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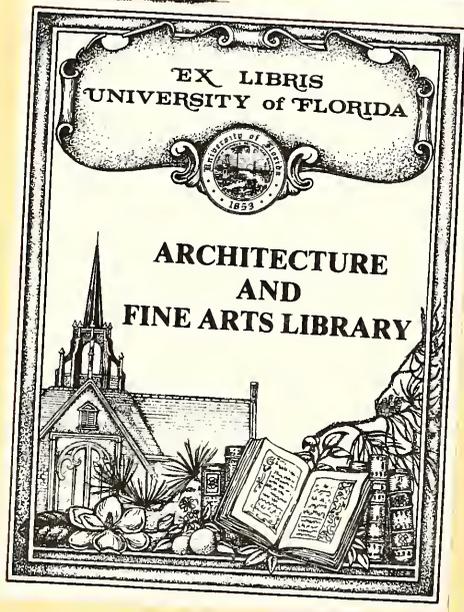
# THE RESIDENTIAL ARCHITECTURE OF RICHARDSON BROGNARD OKIE OF PHILADELPHIA

compiled by Ronald S. Senseman,  
Leon Brown, Edwin Bateman Morris,  
and Charles T. Okie

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JOHN L. GRAND, A.I.A.

Gainesville, Florida

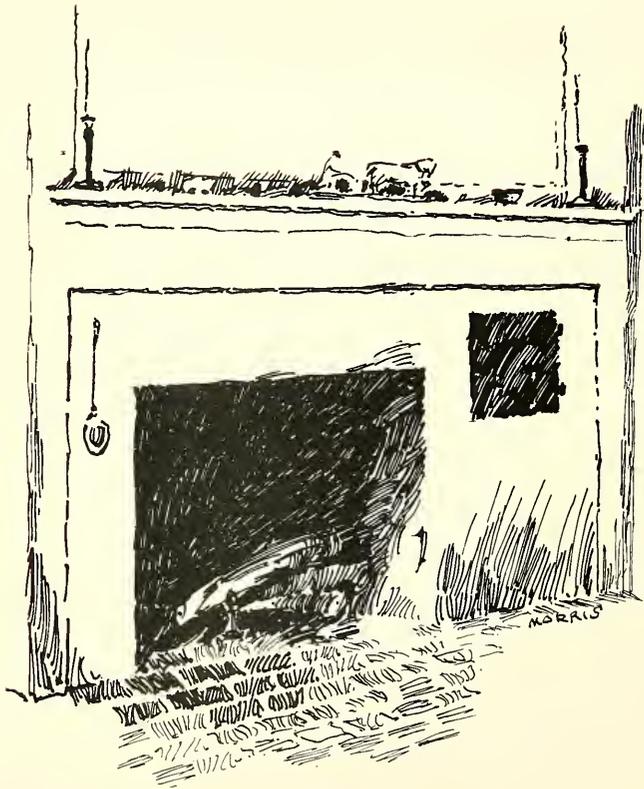


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Photographs by  
Philip B. Wallace and  
Charles W. Bentz

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Fireplace in house for Dr. James P. Hutchinson. Brognard Okie liked the brick floors of the old farm houses, some of which, however, had worn badly. He used a durable, close-textured brick which was in effect a quarry tile.

RICHARDSON BROGNARD OKIE,

doing residential and other intimate architecture in Philadelphia from the turn of the century until 1945, was completely absorbed in his work. When selected for advancement to Fellow of the Institute, he found he could not bring himself to accept publicly reward for achievement which in itself he regarded as ample reward.

Yet that simplicity of intent resulted in straightforward architectural expression – in essential elements well put together – which is and should be architecture. Even in that period before Modern Architecture, therefore, he was thus enunciating in naive spirit principles which were later to become part of the *magna carta* of Modern Architecture.

In the early years of the century, when I was grinding out required sketches, I made a labored drawing of a pleasant stable group of his somewhere in the Chester Valley, a smooth undecorated thing among fine trees. Meeting him on the road one day, I told him I liked it. He recognized, of course, an unbaked undergraduate appraisal, but he said kindly "It is a simple thing" standing for a moment before he went on, as if the phrase brought something of importance to mind. He had evidently been thinking strongly upon that text, for it was about that time that his work began to take on that unusual and appealing simplicity.

His buildings began to show the flavor and atmosphere of the early Pennsylvania farm houses. In these the stonework and carpentry was uncomplicated, done often by community effort rather than by professional hands. Often later need and prosperity caused informal wings to be added, resulting in quaint roof joinings. His houses emphasized this homespun appeal, achieving a functionalism joined with picturesqueness, which is in a sense true architectural design. It is architectural design if you believe functionalism is being as simple as the structural frame and if you believe picturesqueness is beauty simply told.

One of his distinguished clients wrote a book about life in an Okie-designed house – a charming word portrait of a home by one skilled in painting with words. He was the novelist Joseph Hergesheimer, whose house is reproduced in these pages. An architect who could build such a house so sweetly fitting the life and needs of a man sensitive as Hergesheimer had achieved something. It was indicative of insight, keen understanding, and skill in creating companionable beauty. In other words, he understood about a house.

He did understand, about a house, that there was the need for comfort without (important item) ostentation. If, and this is doubtless true, the lack of charm and beauty simply told spelled doom for traditional architecture, Brognard Okie had the

distinction of leaning toward the correction for that, for he moved forward trying not so much to design charm and beauty simply told, as to find it.

Therefore we present these pictures of his work, not that the forms, necessarily, will be followed or always fully approved, but that the spirit behind them is an everlasting sort of thing, underlining the fact that architecture is something to be lived in and near, that it must have no affectations, that it must look as though inner needs had been achieved – and in a livable manner.



