

# ON THE WEST SIDE

THE UNIVERSITY CITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



July/August 2020

<http://www.uchs.net>

Joseph Minardi, Editor

## UCHS Message Regarding Black Lives Matter

The University City Historical Society condemns racism in all its forms. We realize that too often the established environment itself reflects racism. University City and West Philadelphia are not immune to the effects of exclusionary and racist value systems. Our Board of Governors therefore want to unequivocally state:

**Black Lives Matter.**  
**Black History Matters.**  
**Black Stories Matter.**

UCHS commits to listening to and amplifying Black narratives in our West Philadelphia neighborhoods. We are reaching out to local partners to support the Black heritage woven into the fabric of our community. UCHS is committed to short- and long-term initiatives such as these:

- Sponsoring Pennsylvania State Historical Markers of importance to the Black community, e.g. the Black Bottom neighborhood
- Supporting legacy businesses, particularly along historically Black commercial corridors
- Advocating for the adaptive use of existing buildings for BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Color) endeavors
- Programming to uncover the intangible history embedded in our neighborhoods
- Partnering with other neighborhood organizations
- Committing to a diversification of our board

Above all, we recognize that the name of our organization was born of a time when West Philadelphia was in the throes of urban renewal, including Black Bottom, a middle-class Black enclave virtually decimated by the purposeful growth of local institutions. A portion of our very name, University City, is itself part of the erasure of established Black neighborhoods. This is something we deeply regret as we commit to revisiting the name of our own organization. As we begin down a path to be more consciously inclusive of West Philadelphia's history, we will engage and work with as many of our neighbors as possible. With better days ahead, we remember that our success as a community depends on everyone having a place at the table and a voice in the proceedings.

## UCHS Virtual House Tour, Episodes 2, 3 and 4

The UCHS is thrilled to announce that three new installments of our Virtual House Tour series are online. In episode two we take a behind the scenes look at the Calvert Household on Baltimore Avenue. Heather Calvert shows us the beautiful details of her late-Victorian house and shares the challenges of owning an old home. The renovations and upkeep can be quite expensive but it's all worth it when you have such a wonderful outcome. Heather also takes us to her garden area, a fine urban oasis away from the hustle and bustle of Baltimore Avenue.

In episode three we take a look at the home of David Ade and Paul Steinke in the Garden Court neighborhood. Paul Steinke shares the history of his home and of Garden Court. Paul's home of over two decades was built by Clarence R. Siegel in 1921 as part of the Garden Court development. At the time of their construction these houses were advertised as "Siegel's Artistic Homes." Paul also displays the tasteful furnishings on display and his unique collection of antique radios.

In the fourth installment we check out the home of Roy Harker and Bob Ranando in the Chester-Regent Historic District. Their house was built in 1889 from plans by Willis G. Hale. Roy describes the renovations of the house from the days it was a woman's fraternity. Luckily enough of the house's original features were left intact for us to enjoy today.

Please visit our **YouTube Channel** to see these episodes and our other interesting videos. And don't forget to hit the subscription button.

[https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC9Eu1GycpvopB4Wbt570QfQ/videos?view\\_as=subscriber](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC9Eu1GycpvopB4Wbt570QfQ/videos?view_as=subscriber)



Screenshots from episode 2 (top) and episode 3 (bottom).

# Pennsylvania Historical Markers in West Philadelphia

## African American History

### Laura Wheeler Waring, 756 N. 43rd Street

"Laura Wheeler Waring (1887-1948) A Black portraitist who lived here, Waring studied art in this city and in France. She headed the Art Department at Cheyney State College, and her works are part of the National Portrait Gallery and other major collections."



Ms. Waring studied with Thomas Anschutz and William Merritt Chase at Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Ms. Waring's portraits include this one of Philadelphia's own Marion Anderson.

### First African Baptist Church, 6700 Lansdowne Avenue

"Founded in 1809, it is one of the first black Baptist Churches in America and the oldest in PA. In 1832, two members, John and Samuel Bivins, sold themselves into slavery to free an enslaved man, James Burroughs, to serve as pastor. After a year, Burroughs paid the slaveowner and the Bivinses were freed. F.A.B. members helped found Downingtown Industrial School and many Philadelphia-area churches. Booker T. Washington spoke at the church centennial."



