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)

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

Street address: 2176-78 E. York Street

Postal code: 19125 Councilmanic District: 1

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2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: Dr. Thomas Shriner office and residence

Common Name: None

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3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

☒ Building ☐ Structure ☐ Site ☐ Object

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4. PROPERTY INFORMATION

Condition: ☐ excellent ☒ good ☐ fair ☐ poor ☐ ruins

Occupancy: ☒ occupied ☐ vacant ☐ under construction ☐ unknown

Current use: Private residence

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5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

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6. DESCRIPTION

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

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7. SIGNIFICANCE

Please attach the Statement of Significance.

Period of Significance (from year to year): from 1886 to 1915

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: 1886

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: Frank Furness (Furness & Evans), attributed

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan:

Original owner: John Ruhl

Other significant persons: Dr. Thomas Shriner

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 Laura DiPasquale, Preservation Planner Email Laura.DiPasquale@phila.gov

Organization Philadelphia Historical Commission Date 8 May 2015

Street Address City Hall, Room 576 Telephone 215-686-7660

City, State, and Postal Code Philadelphia, PA 19107

Nominator ☐ is ☒ is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt:_____

☐ Correct-Complete ☐ Incorrect-Incomplete Date:_____

Date of Notice Issuance:_____

Property Owner at Time of Notice

Name:_____

Address:_____

_____

City:_____ State:____ Postal Code:_____

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

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission:_____

Date of Final Action:_____

☐ Designated ☐ Rejected

5. Boundary Description

The boundary of the resource encompasses a rectangular lot located on the southwest corner of the intersection of E. York and Sepviva Streets. The parcel contains in front or breadth on E. York Street thirty-seven (37) feet, and of that width extends southwardly between lines parallel and along Sepviva Street sixty-seven (67) feet to an alley two (2) feet six (6) inches wide extending into and from said Sepviva Street. The property is known as Parcel No. 018N18-0176, Office of Property Assessment Account No. 313144101.

6. Building Description

2176-78 E. York Street is a three-story masonry residential building, constructed circa 1886 in the Queen Anne/Furnesque style. The building is finished in red brick with brownstone trim. The front façade faces E. York Street, with a secondary entrance to a one-story wing located on Sepviva Street. The building has three exposed facades; the western façade is a party wall. The building is composed of several volumes; a one-story wing at the southeast corner of E. York and Sepviva Streets, a three-story main block west of the one-story wing, and a two-and-a-half story rear ell directly behind the main block. The façade of the building showcases broken planes and intricate brickwork throughout. The roof over the main block is flat, while the roofs over the one-story wing and rear ell are hipped.

2176-78 E. York Street, May 2015, southeast and northeast elevations

Aerial images courtesy of Pictometry.

Northeast elevation

Southeast elevation

Northeast (York Street) Elevation

The front façade of the building faces north along E. York Street. The elevation along the street encompasses two volumes, a one-story wing on the southeast corner of E. York and Sepviva Streets, and a three-story main block. The main block shares its western wall with the neighboring house. The ground floor of the main block has a rusticated brownstone watertable, which does not continue onto the one-story wing. The main entrance to the property is located on the western end of the main block, and is accessed from E. York Street via five brownstone steps. The wide, wood door features three rows of three square panels over three lower, vertical panels. Two basement windows with wrought-iron grills are located directly east of the entrance steps. The watertable extends up to and includes the sills of the windows on the first floor. Two windows are located directly east of the main entrance. The windows are double-hung, rectangular, one-over-one wood windows set within gently arched masonry openings with rusticated brownstone lintels. Non-original storm windows have been installed on the exterior. A thick band of corbelled brickwork runs between the first floor windows and door. These corbels support the broken plane of the façade, which shifts outwards from this point to form a new plane which extends up to the cornice. A slanted, projecting brownstone beltcourse delineates the second floor from the ground floor, and serves as the sills for the two second-floor windows. The second-floor windows are double-hung, one-over-one rectangular wood windows set within arched-top masonry openings mounted with solider course lintels. A brick beltcourse in a basket weave pattern delineates the second floor from the third floor. The third floor has two double-hung, rectangular wood windows, with a twenty-four-over-one lite pattern, and brownstone lintels and sills. The cornice has prominent brick corbelling, with a slight projection from the plane of the façade, and terminates in a simple metal cap. The one-story wing is attached to the main block. The wing has a single arched-top basement window with an original wrought iron grill. The first and only floor of the wing has a double window with six-over-one double-hung, rectangular wood windows with a brownstone lintel and sill. The wing is finished with corbelling which aligns with and copies the pattern of the corbelling from the first floor of the main block.

2176-78 E. York Street, May 2015, northeast (York Street) elevation

2176-78 E. York Street, May 2015, northeast (York Street) elevation

2176-78 E. York Street, May 2015, northeast (York Street) elevation

2176-78 E. York Street, May 2015, first floor, northeast (York Street) elevation

2176-78 E. York Street, May 2015, front door, northeast (York Street) elevation

2176-78 E. York Street, May 2015, upper floors, northeast (York Street) elevation

2176-78 E. York Street, May 2015, upper floor windows & brick details, northeast (York Street) elevation

Southeast (Sepviva Street) Elevation

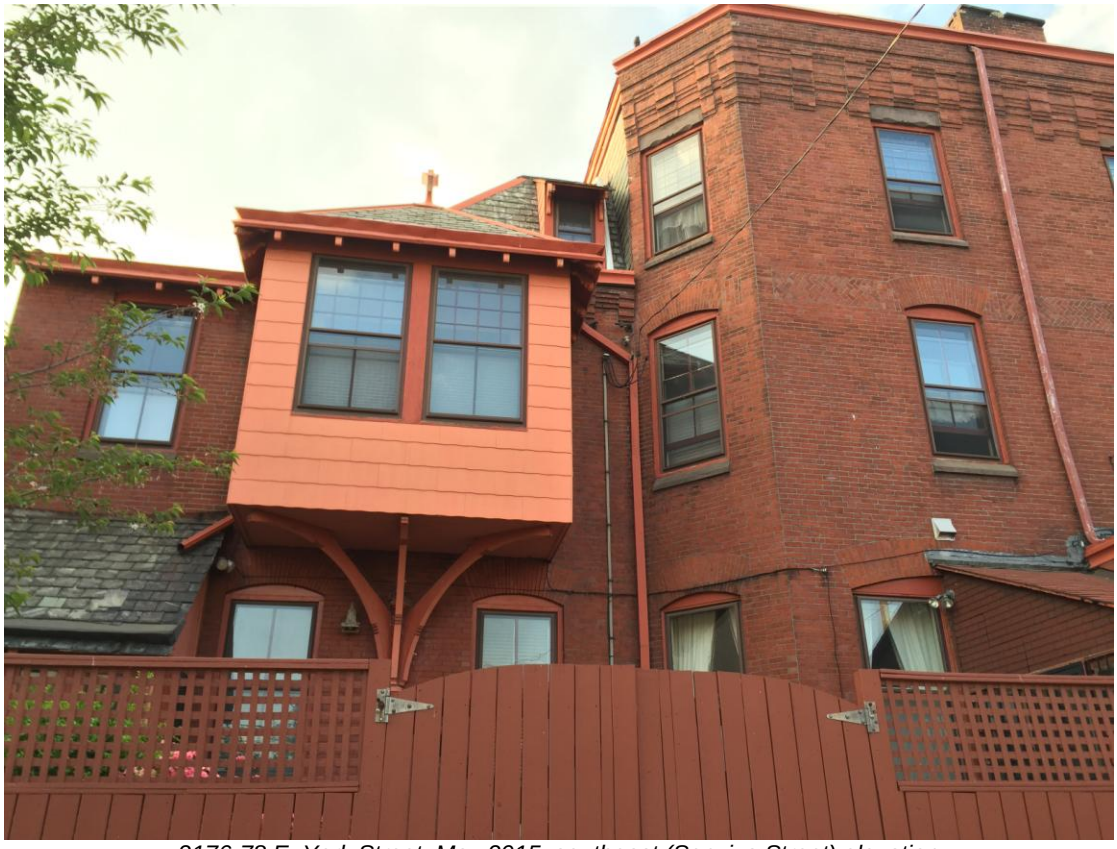
The one-story wing is located along this elevation. There is an entrance located on the northeast corner of the wing, which is accessed via three brownstone steps. The steps are enclosed by a non-original iron fence. The front door is wood with two panels and a transom, the top panel is glazed. The door is covered by a small, heavily pitched roof that sits on two wood brackets. The roof is finished with slate and wood shingles in the pediment. Directly south of the entrance there are two basement windows with rectangular sash, with original wrought-iron grills, and two double-hung, twelve-over-one wood windows in arched masonry openings. The windows are framed by the same ground-floor brick corbelling found along the main façade on E. York Street. This corbelling also serves as the cornice for the one-story wing. The roof over the wing is hipped and covered with shingles.

