets (low walls rising above and running parallel to the roof on the gable ends)—but there are other features on which the views differ. Mason shows the house with twin dormers, as do Watson's 1823 sketch, Breton's three watercolors, and one of his two lithographs.¹³⁷ Mason also shows the house with twin chimney stacks on each of the gable ends, and a decked gable roof—moderately steeply-pitched in the front, which then takes a step up to a roof deck behind the dormers. The Breton views show a single massive chimney stack on each gable end and a simple double-pitched roof rising to a high peak.

Breton and Mason made their views within no more than four and possibly as few as two years of each other, and it is unlikely that the chimneys and roof were changed in that time. The differences in the views make sense if the house possessed the two twin chimney stacks shown by Mason, and Breton (or Watson) made the erroneous assumption that the stacks closest to Market Street had been the house's original chimneys (marking the original peak of the roof), and that the stacks in the rear were a later (post-President's House) addition. If Watson or Breton indeed made this assumption, it would explain the shallow depth of the building in the HSP and Athenaeum sketches, especially if Breton had mistakenly thought (or been told) that the original house had been one-room deep, and the depth increased to two rooms when the building was altered for commercial purposes.

The motives of the artists must also be considered. Breton was being paid to portray the building as the President's House, or, more precisely, to represent Watson's recollection of how the President's House looked some

¹³⁷ One of the two Breton lithographs shows the house without dormers. It is the writer's conjecture that this lithograph was the second one drawn for the *Annals* (after the first was ruined), that the dormers and other details missing from it may have been the result of its having been a rush job, and that these minor differences are more likely to have been mistakes than corrections.

thirty-five years earlier. Mason seems to have drawn the building as he saw it, documenting it before its demolition. Where differences occur, it is the writer's belief that the details of the Mason sketch should be given the more weight.

Nathaniel Burt did have the President's House torn down, and built three narrow, brick, four-story stores within the same frontage—192, 192½, and 194 High Street.¹³⁸ Most of the information about the demolition comes from the 1875 address by his son, Nathaniel Burt II (1822–1893), to the Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Burt states: "The building had long been occupied in the upper part as a boarding house, and on the first floor by a confectioner and others. Everything was in decay, and of no pecuniary value, except for the ground. In the year 1833 the old buildings were razed to the ground: no vestige of them remains on the premises, excepting on the Minor street front a portion of the old coach-house wall was incorporated into the new stores erected on that street. On the Market street front the ground was occupied by three stores, now 526, 528, and 530 Market. No. 530, the largest of these, extending through to Minor and including the wall just alluded to . . ."¹³⁹

Many historians have relied on this address for details regarding the house, but there are several points on which Burt, who was remembering events which had taken place more than forty years earlier, was mistaken. For instance, the "demolition" of the President's House took place in 1832 rather than in 1833, at a time when he was about ten years old.¹⁴⁰ And his assertion that, "No vestige of [the buildings] remains on the premises . . ." is not quite true.

Nathaniel Burt I probably did not tear down the four-story exterior side walls of the main house.¹⁴¹ Save the peak of the gable, the eastern wall unquestionably remained since it was a party wall shared with, partially deeded to, and holding up the floors and roof of 524 Market Street. It is

¹³⁸ John Fanning Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia* (2d ed., 2 vols., Philadelphia, 1844), 2:498. Note that the street numbers of the property (as of 1844) have changed again.

¹³⁹ Burt II, *Washington Mansion*, 33.

¹⁴⁰ The insurance survey for Nathaniel Burt's newly-built stores, which replaced the PH on the site, is dated Sept. 9, 1832. Franklin Fire Insurance, survey no. 578, HSP (hereafter, 1832 insurance survey).

¹⁴¹ "[Nathaniel Burt] bought the presidential mansion . . . where Washington spent eight [sic, six and one-half] years of his life as head of the nation. Mr. Burt transformed the building into . . . stores, leaving only the side walls standing . . ." John W. Jordan, ed., *Encyclopedia of Pennsylvania Biography* (32 vols., New York, 1914–67), 13:162.

likely that almost all of the western wall also remained, since Kid's deed gave the owner of 532 the right to use it as a party wall, and the Market Street frontage described in Burt's deed included only 7 inches (one and a half bricks) of the wall's 14-inch thickness.¹⁴² Alexander Henry had owned Robert Kid's house since 1804,¹⁴³ and he bought the four-foot alley between the properties from the Kennedy heirs in February 1832.¹⁴⁴ No evidence has been found that Henry (or any of the previous owners) had exercised the right to build over the alley and use the western wall of the President's House as a shared party wall up until this time.

Nathaniel Burt had the President's House completely gutted—the facade torn off, all three floors, the attic, and the roof removed, and the north-south brick wall down the middle of the house demolished. The house's exterior foundation walls remained—except, perhaps, for the south wall—and became part of the foundations for the new stores. The cellar was expanded southward by nearly 50 percent by excavating into the old paved yard and where the piazza and kitchen had stood. The enlarged cellar was divided into thirds, front to back, by 14-inch brick walls which rose, on their north ends, to about the same height as the old cornice line. Three brick, four-story stores, each 15 feet in width (including the party walls) and 75 feet in depth, were squeezed into the same Market Street frontage as the old main house.¹⁴⁵

Burt reportedly removed several items from the President's House before he had it gutted, including the mantel from the second floor front parlor, the front door locks, various doorknobs, and a fanlight. He had these items installed in the house he was building for himself at 1203 Walnut Street.¹⁴⁶ This Walnut Street house remained in the Burt family for over a century.

The Market Street stores were also to remain in the Burt family's

¹⁴² The Burt deed seems to formalize the ownership of half of the thickness of the wall between 530 and 532 Market Street by each side. The overall frontage of the main house was 45 feet 8½ inches. Subtracting the 4½ inches of the eastern wall of the PH deeded to 524, and the 40-foot 9-inch frontage described in the Burt deed, leaves 7 inches of the western wall of the PH not included in the property bought by Burt. See Burt deed.

¹⁴³ Philadelphia Deed Book EF-19, 202, Sept. 28, 1804.

¹⁴⁴ Philadelphia Deed Book AM-24, 417-20, Feb. 3, 1832.

¹⁴⁵ 1832 insurance survey.

¹⁴⁶ Struthers Burt, *Philadelphia: Holy Experiment* (New York, 1945), 299 n. Nathaniel Burt V, the son of Struthers, remembers the 1203 Walnut Street house as having had two fanlights—one over the front door, and the other over the door of an interior vestibule. He believes that both were probably destroyed when the house was demolished in the 1930s.

possession for more than a century. Alexander Henry tore down Kid's house and replaced it with two four-story stores (532 and 534 Market Street) similar to Burt's, and the western wall of the President's House became a *shared* party wall sometime before 1850.¹⁴⁷

Not everyone agreed with Watson's memory of the President's House. Around 1850, about the time of the fiftieth anniversary of Washington's death, there were conflicting theories about exactly where it had stood, how large it had been, how it had looked, and what (if anything) remained of it.

Rufus Wilmot Griswold (1815–1857) wrote a history of "Society" in New York and Philadelphia in the early republic. In it he described the President's House in Philadelphia (*italics added*): "Mr. Morris's house was on the south side of High street, near Fifth street. It was three stories high, and about *thirty-two feet wide*, with a front displaying four windows in the second as well as in the third story, and three in the first—two on one side of the hall and one on the other—and a single door, approached by three heavy steps of gray stone. On each side of the house were vacant lots, used as a garden, and containing trees and shrubbery."¹⁴⁸

On a first reading, Griswold's statement that the house had been only 32 feet wide seems unaccountable. He gives no source for his information and he is the first person to make the claim in print. Griswold seems to have made the erroneous assumption that two of Burt's narrow stores (528 and 530 Market) represented the width of the original house, and that the third narrow store (526 Market) had been the wood yard. And indeed, the modest dwelling shown in the Mumford woodcut that illustrated the second edition of Watson's *Annals* (1844) looks much more like a 32-foot-wide building than a 45-foot-wide one. Griswold's error was repeated by later authors,¹⁴⁹ and other historians would become similarly confused.

Richard Rush (1780–1859), the author of the memoir *Washington in*

¹⁴⁷ An 1850 photograph looking north from the tower of Independence Hall shows the rear facades of Henry's stores and Burt's stores, with no space between the buildings. See Robert F. Looney, *Old Philadelphia in Early Photographs, 1839–1914* (New York, 1976), iv, pl. 3. The most complete mid-nineteenth-century view of the block comes from the 1859 *Baxter's Panoramic Business Directory*, which can be viewed at "Places in Time": <http://www.brynmawr.edu/iconog>. The main house of the PH property occupied the same frontage as the fourth, fifth, and sixth buildings from the right. Tower Hall (at center) and the two properties on each side of it comprised the frontage of the walled garden.

¹⁴⁸ Griswold, *The Republican Court*, 240.

¹⁴⁹ Jordan (erroneously) states that the address of the President's House had been "Nos. 528–30 Market street." *Encyclopedia of Pennsylvania Biography*, 13:162.

Domestic Life (1857), wrote: "Walking lately down Market street, from the western part of the city, I looked about, after passing Sixth street, for the former residence of General Washington. I thought I had discovered it, though greatly metamorphosed, in a house some half dozen doors below Sixth street, on the south side, which still retained a little of the old fashion in front, with dentels [*sic*] pendant from the cornice; but, on inquiry, I found that it was not. All is now gone. Not a trace is left of that once stately and venerable residence . . . I could find no vestige of the Philadelphia domicil[e] of Washington, relatively recent as was the day when his living presence sanctified it."¹⁵⁰ The building that Rush initially mistook for the remains of the President's House was probably Anthony Kennedy's 1804 store at 524 Market Street, which had been built on a larger scale than the Burt stores, with higher ceilings, taller windows, more ornate decoration, and a dentilled cornice. Rush was not the only one to make this mistake.

Edward Everett (1794–1865) of Boston, a famous orator and former president of Harvard, gave an address on Washington, sponsored by the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, at the Musical Fund Hall in Philadelphia in April 1856. The purpose of the lecture was to raise money for the purchase of Mount Vernon by the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, and the interest in it was so great that it was repeated twice the following year at the newly-opened Academy of Music.¹⁵¹ According to a Philadelphia newspaper report, in the address Everett either stated or implied that the President's House was still standing.¹⁵² Rush, who shared the stage with Everett, had written his lament about the house quoted above at least two years earlier, so it is unlikely that he was the source of this misinformation. But there were others who mistook the store at 524 Market Street for part of the President's House, and may have unwittingly misled Everett.

Charles A. Poulson (1789–1866), a writer, newspaper editor, and antiquarian, was certain that the building at 524 Market Street—the store that Anthony Kennedy had built in 1804—had been an original part of the President's House, and that the house had been much grander than the

¹⁵⁰ Richard Rush, "A Sketch, in Part from Memory," quoted in Griswold, *The Republican Court*, 242–43.

¹⁵¹ Hampton L. Carson, *A History of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania* (2 vols., Philadelphia, 1940), 1:237–38.

