

**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: **4105-09 Chestnut Street**

Postal code: **19106**

Councilmanic District: **3rd**

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: Hamilton School; West Philadelphia Free Library; West Philadelphia Republican Club; Radio Church of God

Current/Common Name: Church of God; Gospel Spreading Church

3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Building

Structure

Site

Object

4. PROPERTY INFORMATION

Occupancy:

occupied

vacant

under construction

unknown

Current use: Church

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 1891 to 1968

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: 1891

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: Joseph Anshutz

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: _____

Original owner: LE Roy Bliss Peckham

Other significant persons: Elder Lightfoot Solomon Michaux

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 Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia Date October 3, 2018

Name with Title Ben Leech, consultant Email patrick@preservationalliance.com

Street Address 1608 Walnut St, Suite 1702 Telephone 215-546-1146 x5

City, State, and Postal Code Philadelphia, PA 19103

Nominator is is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: 10/3/2018

Correct-Complete Incorrect-Incomplete Date: 11/7/2018

Date of Notice Issuance: 11/8/2018

Property Owner at Time of Notice

Name: Gospel Spreading Church

Address: 1522 R Street NW

City: Washington State: DC Postal Code: 20009

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

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

Date of Final Action: 1/11/2019

Designated Rejected



5) Boundary Description

Beginning at the distance of forty one feet (41') westward from the West side of Forty First Street - thence extending Northwardly along a line at right angles with Chestnut Street one hundred and thirty feet (130') to a point, - thence extending Westwardly along a line at right angle with Forty First Street and parallel with Chestnut Street eighty feet one-quarter inch ($80' \frac{1}{4}$ ") to a point - thence extending South ten degrees twenty one minutes ten seconds West sixty-eight feet two and three eighths inches ($68' 2\frac{3}{8}$ ") to a point, thence extending South eighty-six degrees twenty-eight minutes thirty-one seconds West five feet five and one eighth inch ($5' 5\frac{1}{8}$ ") to a point - thence extending South eleven degrees one minute West on a line at right angles with said Chestnut Street sixty feet five and three eighths inches ($60' 5\frac{3}{8}$ ") to the North side of Chestnut Street - thence extending Eastwardly along the North side of Chestnut Street eighty-four feet six inches ($84' 6$ ") to place of beginning.

6) Description



Figure 1: South (Chestnut Street) and partial west elevations

The former Hamilton School building is a two-story, hip-roofed brick structure located at 4105-09 Chestnut Street in the West Philadelphia neighborhood of Spruce Hill. Roughly square in plan, the 80-foot by 80-foot building fills the majority of its 80-foot by 130-foot lot. Its primary south elevation fronts Chestnut Street with an asymmetrical eight-bay facade featuring a two-bay, gable-roofed projection at its west end and a pyramid roof capping its easternmost bay [Fig. 1]. Its primary entrance is at this eastern bay under a projecting hip-roofed porch [Fig. 2]. A secondary entrance is located in a projecting one-story

vestibule at the raised basement level of the west end bays. Quarry-faced brownstone belt courses (now painted) span the width of the building at the lintel and sill levels of the second floor and the lintel level of the first floor; the sill level of the first floor is spanned by a smooth-faced and beveled stone belt course (also painted). Dark brick headers form an ornamental diamond pattern between the first and second floors and a Flemish checkerboard pattern between the second-floor lintels and eave [Fig. 3]. The original triple-hung windows on both floors have been replaced with shorter round-arched frames and newer brick infill, but the original masonry openings remain largely intact. First-floor windows feature flat stone lintels incised with flattened ogee chamfers [Fig. 3]. Second-floor windows feature segmental arched stone lintels with prominent keystones. The easternmost second-floor bay features a wider rectangular window (now infilled) with a corbeled



Figure 3: Main entrance detail



Figure 2: South elevation detail showing chamfered lintels and diamond brick patterning.

brick and stone sill and a jack-arched, shouldered stone lintel. An exterior chimney stack rises between the fifth the sixth bays (east to west) and breaks the otherwise continuous metal-clad roof eave. A single triangular louvered dormer is located between the chimney and the corner pyramid roof. The western gable-end pediment is clad in clapboard siding.

