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**Representing the city in 1800: William Birch's views of  
Philadelphia**

**Schaaf, Anne-Marie Tyler, M.A.**

**University of Delaware, 1991**

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**REPRESENTING THE CITY IN 1800:  
WILLIAM BIRCH'S VIEWS OF PHILADELPHIA**

**by**

**Anne-Marie Tyler Schaaf**

**A thesis submitted to the Faculty of the University of  
Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of Master of Arts in Early American Culture**

**June 1991**

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REPRESENTING THE CITY IN 1800:  
WILLIAM BIRCH'S VIEWS OF PHILADELPHIA

by

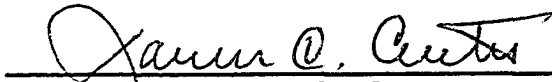
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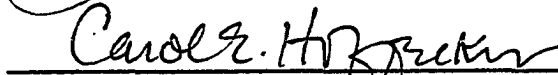
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I thank the staff of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania and the Library Company of Philadelphia for their kind assistance, friendship, and faithful photocopying. I thank the Historical Society of Pennsylvania and the Library Company of Philadelphia for permission to reproduce their Birch prints and drawings. I thank the Free Library of Philadelphia for permission to reproduce the map locating the sites of Birch's views.

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## ABSTRACT

William Birch published The City of Philadelphia, . . . as It Appeared in the Year 1800, a volume of prints, in 1800; these scenes have often been accepted as accurate representations. A more comprehensive evaluation of the city and its portrayal in 1800 was undertaken to resolve this confused relationship between subject and representation. Technical information, Birch's memoirs, writings about cities, and the images themselves were examined as evidence of the technological, personal, social, and intellectual context of the views.

Birch created his representations in the context of debate about the nature of the Enlightenment city. He illustrated no specific text, but his work displayed many of the buildings mentioned by writers. His specific choices and omissions constituted one portrait of Philadelphia's cultural, social, political, economic, and physical landscape. The illusion of comprehension (both understanding and completeness) given by the volume was reinforced by patterns within and among images.



## INTRODUCTION

William Birch (1755-1834) published The City of Philadelphia. . . as It Appeared in the Year 1800, a volume containing twenty-seven pictorial prints, one map, two pages of text, and a title page, in 1800. Since then, these plausible, picturesque scenes have often been accepted as an accurate representation of Philadelphia in 1800. A more comprehensive evaluation of the city and its portrayal in 1800 was here undertaken to resolve this confused relationship between subject and representation.

Technical information, Birch's memoirs, writings about the city, and the images themselves were examined in this thesis as evidence of the technological, personal, social, and intellectual context of the views. The limitations and standards of imagemaking in general and printmaking in particular circumscribed Birch's range of possibilities. When he chose a category of representation, it entailed certain expectations of aesthetic and informational content. William Birch, an enamel painter and engraver in England, came to Philadelphia in 1794, shortly

after completing a large set of landscape prints and after several of his prominent artistic patrons had died. He immediately connected himself with fashionable Philadelphia society and continued to paint miniatures. He remained very concerned with matters of taste and cultural aspirations, as revealed in his memoirs. The Philadelphia views constituted his first large project in America.

Birch created his representation of the city in the context of ongoing debate about the nature of the Enlightenment city. Observers saw the material environment as a determining influence on character; order, cleanliness, and aesthetic attractiveness were significant indicators of moral well-being. Residents and travelers celebrated Philadelphia's civic improvements and its ordered regularity, but other observers exhibited less enthusiasm for urban life. Though nationalist rhetoric surrounded descriptions of Philadelphia as the showpiece of the new nation, the yellow fever devastated its population and the national and state governments abandoned the city.

Birch's portrait of Philadelphia's cultural, social, political, economic, and physical landscape

presented a selection of the city's grand buildings in the context of more ordinary buildings and the open spaces on the edges of the city. He edited the environment, shaping contemporary and later perceptions by offering a controlled program that proposed to define the city. The illusion of comprehension (both understanding and completeness) given by the volume was reinforced by patterns within and among images. Birch mapped the city, depicting activity and growth, but little real disorder. He illustrated no specific text, but his work visually displayed many of the buildings mentioned by writers. The specificity of Birch's details engendered an expectation of accuracy; but he necessarily employed conventions of framing, perspective, and point of view.

## Chapter 1

### PRINTS IN THE LATE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY

Birch's project, like all image-making processes, began with the choice of subject matter and technique. These choices were necessarily accompanied by certain representational conventions and technological limitations. Even in apparently accurate depictions, reality was filtered through the artist's and artisan's minds and hands, altered by artistic selection and manual limitations, and then translated onto a flat surface.

Intaglio prints--engravings, etchings, and allied processes--began with a design incised into a metal plate; the depressions held the ink and transferred it to the paper. Ink was smeared onto a warmed plate with rags, and the plate was wiped; the skilled printer was able to wipe the plate clean without removing ink from the depressions.<sup>1</sup> Moistened paper was placed on the inked plate, covered with cushioning blankets, and passed through a press. The press forced the paper into the depressed areas of the plate, where it acquired the inked design.<sup>2</sup> The plate had to be

re-linked and re-wiped for each new impression, which required considerable time and made intaglio printing more expensive than other methods.<sup>3</sup>

Engraving, the oldest intaglio technique, was a highly skilled activity, nearly always performed by professionals.<sup>4</sup> Engraved images had clear outlines and distinct shadows. The crisp lines cut into the metal of a plate by the graver were usually straight, strong and precise, but not free. One eighteenth-century essay on prints described the result as "a laboured line, ploughed through the metal, and [which] must necessarily, in a degree, want ease."<sup>5</sup> A deeply engraved plate could last through 800-3000 impressions.<sup>6</sup>

The lines on an etched plate were produced by the corrosive action of nitrous or nitric acid. The plate was covered with varnish or wax, the design traced onto the wax through oiled paper, and an etching needle used to follow the design, incising deep into the wax in order to expose the metal. The plate was given a protective wax border, and the surface was covered with acid. The biting of the acid was the riskiest part of the process; only experienced engravers could accurately judge the appropriate length of time to

obtain the desired effect.<sup>7</sup> The acid was poured off, the plate was washed and dried, and the lines that were deep enough were stopped out with varnish. More acid, to bite the deeper lines, was poured on when the varnish had dried. When the biting was finished, the bordering wax and ground were removed, the plate was cleaned, and a proof impression was taken.<sup>8</sup>

Etched lines could be straight or curved, since the etching needle was nearly as flexible and easy to manipulate as a drawing pencil. The lines made in an etched plate were more uniform and not as strong as those of an engraved plate. It was much easier to vary the strength of an engraved line by pushing the graver differently than to create modulated etched lines.<sup>9</sup> Etched lines had to be farther apart than engraved lines, because the corrosion that created them would cause blurring if the lines were too close.<sup>10</sup> Etching was most frequently employed for sketches, trivial or delicate designs, and landscapes, where the ease of manipulating the etching needle permitted novel and artistically expressive renderings.<sup>11</sup> An etched plate would yield two to three hundred impressions.<sup>12</sup>

Antiquarian William Gilpin's Essay on Prints

(1768) explained that etching and engraving techniques were often employed together,

joining the freedom of the one, with the strength of the other. In most of our modern prints, the plate is first etched, and afterwards strengthened, and finished by the graver. . . . That flatness, which is a consequence of an equable strength of shade, is taken off; and the print gains a new effect by the relief given to those parts which hang (in the painter's language) on the parts behind them.<sup>13</sup>

This combination of techniques was employed by Birch. It was most frequently used for the lesser genres--landscape, architecture, and mechanical designs--and less frequently employed for portraits and historical compositions.<sup>14</sup>

Variations on these methods were used to create a greater range of softer effects. Soft-ground etching, developed in the late eighteenth century, employed a resinous ground laid on the plate which stuck to the paper pattern when it was traced on top of the ground. The lines exposed on the metal plate produced more irregular inked lines than the standard etching technique. Stipple engraving employed engraved and etched dots and lines made with a single point; it was used by Birch and others especially for reproducing paintings.<sup>15</sup> The crayon manner employed roulettes

and mattoirs (rolling and flat tools with many small spikes) on an etching ground to simulate the soft appearance of a chalk drawing.<sup>16</sup>

The process of translating a drawing into an image on a metal plate relied on conventions such as stippled skies and visual cliches such as certain figure groups or a standard method of representing trees. Eighteenth-century critics noted the stylization associated with engraving: "It is a rare thing to meet with a print entirely engraved, and free from stiffness."<sup>17</sup> Such stiffness overpowered the style and content of the original image. Late eighteenth century reproductive engravers abandoned the practice of preparatory etching and created elaborate lozenge and dot designs with more emphasis on patterning than subject matter.<sup>18</sup>

Eighteenth century prints, including Birch's views, were valued by consumers interested in information, aesthetics, and humor. Critics applied the academic criteria of painting to prints, asserting that "the foundation of beauty is the same in both; and we consider a print as we do a picture, in a double light, with regard to the whole, and with regard to its parts."<sup>19</sup> Prints were also evaluated for the particular characteristics of the reproductive process.



Printing's capability of mass production was recognized as an important virtue. Preservation of lost paintings and objects and the ready availability and relative cheapness of prints were also celebrated:

Thus the paintings of the greatest masters are multiplied to a boundless number; and the lovers of the polite arts, in every part of the globe, are enabled to enjoy those advantages from which their situations seemed to have deprived them.<sup>20</sup>

Printed illustrations in travel and architectural books, scientific manuals, and encyclopedias were made for informative purposes.<sup>21</sup> The English tradition in printmaking tended toward such informational images. Wenceslas Hollar, a seventeenth-century English engraver, made informational plans and exact representations of cities, "views of particular places, which he copies with great truth, unornamented, as he found them," rather than pictures intended for pure aesthetic appreciation.<sup>22</sup> William Hogarth's mid-eighteenth century prints of city life were considered "valuable repositories of the manner, customs, and dresses of the present age."<sup>23</sup> John Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery, an English publishing enterprise of the 1780s and 1790s that issued prints of all the paintings in his ongoing public exhibition of paintings

related to Shakespeare, fulfilled both artistic and informational ends.

Prints using soft-ground etching, the crayon manner, and stipple to imitate drawings were sold to be framed and hung as artistic interior decorations.<sup>24</sup> Highly finished engravings with etched foundations, often depicting some "galant" subject, were also sold to be framed and displayed.<sup>25</sup> The humorous moral lessons engraved by Hogarth constituted popular entertainment; he was frequently mentioned in lists of artists but often criticized for his low or familiar subjects.<sup>26</sup>

Eighteenth-century print collectors assembled albums based on common themes, masterworks, scarcity, and fashion.<sup>27</sup> Etchings were collected as "the very works themselves of the most celebrated masters,"<sup>28</sup> since they were so close to drawings. Albums of extra-illustrations--images which supplemented published volumes of text, most often histories or travel books--were sold as sets and assembled by collectors from individual plates.<sup>29</sup>

Authors of informational books, and the artists who illustrated them or created their own informational images, often announced the accuracy of their representations.<sup>30</sup> These assertions supported the

artists' claims to be transcribers of nature and actively encouraged viewers to accept the reality of such images. While such "accurate" images were influential in their day, when their truthfulness could have been verified by contemporaries, their influence has been felt even more strongly by subsequent audiences. These realistic images have deceived later commentators who did not separate fact from convention and artistic license. Careful attention to the technology, cliches, and context of such images can assist modern viewers in distinguishing their descriptive and aesthetic elements. All representative images lie on a continuum between the general and the particular visual statement.<sup>31</sup> The critic must discern the scope of the continuum for each image and carefully examine the specificity of the image to determine its place along that continuum.

## Chapter 2

### LIFE OF WILLIAM BIRCH

William Birch (1755-1834) began life in England in a family that assumed lower gentry status. His financial circumstances forced him to work to support himself, but he was able to pursue a profession compatible with his cultural aspirations. He always labored to maintain a lifestyle commensurate with his pleasures and expectations. He modeled himself on his wealthy patrons, appreciating and emulating their taste and collecting patterns. His aspirations and financial constraints followed him to America, where he both worked and attempted to set standards in the arts and cultural taste in general.

Birch was the oldest son born into an old Warwickshire family on 9 April 1755.<sup>1</sup> The family estate (sold by Birch to his own mother in 1786 when he needed money) was located at Ote Hill, near Bolton's Works, "from which is an extensive prospect of the country near Birmingham."<sup>2</sup> The family was historically well-connected<sup>3</sup>, financially comfortable, and

culturally informed. Birch's father had received surgical instruction in France and had established a valuable collection of surgical preparations. He was fond of the arts and a great friend to Thomas Worlidge (1700-66), a portrait miniaturist especially known for his superior rendering of costume.<sup>4</sup> Birch's father was an established Anglican with a seat in St. Mary's Gothic Church in Warwick, but Birch's mother, whom Birch disliked,<sup>5</sup> took their children to the Presbyterian Church.<sup>6</sup>

Birch's education was somewhat irregular. He was first "put to school to old Mrs. Dodd, to learn [his] letters"; but his father, "determined [he] should be a great man," sent him to another school before William had learned to read English. He was enrolled under Rev. Dr. Roberts in the College of Warwick, a school established under the patronage of the Earl of Warwick. The school taught no English, and Birch learned little of anything from his Latin books. He passed his course by using bread and cheese from his mother's pantry to bribe a schoolmate to do lessons for him. An easy master and an easy-going father apparently ignored the situation.<sup>7</sup>

After this pretense at education, Birch was taken to Birmingham to live with his wealthy friend and cousin William Russell.<sup>8</sup> Russell had an elegant retreat on Showel Green, three miles from Birmingham, about a mile from the seat of another cousin, George Russell.<sup>9</sup> Birch wrote later about his admiration for these estates, while lamenting his own failure to maintain such an establishment.<sup>10</sup> William Russell attended to Birch's scanty education and remained a faithful friend throughout his lifetime.<sup>11</sup> While Birch was with Russell, Birch's mother secretly tried to apprentice him to a Birmingham button maker, but Russell prevented this fate. He sent Birch to his friend and distant relation, Thomas Jeffreys, who was goldsmith and jeweller to the king in London.<sup>12</sup>

Birch remained with Jeffreys for over six years and determined to make a career in the arts. He took on Jeffreys' orders for enamel painting, creating scenes on watch cases, snuff boxes, and other small articles. He joined with a Mr. Spicer, "the first enamel painter in London," to gain instruction from him, sharing work and payment for jobs.<sup>13</sup>

Birch noted that enameling "is now become a serious object in the arts, more as mechanical

imitation for the preservation of coloring than the study of painting."<sup>14</sup> Enamel painting consisted of painting a layer of melted glass on the surface of metal, porcelain, or any substance that could be safely raised to red heat.<sup>15</sup> Enamels were always small and often made as copies of full-size oil paintings on canvas; sometimes the copies were merely mechanical reproductions of the originals. Though he called himself a copyist,<sup>16</sup> Birch's enamels were not mechanically stiff, and they did not appear to have been made from ruled and squared drawings.<sup>17</sup>

Birch attained success as an enamelist in London and exhibited enamel miniatures at the Society of Artists in 1775 and at the Royal Academy in 1781 and 1782.<sup>18</sup> He produced a deep "Vandike brown" that helped him to imitate Joshua Reynolds' colors in enamel; for this improvement, he received an honorary palette from the Society of Arts in 1784.<sup>19</sup> In 1785 he was awarded a medal by the Society of Artists for excellence in his art and for his contributions to improvements in its processes, including a method of obtaining a warm white by laying a thin coat of yellow under the final coat of white background.<sup>20</sup>

Birch moved to Hampstead Heath outside London in 1787, living there until 1792, when he moved to No. 2 Macclesfield Street, Soho, London.<sup>21</sup> At both of these addresses, he maintained city and country connections, as he did later in America. He painted at least forty-seven enamels in London,<sup>22</sup> including portraits, still lifes, and ornamental enamels such as simulated cameo brooches.<sup>23</sup> Specific subjects included Lord Lucon, Duke of Devonshire, Hon. Mrs. Stanhope, Mrs. Mary Robinson, Madame Butchelly, Joshua Reynolds, Marquis of Rockingham, Lord Duncannon, Lady Duncannon, Earl of Mansfield, Lord Spencer, Lord A. Hambleton, The Nabob of Arot, King Lear, The Seducer or Snake in the Grass, Woods with Child and Lamb, and Ouse Bridge in the Style of Canaletto. His portraits were most often purchased by spouses of the sitter or other members of the nobility.<sup>24</sup>

Much of Birch's education, especially in ideas and taste, came from various mentors and patrons. His work successfully emulated their ideals, and he in turn emulated the model of their cultured lives.

Sir Joshua Reynolds (1723-92), President of the Royal Academy, became an important friend and admirer. He gave Birch free access to all his paintings and



employed him to copy many of them in enamel. Reynolds appreciated that Birch's enamels would preserve his colors after the originals had faded.<sup>25</sup> Birch referred to Reynolds as "my own master"<sup>26</sup> and made many claims about the connections between them. He asserted that he had convinced Reynolds to alter the Royal Academy's discrimination against enamel painters by abolishing the law forbidding copies in the Academy's exhibition.<sup>27</sup> He also claimed that Reynolds had offered to procure him the position of Enamel Painter to the King, but that he had refused.<sup>28</sup>

Nathaniel Chauncy, an acquaintance of Reynolds, was one of Birch's most important friends and patrons. Birch may have become acquainted with him while carrying out a commission from Reynolds to buy a painting from Chauncy.<sup>29</sup> Birch had a regular appointment with Chauncy every Wednesday afternoon at which they tasted food and wine and shared conversation and art:

the anecdotes of the day would whet the appetite during the repast. Dinner being moved and the gratification of the bodily refreshment being obtained and the wine cleared off, the dessert consisted of the refreshment of the mind in the pleasure of perusing the works of great men in the fine arts, and other picturesque beauties from painters stowed up in volumes of prints, etchings, and drawings from his cabinet . . . and seldom could I leave till near 11 o'clock.<sup>30</sup>

Birch thus gained a significant portion of his artistic education from Chauncy's print collection, which Birch calculated was valued at thirty thousand pounds.<sup>31</sup>

Birch also recognized that he learned from his travels with Chauncy: "It was thus traveling for a month sometimes six weeks together that stored my mind with a treasure well calculated for my profession."<sup>32</sup>

Another important patron was the Earl of Mansfield, William Murray (1705-93), the owner of Kenwood House in Hampstead Heath. Birch lived in a cottage nearby and visited there for nearly eight years. He was always permitted access to Mansfield's library and gardens, and he was welcome to use plants and flowers from Mansfield's greenhouse.<sup>33</sup> Birch claimed to have convinced the Earl to have his portrait painted by Reynolds and copied in enamel by Birch.<sup>34</sup> He further claimed that he "would often speak to his Lordship of the improvements that might be made at Kenwood; he told me if he had been ten years younger he would submit to my taste in the entire new arrangement of his grounds."<sup>35</sup>

Other patrons and friends mentioned by Birch were equally prestigious. He copied a portrait of the Marquis of Rockingham for Lord Fitzwilliams<sup>36</sup> and counted the Devonshire family as very valuable

patrons.<sup>37</sup> He spent time in the law chambers of his friend Robert Gray, Chamber Councillor,<sup>38</sup> and dined with Lord Howe in the home of Mansfield's friend Admiral Sir John Lindsay (1737-88).<sup>39</sup>

Birch took up engraving, "in a stile somewhat new, etching and dotting," beginning in 1787, a skill that later served him well in America.<sup>40</sup> As with his enamels, he produced a variety of subjects but concentrated on portraits. His portraits included Mrs. Mary Robinson by the Sea Side after Reynolds, Reynolds as a Doctor of Laws (without the cap), The Nabob of Surat from Kettle, William Drummond after C. Jansen, John Selden after Sir Peter Lely, and Alexander Drake after Joseph Bush.<sup>41</sup> Other subjects included a drawing by N. Wileyx; The Great Fire of London, from a painting by Jan Griffier (1656-1718) published by Pennent in one of his sets of London views; A View from Mr. Cosway's Breakfast-Room Pall Mall, with the Portrait of Mrs. Cosway, The Landscape Painted by Wm Hodges, RA and the Portrait by Rd Cosway, RA.; and his largest prints, Boys and Dogs and Cottage Children after paintings by Thomas Gainsborough, each twenty-two by fifteen and a half inches.<sup>42</sup>

Birch's most ambitious printing project in England was a small volume of British landscapes after various painters of the modern school in the same etched and dotted (stippled) style, which he thought most suitable to copying paintings. He titled the quarto volume Delices de la Grande Bretagne, "it being a compliment in England to France to adopt French titles to works of art and elegance."<sup>43</sup> It was published in 1791 and contained "thirty-six remarkably fine engravings from originals by Richard Wilson, Joshua Reynolds, Benjamin West, Thomas Gainsborough, Thomas Rowlandson and others, of ancient buildings in Norwich and elsewhere, including views of elegant seats and chief places of interest in the mother country, accompanied by letter-press descriptions of each subject."<sup>44</sup> The quarto volume began with a landscape view from Richmond Hill by Reynolds; it cost three guineas per volume.<sup>45</sup> The subscription list for this project included the Prince of Wales, the duc d'Orleans, the King's and Queen's libraries, principal members of the Royal Academy, and various collectors including nobles.<sup>46</sup>

Birch emulated his patrons by collecting prints himself. He attended evening auctions in London and stayed up nights sorting his lots, retaining only those

pictures that suited his collecting interests.<sup>47</sup> He prided himself on collecting rare and beautiful impressions, only the fine images of each master, rather than accumulating all possible examples. He showed his volume of prints, then worth at least two thousand pounds, to Benjamin West, who declared he had never seen such a volume before.<sup>48</sup> Birch's judgment was also trusted by Chamberlin, librarian of the King's Library at Buckingham House, who commissioned him to purchase prints for the library and gave him complete authority.<sup>49</sup>

Birch also prided himself on his collection of paintings and included a catalog of his collection in his memoirs.<sup>50</sup> He purchased many of them from the collection of a Mr. Hynaca.<sup>51</sup> In the caption for a print of his estate at Springland that he published in a set called Country Seats, Birch mentioned a "small, but very fine collection of paintings by some of the first masters" at Springland. It was largely drawn from the Dutch and Flemish schools, including landscapes, religious and allegorical subjects, still lifes, and a few portraits. He was especially fond of Ruysdael; he owned two Ruysdaels and made numerous copies of them in enamel.

In the early 1790s, Birch's three best friends--Nathaniel Chauncy, the Earl of Mansfield, and Sir Joshua Reynolds--died, leaving him without his primary patrons. Other valuable patrons, the Devonshire family, went abroad. The French Revolution and the ensuing war between England and France rendered other sources of patronage more uncertain. All of these factors contributed to Birch's decision to emigrate.<sup>52</sup>

Judge Samuel Chase of Annapolis (1741-1811), an American patron of the arts whose father, Rev. Thomas Chase, had married Birch's sister, had urged Birch to go to America. Samuel Chase, an active patriot and a signer of the Declaration of Independence, had been sent to London by the Maryland legislature in 1783 to recover money that had been invested in the Bank of England before the Revolution.<sup>53</sup> Chase returned to America with a group of prints by James Gilray collected by Birch but without Birch himself, who had probably not taken Chase's invitation seriously.<sup>54</sup>

Birch's republican sentiments may have provided another motivation for journeying to America. When he had expressed his favorable opinion of Thomas Paine's Rights of Man (published in two parts in 1791-92) in England, he had been warned about the sanctions that

could be imposed on those voicing such seditious and dangerous sentiments.<sup>55</sup> The declared freedom of the United States, the presence of relatives, and the need to find new sources of patronage all played a part in Birch's choice to remove himself to America.

In 1794, William Birch took passage in the William Penn for himself, his wife, and their four children.<sup>56</sup> They arrived in Philadelphia in October, and Birch announced in the Pennsylvania Packet his intention to practice enamel painting of portraits, drawing instruction, and engraving.<sup>57</sup> He probably chose Philadelphia because it was the nation's cultural and national capital, and he immediately applied himself to becoming connected to that city's social network.

Birch noted in his advertisement that he had a letter of recommendation from Benjamin West, an American expatriate artist who became the second President of the Royal Academy upon the death of Sir Joshua Reynolds. His memoirs claimed that this letter was chosen from among many others that were offered. The letter was directed to William Bingham of Philadelphia, the city's most prominent cultural trendsetter.<sup>58</sup> Birch promptly contacted him, and Bingham became Birch's first employer in America.

Birch instructed Bingham's two daughters and three of their friends at the Bingham home twice a week and painted several enamel portraits of Mr. Bingham. Birch built a furnace for firing his enamels and soon received so many orders for portraits that he gave up teaching.<sup>59</sup>

William Bingham and his wife Anne Willing Bingham, Birch's first American employers, set the course of Birch's patronage and his contacts in America. They were young leaders of the Philadelphia elite and prominent members of national Federalist society, part of a wealthy cosmopolitan group known as the "Republican court."<sup>60</sup> William Bingham was a Pennsylvania State Senator and a prominent merchant, Anne Bingham entertained regularly and held a salon which exerted a good deal of influence on Philadelphia's culture and politics.<sup>61</sup>

Birch socialized with relatives and with other friends, especially Philadelphia's cultured elite. Soon after the Birches' arrival, Birch's cousin William Russell came to Philadelphia from France with his son and two daughters. Russell rented a house on Market Street, and the family remained in America for some time. They entertained the Birches, and Russell introduced Birch to his friend Dr. Priestley



(1733-1804), a scientist and natural philosopher.<sup>62</sup> He visited the family of his cousin Thomas Russell and his nieces Betsey and Nancy Chase in Maryland on a journey to the South.<sup>63</sup>

Birch's friends included many diplomats and Europeans. He modeled himself on his former English patrons and attempted to establish a similar social network. He was acquainted with the American consul to England,<sup>64</sup> and Joseph Priestley, recently emigrated from England.<sup>65</sup> He visited the Schuylkill Falls retreat of Judge Smith and his wife who was connected with the Penn family<sup>66</sup> and Fairhill on the Schuylkill, then held by F. de la Roch of Switzerland, aide-de-camp to Washington. De la Roch was fond of the arts and amused Birch by displaying his collection of drawings; Birch painted three enamels of Washington for him.<sup>67</sup> Birch became friendly with Andreas Everardus Van Braam Houckgeest, the Dutch minister to the United States, who also lived on the Delaware River near Neshaminy and painted four enamels of him for his friends.<sup>68</sup>

Birch occasionally encountered British citizens he had known in England. While in Maryland he met a Mr. Cole, an Englishman on assignment from Birch's cousin William Russell and his former master,

Jeffreys.<sup>69</sup> In June or July of 1798, Birch went to meet the British Treaty Commissioners just arrived from London, as usual taking along an enamel of Washington. Guillemard, one of the Treaty Commissioners, approved of the picture and purchased it for \$100. In the course of conversation, Birch reminded him of their previous acquaintance. Birch had assisted Guillemard's uncle, the King's Librarian; and the young Guillemard had looked over portfolios of prints in the stable yard of the palace with Birch, when Birch had been commissioned to collect for the royal library. Birch later visited Guillemard at Solitude on the Schuylkill, the home he rented, and dined with him at Governor Mifflin's home at the Falls of Schuylkill.<sup>70</sup>

One summer during the 1790s, Birch and his family explicitly joined the elite by renting a country seat on the Schuylkill with don Jose de Jaudennes, the Spanish minister to the United States. The plan was formulated while Jaudennes was sitting to Birch for his portrait. Birch wrote,

We spent the pleasantest summer I think I ever remember. Mr. Jaudennes was much the gentleman and a very pleasant man and his lady was as agreeable. He was fond of the arts, very rich, and employed me the whole summer. The ladies agreed as well. We stood at but little expense as we were frequently invited to their table, and joined in amusements in the evening.<sup>71</sup>

Jaudennes' financial support was clearly important to Birch, as it facilitated this chance to share the aristocratic life. Jaudennes was so impressed with Birch's skills and his company that he offered to pay the Birch family's expenses to return to Spain with him, but Birch refused.<sup>72</sup>

William Birch joined other artists in exhibiting at the Columbianum exhibition in 1795, the first formally organized art exhibition in Philadelphia. Charles Willson Peale and other Philadelphia artists formed the Columbianum society, intending it to become an American equivalent to Britain's Royal Academy. The group was short-lived, due to disagreements among members over its purposes; and the 1795 show was its only exhibition.<sup>73</sup> Birch also exhibited at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (founded in 1810) in 1811, 1813, 1814, 1818, 1819, 1824, 1827, and 1830.<sup>74</sup>

Birch's narrative of his engraving of the city of Burlington, New Jersey, pointed to it as a successful project. After the Birches had moved to Burlington in 1797, the mayor and aldermen of Burlington called on him to make a plan of the city and a large island nearby in the Delaware River. He protested that he had never practiced in that line; but he soon surveyed the

Island, each town lot, and each meadow, had a plate engraved, and made a view of the city at one corner of the sheet. The aldermen then charged that he had drawn Assank Creek improperly, and Birch told them to look again. They did and admitted their mistake, changing the name of the stream to Birch's Creek in his honor.<sup>75</sup>

In America William Birch painted enamel portraits of many prominent Americans, from life and from larger oil paintings. His works were usually rectangular, about 2.5 by 3 inches, and cost from \$30 to \$100.<sup>76</sup> His subjects included his wife; his daughter Priscilla (later Mrs. Barnes); his granddaughter as Sleeping Child; Mrs. John Mifflin (Clementina Ross); Mrs. John Penn as Luna; Van Braam (1797), the Dutch minister; William Bingham; Henry Clay; Brockhurst Delaplaine; Benjamin Franklin; Robert Gilmore; Andrew Jackson (1820); Arthur Lee; Miss M. T. Phillips; C. Samuel Rafinesque; Joseph Welch (1796); Mrs. Whittaker; Commodore Stephen Decatur (engraved by Edwin in 1813); William Sully, son of Thomas Sully; and General John Baker.<sup>77</sup> Birch copied Sully's portraits of Bishop William White, George Fairman, and Delaplaine; Stuart's portrait of don Jose de Jaudennes, the Spanish minister; Ary Scheffer's portrait of the Marquis de Lafayette; and Ceracchi's bust of Alexander

Hamilton.<sup>78</sup> He also painted other subjects in enamel, especially landscapes: Niagara Falls, View of Natural Bridge in Virginia, Occoquan Falls in Virginia, Stag Hunt, A Moonlight contrasted by Fire, The Fire Fly Lamp (after More), Grand Aloe and Shells, Venus, and Titian's Woman With Veil.<sup>79</sup>

Birch painted many enamels and at least one panel painting of George Washington, the most popular American subject. He copied Gilbert Stuart's "Mount Vernon head" once,<sup>80</sup> but all the rest of his portraits of Washington--some sixty of them--were taken from Stuart's second painting of Washington, the famous "Lansdowne portrait." The Marquis of Lansdowne had commissioned Stuart to paint Washington and send the portrait to England. The Bingham's stepped in, paid Stuart, and presented the portrait to the marquis as a favor. While it was still in America, Birch made a drawing from it, which he later used as the basis for his enamels.<sup>81</sup>

Birch made an engraving and an enamel of Thomas Jefferson, another popular American subject. His memoirs recounted a visit to Jefferson at his home in October 1805. Jefferson showed him the house and its situation and gave Birch a small engraving of himself.

Birch told Jefferson that the engraving was a caricature and that he could do better. He made a drawing from Stuart's profile of Jefferson and thought of engraving it himself, but he paid David Edwin (1776-1841), a Philadelphia engraver, to do it because Birch thought that Edwin could engrave it better. Birch pulled a few impressions and decided to rebite the plate to make it more lasting. Unfortunately the plate was ruined in the attempt, so no further impressions were pulled.<sup>82</sup> Birch's enamel of Jefferson, probably painted from his original drawing, included a symbolic background of a liberty cap conquering the evils of injustice, with a sun behind.<sup>83</sup>

Birch thought that those who studied the fine arts "should be independent in their circumstances."<sup>84</sup> He modeled himself on a gentleman of leisure complete with an art collection and a country seat, and he wished for financial independence. He claimed to care more for art than for money: "I have not been an idle man, but inattentive to my interest for which I have sufficiently suffered, but I have not lost the credit of my collecting or the pleasure of having had the enjoyment of such a collection."<sup>85</sup> He modestly claimed only to be a copyist himself, not "a member of the fine arts."<sup>86</sup>

Birch made distinctions between the mechanical arts and the fine arts, "the last polish of a refined nation." He thought that America was not yet capable of supporting the former: "a little mind cannot be a member of the fine arts whatever is his practice; nor can a society of professional men and unmeaning amateurs ever nourish the fine arts."<sup>87</sup> He cited the example of the European nations who "excel in their collections of specimens of the fine arts and [to] indulge in their pastime a fond recreation with them."<sup>88</sup> He concluded pessimistically,

There's no example here or taste to encourage-- another fifty years may lay a foundation for the fine arts, but the opinion of the people universally is that a mechanical portrait of a citizen, with other imitations of nature, is the highest power requested for the fine arts; a low basis for a temple of the powers of the human mind.<sup>89</sup>

Birch asserted that his studies had given him knowledge of the fine arts; this knowledge was the source of his judgment and taste.<sup>90</sup> He studied various schools, especially the Flemish, French, and Italian.<sup>91</sup> Birch admired Hogarth's Rake's Progress and Harlot's Progress as "pure representations of nature, not defiled by caricature, and upon the same standing as our beautiful Master Wilkin [Sir David Wilkie (1785-1841)] in his Quarter Day and Reading

of the Will, works never to be excelled, upon the principle of the Flemish school."<sup>92</sup> He was critical of what he deemed caricature and mentioned only one caricaturist, James Gilray, as possessing both wit and merit.<sup>93</sup> He appreciated more realistic rather than exaggerated depictions.

