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## A Fresh Look at Old New Castle's Architectural Heritage

Timothy J. Mullin\*

New Castle, Delaware's oldest continually occupied town, settled in 1651, stands as a charming reminder of the early years of our nation's history.<sup>1</sup> The most historic portion of this small town on the Delaware River remains virtually undisturbed by modern development. The bucolic green with its religious and civic buildings, along with several blocks of homes and shops, became a National Historic Landmark District in 1967 (see Figure 1).<sup>2</sup> One well-documented building dates from circa 1680, although its street façade was altered in the 1830s. Twenty more buildings display early Georgian details from the first half of the eighteenth century, and approximately sixteen buildings date from the third and fourth quarters of that century, showing fine late Georgian features. The bulk of the buildings in town, more than sixty, represent the Federal style, early and late, from the first few decades of the nineteenth century. Only about fifteen structures in the district date from the Victorian period or later.

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<sup>1</sup> The Dutch Fort Zwaanendael, 1631, was obliterated, although the English settlement of Lewes, later built near the location of the fort, often claims that date. The Swedish Fort Christina, 1638, was no longer in existence when Wilmington was founded nearby 100 years later. The Dutch established Fort Casimir, 1651, which changed hands and names a few times before the English called it New Castle, but the site was never abandoned or supplanted by a new town, enjoying steady growth from its original founding. The date 1655 is occasionally used as that is traditionally when the town's streets were laid out.

<sup>2</sup> The boundaries for the 1967 National Landmark District are Harmony Street on the north, Delaware Street on the south, the Strand on the east, Third Street on the west, with a little jog down Delaware Street to Fourth, in order to pick up the Amstel House. A much larger National Register District, added in 1984, extends beyond the core of this early town.

Figure 1. Drawing by Albert Kruse for Perry, Shaw and Hepburn, 1949. This drawing was created to show how New Castle could be turned into a Williamsburg-like restored village. This is the same area that became New Castle's National Historic Landmark District in 1967. The town extends north and west of this central core. (Collections of the Delaware Historical Society.)

New Castle's buildings have been examined and written about for over 160 years. The most definitive study covering the town's architectural heritage, *New Castle on the Delaware*, part of the Federal Writers' Project American Guide Series, was first published in 1936 when the study of historic buildings was in its infancy.<sup>3</sup> Because the authors had only old tales, quaint Colonial Revival myths, and misleading rules of thumb upon which to rely, many of the buildings in New Castle were misrepresented or misunderstood in this publication. Revised and reprinted through 1973, the editors of *New Castle* continued to publish the same architectural information without question.

In several cases where modern structural analysis has been applied, the old myths have been dispelled and a building's genuine architectural history has been revealed. The remaining buildings in New Castle's Historic Landmark District, about 100 of them, are due for a complete reevaluation of their architectural heritage using contemporary methods of analysis.

The editor of the early editions of the Federal Writers' Project guide to New Castle, native Delawarean Jeanette Eckman, had a full career before assuming the directorship of this project.<sup>4</sup> Recognized throughout the 1930s, '40s, and '50s as a local historian, Eckman had no special training in architectural history, so she and her assistants referred to earlier publications for their information about the buildings.<sup>5</sup> Eckman occasionally worked

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<sup>3</sup> Delaware Federal Writers' Project, Work Progress Administration, *New Castle on the Delaware* (New Castle, 1936).

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Richard Eckman, April 16, 2007. Jeanette Eckman (1882-1972), a life long resident of Wilmington, graduated from Wellesley College in 1905. She taught German at Wilmington High School until World War I. She took up the banner of woman's suffrage. She worked for U.S. Sen. T. Coleman du Pont during his two terms in office. At fifty-three she took on the job of director of the Delaware Federal Writers' Project, serving as editor for several editions of the Delaware State Guide (1938, 1947, 1955) and the New Castle guide (1936, 1937, 1950). She continued researching New Castle as plans developed for preserving the town and orchestrated New Castle's tercentenary in 1951. After this, she spent the rest of her life reading.

with architect Albert Kruse, a native Wilmingtonian who was recognized during that era for his work documenting and restoring old buildings. Kruse was considered an expert on historic structures in the state, especially those in New Castle, but his restoration work might give pause to today's historic preservationists, for he too depended greatly on information found in earlier publications.<sup>6</sup>

At the time "reading" a building, or looking at the physical evidence of the structure itself, had yet to be fully understood. Since then the study of historic preservation has become a profession. Many universities now offer the topic as a major course of study, and the tools and techniques available for studying historic structures have advanced dramatically. It is now possible to date wooden beams or determine paint colors with scientific accuracy and hands-on examination of the physical elements allow the structures to speak for themselves. Such methods were not available to Eckman and Kruse. When Kruse's work with historic fabric seems a little heavy-handed today and Eckman's writings ring a bit naïve, we must remember that they were pioneers in the field.

Beginning with the celebration of the Nation's centennial in 1876, the United States entered an architectural and decorative arts period called the Colonial Revival, which lasted well into the 1940s. People began to celebrate and romanticize the county's colonial past. Many hereditary societies like the Colonial Dames, and the Daughters of the American Revolution were founded at this time. Americans, who previously collected only European pieces, began to seek out American antiques. Local

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<sup>5</sup> For Federal Writer's Project bibliography, University of Delaware, Special Collections, Federal Writer's Project papers and Jeanette Eckman Collection, Delaware Historical Society (here after Eckman Collection): Benjamin Ferris, *History of Original Settlements on the Delaware* (Wilmington, 1846); J. Thomas Scharf, *History of Delaware. 1609-1888, 2 vols.* (Philadelphia, 1888); Alexander B. Cooper, "The History of New Castle," a series of typed manuscripts for the *Wilmington Sunday Star*, 1905-1907, Delaware Historical Society; John Martin Hammond, *Colonial Mansions of Maryland and Delaware* (Philadelphia, 1914); Elise Lathrop, *Historic Houses of Early America* (New York, 1927); Anne Rodney Janvier, *Stories of Old New Castle* (privately printed, [1930]); George Fletcher Bennett, *Early Architecture of Delaware* (Historical Press, 1932); Albert Kruse and Gertrude Kruse, *New Castle Sketches* (Philadelphia, 1932).

