

**REPORT OF THE ARCHITECTURAL COMMITTEE
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION**

Arlene Matzkin, Chairperson
Commission Conference Room
Suite 1301, 1401 Arch Street
25 April 1995

Present

Arlene Matzkin, Chairperson, Architectural Committee
Penelope Batchelor
J. William Cornell
Herbert W. Levy
Suzanne Pentz

Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer
Randal Baron, Assistant Historic Preservation Officer
Lori Plavin Salganicoff, Historic Preservation Specialist
Jeffrey Barr, Historic Research Technician

Also

Doris Fanelli, Independence National Historical Park
Bill Brookover, Independence National Historical Park
Dennis A. Waller, Fairmount Park Commission
Larry L. Snyder, Fairmount Park Historic Preservation Trust
Amy Freitag, Fairmount Park Historic Preservation Trust
Suzanna Barucco, Martin Jay Rosenblum, RA & Associates
Peter Andrew Copp, Martin Jay Rosenblum, RA & Associates
Jennifer Goodman, Preservation Coalition

INDEPENDENCE SQUARE GROUP OF BUILDINGS

Doris Fanelli & Bill Brookover, Independence National Historical Park

PROGRESS REPORT: Accessibility Ramps

In order to provide safe and dignified handicapped access to the most important buildings in this historic site, the National Park Service is pursuing entrance ramp designs that are temporary, less intrusive, and that meet all the requirements described in the Americans with Disabilities Act. This was their second visit to the Architectural Committee in as many months. The Park is currently framing a Cultural Landscape Master Plan that will recommend a more permanent solution for the ramps, but Mr. Brookover reported that it will be at least 8 years until that Plan is funded.

The discussion focused on the ramp at the southern entrance to Independence Hall, but also included a ramp on the east side of Congress Hall and the west side of Old City Hall. They will consist of a long wheelchair accessible ramp running alongside buildings as well as the addition of railings to

existing steps. The steps on the south facade of Independence Hall, although not original, were reconstructed to match the originals in proportion and design. The proposed plan showed a ramp of bluestone with soapstone facing for Independence hall and a ramp of brick with granite facing for Congress Hall and Old City Hall.

Concerned about the visual and physical impact of the ramps on the historic fabric, Committee members compared metal and masonry ramps as well as different railing configurations. Owing to their weight and ability to be constructed with expansion joints, metal ramps would need fewer or no footings secured into the ground, would disturb archaeological resources less, and were viewed favorably over masonry. Also, newel posts could be welded onto the ramps' frames rather than sunk for support. Metal was also thought to be desirable as the ramps would be less historic hence more temporary looking. They could also be more easily removed for filming and would be less likely to remain as the permanent solution. Various types of non-skid surfaces were also described. Grading the surrounding ground to rise to entrances at an acceptable pitch was discussed but it was explained that this would be examined as a long-term solution.

Several aspects of the railings' design were debated including the pickets, their placement, and their elimination in places. Committee members questioned the need for so many vertical pickets and were told that building code dictates the allowable space between them. Some confusion arose, however, over whether more widely spaced pickets may be used in exterior railings. At Independence Hall, columns at each side of the south entrance would be partially obscured by the proposed railings, and such solutions as widening the landing and stopping the wall-side railing at the outside of the column were discussed. Widening the landing would change the proportions of the steps. Ms. Batchelor suggested that the railings proposed to flank the existing steps be eliminated and recommended that the Park seek a variance. Mr. Tyler expressed his belief that those with disabilities should be afforded no less than the minimum required means of dignified assistance.

The Committee unanimously voted to recommend that the Applicant continue to examine the benefits of metal ramps over masonry and to develop the non-slip ramp surface, the pickets, and the railing configuration. They shall also look into the possibility of a rust-preventing grey coating on the railings surfaces. The Committee requested that the Applicant return with appropriate graphic representation of their options, including section drawings.

The second part of the proposal revisited the issue of cladding deteriorating portions of wood on the Independence Hall tower with lead-coated copper. As requested, the Applicants returned to the Committee with profile samples shaped from a higher (16 oz.) gauge copper than originally proposed. These would be painted to look like wood. Mr. Brookover stated that several examples of this treatment are already present on the tower and look like painted wood.

Committee members unanimously recommend that this proposal be approved.

This meeting was interrupted during discussion of the previous proposal owing to a bomb threat which evacuated all 14 floors of 1401 Arch Street at 4 pm. The meeting continued, with all who were in attendance by that time, at the offices of J. S. Cornell at 1528 Cherry Street.

BELMONT MANSION, FAIRMOUNT PARK

Martin Rosenblum, Architect

Larry Snyder, Fairmount Park Historic Preservation Trust

PROPOSAL: Conceptual Approval, Alteration to Back Building

Ms. Barucco and Mr. Copp presented the proposal to alter the cottage and kitchen wing buildings of Belmont Mansion for facilities for the American Women's Heritage Society, Inc. The Mansion itself is not part of the proposal. In addition to interior alterations, the kitchen wing would be enlarged and the 1950s addition that connects the cottage to the kitchen wing would be replaced with a half-gable roofed glazed porch.

Committee members generally found the proposal to be satisfactory, but recommended that the Applicants consider a half-hipped roof in place of the half-gable.

The Committee voted to recommend approval of the proposal in concept.

BOELSEN COTTAGE

Peter Svanda, Applicant

PROPOSAL: Air Conditioning System

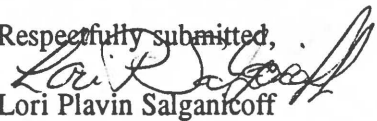
This proposal was scheduled to be discussed at 4:15, 15 minutes after the Commission's offices were evacuated by a bomb scare that emptied all of 1401 Arch Street. Mr. Svanda was therefore not in attendance when his proposal was informally discussed at the meeting reconvened at 1528 Cherry Street.

The proposal calls for installing an air-conditioner fan unit on a visible side wall of the second floor of this extremely old house. To connect the water lines between the interior and exterior units, a 3-1/2" diameter hole would have to be cut through the masonry. The unit would be painted to match the masonry. The site experiences too much vandalism to put the unit on the ground. Offices in the second floor have only one window for natural light, which makes placing a unit in that window undesirable. All sides of the building are highly visible.

Committee members expressed discomfort with cutting a hole through the masonry, and discussed placing the unit on a later wooden addition. Another suggestion was to place the unit in a first floor window and run the line internally. The Committee requested that Commission staff discuss these recommendations with Mr. Svanda and make a report to the Commission at its 10 May meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,


Lori Plavin Salganicoff