

## COLONIAL HOUSES AND THE STEPHEN MOYLAN PRESS



*As good almost kill a man* (to adapt a famous saying of John Milton's) *as destroy an old house.* To this the Pennsylvania Federation of Historical Societies gave vigorous assent at its annual meeting on May 11, when a plea was made for the preservation of Pennsylvania's historic homes. Many handsome structures, replete with historic memories (the lifeblood of patriotism), are now threatened

with destruction to make way for speedways and gas stations.

Top honors in the fight to preserve Pennsylvania's architectural heritage belong to Mr. Henry T. MacNeill, an exhibit of whose pictures was presented at the Federation meeting.

Mr. MacNeill—whose ancestral family connection includes a great-great-grandfather who came to America with Lafayette, and (in a collateral line) General Stephen Moylan of Washington's army—is by profession an architect, by instinct an artist. His wife, the former Aimée Junker (whose father owned the first automobile in Philadelphia), does the historical research these drawings entail, writes them up, attends to the business, and nourishes a fountain of ideas for the family to exploit. As an architect, Mr. MacNeill is thoroughly modern, with a *penchant* for picture windows—and something to see through them, as he has demonstrated with his own hilltop garden; but, as an artist, he savors the past, and loves Pennsylvania's wealth of beautiful eighteenth-century homes, both great and small.

It was during the First World War that his attention was drawn to the importance of architectural draftsmanship in the preservation of old buildings. The Philadelphia Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, fearing that if the Germans bombed the city it would be impossible to reproduce its most treasured building, engaged Mr. MacNeill to measure and draw architect's plans of Independence Hall. He did the same with the



ARTIST HENRY T. MACNEILL  
*sketching Moore Hall near Valley Forge*  
*Courtesy Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*

City Hall, which was later restored. During the years 1937-1940, while working in the Procurement Division of the Treasury, he made some lithograph pencil sketches of court houses and post offices. But it was the setting up of a print shop for his son, Stephen Moylan MacNeill, that finally turned the elder MacNeill into the historical artist, friend and preserver of Pennsylvania's old homes, whom we love and admire.

Stephen MacNeill had always been interested in printing. When he was twelve years old, he was given a hand press (the same his son at the age of six now operates with skill) and half a ton of type. By the time he was fourteen, Stephen had made enough money with the hand press to buy a small power press, and before he left high school he had built up a considerable business with jobs like the printing of fifteen thousand folders for the Philadelphia Flower Show. Stephen had the privilege of receiving direction in typographic design from his great-uncle, Harvey Hopkins Dunn, who designed Stephen's trademark (see above)



#### THE MACNEILLS IN ACTION

*Stephen Moylan MacNeill, printer, and Mrs. Henry T. MacNeill, proofreader*  
*Courtesy Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*

and did the drawing of Benjamin Franklin reproduced below. The war interrupted Stephen's career, but when he came out of the Merchant Marine he and his father built a printing shop—the Stephen Moylan Press—on a hilltop near Whitford, and adjoining it two dwellings, one for the father and one for the son.

This double house, "Barra," which is named for an ancestral island home in the Hebrides, is now the center of the clan. Here, round the large dining room table, the family gathers: Mr. and Mrs. Henry T. MacNeill, Stephen, Fletcher, Aimée, and William. All the children are either artists or printers. Stephen, in the printing shop, transfers their ideas to the permanency of the printed page in a series (among other things) of monthly calendars of exquisite workmanship.

The first calendar was issued for April, 1947. The original

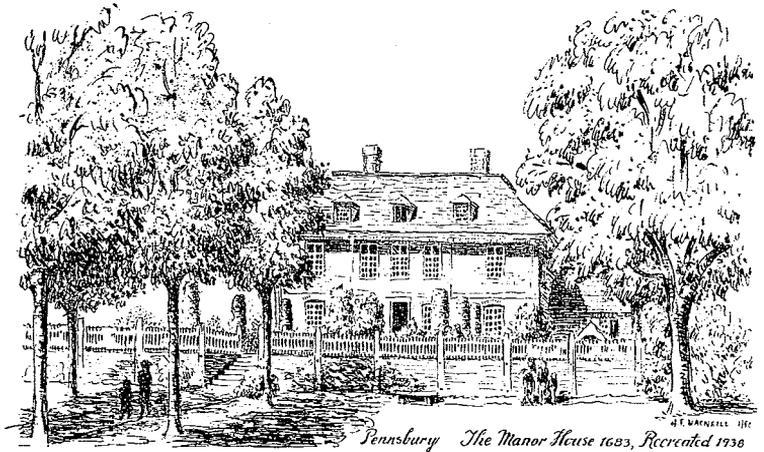
purpose was to advertise the Stephen Moylan Press. It was arranged that a young artist, Jeanne Schneider, and the architect, Henry MacNeill (who had as yet no particular reputation as an artist), should take turns, month by month, in supplying Stephen's calendars with pictures of historic landmarks. Jeanne opened the series auspiciously with a finely-drawn picture of the Knox Covered Bridge at Valley Forge. But her marriage (to Stephen Moylan MacNeill) and the subsequent care of a growing family upset the initial plan, with the consequence that Henry MacNeill has done all but three of the 150 sketches that have been drawn for the series to date. Fletcher, a commercial artist, contributes work to the press in the same vein. Henry MacNeill is now doing other work of a similar kind for individuals and institutions, such as, for instance, illustrating leaflets published by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission for the information of visitors to its properties. What began as a simple device to advance his son's press, has become the main stream of Mr. MacNeill's artistic career.

