

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: 2224 and 2226 W. Tioga Street

Postal code: 19140

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: Conkling-Armstrong House

Current/Common Name: _____

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: _____

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Please attach a narrative description and site/plot plan of the resource's boundaries.

6. DESCRIPTION

Please attach a narrative description and photographs of the resource's physical appearance, site, setting, and surroundings.

7. SIGNIFICANCE

Please attach a narrative Statement of Significance citing the Criteria for Designation the resource satisfies.

Period of Significance (from year to year): from 1898 to present

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: 1898

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: Edgar V. Seelers

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: Conkling-Armstrong Terra Cotta Company

Original owner: Ira L. Conkling; Thomas F. Armstrong

Other significant persons: _____

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

Organization The Keeping Society of Philadelphia Date November 13, 2018

Name with Title Amy Lambert, Casey Weisdock Email _____

Street Address 1325 Walnut Street, Suite 320 Telephone (267) 584-6544

City, State, and Postal Code Philadelphia, PA 19107

Nominator is is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: November 14, 2018

Correct-Complete Incorrect-Incomplete Date: January 9, 2019

Date of Notice Issuance: January 10, 2019

Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: Gabriel Crowley (2224 W. Tioga) Naomi Turner (2226 W. Tioga)

Address: 126 W. Abbottsford Ave 2228 W. Tioga St

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19144/19140

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: February 13, 2019

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: March 8, 2019

Date of Final Action: March 8, 2019

Designated Rejected

5. BUILDING DESCRIPTION

2224 W. Tioga Street

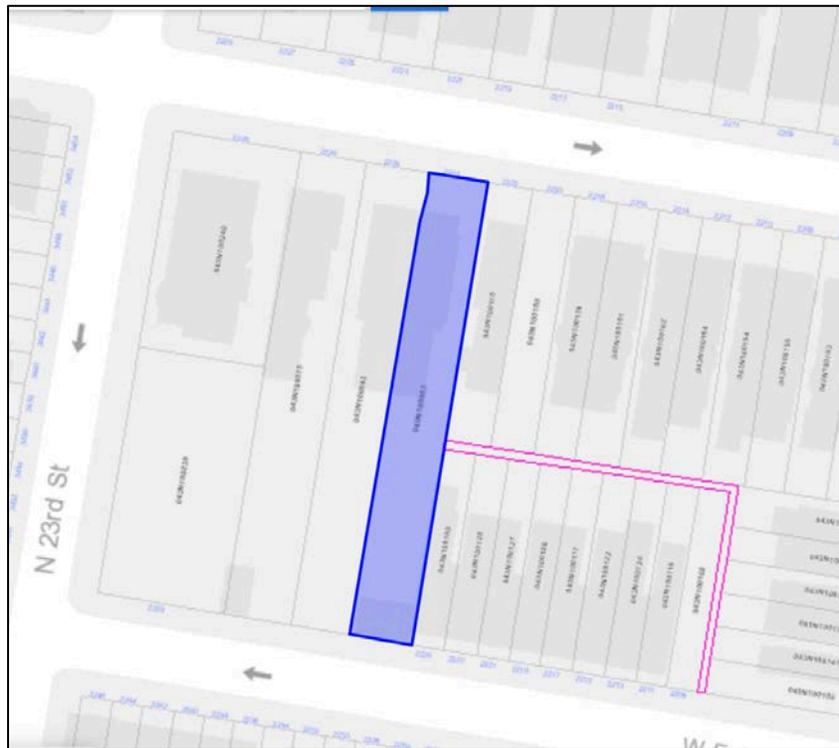


Fig. 1. Parcel map from the Office of Property Assessment website, City of Philadelphia.

All that certain lot or piece of ground with the buildings and improvements thereon erected, Situate on the South side of Tioga Street, at the distance of 124 feet Eastward from the East side of 23rd Street in the 38th Ward of the City of Philadelphia.

Containing in front or breadth on the said Tioga Street 30 feet and extending of that width in length or depth Southward between lines parallel with the said 23rd Street 225 feet to the North side of E Staugh Street. Being known as 2224 West Tioga Street.

The property is known as Parcel No. 043N100083, Office of Property Assessment Account No. 112093100.

5. BUILDING DESCRIPTION, continued

2226 W. Tioga Street

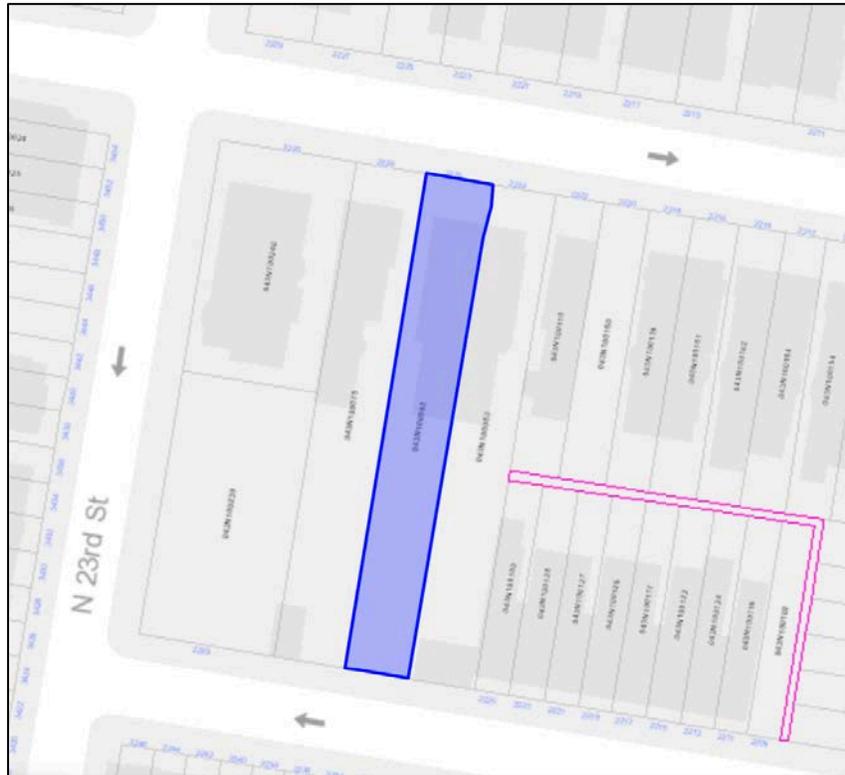


Fig. 2. Parcel map from the Office of Property Assessment website, City of Philadelphia.

All that certain lot of piece of ground with the buildings and improvements thereon erected. Situate on the South side of Tioga Street, at the distance of 94 feet Eastward from the East side of 23rd Street in the 38th Ward of the City of Philadelphia.