House of  
C. P. Schilling  
Bryn Athun, Pa.



House of  
L. H. Parsons  
Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania



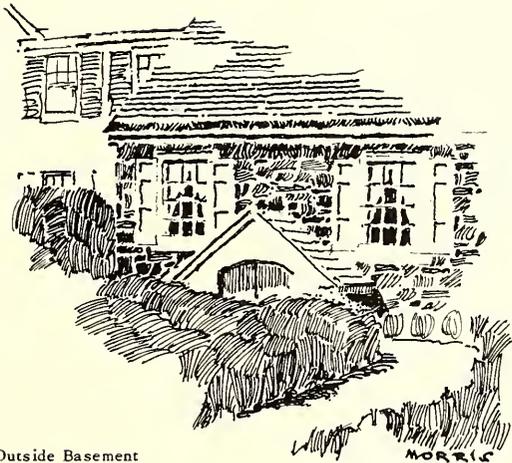
House of  
Justice Owen J. Roberts  
Kimberton, Pennsylvania



House of  
Justice Owen J. Roberts



House of  
Herbert C. Egmore  
Radnor, Pennsylvania



Outside Basement  
Entrance  
House for Wm. H. Taylor

AN APPRECIATION OF THE WORK  
OF RICHARDSON BROGNARD OKIE  
by George S. Koyl - from the A.I.A.  
Journal of November 1949.

SOME YEARS HAVE PASSED SINCE A tragic turn of Fate took from the profession one of its "most sensitive and individualistic" practitioners. Richardson Brognard Okie, of Devon, lost his life in an automobile accident on December 25, 1945. Many examples of his distinguished work dot the Pennsylvania countryside as monuments to his artistic genius.

R. Brognard Okie was born in Camden, N. J., on June 26, 1875. Realizing that the son's aptitudes lay in some field other than his own, his father, a physician, enrolled him in Haverford College for the study of civil engineering. The son, however, decided upon architecture as a career and transferred after two years to his father's Alma Mater, the

University of Pennsylvania, graduating in the class of 1897. Four members of that class of twenty-four, among them Brognard Okie, have been raised to date to Fellowship in The Institute.

His post-college employment was with the architect, Arthur Stanley Cochrane, of Philadelphia, but he soon associated himself with two other young men, Herman Louis Duhring and Carl Ziegler, in a partnership which was never tainted by written agreements and which continued on the most friendly terms for twenty years when, due to the exigencies of World War I, it came to an end. The extensive work of that firm in country houses gave direction to this field of practice with which the name of R. Brognard Okie is so inseparably associated.

He loved the country and the soil. He lived that kind of life at his ninety-acre farm near Devon, Pa. He took pride in his stable of fine horses and was one of the first to exhibit in the annual Devon Horse Show. He had an antipathy toward mechanical contrivances such as the automobile, however convenient for extensive travel with his son, Charles, throughout Pennsylvania in the search for fine examples of early Dutch buildings. His tours over the less frequented byways of southeastern Pennsylvania always with a six-foot rule in his hip pocket, measuring details and collecting odd pieces of old hardware, resulted in a knowledge of early American architecture which is so strongly reflected in his own work. His mastery of its design and peculiarities of construction resulted in many opportunities for the restoration of old homes and small rural churches.

In 1925 he was appointed by the Women's Committee of the Philadelphia Sesqui-centennial Exposition, architect for the reconstruction of High Street, in which he chose as associates for the complex historical undertaking, Ellison Perot Bissell and John P. R. Sinkler. Eleven years later, upon the recommendation of a Committee of the Philadelphia Chapter, he was selected as architect for the recreation of Pennsbury Manor, the country home of William Penn, some twenty-six miles north of Philadelphia on the west bank of the Delaware.

Exhaustive research resulted in eminently noteworthy accomplishments in these two difficult assignments. The High Street restoration, necessarily of staff construction, was cited as one of the two most successful parts of the Sesquicentennial. Pennsbury Manor now stands in all its original dignity, restored as was Williamsburg, Va., from the scanty remains of foundation walls and scraps of pavement. In this case he was guided by letters, filled with detailed instructions, from Penn, detained in England during the fifteen years of its construction, to James Harrison, steward of his "Plantation at Pennsbury" in Pennsylvania. Begun in 1683 and completed in 1700, construction suffered the vicissitudes prevailing at that time of long delays in the shipment of materials; this is clearly interpreted in the clapboard protection of thin brick walls for the rear portions of the Manor house and in the Office of the Plantation.

However important these works are as essays in the realm of the historical, it is in the design of country houses that his sensitiveness and individualistic genius are best illustrated. It is no small tribute that his work has been frequently used by the speculative house builder as a source of inspiration. In restorations such as the Betsy Ross House on Arch Street, Philadelphia; or in the Paxton, Silver Spring and Winchester Presbyterian Churches; or the interiors of St. Peter's Church in the Valley at Cedar Hollow; or in the numerous restorations and additions to old Pennsylvania Dutch country houses, as well as in houses and their dependencies entirely of his own design, his qualities as artist and master builder are especially apparent.

Among the earlier works was that of the Main House at Valley Forge Farms for Secretary Philander Knox, completed while associated with Duhring and Ziegler. Restorations and additions to the house for Justice Owen J. Roberts, near Kimberton, Pa.; restoration of Redding Furnace, home of Arthur E. Pew, Jr., and to the house of Dr. and Mrs. John E. Livingood, of Robeson, Pa., are characteristic. The complete houses of Mr. and Mrs. Charles A. Higgins, London Grove, Pa.; of Mr. and Mrs. Ernst R. Behrend, at Erie, Pa.; of Mr. and Mrs. Ledlie I. Laughlin, at Princeton, N. J., and of Mr. and Mrs. Nicholas R. duPont, Wilmington, Del., may be taken as examples from a long list of his own works. It is a solid tribute that each of several of his clients claims his own house to be the Master Work of Brognard Okie.

