

# ON THE WEST SIDE

THE UNIVERSITY CITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



September/October, 2014

<http://www.uchs.net>

Joseph Minardi, Editor

## RETURN OF THE BALTIMORE AVENUE DOLLAR STROLL

The second Baltimore Avenue Dollar Stroll of 2014 was a rousing success, with lines for food blocks long in spots, and throngs of happy revellers taking in the sparkling late-summer weather. As usual, there was a wide array of dining options, all available for the low price of only one dollar. In addition to the exotic edibles there were a number of street performers ranging including jugglers, fire artists, live musicians and Y-Not Radio, a Philly-based indie radio station.

With more than 30 vendors stretching from 43rd and Baltimore to 50th, there were a number of non-food related vendors this time around. Thank you, UCD!



Photos by Joseph Minardi

## Ask the Experts - (Lee Garner)

Many of you think that a clogged sink drain requires an “expert”; perhaps, by the time it creates a smelly pool of stagnant water in your fine kitchen or bathroom, you should call your local drain cleaner or plumber. However, dear reader, let’s try an experiment:

We all may have experienced a perennially slow-draining sink, in a 19th or 20th century home in West Philadelphia. BEFORE it becomes a disaster again, go for this home remedy (some of the older members/readers will remember this regimen...). And perhaps you should practice this annually (maybe when you change your smoke detector batteries), or even quarterly, once each season. Don’t fear, this organic method will never rot your drain lines. It is way less expensive than a professional service call.

Using only white vinegar and baking soda (bicarbonate of soda), first mix a half box of soda in a quart of warm water and stir until nearly clear. Pour this solution into your slow drain and wait only as long as it takes for all of it to drain away.

The chemically base fluid is coating the clog with wet white powder.

Now, pour slowly an entire half gallon of white vinegar down the same drain; the acid will react with the soda somewhat explosively (keep small children away during this operation). If the offending clog isn’t dislodged, you may need to use the same treatment a few hours later. However, to increase the effectiveness of the treatment, have a toilet plunger handy. First covering any overflow openings with a washcloth or rag, vigorously use your plunger in the drain, focusing mostly on the upstroke (the “pull” stroke). This can even work in a modern garbage disposer (though a double sink will require two plungers).

Like I said, you may have to apply this treatment several times in a row before you have major satisfaction.

Tune in next time for similar homeowner skills around a poorly flushing toilet!

- Lee Garner

## 4224 BALTIMORE AVENUE UPDATE

As many of you are already aware, there has been a recent and unsettling change concerning 4224 Baltimore, a proposed development project on the empty lot at Baltimore & 43rd St. across from Clark Park. When the New York developers, Clarkmore Group LLC, became aware of the uncertainty and delays other developers face when they deviate from 'as of right' projects and instead subject themselves to the unpredictable rulings of Philadelphia's Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA), Clarkmore lost its enthusiasm for the project worked out by U3 Ventures and the community. They now favor building the "by-right" design that had been granted to them from the start, rather than the alternative plan that was hashed out with Spruce Hill neighbors over a period of months, involving four well-attended public meetings. Community members almost unanimously felt that the alternative plan, which involved a number of amenities, was much better suited for the neighborhood, so this change is being seen as a disaster. (See <http://4224baltimore.com> for background and details of the community-planned project.)

The only way Clarkmore will be willing to build the community plan now will be if Councilwoman Blackwell will introduce legislation to allow them to build it. A legislative approach supplants the ZBA process, so the developers would avoid the lengthy process and the uncertainty of the outcome. In other situations, the Councilwoman is not in favor of the legislative route, because it usually precludes community involvement. In this case, however, the community has already designed the building which the legislation would permit.

We are at a critical juncture in the project. Right now, Clarkmore can move ahead with the "by-right" zoning permit, but the Spruce Hill Community Association, Friends of Clark Park, UCHS and many local neighbors are asking Councilwoman Blackwell to help the developers build the more neighborhood-friendly plan instead. If she decides not to support it, we will most likely be stuck with the "as of right" building which will have 6 total parking spots, no commercial space on the ground floor, and little to no character.

Please take a few minutes to send an email to Jannie Blackwell ([jannie.l.blackwell@phila.gov](mailto:jannie.l.blackwell@phila.gov)) if you support the community-approved project. Be sure to cc her Chief of Staff Martin Cabry ([marty.cabry@phila.gov](mailto:marty.cabry@phila.gov)) also, since he will most likely be the one counting the "votes." If you are opposed to the "as of right" option, please make your opposition clear, and give reasons.

