

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

SUBMIT ALL ATTACHED MATERIALS ON PAPER AND IN ELECTRONIC FORM (CD, EMAIL, FLASH DRIVE)
ELECTRONIC FILES MUST BE WORD OR WORD COMPATIBLE

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

Street address: 201 N. 36th Street

Postal code: 19104 Councilmanic District: 3rd

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: Simpson's Apothecary

Current/Common Name: _____

3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Building Structure Site Object

4. PROPERTY INFORMATION

Occupancy: occupied vacant under construction unknown

Current use: Vacant

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Please attach

6. DESCRIPTION

Please attach

7. SIGNIFICANCE

Please attach the Statement of Significance.

Period of Significance (from year to year): from 1876 to 1970

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: 1876; c.1904-07

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: _____

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: _____

Original owner: Michael Kelleher

Other significant persons: _____

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION:

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

Criterion A
removed by
PHC

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

8. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Please attach

9. NOMINATOR

Organization Powelton Village Civic Association Date November 5, 2018

Name with Title Ben Leech, consultant Email bentleech@gmail.com (cc: gpoulin@stradallc.com)

Street Address c/o PVCA, PO Box 7616 Telephone 267-978-2994

City, State, and Postal Code Philadelphia, PA 19101

Nominator is is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: 11/5/2018

Correct-Complete Incorrect-Incomplete Date: 11/8/2018

Date of Notice Issuance: 11/8/2018

Property Owner at Time of Notice

Name: Christy Garrett

Address: 201 N. 36th Street

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19104

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: 12/12/2018

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: 1/11/2019

Date of Final Action: 1/11/2019

Designated Rejected

3/12/18

5. Boundary Description



Beginning at the Northeast corner of 36th and Race Streets, thence extending Northward along the East side of 36th Street 18 feet, thence extending Eastward on a line at right angles with said 36th Street 100 feet thence extending Southward on a line parallel with the said 36th Street 28 feet 10- $\frac{1}{4}$ inches to the North side of said Race Street and thence extending Westward along the North side of said Race Street 100 feet and $\frac{7}{8}$ of an inch to the place of beginning.

6) Description



Figure 1: Subject property 201 N. 36th Street (the northeast corner of 36th and Race Streets) as viewed across Lancaster Avenue.

The former Simpson's Apothecary at 201 N. 36th Street stands on the northeast corner of 36th and Race Streets, a prominent five-point intersection bisected by Lancaster Avenue in the Powelton Village neighborhood of West Philadelphia [Fig. 1]. The building was constructed in 1876 as a freestanding three-story "store and dwelling" in the Italianate style. It measures 18 feet wide along its two-bay west (36th Street) elevation and 48 feet wide along its four-bay south (Race Street) elevation, with a two-story, three-bay rear ell extending an additional 24 feet to the east. Its rear east elevation faces a short yard area occupying the remainder of the lot. Its north elevation is an unfenestrated, stuccoed party wall facing the side yard of the adjacent parcel [Fig. 3]. Both its 36th and Race Street sidewalks are brick.

The building's upper floor walls are red brick set in a running bond. Windows feature segmental arch marble lintels, marble sills, and two-over-two wood sashes with arched upper lights. The projecting cornice features scrolled wood brackets [Fig. 2].



Figure 2: South (Race Street) elevation, main block.



Figure 3: North elevation



Figure 4: Storefront detail, 36th Street (left) and Race Street (right)



Figure 5 (left): 36th Street storefront detail



Figure 6 (right): Race Street storefront detail



Figure 7: Storefront cornice, fascia signage, brownstone panels, and bay window details.

