

An Architectural Summary
of
Franklin Court
and
Benjamin Franklin's House

by

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This report is an architectural summary of the available documentary and archeological facts related to the physical appearance of Franklin Court, in Independence National Historical Park. It includes a conjectural plot plan of the Court, and conjectural floor plans of Benjamin Franklin's own house which stood in the middle of the Court. Written on these plans at the appropriate location are quotes from the documentation gathered so far by the National Park Service Historians and Archeologists.

Three particularly valuable documentary sources have been included in facsimile for handy reference: two 18th century sketches of the first and second floor plans of Franklin's house, and the Philadelphia Contributionship Fire Insurance Survey of the house made in 1766.

I was asked in March 1969, by the Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation, Division of Historic Architecture, to represent them on a team to investigate whether the known data would indicate that a reasonably accurate reconstruction of the Franklin Court complex was possible.

To present an objective architectural summary of what we know about Franklin Court, I found it essential to also suggest what we don't know.

There is a tantalizing quantity of pertinent description which has survived in correspondence, and in the enclosed survey and sketches. For example, the surveyor's mention of "A Rich Chimney peice" indicates the relative position of the Franklin House "Old Dining Room" in the rank of elegance of Philadelphia Architecture. But such a description falls far short of indicating the very form of the architectural element. The design of this chimney piece must, from the standpoint of an architect in the Branch of Restorations, be listed as an unknown. All such "unknowns" have been included with the annotated "known" facts on the drawing to which they pertain.

I hasten to add that even these rudimentary conjectural plans are subject to personal interpretation, and never will be otherwise unless further historical or archeological documentation can be more definitive.

On the plot plan (sheet No. 1) I have indicated areas where additional archeological investigations should be made. These are areas which have possibly been undisturbed since 1812 when the Franklin structures were torn down; yet were not available to be included in the 1953 and 1961-2 NPS archeological investigation programs.

It has been a great pleasure to be assigned to this team. The Historians and Archeologists, who have assembled the material which I have drawn upon, have had their reward for the good job they did in the fascinating pursuit. My pleasure has not only been the challenge of the jig-saw puzzle aspect of putting together the plans, but of course the pleasure of reading these delightful hints to Franklin's family life.

Conclusions and Recommendations

My personal answer to the question assigned: whether the known data would indicate that a reasonably accurate reconstruction of the Franklin Court complex was possible -- is, no.

Anyone's answer to this question must relate to that individual's standards or aspirations for presenting Benjamin Franklin to people.

In facing the unknowns and what would be called for if a reconstruction were attempted, I am overwhelmed with the conjectural decisions which would have to be made by the architect.

Let us consider "A Rich Chimney peice" in the "old Dining Room," even when it is in fact further modified by presumably being flanked by "fluted Collums & half pilasters with intabliture." When the architect has conjecturally decided how high the ceilings might have been, and fixed a possible dimension for the width of the room, he must then choose a size for the fireplace openings, and then a possible width for the chimney masonry mass. Having done this, he would perhaps turn to architectural books which may have been owned by the 18th century architect Robert Smith, who may have dictated the design of such important elements in the house. And from these books he could choose a plate which shows possibly three chimney pieces. The question then to be asked would be -- which of the three might the 18th century Robert Smith have chosen for Benjamin Franklin's dining room? Having made this choice, he would then start sketching to see how this choice would fit with the chosen dimensions, and how it would compose with fluted engaged flat (or possibly round?) columns, with half pilasters flanking them, and all under a full entablature of an architectural order of his choice.

And when he has made all these basic decisions, there are a myriad of other decisions of construction methods, moulding profiles and the carving which probably made the insurance surveyor add the adjective "Rich."

The aspect of this process which in my opinion would make a reconstruction of Franklin's house unreasonable, is the extreme degree to which the assigned architect's choice would enter the project. Based on the architect's knowledge of the local 18th century building practices, the house would be an amalgam of Delaware Valley 18th century architecture.

I personally would not want to commit to three dimensional materials, and ostensibly a factual presentation, that which I knew was a selection of numerous conjectural alternatives.

More appropriate in my opinion, would be a treatment of Franklin Court which states only what we know in three dimensional materials, yet includes a presentation of all of Franklin's enlightened life through other media.

Would it be more effective to present within the preserved and reconstructed shells of the Market Street houses, those objects, etc. which illustrate the varied facets of his life, displayed in spaces which would be used by the visitor as an introduction to a two dimensional celluloid and sound, 1970's portrayal of the man: his life in Franklin Court and Philadelphia, but also his life as it extended in ideas and deeds across the world and forward in time to us?

Physically such a presentation could be within a structure attached to the Market Street houses straddling Franklin's 1787 passageway, yet allowing the passageway to freely enter the Courtyard as always.

Without literal attempt, Franklin's garden could be respected by the use of Plane trees, flowering shrubs and "a very large Mulberry."

And on the house site itself could be presented a model of our conjectural idea of the original Franklin Court, surrounded with an exhibit of artifacts and documentation pertaining to the Court and house, and shafts which would allow the visitor to look down at the few intelligible archeological survivals.

I think that with such a presentation the visitor could exit to Chestnut Street feeling fullfilled -- having been inspired with the unbelievable scope of this man's life, and having been elated by the close "touch" of the honest presentation of that which we know to have been his.

