

# ON THE WEST SIDE

THE UNIVERSITY CITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



August 2016

<http://www.uchs.net>

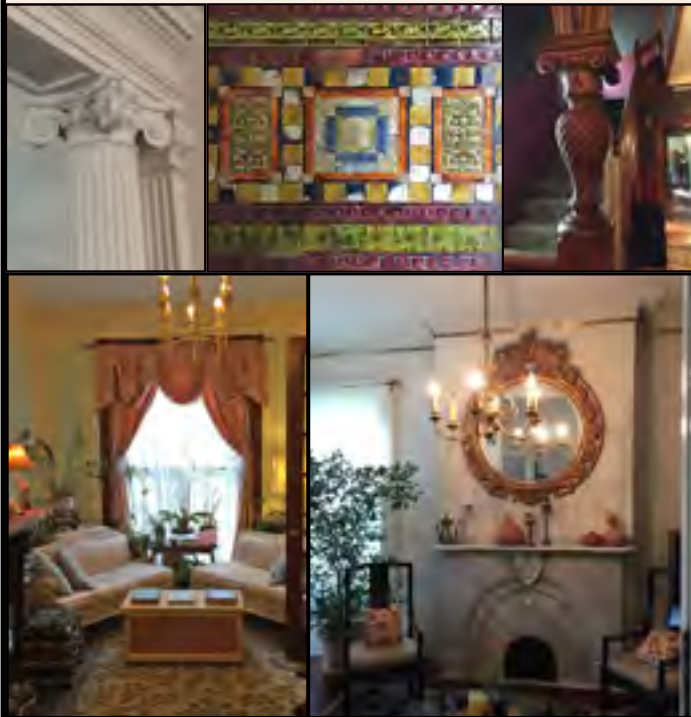
Joseph Minardi, Editor

## 2016 HOUSE TOUR WRAP UP

The University City Historical Society would like to thank all of the homeowners who opened up their wonderful dwellings on Saturday, May 21, for the UCHS spring house-tour featuring the fabulous homes of the Powelton Village.

A special note of gratitude goes to the Dornsife Center for letting us use their building as our “home base” for the tour and to George Poulin for arranging and coordinating the event.

The quantity and quality of the homes were very impressive. And let’s not forget to thank Mother Nature for holding off the heavy rain until after the tour ended.



## PRESERVATION UPDATE FOR 4046-4056 CHESTNUT STREET

On May 10th the University City Historical Society submitted the nominations of six twin houses on the south side of the forty-hundred block of Chestnut for historic designation before the Committee on Historic Designation. Speaking in support of the nomination were Oscar Beisert, Architectural Historian; Aaron Wunsch, Associate Professor in the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate Program in Historic Preservation; and UCHS President Elizabeth Stegner, who, together, persuaded the Committee to recommend all the properties to the full Historical Commission for historic designation.

As one Committee member said, individually, the houses lack the “wow factor,” but collectively represent an entire row that warrants historic designation under a variety of criteria. Another Committee member compared the nominated portion of the block to architecture in Bath, England. The homes, designed in a simplified Italianate style, were built by chemical magnate, Thomas Powers in the 1870s. Despite some alterations, the grouping represents strength and dignity to the district and are well-preserved both inside and out. One twin from this block (4042-44 Chestnut) has already been demolished and replaced with, in the words of Elizabeth Stegner, a “plain, architecturally inappropriate edifice, not compatible with the historic nature of the neighborhood.”

The twin homes (4046-48) were sold to a developer who planned on demolishing them and replacing them with structures holding more apartments and targeting student renters. A demolition permit was issued, but nominations to register the buildings as historic were also submitted to the Philadelphia Historical Commission. A stay of demolition was issued by Judge Linda Carpenter of the Court of Common Pleas.

The UCHS owes a great deal of gratitude to the writers of the nomination for their hard work and expertise in the process and to Hal Schirmer, Esq., who is the lawyer acting on behalf of the UCHS.

Lately many members of the University City Historical Society and neighbors in University City in general have expressed great concern about the number of demolitions taking place in University City and have decided it is time to become more active in finding means of stopping the destruction. To that end, we have established the Sylvia Barkan Fund for expenditures related to preparing historic nominations and, when necessary, hiring legal counsel. The late Sylvia Barkan was an artist and designer who was a long-time resident of University City, who loved her community and wanted to protect it. She was also one of the founding mothers of the University City Historical Society, and we believe she would be pleased to have her name lent to this important cause. In addition to an update to the membership renewal form that will allow for specific donations to the Sylvia Barkan Fund, donations can be sent to the UCHS, P.O. Box 30197, Philadelphia, PA 19104-0627.