The southeast façade of the main block is visible along Sepviva Street. The brownstone and brick beltcourses on the front façade wrap the corner and are found along this elevation. There are two sets of windows on the second and third floors. The second-floor windows are rectangular, double-hung, two-over-two wood windows set within arched masonry openings with brick soldier course lintels. The third-floor windows are rectangular, double-hung, eight-over-one wood windows with brownstone lintels and sills. All windows have non-original storms installed on the exterior. The corbelled cornice found on the front façade wraps the corner and continues along this elevation. A short chimney is located towards the middle of the elevation. The southeastern corner of the main block is chamfered. There is a single window at each floor, which match the configuration of the other windows on their respective floors. The ground and second-floor windows are double-hung wood windows set in arched masonry openings with soldier course lintels and brownstone sills. The ground-floor window has a one-over-one pattern while the second-floor window has a two-over-two pattern. The third-floor window is a rectangular, eight-over-one wood double-hung window with a brownstone lintel and sill. The rear-ell of the property is slightly recessed from the main block. The ground floor of the rear-ell has two wood, two-over-two, double-hung windows set in arched openings with soldier course lintels. An attached wooden shed with a grey slate shed roof is directly adjacent to the windows. The second floor has a prominent bay which is clad in horizontal siding and is supported by three carved wood brackets. The bay has four windows, two on the sides and two on the front along Sepviva Street. All the windows are wood with non-original storms. The side windows have a two-over-two pattern and the front windows have an eight-over-two pattern. The bay has a hipped roof covered with grey slate and metal ridge rolls and is topped by a decorative finial. A single wood double-hung window with a two-over-two pattern is located directly adjacent to the bay. The rear-ell also has a half-floor. This floor is attached to the third-floor of the main block and only extends half of the length of the rear-ell. It features a dormer with a wood double-hung window with an eight-over-two pattern. The dormer has a shed roof covered in grey slate. The half floor has a hipped roof covered in grey slate.

The southwest elevation is not easily visible from the public's right-of-way. The northwest elevation is a party wall.

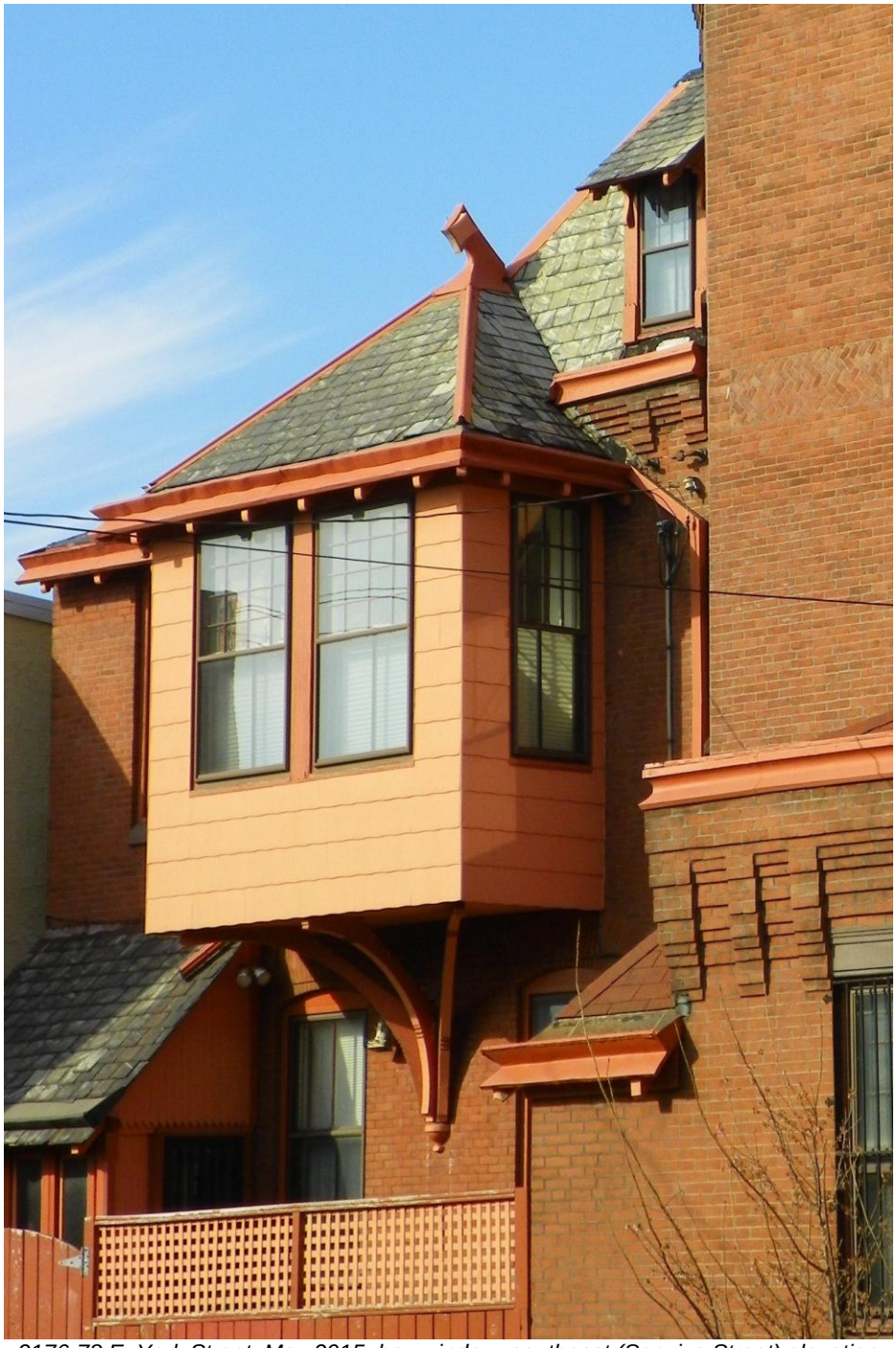
2176-78 E. York Street, May 2015, one-story wing, corner of E. York and Sepviva Streets

2176-78 E. York Street, May 2015, southeast (Sepviva Street) elevation



2176-78 E. York Street, May 2015, southeast (Sepviva Street) elevation

2176-78 E. York Street, May 2015, southeast (Sepviva Street) elevation



2176-78 E. York Street, May 2015, bay window, southeast (Sepviva Street) elevation

All photographs taken May 2015 by Historical Commission staff

7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The residence located at 2176-78 E. York Street is a significant historic resource that merits designation by the Philadelphia Historical Commission and inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The building satisfies Criteria for Designation a, d, e, and h of Section 14-1004 of the Philadelphia Code. The building:

(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;

(e) Is the work of 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;

(h) Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community, or City.

