

2018

Valentine Tea & Awards Presentation

The University City Historical Society would like to cordially invite you to its annual Valentine Tea and Awards ceremony at **The Castle** (northwest corner of 48th and Springfield Avenue) on **February 11, 2018** from **4:00 to 6:00 P.M.** The event is free to all UCHS members and is a great opportunity to meet with members of the University City community and partake of some delicious homemade sweets and treats.

The UCHS is now accepting nominations of restorations and rehabs. Please inform us of anyone you know who has performed a superior restoration or renovation job during the previous year for a **Gift to the Streets Award**: Given for high-quality exterior maintenance, upgrades or restoration of historical features, **Outstanding Preservation Award**: Given to properties that have received full architecturally appropriate exterior restorations. Partially completed projects are not eligible, or a **Preservation Initiative Award**: Given to a person or group of people who have acted unselfishly towards the preservation of a building or historical neighborhood resource in University City.

And please feel free to nominate yourself at info@UCHS.net. Nominations are due no later than **Monday, January 22nd**. We hope to see you on February 11th!



Top left, Sara Corse and Kenwyn Smith, Gift to the Streets recipients for 2016; Top right, Dessert tower; Bottom left, tea sandwiches; Bottom right, our guest guitarist; Middle top, vintage photo of "The Castle" from c. 1910; Middle bottom, "The Castle" as it appears today.

Photos by Joseph Minardi and University of Pennsylvania archives.

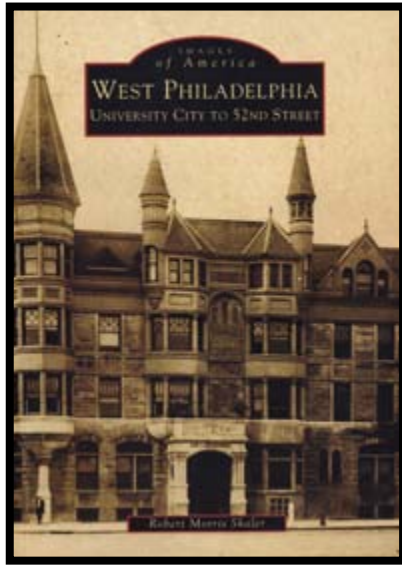
UCHS Recommended Reading: West Philadelphia: University City to 52nd Street

We know that UCHS members love to read about Philadelphia's rich history, so when a good book comes along, we'll make a recommendation for addition to your library.

As part of Arcadia Publishing's very popular Images of America series, Robert Morris Skaler's book *West Philadelphia: University City to 52nd Street* is widely owned by many residents of University City. The book contains over 200 historic photographs, most of which are from Skaler's vast collection of real photo postcards, as well as his own thoughtful chapter introductions and captions.

The book covers different neighborhoods including University City, Spruce Hill, Walnut Hill, and Cedar Park, and Powelton. Additionally there are chapters on Belmont and Parkside-Girard, as well as a chapter on the Market Street Elevated Line. The book offers a rare opportunity to see what the area looked like when the houses and churches were new, back in the Streetcar Suburb days, prior to renovations and demolitions that have taken place over the past century.

Robert Skaler grew up in the Belmont section of West Philadelphia, so his writing reflects his personal recollections of the "good old days." He would later go on to graduate from the University of Pennsylvania in 1959, earning a BA in Architecture, eventually becoming a forensic architect. Skaler has also lectured and written extensively on Victorian architecture, which can be found in abundance in University City and nearby parts of West Philadelphia.



"West Philadelphia: University City to 52nd Street." Courtesy of Arcadia Publishing, 2002.

One of Skaler's other hobbies includes collecting real photo postcards of Philadelphia neighborhoods. These photos were issued from 1904 to around 1920 by different photo studios in Philadelphia, used mostly as advertising for builders. One of the biggest distributors of real photo postcards was the Mercantile Studio (fl. 1904-1911), formerly located on Haverford Avenue. In the process of creating these mailable images they've created an incredible record of the city's housing stock from the Gilded Age, which is a great visual resource for the historian and history buffs. Mr. Skaler's entire collection of real photo postcards is available online through the Athenaeum's PAB website.

Robert Skaler is retired and currently resides in Cheltenham, Montgomery County. Autographed copies of Robert Skaler's book are available for \$20 which includes postage and handling from the University City Historical Society. Mail order with check to the **University City Historical Society, P.O. Box 31927, Philadelphia, PA. 19104-0627.**

A large sampling of over 250 examples of Robert M. Skaler's real photo postcard collection from the entire city was recently exhibited at the Athenaeum of Philadelphia (219 South 6th Street) on Washington Square. The free exhibit, "Real Philadelphia, Selections from the Robert M. Skaler Postcard Collection," will run through January 26, 2018.

PICTURES FROM OUR PAST



Every once in a while we come across some interesting vintage photographs of University City and when we do we like to share them with you. The photographs presented here depict the neighborhood from the 1950s and represent a rare glimpse into our past.

Top row; Southwest corner of 39th and Spruce, 221 S. 37th St. Bottom row; 40th and Baltimore Ave., 3639 Walnut St., 3400 block of Walnut St. UCHS archives.



The Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority invites proposals from financial institutions to carry out the origination and servicing of loans as part of the Housing Preservation Loan Program (HPLP), a new initiative of PRA and the City of Philadelphia. For complete information regarding this RFP, including all deadlines and attachments.

Go to <https://www.philadelphiaredevelopmentauthority.org/rfps/prs-invites-proposals-financial-institutions-carry-out-origination-and-servicing-housing> to visit the RFP webpage.



University City Then & Now: Fisher-Bennett Hall, 3340 Walnut Street



Courtesy of the Penn Archives.



