

THE MINUTES OF THE 370TH STATED MEETING OF THE
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

10 February 1993

City Council Caucus Room
Room 401 City Hall

Present

Wayne S. Spilove, Chairman
David Brownlee, Ph.D., Architectural Historian
James Cuorato, First Deputy Director Of Commerce
Department
Barbara Kaplan, Executive Director, City Planning Commission
Scott Wilds, Executive Assistant, Office of Housing & Community
Development
Stephanie Wolf, Ph.D., Historian
William L. Brown, Community Representative
Arlene Matzkin, AIA, Chairperson of the Architectural Committee

Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer
Randal Baron, Preservation Planner
Ira Kauderer, Executive Secretary
Sally Elk and Andrew Haines, Historic Research Technicians

Also

Howard Kittell, Preservation Coalition
Roger Prichard, Old City Civic Association

THE MINUTES of the 369TH Meeting of the Philadelphia Historical
Commission held on 9 December 1992, Wayne S. Spilove,
Chairman.

THE REPORT of the Meeting of the Architectural Committee held on
28 January 1993, Arlene Matzkin, Chairwoman.

Approval

Belmont Mansion, Fairmount Park: This proposal calls for restoring Belmont Mansion to its original 18th century appearance. Ms. Matzkin outlined the presentation that architect Martin Rosenblum made to the Committee. She explained that Belmont Mansion has had three incarnations. The original building dates from the 18th century and possesses great historic significance for its Georgian design and interior plan and plasterwork. In about 1850 the building was "Victorianized" by the addition of a third floor and wrap around porch that gave the building an Italianate appearance. In the early 20th century the building sustained a fire. After this fire the roof, cornice and porch were reconstructed. Currently, the third floor is unstable

and must either be rebuilt and stabilized or removed. The original appearance of the building can then be restored. The original design can be ascertained through an early painting of the house and physical evidence on the building.

Both Dr. Brownlee and Ms. Kaplan expressed the view that since the City will be providing a considerable sum towards the restoration of Belmont Mansion, substantial public access should be guaranteed.

Ms. Matzkin reported that the Committee had a discussion about the Secretary of the Interior Standards and how they should be applied to the restoration of this building. Dr. Tyler explained that these Standards hold that later fabric that has assumed its own historic significance not be removed. In recent years people have applied the standard rigidly. Given the 1905 fire and the loss of the integrity of the 1850s additions, Dr. Tyler asserted that what is proposed for removal does not possess a level of significance that warrants rigid application of this rule. An engineering study has revealed that the third floor is structurally unsound. If this floor was stabilized, it would still have a zero floor-loading capacity. In addition, the method of strengthening this third floor would destroy some of the plasterwork that gives this building significance in the first place. Dr. Tyler stated that the third floor addition is not that historically significant. Ms. Matzkin added that the Committee had reached the same consensus.

Mr. Wilds moved that the Commission approve the Committees's recommendation for conceptual approval of this project. Mr. Brownlee seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Plaisted Hall, #1 Boat House Row: This proposal is a request from the Fairmount Park Commission to demolish Plaisted Hall, the first boat house along Boat House Row. The Park Commission proposes to replace the building with a new structure with somewhat different programmatic uses.

Ms. Matzkin stated that Plaisted Hall consists of three parts: the half-timbered headhouse, the boat house and the carousel house. The Committee visited the site with a structural engineer. There they found enormous structural problems. It became apparent that given the condition of the building, any effort at retaining it would involve reconstruction rather than restoration. This militated against retaining the existing building.

The Committee turned its attention to the Park Commission's plans for replacing the building. The Committee decided to approve demolition conditioned on the Commission's review and approval of a new design. The Committee expressed concern about the conceptual program of the new building. As presented, it is

to be a one-story high multi-purpose space without much thought given to context or program. The Committee's discussion then turned to a possible competition to produce the design for the new building.