One recognizes in houses of his design the common denominator of undressed field-

stone walls, with either pointed or struck joints, a material which abounds, often on the site, in the southeastern Pennsylvania areas. His love for this material with pointed joints is evidenced by its use, eighteen inches thick, for exterior walls of the principal portions of a house and for gable ends of secondary or service wings where the fieldstone with struck joint or clapboard finish otherwise predominates. Door and window frames of solid oak or cypress, and sills cut out of 6" x 8" pieces of solid white oak were his usual practice. The flat lintel, built of three stones including the center key, or the segmental arch of the same undressed fieldstone, maintain the over-all uniform character of walls. Along the eaves of facade there is usually a prominent square box cornice with pole gutter. Three-inch leaders without leaderheads drop, apparently without anchorage, to a 5" x 5" wood shoe. Thin bargeboards on gable ends pass most often unbroken by the chimney to the ridge, the gable effect being increased by setting the chimney back sufficiently from the wall face for a narrow strip of overlapping shingles. These few details are mentioned only because they have a special character throughout his work.

Chimneys are a feature of his houses, just as are the fireplaces within. Of generous size, beautifully proportioned, they are always well related to walls and roofs. His special concern is illustrated by the story of one client who, upon visiting his house one day, found the workmen demolishing a chimney; he ordered them to stop, implying his right to restrict the extent of alterations on his own house. When he returned the next day he found the demolition almost complete. He rushed to a telephone to remonstrate with architect, whose answer was that he had ordered the workmen to tear down the old chimney and was himself paying for the construction of one to take its place. He was known to have demolished a chimney of his own design and to have replaced it at his own expense with corrections incorporated. To him, old Dutch farmhouse chimneys rarely needed more than being restored to their original state.

Restorations were not done to produce effect. Rather, each small part was reconstructed according to historical precedent and the effect was automatic. No detail was too small to be worthy of his concentrated attention. The detailing of the unseen but important rafters of white oak usually tapered, fish-tailed, halved and oak-pinned without ridge boards; the rabbetted, tapered and beaded clapboards; variety in design of latches and other hardware for exterior or interior, illustrate the point. Sound construction and

interesting design resulted from long hours of study on many large-scale drawings. All hardware was carefully drawn full-size – his own large collection of old pieces serving as inspiration for new designs. Modern heating, air conditioning, lighting and plumbing were naturally incorporated with no concessions to their inevitability.

Brogard Okie's architecture is the expression of an American way of life. It epitomizes his own culture and refinement as well as that of his clients. Naturally retiring and modest, his work attained high qualities by reason of his insistence upon perfection, and is a personification of the Pennsylvania countryside which he cherished so greatly as to make it the chief theme of his career—a distinguished contribution to a fine tradition in American architecture.



House of James Cox Brady





House of  
L. H. Parsons  
Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania  
(opposite page and  
above)



House of  
Wm. H. Taylor  
Sugartown, Pennsylvania



House of  
N. M. Seabrease  
White Horse Pike, Pennsylvania



House of  
N. M. Seabrease



House of  
N. M. Seabrease



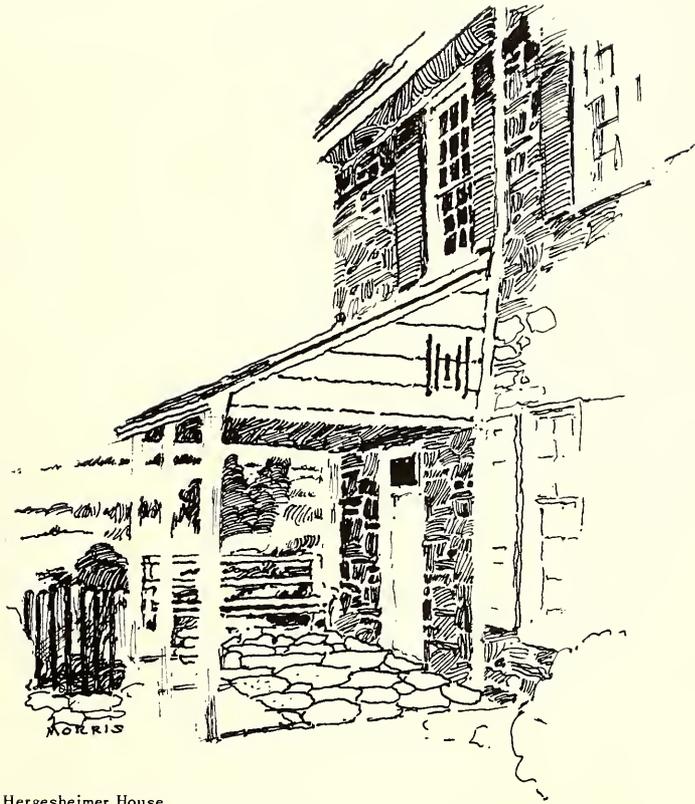
House of  
N. M. Seabreeze



House for  
Mrs. Mary Gyger  
Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania



House for  
Joseph Hergesheimer  
West Chester, Pennsylvania



Hergesheimer House

**T**HE JOSEPH HERGESHEIMER HOUSE in West Chester, Pennsylvania, is an example of the livability of houses built or renovated by Brognard Okie. Hergesheimer, a novelist of the Depression and pre-Depression era, was a writer of great charm of expression and of deep feeling. His house, known as "Dower House", its first portion built in 1712, was, in the middle twenties, remodelled by Brognard Okie, to be an appealing place of great simplicity, which the emotional and feeling Hergesheimer enjoyed with a full-souled appreciation.



