

**GIBRALTAR  
(THE H. RODNEY SHARP HOUSE)  
WILMINGTON, DELAWARE**

**AN ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION AND  
PHOTOGRAPHIC DOCUMENTATION  
OF FOUR MAJOR ROOMS**

By

Jeffrey Hamilton  
Rebecca J. Siders  
Kelli W. Dobbs  
Amy Richards

Center for Historic Architecture and Design  
University of Delaware  
Newark, Delaware  
1999

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## **I. Introduction**

This architectural description of Gibraltar at 2501 Pennsylvania Avenue, Wilmington, Delaware comprises a study of the four principle, non-service spaces of the first floor: the dining room, stair hall and hall, living room, and library. The brief discussion of the exterior at the end of this report is not intended as a thorough description, but is meant to relate the various rooms examined and the various building campaigns of the 1840s, c. 1915, and c. 1927 to the exterior of the house. The room designations used in this description follow those on the plans prepared by Homsey Architects of Wilmington. The house's facade is actually more nearly oriented south, but the compass directions used throughout this description will correspond to those used in the National Register of Historic Places registration form for Gibraltar, which describes the house as facing east.



## **II. Architectural Description**

### **A. Exterior**

The walls of the original house and all subsequent additions are of Brandywine gray granite from a quarry north of the property on Delaware Avenue near Bancroft Parkway. The original three-bay, three-story core can easily be discerned on Gibraltar's east elevation. The two-story dining room and porch addition to the north, with a small service wing behind, represents part of the alterations carried out c. 1915. A three-story addition to the west was also built at that time. At the same time, a larger east porch may also have been reduced to just its central section and the Doric columns changed to the present square-section pillars. To the south of the central core, is the two-story c. 1927 addition to the living room and the two-story conservatory, which dominates the south elevation. On the north elevation, to the west of the c. 1915 addition, a later two- and three-story service wing with a one-story porch was added as a part of the alterations of c. 1927. It is the west elevation, with its c. 1927 one-story entrance hall, where evidence of all three building campaigns can be seen. This is, consequently, the most irregular of all the elevations.

### **B. Interior**

The rooms of the first floor exhibit a variety of architectural features, and there is very little correspondence regarding the woodwork and trim among the various rooms. Most woodwork and architectural trim, especially the dining room chimney piece, and the sidelights of

the east entrance door in the stair hall are in the Federal style, although the living room also contains bolder elements in keeping with the Greek Revival, and the library is Colonial Revival. Floors in the dining room, stair hall, hall, and library are of 2-inch oak boards. The dining room, stair hall, and hall floors have a border of oak boards with a pair of parallel 1-inch wide walnut strips at 4¼" and 7¾" in from the baseboard respectively. The border begins at the innermost walnut strip. The floor of the living room consists of narrow oak strips laid in a herringbone pattern with border of narrow oak strips. Moldings vary considerably among the four rooms and will be discussed individually.

### **C. Stair Hall and Hall**

The stair hall and hall are key to the circulation patterns of the house. Access to the house is gained through either the east (front) entrance to the stair hall or through the west entrance to the hall. The west door leads into a small entrance hall that was part of the c. 1927 work of Ives. Four stairs lead up from the hall to the stair hall. Doorways in the stair hall and hall give direct access to the dining room, living room, and library, as well as to two other small rooms: a room west of the dining room placed above the level of the other first-floor rooms and referred to on the Homsey plan as the "study" and a small service room below it on a level lower than the hall. This service room in turn gives access to the rest of the service wing and the service stairs.

The 1840s stair with its balustrade remains intact in its original location. Architraves in the stair hall and hall are all of the same bilaterally symmetrical profile, but those surrounding the east door and the original west door are larger than those of the doorways to rooms and that of the c. 1927 west door.

## **D. Dining Room**

The present dining room is the result of renovations and an expansion to the original house. The enlargement of the dining room and the addition of an adjacent service wing were part of the alterations carried out by the Philadelphia architectural firm of De Armond, Ashmead, and Bickley around 1915. Wilmington architect Albert Ely Ives enlarged the service wing to the north with a two- and three-story addition c.1927. All four walls of the dining room are paneled. The two short walls are bilaterally symmetrical. The fireplace on the north wall is flanked by triple-sash windows; these windows provide access to the porch through paneled doors. The chimney piece is in the Federal style and features reeded pilasters and a plain central tablet. It is surmounted by five vertical panels. There are two varieties of paneling in the dining room—one on the wall surfaces and cupboard doors and another in the window splays. In both cases the moldings surrounding the panels are applied and are not cut from the same stock as the rails and stiles. The paneling of the window splays consists of flat panels surrounded by a very flat mitered ogee molding. Wall paneling consists of raised panels surrounded by mitered and coped quarter round molding. The top of the baseboard is molded with an ogee above a small torus. There is a quarter round oak shoe molding. A complex chair rail of multiple molding profiles separates the attenuated panels of the upper wall from the shorter panels below, and the whole is surmounted by a large, deeply-projecting, two-part cornice. On the south wall, two recessed cupboards, each with an open section with four scalloped shelves above an enclosed lower section, flank the doorway to the stair hall. The west wall consists of a repeated series of panels, interrupted only at its north end by the door to the c. 1915 service wing.

