

Six Houses for the President

THE REDISCOVERY AND CONJECTURAL RECONSTRUCTION of the President's House on High, now Market, Street in Philadelphia¹ has put the spotlight on one of the six different houses that were built for or occupied by the first president of the United States as his official residence and office. Taken together, the three in New York, the two in Philadelphia, and the White House in Washington comprise a fascinating group of houses of signal importance during the first decade of the new American republic. Three, one in each city that served as the capital of the new country, were built specifically for this purpose, though two were never occupied by a president; the other three, two in New York and one in Philadelphia, were inhabited by George Washington and adapted by him as his executive residence. And he used all of them to convey his developing ideas of the role of the president and the way he would function in that position. Providing an insight into both architectural and political history, they form a remarkable theme within the study of Federal architecture.

In New York, where the United States government under the Constitution began, the president utilized first the Franklin-Osgood House at 3 Cherry Street and then the Macomb House at 39–41 Broadway while the State of New York was erecting an appropriate structure, Government House, on Bowling Green. As a result of the compromise worked out by Jefferson, Madison, and Hamilton involving both the assumption of the states' debts and the capital for the new country, the Residence Act of 1790 called for the moving of the capital to Philadelphia for ten years and the creation of a new Federal City on the Potomac, which would become the seat of government in 1800. In Philadelphia Washington, and then John Adams, occupied the Masters-Penn-Morris House at 190 High Street, though, again, the state government decided to erect a proper presidential mansion, on Ninth Street between Market and Chestnut. During this time, too, the federal government built a

¹ See Edward Lawler Jr. "The President's House in Philadelphia: The Rediscovery of a Lost Landmark," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 126 (2002): 5–95.

President's House in the new Federal City. Adams did occupy this house during his last months in office, from November 1800 to March 1801.

All were fashionable houses, among the largest and grandest in their cities, but, of course, only the purpose-built ones had rooms specifically conceived for the kind of public receptions that Washington introduced and Adams followed. Still, Washington adapted and enlarged the Philadelphia house he occupied to accommodate these. All but the White House were brick with stone ornamentation; the latter built at Washington's insistence of stone with elaborate stone decorations. And only the White House survives, though the other five can be conjured up through prints, drawings, documents, letters, and contemporary descriptions. From all of this we can get a glimpse of these six important houses in the life of the early republic.

Like the High Street house in Philadelphia, the first President's House in New York was built shortly before the Revolution, in 1770. Erected by Walter Franklin, it had been lived in by his widow and her second husband, Samuel Osgood, who later became Washington's Postmaster General. Rented to the president of the Congress under the Articles of Confederation, it was subsequently rented by the new United States government for Washington's residence, and he occupied it from his arrival in the city in April 1789 to February 1790.² Between April and December 1789, bills for repair and cleaning of the house came to £633.6.1, and £5,047.16.6¾ was expended during this period for furniture, furnishings, wine, and groceries, but these do not include any substantial remodeling of the house.³ Judging by illustrations of the 1850s before its destruction, it was a foursquare three-story house with five bays of rectangular windows on each side, a broad frieze with bowknots and blank panels, and a

² For this house, see Henry B. Hoffmann, "President Washington's Cherry Street Residence," *New-York Historical Society Quarterly Bulletin* 23 (1939): 90–102; and I. N. Phelps Stokes, *The Iconography of Manhattan Island*, 6 vols. (New York, 1915–28), 5:1237 (Mar. 30, 1789). Quotations about it from accounts of the time can also be found in Thomas E. V. Smith, *The City of New York in the Year of Washington's Inauguration, 1789* (New York, 1889), 224–25; Anne H. Wharton, "Washington's New York Residence in 1789," *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine* 43 (1889): 741–45, quoting a letter from Sarah (Mrs. William T.) Robinson to Kitty Wistar, Apr. 30, 1789; and Constance Cary Harrison, "Washington in New York in 1789," *Century Illustrated Monthly Magazine* 37 (1889): 850–59.

³ "Abstract of Accounts of sundry persons for Goods furnished and Repairs done to the House occupied by the President of the united States. Also accounts for Marketing and servants Wages," Dec. 29, 1789, Osgood Papers, New-York Historical Society, printed in Hoffmann, "President Washington's Cherry Street Residence," 94–95.

roof balustrade with panels at the corners.⁴ Washington does not appear to have made any significant changes to the interior, though it was apparently "sumptuously fitted out,"⁵ with "every room furnished in the most elegant manner."⁶ But his institution of a levee on Tuesdays and Fridays from two to three o'clock established a formal pattern that was to have implications for his changes to the President's House on High Street in Philadelphia.⁷

On February 23, 1790, the Washingtons moved to the relatively new house of General Alexander Macomb at 3941 Broadway, which had been built only in 1786–87 and had previously been rented by the French minister, the Comte de Moutiers.⁸ More conveniently located, a block-and-a-half above Bowling Green, this five-bay house was four stories tall. Like the Franklin house, it had quoined corners and a large number of rectangular windows with pronounced lintels, but it also featured two Palladian windows in the center of the second and third floors and an elaborate fan-and-side-lit doorway in the slightly projecting central bay.⁹ A large or double drawing room had at its "upper end . . . glass doors, which opened upon a balcony commanding an extensive view of the Hudson River, interspersed with islands, and the Jersey shore on the opposite side."¹⁰ Washington remained in the house until August 1790, shortly before the capital moved to Philadelphia later that year.

Before it was decided in July to move the capital,¹¹ the State of New

⁴ In *Valentine's Manual* of 1853 and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* of June 7, 1856, both reproduced in Hoffmann, "President Washington's Cherry Street Residence."

⁵ Wharton, "Washington's New York Residence," 742.

⁶ Letter from Sarah Robinson to Kitty Wistar, Apr. 30, 1789, quoted in Harrison, "Washington in New York in 1789," 852.

⁷ See Smith, *City of New York*, 236; and Lawler, "President's House in Philadelphia," 24, 33–34. A few weeks later, the hour of the levee was changed to three o'clock in the afternoon. Smith, 240.

⁸ Stokes, *Iconography*, 5:1210 (May 8, 1786) and 1262 (Apr. 23, 1790).

⁹ Although this house, too, is gone, its appearance was also recorded in prints, including an 1831 view subsequently published in *Valentine's Manual*. Both this oblique view and a frontal view are reproduced in Hoffmann, "President Washington's Cherry Street Residence."

¹⁰ Quoted by Stokes, *Iconography*, 5:1262 (Feb. 23, 1790).

