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1752

THE HISTORY OF A HOUSE

*Det Bernstorffske Palæ*

1952

## THE HISTORY OF A HOUSE

# THE HISTORY OF A HOUSE

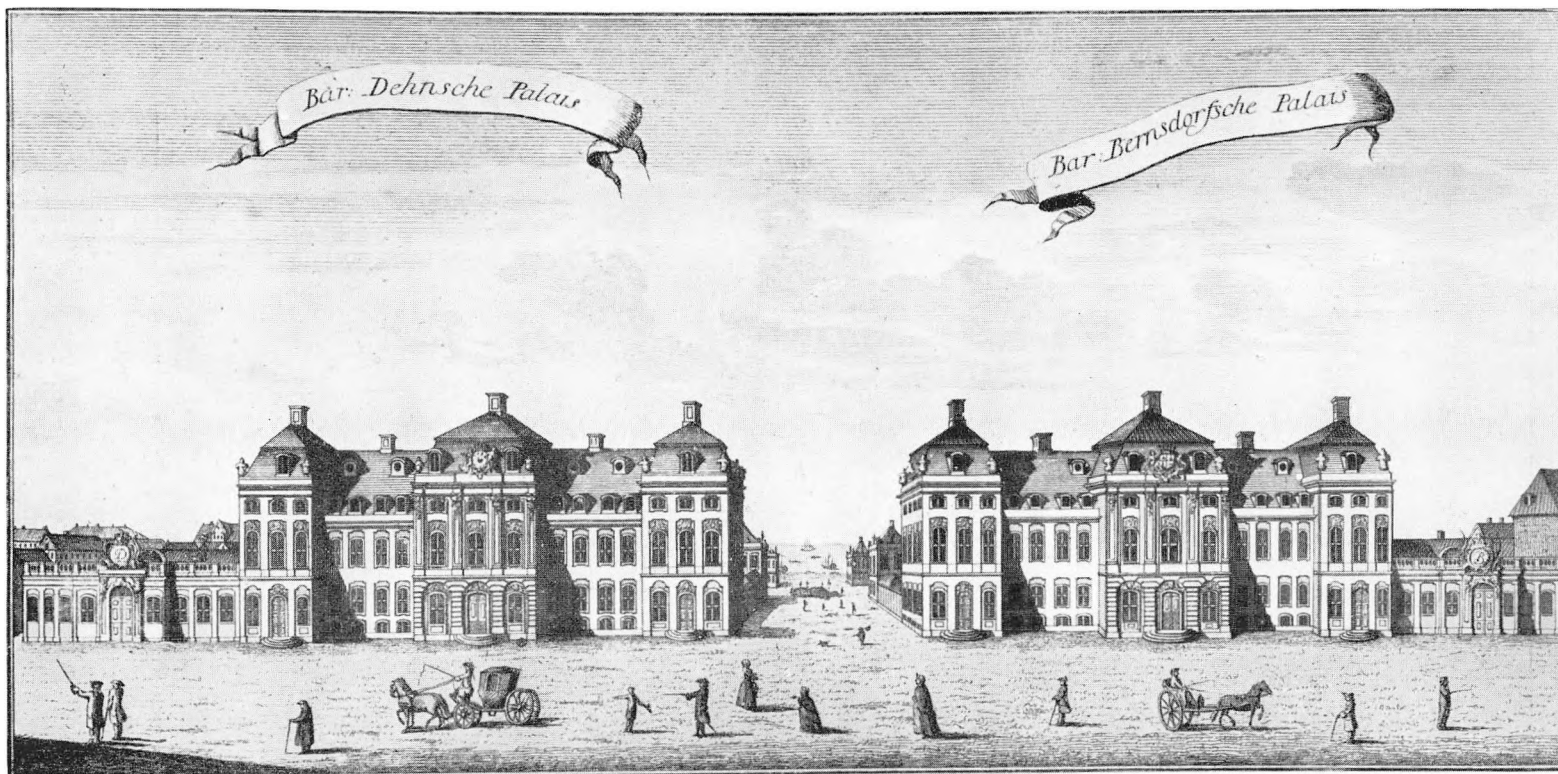
*Det Bernstorffske Palæ 1752-1952*

*by Bredo L. Grandjean*

EDITED BY THE BALTICA INSURANCE COMPANY, LIMITED

COPENHAGEN 1952





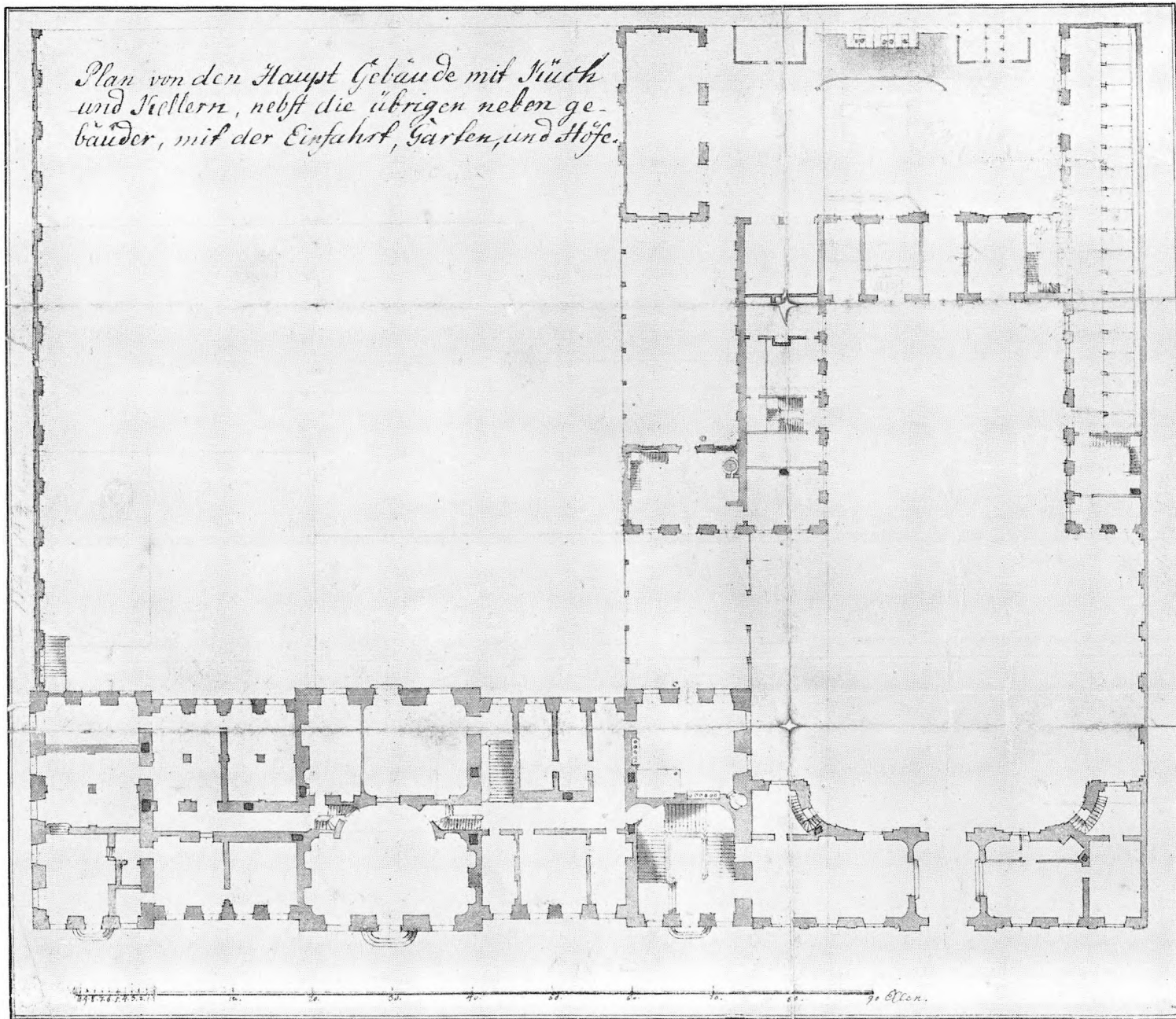
Engraving from Erich Pontoppidan, *Den Danske Atlas*, 1764.

