

**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 a Board of Revision of Taxes address)

Street address: 836 N. Preston Street

Postal code: 19104

Councilmanic District: 3

**2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE**

Historic Name: 836 N. Preston Street

Common Name: 836 N. Preston Street

**3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE**

Building

Structure

Site

Object

**4. PROPERTY INFORMATION**

Occupancy:  occupied  vacant  under construction  unknown

Current use: Sarah Allen Senior Homes

**5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

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

**6. DESCRIPTION**

Please attach a description of the historic resource.

**7. SIGNIFICANCE**

Please attach the Statement of Significance.

Period of Significance (from year to year): from 1890 to 1964

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: built 1890. Altered 1930-1933

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: Not able to be determined

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: Alexander McGaw

Original owner: Alexander McGaw

Other significant persons: n/a

**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 Joshua D. Bevan , Consultant Email patrick@preservationalliance.co6/  
 Organization Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia Date 6/29/2018 (previously 1/31/18)  
 Street Address 1608 Walnut St, Suite 1702 Telephone 215-546-1146  
 City, State, and Postal Code Philadelphia, PA 19103  
 Nominator  is  is not the property owner.

**PHC USE ONLY**

Date of Receipt: June 27, 2018 (initial draft January 31, 2018)  
 Correct-Complete  Incorrect-Incomplete Date: 13 August 2018  
 Date of Notice Issuance: August 13, 2018  
 Property Owner at Time of Notice  
 Name: Sarah Allen Community Homes  
 Address: 704 W. Girard Avenue  
 City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19123  
 Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: October 17, 2018  
 Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: November 9, 2018  
 Date of Final Action: November 9, 2018  
 Designated  Rejected

## 5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION



Beginning at a point of intersection of the Northerly side of Parrish Street (50 feet wide) with the Westerly side of Preston Street (50 feet wide); thence extending South 83 degrees 40 minutes 31 seconds West, along the said northerly side of Parrish Street, the distance of 100.313 feet to a point; thence extending North 6 degrees 19 minutes 29 seconds West, the distance of 55.417 feet to a point; thence extending North 83 degrees 40 minutes 31 seconds East, the distance of 100.313 feet to a point on the said Westerly side of Preston Street; thence extending South 6 degrees 19 minutes 29 seconds East, along the said Westerly side of Preston Street, the distance of 55.417 feet to the first mentioned point and place of beginning. Being known as 836 N. Preston Street (55-N-02-266, OPA account #886740020).

## 6. DESCRIPTION

(All photographs taken by author in December 2016-March 2017 unless otherwise noted)

### *Location and General Design*

The former McGaw Mansion is a three-and-one-half-story, detached, Queen Anne style brick mansion located at 836 N. Preston Street on the northwest corner of N. Preston and Parrish Streets in West Philadelphia's Belmont neighborhood. The building's corner location is emphasized by a low stone retaining wall with corner posts wrapping the southeast corner of the property and separating the property's front and side yards from the adjacent public sidewalk, planted with a variety of trees and bushes. Steps aligned with the building's central main entrance connect a raised front stoop to the Preston Street sidewalk. The building features a generally rectangular plan with cross-gabled attic volumes augmented by cylindrical cone-roofed turrets at its southeast and southwest corners [Fig. 1].

The building is clad primarily in red brick with brownstone trim and wood-shingled gables. The roof is clad in replacement asphalt shingles. Brownstone belt courses articulate each floor level along the building's street-facing east and south facades. The partially exposed basement is distinguished from upper levels by a rusticated brownstone water table, portions of which have been faced with stained concrete or cement plaster.<sup>1</sup> The building is generally fenestrated with one-over-one, double-hung, wood-sash windows with stone transoms. Masonry openings are graduated in height to emphasize verticality, with taller windows on the ground floor and shorter windows on the upper floor levels.

### *East Elevation*

The primary east elevation faces N. Preston Street [Fig. 4]. It features a three-and-one-half-story, three-bay gable wall and an adjacent cylindrical three-bay corner turret with a conical roof. The building's main entrance is located in the center bay of the raised first floor and features a single-leaf wood and glass door [Fig. 5]. The doorway and two flanking ground-floor windows all feature rock-faced brownstone lintels dividing the lower openings from single-light transoms; the windows feature matching rock-faced brownstone sills. A rock-faced brownstone belt course spans the façade above the ground floor transoms. The upper-story windows are similarly configured and centered above the ground-floor bays, though the bay closest to the corner turret is windowless at the second and third floor. Smooth-dressed brownstone belt courses cap each upper story and smooth-faced brownstone lintels divide the windows from their transoms. A shingle-clad attic gable with a

---

<sup>1</sup>Bromley's 1927 *Atlas of West Philadelphia* indicates a curved porch constructed of wood along the east façade and southeast corner of the building. Differences in material of the water table at roughly this location may indicate this feature's prior existence and removal.

sixteen-light, leaded-glass window projects slightly outward from the brick wall plane. The pediment area above this window is folded into a shallow prow.

The adjacent cylindrical turret wraps the building's southeast corner and follows the general fenestration pattern of the gable volume, though the windows are curved to follow the arc of the turret. The conical roof is double-tiered and features a shallow-relief plaster or pressed metal decorative band between its two shingled pitches [Fig. 6].

#### *South Elevation*

The south elevation faces Parrish Street and continues the basic façade materials and fenestration patterns of the east elevation. The previously described southeast corner turret and a matching turret at the opposite southwest corner bracket the long seven-bay main volume, with an attic gable centered above the middle five bays [Fig. 7]. The second, third, and fourth bays of the first floor (from west to east) are grouped into a one-story projecting bay window capped by a brick parapet [Fig. 9]. The seventh bays of the first and second floor are blind, and the third bays of the second and third floors appear to have been infilled with brick (though their transoms remain open). All other bays on the south elevation are filled with double-hung wood sashes and transom lights. An engaged molded brick chimney adjacent to the southeast corner turret rises from the base of the second floor, breaking the cornice line. The attic cross-gable is clad in wood shingles and features three sixteen-light wood windows below a folded prow. A second molded brick chimney is partially visible behind the central gable [Fig. 10].