Containing in front or breadth on the said Tioga Street 30 feet and extending of that width in length or depth Southward between lines parallel with the said 23rd Street 225 feet to the North side of Estaugh Street. Being known as 2226 West Tioga Street.

The property is known as Parcel No. 043N100082, Office of Property Assessment Account No. 112093200.

6. PROPERTY DESCRIPTION



Fig. 3. North and primary elevation of 2224 and 2226 West Tioga Street. Photo: A. Lambert, 7/19/ 2018.

The three and a half story twin dwelling at 2224 and 2226 West Tioga Street is a unique demonstration house for the architectural terra cotta of the Conkling-Armstrong Terra Cotta Company. The Conkling-Armstrong Houses comprise two halves of a grand, Châteauesque twin in the Nicetown-Tioga section of north Philadelphia. The 4,125-square-foot structure sits on a 6,700 square foot lot. A work of late nineteenth century academic eclecticism, the exterior is constructed of iron-flecked yellow-orange brick with extensive, granitized terra cotta trim. It is capped by a slate-and-copper mansard roof that extends over the service wings at the rear. Constructed in 1898 by architect Edward V. Seelers, the subject property forms a commanding presence in the middle of this residential block.

The building is exceedingly ornate, befitting its de-facto function as a sampler of the terra cotta products manufactured by its original owners. No corner or architrave is left unadorned. Window openings and doorways are generally surrounded by quoins or other decorative elements at all elevations except at the rear, south elevation. Dormer heads and the occasional niche take the form of aedicules. The front porch is especially richly embellished. Divided into four bays by pairs of columns with diaper-work patterning on high bases, its gryphon-sprouting capitals and elaborately festooned cornice recall the most exuberant Plateresque details of Old World palaces and advertise to admirers what may be had in the New World at moderate cost. The structure is composed primarily of Roman brick, with contrasting quoins at each corner, details that surround each window and door opening.

The north elevation is the primary elevation, and is asymmetrical at the first level yet symmetrical at the upper levels. An integral porch with four bays extends the entire width of both houses, and is L-shaped in plan since it wraps around the northeast corner of 2224. The porch is accessible by two sets of four steps, each placed at the outermost bays to correspond to each residence's entry door; it is covered by a portico supported by coupled Corinthian-inspired columns. The lower third of the column shafts are fluted; the upper two-thirds of the shafts are decorated in a floral pattern set within a grid of diamonds. Each pair of columns rests upon a rectangular brick column. The columns are topped with a complex cornice line. Above the columns, a cable molding sits at the lowest fascia line, topped with a thin half round profile, the frieze contains a filigree pattern by a dentil band, above which is a supplemental band of egg-and-dart molding. Small scroll pendants hang from the soffit. The cornice line features a floral pattern within a cove molding. The ceiling of the porch is made of thin boards and is intact. The entrance to 2226 is located just west of the centerline, adjacent to a bay window, and to the west of the bay window at the west end of the elevation is a rectangular window. The entrance to 2224 is located at the terminus of the L-shaped porch along the east elevation, but facing north. A matching bay window fills the space between the centerline and the entry door to its east. The bay windows are set apart with vertical architraves ornamented with a geometric diamond pattern.

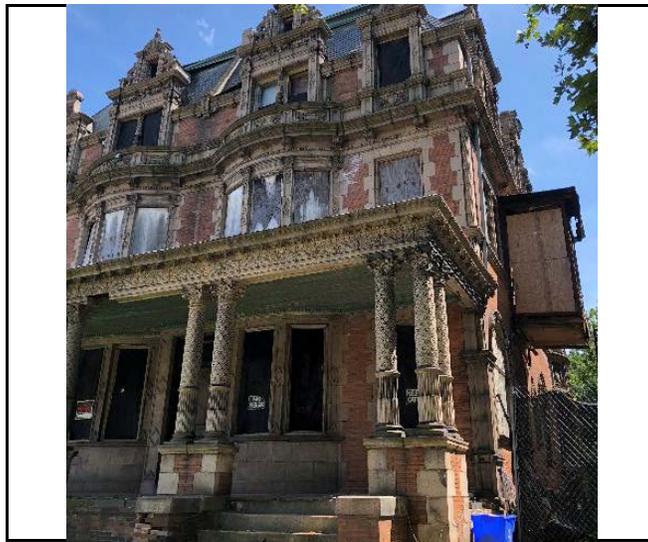


Fig. 4. Porch at the north/primary elevation. Photo: C. Weisdock, 8/5/2018.

The second story features mirrored bay windows that are situated directly above those on the first story. The architrave with diamond patterning separates each panel of the bow windows. Topping these columns is a simplified composite capital with acanthus leaves and antic forms. Narrow rectangular windows flank the bay windows within the wall plane. An ornate band of terra cotta details separates the second and third stories. From bottom to top of this band, an egg and dart molding is capped with modillions. A course of acanthus patterning forms the next level, topped with alternating plain and intricate rectangular panels featuring scrolls, leaves, and shields. The quoins on the corners of the first and second stories contain an inset spirally banded pole motif.



Fig. 5. Second level bay window at the north façade. Photo: C. Weisdock, 8/5/2018.

The third story is capped by a grey mansard roof with a patinaed copper coping trim, and continues the heavily ornamented detail. Centered above the third level bay windows are rectangular dormer window openings, surrounded by the geometric diamond patterned columns to the outside, and a decorative mullion at the center of the window. These dormer openings are topped with an ornately decorated gable dormer, with an intricately detailed frieze between the two. The gable window is a narrow rectangle, framed by a banderol molding, then flanked on either side with a circular geometric pattern, which supports a foliated scroll set upon balusters. Topping the dormer window is a half-circle with a scrolling motif within the arc. Set upon the arc is an urn motif.

Maintaining the pattern of the rectangular window at the outside line of the house on the third floor, this window is set within a simplified frame of the geometric diamond columns, topped with a heavy cornice of geometric details. Topping the cornice is a decorative element with rococo-style motifs. The cornice and decorative arch are situated in front of a smaller gable.

