

NOMINATION OF HISTORIC BUILDING, STRUCTURE, SITE, OR OBJECT
PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

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

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

Street address: 1100-02 N. Delaware Avenue

Postal code: 19125 Councilmanic District: _____

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: Edward Corner Marine Merchandise Warehouse

Common Name: Other: Edward Corner Warehouse

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: Unoccupied

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

6. DESCRIPTION

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

7. SIGNIFICANCE

Please attach the Statement of Significance.

Period of Significance (from year to year): from 1921 to 1955

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: Constructed 1921

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: A. Raymond Roff

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: A. Raymond Roff

Original owner: Elizabeth T. Corner

Other significant persons: Edward Corner and Edward T. Corner

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION:

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

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

8. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Please attach a bibliography.

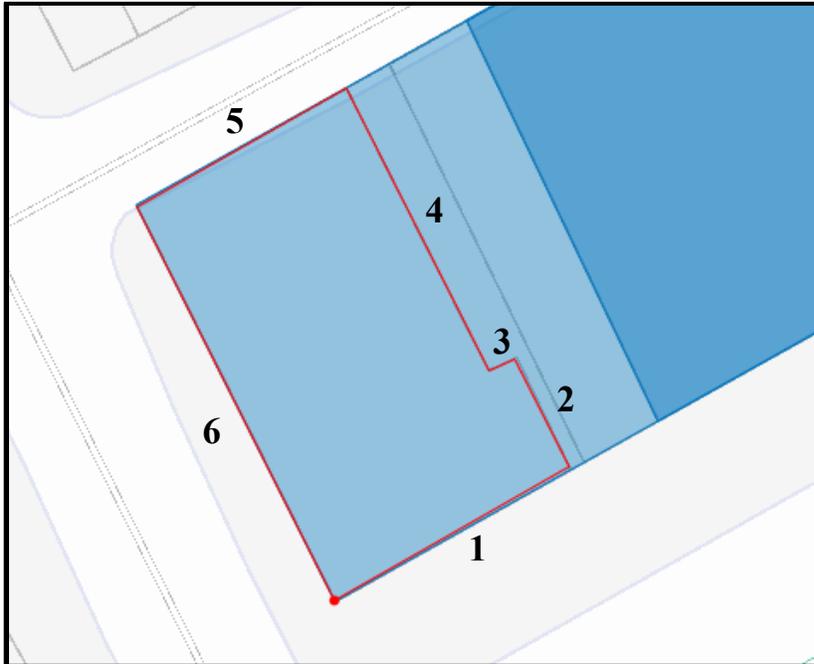
9. NOMINATOR

Name with Title Oscar Beisert, Architectural Historian Email Oscar.Beisert@gmail.com
Organization N/A Date August 11, 2015
Street Address 205 Rochelle Avenue Telephone 717.602.5002
City, State, and Postal Code Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19128
Nominator is is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

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

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

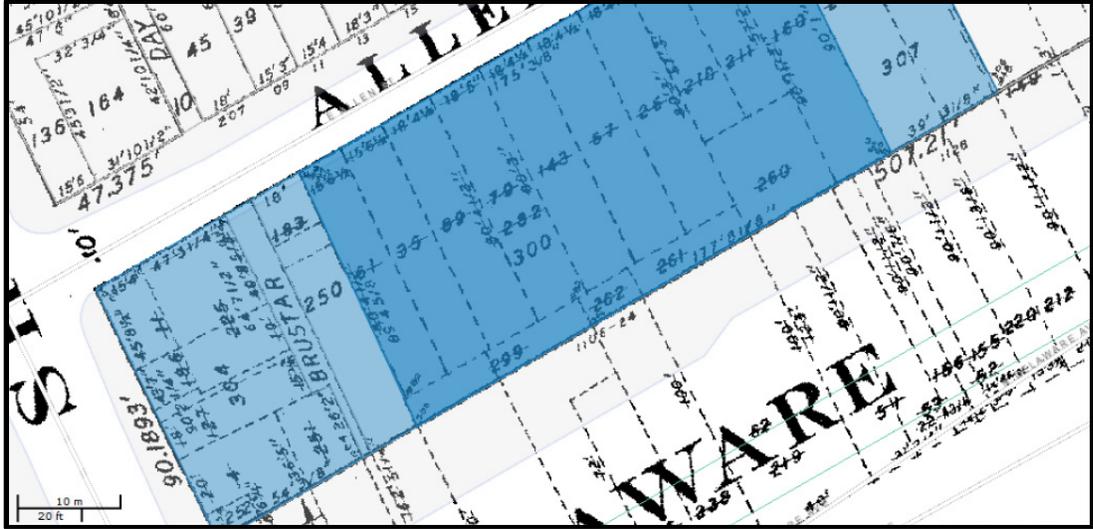


1. 54.062
2. 25.125
3. 6.781
4. 64.625
5. 47.281
6. 90.187

The Edward Corner Marine Merchandise Warehouse is located at 1100-02 N. Delaware Avenue at the northwest corner of Shackamaxon Street in the Fishtown section of the larger Kensington neighborhood of Philadelphia. The building faces southeast on Delaware Avenue, southwest on Shackamaxon Street, and Allen Street at the northwest.

The building is situated on the northwest side of Delaware Avenue, beginning at Shackamaxon Street. It contains in front or breadth on the said Delaware Avenue fifty-four feet, seven inches (54'-7") to the northeast making a ninety-degree turn at the east corner of the building to the northwest; thence continuing to the northwest twenty four feet, eight inches (24'-8") to the northwest; thence continuing to the southwest five foot, seven inches (5'-7") making a ninety degree turn to the northwest; thence continuing to the northwest sixty-five feet, one inch (65'-1") making a ninety degree turn to the southwest at the north corner of the rear of the building at Allen Street; thence continuing to the southwest forty-eight feet, seven inches (48'-7") making a ninety degree turn to the southeast at the west corner of the building; thence continuing to the southeast ninety feet, five inches to the point of the beginning, the south corner of the building.

Being known as Parcel No. 017N04-0323 (formerly 017N04-0304), Office of Property Assessment Account No. 884019058.



Registry Map

6. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION



The Edward Corner Marine Merchandise Warehouse is a three-story, red-brick building of load-bearing masonry construction with structural steel reinforcement. The brick is largely laid in a running bond and the walls are seventeen inches in thickness. The building sits atop a stone foundation, the walls of which are twenty-two inches thick in thickness and contains a full basement. The detached warehouse is of an approximate rectangular form, which is interrupted by a notch that beginnings just beyond the first fifth of the buildings depth. The notch maximizes façade width and creates a court that allows for a full fenestration of windows in the case that a building was constructed immediately to the north. The building features a flat roof that is obscured by a three-foot parapet wall with terracotta coping. The building's notable features include its red brick, multi-light fenestration, and distinctive original period ghost signage at each elevation.

Facing southwest, along North Delaware Avenue, the primary elevation consists of a regularly aligned fenestration of multi-light windows. Measuring just over fifty-four feet in width, the ground floor, spanning left to right, consists of four apertures, including a single vehicle entrance; and a single vehicle loading dock entrance, which is obscured by a modern roll top door and new pedestrian door with what appear to be original concrete steps; a single, narrow pedestrian doorway, likely once leading to the office or lobby of the building; and a vehicle bay that retains its original size and configurations. Between the first and second floors is a ghost sign of white paint that reads, spanning left to right, "CONTRACTORS'..... [the remainder of which is painted over in white]." The second and third floors contain four bays of metal industrial windows. The first, second and fourth bays contain double fix by five foot windows with central hopper-awning sashes. The third bay contains single four by five foot windows with a central hopper-awning sash. The first, second, and third bays are covered with wood boards at the second floor, while the third floor retains all of its original window fabric. Between the second and third floors is a ghost sign of white paint that appears in three distinct sections of advertising, spanning left to right:

ROPE
and
CANVAS

EDWARD CORNER

ANCHORS
and
CHAIN

All of the windows are defined by soldier-course lintels flush with the facade. Above the third floor windows is course of brick corbeling and coping. A metal antenna rises from the front center of the roof, which appears in photographs taken in the 1950s.

The first twenty-five feet of the northeast elevation is a solid brick wall with a painted ghost sign reading:

EDWARD CORNER
ROPE
CANVAS COVERS and FALLS
BOAST & SHIP SUPPLIES
BLASTING MATS

WE BUY OLD ROPE

After twenty-five feet, the remainder of the building is set back approximately six feet, creating a narrow court, maximizing the amount of light in the building. The set back portion of the northeast elevation extends for five bays of aligned openings per floor. The first three bays feature double five by five foot metal industrial windows with central hopper-awning sashes. The last two bays are narrower, single windows with three by five foot and four by five foot configurations, respectively. In the fourth bay of the first floor, in place of a single-width window, there is a pedestrian door. The corbelled coursing present on the front façade continues around the top of the building and an elevator shaft is extant at the north corner of the building, where a penthouse pierces the otherwise flat roof.

The northwest elevation, along Allen Street, features four bays, the first of which, near the north corner and contains the rear of the penthouse, which is articulated in blind brick. The three other bays are aligned apertures, most of which historically would have contained metal, multi-light hopper-awning windows. The first floor features the following configuration: a single, narrow multi-light, metal hopper-awning window; a low-slung loading dock entrance; and a double, multi-light, metal hopper-awning window. The height and width at the first floor is repeated in the second and third floors of this elevation, with the exception of the low slung loading dock entrance. The second floor apertures are filled with concrete block, while the third floor apertures contain all of their original windows.