¹¹ The Senate passed the Residence Bill on July 1, designating a new capital on the banks of the Potomac as the "permanent seat of Congress and the Government of the United States," "according to such Plans, as the President shall approve, the said Commissioners, or any two of them shall prior to the first Monday in December in the year one thousand eight hundred, provide suitable buildings for the accommodation of Congress, and of the President, and for the public Offices of the government of the United States." It further stated that "prior to the first Monday in December next, all offices attached to the seat of the government of the United States shall be removed to, and until the said first Monday in December in the year one thousand eight hundred, shall remain at the City of

York undertook to build a house at Bowling Green at the foot of Broadway for the official presidential residence. The legislature passed an act for that purpose on March 16, 1790. Eight days later, the commissioners appointed by the law advertised that

they are desirous of receiving plans for a house to contain, a room for the reception of the Legislature on public business, and drawing and dining room for special occasions; a drawing and dining room for private use, a room for a library, together with other requisite appartments and accommodations. It is at present proposed to front the house towards the Broadway, and that the extent in front shall be about eighty feet, and the depth as shall be found necessary.¹²

By April 26 the commissioners had “agreed on a plan for the said house, and directed the cellar to be dug.” The cornerstone was laid on May 21, and the building was completed in the spring of 1791.¹³ By that time, however, the federal government had long since left for Philadelphia, and the building became the home of New York’s governors until 1799, when the state government decamped for Albany. After that it was used as the custom house until 1815, when it was demolished.

It is not known for certain who designed the building, but on the same day as the cornerstone laying an “Account Book of Receipts & payments respecting the Government House” records “paid John Mc Comb jun. for Elevations . . . [£] 3 . . . 4 [s].”¹⁴ This is, however, the only reference to McComb found in the account book and twenty-eight groups of weekly bills and receipts for the building.¹⁵ On the other hand, the *New-York Magazine; or, Literary Repository* for January 1795 says that “the whole of the building appears to be executed in a stile which reflects much credit on the professional abilities of those who had the direction of it, Messrs.

Philadelphia in the State of Pennsylvania, at which place the Session of Congress next ensuing the present shall be held.” National Archives, Washington, DC; transcript available under First Federal Congress Project, George Washington University, http://www.gwu.edu/~ffcp/exhibit/p12/p12_1text.html. The House approved the bill on July 9, and it became law on July 16, 1790.

¹² *New York Daily Advertiser*, Mar. 24, 1790, quoted by Stokes, *Iconography*, 5:1264. See *ibid.*, 5:1263 for passage of the act.

¹³ Stokes, *Iconography* 2:1266 (quotation from the *Daily Advertiser*), and 1:418.

¹⁴ Account Book, p. 1, Onondaga Historical Association, Syracuse, NY. I am grateful to Harley J. McKee, who told me about this in a letter of Feb. 5, 1956, and credited the association for saving this and other manuscripts from destruction in a paper mill.

¹⁵ All also at Onondaga Historical Association, as per letter from McKee to the author, Feb. 5, 1956.

Robinson, Moore and Smith.”¹⁶ The latter two seem to have been the masons, but James Robinson, who is listed in the 1792 city directory as a “House Carpenter and Master Builder,” is generally credited with designing the executed building,¹⁷ which is known only through an anonymous 1796 watercolor which served as the model for William Rollinson’s engraving of 1799 and an 1847 lithograph by H. R. Robinson after a 1797 drawing by W. J. Condit.¹⁸

As seen in this lithograph, it was a two-and-one-half-story brick building on a stone basement and with stone ornamentation. The house had seven bays in each direction, with pediments and pilasters in the central three bays of both front and sides, preceded on the façade by a double-height Ionic portico. In its late colonial Adamesque quality, it looks nothing like the drawings for which McComb was apparently paid, for these, too, survive, but are more overtly neoclassical.¹⁹

McComb’s lone elevation (fig. 1) does have a giant four-column portico but in other respects is quite different from the executed building, for it features not only canted projections on each side of the portico but also niches with statues topped by busts in roundels between the projections and the portico, as well as a large saucer dome crowned with a low cupola ringed with windows.²⁰ With its balustraded roofline and dramatic curved staircases, it is quite a conception for the first known effort by the twenty-seven-year-old son of a builder-architect.

There are two plans by McComb that correspond to the elevation,

¹⁶ *New-York Magazine; or, Literary Repository*, Jan. 1795, 1. See also Stokes, *Iconography*, 1:418.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ Both are preserved at the New-York Historical Society. The former is illustrated in Agnes Addison Gilchrist, “John McComb, Sr. and Jr., in New York, 1784–1799,” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 31 (1972): 15, and the latter in William Seale, *The White House: The History of an American Idea* (Washington, DC, 1992), 13.

¹⁹ McComb Drawings, nos. 54, 55, 56, 58A, New-York Historical Society. Although these are mostly signed by McComb, they are not identified on the drawings as for Government House. They have, however, long been identified as for this project. See Stokes, *Iconography*, 3:869–70 and plates 10a, b, c; and Fiske Kimball, *Domestic Architecture of the American Colonies and of the Early Republic* (New York, 1922), 163–64. The general outline of certain of the plans fits the shape of the building on an 1808 map of the area by John S. Hunn and Amos Corning (see Stokes, 3:869–70) and the anonymous and Condit drawings noted just above. The term “late colonial Adamesque,” which I have used here, describes, in my view, the architecture of the postcolonial or early federal era, which manifested many of the characteristics of colonial architecture but modified by the addition of influences from the neoclassical style of the British architect Robert Adam (1728–1792). These include specific neoclassical motifs but also a tendency toward attenuation.

²⁰ McComb Drawings, no. 56, New-York Historical Society.

