

# NOMINATION OF HISTORIC BUILDING, STRUCTURE, SITE, OR OBJECT

## PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

SUBMIT ALL ATTACHED MATERIALS ON PAPER AND IN ELECTRONIC FORM ON CD (MS WORD FORMAT)

### 1. ADDRESS OF HISTORIC RESOURCE (must comply with an Office of Property Assessment address)

Street address: **1527 N. Front Street**

Postal code: **19123**

Councilmanic District: **5**

### 2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: **Sloan House: Second Associate Presbyterian Church Institutional Court**

Common Name: **NA**

### 3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Building

Structure

Site

Object

### 4. PROPERTY INFORMATION

Condition:  excellent  good  fair  poor  ruins

Occupancy:  occupied  vacant  under construction  unknown

Current use: **Unknown**

### 5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Please attach a plot plan and written description of the boundary.

### 6. DESCRIPTION

Please attach a description of the historic resource and supplement with current photographs.

### 7. SIGNIFICANCE

Please attach the Statement of Significance.

Period of Significance (from year to year): from **1852** to **1954**

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: **Built, 1852-1854**

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: **Unknown**

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: **Unknown**

Original owner: **Robert and Mary Sloan**

**CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION:**

The historic resource satisfies the following criteria for designation (check all that apply):

- (a) Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past; or,
- (b) Is associated with an event of importance to the history of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- (c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style; or,
- (d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen; or,
- (e) Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- (f) Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation; or,
- (g) Is part of or related to a square, park or other distinctive area which should be preserved according to an historic, cultural or architectural motif; or,
- (h) Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City; or,
- (i) Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in pre-history or history; or
- (j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

**8. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Please attach a bibliography.

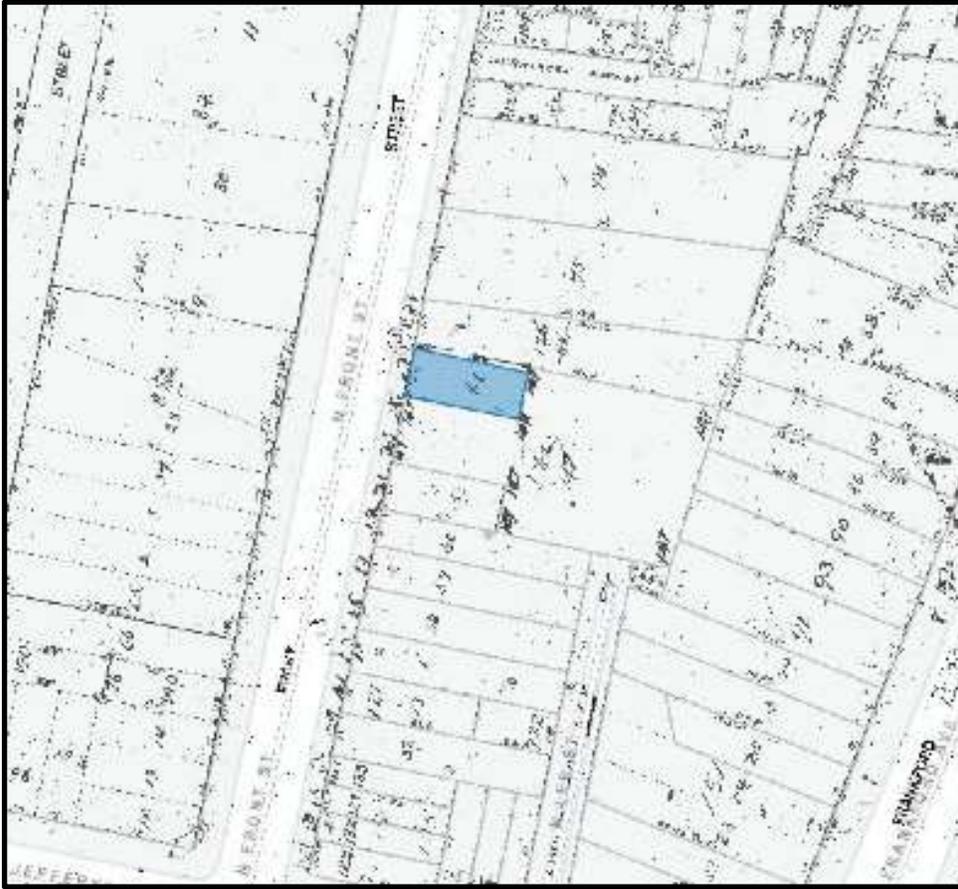
**9. NOMINATOR**

Name with Title **Oscar Beisert, Historian/Author** Email **Oscar.Beisert@gmail.com**  
 Organization **Kensington and Olde Richmond Heritage, LLC** Date **February 9, 2016**  
 Street Address **P.O. Box 3703** Telephone **717.602.5002**  
 City, State, and Postal Code **Philadelphia, PA 19125**  
 Nominator  is  is not the property owner.

**PHC USE ONLY**

Date of Receipt: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Correct-Complete  Incorrect-Incomplete Date: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date of Notice Issuance: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Property Owner at Time of Notice  
 Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
 \_\_\_\_\_  
 City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Postal Code: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Date of Final Action: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Designated  Rejected

## 5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION



The Sloan House, 1527 N. Front Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The Sloan House is located at 1527 N. Front Street, between W. Jefferson Street and W. Oxford Street in the Fishtown neighborhood of the Kensington section in Philadelphia. The building is set immediately upon the street frontage with the sidewalk as its only recession. 1523-25 N. Front Street, the former Second Associate Presbyterian Church, the Sloan House at the south and east elevations of its property line. The Sloan House and the vacant lot at 1521 N. Front Street create a bottle-neck shape to the 1523-25 N. Front Street parcel.

The boundaries for the subject designation are as follows:

The property is situated on the east side of N. Front Street, beginning at a point of two-hundred and five feet (205') northward from the north side of Jefferson Street. It contains in front or breadth on the said Front Street twenty-feet (20') and extends in length or depth eastwardly forty-eight feet (48').

Being known as Parcel No. 011N23-0061, Office of Property Assessment Account No. 884343035.



Left: looking northeast, the primary and south elevations of the Sloan House. Right: looking east, the primary elevations of the Second Associate Presbyterian Church Court, which includes the Sloan House on left.

## 6. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The Sloan House is a semi-detached row house on the east side of N. Front Street near the center of the block in the Fishtown neighborhood of the Kensington section in Philadelphia. The building's south-facing elevation is a blind brick wall, which forms the northwest corner of the institutional court that was created by the Second Associate Presbyterian Church. The large city block is bound by N. Front Street at the west, Oxford Street at the north, Jefferson Street at the south, and the party-line of the building lots facing Frankford Avenue at the east. The building is situated on a parcel that is twenty feet front, extending forty-eight feet to the rear of the property. Since 1922, the building has also faced the Frankford Avenue Elevated set above North Front Street.

Constructed between 1852 and 1854, the Sloan House is a five-room building located at 1527 N. Front Street. Influenced stylistically by larger Georgian and Greek Revival aesthetics in Philadelphia, the vernacular red brick building fulfilled the stipulation of its "Deed of Ground," in which the Second Associate Presbyterian Church required Robert and Mary Sloan to construct a "substantial brick house." The house is a three-story load-bearing masonry, red brick building that consists of two sections—the main block and the piazza. The main block is the larger, three-story section, containing the N. Front Street facade. The facade features a semi-symmetrical fenestration that is set within three stories finer brick laid in a running bond. Beneath the low-slung, side-gabled roof are two sets of aligned apertures—the two windows of the third floor being smaller than those on the second floor, typical of Greek Revival-period row houses. On the ground floor, the fenestration contains four apertures (described here left to right): a single entry door to the front hall or room, the threshold of which is accessed by three slabs of marble forming steps; two identical windows lighting the front room and not aligned with the upper floors; and a single door accessed at the sidewalk level, leading to an enclosed, private pedestrian alley to the rear of the main block. The alley entrance retains its original paneled door that likely matched the ground floor shutters that have long since

been taken down. The ground floor apertures feature marble sills and lintels, while the upper stories are wooden. Some of the original shutter dogs remain and plywood fills all of the apertures, which may or may not contain original window fabric.

Historically, the north elevation of the main block was attached to another row house—the wider, commodious brick dwelling house of James Irwin, an important local manufacturer, but this earlier building has since been replaced by a one-story, commercial-appearing single-vehicle garage of load-bearing, red brick masonry construction. This building is not legally associated with the Sloan House. However, it is a handsome garage of its period of construction—a compliment that in no way justifies it replacing the Irwin House.

The east elevation of the main block features apertures that have been obscured by plaster-based cladding. The access door to the pedestrian alley is present at the ground floor. The piazza extends from the east elevation, being recessed from the main block by roughly one-third in height and width. As was usually the case, the piazza created a strip of ground that was historically fenced at the property line.