Mr. Tyler stated that the Park Commission expressed reluctance to hold a design competition. This reluctance stems from their perception that they would be compelled to construct the winning design. Mr. Tyler added that this need not necessarily be the case. Ms. Kaplan concurred and added that design competitions can be conducted in two ways. Either the competition can involve a financial reward and can be used to develop a concept to generate ideas with no compunction to build, or the competition can proceed with the idea that whoever wins gets the commission, though it may not be built exactly as presented. Ms. Kaplan expressed her approval of a design competition for this project. Mr. Spilove added that the nature of the project lent itself to corporate sponsorship. Dr. Brownlee also endorsed the idea of a design competition. He stated that the critical first step, in addition to the budget, would include planning the program of the new building so architects know what they should design. Ms. Kaplan emphasized that there has been too summary a discussion of the function of the building, and the program should be carefully developed.

Ms. Kaplan said that there are new pressures in capital spending due to the PICA borrowing. This will create time pressure for this project. Ms. Kaplan proposed that a Committee be formed to work with the Park Commission and expedite the design and construction of a new Plaisted Hall. This will ensure that the project be of high quality and move quickly forward.

Mr. Tyler reported that Mr. Spilove has received a letter from the City Parks Association recommending exactly what the Committee has recommended. Mr. Tyler added that it might be expeditious to ask the Mayor to designate a Plaisted Hall Committee.

Howard Kittell addressed the Commission for the Preservation Coalition. He reported that the Coalition supports the Commission's position on Plaisted Hall. Mr. Kittell added that the Coalition has expressed its concern to the Park Commission that it was under Fairmount Park Commission stewardship that Plaisted Hall was allowed to deteriorate to the point that it must be demolished. This looks very much like demolition by neglect.

Dr. Brownlee moved that the Commission vote on conditional approval of the demolition of Plaisted Hall contingent upon 1) recordation of the existing building and its history; and 2) review and approval by the Commission of a development plan for the site which should be in place before demolition of the existing building goes forward. The Mayor should be contacted

and asked to form a Committee that would oversee this process with Historical Commission participation.

Mr. Wilds seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

144 N. 2nd Street: This proposal calls for legalization of work that includes the demolition of an ornate 19th century storefront, replacement of a 6/6 dormer window and restuccoing of the facade. Ms. Matzkin stated that the applicant's contractor stated that he did not know that he had a responsibility to obtain a building permit before beginning work. Committee members recalled that in a similar recent case in Chinatown the Committee decided not to legalize work completed without a permit. Ms. Matzkin reported that the Committee was most concerned with the demolition of the ground floor storefront. It voted unanimously to require the applicants to replace this wooden storefront, from the sidewalk to the cornice.

Roger Prichard of the Old City Civic Association addressed the Commission. Mr. Prichard stated that the Civic Association supports the recommendation of the Committee. Mr. Kittell added that the Preservation Coalition has offered design assistance to the applicants in rebuilding the storefront.

Dr. Brownlee moved that the Commission approve the Committee's recommendation to have the applicants rebuild the illegally demolished storefront. Mr. Wilds seconded the motion which passed unanimously.

Mr. Prichard reported that the Old City Civic Association has met with the owners of the Sichel Building on North 2nd Street. The neighbors have agreed to support a zoning variance behind the historic building. The owners have agreed to stabilize the 1898 Collins and Authenreich section of the building.

January Report of the Historical Commission - Dr. Tyler reported that about 75 feet of the Bainbridge Street wall around the grounds Naval Home property has collapsed. He said that the City would make sure the owners seal the opening for the security of neighbors, trespassers and the building. Given that an inspection of the Naval Home has not been conducted for about a year, another visit should be scheduled soon.

***Certified Local Government, Educational Session, 19th Century Architecture in Philadelphia, David Brownlee, Architectural Historian.**

To maintain Certified Local Government status the National Park Service requires the Philadelphia Historical Commission to

present eight hours of preservation education per year. In partial fulfillment of this obligation Dr. Brownlee presented Commission members with a lecture on 19th Century Architecture in Philadelphia.

Respectfully submitted,

Ira Kauderer