The building's west side elevation faces a surface parking lot. The majority of its original windows have been infilled with brick, though quarry-faces stone lintels and sills remain visible in the projecting front three bays. The recessed rear three bays feature small replacement windows in infilled openings. The stucco-clad east side elevation faces a narrow

breezeway between it and an adjacent three-story rowhouse structure. It is minimally visible from the public right of way except for its rear gable-roofed northeast corner [Fig.4]. The rear north elevation faces a concrete parking pad which fills the remainder of the building's lot [Fig. 5]. The majority of its window openings are also infilled, though four central second-story windows appear to retain original frames and transoms. The hipped roof features two triangular louvered dormers.



Figure 4: Rear of east elevation



Figure 5: Rear (north) elevation



Figure 6: Former Hamilton School, circa 1901. Free Library of Philadelphia, Print and Picture Collection.

7) Significance

The former Hamilton School building at 4105-09 Chestnut Street was designed by prolific school architect Joseph Anshutz¹ and constructed in 1891 for use as a private primary and secondary school. Following the school's closure in 1900, the building housed the Free Library of Philadelphia's West Philadelphia Branch from 1901 to 1906. Between 1906 and 1926, the building served as the headquarters of the West Philadelphia Republican Club. Since 1940, the building has been home to the Radio Church of God², a congregation founded by the charismatic African American evangelist Elder Lightfoot Solomon Michaux (1885-1968), a nationally significant pioneer in religious radio and television broadcasting. Through each of

¹ "Anshutz" is also commonly spelled "Anschutz," though the former appears more frequently.

² "Radio Church of God" was the legal name of the congregation when it purchased the building, though many documents refer only to the "Church of God." It is now legally known as the "Gospel Spreading Church."

these incarnations, the property has retained its character and integrity as a significant example of Late Victorian-era educational architecture while accruing multiple added layers of social and cultural significance. The property therefore meets the following criteria for listing on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places as established in the Philadelphia Historic Preservation Ordinance §14-1004 (1):

- (a) Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past;
- (c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style;
- and*
- (j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

Hamilton School

Population growth in late-nineteenth-century Philadelphia fueled a corresponding boom in new school construction across the city, both public and private. On April 10, 1891 the *Philadelphia Inquirer* reported the following:

The people of West Philadelphia are interested in the erection of a building known as the Hamilton School to be located at Forty-first and Chestnut Streets. Quite a number of influential citizens are backing the enterprise, and Joseph Anschutz has been engaged to make the plans, which call for a very ornamental structure, a portion of which will be adapted to the uses of a trade school.³

³ “New School Houses,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 10, 1891, p. 5.



Figure 7: *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia*, G.W. Bromley & Co, 1895, Plate 10.

Built as a private preparatory academy for boys aged 5 to 18, the Hamilton School was founded by Le Roy Bliss Peckham, who studied law at Yale University and the University of Pennsylvania before becoming a headmaster in 1885.⁴ He purchased the Chestnut Avenue parcel in April 1890 and began advertising the Hamilton School in *Boyd's Blue Book* the same year.⁵ With a curriculum founded on a “scientific coordination of studies” to prepare students for business or college, the school was one of many private preparatory academies established independently from the School District of Philadelphia, whose evolution from a ward-based system of semi-autonomous neighborhood schools into a centralized, unified school district had only been partially realized by the turn of the twentieth century. Interestingly, Peckham selected School District of Philadelphia chief designer Joseph Anshutz to plan the Hamilton School, resulting in a building that shared numerous formal and stylistic characteristics with Anshutz’s public school designs of the period.

⁴ William G. Daggett, ed. *A History of the Class of Eighty, Yale College, 1876-1910*. New Haven, Conn: Yale University, 1910, p. 211; “The Hamilton School,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Aug. 23, 1899, p. 14.

⁵ *Philadelphia Blue Book*. Philadelphia: C.E. Howe Co. 1890, p. 686.