The building at the southwest corner of E. York and Sepviva Streets was constructed in 1886, and is significant as a remarkably well-preserved example of a Frank Furness interpretation of the Queen Anne style, and as a landmark building in the Kensington neighborhood. It is furthermore significant for its association with its first owner, John Ruhl, a conveyancer and Councilman turned criminal, as well as its second owner, Dr. Thomas Shriner, one of the most prominent physicians in northeast Philadelphia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Likely commissioned using the ill-gotten gains of Ruhl's embezzling scheme, the elegant and intricately-detailed home and office is visually striking in a neighborhood of primarily working-class homes.

***Criteria D, E, and H:* Constructed in 1886 as the home and office of conveyancer and Councilman John Ruhl, the building at 2176-78 Street has been attributed to the work of prominent Philadelphia architect, Frank Furness, and is an exceptionally well-preserved example of a Furness interpretation of the Queen Anne style for an urban parcel outside of center city proper. Built in a largely working-class neighborhood composed of modest, two and three-story Italianate rowhouses, the high-style Queen Anne building at York and Sepviva is a landmark in the community.**

Although the original building permit and deed have been lost, the building at 2176-78 E. York Street is known to have been constructed in 1886 as the home and real estate office of conveyancer and Councilman John Ruhl. The elegant three-story dwelling with attached one-story office has been attributed to Frank Furness owing to the striking stylistic elements of the design, which represent a Furnesque interpretation of the Queen Anne style.[1]

The English Queen Anne style came into vogue in the 1880s, following the Centennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1876, and remained one of the dominant residential architectural styles in the country until the early twentieth century. Constructed in 1886, the building at 2176-78 E. York Street features many typical Queen Anne elements, including articulated facades, an

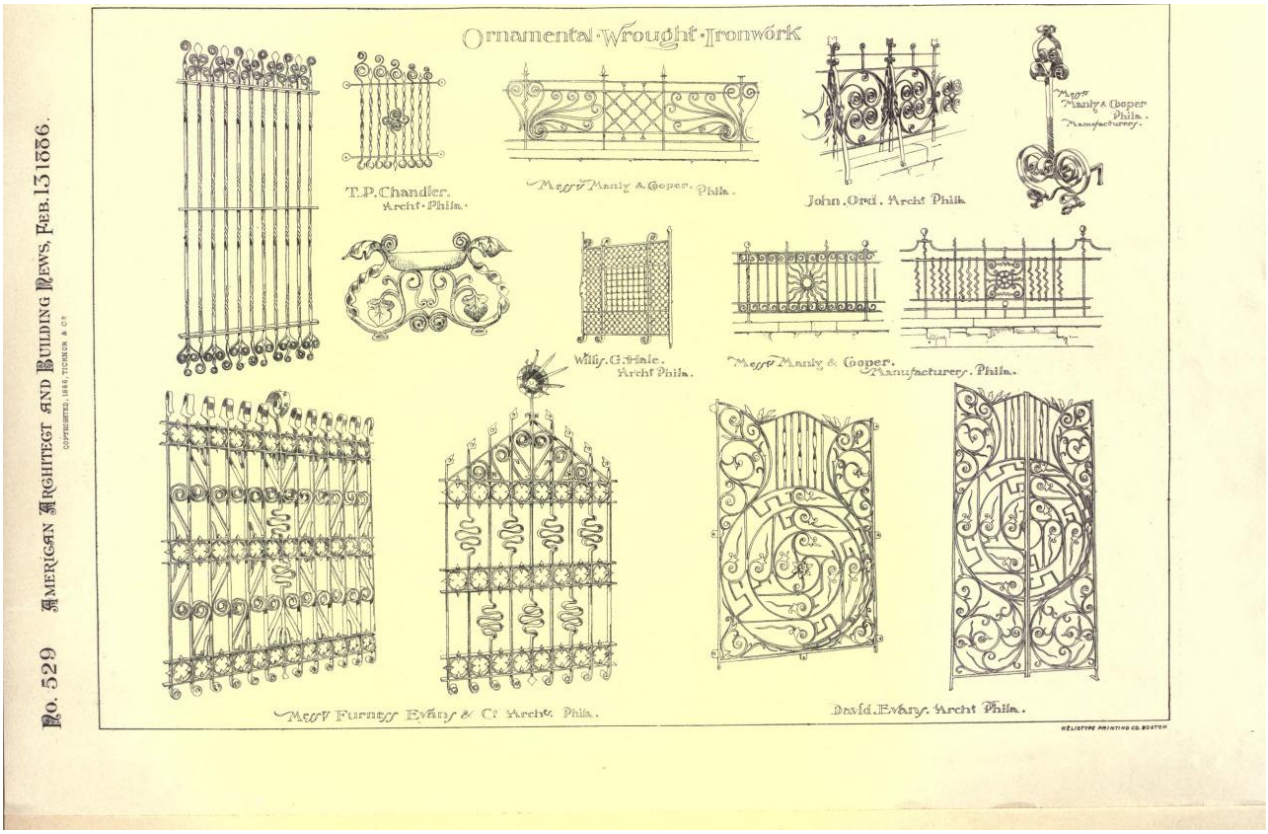
[1] The property was first attributed to Furness in the updated version of the seminal work *Frank Furness: The Complete Works, Revised Edition* by George E. Thomas, Jeffrey A. Cohen, and Michael J. Lewis, which features a fireplace detail that "reveal[s] Furness's interest in Japanese design." The property is misidentified, however, as the Dr. Thomas Skinner residence, perhaps a misreading of the handwritten deed.

asymmetrical footprint, the use of brownstone details and rusticated brownstone base, corbelled brickwork, wooden shingles, slate roofing, and multi-paned, or small square-paned, upper sash over a single-paned lower sash windows.