Hergesheimer House

His fine book "From an Old House" pours out his satisfaction in living there, from the first touch of morning until late at night. He speaks, naively, of not being able to tear himself away from his beautiful night-enveloped terrace to go to bed.

Few architects are fortunate enough to have clients like that, to whom a house is

a sweet part of life. Hergesheimer does not speak of appealing details of the house, though these were during construction deeply important to him, but of its feel, its surrounding embrace. He describes a house which he considers a perfection of residence. No greater accolade for achievement in architectural design of pleasantly enclosing spaces could perhaps have been given.

Hergesheimer was an ideal Brognard Okie client. He speaks of a first set of plans as "not simple enough", the stone facade being too broken up for the novelist's desire. A second set was simpler and better. And then there was a rendering in color which delighted Hergesheimer.

After some fear and some reluctance to change, Hergesheimer relates he found a special congeniality with the architect, in their common passion for detail. He found an evident and glowing interest by Brognard Okie in all the little matters of the house, a thing that later made it livable and affectionately close to its owner.

Thus they did the house right, without being too much swayed by cost. Wide boards, hand-wrought nails, oak door frames pinned with oak pins, hand-split cypress shingles, old hardware, all became necessary. The novelist derided himself for extravagance, but was built up by the fact that he was getting a house that was completely his and that was tailored to him.

In the ability to make the client bring forth his inner desires, the architect was outstandingly gifted. He was thus able to design houses to fit the deeper desires of their owners. Thus the Brognard Okie houses were not just construction, but places congenial to occupants, where they lived and enjoyed the happiness of the world.



High Street

In 1925 Brognard Okie was appointed by the Women's Committee of the Philadelphia Sesquicentennial Exposition architect for the reconstruction of High Street in early Philadelphia. He chose as assistants Ellison Perot Bissell and John P. B. Sinkler.