The east elevation of 2224 is composed of brick with contrasting color quoins framing each window. The first story, read front to rear (north to south), has a pair of columns supporting the porch roof, two arched openings, which allow access to the porch from the east. A rectangular window sits perpendicular to the east entry door, under the covered porch. Moving south toward the rear of the building, there are two windows framed in ornate decorative details, one window significantly smaller than the other. The smaller window takes the form of an aedicule. The window and columns are set within a larger frame of quoins, topped with a cornice that has Vitruvian scrolls at the top corners of the window. Set upon the window cornice is a half-circle with a scalloped tympanum. Three abstracted faces sit on bases, one atop the arch, two atop the corners. The larger of the two windows sits to the south of the smaller window. Decorative capitals rest upon the quoins that frame the window. A half-round arch sits on the capitals, decorated with Vitruvian scrolls and egg and dart molding. South of the windows is an arc shaped bay window matching those on the front elevation. The window is framed in

the same geometric diamond pattern as those at the primary elevation, and is topped with panels containing a wreath and surrounded by a floral motif. A string-course runs along the elevation separating the first and second stories.



Fig. 6. Window at east elevation. C. Weisdock, 8/5/2018.



Fig. 7. Window at east elevation. C. Weisdock, 8/5/2018.

The second level of the east elevation starts with a pair of rectangular windows at the north end, centered directly above the two arches that allow porch access. These rectangular windows are framed in simple terra cotta blocks within quoins. Directly south of this pair of windows is the remnant of an added restroom, which has since been removed. The removal was completed hastily, and the resulting gap in the wall has been covered with plywood to protect the interior from the elements. South of the plywood covering is another pair of windows, separated by a panel of bricks between them, simply framed in quoins. The arc shaped bay window continues up to the second story. The thick course of decorative elements wraps around from the front to sides demarcating the separation between the second and third stories. This band contains an egg and dart molding at the bottom, a row of scrolls projecting from the acanthus patterned cornice forming the next level.

The third story of the east elevation of 2224 largely matches the third story of the primary elevation. Moving from north to south, a pair of rectangular windows is surrounded by the geometric diamond

patterned columns to the outside, and a decorative mullion at the center of the window. These windows are topped with an ornately decorated gable dormer, with an intricately detailed frieze between the two. The gable window is a narrow rectangle, framed by a banderol molding, then flanked on either side with a circular geometric pattern, which supports a foliated scroll set upon balusters. Topping the dormer window is half-circle with a scrolling motif within the arc. Set upon the arc is an urn motif. South of the double window is a smaller window set within a simplified frame of the geometric diamond columns, topped with a heavy cornice of geometric details. Topping the cornice is a decorative element with rococo-style motifs. The cornice and decorative arch are situated in front of a smaller gable. The third story of the west elevation has the mirror opposite configuration.



Fig. 8. Third level window at north façade topped by an ornate dormer. Photo: C. Weisdock, 8/5/2018.



Fig. 9. East elevation of 2224. Photo: C. Weisdock, 8/5/2018.

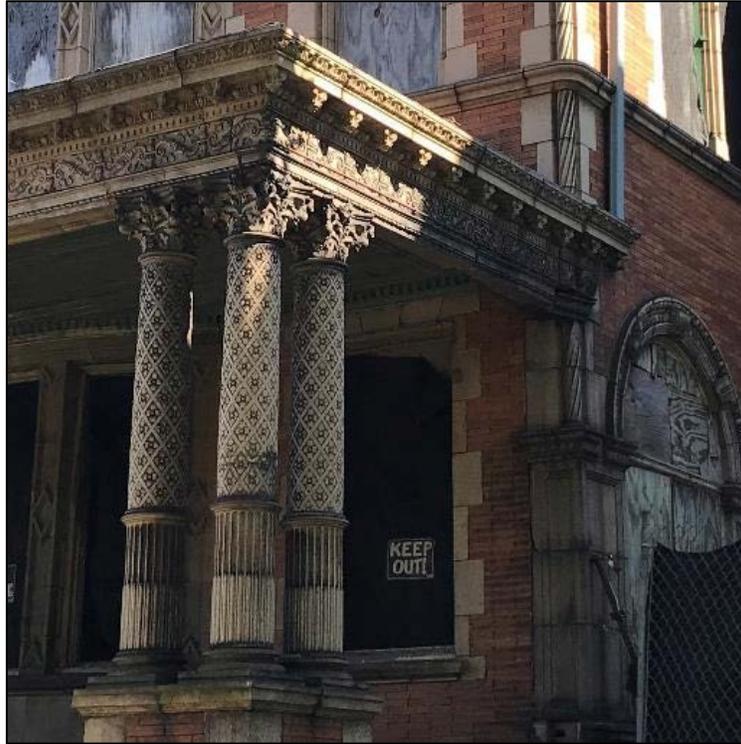


Fig. 10. Porch detail at north façade. Photo: A. Lambert, 7/19/2018.



Fig. 11. Porch detail and ceiling at north elevation. Photo: C. Weisdock, 8/5/2018.

Conkling-Armstrong House
2224 and 2226 West Tioga Street
Nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places



Fig. 12. Northwest corner perspective of house showing west elevation of 2226. Photo: A. Lambert, 7/19/2018.

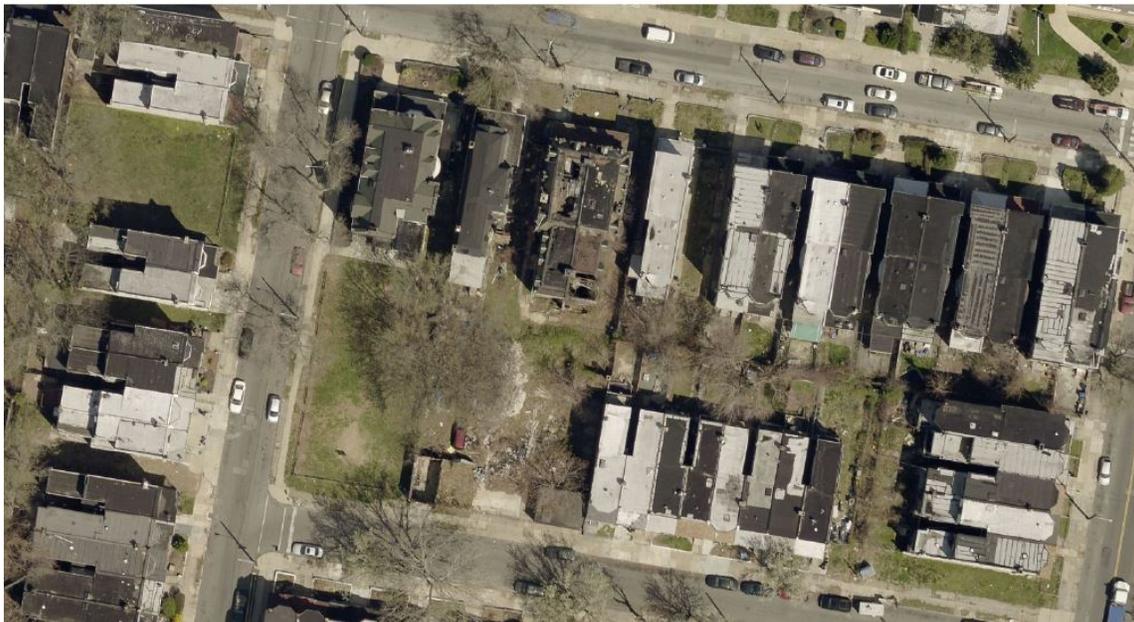


Fig. 13. Aerial view of the semi-detached houses on the south side of West Tioga Street, April 16, 2015. Source: Pictometry.

