

# ON THE WEST SIDE

THE UNIVERSITY CITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



March/April, 2014

<http://www.uchs.net>

Joseph Minardi, Editor

## University City Historical Society Spring House Tour



June 1, 2014

Celebrate the coming of spring with a lovely house tour in University City. Details about the UCHS House Tour will be in the next issue of *On the West Side*.

## UCHS SPRING DINNER EVENT AT THE RESTAURANT SCHOOL AT WALNUT HILL COLLEGE

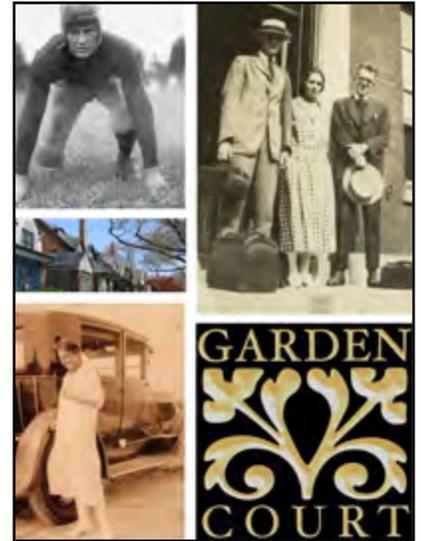
### ROARING TWENTIES EDITION

**HOLD THIS DATE:** The UCHS is pleased to announce another special evening for our members and guests. On **April 4, 2014, starting at 6:30 p.m.**, we will be hosting a **Roaring Twenties** themed dinner at the Restaurant School at Walnut Hill College. As with our previous successful "Before We Were University City" dinner, this occasion will feature a three-course meal, reflecting the tastes of the 1920s (vegetarian option available) with accompanying beverages for **\$45 for members** (\$55 for non-members). Attendees are encouraged to wear "Roaring Twenties" attire to get into the spirit of the event. So get out those straw hats and spats and come on out to the Restaurant School at Walnut Hill College on April 4th. Seating is limited, and reservations are required. Please include an e-mail address or a telephone number so that we can confirm receipt of your reservation.

**Mail check to UCHS, PO Box 31927, Phila., PA 19104 by Friday, March 28th**

**Make check payable to The University City Historical Society**

*1920s photos of U-City courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Archives. All others by Joseph Minardi.*



## UNIVERSITY CITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY OPINION, 400 SOUTH 40TH STREET

The University City Historical Society hosted a Membership Meeting on February 19th, 2014. At this meeting, representatives from the University of Pennsylvania and the development group Equinox, Paul Sehnert and Peter Staz, summarized the different iterations of proposals that have been put forward over the last several years and possible outcomes for the historic Italianate mansion at 400 S. 40th St.

At this moment, proceedings are in progress to finalize an approval for demolition of the building. These approvals have been challenged in court by the Woodland Terrace Homeowners Association and two other parties, thereby halting redevelopment of the site. In hopes of coming to a more amenable resolution, the University and Equinox have put together a "Compromise Plan" that seeks to address the concerns first voiced by the Woodland Terrace neighbors, Spruce Hill Community Association, and others, while turning the property and lot into a profitable enterprise. In this plan, the historic structure would be preserved to the Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation and a new 5-story apartment building would be constructed to the rear and side of the lot.

At our February 19th meeting the various proposals and possible courses of action were carefully weighed by Historical Society members against the formal statement issued by the litigants. Each UCHS member present was given a paper ballot to anonymously submit at the conclusion of this presentation. The results were unanimous in our membership's support for the "Compromise Plan."

As an organization dedicated to the long-term preservation and sustainability of the University City area, we feel that inaction is not an option. The building has been vacant for over a decade, and is falling into further disrepair despite attempts to maintain it during this period. We oppose the demolition of this structure and would like to see the litigants thoroughly consider the benefits of the recently-proposed Compromise Plan. We do not feel that "demolition or nothing" is an appropriate approach to this case; and we also understand that additional site development is necessary to make preservation viable. We would like to see the redevelopment of this highly visible site come soon rather than let it sit vacant for another decade as the battle continues in court.

We, the University City Historical Society, find that the "Compromise Plan" is a true compromise. We are gladdened to see that the developers are proposing a creative solution that will preserve and restore a significant antebellum building to its previous glory as well as reinvigorate a currently dark, unsafe, and underutilized corner. We feel that the new 5-story annex can be sensitively designed and would provide this neighborhood with a fine example of contemporary architecture that incorporates local history. Additionally, because the mansion is designated on the local historic register, we are assured that the Philadelphia Historical Commission shall have design review for the annex. If allowed to proceed, the University City Historical Society believes that this proposal will generate a new asset for our neighborhood and be a positive solution to this ongoing dispute.

