

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: 1535 W Girard Avenue

Postal code: 19130

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: Charles T. Yerkes House

Current/Common Name: _____

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: Residential

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 1864 to 1886

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: 1864-65

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: _____

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: _____

Original owner: Charles T. Yerkes, Jr.

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

Please attach a bibliography.

9. NOMINATOR

Organization Staff of the Philadelphia Historical Commission Date 8/12/2019

Name with Title Laura DiPasquale, Historic Preservation Planner Email Laura.dipasquale@phila.gov

Street Address 1515 Arch St, 13th Fl Telephone 215-686-7660

City, State, and Postal Code Philadelphia, PA 19102

Nominator ☐ is ☒ is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: 8/12/2019

☒ Correct-Complete ☐ Incorrect-Incomplete Date: 8/15/2019

Date of Notice Issuance: 8/15/2019

Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: Willis W. Berry Jr.

Address: 1535 W Girard Avenue

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19130

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: 11/13/2019

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: 12/13/2019

Date of Final Action: 12/13/2019

☒ Designated ☐ Rejected

12/7/18

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

All that certain lot or piece of ground with the buildings and improvements thereon erected, containing in front or breadth on W. Girard Avenue 21 feet and extending in length or depth northward between parallel lines at right angles with the said Girard Avenue, the westerly line thereof extending along the east side of 16th Street 150 feet to the south side of Flora Street.



6. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Located on the northeast corner of W Girard Avenue and N 16th Street, the property at 1535 W Girard Avenue is set within a context of predominantly three- to three-and-a-half-story rowhouses and other buildings of varying nineteenth-century architectural styles, mixed with newer construction buildings. Constructed c. 1865 in the high-style Italianate/Italian Renaissance Revival style by an unknown architect, the property at 1535 W Girard Avenue extends the full width to Flora Street and features a three and a half story, red brick main block with a gabled roof and coated brownstone façade; a full-width, three-story, brick rear extension with a sloped roof; and a two-story brick and iron-clad frame rear extension with a flat roof (see Figure 8).



Figure 1: View of 1535 W Girard Avenue looking northeast from the intersection of Girard Avenue and N 16th Street, May 2019.

South Elevation (W. Girard Avenue)



Figure 2: South elevation and details, May 2019.

The front, or south, elevation of the main block along W Girard Avenue features three vertical registers of round arch openings, with the door set in the easternmost bay of the first floor, and set on an intricate base with two arched basement windows. The first and second-story window and door openings are round arched and set within rectangular surrounds under projecting hoods with carved floral panels in the spandrels. The first-floor window and door surrounds also feature a central modillion keystone. The pair of full-lite wood doors, which are accessed by a wide brownstone stairway with curved bannisters and varved balusters, features a round-arched transom. The third-floor windows are also round-arch, but set within arched surrounds without the projecting hoods of the lower-floor windows. The second and third-floor window openings feature Gothic arch two-over-two windows, while the first-floor features arched one-over-one windows. Projecting belt courses run in line with the first-floor window sills and hoods, second and third-floor window sills, and above the third-floor windows. The latter serves as the sill for three, small, rectangular windows set beneath the projecting cornice, which is supported by four brownstone brackets that flank the windows.

West Elevation (N. 16th Street)



Figure 3: West elevation along 16th Street, showing the main block (to the right), the three-story rear extension (center), and a portion of the two-story rear extension (to the left), May 2019.

The west, 16th Street elevation of the main block is red brick and features a gently gabled roof broken by two chimneys connected by a parapet. The parapet and roof slopes are edged with simple crown trim, ending in the returns of the south and dentillated north elevation cornices. While the southerly half of the west elevation of the main block is unfenestrated, the northern half features rectangular windows with stone lintels and sills. A round-arched window is set below the broken parapet.

The west elevation of the full-width rear extension features five irregularly-spaced bays of rectangular windows with stone lintels and sills. No original windows remain in the openings. The basement windows have been infilled with glass block. The sloped roof of the ell terminates in a bracketed cornice that tops the west elevation.

West/North Elevations (Rear Extension)



Figure 4: Looking southeast at the rear (north) and west side elevations, May 2019.

Beyond the three-story rear extension is a two-story extension with a masonry base and an iron-clad frame upper floor supported by large brackets and thin metal posts. Historically, the upper floor extended out over the brick first-floor, leaving a porch which has since been infilled with a stuccoed enclosure. The metal cladding of the second floor, which is remarkably intact, features a series of paneled pedestals with Composite order pilasters and entablature. The second-floor features two windows per elevation.

The north portion of the property, which terminates at Flora Street, is undeveloped, as it was historically. It is surrounded by a stone retaining wall, which is partially rebuilt along 16th Street.



