

**Address: 231½-253 CHURCH LN**

Name of Resource: Wallace Storage & Carpet Company

Proposed Action: Designation

Property Owner: Church Lane Partners LLC

Nominator: Kimberly La Porte

Staff Contact: Allyson Mehley, [allyson.mehley@phila.gov](mailto:allyson.mehley@phila.gov)

**OVERVIEW:** This nomination proposes to designate the property at 231½-253 Church Lane, located in the Germantown neighborhood of Northwest Philadelphia, as historic and list it on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Historically known as the Wallace Storage and Carpet Company, it was constructed between 1927 and 1928. The nomination argues that George S. Kingsley, an architect notable for his warehouses and storage buildings, designed the façade in the fashionable Art Deco style of the period with an interior that embodied the latest engineering for this building type, satisfying Criterion C, D, and E. The nomination contends that the building is a community landmark, with its historic clock tower visible from Germantown Avenue and the adjacent rail line, satisfying Criterion H.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** The staff recommends that the nomination demonstrates that the property at 231½-253 Church Lane, satisfies Criteria for Designation C, D, and H, but not Criterion E. The nomination presents no evidence that George S. Kingsley “significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation.”



**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: 231-53 1/2 Church Lane (aka 237-253 Church Lane and 231 1/2-53

Church Lane, Premises B<sup>1</sup>\*)

Postal code: 19144 Councilmanic District: 8

*\*Nomination references property by historic addresses: 237-53 Church Lane and 237-53 East Church Lane*

**2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE**

Historic Name: Wallace Storage & Carpet Company

Current/Common Name: Germantown Fireproof Storage; Germantown Fireproof Storage Company

**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: Vacant (formerly Storage)

**5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION**

Please see attached.

**6. DESCRIPTION**

Please see attached.

**7. SIGNIFICANCE**

Please see attached.

Period of Significance (from year to year): from 1927 to 1928

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: 1927 to 1928

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: George S. Kingsley

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: George Kessler Contracting Company

Original owner: Wallace Storage & Carpet Company

Other significant persons: N/A

**CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION:**

The historic resource satisfies the following criteria for designation (check all that apply):

- (a) Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past; or,
- (b) Is associated with an event of importance to the history of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- (c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style; or,
- (d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen; or,
- (e) Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- (f) Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation; or,
- (g) Is part of or related to a square, park or other distinctive area which should be preserved according to an historic, cultural or architectural motif; or,
- (h) Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City; or,
- (i) Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in pre-history or history; or
- (j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

**8. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

Please see attached.

**9. NOMINATOR**

Organization University of Pennsylvania Date July 5, 2019

Name with Title Kimberly La Porte Email klaporte@upenn.edu

Street Address 102 Meyerson Hall, 210 South 34th St. Telephone (215) 898-6520

City, State, and Postal Code Philadelphia, PA, 19104

Nominator  is  is not the property owner.

**PHC USE ONLY**

Date of Receipt: July 8, 2019

Correct-Complete  Incorrect-Incomplete Date: May 15, 2020

Date of Notice Issuance: May 15, 2020

Property Owner at Time of Notice

Name: McFarland Landscape Services Inc.

Address: 255 W. Tulpehocken St

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19144

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

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

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

Designated  Rejected

## 5. Boundary Description



*Figure 1. Satellite view of Parcel No. 067N240041. Google Maps.*

The lot located at 237 – 253 East Church Lane is defined as Premises B in Deed No. 51868229, dated March 10, 2008. Its boundaries are described in that record as follows:

“Situate in the 22<sup>nd</sup> Ward of the City of Philadelphia and beginning at a point on the Northwestern side of Church Lane at the distance of 296 feet Northeastwardly from the Northeastly side of Lena Street; thence extending on a line parallel with the said Lena Street North 42 degrees, 54 minutes, and 40 seconds West 120 feet to a point; thence on a line parallel with said Church Lane North 44 degrees 44 minutes and 35 seconds East 91 feet, 10-1/2 inches to a point in the Southwesterly Right-of-Way of the Germantown Branch of the Philadelphia and Reading Railway; thence extending along the said Right-of-Way of said Railway South 71 degrees, 38 minutes and 15 seconds East 133 feet and 10 inches to a point in the Northwestern side of Church Lane; thence extending along the said Northwestern side of Church Lane, South

44 degrees, 44 minutes and 35 seconds West 156 feet and 3 inches to the first mentioned point and place of beginning.”

Figure 1 approximates the property lines of 237 – 253 East Church Lane in red. Historical maps with overlaid contemporary bounds are located in the “Maps” section of the Appendix.



**Boundary Description (continued)**



Figure 1a. Parcel boundary of subject property is shown in blue. Image provided by [CityAtlas](#), City of Philadelphia.



Figure 1b. Satellite image showing parcel in blue. Image provided by [CityAtlas](#), City of Philadelphia.

## 6. Description



*Figure 2. Southeast façade of 237 - 253 East Church Lane.*

The Germantown Fireproof Storage Company building, located at 237 – 253 East Church Lane in the Germantown section of the City of Philadelphia, is a six-story, reinforced concrete warehouse with an eight-story clock tower on its east corner (Figure 2). It was designed by noted architect George S. Kingsley and constructed by the George Kessler Contracting Company between 1927 and 1928. Located at the bottom of a hill, the building sits across the street from a

community garden and is directly adjacent to railroad tracks now used by SEPTA. The building is striking for its towering profile; it is visible from as far as Germantown Avenue. The Kingsley design displays a command of the Art Deco architectural style prevalent during the 1920s, while the construction incorporates innovative fireproofing techniques.

The primary elevation of the building, looking out over East Church Lane, achieves its style through geometric abstraction of traditional elements. Raised headers form vertical bands and two-course stacked soldiers form horizontal belts across the 75-foot wide façade of the building. Flattened but familiar Classical details in Caen stone (a type of limestone), terra cotta, or cast stone create a rhythm in form that direct the eye upwards and emphasize the verticality of the building. The entrance is framed by a monumental gateway comprised of oversized voussoirs and quoins. Keystones placed above the ground level windows echo the installation of rounded pediments, hoodmolds, and label stops over the top floor windows. Similarly, the protruding ledge at the ground level runs parallel to a dripstone course at the second story and another at the roofline. The clock tower further underscores a sense of height that is a common characteristic of Art Deco, as it extends a full two stories above the rest of the building. It is further capped with a stepped parapet. Each side of the tower features a clock face manufactured by Seth Thomas, surrounded by quoins that recall the masonry around the ground entrance.

Kingsley applied a completely different design approach to the other faces of the building. On these, function is the focus: exposed concrete framework with flameproof red brick infill projects a sense of durability, marketing the purpose of the building. On the southwest side, painted signage spelling out “Germantown Fireproof Storage Company” gives additional promotion to the business that activated the site (Figure 3). Decorative metal elements recalling ends of floor joists



or protruding capitals feature on the northwest façade, visible to train passengers commuting through Germantown Station.

The integrity of the building has endured, despite neglect, some minor alterations, and the loss of some original decorative features. Its stylish frontage on East Church Lane remains distinct, and the clock faces of its tower are mostly intact, though they have lost their time. Bio-growth and staining on all sides of the structure belie a design that very well may have been considered on the cutting-edge in the time of its construction.



