

**REPORT OF THE HISTORIC DESIGNATION COMMITTEE
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION
4 April 2001**

**One Parkway, 1515 Arch Street, 18th Floor
David Brownlee, Chair**

Present

David Brownlee, Ph.D., Chair
David Baldinger, City Planning Commission
Janet Klein
Bruce Lavery
Hyman Myers
Stephanie Wolf, Ph.D.

Julianne L. Brennan, Historic Preservation Planner
Laura M. Spina, Historic Preservation Planner
Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer

Also Present

Ted Caviness, Jones Tabernacle AME Church
Brian K. Friedman, Northern Liberties Development
John J. Griswold, Jr.
Ms. Jones, Jones Tabernacle AME Church
Reverend Desiree Lindsay, Jones Tabernacle AME Church
Reverend Ellis B. Loudon, Jones Tabernacle AME Church
Tina Roberts, Northern Liberties Development
Judith Robinson

Mr. Brownlee called the meeting to order at 2 p.m. and stated that the designation discussion of the Eagle Statue in the Wanamaker Building would not occur until further notice owing to a postponement request by the owners. He then polled the audience with regard to their interest in the designations on the agenda and consequently reordered the agenda such that Schmidt's Brew House would be heard first, followed by the Diamond Street Historic District and the Eighth National Bank. Mr. Brownlee then asked the Committee to introduce themselves and explained that the Committee serves as an advisory committee to the Historical Commission.

Schmidt's Brew House

160-68 West Girard Avenue
Date: 1911-14
Architect: Otto Wolf

Mr. Brownlee introduced Laura Spina of the Historical Commission staff. Ms. Spina summarized the nomination for the Brew House first discussing the importance of the architect, Otto Wolf. Over half of Wolf's 500 career buildings were located in Philadelphia and the majority were brewery related. All of his brewery buildings, except Schmidt's Brew House, followed the 19th century notion that the building's exterior shielded the public from the industrial work happening on the interior. Schmidt's Brew House, however, was the first and only work of Wolf's that displayed the interior workings of the brewery for the public to view. The nomination argued that inspiration of this exterior view of interior workings derived from the

German Werkbund movement. Based on the idea of glorifying industry and technology, architects of the Werkbund movement such as Peter Behrens and Walter Gropius designed buildings that displayed interior industrial workings on the exterior of the building. Ms. Spina presented the nomination's argument that the design of Schmidt's Brew House drew from the German Werkbund while retaining a classical facade. With regard to the brewery's history in the Northern Liberties, Schmidt's served as one the largest brewers of lager beer in the U.S. and as one of the last remaining breweries in the City when it closed in 1986. Ms. Spina stated that while the Historical Commission staff determined that the Schmidt's Brew House is eligible for listing on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, the owner of the site does have a legal demolition permit that dates from August 2000. Based on this fact, the staff did not recommend designation. Ms. Spina then presented slides of the Brew House to the Committee.

Discussion among Committee members ensued with respect to the Brew House. Mr. Brownlee clarified that as an advisory committee, the members must discuss the merits of the nomination regardless of the fact that the building has a valid demolition permit. Mr. Myers questioned whether the rear of the Brew House was an original part of the building. The Committee concluded that two of the building's bays and the original tower were demolished around the 1950s. Mr. Myers then questioned the validity of the nomination's link between Wolf's architecture and the German Werkbund movement. Mr. Brownlee concurred and added that he could not see any influence of Gropius's style in the Brew House's architecture. In response to a question by Mr. Laverty, Mr. Tyler stated that another brewery designed by Wolf was listed on the Philadelphia Register. Mr. Brownlee stressed that, regardless of the building's condition, the merits of the nomination must be discussed. He further noted that the Committee's minutes should be added to the Brew House folder on file at the Historical Commission office to reflect the Committee's disagreement with the correlation between Wolf's design and German Werkbund architecture.

Mr. Brownlee invited the audience to participate in the Committee's discussion. Brian K. Friedman of Northern Liberties Development spoke as the owner of Schmidt's Brew House. He argued that the historic appeal of the building did not lie in its facade, but rather in the concept and function of the structure. He stated that the building changed how society viewed industry and that the only way he could truly save the building would be to open another brewery. Since that option lacks feasibility, he argued that saving the facade would not reflect the building's true importance, mainly its interior. Mr. Brownlee clarified that the Committee has no jurisdiction over interior spaces. Ms. Wolf asked the owner if any of the building's cornice remained for salvage. She stressed the importance of documenting the building before its demolition.