### **E. Living Room**

The living room was enlarged to its present size as a part of the c. 1927 alterations by Ives. In general the room's woodwork is bold without being elaborate. The raised panels of the doors and their jambs are set within frames with a simple quarter round molding. In the window jambs, however, flat panels are surrounded by a frame with a broad, flat ogee molding. All of the windows are triple-sash windows and access to the c. 1927 conservatory on the south elevation of the house is gained through the westernmost window on the south wall. Beams supporting the rooms above the enlarged living room are cased, and the casing is ornamented with alternating panels containing circles and elongated diamonds. Paired pilasters with foliated capitals give the appearance of upholding the casings at each end. The very plain cornice sits above a prominent Greek fret band. The most elaborate feature in the room is the Neo-classical chimney piece with its paired columns and boldly sculptural moldings and central tablet.

### **F. Library**

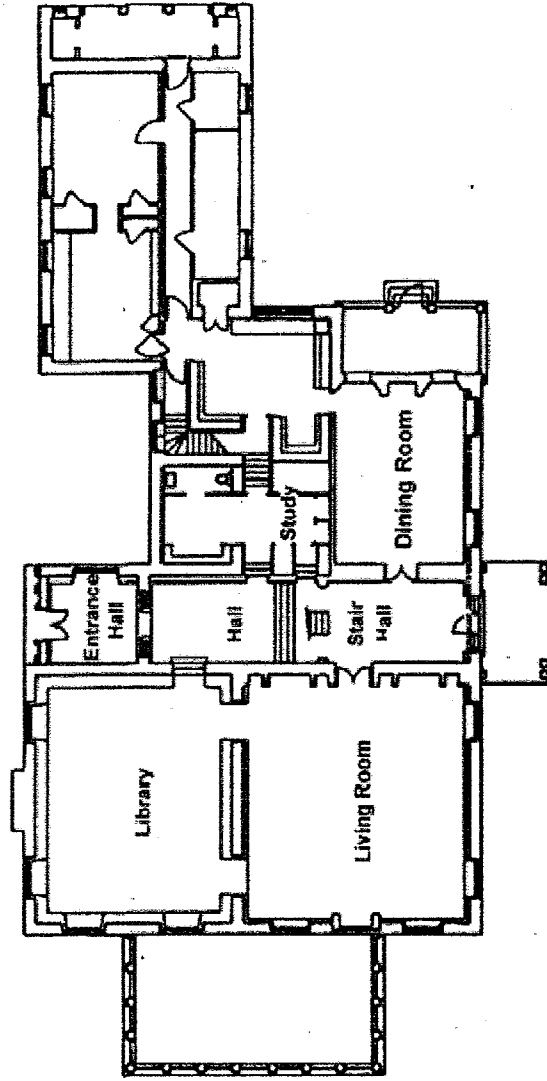
The library's interior is the most truly Colonial Revival of the first-floor rooms. What was referred to in the 1990 National Register registration form as a "plain wood Colonial Revival mantle" is now missing from the fireplace on the west wall, as is the central panel of the overmantle. Arched, recessed cupboards with open shelves above enclosed sections flank the fireplace. Given the scalloped shelves and the curved backs in the open sections of these cupboards, it is presumptuous to classify them as bookcases, although they might very well have been. Deeply recessed French windows in turn flank these cupboards on the west wall. On the

south wall, two French windows flank a small recessed bookcase with an open, rectangular upper section above an enclosed cupboard. The shelves in the bookcase are straight, not contoured in the manner of the shelves on the west wall. The easternmost of the windows gives access to the conservatory.

On opposite ends of the library's east wall, doors lead into the living room; and between them a large, rectangular, recessed bookcase is flanked by a pair of smaller arched bookcases. All three are again above enclosed cupboards. The north wall of the library is the most problematic. Here a central bookcase mirroring that on the south wall is flanked on the right (east) by the doorway into the hall and on the left by another recessed bookcase above an enclosed cupboard. This bookcase, however, is unlike all the others and is clearly an adaptation of an earlier feature. That earlier feature may have been either a window or a door. It appears most likely to have been a door, since above the bookcase there remains a light consisting of four panes of glass arranged horizontally. These panes have been painted and are identical to those, which have also been painted, above the doorway into the hall. Had such a door existed at the time of the execution of the three-story west extension c. 1915, it would have been an exterior door, since the western extension to the porch was not carried out until the c. 1927 renovations.