*Figure 3. Detail view of southwest elevation.*

## 7. Significance

Storage Warehouse, 237-53 Church lane, Philadelphia. Architect, George S. Kingsley, 1452 Broadway, New York. Owners, Wallace Storage & Carpet Cleaning Co., 1826 North Twentieth street, Philadelphia. Reinforced concrete, brick, 6 stories and basement, 75x120 feet, slag roof, concrete floors, hollow tile, elevators, plumbing, metal window guards, metal ceilings, waterproofing, architectural terra cotta, ornamental iron work, bond, hollow metal doors, galvanized iron skylights, hollow metal sash, marble and terrazzo work, metal lath, electric light, steam heat, caenstone, metal toilet partitions. Architect taking bids due January 7th.

Figure 4. January 6, 1926. *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, Vol. XLI, No. 1.

By 1926, Robert Wallace was planning to expand Wallace Storage and Carpet Cleaning, the company he had established in 1885. The newest location of his business would be 237 – 253 East Church Lane in the Germantown neighborhood of Philadelphia. The site had once been a bucolic parcel in the estate holdings of the wealthy Armat family. It was later sold off to be exploited for its manufacturing potential by the Shoemakers, who identified the value in its location along both a watercourse and railroad. By the start of twentieth century, however, the factory structures on-site had been removed and replaced with a storage business that tapped into an increasingly complex commercial shipping network and a burgeoning middle class that could newly afford to both travel and move. The opening of Wallace Storage was a natural progression in the use of the lot.

Wallace engaged the prominent storage architect George S. Kingsley to design a new fireproof storage facility and the George Kessler Contracting Company was hired to build it. A call for bids in the *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* lists the proposed use of an array of materials and elements, from concrete floors, hollow tile, and elevators to ornamental

iron, marble and terrazzo work, and electric light (Figure 5). Wallace likely considered the high-quality construction an investment in the future success of his enterprise. However, his involvement with the building would not last past 1927, just as construction began. Instead, employees of Integrity Trust Company and George Kessler Contracting Company stewarded the building into its use as the headquarters of the Germantown Fireproof Storage Company. The company would operate from its location at 237 – 253 East Church Lane for over fifty years, beginning in 1931.

The distinctive design and massing of Germantown Fireproof Storage continue to make an impression on the area it occupies. The clock tower is effectively a landmark to both pedestrians walking the main thoroughfare of Germantown Avenue and SEPTA passengers coming in and out of Germantown station. The building stands as a testament to the thriving economy of the Germantown community in the early twentieth century and the significance of the area in a larger narrative of national industrial growth. **I propose that the Germantown Fireproof Storage Company building satisfies Criteria for Designation (c), (d), (e), and (h) according to Section 14-1004 of the City of Philadelphia Historic Preservation Ordinance as follows.**

(c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style;

The 1920s in Germantown and Commercial Art Deco



*Figure 5. September 1951. Germantown Crier, Volume 3, No. 2.*

Germantown Fireproof Storage may be considered an example of a warehouse type that is distinct from neighboring 19<sup>th</sup> century storages constructed by local manufacturers (see, for example, 48 West Queen Lane). Instead, Germantown Fireproof Storage functioned simultaneously as a distribution center for importers and merchants and as a household goods storage for vacationers, apartment dwellers, and multi-property owners alike. Proximity to the Philadelphia, Germantown, Norristown Rail Road and access to a fleet of vans bolstered both branches of the business. An expanded list of services allowed Germantown Fireproof Storage to position itself, as did other warehouses of the 1920s, as responsive and modern, in contrast to

“those ancient, dark, damp and rat-ruined storage places of only a few decades back.”<sup>1</sup> George S. Kingsley, as the architect for Germantown Fireproof Storage, communicated this break from the past through the use of au courant Art Deco design.

Plans to develop a new fireproof storage at 237 – 253 East Church Lane were announced as early as January 1926, just months after the close of the 1925 *Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes* in Paris. This exhibit spurred the popularity of the Art Deco style, blending elements from historical and contemporaneous movements to express “progress and...efficiency” through architecture.<sup>2</sup> The fashionable Art Deco, with its distinct visual language, was applied to commercial structures to appeal to a wealthy consumer base. The Germantown Fireproof Storage façade illustrates the result of that effort to capture clientele through design.

Kingsley himself is noted as remarking, “Good architecture is good advertising. Twenty or twenty-five thousand dollars added to make a building look attractive is an investment cheaper than billboard rental, more lasting, equally effective, and in better taste. People who store furniture generally live in artistic homes. They will appreciate their furs and pianos being kept in a beautiful building.”<sup>3</sup> The Germantown Fireproof Storage building embodies this philosophy. By making use of high-style architectural vocabulary, Kingsley appealed to both the aspirational and the wealthy – at least on the front of the building. The execution of Kingsley’s design was indeed an investment: the building permit for the project estimated total costs at \$300,000, roughly equivalent to \$4 million today.

---

<sup>1</sup> The Girard Letter, Volume V, Number 2, January 1925. The Girard Trust Company: Philadelphia.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Gelernter, *A History of American Architecture: Buildings in their Cultural and Technological Context* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), p. 242.

<sup>3</sup> “Landmark Designation Report: Reebie Storage Warehouse, 2325-33 N. Clark Street,” Chicago Landmarks Commission. June 3, 1998.



(d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen

The “Fireproof” Storage



Figure 6. Detail of 1950 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map.

Around the turn of the century, architects and builders pursued the perfect design for the fireproof building. Tragedies like the Great Chicago Fire in 1871 and the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire in 1911 left communities traumatized and demanding innovations to improve standards for building occupancy. The revitalized warehouse industry took advantage of these improvements in construction. The applied structural systems as recorded in the building permit for Germantown Fireproof Storage illustrate the type of overbuilt design that reassured owners and occupants but also perfectly suited warehouse needs.

The building is comprised of a steel reinforced concrete frame, twelve-inch thick brick walls, and a hollow clay tile flooring assembly. It was also installed from the outset with automated sprinklers, a relatively new system for its time. During the 1920s, hollow clay tile systems and

sprinklers were often of proprietary designs. Further investigation of the building itself might provide information that could lead to the relevant manufacturers.

The sheer amount of materials required in the construction of the Germantown Fireproof Storage building is impressive. Contemporaneous journals *The Bridgemen's Magazine* and *The Iron Trade Review* record the fact that 230 tons of steel were being transported into the City of Philadelphia for the project. It might be suggested, however, that the proximity of the storage to the train tracks reduced overall transportation costs enough that increased capital could be invested into the quality of materials.

**(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**

George S. Kingsley: Storage Architect



Figure 7. February 15, 1908. *The Construction News*.

“While he is generally equipped for an all around practice, his work recently has been devoted chiefly to the designing of apartment houses and storage warehouses...It is unfortunate that Mr. Kingsley does not devote more attention to designing residences...”

- February 15, 1908 issue of *The Construction News*

George S. Kingsley was well known in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as a storage architect, pioneering a practice that was sensitive to an array of proprietor needs. Born in 1869 in Cleveland, Ohio, Kingsley began his career in architecture locally at the office of George F. Hammond. He worked there from 1888 to 1891 before arriving in Chicago, where he opened his own firm with partner William L. Carroll. In 1894, Kingsley began an independent practice and moved to New York. By 1922, however, that office had closed and Kingsley went back to Chicago; there he also registered as a member of the AIA.