#### *West Elevation*

The west elevation faces a driveway located between the subject property and an adjacent multi-story tower [Fig. 11]. This elevation is more utilitarian in character than the two street-facing elevations and features an informal fenestration arrangement. A lone ground-floor window is shorter in height than those on the east and south elevations, but duplicates their transom configuration. A pair of transomless second-floor windows is offset above the window below, while a lone third-floor window (also transomless) is centered above the northernmost second-floor window. A ground-floor doorway at the northwest corner has been infilled with brick.

#### *North Elevation*

The north elevation faces a parking lot located directly north of the subject building and continues the basic façade materials of the building's primary elevations [Fig. 13]. It features two cross-gabled volumes projecting

slightly outward the main volume. The four-bay western cross-gable features an asymmetrical fenestration pattern, with half of its windows infilled with brick [Fig. 14]. It is capped by twin shingle-clad attic gables, each with a single multi-light attic window below a folded prow. Portions of the shingle cladding appear to have been replaced or repainted [Fig. 17]. The two-bay eastern cross-gable features a more regular window grid and a single attic gable, also shingle-clad and lit by an attic light [Fig. 16]. Between the two cross-gable volumes, a three-bay wall segment features diagonally-aligned windows indicative of an interior staircase [Fig. 15]. A utilitarian exit door is located at the base of this wall segment, accessed by a set of concrete steps.



Figure 1: 836 N. Preston Street viewed from intersection of N. Preston and Parrish streets, January 2017. Facing northwest.



Figure 2: Rusticated brownstone water table with typical fenestration at base of building.



Figure 3: Portion of water table at base of east elevation and southeast corner of building that has been refaced with smooth cement.



Figure 4: East elevation viewed from N. Preston Street.





Figure 5: Detail of main entrance comprised of central paneled-wood door with glazed upper half. Wood-sash windows flank the door. A belt course of rock-faced brownstone is placed above the door and windows.



Figure 6: Detail of shingles and decorative band found on both turrets.



Figure 7: South elevation of 836 N. Preston Street. Looking north.



Figure 8: Centered cross-gable, south elevation. Looking north.



Figure 9: Projecting bay window at first floor, south elevation. Looking north.



Figure 10: Chimney stack with molded brick. Looking northeast.



Figure 11: West elevation viewed from northwest.



Figure 12: Southwest corner of building viewed from Parrish Street. Facing northeast.



Figure 13: North elevation viewed from N. Preston Street. Looking southwest.



Figure 14: Easternmost bays of north elevation. Looking south.



Figure 15: Central bays of north elevation with diagonal fenestration. Looking south.



Figure 16: Westernmost bays of north elevation. Looking south.



Figure 17: Paired cross-gables, north elevation. Looking south.

## 7. SIGNIFICANCE

The former McGaw Mansion is a prominent freestanding Queen Anne mansion constructed in 1890 at 836 N. Preston Street. Its architectural character style, association with mason and contractor Alexander McGaw, and its association with late-nineteenth-century development in the Belmont neighborhood justify the building's nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places under criteria A, C, D, and J. The building's period of significance extends from its date of construction to when the building's original owner, Alexander McGaw, died in 1905. This period also relates to a time in which the Belmont neighborhood saw great change as residential development increased around the emergence of institutions such as the West Philadelphia Hospital for Women and the Pennsylvania Railroad Branch YMCA. It survives as a rare and notable example of a freestanding mansion in a neighborhood that largely transitioned to rowhouse and institutional development in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Though it falls beyond the above-stated period of significance, the building was purchased by the adjacent West Philadelphia Hospital for Women (WPHW) in 1922 and subsequently incorporated into its campus. The significance of the building's association with the WPHW campus should be recognized in any future designation consideration of other surviving hospital resources, most notably the Elizabeth L. Peck Maternity Ward Building, constructed in 1917 and designed by noted Philadelphia Architect, Walter Smedley.

**Criterion A: Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past**

*and*

**Criterion J: Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community**

The building is located in the northern reaches of Philadelphia's Belmont neighborhood, which grew around transportation connections to the city center and distant townships in the decades following the American Civil War. Belmont's position along the Lancaster Avenue commercial corridor was integral to its growth, bringing commodities produced beyond the city through West Philadelphia on their way to city markets. In particular, during the mid-1800s Belmont was characterized by its role in Philadelphia's cattle economy with a number of drove yards, drover's hotels, abattoirs, and slaughterhouses interspersed within its steadily-growing blocks of urban grid extension. West Philadelphia's residential makeup experienced extensive growth between 1850 and 1860, while subsequent waves of growth during the last quarter of the nineteenth century completed the district's transformation from a quasi-rural suburb to a more characteristically dense, urban area.<sup>2</sup> Belmont was no exception, and witnessed the establishment of institutions that shaped its development

---

<sup>2</sup> Miller, Roger and Joseph Siry. "The Emerging Suburb: West Philadelphia, 1850-1880." *Pennsylvania History*, Vol. XLVII. No.2 (April 1980).

into the twentieth century. These included the West Philadelphia Hospital for Women, which began operation in 1889 along the 4000 block of Parrish Street, and the Pennsylvania Railroad's (PRR) YMCA Branch, which opened its doors to PRR employees—several of whom resided in Belmont—in 1892.<sup>3</sup> These institutions, as well as several churches, schools and a flourishing streetcar network, drew many new residents to the neighborhood, ultimately shaping Belmont's diversity of residential architecture.<sup>4</sup>

The origins of the McGaw Mansion can be traced to Belmont's nascent growth between the Civil War and 1876 Centennial Exhibition held in Fairmount Park. The building's lot was one of several owned by Philadelphia-born Congressman and attorney, William D. Kelley, between the 1860s and 1889. Kelley maintained residency in Belmont after the Civil War and was one of the neighborhood's key landowners. Over the course of two decades following the war, Kelley acquired, improved, and sold off many parcels in the vicinity of his home, an Italianate villa just east of the northeast corner of 41st and Parrish Streets.

