



THREATENED BLOCK OF 3600 LANCASTER AVENUE GETS REVIEW PERIOD FOR HISTORIC NOMINATION



3600 block of Lancaster Avenue, aka Lancaster Mews. Photo by Joseph Minardi.

As many of you are already aware, the three-story row of stores/dwellings on the 3600 block of Lancaster Avenue, aka Lancaster Mews, is under threat of demolition by owners, AP Contractors, to be replaced with a modern building designed for high-density student housing. The row of buildings in question was built in the 1870s and contribute greatly to the Powelton Village neighborhood and the Victorian-era commercial corridor of Lancaster Avenue. The loss of Lancaster Mews would be a devastating blow to a neighborhood that is already busily fighting off a number of historic building teardowns.

In an effort to protect the block, the Powelton Village Civic Association (PVCA), led by George Poulin, UCHS Board member and chair of PVCA Zoning, said PVCA had submitted an application for historic nomination

(cosponsored by PVCA and the UCHS). A final decision on the future of the block was postponed by the PHC until the fall to allow for meetings with residents of Powelton. The inclusion of 3600-3630 Lancaster on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places would prevent the demolition of the block, and that while the nomination is under review, permits for demolition cannot be issued.

The owner of Aloosh Hookah Bar and Restaurant at 3600 Lancaster Avenue was somewhat pessimistic about the outcome. “What can you do? [AP Contractors] own the property. They can do whatever they want.” He went on to say, “In the world there are minnows and sharks. One million minnows can’t defeat a shark.”

ST. FRANCIS DE SALES AND GUASTAVINO

What do the Penn Museum, Ellis Island, Registry Hall, Grant’s Tomb, and St. Francis de Sales Church all have in common? Each one has a Guastavino tile dome or vault as part of its architecture.

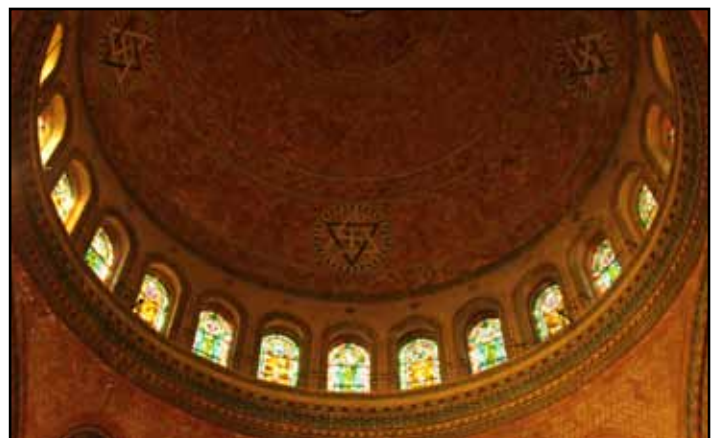
In May of this year William Whitaker of the Penn Architectural Archives hosted an exclusive tour inside the sanctuary and discussed the controversial Venturi Scott Brown project that incorporated Modernism into its traditional sacred space in 1968.

The Byzantine style church was designed by Henry D. Dagit (1865-1929), a prominent Philadelphia architect who specialized in Catholic Church architecture. The foundation of the landmark church began in 1907 and wasn’t completed until 1911. To complete the beautiful interior of the church, Rafael Guastavino y Moreno was employed to design the intricate herringbone tile work.

Guastavino, founder of the R. Guastavino Company, started out working as a tailor in Valencia, Spain. It could very be the inspiration of seeing herringbone patterns in the fabrics with which he worked with that inspired him to “knit” together tile construction for which he would become world-renowned.

At the age of 19 he moved to Barcelona to study architecture and moved to America in 1881 seeking a better life for his young family. After settling in Woburn, Massachusetts, he set up a construction business. There, he improved and patented a traditional Catalan technique for using interlocking tiles and thin layers of special mortar to build arches and domes without requiring expensive temporary interior framework and bracing. This construction method was not well known in America, and his business prospered.

Today, Guastavino’s tiles can be found on more than 600 build-



Dome of St. Francis de Sales. Photo by Joseph Minardi.

ings in 36 states. The 63-foot dome of St. Francis is unique among them because it has no copper or other roofing above it. The distinctive appearance of the colored dome has made it an icon in the Cedar Park neighborhood. However, the innovative design of St. Francis, while well-suited to a mild Mediterranean climate, left it vulnerable to the weather extremes of Philadelphia’s winter and summer seasons, causing water leakage.

The Guastavino firm was consulted about leaks in the 1920s and again in 1938. In the 1950s, the dome was topped with a layer of concrete and shiny ceramic “subway tiles” which held up for fifty years. Today the heavy, deteriorated tiles are gone. The concrete shell is sealed and painted to match the original tile pattern. The water-seeping gaps are gone, hopefully for the next century.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS FOR HOMEOWNERS*

Continued from previous issue

Three-ply

A technique developed in 1824 for weaving a flat-pile carpet composed of three layers of interwoven fabric (also called an "Imperial").

Tint

The lighter values of a particular hue obtained by mixing the hue with white.

