

ON THE WEST SIDE

THE UNIVERSITY CITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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Joseph Minardi, Editor

UCHS HOUSE TOUR WRAP UP

Thanks to everyone who came out for the UCHS House Tour on May 19th. The house tour highlighted the many renovation and restoration projects taking place in University City, focusing on homes in Spruce Hill and Cedar Park. This was a great opportunity for proud homeowners to show off their hard work and dedication. Some of the houses on the tour took years to get into livable shape while others are still “works in progress.”



4213 Baltimore Avenue, photo by Joseph Minardi

As any owner of a vintage Victorian-era home can tell you, there always seems to be something else to work on. Another aspect of the restoration efforts was adapting old-time architectural concepts into twenty-first century practicality. While many living rooms or parlors still maintained a Victorian ambiance, other household spaces such as bathrooms, bedrooms, and especially kitchens, were often thoroughly modernized for convenience.

The UCHS would like to thank the eight homeowners on the tour who welcomed us into your fine old houses.

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4224 BALTIMORE SPARKS DEBATE

Query: What has 92 units, 36 bicycle spaces, six parking spots and is one of the most hotly contested new proposals to come to University City lately? Anyone who lives within a stone's throw of Clark Park already knows the answer is 4224 Baltimore Avenue, and neighbors are voicing their desires and concerns for this rather large newcomer. 4224 Baltimore Avenue is to be built on the one-acre parcel where a community garden and recently demolished historic house once stood. The house was a c. 1860 Second Empire residence that once housed the Episcopalian Byrd School, the Phillip Brooks School, and most recently, a shelter for Women Against Abuse. New York based Clarkmore Group LP, in partnership with Thylan Associates, purchased the site in 2008 for \$3.5 million. Demolition took place the following year, despite very vocal pleas for adaptive reuse of the mansion.

Spruce Hill neighbors have a number of issues regarding the mixed-use development. Some of the topics brought up during a May 20th meeting ranged from the design, retail, unit types, and parking. Specifically, the residents who attended the symposium requested that no undergraduates were to be admitted, no pharmacies were to be part of the retail options, and more parking spots should be made available. Another subject was how would the new building blend with the surrounding historic Spruce Hill neighborhood. “I promise you I will give it my best fight to oppose anything that takes away the beauty, historical character and charm of our neighborhood. I feel it must reflect and pay homage to our late-19th Century Victorian ‘street car suburb,’” said Mark Silber of 4200 block of Baltimore Ave. Philadelphia based Cecil Baker + Partners Architects are the design team signed up for the project. A second of three meetings conducted by U3 Ventures was held on June 18th at the International House of Philadelphia. A proposal for a 178-unit two-building option with two towers (one with between 9 and 11 stories and the other at least five stories) and more amenities was also presented to the group of 50 Spruce Hill residents. Underground parking spaces (65) and about 8,000 s.f. of ground floor retail fronting on Baltimore Ave. and 43rd St. would be part of this option.



Neighbors break off into discussion group at June 18th meeting. Photo by Joseph Minardi.

After a Powerpoint presentation and a Q&A session the attendees broke off into several discussion groups, as with the previous meeting, hoping to influence the final product.



c. 1887



2010

Photograph by Joseph Minardi

PROFILES IN ARCHITECTURE

Willis Gaylord Hale

Flamboyant, brash, and well-connected, Willis Hale set the tone for the extravagant eclecticism of the late Victorian era. Hale was responsible for some of the most lavish abodes of Philadelphia's nouveaux riches during the late nineteenth century.

Hale's early life was spent in upstate New York, having attended school in Seneca Falls, Aurora, and Auburn before apprenticing in Buffalo and Rochester. He moved to Philadelphia in 1860 to work for Samuel Sloan and then onto the office of John McArthur, Jr. (1823-1890). After a brief stint in Wilkes-Barre lasting from 1872-1875, Hale returned to Philadelphia in 1876 to marry into the family of the pharmaceutical giant and "Quinine King," William Weightman (1813-1904). Not only was he a big man in the chemical business, Weightman was also one of the top real estate developers in the city. This relationship allowed Hale not only



Willis G. Hale (1848-1907)

to quickly climb the social ladder in Philadelphia, but was also a source of many valuable commissions, including Weightman's East Falls mansion, Ravenhill on School House Lane.

