

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

**David Brownlee, Chair
Commission Conference Room, One Parkway, 1515 Arch Street, 18th Floor
1 October 1999**

Present

David Brownlee, Ph.D., Chair
Hyman Myers
Janet Klein, Chair, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission
David Baldinger, Deputy Planning Director, City Planning Commission
Sandra Tatman, Ph.D.
Stephanie G. Wolf, Ph.D.

Elizabeth Harvey, Historic Preservation Planner
R. Scott Jacob, Executive Secretary
Laura Spina, Historic Preservation Planner
Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer

Mark Zecca, Esq., Senior Attorney, Law Department

Also

Shelby Weaver Splain, Noble Preservation Services
Peter Kelsen, Esq., Blank Rome Comisky & McCauley Attorneys
Thomas Witt, Esq., Wolf Block Schorr and Solis-Cohen Attorneys
George Thomas
and others

Mr. Brownlee, Chair, recognized the presence of a quorum and called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m. He explained that this Committee serves as an advisory body to the full Commission.

Mr. Tyler announced that the Committee had held an executive session with counsel to consider legal questions.

200-212 and 214-220 Walnut Street, a.k.a. 201-205 and 200-206 Dock Street

Owner: 200 Walnut Street Associates and 220 Walnut Street Associates

Date: early 1970s

The owner of 220-212 and 214-220 Walnut Street, a.k.a. 201-205 and 200-206 Dock Street seeks the re-categorization of these two buildings from "Contributing" to the Society Hill (and Pennsylvania Hospital of Washington Square West) Historic District to "non-contributing."

Thomas Witt, Esq., counsel for the owner, addressed the Committee regarding the design and quality of the construction of the two buildings as they relate to Society Hill. He described these structures as temporary and poorly built, with no regard for design the elements of the surrounding neighborhood. He acknowledged the importance of the Redevelopment Authority (RDA) in the revitalization of Society Hill and

other parts of Philadelphia, but questioned the inclusion of the subject properties in the historic district as contributing to the historic district. He maintained that the RDA's significance rests on its mission to preserve the 18th and 19th century buildings, and noted that several buildings of that early period were demolished by the RDA to make way for the subject buildings.

George Thomas, architectural historian, inquired why these buildings are listed as contributing, while other structures from the same period and constructed under the aegis of RDA controls are listed as non-contributing. He cited Independence Place as an example. Ms. Spina stated that staff determined the RDA was not involved in the construction of the Independence Place towers. Mr. Thomas and others contended that the RDA was involved. Committee members explained that if the towers were listed as non-contributing because of the lack of RDA involvement, contrary evidence may affect the listing. Mr. Thomas echoed Mr. Witt's comments regarding the two subject buildings and their inappropriateness in the historic district. He also asserted that they postdate the significant "Redevelopment Period" of Society Hill.

Mr. Tyler noted that many of the 18th and 19th century buildings in Society Hill were also constructed cheaply. Mr. Myers explained that many structures constructed for "temporary" use such as Ohio House in Fairmount Park are important historic resources. Mr. Brownlee stated that the RDA's unprecedented contribution to the revitalization and redevelopment of Society Hill had revolutionary consequences nationwide. Mr. Myers added that the residential buildings constructed under the aegis of the RDA to replace those it demolished constitute an important aspect of Society Hill's history. He maintained that the commercial structures from the period do not possess as much significance. Committee members agreed.

The Committee discussed the possibility of reclassifying all of the commercial buildings constructed with direct RDA involvement as non-contributing. Mr. Tyler listed the ten properties that fall into that category:

200-212 Walnut Street, a.k.a. 201-205 Dock Street - Lamberti's
214-220 Walnut Street, a.k.a. 200-206 Dock Street - Ritz Theater
406-426 South Front Street - New Market
129-135 Lombard Street - Part of New Market
130-134 Lombard Street
422-428 South 2nd Street - New Market Square
275 South 5th Street - National Park Service Maintenance Building
307-331 South 5th Street - SuperFresh Market
314-320 South 5th Street - Society Hill Shopping Center
220-230 Chancellor Street

Mr. Myers moved to recommend reclassifying all of the above listed commercial buildings constructed by the RDA as non-contributing within the Society Hill (and Pennsylvania Hospital of Washington Square West) Historic District. Mr. Baldinger seconded the motion which carried with five votes. Ms. Wolf dissented.

7913 Oxford Avenue

Owner: Wawa Inc.

Date: c. 1850

Peter Kelsen, Esq., counsel for the owner, showed the Committee maps of the property to help describe its recent development as a Wawa convenience store and gas station. The designated buildings stands to one side of the larger assembled parcel and is currently unoccupied. Mr. Kelson explained that the owner had no knowledge of the historically designated status of the property and that nothing in the its zoning file suggests the designation. In addition, nothing during the early stages of the permitting process for this development revealed the designation. Site preparation properly began on the basis of the zoning permit and the Department of Licenses and Inspections accepted the permit application and began the plan review for the new commercial building without identifying the property as historic. Not until the submission of a demolition permit application for the house at 7913 Oxford Avenue did the developer learn of the Commission's involvement. To meet its schedules of construction and opening the new store, Wawa amended its application for the actual site improvements to leave the historic structure on as island until it could comply with the requirements of the historic preservation ordinance. Wawa now wishes to have the siting on the Philadelphia Register rescinded to facilitate the demolition of the historic and the creation of additional green space. Mr. Tyler noted that staff research into the permit history of the property revealed that permits had issued in the past, including one for aluminum siding, without referral to the Historical Commission, and one had affirmatively indicated that the property is not historic.

Shelby Splain of Noble Preservation Services spoke regarding the history of the building. She stated that this and neighboring properties were added to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places in 1966, but that the minutes from that time do not reveal the basis for the designation. Ms. Splain described ways in which this building has lost its historic character over the years, including the installation of aluminum siding, capping the cornice and major alterations to the storefront.

Ms. Spina explained that this and neighboring buildings were designated because they represent the early development of this section of the city. She also noted that, despite the unsympathetic alterations and siding, this structure has not so lost architectural and historical integrity as to warrant its rescission from the Philadelphia Register. Mr. Myers observed that much of the historic fabric remains intact, and spoke regarding the importance of preserving the few remaining historic buildings in this neighborhood.

Committee members suggested that application for a demolition permit offered the better course than a petition for rescission. Mr. Kelsen agreed to withdraw with request and to apply for a demolition permit.

In view of this, no Committee member made a motion to rescind or not to rescind the designation.

Respectfully submitted,

R. Scott Jacob
Executive Secretary