Despite the characterization of the missing chimney piece as "plain," the woodwork in the library is by far the most elaborate of any of the rooms here discussed. Every element--particularly the cornice, with its complex profiles, fret band, and accompanying molding around the perimeter of the ceiling--is more elaborate than the trim elsewhere on the first floor.

### **III. Floor Plans and Detail Drawings**

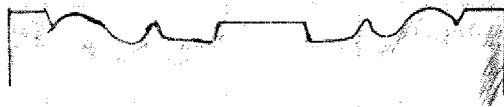
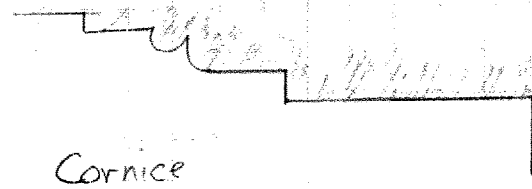
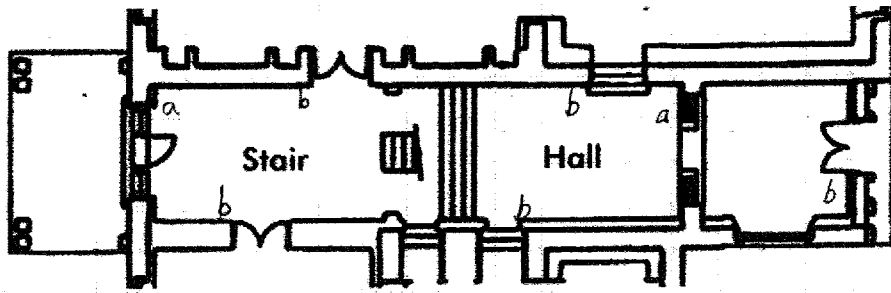


Gibraltar  
2501 Pennsylvania Ave  
Washington, DC

GIBRALTAR  
FIRST FLOOR PLAN

HOMSEY  
ARCHITECTS





Architraves

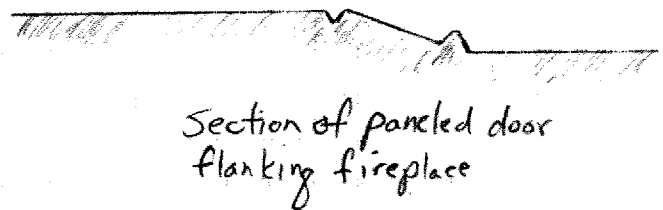
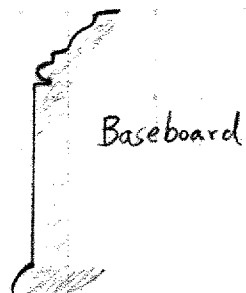
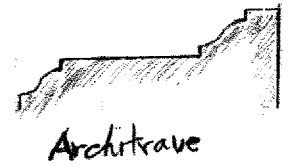
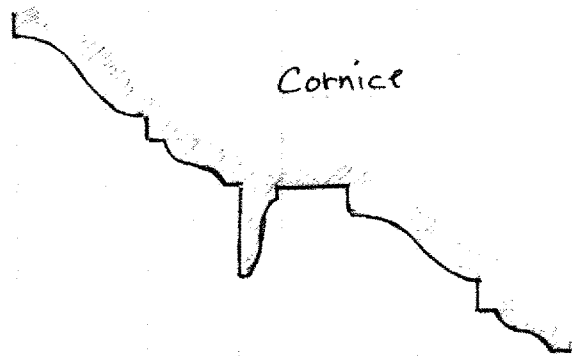
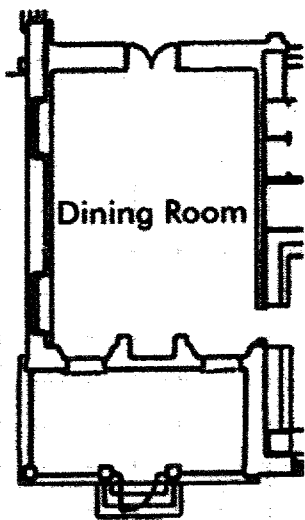
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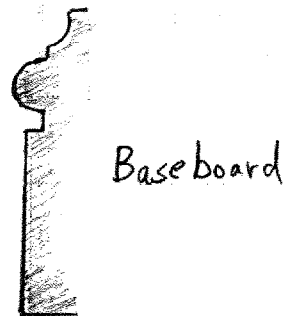
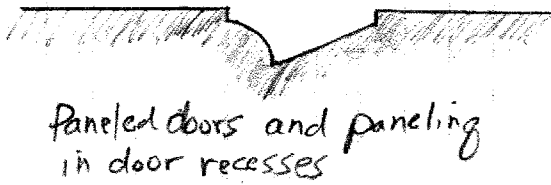
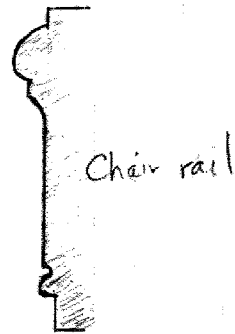
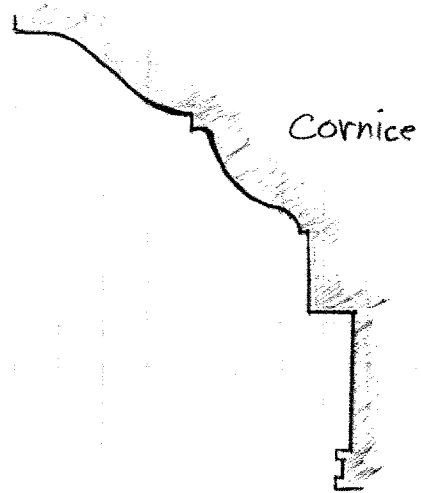
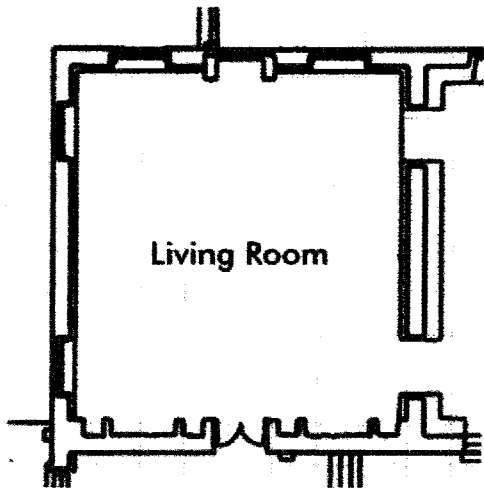
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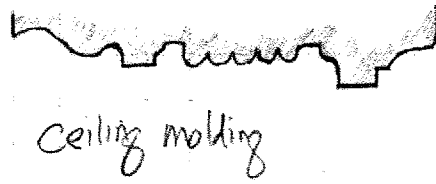
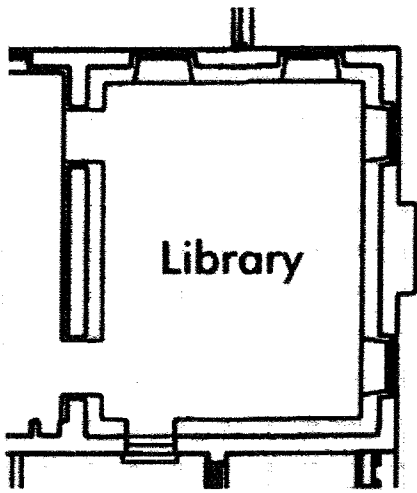