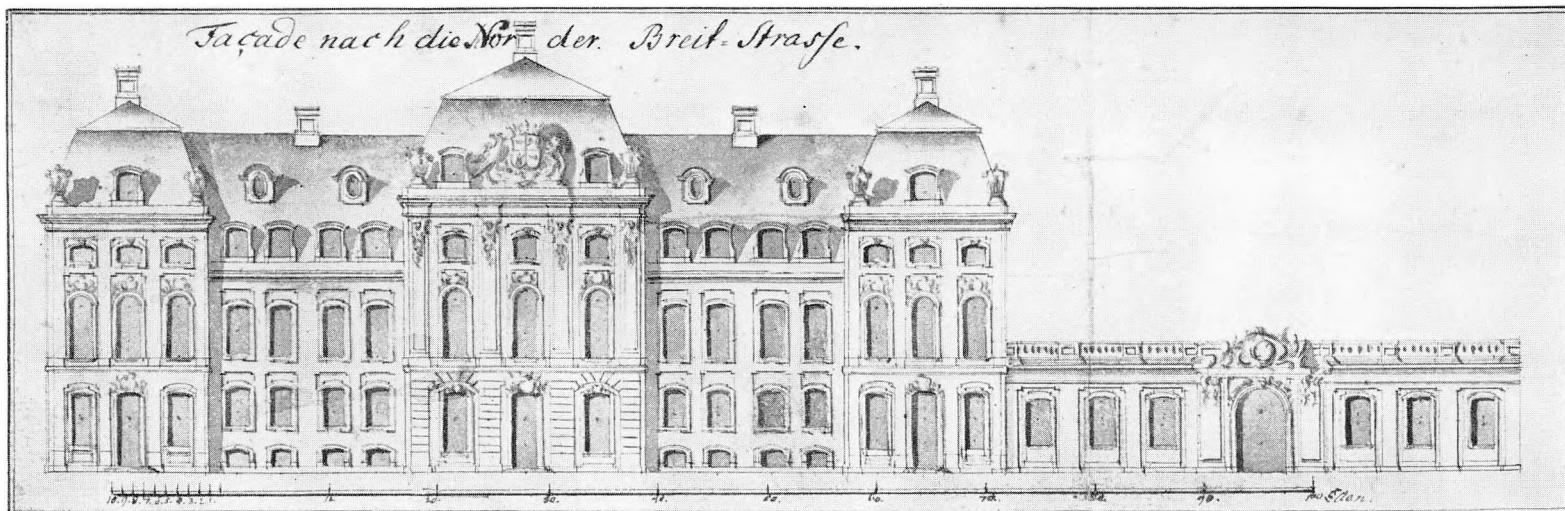
In the 1740's the site on which the residence of the Bernstorffs at Bredgade was founded used to be part of a broad canal surrounding the former Amalienborg Gardens and an adjacent military assembling place. Here, in memory of the 300th anniversary of the Oldenburg Royal Family in Denmark *Frederiksstaden* was laid out, its two axes Amaliegade and Frederiksgade intersecting at right angles. Centered around Amalienborg Palace it was to become the most modern and fashionable part of the town. The magnificent plan was related to similar lay-

outs in the France of the 1740's described in detail by Baron Johan Hartvig Ernst Bernstorff, the Danish envoy to Paris, in his reports to King Frederik V. and his government.

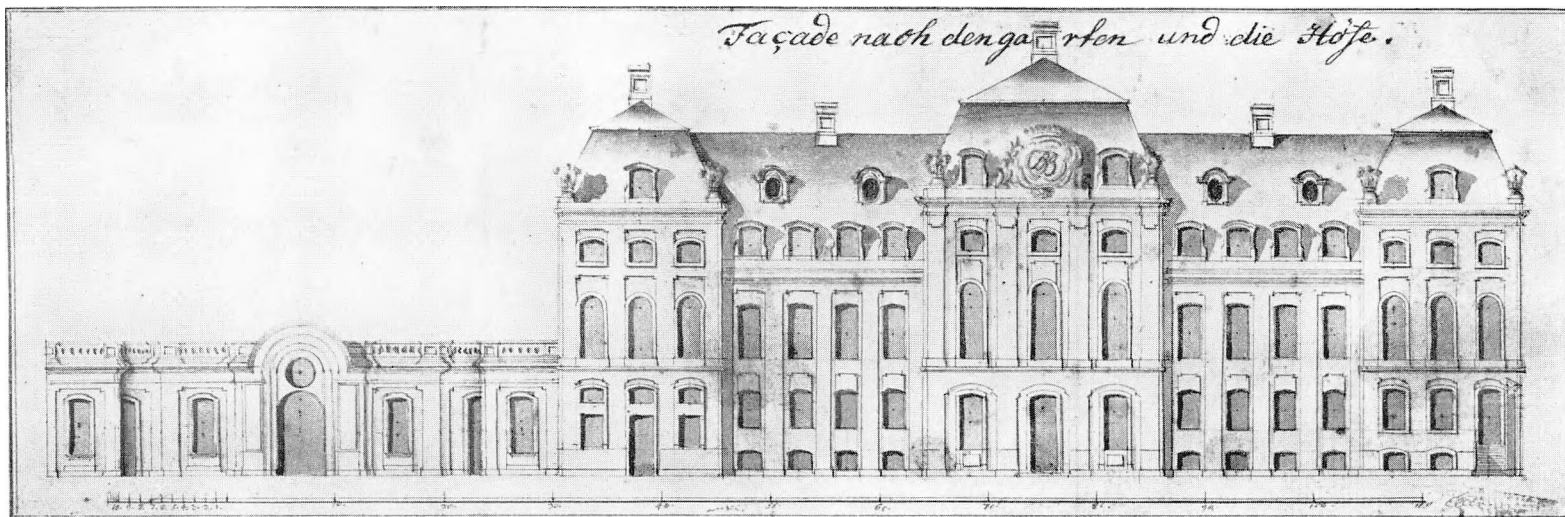
In December 1749 His Majesty presented the municipal authorities with the entire area, the intention being to distribute sites free of charge to citizens who might want to build there. It was stipulated that the prospective builders should conform to the regulations of the town plan, and Niels Eigtvad, Surveyor of His Majesty's Works,

Plan von den Haupt Gebäude mit Küche  
und Kellern, nebst die übrigen neben ge-  
bäude, mit der Einfahrt, Gärten, und Höfe.





*Elevation facing the street. From the 1750's (Royal Library, Copenhagen).*



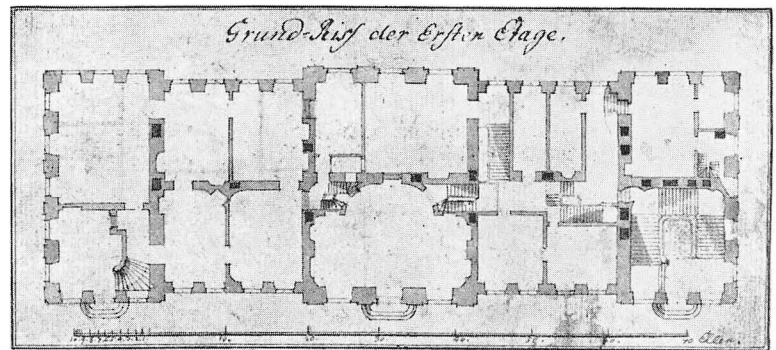
*Elevation facing the courtyard. From the 1750's (Royal Library).*

*Opposite page: Complete ground plan from the 1750's (Royal Library).*

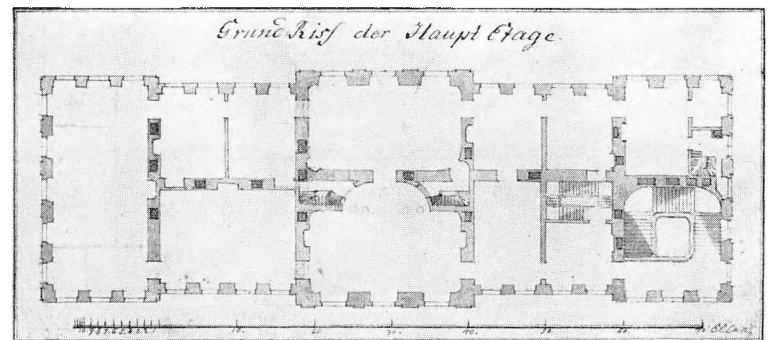
should approve of their designs or by Royal command provide drawings free of charge. In return the builders were granted taxation reliefs and import of building materials free of duty.

