

# 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: 807-11 Bainbridge Street

Postal code: 19147

#### 2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: Church of the Crucifixion

Current/Common Name: Church of the Crucifixion

#### 3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

☒ Building

☐ Structure

☐ Site

☐ Object

#### 4. PROPERTY INFORMATION

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

Occupancy: ☐ occupied ☐ vacant ☐ under construction ☒ unknown

Current use: Religious Events

#### 5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

*Please attach a narrative description and site/plot plan of the resource's boundaries.*

#### 6. DESCRIPTION

*Please attach a narrative description and photographs of the resource's physical appearance, site, setting, and surroundings.*

#### 7. SIGNIFICANCE

*Please attach a narrative Statement of Significance citing the Criteria for Designation the resource satisfies.*

Period of Significance (from year to year): from 1883 to 2015

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: 1883-84; 1902

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: Isaac Pursell

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: \_\_\_\_\_

Original owner: Church of the Crucifixion

Other significant persons: Henry L. Phillips, W.E.B. Du Bois, Marian Anderson

**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**

Organization Bella Vista Neighbors Association Date 11/15/2019

Name with Title Scott Welden Email scott.welden3@gmail.com

Street Address 713 S. Delhi Street Telephone 610-761-4478

City, State, and Postal Code scott.welden3@gmail.com

Nominator ☐ is ☒ is not the property owner. Edited and supplemented by PHC staff

**PHC USE ONLY**

Date of Receipt: November 15, 2019

☒ Correct-Complete ☐ Incorrect-Incomplete Date: December 11, 2019

Date of Notice Issuance: December 12, 2019

Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: The Rectors of the Church of the Crucifixion

Address: 807-11 Bainbridge Street

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19147

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

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: \_\_\_\_\_

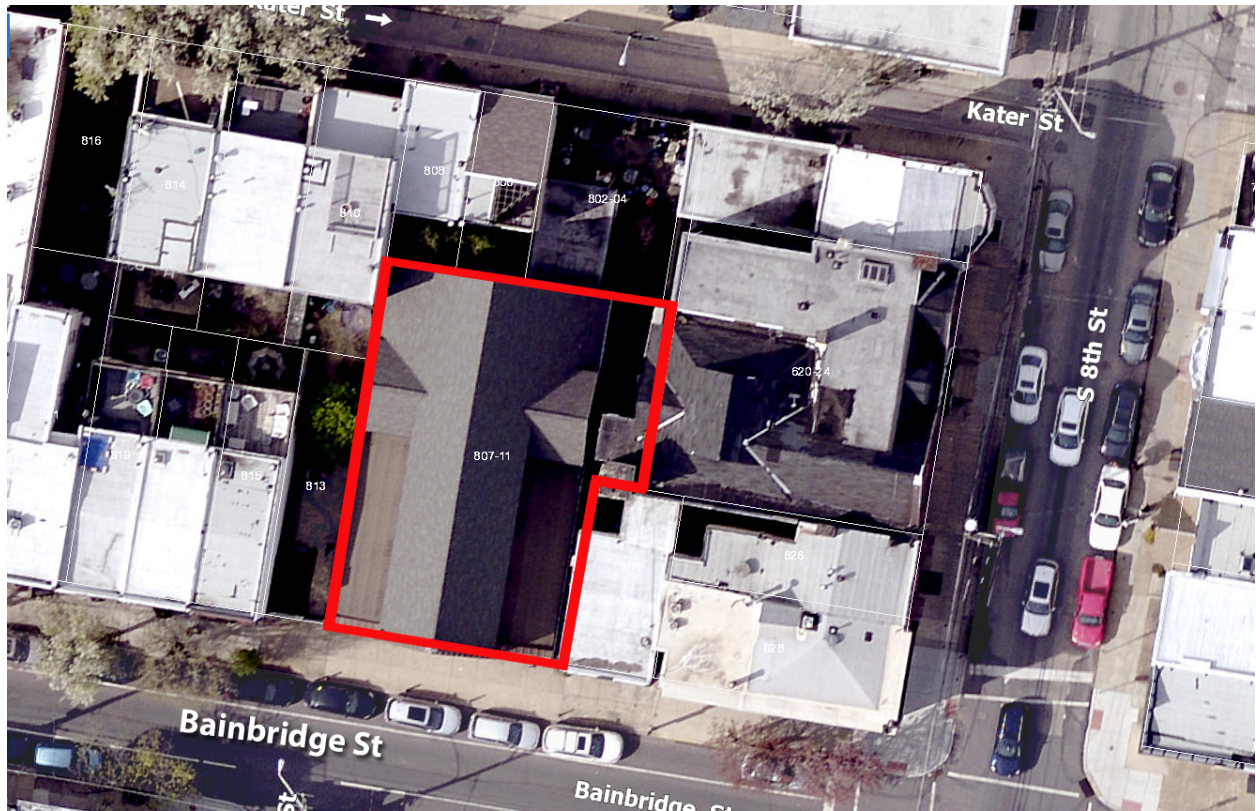
Date of Final Action: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Designated ☐ Rejected

12/7/18

## 5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTIONS

### Church building at 807-11 Bainbridge Street



Beginning at a point on the North side of Bainbridge Street approximately 66 feet West of the Northwest corner of Bainbridge Street and S. 8<sup>th</sup> Street. Containing in front or breadth on the said Bainbridge Street 48.58 feet; thence extending North between property lines approximately 74 feet to a point; thence extending East approximately 59 feet to a point; thence extending South along the rear property line of the parish house 37 feet to a point; thence extending West approximately 10 feet to a point; thence extending South 36.75 feet to the place of beginning. Being 807-11 Bainbridge Street.



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

Street address: 620-24 S. 8th Street

Postal code: 19147

**2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE**

Historic Name: Church of the Crucifixion parish building

Current/Common Name: Church of the Crucifixion parish building

**3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE**

☒ Building

☐ Structure

☐ Site

☐ Object

**4. PROPERTY INFORMATION**

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

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Current use: Religious Events

**5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

*Please attach a narrative description and site/plot plan of the resource's boundaries.*

**6. DESCRIPTION**

*Please attach a narrative description and photographs of the resource's physical appearance, site, setting, and surroundings.*

**7. SIGNIFICANCE**

*Please attach a narrative Statement of Significance citing the Criteria for Designation the resource satisfies.*

Period of Significance (from year to year): from 1887 to 2015

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: 1887; 1902; c. 1915

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: Isaac Pursell; Duhring, Okie & Ziegler

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: \_\_\_\_\_

Original owner: Church of the Crucifixion

Other significant persons: Henry L. Phillips

**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,
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Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: The Rectors of the Church of the Crucifixion

