

**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 (CD, EMAIL, FLASH DRIVE)  
ELECTRONIC FILES MUST BE WORD OR WORD COMPATIBLE**

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

Street address: **1132 Marlborough Street**

Postal code: **19125**

Councilmanic District: **5**

**2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE**

Historic Name: **Jacob Souder Frame Dwelling**

Current/Common Name: **1132 Marlborough Street**

**3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE**

Building

Structure

Site

Object

**4. PROPERTY INFORMATION**

Occupancy:  occupied  vacant  under construction  unknown

Current use:

**5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

Please attach

**6. DESCRIPTION**

Please attach

**7. SIGNIFICANCE**

Please attach the Statement of Significance.

Period of Significance (from year to year): **1810 to 1906**

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: **1810-11**

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

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

Original owner: **Jacob Souder**

Other significant persons: **Unknown**

**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

**9. NOMINATOR: KEEPING SOCIETY OF PHILADELPHIA**

Author: **Oscar Beisert, Architectural Historian**

Date: **3 September 2019**

Author: **J.M. Duffin, Archivist & Historian**

Email: **keeper@keepingphiladelphia.org**

Street Address: **1315 Walnut Street, Suite 320**

Telephone: **717.602.5002**

City, State, and Postal Code: **Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19107**

Nominator  is  is not the property owner.

**PHC USE ONLY**

Date of Receipt: September 13, 2019

Correct-Complete  Incorrect-Incomplete

Date: October 10, 2019

Date of Notice Issuance: October 10, 2019

Property Owner at Time of Notice

Name: Adam Margent, Jeremy Margent

Address: 804 N. 26<sup>th</sup> Street

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19130

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: \_\_\_\_\_

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Final Action: \_\_\_\_\_

Designated  Rejected

# NOMINATION

FOR THE

## PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

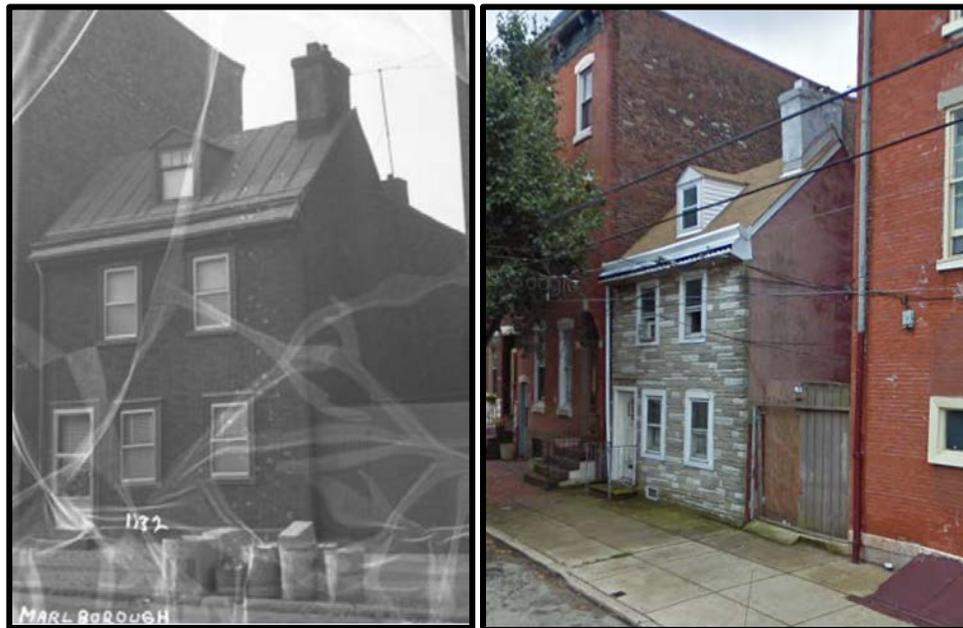


Figure 1. Both photographs above show the Jacob Souder Frame Dwelling, Fishtown. Source: on left, Phillyhistory.org. Right: Oscar Beisert, 2019.

## **THE JACOB SOUDER FRAME DWELLING**

**BUILT C. 1810-11**

**1132 MARLBOROUGH STREET  
FISHTOWN, KENSINGTON,  
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA**



Figure 2. The proposed designation is limited to the parcel outlined in blue. Source: Atlas, City of Philadelphia. The proposed designation is limited to the main block of the subject property and is not meant to prevent changes and improvements at the rear, outside the public viewshed.

## 5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The parcel and building portion subject to this nomination for the Jacob Souder Frame Dwelling at 1132 Marlborough Street is limited to the following boundaries:

ALL THAT CERTAIN lot or piece of ground with the buildings and improvements thereon erected, SITUATE on the Southwesterly side of Marlborough Street at the distance of fifty-eight feet three inches Southeastwardly from the Southeasterly side of Girard Avenue in City of Philadelphia.

CONTAINING in front or breadth on the said Marlborough Street nineteen feet four inches and extending of that width in length or depth Southwestwardly between lines parallel with the said Girard Avenue one hundred and one feet.

BEING known as No. 1132 Marlborough Street.

The property is known as Parcel No. 017N11-0135, Office of Property Assessment Account No. 181055400.



Figure 3. Left: The primary (northeast) elevation of the subject property. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2019. Figure 4. Right: Looking southeast at the primary (northeast) elevation of the subject property. Source: Google.

## 6. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Constructed c. 1810, the Jacob Souder Frame Dwelling is a two-and-one-half story timber frame house. The main block measures roughly seventeen feet (17'-0") front with a depth of roughly fifteen feet (15'-0")—this being the original portion of the house. The building is located at 1132 Marlborough Street just southeast of the thoroughfare's intersection with Girard Avenue in the historic Fishtown neighborhood of the larger Kensington District. In the context of Marlborough and other adjacent streets, this frame dwelling appears to be one of the oldest.



Figure 5. Looking southeast at the subject property in context. Source: Atlas, City of Philadelphia.

Detached, the main block of the subject property stands two-and-one-half stories and is a single pile house, featuring a side-gabled roof that is indicative of the era of construction. The house appears to sit atop a basement, which likely includes brick and/or rubble stone foundation. The primary elevation is characteristic of a vernacular Georgian plan as applied to row and/or town houses in Philadelphia. This house and its relatives in various forms feature fenestrations that are generally symmetrical. The timber frame method of construction is apparent in the scale and stature of the building, a natural sag of the frame structural members presses upon the learned observer in relationship to the age of its workmanship. Though the shrinking scale of the house is uplifted by a proud brick stack that pierces the center of the northwest gable end at the center. While none of the original clapboards are visible, the form- or Perma-stone, as well as its stucco clad walls in addition to its structure, speak to the nature of the house, passing nearly two hundred years of occupation by Philadelphians of working-class to modest means.

The primary (northeast) elevation retains an historic fenestration. At the first floor, left to right, a single pedestrian entrance with a replacement door is followed by two like-size windows with replacement units. The doorway is quite low to the ground, speaking to the age of the house and the change in grade that has occurred in two centuries of urban development. The second floor features the original fenestration of two windows, though these windows are centered unlike those of the ground floor, which are symmetrically spaced and sized, but shifted to the side to accommodate the doorway within the narrow pallet. While the windows appear to be replaced, the architraves may survive as the size of the windows appears to align with the condition of the building in the oldest accessible photograph from 1958, when it was photographed individually by the Philadelphia Historical Commission.

Beyond the flat and linear plane of the primary (northeast) elevation, the side-gable roof form remains intact, as does the aforementioned brick chimney. Within both the primary (northeast) and the rear (southwest) elevations of the main block's half-story, a small dormer, proportionate with the size and scale of the building, stands at center. The projecting structure features a low-pitched gable treated with a pediment, as was typical of the period. The brick stack is not a simple stub just above the roofline, but rises several feet and features a simple cornice of corbeled brickwork, indicative of vernacular Georgian houses in Philadelphia of the period.



Figure 6. The primary (northeast) elevation of the subject property in 1958. Source: City Archives of Philadelphia.

## 7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Jacob Souder Frame Dwelling at 1132 Marlborough Street is a significant historic resource that merits designation by the Philadelphia Historical Commission and inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The building satisfies Criterion for Designation j of Section 14-1004 of the Philadelphia Code.

- (j) *Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social, or historical heritage of the community.*

The Period of Significance is c. 1810-11 when the subject property was built by Jacob Souder to 1906 when it was sold by his descendants.

**Criterion J:** Representative of both the historical heritage of the neighborhood's initial period of urban development, as well as the economic and social history of the people that founded and formed these early communities, the Jacob Souder Frame Dwelling is one of a small collection wooden houses of late-eighteenth to early nineteenth century vintage in Philadelphia. This 200-year old building speaks to the foundational period of Kensington (today known as Fishtown), as it evolved from a sparse settlement at the Delaware River waterfront to an urban village that would be densely constructed like many of the early towns and villages in what would become Philadelphia County.<sup>1</sup> The wooden house was a dominant building type in the Quaker City from the time of its settlement until masonry predominated deep in the nineteenth century.

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<sup>1</sup> The name Kensington is used throughout this nomination to refer to the neighborhood generally known today as Fishtown. Fishtown encompasses the core of the original eighteenth century community known as Kensington. Over time the name Kensington came to be associated with the area west of Frankford Avenue.



