

# ON THE WEST SIDE

## THE UNIVERSITY CITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY



January/February 2020

<http://www.uchs.net>

Joseph Minardi, Editor



Join us once again for our annual UCHS Valentine Tea and Awards Presentation at **Akwaaba Philadelphia** (formerly Spruce Hill Manor) at **3709 Baring Street** on **February 16th from 4:00 to 6:00pm**. This event is that special time where we as an organization get to recognize the deserving individuals who have made a positive difference in the neighborhood. It is also a chance for neighbors to connect with neighbors. The Valentine Tea and Awards Presentation is free to all UCHS members and their guests.

Please contact the University City Historical Society to inform us of anyone you know who has performed a superior restoration or renovation job during the previous year for our **Gift to the Streets Award, Outstanding Preservation Award, or Preservation Initiative Award**. And please feel free to nominate yourself. Email your nominations to [info@uchs.net](mailto:info@uchs.net) by **January 25th, 2020**.

## UCHS Lecture Series with John Puckett



### When

Wednesday,  
January 22, 2020  
6:30 PM - 7:30 PM

### Location

Hamilton Mansion at the Woodlands  
4000 Woodland Ave

UCHS welcomes you to learn about West Philadelphia Collaborative History, a project with resources on the history of 20th- and 21st-century West Philadelphia. The project is co-developed with leading West Philadelphia community activists and will incorporate participation and input from West Philadelphia residents, organizations, teachers, and students.

West Philadelphia Collaborative History explores the stories of West Philadelphia over the past century. Among other features, it provides historical narratives, data summaries, interviews, photographs, and other resources contributed by community members. Our starting point is 1907, the year that introduced the Market Street Elevated rapid transit line ("The El"), which spurred expansive population growth and transformed West Philadelphia from a "streetcar suburb" to a major urban district with a population greater than 300,000 residents.



To register for this event go to: <https://uchs.wildapricot.org/events>. This is a free event.

# Councilwoman-elect Jamie Gauthier Visits UCHS

Councilwoman-elect Jamie Gauthier was invited to our monthly board meeting on December 11 as our special guest. At the gathering, Jamie engaged board members in dialogue to discuss recent accomplishments and preservation objectives for West Philadelphia in the coming years. Jamie has made working with local residents to solve problems a top priority.

We would like to thank Jamie for her time and we look forward to working with her and her staff in the upcoming years.



UCHS Board meeting of December 11, 2019 with Jamie Gauthier, right, as our special guest. Joseph Minardi, photographer.



## PROFILES IN ARCHITECTURE

### *Frederick Fox*

Frederick Fox was active as an architect and real estate developer in Philadelphia from 1892 to 1908. Although he was mostly active in Germantown, Mr. Fox designed a number of buildings in West Philadelphia, primarily for builders Vickers & Falckenstein.

#### Selected Relevant Commissions:

- 1897: Residences (16), west side of Lindenwood, north of Jefferson Residences (41), 33rd and Spring Garden area  
1898: Residences (47), 54th and Girard area

## Ask the Experts

### PERPLEXING PAPERING PROBLEM

**Q:** Our Victorian house was remuddled with simulated-wood panelling. When we removed one section around a doorway, the plaster pulled away from the lath. I am afraid that the plaster would come with it. And we don't want to remove all the plaster and put up new wallboard.

I have gotten two suggestions for wallpapering over the panelling. One is to put on a skim coat of joint compound, then size and paper. The other is to put up liner paper and wallpaper over that. What do you think? Would I be able to remove the wallpaper later?

**A:** Wallpapering over composition-board panelling is problematic. The wallboard will expand and contract with changes in the humidity, and cause the paper to blister. Unfortunately, this problem is unavoidable. A layer of lining paper under the wallpaper might help to take some of the stress, especially at the joints of the panelling. But the real determining factor for the longevity of your papering job is the temperature and humidity of your home.

A coat of joint compound is definitely a bad idea. It shrinks when it dries and so is unsuitable for the covering of large surfaces. Moreover, even with sizing, moisture from the wallpaper paste would resoften some of the compound and cause failures even before you could complete the job.

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

## The Panic of '93

Contrary to popular belief, the "Gay Nineties" was a decade of turmoil and upheaval. Economic strife engulfed the nation. On May 3, 1893, the stock market collapsed and on June 7th, there was a panic. "Everyone is in a blue fit of terror, and each individual thinks himself more ruined than his neighbor," wrote Henry Adams (1838-1918), grandson of President John Quincy Adams (1767-1824).