Conkling-Armstrong House
2224 and 2226 West Tioga Street
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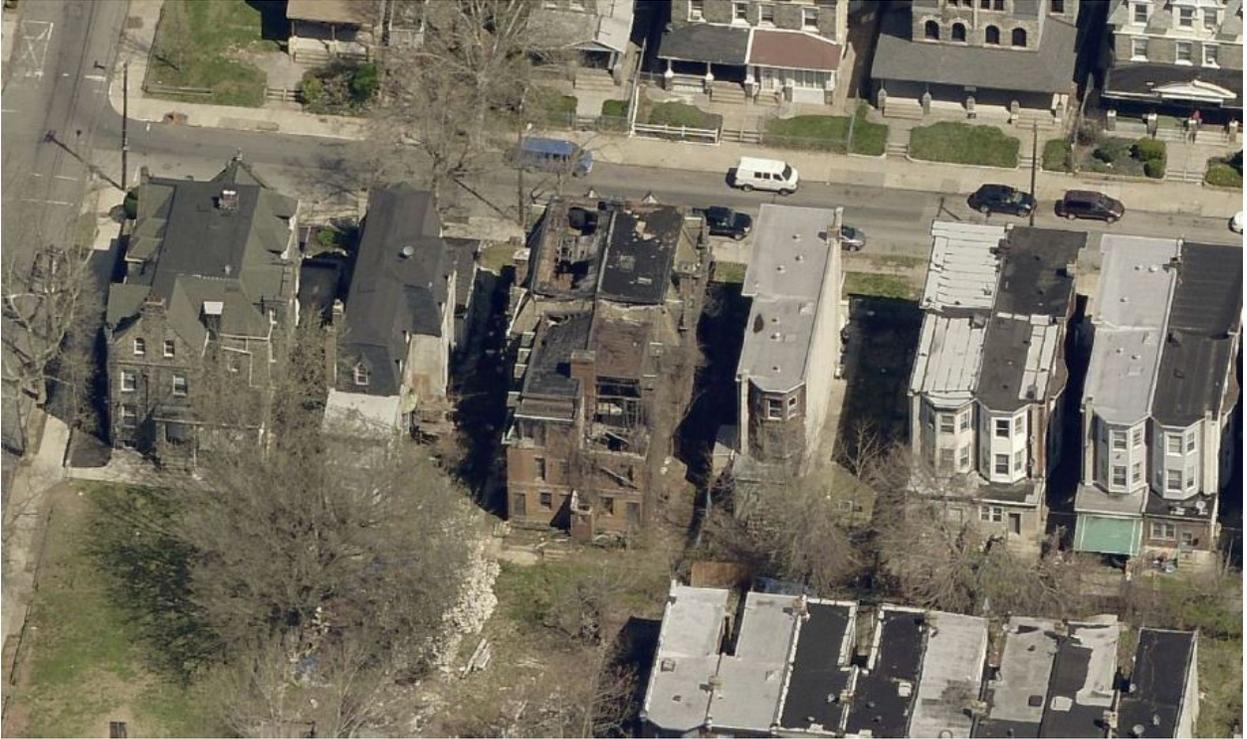


Fig. 14. Oblique perspective of 2224 and 2226 W. Tioga Street from the south, April 16, 2015. Source: Pictometry.

8. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE



Fig. 15. An 1898 as-built photograph of the Conkling-Armstrong House from the catalogue of the T-Square Club Architectural Exhibition of 1899. Source: Google Books.

The twin dwelling at 2224 and 2226 West Tioga Street, known as the Conkling-Armstrong House, is a significant historic resource in Philadelphia and meets Criteria A, C, D, E, and F for designation on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, as enumerated in Section 14-1004 of the Philadelphia zoning code. The dwelling meets Criterion A as an exemplar of a materials demonstration house, in this case for terra cotta. It meets Criterion C and D as a wonderful example of baroque Châteauesque design, a Gilded Age hallmark. It meets Criterion E through its association with successful and noted architect Edgar V. Seeler. The Conkling-Armstrong House meets Criterion F owing to its impressive and unique use of a multitude of terra cotta architectural elements.

Criterion (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, and criterion (f): Contains elements of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship that represent a significant innovation.

Philadelphia, unlike other American cities whose economy rested on one avenue of industrial development, was built and maintained by an incredibly varied network of industries. Between 1880 and 1920, the city's manufacturing was unrivaled. During this time the U.S. Census recorded approximately 300 types of industry; Philadelphia surveys showed local companies active in almost 90% of them. Production of hard goods such as transportation equipment and tools, soft goods such as textiles and hosiery, chemicals, oil refineries and large industrial production, along with harvesting and transporting of local raw materials earned Philadelphia the title, "The Workshop of the World".¹

Further, Philadelphia was known not only for big industry, but for supporting and nurturing small enterprise. Many employees went on to open their own businesses and were supported by the web of industry around them. This in part was because of the diverse population and the ethos of the city. Being the first capital of the free world, and the largest colonial city, Philadelphia was the epicenter of independence and innovation.²

