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Historical Research Report
Houses at 14, 18, 20 and 22 Christian Street

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HISTORICAL DATA

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Return to park.

STATEMENT OF LOCAL TRADITION AND
HEARSAY REGARDING THE STRUCTURES

One mile south of the main area of Independence National Historical Park, within view of the Delaware River, are four eighteenth century residences purchased by the National Park Service while carrying out the Congressional authorization "to provide a dignified open setting for Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Church." Three of these houses have been part of the setting since the 1760's; the other since the 1790's. One, at 14 Christian Street, is a separate unit; the three at 18, 20, and 22 are adjoining structures. All have suffered the ravages of time to an extent; the structural shells of all remain, one virtually intact (Illustration No. 1).

The tradesmen and shopkeepers who built these houses also lived in them and kept their businesses in them. In their small way, they contributed to the life of their times: in the by-ways if not the mainstream of commerce. Having built in the Indian summer of imperial relationships, following the ousting of the French from the North American continent, they lived to witness and take part in the establishing of a new nation. It is entirely likely that one or more of them stood in the crowd at Independence Square and listened to Colonel John Nixon read the Declaration of Independence, read publicly for the first time on July 8, 1776. While walking the streets of Philadelphia they observed, if they never joined, the swirl of celebrated figures who acted their parts in the Assembly Room of the State House and the chambers of Congress

Hall. They read and probably agreed with the diatribes of Benjamin Franklin Bache's Aurora, or they chuckled over the scurrilous abuse of William Cobbett's Peter Porcupine. They lent their presence to the galleries of courts, theaters, the equestrian circus. From their backyards they saw the frigate Philadelphia slide down the ways, be fitted for active service, and sail down river on the way to protect the young nation's commerce from French privateers and raiding Algerines and to burn in the harbor of Tripoli in 1804. They too were a part of the Philadelphia scene we are so fond of noting. They were the common people, who after a lifetime of toil and care over the small concerns of life, were laid to rest in the churchyards of Philadelphia.

The houses themselves were as anonymous as their owners. Of unimposing appearance they stirred no comment of record, invited no written descriptions, were the scenes of no events of any significance. No fashionable gatherings graced their tiny parlors. The very fact that these houses have endured so long when other better houses have been lost can be explained in terms of their utter lack of status: they began poor and have offered to the poor modest abodes even to the present. And they now offer nothing more elevated than their meaning as a humble remnant of Philadelphia and America's past.

The neighborhood to which these houses belong is one of the oldest in Philadelphia. Once included in a considerable land holding of the Swanson family, Swedish settlers who lived in a log house nearby,

it was then and for many years thereafter known by the name of Wicaco, the Indian village that had occupied the tract. The Swansons sold William Penn the land area of eighteenth century Philadelphia. Wicaco is the site of Gloria Dei, a mother church of the Swedish Lutheran denomination, built where it is in 1700 "that the name of the Swedes would ever be held in remembrance as their church [and graveyard] thus stood in view of vessels as they sailed upon the river." The church is a landmark to a phase of American colonization and has been declared a National Historic Site.

Wicaco's development as a community began in the eighteenth century. Early street names are suggestive of Swedish background: Queen and Christian (perhaps from Queen Christina during whose reign settlement took place) and Swanson, after the family of that name. By the time the Clarkson-Biddle map of Philadelphia appeared in 1762, groupings of houses had been built on these streets (Illustration No. 2). Most of them have survived to the present. Several on Christian Street and nearby Queen Street are reputed to be of Swedish origins and to reflect in their architecture several typically Swedish characteristics of house design.

Life in the community of the eighteenth century was centered on the waterfront. The names of the area's inhabitants at mid-century suggest a population more like that of the thriving port of Philadelphia than a throwback to the New Sweden of a hundred years before. The

nearby stretch of gravelled river-bank afforded good footing for ship-building. Across Swanson Street from the church Richard Dennis had his shipyard. Upriver from him were the counting house and ways of John Wharton, shipbuilder and factotum, who constructed the men-of-war Experiment and Enterprise for the Pennsylvania Navy during the Revolution and served as a member of the Continental Navy Board. On the other side, the wealthy merchant, Samuel Coates, had his wharf. South of these wharves and ways was the grand battery, constructed by Benjamin Franklin's Associates in 1748. It was at this location that Major Andre's Meschianza regatta with its British gallants and their Tory maids wound to its end in 1778. Later still, the Federal government located between the battery site and Gloria Dei the "U. S. Ship-yard" where Naval Constructor Joshua Humphreys, architect of the frigate Constitution, built the sister ship Philadelphia (Illustration Nos. 3 and 4). In 1801 the Government bought the battery site and established there the old Navy Yard.