Figure 7. Left: The Loxley House, one of the most famous of the early wooden houses of Philadelphia. Notice that the house is essentially like a half house front gable disguised by a projecting gable-front porch roof. Figure 8. Right: Similar to the building type that is the subject of this nomination, the wooden house at the northeast corner of Cherry and Darien Streets in Center City. This drawing is by T.H. Wilkinson. Source: Castner Scrapbooks, Free Library of Philadelphia.

The prevalence of wooden houses in Philadelphia is shaped by necessity and ease of access to building materials in the foundational period; cultural, economic and social factors throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; and, finally, diminished by regulations related to a growing concern for fire prevention, as well as property values, and the eventual prominence of larger buildings and masonry construction. One of the first official regulations to prohibit the construction of new wooden houses occurred in 1796, barring these structures in the old river wards of Philadelphia proper. This coupled with certain economic factors, such as the development of the Delaware River waterfront and the growth of Philadelphia as an industrial powerhouse, led to the disappearance of wooden houses in Old City and Society Hill. At that time, the construction of frame dwellings migrated to other parts of the city, with Kensington being the primary recipient of the building type.

By 1810, Kensington's built environment consisted of about 615 houses, 431 frame to 184 brick. Being one of just a handful of extant houses from the period, the Souder house is representative of the dominant house type in Kensington, making up 70 percent of the neighborhood's housing stock.<sup>2</sup> This high concentration of wooden dwellings was built by fishermen and other tradesmen, representing the cultural, economic, and social heritage of the city's working and middle classes. Over 200-years old, the Jacob Souder house is one of these rare surviving buildings, representing not only the early development of the neighborhood and its economic and social history of its people, but also a building tradition that adheres to a typology of frame buildings in Fishtown, the larger Kensington District, and Philadelphia at-large.

<sup>2</sup> James A. Paxton, *The Stranger's Guide: An Alphabetical List of All the Wards, Streets, Roads, Lanes, Alleys, Avenues, Courts, Wharves, Ship yards, Public Buildings, &c. In the City and Suburbs of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1811), 18-20.

### ***Historic Context: Wooden Houses in Kensington***

The story of the wooden house in Kensington is not one guided by high style architecture; rather these dwellings were often emulating architectural features, forms, and style in an evolving and varying vernacular expression. As an urban development in both name and plan, the neighborhood we know today traces its origins to the 1730s when Anthony Palmer (1675-1749), a merchant and the Pennsylvania provincial councilor, subdivided his 191½-acre Delaware River front property. Palmer laid out streets and sold lots in the area that now compasses East Columbia Avenue (formerly Hanover Street), the Delaware River, Norris Street and Frankford Avenue. He called this new community Kensington. Palmer's immediate neighbor to the southwest, Benjamin Fairman, followed Palmer's lead by laying out streets on his river-front property that extended Kensington from East Columbia Avenue to roughly Frankford Avenue. In spite of the development plans that Palmer's new streets and lots anticipated, the pace of settlement in Kensington was slow, but still a maritime fishing village formed along the bank of the Delaware River. Shipbuilding and other pursuits at the end of the eighteenth century led to a rise in development and construction near the waterfront. Specifically, as the city moved north along the Delaware River, the area underwent its formative and largely first period of urban development during the first quarter of the nineteenth century with a major boom in construction during the 1830s.

Though the realization of Anthony Palmer's Kensington development progressed slowly throughout the eighteenth century, the construction of frame dwellings was the most common house form of those completed. The local population prior to the Revolution consisted of shipwrights operating along the Delaware River. Other workers often lived nearby in wooden houses. By necessity, all of the shipyards were associated with water lots extending east from Richmond Street. As with fishing and shipbuilding trades throughout the centuries and around the world, those in the industry brought with them the knowledge of wood construction. Immigrants equally impacted Kensington's built environment. Many Germans arriving in Philadelphia in the eighteenth century became the fishermen of Fishtown. Germans imported an understanding of frame construction from the old country and were likely the fishermen who occupied the Kensington dwellings, along with all manner of maritime and other trades people.

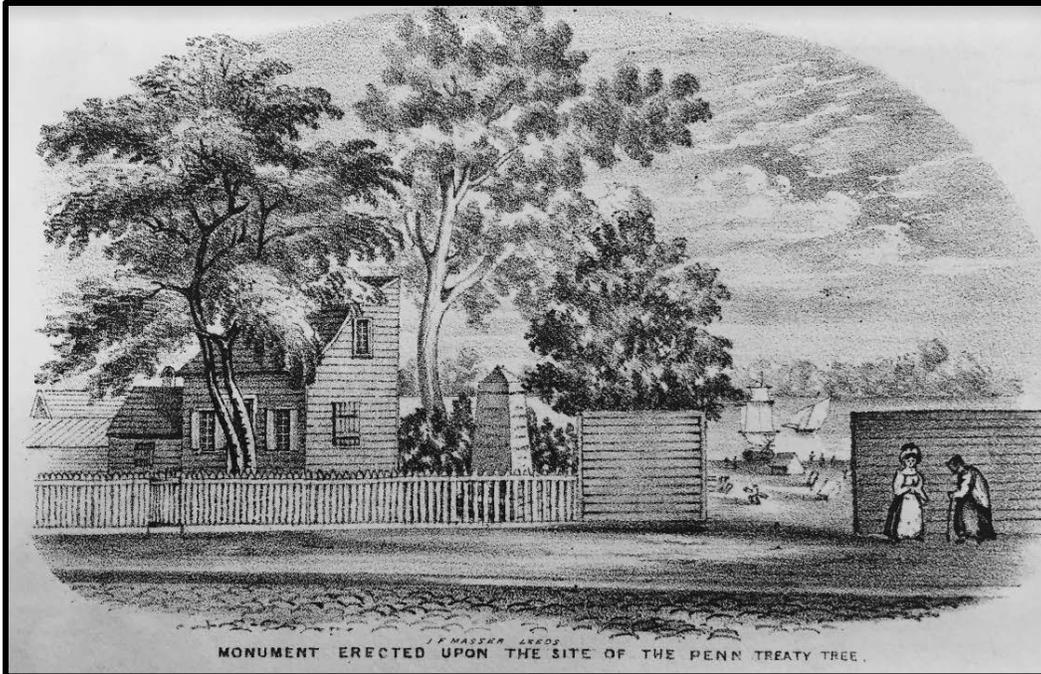


Figure 9. An illustration of the “Monument Erected Upon The Site Of The Penn Treat Tree,” this illustration shows a small, one-story frame dwelling with a side gable roof featuring a broken pitch. Whether or not this scene was exactly as it is shown is unknown, but the presence of the wooden house tells the story of the type of houses found in Fishtown and the larger Kensington neighborhood. Source: Castner Scrapbook on the Delaware River, Free Library of Philadelphia.



Figure 10. Showing as many as five frame out of eight buildings along Beach Street at the Delaware River waterfront in the Fishtown section of Kensington, David Johnston Kennedy’s (1816-1898) 1869 drawing depicts the early built environment of the neighborhood. Source: HSP.

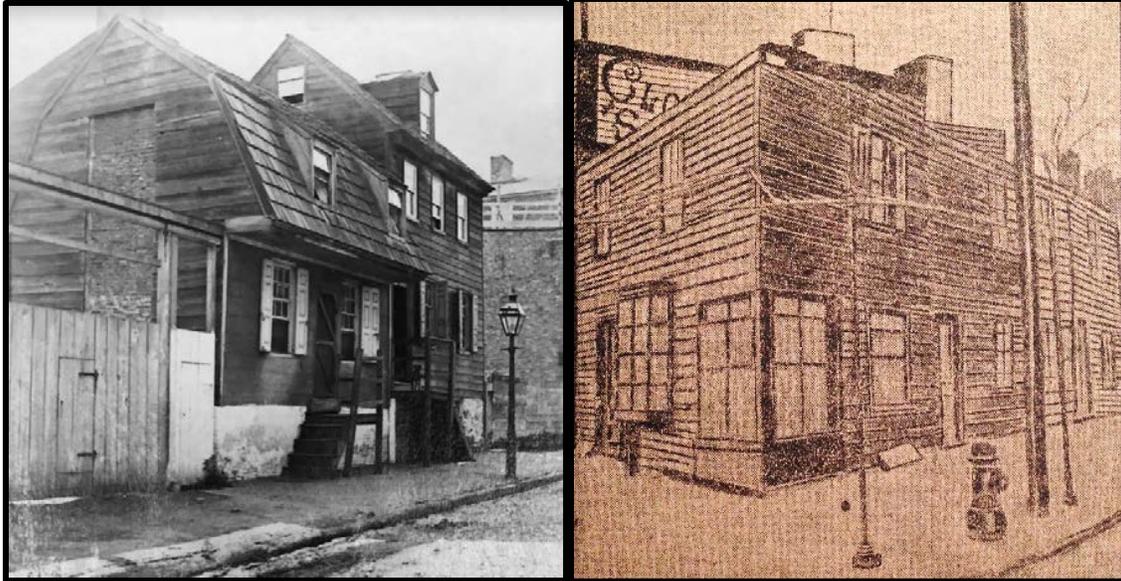


Figure 11. Left: Houses on Warren Street in Kensington. Source: Castner Scrapbook on Old Houses, Free Library of Philadelphia. Note that the house on right is similar in form and scale to the subject property. Figure 12. Right: This illustration accompanied an article titled, “Old Penn Homestead Will Be Destroyed.” The image showed an unusual row of wooden tenements, which was interestingly purported to be “The Penn Homestead,” particularly of Richard and Mary Masters Penn. This wooden “Penn” house was said to date to c1775, but may have been built as late as 1812—located at 951 Frankford Avenue. Just who lived there originally or the precise age of the building is not known, but buildings of this form, scale, and size were certainly more commonly found in the early built environment of Kensington.<sup>3</sup> Source: Miss Jane Campbell Scrapbook, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