## Featured Historic House - 4726 Springfield Avenue

What do you get with an 1892 Queen Anne Victorian twin and three years of toil, sweat, dust, money and frustration? Amazing results! "Most first-time buyers are considered crazy; we were outright delusional," exclaimed Rachel and Gregg Mohrmann, the present owners of 4726 Springfield Avenue, a large corner property on the corner of 48th and Springfield Ave. "The first week we moved in, we gutted our kitchen, used a washtub as our sink, a microwave for all our cooking and slept on an air bed while our floors were finished."

The list of renovations, both interior and exterior, is staggering. On the outside the porch floor had to be redone, with exterior painting recently completed. The Mohrmanns have added an exterior entrance and steps to the basement, plus a number of landscaping and gardening issues had to be addressed. The entire kitchen was rebuilt except for a built-in cabinet, but with a "horrid orange-red laminate top that we've removed and replaced with granite." Other parts of the house

that required extensive work were the breakfast room, powder room, hallways, reading room, bathroom, and bedroom suite.

4726 Springfield also belonged to former UCHS Board member and local historian Joan Wells and her husband, who purchased the house circa 1970 and lived there for the next few decades, until her death. To this day some still think of it as Joan's house.

How awesome is the restoration of this proud Victorian dwelling? Awesome enough to be featured on the DIY Network's *Good, Better...Best* program on March 14, 2012. The focus of the show was the attic renovations and whether a modern or traditional approach was the best choice. The Mohrmanns opted for a blend of both for the 1,000-square foot attic and is now a perfectly usable living space.

The UCHS would like to thank the Mohrmanns for taking part in the 2013 Renovations and Restorations Tour. They were also recipients of the 2013 Outstanding Preservation Award (see page 3). 4726 Springfield Avenue is also the subject of this issue's Then & Now section.

### University City: Then & Now

4727 Springfield Avenue



Courtesy of the University of Pennsylvania Archives



Photo by Joseph Minardi

## Italianate Architecture in University City - Part Two

One of the biggest proponents of the Italianate style in Philadelphia was architect Samuel Sloan (1815-1884). After a successful commission for railroad executive Andrew M. Eastwick's Norman style villa in 1850, Sloan became a rising star architect among Philadelphia's commercial and industrial elite. Sloan kept busy with a number of residential commissions in West Philadelphia during the 1850s, designing suburban houses in a variety of styles.



This handsome Italianate twin home is located at 401-403 North 33rd Street in Powelton Village, built circa 1865. Photo by Joseph Minardi.

For the 1861 commission of Woodland Terrace, Sloan chose the Italianate villa mode for this project. The houses in Woodland Terrace lacked campanile towers, but had other distinguishing characteristics such as wide eaves, verandas (porches), and belvedere observatories. These houses are actually twin homes, built in such a way that gives the appearance of one single large villa. In one of his pattern books, Sloan echoed the sentiments of A.J. Downing regarding the Italianate style. "Country residences in the Italian style are becoming more and more popular, both here and in the old world." As for his belief in the Italianate mode as being a preferred architectural style for the new suburban class, Sloan did not mince words. "Its elegant and picturesque appearance... speaks of [the homeowner] as a person of educated and refined tastes, who can appreciate the beautiful both in art and nature; who accustomed to all the ease and luxury of a city life, is now enjoying the more pure and elevating pleasures of the country."

The Italianate style lasted in America until the mid-1880s, replaced by the other revival styles of the late-Victorian era. The recommended painting scheme is a light grayish-green, with the doors, cornice, porch, and window mouldings painted a dark olive green. For blinds, moulding strip on cornice, door trim, etc. a reddish-brown is recommended.

## UCHS Valentine Tea & Awards

### WRAP UP

The UCHS would like to thank all of the attendees of the Valentine Day Tea and Awards (February 26th) and for making it a rousing success. As usual, there was a wide assortment of delicious finger sandwiches, tasty pastries, and of course, a variety of tea to wash it all down with. The UCHS is indebted to the generous hospitality of our hosts, Ellie and Nick Cernansky and their beautifully historic "Castle" and to Doris Cochran-Fikes for her tireless prep work in making the sandwiches for the Tea. Also a great deal of gratitude goes to Board members Ellis Mumford-Russell and Mat Huffman for their work in the nominating process and preparing the certificates.