Address: 620-24 S. 8th Street

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19147

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

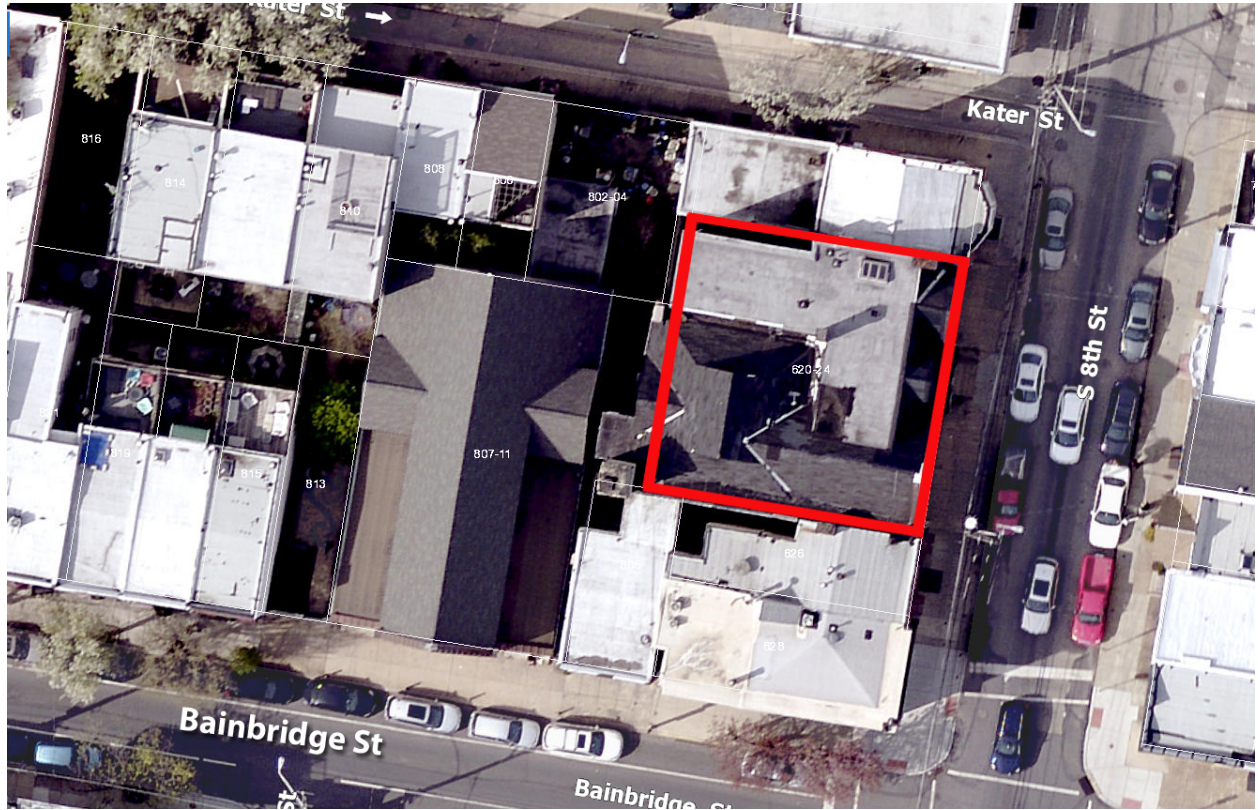
Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Final Action: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Designated ☐ Rejected



Parish building at 620-24 S. 8<sup>th</sup> Street



Beginning at a point on the West side of S. 8<sup>th</sup> Street 18.14 feet South of the Southwest corner of S. 8<sup>th</sup> Street and Kater Street. Containing in front or breadth on the said S. 8<sup>th</sup> Street 55.12 feet and extending of that width in length in length or depth Westward between parallel lines at right angles with the said S. 8<sup>th</sup> Street 56 feet to abutting property lines. Being 620-24 S. 8<sup>th</sup> Street.





## 6. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Located at the intersection of S. 8<sup>th</sup> Street and Bainbridge Street in the Bella Vista neighborhood of Philadelphia, the Church of the Crucifixion complex consists of a church building at 807-11 Bainbridge Street, and a parish building at 620-24 S. 8<sup>th</sup> Street. These two buildings form an L-shape and connect at the rear (Figure 1).



*Figure 1. View of the two buildings from the intersection of S. 8<sup>th</sup> and Bainbridge Streets. The church is the gabled building on the left, and the parish building is the double-gabled building on the right. The rowhouses between the church and parish building are on separate parcels and are not associated with the subject properties. Staff photograph, November 2019.*

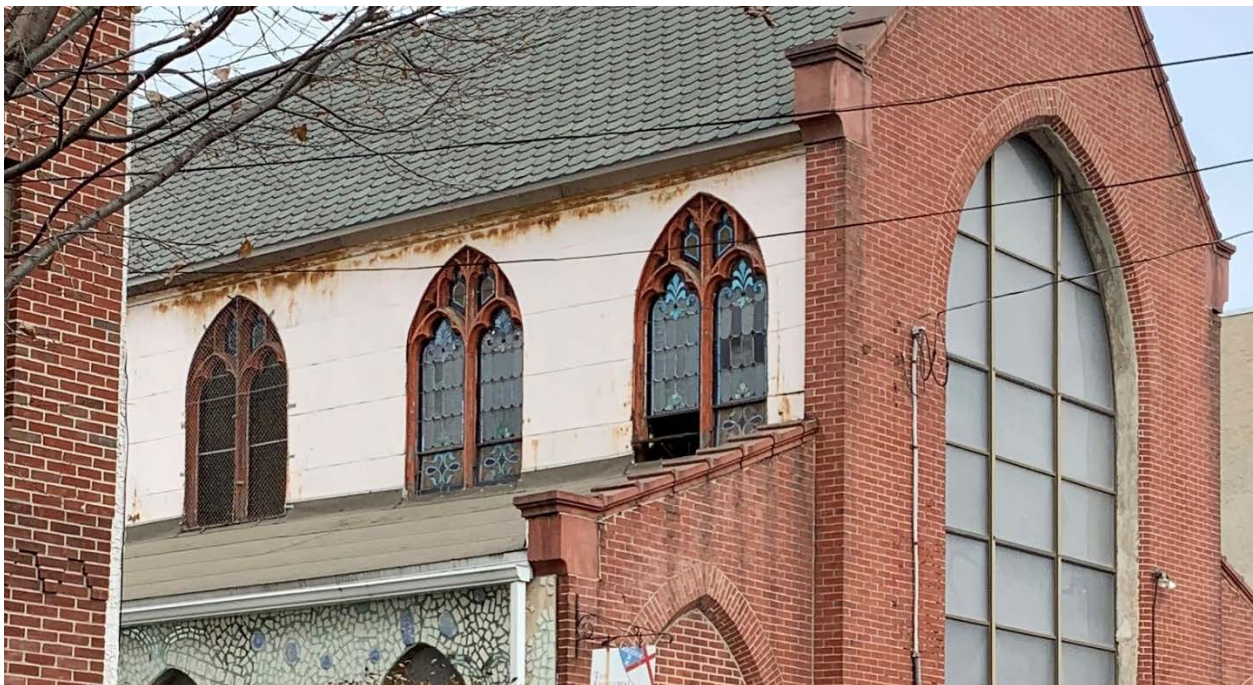
### 807-11 Bainbridge Street: Church Building