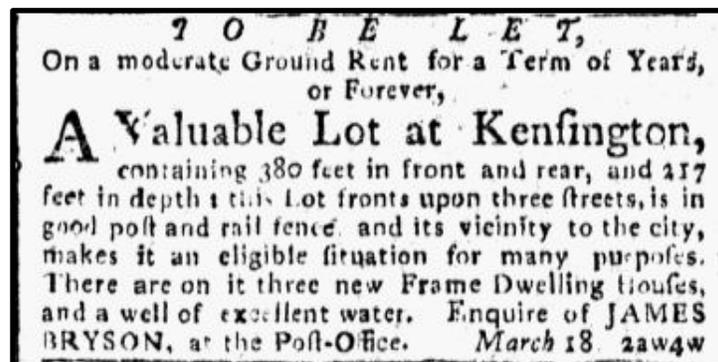


Figure 13. Advertisement for “A Valuable Lot at Kensington” which includes “three new Frame Dwelling Houses.” Published on April 3, 1789 in the *Pennsylvania Packet*.

In the last decade of the eighteenth century, increasing concern related to fire and its relationship to wooden houses, as well as the poor state of maintenance of older frame dwellings led to the passage of laws to mitigate the problems of absentee landlords and fire hazards. An ordinance of June 6, 1796 declared that no “wooden mansion-house, shope [sic.], ware-house, store, or carriage or stable” should be erected in the City of Philadelphia between the Delaware River and Sixth Street, Vine to South Streets.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>3</sup> “Old Penn Homestead Will Be Destroyed,” 1901, Scrapbook Collection of Jane Campbell, HSP.

<sup>4</sup> John C. Lowber and C.S. Miller, *A Digest of the Ordinances of the Corporation of the City of Philadelphia; and of the Acts of Assembly Relating thereto* (Philadelphia: R. Desilver, 1822), 255–56.

However, the ordinance likely had minimal effects on the construction of wooden houses outside of its mandated boundaries. Three decades later in 1826, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania gave the City of Philadelphia the power to prohibit the construction of any building of the following description: "...the walls that are not completely composed of incombustible materials..."<sup>5</sup> Finally, the City of Philadelphia passed an ordinance on June 8, 1832 that brought the following into effect:

From and after the passing of this ordinance, it shall not be lawful to erect or construct within the city of Philadelphia, any wooden, framed, brick-paned, or other building, whereof the walls are not composed wholly of incombustible materials.<sup>6</sup>

The number of wooden houses constructed after 1796, which includes the c. 1810 Souder house, confirms that the initial ordinance had little impact on Kensington. It certainly did not deter the construction of wooden houses; instead the frame dwelling proliferated over time as a house type represented through various forms and styles, coming full circle by the mid- to late-nineteenth century when the frame dwelling diminished as this neighborhood underwent intense development to accommodate a growing population.

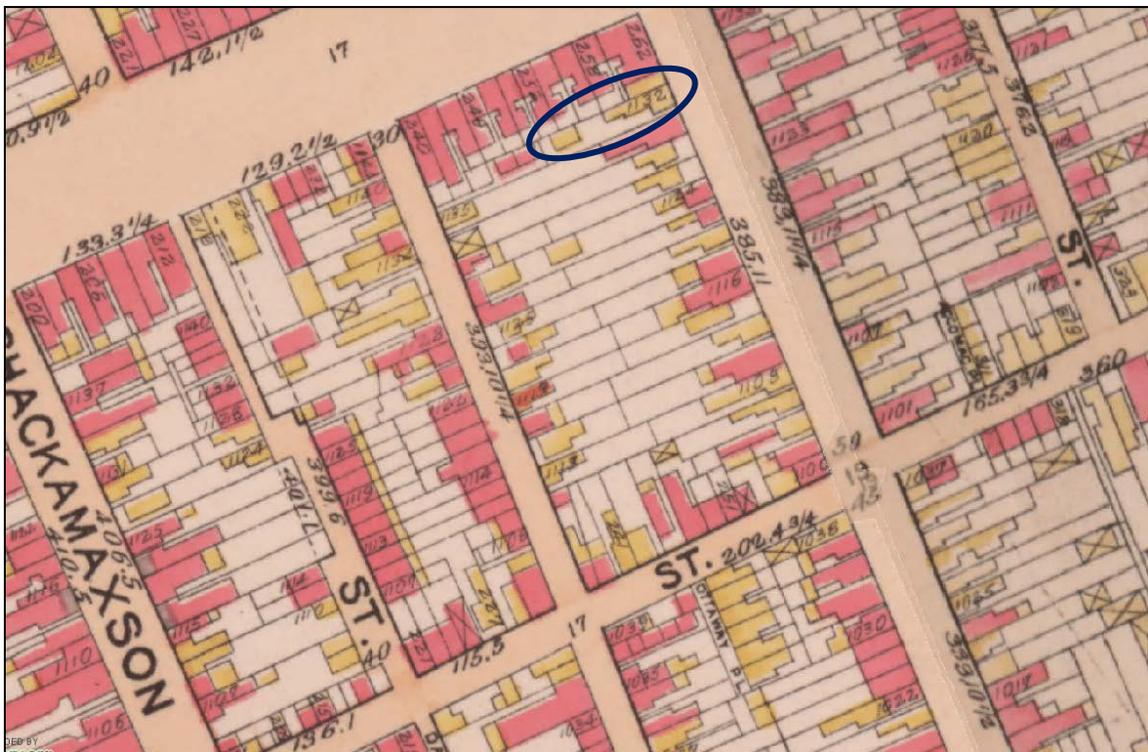


Figure 14. 1895 G. W. Bromley Atlas with the Jacob Souder house circled. Yellow denotes frame buildings; red denotes masonry construction. Source: PhilaGeoHistory.

<sup>5</sup> Frank F. Brightly, *A Digest of Laws and Ordinances of the City of Philadelphia from the Year 1701 to the 21<sup>st</sup> of June 1887* (Philadelphia: Kay & Brother, 1887), 168.

<sup>6</sup> *A Digest of the Ordinances of the Corporation of the City of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: S.C. Atkinson, 1834), 310–311.



Figure 15. The photograph on left shows a frame dwelling at 1113 Crease Street in Fishtown. Figure 16. The photograph on right shows the frame dwelling at 1037 Marlborough Street in Fishtown. Source: Phillyhistory.com.



Figure 17. Left: The frame dwelling that stood at 315 E. Willey Street is another house like the subject property. Figure 18. Right: The frame dwelling that stood at 1112 E. Hewson Street (demolished) is another building that is of the same form as the subject property. This photograph was taken in 1958 by a photographer named Cuneo. Source: Phillyhistory.com.



Figure 19. The frame dwelling that stood at 1118 E. Berks Street (demolished) is another building that is of the same form as the subject property, being also of a similar scale with its main block that is much like a trinity with its own roof structure. This photograph was taken in 1958 by a photographer named Cuneo. Source: Phillyhistory.com



Figures 20 and 21. The above photographs show 1112 Marlborough Street before (left) and after restoration. The frame dwelling is a great example of what can be done to restore a period appearance to a wooden house with some relaxed standards. While the windows and siding appear to be of faux materials, the overall appearance of the house after renovation (right) has a historic quality. The 2009 Google Street View photograph (left) shows a much more mundane view of 1112 Marlborough Street. By 2013, Google Street View shows that house had been renovated to its present appearance (photograph on right taken in 2019). This building also appears to be of a similar wooden house form and scale as the subject property.

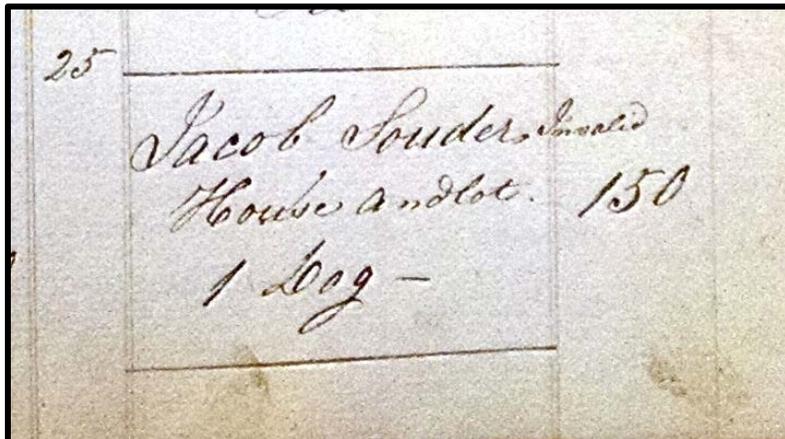


Figure 22. Jacob Souder's listing in 1819 tax list at the subject property. Source: East District, Unincorporated Part of Northern Liberties, 1819, p. 47, State Tax Assessment Ledgers (1.8), Office of City Commissioners Records, Record Group 1, City Archives of Philadelphia.

