

cided to build a mansion on his island estate on the Eastern Shore, he adopted the English country house as his model.

Wye Hall, the mansion Paca built on Wye Island, was almost certainly the most splendid house in America when completed. Construction began about 1790, and before it was finished Paca had liquidated all of his property holdings in Pennsylvania and had called in several large debts to finance the building. In spite of the cost of Wye Hall, it is popularly believed that Paca built the mansion for his son and that his own residence was across Wye Narrows on the mainland on a tract known as Wye Plantation. The latter tract did not come into the Paca family until 1811, when it was left to John Philemon Paca's wife by her aunt, Anna Maria Tilghman Chew.²³ Wye Hall was William Paca's only residence on the Eastern Shore during the last ten years of his life, and he alone was responsible for approving the design and execution of the building. It was thus a remarkably revealing indication of the wealth and cultural sophistication Paca had attained during his lifetime. Wye Hall burned in 1879, but some idea of its magnificence can be seen in an extant front elevation and floor plan of the building. Stretching nearly one hundred feet in length, the house was distinguished by a massive two-story central block connected to terminal wings containing large Palladian windows. According to tradition, Wye Hall was designed by James Hoban, the Irish architect who designed the White House in Washington, but the architect's drawing clearly shows that the plan for the dwelling was the work of Joseph Clark. Born in England, Clark was the first post-Revolutionary Marylander to advertise in the newspaper as a professional architect. Among his other achievements in Maryland were completing the State House—especially the cupola and dome—and finishing "Bladen's Folly," the house originally intended as the residence for the colony's governor that is now the central building on the campus of St. John's College. Not only did Paca employ an accomplished architect to design Wye Hall, but he also commissioned Luke O'Dio, a landscape architect, to lay out the gardens that ornamented the terraces in front of the building.²⁴

Wye Hall was Paca's last great achievement, and it was here that he spent his final years in isolated splendor. Paca's life had been repeatedly touched by tragedy, and each time he withdrew a bit more within himself. By the 1790s Paca had few close friends and little interest in social activities. His son John still lived with him, but throughout most of his