Sketch Plan of the First Floor of Benjamin Franklin's House, pre - 1786

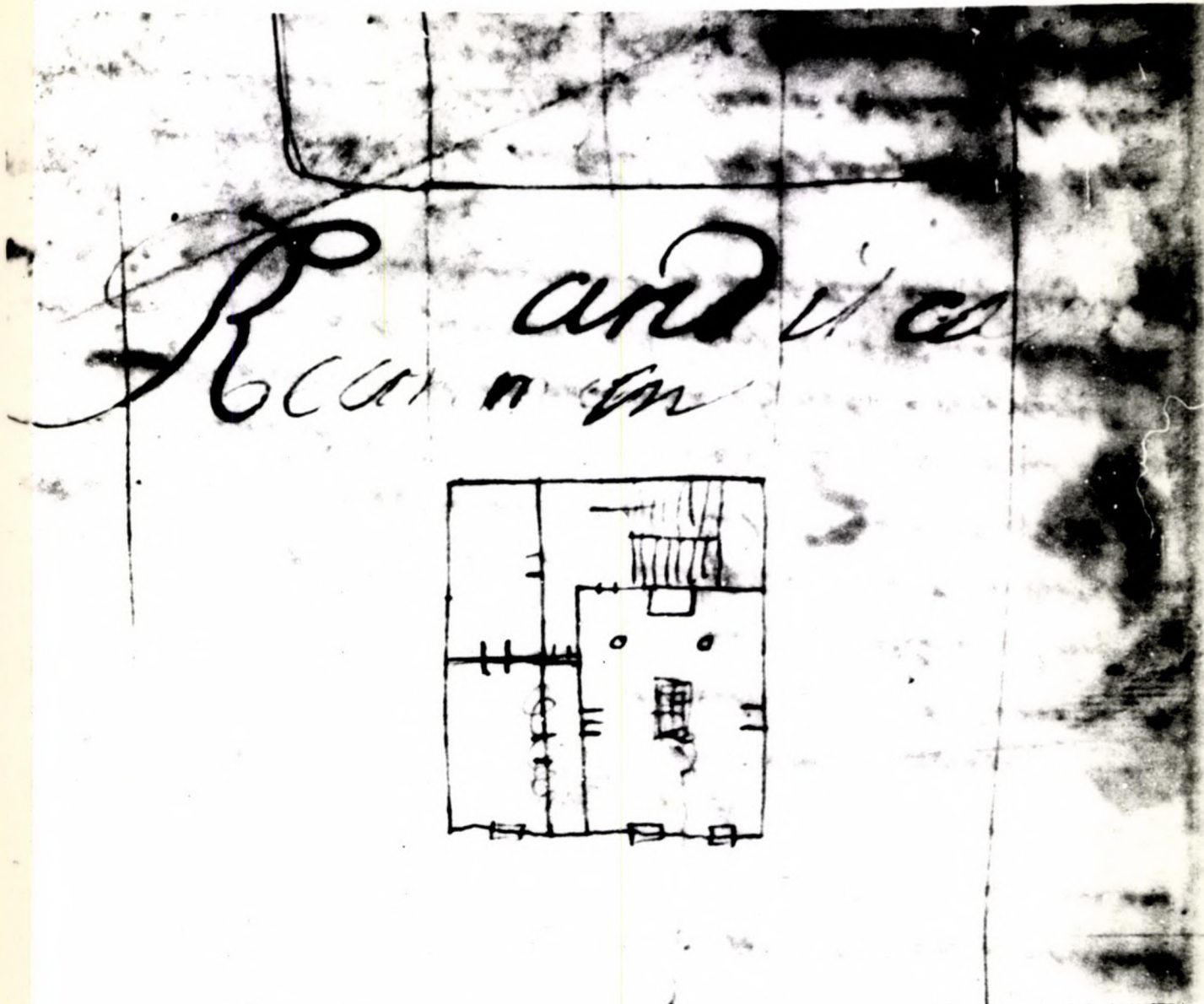
Franklin Papers, Vol. 44, pt. 1, p. 110
American Philosophical Society Library

Ink sketch on back of a laid paper letter addressed "To Doctor F." [Franklin] from John Huske (a Bostonian and subsequently a member of Parliament) on a political subject, written c.1766 [opinion of APS MSS Librarian Mr. Murphy Smith].

Franklin probably drew the sketch, as the ink writing immediately above it is his hand. The unusual upper case R has similar elaborations to those of a French stencil set owned by Franklin and now deposited at the American Philosophical Society.

The original sketch was full size 1 13/16" E-W dimension x 2 1/16" N-S dimension.

Independence National Historical Park negative No. 7826.