The church building fronts Bainbridge Street (Figure 2). It is a small, Gothic style church built on the tight streets of South Philadelphia in 1883-84 and again in 1902 after it was destroyed by fire. The two-story nave is gabled, with flanking one story sloped roof aisles. The red brick façade is dominated by a large stained glass window opening, from which the stained glass has been removed. The entrances, finished with pointed arches which have been infilled with brick and modern doors, lead directly into the aisles. A seven-foot high rough carved granite base finishes the composition. Stained glass remains in the pointed arch windows on the second-story side openings (Figure 3). A small bell tower shown in a 1969 photograph has since been removed (Figure 5).





*Figure 2. View of church building from Bainbridge Street. Staff photograph, November 2019.*



*Figure 3. Close-up of second-story windows on side of Church building. Staff photograph, November 2019.*





Figure 4. View of church building from Bainbridge Street. Staff photograph, November 2019.



Figure 5. View of church building from Bainbridge Street in 1969. Source: Philadelphia Historical Commission archives.

620-24 S. 8<sup>th</sup> Street: Parish Building

The Gothic styled parish building fronts S. 8<sup>th</sup> Street (Figure 6). The southern two-thirds of the building was constructed in 1887, with the remaining portion constructed sometime between 1910 and 1917. Its gabled roof runs north-south, and is intersected perpendicularly by two gables that appear as transept-like forms on the façade. The wall is broken by a mixture of pointed arches, segmentally arched and flat headed windows, the majority of which have been infilled with brick at the top. The entrance is treated with a porched opening, with a pointed arched entranceway which has been infilled with brick and a modern door.



*Figure 6. View of parish building from S. 8<sup>th</sup> Street. Staff photograph, November 2019.*





*Figure 7. View of parish building from S. 8<sup>th</sup> and Bainbridge Streets in 1969. Source: Philadelphia Historical Commission archives.*

## 7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The properties at 807-11 Bainbridge Street and 620-24 S 8<sup>th</sup> Street are historically significant and merit listing on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Pursuant to Section 14-1004(1) of the Philadelphia Code, the properties satisfy Criteria for Designation A, E, and J. The properties:

(A) Have significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation and are associated with the life of a person significant in the past, Archdeacon Henry L. Phillips;

(E) Are the work of Isaac Pursell, an architect whose work has significantly influenced the historical and architectural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation;

(J) Exemplify the cultural, economic, social and historical heritage of the community.

### Site and Building History

The Protestant Episcopal Church of the Crucifixion was organized in 1847, being the first colored mission of the Episcopal Church in Philadelphia.<sup>1</sup> The Church of the Crucifixion complex consists of a church building at 807-11 Bainbridge Street, and a parish building at 620-24 S. 8<sup>th</sup> Street. These two buildings form an L-shape and connect at the rear.

The church building fronting Bainbridge Street was first constructed in 1883-84 to a design by prolific Philadelphia church architect Isaac Pursell (Figure 8). The newspaper announcement regarding the church erection is as follows:

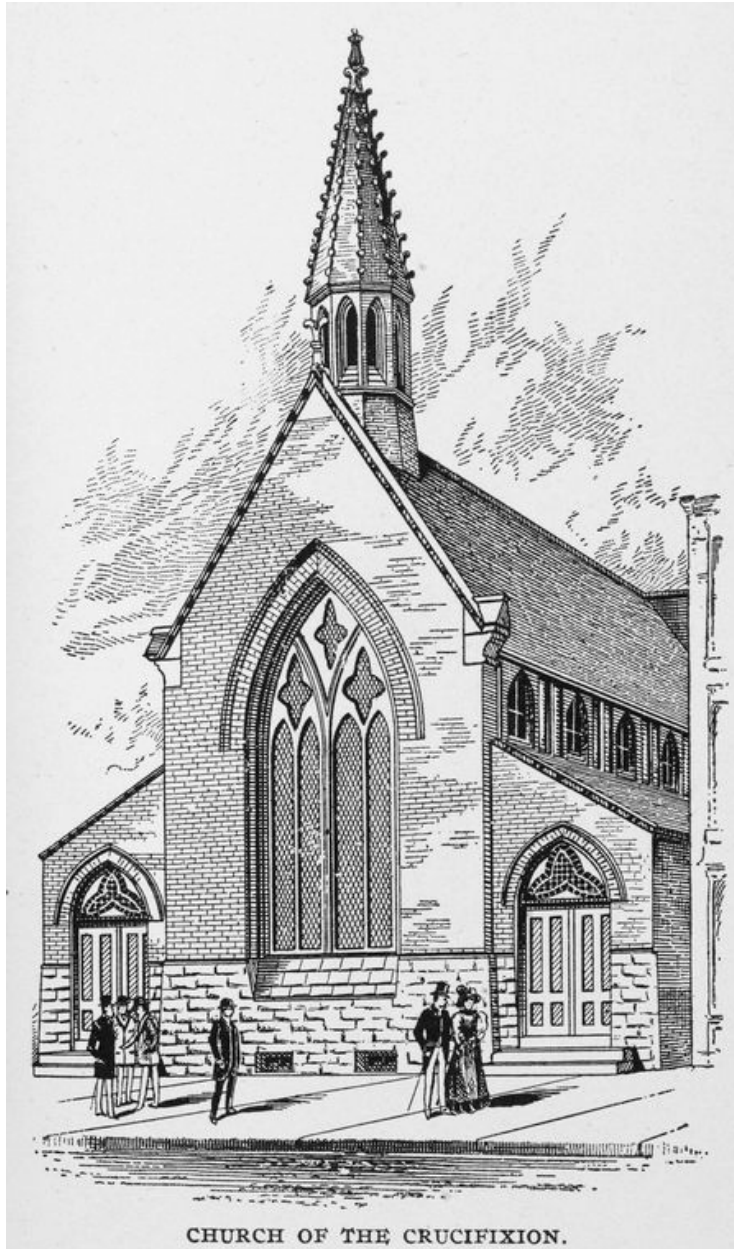
There is considerable activity in church building. Among the plans prepared by Mr. Pursell... The new building erecting for the Protestant Episcopal Church of the Crucifixion, at Eighth and Bainbridge streets, will be a neat example of pure Gothic. It is a clearstory building, with an exterior of gray stone to the window sills, seven feet from the foundations. The remainder will be of plain pressed brick, with terra cotta trimmings. The roof will be covered with tiles. The interior walls will be finished in chocolate enameled bricks under the window sills, and above these with plain buff bricks. The woodwork of the rafters, which are exposed, will be in finished cherry, the