¹⁵² See "Mr. Edward Everett's Oration—Addresses by Messrs. Ingersoll and Rush." *Cumming's Evening Bulletin* (a.k.a. *Evening Bulletin*), April 5, 1856, 1.

Mumford woodcut and much larger than the Griswold description. Poulson worked for his father's newspaper, *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser*, the largest in Philadelphia, and wrote a column on American history with an emphasis on Philadelphia. He was also the first librarian of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, a post he held for thirteen years (1835–48).¹⁵³ Relying on the listings in the *Philadelphia Directory*, on his own memory and those of others, Poulson declared in 1850 that 524 Market Street had been the eastern section of the original house.¹⁵⁴ Poulson's theory was that the President's House had been a traditional five-bay, center hall, double house, and that the original building had extended from 524 to 528 Market Street. This would have made its frontage about 56 feet.¹⁵⁵

The modern street numbers were introduced just before the consolidation of the city and county of Philadelphia in 1854, and High Street was officially renamed Market Street at the same time. 524 Market Street had had the sole use of the number 190 High Street only since 1805, but Poulson concocted an elaborate proof which seemed to show that the old street numbers on the block had not changed since Washington's time.¹⁵⁶ Poulson was considered an expert on Philadelphia history, and it seems likely that it was he who misled Everett about the house. Poulson's theory contradicted Watson, and while the former made his own private drawings of the President's House, he waited until after the annalist's death to publish his vision of the building (fig. 10).¹⁵⁷ Poulson himself died soon after this sketch

¹⁵³ Carson, *History*, 1:216. Dozens of volumes of Charles A. Poulson's notes, writings, newspaper clippings, and his own illustrations are in the collection of the Library Company of Philadelphia.

¹⁵⁴ "The Eastern portion of this house is still standing (although altered in front), and occupied as a Store by Messrs Conover and Co. It was the former No. 190—now No. 524 Market Street. C.A.P." Inscription on the verso of a watercolor sketch by Poulson entitled "Washington's Mansion, 190 High Street," and dated "April 1850." "Drawings & Watercolors—Poulson, Charles A.," Print Department, Library Company of Philadelphia.

¹⁵⁵ The Macomb House in New York City, where President Washington lived from February to August 1790, reportedly had had a frontage of 56 feet, which may have contributed to the confusion about the Philadelphia house. Decatur, *Private Affairs of George Washington*, 148.

¹⁵⁶ Poulson's theory about the PH and his erroneous "proof" were published in letters to a Philadelphia newspaper several weeks before Everett's address. All the other correspondents (and the editor) disagreed with Poulson, and claimed (correctly) that the house had stood at what is now 526–30 Market Street. The question of four bays versus five bays was not discussed. See "Washington's Mansion," *Sunday Dispatch*, Feb. 24, 1856, and March 9, 1856.

¹⁵⁷ Poulson's theory is also outlined in the preface of the 1865 book: "It is proper to say here that part of the house which is shown here as the one where Washington lived, *is still standing*, and forms part of the store which is now erected on its former site." William Brotherhead, ed., *Sanderson's Biography*

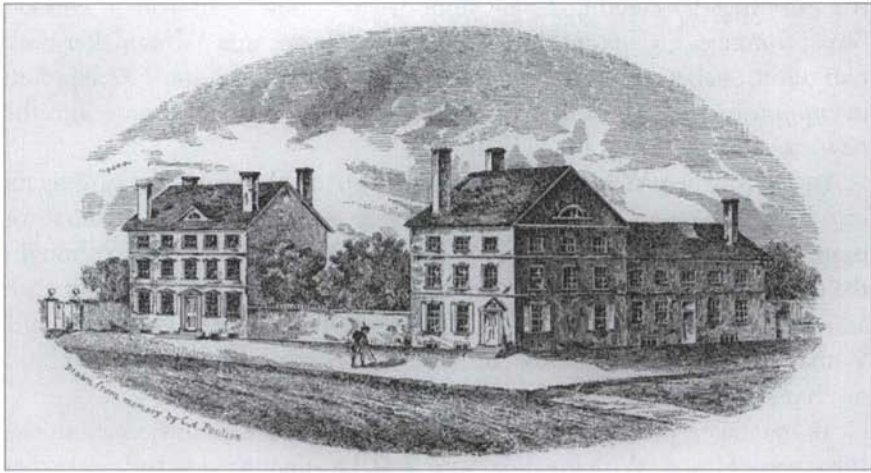


Fig. 10. "Residence of Geo. Washington and R. Morris, south-east corner of Sixth and Market Streets, Philadelphia." The notation at the bottom left reads, "Drawn from memory by C. A. Poulson." Wood engraving by Charles A. Poulson and an unknown engraver. From William Brotherhead, ed., *Sanderson's Biography of the Signers* (Philadelphia: 1865), 337.

was published, and no evidence has been found in the years immediately following of any effort to prove his five-bay house (or Watson's four-bay one) wrong or right. But in the 1870s, as the approach of the Centennial inspired a burgeoning interest in American history, the erroneous Poulson sketch received a tremendous and unexpected boost in visibility, if not credibility, from an unlikely source—the merchant John Wanamaker.

Wanamaker, the founder of the great department store which bore his name, opened his first store, "Oak Hall," in 1861 in the second story of the McNeille Building at the southeast corner of 6th and Market, built on the site of the old Stedman-Galloway House. He and his partner Nathan Brown soon occupied all six stories of the building, and expanded it southward to Minor Street. In 1871, Wanamaker more than doubled the size of Oak Hall by expanding it eastward into Alexander Henry's stores at 532–34 Market Street, building them up to six stories and back to Minor Street. He unified

the buildings by erecting a new stone facade along all 65 feet of Market Street frontage.¹⁵⁸ Circumstantial evidence indicates that Wanamaker built two additional stories atop the party wall between 530 and 532 Market, incorporating the four-story western wall of the President's House into the new six-story eastern wall of "Oak Hall."¹⁵⁹

In 1873, when Wanamaker wished to expand the store eastward again into 526–30 Market Street, the Burts either refused to sell, or held out for more than he was willing to pay.¹⁶⁰ The following year, Wanamaker bought the recently-abandoned freight depot of the Pennsylvania Railroad at 13th and Market Streets, and in 1876 he opened it as his "Grand Depot." Wanamaker's world-famous department store, completed in 1911, was built on that same site.

Wanamaker, probably unintentionally, added to the confusion about the President's House. With great patriotic zeal, he announced to the world that Oak Hall (532–36 Market Street) stood on the site of Washington's "White House." Wanamaker embraced and heavily promoted the Poulson sketch, perhaps without really understanding it—Poulson's theory that the house had stood at 524–28 Market Street actually contradicted the claim that Oak Hall stood on the exact site of the President's House. Regardless of the facts, associating the Wanamaker name with that of Washington was good for business, and the Poulson sketch was used in store promotions for more than thirty years.¹⁶¹

Amidst the confusion, attempts were made to get at the truth about the President's House. In 1875, the councilors of HSP solicited Nathaniel Burt II to give an address on the house, writing in their invitation: "Some confusion of idea, as you are aware, has prevailed of late among antiquaries, as to the exact situation and history of the house, in Market street, below

¹⁵⁸ An 1879 engraving of the block by Baxter showing the expanded Oak Hall store can be viewed at "Places in Time": <http://www.brynmawr.edu/iconog>.

¹⁵⁹ It is unlikely that the western wall of the PH was torn down and a new six-story wall built in its place since this would have meant the gutting of both Burt's store at 530 Market and the section of Wanamaker's store contained in 532 (the party wall supported half of the floors and roofs of each). The eastern wall of Oak Hall does not seem to have been built side by side with the western wall of the PH. A photograph of Oak Hall from 1936, after the top three stories of 530 had been removed, shows a single wall between the properties, rather than two walls side-by-side. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 21, 1936. Figure 15 (below) also seems to show the remnants of a single wall between the buildings.

¹⁶⁰ *Golden Book of the Wanamaker Stores* (Philadelphia, 1911), 35.

¹⁶¹ The writer has found five examples of Wanamaker store advertisements using the Poulson sketch in the Wanamaker Papers at HSP, and elsewhere. Unfortunately, most of these items are undated.

Sixth, occupied by Washington, while the seat of Government was in this city. Mr. Everett, in his discourse delivered here, not many years since, seemed, according to a printed report of it, to have considered the house as then standing . . . We question the accuracy of that impression. Claims are now made for different sites, below Sixth street, as the honored spot . . . We suppose you to be now the owner of the lot on which the house formerly stood, and if this is so, no one can know the history better than you."¹⁶²

Nathaniel Burt II accepted the invitation to speak. His address was modest and well-intentioned, but it may have been more inspirational than educational. Burt relied heavily on and unfortunately repeated many of the errors of Griswold's *The Republican Court*, to which he added a healthy dose of his own patriotic blather. His most important contribution was to bring to light the 1785 (or earlier) groundplan of the property (fig. 3), the history of the Burt family's association with the house, the list of items in the 1795 Robert Morris-Andrew Kennedy contract, and the news that the second-story front drawing room mantel and the front door locks had survived. The Historical Society published the address (which included a facsimile of the groundplan) later that year.

Nathaniel Burt II resolved the debate over the location and size of the President's House, but he did not address the question of whether it had had four or five bays. In Centennial publications, illustrations of the five-bay Poulson sketch were almost as prevalent as the four-bay Watson-based views.¹⁶³ Perhaps in reaction to the growing popularity of the Poulson sketch, Philadelphia historians rallied around the Watson-based views. Thompson Westcott used the Mumford woodcut to illustrate the chapter on the President's House in his 1877 book on Philadelphia buildings,¹⁶⁴ and he and J. Thomas Scharf used a new four-bay illustration by an unknown artist for their 1884 three-volume *History of Philadelphia*.¹⁶⁵ Charles Henry Hart wrote a multipaged description of the house for one of the first issues of this magazine, and got almost everything right, including the four-bay facade.¹⁶⁶ An illustration of a four-bay house, based on Mumford's woodcut, appeared

¹⁶² Councilors of HSP to Nathaniel Burt II, Jan. 6, 1875. Burt II, *Washington Mansion*, 5.

¹⁶³ In the clippings collections at HSP, there are almost equal numbers of Poulson- and Watson-based illustrations.

¹⁶⁴ Westcott, *Historic Mansions*, 251.

¹⁶⁵ Scharf and Westcott, *History of Philadelphia*, 1:351.

¹⁶⁶ Charles Henry Hart, "Mary White—Mrs. Robert Morris," *PMHB* 2 (1878), 173–75.



Fig. 11. "Market Street between Fifth & Sixth Streets, south side." Photograph, ca. 1903-08. *Philadelphia Rapid Transit Photo Albums*. Gift of Clarence D. Jones, 1966. Society Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

on the front page of the issue of *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* commemorating the centennial of the Constitution.¹⁶⁷

At the close of the nineteenth century, there seems to have been a consensus among Philadelphia historians on where the President's House had stood, and that its facade had had four bays. A committee from the Pennsylvania Society of Sons of the Revolution, which included the great Washington expert William Spohn Baker, correctly concluded that the President's House had stood at 526-30 Market Street. The "Sons" erected a large bronze plaque on 528 Market Street in 1897—the centenary of the end of Washington's presidency (fig. 11).¹⁶⁸ All of the major books on the

¹⁶⁷ *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, Sept. 17, 1887, 1670.