<sup>6</sup> The American Institute of Architects Archive, Washington, D.C. Albert Kruse (1897-1974) born in Wilmington, was an alumnus of Wilmington Friends School and attended MIT, 1916-1922. He directed the Historic American Buildings Survey for Delaware, 1933. He joined George Pope to form Pope and Kruse in Wilmington in 1934. Kruse joined the AIA and was the president of the Delaware chapter, 1940-1942. He was generally accepted as the expert on local historic architecture. He restored the New Castle Court House, the New Castle Presbyterian Church, the Dutch House, the Hale-Byrnes House, and others, and he designed the Delaware State Museum in Dover.

antiquarians formed organizations and opened house museums, like the home of Betsy Ross, and the Amstel and Dutch houses in New Castle. Visits to colonial shrines, like Mount Vernon, increased as the nation celebrated its sesquicentennial in 1926, and George Washington's 200<sup>th</sup> birthday in 1932. New Castle organized the very first pilgrimage-type tour of homes and gardens in 1924, and Williamsburg opened its doors to the public in 1928. In 1935, the first national Historic Sites Act was passed allowing the government to acquire and preserve national landmarks. It is easy to understand why the Depression era Federal Writers' Project (hereafter FWP) put researchers and writers to work creating guidebooks for the states which captured the stirring tales of past greatness in America's communities.<sup>7</sup>

The colonial revival period is often criticized today for its casual disregard for historic facts in favor of a certain graciousness, charm, and belief in how the past should have been. This pervasive concept of "how it should have been" influenced everyone; an antiques dealer might dress up a rather plain eighteenth-century piece of furniture with new carvings, while a restoration architect might force "Georgian" symmetry on an historically asymmetric façade. Landscape architects might design "colonial" boxwood gardens that never existed in the past. An artist might make up details to create a "colonial" scene, or a writer might color the facts to create a stirring tale.<sup>8</sup>

Of course, individual families had always faithfully kept and taught their own histories to successive generations. Several older New Castle residents had also written down their recollections before the FWP was created. Alexander B. Cooper (1844-1924), a lawyer and avocational local

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<sup>7</sup> The Federal Writers' Project, formed in 1935, functioned as a branch of the New Deal's Works Progress Administration, employing out of work writers for the creation of guide books to the states and major cities known as the American Guide Series. In Delaware, New Castle was thought important enough to warrant a guide book of its own. *New Castle on the Delaware* was the very first book published under FWP legislation.

<sup>8</sup> See furniture pieces in the Laird Collection, at the Delaware Historical Society, Albert Kruse's work on the New Castle Court House later in this article, the gardens at the Amstel House and Dutch House, Robert Shaw's painting, *New Castle Waterfront*, or read almost anything written in this period. Mount Vernon, Williamsburg, Winterthur, and other museums and historic sites have recently taken a more scholarly approach and reinterpreted colonial revival spaces to be more historically accurate. In Williamsburg, the colonial revival boxwood gardens have been preserved not because they reflect the colonial past but because they are good examples of design from the 1920s and '30s.

historian, moved to town in 1869 and wrote a series of lengthy articles about New Castle between for the *Wilmington Sunday Star* between 1905 and 1907. In article thirty-two, Cooper chronicles the Marquis de Lafayette's visit in 1824, including long-held community tales of Lafayette visiting the Read House and staying overnight. This information is not born out either by Lafayette's personal secretary, who recorded the trip in great detail, or by "an officer" who recounted the general's trip some years later.<sup>9</sup>

Another example of the anecdotal level of research at the time is John Hammond's *Colonial Mansions of Maryland and Delaware*, published in 1914. Typical of the period, Hammond offered this amazingly inaccurate information about the Read House:

The disastrous fire of 1824...almost wiped the little city [of New Castle] out of existence, destroyed among other beautiful colonial reminders the historic Read Mansion...

The edifice which now stands on its site...was built by George Read [III], grandson of George Read the signer...so gracious in mass and outline that it may serve to recall some of the charm of its forerunner, as well as to continue the name of the family so long associated with this spot of ground.

The Read Mansion that was destroyed was...built by John Read...[and was] the birthplace as well as the life-long home of the illustrious George Read [I]<sup>10</sup>

This misinformation influenced Gertrude Kruse's paragraphs about the Read House in *New Castle Sketches*, published in 1932. Her text corrects the most egregious errors, but uses the same phrasing when describing the building, suggesting that the earlier house could somehow be compared to the existing building:

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<sup>9</sup> Alexander B. Cooper, "The History of New Castle"; A. Levassuer, *Lafayette in America* (New York, 1829), I:152; "An Officer in the Late Army," *A Complete History of the Marquis de Lafayette...* (Hartford, 1845), pp. 463-464. Both chroniclers of Lafayette's tour of the United States confirm that Lafayette left Wilmington at noon after a "sumptuous repast," made a long stop in New Castle only to attend the wedding of Dorcas Van Dyke, and continued on to Frenchtown, Maryland the same night, where a steamboat was waiting for him. Neither author refers to any other activity in New Castle, though they both include minutia about other aspects of the trip.

<sup>10</sup> Hammond, *Colonial Mansions*, pp. 264-65.

The original Read House was destroyed in the disastrous fire of 1824, which almost wiped the little city of New Castle out of being... The present Read House, built by George Read II...recalls much of the beauty of its forerunner and carries the name of the family so many years associated with this piece of land."<sup>11</sup>

In reality, the earlier house destroyed in the fire was a small, old building of five or six rooms, possibly dating from the 1600s, which George Read I, who was born in Maryland, rented after he married the widow Gertrude Ross Till in 1763. For over twenty years this little old house sat next to the twenty-two room mansion built in 1801 by his son George Read II. The old home would be difficult to describe as beautiful, though it did possess a certain quaint charm. The huge mansion next door in no way recalled or reflected anything about the older home. It was, in fact, the opposite. The son's house physically proclaimed a new, bolder era of Read presence in the small town (see Figure 2).

Writers were not the only ones who placed primary importance upon creating good stories in the colonial revival period. One well known local artist, Robert Shaw (1859-1912), often used artistic license to envision the historic buildings he painted as he thought they should have looked, rather than the worn, often ruined building that stood in front of him. Shaw painted a fanciful rendering of the New Castle waterfront around 1900, in which he envisioned the scene as he imagined it looked in the 1830s, mixing fantasy with fact.

It was not unusual at this time for correct information to be recorded, only to be disputed by the next author or artist. For instance, Gertrude Kruse correctly identified Robert Buist as the designer of the Read House garden in *New Castle Sketches*, a fact that owner Lydia Laird altered a couple of years later in an article she wrote for The Garden Club of America.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> A. and G. Kruse, *New Castle Sketches*, pp. [29-32]. This is basically a book of Albert's drawings of historic buildings, with a few short paragraphs about each structure by his sister, Gertrude Kruse (1900-1981).