#### The 2013 Gift to the Streets Award winners are:

**Denis and Doris Cochran-Fikes** - 802 S. 48th Street, **Patrick Walsh** - 804 S. 48th Street, **Robert Curley** - 819 S. 48th Street, **Richard Landis** - 821 S. 48th Street, **Lance Becker and Karin Rhodes** - 3504 Hamilton Street, **Bruce Benedon** - 3600 Hamilton Street, **Philip and Deborah Zuchman** - 4724 Springfield Avenue, **Olen Ljachin and Vivian Hiona** - 3302 Baring Street, **Gerardo Razumney and Frances Berge** - 911 S. 48th Street, **Lawrence Copeland and Laurie Segal** - 1007 S. 47th Street, **Phil Senechal, DDPS LP** - 636 S. 48th Street, **Little Baby's Ice Cream** - 4903 Catherine Street, **Lee's Deli** - 4700 Baltimore Avenue, **Theresa Marsh** - 1125 S. 46th Street

#### The 2013 Preservation Initiative Award went to:

**Project Rehab, University City District, and Ryan Spak** for extensive efforts to rehabilitate distressed properties in University City.

#### The 2013 Outstanding Preservation Awards went to:

**Jessica Senker and Brian Donlan** for repair and restoration of historic windows and exterior painting - 4503 Spruce Street.

**Kimberly I. Miller, AIA and Richard Olaya, AIA** for full exterior restoration including rebuilding of exterior walls, new slate roof, new cornice and new 2-over-2 windows for 3423-5 Race Street.

**Gregg and Rachel Mohrmann** for full, historically-accurate restoration of the facade, including repair of windows, gutters, downspouts, and gates for 4726 Springfield Avenue.



Photos from the Valentine Tea;

**Top left, Melani Lamond and Ryan Spak; middle left, Richard Olaya and Kimberly I. Miller; bottom left, pastry temptations; top right Brian Donlan, Melani Lamond, and Jessica Senker; bottom right, Rachel Mohrmann, Gregg Mohrmann, and Melani Lamond.**

All photos by Joseph Minardi.

# ON THE WEST SIDE



## PROFILES IN ARCHITECTURE

### *Wilson Eyre, Jr.*

Wilson Eyre, Jr. was born in Florence, Italy, (his parents were American citizens) Eyre would become a giant in the field of architecture. Wilson Eyre stayed in Italy until age eleven before returning to America. At a young age, he showed a talent for painting but was discouraged from that field by his parents, deciding on a career in architecture instead. His knack for art would be put to use later in his beautiful architectural renderings.



*Wilson Eyre, Jr.*  
(1858-1944)

Eyre attended the Massachusetts Institute of Technology from 1876-1877 before moving on to the office of James P. Sims (1849-1882). The death of Sims from a stroke allowed Eyre to

take control of the operation. In 1888 he became one of the founding members of the T-Square Club, an organization designed to encourage creativity in young professionals. The first partnership of any consequence occurred in 1911 when Eyre and John Gilbert McIlvaine (1880-1939) went into practice together. This successful venture lasted until 1939 when McIlvaine retired and died shortly thereafter.

Eyre was part of a new breed of architects that was turning away from the excessive embellishments used by his contemporaries. He once told a class at the University of Pennsylvania that “nothing is more offensive as a building overloaded with ornament.” This was perhaps a reaction to the “aberrations” being created throughout the city by Willis Hale, Angus Wade, and even Frank Furness.

One of Eyre’s greatest contributions to the University of Pennsylvania’s campus, if not the entire city of Philadelphia, was the sprawling and eclectic Free Museum of Science and Art across from Franklin Field. Although a collaborative effort with some of his other talented contemporaries, the overall design clearly had the Wilson Eyre stamp on it.

## Did you know?

Some notable events in University City’s history

**April 2, 1792,** Philadelphia and Lancaster Turnpike is chartered, providing a 62-mile toll road between the two cities.

**1795,** Construction is completed on the Philadelphia and Lancaster Turnpike, the largest public works in the U.S. Built at a cost of \$500,000, it is America’s longest well-paved highway.

**1805,** The Market Street Bridge is completed.

**1813,** A bridge is constructed across the Schuylkill River at Spring Garden Street, providing wagoners with an unbroken route from the northern section of the city to the west.

**December 17, 1891,** The Drexel Institute of Arts, Science, and Industry is formally dedicated.

**1892,** The University of Pennsylvania opens its graduate school to women students.

**July 16, 1893,** Walnut Street Bridge is formally opened to the public.

**March 4, 1907,** The Market Street subway/elevated commuter train is opened.



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