

Thompson Building  
163-167 East Main Street (Lincoln Highway)  
Coatesville  
Chester County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-1955

HABS  
PA  
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

Thompson Building

HABS No. PA-1955

Location: 163-167 East Lincoln Highway (formerly East Main St.)  
Northwest Corner Second Street and East Lincoln  
Highway

Present Owner: Redevelopment Authority of Chester County  
Hamilton Bonic Building, 3rd floor  
1 South Church Street  
West Chester, PA. 19380

Present Occupant: Unoccupied

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History: (Significance)

The Thompson Building is one of the principal landmarks of Coatesville, Pa.'s boom years at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. Its four stories, generous pediment, and corner tower (since removed) made it one of the constituent elements of the East Main Street streetscape, punctuating the two and three story facades that characterize the business district. With the Odd Fellows Hall (1891); the early 20th century towered National Bank Building; and the 1890s YMCA building across the street to the west, the Thompson building continues the scale, historicizing detail, and materials of the late Victorian street.

The Thompson Building is the second commercial building for the family of William H. Thompson, on the site. A building, dating from 1850, and erected by Charles H. Wilson, for William H. Thompson was one of Coatesville's principal early retail buildings. An account in the Daily Local News, for 29 March 1901, described it as having been recently occupied by Hick Brothers, and by Russell Brothers, operators of a restaurant. In former years, it had been the community's first clothing store, run by John Jenkins, while its second floor was used "by a colored man for a barber shop, which was also the first in the town".

1. Date of erection:

The 1901 article was written on the occasion of the demolition of those earlier buildings for the construction of a new four story structure which, it was fervently believed, "will be one of the finest buildings in town". That date can be further confirmed by the side entrance to the office building, on Second Street, which is graced by a terra cotta entablature, bearing the building's name, "The Thompson

Building" with the date, "erected 1901" on the right side.

2. Architect:

Though contemporary Coatesville newspapers make no mention of the designer of the building source, the Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builder's Guide provides complete information. In the issue for 27 February, 1901 (vol. 16 number 9), the following description appears:

"Architect Albert W. Dilks, 1001 Chestnut Street, has made plans and is receiving estimates for a 4 story office, store and assembly building at Coatesville, Pa., including additions and alterations to adjoining business premises, for John W. Thompson, Esq. President of the National Bank of Chester Valley. The operation requires first-class plumbing, steam heating, steel beams, etc. necessary in the best modern building".

Dilks was active 1885-1915, after studying in the well known office of Theophilus P. Chandler. Other important works include the mansion for Brewer Frederick A. Poth, at 33rd and Powelton, in Philadelphia, and the Provident Bank on State Street in Media, Pa.

3. Original and subsequent owners:

The Thompson Building continued in the Thompson family until 1920, though the land had changed hands from the estate of William H. Thompson to his descendent John Thompson in a deed recorded 1 March, 1883, Chester Deeds Volume R-9 V-214, P.485. The fact that John H. and Joel G. Thompson retained shares in the property suggests the use of the sale to comply with the terms of William Thompson's will that required a sale, to satisfy his allocation of his estate. The property was further defined as the land acquired from Jesse Coates, of Coatesville, 20 March 1850 (Volume M-5-109, p.168) on 1 April 1920, the Thompson Building, (sale price, \$13,065.00) and the surrounding property to the north, up to Diamond Street, was sold by Joseph M. Thompson to Morris and Philip Weiss, and their wives, respectively Anna and Bessie. They were operators of one of Coatesville's principal shoe emporia the "Boston Sample Shoe House", at 228 East Lincoln Highway. That sale suggests the value of this most central of locations, for a sum of \$122,500 was charged, with the owners taking a mortgage. (Deed record Chester Co. Deeds, vol. U-15 Vol.367-p.24) (Mortgage Volume E-8-p.422.)

Four years later, the Thompson Building was sold to Lewis D. Cohen, on 1 August 1924, 9 months before a sum of half of the value of the building was due to be paid to the Thompson family. (Chester Co. Deeds, Vol.O-16-386, p.53).

The Cohen interests were represented by M.J. Metgang in a sale on 10 December 1971, to Royale Ventures Limited, marking the shift to rapid changes of ownership signaling the building's decline. (Chester Co. Deed Book H-40, p.1034).

A sheriff sale removed the property from Royale Ventures Limited, 17 May 1973 (James H. McQueen, sheriff, to Charles Harris and Wilbert Hewitt) (Chester Co. Deed Book K Vol.41 p.115).

Howell Harris acquired the building 4 April 1974 (Chester Deed Book B-Vol.43, p.162), and in turn sold it to Anthony Stokes and Oscar Asparagus, Jr. (Chester Co. Deed Book O-Vol.48, p.27) on 7 July 1976. On 27 July 1979 (Deed Book I Vol.55, p.137) the Redevelopment Authority of Chester County purchased the building from "S.A. Building Operations" which acquired the property 20 May 1979 (Deed Book T-Vol.54 p.161).

