

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

**RICHARD DILWORTH, PH.D., CHAIR
WEDNESDAY, 16 JULY 2008, 9:00 A.M.
ROOM 578, CITY HALL**

PRESENT

Richardson Dilworth III, Ph.D.
Penelope Gilles
Janet Klein
Bruce Laverty
Douglas Mooney, MA
David Schaaf, RA
Jeff Cohen, Ph.D.

Jonathan Farnham, Executive Director
Erin Coté, Historic Preservation Planner

ALSO PRESENT

Sabra Smith, Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia
John Gallery, Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia
Howard Haas, Friends of the Boyd
David Brownlee, University of Pennsylvania
R.J. White, Center City District
M. Larry, Woodbrook Associates
Hy Myers, Vitetta
Tom Walsh
Babette Josephs, Pennsylvania House of Representatives
Jeanette Blize, Office of Representative Josephs
Harris Steinberg, Penn Praxis
Matt Golas, Plan Philly
Jane Golas, Plan Philly
Dane Wells, Center City Residents Association
Adrian Fine, National Trust for Historic Preservation
S. Lee, Office of Councilman Green
Mike Benick, FOB
Frank Mueller

CALL TO ORDER

Mr. Dilworth, chair, called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m. Ms. Klein and Messrs. Mooney, Laverty, Cohen, and Schaaf joined him on the Committee.

1910 CHESTNUT STREET, BOYD THEATER

Owner: Clear Channel Communications-Live Nation

Nominator: Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia

History: 1928, Hoffman & Henon, architects

Proposal: Designate as historic and list on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places

OVERVIEW: The Preservation Alliance has nominated the Boyd Theater at 1908 Chestnut Street for designation as historic. Constructed in 1928, the Boyd was one of the first grand movie palaces designed in the Art Deco style. Today, it is the last surviving movie palace in Center City, an area that was once home to many impressive motion picture palaces. The nomination prepared by the Preservation Alliance contends that the theater satisfies Criteria for Designation A, B, D, E, F, H, and J.

Satisfying Criteria A and J, the Boyd, the lone surviving movie palace in Center City, has significant interest as part of the development and cultural characteristics of the city and exemplifies the cultural, economic, and social heritage of Philadelphia. Satisfying Criterion B, the Boyd was at the center of two highly significant court cases that ultimately affirmed the right of cities and municipalities to designate and protect historic resources in Pennsylvania. Satisfying Criterion D, the Boyd is significant for being one of the earliest motion picture palaces to embody distinguishing characteristics of the Art Deco style, or the “modern French style” as it was called at the time. Satisfying Criterion E, the Boyd is an important example of the work of the architectural firm Hoffman & Henon, the premiere motion picture theater designers of Philadelphia. Satisfying Criterion F, the Boyd contains elements of innovative design including its creative plan, which set a standard for theaters in urban settings. Satisfying Criterion J, the Boyd, by virtue of its Art Deco façade including the recessed open lobby, is a familiar landmark on Chestnut Street.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The staff recommends that 1910 Chestnut Street satisfies Criteria for Designation A, B, D, E, F, H, and J, warrants designation as historic by the Historical Commission, and listing on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.

DISCUSSION: Mr. Farnham presented the application. John Gallery represented the nomination.

Ms. Klein stated that she thought the nomination was thorough; she commended Mr. Gallery, who prepared the nomination. She also noted that the building was classified as contributing to the National Register Center City Commercial Historic District.

Mr. Mooney stated that the nomination should be amended to include Criterion I because the site has archaeological potential. He stated that the site was first built on in 1850. It was the home of James Rush, one of Philadelphia’s wealthiest individuals. The Rush House was later converted into the Aldine Hotel. The Boyd Theater is only the second generation of buildings to occupying the site. Much of the Boyd has little or no basement. Therefore, the ground has been relatively undisturbed.

Mr. Laverty asked if the map submitted with the nomination shows the boundaries of the proposed designation. Mr. Farnham confirmed that the map does mark the property boundaries; he stated that the description of the boundary in the nomination corresponds with the map.

Mr. Cohen stated that the nomination was well researched, but contended that the section discussing the Art Deco style should be augmented. He stated that this building is a very early and unusual example of the Art Deco style; the nomination should explain how it relates to and

differs from the broader style. Mr. Cohen also observed that the Boyd is the only survivor of the grand movie palaces that once dotted this section of downtown Philadelphia. He suggested that the nomination be revised to include a discussion of the community of movie palaces and the Boyd's position within that community. Mr. Dilworth stated that the Committee could recommend that the Commission designate the Boyd, but also request that the Commission direct the staff to revise the nomination. Mr. Lavery noted that the Committee had taken this path at its last meeting; it recommended that the nomination be strengthened but that the Commission designate before the revisions.