### ***Historic Context: The Jacob Souder Frame Dwelling***

The Souder property was originally part of a 4½ acre lot owned by Edward Duffield (1720–1801), the eminent Philadelphia clockmaker and friend of Benjamin Franklin. The larger lot covered everything in the square bounded by Columbia Avenue, Wildey and Marlborough Streets, and Girard Avenue in addition to everything on the southwest side of Marlborough Street from 1122 Marlborough Street northwest to Girard Avenue and along the southeast side of Girard Avenue to Day Street. In April 1805, Edward Duffield, Jr., sold the 4½ acres to Christian Sheetz and Conrad Worknot.<sup>7</sup> Sheetz and Worknot subdivided the property into town lots that fronted on Columbia Avenue and Marlborough Streets. The lots on the northeast side of Marlborough Street were sold first in 1806, and those on the southwest side (where the subject property is located) in 1810.<sup>8</sup> Unlike the pattern common in other parts of Philadelphia, these lots specifically were sold for cash and not on ground rent, and the buyers were not employed in the building trades. Many of the purchasers were local men who had connections to the Kensington shipbuilding industry.<sup>9</sup> As these men were able to accumulate enough capital, they built houses on their lots.

<sup>7</sup> Deed: Edward Duffield to Christian Sheetz and Conrad Worknot, 13 April 1805, Philadelphia Deed Book (hereafter PDBk) E. F., No. 21, p. 21, City Archives of Philadelphia (hereafter CAP).

<sup>8</sup> *Aurora General Advertiser*, 25 June 1806, 3.

<sup>9</sup> Deed: Christian Sheetz, of Kensington in the Northern Liberties of the City of Philadelphia, esquire, and Magdalen, his wife, and Conrad Worknot, of the same, grazier, and Mary, his wife, to John McCleary, of the same shipwright, for \$200, 15 June 1810, PDBk I.C., No. 10, p. 191; Deed: Christian Sheetz, of Kensington in the Northern Liberties of the City of Philadelphia, esquire, and Magdalen, his wife, and Conrad Worknot, of the same, grazier, and Mary, his wife, to William Russell, of the same, shipwright, for \$200, 15 June 1810, PDBk I.C., No. 12, p. 475; Deed: Christian Sheetz, of Kensington in the Northern Liberties of the City of Philadelphia, esquire, and Magdalen, his wife, and Conrad Worknot, of the same, grazier, and Mary, his wife, to Charles Murphy, of the same, shipwright, for \$200, 15 June 1810, PDBk I.C., No. 13, p. 431; Deed: Christian Sheetz, of Kensington in the Northern Liberties of the City of Philadelphia, esquire, and Magdalen, his wife, and Conrad Worknot, of the same, grazier, and Mary, his wife, to Jacob Sheppard, of the same, ship caulker, for \$300, 1 March 1808, PDBk E.F., No. 33, p. 318, CAP.

The subject property was purchased as a vacant lot by Jacob Souder, a victualler, for \$200 on May 25, 1810, and appears to have been constructed shortly afterwards.<sup>10</sup> Jacob Souder (1765–1823) grew up in Kensington.<sup>11</sup> His father Casper Souder (c. 1735–1785) owned, and operated a tavern, the Sign of the Lamb, at the corner of Frankford Avenue and Shackamaxon Street until his death in 1785 when he willed the property to his wife Wilhelmina and their five children.<sup>12</sup> The family sold the tavern in March 1810, netting each child \$480 as his or her share of the property.<sup>13</sup> This windfall appears to have enabled Jacob Souder’s purchase of the property, providing him with the means to fund construction.<sup>14</sup>

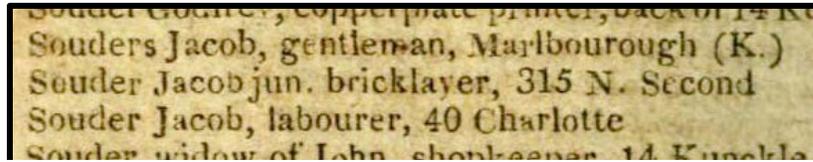


Figure 23. Jacob Souder’s first appearance at the subject property in the 1811 city directory (*Census Directory for 1811* [Philadelphia: Jane Aiken, 1811]).

Jacob Souder and his heirs made the wood house their home for several generations. After Jacob Souder’s death in 1823, his widow, Margaret, and their only child, Catharine remained in residence. Margaret Souder died in February 1841 and the subject property passed to Catharine Souder (c1789–1873) and her English-born husband James Robson (c. 1775–1852), who worked as a rigger in the local shipyards and later as whip maker.<sup>15</sup> Like her parents before her, Catharine (Souder) Robson raised her eight children in this house. Their sons Henry Robson (1827–1906) and William Robson (c. 1809–1878) lived most of their adult lives in this house as well. After Catharine (Souder) Robson’s death in 1873, the children sold their share of the property to their brother Henry Robson, a

<sup>10</sup> Deed: Christian Sheetz, of Kensington in the Northern Liberties of the City of Philadelphia, esquire, and Magdalen, his wife, and Conrad Worknot, of the same, grazier, and Mary, his wife, to Jacob Souder, of the same, victualler, for \$200, 25 May 1810, Philadelphia Deed Book F.T.W., No. 39, p. 67 CAP.

<sup>11</sup> Jacob’s baptism is recorded in the Philadelphia German Reformed Church records and death in the First Presbyterian Church of Kensington records (F. Edward Wright, *Early Records of the First Reformed Church of Philadelphia* [Westminster, Md: Family Line Publications, 1994], 1:40; Ancestry.com, *Pennsylvania and New Jersey, Church and Town Records, 1669 2013* [database on-line]). Jacob Souder, son of Casper, should not be confused with Jacob Souder, Sr. and Jr., who were bricklayers and involved in Northern Liberties politics.

<sup>12</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 15 December 1785; Will of Casper Souder, of Northern Liberties of the City of Philadelphia, 2 December 1785, proved 9 December 1784, Philadelphia Will Book T., p. 230. Casper purchased the property in 1771 (Deed: Mary Norris, city, widow, to Caspar Sowder, Northern Liberties of city, cordwainer, 17 June 1771, PDBk D., No. 69, p. 149).

<sup>13</sup> Deed: Christopher Sowder, of the Northern Liberties of the City of Philadelphia, victualler, and Elizabeth, his wife, Jacob Sowder, of the same, victualler, and Margaret, his wife, Philip Sowder, of the same, cordwainer, Casper Sowder, of the same, rope maker, and Jane, his wife, and Peter Peterson, of the same, yeoman, and Mary, his wife, they being the children of Casper Sowder, late of the same, cordwainer, to Benjamin Harper Roberts, of the same, innkeeper, for \$2,400, 1 March 1810, Philadelphia Deed Book I.C., No. 9, p. 174, CAP.

<sup>14</sup> Comparable costs for wooden houses for this period can be found in the mechanic’s liens docket of the Philadelphia County Court of Common Pleas and District Court (December Term 1812, no. 151; March Term 1813, no 238; June Term 1813, no. 70; September Term 1813, no. 63, CAP).

<sup>15</sup> A. McElroy’s *Philadelphia Directory for 1837* (Philadelphia: Rackliff and Jones, 1837); PDBk F.T.W., No. 28, p. 511, CAP.

bachelor.<sup>16</sup> While Henry Robson continued to live in the house for several years after his purchase, his brother's family eventually took over the property. In 1880 William Robson's widow, Rebecca (Harmer) Robson (1882–1907), was living in the house with two sons John Robson and Robert Robson; however, the family moved to another house by 1884.<sup>17</sup> During this period Henry Robson lived with his sister, Mary (Robson) Thornley (1825-1906), the widow of James Thorney, a wealthy rubber manufacturer. He would retain ownership of the property until the time of his death in 1906.<sup>18</sup> It was not until November 1906 that the house finally left the family's hands after an ownership of 96 years.<sup>19</sup>

## Conclusion

Representing both the development and the economic, social and historical heritage of Fishtown and the larger Kensington neighborhood, the Jacob Souder house is one of a small collection of early-nineteenth-century wooden houses east of Girard Avenue and above Frankford Avenue. While fewer and fewer survive, frame houses were once a dominant house type in the neighborhood, and throughout Philadelphia. The house type is also commonly associated with the early development of the city and was home to many of its maritime and working-class citizens. In fact, at one time there were so many wooden houses in the older waterfront-neighborhoods that an ordinance was passed prohibiting new frame buildings in 1796. Roughly a century ago there were 436 wooden houses standing east of Girard Avenue; only about 50 survive today, and the subject

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<sup>16</sup> Deed: William Robson, of the City of Philadelphia, house carpenter, and Rebecca, his wife, Jacob Robson, of the same, whip maker, and Elizabeth, his wife, Warren Scott, of Burlington, New Jersey, farmer, and Margaret (formerly Margaret Robson), his wife, Joseph Paxson, of Philadelphia, agent, and Eliza (formerly Eliza Robson), his wife, Lewis Fow, of the same, victualler, and Christianna (formerly Christianna Robson), his wife, John Thornley, of the same, merchant, and Mary (formerly Mary Robson), his wife, Emma Robson, of the same, single woman, John Dych, of the same, house carpenter, and Margaret, his wife, George Cramp, of the same, ship carpenter, and Kate R. (formerly Kate Dych), his wife, Frank O'Bryon, of the same, agent, and Maggie (formerly Maggie Dych), his wife, to Henry Robson, of the same, house carpenter, for \$1,800, 27 March 1873, PDBk F.T.W., No. 28, p. 511, CAP.