The southwest Shackamaxon Street elevation of the building contains the most extensive fenestration. This elevation is six bays in width and runs the full depth of the block from Delaware Avenue to Shackamaxon, spanning left to right: a single, four by five foot multi-light, metal hopper-awning window, which is followed by five bays of double-width, five by five foot metal hopper-awning windows. This configuration is repeated on each floor. Three of the five apertures at the ground floor are filled with concrete block, while the upper two floors retain much of the original window fabric. Between the first and second floors is another section of ghost signage, from left to right:

CONTRACTORS'
SUPPLIES
NEW and USED ROPE

EDWARD CORNER

CANVAS COVERS
TO-HIRE
BOAT SUPPLIES



Looking west, the primary elevation.



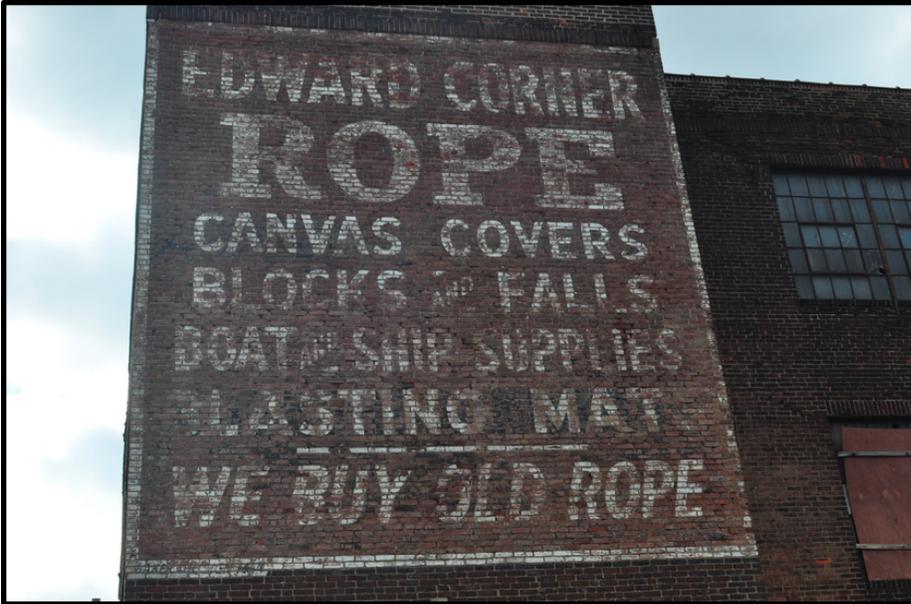
Looking southwest, the primary and northeast elevation.



Looking northeast at the southwest elevation.



Looking southwest at the northeast elevation.



Looking southwest at the ghost signage.



Looking northeast at details at the primary elevation.

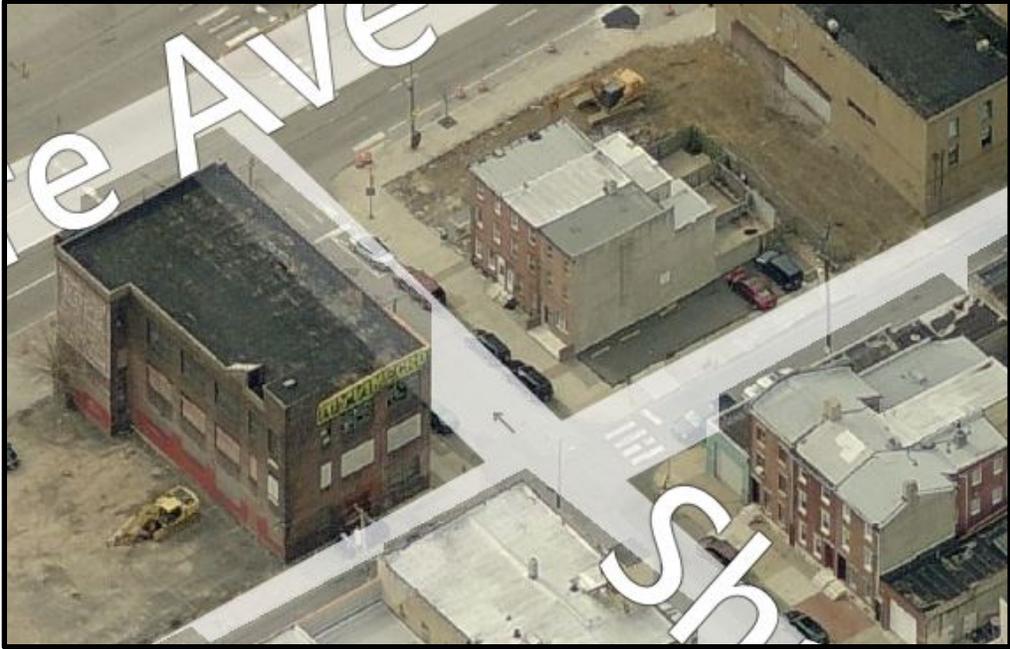


Looking north at the details of the ghost signage and the apertures.

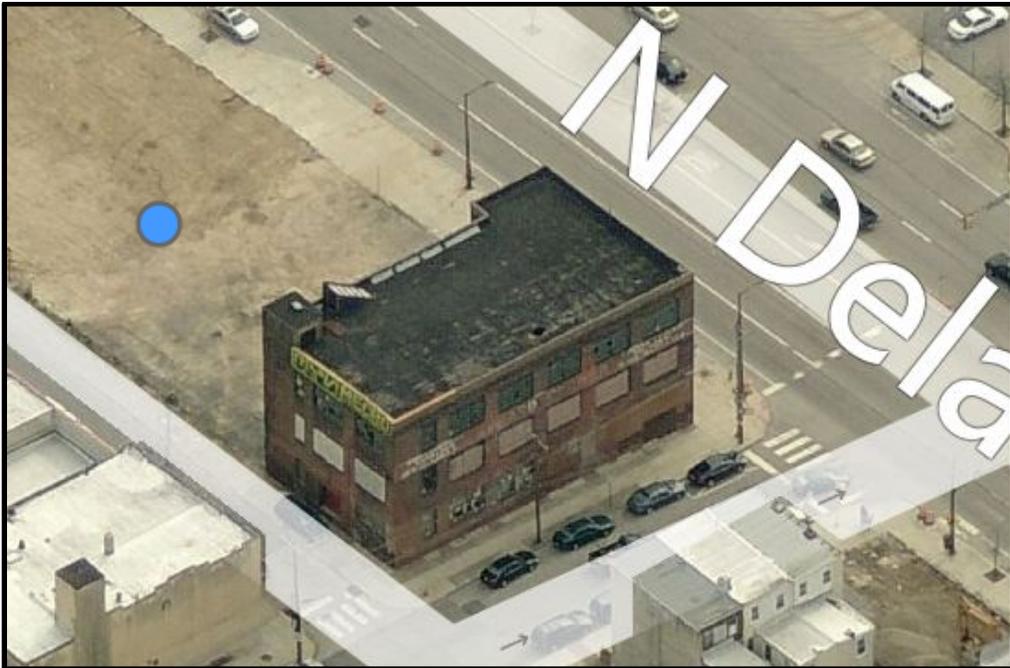


Looking east at the west and southeast elevations.





Looking southeast.



Looking northeast.

7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Edward Corner Marine Merchandise Warehouse is a significant historic site that merits designation by the Philadelphia Historical Commission and inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.

As part of the Philadelphia City Planning Commission's "Philadelphia 2035" of March 2015, the River Wards District Plan, Technical Memoranda: Existing Conditions, Issues, and Opportunities, Laura DiPasquale, Philadelphia Historical Commission, has specifically called out for recommended follow-up and potential designation in the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, under industrial resources, 1100-02 N. Delaware Avenue, Edward Corner Marine Merchandise Warehouse, 1921.

Located at 1100-02 N. Delaware Avenue in the Fishtown section of the larger Kensington neighborhood of Philadelphia, the former Edward Corner Marine Merchandise Warehouse satisfies Criteria for Designation a, c, h, and j as enumerated in Section 14-1004 of the Philadelphia Code. The former Edward Corner Marine Merchandise Warehouse:

- (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;
- (c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style;
- (h) Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City; and
- (j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.



Looking north, this 1955 photograph depicts the environs of Delaware Avenue and the Edward Corner Marine Merchandise Warehouse (on right). Courtesy the City of Philadelphia.¹

¹ Balionis, Francis and Atheniasis T. Mallis. N.W. View of Pumperete Machine at Shackamaxon & Delaware Avenue. November 18, 1955, City of Philadelphia/DOR Archives, Philadelphia. Note the Edward Corner Marine Merchandise Warehouse on right.



The Edward Corner Family and their employees, laying the **cornerstone**, 1921.²



The cornerstone of the Edward Corner Marine Merchandise Warehouse, providing the date of establishment and construction.

² Courtesy the Severe-Robson Family. Provided April 29, 2015.

