

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: 3850 The Oak Road
Postal code: 19129 Councilmanic District: 4th

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: Henry W. Brown House
Current/Common Name: _____

3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Building Structure Site Object

4. PROPERTY INFORMATION

Occupancy: occupied vacant under construction unknown
Current use: Institutional/special events

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

See attached

6. DESCRIPTION

See attached

7. SIGNIFICANCE

Please attach the Statement of Significance.

Period of Significance (from year to year): from 1907 to 1926

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: 1907; 1937-38

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: Clinton Gardner Harris

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: Frederick Eldridge

Original owner: Henry W. Brown

Other significant persons: _____

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

See attached

9. NOMINATOR

Organization East Falls Historical Society Date 7/23/2018

Name with Title Steven J. Peitzman Email peitzmansj@gmail.com

Street Address 2911 Wood Pipe Ln Apt D Telephone 215-843-7412

City, State, and Postal Code Philadelphia, PA 19129

Nominator is is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: 7/23/2018

Correct-Complete Incorrect-Incomplete Date: 8/20/2018

Date of Notice Issuance: 8/21/2018

Property Owner at Time of Notice

Name: William Penn Charter School

Address: 3000 W School House Lane

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19144

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: 10/17/2018

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: 11/9/2018

Date of Final Action: 11/9/2018

Designated Rejected

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Beginning at a point on the Southwesterly side of The Oak Road at a distance of approximately 216 feet Southeastwardly from the Southeasterly side of School House Lane, thence extending Southwest approximately 231 feet to a point, thence Southeast approximately 300 feet to a point, thence Northeast 72 feet to a point, thence Southeast approximately 19 feet to a point, thence Northeast approximately 96 feet to a point, thence Northwest approximately 9 feet to a point, thence Northeast approximately 34 feet to a point on the Southwesterly side of The Oak Road, thence extending along the same in a Northwesterly direction the distance of approximately 313 feet to the first mentioned point and place of beginning.



Figure 1: 3850 The Oak Road, parcel in blue. OPA account #775528500.

6. DESCRIPTION¹



Figure 2: View towards the property from the Oak Road. Source: Steven Peitzman, August 2018.



Figure 3: Birdseye view looking true north. For the purposes of this nomination, cardinal directions will be used for the building elevations. Source: Pictometry, 2018.

Set on a large lot and oriented perpendicular to The Oak Road, the roughly U-shaped Colonial Revival residence, constructed in 1907 on a design by Clinton Gardner Harris, is dominated by

¹ Note: The streets most relevant to this nomination are The Oak Road and School House Lane. By the compass, the former runs northwest-southeast, and the latter southwest-northeast. But in the northwest part of Philadelphia streets are numbered from Germantown Avenue, deemed a north-south street. Streets perpendicular to it, more or less, are officially denoted as east-west. To avoid the cumbersome oblique directions, the nomination will refer only to the four primary directions. The house nominated, 3850 The Oak Road, by the compass faces southeast, but will be referred to as facing south. **This description was written largely by David Breiner, PhD.** Photographs for this nomination are by Steven J. Peitzman in May and June 2018, unless otherwise noted.

its wide, symmetrical, main block. One best views the primary or south elevation of 3850 The Oak Road across a green expanse, as was intended for this early twentieth-century gentleman's country home. The contrast between red brick and white stucco, reminiscent of Mount Pleasant, presents the dominant visual effect. The primary facade attains as well a sense of balance and substantiality. The dominant horizontality (95 feet wide and about 34 feet high from ground to peak of roof) is relieved by the brickwork quoins and the projecting portico. The profusion of windows and overhanging hipped roof suggest welcome and shelter. The rear of the house (north) with its two extensions continues basic design features, as noted below, and shows an array of generous dormers (needed for light and ventilation in rear sleeping rooms). The designer eschewed dormers in the front, however, which might agitate the sweep of the roof line. The house contained about 20 rooms when built. After renovations carried out by a new owner in 1937-1938, the house comprised the following: basement: heating and air conditioning plant, recreation room and bar; first floor: stair hall, lavatory, library, music room, living room, dining room, pantry, kitchen, laundry, toilet; second floor: hall, bedrooms & baths, etc.; attic half-story: hall, bedrooms & bath, unfinished storage.² (This information is added only for completeness: the nomination seeks only designation for the exterior.)



Figure 4: South elevation of the main block.

On the main block, three brick chimney stacks interrupt the expansive hipped slate roof, as does a large central cross gable that caps a central projecting bay. This dominant element comprises a

² Mutual Assurance Company Survey 11438, 2 May 1938, 3850 The Oak Road, Philadelphia, for policy issued to John H. Hohenadel, at Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

first-story projecting entry porch with fluted Tuscan columns and pilasters, a tripartite arrangement of second-story windows, and a grand Palladian window within the gable. A delicate fan window surmounts a single six-panel entrance door. The edges of the projection are highlighted by brick quoining against the white stucco of the walls.

A similar contrast unites the rest of the facade, in which brick is employed to create flat arches above the window openings, a stringcourse between first and second stories, and quoining to separate major elements in the composition. Gray stone sills visually balance the flat arches to complete the window treatment. Flanking the central projection on each side are three bays of aligned windows and a wider end bay, brick below and stucco above, with tripartite openings of either all windows or windows framing a door. Most windows are double-hung wood sash, six-over-six or twelve-over-twelve; a few are smaller. Wood details are found at the porch entablature, the cornice at the top of the wall, and outlining the gable. The prominent brickwork of the corner sections of the main block utilizes a quoin variant with every fifth course recessed, and an

expanded base that continues along the walls as a low water table (not seen in photographs), the overall effect conveying strength, and providing a clear “framing” of the façade. This brickwork is exactly replicated in the gate/fence posts, contributing to an overall sense of cohesive design.



Figure 5: Central projecting bay.



Figure 6: (Left) West elevation of the main block. (Right) Southeast corner of the main block.

The west and east elevations of the main block continue the motifs of the main façade. For the former, brick frames expanses of four large four-over-four double-hung windows at each level. Such windows are seen also at the west-most bay of the front elevation, slightly violating symmetry of the façade. These larger windows and panes suggest the use of the first and second-floor rooms at the west end as a glazed sun porch or “living porch” below and a sleeping porch above, end porches being highly popular and deemed salutary when this house was built. For the east elevation, the first story incorporates a series of five jalousie windows (a modification) beneath a stucco second story showing two small double-hung nine-over-nine windows. (An insurance survey from 1938 indicates that the first-floor space at this end of the structure had been an open porch, again in keeping with Progressive Era favoring of ventilation.)^{3,4}

North Elevation/Rear Extensions

The rear extensions (which are original to house) projecting from the main block as well as the north (rear) elevation of the main block are dominated by stucco walls, while the brick flat arches, brick string course, and broad brick chimney stacks are reminiscent of the façade. Windows are double-hung wood sash. At the attic level, gabled dormer windows project. The rear extension along the east side of the building, the larger of the two, steps down from two-and-one-half stories with a hooded doorway facing southwest, to a



Figure 7: Looking south at the north elevation and rear wings.

slightly recessed one-story segment, and terminates in a one-story glazed porch with wood steps. The smaller rear extension along the west side of the building shares the architectural vocabulary with the first extension. It also has a two-and-one-half-story section which is flanked on one side by a one-story portion, lined with double-hung windows, and by a one-story portion with a large section of glass block.

