

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

**Thomas Sugrue, Ph.D., Chair  
Room 578 City Hall  
1 April 2004**

Present

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Thomas Sugrue, Ph.D., Chair,  
Warren Huff, Philadelphia City Planning Commission  
Hyman Myers, Vitetta

Jonathan Farnham, Historic Preservation Planner  
Laura M. Spina, Historic Preservation Planner

Also

Alfreda Hendricks  
Bill Murray, 2019-23 Green Street  
Ines Featherstone  
John Gallery  
John Tull, Friends Rehabilitation Program  
Jim Miller, Friends Rehabilitation Program  
Rab Johns, Friends Rehabilitation Program  
I.R. Gowans  
Mike Devine, Friends Rehabilitation Program  
Blanche Burton-Lyles, Marian Anderson Residence  
Phyllis Sims, Marian Anderson Historical Society  
Marcella Hand, Marian Anderson Historical Society

Thomas Sugrue, Chair, called the meeting to order at 9:05 a.m.

**711-39 Spring Garden Street, Guild House**

Friends Neighborhood Guild, Owner

Date: 1960-66

Sculptor: Robert Venturi with John Rauch, Paul Cope & Mather Lippincott, architects

Mr. Farnham gave an illustrated presentation of the nomination. Although a seemingly modest building on a nondescript stretch of Spring Garden Street, Guild House, which was designed by architect Robert Venturi and several collaborators including John Rauch and Cope & Lippincott between 1960 and 1964 and constructed in 1965 and 1966, is one of the most important works of architecture of the twentieth century. Perhaps more than any other structure in the world, the 91-unit elderly apartment building marks the paradigmatic shift away from Modernism, the style and ideology that dominated architectural discourse between 1925 and 1975, toward the new architecture known as Post-modernism.

Within a few years of its construction, Guild House was inducted into architectural history's hall of fame when noted historian Vincent Scully canonized it in his survey entitled *American Architecture and Urbanism*. Since that publication, Guild House has been included in every

major history of twentieth-century architecture, Modern and post-Modern architecture, and American architecture. The modest brick building has appeared in hundreds of articles, books, websites, and documentaries, publicizing it around the world. College students enrolled in art and architectural history survey classes throughout the world are introduced to Guild House and its role in shaping the discourse. Architects and critics have vigorously debated and continue to debate its merits and significance. Guild House is, perhaps, the most discussed building of the second half of the twentieth century.

Mr. Farnham noted that Guild House meets seven of the criteria for listing on the Philadelphia Register in the Historic Preservation Ordinance, §14-2007(5):

- (a) has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation;
- (b) is associated with an event of importance to the history of the City, Commonwealth, or Nation;
- (c) reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style;
- (d) embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen;
- (e) is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influence the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation;
- (f) contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation
- (j) exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

Mr. Farnham concluded by noting that the local chapter of DOCOMOMO/US sent a letter supporting the nomination. Mr. Sugrue said that a professor of his at Harvard University dedicated a major portion of a class specifically to this building. Mr. Huff and Mr. Myers agreed that the building deserves recognition for its significant impact on architecture throughout the world. The Committee members also commended Mr. Farnham on the quality of his nomination, stating that it was an excellent essay, worthy of publication in its own right.

John Tull and Jim Miller of the Friends Rehabilitation Program questioned the effects of designation. They noted that the building is undergoing a four to five million-dollar renovation. They want to preserve the integrity of the building and have been in contact with Robert Venturi to discuss their proposed changes. However, they were concerned that the Historical Commission would not approve some of the exterior alterations that they have in mind. The Committee members explained that the Architectural Committee and Historical Commission would review any changes and, if necessary, the owners could apply to the Financial Hardship Committee.

John Gallery of the Preservation Alliance noted his support for the nomination. He said that the Alliance and DOCOMOMO are partnering to submit more nominations for buildings of this period for the Historical Commission to consider in the near future, including Vanna Venturi's House.

Mr. Miller stated that the Friends Rehabilitation Program had applied for a Keystone Grant, but was denied. The Committee and Mr. Gallery noted that listing on the Philadelphia Register would help the owner's chances for grants of that kind. Also, if the state legislature passes the state rehabilitation tax credit legislation now pending, the property would be eligible for that program as well.

*Mr. Huff made a motion to recommend the listing of 711-39 Spring Garden Street on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Mr. Myers seconded the motion, which passed unanimously.*

**762 Martin Street, Marian Anderson House**

Blanche Burton-Lyles, Owner

DATE: 1870s; purchased by Marian Anderson, 1924; new façade and rear addition, 1940s