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

1100-02 N. Delaware Avenue, the former Edward Corner Marine Merchandise Warehouse, has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of the City of Philadelphia; the riverward that encompasses Fishtown and the larger Kensington neighborhood; and the enlargement of the Port of Philadelphia in the early twentieth century. The building also represents the local response to the development and effects of the South Philadelphia Agreement and the eventual widening of Delaware Avenue, as a major municipal effort to enlarge the capacities of the Port of Philadelphia with the creation of a great marginal street as a primary component. Removal from Beach Street to 1100-02 Delaware Avenue is a direct result of this larger movement, representing that important transition in Philadelphia. The building represents the economic, social, and historical heritage of the Fishtown and Kensington communities as they evolved from being a maritime community in their own right to being part of the larger Port of Philadelphia in the early twentieth century. As the Society of Industrial Archaeology 1990 survey of Philadelphia states, “The Edward Corner Marine Merchandise Warehouse stands as one of the last vestiges of Fishtown’s association with maritime-related industries.”³ Furthermore, the building represents the cultural characteristics that embody Edward Corner as a Philadelphia success story. This is the story of an immigrant who arrived in Philadelphia with nothing, becomes part of a large context of those working in the junk business, specializing in rags. Over time he grew his business to become a major fixture in the maritime community and eventually achieves a national reputation. After his death, his sons grew the business to a new phase, diversifying its products and responding to the changing times, which includes the removal from Beach Street to the subject building at 1100-02 Delaware Avenue. The building represents the economic success of Edward Corner as a family business, and the social and historical implications that it had on the built environment through the construction of the subject building. Furthermore, the building represents Fishtown and Kensington as these communities evolved in the early twentieth century, as well as the development of the Port of Philadelphia in the first decades of the twentieth century.

Fishtown Section of Philadelphia

1100–02 N. Delaware Avenue is located in the Fishtown section of Philadelphia. The current neighborhood traces its origins to the 1730s when Anthony Palmer decided to carve up his 191½ acre Delaware River front property. Palmer laid out streets and sold lots in the area that now compasses East Columbia Avenue, the Delaware River, Norris Street and Frankford Avenue. He called this new community Kensington. Palmer’s immediate neighbor to the southwest, Benjamin Fairman, followed Palmer’s lead by laying out streets on his river-front property that extended Kensington from East Columbia Avenue (originally Hanover Street) to roughly Frankford Avenue. In spite of the development project that the new streets and lots portended, the actual settlement of the area ended up forming only along the bank of the Delaware River.

³ Oliver Evans Chapter of the Society for Industrial Archaeology, *Workshop of the World: A Selective Guide to the Industrial Archaeology of Philadelphia* (Wallingford, PA: Oliver Evans Press, 1990), 4-17.

The interior lots would have to wait for the expansion of population in the city to move north in the 1820s and 1830s before a large community would form here.

As the neighborhood's name suggest, the early roots of settlement here were closely tied to the Delaware River. Many of the early settlers were German-speaking people who were connected with the shad-fishing business along the river which continued into the nineteenth century and gave rise to the popular name for the area. Another important early industry of the area was ship building. The growth of Philadelphia's maritime trade created a large demand for ships and by the 1750s Philadelphia surpassed Boston as the major shipbuilding center in British North America. Along with Southwark, Kensington soon developed as a major area of shipbuilding in Philadelphia. For example, Manuel Eyre was building ships in Fishtown by the 1760s. The vicissitudes of international trade and wars in the early nineteenth century did take its toll, however, by the mid-nineteenth century the industry rebounded. The largest shipbuilding company in city, William Cramp & Son, was founded in 1830 and located in Fishtown. Its reputation for ships for both commercial and military use in the nineteenth and early twentieth century was world-wide.

The shipbuilding industry of Fishtown fostered a whole community of related business, such as iron workers, blacksmiths, carpenters, and rope makers in the early period, and iron foundries and engineering firms, later on. Philadelphia's long tradition of smaller scale industrial manufacturing also feed into the supply business for the larger firms whether private or public, such as the Philadelphia Navy Yard. Smaller businesses would spring up in this area and tap into the larger manufacturing and shipping that occurred along the Delaware and a little farther inland in Kensington.

Edward Corner (1840 – 1903), Junk Dealer and Rag Man

Almost a century prior to the construction of the building at 1100–02 N. Delaware Avenue, Edward Corner was born in the coastal village of Fairlight in East Sussex, England in 1840, the son of John and Mary Ann Corner. John and Mary Ann Corner had a large family of at least nine children and moved around a fair amount in East Sussex.⁴ John Corner was a shepherd. The limited opportunities for the children in rural England at this time were no doubt the main factor in prompting Edward and his brother Lewis to leave England at the ages of 18 and 16 respectively to seek better opportunity in America. Edward and Lewis boarded the *Plymouth Rock* in 1859 arrived in the New York Harbor on September 30. The Corner brothers are listed as “manual laborers” in the passenger manifest.⁵

The Corner brothers headed immediately for the Delaware Valley upon their arrival in America. Edward appears in the 1860 Census as a farm laborer working for and living with Charles Haines and his family in Cinnaminson Township, Burlington County, New Jersey.⁶ Though Lewis does not appear in the 1860 Census, he was probably in the area because he shows up in later census

⁴ Household 30, Parrish of Guestling, Sussex County, Class HO107; Piece 1635; Folio 22; Page 10; GSU roll 193538, Census Returns of England and Wales, 1851, National Archives of the UK; Household 88, p. 15, Parish of Ditchling, Sussex County, Class RG 9; Piece 584; Folio 11; Page 16; GSU roll 54266, Census Returns of England and Wales, 1861, National Archives of the UK.

⁵ *Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 1820–1897*. Microfilm Publication M237, 675 rolls. Records of the U.S. Customs Service, Record Group 36. National Archives at Washington, D.C.

⁶ Edward Corner; p. 68 (1014), line 25, Cinnaminson Twp, Burlington County, New Jersey Census of Population; *Eighth Census of the United States, 1860* (National Archives Microfilm Publication M653, roll 685); Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, NARA.

schedules in or near Cinnaminson. Edward saw his future across the river in Philadelphia. Edward Corner soon found a footing in the city. He first appears in the Philadelphia city directory in 1867 at 321 New Market Street. On December 22, 1869 married Elizabeth Theresa Baus at the Church of the Advent of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Northern Liberties.⁷ Also an immigrant, born in Germany on August 22, 1850, Elizabeth arrived in Philadelphia with her father, Christian Baus just after the time of her birth.⁸

The profession that Corner chose to take on coming to Philadelphia was that of junk dealer. It is the occupation that appears after his name in the 1867 and 1868 city directories and the one that he essentially held until his death in 1903.

The Junk Business in America and Philadelphia

According to the Philadelphia City Code the following definition applies to certain types of businesses:

Junk Dealer. An individual, partnership, association, corporation, other business entity doing business in the City of Philadelphia which handles, stores, buys, sells, sorts, picks, or otherwise processes junk, as commonly defined but not limited to, rags, paper, wastes, scrap metal, plumbing fixtures, and other materials.⁹

Junk Dealers were a prominent fixture of the American industrial city, forming its own commercial milieu in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While hardly a glamorous profession, the term “junk dealer” applied to someone dealing in and selling secondhand items and materials. The great expansion of industry in America created large amounts of waste and also a demand for scrap material. As one author describes it:

The increased demand for rags between 1840 and 1860 combined with continued local demand for old metals to produce a proliferation of businesses devoted to sorting and selling scrap materials in the United States' largest mercantile cities. ... Philadelphia and especially New York City hosted importers of rages, rope, waste paper and scrap metals.¹⁰

⁷ *Historic Pennsylvania Church and Town Records*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁸ Pennsylvania (State). Death certificates, 1906–1963. Series 11.90 (1,905 cartons). Records of the Pennsylvania Department of Health, Record Group 11. Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

⁹ Philadelphia Code: § 9–613 Junk Dealers. Added, 1974 Ordinances, 1141; amended by deleting subsection (3), 1990 Ordinances, p. 715.730, (1) Definitions.

¹⁰ Carl Zimring, “Dirty Work: How Hygiene and Xenophobia Marginalized the American Waste Trades, 1870–1930,” *Environmental History* 9 (2004): 82.



Dreifus & Co. Inc., Junk, 2007-09 Frankford Avenue, a similar, but smaller business to Edward Corner. Courtesy the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

These businesses expanded greatly after the Civil War and served an important function in the industrial economy. For example, technological changes in the 1870s and 1880s created a greater demand for scrap metal by foundries and steel works.¹¹ The demand for rags had existed in Philadelphia almost from the beginning of the textile industry. Woolen rags were particularly adaptable to reuse and could readily supply the voracious demand that the carpet mills of Kensington generated in the late nineteenth century as Philadelphia became a national leader in this particular form of textile manufacture.¹² Rags were also helpful as an all-purpose cloth when working with machinery.

Because of the status of the profession and the relatively low start-up costs, junk dealers were generally immigrants, like Edward Corner—in the early years mostly Irish and by the turn of the century generally Jewish. The low costs also allowed the firms to operate as family-run operations. The establishment of a “rag store” in 1905 required roughly \$400 of capital.¹³ Rag dealers were thrifty in the sense that they almost always scavenged and procured other goods, including old iron, furniture, and clothing. A junk dealer may or may not have his or her own operation for recycling the refuse but would always reform the materials for reuse or sell in bulk to manufacturers.

Changes in industrial practices, such as internal waste management, hygiene laws and zoning changed the nature of the nature of the junk business at the beginning of the twentieth century.

¹¹ Zimring, “Dirty Work,” 84–85.