Hale was on his way as one of the city's top architects, even though his High Victorian Gothic style was not always critically acclaimed. A series of articles by Montgomery Schuyler in the Architectural Record titled "Architectural Aberrations" was especially harsh regarding two of Hale's buildings. "Crude," "revolting," and "ridiculous" were just a few of the pejoratives thrown Mr. Hale's way. Despite the critiques, he continued to get commissions for private citizens and public companies. His Weightman connection gave him business through the 1890s. Although he was listed as an architect in city directories as late as 1906, he actually did little work in the 1900s. When he died in 1907, Hale was broke and disrespected in architectural circles. Many of his buildings were torn down long ago or were badly altered.

Willis Hale was a member of the AIA (both local and national chapters), the Philadelphia Art Club, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, the Athletic Club of the Schuylkill Navy, as well as an accomplished musician.

GOT AN IDEA OR SUGGESTION FOR US?

Do you have a photo, a story, or an idea for an article related to University City that you think would be a great addition to a future issue of the UCHS Newsletter? Forward them to us and we'll include them in future issues with your name in the credits.

Send any material to: editor6uchs@gmail.com



DETAILS, DETAILS

Extravagant details were *de rigueur* for many Victorian era builders. Often these flourishes and embellishments go overlooked by modern passersby. Let's see how many of these University City buildings you can identify based on their exterior detailing. Answers below.



1



2



3



4



5



6

1. Hawthorne Hall 2. 4106 Locust Street 3. 3815 Walnut Street 4. 3725 Chestnut Street 5. U-Penn Quad Entrance 6. Drexel Institute

CHESTER AVENUE TWINS DEMOLISHED



A Tudor Revival twin house on the 4700 block of Chester Avenue in Squirrel Hill will soon be history. Sitting next to the Chester Avenue Dog Park are the pair of abandoned twins, 4718-4720 Chester Avenue, which were built around 1890. Renaissance Healthcare and Rehabilitation Center (formerly Park Pleasant Nursing Homes) will revamp its grounds encompassing Chester and Kingsessing Avenues under the guidance of its new owner, Nationwide Healthcare Services, which purchased the 123-bed long-term and short-term care facility on January 1st for \$4 million. Currently the houses are being gutted as a permit for demolition has not yet been obtained. As of yet the nursing home has no plans for the space once the demolition has been completed, which has neighbors concerned that the parking lot will expand on to Chester Avenue. As one concerned citizen noted, "We don't see any benefit in that since the nursing home already has more than forty spots on two lots already. Who wants a parking lot in their neighborhood?" Others were upset that



the nursing home is moving forward with the demolition of the twin homes. "I can't believe that just because the houses are vacant they're acting like they must be falling down... The neighborhood doesn't need an even bigger parking lot." Recently the gutting was halted by the Department of L&I due for lack of bracing and expired workers compensation insurance. No doubt the June 5th building collapse at 2136 Market Street led to this closer scrutiny by L&I.

4718-4720 Chester Avenue is seen here in an 1895 atlas page.