Extending from the east, rear elevation of the main block, the piazza is a two-story ell of load-bearing, red brick masonry construction, consisting of two small rooms, one per floor. There is a single aperture per floor, which are aligned. The ell features a shed roof that extends at a low decline from the north party-line of the lot. The piazza has been enlarged by roughly forty percent with a small concrete block addition at its rear. The concrete block portion of the building is non-contributing.



Left: looking east, the primary elevation of the Sloan House. Right: looking southeast, the north and primary elevations of the Sloan House.



Looking north, the south elevation of the Sloan House.



Left: looking east, the alley entrance and its paneled door within the primary elevation of the Sloan House. Right: the south elevation of the Sloan House in context.



Left: looking east, the upper two floors of the Sloan House's primary elevation. Right: looking east the first floor of the primary elevation of the Sloan House—note: early sidewalk brick pavement is presently exposed and apparent beneath lesser forms of recent pavement.



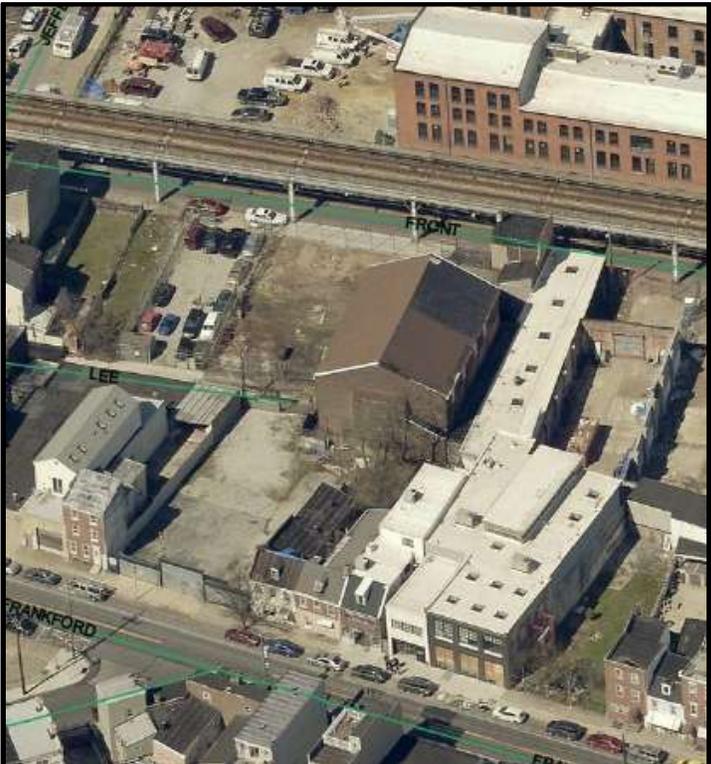
Looking north, the Sloan House is present near the top left.



Looking east, the top floor of the Sloan House is near the center west of the Second Associate Presbyterian Church.



Looking south, the north elevation of the Sloan House is near the center on right.



Looking west, the south elevation of the Sloan House is near the center on right.

## 7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Sloan House is a significant historic resource that merits designation by the Philadelphia Historical Commission and inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Located at 1527 N. Front Street in the Fishtown neighborhood of the larger Kensington section in Philadelphia, the Sloan House satisfies Criteria for Designation A, as enumerated in Section 14-1004 of the Philadelphia Code. The Sloan House:

- (A) Has significant character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth, or nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past.

### **Historic Context: the Second Associate Presbyterian Church and the Substantial Brick Dwelling House of Robert and Mary Sloan**

On May 8, 1850, the Second Associate Presbyterian Church purchased a lot on the east side of N. Front Street, which measured seventy feet front by one hundred thirty-one feet four inches deep. The owners, Alexander H. Smith and his wife Matilda, sold on ground rents, meaning that the Presbyterians would pay an annual rent to the Smiths. A detailed explanation of the Ground Rent System is attached to this document as Appendix A. However, it is important to note that this system likely made owning a home more affordable, requiring only the cost for construction rather than the cost of the lot.<sup>1</sup> The deed included rights to subdivide the property and, most importantly, a requirement that a church edifice be constructed. The frugal congregation subsidized the payment of ground rents by subdividing the property almost immediately after construction. With an annual ground-rent of \$184, the Presbyterians didn't have to purchase the lot. However, construction costs would be expensive and the annual fees would be costly to the congregation.<sup>2</sup>

On May 17, 1852, the Second Associate Presbyterian Church's congregation sold the northwest corner of the lot to Robert and Mary Sloan. Containing twenty feet of street frontage, the lot was forty-eight feet deep.<sup>3</sup> Robert Sloan was required to pay \$25 per year, deliverable in installments on the first of July and January. This payment subsidized the ground rents of the Second Associate Presbyterian Church and was the primary reason for the sale of the lot. The deed also stipulated that Robert Sloan would "...from the date hereof erect and build on the said lot a good substantial Brick Dwelling House..." to secure the said annual rent. The requirement to construct a house was to ensure that the ground rent could be paid, making the lot viable to generate income. The house appears to have been built almost immediately after this agreement was signed. A history of the Sloans is attached to this document in Appendix B.

---

<sup>1</sup> Rilling, Donna J. *Making Houses, Crafting Capitalism: Builders in Philadelphia, 1790-1850*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 61-62.

<sup>2</sup> Philadelphia Deeds, 1852.

<sup>3</sup> Philadelphia Deed Book G.W.C., No. 85, p. 314. Philadelphia City Archives (hereafter CAP).

*CRITERION A: The Sloan House has significant character, interest, and value, representing a distinctive component of the development and cultural characteristics of Philadelphia. Being the first of two houses that enclosed the Second Associate Presbyterian Church into an institutional court for the purposes of subsidizing the congregation's ground rents, the Sloan House is an integral and formative building of the extant L-shape institutional court. Its counterpart, the Second Associate Presbyterian Church, has been designated; however, its significance as an institutional court is contingent on the Sloan House. Institutional courts are distinctive pieces of urban design, as well as an important architectural form in Philadelphia, representing institutional development and urban design in eighteenth and nineteenth century Philadelphia.*



The original Moravian Church, Moravian Alley, Philadelphia. Circa 1820. Courtesy the Library Company of Philadelphia.

### **The History of Institutional and Residential Courts in Philadelphia**

Originally laid out as spacious blocks set within streets of ample width, Penn's Philadelphia evolved quickly into an eighteenth century urban context of commerce and trade, interwoven with two- and three-story single-family houses. Narrow streets and even narrower alleys filled in the Philadelphia grid as second and third subdivisions, creating an urban setting that Penn had hoped to avoid. Yet this dense matrix is not only the depth of the facades set upon these principal streets. "Block-specific by block-specific" networks of pedestrian courts accessed by pedestrian streets comprise an integral component of Philadelphia's urban design and its built environment, which

evolved and developed in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.<sup>4</sup> As Dell Upton's study points out when describing Philadelphia's development:

Equally striking ... [are] the secondary streets, alleys, and courts that penetrated the interiors of the larger squares, as property owners subdivided their lots. Although these interpolations are often described by urban historians as unfortunate perversions of Penn's green country town, they were part of the process of "building here after Streets" on individual holdings that Penn anticipated. In the days of the walking city they were essential to the creation of a vital urban landscape.<sup>5</sup>

According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term *court* has referred to "A quadrangular area surrounded by a building or a group of buildings" since the seventeenth century.<sup>6</sup> More simply, a court is a space that is enclosed wholly or partially by buildings. Courts are also the interior space, or spaces, within a block, often divided into densely developed lots. Courts served all manner of purposes, including agricultural, commercial, industrial, institutional, and residential uses. Institutional and residential courts are the types most ubiquitous in Philadelphia.

Institutional and residential courts long pre-date the founding of Philadelphia, being an important concept of urban design in England. As the mercantile class enlarged in the seventeenth century, residential courts developed in response to the demand for density in London. However, the greatest period of residential court development occurred in the eighteenth century, as London became the first major industrial center in the world. Small house types became particularly important for use in compact urban spaces and it is this type of dwelling or development that defines the built environment in the oldest parts of Philadelphia. Archetypes for these small houses were created by almshouses as early as the fifteenth century, as in the United Kingdom. These small houses were built in rows as a cost effective mechanism for providing housing for the poor.<sup>7</sup>

From the fifteenth century onwards almshouses provided multiple-occupation housing, each room being a distinct dwelling, usually grouped in short low ranges.<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Hayward, Mary Ellen, *Baltimore Alley Houses: Homes for Working People Since the 1780s* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008), 15-16.

<sup>5</sup> Dell Upton, *Another City: Urban Live and Urban Spaces in the New American Republic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 115.

<sup>6</sup> "Court, n.1". *OED Online*. December 2015. Oxford University Press.