Between these rear extensions, some of the north (rear) elevation of the main block is visible. At the second story, one sees a triad of windows of decreasing height, which presumably align with a grand interior staircase and otherwise resemble the windows elsewhere on the building. Above

³ Mutual Assurance Company Survey 11438, 2 May 1938, 3850 The Oak Road, Philadelphia, for policy issued to John H. Hohenadel.

⁴ Bridget A. May, “Progressivism and the Colonial Revival,” *Winterthur Profiles*; 26(1999):107-122.

a shingled setback stands another Palladian window beneath the eaves of the gabled roof, matching that on the front facade.



Figure 8: (Left) North elevation with east extension; (Right) Larger, east, rear extension.

The site's landscape elements, including brick gateposts and fence posts capped by stone finials (five are extant), a curved driveway entered from The Oak Road (originally, access was from School House Lane), and a hedge-framed lawn, accentuate the suburban character of the estate.

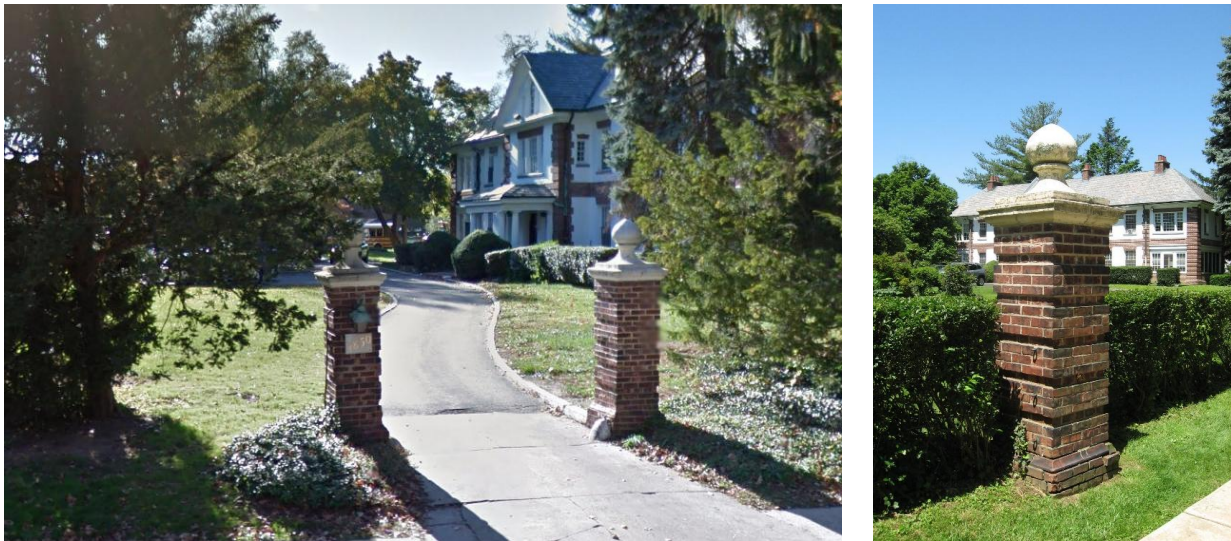


Figure 9: Brick gate and fence posts along property line on The Oak Road. The driveway entrance from The Oak Road was created in the 1920s.



Figure 10: The Oak Road, bending northeast towards the oak island.

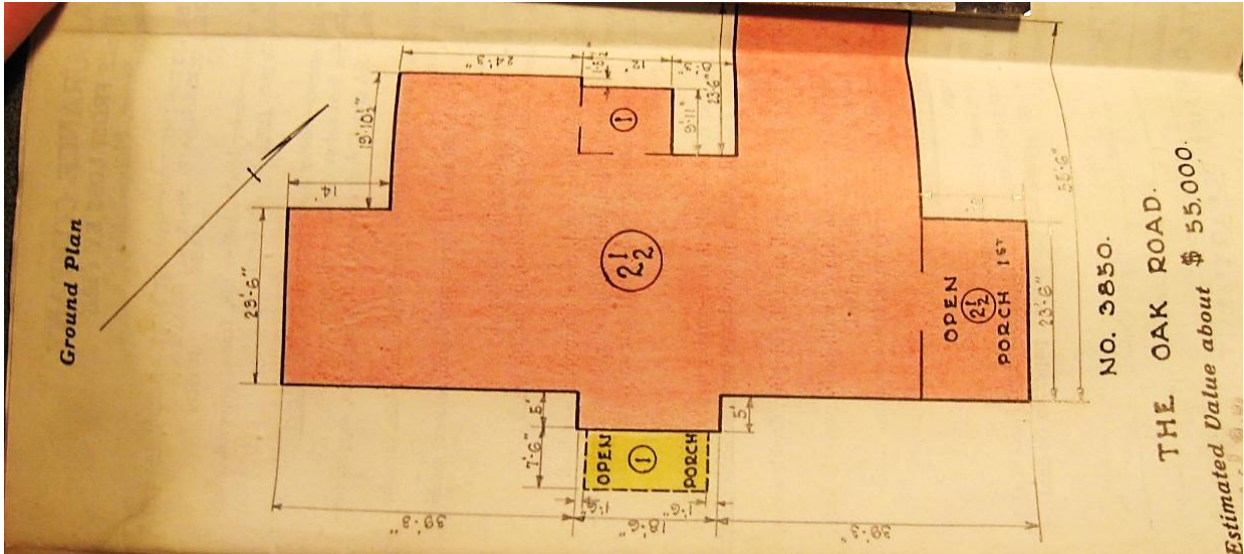


Figure 11: Plan of first floor, from 1938 insurance survey. Source: Mutual Assurance Company Survey 11438, 2 May 1938, 3850 The Oak Road, Philadelphia, for policy issued to John H. Hohenadel.

Additional Photographs



Figure 12: Photograph from the 1938 insurance survey, cited above. At this time, the house had shutters.



Figure 13: Current photograph. When compared to the historic photograph of the property, it is clear that the building retains nearly all of its original features.

7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The property at 3850 The Oak Road is historically significant and should be listed individually on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Pursuant to Section 14-1004(1) of the Philadelphia Code, the property satisfies Criteria for Designation C, D, and J. The property:

- (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.

3850 The Oak Road was constructed in 1907 for businessman Henry W. Brown, a notable figure in the insurance industry in his day, and the person responsible for the establishment of The Oak Road. Brown's development of the property and The Oak Road connected the history of School House Lane as a secluded realm of country estates to the early twentieth century suburban transformation of the adjacent section of East Falls, satisfying Criterion J. Nearly unchanged since its construction, the grand former residence is an excellent representative example of the Colonial Revival period in American architecture and culture, satisfying Criteria C and D.

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

West School House Lane and in the Early Twentieth Century

At the turn of the twentieth century, country estates of varying size lined School House Lane (earlier known as Bensell's Lane) from Wissahickon Avenue (earlier known as Township Line Road) almost to the Schuylkill River, with names like Torworth, Woodside, Oakley, The Pines, Blythewood, Netherfield, etc. At the east end of this range, at Wissahickon Avenue, an area then considered part of Germantown though technically in Roxborough Township, stood Justus Strawbridge's Torworth on a large tract of land; at the west extreme, and surviving, is the large stone house known as Ravenhill Mansion, in the 1890s the home of William Weightman of Weightman and Powers, once a large chemical manufacturing plant in Falls of Schuylkill. It is now part of the East Falls campus of Jefferson University, formerly Philadelphia University, and Philadelphia College of Textiles and Science before that. Thomas Powers also owned a large house and property adjoining his partner's, both estates sited just north of, and across railroad tracks from, their sprawling manufacturing plant.