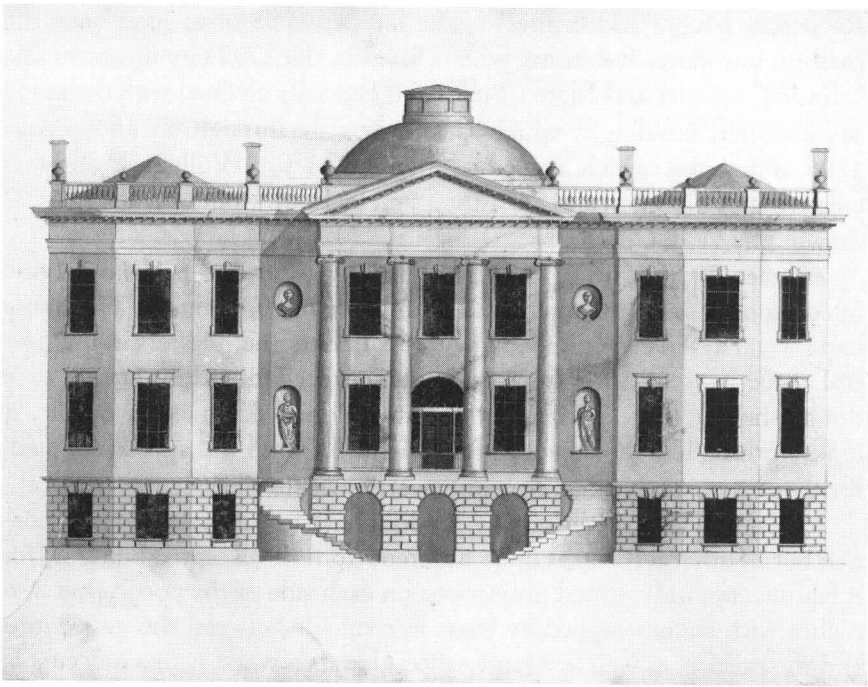


Fig. 1. Design for Government House, New York, 1790, Elevation, drawing 56, by John McComb Jr., McComb Architectural Collection, PR-040. Collection of The New-York Historical Society.

probably progressively smaller versions, though both share the dramatic canted projections that indicate rooms with one apsed end within, as well as semicircular stairs on the sides and a large rectangular central room with columns and/or niches beneath the central dome. Both, too, are 100 feet wide. The larger, which is 150 feet deep, also has a “Grand dining room” across the back with a large semi-octagonal bay projecting into the garden whereas the smaller—79 feet deep—puts the dining room in one of the two front projections, with an arcade at its rear.²¹ Smaller still—70 feet wide by 60 feet deep—is a design with the portico and curved exterior stairs but without the front canted projections, though, like the larger of the two previous schemes, it features a large canted bow on the garden face, a projection from the central rear “Withdrawing room.”²³ For its central domed space, this version uses a small circular room with corner niches and a balcony, as well as a piazza or balcony on the garden front.

²¹ *Ibid.*, nos. 55 and 57, respectively.

²² *Ibid.*, no. 54.

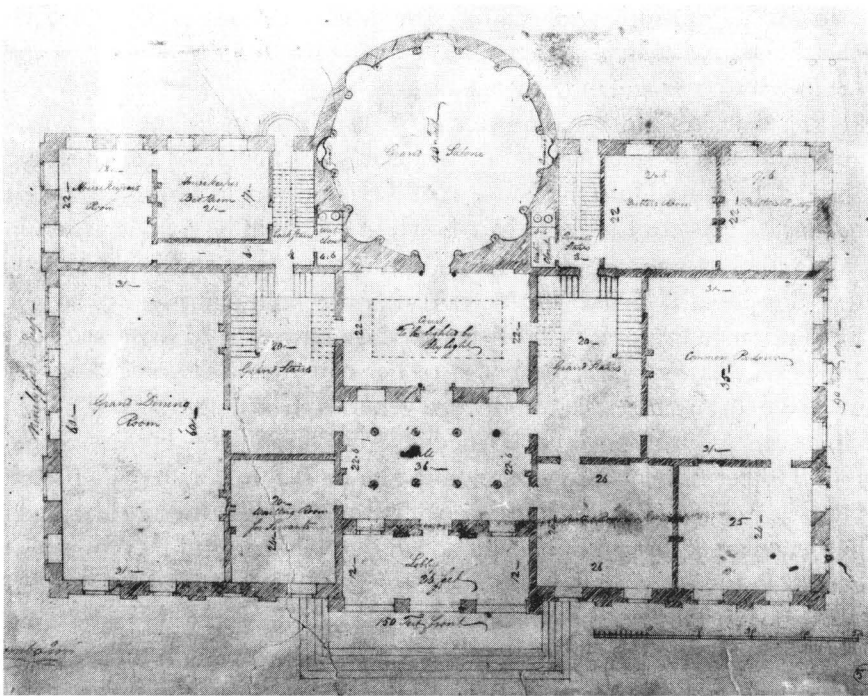


Fig. 2. Design for Government House, New York, 1790, Plan, drawing 58A, by John McComb Jr., McComb Architectural Collection, PR-040. Collection of The New-York Historical Society.

Grander still is another plan probably for this project (fig. 2), which is 150 feet wide and 90 feet deep.²³ Although lacking the large portico of the other designs, it includes a circular “Grand Salone,” 40 feet in diameter, which projects dramatically into the garden. This highly characteristic neoclassical motif, in an oval form, would characterize the slightly later President’s Houses erected in Philadelphia and Washington. Other significant spaces are two grand staircases, a double-columned hall, and a sky-lit court. Although no specific English models can be found for the other designs, this one seems clearly adapted from John Crunden’s *Convenient and Ornamental Architecture* of 1767, which McComb owned in 1808.²⁴ Even here, though, he did not by any means copy the

²³ Ibid., no. 58A.

²⁴ “Catalogue of Books Etc. Belonging to John McComb Junr: 1808,” Misc. MSS McComb, New-York Historical Society. There were later editions in 1770, 1785, and 1788, as well as 1791, 1797, 1805, and 1815. McComb’s use of Crunden’s plate 53, “Plan of a Mansion for a Person of Distinction,” was first noted by Kimball, *Domestic Architecture*, 163–64.

plan exactly but rather substantially modified it, retaining the grandeur and the dramatic circular exedra but reducing the building somewhat and making it tighter and a bit more practical.

President Washington, however, never lived in it, as he and the federal government departed New York while it was still under construction. Instead, he moved into the house at 190 High Street in Philadelphia (see p. 386), as Edward Lawler Jr. has shown in his ground-breaking article in this journal of January 2002.²⁵ As he has demonstrated, the house, like the first President's House in New York, was built shortly before the Revolution, in this case in 1767–68 by Mary Lawrence Masters. On May 19, 1772, Masters gave the house to her daughter Polly preceding her marriage to Richard Penn. British generals Howe and Clinton, the American military governor Benedict Arnold, and the French consul John Holker subsequently occupied the house before it suffered a fire on January 2, 1780. Robert Morris acquired and rebuilt the fire-damaged house, enlarged the property, and added outbuildings and then turned it over to President Washington for his use in September 1790.²⁶

Although Washington considered it “the best *Single* house in the City; yet,” as he wrote Tobias Lear on September 5, “without additions, it is inadequate to the *commodious* accommodations of my family . . . It is proposed to add bow windows to the two public Rooms in the South front.”²⁷ So, although the house was still a late manifestation of colonial architecture, with its doors and windows enframed like those of the façade of the executed New York Government House, Washington proposed to add a very neoclassical feature that McComb, albeit with a canted exterior, had suggested for that New York building and William Hamilton had introduced at The Woodlands, just outside Philadelphia, two years before.²⁸

We do not know if the garden projections were curved or canted, but those additions, built in brick by “Master Mason, Mr. Wallace,” went up

²⁵ Lawler, “President’s House in Philadelphia,” 5–95. See also Lawler’s article in the present issue.

