

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: **3460 West School House Lane**
Postal code: **19129** Councilmanic District: **4**

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: **The Alexander Henry House**
Current/Common Name: **The Smith House**

3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Building Structure Site Object

4. PROPERTY INFORMATION

Occupancy: occupied vacant under construction unknown
Current use: Religious

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Please attach

6. DESCRIPTION

Please attach

7. SIGNIFICANCE

Please attach the Statement of Significance.

Period of Significance (from year to year): **c. 1853-1858 to 1984**
Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: **c. 1853-1858, 1952, 1955, 1966**
Architect, engineer, and/or designer: **Unknown**
Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: **Unknown**
Original owner: **Powers & Weightman/William M. Uhler, M.D.**
Other significant persons: **Alexander Henry, Mayor of Philadelphia; Francis Beverly Biddle; and L.M.C. Smith and Eleanor Houston Smith**

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: **2 November 2018**

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: 2 November 2018

Correct-Complete Incorrect-Incomplete

Date: 6 February 2019

Date of Notice Issuance: 8 February 2019

Property Owner at Time of Notice

Name: Philadelphia University

Address: 3460 West School House Lane

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19144

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: 12 March 2019

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: _____

Date of Final Action: _____

Designated Rejected

NOMINATION
FOR THE
PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES



Figure 1. The primary (northwest) elevation of the subject property. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2018.

THE ALEXANDER HENRY HOUSE

ALSO KNOWN AS
THE SMITH HOUSE

■

**“DESIGN XX. VILLA FARM HOUSE”
IN THE GOTHIC REVIVAL STYLE**

**3460 WEST SCHOOL HOUSE LANE
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA,
ERECTED C. 1853–1858**

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Figure 2. The boundary for the proposed designation is delineated in blue. Source: Philadelphia Water.

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundary for the designation of the subject property is as follows:

ALL THAT CERTAIN lot or piece of ground with the buildings and improvements thereon erected, described as follows, to wit:

BEGINNING at the point formed by the intersection of the southeast side of School House Ln. with the Southwest side of former Pembrey Rd. (50 feet wide, now stricken from City Plan) said point of beginning being at the distance of 297 feet 2-7/8 inches measured Southwest from the southwest side of Vaux St., thence extending South 39 degrees 57 minutes East along the former southwest side of Pembrey Rd. crossing the southeast side of School House Ln. 471 feet to a point, thence extending South 50 degrees 3 minutes west 198 feet 1/4 of an inch to a point, thence extending North 39 degrees 57 minutes West re-crossing the southeast side of School House Ln. 442 feet 8-3/8 inches to a point on the southeast side of School House Ln., thence extending North 41 degrees 54 minutes 56 seconds East along the last mentioned side of School House Ln. 200 feet 1/4 of an inch to the first mentioned point and place of beginning.

BEING NO. 3460 School House Lane



Figure 3. Top: The primary (northwest) elevation and yard of the subject property. Bottom: The primary (northwest) elevation of the subject property. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2018.

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Figure 4. The primary (northwest) elevation. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2018.

6. Physical Description

The subject property at 3460 West School House Lane in the East Falls neighborhood of Philadelphia is a distinctive Gothic Revival Villa that is set within the somewhat preserved setting of a pastoral, suburban setting. Built c. 1853-1858, the building is a two-and-one-half-story stone mansion with a roughcast finish, and rambling additions that date to 1952, 1955, and 1966. Based on a T-shaped form with a historic rear addition, the main block features gable ends at each elevation.

The primary (northwest) elevation features two distinct sections, the large, projecting gable-front creating an asymmetrical appearance and form. The projecting gable-front is a prominent feature with an ample, non-parapeted open rake with enclosed rafters and purlins. Beneath this gable, the first floor features a one-story bay window with one large central opening with a wooden two-over-two sash window that is flanked by narrower windows of the same height, all of which are defined by segmental arches. Each window is set within wooden architraves, and flanked by wooden, paneled shutters. The bay window structure features a distinctive, bracketed cornice and molding, all appearing to be made of wood. The second-floor features two openings, symmetrically placed, and defined by segmental arches with two-over-two wooden sash windows set within wooden architraves; Gothic Revival hoods and plain sills, both likely of stone; and wooden louvered shutters. The third floor features a gracious expanse with a small opening at center, featuring a two-over-two wooden sash window set within a wooden architrave, defined by a pointed arch and corresponding hood and plain sill, both of which appear to be of stone.

The second section of the primary (northwest) elevation is recessed from the gable-front. This section is three bays in width, featuring a symmetrical fenestration. The first floor features a single pedestrian door, defined by a segmental arch. The primary entrance is accessed and shaded by a covered porch with a flat roof that is defined by a bracketed cornice, rising above porch details and supports that create a flattened arch. The porch roof is supported by pairs of slender columns. The fenestration features this opening and two other full-length openings that feature wooden jib windows that are defined by segmental arches. Each window is set within wooden architraves and flanked by paneled wooden shutters. Symmetrically placed above, the second-floor features three openings with two-over-two wooden sash window set within wooden architraves. The windows are defined by segmental arches and flanked by wooden louvered shutters. The third floor features a compact gable front at center with a small opening, containing a two-over-two wooden sash window that is defined by a pointed arch. A single chimney stack pierces the roofline at the center of this section of the building.



Figure 5. Top: The upper floors of the larger gable end within the primary (northwest) elevation of the subject property. Note, the window, defined by the pointed arch, as well as the window hoods on both floors. Bottom: The smaller gable within the primary (northwest) elevation. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2018.

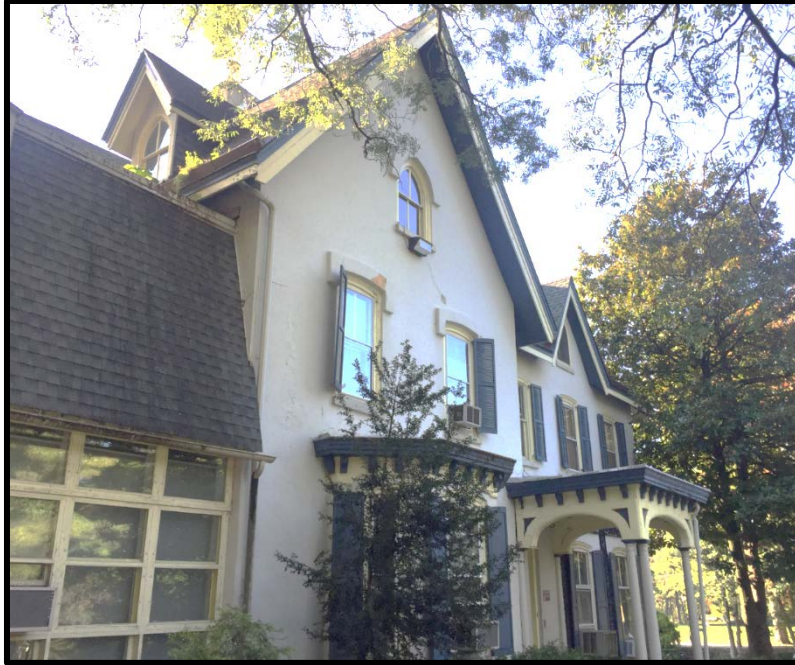


Figure 6. The primary (northwest) and side (northeast) elevations of the subject property. Addition 2 is on left. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2018.

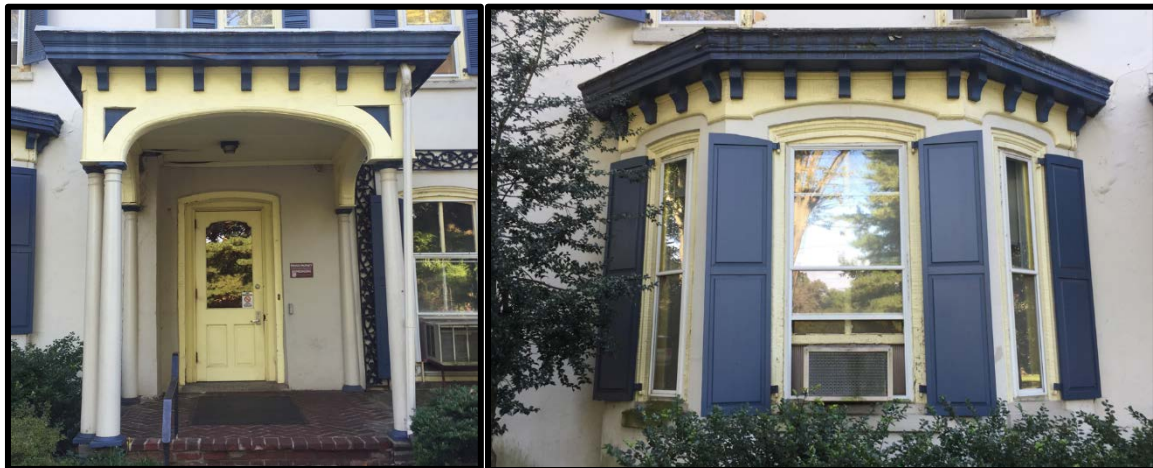


Figure 7. Left: The entrance porch and its bracketed treatment within the primary (northwest) elevation of the subject house. Right: The bay window and its bracketed treatment within the primary (northwest) elevation of the subject house. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2018.



Figure 8. Top: The side (southwest) elevation of the subject property with the pointed arched window in the third, half-story. Bottom: The side (southwest) elevation of the subject property with Addition 1 in the foreground. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2018.

Facing northeast, the side (southwest) elevation features three floors. The first floor is defined by a large, projecting bay window with a flat roof and a cornice defined by brackets. The bay window includes two-over-two wooden windows set beneath segmental arches and flanked by paneled wooden shutters. The second-floor features two sets of paired mullion windows, each of which are defined by segmental arches. The architraves appear to be original and wooden and the larger unit is flanked by louvered wooden shutters. The large gable end features a generous central window. The opening is defined by a mullion window that is executed in the form of a lancet arch. Addition 1 appends the building to the southeast and is non-contributing.



Figure 9. Top: The rear (southeast) elevation of the subject property. Note that the three-part façade features windows at each floor that are almost entirely original and/or early two-over-two wooden sash configuration. Bottom: The upper two floors of the rear (southeast) elevation. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2018.

