

# ON THE WEST SIDE

THE UNIVERSITY  
CITY HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY



January, 2007

<http://www.uchs.net>

Mike Hardy, Editor

## AWARDS

### TEA

2007



On Sunday, February 11, 2007, the annual **UCHS Valentine Tea** will be celebrated at “**The Castle**,” **Ellie and Nick Cernansky’s** home and B&B (c. 1903), at **930 S. 48<sup>th</sup> Street** between 4 & 6 p.m.

All current members and other invited guests are encouraged to **RSVP** to (215) 387-3019 or [info@uchs.net](mailto:info@uchs.net) to leave word as to who and how many plan to attend this “high tea” and fun get-together to recognize and applaud those who have given us all **Gifts to the Streets** in the form of historically sensitive exterior property improvements and greening initiatives, learn (at 5 p.m.) who will receive this year’s **Outstanding Preservation and Preservation Initiative Awards**, hear about the new programs of UCHS, and, most importantly, consume the tea spread prepared and served by the **Board of Governors of UCHS**. Your RSVP helps us calculate the volume of food needed for this popular occasion.

Attendees will also get to see the latest in improvements/restoration efforts at The Castle, including those which post-date last year’s tea!. The rain/snow date for the event is Sunday, February 18 at the same time and place.

Don’t miss the fun and opportunity to mingle, praise and celebrate this season of giving.

## SPOTLIGHT ON THE HISTORIC PROPERTIES REPAIR PROGRAM

The **Historic Properties Repair Program (HPRP)** is an initiative funded by the **City of Philadelphia** and administered by the **Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia**.

It offers a new and unique opportunity, both to **University City** and all of **Philadelphia**, as a major tool to support preservation of our area’s historic architecture.

Still in its first year of operation, it emerged from a recommendation of the **Historic Preservation Task Force** convened by **Councilwoman Blackwell** which was implemented by **Major Street**, who directed that one million dollars from the **Neighborhoods Transformation Initiative** budget be set aside to assist low- and moderate-income homeowners living in historic homes with grants to make needed exterior repairs to their properties and to participate in the revitalization of their neighborhoods. The **National Trust for Historic Preservation** added an additional \$100,000 to the initiative.

Under the program, owner/occupants of houses listed on both the local **Philadelphia Register**, in local historic districts or in **National Register Historic Districts**, such as the three which exist in University City – **Powelton, Garden Court & the West Philadelphia Streetcar Suburb** – are eligible to apply if their total household annual income is not more than the income levels of the program. These range from a maximum income of \$38,550 for a one-person household to \$72,650 for an eight-

person household.

Grants ranging from \$1,500 to a maximum of \$20,000 can be made in amounts that equal the difference between a basic exterior “remodeling” project to a repair/restoration work of a higher standard, quality and historical accuracy. Examples are porch repairs/restoration, painting, masonry re-pointing, carpentry restoration, roofing or window repairs or replacement. Interior work is not eligible.

Program brochures have been mailed to over 14,000 owners of certified historical homes, including those mailed by **UCHS** to its members. These, as well as grant applications, are still available from the program administrator, **Randy Cotton**, at the Preservation Alliance (215) 546-1146, x 2 or [randy@preservationalliance.com](mailto:randy@preservationalliance.com)

Randy also reports that some 160 requests for grant applications have been received to date and more than 50 full applications returned. The program staff have also made site visits to 34 homeowner properties and \$201,000 of the program’s funds have been contractually committed thus far to 13 completed or in-progress projects, with some 30 pending. Individual grants have ranged from 20% to 50% of the total expense of a project.

According to him, the average repair grant has been \$16,000 with projects in historic districts in **Parkside, Germantown, Girard Estates, West Philadelphia, Overbrook Farms, Fishtown, Queen Village, Fairmount, Manayunk and North Philadelphia**. Randy declares that “one of the most satisfying parts of the program is meeting people who own and love their properties, which vary in age from Federal to the 1930’s, with a surprising number from the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.”

Information about a variety of city programs and options for homeowners meeting their “share” of the project expenses are available from Randy including the 3% loans of up to \$25,000 from the **Philadelphia Home Improvement Loan Program** at [www.philaloan.com](http://www.philaloan.com).

