

PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

COMMITTEE ON HISTORIC DESIGNATION

23 April 1993

David Brownlee, Chairman

The fortieth meeting of the Committee on Historic Designation began at 2:00 p.m. on Friday, 23 April 1993 in Room 1301, 1401 Arch Street, Philadelphia Historical Commission conference room.

Present: David Brownlee, Chairman of the Committee on
Historic Designation
David Baldinger, Deputy Director, Philadelphia
City Planning Commission
Janet Klein
Sandra Tatman
Stephanie Wolf

Randal Baron
Ira Kauderer
Richard Tyler

NEW BUSINESS

The Committee reviewed applications for the following historical and architectural resources.

The Committee first reviewed information on a building at 41st and Viola Streets now used as a Church but formerly a synagogue. This was not presented as a formal nomination but rather as an information sheet to assess whether the building has enough potential to expend the time and effort necessary to prepare a nomination. After a site visit it was felt that the building may not possess enough architectural significance, but the congregation would very much like the building to be listed on the Historic Register and so the staff put the question to the Designation Committee.

The Tikvas Israel Synagogue was constructed in 1922 to a design by architect Herman H. Kline. The work involved the remodeling of a nineteenth century factory with new front and side walls and interior. The area once contained a large Jewish population and the building is now listed as a contributing building in the Parkside National Register Historic district.

The members of the Congregation spoke about the church that has occupied the space for approximately 20 years. Led by Reverend Henry it has been a guiding force in the affairs of the Parkside Community.

Members of the Committee discussed what little is currently known about the architect. It was agreed that although the building is difficult to nominate based on its architecture alone, further information on the history of the Congregation and the work of Herman H. Kline might raise the assessment of its significance. It was agreed that the staff and the representatives of the church would look into these aspects of its history and report back to the Committee.

41st District Police Station
& Engine Co. #19
1919

2301-2335 S. 24th Street
Phillip Johnson Architect

Summary of Significance

The Police and Fire Station Complex at 24th and Ritner Streets possesses significance as a fine example of the Georgian/Classical Revival. It manifests this both in terms of its five part layout with a central boiler building and stable flanked by "hyphens" and two larger end buildings containing the fire and police stations. The Flemish bond brick walls and the projecting "Baroque" quoins and keystones as well as the overall symmetry of multi-pane windows, doors and balconies all are manifestations of Georgian/Classical Revival design. The architect, Philadelphia's Phillip Johnson, was the City's main in-house architect for thirty years and designed important buildings including City Hall Annex. This complex of buildings serves as one of his grander designs. The building also embodies the history of the development of the professional Police and Fire departments in their second major period of expansion in the early twentieth century.

The Committee members discussed the nomination and agreed unanimously that the building complex possesses significance in each of these three areas listed above: style, architect and local history. David Baldinger explained that the Department of Public Property has been planning for the potential demolition of the complex in order to build a new Police and Fire Station on the site and he was concerned about the Commission getting involved in a building that is potentially slated for demolition. Richard Tyler of the staff explained that it had been the Commission staff's understanding that the buildings were to be rehabilitated. In fact, staff had been involved in reviewing the specifications for rehabilitation when they came to the Art Commission. David Baldinger explained that there had been plans to renovate the building for twenty years which had never been acted upon but that after studying several options the plans have shifted toward demolition and rebuilding on the site. It was explained that there will be a community meeting to be sponsored by Councilperson Verna's office to discuss and gauge the desires of the community on this issue Monday evening on May 2. David Baldinger made a motion that the Committee table the vote on significance until after that

meeting. The motion was not seconded.

Other Committee members expressed the opinion that the Committee's role and powers do not allow them to decide on whether the building should be designated. They stated the Committee can only recommend whether the building has the architectural and historical significance necessary for designation as described in the ordinance in section 14-2007 5(a-j) of the Philadelphia Code. The Commission meeting is the proper forum for weighing the planning issues into the decision. Since the Commission will not be meeting on this issue until 9 June at the earliest, it was felt that there would be plenty of time for community comment before any possible designation of the property.

A motion was made to recommend to the Commission that 2301-2335 S. 24th Street meets the criteria of significance for designation. The vote was 4 to 1 in favor of this motion. David Baldinger voted against the motion.

Germantown Town Hall
1923

5928 Germantown Avenue
John Penn Brock Sinkler

Germantown Town Hall possesses significance as a fine example of Classical Revival style, in its association with Germantown history and as an example of the work of architect John Sinkler. Constructed at a time when light stone Classical monuments were being erected for dignified purposes such as government buildings and banks, this structure weds a memorial rotunda based on the Merchants Exchange in Philadelphia combined with a modern classical office building at the rear. The original Town Hall came about in anticipation of the merger of independent Germantown into the City of Philadelphia. This second Town Hall is constructed on the same site. John Sinkler served as the City's in house architect from 1920-1924 designing many municipal buildings, however, Germantown Town Hall serves as his most important work.

The Committee unanimously recommended the designation of Germantown Town Hall.

Paine House
c. 1869

5201 Vicaris Street
Vernacular

The Paine house possesses local significance as an example of a vernacular Pennsylvania Farmhouse-type unusual within the City of Philadelphia. The building constructed in approximately 1869 is one of the earliest extant houses in the Wissahickon neighborhood. Wissahickon received its impetus to grow as a commuter suburb from the nearby train station. Although never a farm house itself, the

building took the form of a Pennsylvania farm house. This vernacular form is an amalgam of English and German traditions which came together in the 18th century but conservatively remained in place through the 19th century. This building with its four bay form is here dressed up with the brackets of mid 19th century Italianate design. Preserved because of its park location, this house deserves preservation as an example of rural vernacular design in the midst of the big city.

The committee unanimously recommended designation of the property.

University Avenue Bridge
1925-1930

University Avenue
Paul Phillipe Cret

University Avenue Bridge possesses significance as an outstanding and unusual bridge design by the nationally important architect Paul Phillipe Cret. One of Philadelphia's only remaining drawbridges, the bridge is a landmark gateway in the city. Paul Cret, a highly influential proponent of the Beaux Arts movement designed the bridge in 1925 using a modern Classical idiom. With its limestone operations tower and piers and bronze light standards this is an architecturally rich bridge structure which possesses significance in the areas of architect, style, engineering and as a visual landmark.

The Committee unanimously recommends the designation of the University Avenue Bridge.

Temple Beth Israel
1907

1801 N. 32nd Street
Sauer and Hahn

The former synagogue building possesses significance for its Beaux Arts/Byzantine style, its design by Philadelphia architects Sauer and Hahn and for its association with the history of the City's Jewish Community. This building is a surprisingly early modern interpretation of the eastern, in this case Byzantine style, which was thought appropriate to cloth a house of Jewish worship. Sauer and Hahn were architects with close ties to the Philadelphia Jewish community who designed a number of synagogues. The construction of this building in Strawberry Mansion for the third oldest Jewish congregation in Philadelphia represents a massive movement of Jews to this neighborhood in the early twentieth century. Its conversion to a church represents a more recent migration of African Americans to this area.

The Committee unanimously recommended this building for designation.

There being no further business, the Committee adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Randal Baron

Randal Baron
Preservation Planner

RB:sj