

**THE REPORT OF THE ARCHITECTURAL COMMITTEE OF THE
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION**

**Arlene Matzkin, Chairperson
Commission Conference Room
Suite 1301, 1401 Arch Street**

29 March 1994

Present

Arlene Matzkin, AIA, Chairperson
Tony Atkin, Tony Atkin & Associates
Penelope H. Batcheler, Historical Architect
J. William Cornell, J.S. Cornell & Sons, Inc.
David Hollenberg, Historical Architect, National Park Service
Herbert Levy, AIA, Geddes Brecher Qualls Cunningham
Don Stevenson, Sheward & Associates

Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer
Randal Baron, Historic Preservation Planner
Lori Plavin Salganicoff, Historic Preservation Specialist
Jeffrey Barr, Historical Research Technician

Also

David R. Slocum
Ron Avery, Daily News
Carol Cook, Planning Commission
Warren E. Huff, Planning Commission
Samuel Fadullon, Planning Commission
Ken Jacobs, Vitetta Group
George Skarmeas, Vitetta Group
James Straw, Kise Franks & Straw
Burdell Buckley, Maria C. Romañach Architects
Bill Brookover, National Park Service
Doris Finelli, National Park Service
Cliff Northrop, National Park Service
James W. Fox IV

PROPOSALS

1912-1916 SOUTH RITTENHOUSE SQUARE

David R. Slocum, Architect

James W. Fox IV, Owner

PROPOSAL: Additions and Renovations for Medical Offices

This building, or group of buildings together known formerly as the McIlhenney Mansion. The rear of the building faces Manning Street, a street that contains some rowhouses but mostly rear elevations of buildings. A non-publicly visible courtyard sits to the west.

The Applicant seeks to construct a large red brick three-story addition containing a fire stair in the courtyard visible only on Manning Street, slightly alter the Manning Street garage opening, and install a railing and a light on the front of 1914 South Rittenhouse Square.

Committee members approved of the massing and general design of the addition, the choice of brick, and the other minor changes. They objected to the additions lack of windows on Manning Street. Mr. Slocum stated that the owner would not want windows as they would have to be fire-rated and therefore expensive. Several Committee members questioned the need for expensive windows and Ms. Matzkin offered to research the matter within the Philadelphia Code. Dr. Fox, the owner, later accepted the proposal to allow windows if they could be wood and otherwise build a reveal where windows would have been so as to break up the monotony of the wall.

The Architectural Committee voted to recommend approval of all aspects of the project with the addition of wood windows to each Manning Street floor of the stairwell addition if they are found to be code compliant. If wood windows are not acceptable for code reasons, reveals should be required.

C.A.P.A. (FORMERLY RIDGEWAY LIBRARY)

Jim Straw, Kise Franks and Straw Architects

PROPOSAL: Conceptual Approval, Additions and Renovations

The Applicant, who received preliminary conceptual approval on this project at the Commission's 377th Stated Meeting of 10 November 1993, now seeks conceptual approval at the intermediate design development stage. In response to earlier recommendations, the Applicant has changed the design to better resolve the interface between the original building and the new.

Primary features of the plan now include the exposure of the original's building rear facade within the new building lit with house lights, the location of new building's roof line joined above the original building's pediment, and a glass wall hyphen between the old and the new buildings.

Committee members found the new design to be an improvement over the preliminary design, with most of their previous concerns addressed. Members questioned whether the glass panels of the hyphen were flush or recessed within their frames. Also, the materials of the building were not as visible as necessary on the rendered drawings presented -- brick walls appeared as smooth as stone -- making reading the aesthetic effect of the building difficult in places. Finally, members recommended seeking a different solution to the large metal spandrel panels, partially by increasing the length of the windows. Mr. Straw suggested coming back to the Committee with a detail of the link and one bay of the new building.

The Committee recommended conceptual approval of this stage of the project, with some design changes as described above.

CITY HALL, BROAD AND MARKET STREETS

Burdell Buckley, Maria Romañach Architects

PROPOSAL: Conceptual Approval, Fire Code Compliance

The Applicant seeks conceptual approval of changes to the top stair landings of City Hall for fire code means of egress requirements. These requirements dictate that the grand stairways must be connected to a new fire stair. The previously approved Vitetta Group solution for this situation cut through walls into the side of the grand stair halls and extended the top landing of these grand stairways. Maria Romañach Architects, hired by Vitetta to manage the City Hall project, strongly objects to this design and has submitted an alternate.

The design submitted for conceptual approval retains the original appearance of the stairhall walls and landing, creating openings instead through the elevator lobby wall and the fire stair bearing wall.

Committee members reacted favorably to the new design, declaring it as much better from a preservation point of view. This design does, however, require egress through a less direct route. Members questioned whether it would be approved by the Board of Building Standards of the Department of Licenses and Inspections.