Contributing to the almost rural milieu of this distinctive segment of Philadelphia were the physical characteristics of School House Lane itself – narrow and only partly fitted with concrete curbs and sidewalks until relatively recent (i.e., post-1990) modernizations, and no traffic lights until Henry Avenue intruded about 1910. Furthermore, the properties along both sides of School House Lane enjoyed a surprising level of seclusion in 1900. The estates on the north side of the

Lane were bounded by Fairmount Park and the Wissahickon Creek, and only Gypsy Lane near the lower end extended from School House Lane to another road - that being only the drive along the Creek, within the Park. On the south side, from Wissahickon Avenue to Ridge, only one small pathway, sometimes referred to as Cedar Lane, extended part of the way towards Midvale Avenue just east of present day Henry Avenue (it still exists as a driveway between School House Lane and Coulter Street serving homes on Netherfield Road and Henry Avenue; Coulter Street, earlier Mill Street, though on the city plan did not yet exist at this location in 1900). Of course numerous private drives led into the many properties, but in effect in 1900 no street worthy of the name connected this 1.3 mile span of School House Lane with adjoining sections of the city.⁵ A man named Henry W. Brown would soon change this, combining the construction of a fine suburban house with the development of an actual street coming off School House Lane.

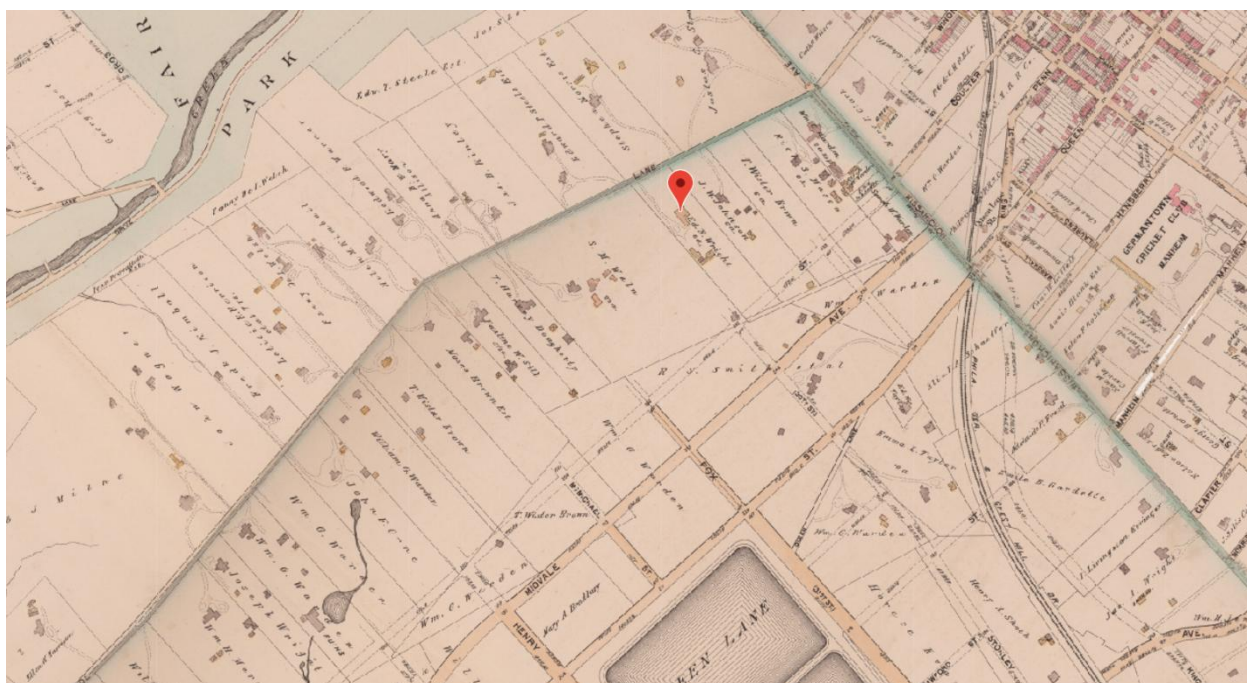


Figure 14: Detail from 1895 G.W. Bromley *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia*. Source: PhilaGeoHistory.

Henry W. Brown and His New House

In 1906, Henry W[aterston] Brown (1847 – 1925) purchased two adjoining rectangular six-acre parcels on the south side of School House Lane about one quarter mile west of Wissahickon Avenue, both extending from School House Lane south to a property line (corresponding to a small lane not on the city plan and once called Cherry Lane) parallel to School House Lane (see map 1). One parcel, to the west, was the tract and house known as Oakley, since the 1840s the home of the Wright family, Quakers who built their crockery importing business into one of

⁵ G. W. Bromley & Co., *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, 1901* (accessed via philageohistory.org).

Philadelphia’s major shipping and import-export firms.⁶ The head of the family in the late nineteenth century, Edward N. Wright (b. 1817) died in 1902, and the family sold the grounds and buildings on it to Brown in 1906.⁷ The second parcel, adjacent to the Oakley property to the east, was sold to Brown by a family named Johnson who had owned their land also since the 1840s.⁸ This sale included a large “Gothic cottage” known as Ivy Cottage, extant today as 3819 The Oak Road and on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.