<sup>12</sup> Alice B. Lockwood, ed., *Gardens of Colony and State*, 2 Vols. (New York, 1931, 1934), 2: 188-89; and "The Garden of the Read House," *House and Garden*, Nov. 1901, pp.12-17. Lydia Chichester Laird (1895-1975), for unknown reasons, claimed that Andrew Jackson Downing laid out the garden. This led later researchers to list the garden among Downing's work and, for a number of years, established as

Figure 2. Detail of Read Houses, Latrobe Survey, 1805. Benjamin Henry Latrobe (1764-1820) and his assistants, Robert Mills and William Strickland (each of whom became noted architects in the first half of the nineteenth century), completed a survey of New Castle's streets in 1805. This survey included sketches of some of the houses. The detail shown here displays the recently completed George Read II mansion sitting next to the small older house where George I and Gertrude Read had lived. At the time of the survey, the senior Reads had passed away and Latrobe, along with his assistants, rented the smaller house while working in town. (Courtesy of Delaware Public Archives.)

By the mid 1930s no one had yet attempted a research project on the scale of the FWP *New Castle* work. Eckman, and her assistant editors, Anthony Higgins and William Conner, along with sixteen or seventeen other assistants, researched and wrote essays on the town's education, churches, transportation, and economy.<sup>13</sup> While the writers relied on earlier publications, like Alexander Cooper's articles, John Hammond's book, and Elise Lathrop's *Historic Houses* for architectural information, they were laboring to break out of the colonial revival mode and present well researched history. Higgins, in a later interview, described Eckman's high standards by saying she "...would never tolerate anything that you [as a researcher] couldn't prove." Eckman and her assistants also collected anecdotes, family stories and folklore, "...trying to get informal as well as formal history..." as Higgins recalled.<sup>14</sup> The result was a history of the

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truth this false bit of information. Robert Buist was noted as the designer of the garden (1846) in articles in *House and Garden* magazine in the November issue of its maiden year, 1901.

<sup>13</sup> Eckman Collection; University of Delaware, Special Collections, Delaware Federal Writers' Project Report. Eckman's assistants on the FWP: Anthony Higgins, William Conner, Ellen Samworth, Ed Rotter, Reese Hammond, Jerry Sweeney, M. Margery Moore, Gordon Butler, James Allen, Donald Crowe, Frank Grant, Ernest Ballinger, J. Franklin Pote [one of the very few African-Americans who worked for the FWP], E. Thompson-Walls, J. F. Cunningham, Edmund Knight, J. Barton Cheyney, V. E. Shaw, and Thomas Morris.

<sup>14</sup> Anthony Higgins, interview by Steven Schoenherr, Sept. 21, 1973. University of Delaware, Special Collections. Anthony Higgins (1905-1985), a Delaware native, graduated from University of Virginia in 1927 and sought a career in New York City, with no luck. As the Depression hit, he returned to Delaware to eek out existence farming in Sussex County, and began writing short articles for the *Baltimore Sun*. By 1935 he happily joined the newly formed Federal Writers' Project to work on the New Castle book and then on *Delaware: A Guide to the First State*. After writing his own book on New Castle, Higgins was employed by A. Felix du Pont to work on the biography of Alexis I. du Pont, which was interrupted by World War II. Higgins went back to Sussex County after the war and began writing editorials for Wilmington's News Journal papers. Editor-in-chief, Charles L. Reese finally convinced Higgins to move to Wilmington and join the editorial board of the paper, a career which Higgins enjoyed until his retirement. In 1973, Higgins edited the third (fourth) edition of *New Castle on the Delaware*,

town, as accurate as possible at the time, including a building-by-building description of architectural features and important dates for each structure.

After the 1936 publication of *New Castle on the Delaware*, Jeanette Eckman and her team turned their attention to the *Delaware State Guide*, another FWP book, published in 1938. After the *Delaware Guide* was finished, Anthony Higgins teamed up with photographer Bayard Wooten to create a coffee-table picture book of New Castle. Using the basic historical information gleaned from working on the 1936 book, *New Castle, Delaware 1651-1939* included many black and white photographs by Wooten, accompanied by short paragraphs about each building. This picture book, with interior views as well as artistic images, was produced on a subscription basis, and judging from the list of subscribers in the front, was included on all the best bookshelves in the state. Higgins carefully avoided too many architectural claims.<sup>15</sup>

Eckman returned to New Castle to continue researching as a plan began to unfold for preserving the town following the example of Williamsburg. That plan, developed by Daniel M. Bates, Louise du P. Crowninshield, Philip and Lydia Laird, and others, engaged the Boston firm, Perry, Shaw and Hepburn, the same architects who worked on the Williamsburg project, to develop New Castle as a restored colonial village.<sup>16</sup> The Boston firm sub-contracted with their friend Albert Kruse to undertake a complete architectural survey of the town. Kruse arranged for Eckman and her assistants to do a great deal more primary research, seeking out deeds and documents relating to the town's earliest period in the 1600s. This new research led to an expanded edition of *New Castle on the Delaware* in 1950.

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dedicating the book to his mentor, Jeanette Eckman, who had recently passed away. There is some controversy about the editions. Because there was a reprint of the 1936 edition in 1937, the edition of 1950 was considered the third, with the 1973 edition being the fourth....although it is often referred to as the third.

<sup>15</sup> Anthony Higgins, and Bayard Wooten, *New Castle, Delaware 1651-1939* (Boston, 1939).

<sup>16</sup> Deborah Van Riper Harper, "'The Gospel of New Castle': Historic Preservation in a Delaware Town," *Delaware History*, 25 (1992-93):77-105. A number of concerned New Castilians and other Delawareans got together in the 1930s to begin discussing the town's future. By the late 1940s they established the need for a complete architectural survey of the town and for a corporation to operate the next Williamsburg, so they formed Historic New Castle, Inc. They intended to buy up the properties in town and restore them, or convince the residents to restore their homes. This corporation lasted from 1949 to 1959, folding due to lack of funds.

The updated publication was just in time for the town's 1951 Tercentenary, also orchestrated by Eckman.

In 1958, the small pamphlets published annually by Immanuel Episcopal Church for its pilgrimage tour were transformed into large-format booklets titled the same as the event, *A Day in Old New Castle*.<sup>17</sup> The early pamphlets offered little more than identification of the buildings open for tours, while the newly expanded booklet included additional information about each building, borrowing heavily from Eckman's work. Those booklets likely got into more hands than all the editions of Eckman's books put together (in some years the tours attracted as many as 2,000 people), introducing visitors far and wide to the town's architectural history, including, unfortunately, the misinformation.