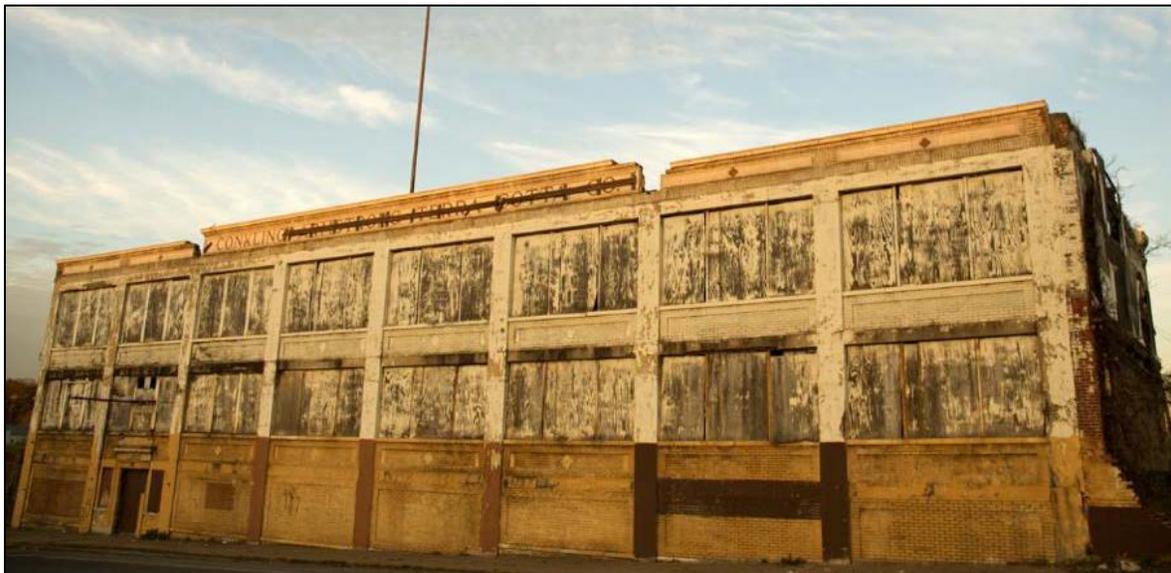


Fig. 16. The last remaining building that was part of the Conkling-Armstrong factory on Wissahickon Avenue in the Nicetown neighborhood of North Philadelphia. Demolished. Source: Hidden City Philadelphia website.

Architectural terra cotta was one of the cottage industries that rose to prominence in the greater Philadelphia area during the height of city's industrial golden era. Founded sometime between 1886 and 1890, Stephens, Armstrong & Conkling was the first company in Philadelphia dedicated to the sole

¹ <http://www.workshopoftheworld.com/introduction/introduction.html>

² <http://www.workshopoftheworld.com/overview/overview.html>

manufacture of terra cotta for architectural purposes.³ By 1894 the company had a sizable clay works at 46th Street and Girard Avenue, employing between 100 and 125 men. Only a year later, Stephens split away to create Stephens & Co., a branch of the New York Architectural Terra Cotta company, while Conkling-Armstrong Terra Cotta Company forged ahead in Philadelphia.⁴ Conkling and Armstrong relocated their clay works to the Nicetown neighborhood and took up office in the Philadelphia Builder's Exchange at 24 S. 7th St., and they were successful enough, even during the economic depression of the mid-1890s, to open an office in New York City, at 156 5th Avenue. During this time, they continued to hold steady with approximately 100 employees.⁵

The company advertised their slip-glazed buff terra cotta as, “[possessing] advantages over all other materials.”⁶ Their marketing, and the low cost to use terra cotta as imitation stone, was successful as they went on to supply terra cotta for prominent buildings in Philadelphia such as the Witherspoon Building, Curtis Publishing House, and the University of Pennsylvania's Dental Hall.⁷ By 1898, the company had supplied terra cotta for nearly 90 buildings designed by notable architecture firms like Walter Smedley (West Philadelphia Title and Trust Building), and Cope & Stewardson.⁸



Fig. 17. A page from the Conkling-Armstrong Terra Cotta Company's 1898 catalog and some details that were used in the Dental Hall at the University of Pennsylvania by the architect of the subject property, Edgar V. Seeler.

³ According to Charles Thomas Davis, the company was founded in 1886 by two men- Messieurs Stephens and Leach, but shortly thereafter became known as Stephens, Armstrong & Conkling.

⁴ Davis, Charles Thomas. *A Practical Treatise on the Manufacture of Brick, Tiles, and Terra Cotta*. 3rd ed. (Philadelphia, PA, 1895), 471.

⁵ Ibid.

Hopkins, T. C. "Clays and Clay Industries of Pennsylvania II." in *Annual Report of the Pennsylvania State College, 1898-1899*. (State College, PA: W. Stanley Ray, 1900).

Conkling-Armstrong Terra Cotta Company, *Terra cotta details: Conkling-Armstrong Terra Cotta Co., Philadelphia*, (Columbia University Printers, 1914).

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ "Conkling-Armstrong Terra Cotta Company Projects" Philadelphia Architects and Buildings, accessed December 2017. https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display_projects.cfm#Projects.

"Among Philadelphia Brickmakers" *The Clay Worker*, Vol II, (1909), 411.

"T.F. Armstrong Dies at Age of 84," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 9, 1953.

⁸ Conkling-Armstrong Terra Cotta Company, *Terra cotta details: Conkling-Armstrong Terra Cotta Co., Philadelphia*, (Columbia University Printers, 1914).

Conkling Armstrong's success was unique to Philadelphia, but not to the nation; their popularity only mirrored the terra cotta industry boom that was happening at the national level toward the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth centuries.

What has become known as the Conkling-Armstrong House is an extremely unique typology, being the only one of its kind in terra cotta architectural detailing. It is clad in architectural details that are the exact duplicates of original details that are featured on some of Philadelphia's most well-known and loved buildings. The Conkling-Armstrong House stands as a testament to the legacy of an innovative and highly successful Philadelphia company during a period in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of enormous residential development and focus on terra cotta as a prized architectural material. Despite its poor condition, the house remains one of the best demonstration or model houses for its product.

Terra Cotta in Context

"This is an innovation. It is indestructible and as hard and as smooth as any porcelain ware. It will be washed by every rainstorm and may if necessary be scrubbed like a dinner plate." -Daniel Burnham (1894)⁹

Terra cotta or "baked earth", was first used as architectural embellishment by the Romans (who gave it its name), the Greeks, and Etruscans. Proceeding this era, terra cotta fell out of favor until it regained popularity in Italy in the late 15th and early 16th centuries. After this revival, terracotta's popularity spread slowly to England. By the late-18th century slip-glazed terra cotta had become an extremely popular alternative to stone and was used as its imitation. Roughly, the years 1880 to 1910 are considered the official "Terra Cotta Revival" period which ushered in a time when high-fired terra cotta was used widely in architectural assemblies in America. During this period terra cotta created for architectural purposes was molded or extruded into four different iterations; brownstone, fireproof construction, ceramic veneer, and glazed architectural.¹⁰

The material benefits of terra cotta were that it was strong in compression, fireproof, capable of taking any shape and color, and therefore capable of being highly ornamental. Additionally, it was cheaper and lighter than carved stone. Manufacturers claimed that terra cotta was self-cleaning and would preserve its original appearance for decades in the midst of metropolitan pollution. What really carried the terra cotta industry to great heights was its marriage with transitional masonry and later curtain wall construction that made up America's earliest skyscrapers. In such a configuration, the lightweight terra cotta units could be secured via anchors to an internal steel cage.

