

ADDRESS: 1401 E SUSQUEHANNA AVE

Name of Resource: The Penn Asylum for Indigent Widows & Single Women; The Penn Home

Proposed Action: Designation

Property Owner: Penn Asylum for Indigent Widows

Nominator: Keeping Society of Philadelphia

Staff Contact: Laura DiPasquale, laura.dipasquale@phila.gov

OVERVIEW:

This nomination proposes to designate the property at 1401 E. Susquehanna Avenue as historic and list it on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The nomination contends that the complex, which resulted from multiple building campaigns dating from the eighteenth through the mid-twentieth centuries, is significant under Criteria for Designation A and J. The nomination explains that the Penn Asylum for Indigent Widows and Single Women purchased the eighteenth-century country seat of the Austin family at what is now Susquehanna Avenue and Belgrade Street in 1858. The asylum expanded upon the original building through the acquisition of neighboring parcels and the construction of numerous additions and modifications over the next century, and provided services to neighborhood women, and eventually men, until its closure in 2020. The nomination contends that the Penn Asylum, also known as the Penn Home, represents the development of early geriatric care, nursing homes, and social services in mid-nineteenth-century Philadelphia. Established to provide nonsectarian living accommodations for elderly widowed and single women of limited means in the Fishtown and larger Kensington neighborhood, satisfying Criterion J, the founding and physical development of the Penn Widows' Asylum is representative of developments in the broader economic, social, and political culture, as well as the organizational and physical development patterns in the city state, and nation, satisfying Criterion A.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The staff recommends that the nomination demonstrates that the property at 1401 E. Susquehanna Avenue satisfies Criteria for Designation A and J.



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: **1401 E. Susquehanna Avenue**

Postal code: **19125**

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: **The Penn Asylum for Indigent Widows & Single Women; and West Hill**

Current/Common Name: **The Penn Widows' Asylum; The Penn Home**

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: Assisted living facility

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 **ca.1769** to **2020**

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: **ca.1769; 1858; 1867; 1887; 1894; 1904; c. 1910; 1958**

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: **Unknown**

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: **Alex J. Richard, contractor; Joseph F. Myers, contractor; etc.**

Original owner: **Charles West, Jr.; and Hannah (Cooper) West**

Other significant persons: **Elizabeth Van Dusen, Margaret Creamer, Elizabeth Keen, and Ann Lee**

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: **Keeping Society of Philadelphia (Supplemented by the PHC staff)**

Author: **Oscar Beisert, Architectural Historian
J.M. Duffin, Archivist & Historian
Kelly Wiles, Architectural Historian**

Date: **25 August 2020**

Address: **1315 Walnut Street, Suite 320
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19107**

Telephone: **717.602.5002**

Email: **keeper@keepingphiladelphia.org**

Nominator is is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: 8/25/2020

Correct-Complete Incorrect-Incomplete

Date: 9/18/2020

Date of Notice Issuance: 9/18/2020

Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: Penn Asylum for Indigent Widows

Address: 1401 E Susquehanna Ave

City: Philadelphia

State: PA

Postal Code: 19125

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

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: _____

Date of Final Action: _____

Designated Rejected

NOMINATION
FOR THE
PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES



Figure 1. The southwest elevation of the 1894 Annex. Source: Hidden City Philadelphia.

THE PENN ASYLUM
FOR
INDIGENT WIDOWS & SINGLE WOMEN
1858 - 2020

—
FORMERLY KNOWN AS *WEST HILL*, CA. 1769
—

1401 E. SUSQUEHANNA AVENUE
FISHTOWN/KENSINGTON
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundary for the designation of the subject property is as follows:

All that certain lot or piece of ground with improvements thereon erected. Beginning at a point at the northwest corner of E. Susquehanna Avenue and Belgrade Street, thence extending along the northwest side of Belgrade Street approximately 123.45 feet to the intersection with E. Fletcher Street, then turning northwestwardly and extending approximately 155.83 feet along the southwest side of E. Fletcher Street to a point; then southwestwardly along a line at right angles to E. Fletcher Street 40 feet; then southeastwardly along a line parallel with E. Fletcher Street about 18 feet to a point, then southwestwardly along a line parallel to Belgrade Street about 83.16 feet to a point on the northeast side of E. Susquehanna Avenue, then southeastwardly along E. Susquehanna Avenue about 149.33 feet to the place of beginning.

OPA Account No. 881299230



Figure 2. The boundary for the proposed designation is delineated in red. Source: Philadelphia Water Department Stormwater Parcel Viewer.

6. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The Penn Widows' Asylum is a complex property that contains multiple building phases:

Resource 1: Mansion House (ca.1769) with additions in 1858, 1867, 1887, and 1958;

Resource 2: Courtyard;

Resource 3: 1894 Annex;

Resource 4: 1413 E Susquehanna Ave, c. 1858-60 rowhouse, acquired by Penn Asylum in 1896

Resource 5: 1904 Kitchen/Laundry/Fire Tower



Figure 3: Birds eye view north of the property at 1401 E Susquehanna Avenue and its component parts.

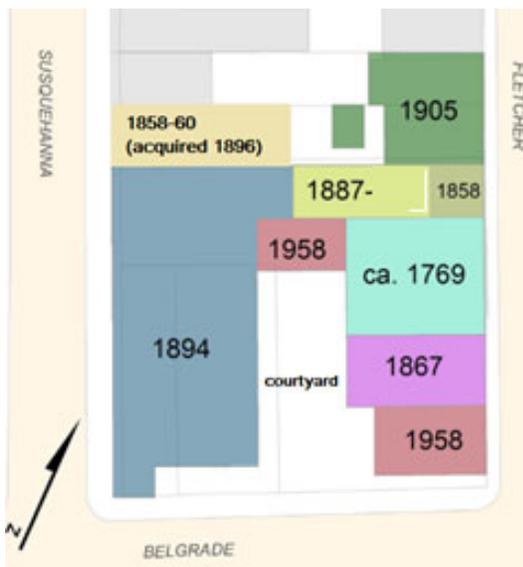


Figure 4: Key dating the building components of The Penn Widows' Asylum. Source: JM Duffin.

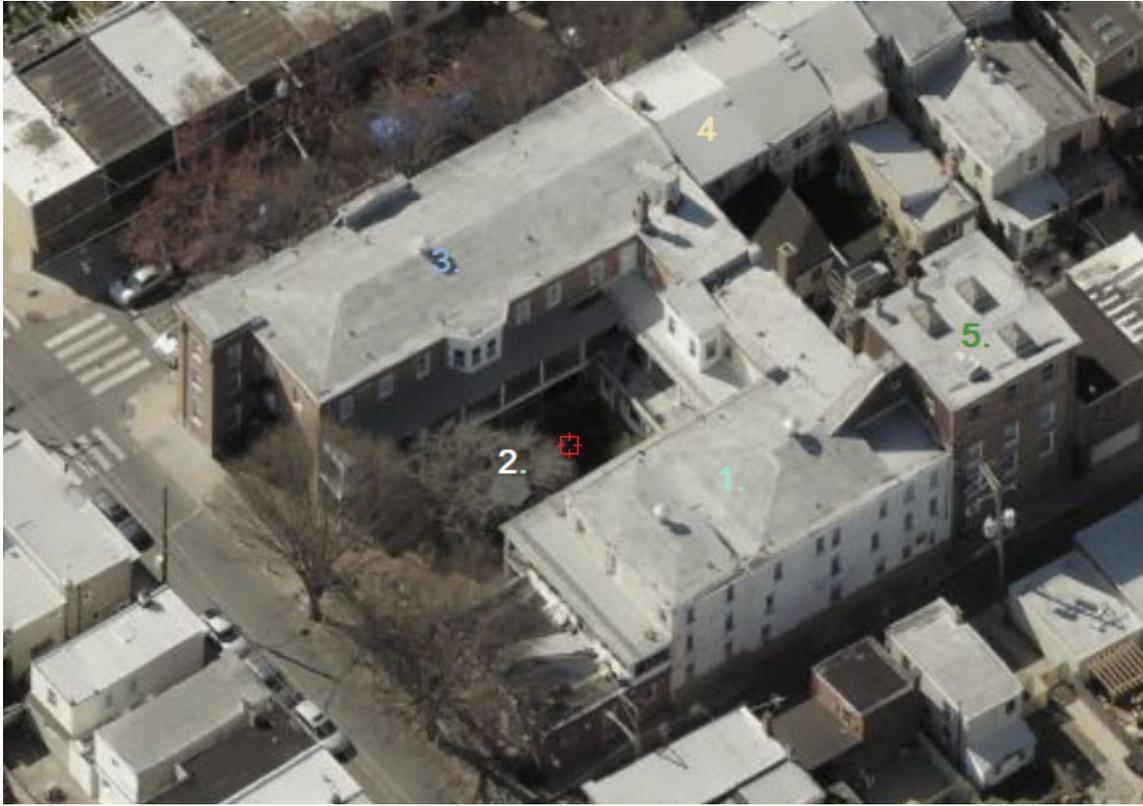


Figure 5: Birdseye view looking west at 1401 E. Susquehanna Ave. Source: Pictometry, 2020.



Figure 6: Birdseye view looking east at 1401 E. Susquehanna Ave. Source: Pictometry, 2020.

RESOURCE 1: MANSION HOUSE WITH 1858, 1867, 1887 & 1958 ADDITIONS

Constructed ca. 1769, the Mansion House is located on the northeasterly edge of the property along Belgrade and E. Fletcher Street. The hipped roof of the original four-bay deep country seat is visible in the aerial view of the property. In 1858, an addition was added to the northeast corner along what is now E. Fletcher Street. In 1867, an additional two bays in depth were added to the main, southeast elevation facing Belgrade Street, and a one-story addition appended to this addition in 1958. A present-day aerial view of the property shows seams in the roof between the hipped roof of the original house and the 1858 and 1867 additions. A downspout at the intersection of these two roofs delineates the addition on the southwestern façade, and a slight setback of the façade and transition at the cornice and base demarcate the addition and original building along the northeast elevation on E. Fletcher Street. In 1887, an addition was added to the northwest corner of the Mansion House, extending to the southwest (PRERBG v. 2, 5/16/1887). Multi-level and wrap-around porches have been removed, added, and altered over time to the southeast and southwest elevations.

