

ON THE WEST SIDE

THE UNIVERSITY CITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



May/June 2020

<http://www.uchs.net>

Joseph Minardi, Editor

A Note from the University City Historical Society

Like many of you, UCHS is adjusting to the new reality that is Covid-19. To our great regret, this has meant the postponement of planned events, such as walking tours, oral history interviews, discussions, and our reliable attendance at the May Fair. Although our April Board meeting was cancelled, our committees continue to plan, organize, and oversee the financial health of the organization. We've continued our work researching and preparing historic register nominations. Our board meetings will take place virtually for the foreseeable future. I am thankful for the board's dedication and talent, and the support of so many of our members who allow us to pursue the important work of this organization.

And yet, despite this new reality, some additional time at home reminds us what a wonderful place West Philadelphia is to live. It's spring in the neighborhood, and that means bursting gardens, hearty porch discussions (at a social distance, of course), and walks to admire the spectacular architecture that grace our streets. The Covid-19 crisis is unlike anything we've ever experienced before. And yet we can take comfort knowing that West Philadelphia will persevere and ultimately thrive, as it has for so many decades prior.

Where I live, in Powelton Village, my home was nearly 60 years old by the time the Spanish Flu hit in 1918. This home had already endured the Civil War and the industrialization of Philadelphia. And after the Spanish Flu, it would go on to withstand the Great Depression, 2nd World War, urban redevelopment, Cold War, 1978 MOVE stand-off, the crack epidemic, ever-encroaching presence of Drexel University, and ultimately the social change that gentrification brings. It's amazing to think that this home, which is protected through listing on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, has been virtually unaltered from exterior view since that time. A neighbor who might have endured the Spanish Flu in 1918 would still recognize this home today. Like many of you, I feel honored to be just a temporary caretaker of this extraordinary asset.

So, despite the insanity of the current situation, be assured that this too shall pass. West Philadelphia will survive and adjust, as it has so many times before. Stay home and be safe.

George Poulin
President, University City Historical Society

Did You Know?

Did you ever notice regular indentations in a masonry wall and wonder just exactly what those were? They almost look like claw marks except that they are definitely mechanical looking. Well, they are visual reminders of the quarrying process! Stone lives buried in the earth as bedrock. In order to extract it from the ground, it must go through a quarrying process. To quarry stone may depend on several factors: the kind of stone (granite, marble, serpentine, etc.); the stone's strength; and the stone's natural ability to fissure, or break. For many types of stone, a process of splitting called "pin and feather" is used. This technique requires that large metal pins are inserted into the stone and the metal feathers (curved arms) are expanded to extract a portion of stone along a natural fissure so that stone breaks and becomes free.



Photos by Amy Lambert.

These marks are from the places where the pins have been inserted to break this stone free. Look for them on your next walk!

UCHS Virtual House Tour

We are pleased to announce our new UCHS Virtual House Tour. The idea is to show our members the interiors of historic houses in University City from the safety of their own homes. Home owners will be filming their houses "blogger style," adding their own insights into the house's history, planned or completed renovations, and special features that old-house lovers, such as our members, would appreciate.

In our first episode we'll be looking inside the Poulin/Roeckle house in Powelton Village. George Poulin takes you inside his wonderful circa 1860 Italianate home and all of the original features combined with some tasteful renovations. George, who is also UCHS President, has been living in his current home for five years and has put his architectural expertise to good use in refurbishing his old house.

Please visit our **YouTube Channel** to see episode one of our virtual house tour (see link below) and check in later for future episodes.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HiHStlR5jbo>

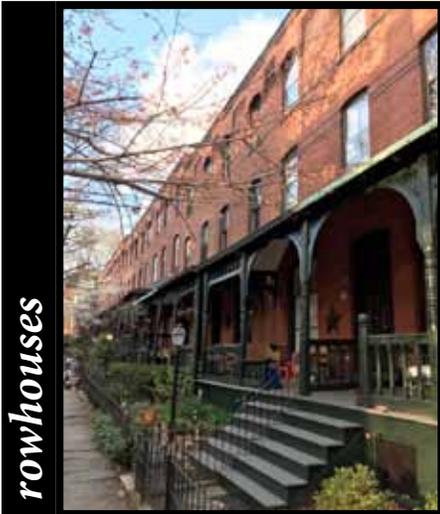


Screenshot from episode one.