Anshutz designed approximately 75 school buildings for the School District of Philadelphia between 1885 and 1900, making him one of the most prolific school architects in the city's history. Under his tenure as chief designer, the district adopted a standardized plan featuring single-loaded corridors and moveable room partitions to allow for flexible classrooms organized by grade. The majority of Anshutz's school designs were executed in brick, as opposed to the more common use of stone by his predecessors, and with clear Late Victorian style elements that echoed some of the scale and character of Philadelphia's contemporaneous rowhouse developments.⁶ His Francis Scott Key, Frances Drexel, and David Landreth schools, all from the late 1880s, perhaps best characterize the Late Victorian characteristics of Anshutz's designs. Each were three-story brick structures trimmed with stone and decorative brickwork, with shingled gable dormers, prominent chimney stacks, and other picturesque roof elements [Figs. 8]. Fifteen of his public schools currently remain standing, ten of which are listed on the National Register of Historic Places as part of the Philadelphia Public Schools Thematic Resources nominations of 1986-88. Eight remain in use as school buildings, including the Francis Scott Key School, the oldest operating public school building in Philadelphia.⁷

The Hamilton School likewise displays Anshutz's characteristic brick and stone palette, decorative brickwork

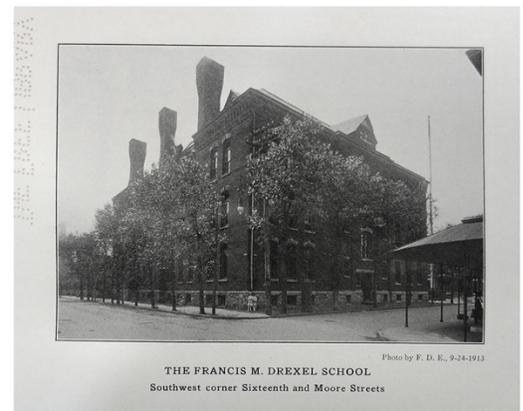


Figure 8: Anshutz-designed public schools, top to bottom: Drexel School (1888), now demolished; Foy School (1889), now Francis Scott Key School; Landreth School (1889), now Landreth Apartments. The Public School Buildings of Philadelphia, Franklin D. Edmunds

⁶ *Philadelphia Public Schools Thematic Resources Statement*, National Register of Historic Places Nomination Washington: National Park Service, 1986, p. 8-3.

⁷ At least two others, including the David Landreth School, have been adaptively reused as multi-unit residential developments. The Francis Drexel School, despite its National Register status, was demolished in 2010.

embellishments, prominent chimneys, and a complex asymmetrical roofline of pediments, triangular dormers and a pyramidal corner. Though the school's original interior plan is unknown, its footprint is similar to Anshutz's public schools designed on the single-loaded corridor plan, with asymmetrical projecting bays for circulation and other specialized uses. All of these surviving features of the Hamilton School reflect the prevailing educational philosophies of late nineteenth century Philadelphia and the influence of Late Victorian design trends in the evolution of school design.

The Hamilton School occupied the property for less than a decade before unspecified health issues led to the departure of headmaster Peckham and the school's eventual closure.⁸ A *Philadelphia Inquirer* notice from August 1899 reported that former Rittenhouse Academy principal Erasmus B. Waples would be exercising his "ripened pedagogic powers" as new headmaster for the upcoming school term, but in July 1900, title of the property had transferred via sheriff's sale from Peckham to the Western Saving Fund Society. By October 1900 the building was being advertised for sale in the *Inquirer* as the "old Hamilton School."⁹

Free Library of Philadelphia, West Philadelphia Branch

Despite its relatively short tenure as a school, the building nevertheless remained a prominent fixture of civic life in West Philadelphia for decades to follow. Soon after the school's closure, the building was converted into the West Philadelphia Branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia, one of the earliest branches of the citywide Free Library system. The library relocated to the former Hamilton School in 1901 from its first location at 40th and Ludlow Streets, which it inherited in 1895 (along with the bulk of its original collections) through a merger with the West Philadelphia Institute, a philanthropic lending library originally founded in 1853. In its new location on Chestnut Street, the library greatly expanded its collections and reading room facilities. By 1903, the West Philadelphia Branch boasted over 16,500 volumes and was the second-largest branch library (after the Wagner Free Institute) in the city.¹⁰

In the early years of the Free Library system, library branches were typically housed in commercial storefronts, converted mansions, or other makeshift spaces; in this regard, the conversion of the old Hamilton School was entirely typical for the era. But it was also a relatively

⁸ Daggett, p. 211.