¹² For example see, Philip Scranton, “An Immigrant Family and Industrial Enterprise: Seville Schofield and the Philadelphia Textile Manufacture, 1845–1900,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 106 (1982): 365–392. Also Philip Scranton, *Proprietary Capitalism: The Textile Manufacture at Philadelphia, 1800–1885* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983).

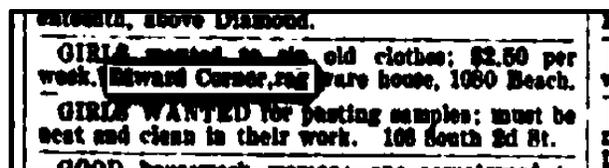
¹³ Abraham Bisno, “Economic and Industrial Conditions,” in Charles Seligman Bernheimer, *The Russian Jew in the United States: Studies of Social Conditions in New York, Philadelphia, and Chicago, With a Description of Rural Settlements* (Philadelphia: John C. Winston Co, 1905).

Rag collection declined because of health and safety concerns. The trade’s common associations with stolen goods also lead to tighter regulation. Many cities like Philadelphia, New York and Boston passed a series of laws to restrict the junk trade during this period as well.¹⁴ These forces junk dealers to adapt and innovate.

The Edward Corner Business, 1870 – 1921

According to the cornerstone of 1100–02 N. Delaware Ave, Edward Corner started the business in 1870, however, the city directories suggest an earlier date. The first entry for Edward in 1867 lists him with the occupation of “junk [dealer]” at 321 New Market Street. The same listed appeared in 1868. The record for 1870 and 1871, however, has Edward as a waterman living at 112 Arch Street.¹⁵ There is no listing in 1872.¹⁶ 112 Arch Street appears to have been a boarding house with a people living there who had occupations which would figure later in Corner’s career: salesman, sailmaker, and waterman.¹⁷ It is possible his early experience and interaction with people here may have helped him later in life.¹⁸

The city directory of 1873 records the return of Edward Corner to the junk business and his permanent move to the Fishtown section of the city. He is listed as a partner in the firm of Corner & Keighley, “rags,” at 1083 Beach Street. Corner’s partner was William J. Keighley who started out his career as a bartender. Though Corner & Keighley are listed at four different locations in the directories from 1874 to 1882, the business remained in the same one to two block radius to the 1000 block of Beach Street in Fishtown.¹⁹ Corner appears to have been the lead partner in the firm.²⁰



Left: Advertisement published by Edward Corner in *The Times*.²¹ Right: Advertisement for Rags published in *Motor World Wholesale*.²²



¹⁴ Zimring, “Dirty Work,” 85–94.

¹⁵ *Gopsill’s Philadelphia City Directory for 1870* (Philadelphia: James Gopsill, 1870).

¹⁶ *Gopsill’s Philadelphia City Directory for 1871* (Philadelphia: James Gopsill, 1871).

¹⁷ William E. Harper, salesman, John P. Hopkins, sailmaker, James Toger, waterman (*Gopsill’s Philadelphia City Directory for 1870* [Philadelphia: James Gopsill, 1870]).

¹⁸ According to Craig Bruns, Chief Curator at Philadelphia’s Independence Seaport Museum, this reference would fit into the context of Edward Corner’s life, providing him with the knowledge and potentially the connections required to establish a successful business.

¹⁹ The following locations appear in the *Gopsill’s Philadelphia City Directory*: 1083 Beach St., 1873–1874; 1084 Beach St., 1875; 1056 Beach St., 1877–81; 1048 N. Delaware Ave., 1882.

²⁰ When they purchase their first property in 1881, Corner is noted as having a three-quarters and Keighley a one-quarter interest in the lot.

²¹ Advertisement. *The Times*. Philadelphia, Pa, 23 Feb 1898.

²² *Motor World Wholesale*. Volume 48.

By 1881, the firm was doing well enough to be able to purchase a three story brick house and lot at 1078–80 Beach Street for \$5,750.²³ The property not only provided the firm with a security of a fixed location but the double lot (40 feet wide by 100 feet) also gave them the much needed space their business required. In 1891, Edward Corner acquired for \$2,000 the brick building and lot next door at 1078 Beach Street which added another 19½ feet to his Beach Street frontage.²⁴ Corner bought out Keighley’s interest in the business and property in 1893 and continued on it under his own name.²⁵ The business remained at this location until the move to 1100–02 N. Delaware Avenue in 1921.

Between 1873 and the late 1890s, Corner & Keighley was a relatively solid business, advertising all manner of products for sale in local newspapers.²⁶ The city directories for this period variously list the business as rags, junk, paper stock with rags being the most frequently used heading.²⁷ All these headings, however, relate to the same business.²⁸ In 1897, Edward Corner advertised “...a lot of plumber’s Yoakum, Cheap, which is available at 1078–80–82 Beach Street,” indicating the versatility of a junk man’s products. Through the last decade of the nineteenth century and the first decade of the twentieth century, Edward and his son Edward L. Corner were recorded as having made dozens of purchases of “condemned property” at Navy Yard sales, buying products that the firm no doubt repurposed and resold.²⁹ Corner often employed females on a temporary basis to “rip clothes,” working also as “Skirters and Sorters” at his Beach Street warehouse.³⁰ In September 1900, Edward Corner advertised “Canvas, Anchors, Chains, Etc. Army Tents all sizes,” as well as second hand canvas and rope—perhaps his local specialty.³¹

²³ Deed: Benjamin H. Brown, lumber merchant, to Edward Corner and William J. Keighley, dealers, 22 December 1881, Philadelphia Deed Book J.O’D., No. 11, p. 25, City Archives of Philadelphia (hereafter CAP).

²⁴ Deed: Sarah Wood, widow, John A. Ristine and Anna E. his wife, Isaac A. Wood and Josephine E., his wife, Henry F. Bauer and Laura V., his wife, Edward J. Kirk and Lizzie M., his wife, to Edward Corner, dealer, 29 January 1891, Philadelphia Deed Book T.G., No. 8, p. 218, CAP.

²⁵ Deed: William J. Keighley, dealer, to Edward Corner, dealer, 27 January 1893, for \$2,300, Philadelphia Deed Book T.G., No. 260, p. 425, CAP.

²⁶ For example: Classifieds, “Scrap Iron, Metals, Etc.,” *North American*, 28 October 1899.

²⁷ The breakdown is as follows: rags, 1873–75, 1879–80, 1882–86, 1890–99; junk, 1877, 1881, 1888–89, 1893, 1901; paper stock, 1878.

²⁸ For example, the 1904 city business directory adds under the heading for rags “see also Junk, Paper stock” (William H. Boyd, *Boyd’s Co-Partnership and Resident Business Directory of Philadelphia City* [Philadelphia: C.E. Howe Company, 1904]).

²⁹ *Annual Reports of the Navy Department*, 1918.

³⁰ “FEMALE: CLOTH, Skirters and Sorters wanted,” *The Times* (Philadelphia: Pa), 26 January 1898.

³¹ Advertisement. *The Times* (Philadelphia: Pa), 6 May 1900.



The Edward Corner Family. Top: Blanche, Elsie, William, and Fannie. Bottom: Edward L., Elizabeth T., Edward (founder of the business), and Katie.³²

After Edward Corner died in 1903 at the age of 62, his sons Edward L. and William D. took over the management of the business for their mother, the legal owner, and successfully helped the business transition to the marketplace of the early twentieth century.³³ The sons were able to respond successfully to the changes in the general economy of Fishtown and Philadelphia and they also began to reach out to the national market.

One of the ways the Corner business adapted was to specialize in a variety of products. Building off their long practice of working with rags, their business started selling rags rather than just collecting them. In 1916, they placed an ad in a national automotive journal stating that they had “Rags for cleaning automobiles, all clean stock, let us supply your garage or repair shop.”³⁴ They continued the sale of these rags into the 1920s at 1100–02 N. Delaware Avenue.³⁵

Turning to the advantages of their location near the Delaware River and the port, the Corners began to sell rope and related products. A product called Old Manila Rope was one of their specialties. It was a rope that was particularly adaptable to be being recycled into Oakyum (Yoakum) used to caulk pipes and the spaces between planks of wood or iron and steel plates of a ship’s hull.³⁶

³² Robson, Jeanne. Personal communications (via online communications). 29 April 2015.

³³ "Pennsylvania, Philadelphia City Death Certificates, 1803–1915," Index Family Search, Salt Lake City, Utah; Kenneth W. Milano, *Remembering Kensington and Fishtown: Philadelphia's Riverward Neighborhoods* (Philadelphia: The History Press, 2008).

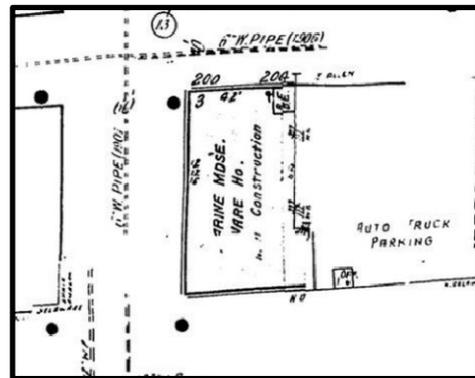
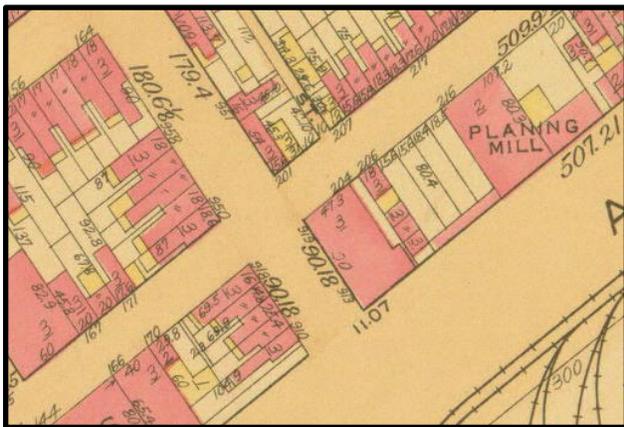
³⁴ *Motor World Wholesale*, 48 (1916): 102.