A FEAST FOR THE EYES

A photo essay of West Philadelphia by Paul Steinke

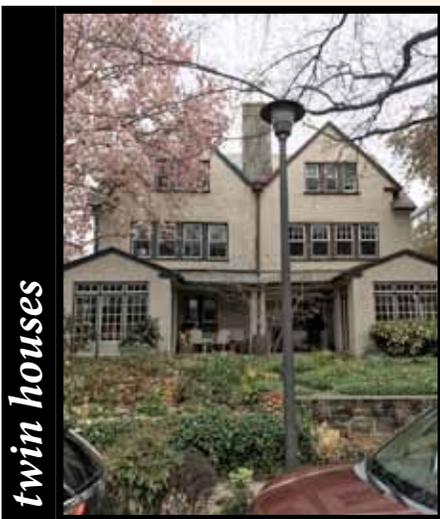
We at UCHS are greatly indebted to Paul Steinke, the founding director of the University District and current executive director of the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, for allowing us to share some of his outstanding photographs of University City.



rowhouses



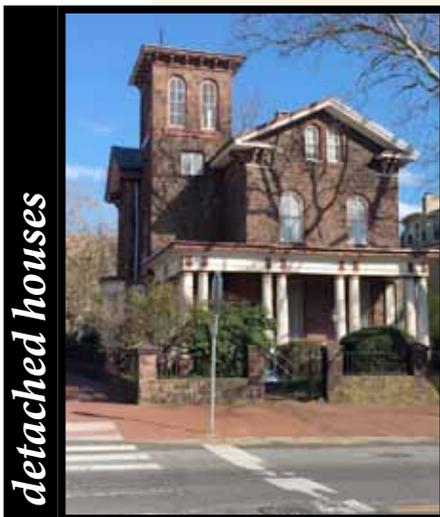
Left, east side of St. Mark's Square, Hewitt Brothers, architects (1879); Middle, Melville Street south of Larchwood Avenue; Right, Govatt Annesley Development Houses on Pine Street east of 40th Street (1872).



twin houses



Left, 4600 block of Larchwood Avenue; Middle, 42nd Street south of Locust Street; Right, Walnut Street east of 42nd Street.



detached houses



Left, southeast corner of 42nd Street and Locust Streets; Middle, 46th and Osage Avenue; Right, Locust Street west of 41st Street, George T. Pearson, architect (1905).



Hickman Temple AME Church (formerly St. Paul's Presbyterian)

Early accounts of Saint Paul's Church indicate that services were begun in a tent in June, 1898 as the Baltimore Avenue Presbyterian Mission by one of the church's first elders Samuel M. Pugh. A month later, a Sunday School of 21 members was organized. In October 1899 the congregation was officially organized as Saint Paul's Presbyterian Church with 62 members, and that same year the mission purchased a small frame building, which original was operated as a Methodist church, at 50th Street and Baltimore Avenue. The presiding pastor was the Reverend Dr. J.R. Miller, who oversaw the congregation during its first decades and was described as "one of the leading spirits of the Presbyterian Church in the eastern part of the United States. Upon the organization of Saint Paul's Presbyterian, the congregation grew, which resulted in the need for a larger building. They hired contractor Frank S. Riggs and architect Isaac Pursell to build and design their new building. For an approximate cost of \$18,000, they proposed to construct a one story Port Deposit stone chapel 137 feet by 100 feet with a slate roof and galvanized iron cornice. The building would not only be a sanctuary which could accommodate 700 people but would also have Sunday school rooms, a dining room, library, women's room, prayer room and infant room. This chapel and then completed 13,700 square foot church would follow a few years later. On October 14, 1900 the cornerstone was laid with Reverend JR Miller presiding. Several others, including John Wannamaker, made addresses at the event.