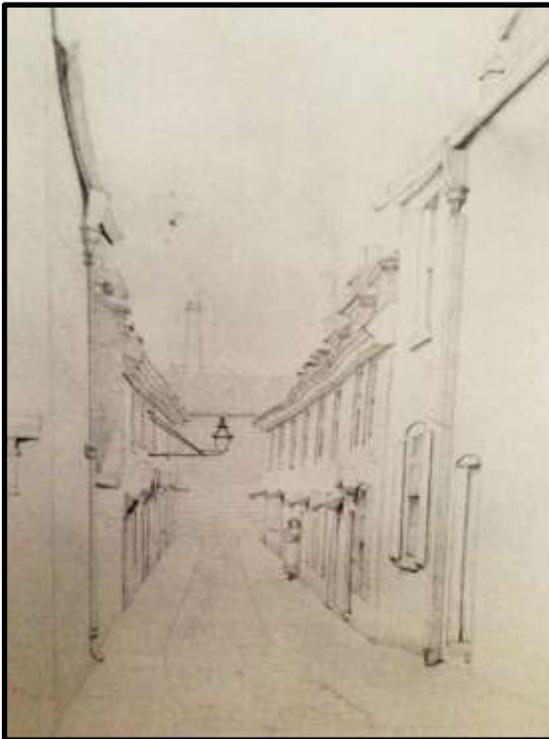
<sup>7</sup> Olsen, Donald J. *Town Planning in London: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982, 167-172.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Guillery, *Small House in Eighteenth-Century London* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 52.



Almshouses, England. Starting life as a priest's house, The Chantry, on left, was converted into four dwellings in 1589, while the buildings on right date to the early eighteenth century. The eight dwellings were part of the almshouse of St. John the Baptist Church. Courtesy Richard Croft.

The requirement of small houses in developing cities led to the adoption of these house types in residential court development. However, there are examples of house types for both the prosperous merchant or trades person, as well as the laborer.<sup>9</sup> The prosperous merchant type featured classical finishes that appealed to the aspiring merchant or trades person.<sup>10</sup>



Angel Court (later Sarah's Court), New Gravel Lane (now Garnet Street), in London is an example of a court development with merchant or trades person housing. Courtesy the *Small House in Eighteenth Century London*.

---

<sup>10</sup> Guillery, *Small House in Eighteenth-Century London* 53-55.





The Trinity Almshouses, Mile End Road, built to designs by William Ogborne in 1695. Naturally, the area surrounding the almshouses was open undeveloped when the institution was first built, but by the late nineteenth century was a dense section known as Sptalfields, London. Drawing by the Committee for the Survey of the Memorials of Greater London, circa 1896.

Institutional courts are a feature of many ancient cities. In London, institutions of all sizes usually started out on larger lots and those that survived development over time sold off pieces of their property to raise funds or generate income, at the same time allowing for progress. Naturally, the few examples of institutional courts in London that survive are in the oldest sections of the city. Located in Abchurch Lane, St. Mary Abchurch is a modest building that dates to 1681-1686 and is within a tiny square that was once part of its graveyard.<sup>11</sup> Having been on the site since the twelfth-century, the original site has been swallowed up by centuries of development.<sup>12</sup> Another important institutional court retains the oldest synagogue in Great Britain—the Bevis Marks Synagogue (built 1700–01). St. Anne’s Vestry Hall is another important example of the continued pedestrian tradition, as the building is located on a typical pedestrian footway off of a lane. Despite its ancient location type, it was built in 1905.<sup>13</sup>

---

<sup>11</sup> Jones, Edward and Christopher Woodward. *A Guide to The Architecture of London*. (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1983), 265.

<sup>12</sup> Guillery, *Small House in Eighteenth-Century London* 265.

<sup>13</sup> Jones, Edward and Christopher Woodward. *A Guide to The Architecture of London*. (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1983), 282.



Bevis Marks Synagogue—the Oldest Synagogue in the United Kingdom. After signing a contract with a Quaker master-builder, a committee of Sephardic Jews entered a lease on June 24, 1699 with Sir Thomas and Lady Pointz for the tract of land at “Plough Yard” in Bevis Marks. The building was completed in September 1701.<sup>14</sup> Courtesy the Bevis Marks Synagogue.

The architecture of institutional and residential courts in Philadelphia was similar to that which existed across the Atlantic. However, the process by which Philadelphia’s institutional courts were developed was one that was more organized and thoughtful, starting from scratch in the eighteenth century. Mercantilism represents the economic history of eighteenth century America and the industrial revolution began to show its face during that period as well. This led to a rapid increase in the urban population. As a result, the early development responded with the construction of a dense built environment. Both the institutional and residential courts were primary components of this development.

### Residential Courts

Residential courts ranged from the few grand examples to intense networks of brick houses for industrial laborers. Franklin Court is perhaps the most known and visited today, yet, as a residential court, it was the most uncommon, and, in many ways, it was built much like an institutional court. Representing the residential court in its grandest form, American Founding Father Benjamin Franklin built a freestanding mansion house in 1763. The house stood at the back of his lot behind commercial and residential buildings facing onto Market Street between Second and Third. The configuration also included a cartway that remained as street even when the mansion was lost at the hands

---

<sup>14</sup> Barnett, Richard D. and Abraham Levy (1998). *The Bevis Marks Synagogue*, London: The Society of Heshaim.

of Franklin’s descendants for dense residential development in the early nineteenth century.<sup>15</sup> More common were residential courts of small to medium size houses. Loxley’s Court is one of the best examples of a residential court developed over time for the merchant or tradesman class. The pedestrian entrances to interior of the block lead one to a wide opening of space surrounded by medium to large red-brick dwellings that date at the earliest to the 1770s. Drinker’s Court is another from that period, which appealed to the middling sort.<sup>16</sup>,



1895 Philadelphia Atlas, G.W. Bromley. Northern Liberties was a dense network of residential courts, serving “the Workshop of the World”. Within this small excerpt of a Bromley atlas there are numerous examples: one of the largest and architecturally striking was Onas Street, which contained houses of all sizes, and provided both cart- and footway; Burwick Place, nine brick boxbands; Perkenpine Place, a combination of ten brick and wooden boxbands; Almira Place, no less than eighteen houses—two or three even of wood; Moore’s Place, about ten brick boxband houses at the rear of a larger house; Bristow Place, eleven brick boxbands; Hobensack Place, a mixture of small to medium size dwellings; Astor Place, a footway of eight tiny brick boxbands; etc. The subdivision of the original lot created a court that is essentially a bottleneck. Courtesy Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network.

<sup>15</sup> Edward M. Riley, “Franklin’s Home,” in *Historic Philadelphia: From the Founding Until the Early Nineteenth Century*, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 43, pt. 1 (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1953), 148–160.

<sup>16</sup> Drinker’s Court, National Register of Historic Places Inventory, 5 August 1970, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.



Typical pedestrian residential court. Courtesy the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Workers occupied smaller houses in more remote and industrializing locations. Near the Second Associate Presbyterian Church and the Sloan House at the southeast corner of N. Front and E. Oxford Streets was Deringer Avenue, a small residential court of trinities. Later named James Avenue, this residential court was developed much like the nearby Second Associate Presbyterian Church with two larger houses facing onto N. Front Street. The six brick boxband houses were accessed by a narrow cartway that narrowed halfway down to a footway. In the same block, just south of Deringer Avenue was another larger house at 1533 N. Front Street, which featured a footway along its north elevation, leading to a row of five brick boxband houses. Both of these residential courts have disappeared. This was a common form in Kensington and even more prevalent just south in Northern Liberties where blocks of incredible networks of residential courts dominated the built environment. The path of I-95 appears to be the location of one of the densest sections of Northern Liberties. Most of the residential courts in this section have vanished. Residential courts also transitioned overtime, the houses of mercantilism becoming the overpopulated houses of factory workers in later years, a fate that worsened as time went on.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>17</sup> Smith, Billy G., *The "Loer Sort:" Philadelphia's Laboring People, 1750-1800*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Place, 1990), 163.



Top (left): House recessed into a residential court with vehicle access. Drawing, early nineteenth century. Top (right): Residential court behind an church, likely serving institutional purposes . Taken in 1853, the photograph shows 322 Spruce Street. Bottom: taken from the largest section of the residential court, this photograph shows the Arch Street entrance to Loxley's Court. Courtesy the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.



Residential Court, Circa 1890. Courtesy the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.



Carpenters' Court and Hall (in perspective), Chestnut Street, ca. 1855. Photograph by Richards. Courtesy the Library Company of Philadelphia.

### Institutional Courts

Philadelphia's most prominent institutional court is Carpenter's Hall, which stands at the center of a city block with cartway access from Chestnut Street between Second and Third. Recessed from the street, it was built by the Carpenter's Company in 1770. Only five years later the organization sold off twenty-six feet of its Chestnut Street frontage. Nearby is the prominent institutional court of Old St. Joseph's Roman Catholic Church. Founded in 1733, this is the first Catholic Church in Philadelphia developed the built environment of its current institutional court over time. The original church as well as the later 1757 and current 1838 building were all built on the same location set back from the street.<sup>18</sup> The Independent Tabernacle dating from around 1806 was built on the back end of Market Street lots and situated at the end of Ranstead Court.<sup>19</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> Dennis C. Kurjack, "St. Joseph's and St. Mary's Churches," in *Historic Philadelphia*, 199-203.