The rear elevation of the building features a large, three-story component or “back building” that is unusual in form and execution, being three elevations with a low-slung, hipped roof. The primary (southeast) elevation of the back building is this façade, featuring three distinctive parts. The fenestration is symmetrical with three openings per floor. The first-floor features three openings, including a wooden pedestrian door at center that is flanked by two-over-two wooden sash, defined by segmental arches. The architraves appear to be both original and wooden. The sills appear to be of stone. The second floor repeats this motif in three windows. The third floor features the same windows at each end with a central aperture featuring a larger, mullion window with one-over-one wooden sash windows. The hipped roof features exposed brackets.

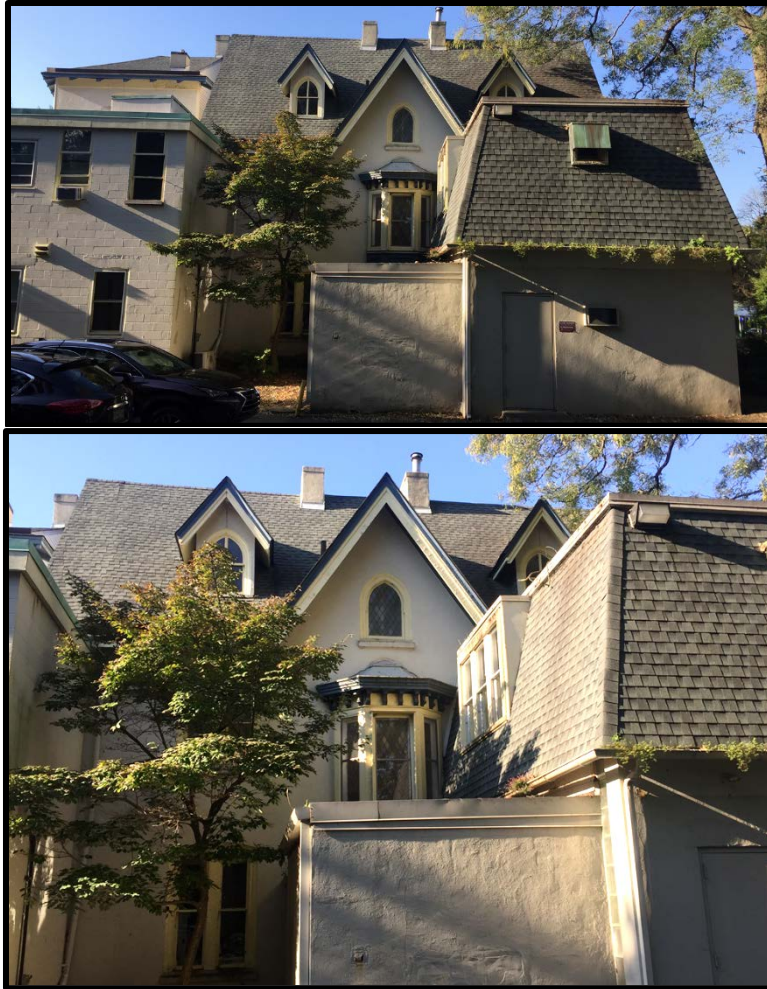


Figure 10. The side (northeast) elevation of the subject property. While the central component and elevation of these photographs is integral to the proposed designation, Addition 3, the two-story block building on left, and Addition 2, the one-and-one-half story building on right is considered non-contributing. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2018.

Facing southwest, the side (northeast) elevation of the subject house features an unusually well-articulated elevation of Gothic Revival details and features. The first floor is largely obscured by Additions 2 and 3; however, important historic fabric survives. If the façade were to be divided into three generous bays, it could be said that the rear bay at the first floor is still visible, including an opening that is divided into two mullion windows that are defined by pointed arches. The second floor is far more intact with the central and rear bays unobscured. At center is an exquisite cantilevered bay window that is defined by three elevations. This oriel features a molded base, a bracketed cornice, and a hipped roof. Each elevation features an opening that includes wooden, molded architraves and leaded glass windows with diamond-shaped panes. The rear bay of the second floor features an original opening. Amidst the side elevation of a front-gabled roof, a smaller, central gable is introduced, at the center of which is an opening defined by a pointed arch, which features a beautifully intact, molded architrave that anchors a leaded glass window with diamond-shaped panes. Flanking the central gable are gable-front dormers that feature single openings defined by pointed arches, retaining beautifully molded

architraves and two-over-two wooden sash windows. The two chimneys that pierce the roofline and relate to this section of the building are symmetrically placed along the ridgepole.



Figure 11. Overview of the property. Source Atlas, City of Philadelphia, 2018.

Landscape Features

1. Stone Walls. The low stone retaining wall along School House Lane and the low stone wall at the western margin of the property is contributing to the proposed designation.
2. Stone Gate Posts. The stone gate posts at each side of the westerly driveway entrance are contributing to the proposed designation.
3. Shed. The roughcast stone shed to the east of the subject property
4. Masonry Wall and Cooking Apparatus. The masonry garden wall and cooking apparatus are contributing to the proposed designation.



Figure 12. The numbers used in the photographs above correspond with the list of “Landscape Features” at the center of this page. Left: Looking northeast at the primary vehicle entrance of the subject property with the stone retaining walls and abutments that contribute to the character of the subject property. Right: Looking east at the garden wall and ancillary brick structure of the subject property. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2018.



Figure 13. The numbers used in the photographs above correspond with the list of “Landscape Features” at the center of the previous page. Left: Looking northwest at the rear elevation of the shed building in the Gothic Revival style. Right: Looking south at the side (northeast) elevation of the shed building. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2018.



Figure 14. Looking northeast at the subject property, the non-contributing portion is highlighted in black—Additions 1, 2, and 3. Source: Atlas, City of Philadelphia, 2018.

Largely built in 1952, Addition 1 is a sprawling, low-slung, multi-level building of concrete block construction designed in a streamline modernist style. Built in 1955, Addition 2 is a one-and-one-half story masonry building with a roughcast finish. The second, half-story is articulated in the form of a mansard roof. The primary (northwest) elevation features a large multi-light

picture window indicative of the period of construction. Built in 1966, Addition 3 is an unremarkable two-story building constructed of concrete block with a flat roof. The building incorporates an older stone garden wall in the first-floor rear elevation.¹



Figure 15. Top: Looking southwest at the rear of the subject property, the non-contributing portions are highlighted in black—Additions 1, 2 and 3. Bottom: Looking northwest at the rear elevation of the property, the non-contributing portions are highlighted in black—Additions 1 and 3. Source: Philadelphia Atlas.

¹ Zoning Permit Documents, 3460 W. School House Lane, ID 219-325638, City of Philadelphia.



Figure 16. Top: The southwest elevation of the subject property with Addition 1 in the foreground. Bottom: The rear elevation of the subject property, Addition 3 is the two-story block building in the foreground at center and is considered non-contributing. The three-story building of left and the stone wall beneath the Addition 3 are both contributing. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2018.



Figure 17. Top: Looking northwest at an old garden masonry wall, which is considered contributing, while Addition 3, the two-story brick building above/behind it, is non-contributing. Center: Looking southeast, Addition 2 is considered non-contributing, located at the far left of this photograph. Bottom: Looking southwest, Addition 3, the two-story brick building on left, is considered non-contributing, while the Shed in the foreground on right is considered contributing. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2018.

7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The house at 3460 West School House Lane is a significant historic resource that merits designation by the Philadelphia Historical Commission and inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The subject building satisfies the following Criteria for Designation, as enumerated in Section 14-1004 of the Philadelphia Code:

- (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;

- (d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen;
and

The period of significance dates from c. 1853-1858 (the time of design and construction) to 1984.

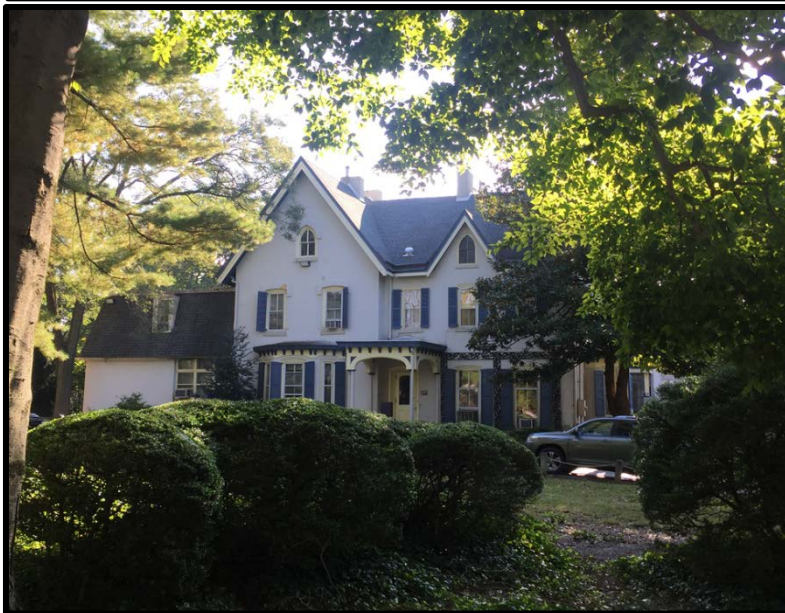
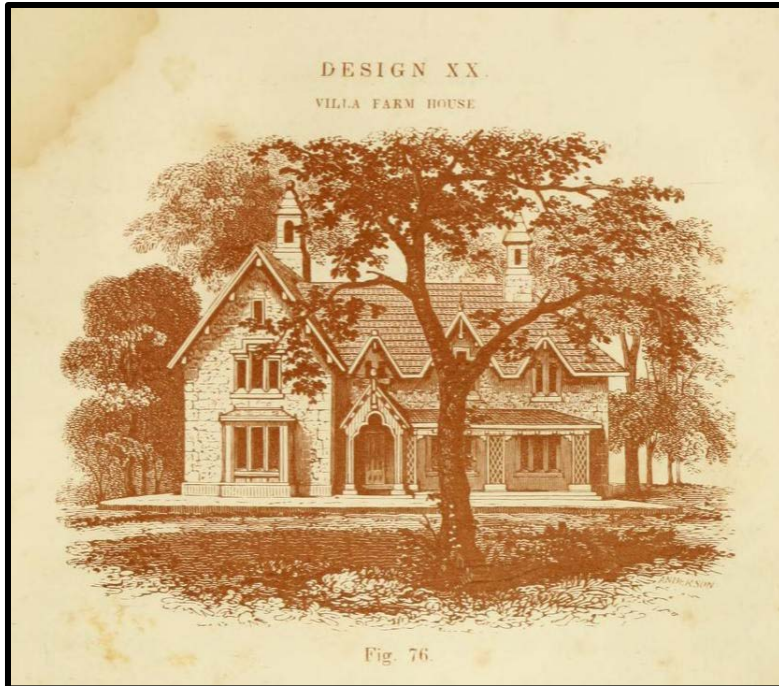


Figure 18. Top: “Design XX. Villa Farm House,” as illustrated in Andrew Jackson Downing’s *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1851). Bottom: The primary (northwest) elevation of the subject property. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2018.