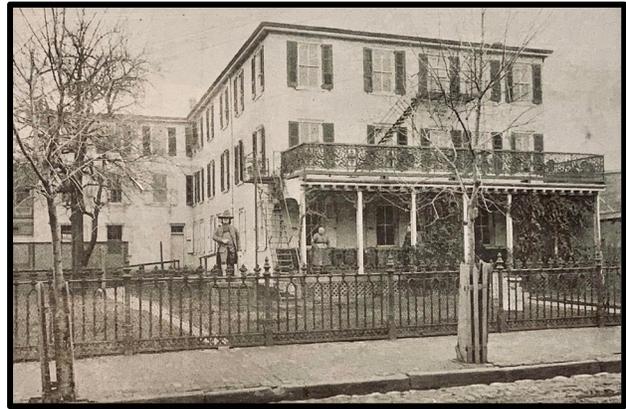


Figure 7: Left, c. 1836-45 painting of West Hill from Belgrade Street, during the ownership of the Austin family, which shows the core Mansion House building, built c. 1769. Source: Mary Cheek Mills, Historic Glass Specialist, via the duPont family. Right: the Mansion House after additions in 1858, 1867, and 1887. Source: The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.



Figure 8: Left, bird's eye view of the Mansion House with subsequent additions. The hipped roof of the original house is still visible. Right: View from Belgrade Street, with 1958 addition in foreground.



Figure 9: View from Belgrade Street of the southwest and southeast elevations of the Mansion House and its additions. Source: Philadelphia Historical Commission staff, September 2020.



Figure 10: Southeast elevation of the one-story 1958 addition at the corner of Belgrade Street and E. Fletcher Street. The addition's Colonial Revival doorway emulates the original doorway of the Mansion House. Source: Michelle Shuman, 2020.



Figure 11: Looking northwest from the corner of Belgrade and E. Fletcher Streets. The 1958 addition is visible in the foreground. The first two bays of the three-story stuccoed portion of the property is the 1867 addition, which steps in slightly from the original Mansion House. Source: Michelle Shuman, 2020.



Figure 12: Looking south at the Mansion House, 1858 and 1867 additions from E. Fletcher Street. Source: Philadelphia Historical Commission staff, September 2020.

RESOURCE 2: COURTYARD

The courtyard is a landscaped outdoor area surrounded on three sides, with the 1894 Annex to the southwest, the 1887 addition to the northwest and the Mansion House to the northeast. The courtyard, which is visible from Belgrade Street, was integral to the design of the institution, which located two-story porches around its perimeter. There is a small one-story addition at the ground floor of the 1887 addition that was built in 1958. The area has several small trees, plant beds, grass patches and paved walkways and a small patio.



Figure 13: Looking northwest into The Courtyard of The Penn Widows' Asylum. Source: Michelle Shuman, 2020.



Figure 14: Looking northwest into The Courtyard. Right: Looking south within The Courtyard in 2018 with the 1894 Annex on right. Source: Penn Home Facebook Page.



Figure 15: Looking north within The Courtyard of The Penn Widows' Asylum, showing the rear wings on left and the Mansion House on right. Source: Penn Home Facebook Page.



Figure 16: Looking southeast within The Courtyard in 2015 towards Belgrade Street. Source: Penn Home Facebook Page.

RESOURCE 3: 1894 ANNEX

Situated at the northwest corner of E. Susquehanna Avenue and Belgrade Street, the 1894 Annex is a large three-story, eleven-bay rectangular masonry building which accounts for nearly half of the property's square footage. The building has a slightly pitched hipped roof with rolled asphalt. The brick is laid in a Flemish stretcher bond and exhibits decorative brickwork including a corbelled cornice along the entirety of the building's perimeter and corbelled brick pilasters that flank the main entrance. A flared dome bell tower that once topped the southeast corner tower has since been removed.

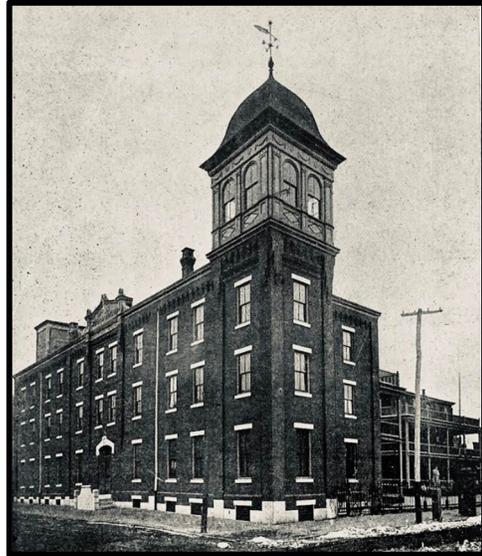


Figure 17: Looking north at the 1894 Annex, from the corner of E. Susquehanna Avenue and Belgrade Street. Left: an undated photograph. Right: in 1910. Source: Jane Campbell Scrapbook, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.



Figure 18: Looking north at the 1894 Annex of The Penn Widows' Asylum at the corner of E. Susquehanna and Belgrade Streets. Source: Hidden City Philadelphia.

Marble lintels and sills define the building's window openings, which historically featured two-over-two wood windows, but which have since been replaced by synthetic one-over-one windows. The basement windows, which are located within each bay, have marble lintels and have been infilled with glass block. A marble water table also runs around the perimeter of the building at the basement level. The primary elevation faces onto East Susquehanna Avenue includes the complex's main entrance. This entrance is located in the center of the elevation and can be accessed through both a set of concrete steps and ramp. The paneled and plate glass door likely dates to the first decades of the twentieth century. It is flanked by two sidelights and topped with a fanlight. A limestone segmental arch door surround with a keystone featuring a relief bust of William Penn adorns the top of the entrance. A commemorative plaque to the right of the door reads:

PENN HOME
THE FRIENDLY RETIREMENT HOME
SINCE 1848
KENSINGTON
COUNTY OF PHILADELPHIA

A gabled parapet with the words PENN HOME defines the entrance bay at the roof line.



Figure 19. Left: The southwest elevation of the 1894 Annex. Source: Senior Advisor website. Right: The formal entrance to the 1894 Annex on Susquehanna Street with a keystone featuring a relief of William Penn above the doorway. Source: Philadelphia Historical Commissions staff, September 2020.



Figure 20: Left: The southeast elevation of the 1894 Annex of The Penn Widows' Asylum. Source: Michelle Shuman, 2020. Right: The cornerstone, memorializing the date year of construction, 1894, on left, and the year The Penn Widows' Asylum was founded in 1852 on right. Source: Michelle Shuman, 2020.

The tower at the corner Susquehanna Ave and Belgrade Street features the building's date stone, transcribed with the date of construction (1894) and the organization's founding (1852). Beyond the one bay return of the tower, the building is recessed one bay, and then extends an additional two bays in depth, allowing space for a secondary entrance and a fire escape. Like its Susquehanna Avenue counterpart, this entrance has a segmental arch stone door surround. The door has been replaced with a modern plate glass and metal swinging door; however, the original paneled jamb and transom window remain. The original stone steps are also still present. The northeast elevation of the 1894 Annex, which faces the Courtyard, is eight bays wide and dominated by a two-story porch. An original bay window breaks up the rhythm of the columns of individual double-hung windows.



Figure 21: View from Belgrade Street of the Penn Widows' Asylum in 1894. The northeast elevation of the Annex is visible on the left, and the Mansion House and 1867 addition to the right, with the courtyard in the center. Source: The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.



Figure 22: View of the northeast elevation of the 1894 Annex from Belgrade Street, May 2020. Source: Cyclomedia.

RESOURCE 4: 1858-60 ROWHOUSE, 1413 E SUSQUEHANNA AVE

Built between 1858-1860 as a private residence historically known as 1413 E Susquehanna Avenue, this three-story Italianate red-brick rowhouse was acquired by the Penn Widows' Asylum around 1896. The building features a marble watertable, steps, and a marble header over a doorway into which is set a single (replacement) door and transom with acanthus leaf decoration. The building retains its original window frames and shutter hardware, but has replacement lintels and sills, and window sash. The original cornice has been removed or is concealed by aluminum siding. The building is connected internally to the 1894 Annex through a bay window at the second-floor side elevation.

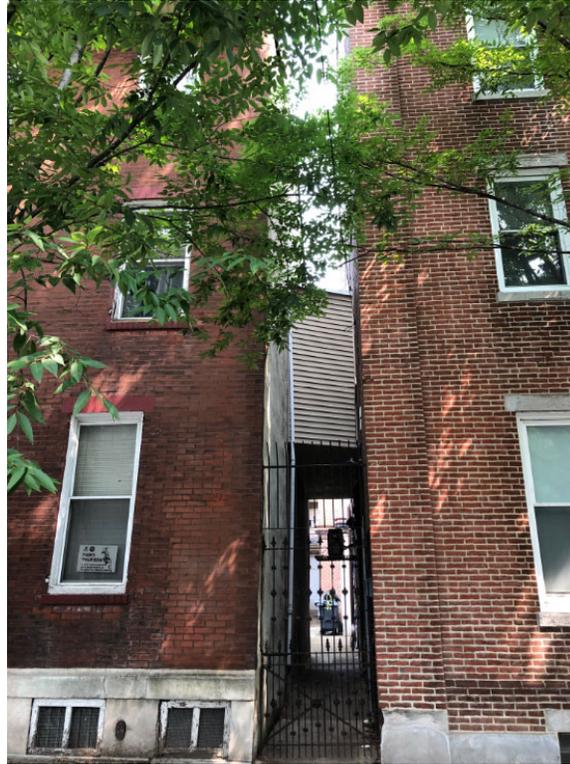


Figure 23: The rowhouse formerly known as 1413 E Susquehanna Avenue. Source: Philadelphia Historical Commission staff, September 2020.

RESOURCE 5: 1904 KITCHEN/LAUNDRY/FIRE TOWER

Facing E. Fletcher Street, the 1904 Kitchen/Laundry/Fire Tower is a four-story, three-bay brick masonry building constructed on the northwest side of the 1887 addition to the Mansion House. The original building, constructed in 1904, was three stories tall. By 1917, the institution constructed a fourth story with a pilothouse that provides access to the Mansion House.¹ The exterior brickwork is laid in a Flemish stretcher bond with a corbelled cornice between the third and fourth stories. The building has a slightly-pitched side gabled roof with a slight flare and is clad in rolled asphalt. Four skylights are also located on the building's roof. The northeast elevation on E. Fletcher Street has three symmetrical columns of window openings on each level (basement, first, second, third and fourth). The basement-level windows have limestone lintels and terminate at ground level and have been infilled with concrete. The windows on the remaining stories have limestone sills and lintels. The window openings on the first story have been infilled with wood and glass block (southernmost window) and brick (middle and northernmost window). All of the window fixtures on the second, third and fourth story window openings contain one-over-one synthetic sash fixtures.



Figure 24. The northeast elevation of the 1904 Kitchen/Laundry/Fire Tower of The Penn Widows' Asylum from E. Fletcher Street. Source: Michelle Shuman, 2020.