In June the *New York Tribune* reported: "The failure of Schaffner & Co., and the Grant Locomotive Works at Chicago, the Plankinton Bank at Milwaukee, the Victoria Cordage Company at Cincinnati and the Domestic Sewing Machine Company in New York City, each supposed to have liabilities reckoned in the millions, besides 236 other failures in the United States alone, indicate clearly the financial pressure."

By the end of the year, over 500 banks would fail and more than 15,000 businesses had failed. Labor leader Samuel Gompers (1850-1924) estimated the number of unemployed at 3 million.

The Panic of 1893 was also marked by the failure of nearly 600 banks, most of which were located in the south and west.

There was a myriad of reasons for the Panic of 1893: overproduction of goods, overbuilding of railroads, deflation, unwieldy debt in the agriculture sectors, economic weakness abroad, and reduced income on imports as a result of the McKinley Tariff of 1890.

To deal with the crisis, President Grover Cleveland (1837-1908) called for a special session of Congress, and on August 8 they repealed the Sherman Silver Purchase Act of 1890, which was largely blamed for the Panic of 1893 by the public. The crisis continued unabated, leading to additional governmental attempts at remedy. By 1895, the Treasury's gold supply would be so depleted that the government would take financier and banker J.P. Morgan (1837-1913) up on his offer of a loan.

Evidently the economic downturn of 1893 had a deleterious effect on the building trade in Philadelphia. The number of new houses built in the city for 1893 was only around 6,000, down from nearly 9,000 just a few years earlier. Things languished for the remainder of the decade when a mere 3,000 houses were built in 1899. Production picked up dramatically in the new century with a peak of 10,000 new houses, until the Panic of 1907 caused new house production to drop to 6,000 by 1908 only to rebound sharply the following year.

## A BILL OF RIGHTS FOR VICTORIAN BUILDINGS

This bill of rights first appeared in the book *America's Painted Ladies* by Elizabeth Pomada and Michael Larsen, 1978.

Just as trees are part of our natural environment, Victorian buildings are part of our cultural environment. A Victorian recognized for its architecture or history is entitled to certain inalienable rights:

A Victorian building has the right to survive, unless preservationists agree that it is not worth saving.

A Victorian building has the right to retain its original facade.

A Victorian building's has the right to survive without alteration except for the addition of such modern amenities as kitchen and bathroom fixtures, heating, electricity, and other changes that meet building-code requirements. Such changes will be made with minimum alterations to the building and with the goal of preserving the architectural integrity of the building.

A Victorian building has the right not to be stripped of its original woodwork, stained glass, and fixtures. If original woodwork or fixtures are removed, the owner is obligated to document them and store them in the building in good condition and pass them on the new owners as part of the deed, to permit restoration in the future.

A Victorian building has the right to a complete documentation, illustrated when possible with photographs and video, of its history and the alterations done to the building. When the building is sold, the seller is obligated to give a copy of the documentation to the next owner as part of the deed to the building.

A Victorian building has the right to be maintained inside and out with the same love and pride with which it was built.

A Victorian building has the right to be used for whatever purpose will require the least alteration and enable it to be maintained in the best condition.

A Victorian building has the right to remain on its original site. If a Victorian cannot remain on its original site, it has the right to be moved to a site as close in location and character as possible to its original site.

A Victorian building has the right to retain its visual context. If a new building is to be added near a Victorian, the new building must be appropriate in character and scale to its surroundings.

A Victorian building has the right to have its value understood and appreciated by the community. This can be accomplished if individuals, business and non-profit organizations, and all levels of government will strive to:

- create a preservation board with the power to protect A Victorian buildings and Victorian neighborhoods;
- give landmark status to deserving buildings and districts to help protect them;
- establish and carry out a master preservation plan for the community;
- encourage preservation and preservation groups;
- have the history of our architectural heritage and the value of preserving it taught in schools and textbooks at all levels;
- give annual awards for restoration and preservation efforts;
- support the founding and maintaining of house museums with paid staff or volunteers from preservation groups;
- commission a history and a photographic inventory of the buildings in the community;
- support tourism, including house tours, a walking map of Victorian buildings, and a booklet or book about the community Victorians;
- assist homeowners researching the history of their homes;

• establish interior and exterior maintenance standards and the means to enforce them;

• provide information and financial assistance on restoration and maintenance;

• buy the house and sell it to someone who will care for the Victorian, if the current owner can't or won't take care of it;

• calculate periodically the economic value of Victorians to the community through jobs, taxes, tourism, merchandise, the business generated through restoration and maintenance, changes in ownership, and appraised value;

• discourage developers from destroying Victorians.

These rights are to be protected with a spirit of community, a sense of fairness, and a recognition of personal rights along with the need to balance them against the enduring value of the community's architectural heritage. Preservation is only possible with the continuing passionate assistance of those who care about making what is of enduring value from the past a gift from the present to the future.

