

THE MINUTES OF THE 374th STATED MEETING OF THE
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

11 August 1993

City Council Caucus Room
Room 401 City Hall

Present

Wayne S. Spilove, Chairperson
David Brownlee, Ph.D., Architectural Historian
Susan Rabinovitch, Real Estate Developer
Louis Einhorn, Public Property
Scott Wilds, Department of Housing
Stephanie Wolf, Ph.D., Historian
Barbara Kaplan, Director, City Planning Commission
William Brown, Community Representative
Jim Cuorato, Dept. of Commerce

Richard Tyler, Historic Preservation Officer
Randal Baron, Preservation Planner
Ira Kauderer, Executive Secretary

Also

Lauren Archibald

THE MINUTES of the 373nd Meeting of the Philadelphia Historical
Commission held on 14 July 1993, Wayne S. Spilove,
Chairman.

THE REPORT of the Architecture Committee, 29 July 1993, Arlene
Matzkin, Chairperson.

Proposed Alterations

4717-21 E. Fisher's Lane: This proposal calls for alterations to the landscaping around an early 19th century residential building. The alterations include the addition of a parking lot, a putting area, a tee area, and a driving range. The Committee considered changes to the building itself at the April meeting. The entire property is being altered to become a golf course and driving range.

The applicants proposed constructing a two-story "tee-off" structure. This structure will be partially hidden from view from the private access road because it will stand in a depression in the landscape and behind a row of bushes.

The Committee voted unanimously to approve the landscaping alterations as presented. The Commission voted unanimously to

accept the recommendation of the Committee and approve these landscaping alterations.

325 South: This proposal involves illegal alterations to a fine and rare surviving turn-of-the-century storefront. The Committee considered limited alterations to this storefront at a meeting on 25 March 1993. In the March review, the architect discussed the possibility of altering the door to the store as well as changing the tiles in the floor of the entryway. After the meeting, the tenant of the store went ahead with other alterations not discussed in that meeting. These alterations were all done without a building permit. The exterior cornice, stained glass, transoms and side panels of the shopfront were covered with wood. The decorative exterior vestibule ceiling was encased in a drop ceiling as well as the tops of the visible decorative arches in the storefront. Bars were installed in the entry vestibule. The bulkhead was covered over hiding the tile floor and changing the ground plan of the storefront. Staff met with the tenant and architect on site to explain what should be done. Work continued even with a "stop work" order.

No representative of the owner appeared at the Committee meeting. The Committee unanimously voted to have the tenant remove the recent alterations and reveal the historic storefront which still exists. The Commission concurred and unanimously voted to approve the recommendation of the Architectural Committee.

2100 Mount Vernon Street: This proposal involves alterations to an intact circa 1855 storefront. The property, a three-story corner house, features an original ground floor storefront that wraps around the corner of 21st and Mt. Vernon Streets. The owner seeks to alter the storefront to reduce the commercial quality of the property. He believes that this will enhance the marketability of the property in the event he chooses to sell it at some time in the future. On Mt. Vernon Street this would involve removing the bracketed cornice and building a new wall in place of the old storefront. On 21st Street the plan involves closing in and altering the windows by creating brick piers on one side and filling in the bottom of the windows with bead board panels. The front doors which are now slightly recessed would be brought flush and the transom would be altered. Planters would be attached to the area below the windows.

Though the applicant had been told by a previous owner of the building that the storefront dated from the 1920s, an insurance survey in Commission files confirms that it dates from 1855, the probable construction date for this building. The Committee questioned whether the proposed demolition of the historic storefront would actually increase the value or marketability of the property in the future. Mr. Baron stated that if the owner wished to eliminate the large ground floor windows he could do so by an interior scheme that would wall off

the interior space while retaining the historic fabric outside.

The Committee unanimously voted to deny the applicant's proposal. The staff expressed a willingness to work with the owner to come to a mutually satisfactory alternative scheme. At the Commission meeting Ms. Kaplan stated that she believed that the notion that the building would be more valuable with a more residential appearance was too speculative to support this application. Dr. Brownlee added that intact mid-19th century storefronts in good condition are rare and valuable additions to the City's neighborhoods. The Commission unanimously voted to approve the recommendation of the Committee against acceptance of this proposal.

Logan Hall, University of Pennsylvania: Logan Hall is an 1870s building faced with badly deteriorated green serpentine stone. Over the years this stone has been repaired by applying stucco and, alternatively, replaced with cast stone. This proposal calls for full depth replacement of the stone with cast stone on the majority of the surface of all exterior walls. Portions of the walls will be patched with an aggregate that contains a green stone that will closely match the other portions in color. In areas where modern strip windows had been installed, piers are being built to create vertical windows which more closely match the character of the existing windows. Other windows and doors will be replaced in wood to approximate the originals. Because of structural problems, chimneys are being and have been removed without permits. Some of these are to be rebuilt as non-working chimneys. Nick Gianopoulos explained the structural problems of the building that very nearly led to an application for demolition of the building.

The Committee voted unanimously to approve the University's proposal to renovate Logan Hall. The Commission voted to approve the recommendation of the Committee. Dr. Brownlee abstained from the vote.

Reading Terminal/Convention Center/Train Shed: This application involves changing the dividing wall between the grand court and the ball room area from all glass, to one where areas of about 16 feet by 8 feet at either side would be of dry wall. The Committee recalled that the whole basis of the approval of the curtain wall is that it would be transparent.

As an integral part of the design of this important space, the Committee strongly and unanimously recommended that the wall be constructed completely of glass as originally conceived. At the Commission meeting members agreed that this glass wall is one of the most important contributions of the Commission to the design and should remain a part of the project.