Responding to its urban, and specifically Philadelphian, context, the property at 2176-78 E. York Street is at once restrained and highly ornamental. Although the architect for the building cannot be confirmed, the level and type of detail applied to the design is characteristic of Philadelphia architect Frank Furness. While many Queen Anne buildings throughout the country employed materials other than brick, the architecture of Philadelphia remained synonymous with red brick through the end of the nineteenth century. In designing for urban parcels, Philadelphia architect Frank Furness paid homage to the Quaker City's red brick past by employing local red pressed brick, loading-bearing masonry construction. The playful use of details such as heavy corbelling and ornamental iron-work is also indicative of a Furness design. Basement grills on the front façade of the property contain motifs that strongly resemble those designed by Furness, Evans & Co. for production by the Manly & Cooper Manufacturing Company in 1886.[2] Although not part of this nomination, the fireplaces on the interior of the property feature Japanese-inspired forms popular with Furness after the late 1870s, and provide further evidence of Furness's involvement in the design of the property.[3]

Decorative wrought-iron grill on the basement window of 2176-78 E. York Street

[2] *The American Architect & Building News*. July-December ed. Vol. 20. Boston: Ticknor & Publishers, 1886.
[3] *Frank Furness: The Complete Works Revised Edition* (page 344H, catalog # 676A) features a photograph of a parlor fireplace detail taken in 1996 by George E. Thomas with the note "Interior fireplaces reveal Furness's interest in Japanese design while the stair detail is typical for the period."



Design for Wrought-Iron Work by the Manly & Cooper Manufacturing Co. from *The American Architect and Building News, Feb. 13, 1886.*

Frank Furness

Frank Furness was born in Philadelphia on 12 November 1839, the youngest son of Rev. William Henry Furness, a well known member of the Unitarian clergy.[4] He had three siblings who survived to adulthood, William Henry. Jr. (1827-1867), Annis Lee (1830-1908) and Horace Howard (1833-1912), and grew up in the center of Philadelphia in an intellectually and artistically oriented atmosphere.[5]

Although educated in the city's private schools, Furness did not attend a university. Instead, he began his architectural training in his teens with an apprenticeship in the office of Philadelphia architect John Fraser, under whose tutelage he remained until 1859, when he moved to New York City to study under renowned architect Richard Morris Hunt.[6]

Until 1868, no professional architecture schools existed in the United States; aspiring architects were either trained through apprenticeships or pursued studies abroad. In 1857, Richard Morris Hunt, a friend of William Furness, began to offer architectural instruction in the upper story of a purpose-built studio in New York City. Inspired by his own architectural education at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris, Hunt started his *atelier*, or workshop, to train American artists and

[4] Tatman, Sandra L., and Roger W. Moss*. Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects: 1700-1930*. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1985, page 287.
[5] Lewis, Michael, Frank Furness, Architecture and the Violent Mind. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2001, page 10.
[6] Tatman, Sandra L., and Roger W. Moss*. Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects: 1700-1930*. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1985, page 287.

architects. Furness entered Hunt's atelier in the spring of 1858, wherein he learned the "medievalized eclectic forms which he would later popularize in the Philadelphia area."[7] When the Civil War broke out in 1861, Furness enlisted in the Union Cavalry.[8]

Following the Civil War, Furness returned briefly to the Hunt atelier in 1864, leaving that same year to be married and begin his own architectural practice in Philadelphia.[9] He soon joined forces with his former mentor John Fraser and George W. Hewitt, forming the firm of Fraser, Furness & Hewitt (1867-1871). When Fraser left the firm to become the Supervising Architect of the United States Treasury Department in Washington, D.C., Furness & Hewitt remained together, taking on the important commission of the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts (1871-76). George Hewitt left the firm in 1875, and by 1881, Furness and his chief draftsman Allen Evans had established a new partnership of Furness & Evans.

In the early 1880s, Furness & Evans were flooded with work. Evans' high social position reinforced the firm's reputation among elite Philadelphians, and Evans provided a more subdued elegance to Furness's flamboyant and eclectic style. By 1886, the practice had become so large that Furness and Evans promoted several young draftsmen to partners, forming Furness, Evans & Co., a name which endured long past Furness's death in 1912.

After Furness' death in 1912, his work was seen as hopelessly out of fashion, and was almost universally vilified, and frequently demolished or altered. Since the mid-1970s, however, Furness has been increasingly recognized as one of the greatest American architects of the second half of the 19th century, and certainly one of the towering figures of Philadelphia architecture. His surviving designs have been saved, restored and are now some of the greatest architectural treasures of the city.

The house at 2176-78 E. York Street was constructed around 1886, one of the busiest periods for the firm of Furness & Evans, for conveyancer and newly-elected Councilman John Ruhl. It seems likely that Ruhl, a native Kensingtonian and son of German immigrants, who worked his way up the social ladder through both legal and illegal means, would have hired a firm famous for designing the residences of Philadelphia's elite to design his home and real estate office. Although building permits prior to 1886 have been lost, and no other documentation could be found to definitively link Furness to the property, given the stylistic elements of the building which reflect a Furnesque version of the Queen Anne style, and the ambitious nature of its owner, John Ruhl, it seems highly likely that the property has been accurately attributed to Furness. Constructed on the site of two separate lots that had been individually developed two decades earlier, as the Sepviva Estate was being divided and Kensington was pushing northwestward from its previous boundaries, the home and residence at 2176-78 E. York Street would have been as striking then as it is today. In a neighborhood of primarily working-class immigrant residents living in modest two and three-story Italianate rowhouses, the intricately designed, asymmetrical home in the Kensington section of the Philadelphia is an extremely rare example of Furness' residential architecture, or at minimum, influence, outside of center city proper.

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[7] Tatman, Sandra L., *American Architects and Buildings Database*. Philadelphia: The Athenaeum of Philadelphia.
[8] Thomas, George; Jeffrey Cohen and Michael Lewis, Frank Furness, The Complete Works. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1996, page 22.
[9] Tatman, Sandra L., and Roger W. Moss, *Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects: 1700-1930*. Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1985, page 287.

***<u>Criterion A</u>*: The building at 2176-78 E. York Street has significant character, interest or value as part of the development of the Sepviva Estate during the mid- to late-nineteenth century, and for its association with the life of its first owner, John Ruhl, a conveyancer and Councilman who embezzled large sums of money from the Sepviva Estate, among others, and, as a result, was forced to transfer his properties to pay the judgment against him. The property's next owner, Dr. Thomas Shriner, was the antithesis of John Ruhl, dedicating his life to serving the local population and advancing the field of medicine in northeast Philadelphia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.**

Early Development of Kensington and Northern Liberties

Following the establishment of the Pennsylvania Colony in 1682, William Penn and his Surveyor General Thomas Holme laid out the city of Philadelphia in a geometric grid pattern between the Delaware and Schuylkill Rivers and Vine and South Streets. Penn designated the areas surrounding Philadelphia to the north and west, including the area surrounding the property in question, as "Liberty Lands," distributing these 16,000 acres of liberty lands to English "First Purchasers," who received bonus property in the liberty lands in exchange for purchasing city plots. Many of these first purchasers acquired large tracts of land outside of the city proper, but did not immediately develop them, choosing instead to sell the land for a profit. The liberty lands were soon divided, with the land west of the Schuylkill River becoming Blockley Township, and the area between the Schuylkill and Delaware Rivers dividing into Penn Township on the west, and the unincorporated Northern Liberties Township on the east.