Kingsley understood both the promotional value of architectural design as well as the pragmatic demands of commercial construction. His legacy today speaks to the ambitions of his portfolio: several extant buildings by Kingsley are listed on the National Register of Historic Places, including The Kingsley Building (formerly Grand Rapids Storage & Van) in Grand Rapids, Michigan and Reebie Storage Warehouse in Chicago, Illinois. Other buildings by Kingsley have been recognized as significant at the local level, such as Lee Brothers Storage in New York.

The Germantown Fireproof Storage building still bears the hallmarks of a typical Kingsley design. Like the Kingsley Building in Grand Rapids, Germantown Fireproof Storage retains a geometric buff brick façade with vertical bands of raised headers, parapet rooflines, and Seth Thomas clocks. There is only one other building designed by Kingsley left in Philadelphia, located at 4015 Walnut Street, though it is much smaller in scale.

**(h) Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community, or City**

The Clock Tower



*Figure 8. View of the northeast side of Germantown Fireproof Storage, 1931. Philadelphia City Archives.*

The clock tower at 237 – 253 East Church Lane is a familiar landmark to Germantown residents and commuters alike. Visible from Germantown Avenue and the SEPTA Regional Rail, it is clear that the tower was meant to catch attention and bring visibility to the location of the business it flagged. The clock tower, often seen in Art Deco designs as robust symbols of progress and advancement, gave the design of Germantown Fireproof Storage impact. As Lewis Mumford states in his seminal 1934 publication *Technics and Civilization*, “the clock, not the steam-engine, is the key machine of the modern industrial age.” The clock tower now stands as an integral part of the visual identity of Baynton Hill community and the larger Germantown neighborhood.



It has been noted that the architect George S. Kingsley frequently incorporated clocks, specifically of Seth Thomas manufacture, into his work. The Seth Thomas Clock Company is notable on its own merit. It was founded by Seth Thomas in 1813, and rapidly gained popularity across the nation. In fact, the company was so successful that the area in Plymouth, Connecticut in which Thomas was from was inspired to change its name to “Thomaston” in his honor.<sup>4</sup> The Seth Thomas brand has been further immortalized through popular culture references in publications and other media such as the novel *East of Eden* by John Steinbeck and in the October 1979 issue of *Good Housekeeping*.

The Seth Thomas Clock Company was purchased in 1968 by General Time Corporation, and later, the Colibri Group. Though it ceased operations in January 2009, examples of Seth Thomas clocks may be found in residences, streets, and public buildings throughout the country. Nearby prominent examples may be found at City Hall in Philadelphia and at Grand Central Terminal in New York.

---

<sup>4</sup> “Early American Clock Makers,” *American Jeweler*, Volume 30, Issue 9 (September 1910), pp. 370 – 372. Center for Research Libraries, Chicago.

## 8. Major Bibliographical References

Bower, Mark Arnold. "Loudoun, Germantown, Philadelphia: Country House of the Armat Family: The Years 1801 – 1835." Master's Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1984.

Chicago Landmarks Commission. *Landmark Designation Report: Reebie Storage Warehouse, 2325-33 N. Clark Street*. June 3, 1998.

Contosta, David. "Philadelphia's "Miniature Williamsburg": The Colonial Revival and Germantown's Market Square." *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 120, No. 4 (October 1996).

Dotterer, Henry S. "Past and Present: The Church at Market Square," *The Perkiomen Region, Past and Present*, Volume 2. Perkiomen Creek and Valley: Perkiomen Publishing Company, 1900.

Duffin, Jim. "Mapping West Philadelphia: Landowners in October 1777," <http://www.archives.upenn.edu/WestPhila1777/map.php>. Accessed October 28, 2018.

"Early American Clock Makers." *American Jeweler*, Volume 30, Issue 9 (September 1910).

Gelerntner, Mark. *A History of American Architecture: Buildings in their Cultural and Technological Context*. New Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 1999.

*Laws of the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania Passed at the Session of 1853*. Harrisburg: Theo. Fenn & Co., Printers to the State, 1853.

Mumford, Lewis. *Technics and Civilization*. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul LTD, 1934.

Muse, John. "George S. Kingsley, Architect," <http://www.finleymuse.com/2010/06/george-s-kingsley-architect/>. Accessed October 28, 2018.

*Textile World's Directory of the Mill Trade in the United States*. Guild & Lord, 1897.

*The Girard Letter*, Volume V, Number 2. Philadelphia: The Girard Trust Company, January 1925..

The Transfer and Storage Directory. New York: Transfer and Storage Publishing Corporation, February 21, 1916.

Tinkcom, Harry M. and Margaret B. *Historic Germantown: From the Founding to the Early Part of the Nineteenth Century, A Survey of German Township*. Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1955.

Shoemaker, Thomas H. "A List of the Inhabitants of Germantown and Chestnut Hill in 1809 (concluded)." *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography*, Vol. 16, No. 1 (1892).

Wermeil, Sara. "The Development of Fireproof Construction in Great Britain and the United States in the Nineteenth Century." *Construction History*, Vol. 9 (1993).

## Appendix

### Chain of Title

#### *Background*

Germantown, now a neighborhood in the City of Philadelphia, was founded in 1683 by Francis Daniel Pastorius as an independent Township. Originally planned as a series of contiguous, long, thin parcels with frontage on the primary thoroughfare now called Germantown Avenue, it initially served as a sanctuary for a small group of Quakers escaping religious persecution. By the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, however, Germantown had become a center of cultural and economic exchange and wealthy merchants possessed the large tracts of land in the area.<sup>5</sup> The following chain of title begins at the beginning of this history of Germantown, when the present-day lot of 237 – 253 East Church Lane represented only a small area of a larger estate. Over time, that parcel would undergo a series of divisions due to deaths, social pressure, and shifts in economic trends to arrive at the property lines currently observed.

#### **Third day of the sixth month, 1689. Francis Daniel Pastorius, Attorney of Jacobus Vanderwalle et al to Derick Opdenkolke.**

Property: Fifty acres of land in Germantown.

Price: Under a contract dated March 23, 1685, Op den Kolck was “enfeoffed” to the Frankfort Company one day per week for a four-year period, in order to receive this tract of land.

Opdenkolke also paid a yearly rent of “twenty-five pence current money of Old England.”

Source: Deed Book F. 7, p. 145 and following.

Note: A translated summary of the context of the transaction recorded in this deed is provided in the following deed.

#### **Fifth day of the third month, 1691. Derrick Opdenkolck to James de la Plaine.**

Property: Fifty acres of land in Germantown, bounded by Mill Street on one side and the lot of Wigert Levering on the other, with frontage on Main Street.

Price: “A considerable sum of money in hand.”

Source: Deed Book F. 7, p. 147 and following.

#### **May 30, 1723. James Delaplain and Hannah his wife to John Midwinter.**

Property: The property in this deed is only a fraction of what Delaplain had previously acquired. It is defined as a plot of land containing seventeen and a quarter acres, beginning at a point at the corner of the Market, then along Mill Street in the direction of Bristol Township, then back towards the Market.

Price: Five shillings of sterling money of England.