Ms. Matzkin reviewed the discussion of the Committee on several issues presented by Mr. Tyler: the sputnik lights in City Hall, the removal of the third floor addition to Belmont Mansion and the issue of mismatched brick in the rear wall of the Reading Terminal Train Shed.

1. The Committee agreed that as part of the ongoing restoration of City Hall one "sputnik light" may be removed. The Committee requested that more information be provided before they consider the removal of the three remaining lamps.

Mr. Einhorn reported that the Department of Public Property has been considering ways to introduce more light into the lobby of the Municipal Services Building, now undergoing renovation. The architects for the MSB renovation have come up with no satisfactory solution up to this point. Mr. Einhorn suggested that since the lights and the building are of the same era, 1950s to 1960s, and were both designed by architect Vincent Kling, perhaps a solution to both problems would be to install the sputnik lights in MSB.

Dr. Brownlee recalled that the Commission discussed this issue at a previous meeting when David Hollenberg chaired the Architectural Committee. The consensus of the Commission at that time was to retain the sputnik lights. Mr. Wilds concurred that the lights had value and were worthy of preservation. Mr. Tyler added that this issue would come back to the Commission as work on City Hall progressed.

2. The Committee reaffirmed their decision that the third floor of Belmont Mansion should be removed to restore the building's structural integrity and original appearance. The new construction should have some subtle architectural treatment to have it read as added and not original fabric.

Mr. Tyler presented the issue to the Commission. The staff received a petition to re-examine this issue from the women's group that has been leasing Belmont Mansion since the 1980s. The letter alleged that in allowing the removal of the added third floor of the Mansion, the Committee and Commission ignored Secretary of the Interior Standards and the contribution of women and African-Americans to the history of the City. Though the women's group referenced written material about the contributions of women and African-Americans to the nation, Mr. Tyler noted that the letter failed to associate any of these events with Belmont Mansion. Mr. Tyler added that the structural problems and threat to the original portion of the building posed by the poorly built 19th century addition also militates in favor of its removal.

2. The Arch Street wall of the Reading Terminal Trainshed has been repaired using new orange brick. Above a stone belt course

this has resulted in a discordant juxtaposition of old and new brick. The Committee agreed that below the belt course the wall should remain completely of original brick. Above the belt course the old brick can be removed and the wall may be rebuilt using all new brick. The Commission agreed with the Committee and added that if the upper part of the wall is rebuilt in new brick the old bricks should be salvaged to repair the lower section.

OLD BUSINESS

THE REPORT of the Committee on Historic Designation, 23 April 1993, David Brownlee, Chairperson.

Proposed Designation

Germantown Town Hall
5928 Germantown Avenue
John Penn Brock Sinkler, architect
1923

Dr. Brownlee outlined three areas of significance for this building: architectural style, government/politics and architect.

City architect John Sinkler produced the design for this prominent local landmark by combining the forms of several historic buildings. For his Town Hall, Sinkler turned not to Colonial models, but to precedents of the 1830s. Strickland's Greek Revival Merchants Exchange building at 2nd & Walnut Streets provided the general form of the Town Hall, a domed semi-circular building with a tower and a rectangular office block behind. Instead of using Strickland's tower which derived from an ancient Greek source, Sinkler turned to New York's old City Hall by John McComb of 1804-12. That building's tower in turn derived from the tower of St. George's Church of 1713 in London. This emulation of historic precedent is consistent with the type of classical revival that produced the Free Library/Family Court buildings on the Parkway, based on Paris's Place de la Concorde Buildings, and the Museum of Art, based on Greek Temple models. This contrasts to a second type of classical revival expressed by the more abstract and freer works of Paul Cret and Zantinger, Borie & Medary.

A second area of significance for the Town Hall is that of government and politics. Sinkler served as City Architect for four years in the 1920s. During that time he produced scores of police stations, fire houses and recreation centers as part of a broad City program to provide amenities for City residents. Town Hall was built in part as part of reform Mayor J. Hampton Moore's program to get City offices out of rented space. The Town Hall also reflects the perceived independence of Germantown as a community, which has persisted to an extent from 1854, when the

formerly independent area was consolidated into the City of Philadelphia. The present Town Hall replaced one built during Consolidation, at a time when once independent towns undertook public works projects knowing the cost would soon be borne by the enlarged City.

Town hall possesses added significance because of its design by Philadelphia architect John Sinkler. Sinkler was trained at the University of Pennsylvania and the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. During the time he designed Town Hall he was involved with several important historic preservation projects including the restoration of Independence Hall. He worked as City architect at a time when there was a great volume of work and much debate over the merit of having a self-sufficient in-house architectural department.

The Commission voted unanimously to accept the recommendation of the Designation Committee and add the Germantown Town Hall to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.

ARCHEOLOGICAL QUESTIONNAIRE from Lauren Archibald.

Lauren Archibald presented a series of questions to the Commission concerning the relationship of archeology to historic preservation in Philadelphia.

Mr. Tyler recalled that in the past the Commission Staff included a full-time archeologist. The initial idea was for this archeologist to produce an overlay of maps of the City showing the location of known and potential archeological sites. A project at what is now the Hertz parking lot arose and occupied much of the time of this Staff member instead. The Commission has designated one important site based on its archeological merit: the Catto House site at 814 South Street.

Outside of local designation, section 106 of the Historic Preservation Law provides that archeological investigations be undertaken when projects receive federal money. The investigation and documentation of the First African Baptist Church Cemetery at Vine Street was a product of this type of section 106 review.

Given the resources available to the Commission it seems unlikely that the Commission staff will include an archeologist in the foreseeable future. Commission members agreed, however, that because archeology remains an important consideration the Commission should consider adding an archeologist as a Commission member.