

# *New Castle's Dutch Tile House of 1687: Fraud or Genuine?*

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THE TILE HOUSE on the Strand in New Castle, Delaware, was demolished in 1884. With its passing was lost one of the most interesting early houses of the Delaware Valley, apparently a unique survival of a seventeenth-century Dutch colonial town dwelling (Fig. 1). While it stood, the Tile House offered an extraordinary window into the past, a look back nearly to the first generation of European settlement in northeastern America. But this building has always been perplexingly mysterious, as conflicting and apparently irreconcilable accounts and depictions of the lost structure have formed a fascinating series of puzzles to challenge historians. For years these architectural mysteries have seemed unsolvable.

Recent decades have brought increased scholarly attention to the history of New Castle, but also deepening uncertainty concerning the Tile House. In particular, investigators have come to doubt that the structure originally bore the numerical irons that provided the date of construction, 1687. In his 1961 study of Front Street (another name for the Strand), Robert Frank Brown first wondered "if they date from the erection of the house." By 1986, skepticism had hardened into outright refutation, as the registrar of the Historical Society of Delaware (HSD) wrote, "We believe they are not original to the building." In her 1992 study of preservation in New Castle, Deborah Van Riper Harper warned that "the date of the building's erection is conjectural, and the date irons may not have been original to it." If the irons were added to the house as an early-nineteenth-century exercise in spurious antiquarianism—brought in from some other building where perhaps they had even read "1768" or "1786"—then the date of the building itself is called into question. According to HSD Registrar files.

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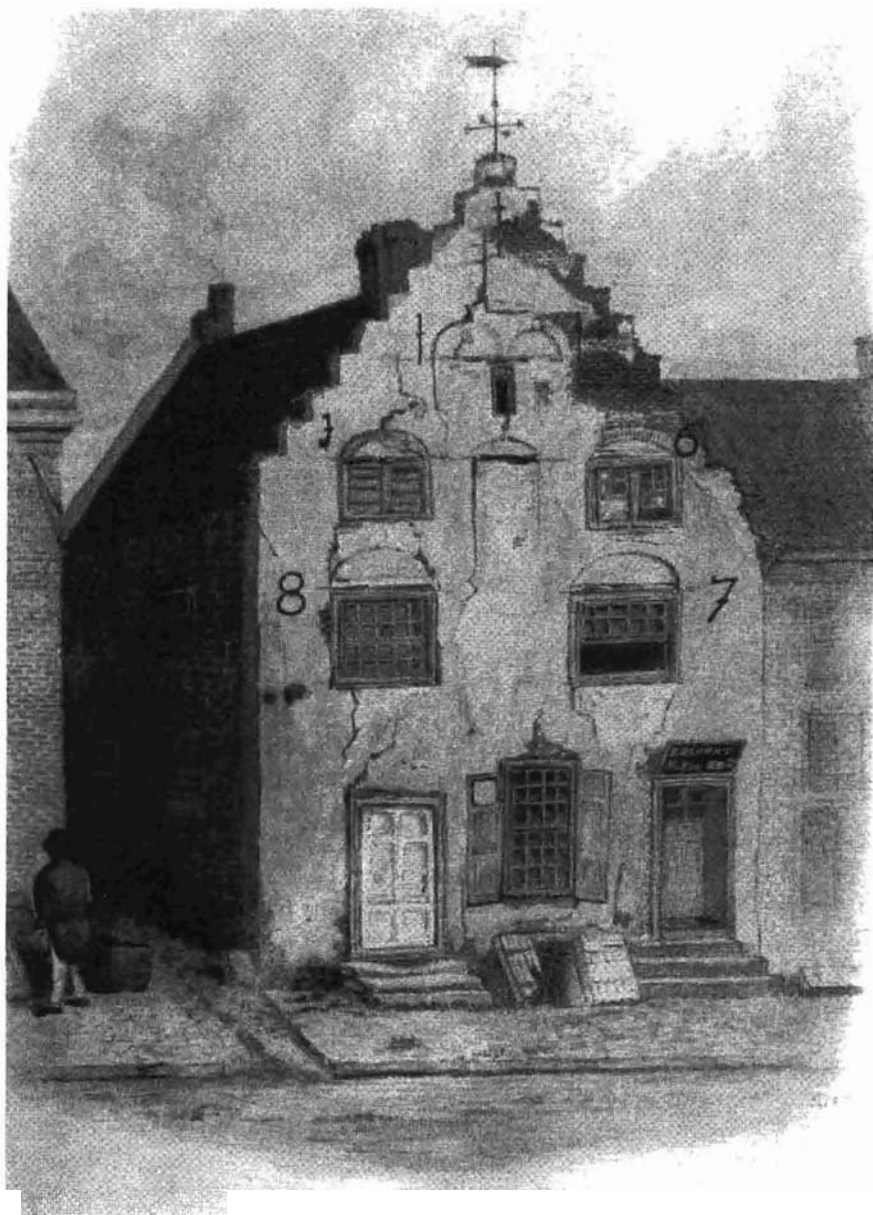


FIGURE 1. Edward Williams Clay, *The Tile House, New Castle, Delaware*, 1822, watercolor. (Courtesy of the New Castle Historical Society.)

"Aside from the date irons themselves, there is no evidence that the Tile House was built in 1687." The authenticity of one of Delaware's earliest and most famous buildings is called into question — no trivial matter, as there have been calls over the years for a costly reconstruction of the venerable

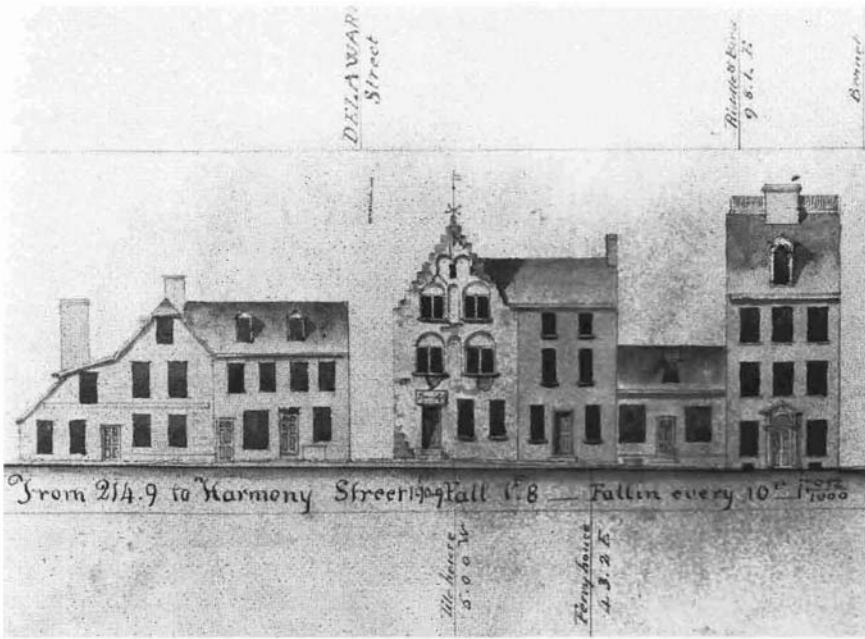


FIGURE 2. Tile House and vicinity, with the McCallmont House immediately adjoining and the Thomas House at far right. B. Henry Latrobe and Robert Mills, *Survey of New Castle*, 1805. (Courtesy of the Delaware Public Archives, Dover.)

landmark. Was the Tile House a kind of historical fraud? By considering all known visual representations of the building, including several that have never been reproduced before, this essay seeks to answer this question as decisively as possible.<sup>1</sup>

Many aspects of the Tile House have long been mysterious, and even the origin of the name is unknown. It was listed as the dwelling "known by the name of Tile House" when sold in 1803; B. Henry Latrobe and Robert Mills labeled it "Tile House" on their 1805 survey of New Castle (Fig. 2); and in 1809 George Read II recorded a payment to "baker at Tile house for 1 loaf of bread."<sup>2</sup> Clay pantile roofs were typical Dutch practice (see Fig. 12), and

<sup>1</sup> Robert Frank Brown, "Front Street New Castle, Delaware: Architecture and Building Practices 1687–1859" (M.A. thesis, University of Delaware, 1961), p. 8; Thomas Beckman to Roderic H. Blackburn, Jan. 3, 1986, in "Tile House—New Castle 1687 Date Irons," museum registrar's folder, Historical Society of Delaware (HSD); and Deborah Van Riper Harper, "'The Gospel of New Castle': Historic Preservation in a Delaware Town," *Delaware History* 25 (1992–93): 79. For a somewhat analogous example of a colonial house known only through nineteenth-century representations, see Margaret Henderson Floyd, "Measured Drawings of the Hancock House by John Hubbard Sturgis: A Legacy to the Colonial Revival," in *Architecture in Colonial Massachusetts* (Boston, 1979), pp. 87–111. The Hancock House was built in 1736 and demolished in 1863.