⁹ Susan Tunick, "Architectural Terra Cotta: 1900-1990," *The Studio Potter*, accessed November 5, 2018. <https://studiopotter.org/architectural-terra-cotta-1900-1990>.

¹⁰ Weisdock, Casey Alane (2016). *Performance-Based Evaluation of Salt Crystallization Inhibitors as a Means to Mitigate Salt Damage in Terracotta*. (Master's Thesis). University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA, 13-14.

Architects who used terra cotta in their architectural creations include Louis Sullivan, Frank Lloyd Wright, H.H. Richardson, and the Chicago-based firm of Burnham and Root. Sullivan's 1896 Guaranty Building in Buffalo is an early skyscraper with a body and cornice of foliate, red terra cotta whose visual lightness contrasts with the sturdy regularity of the overall building design. Daniel Burnham and John Root used red terra cotta detailing to similar effect in Chicago's The Rookery (1888) but for the 1890-95 Reliance Building nearby, the cream colored terra cotta accents resemble those at the Conkling-Armstrong House, giving the building a stateliness through a more restrained application of the material.



Fig. 18. Cornice detail of Louis Sullivan's 1896 Guaranty Building in Buffalo, NY. Source: HodgsonRuss website.

Due to demand, architectural terra cotta companies sprung up in and around cities across the nation. By 1914, around 25 large terra cotta works were in business, and were members of the National Terra Cotta Society, Conkling-Armstrong being one of them. On the west coast, the Gladding McBean Company in Lincoln, California, continues its excellence of architectural ceramics and terra cotta production that it has been employing since the firm was founded in 1875. Gladding McBean terra cotta graces several of the original buildings at Stanford University and the company helped achieve the Spanish Colonial Revival idiom that distinguishes so much of the west coast's architecture.



Fig. 19. The 1890-95 Reliance Building, Chicago by Burnham and Root. Source: Chicago Architecture Center website.

Most firms had terra cotta showrooms, where clients could examine stock designs and what the material textures, glazes, and units looked like in person. Several of the larger firms that sold material nationally had paper catalogues of their specifications, standard designs and finest ornamental work that could be sent by mail. However, no other company had the common sense ingenuity that Ira L. Conkling and Thomas Armstrong had in constructing their personal homes - a residential twin that was clad in their own stock designs; it was a true outdoor showroom and catalogue in one and was only a few blocks from their terra cotta factory on Wissahickon Avenue.



Fig. 20. The 1897 West Philadelphia Title and Trust Company in a c.1922 photo. Source: Free Library of Philadelphia website.

Criterion (c): Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style and Criterion (d): Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen.

Architect Edgar V. Seeler chose to highlight and complement the various and highly detailed architectural components from the Conkling-Armstrong Terra Cotta Company by employing the elaborate Châteauesque style in this commission. The twin residence on West Tioga Street was to be the home of both Ira L. Conkling and Thomas F. Armstrong, founders and co-owners of their eponymous company and as such, should reflect the quality of their work. The house was commissioned in 1897 as this area of North Philadelphia was beginning to be developed by new titans of industry and their peers. This block of West Tioga Street, in particular, was developed with elegant twins and a few detached houses that to this day retain a certain grandeur, albeit now rather faded.

The Châteauesque is a style of architecture that was initially promoted by American architect Richard Morris Hunt. It describes masonry constructed buildings with high-pitched or mansard roofs and

dormers or decorative pinnacles that lend a decorative verticality to the structure. Hunt was an Ecole des Beaux-Arts educated architect who was inspired by the chateaux he studied throughout France. The Château de Chambord in the Loire Valley is considered the epitome of a style that is often referred to as “Francois Ier,” a reference to the French king reigning during the time that Renaissance ideas began their migration from Italy. The Francis Ist style combines gothic elements with the classical forms and details that Renaissance builders were rediscovering.



Fig. 21. The William Vanderbilt residence on Fifth Avenue, New York City by Richard Morris Hunt, undated.
Source: Wikipedia.

Hunt’s Fifth Avenue house for William K. Vanderbilt was described by architecture critic Montgomery Schuyler as “an attempt to summarize in one building the history of a most active and fruitful century in the history of architecture, which included the late Gothic of the fifteenth century and the early Renaissance of the sixteenth, and spanned the distance from the minute and complicated modeling of the Palais de Justice at Rouen and the Hotel de Cluny at Paris, to the romantic classicism of the great chateaux of the Loire.”¹¹

Among other highlights of the Châteauesque style in America are Biltmore, the 1895 Asheville, North Carolina estate of the Vanderbilts. In Philadelphia, the Pennsylvania Railroad’s North Philadelphia station originally exhibited the Châteauesque style; it was designed by Theophilus P. Chandler in 1901.

¹¹ The Sterling Masonic Temple, Whiteside County, Illinois. National Register nomination.

The 1901 First Baptist Church of Philadelphia at 17th and Sansom Streets is a Romanesque diversion from the Beaux-Arts regularity of Seeler's office buildings and a highly successful commission. Additionally, Seeler was employed as an Assistant Professor of Architectural Design at the University of Pennsylvania from 1893 to 1898 during which time he was responsible for the design of Hayden Hall (1896), originally Dental Hall, on Penn's campus.

Seeler was active in the city's professional clubs with membership in the American Institute of Architects, the T-Square Club, and the Fairmount Park Art Association. He lived on Locust Street in the Rittenhouse Square neighborhood, retiring from practice in 1926 and dying three years later in 1929.