His sketches have a special appeal to the historian, who is by training suspicious of impressionistic art when applied to his field. This is not to say that Mr. MacNeill is matteroffact in his rendering. He has a subtle sense for the atmosphere of buildings, a feeling for the dramatic, an eye for the single effect; and he conveys these impressions faithfully with his pen. But the professional architect in him keeps his impressions under closer

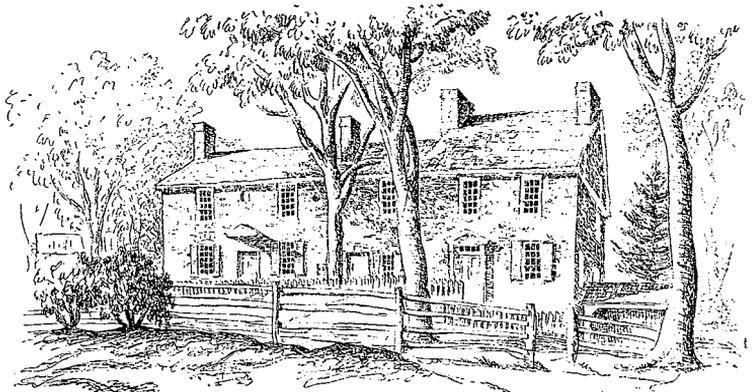
control than is common today in some art circles. He has a strong feeling for structure, solidity, permanence. His buildings do not topple. They stand firm for examination. You can measure them, feel their texture, understand how they were built, imagine yourself at home in them.

A few samples of his work are here presented.

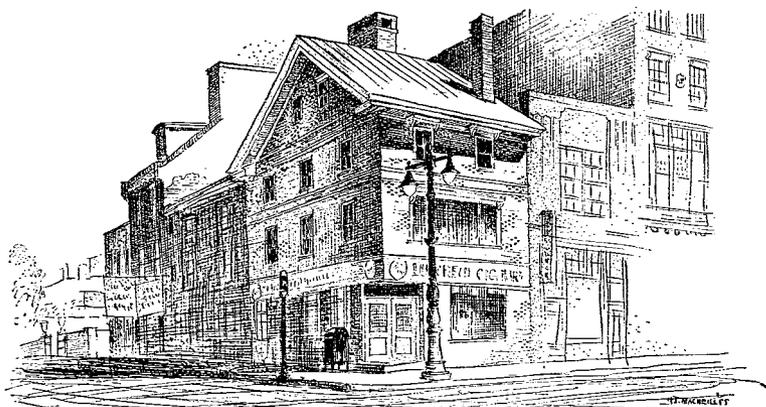




*Pennsbury The Manor House 1683, Recreated 1936*

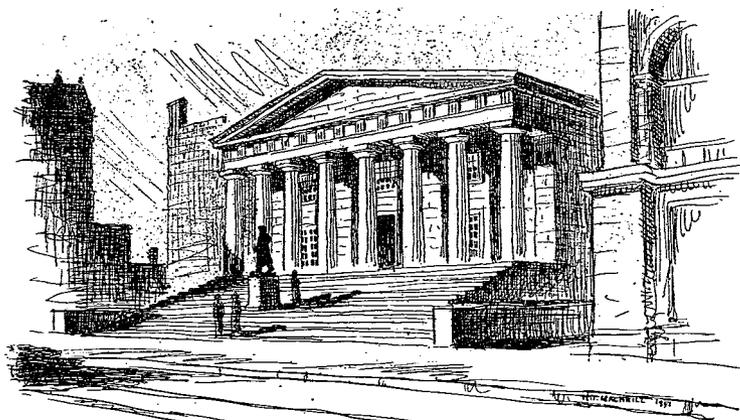


*The Thompson-Neely (Pidcock) House  
Bowman's Hill Section  
Washington Crossing Park, Pa.*



*Dilworth-Todd-Moylan House*

*Philadelphia*



*The Old Custom House 1819 Philadelphia, Pa.*



*Ephrata Cloister 1735-1749, Ephrata, Lancaster County, Pa.*



*The Watson House, The Pleasants House, Fallsington, Bucks Co. Pa.*