<sup>19</sup> Alexander Mackie, "The Presbyterian Churches of Old Philadelphia," in *Historic Philadelphia*, 224-25.



The Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Chestnut Street above Tenth with commercial buildings in front, ca. 1870. Courtesy the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

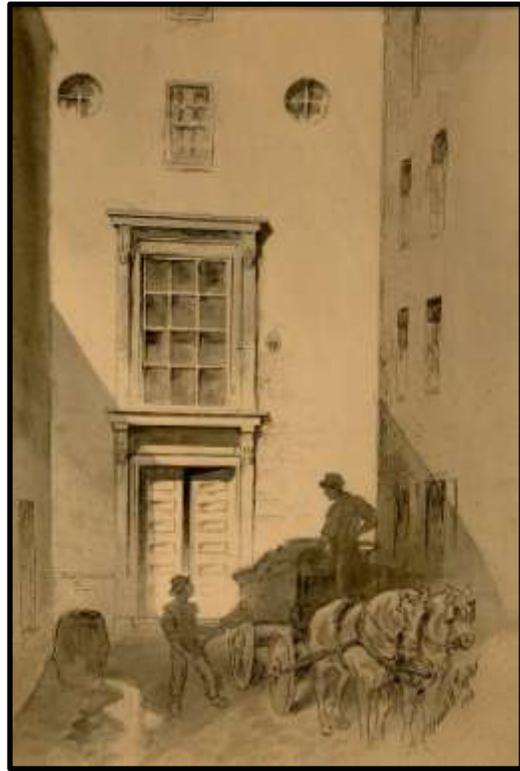
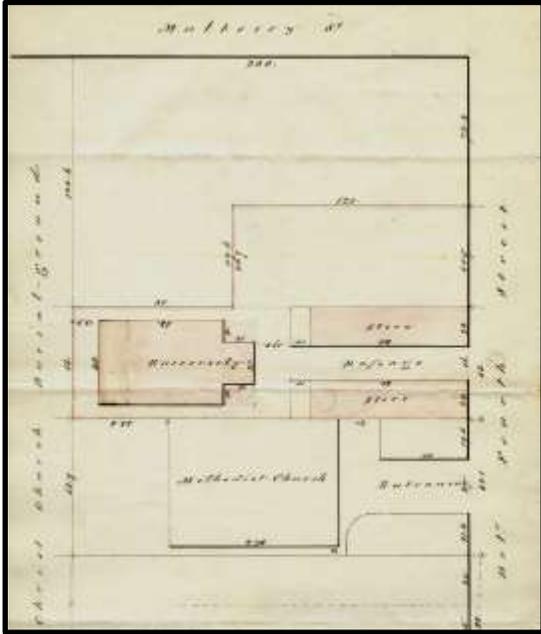
St. Joseph's being a less usual confirmation, most of Philadelphia's institutional courts followed the example set by the Carpenter's Company. This is certainly the case with the subject institutional court, the Second Associate Presbyterian Church and the Sloan House. Like Carpenter's Hall, the buildings were set at the rear of a large lot, intentionally leaving space for buildings at the street front. Access to institutional court buildings varied due to the lot size, many including only enough space for a cart or footway. In rare instances a graveyard occupied the open space, which was also centered on a footway.

This form continued well into the first half of the nineteenth century in the densely built-up sections of the City. The Academy of Natural Sciences hired William Strickland to build a hall for them in Gilliams Court (in the 200 block of Arch Street) in 1814 which they occupied until 1826.<sup>20</sup> Another example which is very similar to the Second Associate Presbyterian Church site is that of the 1845 Charity School of the University of Pennsylvania near Fourth and Arch Streets. The University was low on funds to support its Charity School as mandated by the original 1749 deed of trust for the property. In order to solve the problem the University tore down the original 18<sup>th</sup> century buildings and built a new school house at the rear of the lot and two stores to generate rental income at the front of the lot on Fourth St.<sup>21</sup>

---

<sup>20</sup> Maurice E. Phillips, "The Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia," in *Historic Philadelphia*, 269.

<sup>21</sup> William L. Turner, "The Charity School, the Academy, and the College, Fourth and Arch Streets," in *Historic Philadelphia*, 186.



Left: Plan of the New Charity School of the University of Pennsylvania, 1845. Shows school along with the two stores built in front on N. 4<sup>th</sup> St. below Arch. Note the Union Methodist Church to the south which was also recessed in a court created by two flanking structures. Courtesy University Archives, Univ. of Pa. Right: Sketch of 1845 Charity School building of the University of Pennsylvania, by Frank H. Taylor, 1918. Courtesy of the University Archives, University of Pennsylvania

There are several other examples of this configuration with churches. The former Third Baptist Church at 771 S. Second Street, which is known to have been constructed prior to 1858. Later to become the synagogue of the Neziner congregation, the Third Baptist Church is very similar in form, style and size to the Second Associate Presbyterian Church. It is also recessed from the street with one row house at the northwest corner of its original parcel, creating a church court. Because of the simplicity of the Greek Revival building format, condos were an easy conversion for the Third Baptist Church, which was completed in recent years—the Neziner Court Condos, reflecting its later history as a synagogue. There are several other examples of various other denominations, but, by and large, the survival of this form is not common, although it is highly characteristic of Philadelphia’s built environment in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

## A Brief Typology of Institutional Courts

“...it would appear from this and subsequent developments [of the property] that the [Carpenters’] Hall was always planned to head up a narrow court with flanking buildings as rent payers...[and] it was not conceived of as a conspicuous free-standing architectural landmark.”<sup>22</sup>

When the Second Associate Presbyterian Church constructed its building, the placement of the building at the back, center of the lot was part of a conscious plan to allow for residential development at the street front. Soon after the building was complete, the lot at the northwest corner was sold with the stipulation that a house was built within one year. Construction of the Sloan House at the northwest corner of the lot essentially created the institutional court. Several years later a second house was constructed at the southwest corner of the lot, which essentially created a bottleneck lot for the Second Associate Presbyterian Church.

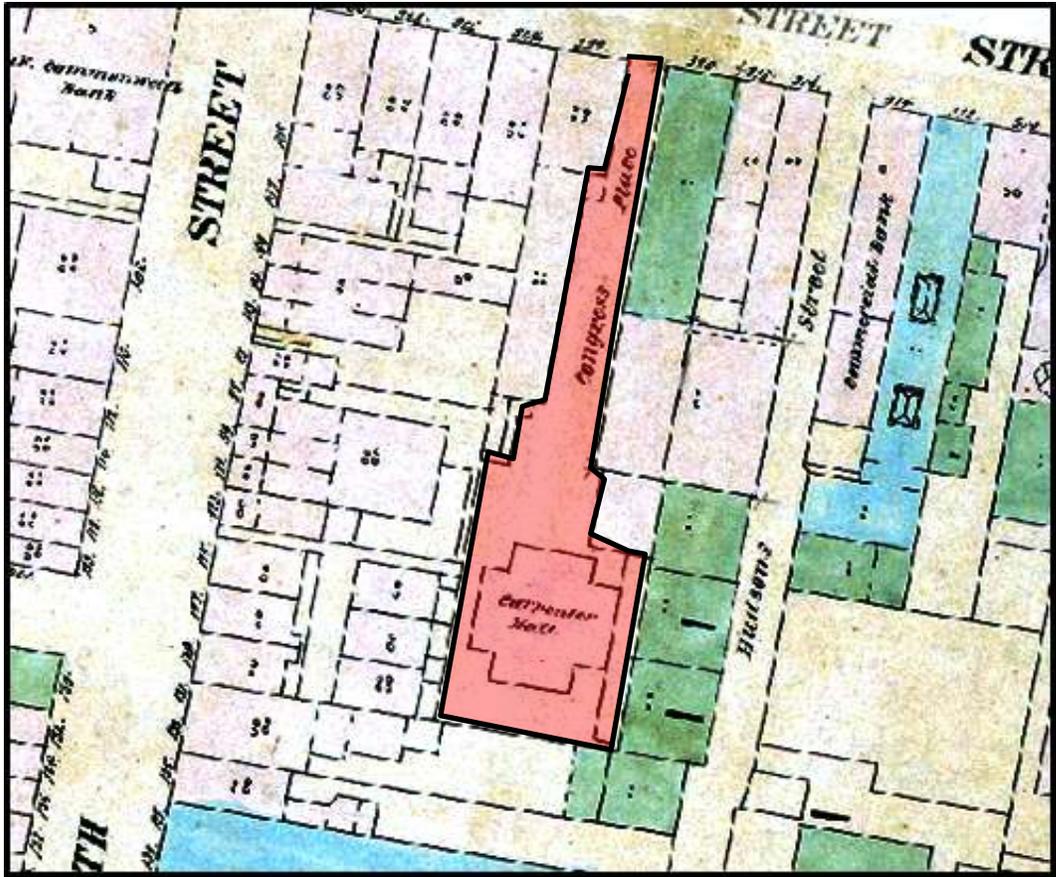


The Sloan House (on left) and the Second Associate Presbyterian Church, forming an institutional court on N. Front Street. Photo by Oscar Beisert.