¹ Sanborn Map Company, Sanborn Fire Insurance Map, City of Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania, Volume 8, (Sanborn Map Company: New York City, New York, 1918).



Figure 25: Northwest elevation of the Kitchen and Laundry addition. Source: Cyclomedia, 2020.

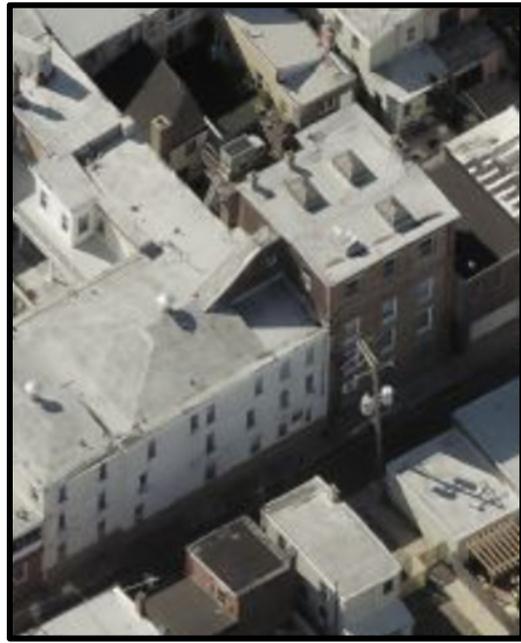


Figure 26. Looking north at 1904 Kitchen/Laundry/Fire Tower of The Penn Widows' Asylum. Figure 27. Looking south at the 1904 Kitchen/Laundry/Fire Tower of The Penn Widows' Asylum. Source: Pictometry, Atlas, City of Philadelphia.

7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Penn Asylum for Indigent Widows and Single Women at 1401 E. Susquehanna Avenue is a significant historic resource that merits designation by the Philadelphia Historical Commission and inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The subject property satisfies the following Criteria for Designation, as enumerated in Section 14-1004 of the Philadelphia Code:

- (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; and
- (j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

Established in 1852, the Penn Asylum for Indigent Widows and Single Women purchased the eighteenth-century country seat of the Austin family at Otis Street (now Susquehanna Avenue) and West Street (now Belgrade Street) in 1858. There the organization expanded upon the original building through the acquisition of neighboring parcels and with numerous additions and modifications over its 142 year history, until its closure in 2020.



Figure 28. Looking north from Belgrade Street at the “Mansion House” of The Penn Asylum for Indigent Widows and Single Women after modifications and additions in 1858, 1867, and 1887. Source: The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.



Figure 29: Left: Detail of 1849 Sydney atlas showing the Austin estate (center). E. Fletcher Street (Capewell St) had not yet been established. Source: Historicmapworks.com. Right: Detail of 1862 Smedley atlas, showing former name of Belgrade Street (West Street). Source: Greater Philadelphia Geohistory Network.

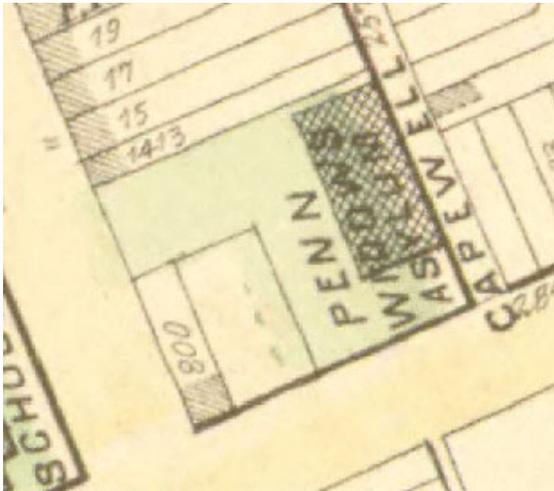


Figure 30: Left: Detail of the 1875 Hopkins atlas. Right: Detail of 1887 Bromley atlas. Source: Greater Philadelphia Geohistory Network.

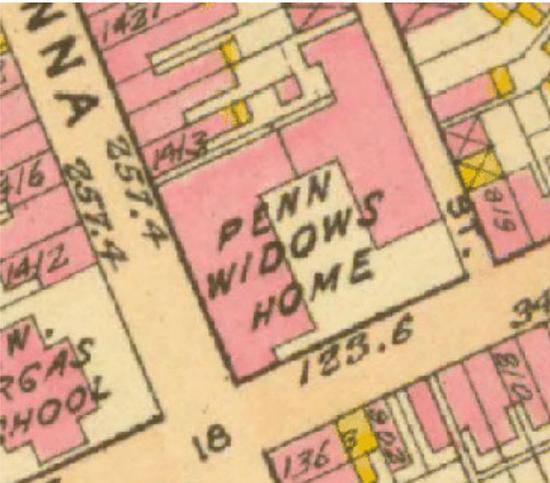


Figure 31: Left: Detail of 1895 Bromley atlas. Right: Detail of 1910 Bromley atlas, showing addition of kitchen and laundry wing to the northwest.

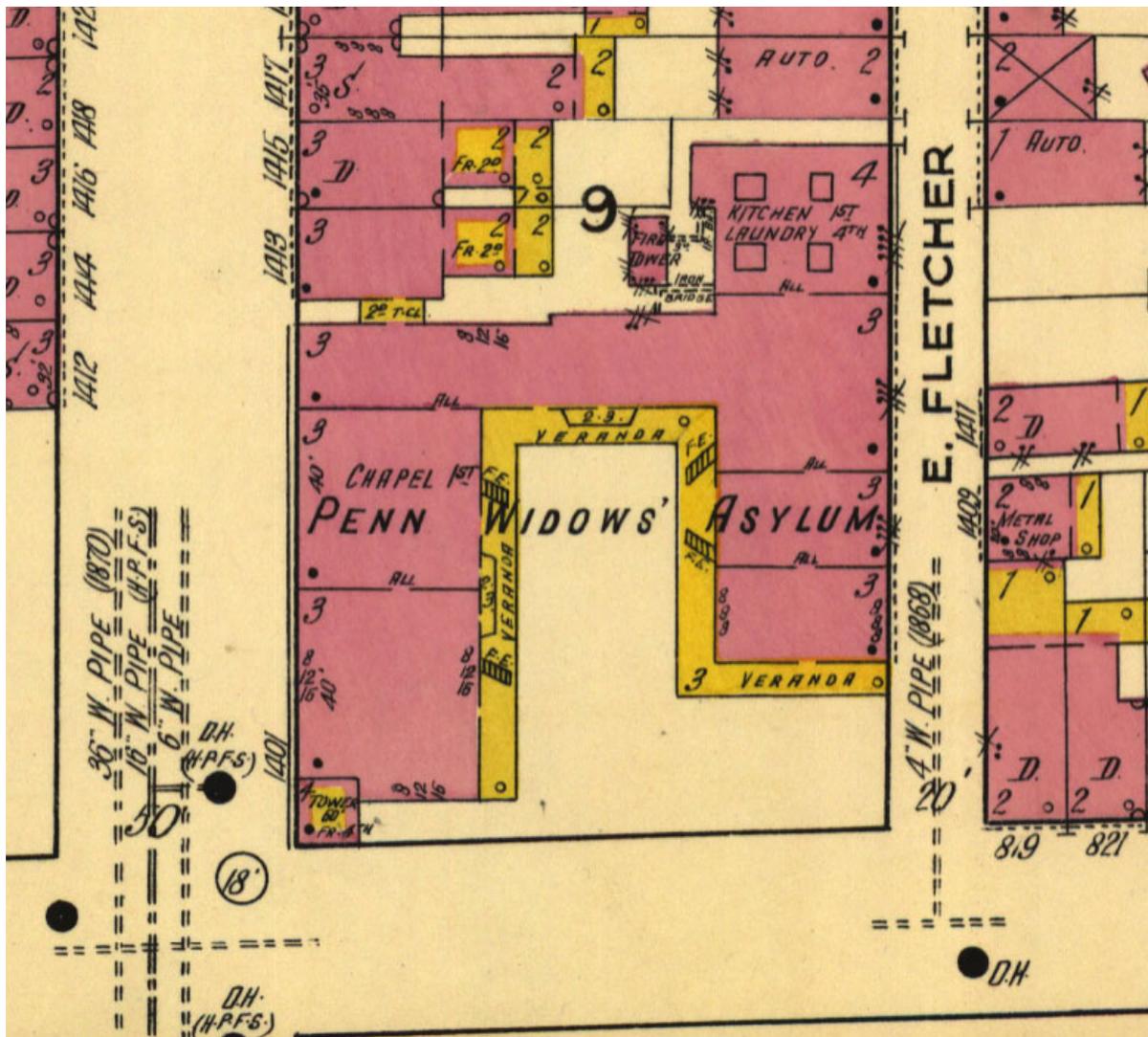


Figure 32: Detail of 1917 Sanborn map, showing the Penn Widows' Asylum. Source: Pennsylvania State University.

CRITERIA A & J

Incorporated on December 6, 1852, The Penn Asylum for Indigent Widows and Single Women in the District of Kensington in the County of Philadelphia (hereafter referred to as The Penn Widows' Asylum) represents the development of early geriatric care, nursing homes, and social services in mid-nineteenth-century Philadelphia. Established to provide nonsectarian living accommodations for elderly widowed and single women of limited means in the Fishtown and larger Kensington neighborhood, the founding and physical development of The Penn Widows' Asylum is representative of broader economic, social, and political culture, as well as the organizational and physical development patterns in the City of Philadelphia, the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, and the United States, when private charitable organizations largely subsidized the economic assistance and social services, which are now primarily administered by the government and funded by taxation.² The Penn Widows' Asylum did receive some appropriations

² *Fourth Annual Report of the Penn Asylum.*

the Pennsylvania Legislature, though after an arduous political process of failed legislation to fund these essential services for various charitable organizations.³ For over 140 years, the organization provided housing for women in the community over than 59 years of age. With a charter change in the 1990s, the organization expanded to provide an affordable nursing home regardless of gender.⁴ From 1858 to 2020, The Penn Widows' Asylum, known as the Penn Home after 1982, served the greater neighborhood, comprising one of the oldest continually operating charitable institutions of its kind in the area and, it is safe to say, within the larger Quaker City.⁵

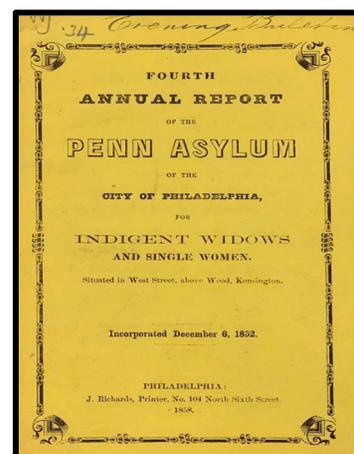
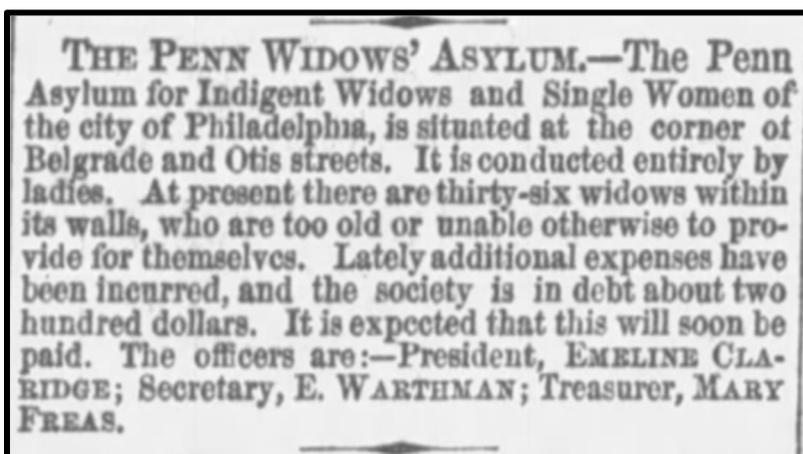


Figure 33. “The Penn Widows’ Asylum,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 18 February 1863, 4.