Jeanette Eckman and her assistants did tremendous work and deserve great credit. However, with advances in understanding structural clues, that work cannot be accepted as the final word on New Castle's architectural history no matter how often it has been published. To be fair, Eckman's team, and for that matter, Kruse, were hindered in their research by adhering to some long held "rules of thumb," which went out of use when the study of architectural history began in earnest in the 1960s.

### ***Old Rule of Thumb #1. Smaller = older***

While an old building such as the Dutch House is indeed smaller than, for example, the Read House, built a century later, this rule of thumb did not allow for a building that was constructed all at once to have sections of different proportions. Nor did this rule take into consideration the possibility that a large earlier building might have smaller, simpler wings added later. This mistaken "rule" plagued many early researchers trying to understand the history of buildings all over the country.

Using the Read House as an example, the main block of this 1801 structure is much larger and more elegant than either of the subordinate wings. Because those wings have lower ceilings and smaller windows, and are less formal than the main block, this old rule of thumb would lead a researcher to assume earlier dates for the kitchen wing and the wash house. Since the Read House was built all at one time there is no physical evidence

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<sup>17</sup> Immanuel Episcopal Church, *A Day in Old New Castle* (New Castle, annual publication).

to support different building periods, but this was not taken into consideration at the time.

***Old Rule of Thumb #2. Our ancestors valued older houses  
and did not tear them down.***

This rule of thumb is equally true and false. A farmhouse, passed down from father to son, would be valued and commonly grew along with the multi-generational family it housed. The older section left to the widow as a dower house often had a newer section built for the son and his family. In town, however, much like today, small older buildings were not highly valued and were most often torn down to make way for larger, more elegant structures, especially when properties changed hands.

By following this old rule, when researchers came across a reference for a building in a deed or will, it was presumed that the building mentioned had been incorporated into the existing house. So, using rule # 1, the researcher looked to find the smallest, simplest part of a building to assign the earliest date, regardless of physical evidence. Quite naturally, the smallest, simplest part of any house would be the service wing, and nearly every service wing in New Castle has been identified as a seventeenth century structure.

Again, using the Read House as an example, an earlier house from the seventeenth or early eighteenth century stood on the property when purchased by George Read II in 1797. This small house can be seen in Ives LeBlanc's painting of the New Castle water front painted on July 4 that same year (see Figure 3). Rule # 2 would encourage the researcher to identify some portion of the existing building as being that early structure. Looking for the smallest section, the obvious choice would be the wash house, nearly sixty feet back from the sidewalk. In reality, the earlier building, which sat right on the property line, was completely demolished shortly after being included in the painting, to make way for the construction of the Read House, or Read Mansion, as it was often called.

Figure 3. Detail, *New Castle, 4<sup>th</sup> July, 1797*, by Ives Le Blanc. The small early house seen behind the sails of the ship was torn down to make way for George Read II's mansion. (Courtesy of Gordon Hargraves.)

A paragraph about the town's architectural heritage printed in the expanded guide booklet, *A Day in Old New Castle*, sums up these mistaken rules of thumb by stating, "Many early structures have been incorporated, usually as kitchens, at the rear of later, larger dwellings."<sup>18</sup> If one believed that statement, the early houses in town were built thirty or forty feet back from the street allowing room for subsequent additions to be added in front of them. In fact, the earliest reliable map, Latrobe's survey of 1805 (see Figure 4), and the few early drawings and paintings of New Castle (see Figure 5) show the oldest houses built up against the street, with corner properties often occupied first. The extant seventeenth- and very early eighteenth-century houses in town, the William Penn Guest House, the Dutch House, Rosemont, Bridgewater Jewelers, McWilliams, and others, all sit right on the property line, as do most early houses in other colonial towns up and down the East Coast.

Figure 4. Detail, Latrobe Survey, 1805. Note that all the structures are built right on the property line, and are not set twenty or forty feet back. (Courtesy of Delaware Public Archives)

Figure 5. *The Tile House* by Robert Bird, ca. 1825. This seventeenth-century warehouse sat right on the property line, as did the small seventeenth-century house shown two doors to the right. That small house was replaced shortly after being painted by a more stylish late federal townhouse. (Courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. Robert Montgomery Bird, and The Winterthur Library: Decorative Arts Photographic Collection.)

### ***A Brick Town***

Luckily, structures in New Castle are principally built of brick. Of all the possible building materials, brick is the most easily "read" or understood by architectural historians or anyone else who knows its language. The bricks themselves tell the story of their construction. Brick masons used various methods of laying brick, called bonds, and home owners of the past wanted the most stylish bond used for their home's façade. A brick bond is the relationship of the stretcher (or long side of a brick) to the header (or

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<sup>18</sup> Immanuel Church, *A Day in Old New Castle* ([1961]), p. 3. This annual booklet was transformed from a small folder into approximately forty 8 ½ by 11 inch pages in 1958. This new format, still used today, included more information about the buildings and general information about the town.

short end of the brick) and how they are used from course (row) to course as a wall is constructed. Knowing when certain brick bonds were popular helps to date a building. The color or consistency of brick and how it was fired give the knowledgeable researcher a clue to its age and manufacture. Also, changes and alterations to brick buildings are often much simpler to detect than those in wood or stone structures. King and queen closers, bonds, seams, and other physical parts of the construction help determine when it was built, where a door or window had been, and where something was added or taken away. The charts, 'Brick bonds,' and 'Other Features,' offer examples of brick bonds and other architectural features found in New Castle.

Figure 6. Side wall of the Spread Eagle Tavern, Second Street, New Castle, 2007. Dating from the first quarter of the eighteenth century, this building has seen many changes. Notice the original window opening with relieving arch and queen closers, now closed up, and a later door opening with a flat arch punched through a portion of that window, now also closed up. Originally below-grade and exposed in the early 1800s when the streets were regraded, the stone foundation are now stuccoed. English bond brick is used on the lower part of the wall, from the stone foundation to mid-way up the original window, with English common bond above. The front of the building (not shown) is in Flemish bond. (Photo by Eric Jodlbauer.)

