

THE MINUTES OF THE 373rd STATED MEETING OF THE
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

14 July 1993

City Council Caucus Room
Room 401 City Hall

Present

Wayne S. Spilove, Chairperson
David Brownlee, Ph.D., Architectural Historian
Susan Rabinovitch, Real Estate Developer
Louis Einhorn, Public Property
Scott Wilds, Department of Housing
Stephanie Wolf, Ph.D., Historian
Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer
Barbara Kaplan, Director, City Planning Commission

Randal Baron, Preservation Planner
Ira Kauderer, Executive Secretary
Andrew Haines, Historic Research Technician

Also

F. Cecil Baker, Cecil Baker & Associates
David Villela, Dept. of Public Property
Belinda Bail, Cecil Baker & Associates
John Nedby, City of Philadelphia Police
Chuck Legradi, City of Philadelphia Fire Department
Matthew J. McCrory Jr., City of Philadelphia Fire Department
Jennifer Goodman, Preservation Coalition of Philadelphia
Rev. George E. Gibson Jr., Christian Love Baptist Church
Rev. Curtis Wadlington, Christian Love Baptist Church
Charles Roller, Wissahickon Interested Citizens Assoc.
J. Allegre, Jr., Wissahickon Interested Citizens Assoc.
Freda Lippes, AIA, ADA Coordination Committee

THE MINUTES of the 372nd Meeting of the Philadelphia Historical
-Commission held on 12 May 1993, Wayne S. Spilove,
Chairman.

Dr. Tyler opened the meeting by discussing some of the legal implications of the pending United Artists case. He explained that read narrowly, that case held that the Historical Commission may designate publicly owned property or private property with the consent of the owners. Dr. Tyler noted that as one of the most important functions of the Commission, it is important that the designation of historic resources continues.

Next, Dr. Tyler briefly outlined the process of historic designation in Philadelphia. Once a historic resource is identified, a staff member completes a Philadelphia Register of

Historic Resources nomination form, which has been adapted from the National Register of Historic Places. Randy Baron, preservation planner, reviews the form for correctness. The Committee on Historic Designation then meets to confirm that the building merits designation and again considers whether the nomination form is correct and complete. Owners receive notice of a pending designation at least 30 days before the Commission considers the designation of any building.

THE REPORT of the Committee on Historic Designation, 23 April 1993, Dr. David Brownlee, Chairman.

In his introductory comments Dr. Brownlee commented on the high quality of the nominations that the Staff and consultant prepared for the Commission's consideration. He noted that most of the buildings were constructed in the first few decades of this century, a period of prolific growth for public architecture including facilities for security, recreation and transportation. During this period Philadelphia's Philip Johnson was City Architect and Paul P. Cret headed the Art Jury, which reviewed the plans he produced.

41st District Police Station & Engine Co. #19: The Police and Fire Station Complex on 24th Street at Ritner possesses significance as a fine example of the Georgian/Classical Revival style. Philadelphia adopted this style in the period between the Centennial Exposition of 1876 and the Sesquicentennial of 1926 as its own emblem. This building manifests this style both in terms of its five part layout with a central boiler building and stable flanked by "hyphens" and two larger end buildings containing the fire and police stations. The Flemish bond brick walls and the projecting Baroque quoins and keystones as well as the overall symmetry of multi-pane windows, doors and balconies are all manifestations of Georgian/Classical Revival design. The architect, Philadelphia's Philip Johnson, was the City's main in-house architect for thirty years and designed important buildings including City Hall Annex. This complex of buildings serves as one of his grander designs which serves as a major landmark constructed in what was a newly developed residential area. The building also embodies the history of the development of the professional Police and Fire departments in their second major period of expansion in the early 20th century.

This building came to the Commission with the approval of the Committee, based on a 4 to 1 vote. Ms. Wolf moved to accept the Report. The motion was seconded by Mr. Einhorn.

Mr. Einhorn, of the Department of Public Property, gave the Commission an overview of the position of the Department. Over the last 15 years, the Department of Public Property has considered various plans to improve the facilities of the police and fire department at this location. At various times these

plans have included schemes for renovation, partial demolition and new construction, and total demolition and replacement of the existing building with new facilities. While the Fire Department believes that renovation of the existing Fire Station portion of the complex would adequately meet its needs, the Police Department believes that the present structure, even after extensive renovation, would not be suitable to their needs. Mr. Einhorn reported that studies show that there is little difference between the price of new construction and renovation. The concern of his Department is to provide the best facility possible for the Police Department at that location. In the opinion of the Departments of Police and Public Property, this can only be achieved by total demolition of the existing structure and construction of a new facility.

Mr. Einhorn added that Councilwoman Verna held a public meeting held to consider this issue. He reported that those present expressed a clear preference for constructing new facilities. Dr. Tyler and Ms. Goodman responded that there are questions about how adequately the entire community was represented at this public meeting. Ms. Goodman reported that an informal survey she conducted in the area shows that many neighbors prefer retention of the existing building.

Dr. Tyler addressed the Commission. He stated that there was no question, in his opinion, that this complex of buildings meets the criteria for historic designation as set out by the Ordinance. Nevertheless, Dr. Tyler recommended against listing these buildings.

Last year, responding to the new requirements of the United Artists decision, the Historical Commission staff undertook a review of publicly owned property and determined that this complex appeared eligible for the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Concurrently, information was circulating about its proposed renovation. Given this, the staff began the nomination process. Subsequently, the Police and the Department of Public Property decided that the community would be better served by replacing the facility entirely.