<sup>17</sup> John "Robinson" at 1132 Marlborough Street, enumeration district 328, p. 2, line 35, City of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Census of Population; *Tenth Census of the United States, 1880* (National Archives Microfilm Publication T9; Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, NARA. There are no Robsons list at 1132 Marlborough Street in the city directories after 1883.

<sup>18</sup> Henry is listed in the city directories and 1880 census in the household of his sister Mary (Robson) Thornley (1825–1906), widow of James.

<sup>19</sup> Deed: Christianna Fow, widow, Emma Robson, single woman, James R. Dych and Margaret, his wife, George S. Cramp and Kate R., his wife, Margaret O'Bryon, widow, John D. Robson, and Elizabeth, his wife, William H. Robson and Kate H., his wife, Joseph R. Paxson, unmarried, Mary Ella Paxson, unmarried, John R. Paxson and Eva, his wife, Claudine Mills, widow, Henry C. Heller and Sarah, his wife, William A. Nickert and Ada M.A., his wife, and William Robson, unmarried, all of the City of Philadelphia, Ellis W. Scott and Hannah A., his wife, Joseph B. Copeland and Sarah A., his wife, of Burlington, New Jersey, Timothy W. Ashley, of Florence, New Jersey, and Mary Emma, his wife, to James R. Eastwood, of the City of Philadelphia, carpenter, for \$1, 8 November 1906, PDBk W.S.V., No. 763, p. 175, CAP.

property appears to be one of the oldest in that group.<sup>20</sup> Architectural historian Bernard L. Herman, comments on the rarity of surviving wooden houses in an urban context in his book, *Town House, Architecture and Material Life in the Early American City, 1780–1830*:

The houses that survive tend overwhelmingly to be of brick construction. Their frame counterparts largely disappeared from the late nineteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries, when they were pulled down and replaced with larger, less combustible brick residences.<sup>21</sup>

The Jacob Souder house is representative of a type of frame dwelling that was once prominent in the neighborhood and beyond. The subject property appears to retain its original massing and form; its original fenestration pattern; and its original dormers.

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<sup>20</sup> This statistic is based a review of Pictometry with comparisons to the historic atlases of Philadelphia. In the last nomination submitted for a wooden house east of I-95, there were 54 wooden houses standing; now only 50 and at least one has a demolition permit.

<sup>21</sup> Bernard L. Herman, *Town House, Architecture and Material Life in the Early American City, 1780–1830* (University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 108–109.

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Oscar Beisert, Architectural Historian and Historic Preservationist

J.M. Duffin, Archivist and Historian

Ken Milano, Historian

Kelly Wiles, Architectural Historian

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Brewington, Marion V. "Maritime Philadelphia 1609–1837," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 63 (1939).

Deed: Christian Sheetz, of Kensington in the Northern Liberties of the City of Philadelphia, esquire, and Magdalen, his wife, and Conrad Worknot, of the same, grazier, and Mary, his wife, to Jacob Souder, of the same, victualler, for \$200, 25 May 1810, Philadelphia Deed Book F.T.W., No. 39, p. 67 City Archives of Philadelphia (hereafter CAP).

Deed: Christianna Fow, widow, Emma Robson, single woman, James R. Dych and Margaret, his wife, George S. Cramp and Kate R., his wife, Margaret O'Bryon, widow, John D. Robson, and Elizabeth, his wife, William H. Robson and Kate H., his wife, Joseph R. Paxson, unmarried, Mary Ella Paxson, unmarried, John R. Paxson and Eva, his wife, Claudine Mills, widow, Henry C. Heller and Sarah, his wife, William A. Nickert and Ada M.A., his wife, and William Robson, unmarried, all of the City of Philadelphia, Ellis W. Scott and Hannah A., his wife, Joseph B. Copeland and Sarah A., his wife, of Burlington, New Jersey, Timothy W. Ashley, of Florence, New Jersey, and Mary Emma, his wife, to James R. Eastwood, of the City of Philadelphia, carpenter, for \$1, 8 November 1906, PDBk W.S.V., No. 763, p. 175, CAP.

Deed: Christopher Sowder, of the Northern Liberties of the City of Philadelphia, victualler, and Elizabeth, his wife, Jacob Sowder, of the same, victualler, and Margaret, his wife, Philip Sowder, of the same, cordwainer, Casper Sowder, of the same, rope maker, and Jane, his wife, and Peter Peterson, of the same, yeoman, and Mary, his wife, they being the children of Casper Sowder, late of the same, cordwainer, to Benjamin Harper Roberts, of the same, innkeeper, for \$2,400, 1 March 1810, Philadelphia Deed Book I.C., No. 9, p. 174, CAP.

Deed: William Robson, of the City of Philadelphia, house carpenter, and Rebecca, his wife, Jacob Robson, of the same, whip maker, and Elizabeth, his wife, Warren Scott, of Burlington, New Jersey, farmer, and Margaret (formerly Margaret Robson), his wife, Joseph Paxson, of Philadelphia, agent, and Eliza (formerly Eliza Robson), his wife, Lewis Fow, of the same, victualler, and Christianna (formerly Christianna Robson), his wife, John Thornley, of the same, merchant, and Mary (formerly Mary Robson), his wife, Emma Robson, of the same, single woman, John Dych, of the same, house carpenter, and Margaret, his wife, George Cramp, of the same, ship carpenter, and Kate R. (formerly Kate Dych), his wife, Frank O'Bryon, of the same, agent, and Maggie (formerly Maggie Dych), his

- wife, to Henry Robson, of the same, house carpenter, for \$1,800, 27 March 1873, PDBk F.T.W., No. 28, p. 511, CAP.
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## **APPENDIX – HISTORICAL CONTEXT INFORMATION**

### **Historic Context: Fishtown Section of Kensington, Philadelphia**

Fishtown originated as a quaint fishing village at what was historically known as Shackamaxon—“the place where the chiefs meet.” Located along the west bank of the Delaware River above Cohocksink Creek (now Canal Street), the settlement’s greatest claim to fame is associated with Penn Treaty Park, the former site of the Elm tree that shaded the Lenni Lenape and William Penn signing of the “great treaty” in 1682. While the event may ultimately amount to folklore that was eventually inscribed upon the pages of Philadelphia’s history books, the name Shackamaxon is one that derived from “Kackamensi,” and was a place of Lenape occupation as early as the seventeenth century. Eventually came the settlers of New Sweden, and it was the Cock, Nilsson, Salung, and Rambo families who chose this locality for their agricultural endeavors.

As an urban development in both name and plan, the neighborhood we know today traces its origins to the 1730s when Anthony Palmer (1675-1749), a merchant and the Pennsylvania provincial councilor, decided to carve up his 191½-acre Delaware River front property. Palmer laid out streets and sold lots in the area that now compasses East Columbia Avenue (late Hanover Street), the Delaware River, Norris Street and Frankford Avenue. He called this new community Kensington. Palmer’s immediate neighbor to the southwest, Benjamin Fairman, followed Palmer’s lead by laying out streets on his river-front property that extended Kensington from East Columbia Avenue to roughly Frankford Avenue. In spite of the development plans that Palmer’s new streets and lots portended, the pace of settlement in Kensington was slow, but still a maritime fishing village formed along the bank of the Delaware River. Shipbuilding and other pursuits at the end of the eighteenth century led to a rise in development and construction near the waterfront. Specifically, as the city moved north along the Delaware River, the area underwent its formative and largely first period of urban development during the first quarter of the nineteenth century with a major boom in construction during the 1830s.