Figure 34. Right: The cover sheet of the *Fourth Annual Report of The Penn Widows’ Asylum of the City of Philadelphia, for Indigent Widows and Single Women*. Source: The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

While not unique in its mission to serve women, the leadership of The Penn Widows’ Asylum was somewhat unusual in the 1850s compared to most organizations at that time. Founded by Elizabeth Van Dusen, Margaret Creamer, Elizabeth Keen, and Ann Lee, the institution was propelled and managed for the vast majority of its history by women—meaning that only females served on the Board of Managers, as president, vice president, treasurer, secretary, managers, and on its committees. Membership in the corporate body was open only to women who contributed at least one dollar a year and they elected the Board of Managers, officers and the trustees. The trustees were all men but only had power to manage the real estate of the corporation and advise the female Board of Managers.⁶

Looking purely at financial records of the organization, the female leadership of The Penn Widows’ Asylum managed to establish the organization, and, within ten years, acquire suitable accommodations and serve dozens of women, requiring tens of thousands of dollars, resulting in a debt of just \$400 by 1862.⁷ While trustees, attending physicians, and legal counsel were male, the human story of The Penn Widows’ Asylum is one almost entirely of women, representing an

³ *The Daily Evening Express* (Lancaster, Pennsylvania), 24 February 1858, 3; *Reading Times*, 2 April 1859, 2; *Lancaster Intelligencer*, 12 April 1859, 2.

⁴ “Three Centuries of Caring,” *The Penn Home Connection* 6, no. 2 (Spring 2003): 10.

⁵ “Three Centuries of Caring,” 10.

⁶ Constitution of The Penn Asylum for Indigent Widows and Single Women in the District of Kensington in the County of Philadelphia, 15 June 1852, Philadelphia Miscellaneous Book No. 11, p. 546, City Archives of Philadelphia (hereafter CAP).

⁷ “The Penn Widows’ Asylum,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 11 January 1862, 8.

early example of female leadership and management in a nineteenth and early twentieth century setting that was often dominated by men (See Appendix B for biographical information on the women founders).

HISTORIC CONTEXT: THE PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT OF CHARITABLE INSTITUTIONS AND OLD AGE HOMES IN PHILADELPHIA

The physical development of the subject property to accommodate The Penn Widows' Asylum represents a significant movement and pattern in the establishment of charitable institutions all across the city of Philadelphia. While the major entities like the Pennsylvania Hospital and The Asylum for the Relief of Persons Deprived of Use of Their Reason (later known as Friend's Hospital) had large institutional facilities in the eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, other charities evolved over time, starting in old houses and mansions. Looking at the development of The Penn Widows' Asylum and other similar entities, this development and organizational process usually involved the following steps: 1. An institution is founded in the early-to-mid-nineteenth century in rented quarters by charitable-minded, middle to upper class citizens; 2. The institution is bequeathed or is able to purchase a former residence or mansion, often on large lots or tracts of land, on the fringe of dense neighborhoods, and, in many cases, in suburban and/or rural parts of the city; 3. The institution renovates, through alterations and additions, the former dwelling to serve its purposes; and 4. As the constituents and services expand, the institution constructs buildings and/or additions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, amplifying and/or demolishing the original structure(s). Only a handful of these institutional complexes survive with all of the component parts, including original and later historic buildings, representing what once was commonplace throughout the urban landscape.

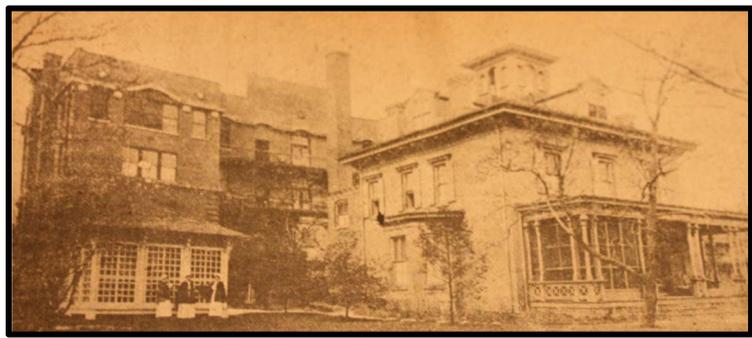


Figure 35. Left: A mansion house on Frankford Avenue, which became the Frankford Hospital. Source: Helen Perkins Collection, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Figure 36. Right: The Frankford Hospital with one of its large institutional additions. Source: Frankford Gazette.

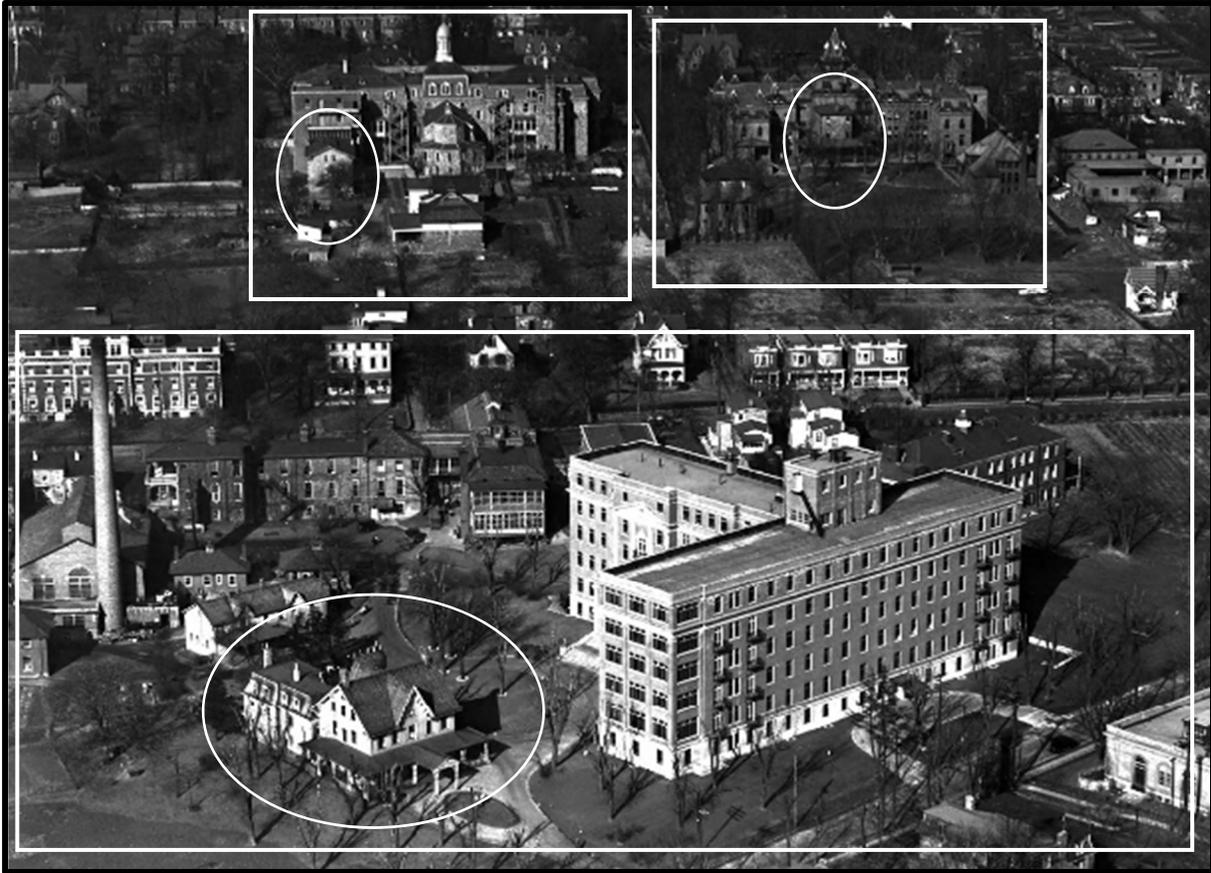


Figure 37. Three Germantown institutions, including the Little Sisters of the Poor on the site of the Invilliers Mansion (top left); the Jewish Foster Home on the site of the Smith Mansion (top right); and the Germantown Hospital on the site of several estates and properties (bottom), including the Heinrich Weiner's Gothic Revival house.⁸ The domestic houses are circled in white. Source: The Library Company of Philadelphia. All of the estates shown above were converted to charitable uses by the said organizations, retaining mansion houses with immense institutional additions and other buildings.

One of the best-known facilities that developed similarly and became a dominant force in Kensington was Episcopal Hospital on Lehigh Avenue, an institution also established in the mid-nineteenth century. Shown in Figure 38 and Figure 39, the Protestant Episcopal Church founded the hospital campus on the grounds of the Leamy Estate—including the “Leamy Mansion”, a family bequest of Philadelphia merchant John Leamy. Originally, the hospital repurposed the former Leamy Mansion as the “Bishop Potter Memorial House”, but, in time, the enlargement and modernization of what became a campus led to its demolition.⁹

⁸ 1871 Philadelphia Atlas, 22nd Ward. Source: Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network.

⁹ *The Hospital of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Philadelphia: Its Origin, Progress, Work, and Wants.* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1869).