Many of the residents of Wicaco thus followed the maritime trades: Shipwrights, ship carpenters, mastmakers, wharf builders, mariners, coopers, cordwainers, laborers, merchants, carters and, of course, tavernkeepers. Others listed in deedbooks, tax records, and directories were bricklayers, cabinetmakers, plasterers, tailors, and shopkeepers. They and their families lived in the little houses on the streets around the Swedish church, the ring of hammers, the creak of

block and tackle, and the many sights and sounds of building and loading in the air.

The Wicaco community was, until late in the eighteenth century, a unit of the Southwark district of Philadelphia County (Illustration No.4). By 1796 the built-up section of Philadelphia had reached Wicaco and in that year it, along with the rest of the Southwark district, was incorporated into the city. The 1796 Hills map of Philadelphia shows graphically for the first time the houses at 14, 18, and 20 Christian Street (Illustration No. 5).

As a neighborhood of Philadelphia, Wicaco has retained in general outline its appearance of the eighteenth century, the church at the center, ancient houses on the streets around it. The only notable addition to the setting from later periods is the Sparks shot tower, an 1808 structure, the first one in this country. Many intrusions mar the scene. The waterfront has been transformed by raising of modern piers, railroad trackage abounds on Delaware Avenue and Washington Street which are also main traffic arteries. Nineteenth century buildings intersperse the older homes.

KNOWLEDGE OF THE STRUCTURE
FROM DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE

Sixty years after the erection of Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Church, the vestry sold in three parcels the open area northwest of it, until that time a section of the church lot, to James Bayley, shipwright, Michael Sisk, plasterer, and Joseph Towne, shopkeeper. A condition of the sale was that a two-story house with cellar be built on each lot within two years.¹

Bayley's share of the property encompassed the lots now denominated 14, 16, and 18 Christian Street. He proved unable to meet his obligations and following seizure of the property in 1763 Sheriff Joseph Redman sold it to Frederick Detes, a tailor.² Detes sold the lots at 14 and 16 Christian Street to Samuel Davis, a carter.³ The lot at 18 Christian Street he sold to Aaron Middleton, a waterman.⁴

Sisk's share of the property encompassed the lot now denominated 20 Christian Street. Not having met the condition established in the deed that he build within two years, Sisk in 1762 sold the lot to George Rose, a baker.⁵

Towne's share of the property encompassed two lots now denominated 22 and 24 Christian Street. He kept them for the remainder of his life. The year after his death in 1771, his heirs sold the lot at 22 Christian Street to Rebecca Jones, a widow.⁶ After six years she in turn sold it to Philemon Dickinson, gentleman and civic figure.⁷ He sold it two years later to William Bingham, later Philadelphia's

wealthiest merchant and United States Senator, as part of a larger deal in real estate.⁸ Bingham sold it in 1795 to Joseph Marsh, Jr., a ship carpenter.⁹

14 Christian Street

Samuel Davis, the carter who found money enough to pay ground rents on two properties, 14 and 16 Christian Street, also managed to build two houses on them. While the record is not conclusive as to date of construction, the fact that he sold 16 Christian Street as house and lot in 1771 and was living in the house at 14 Christian Street in 1791 makes it a reasonable assumption that he bought with the intention of building, erecting the houses very soon thereafter.¹⁰

As viewed today, the house at 14 Christian Street is a two-and-one-half story building with a double-pitch roof and a two-story kitchen wing. The front is covered with permastone and the sides stuccoed, hiding the brick wall beneath. An old wood cornice and beaded rake rail are noticeable indications of the house's age (Illustration Nos. 1, 6). Inside, a number of items of original trim remain (Illustration Nos. 7, 8).