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[charts]

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### *Case Histories*

#### *Old New Castle Court House*

The one building in town that has possibly received the most attention, due to its prominent location and its place in Delaware history as

its colonial capitol, is the New Castle Court House. Since the building was built, burned, reconstructed, added on to three or four times, and covered with stucco in the 1840s, much of the early information about the court house was conjectural (see Figure 7). The small east wing "was erected prior to 1680," according to J. Thomas Scharf in his *History of Delaware*. Anne Rodney Janvier states in her *Stories of Old New Castle*, published in 1930, "the Court House is undoubtedly one of the oldest state buildings in the country...the east wing was the original State House ... it was built about 1675 as the tablet on the wall (erected by the Colonial Dames of Delaware ) will tell you." Gertrude Kruse repeats this 1675 date in her *Sketches*. The old rules of thumb guided each of these statements.<sup>19</sup>

Figure 7. The New Castle Court House, ca. 1900. From the 1840s to 1936, the building was covered in stucco and the early brick work could not be seen. (Collections of the Delaware Historical Society.)

While Eckman included these seventeenth-century dates in her 1936 and 1950 editions of *New Castle*, she did not agree with them. After pointing out the historical inaccuracies she wrote, "The tradition [of an early date], however is a healthy one and promises to continue unabated." In her personal copy of the *Day in Old New Castle* pamphlet for the 1936 tour, Eckman wrote "NO" next to the statement, "East wing built before 1682," and drew a pencil line through the same phrase in her pamphlet from the 1947 tour.<sup>20</sup>

Even after the Victorian stucco was removed from the court house in 1936, revealing the eighteenth-century brick work, the physical indications of date such as brick bonds, belt courses, relieving arches, etc. were confusing to those observing them, and the misconception of the east wing's earlier date continued because of its small size.

Figure 8. Old New Castle Court House after the stucco was removed. (Collections of Delaware Historical Society.)

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<sup>19</sup> Scharf, *History of Delaware*, 2: 869; Janvier, *Stories of Old New Castle*, p. 6; Kruse and Kruse, *Sketches*, pp.[23-24].

<sup>20</sup> Eckman, *New Castle*, 1936 ed., pg. 62; 1950 ed., pg. 65; and Jeanette Eckman Collection, Box 105, Folder 'Day in Old New Castle.' Eckman hedges as much as possible on the dates for the various parts of the courthouse, pointing out the inaccuracies.

In 1950, Albert Kruse took an unnamed group to visit the courthouse that included "One antiquarian... two architects... one painter... and three 'just plain interested' [people]," as recorded in his article "An Impression of the Old Manner of Building in New Castle, Delaware," published in *Delaware History*.<sup>21</sup> Kruse notes that his group crawled into attics and examined all the pieces and parts of the building;

Another of us ran outside to see what happened to the water table on the central building when it joined the east wing. This explorer reported that...this... brick course seemed to disappear under the brick face of ... the east wing. His theory naturally ...would make the central wing the No. 1 operation, followed by the east wing.<sup>22</sup>

This is a perfectly sound evaluation because these structural clues do identify the central section as the oldest. Next, Kruse reports that they climbed into the attic of the east wing and found "a belt course.... of the central wing...under the peak of the roof of the east wing."<sup>23</sup> Here is another good indication that the central section is older. However, Kruse writes, "the picturesque legend persists that this small portion of the building [east wing] is the original courthouse."<sup>24</sup> Kruse chose not to use the physical evidence at hand to reject the smaller=older rule of thumb.

Clearly there was mounting evidence against the east wing being the oldest. First came Eckman, and then at least one of the architects on Kruse's tour favored the central portion being the oldest. To settle the matter an outside expert was called in to rule on the dispute. Unfortunately, the expert is referred to only as "Mr. Moorehead,"<sup>25</sup> but his report clearly defines the construction phases of the court house with the central block coming first, the near section of the east wing next, the extended portion of the east wing third, followed by the rebuilt west wing, which, as last to be built, was never

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<sup>21</sup> Albert Kruse, "An Impression of the Old Manner of Building in New Castle, Delaware," *Delaware History*, 4 (1950-51): 172.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Due to the close ties between Albert Kruse and Perry, Shaw and Hepburn, and that firm's close ties to Williamsburg, this is likely Singleton Peabody Moorehead (1900-1964), who was an architect with the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation.

in doubt (see Figure 9). Moorehead did, however, suggest a date of 1690 for the central section, corrected later by Miss Eckman as she dug through documents to find accounts of the original court house burning to the ground in 1729, and a new court house in use by 1732.<sup>26</sup>

Figure 9. The building phases of the New Castle Court House, adapted from floor plans drawn by Albert Kruse for Perry, Shaw and Hepburn in 1952. (By the author.)

Once the construction phases for the Court House were settled (1732, central block; 1765, east wing; 1801 extended east wing; 1845 west wing), Albert Kruse began the restoration work. The earliest image of the building, Benjamin Latrobe's perspective view (see Figure 10) from his 1805 survey, became an important visual tool showing features like an early door surround and a balcony. While some aspects of the restoration were done well, such as replacing the balcony and lowering the main-floor windows down to original height, other restoration work ignored original fabric and forced a colonial revival everything-the-same-size symmetry on certain sections of the building.

Kruse experienced some confusion over the window and door arrangements for the east wing. The windows and doors shown in Latrobe's view of the building were still in use in a drawing of 1849 (see Figures 10 and 11). By the early twentieth century, however, the original openings had been greatly altered (see Figure 8). The original relieving arches from 1765, indicating a window on the left and a door on the right, remained in place through all of this. Perhaps Kruse was unaware that those arches were original features and served to identify the original size and use of the openings, for he installed windows of equal size into both positions (see Figure 12). At the same time, Kruse carefully wove new brick with the old to avoid seams and used queen closers in historic fashion.

The New Castle Courthouse has recently completed a restoration based on an historic structures report. Created by a team of restoration architects who examine every inch of a building, from top to bottom, and often below the surface as well, a historic structures report identifies original

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<sup>26</sup> Eckman Collection, Box 108, Folder "Courthouse Restoration," Mr. Moorehead, 'Report on the New Castle Court House,' typed ms. 1953, and various notes and copied articles referencing the 1729 fire.

and replacement features, tells when various changes in construction took place, and guides the restoration work. In this case, the decision was made to allow some of Albert Kruse's work to remain, notably the windows in the east wing, while replacing other work he did. This restoration was sparked by the need to install modern heating, air conditioning, and wiring in this structure which functions as a museum. During archeological work under the old floors of the west wing, foundations of an earlier structure were located (possibly the 17<sup>th</sup> century courthouse?), and paint analysis revealed the original paint colors for the interior.<sup>27</sup>

Figure 10. Perspective of Court House by Benjamin Latrobe, 1805. (Courtesy of Delaware Public Archives.)