7826

Sketch Plan of the Second Floor of Benjamin Franklin's House, pre - 1786

Franklin papers, Vol. 66, p. 124
American Philosophical Society Library

Pencil sketch on back of a laid paper receipt written by
Benjamin Franklin in ink:

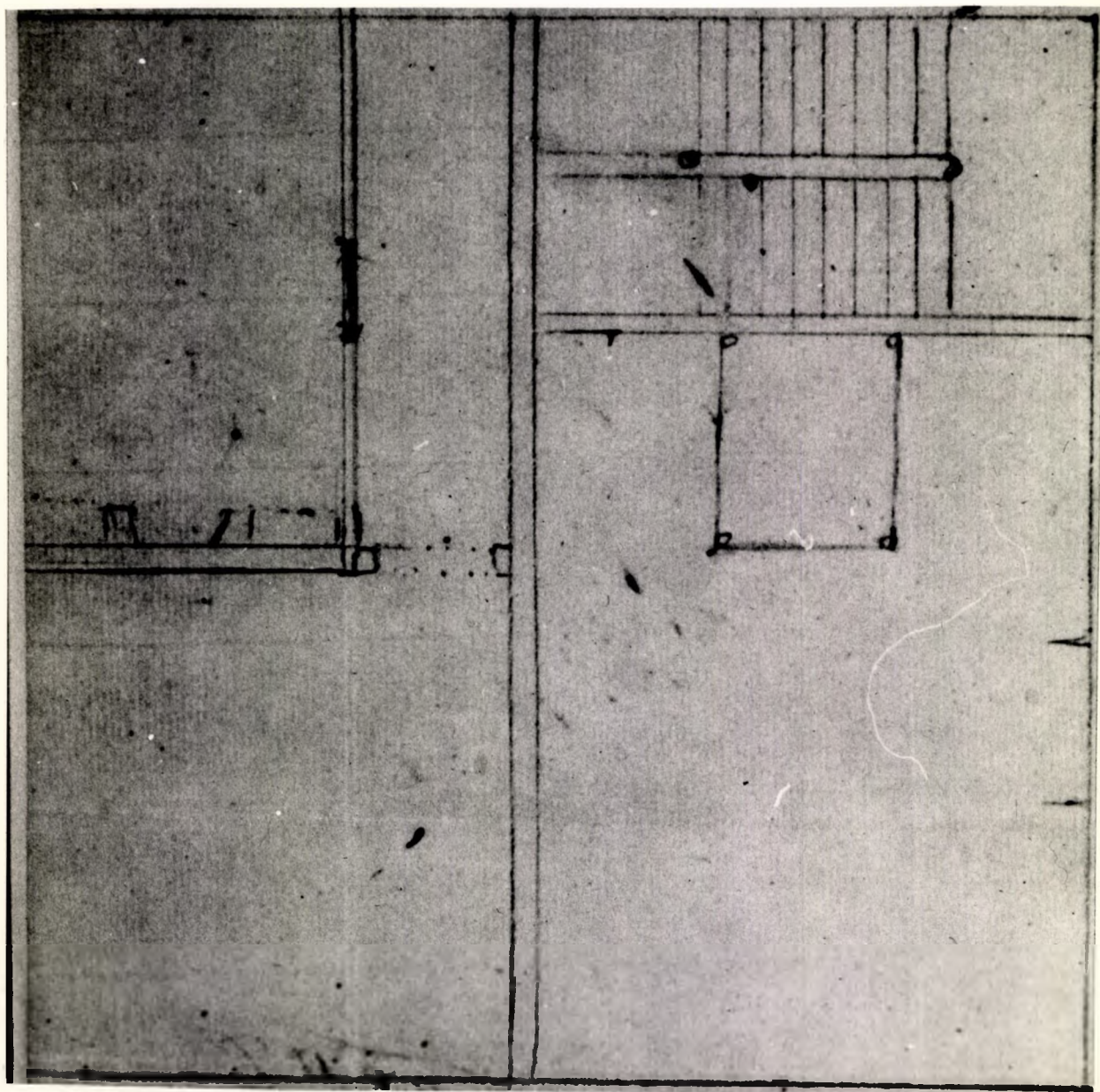
"Receiv'd May 17, 1764 of Benjamin Franklin,
Eleven Pounds for Four Reams of Money Paper
at 55/pr Ream
P me / £11.0.0

[Signature] Jacob [Gagy]."

Franklin probably drew this sketch. He was in Philadelphia when he wrote the receipt. As there would have been no reason for him to take the receipt with him when he departed in Nov. 7, 1764 for England, we can say that he probably drew the plan sometime between May and November 1764.

The original sketch was full size $\pm 6 \frac{3}{8}$ " square.

Independence National Historical Park negative No. 7827.



7827

January 8th 1766

N. 1140

A house belonging to Benjamin Franklin, situate on the South Side of High Street between third & fourth streets where his family dwell

36 feet square - 3 stories high - 1489 inch walls - 3 Rooms on a floor - partitions in the Easternmost part of the house 9 inch Brick wall. & the Garret floor is in the Westernmost part stucco & plastered.

East Room below wainscoted ^{with feet board} all round, - four pediment with front pediment a Rich Chimney piece, & fluted Columns & half pilasters with intabulation - the other two Rooms and passage below are painted pediment high, with front and side at Cornish throughout one Room has a Chimney piece with tabernacle frame pediment &c.

All the second story wainscoted pediment high, front & side at and plain double Cornish through the whole, ~~one~~ a Chimney piece in one of the Rooms with tabernacle frame pediment &c.

Chimney Breasts such as ~~starting~~ and single Cornish through.

The third story - Garret plastered away out on Roof - two stories of stairs Ramp: Bracketed and wainscoted one - do - Bracketed - painted inside and out

Modillion eaves - 2 large pain houses with triforcate each end - all new - kitchen in cellar

Gunning Bedford

\$500. a day of W. or if any higher sum to be at 92/6.

