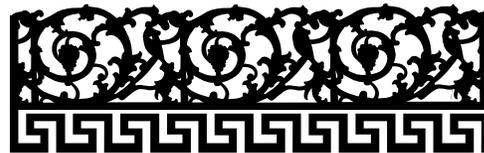


ON THE WEST SIDE

THE UNIVERSITY CITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



May/June 2019

<http://www.uchs.net>

Joseph Minardi, Editor

UCHS is updating our membership renewal system!

The Board of Governors is pleased to announce that we are updating how members can join or renew with the University City Historical Society at www.uchs.net.

Although we may be an historical society, we refuse to remain stuck in the past. Our antiquated system of paper renewals is no longer an effective or efficient means of maintaining our membership database, and as such, we will be switching to a digital platform. By doing so, UCHS will be able to utilize resources more efficiently, reach a broader audience, and provide better service to our members. We anticipate being able to dramatically increase our membership while better publicizing our events and the important work of our organization.

Member Benefits

The University City Historical Society has been an active champion of historic preservation throughout West Philadelphia. Benefits of being a member of UCHS include:

- Discounts to UCHS events, such as walking tours and house tours
- Receipt of our fabulous bi-monthly newsletter, *On the West Side*
- Invitation to our annual Valentine's Tea and Awards Ceremony
- Access to our Contractor's List for services such as porch restoration, masonry repairs, window restoration, as recommended by fellow UCHS members.
- Support for the preservation of the incredible built environment of West Philadelphia

Your membership also helps support these important initiatives:

- Nominations of properties to the Philadelphia Historic Register (UCHS has sponsored more than 50 properties on listing to the local register!). These nominations frequently require the expertise of consultants, which we hire for service.
- Oral History Project. See more at www.uchs.net or by searching "University City Historical Society" at www.youtube.com.
- Recognition for property owners who make improvements to their properties through our Gift to the Street and Outstanding Preservation Awards
- Advocacy of our built environment and historic preservation through governmental agencies, local Civic Associations, and area developers.
- Promotion of our work at events such as the annual Spruce Hill May Fair and Baltimore Avenue Dollar Stroll

What does this mean for you?

All members due for renewal with active email addresses on file will be receiving an invitation to renew their memberships via email. If you receive this invitation from UCHS, we encourage you to follow the instructions to renew your membership online. Doing so will take you to our new membership page hosted by an online membership tool called Wild Apricot. By using this tool, we can ensure that online renewals are done securely and safely.

If you have any questions about this process, or have difficulty renewing online, please reach out to us at info@uchs.net and we will be happy to assist you.

While we roll out this system, we will still be offering the option for members to renew the old way via USPS and check. For those without email addresses on file, this will continue to be our means of reaching you. Renewal forms will also include information for renewing online. Moving forward, paper renewals will only be offered as an option for those who opt in by checking the appropriate box on the renewal form.

Notice of Rate Increase

Additionally, UCHS has not updated our membership rates in over a decade. Rates will increase on September 1, so by renewing now, you will be able to lock in the current rate for the next 12 months. As of September 1st, our membership rates will be available in the following tiers:

Student/Senior: \$20

Individual: \$25

Household: \$35

Friend: \$75 (free tote bag)

Patron: \$125 (free tote bag and complimentary tickets to UCHS tours)

Business: \$250 (advertising in *On the West Side*)

If you are not yet up for renewal, but would like to renew these rates, please visit www.uchs.net and click the "Join Us" button.

Thank you!

To our loyal members, we offer our sincere appreciation for continuing to support the University City Historical Society. We couldn't do what we do without your support. Thank you!

University City Historical Society



The UCHS will be hosting a house tour on Saturday, October 19th featuring buildings that have been added to the local Register of Historic Properties. Tickets will be \$25 for UCHS members and \$35 for non-members. Look for further details about the house tour in the next issue of *On The West Side*.

Errata

In the print edition of the March/April newsletter it was erroneously stated that St. Francis de Sales Church was approved by the Committee for Historic Designation at the April 17th meeting. In fact the matter was not heard because St. Francis de Sales requested a continuance which was granted. The nomination is next to be heard at the September Committee for Historic Designation meeting. This correction was made for the online edition.

Also author Thom Nickels name was misspelled in the print edition but corrected in the online edition.

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.

Thom Nickels, an author, a columnist, and fiction writer, talks about his most recent book. Here is part two of the interview, continued from the previous issue of *On The West Side*.