Source: Deed Book F. 7, p. 121 and following.

#### **August 25, 1753. Isaac Midwinter, John Bartolet and his wife Hannah, and Mathias Keyser and his wife Catherine to James Delaplaine.**

---

<sup>5</sup> Harry M. and Margaret B. Tinkcom, *Historic Germantown: From the Founding to the Early Part of the Nineteenth Century, A Survey of German Township* (Philadelphia: The American Philosophical Society, 1955), pp. 2 – 6.

Property: The area listed in this deed extends along Mill Street from the Market Place to the Mill Dam. It covers only four of the seventeen and a quarter acres in total that John Midwinter had originally purchased.

Price: £85, plus the payment of a portion of quit-rent.

Source: Deed Book E.F. 18, p. 700 and following.

Note: This deed notes that Isaac Midwinter, Hannah Bartolet, and Catherine Keyser are the children of John Midwinter, who died without a will.

**June 23, 1775. James Delaplaine and his wife Ann to Joseph Ferree and his wife Sarah.**

Property: Two lots on either side of Main Street, now known as Germantown Avenue. The lot relevant to this chain is on the northeast side of that street, “bounded by Main Street and the Market Place, the German Reformed Church Lot, the Mill Street, Benjamin Shoemaker’s Mill Dam, and lands late of Daniel Mackinett and Jacob Summers,” containing twelve acres.

Price: N/A

Source: Deed Book I. 14, p. 479 and following.<sup>6</sup>

Note: This deed is both a record of transfer and a will. James Delaplaine grants ownership of two Germantown lots that he himself had inherited through his father from his uncle to his daughter Sarah and her husband Joseph Ferree out of “natural love and affection.” He also directs any profits collected from the properties (such as that from ground rent) after his death to his wife Ann and then to his son Nehemiah.

**September 10, 1795. Joseph Ferre and his wife Sarah to John Fromberger.**

Property: Same as above.

Price: £4,750.

Source: Deed Book D. 54, p. 134 and following.

Note: This deed notes that it is assigned to John Fromberger as compensation for the debt that John Mays owed him. Mays intended to purchase the entire property, but he became “Insolvent” before fulfilling the terms of the sale and a deed listing him as the grantee could be recorded.

**January 31, 1808. Jacob Chrystler and John Greiner on behalf of John Fromberger to Thomas Armat.**

Property: Same as above.

Price: \$1,450.

Source: Deed Book E.F. 29, p. 393 and following.

Note: Jacob Chrystler and John Greiner were the executors of the estate of John Fromberger; they sold portions of Fromberger’s real estate holdings to settle his debts.

**August 3, 1835. James J. Skerrett and his wife Jane Caroline to Bayse Newcomb.**

Property: The large lot on the northeast side of Germantown Avenue has been divided in this deed, with the portion relevant to this chain reduced to an irregularly-shaped parcel of six acres.

Price: \$1.

Source: Deed Book A.M. 64, p. 554 and following.

Note: James J. Skerrett and Jane Caroline, his wife, were the grandson-in-law and granddaughter of Thomas Armat. Skerrett was a banker at the Philadelphia National Bank; in 1835, a scandal

---

<sup>6</sup> All deed books referenced in this chain of title were located in the City Archives, Department of Records, City of Philadelphia.



unfolded implicating Skerrett's active involvement in check fraud and culminating in a lawsuit against him. Skerrett resigned and countersued, but the damage was done. Ostracized by the community, Jane Caroline and the children took leave for an extended tour of Europe. Meanwhile, Skerrett stayed in Philadelphia to stand trial. To protect the extensive Skerrett estate, largely inherited by Jane Caroline's grandfather Thomas Armat<sup>7</sup>, from the reaches of the law, the Skerretts transferred their properties and associated powers of ownership (except for their home and goods at Loudoun) to lawyer Bayse Newcomb.<sup>8</sup>

**October 1, 1852. Bayse Newcomb to Charles H. Shoemaker and Henry S. Harper.**

Property: The lot is now further reduced, confined to the area between Armat Street, Cumberland Street, Mill Street, and the Philadelphia and Germantown Rail Road. The beginning point noted is at the "southeasterly side of a new street...named Armat Street" and extends 594 feet in a line parallel with Cumberland Street to Mill Street. The total area is three acres, "more or less."

Price: \$15,000.

Source: Deed Book T.H. 63 p. 439 and following.

Note: Charles H. Shoemaker and Henry S. Harper are listed as tenants-in-common in this deed. This means that each has equal share to the property and may assign their stake to an heir of their choosing.

**December 1, 1853. Charles H. Shoemaker to Spencer Shoemaker.**

Property: The property in this deed specifically refers to Charles Shoemaker's "moiety" of the lot recorded in the prior deed. The boundary begins 120 feet from Armat Street and runs parallel to Mill Street until it meets the Philadelphia and Germantown Railroad. It then follows alongside the track until it turns parallel to Mill Street, towards Cumberland Street. Stopping 120 feet from Cumberland Street, the property line turns back to the point of beginning.

Price: \$3,500.

Source: Deed Book T.H. 140, p. 313 and following.

Note: This deed conveys privileges-in-common, shared "with certain others," pertaining to Armat Street and Cumberland Street as well.

**March 11, 1854. Spencer Shoemaker to Thomas Hallowell.**

Property: The moiety of the prior deed is further divided into two distinct lots. The first of them starts at a point 120 feet from Cumberland Street and moves towards Armat Street. It then runs alongside a coal yard towards the Philadelphia Germantown and Norristown Rail Road, where it runs towards Mill Street. At a distance of 120 feet from Mill Street, the boundary turns and runs parallel to the next lot described. It then turns back in parallel with Cumberland Street, until it reaches Mill Street. At Mill Street, the line turns parallel and runs 80 feet back to the point of beginning. The one relevant to this chain is the second listed and begins on the west side of Mill Street, then runs in a line 120 feet parallel with Cumberland Street, then moves towards the Rail Road for 120 feet, then runs alongside the track towards Mill Street, and turns and travels 150 feet to meet the starting point. The final measurement of 150 feet corresponds with the frontage on the northwest boundary of the parcel today.

Price: \$6,000.

---

<sup>7</sup> Arnold Mark Bower, "Loudoun, Germantown, Philadelphia: Country House of the Armat Family: The Years 1801 – 1835," (Thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1984), pp. 74 – 76.

<sup>8</sup> Bower, pp. 107-113

Source: Deed Book T.H. 160, p. 137 and following.

Note: Initial genealogical research suggests Thomas Hallowell was a member of the Shoemaker family. Further research is required.

**September 26, 1856. Thomas Hallowell and his wife Elizabeth L. to Isaiah S. Shoemaker.**

Property: Same as the second lot described above, only.

Price: \$2,500.

Source: Deed Book R.D.W. 99, p. 239 and following.

**February 16, 1858. Isaiah S. Shoemaker to Spencer Shoemaker.**

Property: The area of the property is again reduced. The southwest boundary of the lot is now given at a precise distance of 296 feet from Cumberland Street. This roughly equates to the present-day southwest boundary. This deed and the prior illustrate a gradual transformation of property lines that clearly set the precedent for what is seen today. Also, for the first time, a steam planing mill is present on the premises.

Price: \$2,000.