During the years leading up to the Centennial International Exhibition of 1876, which placed Belmont alongside the World's Fair stage in Fairmount Park, Kelley's influence in real estate speculation in the neighborhood reached a zenith. After the Centennial, his holdings gradually gave way to suburban development when a wave of homebuyers began settling there.<sup>5</sup> In 1872, three years after the establishment of the Belmont Grammar School at Oregon (now Brown) and Preston Streets, Belmont mainly consisted of scattered residential development north of Lancaster Avenue. The Race and Vine Street Passenger Railroad Depot near 41<sup>st</sup> and Lancaster appeared as a local transportation hub on Hopkins' 1872 atlas, joining the Market Street Horsecar Line in opening up the northern reaches of the city west of the Schuylkill River.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>3</sup> United States Federal Census Records from 1900 indicate several PRR employees living in the vicinity of the PRR YMCA. United States Census Records accessed via Ancestry Library Online. On the West Philadelphia Hospital for Women see, West Philadelphia Hospital for Women records, 1899-1932, Drexel University College of Medicine, Legacy Center: Archives and Special Collections on Women in Medicine and Homeopathy. This collection is referenced in a collection guide compiled by the University of Pennsylvania located at [http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/pacscl/ead.html?id=PACSCL\\_DUCOM\\_WMSC160](http://dla.library.upenn.edu/dla/pacscl/ead.html?id=PACSCL_DUCOM_WMSC160), which notes: "Founded by "Dr. Elizabeth Comly-Howell in 1889, the West Philadelphia Hospital for Women was established in order to provide a place in West Philadelphia where women could be treated by women." Founded by Dr. Elizabeth Comly-Howell in 1889, the West Philadelphia Hospital for Women was established in order to provide a place in West Philadelphia where women could be treated by women." The collection guide also notes the following sources, Ed. Frederick P. Henry, *Founders' Week Memorial Volume*, "The West Philadelphia Hospital for Women," by Amy Comegys. Philadelphia: City of Philadelphia, 1909; and, Elizabeth Peck, M.D., "The West Philadelphia Hospital for Women," *Transactions of the Twenty-Fifth Annual Meeting of the Alumnae Association of the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania*. (Philadelphia: Alumnae Association of the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania, 1900).

<sup>4</sup> Robert Morris Skaler, *Images of America: West Philadelphia University City to 52<sup>nd</sup> Street*, (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishers, 2002), 95, 108, 115.

<sup>5</sup> Josh Bevan, "In Belmont, The Making of a 'City of Villas,'" Hidden City Philadelphia, 20 January 2017. <http://hiddencityphila.org/2017/01/in-belmont-the-making-of-a-city-of-villas/>.

<sup>6</sup> H.W. Hopkins, *Atlas of West Philadelphia Including the 24<sup>th</sup> & 27<sup>th</sup> Wards of the City of Philadelphia From Actual Surveys & Official Records*, (Philadelphia: G.M. Hopkins & Co, 1872), plate F, University Archives, University of Pennsylvania.