¹⁶⁸ Figure 11 shows the facades of the three narrow stores built by Nathaniel Burt in 1832; 524 Market Street (built in 1804) is to the left, Oak Hall (expanded in 1871) is to the right. The plaque is

city's history were in agreement, and there was a large new printing of Watson's *Annals*. Unfortunately, Poulson's erroneous five-bay vision of the house was about to get a major boost from outside Philadelphia.

December 14, 1899, was the one-hundredth anniversary of the death of George Washington. Perhaps in anticipation of the event, Leila Herbert, a vice-regent of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association, wrote a chatty new book about the president and his houses—*The First American, His Homes and His Households* (1899). Most of what Herbert wrote about the President's House in Philadelphia was correct. The problems arose from the illustration created for the book, an especially beguiling ink-and-wash drawing by English illustrator Harry Fenn, showing the house with a five-bay facade.¹⁶⁹ Fenn's drawing was basically a highly-polished version of the 1850 Poulson watercolor (see above, n. 154), but with the apparent imprimatur of the Mount Vernon Ladies' Association behind it, the Fenn illustration was accepted as an accurate view of the President's House.

At least one author tailored the facts to suit the fiction, or, rather, to the Poulson and Fenn versions of the house. John T. Faris, a Philadelphia writer on gardens and colonial buildings, while purporting to quote Charles Henry Hart, altered Hart's description of the house (italics added): "The mansion occupied by the President has been described by Charles Henry Hart thus: 'It was built of brick, three stories high, and the main building was *fifty-five feet six inches wide* by fifty-two deep . . .'¹⁷⁰ Forty years earlier, Hart had actually written in the *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* that the house was "forty-five feet six inches wide,"¹⁷¹ but that measurement matched neither the Poulson sketch nor the Fenn illustration. Faris's "correction" would be repeated by others, most notably thirty years later in the report to the United States Congress recommending the creation of what became Independence National Historical Park.¹⁷²

The Poulson sketch made enormous headway in the early twentieth

visible just to the left of the fire escape between the second-story windows of 528. I am indebted to Mark Frazier Lloyd, president of the Pennsylvania Society of Sons of the Revolution, for background information on the plaque.

¹⁶⁹ Leila Herbert, *The First American, His Homes and His Households* (New York, 1899), facing p. 78.

¹⁷⁰ John T. Faris, *The Romance of Old Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1918), 306.

¹⁷¹ Hart, "Mary White," 173. Hart was quoting the measurement from the 1785 (or earlier) groundplan of the house.

¹⁷² *Final Report to the United States Congress by the Philadelphia National Shrines Park Commission* (8 vols., Philadelphia, 1947), 1:262.

century, being published in such books as Rhoades's *The Story of Philadelphia*, Oberholtzer's *Robert Morris, Patriot and Financier*, his massive, four-volume *Philadelphia: A History of the City and Its People*, and his *Official Pictorial and Descriptive Souvenir Book of the Historical Pageant*, Matos's *Official Historical Souvenir—Philadelphia*, Lippincott's *Early Philadelphia, Its People, Life and Progress*, Jackson's *Market Street, Philadelphia*, Joyce's *Story of Philadelphia*, and Brandt and Gummere's *Byways and Boulevards in and about Historic Philadelphia*.¹⁷³ The writer has found only one book published in the first quarter of the twentieth century which used a four-bay, Watson-based illustration of the President's House. Ironically, it was a 1911 book published by John Wanamaker, the former champion of the five-bay Poulson sketch.¹⁷⁴

These authors were among the premier Philadelphia historians in the early twentieth century. Why did they, en masse, abandon the Watson-based views—the consensus of the generation before them—for the erroneous Poulson sketch? The answer may lie in a new and what might be termed a comprehensive theory, which seemed to reconcile the four-bay Watson-based views and the five-bay Poulson sketch, the different frontages of Griswold and Burt II, and (what appeared to have been) the three street numbers for the main house in the early *Philadelphia Directory*. The theory went something like this.¹⁷⁵ (1) The house that Mrs. Masters built in the 1760s had been 32 feet wide (Griswold), and had had a four-bay facade (Watson). The house had taken up two thirds of the frontage of the original

¹⁷³ Lillian Ione Rhoades, *The Story of Philadelphia* (New York, 1900), 284; Ellis Paxson Oberholtzer, *Robert Morris, Patriot and Financier* (New York, 1903), facing p. 226; Oberholtzer, *Philadelphia: A History of the City and Its People* (4 vols., Philadelphia, 1912), 1: facing p. 342; Oberholtzer, *Official Pictorial and Descriptive Souvenir Book of the Historical Pageant* (Philadelphia, 1912), facing p. 69; William W. Matos, *Official Historical Souvenir—Philadelphia, Its Founding and Development, 1683–1908* (Philadelphia, 1908), 383; Horace Mather Lippincott, *Early Philadelphia, Its People Life and Progress* (Philadelphia, 1917), facing p. 46; Joseph Jackson, *Market Street, Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1918), facing p. 104 (strangely, this book is illustrated with the five-bay Poulson sketch even though Jackson argues in the text in favor of the four-bay Watson view); J. St. George Joyce, *Story of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1919), 83; Francis Burke Brandt and Henry Volkmar Gummere, *Byways and Boulevards in and about Historic Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1925), 101.

¹⁷⁴ *Golden Book of Wanamaker Stores*, facing p. 42.

¹⁷⁵ The theory is outlined in a Nov. 13, 1952, letter from David H. Morgan to Harold Donaldson Eberlein in the 500 Market Street/Washington Mansion File at the Philadelphia Historical Commission. The rest is extrapolation by the writer. Although the originator of this comprehensive theory has not been identified, Ellis Paxson Oberholtzer seems to have been the first major historian to abandon the Watson-based four-bay views and adopt the five-bay Poulson sketch.

48-foot lot, and had stood at 528–30 Market Street (Jordan). (2) After the 1780 fire, Robert Morris rebuilt Mrs. Masters's house and expanded the whole building eastward by almost 50 percent to occupy the frontage of 526 Market. (3) The resulting house was 45 feet 6 inches wide (Burt II), had a five-bay facade (Poulson), and stood at 526–30 Market Street (Pa. Sons). This was the house in which Washington and Adams each lived as President. (4) Poulson may have been mistaken about the exact location and dimensions of the house, but his five-bay sketch came the closest to depicting the appearance of the building when it served as the President's House.

The advantages of this comprehensive theory were numerous and irresistible. It offered a logical explanation for everything, and like Pish-Tush in *The Mikado*, the conciliatory "I am right, and you are right, and everything is quite correct!" aspect of it was very appealing. It also resulted in a President's House which was symmetrical—an ideal of the flourishing Colonial Revival movement. Unfortunately, the historians and their comprehensive theory were wrong.

The repeated use of the erroneous Poulson sketch by these Philadelphia historians (not to mention historians elsewhere) had a snowball effect, turning it, over the course of less than a generation, into the generally accepted view for both the professionals and the public. Confidence in a five-bay version of the President's House probably reached its zenith in 1932 with the two-hundredth anniversary of Washington's birth, when the Poulson sketch was reprinted in numerous books and articles nationwide. It was the only illustration of the Philadelphia house used in the mammoth, five-volume *History of the George Washington Bicentennial Celebration*.¹⁷⁶

Watson's four-bay President's House had what might have appeared would be its last hurrah at the 1926 World's Fair, the Sesquicentennial exhibition in Philadelphia. R. Brognard Okie, an architect best remembered for the restoration of the Betsy Ross House and the re-creation of Pennsbury Manor (William Penn's mansion and estate), designed a re-creation of the President's House for an exhibit of demolished Philadelphia colonial buildings. It was built on the fairgrounds in South Philadelphia, at two-thirds scale, with a four-bay facade, and was based on one of the Breton

¹⁷⁶ *History of the George Washington Bicentennial Celebration* (5 vols., Washington, D.C., 1932), 2:195. This several-thousand-page work included a summation of all the scholarship on Washington, and was considered definitive.

watercolor sketches.¹⁷⁷ The Daughters of the American Revolution made "The Washington House," as they called it, their headquarters at the fair from June to December 1926. It was demolished after the Sesquicentennial exhibition was over.

Charles Abell Murphy (1865–1943), an amateur historian originally from Baltimore, was unconvinced by the re-creation of the President's House built for the sesquicentennial. He, like many others, continued to believe in the Poulson sketch and the Fenn illustration. In the early 1930s, the idea of creating an appropriate setting for Independence Hall and clearing land to the north of it for a park—what eventually became Independence Mall—began to gain momentum. Murphy had the idea that a re-creation of the President's House should be the centerpiece of the proposed park. And he really did mean it to be *in the center*. Based on a superficial and misguided reading of the 1801 *Philadelphia Directory*, Murphy claimed that the main house had stood at 518–20 Market Street and the wood yard at 516, which would have put the property almost on axis with Independence Hall.¹⁷⁸ The main house had actually been about eighty-eight feet west of the axis of Independence Hall, the centerline of the block.

Murphy may not have known much about history, but he did know something about publicity and building public support for a project—and about politics. It was the middle of the Depression and President Roosevelt was up for reelection. In the summer of 1936, Murphy wrapped himself in the flag and launched a publicity campaign. His stated goal was to create a project which would hire unemployed architects and woodworkers under the Works Progress Administration (WPA) to make scale models of the President's House and the other early "White Houses" for educational purposes. His unstated goal was to rebuild the house as he envisioned it, full-sized on Market Street, and an expert scale model would be a useful tool in raising money toward this end. Murphy made repeated appeals to Roosevelt's patriotism in the press,¹⁷⁹ and, not long before the election, the project was approved.

¹⁷⁷ Sarah D. Lowrie and Mabel Stewart Ludlum, *The Book of the Street*, "High Street" Old Philadelphia (Philadelphia, 1926), 29.

¹⁷⁸ In 1801, the Kennedy brothers (the owners of the PH) rented the building at 518 Market Street for their store, while the PH was occupied by Francis's Union Hotel. Murphy interpreted this Kennedy listing in the 1801 *Philadelphia Directory* to mean that the PH had stood at 518 Market Street. See above, n. 126.

¹⁷⁹ See *Catholic Standard and Times*, July 17, 1936, and *Evening Bulletin*, July 23, 1936.

David Howell Morgan (1886–1983) was brought in to manage the tongue-twisting Philadelphia Federal Historical Buildings Models Project. A Welsh-born architect who had worked in the offices of the Philadelphia firm of Cope and Stewardson, he had been the assistant director of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission from 1934 to 1936. He was active in the Philadelphia chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA) and later served as its president (1955–56). Morgan seemed to be a good choice for the project both for his artistic skills and his professional connections.