⁹ Untitled advertisement, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Oct. 28, 1900, p. 6.

¹⁰ Kuntz, Samantha. "Nomination of Historic Building, Philadelphia Register of Historic Places: 3948-50 Walnut Street." December 2014.

short-lived incarnation. Just two years after the library's move to Chestnut Street, philanthropist Andrew Carnegie donated \$1.5 million to the City of Philadelphia for the construction of new purpose-built Free Library facilities citywide, and land for a new West Philadelphia Branch at 40th and Walnut Streets was donated to the City by West Philadelphia real estate magnate Clarence H. Clark. A newly-formed Carnegie Fund Committee approved the site and the selection of architect Clarence Zantzing by April 1904. The new library broke ground in April 1905 and was dedicated with fanfare in July 1906 as Philadelphia's first Carnegie Branch, having vacated the Hamilton School property the previous summer.¹¹ Eventually renamed the West Walnut Branch, the 1906 building currently remains an active branch library and was added to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places in 2015. The first location of the West Philadelphia Branch, the former West Philadelphia Institute building at 40th and Ludlow, was likewise added to the Philadelphia Register in 2017.



Figure 9: The West Philadelphia Republican Club, circa 1909. From Pennsylvania and its Public Men.

¹¹ Lavoie, Catherine C. "Free Library of Philadelphia, West Philadelphia Branch." Historic American Buildings Survey, HABS No. PA-6765.

West Philadelphia Republican Club

In anticipation of the library's future relocation, the West Philadelphia Republican Club agreed to purchase the Hamilton School building in October 1904 for \$20,000, announcing plans for "what is believed to be the largest and handsomest political club house in the city."¹² The sale was completed in March 1905 and the library vacated the building in July. Extensive interior renovations included the addition of reception rooms, a billiards hall, bowling alleys, card rooms, baths and showers, and improvements to an existing 500-seat auditorium and stage.¹³

The West Philadelphia Republic Club was founded in 1872 as the Beowawa Club, a social club which rented a third-floor loft at Thirty-Seventh and Market Streets. Within a year, its name was changed to the Republican Club of West Philadelphia to better reflect the political interests and geographic associations of its swelling ranks. By 1884 the club had outgrown two previous clubhouses and commissioned a new purpose-built headquarters at 3616 Market Street, where it remained for twenty years before purchasing and renovating the Hamilton School.¹⁴ The club remained on Chestnut Street for another twenty years, hosting regular community fundraisers and events in addition to its private club functions, before eventually vacating the building in 1926. Between 1926 and 1940, the property passed through a series of owners whose uses of the building, if any, are currently unknown.

Radio Church of God

In June 1940, the building was purchased by Elder Lightfoot Solomon Michaux and the Trustees of the Radio Church of God. Though no longer a household name today,



Figure 10: Elder Lightfoot Solomon Michaux in 1937. Life Photo Collection, Thomas Mcavoy.

¹² "Model Club House Will Be Constructed," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Oct. 15, 1904, p. 4.

¹³ Hudson, Sam. *Pennsylvania and its Public Men*. Philadelphia: Hudson & Joseph, 1909, p. 57.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 56.

Michaux at the time was an immensely popular African American radio evangelist and public figure based in Washington D.C. Known as the “Happy Am I” preacher for his signature hymn, Michaux reached 25 million listeners with his weekly radio show broadcast coast-to-coast by CBS in the 1930s and 1940s.¹⁵ Michaux’s radio popularity carried over to television in the 1940s and 1950s; his weekly television broadcasts beginning in 1946 made him the first minister, black or white, to host a syndicated television show.¹⁶ He also hosted annual revival meetings in Washington’s Griffith Stadium that drew mixed-race audiences of up to 25,000.¹⁷ As an advocate for affordable housing during the Great Depression, he gained the confidence of Franklin D. Roosevelt, and later advised Presidents Truman and Eisenhower on issues of race relations and economic policy.¹⁸ He was also known for his public feuds with other prominent African American religious leaders, including Father Divine, Daddy Grace, and even Martin Luther King., Jr. Michaux’s legacy today has been considerably tarnished by revelations that he actively colluded with J. Edgar Hoover’s FBI to discredit King as a communist and charlatan during the height of King’s civil rights campaigns.¹⁹

