

**REPORT OF THE COMMITTEE ON HISTORIC DESIGNATION
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION**

**TUESDAY, 13 APRIL 2010, 9:00 A.M.
ROOM 578, CITY HALL
RICHARD DILWORTH, PH.D., CHAIR**

PRESENT

Richardson Dilworth III, Ph.D.
Janet Klein
Bruce Laverty
Jeffrey Cohen, Ph.D.
David Schaaf
Doug Mooney

Jonathan Farnham, Executive Director
Erin Coté, Historic Preservation Planner II

ALSO PRESENT

Gay G. Johnson, resident
John Gallery, Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia
Ben Leech, Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia
Laura Beardsley, Germantown Historical Society
Mark Sellers, resident
Denise Schultz, resident

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Dilworth called the meeting to order at 9:16 a.m. Ms. Klein and Messrs. Laverty, Mooney, and Schaaf joined him on the Committee.

AWBURY HISTORIC DISTRICT

Owner: Various, 33 properties
Nominator: The Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia and Mark Sellers
Proposal: Nomination for district designation

OVERVIEW: The proposed Awbury Historic District is located in the East Germantown section of Philadelphia. It is comprised of landscaped grounds and buildings created by the extended Cope family, including Henry Cope (1793-1865), son and successor to prominent Philadelphia Orthodox Quaker merchant Thomas Pym Cope (1768-1854), and his relatives and descendants. Prominent architects, including Thomas Ustick Walter, Addison Hutton, Brockie & Hastings, Carl Ziegler, Cope & Stewardson, and Edmund Gilchrist, designed houses for successive generations of the family at the enclave in the Gothic Revival, Italian Villa, Queen Anne, Tudor Revival, and Colonial Revival styles between 1849 and 1922. In 1916, the Awbury Arboretum was established as a public park, when the Cope family donated fifty-five acres to the City.

The nomination contends that the Awbury Historic District is significant under criterion (a), as an

important part of the development of the Germantown section of the city in the mid- to late-nineteenth century and early twentieth century. It is also significant under criterion (e), for its concentration of buildings and landscapes by designers significant both regionally and nationally. Beyond the substantial merit of these individual design features, Awbury's significance is derived from its integration of buildings and landscape and its identity as a perceived whole created by an extended family group with shared design, planning, and conservation interests. Additionally, the District is significant under criterion (g), for its publicly-accessible, early twentieth-century arboretum. And finally, the District is significant under criterion (i), for its potential to yield important archeological information. The Awbury Historic District's period of significance begins with the first Cope family occupation of the land in 1849 and concludes with the end of the historic period of development of the Awbury Arboretum in 1940.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The staff recommends that the proposed Awbury Historic District as defined in the nomination satisfies Criteria for Designation a, e, g, and i, and should be designated as historic and listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.

DISCUSSION: Ms. Côté presented the nomination to the Committee.

Mr. Dilworth asked for public comment. Gay Johnson, a resident of the proposed district, read the following statement to the Committee:

While the houses of Awbury Arboretum have been recognized as representing a series of distinctive 19th and 20th Century styles, it could be argued that the landscape in which they are set lends them drama and style beyond similar period houses which are more closely set in rows on a city block.

Until the 1850s when Awbury was purchased by Henry Cope, it was farm land, surrounded by farms and opposite one corner, was a brickyard. Awbury's 22 acres to the north of Washington Lane are a suggestive remnant of that farmland – the Caroline Cope Farm, built 218 years ago in 1792.

It was the inspiration and combined design skills of William Saunders and Thomas P. Cope II that first reshaped the land around the central houses on the southeast side, into pleasant gentle slopes and valleys. Long vistas among copses of trees and understory are reminiscent of the Cope's ancestral country near Avebury in Wiltshire, England.

Over the next 125 years, success landscape planners contributed to the development of Awbury in a style which many want to call an "English landscape." Although it is small, it does resemble the "landscape of the picturesque" of many large English estates of the 18th and 19th century. Influenced by the Quaker love of simplicity, the Copes avoided elaborated Victorian flower gardens and complicated building materials of the late 1800s, and made their buildings and land express peace and quiet and simplicity.

In 1917 when some of the grounds were opened to the public, Arthur Cowell designed detailed plans for displays to attract visitors and students of horticulture and botany, only some of which were carried out.