Historical research began at the end of June 1937, with three workers gathering all they could find on the house. Initially only six weeks were allotted for research. A large amount of data was amassed, and almost-daily progress reports were filed, so it is easy to track what the researchers knew and when.¹⁸⁰ Little original research was done. The workers mostly relied on published sources, which were often wrong, and the researchers failed to find some of the most important documents (such as the 1773 insurance survey, the Breton views, and the Mason watercolor sketch). The research was filtered through Morgan, whose preliminary design for the model is dated August 10, 1937. In mid-August, after the allotted time for research had run out, Morgan joined in researching the house. This may have been a cost-saving measure. In the course of a little over a year, the cost estimate for the "Models Project" had ballooned from \$5,777.64¹⁸¹ to \$26,625.14,¹⁸² even as the number of models to be built had been reduced from six to four.

Morgan made a comprehensive survey of design books, measured colonial houses around Philadelphia and elsewhere, and read (and wrote up progress reports on) everything he could find about Georgian buildings. He and his assistants reportedly prepared 114 pages of architectural drawings, with

¹⁸⁰ See David H. Morgan, *190 High Street, Philadelphia, Research Data 1937–1938*, Works Progress Administration Project #13341, Manuscript Dept., American Philosophical Society. This volume contains 234 of the progress reports. The writer has written an annotated summary and an introduction to the WPA notes, which have been added to the volume.

¹⁸¹ WPA Project Application, Aug. 18, 1936, Records of the WPA, RG 69, box 10, entry 764, National Archives, Washington, D.C. This was for twenty workers (plus the project head and an assistant) to build models of six buildings in three months. The budget included no money for researchers.

¹⁸² WPA Project Proposal, Sept. 9, 1937, WPA Project Folders, OP #465-23-3-415, microfilm reel 3264, National Archives, Washington, D.C. This was for thirty-nine workers (plus the project head and an assistant) to build models of four buildings in six months. The budget included money for researchers and office staff.

practically every detail based on a referenced eighteenth-century source.¹⁸³ Woodworkers were hired and construction of the model was begun, even though the research on the building had not been completed. Morgan himself became the primary researcher on the house, and he is listed as the author of more than 40 percent of the progress reports in the volume of research data.

Morgan believed in the comprehensive theory, and all of the physical evidence that he and the WPA workers found seemed to support it. Nathaniel Burt had divided the main house's perimeter foundations into thirds by the two brick party walls he had built between his stores; but Morgan assumed that Burt's 1832 walls had been original to the house, and dated back to Mrs. Masters.¹⁸⁴ The early nineteenth-century editions of the *Philadelphia Directory* had (or appeared to have had) three listings for the house—190 High, centre 190 High, and next 192 High.¹⁸⁵ By an almost cruel coincidence, the 1798 insurance policies divided the main house into thirds, front-to-back, with a single policy for each third, much as the 1773 insurance survey had divided it into quarters.¹⁸⁶ These divisions were made with imaginary lines, but Morgan took them literally. Mumford's woodcut, Griswold's 32-foot width, the three listings in the *Philadelphia Directory*, the "thirds" described in the 1798 insurance policies, and the measurements Morgan himself took in the basement of 530 Market Street all seemed to add up to an airtight case in support of the comprehensive theory.

In April 1938, about ten months into the research and almost six months into the model's final design and construction, Morgan traveled to the Library of Congress to read the George Washington-Tobias Lear correspondence about the house.¹⁸⁷ He should have realized then that he and the project were on the wrong track. Until Morgan read the Washington-Lear letters, he had no real evidence for a four-bay facade—only the tradition passed down from Watson. Had he or his researchers read the

¹⁸³ See "Women Organize to Effect 'Greenbelt Memorial' Hope," *Evening Public Ledger*, July 13, 1939, 18 (hereafter, Murphy article).

¹⁸⁴ "Checked dimensions then taken revealed that the frontage of the original house (prior to enlargement by Morris) had a foundation dimension of 31' . . ." Morgan letter. Morgan took this measurement from the 1767 western stone foundation wall of the house to Burt's 1832 brick wall separating 526 and 528 Market Street.

¹⁸⁵ See above, n. 135.

¹⁸⁶ See 1798 insurance policies.

¹⁸⁷ Morgan, *190 High Street*, sheets 196–214.

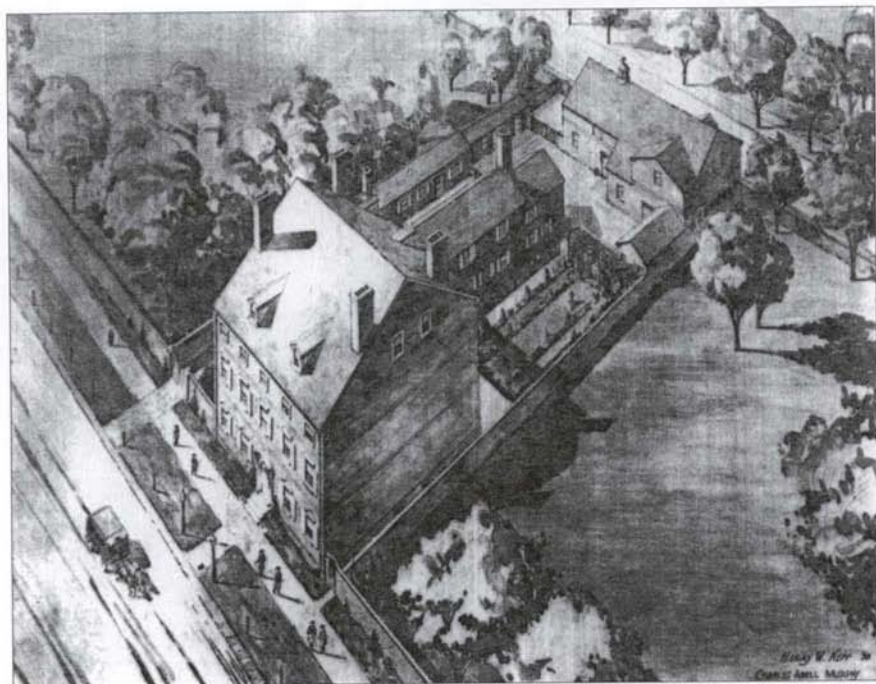


Fig. 12. "Robert Morris House (known as Washington Mansion) 190 High Street." Photostat of drawing by Harry W. Neff and Charles Abell Murphy (based on the designs of David H. Morgan). Dated "[19]38." Free Library of Philadelphia.

letters early in the process, or had they found the 1773 insurance survey or the Mason watercolor sketch, Morgan might have realized that the comprehensive theory was wrong in time to change his design for the model (fig. 12).

Morgan's decision to give the model five bays meant that every room within the main house had the wrong dimensions. The formal rooms were less than 16 feet wide (instead of 21+ feet), and the bow was substantially smaller than it had actually been. According to the WPA notes, by July 26, 1937, the researchers possessed a copy of Nathaniel Burt II's 1875 HSP address¹⁸⁸—which included the facsimile of the 1785 (or earlier) groundplan

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., sheet 26.

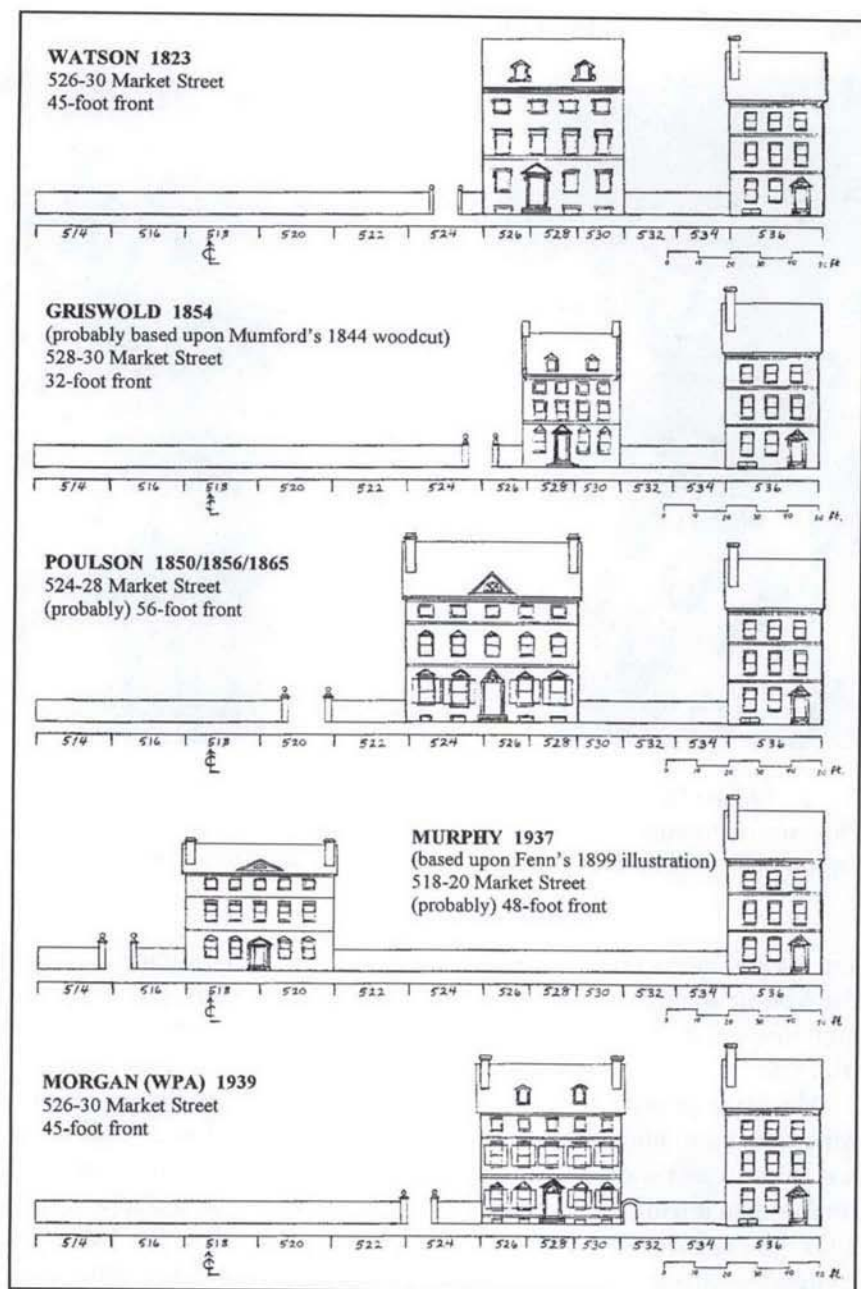


Fig. 13. Comparison of the Market Street elevations for five conjectural views of the President's House from the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. By the author.