²⁶ For all of this, see Lawler, “President’s House in Philadelphia,” 9–23.

²⁷ *Letters and Recollections of George Washington: Being Letters to Tobias Lear and Others between 1790 and 1799* (New York, 1906), 3–4, 6, quoted in Lawler, “President’s House in Philadelphia,” 23.

²⁸ Hamilton’s remodeling of The Woodlands in 1787–88, probably based on a plan he had brought back from his 1784–86 trip to London, provides the first example in America of the use of these highly characteristic neoclassical oval rooms, rectangular rooms with oval ends, and projecting curved exedrae.

that fall, and, according to Lear, "When the Bow Window is run up it will make the large dining Room and the drawing room over it 34 feet long" by just over 21 feet wide, with a rounded interior.²⁹ This addition (see p. 384) not only made the new President's House *au courant*; it also enabled Washington to stage his levees as he had in New York, only more effectively, for he could position himself in the projecting bow of the state dining room, where people coming from the family dining room, where they waited, would immediately see him in a formal pose.³⁰

While Washington lived in this house during the rest of his two terms as president, and John Adams did as well until the government's move to the new Federal City in the fall of 1800, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, like the State of New York, erected a building specifically for the president. Suggested by the Pennsylvania delegation to Congress as early as July 19, 1790, three days after the Residence Act became law, the new house was supported by Philadelphia's mayor and city council and authorized by the Pennsylvania legislature on September 27, 1791, which appropriated £17,000 for the new building and £3,000 for temporary accommodations.³¹ Governor Thomas Mifflin signed the bill the next day, appointed commissioners to superintend the work on October 8, and within a month asked first Pierre Charles L'Enfant, then in charge of designing the new Federal City, and then the commissioners for a design.³² There is no evidence that L'Enfant ever responded, but apparently the commissioners altered a design they had received, one which, according to British traveler Isaac Weld, they said had "no small share of merit."³³ "Conceiving that it could be improved upon," they "reversed the

²⁹ Tobias Lear to George Washington, Oct. 17, 1790, ser. 4, General Correspondence, George Washington Papers, Library of Congress, <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/gwhtml/gwhome.html>, quoted in Lawler, "President's House in Philadelphia," 25. The identification of Wallace is found in letters from Lear to Washington of Nov. 4, 7, and 14, quoted in Lawler, 24.

³⁰ See Lawler, "President's House in Philadelphia," 33–34.

³¹ Minutes of the Common Council of Philadelphia, July 19, 1790, pp. 291–93, 297–99, and of the Pennsylvania State Assembly, Feb. 2–Sept. 1790, p. 288, and James T. Mitchell and Henry Flanders, ed., *The Statutes at Large of Pennsylvania from 1682 to 1801*, 16 vols. (Harrisburg, PA, 1896–1915), 14:181–83, all cited in Dennis C. Kurjack, "The 'President's House' in Philadelphia," *Pennsylvania History* 20 (1953): 382–84. Other manuscript sources are preserved in Internal Improvements File, RG 4, Records of the Office of the Comptroller General, Pennsylvania State Archives, Harrisburg, cited by Kurjack and here as President's House Papers.

³² A. J. Dallas to Pierre Charles L'Enfant, Oct. 11, and to Francis Gurney and Richard Wells, Nov. 4, 1791, in President's House Papers; *Pennsylvania Archives*, 9th ser., 1 (1931): 239, 242, 272; Kurjack, "President's House," 384–86.

³³ Noted by Isaac Weld, *Travels through the States of North America, and the Provinces of Upper and Lower Canada, during the Years 1795, 1796, and 1797*, 2 vols. (London, 1799), 1:10,



Fig. 3. President's House, Ninth Street, Philadelphia, 1792–97. Perspective engraving, 1799, from W. Birch & Son, *City of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1800), plate 13.

position of the upper and lower stories, placing the latter at the top, so that the pilasters, with which it is ornamented, appear suspended in the air.”³⁴

The purpose of all of this, of course, was to discourage Congress from actually leaving Philadelphia and moving to the new Federal City, but although the building was eventually completed, Adams refused to accept it and move in. But, in the meantime, the effort moved ahead. Ground was broken on April 23, 1792; the cornerstone was laid on May 10; and by December 1 some roof rafters were already in place. Work continued until May 3, 1793, when the money ran out, to be resumed in 1795 after the legislature appropriated \$25,000 a year earlier and granted another

quoted by Kurjack, “President’s House,” 384–86. See also the latter’s other article of the same year, Dennis C. Kurjack, “Who Designed the ‘President’s House?’” *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 12 (May 1953): 27–28.

³⁴ Weld, *Travels*, 1:10, quoted in Kurjack, “President’s House,” 386.

\$30,000 in 1796. The building was finally completed in the spring of 1797.³⁵

Various individuals have been suggested as the designer or designers, from L'Enfant to William Williams, who supervised the construction until his death in October 1794, and John Smith, who was the supervisor after construction was resumed in 1795 and under whom in September 1795 "twenty-three men [were] at work on the circular stairs."³⁶ But there is no actual evidence for the identity of that person. Still, we have both the William Birch engraving of the exterior (fig. 3) and a second-floor plan drawn after the house was acquired by the University of Pennsylvania in 1800 (fig. 4), along with individual comments, bills, and reports to help us understand how this long-lost building looked.³⁷

The President's House on Ninth Street in Philadelphia shared some of the characteristics of both the New York Government House as built and McComb's imaginative designs for it, though its surface was flatter and it had more of the appurtenances of Adamesque neoclassicism. Of brick with stone decorations, the three-story-plus-half-basement structure formed a square of one hundred feet with five bays on each side. And most of the windows were crowned by lintels with pronounced keystones. As Isaac Weld noted, two-story pilasters decorated the second and third floors, rather than the first, those elongated Corinthian orders being coupled at the ends of the entrance front and used singly between the slightly projecting central three bays. On the second floor, treated as the main story though joined to the third floor by those pilasters, there were tall arched windows in the center and Palladian motifs within relieving arches in the two end bays, the latter especially enjoyed by Robert Adam in his English neoclassical buildings. Arched windows also occupy the center of the Market Street side shown in the Birch engraving, the end rectangular windows being surmounted by blank sunken panels, as on the executed

³⁵ Details of construction activity are indicated in the diary of one of the commissioners: Jacob Cox Parsons, ed., *Extracts from the Diary of Jacob Hiltzheimer, of Philadelphia, 1765–1798* (Philadelphia, 1893), esp. 177, 179, 182, 184, 185, 191, 219. Details of appropriations can be found in Mitchell and Flanders, eds., *Statutes at Large* 15:169–70, 402–3. See also Report of the Commissioners to Gov. Mifflin, Dec. 5, 1796, President's House Papers. For all of this, see Kurjack, "President's House," 388–89.

