

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

**Hyman Myers, Chair
Commission Conference Room, One Parkway, 1515 Arch Street, 13th Floor
20 November 1998**

Present

Hyman Myers, Acting Chair
Janet Klein, Chair, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission
Ernest Leonardo, Chief, Comprehensive Planning, City Planning Commission
Sandra Tatman, Ph.D.

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

Mark Zecca, Esq., Deputy City Solicitor

Also

Lauralou Courtney Bates
Carole Sivin
Hana Kramer
Michael Ficht
Janet Mason
Karen Schwartz
Alik Strakes, Preservation Alliance
John Soroko, Esq.
George O'Connell, Esq.
Catherine Etting
James Steigerwald
Robert Lochger
Jane Stran
Diane Dalto, First Deputy City Representative - Arts and Cultural Affairs
William Brennan
Laura Lebaudy
Adrienne Ragen
Laura Griffith, Fairmount Park Art Association
Penny Bach, Fairmount Park Art Association
Edward Lawler, Jr.

Mr. Myers, Acting Chair, recognized the presence of a quorum and called the meeting to order at 2:00 p.m.

Dream Garden, Curtis Building Lobby, 170 South Independence Mall East

Estate of John W. Merriam, Owner

DATE: 1914-1916

Mr. Tyler described the Committee on Historic Designation as a technical, advisory body to the Commission. Mr. Tyler stated the questions before the Committee: is the nomination form technically correct and does it demonstrate that the nominated resource, the *Dream Garden* mosaic, meets one or more of the criteria specified by the ordinance at §14-2007(5)? He also read the ordinance's definition of an object as "[a] material thing of functional, aesthetic, cultural, historic or scientific value that may be, by nature or design, movable yet related to a specific setting or environment." §14-2007(2)(1).

Laura Spina of the Commission staff presented a summary of the nomination prepared by her and Elizabeth Harvey. Ms. Spina stated that *Dream Garden* meets four criteria listed in the historic preservation ordinance at §14-2007(5)(a, b, e and h):

1. *Dream Garden* possesses "significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City," and "is associated with the life of a person significant in the past." Cyrus H. Curtis, publisher of *The Saturday Evening Post* and *The Ladies Home Journal*, Edward Bok, editor of *The Ladies Home Journal*, Maxfield Parrish, and Louis Comfort Tiffany all participated in the creation, placement, and execution of this object.

2. It is the work of a "designer . . . whose work has significantly influenced the historical . . . or cultural development of the City." Maxfield Parrish, a native of Philadelphia, was the most reproduced illustrator of his time, and his influence extended well beyond Philadelphia. Not only did he create numerous murals, but he produced posters, calendars, and book illustrations accessible and affordable to the general public. His work appealed to the middle class, the audience of Curtis' magazines.

3. *Dream Garden* "[c]ontains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship that represent a significant innovation." Louis C. Tiffany developed his own technique to create the favrile glass, an iridescent glass, that is used in this mosaic. Maxfield Parrish used his own method of painting to create an iridescent effect in his work. *Dream Garden* was the only collaboration between these artists, and it is one of the few public secular mosaics created by Tiffany.

4. "Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic," *Dream Garden* "represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City." The Curtis Building is open to the public during business hours, and after business hours visitors can see the mosaic through the glass doors at the 6th Street entrance. Philadelphians and tourists frequent the Curtis Building to see this object. Extensive press coverage, numerous letters, and a petition have been sent to the Commission expressing support for keeping *Dream Garden* in the lobby of the Curtis Building.

Ms. Spina and Ms. Harvey explained that the Curtis Building was originally intended to have a mural in the lobby and that engineers designed the space to accommodate such a large work of art. Mr. Tyler added that a structural engineer

accompanied him on an inspection behind the mural, which revealed its methods of installation.

Ms. Spina answered several questions asked by members of the public and counsel for both the Commission and the owner. She explained that this mosaic was one of twelve mural commissions that Parrish executed, and that the Curtis Building also has murals in the former Girls Dining Room by Parrish. The mosaic is the result of a collaboration between Parrish, who painted the model for the mosaic, and Louis Comfort Tiffany, who executed the model in glass. She commented on the tremendously vivid colors of the mural, which closely resemble colors used by Parrish in his paintings.

In answering a question by John Soroko, Esq., counsel for the Merriam Estate, Ms. Spina also said that the mosaic is in a privately owned space. Mr. Zecca noted that the Commission has exercised its jurisdiction over private property by designating buildings in private ownership in the past. Mr. Soroko also asked if the “unique location” of the mosaic, as cited in the nomination on page eleven (11), referred specifically to the lobby of the Curtis Building. Ms. Spina replied that it did, but also that the lobby is a public space in general, and that the mosaic has connections to the neighborhood and City as well. She noted that Tiffany executed very few public secular mosaics or windows. Mr. Leonardo emphasized the second part of the sentence in question, which states that the *Dream Garden* “represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City.”

Mr. Soroko stated that the Estate of John W. Merriam opposes the designation of the *Dream Garden* mural as an object. He declined to elaborate at the Committee meeting, but stated he would explain the Estate’s position at the Commission meeting. Mark Zecca, Esq., counsel for the Commission, stated that Mr. Soroko’s comment constitutes the first objection to the designation made by the Merriam Estate.

Several members of the Community voiced their support for the designation and objection to the removal of *Dream Garden*. Carol Sivin discussed a petition, signed by over 300 persons, in support of saving the mural in the Curtis Building lobby. Karen Schwartz stated that the Free Library frequently receives calls inquiring about *Dream Garden*, and stressed the public interest in this work. Penny Bach, who has written a book on Philadelphia’s public art, contended that privately owned work is often readily visible and accessible to the public.

Mr. Leonardo made a motion to recommend approval of designating the Maxfield Parrish and Louis Comfort Tiffany mosaic mural Dream Garden as an historic object. Ms. Klein seconded the motion which carried unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

R. Scott Jacob
Executive Secretary