

PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

COMMITTEE ON HISTORIC DESIGNATION

8 November 1985

Grace Gary, Chairman

The Twenty-second meeting of the Committee on Historic Designation began at 1:00 p.m. on Friday, 8 November 1985, in Room 1313 City Hall Annex.

Present: Grace Gary, Chairman of the Committee on Historic Designation
David Baldinger, Deputy Director, Philadelphia City Planning Commission
Dr. Caroline Golab
Janet Klein
Hyman Myers
Sandra Tatman

Richard Tyler, Historian, Philadelphia Historical Commission
Patricia Siemiontkowski, Architectural Historian, Philadelphia Historical Commission
Randal Baron, Executive Secretary, Philadelphia Historical Commission
Mary Lou McFarland, Executive Director, Preservation Coalition of Greater Philadelphia

OLD BUSINESS

The Committee discussed the suggestions brought up in a letter written by Hyman Myers for the institution of procedures for designation. It was agreed upon that each member of the Designation Committee will be asked by the Commission staff to write up suggested rules for one area of the designation procedure to be discussed by the whole Committee at a future meeting. A question raised in the letter pertaining to the legal responsibility of Committee members will be answered by the City Law Department.

NEW BUSINESS

The Committee discussed and voted on advising the designation of the following historical and architectural resources.

Diamond Street Historic District
1875 - 1895

Diamond Street between Broad and Van Pelt Streets, developed between 1875 - 1895, possesses significance as the most intact grand avenue of speculative Victorian rowhouses in North Philadelphia and as an expression of the architectural and residential aspirations of the city's nouveau riche during the expansive period of post Civil War industrialization. The emergence of Diamond Street as a residential area reflects the tremendous increase in the managerial and service related middle and upper middle classes that resulted from the growth of the city's industrial base in the decades after the Civil War as well as the expansion of the streetcar system which allowed Diamond Street homeowners to commute to work. The rowhouses of Diamond Street were built by speculative developers who, taking advantage of the housing shortage created during the war, were themselves the product of the post-Civil War economic expansion.

Planned as an extra wide street, this grand avenue leading to Fairmount Park was an ideal location for the finest rowhouses of North Philadelphia. The rowhouses, many faced with stone, were built larger than those on the surrounding streets. Some of Philadelphia's most well-known Victorian architects designed rowhouses on Diamond Street including Angus Wade, Willis Hale and Frank Furness. Diamond Street was also seen as an excellent location for churches, being on the main east west street in a prosperous residential neighborhood. Some of the finest Victorian churches in the city including the George W. South Memorial Church of the Advocate and the Jones Tabernacle AME Church are located on Diamond Street. The churches and houses of Diamond Street represent: 1. fine examples of their styles, 2. the work of important Philadelphia architects and 3. the history of a neighborhood which grew owing to the expansion of the post bellum economy and the growth of public transportation in North Philadelphia.

The Committee recommended the designation of the Diamond Street Historic District by a vote of 4 - 0 with 1 abstention. Mr. Myers abstained because he arrived at the end of the discussion to consider Diamond Street. The Committee requested that the minutes note the reasons for choosing Diamond Street as the city's first locally designated historic district. These reasons include:

- 1) The architectural and historical significance of the street which had up until now not been documented at either the local or national register level.

- 2) The desire to use preservation and the 25% tax credit as a planning tool in a low and moderate income area.
- 3) The initiative of neighborhood groups attempting to preserve buildings without creating displacement.

Caroline Golab noted that Diamond Street makes a good focus for preservation efforts because it is a small focused area surrounded by buildings that are relatively intact as opposed to other parts of the city that are more thoroughly blighted, possibly precluding a successful preservation effort.

The boundaries of the Diamond Street District are carefully drawn based on the physical and historical character of the district. The district is confined to Diamond Street because the houses facing that street are larger and grander than those on the surrounding parallel streets. The boundaries on both the east and west are formed by large areas of newer construction.