DESIGN • CONFIGURATION OF:

- sub-cellar form? brick/vault? access?
- kitchen, cooking fireplace, flues for smoke, steam
+ smell, dampers, boilers, furnaces, oven, drain?
- window frames, sash mechanisms, no. of lights?
- doors + door frames?
- stairs enclosure?
- ice pit interior + covered roof?

MATERIALS, COLORS OR TEXTURES:

- Type of Stone painting?
- Plaster on kitchen walls & ceiling?
- Plastered surfaces whitewashed? Colors?
- Paint or whitewash on wood trim?
- Flooring material in kitchen & bathroom?
- Hard-core - hinges, lathe, locks?

POSSIBLE EXISTENCE OF:

- Bulkheads from exterior for bringing in ice and wood?
- Access from the kitchen to a water well?
- Iron bars on windows?
- Mantle shelf over kitchen fireplace?
- Shelving?
- Closets?
- Meat boxes etc.?
- Dumb waiter?

NOTE: Elevations related to "City Datum - 1962"

Flattening
EL. 15.7

Brick Dome
EL. 16.0'

Base El. 30.2'

F38

1786 Necessary pit (inside dome) to
found L.P. Arch supports.
The pit was lined with
dry land bricks and
had a brick dome over it.
Its fill included "concrete" 18" c. depth.

DIMENSIONS OF:

- Exterior grade is no + dimension of steps?
- Height of water table?
- Height of Pent Eave?
- Floor to ceiling heights?
- Precise room sizes?
- Windows openings?
- Door openings?
- Interior stair tread + riser dimensions?
- Fireplace openings + hearths?

DESIGN + CONFIGURATION OF:

- Exterior: D₂ + transoms *
- Windows + transoms: show skills + meanings?
- Water-tight, insulated bricks?
- Exterior: chimneys?
- Area: no 2nd story?
- Iron supports + "candlestick" heads *
- Butt ends: not carved + tapered *
- Shingles: no moldings, + turnings + brackets?
- Horizontal moldings at base, panels + subpanels
- Windows: arch + transoms
- Door: no moldings, panels + pediments *
- Corner: "profiles" *
- "Belfrets" and "paneling" in the study?
- Tall narrow frame: pediment + carriage in Pa.
- "Red chimney piece": double columns + shelf, not
surmounted by an entablature, in Old D.
Chimney, breast in 1787 Dining Room.

MATERIALS: COLORS OR TEXTURE ?
 Exterior brick, Board & banded leaders ? paint inside walls ?
 Exterior door - trim - paint colors ?
 Interior wood trim - paint colors ?
 Interior plaster wall and ceiling colors ?
 Hearth - marble - type ?
 178 ? marble surround - type ?
 Flooring - yellow pine - board width ?
 Wall papers -
 Hand wash - hinges ? latels ? leils ?

POSSIBLE EXISTENCE OF ?

- Connections of Necessary to main house?
- Buildings ~~are~~ exterior steps and area, say?
- Transom lights over exterior doors?
- Drivable living space?
- Exterior shutters
- Chairs on? Baseboards? Corners? and window treatments in 1929 dining room?

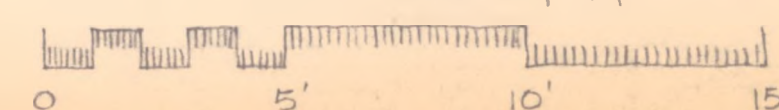
NOTE: For 1766 1st House plan, see ink sketch on back of letter from [John Huske] to Benjamin Franklin c. 1766. Sketch probably made by B. Franklin as scribbled writing adjacent to sketch seems to be his hand. Franklin pps. Vol 44, pt 1, p110. Am Phil Socy, Lib.

Necessity pit and drains
found in NPS 1960-62
Archaeological Survey -
Available pits indicate
that necessity dates
from 1980 period -
because drains built during
and with quarry pit.

"To the East End of my basement - House
I have made an addition of 10 feet
and on half the road 30 feet
that is the whole width of the
old House, so that the front of
Back of the old and new Building
range even and the two plumbings
East and West are connected so
as to appear but one Building."

Mar. 30, 1879

SCALE : APPROXIMATELY $\frac{1}{4}" = 1-0'$



BASIC DATA: INDEPENDENCE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK HISTORY AND ARCHEOLOGY FILES

CHECKED BY BOB NELSON	ARCHIVES OF CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL BY LINDA FOWLER CATCHER
UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR NATIONAL PARK SERVICE OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION BRANCH OF RESTORATIONS	REGION NORTHEAST PCP NO SHEET 2 OF 4
ARCHITECTURAL SUMMARY OF B. FRANKLIN'S HOUSE FRANKLIN COURT INDEPENDENCE NATIONAL HISTORICAL PARK	DRAWING NO. 891 94 001 DATE SEPT 30 1989