Birch's aspirations extended to a desire for a country estate. Birch claimed an early interest in taste and wrote poetically in his memoirs about an enchanting rocky spring in Warwickshire.<sup>94</sup> He noted the influence of his surroundings, such as the estates of his cousins William and George Russell. Birch described William Russell as a man of genuine taste and his home as "a handsome house, upon an extensive flat of lawn, decorated with wide groups of shrubbery in the front, well disposed . . ."<sup>95</sup> In America he admired William Hamilton's home, the Woodlands, and Lansdowne, owned by the Bingham.<sup>96</sup> He admired the project, situation, and style of Van Braam Houckgeest's house on the Delaware near Springland.<sup>97</sup> He made a design for a small Gothic house which was accepted by a Mr. Forsyth for his mother's house.<sup>98</sup>

Birch was particularly interested in landscape design. He made a plan for the grounds of the houses



of Dr. James Tilton of Wilmington (1745-1822), an acclaimed army surgeon, and his neighbor Mr. Rodney (either Thomas [1744-1811] or his son Caesar Augustus [1772-1824]).<sup>99</sup> He also laid out landscaping plans for Charles Stier's home, Riversdale, and Samuel Smith's home, Montebello, both in Maryland.<sup>100</sup>

The Birches moved out of Philadelphia in 1797, only three years after their arrival. They first moved to Burlington, New Jersey, and soon relocated just across the Delaware River in Bucks County, Pennsylvania, living in rented houses. By 1800 they had purchased a property at Springland, near Neshaminy Bridge, on the Bristol Road. Birch planned to build a fine house called "Green Lodge" at Springland, aiming to inspire better standards of taste among those who visited it. He wanted to introduce "those refinements which when united with the beauties of nature add so much to cultivate society."<sup>101</sup>

Birch erected out-buildings and purchased lumber for the construction of the principal building, planning to build it with the profits from the Philadelphia views. To decorate the front of his house, he claimed to have purchased two bas-reliefs representing painting and sculpture which had been

executed by an Italian sculptor for the unfinished Robert Morris house.<sup>102</sup> He laid out walks, planted shrubs and flowers, groomed the lawn, and stocked the ponds with fish.<sup>103</sup> His studio, where he created the Philadelphia views, was located in the two-room tollman's house built on the middle pier of the bridge over the Neshaminy, according to Rev. Abel C. Thomas.<sup>104</sup>

Birch's project of improving American taste through his example at Springland met with little success. A visit from a General Ridgely and one from a Mr. Cultock of Charlestown were "almost the only gratification or encouragement I received for my labors to propagate taste in Springland as a sample to serve the country."<sup>105</sup> Birch wanted to identify himself with the wealthy whose establishments he depicted. He attempted to demonstrate the life of rural retirement by example; when that failed, he attempted to influence Americans by depicting it in his album of Country Seats, published in 1808.<sup>106</sup>

Birch's financial position forced him to sell the estate. He stayed on there for about a year, supervising and continuing the improvements to the property for the new owner, but the results were

unsatisfactory. The new owner tore down the main building and sued Birch in the county court at Doylestown, costing Birch three hundred dollars.<sup>107</sup> Birch thought of returning to England but had no money to escape that way. He claimed that the number of foreign visitors to America, on whom he chiefly depended for patronage, had greatly decreased, and that the art of enamel painting was not adequately understood or encouraged in America.<sup>108</sup>

The family spent the rest of their time in Philadelphia. They were listed in the city directories in Philadelphia in 1811-12, at Springland again in 1814-19, and in Philadelphia again in 1830.<sup>109</sup> Birch was naturalized on 1 October 1808, a year after his son Thomas (1779-1851) had been through the process.<sup>110</sup>

William Birch died in Philadelphia on 7 August 1834, and the United States Gazette carried a notice of the death the following day.<sup>111</sup> His will, dated 16 May 1834, gave his entire estate to his daughter, Priscilla Barnes, to be disposed of at her discretion, exercising "a proper liberality towards her brothers Thomas and George Birch." It mentioned Birch's claims to "certain tracts of land in Maryland . . . now in the

course of a judicial process," which he claimed through his relations, the Onions.<sup>112</sup>

Thomas Birch followed his father and pursued an artistic career; he painted, made designs for engraving, sold art supplies, restored old canvases, and decorated furniture.<sup>113</sup> Thomas was presented with awards from the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and other artists' societies in the 1810s and 1820s, but his father never received any such prizes.<sup>114</sup> (see fig. 1)

William Birch's interest in representational art and the quality of life continued throughout his life. He appreciated and promoted the aesthetic qualities of realistic depictions as well as their moral implications.

### Chapter 3

#### VERBAL IMAGES OF THE CITY

When the 1790 census was taken, just over five percent of the American population lived in towns of over 2,500 people; the figure for the 1800 census was six percent.<sup>1</sup> Many of these towns had been established by the English because of their interest in central locations for trade, administration, and cultural activities in the colonies and as a means of stimulating development.<sup>2</sup> These centers of trade, organization, and communications remained true to the description of the "walking city"--a compact area of mixed intensive land use. Historians have argued that such spatial concentration and integration encouraged and supported social cohesion, cooperation, and deference.<sup>3</sup> Some have considered more expansive notions of the all-encompassing urban culture that develops within a single city, subsuming subcultures and individual differences;<sup>4</sup> all generalizations about cities have necessarily employed such notions.

Foreign and American travelers in the early national period (1780s-1810) had much to say about American cities. They evaluated the physical environment they found--the city's plan and pattern of development, the kinds of structures and their architectural style, the city's improvements and sanitation, and its growth and future prospects. They also appraised the kinds of people and activities they found in a city. They assessed the city's social structure in discussions of commerce and community. Their faith in the efficacy of the material environment as an instrument of character formation led them to judge the city on its material and social aspects.

Philadelphians in the 1790s were especially concerned with the status and importance of their city. It was the primary example cited in the ongoing American debate about the nature of the Enlightenment city. Jefferson, one of the principal voices in the discussion, thought that the American people would remain virtuous as long as they were chiefly agricultural, although he admired Philadelphia's plan and enjoyed urban cultural life.<sup>5</sup>

The first episode in the capital shuffle, the drama in which the ideas about cities intersected with

reality, happened in June 1783. Pennsylvania militia troops marched on the State House, wanting assurances of payment for service; Congress responded by fleeing to Princeton and did not return until 1790.<sup>6</sup> Many congressmen had previously wished for Congress to leave Philadelphia because the city was too expensive and because of Pennsylvania and Philadelphia's political power, which were given added influence in that location.<sup>7</sup> The removal was originally approved as a temporary stay, and Philadelphians expected Congress to return immediately after the military threat subsided.<sup>8</sup> But all those suspicions of Philadelphia as the combined center of self-interested financiers and unruly mobs, added to concern about city's high prices, led to the handy defeat of a motion to return to Philadelphia.<sup>9</sup>

Talk then turned to discussion of the location of a permanent capital. In late October 1784, while Congress was in Trenton, a plan for a permanent capital at the falls of the Delaware with a temporary capital at New York City was approved.<sup>10</sup> The latter half of the plan was executed, but the former remained at issue. Geographic loyalty strained the unity of the

new nation, and even the location of the temporary capital was continually called into question.

From 1789 to 1791, Philadelphia boosters, including Peter Muhlenberg, Tench Coxe, and Robert Morris, campaigned to promote Philadelphia as the most attractive site for the planned national capital. The Philadelphia congressmen focused on flattering other congressmen who passed through the city. They lobbied to get Congress to move the temporary capital to Philadelphia in hopes of getting the permanent capital fixed there.<sup>11</sup> Citizens presented petitions; the Philadelphia newspapers campaigned actively; recently elected city officials lobbied for it; and the city council appropriated money to refurbish buildings, including money to remodel Robert Morris's house for the use of the President.

Opponents of Philadelphia lobbied hard against them, fearing that a return to Philadelphia, even if intended only as a temporary stay, would be permanent.<sup>12</sup> They argued that the financial and political power of Robert Morris and other Pennsylvanians represented a threat to limited government. They further asserted that the city of Philadelphia was a threat to the public virtues of



republicanism because of its moral decay and social disorder.<sup>13</sup>

In May and June of 1790, the matter was again debated. At the end of June, three days of voting resulted in early votes giving the temporary capital to New York and a final vote settling on Philadelphia.<sup>14</sup> The location of the temporary capital at Philadelphia for ten years and federal assumption of the Revolutionary war debts of the states had both been resolved through joint compromise between geographic and political factions.<sup>15</sup> Concession was evident, and the move became the subject of many political cartoons.<sup>16</sup>

Soon after the move, William Currie published An Historical Account of the Climates and Diseases of the United States of America, which praised Philadelphia's "elevated and delightful" location, washed by "fresh and pure" waters, and its dry, clean, well-ventilated streets. He described the city as a place of "simplicity, industry, and republicanism" where "learning, manufactures, and human improvements of every kind thrive and flourish."<sup>17</sup> When the yellow fever struck Philadelphia the following year,

causing over five thousand deaths, it implied an immediate threat to American moral and political purity.<sup>18</sup>

The link between physical and moral well-being had been securely established by such diverse philosophers as Samuel Stanhope Smith of the College of New Jersey (later Princeton), Benjamin Rush, the Abbe Raynal, and Comte de Buffon; thus, this evidence of a physical plague more than hinted at moral decay.<sup>19</sup> Even liberal Mathew Carey's A Short Account of the Malignant Fever, published in Philadelphia in 1793, attributed part of the cause to extravagance; Philadelphia had become too proud and prodigal and had replaced its plain and wholesome habits with dissipation.<sup>20</sup> Philadelphia's clergymen were even more certain of divine judgment, as evidenced by Christian Helmuth's Short Account of the Yellow Fever in Philadelphia for the Reflecting Christian, published in 1794.<sup>21</sup>

The entire matter deeply affected those within the city and those outside it. Carey's account described total social disintegration within the city.<sup>22</sup> Thousands of people fled, and even Washington hesitated to return as planned.<sup>23</sup> Many

Philadelphians who left the city after the yellow fever had begun were ostracized in other places because of fear of contamination.<sup>24</sup> The event was even more broadly interpreted as a lesson to the nation in Samuel Stearns' Account of the Terrible Effects of the Pestilential Infection in the City of Philadelphia (Providence, 1793).<sup>25</sup> The return of the plague in 1797 (1,292 deaths), 1798 (3,537 deaths), and 1799 (1,015 deaths) further demoralized Philadelphians.<sup>26</sup> Though some eternally optimistic observers like Benjamin Rush (1746-1813), the eminent Philadelphia physician, and Jefferson felt that the disaster had some beneficial effects,<sup>27</sup> most remembered only its devastation.

The decade of the 1790s brought renewed activity to Philadelphia with the return of the national government, but it closed with fewer positive signs. Political tension increased as issues became polarized between Federalists and Republicans.<sup>28</sup> Emotions ran high concerning the Quasi-War with France and the Jay Treaty, and Philadelphia's scurrilous press further inflamed the public. Crowds responded by forming mobs and marching on the residences of individuals who symbolized each extreme.<sup>29</sup> The 1796-1797 depression

that swept away Robert Morris's fortunes also ruined many other merchants and tradespeople.<sup>30</sup>

When the state capital moved to Lancaster in March 1799--a move supported by Republicans to decrease Federalist influence in state affairs<sup>31</sup>--a significant source of status, influence, and business was removed. When the national capital finally removed to the new federal city, Washington, D.C., in November 1800, Philadelphia's fortunes seemed to have turned. The opportunity to establish Philadelphia as a single American center of politics and culture had been lost.<sup>32</sup> The artificial separation of seats of government from the country's metropolitan areas, which happened all over the nation around 1800, enshrined the rhetoric of a national agrarian ideal and an accompanying distrust of cities.<sup>33</sup>

Philadelphia was nonetheless admired by most of the visitors and residents who wrote about it during this period. Joseph Sansom, a Philadelphian who wrote a brief pamphlet on the city in 1804, not atypically described it as "the chief city of the United States, in point of wealth and splendour," unfortunately yielding metropolitan precedence to "the doubtful

policy of a seat of government, far removed from the chief resort of wealth and population."<sup>34</sup>

Those who visited Philadelphia before the American Revolution--nearly all British--had all admired the city's grid plan, the regularity of its buildings, and such progressive improvements as paving and lighting. Post-Revolutionary visitors included other Europeans, especially French, and not all of them were so impressed with Philadelphia.<sup>35</sup> Those visitors who had supported the Revolution admired the cityscape, but some were bored by the regularity of Philadelphia's plan and its architecture.<sup>36</sup> The critical observers admired the picturesque qualities of natural elements more than the consistency of human-made elements.<sup>37</sup>

Visitors generally expressed their admiration in aesthetic terms. Charles William Janson, an English traveler who published an account in 1807, found Philadelphia decidedly preferable to New York "in beauty, regularity, architecture, and improvement."<sup>38</sup> Pavel Petrovich Svinin, a Russian visitor, found Philadelphia to be the largest and most beautiful city in the United States.<sup>39</sup> An unidentified Englishman in 1787 described Philadelphia as "an undertaking which has introduced a degree of elegance and symmetry into

the streets of the metropolis, that is the admiration of all Europe and far exceeds anything of the kind in the modern world."<sup>40</sup> Another Englishman, Francis Baily (1774-1844), most admired Philadelphia's perfect regularity, though he recognized that not everyone approved of it.<sup>41</sup> Brissot de Warville (1754-93), a French traveler and revolutionary, admired this ornamental regularity, but found it "at first confusing to the stranger, for it is difficult to find one's way."<sup>42</sup>

Visitors admired the order of the Philadelphia gridiron plan and explicitly linked it to general American beliefs: "That perfect regularity . . . accords so much with the ideas of the Americans in general, that it is a practice which is almost universally adopted in laying out their new towns, and in improving their old ones."<sup>43</sup> All the visitors viewed Philadelphia as the embodiment of rationalism; their reaction to the cityscape was determined more by their individual attitudes toward landscape in general (appreciating the picturesque or the rational) and toward American political ideology than by the actual landscape.<sup>44</sup>

Philadelphia's block sizes, admired for their rectangular regularity, varied in size to accommodate the original lots and different street widths.<sup>45</sup> The major streets, High (Market) and Broad Streets, were laid out one hundred feet wide; Front Street was sixty feet wide, the equivalent of London's broadest street; most other streets were fifty feet.<sup>46</sup> Center Square was ten acres and was intended to have "a Meeting-House, Assembly or State-House, Market-House, School-House, and Several other Buildings for Publick Concerns"; four other squares of eight acres each were also established.<sup>47</sup>

Philadelphia's Water Street, only about thirty feet wide<sup>48</sup> and much narrower and more crowded than any other street, was not part of William Penn's plan. Penn had been inspired by Charles II's idea of creating open space along the Thames in London with a forty-foot wide paved quay flanked by a row of dignified houses.<sup>49</sup> Penn planned to build a thirty-foot cartway under and along the front of the bank of the Delaware River for common use (Water Street). He also wanted to limit the length of wharves and the height of buildings on the wharves and to require stairs to be built from the river to the wharf, from the wharf to

the top of the bank (Water Street), and from Water Street to Front Street.<sup>50</sup>

Penn's plans were ignored when Water Street was built, and many later observers lamented this fact. Sansom, Warville, Janson, and James Mease, a Philadelphia physician who wrote a guidebook in 1811, all regretted that the view of the river and the passage of refreshing air from it were blocked by the wharves and buildings on Water Street.<sup>51</sup> Nicholas King, the surveyor general of Washington, D.C., hoped to follow a similar plan along the river of that city. He argued that a common cartway would be more beneficial to the merchants than license to build wharves and warehouses wherever they pleased.<sup>52</sup>

Another feature that William Penn had hoped to avoid nevertheless became a part of the Philadelphia cityscape. Back streets and private alleys were soon cut through the city blocks without regard to the overall plan of the city. Such streets had been created in London's West End to contain carriage houses and to provide access for rubbish and night soil collection.<sup>53</sup> Philadelphia alleys served similar purposes, but they were not part of a comprehensive plan. Their character further changed after the



Revolution when the city's administration passed from the hands of the Proprietary. Formerly private passageways were difficult to close off, so they became public alleys. Lots were further subdivided, and even alley frontage was opened to commercial use, resulting in greater crowding and much heavier traffic than originally intended.<sup>54</sup> Writers about Philadelphia generally found these alleys unworthy of mention.

Philadelphia had 11,200 dwelling houses in 1801, mainly of red brick and roofed with shingles, and generally three stories high.<sup>55</sup> Henry Wansey (1752?-1827), an English antiquarian, mentioned five- and six-story houses, but these were much less common than two or three stories.<sup>56</sup> Visitors saw them as well-built, and they generally were.<sup>57</sup> The houses sat on stone foundation walls and usually had fourteen-inch facade walls and nine-inch party walls, as required in the eighteenth century building code.<sup>58</sup> Philadelphia's building codes were not so rigid as London's, which determined the type of house, number of stories, and the construction specification for each type of street, categorizing the streets by degree of importance.<sup>59</sup> In London, merchants' mansions could be set back from the street on their own grounds, as were a very few

Philadelphia buildings--Clarke Hall at Chestnut and the Bingham House at Spruce, both on Third.<sup>60</sup> The height limit of Philadelphia's buildings was unrestricted.

Philadelphians did begin to consider regulation of construction materials in the late eighteenth century. Brick was praised for its attractiveness and its connotations of stability and prudence. Wood was quicker to build, but more perishable, less safe, required more repairs, and was "unsusceptible of chaste ornament."<sup>61</sup> Some thought, "Bachelors only ought to build of wood--men who have but a life estate in this world, and who care little for those who come after them."<sup>62</sup> Efforts began in 1795 to ban construction of wooden buildings in the thickly settled parts of the city, and such a law was passed in 1796. Some residents and observers complained, but others, including Mease, praised its effects: "This excellent law has greatly tended to lessen fires in the city, and to improve its appearance."<sup>63</sup>

Such legal building standards reinforced the standards of the strong insurance industry in Philadelphia. In 1800, forty to fifty percent of all residences had been reviewed by one of the city's two insurance companies, the Philadelphia Contributionship

for the Insurance of Houses from Loss by Fire and the Mutual Assurance Company. The standards of these companies had enforced a kind of informal building code which limited hazards such as cornices; required progressively thicker masonry, improved roofs, and clear access to front doors and cellars; and encouraged plastered stairs and attics and installation of roof trap doors and ladders.<sup>64</sup>

The general uniformity of appearance among the city's buildings drew both criticism and praise. The interest in American architecture displayed by English observers may have been heightened by the lack of building in England at this time; the war with France tied up English capital from the 1790s through 1815.<sup>65</sup> The modest ornamentation on American public buildings, which did not compare to Europe, led Hector St. John de Crevecoeur (1735-1813), a Frenchman who settled in America for many years, to pass over them and simply admire the consistency of the private dwellings.<sup>66</sup> Svinin protested against the "monotony of the architecture," and Mease claimed that it had always appeared a striking defect to intelligent strangers.<sup>67</sup> Janson favorably compared Sansom Street between Seventh and Eighth streets, built as a row, to the fashionable

parts of London.<sup>68</sup> Other streets, though all of brick, were less uniform. Buildings varied in height (since there were no restrictions) and in width (because the original lot sizes were not uniform).<sup>69</sup>

Uniformity was emphasized by a standard building line. Penn's determination to have Philadelphia houses built in a line or upon a line came from London.<sup>70</sup> The Great Fire of 1666 had generated a new notion of restricting building into and over the street in order to reduce the spread of fire. Penn and his surveyor Thomas Holme followed this thinking in creating broad streets that could not be encroached upon or built over with overhangs. In London's West End, the building line was pushed back ten feet from the edge of the sidewalk to bring light into basements, but this practice was not followed in Philadelphia.<sup>71</sup>

Other encroachments, such as cellar doors, steps, porches, and awnings, were also regulated in Philadelphia; but many buildings had them.<sup>72</sup> Travelers' and residents' opinions of them were mixed. Mease objected to the steps and sloping cellar doors protruding into the pavement; Wansey merely mentioned them; and Janson admired the finest of them: "A great

number of private houses have marble steps to the street door, and in other respects are finished in a style of elegance."<sup>73</sup>

This elegant style, "Philadelphia Georgian," consisted of modest ornamentation, usually in white stone or painted wood, added to a red brick facade. Band courses, lintels, and cornices were emphasized; these parts were further elaborated with carving in the finest buildings. The most elaborate treatments, largely found on public rather than private buildings, accorded special articulation to the second floor, with grander windows, a different surface treatment, and applied pilasters or functional porch columns.<sup>74</sup> Examples of such building were praised by many writers; Svinin commented that America's artistic monuments were mostly architectural rather than sculptural, and most others would have concurred.<sup>75</sup>

Many travelers and residents praised the civic improvements of Philadelphia, noting lighting, watchmen, fire protection, paved streets and sidewalks, cleanliness, public water systems, and street trees: "Every thing which can contribute to the comfort of the inhabitants, has of late years been supplied in Philadelphia."<sup>76</sup> Oil-burning lamps enclosed in glass

lanterns fixed on top of posts lined the major streets. Lamps under the market houses were lit every night at dusk and continued burning until daylight, while other lamps were lit only when the moonlight was not bright enough.<sup>77</sup> The night was also policed by the night watchmen, whose pay came from the city's taxes. The watchmen cried the hour from their wooden guard boxes, while several visited the boxes to ensure punctuality.<sup>78</sup>

Philadelphia had fire companies from its early days, and various regulations aimed at reducing the risk of fire. Storage practices were regulated along with construction practices--rules about building bakehouses and coopers' shops, and storing hazardous materials such as gunpowder, hay, and chemicals. Citizens were required to keep elementary fire-fighting aids such as hooks, ladders, and buckets.<sup>79</sup>

Travelers and residents alike lauded the Philadelphia streets, paved with pebble stones and bordered with brick sidewalks paid for by homeowners.<sup>80</sup> These footways were defended from carriages by ranges of curbstone, by strong posts, or by their elevation above the carriage way.<sup>81</sup> The streets were graded, with a raised center to make the water run

off into narrow gutters of brick or wood on both sides and thence into the river.<sup>82</sup>

Philadelphia was consistently praised by travelers for its cleanliness; the actions of street cleaners were commented upon as well as the results of their work.<sup>83</sup> Svinin reported on the cleanliness of the city's houses outside and inside and described the residents scrubbing "not only the windows, the outer walls of the houses, the porches, but the very sidewalks" with soap on Saturday afternoons.<sup>84</sup> Bailly termed Philadelphia "one of the cleanest places I ever was in" and noted that the market street was cleaned immediately after the market was over.<sup>85</sup> Warville especially praised the hygiene of Philadelphia's market and its butchers:

Here, cleanliness is evident in everything. Even meat, which looks so disgusting in all other markets, has an attractive appearance, and the spectator is not revolted by the sight of streams of blood that infect the atmosphere and befoul the streets.<sup>86</sup>

Not everyone praised all aspects of Philadelphia's sanitation. Warville mentioned that foreigners were shocked to see pigs wandering in the streets and rooting in the garbage, noting that a law against them was ignored.<sup>87</sup> "Tom Trudge," a newspaper contributor of 1769, mentioned "the constant

necessity of wading to the knees, every time I crossed the street" and complained that only the streets of the wealthy were cleaned, not the alleys of the poor.<sup>88</sup> Israel Israel, a wealthy merchant and innkeeper, wrote to the Pennsylvania Assembly in 1794, complaining of the condition of Harmony Street from Third to Fourth and claiming that the filth was piled so high in the cartway that it was impossible for carts to enter his stables.<sup>89</sup>

Newspapers in 1796 contained letters calling for the draining of stagnant pools on the urban periphery and in more centrally located alleys and warning that "dead carcasses, the ghosts of departed cats and dogs are frequently to be seen" in the streets and common sewers.<sup>90</sup> Other newspaper commentators in 1797 and 1798 also complained about filth in the streets, especially in the alleys.<sup>91</sup> In 1798 the Board of Health tried to improve the situation by urging that strict attention be paid to cleansing the narrow alleys and lanes as well as the large streets, but filth was naturally a recurring problem.<sup>92</sup>

Other attempts to improve Philadelphia's sanitation included regulation of the depth of wells and privies and the disposal of refuse, especially from



distilleries, soap boilers' works, and slaughter houses.<sup>93</sup> Adequate gutters and downspouts were required by law in order to prevent the discharge of rainwater on passersby.<sup>94</sup> The public pumps, approved by the Mayor and Aldermen, erected by individuals, and funded by rents from the neighborhood, were commented on by many travelers.<sup>95</sup> The introduction of such public water and sewer works permitted greater population growth.<sup>96</sup> This capacity was further increased by the mechanically operated public waterworks in Center Square, first operated in 1801.<sup>97</sup>

Travelers and residents appreciated the trees that lined the major streets. These Lombardy poplars had been brought from England by William Hamilton in 1784, after a controversy about Philadelphia's street trees had been resolved. In 1782 the Pennsylvania Assembly ordered removal of all trees in streets, lanes, and alleys because they obstructed passage, destroyed water courses, and spread fires. Many residents resented this decision and responded with petitions arguing that trees "conduce much to the health of the inhabitants, and are in other respects of great public utility." The act was soon repealed and

the trees were saved.<sup>98</sup> Mease approved, but he continued to weigh the arguments in 1811:

They serve not only greatly to ornament the city, but to promote public health by the circulation of air that they produce, and the shade they afford during summer: --enough to overbalance the trifling inconvenience arising from the tendency of the roots to force up the pavement, and which has been offered as an argument against their propagation in the city.<sup>99</sup>

John Bernard, an English actor, waxed more lyrical in 1798:

Not only do trees, lining the streets of a town, conduce to health . . . , but there is something peculiarly beautiful in thus introducing the works of the Creator amid those of man, and establishing in the abode of traffic the groves sacred to meditation.<sup>100</sup>

The yellow fever that ravaged Philadelphia prompted an even more intense scrutiny of Philadelphia's environment and sanitation practices.<sup>101</sup> Greater concern over public health led to the covering of Dock Creek, cleaner streets, improvements in medicine and in public health education, and the increased cultivation of lots near the city, "many of which were low and retained water, and thus gave rise to poisonous exhalations."<sup>102</sup> Some observers thought the fever was caused by heat and exhalations of the marshes and that it would go away "in proportion as the country is more drained and cultivated."<sup>103</sup>

Another popular theory ascribed the cause of the fever to the vapors generated by the "low, close, and ill-cleansed parts of a town."<sup>104</sup> This miasma theory, which appeared in the late seventeenth century and thrived in the eighteenth, proposed that illness could be caused by stagnant air.<sup>105</sup> The spacious streets included in London's West End, Penn's Philadelphia, and the plan for Washington, D.C., were intended to help ventilate these cities and to keep them healthy.

Regrets about the deviation from Penn's plan in the waterfront area included a very real concern for the perceived health risks emanating from the dirty, confined situations on Water Street.<sup>106</sup> Janson wrote that Water Street was "so very contracted and dirty, compared to the cleanliness of other parts of the city, that it is alone sufficient to engender disease in the hot months; and there contagion first makes its appearance."<sup>107</sup> Wansey was seriously advised not to go near the wharfs and banks of the Delaware ten months after the yellow fever epidemic, for fear of infection.<sup>108</sup>

The onset of yellow fever was also attributed to Philadelphia's climate. Many visitors and residents found the heat oppressive and sought to avoid the city

In the summer. Sansom wrote that the excessive heat was "so nearly allied to the atmosphere of the burning zone, as readily to receive and propagate the Yellow Fever of the West Indies."<sup>109</sup> Janson thought the reflection of the sun on the brick houses and pavements intensified the already relentless heat.<sup>110</sup> Jefferson attributed the yellow fever to many factors, including filth and crowding, but he also blamed America's cloudless skies.<sup>111</sup>

Philadelphia's growth often attracted the notice of visitors and residents. The increase of four to five hundred houses a year since 1789<sup>112</sup> gave the city a population of nearly seventy thousand by 1800. Such a substantial population led Bailly to consider Philadelphia worthy of the title of "metropolis of the United States."<sup>113</sup> Warville attributed the city's prosperity to its geographical location and to Quaker virtues including toleration and industry. He claimed that population was the most exact index of prosperity, but he would have preferred to halt Philadelphia's growth before it required more almshouses, prisons, soldiers, and spies.<sup>114</sup> Janson plainly admired the city's growth in size, wealth, splendor, and trade.<sup>115</sup> Jefferson, as ever, was dubious about the growth

of urban areas and actually saw the yellow fever as beneficial in discouraging the growth of great cities.<sup>116</sup>

Visitors and residents recognized that Philadelphia's population was diverse in occupation, social class, and wealth. The city was a recognized center of trade, government, communication, culture, business, and industry. Its importance stemmed from its location and position as the state and national capital, and from the presence of many important people. Important engineers and inventors could link up with business people and sources of investment.<sup>117</sup> Warville observed, "Here you find more well-educated men, more knowledge of politics and literature, more political and learned societies than anywhere else in the United States."<sup>118</sup> Philadelphia was a perfect example of the advantages of cities as described by a Baltimore gentleman in 1773:

Liberty, science, and commerce, the great friends of men, are sister adventurers. They are intimately, indeed inseparably connected together, and always take up their chief residence in the cities. Thither the greatest geniuses of the age generally resort, and incited by emulation or fired by ambition, they stimulate each other to successful exertions of native talents, which might have otherwise lain dormant, and forever deprived mankind of much useful information. To them repair the patriots, the men of letters, and the merchants, who become the guardians of the people's

rights, the proprietors of learning, the supporters of their country's trade. Thus free cities, considered in this light, are the repositories, preservatives, and nurseries of commerce, liberty, and knowledge.<sup>119</sup>

Philadelphia's population included many skilled and unskilled artisans and shopkeepers, and many Germans, whose shop signs carried notice of their names and trades in both English and German.<sup>120</sup> Warville remarked that there were fewer French merchants in Philadelphia in 1788 than during the war, but some still remained.<sup>121</sup> More relocated to Philadelphia after the revolutions in France and Haiti.

Concerns were voiced about youths in the streets and about prostitution, but Warville asserted that the latter was more "restrained, restricted, held in contempt, and . . . almost unnoticeable" than in Paris and London.<sup>122</sup> Many Quaker laws had regulated undesirable behavior, and later legislation often followed suit. A 1790 revision of Philadelphia's penal code gave the city the power to sentence anyone convicted of being vagrant, or idle and disorderly, to a jail sentence in order to get them off the streets.<sup>123</sup>

Many commented on American prosperity, but some recognized the simultaneous existence of American poverty.<sup>124</sup> Philadelphia's population was largely

what contemporaries referred to as "the lower sort,"<sup>125</sup> though this majority was infrequently mentioned in print. More than one-third of the population owned no taxable property, and approximately one-tenth were laborers.<sup>126</sup> At the highest end, five percent of the citizens owned nearly half of the taxable property.<sup>127</sup> At the lowest end, some of the people were property; most of Philadelphia's African Americans (ten percent of the population) were free, but some remained enslaved.<sup>128</sup> Janson remarked that he saw few beggars, since "there is indeed no pretext for begging in a country where every individual can find employment, and the infirm are maintained."<sup>129</sup>

Visitors and residents easily recognized a person's occupation level and rank in society by his or her clothing in the eighteenth and the early nineteenth century. As late as 1797, Charles Willson Peale noted of a woman passerby, "her dress bespoke that her wants were supplied by industry."<sup>130</sup> Warville commented on the wealthy women of fashion "who wear hats and bonnets almost as varied as those seen in Paris. These women pay a great deal of attention to their dresses and hairdos and are too obviously affected to be

pleasing."<sup>131</sup> Such comments employed observation to immediately categorize subjects.

Philadelphia's streets were often full of a variety of people. The fairs held in Market Street at about Fourth Street until 1787 attracted people from the country who brought handmade goods to sell to city dwellers.<sup>132</sup> The markets--the larger one on Market Street and New Market on Second Street--attracted considerable, varied crowds--"this multitude of men and women all moving about and going in every direction."<sup>133</sup> Warville thought the market would have been better located in a large square than in the middle of a street, but he praised the restraint and courtesy of the Philadelphia crowds: "without any tumult or abuse . . . your ears are not assailed by harsh shouts as in other markets. Everyone buys and sells in silence."<sup>134</sup>

The streets of Philadelphia were also crowded in the evening. Warville reported that families sat on benches at the door of their houses in the evenings to enjoy the fresh air and observe the passers-by; he thought this a bad habit because the evening air was not always healthy. According to him, all was quiet in the streets at ten o'clock in the evening, with only the watchmen about.<sup>135</sup> Janson, however, wrote of



women emerging at night to pay visits by moonlight rather than in the heat of the day, "while the girls sport and play without hats or cloaks uninterrupted often till near midnight."<sup>136</sup> Svinin claimed that everyone in Philadelphia was sober-faced on Sundays, but at other times there were horse races in Mulberry Street (later named Race after such activities) and around Center Square.<sup>137</sup>

Carriage traffic had encouraged the construction of wide streets in London's West End and in Philadelphia.<sup>138</sup> Philadelphia's generously broad streets themselves encouraged carriage traffic and provided a venue for displaying conveyances to advantage. In 1794 Philadelphia had 307 four-wheeled and 553 two-wheeled carriages. In 1804, the year the tax on them was discontinued, the number had increased to 396 four-wheeled and 588 two-wheeled carriages.<sup>139</sup> Warville saw many handsome wagons used to convey families to the country--long, open, lightly built, and able to hold twelve persons; he also found small chairs and sulkies, open on all sides, common in the country.<sup>140</sup>

Carriages and wagons were both admired and regulated. Janson remarked that Philadelphia's

post-theater "bustle of carriages" was similar to that of London on such occasions.<sup>141</sup> Warville praised the quiet and orderliness of the carts and horses and their drivers during the market: "you see no madmen galloping at full speed down the streets."<sup>142</sup> Carts and carriages were forbidden to enter the market area during market hours, and various regulations were passed to reduce other traffic problems.<sup>143</sup> By 1790 drivers had to keep to the right on specific roads, provisions were made for passing in the narrow streets, and speeding was actively discouraged.<sup>144</sup>

Parking problems were also addressed. By 1790 parking was limited to two hours in specified places, and carters were forbidden to park across walkways and to obstruct others' passage.<sup>145</sup> By the early 1800s, places were designated for carriage taxi stands, pumps had to be left clear, and wagons and carts were licensed and marked with registration numbers.<sup>146</sup>

Other activities occurred in the street, including parades and mass marches, often politically motivated. Strong political feelings were often manifested in front of or near the State House, the symbol of colonial authority. The 1748 Associators, the 1765 Stamp Act rebels, the 1773 Tea Act resisters,

and other Revolutionary era crowds gathered there to express their discontent.<sup>147</sup> Such activities were unregulated, but more ordinary activities became more restricted.