<sup>2</sup> Jeannette Eckman, "The Strand: Tile House Site," in "Report: New Castle, Delaware,"

the building is commonly said to have "received its name from its steep roof of Dutch tile"; but photographs show it to have been wood-shingled following extensive alterations in the mid-nineteenth century, when the entire façade was replaced. It was the bricks of the façade that attracted the most comment. Historian John Fanning Watson described them in 1822: "The bricks are very small [and] yellowish." They resembled what were called "Dutch tiles" in eighteenth-century England, where they were sometimes used to build chimneys. Probably it was these bricks, rather than the building's roof, that suggested the name "Tile House."<sup>3</sup>

Deed research by Jeannette Eckman (1882–1972) as part of a 1940s survey of the town by the architectural firm of Perry, Shaw and Hepburn did not reveal a precise date for the building. Only "a small house" was standing when John Boyer bought the lot from Moses D'Gonne in 1678. Boyer was not Dutch, and Dutch rule had ended in 1664 (except for 1673–74), but, as Eckman writes, "New Castle remained predominantly a Dutch town with an admixture of Swedes and Finns" into the 1680s, which might help explain the Dutch style of the Tile House. She speculates that "Jan Harmensen, the carpenter, who lived next door. . . may have been the craftsman engaged to build the Tile house; he was a prominent builder at the time, and appraiser of property for the court, and he was Dutch." Boyer's father had worked for Stuyvesant and had once taken his family to live in Manhattan, with its abundant Dutch townhouses. Boyer's daughters sold the Tile House property to Joseph Wood about 1703, and a few years later the first written reference appears to a "large brick house." The imposing Tile House faced the Delaware River in the block that historians have called "the New Castle merchant district, where business was done and where the community's leaders had their residences" in the seventeenth century.<sup>4</sup>

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1947–49. The report was a collaboration, its authors including Perry, Shaw and Hepburn, Architects, with Pope and Kruse, Associate Architects; Anthony Higgins; and Eckman. Copies in varying degrees of completeness are at HSD. New Castle Historical Society (NCHS), and New Castle Public Library. Latrobe-Mills Survey of New Castle, 1804–05, Delaware Public Archives, Dover; George Read II account book, 1809, copy in "Tile House—New Castle 1687 Date Irons," HSD.

*Old New Castle and Modern Delaware: The Tercentenary of the Founding of New Castle by the Dutch* (Washington, D.C., 1951), p. 36. The building "was three stories high and its roof was very steep and covered with tile brought from Holland" (J. Thomas Scharf, *History of Delaware 1609–1888* [Philadelphia, 1888], 2:868). On Dutch roof tile, see Roderic H. Blackburn and Ruth Piwonka, *Remembrance of Patria: Dutch Arts and Culture in Colonial America 1609–1776* (Albany, 1988), p. 126. John F. Watson, Aug. 5, 1822, in "A Trip to the Sea Shore 1822," Col. 189, Watson Family Papers, **Rox** 1. Folder 1, Joseph Downs Collection, Winterthur Library. "Dutch tiles" in *Oxford English Dictionary*, s.v. "tile." Outside Philadelphia, John Moran photographed a colonial log-and-stone cottage he called "Tile-roofed House Main St. Germantown 1867" (The Library Company of Philadelphia 1717. F. 125).

<sup>4</sup> Eckman; "The Strand: Tile House Site"; and Jeannette Eckman, ed., *New Castle on the Delaware* (1936; 3 ed., New Castle, 1950), p. 34; on the Tile House, see also pp. 98–100. Boyer

## NEW CASTLE'S TILE HOUSE

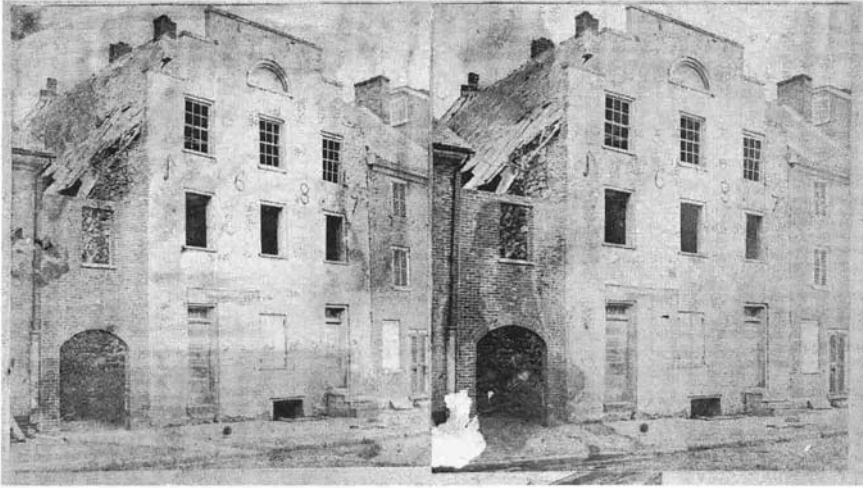


FIGURE 3. Tile House prior to demolition in 1884, stereo view. (Collections of the Historical Society of Delaware).

We know more about its end than its beginnings. Passing through a series of owners, it "became very dilapidated" during the mid-nineteenth-century tenure of the Robinson family (Figs. 3 and 4), and as the roof rotted one could almost see from outside that "the rafters were made like the knees of a vessel, all cut out of crooked timber," in Dutch fashion. The Wright family bought the adjoining McCallmont House in 1853, and in May 1884 an exasperated Sallie Wright appeared before the New Castle City Council "to protest against the damage which the old Tile House in its present unsafe condition is doing to her property." A "Committee on Tile house" was appointed, and on July 1 that body "recommended that it be torn down," moving "to notify owner [James A. Robinson] to remove dangerous part of old Tile house as soon as possible." A Wilmington newspaper reported, "By order of city council the old building on Water Street known as the Tile House will be torn down. The building is probably the oldest in the city, and on the face wall bears in large iron figures the date 1687. The

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is mentioned in C.A. Weslager, *Dutch Explorers, Traders and Settlers in the Delaware Valley, 1611-1664* (Philadelphia, 1961), p. 212. "Merchant district" in Louise B. Heite and Edward F. Heite, *Saving New Amstel: A Proposed City of New Castle Archaeological Preservation Plan* (New Castle: Trustees of New Castle Common, 1989), p. 31. On New Castle in Dutch times, see Jeannette Eckman, "Life Among the Early Dutch at New Castle," *Delaware History* 4(1950-51): 246-302; C.A. Weslager, *The Swedes and Dutch at New Castle* (Wilmington, 1987); Constance Jean Cooper, "A Town among Cities: New Castle, Delaware, 1780-1840" (Ph.D. diss., University of Delaware, 1983), ch. 1; and William R. Cario, "Anglicization in a 'Frenchified, Scotchified, Dutchified Place': New Castle, Delaware, 1690-1750" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1994). A land survey of 1701-02 shows eight buildings of various heights facing "The front Street," all apparently with step-gables, although the drawing is highly schematic (Janvier folder, HSD).



FIGURE 4. Tile House prior to demolition in 1884, but subsequent to Figure 3. (Collections of the Historical Society of Delaware.)

old house has long been lying idle and uncared for, and the condition of the walls had become such as to endanger the lives and property of those passing or living near." Years later, Laussat R. Rogers (1866–1957) would complain that the structure had been removed "from mistaken ideas of safety," and local lore holds that it proved surprisingly difficult to demolish: "The walls had to be dynamited to bring them down."

A March 1885 Sanborn map labeled the outline of the house, "ruins." In his 1906 history of New Castle, Alexander B. Cooper recalled that the Tile

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<sup>3</sup> Eckman, "The Strand: Tile House Site," reconstructed the ownership of the property as follows: William Maurits by 1657, Moses D'Gonne, John Boyer, and heirs 1678, Joseph Wood 1705, Patrick Reilly 1716, John Finney, Gideon Griffith, Anthony and Abigail Whitely 1754, Israel Israel 1782, William Armstrong 1796, Anne Yeates 1803, Thomas Robinson and heirs, ca. 1850. "Very dilapidated" and "knees" in Scharf, *History of Delaware*, 2:868. For Dutch roof framing similar to Scharf's, see diagram in Blackburn and Piwonka, *Remembrance of Patria*, p. 101. Minutes of the City Council, New Castle, May 6 and July 1, 1884, reel 1, New Castle Public Library; *Delaware Gazette and State Journal* (Wilmington), July 31, 1884, p. 3; Laussat R. Rogers, memorandum on the A.V.L. George House, Historic American Buildings Survey No. Del-96, ca. 1937, in Eckman Papers, Box 106, "Miscellaneous Historic Buildings" folder, HSD; and Mary Lou Sherwood and Nick McIntire, *A Walk in Old New Castle* (New Castle, 1974).



FIGURE 5. The Strand from Harmony Street, September 20, 1930. Left to right on the northwest block (at right): George Read II House (1797–1804); large tree; house built by Laussat R. Rogers on the Tile House lot (ca. 1910–1914); McCallmont House; No. 58 the Strand; Thomas House (1801). (Collections of the Historical Society of Delaware.)