UCHS: What was the most surprising fact (or facts) you uncovered while researching the book?

Thom Nichols: The history of the historic Morris House at 225 South Eighth Street (now the M Hotel and restaurant) surprised me. I hadn't known that the house best represents what the original Presidents House looked like when Philadelphia was the capital of the nation. The Morris House, of course stands in direct contrast to what poses as the Presidents House—that modernist skeletal structure near Independence Hall that looks like a Septa wait station for Frankford-Market El passengers. Another surprise for me—but this was more of a personal surprise-- had to do with my architect grandfather, Frank V. Nickels, who was assigned the task (from the Archdiocese of Philadelphia) of making a deal with Howard Hughes about purchasing the land for Nazareth Hospital in northeast Philadelphia. Hughes owned the land so the hope was that he would offer the Archdiocese a discount but apparently he was so taken with the Nazareth design he donated the land for free.

In researching Loch Aerie I happened on a story about how the poet James Whitcomb Riley got lost in Center City during one of his poetry tours and couldn't find his way back to his hotel. Then there was the fight that E. Dunbar Lockwood got into at the Union League. Research into the McIlhenny mansion on Rittenhouse Square led me to James Lord's fascinating essay on Henry McIlhenny in his book, *A Gift for Admiration*. Then there was Mother and Father Divine's Woodmont mansion on the Main Line, and how Mother Divine ordered Jim Jones of Jonestown infamy and a number of his followers off mansion property when Jones announced that Mother Divine's followers should join the Peoples Temple because he now carried Father Divine's "mantle."

UCHS: Is there one particular takeaway readers should have from the book?

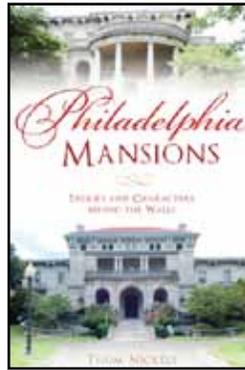
TN: I like to play on that quote in Scripture, "In my Father's House there are many mansions," because there are many different types of mansions in the book. I also expand the definition of the word mansions to include houses where extraordinary events occurred or where extraordinary individuals lived, such as the Walt Whitman house in Camden, so this would be a very unorthodox type of mansion. I suppose if you are an extreme ideological fan of barren modernist architecture, you would find many things in my book to object to. Then again, the book may help you to soften your views a bit.

UCHS: Can you tell us a little about your upbringing?

TN: I grew up in Drexel Hill and then Frazer, Pennsylvania. Manayunk was the town where my great grandparents settled after migrating from Dusseldorf, Germany. We were a family of burgermeisters. My great grandfather was a green grocer and owned a store near Baker Street. He later became the head of the Manayunk Business Man's Association and was appointed by President Theodore Roosevelt to head the local Draft Board. He built the Nickels Building on Main Street which

was where Manayunk residents heard the announcement that all of the town's mills were closing. This was at the beginning of the Great Depression. On Saturday nights the dance parties held in the Nickels Building shocked the local Methodist community, so for a time the family name became associated with libertine decadence. I'm happy to say that the Nickels Building on Main Street still stands.

Frazer in the 1960s was Andrew Wyeth country. My family's large split level home was right up against a cow pasture; down the street was a big red barn where we'd play in the hay lofts and look at the horses. As kids we would hike to Valley Forge or walk along dead railroad tracks to a quarry that had a lake for swimming and a "mountainous" like area that to a kid seemed like a taste of Wyoming. In the fall the Mennonite farmer who owned the barn would put up scarecrows. We spent many a summer's day trying to find our way out of the corn maze. There was a golf course nearby so we often sold lemonade on little red wagons to golfers.



Cover, *Philadelphia Mansions*.

UCHS: Do you have a favorite building in Philadelphia?

TN: That would be the Bell Atlantic Building. This building has a rich, world class feel to it, unlike the new Comcast tower which seemed to look better on the drafting board than it looks in reality. Initially I think Comcast II was supposed to have a tall thin graceful spire that didn't "punch" the sky the way the present Sponge Bob Squarepants computer plug "spire" does. The best skyscraper plan for the city was the never built 1,500-foot-high American Commerce Center, slated to be taller than the Empire State Building. The project was lauded as iconic and breathtaking, designed by architects Gene Kohn and Bill Louie of Kohn Pedersen Fox Architects. I go into this project at some length in *Philadelphia Mansions*. Mention should be made of the old Penn Center complex built in the 1950s and especially the Vincent Kling-designed Penn Center Ice Skating Rink, demolished in the 1970s and that put one very much in mind of New York's Rockefeller Center. I have a sentimental attachment to the city at this time---it was the Philadelphia of Stouffer's, Horn & Hardart's and John Wanamaker's department store.