Hyman Myers of Vitetta and a former member of the Committee supported the nomination and opined that the nomination is strong. He stated that the front façade of the Boyd is important as an example of the Art Deco style, a style which is unusual in Philadelphia. He asserted that the rear and sides facades of the theater are also important because they are examples of the "form follows function" theory that guided architecture at the time. He stated that this theater was unique because it was designed for the projection of movies only; other theaters constructed at that time also served as vaudeville houses.

Ms. Giles joined the Committee.

David Brownlee, a professor of architectural history at the University of Pennsylvania and a former Commission member, also supported the nomination. He stated the Boyd stands at the exciting intersection of two very powerful and innovative early twentieth-century movements: Art Deco architecture and the movie industry. The preservation of the Boyd is very important because it stands at the intersection of these two innovations, which lasted for a brief burning moment prior to the onset of the Depression. Mr. Brownlee called the period an inferno of change for the arts, architecture, and cinema.

Harris Steinberg, the director of Penn Praxis and former Committee and Commission member, supported the nomination. He stated that the Boyd has significance because of its history and architecture, but also because of its role in historic preservation legal history. The United Artists I and II are landmark cases in historic preservation law. He stated that the Boyd is worthy of designation on those grounds alone.

State Representative Babette Josephs, who represents the district in which the Boyd is located, supported the nomination and fondly remembered seeing movies at the Boyd.

Adrian Fine of the National Trust for Historic Preservation supported the nomination. He reported that the National Trust placed the Boyd Theater on the 2008 List of America's 11 Most Endangered Historic Places in May.

John Gallery of the Preservation Alliance clarified that the nomination includes the entire site. Therefore, any new construction that would impact the historic building would be under the Commission's jurisdiction. He stated that the Boyd satisfies multiple criteria for designation. He appreciated the suggestion to strengthen the nomination, but asserted that a history of the entire Art Deco movement was not necessary. He stated that he would be willing to add information about other theaters in Philadelphia at that time. He added that he had no knowledge of the site's archeological significance. He was concerned that designating the site under Criterion I might result in a legal challenge.

Mr. Cohen stated that the Boyd has an unusual Art Deco style and its uniqueness should be explored; the nomination should state what is distinctive about this building. He added that the

nomination should include more information about Hoffman & Henon and their work, providing comparisons to their other buildings. Mr. Steinberg stated that, although the additional information is important, it is more important to get the building designated and protected.

Mr. Dilworth asked if the minutes of the nomination review becomes incorporated into the nomination. Mr. Farnham clarified that the minutes become part of the record, but not the nomination.

Mr. Myers remarked that the size of the Boyd is important. Mr. Lavery concurred, stating that the Boyd is a movie palace; it has 1000 seats. There were 8 theaters of that size in Philadelphia in the early twentieth century; the Boyd is the last one standing.

Mr. Mooney stated that the time of designation is the appropriate time to flag a property for its archeological potential. This site includes a history that predates the structure. There has not been an archaeologist on the Commission's staff since the 1980s. He stated that, when reviewing a nomination, the Committee should look at historic maps to ascertain the archaeological potential of the site. Ms. Klein stated that Mr. Mooney has brought a new perspective the Committee; she thanked him for making the Committee look at and think about nominations differently. Mr. Brownlee opined that a nomination cannot be based on probabilities and presumptions and that with every designation there is archaeological potential. Mr. Gallery asked the Committee to be conservative with regard to the possible archaeological ramifications when amending the nomination. He stated that we are not aware of any indications that there are archaeological resources at this site. Mr. Myers opined that the site has great archaeological potential. He stated that the basement of the Boyd is very shallow where there is one. Mr. Cohen suggested that the archaeological potential could be explored further by reviewing the watercolor collection at the Free Library. Mr. Schaaf opined that the archeological potential is an important consideration. Mr. Mooney stated that archaeological exploration never results in the demolition of an above-ground resource. Preservation is a primary objective in archaeology as well. He asked if the Commission have the authority to require an archaeological study at a later date if the archaeological criterion is not included in the nomination today. He cited recent work on President George Washington's house on Independence Mall and findings at the site of the proposed Sugarhouse casino on the Delaware River waterfront as proof that sites can yield treasures. Mr. Gallery recommended that the staff work with the future developer to protect potential archaeological resources. The committee rejected recommending the inclusion of Criterion I.