Tongue-and-groove

Method of joining the edges of boards where the tongue (tenon) of one board fits into the groove of the next.

Tripartite Wall

A decorative scheme popular during the 1870s and 1880s that divided the wall into three parts -the dado, the field, and the frieze.

Two-ply

A method of weaving a flat-pile carpet resulting in two layers of interwoven fabric; commonly called an "ingrain."

Valance

Fabric arranged in vertical folds suspended from a pole or cornice above a window; sometimes identified in the nineteenth century as a "piped valance."

Value

The lightness (tint) or darkness (shade) of a particular hue.

Velvet

A term used to describe cut-pile carpeting first manufactured in 1832 in which the face yarns were preprinted to form a pattern when woven (sometimes called "tapestry Wilton").

To be continued in next issue.

*From *Victorian Interior Design*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, New York, 1986.

4224 BALTIMORE APPROVED

At long last the final design of 4224 Baltimore Avenue was approved by a narrow vote of 3-2 by the Zoning Board of Adjustments. The approved design is the end result of three meetings with residents of Spruce Hill, will be situated on 1.1 acres of land on the southeast corner of 43rd and Baltimore Avenue. The mixed use building will contain 132 residents, a fitness center, 1,700 square feet of commercial space on the ground level, 60 parking spaces, and 50 spaces for bicycle storage.

Despite objections from a few residents, the majority of Spruce Hill neighbors were in favor of the project. Additionally local organizations Spruce Hill Community Association, University City Historical Society, the Friends of Clark Park and the Civic Design Review all supported 4224 Baltimore Avenue.

It is believed that the project will be a boon to the local economy, adding new businesses and new residents to Spruce Hill.



UCHS SUMMER INTERN

The UCHS would like to welcome Jennifer Robinson to our summer intern program. Jennifer was recommended by Dr. Aaron Wunsch and is a recent graduate of the University of Pennsylvania with a Masters Degree of Historic Preservation. She will be assisting the Society in identifying and nominating endangered properties throughout and is working with George Poulin on researching and designating properties in Powelton Village for historic designation.

University City: Then & Now: St. Paul's Presbyterian Church, 50th Street and Baltimore Avenue



Photo courtesy of The University of Pennsylvania Archives.



Photo by Joseph Minardi.

Churches have always been important to social life in West Philadelphia, from the pre-street car days to the present time. At the northwest corner of 50th and Baltimore Avenue is one of the more substantial church buildings in the Cedar Park neighborhood. St. Paul's Presbyterian Church (now Hickman Temple AME Church) was built in 1904, designed by the firm of Pursell & Fry. The exterior has remained largely unchanged over the past century.

CONSERVATION OVERLAYS OR HISTORIC DISTRICTS: WHICH ONE TO USE?

Introduction

The role and the nature of city planning as an activity of local government continues to evolve. New importance has been given to physical development as a result of environmental concerns, interest in historic preservation, the increasing complexity and magnitude of development proposals, and the special emphasis placed on humanizing the scale of the city through urban design.

Neighborhood groups have also evolved, becoming more knowledgeable and involved in the development process. As you look at your neighborhood and evaluate your individual needs to guide changes and new development, you should consider two important tools which the Philadelphia Code offers.

Conservation Overlays

Overview and Objectives

- Created by City Council in 2004 for residential areas only with the change to the code in 2012 they are no longer just residential.
- Recognize that neighborhoods have integrity of form and streetscape that warrant conservation.
- Regulate significant work to a building's facade that is visible from a public right-of-way, replacement of existing buildings and construction of new structures.
- Overall goal is to maintain the public streetscape (i.e., setbacks, cornice lines, landscaping) and visual qualities of the district.
- Cannot overlap with an existing or proposed municipal historic district
- Maximum size is 25 blocks.

Application Process

- Requires initiation by neighbors or a community group with proof of interest by the affected residents (either minutes from a public meeting of the group or signatures from 30% of the affected property owners).
- Process includes the creation of community-based design guidelines for the proposed district.
 - Guidelines address such items as materials, setbacks, massing.
 - Guidelines are written by the community in conjunction with the City Planning Commission.
- Once guidelines and boundaries of district are set, City Council votes to create district.
- Any work to properties with district must receive Certificate of Compliance from the Planning Commission before building permit can be issued.
- In its reviews of permit applications, Planning Commission uses the guidelines approved for that particular district.

Municipal Historic Districts

Overview and Objectives

- The Philadelphia Historical Commission was created by City Council in 1955, and local historic districts were created when the Historic Preservation Ordinance was revised in 1984.
- Purpose is to recognize historic, cultural, and architectural importance of a neighborhood or area.
- Commission regulates any work that requires a building permit or alters the exterior appearance of a property (jurisdiction is entire building envelope).
- Overall goal is to preserve the historic fabric that makes up the district.

Application Process

- Initiated by a community group.