These characteristics are consonant with the documentary evidence. The first reference in any way descriptive of the premises is in the 1791 Philadelphia county assessment ledger, which gives it as a brick building with back building. This is corroborated by later tax records and deeds. Not until 1835, while in the ownership of one William Kelly, was the house insured for the first time (by Philadelphia's

Fire Association, Survey No. 8858):

a two Story Brick house & a two Story Kitchen No 12 [14]
Christan Street in the district of Southwark 17½ feet Frount
by 18 feet 4 depth 7 windows one Circular dormer 12 lights
10 by 12 Cedar Roof Broken pitch---
First Story 8½ feet oak Joice 8 inches 2 Closets plane wooden
Mantels Sap floors Winding Stars
2th Story 8 feet Base Entry 2 Closets Sap floor Garrit Base
Entry one Small Closet Sap floor
as a Kitchen 17 feet by 14 feet first Story 7½ feet 2 Closets
and Dresser
plane Wooden Mantel winden Stars Sap floor 2th Story 7 feet
1 Closet Sap floor Base Entry all finished in a plane manner

th
July 7 1835

L Paynter
Surveyer for the Company

The arrangement of rooms thus described can be found today on the second and third floors, along with entry and closet features (Illustration No. 8). The appearance of the survey at this time may indicate that changes adding to the value and thus the insurability of the house had just taken place. As the first floor trim is of nineteenth century character, it very possibly dates from that period.

No later surveys, prints, early photographs, or other materials of a graphic or descriptive nature have been located. Family papers, builders' records, plans, will inventories, or other manuscript or documentary materials relating to the house have not so far come to light.

18 Christian Street

Aaron Middleton, the waterman who bought the lot at 18 Christian Street from Frederick Detes, built a house on it sometime before 1783, when the deed of sale establishes a "certain house" at the site.¹² It

can be assumed that Middleton built soon after buying the lot.

To all outward appearances, 18 Christian Street is a non-historic building. Its front has undergone a face-lifting and a wall of recent vintage brick has been laid over the old wall. However, a dormer of an early type peeps over the brick cornice (Illustration No. 4). Inside and outside it has been thoroughly rehabilitated for twentieth century living. Few original features remain in the house, a mite of panelling and a brick floor and arches in the cellar the exceptions (Illustration No. 9).

Judging from the description of the premises given in the only known insurance survey, the house was a simple one even at the start (Fire Association Survey No. 8859):

a two Story Brick Dwelling house on the South Side of Christian Street No 16 [18]
Seventeen feet Six inches front by Twenty three feet 6 inches depth- 3 windows front all with Shutters one and one fourth inch thick- Sash Single hung Sallid fram^es- Back 2 windows one with Shutters
a d^ouble pitch Cedar Roof a 9 lighth d^ouble pitch Dormer ditto a 9 light Singel pitch back do and a Circular door front 2 inches thick
First Story 9 feet one Room one parlor two wooden mantel no Closet all the floors in the house Sap wide boards
Second Story Eight feet 6 inches 2 Rooms 2 Closets a plane wooden mantel paneled doors one inch thick Sash Single hung-window Stars Garret not plasterd

ditto a two Story Brick Kitchen Twenty Six feet depth By Eleven feet Six and Nine feet Six 7 windows Three with Shutters a Single pitch Cedar Roof
First Story Seven feet 2 inches 2 Rooms 2 Closets 2 Cornish Mantels all the floors ^{Jersey Hart Pine} Sap-boards-wide

Second Story Seven feet 2 inches 2 Rooms one Closet no Mantels
doors paneled one inch thick- Sash not hung -- an Entry between
the house and Kitching for the Stars

the
October 26 - 1837

L. Paynter
Survey for the Company

Only the second floor then had panelling, and that was limited to the partition of the board newell stairs. Of interest is the plainness of the first floor, embellished only by two wooden mantels. The attic in 1837 was unplastered.

Like the house at 14 Christian Street, the record of Middleton's house is bare. An inconspicuous little building, it simply did not encourage graphic, descriptive or documentary treatment.

20 Christian Street

George Rose, the baker who bought the lot at 20 Christian Street from Sisk in 1762, proceeded immediately to build the house which, very largely intact, still stands on the site. By spring of the following year he had taken out insurance on a partially built house at that location.¹³ Like practically all the houses of that period in the vicinity, the house has two-and-a-half stories, a gabled dormer, and a later kitchen addition. It also has an arched passageway leading to the yard in the rear. All the characteristic elements of eighteenth century small house facades are present in Rose's: wooden cornice, pegged window casings, cellar door, and marble steps.

The insurance survey shows an unplastered house with the second floor woodwork finished (Philadelphia Contributionship Survey No. 815):

Survey'd the 2 Day of May 1763 a New unfinnished house
for George Rose Situate on the South-Side of Christian
Street Between front and Warton Street in the Districk
of South Worck near the Sweeds Church.....
20 feet front including a 3 feet Alley 24 feet Back &
2 Storeys high 9 inch partey Wallis - The floors are
lay'd the upper Stairs are Carried up
he intend Iron Rails up in a few Days.....
the Carpenters Work in the Chamber is finnished and
No Other part - The Carpenters Now at Work.

