

**REPORT OF THE HISTORIC DESIGNATION COMMITTEE
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION
1 December 1998**

**One Parkway, 1515 Arch Street, 18th Floor
David Brownlee, Chair**

Present

David Brownlee, Ph.D., Chair
Janet Klein
Hyman Myers
Stephanie Wolf, Ph.D.

Kristin Fetzer, Historic Preservation Planner
Liz Harvey, Historic Preservation Planner
Laura M. Spina, Historic Preservation Planner
Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer

Also Present

Janet Greenstein Potter, Philadelphia Historic Northwest Coalition
Chuck Karnes, 2000 block Locust Street
Michael Carpenter, 2500 block Panama Mall
J. Raymond Shea, 300 block New Street
Alik K. Strakes, Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia
Mitch Deighan, Northern Liberties
Janet Fineger, Northern Liberties Neighbors Association
Jonathan Sher, Northern Liberties Neighbors Association
Ted Newbold, Old City Civic Association
Catherine Franklin, Penn-Knox Neighborhood Association
Tanya Green, 300 block W. Winona Street
Victor Gordon, Bodine Street
Michael Gordon, Bodine Street
Cynthia Heppinstall, 300 block W. Winona Street
Diana Fertik, 200 block S. Jessup Street
Mark D. Sanders, Philadelphia Street Railway Historical Society
Robert J. Hotes, AIA, Center City Residents Association
Seldia Blatman, 2100 block St. James Street
Joyce L. Robinson, 400 block W. Brighthurst Street
Helen C. Schmutz, 200 block S. Quince Street
Wendy R. Bennett, 2000 block Latimer Street
Gianne Conard, SPG Apartments
S. Aisha Squire, 300 block W. Winona Street
Ruthanne Madway, East of Broad Street Improvement Association
Allison Weiss, 700 block S. Warnock Street
Frank Heppinstall, 300 block W. Winona Street
John Jordon, Washington Square West Civic Association
Bud Schoefer, 300 block W. Winona Street
Judith Vale, unit block N. Columbus Boulevard
Keith Rickard, 300 block New Street
Larry Besnoff, 200 block S. Hutchinson Street
Larry Weintraub, 700 block S. Warnock Street

John Diaz, 400 block W. Price Street

Mr. Brownlee called the meeting to order at 2:05 pm. After introductions, Mr. Brownlee explained that the Historic Designation Committee acts as an advisory committee to the Commission, the body that actually votes on nominations. The Historic Designation Committee must review the nomination for accuracy and completeness, and determine if the nomination meets one or more of the criteria for designation as set forth in the Historic Preservation Ordinance at § 14-2007(5) of the Philadelphia Code.

Ms. Spina then presented the nomination for the Historic Street Paving Thematic District to the Committee. She gave the definition for “district” as outlined in Section 14-2007(2)(i) of the Philadelphia Code, which includes discontinuous elements that may be linked by association, plan, design or history. In this district the common theme is the historic paving materials for streets. The district includes 338 blocks on 159 streets in 35 different neighborhoods that retain historic paving materials. Ms. Spina emphasized that the district includes only the cartway of the street; curbs and sidewalks are not included in the nomination. In preparation for these meetings, the Historical Commission sent notice letters announcing the meetings for this nomination to the Streets Department, Water Department and owners of any privately owned streets, and placed posters on the affected blocks.

Ms. Spina enumerated the five criteria in the historic preservation ordinance at Section 14-2007 (5)(a, d, f, h and j) that the Historic Street Paving Thematic District meets to qualify as an historic district:

- 1) the district has significant character, interest or value as part of the development of the City;
- 2) it embodies distinguishing characteristics of an engineering specimen;
- 3) the district contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship, which represent a significant innovation;
- 4) owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, the district represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City; and
- 5) the district exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

As outlined in the statement of significance, the development of the paved street in Philadelphia is closely tied to the political and economic stability of the municipal government as well as the social, developmental and economic history of Philadelphia in general. Ms. Spina, using slides for illustration, described the primary materials that constitute the district. These include cobblestone, vitrified brick, granite block, wood block, and bluestone.