Figure 38: The Leamy Mansion, which became a building of Episcopal Hospital in 1852. Source: The Library Company of Philadelphia

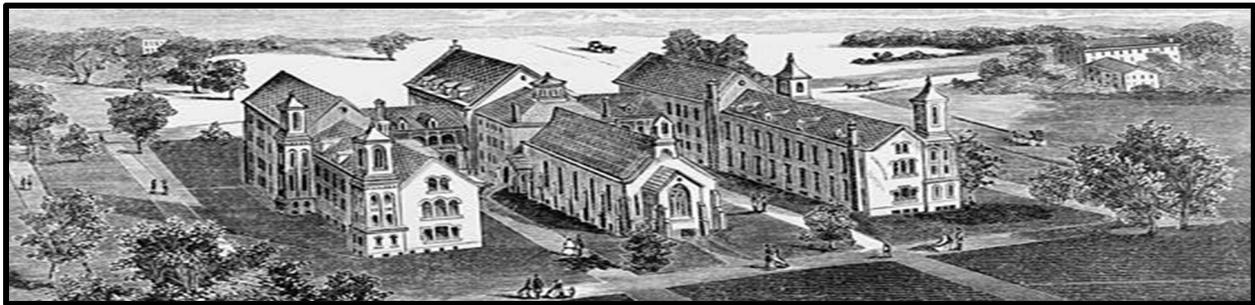


Figure 39. Episcopal Hospital after the once iconic and immense institutional pile (now largely demolished) was complete. The Leamy Mansion was located to the east of these buildings and is either out of view or has already been demolished. Source: The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Perhaps the best surviving example is shown in Figure 40, highlighted in recent years through designation by the Philadelphia Historical Commission, the former Pennsylvania Working Home for Blind Men, established in 1876 on the 1799 estate of Samuel Blodget and Rebecca Smith known as *Greenville*, 3514–30 Lancaster Avenue in West Philadelphia. First institutionalized by the first foreign Episcopal Mission, the mansion house was altered and enlarged to serve the Pennsylvania Working Home for Blind Men in 1876, which led to the larger development of the site to serve growing institutional needs. Two industrial buildings were added to the property that markedly diverged from the residential character of the site.¹⁰ While this facility is slightly larger, it represents this city-wide and, essentially, larger societal development trend. This type of institutional development on the sites of old estates can be found throughout Philadelphia—especially beyond Center City, as shown in the figures below. The Penn Widows’ Asylum is an exemplar of this development and organizational motif, as it was established and flourished throughout the course of its more than 170 years of service.

¹⁰ Oscar Beisert and J.M. Duffin, “Philadelphia Register of Historic Places Nomination: Greenville, The Pennsylvania Working Home for Blind Men,” Philadelphia, 2017.

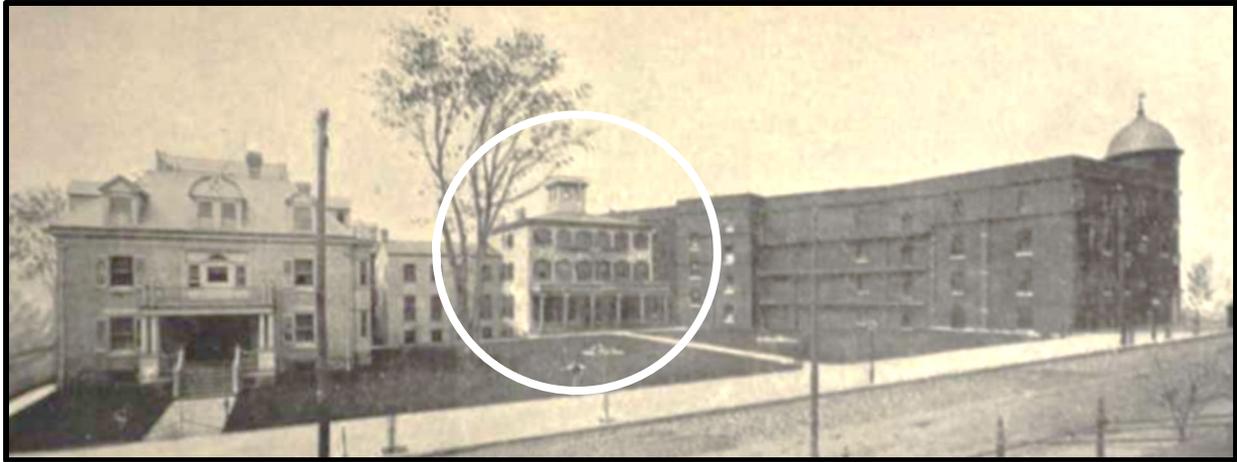


Figure 40. The Pennsylvania Working Home for Blind Men, ca.1900, with *Greenville* at the center, which was built in 1799 by Samuel Blodget and Rebecca Smith Blodget. Source: The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

In addition following a common physical development pattern for charitable institutions, the Penn Widows' Asylum is a rare surviving example of the same pattern for old age homes in Philadelphia. A critical component in all the nineteenth-century old age homes was creation of a home-like setting for the residents in direct contrast and reaction to the institutional and almost penal-like housing of the Almshouse. Most old age homes in nineteenth-century Philadelphia started in former mansions. These dwellings were ideally suited for such use as they provided both a fair amount of space for numerous residents and a level of basic dignity that the Almshouse lacked. Many were former mansions with a center hall plan flanked by rooms on either side. This room arrangement eventually became such a character-defining feature for old age homes in the nineteenth century that when some institutions built new buildings they often recreated the central hall pattern in the main residential and public areas.¹¹

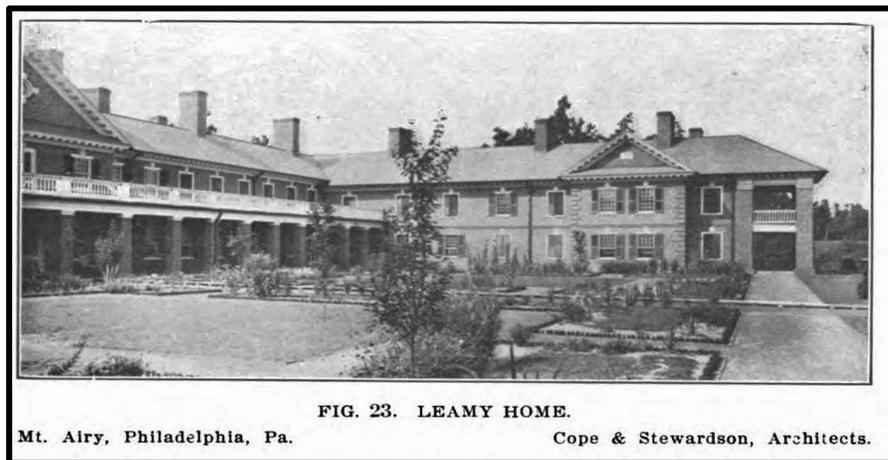


Figure 41. The Leamy Home in Mount Airy with porches as a prominent feature of the building. Source: Ralph Adams Cram, "The Works of Messrs. Cope & Stewardson," *Architectural Record* 26 (1904): 435.

¹¹ Theresa R. Snyder, "Old Age Homes in Philadelphia, 1870–1929: Creating, Promoting, and Negotiating Middle Class Community" (PhD. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2002), 214–17, 301.



Figure 42. Left: The Edwin Forrest Home at Holmesburg, featuring a full porch along the facade and its wings (demolished). Source: The Free Library of Philadelphia. Figure 43. Right: The Old Age Home, built in the 1870s, with porches as a prominent feature, at the Germantown Home on Germantown Avenue above Gorgas Lane (demolished). Source: T.W. Kretschmann, *The Church's Treasures: A History of the Orphans' Home and Asylum for Aged and Infirm of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, Philadelphia, Pa* (Philadelphia: A.J. Holman Company, 1923).

Another common feature of old age homes in Philadelphia were porches. Providing residents with direct and protected (i.e. covered) access to the outdoors and fresh air was considered important.¹² In a time before television, porches also provided residents with an activity that allowed them to observe the outside world, as shown in Figures 41, 42, and 43. Many of Philadelphia's nineteenth-century homes were located in suburban like settings with large grounds that were ideal for the porches. The original eighteenth-century country house at the core of the present-day Penn Widows' Asylum was in the 1840s flanked by porches looking out on an open landscape (see Figure 47). In spite of being in a growing and eventually densely developed neighborhood, the Penn Widows' Asylum understood the importance of porches for its residents and continued to retain a small amount of open land on its property for them. An integral part of the Asylum's 1894 expansion was the first and second floor porches facing an inner courtyard.

HISTORIC CONTEXT: THE DEVELOPMENT OF OLD AGE HOMES IN PHILADELPHIA

Prior to the development of the federal programs, such as Society Security, private pensions, and retirement plans, the elderly in American society relied upon their families and relatives for care and living spaces. This arrangement worked well when America was a fairly small and local society (compared to today's population) and there were close-knit extended family structures to support the elderly. As the population of Philadelphia and the United States grew in the nineteenth century and economic conditions particularly for working class people became somewhat precarious with various economic cycles of panics or recessions, the number of elderly people who could not earn a living wage and did not have family members able to support them grew substantially. For people in these conditions the only option was living in the Philadelphia Almshouse at Blockley in West Philadelphia (Figure 49).¹³

¹² Snyder, "Old Age Homes in Philadelphia," 235, 288, 296–300.

¹³ Theresa R. Snyder, "Old Age Homes in Philadelphia, 1870–1929: Creating, Promoting, and Negotiating Middle Class Community" (PhD. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2002).



Figure 44. The Philadelphia Almshouse, Blockley, West Philadelphia. Source: The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Almshouses were a fixture of every American city in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. While they provided the basic sustenance to keep people alive and off the streets, the conditions for living were, at best, less than ideal. This ultimately led to the forcing people to find whatever means possible to avoid that fate. In many cases, almshouses were truly horrible facilities for the sound elderly because they were mixed in with a general population of people with mental, physical, and social disabilities that then had little to no forms of treatment. As the population of the Blockley Almshouse grew, various informal charitable individuals, groups, and organizations volunteered to assist with providing care to the “inmates”—as they were called. During these exchanges many visitors were horrified at the living conditions. Those jarring experiences prompted many to form private charitable organizations to provide a more humane options to the Almshouse. A number of Philadelphia’s nineteenth-century old age homes were born out of such exchanges.¹⁴

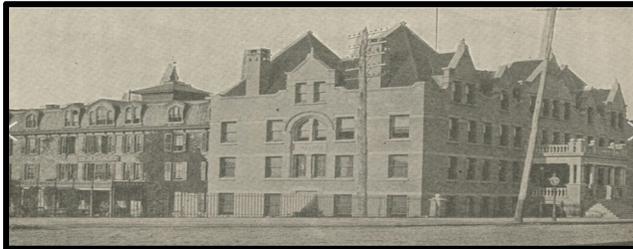


Figure 45. Left: Home for Aged and Infirm Colored Persons, West Philadelphia. Source: Free Library of Philadelphia. Figure 46. Right: Home for Indigent Widows and Single Women, Philadelphia. Source: The Free Library of Philadelphia.

