

THE MINUTES OF THE 225th STATED MEETING OF THE PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

4 May 1978

F. Otto Haas, Chairman

Present: F. Otto Haas, Chairman of the Commission
Janet S. Klein, Vice Chairman of the Commission
Mrs. James C. Crumlish, Jr.
Edward Pinkowski
John Taxin
Val Mogensen, Executive Assistant Director of Finance
David Rosenblum, Esq., Assistant City Solicitor, Law Department
Richard Tyler, Historian
Patricia Siamiontkowski, Executive Assistant to the Chairman
Herbert W. Levy, A.I.A., Architectural Advisor
to the Commission

Also: Elizabeth Mintz, Historic Sites Survey Director
Thomas Hine, reporter for THE PHILADELPHIA INQUIRER.

Unless otherwise noted, all actions taken herein are the results of motions correctly made, seconded and carried.

THE MINUTES of the Stated Meeting, 6 April 1978, were approved and directed to be filed.

REPORTS

The Report of the Architectural Committee, 19 April 1978, Herbert W. Levy, A.I.A., Architectural Advisor to the Commission. The report was approved and directed to be filed with the official copy of the Minutes.

Subsequent to the April 19th meeting members of the Architectural Committee and the Commission staff inspected the sign on the Second Street facade of the Girard Bank building at Second and Chestnut Streets. The sign, installed prior to the receipt of the Commission's approval of its design, was found to be acceptable.

Recommendations by the Staff for the Certified of Buildings, Richard Tyler, Historian.

Owing to the owner's desire to restore the building situate at 302 Lombard Street, the Commission voted to ratify its certification. The question of certification had been tabled during the Commission's on-site inspection of Lombard Street in February.

REPORTS (Cont'd)

At the request of Kensington Action Now, the Philadelphia Historical Commission took under consideration the certification of the Midway Theatre located at 1821 E. Allegheny Avenue.

Louise Westfall and Deborah Kearney, members of KAN, presented to the Historical Commission members a general description of their organization and a brief statement on the significance of the movie theatre to the Kensington neighborhood. Mrs. Westfall noted particularly the theatre's importance to the community as a local landmark and pointed to the significance of the structure as the work of Louis Magaziner, a noted architect.

In addition to asking for the historical certification of the building, KAN expressed the hope of enlisting the Commission's assistance in securing funds for the building's preservation and restoration.

The Historian, in presenting some background to the Commission members on recent developments in regard to the theatre, reported that the building had been inspected on the exterior approximately six or seven months ago by himself, Henry Magaziner, the son of Louis Magaziner, and the Executive Assistant. It was determined at that time that the exterior had been altered and that too little of the original design by Magaziner remained to be preserved.

Subsequent to this inspection, Councilman Joseph Zaxyemny contacted the Historical Commission to convey the community's concern for the preservation of the building as a movie theatre. The Historian pointed out that certification could not control use of the building, the community's primary concern, and suggested that certification, in that respect, could offer little assistance.

Following a meeting with representatives of KAN and the Kensington neighborhood, Mr. Tyler agreed to look at the building a second time. With Henry Magaziner and Commissioner Sabatini of the Department of Licenses and Inspections, Mr. Tyler made another inspection of the building. Although the exterior of the theatre had undergone alterations, the Art Deco interior remained intact and is one of the few surviving interiors of its genre in the City.

Since there is no distinction between interior and exterior in regard to certification, the theatre could be placed on the local register on the merit of its fine interior alone. A similar request for certification of the Shubert Theatre whose exterior had completely altered and its interior restored came before the Commission at a recent meeting. In that particular case, certification was denied.

REPORTS (Cont'd)

In view of the fact that there are no certified buildings within the Kensington neighborhood, the Historian asked that the neighborhood's request for certification of the Midway Theatre be given special consideration. Mr. Tyler stressed the fact, however, that the Kensington community should be aware of the Historical Commission's limited jurisdiction. Provided the interior fabric of the theatre remains intact, there can be no control exercised over use of the building.

In addition, Mr. Levy advised the neighborhood group that the present owner of the theatre will be notified of its pending certification and can refuse to accept it.

A motion was made to approve the certification of the theatre. This was seconded and carried with Mr. Hogsensen abstaining. Following the vote to approve certification of the Midway Theatre, the possibility of nomination to the National Register of Historic Places was discussed as was the possibility of obtaining funds to insure the building's continued use as a theatre. Mr. Tyler agreed to meet with the community to discuss, in detail, funding possibilities.

Report on Historical Commission Staff Activities for the month of April, Richard Tyler, Historian.

The Historian announced the awarding of a grant to the City Planning Commission from the State for the commencement of the historic sites survey of Philadelphia County. Elizabeth Mintz, Director of the Survey, was introduced and answered several questions concerning the survey presented to her by the Commission members.

In addition, the Historian reported an expression of interest in the restoration and reuse of the John Wanamaker Mansion and two near-by brownstone houses in conjunction with the construction of a high-rise apartment building on the adjoining lot. The Department of Licenses and Inspections has been asked to withhold the issuance of a demolition order in view of this new development.

Finally, Ed Weintraub was recently appointed State Historic Preservation Officer for Pennsylvania.

Mr. Tyler's report was approved and directed to be filed with the official copy of the Minutes.

OLD BUSINESS

There were no items to be discussed under Old Business.

NEW BUSINESS

Lit Brothers Department Store, Robert Levy. Mr. Levy presented to the Historical Commission members a proposal for the adaptive reuse of the Lit Brothers Department Store complex. Mr. Levy is enrolled in the Historic Preservation Program at Columbia University and prepared the Lit Brothers feasibility study in connection with his studies.

In addition to presenting his proposal for the adaptive reuse of the Lit Brothers Department store as a combination of residential and commercial uses, he spoke briefly on the history of the development of the streetscape and the problems arising from the combination of a variety of individual structures into one unit.

The Commission members thanked Mr. Levy for his fine presentation.

There being no further business, the meeting adjourned at 4:30 P. M.

Respectfully submitted,

Patricia Sismiontkowaki
Executive Assistant to the Chairman

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