Michaux’s more controversial allegiances aside, he was nevertheless a highly influential and charismatic figure whose Church of God movement spawned seven East Coast congregations during his lifetime. His Philadelphia congregation reportedly formed following a ten-day tent revival at the Philadelphia Arena at 45th and Market Streets in 1934, the first of many “road shows” Michaux made with his D.C.- based Radio Church of God revue.²⁰ He also founded churches in New York City, Baltimore, Edenborn PA, and Newport News and Hampton VA.²¹

Little is known about the Philadelphia congregation’s early years, though occasional notices in the *Philadelphia Tribune* reported on special events the church continued to hold at the Philadelphia Arena through the 1930s.²² After purchasing the Hamilton School building in 1940,

¹⁵ Rouzeau, Edgar. “Happy Am I’ Preacher is Ex-Virginia Fisherman,” *Baltimore Afro-American*, Oct. 6, 1934, p. 5.

¹⁶ Martin, Lerone, “Bureau Clergyman: How the FBI Colluded with an African American Televangelist to Destroy Martin Luther King, Jr.” *Religion and American Culture*, Vol. 28, no. 1 (Winter 2018), pp. 7-8.

¹⁷ Dole, Kenneth. “Elder Lightfoot Solomon Michaux, Negro Religious Leader, Dies at 84,” *Washington Post*, Oct. 21, 1968, p. A1.

¹⁸ “Elder Michaux, Crony of Three Presidents,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, Oct. 22, 1968, p. 1.

¹⁹ Martin, p. 2ff.

²⁰ Webb, Lillian Ashcraft. *About My Father’s Business: The Life of Elder Michaux*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1981, p. 44; “Elder Micheaux [sic] to Conduct Big Revival in Philly,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, May 26, 1934, p. 3.

²¹ <http://gospelspreadingchurch.org/our-founders-and-history.html>

²² “Sacred Concert at Radio Church of God,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Aug. 9, 1934.

Michaux made regular visits to Philadelphia and kept an apartment in the city.²³ In addition to regular church services at the Chestnut Street church, some of which were presided over by Michaux himself and his traveling 100-person choir, the Radio Church of God also hosted tent revivals in locations across the city.²⁴

In 1951, legal title to the property passed from the Trustees of the Radio Church of God to the Gospel Spreading Association, a reorganization of Michaux's substantial real estate holdings and religious enterprises. The Gospel Spreading Church of God, the direct descendent of Michaux's original church, remains the owner and occupant of the building. Exterior alterations undertaken by the church have included the modification of windows and installation of church signage; otherwise the building has maintained a significant continuity in appearance since its original construction as a school building.

Conclusion

Over the course of 127 years and at least four significant periods of ownership, the former Hamilton School at 4105-09 Chestnut Street has stood as an architectural and cultural landmark embodying the growth and evolution of West Philadelphia and the city as a whole. It retains significant architectural integrity from its original construction to reflect the Late Victorian era of school design in Philadelphia, a period dominated by the work of architect Joseph Anshutz (Criterion C). The building's subsequent incarnations as a public library, political clubhouse, and evangelical church all exemplify the cultural, political, and social heritage of the community and city (Criterion J). Finally, the building is associated with Elder Lightfoot Solomon Michaux, one of the most influential African American religious personalities of his generation (Criterion A). For these reasons, the property merits listing on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.

²³ Webb, p. 153.

²⁴ Woods, Joseph. "1,000 Hear Elder Michaux Preach Everything in Tent," *Philadelphia Tribune*, Aug. 8, 1940, p. 20; "Youth Advised to Avoid Actions That Lead to Trouble," *Philadelphia Tribune*, May 7, 1955.

8) Bibliography

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"Youth Advised to Avoid Actions That Lead to Trouble," *Philadelphia Tribune*, May 7, 1955.