CRITERION D

The subject house at 3460 West School House Lane is a distinctive example of the Gothic Revival style, and, specifically, was likely influenced by “Design XX. Villa Farm House,” as described in Andrew Jackson Downing’s *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1851). As was intended by Downing, the subject house is an adaptation of the said type, featuring a distinctive interpretation of a dwelling defined by “dignified and superior character, without indulging in

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too much ornament,” retaining essential elements of the Gothic Revival villa.² Numerous examples of vernacular Gothic Revival houses and villas exist throughout northwest Philadelphia, and the larger Philadelphia Region, but only a few adaptations of Design XX are extant.

Downing describes the building type as follows in his book, *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1851):

Construction. The superior character given in this design is largely due to the solid and substantial expression of the stone walls, shown in Fig. 76. The bold and simple details shown in the doors, windows, etc. harmonize well with the subject, and with the materials of the dwelling.

The first story of this house is 12 feet high, and the second story 10-1/2 feet high.

The roof projects 2-1/2 feet at the eaves. The wood-house dairy, etc. are continued in a one-story wing in the rear, built in a corresponding manner, with projecting eaves.

The porch and veranda are built of wood, painted in stone color.

Variation. The exterior of this design might perhaps be improved, by omitting the two small gables in front, and increasing the size of the middle gable sufficiently to allow of a small attic window. This would give more simplicity and less picturesqueness. If the building were to be erected in a bare site, the omission of the two gables would be a decided improvement; but if in a well-wooded site, where the picturesque irregularity of the roof line would be partly concealed and aided by the intricacy of foliage, and the lights and shadows afforded by it, then the effect of the design would be much better as it is at present.³

² Andrew Jackson Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses: Including Designs for Cottages, Farm Houses, and Villas with Remarks On Interiors, Furniture, and The Best Modes of Warming and Venting* (New York: Appleton & Company, 1851), 171.

³ Downing, *The Architecture of Country Houses*, 171–173.



Figure 19. *The Residence of Benjamin Allen at 304 E. Wister Street, Germantown. Like the subject property, this specimen was clearly influenced by Design XX and other of Downing's house types. Source: Jane Campbell Scrapbook Collection, HSP.*

As described, the subject house is an ideal adaptation of Downing's "Design XX. Villa Farm House," emulating the format of the primary elevation and some elements of the layout with the large gable front section and the wing to the side with the entrance porch. This specimen fits into the "variation" discussed, simplifying the design by omitting the two small gables (as shown in the illustration above) and enlarging the central gable, as was specifically prescribed by Downing as a removal from the picturesque.

According to Virginia and Lee McAlester's *A Field Guide To American Houses*, the Gothic Revival style was in popular use between 1840 and 1880, as part of the larger movement that is referred to as "Romantic Houses." The "Principal Subtypes" of the Gothic Revival are as follows:

Asymmetrical—About one-third of Gothic Revival houses are of compound asymmetrical plan. L-shaped plans with cross-gabled roofs are the most common form, but there are many less regular variations. Small secondary cross gables, or gabled dormers, were commonly added to one or more wings. After 1860, square towers were occasionally added.⁴

⁴ Virginia and Lee McAlester, *A Field Guide To American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knoff, Inc., 1984), 197.
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Most Gothic Revival style houses include a central entrance that is accessed by a narrow entrance porch.⁵ The fenestration often includes at least one window with Gothic detailing. These windows may have a pointed-arch shape or consist of two or three pointed or round-arches. However, variants of the Gothic Revival cottages described by Downing took on other stylistic details that suited the selected variant. Many Gothic Revival cottages, houses, and villas become a hybrid when other stylistic modes are employed.⁶

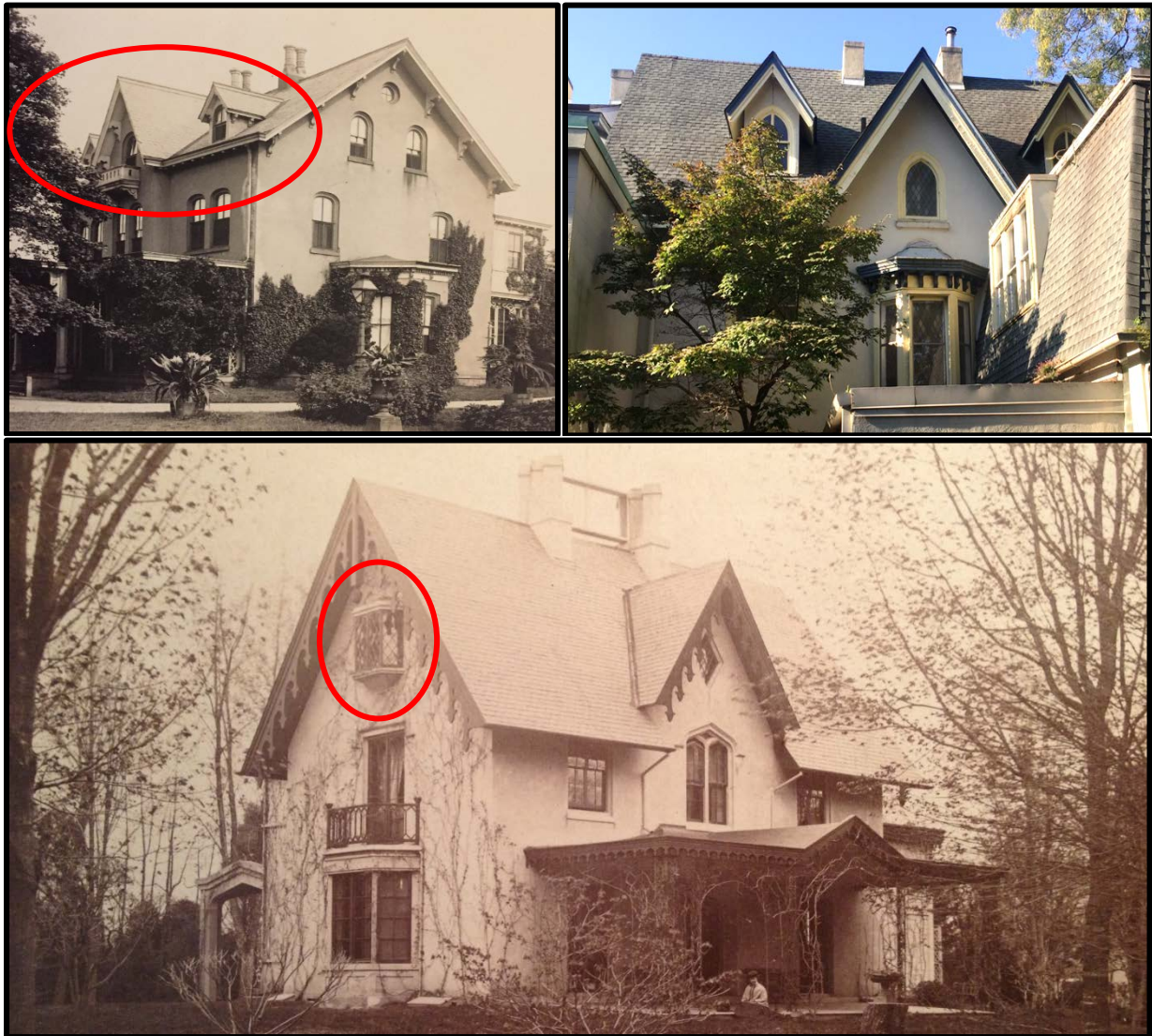


Figure 20. Top left: *The Residence of John Dobson, Alleghany Avenue near Clearfield Street*. Source: HSP. Top right: the side elevation of the subject property, containing a central gable and dormers like the Dobson House, and a high Gothic Revival bay window, similar, but larger than the one shown in the photograph of Ivy Cottage at the third floor of the side elevation. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2018. Bottom: *Ivy Cottage, The Oak Road, c. 1866*. Source: Jane Campbell Scrapbook Collection, HSP.

⁵ T. Wadskier. "Cottage and Villa Architecture," *Sartain's Union Magazine of Literature and Art*. 10, no. 5 (May 1852): 420.

⁶ "A Suburban Cottage in the Italian Style," *Peterson's Magazine* 24, no. 5 (November 1853): 255.

With the subject house being “bracketed” in some respects, it is appropriate that many of the windows emulate the Italianate style. While laid out in the same manner as purely Gothic Revival houses, the subject house employs windows with segmental and full arch details. The segmental arch is employed on the first and second floors of the house, while the pointed arch is reserved for effect in the primary, central gables, as well as the gables and dormers of the side elevations. Both front gables feature small, single windows with apertures defined by pointed arches, which are also employed in the gables and dormers of the side elevations.⁷

Additional features of the primary elevation include the entrance porch and the one-story bay window, both of which replicate features from “Design XX. Villa Farm House,” including original brackets in the form of exterior architectural ornament. Originally, the porch appears to have spanned the westerly side of the primary elevation but was altered at some unknown date. The side elevation features what could almost be called a secondary primary elevation with a central gable and two dormers, all of which featured windows defined by pointed arches, further representing the Gothic Revival style. At the second floor of the side elevation is a cantilevered oriel window, which projects from the center of the façade beneath the central gable with bracketed architectural details.



Figure 21. The southeast and rear (northeast) elevations of the cottage, stable, or residence and carriage house-stable building that was formerly associated with the subject property. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2018.

⁷ “A Suburban Cottage in the Italian Style,” *Peterson’s Magazine* 24, no. 5 (November 1853): 255.

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Figure 22. Residence of Thomas Drake. Source: Jane Campbell Scrapbook Collection, HSP.