Photo by Joseph Minardi.

Bennett Hall, now Fisher-Bennett Hall was built in 1925 and designed by Cope & Stewardson. Bennett Hall was the first women's facility at Penn. The building has undergone major renovations and re-opened in 2006 as Fisher-Bennett Hall. It currently houses the English Department, English Language Programs, Music Department, and Cinema Studies.

Ask the Experts

EXPOSED BRICK WALLS

Q: Is it a good idea to expose the brick of the back wall of my nineteenth century house?

A: The short answer is no. If the brick was originally covered, then it probably is not of a quality that merits showing. Moreover, it is almost impossible to remove all the covering material without damaging the brick surface and mortar joints. There's one more problem too: Everyone we know who has stripped down walls in an addition has regretted it because of cold-air infiltration. So don't do it unless you're prepared to put up with a lot of drafts.

From *The Old-House Journal*, May, 1981.

Did you know?

West Philadelphia was incorporated as a borough in Blockley Township in 1844, and as a district in 1851. It included the section immediately west of the Schuylkill, bounded on the south by the old Blockley Almshouse line, and by Woodland Avenue and Baltimore Avenue, on the west by Mill Creek, and on the north by Westminster Avenue and by Sweet Briar Creek.

PROFILES IN ARCHITECTURE

J. Frank Bradley

Very little is known about J. Frank Bradley other than he was active from around 1910 to 1927 and had a very brief partnership with Edward F. Janke in 1911. He is also sometimes confused with builder/architect Joseph F. Bradley who was active around the same period.

Selected Relevant Commissions:

1910: Bradley, Thomas, residences (16), Markoe, 140' North of Spruce Bricker, William R., residence (5), SS of Chester, East of 55th Residences (6), Hazel Ave, East of 61st Street
Gilbert, J. Woolsey, residences (21), 59th and Walnut Street area
Watt, Thomas J., residences (50), 61st St, South of Haddington
1913: Imperial Church, 215-219 S. 60th Street

WINDOW TALK: A GLOSSARY

Continued from previous issue.

Rose Window: A round window with tracery, often used in church architecture.

Round-head Window: A window with a semi-circular or curved top. Used most often in classical Romanesque Revival, Italianate, and Classical Revival buildings.

Roundel: A very small circular window. In glazing, a circular light that resembles the bottom of a bottle.

Saddle Bar: Light steel bar placed horizontally across a window to stiffen leaded glazing.

Sash: The framework of stiles and rails in which the panes or lights of a window are set.

Sash Weights: A lead counterweight that, together with the sash cord and pulley, holds a sash in the raised position.

Shutters: Like blinds, shutters are rectangular frames consisting of top and bottom rails and side stiles. These are filled in, however, with a solid panel designed to actually "shut up" the house for protection.

Sill: The bottom crosspiece of a window frame on which the bottom sash rests. The sill is of heavier stock and slopes to shed water.

Stained Glass Window: A window with a painted scene or pattern that has been fired into the glass. Windows with plain colored glass set in lead are most often (inaccurately) called stained glass.

From *Talk to Me of Windows: An Entertaining Story About Windows*, F. Palmer Cook, New York, New York, 1971.

To be continued in next issue.



The Spruce Hill Historic District: Will it Finally be a Reality?

It was first proposed in the 1980s, and then again in the 1990s, but the West Philadelphia Streetcar Suburb Historic District was never recognized as a historic district by the Philadelphia Historical Commission (PHC), although it was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1997. The University City Historical Society played a major role in compiling data on both occasions.

But now there's a better chance of this greatest collection of Victorian era-homes to be added to PHC's list of protected Historic Districts. The difference this time is an infusion of cash by the Kenney Administration and increase in the PHC staff (by only two new members). This is the first staff increase since 1988. Critics suggest that this meager hiring by the PHC isn't nearly enough to handle the tremendous backlog of nominated properties currently collecting dust, but executive director John Farnham believes it's enough to start nominating entire districts. The recent designation of 420 Row Historic District (420 to 434 S. 42nd Street), located in University City and co-nominated by UCHS Board member Justin McDaniel, along with neighbor Todd Margasak, should give hope that the 2,000+ properties in University City can be protected as an historic district. Prior to 420 Row, the Awbury Historic District in East Germantown was the last to be approved.

The Kenney Administration also put together a twenty-nine member Preservation Task Force this past summer to offer recommendations to the Mayor and the Historical Commission for improving preservation in Philadelphia.

What older district nominations should get priority? Many believe that larger districts, particularly those that have languished in the neglected pile for the longest, deserve top consideration. Spruce Hill resident Mary McGettigan has been a strong advocate for her neighborhood.

"I think we really should be first in line, both because of the extremely significant character of our neighborhood, but also because we were the first there many years ago," said McGettigan. "It is unconscionable to me that you would encourage new districts to be nominated, and you could consider them, without taking ours into consideration first."

Given the alarming rate of demolition in University City as of late, this should give preservationists in the neighborhood additional motivation for getting recognized as a protected historic district. As *Philadelphia Inquirer* architecture critic Inga

Saffron recently opined, "Never has Philadelphia seen so many good buildings displaced by bad ones." A textbook example of this quote can be seen on the 4000 block of Chestnut Street, but it's happening all over University City.

Alas, even with the promise of more personnel at the PHC, the same old issues continue to plague the process. The December meeting of the PHC lasted for over four hours, with most of the time taken up by the consideration of alterations to already protected buildings and a lengthy presentation about the technicalities of adapting historic buildings for energy efficiency. In all that time, only a single building was given protection from demolition.



42nd Street, north of Pine Street in Spruce Hill. Joseph Minardi, photographer.

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