No. 815 (signed) Wm. Dillworth

Deserves 150 or 200 pounds
£200 at 25% when Iron Rails are put at Top

The first floor, if intended for use as a bakery shop, would have been finished with next to no trim. The suggestion of "Carpenters Work in the Chamber" ties in with the excellently preserved panelling of the second floor (Illustration Nos. 10, 11, 12). On the first floor, by contrast, the woodwork at all but the doorway leading upstairs is nineteenth century in character (Illustration No. 13). Fine sets of "HL" hinges, scalloped shelves, beaded baseboard, handsome chair rail, and board for pegs in closets are in place in the second floor rooms (Illustration Nos. 10, 11, 12).

That Rose went on to finish the house is implied: "The Carpenters Now at Work." (See insurance survey above.) His insuring it indicates that it was a better than ordinary house for the neighborhood. He did not own it for long. Perhaps Rose had overreached himself, for Sheriff

William Parr seized and sold the property at public vendue in 1765 to Hannah Jenkins, a widow.¹⁴ It remained in her family throughout the remainder of the eighteenth century, and finally in 1815 was purchased by a baker, named Oto Henry Jahrens.¹⁵ At his death in 1826 Jahrens left the property to his wife. It remained in the hands of his descendants until 1873 and is designated on the Hexamer and Locker map for 1860 as a bakery "1st class," meaning it had a non-combustible roof.¹⁶ It may be that the shed-roofed addition in the rear served as the bakery and dates from this period (Illustration No. 14). Apparently, the house served as a bakery and residence, at least off and on during the first hundred years, and as a structure, was adapted for use as both.

22 Christian Street

The last of the four houses was built many years after the other three, and is as widely separated from them in scale and type. Joseph Marsh, Jr., the ship carpenter, having acquired the lot in 1795, began to build without delay. By 1796 the tax records refer to an "unfinished 3 story brick house" at No. 22 Christian Street.¹⁷

Further knowledge, except for the identity of successive owners, must come from the building itself. No later surveys or graphic or documentary materials of the post-1795 period have yet been found. The building represents two or more periods in externals and interiors. From the outside it is representative of houses of the 1790's owned by people of some substance. This can be attributed in no small measure

to the skills of Joseph Marsh rather than his station in life or success in business. Its generous proportions and structural quality are apparent, and it possesses such marks of breeding as stone band course, water table, dormer with arched window, and intricate cornice. Window casings of the second and third floors of the front and all of those in the back, as well as the back cornice and dormer, are of eighteenth century design (Illustration No. 14).

The interiors are of quite another period. With the exception of arches in the hallways, some trim on the second floor, and doors, trim, and mantel on the third floor, they are mid-nineteenth century (Illustration No. 15). A three-story kitchen wing is no better documented than the house.

From Marsh the house passed to a "gentleman" in 1828, a blacksmith in 1831, a merchant in the same year, and a ship carpenter in 1836.¹⁰ The ship carpenter and his family owned it until 1872, and in all likelihood he made the changes to the interior.

NAME OF ARCHITECT
OR DESIGNER

All four houses are conventional Philadelphia row houses, following patterns well known to the highly developed and organized carpenters' trade in the Philadelphia of the 1750-1800 period. No professional architect or designer was in any way associated with them. They stem rather from prototypes of that day in the Southwark and Cheapside districts of London, England.

NAME OF BUILDER

None of the builders has been identified.

NAME OF OWNER IN
HISTORIC PERIOD

14 Christian Street

Samuel Davis, the carter who had the house built, lived in it until his death in 1800 and willed it to his son John, a cabinet-maker.¹⁹

18 Christian Street

Aaron Middleton, the waterman who had the house built, rented it until 1783. John Turner, a shipwright, who bought it from Middleton, is believed to have lived there until his death in the 1830's.²⁰

20 Christian Street

George Rose, the baker who had the house built, owned it for two years before its seizure and sale by the sheriff of Philadelphia County to Hannah Jenkins, a widow. She and her heirs owned it for the remainder of the period.²¹

22 Christian Street

Joseph Marsh, Jr., the ship carpenter who built the house, lived there throughout the historic period.²²

Although these four houses can claim no association with important figures and events in the nation's history, they are intimately and long associated with Gloria Dei National Historic Site. They are also important elements of the historic neighborhood in which they stand, as noted above recognized by city historical authorities.