The building was dedicated in March, 1901 and the occasion "culminate[d] one of the most rapid growths in the history of the Presbyterian church" as the congregation nearly

quadrupled to 250 members since its founding just two years earlier. A mere three years after the church was dedicated, the congregation found it was in need of another expansion to accommodate their "rapidly growing congregation and Sunday School." The congregation again hired Pursell, who in turn hired contractor Thomas Reilley, to design their new chapel addition. Construction began in 1904 and continued into 1905, the year the cornerstone was laid. Dedication of the new wing took place on October 7, 1906. Like the dedication of the original building five years before, the congregation invited John Wannamaker to speak at the ceremony. By 1908, Saint Paul's Presbyterian boasted over 1100 congregants and was considered one of the "most flourishing congregations" in the city.

Throughout the twentieth century, the neighborhood remained dense with residential buildings. Saint Paul's Presbyterian Church continued to worship at their Baltimore Avenue church until it appears they absolved and sold the building to the Philadelphia Annual Conference of the African Methodist

Episcopal Church. It was during this time that Hickman Temple, a congregation associated with the Philadelphia Annual Conference, began their tenure at 5001 Baltimore Avenue. Since then, the congregation has not only been an integral part of West Philadelphia's religious and spiritual life but also the community at large. Their continuous philanthropic endeavors include providing food, clothing and support services for neighbors but also an active daycare center.

Written by Kelly Wiles.



Hickman Temple Church; top, courtesy of the Philadelphia Inquirer, 1906; bottom, courtesy of Jennifer Loustau, October 2019.

WHEN BASEBALL WAS PLAYED IN WEST PHILLY

It's spring time which marks the beginning of a new baseball season. The city of Philadelphia has had a professional baseball team dating back to 1871 with the Philadelphia Athletics, a charter member of the National Association. Philadelphia teams played at many ballparks over the next three decades. These included Jefferson Street Grounds, which was the site of the first game in National League history and featured a swimming pool behind the outfield fence, a concept way ahead of its time.

Unbeknownst to many citizens there was once a ballpark located at the intersection of Belmont and Parkside Avenues in the Parkside neighborhood, which was the home turf of the Philadelphia Stars of the Negro National League. This ballpark, known as the 44th and Parkside Ballpark, Pennsylvania Railroad Athletic Field and Penmar Park, had an overflow capacity of 10,000. The ballpark was demolished in the 1950s. Although the stadium is gone, there is a park dedicated to the memories.

Top photo; Philadelphia Stars mural by David McShane at Belmont and Parkside Avenues, dedicated September 19, 2006. Bottom left; Philadelphia Stars Negro League Memorial Park statue, dedicated April 15, 2005. Bottom right; A Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission marker dedicated to African American baseball in Philadelphia (1998). Photos by Paul Steinke.



ON THE WEST SIDE



University City Then & Now: 4105-09 Chestnut Street



Courtesy of the Print and Picture Collection, Free Library of Philadelphia

Photo by Joseph Minardi.

The photo on the left is that of the Radio Church of God at 4105-09 Chestnut Street, formerly the Hamilton School Building. It was built in 1891 as a private and primary second school. The architect was Joseph W. Anshutz, who specialized in school buildings. When this photograph was taken in May of 1901 it had become the West Philadelphia Branch of the Philadelphia Public Library, which it remained until 1906. In the ensuing decades the building changed hands. In June 1940, the building was purchased by Elder Lightfoot Solomon Michaux (1885-1968), an immensely popular African American radio evangelist, and the Trustees of the Radio Church of God.

Despite the number of different owners the building itself has remained largely unchanged and is a fine example of late-Victorian educational architecture. In January of 2019 the Radio Church of God was approved for historic designation by the Philadelphia Historical Commission. The nomination was written by Ben Leech on behalf of the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia.

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