The Architectural Committee voted to recommend conceptual approval of the design, with the note that it will probably need to be seen by the Board of Building Standards of the Department of Licenses and Inspections.

INDEPENDENCE HALL, 5TH AND CHESTNUT STREETS

Dr. George Skarmas, The Vitetta Group, Inc.

PROPOSAL: Changes to Mechanical Systems

Independence Hall was built in 1733-1755 by the Province of Pennsylvania to serve as the Colonial State House. It is, of course, the building in which the Declaration of Independence was debated and proclaimed in 1776, and where the Constitutional Congress was held. However, by 1799 both the Nation and the State had moved their capitals from Philadelphia, and in 1818 Independence Hall, Congress Hall, and Old City Hall were sold to their present owner, the City of Philadelphia.

Congress voted to establish Independence National Historical Park in 1948 and the Department of the Interior, which contains the National Park Service, and the City entered into an Agreement on 14 July 1950. This Agreement permits the Department to occupy the buildings and land "for the purpose of preserving, exhibiting, and interpreting them..." and to "have curatorial responsibility for the care and display of ... museum objects, furnishings, or exhibits of historic interest...." The Agreement also requires the Department to maintain the buildings and undertake restoration which is agreed upon between the City and the Department. Finally, the Agreement assumes "a high degree of cooperation."

The Park is on the National Register of Historic Places, and Independence Square and its buildings are listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. They are also considered a National Historic Landmark and a World Heritage Site.

The Applicant seeks to modify and upgrade the Independence, Congress and Old City Halls' mechanical systems dating from the 1960s, in particular HVAC and fire suppression, plumbing, lighting, and security systems. These systems, at least in some cases insufficient or threatening failure, were cited along with other maintenance issues as a part of the National Trust's justification for calling Independence Hall "Endangered." This is the first phase of a ten year Park-wide project.

According to the Vitetta Group HVAC documents submitted for this meeting, the Independence Hall proposal calls for the maintenance of 70° F and 50% relative humidity (RH), renewing the two air handler units in the cellar, and placing a new air handler in the Tower with ductwork running into the attic and new diffusers in the second floor ceiling. In Congress Hall, it is proposed to renew the existing air handlers in the cellar and attic and to have additional diffusers. In Old City Hall, the existing cellar air handler will be replaced and only a few modifications are recommended for the diffusers

Also proposed are new sprinkler systems with heads to be placed throughout the buildings. These alterations would serve to bring the buildings' mechanical systems into BOCA health and life safety code compliance. Some original material is proposed to be cut from a 1750's partition and brick wall, joists and truss members.

Upon a review of the volumes of documentation received from the Vitetta Group on 24 March, several general and specific questions were raised and submitted to Vitetta by Commission staff and Committee members. Some of those questions included:

1. What was the criteria for the temperature and humidity assumptions, and was there precedence given to either historic buildings or the historic furnishings?
2. Will the maintenance of a 70°/50% interior condition cause condensation on or in the wall or sash?
3. What are the project deadlines and are they sufficient for careful review?
4. Does the potential impact on the historic fabric of the buildings under this proposal suggest a less damaging proposal?

Given the importance of the project and the sheer amount of information to evaluate and digest, Mr. Tyler recommended that the Committee briefly discuss the proposal at this meeting and then reconvene at Independence Hall, tour the buildings, and hear the answers to the questions which have arisen.

Dr. Skarmas described the project as having been initiated by the Park three years ago with an evaluation of all buildings in the Park to identify areas of deficiency in building systems and non-compliance with contemporary building codes. The first part of Vitetta's project entailed evaluating structural conditions along with Keast & Hood, Structural Engineers. Keast & Hood submitted the findings of the structural evaluation and recommendations for seismic retrofit in a report and will present them in person to the Committee if so requested.

During the 1960's installation of the present mechanical system, a series of ducts were added and some historic fabric lost. The Vitetta Group's drawings demonstrate the impact to historic building fabric with their proposal. Ms. Batcheler commended the Vitetta Group for their thorough survey of the documentation and subsequent recording of the building's history graphically. She stated that these drawings would be useful for many generations.

The present mechanical system offers heating and cooling, but does not control humidity. Hydrothermograph readings taken in the buildings reveal wide swings in temperature and relative humidity with several spikes. According to Dr. Skarmas, the design of the present system has minimized the impact to historic fabric to a degree not possible today. Dr. Skarmas stated that contemporary building codes, including new ASHREA standard ventilation requirements, and the expected increase in visitation over the next 20-30 years, require a more substantial system. The new system has taken health code issues into consideration as well as the flexibility desired when dealing with both buildings and collections. Computer software is to be a part of the system in order to better balance interior and exterior temperature and relative humidity fluctuations. Dr. Skarmas explained that his team had given equal weight to the importance of the building and the interior artifacts in designing the systems. He proposed to describe the system and the criteria for its specifications at the site visit.