Its property identification number at the time was 16-5-161.

- 1850 Deed, March 20, 1850, recorded in Volume M-5-109, p.168  
Jesse Coates to William H. Thompson.
- 1883 Deed, March 1, 1883, recorded in Volume R-9 V-214, p.485  
William H. Thompson to John Thompson
- 1920 Deed, April 1, 1920, recorded in vol.U-15, Vol.367, p.24  
Joseph M. Thompson to Morris and Anna Weiss and Philip  
and Bessie Weiss.
- 1924 Deed, August 1, 1924, recorded in Volume O-16-386, p.53  
Morris Weiss etux and Philip Weiss etux to Lewis D.Cohen.
- 1971 Deed, December 10, 1971, recorded in Volume H-40, p.1034  
Lewis D. Cohen to Royale Ventures Limited.
- 1973 Deed, May 17, 1973, recorded in K Vol.41, p.115  
James H. McQueen, sheriff, to Charles Harris and  
Wilbert Hewitt
- 1974 Deed, April 4, 1974, recorded in B Vol.43, p.162  
Charles Harris and Wilbert Hewitt to Howell Harris.

- 1976 Deed, July 7, 1976, recorded in O Vol.48, p.27  
Howell Harris to Anthony Stokes and Oscar Asparagus,  
Jr.
- 1979 Deed, May 20, 1979, recorded in T Vol.54, p.161  
Anthony Stokes and Oscar Asparagus, Jr. to S.A.  
Building Operations
- 1979 Deed, July 27, 1979, recorded in I Vol.55, p.137  
S.A. Building Operations to Redevelopment Authority  
of Chester County.

4. Builder:

The local newspaper accounts do mention contractors Dunlavy (sic) Brothers, tearing down the original building (29 March 1901). It can be assumed that it was their crew that built the new building as well, for Charles Dunleavy was regularly reported building new structures, and is listed in the contemporary directories. Materials were apparently largely local, but drain spouts of cast iron, labelled "B.B. & Co. Phila" provides evidence about the source of supplies.

5. Original plans:

The building has been much altered in the past half century, but building evidence, and the insight derived from the known uses of the building make an accurate description probable.

The first floor was intended as commercial retail space fronting on Coatesville's East Main Street, through a bulk window shopfront. Two entrances provided access to what were apparently two long, narrow stores that ran perpendicular to the street. A pressed tin ceiling survives on the western half, and presumably defines the original shop space which reached back to the partitions that separated the stair that opened off Second Avenue and provided access to the upper levels. The rear of the first floor, beyond the stair, was a separate commercial use; the 1909 Sanborns lists a millinery shop there.

The side portal opened through generous doors into a stair hall, from which rose a stair that probably paralleled the arrangement of the second and third floor landings. It can be assumed, further, that the stair was wood, with the rectangular balusters and newels of the late Queen Anne, and that the wainscoting was of the narrow, vertical wood

strips of the upper level.

Evidence on the first floor use:

1909 Moore's Standard Directory of Coatesville  
p.51 J.M. Duncan and Co. 5 & 10 cent store 167 E.Main St.  
p.118 C.August Carmany, Jeweler 165 E. Main St.

The Carmany store was also at 165 E. Main Street, in the 1904 Directory.

Second Floor-

The stairs rose to a landing that opened to the front to a large office suite, and by a second door to a rear office suite. A reception room, with columned screen, recently vandalized, opened on the west side, while the remainder was subdivided into small offices.

Evidence on the second floor use:

1909 Moore's Standard Directory of Coatesville  
P.20 Harry S. Woodward, Rm.201-202 Thompson Building  
Real Estate, Notary Public.

Upper floors-

The third and fourth stories housed the Clark Business College; indeed the building probably was erected with the needs of the college in mind. The secretary, not coincidentally, was one Lee Thompson, of Coatesville, while the principal was Philadelphian H. Chauncey Clark, who operated another school at 3859 Lancaster Avenue in Philadelphia.

The original description in the PRER & BG suggests that at least one of these floors may have been an assembly hall, a suitable use for a school, and one with commercial application.

Evidence on the upper floor use:

1909 Moore's Standard Directory of Coatesville  
p.31 Clark Business College "The School That Educates"  
Thompson Building.

1904 Moore's Standard Directory of Coatesville  
H. Chauncey Clark, principal, Coatesville Business College, Thompson Building."Bookkeeping, Manufacturing, and Banking, Actual Business Learning By Doing."

1909 Sanborn's Atlas

Plan of first floor of building, showing two shops on front, jewelry on west, and 5 & 10¢ on east; millinery shop in rear el. "Business School 3rd & 4th".