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<sup>1</sup> *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Feb. 10, 1902, p. 16.



remainder of the woodwork will be in oiled cherry. The windows are to be glazed in stained glass. This little church, which will be capable of seating four hundred, is designed as a mission church and will be occupied by colored people.<sup>2</sup>



CHURCH OF THE CRUCIFIXION.

Figure 8. 1897 rendering of the church building. Source: Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library. "Church of the Crucifixion." New York Public Library Digital Collections. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47da-77b5-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>

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<sup>2</sup> *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Jul. 10, 1883, p. 3.

This church building was completely destroyed by fire in 1902 (Figure 9).<sup>3</sup> It was reconstructed immediately following the fire to the same design as the original, and Isaac Pursell was the architect of record for the 1902 reconstruction.<sup>4</sup>

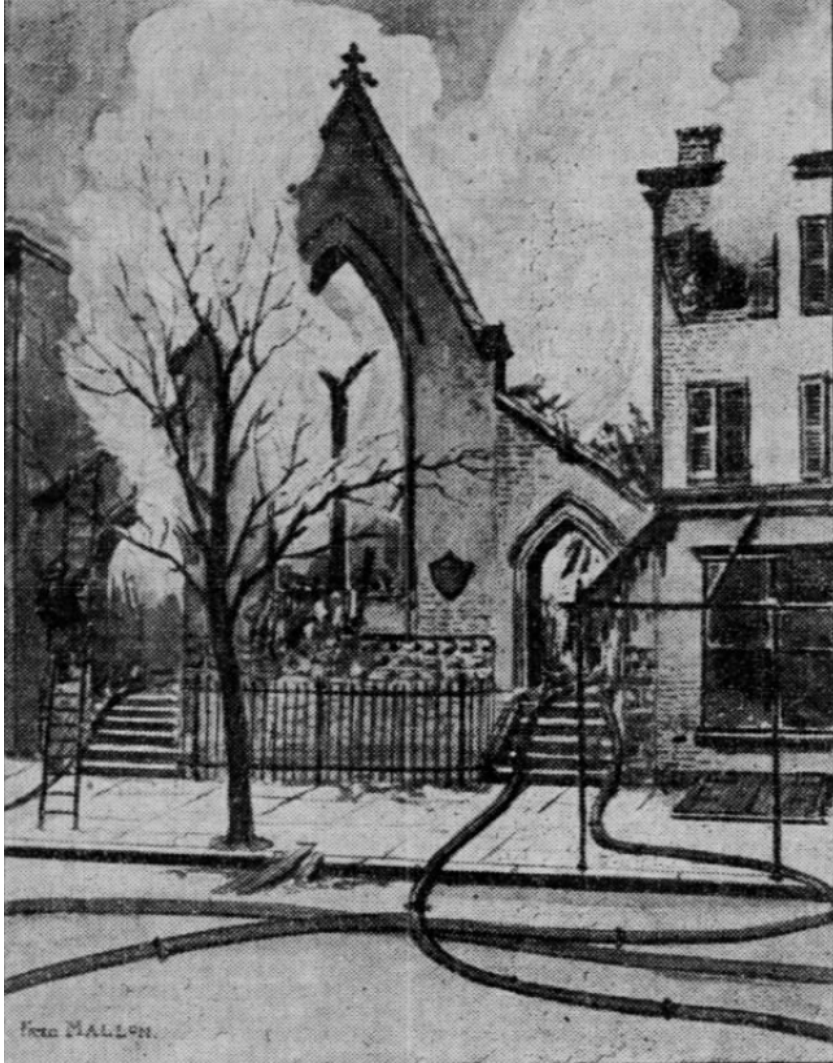


Figure 9. Rendering of the church building during the fire. Source: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Feb 10, 1902, p. 16.

The majority of the parish building fronting S. 8<sup>th</sup> Street was constructed in 1887 (Figure 10), also to a design by architect Isaac Pursell. It replaced an earlier structure that had been used as the church prior to the construction of the new church building fronting Bainbridge Street. According to a September 1887 *Philadelphia Inquirer* article:

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<sup>3</sup> *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Feb. 10, 1902, p. 16.

<sup>4</sup> *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, v. 17, n. 8, 2/19/1902, p. 113.

Rev. H. L. Phillips, rector of the Protestant Episcopal Church of the Crucifixion, Bainbridge Street, near Eighth, has long felt the need of increased accommodations to carry on the work successfully among the large colored population to be found in the neighborhood of his church. Since the completion of the new and handsome edifice on the north side of Bainbridge Street, above Eighth, the old structure on Eighth Street, above Bainbridge, has been used as a parish building. Not only were the accommodations in the old structure very inadequate, but the building was damp and badly ventilated. Some months ago an effort was made to raise funds for the erection of a more commodious house, and yesterday afternoon the corner stone of a new parish building was laid by the Right Rev. Ozi W. Whitaker, D. D., Bishop of Pennsylvania. The new structure will substantially occupy the site of the old one, which has been pulled down. The dimensions are 37 by 58 feet, and it is to be constructed of brick, with trimmings of brown stone. The edifice is to be two stories in height; on the first floor two Bible class rooms and the infant department, and on the second floor class rooms for scholars of a larger growth, which may also be used for social gatherings. The rooms on both floors can be thrown into one, and when this is done the seating capacity of the first floor will be 314 and of the second floor 272. The cost of the building will be about \$11,000, of which amount \$8000 has already been raised. It will be ready for occupancy in February 1888. The communicant membership of the Church of the Crucifixion is 225, and there are 350 scholars in the Sunday school.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Sep. 21, 1887, p. 2.