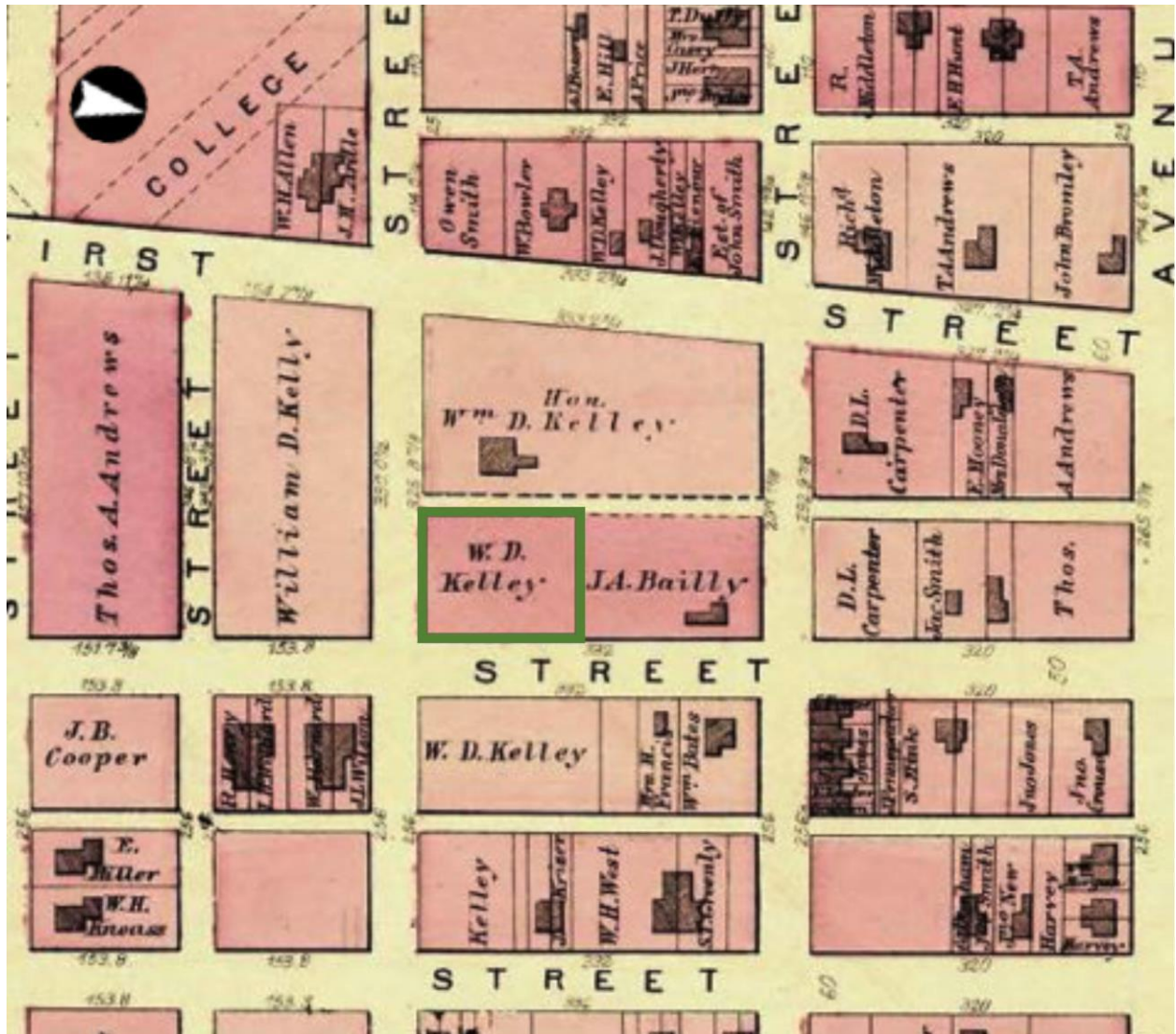


Figure 13: Hopkins' 1872 *Atlas of West Philadelphia* shows Belmont in the years leading up to the Centennial. William D. Kelley is indicated as owner of land upon which the McGaw residence would be built in 1890 (indicated with green rectangle). Kelley also indicated as owner of future site of West Philadelphia Hospital for Women. University of Pennsylvania, UniversityArchives.

Following the Centennial, which drew domestic and international attendees in droves to Fairmount Park's verdant grounds via West Philadelphia streetcars, Belmont appeared on J.D. Scott's 1878 atlas as a neighborhood in the midst of transformation.<sup>7</sup> As West Philadelphia historian M. Laffitte Veiera noted, "Like its great successor, the [World's] Columbian Expo[sition], the Centennial tended to make people of many nations better acquainted and it gave a great impetus to the growth and importance of West Philadelphia."<sup>8</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Scott, J.D. *Atlas of the 24th & 27th Wards, West Philadelphia: From Official Records, and Actual Surveys, Based Upon Plans Deposited in the Department of Surveys*, (Philadelphia: J.D. Scott, 1878), plate F. University Archives, University of Pennsylvania. See also, Veiera, 85.

<sup>8</sup> Veiera, M. Laffitte. *West Philadelphia Illustrated: Early History of West Philadelphia and Its Environs, Its People and Its Historical Points*. Philadelphia: Charles H. Clarke, 1903, 97.

Over the following decade-and-a-half, undeveloped parcels were turned into blocks faced with brick row houses situated upon subdivided lots, and the estates of landowners since passed, such as that of renowned Philadelphia builder Jesse Vodges, Sr., were just a few short years away from speculative development.<sup>9</sup>



Figure 14: Baist's *Atlas of the 24th and 27th Wards*, published in 1878, shows Belmont's development in immediate post-Centennial years. At this point, Kelley, whose holdings appear at top right, remained owner of several parcels surrounding his residence. Subject building's location indicated with green rectangle. University of Pennsylvania, University Archives.

These, among other parcels in Belmont, awaited investment in an area sandwiched between Lancaster Avenue and the Pennsylvania Railroad's lines running adjacent to Westminster Avenue. Proliferating streetcar connections proved catalytic to Belmont's influx of residents during the 1880s and 1890s. Rail transportation in particular transformed from a proximal amenity to an encircling asset that ran not only along Lancaster Avenue, but also along 41<sup>st</sup> and 42<sup>nd</sup> Streets all the way to Wyalusing Avenue.<sup>10</sup> Kelley, however, remained a patient speculator who retained ownership of undeveloped parcels longer than most of his Belmont contemporaries, albeit in part because he outlived them. Whether Kelley's speculative instinct or his health

<sup>9</sup> Veiera, 130.

<sup>10</sup> See Bromley's 1892 Atlas, plate 7 which shows streetcar lines running along several streets throughout Belmont including 40<sup>th</sup>, Parrish, Westminster, and 42<sup>nd</sup>.



drove his decision-making is unclear, but in 1886, the Congressman began to part with his holdings that were located in most cases within two blocks of his residence at 41<sup>st</sup> and Parrish Streets.

In 1889, roughly six months prior to his death in early January 1890, Kelley sold two lots at the northwest corner of Parrish and N. Preston Streets to neighboring Belmont resident Alexander McGaw.<sup>11</sup> McGaw was born in Drummore, Scotland on May 15, 1831 and immigrated to Canada in 1851, where he spent the next two decades in bridge and railroad construction. He arrived in Philadelphia by 1873 and established a partnership with contractor James S. Smith. Soon after, the pair was subcontracted by Phoenix Bridge Company for the construction of Philadelphia's Girard Avenue Bridge, which began in 1874.<sup>12</sup> McGaw garnered several major contracts that most often placed him in charge of masonry construction for bridges, dams, and other projects, including the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty, completed in 1886. An 1884 notice of contract for McGaw's work on the Seekonk River Bridge in Providence, Rhode Island noted, "Alex. McGaw, Contractor, who is now building the concrete portion of the pedestal of the Bartholdi statue...has been awarded the masonry, etc."<sup>13</sup> McGaw worked with well-known civil engineers including Alfred P. Boller on projects such as the Thames River Bridge in New London, Connecticut (1889) and the Duluth-Superior Bridge in Minnesota (1897).