³⁵ “Wipers and Polishing Cloths,” *Automobile Trade Directory* 19:2 (April 1921).

³⁶ Bruns, Craig, Correspondence.

Strings became another specialty. As one national trade journal describes in 1913:

Over fifty years ago Edward Corner established himself in business at Nos. 1078–80–82 Beach Street, Philadelphia, with a line of general merchandise. One of his departments made a specialty of selling strings to nearby [meat] packers. This department gradually grew larger, until today it is a very important branch of the business. The founder of the business died about ten years ago, leaving it in the hands of his sons, who have shown their competence by increasing it very large, particularly the ham string end of it. ... While ham strings may not appear to be a very large item, many thousands of tons are sold yearly by Mr. Corner, who takes pride in delivering his goods in the most sanitary way possible³⁷

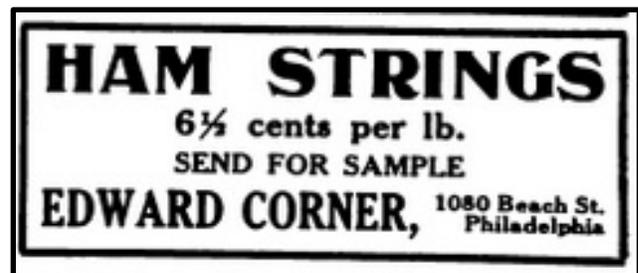


Left: G.W. Bromley and Co. *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia (Central)*, 1922. Right: Sanborn Map, Circa 1955.

The use of string was very important in air-dried ham, requiring a special string to compete the curing process. After the preparation process is complete, a ham that is air-dried is then wrapped and suspended with the use of a specific types of string that are both thin and strong. The Edward Corner firm sold ham string to a wide array of companies in the meat industry, including the Jacob Dold Packing Company in Buffalo, Armour in Milwaukee, and the Chicago firms of Cudahy, Hammond, S. & S. Swift.³⁸

The Corner's business plan appears to have been fairly resilient as the following notice during the 1910s shows:

Edward Corner, of No. 1080 Beach street, Philadelphia, who is a leading purveyor of ham strings to the trade, reports that he is ready to fill all orders, in spite of a fire which totally destroyed his warehouse a few days ago.³⁹



³⁷ *The National Provisioner*, 48 (22 March 1913): 43.

³⁸ *The National Provisioner*, 48 (22 March 1913): 43.

³⁹ "To Fill Orders For Ham Strings," *The National Provisioner*, 23 August 1913.

By 1919, the Corner firm appears in the *Industrial Directory of Pennsylvania* in two capacities: Junk – Paper, rags, etc, and Fuel. The directory also reported that five men worked in fuel, while three men and one woman worked in junk, two of which were always in the office.⁴⁰

The Corners were well aware of the power of advertising. As several of the illustrations and sources used here indicate, the Corners were reaching out to both a local and national audience in newspapers and trade journals in the 1910s.

During the 1920s, the Edward Corner firm faced some challenges brought on by major changes which were happening in their section of Fishtown and were related to the improvement of Philadelphia port facilities. These changes lead to the construction of 1100–02 N. Delaware Avenue and some shifts in their business that proved to be successful.

Port of Philadelphia Improvements and Delaware Avenue Expansion, 1907 – 1930

Philadelphia's very existence and success lies in the fact that it became a major port in both British North America and the United States. Located near abundant natural resources and agricultural products, the colonial city was able gain status as the largest port in terms of trade by 1760. Though later overtaken by New York, Philadelphia would still retain its status as the second largest export port throughout much of the nineteenth century.⁴¹

The leadership of Philadelphia's port began to falter by the beginning of the twentieth century. In 1907 its foreign trade was almost equal with that of Baltimore, a city with one-third the population of Philadelphia, and there were fewer than 20 wharves along the Delaware, most of which could not accommodate large ships.⁴² Though the City established a single agency to manage the port, the ability of Philadelphia's machine politics to effect change was limited. It finally took the stunning wake-up call of 1909 Interstate Commerce Commission decision that effectively codified the Port of Philadelphia's backwater status to propel the both business and political community forward to seek solution.⁴³ In two years' time the City managed to put together a draft agreement with the three major railroads to improve access to the port. Known as the "South Philadelphia Agreement," it provided the major railroads direct access to the wharves through a belt-line route. In exchange for giving up some rights of way and wharves to the City, the City gave the railroads land farther south in the City and, importantly in the context of the Corners, committed to widening Delaware Avenue to allow for rail lines connecting to all the wharves from lower end of South Philadelphia to Port Richmond.⁴⁴ The widening of Delaware Avenue to width of 150 feet was completed as far north as Fairmount Avenue when World War I diverted the City's resources.

It was under the leadership of Philadelphia's reform mayor, J. Hampton Moore and the Director of Wharves, Docks and Ferries, George F. Sproule, that "the greatest period of development of

⁴⁰ *Industrial Directory of Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg: J.L.L. Kuhn, 1919).

⁴¹ Thomas M. Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise: Merchants and Economic Development in Revolutionary Philadelphia* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986), 335–42.

⁴² Lloyd M. Abernethy, "Progressivism, 1906–1909," in *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History*, ed. Russell F. Weigley (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982), 546.

⁴³ Jonathan E. Farnham, "A Bridge Game: Constructing A Co-Operative Commonwealth in Philadelphia, 1900–1926," Ph.D. diss. (Princeton University, 2000), 413–14.

⁴⁴ *The Regional Plan of the Philadelphia Tri-State District* (Philadelphia: 1932), 447–49; Farnham, "A Bridge Game," 696–96.

the commercial facilities of the Port of Philadelphia than has been witnessed in all of its history” occurred.⁴⁵ In the first six months of the Moore Administration, the port of Philadelphia was a constant subject of discussion in the local news.⁴⁶ Plans to enlarge the port’s capacity with new and larger wharves were clear from the beginning of Sproule’s term. One could even say that there was fervor of positivity around his appointment within the maritime community, shown by a wide range of publications. In August 1920, the City announced its plans to revive the widening of Delaware Avenue by continuing it north of Fairmount Avenue to Laurel Street.⁴⁷ A bill was introduced into City Council in December and passed in January 1921 to authorize widening of the section between Laurel and Dyott Streets from 50 to 140 feet.⁴⁸

The progress of the port improvements would continue through much of the decade, serving as a new boom along the Delaware River. By 1930, the customs collections had increased by 93% since 1907.⁴⁹ This increased activity led to an overall enlargement of not only the port facilities but also a demand for commercial and industrial enterprises providing products and services for all components of the port. The physical improvements also forced many to adapt to the new environment. Obviously, commercial and industrial entities with enlarged and improved capacities and the ability to change benefited from this. The Corner firm was one of these.

Among the commercial and industrial enterprises, marine suppliers were both a significant and prominent component, as they were integral to the operations of the port and various associated shipping enterprises.

⁴⁵ “George Sproule [obituary],” *Journal of Commerce and Industry* (1928).

⁴⁶ “Moore and Cabinet View Improvement Along Waterfront,” *Philadelphia Press*. Philadelphia: 11 January 1920.

⁴⁷ “To Widen Delaware Avenue,” *Public Ledger*, 2 August 1920.

⁴⁸ Ordinance to Authorize the Opening of Delaware Avenue, from Laurel to Dyott Street, December 23, 1920, *Journal of the City Council of the City of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Dunlap Printing Co., 1920), 2:797; Passed 11 January 1921, *Journal of the City Council of the City of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: Dunlap Printing Co., 1921), 1:22–23.

⁴⁹ *The Regional Plan of the Philadelphia*, 105.