Blanche Burton-Lyles, the owner of the property, presented the nomination. Contralto Marian Anderson was one of the most acclaimed classical singers of the twentieth century. Anderson purchased the house at 762 Martin Street in her childhood neighborhood in 1924, when she was but 27 years of age. She owned the rowhouse for 69 years, until her death in 1993. During those seven decades, Anderson enjoyed a spectacular career and an international following. She sang in the world's most prestigious concert halls for kings, queens and presidents. In 1936, Anderson was the first African-American singer to perform at the White House. In 1939, she sang for 75,000 at the Lincoln Memorial; the same year she was awarded the NAACP's Spingarn Medal. She made history in 1955 as the first African-American to perform with the New York Metropolitan Opera. In 1957, she sang "The Star Spangled Banner" at President Eisenhower's inauguration. That year, renowned journalist Edward R. Murrow documented her tour of Asia for the State Department in a film titled *The Lady from Philadelphia*. She sang at President Kennedy's inauguration in 1961 and at his memorial service in 1963. Also in 1963, President Johnson awarded her the Presidential Medal of Freedom. She has also been awarded the United Nations Peace Prize, the New York City Handel Medallion, the Congressional Gold Medal, the Kennedy Award for a lifetime of achievement, the Eleanor Roosevelt Human Rights Award, and a Grammy Award for lifetime achievement in the arts. When not touring the world, she returned to her rowhouse, which she called her "dream house." In 1954, at the height of her career, *Life Magazine* published a photograph of the famous singer sitting with her mother on the stoop of the rowhouse, which the singer added along with a new front façade, in the 1940s. These alterations, which have survived, connect Anderson directly to the historic fabric.

Mr. Farnham noted that 762 Martin Street meets criterion A for listing on the Philadelphia Register in the Historic Preservation Ordinance, § 14-2007(5), which reads, "has significant character, interest and value as part of the cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past."

Ms. Burton-Lyles stated that Ms. Anderson's husband, Orpheus Fisher, a prominent architect, designed the interior of the house, which remains intact. When the front façade and stoop were installed in the 1940s, they also changed the house next door, where Ms. Anderson's sister lived.

The house is now operated as a museum, open by appointment. Phyllis Sims, curator for the Marian Anderson Historical Society, noted that Toyota published a magazine highlighting African-American museums in the country and this site was chosen among those in the Mid-Atlantic region.

Mr. Gallery proffered the Alliance's support for the nomination. The purpose of the ordinance is to recognize more than just architectural treasures and this is a site that has great cultural significance.

*Mr. Huff made a recommendation to list 762 Martin Street on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Mr. Myers seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.*

### **1900 Chestnut Street**

1900 Equities, Owner

DATE: 1922

Mr. Gallery stated that his initial research showed that Leroy Rothschild as the architect for the building, but other research has proven that the architect was probably Frank Hahn. He requests the opportunity to withdraw the nomination to perform further research and expand on the nomination.

*Mr. Myers made a motion to recommend tabling the designation of 1900 Chestnut Street until the receipt of a revised nomination. Mr. Huff seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.*

### **Reclassification of 2019-23 Green Street**

Hilda Sereira, Owner; Joseph Duffy and William F. Murphy, Equitable Owners

DATE: c. 1860 as three houses; combined into single apartment building, refaced with limestone façade at first floor, c. 1922; turned into social club, upper floors demolished, openings infilled and entrance added, 1959.

This application proposes the reclassification of 2019-2023 Green Street from Contributing to Non-contributing to the Spring Garden Historic District. The property was designated on 11 October 2000 as part of the district. It was not designated individually prior to the creation of the district. The Spring Garden nomination defines the district's period of significance as 1850 to 1930.

The property has a long history. About 1860, three rowhouses like those to the east were constructed on three separate parcels. About 1922, the rowhouses were consolidated into a single apartment building. At that time, a Classical Revival-style limestone veneer was applied to the 1<sup>st</sup>-story front façade to tie the three consolidated buildings together. In 1959, the apartment building was converted into a social club. For the conversion, the entirety of the building except a piece of the front façade was demolished and a new building was erected behind the façade remnant. To complete the social club, the front façade openings were infilled and a new central entranceway was added. The surviving piece of the front façade is approximately one and a half stories tall and is made up of 1860s brick faced with 1922 limestone and stucco. The building has been vacant for several years. During the vacancy, the façade has decayed considerably. The limestone veneer is in poor condition and the wall behind it is not structurally sound. The developers seek the reclassification to allow for complete demolition and construction of a residential building. The Spring Garden Civic Association, which nominated the district, supports the reclassification and demolition.

Mr. Myers remembered the building from touring the neighborhood for the district's designation. He thought that they classified the property as contributing because it was a remnant of historic fabric and it retained the street wall.

William Murphy and Joseph Duffy, the equitable owners of the property, noted that the property is extremely difficult to develop in its present condition. They enumerated some of the problems with the present building: the limestone is in very deteriorated condition and would not withstand the demolition of the building behind it; the basements have been completely in-filled and the property has no other access for excavation equipment; the site must have parking to meet code and so a garage opening will have to be cut through the façade at some point on the front.

Ms. Spina noted that the question before the committee today was simply if the property's classification should be changed from contributing to non-contributing. Since a building was present on the lot at the time of designation, the Historical Commission will have jurisdiction over the design of the new construction, if it allows the demolition of the present building.

*Mr. Huff made a motion to recommend the reclassification of 2019-23 Green Street from contributing to non-contributing to the Spring Garden Historic District. Mr. Myers seconded the motion, which carried unanimously.*

The meeting adjourned at 10:25 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Laura M. Spina  
Historic Preservation Planner