FEATURED HISTORIC BUILDINGS

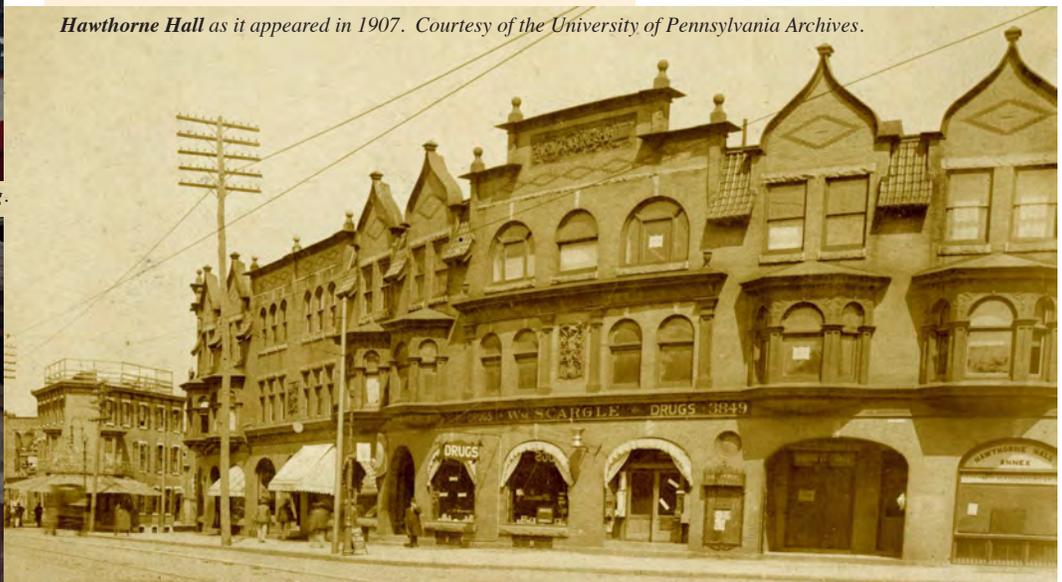
Hawthorne Hall

Hawthorne Hall has occupied the curvilinear space of Lancaster Avenue between 39th Street and Hamilton since 1895, when the Romanesque Revival mixed-use development first took shape on Taylor's Lumber Yard. Designed by the firm of Wright & Prentzel as housing units with ground level retail and a theater, Hawthorne Hall has a distinctly Mediterranean flavor complete with Roman brick façade and ogee shaped gables, adorned with terra cotta reliefs of allegorical figures. On the interior there are traces of Greek Revival stenciling underneath the crumbling plaster. The project's name is spelled out in fancy script in the uppermost parapet of the central portion. At the time of its conception, this section of Poweltown was already established as an upscale suburb in West Philadelphia. The young architects involved in its design were no doubt influenced by the expressive work of such local luminaries as Willis G. Hale, Frank Furness and Angus Wade.

Over the years, Hawthorne Hall has had many occupants such as a pharmacy, a bar and grille, the Knights of Pythias Union Lodge No. 14, the New Light National Baptist Church, New Beginnings Inc., and Christ Ministries, Inc., who used the theater in the central portion for meetings. The theater was a rather large gathering place with a full stage and balcony level. The whole of the interior has been badly neglected and is in need of extensive repairs if it is to survive. The exterior too is crumbling, but even with the extensive blight, the exuberance of this late-Victorian edifice shines through. Recently a troupe of artists known as Rabid Hands Arts Collective is commandeering the relic and will be hosting art installations and performances here soon. For their part, Rabid Hands is cleaning up the interior spaces and doing some minor repairs to Hawthorne Hall. The People's Emergency Center (PEC) purchased 3859-3861 Lancaster Avenue in June 2011 for \$205,000 and 3849 Lancaster Avenue for \$385,000 in July 2012 with the hopes of beginning renovations in July.



Machine turned balusters, third-floor railing.



Hawthorne Hall as it appeared in 1907. Courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Archives.

← Console bracket and original pressed-tin ceiling with rope molding. Photos by Joseph Minardi.

ON THE WEST SIDE



SPRUCE HILL MAY FAIR WRAP UP

The overcast skies couldn't dampen the enthusiasm of the Spruce Hill May Fair and the University City faithful who came out on to Clark Park on May 11. It was a day filled with good food, good music, and lots of great neighbors. A special big thanks goes out to those who visited the UCHS table. We hope to see you again at the September 13th Baltimore Avenue Dollar Stroll.



Urban cowboy.



Sour Mash performing.



Chatting with Jim Roebuck

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SEDGLEY APTS. TO GET A MAKEOVER

Occupying the corner of 45th and Pine like a medieval fortress is the Sedgley Apartments. Like a castle of olden times, the Sedgley has seen better days and is about to undergo a sorely needed makeover. The building itself, built around 1910, was one of a number of apartment buildings that appeared in West Philadelphia after 1900. The architect for the Sedgley, as well as the Stoneleigh (45th and Walnut), the Stonehurst (45th and Osage) and the Castle (48th and Warrington) was A. Lynn Walker (active 1909-1922). All of these apartment buildings by Walker were executed in a similar Romanesque-Revival style. The crenelations and thick stone walls definitely harken back to the days of knights and jousts. But the sturdy-looking exterior belied the deteriorating conditions of the interior.



The herculean task of revamping this old stalwart of University City has fallen upon ReStore, an architectural salvage company based out of Port Richmond. They tried to salvage everything they could in the Sedgley, which has been abandoned for the last several years. The apartments were in various states of disrepair, some being empty while others were trashed. Some of the items salvaged by ReStore were original bathroom sinks, clawfoot tubs, thousands of decorative tiles, about 100 doors (some with leaded mirrors), a dozen butler's pantries, wooden built-in medicine cabinets, a few pieces of lattice work, hooks, hardware, etc. One former resident recalls, "It was gorgeous, but falling ceilings, electrical fires, broken heat, poor management, etc. meant they were only able to charge \$900 a month for a three-bedroom that was at least 1,200 s.f." After the renovations, the Sedgley is hoped to become a "luxury" apartment building according to 45th Street LLC, who purchased the century-old building in February 2013.

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