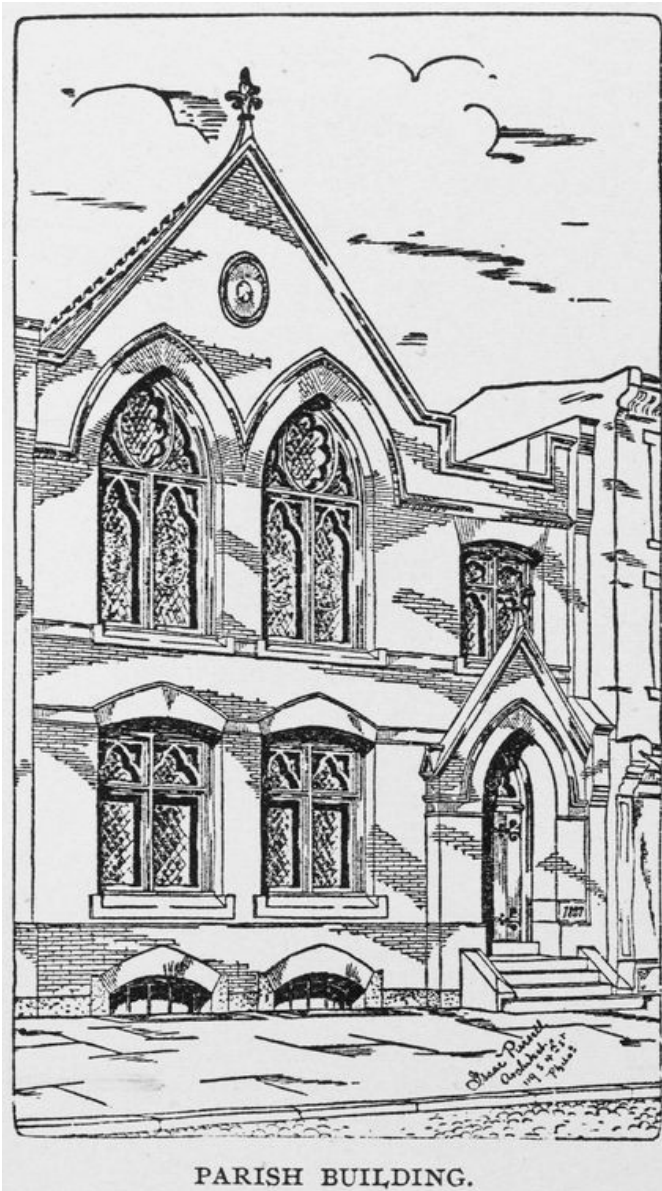


Figure 10. 1897 rendering of the parish building. Source: Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library. "Parish building." New York Public Library Digital Collections. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47da-77b6-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>

The parish building was apparently constructed in two phases, despite its façade being remarkably cohesive. Note that the frontage given in the newspaper announcement is 37 feet, which corresponds to the width of two parcels. This is also reflected in the 1897 rendering of the parish building, where a rowhouse is visible to the north of the entrance (Figure 10), and a 1910 map, which shows the parish building occupying only two lots, rather than the three lots that it occupies present-day (Figure 11). The deed transfer sheet for the rowhouse lot at 620 S. 8<sup>th</sup> Street was sold to the Church in 1902. A 1917 map appears to show a consistent setback of the three parcels, indicating that the northern 1/3 section of the parish building was constructed by this time (Figure 11).



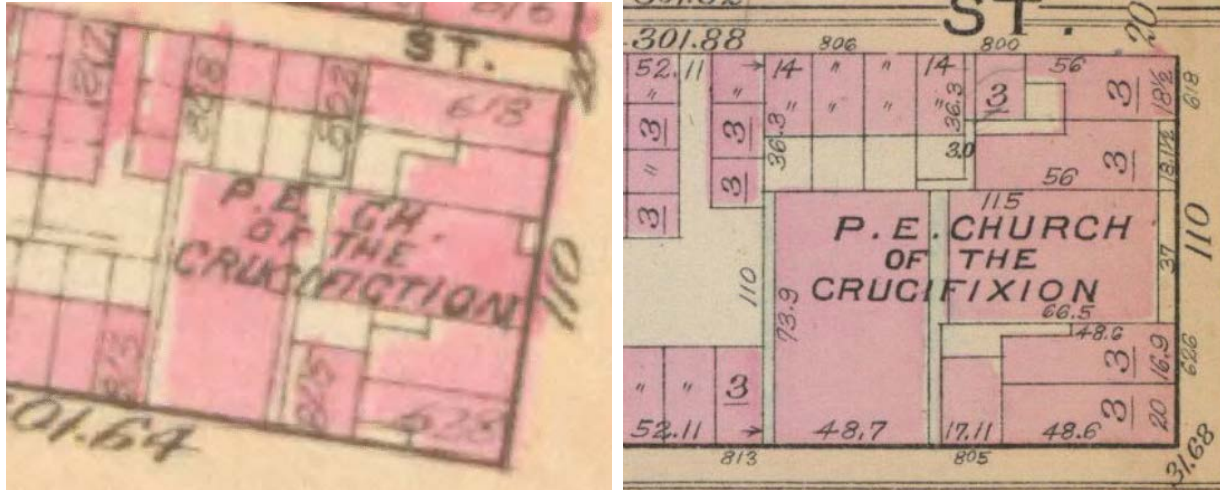


Figure 11. (Left) *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, 1910*. G.W. Bromley and Co. (Right) *Atlas of the 2nd, 3rd, 4th, and 30th Wards of the City of Philadelphia, 1917*. Elvino V. Smith. Note the change showing a uniform setback in the 1917 map, indicating that the parish building was extended north by this time.

The parish building was affected by the 1902 fire at the rear of the building. The architectural firm of Duhring, Okie & Ziegler was commissioned for the new rear addition to the parish building immediately following the fire.<sup>6</sup>

#### Satisfaction of Criterion A and J

**Criterion A:** The buildings have significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation and are associated with the life of a person significant in the past, Archdeacon Henry L. Phillips.

**Criterion J:** The buildings exemplify the cultural, economic, social and historical heritage of the community.

Throughout the history of Philadelphia, the neighborhood now known as Bella Vista has seen significant demographic and socioeconomic changes. In the mid-19th century, the neighborhood was ripe with racial discord, poverty, and violence. Today, people are planting their roots in Bella Vista due to its familial and friendly atmosphere. One of the many factors that has contributed to this is the ubiquitous, vibrant culture and history of the neighborhood. For evidence of this, one need to look no further than the buildings, particularly the churches, in the area.

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<sup>6</sup> *The Times*, Feb. 21, 1902, p. 10.