Left: the twin homes on the 4000 block of Chestnut Street from 2010. Right: Aaron Wunsch, Associate Professor in the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate Program in Historic Preservation; Elizabeth Stegner, UCHS President; and Oscar Beisert, Architectural Historian, testifying at a June 15, 2016 meeting of the Committee of Historic Designation. Photos by Joseph Minardi.

## UNIVERSITY CITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY: CALL TO ACTION

Dear friends and neighbors,

University City is at a preservation crossroads. Within the past two years, the number of demolitions of historically and architecturally significant properties within University City has dramatically increased, with most recent demolitions taking place at 4042-4044 Chestnut Street, 245 S. 45th Street, and 3937 Chestnut Street.

This trend shows no sign of stopping, and is only likely to accelerate as University City continues to grow and prosper. As it turns out, shockingly few properties within University City are listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, and none of the University City's neighborhoods maintain local historic district status, both of which would provide protection from demolition. Furthermore, many blocks in University City hold underlying zoning designations of high density use, which will make older structures more vulnerable to demolition, and in some cases, actually encourage it.

The University City Historical Society is troubled by this demolition trend, and we know many of our neighboring community groups and institutions are as well. The University City Historical Society (UCHS) is a non-profit organization with a mission to promote awareness of the history and architectural character of University City. We are a small, membership-based organization with a board comprised of volunteers who share an interest in the history of our community. Regretfully, our volunteer board members collectively do not possess the capacity to write our own Philadelphia Register of Historic Places nominations. Within the past year, UCHS has leveraged our limited resources to hire architectural historians to nominate significant parcels in University City: 3600-30 Lancaster Avenue and 4300-06 Osage Avenue. Additionally, for the past two summers, UCHS has worked with student interns from the University of Pennsylvania's Historic Preservation program to prepare nominations for several other historically significant buildings in our neighborhood. These efforts are reactionary and have been undertaken when threat of demolition appears imminent, but in many cases, we learn of these threats only after demolition permits have been pulled and it is too late.

On a more strategic level, the UCHS has formed a preservation task force which has identified those structures and blocks in our neighborhood which are at greatest risk for demolition. It is our hope that future efforts can be proactive, rather than reactive, so that we can better protect the character of University City. UCHS welcomes outside participation in this task force for those willing to volunteer their expertise or time toward this important cause. It is our hope that we can target preservation initiatives for those properties in University City which may be at greatest risk for redevelopment.

Despite these efforts, it is clear that the University City Historical Society cannot go it alone when it comes to preserving our neighborhood's historic resources. Without support of our fellow community organizations, homeowners, and institutions, we will be limited by how many structures we can nominate and preserve. At its most basic level, each nomination may cost several thousand dollars in consulting fees. Additional financial support towards these efforts can go a long way towards furthering our efforts.

Here are ways that you can assist with us in this uphill battle:

- **Keep each other informed.** Alert the UCHS when you suspect a property may be vulnerable for demolition. The more we can share information, the more effective we can be.
- **Contact your elected officials** and let them know that you value historic preservation and its importance toward the cultural fabric of University City.
- **Become a member** of University City Historical Society and Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia and stay informed about preservation issues in our City.
- **Make a tax deductible donation** to the University City Historical Society that can be used specifically for the preparation of nominations of historic structures.
- **Volunteer your skills** and spread the word among your neighbors.

Likewise, in the coming months, UCHS will be organizing a Preservation Summit within our neighborhood to discuss the facts, challenges, and opportunities surrounding preservation in our neighborhood. In attendance will be representatives from the City, local neighborhood organizations, trained preservationists, and like-minded preservation organizations. We see this as an important step towards sharing knowledge and collaborating together to strengthen our efforts. Invitation to this important event will be forthcoming.

The significance of University City architecture is universally acknowledged, but it is easy to take for granted that this may not always be the case. Together we can find a comfortable balance between the preservation of our historic resources and the growth and economic vitality of this very special neighborhood.

**Elizabeth Stegner**, President, UCHS

**George Poulin**, Committee Chair

July 28, 2016

## University City Then & Now: 318-336 S. 42nd



Courtesy of the Free Library of Philadelphia



Photo by Joseph Minardi.

William S. Kimball built many dwellings in West Philadelphia, including this set of row homes known as the "Kimball Block." The block is noteworthy as an early example of the Queen Anne style in Philadelphia, but there were some significant alterations done to the homes, namely the removal of the front porches.

## CARPETS & RUGS: A GLOSSARY

**Crumbcloth:** A cloth laid on the floor, usually under the dining room table, to catch crumbs and protect the fine carpet. Most frequently a floorcloth, but references are also made to fabrics such as damask.

**Drugget:** This inexpensive 18th and 19th century substitute for carpeting was a coarse woven rug of wool and linen. It was usually produced in solid colors, woven stripes, or checks, and could be used to cover a more expensive carpet. It's not woven today; Dhurries or other coarse-woven carpets could be used as substitutes.