In Philadelphia, McGaw initially resided at the Bingham House at 11<sup>th</sup> and Market Streets. By 1883, the year in which McGaw was contracted by the State of New York to begin construction of the McChancellorville Dam over the Hudson River, he was residing in one half of an Italianate villa at 819 N. Preston Street.<sup>14</sup> During the prime of his career McGaw maintained an office at 410 Walnut Street in Philadelphia, while also maintaining a second office in New York City. In 1889, McGaw purchased the subject parcel at N. Preston and Parrish Streets from William Kelley for the construction of a grand new residence, which broke ground in April 1890, as indicated on the building's original building permit. The construction was also noted in *American Architect and Building News* in May.<sup>15</sup> No other architect was listed for the project, making it highly probable that its Queen Anne design was either McGaw's own work or was adapted from a patternbook, still a relatively common practice at the time.

---

<sup>11</sup> Deed GGP 531/55, June 19<sup>th</sup> 1989 and GGP 529/219, June 24<sup>th</sup> 1889. Philadelphia City Archives.

<sup>12</sup> *An [sic] Historical Catalogue of The Saint Andrew's Society of Philadelphia: With Biographical Sketches of Deceased Members: 1749-1907*, (Philadelphia: St. Andrew's Society of Philadelphia, 1907), 243.

<sup>13</sup> "Seekonk River Bridge," *Engineering News and American Contract Journal*, Vol 11, May 31, 1884, 273.

<sup>14</sup> *Laws of the State of New York Passed at the One Hundred and Sixth Session of the Legislature*, (Albany, NY: Weed, Parsons and Company, Printers, 1883), 180.

<sup>15</sup> "Building Intelligence," *American Architect and Building News*, May 31, 1890, Vol. 28, 753. Original Permit: Building Permit Records, April 23, 1890, owner and contractor listed as Alex McGaw. North side of Parrish Street, west side of Preston Street, 24<sup>th</sup> Ward. Original building permit recovered at Philadelphia City Archives by historian, Donna Rilling.



Figure 20: 817/819 N. Preston Street, December 2016. Alexander McGaw resided at 819 Preston Street, the northern half of the semi-detached Italianate villa pictured between 1883 and 1889. McGaw retained ownership of 819 N. Preston through the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

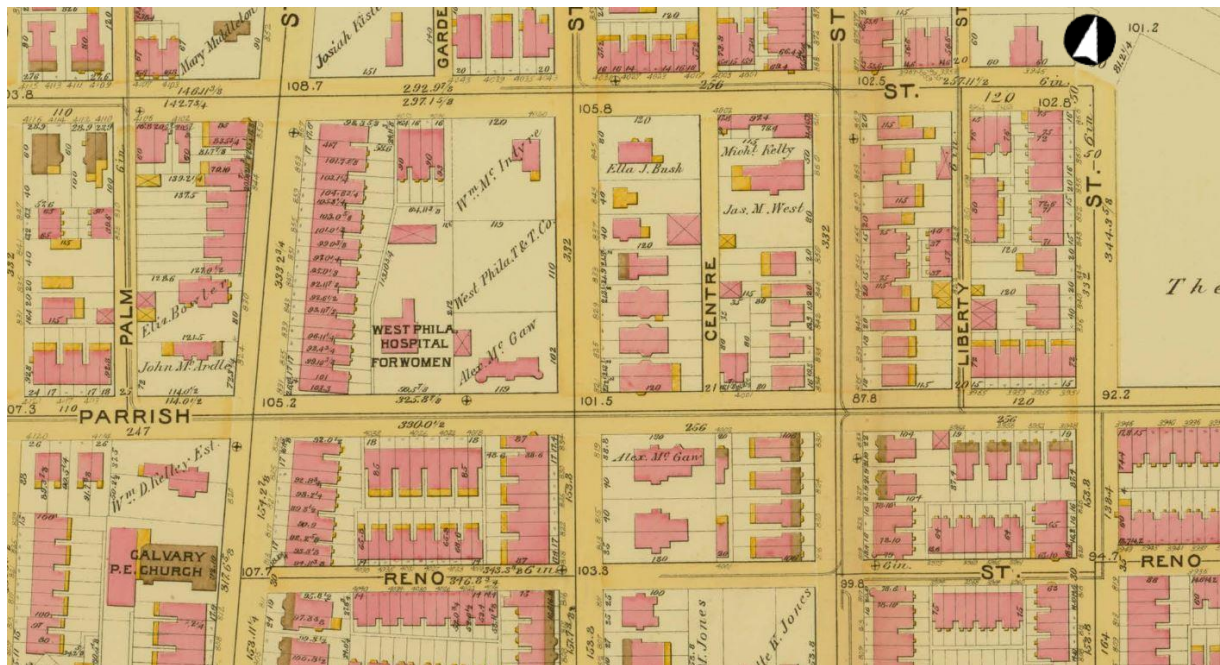


Figure 21: Bromley's 1892 *Atlas of the 24th and 27th Wards, West Philadelphia*. McGaw's residence is shown in an area with considerably higher density than around the time of the Centennial. The West Philadelphia Hospital for Women is shown immediately west of the mansion. University of Pennsylvania, University Archives.

