

PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

COMMITTEE ON HISTORIC DESIGNATION

8 July 1986

Grace Gary, Chairman

The twenty-fourth meeting of the Committee on Historic Designation began at 2:00 p.m. on Friday, 8 July 1986 in the offices of the Philadelphia Historic Preservation Corporation, 22nd floor, One East Penn Square.

Present: Grace Gary, Chairman of the Committee on Historic Designation
David Baldinger, Deputy Director, Philadelphia City Planning
Commission
Dr. Caroline Golab
Janet Klein
Sandra Tatman

Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer, Philadelphia
Historical Commission
Randal Baron, Preservation Planner, Philadelphia Historical
Commission

NEW BUSINESS

The Committee reviewed nominations of the following historical and architectural resources for consideration by the Commission:

Lodge Number Two, Benevolent and
Protective Order of Elks
Caldwell and Simon, Architects

1320-1322 Arch Street
1904

The Elks lodge possesses significance primarily as a fine example of the Beaux Arts Renaissance Revival style. The brick building, encrusted with decorative stone and metal work, contains in profusion all of the hallmarks of this style including symmetrical composition and overscaled Renaissance ornament such as the rusticated base, segmental arched and pedimented windows, a second story "piano nobile" and a heavily bracketed cornice. The architects for the building Caldwell and Simon, are best known for their residential design. Later on Simon in the firm of Simon and Simon completed such monumental works as the Philadelphia Municipal Stadium and the Fidelity Trust Building on South Broad Street.

The building possesses historical importance as the oldest surviving home of the Philadelphia Elks organization, the second Elks Lodge in the country. The Elks, an important 19th century charitable organization derived its membership from actors and theater related professionals. The organization used entertainment as a method for raising funds for charity. Since 1880, the Elks, with a membership of 1.5 million members and 2300 lodges, have given over \$600 million in charity for the Boy and Girl Scouts, hospitals, and scholarship funds. This Elks lodge remains an important survivor in a district around City Hall once filled with numerous headquarters of social and fraternal organizations, such as the Masons, Odd Fellows, Scottish Rite Masons and the Art Club.

The Committee asked that information regarding other charitable organizations on Broad Street and their loss be added to the nomination form.

The Committee recommended the designation of the Elks Lodge by a vote of 4 - 1.

College Hall, Temple University
Thomas P. Lonsdale, Architect

1801-1855 N. Broad Street
1893

College Hall possesses historical significance as the original building of Temple College, an institution that helped democratize higher education in Philadelphia. The building also has outstanding architectural significance as a fine example of the work of architect Thomas P. Lonsdale and the Romanesque Revival style. Intimately connected with the Baptist Temple both physically and in terms of style and history, College Hall possesses additional importance as an integral part of this North Broad Street architectural ensemble.

Temple grew out of the vision of Russell Conwell, the nationally famous pastor of Grace Baptist Temple. Mr. Conwell counted among the primary goals of his life the founding of a college for the working classes. He raised the money to fund classes and to build College Hall through church contributions and admission fees to his often delivered inspirational talk "Acres of Diamonds". Mr. Conwell founded Temple University to provide an affordable, convenient evening curriculum so that motivated workmen and women could make the best use of their talents. College Hall, the original building of Temple college, remains a potent symbol of this dream and of Temple's special place among educational institutions.

Conwell and the congregation of Grace Baptist Temple hired the important Philadelphia architect Thomas P. Lonsdale to design the impressive Romanesque Revival Baptist Temple and College Hall. Mr. Lonsdale earned recognition for designing the Pennsylvania Building at the Columbia Exposition as well as numerous churches and public buildings throughout Pennsylvania. College Hall remains as one of Lonsdale's best works in Philadelphia. The building, a showcase of the Romanesque Revival style, has rock faced banded stone walls, decorated arched windows and pre-Gothic stone carving. It contains additional Byzantine details such as the egg shaped copper dome and smaller pyramidal domes framing the central facade. College Hall has additional significance as half of one of the finest Victorian architectural ensembles in Philadelphia.

Recognizing the building's outstanding historical and architectural significance, the Committee recommended the designation of College Hall by a vote of 5 - 0.

Masonic Hall and Market of Manayunk
Edward Struse, Mason
James Turner, Carpenter

4313 Main Street
1860-61

The Masonic Hall and Market of Manayunk possesses historical significance for its role in the history of Manayunk and architectural significance as a major civic landmark and fine example of the vernacular stone construction of the area. Historically the building served many of the functions of a town hall for a community that lacks an official corporate identity. Manayunk developed to be one of the premier mill towns in the United States after the opening of the Schuylkill Navigation Canal in 1819. Prosperity in the 1850's brought a desire for civic improvements such as paving, streetcars, and in 1859 a public market. In the same year, the Freemasons of Roxborough decided to build a new hall on Main Street. They purchased the rights to the public market in order to incorporate it into their building following the traditional model of combined townhall - markets in England. The Masonic Lodge served as a place where Manayunk community leaders met to discuss civic issues. During the Civil War local troops practiced military drills in the Hall.