In the 1950s further plans and surveys of Awbury were made by [Thomas] Sears. By mid century, the families in Awbury made use of several plans and landscape men who were often seen walking around the grounds with neighbors discussing planting plans and

care for the trees. Small gardens of note were designed by Harrison, Mertz & Emlen, and the others whose names are mentioned and whose stories need research.

There is room for exciting future scholarship and the people of Awbury's unusual family community, their land, their houses, their trees and plants – the special world they created.

John Gallery of the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia stated that the Alliance prepared the nomination along with Mark Sellers, a resident of the proposed district. He stated that this proposed district is unique because it could be designated for the buildings alone, but the integration of the landscape and the buildings creates a perceived whole. He mentioned that several of the properties are already individually listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Mr. Gallery observed that three property owners on Chew Avenue had sent the Commission a letter requesting that their properties be removed from the district because of the grave financial implications the designation would have for the owners; he noted that two of the three properties are already individually designated and have been for many years. Mr. Gallery stated that many of the properties within the proposed district are not listed on the Philadelphia Register, but should be, to protect the district as a whole, in its totality.

Mr. Sellers stated that the community perceives the area as a district because it is separate and different from the low-scale rowhouses that surround it. He stated that this proposed district has excellent examples of Colonial Revival style houses. He stated that 70% of the land inside district is already designated; a patchwork of properties is already designated. In regards to the opposition letter, Mr. Sellers stated that 6012 and 6014 Chew Avenue, a very unusual Cope and Stewardson designed twin house, is already individually designated. He stated that the owner of 6000 Chew Avenue, a house designed by important Okie, During & Ziegler firm, is also advocating for the removal of the three properties from the district. He opined that removing these three properties from the district would be a tragedy. Mr. Sellers noted that there is some community concern about the expansion of a nursing home at the northeast corner of the district. He contended that it would not be appropriate for the home to expand into the Arboretum. Lastly, Mr. Sellers stated that there is great support for the district among the owners of properties in the district.

Laura Beardsley, Executive Director of the Germantown Historical Society, voiced her support for the nomination. She stated the proposed district is a tremendous asset to the larger community. She stated that Awbury Arboretum is important for its history and architecture, but also for its green space; it is a treasure in Germantown.

Ms. Klein stated that she found no fault in the nomination and that she had visited the Arboretum and found it to be an amazing survivor. She stated that the integrity and condition of the proposed district is a credit to the homeowners and the Arboretum.

Mr. Laverty stated that the current ownership of the properties and the Arboretum had not been made clear in the nomination. Mr. Sellers replied that the area was originally owned by the extended Cope family. He explained that the park was created in 1916; private ownership of most of the houses was retained. He stated that the boundaries between private property and park land are maintained visually. Mr. Sellers stated that the park land is held in trust by the Awbury Arboretum Association. He noted that most of the park is already designated.

Mr. Cohen joined the meeting.

Mr. Lavery asked Ms. Cote to comment on the the differences between the National Register Historic District and the district proposed in this nomination. Ms. Coté explained that the boundaries were slightly different. In the National Register District, the property at 937 E. Haines Street is designated, but not physically connected to the remainder of the district. The local nomination proposes the inclusion of the property between 937 E. Haines and the remainder of the district.

Mr. Mooney asked when the district was placed on the National Register. Mr. Cohen replied that the National Register district was created in 2000. Mr. Cohen asked about the numbers that appear on the map in the local nomination. Ms. Coté replied that they locate resources referred to in the inventory.

Mr. Lavery commended the Preservation Alliance on the well-documented and written nomination. He stated that he had a few corrections and suggestions. T. U. Walter was not the architect of the Capital building, but only of the wings and dome, which date to 1851 to 1865. William Johnston was the architect of Phil Ellena. Walter oversaw the construction after Johnston's death in 1849. Walter designed the Garret House, near Phil Ellena on Germantown Avenue, and lived in Germantown himself. Mr. Lavery opined that some of the style listings in the inventory are clearly incorrect. He provides examples found on pages 1, 4, 5, and 10 of the inventory. Mr. Farnham suggested that the staff review and correct the style listings that are clearly incorrect.