Figure 5: View south towards the rear, north elevation of the property from Flora Street, May 2019.



Figure 6: Details of the metal-clad second-floor rear extension, May 2019.

East Elevation

The east elevation of the property features a prominent mural, titled “Celebrate the Arts,” by artist Parris Stancell, installed c. 2004. Although stuccoed, the wall is not and was not historically a party wall, and features several window openings, including an arched window at the third-floor of the main block and several windows in the rear extensions, including a bay window at the second floor of the three-story portion.



Figure 7: East elevation, May 2019.

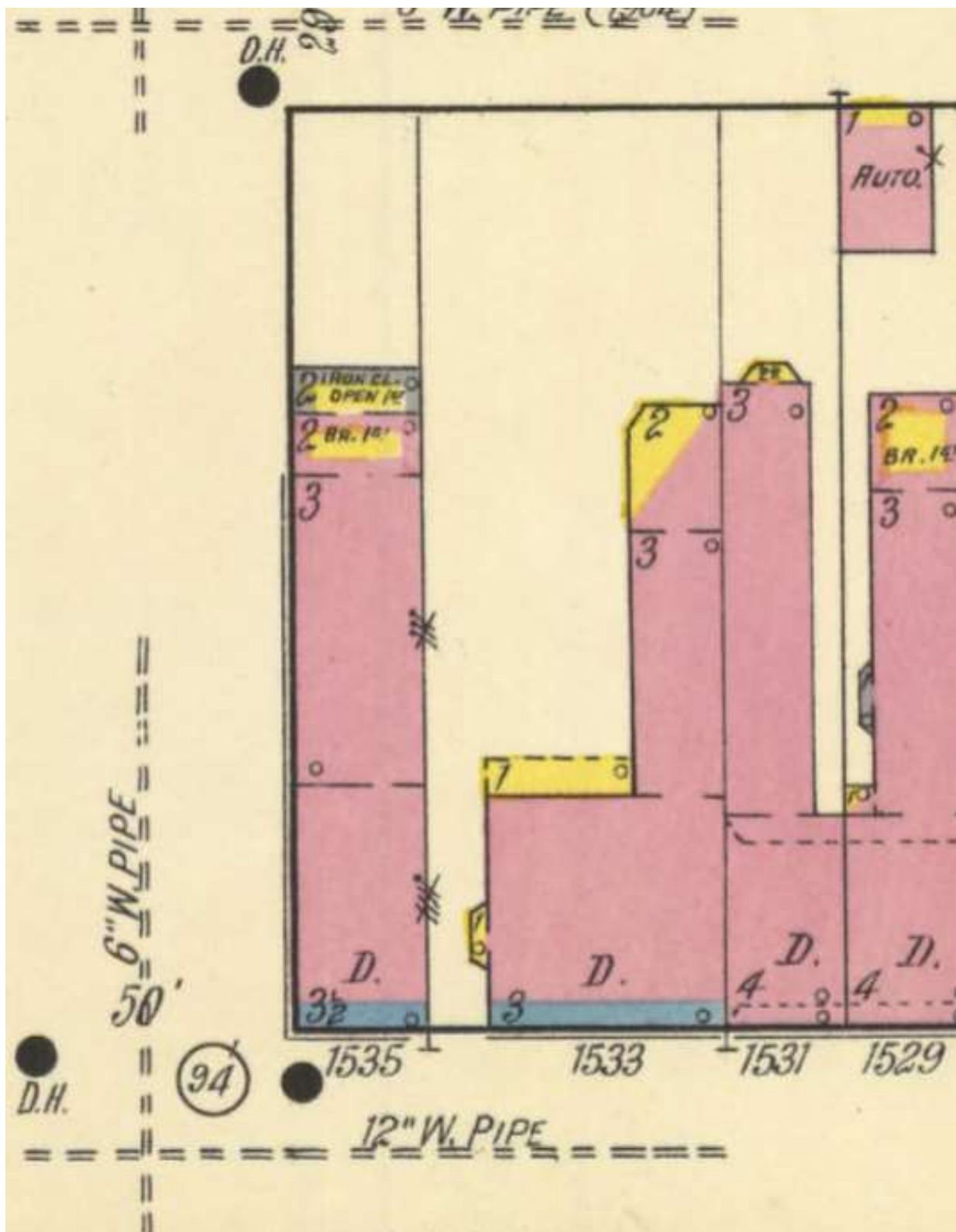


Figure 8: Detail of the 1918 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, Vol. 7, sheet 613. Source: Pennsylvania State University Digital Archives.