Long since sold off from the original property, a stone cottage, originally appearing to also have served as a stable, or a residence and carriage house-stable, is located at the rear of the property and is also done in the distinctive Gothic Revival style. The estates of greater importance and wealth were more commonly known to have stables, which set such properties off from suburban residences throughout the area that just included a house or villa. One example, illustrated above, shows a large Italianate mansion with a large two-and-one-half-story stable in the rear as would have been the case with the subject property.



Figure 23. Looking southeast at the subject property. Source: Pictometry, City of Philadelphia, 2018.

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CRITERION A

From the time of its construction c. 1853–1858 until 1984, the subject property served as a residence for important, prosperous, and successful Philadelphians and their families. Each of these residents was highly placed in the cultural, economic, professional, and social realms of Philadelphia society, contributing greatly to various aspects of the city’s impressive heritage. Perhaps the most significant of these residents was a past Mayor of Philadelphia, Alexander Henry (1823–1883) for whom nearby Henry Avenue is named. Not only was Mayor Henry a successful politician, he was one of the most revered mayors in Philadelphia history. As a result, more research was conducted on Mayor Henry than on some of the other residents, though all merit inclusion in this nomination.

The first occupant of the house from c. 1853–1858 to 1867, William Millward Uhler, M.D. (1820–1865), (who may have commissioned its construction) was the Supervising Chemist for Powers & Weightman, one of the earliest and most important chemical/pharmaceutical manufacturers in American history. The second owner, Mayor Alexander Henry occupied the place from 1867 until his death in 1883. The third owner, Joseph Wright (1841-1914), was heir to an important umbrella manufacturer in Philadelphia, and was hugely involved in local civic affairs. During his official retirement, Wright occupied the subject property from 1890 until death in 1914 and it was during his residency that the subject property was named “Windrush.”⁸ After Wright, the house seems to have passed through a few brief periods of ownership. However, the fourth long-term owner and resident was Francis Beverley Biddle (1886–1968), who occupied the subject property from 1926 to 1947. During his tenure, Biddle served in several important positions, including Attorney General of the United States under Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s administration. One of the longest and most locally significant owners, especially in modern history, was Lawrence M.C. “Sam” Smith (1902–1975) and Eleanor Houston Smith (1910–1987), who were both heirs and members of old Philadelphia families, occupying the house from the time of purchase in 1947 until 1984. Both Smiths were heavily involved in civic, environmental, historical and philanthropic matters that greatly impacted the Philadelphia area and beyond.

Alexander Henry (Occupied subject property from 1867-1883)

The subject property was the home of the Honorable Alexander Henry (1823-1883), a significant person of the past, who served three terms as Mayor of Philadelphia, during a significant period of local, Commonwealth, and National history. Leading the city during the Civil War, Mayor Henry was a highly revered public servant and the elected official that made formative changes in the years after the Consolidation of 1854, who remained involved in civic matters after his final term expired. The subject property was the only home that Mayor Henry purchased and owned, the place where he spent the last period of his life from 1867 to 1883.

⁸ *Boyd’s Philadelphia Blue Book: Being the Fashionable Private Address Directory, the Ladies’ Visiting and Shopping Guide, and Philadelphia Club List, Season of 1896–97* (Philadelphia: C.E. Howe Co., 1896), 590.

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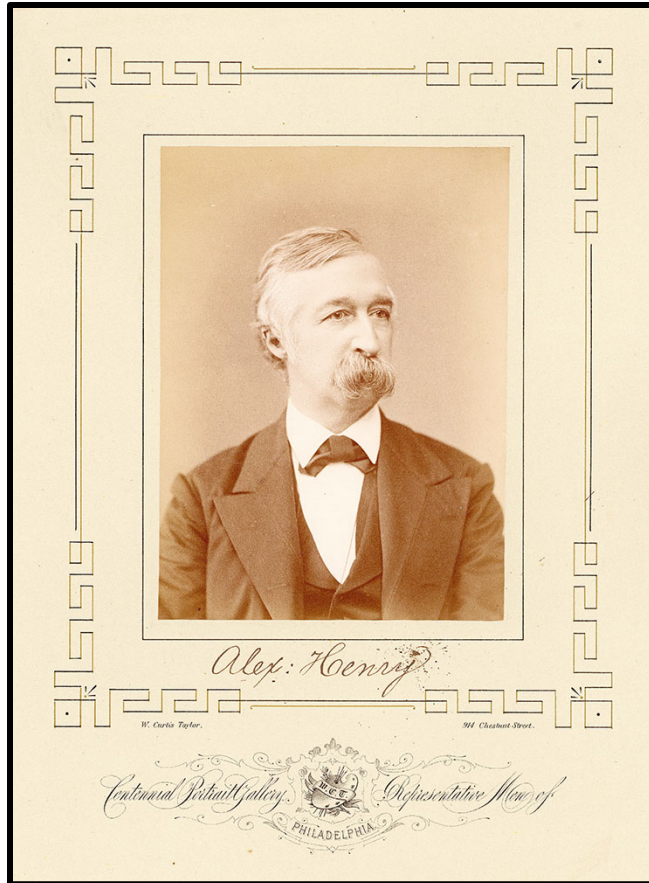


Figure 24. Mayor Alexander Henry. Source: the Free Library of Philadelphia.

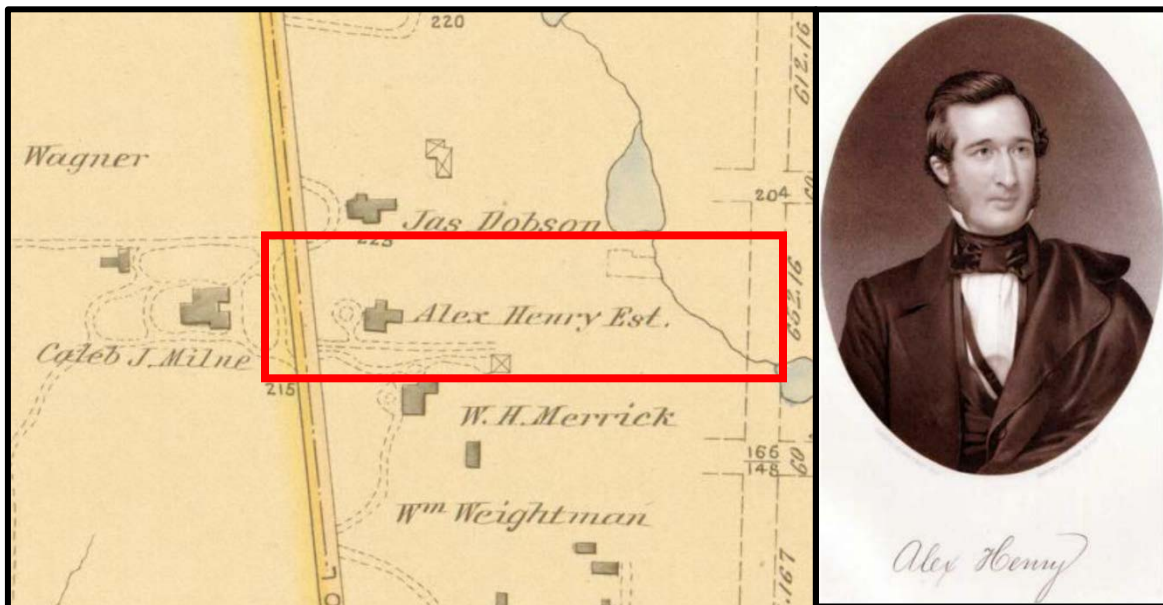


Figure 18. Left: Baist's Property Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, Penna, complete in one volume, 1888. Source: Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network. Right: Alexander Henry in 1859, by John Sartain. Source: Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

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 3460 West School House Lane, East Falls, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

The grandson of Alexander Henry (1763-1847), and the son of John Snowden Henry (1795-1835) and Elizabeth I. Bayard (1797-1881), Alexander Henry (the younger) was born on April 14, 1823 in Philadelphia. His father and paternal grandfather were important merchants and, as a result, Alexander Henry had a privileged upbringing, so much so that in his youth, John Snowden Henry removed the family permanently to Germantown, where they occupied the famous Wachsmuth-Henry House at 4908 Germantown Avenue opposite the Hood Cemetery.⁹ He was approximately twelve years old when his father died, leaving his mother a widow with five children. Despite the early death of his father, Henry would go on to become a “staunch Presbyterian.”¹⁰

Alexander Henry received his education at the Germantown Academy and later attended Princeton University, graduating from the latter with “distinguished honors” in 1840.¹¹ Soon after he studied law and passed the Bar on April 13, 1844, going on to establish his own law firm. In the summer of 1845 he was appointed “inspector” to the U.S. Customs House at Philadelphia.¹² He served in this post until George W. Williams succeeded him in October 1846.¹³ During this time Alexander Henry was also serving as Secretary to the Board of Directors at Girard College, a post that he soon resigned.¹⁴

In 1847, Alexander Henry the elder died and in November of that year the younger Alexander Henry married Elizabeth Stadleman Paul, the daughter of Comegys Paul (1785–1851), the eminent Philadelphia merchant, and Sarah Rodman (ca. 1790–1867).¹⁵ Alexander Henry and Elizabeth S. Paul had one child—John Snowden Henry (d. 1880), dying young without issue. Alexander Henry gave his first public oration at the opening of the new House of Refuge building in 1847.¹⁶ As it was in their first years of marriage, the Henrys resided at the Paul residence for many decades. In 1850, Comegys Paul was worth no less than \$50,000. He, his wife Sarah Rodman, and their five children were living together in Northern Liberties. Alexander Henry, “Attorney at Law,” as well as Elizabeth I. Paul, and their son, “John,” then about one year old, were also in residence. Four servants were also boarded on the property.¹⁷

In April 1856, Henry was nominated by the Whig Party of the Seventh Ward of Philadelphia to be elected to the Common Council.¹⁸ That same year, he was one of the nominees chosen to represent the First Congressional District by the Republican Convention of the First District;

⁹ *T. Charlton Henry: 1828–1890* (Philadelphia: Privately published, c. 1890), 6–10.

¹⁰ Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, *The University of Pennsylvania: Its History, Influence, Equipment and Characteristics; with Biographical Sketches and Portraits of Founders, Benefactors, Officers and Alumni* (Boston: R. Herndon Company, 1901) 1: 341.

¹¹ Sprogle, *The Philadelphia Police, Past and Present*, 125.

¹² “Custom House,” *Public Ledger*, 7 June 1845, 4.

¹³ “Custom House,” *Daily Pennsylvanian*, 29 October 1846, 2.