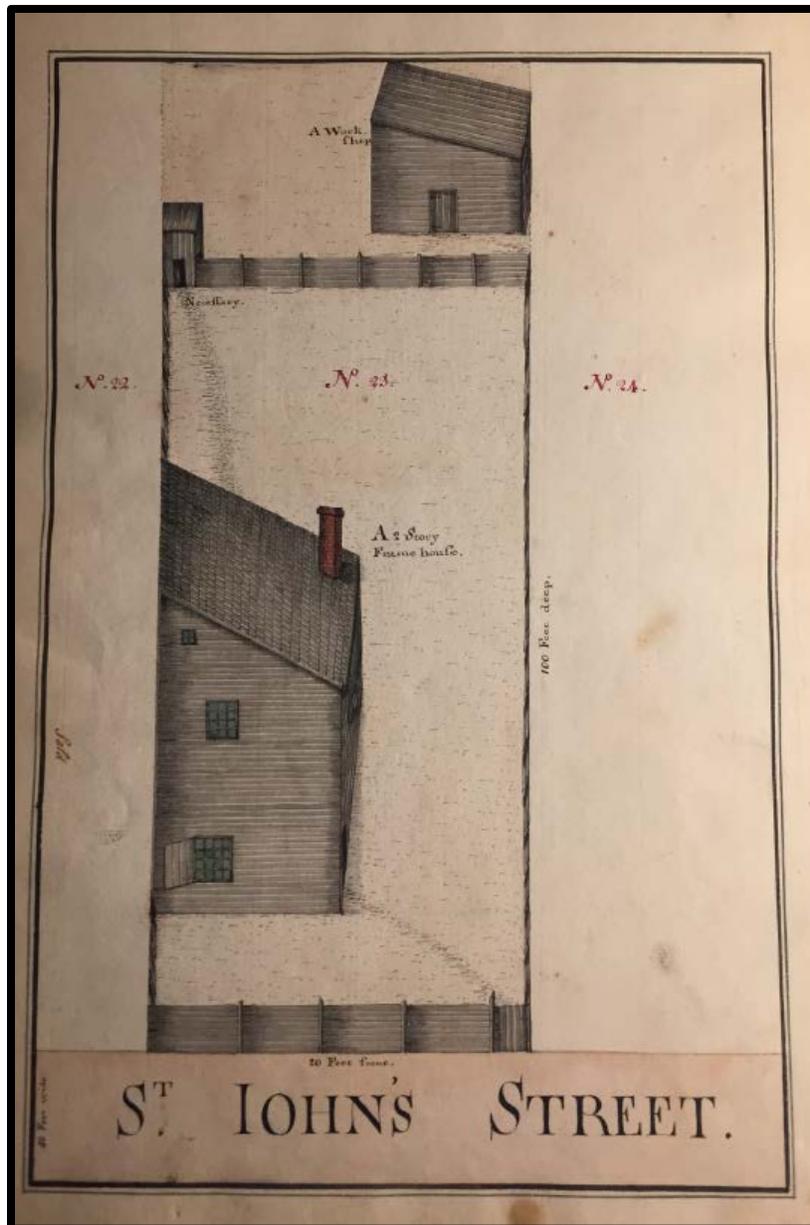


Figure 24. A survey of a wooden house on St. John's Street in Philadelphia. Note that the house is a very simple two-story frame structure with almost no architectural pretense. Source: HSP.



Figure 25. Seen between a variety of wooden houses, the Georgian doorway (on left) in the lithograph is a representative of the Georgian vernacular that pervaded the architectural landscape of Philadelphia, even in the largely unknown context of frame buildings in what reads as the Quaker City. Adjacent, in the foreground, as well as the background, and on right are all manner of timber frame houses—one even prominently displays the lines of a Gambrel roof. This scene is, on a whole, a court of frame dwellings, depicted in *The little homeless one or "no one to kiss me good night,"* a lithograph by P.S. Duval, Philadelphia, dated 1867. Source: Library Company of Philadelphia.

### **The Frame Dwelling in Philadelphia—the Northern Liberties and Kensington**

When the Welcome arrived at Philadelphia in 1683, William Penn and his fellow Quakers encountered a sparse community of Swedes, which largely consisted of subsistence farmers living in log hewn and timber frame buildings. Beyond their own cave dwellings, the first houses built by Quakers likely included small, simple, and perhaps even temporary wooden structures. And while brick soon became a standard, frame dwellings, dating to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, were a common building form in the city.

In 1749, Swedish Naturalist Peter Kalm noted an “ancient” frame dwelling “preserved” in the Philadelphia landscape, a building that represented early colonization in the area:

A wretched old wooden building is preserved, on a hill near the [Delaware] river, located a little north of Wicaco ... on purpose as a memorial to the poor condition of the place before the town was built on it. It belonged formerly to one of the Svensons ... <sup>22</sup>

<sup>22</sup> John Fanning Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania, in Olden Time*.

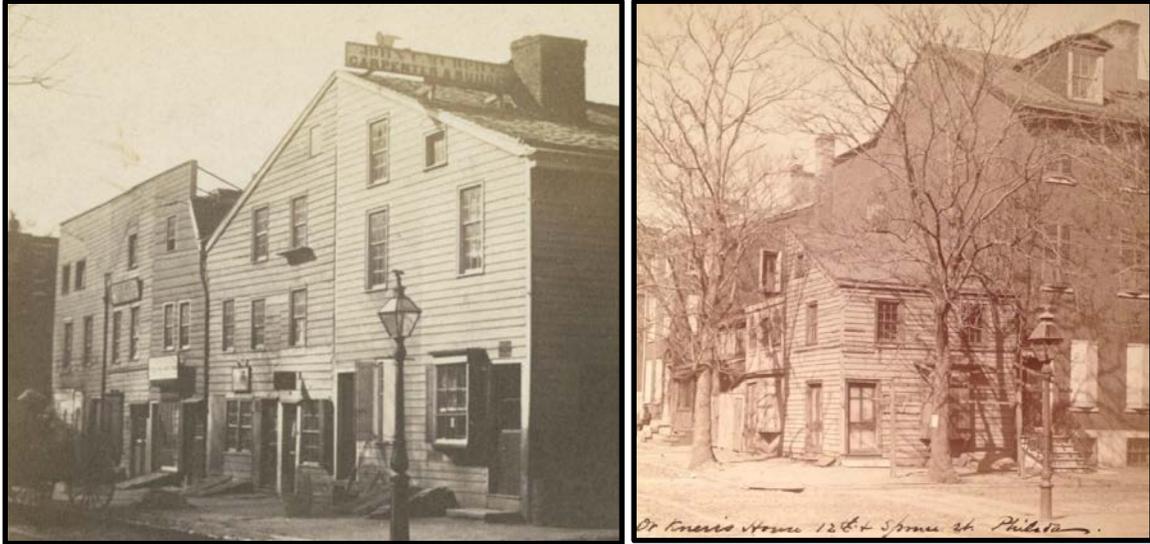


Figure 26. Left: Old wooden houses, that once extended southwardly from the corner of Marble Street, on the west side of Tenth Street, to Miss Sally Keene's, late Maj. Lennox's property and residence, built by "Col." Peter L. Berry. This was once the scene at the northwest corner of Chestnut and Tenth Streets. Source: HSP. Figure 27. Right: an unusual surviving wooden house at the corner of 12<sup>th</sup> and Spruce Streets. Source: HSP.

Since the local annals of history were first researched, written, and published, professors and teachers alike have perverted the minds of students on certain aspects of the foundational history of the Quaker City's built environment. Their narrative has been that William Penn's Philadelphia was one built entirely of brick, a conclusion made possible by the old wives' tale that early legal prohibitions against timber frame construction governed the city's physical development. Nevertheless, Penn's nascent, but groundbreaking efforts in urban planning were largely limited to his commissioning of Thomas Holme to lay out the City of Philadelphia. Never did he effectively prohibit wooden buildings and/or require that all attached houses be constructed masonry. Some attribute Penn's fervor for brick buildings to a lesson learned in the aftermath of the Great Fire of London in 1666, but, this presence, like the Green Country Town, was a mere idea that never realized historically, whatsoever.

While the natural resources of the region led to the use of brick and stone, as night follows day, buildings were more easily and efficiently constructed of timber frame. Specifically, frame dwellings were both cheap and quick to construct, which made them appealing options to immigrants, landlords, and first-time, frugal, and financially-limited property owners. These dwelling types were built in all parts of the city from a time prior to William Penn's arrival through the middle of the nineteenth century—and even now again.

According to James Mease (1771-1846), local scientist, horticulturist, and physician, Philadelphia's built environment of 1810 consisted of roughly 6,351 brick houses to 2,523 wooden ones—a ratio of three to one.<sup>23</sup> Interestingly, the general claim, as noted by historian Carole Shammas, is that houses were constructed at “an average of 228 per

<sup>23</sup> Margaret B. Tinkcom, “Southwark, a River Community: Its Shape and Substance,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 114 (1970), 327–342.

annum between 1760 and 1800,” a trend that led to the 1810 statistic.<sup>24</sup> Close inspection of early images and other records provides insight as to the physical appearance of these buildings. Many of these houses were entirely without pretense or style, while others took on the stylistic antecedents of their brick, stone, and wooden primates across the Atlantic in England and in continental Europe. North and south of the old municipal lines, the prevalence of the frame dwelling was even greater, and the forms and styles of Philadelphia’s wooden houses developed into its own vernacular language. One historian, Dell Upton, provides a more evolved understanding of Philadelphia as a city of brick, stone, and wood:

Many of these were built of wood long after better-off Philadelphians’ houses were routinely built of brick. Older-type structures that combined artisans’ workshop and living quarters remained scattered throughout the city, but were particularly common near the waterfront.<sup>25</sup>

The reality is that wooden houses were prevalent throughout the city and represent a largely lost component of the early development and built environment of the Quaker City. As a result, historic preservation, as well as, the material construction and common alteration of these buildings, has played into the misnomer that Philadelphia was always a city of masonry construction. An inventory of such buildings, preserved in Philadelphia proper, includes only a handful, while the neighborhood of Queen Village provides a slightly better glimpse of the mixture of building forms, styles and types, though only a few specimens of wooden houses are historically designated by the Philadelphia Historical Commission.