McGaw resided at 836 N. Preston Street from 1890 to his death in 1905. The 1890s saw McGaw's masonry contracts continue to flourish across the Eastern Seaboard and the Midwest. Several Philadelphia city directories from later in the decade indicate McGaw and his sons William and Robert also operated a local construction business, and all three were also noted members of the Saint Andrew's Society of Philadelphia. McGaw was also a significant shareholder of the Belmont-based Blackwood Improvement Company (later the Park Front Improvement Company), which developed fashionable residences along Fairmount Park's western border in the 1890s. In 1892, the *North American* noted:

Numerous deeds were placed on record yesterday conveying property aggregating nearly \$1,000,000 to the Blackwood Improvement Company. The land conveyed embraces ground lying between 40<sup>th</sup> street and Belmont avenue...extending from the solidly built up portion of West Philadelphia to the Park, including a large number of houses...Old buildings are now being removed, new and handsome structures are in progress and the entire territory is restricted to the improvements of such a character as will ensure the creation of one of the choicest residence sections of Philadelphia.<sup>16</sup>

Shortly after 836 N. Preston was completed in mid- to late-1890, McGaw's wife Jessie Findlay, a native of Canada, passed away in 1891 at age 60.<sup>17</sup> Four years later, McGaw's daughter Margaret married Maryland-born druggist Lawson C. Funk. Funk, who resided a block westward at 841 N. 41<sup>st</sup> Street, was already acquainted with Alexander McGaw through prior real estate transactions, including those between McGaw and Kelley in which Funk served as a middle-man.<sup>18</sup> After McGaw's daughter moved out of the mansion following her marriage, the residence continued to be occupied by McGaw and his two sons. McGaw retired following the completion of the Duluth-Superior Bridge in 1897 and died in 1905 at the age of 73. In an article published by *The Washington Times* on New Year's Eve, 1905, McGaw was listed as an "architect/engineer" and featured among three hundred "Men and Women, Whose Place in This World's Work it Will be Hard to Fill." Following his death, McGaw's estate was equally divided between his daughter and two sons and 836 N. Preston Street remained in his family's ownership, with sons William and Robert heading the household.<sup>19</sup> McGaw's sons remained residents at 836 N. Preston Street through the early 1920s, renting out rooms to a roster of boarders who filled the mansion's expansive three-and-one-half stories.<sup>20</sup>

The late 1920s, however, placed the residence's continued existence at odds with the neighboring West Philadelphia Hospital for Women, an institution that was struggling at the time to manage its growth (annual

---

<sup>16</sup> "A Great Project Started," *North American* (Philadelphia, PA), 4 June 1892. *19<sup>th</sup> Century U.S. Newspapers*. Web. 6 April 2017.

<sup>17</sup> McGaw's wife passed away on October 23, 1891. Her obituary listed her residence as 836 N. Preston Street. See *The Times-Philadelphia*, 26 October 1891, 5.

<sup>18</sup> Funk conveyed lots to McGaw for \$1 after acquiring them from Kelley shortly prior.

<sup>19</sup> See McGaw's Will and Probate records available through Ancestry.com. Final Will, February 7, 1905.

<sup>20</sup> United States Federal Census Data. Accessed via Ancestry Library Online.

births at the WPHW increased from 21 in 1897 to 315 in 1916, for example).<sup>21</sup> The hospital expanded in 1917 with the construction of the Elizabeth L. Peck Maternity Ward immediately north of the subject building, designed by architect Walter Smedley and ornamented with Conkling-Armstrong terra cotta.<sup>22</sup> The new maternity ward emerged as a sign of the hospital's augmented capacity for care and West Philadelphia's rising population.

WPHW merged with the Woman's Hospital of Philadelphia (WHP) in 1929, which resulted in a change in name, but a continued purpose.<sup>23</sup> An expansion proposal following the merger called for the demolition of all existing WPHW buildings except for the Peck Maternity Ward, according to renderings produced ca. 1929.<sup>24</sup> Perhaps due to the onset of the Great Depression, the proposed expansion was only partially constructed and by 1931 the McGaw property was functioning as part of the hospital campus. A definitive sell date of the McGaw property was not able to be discovered. The Woman's Hospital of Philadelphia continued its operation in Belmont until 1964 when it was absorbed into the University of Pennsylvania's healthcare system. More recently, buildings from the hospital's complex underwent renovation and rehabilitation as part of the Friends Rehabilitation Program's Sarah Allen Homes, which provided affordable housing to seniors and families.<sup>25</sup> Despite apparent alterations to the buildings fenestration, and likely to interior spaces, the building retains an abundance of historic character that continues to reflect Belmont's growth in the late nineteenth century.

---

<sup>21</sup> Ladye W. Burrows, "New Maternity Building for West Philadelphia," *The Modern Hospital*, Vol. X, No. 6 (June, 1918): 413-417.

<sup>22</sup> *Philadelphia-World's Medical Center, 1930*, (Philadelphia, 1930), Drexel University College of Medicine, Archives and Special Collections. Accessed via Archive.org. See also, *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, v. 31, n. 40, p. 656, 10/4/1916. Athenaeum of Philadelphia, Philadelphia Architects and Buildings Database.

<sup>23</sup> "Hospital Campaign First Report Today." *Philadelphia Evening Public Ledger*. 29 January 1919, page 4.

<sup>24</sup> See, *Philadelphia-World's Medical Center, 1930*. Drexel University College of Medicine. Archives and Special Collections. Accessed via Internet Archive, Archive.org.

<sup>25</sup> *Sarah Allen Redevelopment Area Plan*, Philadelphia: Philadelphia City Planning Commission, April 1998, <http://www.phila.gov/CityPlanning/plans/Blight%20and%20Redevelopment%20Reports/sarahallenrap.pdf>. Accessed April 2017.



Figure 15: Elizabeth L. Peck Maternity Ward. Designed by architect, Walter Smedley, in 1916. Ornamentation for the Georgian Revival building was supplied by Philadelphia's, Conklin-Armstrong Co. Source: *The Modern Hospital*, Volume XI, 1918. Archive.org.



Figure 23: The WPHW complex pictured c. 1930. William D. Kelley's former residence along Parrish Street pictured left. Maternity pictured at center. McGaw's former residence at 836 N. Preston pictured at right. Philadelphia-World's Medical Center, 1930. Archive.org.