The grounds had just been cleared of shrubs, trees, and garden *chalets*, the canal had been filled in and the first sites distributed, when Bernstorff was recalled to new duties as Minister for Foreign Affairs. It was only natural that he should choose for himself a suitable site in the new part of the town which he had sponsored. Frederiksgade was the most important street forming a short cross-axis connecting the Square and the Marble Church. To suit the plan the Bredgade corners had to give an impression of grandeur, and here were planned two mansions forming counterparts. Together with the Amalienborg Residences they constitute the main architectural monuments of *Frederiksstaden*. Bernstorff chose the site to the south and Baron Dehn, a colleague of his from the Privy Council, had the northern one. Both of them employed Gottfried Rosenberg, an architect from Mecklenburg, who may have been recommended to them perhaps by Niels Eigved, the Surveyor of His Majesty's Works.

In June 1752 Bernstorff, having obtained the deed of conveyance, applied to the civil authorities for import of building materials free of duty. He enclosed a specification from 'mein Baumeister Rosenberg' which detailed materials as follows — 1 800 000 bricks, 50 000 glazed tiles, 20 000 red tiles, etc., plaster of Paris, baskets of French and boxes of Pomeranian glass, Pomeranian beams, sand-



*Plan of the ground floor.*

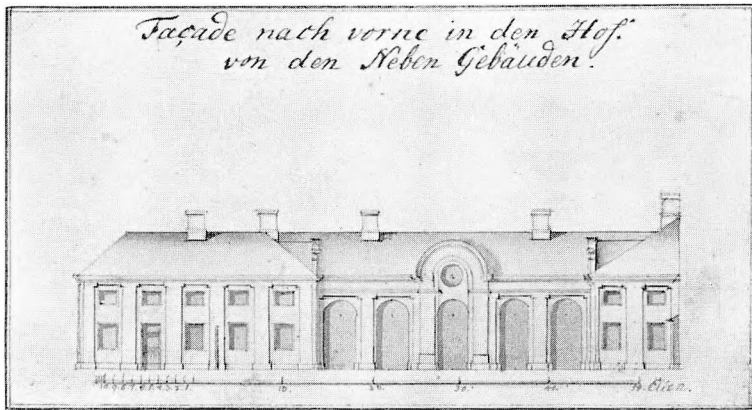


*Plan of the first floor.*

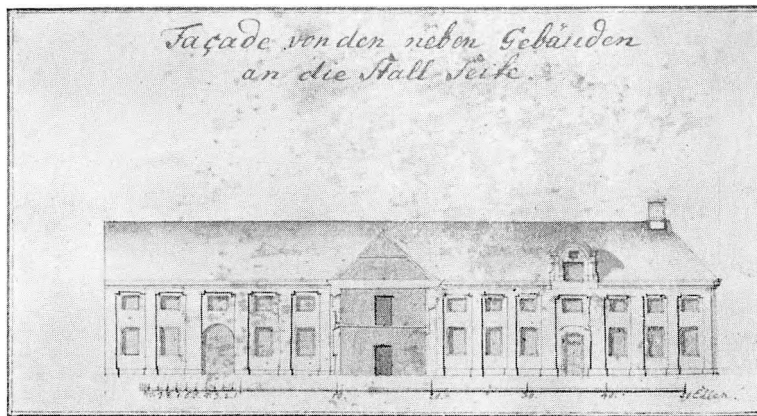
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*Both drawings date from the 1750's (Royal Library).*





*Elevation of buildings in the courtyard.*



*Elevation of the stables.*

*Both drawings date from the 1750's (Royal Library).*

stone and flag-stones from Sweden, and 174 000 nails. At last, on the 13th of September, the laying of the foundation stone took place. The Baroness Bernstorff, *née* von Buchwald, laid the stone containing a copper plate with a Latin inscription in memory of the occasion. A copy of this inscription exists in a third, never printed volume of the Danish Vitruvius by Laurids de Thurah. The accuracy of de Thurah cannot be doubted, and we need not take any notice of the date usually given in printed sources. A week later the foundation stone of Baron Dehn's residence was laid.

The walls rose slowly over the foundations, and in the spring of 1753 Bernstorff sent the designs to a friend in Paris asking him, a little late it seems, to submit them to an architect. One Pierre Coustillier was asked to pronounce the verdict, which was anything but flattering. One can imagine Bernstorff wincing at its severity. The French architect examined the rooms one by one uttering comments like 'ridicule' or 'tout à fait gotique'. The main staircase he considered particularly unsatisfactory, but when his unfavourable verdict reached Copenhagen it was too late to alter it. Otherwise the warning was heeded. Before considering its effect, however, let us examine the work, which was so heavily criticized and see what was the responsibility of Niels Eigtved in the matter. Naturally the Bernstorff residence should not be considered apart from Baron Dehn's, its counterpart in the intended new development of the town.

Each house had a Mansard roof and consisted of three

sections two and a half storeys high. They were connected by buildings of two storeys each. The window rhythm was 3-4-3-4-3. To the north and south there were low gate houses, just above half the length of the front. The very pronounced division of the façade was not accidental. On the contrary, it continued the rhythm of the Amalienborg façades, where low gate houses originally connected the main blocks with the corner houses. These again were joined to the Dehn and Bernstorff residences by low walls. Seen from the middle of the square the courtyard façades used to play an important part in the transition to the projected church with its towering cupola and spires. Eigtved no doubt was responsible for this well-planned and impressive lay-out. As pointed out by Professor Christian Elling, a Danish authority in the field, Eigtved most likely had the Sulkowski mansion at Warsaw in mind when he was consulted on the matter. He may have provided a sketch of the type he had thought of or he may have referred to appropriate models.

Rosenberg, the architect, was not merely clerk of the works in the building scheme. He must have planned the arrangement of rooms and no doubt designed the Mansard roofs which were unknown in Eigtved's own work. He designed the ornament and built an attractive stable-yard, admirably suited to the gate house. He was no mean designer, but the supreme rule of the Court architect left little to the initiative of others. Admittedly, when we examine the plans, the ground floor does appear somewhat muddled, with three entrances and no less than



*The entrance hall and staircase.*



*The entrance hall and staircase.*

four separate flights of stairs leading to the top storeys, besides the monumental stair which led only to the first floor. Here, on the other hand, the arrangement of rooms is well balanced and related to that on the same floor in Count Moltke's wing of the Palace. For the design of the main staircase Rosenberg depended upon Eigtved or upon French models. That together with the staircase of Baron Dehn's residence have been rightly called 'the most attractive Danish rooms in the rococo manner'. The construction is daring, marble has been used plentifully, and the colour scheme is a noble one — employing grey, white, and discreet gilding. The wrought iron banisters have been copied from an engraving by J. F. Blondel. The walls are beautifully panelled, and the stucco work is elegant with a rich rosette on the ceiling and graceful trophies and *rocaille* ornament above doors and windows.

A first-hand acquaintance with French art and culture had made Bernstorff a proper Francophile, and the adverse judgment of a Parisian expert on the building plans of his architect must have been a bitter pill for him to swallow. But it made him only the more determined at all costs to make a home for himself which would stand comparison with the best French domestic architecture. Thanks to good connections in Paris he was able to contact excellent artists and decorators, and the following month saw a flow of letters, sketches, and specimens of wall-paper pass between Paris and Copenhagen. In 1752 two shiploads of furniture arrived from the Embassy Hôtel at the Rue Bourbon. Among the treasures was