¹⁴ “Girard College,” *North American*, 30 December 1847, 3.

¹⁵ “Marriages,” *North American*, 13 November 1847, 2.

¹⁶ “Death of Alexander Henry: The Life and Public Services of Philadelphia’s War Mayor,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 7 December 1883, p. 2.

¹⁷ Seventh Census of the United States, 1850; (National Archives Microfilm Publication M432, 1009 rolls); Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29; National Archives, Washington, D.C.

¹⁸ “The Undersigned Having Been...,” *Daily Pennsylvania*, 18 April 1856, 5.

however, another candidate was selected.¹⁹ At the American Legislative Convention in August 1857, Alexander Henry was subject to a nomination, but soon communicated his desire to be withdrawn.²⁰ However, despite all of these political scenarios, he would continue to serve the Seventh Ward on the Common Council. Like his father and grandfather, Henry served several charities, during this time, he was “Secretary” of the House of Refuge.²¹

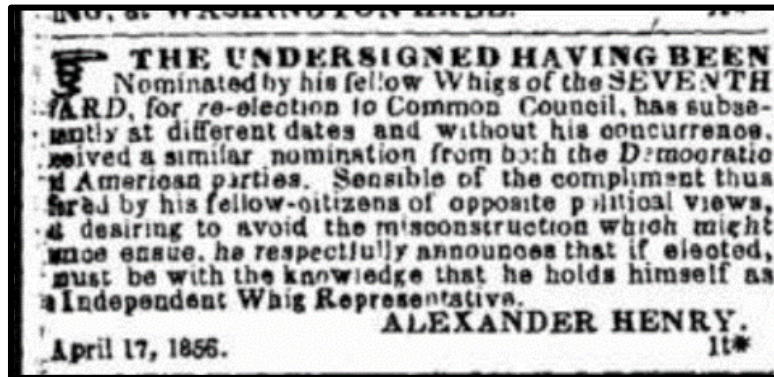


Figure 26. Political Advertisement for Alexander Henry, during his bid for re-election to the Common Council of the Seventh Ward of Philadelphia. Published in the Daily Pennsylvanian on April 18, 1856. Source: ProQuest, America’s Historical Newspapers.

During his tenure on the Common Council, Henry’s reputation and renown increased dramatically. Although not everyone believed in the politician, Lewis C. Cassidy, Esq. spoke on behalf of Alexander Henry on May 3, 1858:

Mr. Henry has been a member of the Common Council from the Seventh Ward. He was elected by anti-Know-Nothing votes, to go for reform. Now, he was not more than warm in his seat before he voted for the Know Nothing caucus candidate, John P. Verree, for President; and he did not stop there, but voted for John M. Riley for Clerk, and all the other officers. Shortly after, he presented a resolution voting \$750,000, to do what?—to give it to the Pennsylvania Railroad or the Reading Railroad! No, sir! But to the Northwestern Railroad Company, a concern that tis a perfect myth—that never had any existence except in the brains of speculators and leeches who wished to swindle the City Treasurer.²²

Earlier in 1858, the call for “Honest, Economical Government and Reform” was loudly proclaimed by the progressive “People’s Party” in Philadelphia. This new party was a “fusion” of parties opposing the “extension of slavery,” being largely composed of “Whigs and Republicans.”²³ This “American-Republican coalition” was made up of members of the said

¹⁹ “Republican Convention of the First District,” *North American*, 29 April 1856, 2.

²⁰ “American Convention,” *Dollar Newspaper*, 19 August 1857, 2.

²¹ “At The Annual Meeting,” *Daily Pennsylvania*, 15 January 1857, 5.

²² “The Democracy in Council at National Hall,” *Daily Pennsylvanian*, 3 May 1858, 2.

²³ Anthony Joseph, Waskie, *Philadelphia and the Civil War: Arsenal of the Union* (Charleston: The History Press, 2011), 167.; and Spogle, *The Philadelphia Police, Past and Present*, 125.

parties who were willing to stand up for popular sovereignty, the cause that veiled anti-slavery. Another component of this political movement was the protection of American labor.²⁴ Democrat Richard Vaux then serving as Mayor, which was during the consolidation of the County of Philadelphia and all its municipal governments under one authority—the municipal government of Philadelphia.

In March 1858, Alexander Henry was nominated as the “standard-bearer” of the People’s Party at their convention, becoming Mayor Richard Vaux’s stealth competition.²⁵ The election was held during the first week of May 1858. Henry, the “People’s Candidate,” won the election by 4,702 votes. The Mayor-elect brought in 33,771 votes, while the incumbent, Richard Vaux, a Democrat, lost the election with 29,065 votes.²⁶

Alexander Henry’s first month of office was not a happy one, with his supporters making clamorous demands for appointments on the police force. The first four weeks of his administration were said to be so intense that there were days when his office was so crowded with importunate applicants that it was almost impossible to physically enter the chambers.³⁰

This led Mayor Henry to change “the mode of organization of the police force.”³¹ Henry and his advisors implemented the process of testing appointees, this being the first divergence from the usual political machinations that were previously required to arrange such appointments. In order to reach “a semblance of stability,” Mayor Henry “engineered a law giving policeman tenure dependent on good behavior.”³² He also recognized the need for more policemen and setting limitations on “beats” in terms of mileage. His administration placed a great emphasis on the importance of a newly organized detective system, which led to the establishment of its very own department.³³

By the fall of 1858, the Reserve Corps, said to be “one of the most useful divisions of the police force,” was officially “put in uniform” by Mayor Henry.³⁴ Established by Mayor Richard Vaux, sixty men formed a special force, being quartered at Fifth and Chestnut Streets, and providing a supplemental police force.³⁵ However, over time, the Reserve Corps patrolled Chestnut Street from the Delaware River to Fifteenth Street and Eighth Street from Chestnut to Arch Streets.³⁶ The force was made readily available by their commanding presence in distinctive military-inspired uniforms, making them “easily recognized when their services were needed.”³⁷

²⁴ Russell Frank Weigley, ed., *Philadelphia: A 300 Year History* (Philadelphia: Barra Foundation), 372, 389.

²⁵ “Movements of the Opposition,” *Daily Pennsylvanian*, 19 March 1858, 2.

²⁶ “Municipal Election in Philadelphia,” *Christian Observer*, Philadelphia: 6 May 1858, 71.

³⁰ Howard O. Sprogle, *The Philadelphia Police, Past and Present* (Philadelphia: Howard O. Sprogle, 1887), 114.

³¹ Sprogle, *The Philadelphia Police, Past and Present*, 107.

³² Allen Steinberg. *The Transformation of Criminal Justice: Philadelphia, 1800-1880*. (University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 292. Johnson. “The Search for an Urban Discipline,” 152-53, 168; *Second Annual Message of Alexander Henry, 187-96; First Annual Message of Alexander Henry*, 13.

³³ Sprogle, *The Philadelphia Police, Past and Present*, 115.

³⁴ Sprogle, *The Philadelphia Police, Past and Present*, 107.

³⁵ Sprogle, *The Philadelphia Police, Past and Present*, 107.

³⁶ Sprogle, *The Philadelphia Police, Past and Present*, 353.

³⁷ Sprogle, *The Philadelphia Police, Past and Present*, 115.

With consolidation came the moment for the City of Philadelphia to greatly improve its infrastructure. In 1859, Mayor Henry had also administered proposals for \$450,000 in loans, designed to address issues with the city's water supply, etc. However, by the start of the following year, perhaps the greatest physical reminder of Mayor Henry was the "Ordinance, to provide for the erection of new public buildings in Philadelphia..."³⁸



Figure 27. "Illustration from Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper showing the Japanese delegation on a tour of the Philadelphia Mint. Philadelphia Mayor Alexander Henry and council members made up the welcoming party. The visitors are dressed in traditional costumes and wearing bob style length classical Japanese haircuts. The visit to Philadelphia was one stop on a nationwide tour by the Japanese ambassadors - the first such diplomatic mission to the United States." Source: Castner Scrapbooks, Free Library of Philadelphia.

Mayor Henry was re-elected in 1860 by a majority of 882 votes, which was a victory with far less of a margin than in 1858.³⁹ The Civil War began and ended during the tenure of Mayor Henry. While the war caused problems in the city, it also led to the type of prosperity stimulated by war time, which is described below:

It was with thrilling effect that Mayor Henry alluded to the great Union meeting called by the city government in that very spot last winter. "This place, this throng, this scene" said he, "cannot fail to recall the last occasion upon which you met here by appointment of your municipal councils. But eight months since, my fellow-citizens, in all earnestness and affection, you held forth the hand of brotherhood to the disaffected people of another section of our common country. The offer of hand has been spurned and rejected. History will reserve its darkest page for the perfidy, the ingratitude and infatuation, which find no parallel in its records."⁴⁰

³⁸ "New Public Buildings," *Public Ledger*, 10 February 1859, 1.

³⁹ "Philadelphia Election," *Saturday Evening Post*, (12 May 1860), 7.

⁴⁰ "A Patriotic Demonstration," *New York Observer and Chronicle*, 26 September 1861, 310.

According to the 1860 United States Federal Census, the Henrys continued to live with the Paul family. Comeygs Paul died in 1851. However, his wife was listed as the head of household, then sixty years old. Three unmarried children remained; several servants; and the Henrys.⁴¹ To ensure local peace during wartime, Alexander Henry employed the local resources of militia, which was led Democratic militia general and Mexican War hero George Cadwalader. This allowed immediate suppression of minor disturbances.⁴²

In 1862, Mayor Henry was nominated for a third term under the National Union ticket—which was largely backed by Republicans.⁴³ His opponent was Daniel M. Fox—the Democratic “stand-bearer,” who lost by roughly “5088 votes.” The inauguration was held on a Thursday in January 1863 in the chamber of the Common Council. He spoke about the consolidation of the city nine years prior.⁴⁴ Soon after his inauguration, Mayor Henry published an Appeal...to the People of Philadelphia, in which he requested that brave citizens enlist to fight against the invasion of the city by the Confederate soldiers.⁴⁵

Despite his popularity, Mayor Henry chose not to run for reelection in 1865, indicating that more than three terms would be abusing the public faith.⁴⁶ The *North American* published the following on Mayor Henry that year:

MAYOR HENRY

A few days since the Hon. Alexander Henry, who was, for seven years past, filled with eminent credit to himself and benefit of Philadelphia, the position of Mayor of the city, announced to his friends his fixed determination to retire finally from the position, declining a renomination [sic]. Mr. Henry has on previous occasions felt a disinclination to continue to labor at the arduous duties of the post, and therefore his present resolution is not a sudden one, but the consummation of a long cherished wish. His unimpeachable integrity, combined with his purity of motives, have procured for him the respect of all classes of our people in a high degree. He has been a friend of economy in the administration of municipal affairs consistently from the beginning, yet at the same time keenly alive to the necessity of fostering our business interests by a liberal policy in all that affects them. Mr. Henry has sustained the honors of his position with dignity, urbanity and efficiency throughout, and, whoever may be his successor, we shall part from our chief magistrate with regret.⁴⁷

⁴¹ Eighth Census of the United States, 1860; (National Archives Microfilm Publication M653, 1483 rolls); Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29; National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁴² Weigley, *Philadelphia: A 300 Year History*, 411.