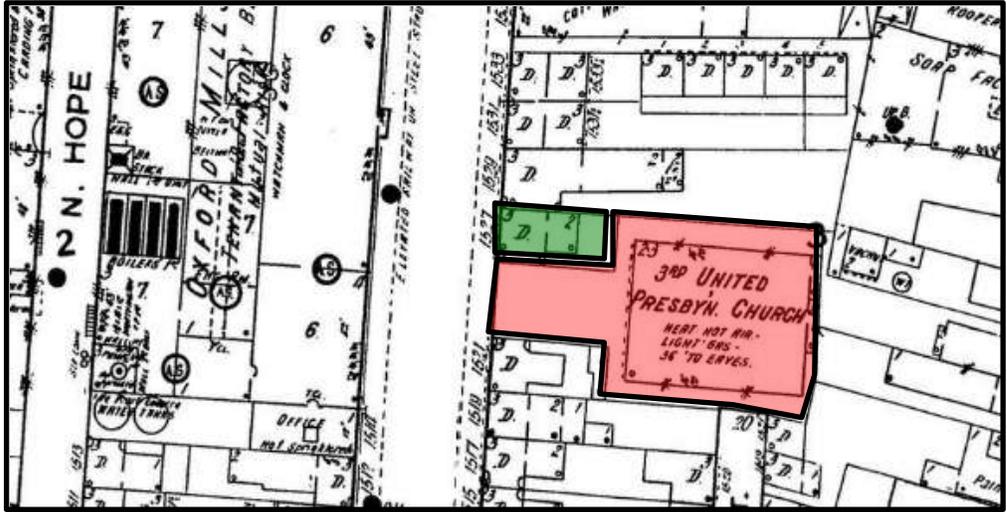
<sup>22</sup> Charles E. Peterson, “Carpenter’s Hall,” in *Historic Philadelphia*, 115.



The Second Associate Presbyterian Church and the Sloan House (on left) forming an institutional court.  
Photo Courtesy Google Books.

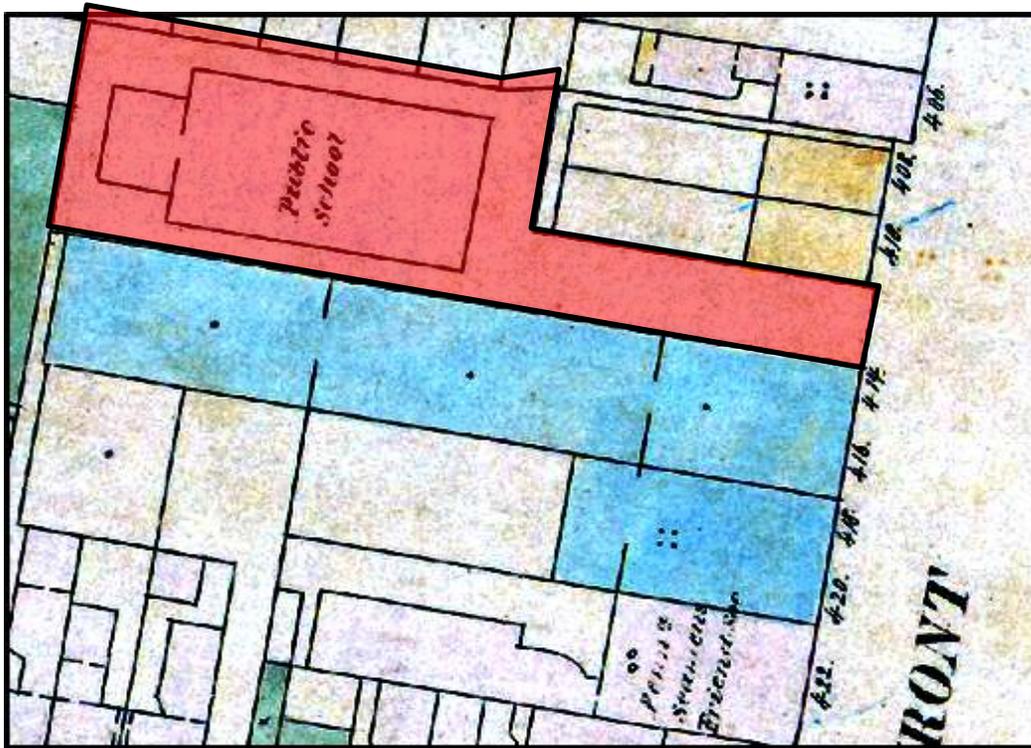


1858-1860 Phila Atlas, Heamer & Locher. The subdivision of the original lot created a court that is essentially a bottleneck. Courtesy Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network.

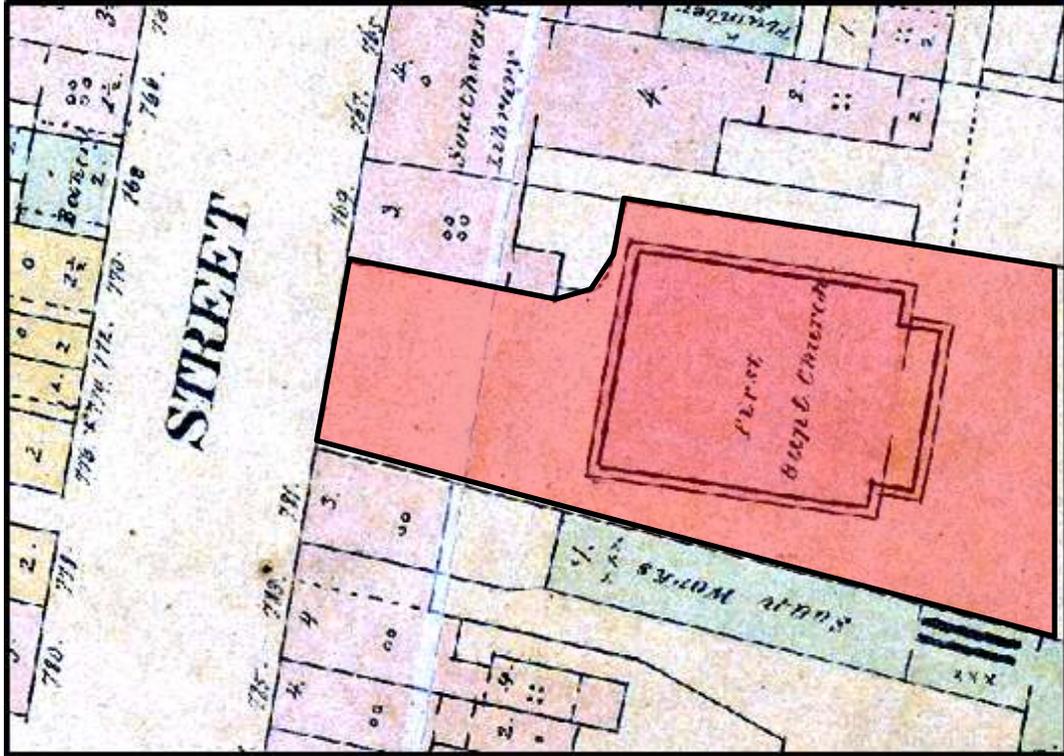


Sanborn Map, Circa 1916. Like Carpenters' Hall shown above, the Second Associate Presbyterian Church (the Third United Presbyterian Church by the time of the Sanborn Map) subdivided the lot in the typical manner, creating a bottleneck (shaded in red). Construction of the Sloan House (shaded in green) is what makes the area distinctive, creating the institutional court. Courtesy of the Free Library of Philadelphia.

