

THE MINUTES OF THE ARCHITECTURAL COMMITTEE OF THE
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

APPROVED: 13 FEBRUARY 1991

David Hollenberg, Chairman

31 January 1991

Present

David Hollenberg, Architect, Chairman
Tony Atkin, Architect
Penelope H. Batcheler, Historical Architect,
Independence National Historical Park
William Cornell, J.S. Cornell & Sons, Inc.
Dr. David DeLong, Professor and Chairman
University of Pennsylvania, Historic Preservation Program
Herbert W. Levy, American Institute of Architects
Donald Stevenson, Architect

Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer
Randal Baron, Preservation Planner
Daniel W. Simcox, Executive Secretary

Also

Willman Spawn, Monthly Meeting of Friends of Philadelphia
Charles S. Hough, Hayes and Hough Architects
Roger T. Prichard, Old City Civic Association
Greg Hanson, Asta de Blue, 265 South 20th Street
Warren E. Huff, City Planning Commission
Howard Kittell, Preservation Coalition
Carmin A. Pody, contractor, 2200 Green Street
Michael Sklaroff, owner, 2223 Green Street
Louise Cruz Vizcaino, owner, 230 Pine Street
Linda Cruz-Carnall, Counsel for Ms. Cruz-Vizcaino
Tony Micela, mason, 230 Pine Street
David J. Moloznick, counsel for Mr. Micela
Dale Truscott, neighbor, Blackwell Place
Douglas Buchanan, agent for owner, 260 South 15th Street

APPROVAL

Arch Street Meeting House, 330 Arch Street: The Monthly Meeting of Friends of Philadelphia propose to replace the roof of this Greek Revival meetinghouse built in 1803-1805 and altered through the 19th and 20th century. Wood shakes originally covered the building from 1804 to the mid nineteenth century. Then a standing-seam, metal roof provided shelter until 1968. Presently, the roofing is formed by asphalt shingles. Charles Hough, Hayes & Hough Architects, presented two alternatives: a terne-coated, stainless-steel, standing-seam roof and a weathered-wood color, asphalt shingle which would last 40 years.

The Committee noted that either alternative was acceptable. Mr. Cornell and Mrs. Batcheler agreed that the former would cost more than twice as much as the latter. If the Friends choose the terne-coated roof, they should leave it unpainted and employ a seam-width of 17 inches. Though the metal roof of the meetinghouse almost certainly was painted originally, re-painting

would add unnecessary maintenance costs. The Committee stressed that the Friends should submit applications for any other work planned for this building, including its interior. With these comments, the Committee recommended approval of either alternative proposed.

Asta de Blue, 265 South 20th Street: The owners received a violation for installing security grates on this building in the proposed Rittenhouse Fittler Historic District. Victims of several burglaries, they installed grates because their insurers refused to pay for any further window repairs. However, the grates obstruct an elaborate, mid-nineteenth century, bracketed storefront on this Vernacular brick rowhouse. The owners also installed iron bars on a window on the Manning Street facade.

Greg Hanson, owner, explained the severity of property crime in the neighborhood and his rationale for installing the grates. Since June 1990, Asta de Blue has suffered five break-ins. The owners considered the installation of bullet-proof glass; yet Lucite can pop out easily and clouds when scratched. They considered installing an iron gate, but that fixture could not have been supported by the trim of the decorative wood storefront. The owners then considered sinking an iron frame, with sliding, removable iron panels, into the sidewalk. However, the panels would have been too heavy for daily use. A folding-out iron gate also was unacceptable because it would project two feet further into the sidewalk. Steel, roll-down security grates seemed the unavoidable choice. There was not sufficient room inside the building for an interior installation. Though averse to the appearance of the grates, Mr. Hanson indicated that their protection, unfortunately, is essential.

The Committee expressed frustration in facing an unattractive design which was a symptom of a larger societal problem. However, all members agreed that review of this application before installation would have been preferred. The Committee stressed that no work should be undertaken before obtaining a permit. Tony Atkin admonished the applicant for having sought the advice of neighbors and contractors while failing to seek the free advice of the Architectural Committee. Mr. Stevenson suggested that the Committee could not approve every application accompanied by a personal plea. If it did, good intentions would create an unattractive city.

Considerable discussion and questioning ensued. Mr. Levy inquired into the reason for a greater projection of the grate housing above the door. This additional space was necessary to accommodate an air conditioner. Another air conditioner burned out from overheating because of insufficient ventilation space in an earlier design for the grate frame. Dr. DeLong recommended an expeditious design study of security grates. Mrs. Batcheler noted that, in spite of its unattractive appearance, the frame did not harm the historic fabric. The Committee directed the

staff to write to all grate companies in the region to notify them that a permit is required prior to any installation. The Committee then recommended an approval of this permit.

230 Pine Street, a.k.a. 227 Stamper Street. Louise Cruz Vizcaino, owner of 230 Pine Street, received a violation for work undertaken without a permit to the rear portion of this c. 1840 Greek Revival townhouse. In 1970, the Commission approved the construction of a rear addition of cinder-block construction with three-over-six windows on the third floor. New windows also were installed in the original rear L of the house; this alteration was not mentioned in the permit. The windows installed were smaller in size than the openings and the masonry openings were blocked-down. The facades of the addition remained as exposed cinder-blocks when the building was sold to the present owner. Mrs. Cruz Vizcaino retained Tony Micela, a mason, to stucco the contemporary addition. Mr. Micela also stuccoed the brick wall of the rear L of the historic building.