⁴³ Weigley, *Philadelphia: A 300 Year History*, 405.

⁴⁴ “Inauguration of Mayor Henry.,” *Dollar Newspaper*, 7 January 1863, 2.

⁴⁵ “Appeal of Mayor Henry to the People of Philadelphia,” *World*, (New York: 30 June 1863), 1.

⁴⁶ “Union Nominations for Mayor,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 16 August 1865, 8.

⁴⁷ “Mayor Henry,” *North American*, 18 August 1865, 2.

Of all the milestones and reforms attained under Mayor Henry's administration, law enforcement was perhaps his greatest achievement. Historian Howard O. Sprogle summarizes the accomplishments:

It was one of the cardinal principles of Mayor Henry's administration that members of the police force should be retained during good behavior, without liability to removal for their political opinions. He regarded it as a matter of great importance not only to the maintenance of an effective police force, but to the welfare of the community. Several bills to that end were prepared by him and submitted to the Legislature.⁴⁹

The consolidation of Philadelphia in 1854 had created a disjointed and disorganized police force. This combined with "climactic sectional crises" and the problems created by the Civil War led to many challenges in local law enforcement. Despite the continual uprisings during this period, Mayor Henry and the new police force succeeded.⁵⁰ The *Age* summarized this success in 1865:

As mayor, he [Alexander Henry] never permitted the constitutional rights of the people to be crushed. We honor the public officer who stands by the Constitution of the State and that of the Union. Mayor Henry did that at a time when the "loyal leaguer" and the "loyal shoddy," and the "loyal lawyer" were striking down every vestige of the constitutional privileges and rights of the citizen. Mayor Henry yielded no obedience to the behests of the "Loyal League." Mayor Henry never yielded to the negrophobia of the times. He believed a negro was a human being—to be protected in his position, but never to be raised above it for political purposes.⁵¹

Henry retired from his position of Mayor of Philadelphia on January 1, 1865 on the occasion of Morton McMichael's inauguration in the old chamber of the Common Council.⁵² There was almost immediate talk of appointments to various posts for the former mayor. Several judicial appointments were entertained—some of which proved entirely false, never even having occurred. Mayor Henry even published letters to dispel such rumors.⁵³

After serving as mayor, Alexander Henry devoted his life to other charitable and business pursuits, as well as a full return to his law practice. One cause that had been started during his last year in office was the formation of a committee to honor former President Abraham Lincoln. He chaired the Monument Association, helping to erect a permanent memorial in Fairmount Park to the fallen president.⁵⁴ In business, he was also a longtime Director of the American Life Insurance Company of Philadelphia.⁵⁵

⁴⁹ Sprogle, *The Philadelphia Police, Past and Present*, 126.

⁵⁰ Weigley, *Philadelphia: A 300 Year History*, 372.

⁵¹ "Mayor Henry," *Age*, Philadelphia: 13 December 1865, 2.

⁵² "Inauguration," *The Daily Age*, 2 January 1866, 2.

⁵³ "The Local Nominations," *North American and United States Gazette*, 3 September 1866, 2.

⁵⁴ "A Monument to Mr. Lincoln," *Commercial Advertiser*, (New York: 31 May 1867), 4.

⁵⁵ "Advertisement," *Patriot*, Harrisburg, 12 January 1870, 2.

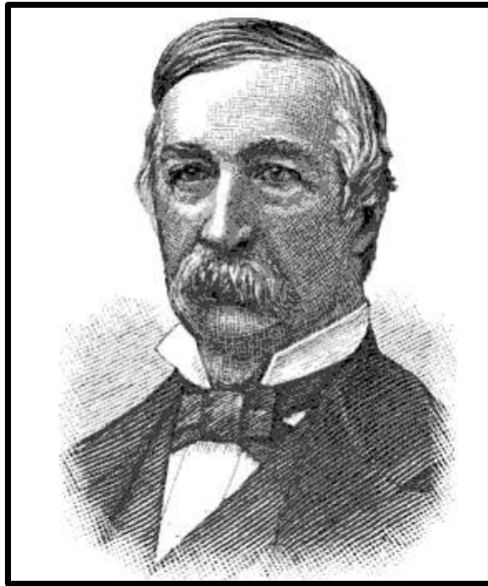


Figure 28. Alexander Henry, c. 1870. Source: Hathi Trust.

A sign of Henry's retirement was evident in 1867, when he purchased the subject property at 3460 West School House Lane from the Uhler Estate. Finally, the Henrys moved out of the Paul residence into their own home. By 1870, then forty-seven years old, Alexander Henry was listed at the subject property as a "Lawyer" with \$40,000 in real estate and \$25,000 in personal estate. He lived with his wife, Elizabeth, and their son, John. The household included several servants—J.M. Chamberlain, a teacher; Eliza Chamberlain, a nurse; Susan Maguire, servant; Annie Carlin, servant; Ellen Dowd, servant; and David Hunter, gardener.⁵⁶ Around this time Henry became President of the Sinking Fund Commission, a position he held through September 1871.⁵⁷ Later that year, he announced a "Fair for the Benefit of the Pennsylvania Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals," of which he was the presiding officer at that time.⁵⁸ In April 1873, Alexander Henry was named a "centennial supervisor" by Governor Hartranft (1830–1889), a post that would evolve over time and involved Henry in the planning of the Centennial Exhibition and administering its financial affairs.⁵⁹

He was also a Trustee of the Fairmount Park Commission, Director of the Fidelity Insurance, Trust and Safe Deposit Company, of the Philadelphia Saving Fund Society, and Inspector of the Eastern State Penitentiary. He was also a member of the Centennial Board of Finance.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Ninth Census of the United States, 1870; (National Archives Microfilm Publication M593, 1,76 rolls); Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29; National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁵⁷ "Resignation," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 10 May 1870, p. 8; "City Intelligence," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 22 September 1871, p. 2.

⁵⁸ "A Fair For the Benefit of the . . .," *Public Ledger*, 6 December 1870, 2.

⁵⁹ "The Centennial," *Patriot*, (Harrisburg: 1 April 1873), 2.

⁶⁰ Charles Henry Jones, *Genealogy of the Rodman Family, 1620–1886* (Philadelphia: Allen, Lane & Scott, 1886), 226.

In 1880, the Henrys suffered a major tragedy with the death of their only son, John Snowden Henry. After several years had passed, Elizabeth Henry was in poor health and, in 1883, it was recommended that she take a trip abroad to improve her condition. She had been emotionally strained since the death of their only child three years earlier. After the entire summer and fall, the Henrys returned to Philadelphia. Alexander Henry returned with a reported, "...new lease of life."⁶¹ Seemingly in perfect health, he visited his office in Walnut Street daily through the first days of December, when on a Wednesday he showed signs of a severe cold. Alexander soon was diagnosed with typhoid-pneumonia and died early in the morning on December 6, 1883 at the subject property.⁶² He was interred the Saturday following his death at Laurel Hill Cemetery.⁶³



Figure 29. Left: Thomas H. Powers (1812-1878). Right: William Weightman (1813-1904). Source: HSP.

Historic Context: History of Ownership

In addition to Mayor Alexander Henry, several other prominent Philadelphians resided in the house at 3460 West School House Lane. The subject house appears to have been originally constructed in the 1850s, when on June 9, 1853, Abraham Martin of Roxborough Township and his wife Susan conveyed the lot that now contains the subject property to Thomas H. Powers (1812-1878) and William Weightman (1813-1904) of the District of Spring Garden,

⁶¹ "Death of Alexander Henry: The Life and Public Services of Philadelphia's War Mayor," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 7 December 1883, p. 2.

⁶² "Death of Alexander Henry," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 7 December 1883, 2.

⁶³ "Pennsylvania, Philadelphia City Death Certificates, 1803-1915." Index. FamilySearch, Salt Lake City, Utah, 2008, 2010. From originals housed at the Philadelphia City Archives. "Death Records"; and *Find A Grave*. Find A Grave. <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi>.

manufacturing chemists, for the sum of \$3,600.⁶⁴ The next legal transaction that occurred regarding the subject property was on January 1, 1858, when Powers and Weightman conveyed the property to William M. Uhler, M.D. (1820-1865) This indicates that Powers and Weightman constructed the building, perhaps for Uhler—who was in their employ—between 1853 and 1858. Uhler paid Powers and Weightman \$9,000 for the subject property.⁶⁵

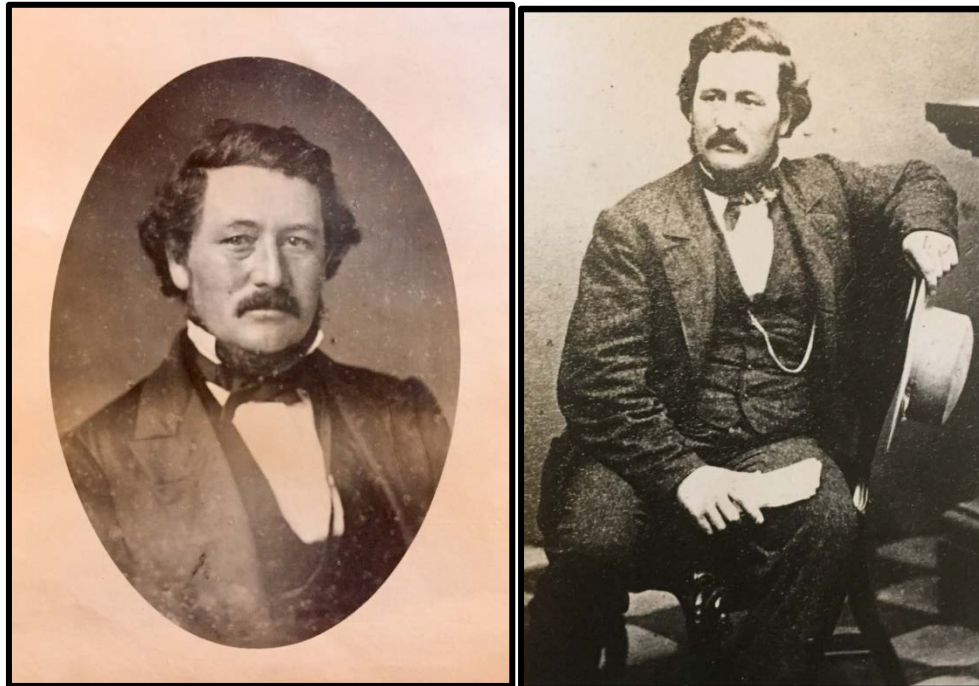


Figure 30. Both photographic portraits are of William Millward Uhler, M.D. (1820-1865) Source: HSP.