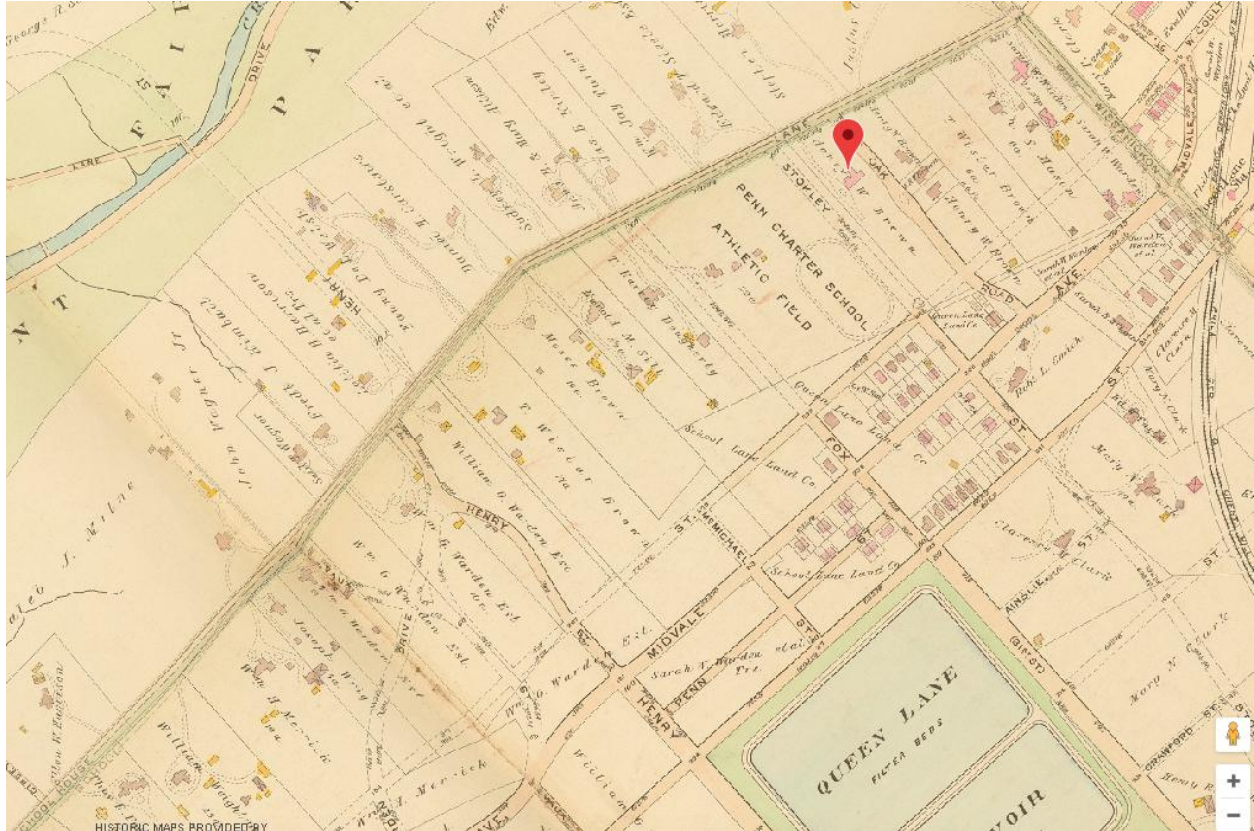


Figure 15: Detail from 1910 G.W. Bromley *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia*. Source: PhilaGeoHistory.

Henry W. Brown was born in Beverly, Massachusetts in 1847, served in the Civil War, and came to Philadelphia in 1871. He became a prominent insurance broker and founded Henry W. Brown & Company, a firm centered on fire and catastrophe insurance for manufacturers. In an advertisement in the September 17, 1920, *Evening Public Ledger* the company offers quotations for “EXPLOSION INSURANCE: Insurance against Damage of Every Kind Resulting from Explosion.”⁹ This appeared the day after a massive bombing in front of the J. P. Morgan offices on Wall Street that killed over thirty people – an event largely forgotten and a mystery never

⁶ Edward Needles Wright, “The Story of Peter Wright & Sons, Philadelphia Quaker Shipping Firm 1818-1911,” *Quaker History* 56(1967):67-89.

⁷ City of Philadelphia, Deed Book WSV, no. 622, p. 294, indenture 14 May 1906, between Emily W[right] Bray et al and Henry W. Brown.

⁸ City of Philadelphia, Deed Book WSV, no. 651, p. 419, indenture 23 June 1906, between Lindley Johnson et al and Henry W. Brown.

⁹ *Evening Public Ledger*, Philadelphia, 17 September 1920.

solved. In 1880 Brown initiated the formation of the Philadelphia Manufacturers Mutual Fire Insurance Company not only to provide insurance but also to improve preventive measures, particularly within the city's many textile factories, which were particularly vulnerable to fire. He was also among the first to press the Bureau of Water (later, Water Department) to create a high pressure water system for use in fighting blazes. Brown occasionally spoke publicly about the need for insurance within industry. He was a leading figure in Philadelphia insurance.

Brown seems to have been already married when he came to Philadelphia. By 1880, he was living at 145 West School House Lane in Germantown with his wife, Alice P. Driver Brown, three sons (Henry Ingersoll, 1870 – 1955; Theodore Edmonson, 1878 – 1947; and Reynolds Driver., 1869 - 1952), and daughter Alice (1872 – 1889), who died young, from typhoid fever. An 1895 Bromley atlas, however, shows H. W. Brown at a location on Wayne Avenue just north of School House Lane. For a time, the family lived at 1023 Spruce Street before returning to the Germantown area in 1907 to build and live on what would become The Oak Road. Brown and the family ascended to the upper reaches of Philadelphia society. He and his wife appeared in the *Philadelphia Social Register* by the early 1900's. Brown was a member of the Union League, the Philadelphia Country Club, the Philadelphia Cricket Club, and the Germantown Cricket Club (also known as Manheim). None did he value more than the last of these: Henry W. Brown was a skilled and devoted cricketer, playing on the "Daisy Eleven" at Germantown. Cricket occupied a lively place in Philadelphia athletics in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially



"HALIFAX CUP" CHAMPIONS—DAISY ELEVEN, 1886

Figure 16: Brown, seated center, served as captain of one of the Germantown Cricket Club Teams. Source: The Germantown Cricket Club, *100 Years of the Germantown Cricket Club* (Philadelphia, 1954), available on the Club's website germantowncricket.org

among the city's elites. The well-coached Germantowners played well and competed internationally. Brown and his wife became life members; Mrs. Brown worked on several of the women's committees. The Cricket Club could serve as a social hub for members well beyond their playing years. (The photograph shows Brown, center seated, as captain of one of the Germantown Cricket Club teams). Brown later took up golf and competed at a high level in this pursuit. The family owned a lodge at Manchester-in-the-Mountains New Hampshire for the traditional summer escape from Philadelphia.¹⁰

¹⁰ Sources for the life of Henry W. Brown and Brown's family: "Henry W. Brown," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 24 December 1925 p. 23 (a brief obituary notice); Census of the United States 1880, Philadelphia, 22nd ward, enumeration district 446, sheet 366-A; Census of the United States 1910, Philadelphia, 38th ward, enumeration district 953, sheet 1-A; Census of the United States 1920, Philadelphia, 38th ward, enumeration district 1373, sheet 8-B; *Philadelphia Social Register* 1903 (New York: Social Register Association, 1903) and subsequent editions; The Germantown Cricket Club. Charter, By-laws, Rules, Officers, and Members, (Philadelphia, 1895); J. A. Fowler, *History of Insurance in Philadelphia in Two Centuries, 1683 – 1882* (Philadelphia, 1882); John A. Lester, ed., *A Century of Philadelphia Cricket* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1951); The Germantown Cricket Club, *100 Years of the Germantown Cricket Club* (Philadelphia, 1954), available on the Club's website germantowncricket.org; David Ahern, *The Germantown Cricket Club: Philadelphia's Forgotten Pastime*,

In 1907, Brown commissioned architect Clinton Gardner Harris (1872 – 1910) to design his new home.¹¹ Harris attended Germantown Academy and graduated with a B.S. in architecture from the University of Pennsylvania in 1893, having been awarded first prize in architectural design. He also studied at the Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Arts, and in Paris. Harris traveled in Spain and published several memoirs of his visits to famous house gardens.

Directories show him listed as “architect” with home address 165 West School House Lane (his family home) from 1896 to 1906. He practiced in the offices of Cope & Stewardson of Philadelphia, Warren & Wetmore in New York, and then for a few years with the firm of Magaziner & Potter in Philadelphia.