7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The property at 1535 W Girard Avenue is historically significant and should be listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Pursuant to Section 14-1004(1) of the Philadelphia Code, the property satisfies Criteria for Designation A, D, and J. The property:

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

Constructed between 1864 and 1865 for Charles Tyson Yerkes, the property at 1535 W Girard Avenue is significant under Criterion A for its association with Yerkes, one of shrewdest businessmen and most influential mass-transit financiers of the late nineteenth century. While Quaker-born Yerkes got his start in business in Philadelphia, his influence extended beyond the city, and even the nation, as he would go on to give Chicago its “L,” and London its “Tube” systems. Through his questionable morals and unfettered ambition, Yerkes exemplified the Gilded Age robber baron to such an extent that he was immortalized, shortly after his death, in Theodore Dreiser’s *Financier* trilogy of the early twentieth century. His home along Girard Avenue, just west of Broad Street, designed in a high-style Italianate style (satisfying Criterion D) likewise exemplifies the development of West Girard Avenue as it transitioned from a rural area to a streetcar suburb and ultimately a fashionable thoroughfare for the nouveau riche elite in the second half of the nineteenth century, satisfying Criterion J.



Figure 9: Charles T. Yerkes, from Catalog of Paintings and Sculpture in the Collection of Charles T. Yerkes, New York, 1904.

Born in Northern Liberties in 1837, Charles Tyson Yerkes, Jr. began his business career at age 17 as a clerk in a local grain brokerage in Philadelphia. In 1859, at the age of 22 and with a recent inheritance from an uncle who died the previous year, Yerkes opened his own stock broker’s office at 20 S. 3rd Street, and joined the Philadelphia Stock Exchange.¹

Although Yerkes was an early investor in Philadelphia’s street railways—and would be again later in his career—it was his success in government bonds following the Civil War that would truly galvanize his career.² By this time, Yerkes’ firm, C.T. Yerkes, Jr. & Co., had moved into banking, specializing in high-risk deals. In the financial turmoil that followed the Civil War, the City of Philadelphia issued a series of bonds, but their price on the open market stagnated between 65 and 85 percent, preventing the City from disposing of them.³ Yerkes, however, was able to sell the bonds at par, relieving the impasse, and earning him a reputation as a financial genius among the city’s political and financial leaders.

¹ Robert Forrey, "Charles Tyson Yerkes: Philadelphia-Born Robber Baron," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 99, no. 2 (April 1975): 227.

² Yerkes first invested in Philadelphia’s street railways in 1861 at age 24. Stephen Salsbury, "Charles Tyson Yerkes (1837-1905)," *American National Biography*, February 2000.

³ Forrey, op. cit. 228; and Salsbury, op. cit.

It is also around this time that Yerkes moved from 1320 N. 7th Street to a new home he had built at the corner of 16th and Girard Avenue between 1864 and 1865.⁴ Girard Avenue west of Broad Street had been laid out in the early 1840s following the establishment of Girard College, which pushed development further north into what was then a rural part of Penn Township. The openness of the area, known then as Green Hill, invited institutional development, including the John Notman-designed Green Hill Presbyterian Church (c. 1847) and St. Joseph's Hospital (c. 1849) on the 1600 block of W Girard Avenue, as well as the construction of large country estates (see Appendix).⁵ Half again as wide as most Philadelphia streets, Girard Avenue also proved ideal for the installation of one of the earliest horse-drawn streetcar lines in the city, which, after it opened in 1859, in turn elevated the thoroughfare's status and made it even more attractive to wealthy would-be residents.⁶ In the pre-automobile era, easy access to public transportation was viewed as an advantage rather than a liability, and Girard Avenue quickly became one of the most accessible and fashionable streets in North Philadelphia.⁷



Figure 10: Detail of the 1862 Samuel Smedley atlas, showing the trolley lines along Girard Avenue. The red dot shows the undeveloped parcel of 1535 W Girard Avenue, prior to construction of the existing building. Source: Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network.

It is along this newly-minted transportation corridor that Charles T. Yerkes, Sr., a banker, purchased two large pieces of property in the early 1860s.⁸ Within six months, Yerkes Sr. sold the vacant lot at the corner of Girard Avenue and 16th Street to his son, Charles T. Yerkes, Jr., keeping the double-width property and house at 1533 W Girard Avenue for himself.⁹ Construction of the house at 1535 W Girard Avenue was apparently complete by 1865, as Charles T. Yerkes, Jr. is listed in city directories as residing at

⁴ Yerkes' Civil War Draft Registration card as well as the 1863 and 1864 Philadelphia City Directories list Charles T. Yerkes, Jr.'s home as 1320 N. 7th Street. The 1865 city directory lists his home address as 1535 W Girard Avenue. Source: Ancestry.com. *U.S. City Directories, 1822-1995* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011.