Baseboard

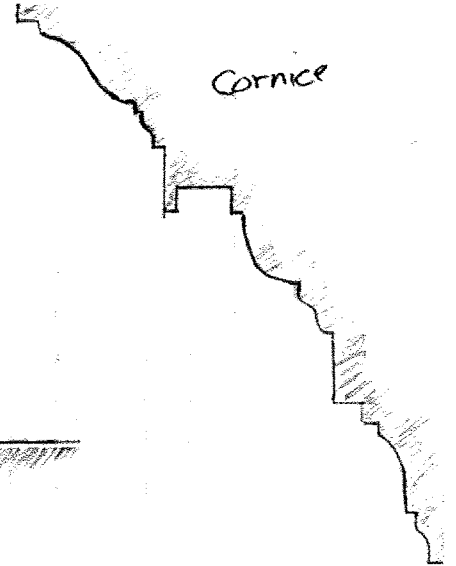








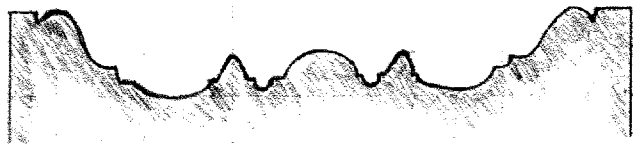
Ceiling molding



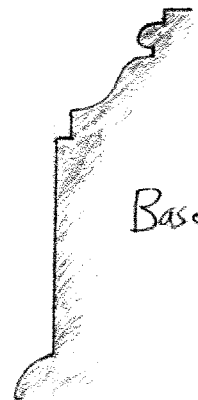
Cornice



Paneling



Architrave



Baseboard

#### IV. Photographs

Gibraltar  
2501 Pennsylvania Avenue  
Wilmington, Delaware

CRS # N-9705

Photographer: Jeffrey Hamilton

June 1999

##### Exterior

- N-9705-1      Elevation of the east side
- N-9705-2      Elevation of the east porch and entry
- N-9705-3      Elevation of the east side, two-story addition to the original three bay house
- N-9705-4      Elevation of the north side, showing the northwest porch
- N-9705-5      Elevation of the north side, showing the northeast porch
- N-9705-6      Elevation of the south side, view of conservatory
- N-9705-7      View of southeast corner on two-story addition to original three-bay house
- N-9705-8      Elevation of the west side
- N-9705-9      Elevation of the west side, looking northeast
- N-9705-10     Detail of the cornice
- N-9705-11     View of the west entrance
- N-9705-12     Elevation of the north side, showing northwest porch