Mr. Lavery commented that the open spaces in the district are well documented. He asked about the Commission's jurisdiction of these spaces. Mr. Farnham responded the Historical Commission has jurisdiction over the building, site, and site appurtenances of a designated property. The Commission would review proposals to alter the exterior appearance of the site; this would include reviews of fences, walls, and grading that would alter the landscape even though these alterations might not require building permits. Mr. Farnham opined that the Commission would not assert any jurisdiction over horticultural projects like flower planting and tree trimming. Mr. Farnham stated that the staff has had discussions with the Water Department, its consultants, and the Arboretum regarding a storm water management project. Mr. Farnham stated that he informed the parties that the Commission would have jurisdiction over the construction of culverts and retaining walls. He added that some aspects of this nomination that relate to landscapes will raise unprecedented issues for the Commission.

Mr. Lavery pointed out that the "Atlas" field on the inventory sheets states that most buildings first appeared on the City's 1942 land use map. He suggested that most, if not all, of the buildings appear in earlier atlases; he noted that those atlases are available digitally on the Greater Philadelphia Geohistory Network website.

Mr. Mooney commended the Preservation Alliance for including criterion I, archaeological resources, in the Statement of Significance. However, he contended that the claims regarding archaeological resources are not broad enough. He stated that there is a high probability of finding Native American sites in this proposed district. He added there is a high probability of finding archaeological resources in the yards of the residences. He stated that "every square inch" has a high potential for revealing archeological resources. He stated that this fact should be clearly stated in the nomination. He opined that that the Water Department should be required to undertake archaeological investigations as part of its storm water management project. Mr. Dilworth asked if Mr. Mooney would be willing write a paragraph regarding the archaeological potential for insertion into the nomination. Mr. Mooney agreed to assist the staff with the paragraph. Mr. Farnham suggested that, if the Committee decided to recommend

inclusion of the paragraph in the nomination, it should so stipulate in its motion. Mr. Mooney pointed out that the National Register nomination does not list criterion D, archaeological potential, as one of the bases for designation. He stated that, owing to this exclusion, it is even more important to include that criterion in this nomination.

Mr. Schaaf suggested that the amount of acreage in the proposed district should be included in the description. He stated that the nomination is well written and documented. He also suggested that the staff review the document for spelling and grammatical errors.

Denise Shultz, a resident of the 6000 block of Chew Avenue, stated that she submitted the opposition letter for the three properties on her block proposed for inclusion in the district. Mr. Farnham asked Ms. Shultz if he could provide some background about the designation status of her property before she spoke. Ms. Shultz asked for an opportunity to present her statement. She observed that her block is in a different zip code from the rest of the proposed district. She stated that it would be an extreme hardship for the owners on this block to have their properties placed on the Philadelphia Register. She stated that, when she moved into her property at 6012 Chew Avenue 35 years ago, there was trash everywhere and the copper pipes had been torn out of the building. She noted that although the twin houses at 6012 and 6014 Chew Avenue are one building, they are separate residences. She stated that the architectural integrity of the building depends on the unity of the whole; however, owing to the separate ownerships, the building has lost the unity it once had. Ms. Shultz showed the Committee some photographs taken 15 or 20 years ago. She noted that there were shingles the way across the entire building. She stated that the shingles had to be replaced, owing to decay caused by bus exhaust. Stucco and asphalt shingles have been put up. She stated that all the multi-light windows have been removed at the other property. She stated that her multi-light windows are inefficient and let snow into the building. She stated designating the house as historic will make it more difficult to sell. Mr. Farnham informed Ms. Shultz that her property and the neighboring twin at 6012 and 6014 Chew Avenue have been listed on the Philadelphia Register since 1981. Ms. Shultz responded that she was aware of the designation. She stated that the "State" had not compelled her to conform to its historic preservation standards because doing so would have created a hardship. Mr. Farnham clarified that the "State" would have no role in reviewing proposals for this property for compliance with historic preservation standards unless the state or federal governments were involved in a proposal. Ms. Shultz stated that she would face financial hardships if her property was designated to the Philadelphia Register. Mr. Farnham repeated that her property has already been designated for 29 years. He stated that, for all intents and purposes, the Commission's jurisdiction over her property would not change with the designation of the district. He pointed out that Ms. Shultz owned the property when it was designated in 1981; the designation notice letter sent by the Commission in 1981 is addressed to Ms. Shultz. Mr. Farnham presented her with a copy of the letter addressed to her. He also pointed out that the Commission has no records of any reviews for the property since 1981. Therefore, Ms. Shultz cannot possibly claim that the designation has placed any hardships on her to date. Mr. Farnham explained to Ms. Shultz that the Commission has policies and procedures that protect low- and moderate-income persons from facing hardships owing to designations. Ms. Shultz stated that the district designation concerns her because she believes that the preservation ordinance will be enforced more strictly after the district is created. Mr. Farnham again stated that the Commission's jurisdiction over her property will not materially change if the district is established. He also offered to investigate potentially illegal modifications made at the neighboring twin. Ms. Shultz stated that she could barely afford to heat her house, much less undertake the custom work that the designation would require. Mr. Farnham stated that the Commission would not unilaterally require her to work on her property, but would review her proposals within the scope of work she defined. He again noted the policies and procedures