SECOND FLOOR UNKNOWNNS

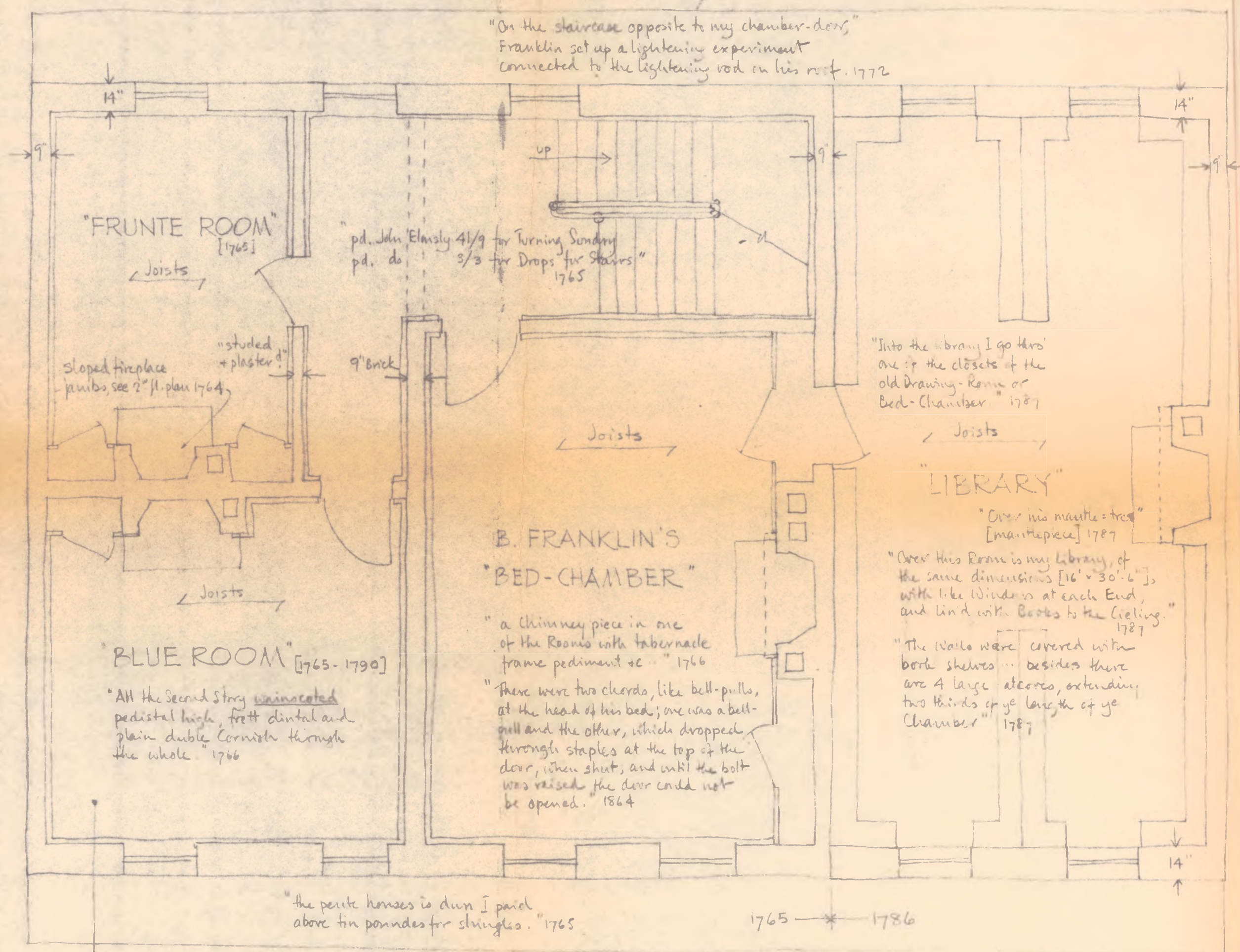
LOCATION OF:
Windows at stairhall?

DIMENSIONS OF:
Precise room sizes?
Floor to ceiling height?
Window openings?
Window sill heights?
Door openings?
Fireplace openings? hearths?

DESIGN + CONFIGURATION OF:
Mantelcase base, panels + surbase?
Window architraves?
Door panels + architraves?
Exact disposition + profiles of cornices?
Fireplace surrounds?
Chimney piece + tabernacle frame in Bed Chamber?
Mantelcase in Library?
Bookshelves in Library?
"Blue Room" ceiling cantonche design?

MATERIALS, COLORS OR TEXTURES:
Interior trim colors?
Interior plaster walls + ceiling colors?
Hearth brick types, square?
Flooring - yellow pine? board widths?
Wallpaper?
Hardware - hinges? latches? locks?

POSSIBLE EXISTENCE OF:
Belt courses?
Connections between 2nd floor and
Necessary for Bathing House?
Trim in 1787 Library - Chair rails,
baseboards, Cornice, Architraves?
Double hung sash?
Exterior shutters?



"Bleu room... I think the paper has loste much of the blome by pasteing of it up...
D. Franklin to B.F. 1765

"I suppose the blue Room is too blue... I would have you finish it in thus. Paint the wainscot a dead white; Paper the walls blue, + tack the gilt border round just above the surbase and under the Cornice. If the paper is not equal coloured when pasted on, let it be brush'd over again with the same colour; and let the Paper in the musical figures be tack'd to the middle of the Ceiling...
B.F. to D. Franklin June 1767

"Blue Room [followed by list of furniture + Musical Instrs] - "Inventory of the Estate of Benjamin Franklin, 26th day April 1790

"The doors of the Chambers, and nearly all the doors about the house, were lined or edged with green baize, to prevent noise when shutting, and several of them had springs behind them to close them. 1864

NOTE: For the 1764 Second Floor plan see pencil sketch on back of ink receipt in Franklin's hand, dated May 17, 1764. Sketch probably made by Franklin before Nov. 7, 1764 when he departed for England.
Franklin pps. Vol. 66, p. 124, Am. Phil. Society Library.