William Millward Uhler, M.D. (Occupied subject property from 1853-1858 to 1867)

William Millward Uhler was the son of George Uhler, a prominent physician, and Mary Ann Millward. For many years he was the “analytical” or superintending chemist in charge of the Chemical Works of Powers & Weightman at the Falls of the Schuylkill. Dr. Uhler graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1839, receiving an honorary M.D. in 1855.⁶⁶ He married Martha Follansbee (1820–1897), the daughter of Nathan Follansbee, a merchant of Newburyport, Massachusetts. The union was blessed with five children, including William Follansbee Uhler, John Uhler, William Uhler, James C. Booth Uhler, and Katharine Lawson Uhler.⁶⁷ Earning “fame as a chemist,” Dr. Uhler also served as a member of the Select Council in 1862, 1863, and 1864.⁶⁸ After Dr. Uhler died “at his residence at Falls of Schuylkill” on Monday, November 27,

⁶⁴ Deed: Abraham Martin to Thomas H. Powers and William Weightman, 9 June 1853, for \$3,600, Philadelphia Deed Book T.H., No. 91, p. 498.

⁶⁵ Deed: Thomas H. Powers and William Weightman to William M. Uhler, M.D., 1 January 1858, for \$9,000, Philadelphia Deed Book A.D.B., No. 28, p. 504.

⁶⁶ Stephen J. Laden, “Genealogy Report: Descendants of Dr. Uhler”. <https://www.genealogy.com/ftm/l/a/d/Steven-J-Laden/GENE4-0002.html>

⁶⁷ William Millward Uhler file, Alumni Records Collection, University Archives and Records Center, University of Pennsylvania.

⁶⁸ “Death of William M. Uhler, M.D.,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 29 November 1865, 2.

1865, the family retained ownership for roughly two years when they sold the property to the Honorable Alexander Henry, Mayor of Philadelphia, on May 16, 1867 for \$14,000.⁶⁹ In 1868, Alexander Henry commissioned an insurance survey of the property.

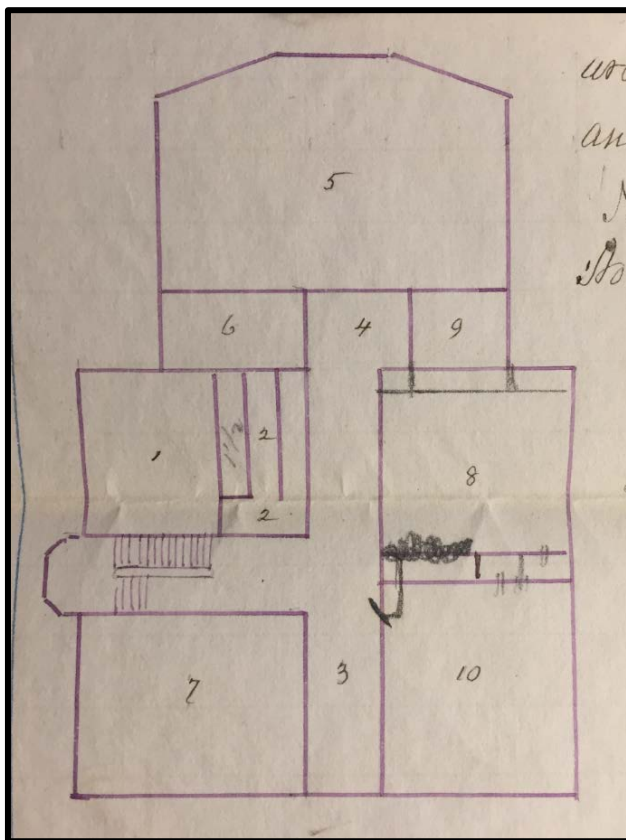


Figure 31. Floor plan of the subject property taken from the 1868 Insurance Survey. Source: HSP.

Alexander Henry (Occupied subject property from 1867-1883)

As previously discussed, Alexander Henry resided on the property from until his death in 1883, after which his widow retained both ownership and residency until her own death. Because the Henrys left no children, the property passed into the ownership of T. Charlton Henry, who also eventually died. His heirs, J. Bayard Henry, Thomas W. Henry, and John J. Henry, sold the property to Joseph Wright on November 5, 1890.⁷⁰ Wright commissioned an insurance survey shortly after he purchased the property in 1890, reflecting improvements at the rear of the building.

⁶⁹ Deed: Martha Uhler, widow of William M. Uhler to the Honorable Alexander Henry, Esquire, Mayor of Philadelphia, 16 May 1867, for \$14,000, Philadelphia Deed Book J.T.O., No. 47, p. 148.

⁷⁰ Deed: J. Bayard Henry, Thomas W. Henry, John J. Henry, executors of the Will of T. Charlton Henry, deceased, and others to Joseph Wright, 5 November 1890, Philadelphia Deed Book G.G.P., No. 714, p. 204.

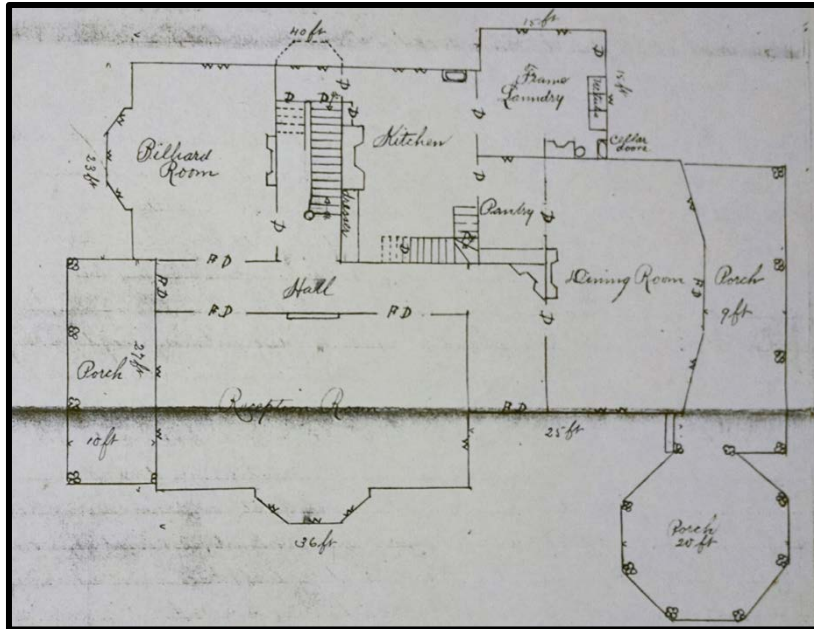


Figure 32. Perpetual Survey No. 70228, dated March 25, 1890, purchased by Joseph Wright. Source: Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Joseph Wright (Occupied subject property from 1890 to 1914)

Joseph Wright was born in Philadelphia to Samuel Wright, one of the founders of a firm of Wright Brothers, umbrella manufacturers, established in 1816. When Joseph Wright came of age, he entered his father's firm, and in 1866, he married Mary Williams Sharpless, a daughter of Charles L. Sharpless. Wright would continue to work at his father's firm until retirement in 1892, when the "firm expired by limitation." Shortly after his retirement he purchased the subject property, where he "devoted his remaining years to art and literature." "He was a member of the Rittenhouse, Art, Philadelphia Country, and Germantown Cricket clubs of Philadelphia, Grolier and Stroller's Clubs of New York, also the First Troop Philadelphia City Cavalry." Even after his retirement he was "director of the United Security Life Insurance and Trust Company of Philadelphia and a director of the American Security and Trust Company of Washington, D.C."⁷¹ After taking ownership of the subject property, Wright called the house "Windrush" and it was here that he resided from 1890 to 1914. Wright's period of residence is another example of how the occupants were important players in the cultural, economic, and social history of Philadelphia.

⁷¹ *Proceedings of the Numismatic and Antiquarian Society of Philadelphia* (The Society, 1916), 36-37.



Figure 19. Top: 1895 Bromley Philadelphia Atlas. Bottom: 1910 Bromley Philadelphia Atlas. Source: Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network.

Wilson D. Craig Wright, Albert B. Heimer, Provident Life & Trust Company, executors of the will of Joseph Wright, sold the property to Sarah H. Warden on November 24, 1914. Sarah H. Warden conveyed the property to Barbara Warden Strawbridge on July 16, 1915. Barbara Warden Strawbridge transferred the property to the School Lane Land Company on April 14, 1916, a company that held the property until it was sold to the Philadelphia builder John H. McClatchy on May 11, 1925. McClatchy subdivided the property taking off the back half (which included with the carriage house) for his development along Warden Drive. The front part of the

property along School House Lane that included the subject property was sold by McClatchy to Francis B. Biddle on June 8, 1926.⁷²



Figure 204. Francis Beverly Biddle (1886-1968). Source: Google Books.