House owner at the time of demolition, "prompted by most proper and sentimental impulses, permitted the front wall to stand, at about eight feet high. He also left the cellar and foundation walls as they were. . . . It is hoped that it may continue to remain, though unsightly, yet as a veritable and lasting link to connect the distant past with the present and the future." Cooper, who bought the Tile House lot in 1889 and whose family owned it for twenty years, had mistaken the post-restoration façade with its "'blunt point,' about six feet wide at the top" for the seventeenth-century original, and the error may have been a general one. About 1909, Rogers "made measured drawings of the foundations and parts of the first story walls" prior to his designing a new dwelling for the site (Fig. 5). "The foundations of the old structure were used as far as possible in this modern building," he explained. Examination of the cellar of Rogers's house shows that it was built of stones that may have been recycled from the remains of the Tile House, but the only feature that can definitely be assigned to the earlier building is two brick piers that probably supported the bulkhead



FIGURE 6. Tile House bricks turned into late-nineteenth-century souvenirs. "Tile House/1687/1884" is inscribed on the brick at right, the dimensions of which are  $6 \frac{1}{16} \times 2 \frac{7}{8} \times 1 \frac{1}{16}$  inches. (Courtesy of the New Castle Historical Society.)

opening added to the street front in the early nineteenth century (see Figs. 1 and 3).<sup>6</sup>

The demolition of the Tile House coincided with the first full onslaught of the colonial revival, and there was great interest in obtaining bricks from the ruins. Delawarean John J. Black wrote a colleague on January 12, 1885, "I will send a tile to Col Lamotte & also one to Hist. Soc. Pa—of which Soc. I am a member." Cooper noted, "Many of them have been preserved and are now to be found in the possession, not only of the inhabitants of the city, but of many who live beyond its limits, and carefully kept as souvenirs of the old building."<sup>7</sup> Seven and a half of these bricks survive at the New Castle Historical Society (NCHS) today, including three that were carved or painted (Fig 6). Others are at the HSD and in private collections, and

"Alexander B. Cooper, "The History of New Castle, Delaware. . . Continued from THE STAR, of June 10, 1906," Part 13, HSD; Eckman, *New Castle*, p. 99; and Laussat R. Rogers, memorandum on George House, "Historic New Castle," Boothhurst Collection, Box 31, HSD. Rogers designed the house for Carolyn B. Rogers, who bought the lot from Cooper descendants in April and May 1909. The memorandum (Eckman Papers, Box 106, HSD) gives a construction date of 1914, but Rogers later recalled it as 1909 or 1910 (Boothhurst Collection, Box 31, HSD). On Rogers, see Gene E. Harris and Thomas Beckman, *Laussat Richter Rogers 1866-1957* (Chadds Ford, Penn, 1986).

<sup>7</sup>John J. Black to Dr. Bush, Jan. 12, 1885, Box 82B, Folder 4, HSD; Cooper, "History of New Castle," Part 13, HSD. A box given to HSD in 1992 has a painted inscription on top: "Made 1885, from wood taken from tile house, Built at New Castle Delaware 1687. M.S. Woolson."



tracking them all down is an entertaining and seemingly never-ending quest. They are of two different degrees of quality: lumpy and coarse, versus crisp and rubbed. All are yellowish and generally measure just over an inch high, about three inches wide, and under seven inches long. Perhaps they are chimney bricks rather than survivals of the original façade removed 150 years ago. Eckman described the front wall as having been of "brick of small size, thinner than the local brick, and closer to apricot than red in color" but was clear that the NCHS specimens were "taken from a chimney . . . from above the ovens."

Historian Roderic H. Blackburn writes, "The Dutch exported a small pale yellow brick to New Netherland in the early period of the settlement. While examples have been found in many archaeological sites, none is known in surviving houses"—although a few escaped the 1837 alterations to the Old Dutch Church of Sleepy Hollow, Tarrytown, New York (1697), and can be seen in its walls today (Fig. 7). All these so-called *drielingen* of the Hudson Valley are of similar dimensions and color to the Tile House bricks. There is a long tradition of Dutch bricks being unearthed in New Castle, "where the yellow brick and coins of Holland were still occasionally picked up" in the early nineteenth century. In those days, most colonial bricks were assumed to have been imported, but this "importation myth" has largely been dispelled in recent years. In the case of the distinctive yellow bricks—"a characteristic feature of early Swedish and Dutch settlements" along the Delaware River—archaeologists are still uncertain whether they were imported or made here."

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<sup>8</sup> Eckman, *New Castle*, p. 82. "The brick in its walls were of small size and made of 'whitish earth' " (Scharf, *History of Delaware*, 2:868). A broken lumpy brick that resembles those of the Tile House is imbedded in the west-corner wall of the Sheliff's Office (1858), perhaps placed there during repointing. Three yellow lumpy-brick fragments at New Castle Public Library appear to have been dug up. "Tradition asserts that [they] were dumped onto the filling shoreline near the foot of Harmony Street" (Heite and Heite, *Saving New Amstel*, p. 33). HSD has five bricks. Two donated in 1992 are lumpy and show traces of mortar; they appear to have been unearthed. Another lumpy brick has "1687" inscribed on its top. A rubbed brick bears a label with a faded autograph that seems to say, "Geo. Read . . . Jan'y 1780." Alexander B. Cooper records some red bricks from the Tile House: "They vary very much in size and appearance. Some being exceedingly large red brick, and running down to a very small yellow or buff brick, about six inches long, three inches wide and one and a half inches thick. These small bricks seem to have been used more for the purpose of ornament, above the windows and doors" (Cooper, "History of New Castle," Part 13, HSD). The latter observation is unconfirmed.

<sup>9</sup> Blackburn and Piwonka, *Remembrance of Patria*, pp. 126–27; Clement E. Foust, *The Life and Dramatic Works of Robert Montgomery Bird* (New York, 1919), p. 16; and "Characteristic feature" in Marshall J. Becker, " 'Swedish' Colonial Yellow Bricks: Notes on Their Uses and Possible Origins in 17<sup>th</sup> Century America." *Historical Archaeology* 11 (1977):112. A yellow lumpy brick was unearthed in M'ilmington (Second Street between King and French) and donated to HSD in 1875. Yellow bricks were discovered at the Fort Casimir site in New Castle in 1986 (Edward F. Heite and Louise B. Heite, "Report of Phase I Archaeological and Historical Investigations at the Site of Fort Casimir, New Castle, Delaware," *Bulletin of the Archaeological*

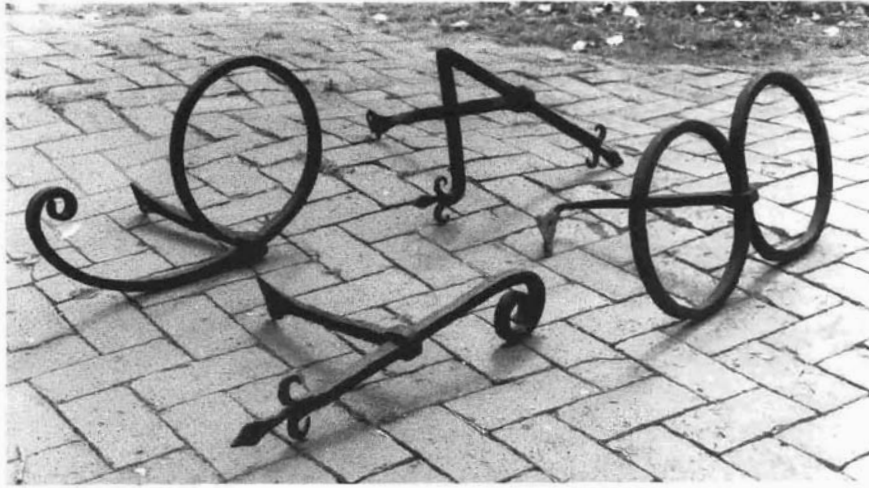


FIGURE 7. Ten small yellow bricks adjacent to ordinary red bricks in the front façade of the Old Dutch Church of Sleepy Hollow, Tarrytown, New York, 1696 (altered 1837, restored 1897). (Courtesy of the author.)

When the Tile House was demolished, the date irons were saved. Black wrote, "Miss Blunt of N.C. has the old figures—1687 lately in the front of the house—& are said to be the original ones—She must sell or give away, but promised me to leave them to Del. Hist. Soc!" She did not act on that suggestion, and after her death a relative donated them to NCHS, where they would spend decades in the Amstel House attic or toolshed. They are remarkable examples of the colonial ironmonger's art, with decorative twists and fleur-de-lis designs (Fig. 8). Each has a rod at the back that widens into a flange pierced with holes, used to affix the rods to wooden beams inside the house. The anchors were both decorative and functional,

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*Society of Delaware* 25, n.s. [Summer 1989]: 42–43). Recently archaeologists "have found 'yellow bricks' on the Read House property" (Lu Ann De Cunzio, University of Delaware, personal communication, April 10, 2000). Buildings with yellow bricks still stand in English "ports which traded with Holland. These are the small hard bricks known as 'Dutch clinkers,' which in the last quarter of the seventeenth century were sometimes brought as ballast in ships" and which are similar in size to Tile House bricks (Alec Clifton-Taylor, *The Pattern of English Building* [London, 1972], p. 23.5).



**FIGURE 8.** Date irons of the Tile House. (Courtesy of the New Castle Historical Society.)

firmly bonding the brick facade to the framework of the house in typical Dutch manner.”'

Some late-nineteenth-century photographs survive of the Tile House (Figs. 3 and 4), but they are of limited usefulness to the historian, as they show the building in altered condition. The facade has been completely rebuilt, with date irons reincorporated. The date of these alterations has never been established, but 1830–1850 seems likely.<sup>11</sup> Artistic depictions—with the potential for error—are the next resort of the historian. Sorting out the accurate from the fanciful is challenging, but promises to resolve the longstanding mysteries about the original appearance of the building.