At the time of Penn's arrival, much of the land along the Delaware River, north of the city proper, was occupied by Dutch and Swedish settlers who had established subsistence farms on large tracts of land near the Cohocksink Creek and Gunner's Run (now Aramingo Avenue) in the mid-seventeenth century. The neighborhoods we know today as Fishtown, Kensington, and Port Richmond were built on part of a large tract of land known as Shackamaxon, a corruption of the term *Sakimauchheen Ing* used by the Lenni Lenape, who occupied the area on a semi-permanent basis prior to European arrival. Members of the Cock, Rambo, and Nelson families of New Sweden had been granted the lands north of the Cohocksink Creek, and their names appear on the 1681 Thomas Holme *Map of the Improved Part of Pensilvania in America*. In 1678, William Penn's deputy surveyor Thomas Fairman acquired an 1,800 acre tract from Lasse Cock, one of the early Swedish settlers. It is commonly held that Fairman's mansion, constructed in 1702, was built near the historic Treaty Elm, and was depicted in Benjamin West's iconic 1771 painting of *Penn's Treaty with the Indians.*

Detail from Thomas Holme, Map of Improved Part of Pensilvania in America, Divided into Counties, Townships and Lotts., 1681.

Although not first purchasers themselves, two Englishmen in particular would shape the development of the areas known today as Fishtown and Kensington. Anthony Palmer (c.1663 – 1749) and Isaac Norris (1671-1735), both English merchants by way of the Caribbean, established their homes north of the Cohocksink Creek during the early eighteenth century. Around 1709, Anthony Palmer bought a substantial amount of land from Captain George Lillington, one of the area's First Purchasers, who had acquired property between 1697 and 1699. Palmer named his estate "Hope Farm," and continued to enlarge his holdings over the next twenty-five years. In 1730, Palmer sold Hope Farm and purchased the Fairman estate from Robert Worthington, a descendant of Thomas Fairman. The Fairman property was located directly south of Hope Farm along the Delaware River, with Gunner's Run (now Aramingo Avenue) as the dividing line between the two. Palmer went on to subdivide the 191.5 acre Fairman estate surrounding the mansion into lots which he then sold to shipbuilders eager for waterfront property. Palmer laid out a grid of streets between the Delaware River and Frankford Road (now Avenue), naming his new town "Kensington" after a fashionable area in London.

The Norris Family and the Fairhill and Sepviva Estates

Like Anthony Palmer, Isaac Norris also purchased a number of liberty land plots in the Northern Liberties, which he consolidated under one deed to create the Fairhill Estate and Sepviva Plantation. At its largest, Norris's lands spread from Germantown Avenue on the west to today's Aramingo Avenue on the east, Norris Street on the south, and slightly above Lehigh Avenue on the north. Norris established his country seat on the land west of Frankford Avenue, building his Fairhill mansion near today's 7th and York Streets.

Unlike Palmer, however, Norris's estate remained largely intact for the next 140 years, being passed down from generation to generation, and preventing development in Kensington from creeping northwest until the Industrial Revolution was well underway. Upon his death, Norris's property passed to his eldest son, also named Isaac (1701-1766). The younger Isaac Norris in turn bequeathed the property to his only surviving child, Mary Norris (1740-1803), who later married founding father John Dickinson. The house was burned by the British during the Revolution, but later rebuilt. Around 1790, Mary Norris Dickinson transferred the property to her paternal cousin, Joseph Parker Norris (1763-1841).[10]

When Joseph Parker Norris died on 22 June 1841, he devised his Fairhill estate to trustees for the children of his sons, and the Sepviva estate to trustees for his daughters' children.[11] The stipulations in his will made it difficult to develop the land, and in order for his children to begin subdividing the land into building lots, an Act of Assembly had to be passed that enabled the trustees to lease certain parts of the real estate through ground-rent.[12] Over the next several decades, peppered with legal battles over survivorship, the trustees of the estate maintained control of the estate, negotiating and implementing the sales on ground-rent for most of the estate.

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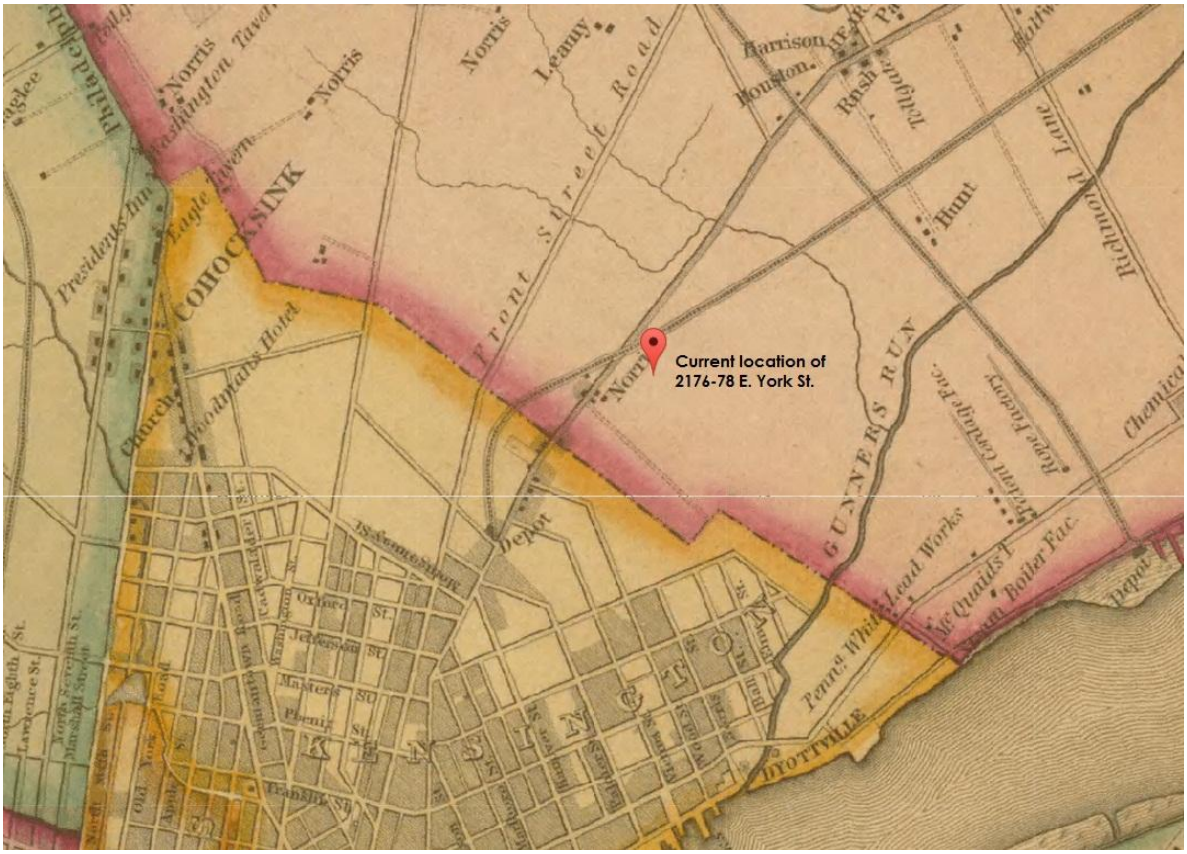
[10] McKenney, Janice E. Women of the Constitution: Wives of the Signers. Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2013. 52-53.

[11] Jordan, John W., ed. Colonial and Revolutionary Families of Pennsylvania: Genealogical and Personal Memoirs. Baltimore: Genealogical Pub., 1978, 89.