The rapid growth of the elderly population in the United States during the nineteenth century led to a growth of old age homes. The “over-60” segment of the American population grew by more than one million people per decade beginning in 1850. In 1920 there were 4.9 million Americans over the age of 60.¹⁵ Philadelphia responded well to the needs this situation created. By 1903, charitable organizations and institutions in Philadelphia had established approximately 62 old age

¹⁴ For example, see the following: Carole Haber, “The Old Folks at Home: Development of Institutionalized Care for the Aged in Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 51 (1977): 240.

¹⁵ Theresa R. Snyder, “Old Age Homes in Philadelphia, 1870–1929: Creating, Promoting, and Negotiating Middle Class Community” (PhD. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2002), 23.

homes, which, in comparison to other large American cities, meant that the Quaker City was the leader in this field of charitable development and progress.¹⁶ In New York City, even then much larger than Philadelphia, there were approximately only 40 old age homes by 1903. At the same time, nine are known to have been established in Chicago.¹⁷ By 1923, Boston had approximately 17 such facilities.¹⁸ Philadelphia far outranked most other cities in establishing and providing a housing standard along with accommodations for the elderly.

Based on a study completed by Theresa R. Snyder, of the 62 Philadelphia old age homes in 1903, only 14.5% were founded prior to 1865, which appears to be the reasoning for the timeframe of 1870 to 1929 for her dissertation, this being the primary period when the old age home growth in Philadelphia and when it became a staple of society.¹⁹ Snyder's work on the history of old age homes in examined all aspects of the institution as a type and included a study of extant buildings that once served as these facilities, including The Penn Widows' Asylum (1852), the Forrest Home (1873)—shown in Figure 47, Hayes Mechanic's Home (1858), the Friends Boarding Home of the Concord Quarterly Meeting (1891), the Presbyterian Home for Aged Couples and Aged Men (1885), The Home for Aged and Infirm Colored Persons (1864)—shown in Figure 50, the Lutheran Home of Germantown (1858)—shown in Figure 48, the Leamy Home (1903)—shown in Figure 46, the Home for Aged Couples (1876), and the Home for the Aged (1888).²⁰

Being one of the oldest institutions of its kind in Philadelphia, The Penn Widows' Asylum is a significant exemplar of the foundational period of old age homes, predating by several years the enlargement of the movement in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. As a non-sectarian institution, the Penn Widows' Asylum was at its very core a community-based organization and an integral part of the Kensington (today called Fishtown) neighborhood. Unlike almost all other homes of similar age, the Penn Widows' Asylum remained in the Fishtown neighborhood for its entire life, making it perhaps the only example of its type in Philadelphia today.

¹⁶ Snyder, "Old Age Homes in Philadelphia."

¹⁷ Haber, "The Old Folks at Home," 240–257.

¹⁸ Brian Gratton, *Urban Elders: Family, Work, and Welfare Among Boston's Aged, 1890–1950* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 103.

¹⁹ Snyder, "Old Age Homes in Philadelphia," 9.

²⁰ Snyder, "Old Age Homes in Philadelphia," 9.

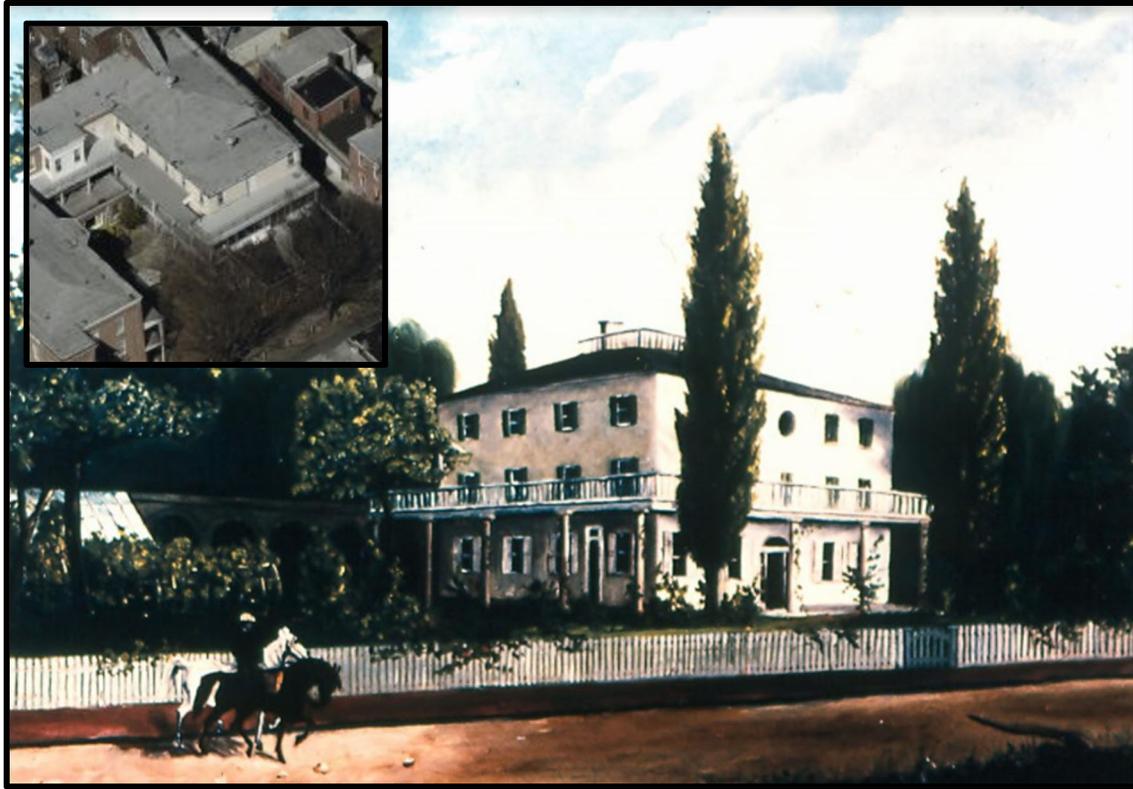


Figure 47. A ca. 1836-1845 painting of West Hill from Belgrade Street above Susquehanna Avenue, during the ownership of Charles B. Austin and Ann Liseter Austin, showing the core Mansion House, built ca.1769, in its last years as a country seat. The painting shows a hot house and an grapery on left, the latter of which may have dated to the eighteenth century. Source: Mary Cheek Mills, *Historic Glass Specialist*, via the duPont family. Please note that the aerial image reproduced here in the top left corner to shows the surviving form of the Mansion House, part of The Penn Widows' Asylum for more than 170 years.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT: DEVELOPMENT OF THE PENN ASYLUM FOR INDIGENT AND SINGLE WOMEN

On June 14, 1858, six years after its founding, The Penn Widows' Asylum purchased "the Austin property in West street [Belgrade Street] above Wood [E. Susquehanna Avenue]," which would serve as the first building of the institution. On the site stood "a fine old mansion, 40 feet square," which is consistent with the earliest component part of the subject property, then occupying "a lot 70 feet front on West street, extending in depth 75 feet."²¹ Known as *West Hill*, the Mansion House was built ca.1769 by the wealthy Quakers Charles West, Jr. (1725–1795) and Hannah Cooper West (1733–1813) and altered over time by subsequent owners.²² After the death of Charles West, Jr. in 1795, the subject property, including the Mansion House, passed through several owners, a history of which is discussed in detail in Appendix A. During the period of 1836 to 1845, English immigrants Charles Baldrey Austin (1787-1840), a glass manufacturer and proprietor of Charles B. Austin & Co. from Shifnall, Shropshire, England, and his wife Ann Liseter Austin from Market

²¹ *Fourth Annual Report of the Penn Asylum of the City of Philadelphia for Indigent Widows and Single Women*. (Philadelphia: J. Richards, 1858), 7.

²² Will of Charles West, of Northern Liberties, shipwright, 5 August 1761, probated 24 August 1761, Will Book M, p. 182, Philadelphia Register of Wills; Provincial Tax Lists for Northern Liberties, Philadelphia County, 1774, "Pennsylvania, Tax and Exoneration, 1768–1801" Ancestry.com; and U.S., *Quaker Meeting Records, 1681–1935* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2014.

Drayton, owned and occupied the Mansion House, establishing a point of pride remembered even after The Penn Widows' Asylum took ownership.²³

The subject property was acquired for \$6,000, a handsome sum in those days, \$1,000 of which was forgiven by the seller, and an additional \$2,000 paid through donations, leaving a mortgage of \$3,000. Additional funds were raised for "an addition of a new kitchen to the building," along with "some necessary repairs," amounting to \$816.37. This did not include the many business and tradesmen who donated both materials and labor. When the building opened in October 1858, The Penn Widows' Asylum could accommodate "thirty inmates," requiring an entrance fee of \$30 with bedroom furniture or \$70 without furniture.²⁴ This represents historic efforts to provide affordable housing for elderly women of limited means. While these fees would increase over the years, it appears that the costs were always below market rate.

PENN WIDOWS' ASYLUM,		TO JNO. H. BRINGHURST, DR.		EXPENSE OF REPAIRS.	
		Treasurer of the Fair.			
1857.				Mr. Jones's bill of carpenter work,	\$560 80
June 17,	Cash paid for rent of Hall for Fair,	\$200 00		Deduct donation and materials,	50 00 510 80
20,	" " meeting,	15 00		Mr. Dare's bill of gas-fitting,	61 50
"	" Connterfeit note,	5 00		Deduct donation,	11 50 50 00
28,	" on Real Estate,	1758 93		Mason & Son's bill of painting,	140 16
"	" Lukens & Montgomery,	25 00		Deduct lead from Davis & Riggs,	18 00 122 16
Oct. 28,	" on Real Estate Note and			Peters & Johnson's bill of range,	75 00
"	" Interest,	99 74		Deduct donation,	20 00 55 00
Jan.	" do	200 00		Rice & Kelly's bill of plumbing,	96 27
				Deduct donation,	40 00 56 27
				Mr. Drady's bill of sash and blinds,	22 14
					\$816 37
	CR.				
	By Cash received from Fair and meeting,	1978 00			
	" Mrs. Lee,	50 00			
	" Mrs. Mason,	42 50			
	By Donation from Lukens & Montgomery,	10 04			
		\$2081 30			
	Balance due Jno. H. Bringhurst,	\$222 24			

Figure 48: An excerpt on the expenses related to the renovation of the Mansion House from the Fourth Annual Report of the Penn Widows' Asylum of the City of Philadelphia for Indigent Widows and Singlewomen. Source: The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

As the Penn Widows' Asylum expanded their services to the community over the years, newspapers continually reported on fundraising efforts through campaigns and events for general management, maintenance, subsidies, and a continued effort to expand upon their mission. In addition, the institution continued to receive appropriations from the Pennsylvania Legislature, as well as bequests.²⁵ It appears the Mansion House was enlarged and renovated in 1867, which likely represents the in-kind addition at the southwest of the original eighteenth century building.