Laws about gutters and downspouts, disposal of refuse, street cleaning, night patrols, vehicular traffic, street sales, and vagrancy redefined the permissible range of activity in the street. At the same time, the regularity of the streetscape, the background for the activity, was being redefined by the original limitations of the grid and the advancing regulation of building materials, street and sidewalk design, and ornamentation with trees, posts, curbs, pumps, guard boxes, and street lamps. Such changes in the material environment were intended to effect corresponding changes in the behavior and character of people. Street behavior and the form of the urban environment had been qualified as the gradual sequence of regulation laid down a new code of conduct and context for the roadway.<sup>148</sup>

Many observers commented on Philadelphia's commercial reputation, noting "the presence of established sources of capital, the universally good reputation of the Quaker merchants, the extension of

new settlements, and the progress of industry."<sup>149</sup> Philadelphia's banks, its wharves, the amount of trade, and its much-lauded market contributed to its reputation: 1,420 ships arrived in 1797, and 1,799 arrived in 1804; export figures amounted to \$7,953,418 in 1790 and \$17,523,866 in 1796.<sup>150</sup> Warville thought the wharves generally rather small and unimpressive, but he saw the ships of many nations there.<sup>151</sup> Along with other travelers, he praised the market and its selection of goods: "It combines everything one might wish--variety in agricultural and manufactured products, orderly displays, honest dealing, and quiet trading."<sup>152</sup> Sansom thought Philadelphia's market second only to Leadenhall.<sup>153</sup>

Philadelphia's industry and commercial speculations had been stimulated since the peace. Warville saw factories "rising in the city and in the country; everywhere there is activity, industry, and competition."<sup>154</sup> The area around Philadelphia had many paper mills; and there were many printing presses, gazettes, and bookstores in the city. More printing was done in Philadelphia than in any other American city.<sup>155</sup> Warville also cited Philadelphia's shops

for their cleanliness and selection: "You find here the same taste and the same quality as in London."<sup>156</sup>

Philadelphia's social and cultural life was also admired in America, though it did not compare to Europe. It had an assembly room for dances and an amphitheater for plays and concerts "so that there are the same amusements to be met with, and in an equal degree, to what there are in the large towns in Great Britain. The state of society too is much the same," said Bailly.<sup>157</sup> Elements of the civilized urban life--conversation, cultivation, architecture, painting, music--flourished in the narrow elite circles of Philadelphia society, along with the country gentlefolk appurtenances of estates and fox-hunting and fishing clubs. Many newspapers, magazines, and handbills contributed to the flow of information. Literary and scientific societies and libraries flourished, though artists and many observers still complained of little encouragement for the arts.<sup>158</sup>

Warville depicted Philadelphia as a moral, law-abiding city: "Here, law needs no muskets; education, morality, and habit do everything."<sup>159</sup> It had many charitable societies, improvement societies,

mutual beneficial organizations, and associations for the relief of foreign immigrants.<sup>160</sup> A dispensary gave out free medicines, a benevolent institution cared for needy pregnant women, and a prison society monitored and aided in the care of prisoners.<sup>161</sup>

Some people and activities worked to disrupt the order and integration of Philadelphia. Complaints of disorder, night robberies committed by escaped thieves, noise, "whoring, drunkenness, swindling, fraud, and daring impiety" tended to cite the outskirts of the city, as if discipline dissolved along the edges.<sup>162</sup> Fears of disturbances also concerned residents of the most densely settled core of the city. Philadelphia had markets on Sundays for a time, but the neighboring inhabitants complained, not only for religious reasons, in 1805. They also objected because the

morals of the young are thereby depraved in a very alarming degree: on the evening of Saturday the Butchers Boys, dissipated men, and idle women collect, and the Market during the whole night is the scene of every species of riot and debauchery; the people in each side of the street are not only molested by their wicked and vulgar noise but even are prevented from sleeping.<sup>163</sup>

Famous figures of the era also voiced objections to urban living. John Adams complained,

Who can study in Boston streets? I am unable to observe the various objects that I meet, with sufficient precision. My eyes are so diverted with chimney sweeps, sawyers of wood, merchants, ladies, priests, carts, horses, oxen, coaches, market-men and women, soldiers, sailors; and my ears with the rattle-gabble of them all, that I cannot think long enough in the street upon any one thing, to start and pursue a thought.<sup>164</sup>

Jefferson thought that cities "nourish some of the elegant arts, but the useful ones can thrive elsewhere, and less perfection in the others, with more health, virtue & freedom, would be my choice."<sup>165</sup> In his Notes on the State of Virginia (1784-85), he advised Americans to "let our workshops remain in Europe," jeering that "the mobs of great cities add just so much to the support of pure government, as sores do to the strength of the human body."<sup>166</sup> The Philadelphia Gazette (a Federalist newspaper) later responded in October 1800 by reprinting parts of Jefferson's Notes on Virginia which claimed that farmers were the chosen people of the earth. The paper ironically asked how Jefferson could be a friend to urban artisans when his mechanics were his slaves.<sup>167</sup>

Both those who scorned cities and those who praised them often discussed and sentimentalized nature. Jefferson's self-reliant rural yeomen, the much-touted characters of noble savages and rustics,

and Marie Antoinette playing milkmaid exemplified these tendencies. Cities and people were prosperous and powerful enough to tame nature and to control it in various ways. With cities as the mediators, urban residents could remove nature from the realm of the powerful, unpredictable, and unknown and regard it as benign, ennobling, and pure. Cities were depicted as seats of malignancy, corruption, and enemies of nature; but they actually enabled nature to be tamed and enclosed rather like a pet.<sup>168</sup>

Philadelphia boasted of its tamed nature in the State House Garden, the four squares planned by Thomas Holme, and Center Square. The State House Garden was a block of grass and trees with pathways and benches. The four squares amounted to little more than open fields and burial grounds until the southeast one was re-landscaped in 1794.<sup>169</sup> Center Square, for many years a site of horse races and betting, became an improved park housing the water works in 1799-1800.

Philadelphia also was closely linked to the nearby liberty lands and to the surrounding counties through the original system of land ownership. William Penn and his surveyor Thomas Holme devised a system in which lots in town and in the liberties were given to



the first purchasers along with their large tracts in the counties.<sup>170</sup> A poem about the city published in a newspaper in 1729 illustrated this connection as it discussed the waterfront, market, houses of worship, shops and workshops, inns, industry, residences, and then eased into a description of the countryside.<sup>171</sup> Birch's visual description of the city similarly used illustrations of the adjacent townships to frame a portrait of the city.

## Chapter 4

### ORDER AND AESTHETICS IN BIRCH'S VIEWS OF PHILADELPHIA

Images have always contained both a plane of content and a plane of expression,<sup>1</sup> but the subjectivity of an image has not always been recognized. The sense of reality conveyed by a convincing presentation often overcame the knowledge of its manipulation. Such persuasive force was especially potent when few or no other images were available. The evidence of an image seemed truer than words,<sup>2</sup> giving an impression of immediacy because viewers imagined they were viewing the actual scene rather than a representation. As Jonathan Richardson, an eighteenth-century critic described it, painting's advantage over writing was that ideas

come not by a slow progression of words, or in a language peculiar to one nation only; but with such a velocity, and in a manner so universally understood, that it is something like intuition, or inspiration. . . . What a tedious thing would it be to describe by words the view of a country (that from Greenwich Hill for instance) and how imperfect an idea must we receive from hence! Painting shews the thing immediately, and exactly.<sup>3</sup>

Pictorial representations have often been assumed to possess a level of informational value. In fact, an artist looking at a scene has never been able actually to transcribe such observations; he or she could only translate them into the terms of a medium.<sup>4</sup> The terms of a medium included an expected degree of accuracy, based on the subjectivity of vision implied by the medium and the sway of conventions associated with both the medium and the subject. Existing representations tended to have a significant influence, since from them an artist acquired a working vocabulary with which to represent reality.<sup>5</sup> Generally familiar conventions also shaped an artist's vision and practice.

An artist's creation of an image and a viewer's experience of an image have both been influenced by the expectations aroused by different genres. These different categories of artistic creation have maintained a different balance between an expected degree of accuracy and artistic license; these expectations shape a viewer's experience of an image. Viewers have expected to perceive both aesthetics and information in city views and architectural drawings, the genres most similar to Birch's views of Philadelphia. Architects made drawings for many

reasons: to enhance their own reputation, to raise money for construction, to thank donors for gifts, or to advertise some commercial enterprise. They often represented the subject in the most favorable light, sometimes adding decorative details, eliminating offensive surroundings, or presenting unfinished projects as completed.<sup>6</sup> Visitors, both architects and leisured travelers, often recorded architectural landmarks in drawings.

Viewers have always been unable to perceive an image without immediately categorizing it; the process of categorizing and "reading" an image depends on the viewer's culture and knowledge of the world and of pictorial representation. The image immediately becomes part of language because it must be verbalized to be discussed.<sup>7</sup> Images are translated through words, but they are not ultimately reducible to words because of the capacity of visual representation to transcend words in conveying meaning. The perceptual aspects of viewing and translating images have often been ignored in favor of mere discussion of the subject.

William Birch's views of Philadelphia (see figs. 2-29) have often been discussed as exact representations of the city in 1800, when the set was published.

He presented them as an informative likeness intended to attract residents and investors. He referred to the prints as "dissections" in his introductory page,<sup>8</sup> and he originally named the entire project, "Philadelphia Dissected, or the Metropolis of America."<sup>9</sup> The published title--The City of Philadelphia, in the State of Pennsylvania, North America; as it appeared in the Year 1800 consisting of Twenty Eight Plates Drawn and Engraved by W. Birch & Son.--presents the volume as the definitive equivalent of the city.

Birch's introductory page asserted that "the street-scenes are all accurate as they now stand"; "the buildings, of any consequence, are generally included"; and "the choice of subjects are those that give the most general idea of the town."<sup>10</sup> His choices--focused on, or at least including, architectural and/or commercial landmarks--often paralleled those mentioned by the authors of travel accounts and guides to the city.

Birch stressed the significance of Philadelphia in the introductory page to the second edition (1804):

when it is considered that Philadelphia is one of the most prominent Cities of a recently established nation--placed upon a continent so vast, flourishing under a free government, its future advancement must be viewed as an object of interest and worthy of attention.<sup>11</sup>

He praised Philadelphia's rise to civilization, saying that his work would stand as a memorial of its progress for the first century: "The ground on which it stands, was less than a century ago, in a state of wild nature; covered with wood, and inhabited by Indians. It has in this short time, been raised, as it were, by magic power, to the eminence of an opulent city."<sup>12</sup> Since his work was intended to demonstrate this development, he included those ingredients that appropriately illustrated Philadelphia as a civilized city.

In a brief introductory description, Birch's verbal presentation of the city stressed commerce : "an opulent city, famous for its trade and commerce, crowded [sic] in its port, with vessels of its own producing, and visited by others from all parts of the world."<sup>13</sup> In his memoirs, written long after the publication of the Philadelphia views, he emphasized the role of the work "to promote and encourage settlers to the establishment of trade and commerce," especially to attract "those with capital." When they saw "number after number, of the elegant establishments of a city," after expecting only a forest, his work would soon cause "the full effect of its intention, by the arrival of funds, talents, projectors, and every other aid that a new country could wish."<sup>14</sup>

Birch concluded that timing had also proved critical to his success: "There is reason to suppose that from that ardent attempt of the arts, at so favorable a season, when Europe was everywhere at war, that the present bustle in the solid improvements in our cities, and internal projections in the country did originate."<sup>15</sup> He also aimed to improve American civilization by promoting the fine arts. He would propagate taste in order "to form the national character favorable to the civilization of this young country, and establish that respectability which will add to its strength."<sup>16</sup> He aimed his images and encouragement at the wealthy, who could afford to purchase his work and to cultivate taste. The price of the views--\$1.00 for each plain print, \$1.50 hand-colored; \$28.00 for a plain set, \$41.50 colored--revealed that the intended audience was the nation's wealthy elite. Birch catered to their interest in the material environment and the general faith in its efficacy as an instrument of character formation.

William Birch's memoirs stated that he himself chose the subjects for the series and instructed his son Thomas in making the preliminary drawings. One surviving preliminary watercolor is signed with

Thomas's initials.<sup>17</sup> Surviving watercolor drawings of the State House yard, Robert Morris's unfinished house, and High Street Market appeared very similar to the finished prints. (see figs. 30-32, 11, 14, 23) Small figure sketches of Native Americans and a horseman in the street were closely paralleled by finished plates. (see figs. 33-34, 6, 15) These focused studies of street life emphasized the human element; the printed images combined these scenes of city life with studies of architectural landmarks.

Birch used a good grade of both laid and woven unwatermarked paper in the first edition of his Views of Philadelphia.<sup>18</sup> He claimed in his memoirs that it was difficult for him to obtain materials to publish the views at any decent rate.<sup>19</sup> The plates measured about eleven by thirteen inches; the pages were fifteen and a half by eighteen inches overall, allowing room for ample margins.<sup>20</sup>

Birch claimed that he had instructed "our Friend Mr. Seymour" in the engraving of the views.<sup>21</sup> Samuel Seymour, a portrait engraver in Philadelphia from 1797-1822, was credited as engraver only on the large framing print, slightly different from the first plate, The City and Port of Philadelphia, (fig. 2) which



appeared in May 1801, after the bound set of views had already been issued.<sup>22</sup> The plates were engraved in line only, without employing the stipple technique that Birch had earlier used in the Delices de la Grande Bretagne. These images were larger than those of the Delices, making minute rendering in stipple inappropriate. Also, Seymour may not have been familiar with this technique.<sup>23</sup>

William Barker, a script engraver, engraved the title page and the map of Philadelphia which served as the third plate.<sup>24</sup> (fig. 3) Barker's map was based on a map prepared by Thomas Stephens as part of the 1796 Philadelphia directory; the two maps have the same compass orientation, the same scale of one hundred perches to the inch, and the same shading of the built parts of city.<sup>25</sup> A 1799 advertisement specified [Richard] Folwell, No.33 Carter's Alley, as the printer.<sup>26</sup> Robert Campbell, at 30 Chestnut Street, was listed as the seller on the plates of the first edition. He was listed in the Philadelphia directories at that address until 1800, but the 1801 advertisement sheet made no mention of him and advised interested parties to contact Birch directly.<sup>27</sup>

Birch's finished project of twenty-eight plates fulfilled the plans of his subscription book, which projected "about 25 or 30 of the principal Buildings and Views."<sup>28</sup> Late in 1799 Birch issued a printed advertising flyer entitled "Memento for the 18th Century," which listed all the images and noted which ones were available at the time of the advertisement.<sup>29</sup> This advertisement stated that "the Prints may be had separately, as all the subjects are well calculated for framing," and that Birch's work was already on display "at principal booksellers" in New York, Baltimore, and Philadelphia.<sup>30</sup> He had originally projected selling the edition in pairs, with a title page to be delivered with the last number; but the volume was probably only sold as a set.<sup>31</sup> A separate sheet that served as an advertisement was also included in some volumes.<sup>32</sup>

The 1799 advertisement projected "an elegant Volume, to show the progress of the City in its first Century,"<sup>33</sup> a theme that Birch continued to emphasize in his promotion of the work. His later memoirs called it a work "by which an idea of the early improvements of the country could be conveyed to Europe."<sup>34</sup> He affirmed the importance of the international market and

declared that there was at that time "scarcely one set of the work in Philadelphia that was not sent to Europe for that purpose."<sup>35</sup>

Birch proved the work's popularity in America by including a list of subscribers, updated for the new edition, in each volume. The subscription book and the list of subscribers printed in the first edition totalled 156, providing a minimum number of impressions of the first edition. In his memoirs, Birch made further assertions concerning the work's popularity with a story about "our late Friend and best wisher to mankind that formed the constitution of the Country," Thomas Jefferson, who, "during the whole of his presidency," left an edition of Birch's views of Philadelphia "on the sofa in his visiting Room at Washington till it became ragged and dirty but was not suffered to be taken away."<sup>36</sup>

Birch employed another strategy to market his set of Philadelphia views. He published "a large Print of the Frontispiece, 25 1/4 by 21 1/2 inches engraved in an elegant and bold style, for the purpose of framing."<sup>37</sup> An 1801 printed advertisement declared that this print of the City and Port of Philadelphia, and a companion view of the New York City harbor, were

"intended as elegant furniture for a drawing or setting room, which will serve as references for amusement to the two volumes, when conversation or entertainment of more consequence should cease to be the subject of a party."<sup>38</sup> The Philadelphia framing print appeared in 1801, and Samuel Seymour finished engraving The City of New York in March 1804.

Birch originally planned two sets of city views, one of Philadelphia and one of New York; the latter work was never completed, despite a statement in the second edition of the Philadelphia views declared that "The city of New-York is now in hand as a companion volume to the Philadelphia."<sup>39</sup> Birch's memoirs gave the following reasons for abandoning the venture:

I had nearly completed a set of drawings of that city [New York] which I meant to publish as a companion Volume to the Philadelphia; but found profits of the undertaking was not equal to the expense of traveling and the support of my family.<sup>40</sup>

Later editions presented the Philadelphia work as an ongoing project. The introductory page of the second edition suggested that changes in the city, new buildings, and new architectural styles, made it proper to regard these views "as the basis for a more extensive scale, rather than a finished work in

itself."<sup>41</sup> The subscription page of the same edition informed purchasers that the work would be continued in supplements, "as the City shall increase in public Buildings, and other ornamental elegancies."<sup>42</sup> The definition of the city had seemed complete in 1800, but by 1804 Birch had already admitted that his portrait would have to remain open to changes in the city.

The four views completed in 1798--State-House, With a View of Chesnut Street; State-House Garden; High Street, From the Country Market-Place; and Bank of the United States, in Third Street (figs. 21, 23, 35, 36)--were labeled as being "Drawn & Engraved by W. Birch & Son" and "Published by R. Campbell & Co. No. 30 Chesnut Street Philada. 1798." Three showed street scenes on broad avenues, and all four compositions lacked a strong central focus. Despite depicting Philadelphia's most famous political monument, the two State House scenes ignored the building rather than focusing on it. The latter two were replaced by other versions for the full first edition. (see figs. 11, 17) Birch completely revised the view of the Bank of the United States, making the building larger and the image more powerful. The second version also provided a clearer distinction between the Bank and the First

Presbyterian Church, a very similar-looking building. George Washington's funeral procession was added to the plate of High Street, From the Country Market-Place in 1800. A few copies of the two reworked and abandoned views appeared, but not as part of the volume.<sup>43</sup>

Five of the prints dated 1799--New Lutheran Church, in fourth Street; The House intended for the President of the United States, in Ninth Street.; Second Street North from Market St w/th Christ Church; Library and Surgeons Hall, in Fifth Street; and Gaol, in Walnut Street (figs. 6, 13, 15, 19)-- were also published by Campbell and thus were probably made earlier in the year. The images of the Jail and Christ Church depict familiar landmarks mentioned by nearly all writers who discussed the city. The New Lutheran Church, the President's House, and Library Hall had all recently been built in the American version of delicate Adamesque Neoclassicism. All of the compositions employ a strong diagonal, showing the corner and two sides of buildings. Each of the streets is enlivened with figures and vehicles, usually heading into the space of the picture, away from the viewer.

Ten more prints were published by W. Birch & Son in 1799--Arch Street, with the Second Presbyterian

Church; South East Corner of Third. and Market Streets;  
High Street. with the First Presbyterian Church; High  
Street Market; High Street. from Ninth Street; New  
Market. in South Second Street; Back of the State  
House; Alms House in Spruce Street; Pennsylvania  
Hospital. in Pine Street; and a second version of Bank  
of the United States. in Third Street (figs. 5, 8, 9,  
 10, 12, 16, 22, 25, 26, 17). These were street scenes  
 showing foot and vehicular traffic against a backdrop  
 of some well-known buildings and streets, with more  
 attention focused on human activity than on buildings.  
 The second plate of the Bank retained a lively picture  
 of street life but emphasized the impressiveness of the  
 building's architecture much more than the previous  
 image.

Seven plates were published in 1800--The City &  
Port of Philadelphia. on the River Delaware from  
Kensington; Arch Street Ferry; Old Lutheran Church. in  
Fifth Street; High Street. From the Country Marketplace  
Philadelphia. with the procession in commemoration of  
the Death of General George Washington. December 26th  
1799; An Unfinished House. in Chesnut Street; Congress  
Hall and New Theatre. in Chesnut Street; and Prepara-  
tion for War to defend Commerce. The Swedish church

Southwark with the building of the Frigate Philadelphia (figs. 2, 3, 7, 11, 14, 20, 29). These images contained fewer buildings and focused more on a central structure or framing device. Trees and sky were integrated into the composition, making an interplay between solids and space. Foreground, middle ground, and background occupied separate planes that drew the viewer's eyes back and forth rather than following a continuous recession into perspectival space. The composition of Congress Hall and New Theatre was less focused and did not adhere to this pattern.

Three undated plates may have been the last ones included. In View in Third Street, from Spruce Street (showing the Bingham's house); Bank of Pennsylvania, South Second Street; and The Water Works, in Centre Square (figs. 18, 27, 28), the buildings did not dominate the entire image, the images were not so dramatic, and activity was slow and leisured. The Water Works and the Bank of Pennsylvania plates were probably produced in 1800, when the former building was completed and the latter was nearly finished. The view of the Bingham house might have been created in 1799, when Birch made many other views of neoclassical buildings.



Birch's introductory page described the first and last of his views as follows:

the scenery is confined within the limits of the city, excepting the first and last views: the frontispiece represents, with the city at large, a busy preparation for commerce, and the last plate, with the Swedish church, the exertion of naval architecture to protect it; each subject terminating at the opposite extremities of the suburbs, on the bank of the river.<sup>44</sup>

The first plate showed Philadelphia as a whole from a distance, while the rest of the plates depict the city from the inside.<sup>45</sup> Birch began with a view of Philadelphia's harbor to emphasize the importance of the city's commercial achievement and its effect on the city's growth.<sup>46</sup> (fig. 2) He chose to depict the city from a particularly significant location. Kensington, located north of the city on the Delaware River in the Township of Northern Liberties, was physically and legally separate from the city of Philadelphia. The large tree located there and seen in the print was the Treaty Elm, the supposed location of William Penn's first landing in America and of his treaty with the Indians, commemorated in Benjamin West's famous painting of the event (1771). The geographical relationship of the areas is indicated on the map Birch included in his volume. The remaining views mapped

the city in three dimensions from street level rather than abstracted in two dimensions.

The order of Birch's images did not correspond to the narrative structure employed by those who wrote about Philadelphia, since their verbal texts nearly always lacked any kind of order in their sequence of urban images. Birch's arrangement was probably more conscious; his sequence of plates may be likened to a series of walks through the city, as seen by the implied viewer, a well-traveled person of leisure with an interest in contemporary life. This arrangement of views framed the city as a sequence of vistas, roughly progressing from north to south and east to west. (see fig. 37)

After the title page, the view from Kensington, and the map of the city, the next four plates depicted scenes progressing westward on Arch Street. Plate 4 depicted the wharf, and Plate 5 stopped just west of Fourth Street and faced back east, past the Second Presbyterian Church, to give a glimpse of shipmasts at the end of the street. Plate 6 pointed north from Arch at Fourth Street at the New Lutheran Church, while the fourth faced south from Fifth toward Arch at the Old Lutheran Church.

The next six images focused on Market Street (formerly known as High Street). Plates 8 and 9 depicted buildings facing Market Street at Third Street and just east of Third--Cooke's Building and the First Presbyterian Church. Plate 10 took the viewer into the market sheds east of Second Street, facing west and looking through the distantly receding tunnels of the market. Plate 11 depicted the view west on Market Street from the end of the market buildings at Fourth Street. Plate 12 faced east on Market Street at Ninth Street, with the market building visible in the distance. Plate 13 depicted the house intended for the President on Ninth Street south of Market, a house which formerly belonged to Robert Morris. Plates 14 and 15 did not fit so neatly into this geographical sequence; Plate 14 depicted Robert Morris's own unfinished house at the corner of Eighth and Chestnut, and Plate 15 returned east to Second Street north of Market, showing the Old City Hall and Christ Church.

The next twelve plates meandered among landmarks on the south side of town, gradually moving from east to west. Plate 16 depicted the market sheds in Second Street south of Pine. Several blocks north and one block west, Plate 17 showed the Bank of the United

States on Third Street north of Walnut. Moving south again, Plate 18 depicted the Bingham house just north of Spruce on Third Street.

Plates 19-23 centered on well-known buildings and scenes around State House Yard (now known as Independence Square), between Fifth and Sixth on Chestnut and just south of Chestnut. Plate 19 showed Library Hall south of Chestnut on Fifth. Plate 20 depicted Congress Hall and the Chestnut Street Theatre on Chestnut Street from in front of the State House. Plates 21 and 22 showed the front and back of the State House, and Plate 23 displayed the State House Garden facing the brick wall on Walnut Street.

Four of the remaining plates depicted Philadelphia's great civic institutions, some of which were also architectural landmarks, on the edges of the growing city. The large buildings on their own blocks, the condition of the streets, and the kinds of street activities betrayed the still-rural nature of the areas surrounding the eastern core of Philadelphia. Plate 24 shows the Walnut Street Jail between Fifth and Sixth, Plate 25 the Alms House on Spruce between Tenth and Eleventh, Plate 26 Pennsylvania Hospital on Spruce between Eighth and Ninth, and farthest west, Plate 28

depicted the Centre Square Water Works, at Market west of Thirteenth (now the site of Philadelphia's City Hall). Plate 27, which depicted the Bank of Pennsylvania, the city's newest classical building, was an exception, being located in the heart of the city on Second Street between Walnut and Chestnut.

The final image explicitly emphasized the importance of maritime trade in its depiction of shipbuilding and in its title, Preparation for War to defend Commerce: The Swedish Church Southwark with the building of the Frigate Philadelphia. The church, also known as Gloria Dei, had been a local landmark for the entire century of its existence. It was nearly completely obscured by the construction scene and equally subordinate in the title. Southwark, the site of the last plate, was just south of the city, with a similar settlement pattern focused on the Delaware riverfront.

The structure of a volume of city views offered what one scholar, Peter Hales, has called the "symbolic equivalent of a guided tour."<sup>47</sup> It presented many perspectives as it provided a layered picture of the city in a series of images. The viewer could absorb the views by looking at each individually in sequence

and/or by examining them all in relation.<sup>48</sup> The book provided its own context for each of the images. It was a controlled program describing the city according to its creator's intentions, automatically taking on greater significance and claiming to be more representative than a single image. A single view might have been atypical and thus biased, but the entire volume gave an illusion of completeness and representation. This ordering of a city, like all others, represented the shaping of its image by a specific creator.

Each of the images was also ordered within itself through composition, framing, focus, perspective, and text. The subject of the views--Philadelphia's streets--determined the overall structure of the images. The city's grid plan dictated the form of visual chunks, requiring depictions based on straight lines and right-angled corners. The compositions of the images employed diagonals, depicted buildings from an oblique angle, and gave a sense of space overhead through representations of sky and clouds.

All the images had a vanishing point within the lower third of the composition. Only the view within the Market Street shed depicted a perfectly centered

frontal view; the view down Market Street from Ninth had a central vanishing point but was seen from left of center. All the rest were seen from a vantage point to the right or left, with a vanishing point in the far distance at the opposite side. The images were structured around the straight diagonals formed by the composition. Twelve of the twenty-seven images (excluding the title and map pages) had a composition with fairly shallow perspective, focused on the foreground; the perspective of eight images proceeded from the left front to the right back, the most natural direction for perceiving space; and the perspective of five proceeded from the right front to the left back. All the views depicted a rational space in which every part of the image was seen as if the viewer was positioned at a single point.

The views were often framed by the side of a building or a tree which extended up along one or both edges of the image. The more perspectival views closed off both sides of the image with the buildings along a street and distant open space at the vanishing point. Other views focused on a landmark building and its context. These important buildings dominated the images because they actually were significantly larger

than the surrounding buildings. Art historical monuments were integrated with vernacular buildings in reality, and they were shown in that context in these images.

Titles of individual plates built upon an expectation of accuracy and promoted belief in their own truthfulness through the manipulation of words. Fifteen titles gave a building name and location, providing the built context for the landmark in text as well as visually; nine began with a street, a location, and then often mentioned a notable building visible in the view; and three depicted more diffuse locations and themes, as was evident in both titles and images. All of the titles ended with the word Philadelphia. They gave the impression of mere objectivity because they seemed straightforward, but even the subtle difference between the two types of titles guided viewing of the images by pointing first to a landmark or to the streetscape. Such titles presumed that the volume, and each of the images, would exactly duplicate the places mentioned.

The images also built on an expectation of accuracy and promoted belief in their own truthfulness through the manipulation of visual elements. They



seemed informative rather than aesthetic because of their level of detail. The details particularized each image and the elements within it, implying that the image accurately represented reality. More generalized images would have displayed more unity among the series and greater integration within each image, but they would have seemed more idealized.

The discrete details of buildings, people, and other elements of the cityscape depicted by Birch implied his faithfulness to the autonomous reality of each of these elements. He portrayed the independence of the various parts rather than subordinating them to an overall aesthetic scheme. The disintegration of his oblique angle perspective; the lack of strict uniformity in his depiction of such repeated elements as trees, posts, buildings in the background, vehicles, and people; the inclusion of mundane, unaesthetic activities like rubbish collection and pig driving; and the unexpected subjects such as an empty marketplace and moving a house suggested a realistic rather than utopian view of the city. These ingredients appeared to be based on empirical evidence from the creator's knowledge of the city.

Birch's images were not intended as pure art or as reproductions of art; he did not show architecture or sculpture for its own sake. Buildings were exhibited in their crowded context; or, if they did stand alone, the walls, mud, and debris were not omitted. The only piece of public sculpture in Philadelphia, the statue of Franklin at Library Hall, was not treated as a work of fine art but as part of the ornamentation on a building.

Birch's prints concentrated on the materiality of objects, describing the textures and colors of materials with a variety of line. Hatching served to suggest volume, and shadow was suggested by the varying thickness of lines. The narrow range of tones afforded by the plain black and white images was capable of implying colors through its rendering of brick, stone, wood, grass, leaves, and mud. The effect of hand-coloring was to emphasize the impression of reality, while obscuring the knowledge that these images were merely reconstitutions of reality. The enhanced picturesqueness of the colored plates made them more attractive and thus more beguiling.

## Chapter 5

### REPRESENTATION IN BIRCH'S VIEWS OF PHILADELPHIA

Birch's views celebrated the pattern of Philadelphia's grid plan. He explicitly acknowledged it in his third plate, a map of the city. He focused on regular straight lines and right angles in streets stretching off into the distance and street corners, his representations of the waterfront did not emphasize the irregularity of that boundary, and he did not depict Dock Street, the one street that was not guided by the grid. He consciously chose to ignore the irregular city.

Birch depicted the breadth of Philadelphia's major streets rather than the narrowness of the other passages cut through the original blocks, ignoring the back alleys just as Philadelphia's textual describers had. The alleys were primarily the residences of Philadelphia's middling and poorer citizens, those who performed manual labor; nearly all of the merchants and professionals lived on the major streets.<sup>1</sup> Birch, who catered to this wealthy audience, chose to depict the streets where they lived and performed business.

The view of the Bank of Pennsylvania showed only a glimpse of the opening of one such alley, but none was visible in its length. The city seemed spacious, with room for plenty of traffic on the sidewalks, in the extensive marketplaces, and in the streets, and plenty of sky overhead. Birch emphasized the length of Philadelphia's waterfront by depicting it in the first two images and again in the last.

Birch focused on twenty major buildings, besides the market sheds in Market and Second Street, visually describing what the travelers and guidebooks described in words. Five of the buildings were old landmarks, built in the 1750s or earlier; four were built between 1760 and 1789; and the majority, eleven, were recent structures, built in the 1790s. He pictured buildings from a front corner, concealing any back buildings.

Birch mainly depicted brick and stone public buildings, surrounded by open yards or other brick buildings. The only prominent frame buildings in his views were those on the waterfront and near the Bank of the United States and Library Hall, and the one being moved through the street in front of the Jail. In depicting few frame buildings, he conformed to the pattern of writers about the city and the actual

pattern of building in the central city as reported in city directories.<sup>2</sup> He depicted streets with a uniform building line, often including sidewalk encroachments such as front steps, cellar doors, awnings, and signs suspended between posts and buildings.

Most of the buildings Birch portrayed were typical Philadelphia Georgian or stylish neoclassical structures. The classical architectural style of the older churches--Second Presbyterian, Christ Church, Old Lutheran (St. Michael's)--was evident from their steeples and arched windows. Other prominent older buildings and all the ordinary surrounding buildings followed Philadelphia's pattern of relatively plain symmetry. The Bingham house of the 1780s and all the prominent buildings of the 1790s displayed a more self-conscious style. Nine of these 1790s structures--Zion Lutheran Church, Cooke's building, the First Presbyterian Church, the house intended for the President, Morris's unfinished house, the Bank of the United States, Library Hall, the Chestnut Street Theatre, and the new wings of Pennsylvania Hospital--were among America's finest examples of Adamesque neoclassicism. The two most recent--the Bank of Pennsylvania and the Water Works--illustrated the

early Greek Revival style, a more severe form of classicism; and one--Robert Morris's unfinished house--displayed an unusual picturesque French form of classicism. All of these examples and styles were frequent subjects of commentary.