¹² In addition to the design for his home, Henry W. Brown engaged Harris to design alterations to a structure on 5th Street that would house his insurance company, and also in the Colonial Revival style.¹³ Brown’s son Reynolds D. Brown in turn hired Harris to design *his* home on the Oak Road in 1907.¹⁴ In fact, Clinton Gardner Harris was a member of the family: two of Henry W. Brown’s sons had married two of Clinton Gardner Harris’s sisters. Harris’ brother George B. Harris by 1908 had purchased Ivy Cottage from Henry W. Brown (this was the surviving Gothic revival house on the Johnson parcel which Brown had acquired, standing directly across The Oak Road from the house Brown built). Clinton Gardner Harris died of typhoid fever in 1910, leaving few known completed projects to speak to his capability.¹⁵



Figure 17: 1915 photograph of Henry W. Brown & Co. office building (1910), 433 Walnut Street. One of the last designs by Clinton Gardener Harris, who died the same year. This block of Walnut Street was demolished in the 1950s for Independence Mall. Source: Philadelphia Historical Commission.

Available evidence does not clarify exactly what Henry W. Brown at sixty years of age had in mind when he bought the two parcels on School House Lane in 1906 and set about building a

<http://www.philaplace.org/story/963/>, accessed 25 June 2018; “The White Mountain Resorts are Awakening,” *The Times* (Philadelphia), 28 June 1900, p. 6.

¹¹ Building Permit 1907-2450, 23 April 1907, Philadelphia City Archives.

¹² John Woolf Jordan, *Colonial Families of Philadelphia Vol. 2.*, 1911, p. 1324.

¹³ *Philadelphia Read Estate Record and Builders’ Guide*. 7 June 1905, v. 20, p. 363; Charles Francis Osborne, ed., *Historic Houses and their Gardens* (Philadelphia: House & Garden, John C. Winston Co., 1908), chapters by Harris on Aranjuez, 27-48; on Granja, San Ildefonso, 95-104.

¹⁴ “Frederick Eldridge, three-story residence...for Reynolds D. Brown...,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 16 May 1907, p. 11.

¹⁵ The sources for the short life and work of Clinton Gardner Harris, which is scant, comprise mainly materials in his biographical folder at the Athenaeum of Philadelphia. The family relationships are described in John Woolf Jordan, *Colonial Families of Philadelphia*, v. 2 (New York, 1911), p. 1324. The entry in this work states that Harris “was in the office of Cope & Stewardson, Philadelphia, for several years” and in the office of “Warren and Wetmore, architects, New York City, until 1906” then back in Philadelphia. The 1895 Bromley *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia* shows that Joseph S. Harris (father of Clinton Gardner and of the two daughters-in-law of Henry W. Brown) resided at 165 West School House Lane, and that an adjacent property with a Wayne Avenue address is labeled as that of “H. W. Brown.” So the friendships and connections of the two families go back at least to the 1890s. Joseph S. Harris was a president of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad, commonly known as the “Reading Railroad.”

landmark house. Perhaps his intent initially was to establish a country estate for his eventual retirement, conveniently close to the Germantown Cricket Club (and also, for easy access to Center City while he still worked, very near the Queen Lane station of the Pennsylvania Railroad Chestnut Hill Branch). Maybe he conceived of establishing a sort of family colony, with homes for his sons as well; two of them did live in houses on The Oak Road at one time or another. Or, perhaps he at the outset planned to both build an exceptional house for himself and family, *and* start a small but elite housing development along a new street – something previously unknown to the stretch of School House Lane we have been here discussing.

Both house and new street, to be called The Oak Road, were well underway in 1907.¹⁶

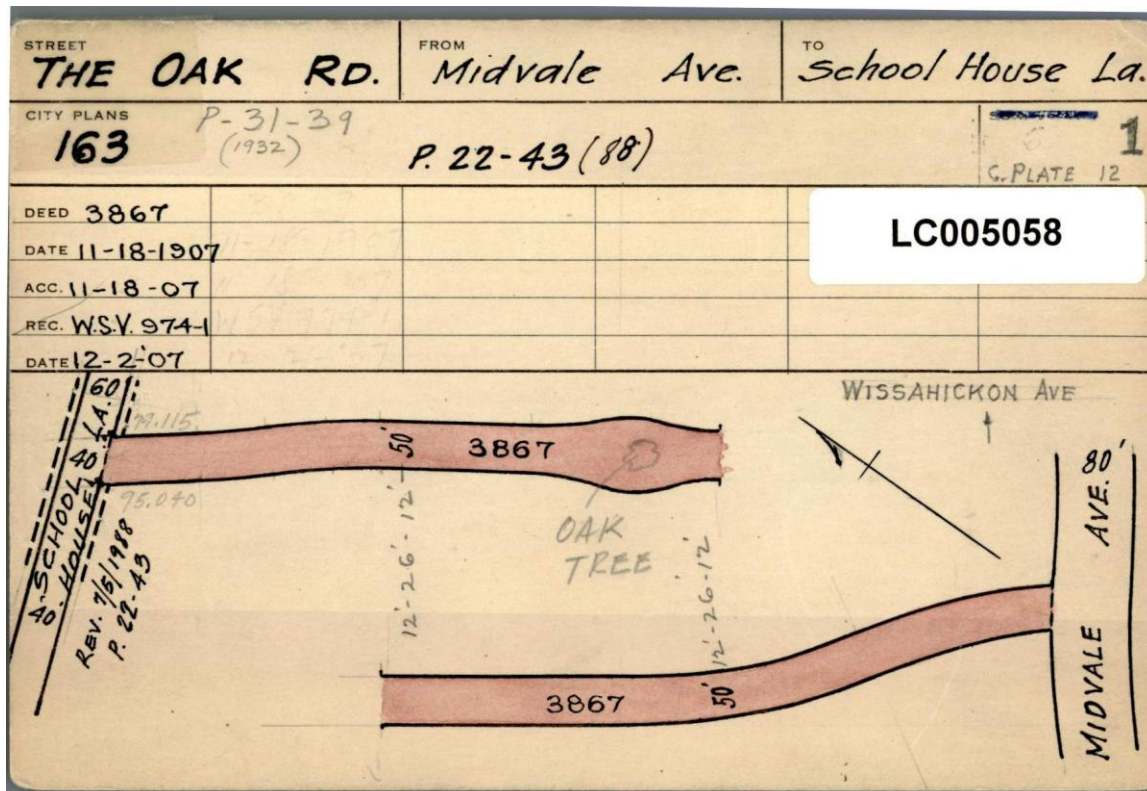


Figure 18: Legal Card for The Oak Road, from Midvale Avenue to School House Lane. Source: phl.maps.arcgis.com

The Oak Road

When Henry W. Brown purchased his twelve acres along School House Lane presumably with the intention of both building a fine house for himself, and undertaking development, he had something like a precedent, probably not known to him, one hundred years earlier in West Philadelphia. William Hamilton, owner of Woodlands mansion in 1804 subdivided some of his

¹⁶ “Frederick Eldridge will start work on the erection of the large residence on School Lane, west of Wissahickon avenue, for Henry W. Brown,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 24 April 1907, p. 9 (Eldridge was a well-known builder in the Germantown area); “And ordinance to accept the water pipe now laid in the Oak Road, between School House Lane and Midvale Avenue...,” *Philadelphia Inquirer* 10 February 1909, p. 11. This notice states that the ordinance to place The Oak Road on the Philadelphia city plan was approved 11 July 1907, and for the City to assume responsibility for the water pipe 31 December 1908.

huge property to create a development he called “Hamiltonville.” Also in West Philadelphia, in the 1850s, Samuel A. Harrison and Nathaniel B. Browne resided in a development they created with the noted architect Samuel Sloan.¹⁷ According to one source, such an arrangement was not uncommon in nineteenth-century West Philadelphia.¹⁸ Closer to Brown in time and space, but on a far grander scale, one can even cite Henry Howard Houston’s residence and estate, Druum Moir, which he built within the suburb he would create in Chestnut Hill. But Brown could not be unaware of a trend towards suburban development nearly adjacent to his new home. In 1906-1907, the southeast border of Brown’s School House Lane property touched the city grid as far as it had come in this area. At this juncture Coulter Street (former Mill Street) running southwest-northeast stopped when meeting Stokley Street, though the city plan showed it going through to Wissahickon Avenue. Stokley Street, running southeast-northwest, also gave up at this point, where it met Coulter, though the plan had it going through to School House Lane (See Figure 19). This is the configuration existing to this day (Coulter resumes east of Wissahickon on into Germantown).