[12] The Will of Joseph Parker Norris, and Acts of Assembly, in reference to the Fair Hill and Sepviva Estates: 1852, available at the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Call Number Wk*.999, Volume 3.



Above: 1843 Charles Ellet Atlas showing the development of Kensington and the Norris Estates in Northern Liberties. Below: 1862 Samuel Smedley Atlas showing limited development of the Sepviva Estate.

Two of these trustees were J. Dickinson Sergeant and J. Norris Emlen, both descendants of Isaac Norris, who collected the income from the Sepviva estate through an appointed agent, Benjamin Ritter. Ritter died prematurely at the age of 50 in 1872, presumably having suffered from an illness left him incapacitated for the last months of his life.[13] During that time, Ritter's assistant, a young man by the name of John Ruhl, assumed his duties and collected and returned the income from the estate to the trustees. In June 1872, J. Dickinson Sergeant was appointed by the trustees to take Ritter's place as the collector of income for the estate, and John Ruhl was retained as Sergeant's assistant.

John Ruhl: Conveyancer, Politician, and Swindler

The only child of German immigrant parents, Catharine and Henry Ruhl, an inn keeper, John Ruhl was born in Pennsylvania in 1854 and grew up in the Kensington neighborhood, living with his parents at 2212 Frankford Avenue until 1886, even after he married and had two children.[14] As a resident of the neighborhood who was already familiar with the business, the tenants, and the debts to be collected, Ruhl was the obvious choice for Sergeant's assistant.

For the next three years, the trustees maintained an office at 319 Walnut Street, where they kept their books, made their distributions, and controlled the principal sums, derived mostly from the redemption and extinguishment of ground-rents; Sergeant and Ruhl handled the income from the estate only. After the trustees vacated their office in 1875, the method for handling and accounting for the principal sums of the estate changed. Sergeant and Ruhl began handling the principal sums, which were reported and paid over to the trustees—or at least were supposed to be.[15]

Over the next decade, John Ruhl gained the trust of the trustees of the estate, of his supervisor, J. Dickinson Sergeant, and even his fellow citizens. Treasurer of the Board of Guardians of the Poor, Ruhl resigned his post in April 1885 when he was elected to City Council as the representative of the Thirty-first Ward.[16] The following year, he built a beautiful new home and office at 2176-78 E. York Street, which was reported to have cost $15,000, a hefty sum for the time.[17] Ruhl had acquired the property, which consisted of two separate, individually-developed parcels, in 1882 from Richard Clay, one of the trustees of the Sepviva estate. Given his ambition and recent rise in life, it is plausible that Ruhl commissioned the firm of Furness & Evans, the architects of numerous homes of the Philadelphia elite, to design his purpose-built home and office.

Ruhl's moment in the sun was short-lived. In December 1887, Ruhl confessed to having embezzled more than $30,000 from the Sepviva estate, J. Dickinson Sergeant, and numerous others, and his debts were believed to run as high as $100,000.[18] As a conveyancer not only for the Sepviva estate, but various building associations, Ruhl had several ways of appropriating money. Often he failed to report or to deposit income paid to him or the sums of principal he received, or duplicated mortgages to increase his profit. Other times, he entered the money he received into the cash book, and then took money out of the cash drawer. His supervisor for the Sepviva estate, J. Dickinson Sergeant, did not keep proper records, and was unaware of Ruhl's

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[14] 2212 Frankford Avenue was renumbered to become 2242 Frankford Avenue circa 1884. John Ruhl is listed as living on Frankford Avenue in the 1873-1885 Philadelphia City Directories.
[15] Crumrine, Boyd. "J.D. Sergeant et al v. George Emlen." In *Pennsylvania State Reports Containing Cases Adjudged in the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania: Containing Cases Decided at January Term 1891*, 580-593. XXVI ed. New York & Albany: Banks & Brothers, Law Publishers, 1891.
[16] *Journal of the Select Council of the City of Philadelphia: From October 2, 1884, to April 2, 1885.* Philadelphia: Dunlap & Clarke, 1885.
[17] *The Times,* Philadelphia, December 13, 1888. 3. Accounting for inflation, $15,000 would total nearly $400,000 today.
[18] *The Times,* Philadelphia, December 13, 1888. 3. Accounting for inflation, $100,000 would total more than $2.5 million today.

substantial pilfering. To add insult to injury, Sergeant had consulted with Ruhl about his private real estate investments, giving Ruhl money to invest on his behalf, which Ruhl pocketed.[19] Additionally, Ruhl borrowed money from the six building associations of which he was a member, and withheld money given to him by different members. Even Ruhl's own relatives were not safe from his embezzlement. A newspaper article from 1888 notes that Ruhl sold his wife's uncle, John Baumgardner, a portion of the Sepviva estate which he said was clear of encumbrance, only to find out seventeen months later that two years' interest on the ground rent was due.[20]

Ruhl's swindling may have stemmed in large part from a gambling problem. The 1888 *Times* article asserts that Ruhl was a "heavy poker player at the Vesta Club and a big loser," a sentiment echoed in the Civil Service Record, which described him as a crony of corrupt politician and thug David Martin, with whom he "got up a prize fight in the Nineteenth Ward, which some of the politicians of the city government attended."[21] The fight, held in 1883, was raided by police, and Ruhl and Martin both arrested. Although Martin was freed owing to his political connections, Ruhl served time at Eastern State Penitentiary.[22] His conviction does not seem to have stopped him from pursuing his own political career, however, and he continued to spend more money on politics than on handling his business affairs.

Ashamed of his crimes, and perhaps afraid of his creditors, Ruhl fled the city of Philadelphia in February 1888, his absence noted in Philadelphia Record Almanac, which read: "Disappearance of ex-Councilman John Ruhl, of the thirty-first war, Philadelphia, announced, leaving behind him a heavy indebtedness and many business irregularities."[23] Ruhl also left behind his wife, who told reporters he had gone to Pittsburgh to sell natural gas stock. He returned the following March, and pled guilty to larceny and embezzlement and was sentenced to three years in County Prison.[24] In order to cover the $100,000 judgment levied against him, four of Ruhl's properties, including his home and office at 2176-78 E. York Street, were assigned to J. Dickinson Sergeant on 14 February 1888 for one dollar.[25] When he returned from prison, the Ruhls relocated to far north Philadelphia, where John Ruhl worked as a secretary for a fraternal organization until he was over 75 years old.[26] He died in 1935 at the age of 80 of a carcinoma of the left heart.[27]

Dr. Thomas Shriner: The Sage of Kensington

On March 28th, 1888, one month after J. Dickinson Sergeant acquired John Ruhl's properties, Dr. Thomas Shriner and his wife Mary purchased the building at 2176-78 E. York Street for the