6. Alterations and additions:

The building was extensively vandalized over the last four years, and was damaged by fire as well. The fires have resulted in numerous holes being punched through walls that show the construction system of the partitions of the third and fourth floors. The expanded wire lath, and the relative newness of the studding, evident from the wood color and its wide grain, make it clear that those levels were completely renovated perhaps in the past two generations. At that time, those floors were converted into apartment units, with internal corridors running parallel to each other along the long axis of the building, providing access to the individual chambers. Kitchens at the entrance end, open by doors into dining rooms. Bed chambers and bathrooms complete the small side rooms, while the entire width of the unit is used as a living room, on the Lincoln Highway front.

A similar alteration of function occurred at the rear office suite, which also became a small apartment. (see plan)

Second floor-

Perhaps the partitions that survive reflect the original office use of the building, again with a central spine subdividing the span. They were later converted into apartments as well. The new exitway left the building to the rear, on a stair that gained the outside through the first bay of the one story commercial building to the north. (see plan)

First floor-

The greatest alteration to the building occurred on the first floor, in front of the terra cotta shop fronts that continued the architectural vocabulary of the block; it was later extended with a wood porch, since covered with modern aluminum; the door locations were altered. The original shop entrance at the corner was closed off, and the round form that followed the shape of the oriel and the tower was made angular.

Second, the handsome Thompson Building arched portal on Second Street was walled up, and the lobby and stair within were removed to make additional commercial space.

The subdivision of interior space survives in the central

spine wall, but the partition separating the stair from the shop has been removed. All original detail has been stripped, with the exception of the pressed tin ceiling in the old jewelry store. (see plan)

No original drawings have been located.

B. Historical Context:

The Thompson Building represents the activity of one of Coatesville's most prominent citizen, John W. Thompson, Esq. His obituary appeared April 22, 1939, in the Coatesville Record, which noted his work as President of the National Bank of Chester Valley (1893-1905), and his position in the local Methodist Church. The Thompson Building marks an astute decision, capitalizing on the business sense of his father, William H. Thompson who had acquired the most important commercial site in the city, near the nearby Brandywine Creek, the rail lines, and the growing town center.

The decision to retain Dilks adds to the building's significance, for Dilks was a fashionable, high style architect-- unlike Coatesville's own E.W. Thorne whose office stood at 351 Lumber Street. Later owners paid increasing prices through 1924, suggesting the ongoing viability of East Main Street. One last point; the building's construction, its flourishing years, and its final failure provide a neat analog to the success of Main Street itself.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character:

The Thompson Building is a transitional design that spans from late Victorian Individualism to turn of the century historicizing revival. That change is reflected in the mixtures of style and varying attitude to color. Its late Victorian qualities are apparent in the continuation of architectural polychromy, with red brick, brownstone sills, red terra cotta window trim, and side entrance frame, all emphasized by changes of color and texture. At the same time the building was clearly based on architectural forms that led away from Victorian individualism toward more academic rendering of style. The round arched windows of the third and fourth floors, the massive, textured belt course of the third floor are Richardsonian in scale and detail.

The selection of a pressed tin corinthian cornice and pediment however suggest the Colonial Revival, fashionable in the 1890s, and which when blended with medievalizing forms often represented the anglicizing Queen Anne. By contrast, the corner tower is a Victorian accent in the streetscape that emphasizes the corner entrance, while also giving the building additional presence.

Finally, the application of the ornamented front to the building block, which appears to be wrapped by the fancy work, is again largely a late Victorian homage to the street, rather than to the totality of the building. Thus, stylistically this is a building that is partly progressive, partly conservative, in keeping with the architect's career, and with its location, in 1901, in Coatesville.

## 2. Condition of fabric:

The building itself, is in reasonable condition, considering its recent vicissitudes, fires, leaks, and not so benign neglect. The brick bearing walls were well constructed of hard, pressed brick, which despite repointing, has held up well; the terra cotta trim of windows, and the main side door, has been minimally damaged by weather, a tribute to that material's longevity. The pressed metal oriel is intact, and the cornices and pediment, though of pressed metal have escaped extensive visible damage. Only the removal of the corner, conically roofed tower, and the redesign of the shop fronts have significantly altered the appearance, and with little effect on the apparent integrity of the building.

Within, however, the story is different. The plan has been reduced to a shambles by the removal of the main stair and lobby. Fire damage, and extensive leaks have damaged floors, making them dangerous. Vandalism has destroyed the once handsome stair. Poor planning has made the building a fire code nightmare.