Mr. Brownlee then asked the Committee if the merits of the building warranted its listing on the Philadelphia Register.

Ms. Wolf made a motion not to recommend designation of the Schmidt's Brew House to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Mr. Myers seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

Mr. Brownlee reiterated the reasons for denying recommendation of the Brew House to the Philadelphia Register: first, the condition of the building and its valid demolition permit; and second, the German Werkbund argument in the nomination which did not accurately represent the building's architectural origins. Mr. Tyler reminded the audience that the Committee serves as an advisory to the Historical Commission which will hear this case at its 9 May 2001 meeting. Mr. Baldinger reminded the owner of his demolition permit's validity and that demolition of the structure need not wait until the 9 May meeting.

Diamond Street Historic District

Mr. Brownlee introduced the issue by stating that the extent of demolition in the Diamond Street Historic District has raised the issue of whether or not to amend the District boundaries.

Ms. Spina presented slides to the Committee of District properties that illustrated areas of extensive demolition. Slides of the south side of Diamond Street showed the majority of vacant lots beginning after 20th Street. On the north side of Diamond Street, three of the District's key churches continue to exist opposite multiple vacant lots. Ms. Spina presented the proposal to cut the boundary of the District to 20th Street. She stated that the Historical Commission staff felt divided on the issue; however, most wanted to leave the boundaries where they currently lie. Owing to PHA's ownership of several vacant lots, staff thought that review of any new PHA construction would benefit the District.

Mr. Brownlee recommended discussion among the Committee members. Ms. Wolf questioned whether the three churches could be nominated individually if the District were truncated at 20th Street. Mr. Myers reminded the Committee that the significance of the District at the time of its nomination was the mixture of churches and residences. Ms. Wolf concurred and commented that if PHA does build, that mixture of church and residence will be restored beyond 20th Street. Ms. Klein questioned the District's original 22nd Street boundary. Mr. Tyler commented that the character of the street changed at that location in 1986, the time of designation. Mr. Myers added that the positioning of the houses changes at 22nd Street and houses no longer face Diamond Street at the corners. Ms. Klein then questioned how designated properties had been demolished in such numbers. Mr. Tyler stated that in every instance, the Department of Licenses and Inspection labeled these buildings "Imminently Dangerous." Mr. Tyler explained the argument for amending the District's boundaries. He stated that west of 20th Street, there remains little to no residential fabric in the District and therefore the Historical Commission's continued jurisdiction cannot be justified. He argued there no need further need for preservation exists in the area other than the churches, which could be designated individually. The Committee discussed how review of new PHA construction could serve to benefit the District. Ms. Spina noted the ownership of the vacant lots and PHA's title to 12 contiguous vacant properties.

Mr. Brownlee invited the audience's participation. The Reverend Ellis B. Loudon of Jones Tabernacle AME Church spoke on behalf of the Church and the surrounding neighborhood. He argued the historical significance of the Church and stated his concern over truncating the District. He expressed his desire to see any new construction reviewed so that the District can begin to rebuild its neglected areas. Judith Robinson, a block captain of the 2100 block of Woodstock Street and a Board Member of the Advocate Community Development Corporation, spoke about her concern over new PHA funded construction. She stated that extensive rehabilitation being conducted between 16th and 20th Streets will improve the area and further prompt PHA to build on their empty lots. She commented that the churches serve as anchors in the District and that cutting the boundaries would serve as a disadvantage to the community. John J. Griswold, a resident of Diamond Street, spoke in favor of keeping the current district boundaries. The Reverend Desiree Lindsay of Jones Tabernacle AME Church commented that she writes grant applications on behalf of the Church and is worried that altered boundaries would affect possible funding. The Committee reminded her that a listing on the Philadelphia Register would not overcome that concern.

The Committee engaged in further discussion and Ms. Klein questioned why the proposal to amend the boundaries surfaced in the first place. Mr. Myers responded that when Committee members reviewed the District, the missing residential fabric raised the question of how a vacant

lot could continue to be designated. Mr. Brownlee commented that the desire of the community to remain part of a district is positive proof that the District should not be altered.