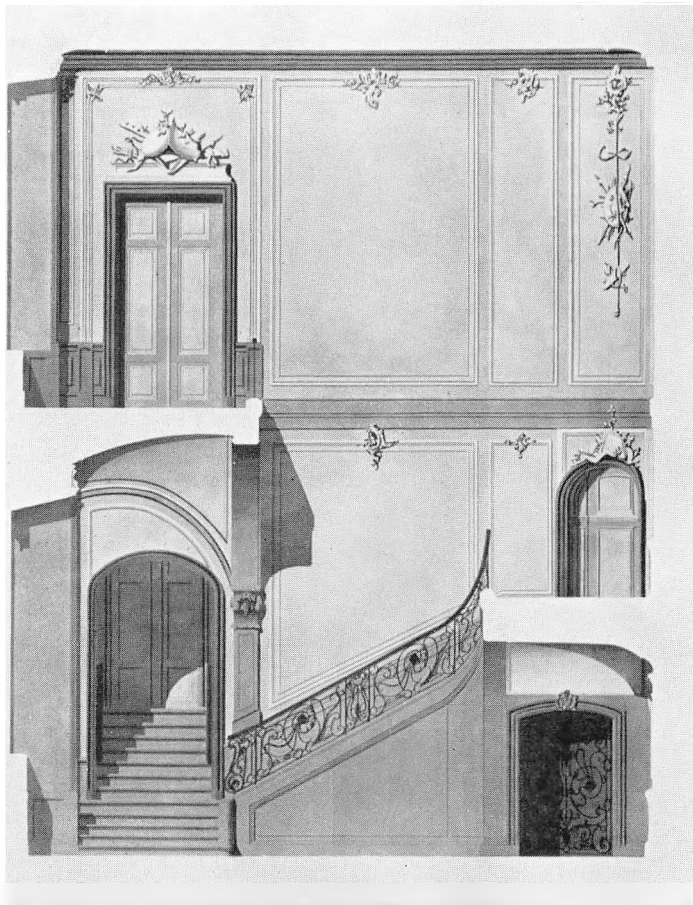
Bernstorff's fine collection of books. With special care the owner prepared the furnishing of the so-called tapestry hall on the first floor. It was named after four French tapestries with mythological subjects woven by the Beauvais factory from cartoons by François Boucher. In the summer of 1756 they arrived in Copenhagen together with a suite of furniture including a sofa and twelve chairs. A marble fire-place with some wonderful bronze ornament and pier-glasses was the work of François Germain, a French goldsmith. His signature and the year 1756 are engraved on it. Baron de Thiers in 1755 declared the room 'dans le gout de notre dernière volupté', but when completed two years later it was already a little out of date compared with the dining hall of Count Moltke's residence at Amalienborg. The latter was finished just about this time by N-H. Jardin, a French architect of a more advanced taste. Whether Bernstorff was disappointed or not we do not know, but later on when planning Bernstorff Manor he himself employed Jardin. In 1756 he moved in, but the furnishing was not completed until a couple of years later. We know little about it, apart from his own reference to the hanging of several portraits of foreign princes to whom he had been accredited.

A letter from A. P. Bernstorff, his nephew, in the following manner describes a party given in honour of the Royal Family when the Bernstorffs were raised to the rank of Counts, "La fête de hier que mon oncle a donnée au roi et à sa cour est heureusement passée, et tout le

monde convient que c'est la plus belle qui ait été donnée depuis longtemps. Il n'y a pas eu le moindre désordre; rien n'a manqué, tout a eu grand air et je n'ai presque jamais vu autant de tables servies aussi délicatement et aussi abondamment. Le roi arriva à 3 heures au sortir de la comédie et resta jusqu'à 4¼ du matin. La danse a été singulièrement vive et animée. On a paru fort gai et content et L. L. Maj<sup>tes</sup> se sont exprimés ladessus en des termes fort agréables. La première table était de 37 couverts, la 2<sup>de</sup> de 28, la troisième de 22, en suite deux de 13 (!) et trois de 10 couverts. Dans la cour il y avait une illumination qui a très bien réussi et qui a fait un effect fort agréable. Celle-ci est sans contredit la première maison en ville pour de pareilles occasions . . ."

Four years later the Baron died and his nephew left Holstein and travelled to Copenhagen to wind up the estate. He negotiated the sale of the house to the municipal authorities, but the bargain was never completed, and he actually needed the house when in 1772 he was appointed Chancellor of the Exchequer. For eight years the house saw numerous splendid parties, until one evening in the autumn of 1760 when without warning Bernstorff received a letter from the Heir Presumptive asking him to send in his resignation. People flocked to the house demonstrating in his favour, disapproving of the removal of the most able statesman of the country. He retired to his estate in Holstein, until 1784 when he was reappointed. The rest of his life was spent here and at Bernstorff Manor.