Randy also concludes that the major obstacle of the program is finding enough qualified contractors to work in the program. These may include general contractors, masons, carpenters, roofers, painters and decorative finishers, metalworkers, plasterers,

tile setters, glaziers and suppliers of materials, especially those that are historically authentic. Please encourage those you know in these trades to get in touch with him to learn the details of what requirements contractors must meet to qualify.

And, continue to send in your recommendations to **UCHS’s Contractors/Suppliers List**, who may also qualify for UPRP.

Grant applicants who bring a contractor who meets the program’s qualifications can go to the front of the line. But with additional qualified contractors, the program can be accelerated and stands an even better chance of being refunded in the future.

Please inform your friends and neighbors of this effort to spread the benefits of historic preservation to those who could use the resources this standard-bearing program offers to the owners of historic homes.

## YEAR END RAPE

From its construction in 1863, by developer **William A. Mitchell**, just north of the “new” **Satterlee USA Hospital** established by the **United States Army** in 1862 along **Mill Creek, 4323 Spruce Street**, remained one-half of a classic **Italianate** twin, with its three stories faced in cut schist, surrounded by a wrap-around porch with **Doric** columns, approached by a slate front walk through an ironwork fence and expansive front garden.

Its signature porch protected a glazed paneled wood door and floor-length first-floor windows and wooden shutters, all the markings of the Italianate villa of the new suburban development west of the Schuylkill River.

4323 Spruce welcomed owners, survived wars, panics, depressions, downturns and even urban renewal, only to be raped by a new owner who, during the final days of 2006, ripped down the columns and wrapped the first floor porch in plywood, stucco and “new” vinyl sash windows and front door to extend the rentable space in this now multi-unit building!

These pictures tell the horror tale as one column can be seen on the ground and the plywood box begins.



For the first time in its long history, 4223 Spruce will now look like a **Home Depot** garden tool shed



and all of us will be forced to look away as we travel up and down **“Spruce Hill”** in the heart of the **Spruce Hill** neighborhood.

And some of us will have it worse than others. As one neighbor put it on a neighborhood list serve, “As a longtime resident and homeowner of Spruce Hill, I have had the pleasure of watching the neighborhood grow and improve. I continue to be enthused about the vitality of the area. The beauty and variety of the homes in our neighborhood are wonderful, as is the diversity of people and things to do.

Of course, there are always exceptions. I know not everyone can afford to keep or restore homes to original condition, but people generally do the best they can. Sometimes I have to grit my teeth when I see some of the more unique attempts, but I have learned to be more tolerant (good for me I guess).

However, when a neighborhood developer shows a complete lack of regard for the quality, appearance, and consideration of his neighbors, I can’t sit idly by. I am of course talking about (the work at 4323 Spruce Street). Right now, it looks like he is building a bunker.

I know there is nothing you can do, but I just wanted to express my concern, and frustration in not being able to prevent this kind of cheap ill-conceived work that takes away from the neighborhood appearance, and property values. It is my misfortune that I will have to see this architectural dreck every time I look out my window. It is the neighborhood’s fate that we seem powerless to control our own “front yard.”

Isn’t there anything that can be done to keep someone like this in check? Doesn’t seem right one person can push such junk on the rest of us.”

And, alas, other than requesting the owner to

reconsider, which he rejected, and local zoning controls, which didn’t apply here, the community has no tools at its disposal to control its fate. The only hope is still in a local district nomination for this area that has sat, since 2002, before the **Philadelphia Historical Commission** without action!

This latest mutilation of properties listed as “contributing” to a local district also repudiates those who have suggested that the recent increase in real estate values and new property owners “doing the right thing” make a local district unnecessary. As long as there are those who undertake these gratuitous mutilations, not for lack of resources, but for adding a buck to the profit margin, the community can only watch and weep as something unique and beautiful becomes another mediocrity.