Samuel Yellin Metalworks - 5520 Arch Street
1915: Mellor and Meigs, Architects

The Samuel Yellin Metalworks possesses significance as the building where Samuel Yellin, America's most talented architectural iron worker, practiced his craft and as one of the only industrial buildings designed by Mellor and Meigs, a nationally recognized Philadelphia architectural firm. Samuel Yellin, trained in Poland, emigrated to America in 1906 and within five years established himself in the business of creating pieces of architectural ironwork. Over the course of his career, Yellin, renowned for his creative historically based designs and meticulous craftsmanship created many of the masterpieces of ironwork in the United States. His work includes pieces for Harvard, Princeton, Yale and Pittsburgh Universities, important churches such as the Cathedral of St. John the Devine in New York and Grace Cathedral in San Francisco and banks, businesses and private mansions across the country. It was natural that Yellin chose Mellor and Meigs to design his metal workshop as this firm was a leading proponent of the Arts and Crafts movement in the area and in fact often used Yellin ironwork in their houses. The building they designed, one of their only industrial buildings, is loosely derived from Spanish medieval design and provides ample opportunity to show off Yellin's ironwork on its balconies, gates, doors and window grills.

The Committee recommended the designation of the Samuel Yellin Metalworks by a vote of 5 - 0.

The Market Street National Bank - 1-21 N. Juniper Street
aka 1 E. Penn Square
1930: Ritter and Shay, Architects

The One East Penn Square Building, formerly the Market Street National Bank, possesses architectural significance as one of the few very fine examples of the Art Deco style in the City of Philadelphia, as one of the superior works of the important Philadelphia architectural firm Ritter and Shay, and for its contextual role as part of the grand ensemble of buildings surrounding City Hall. The Market Street National Bank was founded in 1887 on the principle that a bank was needed on Market Street near both the public buildings and the train stations. The bank achieved such success that in 1929, in the midst of the depression, they built a large and ornate office building on one of the choicest pieces of real estate in the city. The bank commissioned the well-known firm of Ritter and Shay to design their new buildings. This firm is responsible for a number of important twentieth century buildings in the city including the Packard Building, the Drake Hotel and the Customs House, several of these also being fine examples of the Art Deco style. The Market Street National Bank, an extravaganza of colored terra cotta, represents an excellent example of the Art Deco style with its vertical twenty-two story massing, zoning inspired setbacks and Mayan detail. Perhaps most importantly of all, the bank along with the other buildings surrounding Penn Square create a grand walled-in area enveloping City Hall like a setting around a diamond, forming one of the greatest public spaces in America.

The Committee recommended the designation of the Market Street National Bank at 1-21 N. Juniper Street by a vote of 6 - 0.

City Hall Annex
1927: Phillip Johnson, Architect

City Hall Annex at 23-29 N. Juniper Street, built in 1927, possesses architectural significance as a fine example of Classical Revival Civic architecture, as one of the finer works of Phillip Johnson, architect for the Philadelphia City Department of Public Health for thirty years, and most importantly as a defining element in the group of fine old buildings surrounding Penn Square. The building has historical significance for its role in housing important departments of city government for nearly sixty years. When the city government began to outgrow its quarters in City Hall, a new building

was erected to house city agencies such as the Department of Public Health, Public Welfare, City Transit, Voter Registration and the Board of Review and Revision of City Taxes. Phillip Johnson, who served as the chief-in-house architect in city government for thirty years, was chosen to design the new building. Johnson, one of the countries most prolific architects designed over 275 buildings in his long career including Conwell Hall at Temple University, the Philadelphia Convention Center and numerous civic buildings such as police stations, hospitals and recreation centers. City Hall Annex, probably Johnsons finest work, is a refined example of Classical Revival Civic architecture based on the principles of the Beaux Arts movement, including the use of light colored stone as a building material, the division of the building into base, shaft and capitol and the classical detailing of an arcade, pediments, the correct use of the classical orders and the coffered ceiling of the front lobby.