Architecturally the Masonic Hall and Market serves as a fine example of the vernacular stone construction seen in the mills and rowhouses of Manayunk. It remains the largest civic example of this type of construction in Manayunk. The exterior and the decorative second and third meeting rooms remain largely intact.

The Committee members applauded the high quality of the nomination and voted to recommend the designation of 4313 Main Street by a vote of 5 - 0.

River Bank Steps

Wood Street, Front to Water

1730-1790

a.k.a. the alley between 323-325 N. Front Street

The granite River Steps running between Front and Water Streets on Wood Street possess significance as the unique example of such steps left in the City of Philadelphia. When William Penn laid out plans for the City of Philadelphia, he specified that the top of the river bank remain a public area or common. Each block was to have at least one set of steps leading down the river embankment to the water. This allowed everyone to have access to the river, the lifeline of the community. Although the earliest steps were built of wood, they were later replaced with stone. The top of the embankment was called Front Street while Water Street resulted later as the river's edge was pushed forward with landfill. The nomination which includes early maps and drawings shows the location of the many alleys and steps which communicated between Water and Front Street in the 18th and 19th century. The building of Interstate 95 resulted in the destruction of all of these steps except this set on Wood Street. These steps possesses "significant character, interest and value as part of the development, heritage and culture of the City of Philadelphia".

The Committee praised the scholarship and preparation of the nomination form although they asked that the last two sentences of the Statement of Significance be stricken from the nomination as extraneous information.

The Committee recommended the designation of the River Bank Steps on Wood Street by a vote of 5 to 0.

U.G.I. Building
Wilson Brothers; Perry Shaw & Hepburn, Architect

1401-1415 Arch Street
1897-99, 1926

The U.G.I. building possesses significance primarily because of its historical role as the home of the United Gas Improvement Company, a nationally important public utility and holding company. The building has architectural importance as a monumental example of the work of the Wilson Brothers in the Renaissance Revival style, and as a part of Penn Square, "a distinctive area which should be preserved according to an historical cultural or architectural motif".

The U.G.I. Company was founded in 1882 to sell, install and lease the recently invented and patented Lowe system for the production of gas for heating and lighting. Thaddeus S. C. Lowe devised a process by which coal gas was combined with a stream of naphtha to produce a fuel that was more economical and brighter than coal gas alone. With the leadership of William Gibbs, William Warden, and William Elkins, all successful entrepreneurs in the oil industry, U.G.I. aggressively marketed its gas and gas appliances throughout the nation. The popularization of gas stoves and water heaters in the home, gas lighting in the streets and the proliferation of gas lines in scores of cities can all be attributed to U.G.I. By 1892 U.G.I. had purchased a controlling interest in thirty gas companies throughout the nation. By the mid-twentieth century, U.G.I. managed Philadelphia Gas Works, Philadelphia Electric Company and eighty other companies with assets of over 800 million dollars. U.G.I. became the leading holding company of the region and one of the largest in the country. The company branched out into the construction industry forming United Engineers and Contractors in 1928 and building such Philadelphia Landmarks as the Barclay Hotel, the Franklin Institute and 30th Street Station. The U.G.I. Corporation suffered a tremendous blow during the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt when he fulfilled a campaign promise to break up monopolistic holding companies. Chosen as one of the prime examples of a public utility holding company, U.G.I. was forced by law to divest 75 percent of its assets.

The building at 1401-15 Arch Street stands as the major landmark for this important company. U.G.I. began building this, its first, headquarters building in 1897, the same year it received a contract to manage Philadelphia Gas Works. The handsome gas lit building contained not only the offices but also the extensive development laboratories that gave U.G.I. its edge over competitors. The original Renaissance Revival building designed by Philadelphia's premier engineering/architecture firm, Wilson Bros, was doubled in size in 1926 to accommodate the spectacular growth of the U.G.I. Company. The resulting monumental building makes up the visual northern wall of Penn Square.

The Committee asked that the nomination be revised to further discuss U.G.I.'s role as a prototypical holding company, the effect of U.G.I.'s inventions on the American Public, and the relation of this building to the U.G.I. Company.

The Committee voted to recommend the designation of 1401-1415 Arch Street by a vote of 5 - 0.