Ms. Wolf made a motion to not alter the District's boundaries and was seconded by Ms. Klein. Further discussion among Committee members and Mr. Tyler ensued regarding the District. Mr. Tyler continued to argue that the lack of 19th century density and the fact that the vacant lots do not require any preservation as reasons to amend the boundaries. The Committee members respectfully disagreed and Mr. Brownlee stated that if Ms. Wolf withdraws her motion, no action on this matter would be reported to the Historical Commission.

Ms. Wolf withdrew her motion to retain the District's current boundaries, Ms. Klein withdrew her second, and no action was deemed taken on this matter. Accordingly, no report need be issued and the Historical Commission need take no vote on this question.

Eighth National Bank

1201-09 North Second Street, a.k.a. 183-87 Girard Avenue

Date: 1871 with additions

Architect: Thomas S. Levy

Julianne Brennan made an illustrated presentation of the nomination, which she had written, of the Eighth National Bank to the Committee. She placed the Eighth National Bank in the context of the National Banking Act of 1863, the foundation for the nation's currency system, the growth of banking in Philadelphia the community and businesses of the Northern Liberties, and the growth and merger of banks in Philadelphia. She also commented on the use of both the Italianate, the conventional style for antebellum banks in the city, and the more fashionable Second Empire post Civil War Philadelphia by architect Thomas Levy in the design of the original 1871 structure and its subsequent additions.

Ms. Brennan concluded that the Eighth National Bank meets five of the criteria for listing on the Philadelphia Register in the Historic Preservation Ordinance, §14-2007(5):

- (a) has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation;
- (c) reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style;
- (d) embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style;
- (h) represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City, and
- (j) exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

The Committee discussed briefly the architectural styles used for bank buildings and the design homogeneity of the original structure and its additions.

Ms. Klein moved to recommend the listing of the Eighth National Bank on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Mr. Myers seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

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Additional Matters

Ms. Spina presented an additional matter to the Committee regarding the Historical Commission's policy of removing individually listed properties no longer extant from the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. She stated that in July 1999, the Committee recommended the following policy, but the Historical Commission did not vote to adopt it.

"Automatic de-designation shall be generated following demolition approved by the Historical Commission on financial hardship or public interest grounds, and inspection by Commission staff to determine that no historic resources remain at the address.

Following all other demolitions and application by the owner for de-designation, staff will investigate and determine whether to bring the issue before the Committee on Historic Designation and the Historical Commission."

In addition, Ms. Spina presented a list of individually listed properties no longer extant and questioned the Committee as to whether or not they could be de-designated. A discussion among Committee members ensued on whether or not legally demolished buildings could be automatically de-designated by the Historical Commission staff. Mr. Tyler explained the process by which demolition occurs legally. Mr. Lavery suggested that if a staff member verifies the legal demolition, then de-designation could occur. Ms. Klein questioned de-designation of properties where the building was not necessarily historic but the site held historic importance. Ms. Wolf recognized Ms. Klein's point and added that records must be kept to show the history of the building, including its demolition history. She stressed the importance of determining that the legality of the demolition. Ms. Spina raised the question of demolition by neglect. The Department of Licenses and Inspections may demolish a building after declaring it "Imminently Dangerous." However, a building may reach that condition through neglect on the owner's part. While demolition by Licenses and Inspection occurs legally, the neglect leading up to the demolition could be construed as purposeful. Ms. Wolf expressed the importance of punishing an owner of a neglected building but stated since the damage takes place over years, punishment can be difficult.

The Committee then addressed the 1999 policy. Ms. Spina suggested the need for a clarified policy. Mr. Tyler concurred and Mr. Baldinger recommended a time frame for de-designation. For example, a 60 to 90 day period would allow a Historical Commission staff member to investigate the legality of the demolition and whether or not it qualifies for automatic de-designation. Ms. Spina recommended properties be removed from the Philadelphia Register within six months unless the Committee deems otherwise. She stated that if within that six months staff finds an illegal demolition occurred, then Committee and Historical Commission would have time to hear the case. Mr. Tyler suggested he draft new policy language and forward it to the Committee members upon completion. The Committee expressed its desire to meet again before the June 2001 Historical Commission meeting to discuss the new language.

Mr. Lavery made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Myers seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Julianne L. Brennan
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