High Street

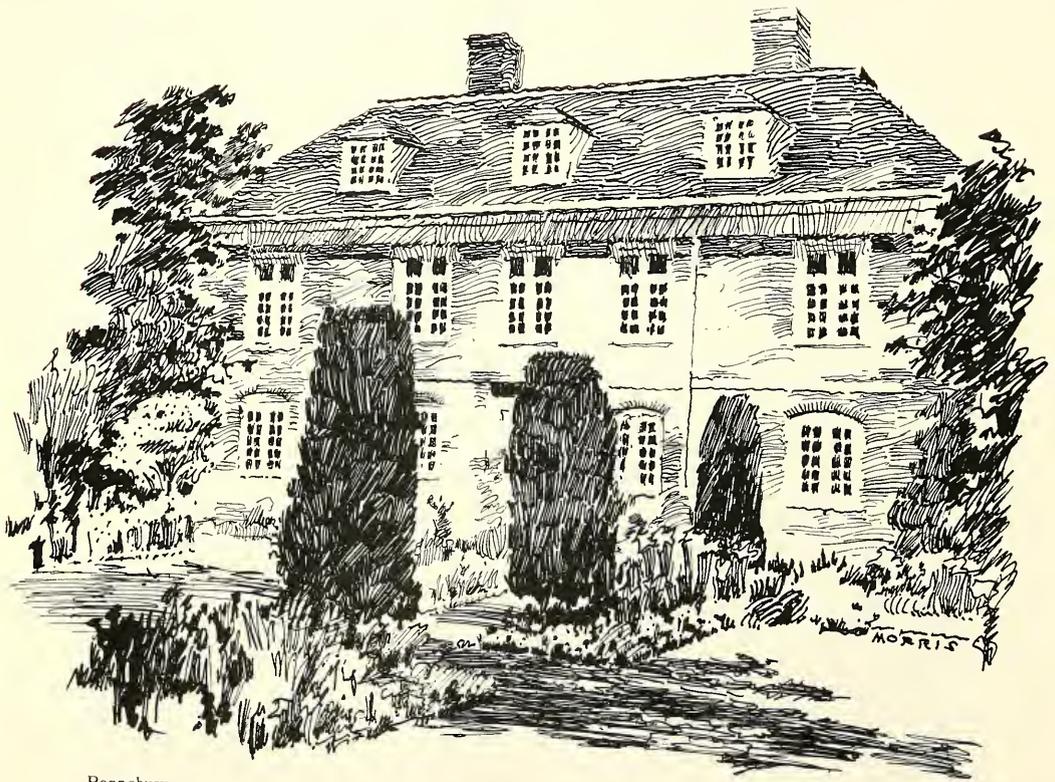




High Street



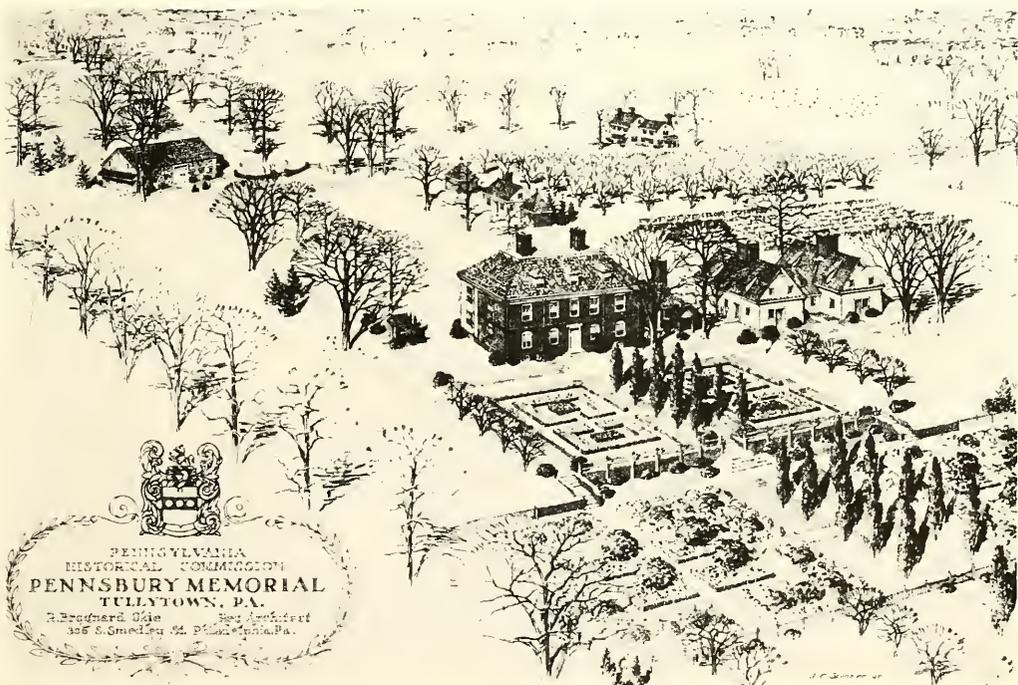
House for  
Caspar Wistap  
Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania



Pennsbury

**N**OT LONG AFTER HIS FOUNDING OF THE city of Philadelphia, William Penn, desiring a secluded country estate, selected a site twenty-five miles north of the new city, on the Delaware, to protect his children from the ills of the city, though Philadelphia was but a village. It took 17 years to build the house which was not completed until 1700. He lived in it but a short while and after his death it disintegrated, from neglect and poor initial workmanship, into a mere pile of rubble.

In 1930 a project for restoring the house came into being. Those in charge of the Williamsburg restoration recommended Brognard Okie as architect for this restoration. This was confirmed by the Philadelphia A.I.A. chapter. Acting contrary to established State procedure to use the cheapest materials, Brognard Okie used in the reconstruction bricks, ironwork and other materials found in the ruins as models and examples and had all materials in the building authentic, which became an excellent restoration, vying with Williamsburg itself in accuracy and charm.

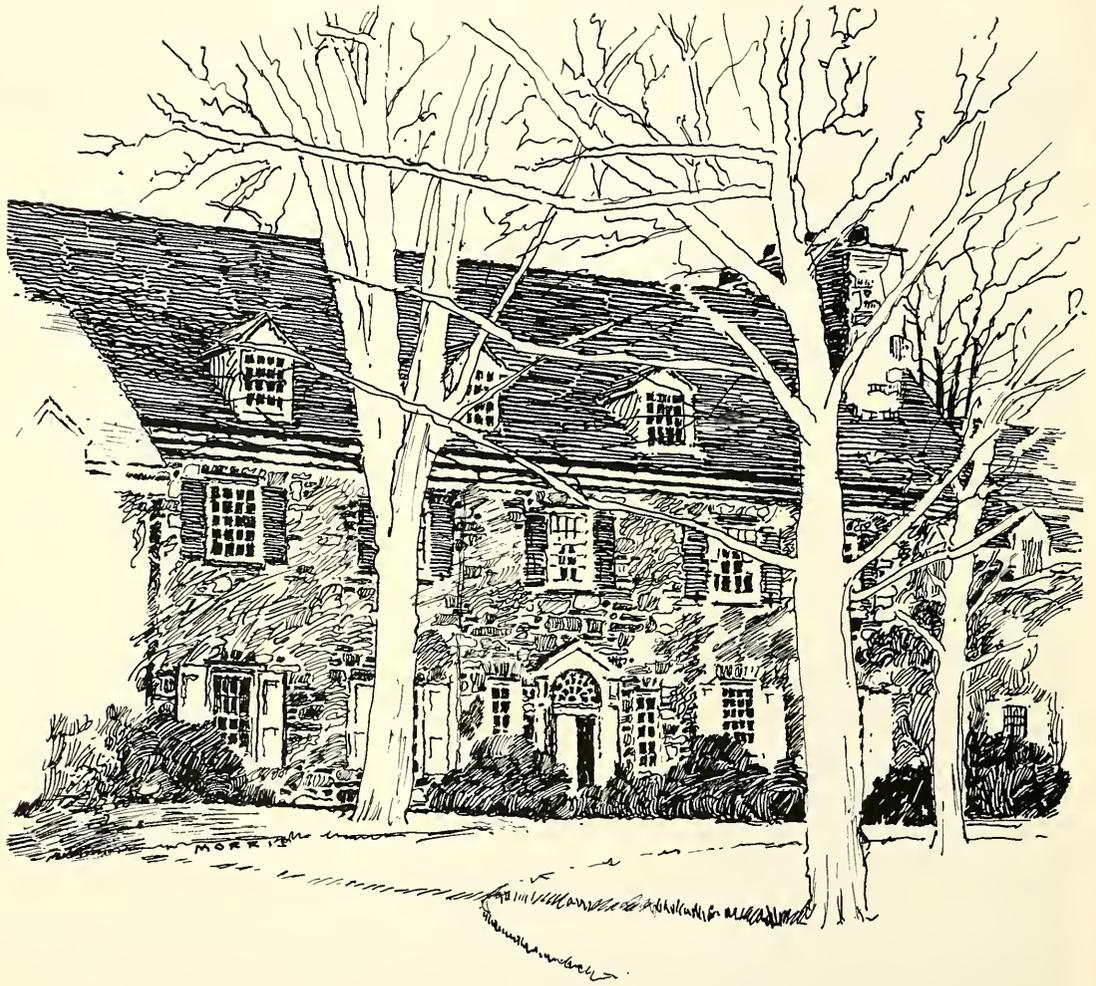




The architect's house  
Hillside Farm  
Devon, Pennsylvania



The architect's house  
Hillside Farm  
Devon, Pennsylvania



House for  
H. B. du Pont  
Wilmington, Delaware



Five-sided Smoke-house  
Estate of S. Halleck Du Pont  
Wilmington, Delaware



House for  
Richard B. Morgan  
Fairview, Pennsylvania



House for  
Barkley McFadden  
Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania



House for  
W. W. Philler  
Wynnewood, Pennsylvania

Note the horizontal trough  
gutter under 2nd story windows



House for  
Frank Mauran  
Edgemont, Pennsylvania



House for  
Richard Houghton  
Paoli, Pennsylvania



House for  
Nicolas R. Du Pont  
Wilmington, Delaware



House for  
James Cox Brady  
Lexington, Kentucky



House for  
Gov. C. Douglas Buck  
New Castle, Delaware



House for  
A. L. Leighton  
Bryn Mawr, Pennsylvania



House for  
William A. Clarke  
Wallingford, Pennsylvania



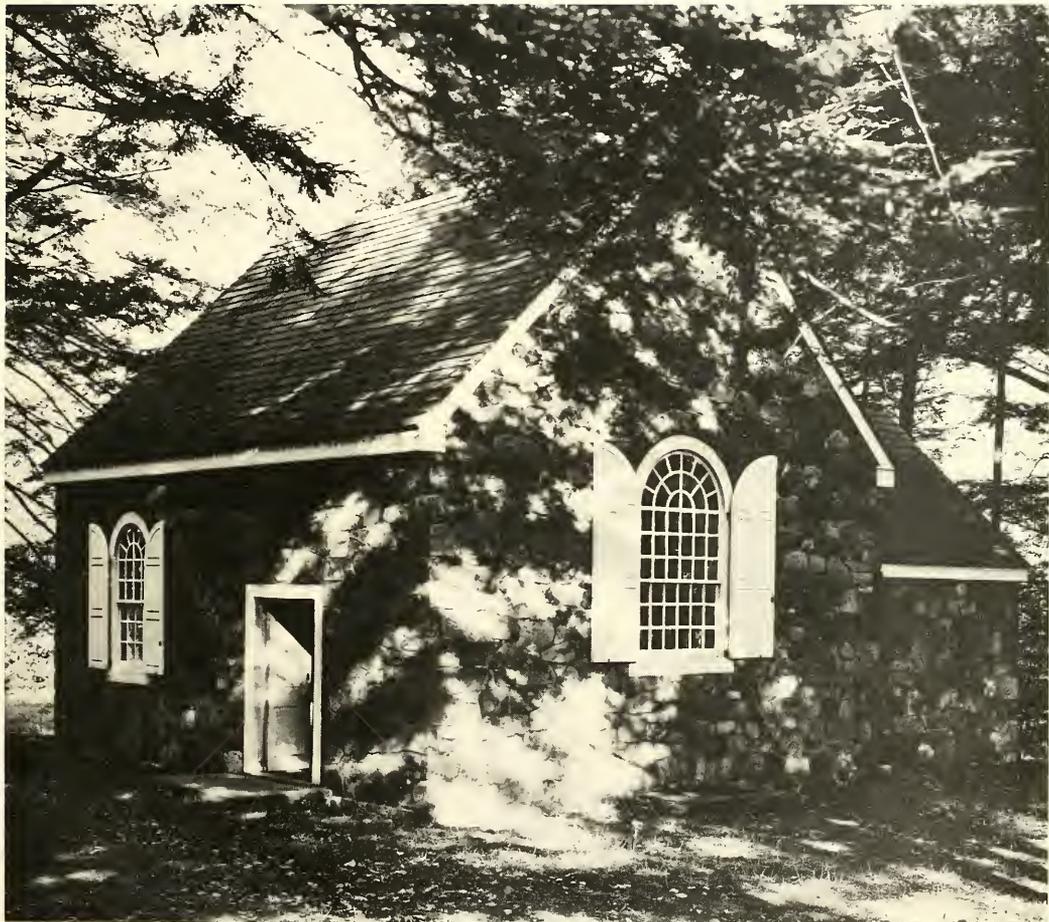
House for  
Ledlie J. Laughlin  
Princeton, New Jersey



Tenant House for  
John M. Gross  
Bethlehem, Pennsylvania



Glenhill Farm  
E. R. Behrend  
Erie, Pennsylvania



Chapel on Property of  
E. R. Behrend  
Erie, Pennsylvania

Brogard Okie frequently attended church at Old St. David's, at Radnor, near Philadelphia. This church dates back to 1714 and is the inspiration for the Behrend Chapel.