The building's ground floor, most likely an early-20th-century alteration, is faced with iron-spotted Roman brick and trimmed with brownstone [Figs. 4-7].¹ A pair of projecting display windows-- one along 36th Street, one along Race Street-- bracket a double-leaf wood and glass store entrance facing 36th Street. The display windows are round-cornered, full-height bays on stone bulkheads and capped with bracketed copper cornices. Both bays feature engaged Corinthian piers, disc-patterned mullions, and fascia bands with dimensional festoons. The 36th Street bay retains a leaded glass transom. The bracketed cornice wraps the building's corner with dimensional fascia signage reading "CHEMICALS" along 36th Street and "DRUGS" along Race Street. Brownstone foliate relief panels cap a brick corner pier and flank each display bay. The Roman brick continues the length of the Race Street ground floor elevation [Fig. 2]. A high-set masonry opening with decorative brownstone lintel blocks and a curved sill is located at the center of the elevation. A secondary single-leaf wood door and flanking window (currently boarded) are located at its eastern end; both are capped by brick arch lintels. A two-story rear ell stands to the east of the main volume, with a shallow shed roof projecting over a ground floor

¹ Though the building's original tenant was an apothecary, the current ground-floor configuration likely dates to c.1904-1907, based on evidence discussed in further detail in Section 8 below.

porch area currently concealed behind sloping plywood panels [Fig. 8]. The shed roof and porch were added c.1981 and are non-contributing features.²



Figure 8: South (Race Street) elevation, rear ell.

² Zoning Permit #29177, March 27, 1981.

7) Significance

The former Simpson's Apothecary building at 201 N. 36th Street is a significant and well-preserved example of a late-19th-century mixed-use commercial and residential structure with an outstanding and relatively intact early-20th-century storefront. The building is a contributing resource in the Powelton Village Historic District, listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1985.³ Its Italianate style characterizes West Philadelphia's Centennial-era urban expansion, and its later storefront alterations reflect significant turn-of-the-century developments in both architectural trends and commercial design. The building's integrated signage also reflects its century-long tenure as a neighborhood apothecary shop, a once-ubiquitous trade with deep Philadelphia roots and significant interest in the cultural and economic heritage of the city. The property meets the following criteria for listing on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places as established in the Philadelphia Historic Preservation Ordinance §14-1004 (1):

- 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;
- D: Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen;
- and*
- J: Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

Early history

Though original construction notices or permits have yet to be identified, the three-story brick store and dwelling at 201 N. 36th Street almost certainly dates to 1876, when *Boyd's Philadelphia City Business Directory* first advertises a druggist, Charles H. Clark, as occupying the corner of 36th and Race Streets.⁴ The previous year, speculative developer Michael Kelleher purchased the narrow, undeveloped corner lot for \$1,700 from George S. Gerhart, an adjacent property owner.⁵ After construction, Kelleher initially rented the property to Clark and other tenants; the 1880 census lists Clark as an apothecary and boarder at 3507 Race (an

³ Thomas, George R. and Beneson, Carol. "Powelton Historic District." National Register of Historic Places Nomination/Inventory Form. Clio Group, Inc. Sept. 24, 1984.

⁴ *Boyd's Philadelphia City Business Directory*, 1876.

⁵ Deed Book FTW 197, p. 268, May 21, 1875.

alternate address for 201 N. 36th) living with his wife Miriam, two young daughters, and the 22-year-old apothecary Harry S. Clark (possibly a brother). Also residing at the property were the 51-year-old Sarah Rockey, listed as head of household and housekeeper, along with her 22-year-old daughter L. Augusta and 19-year-old son H. Chester, a store clerk.⁶ Kelleher remained owner until 1880, when he sold the property to Patrick Daly, a local flour merchant, for \$4,000. Kelleher then repurchased the property from Daly two years later, again for \$4,000, but died in debt shortly thereafter. Control then passed to John Erickson, a real estate broker and administrator of Kelleher's estate. Clark, who remained tenant of the store and dwelling through these subsequent transactions, finally purchased the property himself at public auction in 1882 for \$6,900.⁷