Dr. Tyler noted that the Police had been receiving assurances for a decade about improvement of their facility. Though numerous studies were undertaken, because of indecision about the desirability of reusing the building, no action was taken, normal maintenance of the building was deferred, and conditions at the facility deteriorated. Given that the programmatic requirements of the Police Department cannot be met by the existing structure and the longstanding expectations of the users for an improved facility, Dr. Tyler expressed his reluctance to impact policy or operations adversely by designating the complex.

Dr. Tyler strongly recommended that the Department of Public

Property incorporate historic preservation in the City's planning process for its public property. The small Commission staff cannot write complete nomination forms for all the eligible public buildings in a short period of time. Therefore, the best approach might be to develop a list of "eligible" buildings that the Department of Public Property would treat sensitively.

Ms. Kaplan concurred that if the Commission expects the Department of Public Property to take particular care in maintaining historic buildings, the Department must be notified as to their identity and significance. For example, if the complex of buildings in question has been so identified 15 years ago, another site might have been found for the police and fire department and a reuse found for these buildings.

Jennifer Goodman of the Preservation Coalition addressed the Commission. She stated that the Preservation Coalition supports the designation of these buildings, though they also recognize the responsibility of the City of Philadelphia to provide adequate facilities for the police and fire departments. Ms. Goodman further expressed concern about the process by which public input was assessed and about the design of any new building which might be constructed on this site.

The motion that the recommendation of the Designation Committee that these buildings be added to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places be accepted, failed, 1 to 5 with 2 abstentions.

University Avenue Bridge: University Avenue Bridge possesses significance as an outstanding and unusual bridge design by the nationally important architect Paul Phillipe Cret. One of Philadelphia's only remaining drawbridges, the bridge is a landmark gateway in the City. Paul Cret, a highly influential proponent of the Beaux-Arts movement designed the bridge in 1925 using a modern Classical idiom. With its limestone operations tower and piers and bronze light standards, this is an architecturally rich bridge structure which possesses significance in the areas of architect, style, engineering and as a visual landmark.

This bridge came to the Commission with the unanimous favorable recommendation of the Designation Committee for designation. The Commission voted unanimously to accept the recommendation of the Committee, to add the University Avenue Bridge to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.

Paine/Vicar's Street House: The Paine House possesses local significance as an example of a vernacular Pennsylvania Farmhouse-type unusual within the City of Philadelphia. The building, constructed in approximately 1869, is one of the earliest extant houses in the Wissahickon neighborhood. Wissahickon received its impetus to grow as a commuter suburb

from the nearby train station. Although never a farm house itself, the building took the form of a Pennsylvania farm house. This vernacular form is an amalgam of English and German traditions which came together in the 18th century but conservatively remained in place through the 19th century. This building with its four-bay form is here ornamented with the brackets of mid-19th century Italianate design. Preserved because of its Park location, this house deserves preservation as an example of rural vernacular design in the midst of the big City, in association with the development of the Wissahickon section of the City and in association with Dr. William Paine, the first owner of the house.

This building came to the Commission with the unanimous recommendation of the Designation Committee for listing on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.

Dr. Tyler noted that this house, owned by the Fairmount Park Commission, possesses little value for park use, due to its siting. At one time, the Park Commission considered demolishing the house in order to straighten Vicaris Street, which turns as it approaches the house. The Park Commission, now aware of the historic significance of the house and its desirable residential location, has now decided to sell the building to ensure its preservation.

The Commission voted unanimously to accept the recommendation of the Designation Committee and add the Paine/Vicaris Street House to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.

Temple Beth Israel/Christian Love Baptist Church: This former synagogue building possesses significance for its Beaux-Arts/Byzantine Revival architectural style, its design by Philadelphia architects Sauer and Hahn and for its association with the history of the City's Jewish community. This building is a surprisingly early modern interpretation of the eastern, in this case Byzantine style, which was thought appropriate for a house of Jewish worship. Sauer and Hahn were architects with close ties to the Philadelphia Jewish community who designed a number of synagogues. They also produced notable apartment buildings, factories and theaters. The construction of this building in Strawberry Mansion for the third oldest Jewish congregation in Philadelphia, represents a massive movement of Jews to this neighborhood in the early 20th century. Its conversion to a church represents a more recent migration of African-Americans to this area. This building remains a major public building in the Strawberry Mansion section.

This building came to the Commission with the unanimous positive recommendation of the Designation Committee. The Commission accepted the recommendation of the Committee, and

voted unanimously to designate the building.

Germantown Town Hall: Mr. Einhorn requested that discussion of the historic designation of this building be continued until next month giving the Department of Public Property time to consider their position on the matter. He added that the Department concurs that this building possesses historic significance. The building, however, will need substantial capital expenditures before it could be made suitable for re-use. It currently stands mostly empty.

Ms. Kaplan noted that the Planning Commission has received inquiries as to the possibility of the establishing private offices in the building. Mr. Einhorn agreed to discuss privatization and other options at the next Commission meeting, when he will be prepared to present the best thinking of the Department of Public Property on this matter.

THE REPORT of the activities of the Historical Commission Staff,
May and June 1993, Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation
Officer.

Respectfully submitted,

Ira Kauderer