## B. Description:

### 1. Over-all dimensions:

The Thompson Building occupies an irregular site, determined by the angled intersection of Second Street with East Main. Because the building covered essentially 100% of its available area, its east side is at less than a right angle to the street front. That change in plane occurs immediately to the rear of the first shop bay. The front and west sides

are at 90° to each other, and project back to the position of the stair, at which point a lightwell was cut out that provided illumination for the stair. To the rear, a three story building-- perhaps existing from an earlier building and incorporated into the new building, as suggested by the PRER & BG description, extends at 90° to the west wall. The deed descriptions make it apparent that the front of the property is 51'9" along Main Street, and that the building extended to the middle of the clock, approximately 91 feet to the north, where it returned to Second Street, at a 90° angle to the west wall of the building. At a later date the stair for the apartments was added through the neighboring property to the north.

## 2. Foundations:

The foundations were inaccessible because of the condition of the building which made it necessary to seal the lower levels. During demolition, the foundation should be visible.

## 3. Walls:

The walls are of red Philadelphia pressed brick, laid in common bond with no bonding courses. The same hard brick was used on all visible exterior walls. Red mortar, since repointed, continued the reddish hues of the wall.

## 4. Structural system:

The original description of the project indicated that steel was used in the building. Evidence in the interior suggests that steel beams carried the upper levels of the building above the shop fronts, and in the stair well. Wooden joists span the relatively narrow rooms, running parallel to the East Main Street front, and resting on the center spine. There is little that would be considered unusual in a contemporary house, let alone an office building in a small town.

One other structural item deserves comment-- the support of the stair, which at certain points was suspended from a wrought iron rod to eliminate the tendency to sag inward.

## 5. Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads:

The front of the building, when constructed, lacked the commercial bulk windows of later years. Instead a terra cotta cornice and entablature, carried on masonry piers, framed shop windows, which early views show sheltered by striped awnings. By 1909 the Sanborn's Atlas shows a projecting wood frame front porch, with bulk windows, that added to commercial

space. Its upper level survives, but it has been refaced, probably after World War II.

A corner oriel, sheathed in pressed metal is the other major element of the wall. Panels, representing pilasters, support horizontal panels that are entablatures in a classical scheme. Above the fourth story cornice the oriel terminated in a conically roofed tower surmounted by a finial.

#### 6. Chimneys:

The building was steam heated, with a small chimney set well back near the interior party wall.

#### 7. Openings:

The openings of the front block of the first floor were framed with terra cotta. Behind the frontispiece, segmental brick arches span openings on the first, second and third floor, while the fourth floor windows are round headed like the front windows-- but without the terra cotta frames.

The major ornamental opening is that of the office entrance, with terra cotta capitals on pilasters, supporting the arched opening, framed by the entablature with the building's name cast into its surface. A round arched window, accented by a terra cotta keystone, lighted the stair landing of the second floor.

Sills throughout were brownstone, continuing the red-brown tonality of the facade.

No original doors survive on the exterior. Sash were typically 1 over 1, with rectangular frames in the segmental headed openings and round headed windows in the round headed openings.

#### 8. Roof:

The roofs were flat, with a rear slate portion visible from the street. No vantage point could be obtained to determine whether it was built up, or tin. Cornices are of pressed metal, with a dentil band above the frieze. To the west of center of the East Main Street front, the cornice is capped by a pediment, framing a semi-circular lunette in the tympanum. The tower at the corner, described earlier, has been removed, and the damaged area sheathed with a modern metal.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans:

Enclosed

2. Stairways:

The stair to the upper levels of the building is a straight run, that is contained in the building to the north. It was not accessible.

The second floor landing and stair turned around an open well that rose through the top three levels of the building. Square newels, and balusters with turned sections carry a common banister. Wood wainscotting, surmounted by a simple moulding complete the finish.

3. Flooring:

Floors were of wood, but finish was destroyed.

4. Wall and Ceiling Finish:

Walls were typically plastered, without ornament.

5. Openings:

Doors and window openings have been altered on the interior. Simple millwork framed openings, with mitered joints instead of the typical corner blocks.

Doors were of the two panelled, wood, single leaf variety, with plain brass plated hardware.

D. Site:

The building sits at the northwest corner of Second and East Main Street, in the center of Coatesville, on the major business street of the community. The main facade faces south, while the Second Street facade looks east northeast.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

I. Early Views:

- A. The Coatesville Library contains several street views that show the shop front of the building.

B. The Chester County Historical Society, West Chester, Pa.

Street files contain a post card view of the building, a copy of which is included in this report.

Other views include a panorama of East Main Street, also included.

C. DiOrio, Eugene, Chester County, A Traveller's Album, privately printed, Coatesville, 1980.

II. Bibliography:

Site maps, Chester County Historical Society

Breou's Farm Maps of Chester County, W.W. Kirk & Co. Phila., 1883.

Atlas of Chester County, A.R. Witmer, Lancaster, Pa. 1873

Sanborn's Atlas of Coatesville, Pa., New York 1909 Plate 6

Newspapers & Trade Publications:

Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builder's Guide, 27 Feb. 1901, XVI: 9

Daily Local News 29 March, 1901; 26 June 1901 in clipping file, Chester County Historical Society, Coatesville Record 22 April 1939, obituary, John W. Thompson, clipping file Chester County Historical Society.