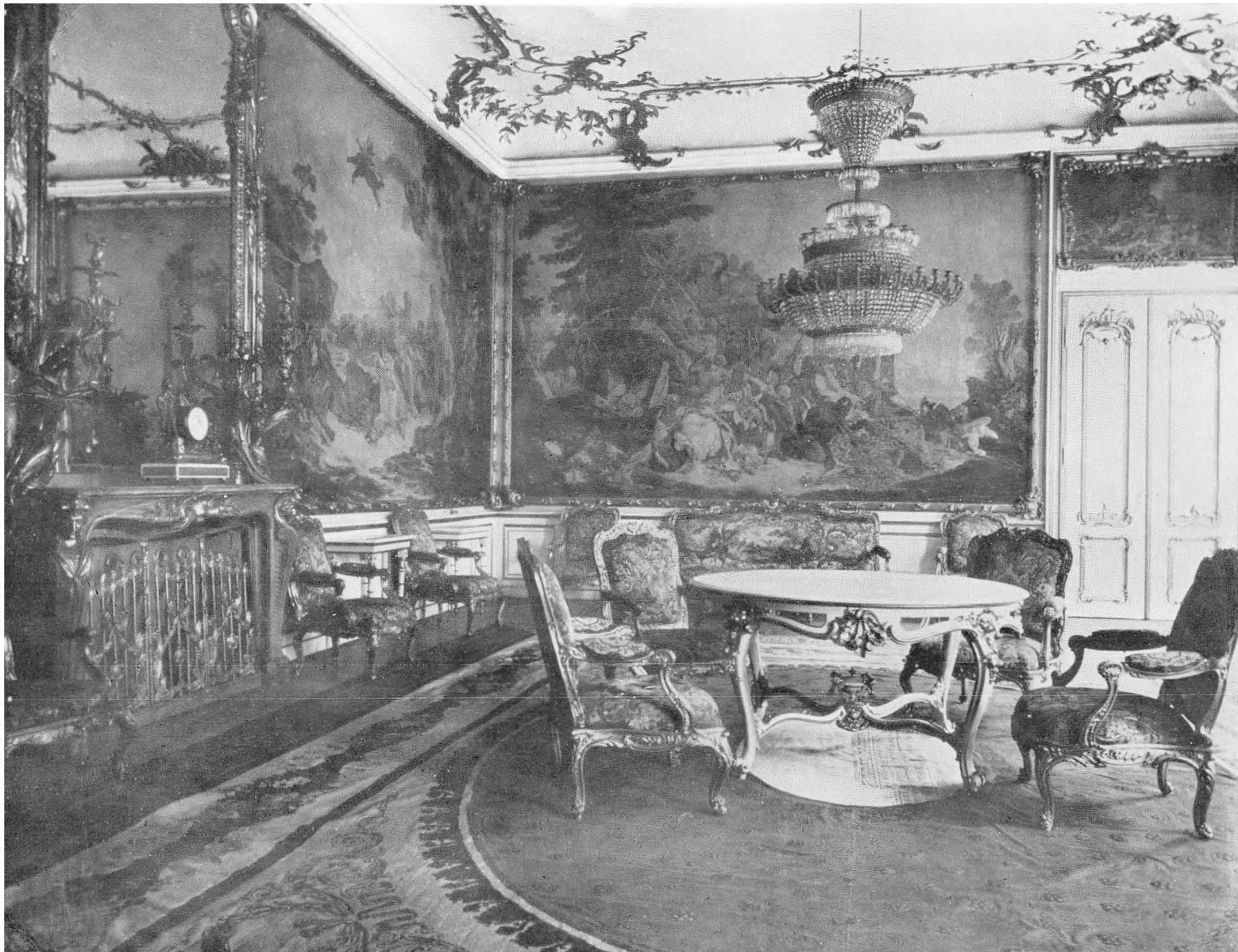


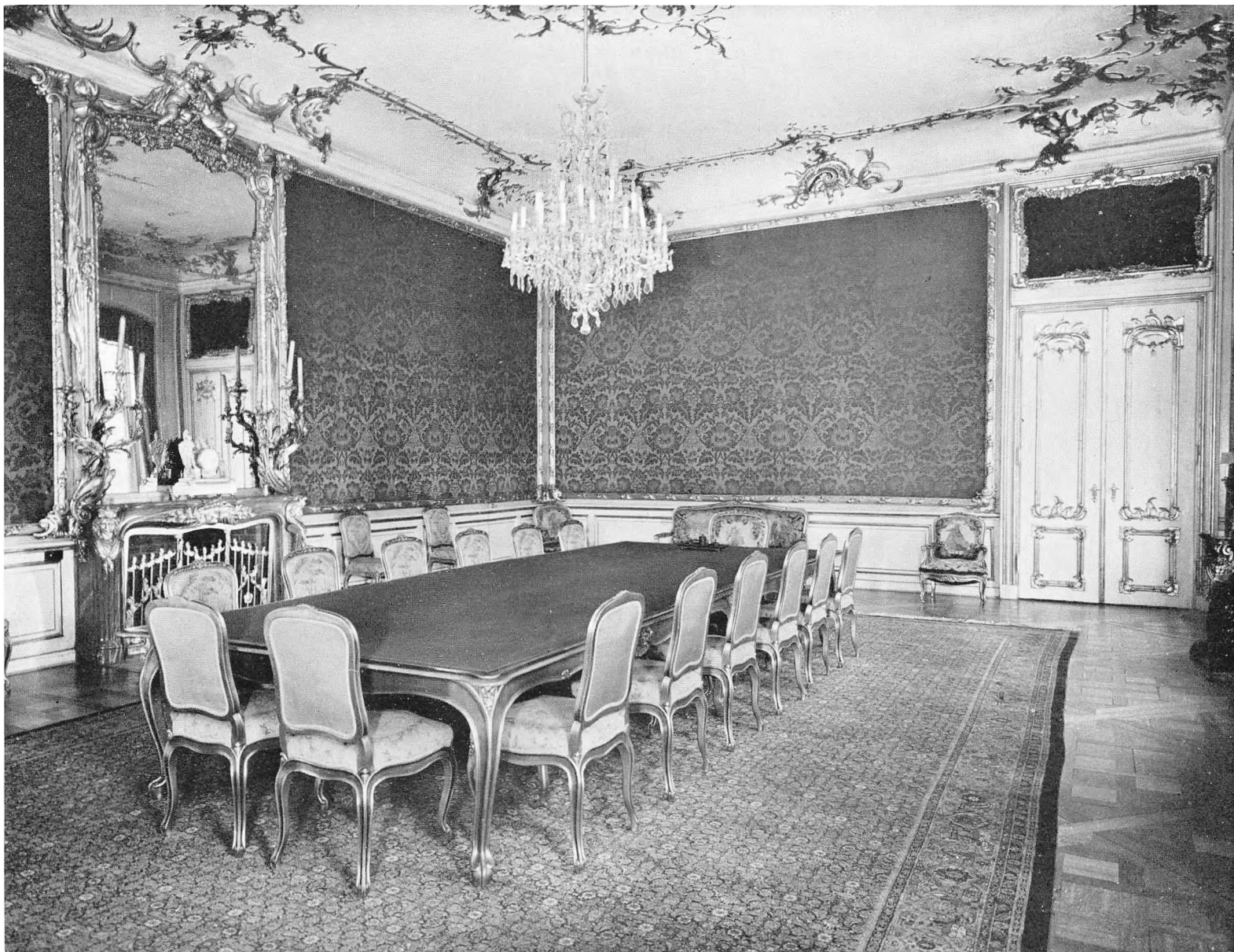
*Section of the staircase. Measured in 1942.*

Two years after his death in 1797 his son sold the house to two prominent speculative builders. They were intent on business, and their first step was to have it revalued for the fire insurance. The house was divided into three separate parts, each with a new registration number and its own policy. They were reunited eventually, but the following is an outline of their fate during the separation.

As for the corner house at Frederiksgade an expert appraisal from 1799 informs us of its interior. A main staircase had been built into the eastern part of it, and the corner room on the ground floor was described a few years later as decorated with gilded pilasters and figured wall-paper with gilded mouldings. Above the doors were panels painted yellow and blue. A small wing was added providing room for stables and a carriage shed. Among the owners up to 1829 were Frederik Hoppe, a Gentleman Usher, Christian Bülow, a Chamberlain and Peter Saabye, a consul.

The rest of the house was extended in 1799, the intention being to provide a new entrance. Unfortunately it proved to be the first step towards a destruction of the old gate house. The gate proved too narrow, and in 1814 it was extended to the whole width of the new building, just as it is today. In 1799 the interiors looked much like the original plans show them. The appraisal refers to costly painted panels, velvet and damask hangings, marble fire places, and gilded mirrors at the windows. The two central rooms on the first floor had marvellous





*The tapestry room to-day.*

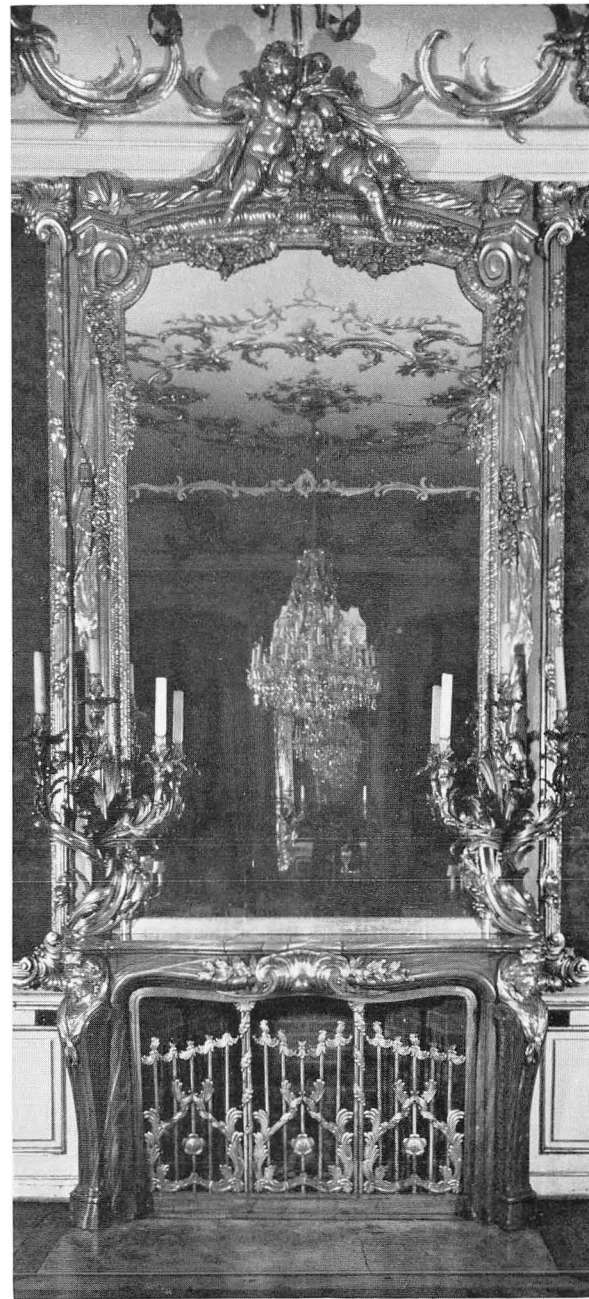


stuccoed ceilings, inlaid parquet flooring and console mirrors. From 1803 this part of the house was owned by Commander Steen Andersen Bille who is well known from the defence of Copenhagen against the British in 1801 and 1807 when Lord Nelson and young Arthur Wellesley fought here. During the bombardment in 1807 the house was slightly damaged by a bomb, which fell in the street outside. Bille had some prominent tenants including a Prime Minister, and one Count Yoldi, Spanish envoy and a connoisseur of conches. In 1814 the house was acquired by Prince Frederik Ferdinand, son of the Heir Presumptive and brother of the later King Christian VIII. In 1817 he leased it to his cousin King Frederik VI, but still retained his apartment on the ground floor. For the following hundred years sentry boxes flanked the doorway of the residence.

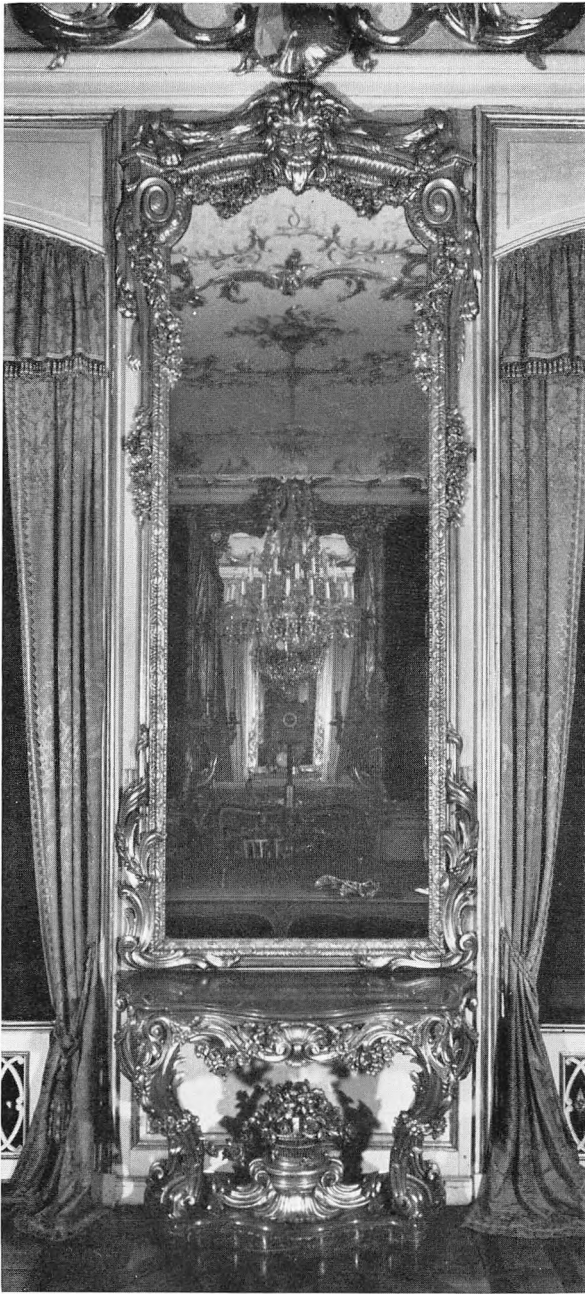
In 1799 the old gate house was still standing, reduced but with its splendid, hewn sandstone decorations intact. It soon had to go, however. In 1801 two new houses three storeys high rose on the site. In the courtyards at the back can still be seen Bernstorff's stable and carriage shed, practically unaltered. Its walls are handsomely relieved with dressings and has low windows on the first floor. In 1805 the house was sold to a merchant and in 1823 to a Captain Malling.