²³ The subject property may be eligible under Criterion A for its association with Charles Baldrey Austin. The source information for the information presented is from the following: Mary Margaret Cheek. "The Cooperative Venture of the Union Glass Works, Kensington, Pennsylvania, 1826-1842.", *Journal of Glass Studies*. (New York: Corning Museum of Glass, 1997), 93-140.

²⁴ *Public Ledger*, 22 May 1858, 4; and *Fourth Annual Report of the Penn Asylum of the City of Philadelphia for Indigent Widows and Single Women*. (Philadelphia: J. Richards, 1858), 7.

²⁵ *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 22 March 1876, 2; *The North Alabamian*, 21 January 1881, 1; *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 6 May 1882, 3.

A “Re-Opening” ceremony was held on November 7, 1867.²⁶ As shown in Figure 47, the Mansion House featured a wraparound porch long before its institutional occupant; however, which have been retained as part of the design with the upper story porches being added by The Penn Widows’ Asylum perhaps as part of the 1867 renovation. These improvements allowed the institution to provide housing for more than fifty women.²⁷ The building was again enlarged in 1887 by Alex J. Richard, contractor.²⁸



Figure 49. The Penn Widows’ Asylum in 1894, when the 1894 Annex was completed. Source: The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

While The Penn Widows’ Asylum was well-known as being “old-fashioned and homelike,” that did not stop the efforts to further develop the property in the late-nineteenth century.²⁹ The first step of what would comprise their greatest development and improvement project was acquiring the property at the northwest corner of E. Susquehanna Avenue and Belgrade Street, a visual understanding of which can be obtained by referencing Figures 35, 36, and 37. The institution was able to procure the property, improved with a three-story brick dwelling, on December 20, 1892 from Harriet A. Lovett, the widow of John R. Lovett, for \$4,075.³⁰ This purchase was followed by the creation of plans and taking bids for construction, which occurred in August 1893.³¹ The cornerstone of the 1894 Annex and the 1887-94 Annex Wing was laid with great ceremony for a

²⁶ *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 5 November 1867, 5.

²⁷ “Penn Asylum,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 9 January 1874, 2.

²⁸ “Building and Real Estate Notes,” *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide* (hereafter *PREBG*) 2 (16 May 1887): 220.

²⁹ “The Penn’s Widow Asylum Tea,” *The Times*, 4 December 1885, 3.

³⁰ Deed: Harriet A. Lovett, et. al. to The Penn Asylum for Indigent Widows and Single Women of the District of Kensington in the County of Philadelphia, 20 December 1892, PDBk T. G., No. 256, p. 202, CAP.

³¹ “Building and Real Estate Notes,” *PREBG* 8 (16 August 1893): 521; “Building Permits,” *PREBG* 8 (29 November 1893): 736

building that would more than double the capacities of the institution.³² The annex was described as “extending 112 feet on Susquehanna avenue, is 38 feet wide, with a 50-foot wing in the rear, connecting it with the old building” comprised of brick walls of “the most ornamental character.” The first floor would contain a parlor and other rooms, while the upper floors were devoted to bedrooms with bathrooms, including “hot and cold water.”³³ A very important feature of the 1894 Annex that brought the Asylum in line most of other old age homes in Philadelphia of the period were the porches the faced an inner courtyard of green space. The 1894 improvements not only increased capacities, it also amplified the need for fundraising, as well as the continual improvement of the organizational mission and its delivery. Construction of the 1894 Annex and the 1887-94 Annex Wing was completed by Joseph F. Myers, contractor.³⁴

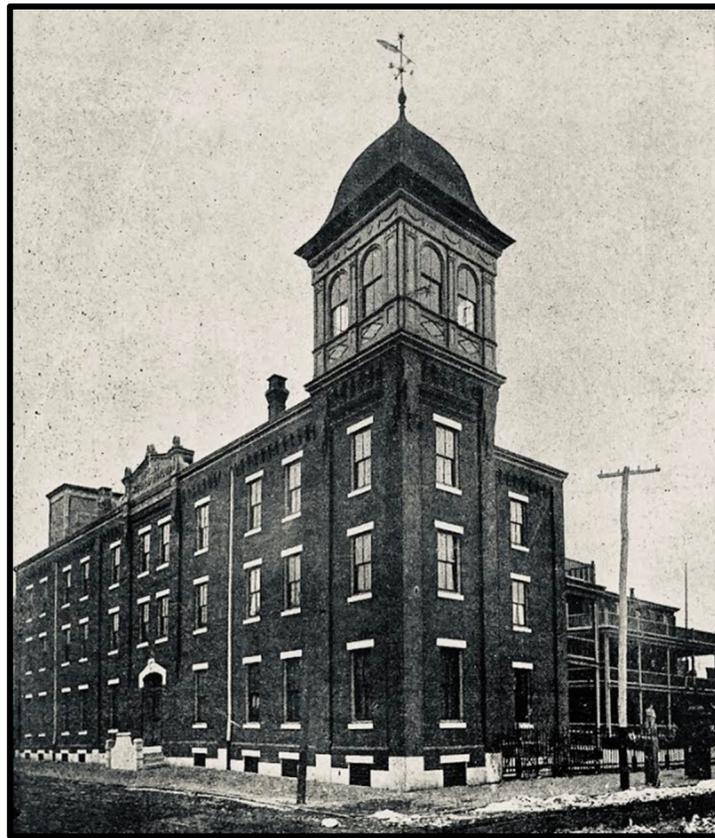


Figure 50. Looking north at the 1894 Annex at the corner of E. Susquehanna Avenue and Belgrade Street with the Mansion House in the background on right. Source: The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Ten years later in 1904, Meyers would return to construct a three-story “fire tower” at a cost of \$11,500, which is known in this nomination as the 1904 Kitchen/Laundry/Fire Tower on Fletcher Street.³⁵ No major additions to the facility would occur for more than fifty years, until a one-story, red brick addition to the southwest elevation of the Mansion House was completed in 1958 with

³² *The News Journal* (Wilmington, Delaware), 23 November 1893, 4; and “Penn Asylum’s Corner-Stone,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 16 March 1894, 8.

³³ “With Silver Trowel,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 23 March 1894, 7.

³⁴ “The Latest News In Real Estate,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 22 November 1893, 5.

³⁵ *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 22 July 1904, 9; “Building Permits,” *PREBG* 19 (23 March 1905): 187.

an elevator to follow in 1967.³⁶ Substantial renovations and restorations of The Penn Widows' Asylum took place in the early 1980s and again in 2000, the latter through a bequest made by Sarah Edenborn.³⁷



Figure 51. Looking north at E. Susquehanna Avenue east of Belgrade Street with the 1894 Annex of The Penn Widows' Asylum at center in 1910. Source: Jane Campbell Scrapbook, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Largely completed in its present form with the 1904 Kitchen/Laundry/Fire Tower and Fletcher Street addition, The Penn Widows' Asylum used its evolving facility to serve elderly women exclusively for roughly 140 years and the elderly, in general, for nearly 170 years.



Figure 52. A photograph of an unknown elderly resident of The Penn Widows' Asylum. Source: Penn Home Facebook Page.

³⁶ Application for Zoning Permit, 30 January 1958, 1401 E. Susquehanna Ave., Philadelphia Zoning Archive.

³⁷ "Three Centuries of Caring," 10.

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This nomination was completed by the Keeping Society of Philadelphia with the primary authors as Kelly E. Wiles, Architectural Historian; and Oscar Beisert, Architectural Historian and Historic Preservationist with research and editorial assistance from Ken Milano, Historian; J.M. Duffin, Archivist and Historian; and Michelle Shuman, Fishtown Resident. The Keeping Society of Philadelphia also offers special praise for Joaquin Moreland-Sender, Business Operations Manager and Research of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania; Mary Cheek Mills, Glass Specialist; the past work of Rich Remer, Historian; John Manton, Historian; and Steve J. Peitzman, Medical Historian.

The following repositories and sites were used to create the nomination: Ancestry.com, Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Newspapers.com, and Proquest Historical Newspapers

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APPENDIX A

WEST HILL DEVELOPMENT PRIOR TO THE PENN WIDOWS' ASYLUM



Figure 53. A ca. 1836-1845 painting of West Hill from Belgrade Street above Susquehanna Avenue, during the ownership of Charles B. Austin and Ann Liseter Austin, showing the core Mansion House, built ca.1769, in its last years as a country seat. The painting shows a hot house and a grapery on left, the latter of which may have dated to the eighteenth century. Source: Mary Mills, Historic Glass Specialist, via the duPont family.

The history of the subject property begins in the middle of the eighteenth century with the settling of the Anthony Palmer estate in the village he created called Kensington. After Anthony Palmer's death in 1749, the heirs began paying final debts and dividing the unsold land in Kensington. In the process Mary Leech brought a suit against the estate for money owed her and forced a sheriff sale of several lots in April 1750. Among these were five lots containing about five acres on "south-side of the little hill, at the upper end of Kensington ... affording a most pleasant prospect of the river Delaware, and to Frankford road."³⁸ One of these lots was a relatively small triangular lot at northeast corner of present-day Belgrade (formerly West) St and E. Susquehanna Avenue (formerly Wood St) – comprising the largest part of the subject property – which was purchased by Charles West of Northern Liberties Township, shipwright.³⁹

Charles West, Sr. (1690–1761) was a Quaker and one of Philadelphia's leading shipbuilders. He was producer of "some of the most celebrated vessels in the colonies" at his shipyards across from

³⁸ Sheriff sale notice, *The Pennsylvania Gazette* 26 April 1750, 3.