Business Directories:

Moore's Standard Directory of Coatesville, Pa., 1904, 1909

Polk's Coatesville Directory, 1923-4

Mullin-Kille, Coatesville, PA. City Directory Supplement, 1942.

Non Published Sources:

Chester County Deed Books, Courthouse, West Chester, PA

III. Project Information:

The project was initiated by the Redevelopment Authority of Chester County, Pa. which intends to demolish the building on 22 August 1981, for a small park on Main Street.

The survey was undertaken by George E. Thomas and Carl E. Doebley on Tuesday, 11 August, 1981.

Photographs were taken on the same date by George E. Thomas.

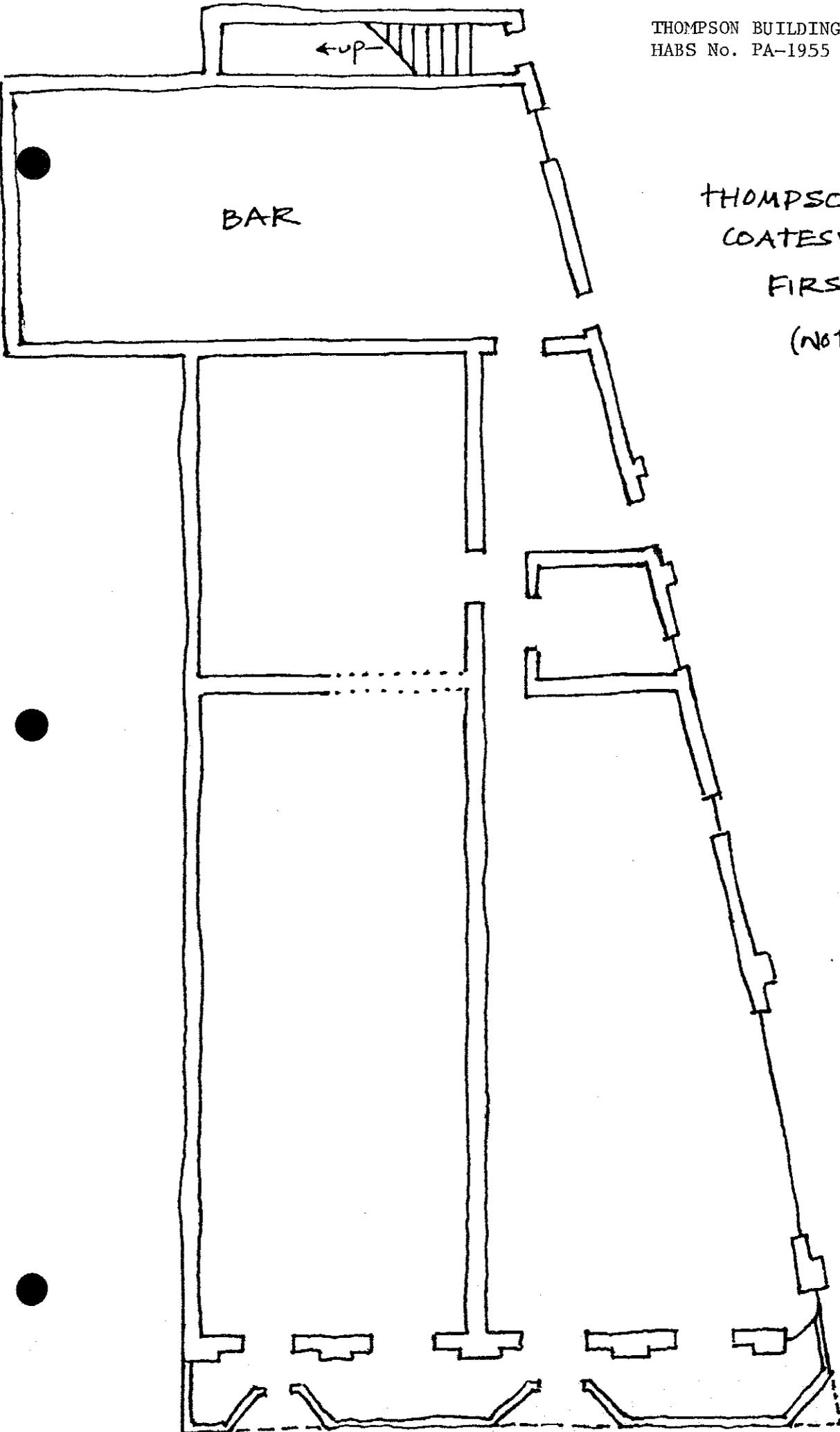
The narrative was completed by George E. Thomas.

Plans were drafted by Jeffrey Cohen.