**Hearth or Scatter Rug:** Small hooked or embroidered rugs usually made of wool and placed in front of the fireplace to protect the finer carpet underneath. By 1900, these were also used on bare wood or linoleum floors in kitchens and living rooms.

**Hooked Rug:** Hooking was a popular craft of the 1840s which enabled even the poorest household to create the effect of a manufactured carpet. Narrow strips of rags or yarn were pulled through burlap to form a pile. Popular designs ranged from a curled-up cat to Oriental rug motifs. Even when machine-produced carpeting was easily available and affordable, this handcrafted touch remained popular...and still does.

**Ingrain:** Also known as Kilmarnock, Kidderminster, or Scotch (for the location of its principal manufacturers) this was by 1840 a common floor covering in most American dining rooms, larger bedrooms, and occasionally parlors. Pileless, loom-woven, all-wool, its double construction

featured simple, small patterns in one color on the face and reverse colors on the back. By the 1890s, the availability of pile carpet all but ended the reign of ingrain, although it could still be purchased through the Sears catalog as late as the 1920s (see photo below).

**Jacquard:** Loom attachment (usually on a Wilton loom) designed to increase productivity. Wires and an endless belt of perforated cards are keyed to the desired pattern. Adapted to carpet manufacturing in 1825, it's still used by some manufacturers today.

**Matting:** Known by a variety of names including Canton or India mats, its use throughout the house has been documented as early as 1750, and by 1820 it was a typical floor covering in every house. Even those who could afford woven carpeting used matting for halls, stairs, and bedrooms. As a summer covering it was tacked down to replace heavy wool carpets, and there are references to it being left in place (under winder carpet) as an insulator and pad.



An ad for a "fancy ingrain" carpet that sold for 35 cents per yard, reproduced from the 1902 edition of the Sears, Roebuck Catalogue.

From *Old House Journal*, Joni Monnich, August-September, 1983.

To be continued in next issue.

# ON THE WEST SIDE



## PROFILES IN ARCHITECTURE

*James C. Fernald*

James Fernald designed residences throughout Philadelphia, including West Philadelphia during the boom years of development. In 1899 he formed a brief partnership with a Mr. Lucas, of which nothing is known. Fernald continued working as an architect until 1929.

### Selected Relevant Commissions:

- 1895:** Anderson, Harry P., residences (4), NS of Girard, east of 42nd
- 1897:** Eaches, William, residences (5), SE side of Florence, 20' South of 50th  
Smith, Charles & Son, residences (2), SS of Mantua, 100' South of 42nd  
Supplee, A.L., residences (5), SW cor 46th & Brown
- 1898:** 511 North 40th
- 1899:** Power, William, residences (3), ES of Wyalusing, North of Lancaster Ave

### Fernald & Lucas:

- 1899:** Residences (3), WS of "State Road," 100' S of Baring  
Residences (2), 54th & Wyalusing

### James C. Fernald:

- 1900:** 54th & Wyalusing
- 1902:** Magraw, John, residences (140), Reno & Funston Streets, West of 51st  
Residences (5), WS of 63rd, 150' N of Callowhill  
Residences (2), SE corner of 51st & Pentridge  
Shoemaker, Samuel, residences (50), Wyalusing and Harmer Streets, West of 55th

*To be continued in next issue.*

## Ask the Experts

### VENTILATING A CRAWL SPACE

**Q:** My house has a cement-block foundation with some holes for ventilation, as well as some broken blocks and holes where pipes had been run through into the crawl space. Is it absolutely necessary to ventilate the crawl space with one or two open spaces?

**A:** Ventilation is unnecessary only when the crawl space is heated and the foundation walls are insulated. With an unheated crawl space, some ventilation is always required, but the amount can be greatly reduced by installing a polyethylene vapor barrier over the dirt floor. Without a vapor barrier, there should be at least four openings with a total area of 1/150th of the total floor area. With a vapor barrier, this can be reduced to a ratio of one to 1,500, and the number of openings can be reduced to two. You might also want to consider one of the number of available basement ventilators that are the size of a standard concrete block and have louvres and screening to keep out water and animals.

From *The Old House Journal*, November 1983.

The University City Historical Society is seeking nominations to its governing board. During the coming year, the UCHS will be continuing its work nominating properties to the Philadelphia Historical Commission for historic designation, beginning a University City/West Philadelphia Oral History Project, and with events celebrating the 50th anniversary of its founding. A background in historic preservation or local history is useful but not required. Nominations should be forwarded via email to [info@uchs.net](mailto:info@uchs.net) or to the UCHS's mailing address of P.O. Box 31927, Philadelphia, PA 19104-0627 by August 24th. Self-nominations are welcome.

### University City Historical Society

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