

# ON THE WEST SIDE

THE UNIVERSITY CITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



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<http://www.uchs.net>

Joseph Minardi, Editor

## Preservation Updates

The **Chester-Regent Historic District** and **4100 Haverford Avenue** (West Philadelphia Railway Company Depot) were recommended for designation by the Committee for Historic Designation on April 17. The nominations will now move to the full Commission for final review on May 10. If approved by the Commission they will be added to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The Chester-Regent Historic District consists of 41 houses designed by Willis G. Hale. The houses are mostly twins and were meant to be suburban homes for Philadelphia's expanding middle and upper-middle class during the late-1800s. The time frame for construction of these exquisite dwellings was from between 1889 to 1892. All 41 houses share common building materials and distinguishing characteristics of the Queen Anne style. This would be to date the largest grouping of homes to be protected in a historic district in University City at one single time.

A special thanks goes to UCHS Vice-President Jennifer Loustau for putting this nomination together and the support of Laura DiPasquale of the Philadelphia Historical Commission. This is the first time that Jennifer worked on a nomination, and it should serve as a shining example to the concerned citizen that you can do it too.

The **West Philadelphia Railway Company Depot** at 4100 Haverford Avenue was built in 1876 and was inextricably linked to the formation of streetcar lines during the nineteenth century. "The first and most significant streetcar company in West Philadelphia," according to the nomination. It was nominated by the University City Historical Society and written by Oscar Beisert.

The **Trolley Barn** at 41st and Chestnut Streets has been recently added to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. A special thanks goes to our intern Annie Albert and Oscar Beisert for writing this successful nomination.

**St. Francis de Sales Church** on 47th and Springfield Avenue (4625 Springfield Avenue) has requested a continuance at the April 17th meeting for a future hearing. The continuance was granted and the matter is next to be considered at the September Committee for Historic Designation meeting. The church contains stained glass by Nicola D'Ascenzo and a tiled dome by Rafeal Guastavino. The nominator was Corey Loftus of Bryn Mawr.

The Philadelphia Register of Historic Places protects properties from being torn down.



*A view of Chester Avenue, part of the Chester-Regent District. Photo by Joseph Minardi.*

## PROFILES IN ARCHITECTURE

### *Minerva Parker Nichols*

Minerva Parker Nichols (1863-1949) was a pioneering female architect, originally from Chicago, who made her claim to fame working in Philadelphia in the late-nineteenth century into the early-twentieth century.



Nichols was the granddaughter of Seth A. Doane, a well-known ship builder and architect. During her childhood her mother was closely associated with her father, not only in study but in practical work, which no doubt made an impression on young Minerva.

After an early education at St. Joseph's Convent in Dubuque, IA, Nichols took up study in the School of Design, the Industrial Art School, and studied painting under Victorian artist George C. Lambdin (1830-96). She received her four-year diploma in architecture from the Franklin Institute Drawing School in 1885, receiving honorable mention. Upon graduation Nichols worked in the office of architect Frederick G. Thorne, eventually heading up his old office at 14 South Broad Street upon his death in 1888. Miss Parker received many commissions for work, mostly for residences (which she intended to be a speciality of hers) and many of those were for female clients.

The young architect quickly made a positive impression on her male counterparts, receiving glowing praise and well wishes.

*"... Words of encouragement and good fellowship have at all times been freely extended, both by the public in general and her fellow architects. Such facts as these, more than anything else, afford convincing proof that a position is waiting for every woman just as soon as she makes herself capable of filling it."*

-The Philadelphia Real Estate and Builders Guide, March 26, 1890

Minerva Parker won the international competition for the Queen Isabella Pavilion at the World's Columbian Exposition in 1893 in her hometown of Chicago. Although her design was never built, the publicity helped to raise her profile, both in Philadelphia and on a national level. She also lectured on historic ornament and classical architecture at the Woman's School of Design, an antecedent of the Moore College of Art.

Miss Parker married Reverend William J. Nichols of the Unitarian Church. Together they moved to Brooklyn, after which Mrs. Nichols curtailed her work as an architect, restricting commissions to friends and relatives. At the time of her death she was supervising construction of a house she designed for one of her daughters.