of the property (fig. 3)—so Morgan had the map showing where the backbuildings had stood. He wrote that “we determined to give the map order of priority in authenticity,”¹⁸⁹ but he actually disregarded it. Morgan kept the dimensions the same but changed the location of every backbuilding for the model. The kitchen ell was moved 7 feet closer to the main house and the piazza was rotated by ninety degrees and moved 6 feet west. The coachhouse and stable were moved 24 feet west, and the bathhouse and servants hall were separated from the kitchen ell and placed on the eastern side of the wood yard. The icehouse was located 38 feet north of where it had actually been, and the well was placed in the wood yard (instead of the paved yard). The washhouse was rotated by ninety degrees, and Morgan erroneously made the room over it into Washington’s study.¹⁹⁰

Calling things to a halt and starting over in late-April 1938 might have resulted in the whole project’s cancellation, since it was already wildly over budget and not popular with local WPA officials. The project’s mission was to research and build models of *four* historic buildings and the President’s House was only the first of these. Blowing the whistle probably would have thrown dozens of people back onto the relief rolls and been an enormous professional embarrassment. Privately, Morgan prepared cost estimates for building a full-sized re-creation of the house based on his design for the model.¹⁹¹ A new national park was being proposed for the area surrounding Independence Hall, and the endorsement of the Philadelphia chapter of the AIA (perhaps, through Morgan’s influence) was secured for building a full-sized re-creation of the President’s House on its original site.¹⁹²

Based on his many months of painstaking work, it is not much of a conjecture to presume that Morgan hoped to be the architect of the re-creation. It would have been the most prestigious commission of his career. The WPA model may have been a fantasy with little or no historical value, but it was exquisite—beautifully crafted and thoroughly convincing. For a while it fooled almost everyone. Whether Morgan was aware of how wrong he had been about the house and decided to brazen it out, or whether he put on blinders and simply ignored the contradictory evidence in the Washington-Lear letters cannot be

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., sheet 222.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., sheet 66.

¹⁹¹ Morgan to Murphy, Aug. 13, 1938, 500 Market Street/Washington Mansion File, Philadelphia Historical Commission.

¹⁹² “Architects O.K. Project to Restore Morris House,” *Evening Bulletin*, Oct. 18, 1937.

determined.¹⁹³ Morgan left the WPA project before the President's House model was completed. (The relative size, location, and the number of bays for five conjectural views of the President's House from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including Morgan's, can be seen in figure 13.)¹⁹⁴

The Models Project continued under Morgan's successor as project head, Charles Abell Murphy, and models of the Presidential Mansion on 9th Street (where no president ever lived) and the Dove House in Germantown (where Washington lived during the 1793 yellow fever epidemic prior to moving to the Deshler-Morris House) were completed. The WPA model of the President's House was greeted with great fanfare when it was unveiled in June 1939. It was exhibited in Washington, D.C., and then was given to the Atwater Kent Museum in Philadelphia, where it remained on display for more than forty years.

Murphy became a member of the Independence Hall Association, presided over by Judge Edwin O. Lewis, the body which worked to create what is now Independence National Historical Park (INHP). He continued to lobby for building a full-sized re-creation of the President's House and launched several schemes toward that end, but he was never able to secure private funding or to find a sponsor for his proposals. Murphy attempted to create an "Independence Park Ladies' Association" patterned after the organization at Mount Vernon,¹⁹⁵

¹⁹³ Morgan's son was not born until the 1940s. He has no memory of the President's House model ever being discussed by his family. I thank him for his assistance.

¹⁹⁴ The elevations shown in figure 13 are presented in the order in which the conjectural views or descriptions of the PH were drawn or published. Watson's 1823 sketch comes the closest to getting the major details right—the location, the size of the house, and the four-bay facade. It is the writer's belief that Griswold's theory, published in 1854, that the house had been thirty-two feet wide (and had taken up two of Burt's stores), probably had been in circulation several years earlier. Poulson's watercolor sketch (dated April 1850) at the Library Company of Philadelphia, which grafted two of Burt's stores onto 524 Market Street to form an enormous PH, would seem to have been a reaction (or overreaction) to the small PH described by Griswold (and perhaps by others). If this is true, then Poulson's fantasy of a five-bay PH was the result of his ham-handed efforts to correct Griswold's misinformation—efforts which, ironically, themselves produced one hundred more years of misinformation.

To give a sense of the scale of all of these buildings, the Stedman-Galloway House (which was about the same size as the Powel House) is included at the southeast corner of 6th and Market Streets. The conjectural sketch of this house is based on the one-third of the building's Market Street facade visible in Breton's watercolor sketches of the PH (ca. 1828–30), drawn when the Stedman-Galloway House was still standing, and Poulson's watercolor sketch of it (dated April 30, 1860) at LCP, drawn after it had been demolished. The long garden wall to the east of the PH shows the extent of Morris's property on Market Street: 514–22 was the walled garden, 524 the wood yard, 526–30 the PH, 532–34 the alley and side yard, and 536 the Stedman-Galloway House. The centerline of the block is marked under 518.

¹⁹⁵ "First objective of the group is to rebuild the famous Robert Morris mansion which once stood at 528 High Street, now Market Street." Murphy article.

but nothing ever came of it. The drive to re-create the house effectively ended with his death in 1943.

The long confusion about the President's House was the key factor contributing to the destruction of what was left of the building. Both of the brick side walls of the President's House had been exposed by the demolition of Burt's stores in 1935 and stood visible for several years.¹⁹⁶ Had anyone recognized the walls for what they were (and been able to prove what they were), it is likely that they never would have been demolished. Documenting what remained of the President's House may not have been the mission of the Models Project, but almost all of the primary sources necessary to correctly identify the side walls (or to create an accurate model) were available to Morgan and his researchers—they just did not find them, did not understand what they had, or did not follow the facts.

Oak Hall was demolished by 1941 and replaced by a large, single-story building—Devitt's Hardware Store. One story of the western wall of the original house remained as the party wall shared by what was left of the westernmost of Burt's 1832 stores, now called Washington Hall (530 Market) and the hardware store (532–36 Market). Almost all of the eastern wall of the original house also remained and was visible as the western wall of Anthony Kennedy's 1804 store, now called Zorn's Store (524 Market Street).

These buildings were demolished in October and November 1951 to create Independence Mall (fig. 14).¹⁹⁷ The idea of clearing land north of Independence Hall for a park had been around since before World War I. Interest in it increased in anticipation of the Sesquicentennial, but no action was taken. Drawings of a vast three-block mall were unveiled in the late 1930s and early 1940s, but many saw the plan as more of a Philadelphia urban renewal project than as an integral part of what had become a proposed national park. There was little action on the national park during World War II, and, after more than two years of waiting for federal legislation, the supporters of the mall took their proposal to the Pennsylvania

¹⁹⁶ Both 526 and 528 Market Street were razed to the ground, their foundations filled in, and became a parking lot. The upper three stories of 530 were removed, leaving a one-story building and cellar.

¹⁹⁷ This photograph is dated November 1, 1951, and looks south from Market Street. The depression in the foreground is the cellar of Washington Hall (530 Market Street), the westernmost of Burt's 1832 stores. The wall at left is the eastern wall of Zorn's Store (524 Market), Kennedy's 1804 store. The eastern wall of the PH (the party wall shared with Zorn's Store) has just been demolished. The tower of Independence Hall is visible at the top.



Fig. 14. Demolition of 524–30 Market Street. Photo dated November 1, 1951. *Evening Bulletin* Newspaper Collection, Urban Archives, Temple University.

governor and legislature in 1945. Independence Mall State Park, promoted as “a State Memorial to our war heroes,”¹⁹⁸ was created with the intention that the land would be turned over to the national park when the development bonds that funded the acquisition and demolition of the buildings and the park’s construction were retired. The Philadelphia AIA publicly urged that some sort of archaeological record be made of the President’s House site,¹⁹⁹ but nothing official was done. The grandiose vision of the mall seems to have superseded any commemoration of the President’s House beyond placing a bronze plaque in a wall. In adherence to the

¹⁹⁸ Judge Edwin O. Lewis to Sydney E. Martin, Jan. 23, 1945, as quoted in Anna Coxie Toogood et al., *Cultural Landscape Report: Independence Mall* (Philadelphia [National Park Service], 1994), 58.

¹⁹⁹ See Ernest Howard Yardley to the editor of the *Evening Bulletin*, Jan. 9, 1952. 500 Market Street/Washington House File, Philadelphia Historical Commission (hereafter, AIA letter).

symmetry of the plan (and through the ignorance or indifference of the mall's designers), a restroom was erected on the site of the main house in 1954.

The WPA study and model turned out to be an embarrassment for everyone involved, and the opportunity to preserve the surviving walls was squandered. Had the WPA done a competent job the results could have been much different. Given the cultural values of the period and the precedent set in the 1920s and 1930s by the restoration of Colonial Williamsburg, a re-created President's House probably would have been built on Market Street between the building's original brick side walls and upon most of its original stone foundations. The re-creation would have become an attraction within the proposed national park, and today the President's House might be as familiar a sight (and site) as the Governor's Palace in Williamsburg.

On the other hand, had Morgan's five-bay, center-hall model been reproduced full-sized, fiction would have triumphed over fact. The side walls of the original house would have been preserved, but the building between them would have been a total fantasy.

Despite the blunder of the model, the WPA research notes themselves contain some important pieces of information. In 1937, Morgan and his team examined the cellars of 524 and 530 Market Street (fig. 15).²⁰⁰ In the cellar of 524—the store that Anthony Kennedy had built in 1804, now expanded and renamed “Zorn’s Store”—they recorded a depression in the cement floor. George Zorn, Jr., told the WPA that the sinking was caused by “the old Washington well,” which he remembered from before the floor was laid as “round, about three or four feet in diameter and fifty feet deep.”²⁰¹

Morgan placed the well for the WPA model in this location. (This probably was what inspired him to move the bath house/servants’ hall to the opposite side of the wood yard from the kitchen ell.) It is likely that Mr. Zorn had been wrong, and that this actually was an earlier well than the one which served the President’s House. The Washington-Lear letters make

²⁰⁰ The four-story wall at the center of the photograph is the eastern wall of the President’s House. The one-story party wall between 530 and 532–36 Market Street at right is what was left of the western wall of the house after the demolition of Oak Hall. This photograph was taken in 1947, but ten years earlier when the WPA studied the President’s House three stories of the western wall had probably still been intact, incorporated into the six-story eastern wall of Oak Hall.