Birch portrayed the street lights, trees, watchboxes, and paving often praised by writers. The presence of these amenities on most of the streets contrasted with their absence from the streets on the outer edges of the city. Writers consistently praised Philadelphia's cleanliness; Birch's views followed suit by generally depicting neatness, but some evidence of rubbish intruded, even near distinguished monuments. Fairly orderly bundles lay on the wharf at Arch Street; bundles and debris rested against the wall and building next to the First Presbyterian Church; and some debris was heaped on Market Street near a stopped cart. A rotting fence remained across from the house intended for the President; stacked lumber blocked the entrance to Morris's unfinished house; and a pile of wood scraps lay in the street across from the Bank of the United States. Dogs, some attended, some not, roamed about the waterfront, the market, State House Yard, and the outskirts of town in ten of the views. His prints did

not testify to the presence of pigs in Philadelphia streets; the only stray pig obviously escaped from its cart and would soon be returned.

Birch depicted the various amenities of Philadelphia's public water system also praised by writers. Gutters or downspouts were visible on such prominent buildings as the Bank of the United States, the Bingham house, Library Hall, Congress Hall, and Pennsylvania Hospital. Public water pumps were visible on sidewalks, and an entire plate was devoted to Philadelphia's most recent marvel of water engineering. Benjamin Latrobe began construction on the Pump House of the Water Works in Centre Square in May 1799, and the first water was pumped in January 1801.<sup>3</sup> The purpose, materials, and form of the project were remarkable innovations. The Water Works was praised as both an engineering marvel and an outstanding aesthetic success, but the latter aspect is more evident in Birch's view.<sup>4</sup>

Birch depicted the Water Works as a grand monument, almost sculptural as it sat untouched in the middle of a sylvan setting. The chimney discharged smoke, but the entire building seemed very self-contained; no door was visible, and the windows

appeared to serve a formal exterior aesthetic purpose rather than the pragmatic purpose of admitting light. The smooth marble surface of the structure's geometric solids--a cylinder and the lower half of a cube--seemed especially impenetrable. Rows of trees enclosed the parklike area where a wealthy woman supervised her children while affluent horsemen rode on the road surrounding the square. In contrast, the two covered wagons headed out of the city to the right suggested a much more prosaic tale of the laborious transport of goods.

A substantial part of the impetus for the improvement of Philadelphia's water supply had stemmed from concern about yellow fever, but Birch's prints made no reference to these fears. He described none of the surrounding swamps, overcrowded alleys and waterfront, accumulated rubbish, pollution, heat, or stagnant air to which contemporaries attributed the fever. His skies were only partly cloudy, and few of the chimneys discharged smoke. The scenes of the waterfront were quite tidy and busy, with workers actively manipulating the materials that temporarily littered the ground. The views of Arch Street Ferry



and Library Hall exhibited the only examples of congested clustering of buildings.

Philadelphia's growth, often commented upon by visitors and residents, was evident in Birch's prints. Eighteen of the plates described the densely settled area of the city, but six showed substantial development on the fringes within the incorporated city. The two views from outlying townships, Kensington in the Northern Liberties and Southwark, pointed to healthy economic development outside the city limits.

The people Birch described were as varied as those mentioned by contemporary writers, but the details he included made them more particularized examples. Of the 506 identifiable people Birch depicted, 378 (75 percent) were male and 129 (25 percent) were female. He depicted forty-two children (8 percent) and no elderly people. Fourteen (3 percent) were African-American, and eight (2 percent) were Native American. Such specificity invited comparison with other population information. The actual male-female ratio in Philadelphia was not so skewed as that depicted by Birch. The number of African-Americans he depicted was significantly lower

than their representation in the general population (10 percent).<sup>5</sup>

The Native Americans represented visitors rather than residents, so population figures were not relevant to them. In 1793 forty-seven Native Americans came to Philadelphia to meet with the leaders of the United States government. President Washington presented them with peace medals, Governor Mifflin received them at the State House, and Frederick A. Muhlenberg, Speaker of the House of Representatives, showed them the sights.<sup>6</sup> Birch chose to depict Native Americans in locations they probably actually visited: State House Yard and Arch Street near Zion Lutheran Church, where Muhlenberg's relative had been pastor. No ethnicity was evident in Birch's depiction of European-Americans.

Birch and his contemporaries were able to recognize the occupational level and social rank of the people he depicted from the way they were clothed and the actions they performed. Judging from dress, 233 (46 percent) of the people Birch depicted were from the elite upper class, and 209 (41 percent) were from the working classes. Wansey mentioned women who wore veiled bonnets and carried large fans "like the fashion of last year in England," and "the gentlemen with round

hats, short canes in their hands, their coats in the English taste, and wearing pantaloons";<sup>7</sup> such people were well-represented in Birch's views.

Working-class occupations represented by Birch included lamplighter, butcher, smith, fiddler, and many carters, laborers, servants, vendors, shipwrights, and carpenters. Mariners, the largest occupational group in the city, were also the largest single group represented at work in Birch's views.<sup>8</sup> Few artisanal trades were represented because most of these were carried on indoors. Overall, though, his picture of the city's population was a gross distortion. Birch employed the same bias in his memoirs, singling out only the wealthy as worthy of mention. Most writers also largely ignored the working classes and focused on the places and activities frequented by the elite. The picture drawn by Birch and by those authors was calculated to appeal to the cultured class of visitors, investors, and residents.

Nearly all of the distinguishable facial expressions were pleasant or serious. Only one instance of extreme emotion--a military man crying into his handkerchief at George Washington's funeral procession--was depicted. Only two of the figures

looked directly out through the surface of the picture plane and established a relationship with the viewer--the blank-faced boy in front of the house intended for the President and the curiously vacant woman in front of the State House. All the other figures looked in other directions or expressed an undecipherable gaze, and many were simply too small to show facial expression or gaze. Warville had admired the peacefulness of the Philadelphia crowds; Birch's characters appropriately conformed to the standards of desirable street behavior--lack of violence in action or emotion.

Birch portrayed Philadelphia as the site of much human activity. He scattered individuals and groups across the sidewalks and streets, but they seemed to have a purpose for being there. These anecdotal groupings provided a narrative structure for the images, emphasizing interactions among people and the nature of the city's social groups. The groupings had the flavor of realistic anecdote rather than hypothetical compositional elements, because a plausible narrative could be constructed about each of them.

The composition of these images was not dependent upon the figures, which emphasized that the rationale for their inclusion was other than aesthetic. If the prints had been made without figures, the compositional lines would not have been altered, but the scenes would have looked less busy and cluttered. The figures of George Washington's funeral procession were actually added later to the plate of the View from the Country Marketplace: the composition remained successful with or without them. The scattered distribution of the figures gave the scenes the look of natural accident rather than intentional artifice.

The activity portrayed in Birch's views included many vehicles, ranging from a variety of fine luxury carriages to covered wagons, open carts, and wheelbarrows. Vehicles and riders moved purposefully, a few people entered and left buildings, and children played on sidewalks, with dogs, and with hoops and sticks. Military figures, identifiable by their uniforms, walked and rode in the streets, alone and in groups. Signs of "wholesome" entertainment were visible in the form of a fiddler, a parade, parks, and a theater. No "immoral" activities such as gambling, cockfights, violence, or prostitution were visible,

though some contemporary writers mentioned these activities. No drinking or eating of any kind were visible. All of these aspects were presented as a direct transcription of life in Philadelphia's streets, but judicious editing had already eliminated some activities from the realm of appropriate description.

Many groups, as evidenced by their body language, were conversing. Some figures intentionally loitered, others congregated to follow a fiddler, watch a parade or a house being moved, waited for the theater to open, or took their leisure in a park. Others transacted business at the market, engaged in discussions outside taverns, rode horses or wagons, paraded through the streets with a militia group, transported goods, fished, or walked through the empty market shed, perhaps to avoid rainy weather.<sup>9</sup> Some merely looked at the sights, just as the viewer of the volume did.

Birch's volume opened and closed with images of the mercantile city, heavily dependent on Atlantic trade for its wealth and goods. His introduction emphasized this dependence, mentioning the first and last images. Philadelphia's shipping expanded greatly in the 1790s, judging from the evidence of tax lists,<sup>10</sup> and Birch's images described this prosperity.

In the first view (fig. 2), quite a distance from the heart of the city, a handful of laborers worked while an equal number of persons pursued relaxation and leisure activities. In the central location of Arch Street Ferry (fig. 3), the launching point for John Flitch's steamboat,<sup>11</sup> more activity centered on the movement of goods. The final image of Joshua Humphreys' shipyard in Southwark (fig. 29) was the volume's most focused image, integrating form (the framework of the ramp) with subject matter (work in the maritime industry) and meaning (Philadelphia and America's naval power in commerce and defense).

Philadelphia's Market Street Market, praised by visitors and residents, featured prominently in Birch's views. The market sheds were pictured from the side, from both ends, from far away, and from within; vendors in the street between the sheds were also indicated (figs. 8-12). The market began at Front Street and was extended west to Third Street in 1759 and to Fourth Street in 1786.<sup>12</sup> The building west of Second Street, built in 1707-10, originally housed the city's first Town Hall and Courthouse on the second floor and followed the European practice of employing the ground

floor as a public market.<sup>13</sup> All the buildings were sheds with brick piers supporting a gabled roof over an arched ceiling, following the form of rural markets in England and the Low Countries.<sup>14</sup>

In the three halls, merchants and grocers rented permanent stalls. The easternmost stalls were the choicest, while butchers leased the less expensive space in the two western halls. Vegetable and fruit sellers paid to set up wooden stands interspersed between the market houses, and sawyers sold firewood at the eastern end of the three halls.<sup>15</sup> Portable stalls were stowed away after hours. Different parts of the market were designated for butter, salt fish, Jersey produce, other country produce, American earthenware, cooper's ware, fruit and garden seeds, and butcher's meat; all sorts of herbs, roots, and meal were sold by vendors standing under the eaves.<sup>16</sup>

The New Market in Second Street between Pine and Cedar (now South) was built in 1745.<sup>17</sup> (see fig. 16) There were eight permanent stalls in the sheds north of Lombard and the same number to the south.<sup>18</sup> The western half of the stalls was legislated for the country people, while the other half was let to butchers.<sup>19</sup>



Birch's view of Third and Market displayed a bustling intersection full of people and goods (fig. 8). Clusters of figures interacting suggested stories of buyers and sellers haggling, servants meeting, and neighbors gossiping. The view of Second Street north from Market (fig. 15) showed a fair amount of activity and traffic, with a variety of vendors outside the Old Town Hall and several wagons and horsemen in Second Street. The presence of the latter indicated that the view probably did not represent market day, when vehicles were prohibited in the market area.<sup>20</sup> The other views of the marketplaces--Market Street east of Third, the interior of the market and the view from it, and the view of New Market (figs. 9-11, 16)--depicted a few individuals and groups in the area of the market sheds again when the sheds were not in use; this strategy made the buildings appear more monumental.

Birch never depicted Philadelphia's famous markets in full operation in the sheds designed to house them. His view of Market Street west from the marketplace was originally such a view, with a butcher and vegetable seller and their wares displayed in the shed, but they were replaced by George Washington's funeral procession in the final version. Perhaps a

scene of the height of market activity would have been too confused for Birch's aesthetics, overwhelming the architecture that he wanted to emphasize, or perhaps it was merely too difficult to recreate.

Philadelphia's merchants and innkeepers were also renowned and often praised by visitors and locals. The hanging signs exclusively signalled inns; the signs over doors indicated other businesses.<sup>21</sup> A three-dimensional boat attached to the side of the building marked a tavern at the foot of Arch Street, and the sign visible behind George Washington's funeral procession marked the location of the Black Horse Inn.<sup>22</sup> The building with an awning next to the Bank of Pennsylvania was the City Tavern, in 1794 "a principal tavern, where the books are kept of what ships arrive and clear out; and to this coffee-house the principal merchants resort every day."<sup>23</sup> It decreased in importance in the 1790s as the center of city and tavern life shifted westward and was eclipsed by Oeller's Hotel at Sixth and Chestnut.<sup>24</sup>

Congressmen often lived and ate at Oeller's because of its proximity to the State House.<sup>25</sup> It became Philadelphia's first real hotel, the scene of Assembly balls, musical entertainments, Society of

Cincinnati and Philadelphia Medical Society meetings, and French banquets, often held in its sizable Assembly Room. It appeared in Birch's view of Congress Hall, but it had been destroyed by the time of the entire volume's publication. On December 17, 1799, Rickett's Circus caught fire and spread the flames to the hotel next door; both buildings were ruined.<sup>26</sup>

Buildings with large shop windows on the ground floor, like those on Market Street at the corner of Second, seen from the marketplace beyond the parade, and next to the First Presbyterian Church, indicated larger commercial establishments. Such luxury services expanded in the 1790s, judging from the evidence of tax lists;<sup>27</sup> this resulted in larger and more elaborate salesrooms. The largest retail building in Philadelphia, Cooke's building, was pictured in Birch's print of Third and Market. (fig. 8) Joseph Cooke, a Jeweller, built it about 1792, finishing it "in the very best manner," with an elaborately ornamented exterior. He included space for apartments, full kitchens in the cellars, and stores that "when first opened, presented a scene of magnificence not surpassed by any place of business on the globe, at that day."<sup>28</sup>

Cooke's building was the subject of much local comment; it soon became popularly known as Cooke's Folly in the early nineteenth century when its fortunes declined. Birch represented Philadelphia's first stylish commercial building not as a marvel in its own right but as the backdrop for the open marketplace vendors. Perhaps he found the lively peddlers more picturesque and interesting than the luxury craftspeople and merchants of the commercial palace.<sup>29</sup> The contrast may have been intentional, since he could have chosen to depict the vendors from an angle that did not include Cooke's building.

Birch failed to depict any scenes focused on industry and manufacturing, despite the fact that a substantial number of industrial enterprises flourished in Philadelphia. The city was a center for American scientific, engineering, and mechanical knowledge. The Pennsylvania Society for the Encouragement of Arts and Manufactures was founded there in 1787,<sup>30</sup> and the United States Mint was established there in 1792. The Mint remained in Philadelphia after the federal government removed to Washington, since it had to be near Philadelphia's technologically skilled workers.<sup>31</sup>

Lumberyards, tanneries, breweries, textile mills, paper mills, printshops, glass furnaces, iron forges, smithies, potteries, brickyards (the John Hills map of 1798 shows at least twenty-five in Philadelphia), and other factories were active in and around the city; but Birch ignored them. He preferred to live in the country in both England and America and later promoted that lifestyle with a volume of prints of country estates. He seemed to promote an agrarian ideal similar to that of Thomas Jefferson and other Democratic Republicans, including the planners of the Federal City, who made no provisions for industry there. Like them, his image of a city focused on grand public buildings, but his vision was comprehensive enough to include the middle range of ordinary buildings which lined the city's major streets. The only manufacturing he depicted aside from shipbuilding appeared in the view of Library Hall--a glimpse of a smith in front of a fire, seen through the window of a small frame building (fig. 19).

Birch chose not to depict Carpenter's Hall, intended for use as a guild hall for the Carpenters' Company. Built in 1770-74 (earlier than most of Birch's subjects), it may have been designed by Robert

Smith (1722-77), a Philadelphia architect and member of the company.<sup>32</sup> Its architecture was not outstanding, and the building was somewhat hidden from the street because it was set back so far, but it had been updated in 1790 with the addition of a decorative doorway.<sup>33</sup> The building was best known as the temporary quarters of many early Philadelphia organizations: the American Philosophical Society, Library Company of Philadelphia, Continental Congress, and most recently the Bank of the United States (1791-97) and the Bank of Pennsylvania (1798-1801).<sup>34</sup> Birch probably thought that picturing the permanent homes of these institutions would be more symbolically and architecturally impressive.

Birch prominently displayed the new home of the Bank of the United States (fig. 17), chartered as the depository of federal funds, issuer of notes that could be circulated as currency, and de facto regulator of other banks.<sup>35</sup> The new building, opened in 1797, was designed by Samuel Blodget, Jr., a talented businessman and amateur architect.<sup>36</sup> Birch showed that its grand pillars and pilasters and even its steps dwarfed the ordinary buildings beside it. The columns and building front were marble; the cornice, balustrade, and pediment were wood; and the side and rear walls were

brick.<sup>37</sup> Blodget's plans had called for all marble, and he later complained that the brick sides were "an injurious deviation;"<sup>38</sup> but even with the substitutions, the building cost over \$100,000 to complete.<sup>39</sup> The copper sheets for the roof had been imported from England, and the capitals and the eagle on the tympanum had been carved by a French sculptor, Claudius F. Le Grand.<sup>40</sup> The material details of all these ornaments were evident in Birch's view.

The building's size and style both impressed observers. Writers declared the building "a superb edifice . . . with a majestic portico" and "the master-piece of Philadelphia, for beauty and grandeur of architecture."<sup>41</sup> One writer explicitly equated the symbolism of architecture with the country's financial strength, saying that the Bank "does infinite credit to the nation," describing the architecture, and concluding: "This building indicates the flourishing state of those finances which were organized by the much-lamented General Hamilton."<sup>42</sup> Many of Birch's prints similarly conflated architectural monuments with commercial success and financial stability.

Birch also recorded the Bank of Pennsylvania (fig. 27), designed by Benjamin Latrobe (1764-1820), an

English-born and -trained architect and engineer who came to America in 1795;<sup>43</sup> but its marble pillars, pediment, and steps did not appear as impressive as those of the Bank of the United States. The Bank of Pennsylvania was much smaller and was seen from farther away. The buildings on both sides were not dwarfed by it, and its roofline was fragmented by the large front gable, the domed lantern with transparent sides arising out of a central circular platform, and more than one chimney. All these factors combined to reduce the impact of the severe architecture. The building did represent an advance in construction techniques as the solid local marble made it fireproof.<sup>44</sup> It was deemed "an elegant structure, executed in white marble, from the design of an Ionick Temple," and one foreigner thought that it was "the only building in the United States which exhibits taste and proportion."<sup>45</sup>

Many times other eminent buildings were cited as precedents for these two banks. These so-called prototypes merely exhibited steps leading up to a central portico with a triangular tympanum and a rectangular building with a domed inside ceiling. The Dublin Exchange was mentioned as a model for the Bank of the United States.<sup>46</sup> The Bank of Pennsylvania was



said to be derived from the temple of Minerva at Athens, Thomas Jefferson's Virginia State Capitol (1785-89), and the Bank of the United States.<sup>47</sup> Such associations, often cited in verbal accounts, added to the reputation of these buildings and the institutions. Birch's presentation of the buildings had to rely on their visual features alone. He included the prosaic details of brick sides and a fragmented roofline as well as the distinguished particulars of pure marble and grand columns.

Birch recorded the most prominent public service institutions, those mentioned by nearly every visitor to Philadelphia and already celebrated in previous prints.<sup>48</sup> He followed the writers' pattern in describing the Walnut Street Jail, the Almshouse, and Pennsylvania Hospital, each in a single view. His images also drew attention to activity in the street in front than to the building behind.

Robert Smith designed the Walnut Street Jail (fig. 24) and began building it in 1776, but it was not used as a jail until after the American Revolution.<sup>49</sup> The rough-hewn stone structure consisted of a main building with a central portal and cupola, and a wing

at each end.<sup>50</sup> High walls connected to the wings extended to Prune Street (later Locust).<sup>51</sup> A smaller stone building on Prune Street was erected in 1785 as a workhouse and later became a debtors' prison. A small rectangular structure was added in 1791 as a penitentiary for solitary confinement.<sup>52</sup>

The entire jail complex was already overcrowded by 1800, but it was known for its innovative approach to treatment of criminals.<sup>53</sup> Many accounts of the prison and its innovations were published in the 1790s: Caleb Lownes' An Account of the Gaol and Penitentiary House of Philadelphia and of the Interior Management Thereof (1793), the Duc de la Rochefoucauld-Liancourt's On the Prisons of Philadelphia (1796) which was translated into many languages, and Robert J. Turnbull's A Visit to the Philadelphia Prison (1797).<sup>54</sup> One contemporary called it "the most elegant and secure building of the kind in America."<sup>55</sup> Though Birch's print distracted the viewer's attention with the anecdotal narrative of a house being moved through the street, the building's size, filling two-thirds of the image in width, and its repetitious rows of windows testified to its substance and order.

The Friends' Almshouse and the House of Employment (fig. 25) were built in 1767 as identical two-story, L-shaped, brick buildings, with a four-story square tower at the corner.<sup>56</sup> Poor people unable to work were sent to the Almshouse, on the east side of the square, which is visible to the left in Birch's view. The able-bodied poor were set to work in the House of Employment, on the west side of the square, visible to the right in the print. Birch depicted a pleasant square with picturesque trees and a tall protective wall.

Despite the title--Alms House in Spruce Street Philadelphia--the House of Employment was the most prominent building shown. Birch may have preferred to use the name of the Almshouse because it was an older institution or because Almshouse sounded more charitable and prestigious than House of Employment. He may have shown the House of Employment more prominently because he could get a better view from the west side than the east or because he preferred to concentrate the composition on the right side.

Pennsylvania Hospital (fig. 26) had been designed by Samuel Rhoads (1711-84) to be built in parts; the first part, the T-shaped east wing was built in

1756.<sup>57</sup> The matching west wing was built 1794-96, when the central pavilion, designed by David Evans, Jr. was begun.<sup>58</sup> The central pavilion's neoclassical ornament included six marble Corinthian pilasters, a pediment with an inset stone patera, a detailed entablature and doorway, marble sheathing for the first and second stories, and a circular balustrade on the roof surrounding a skylight for the surgical amphitheater below.<sup>59</sup> The latter parts of construction, notably the amphitheater, were still underway when Birch made his view, but all was completed by 1804.<sup>60</sup>

The hospital was well-known for its prominent physicians and for its fashionable architecture. A contemporary deemed it and the Almshouse "unrivalled in America."<sup>61</sup> As Birch portrayed it, the building loomed large in its square, pleasantly enclosed by trees and a high brick wall. The anecdotal episodes--a uniformed militiaman holding a rearing horse and two men carrying another man bundled up in a chair--distracted less from the monumental architecture than did the scenes in the Jail and Almshouse prints. The narrative implication of an invalid even pointed to the hospital's significance.

Library Hall was the one institution of learning prominently featured in Birch's views (fig. 19). It had been designed by Dr. William Thornton, a West Indies physician with no previous architectural training, and built by the Library Company of Philadelphia in 1789-90.<sup>62</sup> It was a two-story brick building with pilasters, a pediment with a semicircular window, and a balustraded roof with ten ornamental urns.<sup>63</sup> The Loganian annex, a long narrow room lit by a palladian window at each end and from the top by a skylight in its copper-covered roof, had been added in 1794 to house the Loganian Library;<sup>64</sup> but it was not visible in Birch's view. The building's entrance was especially unusual for Philadelphia, with its pair of curved staircases meeting at a flat porch with iron railings along all the edges and a niche over the door with a statue of Benjamin Franklin. The statue had been made in white Carrara marble by Francis Lazzarini, an Italian sculptor, and presented by William Bingham. Franklin had been consulted about its form and clothing, and he had approved of a "gown for his dress and a Roman head."<sup>65</sup>

Library Hall was much admired by Philadelphians and visitors for its fashionable architecture and its

altruistic learned purpose.<sup>66</sup> Charles William Janson referred to both aspects when he said, "The library is an institution which does credit to the country."<sup>67</sup> Birch admirably displayed its architecture and demonstrated its popularity and usefulness by depicting persons both entering and leaving the building.

Birch rather slighted other institutions of learning such as the American Philosophical Society. Its Philosophical Hall, erected 1787-89 in State House Yard across the street from Library Hall, was visible through the trees in the view of the back of the State House, but it seemed rather an accidental inclusion.<sup>68</sup> (see fig. 22) Birch also disregarded Charles Willson Peale's Museum of patriotic portraits and scientific curiosities, a mixture of education, culture, and popular entertainment. It was located in Philosophical Hall from 1794-1802;<sup>69</sup> and the Museum sign was just visible over the door to Philosophical Hall. He probably chose not to focus on Philosophical Hall because the building's architecture was of insufficient size and aesthetic interest. Birch's interests also tended toward culture and landscape rather than science and natural philosophy. He may also have been reluctant to promote a competitor in the field of fine

arts, since Peale was an artist and had designed prints and had several children who painted miniatures.

Birch depicted a building owned by the University of Pennsylvania, the house intended for the President of the United States (fig. 13); but he made no reference to the university. The purchase had not been completed when he made the view and the move had still not occurred when he published the set. The University bought the house in 1800 for \$42,000, only half of the construction costs, but the institution did not move there until early 1802.<sup>70</sup>

Neither did Birch depict the earlier University buildings at Fourth and Arch, which included the old tabernacle built for the visit of George Whitefield. The tabernacle was a large brick building with two rows of arched windows and a central arched doorway with a triangular pediment and plain columns; it was later altered by Robert Smith, who added more windows and a steeple with bell and weather vane. Smith also designed a three story brick dormitory building finished in 1763; a three story brick house for the provost finished in 1774; and a one story kitchen. All of these buildings were partially renovated in 1794,

but they never looked so attractive as the house intended for the President.<sup>71</sup>

Birch did depict the most famous and infamous place of popular entertainment in the city, the Chestnut Street Theatre (fig. 20). Comedian Thomas Wignell began construction in 1791 on a building said to have been copied from the Royal Theatre at Bath.<sup>72</sup> After delays due to the yellow fever epidemic, the theater was finally opened in 1794. It had a total capacity of 1165 people, accommodated on the ground floor and in three galleries.<sup>73</sup> Birch showed its decorative palladian window and articulated pediment with a semicircular window and the more prosaic board awning sheltering crowds in front of the building.

Visitors lauded the building--"an elegant and convenient theatre, as large as that of Covent Garden," said Henry Wansey<sup>74</sup>--but also noted opposition to it within the city. Quakers and some Republicans despised its frivolity and viewed the yellow fever as the city's punishment for the ostentation and dissipation it represented.<sup>75</sup> Petitions circulated urging its closing, and epithets like "Synagogue for Satan" were hurled in the local newspapers.<sup>76</sup> As a successful venue for plays, lectures, and musical entertainments



and as a perceived mixture of a bordello and a palace, the Chestnut Street Theatre was both a sign of the city's cultural development and an extremely complex negative symbol. Birch's image demonstrated the theater's popularity but made no comment on its complexity. The building was not prominent enough to warrant an image to itself; and the juxtaposition of the theater and Congress Hall did not resolve the ambiguity of the theater's allusions.

Six of Birch's prints depicted churches, making religion one of his most significant themes. Churches were the most numerous and among the city's most noticeable public buildings and most influential institutions. Of the more than thirty churches and meetinghouses in Philadelphia around 1800,<sup>77</sup> he chose three Lutheran and two Presbyterian churches and a single Episcopal one--St. Michael's Lutheran, Zion Lutheran, Gloria Dei (Swedish Lutheran), First and Second Presbyterian, and Christ Church (Episcopal). Some of these he depicted more conspicuously than others.

St. Michael's German Lutheran church was prominently recorded in one of Birch's prints (fig. 7). The building was built 1743-48 and was quite large for

its time. Two porches were later added, giving it a cruciform shape.<sup>78</sup> In 1765 part of St. Michael's congregation formed Zion Lutheran because St. Michael's had become too crowded.<sup>79</sup> Birch may have included St. Michael's Lutheran Church because its congregation had founded Zion. It may also have seemed a logical conclusion to the series of views along Arch Street, several of which included churches. He may have wanted to show a substantial older building to allude to the longevity of the city in general and the German Lutheran community in particular.

Zion Lutheran Church, notably depicted in one of Birch's views (fig. 6), was designed by Robert Smith (1722-77) and built 1766-69.<sup>80</sup> A 1794 fire consumed the building, but it was rebuilt in 1796.<sup>81</sup> It was the largest public meeting space in Philadelphia, and thus was used for the George Washington memorial service. It was widely admired and named by some as "the most elegant church in America."<sup>82</sup> Birch probably chose to depict Zion because of its architectural prominence, both in size and style. The fire which had consumed the previous Zion Church and been recorded in a print had also made its replacement more memorable.<sup>83</sup> In addition, Zion was an appropriate backdrop for a

scene of a Muhlenberg, a good German Lutheran, directing a tour of Philadelphia for a group of Native Americans.

Outside the city limits, the oldest church was Gloria Dei, the Swedish Lutheran Church in Southwark, built 1698-1700 and seen in the last print in Birch's volume (fig. 29).<sup>84</sup> It was not known for its size, but it was often mentioned by travelers because of its age and the reputation of its learned Swedish minister, Dr. Nicholas Collins.<sup>85</sup> Birch probably depicted Gloria Dei because of its age and reputation and because it was convenient to include it in his picture of the shipyard.

The First Presbyterian Church at the corner of Market and Bank Street, east of Third, occupied the right half of another of Birch's images (fig. 9). It had been entirely rebuilt 1793-94 by John Trumbull, and the majesty of its design was evident.<sup>86</sup> Its emphatic classical design of four Corinthian columns supporting a large triangular pediment and entablature, and its considerable size made it the most architecturally conspicuous church in the city.<sup>87</sup> He probably depicted the First Presbyterian Church because of its dramatic architecture. Its similarity to the Bank of the United

States may have reflected the similarities between their audiences.

The Second Presbyterian Church, visible in Birch's view of Arch Street (fig. 5), was built at Third and Arch in 1750. It was simply a rectangular building with an unusually tall steeple that had been added in 1770.<sup>88</sup> Birch's picture of the steeple of the Second Presbyterian Church captured the church's most notable feature and incorporated it in a pleasant view of largely residential Arch Street.

The Third Presbyterian Church, not pictured by Birch, was built 1766-68 on Pine west of Fourth as a chapel of ease for First Presbyterian.<sup>89</sup> Robert Smith designed the rectangular brick building with a peaked roof.<sup>90</sup> A congregation of Scots Presbyterians (known popularly as Seceders, but technically an Associate Reformed Church) built a classically designed church in 1770.<sup>91</sup> Birch did not depict the this building, located on part of the old Alms House square, on Spruce between Third and Fourth. These latter Presbyterian churches served middling and poorer congregations, while First and Second Presbyterian's members were Philadelphia's wealthy Presbyterians;<sup>92</sup> this

difference may also have influenced Birch, who would have wanted to attract the wealthy as his customers and patrons.

Birch included Christ Church, the best-known church in Philadelphia in his view of Second and Market (fig. 15). It had been built 1727-44 and probably designed by John Kearsley, a doctor and amateur architect.<sup>93</sup> The church itself was large, with a square tower at the west end and four foot thick stone walls encased in brick. A steeple nearly two hundred feet tall was added in 1751 by Robert Smith;<sup>94</sup> an 1805 guidebook to the city called it "a steeple that may vie in point of elegance, with any spire in Europe."<sup>95</sup> It was the site of the organization of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States; its rector, William White (1748-1836), became the most prominent bishop in America and conducted the memorial service for George Washington.<sup>96</sup> Many members of Congress had attended church there. The inclusion of Christ Church steeple in a view of the intersection of Second and Market, along with the old Courthouse and a market scene, seized on one of that church's most prominent exterior features. Since it was the city's best-known church, Birch may have felt obliged to

include it. He may not have felt required to focus an entire print on it since such an image had already been published in the Columbian Magazine.<sup>97</sup>

St. Peter's Anglican Church, not pictured by Birch, was built 1758-61 at Third and Pine as a chapel of ease for parishioners of Christ Church.<sup>98</sup> Designed by Robert Smith, but fairly plain, it was fairly large.<sup>99</sup> St. Paul's Anglican Church, also not pictured, was built in 1762 on Third below Walnut. It was independent of Philadelphia's other Anglican churches.<sup>100</sup>

Birch ignored such churches as St. George's Methodist Episcopal, a plain brick building erected in 1763 at the corner of Fourth and New Street,<sup>101</sup> and First and Second Baptist, the former built in 1762 at Second near Mulberry (later Race).<sup>102</sup> These denominations were more likely to have represented middle- and lower-class Philadelphians than the churches he did depict.<sup>103</sup> He also ignored all the African-American churches in Philadelphia. Though not so significant in size, they were decidedly influential as the founding churches of such denominations as the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Considering Birch's bias toward the Anglo-American elite, and the

uneven representation of other people in his views, such neglect was not uncharacteristic.

Perhaps more surprising was Birch's omission of any views of Friends' meetinghouses. Nearly all visitors and many local writers commented on the practices and appearance of Philadelphia's Quakers, but Birch never mentioned them in his memoirs nor depicted them or their buildings in his views. The Greater Meeting House, which stood at the southwest corner of Second and Market, was just visible in the distance in the view of the First Presbyterian Church. The Hill Meetinghouse, built in 1753 on Pine near Second, and the Fourth Street Meetinghouse, built in 1763 on Chestnut,<sup>104</sup> though noticeable in the city's political and intellectual life because of their prominent members, were not significant in size or architecture.

The Free Quaker Meetinghouse at the southwest corner of Fifth and Arch was erected as a two-story brick building in 1783, as plain as other Quaker structures.<sup>105</sup> Its political role as the religious home of Quakers who chose to take up arms in the American Revolution was much more significant than its architecture. Birch may have chosen to ignore these buildings because they were architecturally ordinary,

but he may also have assumed that the Friends' waning influence in the city did not warrant their inclusion.