Prepared by:

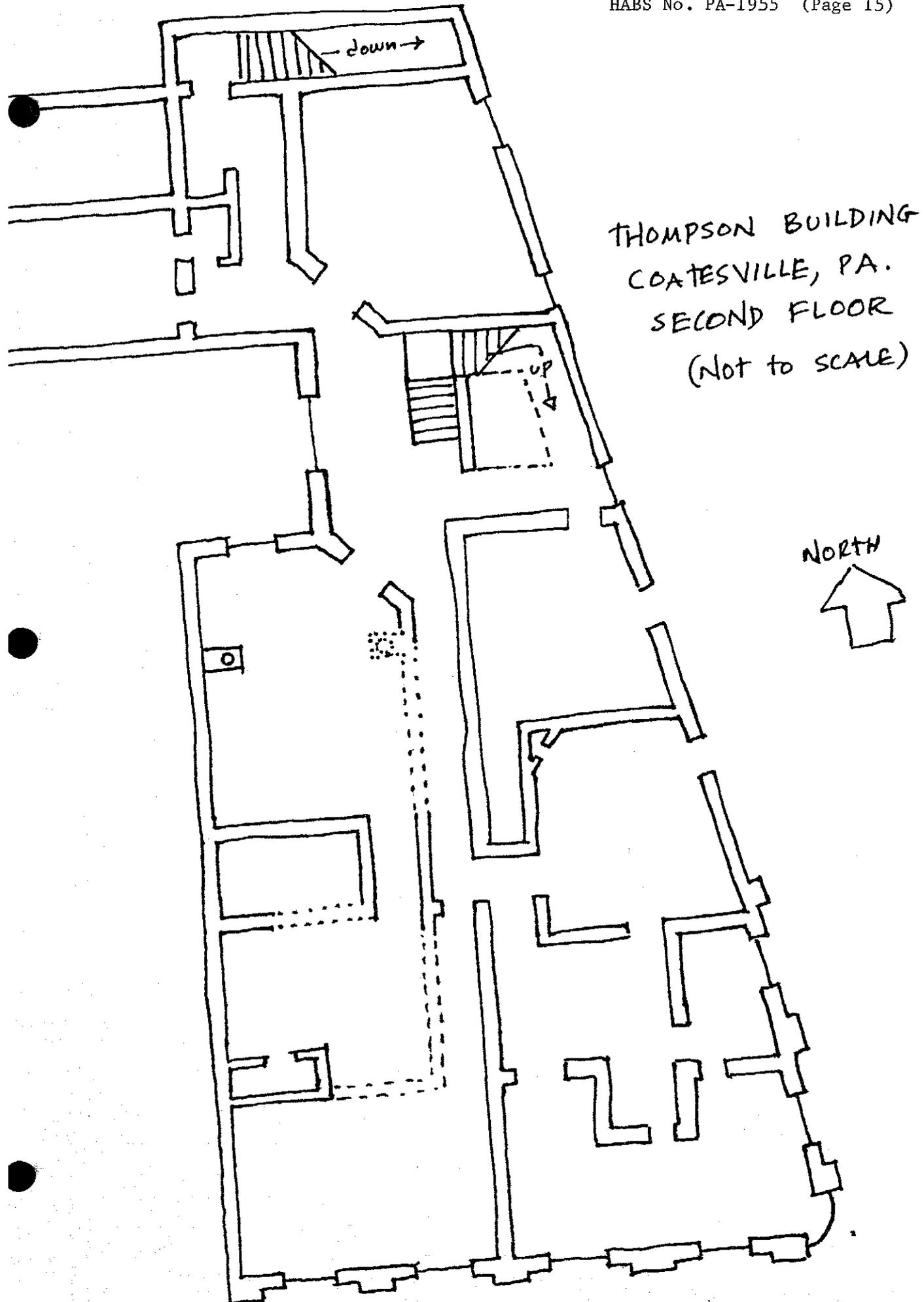
George E. Thomas, Ph.D.  
CLIO GROUP, INC.  
3961 Baltimore Ave.  
Phila., PA 19104

