

PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

COMMITTEE ON HISTORIC DESIGNATION

10 November 1988

The thirty-second meeting of the Committee on Historic Designation began at 10:00 a.m. on Thursday, 10 November 1988. Room 1313 City Hall Annex.

Present: David Brownlee, Chairman of the Committee on Historic Designation
David Baldinger, Deputy Director, Philadelphia City Planning Commission
Caroline Golab
Hyman Myers
Sandra Tatman
Janet Klein cast her votes by telephone
Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer, Philadelphia Historical Commission
Randal Baron, Preservation Planner, Philadelphia Historical Commission

Also: Mary Lou McFarland, Preservation Coalition of Greater Philadelphia
Rebecca Trumbull, Preservation Coalition of Greater Philadelphia
Ira Kauderer

NEW BUSINESS

The Committee reviewed nominations of the following historical and architectural resources.

The Dunbar Stores
.920-922 Chestnut Street
Stephen D. Button, Architect

1851

The Dunbar Stores possess significance as outstanding examples of the Italianate style, of the work of the important Philadelphia architect Stephen D. Button and most importantly as a rare surviving fragment of the first generation of commercial building on Chestnut Street. Stephen Button, an important Philadelphia architect worked both in the mid-Atlantic region and the South. He designed a variety of significant buildings including the Alabama State Capitol, the now demolished Spring Garden Institute and the First Baptist Church at Broad and Arch Streets. He is most well known, however, for his development of commercial

buildings in the Italianate style such as this particularly fine example at 920-22 Chestnut Street. This double store is given added significance as one of the handful of first generation commercial buildings left in the central business district and as part of a streetscape of similarly scaled mid-19th century commercial buildings.

David Baldinger explained that the Planning Commission is quite pleased to see the nomination of this building as well as 926 and 930 because the protection of buildings of this height, width and rhythm on Chestnut Street is consistent with the New Center City Plan as well as the existing 50 foot height limit on this section of Chestnut Street.

The Scherr Store
926 Chestnut Street

1850

The Scherr store possesses significance as one of the very few remaining examples of the original transformation of Chestnut Street from a street of residential structures, to one filled with expressly commercial ones, and also as an important example of mid-19th century Palazzo Italianate commercial architecture. In the 18th and early 19th century, business was primarily domestic with little differentiation between commercial and residential structures. Residential, commercial and industrial uses clustered together in the same neighborhood. In the mid-19th century, the City's increased population, new technology and expanding transportation system helped to create separate areas for different uses. In this period Chestnut Street, originally built up as a residential street, was transformed into the prime commercial district of the City. The Italianate architecture of 926 Chestnut Street derived from the Renaissance palaces of Florence which provided "the most impressive architectural results of the patronage of a rich merchant class." The building receives added significance as part of a grouping of similarly scaled 19th century commercial buildings.

The Committee unanimously recommended the designation of 926 Chestnut Street.

The Allen Store
930 Chestnut Street

1857

The Allen Store possesses significance as one of the very few remaining examples of the mid-19th century commercialization of Chestnut Street, as an excellent example of a commercial Italianate style, and as the first home of what became a large Philadelphia department store. This building remains as one of only 6 mid-19th century commercial structures left on Chestnut Street between 5th and Broad Streets. A fine example of the Italianate style with its columns, arched windows and bracketed cornice, it achieves added significance as part of a clustered streetscape of similarly scaled early commercial structures.

The Committee unanimously recommended designation of 930 Chestnut Street.

The Committee also recommended that the staff help foster the nomination of 928 and 932 Chestnut as time permits.