Birch also ignored the city's Catholic churches, perhaps because their members were less influential and because most of their churches were not architecturally fashionable. St. Joseph's was built in 1757 south of Walnut and east of Fourth Street on Willing's Alley. It was a single-story brick building with a broken-pitch roof supported by arches; several observers commented that its architecture was unexceptional.<sup>106</sup> Nor was St. Mary's, built on Fourth Street below Locust in 1763, architecturally notable.<sup>107</sup> When a number of Germans seceded from St. Mary's for linguistic reasons and founded Holy Trinity, they did build a more architecturally significant structure.<sup>108</sup> This building, constructed in 1789 on the corner of Sixth and Spruce, was large and fashionably neoclassical.<sup>109</sup> St. Augustine's, on Fourth near Vine, was under construction when Birch made his views, but construction did not prevent him from depicting the Bank of Pennsylvania and the Water Works.<sup>110</sup>

Birch depicted a number of scenes and elements of nature in his urban views. The regularity of the



plantings of nearly all the trees revealed their intentional cultivation. Those on Market, Chestnut, Arch, Second, and Third Streets follow a straight line along the curb. Even the trees in Centre Square and the yard of Pennsylvania Hospital were a consistent distance from the boundaries of these squares. The trees in the Almshouse yard seemed to be a mixture of species, but they were all located at near the periphery of the yard. Even the trees in Southwark, with the exception of the one next to the guardhouse in the right middle ground, appeared to be planted in a pattern. Only the Treaty Tree in Kensington was obviously and actually a spontaneous indigenous growth.

Birch focused the greatest attention on nature in State House yard (figs. 22-23). The Pennsylvania Assembly had decreed in 1736 that the remainder of the square "shall be enclosed and remain a public open green and walks forever."<sup>111</sup> The formal landscaping did not occur until 1784-85, when George Morgan of Princeton, New Jersey, donated one hundred elm trees. Samuel Vaughan, a wealthy Jamaica sugar planter living in Philadelphia, directed the planting. A brick wall with a grand central doorway was built on Walnut Street, gravel walks were laid out, and seats were

added.<sup>112</sup> It became a fashionable retreat and a place where members of Congress could "retire to compose their thoughts, or refresh themselves after any fatigue of business, or confer together and converse, without interrupting the debate."<sup>113</sup>

Visitors described the State House Garden as "the pleasantest walk at Philadelphia" and "a fine display of rural fancy and elegance."<sup>114</sup> The Rev. Manasseh Cutler continued his praise:

The artificial mounds of earth and depressions and small groves in the squares have a most delightful effect. . . . [serpentine walks] heighten[s] the beauty, and affords constant variety. That painful sameness, commonly to be met with in garden-alleys, and other works of this kind, is happily avoided here, for there are no two parts of the Mall that are alike.<sup>115</sup>

In Birch's description, the trees appeared as a picturesquely haphazard backdrop for the activities of Philadelphia's elite at leisure, the group he targeted as his patrons. The architecture of the back of the State House, most notably the clock designed by Peter Stretch, and the dramatic doorway in the brick wall, strongly emphasized the city's imitation of European civilization and classical aesthetic styles and pointed to the artificiality of the nature enclosed by them.

Birch chose to depict the presidential mansion that was never occupied (fig. 13) rather than the house where Washington and Adams actually lived. The Pennsylvania General Assembly had authorized construction of a house for the President at the southwest corner of Ninth and Market in early 1791 after the federal government had returned to Philadelphia. Construction began in 1792, continued through 1797, and ultimately cost nearly \$100,000. When the home was offered to John Adams, the new President, he declined to use it on constitutional grounds. It was sold to the University of Pennsylvania, modified, and finally used as a college building.<sup>116</sup>

The house where Washington and Adams lived, 190 Market Street, the second house east of Sixth, had been built in 1761, owned by a member of the Penn family, and appropriated by both Gen. Sir William Howe and Gen. Benedict Arnold while each commanded the city during the American Revolution. In 1785 Robert Morris (1734-1806) purchased the house from the Penns and rebuilt it, giving it four bays, two dormers, and raised ceilings on the second floor to accommodate entertainment after the London fashion.<sup>117</sup> The

three-story brick building had a gracious entrance, with three steps up to the door and vacant lots with trees and shrubbery on each side used as gardens.<sup>118</sup>

In 1789 the Morrises graciously moved next door to the former Joseph Galloway house on the southeast corner of Sixth and Market, allowing Washington to occupy their house.<sup>119</sup> Though it had been chosen as the grandest house in the city, Washington was not so satisfied when he inspected it in 1790: "It is, I believe, the best single house in the City, yet without additions it is inadequate to the commodious accommodation of my family."<sup>120</sup> Washington enlarged and altered rooms and added back buildings to improve and adapt its capacity.<sup>121</sup> Adams succeeded him as President and as resident of 190 High Street. After Adams left in 1800, it was sold and became John Francis's Union Hotel from 1801-1804.<sup>122</sup>

Birch chose to depict the grander building, with its Corinthian pilasters, marble steps, an articulated cornice, balusters around the roof, Palladian windows, and an ornamented cupola.<sup>123</sup> The size and location of this house made it more prominent, and its fashionable architecture, planned as part of its original construction, may have been more coherent than

190 High Street, which was repeatedly renovated. Highlighting a building as the intended Presidential mansion was probably more attractive than focusing on a hotel. But even this choice was not without its share of irony. The unused mansion symbolized the emotional and monetary cost of Philadelphia's investment in its role as the temporary capital and its loss of that role and those benefits.

Another residence pictured by Birch was Robert Morris's later house (fig. 14). Morris, a merchant, investor, and prominent politician, purchased nearly the entire block from Chestnut to Walnut between Seventh and Eighth in 1791.<sup>124</sup> He hired Pierre L'Enfant, a French-born architect who had remodeled New York's Old City Hall for use by Congress,<sup>125</sup> to design a fashionable new mansion there. It was built of red brick with pale blue marble window-heads, lintels, sills, and pilasters, and a French-style mansard roof.

The Morris mansion attracted a great deal of attention while under construction because of its size, its dramatically different picturesque style, and its lavishness. In 1795 Isaac Weld wrote that only two or three houses in the city would attract attention for their size and architecture. He continued,

The most spacious and most remarkable one amongst them stands on Chestnut Street, but it is not yet quite finished. At present it appeared a huge mass of red brick and pale-blue marble, which bids defiance to simplicity and elegance. This superb mansion, according to report, has already cost upward of fifty thousand guineas and stands as a monument of the increasing luxury of the city of Philadelphia.<sup>126</sup>

The mansion was never finished, due to Morris's bankruptcy. The women prisoners from the Walnut Street Jail, quartered there during the yellow fever epidemic of 1798, were the only people who ever lived in the house.<sup>127</sup> Even while it was being built, especially while Morris's financial affairs worsened, the house was christened "Morris's Folly."

When Morris's speculation finally drove him to ruin, the Bank of Pennsylvania seized the property and sold it to William Sansom, a prominent real estate promoter, who soon built a series of handsome rowhouses there.<sup>128</sup> The house itself was unsalable, so it was dismantled and the materials sold about 1800. Many of the decorative elements--two marble mastiff dogs, tablets with festoons of flowers, and elegant semicircular bas-relief tablets of Tragedy and Comedy--were later used at other locations--in front of a marble yard, under windows on a row of houses, and on the remodeled Chestnut St theater.<sup>129</sup>

Birch chose to depict the most dramatically different home in the city, despite its role as the target of ridicule. He gave his image an ambiguous title, An Unfinished House, thus excusing the incomplete central section barricaded by boards, the boarded-up windows, the mere skeletons of cupolas, and the lack of landscaping; but he did not disguise these characteristics. The onlookers hinted at continuing curiosity about the building, but even their presence in the muddy yard of his grand private mansion seemed a mockery of Morris's pretensions. Probably all of Birch's American audience was aware of the irony of his title, but the meaning may not have been so evident to Europeans. No construction was in evidence, but uninformed viewers may have interpreted the man at the left with a ladder and an oilcan as a construction worker rather than a lamplighter.

Birch also depicted the Bingham house, Philadelphia's earliest large urban mansion set in its own yard like a public building (fig. 18). The Binghams made several trips to Europe and were frequent guests of the Duke of Manchester, whose home in London had been designed by Joshua Brown in 1776 and finally completed in 1788.<sup>130</sup> The Binghams admired its

imposing facade and generous entertaining space and decided to model their new Philadelphia home, Mansion House, after it. Soon after arriving in England in 1784, William Bingham began to copy the plan but worried about building such a grand edifice in Philadelphia. He wrote to his father-in-law, Thomas Willing, not to "permit any one but the Persons to whom it is necessary to exhibit this Plan, see it--as it would only expose it to criticism."<sup>131</sup>

The Bingham's Mansion House copied Manchester House's five-bay facade and Venetian (French) windows on the first floor, but it had no giant pilasters to relieve the horizontal impression and no rusticated ground floor. Its other architectural appointments--back and front bow windows and stucco figures--were details then fashionable in London.<sup>132</sup> The grounds of Mansion House included other buildings and auxiliary embellishments: stables, a greenhouse, and a kitchen; a circular gravel carriage way, swinging gates of open ironwork, and a brick wall enclosing the house and garden; and walks, statues, and exotic citrus trees arranged in at least three acres of formal gardens.<sup>133</sup>



The Bingham's Mansion House was the first house to break with the pattern of Philadelphia's plain brick town houses, and it was both admired and criticized. Anne Bingham was "accused of having contributed more than any other to this taste for extravagant show."<sup>134</sup> Charles Bulfinch, the Boston architect, visited Philadelphia in 1789 and made a drawing of the house for his own reference.<sup>135</sup> He described Philadelphia's universal "quakerish neatness"<sup>136</sup> and contrasted that with the Bingham house, which was

in a stile [sic] which would be esteemed splendid even in the most luxurious parts of Europe. Elegance of construction, white marble staircase, valuable paintings, the richest furniture and the utmost magnificence of decoration make it a palace . . . far too rich for any man in this country.<sup>137</sup>

Ann Warder, a modest young Philadelphia Quaker, thought it "very ungenteel . . . as it much resembles some of our heavy public buildings."<sup>138</sup>

Birch portrayed the home's handsome neoclassical facade surrounded by luxurious trees; he took his view from a distance in order to reveal the building behind its protective wall. The wall and the finished street in front of the house signaled its long-established character, in contrast to the mud and boards in the other views of prominent residences. The well-dressed pedestrians walked on the sidewalk, rather than

violating the careful boundary of the wall. This undated view was probably completed before 1800, when the Bingham's influence evaporated. Anne Bingham died late in that year, and William Bingham never returned to Philadelphia.<sup>139</sup>

Though this image contained no overt irony, the Bingham house was a despised symbol of privilege to less fortunate Philadelphians. Birch did not specifically the Bingham's or the house in the view's title. In 1795 it was attacked by an anti-Anglophile mob protesting the approval of the Jay Treaty, which gave commercial concessions to the British and seemed to imply United States opposition to revolutionary France.<sup>140</sup> The audience Birch addressed would have identified itself more with the Bingham's and their circle than with such unruly rabble; they were presumably content with this idyllic depiction.

Birch portrayed other, less prominent residences in his views but only as incidental inclusions. The regularity of Samuel Breck's mansion and the rest of Hunter's Row, erected about 1790, leads the viewer's eye down the north side of Market Street in the view looking west from Ninth.<sup>141</sup> The view of Second and Market shows John Speakman, Jr.'s substantial

three-story brick home and drugstore at the northwest corner, where he later formed the Academy of Natural Sciences.<sup>142</sup> The former home of David Franks (a distinguished merchant) was an early city mansion with a prominent gabled doorway, visible to the right of the Bank of Pennsylvania.<sup>143</sup> None of these structures warranted the focus of a view; they were just part of the background of the city, more modest brick buildings in rows flush with the sidewalk. Only those that distinguished themselves with yards and walls merited special treatment.

The State House, featured prominently in two of Birch's views (figs. 21-22), was the largest governmental building in the city at that time. It was begun in 1732, probably designed by Andrew Hamilton, Speaker of the Pennsylvania Assembly and an amateur architect, and Edmund Woolley, a master builder.<sup>144</sup> The wing buildings were connected to the main building by a brick roofed colonnade. The decked gabled roof had a small central cupola and balustrades between the end chimneys. A brick tower and belfry with a wooden steeple were added to the structure in 1752-53, and a clock was added to the facade.<sup>145</sup> The decaying wooden part of the steeple was removed in 1781 and replaced

by a low sloping hipped roof with a slender finial and weathervane.<sup>146</sup> The building's architecture drew reserved praise from writers, who referred to it as "a fairly handsome building" and "magnificent, rather than elegant."<sup>147</sup>

When Birch depicted it in 1799, the State House might already have been abandoned by Congress. It was owned by the state of Pennsylvania; and, except for a room occupied by the Grand Lodge of Free Masons, it was used only for elections after the removal of the federal government.<sup>148</sup> Neither of Birch's images depicted the State House completely dominating the image or as an iconic symbol of America's statehood. The only reference to national affairs was the group of Native Americans pictured behind the State House, but they were probably not a gratuitous inclusion. Many Native American leaders visited the United States government to participate in treaty negotiations and exchange courtesies with heads of state.

The print of the front of the State House depicted it from an extreme angle, completely in shadow, decreasing the impact of its size. In Birch's view of the back of the building, two stove pipes emerged from the upper panes of two windows next to the

clock, crossing the outside wall diagonally to enter into the chimneys.<sup>149</sup> Such mundane details as the stove pipes and the heap of firewood stacked against the building were incidental to the general impression of people at leisure in a pleasant grove near an example of imposing architecture, but they were nonetheless included. Their presence pointed to Birch's obsessive concern for exact transcription.

Other governmental buildings in State House yard were also depicted by Birch (figs. 20-21). Congress Hall and City Hall were two-story brick buildings with peaked roofs and cupolas, matching the State House's classic Georgian architecture. The county courthouse erected in 1787 on Chestnut at Sixth Street was used as the meeting place for Congress throughout the 1790s, when it became known as Congress Hall. It was enlarged and remodeled in 1793-95 to accommodate an increase in the membership of the House of Representatives, and then returned to service as the county courthouse after Congress departed.<sup>150</sup> Birch depicted it in shadow, looking abandoned in contrast to the busy Chestnut Street Theatre across the street.

The new City Hall, built on Chestnut Street at Fifth in 1790, was used by the Supreme Court when the

federal government was in Philadelphia and returned to the city's use afterward.<sup>151</sup> It appeared in the middle distance in the view of the front of the State House, neither in shadow nor very prominent.

While Birch's depiction of political buildings did not explicitly reflect politics, politics played a major role in the two national events he portrayed--the procession in honor of George Washington's death and the building of the frigate Philadelphia. The former view (fig. 11), depicting a much more famous event, became Birch's most popular print.<sup>152</sup>

Washington died on 14 December 1799, and 26 December was set as a formal day of mourning in Philadelphia. A funeral procession with an empty coffin followed by troops from the national army and all local militias marched along Chestnut Street to Fifth, south on Fifth to Walnut, east on Walnut to Fourth, and then north to Zion Lutheran Church, the largest auditorium in the city. Bishop William White conducted the service, and Rep. Henry Lee of Virginia gave the funeral oration.<sup>153</sup> During the procession, bands played the dead march, minute guns fired constantly, all soldiers wore their arms reversed, and all drums were muffled. After a symbolic burial, a

detachment of infantry fired three volleys over the bier, and the procession returned, marching to the music of the President's March.<sup>154</sup>

At a time of deep division between Federalists and Republicans, partisan newspapers showed that even grief and nationalist sentiment only papered over their differences. The Federalist account focused on the image of Washington--a splendid riderless horse with a saddle, holsters and pistols, and boots reversed in the stirrups, led by two sergeants wearing black scarves. The horse was trimmed with black fabric, black and white feathers on its head, and an American eagle in a rose on the breast and in a feather on the head.<sup>155</sup> The Republican account mentioned none of these elaborate symbols. It concentrated on a description of the militia and revealed the marching order. The twenty-two militia units, variously Republican and Federalist, marched separately, grouped by political affiliation rather than type of company (infantry, artillery, cavalry [lightly armored mounted], dragoons [heavily armored mounted]).<sup>156</sup> The difference between elite Federalist militia corps who had bought their own expensive uniforms, firearms, and horses, and the

motley crew of Republican local militia must have been evident to alert observers.<sup>157</sup>

Birch showed militia groups ahead of the horse, dressed as the newspaper accounts described. The bier was next, carried by six well-dressed military men, draped with a black cloth and ornamented with crossed swords and a hat. Another mounted officer followed, holding two poles loosely twisted with black scarves. Orderly rows of civilians, members of Congress, followed, dressed in black with white scarves. A substantial crowd looked on, and an elite officer in uniform held a handkerchief to his eyes in the right foreground. The difference among militia groups was not really evident, because few groups were visible in the image.

Interest in the event was clearly indicated by the crowd. Birch must have edited out other observers standing in the market shed in order to clearly display the high point of the procession. The viewer of the print then stood in that place, looking at the procession. Birch also altered his earlier image which simply showed Market Street stretching west from the marketplace, with covered wagons lined up near the buildings and one open carriage and one man dragging a



fully packed cart in the roadway. He replaced all this, including the marketplace vendors, with the procession and its onlookers, perhaps in an effort to be topical, perhaps to allude to Philadelphia's capacity for public display.

The building of the frigate Philadelphia was depicted in the last of Birch's plates (fig. 29). It was built at Joshua Humphreys' shipyard, just after the same shipyard had built the frigate United States. The Philadelphia was built with funds subscribed by that city's citizens and was slightly smaller than the United States. The United States had been sent out to face the French, commanded by Commodore John Barry; and the Philadelphia followed it to the Mediterranean.<sup>158</sup> The Philadelphia was thus a sign of Philadelphians' patriotism and their shipbuilding skills. It represented the best of civic republicanism.

With all their specific details, Birch's images shaped the perception of Philadelphia for his contemporaries and for later audiences. Playing on certain expectations of aesthetic and informational content, he offered a controlled program that proposed to define the city. More recent interpretations and the persuasive force of these plausible images have

also generated confusion between the subject--  
Philadelphia in 1800--and its representation by Birch.

Birch's portrait of Philadelphia's cultural, social, political, economic, and physical landscape presented a selection of the city's grand buildings in the context of more ordinary buildings and the open spaces on the edges of the city. He defined the city's breadth, its various elements, and the specific details of those elements. The illusion of comprehension (both understanding and completeness) given by the volume was reinforced by patterns within and among images. Though he copied architectural and other details exactly, making figures and buildings unique transcriptions of reality, he employed conventions of framing, perspective, and point of view to edit the environment he saw.

Birch's images joined others' writings about the city to celebrate Philadelphia as the nation's true capital. Both focused on Philadelphia's regular plan and ordered streetscapes. Both noted Philadelphia's famed public buildings and its civic improvements. Both lauded Philadelphia's taste and cultural aspirations. In the context of ongoing debate about

the nature of the Enlightenment city, they celebrated the urban landscape. Since they believed the material environment to be a determining influence on character, Philadelphia's order, cleanliness, and aesthetic attractiveness were significant indicators of its moral well-being. Depicting these characteristics in the face of the city's recent political disappointments was a gesture of civic pride.

Birch's views served to promote Philadelphia as the nation's true cultural, financial, and commercial capital. Birch alluded to Philadelphia's political importance, but ignored most of the city's diversity, most of its intellectual focus, and all of its manufacturing. His case was made in terms of Atlantic trade and its protection, retail sales, local markets, and religious and cultural networks. Most of all, Birch's pictorial assessment of Philadelphia employed images of architectural aspirations and grandeur to give an air of authority to claims of the city's importance.

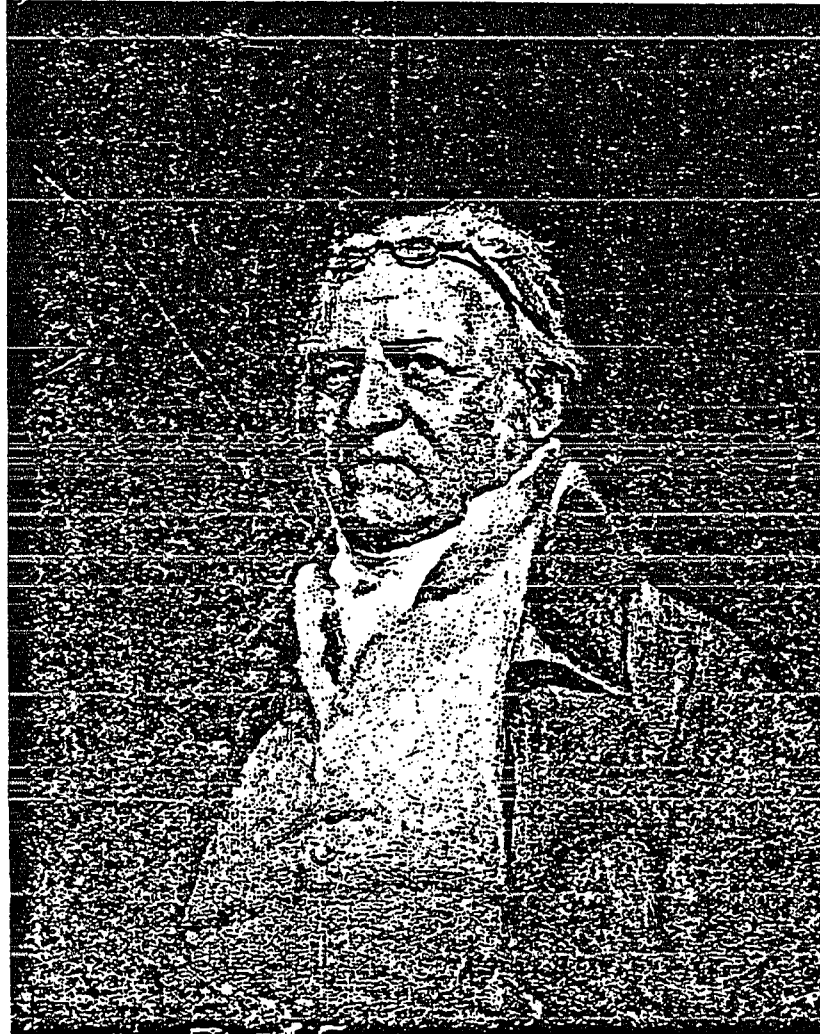


PHOTO-COLLOTYPE

WILLIS & SONS CO.

PHILADELPHIA

*Copied for Ford. J. Dresser.  
From Painting by John Hagle.*

**Figure 1. Portrait of William Birch (1755-1834).  
The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.**



Figure 2. The City and Port of Philadelphia, on the River Delaware from Kensington, 1800.  
The Library Company of Philadelphia.

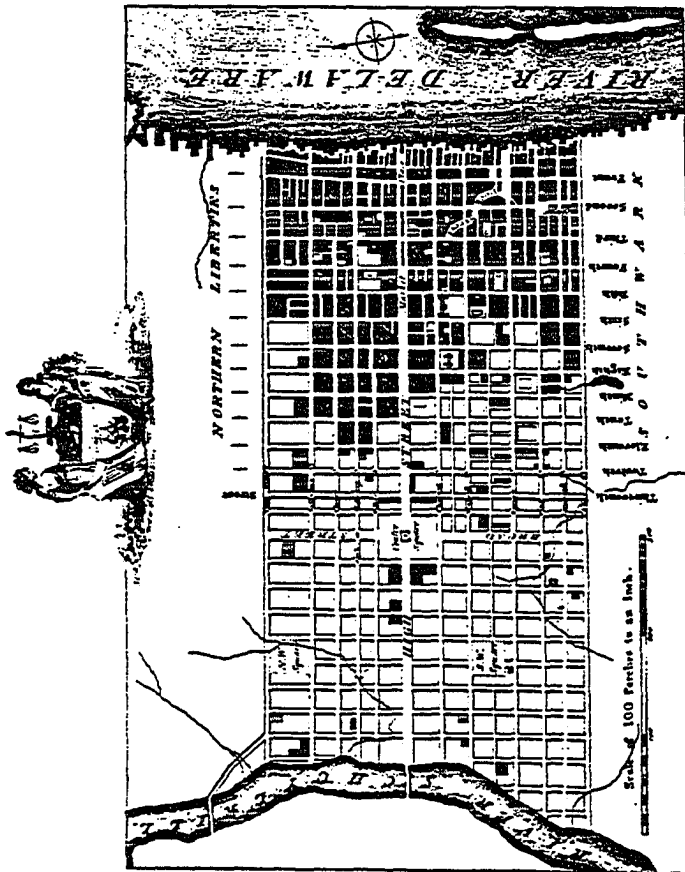


Figure 3. Plan of the City of Philadelphia. n.d.  
The Library Company of Philadelphia.

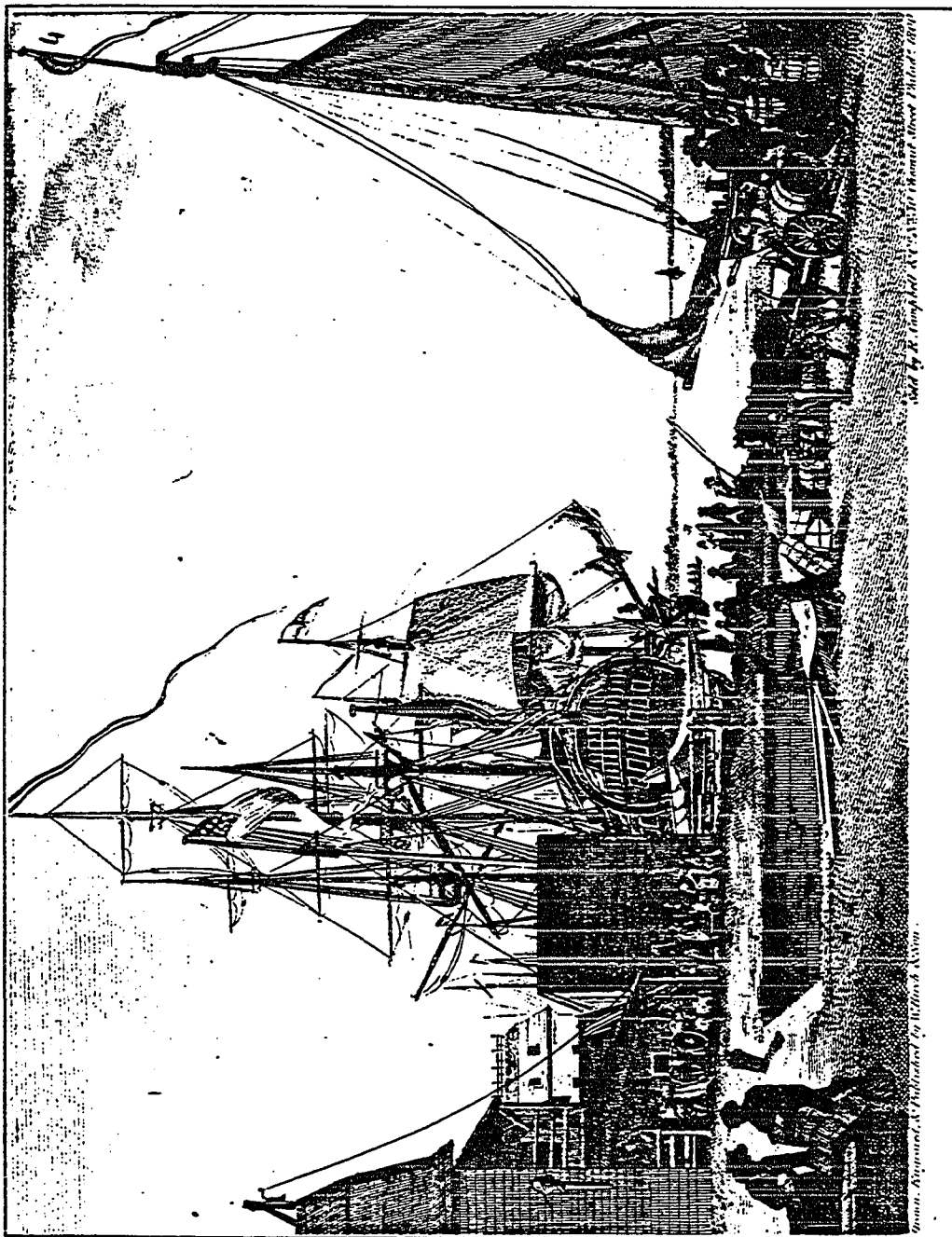


Figure 4. Arch Street Ferry, Philadelphia, 1800.  
The Library Company of Philadelphia.

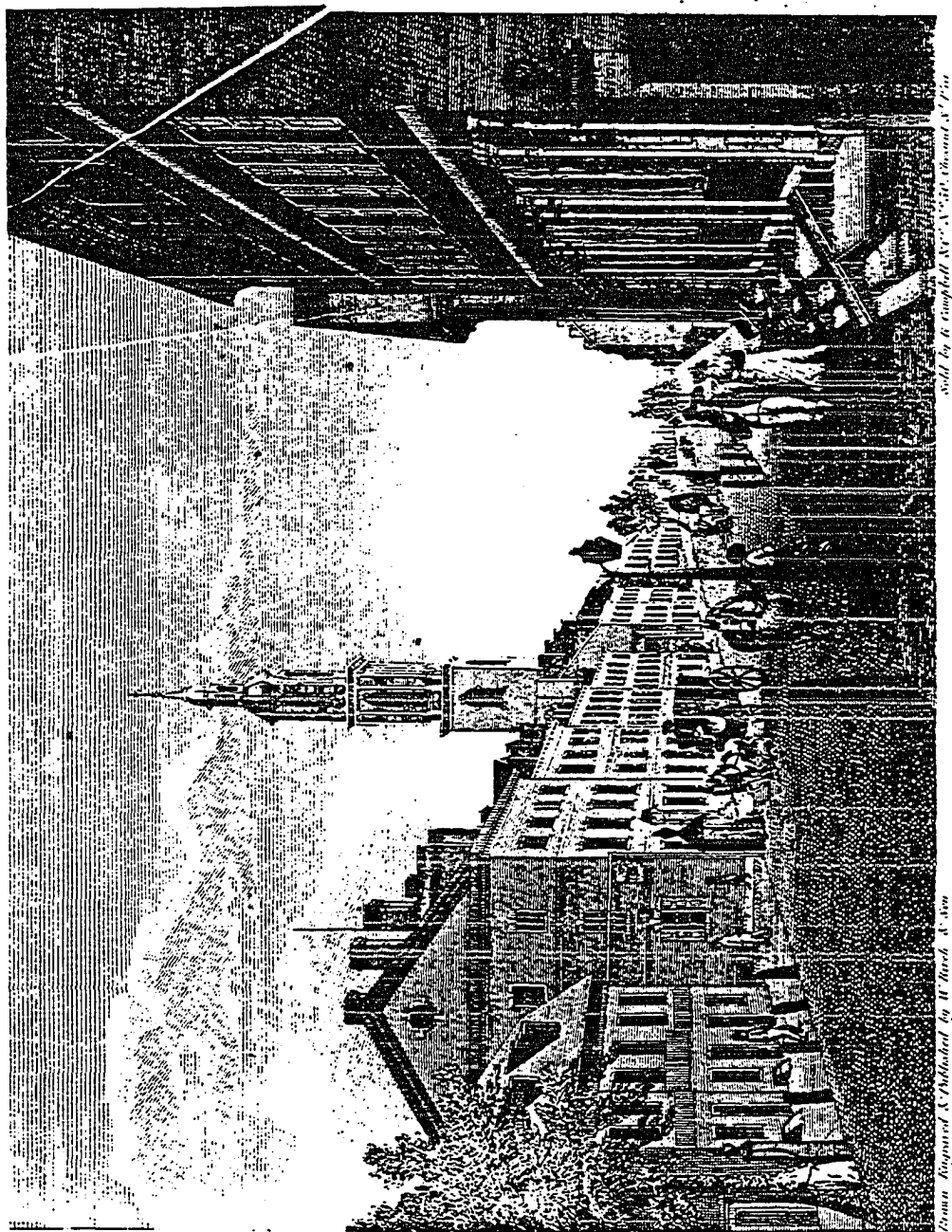


Figure 5. Arch Street, with the Second Presbyterian Church Philadelphia, 1799. The Library Company of Philadelphia.