#### *Ives Le Blanc and Latrobe-Mills*

The earliest artistic depictions of the Tile House date from the years around 1800. Ives le Blanc included the structure in a drawing of the New Castle waterfront in July 1797 (Fig. 9). Even more revealing is the Latrobe-

<sup>10</sup> Black to Dr. Bush, HSD. The Historical Society of Pennsylvania has no record of any Tile House bricks. Mary Elkinton gave the date irons to NCHS ("Tile House—New Castle 1687 Date Irons," HSD). On the date irons, see Blackburn and Piwonka, *Remembrance & Patria*, p. 115.

<sup>11</sup> Perry, Shaw and Hepburn, "Restoration of the Tile House," in "Report: New Castle, Delaware," estimates 1820 to 1850. Presumably the façade had, through lack of upkeep, suffered irreparable cracking and had to be entirely rebuilt, just as happened during the course of this study (March 2000) to the eighteenth-century Shannon Hotel in Christiana, Delaware, five miles from New Castle.

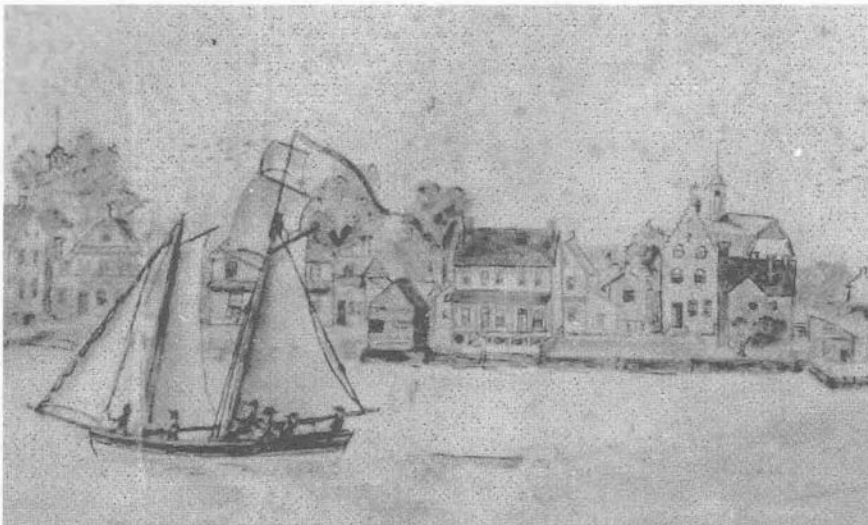


FIGURE 9. Tile House with Immanuel Church behind it. Detail from Ives le Blanc, *A View of the Town of New Castle from the River Delaware, Taken the 4<sup>th</sup> of July 1797*, watercolor. (Courtesy of Gordon S. Hargraves.)

Mills survey.<sup>12</sup> It is not generally recalled that there are two copies, the familiar one in the Delaware Public Archives, Dover, on "the largest Elephant paper," and an abbreviated edition in three vellum sheets that was passed down through the Janvier family, in the collections of the NCHS. The survey is usually said to date to 1804; but although it was commissioned in June 1804 it was largely carried out the following year. The Tile House is depicted on the "Section of *Front* street, with all the Buildings on the

<sup>12</sup> On the survey, see Lucille P. Toro, "The Latrobe Survey of New Castle 1804–1805" (M.A. thesis, University of Delaware, 1971); Robert Curtice Cottrell, "Town Planning in New Castle, Delaware, 1797–1838" (M.A. thesis, University of Delaware, 1991); Edward C. Carter II, John C. Van Home, and Charles E. Brownell, eds., *Latrobe's View of America, 1795–1820* (New Haven, 1985), pp. 254–55; and Warren Boeschstein, *Historic American Towns along the Atlantic Coast* (Baltimore and London, 1999), p. 183. Latrobe moved to New Castle to be near the feeder canal project (see Darwin H. Stapleton and Thomas C. Guider, "The Transfer and Diffusion of British Technology: Benjamin Henry Latrobe and the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal," *Delaware History* 17 [1976–77]: 127–38). Latrobe's dates of residence in New Castle have never been given precisely: first letter with a New Castle heading, July 10, 1803; first letter after the move to Wilmington, Oct. 4, 1804. He was frequently at the canal, in Washington, or elsewhere during this time, and part of the summer of 1804 was spent in Philadelphia. He lived in one of Mrs. Aull's houses across from the Tile House (see Latrobe to Mrs. Aull, June 6, 1804, in Thomas E. Jeffrey, ed., *The Microtext Edition of the Papers of Benjamin Henry Latrobe* [Clifton, N.J., 1976], no. 32; Latrobe to George Read, Nov. 2, 1804, *ibid.*, no. 35; Latrobe to Mills, Nov. 3, 1804, *ibid.*). Mrs. Aull (her husband died in Sept. 1803) owned today's numbers 49, 53, and 55 the Strand (Latrobe-Mills Survey, NCHS). "In 1826, #55 was 'lately occupied by B.H. Latrobe'" (Eckman, account of no. 55, in "Report: New Castle, Delaware").

North-west side of the Street, which stood in the year 1805" (Dover); an oblique view of the courthouse was "taken August 1805, from Judge Booth's" (Dover); and five leading citizens signed their names on the back on August 16, 1805 (NCHS). The survey deserves to be called Latrobe-Mills, as Latrobe's twenty-three-year-old assistant Robert Mills (1781–1855) had the chief responsibility and did the drawings and elegant lettering while Latrobe, preoccupied with his job as architect of the United States Capitol and other projects, spent the summer at Iron Hill, Delaware. In later years Mills would achieve fame in his own right as an architect and would design the Washington Monument. Each page of the survey (NCHS) bears at the bottom the words "Robert Mills del[ineavit]—1805."<sup>13</sup>

The Tile House as shown on the Dover version of Latrobe-Mills has been frequently reproduced (Fig. 2), but that on the little-known NCHS version has apparently never been (Fig. 10). The latter is a smaller variant of the former, with less detail, but it is interesting in suggesting how important the Tile House was as a local landmark: the only buildings that Mills shows in elevation on this version are Immanuel Church, the Courthouse, and the Tile House (plus McCallmont House next door). Le Blanc and both versions of Latrobe-Mills substantively agree in what they show of the Tile House: a Dutch townhouse of three-and-a-half stories, the roof very tall with a multi-step gable and a windvane. The drawings concur in the number and shape of the windows and in the placement of a single door at left. So close are they to each other that we feel we have a sound understanding of the original appearance of the building—but the date irons do not appear in either drawing. It is this troubling omission that has led scholars increasingly to doubt that the irons were original to the Tile House.

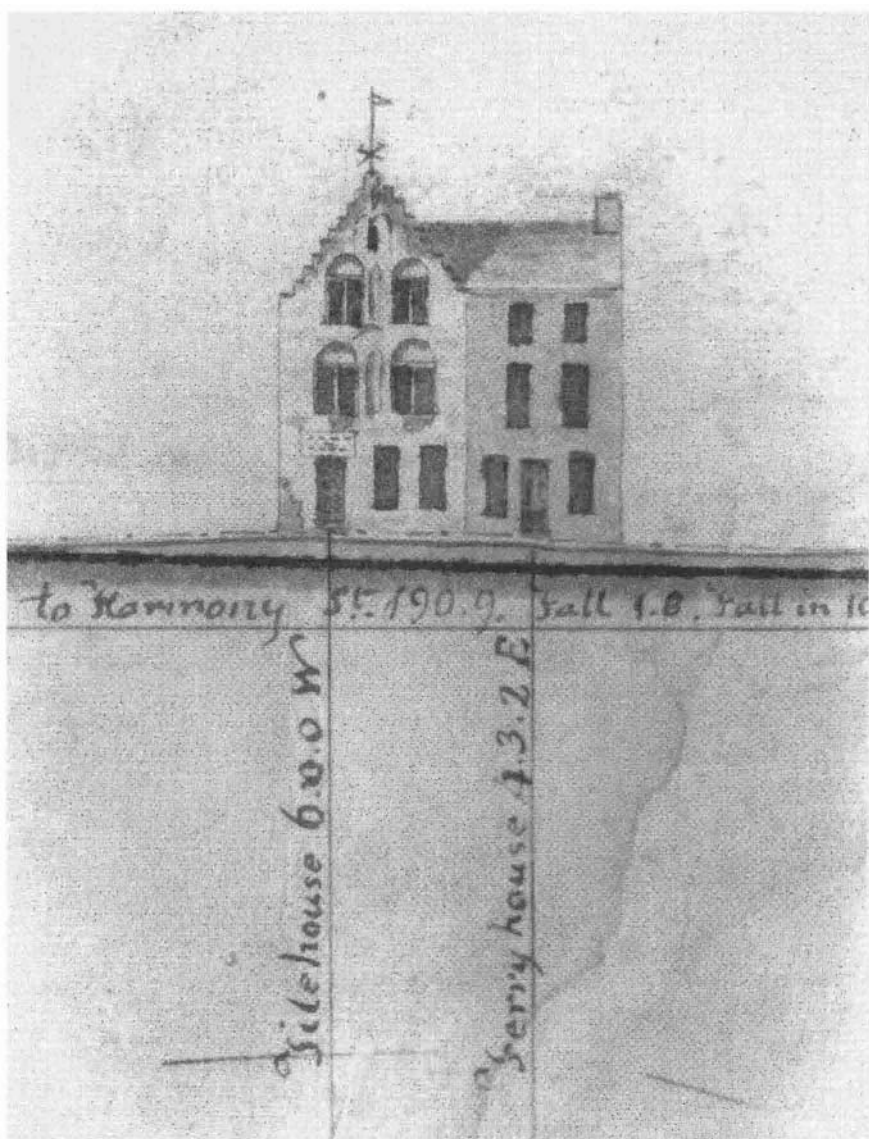
*John Fanning Watson*

Certainly the irons were on the building by August 5, 1822, when historian Watson (1779–1860) visited during a steamboat trip down the Delaware River to Cape May. His account survives in manuscript:

Went ashore, into the main first street to see the house built in 1687—after the manner of the houses in Sweden, of brick said to have been then imported from thence—The bricks

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<sup>13</sup> "Elephant paper" in Latrobe to John Bird, June 16, 1804, *Microtext Edition*, no. 33. Mills oversaw the New Castle survey, with Latrobe's other pupils assisting. Latrobe wrote William Strickland: "I enclosed a draft for your share [\$25] of the turn to be paid by the Commissioners of the town of Newcastle for the regulation of the streets formerly promised to be divided among my pupils, which will be paid after you shall have assisted Mr. Mills in setting out the same" (Latrobe to William Strickland, Aug. 11, 1805, *ibid.*, no. 42). Latrobe himself spent more than a week working on the survey in summer or fall of 1804, and he hired laborers: "To James 8 1/2 days attendance in measuring the plan of the town at 1\$—8.50. To Michael D[itto]" (Latrobe to John Bird, Nov. 12, 1804, *ibid.*, no. 36).



**FIGURE 10.** Tile House and McCallmont House. B. Henry Latrobe and Robert Mills, *Survey of New Castle*, 1805. (Courtesy of the New Castle Historical Society.)

are very small—yellowish & now rough cast with plaster—It presents its gable end to the Front Street—the Roof is remarkably steep, making 2 stories in itself—the End Walls are higher than the roofs & have regular steps on their upper surface above the roof the Year 1687 is in Iron letters as

clamps on the front wall—One feels a sentiment of veneration at seeing such a vestige of antiquity.

This account was later published in his *Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania, In the Olden Time* (1830, 1844), where he changed his attribution of the imported bricks from Swedish to Dutch.<sup>14</sup>

Unpublished until now is Watson's thumbnail sketch of the Tile House, which appears in the margin of his manuscript (Fig. 11). It is a conceptual, not a literal representation; it errs, for example, in showing a central door and no windows above the second floor. Watson did not make the sketch during his very brief visit (he "staid at N Castle but 10 minutes" while his boat stopped there), but somewhat later, when he composed his written account. But the sketch is nonetheless important, as it confirms that the facade had not yet been altered in 1822—it still has numerous steps in the gable. Indeed it remained unaltered when Watson visited again in July 1826. The building had escaped the ravages of the fire that destroyed much of Front Street in April 1824: "New Castle presents quite a renewed appearance since the late fire—Much better houses than formerly—Saw there still the ancient old Brick house of 1687." Watson was an ardent preservationist and would have noted any alteration to the facade since his last visit.<sup>15</sup>

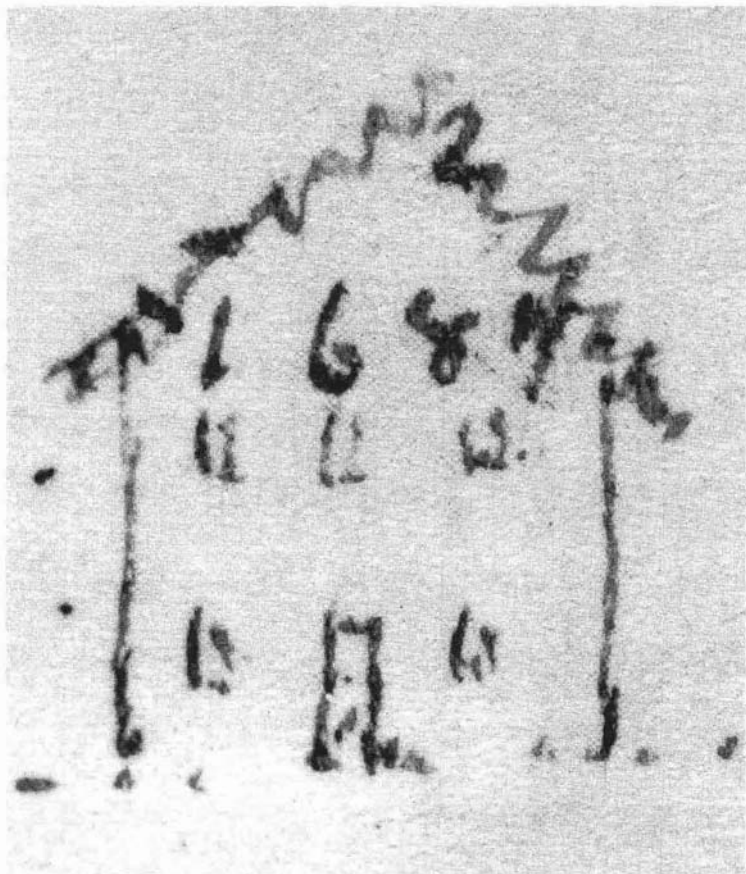
### Edward Williams Clay

Another image of the Tile House, nearly as obscure as the Watson sketch in spite of the fact that it has been in New Castle for generations, is the watercolor by Edward Williams Clay (Fig. 1). It bears the date 1822 in a later hand that may repeat an original inscription; possibly this was added by Joseph H. Rogers (1817–1909), who owned the picture for years and, seemingly inspired by it, would recall in 1905 that he first visited the Tile House in 1822 when "James Blount, Baker," was the sign over the door"

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<sup>14</sup> Watson, "Trip to the Sea Shore 1822," Winterthur Library; John F. Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania, In the Olden Time* (Philadelphia, 1844), 2:539. On Watson, see Deborah Louise Dependahl, "John Fanning Watson, Historian 1779–1860" (M.A. thesis, University of Delaware, 1971); Deborah Louise Dependahl, "Philadelphia's Boswell: John Fanning Watson," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 98 (1974): 3–52; *Dictionary of American Biography*, s.v. "Watson, John Fanning"; and E. Richard McKinstry, *Personal Accounts of Events, Travels, and Everyday Life in America: An Annotated Bibliography* (Winterthur, Del., 1997), pp. 115–19. The Tile House does not quite seem to match the account of "an ancient building in the lower part of the town, erected about [1627, which] presents to the passenger the most impressive testimony of the antiquity of its origin," described in "Extract from the Journal of a Traveller Passing Through the Town of New-Castle," *Delaware Gazette* (Wilmington), Oct. 24, 1820.

<sup>15</sup> Watson, "Trip to the Sea Shore 1822," Winterthur Library; and John F. Watson, July 4, 1826, in "Trip to Count Surveilliers 1826," Col. 189, Watson Family Papers, Box 1, Folder 2, Joseph Downs Collection, Winterthur Library.



**FIGURE 11.** The Tile House in August 1822. John Fanning Watson, "A Trip to the Sea Shore 1822," MS. (Courtesy of the Winterthur Library: Joseph Downs Collection of Manuscripts and Printed Ephemera, No. 58x29.2.1.)

(a sign in Clay reads "R Blount/Baker"). The date may well be correct; Clay (1799–1857), a Philadelphian with family ties to New Castle, was admitted to the bar in 1825 but "preferred art to law, and became noted as a caricaturist" and first published some of his drawings during the 1820s." His

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""Recollections of New Castle, as Detailed by Joseph H. Rogers . . . September 15, 1905," HSD. The sign shown on Latrobe-Mills (Dover) is only 3/16 inch wide and hence barely legible, but it seems to read something like "Dennis Gall/Grocer." But researches in the 1940s concluded that the sign indicated "a tap room" (Perry, Shaw and Hepburn, "Restoration of the Tile House"). *The Family of Clay of New Castle, Delaware, and Philadelphia, Pennsylvania* (Washington, D.C., 1895), pp. 18–19, 42, Boothhurst Collection, Box 2, HSD. On Clay, see Allan Nevins and Frank Weitenkampf, *A Century of Political Cartoons: Caricature in the United States from 1800 to 1900* (New York, 1944), pp. 48–71; George C. Groce and David H. Wallace, *The New-York Historical Society's Dictionary of Artists in America 1564–1860* (New Haven, 1957), p. 131; and *Dictionary of American Biography*, s.v. "Clay, Edward Williams."



depiction of the Tile House would seem to be quite accurate, as it agrees with Latrobe-Mills in subtle details (shape of the windvane and the crane in the gable; lower steps on the right side of the gable in ruinous condition; location of cracks in the stucco) as well as with later photographs (extra door cut into the first story; a fieldstone side wall with windows; at rear, a topped gable with a two-stepped decorative "spout" atop). As we shall see, these details accord closely with known Dutch building practices, lending further credence to the accuracy of Clay's depiction. Clay demonstrates that some changes had occurred since Latrobe's day: the added doorway (its steps still unworn, unlike those of the 135-year-old original door) and second-floor windows converted from old-fashioned casement to sash.