Figure 11. Perspective of the Court House by Rea and Price, 1849. (Collections of the Delaware Historical Society.)

Figure 12a & b. Original relieving arches for door and window openings in the disputed east wing of the courthouse. A small arch on the left(a) indicates a narrow window and wide arch on the right (b) indicates a door. Kruse forced new windows of equal size into all the openings in this wing. (Photo by Eric Jodlbauer.)

The New Castle Court House has always been recognized for its historical importance, even though its architectural heritage may not have been fully understood. When the Historic Preservation Act of 1966 established the National Register of Historic Places, it inspired communities to nominate their historically important buildings. The courthouse was listed as part of the New Castle National Landmark District in 1967, and was separately listed as a National Landmark structure in 1972.

### *Amstel House*

Until very recently the Amstel House suffered from the “smaller=older” kitchen wing belief, but in this case it was an idea based on research and not on old tales. The earliest mention of the Amstel House, in

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<sup>27</sup> Interview with Cynthia Snyder, Site Administrator for the New Castle Courthouse Museum, Sept. 24, 2007. The restoration architects, Frens and Frens, LLC, West Chester, PA., also worked on the recent restoration of the interiors of the John Dickenson Plantation near Dover, Delaware.

Hammond's *Colonial Mansions*, states it is "the oldest dwelling-house in New Castle," and does not mention any earlier structural parts. In *Sketches*, Gertrude Kruse again mimics Hammond, "built in 1730, Amstel House is the oldest dwelling in New Castle," and mentions nothing of an earlier wing. Anne Janvier in her *Stories*, (1930), is also silent on that issue.<sup>28</sup>

Figure 13. Amstel House. (Collections of the Delaware Historical Society.)

Eckman only hints that "some have thought that the kitchen wing is considerably older...but the difference in time is so brief as to be of small importance" in the first publication of *New Castle* (1936). However, by the publication of the updated version in 1950, Eckman and her assistants had done significantly more research and found references to earlier houses on the site, so they looked for the smallest portion of the structure to identify as an earlier house. In the 1950 edition of *New Castle*, they wrote, "either Johannes [de Haes] or his son may have built the old brick back building of the present house. If the former, it could date back to the 1670's." This new edition goes on to introduce a second error, that a door was cut through on the Delaware Street side of the house for a nineteenth-century tenant.<sup>29</sup>

The 1950 *A Day in Old New Castle* pamphlet listing for the Amstel House boldly states, "main house circa 1730, kitchen wing before 1700." The expanded 1958 booklet is more detailed: "Finney built the solid brick house about 1730, although the service wing is earlier." Later printings of this booklet flatly say, "the earliest section of Amstel House is the old kitchen which was built circa 1680."<sup>30</sup>

Physical evidence contradicts those statements; the very bricks of the walls themselves tell a different story. Looking at this gable-façaded house, the Flemish bond brick, water table, relieving arches, coved cornice, and belt course are all present and typical of the period. The unusual gable-to-the-

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<sup>28</sup> Hammond, *Colonial Mansions*, pp. 247-250; Kruse and Kruse, *Sketches*, pp. [16-17]; Janvier, *Stories*, p. 34. It should be noted that the William Penn Guest House, ca. 1680, and about five other extent houses in New Castle pre-date the Amstel House.

<sup>29</sup> Eckman, *New Castle*, 1936 ed., pp. 74-78; 1950 ed., p. 63.

<sup>30</sup> Immanuel Church. *A Day in Old New Castle*, [1950]; [1958]; [1961], p.15; [1986], p. 21.

street façade was an early Georgian style with short-lived popularity. It is also seen in the original design of the John Dickinson Plantation near Dover, built within a few years of the Amstel House, as well as a few other houses in the Delaware Valley.

If the kitchen wing were from the 1600s, one would expect to find a seam in the brick work, a different brick bond (either English bond or English common bond), and brick of different color made at a different time, but none of that physical evidence exists. Here, the brick work is continuous in color, bond, and date from the front corner of the Delaware Street side to the back corner of the kitchen wing. The stepped-belt course angles down from the main block of the house to continue across the entire kitchen wing, tying the entire building together as a single period of construction.

Figure 14. The Delaware Street side of Amstel House. There is no seam or change in construction between the main block and the kitchen wing. (Photo by Eric Jodlbauer.)

In 1905 the Amstel House suffered a different sort of problem. The new owners, Mr. and Mrs. Henry Hanby Hay, who placed a marble plaque over the door stating the house was built in 1730, hired their cousin, Laussat Richter Rogers (1866-1957), to restore the house. Rogers, from a family with deep roots in New Castle, moved to Delaware after a childhood in California. He took architectural courses at Columbia and studied in Europe with a vision of becoming an architect. His training was all in classical architecture, and the Amstel House seems to have been his first venture into restoration. While Rogers had limited success as an architect, he became much better known as an artist.<sup>31</sup>

A generation earlier than Albert Kruse, Rogers was even harsher with historic fabric. Restoration is the wrong word to use in this case, as it suggests taking the house back to how it looked in an earlier period. What Rogers did was renovation: he stripped paint; closed up doorways; knocked

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<sup>31</sup> Thomas Beckman, "The Architectural Career of Laussat R. Rogers," in Gene E. Harris, *Laussat Richter Rogers 1866-1957* (Chadds Ford, Pa., 1986), pp. 17-31. Rogers occupied an old family estate, Boothhurst, a few miles north of New Castle. In the late 1890s he stripped John Notman's "Gothic" additions, altered the 18<sup>th</sup> century core of the house beyond recognition, and doubled the size of the house in half-timbered Queen Anne style; none of which could be called restoration.

through new windows; and removed walls. He also added a fussy little Victorian oriel on the back of the disputed kitchen wing where an original interior staircase had been, an alteration that Rogers, himself, describes as “not unattractive.”<sup>32</sup>

Even with Rogers' Colonial Revival work, the original historic fabric shows through and tells its own story of an L-shaped house built about 1738 with a kitchen wing as part of that construction. Two exterior doorways were originally designed into the Delaware Street side of the building and not cut through later as Eckman suggests. Above what is now a window into the dining room is an original relieving arch, spanning a wider opening than Rogers' window occupies. In other words, the original brick mason built a wide relieving arch to span a doorway. An alteration for a tenant in the nineteenth century would not have included a carefully built early-eighteenth-century-style relieving arch; the typical construction practiced in the 1800s would have been to place a large wooden beam or a iron plate across the opening to carry the weight of the wall above. Similarly, examination of the brickwork below the window shows the original queen closers installed in 1738 to make his courses come out evenly at the door opening. A contractor cutting through a door for a tenant in the mid-nineteenth century would have hacked through original brick and filled the resulting gaps with rubble or cheap contemporary brick. He would not have carefully removed original brick to insert eighteenth-century queen closers and then replace original brick. When Rogers closed this original doorway, he carefully removed bricks to hide the seams and wove new brick in with old. He did not work so far back into the wall as to disturb the original queens.