²⁰¹ Morgan, *190 High Street*, sheet 97.

it clear that when Morris lived in the house, the well had been located in the paved yard near the northwest corner of the kitchen ell. Lear wrote that during the construction of the bow it was decided that a new well would be dug, but this new well was also located in the paved yard.²⁰² The well that the WPA found probably would have been covered by the bath house as early as 1781, and it unquestionably was covered by the backbuildings built behind the four-story store at 524 Market in or after 1804.²⁰³ Since Mrs. Masters's house was the first recorded structure built by European-Americans on the property, it is likely that this well dated from the era of Mrs. Masters, General Howe, and Benedict Arnold, and that Morris abandoned it when he built the bath house. Presumably, the original wellhead had been at the old grade level; the section the WPA recorded under the cellar floor would have been missing its top 8 to 10 feet. Morgan (later) located this well about 15 feet east of the property line with 526 Market and about 55 feet south of the building line of Market Street.²⁰⁴

This raises the question of whether the bath house had had a cellar. No conclusive evidence has been found one way or the other, although Morris's wine cellar seems to have been in a place isolated from the cellars of the main house. Lear wrote to Washington that "[Mr Wallace] is directed by Mr. Morris to make drains in the cellars [of the main house] to carry off the water which is found troublesome there in wet seasons.—This Job he says will take him a week or ten days . . ." ²⁰⁵ Two weeks later, Lear wrote "[W]e cannot put a single barrel into the Cellar. Mr. Morris still occupies the wine Cellar which is the only one in which the Masons will suffer anything to be put."²⁰⁶ If the bath house was built with a cellar, it would mean that the well was probably cut down in the eighteenth century. (In the conjectural floorplan, it has been assumed that the bath house did have a cellar, and a cellarway leading to the wood yard.)

The WPA researchers found the remains of a privy, a brick platform and

²⁰² Lear to Washington, Nov. 14, 1790, ser. 4, General Correspondence, GW Papers, LC.

²⁰³ See Franklin Fire Insurance, survey no. 24262, June 9, 1856, HSP. See also Ernest Hexamer and William Locher, *Maps of the City of Philadelphia* (7 vols., Philadelphia, 1858–62), 1:12.

²⁰⁴ These are Morgan's corrected measurements, made in 1952. See below, n. 209.

²⁰⁵ Lear to Washington, Nov. 4, 1790, ser. 4, General Correspondence, GW Papers, LC.

²⁰⁶ Lear to Washington, Nov. 21, 1790, *ibid.*



Fig. 15. "The Present-day Appearance of the Site upon Which the Presidential Mansion Stood, One Block North of Independence Hall." Photo, ca. 1947. From Charles E. Peterson, *Final Report to the United States Congress by the Philadelphia National Shrines Park Commission* (December 1947), vol. 7, facing p. 270. Independence National Historical Park Archives.

trough upon which a (wooden?) outhouse would have stood. This was at the old grade level, along the eastern property line of 524 Market, 112 feet 5 inches south of the building line of Market Street.²⁰⁷ If this structure dated from the eighteenth century, the privy would have been located in the alley between the servants' hall and the walled garden.

Morgan's team also measured a section of the stone foundations of the President's House itself in the cellar of 530 Market Street—then called "Washington Hall"—the westernmost of Nathaniel Burt's three 1832

²⁰⁷ See Morgan, *190 High Street*, sheet 98.

stores.²⁰⁸ They found what seemed to have been a doorway in the Market Street wall. The opening had been filled in, but it was located exactly where one would expect to find a cellarway, or stairway to the street (and where Breton drew a bulkhead in the HSP and Athenaeum watercolors). The "closed opening in stone wall" recorded by Morgan was 55 inches wide, and the centerline of it was 92½ inches from the outside edge of the western wall. (In the conjectural floorplans and elevation drawn for this article, it has been assumed that the windows of the westernmost bay were centered on this cellarway. The centerlines of the outer bays of the facade have been drawn 92½ inches in from the outside edges of the eastern and western walls.)

On January 4, 1952, thirteen years after he left the WPA, Morgan returned to the President's House site, and did his own one-day "dig," measuring and recording what he found.²⁰⁹ His measurements show the overall width of the building to have been 45 feet 8½ inches. Given this width of the main house, one can get a good idea of the probable size and spacing of the openings in the facade by comparing what is documented about the President's House with the Powel House, built in 1765, at 244 South 3rd Street, and other contemporaneous buildings. (It is assumed that the front door and windows of the President's House were arranged equidistantly across the width of the facade, and that the openings in each bay were centered vertically on each other.) The 1773 insurance survey lists the first-story windows as having pediments, although Watson's 1823 sketch (fig. 8) shows six-over-six-light sash windows (six panes over six panes) with no pediments. Watson shows the second story with much taller nine-over-six-light sash windows, which could lead one to mistakenly conclude that the ceilings of the second story had been significantly (16 to 18 inches) higher than those of the first. The 1832 Mason watercolor sketch (fig. 9) shows the facade with the original architectural features of the first story obliterated. Mason's sketch confirms the arrangement of the windows of the second story, but it also shows the "ghosts" of the missing first-story pediments, two of them rising from behind the frontispiece of the new twin front doors. These "ghost" pediments are much too tall for the six-over-six light sash

²⁰⁸ Ibid., sheet 117. Morgan mistakenly recorded that he was in the cellar of 528 Market Street (which was the street number of the parking lot next door) instead of 530.

²⁰⁹ Morgan's map of the foundations and his notes can be found in the 500 Market Street/Washington House file at the Philadelphia Historical Commission.

windows drawn by Watson. One could argue that the original windows (with 12 x 6 inch panes, according to the 1773 insurance survey) could have been replaced by windows with taller panes, except that Watson's sketch shows all of the facade windows with panes of similar size and proportions. Mason's much more detailed sketch (drawn nine years later) also shows the upper windows on the facade with panes of similar size and proportions—again about 12 x 6 inches. The first story of the facade of the President's House was stripped of its architectural ornamentation by Anthony Kennedy, perhaps as early as 1804. The most likely explanation for the inconsistencies in Watson's sketch and its disagreements with the 1773 insurance survey is that Kennedy made his alterations to the building before Watson drew the sketch—up to nineteen years before—and the annalist misremembered the facade. In the opinion of the writer, the architectural details of the first story in the 1823 Watson sketch are almost certainly conjectural, and probably erroneous.

Based on these views and the 1773 insurance survey, it is the conjecture of this writer that the windows of the first and second stories of the facade of Mrs. Masters's house were the same size—nine-over-six-light sash windows with 12 x 16 inch panes of glass—and that both stories had similar ceiling heights.

The Stamper-Blackwell House (224 Pine Street, built in 1764, demolished ca. 1930) had similar nine-over-six-light sash windows on the facade of its first and second stories, and both stories had similar ceiling heights.²¹⁰ (The front room of the first story—the Stamper-Blackwell parlor—was installed in the Winterthur Museum. The windows of this recreation are not original, and have smaller-paned twelve-over-twelve-light sashes.)

The first and second stories of the facade of the Powel House have windows of the same size. Before the restoration of the Powel House in the 1930s, the windows of the first two stories had six-over-six-light sashes with 12 x 19 inch panes of glass.²¹¹ In terms of just the glass surface, the nine-over-six-light sash windows with 12 x 16 inch panes of Mrs. Masters's house would have been four inches taller than these windows of the Powel

²¹⁰ See Looney, *Old Philadelphia*, 44. The panes of the windows of the Stamper-Blackwell House were slightly smaller than those of the PH—11 x 14 inches. See Philadelphia Contributionship, survey no. 415, Dec. 17, 1845.

²¹¹ Philadelphia Contributionship, survey no. 10.224, May 14, 1859.

House—36 x 80 inches of glass versus 36 x 76. The Powel House windows are recessed into the facade, with $49\frac{1}{2}$ x 88 inch openings in the brick. Its bricks are a standard $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches tall, and densely-laid with only about a tenth of an inch of mortar between courses. In Mrs. Masters's house, the ornamental window frames and their pediments or entablatures were applied to the facade, but the openings in the brick behind them must have been about the same width as those of the Powel House, or narrower. If these openings in Mrs. Masters's house were 5 inches taller—the height of two standard bricks—it would allow for the taller glass surface, plus the additional muntin between the panes of glass. In the Mason sketch, one can see shallow brick arches over the old bricked-in windows of the first story, a detail which would have been hidden by the pediments and entablatures.

The ceiling heights of the first and second stories of the Powel House are similar, 149 inches and $153\frac{1}{2}$ inches respectively (essentially two bricks' difference between them), and the thickness of the floors is 13 inches. The Powel House has twenty-four steps between its first and second stories, each $6\frac{3}{4}$ inches tall, which makes the distance floor-to-floor 162 inches. Given the similar proportions of mid-eighteenth-century Philadelphia city houses, the ceiling heights of the first two stories of Mrs. Masters's house probably would have been slightly taller than those of the Powel House—somewhere between 154 inches and 159 inches. Assuming that the thickness of the floors in Mrs. Masters's house also was 13 inches, the distance from floor to floor would have been somewhere between 167 inches and 172 inches. (It has been assumed that the ceiling heights of both the first and second stories of the President's House were $155\frac{3}{4}$ inches—just under 13 feet—and that the distance floor-to-floor was $168\frac{3}{4}$ inches, which works out to a staircase of twenty-five steps, each $6\frac{3}{4}$ inches tall.)²¹²

The exact height of the facade of the President's House was documented in the eighteenth century. Washington, who may have been contemplating alterations to the building, wrote to Lear (from Mount Vernon), asking him to measure the height of the Philadelphia house.²¹³ Lear's response: "I have measured the walls of the house in conformity to your desires—and find

²¹² Other plausible staircase solutions, such as twenty-four steps, each 7 inches tall, for a total floor-to-floor of 168 inches; twenty-six steps, each $6\frac{1}{2}$ inches tall, for a total floor-to-floor of 169 inches; and twenty-seven steps, each $6\frac{1}{4}$ inches tall, for a total floor-to-floor of (coincidentally, again) $168\frac{3}{4}$ inches, are so close to this that all four of them must be considered equally probable.

²¹³ Washington to Lear, Sept. 23, 1791, [Sparks], *Letters and Recollections of George Washington*, 49.

them to be in the front of the house forty-one feet six inches—and back, thirty-nine feet six inches—the difference owing to the ground being higher in the yard than in the street . . . The measurement was taken with a piece of line—one end of which was held up to the edge of the cornice, directly under the ends of the shingles which project at the eaves—and falling to the pavement, was drawn tolerably tight by a person beneath . . . ”²¹⁴

Assuming that the four front steps of the house were each 7 inches tall (as at the Powel House), and that all the floors were 13 inches thick (as at the Powel House); subtracting the conjectural floor-to-floor measurement of 168¾ inches for each of the first and second stories from the 498-inch total height of the facade (41 feet 6 inches) yields a ceiling height for the third story of slightly less than 10 feet. (The ceiling height of the third story of the Powel House is 9 feet 7 inches.) These are the dimensions used in the conjectural elevation of the President's House (see cover illustration). Three details of this are strictly the writer's conjecture. First, there is no documentation for the columns of the frontispiece and the square lights over the front door. Contemporaneous (and comparable) city houses such as the Powel House, the Stamper-Blackwell House, the John Cadwalader House, and the Thomas Willing House all had frontispieces with engaged columns. Watson's 1823 drawing of the house shows no columns (nor do the five Breton views which were themselves based upon his sketch), but the reliability of the Watson view is questionable due to the reasons explained above. The "ghost" of the pediment of the doorway in Mason's 1832 watercolor sketch is slightly larger than those of the first-story windows, which indicates that the frontispiece had been wider than the ornamental windowframes (as it is in all five of the Breton views).