If they had been considered for inclusion in the Historic Structures Inventory, they might have been classed as BBB buildings: "Structure Part of Historic Scene" to be restored.

Chapter II
Notes

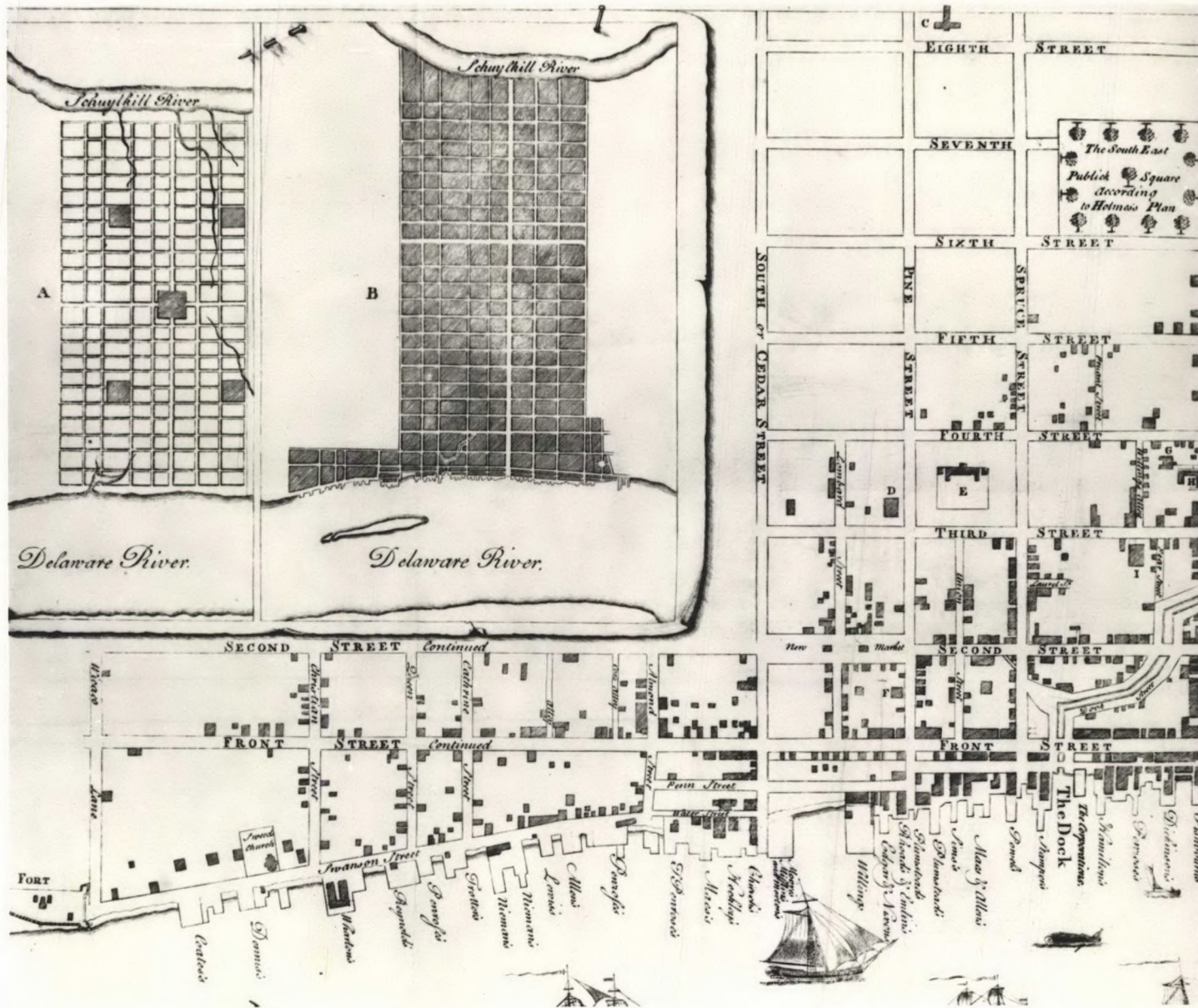
1. Deed Book H-6, 370-373, Department of Records, Philadelphia City Hall.
2. Sheriff Deed Book A-1, 325, Records of Court of Common Pleas, Philadelphia City Hall.
3. Deed Book D-72, 256-258, Department of Records, Philadelphia City Hall.
4. Deed Book SHF-19, 61-62, Department of Records, Philadelphia City Hall.
5. Deed Book H-16, 373-374, Department of Records, Philadelphia City Hall.
6. Deed Book D-1, 229-231, Department of Records, Philadelphia City Hall; Will Book P, 265-267, Department of Wills, Philadelphia City Hall.
7. Deed Book, D-1, 231-233, Department of Records, Philadelphia City Hall.
8. Deed Book D-29, 138-191, Department of Records, Philadelphia City Hall.
9. Deed Book D-60, 102-104, Department of Records, Philadelphia City Hall.
10. Deed Book SHF-19, 63-65, Department of Records, Philadelphia City Hall; Southwark, County Assessment Ledger (1791-1796), 1791, 47, Philadelphia City Archives.
11. Southwark County Assessment Ledger (1791-1796), 1792, 42; 1794, 49; 1795, 58; Deed Books MR-12, 611-613; MR-12, 613-614; GWR-4, 224-225; GWR-5, 90-92, and ADB-120, 442-444 Department of Records, Philadelphia City Hall.
12. Deed Book SHF-19, 62-63, Department of Records, Philadelphia City Hall. A waterman was a seaman, a boatman, or a water-carrier. In light of Middleton's continued residence in the Wicaco neighborhood, it would appear that he was a boatman. If a seaman, he would have been so identified. A boatman in London was licensed for his work on the Thames and presumably knew pilotage. As the owner of several properties, Middleton may have been a barge-man with fair income.
13. Survey #815 dated May 2, 1763, Philadelphia Contributionship Records.
14. Deed Book I-1, 424-26, Department of Records, Philadelphia City Hall.
15. Deed Books IC-30, 475-476; MR-2, 722-24, Department of Records, Philadelphia City Hall.