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[19] Crumrine, Boyd. "J.D. Sergeant et al v. George Emlen." In *Pennsylvania State Reports Containing Cases Adjudged in the Supreme Court of Pennsylvania: Containing Cases Decided at January Term 1891*, 580-593. XXVI ed. New York & Albany: Banks & Brothers, Law Publishers, 1891.
[20] *The Times,* Philadelphia, December 13, 1888. 3.
[21] The Civil Service Record. Boston, MA: Civil Service Reform Associations, 1890. 121.
[22] The Civil Service Record. Boston, MA: Civil Service Reform Associations, 1890. 121.
[23] "February 1888." In *The Record Almanac for the Years 1885-1888*, 92. Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Record.
[24] "March 1889." In *The Record Almanac for the Years* 1885-1888, 20. Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Record.
[25] Deed of Sale from John Ruhl et ux to J. Dickinson Sergeant, 14 February 1888, City of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Book GGP, pages 41-45, Philadelphia Department of Records.
[26] 1900 United States Federal Census, Philadelphia Ward 19, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Roll: 1461, page 4B, enumeration district 0395, FHL microfilm: 1241461; 1910 United States Federal Census, Philadelphia Ward 19, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Roll: T624_1393, Page: 2B, Enumeration District: 0321, FHL microfilm:1375406; 1920 United States Federal Census, Philadelphia Ward 42, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Roll: T625_1643, Page: 2A, Enumeration District: 1571, Image: 869; 1930 United States Federal Census, Philadelphia Ward 42, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Roll: 2133, Page: 21A, Enumeration District: 1029, Image: 42.0, FHL microfilm:2341867.
[27] Death Certificate for John Ruhl, 25 April 1935, File No. 33610, Records of the Pennsylvania Department of Health, Bureau of Vital Statistics, Record Group 11, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Available on ancestry.com

sum of $10,500.[28] Born in 1843 in the central Pennsylvania town of Walker Township to John and Mary Shriner, Thomas Shriner became one of the most prominent physicians in northeastern Philadelphia during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.[29] After serving as a member of the Union Army during the Civil War, Shriner returned to Philadelphia to attend Jefferson Medical College (now Thomas Jefferson University), where he graduated in 1869.[30]

A proud Kensingtonian, Shriner lived and worked in Kensington for his entire adult life. Following the Civil War, Shriner took up residence in Philadelphia's 18th Ward, the 1870 boundaries of which roughly correspond to today's Fishtown neighborhood, with Frankford Avenue on the west, Norris Street at the north, and the Delaware River on the east. The 1871 through 1873 city directories list Shriner as residing at 1502 Otis Street (now E. Susquehanna), at the northwest corner of Otis (E. Susquehanna) and Gaul Streets.[31] Presumably around 1872, Shriner was married, as he and his wife Mary (nee Turner), and children Howard and Bessie, ages 7 and 6 respectively, are listed in the 1880 Census.[32] Between 1875 and 1877, the Shriners lived at 623 E York Rd (now 2222 E York Rd), one block from the property in question, but by 1878 the family had relocated a few blocks away to 2204 Frankford Avenue.[33] Their new home on Frankford Avenue also happened to be located one block from the home of John Ruhl, at 2242 Frankford Avenue. The Shriners lived at 2204 Frankford Avenue (renumbered to 2404 circa 1884) until 1886, when they acquired Ruhl's contentious E. York Street home and office, converting the one-story wing from a real estate office to Shriner's medical practice. Dr. Thomas Shriner would live there with his daughter Elizabeth, who never married, until his death in 1915.[34]

For 46 years, Shriner worked as a physician for the Penn Widows' Home, located at the northeast corner of Otis (now E. Susquehanna Ave) and Belgrade Streets. Established in 1848 as the Penn Asylum for Indigent Widows and Single Women, the Home was open to single and widowed women in "reduced circumstances."[35] In exchange for a fee of $30, each woman was ensured a "home during life, abundant food, comfortable clothing and kind attendance" for the remainder of her life.[36] The organization, which still exists in its original location, has been rebranded the Penn Home, and offers affordable housing and personal care to both men and women over 60 years of age.[37]

Dedicating not only his professional but his free time to the residents of North Philadelphia, Shriner was extremely active on the boards of the Northern Dispensary and the Northern Medical Association, organizations both targeted at the health and well-being of the residents of Philadelphia's northern communities of Spring Garden, Northern Liberties, Germantown, Frankford, and Kensington. After the War of 1812, two new medical charities, the Northern and Southern Dispensaries, were formed in Philadelphia to provide additional medical assistance to the growing city's residents. Joining the Philadelphia Dispensary, founded in the late eighteenth

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[28] Deed of sale from J.Dickinson Sergeant to Thomas Shriner, 28 March 1888, City of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Deed Book GGP, pages 213-215, Philadelphia Department of Records.
[29] 1850 United States Federal Census, Roll: M432_784, Page: 159B, Image: 320;1860 United States Federal Census Walker Township, Huntingdon County, Pennsylvania, Roll: M653_1115, Page: 655, Image: 661, Family History Library Film: 805115.
[30] Pennsylvania, Civil War Muster Rolls, 1860-1869 [database on-line at ancestry.com].
[31] Philadelphia City Directories for 1872 and 1873.
[32] 1880 United States Federal Census, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Roll: 1190, Family History Film: 1255190, Page: 493C, Enumeration District: 677, Image: 0208.
[33] Philadelphia City Directories for 1875, 1876, 1877, 1878.
[34] U.S. Find A Grave Index, 1600s-Current [database online at ancestry.com]. Thomas Shriner (1843-1915), his wife Mary Turner Shriner (1843-1897) and daughter Eliza T. Shriner (1873-1954) are buried together at North Cedar Hill Cemetery in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
[35] "Penn Home - History of the Penn Home." Penn Home - History of the Penn Home. Accessed May 7, 2015.
[36] "Penn Home - History of the Penn Home." Penn Home - History of the Penn Home. Accessed May 7, 2015.
[37] "About Penn Home." A Place for Mom. Accessed May 7, 2015.

century, the Northern and Southern Dispensaries provided medical assistance and medicine to those who, although not destitute, could not afford medical care.[38] Governed by a board of managers (including in the late nineteenth century, Thomas Shriner), the organization was supported by membership, donations, legacies, investment, and rental incomes. As late as 1891, the Northern Dispensary is noted to have bemoaned the fact that they still could not afford to stop renting the second floor of their building, despite their need for space.[39] Originally located at 603 Spring Garden Street, the dispensary moved to 608 Fairmount Avenue in 1881, along with its sister organization, the Northern Medical Association.[40]

Founded in 1847 to "cultivate the science of Medicine, and promote harmony among its members," the Northern Medical Association was the second medical association in Philadelphia; at the time, the College of Physicians, established in 1787, was the only active medical society in the city.[41] In an address at the 74th anniversary celebration of the Northern Medical Association in 1920, five years after Shriner's death, Dr. David Riesman singled out two men as the most prominent members of the Association, Drs. Henry W. Rihl and Thomas Shriner. Shriner, he described posthumously, "was a different man; not a scholar, his language was the Elizabethan English spoken in Kensington, but his heart—well, no man ever had a better! With such men greeting the young man when he first rose to speak, all fear and stage fright vanished. It became a tradition in the society that it should be a forum for beginners because that tradition has never been broken the association has entwined itself with hoops of steel around the heart of every member of it." Two years later, in a similar address, Riesman again described Shriner as "the sage of Kensington…" a "…rough diamond, loyal and kind, and possessing that which no man wants to be without and which many lack, a sense of humor. Shriners are common in the world, but Thomas Shriners are rare." Dr. Shriner, it is clear, made a lasting impression.