In the inventory, each block has a rating of its condition: High, Moderate or Low Integrity. The definitions for each rating are:

- 1) High Integrity: The street remains completely or nearly intact with no large patches or damage;
- 2) Moderate: Streets with some patching or noticeable repairs; and
- 3) Low: Extensive visible repairs have been made to the street.

Ms. Spina explained that there is a list of blocks not included in this nomination despite

having historic paving material. These are not included because of such low integrity. She then showed slides that illustrated different blocks in approximately twelve different neighborhoods. Ms. Spina concluded by saying that the Historic Street Paving Thematic District, if designated, would preserve one of the most threatened historic resources in the City of Philadelphia. Since the first inventory was made of these streets in 1993, 28 have been lost.

Ms. Spina and Ms. Fetzer explained that historic features, such as crosswalks or trolley tracks, are noted in the inventory. Mr. Brownlee also stated that each block has been photographed for the Commission records and the photographs record the street's condition and any specific features.

Mr. Tyler questioned the inclusion of several streets on the inventory because they are recreations. He explained that Elfreth's Alley was historically a granite block street. In 1976, for the nation's bicentennial, the granite block was removed and cobblestone installed with granite slab gutters. He noted that there is no historical basis for the current configuration, and the installation of the cobblestone does not meet the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards* for reconstruction. Mr. Tyler recommended deleting Elfreth's Alley and other streets in the Independence National Historical Park that were recreated in the 1950s through the 1980s. Mr. Myers suggested deleting all reconstructed streets. Mr. Brownlee and Mr. Tyler noted that streets, such as South Camac Street, have been reconstructed because the materials needed replacing. However, the new materials had an historical basis supported by scholarship, existing fabric and historic plans and specifications. Ms. Wolf noted that a difference exists between streets that are reconstructed because of integrity and recreated to make them look "historic."

Mr. Myers made a motion to delete all streets that were recreated in the 1950s through the 1980s to represent what may have been earlier streets. These include: Elfreth's Alley; Dock Street – 100 block; Moravian Street – 200 block; South Orianna Street – unit and 100 blocks; Sansom Street – 100 and 300 blocks, and Library Street. Ms. Klein seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.

Mr. Myers asked if protection extended to the trolley tracks found on some blocks. Mr. Tyler explained that most historic tracks have nine-inch rails and new tracks have seven-inch rails, which may pose a problem. Mr. Brownlee noted that while the tracks date to the period of the streets, the Historical Commission does not require owners to use materials no longer available. Mr. Tyler stated that if the Streets Department comes to the Historical Commission in the future, the Commission will try to balance design with available materials. The Committee members concurred that the designation includes the trolley tracks or any other historic feature of the street.

The Committee discussed the use of the blue-glazed granite block. Mr. Tyler and Mr. Myers noted the legend that the blue-glazed granite block was used for the plaza in front of the Belgian pavilion in the Centennial Exposition of 1876 and then distributed after the exposition closed. However, the actual origin of the blue glazing remains unknown. Usually the vendor or quarry has a stamp on each granite block, but those with blue glazing do not have such marks.

Committee members emphasized that the nomination only includes the cartway of the streets, curbs, sidewalks and islands are not included.

Mr. Brownlee opened the floor to the audience.

Ted Newbold expressed concern for safety at crosswalks and noted that trolley tracks pose a danger to cyclists. He also mentioned Bladen's Court as a street that has been reconstructed. The Committee discussed Bladen's Court, noting that the original cobblestone no longer exists. Mr. Brownlee noted that the Streets Department is very concerned with safety and the Historical Commission will work with the Department in such cases.

Mr. Myers, with a second from Ms. Wolf, made a motion to include Bladen's Court on the list of streets to be deleted. The motion carried unanimously.