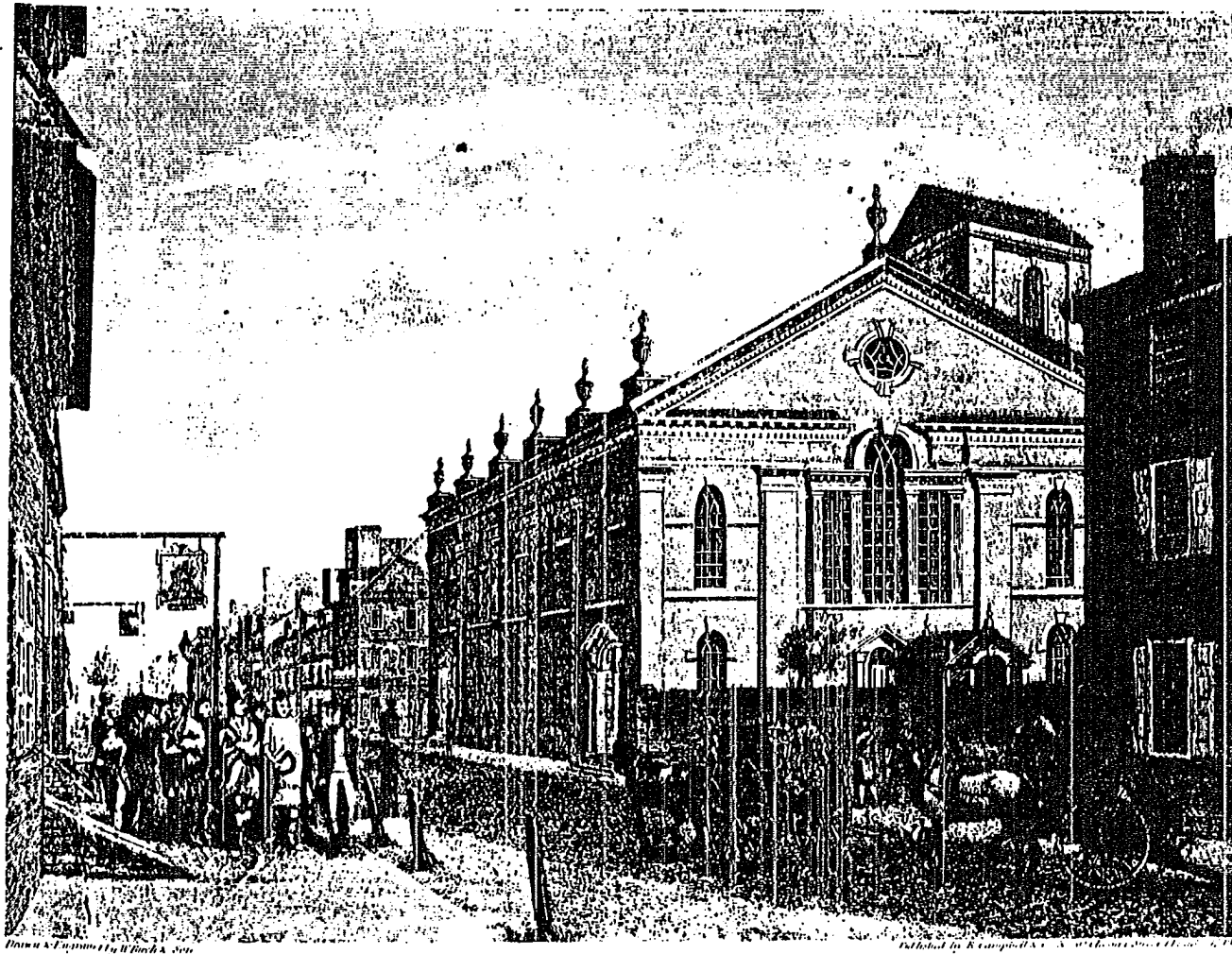


Figure 6. New Lutheran Church, in Fourth Street  
Philadelphia. 1799. The Library Company of Philadelphia.

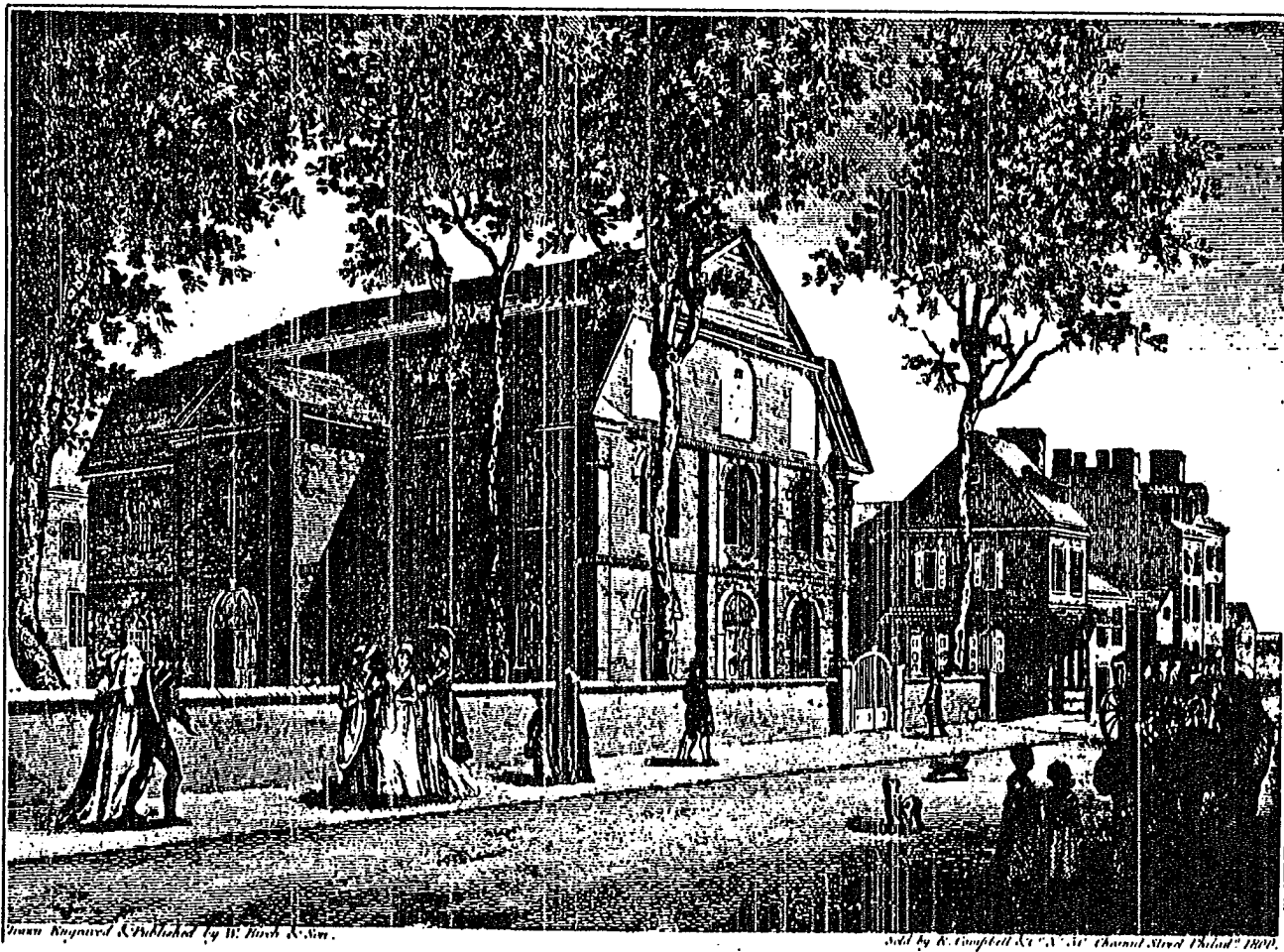
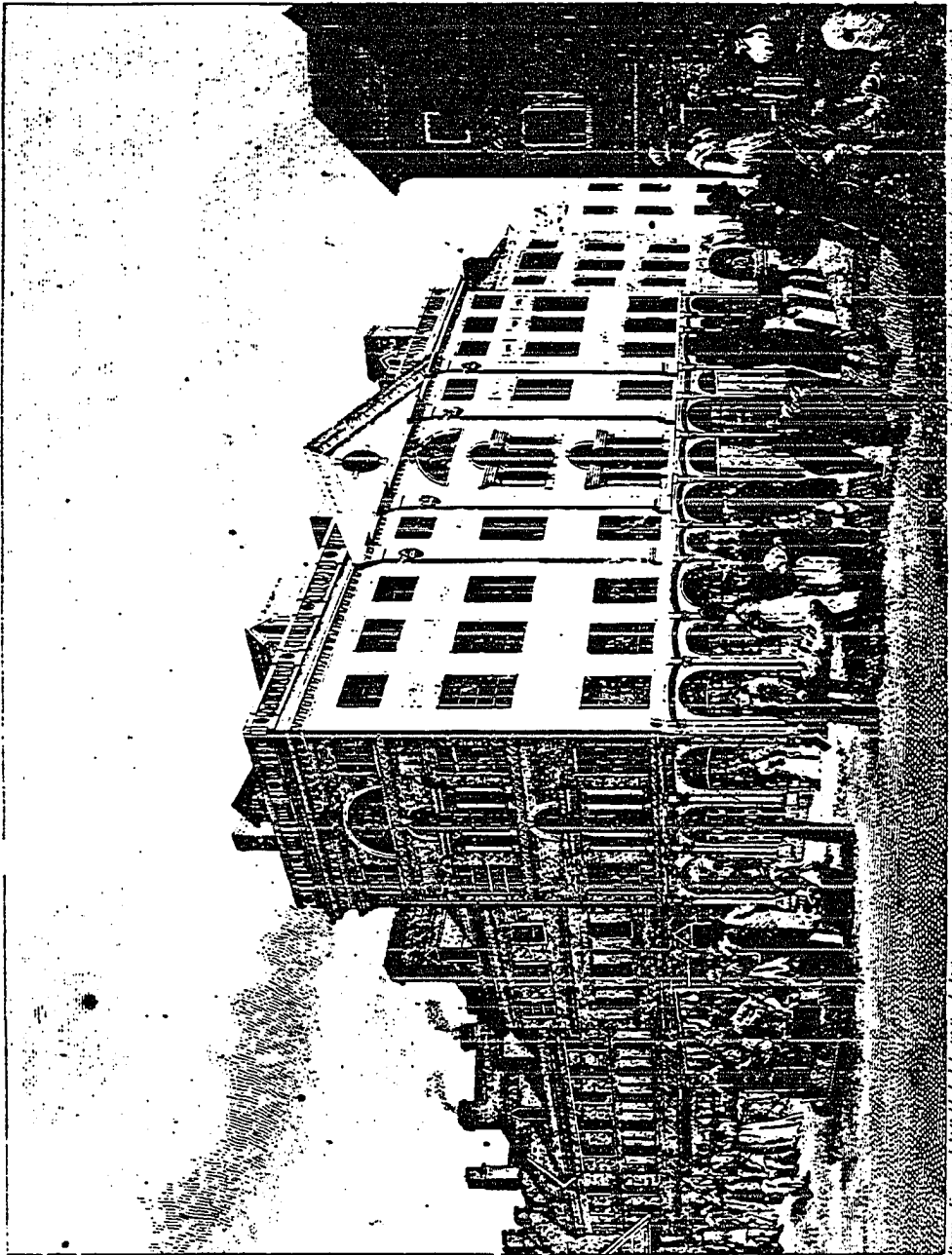


Figure 7. Old Lutheran Church, in Fifth Street  
Philadelphia, 1800. The Library Company of Philadelphia.



**Figure 8. South East corner of Thlrd. and Market Streets Philadelphia. 1799. The Library Company of Philadelphia.**

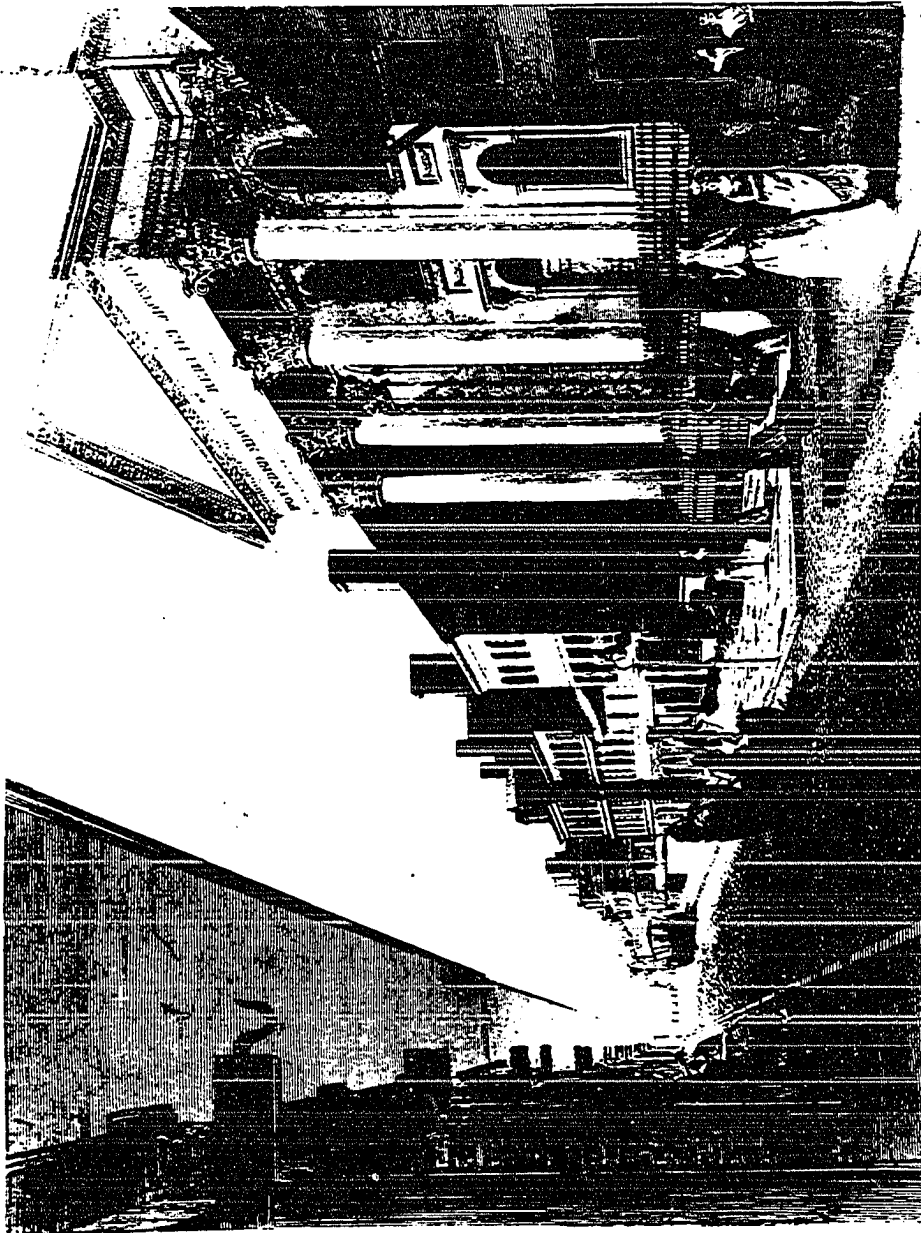


Figure 9. High Street, with the First Presbyterian Church, Philadelphia, 1799. The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

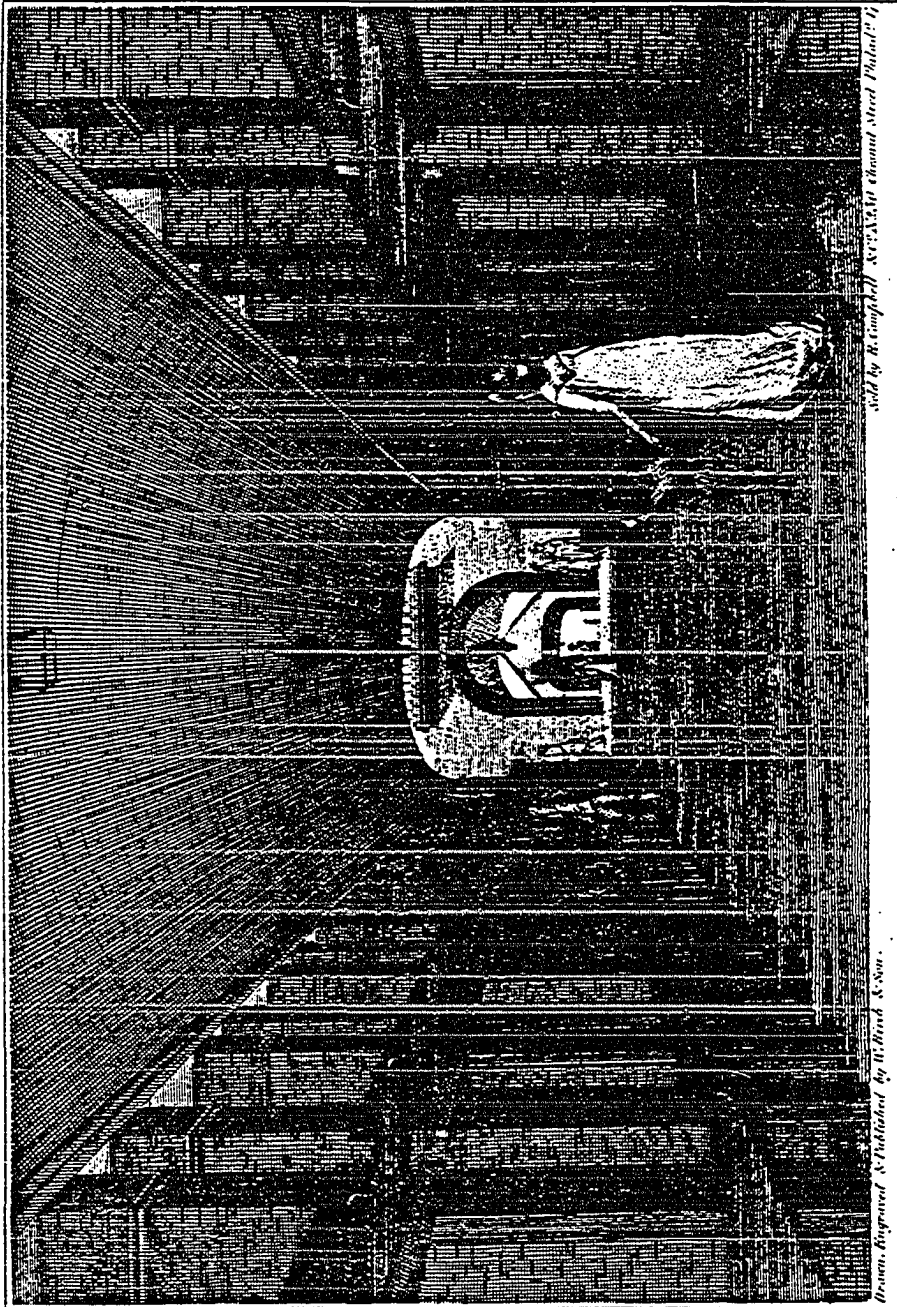


Figure 10. High Street Market, Philadelphia. 1799.  
The Library Company of Philadelphia.

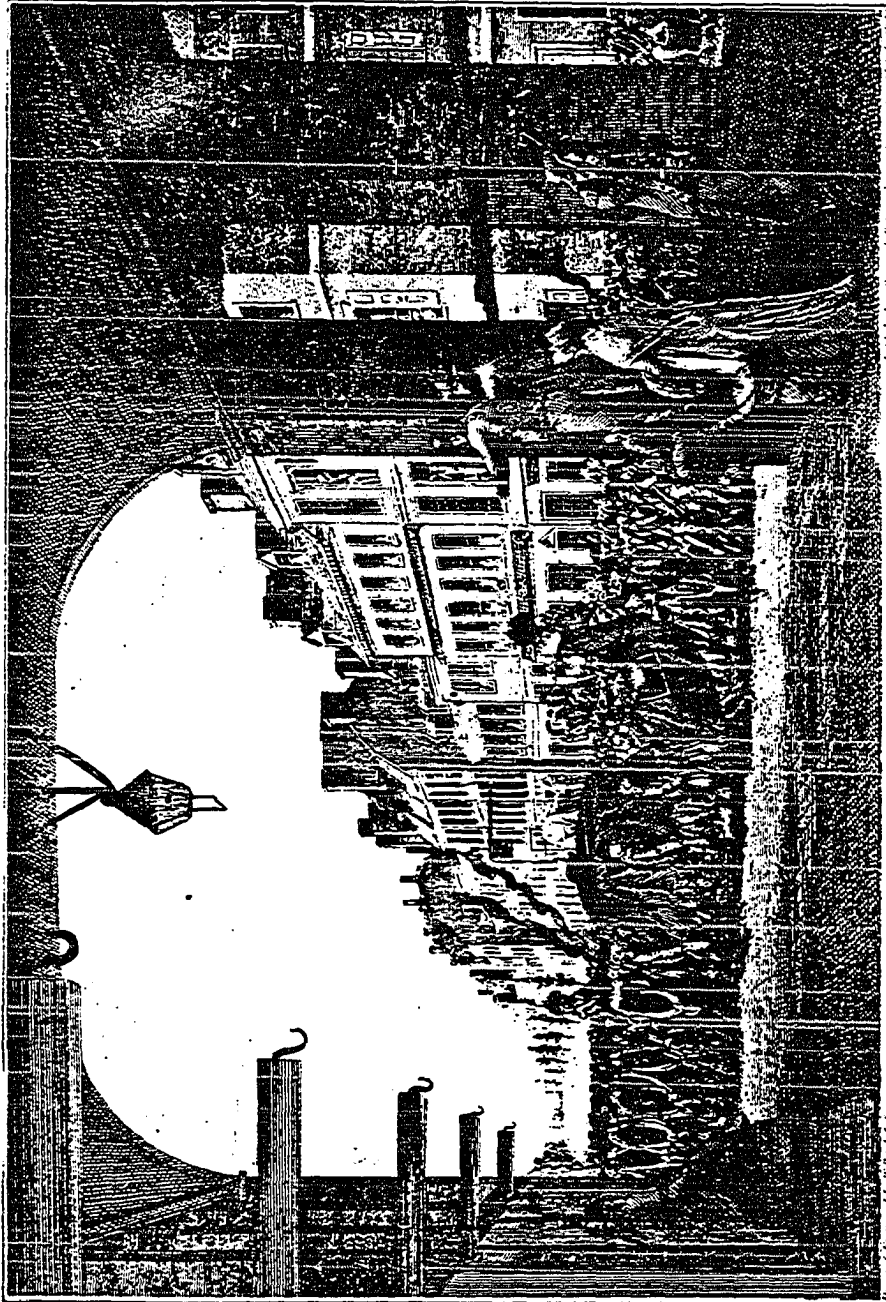
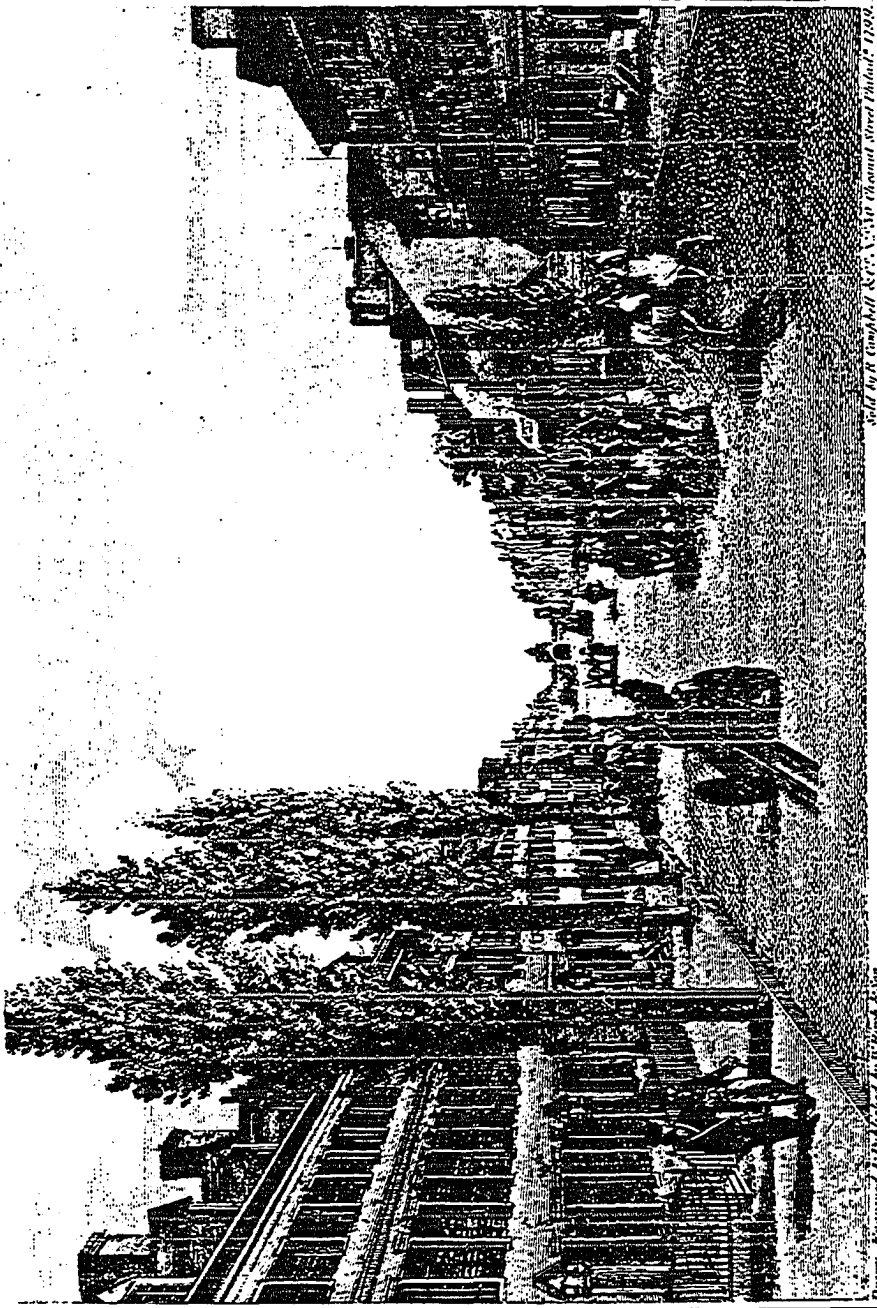


Figure 11. High Street. From the Country Marketplace  
 Philadelphia. with the procession in commemoration of the  
 Death of General George Washington. December 26th 1799.  
 1800. The Library Company of Philadelphia.



**Figure 12. High Street, from Ninth Street, Philadelphia, 1799. The Library Company of Philadelphia.**



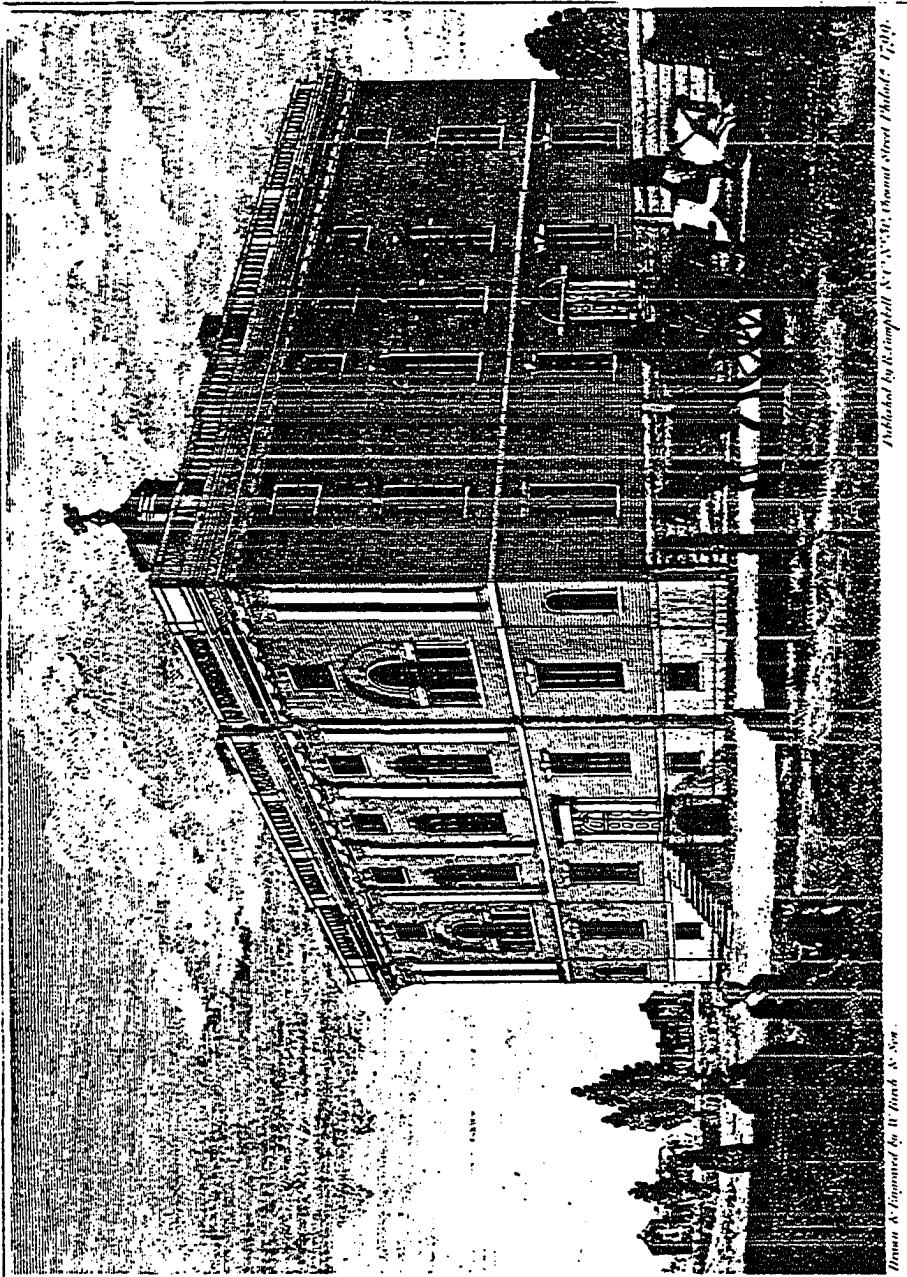


Figure 13. The House Intended for the President of the United States. In Ninth Street, Philadelphia. 1799.  
The Library Company of Philadelphia.



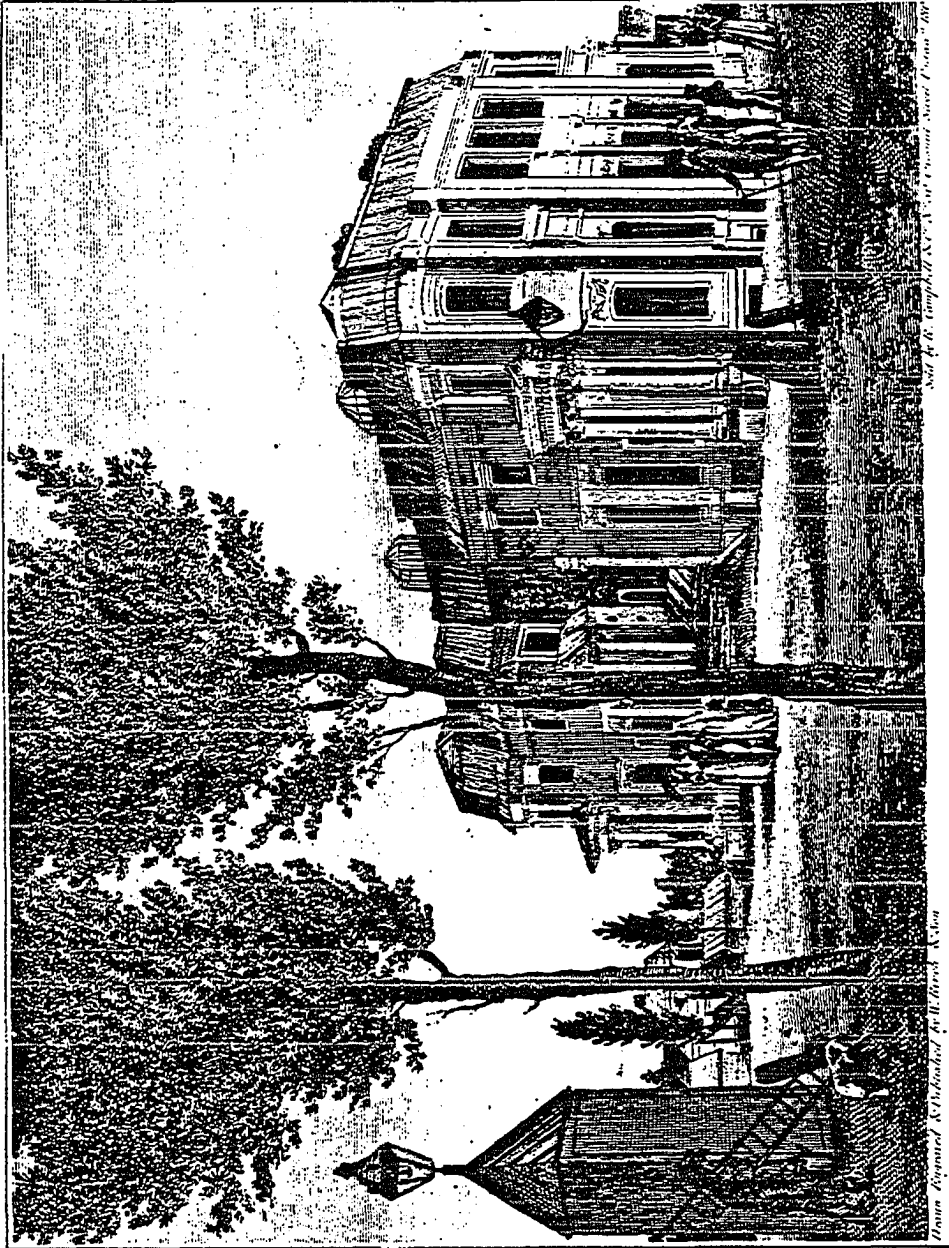


Figure 14. An Unfinished House, In Chesnut Street Philadelphia, 1800. The Library Company of Philadelphia.