Perhaps the most comprehensive and representative ensemble of frame dwellings survives in Fishtown and the larger Kensington neighborhood, though there is also a notable collection in Frankford. East of Girard Avenue is a small component of the larger collection of wooden houses that exist citywide. In this area there were once 436 wooden houses a century ago and today there are only 52.<sup>26</sup> The subject building is one of the oldest of these buildings and an important example of a common type that was once common throughout the neighborhood and the city beyond.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Dell Upton, *Another City: Urban Life and Urban Space in the New American Republic* (Cambridge: Yale University Press, 2008), 25–26.

<sup>25</sup> Upton, *Another City: Urban Life*, 25.

<sup>26</sup> This figure is taken from analysis of plates for the 1916 Sanborn atlas for Fishtown and present-day conditions (*Insurance Maps of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*, vol. 3 [New York: Sanborn Map Company, 1916]).

<sup>27</sup> Being able to document the exact age of many of these houses is often difficult because of lack of surviving records (such as tax lists). The subject property is a rare exception to that.



Figure 28. Left: Early Log Dwelling—“One of the oldest houses in Phila,” Warren Street above Beach Street, Kensington. Figure 29. Right: Early Wooden Dwelling, which stood at the southwest corner of Belgrade Street and Montgomery Avenue on the grounds of the Palmer Cemetery. Source: Jane Campbell Collection, the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Early examples of high style architecture in Kensington are limited to a few of the larger, Georgian-inspired mansion houses and dwellings owned by elite Philadelphians, as well as some successful shipwrights along the Delaware River. Once situated on a larger tract of land on the waterfront near the “Treaty Elm,” the Fairman Mansion was the most famous eighteenth century building of architectural significance in the area. Other well-known houses also emerged in brick. Fronting on Beach Street, the Jehu Eyre House was built near the Fairman Mansion by 1770; however, its design was in the manner of a detached row house, adhering to the prevailing urban format of Philadelphia. The oldest known brick building extant in Kensington today, the Frederick J. Rapp house, was built between 1786 and 1787 in the 1000 Block of Frankford Avenue.<sup>28</sup> These three brick dwellings tell a brief, but representative story of brick house types that represent Kensington’s early historic built environment, but do not represent what was historically the primary building type of the area—the frame dwelling.



Figure 30. Caption from the Historical Society of Pennsylvania: ““Priestly Lodge,” the residence of Mr. John Harrison on Frankford road above Mud Lane (now Columbia Ave) in 1807, then a mile north of the city, the centre house built about 1770, the frame side additions in 1820 having an unobstructed view of the Delaware River. Demolished in 1887.” Drawing by David J. Kennedy. Source: HSP.

<sup>28</sup> Beisert, Oscar and Duffin, J.M. Philadelphia Register of Historic Places Nomination Form: The Frederick J. Rapp House, The Oldest House In Fishtown (1786-87). (Philadelphia: The Keeping Society of Philadelphia, 2016).



Figure 31. Showing as many as five frame out of eight buildings along Beach Street at the Delaware River waterfront in the Fishtown section of Kensington, David Johnston Kennedy's (1816-1898) 1869 drawing depicts the early built environment of the neighborhood. Source: HSP.

The story of the wooden house in Kensington is not one guided by high style architecture, rather these dwellings were often emulating architectural features, forms, and style in an evolving and varying vernacular expression. Although, there were no doubt more impressive and stylized frame dwellings in the area, these buildings have largely been lost to memory. On what was then known as the Frankford Road (now Frankford Avenue) at Mud Lane (now Columbia Avenue), Priestly Lodge was built c1807 and occupied by John Harrison. While the original house was of brick masonry construction, identical frame wings flanked the main block by 1820, both being clad in lapped siding. This building was by no means a high style example of wooden house architecture, but, nevertheless, is an unusual country house example in Kensington that, when enlarged by its owner, mimicked the architecture of the neighborhood in the 1820s.

Local lore tells us that one of the earliest vernacular wooden houses to survive into the nineteenth century was the tiny log hewn dwelling in the 1500 or 1600 Block of Richmond Street—now the site of an I-95 on ramp. Shown Figure 23, a captivating, staunch old lady appears to have used the building as house and home, selling ice, no doubt being very good with a pick, occupying “the oldest house in Philadelphia”—a nickname bestowed upon a number of ancient-appearing dwellings in the city. Almost always clad in lapped siding, and, occasionally vertical board, other houses of this material construction, form, and scale were known in Kensington, including the one shown Figure 24—it was located in Belgrade Street at the corner of Palmer Cemetery. The Belgrade Street house features a Georgian style dormer, conforming to the taste of the time in a modest format, while the Beach Street dwelling, that of the ice lady, had absolutely no pretense. These dwellings represent what was likely the oldest house type in the area—a primary feature being that the house was one-story of frame construction, often with a side gable roof.

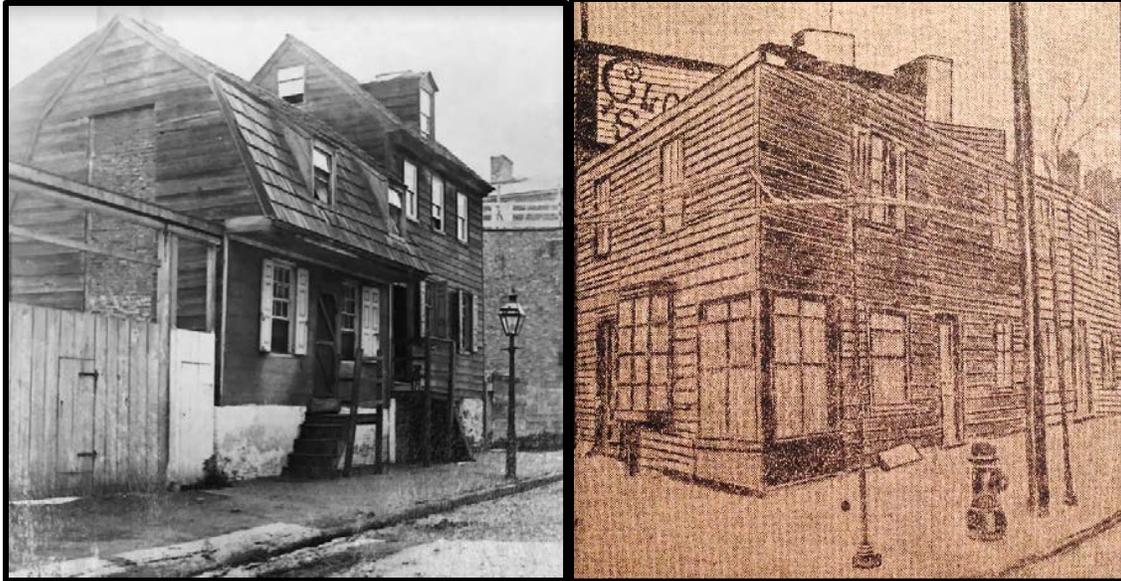


Figure 32. Left: Houses on Warren Street in Kensington. Source: Castner Scrapbook on Old Houses, Free Library of Philadelphia. Note that the house on right is similar in form and scale to the subject property. Figure 33. Right: This illustration accompanied an article titled, “Old Penn Homestead Will Be Destroyed.” The image showed an unusual row of wooden tenements, which was interestingly purported to be “The Penn Homestead,” particularly of Richard and Mary Masters Penn. This wooden “Penn” house was said to date to c1775, but may have been built as late as 1812—located at 951 Frankford Avenue. Just who lived there originally or the precise age of the building is not known, but buildings of this form, scale, and size were certainly more commonly found in the early built environment of Kensington.<sup>29</sup> Source: Miss Jane Campbell Scrapbook, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

As previously mentioned, the realization of Anthony Palmer’s Kensington development progressed slowly throughout the eighteenth century with the construction of frame dwellings being the most common house form. Shipwrights were among those in the area prior to the Revolution, operating along the Delaware River, their workers often lived nearby in wooden houses. And, naturally, all of the shipyards were associated with water lots extending east from Richmond Street. Fishermen too were often associated with wooden houses, though neither the shipbuilding and/or fishing were strictly associated with timber frame construction. Germans arrived in America—specifically in Philadelphia—in the eighteenth century, many of whom migrated from the Rhine Palatinate. It was primarily a group of these immigrants who became the fishermen of Fishtown. Germans knew frame dwellings from the old country and fishermen seem to have occupied these dwellings in Kensington, along with all manner of maritime and other trades people.