Minerva Parker Nichols was only the second woman in America to have a lucrative career as an architect (Louis Blanchard Bethune being the first). Although her career wasn't long, her impact on the then male-dominated field of architecture was of great benefit to woman designers of a later generation.

*"Energy and push, generally meet with success, and as there is every evidence that she possesses both, the latter is evidently within grasp."*

-The Philadelphia Real Estate and Builders Guide, March 26, 1890

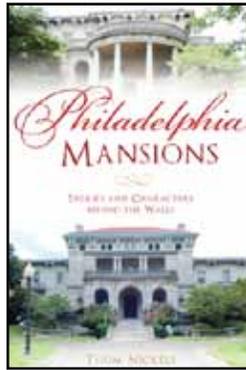
# UCHS Recommended Reading: Philadelphia Mansions: Stories and Characters Behind the Walls

We know that UCHS members love to read about our neighborhood's rich history, and when a good book comes along, we'll make a recommendation for addition to your library.

For this issue we'd like to thank Thom Nickels for letting us interview him about his new book, *Philadelphia Mansions: Stories and Characters Behind the Walls*. Thom is an author, a columnist, and a fiction writer who has published four novels.

**UCHS:** What inspired you to write the book, "Philadelphia Mansions: Stories and Characters Behind the Walls"?

**Thom Nickels:** That happened because of a recommendation from the editorial board of The History Press. Initially I wanted to do a book on the Loch Aerie estate in Frazer, Chester County. I grew up near Loch Aerie, a blue limestone Victorian mansion designed by Addison Hutton in 1865. Its owner was William E. Lockwood, the chief manufacturer of the men's paper collar, although the actual paper collar for men was invented by a woman in Troy, New York. Lockwood's estate encompassed 600-plus acres in the 1880s; he had his own post office and his own train station. The Gilded Age comes to the wilds of Chester County! Lockwood and his brother, E. Dunbar, were 19th century Chester County notables although they were not blueblood Philadelphians per se. The poet James Whitcomb Riley would often stay there during his national poetry tours. The story of this house proved too narrow a concept for a book, so it was suggested that I expand the idea to include many other mansions in the region. *Philadelphia Mansions* was never meant to be a bricks-and-mortar architectural guidebook but, as the title suggests, the stories of the people who lived in these houses. The Lockwood mansion, for instance, fell into disarray for a number of decades and provided living space for a motorcycle gang called the Warlocks. There was a shooting in-



Cover, *Philadelphia Mansions*.

side the house. When I toured the house there were still motorcycle tracks on the floor of one of the upstairs rooms.

**UCHS:** What types of research were involved in the writing of the book?

**TN:** As a working journalist for a number of newspapers and magazines for many years, I have a pretty hefty archive of published interviews I did with architects, preservationists and others that came in handy when I began working on the book. Some of these pieces were published in *Metro Philadelphia* when I was that paper's architectural critic, and the revived *Evening Bulletin* (not the original newspaper) that was around for a few years beginning in 2009, I believe. Some were published in the *Philadelphia Free Press*. My 2005 book, *Philadelphia Architecture*, also served as a personal reference. I recorded all of these interviews initially, then transcribed them by hand. As individual assignments over a five to ten year period, the painstaking aspects of transcribing them wasn't so bad, but I can't imagine what it would have been like if I had had to transcribe them all

at once rather than as separate assignments. Had I not been a working journalist all along, that's probably what I would have been forced to do. Other resources included my rather large library of old books. There were also the usual Amazon purchases and the hunt for old tomes in bookstores that specialize in out-of-print stuff. The Library Company of Philadelphia was also valuable, as was the Chester County Historical Society, especially when it came to researching Loch Aerie. I think I'm well read in Catholic-Vatican II issues, so this knowledge was useful in the sections that reference modern Catholic Church architecture.

*To be continued in next issue.*

## The Many Ways To Say... "Porch"

*Continued from previous issue.*

**Portico:** The roofed space, usually open on three sides, forming the entrance and centerpiece of the facade of a temple, house or church. It has columns and a pediment. A portico can be further defined by the number of columns; e.g., a "tetrastyle portico" has four columns. The term should be restricted to classical architecture and buildings based on classical models..

**Stoop:** A small porch platform or staircase leading to the main entrance of a house or building. The term derives from the Dutch "stoep" (for step). Used mainly in the northeast U.S.