CONJECTURAL

SECOND AND THIRD FLOOR PLANS

ARCHITECTURAL SUMMARY OF BENJAMIN FRANKLIN'S HOUSE

THIRD FLOOR UNKNOWNNS

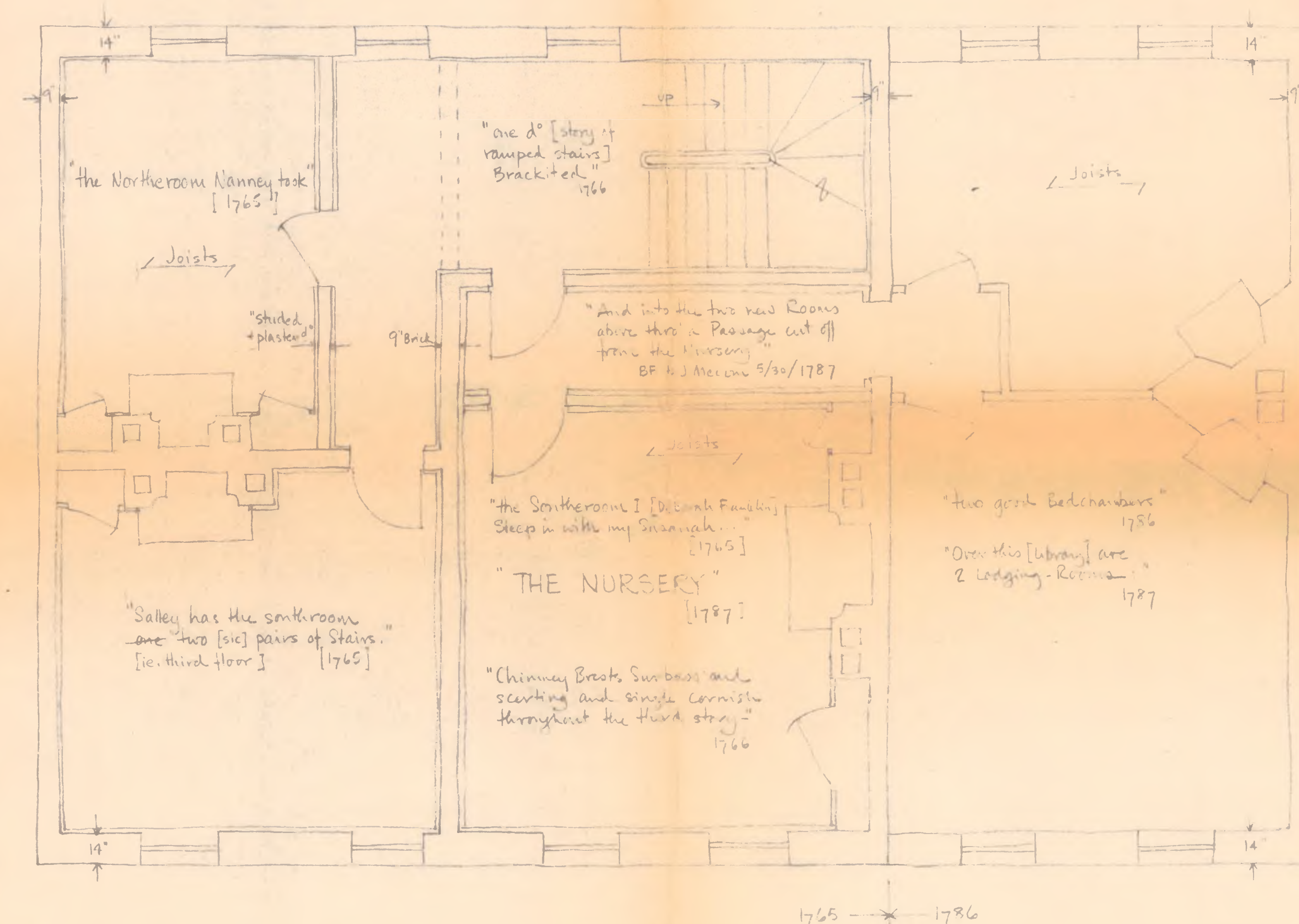
LOCATION OF:
Windows at stairhall?
Room division in 1787 addition?

DIMENSIONS OF:
Precise room sizes?
Floor to ceiling height?
Number + sizes of stair treads + risers?
Window openings + sill heights?
Door openings?
Fireplace openings?
Hearths?

DESIGN + CONFIGURATION OF:
Paneled chimney breasts + fireplace surrounds?
Chair rails?
Baseboards?
Single cornices?
Dormer architraves?
Window architraves?

MATERIALS, COLORS OR TEXTURES:
Interior trim colors?
Interior plaster walls + ceiling colors?
Flooring - yellow pine? board widths?
Hearth brick type?
Hardware - hinges? latches? locks?

POSSIBLE EXISTENCE OF:
Belt course?
Exterior shutters? Venetian?
Single hung sash?
Cornice fireplace in 1787 addition?
Hut rail at stairway?