Figure 15. An original wide relieving arch intended for a door in the Amstel House, 1738, with Rogers's narrow window, 1905, beneath it. (Photo by Eric Jodlbauer.)

The relieving arch on the original kitchen door is especially wide, as might be expected for a door through which a side of beef or a barrel of flour could be carried. Rogers simply made a window wide enough to fit the opening in this case (see Figure 15). Again, the queen closers bear out the true story of this original door opening.

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<sup>32</sup> Eckman Collection, Box 106. folder 'miscellaneous,' typed ms. “About the Amstel House,” “submitted by Laussat R. Rogers, March 31, 1936.”

The New Castle Historical Society, which owns and operates the Amstel House as its headquarters and as a house museum, recently had a student trained in historic architecture, Jeffrey Klee, conduct a structural analysis of the building. His report agrees that the physical evidence suggests a house built all at once, not incorporating an earlier building, and that a door to the kitchen from Delaware Street was original. Klee has not yet finalized his evidence on the originality of the dining room door.<sup>33</sup>

The Amstel House is a very beautiful early New Castle mansion, a gracious, well-proportioned home that stands on its own merit and does not need to be enhanced by tales of earlier structures or later alterations. However, interpreting the original door openings from Delaware Street would certainly help to better understand the interior arrangements of the building. The room now designated as a dining room, for instance, was more likely a law office or shop with a side entrance, an arrangement commonly found in eighteenth-century houses at a time when dining rooms were not. When Klee's report is complete, the New Castle Historical Society can begin the task of reinterpretation.

### *Harmony House*

Information about this fine 1830s, late federal townhouse first appears in the *Day in Old New Castle* pamphlet of 1948 and was repeated every year that Harmony House was open for the tour. The house is also included in the 1973 edition of *New Castle*.

Figure 16. Harmony House, taken for the Perry, Shaw and Hepburn survey, ca. 1947. (Collections of the Delaware Historical Society.)

While working on the Perry, Shaw and Hepburn project in the late 1940s, Eckman and her assistants researched many buildings in New Castle, such as Harmony House, that had not previously been included in publications. When an early deed was found it established the earliest date

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<sup>33</sup> Interview with Bruce Dalleo, Executive Director for the New Castle Historical Society, April 10, 2007.

to be used by the team, according to the old rules of thumb. Completed in 1947, the report on Harmony House (#44 as the Perry, Shaw and Hepburn team numbered the buildings) surmised as follows:

the conclusion from the search is that what was probably a small dwelling of Hans Baens was replaced or incorporated in a larger dwelling house by Cornelius Kettle...who had the property from 1694 to 1724; and that James Merriweather, currier, who had it from 1724 to 1735, further enlarged or rebuilt the house then on the site... The date of erection or of remodeling to its present form may be discovered from some New Castle resident.....There is some visual detail both inside and out that would suggest that the wing was of earlier origin as the history would indicate.<sup>34</sup>

Although somewhat noncommittal on whether various portions of the building had been “replaced or incorporated,” this report was used to create the information on Harmony House found in the *Day in Old New Castle* pamphlet in which prevarication seemed unnecessary. In some versions the house is said to include a "colonial kitchen in the rear," in other versions, a "colonial kitchen circa 1700." By 1959, the expanded *Day in Old New Castle* booklet gets much more specific:

Like so many Third Street homes, this was also built in sections. The kitchen, now restored to its original appearance, probably dates from 1695; the middle section, along Harmony Street, was built about 1725; and the front part, facing Third street, in 1836.<sup>35</sup>

When *New Castle*, was revised and republished in 1973, Harmony House was described as:

a tall, dignified town house built of brick in sections like many other New Castle houses. The most recent is the large three [sic]- and-a-half story front section added about 1836 by John

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<sup>34</sup> Perry, Shaw and Hepburn, New Castle Restoration files, property #44, Delaware Historical Society.

<sup>35</sup> Immanuel Church, *A Day in Old New Castle*, [1959].

Janvier to a center part of the early 18<sup>th</sup> century – with a back kitchen ascribed to the late 17<sup>th</sup>. A title search has suggested that a small dwelling of Hans Baens became part of Cornelius Kettle’s later house after 1694. Perhaps it was James Merriweather, a currier, who further enlarged it after he got it in 1724.<sup>36</sup>

The listing in the *Day in Old New Castle* booklet continued with statements about how the house was passed down through the Janvier family, along with information about the family’s ancient and heroic connections, though added no further information about the structure itself.

Jeanette Eckman found the deeds of Hans Baens and Cornelius Kettle and determined that a house stood on the property before 1694, and there is no reason to doubt that assertion. Misguided by those pesky rules of thumb, Eckman and her assistants were led to identify the smallest section of the extant Harmony House, all the way at the back of the building, farthest from Third Street, as being that seventeenth-century structure.

Logically, a brick house built in the 1600s would be constructed using English bond brick and/or English common bond and be placed against the property lines right in the corner of the lot, as shown in Latrobe’s 1805 survey of the town. If any part of that seventeenth-century brick building survived, one would expect to find brick bonds, relieving arches, or some indication of seventeenth-century construction. However, no seventeenth-century construction can be found anywhere on Harmony House.

Eckman and her researchers next traced the ownership of the property to a Mr. Merryweather, and feel compelled to identify the next larger segment of Harmony House as dating to 1725. A brick house built in 1725 would have Flemish bond, and, possibly, glazed-headed Flemish bond brick. There would have been relieving arches over the window and door openings. The base of the wall would most likely have had a water table feature and possibly a drip course or belt course dividing the first and second stories.

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<sup>36</sup> Anthony Higgins, ed., *New Castle on the Delaware* (Newark, Del., 1973), p. 83. The building is two-and one-half stories; this is presumed to be a misprint.

While the façade of Harmony House is Flemish bond, no other eighteenth-century structural elements can be found anywhere on the building.