Square lights over the front doors of Philadelphia houses were very common before the Federal period, when fanlights became almost de rigueur. An illustration of the Thomas Willing House (perhaps the Philadelphia house closest in design to Mrs. Masters's house) shows a frontispiece with engaged columns and square lights over the front door.²¹⁵ The assumption made is that some sort of lights would have been necessary to light the passage, and if Struthers Burt's fanlight had been over the front door of the President's House, it would have been removed when Anthony

²¹⁴ Lear to Washington, Sept. 27, 1791, ser. 4, General Correspondence, GW Papers, LC. This may be the first time this letter has been transcribed.

²¹⁵ John Fanning Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia* (3d ed., 1857; reprint, 1900), 2: facing p. 619.

Kennedy stripped the first story of the facade and moved the doorway. Since the fanlight was part of the house in 1832 (according to the Burt family tradition), it probably had been elsewhere. If Burt's fanlight did date from the eighteenth century, it is more likely to have been part of Morris's 1781 rebuilding than the original 1768 house. It would have been an unusual and expensive item in 1773, but it does not appear in the insurance survey. There is also the possibility that Burt's fanlight had been one of the two pictured in Mason's 1832 watercolor sketch (over Kennedy's new twin doorways, added in 1804 or later), and thus not part of the building when it served as the President's House.

Second, there is no documentation for the roof balustrade or widow's walk. This is another item which probably would have appeared in the 1773 insurance survey had it been part of Mrs. Masters's house. Eberlein makes the conjecture that after the 1780 fire Morris rebuilt the house with "A roof of steeper pitch, [which] gave a loftier attic than formerly."²¹⁶ The Mason sketch does not show a balustrade, but it was drawn more than fifty years after Morris rebuilt the house—plenty of time for a widow's walk to rot away or be removed. A roof balustrade is appropriate to the altered house. Similar ones can be seen in contemporaneous views of other buildings with decked-gable roofs, and one would be very much in keeping with Morris's taste for high-style ornament. This roof balustrade is modeled after that of Independence Hall.

Third, there is no documentation for the covered walkway or porch in front of the bath house. Deliveries to the house probably would have been made through the wood yard, and, if so, the door to the first story of the bath house would have been the likely entrance for tradesmen and the household staff. Some sort of roofed structure to give protection in this area seems logical. The covered walkway has been drawn as leading to the walled garden.

The one-story building peeking out from behind the main house on the west side is the icehouse (described in detail below), which stood about 160 feet south of the building line of Market Street. The wooden gates are based on those shown in the Breton views, as are the front steps. The console brackets or scrolls on either side of the dormers are based on those shown in

²¹⁶ See Eberlein, "190 High Street," 162. This may be the only Eberlein conjecture with which the writer heartily agrees.

Watson's 1823 sketch. One undated document found by the WPA states that the house was "built of 'blue ender' brick," which probably describes glazed "headers" laid in Flemish bond (as at the Stamper-Blackwell House).²¹⁷ Richard Rush wrote that the brickwork had been "dark with age," and remembered there having been "two ancient lamp posts, furnished with large lamps" in front of the house.²¹⁸

Most of the architectural detail shown in the conjectural elevation comes from the 1832 Mason watercolor sketch (fig. 9). The rusticated base (visible on the western half of the facade beneath the shop window) appears to be faced with cut stone (as on the Stamper-Blackwell and Powel Houses). The stone belt course coincides with the sills of the windows of the second story.²¹⁹ The cornice has twenty-two modillions or brackets, with a striated wooden frieze below them. The uppermost section of the cornice (cymatium) wraps around the corners of the buildings and continues on the gable walls, rising parallel to the parapets, a highly unusual feature. The parapets have white coping (stone?), with pedestals in the front (for urns?), as on Independence Hall. The rainwater conductor heads and downspouts almost certainly date from Robert Morris's time since the initials "R M" appear on the rain heads. The size of the pediments on the first-story windows is apparent from the "ghosts," and the entablatures (with pulvinated friezes) above the second-story windows can be seen in detail.²²⁰

The 1832 watercolor sketch was a freehand rendering of the building, not a measured elevation, and Mason, who would have been sketching from the market stalls in the middle of High Street, gets the proportions of the building slightly wrong, overestimating the height of the facade by about 20 percent.²²¹ There seem to be similar distortions in the heights of the

²¹⁷ See Morgan, *190 High Street*, sheet 12. The writer has been unable to locate this document. Flemish bond alternates bricks laid lengthwise (stretchers) with those laid widthwise (headers). Glazed headers are fired, and are bluish-black in color. See Looney, *Old Philadelphia*, 44.

²¹⁸ Griswold, *The Republican Court*, 242.

²¹⁹ The only surviving eighteenth-century Philadelphia buildings with this decorative feature are the north facades of Independence Hall and Carpenters' Hall, although it can be seen on several long-demolished Philadelphia buildings in "Birch's Views."

²²⁰ Carpenters' Hall (1770-74) is the only extant eighteenth-century Philadelphia building with similar (though smaller) ornamental windowframes which feature entablatures with pulvinated friezes. (They are on the second story of the central portion of its south facade.) These frames are of wood with stone sills. It is likely that the ornamental windowframes of the PH also were of wood with stone sills.

²²¹ Based on the known 45-foot 8½-inch width of the house, the Mason sketch shows the top of the cornice as being just over 50 feet above the sidewalk. From Lear, we know that this measurement was

windows and some of the other vertical elements. Still, because of the architectural detail it documents, the Mason watercolor sketch remains the most valuable image of the President's House.

The five-bay WPA model became a popular exhibit at the Atwater Kent Museum, and it wasn't until July 1952 that anyone challenged it in print. The first to do so was Hannah Benner Roach, an architect and genealogist hired to research the history of the buildings which had been torn down to create the first block of Independence Mall. She was unconvinced by the data that the WPA had amassed, and wrote: "An extensive documented study of this house was made under the auspices of the Federal Government in 1934-1936 [*sic, read 1937-39*]. On the basis of the findings of this study a model was later executed which can be seen in the Atwater Kent Museum. While the model portrays the Presidential Mansion as having a symmetrical street elevation, this writer could find no solid basis for that conclusion in the material of the governmental study . . . One old print, of which there are numerous copies extant, shows the symmetrical elevation, but if the Tobias Lear letters, quoted below, can be accepted as true, to this writer there seems no question but that the elevation was as here described [a four-bay, asymmetrical facade]." ²²²

At about the same time that Roach completed her report, Harold Eberlein was researching the President's House for an essay he would write the following year for inclusion in the book *Historic Philadelphia*. He contacted Morgan to enlist his help, and the two had a friendly correspondence. Eberlein strongly condemned the Poulson sketch in his monograph, ²²³ but he lobbed Morgan and the WPA a softball when he suggested that perhaps the house had had a five-bay facade *before* the 1780 fire and that Morris had rebuilt it with a four-bay facade. ²²⁴ Ironically, this far-fetched, but undeniably generous conjecture was the exact opposite of the well-reasoned, but ultimately erroneous comprehensive theory

The final knockout punch to the Poulson sketch, the WPA model, and

41 feet 6 inches.

²²² [Roach], *Historical Report: First Block, Independence Mall*, 23-24.

²²³ "It is most unfortunate that the Poulson picture has been so long and widely publicised, and labelled as the house in which General Washington lived during his Presidency. For years past—and they are still doing it—books, leaflets, advertisements and what not have set forth the Poulson picture as a true representation of Washington's Philadelphia domicile from 1790 to 1797—which it most certainly is not." Eberlein, "190 High Street," 162 n. 9.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 163.

more than a century of misinformation was delivered by Nicholas B. Wainwright, research librarian (and later director) of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, and editor of this magazine (1950–80). He found, and published for the first time, the 1773 insurance survey, and wrote: "Poulson's sketch, however, can be rejected as a likeness of the mansion either before or after the fire on evidence not hitherto considered. After the fire the house was surveyed for insurance by the Mutual Assurance Company, and that survey has been studied. Before that, it had been insured by the Contributionship, whose insurance was eliminated by the severity of the fire. The Contributionship's survey plainly states 'a frontispiece at door, 3 pediments to windows,' in other words a front door with two windows on one side and one on the other."²²⁵

In November 2000, archaeologists from John Milner Associates, Inc., uncovered the pit of the icehouse that Robert Morris had built behind his Market Street house (fig. 16).²²⁶ The research for this article helped identify and date the pit. A new Liberty Bell Center (LBC) is to be built on the western side of the first block of Independence Mall, and under federal law a complete archaeological record is required of the site. The pit is octagonal in shape, about 13 feet across, with stone walls about 18 inches thick. Only the bottom 9 feet of it remain.

A fascinating description of this very icehouse and its pit survives from the eighteenth century. Washington, who was a regular houseguest of the Morrisses when in Philadelphia and may have been familiar with their icehouse, converted a dry well at Mount Vernon into an icehouse pit in the winter of 1783–84. He had it packed with snow, which melted by June, and he wrote to Morris asking for advice on what he had done wrong. Morris, whose icehouse may have been the most elaborate built in America to that date, replied with instruction on how his had been constructed, and his experiences with it over the previous couple of years.²²⁷

²²⁵ Wainwright, *Colonial Grandeur*, 149.

²²⁶ This photograph looks east from 532–34 Market Street. The wall at the top is in the same location as the western wall of the brick stable in the 1785 (or earlier) groundplan, but none of this building seems to have been incorporated into these foundations. Minor Street is to the right.

²²⁷ "My Ice House is about 18 feet deep and 16 square [interior dimension?], the bottom is a Coarse Gravel & the water which drains from the ice soaks into it as fast as the Ice melts, this prevents the necessity of a Drain . . . The Walls of my Ice House are built of stone without Mortar (which is called Dry Wall) untill within a foot and a half of the Surface of the Earth when Mortar was used from thence to the Surface to make the top more binding and Solid. When this Wall was brought up even with the

Morris's icehouse pit has been reburied and protected, and it will lie beneath the new Liberty Bell Center. The section of the President's House site which will be covered by the LBC was excavated to about seven or eight feet below street level in the fall of 2000. Nothing identifiable was found of the foundations of the stone icehouse (which once covered the pit) or of the foundations of the stables.

How much more of the property remains under Independence Mall? It is likely that something of the two wells from the paved yard are there, along with the well from the wood yard. The foundation of the front wall of the main house probably survives, and should be located about a dozen feet south of the current curb of Market Street, and, if the 1950s demolition specifications were followed, about four or five feet below the sidewalk.²²⁸ It is possible that the foundations of the eastern and western walls of the main house remain, although these may have been demolished to a greater depth to accommodate the rootballs of the trees which were planted on either side

Surface of the Earth, I stopped there and then dug the foundation for another Wall, two foot back from the first and about two foot deep, this done the foundation was laid so as to enclose the whole of the Walls built on the inside of the Hole where the Ice is put and on this foundation is built the Walls which appear above ground and in mine they are ten foot high. On these the Roof is fixed, and these walls are very thick, built of Stone and Mortar, afterwards rough Cast [stuccoed] on the outside. I nailed a Ceiling of Boards under the Roof flat from Wall to Wall, and filled all the Space between the Ceiling and the Shingling of the Roof with Straw so that the heat of the Sun Cannot possibly have any Effect.