"Sally has the southern room - one two [sic] pairs of Stairs." [i.e. third floor] 1765

"the Southern Room [where Franklin slept in with my Son-in-law] 1765
"THE NURSERY" 1787
"Chimney Breasts Surbases and scutling and single cornices throughout the third story." 1766

"two good Bedchambers" 1786
"Over this [library] are 2 Lodging-Rooms." 1787

SCALE: APPROXIMATELY 1/4" = 1'-0"
0' 5' 10' 15'

GARRET UNKNOWNNS

LOCATION OF:

Way out on Roof?
Knee walls?

DIMENSIONS OF:

Precise room sizes?
Floor to ceiling height?
Stair tread & riser number & sizes?
Door openings?
Window openings?
Fireplace openings? Hearths?

DESIGN & CONFIGURATION OF:

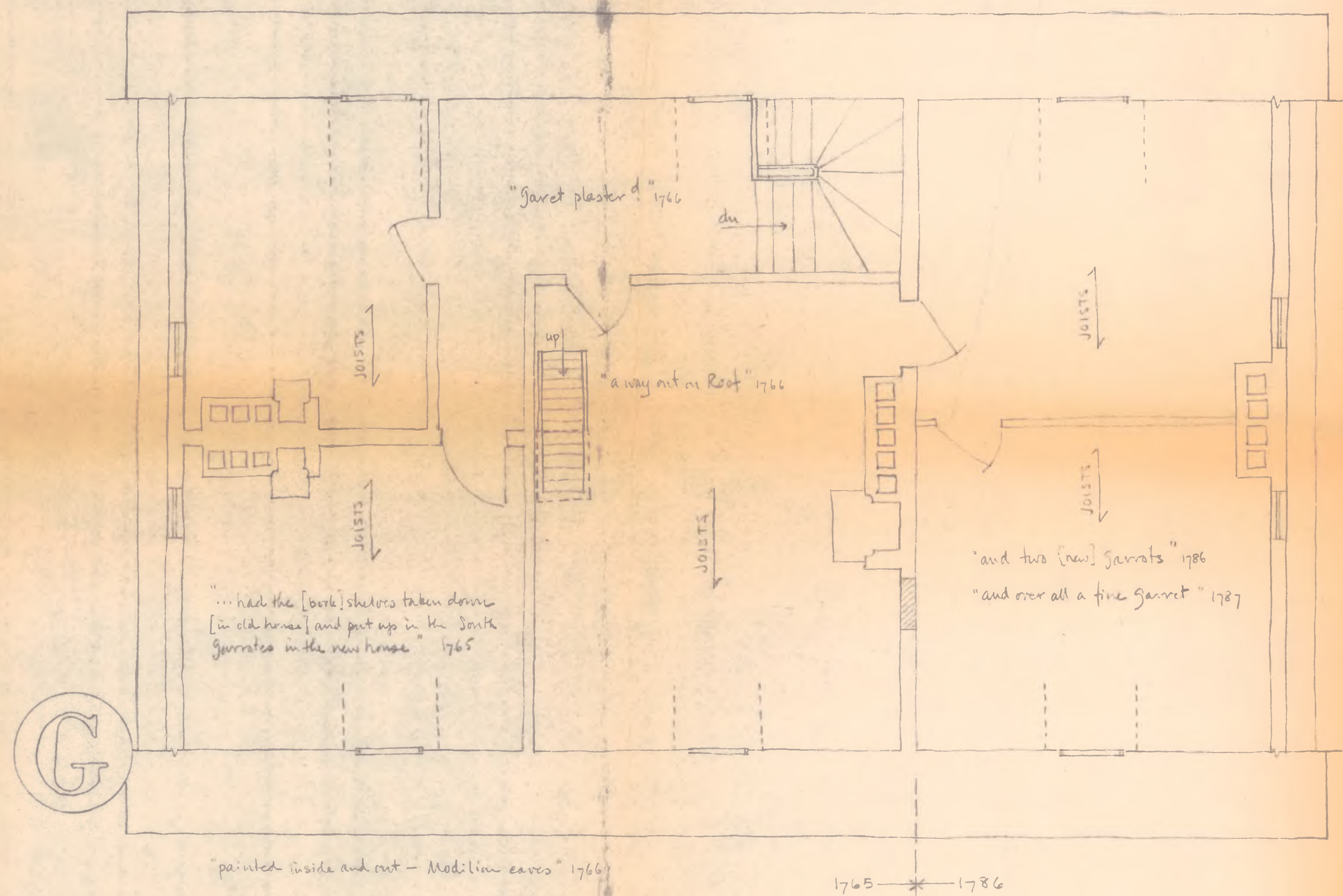
Modillion exterior cornice?
Ladder? to roof?
Fireplace surrounds?
Baseboards?
Window trim?
Door trim?
Stair rail?

MATERIALS, COLORS OR TEXTURES:

Flooring - white pine? board widths?
Plaster wall & ceiling colors?
Interior Trim Colors?
Exterior Trim Colors?

POSSIBLE EXISTENCE OF:

Dormer windows?
Gable end windows?
Modillion cornice returns on gable ends?
Board & plaster partitions?
Fireplace openings?
Winding stairway?



ROOF UNKNOWNNS

LOCATIONS OF:

Roof flat & trap door?
Railing between chimneys?
Dormers?

DIMENSIONS OF:

Roof slope?
Flat & Rail height?
Dormer windows?
Chimney heights & fire signs?