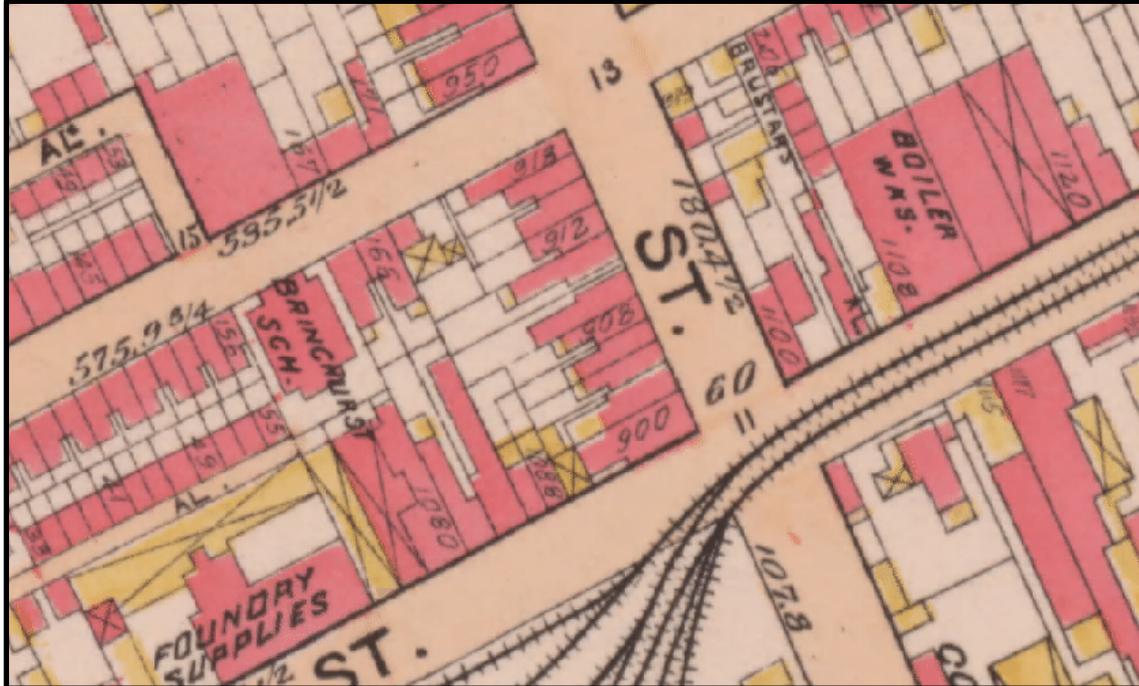
Advertising for the Port of Philadelphia, 1920.⁵⁰

Edward Corner Marine Merchandize Warehouse & Business, 1921 – 1955

The Edward Corner Marine Merchandize Warehouse at 1100–02 as well as the business were both by formed and changed by the enlargement of the Port of Philadelphia facilities in the 1920s. The expansion of Delaware Avenue from Laurel to Dyott Street was the direct cause that lead to the building of 1100–02 N. Delaware Avenue. The widening of the street took 90 of the 100 foot deep lot at the Corners' original business site, 1078–80–82 Beach Street and resulted in the demolition of all their existing buildings. The exigencies of that event, however, created an opportunity for the business to tap into the growing needs of the port and find a prominent location on the “great marginal highway of the Port of Philadelphia” – Delaware Avenue.⁵¹ The move also increased the capacity of their business with a new modern warehouse.

⁵⁰ Goodfellow, George B. *Advertising a City as a Merchant Advertisement*. Philadelphia: 6 June 1920.

⁵¹ Quote from George F. Sproule's report for the Department of Wharves, Docks and Ferries, *Third Annual Message of J. Hampton Moore, Mayor of Philadelphia ... For the Year Ending December 31, 1922* (Philadelphia: 1923), 233.



The Site of the Edward Corner Marine Merchandise Warehouse. Courtesy Philadelphia Geohistory.

Once the news revival of the plans to expand Delaware Avenue hit the newspapers in August 1920, the Corners quickly stepped into action looking for a new site for their business. Having lived in East Allen Street from the 1870s until their move to East Columbia Avenue in 1901, the Corners would have known most of the age-old residents in what was the oldest part of Fishtown and knew what location would be good for them. They chose to move the business around the corner to Shackamaxon Street and the new widened Delaware Avenue. By November 1920 Elizabeth T. Corner managed to negotiate with two owners to acquire two non-contiguous lots on Shackamaxon Street (one being at the corner of Allen Street) and in May 1921 she purchased the intermediate lot on Shackamaxon Street.⁵² The formal transfer of other parcels needed to complete the new site had to wait until the final appraisals of the Board of View in the fall of 1921. Two small lots on the new widened Delaware Avenue were purchased in December 1921.⁵³ All together the lots had roughly eight buildings on them, two of which were stores, and covered the addresses of 913, 917, and 919 Shackamaxon Street; 204 and 206 Allen Street; and a small court called Day's (formerly Brustar's) Lane.⁵⁴

⁵² Deed: Julius Kress and Amelia, his wife, to Elizabeth T. Corner, 8 November 1920, Deed Book J.M.H., No. 1033, page 169 (Deed Registry Plan 17N4, Plot 4); Deed: John A. Hoffman to Elizabeth T. Corner, 8 November 1920, Deed Book J.M.H., No. 963, page 409, (Deed Registry Plan 17N4, Plot 225); Deed: Edward S. Carlin and Elizabeth S., his wife, to Elizabeth T. Corner, 20 May 1921, Deed Book J.M.H., No. 1082, page 285, CAP (Deed Registry Plan 17N4, Plot 127).

⁵³ Deed: Horace A. Ebener and Lillian V., his wife, Benjamin F. Wagner and Dora A., his wife, and James A. Shawcross and Elsie, his wife, to Elizabeth T. Corner, 22 December 1921, Deed Book. J.M.H., No. 1511, page 506 (Deed Registry Plan 17N4, Plot 251); Deed: Wilhelmina Mueller to Elizabeth T. Corner, 28 December 1921, Deed Book. J.M.H., No. 1595, page 461, CAP (Deed Registry Plan 17N4, Plot 252).

⁵⁴ Sanborn Map Company, *Insurance Maps of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*, vol. 3 (New York: 1916, original edition), plate 261.



Laying the cornerstone, 1921. Those pictured include: Unknown, Unknown, Bart Hillman, Fanny Corner, Bessie Corner (left of cornerstone), Robert Robson, Blanche Hillman. Edward Corner Robson (with hammer), Grandma Corner, Elsie Corner Robson. Top middle: Edward L. Corner and William Corner. Courtesy the Severe-Robson Family.

While the Corners were assembling the lots for their new site, they commissioned A. Raymond Roff to design and construct a modern warehouse to suit their commercial needs. Roff was familiar with buildings of this type by 1920, having bid on much larger projects since as early as 1904 when his firm was among the qualified bidders for the “new clothing depot” for the United States Navy at South Broad Street and Washington Avenue—the Quartermaster Terminal.⁵⁵

Even before title to the final two lots on Delaware Avenue was transferred, Roff filed a building permit for Edward T. Corner on September 6, 1921 for the purpose of constructing a two-story brick warehouse at Delaware Avenue and Shackamaxon Street.⁵⁶ The original plans, however, required revisions almost immediately. On October 27, Roff filed an additional permit to add a third story.⁵⁷ The Corners clearly recognized that the new location which had a smaller footprint than their original property needed to compensate by building up. The new building was

⁵⁵ Elihu Root, *Report of the Secretary of the Navy* (Washington, D.C.: 1904).

⁵⁶ Permit No. 8695 of 1921, Philadelphia Building Permits, CAP.

⁵⁷ Permit No. 10910 of 1921, Philadelphia Building Permits, CAP.

estimated to cost \$36,000 and may have been funded in part by the \$55,861.30 the Corners received for their original site.⁵⁸

**Cornell, Leo. J., N. W. cor. Fifty-ninth and Chestnut, Battery Service and Auto Supplies.
Corner, Edward, 1100-1106 N. Delaware ave., Rope, Canvas, Iron and Metals.
Cortright, H. K., President Cortright Coal Co., Pennsylvania Building, Coal Wholesale**

Edward Corner's listing in the *Annual Report* of the Philadelphia Board of Trade, 1923.⁵⁹

The move and new building was a major event for the family. They commissioned a corner stone to be carved that had the date of the founding of the business and the date of the new building. Sometime in September or October 1921, the entire family assembled for the cornerstone laying and had a photographer document the event.

The new location provided the business with a prominent corner location on Delaware Avenue which it still possesses today. Knowing the power advertising from their efforts of the previous ten to twenty years, they took full advantage of the site by including signage on the building that could be readily seen from a distance and would make the building a familiar landmark along Delaware Avenue. When seen through contemporary and later photos of Delaware Avenue in Fishtown into the 1950s, the Corner's buildings signage was a unique feature of the landscape. Most of the other buildings lacked any large and prominent signage on the same scale of the Corner building.



Looking northwest at Delaware Avenue and Shackamaxon. The Edward Corner Marine Merchandise Warehouse is on left, 1955.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Building costs from building permits; "Delaware Avenue Claims Cut Down," *Public Ledger*, 8 December 1922.

⁵⁹ Philadelphia Board of Trade. *Ninetieth Annual Report of 1923*.

⁶⁰ Balionis, Francis and Atheniasis T. Mallis. N.W. Views of N. Delaware Avenue & Shackamaxon Street. Philadelphia: City of Philadelphia/DOR Archives, 15 July 1955.

As can be expected, the business at the new location retained elements of the Beach Street days. In 1921 *The Automobile Trade Directory* listed “Corner, Edward” as being dealers in “Wipers and Polishing Cloths” and *Lockwood’s Directory of the Paper and Stationary Trade* as “only the Wholesale Packers and Dealers are included in this list” dealing in rag-quality paper products—i.e. rope and cordage.⁶¹ By 1926, Edward L. Corner was toasting the paper industry with others interested in “rag-content” at an industry dinner. That same year the Corners were listed again by the Board of Trade, in all of the categories.⁶² The company even had regular listings in *America’s Textile Reporter*.⁶³

The 1922 annual report of the Philadelphia Board of Trade spoke best to Edward Corners primary products in the early 1920s: metals, ropes and cordage.⁶⁴ Only three other firms in Philadelphia are listed in the same directory.⁶⁵ An additional product listed was canvas, of which Corner was one of only four firms.⁶⁶ The same listings were repeated in 1923, only all of the specialties were listed in one line under the new Delaware Avenue address, as well as separately under each specialty.⁶⁷

⁶¹ “Wipers and Polishing Cloths,” *The Automobile Trade Directory* 19:2 (April 1921); “Philadelphia,” *Lockwood’s Directory of the Paper and Stationary Trade*, 1921.