⁵ James A. Jacobs, "Historic American Buildings Survey form, Green Hill Presbyterian Church," HABS No. PA 6668. Available: <https://cdn.loc.gov/master/pnp/habshaer/pa/pa3800/pa3861/data/pa3861data.pdf>

⁶ Opened in 1859, the Richmond and Schuylkill River Passenger Railway along Girard Avenue would eventually connect to multiple other streetcar lines, including the Ridge Avenue and Broad Street lines, as well as the Girard Avenue Bridge that opened in 1875. "Girard Avenue Historic District," *National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form*, 1984.

⁷ George E. Thomas, "National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Girard Avenue Historic District," Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 13 May 1985.

⁸ Deeds of Sale: James Clark to Charles T. Yerkes Sr., 10/20/1862; William Jarden to Charles T. Yerkes Sr., 4/11/1863.

⁹ Despite his Civil War Draft Registration Record, it does not appear that Charles Yerkes, Jr. ultimately served in the Civil War. Deed of Sale: Charles T. Yerkes, Sr. to Charles T. Yerkes, Jr., Deed Book ACH 125, p. 69, 10/7/1863.

that address following that date.¹⁰ In fact, it may have been his earnings as an early investor in Philadelphia's horsecar system that allowed Yerkes, Jr. to locate his home in a burgeoning streetcar suburb.

For the design of his new mansion, the ambitious young Yerkes chose a high-style version of the popular Italianate style, which drew inspiration from fifteenth-century Italian palazzo design, the classical detail, elegance, and gravitas of which were "deemed eminently suitable for symbolizing prosperity and social position in a limited space."¹¹ Dominant during the period from 1855 to 1880, the Italianate style lent itself well to numerous building forms, including urban and rural residences, commercial, and institutional buildings. Distinguishing characteristics of the urban townhouse adaptation of the Italianate style found at 1535 W Girard Avenue include its low-pitched roof with wide eaves supported by decorative brackets; tall, narrow two-over-two arched double-hung windows with decorative hoods; small, rectangular top-floor windows; a prominent entry with double doors set in a decorative surround; and decorative cast iron elements, a newly developed technology in this period.¹² A free-standing townhouse with a brownstone façade (now coated), the building at 1535 W Girard Avenue further presented a higher-style version of the often brick-fronted Italianate rowhouses found throughout Philadelphia.

During the Yerkes' tenure along Girard Avenue following the Civil War, North Philadelphia, and the city as a whole, experienced dramatic social and cultural change. Philadelphia witnessed a population boom brought on by a rapid influx of immigrants, the migration of freed slaves northward, and the general movement in the country from an agrarian to an industrial economy. Industry, fueled by breakthroughs in technology, flourished in Philadelphia, which had long been considered the "Workshop of the World." With changes came opportunity, and as capitalist empires were built, a new upper class emerged.¹³ In the late nineteenth century, the focal point of development for this nouveau riche class was around the intersection of West Girard Avenue and North Broad Street, where the Yerkes had established themselves in the preceding decades. At the peak of the Gilded Age, the axis of Girard Avenue and Broad Street would be connected by the great mansions of the Widener and Elkins families, constructed in 1887 and 1893, respectively (both now demolished, see Figure 11).



Figure 11: Detail of the 1895 G.W. Bromley atlas showing increased development along and around Girard Avenue. Source: Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network.

¹⁰ Despite the fact that Yerkes owned the property until 1886, city directories only list his address as 1535 W Girard Avenue through 1882. After that, his company remains in city directories, but Yerkes himself is noted to live in Chicago.

¹¹ Suzanne Spellman, "Italianate Architecture." Brownstoner, April 6, 2016.

¹² "Italianate Villa/Italianate Style 1840 - 1885." Pennsylvania Architectural Field Guide. Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, <http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/portal/communities/architecture/styles/italianate.html>.

¹³ E. Digby Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1958).

As a descendant of Welsh farmers and tradesmen who came to the New World in the seventeenth century and converted to Quakerism after the arrival of William Penn, Charles T. Yerkes, Jr. did not technically fit into either the world of the old money or nouveau riche families of Philadelphia.¹⁴ Nevertheless, he came to exemplify the latter; he was solidly a man of his time, taking full (and not always legal) advantage of the monumental growth and industrialization of Philadelphia and, eventually, beyond.