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- N-9705-17     Stair hall, detail of balustrade and newels at turning point of stair
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- N-9705-24 Stair hall, detail of baseboard

#### **Interior, Entrance Hall**

- N-9705-25 Hall, view of west entrance
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#### **Interior, Dining Room**

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- N-9705-36 Dining room, detail of fireplace
- N-9705-37 Dining room, detail of fireplace
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- N-9705-39 Dining room, profile of chimney piece. Showing wall paneling and paneling in the flanking window splay, looking west
- N-9705-40 Dining room, view of triple-sash window flanking fireplace looking north
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- N-9705-43 Dining room, view of cupboard flanking door, looking south
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#### **Interior, Living Room**

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- N-9705-58 Living room, view of fireplace on south wall
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- N-9705-60 Living room, detail of fireplace
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- N-9705-63 Living room, detail of fireplace
- N-9705-64 Living room, detail of fireplace
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- N-9705-68 Living room, detail ceiling molding

- N-9705-69     Living room, detail of capitals of pilasters
- N-9705-70     Living room, detail of cornice
- N-9705-71     Living room, detail of chair rail
- N-9705-72     Living room, detail of baseboard
- N-9705-73     Living room, detail of floor, showing the herringbone pattern and the oak and walnut border

### **Interior, Library**

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- N-9705-78     Library, view of shelves on east wall
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- N-9705-80     Library, view of fireplace, looking west
- N-9705-81     Library, view of cupboard flanking fireplace on west wall
- N-9705-82     Library, profile of cupboard shelves on west wall
- N-9705-83     Library, detail of north wall shelves with painted glass panes above
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- N-9705-92     Library, detail of molded edge of shelves on west wall
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- N-9705-94     Library, detail of hardware on French windows

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- N-9705-96    Library, detail of hardware on French windows
- N-9705-97    Library, detail of cornice
- N-9705-98    Library, detail of paneling

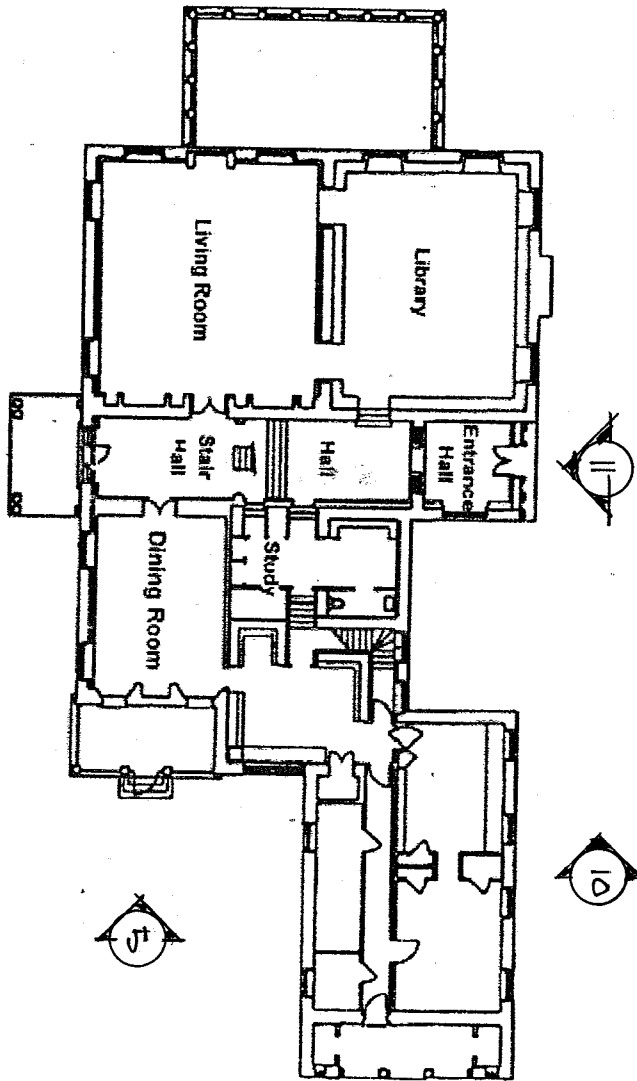
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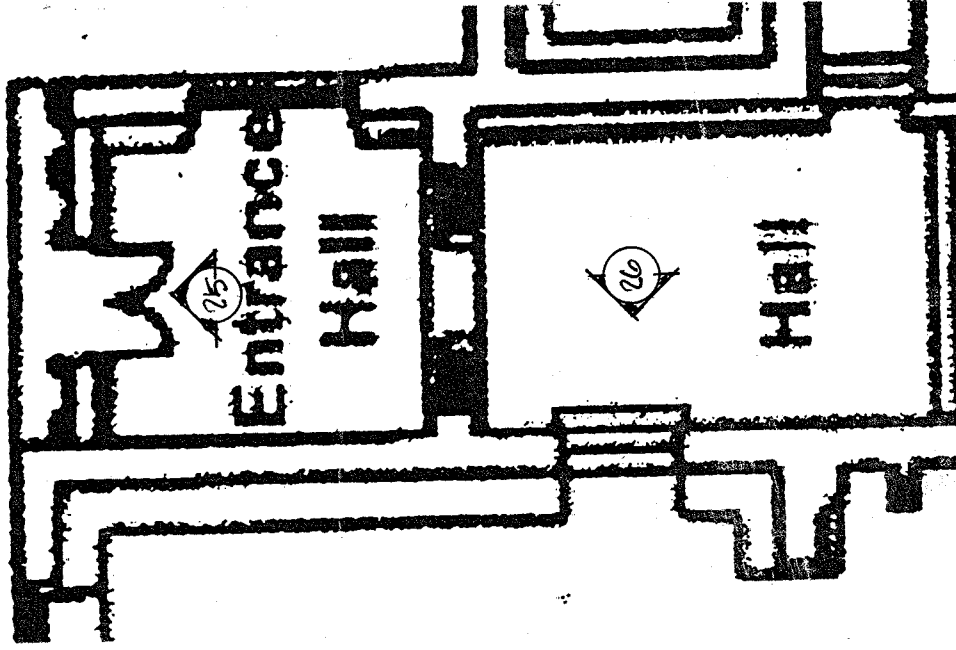