House for  
C. A. Higgins  
London Grove, Pennsylvania

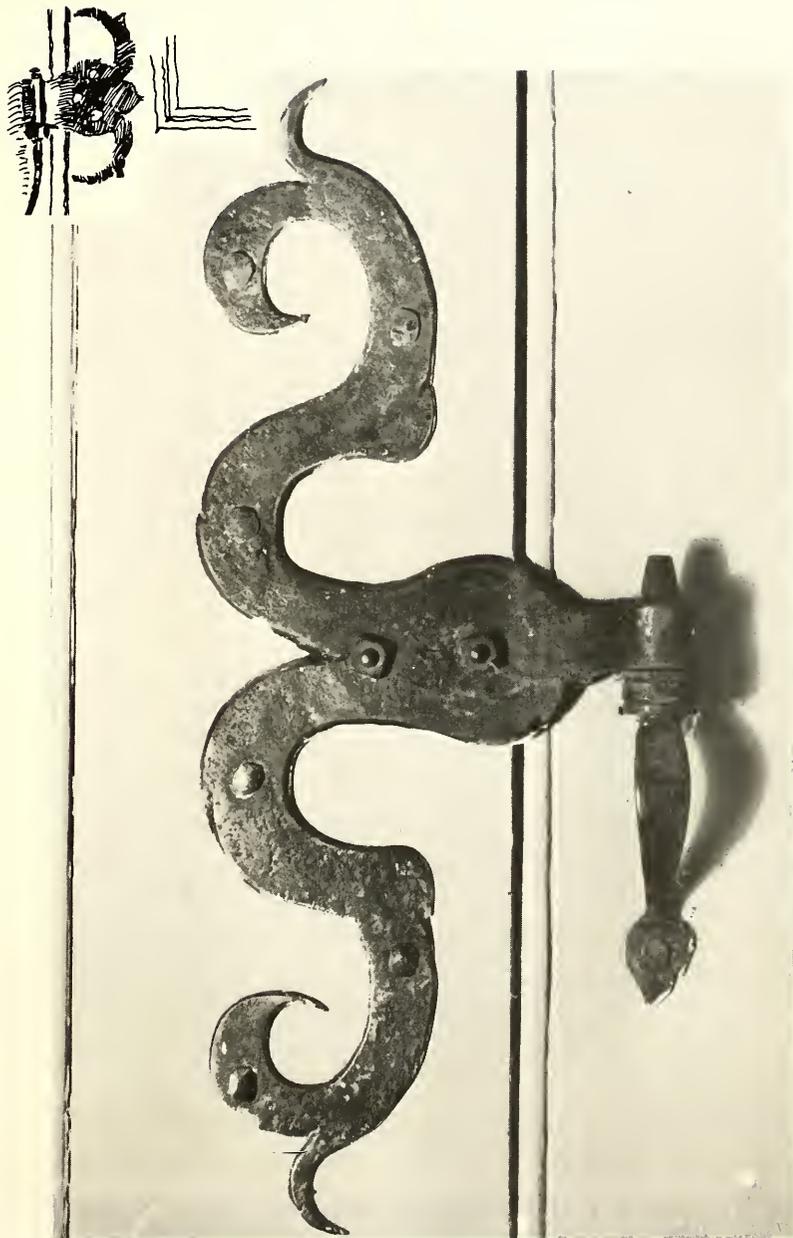


House for  
William L. Edison  
Wilmington, Delaware



Corner of Library Building  
Donated to the town of  
Beach Haven, New Jersey, by  
Mrs. Walter W. Pharo