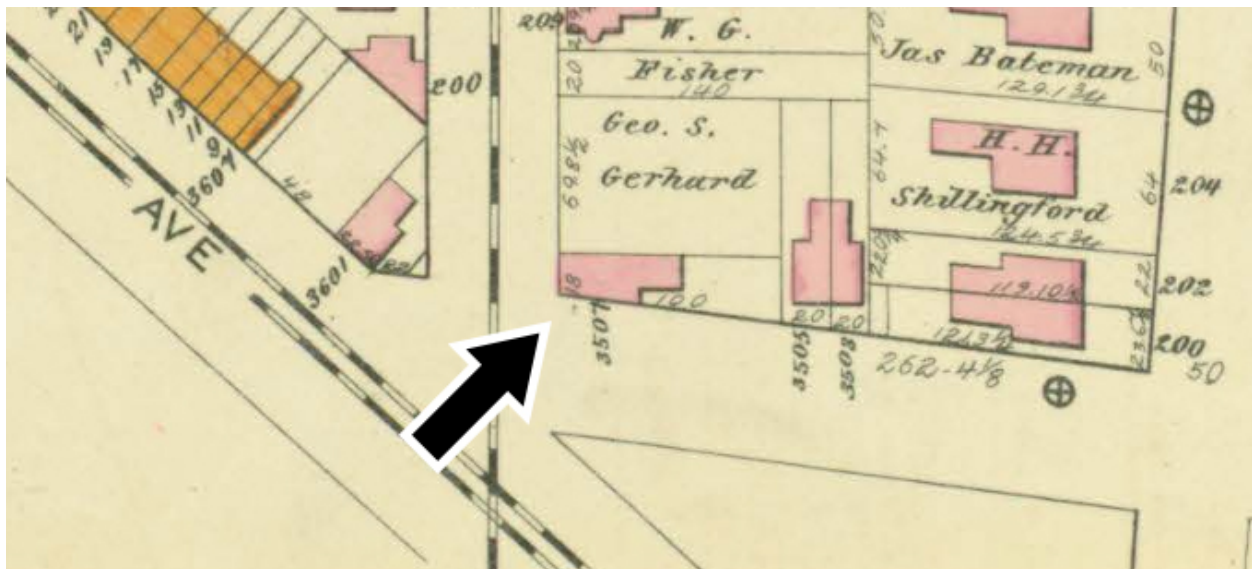


Figure 9: Property and surroundings in 1878. Atlas of the 24th and 27th Wards, West Philadelphia. J.D. Scott, 1878, Plate B. (Note: developed blocks to the south appear on separate plates)

In both appearance and use, the building was highly characteristic of its era. Its bracketed wood cornice, marble segmental arch lintels, and two-over-two wood sashes are all defining features of an Italianate rowhouse style that proliferated in the decades following the Civil War, with dedicated ground-floor commercial space especially common on corner properties and along streetcar lines. At the time of the building's construction, Lancaster Avenue was a rapidly-developing commercial and institutional corridor serving the adjacent "streetcar suburb"

⁶ Tenth Census of the United States, Philadelphia Enumeration District 487, 1880.

⁷ Deed Book LW 107, p. 501, Sept. 4, 1880; Deed Book JOD 17, p. 343, March 18, 1882; Deed Book JOD 25, p. 369, April 8, 1882; Deed Book JOD 91, p. 466, April 6, 1883.

neighborhoods of Powelton to the north and Greenville to the south. Between 1870 and 1880, the adjacent 3600 block of Lancaster Avenue developed as a contiguous row of nearly identical three and four-story Italianate store-and-dwelling units; the row was listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places in 2015 based in part on the significance of its Italianate character.⁸



Figure 10: Property and surroundings in 1895. Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, G.W. Bromley & Co, 1895.

Though 201 N. 36th Street was built as a stand-alone structure, its corner location on an otherwise residential block is typical of a “corner store” typology that proliferated in tandem with Philadelphia’s explosive rowhouse growth in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. As Lynn Alpert describes these “part storefront and part rowhouse” structures in her 2012 University of Pennsylvania masters’ thesis, *Philadelphia Corner Stores: Their History, Use, and Preservation*,

Corner stores were built as a direct result of the rapid changes that were taking place in urban areas during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The many technological advances that reshaped transportation and industry in the second half of the 19th century greatly affected the American city. Urban areas expanded at rapid rates due to these changes, and the neighborhoods that developed around the city’s core marked the beginning of America’s great suburban