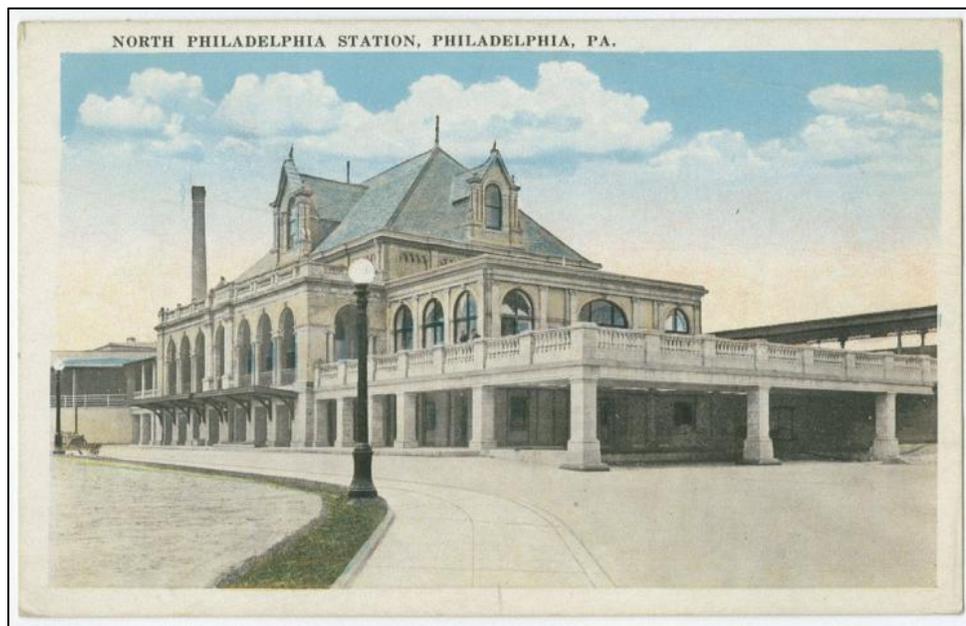


Fig. 22. The North Philadelphia Station commissioned by the Pennsylvania Railroad in 1901 by architect Theophilus P. Chandler. Source: The Library Company of Philadelphia.

Additionally, the former Nugent Home for Baptists on W. Johnson Street in Germantown also follows the stylistic leanings of the Châteauesque; it was designed in 1896 by J. Franklin Stuckert.

Criterion (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.

The Conkling-Armstrong House is notable as a building that served as both a grand, two-family residence and demonstration house designed in 1898 by renowned Philadelphia architect Edgar Viguers¹² Seeler. Seeler managed to employ a riotous variety of the Conkling-Armstrong Terra Cotta Company's architectural wares into that company's owners' new residence in the middle of an elegant

¹² Edgar V. Seeler's middle name is listed as "Viguers" on the Philadelphia Architects and Buildings website of the Athenaeum of Philadelphia and as "Vigners" in other references, especially those regarding his Pittsburgh and Florida commissions. No genealogical information can be found to corroborate either version.

block of grand twins on W. Tioga Street in North Philadelphia, not far from the company factory on Wissahickon Avenue.

Edgar Viguers Seeler was born in Philadelphia in 1867 and graduated from Central High School. After taking night classes at the Philadelphia Museum and School of Industrial Art, he graduated from MIT before pursuing further studies from 1890 to 1893 at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris where he studied under Victor Laloux. Laloux's own dedication to the Beaux-Arts tradition was punctuated by his willingness to innovate with new materials such as cast iron and large-span glass constructions. His own buildings include the Gare d'Orsay (now Musée d'Orsay) in Paris as well as that city's American Embassy which was undertaken in partnership with the US firm Delano & Aldrich, purveyors to the American gentry of the classical Beaux-Arts idiom.

Seeler returned to Philadelphia after his time in Paris to open an office at 328 Chestnut Street and by doing so "bypassed the traditional apprenticeship with an older seasoned firm."¹³ His practice included private residences, commercial and academic buildings, and churches. Among his house commissions are "Clovelly," the residence of Dr. Henry Carey Register in Ardmore, PA; "In the Woods" (c.1904), the St. David's residence of John B. Miles; and the grand Tudor "Thornhedge" (c.1903) for Miss H. L. Murphy in Radnor Township along Philadelphia's Main Line.

The Curtis Publishing Company Building (1912) on the north side of Washington Square Park, the Penn Mutual Life Insurance Company Building (1916) adjacent to Independence Hall, and the now demolished Philadelphia Bulletin Building are among some of the more prominent buildings that decorate Center City Philadelphia. On these as well as the Real Estate Trust Building at Broad and Chestnut, Seeler worked with Frank C. Roberts, an engineer who had several patents in iron and steam generation. Roberts was joined in business by John Miles whose house in Radnor Township was designed by Seeler.



Fig. 23. Dental Hall by Edgar V. Seeler at UPenn in a 1901 photograph. Source: UPenn Archives.

¹³ Sandra L. Tatman and Roger W. Moss. *Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects: 1700-1930*. (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1985).

Conkling-Armstrong House
2224 and 2226 West Tioga Street
Nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places



Fig. 24. The First Baptist Church by E. V. Seeler on Sansom Street in Center City Philadelphia. Source: Wikipedia.



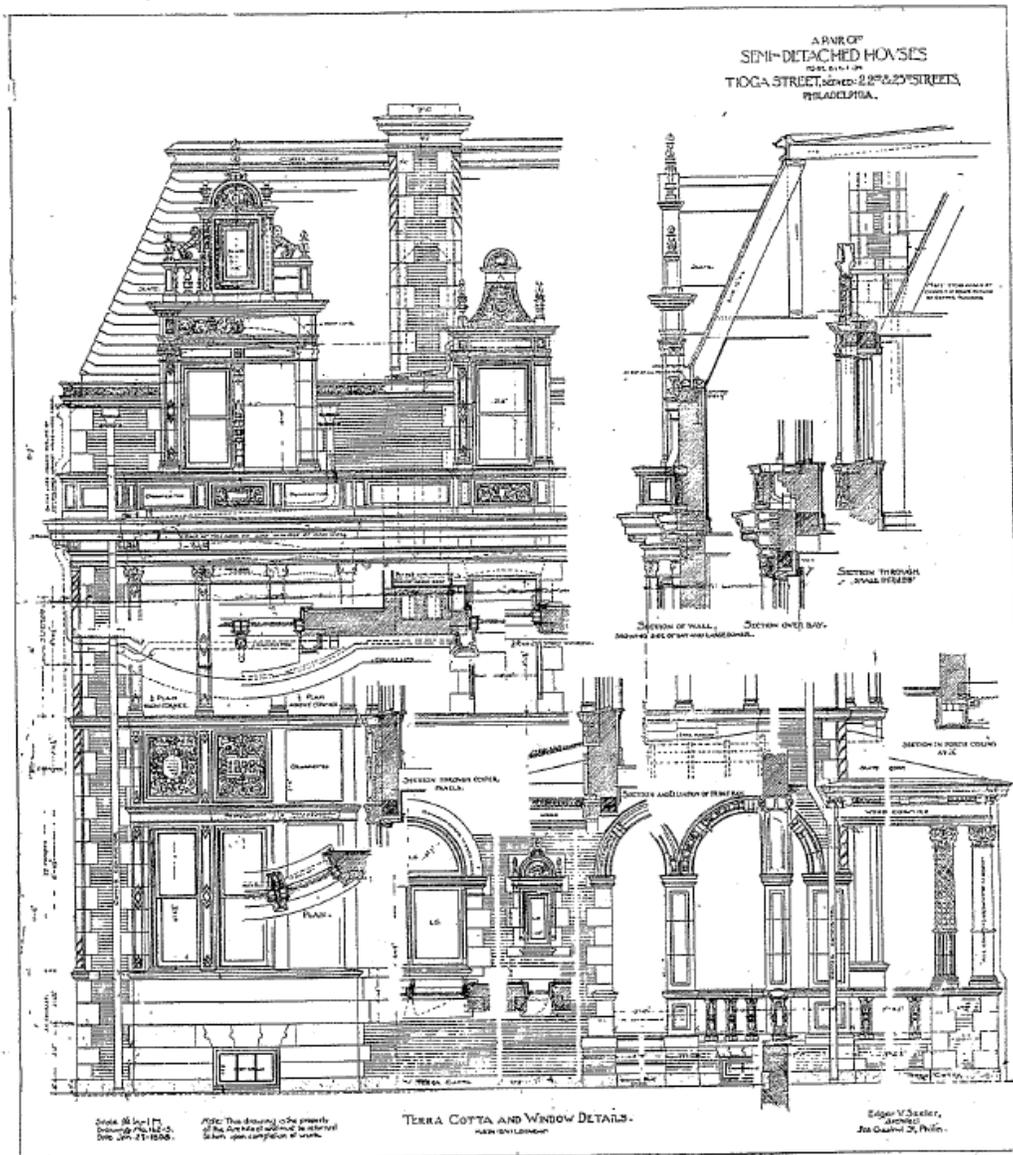
Fig. 25. Edgar V. Seeler's "Thornhedge," Radnor Township, PA. Source: Zillow.