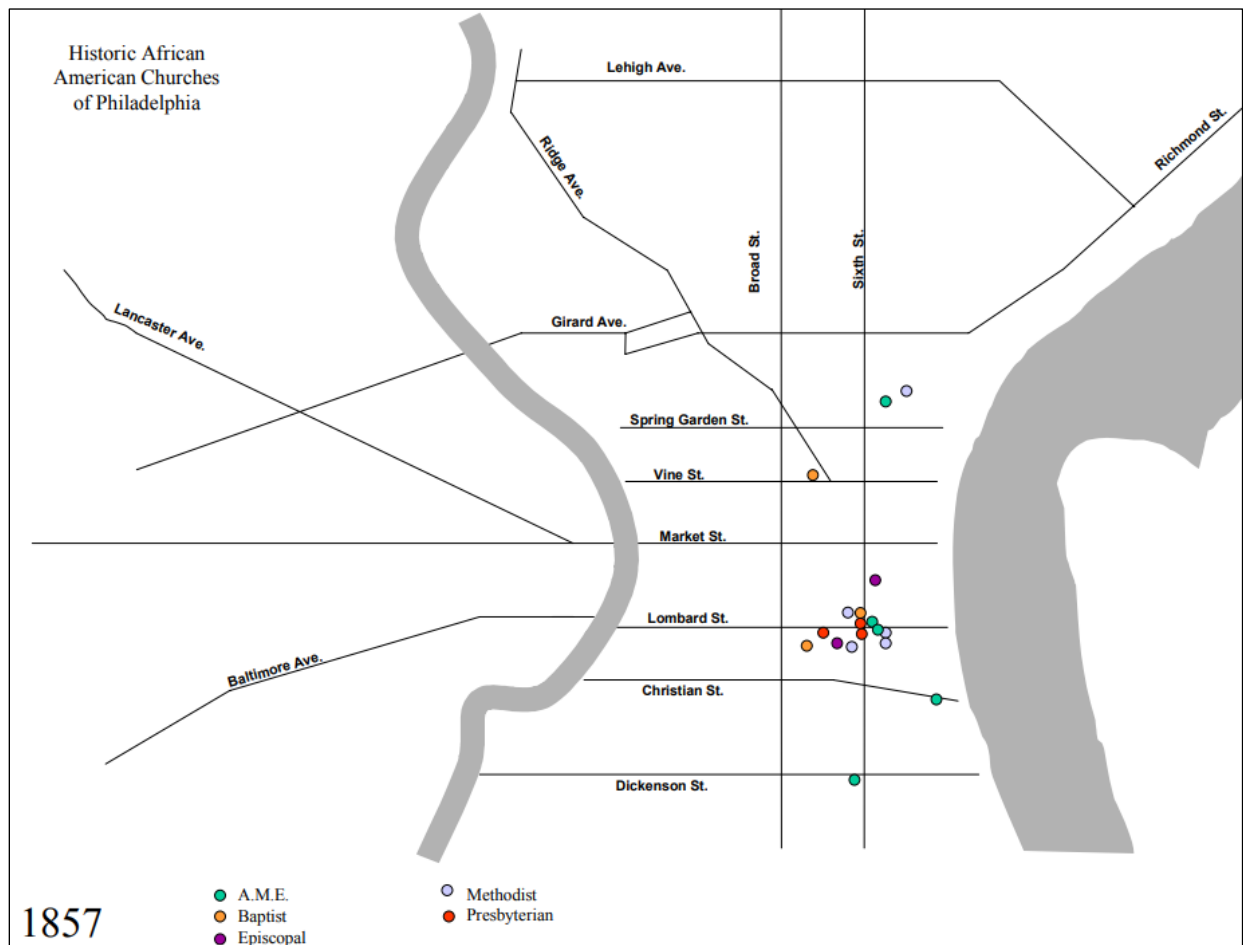


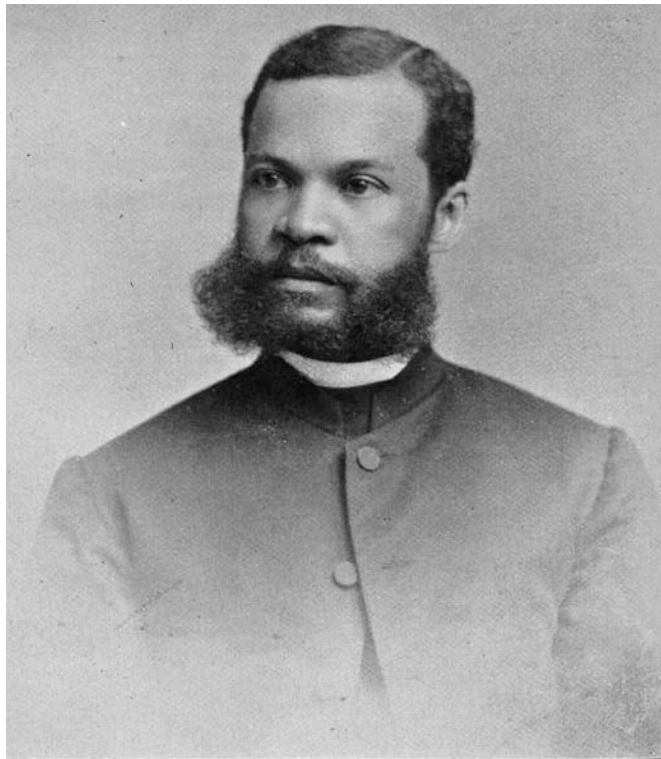
Figure 12. Map depicting the location of African American churches in Philadelphia in 1857. Note the concentration of churches located in the Bella Vista vicinity. Source: <http://www.preservationalliance.com/wp-content/uploads/aachurches1.pdf>.

The Church of the Crucifixion and its parish building have been constant structures throughout the various cultural shifts seen in Bella Vista over the years. African American churches typically drew members that lived within a short walk of the church; therefore, churches were born in the neighborhoods in which the congregants lived. By 1849, which corresponds with the approximate time of the founding of the Church of the Crucifixion, there were ten African American churches in the city proper, four in Moyamensing and Southwark, three in the northern sections, and two in West Philadelphia. In 1857, the number had grown to at least eighteen African American in Philadelphia.<sup>7</sup> Figure 12 depicts the location of these churches, showing a concentration in the vicinity of the subject church.

<sup>7</sup> See *From Refuge to Strength: The Rise of the African American Church in Philadelphia, 1787-1949* by Matthew S. Hopper for an excellent report on the topic: <http://www.preservationalliance.com/wp-content/uploads/aachurches1.pdf>.



The Church of the Crucifixion was a shelter and refuge for some of the city's poorest black residents, who often had to endure dangerous conditions on their walk to Church, including physical and verbal threats. According to *Philadelphia Tribune* articles from 1912, many men from the congregation were attacked by white men on S. 8<sup>th</sup> Street, and the nearby volunteer fire department was also outwardly oppressive of the black male congregants, making for an unsafe commute to church each week.<sup>8</sup> Despite this, through the work of its renowned Rector, Henry L. Phillips (Figure 13), the Church was a leader of its time in offering social programs.