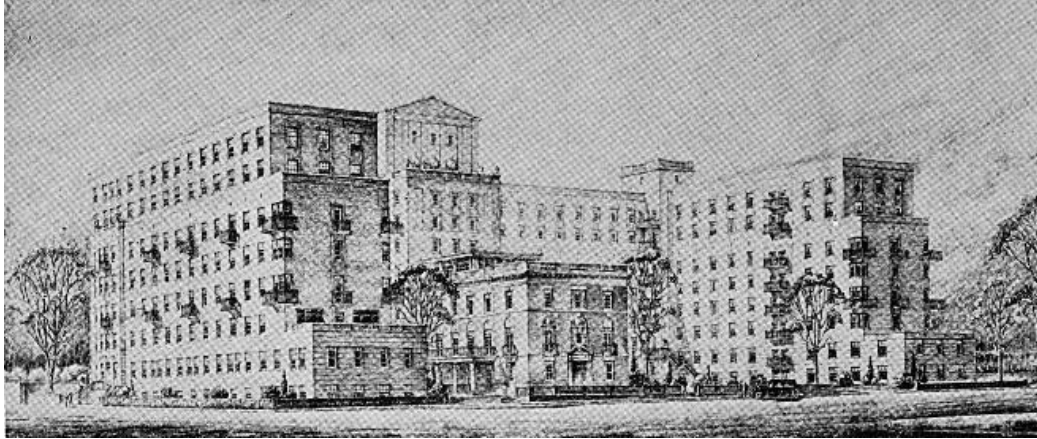


Figure 24: c. 1930 rendering of the proposed Woman's Hospital of Philadelphia Belmont complex. The Peck Maternity Ward, opened in 1917 is pictured at center. The unexecuted proposal entailed the demolition of the McGawproperty. Philadelphia-World's Medical Center, 1930. Archive.org



Figure 16: The Elizabeth L. Peck Maternity Ward building stands with high historic integrity alongside former buildings of the WHP just north of the subject building.



Figure 17: 836 N. Preston Street shown in context with former buildings of the WPHW/WHP, currently within the Sarah Allen Homes complex at N. Preston and Parrish Streets.

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

**Criterion D: Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen**

In 1876, Philadelphia and many international attendees were introduced to the Queen Anne style at the Centennial Exhibition held in Philadelphia's Fairmount Park. Among the many temporary, yet alluring buildings at the exhibition were several from England, designed in the soon-to-be popularized aesthetic that spread around the city and the United States in the 1880s.<sup>26</sup> As the Centennial captivated thousands, Philadelphia became the locus of the Queen Anne style's proliferation from the shores of New Jersey to San Francisco. Philadelphia in particular took hold of the Queen Anne for a bevy of aesthetic and social reasons. As such, the style's adoption in Philadelphia was exemplified in row houses, twins, and single-detached

---

<sup>26</sup> For a brief overview of the Queen Anne style see, Mark Gelernter, *A History of American Architecture: Buildings in Their Cultural and Technological Context*, (London: University Press of New England, 1999), 176-180. See also H. Hudson Holly, *Modern Dwellings in Town and Country: Adapted to American Wants and Climate*, (New York: Harper & Brothers; 1878) and W. Knight Sturges, "The Long Shadow of Norman Shaw," *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians*, Vol. 9, No. 4 (Dec., 1950), 15.

residences throughout the 1880s and early 1890s. The McGaw Mansion was constructed towards the twilight of the Queen Anne's popularity in Philadelphia and remains an excellent example of a restrained application of the style. Featuring the city's predominant brick cladding, the mansion flaunts characteristic Queen Anne detailing in its cylindrical bays and prominent cross-gabled forms, picturesque roofline, and varied material palette of brick, stone, plaster or pressed metal, and wood shingles. The building's brick and brownstone exterior was likely a reflection of owner and builder Alexander McGaw's professional experience and skills as a mason and contractor, as well as the prevalence of such materials in Philadelphia.

### **Conclusion**

During the last quarter of the twentieth century, the Belmont neighborhood in West Philadelphia witnessed a dramatic evolution of its built environment. Scattered clusters of speculative semi-detached houses and the larger estates of major landowners such as William D. Kelley were gradually transformed into a dense rowhouse neighborhood as the extension of rail-based transportation, increasing real estate values, and institutional development catalyzed the neighborhood's transformation. Notable contractor and mason Alexander McGaw acquired the subject parcel, then undeveloped, from Kelley in 1889 to construct what would become one of the last-built and last-surviving freestanding mansions in Belmont. Completed in 1890, 836

N. Preston Street is a characteristic example of the Queen Anne style and represents a significant benchmark in the residential development of the Belmont neighborhood, which now largely consists of rowhouse blocks and institutional buildings constructed in the ensuing decades. As such, the building merits listing on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places by satisfying Criteria A, C, D, and J as defined in the Philadelphia Historic Preservation Ordinance, Section 14-1004(1).