"In the Bottom of the Ice House I placed some Blocks of Wood about two foot long and on these I laid a Plat form of Common Fence Rails Close enough to hold the Ice open enough to let the Water pass through, thus the Ice lays two foot from [above] the Gravel and of Course gives room for the Water to soak away gradually without being in contact with the Ice, which if it was for any time would waste it amazingly. The upper Floor is laid on joists placed across the top of the Inner well and for greater security I nailed a Ceiling under those Joists and filled the Space between the Ceiling and Floor with Straw.

"The Door for entering this Ice House faces the north, a Trap Door is made in the middle of the Floor through which the Ice is put in and taken out. I find it best to fill with Ice which as it is put in should be broke into small pieces and pounded down with heavy Clubs or Battons such as Pavers use, if well beat it will after a while consolidate into one solid mass and require to be cut out with a Chizell or Axe. I tried Snow one year and lost it in June. The Ice keeps until October or November and I believe if the Hole was larger so as to hold more it would keep untill Christmas . . ." Robert Morris to Washington, June 15, 1784, ser. 4, General Correspondence, GW Papers, LC.

²²⁸ The notation on a 1952 map of the first block reads: "All buildings within this block were demolished during 1950-52 and entire area filled with rubble topped with six inches of earth to elevations shown. Building walls and piers removed to elevations 4 feet below adjacent curb elevations. Temporary wood fence and temporary sidewalk were erected under demolition contract." Harbeson, Hough, Livingston and Larson, Project P-1409, *Survey of Independence Mall, Philadelphia, PA*; sheet GC-1, Oct. 17, 1952, National Park Service, INHP Archives, Maps, Plans and Drawings Coll., Unacc., drawer 36, folder 7.



Fig. 16. Excavation of the icehouse pit from the President's House in Philadelphia. Photo by author, January 9, 2001.

of the restroom. The foundation of the rear wall of the main house may have been removed in 1832 when the cellar was expanded southward by 50 percent for Burt's stores, and there is no indication that any trace of the bow added by Washington survived. None of the backbuildings—save, perhaps, Morris's bath house—seems to have had a cellar so even if original walls had been incorporated into later structures, it is likely that their foundations would have been less than four feet deep, and they would have been obliterated in the 1951 demolition.

In 1984, the restroom was doubled in size. This section of Independence Mall was still under state ownership, although the land was leased to the National Park Service, and responsibility for the operation and maintenance of the mall was transferred to INHP before the Bicentennial.²²⁹ No archae-

²²⁹ See Greiff, *Independence*, 229.

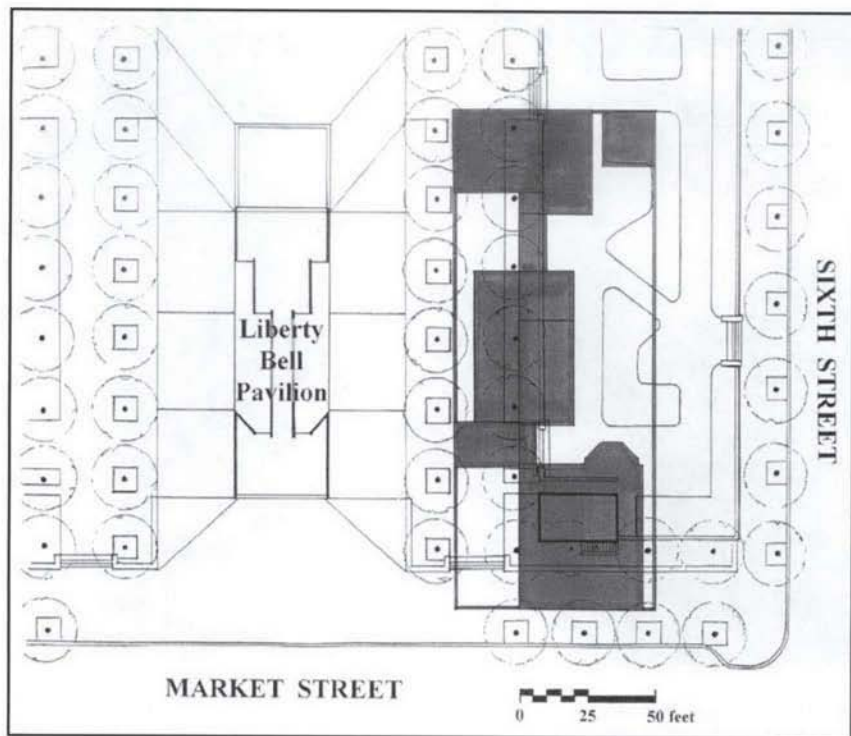


Fig. 17. Groundplan of the first block of Independence Mall, northwest corner (prior to November 2000), with additions by the author. North is to the bottom. Based on Anna Coxé Toogood et al., *Cultural Landscape Report: Independence Mall* (June 1994), figs. 29, 41. Independence National Historical Park Archives.

ological study was made of the site by either the state or INHP prior to (or during) the expansion of the building. As one can see, the 30 x 17 foot restroom and the exterior stairway to its basement lie squarely within the footprint of the main house (fig. 17).²³⁰

The new Liberty Bell Center will be longer than a football field. It will consist of three parts: a large two-story overhang or "porch" at its north end where visitors will enter, a long narrow exhibit area in the middle, and the

²³⁰ Figure 17 is based on maps in the *Cultural Landscape Report: Independence Mall*, along with measurement of the site taken by the author. The tree by the northwest corner of the restroom has since been removed.

Bell Chamber at the its south end, angled to face the tower of Independence Hall. Most of the building will be about the same width as, and, coincidentally, almost exactly centered (east-west) on, the main house and alley of the President's House. The main entrance to the LCB will be set back more than 150 feet from Market Street, and will straddle the line between the brick stable and the cowhouse. The "porch" will extend north from there to the kitchen, just covering the wash house. The discovery of the icehouse pit came as a surprise to INHP, and it is unfortunate that no accommodation has been made in the design of the LBC to display the artifact. The pit will lie about a dozen feet into the exhibit area, buried eight or nine feet below the floor.

An extraordinary juxtaposition will be in place when the LBC is completed, one which seems to have occurred by accident. The Liberty Bell is universally recognized as a representation of American freedom, but the bell once had a very specific symbolic meaning. Until the mid-nineteenth century it was a relatively obscure object, simply called the "State House Bell." It did not become famous or gain the name "Liberty Bell" until the 1840s, after it was adopted as the emblem of the abolitionist movement, and the bell's inscription, "Proclaim Liberty throughout all the Land unto all the Inhabitants therof," as the movement's watchword. The Liberty Bell became then the powerful rallying symbol of the struggle to end slavery in America. This meaning will echo as one approaches the new building on Independence Mall. The last thing that a visitor will walk across or pass before entering the Liberty Bell Center will be the slave quarters that George Washington added to the President's House.

It may be said with justice that the President's House has been the victim of the misinformation spread about it. The various players no doubt had the best of intentions. They were trying to honor Washington and promote patriotism. But the conflicting voices and opposing camps of Watson and Poulson created enormous confusion. Nathaniel Burt II's address to HSP added valuable new information, but he also repeated and reinforced many of the errors of Griswold. Late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century historians made logical deductions about the house based on the information they possessed, but no one amassed enough evidence to set the record straight. The comprehensive theory seemed to offer an answer for everything, but the Washington-Lear correspondence proved it wrong.

Until about 1941, a recreated President's House could have been built

between the building's original side walls and upon most of its original foundations. The block was demolished in the early 1950s in the creation of Independence Mall, but no formal archaeological study was made of the President's House site, and any meaningful commemoration of the building was sacrificed to the symmetry of the mall and the comfort of the visitors. The blunder of the WPA study and model only increased the confusion, and Eberlein's 1953 essay, while more accurate than the WPA study, still contained major errors about the house. Nicholas B. Wainwright corrected some of Eberlein's excesses in 1964, but everyone since then who has attempted a serious study of the house seems to have gotten lost in the jungle of misinformation.

In recent decades, the President's House has fallen deeper and deeper into obscurity, until now even the experts are unsure of what is true about it. Nearly a third of the footprint of the main house lies under the Market Street sidewalk, and thousands of people unknowingly walk across it each day. The site was prominently featured in Philadelphia visitor guidebooks of the 1920s through 1950s, and the house merited a half-page description, an illustration, and a location on the map in the major guidebook of the 1960s,²³¹ but there is no mention of the President's House in current tourist literature.

Over the past four years, this writer has shared his research with Independence National Historical Park in the hope that an appropriate way of commemorating the President's House can be found. The discovery of the icehouse pit in November 2000 raised the profile of the property somewhat, but the announced plans for Independence Mall call for the pit to be entombed beneath the new Liberty Bell Center, inaccessible until some (possible) future reconfiguration of the mall who knows how many decades from now. Remnants of the foundations of the main house and other features of the property survive, but, as in 1952 and 1984, there are no plans to make an archaeological study of them.

The President's House has been woefully neglected—whether out of embarrassment, uncertainty, or indifference—but it is not too late to remedy the situation. In January 1952, a committee of the Philadelphia chapter of the AIA publicly urged that the design for the proposed Independence Mall

²³¹ Robert H. Wilson, ed., *Philadelphia—Official Handbook for Visitors* (Maplewood, N.J., 1964), 5, 90.

"should be made to include full size markers"—outlines in the paving of the Market Street house and other important historic buildings—"to indicate the locations and extent of the original structures."²³² The recommendation was ignored, but even now, a half century later, it remains a good idea. A "President's House Plaza" in the open space north of the new Liberty Bell Center, with a floorplan or model of the President's House, would seem to be a fitting way to remember this lost landmark. Currently, the only indication of one of the most important buildings in Philadelphia's history, and a significant structure in the nation's history—the executive mansion of the United States from 1790 to 1800—is a slightly-inaccurate plaque outside the restroom.

Fifty years ago (on Washington's Birthday), a columnist for the *Philadelphia Inquirer* warned: "Unless someone hurries up and notes the location, the site [of the President's House] will become an indistinguishable part of an open space in the Mall."²³³ Who then would have guessed to what extent this prediction would come true?

Postscript: In November 2001, a 5-foot-wide trench was dug through the whole 180-foot length of the President's House site to lay conduit for the Liberty Bell Center. An underground crypt (with manhole) was excavated beside the foundations of the main house in what had been the wood yard, and the trench was cut south from the Market Street sidewalk toward Independence Hall. Except for the crypt, the excavations do not seem to have been dug any deeper than the foundations remaining after the 1951 demolition. But by laying the conduit directly over eighteenth-century features such as the well, the Independence National Historical Park has substantially complicated the task of doing archaeological work on the President's House in the near future.

Philadelphia

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²³² See AIA letter.

²³³ James R. George, "Bulldozers Trample Site Where Washington Slept," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Feb. 22, 1952.