David Moloznick, counsel for Mr. Micela, testified in support of the application, despite a factual dispute over the permit between his client and Ms. Cruz Vizcaino. Mr. Moloznick suggested that forcing his client to remove the stucco from the historic brick wall would further damage the fabric. Prior to the stucco work, the wall was beyond repair, with missing mortar, crumbling bricks and cinder-block patches. Mr. Moloznick submitted a petition, signed by six neighbors on Stamper Street, who requested that the Committee allow the work to remain. Mrs. Truscott, a resident of neighboring Blackwell Place, reinforced this request by testifying that the rear wall had been in poor condition and that its present appearance is more attractive.

Mr. Cornell suggested that the stucco treatment may have been the proper choice for the structural integrity of the building. He and the rest of the Committee acknowledged that the removal of the stucco and its supporting wire lath would cause unacceptable damage to the brick. However, the Committee disputed the claim that the brick wall was "beyond repair," noting that there are many ways to repair damaged brick walls.

A representative of the Society Hill Civic Association stressed the disturbing frequency with which work was undertaken without a permit in this historic neighborhood. She requested that the Committee impose some disciplinary action.

The Committee admonished Ms. Vizcaino to ensure Committee review and approval of all proposals before beginning any further work. The Committee recommended approval of this application and insisted upon the imposition of a fine for work undertaken without a permit.

260 South 15th Street: Douglas Buchanan, appeared for the owners of this circa 1927 Art Deco/Renaissance Revival office building in the proposed Rittenhouse Fittler Historic District. He submitted a catalogue cut showing the proposed lantern design and a perspective drawing which indicated the proposed placement of one either side of the building's entrance arch. Though suggesting further exploration of a more appropriate style, the Committee recommended approval of this installation.

DISAPPROVAL

2200-2210 Green Street: Nick Pody, a contractor, commenced construction of a garage door in a circa 1950 stone wall on the Green Street embankment of this circa 1915 Gothic Revival chapel and convent. The garage will allow the nuns of this cloistered order to drive their cars directly into the convent complex. The Department of Licenses and Inspections issued a permit for work on 2201-2223 Brandywine Street, unaware that the same property was listed on the Philadelphia Register as 2200-2210 Green Street. The Department revoked the permit, noting that it may be reinstated upon approval of the Historical Commission. Mr. Pody indicated that he began work only after having obtained a legitimate permit. He added that he was amenable to suggestions regarding the design of the door.

Michael Sklaroff, owner of 2223 Green Street, opposed this application. After asserting that the contractor had not obtained a zoning permit, Mr. Sklaroff focused on the adverse impact of this proposal on an historic streetscape. He warned that approval of this request would serve as a harmful precedent for a proliferation of curb cuts on Green Street.

Mr. Tyler indicated that Commission jurisdiction was limited to the historic fabric and site. The nature and recent construction date of the stone wall seemed to possess little historic value. Therefore, he suggested that the Committee review was limited. Mr. Hollenberg indicated that there were two issues: whether a garage was appropriate in this wall and whether the proposed design was acceptable. The Committee unanimously agreed to approve the concept of cutting an opening in the wall for a garage, subject to approval of all other relevant city agencies. The Committee, however, did encourage further exploration of the possibility of creating this opening on the Brandywine Street side. On the second issue, the Committee recommended disapproval of the proposed design. The new entrance should match the height of the adjacent service bay and relate to it through the use of similar materials and architectural elements. The stone courses should match and the new entrance should have an entablature.

Mr. Sklaroff indicated that he would oppose this proposal at the meeting of the Commission on 13 February 1991.

DISCUSSION

Having completed its agenda the Committee discussed several policy questions which arose during the preceding meeting. Mr. Stevenson asked for a clarification of the preservation ethic guiding the Committee. He reiterated his belief that the Committee could not approve every difficult application accompanied by a tale of personal hardship. To do so would promote bad design and ruin many historic buildings. Mr. Hollenberg noted that the Committee received numerous applications for work undertaken without a permit. Unfortunately, forcing an owner to undo much of this work would cause more harm than good. Though these applications place the Committee in an unenviable position, it must confront them. Further, consideration of these applications require discretion regarding the parties applying, the nature of the work and the significance of the building. Dr. DeLong added that general rules, specifically in these cases, possessed limited utility; each application possessed its own particular circumstances which merited consideration. Mr. Atkin concurred, but stressed the value of reviewing applications prior to the work; regarding the past meeting, he indicated that the Committee may have reached the same conclusion on one application, yet achieved a better design for another. Mr. Hollenberg stressed that a vast majority of applications went through the normative procedure and that those for work undertaken without a permit were exceptions.

Having acknowledged the value of the preceding discussion, Mr. Hollenberg introduced Mr. Warren Huff of the City Planning Commission. Mr. Huff noted that he would attend the Committee meetings to offer assistance and to coordinate the review of any applications with shared jurisdiction.

The Committee adjourned at 4:30 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Daniel W. Simcox
Executive Secretary