Source: Deed Book LRB No. 131, p. 46 and following.

Note: This deed, as well as the deeds dating back to 1852, record the efforts of the Shoemakers to keep this property in family hands.

**May 7, 1864. Spencer Shoemaker to Thomas D. Smith by Sheriff John Thompson.**

Property: Same as above.

Price: \$4,500.

Source: Sheriffs Deed Book No. 59, p. 442 and following.

Note: Five days prior to the signing of this deed, John Thompson held an auction for the property at Sansom Street Hall; Thomas D. Smith was the highest bidder.

**May 24, 1866. Thomas D. Smith to Henry Gault.**

Property: Same as above.

Price: \$8,000.

Source: Deed Book J.O.D. 73, p. 424 and following.

**June 23, 1866. Henry W. Gault to Henry B. Bruner.**

Property: Same as above.

Price: \$9,000.

Source: Deed Book L.R.B. 190, p 251 and following.

**September 19, 1871. Thomas D. Smith vs Henry Bruner to Henry Bruner by Sheriff William R. Leeds.**

Property: The boundaries of the lot are the same as above, although more structures begin to appear, including a “three story stone mill, engine house with engine and boiler, one story brick picker house, frame stable, and wagon house.” Mill Street is now referred to as Church Lane, and it is emphasized that the frontage is 150 feet wide.

Price: \$5,500.

Source: Sheriffs Deed Book No. 74, p 303 and following.

Note: A case was brought to court between Thomas D. Smith and Henry B. Bruner, and the parcel previously deeded to Bruner was seized. He was able to reclaim the property after his debt to Smith was cleared.

**January 1, 1883. Henry B. Bruner and his wife Emma to Francis Taylor and James Taylor.**

Property: Same as above.

Price: \$7,000.

Source: Deed Book J.O.D. 63, p. 558 and following.

**April 6, 1905. Francis Taylor and James Taylor to Charles O. Neill by Sheriff James J. Miles.**

Property: The frontage is slightly reduced from previous measurements to 133 feet. Machinery is also recorded on-site, including 5 garnet machines, 4 pickers, 1 duster, 1 carpet cleaning machine, 2 engines, 1 boiler, belting, shafting, pulleys, etc.

Price: \$9,700, subject to mortgage of \$5,000.

Source: Sheriffs Deed Book 218, p. 345 and following.

Note: The Taylors were indebted to O'Neill, and unresponsive to collection attempts. The property listed in this deed was thus seized to compensate. Further information can be seen in records of the Court of Common Pleas No. 3, December 1904.

**July 17, 1905. Charles O. Neill and his wife Sarah to James L. Taylor.**

Property: Same as above.

Price: \$1.

Source: Deed Book W.S.V. 508, p. 376 and following.

**May 13, 1907. James L. Taylor to Edward M. Jones by Sheriff Wilson H. Brown.**

Property: Same as above.

Price: \$50.

Source: Deed Book W.S.V. 814, p. 422 and following.

Note: Wilson H. Brown seized the property from James L. Taylor and transferred it to Edward M. Jones. Further information can be seen in records of the Court of Common Pleas No. 4 from December 10, 1906, number 2105.

**February 3, 1908. Edward M. Jones to John Watson Ellis.**

Property: The lot was surveyed on this same day by Joseph C. Wagner, and the dimensions of the parcel change only nominally – starting with a point at a distance of 296 feet from Lena Street, it runs parallel to Lena Street approximately 120 feet, then 90 feet to the side of the Rail Road, about 130 feet alongside the track to Church Lane, and 150 feet more or less to the point of beginning. The industrial buildings and machinery listed on previous deeds are removed from the site.

Price: \$11,000.

Source: Deed Book W.S.V. 1000, p. 52 and following.

Note: This deed addresses changes in street names. Cumberland Street is now known as Lena Street and Mill Street is now known as Church Lane.

**February 3, 1908. John Watson Ellis and his wife Anne Ida to Robert Wallace.**

Property: Same as above.

Price: \$1, subject to the payment of a mortgage debt of \$10,500.

Source: Deed Book E.L.T 164, p. 501 and following.

**June 8, 1927. Robert Wallace and his wife Mary C. to Wallace Storage Co.**

Property: Same as above.

Price: \$1.

Source: Deed Book J.M.H. 2516, p. 367 and following.

Note: Robert Wallace was the proprietor of Wallace Storage Company.

**June 10, 1927. Wallace Storage Co. to George Killian and his wife Amelia.**

Property: Same as above. It is further described by the address of 237 to 253 inclusive Church Lane.

Price: \$1, subject to the payment of a mortgage debt or principal sum of \$165,000.

Source: Deed Book J.M.H. 2559, p. 344 and following.

Note: George Killian was Treasurer of Integrity Trust Company, a Philadelphia-based bank.

**September 1, 1928. George Killian and his wife Amelia to Wallace Storage Co.**

Property: Same as above.

Price: \$1, subject to the payment of a mortgage debt or principal sum of \$165,000.

Source: Deed Book J.M.H. 2819, p. 438 and following.

**November 12, 1929. Thomas W. Cunningham Esquire Sheriff of the County of Philadelphia to J. Harrison Jones.**

Property: Same as above.

Price: \$21,000.

Source: Deed Book J.M.H. 3137, p. 117 and following.

Note: The plaintiff in the related case was Integrity Trust Company; it might be assumed that Wallace Storage Co. defaulted on its mortgage, and the property was seized to satisfy its debt. J. Harrison Jones was an employee of Integrity Trust Company. Further research on this transaction is necessary.

**April 30, 1930. J. Harrison Jones to George Kessler Contracting Co.**

Property: Same as above.

Price: \$1.

Source: Deed Book J.M.H. 3180, p. 342 and following.

Note: George Kessler, the proprietor of the grantee organization, was a former executive at Integrity Trust Company. It might be possible that this was a straw transaction to transfer a mortgage.

**November 1, 1944. Germantown Fireproof Storage Co. to David Balaity.**

Property: Same as above, though the address is now noted as 263 Church Lane and Rear.

Price: \$1.

Source: Deed Book C.J.P. 700, p. 391 and following.

Note: The president of Germantown Fireproof Storage was George Kessler. Further research on this business is necessary. This deed reflects one of a two-part transaction, the other half of which follows. It suggest a transfer of the mortgage.

**November 1, 1944. David Balaity to Germantown Fireproof Storage Co.**

Property: Same as above.

Price: \$1, and an initial mortgage debt payment of \$100,000.

Source: Deed Book C.J.P. 700, p. 278 and following.

**September 23, 1985. Albert Fairshter and his wife Mary T. Fairshter to Gerstein, Burruano, and Fairshter, a PA Partnership consisting of Jerold Gerstein, Anthony Burruano, and Albert Fairshter.**

Property: The deed now lists the lot described above as one in a group of five adjoining properties, all previously owned by Germantown Fireproof Storage Company. The lot relevant to this chain is Premises "B." Its address is listed as 263 Church Lane and Rear.

Price: \$1.00

Source: Deed Book F.H.S. 411, p. 353 and following.

Note: The grantors listed in this deed are the individual stakeholders in Germantown Fireproof Storage Company.