Ms. Matzkin stated that the contemporary building codes were written for contemporary office buildings, not historical buildings where people spend less than an hour inside. Additionally, the buildings' doors are often opened for long periods of time to allow the entry of tour groups, thereby allowing a good deal of air circulation. Ms. Matzkin noted that Interior Environmental Requirements in BOCA 90 requires that: "every building and structure hereafter erected and every building, room, or space which is changed in use shall be constructed to conform to the requirements of this article." The same passage appears in BOCA 93. According to a Department of Licenses and Inspections official contacted after this meeting, this clause exempts the buildings in question from conforming to the code.

Mr. Atkin inquired about the nature of the artifacts located within the buildings. Ms. Finelli stated that the building has been furnished with period furnishings to approximate the 18th century, with one chair and one inkwell original to the building. Ms. Finelli stated that, while the systems in historical museums have not been studied as closely as those in art museums, it is obvious that the specifications would not be the same and that some artifacts could not be accommodated; a wider range than a museum's standard 65°-75°F and 50-55% RH would be necessary. Additionally, the Park is interested in accommodating swings in temperature and relative humidity and to allow for these changes to occur gradually. Ms. Batcheler noted that this allowance for swing was not evident in Vitetta's documentation, but did appear in a letter submitted by the Park.

Mr. Atkin took issue with the 50% RH parameter, stating that such a level would certainly cause damage to building fabric, specifically with condensation within the very old brick and plaster walls, threatening the joist ends, the window sash, rotting the wooden structure of the building. Ms. Finelli noted that the Vitetta report recommends a more rigid system than the Park believes is required. Ms. Batcheler stated that she wondered what, for example, the interior RH should be on a dry winter day to avoid condensation on the sash. Dr. Skarmas stated that Vitetta's engineers were charged with designing a system which prevented interior condensation both on and within the wall. The engineers found that their system would follow this standard except for occasional condensation on window glass. This system would also allow for relative humidity as low as 25-30%.

Mr. Levy asked whether any consideration had been given to the impact of the expected increase in visitation on the fabric. Would tours be made larger? Mr. Brookover stated that the Park is considering extending the operating hours to include the early evening for visitation by Conventioneers. He agreed with Mr. Levy, however, that there is a maximum number of people who

can be accommodated and that the maximum number at any one time has already been reached. Dr. Skarmear stated that this maximum number has been taken into consideration in designing the air handling system, along with building and artifact considerations.

Congressional funding for this project hinges on it being out for bid by June 1, 1994, and under contract by September 30, 1994. Mr. Levy suggested that an extension on these deadlines should be sought so as not to rush this highly important project. The Committee members questioned the presentation by the Applicant of this immense project at such a late date. Mr. Tyler urged Dr. Skarmear to bring future phases of the project, such as A.D.A.-compliance design work, at a much earlier stage.

Ms. Batcheler stated that it is extremely important that the Committee and the Commission think about this project in the very long term. Describing, through first-hand knowledge, the 1960s alterations, Ms. Batcheler recounted the care taken to reduce the impact on the building fabric and the visual intrusion to visitors. She contrasted this with the very large air handlers that are proposed to be placed into the Independence Hall staircase, probably the grandest of 18th Century America. Mr. Atkin noted that this is not an issue of artifact and building being equal; the building is far more important than the furnishings in this case. Ms. Finelli stated that the Park has always recognized that fact and has never attempted to acquire anything that should be protected in an art museum environment. Mr. Tyler suggested that the Park consider acquiring good reproduction furniture if it is found that the environment necessary to protect historic furnishings sacrifices the building.

The Committee voted to reconvene at 10am on Sunday, 10 April 1994 at Congress Hall. The group will tour the building and the Vitetta Group will describe their resolution of the items questioned as a framework for discussion. Representatives from the Vitetta Group will include Mr. Skarmear and Mr. Jacobs as well as the engineers and the rest of the project team. Finally, the Vitetta Group will issue a written response to the questions raised in the Staff Recommendation.

NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Tyler announced that the Historical Commission had voted at its 380th Stated Meeting to admit a structural engineer to the Architectural Committee. Mr. Tyler submitted to the Committee that it recommend to the Commission the selection of Suzanne Pence, an historic preservation specialist at Keast & Hood. Ms. Pence's structural engineering experience includes the tower of Independence Hall, the Academy of Music, the Fairmount Waterworks, the Furness Library, the Edison House in NJ, and the steeple of Christ Church.

There being no further business, the Committee adjourned at 5:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,



Lori Plavin Salganicoff