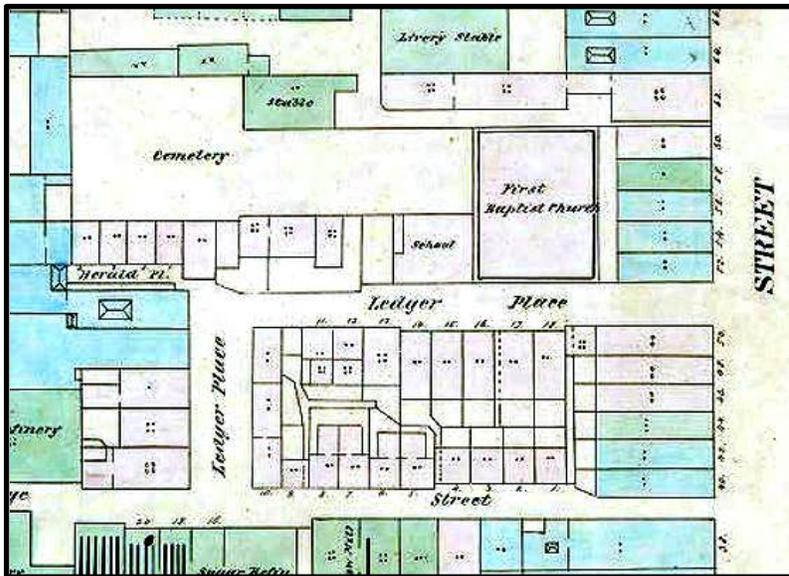
Unlike residential courts, which were tucked into “every crack and cranny”, the institutional court as a type of pedestrian, urban design is highly dependent on lot size due to the general nature of institutional buildings. Therefore, the institutional court almost always requires an above average square or block. Even a small building, like the Charity School of the University of Pennsylvania required ample space when it was built in the 1840s. The need to produce income from the property dictated the decision to construct a small, self-sustaining building, leading to increased income from the improved commercial lots fronting N. Fourth Street. The bottleneck or L-shape courts are the most common form within the larger context. The smaller, even average, size blocks in Philadelphia did usually not permit space for the creation of institutional courts unless the principal streets were narrow with small to medium size houses. Therefore, while a known, distinctive architectural type, institutional courts were never normative within the context of local institutional development.



1858-1860 Phila Atlas, Heamer & Locher. This atlas shows a public school set within an institutional court on the west side of the 400 block of S. Front Street, taking on the confirmation of an L-shape. Courtesy Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network.

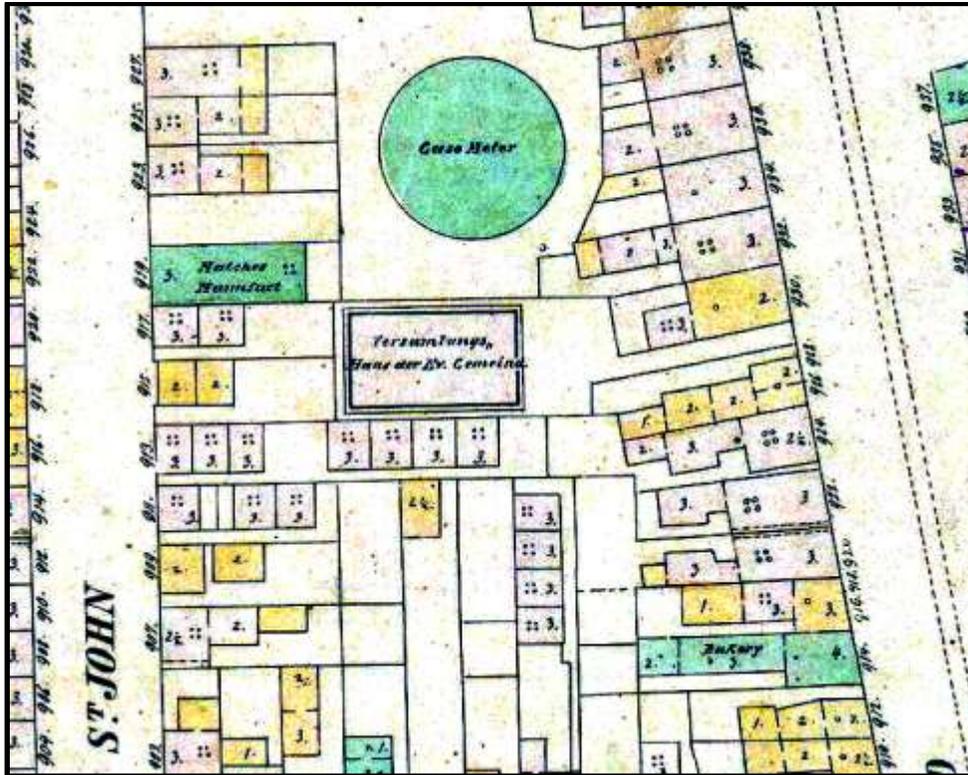


1858-1860 Phila Atlas, Heamer & Locher. The First Baptist Church on S. Second Street in South Philadelphia appears to have stopped after the first subdivision—perhaps its reasons for were different. Regardless, this configuration falls into the L-shape (highlighted in red) category. Courtesy Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network.



1858-1860 Phila Atlas, Heamer & Locher. The older First Baptist Church was located on N. Second Street above Market. Its so wonderfully Philadelphia, that its edifice and its cemetery were set upon a court (Ledger Place) within a court. One might classify the situation of the First Baptist Church an organic court, as it likely started as a church and graveyard on a parcel. So that it did not plan for a Sloan House, rather its eventual neighbors encroached and enclosed the buildings and its grounds. Courtesy Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network.

The bottleneck and L-shape institutional courts formed due to plans created by the institution. However, in other cases, the configuration of the institutional court is organic. St. Joseph's is the perfect and most famous example of a more organic institutional court configuration. Its development history, like the few others that fall into this category, is traceable and explainable, but did not manifest from a physical plan and a vacant lot like the Carpenters' Company and the Second Associate Presbyterian Church. There were also institutional courts that formed due to available space within the interior of a city block.



1858-1860 Phila Atlas, Heamer & Locher. The Versammlungs Haus der Evangelische Gemeinde (Emmanuel Church of the Evangelical Association) was located on the west side of N. Third Street above Poplar. While it is essentially a bottleneck institutional court, there is also something organic about its situation at the center of the block. This is an unusual circumstance where institutional court exists at the center of a rather narrow block. Courtesy Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network.

## **Conclusion**

The Sloan House is a significant representative of the type of dwellings that were planned and constructed as part of the development of institutional courts in the early to mid-nineteenth century in Philadelphia. After the construction of the Second Associate Presbyterian Church, the congregation immediately sold a lot at the northwest corner of its parcel to Robert and Mary Sloan, stipulating that “a substantial dwelling house” be erected on the lot within one year. This stipulation was part of the financial planning of the congregation, as it wanted to ensure that this portion of the ground rent would be subsidized. The Sloan House is also the only remaining feature, aside from the Second Associate Presbyterian Church that makes this property especially distinctive as an institutional court. Institutional courts were a special feature of the built environment and few survive to-date. The Sloan House is integral to the overall court. Like Carpenters’ Hall, the Second Associate Presbyterian Church was not meant to be a conspicuous building, rather it was also to be enclosed by houses. For these reasons the

## Major Bibliographical References

- Barnett, Richard D. and Abraham Levy (1998). *The Bevis Marks Synagogue*, London: The Society of Heshaim.
- “Court, n.1”. *OED Online*. December 2015. Oxford University Press.
- Dennis C. Kurjack, “St. Joseph’s and St. Mary’s Churches,” in *Historic Philadelphia: From the Founding Until the Early Nineteenth Century*. Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 43, pt. 1 (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1953).
- Drinker’s Court, National Register of Historic Places Inventory, 5 August 1970, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.
- Guillery, Peter. *Small House in Eighteenth-Century London*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.
- Hayward, Mary Ellen. *Baltimore Alley Houses: Homes for Working People Since the 1780s* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).
- Jones, Edward and Christopher Woodward. *A Guide to The Architecture of London*. (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1983).
- Mackie, Alexander. “The Presbyterian Churches of Old Philadelphia,” in *Historic Philadelphia: From the Founding Until the Early Nineteenth Century*. Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 43, pt. 1 (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1953).
- Olsen, Donald J. *Town Planning in London: The Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries*. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982).
- Peterson, Charles E. “Carpenter’s Hall,” in *Historic Philadelphia: From the Founding Until the Early Nineteenth Century*. Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 43, pt. 1 (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1953).
- Philadelphia Deed Book G.W.C., No. 85, p. 314. Philadelphia City Archives (hereafter CAP).
- Phillips, Maurice E. “The Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia,” in *Historic Philadelphia: From the Founding Until the Early Nineteenth Century*. Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 43, pt. 1 (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1953).
- Riley, Edward M. “Franklin’s Home,” in *Historic Philadelphia: From the Founding Until the Early Nineteenth Century*, Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 43, pt. 1 (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1953).
- Rilling, Donna J. *Making Houses, Crafting Capitalism: Builders in Philadelphia, 1790-1850*. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).
- Smith, Billy G., *The “Loer Sort:” Philadelphia’s Laboring People, 1750-1800*. (Ithaca: Cornell University Place, 1990).
- Turner, William L. “The Charity School, the Academy, and the College, Fourth and Arch Streets,” in *Historic Philadelphia: From the Founding Until the Early Nineteenth Century*. Transactions of the American Philosophical Society 43, pt. 1 (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1953).
- Upton, Dell. *Another City: Urban Live and Urban Spaces in the New American Republic*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008.