Previously admired, Yerkes' reputation in Philadelphia suffered a substantial blow in 1871, after the Chicago Fire caused panic at the Philadelphia Stock Exchange. Yerkes, who was overcommitted financially, was unable to pay back the money he had been paid for municipal bonds.¹⁵ Authorities found that Yerkes, in collusion with city treasurer Joseph F. Marcer, had misused considerable public funds.¹⁶ Yerkes denied the charges, but was arrested and indicted along with Marcer for embezzlement. During his trial, where he was found guilty of larceny and sentenced to two years and nine months at Eastern State Penitentiary, Yerkes was admonished by the judge, who said, "If your case points no other moral, it will at least teach the lesson long needed at the present time, that the treasury of the city is not to be invaded with impunity, under the thin disguise of a business transaction, and that there is still a law to vindicate itself and protect the public."¹⁷

After serving only seven months in prison, Yerkes was pardoned and publicly exonerated of all charges. Although the cause for the pardon was cited as "loss of business," Yerkes biographer John Franch noted that it may have actually involved a deal of political corruption itself: "In return for a pardon from the governor, Charles [Yerkes] agreed to furnish information that would neutralize [the governor's] principal enemies..."¹⁸ Nevertheless, local support for Yerkes at the time was strong, the *Philadelphia Inquirer* opining that Yerkes and Marcer were "...the unfortunate victims of unforeseen circumstances," as well as the "first victims of the wholesome spirit of reform which demanded a blameless administration of the municipal government."¹⁹

Following his release, Yerkes made assignments of his property—including his home at 1535 W Girard Avenue—to an attorney, and set to work recouping his losses.²⁰ As he recounted to an English journalist in 1901, "By the time I was thirty-five, I had accumulated a fortune of some \$1,000,000, which in those days was looked upon as a large fortune. Then, by a stroke of ill-luck, I lost it all, and had to start the world over again."²¹ Luckily for him, the Panic of 1873, brought on by the failure of Philadelphia's Jay Cooke & Co., allowed Yerkes to buy stock cheaply and quickly regain much of his lost fortune.²² In October 1873, a judge released him from bankruptcy, cancelling the \$478,000 Yerkes owed the city. Out of bankruptcy, he was able to resurrect his brokerage firm, Charles T. Yerkes, Jr., & Company, and was eventually readmitted to the Stock Exchange.²³ By December of 1874, he was also able to buy back his property at 1535 W Girard Avenue.²⁴

¹⁴ Forrey, op. cit., 226.

¹⁵ Salsbury, op. cit.

¹⁶ For a more detailed account of Yerkes' crimes, see Forrey, op. cit., 228.

¹⁷ Ibid., and Eastern State Penitentiary, *Convict Register*, February 10, 1872.

¹⁸ John Franch, *Robber Baron: The Life of Charles Tyson Yerkes* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008): 56.

¹⁹ "Pardoned! Jos. F. Marcer and Chas. T. Yerkes, Jr.," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 28 September 1872, p.1. and "The Pardon of Marcer and Yerkes.," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 28 September 1872, p.4.

²⁰ Philadelphia Deed Book JAH 226, p. 160: Charles T. Yerkes to Bankruptcy, 3/18/1872; Philadelphia Deed Book FTW 26, p. 1, John Sparhawk, George J. Gress and J. Davis Duffield, assignees in Bankruptcy of Charles T. Yerkes, Jr. to Ludovic C. Cleeman, 2/5/1873; Philadelphia Deed Book FTW 32, p. 446: Charles T. Yerkes, Jr. to Ludovic C. Cleeman, 4/15/1873.

²¹ Franch, op. cit., 78.

²² The Editors of Encyclopædia Britannica, "Charles Tyson Yerkes," *Encyclopædia Britannica*, December 25, 2018.

²³ Franch, op. cit., 81.

²⁴ In December 1874, Ludovic C. Cleeman, Yerkes' assignee, sold the property at 1535 W Girard Ave to John S. Hopkins, the trustee for Susannah G. Yerkes, who in turn was nominated to take the conveyance of the property on behalf of her husband,

Although he tried for a time to go straight, implementing strict rules for deals on his firm and opening a new office on Chestnut Street in the ultra-respectable “Banker’s Row,” Yerkes soon fell into his old ways and began associating with William Kemble, a notorious politician and savvy manager of the city’s burgeoning horsecar lines.²⁵ Kemble, who had pushed through a charter for the patriotically-named Union Passenger Railway Company during the Civil War, became Philadelphia’s foremost horsecar operator. After falling out with the more conservative directors of the Union Railway, who objected to Kemble’s aggressive drive for a monopoly over Philadelphia’s transit systems, Kemble left and formed a competing company, the Continental Passenger Railway Company. He soon recruited Yerkes in his fight against the Union Railway, making Yerkes a director of the Continental, and allowing him to make a fortune buying stock in the company at bargain basement prices.²⁶

Kemble would also introduce Yerkes to “traction twins” Peter A.B. Widener and William L. Elkins, who shared Kemble’s belief that investment in streetcar lines was the way of the future. Kemble coached the three younger men on how to run a railroad, including the importance of economical operation and keeping tight control over the firm’s costs.²⁷ Since railway companies required charters from the legislature, which could also take them away, Kemble also stressed the significance of shrewd political maneuvering, favors, and, if necessary, blackmail or bribery. The latter landed Kemble in jail for a time, but that minor setback did not stop him from relentlessly pursuing his goal of controlling the Union Railway and forming a monopoly over Philadelphia’s streetcar systems.