Michael Benick supported the nomination and stated that the Boyd has as history that is worth saving. Howard Haas supported the nomination. Frank Mueller supported the nomination.

Mr. Steinberg suggested that the Committee might consider convening a subcommittee to consider the archaeology question. Ms. Klein concurred and stated that the subcommittee could also enhance the nomination form and requirements.

COMMITTEE ON HISTORIC DESIGNATION RECOMMENDATION: Ms. Klein moved to recommend that 1910 Chestnut Street satisfies Criteria for Designation A, B, D, E, F, H, and J, warrants historic designation by the Historical Commission, and listing on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Mr. Dilworth seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

WALNUT LANE BRIDGE OVER THE WISSAHICKON

Owner: City of Philadelphia

Nominator: Aliya Turner

History: 1908

Proposal: Designate as historic and list on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places

OVERVIEW: Aliya Turner, a summer intern funded by the Preservation Alliance and working at Historical Commission, has nominated the Walnut Lane Bridge over the Wissahickon for designation as historic. The nomination contends that the bridge satisfies Criteria for Designation A, F, G, and H.

The Walnut Lane Bridge will turn 100 years old this fall. Cliveden of the National Trust, the historic site in Germantown, is celebrating the 100th anniversary with an exhibition and a series of events including a recreation of the bridge opening ceremony in October. David Young, Cliveden's curator, suggested the nomination. The City's Streets Department supports the nomination. The bridge, which was the longest single-span masonry bridge in the world when completed, spans the Wissahickon Creek and connects Roxborough and Germantown. The bridge was design by George S. Webster and Henry Quimby of the City of Philadelphia's Department of Public Works, who were internationally considered innovative concrete bridge engineers. The Quimby Surfacing Method, which was developed on this and other Philadelphia bridges during the first decade of the twentieth century, became the industry standard method for finishing concrete surfaces for durability and beauty. The graceful concrete span was a product of the City Beautiful movement, which was dedicated to creating urban infrastructure that was simultaneously beautiful and useful. George Webster, the head of the City's Bureau of Surveys, was a leader of the City Beautiful movement and was involved in not only the Walnut Lane Bridge but also the Ben Franklin Parkway, Ben Franklin Bridge, Roosevelt Boulevard, Cobbs Creek Park and Parkway, and Pennypack Park. The Walnut Lane Bridge was significant as an ornament in the picturesque valley and also as the most efficient link between Manayunk and Roxborough to the south and Germantown, Mt. Airy, and Chestnut Hill to the north. As a material artifact of the City Beautiful and reform movements, the Walnut Lane Bridge is a monument of the Progressive Era.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The staff recommends that the Walnut Lane Bridge satisfies Criteria for Designation A, F, G, and H, warrants designation by the Historical Commission, and listing on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.

DISCUSSION: Mr. Farnham presented the nomination. Aliya Turner represented the nomination.

Mr. Schaaf stated that the nearby C. W. Henry School was also built in 1908. The Mt. Airy area was being rapidly developed.

Ms. Giles asked what responsibilities the Commission would face if the bridge were impacted by a natural disaster. Mr. Farnham replied that the Streets Department would have to comply with the Philadelphia Historical Commission requirements; however, public safety would override historic preservation concerns. Mr. Lavery stated that it would be same review process as it would be for City Hall. Mr. Schaaf observed that the balusters needed to be maintained.

Ms. Klein noted that the bridge was given a state marker in April 2007. She stated that the City Beautiful movement should be discussed and explored in the nomination. She suggested that the bridge meets Criterion D as it embodies an engineering specimen. Mr. Cohen concurred

and suggested that the nomination should be modified. He felt that all the images should be labeled.

John Gallery of the Preservation Alliance stated that it is important to celebrate anniversary events, and opined that it is great to see another structure on the Register. He commended the intern for preparing nomination.

COMMITTEE ON HISTORIC DESIGNATION RECOMMENDATION: Mr. Cohen moved to recommend that the Walnut Lane Bridge over the Wissahickon satisfies Criteria for Designation A, F, G, and H, as well as Criterion D, and warrants designation by the Historical Commission, and listing on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Mr. Dilworth seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Dilworth moved to adjourn. Mr. Lavery seconded the motion, which passed unanimously. The meeting adjourned at 11:00 a.m.