Music and Morgan Buildings
201-205 S. 34th Street
Cope and Stewardson, Architects

1890-1891

These two connected red brick and terra cotta buildings possess significance for their history as an orphanage and as the Physics laboratory of the University of Pennsylvania as well as for their architectural importance as fine examples of the work of the architects Cope and Stewardson. The buildings, originally constructed as the Foulke-Long Institute, housed the orphaned daughters of civil war soldiers and Philadelphia firemen. After only a few years the building was sold to the University of Pennsylvania to house the Randal Morgan Laboratory of Physics. This Physics laboratory represented a revolutionary new approach in Science Education based on the German model of teaching science through experiment and empirical study instead of lectures. The architectural significance of the buildings rests with the fame of the architects Cope and Stewardson who are recognized for their important development of institutional and collegiate buildings. These Renaissance Revival Style buildings which used to exist in close proximity to several similar science related buildings by Cope and Stewardson remain as the only examples of the early phase of Cope and Stewardson's work on the Penn campus. Cope and Stewardson went on to design many important buildings for University of Pennsylvania, Bryn Mawr and other universities.

Because of potential conflict of interest Caroline Golab and David Brownlee left the room and did not participate in the the discussion or vote. The remaining four committee members voted unanimously to recommend designation of the buildings.

Laboratory of Hygiene
Edgar Fahs Smith Hall
215 S. 34th Street
Collins and Autenrieth, Architects

1890-1892

The former Laboratory of Hygiene building at 215 S. 34th Street possesses historical significance as one of the primary seats of the study of Public Health in the United States as well as architecturally an important example of the work of Collins and Autenrieth, a significant architectural firm in late 19th century Philadelphia.

In the late 19th century, the University of Pennsylvania, long a leading force in medical education was finding its pre-eminent position threatened

by reforms at Harvard and by the opening of the Johns Hopkins Medical School. Both Harvard and Hopkins modelled themselves after the world leading institutions of Germany where science was being studied through laboratory work and experimentation in addition to lectures. In medicine, the field at the cutting edge was bacteriology, the study of disease causing agents. After the German scientist Robert Koch isolated the cholera bacillus in 1883 and a diphtheria antitoxin was developed in 1894, bacteriology and the study of public hygiene held the promise of curing and preventing the great plagues of cholera, typhoid and dyphteria that periodically swept the globe. The accelerating influx of immigrants into Philadelphia raised fears of rampant epidemic disease; the University of Pennsylvania as the City's leading educational institution, was ideally suited to offer training to medical professionals in the rapidly growing field of public health. The Laboratory of Hygiene built with the support of university benefactor Henry C. Lea and headed in the beginning by Dr. John Shaw Billings, the nations foremost expert on public health, provided important scientific training in the field of Public Health for over 80 years.

The building possesses architectural significance as a primary example of the work of the architects Collins and Autenrieth. These architects who designed such important buildings as the corner structures on the Lit Brothers Department store and the Central Presbyterian Church at 704-712 North Broad Street are considered instrumental in bringing the round arch Italianate style from Germany to Philadelphia in the mid-19th century.

David Brownlee and Caroline Golab abstained from discussing or voting on this building. The remaining committee members voted 3 to 1 in favor of recommending the designation of 315 S. 34th Street.

David Brownlee asked to discuss some questions that have arisen in regard to the guidelines for designation of historic districts that were adopted by the designation committee at the meeting of 26 July 1988.

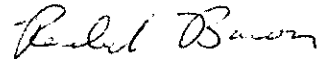
The first question raised was about the confusion on the part of the Commission as to whether the four stage review for districts was meant for use by the Commission or only by the Committee. The Committee asked that the minutes of 26 July 1988 be revised to make clear that the four stage review process pertains only to the internal workings of the Committee and precedes consideration by the Commission.

Other questions involved the meanings of certain words or phrases. Several changes were made in order to make the process clearer. A copy of the revised internal procedures for the Committee have been included with these minutes.

Rebecca Trumbull asked whether the procedures could be revised to impose some time deadlines on the staff for the review of historic district nominations. The Committee responded that given the small staff and the many unforeseen issues that the staff must address, they could not create

deadlines. The Committee and the staff did try to reassure Ms. Trumbull that the historic district nominations would be processed as quickly as staffing allowed. It was pointed out, however, that review and approval of any part of a nomination by the staff or the Committee do not mean that the Commission would necessarily vote to designate that district as historic.

Respectfully Submitted

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Randal Baron".

Randal Baron
Preservation Planner