Since 1957, the home of First African Presbyterian has been in this 1912 Gothic Revival Church designed originally by noted architect Charles Bolton for Emmanuel Presbyterian Church.

### Freedom Now Rally, 40th Street at Haverford & Lancaster

"On August 3, 1965, Dr. Martin Luther King addressed a crowd of 10,000 at this intersection. His 'Freedom Now' tour to Philadelphia, Chicago, Cleveland, and Boston was in gratitude for support given to his Southern Christian Leadership Conference. King brought his message into northern Black neighborhoods, supporting local civil rights efforts and raising funds. His goal was to empower the formation of a coalition to address their common concerns." King's message was a spiritual one: "I come here from the front lines of the civil rights movement in the South to tell you, 'You are somebody.' Let us have a sense of somebodiness. Don't let anybody make you think you are not somebody."



Three days later, Dr. King stood next to President Johnson as the latter sang the Voting Rights Act.

### First African Presbyterian Church, 4159 W. Girard Avenue

"Founded in 1807 by John Gloucester, a former slave who was instrumental in establishing Presbyterianism among African Americans. First edifice was dedicated 1811 at 7th & Bainbridge Streets. Church has been at this location since 1957."



The congregation is located in the 1912 Gothic Revival church originally designed by Charles Bolton for the Emmanuel Presbyterian Church.

### Paul Robeson House, 4951 Walnut Street

"A Rutgers athlete and Columbia law graduate, Robeson won renown as a singer and actor. He was a noted interpreter of Negro spirituals. His career suffered because of his political activism, and he lived his last years here in retirement."



The large twin is now the home of a neighborhood cultural center.

### Muhammad's Temple of Islam #12, 4218 Lancaster Avenue

"Pennsylvania's first Nation of Islam place of worship. Former home of the African American Muslim community of Philadelphia during the 1950s and 1960s under the leadership of Elijah Muhammad. Malcolm X and Imam Wallace D. Muhammad were administrators and teachers here."



### MOVE Bombing, Cobbs Creek Parkway at Osage Avenue

"On May 13, 1985, at 6221 Osage Avenue, an armed conflict occurred between the Philadelphia Police Department and MOVE members. A PA State Police helicopter dropped a bomb on MOVE's house. An uncontrolled fire killed eleven MOVE members, including five children, and destroyed 61 homes."



In 2016, sixth graders from West Philadelphia's Jubilee School gathered signatures to get a state historical marker to commemorate the event. Their mission included erecting the marker along Cobbs Creek Parkway so that it would be visible to more people and not turn a quiet residential street into a sideshow.

# A FEAST FOR THE EYES

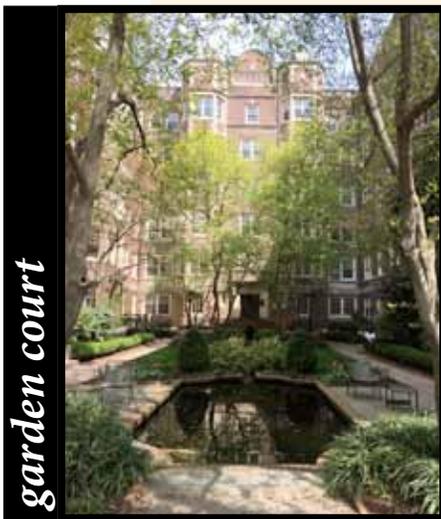
A photo essay of West Philadelphia by Paul Steinke

Continued from previous issue.

Left, 46th and Locust Streets; Middle, 47th and Baltimore Avenue; Right, 45th and Pine Streets.



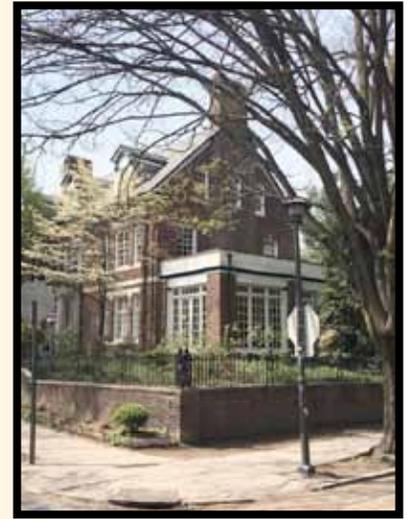
apartments



garden court



Left, Courtyard at Garden Court Condominiums; Middle, 4600 block of Osage Avenue; Right, 46th and Pine Streets.