Had Eckman or her assistants compared their research on Harmony House with the 1805 Latrobe survey (used to advantage for other aspects of their research), an earlier house is shown hard into the corner of the lot at Third and Harmony, in the location of the present house (see Figure 17). However, no portion of the building shown on the survey is anywhere near the sections of the house which Eckman and her assistants claim were built in the 1600s and 1700s.

In 1805, the Jacquet family rented the small old house, represented on the survey, from Mary Long's family. Whatever that building may have been, it was torn down to make way for a larger, more stylish house.

Harmony House was built in 1836, or soon after, by Jesse Moore. He had bought the property from Mary Long for \$600 in 1836. Six years later, Moore sold the property to John Janvier Jr., for \$2,500. More than quadrupling the price of the property in so short a time suggests Moore had made substantial improvements, such as a large new house. The style of Harmony House might be considered a bit old fashioned by 1836, and argues against a building date as late as 1843. Clearly the house was not built by the Janviers.<sup>37</sup>

The property remained with Janvier descendants until the mid-1980s, when it was donated to Immanuel Episcopal Church. After serving as a rectory for nearly twenty years, the home was sold to a private individual in 2007. The new owner has made it possible to undertake, perhaps for the first time in its history, a basement-to-attic re-evaluation of the rich, if somewhat doubtful, structural story that has been circulated about this house for many years. With permission to crawl around inside, as Kruse did in the Court House fifty years earlier, the author and photographer could study and document brick bonds, foundation construction, moldings, seams, and beams to establish a more accurate understanding of the building's evolution.

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<sup>37</sup>, New Castle County Recorder of Deeds, L- 5- 535, V- 4- 299. A title search of Harmony House reveals these two significant transfers, Book L, 1836, from Long to Moore, and Book V, 1843, from Moore to Janvier.

Figure 17. Detail, Latrobe Survey, 1805. A close-up of the corner lot now occupied by Harmony House. The name, Jacquet, on the small building hard in the corner of the lot indicates the occupant, not the owner, of the property. (Courtesy of the Delaware Public Archives.)

Harmony House has consistent orangey- red bricks, in Flemish bond, typical of the 1830s. This brick is consistent from the front section of the house back through the original kitchen wing without any break or change in construction, through the bond typically changes to American Common Bond on the sides. There is no indication in foundations, brick bonds, window and door openings, or any other feature to suggest that any section of Harmony House is earlier than the rest of it. The main block and the original kitchen wing were constructed all at once. Harmony House is a typical late federal, side-hall and double parlor townhouse with an L-shaped kitchen wing.

Figure 18. Harmony Street side of Harmony House, showing an obvious seam, indicating an addition. (Photo by Eric Jodlbauer.)

The only addition to Harmony House is indicated by the very noticeable seam defining where the extended or subordinate kitchen wing was added. On the plate for New Castle in Pomeroy and Beers' *Atlas of the State of Delaware* published in 1868, Harmony House is not represented with this extended or subordinate kitchen wing.<sup>38</sup> A date of ca. 1870 for this addition would be consistent with the other alterations inside the house. New stylish marble mantles grace the double parlors, and a black marble mantle covers a greatly altered cooking fireplace, converting the original kitchen into a formal dining room. Cooking functions were shifted to the new service wing.

Figure 19. Detail, Pomeroy and Beers' *Atlas of the State of Delaware*, the City of New Castle, 1868. (Collections of the Delaware Historical Society.)

An examination of Harmony House by an architectural historian who has the modern understanding of brick bonds, construction methods, and period features, along with early maps, proves that no part of the structure

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<sup>38</sup> D. G. Beers, *Atlas of the State of Delaware* (Philadelphia: 1868), p. 23.

known as Harmony House dates earlier than 1836, and the only changes have been later additions. The house should correctly be described as two-and-a-half stories on a raised basement, and built by Jesse Moore.

Harmony House, which contributes greatly to the ambience of New Castle's Historic Landmark District, also has one of the very few remaining barns or stables in the town. Wooden structures are not as easy to maintain as brick or stone, and often disappear from the landscape due to attrition. Also, buildings no longer needed, such as stables, quickly fall into disrepair or are removed to make way for more useful and immediately valuable assets. Fortunately for the Harmony House property, the new owner appreciates this rare wooden survival from the past and plans to restore it. Another significant aspect of this property, worthy of preservation, is the garden. The massive *Paulownia tomentosa* trees dating from the late-nineteenth century suggest a long gardening history, which the new owner also plans to continue.<sup>39</sup>

The buildings in New Castle have interesting and varied stories to tell, but these are not always the architectural stories assigned to them. Researchers in the early twentieth century, Jeanette Eckman and Albert Kruse among them, did the best they could at the time, but analysis of historic structures has advanced significantly since then. In instances where more modern examination techniques have been used, the old myths established in the colonial revival period surrounding the New Castle Court House, the Amstel House, and Harmony House have been dashed, and a new, more realistic understanding of the architectural history of those buildings has been established. But these are only three out of more than a hundred significant buildings in New Castle that deserve to have their architectural heritage restored to them.

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<sup>39</sup> Along with other colonial revival myths, it is said that the seed pods of these trees were used in packing export porcelain in the eighteenth century, as an explanation for why these trees are so prevalent around docks and port areas. The story has also been circulated that these light seed pods were used as ballast in sailing ships, an impossible situation. In reality, Empress or Princess Trees were imported as exotics from China in the 1830s. Buist included a *Paulownia* in the Read House garden in 1846, which likely was the parent of all the *Paulownia* trees in New Castle. *Paulownias*, like many exotics, are extremely invasive and considered noxious weeds in many states.

The old tales are charming and typical of their period. Preserving these old stories is the work of the folklorist, and a worthy project on its own. However, every building in New Castle would benefit from a re-evaluation of its published history, which could reveal the town's true architectural heritage. Every homeowner whose house includes a story of a back wing from the seventeenth century should take a fresh, modern look at the history of the property. There are many students of architectural history looking for projects, and as many historic preservation professionals seeking just this sort of challenge. All could be gainfully set to work in New Castle for years to come setting the architectural heritage record to rights. The City of New Castle, the Historic Area Commission, and the Trustees of the New Castle Common might consider whether establishing accurate architectural information about the buildings in this Historic Landmark District is worthy of their sponsorship. A new version of *New Castle on the Delaware*, with updated, corrected architectural information could be the result of a willingness to shed a mostly fictional past and embrace a more accurate history.