DESIGN & CONFIGURATION OF:

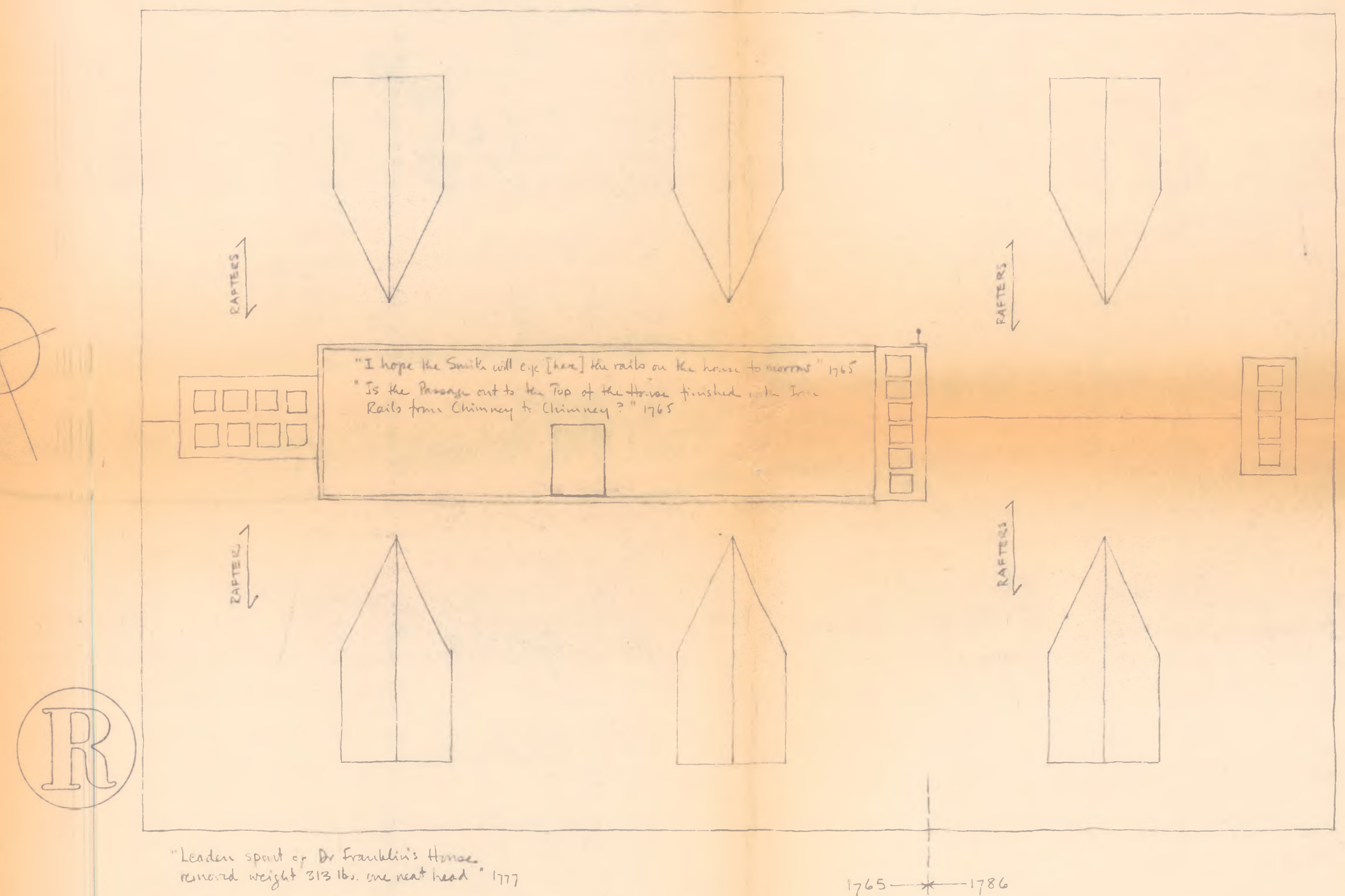
Chimney top courses?
Dormer windows?
Flat railing?

MATERIALS, COLORS OR TEXTURES:

Shingle roof - split cedar? bit ends?
No. of inches to weather?
Sheathing of flat?
Flashing - copper? lead?
Exterior trim color?

POSSIBLE EXISTENCE OF:

Pole gutters?
Valley flashing at dormers?



"Ladder span of Dr Franklin's House, removed weight 313 lbs. one neat head" 1777

"new sports, one a copper one in the room of the ladder are taken away by the public in the year 1777, for which I could get no payment;" 1781

1765 * 1786

In Philadelphia I had such a red [dark pointed] chimney rod fired to the top of my chimney, and extending about nine feet above it. From the foot of this rod, a wire (the thickness of a goose quill) came through a covered glass tube in the roof, and down through the wall of the stair case, the lower end connected with the iron spoke of a pump [see 2d Pl. plan to note of quote]. 1772

"Dr To last p^d for 2 Electrical Rods" 1778

Last year, when I was making some additions to the building, it was necessary to take down the construction" 1787

CONJECTURAL

GARRET AND ROOF PLANS

ARCHITECTURAL SUMMARY OF BENJAMIN FRANKLIN'S HOUSE

SCALE: APPROXIMATELY 1/4" = 1'-0"