**Umbria or Umbrage:** From the Latin word meaning literally "that which offers shade." Victorians occasionally used this term instead of "porch" or "verandah" to show their familiarity with classical Italy.

**Verandah:** Verandahs (like balconies, pyjamas, candy and serendipity, and the French douane) came originally from Persian, which was the language of administration in India under the Mughal Empire (starting c. 1500), and continued under the British until the 1830s, when they changed it to Urdu and English. The word "verandah," which denoted a roofed, open gallery or balcony extending along the outside of a building, and which is designed for outdoor living in hot weather. The word was transplanted to England where it was applied most often to an open gallery with a roof carried on light metal supports that ran across the front of a building. With its emphasis on warm weather leisure, the "verandah" should be applied to any gallery extending across two or more side of a building. A gallery extending across one full side can be called a "verandah" or "porch." Any gallery that is less than a full side of a house or building is best called a "porch."

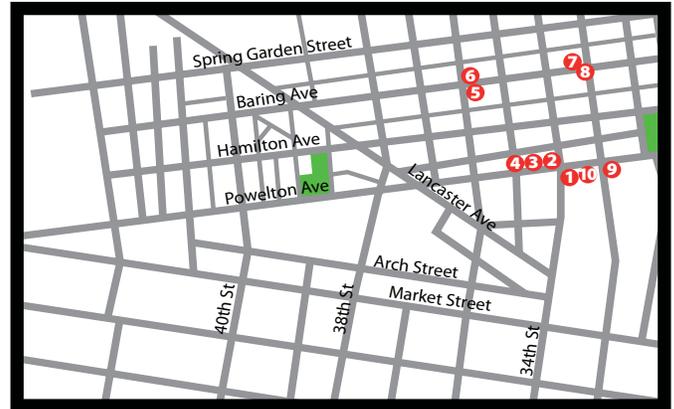
From *The Old-House Journal*, August 1981.

## UCHS Summer Intern

The UCHS is pleased to announce our summer intern for 2019 will be Yujia Zhang. Yujia is from China and is attending the University of Pennsylvania in the Historic Preservation program. While performing her duties as intern, she will be assisting our organization in the nomination writing process.

# University City Historic Architecture Walks: Powelton

Powelton Village is named after the Powel family who were involved in this village on the west bank of the Schuylkill as far back as the 17th century. Samuel Powell, mayor of Philadelphia through the transition from colony to nation, built a “country seat” in 1779 and named it Powelton. A grand classical mansion, Powelton lasted over one hundred years before being torn down, but the name stuck to the neighborhood. Most of the homes date to the late 19th century, the period following the 1876 Centennial Exposition in Fairmount Park when millions traveled through the area and many decided to settle on the lovely west bank of the Schuylkill.



1. Starting from Sabrina’s Café at 227-229 N. 34th Street let’s talk about the building that houses Sabrina’s and the Ross Commons. It’s the Maximilian Riebeck House, an 1890 Queen Anne built for an executive of the Pennsylvania Railroad, his large family and large staff.

2. Kitty-corner to Sabrina’s, at 3401 Powelton Avenue, is the George Burnham Residence of 1886. The style is Richardsonian Romanesque, named for the architect Henry Hobson Richardson who excelled in stone construction.

3. Walk west one block. On the left -- or south side-- of Powelton is a row of townhouses, 3420 through 3432, the Poth Development Apartments. They wrap right around the corner and extend south on 35th Street. The architect for these houses was Willis G. Hale, best known as the architect of the Divine Lorraine Hotel on North Broad. Built in 1895, the style is Flemish Revival, so called for the gables that extend beyond the roofline. In particular, notice the ornate crescents in the gables and the plasterwork panels on units 3422, 3426, and 3428.

4. On the NE corner of Powelton and 35th is a Colonial Revival house, designed around 1890 by Hazelhurst and Huckle. Colonial Revival doesn’t look anything like Colonial, or Georgian, but it reinterprets classical elements such as the Palladian window, Doric columns, and the heavy architrave over the front entrance. Enjoy the playground and sitting park in the side yard of this house; it once was the site of a Renaissance mansion.