17 August 1981

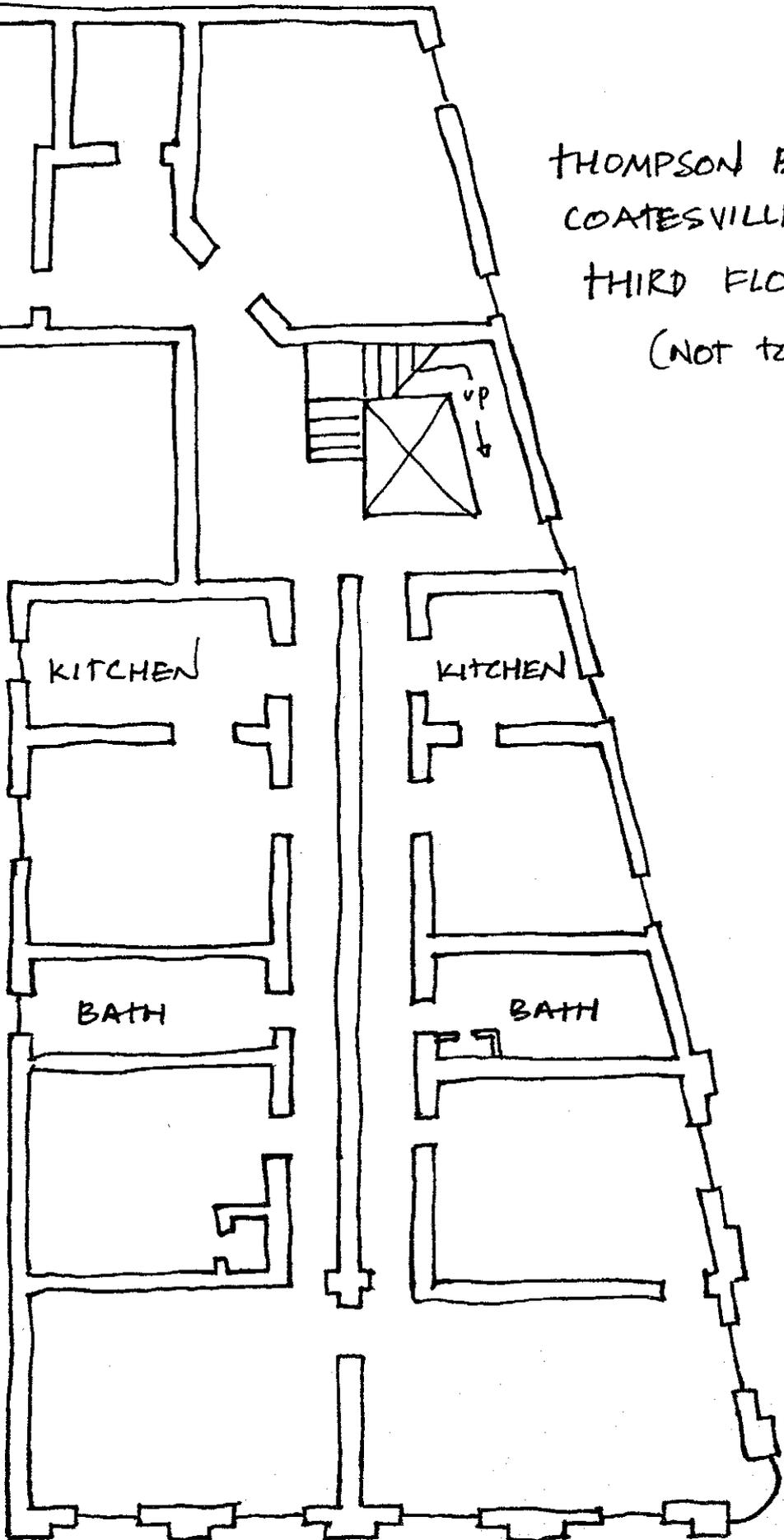


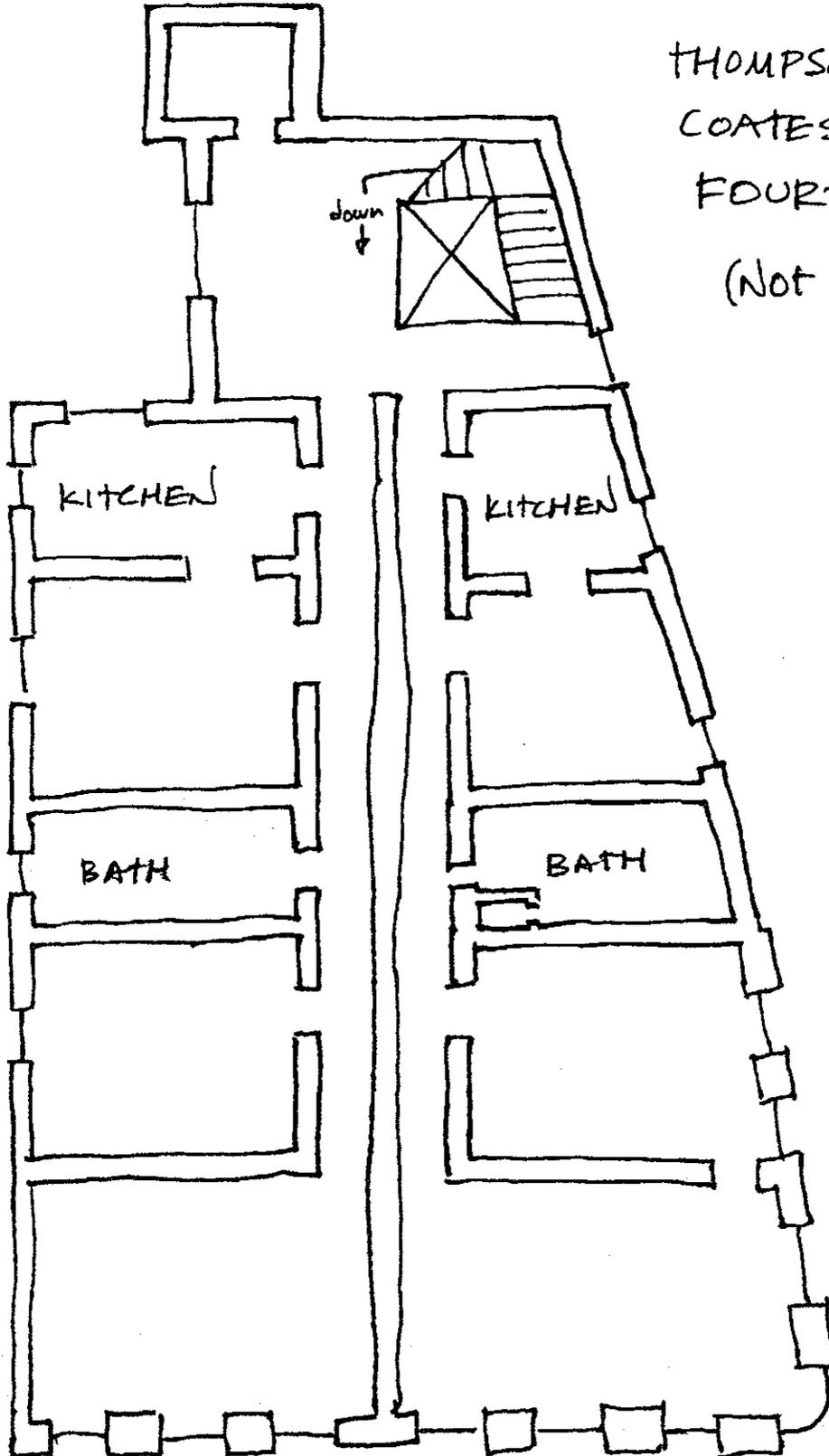
THOMPSON BUILDING  
COATESVILLE, PA.  
FIRST FLOOR  
(NOT TO SCALE)





THOMPSON BUILDING  
COATESVILLE, PA.  
THIRD FLOOR  
(NOT TO SCALE)





THOMPSON BUILDING  
COATESVILLE, PA.  
FOURTH FLOOR  
(NOT TO SCALE)



STATE Pennsylvania	COUNTY Chester	TOWN OR VICINITY Coatesville
HISTORIC NAME OF STRUCTURE (INCLUDE SOURCE FDR NAME) Thompson Building, (on building)		HABS NO. PA-1955
SECONDARY OR COMMNDN NAMES OF STRUCTURE none		
COMPLETE ADDRESS (DESCRIBE LOCATION FOR RURAL SITES) 163-167 East Main Street, Coatesville, PA.		
DATE OF CONSTRUCTION (INCLUDE SOURCE) 1901 (on building) BG- 27 Feb 1901	ARCHITECT(S) (INCLUDE SOURCE) A.W. Dilks	
SIGNIFICANCE (ARCHITECTURAL AND HISTORICAL, INCLUDE ORIGINAL USE OF STRUCTURE) The Thompson Building was a commercial structure, with retail space, offices and a school, built for banker John W. Thompson. It is a handsome transitional Victorian building by A.W. Dilks, a pupil of T.P. Chandler.		
STYLE (IF APPROPRIATE) Queen Anne		