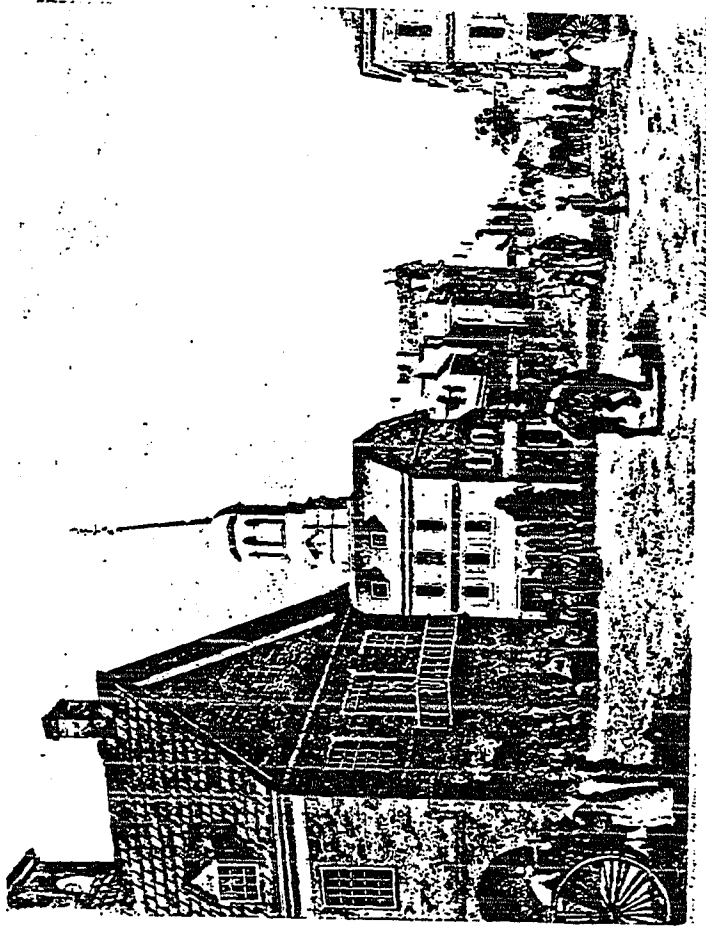
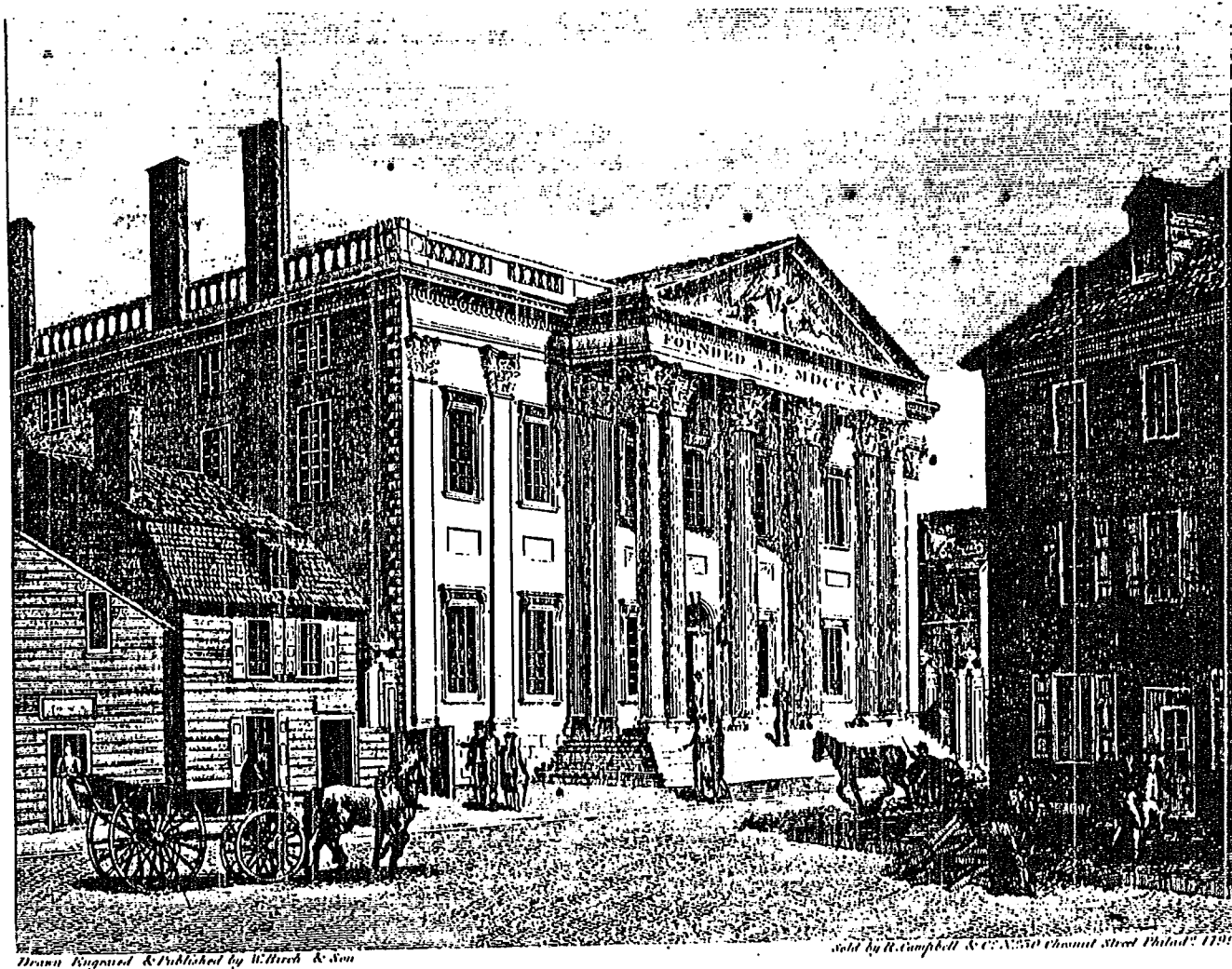


Figure 15. Second Street north from Market St. w/th.  
Christ Church, Philadelphia, 1799.  
The Library Company of Philadelphia.



Figure 16. New Market. In South Second Street Philadelphia.  
1799. The Library Company of Philadelphia.



**Figure 17. Bank of the United States. In Third Street  
Philadelphia. [second version] 1799.  
The Library Company of Philadelphia.**

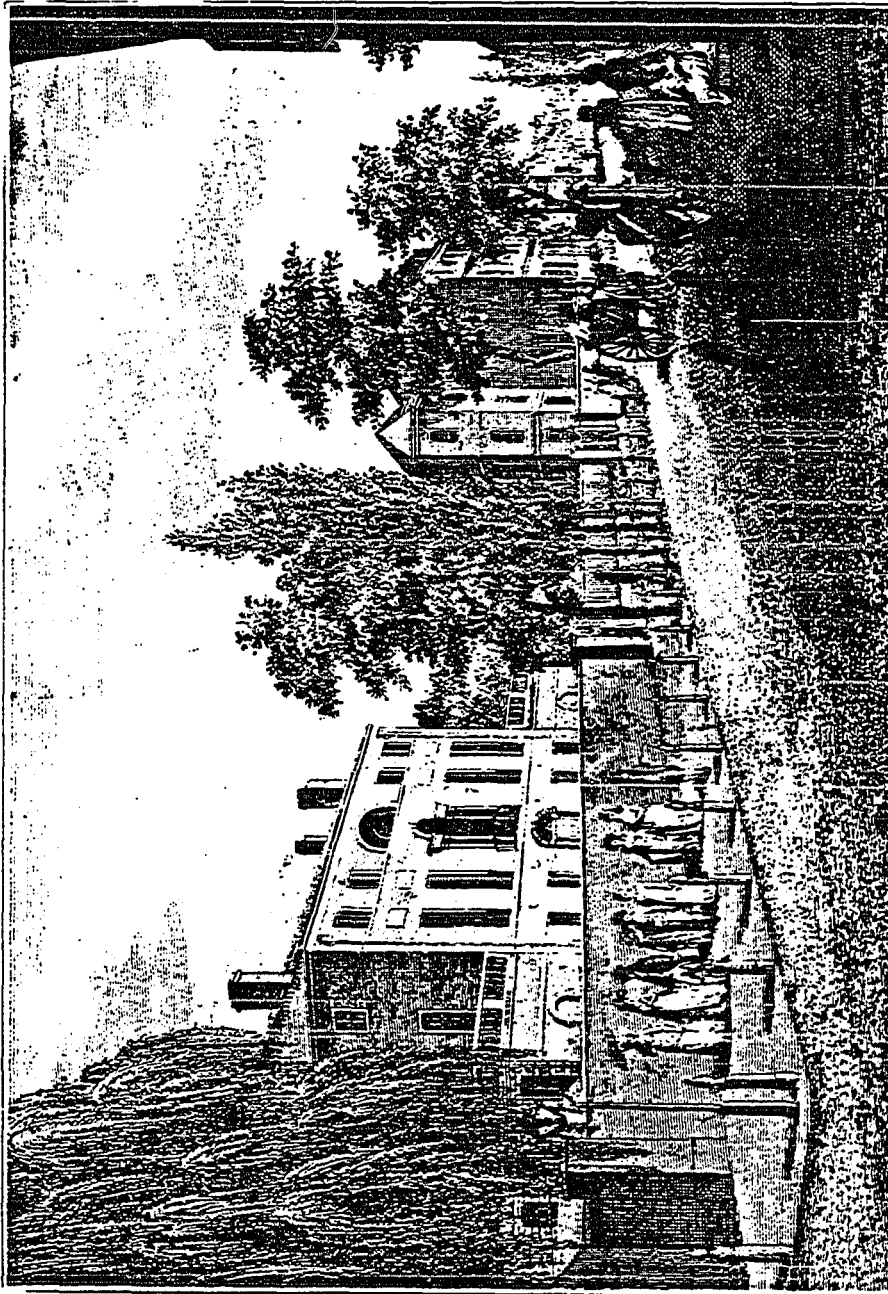


Figure 18. View In Third Street, from Spruce Street  
Philadelphia, n.d. The Library Company of Philadelphia.

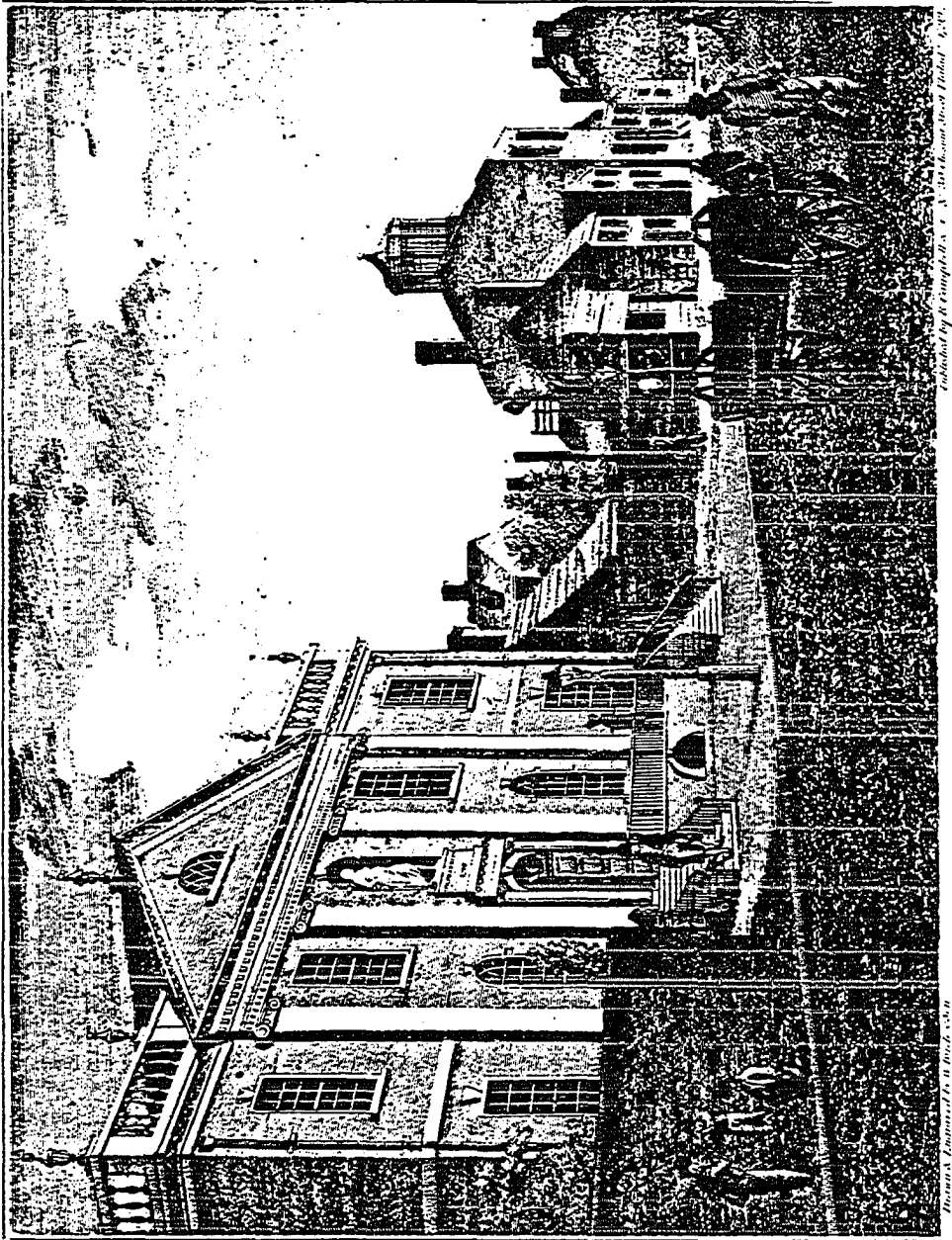


Figure 19. Library and Surgeons Hall, in Fifth Street Philadelphia, 1799. The Library Company of Philadelphia.

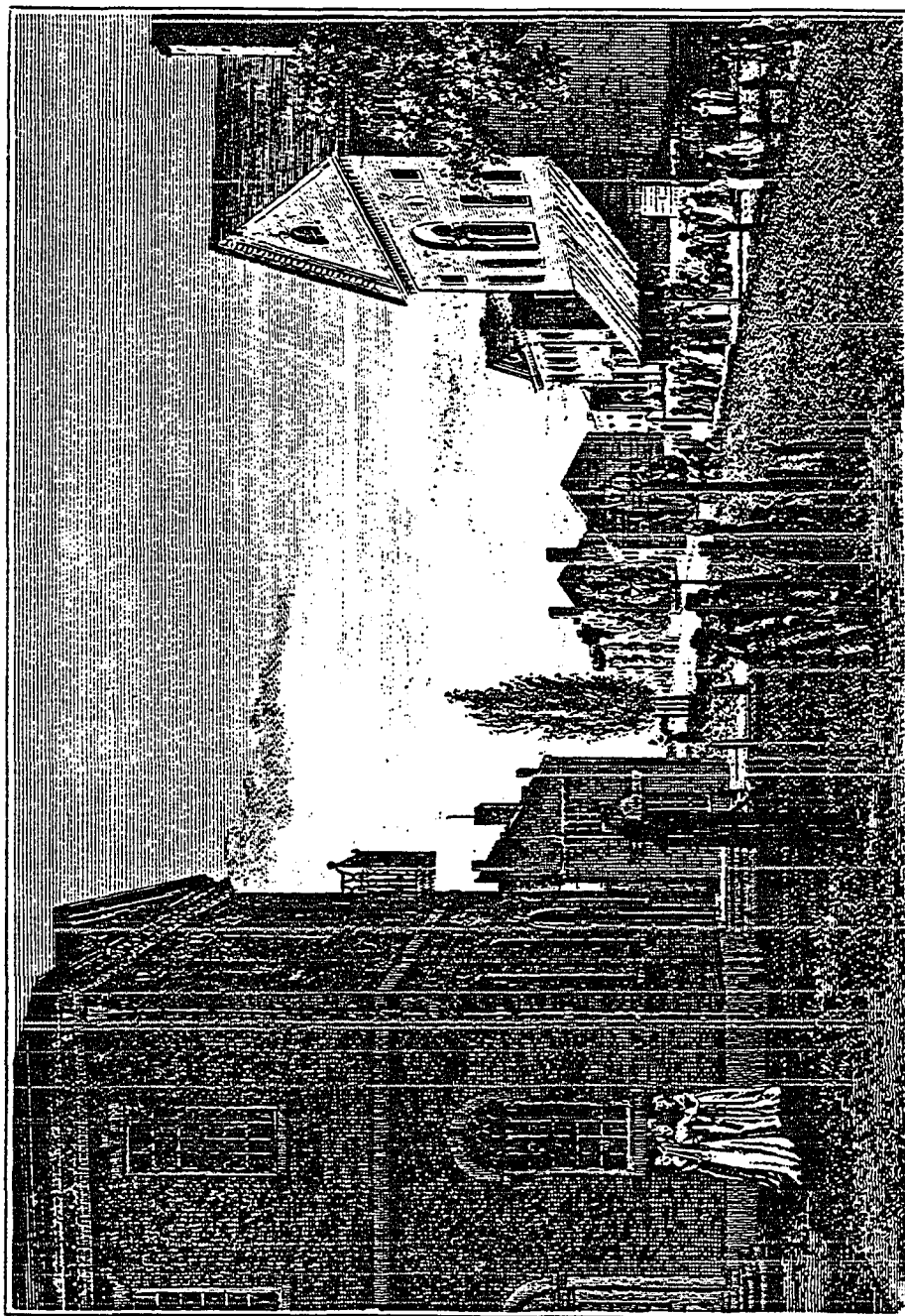
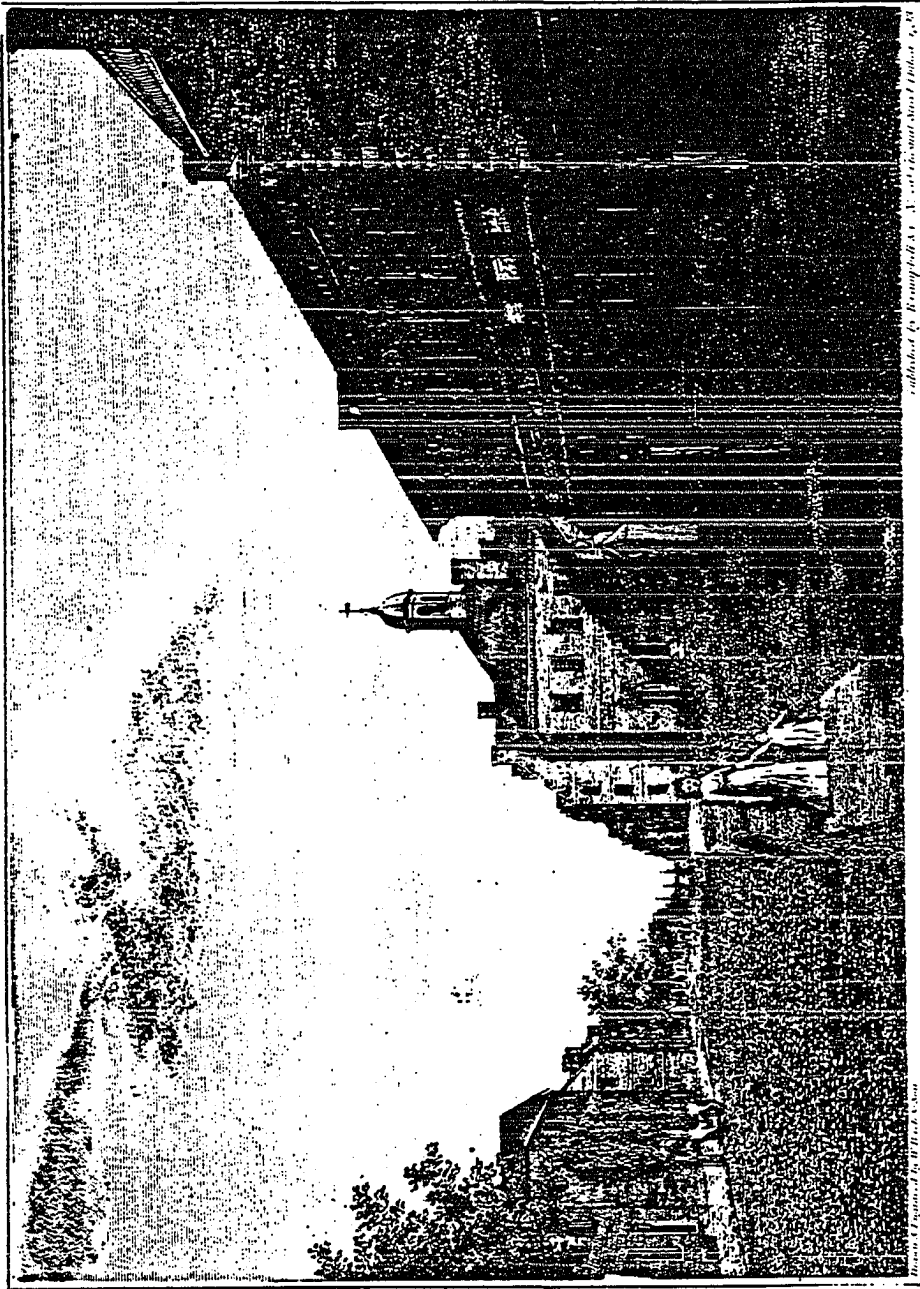


Figure 20. Congress Hall and New Theatre, in Chestnut  
Street Philadelphia, 1800.  
The Library Company of Philadelphia.





**Figure 21. State-House, With a View Of Chestnut Street Philadelphia. 1798. The Library Company of Philadelphia.**



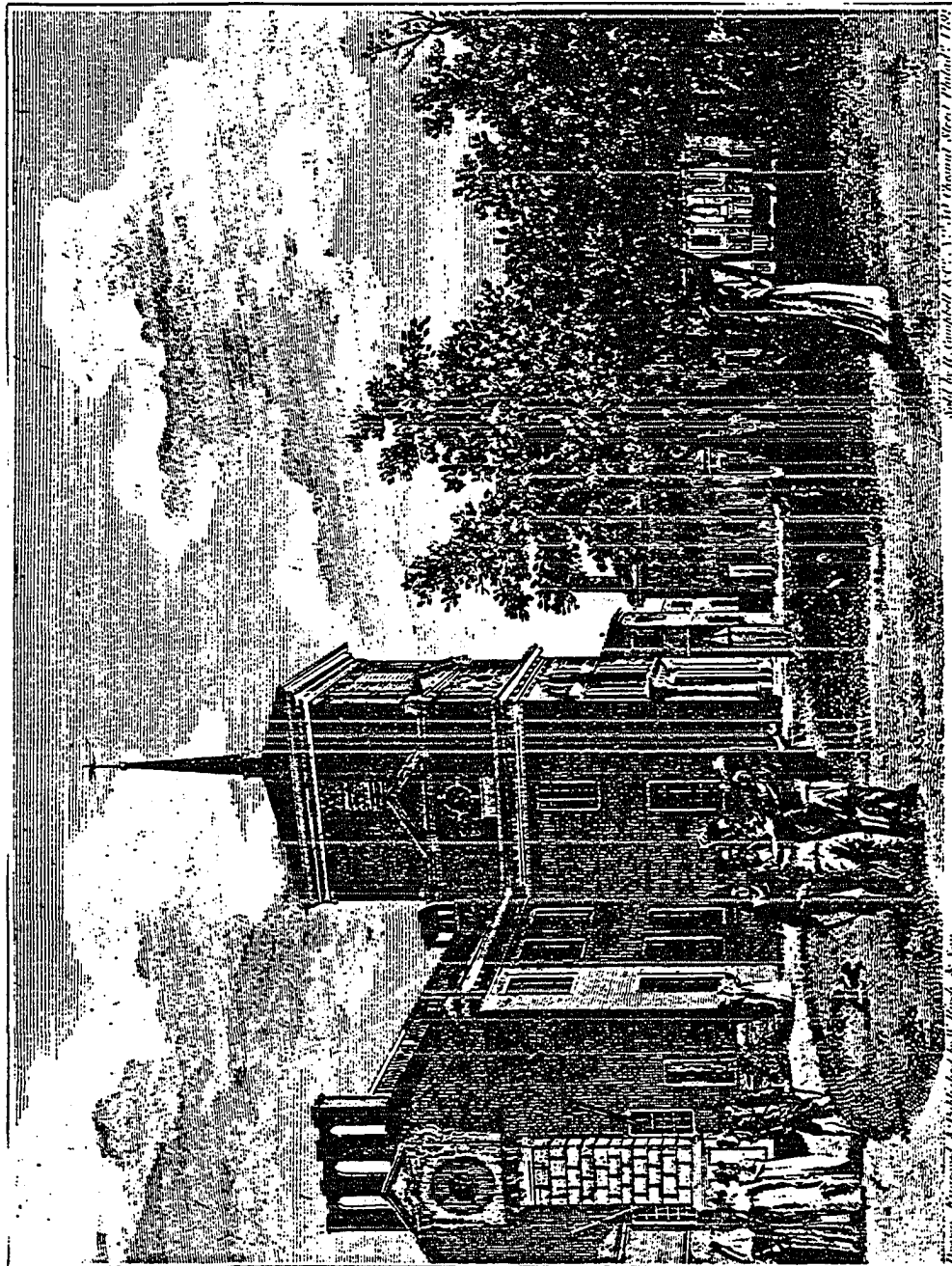
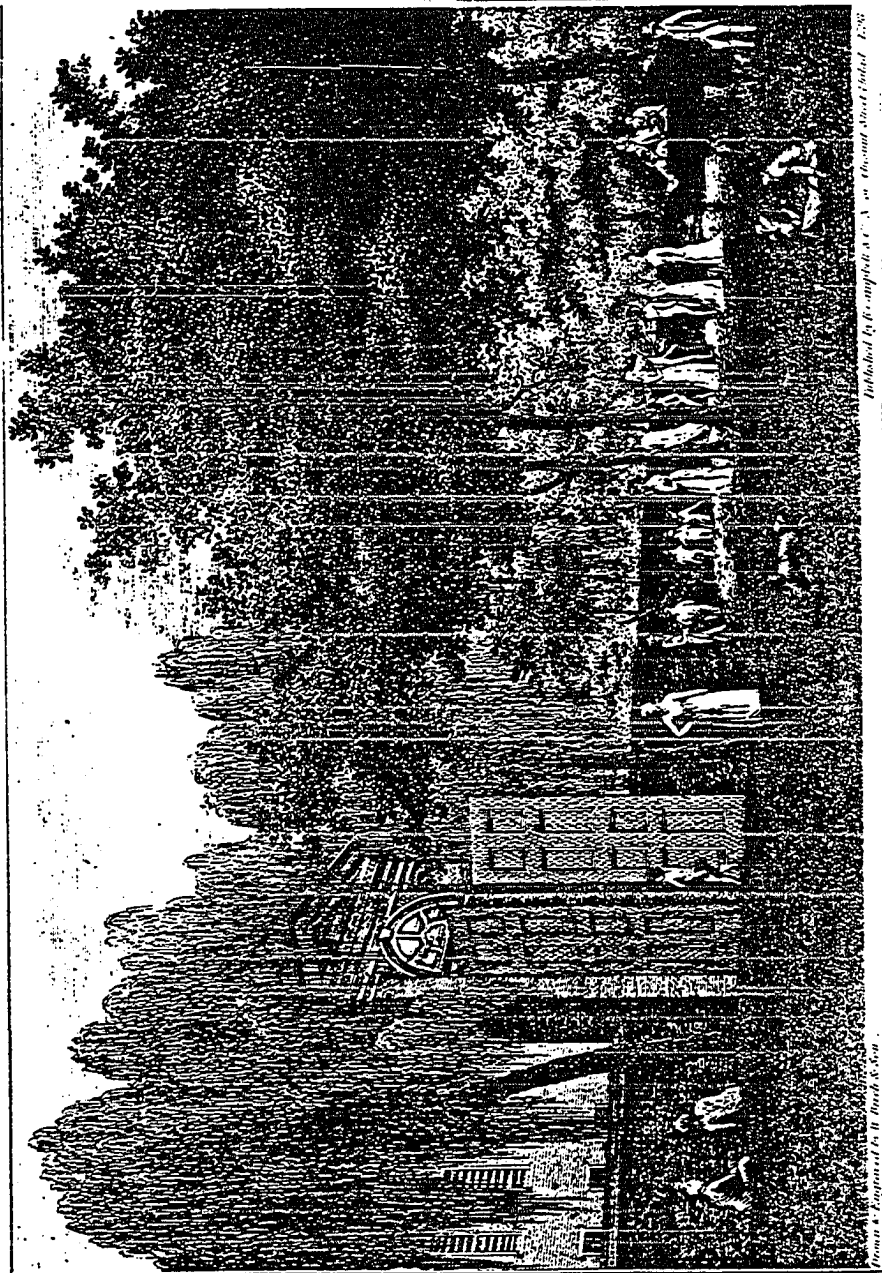


Figure 22. Back of the State House, Philadelphia.  
1799. The Library Company of Philadelphia.



**Figure 23. State-House Garden, Philadelphia.  
1798. The Library Company of Philadelphia.**

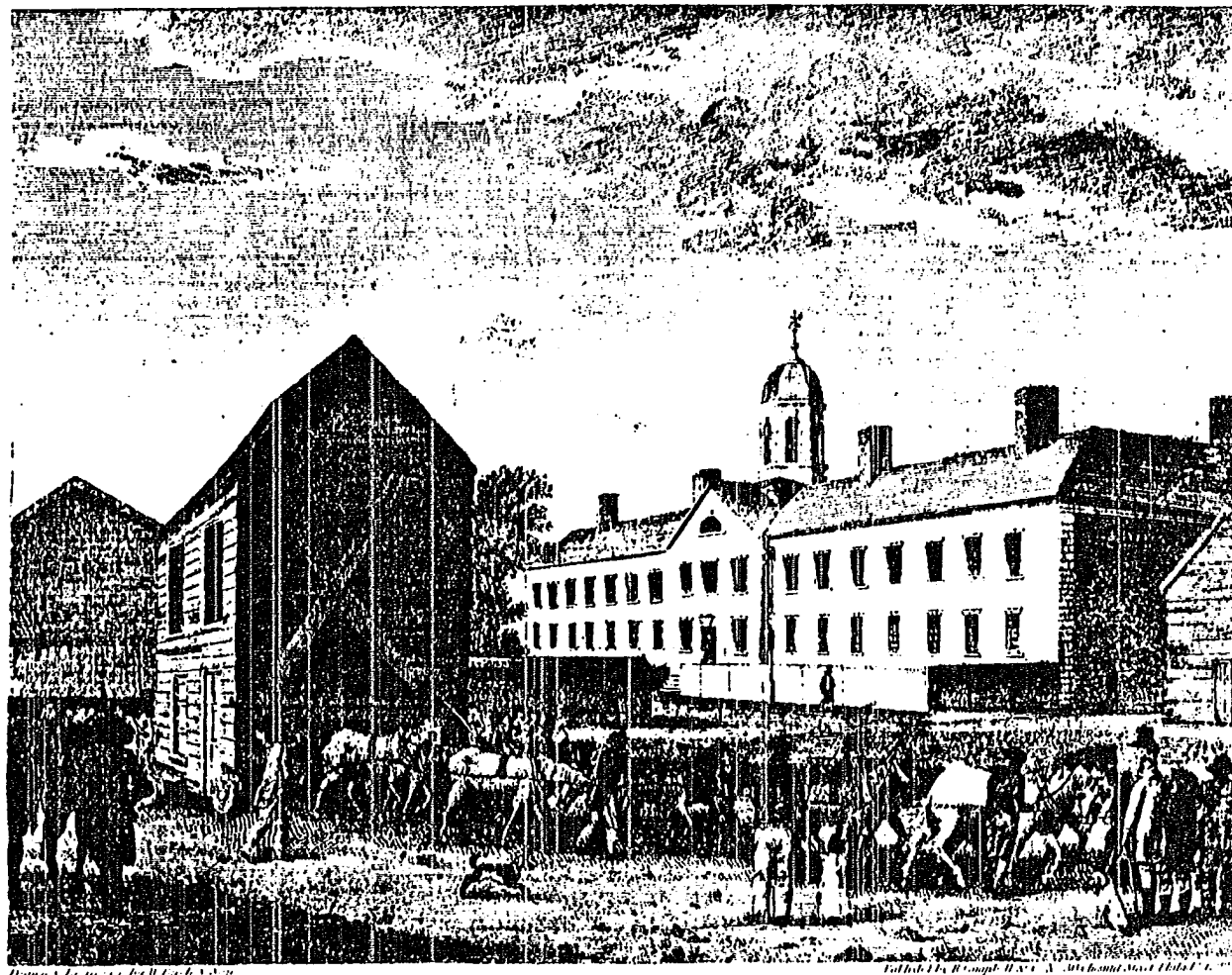


Figure 24. Gaol. in Walnut Street Philadelphia.  
1799. The Library Company of Philadelphia.



**Figure 25. Alms House in Spruce Street Philadelphia.  
1799. The Library Company of Philadelphia.**

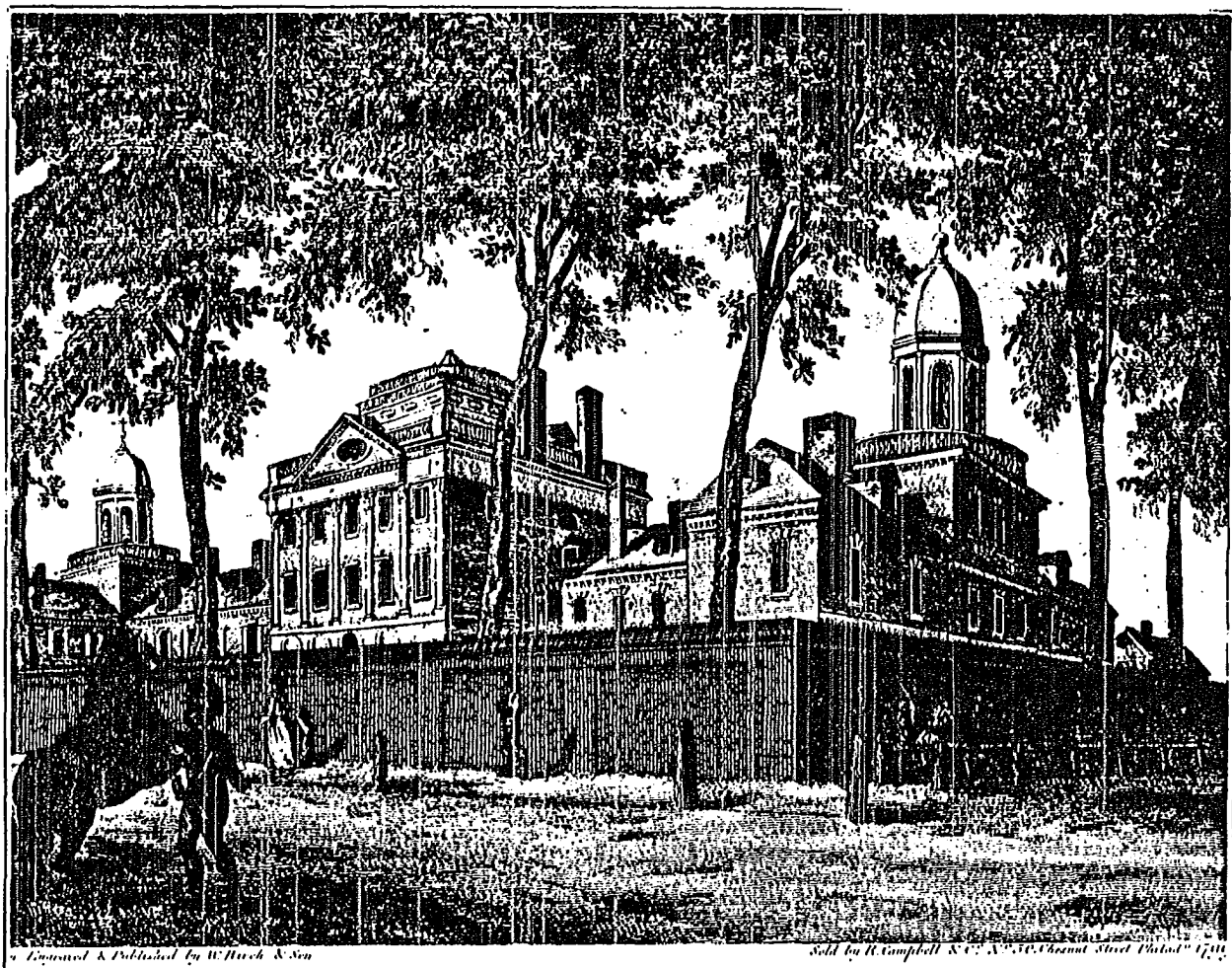


Figure 26. Pennsylvania Hospital. In Pine Street Philadelphia. 1799. The Library Company of Philadelphia.