The UCHS Board has fashioned a petition to Mrs. Blackwell, which reads as follows:

Dear Councilwoman Blackwell:

The Board of the University City Historical Society met on Wednesday, September 10th, and discussed the recent updates to the development plans for the 4224 Baltimore Avenue site. UCHS has just been made aware that the developer's reluctance to be involved in a prolonged process with the ZBA has now led him to a decision to build what the new Philadelphia zoning code allows "by right," rather than to build the better building designed by U3 Ventures in collaboration with the community.

We are very much distressed by this decision. We feel that the scrapping of the community-designed plan is a terrible loss

of a potentially great opportunity for Baltimore Avenue and for University City as a whole. Therefore we are asking you, Councilwoman Blackwell, to persuade the developer to change his mind.

As you may recall, UCHS was disheartened when the original pair of c. 1860 Second Empire residences on the site was torn down. (Some of our neighbors have still not forgiven UCHS for that, although we were powerless to stop the demolition.) So, UCHS at least hoped that a replacement, 21st century building on that prominent site would make a positive contribution to the neighborhood. For that reason, individual UCHS Board members attended all three of the community planning meetings for the site, and we then attended the final presentation meeting on March 26th as a group.

We were encouraged to see how many UCHS members and other University City neighbors were participating, and how seriously and diligently they were working. The meetings were packed; dialogue was very constructive; and the level of positive cooperation was remarkable - an unusual scene compared to the tone of many public discussions in our community!

UCHS could see that the neighborhood "bought into" the plan which emerged from those meetings: set-backs from the street; greater height only at a distance; retail and restaurant space (and the accompanying "eyes on the street" safety of well-lit commercial spaces with foot traffic); parking; green space and other community amenities and attractive design elements. We want to see this version built. We think that our UCHS membership and other neighbors will be outraged if it is not built.

In contrast, the neighborhood has not had, and will not have, any input whatsoever into the "by-right" building design, which UCHS finds rather dreadful. Please don't let this happen! Our Board feels that the "by-right" option is not just less than beneficial, but actually harmful to the immediate neighborhood - because of its high density, architectural appearance at odds with the 100+year-old neighborhood houses, lack of parking, and perhaps most importantly because it will impinge on the next-door park. Clark Park is both a neighborhood historical site and a social and quality-of-life geographic hub for our neighborhood. The 'by right' design would overshadow both Baltimore Avenue and the park, and therefore detract from the entire area. It would be an eyesore.

We understand that there's an option you could propose to the developer to persuade him to choose the better plan - a legislative option. Given that the better plan has already received its community input, we see no harm - indeed, we see much good - in this option. Therefore, we are asking you to introduce legislation for the community-designed plan, so that the developers can build the building which the community wants.

We thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth Stegner, President, University City Historical Society and Board members Ellie Cernansky, Lee Garner, Lizzie Hessmiller, Frank Innes, Joanne Kellerman, Melani Lamond, Joseph Minardi, Mary Beth Murphy, Moira Nadal, Moe Phillips, George Poulin, Mark Silber, Brian Spooner

cc: Martin F. Cabry, Chief of Staff  
Spruce Hill Community Assn.  
Friends of Clark Park

## 4224 BALTIMORE AVENUE UPDATE, CONTINUED



43rd and Baltimore, perspective view of the by-right proposal.  
 Courtesy of Cecil Baker + Partners, Architects.



Proposed building looking east. Courtesy of Cecil Baker + Partners, Architects.



Demolished c. 1860 mansion that stood on the site of the proposed 4224 Baltimore Avenue. Photo by Melani Lamond.



Have you liked the UCHS Facebook page yet? Whatcha waiting for? Go to [www.facebook.com/ucityhistoricalsociety](http://www.facebook.com/ucityhistoricalsociety) to get all of our updates and info about future events. It's fun and free! Also be sure to check out our evolving homepage at [UCHS.net](http://UCHS.net). Now you have two new ways to connect to your favorite historical society and all the goings on in your neighborhood.

### University City: **Then & Now:** The Potts Residence - 3905 Pine Street



Courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Archives.