**Repositories Visited**

The Free Library of Philadelphia

Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network

The Historical Society of Pennsylvania

The Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

University Archives and Records Center, University of Pennsylvania

## APPENDIX A:

### The Ground Rent Estate in Philadelphia

Ground rents are of common-law origin, and in some shape were common in most of the original colonies; but, although ground rents are frequently found in Maryland and sometimes in Delaware and occasionally in New Jersey, and the old Rensselaer Wyck leases of New York partook of their nature, it is in Pennsylvania, and especially in Philadelphia, that this estate has attained its and out from suburban homes in the city limits.<sup>23</sup>

In its early years, Pennsylvania and, in turn, Philadelphia was held by William Penn under “tenure of free and common socage,” which created a sort-of American fealty between the colony and its founder. This was a system that prevailed in the form of quit and ground rent through the colonial period. After the American Revolution, the said fealty was transferred from the British Crown to the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. In 1779, the Divestiture Act was passed, divesting the Penn family of all rights and privileges, including quit rents, which, while similar in character, are not to be confused with ground rents.<sup>24</sup> Ground rents would continue on into the nineteenth century.

In 1888, Edward P. Allinson (1852-1901) and Boies Penrose (1860-1921) defined “ground rents” in a legal paper that was delivered at the Wharton School in February 1888 and subsequently published:

A ground-rent is reserved by indenture. The deed is the act of both parties, and the value or principal of the estate is usually considered one of which the rent would be the annual return of six per cent, or about sixteen years' purchase. The deed usually has a clause of reentry and distress, a waiver of exemption, covenant for payment, and certain provisions as to redemption. Being a rent service, the clause providing for re-entry and distress on default is not necessary. Being also a separate estate from the fee, it is separately assessed and taxed as real estate, although now in all modern deeds the *terretenant*, or grantee of the deed, covenants to pay all taxes. The annual rent payments spring into existence and become debts when they are demandable, and carry interest from that time, and are liens on the land from the date of the deed; but all arrears are discharged by a judicial sale, which, however, does not affect the principal or estate. The principal, not being a debt, was not affected by the legal tender acts, although they gave rise to much litigation as regards ground rents, which was finally settled by the Supreme Court of the United States in *Butler v. Horwitz*, 1 Wallace, 258. It is therefore now accepted law that the rental of

---

<sup>23</sup> Allinson, Edward Pease and Boies Penrose. *Ground Rents in Philadelphia*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1888.

<sup>24</sup> Allinson. *Ground Rents in Philadelphia*.

a ground-rent estate is not a debt within the meaning of any legal tender acts; rent reserved in coin dollars of a certain weight and fineness cannot be paid by dollars of a less weight and fineness, and a rent reserved in coin dollars cannot be paid in note dollars; rent payable in silver dollars can be paid in gold dollars; and where rent is reserved in so many dollars lawful silver money of the United States, though it cannot be paid in currency, yet it may be paid in any silver or gold coin which Congress has declared to be lawful money and a legal tender at the time when the payment is made. A ground-rent, being real estate, is sold and conveyed as such, and is liable to all its incidents, is subject to judgment, and may be mortgaged. It is the most perfect form of an incorporeal hereditament. It must be reserved by deed with apt words, and may be for a term of years, for life, or in fee; but, in Pennsylvania, it is invariably in the latter form.<sup>25</sup>

Unlike other large American cities, such as Boston and New York, Philadelphia's landowners chose not to invest significant amounts of capital into construction as related to residential and other real estate development. For the first 150 years of Philadelphia's history, construction of residential properties was almost entirely limited to single houses, being built largely on narrow lots subject to ground rents.<sup>26</sup>

### **Ground Rents, House Building, and the City of Homes in Philadelphia, 1790-1860**

A simple explanation of the ground-rent estate (ground rent system) and its use in building houses in Philadelphia: a parcel is subdivided into building lots by its owner with interest and/or willingness to sell lots while also retaining interest. Often for the sum of one dollar, the grantee enters the ground-rent system, gaining ownership with the stipulation of paying annual ground-rent and an almost immediate requirement of "improving the property" (usually with one or more houses). Not having to pay for a lot at purchase, mechanic(s), developer(s), and/or any private individual of modest means could more readily afford to complete a single home and/or a development project.

While ground-rent system was an important factor in Baltimore, in cities like Boston and New York, the construction of a home and/or development(s) by small entrepreneurs was almost always prohibited by the high cost of building lots.

Ground rent is key to explaining the evolution of property and capital in Philadelphia, though geography compounded its influence. This land tenure form evolved from English law and custom and was peculiar [in its magnitude] among [most] other American cities.<sup>27</sup>

The First U.S. Census of 1790 recorded 44,000 Philadelphians.<sup>28</sup> In the six decades that transpired between that time and the beginning of the Civil War, the landscape of

---

<sup>25</sup> Allinson, *Ground Rents in Philadelphia*.

<sup>26</sup> Rilling, Donna J. *Making Houses: Crafting Capitalism, Builders in Philadelphia, 1790-1850*.

<sup>27</sup> Rilling, *Making Houses*.

<sup>28</sup> United States Federal Population Census, 1790.

Philadelphia changed entirely. By 1850, the population had risen to 389,000.<sup>29</sup> By this time the city's built environment boasted 52,000 houses.<sup>30</sup> By and large, this achievement was enabled by the ground-rent system. Many of the city's oldest families, having arrived in the first decades as followers of William Penn, were landholders through the eighteenth and into the nineteenth centuries. As said previously, rather than take on the risk of "real estate development" and/or the task of renting buildings to tenants at-large, descendants of the first purchasers preferred to perpetuate the ground-rent estate.

In the tradition of its conservative Quaker origins, Philadelphians who were "ground lords" preferred the guarantee of long-term and regular profits reaped by the ground-rent estate to the potential risks associated with construction finance and/or speculative development. This "system of fealty" influenced the price of small lots long after America's removal from Great Britain and William Penn's quit rents. While this is indicative of a perpetual system of the ground-rent system, land in American cities was expensive in the late eighteenth and first half of the nineteenth centuries. In Philadelphia, the cost of building-lots was out of scale with the cost associated with construction, which is reversed in most places. A small lot could cost upwards of \$1,000, while a wood-frame tenement could be constructed for about \$500. Escalated lot prices were often associated with potential urban development; however, in a more affordable city like Philadelphia, lot costs remained high due to the existence of a perpetual ground-rent system. This made the tasks of both procuring a lot and building a house prohibitive for new entrepreneurs in cities like Boston and New York and, as it does now, development and ownership was largely limited to the upper classes. However, in Philadelphia, a developer could use the ground-rent system and construction loans from wealthy Philadelphians to fund small residential development projects. Or a man of moderate means could construct their own home.<sup>31</sup>

Owing to the lower immediate costs of obtaining land on ground rent property prices reflected the value of the house exclusive of the cost of the lot. In New York, a respectable brick house required from \$2,000 to \$3,500 to erect (in the decade of 1825-35); to that sum \$500 to \$1,000 would have been added for the lot. In Boston, too, builders found land prices a major hurdle.<sup>32</sup>

In terms of the actual costs of the ground rent, it was usually set at no more than six percent of the lot value. After a deed was drawn up, the contract usually allowed the ground rents to be redeemed within fourteen years, after which time one was presumably bound to perpetual ground-rent. For homeowners, this established a bittersweet culture, allowing homeownership for the "middling sort," who would have been unlikely candidates elsewhere, but leaving many "house poor."

---

<sup>29</sup> United States Federal Population Census, 1850.

<sup>30</sup> Allinson, *Ground Rents in Philadelphia*.

<sup>31</sup> Rilling, *Making Houses*.

<sup>32</sup> Rilling, *Making Houses*.

In terms of "creating capitalism," the ground-rent system enabled a wider range of Philadelphians to be involved in the physical development of their city. While the ground lord had the lowest risk, the developer too could easily take on the ground rent of a building lot, erect a dwelling upon that building lot with borrowed capital, and sell or rent the house upon completion. If sold, the ground rents would transfer to the new owner, making the system particularly useful to certain savvy entrepreneurs. Developers of the period consisted of house carpenters, bricklayers, plasterers and other building mechanics, who bet their futures on selling row houses to the expanding residential real estate market.

Builders set Philadelphia's housing economy in motion by exploiting the city's unique ground-rent estate of property tenure. Ground-rent transactions put building parcels and credit for advance construction within the reach of artisans, making Philadelphia a promising and even rewarding venue for small producers. As long as the economy beckoned with cycles of growth and optimism, real estate development invited young men to take chances and become masters, and to anticipate great gains in the business.<sup>33</sup>

Despite the modern misnomer, it's important to understand that while the row house is an attached or semi-detached building type, it is still a private, single-family dwelling, which was epic in the dense context of urban Philadelphia—or any growing American city. The row house defined Philadelphia's built environment from its earliest days to the current period and was a highly practical building type that maximized space and minimized maintenance, as applied to private houses that stand as their own physical entity within a premises. However, this house type and/or form is not one that was developed because of a conscious principal in the new nation. Instead, it was an inherited, largely English, building type and/or form that was perpetuated in Philadelphia largely by the ground-rent system and the maximization of ground rent that was possible through lots containing narrow attached houses.