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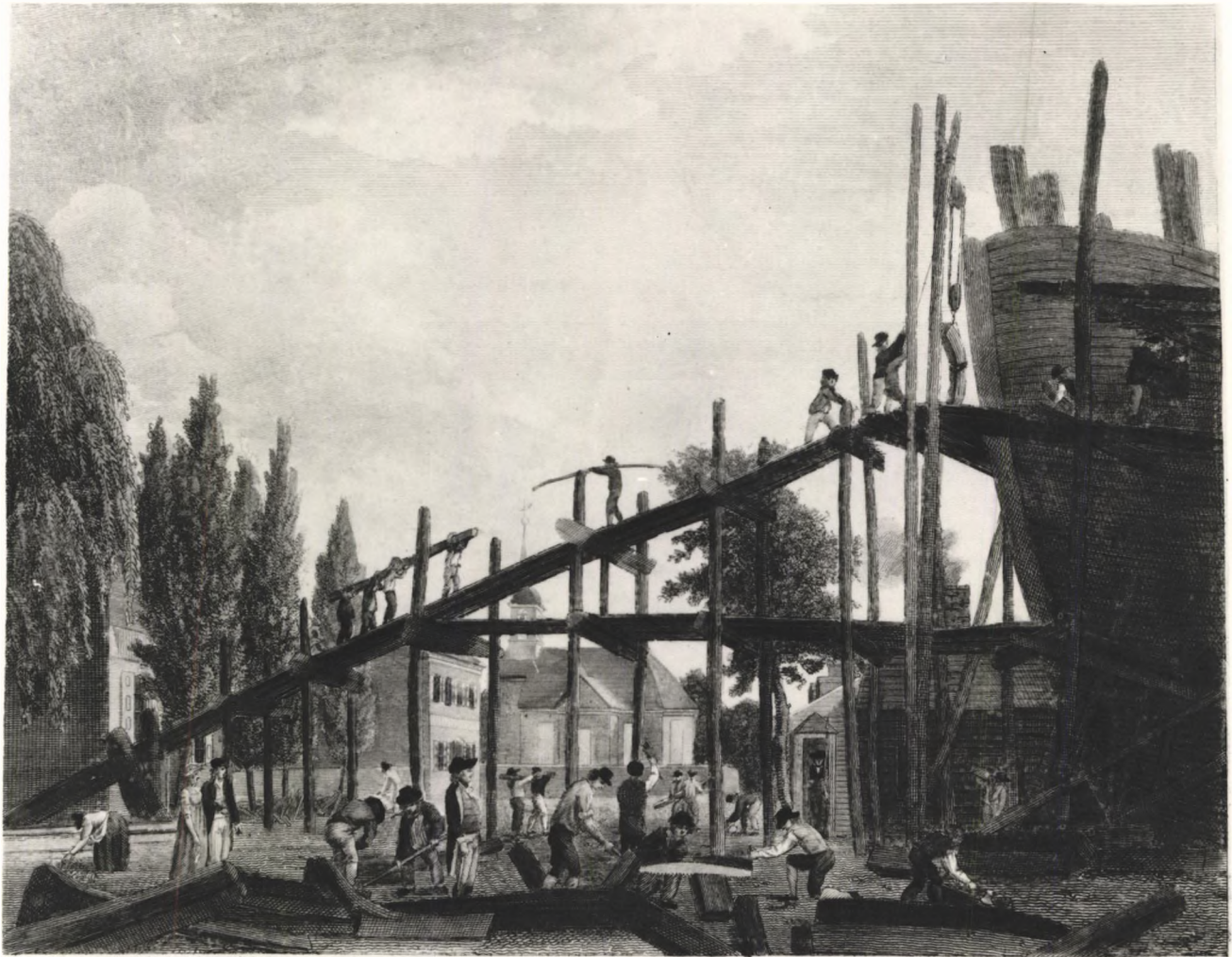
16. Deed Books FTW-43, 553-556, Department of Records, Philadelphia City Hall; Will Book 38, 352-354, Department of Wills, Philadelphia City Hall.
17. Southwark County Assessment Ledger (1791-1796) 1796, 14, City Archives, Philadelphia City Hall.
18. Deed Books SHF-3, 683-684, 684-686, AM-20, 311-313, and GS-38, 284-287 Department of Records, Philadelphia City Hall.
19. Will Book Y, 360-363, Department of Wills, Philadelphia City Hall.
20. Deed Book SHF-19, 62-63, Department of Records and Will Book 11, 81-83 Department of Wills, Philadelphia City Hall.
21. Deed Books I-1, 424-26, IC-30, 475-476, MR-2, 722-724, Department of Records, Philadelphia City Hall.
22. Sheriff Deed Book C, 418, Records, Court of Common Pleas, Philadelphia City Hall.