Yerkes’ break from Kemble, Widener, and Elkins came around 1880, after Kemble’s ultimate takeover of the Union Railway. Yerkes, one of the largest stakeholders in the Continental Passenger Railway, did not feel that stakeholders were adequately compensated for the Union deal and complained loudly and publicly about the situation. The “big three” in turn saw Yerkes’ complaints as disloyal, and his Philadelphia streetcar career came to an abrupt end.²⁸ Kemble, Widener and Elkins would go on to become the biggest names in Philadelphia’s traction history, forming the Philadelphia Traction Company in 1883 with the purpose of acquiring existing streetcar lines and converting them to cable operation (an investment that proved less profitable than some of their other ventures). After Kemble’s death in 1891, Widener and Elkins abandoned cable operation for electrification, and within three years of the formation of their Union Traction Company in 1895, would come to control nearly all the lines in the city.

Life for Yerkes, meanwhile, had become not only uncomfortable professionally, but personally. In 1881, he divorced his wife of 21 years and married a younger woman with whom it was rumored he had been having an affair for some time. Yerkes and his new bride started afresh in the Midwest, aided in establishing a new career by his Philadelphia connections to Widener and Elkins, as well as financier Anthony J. Drexel, who wrote him a letter of introduction to use in Chicago, where he settled in 1882.²⁹

In Chicago, Yerkes initially opened a stock and grain brokerage and dabbled in gas franchises for a time, but he quickly returned to his true love, street railways. Through a series of complex financial deals involving numerous business associates (including long-distance partners Widener and Elkins), political maneuvering, bribery, and blackmail, Yerkes soon gained control of two of the three main street railway companies that covered the north and west sides of Chicago. Within a decade, he had modernized and

Charles. Philadelphia Deed Book FTW164, p.316, 12/5/1874. Yerkes regained control of the property, and owned it until January 1886, when he conveyed it to Thomas Twibill. This deed was not recorded, but is discussed in the deed of sale between Thomas Twibill and M. Adele Kremer, Philadelphia Deed Book GGP109, p. 214, 2/1/1886.

²⁵ Franch, op. cit., 85.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Franch, 87.

²⁸ Franch, 88.

²⁹ Forrey, op. cit., 231.

integrated the transit systems, converting the horsecar lines first to cable and then to electric traction, and extending the tracks from less than 75 miles to 575.³⁰ In 1897, he opened the elevated Union Loop around the central business district, a move that connected the city's otherwise detached business areas on the north, west, and south sides and changed the direction of future development of the city.³¹

Now a Chicago landmark, the Loop, or "L," greatly increased the rapid transit system's convenience, but the turmoil around its construction and operation fomented political distrust, amplified Yerkes' negative public image, and cemented his robber baron reputation. Such was Yerkes' infamy that several pages were devoted to his wheelings and dealings in British journalist William T. Stead's 1894 expose on Chicago's political corruption and underground economy, *If Christ Came to Chicago*. "Of the predatory rich in Chicago there are plenty and to spare," Stead wrote, "but there is one man who stands out conspicuous among all the rest... I refer to Mr. Charles T. Yerkes."³² An "incurable suspicion" and anger mounted against the cavalier Yerkes who, "cheated his stockholders and partners, insulted newspaper editors, bribed city officials with impunity, and retaliated against customers who complained about inadequate services and broken-down equipment."³³ After he attempted to force a bill through state legislature that would have given transit companies a 50-year extension of their franchises, Yerkes' opponents united against him in a two-year court battle. Finally defeated, in 1899 the traction magnate sold out to the inflated tune of \$20 million, and moved to New York.³⁴

In New York, Yerkes installed his wife in a luxurious Fifth Avenue mansion overlooking Central Park, outfitted with his extensive art collection and lavish furnishings collected from Europe and Asia (see Appendix); he set up his favorite mistress, 19-year-old Emilie Grigsby, in a similarly-adorned flat two blocks away on Park Avenue.³⁵ But rather than settle into a quiet—if multi-amorous and hedonistic—retirement in New York, the 63-year-old Yerkes soon departed for London. Biographer Robert Forrey speculates that Yerkes was encouraged to make the move by Miss Grigsby, a social climber who wanted to establish herself in English society after being prevented from doing so in New York by the public revelation of her mother's past as a brothel owner.³⁶

In 1900, after surveying the densely-populated city of London from the summit of Hampstead Heath, Yerkes was convinced to invest in the development of the London underground railway system. Using the techniques he learned in Philadelphia and honed in Chicago, Yerkes established the Underground Electric Railways Company of London and took over control of the existing District Railway and several other partially-built but poorly-funded lines.³⁷ As he had in the United States, Yerkes used complex financial arrangements to finance the construction of new lines and to electrify the District railway.