According to James Robinson and John A. Paxton’s survey of 1810, Kensington’s built environment consisted of about 615 houses. There were roughly 431 frame dwellings to 184 brick ones. This means that in the first decade of the nineteenth century, the housing stock in Kensington was 70 percent wood. Earlier surveys exist, but do not distinguish frame versus masonry construction in a comprehensive manner. The same survey shows that Northern Liberties possessed a total of 2,998 dwellings, almost half of which were frame. Timber frame construction was used for other building types in Kensington as well. In 1810, there were nine storehouses in the area, eight of which were frame. With a

<sup>29</sup> “Old Penn Homestead Will Be Destroyed,” 1901, Scrapbook Collection of Jane Campbell, HSP.

mere ten manufacturing buildings, it is interesting to note that more of these were masonry—a ratio of five to five. Public buildings were wooden as well. In Northern Liberties nine out of nineteen buildings were frame, while in Kensington the ratio was three wooden to one brick. Ninety-four percent of the stables and workshops in both Northern Liberties and Kensington were of timber frame construction, but that was more typical of the building type—outbuildings of frame construction made up 66 percent of the building type citywide.<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, this 1810 analysis of the buildings in Philadelphia, Northern Liberties, Penn Township, Kensington, Southwark, and Moyamensing Township combined to show that wooden buildings made up forty-eight percent, showing that the brick building hardly dominated Philadelphia even as late as 1810, and that wooden buildings made up nearly half of the city’s built environment.

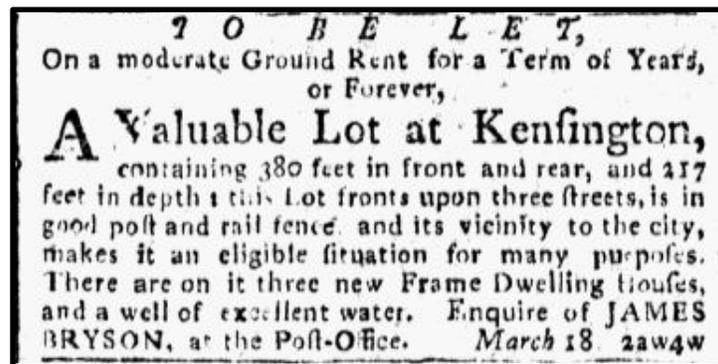


Figure 34. Advertisement for “A Valuable Lot at Kensington” which includes “free new Frame Dwelling Houses.” Published on April 3, 1789 in the *Pennsylvania Packet*.

The Jacob Souder Frame Dwelling is a side gable (single pitch), single pile vernacular Georgian style timber frame dwelling with single dormers, featuring a low pediment, at the primary and rear elevations. The form, scale, style, and the chimney placement, as well as the construction method suggest that the building likely dates to the post-Revolutionary period through the early nineteenth century. Jacob Souder likely constructed this dwelling for himself and his family—an owner-occupied residence. At the time of construction its size was closely related to other frame dwellings in the area. This vernacular Georgian house speaks to the learned fashions of the time and place, which evolved over time to the building and its present condition.<sup>31</sup>

Older house forms appear to have been duplicated in the 1790s and through the first quarter of the nineteenth century. For example, the “half house” or flounder type was built in greater numbers than one would suspect. At one time the half house was even a known form in Northern Liberties. For example, William Ball sold a small lot to John and Adam Mintser in April 1796, which appears to have been unimproved.<sup>32</sup> Two years later, John Mintser was living on the lot in a “two-story” [a two-hand-one-half (2-1/2) story] frame dwelling with the typical measurements of a so-called half house.<sup>33</sup> This is

<sup>30</sup> Paxton, *The Stranger’s Guide*, 18–20

<sup>31</sup> Kenneth W. Milano, *Remembering Kensington & Fishtown, Philadelphia’s Riverward Neighborhoods*. (Philadelphia: The History Press, 2008), 43–46.

<sup>32</sup> Deed: William Ball and wife to John and Adam Mintser, 1 April 1796, PDBk E.F., No. 28, p. 216, CAP.

<sup>33</sup> *United States Direct Tax of 1798: Tax Lists for the State of Pennsylvania*. M372, microfilm, 24 rolls.

no doubt the same building that is shown in the famous image of Commissioners' Hall. There are a few examples of this house type extant in Kensington—particularly in Fishtown, while most have been lost over time.

In the last decade of the eighteenth century, increasing concern related to fire and its relationship to wooden houses, as well as the poor state of maintenance of older frame dwellings led to the passage of laws to mitigate the problems of absentee landlords and fire hazards. An ordinance of June 6, 1796 declared that no “wooden mansion-house, shope [sic.], ware-house, store, or carriage or stable” should be erected in the City of Philadelphia between the Delaware River and Sixth Street, Vine to South Streets.<sup>34</sup> While the ordinance may have sent the proper message to certain Kensington builders, it likely had minimal effects on the construction of wooden houses outside of its mandated boundaries. Three decades later in 1826, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania gave the City of Philadelphia the power to prohibit the construction of any building of the following description: “...the walls that are not completely composed of incombustible materials...”<sup>35</sup> Finally, the City of Philadelphia passed an ordinance on June 8, 1832 that brought the following into effect:

From and after the passing of this ordinance, it shall not be lawful to erect or construct within the city of Philadelphia, any wooden, framed, brick-paned, or other building, whereof the walls are not composed wholly of incombustible materials.<sup>36</sup>

The timeline of these laws spans 113 to 149 years after William Penn founded Philadelphia. Like so many unsubstantiated claims of history, Penn's brick city was an ideal and a myth. Furthermore, the statistics from 1810 confirm that the initial ordinance of 1796 had little impact on Kensington. It certainly did not deter the construction of wooden houses, but over time the frame dwelling proliferated as a house type of various forms and styles, coming full circle by the mid- to late-nineteenth century when the frame dwelling diminished as this neighborhood underwent intense development to accommodate a growing population.

Advertisements also show the range of house types and an evolving customer base over time. On April 3, 1789, the *Pennsylvania Packet* advertised wooden houses as a feature of “A Valuable Lot at Kensington,” referencing “three new Frame Dwelling Houses.” These houses were clearly built as rentals for a business owner or landlord. Other advertisements appear to have been geared towards owner-occupants. On April 14, 1819 the *Franklin Gazette* advertised a “Kensington Property” as “The Frame House, Kitchen and lot...” and this advertisement seemed to be formatted to attract someone to the house

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Records of the Internal Revenue Service, 1791–2006, Record Group 58. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

<sup>34</sup> John C. Lowber and C.S. Miller, *A Digest of the Ordinances of the Corporation of the City of Philadelphia; and of the Acts of Assembly Relating thereto* (Philadelphia: R. Desilver, 1822), 255–56.

<sup>35</sup> Frank F. Brightly, *A Digest of Laws and Ordinances of the City of Philadelphia from the Year 1701 to the 21<sup>st</sup> of June 1887* (Philadelphia: Kay & Brother, 1887), 168.

<sup>36</sup> *A Digest of the Ordinances of the Corporation of the City of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: S.C. Atkinson, 1834), 310–311.

itself, leaving out a reference to the property as a potential rental.<sup>37</sup> These are two of numerous examples of the variation of advertisements that further exhibit the prevalence of the wooden house, as an important and primary component of Kensington's built environment.

**Frame House and Lot.**  
On Saturday morning at 10 o'clock, will be sold on the premises,  
A NEW two story Frame House, and Lot, on which the same is erected, situate on Brown street in Kensington — The lot is 15 feet front, and about seventy feet deep — The house quite new  
**Peter Kuhn & son, auc'rs.**

**Kensington Property.**  
On Tuesday evening, the 20th April, at half past 7 o'clock, at the Merchant's Coffee House,  
 **The Frame House, Kitchen and lot or piece of ground, situate on the east side of Cherry Street, between Prince and Queen Street, being 253 feet, 6 inches from Prince Street, at Kensington, containing in front or breadth on said Cherry street, twenty feet, and in length or depth running parallel with Prince Street, one hundred and eighty feet.**  
The house has been newly painted. A pump at the door. Terms at sale.  
**Taylor & Wagner,**  
April 12—dts Auctioneers.

Figure 35. Left: Advertisement for a Frame House in Kensington. Published on January 17, 1812 in the *Democratic Press*. Figure 36. Right: Advertisement for a Frame House in Kensington. Published on April 14, 1819 in the *Franklin Gazette*.

Utility and the standards it derived influenced the form, scale, size, and styles used in the construction of wooden houses. By 1830, the ubiquitous red brick two-and-one-half story vernacular Georgian style house with a central dormer was perhaps the most fashionable building type used by developers in Kensington. Yet wooden houses continued to be built. The following description shows that by 1845 frame dwellings continued to be built, though comprising a smaller portion of the overall construction than they had in the past.

Kensington—In this District a large number of buildings have been put up without permits having been taken out; the new buildings erected during the past season will number at least 160 three story brick dwellings and stores, 2 churches and 20 frame dwellings, &c., altogether about 182.<sup>38</sup>

In 1844, there were 183 buildings constructed in Kensington, but the specific number of wooden buildings was not referenced.<sup>39</sup> One can suspect that it was a smaller percentage than years past, as reflected in the 1845 statistic. After the Civil War, the construction of frame dwellings was not unknown, but, even in Kensington, houses were likely to be masonry.

<sup>37</sup> "Advertisement." *Franklin Gazette*, 4.

<sup>38</sup> "Growth of Philadelphia." *The North American and Daily Advertiser*, 8 January 1845, 1.

<sup>39</sup> "Philadelphia." *The North American and Daily Advertiser*, 5 October 1844, 1.