³⁶ *Extracts from the Diary of Jacob Hiltzheimer*, 219. This quotation and discussion about the authorship of the building can be found in both Kurjack, "President's House," 386–89, and Kurjack, "Who Designed the 'President's House'?" 27–28.

³⁷ The perspective engraving of 1799 was published in W. Birch & Son, *City of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1800), plate 13, and the plan, Dallett Guide no. 2012, is preserved in the University of Pennsylvania Archives. For the written evidence, see note 39, below.

neoclassical treatments that were just beginning to spread through the new United States.³⁸

Although there are no images of the interior, we know that there were double circular stairs in the central rotunda leading to a gallery that rested on eight fluted Corinthian columns and that the interiors were very elaborate, filled with appropriate ornamentation.³⁹

Despite all of this, John Adams did not accept or live in the house. On July 15, 1800, as the federal government was in the process of moving from Philadelphia, the state sold the house by auction to the University of Pennsylvania, which moved into its new premises in 1802, having "fitted up the west Bow Room on the second story for the Medical School."⁴⁰

Three and one-half months after that auction, on November 1, 1800, Adams entered the last of this series of President's Houses, the White House in Washington, which he occupied from that date to March 4, 1801, Inauguration Day for his successor, Thomas Jefferson.

Its history is at least as complicated as that of the other houses designed and/or built specifically as a presidential mansion of the 1790s, though its architect is definite and its progress clearly recorded. It owes its origin to the compromise that produced the Residence Act of 1790 and President Washington's appointment of Major Pierre Charles L'Enfant to plan the new Federal City and its principal governmental buildings.⁴¹ By late March 1791 L'Enfant had gone over the site with the president, but he also received advice from Secretary of State Jefferson,

³⁸ In addition to The Woodlands and McComb's designs for Government House in New York, such a curved space also appears in Hoban's design for the President's House in Washington and in Boston in Pleasant Hill, Charles Bulfinch's house for Joseph Barrell of 1792–93.

³⁹ For this, see vouchers 29–131, construction accounts, and the commissioners' final report on "Expenditures on the House for the Accommodation of the President of the United States under the two grants" of Nov. 22, 1797, all in President's House Papers, as well as a letter from B. Henry Latrobe, who was consulted by the Trustees of the University of Pennsylvania about the building, to the Trustees, University Papers, vol. 13, University of Pennsylvania Archives. For all of this, see also Kurjack, "President's House," 390–92.

⁴⁰ From the report of the Committee on the New Building to the Trustees of the University in Minutes of the Trustees, 7:273, quoted by George W. Corner, *Two Centuries of Medicine: A History of the School of Medicine, University of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia, 1965), 49. See also Trustees Minutes, 7:231; Report of the Commissioners to Gov. McKean, Aug. 12, 1790, and of David Jackson for the Commissioners to the Comptroller-General, Sept. 10, 1790, both in President's House Papers and Kurjack, "President's House," 394.

⁴¹ L'Enfant's commission is contained in a letter to him from Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, Mar. 2, 1791, Thomas Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress, published in *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Julian P. Boyd et al., 31 vols. to date (Princeton, NJ, 1950–), 19:355–56. For this, and the whole story of the White House, see William Seale, *The President's House: A History*, 2 vols. (Washington, DC, 1986), esp. 1:1 and 2:1069n1

who wrote him on April 10, "Whenever it is proposed to prepare plans . . . for the President's house I should prefer the celebrated fronts of modern buildings, which have already received the approbation of all good judges. Such are the Galerie du Louvre, the Gardes meubles, and two fronts of the Hotel de Salm."⁴² We do not know exactly what L'Enfant designed for the President's House, though the image on his plan for the city, developed during the fall of 1791 and first printed in March 1792, may well provide an indication. L'Enfant shows the house as very large and consisting of a horizontal block at the top of the site, then, south but separate from it, two curving arms attached to the inner ends of two wings parallel to the central block but extending further out. In any case, he must have had a plan in mind when, on December 16, 1791, he ordered his assistant, Isaac Roberdeau, to begin digging the foundation, which was indeed big, far bigger than the eventual White House. And he arranged for shipments of large quantities of stone from Aquia Creek in northern Virginia.⁴³

Due to L'Enfant's imperious behavior and unwillingness to listen to or follow the wishes of the commissioners appointed to supervise the planning and building of the Federal City, Jefferson informed L'Enfant on February 27, 1792, that "your services must be at an end."⁴⁴ Jefferson recommended a competition, an announcement of which was sent to major newspapers on March 14:

A **Premium** of 500 dollars or a medal of that value at the option of the party will be given by the Commissioners of the federal buildings to a person who before the fifteenth day of July next shall produce to them the most approved plan, if adopted by them for a President's house to be erected in this city—The Site of the building, if the artist will attend to it, will of course influence the aspect and outline of his plan and its destination will

⁴² Thomas Jefferson Papers, Library of Congress, quoted in *Thomas Jefferson and the National Capital*, ed. Saul K. Padover (Washington, DC, 1946), 59.

⁴³ Digges-L'Enfant-Morgan Papers, Library of Congress. For this and the idea of the relation of the image on the plan to L'Enfant's design, see also Bates Lowry, *Building a National Image: Architectural Drawings for the American Democracy, 1789–1912* (Washington, DC, 1985), 16–17; and Seale, *President's House*, 1:17–19, 24, this last concerning the stone, for which also see letters from the commissioners to George Brent, Nov. 18 and Dec. 23, 1791, and to George Washington, Dec. 21, 1791, in Commissioners' Letters Sent, RG 42, no. 23, Records of the Office of Public Buildings and Public Parks of the National Capital, National Archives. The L'Enfant plan for the city was first published in March 1792 in Philadelphia's *Universal Asylum and Columbian Magazine*.