The "Tube," as it became known—along with the defeat of rival financier J.P. Morgan in the process—would be Yerkes' swan-song. He died in a New York hotel apartment in 1905 of kidney disease, prevented from returning to his Fifth Avenue mansion by his estranged wife. His legacy would live on, however, not only in the form of public transit systems worldwide, but—surprisingly—in the field of astrophysics. In 1892, in an effort to improve his public image, Yerkes had decided to bankroll the world's

³⁰ Harold L. Platt "Charles Tyson Yerkes and Street Railways." In *Encyclopedia of Chicago*. (Chicago Historical Society, 2005). <http://www.encyclopedia.chicagohistory.org/pages/2416.html>.

³¹ Patrick T. Reardon, "The Elevated Loop, a Chicago Landmark in Everything by Name." *Chicago Tribune*, September 25, 2017. <https://www.chicagotribune.com/opinion/commentary/ct-perspec-elevated-loop-chicago-landmark.0924-story.html>.

³² William T. Stead, *If Christ Came to Chicago: A Plea for the Union of All Who Love in the Service of All Who Suffer* (London: The Review of Reviews, 1894).

³³ Platt, op. cit.

³⁴ Salisbury, op.cit., 3.

³⁵ "Conquistador of Metroland." *The Economist* Vol. 413, No. 8918 (December 17, 2014): 71.

³⁶ Forrey, op.cit., 238.

³⁷ "The American Father of the London Underground: Charles Tyson Yerkes." *The American* (January 22, 2019).

<https://www.theamerican.co.uk/pr/ft-Charles-Tyson-Yerkes-London-Underground>.

largest telescope at the urging of astronomer George Ellery Hale and University of Chicago president William Rainey Harper. He ultimately footed the bill for not just a telescope, but an entire observatory. The Yerkes Observatory, a 77-acre facility in Williams Bay, Wisconsin, credited as the “birthplace of modern astrophysics,” opened in 1897 (see Appendix).³⁸ Yerkes also contributed significant funds to ensure that the Columbian Exposition was held in Chicago, and served on the Exposition’s Committee on Fine Arts. An avid art collector, much of his fine collection was displayed at the World’s Fair.³⁹ Upon his death, his grand mansion and art collection were supposed to be left to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and a hospital in the Bronx founded in his name. These lofty posthumous philanthropic goals never came to fruition, however; Charles T. Yerkes, Jr., it turns out, had already spent most of his fortune and died nearly in bankruptcy. His art collection had to be auctioned off to meet claims against the estate. Unlike other Gilded Age magnates, Yerkes was “fated to be remembered, when he is remembered at all, as a Robber Baron and philanderer nonpareil.”⁴⁰

Constructed between 1864 and 1865, the high-style Italianate townhouse at 1535 W Girard Avenue stands as Philadelphia’s last physical reminder of the ambitious, prolific, and deeply flawed Charles T. Yerkes, whose experiences in Philadelphia shaped his tumultuous future as one of the most notorious, if now forgotten, traction magnates of the Gilded Age.

³⁸ Elizabeth Howell, “Yerkes Observatory: Home of Largest Refracting Telescope.” Space.com (August 16, 2014). <https://www.space.com/26858-yerkes-observatory.html>.

³⁹ A self-published catalog of Yerkes’ art displayed at the Chicago Columbian Exposition is available at Archive.org. Charles T. Yerkes, “Catalogue from Collection of Charles T. Yerkes, Chicago, U.S.A.,” 1893. <https://archive.org/details/cataloguefromcol00yerk>

⁴⁰ Forrey, op cit., 239.

APPENDIX: ADDITIONAL IMAGES



Figure 12: Green Hill Presbyterian Church, Girard Avenue Above Sixteenth Street. Source: Presbyterian Historical Society, Athenaeum of Philadelphia.



Figure 13: St. Joseph's Hospital, 16th & Girard Avenue. Source: Library Company of Philadelphia, Item No. pdcc00846.