MATERIAL OF CONSTRUCTION (INCLUDE STRUCTURAL SYSTEMS) Brick bearing walls; steel for long spans, wood joists		
SHAPE AND DIMENSIONS OF STRUCTURE (SKETCHED FLOOR PLANS ON SEPARATE PAGES ARE ACCEPTABLE) see attached plans		
EXTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE The facade is accented by terra cotta window frames, and a complex archway for the office entrance. A massive cornice, with pediment, and corner oriel add plastic interest.		
INTERIOR FEATURES OF NOTE (DESCRIBE FLOOR PLANS, IF NOT SKETCHED) The suspended open stairwell, with Queen Anne stair was of architectural interest.		
MAJOR ALTERATIONS AND ADDITIONS WITH DATES The front was altered by a commercial porch front before 1909. The interior was redesigned after World War II.		
PRESENT CONDITION AND USE Abandoned		
OTHER INFORMATION AS APPROPRIATE The building is to be demolished in late August 1981.		
SOURCES OF INFORMATION (INCLUDE LISTING DN NATIONAL REGISTER, STATE REGISTERS, ETC.)		
COMPILER, AFFILIATION George E. Thomas, PhD., Clio Group, Inc. 3961 Baltimore Ave. Phila., PA 19104		DATE 17 August 198