## Ask the Experts

### BATHROOM TILE TROUBLE

**Q:** How can we clean the little white hexagonal tiles on our bathroom floor? We'd like to get the existing floor clean, without replacing the tiles.

**A:** The advantage (and disadvantages) of those old-fashioned tiles is that they are not glazed. This makes them non-slippery even when wet, but it also allows them to pick up stains. A good hands-and-knees scrubbing with detergent and household bleach mixed in hot water will improve the color of the tiles. Dingy tiles can be successfully bleached by just letting a strong solution of bleach and hot water sit on the tiles for an hour.

Dirty or deteriorated grout between the little tiles contributes to a dingy appearance. The grout can be brightened by washing with muriatic acid (from the hardware store), or, you may want to have the floor regouted.

From *The Old-House Journal*, February 1981.

## The Case of the Stolen Fences

As many of you are already well aware, there has been a rash of thefts in the neighborhood of vintage iron fences. The thieves even have the audacity to fence the purloined fences online (Craig's List, FB Marketplace, etc.). One of the victims of the thefts went to the Clifton Heights garage of the person who stole her fence. Unfortunately the police in Philadelphia and Delaware County were not interested in getting involved.

Equally unfortunate is the fact that this type of theft is not new to the area. As noted in a newsletter article from December of 1998 (which can be accessed through UCHS.net), wrought iron fences were a popular item for the taking in the past. There are a few things one can do to prevent theft. Thoroughly photo-document your gates and do whatever you can to secure them, even a bicycle lock on a piece of fence or a gate could be a sufficient (though temporary) solution.

Another deterrent to consider is motion detectors that emit a light when motion is detected near the front of your house.



## **Black Bottom: Gone but not forgotten**

The neighborhood once known as Block Bottom, or simply, The Bottom (not to be confused with Forgotten Bottom in South Philadelphia) was a predominately African-American section of West Philadelphia that was wiped out to due redevelopment efforts by local institutions in the 1960s and 1970s. How many people were displaced by these efforts varies widely depending on whom you ask. There is similar ambiguity as to the boundaries of the old neighborhood, but the generally agreed upon boundary was north of Penn's campus and south of Powelton and Mantua (see mural quote at end of article).

As early as September 1950 this area was targeted for major redevelopment by the University of Pennsylvania in what was called University Redevelopment Area Plan, in which about 3,000 dwellings were slated for demolition, to be replaced by apartments, commercial structures and institutional development. It is estimated that at least 2,500 residents were displaced in the process, although some sources estimate the number to be as much at four times that amount. While Penn saw this as a federally funded "urban renewal" program, the residents of Black Bottom saw it quite differently: "slum clearance."

Black Bottom residents were among the first to be uniformly displaced by the creation of the Science Center on a site regarded as the center of Black Bottom, a parcel of land consisting of 105 acres of land along Market Street between Penn and Drexel University. This displacement of over 520 families triggered a march by over 200 Penn students on December 6, 1968, demanding that the Science Center provide housing for people whose homes were destroyed. In the end the Science Center agree to give up 2.5 acres of land along the 3900 block of Market Street for low-income housing.

The former residents of this close-knit neighborhood formed the Black Bottom Association in 1984 and meet at an

annual picnic on the last Sunday in July at Belmont and Park-side Avenues.

In addition, On March 25th, 1999, the Council of the City of Philadelphia designated the last Sunday of August as Black Bottom Day in Philadelphia, "in fitting tribute to the great history and legacy of this great and historic community"

Though the families may have been physically displaced, spiritually the former residents of the Black Bottom remain united.



*Photos of the demolition of Black Bottom, circa 1970. Courtesy of Bob Weidenbacker.*

*A mural of Black Bottom at University City High School reads;  
The Black Bottom was a predominately African-American community that once existed between 32nd and 40th Street and between Walnut Street and Lancaster Avenue. Within these boundaries was a community based on loyalty and respect... Even today, the community still meets every year on the last Sunday in August for the Black Bottom reunion at Fairmount Park. It is the largest neighborhood gathering in the history of Philadelphia.*

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