HENRY L. PHILLIPS.

Figure 13. Henry L. Phillips, Pastor. Source: Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library. "Henry L. Phillips." New York Public Library Digital Collections. <http://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47da-77b4-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>

Henry L. Phillips was born in Jamaica in 1847, was baptized a Roman Catholic, confirmed a Moravian, and ordained an Episcopal priest in Philadelphia in 1875. When he began his ministry in Philadelphia in 1877, there were only two Black Episcopal churches, being St. Thomas and the Crucifixion Mission at the subject property, which was considerably run-down at this time. Phillips chose Crucifixion and turned it into one of the leading churches in the nation for its social outreach programs. These included the first

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<sup>8</sup> <http://www.preservationalliance.com/wp-content/uploads/aachurches1.pdf>.

Philadelphia gymnasium for Blacks, the creation of the first penny savings bank for Blacks in the United States, and the expansion of the Home for the Homeless, which was the only facility in Philadelphia for destitute women and children of both races.

W.E.B Du Bois, who was a member of the Church, claimed in his book *The Philadelphia Negro* that “probably no church in the city, except for the Episcopal Church of the Crucifixion, is doing so much for the social betterment of the Negro.” Du Bois continued:

The oldest of the churches is St. Thomas. Next comes the Church of the Crucifixion, over fifty years old and perhaps the most effective church organization in the city for benevolent and rescue work. It has been built up virtually by one Negro, a man of sincerity and culture, and of peculiar energy. This church carries on regular church work at Bainbridge and Eighth and at two branch missions; it helps in the Fresh Air Fund, has an ice mission, a vacation school of thirty-five children, and a parish visitor. It makes an especial feature of good music with its vested choir. One or two courses of University Extension lectures are held here each year, and there is a large beneficial and insurance society in active operation, and a Home for the Homeless on Lombard street. This church especially reaches after a class of neglected poor whom the other colored churches shun or forget and for whom there is little fellowship in white churches.<sup>9</sup>

The Church once housed one of the more popular choirs in the city (Figure 14). Marian Anderson, one of the most celebrated contraltos in American history, was a member of this choir and often required a chair to stand on in order to see the conductor.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, p. 217.

<sup>10</sup> National Register of Historic Places Registration Form, Marian Anderson House, [http://www.dot7.state.pa.us/CRGIS\\_Attachments/SiteResource/H128869\\_01H.pdf](http://www.dot7.state.pa.us/CRGIS_Attachments/SiteResource/H128869_01H.pdf).



*Figure 14. Church of the Crucifixion Choir, 1936.*

Phillips was responsible for the construction of the parish building in 1887, which he made into the center of Black cultural life in Philadelphia. It was in this building in 1897 that the American Negro Historical Society was founded, and Phillips served as a founding trustee and first treasurer. Phillips utilized the new parish building for other endeavors to serve the poor, including his summer school kindergarten for girls and an afternoon school for 100 children which met three times a week.

Phillips was appointed Archdeacon for Colored Work for the Episcopal Diocese of Pennsylvania in 1912. Because of this appointment, he turned over the parish of the Crucifixion with its 300 communicants to his assistant, Father Robert Tabb. He held the position of Archdeacon until his retirement in 1932, at which time Phillips was 85 years old. During his tenure, the Episcopal Church grew from two Black Episcopal congregations in the diocese to 18 Black congregations and a good number of Black priests.

Phillips had a successful career as both a church and civic leader. He was able to attract wealthy donors who contributed to both church and social service agencies. Phillips was responsible for Theodore Starr's significant contribution for the work of the Church, which financed the penny savings bank, created the first playground for the poor who lived near the Church, and led the campaign to build the

new church building on Bainbridge Street. The nearby Starr Memorial playground is named after Theodore Starr. Phillips also attracted the financial support of George C. Thomas and George Wharton Pepper. Thomas contributed thousands of dollars to advance the mission work, and helped to build and endow the Church of St. Simon the Cyrenian at 22<sup>nd</sup> and Reed Streets, and Pepper became an important fundraiser for Mercy Hospital. Phillips was also a founding trustee and first secretary of the Berean Institute, and joined other distinguished Blacks in the founding of Mercy Hospital, which eventually became the largest Black hospital north of the Mason Dixon line. Phillips guided the hospital to its greatest period of development during his tenure as president of the Board.

Phillips lived to 100 years of age, and passed away in 1947 at his Germantown home. He was a constant supporter of and advocate for the Black community and for cooperation and integration as a means of achieving full equality.<sup>11</sup> Phillips was posthumously recognized for these achievements in 1993 with a state historical marker in front of the parish building, which reads:

Henry L. Phillips

(1847-1935)<sup>12</sup>

Baptized a Catholic, reared a Moravian, and ordained an Episcopal priest, Phillips transformed the Church of the Crucifixion into a Black cultural center, known for its social outreach. He was a founder, American Negro Historical Society.

#### Satisfaction of Criterion E

**Criterion 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.

Nestled amongst houses and shops just south of South Street, the buildings were designed by prolific Philadelphia church architect Isaac Pursell. Sandra Tatman's biography of Pursell is as follows:

New Jersey resident Isaac Pursell was one of Philadelphia's most prolific church

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<sup>11</sup> *The Philadelphia Tribune*, May 7, 1985, p. 12; *The Philadelphia Tribune*, May 14, 1985, p. 7; *The Philadelphia Tribune*, May 21, 1985, p. 4; *The Philadelphia Tribune*, May 31, 1985, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> Note that his year of death is incorrect on the historic marker, and should be 1947, based on numerous obituaries from May of 1947.

designers, competing with the equally popular Charles Bolton for the Protestant market. He was born in Trenton, NJ, apprenticed with Samuel Sloan and opened an independent office in Philadelphia in 1878. Except for a short period in the 1880s (ca. 1885-1887), during which he partnered with Joseph W. B. Fry in Pursell & Fry, he practiced independently from his office in Philadelphia. For many years Pursell was part of the effort on the part of the Presbyterian Board of Church Election to publicize acceptable plans for churches and church manses; many of his design appeared in the Board's annual reports and were constructed across the United States. Many of Pursell's church designs exhibit the English gothic revival style used for St. Martins P.E. Church (1006 East Oak Lane, 1901).

However, church design does not represent all of Pursell's work. During the 1890s he also served as staff architect for *Mrs. Rorer's Household News*, in that case producing residential designs which were available to the readers of that periodical, much in the same way that his mentor Sloan had published his designs in *Godey's Ladies Book* at an earlier period.