⁴⁴ Digges-L'Enfant-Morgan Papers, Library of Congress, printed in Elizabeth S. Kite, *L'Enfant and Washington, 1791–1792* (Baltimore, 1929), 151–52.

point out to him the number, size and distribution of the apartments—It will be a recommendation of any Plan if the Central Part of it may be detached and erected for the present with the appearance of a complete whole and be capable of admitting the additional parts in future, if they shall be wanting—Drawings will be expected of the ground plots, elevations of each front and sections through the building in such directions as may be necessary to explain the internal structure, and an estimate of the Cubic feet of brickwork composing the whole mass of the wall.⁴⁵

A number of builders and amateurs submitted designs, as did at least one architect, James Hoban, whose entry was chosen. Many of the other designs are preserved in the Maryland Historical Society, including those of Andrew Mayfield Carshore, James Diamond, Jacob Small, and probably John Collins. Most of these are generally Palladian and somewhat ungainly, though Diamond's, despite its incredibly outsized eagle finial, included an octagonal saloon projecting into the rear garden, and Small's various designs featured grand square colonnaded halls as well as circular and oval spaces, among them a circular staircase.⁴⁶ One, which has often been attributed to Jefferson himself but may be that of Collins, who won second prize, is clearly based on Palladio's Villa Rotonda in Vicenza.⁴⁷ And there are other designs by Jefferson, at the Massachusetts Historical Society and the University of Virginia, that may represent his ideas for this building. Some of these are also related to the Villa Rotonda, others perhaps to the Hôtel de Langeac in Paris, where Jefferson lived while American minister to France and which he actually remodeled in

⁴⁵ Commissioners' Proceedings, RG 42, no. 21, National Archives. Although Jefferson had suggested a competition for both the Capitol and the President's House earlier, on March 6, after informing the commissioners of the firing of L'Enfant, he reiterated that suggestion. Commissioners' Letters Received, RG 42, no. 1. The advertisement is also quoted, e.g., by Seale, *President's House*, 26–27.

⁴⁶ All of these are under 76.88, Maryland Historical Society, with Carshore's being 76.88.24–.26; Diamond's, 76.88.54–.56; and Small's, 76.88.33–.38. Seale, *President's House*, 1:29–31, talks about these but thinks that Philip Hart's alternate design for the Capitol (76.88.15–.17, Maryland Historical Society), for which there was a competition at the same time, actually represents Hart's entry for the President's House. This certainly is a definite possibility, though it is also very large. Some of Carshore's, Diamond's, and Small's drawings are discussed and reproduced in William Ryan and Desmond Guinness, *The White House: An Architectural History* (New York, 1980), 34–53, figs. 23–25 (Carshore), 26 and 28 (Diamond), 35–38 (Small), and plates 3–4 (Diamond).

⁴⁷ These designs, which are at the Maryland Historical Society, 76.88.6–.10, have often been attributed to Jefferson, but Seale, *President's House*, 1:30, suggests the strong possibility that they are by Collins, who received \$150 as a second prize. Some of the designs are reproduced in Ryan and Guinness, *White House*, figs. 29–32, where they are discussed as by Jefferson.

1785–86. These also included circular and oval rooms.⁴⁸ Apparently Stephen Hallet, who was deeply involved in designs for the Capitol between 1791 and 1794, also submitted an entry for the President's House, though this has not survived.⁴⁹ But the commissioners, perhaps encouraged by Washington, chose the designs of Hoban, an Irishman, who had studied at the Dublin Society architecture school, trained with Thomas Ivory in Dublin, and immigrated to Charleston, South Carolina, where he was responsible for the county courthouse.

Although early drawings by Hoban for the President's House are extant, they seem not to be the ones submitted for the competition, but rather reflect his original conception as changed through the suggestion of Washington that it be made one-fifth larger and also more ornamented. But much of the design is undoubtedly the same. The earliest of these drawings (fig. 5) shows a plan of the building relatively close to the executed structure but with a section of the north elevation at one side that, albeit similar to that built, is quite different in being three stories above a partially exposed basement rather than the two stories that we know today. Presumably, then, Hoban's original idea was for a somewhat smaller three-story building, nine bays wide with a rusticated ground floor, though including such features as a central pavilion with four Ionic columns and probably such interior spaces as an oval room projecting into the rear garden, a large room occupying one end, and two rooms separated by a grand stairs at the other.⁵⁰

Washington seems to have liked the designs Hoban submitted, but as

⁴⁸ For the Jefferson designs possibly for the President's House, see Thomas Jefferson Papers, K125–26, K131, Massachusetts Historical Society, and Jefferson Drawings, N409 and N412, Alderman Library, University of Virginia, Charlottesville. For his remodeling of the Hôtel de Langeac, see Thomas Jefferson Papers, K118, Massachusetts Historical Society, and Expense Book, 1783–1790, under entries Sept. 8, Oct. 17, and Dec. 8, 1785, and Jan. 16 and Feb. 2 and 19, 1786, HM9376, Huntington Library, San Marino, CA; as well as Howard C. Rice Jr., *Thomas Jefferson's Paris* (Princeton, NJ, 1976), 51–53. For illustrations of drawings for both of these, see also Ryan and Guinness, *White House*, figs. 18a, 18b, 19, 20a, 20b.

⁴⁹ The evidence for Hallet's submitting an entry consists of a mention of this by Jefferson in a letter to the commissioners of July 11, 1792, Commissioners' Letterbook, 1 (1791–1793): 101, National Archives, RG 42, and a memorandum by Hallet in "Bonds, Powers of Attorney, Capitol and Other Buildings, Miscellaneous Accounts from June 4, 1792, to March 30, 1868," RG 42, no. 18. For these, see Ryan and Guinness, *White House*, 41–42.

⁵⁰ For the place of this drawing, which is in the Thomas Jefferson Papers at the Massachusetts Historical Society, in the story of the White House, see also Seale, *President's House*, 1:31–33; Seale, *White House*, 5–6; Ryan and Guinness, *White House*, 55–65; and Egon Verheyen, "James Hoban's Design for the White House in the Context of the Planning of the Federal City," *Architectura* 11 (1981): 66–82. For specific documentary evidence, see the following note.