Conclusion

The purpose-built home and office at 2176-78 E. York Street was occupied by two notable characters whose lives were significant to the development of the Kensington neighborhood of Philadelphia. Its first owner, John Ruhl, was a conveyancer and Councilman turned criminal, who likely commissioned the renowned firm of Furness & Evans to design his home and office in order to solidify his newly-elevated position in society. After Ruhl lost the property amid scandal, he was succeeded by Dr. Thomas Shriner, one of the most prominent physicians in northeast Philadelphia in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. While the history of its residents is interesting, it is the extraordinary architecture of the building that immediately catches the attention of any passerby. A remarkably well-preserved example of a Frank Furness interpretation of the Queen Anne style, the building is a landmark in the Kensington neighborhood, where it stands out as a high-style residence in a sea of relatively ordinary rowhomes. The property at 2176-78 E. York Street meets Designation Criteria A, D, E, and H of Section 14-1004 of the Philadelphia Code, and warrants designation on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.

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[38] Clement, Priscilla Ferguson. Welfare and the Poor in the Nineteenth-century City: Philadelphia, 1800-1854. Rutherford, N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1985.
[39] Leavitt, Judith Walzer. Sickness and Health in America: Readings in the History of Medicine and Public Health. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1978.
[40] Konkle, Burton Alva, and James M. Anders. Standard History of the Medical Profession of Philadelphia. 2d ed. New York: AMS Press, 1977.

[41] Constitution, By-laws, and Rules of Order, of the Northern Medical Association of Philadelphia: Organized January 7, 1847.

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APPENDIX

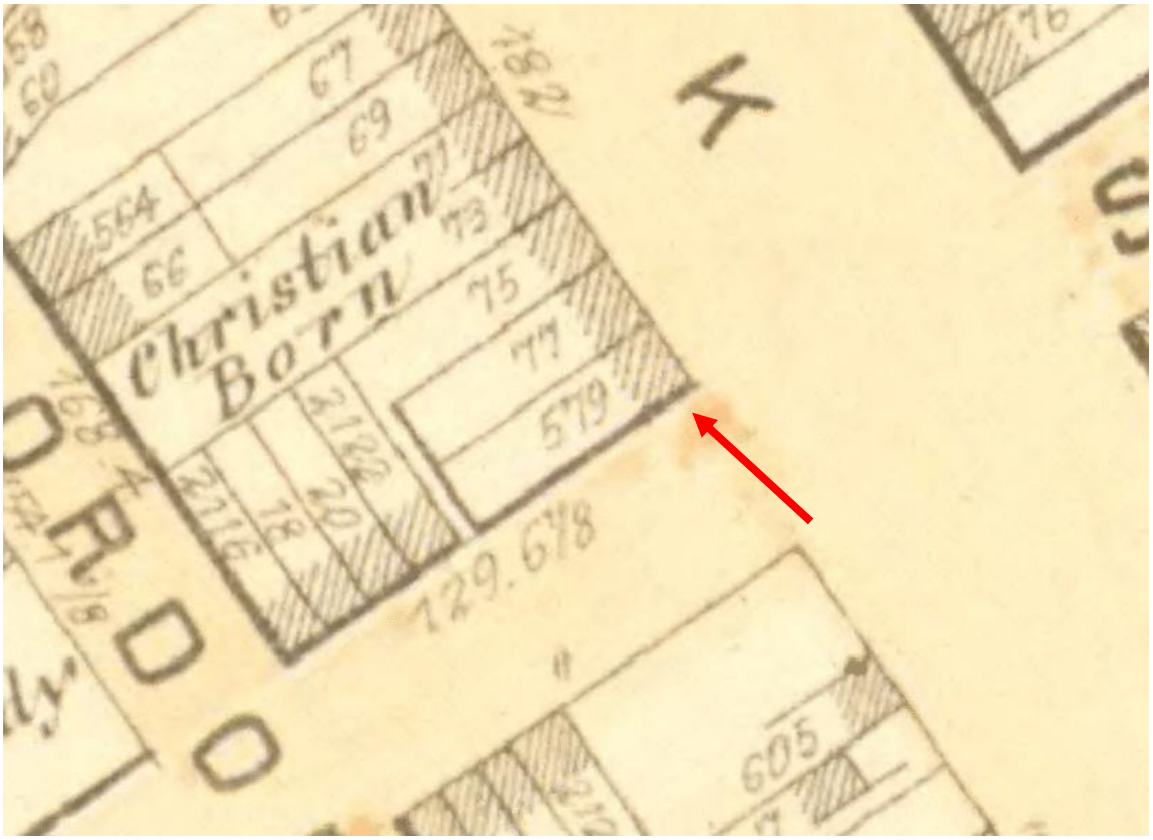

Fig 1. 1875 property atlas, which shows the property as two separate, developed lots. Hopkins, *City Atlas of Philadelphia*, 1875

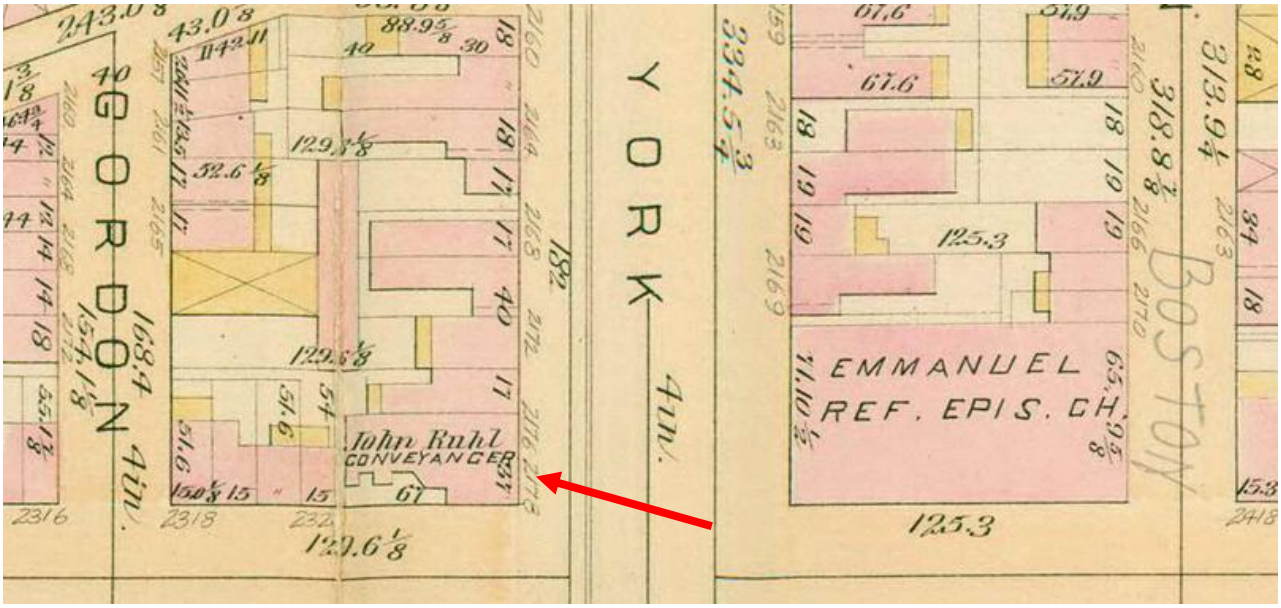

Fig 2. 1887 property atlas, which shows the property as a consolidated lot with the distinctive footprint of the present building. Bromley, *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia*, 1887.