## 8. BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Bevan, Josh. "In Belmont, The Making of a 'City of Villas.'" *Hidden City Philadelphia*, 20 January 2017.  
<http://hiddencityphila.org/2017/01/in-belmont-the-making-of-a-city-of-villas/>.
- Burrows, Ladye W. "New Maternity Building for West Philadelphia" in *The Modern Hospital*, Vol. X, No. 6 (June, 1918): 413-417.
- Henry, Frederick P., editor. *Founders' Week Memorial Volume*. "The West Philadelphia Hospital for Women," by Amy Comegys. Philadelphia: City of Philadelphia, 1909.
- Miller, Roger and Joseph Siry. "The Emerging Suburb: West Philadelphia, 1850-1880." *Pennsylvania History*, Vol. XLVII. No.2 (April 1980).
- Mitchell, Elizabeth. *Liberty's Torch: The Great Adventure to Build the Statue of Liberty*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 2014. 208
- Peck, Elizabeth, M.D., "The West Philadelphia Hospital for Women," *Transactions of the Twenty-Fifth Annual Meeting of the Alumnae Association of the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania*. Philadelphia: Alumnae Association of the Woman's Medical College of Pennsylvania, 1900.
- Skaler, Robert Morris. *West Philadelphia: University City to 52<sup>nd</sup> Street*. Images of America. Charleston, S.C.: Arcadia Publishing, 2002.
- Speirs, Frederick W. *The Street Railway System of Philadelphia: Its History and Present Condition*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1897.
- Vieira, M. Laffitte. *West Philadelphia Illustrated: Early History of West Philadelphia and Its Environs, Its People and Its Historical Points*. Philadelphia: Charles H. Clarke, 1903.
- "Alfred P. Boller". *The Successful American*. Vol. 7, No. 1 (January, 1903), New York: Writers' Press Association, 90-91.
- History of the Portland Cement Industry in the United States*, Philadelphia: American Cement Company, 1895.
- Philadelphia-World's Medical Center*. 1930. Drexel University College of Medicine. Archives and Special Collections. Accessed via Internet Archive, Archive.org.
- Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, v. 31, n. 40, p. 656, 10/4/1916. Athenaeum of Philadelphia, Philadelphia Architects and Buildings Database.
- Sarah Allen Redevelopment Area Plan*. Philadelphia: Philadelphia City Planning Commission, April 1998.  
<http://www.phila.gov/CityPlanning/plans/Blight%20and%20Redevelopment%20Reports/sarahallenrap.pdf>.

## Maps and Atlases from West Philadelphia Community History Center Online

- Baist, William G. *Atlas of West Philadelphia, 24th and 27th Wards. Compiled from Official Records, Private Plans and Actual Surveys Based Upon Plans Deposited in the Department of Surveys*. Philadelphia: J.L. Smith, 1886. Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

Bromley, George W. and Walter S. *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, wards 24, 27, 34, 40, 44 & 46, West Philadelphia, From Actual Surveys and Official Plans*. Philadelphia: G.W. Bromley, 1927. Kislak Center, University of Pennsylvania Libraries.

Bromley, Walter S. *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia. From Actual Surveys and Official Plans of the Survey Department*. Philadelphia: G.W. Bromley, 1892. University Archives, University of Pennsylvania.

Hopkins, H.W. *Atlas of West Philadelphia Including the 24th & 27th Wards of the City of Philadelphia From Actual Surveys & Official Records*. Philadelphia: G.M. Hopkins & Co, 1872. University Archives, University of Pennsylvania.

Scott, J.D. *Atlas of the 24th & 27th Wards, West Philadelphia: From Official Records, and Actual Surveys, Based Upon Plans Deposited in the Department of Surveys*. Philadelphia: J.D. Scott, 1878. University Archives, University of Pennsylvania.

Smedley, Samuel L. *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1862. Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

### **Maps and Atlases from Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network: PhilaGeoHistory.org**

Bromley, George W. and Walter S. *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, Complete in One Volume: From Actual Surveys and Official Plans*. Philadelphia: G.W. Bromley & Co., 1895. Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

Bromley, George W. and Walter S. *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, Complete in One Volume: From Actual Surveys and Official Plans*. Philadelphia: G.W. Bromley & Co., 1901. Free Library of Philadelphia.

Bromley, George W. and Walter S. *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, Complete in One Volume: From Actual Surveys and Official Plans*. Philadelphia: G.W. Bromley & Co., 1910. Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

Bromley, George W. and Walter S. *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia: West Philadelphia, 1916*. Philadelphia: G.W. Bromley & Co., 1916. Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

Bromley, George W. and Walter S. *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia: West Philadelphia, 1918*. Philadelphia: G.W. Bromley & Co., 1918. Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

### **Newspapers & Periodicals**

“A Great Project Started.” *North American* (Philadelphia, PA). 4 June 1892. *19<sup>th</sup> Century U.S. Newspapers*. Web. 6 April 2017.

*An Historical Catalogue of The Saint Andrew's Society of Philadelphia: With Biographical Sketches of Deceased Members: 1749-1907*. Philadelphia: St. Andrew's Society of Philadelphia, 1907.

“Building Intelligence.” *American Architect and Building News*. May 31, 1890, Vol. 28, 753.

“Business at the Register’s.” *Philadelphia Inquirer*. 12 February 1905, 2.

“The Latest News in Real Estate.” *Philadelphia Inquirer*. 19 April 1897, p 11.

“Hospital Campaign First Report Today.” *Philadelphia Evening Public Ledger*. 29 January 1919, page 4.

“Hospitable Women.” *Philadelphia Inquirer*. 22 January 1895, page 2.

*Laws of the State of New York Passed at the One Hundred and Sixth Session of the Legislature.* Albany, NY: Weed, Parsons and Company, Printers, 1883.

“Seekonk River Bridge.” *Engineering News and American Contract Journal*. Vol 11, May 31, 1884, 273.

“The Silent Reapers Harvest of the Great.” *The Washington Times*. 31 December 1905.

“The Thames River Bridge.” *Engineering News*, Vol. 19, 19 May 1888, 399.

*The Engineering & Building Record and The Sanitary Engineer*, Index to Volume 20 June 1, 1889 to November 30, 1889, 285.

*The Railroad Gazette*. Twenty-Ninth Quarto Volume. 12 March 1897, p.180.

F

### **Additional Sources and Repositories**

Newspapers.com.

Philadelphia City Archives.

Philadelphia City Directories via Ancestry.com.

Philadelphia City Directories via Philageohistory.org.

Unites States Federal Census Records via Ancestry.com.