Victor Gordon asked the Committee to delete the unit block of South Bodine Street. He testified that Bodine Street is the only access he has to his property, a surface parking lot, and stated that the street has low integrity. [The inventory lists the street with high integrity on the northern half and moderate integrity on the southern half.] He noted that he feared that the Historical Commission would close the street, cutting off access to his property. Mr. Brownlee assured Mr. Gordon that the Historical Commission does not have the authority to close any street, and that it only seeks to protect the historic materials of the cartway. Mr. Gordon stated that the Streets Department offered the street to him and now he is afraid that the Department will retract the offer. The Committee asked for photographs to review the condition rating in the inventory.

In the meantime, Janet Greenstein Potter of the Philadelphia Northwest Coalition supported the designation of the historic streets, including trolley tracks. She noted that three trolley tariffs still exist and the Route 56 may be reestablished. She also stated that the reconstruction of streets with seven-inch rails should not pose a problem.

John Diaz of Lehmann Lane expressed concern because he has a right-of-way on this privately owned street. The Committee stated that the designation does not mean that City intends to acquire the lane. He also expressed concern for safety. Ms. Fetzer noted that safety is a concern for the Streets Department and, if needed, the Department will pave crosswalks in a different material.

Staff returned with photographs and the Committee reviewed those for Bodine Street. After deliberation, the Committee concurred with the inventory's notation for the integrity of the street. The Committee does not recommend removing the street from the inventory. Mr. Brownlee invited Mr. Gordon to the Commission to restate his case.

Mitch Deighan of the Northern Liberties Neighbors Association stated that the Association's board voted unanimously to support the district nomination. Wendy Bennett of the 2000 block of Latimer Street also voiced her support. Robert Hotes, AIA, representing the Center City Residents Association, endorsed the nomination, saying that these streets are rapidly disappearing and the district's designation reinforces the continuity of Philadelphia's history. Bud Schoffer and neighbors of the 300 block of West Winona Street submitted a petition in support of the nomination. Joyce Robinson and Catharine Franklin also supported the district's designation. Ms. Franklin notified the Committee of another block not listed on the inventory, leading to Hallow Park off of Greene Street. Dominick Lassaro and Rebecca Shulman testified in favor of the nomination. Diana Fertik asked the Committee to define the end of the street in an

intersection, because each time the cross street near her house gets asphalt it encroaches further and further onto her brick street. Mr. Myers noted that the street should begin at the curb of the corner.

Ms. Harvey thanked all those who attended the meeting and stated that residents are the eyes and ears of the Historical Commission, asking them to call the office if they see work happening on their streets.

At the request of Madeleine Antinucci, Fourth Highway District Engineer, Ms. Fetzer asked the Committee to review two streets for possible deletion from the inventory: Gates Street and Sheldon Street in Manayunk. Ms. Fetzer explained that, outside of Center City, the Fourth Highway District has the highest number of historic streets. The Committee reviewed photographs of the two streets. It decided that Gates Street retained enough historic fabric to remain in the inventory.

Ms. Wolf made a motion to delete Sheldon Street because of low integrity. Mr. Myers seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

Ms. Fetzer then asked the Committee, at the request of a City Council member, to review the designation of Chang Street in Fairmount. The very narrow street has low integrity, no houses along it and is in the middle of a block that may be developed.

Mr. Myers made a motion to delete Chang Street from the inventory because of low integrity. Ms. Klein seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.

Mr. Tyler stated that the Commission staff received a letter concerning Beck Street. A company owns some property on both sides of the street and may, in time acquire the entire parcel for development. Committee members noted that the street has a high integrity and decided to leave it in the inventory.

Mr. Myers noted that on Bradford Alley, the inventory mentions marble steps. Staff stated that the steps are actually on the sidewalk and therefore the notation of the steps should be removed from the inventory. The Committee agreed.

Mr. Myers reiterated that the designation includes the entire cartway of the block, even historic fabric that may lie under a non-historic patch. Mr. Brownlee noted that while designation will not mean automatic restoration of these streets, it will guarantee incremental improvements as the Streets and Water Departments and the Gas Company do work.

Ms. Wolf commended the work of the staff for the nomination.

Mr. Myers made a motion to recommend the designation of the Historic Street Paving Thematic District as modified. Ms. Klein seconded the motion, which carried by unanimous vote.

The meeting adjourned at 4:00 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura M. Spina
Historic Preservation Planner