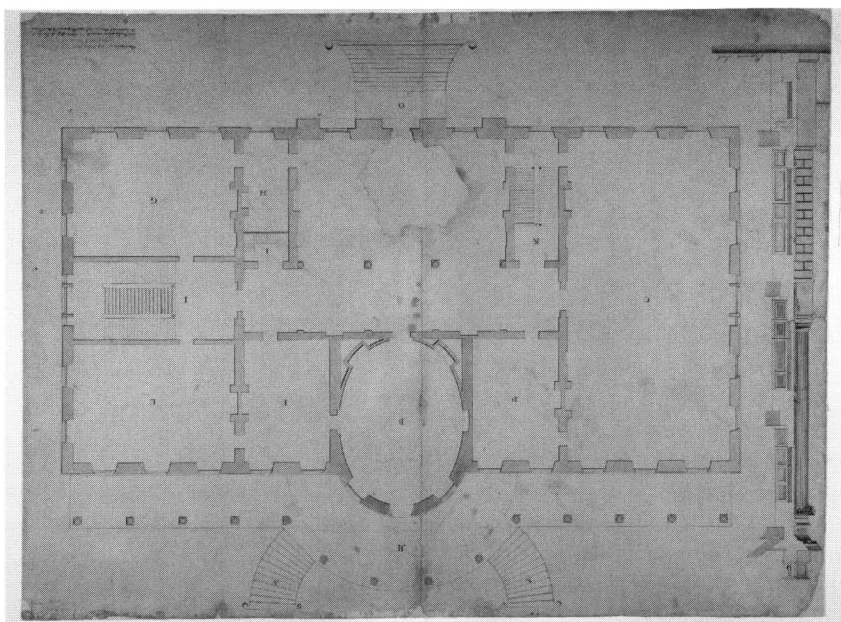


Fig. 5. James Hoban, White House, Washington, DC. Plan and section of preliminary scheme, ca. 1792. N396; K179. Original manuscript from the Coolidge Collection of Thomas Jefferson Manuscripts, Massachusetts Historical Society.

early as July 17, 1792, he requested that it be made 20 percent larger and with added ornamentation, with the result that by early 1793 the commissioners realized that it would now be much more expensive and discussed with the president the possibility of economies, including reducing not its footprint (which, even enlarged, was much smaller than L'Enfant's enormous foundation) but its height. It was only on October 22, 1793, however, a year after the cornerstone was laid, that the commissioners made the two-story arrangement definite, stating "The Elevation of the President's House to be two stories only, besides the Basement."⁵¹ And it was probably about this time or a little later that

⁵¹ Commissioners' Proceedings, RG 42, no. 21, National Archives, under Oct. 22, 1793. On July 18, 1792, the commissioners wrote Samuel Blodget "That the President has approved the plan for a Palace, which we think convenient, elegant, and within a moderate expence," and on January 3, 1793, they wrote the president that, as a result of his suggestion for increasing the size and ornamentation, the cost would be much higher (Commissioners' Letters Sent, RG 42, no. 23). On March 3 he agreed that he had "suggested to increase the dimensions of the President's House one fifth (George Washington Papers, Library of Congress). By March 14, they recommended to Hoban eliminating one story, and on October 15, he asked them for a definite answer as to two or three stories, adding

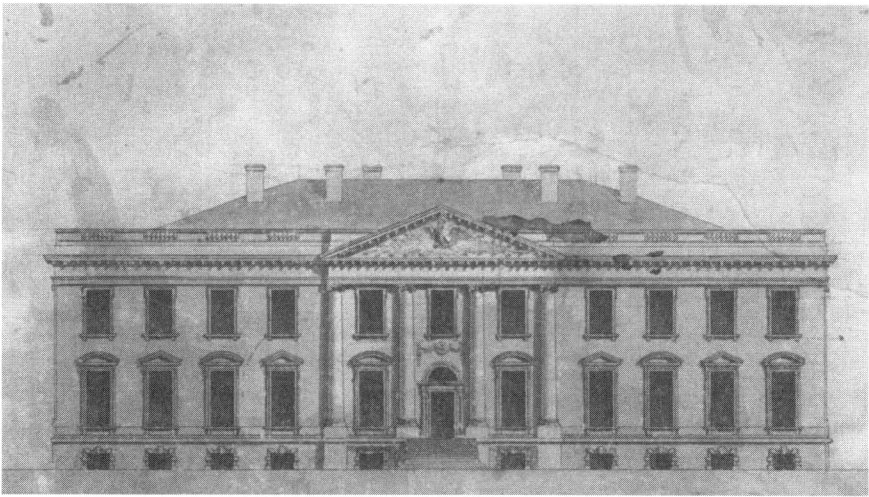


Fig. 6. 1792 Competition Design, Presentation Drawing—*Design for the President's House*, Washington, DC, by James Hoban, 1792. The Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore, MD.

Hoban created his other surviving drawing for the building, the elevation shown in figure 6.⁵²

Putting the two drawings together shows us more or less what the building looked like as construction ensued. In addition to the elements of the plan noted above, it also included a large entrance hall separated from a cross-hall by a colonnade, two rectangular rooms flanking the central oval on the garden front, two sets of subsidiary stairs, a porter's lodge, and a one-story porch along the south front. For its north front, it now boasted a pediment ornamented with an eagle amid arrows resting on unfluted Ionic columns (as opposed to the stop-fluted ones shown on the three-story version); a central doorway flanked by colonnettes and topped by a semicircular fanlight, above which are garland swags; tall pedimented windows on the first floor, alternating between triangular and segmental pediments; shorter but still rectangular second-floor windows, with crosstetted corners at the top and supported by brackets at the bottom;

that "Should the President's House be found sufficient for the purposes intended with two Storeys on the present basement, still retaining the same proportions as the original design, I am of the opinion in point of Elligance it will have a better effect" (Commissioners' Letters Sent, RG 42, nos. 23 and 1). These various letters are discussed and/or quoted in Seale, *President's House*, 1:31–33; and Ryan and Guinness, *White House*, 59–61.

⁵² There is a third Hoban drawing, attached to a letter to the commissioners, Aug. 19, 1799, but it shows only a brick storm drain. Commissioners' Letters Received, RG 42, no. 1, National Archives. See also Ryan and Guinness, *White House*, 59.

basement windows with block rustication (otherwise known as a Gibbs surround); and a balustraded roofline. As executed, the central pediment was left plain, but the doorway enframements and the narrow panels beneath the first-floor windows were further enriched. Drawings by Samuel Blodget and B. Henry Latrobe show us how the east and west fronts looked when Adams moved in, both being five bays long and articulated by two-story Ionic pilasters, the windows matching those on the north front, except for the wider central bay, which featured a Palladian motif topped by a semicircular window enframed within a larger one. The south front also employed the pilasters, with its regular articulation continued around the projecting bow in the center.⁵³

Despite the presence of such a neoclassical element as the projecting oval room in the rear, a space that has become known as the Blue Room, the basic conception of Hoban's design is still Burlingtonian Palladian, reflecting, for example, as has often been observed, almost from the beginning, the character of Leinster House in Dublin of 1745–51, the work of Richard Cassels, which Hoban would have known very well. This was especially true of the three-story elevation, but also of the north front as built; and parts of the plan, too, can be related to that source, though not the insertion of the Adamesque oval room on the garden façade.⁵⁴

⁵³ The Blodget drawing of the west front of ca. 1800 is in the White House Collection, and the Latrobe drawing of the east front of 1807 is in Library of Congress, ADE-11-B-Latrobe 21; the south front is shown in Latrobe's 1807 drawing in *ibid.*, Latrobe 22. All are illustrated in Seale, *White House*, 32, 60, 61; and the first two in Ryan and Guinness, *White House*, fig. 45 and plate 9. There is also a Blodget drawing of the north front (also White House Collection). The Latrobe drawings reflect, as well, that architect's proposed modification of the White House by the addition of north and south porticoes, discussed below.