Figure 19: Detail from 1910 G.W. Bromley *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia*. Source: PhilaGeoHistory.

The grid adjoining Henry W. Brown’s estate in 1907 soon would fill up with houses, but not typical Philadelphia rows of the period. In early 1907, the family or estate of William G. Warden

¹⁷ “Emergence of the Suburb, the 1850s. Harrison/Browne and the Realization of an Ideal Home.” West Philadelphia Community History Center (online), <https://westphillyhistory.archives.upenn.edu/exhibits/building-west-philadelphia/emergence-suburb>, accessed 8 July 2018.

¹⁸ John R. Stilgoe, *Borderland: Origins of the American Suburb, 1820 – 1939* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988, 135-138).

began to market the extensive Warden land holdings through creation of the School Lane Land Company and the Queen Lane Land Company. Born in Pittsburgh, William G. Warden (1831 – 1895) became one of the wealthiest men in Philadelphia through petroleum – he was a trustee of Standard Oil and in effect partner of John D. Rockefeller. The Warden family later in his life lived in a large house on the west side of Wissahickon Avenue near School House Lane. By 1895, he had bought up many estates in the area above (east of) Henry Avenue in what is now considered East Falls. After Warden’s death, the family collaborated with the well-known suburban developers Wendell and Smith (Herman Wendell and William Bassett Smith), known for the creation of Overbrook Farms, Pelham, and residential areas near Wayne, to market houses and lots as “Queen Lane Manor,” mainly in the district bounded by Henry Avenue, Queen Lane, Coulter Street, and Stokley Street. There resulted an attractive neighborhood of mostly Tudor revival and Colonial Revival single and twin houses, substantial and well-proportioned, on straight, tree-lined streets. The name ‘Queen Lane Manor’ eventually faded away in favor of East Falls. So, for many years, Henry W. Brown’s Oak Road formed one link between this new suburb and the older line of estates along School House Lane, though of course such was not its purpose.

Brown ran his new street centrally, roughly along the border between the former Wright and Johnson tracts he had acquired. To avoid destruction of a legacy oak in its path, the little street split at an island, thereby gaining its name and saving a tree (the island is still there, with a younger oak replacing the original). In the ways of modern American suburbs, as opposed to city grids, The Oak Road was laid out with some gentle curvature, though this was partly to accommodate an adjoining property not owned by Brown between Coulter Street and Midvale Avenue (even so, Brown had to purchase a small plot from the Warden estate to get The Oak Road to meet Midvale, the “spine” of twentieth-century East Falls, running from Kelly Drive to Wissahickon Avenue).¹⁹

Brown situated his new home on the site of the former Oakley house on the west side of The Oak Road, looking south--that is, looking across the length of his property, with the rear of the house about 250 feet from School House Lane (see maps). He no doubt intended to maintain an expanse of lawn or garden in front, and maintained ownership of the property on the west side of The Oak Road almost to the time of his death in 1925. His three sons used part of the land, near where The Oak Road comes very close to aborted Coulter Street, to build the handsome Memorial Church of the Good Shepherd in the Georgian Revival (or “Gibbs-Wren”) style, in memory of their parents. It was designed by Carl Ziegler (1878 – 1952), highly accomplished in Colonial Revival work. The Brown Residence and the red brick Church, with its white portico and trim, bracket and anchor the west side of The Oak Road.

¹⁹ The older portion within the old Falls of Schuylkill or Falls Village had been known as Mifflin Street.

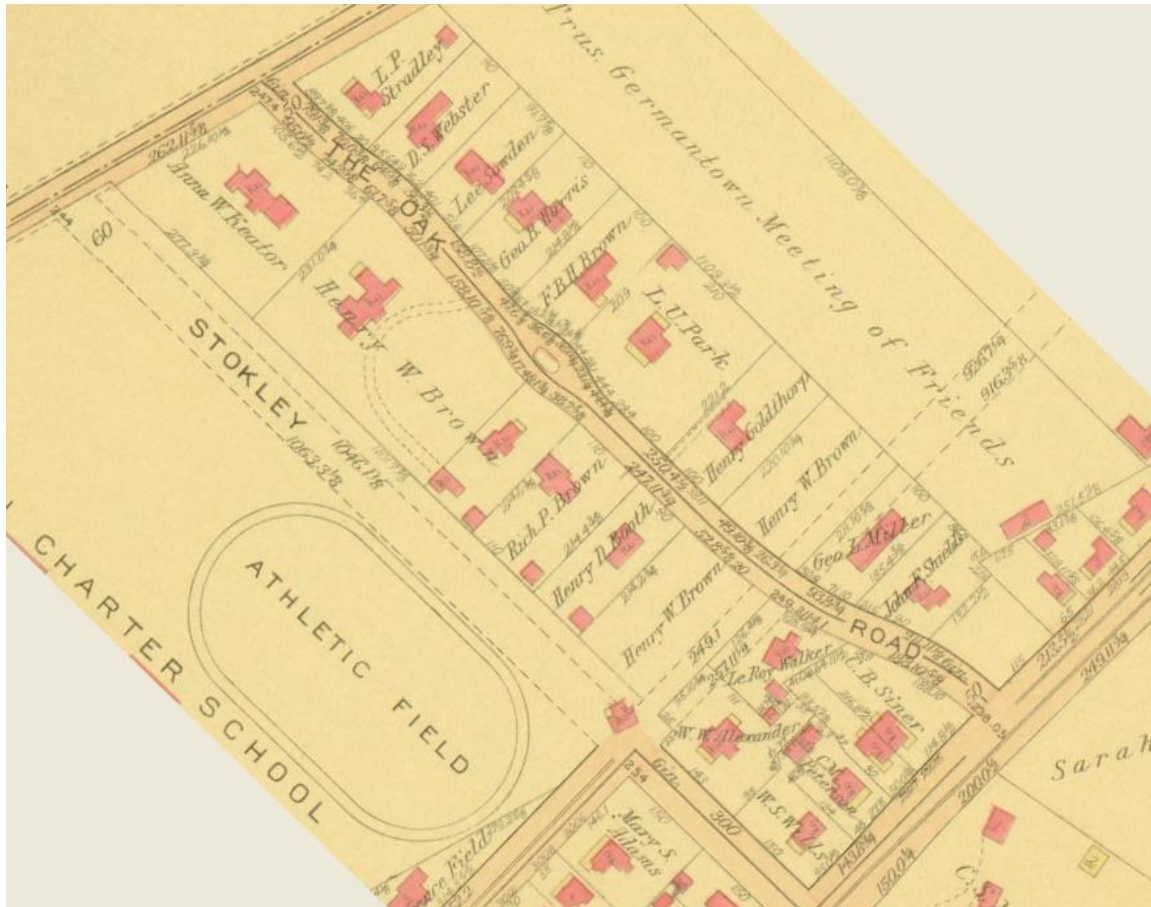


Figure 20: Detail from Plate 9 of G.W. Bromley's 1925 *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia (North Phila.)*, Wards 25, 33, 37, 38, 43, and 45. Source: PhilaGeoHistory.