## HISTORY REVITALIZES

UCHS was recently approached by **Jessi Avrill** of the local **Partnership Community Development Corporation** to help them in their efforts to support the **Carroll Park Community Council’s** plans to brand and improve the curb appeal of their neighborhood in **West Philadelphia** and stimulate private real estate investment in their formerly middle class community.

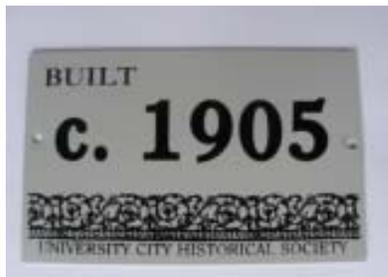
One of the city’s **“Neighborhoods Now”** communities working to retain Philadelphia’s shrinking base of middle-income households (earning \$34,00 to \$52,000 a year), Carroll Park seeks to find its special niche for revitalization by emphasizing the history of its area and its housing. They asked for examples of date plaques for marking the construction dates of houses in their area. UCHS was tapped as one of the few programs in the area providing this service for historic properties and we met with **Holland Brown** and **Gertrude Weaver** in **Carroll Park** to share our process. Based on our experience, one day there could be similar date plaques posted in this “post-El” area of West Philadelphia (i.e., built after the 1907 construction of the **Market Street Elevated**), which radically drove the expansion of row houses to the city line in West Philadelphia.

UCHS applauds the efforts of “Neighborhoods

Now,” the Partnership CDC and Carroll Park in using history and its attractions as one of the tools to urban revitalization and community stability. We wish them well and will report on their future progress.

## SPEAKING OF DATE PLAQUES

At the request of property owners who wish to mark the construction dates of their properties in **University City** not yet within any of its **National Register Historic Districts – Powelton, Garden Court or West Philadelphia Streetcar Suburb** – for which UCHS offers date plaques, UCHS is offering, on the same basis, a “generic” date plaque.

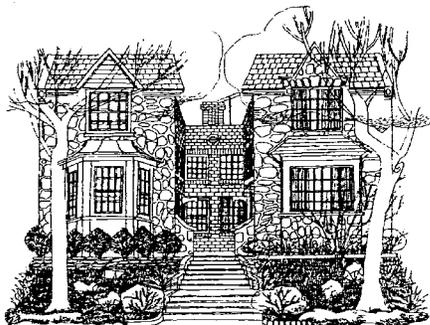


As pictured, the 4”x6” grey enameled metal plaque bears the individualized estimated construction date and the logo of UCHS in black. These will be offered to the general public at \$25/each and UCHS members for \$15/each, with installation included.

The applicant will need to provide us with the circa date (by tracing some simple research either at **City Hall** or at the **Free Library**), which will be described in a new brochure being prepared.

To see the first installed, check out **428 S. 50th Street**.

For more information, contact us at [info@uchs.net](mailto:info@uchs.net) or (215) 387-3019.



## OLD HOUSE FAIR RETURNS

**The Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia** is pleased to announce that it will reintroduce one of its most popular events this year, when it presents the **2007 Old House Fair** on Saturday, March 17, 2007, from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. on the campus of the **Germantown Friends School, 31 West Coulter Street** in the heart of historic **Germantown**. The fair will take place in the **Fieldhouse**, which is located between **Greene Street** and **Germantown Avenue** at **Schoolhouse Lane**.

The Old House Fair, one of the longest running old house fairs on the **East Coast**, is designed to connect owners of old and historic homes contemplating anything from major restoration to a weekend repair or decorating project with the appropriate professional resources. Thousands of people attended past fairs; 90 percent of them were actively planning or actually in the midst of work on their homes. It is anticipated that approximately a thousand people will attend this one day event. The Old House Fair will provide attendees with a special opportunity to interact directly with business and trade professionals based in the Philadelphia area.

The event will feature 50 vendor spaces marketing preservation-related products and services. A number of the participating professionals provide presentations about their products, skills or services in a central demonstration area, or in one of the lecture/presentation rooms in active use throughout the day. In addition, free, 15-minute consultations with old house professionals will be available throughout the day. Bring your pictures of your problems and your projects!