- Nominations are submitted to the Philadelphia Historical Commission, which votes on the districts' creation.
- Work to a property, including demolition, within an historic district must receive approval from the creation.
- Work to a property, including demolition, within an historic district must receive approval from the Historical Commission before a permit can be issued.
- In its reviews of permit application, Historical Commission uses the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for the Treatment of Historic Properties*. These guidelines adopt the hierarchy that calls for the preservation of historic material; if preservation is no longer feasible, the repair that would save as much materials as possible; if replacement must occur, the element should be replaced in kind. The *Standards* do allow for additions and alterations that are considered part of modern living, such as roof decks.

Conservation District or Municipal Historic District?

If a neighborhood would like to maintain some specific design characteristics that are broad neighborhoods features, a conservation overlay would be a better tool. Conservation overlays provide regulations which require that distinct neighborhood characteristics must be included in a new development and new construction, yet does not forbid the demolition of existing buildings. In a conservation overlay, the area may have many new buildings, yet the overall visual character of the area is retained. Conservation overlays must also allow for a variation of architectural styles and cannot be as prescriptive as maintaining just one architectural identity.

If residents are concerned about preserving buildings and the neighborhood's historic fabric, a municipal historic district should be used. In historic districts, a demolition may only happen when a building cannot feasibly be reused or if a profound public interest exists. Any changes to the properties within an historic district are viewed through the lens of protecting the existing building fabric.

City of Philadelphia - Department of City Planning.

REMINDER:

To anyone who attended the Woodland/UCHS joint event: "Your West Philadelphia House, How Old Is It? Who Lived There?" we would love to know if you've found anything unexpected, unusual, or just plain interesting about your house in the process of researching your property. Please share them with us at the UCHS.

Contact us at info@uchs.net. We can't wait to hear from you.

DATE MARKERS FOR YOUR HOME

Some members have asked how they could purchase the historic markers they see on some of their neighbors' homes. The UCHS provides the date plaques, and, where the home owner does not know the construction date, has a data base with the information.

Price: \$15 per plaque for UCHS members

\$20 for non-members

Installation is included in the price.

Order forms are available at uchs.net (uchs.net/newsletter/mark-order.html) or by calling 215-387-3019.

ON THE WEST SIDE



PROFILES IN ARCHITECTURE

James C. Fernald

James C. Fernald began his architectural career in 1886 although he started as a carpenter just two years prior. Within a short time Fernald became one of Philadelphia's most prolific architects, designing a number of homes throughout the city. In 1899 he formed a very brief partnership with a Mr. Lucas and sometimes he was listed as a contractor. His biggest commissions in West Philadelphia were with builders J.H. McClatchy, Samuel Shoemaker, John Megraw, John L. Fry, William A. Patterson, Daniel Crawford, and the Quaker City Realty Co. He ceased working in 1929. Little is known about his training or personal life.

Selected Relevant Commissions:

- 1897:** Residences (2), Mantua Av, east of 42nd
- 1898:** Residence (1), 411 N. 40th
- 1902:** Samuel Shoemaker, residences (60), 55th & Wyalusing area
John Megraw, residences (140), 51st & Reno area
- 1903:** Residences (78), 57th and Wyalusing/Girard area
Residences (5), Vine St, West of 54th
Residences (5), Race St, East of 63rd
J.H. McClatchy, residence (31), 60th & Haverford area
J.M. Stiteler, residences (5), Vine St, West of 64th
William Patterson, residences (3), 63rd, North of Girard
William Patterson, residences (9), 57th & Haverford area
- 1904:** Samuel Shoemaker, residences (79), 58th & Girard area
Samuel Shuster, residences (8), 49th & Parrish/Reno area
Residences (7), 53rd St, North of Warren
- 1905:** Samuel Shoemaker, residences (79), 60th & Haverford area
H.N. Diesel, residences (38), Chester Av, 51st and 52nd
Joseph Johnson, residences (3), Pine St, E&W of 52nd
Residences (13), 53rd and Girard area
Samuel Shoemaker, residences (44), Catharine, E of 52nd
Quaker City Realty, residences (56), 55th and Alden area
A.C. McGill, residences (10), 47th & Westminster area

- 1906:** Quaker City Realty, residences (38), Cecil St, S of Locust
John L. Fry, residences (22), 5110-5152 Cedar Av
John L. Fry, residences (14), 600-626 S. 51st
John L. Fry, residences (8), 522-536 S. 51st
Residence (1), 5512 Vine
- 1907:** Samuel Shoemaker, residences (54), 6200 block of Sansom
William A. Patterson, residences (48), 5400 block of Irving
James F. Stewart, residence, SE corner 55th & Walnut
George Steutzer, residences (13), 58th & Vine area
Daniel Crawford, residences (71); 60th & Lansdowne area

Did you know?

In the mid-1890s the advent of electric streetcars, commonly called trolleys, heralded a new era in West Philadelphia. One important result of streetcar electrification was that it helped reduce the fare. This in turn made a daily commute affordable to a significantly larger portion of the population. Then, on March 4, 1907, elevated rail service was officially opened to the public. This dramatically changed the potential use of the whole Market Street corridor from 46th to 69th Street. Within two decades, strong retail centers evolved out from the El stops at 52nd and 63rd Street. In between, block after block was filled in with two-story row houses.



Early Philadelphia electrified trolley. Joseph Minardi photo collection.