The staff and the Committee agreed that the most important significance of the building rests in its role in defining Penn Square. The Annex along with other already designated buildings, including the Masonic Temple and Wannamakers, make up the sides of a square that mirrors the intricate detail of City Hall while bowing to that building in scale.

The Committee recommended the designation of the City Hall Annex at 23-29 N. Juniper Street by a vote of 6 - 0.

The Townhouse Apartments - 301 S. 19th Street
1924: Ballinger and Perrot, Architects/Engineers

The Townhouse Apartments at 301 S. 19th Street is a sixteen story luxury apartment building within the Rittenhouse National Register Historic District. The nomination form claims several areas of architectural significance for the building. Designed by the Ballinger Company, one of the city's oldest architectural firms, the Townhouse Apartments represents one of the few residential commissions of this firm renowned for their industrial buildings and engineering expertise. The form claims that the Townhouse Apartments were technically advanced in the area of fire proofing with terra cotta tiles embedded in the walls. Lastly, the Townhouse Apartments are part of the architectural ensemble of the Rittenhouse neighborhood, an area of elaborate townhouses mixed with early twentieth century luxury apartment houses around the square. The Committee opined that the evidence did not support the claim of architectural significance in two of these areas. Mr. Myers stated that although

this may be one of Ballinger's few apartment commissions, the company was not known for particularly fine residential design. Additionally, he stated that terra cotta embedded in the walls was a common practice in 1924 and does not constitute advanced engineering technology. In terms of the building's contribution to the Rittenhouse District, several of the Committee members expressed a desire to go to see the building for themselves. The Committee by consensus recommended tabling the Townhouse Apartments until after a site visit.

1329 N. 23rd Street
c. 1870

The rowhouse at 1329 N. 23rd Street stands within a row of speculative houses developed to accomodate the tremendous expansion of the city's population concurrent with the growth of industry. These houses probably were tenanted of members of the working class. This house is a modest example of a Second Empire rowhouse with its slate covered mansard and segmental arched dormer. The building has retained more of its integrity than others in its row.

Committee members expressed the opinion that the building did not possess enough significance to be designated individually and recommended against its designation by a vote of 5 to 1. The Committee suggested that in any case a letter should be sent to the owner encouraging her to continue to maintain her house and thanking her for her interest in preserving the building.

John Coltrane House
c. 1895

The rowhouse at 1511 N. 33rd Street is significant as the house of the renowned jazz composer and performer, John William Coltrane, between 1952 and his death in 1967. Mr. Coltrane created a revolution in the jazz world during the 1960s with a style of saxophone playing that at first shocked his audience and then went on to influence nearly every jazz musician since that time. John Coltrane, born in Hamlet, North Carolina, received musical training in Philadelphia at the Ornstein School of Music and the Granoff Studios. After playing in a Navy band during World War II, Coltrane returned to Philadelphia and played in various jazz clubs with Eddie Vinson, Dizzy Gillespie, Thelonius Monk and the Miles Davis Quintet. He developed a radical new style of jazz saxophone playing creating such musical inventions as "peddle point harmony", changing progressions over a sustained base note,

multiprogression: changing chords on every beat or second beat of a bar, the use of the minor third or fourth as a basic chord progression, and "modal music", improvising on a single scale as opposed to chord progression. Although Mr. Coltrane died in 1967 at the age of 42 from a liver ailment, he remains one of the most recorded musicians of all time with thirty-seven albums which continue to influence the jazz and rock music worlds. John Coltrane bought the house at 1511 N. 33rd Street in 1952 to house himself his mother, his cousin and eventually his wife. Coltrane always considered this his real home. It is presently owned by his cousin who keeps the house in much the same condition as when he lived there.

The Committee recommended the designation of this house by a vote of 6 - 0.

There being no further business, the Committee adjourned at 5:00 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Randal Baron

Randal Baron
Executive Secretary