Photo by Joseph Minardi

In 1875 Joseph D. Potts (1829-94), one of Philadelphia's wealthiest men, purchased a modest country house on Spruce Street and hired the Wilson Brothers to modify and enlarge the home to meet his exacting standards. After the death of Potts' wife Mary, the house fell into disrepair until it was purchased in 1917 by the Christian Association of the University of Pennsylvania. Later it became headquarters for the University's radio station, WXPB, which remained there until 2005, the year the press moved in.

The 1918 photo on left depicts the Potts House shortly after the Christian Association purchased and repaired it. The Victorian mansion still had the appearance of a grand residence, still retaining its porch (originally open, later enclosed).

The matching Victorian carriage house, built circa 1876, is still standing in the back and is now home to Penn's Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Center at 3907 Spruce Street.

# ON THE WEST SIDE



## NEW UCHS OFFICERS ANNOUNCED

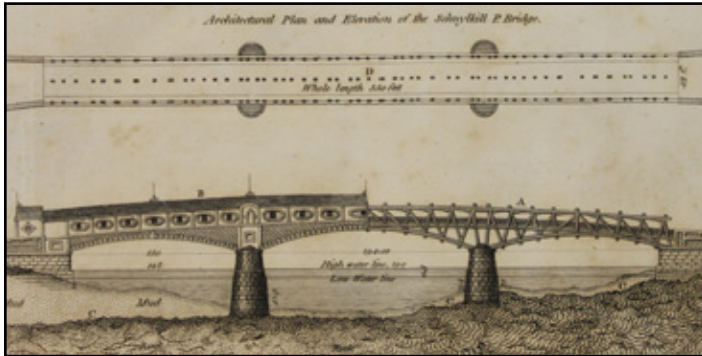
The University City Historical Society is pleased to announce its newly elected officers. Elizabeth Stegner will be taking over the duties of president, Joseph Minardi will be serving as vice president and Moira Nadal will be taking over as secretary. Joanne Kellerman will continue as the UCHS treasurer. We would like to take this time to thank outgoing president, Melani Lamond, for her hard work and dedication to the society during her two-year term.

We look forward to Elizabeth's leadership and hope you will reach out to her and other Board members with your ideas and suggestions. Together we can make a great organization even better.

## Did you know?

The Market Street Bridge officially opened on January 1, 1805. The total cost of this bridge was \$235,000, \$40,000 for the purchase of the site.

Previous to the erection of this bridge, the only passage across the Schuylkill at Market Street was over an insecure and hazardous pontoon bridge. The total amount of tolls collected in 1799 over the floating bridge was \$5,000. The amount received in 1805, after the completion of the bridge, was \$13,600.



*Architectural Plan and Elevation of the Schuylkill Permanent Bridge, 1807.*

## PROFILES IN ARCHITECTURE

### *John L. Coneys*

John L. Coneys (fl. 1903–1930): Coneys' major contribution to the development of University City was the Garden Court Apartments and a number of residences for developer Clarence R. Siegel in the Garden Court neighborhood. Many of the houses by Coneys for Siegel were done in the Arts and Crafts style between 1916 and 1921. It's probable that Coneys first got a taste for this style while toiling for William L. Price (1861–1916), having first worked as a draftsman in his office in 1903. Price's career was noteworthy for the development of Rose Valley, Pennsylvania, a new Arts and Crafts community in Delaware County, about ten miles outside of Philadelphia. He then worked for the firm of Zantzinger, Borie & Medary until 1913. In 1914 Coneys formed a brief one-year partnership with David K. Boyd (1872–1944) and Victor D. Abel (1887–1949), working on about a dozen projects, mostly in the Philadelphia suburbs. Coneys did, however, maintain a professional relationship with Boyd that lasted until the early 1920s. The Rose Valley influence showed in some of Coneys' work for Siegel in Garden Court, especially 4622 Pine Street and 425–439 South Forty-sixth Street. He eventually moved to West Philadelphia, taking up residence at 5509 Catharine Street in 1918. In the waning years of his professional career, Coneys shared an office with architect John T. Carlin (1910–c. 1955) and L. Valentine Scherr (1881–1947) although it cannot be confirmed that the three collaborated on any projects.

Coneys was a member of the Philadelphia and national chapter of the AIA in 1908 and 1911, respectively. Despite nearly three decades of professional work, he is still a somewhat obscure figure in Philadelphia architecture.



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