**November 5, 1987. Jerold D. Gerstein by his Attorney in Fact Anthony P. Burruano, and Anthony Burruano and Albert Fairshter and Jerold Gerstein, Anthony Burruano and Albert Fairshter, Trading as Gerstein, Burruano and Fairshter, a PA Partnership, to John McDaniel.**

Property: Same as above, but the individual address previously listed is not included. The group of five premises is now referred to collectively as 231 ½ – 253 Church Lane.

Price: \$180,000.

Source: Deed Book F.H.S. 938, p. 576 and following.

**October 31, 2005. John McDaniel to Church Lane Partners LLC.**

Property: Same as above.

Price: \$400,000.

Source: Document No. 51327208.

**March 10, 2008. Church Lane Partners LLC to Church Lane Partners LLC.**

Property: Same as above.

Price: \$1.

Source: Document No. 51868229.

Note: This is a corrective deed to update the legal description of the property.

Maps

□: Approximation of contemporary property lines of 237 – 253 East Church Lane



Map 1. Charles Ellet, Jr. A Map of the County of Philadelphia from Actual Survey, 1843.

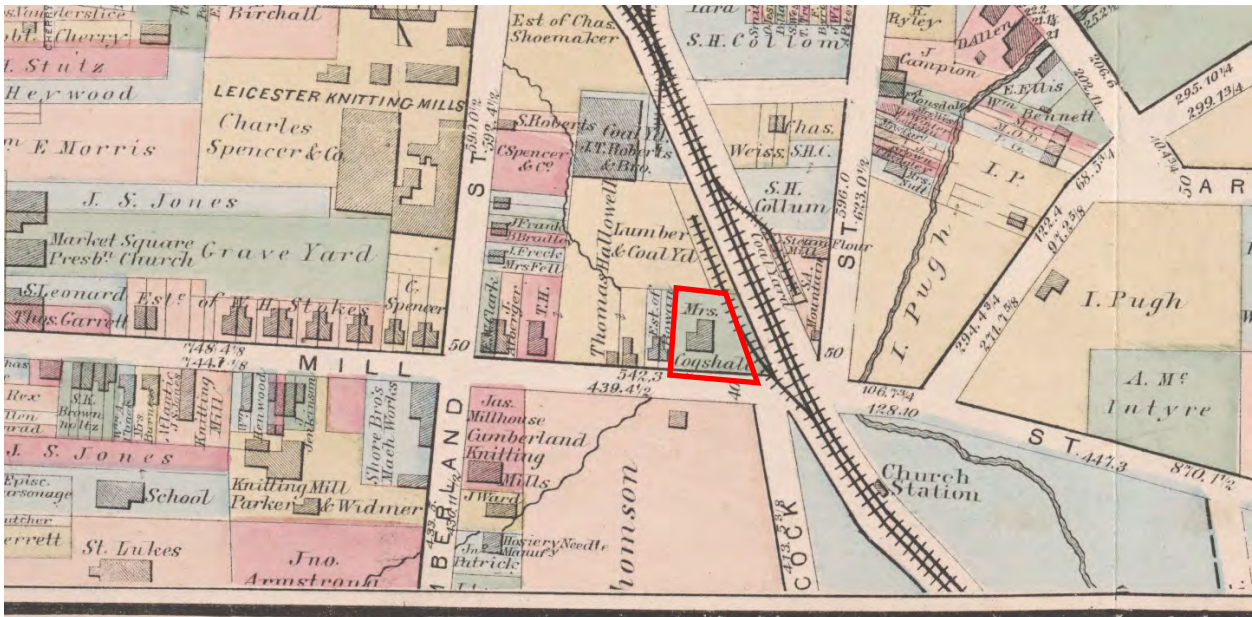


Map 2. A.E. Rogerson and E.J. Murphy, Civil Engineers. Published by John Flynn. Map of the Township of Germantown, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania, 1851.



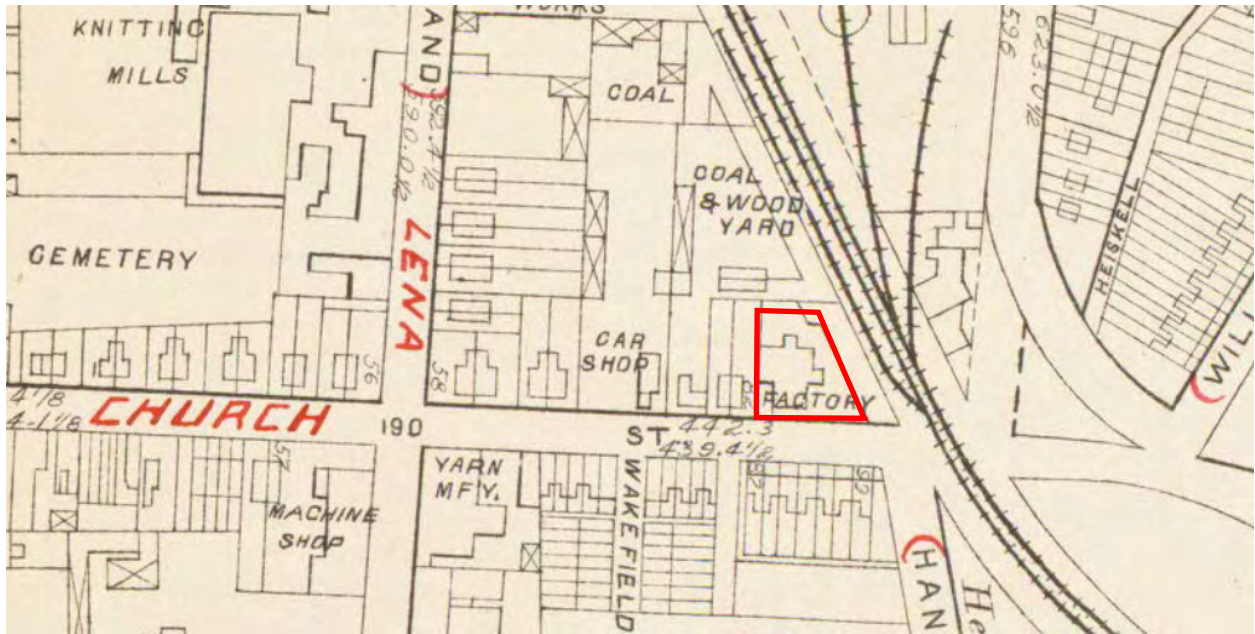


Map 3. D. Jackson Lake and Silas Beers. Published by J.E. Gillette & Co. Plate 3-A: Philadelphia, Map of the Vicinity of Philadelphia From Actual Surveys, 1861.



Map 4. G.M. Hopkins. Plate 7, Atlas of Germantown, 22nd Ward, 1871.





Map 5. George William Baist. Plan 37, Baist's Property Atlas of the City and County of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1885.