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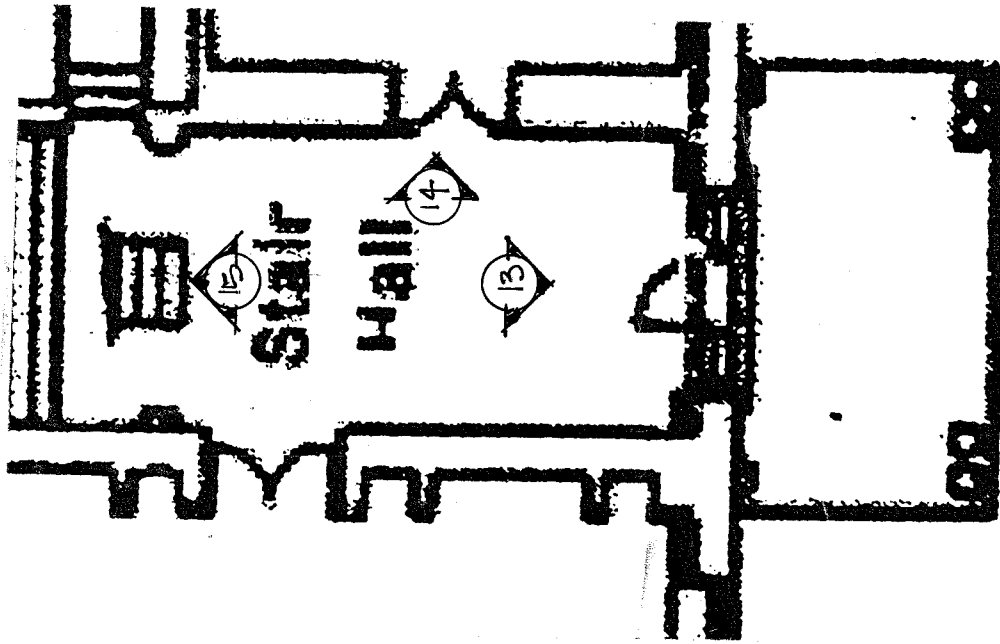
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2501 Penryn Avenue  