Brown began selling lots along his Oak Road in the early 1920s, and by 1925 the streetscapes on both sides were largely complete except for the construction of the Church in 1926. One grand house, built by Anne W. Keator on the west side of the street nearest School House Lane, was later acquired by William Penn Charter School and demolished. Otherwise, The Oak Road in 2018 appears much as it did in 1926. Though none quite so striking as 3850, all the other houses are large and imposing, on good-sized lots. All but two conform to the Colonial/ Georgian/ Federal revival mode, the exceptions being the pre-existing Gothic revival “Ivy Cottage” (3819), and a Cotswold style home at 3803. In 1908, Henry W. Brown engaged a real estate agent named Edgar G. Cross to market Ivy Cottage. Cross produced a printed description and set of drawings which praised The Oak Road for its lines, grades, and the “excellence of its sewer and underground work” and promised that it was designed “to be occupied only by a superior class of residences upon generous lots,”²⁰ which it was. Exactly how this was contrived is not known: probably the sale prices Brown demanded for the plots helped screen out the less worthy. And other sorts of understandings no doubt arose. Brown soon sold Ivy Cottage to George B. Harris, brother to Clinton Gardner Harris the architect and the wives of Brown’s two sons, keeping that

²⁰ “Ivy Cottage,” sales brochure of Edgar G. Cross, 1425 Walnut Street, in folder for 3819 The Oak Road, Philadelphia Historical Commission.

antique and charming house safely in the family. Over time, properties bordering The Oak Road on both sides became open playing fields for William Penn Charter School to the west, and Germantown Friends to the east, adding to the idyllic aura of the elite but idiosyncratic little street.

Criteria C and D: Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style; and embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen.

For the design of his new home in 1907, Henry Brown chose the Colonial Revival style, one of the longest-lived and most popular styles in America, particularly around the turn of the twentieth century.²¹ Brown's residence embodies numerous characteristics of the Colonial Revival style, including a symmetrical façade, hipped roof with a center gable, columned portico, and multi-paned double-hung windows. It also historically featured wood shutters, another common, but more ephemeral, element of Colonial Revival homes.

A standard narrative to explain the genesis of the Colonial Revival movement in American architecture in the last decade of the nineteenth century needs only be briefly recounted here. Some historians assign the origin in some measure to Philadelphia's Centennial Exhibition of 1876, which both raised interest in the colonial and early national past in general, and displayed an intriguingly antique appearing building (amidst the Beaux Arts edifices), the almost Medieval "Connecticut House." Also in the mid-1870s,

architects Robert Peabody of Boston and Charles McKim of New York began their explorations of early American structures, with McKim particularly studying (and admiring) old houses of Newport, Rhode Island. The 1893 World's Columbian

Exposition presented Peabody and Stearns' Massachusetts State Building, a detailed exercise in recreated Georgian style; and the over the top Pennsylvania state building by Thomas P. Lonsdale, a sprawling affair out of which grew the tower of Independence Hall. The Chicago fair also highlighted classicism, of course a foundation of Georgian and Federal design.



Figure 21: Following the Centennial Exhibition and well into the early twentieth century, interest increased in Colonial architecture, such as Philadelphia's Georgian masterpiece, Mount Pleasant. Source: Philadelphia Museum of Art.

²¹ "Colonial Revival Style," *Pennsylvania Architectural Field Guide*, Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission. Available online: <http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/portal/communities/architecture/styles/colonial-revival.html>

Into the 1880s and beyond, McKim, later of McKim, Mead and White, promoted the Georgian version of “Colonial Revival,” by way of the hybrid Shingle Style. Robert Peabody advanced Colonial Revival in New England. Charles McKim, however, seems the architect most associated with the investigation of actual early American houses and the championing of an architecture that would recall the valued elements of the nation’s built past. Of course, the popularity of the relatively simple, symmetric, sometimes even austere Georgian style likely marked a rejection of the clutter and flamboyance of High Victorian architecture. It has even been suggested that the Colonial Revival fit well into the thought of the Progressive Era, which sought the betterment of society through rational planning, scientific knowledge, and *efficiency* – perhaps the favorite word of the 1910s in the United States.²² Dusting the inside and painting the outside of Victorian homes did not foster efficiency.

That an affluent upper-caste Philadelphia businessman in 1907 would choose Colonial Revival for his new house (as well as for the design of his office building) requires no explanation. But one specific inducement can be suggested. Every time Henry W. Brown visited the Germantown Cricket Club he viewed the sweeping façade of Charles McKim’s 1891 clubhouse, an early landmark of the Colonial Revival movement. Though stucco is not used, the contrast of white trim against red brick contributes to the building’s visual flavor, as does the similar contrast of the Brown Residence.



Figure 22: Club House of the Germantown Cricket Club (Manheim).

Conclusion

Situated at the intersection of School House Lane and The Oak Road, the house exemplifies the development of the community. It is one of the last grand homes that recall the long history of West School House Lane, with its singular linear array of country estates within Germantown—then later understood as Philadelphia and East Falls—many of whose owners were persons of local and even national fame. These summer (or sometimes fulltime) country estates constitute an important part of the visual and cultural history of the northwest district of Philadelphia, particularly the German Township. One might add that despite (and in part because of) inevitable changes and a shift to campuses of educational institutions as occupants, West School House Lane still retains its genteel, verdant, suburban character. As the “charter” house of The Oak Road, the Brown Residence also represents the history of this anomalous, curving little street of fine Colonial Revival houses and one elegant church, with an oak tree in the center, all little changed over almost one hundred years.

²² Richard Guy Wilson, *The Colonial Revival House* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2004); Tom Martison, *The Atlas of American Architecture* (New York: Rizzoli, 2009), 102-113; James Stevens Curl and Susan Wilson, *The Oxford Dictionary of Architecture*, ed. 3 (Oxford: 2016), 184-185; Lester Walker, *American Homes* (New York: Black Dog and Leventhal Publ., 1996), 170-171; Bridget A. May, “Progressivism and the Colonial Revival,” *Winterthur Profiles* 26(1999):107-122.