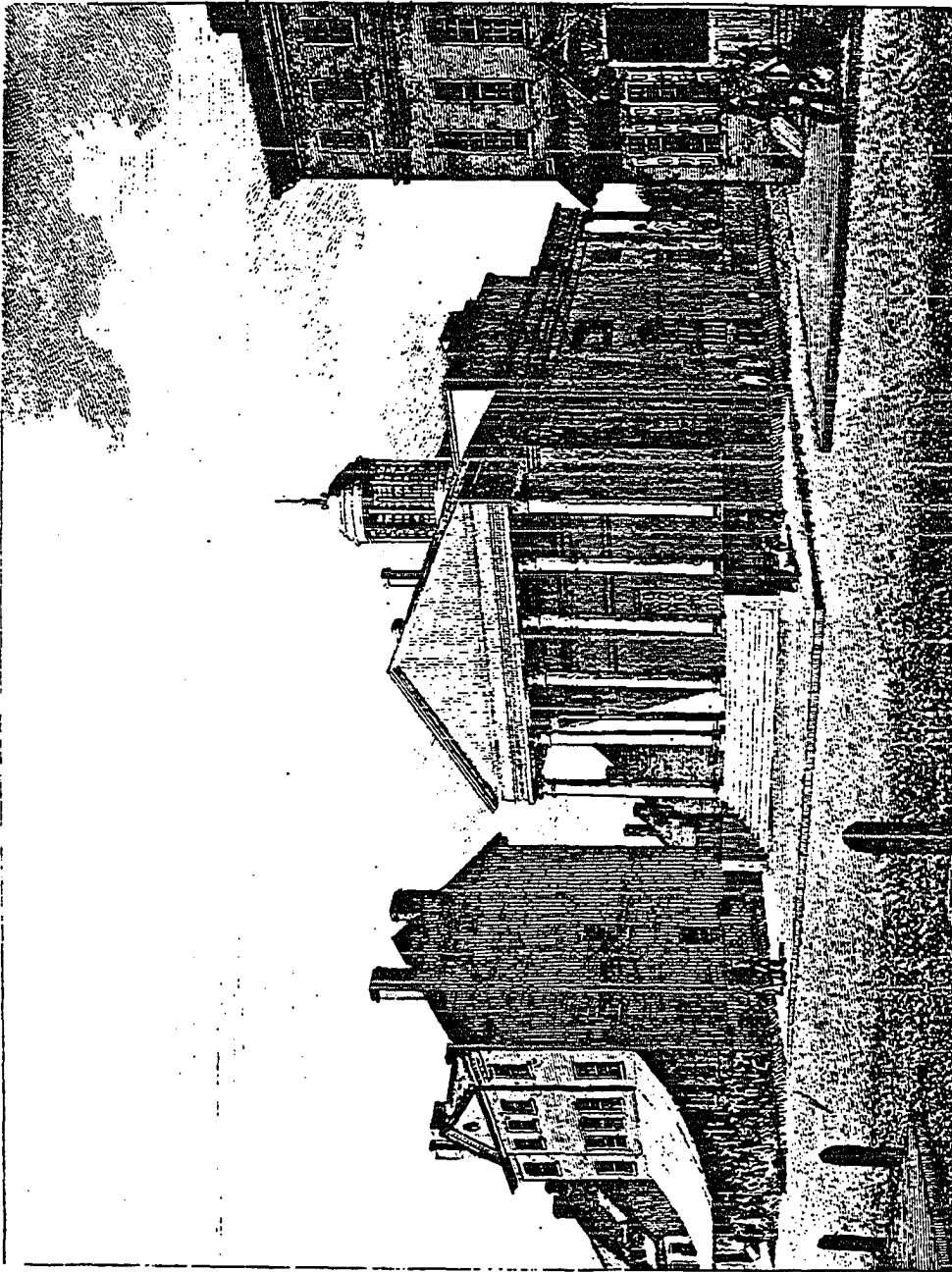


Figure 27. Bank of Pennsylvania, South Second Street  
Philadelphia. n.d. The Library Company of Philadelphia.



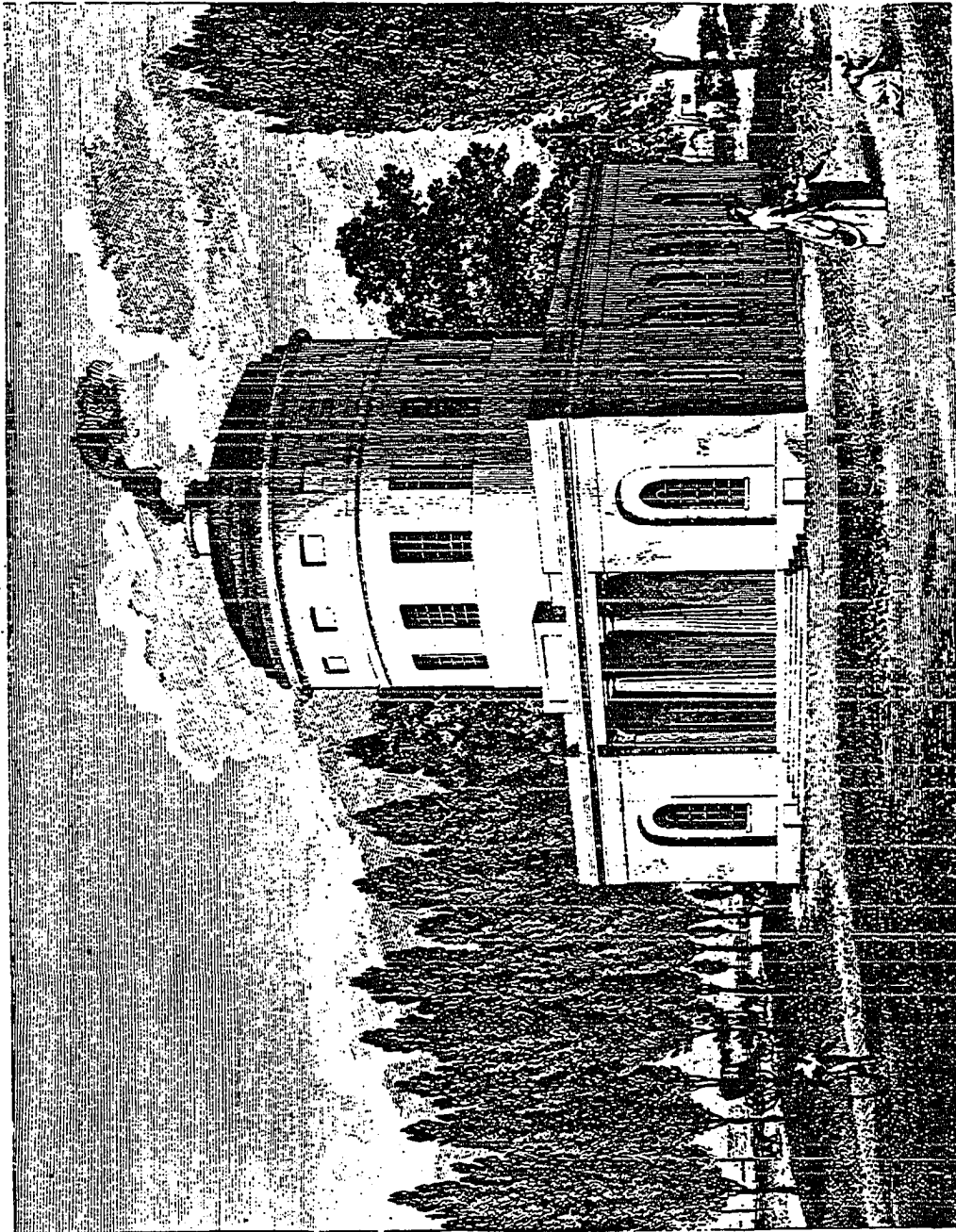
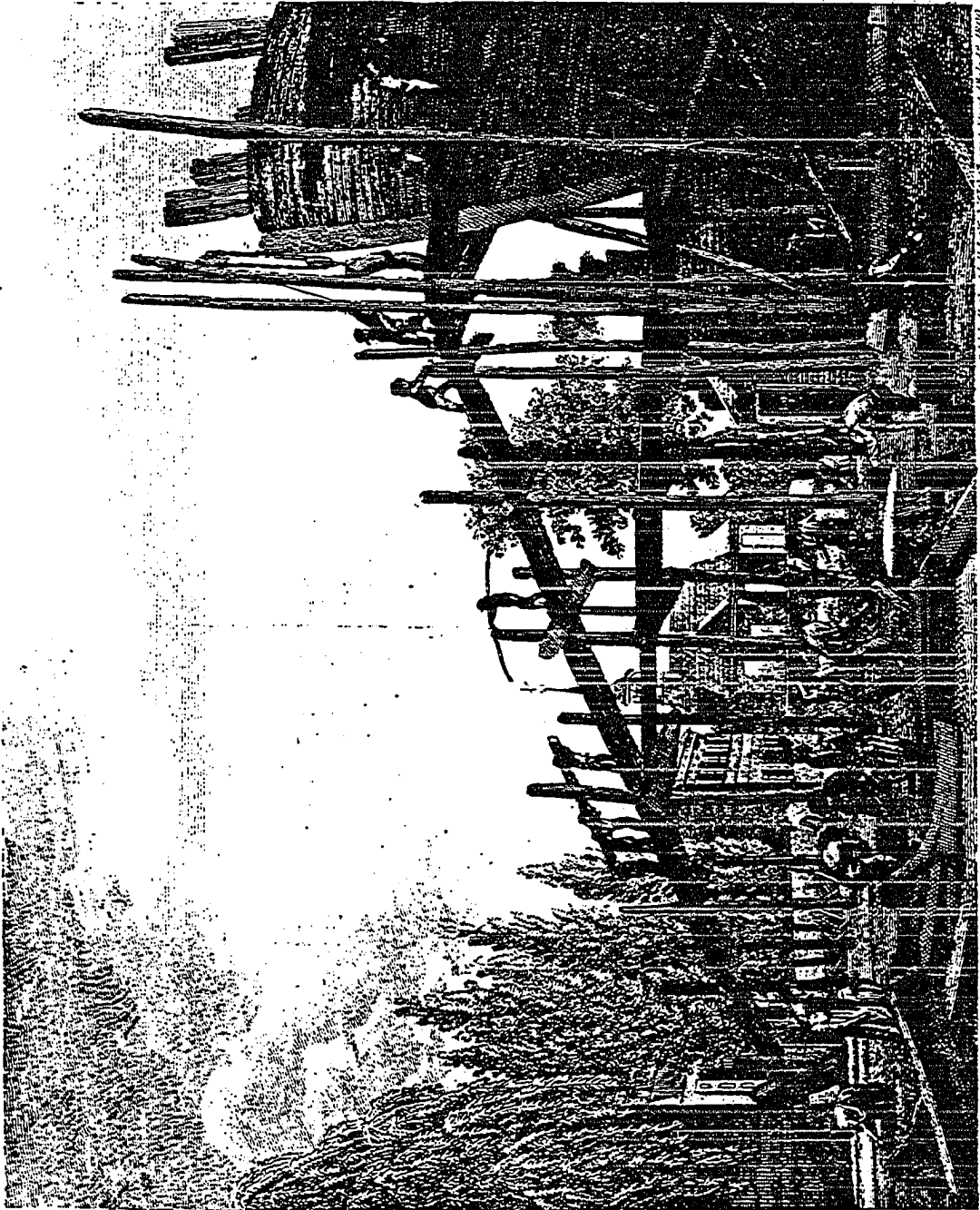


Figure 28. The Water Works. In Centre Square Philadelphia.  
n.d. The Library Company of Philadelphia.



*Sold by H. Campbell & Co., 1317 Chestnut Street, Philad.*

*Down Augmented & Published by H. Birch & Son.*

**Figure 29. Preparation for War to defend Commerce. The Swedish Church Southwark with the building of the Frigate Philadelphia. 1800. The Library Company of Philadelphia.**





Figure 30. "High Street Market." Watercolor.  
The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

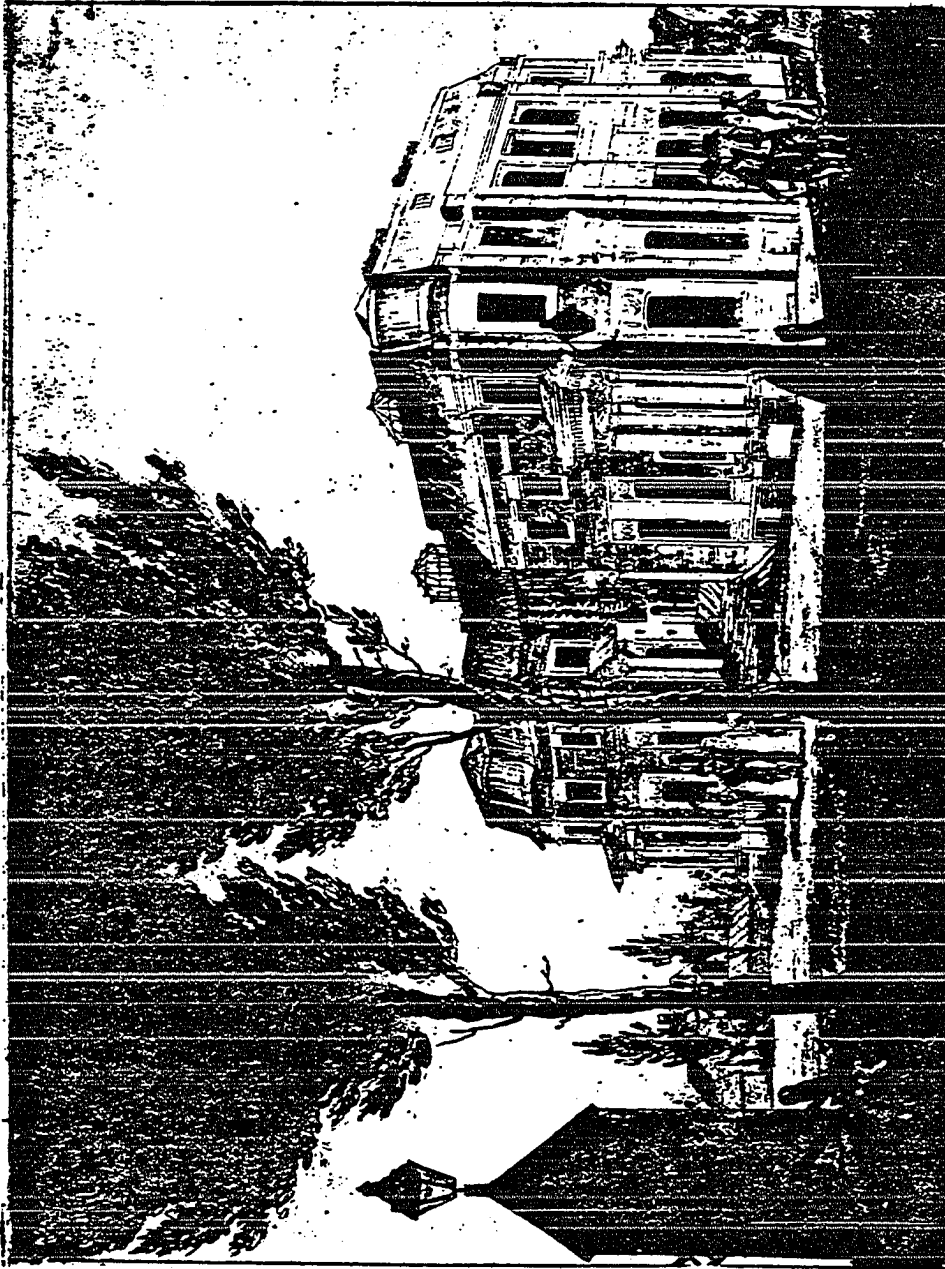


Figure 31. "An Unfinished House, In Chesnut Street."  
Watercolor. The Library Company of Philadelphia.

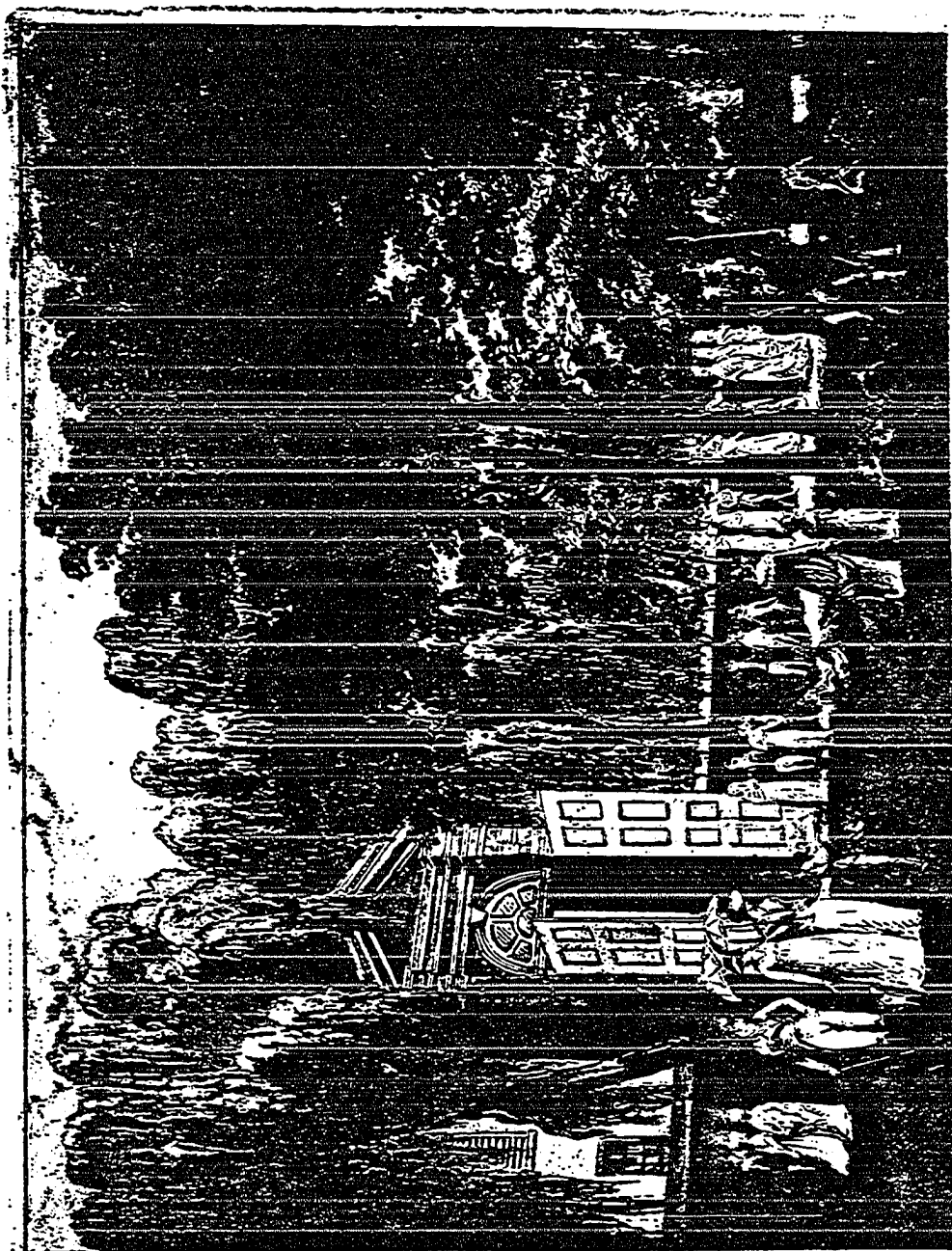


Figure 32. "State House Garden." Watercolor.  
The Library Company of Philadelphia.



Figure 33. "Col. Muhlenberg with Indians." Watercolor.  
The Library Company of Philadelphia.



Figure 34. "Second Street North from Market."  
Watercolor. The Library Company of Philadelphia.

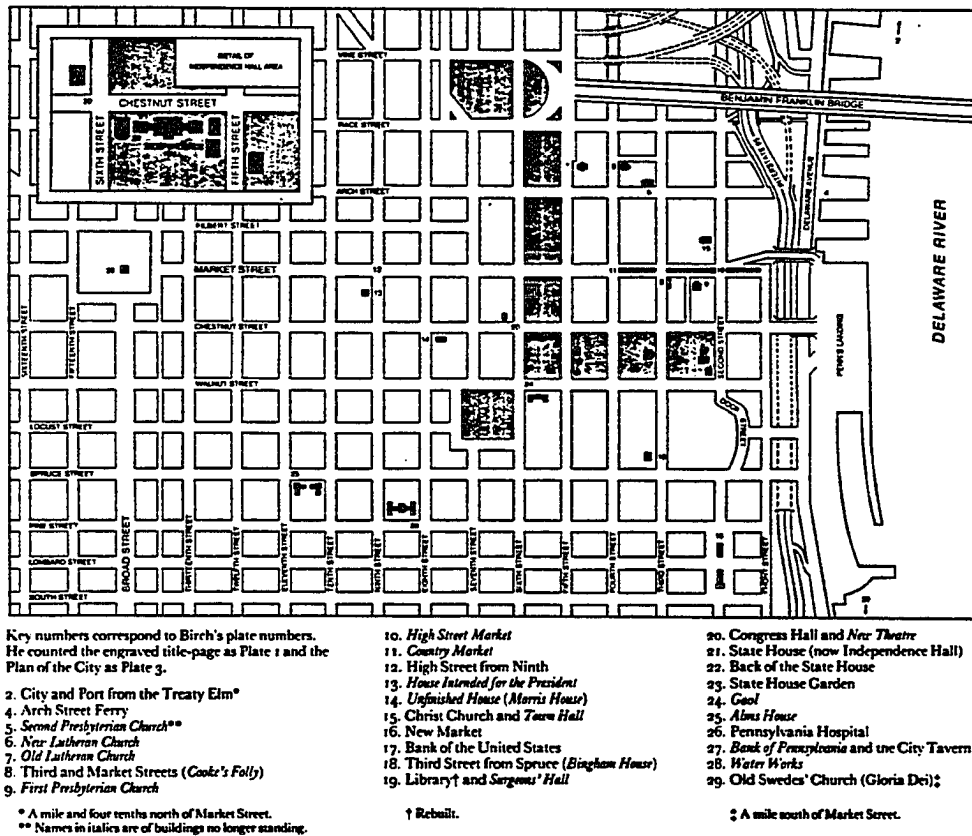


Figure 35. High Street. From the Country Marketplace  
Philadelphia. 1798. The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.



Figure 36. Bank of the United States. In Third Street  
Philadelphia. [first version] 1798.  
The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

**PLAN OF 1982**  
**Locating Sites and Principal Buildings Appearing in Birch's Views of 1800**



**Figure 37. Plan of 1982. Locating Sites and Principal Buildings Appearing in Birch's Views of 1800. 1982.**  
**The Free Library of Philadelphia.**



## ENDNOTES

### NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

1. The Book of Trades, or Library of the Useful Arts, vol. 2 (Whitehall, [Pa.]: Dickinson, for Jacob Johnson, 1807), 96-97.
2. Ibid., 98.
3. Antony Griffiths, Prints and Printmaking: An Introduction to the History and Techniques (London: British Museum Publications Limited, 1980), 30.
4. Ibid., 35.
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Wolf 2nd (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1982), 177;  
Nicholson, passim.
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39. 107. Birch, "Autobiography," Society Collection,
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30. Nicholas B. Wainwright, "The Age of Nicholas Biddle, 1825-1841," in Philadelphia: A 300-Year History, ed. Russell F. Weigley, Nicholas B. Wainwright, and Edwin Wolf 2nd (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1982), 234.
31. Ibid., 240.
32. Charles E. Peterson, "Carpenters' Hall," in Historic Philadelphia, 99.
33. Ibid., 105.
34. Ibid., 104, 107.
35. Edgar P. Richardson, "The Athens of America, 1800-1825," in Weigley, Philadelphia: A 300-Year History, 175-76.
36. Tatum, 40.
37. Mease, 320-21.
38. Samuel Blodget, Jr., Economica (Washington, D.C., 1806), quoted in James O. Wettereau, "The Oldest Bank Building in the United States," in Historic Philadelphia, 72.
39. Tatum, 40.
40. Ibid.
41. Sansom, 7; Claypoole's Advertiser 26 July 1797, quoted in Wettereau, 73.

42. Charles William Janson, The Stranger in America: containing observations made during a long residence in that country (London: James Cundee, 1807), 186.

43. James F. O'Gorman, Jeffrey A. Cohen, George E. Thomas, and G. Holmes Perkins, Drawing Towards Building: Philadelphia Architectural Graphics (Philadelphia: Published for the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts by the University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), 46.

44. Ibid., 48.

45. Sanson, 7; Avrahm Yarmolinsky, Picturesque United States of America. 1811. 1812. 1813. Being a Memoir on Paul Svinin. Russian diplomatic officer, artist, and author containing copious excerpts from his account of his travels in America with fifty-two reproductions of water colors in his own sketch-book, with an Introduction by R. T. H. Halsey (New York: William Edwin Rudge, 1930), 40.

46. Mease, 320.

47. Ibid., 321; O'Gorman, 48.

48. See Martin P. Snyder, City of Independence: Views of Philadelphia Before 1800 (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1975).

49. Tatum, 37; Jackson, America's Most Historic Highway, 75.

50. Mease, 179.

51. Ibid., 180.

52. Tatum, 37; Thorsten Sellin, "Philadelphia Prisons of the Eighteenth Century," in Historic Philadelphia, 328.

53. Tatum, 38.

54. Sellin, 330.

55. "General Description of Philadelphia," American Magazine, no. 1 (January 1788):98.

56. Mease, 295.
57. Arthur M. Schlesinger and Dixon Ryan Fox, eds., A History of American Life, vol. 5, The Completion of Independence, 1790-1850 by John Allen Krout and Dixon Ryan Fox (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1944), xvi.
58. Edward B. Krumbhaar, "The Pennsylvania Hospital," in Historic Philadelphia, 237; O'Gorman, 45.
59. Tatum 51; O'Gorman, 45.
60. O'Gorman, 45.
61. "General Description of Philadelphia," 98.
62. Charles E. Peterson, "Library Hall: Home of the Library Company of Philadelphia 1790-1880," in Historic Philadelphia, 132, 134.
63. Ibid., 132; Wansey, 116-17.
64. Peterson, "Library Hall," 137.
65. Westcott, 403-4.
66. Wansey, 116; Peterson, "Library Hall," 137.
67. Janson, 187.
68. William E. Lingelbach, "Philosophical Hall: The Home of the American Philosophical Society," 43.
69. Richardson, 191; Westcott, 114.
70. William L. Turner, "The Charity School, the Academy, and the College, Fourth and Arch Streets," 186.
71. Ibid., 179-85.
72. Tatum, 61.
73. Arthur Hobson Quinn, "The Theatre and the Drama in Old Philadelphia," 315; Richardson, 192-93.
74. Wansey, 116.

75. Baily, 113.
76. Martin S. Pernick, "Politics, Parties, and Pestilence: Epidemic Yellow Fever in Philadelphia and the Rise of the First Party System," William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd ser., 29 (October 1972): 572.
77. Sansom, 8.
78. Richard G. Miller, "The Federal City, 1783-1800," in Weigley, Philadelphia: A 300-Year History, 130-31.
79. Westcott, 133.
80. Tatum, 31-32.
81. Westcott, 134.
82. "General Description of Philadelphia," 98.
83. Snyder, City of Independence, 189-90.
84. Westcott, 59.
85. Brissot de Warville, 254.
86. Tatum, 39-40.
87. Mease, 219.
88. Alexander Mackie, "The Presbyterian Churches of Philadelphia," in Historic Philadelphia, 221.
89. A chapel of ease was a "branch" church of an established parish, erected so the parishioners did not have to walk so far.
90. Mackie, 227.
91. Mackie, 222.
92. Blumin, chap. 2, note 39.
93. Peterson, "Carpenters' Hall," 96.
94. Westcott, 83-84.
95. Sansom, 6.

96. Westcott, 85.
97. A South East View of Christ's Church, in Columbian Magazine, November 1787.
98. Tatum, 30.
99. Robert W. Shoemaker, "Christ Church, St. Peter's, and St. Paul's," in Historic Philadelphia, 190-91; Mease, 218.
100. Mease, 218.
101. Fred Pierce Corson, "St. George's Church: The Cradle of American Methodism," in Historic Philadelphia, 230-32; Tatum, 31.
102. Mease, 219.
103. Norman J. Johnson, "The Caste and Class of the Urban Form of Historic Philadelphia," Journal of the American Institute of Planners 32 (November 1966): 334-50.
104. Edwin B. Bronner, "Quaker Landmarks in Early Philadelphia," in Historic Philadelphia, 210, 212.
105. Mease, 217; Bronner, "Quaker Landmarks," 210.
106. Dennis C. Kurjack, "St. Joseph's and St. Mary's Churches," in Historic Philadelphia, 200-1.
107. Ibid., 199.
108. Ibid., 206.
109. Mease, 219.
110. Kurjack, 206; Mease, 219.
111. Edward M. Riley, "The Independence Hall Group," in Historic Philadelphia, 7-8.
112. Ibid, 8; Westcott, 110.
113. Wansey, 118.

114. Ibid., 152; Riley, 9.
115. Riley, 9.
116. Tatum, 45-46; Turner, 186.
117. Richardson, 171; Harold Donaldson Eberlein, "190, High Street (Market Street below Sixth)--The Home of Washington and Adams 1790-1800," in Historic Philadelphia, 162.
118. Rufus Wilmot Griswold, The Republican Court, or, American Society in the Days of Washington (New York: D. Appleton, 1855), 240.
119. Westcott, 354; Richardson, 171.
120. Eberlein, 164.
121. Ibid., 163.
122. Jackson, America's Most Historic Highway, 117.
123. Mease, 325.
124. Westcott, 363.
125. Tatum, 44.
126. Westcott, 360.
127. Tatum, 45.
128. Westcott, 366; Tatum, 47.
129. Westcott, 360.
130. Wendy A. Nicholson, "Making the Private Public: Anne Willing Bingham's Role As a Leader of Philadelphia's Social Elite in the Late Eighteenth Century" (Master's thesis, University of Delaware, 1988), 31. Manchester House was renamed Hertford House in 1971 by Sir Richard Wallace; it now houses the Wallace Collection.
131. Ibid.
132. Ibid., 34.

133. Westcott, 344; Wansey, 123.
134. Brissot de Warville, 256.
135. O'Gorman, 25.
136. Nicholson, 34.
137. Tatum, 42-43.
138. Ann Warder, "Extracts from the Diary of Ann Warder," ed Sarah Cadbury, Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography 18, no. 1 (1894): 52.
139. Ethel E. Rasmussen, "Democratic Environment--Aristocratic Aspiration," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography 90, no. 2 (April 1966): 181.
140. Richardson, 177.
141. Jackson, America's Most Historic Highway, 229-30, 232.
142. Ibid., 43.
143. Joseph Jackson, Iconography of Philadelphia (Philadelphia: Privately Printed by Edna G. and Harold H. Kynett, 1934).
144. Riley, 13.
145. Ibid., 16-18.
146. Ibid., 24.
147. Brissot de Warville, 255; "General Description of Philadelphia," 98.
148. Riley, 30; Westcott, 114-15.
149. Riley, 25.
150. Ibid., 28, 30.
151. Tatum, 39; Riley, 27.



152. Martin P. Snyder, "William Birch: His Philadelphia Views," Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography 73, no. 3 (July 1949): 276.

153. Richardson, 204.

154. Simon P. Newman, "'Principles and Not Men': The Political Culture of Leadership in the 1790s" (Paper presented to the Philadelphia Center for Early American Studies, Philadelphia, 4 May 1990), 31.

155. Ibid., 32.

156. Ibid.

157. Ibid., 33.

158. Richardson, 196. The frigate Philadelphia was captured by Tripolitan pirates in the harbor of Tripoli. Stephen Decatur, another Philadelphia naval hero, burned it there to prevent the pirates using the ship (Richardson, 196).

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