Francis Beverley Biddle (Occupied subject property from 1926 to 1947)

Francis B. Biddle was an American lawyer and judge, who served as Attorney General of the United States during the Second World War. He also served as the primary American judge during the Nuremberg trials. Born in Paris, France, while his family was living abroad, he graduated from Harvard University and was a lawyer who worked as a private secretary to Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. from 1911 to 1912. After this brief tenure, he practiced law in Philadelphia for roughly twenty-seven years, during which time he served as the U.S. Attorney of the Eastern District of Pennsylvania from 1922 to 1926. On April 27, 1918, Biddle married the poet Katherine Garrison Chapin, and the couple had two sons. During the Administration of Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Biddle served as chairman of the National Labor Relations Board. On February 9, 1939, President Roosevelt nominated Biddle to serve on the United States Court of Appeals of the Third Circuit, on which he served from March 4, 1939 to January 22, 1940. He resigned this position to serve as the 24th U.S. Solicitor General, a position he filled from January 22, 1940 to August 25, 1941. Finally, on August 26, 1941, Biddle became the 58th U.S. Attorney General, a position in which he served until June 26, 1945. He resigned shortly after Harry S. Truman became president and would go on to serve as the American judge at the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg.⁷³

⁷² Plan 74 N 20, Plots 14 and 24, Philadelphia Deed Registry, City Archives of Philadelphia.

⁷³ Alden Whitman, "Francis Biddle Is Dead at 82; Roosevelt's Attorney General; First Chairman of N.L.R.B. Was Nuremberg Judge-Backed Liberal Causes," *The New York Times*, 5 October 1968.

Nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, Fall 2018 – Page 36
The Alexander Henry House, "Design XX. Villa Farm House" in the Gothic Revival Style,
3460 West School House Lane, East Falls, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Biddle was highly regarded in government and legal circles for his profound integrity and willingness to speak up against wrongs. Witnessing the excesses of anti-immigrant agitation during World War I, he worked hard as Attorney General during World War II not to repeat the same mistakes and achieved some success in that regard in relation to Italian and German resident aliens in the country at that time. Though he was not successful in stemming the virulent anti-Japanese feeling that led to the internment of Americans of Japanese descent during the war, he did raise objections to the policy within the Roosevelt administration. During the war he objected to Stalin's demands and Roosevelt's acquiescence to the forced return of Soviets in occupied Europe to the Soviet Union arguing that they should be considered as refugees.⁷⁴ He was an ardent supporter of civil liberties and active with the American Civil Liberties Union. For example, in 1944 he threatened to quit the Federal Bar Association if it would not admit an African American attorney that worked in the Department of Justice.⁷⁵ It is not surprising that the Francis Biddle Lecture on topics of civil liberties and civil rights was established at the Harvard Law School in his honor. Biddle was known for his "extraordinary political courage and his incredibly low tolerance of bores" or people who hide their true feelings on a topic or hide behind "official pomposity."⁷⁶ On the lighter side, one individual who worked with him at the Nuremberg War Crime trials noted that in spite of Biddle's very serious side he "had a joie de vivre about him that even the long, weary and depressing days at Nuremberg could not quench. His infectious sense of humor and gaiety marked him as a true cavalier. Even the most sober sided roundhead found these qualities irresistible."⁷⁷

Biddle was very fond of the subject property. He devotes an entire chapter in his autobiography to School House Lane and his family's time there. Near the end of it he describes the people he sold it to in June 11, 1947.⁷⁸

I grew intimate with the house on School House Lane, which always seemed to me with its leisurely waste of space and lack of assertiveness to respond to one's moods. I am happy therefore that it is now [1961] owned by my friend L.M.C. Smith, who bought it when we settled in Washington, and who loves its anonymous friendliness as we did. Eleanor Smith has kept it gay with flowers and chintz; and the elm and maple and sweet gum trees that I bought with the proceeds of election bets in 1936 flourish admirably to the south.⁷⁹

⁷⁴ Phil Orchard and Jamie Gillies. "Atypical leadership: the role of the presidency and refugee protection, 1932-1952," *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (2015): 490

⁷⁵ "Atty. Biddle Threatens to Quit Bar Association," *Philadelphia Tribune*, January 8, 1944, 9.

⁷⁶ Adrian S. Fisher, "Francis Biddle," *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review* 9, no. 3 (May 1974): 423.

⁷⁷ Fisher, "Francis Biddle," 427. Most of the information in this paragraph is taken from the various tributes to Biddle which appeared in the *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review* 9, no. 3 (May 1974).

⁷⁸ Deed: Francis J. Biddle and Katherine G., his wife, to Lawrence M.C. Smith and Eleanor Houston Smith, 11 June 1947, Philadelphia Deed Book C.J.P., No. 1728, p. 291.

⁷⁹ Francis Biddle, *A Casual Past* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1961), 380.



Figure 35. The family of L.M.C. Smith (1902-1975) and Eleanor Houston (1910-1987). Source: the Chestnut Hill Conservancy.

Lawrence M.C. “Sam” Smith and Eleanor Houston Smith (Occupied subject property from 1947–1984)

The Smiths were civic leaders, collectors, conservationists, environmentalists, farmers, philanthropists, and preservationists. Both were Philadelphia natives from families with long ties to the city. Sam was graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1923 and then went to Magdalen College at Oxford University where he earned his M.A. in 1925. He returned to Philadelphia and was graduated from the Law School of the University of Pennsylvania in 1928. After several years in private practice he decided he would rather work in government service and joined the Home Owner’s Loan Corporation (HOLC) established by Franklin D. Roosevelt in 1933. That same year he married Eleanor Houston in Chestnut Hill. As ardent supporters of the Democratic Party and New Deal – much to the chagrin of their families – the Smiths went to Washington. There they became active in the life of the federal city. Sam went on to work for the National Recovery Administration (NRA), Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) and finally the Department of Justice, where he became acquainted with Francis Biddle. During World War II Smith was the chief of the special war policies unit of the Department of Justice, of the economic mission to French West Africa, and head of the United States Purchasing Mission in Switzerland, United States Economic Missions to Europe and when he returned from these he and Eleanor decided to move back to Philadelphia and bought “Windrush Hill” from Francis Biddle and his wife.

Sam's activities in Philadelphia were numerous. His main business interests were that of his international trade company, Panocean Corporation, and the Franklin Broadcasting Corporation. The Franklin Broadcasting Corporation, which he founded, established WFLN radio station as Philadelphia's only classical radio station. Smith felt strongly that Philadelphia needed such a station. As he described it:

“We can't survive if we are a country of nuts and bolts. We are judged in the world by our cultural and spiritual meanings – not the number of yards of textiles we produce. Europe respects our orchestra and our museums.”⁸⁰

These views of his business operations also were carried to important positions he held on a number of boards. He served as chair of the Philadelphia Board of Trade and Conventions from 1955 to 1963 and also commission member at UNESCO from 1949 to 1968. He also continued early support for New Deal era politics and social policies. He was a board member of the Philadelphia Housing Association (PHA), local chairman and national treasurer of the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA), member of the City of Philadelphia Commission on Human Relations and the Philadelphia Fellowship Commission. In the cultural and education realm, Smith contributed his knowledge as a member of the board of the Philadelphia Museum of Art as well as an associate trustee of the University of Pennsylvania.

Eleanor Houston Smith was born in Chestnut Hill, the daughter of Samuel F. Houston and granddaughter of Henry Howard Houston – the single most important historical figure in the development of Chestnut Hill. She was raised in Chestnut Hill at “Drum Moir” but left the area not long after her marriage to Sam Smith. Though her early married years were greatly occupied with raising their six children, Eleanor was active in social circles and organizations when they lived in Washington D.C. One tradition she and Sam started in DC and carried with them to School House Lane was the hosting of foreign college students in their home during the Christmas holidays. They became well known for their parties and events for their students.

Having been influenced as a small girl when she saw the Pro Bono Publico fountain in the Wissahickon, Eleanor was active her entire life in various philanthropic endeavors. She served on various boards which reflected her interests in history, historic preservation and conservation/nature. Among these were the Germantown Historical Society, the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, and the Nature Conservancy. She and her husband were responsible for saving the 1696 Thomas Massey House in Broomall, Pa. She and Sam had a strong passion for organic farming and agriculture which they practiced at their summer home near Freeport, Maine and supported many local institutions in Maine. She founded the Institute for Alternative Agriculture in Greenbelt, Maryland. Her greatest legacy for Philadelphia were her donations of land to Fairmount Park along the upper reaches of the Wissahickon that formed part of the Andorra Nature Center and her joint gift with her sister Margaret Houston Meigs of 500 acres for the Schuylkill Valley Nature Center in 1967. Her amiableness and generosity were

⁸⁰ John Frasca, “Smith A ‘Generalists,’ Opposite of Specialist,” *Daily News*, November 1955.

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well known and regarded throughout Philadelphia. In 1987 she received an honorary degree from Philadelphia University.⁸¹



Figure 36. The family of L.M.C. Smith and Eleanor Houston at Wolf's Neck, ca. 1950. Source: David R. Contosta, *A Philadelphia Family: The Houstons and Woodward of Chestnut Hill* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988).

CONCLUSION

The subject home is a distinctive example of the Gothic Revival style, retaining several architectural elements that were likely influenced by “Design XX. Villa Farm House,” as described in Andrew Jackson Downing’s *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1851). From the time of its construction c. 1853–1858 until 1984, the subject property served as a residence for important, prosperous, and successful Philadelphians and their families. For these reasons that are fully elaborated upon in this nomination, it is a significant historic resource that merits designation by the Philadelphia Historical Commission and inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The subject building satisfies the following Criteria for Designation, as enumerated in Section 14–1004 of the Philadelphia Code:

- (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;
- (d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen.

⁸¹ David R. Contosta, *A Philadelphia Family: The Houstons and Woodward of Chestnut Hill* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 162–69; “L.M.C. Smith Elected Head of Trade-Convention,” *The Evening Bulletin*, January 25, 1955; William H. Gray, Jr., “Human Relations Unit Lauds Smith,” *Daily News*, March 14, 1955; Murry Dubin, “Lawrence Smith, ‘Generalist’ Who Founded Station WFLN,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 12, 1975; “Lawrence Smith, 72, Lawyer, Civic Leader,” *The Evening Bulletin*, August 12, 1975; Martha Woodall, “Eleanor Houston Smith, 77; Gave Land for Two Area Nature Centers,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 30, 1987;

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Nominated by the Keeping Society of Philadelphia, this nomination was sponsored by Drs. Irwin and Susan Richman. Dr. Richman specifically wished to honor the memory of Eleanor Houston Smith, who he remembered as a great old Philadelphia lady. This nomination was prepared by Oscar Beisert, Architectural Historian and Historic Preservationist and J. M. Duffin, Archivist and Historian. Stan Smith, a descendant of the Houston and Smith families provided information on the history of the house.