⁶² Philadelphia Board of Trade. *Ninety-Second Annual Report of 1926*. Philadelphia: 1926.

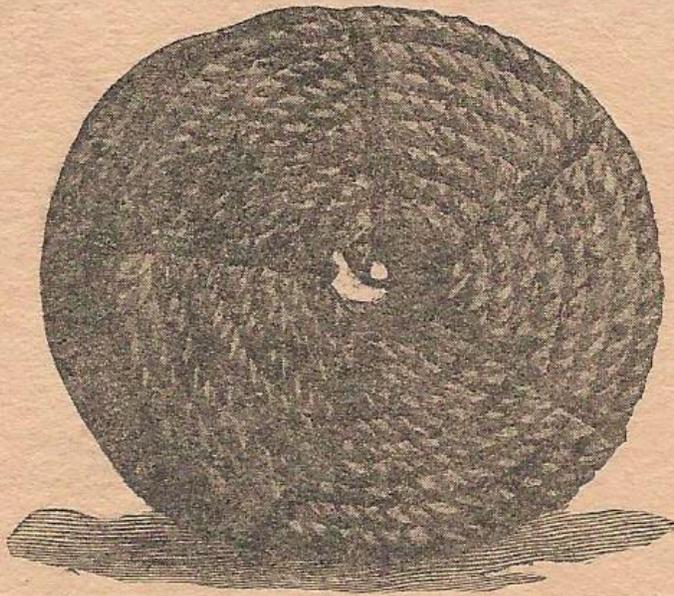
⁶³ “Corner, Edward,” *America’s Textile Reporter*, 34:11 (August 1920).

⁶⁴ Philadelphia Board of Trade, *Eighty-Ninth Annual Report of 1922* (Philadelphia: 1922).

⁶⁵ They were: Edwin H. Fidler Company at 517 Arch Street, the Schlichter Jute Cordage Company at 20 N. Front Street, and the Standard Rope Company at 427 Drexel Building.

⁶⁶ The others were: Barnett Canvas Goods and Bag Company at 41 N. Eleventh Street, William G. Halkett Company at 218 Chestnut Street, and the Keystone Canvas Goods and Flag Company at 1012–1018 Filbert Street.

⁶⁷ Philadelphia Board of Trade. *Ninetieth Annual Report of 1923*. Philadelphia: 1923.



Gentlemen:

We make a Specialty of

**OLD
MANILA ROPE**

Call us up before you sell
**GET OUR PRICE
DO IT NOW**

EDWARD CORNER

1100 N. DELAWARE AVE., PHILA., 25

Bell, REgent 9-7286



Advertisement Card for Edward Corner, 1100 N. Delaware Avenue, Circa 1920s.

Another set of products the firm took on was contractor's supplies. The first time this designation is used is found in the 1912 city directory and it reappears with regularity particularly in the 1920s. The building boom in Philadelphia during the 1920s made this another lucrative market for the Corner firm to enter into. The firm maintained momentum through the 1920s, which, despite the end, proved to be a great decade of prosperity. The Philadelphia Board of Trade reported the company's specialties again in 1924 and 1925.⁶⁸



Looking west, this 1955 photograph depicts the environs of the Edward Corner Marine Merchandise Warehouse (on right). Courtesy the City of Philadelphia.⁶⁹

Edward Corner was always in the city directory and, again, in the Board of Trade's Annual Report in 1927.⁷⁰ The same listings were maintained in 1928.⁷¹ This just so happened to be the year in which Elizabeth T. Corner incorporated the business under the name "Edward Corner" with the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.⁷² And even with the Crash of 1929, the listing prevailed.⁷³ Almost every year, the Report of the Secretary of the Navy included Edward Corner as a purchaser during this period.⁷⁴

Responding to the increasing business of the port that the City's new improvements created, the Corner business also began to specialize in marine related products and advertise this. Their established Old Manilla Rope business even became a fixture of the new building as the sign still visible today reads "WE BUY OLD ROPE." The references in the signage on the outside of the building – "ANCHORS AND CHAINS" "BOAT AND SHIP SUPPLIES" – all point to the Corner's desire to take part in the marketplace of the expanding port as it reached into Fishtown. The city directories document this shift of the business at the Delaware Avenue location.⁷⁵ In 1923, the main listing for Edward Corner has "gen[era]l. supplies." 1924 lists "ship chandler" and 1925 has following:

⁶⁸ Philadelphia Board of Trade. *Ninety-First Annual Report of 1924*. Philadelphia: 1924.

⁶⁹ Balionis, Francis and Atheniasis T. Mallis. N.W. Views of N. Delaware Avenue. Philadelphia: City of Philadelphia/DOR Archives, 1955.

⁷⁰ Philadelphia Board of Trade. *Ninety-Third Annual Report of 1927*. Philadelphia: 1927.

⁷¹ Philadelphia Board of Trade. *Ninety-Fourth Annual Report of 1928*. Philadelphia: 1928.

⁷² Edward Corner, Entity Number: 2141489, 28 May 1928, Database of Corporations, Department of State, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Accessed on May 4, 2015.

⁷³ Philadelphia Board of Trade. *Ninety-Fifth Annual Report of 1929*. Philadelphia: 1929.

⁷⁴ "Statement 34.—Purchasers of Condemned Property, Fiscal Year 1930," Report of the Secretary of the Navy. Washington, D.C.: Department of the Navy, 1930.

⁷⁵ *Polk's-Boyd's Philadelphia Directory* (Philadelphia: J.L. Polk & Company) for 1924 to 1930.

CORNER EDWARD (Elizabeth, Edward L and William D Corner), Marine Merchandise [*sic*] 1100 N Delaware, Phone Bell Regent 7286⁷⁶

This would continue into the 1930s.

While the Crash of 1929 certainly left much of Philadelphia and the nation in an economic crisis, Edward Corner did not fold like many others that were never heard of again. Few business records exist to describe the activity during this period but regular listings in local directories as well as information provided by descendants show that though the period was rocky the company remained solvent.

By the 1940s, Philadelphia's local marine and maritime interests had dwindled. Old suppliers died out and the post-war period did not lead to great prosperity for the Port of Philadelphia. Nevertheless, the industry was not completely inert. Few changes were made to the building over the years due to the consistency of the business which continued to adapt to the changing needs of the time. For instance, one of the few permits filed by Edward L. Corner in 1945, when an oil tank was installed at the site allowing the Corners to begin selling fuel.⁷⁷

The Businessman's Directory of 1949–50 listed six companies under "Marine Supplies," one being our subject:

Corner, Edward
1100 N. Delaware Ave.
Regent 9–7286⁷⁸

Other suppliers listed at this time were the Marine Equipment and Supply Company at 116 Walnut Street, W.E. Gochenaur Manufacturing Company at 525 Arch Street; Johnson & Towers, Inc. at 113–115 Market Street; L. Sichel & Sons, Inc. at 126 S. Front Street; and Elisha Webb & Son Co. at 136 S. Front Street.⁷⁹ The history of Edward Corner closes in 1955 at the death of Edward L. Corner. The building was sold Edward L. Corner's sisters in 1960.⁸⁰

⁷⁶ *Polk's-Boyd's Philadelphia Directory* (Philadelphia: J.L. Polk & Company, 1924), 422.

⁷⁷ Permit No. 1375 of 1945 Philadelphia Building Permits, CAP.

⁷⁸ "Marine Supplies," *The Philadelphia Classified Business Directory: 1949–50* (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Directory Company, 1949).

⁷⁹ "Marine Supplies," *The Philadelphia Classified Business Directory*.

⁸⁰ Deed: Blanche C. Hillman, Clarence E. Robson and Elsie C., his wife, and James R. Anderson, Jr., executor of the Will of Bessie C. Corner, to Joseph Matusow, 25 March 1960, Philadelphia Deed Book C.A.B., No. 1321, p. 361, CAP.



Elizabeth T., Katie Ellen, and Fannie Mary Corner. Courtesy the Severe-Robson Family.

The Corner Family and Fishtown, 1873 – 1955

Fishtown was not only the home of the Edward Corner business but it would be the home of the family for at least two generations. When Corner and Keighley first appears in the city directories in 1873 at 1083 Beach Street, Edward Corner and his family were listed as living a block away at 1084 N. Delaware Avenue.⁸¹ The following year the family moved to 100 block of E. Allen Street right behind the business on Beach Street and would remain there until 1889.⁸² Their next home was just a block away at 214 E. Allen Street, which was only a short distance from the 1921 warehouse. It was on these two blocks of E. Allen Street that the Corners raised their children. All the houses they had here were rented.⁸³ Edward Corner was able to purchase his first home – a recently built house – at 1240 Marlborough Street which was within walking distance of the business.⁸⁴ Edward was not able to enjoy the house for long because he died in 1903.

The Edward and Elizabeth T. Corners had twelve children—six of whom died before 1900.⁸⁵ The surviving children included Katie Ellen Corner Severe (1871–1917); Edward Lukens Corner

(1872–1955), William D. Corner (1875–1930), Fannie Mary Corner (1880–1932), Blanche L. Corner Hillman (1883–1963), and Elsie Piersig Corner Robson (1888–?).