for accommodating people of lesser means. Ms. Shultz stated that the Commission should not designate without the consent of the property owner. Mr. Farnham again informed her that her property was designated in 1981. Ms. Shultz stated that the designation of the district appeared to be a foregone conclusion. Mr. Farnham informed her that this meeting and the Commission's meeting at which the nomination will be reviewed are public meetings and provide her with opportunities to present her opinion on the proposal. Mr. Dilworth suggested that Ms. Shultz might want to apply to have her property rescinded from the Philadelphia Register. Ms. Shultz stated that she would like to have the designations of the entire block rescinded. She stated that her neighbors fixed up their house, but have been unable to sell it. She fears that the designation will make her house harder to sell. Ms. Shultz asked how to request a rescission. Ms. Coté stated that she would discuss the matter with Ms. Shultz outside the meeting.

Mr. Cohen asked about the sources of the information in the inventory. Ms. Coté replied that the nomination includes a bibliography; also, the inventory sheets include a field for "data source," which typically cites the National Register nomination. Mr. Cohen suggested that primary sources should be cited in the inventory sheets; the Committee has no way of knowing whether the information derives from reliable sources. Mr. Gallery stated that the inventory sheet is not a Commission form, but was developed by his consultant with input from the staff. He contended that the sheet provides a better means to organize the data and provide photographic documentation along with the information than the earlier narrative text inventories. He stated that comments on the format as well as content are welcomed the Alliance. Mr. Cohen clarified that nominations should provide clear, easily verifiable citations and not merely reference secondary sources like other nominations. Mr. Lavery offered to meet with the Alliance and staff to discuss the format of the inventory form. He suggested that the data for districts should be captured in such a way that it can be easily associated with other data, for example that held by the Athenaeum.

Mr. Cohen contended that the nomination should include a better map; the map is small and difficult to read. Mr. Sellers offered to provide a pdf copy of the map from the publication entitled "The Historic Houses of Awbury."

Mr. Gallery stated that he was happy to adjust the inventory format for the future. He asserted, however, that, because this nomination was submitted in 2006, it would have been more useful to have this feedback several years ago. Mr. Cohen stated that the Committee had not reviewed the document until two weeks ago.

Mr. Cohen highlighted some places where the nomination should be revised. He suggested that the entire document should be proofread and edited.

Mr. Schaaf mentioned that he happened to visit Avebury, England, a UNESCO world heritage site, similar to Stonehenge, where early inhabitants reordered the landscape with allees and mounds. He noted that the Cope family has also reordered the landscape at Awbury. Mr. Sellers stated that he had not considered the connection, but offered that it could be researched. He stated that Thomas Pym Cope, the younger, went on a grand tour of Europe and returned to start Awbury as we know it today. Mr. Schaaf pointed out the serpentine road to the Francis Cope House. Ms. Johnson stated that that feature could have been designed by William Saunders, the landscape architect. She added that there are little stone bridges over watercourses throughout Awbury much like what you see in England. Ms. Klein stated that she had visited Avebury. She suggested that it would be difficult to incorporate the ancient site into the nomination. Mr. Schaaf agreed, but suggested that Avebury's UNESCO world heritage site status could be mentioned in the nomination.

COMMITTEE ON HISTORIC DESIGNATION RECOMMENDATION: Mr. Lavery moved to recommend that the proposed Awbury Historic District as defined in the nomination satisfies Criteria for Designation a, e, g, and i, and should be designated as historic and listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places with the revisions to the nomination suggested by the Committee on Historic Designation and an additional paragraph inserted under criterion i emphasizing the district's great archaeological potential. Mr. Cohen seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Dilworth moved to adjourn at 10:20 a.m. Mr. Cohen seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.