Clay shows the date irons in a different arrangement from Watson: staggered, with 1 and 6 at the third floor and 8 and 7 at the second. Which is to be believed, Watson's arrangement or Clay's? Both are plausible, given the evidence of contemporaneous Dutch houses in New York, none of which survives today (Figs. 12 and 13). Examination of the date irons themselves resolves the matter: the 1 and 6 are backed with a 12 1/2-inch rod, whereas 8 and 7 have a rod of about 18 inches. Clearly 1 and 6 were higher on the facade—where the wall was structurally thinner—than 8 and 7 were. Clay must be the correct version.

*Robert Montgomery Bird*

There is a close relationship between Clay and a watercolor of the Tile House by artist and playwright Robert Montgomery Bird (1805/06-1854), which came to scholarly attention about 1960 (Fig. 14). Bird was born in New Castle, son of John Bird whose 1804 letter commissioned Latrobe's survey. His watercolor is undated but is one of a series of depictions that he made of New Castle buildings and people, one of which reads "1826."<sup>17</sup> It would seem that Bird's watercolor was inspired by Clay's, which it in many ways resembles. It is less accurate in rendering details: the crane in the gable is omitted; the cracks in the stucco no longer agree with Latrobe-Mills; the topmost window in the gable is elongated; the rear "spout" becomes something like a chimney. Clay's date irons are drawn with considerable accuracy, whereas Bird's number 1 is not. In spite of showing several more buildings, Bird should probably be regarded as a derivation from Clay, more "artistic" and less realistic.

Watson's sketch (Fig. 11), for all its slightness, is crucial in that it *defin-*

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<sup>17</sup> Bird's watercolors are in the possession of his great-grandson, Robert Montgomery Bird of Wilmington. Bird's depictions of New Castle buildings include the Tile House; Green and Immanuel Church, undated but showing the steeple of 1822; and Town Hall (1823), dated 1826. His caricatures may have been inspired by Clay's. Several Bird paintings were exhibited in 1996 at University of Pennsylvania Library Special Collections, Daniel Traister, curator. Nancy Buffington, University of Delaware, is currently researching the life of Bird.

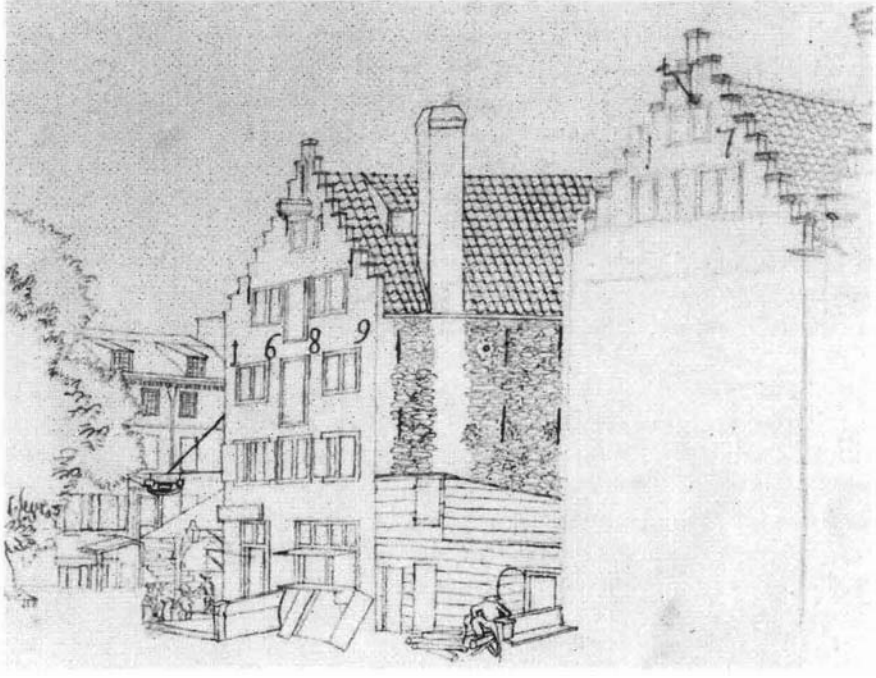


FIGURE 12. Step-gable Dutch townhouses in New York, one bearing 1689 date irons, another 17[—]. Pierre Eugene du Simitière, *View of New York Houses*, ca. 1769, ink on paper. (Courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia.)

*tively associates the date irons with the pre-alteration facade.* In this it corroborates Clay and Bird and thereby greatly strengthens the case for the authenticity of the date irons and, by implication, of the house itself. The crux remains, however—how could both le Blanc and Latrobe-Mills have failed to show the date irons? The problem is particularly acute in the case of Latrobe; Harper writes, "Since his view does include other significant details, it is unlikely that he simply ignored [the irons]." Indeed, Latrobe-Mills is extraordinarily minute in rendering incidental features—for example, the paneled door of the Tile House propped open with a lettered sign above. The survey displays what John M. Bryan has called "the meticulous clarity of Mills's drawings," and Latrobe himself told Thomas Jefferson that Mills "possesses that valuable substitute for genius—laborious precision—in a very high degree." Latrobe and Mills should have known the Tile House façade intimately, for Latrobe rented Mrs. Aull's house right across the street as his dwelling in New Castle (second building from the left in Fig. 5).<sup>18</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Harper, "Gospel," p. 79; John M. Bryan, "Robert Mills: Education and Early Drawings," in John M. Bryan, ed., *Robert Mills, Architect* (Washington, D.C., 1989), p. 6; and Latrobe to Jefferson, Oct. 2, 1803, quoted in *ibid.*, p. 15.



FIGURE 13. Two step-gable Dutch houses in New York, including one with 1698 date irons. Detail of John Joseph Holland, *A View of Broad Street, Wall Street, and the City Hall, New York*, 1797, watercolor. (Courtesy of I.N. Phelps Stokes Collection, Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations.)



FIGURE 14. Robert Montgomery Bird, *Tile House and Vicinity*, ca. 1826, watercolor, heightened with white. (Courtesy of Robert Montgomery Bird, Wilmington.)

Assuming, as recent historians have done, that Latrobe-Mills would certainly have shown the date irons had they been in place, then the irons must have been first applied after **1805**. Harper has noted that "the house **was** renovated in the early nineteenth century and it is possible that the irons were **added** then"; but as we have seen, the 1822 Watson drawing (confirmed by Clay and Bird) proves that the irons were already on the façade prior to these wholesale renovations.<sup>19</sup> The crucial question, then, is this: would date irons have been added as an antiquarian exercise to an old, somewhat decrepit commercial structure in New Castle between **1805** and 1822?

It is not likely, for during those years colonial architecture was at its lowest ebb, with even major public buildings being demolished without comment or qualm. Philadelphia's historic State House (later "Independence Hall") was nearly torn down in 1813, and the woodwork of its Assembly Room was ripped out three years later. A newspaper editor recalled that when the latter "sacrilegious outrage" occurred, "not a pen was moved in reprobation" by anyone but himself. Watson lamented the demise of Philadelphia's historic Old Court House on Market Street (1709) in **1837**;

<sup>19</sup> Harper, "Gospel," p. 79.

it "had long been regarded by many as a rude and undistinguished edifice," and few noticed when it was destroyed. In New Castle in 1820, the town's public buildings were described by a visitor as "apparently in want of improvement. The court house [1732] a large commodious building, has, I am told been long going to decay." Given that far more important buildings were neglected during these inauspicious years, the very nadir for the fortunes of colonial architecture, there is little likelihood that the humble and crumbling Tile House was singled out for nostalgic adornment. As yet there hardly existed any antiquarian interest in old buildings as mementos of the past, and the earliest stirrings of the colonial revival were barely evident.<sup>20</sup>

Moreover, the date irons seem exactly *right* for the Tile House, making perfect sense as part of the Dutch colonial architectural aesthetic. Comparing Latrobe-Mills with sketches of the last surviving Dutch houses in New York City and Albany makes this point abundantly clear. The Tile House closely resembled the New York building at center in Figure 12, a typically Dutch-urban combination of residence and mercantile establishment with a door to the left; windows of various sizes; a steep gable with ten crowsteps and wall anchors (cf. Fig. 1); brick front and stone sides (cf. Fig. 3); and date irons of similar design (cf. Fig. 8). Another step-gable Dutch house in New York had, like the Tile House, date irons in two rows and a metal ornament against the sky; a nearby dwelling had a gable crane (Fig. 13). James Eights's drawings of Albany show that several Dutch houses with step gables survived there in the early nineteenth century and that they closely resembled the Tile House, at least one having arched, mullioned windows, as the Tile House did (Fig. 15). Irons forged by smith Matthias de Foss were prominent on all four exterior walls of Old Swedes Church, Wilmington, most remarkably on the west end with its date of "1698" and a dedicatory inscription of more than one hundred letters, painted red. Thus the evidence would seem to show that the Tile House with its date

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<sup>20</sup> On demolition plans for the State House, see Minutes of Select Council, March 1812, Philadelphia City Archives, in *Historic Structures Report, Part II on Independence Hall* (Philadelphia: Independence National Historical Park, April 1962), p. 84. John Binns, *Recollections of the Life of John Binns* (Philadelphia, 1854), p. 193; Watson, *Annals*, 1:350; see also Agnes Addison Gilchrist, "Market Houses in High Street," in *Historic Philadelphia From the Founding Until the Early Nineteenth Century*, *Transactions of the American Philosophical Society* 43, Part 1 (1953): 304–6. "Extract from the Journal of a Traveller," *Delaware Gazette*, Oct. 24, 1820. On the colonial revival, see Alan Axelrod, ed., *The Colonial Revival in America* (New York, 1985); William B. Rhoads, *The Colonial Revival*, 2 vols. (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1974; New York: Garland, 1977); William B. Rhoads, "The Colonial Revival and American Nationalism," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 35, no. 4 (Dec. 1976): 239–54; and W. Barksdale Maynard, " 'Best, Lowliest Style!': The Early-Nineteenth-Century Rediscovery of American Colonial Architecture," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 59, no. 3 (Sept. 2000): 338–57.