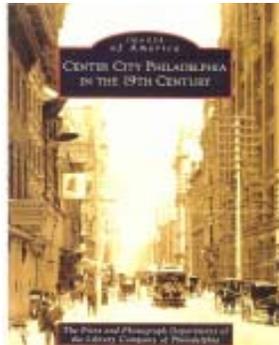
Other attractions at the 2007 Old House Fair will be the **Old House Fair Resource Center** and the presentation of the Alliance’s new “**Awards of Recognition**” to property owners—particularly homeowners—who have shown exemplary stew-

ardship in historic preservation through renovation and maintenance of their property.

Tickets, available at the door or in advance, are \$10/adults, \$20/family with children under 21, \$20; group rate for 10 or more, \$8. Alliance members get a \$2 discount coupon.

For tickets or more information, contact: **George Hoessel, OHF Coordinator**, (215) 546-1146, x7 or [george@preservationalliance.com](mailto:george@preservationalliance.com) or visit, [www.preservationalliance.com](http://www.preservationalliance.com).

## RECENTLY



## ADDED

to the **Images of America** series published by **Arcadia Publishing Company** joining **Robert Morris Skaler's West Philadelphia: University City to 52<sup>nd</sup> Street** and **Allen Meyers & Joel Spivak's Philadelphia Trolleys**, both available from UCHS:

**Carl Spector's Philadelphia: Historic Exteriors and Interiors** and

**Center City Philadelphia in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century** edited by the **Print and Photograph Department** of the **Library Company of Philadelphia**.

Check them out at [www.arcadiapublishing.com](http://www.arcadiapublishing.com) and ask for them at **Brindlestiff Books**, 4530 Baltimore Avenue or the **Penn Bookstore**, 3601 Walnut Street.

## SAVE THESE DATES

Sunday, February 4, 2007 – **Friends of Clark Park's Charles Dicken's Birthday Party**, Griffith Hall, USIP, 600 S. 43rd Street, dramatic readings (featuring *A Tale of Two Cities*), music, food and the traditional **Dickens and Little Nell** statue decorating

Sunday, May 20, 2007 – **UCHS's Spring House Tour – Mansions of University City**, taking you inside some of the unique single houses among University City's typical historic townhouses and twins. Part of the tours of **Philadelphia Open House**, sponsored by **Friends of Independence National Historical Park**; special advance sale discounts for UCHS members, \$20; day of tour sales, \$35

## Close at Hand

For those in **University City** who have not received their copy of the newly revised, fall 2006, edition of **Close at Hand: A Neighborhood Directory of Goods & Services**, published by the **University City District** and the **University City Review**, copies are available (one per household) for pick up at the **UCD, 3940 Chestnut Street**. For those members who would like a copy and for which this arrangement isn't practical, contact us and we will get and send you a copy as one of the benefirts of UCHS.

## AND SPECIAL THANKS TO:

those recently renewing their membership, especially those who also gave generous additional contributions as **Sustainers of UCHS: Nicholas & Eleanor Cernansky; Ron Elum & Bob Cordera; Tom McCarron & Richard Keiser; Susan & Ed Montgomery; Roy Harker & Bob Ranando; Sigrid Larson & Nancy Roth and Belynda Stewart** and those who made special contributions as **Friends of UCHS: David & Linda Blythe; Marja & Jan Hoek; Eddie Brady & Amy Johnson; Jim Lilly, Metropolitan Bakery & Café; Jim Littrell, Rector, St Mary's Church; Dr. Ann Mayer; Heiner & Giesela Moehren; Laurie & Victoria Olin; Elbert Ray Perkins; Jon & Carmen Richter, John Puckett & Karin Schaller; Catherine Carr & Louis Tannen, Fine Carpentry; Josef & Jennifer Wegner; Lewis & Abbie Wendell; Jean Wolf, The Woodlands.**

## COMING UP ..

During the coming months, members of the **UCHS Board** will begin a project aimed at developing a list of programs and services for the next year or two. Board members will be contacting people around the time they join the organization or, in the case of current members, at the time of their membership renewal. Of special interest are what members would like to see the **UCHS** doing as well as learning skills and interests that the members themselves would like to bring to the other members of the organization.

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