Such was the situation when the engagement was declared between the Prince and the eldest daughter of King Frederik VI. The house was considered a suitable residence for the young couple. His Majesty requested the

*Fire-place  
in the  
tapestry  
room.*



*Console and mirror in the tapestry room.*



Royal Steward to buy part of the house and give the tenants notice, at the same time requesting the Surveyor of the Works to submit plans for rebuilding and modernizing it. This was the beginning of another chapter in the history of the house, and in most respects the undertaking was similar to the rebuilding in 1827-28 of the present Royal Residence at Amalienborg.

The similarity was clearly intended, as shown by a letter from King Frederik VI. to the Surveyor of the Works requesting him to provide everything "similar to what was procured the year before last for our dearly beloved daughter, Her Royal Highness Princess Wilhelmine Marie". A new project was drawn up for stables in the courtyard, but even before the Royal consent was given the architect had an idea — if His Majesty would care to acquire the adjacent house and stables the expense of building could be spared, and what was even more important "Her Royal Highness would avoid having the stables below her windows. Over the low rail she would have an undisturbed view of the garden and be spared the usual inconveniences involved by the proximity of a stable". That was a very considerate idea.

In May 1829 Captain Malling's house was acquired, and a plan for the redecoration was approved by His Majesty only two months before the marriage. The decorators would have to be quick about the job. One doorway was covered up and replaced by a window. The pretty façade was deprived of its classical mouldings and redecorated in grey stucco. This annex was designed to

accommodate the more distinguished members of the household, the attendants numbering in all fifty-one persons. A former stable was converted to a garden chalet. French doors led from the garden into a room with a sofa recess, and behind that was a toilet- and bathroom with cold and hot water taps. A few years later a similar pavilion where baths could be taken was set up in the garden behind the Amalienborg Residence. A garden was laid out after designs by the Royal gardener from Rosenborg.

The tapestry room with its fine rococo furnishings was left unaltered, and on the first floor some panels and stucco ceilings were allowed to remain. The modernization was not as thorough as that of Amalienborg, but His Majesty's idea of his daughters being similarly provided for was fulfilled.

The interior decoration was undertaken by a number of Copenhagen craftsmen and firms such as the Holme-gaard Glass Works and the Royal Copenhagen Porcelain Factory. The Court Jeweller delivered the silver even down to the silver knob on the doorman's staff.

Thanks to the preserved ground plans and an inventory from 1829 we are able to reconstruct in detail the interior of the house. The arrangement of the rooms eventually improved in regularity and balance. The large basement contained kitchens, pantries, and a wine cellar, a handsome room with pillars of brick supporting two rows of cross vaults. The servants' quarters were nearby. On the ground floor Prince Frederik Ferdinand had his bachelor apartment.

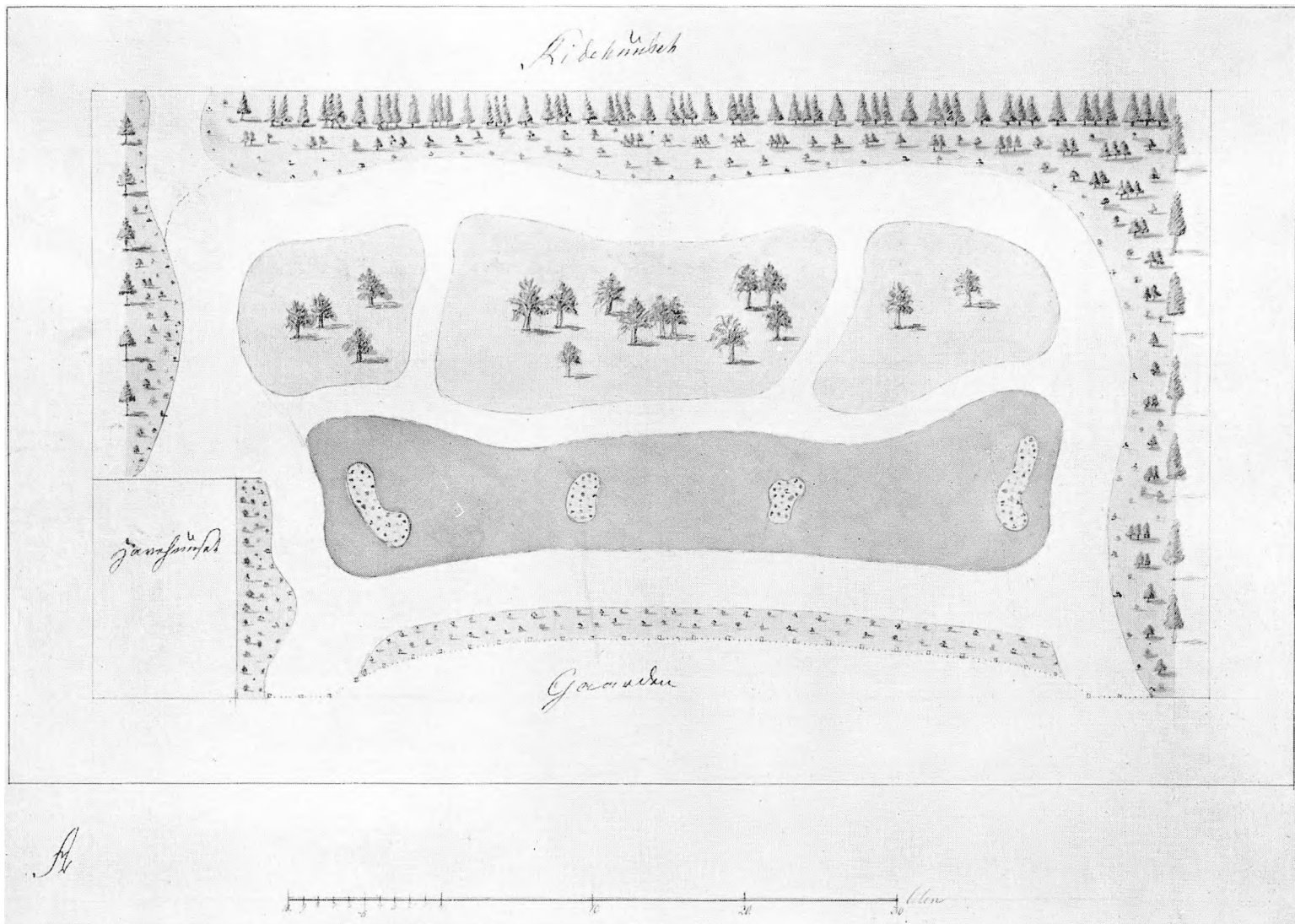
In the footmen's room the curtains were of grey merino and the wall-paper on canvass was purple-grey. The curtains in the ante-room were white on a cream-coloured wall. The audience chamber had red damask curtains and yellow pelmets. Along the windows were mirrors with white and gilded consoles supporting blue marble slabs. The white and gilded furniture had red coverings; round ovens stood in recesses behind rails, and a red and yellow Brussels carpet covered the floor. Further on was a bedchamber with green damask curtains and purple pelmets. The figured wall-paper was pink, and the bed was placed in a recess behind curtains. On the ground floor were the silver and china rooms, the linen room and the quarters of the butler and the valet. Facing the courtyard was a living-room with portraits of Royalty on the walls, console mirrors, a mahogany escritoire and a writing desk. There was a billiard room and a study with a grey flowered Brussels carpet and along the wall three mother-of-pearl painted book cases with glass-doors. From a passageway a secret stair led up to the suite of the Princess on the first floor.