Elizabeth T. Corner remained in the 1200 block of Marlborough Street for three solid decades after the death of her husband. In 1910, Elizabeth was enumerated at home with Blanche, Fannie and Elsie.⁸⁶ In 1920, Elizabeth was in residence with her two unmarried daughters—Blanche and Fannie—then in their thirties. However, Blanche would soon marry Bart Hillman, while Fannie never married, always living with her mother.⁸⁷ In 1930, Elizabeth and her spinster daughter Fannie were still in the family home. The house was valued at \$6,000 and they even had a

⁸¹ *Gopsill's Philadelphia City Directory for 1873* (Philadelphia: James Gopsill, 1873).

⁸² The family lived in the following houses in the 100 block of E. Allen Street: 114, 1875–1878; 140, 1879–1883; 126, 1884, 140, 1885–1888 (*Gopsill's Philadelphia City Directory*).

⁸³ Edward Corner; p. 4, line 65, Enumeration District 336, City of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Census of Population; *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900* (National Archives Microfilm Publication T623, roll 1459); Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, NARA.

⁸⁴ *The Times* (Philadelphia: Pa), 25 November 1901; Plan 17N6, Plot 208, Title Registration Sheets, Board of Surveyors Registry Office Records, Record Group 90.10, CAP (hereafter Title Registration Sheets, CAP).

⁸⁵ Edward Corner; *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*.

⁸⁶ Edward L. Corner; p. 9A, line 24, Enumeration District 278, City of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Census of Population; *Thirteenth Census of the United States, 1910* (National Archives Microfilm Publication T624, roll 1392); Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, NARA.

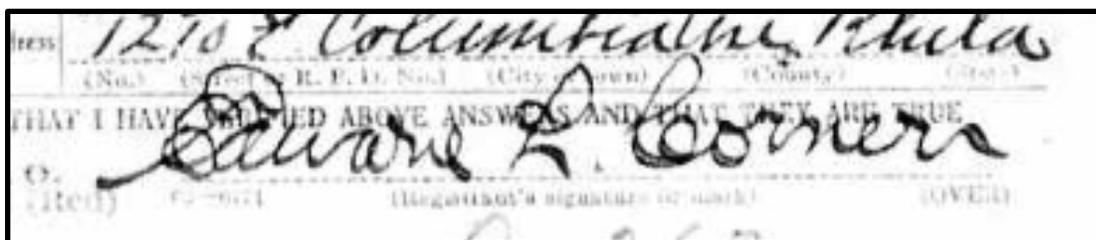
⁸⁷ United States of America, Bureau of the Census. Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920. (NARA microfilm publication T625, 2076 rolls). Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29. National Archives, Washington, D.C.

radio.⁸⁸ Elizabeth died in 1933, at which time the business was under the control of her living children.

Of the Corner children, Edward Lukens Corner would attain the most prominence in the Fishtown community. Edward was born on December 26, 1872 in the 200 block of E. Allen Street. Growing up in his father's firm, he would eventually take over the family business with the help of his brother William and oversee the move to and construction of 1100–02 N. Delaware Avenue. At the time of his father's death, Edward not only took over the chief management of the family business but also married Bessie C. Taylor in Philadelphia. The couple never had children.

The young couple first lived in the 400 block of E. Thompson Street but, by the time of the World War I draft, the Corners were living at 1208 E. Columbia Avenue.⁸⁹ The Taylors, Bessie's family, owned a summer house down the shore, in Ocean City, New Jersey, which the Corners eventually took over, renaming the house "Renroc," which honors Corner in reverse.⁹⁰

Edward L. Corner had connections to a number of Fishtown institutions. He served the board of local building and loan association called the Penn Treaty Building Association.⁹¹ His most notable connection was with the Kensington Soup Society. The Kensington Soup Society was founded in 1844 originally to provide soup to the poor during the winter months. Its program later expanded to provide fuel to needy families. Edward L. Corner joined the board of managers in 1906 and became president in 1919 and would hold this post until 1955. He was the longest serving president. One of his accomplishments included leading the organization through the World War II years. He served as chair of the committee organized to celebrate the 100th anniversary in 1944.⁹² Corner's philanthropy was not restricted to the Soup Society. He was well known in Fishtown for extreme generosity.⁹³



Signature of Edward L. Corner. Courtesy Ancestry.com.

⁸⁸ Edward L. Corner; p. 4B, line 78, Enumeration District 51–833, City of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Census of Population; *Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930* (National Archives Microfilm Publication T626, roll 2100); Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29, NARA.

⁸⁹ World War I Draft Registration Cards, 1917–1918, Pennsylvania; Registration County: Philadelphia; Roll: 1907613; Draft Board: 11, NARA.

⁹⁰ Jessie Severe Robson, Personal interview (via telephone), 29 April 2015.

⁹¹ "Financial Shorts," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 13 October 1951.

⁹² Kenneth W. Milano, *History of the Kensington Soup Society* (Philadelphia: The History Press, 2009).

⁹³ Milano, *Remembering Kensington and Fishtown*, 126.



Above: Edward L. Corner.
Below: Edward L. and Bessie
Corner. Courtesy the Severe-
Robson Family.

Criterion C: Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style; and Criterion H: Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City.

1100-02 N. Delaware Avenue, the Edward Corner Marine Warehouse, reflects the environment in an era characterized by the distinctive architectural style as related to commercial/industrial buildings, specifically, warehouses, of Delaware Avenue in the 1920s; is part of or related to a context of commercial and/or industrial buildings of Delaware Avenue that define the commercial and industrial heritage of the City of Philadelphia and is unique and singular as a physical characteristic of Delaware Avenue and Fishtown, representing one of the last maritime and commercial venues.



Looking north, the environs of N. Delaware Avenue, Circa 1930s. Courtesy the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. Edward Corner Marine Merchandise Warehouse Circled in Red.

Criterion C: Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style;

As stated in the previous context, the building at 1100-02 N. Delaware Avenue that represents the architectural influence of not only major designers of the period, but, more importantly, the Federal government and its impact on the built environment. In 1919, the Office of the Constructing Quartermaster completed the Philadelphia Quartermaster Terminal in South Philadelphia. This massive facility is articulated in a streamline, “modern” architectural style, yet employing tradition and familiar material types used in Philadelphia since its beginnings—red brick and belt coursing.

While the Corners were assembling the lots for their new site, they commissioned A. Raymond Roff to design and construct a modern warehouse to suit their commercial needs. Roff was familiar with buildings of this type by 1920, having bid on much larger projects since as early as

1904 when his firm was among the qualified bidders for the “new clothing depot” for the United States Navy at South Broad Street and Washington Avenue—the Quartermaster Terminal.⁹⁴

While the Quartermaster Terminal is a massive facility and an engineering marvel, the east and west elevations of the terminal show that Roff and his designer were no doubt influenced by the then famous building.⁹⁵ Like the Quartermaster Terminal, the Edward Corner Marine Merchandise Warehouse is also designed in a similar streamline, “modern” architectural style and employs of red brick. The Edward Corner Marine Merchandise Warehouse emulates, in a much smaller format, architectural style to the Quartermaster Terminal at its east and west elevations. Therefore 1100-02 N. Delaware Avenue reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style.



Philadelphia Quartermaster Terminal. Courtesy the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission.

Criterion H: Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City.

As one of the last surviving buildings of Fishtown’s commercial and industrial maritime community, as well as the larger context of the Port of Philadelphia and Delaware Avenue, 1100-02 N. Delaware Avenue is an almost singular representative of the city’s private, commercial maritime past, as related to rags, rope, and marine supply. Edward Corner’s presence in the neighborhood dates back to the founding of his business in 1870, having evolved over time over time due to the demise of Fishtown’s old world maritime community and the enlargement of the Port of Philadelphia.

The building itself and its iconic ghost signage is an established visual feature of the neighborhood and community of Fishtown and Kensington, as well as the larger Port of Philadelphia. The building and its signage is emblematic of the lost maritime world of Fishtown and Kensington, and has also been documented by numerous architects, artists, entities, individuals, and photographers, which can be seen on Flickr, Hidden City Philadelphia, Panoramio, Pinterest, PlanPhilly, etc. Artistic photographs, artist’s renderings, scale models, and etc. represent the building, further illuminating its importance as a visual feature in Philadelphia.

⁹⁴ Elihu Root, *Report of the Secretary of the Navy* (Washington, D.C.: 1904).

⁹⁵ Philadelphia Commercial Museum Photograph Collection (ca. 1840–1954), Manuscript Group 219. Bureau of Archives, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. Accessed on 20 April 2015.

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Contributors

Upon gaining intelligence about plans that include the demolition of this iconic undesignated historic resource, Oscar Beisert, Architectural Historian and Historic Preservationist, first submitted a nomination for the Edward Corner Marine Merchandize Warehouse on April 7, 2015, which was followed by a revised version submitted on May 6, 2015. This version was rejected by the Philadelphia Historical Commission on July 7, 2015, and the third draft was submitted on August 11, 2015. The following individuals provided substantial assistance required for the completion of the three drafts that led to this nomination, with special gratitude to J.M. Duffin, Archivist and Historian, for all of his advice and hard work: Craig Bruns, Chief Curator, Independence Seaport Museum; Laura DiPasquale, Philadelphia Historical Commission; Jean Robson, descendant of Edward Corner; Kenneth Milano, Kensington Extraordinaire and Historian; and Aaron Wunsch, Ph.D., University of Pennsylvania.

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