APPENDIX: Later Owners of 3850 The Oak Road

John J. Hohenadel (1869 – 1958)

After the death of Henry W. Brown in 1925, 3850 The Oak Road remained in family ownership until it was sold to John J[acob] Hohenadel in 1937. This Hohenadel was a surviving descendant of a beer-brewing Philadelphia family going back to German immigrant Jacob Hohenadel in the 1860s. Earlier family members died with distressing regularity from lung affliction, likely tuberculosis, and John J. was fortunate to prevail as he did, becoming “the oldest brewery executive in the city” in 1953. This was not to last, since even with innovate advertising on local television, Hohenadel beer went out of business that year, a victim of larger, national breweries. But in its day Hohenadel was a popular brand, centered at its landmark brewery and beer tavern which eventually and for many years stood at Conrad Street and Indian Queen Lane in Falls of Schuylkill (East Falls). (It had been Schuylkill Falls Park Brewery before adopting the family name). John J., son of John William Hohenadel, grew up on Indian Queen Lane in a very fine house (recently restored) a little ways uphill from the brewery. Hohenadel beer and family were valued members of the East Falls community; John J. served for many years as president of the East Falls Bank and Trust Company. He was also a member of the Germantown Cricket Club, so may have known the Brown family.²³

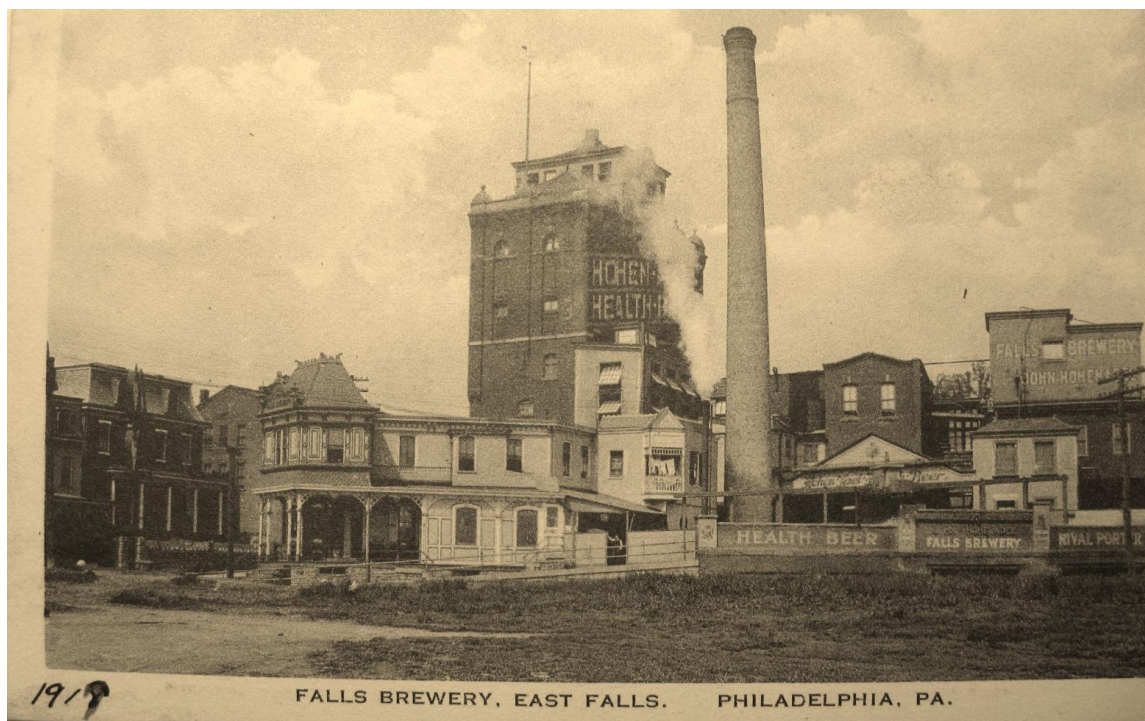


Figure 23: Hohenadel’s East Falls Brewery, 1919. Source: Alexander C. Chadwick Papers, Collection 1844, Falls of Schuylkill scrapbooks, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

²³ “John Hohenadel, 89, Retired Brewer, Dies,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 15 July 1958; “Great Moments in ‘Hoh-Story – a Timeline of Hohenadels in East Falls,” by East Falls Dog Walker, 3 June 2014, www.eastfallshouse.com/great-moments-ho-story [sic]-timeline-hohenadels-east-falls/, accessed 18 May 2018; Rich Wagner, *Philadelphia Beer* (Charleston, SC: History Press, 2012), 56-57, 106, 110, 112.

John Spence Timmons (1893 – 1992)

After the passing of John J. Hohenadel in 1958, the family sold 3850 The Oak Road to John Spence Timmons.²⁴ Born in Philadelphia, Timmons did course work at the Drexel Institute (now Drexel University) and served an apprenticeship at the immense Baldwin Locomotive Works. In the early 1920s, he invented one of the earliest loudspeakers for use with radios, aimed at



A SUMMER NECESSITY
DURING sultry summer nights no one will want to listen in with a pair of hot, restraining and cumbersome earphones pressing against their head.

BY attaching a TIMMONS TALKER to your set you can let everyone of your party "Enjoy Radio the Unselfish Way."

THE TIMMONS TALKER
has adjustable amplification so you can always secure just the right tone value for any audience listening to your set. It is self-contained in a handsome mahogany cabinet. Needs no extra batteries.

WE urge you to buy your TIMMONS TALKER before the summer demand begins. Sold by all worth-while dealers.

J. S. TIMMONS
337 East Tulpehocken Street, Philadelphia, Pa.

Figure 24: An advertisement for the Timmons Talker. Source: *Popular Radio and Television*, Vol. 1; No. 3, 1922, p. 32.

relieving the constraint of listening to the early stations using only headphones. Sources assert that Timmons invented "the first" loudspeaker, though there was probably no one individual inventor. Timmons formed two companies to produce and sell what became known as the "Timmons Talker," and it did prove successful for some years. His companies merged with the Philadelphia Storage Battery Company, which grew into Philco. Timmons became a manager and eventually a vice-president with Philco, whose early radios used the "Timmons Talker." Eventually, this Philadelphia corporation led the country in the manufacture of radios; at least early on, Timmons' loudspeaker proved essential for the company to enter this burgeoning business.²⁵ Timmons deeded 3850 The Oak Road to the adjacent William Penn Charter School in 1963, but did not vacate it until 1974. The School has used the structure for offices and special events and refers to it as "The Timmons House."

Clearly no one of the three private owners was a famous man. Yet each can claim standing as contributors to, and as participants in, the life and business of their city or neighborhood. Brown was a notable figure in the critically important business in his day of fire insurance for Philadelphia manufacturers, and also made efforts to improve fire prevention measures – good for his business, but for his customers as well. In addition, Brown played cricket when it was a Philadelphia thing to do, and he (and one of his sons) excelled. John Jacob Hohenadel made beer, as did his ancestors; and his brewery long stood as a prominent business (and source of refreshment) in East Falls. John Spence Timmons contributed in a modest but significant way to the growth of the radio industry in Philadelphia and the genesis and growth of Philco, once a major Philadelphia corporation whose products went all over the world.

²⁴ City of Philadelphia, deed book indices, John Timmons grantee, John Jacob Hohenadel et ux (?), Series CAB, vol. 955, p. 549, recorded 30 December 1958.

²⁵ "Inventor John Spence Timmons, Radio Pioneer and Businessman," (obituary), *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 26 June 1992, p. C10.; "Services for Loudspeaker Developer Set," UPI Archives, (www.upi.com/Archives/1992/06/26/Services-for-loudspeaker-developer-set/7619709531200/); a great deal of information on the history of loudspeakers can be found, for those interested, at the website radiomuseum.org.

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