*Illustrated Philadelphia: Its Wealth and Industries* (1889, p. 129) described Pursell in this way: "Mr. Pursell is a thoroughly qualified and able architect who has evinced great skill and ability in the practice of his profession, designing and superintending the construction of many prominent buildings not only in Philadelphia but all across the United States. He has made a specialty of the building of schools and churches . . . Many of the buildings erected by this responsible architect are much admired for their beauty, while the elaboration of detail and care bestowed upon every department of the work reflects the utmost credit on the skill and judgment of this popular gentleman."

Pursell was very active in the Philadelphia Chapter of the AIA; he had joined the national AIA in 1901. He was residing in Wenonah, NJ, when he died.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Philadelphia Architects and Buildings, "Isaac Pursell," [https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar\\_display.cfm/85792](https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/85792).

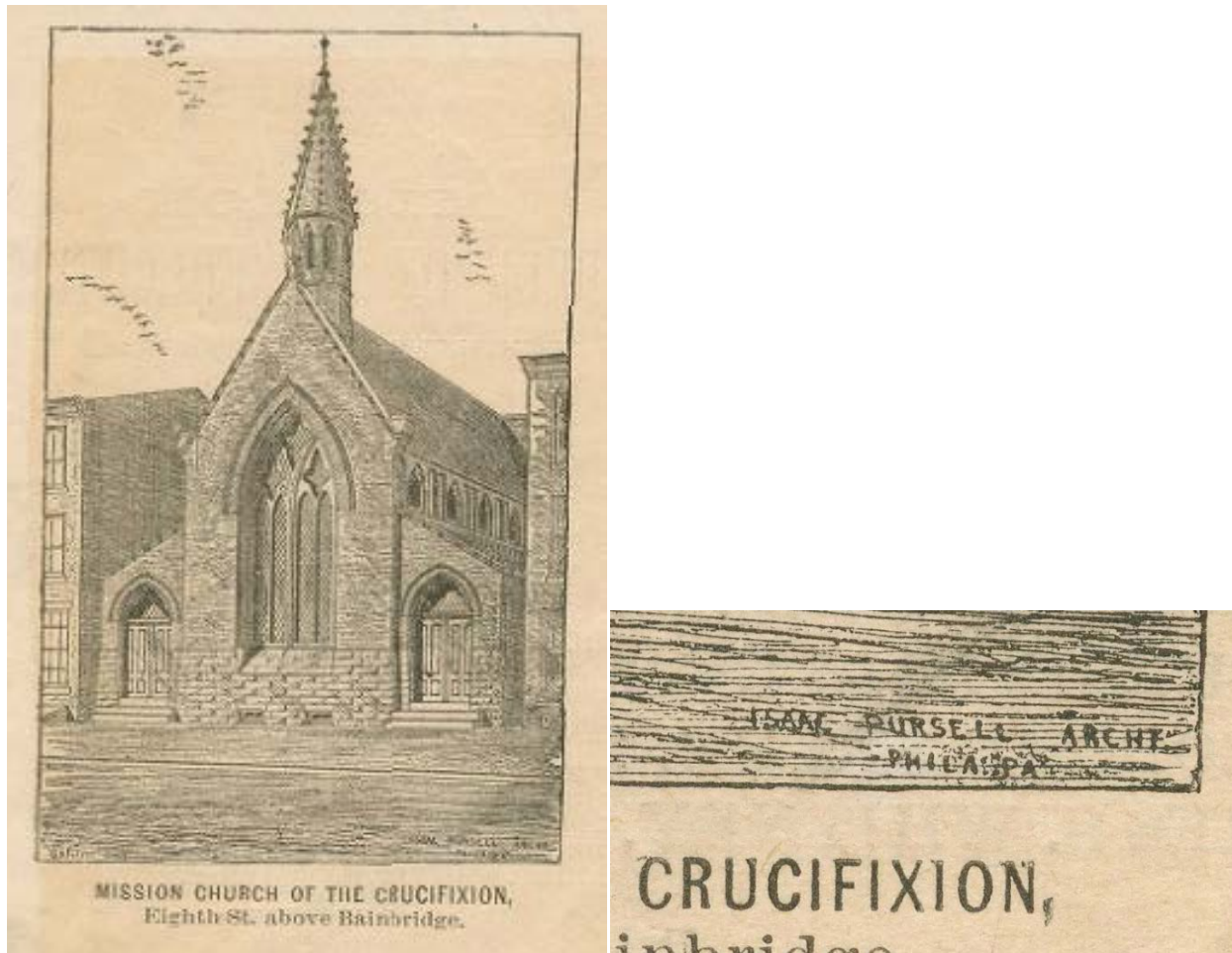


Figure 15. (Left) Mission Church of the Crucifixion, Eighth St. above Bainbridge, undated drawing by G.H. Fettos. (Right) Detail of bottom right showing Isaac Pursell as architect. Source: Athaenaeum of Philadelphia, General Collection – Prints.

[https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/im\\_display.cfm?ImageId=B54C7D32-1422-7865-6BEED626ED77580E](https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/im_display.cfm?ImageId=B54C7D32-1422-7865-6BEED626ED77580E)

Examples of other extant Philadelphia church commissions for Pursell include Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Holy Communion at 2108-14 Chestnut Street and St. Matthew's Church at 624 N. Broad Street (Figure 16), and Woodland Presbyterian Church at 401 S. 42<sup>nd</sup> Street and Temple Lutheran Church at 201-09 N. 52<sup>nd</sup> Street (Figure 17).





Figure 16. (Left) Evangelical Lutheran Church of the Holy Communion, 2108-14 Chestnut Street. Source: Philadelphia Historical Commission archive. (Right) St. Matthew's Church, 624 N. Broad Street. Source: Google Street View.



Figure 17. (Left) Woodland Presbyterian Church, 401 S. 42<sup>nd</sup> Street. Source: Google Street View. (Right) Temple Lutheran Church, 201-09 N. 52<sup>nd</sup> Street. Source: Google Street View.

## Conclusion

Today, despite its vacancy, the building continues to act as a harbor of service. The RISE program, a ministry of Saint Marks Church, will often use the building to bake bread and food to provide to those who are in need. It is for these reasons that we, the Bella Vista Neighbors Association and Preservation Committee, wish to preserve this location. A building that has stood in our city for over a century as a

crucible of service to some of its most impoverished people, is worthy of recognition and preservation. The properties have significant character, interest, or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City and are associated with the life of a person significant in the past; are the work of an architect whose work has significantly influenced the historical and architectural development of the City; and, the properties exemplify the cultural, economic, social and historical heritage of the community.

*Edited and supplemented by Historical Commission staff.*

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