⁸ Historical Commission Staff, “3600-30 Lancaster Avenue/William Fennell Development.” Philadelphia Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, April 29, 2015.

expansion. These new neighborhoods, away from a city's commercial center, demanded new opportunities for shopping and entertainment.⁹

These buildings were often (but not always) owner-occupied, and purpose-built to house grocery stores, taverns, and other commercial trades serving their surrounding residential neighborhoods. Apothecaries (a term used to describe both the profession and its place of business, generally synonymous with both pharmacies and pharmacists) were among the most common of these neighborhood retailers; by 1884, Charles H. Clark was just one of at least twelve doing business along a twelve-block stretch of Lancaster Avenue alone.¹⁰

Clark was an 1872 graduate of the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy, the nation's first pharmacy college and precursor to today's University of the Sciences.¹¹ Founded in 1821, the college played a pivotal role in the evolution of the pharmaceutical field from its Colonial-era roots in quasi-scientific herbal remedies and folk practices into today's standardized, industrialized system of chemical production and distribution.¹² By the late 19th century, a typical pharmacist like Clark was both a trained expert in the standardized preparation of physician-prescribed chemical compounds as well as a general retailer of mass-produced patent medicines and other health and beauty products. Many pharmacies and apothecaries also doubled as soda fountains and places of social gathering; the first generation of public telephones in the 1880s were commonly located in neighborhood apothecaries.

Clark lived and worked at 201 N. 36th Street/3507 Race Street from 1876 to 1903; the 1900 census recorded a household that included his wife Miriam, daughters Helen (24), Mildred (20), and Kathryn (10), servant Elizabeth Lewis (39), and professional nurse Ozella Bly (29).¹³ In 1904, the Philadelphia City Directory listed Clark as a druggist at 2100 Pine Street, with druggist Robert Simpson now occupying 201 N. 36th Street. Three years later, Clark sold the property to Simpson for \$10,500.¹⁴ Though few other details from Clark's period of ownership have survived, at least one recorded anecdote helps confirm the general character of the

⁹ Alpert, Lynn Miriam. *Philadelphia Corner Stores: Their History, Use, and Preservation*. (Masters Thesis). Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 2012, pp. 1, 17.

¹⁰ Hoppin, Samuel B. ed. *The Medical Directory of Philadelphia for 1884*. Philadelphia: P. Blakiston, Son & Co., 1884, p. 76.

¹¹ England, Joseph W. ed. *The First Century of the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy, 1821-1921*. Philadelphia: Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Science, 1922.

¹² McCarthy, Jack. "Pharmaceutical Industry," *The Encyclopedia of Greater Philadelphia*, <https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/pharmaceutical-industry/>

¹³ *Twelfth Census of the United States*, Philadelphia Enumeration District 543, 1900.

¹⁴ Deed Book WSV 857, p, 235, June 14, 1907.

apothecary's presence in the neighborhood during this era. In 1893, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* sponsored an attempt by two men, H.S. Wilmot and Samuel S. Smith, to walk from Philadelphia to San Francisco in a record-breaking 150 days. With great fanfare, the paper recorded the pair's departure from the city via Lancaster Avenue, noting that "a wide-awake druggist, Charles H. Clark, of Thirty-sixth street and Lancaster avenue, [made] the first report of the progress of the expedition. He halted the pedestrians as they passed and hospitably offered them soda water to quench the thirst engendered by a July sun."¹⁵

Simpson's Apothecary

Like Clark, Robert Simpson was also a Philadelphia College of Pharmacy graduate (1883) who established a long tenure working and living at 201 N. 36th Street.¹⁶ In the 1910 census, the 46-year-old Simpson appears at the address with his wife Letitia (43) and 18-year-old boarder and drug store clerk Milton Smith; in 1920, he appears with Letitia and her two sisters Almira and Rachel Murphy. In 1930, he appears alone as a widower (Letitia passed away in 1923).¹⁷ After Simpson's own death in 1933, his executress Ruth Bradley Freitag (relation unknown) sold the property to Nathan Finberg, yet another Philadelphia College of Pharmacy graduate (1922), for \$1,000 and the transfer of a \$6,000 mortgage in 1934.¹⁸ Despite the change in ownership, the store remained in business as "Simpson's Apothecary" or the "Robert Simpson Pharmacy" for another three and a half decades until its eventual closure in 1970.¹⁹

¹⁵ "The First Report." *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 27, 1893. Reports of the pair's progress remained front-page news until Pittsburg, where Smith tripped and sprained his arm, and the coverage unceremoniously ceased.