**FIGURE 15.** Dutch Houses in Albany, New York. James Eights, *North Pearl and State Streets—At and Near the Corner—As It Was in 1814, 1849*, watercolor on paper. Based on a plate in Jacques-Gerard Milbert, *Picturesque Itinerary of the Hudson River (181623)*. (Courtesy of the Albany Institute of History & Art, 1954.59.65.)

irons was a splendidly authentic example of Dutch architecture—and of a dwelling type now all but extinct in America.<sup>21</sup>

Ultimately there is no way of knowing why both le Blanc and Latrobe-Mills omitted the date irons. It should be recalled that neither had as a

<sup>21</sup> For Dutch colonial townhouses in Albany that survived long enough to be photographed, see Blackburn and Piwonka, *Remembrance of Patria*, pp. 112–14. The extant Yates House, Schenectady (ca. 1730), with an unstepped gable, "is the last urban Dutch house in the United States to retain the character of its original period (ibid., p. 114). Pierre Eugène du Simitière in 1769 wrote of date irons in New York, "The oldest date I have been able to discover mark'd by large Irons in the front of the houses in this city is 1678 . . . from that date one can almost find Some of Every year to 1701 or 2 in Some part or other of the City" ("Dates in Iron," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 11, no. 2 [May 1952]: 21). On the Holland watercolor (Fig. 13), see Gloria Gilda Deák, *Picturing America, 1497–1899* (Princeton, 1988), 1:146–47. The 1698 building illustrated by Holland survived long enough to be drawn by architect Alexander Jackson Davis (Theodore S. Fay, *Views of New York* [New York, 1831], following p. 34; see also p. 40). Davis rendered the house as part of a series on old Dutch houses in *The New-York Mirror* 8, no. 1 (July 10, 1830): 1; no. 26 (Jan. 1, 1831): 1; no. 37 (March 19, 1831): 1. On the Old Swedes irons, see Horace Burr, *The Records of Holy Trinity (Old Swedes) Church, Wilmington, Delaware, 1698–1938* (Wilmington, 1938), pp. 1617. On Dutch colonial architecture and culture generally, see Allen G. Noble, *Wood, Brick, and Stone: The North American Settlement Landscape* (Amherst, 1983), 1:27–39; Alice P. Kenney, "Neglected Heritage: Hudson River Valley Dutch Material Culture," *Winterthur Portfolio* 20, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 49–70; and Dell Upton, ed., *America's Architectural Roots: Ethnic Groups that Built America* (Washington, 1986), 48–54.

primary objective a depiction of the Tile House, but rather a portrait of the entire town, and one should not expect every incidental feature to have been rendered. As detailed as Latrobe-Mills is, some minutiae are deliberately disregarded. Shutters, for example, are never shown (failure to understand this has resulted in the misguided removal of them from several restored buildings in New Castle, including the Read House in 1978). Nor does the glazed-header brick pattern of certain houses appear. It is especially telling to note how the Thomas House (1801), three doors to the right of the Tile House and today known as Immanuel Parish House, has been subtly simplified—its shutters, keystone lintels, and cornice modillions are all omitted (cf. Figs. 2 and 5). This is not surprising, for, as Bryan has written, the eighteenth-century architectural-rendering style that Mills originally learned from James Hoban in Washington was conventional and schematizing. Details were frequently elided, and the Tile House wall anchors and date irons apparently fell victim to this impulse.<sup>22</sup>

### *Later Views*

The late nineteenth century saw a flurry of depictions of "the famous old tile house" in the wake of its demolition. Clay was readily available for copy in New Castle; concerning the Tile House, Black wrote in 1885, "J.H. Rogers has a good picture of it by E.W. Clay, which shows everything in the original form I believe." Sometime before 1892, Anne Read Rodney copied Clay in an oil painting (HSD), and a watercolor derived from her image is today in a private collection in New Castle. Rogers's son, Edward Ingraham Rogers (1851–1905), replicated Clay in an 1894 watercolor (Fig. 16). His rendition was printed in George A. Wolf's 1899 book about New Castle, and postcards were fashioned from the illustration (HSD).<sup>23</sup> Laussat Rogers, first cousin of E.I. Rogers, painted versions in 1895 (two at NCHS) and 1896 (private collection, Wilmington). Another version (1928) appears on the painted wallpaper of the Laird dining room in the Read house, and two more are in private collections in New Castle. Rogers did a careful pencil reconstruction of the façade for a watercolor dated 1925 (Boothhurst Collection, HSD). Finally, a Rogers sketch of the building appeared on A Day in Old New Castle tickets in 1939 (I-SD).

The accuracy of the various depictions of the Tile House is no academic

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<sup>22</sup>Shutters in Charles T. Lyle, *The George Read II House: Notes on Its History and Restoration* (Wilmington, 1986); and Bryan, "Robert Mills," p. 5. On Mills in Hohan's office, see Rhodri Windsor Liscombe, *Altogether American: Robert Mills, Architect and Engineer, 1781–1855* (New York, 1994), pp. 7–8.

<sup>23</sup>Scharf, *History of Delaware*, 2:868; and Black to Dr. Bush, HSD. For the Anne Rodney painting, see cover of *Delaware History* 25, no. 2 (Fall-Winter 1992–93). E.I. Rogers was a pupil of painter Clawson Hammitt (Harry Rogers to Daniel Rogers. March 2, 1884, Boothhurst Collection, Box 1.5, "Correspondence: 1884" folder, HSD). George A. Wolf, *Ideal New Castle in the State of Delaware As It Appears in the Year 1899* (Wilmington, 1899).

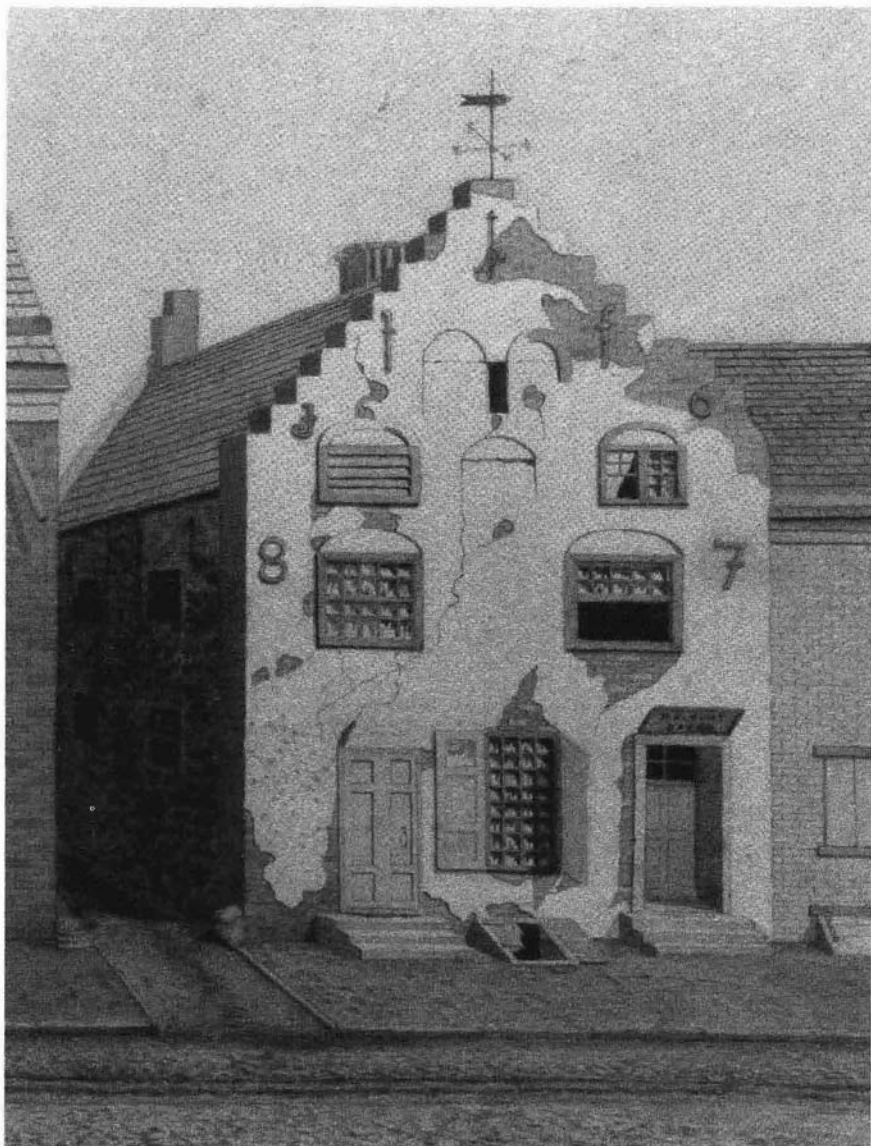


FIGURE 16. E.I. Rogers, *Tile House*, 1894, watercolor, after E. W. Clay, 1822 (Courtesy of the New Castle Historical Society.)