Nos. 14-24 Christian Street, 1957. Brick veneer house is at 18 Christian Street, house with "7 up" sign at 20, and three story house at 22. Courtesy of Philadelphia Historical Commission.



Detail from Clarkson-Biddle Map of City of Philadelphia, 1762. Christian, Queen, and Swanson Streets are at lower left. The "Grand Battery" is denominated "Fort" at extreme left. Engraving, Courtesy of Library of Congress.



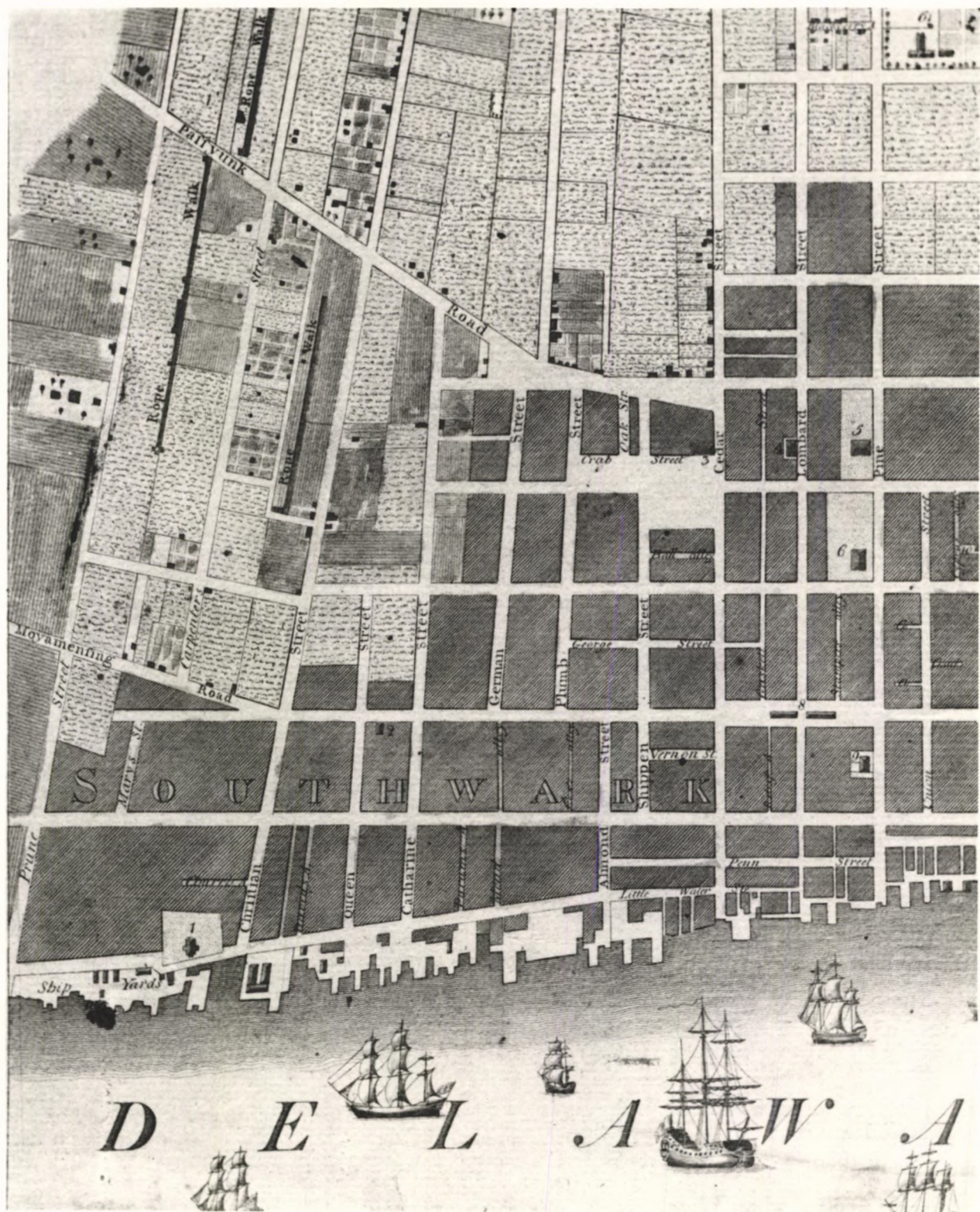
Drawn Engraved & Published by W. Birch & Son.