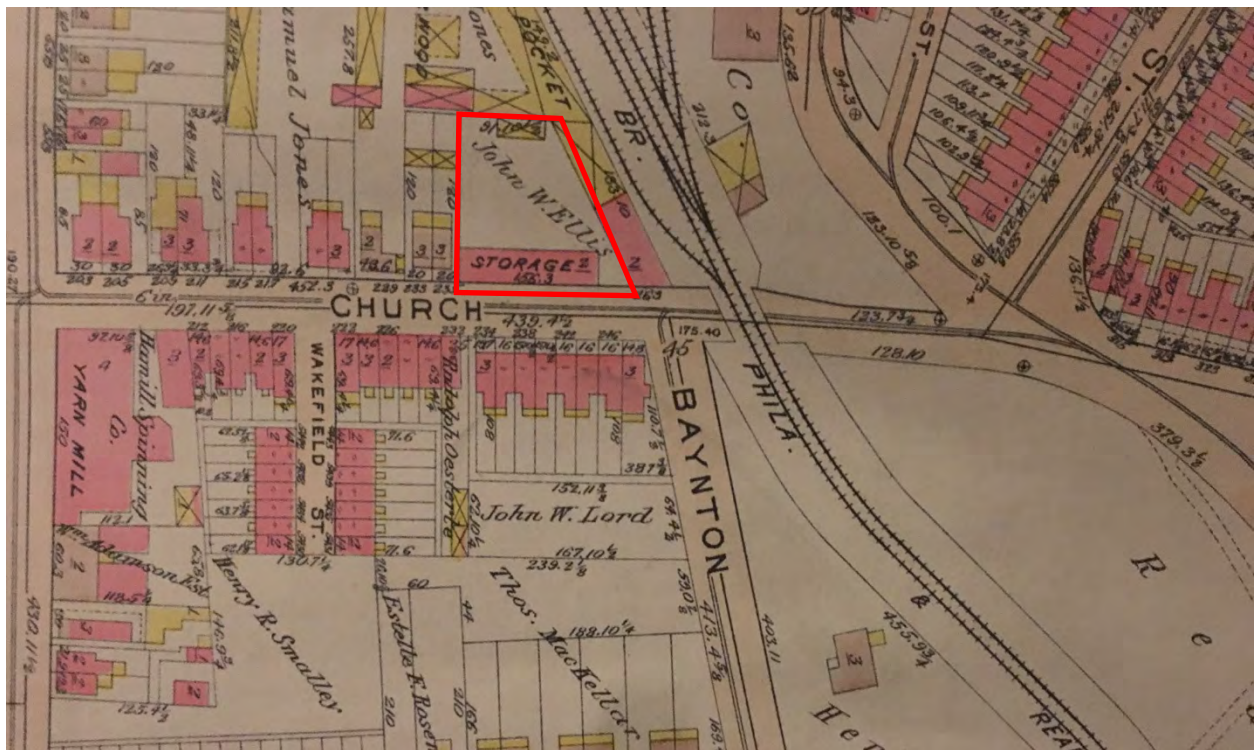


Map 6. George W. and Walter S. Bromley, Civil Engineers. Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, 1901.

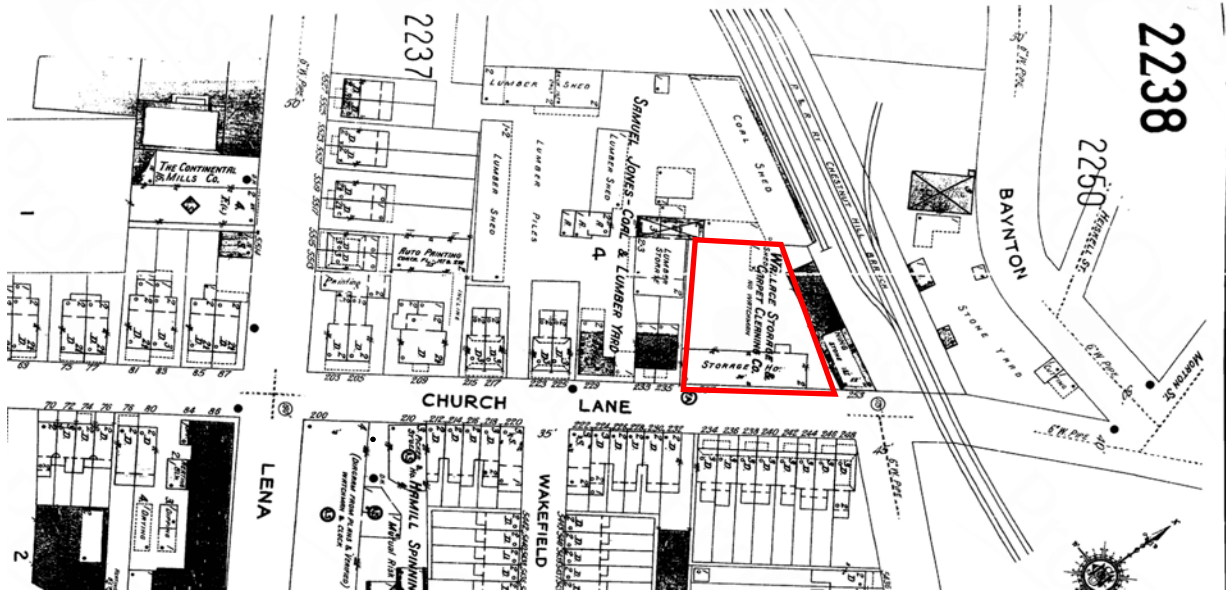




Map 7. George W. and Walter S. Bromley. Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, 1910.



Map 8. George W. and Walter S. Bromley, Civil Engineers. Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, 22<sup>nd</sup> Ward, From Actual Surveys and Official Plans, 1911.