# HARDWARE



Hinge from  
house for  
Richard Morgan



Hardware in  
Morgan house



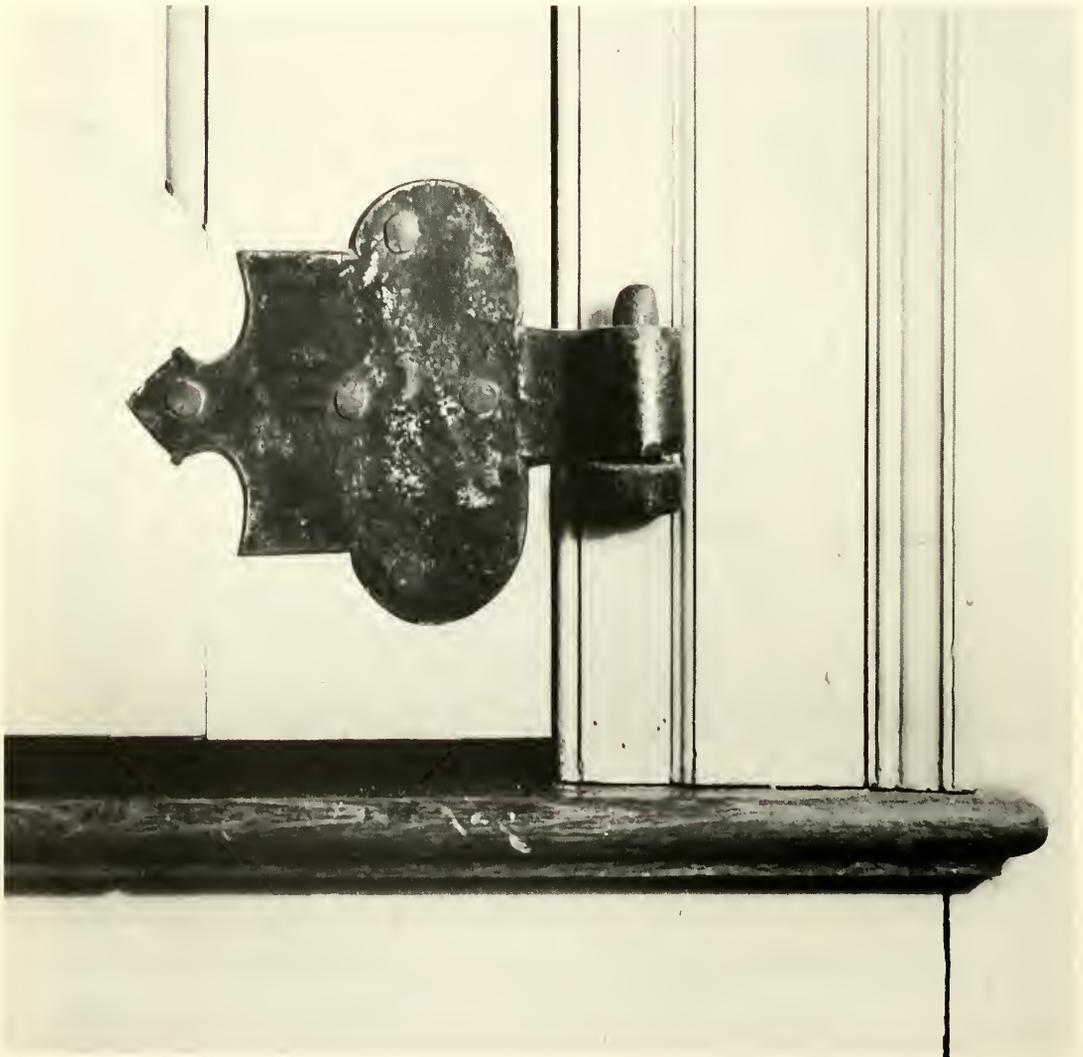
Hardware in  
Morgan house



Hardware in  
Morgan house



Hardware in  
Morgan house



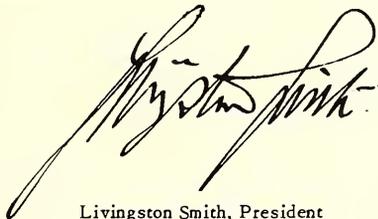
Hardware in  
Morgan house

RESOLUTION BY THE PHILADELPHIA CHAPTER  
OF THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS

The tragic passing of our friend and colleague, R. Brognard Okie, on December 27, 1945 has suddenly ended his direct contribution to the architecture of the American countryside. Indirectly, the influence of his genius will continue as an active force for many years. Few men, in passing, leave so great an artistic heritage.

Brognard Okie was a true artist. Possessed of a sensitive appreciation of the qualities which give to our local traditional architecture its simple and honest merit, he brought to his own work the subtle charm which characterizes these ancient buildings. He was no mere copyist. His work is as readily identified and as individual as that of Thomas Jefferson, to mention but one of the great designers who contributed importantly to America's architecture in the past. Inspired by the sturdy farm houses of southeastern Pennsylvania, which he knew so well, his interpretation and his selection displayed the hand of a master. He will be best remembered as a designer of American architecture. At a time when public awareness of our rich legacy of native art was but beginning, his efforts did much to popularize and increase the growing interest in traditional American culture. This is his real monument.

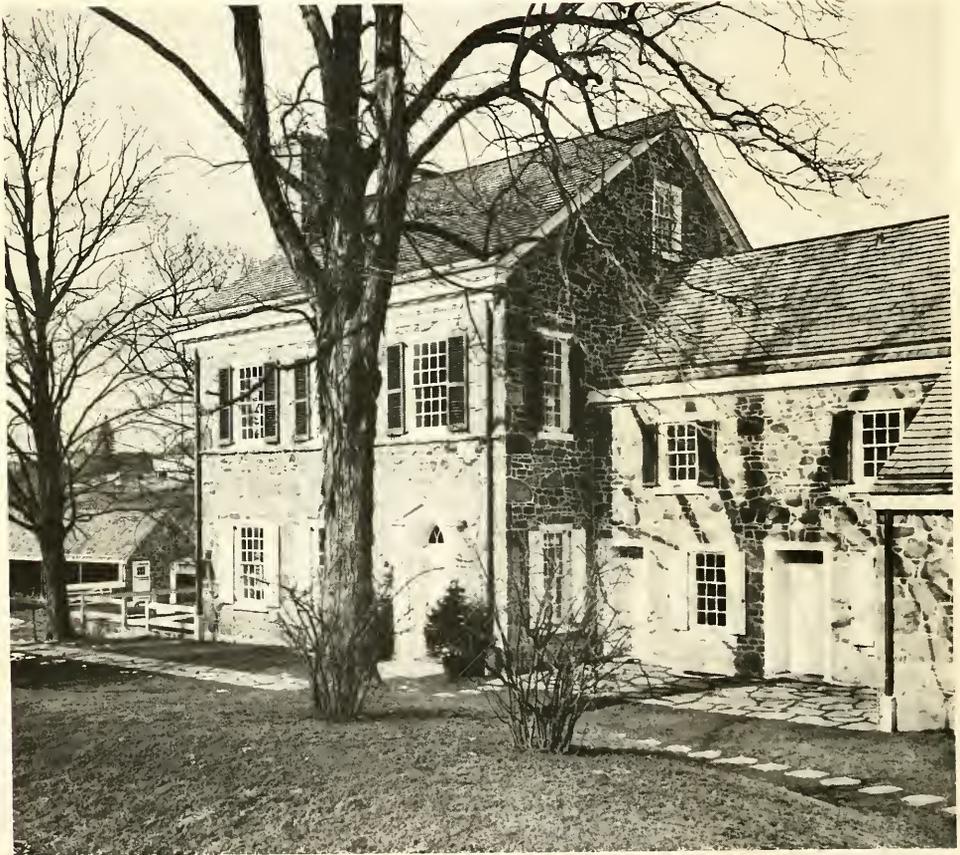
In the full consciousness of our own loss, the Philadelphia Chapter of the Pennsylvania Society of Architects, A.I.A., hereby directs that this resolution be inscribed upon the Chapter records, and that a copy be sent with its deep sympathy to Mr. Okie's bereaved family.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Livingston Smith". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with long, sweeping lines.

Livingston Smith, President

Dated 14th January, 1946

Due



House for  
Arthur E. Pew, Jr.  
Reading Furnace, Pennsylvania

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