matter, as they have decisively shaped modern interpretations of what the building looked like. Eckman borrowed from E.I. Rogers—correcting the form of the date irons—for the frontispiece of her book *New Castle on the Delaware* (1936). When Perry, Shaw and Hepburn were called in to do for New Castle what they had done for Colonial Williamsburg, they proposed





FIGURE 17. Andrew H. Hepburn, Jr., for Perry, Shaw and Hepburn, "View of Tile House—The Strand," 1947–48. (Collections of the Historical Society of Delaware.)

rebuilding the Tile House. The idea originated with Col. Daniel Moore Bates, whose longstanding interest in the restoration of New Castle has been discussed by Harper. William G. Perry echoed Bates's enthusiasm: "Such a building as the Old Dutch Tile House might be [rebuilt] with a view to producing one reconstruction which would be spectacular and outstanding." Andrew H. Hepburn, Jr., son of the firm's principal, surveyed New Castle in November and December 1946 and by March 1948 had completed an attractive drawing of the Tile House and vicinity (Fig. 17). In his written account he assigned a letter to each of the sources consulted: A) Latrobe-Mills (Fig. 2); B) E.I. Rogers (Fig. 16); C) photograph (Fig. 3, but a different print); D) photograph (Fig. 4); E) le Blanc (Fig. 9). His reconstruction was largely based upon Latrobe-Mills, the photographs, and measurements of the existing McCallmont House next door.<sup>24</sup>

Hepburn proposed regularizing the first story to its original Dutch appearance, assuming that its asymmetricality as shown by Latrobe-Mills was the result of alterations: "The fenestration of the first storey is foreign to the design of the façade above, and is of English Georgian proportion and design." The stucco had been applied to conceal the old relieving arches,

<sup>24</sup> William G. Perry, in "Report: New Castle, Delaware." Dutch townhouses were occasionally built as part of the late-nineteenth-century colonial revival. For example, William E. Stone, Princeton Bank, Princeton, New Jersey (1896); see Montgomery Schuyler, "Architecture of American Colleges: 111—Princeton," *Architectural Record* 27, no. 2 (Feb. 1910): 155. Hepburn, Jr., did at least three renderings of New Castle restored: Tile House vicinity (HSD), shops on Delaware Avenue (HSD), and "The Packet Ship" (NCHS). He died at age 89 on August 20, 1999, shortly before the present study was undertaken.

he surmised, and he saw in the pattern of cracks evidence for the original openings. It would seem to be a blatant example of Perry, Shaw and Hepburn's preference for symmetry, which Carl Lounsbury has discussed as a major bias in their 1932-33 reconstruction of the Capitol at Williamsburg. In fact, there was ample precedent for symmetry in the case of Dutch houses. There were many symmetrical Dutch townhouses in early New York, including those shown on Jasper Danckaerts's sketch of Manhattan as seen from Brooklyn about 1679 (at least one of which had an elaborate door surround like Hepburn's). It was probably unwise to ignore the evidence for asymmetry in Latrobe-Mills, however, given that asymmetrical arrangements with a door at the side were common Dutch practice (Figs. 12, 13, and 15), with ground-floor openings sometimes imperfectly aligned with those above. The high-style formality of Hepburn's Tile House may have been meant to rival another Dutch-house restoration in Delaware, E. William Martin's well-known Zwaanendael, the De Vries Memorial at Lewes (1931), which was derived from the Town Hall of Hoorn in the Netherlands (1613).<sup>25</sup>

Aside from his fancy ground story, Hepburn's reconstruction seems questionable in several ways: a wall anchor is substituted for the crane; the rear spout is too broad; and he shows two chimneys on the basis of photographic evidence, notwithstanding the fact that E.I. Rogers (following Clay) shows only one.<sup>26</sup> Sycamores dapple the Strand with shadows in a scene reminiscent of the firm's landscaping of Merchant's Square, Williamsburg. There are no automobiles, no signs of the bustle of modern life—or of colonial life, for that matter. Certainly there is no indication of the teeming, unsavory populace that Latrobe described when he returned to New Castle in August 1804 and found himself locked out of Mrs. Aull's: "I was obliged to go in search of the key while my family waited in the carriage, in the street, surrounded by all the idlers & blackguards of the neighborhood."<sup>27</sup>

Andrew H. Hepburn, Sr., wrote in 1947, "The 'Old Tile House' would be

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<sup>25</sup> Perry, Shaw and Hepburn, "Restoration of the Tile House"; Carl R. Lounsbury, "Beaux-Arts Ideals and Colonial Reality: The Reconstruction of Williamsburg's Capitol, 1928-34," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* 49 (Dec. 1990): 373-89; and E. William Martin, *Selections from the Work of E. William Martin* (Wilmington, 1934).

<sup>26</sup> On the basis of the photographs, Hepburn estimated the width of the Tile house to have been 28 feet. The surviving bulkhead piers (which Hepburn may not have known) are useful in this regard, as the photographs show that the centerline of the building intersected the southwestern edge of the bulkhead. With reference to the extant piers, the house must have been about 27 feet wide, its centerline falling roughly where the northeastern edge of the bay meets the wall of the modern house (see Fig. 5). Latrobe-Mills would seem to promise precise dimensions for the Tile House, but field analysis by the author and Susan E. Matsen has shown that their measurements of the neighboring buildings are inconsistent and unreliable.

<sup>27</sup> Latrobe to John Strickland, Aug. 18, 1804, in *Microtext Edition*, no. 34.

an interesting reconstruction, but requires the purchase of the house now standing on that property and therefore may be in the somewhat distant future." That future would never come. As Harper has shown, restoration plans for the town quickly lost momentum following the June 1949 public meeting at which they were unveiled. The New Castle Tercentenary in 1951 proved more of a distraction than a stimulus, and Bates died suddenly in 1953. In 1973 a local journalist belatedly wondered, "Whatever happened to the recommendation of the New Castle Tercentenary Commission that the State build a re-creation of the old Tile House?"<sup>28</sup>

Today there is little chance of a reconstruction, such efforts having fallen out of fashion nationwide. In 1979 the National Park Service had an opportunity to rebuild the Slate Roof House in Philadelphia (1687-1699), home of William Penn. The situation was quite similar to that of the Tile House—a late-seventeenth-century urban dwelling near the waterfront that had been demolished in the nineteenth century (1867). The Slate Roof House could have been accurately rebuilt, given the numerous photographs taken of it before it was destroyed and a room-by-room campaign of drawings by W.J. Clark. But in the end the reconstruction was not carried out, a rebuilding being deemed inherently grandiose, inauthentic, and misleading. In Philadelphia, as in Williamsburg and New Castle, the 1930s to 1950s were the heyday of ambitious reconstructions, but that moment has long since passed.<sup>29</sup>

The deeply-ingrained skepticism and loss of heart that make reconstructions rare nowadays manifest themselves too in our ready suspicions about the historical record. Recent decades have seen scholars adding their voices to a chorus of doubts about the genuineness of the Tile House and its date irons. This paper has attempted to dispel those doubts and confirm the authenticity of the building. By reproducing for the first time such early depictions as Clay and Watson, it has tried to demonstrate that the Tile House was indeed an extraordinary survival, a Dutch house of the late seventeenth century, its 1687 date irons original to it and the appearance of its facade well-attested by several early artists. The crucial evidence was provided by Watson (exactly dated and showing that the irons preceded

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<sup>28</sup> Andrew H. Hepburn to Albert Kruse, May 13, 1947, in "New Castle Notes," Eckman Papers, Box 105, HSD; and Nicholas S. McIntire, Jan. 3, 1973, in *The Brtt of "Behind the Times": Selected Columns about New Castle by Nicholas S. McIntire* (New Castle, 1986), p. 68. "Plans for a permanent memorial to Dutch founders at New Castle have been started . . . The commission proposes restoration of the Tile house, an outstanding structure of purely Dutch architecture, built in 1687" (1651–19.51 Tercentenary Celebration pamphlet, Eckman Papers, Box 108, HSD).

<sup>29</sup> W.J. Clark, Jr., "Slate Roof House," Bd 16, Sl 14, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. Clark's drawings date to May 1867. See also John L. Cotter, *The Buried Past: An Archaeological History of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1992), pp. 82–83; and Kenneth Finkel, *Philadelphia Then and Now* (New York, 1988), pp. 105–06.

the nineteenth-century renovations) and the irons themselves (measurements proving that Clay's staggered arrangement was correct). Watson and Clay are the trustworthy sources that scholars have long needed to evaluate the authenticity of the place. Although they admittedly date thirteen decades after the construction of the building, the evidence they provide is vitally important in helping us dispel the mysteries that have long surrounded this fascinating structure. They strongly suggest that we may safely put our skepticism to rest—for New Castle's Tile House was no fraud.