Fig. 26. Postcard depicting Edgar V. Seeler's Curtis Publishing Company office building, north of Washington Square Park in Philadelphia. Source: USGenWeb Archives.

Conclusion

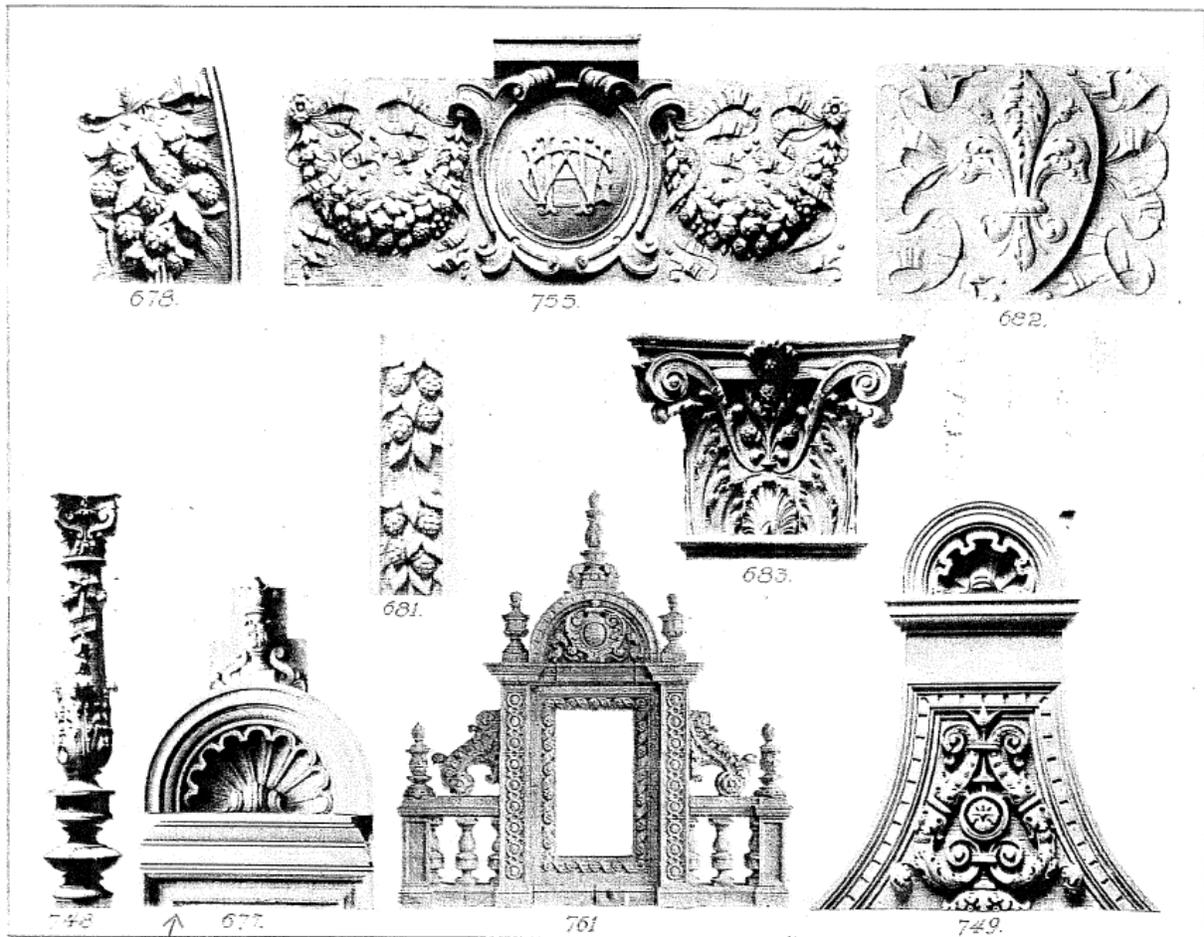
The Conkling-Armstrong House in the Tioga neighborhood of North Philadelphia is an innovative example of a terra cotta demonstration house in the Châteauesque style by one of the city's finest architects, Edgar V. Seeler. The history and surviving architectural glory of the building make it a noteworthy and historically important witness to the residential, architectural and social heritage of Philadelphia.



DETAILS OF A PAIR OF HOUSES AT TIOGA
EDGAR V. SEELER, Architect, Philadelphia

Fig. 27. Edgar V. Seeler's presentation drawings of the Conkling-Armstrong House. Source: Philadelphia Historical Commission files.

CONKLING-ARMSTRONG TERRA COTTA CO., PHILADELPHIA



Nos. 678, 681, 682, 683 and 755—DETAILS OF BREWERY OFFICE, BALTIMORE, MD.—J. Evans Sperry, Architect
 Nos. 677, 748, 749 and 761—DETAILS—HOUSES TWENTY-THIRD AND TIOGA STREETS, PHILADELPHIA—Edgar V. Seeler, Architect
all on upper story of house

Fig. 28. Excerpt from the Conkling-Armstrong Terra Cotta Company catalogue, c. 1914, showing some of the architectural details used at the Conkling-Armstrong House. Source: Philadelphia Historical Commission files.

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