The entrance to her suite led through a footmen's room and the room of the ladies in waiting. The state room — now adapted for office purposes — used to have crimson curtains with yellow and red pelmets. A bronze chandelier with 48 candles and four smaller chandeliers had been removed by His Majesty's order from Christiansborg Castle and installed here. In the tapestry room the decorations had undergone no alterations since Bern-



*The residence seen from the square in front of the Marble Church, 1842. Water-colour  
in the collection at Frederiksborg Castle.*

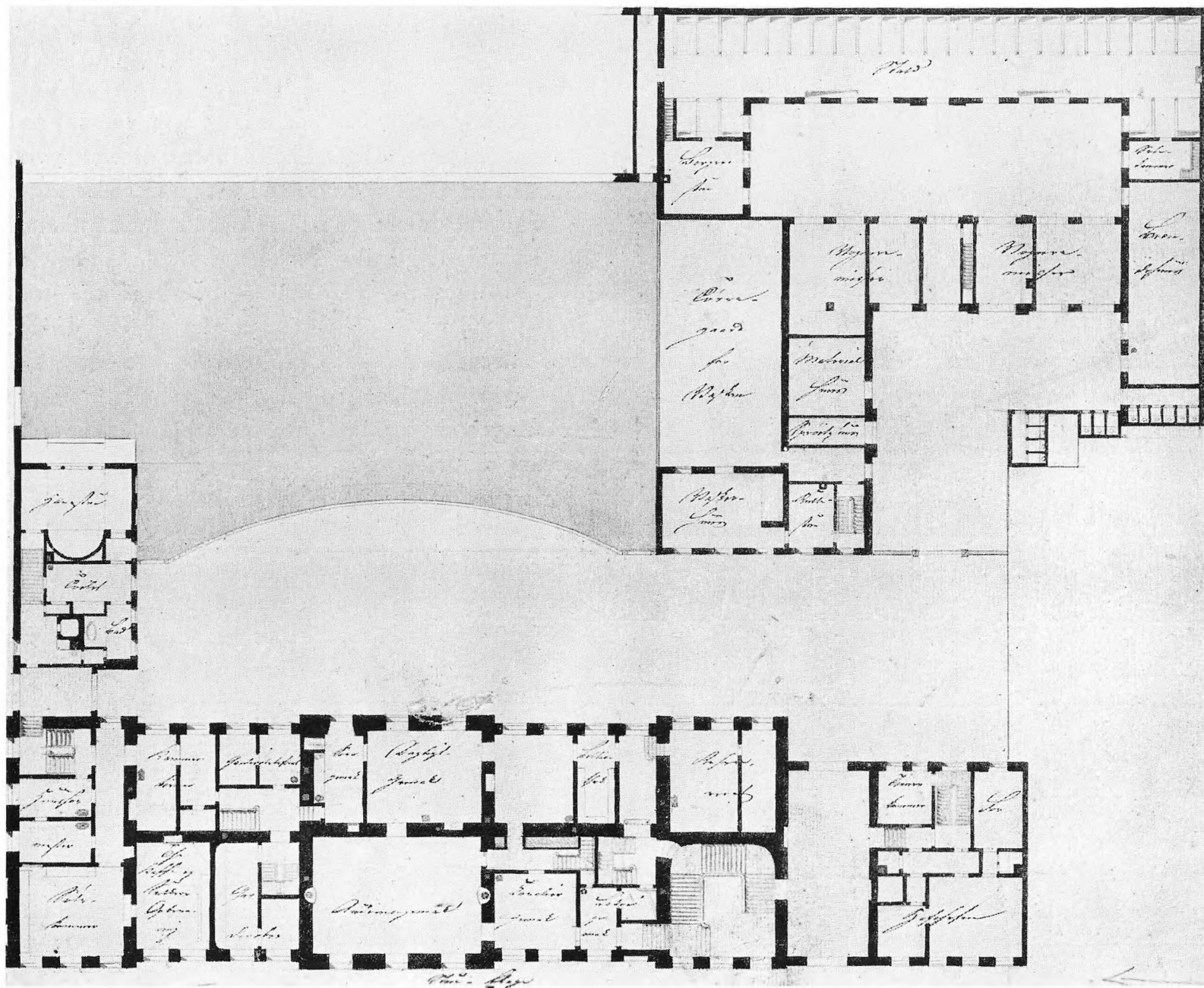


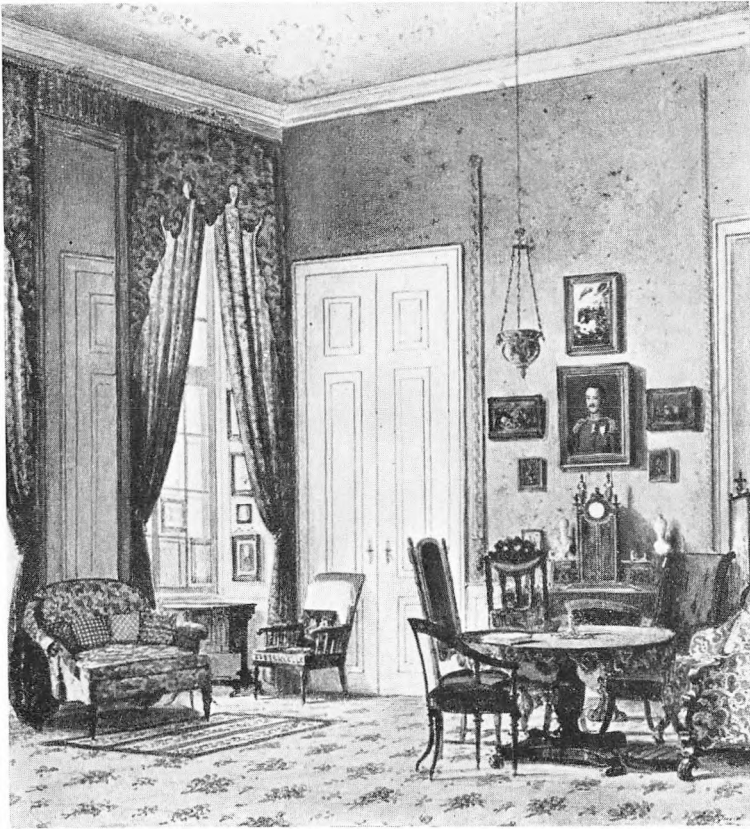


*Lay-out of the garden, 1829.*

*Opposite page: Rebuilding project, 1829. Plan of the first floor.*







*The study of Princess Caroline. Water-colour in the collection at Rosenborg Castle.*

storff's time; only the precious painted panels by Boucher had been carefully restored.

In the corner room the throne was standing under a magnificent marquee. The curtains were made of red satin lined with white, the walls were draped even to the floor with satin and festooned pelmets. The throne was arranged in a recess under gilded halberds supporting

draperies of red velvet with fringes, tassels, and braids in plenty. The carpet was embroidered with a view of Christiansborg Castle.

The daily dining hall had orange satin curtains and pelmets of turquoise blue. The walls were decorated with fruit- and flower-paintings, and with a meander and a painted garland of flowers similar to the decoration of the Royal dining hall at Amalienborg.

The ball room — at present the cashier's office — was in blue and white with crystal and bronze chandeliers. The present Manager's Office used to be a daily apartment with white curtains and wallpaper, red furniture coverings and a console with a musical mantel clock supporting an Apollo with his harp. The study had grey, flowered chintz curtains and chamois wallpaper. It housed a small collection of Danish paintings, the choice of which was the responsibility of the architect acting on the advice of the Keeper of the King's Pictures.