5. Head up 35th Street one block and turn left onto Baring Street. 3512 Baring Street is called the Patricius McManus Residence, a prominent Romanesque Revival building replete with a tower and battlements. Built in 1892, the Wilson Brothers designed it for a very successful general contractor who later moved on to an even bigger house.

6. Directly across the street is the Cochran House, designed by Wilson Eyre who also worked on the University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and on many Main Line and Chestnut Hill residences. This 1891 house in the Mediterranean style is a precursor of Frank Lloyd Wright’s oeuvre in the Prairie Style; they both emphasized the horizontal line, especially in the deep roof overhang. Turn right onto 36th. Go north to Hamilton Street and turn right. Enjoy the Italianate and Second Empire neighborhood. How do you know it’s Italianate? Lots of wooden brackets and porches, and beautiful floor-to-ceiling windows. And you can’t see the roof. If the third floor windows pop through the roof, it’s not Italianate, it’s Second Empire, a slightly later style.

7. Walk two blocks to 34th and turn right or south. At Baring Street turn left and walk east. 3308 – 3310 Baring Street is a brick Queen Anne. Note the original iron fence and posts in front of these houses.

8. On your right at the corner of Baring and 33rd is the Cornerstone Bed & Breakfast, a stone 1865 Victorian Gothic. As you turn the corner and head south on 33rd, notice some of the belvederes on the houses, that extra room at the top of a house where one could get a “beautiful view.”

9. At Powelton Avenue again, stop and take in the Frederick A. Poth Residence on the corner. It’s a red brick Queen Anne, designed by Albert W. Dilks in 1887 for the beer baron who also developed housing.

10. Turn around and see his development houses, 3301 through 3315 Powelton Street, designed by Otto C. Wolf. Poth was also the developer for the Hale apartments you saw on the 3400 block of Powelton and more apartments on the 3500 block of Powelton.

Walk west along Powelton and you’re back where you started at Sabrina’s Café.

## UCHS Oral History Project, Episode Number 3, the Molozniks

The UCHS has recently completed the third installment of our oral history project with an interview of Betty and Joe Moloznik, both of whom were once active UCHS members. The interview was conducted in March at their apartment. Betty and Joe had interesting stories to tell about their time in University City. You can watch the video by typing in University City Historical Society into YouTube and finding the UCHS YouTube Channel.

## Upcoming Events

The University City Historical Society will have a table at the Spruce Hill May Fair on **May 11th** at Clark Park starting at 12 noon. As usual, we will have a variety of items for sale and will be talking history with the neighbors. Stop on by our table and say “Hi!”

We will also have a table at the Baltimore Avenue Dollar Stroll on **June 6th** from 5:30 to 8:30. Our table will be set up outside of Calvary United Church on the Baltimore Avenue side. We will have many items available for sale. So come on by and see us on June 6th.



## University City Then & Now: 42nd St north of Locust



Courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Archives.



Photo by Joseph Minardi.

## Visit our YouTube Channel!

Check out the University City Historical Society's YouTube channel for great videos like our Oral History Project and UCHS updates and events. And be sure to click the subscribe button.



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## R.I.P. Donald Carter

West Philadelphian and activist Donald Carter passed away on Monday February 25, 2019, at age 69 from a sudden and massive heart attack. Mr. Carter was active in the Philadelphia gay community and was founder of the city's chapter of the Log Cabin Republicans. He was known to many around town as the "mayor of the Gayborhood." Donald loved attending the Valentine Awards Tea held by the University City Historical Society on February 10th, just two weeks before his passing. Donald loved and attended all kinds of events and will greatly missed by all Philadelphians.



Donald Carter in his signature suit and tie. Courtesy of Philadelphia Gay News.

## Ask the Experts

### WALLPAPER WOES

**Q:** Removing all the layers of wallpaper in my house is proving to be very difficult because there is a top layer of green enamel paint over them. What is the best way to get through this top layer and at the wallpaper?

**A:** There are two approaches which you should consider. The first is to scratch the surface thoroughly with very coarse sandpaper, or else slash a grid of cuts into the surface with a knife or razor. Then wet down the surface to loosen the wallpaper. It'll take you a while, but you'll get it all off this way. The other method is to attack the surface with a special wallpaper scraper -the paint won't faze it. Hyde tools makes a "Wallpaper Shaver," as does Red Devil.

From *The Old-House Journal* June 1981,