¹⁶ England, p. 514

¹⁷ *Thirteenth Census of the United States*, Philadelphia Enumeration District 492, 1910; *Fourteenth Census of the United States*, Philadelphia Enumeration District 687, 1920; *Fifteenth Census of the United States*, Philadelphia Enumeration District 397, 1930.

¹⁸ Deed Book JMH 3786, p. 63, March 31, 1934; *Bulletin of the Philadelphia College of Pharmacy and Science*, Vol. 15, no. 2 (June 1922), p. 10.

¹⁹ *Philadelphia Telephone Directories*, 1970, 1971.



Figure 11: “Robert Simpson Apothecary” c. 1940. Philadelphia History Museum, Barrie Mason, photographer.

It was almost certainly under Simpson's occupancy that the present storefront was installed, though building permits for the alteration have yet to be located. Despite the property's original apothecary tenant, it is highly unlikely that the current storefront was the original 1876 configuration, since iron-spotted Roman bricks (also called Pompeian bricks) were not in common use before the 1890s.²⁰ The handsome brownstone ornamentation is also more likely an early-20th-century high-style alteration than a typical Italianate commercial detail. Finally, a

²⁰ Architectural historian Vincent Scully credits McKim, Mead & White with the introduction of Roman brick to America in 1885, and references to the brick in *Brickbuilder* and other trade journals first appear in the 1890s. Scully, Vincent. *The Shingle Style and the Stick Style*, rev. 2nd ed. New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 1971, p. 149; “Roman & Pompeian Brick,” *The Brickbuilder*, Vol. 8, no. 10 (Oct. 1899), p. 1.

detailed photograph of the storefront c.1940 [Fig. 11] depicts a now-lost dimensional copper drum sign reading “Simpson Apothecary” that appears to be contemporary with the remaining storefront, given its typographic similarities and its integrated brownstone pedestal.

Despite the loss of some original fabric, the surviving storefront is nevertheless an exceptional specimen of turn-of-the-century commercial design, displaying particularly refined examples of typical storefront materials and features of the era. These include the bracketed, pressed metal (likely copper) storefront cornice, the surviving “DRUGS” and “CHEMICALS” dimensional fascia signs, and the expansive plate-glass display bays with bent glass corners, heavily ornamented frames, and leaded glass transoms. Also distinctive is the incorporation of relatively high-style masonry components--the specialty Roman brick and carved brownstone blocks--that reflect an emergent attention to organic forms and regional materials in the early 20th century (many of Frank Lloyd Wright’s early Prairie Style houses specified “Pennsylvania Iron Spot Roman” bricks, for example).²¹

Conclusion

Under third-generation owner Nathan Finberg, Simpson’s Apothecary survived well into the postwar era with only minor changes to the building’s physical fabric. Even after its closure in 1970, the building was purchased by the Ecology Food Co-Op (one of Philadelphia’s first natural foods cooperatives) and operated as grocery for another 20 years, both maintaining the building’s exterior appearance and its function as a neighborhood amenity.²² Today it survives with a remarkable degree of integrity, reflecting the architectural, cultural, and economic heritage of Lancaster Avenue, the surrounding Powelton Village neighborhood, and the City at large.

²¹ Scully, p. 149.

²² Flaumenhaft, Daniel. “Dead of Natural Causes: The Rise and Fall of Ecology Food Co-op,” *Exploring Cooperatives: Economic Democracy and Community Development in Pennsylvania and Wisconsin*, 2012, pp. 64-66. http://www.uwcc.wisc.edu/pdf/2017_exploring_cooperatives.pdf

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