Sold by R. Campbell & Co. N 530 Chestnut Street Philad^a 1800.

Preparation for **WAR** to defend Commerce.

The Swedish Church Southwark with the building of the FRIGATE PHILADELPHIA.

Wicaco as it appeared from the Delaware River in 1800, the Philadelphia on the ways at the right, Gloria Dei (Old Swedes') Church in center background, houses of neighborhood to right. Engraving by William Birch, 1800. Courtesy of Historical Society of Pennsylvania.



Wicaco at century's end is shaded over at lower left. Humphrey's "Ship Yards" buildings are in location indicated in Illustration No. 3. Detail from Benjamin Davies Map of the City of Philadelphia, 1794. Courtesy of Library of Congress.



Houses are to right of church, designated by numeral "1" at lower left. John Hills Map of the City of Philadelphia, 1796. Courtesy of Library of Congress.



No. 14 Christian Street from northwest, 1960. Window and door openings are conventional for period. Dormer and front door give evidence of nineteenth century remodelling. National Park Service photo.



Second floor front room of No. 14 Christian Street, 1963. Deeply recessed panels over closet, pegged joinery and fireplace wall, cornice and door at left are survivals from house of 1760's. Fireplace, brick hearth, and flooring also date from this period. National Park Service photo.



Garret, No. 14 Christian Street, 1963. Deeply recessed panels of door, beaded baseboard, closet, and flooring date to 1760's. National Park Service photo.



Front of cellar of No. 18 Christian Street, looking northeast, 1963. Note eighteenth century brick floor and arches. National Park Service photo.



Second floor, front room of No. 20 Christian Street, looking east, 1963. Original architectural features include "HL" hinges, beaded base board, deeply-recessed panelling, chair rail, flooring, door, and casing. In hallway can be seen board newell staircase, in place since 1762-1763. National Park Service photo.



Second floor, front room of No. 20 Christian Street, looking east, 1963, closet doors open. Board for cloak pegs can be seen in closet at right, shelf profiles in closet at left. National Park Service photo.



A beautiful small room: second floor, back room, No. 20 Christian Street, looking east, 1963. Panelled wall is intact survival from 1762-1763. Double architrave of cornice and shaped shelf of double-doored closet mark this as room of importance to house. Note also "HL" hinges, details of fireplace, and chair rail at left. National Park Service photo.



First floor, No. 20 Christian Street, looking east, 1963. Stairway leading to the second story is original, other trim of nineteenth century character. National Park Service photo.



Rear facades of Nos. 20 (at left) and 22
Christian Street looking north, 1963.
National Park Service photo.



First floor hallway of No. 22 Christian Street
looking south, 1963. National Park Service photo.