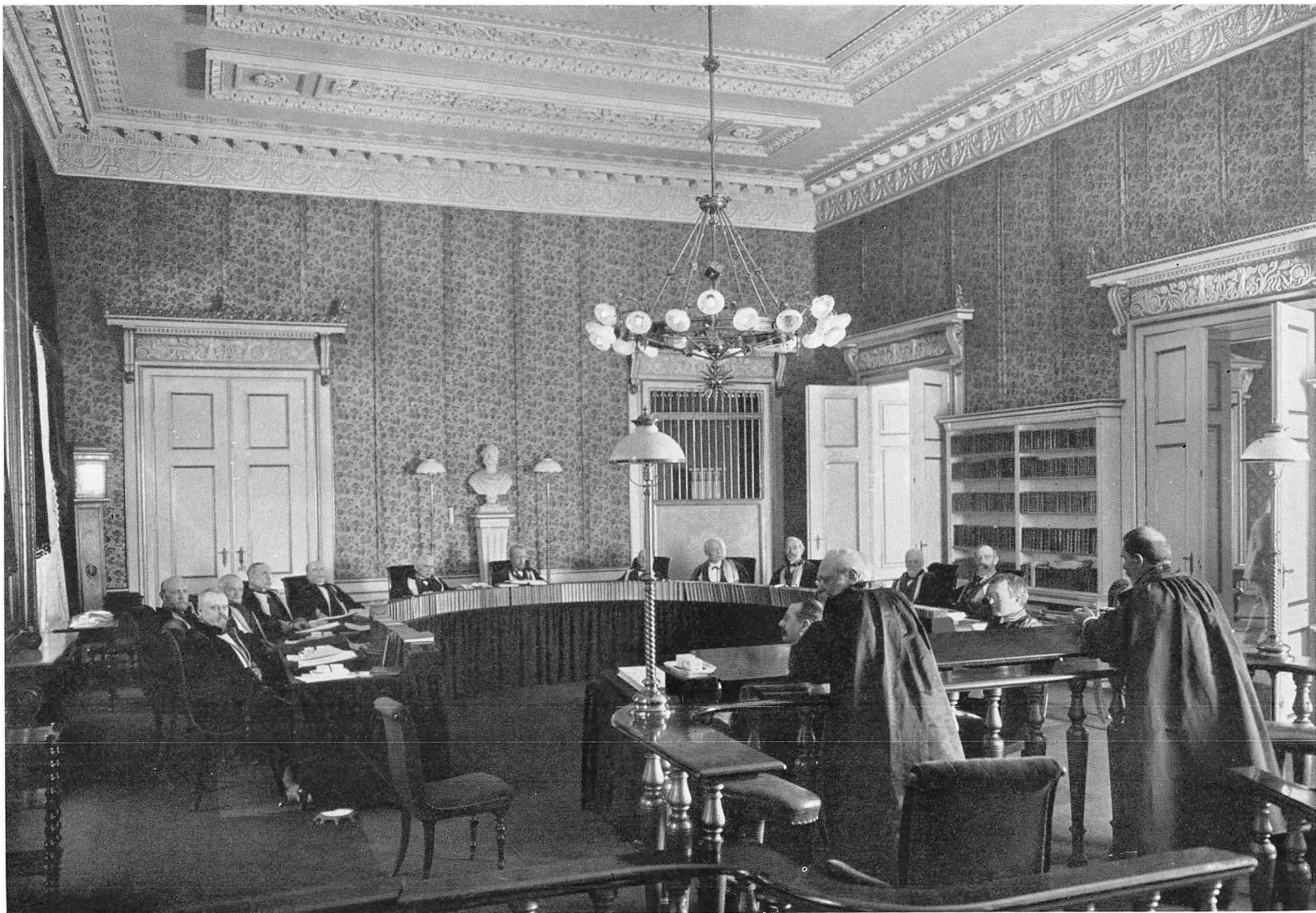
The interiors of the residence were brightly coloured; the Oldenburg colours — yellow and red — being used above all in the state rooms. Most rooms had large white ovens, either round or square, with imitated porphyry urns on top. The many card tables reveal one of the main pastimes of society at the time. The Prince himself was particularly addicted to it.

He was a weak, but good-natured man, spending his life in these elegant surroundings together with Princess Caroline and his court. She was of a firm and kindly disposition, loyal and charitable. They were well liked,



*Drawing of the garden pavilion, 1861. (Collection of the Royal Copenhagen Porcelain Factory).*





*The former court room on the first floor. Notice the rail in front of the oven.*



*The same room as it appears to-day. Doors, mirrors, consoles, and ceiling date from 1829.*

and although the finances of the country were in a bad way, they managed to give some memorable parties. Tableaus were another favourite pastime of society, and M. Bournonville, the Ballet Master of the Royal Theatre, used to arrange ballets, quadrilles, and pageants in which the guests could take part. In May 1838 a party was given to celebrate the engagement of Princess Wilhelmine and Duke Carl of Slesvig-Holstein, Sonderburg, Glucksburg. King Friedrich Wilhelm of Prussia paid a visit to the house during a visit to Denmark.

In 1881 the old Princess died and with her went the last of our absolute monarchy. Her small court was dissolved, and her furniture was sold by auction. Some months after her death a number of artists were allowed to do some sketching in the house, particularly in the tapestry room. Among them was Kristian Zahrtmann. Here he painted a well-known 18th century interior supposed to represent a scene at Hirschholm Manor showing King Christian VII, his English queen, and her admirer Struense. Actually the painter took quite a liking to the old Princess merely from hearing her so well spoken of by her accomplished servants. A careful water-colour copy by him of one of the tapestries is now in the possession of the Museum of Applied Art. In the following December the house was acquired by King George of Greece at a price of 357 000 kroner. He had an apartment set up in the former suite of the Heir Presumptive and went to stay there during his visits to Denmark. In the fire of Christiansborg Castle 1884 the premises of the Supreme



*The so-called Princess's Corridor behind the throne room on the first floor. Contains furniture from the redecoration in 1829.*



Court were destroyed, and King George allowed the Court the use of the first floor of the residence. Messengers took over the footmen's room, secretaries succeeded the ladies in waiting, and the great hall was converted to a court room. At a horse-shoe table with a green cloth the judges sat in their scarlet cloaks, and the gentlemen of the court had their table in front of them. When the voting took place the judges withdrew to the ball-room adjoining the garden.

In 1896 after the marriage of Prince Carl and the English Princess Maud the young couple moved into the house, occupying the ground floor. They remained until 1905, when they were elected King and Queen of Norway. The crown of Norway was bestowed upon them at a ceremony at Amalienborg, and afterwards a reception was held at the Bredgade residence for the members of the Norwegian Parliamentary deputation.

In March 1913 King George was murdered at Saloniki. His five sons inherited the house, and in 1916 it was sold to the Transatlantic Company. Three years later the Supreme Court moved to new premises at Christiansborg, and the house was properly converted for office purposes. Even while preserving the lay-out of the rooms some new corridors and partitions were necessary.

The first floor of the house has undergone little change, only the dining-room with the large flower-paintings being converted. The paintings, however, have been preserved, the intention being to put them up in the canteen which has been opened in the former basement kitchen.

In the Supreme Court room the oven recesses have been converted to a cupboard and a passageway, both with new doors suited to the old interior. The magnificent pier-glasses and consoles have remained. For practical reasons some doorways have been covered up, thus destroying the beauty of the continuous, enfilade view of the doors. In the former throne room — now the office for motor-car insurance — the recess has disappeared, and large, light offices have been accommodated on the first floor. Many of these alterations have been undertaken by the present owners, Baltica Insurance Company, Limited, who took over the house from the Transatlantic Company after their bankruptcy in 1921. Baltica carefully tries to preserve the treasures of the memorable past of their house and fully realise the responsibilities involved in possessing a Trust protected house.

In 1940 at the quarter-centenary of the Company the garden was rearranged in its present shape and on that occasion a sculpture by Professor Utzon Frank was erected. A little gravestone of the Princess' dog Tello can still be seen at the garden wall. In 1950 the garden house was rebuilt, but from outside the beautiful little building has not altered and its warm southern wall supports a couple of old vines.

The purpose for which the old residences were built is no longer in keeping with present day ideas. But for all lovers of Old Copenhagen it is a solace to know that this splendid house is now well looked after.



*The stable yard seen from the garden.*





*The residence to-day. The originally oil-painted façade is now covered with grey concrete.*



*Flower-painting from the daily dining room, 1829.*

#### NOTES AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

M. Coustillier's criticism of Herr Rosenberg's architectural designs is quoted in a letter (12th April 1753) in the Joachim Wasserschlebe collection at the Royal Library, Copenhagen. The correspondence between Baron Bernstorff and Baron de Thiers is discussed in a book by Mario Krohn on the artistic connections between France and Denmark in the 18th century. (»Frankrigs og Dan-

marks kunstneriske Forbindelse i 18. Aarhundrede«, Copenhagen 1922). The documents concerning the redecoration of the house for Prince Frederik Ferdinand are available in the Danish Record Office (Rigsarkivet) mostly in the archives of the Royal Steward (Overhofmarskallatets Arkiv) in the Record Office.

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