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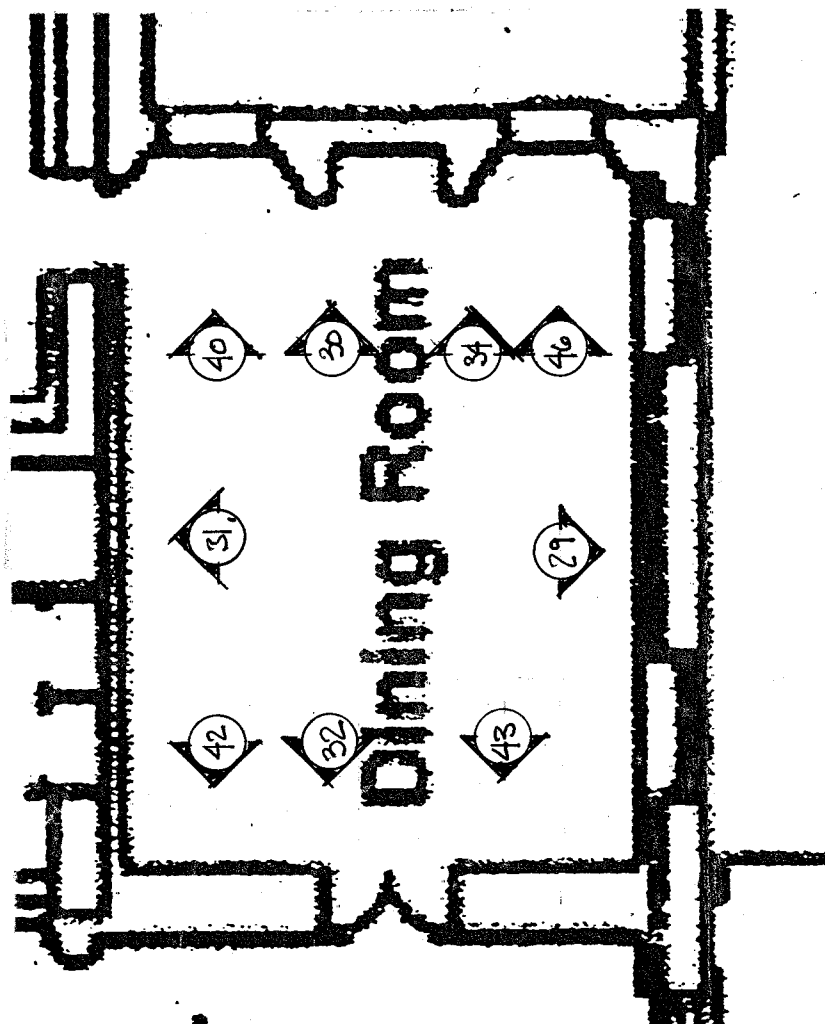
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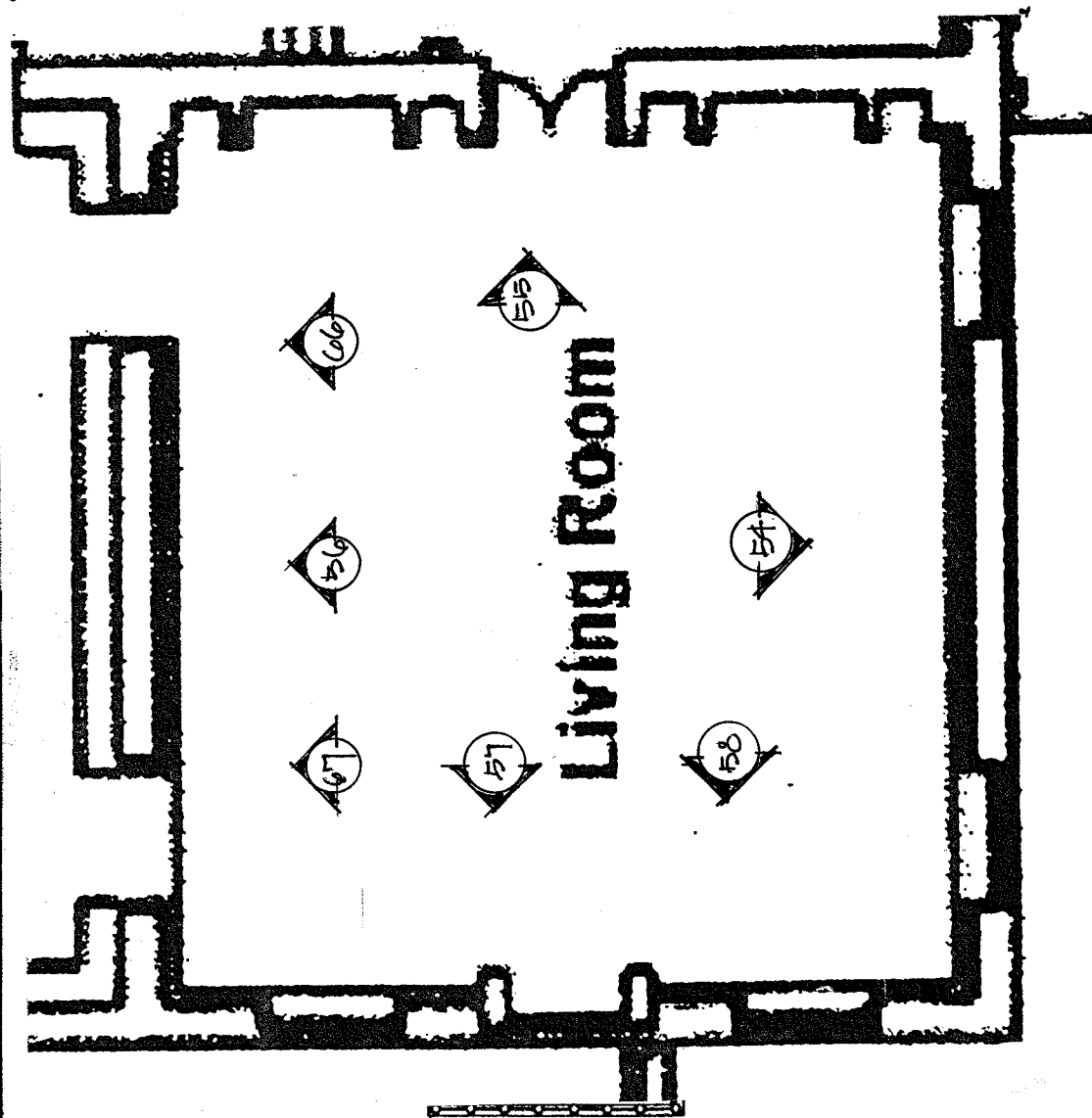