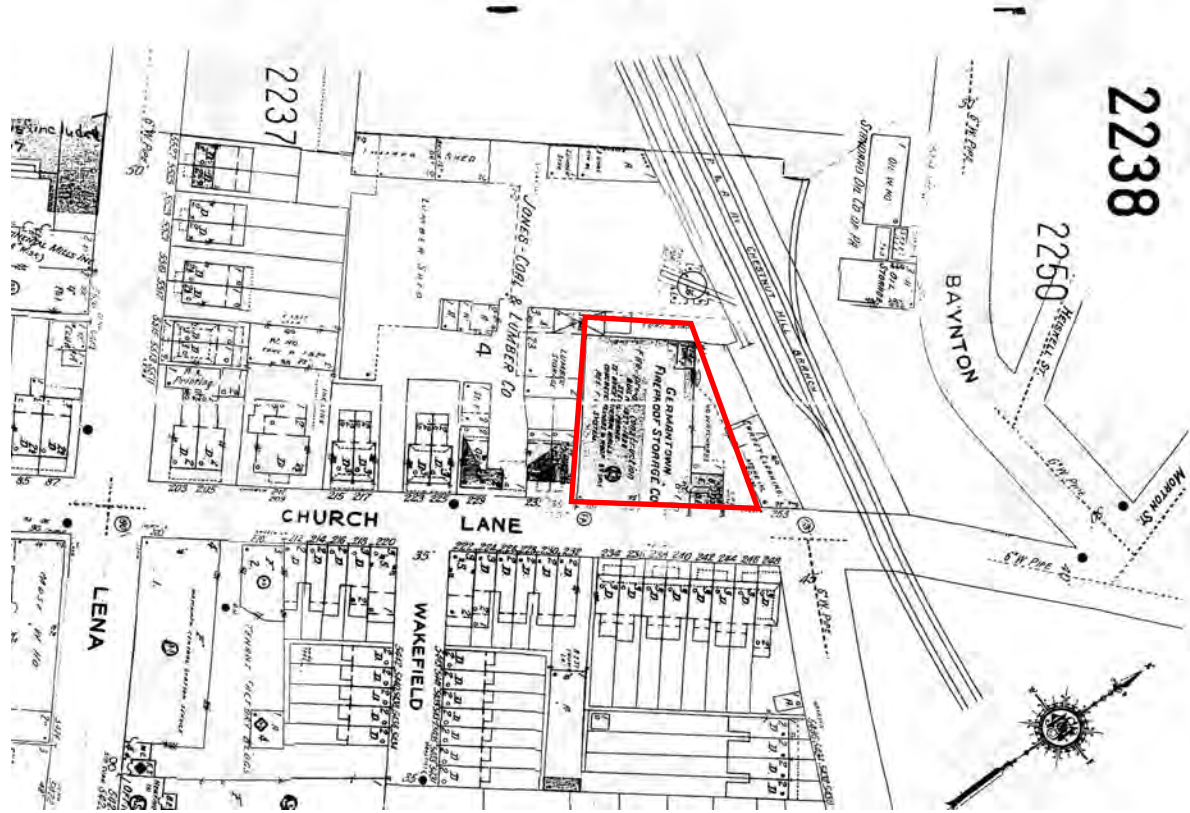


Map 9. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map Company. Map of Philadelphia, 1924.



Map 10. Dallin Aerial Survey Company. Aerial Survey, 1930.





Map 11. Sanborn Fire Insurance Map Company. Map of Philadelphia, 1950.

Additional Figures



*Figure 9. Detail view of the entrance on the southeast façade of the Germantown Fireproof Storage Company building.*



*Figure 10. Detail view of clock tower from the southeast.*





*Figure 11. Aerial view of Germantown Fireproof Storage Company, 1931. Germantown Historical Society.*





PHMC - SHPO

SHPO KEY NUMBER: 053128

*Figure 12. Germantown Fireproof Storage Company, 1979. Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission.*

---

**WALLACE STORAGE & CARPET CLEAN-  
ING CO, 237-253 Church Lane (German-  
town.)**

Robert Wallace, Prop.

Estd. 1885.

Transfer of hhg; motor service.

Storage of HHG, rooms.

Whse 237-253 Church Lane. Bill PRR;

Phila&R, Chelton Ave sta, Germantown.

Bill PRR; Phila&R, Chestnut Hill sta, for

Mt Airy and Chestnut Hill.

Whse 1826-28 N 20th St, located centrally.

Member of NYFWA.

2/21/16

*Figure 13. February 21, 1916. The Transfer and Storage Directory, Transfer and Storage Publishing Corporation, New York.*

## WAREHOUSE READY NOV. 1.

Modern Storage Plant of Morgan & Bro. Is on West 21st St.

Announcement was made yesterday that the newest of modern fireproof storage warehouses built by the firm of Morgan & Bro., at 510-520 West Twenty-first Street, will be opened Nov. 1.

It is being constructed under the supervision of George S. Kingsley, architect. The material is reinforced concrete. The building will be eight stories high, with 150 by 92 feet of floor space to each story. One floor will be devoted to the storing of imports, merchandise bought abroad a year or six months in advance of the New York markets. Tapestry and rug men may ship their foreign purchases direct to Morgan & Bro. while they are touring Europe. On their return they will take a customs inspector to the new warehouse, which is located close to the Chelsea pier, where many of the big ocean liners dock, and adjacent also to the railroads.

Another floor is to be given over to the storing of incoming European baggage. Here returned travelers may check their excess trunks by the day or night, exactly as bags are checked at a railroad depot parcel room, while they are deciding on what their plans will be for the immediate future—an apartment in New York, a stay at Virginia Hot Springs or a jaunt to California. On another floor will be stored office records, and here bankers, lawyers and merchants may file away dusty papers on which they may never look but which must be kept.

Figure 14. September 25, 1927. The New York Times.

Oct. 1927

Germentown - Wallace Storage Company

No. 6 time tower clock mov't

Figure 14. Client record from Seth Thomas Clock Company. National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors.

239

N5-10462 Sept. 14, 1927

Wallace Storage Co.  
237 Church Lane  
Germentown, Pa.

1 N<sup>o</sup> 6 Time tower clock movement, with Gravity escapement and 1<sup>st</sup> second beat compensated pendulum rod; automatic power wind with small winding device having 2<sup>nd</sup> 6<sup>th</sup> 1/2<sup>nd</sup> 110 vlt 60 cycle 2<sup>nd</sup> A.C. motor; toggle switch and thermal cut out # 256923 mounted in # 6474 Columbia cut-out box; movement pillars 60 inches long between shoulders, unequal bevel wheels, expansion bolts for fastening to floor, arranged for and including

4 10 ft sectional iron and glass [intubated] dial; numerals and minute marks painted black and gilded, rings painted white;  
Fig. 8 fasteners for a wall 1/2" thick

2 Pa. Wood hands for 10 ft dial

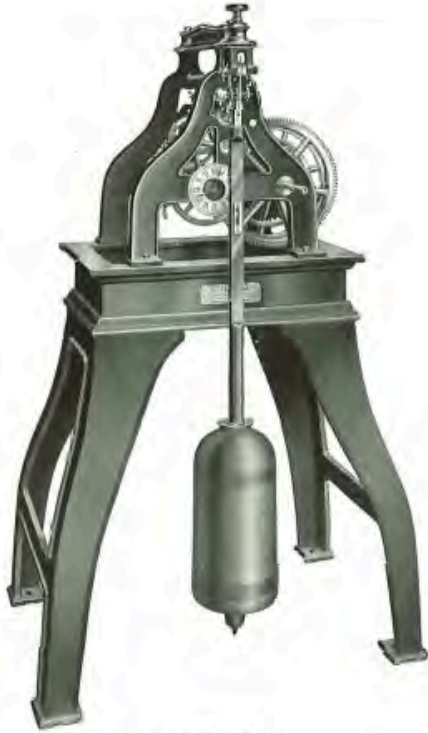
1 Automatic electric light switch mounted on floor from downward connection off pipe

1 One minute contact circuit closer

1 Four way tower center mounted on support to drawing # 731509 (old N<sup>o</sup> 16.43) with pillars 17 1/2" long between shoulders.

4 Sets Dialworks	12L #1
5 Sets Couplings	2C #2
1 Set Couplings with one end bridged out to 1/2" to fit yoke on movement	2C #3
1 Set Couplings-regular	2C #3

Figure 15. Wallace Storage purchase order from Seth Thomas Clock Company. National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors.



No. 5, 9-Day, Time.  
Width, 28 inches; Depth, 24 inches; Height, 37 inches.  
Pendulum, 4 feet; Pendulum Ball, 75 lbs.  
For one Dial up to 8 feet, or four Dials 5½ feet or less.  
Weights, boxed, about 500 lbs.

No. 6, 8-Day, Time.  
Width, 35 inches; Depth, 26 inches; Height, 60 inches.  
Pendulum, 4 feet or 8 feet; Pendulum Ball, 155 lbs. or 175 lbs.  
For one Dial up to 10 feet, or four Dials 8½ feet or less.  
Weights, boxed, about 900 lbs.

*Figure 16. Tower clocks catalogue from Seth Thomas Clock Company. National Association of Watch and Clock Collectors.*