⁵⁴ The connection with Leinster House was noted as early as 1806 by Latrobe, albeit in a derogatory fashion, as well as by David Warden, *A Chorographical and Statistical Description of the District of Columbia* (Paris, 1816), and Latrobe again in 1817. The Latrobe letters are to Philip Mazzei, May 29, 1806, and William Lee, Mar. 22, 1817, Benjamin Henry Latrobe Papers, Library of Congress. There have also been suggestions, by, e.g., Fiske Kimball, "The Genesis of the White House," *Century Magazine* 95 (1918): 523–28, that Hoban's source was James Gibbs's *Book of Architecture* (London, 1728), plates 52–53. But, essentially, it represents a broad generic type, which Hoban seems to have adapted as most eighteenth-century architects would have done. For all of this, see also Seale, *President's House*, 1:44–46; Seale, *White House*, 6–16; and Ryan and Guinness, *White House*, 67–84, with the last discussing the possible origin of the Blue Room. Again, specific Irish models are suggested, but, as with the Palladian exterior and plan, this, too, is generic, though in this case to the neoclassicism of Robert Adam and William Chambers and their enormous influence. The term "Burlingtonian Palladian" connotes the specific adaptation of the architecture of Andrea Palladio (1508–1580) utilized by the 3rd Earl of Burlington and his followers in England in the first half of the eighteenth century and by the American colonists in the second and third quarters of that century. Sometimes also called Neo-Palladian, it reflects the emphasis on the classical elements of the original Palladian style, partially as influenced by Inigo Jones in the seventeenth century.

After Jefferson became president in 1801, he asked Latrobe to complete the finishing of the White House—which, incidentally, has been painted white from 1798 on⁵⁵—and bring it up to his standards, just as he also asked him to complete the Capitol. He undoubtedly gave Latrobe his own suggestions, including perhaps drawings or emendations to Hoban's drawings. Latrobe's principal suggestions were for the interiors and for the north and south porticoes, though, again, how much of this stemmed from Jefferson's ideas is difficult to judge, and Hoban maintained that he had originally intended a portico for the north front.⁵⁶ The Latrobe elevations and plans of 1807 show the porticoes, including the conception of a porte cochere on the north front, though these were not executed at the time. After the British burned the White House in 1814, Hoban was put in charge of the rebuilding, Latrobe's assignment being limited to the rebuilding of the Capitol. Only subsequently, however, were the porticoes erected, in both cases by Hoban, the south portico following the curve of the Blue Room in 1824 and the north portico with its extrawide intercolumniation on the side in 1829–30. The porticoes are certainly close to the Latrobe drawings, but Hoban's involvement in their design cannot be discounted, both because of his claim noted just above and his role as the executing architect.⁵⁷

Although the White House is grander than the other five President's Houses of the 1790s, and it is the only one of stone, it shares certain features with the others, as well as with McComb's unexecuted designs for New York's Government House. The most obvious is the projecting oval or circular room on the garden front, found in two of the newly executed President's Houses and in McComb's drawings for the third, though it should be noted that whereas McComb envisaged either a circular room

⁵⁵ Wilhelmus B. Bryan, *A History of the National Capital*, 2 vols. (New York, 1914–16), 1:313; cited by Charles Peterson, "American Notes," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 10 (May 1951): 22.

⁵⁶ Stated only much later in a letter to Joseph Elgar, Commissioner of Public Bldgs., Jan. 1829, Commissioners' Letters Received, RG 42, National Archives. See also Seale, *President's House*, 1:32.

⁵⁷ The Latrobe drawings, cited above, are Library of Congress, ADE-11-B-Latrobe 19 (showing the "Plan of the Principal Story in 1803"), 20, 21, 22. They are illustrated in Seale, *White House*, 60–62; Ryan and Guinness, *White House*, figs. 83, 93, and plate 9; and Jeffrey A. Cohen and Charles E. Brownell, eds., *The Architectural Drawings of Benjamin Henry Latrobe*, 2 vols. (New Haven, CT, 1994), 2:499–507, nos. D71, D72, D73, D79. The porticoes were certainly intended to be built in 1818, when H.R. 122 of Mar. 9, 1818, for "Making appropriations for the Public Buildings, and for furnishing the Capital and the President's house," called for "porticos to the President's house"; but they both took much longer, due, in part, to the Panic of 1819. For a detailed discussion, see Seale, *President's House*, 1:109–18, 139–51, 159–60, 162–63; Ryan and Guinness, *White House*, 97–120; and Cohen and Brownell, eds., *Architectural Drawings of Latrobe*, 2:493–506.

or a half-octagonal projection and the house on Ninth Street in Philadelphia had a transverse oval, Hoban provided a longitudinal one. But this virtual emblem of neoclassicism was partially introduced into the house at 190 High Street in Philadelphia when Washington had a bowed end added to its garden façade, and the idea undoubtedly stemmed from his development of the concept of the president's levee at his first official residence in New York. The portico reached by dramatically curving stairs that eventually appeared on the south front of the White House has a precedent in some of McComb's Government House designs, as well as in the front of that building as executed, and the pedimented portico in both of these New York creations found its progeny in the much more severe and later porte cochere in Washington. Two-story pilasters articulated the walls of all three newly executed President's Houses, but they are more limited in the New York and Philadelphia examples, unlike the Washington residence where they not only appeared in the center of the entrance front but marched all along the other three walls. The White House is not only larger than any of the others but also more horizontally oriented. Yet it seems, indeed, a fitting culmination to the series of houses and designs for a new kind of American building, an official residence for an elected president, which evolved in the 1790s at the same time as the new United States government was taking shape and the Palladianism of late colonial America was being transformed into a new neoclassical idiom.

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