Visually, the Philadelphia row house was of load-bearing masonry construction, with occasional wooden examples, that most commonly stood two and one-half or three stories high in alignment and separated from the street by the limits of a paved sidewalk. Most of the houses featured red brick facades, emulating the Georgian tradition of architecture, later known in America distinctively as the Federal style. The Greek Revival style was melding with the Federal to create a similar school of Philadelphia taste. Buildings that stood higher than three or four stories were rare in Philadelphia before the last decades of the nineteenth century.

Visitors to the Quaker City found their uniformity and architectural monotonous, but these brick dwellings came to distinguish Philadelphia as the "City of Homes." This architectural consistency meant that the type of

---

<sup>33</sup> Rilling, *Making Houses*.

shelter for workingmen changes very little from 1790 to 1850. Architecture for both the “working class” and the “white collar” varied little in architectural style and form.<sup>34</sup>

Building accomplishments of the first decades of the nineteenth century led Philadelphia to become the "City of Homes." As early as 1840, columnists for Philadelphia papers, *The North American* and *Daily Advertiser*, referred to the City of Homes.<sup>35</sup> On January 31, 1848, a visitor, quietly identified as "H.W.B.," wrote an editorial for the *Christian Inquirer*, which was published on February 5:

Going from New York to Philadelphia, seems like going from a city of hotels, and boarding-houses and exchanges, and theaters, and shops, and foreigners and strangers, to a city of homes, inhabited by a homogeneous population, where the comforts and quietude of domestic life form the principal feature.

This appears in the endless blocks of neat and comfortable dwellings, rarely interrupted by anything magnificent or unclean. The city, for several square miles, appears to be chiefly occupied with moderately sized houses, wearing very much the same appearance, pretty and clean, and giving the idea of substantial comfort. You are persuaded that this is no city of boarding houses; that the population do not merely stay, but live here; and that the middle and largest class are all in possession of pleasant and convenient houses of their own. There is an air of ownership on these houses.<sup>36</sup>

Perhaps over-analyzed as a pleasant ploy to satisfy working people in its entirety, this reference to Philadelphia continued after the Civil War and was not used towards any one particular class. By 1865, the phrase, "in our City of Homes," was used by prominent Philadelphians in a letter to General U.S. Grant, at which time he was house hunting in their city.<sup>37</sup> By 1870, Philadelphia boasted 112,336 private houses with an average of 6.01 inhabitants per.<sup>38</sup> The *New York Times* used this information to compare Philadelphia to New York City—then with 64,044 private houses with an average of 14.72 inhabitants per. As Philadelphia continued to grow and develop, the city would be physically defined by the row house and the high rate of home ownership it allowed through mid-twentieth century.

---

<sup>35</sup> *The North American* and *Daily Advertiser*, 24 December 1840.

<sup>36</sup> H.W.B., Editorial. *Christian Inquirer*. 5 February 1848.

<sup>37</sup> Philadelphia, special to the... *New York Herald*. 25 January 1865.

<sup>38</sup> Allinson, *Ground Rents in Philadelphia*.

## APPENDIX B:



Left: Greek Revival houses on the southeast corner of Twenty-first and Summer Streets. Similar in style, these houses were built in long rows, while the Sloan House was constructed to be an owner-occupied dwelling. Right: Greek Revival house at Spruce and Juniper Streets. The Sloan House emulates upper class houses such as this example. Both early twentieth century. Courtesy the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

### **The Substantial Brick Dwelling House of Robert and Mary Sloan**

On May 8, 1850, the Second Associate Presbyterian Church purchased a lot on the east side of North Front Street, the dimensions of which included seventy feet front by one hundred thirty-one feet four inches in depth. The deed included rights to subdivide the property and, most importantly, construct a church for their congregation. Largely made up of working people in the Kensington neighborhood, the congregation was not one of great means; however, the cost of building was made affordable by the ground-rent system. Rather than purchasing the lot, the money-conscious Presbyterians were subject to an annual ground-rent of \$184. And while this was far cheaper than purchasing such a large lot, the conservative members of the congregation preferred to subsidize their undertaking further.<sup>39</sup>

On May 17, 1852, the Second Associate Presbyterian Church's congregation granted and conveyed a small part of their larger lot to Robert Sloan. Containing twenty feet front and forty-eight feet in depth, the lot was located at the northwest corner of the congregation's original parcel. Bounded at the north by James Irwin's house and at the west by N. Front Street, Sloan's lot was almost entirely exposed to the Presbyterians.

Previously, the larger parcel had been owned by Alexander H. Smith and Matilda, his wife, who on May 8, 1850 sold the property (via the ground-rent system) to the Second Associate Presbyterian Church. This established an annual ground rent of the previously stated \$184, which could be paid in "equal half yearly payments," as stipulated in the deed.<sup>40</sup> In order to

---

<sup>39</sup> Philadelphia Deeds, 1852.

<sup>40</sup> Philadelphia Deed Book G.W.C., No. 85, p. 314, CAP..

subsidize the annual ground rent, Robert Sloan was required to pay twenty-five dollars per year, deliverable in installments on the first of July and January. The deed also stipulated that Robert Sloan would “...from the date hereof erect and build on the said lot a good substantial Brick Dwelling House...” to secure the said annual rent. The house appears to have been built almost immediately after this agreement was signed.



232 (left) and 226 (right) Lawrence Street are both similar to the Sloan House stylistically, but were likely built as part of a row. Both early twentieth century. Courtesy the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

### **Robert and Mary Sloan**

In January 1855, Robert Sloan was buried in Lot No. 784 of Section B in the Monument Cemetery, then located on North Broad at Berks Street.<sup>41</sup> Along with the whole of Monument Cemetery’s inhabitants that were uprooted in the late 1950s for a parking lot geared towards Temple University commuter students, Robert Sloan’s likely became part of a mass grave created by Temple University in Northeast Philadelphia, while his stone memorial was no doubt dumped into the Delaware River as riprap used in the construction of the unremarkable Betsy Ross Bridge. Yet a more important masonry structure stands to represent his life— No. 1527 N. Front Street.

Born of Scots-Irish parentage in Ireland about 1787, Robert Sloan was a typical Philadelphia success story of a middle class ilk. He appears to have arrived in the City of Brotherly Love sometime earlier than 1837, marrying a fellow Scotts-Irish lady by the name of Mary—born about 1808 in Ireland. The two are known to have had one daughter—Elizabeth, born in 1838 in Philadelphia.<sup>42</sup> By 1839, Sloan was a porter, living in or near Black Horse Alley, but this occupation proved to motivate the immigrant to

---

<sup>41</sup> Monument Cemetery Records, Philadelphia.

<sup>42</sup> United States Federal Population Census, 1850.

higher aspirations.<sup>43</sup> Between 1839 and 1840, the Sloans moved to quarters located at Germantown Road and 2<sup>nd</sup> Street. Despite the fact that Sloan was still working as a laborer in 1840, Mary Sloan opened an account on behalf of her husband at the Pennsylvania Savings Fund (PSF) that year.<sup>44</sup> Just two years later, in 1842, the Sloans had opened a tavern at Germantown Road and 2<sup>nd</sup> Street, which was reflected in their deposits at PSF. By 1850, the tavern keeper was worth roughly four thousand dollars—a tidy middling sum at the mid-point of the nineteenth century. That year, the U.S. Census records Robert and Mary, their daughter Elizabeth, then twelve years of age, and a servant named Mary Cherry, just nineteen years of age.



Looking south, the 1600 block of N. Front Street, during the construction of the Frankford Avenue Elevated. Courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia.

Roughly a decade or more after opening their tavern, the Sloans made a move that signified solid success and investment in Philadelphia. Acquiring a lot from the Second Associate Presbyterian Church, the Sloans immediately constructed a “substantial brick house” at No. 1527 N. Front Street. The five-room house was an important accomplishment at a time where most urban dwellers in the world did not even think of owning a home. The lot was acquired in 1852 and the Sloans were in residence by 1854.<sup>45</sup>

Sadly, on January 15, 1855, just a year or so after Sloan began to enjoy the fruits of his labors, the sixty-six year old man died of “Schorriss of Stomach,” attended to by Dr. Hurst at the time of his death.<sup>46</sup> His relatives and friends were “respectfully invited to attend the funeral at his residence in Front Street above Jefferson...”<sup>47</sup> After her

---

<sup>43</sup> McElroy and Co.’s *Philadelphia City Business Directory*, 1839.

<sup>44</sup> Records of the Pennsylvania Savings Fund.

<sup>45</sup> McElroy and Co.’s *Philadelphia City Business Directory*, 1854.

<sup>46</sup> Death Records of Philadelphia, 1855.

<sup>47</sup> Pennsylvania Historic Newspaper Records. Proquest, 1855.

husband's death, Mary Sloan is listed annually in the Philadelphia city directories as a "Gentlewoman" and the widow of Robert at her home, No. 1527 N. Front Street. The listings for her at that address ceases after 1868.<sup>48</sup>

---

<sup>48</sup> McElroy and Co.'s *Philadelphia City Business Directory*, 1867-68.