UCHS: Recently Philadelphia has seen large losses of historic buildings, largely due to development pressures. What should the preservation community do to diminish these losses?

TN: In an old city like ours, virtually everything over time becomes valuable and historic in a way. But everything, obviously, cannot be saved. I wish more attention had been paid to the reconfiguration—destruction--of Love Park near City Hall into a flat Spartan wasteland. The callow disregard for aesthetic and style is really hard to comprehend. The new Love Park is not a welcoming space at all. Invisible fountainettes squirting up from underground springs don't hold a candle to the magnificent fountain that was ripped out of the park as if it was a cancerous growth. This once beautiful park was virtually destroyed. It would have been nice if the preservation community had stepped in and tried to do damage control.

UCHS: What are your future plans?

TN: That would be to sign another book contract and then get to work on it. I'm not very good at writing books on spec, finishing something and then going into the market place, manuscript in hand, looking for a buyer.

University City Historic Architecture Walks: The Woodlands

Inspired by Mark Silber's April 23rd tour of the Woodlands, we are proposing a similar tour of the Cemetery. In keeping with the UCHS focus on historic preservation, we will focus on the people buried there who helped shape the built environment in Philadelphia.

The Woodlands produces a great map and short bios of about 90 gravesites of "famous people." They've also made lists of groups of famous people, such as a list of Writers (nine of them buried in the Woodlands), or a list of Civil War Heroes (16 of them). But on this tour we will focus on designers and developers who helped create the city we live in. We will use numbers that correspond to the Woodlands' map.

Starting at the gate to the Woodlands (1), you must admire the work of French-born architect Paul Philippe Cret (1876-1945). The monumental stone gatehouse is not the original entrance to the cemetery; it was at the end of 38th Street at Woodland Avenue, designed by John McArthur, the architect of City Hall. When University Avenue was constructed in the 1930's, that gate was destroyed and Cret designed this gatehouse in 1936.

Walk into the Cemetery and follow the road to the right, turn left at the intersection, and right at the fifth brick path. Walk through the tree tunnel and keep going straight past the marker of architect Joseph Lee Wickes who worked on the First Union Spectrum, to Paul Cret's tomb (2). Cret lived in Woodland Terrace (which has a historic marker), taught architecture at University of Pennsylvania, and designed – among many national treasures – the Benjamin Franklin Bridge, the Rodin Museum and aspects of the Parkway. His architecture firm continues to this day under the name H2L2.

Walk between the stables and the basement of the greenhouses, and head to the Mansion. On the river side of the Mansion is the grave of architect Thomas Somerville Stewart (1806-1889). (3). He designed St. Luke and the Epiphany Church at 13th and Spruce, but most of his commissions were in Richmond, VA.

Looming over Stewart's grave is the temple-mausoleum of the Drexel family containing at least 30 family members. (4) Their impact on Philadelphia is enormous, not the least of which was the founding of Drexel University in 1892 by Anthony J. Drexel (1826-1893). Old Main is still in use at 32nd and Chestnut. Drexel mansions dotted West Philadelphia; still standing are the Sigma Chi House at 3809 Locust Walk and the Alpha Tau Omega House at 225 S. 39th St.

Walk on the east side of the Mansion and follow the road to the right. At the second brick walk on the right is the monument of Eli K. Price (1797-1884), lawyer and state senator (5). Price is credited with expanding Philadelphia to include West Philadelphia in 1854, with the establishment of Fairmount Park in 1867, and with the founding of Woodlands Cemetery to preserve the Mansion and its arboretum. Across the road and to the right is the nearly indecipherable tombstone of architect Charles Barton Keen (1868-1931). (6) Keen had commissions all over the east coast, but here in Philadelphia he is known for "country house" residences in the suburban developments of Pelham, Ogontz Park, and Glenside.

Keep walking on this road to the second stairs on the left. Above is the black slab tomb of banker and developer Clarence H. Clark (1833-1906). (7) Clark gave West Philly Clark Park, Philadelphia's most beloved and used public park. Clark is also credited with much of the suburban development of West Philly, including the 4000 block of Locust St., and 4047-61 Spruce. Clark was a founder of the Union League at Chestnut and Broad.