Number	7126	Charles T. Yerkes
Age	34 years	
Native of	Room 2	
Bound	Not	
Trade	Doctor	
Complexion	Dark	
Eyes	Brown	
Hair	Brown	
Stature	5 ft. 11 in. 100 lbs	
Mark	Not any	
No. of Convictions	1st	
Parents	Charles living	
Boards	None	Pub. S. 1892
Written	Notes	Age 18 years 11/2
Cooperate	Completely	
Married	Married 2 children	
Property	5 1/2 + 154 and 1/2 and 1/2 and 1/2	
Crime	Disorderly	
Sentence	2 years and 1 year	Detention 100 lbs
County and Court	Phil a. O. S. 1892	and 1/2 and 1/2
Sentenced	February 10, 1892	commitment
Received	18	
Remarks	8, 27, 72 Pa.	

Figure 14: 1872 conviction, Eastern State Penitentiary. Source: Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission; Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; *Convict Reception Registers*; Series: 15.56. Available on Ancestry.com. *Pennsylvania, Prison, Reformatory, and Workhouse Records, 1829-1971* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2016.

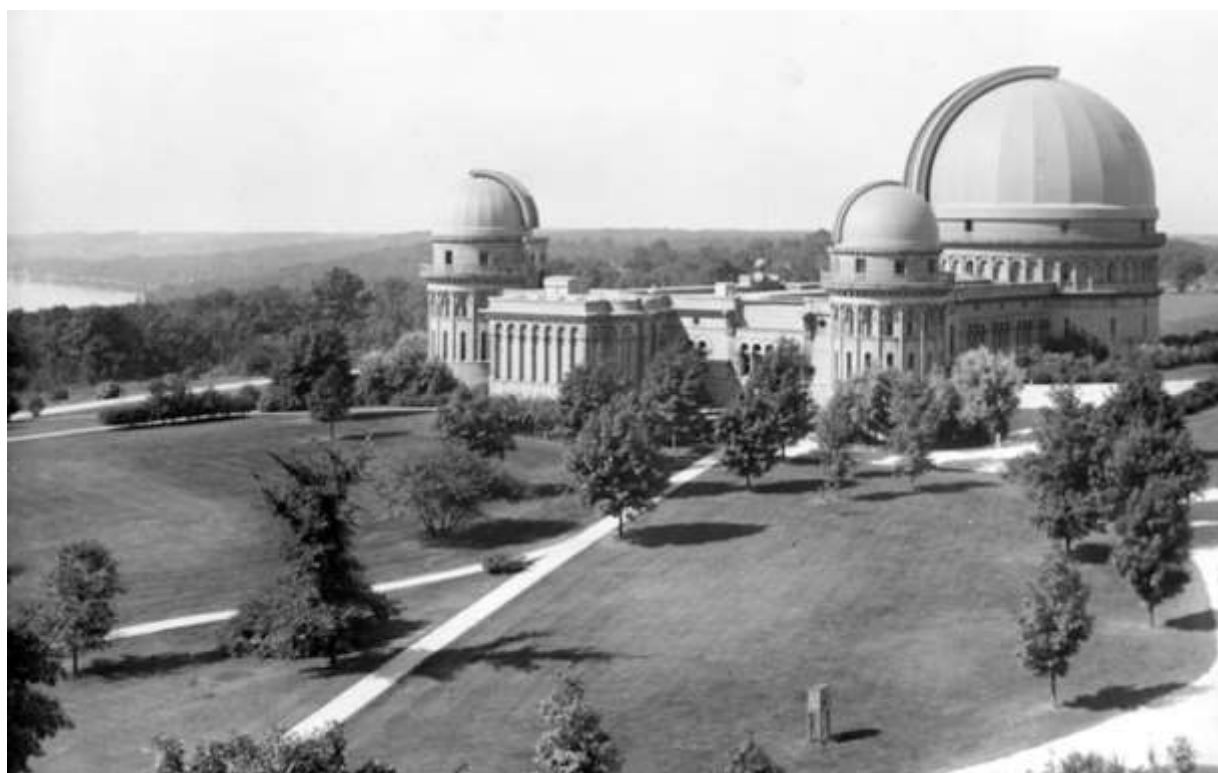


Figure 15: The Yerkes Observatory, opened in 1897, and photographed here in 1925. Source: Frank Elmore Ross, University of Chicago Photographic Archive, apf6-00296, Special Collections Research Center, University of Chicago Library.



Figure 16: Yerkes' New York mansion, c. 1901. Constructed in 1898, the mansion was an upgrade from his Philadelphia townhouse, reflecting his The house and the adjacent art galleries built for Yerkes' collection were demolished in 1925 to enlarge the flower garden of neighbor Thomas Fortune Ryan. Source: Museum of the City of New York. http://collections.mcny.org/C.aspx?VP3=SearchResult_VPage&VBID=24UP1GG3PPFF&SMLS=1&RW=1366&RH=603

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