## THE OUTLOOK FOR 1887: ALARMING!

It's impossible to overstate how important the various modes of public transportation were to the the early residential development of West Philadelphia: first with the omnibuses of the 1850s and 1860s; next with streetcars in the last few decades of the nineteenth century; and then with the Market Street Elevated after 1907. As can be clearly seen here with this article for 1887, the fortunes of developers were completely interdependent with the success of streetcar operators. After all, you can't have a streetcar suburb without them!

*Three drawbacks are working against West Philadelphia real estate interests. The delays in the traction cars is one, and not as trifling a difficulty as might be imagined by persons living on this side of the Schuylkill. Another is that a good many people have gone out along the lines of railroads to live.*

*A third is that old houses, no matter how comfortable, are not wanted; and there are not enough new houses built to meet the demands.*

*Real estate agents west of the Schuylkill dwell in particular emphasis upon the fact that renters are complaining, and some of them mention numerous cases where the traction delays lost them tenants. Many tenants will leave that portion of the city next spring, and seek residences where they can rely upon steam and street-car accommodations. The great bulk of new houses built in West Philadelphia have been small two-story houses, which rent from \$16 to \$25 [per month]. Comparatively few have been built to rent from \$30 to \$50 [per month]. Builders are discouraged at the prospect. Extensive operations are projected, and it is impossible to say to what extent these drawbacks will interfere with them. Efficient street-car service with West Philadelphia would remove all elements of uncertainty. Many people will continue to purchase homes on the lines of the railroads, and the real estate interests of West Philadelphia will continue to suffer until a better method of reaching the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-seventh Wards is established.*

Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders Guide,  
Vol. II, No. 6., February 14, 1887

# ON THE WEST SIDE



## SEEKING VOLUNTEERS FOR HISTORIC DISTRICT NOMINATION IN SPRUCE HILL AREA

The University City Historical Society is seeking volunteers to help with the nomination of a substantial portion of Spruce Hill for a local historic district. The focus of the district nomination is the impact of William S. Kimball and Clarence Clark, Sr. on the 19th-century development of West Philadelphia. If you've ever wanted to take part in creating a historic district but been too overwhelmed by the thought of it, now's your chance!

Volunteers, each serving as a "historic block captain," would assist in gathering data for the large nomination to be called "the Kimball-Clark Historic District." You don't have to live on a block to participate. A committee formed of UCHS board members will train and supervise all the volunteers in the information-gathering process. Board members will also research and write the text of the nomination.

Gathering and organizing data mostly available online, historic block captains would assist the UCHS by compiling documentary information on each property such as date of construction; building type and style; names of owner, architect, and or builder; and identification numbers.

The West Philadelphia blocks requiring the volunteer activity are the following:

- A. Walnut blocks between 40th and 44th Streets (23 properties)
- B. Locust block between 40th and 41st Streets (15 properties)
- C. Spruce block between 40th and 43rd Streets (30 properties)
- D. Pine block between 40th and 41st Streets (6 properties)
- E. Pine block between 42nd and 43rd Streets (30 properties, #4200-4248)
- F. Spruce block between 42nd and 43rd Streets (23 properties, #4200-4248)
- G. Osage block between 42nd and 43rd Streets (24 properties, #4215-4238)
- H. Baltimore block between 42nd and 43rd Streets (22 properties, #4207-4239)
- I. Chester block between 42nd and 43rd Streets (24 properties, #4200-4230)
- J. Regent Square block between 42nd and 43rd Streets (29 properties, #4211-4253)
- K. Baltimore between 42nd and 44th (42 properties)
- L. Baltimore between 44th and 45th Streets (20 properties)
- M. 41st blocks between Locust and Pine Streets (17 properties, #213-247)
- N. 42nd blocks between Walnut and Locust (10 properties, #200-218)
- O. 42nd blocks between Spruce and Regent (25 properties, #318-626)
- P. 43rd blocks between Spruce and Regent (31 properties, #317-449)
- Q. 45th blocks between Springfield and Woodland Streets (13 properties)



*Photo of Baltimore Avenue between 43rd and 44th Street. Joseph Minardi, photographer.*

The impact of this historic district, if approved by the Philadelphia Historical Commission, will be to complement the Hamilton Village West Historic District. That nomination includes most of the properties between Chestnut Street and Chester Avenue in the 4100 blocks.

The tentative start date for historic block captains would be **March 1, 2020**. It is UCHS's intention to complete the nomination and submit it to the PHC by December 2020.

Anyone interested in volunteering should e-mail Jenny Loustau at [Jenloustau9323@gmail.com](mailto:Jenloustau9323@gmail.com). And thank you for considering this!

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