Keep walking on the road, take the next stairs on the left, and make your way to the circular road. Turn left and walk to the Y. Gaze left and somewhere under the grass is the burial site but no marker of architect John Fraser (1825-1906). (8) Fraser was a Scottish-born architect who worked for a while with Frank Furness and George Hewitt and later supervised the construction of the U.S. Treasury in Washington, D.C. He designed the Union League that Clarence Clark founded.

Now keep walking around the circular road. Stop between an angel (Hamm) and an urn (Bickley) and turn left and walk 25 paces to a modest marker (9) for an artist, Carl Hermann Schmolze (1823-1859) who painted the ceiling of the Academy of Music.

Go back to the road and turn left at the Y. To your right is a giant shrub under which is a black slab marked "Eyre" (10). This is renowned architect Wilson Eyre (1858-1944), credited with the design of the University Museum as well as the Parkway (along with Cret). Eyre's work can also be seen at 3511 Baring Street and at 4501-4507 Spruce Street in West Philly.

Follow that road (toward the three University Towers). At the Y turn left and stop in front of a black obelisk marked "Thomson". Now walk to the left of the obelisk, through the two trees, and straight ahead is a tall marker to John Ord (11). Ord (1850-1923), another Scottish architect, is best known for helping John McArthur with the design and construction of City Hall. He is also the architect for a Venetian Gothic townhouse at Walnut and 22nd Streets.

You should now be able to see the gatehouse where you came into the Woodland Cemetery. The Woodlands Trust does a wonderful job of maintaining and preserving this important estate that holds not only one of America's most beautiful homes but also the treasure trove of cemetery markers for the makers and shakers of Philadelphia's history.



ON THE WEST SIDE



The University City Historical Society is thrilled to announce the successful inclusion of the Chester-Regent Historic District to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Officially approved at the May meeting of the Philadelphia Historical Commission, this achievement marks the largest new historic district to be considered in West Philadelphia since the Parkside Historic District was added in 2009. The University City Historical Society was proud to spearhead the nomination.

The 41 homes of the Chester-Regent Historic District were all designed by the well-known nineteenth-century architect Willis G. Hale for a small development on the south side of Chester Avenue and both sides of Regent Street between 45th and 46th Streets. All 41 houses share common building materials and distinguishing characteristics of the Queen Anne style. The properties that comprise the district include four designs, with a single-family mansion known as “The Gables”, large twins on Chester Avenue, smaller south-facing twins on Regent, and a north-facing set of rowhomes on Regent.

In nominating the Chester-Regent Historic District, the University City Historical Society sought feedback and support from property owners within the proposed district. Multiple meetings hosted by UCHS were convened to provide owners the opportunity to understand the impact of historic designation and to ask questions of the staff of the Philadelphia Historical Commission. The nomination was submitted with the majority of property owners supporting the nomination.

UCHS would like to extend special thanks to our own Vice President, Jennifer Loustau, for spearheading this initiative. We also extend our appreciation to Laura DiPasquale of the Historical Commission staff, the Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia, Elizabeth Stegner, Roy Harker, Amy Lambert, and the many neighbors who supported this cause. At a time when West Philadelphia is threatened by development, we can be assured that the legacy of Willis G. Hale on



Photos by Roy Harker.

Chester and Regent Streets will forever be preserved.

UCHS is also pleased that our nomination for hire, The West Philadelphia Railway Company Depot at 4100 Haverford Avenue, has also been listed on the Register. These successful nominations can be counted among the more than 50 West Philadelphia properties that have now been protected because of the efforts of the University City Historical Society.

We couldn't do it without your support.

University City Then & Now: 3400 block of Sansom



Courtesy of the Penn Archives.

Photo by Joseph Minardi.

The 3400 block of Sansom Street, known locally as Sansom Row, is a rare survivor of early row house development this close to Penn's campus, the block being built between 1869 and 1871. The house on the left is 3422 Sansom. The porch was likely added sometime in the 1880s, and the homeowner is probably the man standing on the porch.

Sansom Row (3402-3436 Sansom Street) is comprised of 18 Second Empire-style houses, 16 of which are faced with rough textured brownstone laid as random ashlar. Sansom Row was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1977. Today Sansom Row is a place of restaurants and pubs that are popular with Penn faculty.

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