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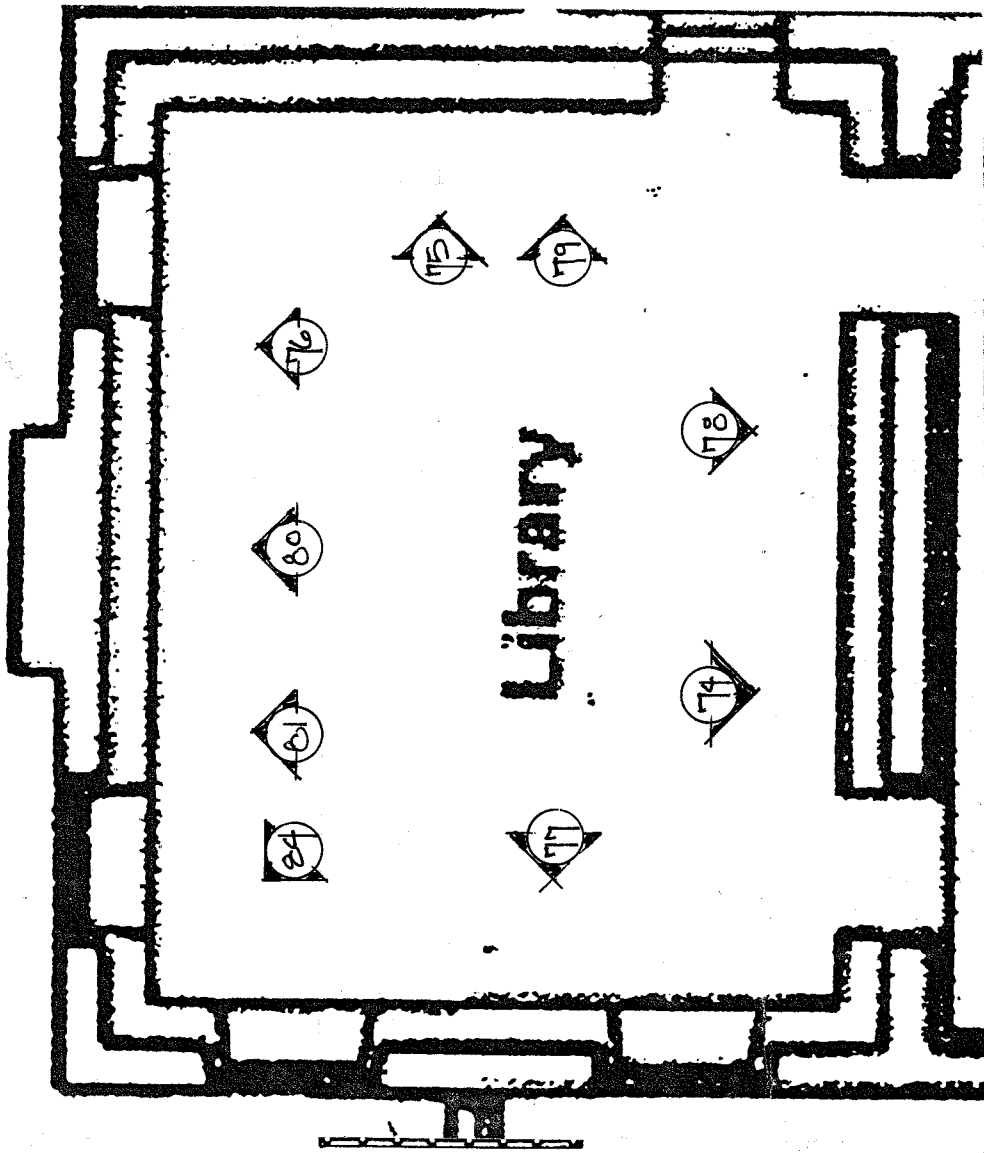
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SCALE 1/4" = 1'-0"