³⁹ Deed Poll: Richard Sewell, sheriff, to Charles West, of Northern Liberties Township, shipwright, for £10 10s, 5 June 1750, Common Pleas Court Sheriff Deed Book A-1, p. 32, City Archives of Philadelphia (hereafter CAP).

his residence at Front and Vine Streets⁴⁰ Charles inherited the business from his father James and expanded it greatly in the eighteenth century. Some of the money he made he invested in mortgages, like the one that ended up giving him an interest in all of Anthony Palmer's 191½-acre Kensington estate, and real estate (land and ground rents).⁴¹ In addition to properties around his home and shipyards, Charles purchased several water front lots in Kensington and a twenty-acre property on Gunners' Run.⁴² The twenty-acre property was located along present-day Norris Street and Aramingo Avenue and butted the northeast side of the lot purchased in 1750, thus forming a portion of the subject property. In his will, Charles devised the triangular lot and twenty-acre property to his sons Charles, Jr. and James with the provision that James receive the portion near Isaac Norris' land and Charles the southwestern half.⁴³

Charles West, Jr. (1725–1795) chose not to follow his father's business but rather joined the ranks of Philadelphia's prosperous Quaker merchants. Throughout the 1780s his taxable wealth ranged between £2,221 and £4,245 with an occupation that fluctuated between merchant and gentleman.⁴⁴ Perhaps the hallmark of his status was the ownership of a "country seat." Beginning 1769, Charles, Jr. was regularly taxed for a country seat.⁴⁵ In 1774 there were only 42 merchants out of 296 (or 12%) who were taxed for country seats.⁴⁶ Known in the nomination as the Mansion House, this house now forms part of the subject property. Charles confirmed his title to the country seat in 1779 when he and his nephew James West, Jr., had the property they inherited surveyed.⁴⁷

⁴⁰ Kathryn Knowles Lasdow, "'Spirit of Improvement': Construction, Conflict, and Community in Early-National Port Cities," PhD diss., Columbia University, 2018, 42.

⁴¹ In 1734, Anthony Palmer mortgage his Kensington property to Charles West for £266 due within a year. When Palmer was unable to pay it, the portion of the title of the property became vested in West and he had to sign off on all the sales of Kensington properties after 1735 (eg. Deeds of [Lease and] Release Tripartite: Anthony Palmer, of Kensington in Shackmaxon in Northern Liberties in city, esquire, and Thomasine, his wife, first part, Charles West, of the city of Philadelphia, shipwright, and Sarah, his wife, second part, to John Norris, of the city, shipwright, [23 &] 24 November 1737, PDBk H., No. 1, p. 112, CAP).

⁴² Deed: Anthony Palmer and Thomasine, his wife, to Charles West, for £287 12s, 18 May 1743, PDBk S.H.F., No. 2, p. 468, CAP.

⁴³ Will of Charles West, of Northern Liberties, shipwright, 5 August 1761, probated 24 August 1761, Will Book M, p. 182, Philadelphia Register of Wills. The will describes the property as "Plantation and Tract of Land in Kensington ... joining to Isaac Norris's plantation" and mentions that West Street (now Belgrade Street) was to be the access road for James West through Charles Jr.'s portion of the property. It also contains provisions for James' access to springs on Charles Jr.'s portion.

⁴⁴ Provincial and State Tax Lists for Northern Liberties, Philadelphia County, "Pennsylvania, Tax and Exoneration, 1768-1801" Ancestry.com

⁴⁵ Provincial Tax Lists for Northern Liberties, Philadelphia County, 1774, "Pennsylvania, Tax and Exoneration, 1768–1801" Ancestry.com

⁴⁶ Thomas M. Doerflinger, *A Vigorous Spirit of Enterprise: Merchants and Economic Development in Revolutionary Philadelphia* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1986), 131–32.

⁴⁷ Deed of Partition between Charles West, of Northern Liberties of the City, merchant, and Hannah, his wife, and James West, of the same place, gentleman, 10 April 1779, PDBk D., No. 4, p. 39, CAP. Charles' portion of the 20-acre property was 9 acres 145 perches in addition to the triangular lot from 1750.

Year	Item	Value	Quantity	Unit
1769	Charles West Dwelling	\$40	24	
	2 Lands		3	
	2 Horses, 1 Cow		1	13 4
	\$25 of John Coppardicate		15	
	\$36 of Peter Post		21	12
	\$12 of Friedrich Verner		7	4
	\$10 of Rich. Mason		10	
	\$14 of Nicholas Brund		8	8
	\$9 10 of Thomas Hurdick		5	14
	\$10 of William Hood		6	
	\$18 of John Lane		10	16
	\$2 of Henry Starnock		2	
	Vacant Land Cable Lane		8	
	Wharf and Store \$60		36	
	3 Acres in Kensington		3	
60 Acres in Lower Dublin		13	10	
Country Seat		6		
			181	17 4
			39	17 6
			141	19 10
1772	Charles West, Merchant Dwelling	30	18	
	2 Servants		3	
	1 Horse			13 4
	\$20 of William Nichols		12	
	\$8 of William Johnson		4	16
	\$36 of Peter Post		21	12
	Country Seat		12	
	11 Acres Land near Baltimore		4	16
	GR of Richard Mason		10	
	\$20 of Joseph Copenthwaite		12	
	\$12 of Valentine Brown		7	4
	\$12 of George Starnock		7	4
	GR of Edward Cutbush		2	10
	Wharf & Store in his Possession		30	
	GR of Seymour Hart		27	
Vacant Lot on Cable Lane		3		
195 Acres Land in uppr Dublin		16	16	
			192	11 4
			4	17 6
			188	13 10

Figure 54. 1769 (left) and 1772 (right) Provincial Tax List entries for Charles West, Jr. showing his tax for a “Country Seat.” Source: Northern Liberties, Philadelphia County, “Pennsylvania, Tax and Exoneration, 1768–1801” Ancestry.com

The country seat was retained by Charles West, Jr. for the remainder of his life. In his will he gave his wife Hannah (Cooper) West (1733–1813) the contents and the use for life of his dwelling house and “our Mansion house [sic] at Kensington.” After her death he devised the “Mansion House and Lot at Kensington” along with some other properties and ground rents to his five children: Charles, Hannah, Sarah, Mary and Ann.⁴⁸ In 1817 the West children divided up the “Mansion House” and lots in Kensington among them. Sarah (West) Bacon (1757–1823) and her husband Joseph Bacon (1756–1829) received the “Mansion House” at the northeast corner of West Street (present-day Belgrade Street) and Wood Street (present-day E. Susquehanna Avenue).⁴⁹ After Sarah and Joseph’s death their children divided up the estate in 1829 and the “Mansion House” was allotted to David Bacon (1787–1846).⁵⁰ It is unclear how the Bacon family used the house during this period. It is possible they continued to use it as a residence or rented it out.

⁴⁸ Will of Charles West, of Northern Liberties of the City, merchant, 9 September 1793, probated 27 April 1795, Philadelphia Will Book X, p. 227–30, Philadelphia Register of Wills.

⁴⁹ Deed of Partition between Charles West, of the Philadelphia County, Joseph Bacon, of the same, and Sarah, his wife, Mary Starr, of the City of Philadelphia, widow, Joseph R. Jenks, of Northern Liberties of the City, and Ann, his wife, 26 September 1817, PDBk M.R., No. 17, p. 144, CAP. Hannah (West) Norton and her husband Thomas released their rights to the property in 1814.

⁵⁰ Deed: Charles W. Bacon, gentleman, Thomas Bacon, gentleman, and Elizabeth, his wife, Samuel Bacon, iron monger, and Mary Bacon, all of Northern Liberties of the city, to David Bacon, of Northern Liberties of the City, carpenter, 18 May 1829, PDBk G.W.R., No. 29, p. 732, CAP. At this time was reduced to a fairly basic lot bordered by present-day Belgrade St., E. Susquehanna Ave., a little above Gaul Street and Norris Street. The small triangular lot at the corner Belgrade and Norris Streets was broken off from the original lot.

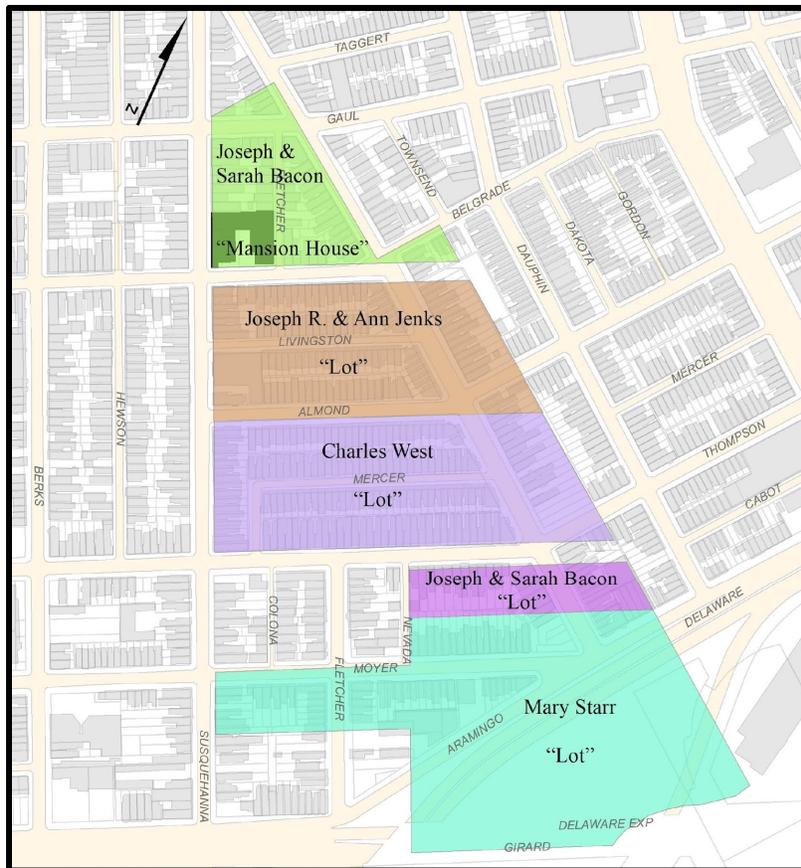


Figure 55. Plan based on the 1817 division of the Charles West, Jr. heirs of the “Mansion House” property in Kensington noting in quotations the description of the properties in the deed. Source: Deed of Partition between Charles West et alia, 26 September 1817, PDBk M.R., No. 17, p. 144, CAP

In 1836, the subject property passed out of the West/Bacon family hands. David and Margaret Bacon sold the Mansion House and lot to Charles Baldrey Austin (1787–1840).⁵¹ Austin was born in England and came to America with his wife in 1818 first settling in New York. When he came to Philadelphia he worked for the Union Glass Works in Kensington and eventually became one of the owners of the cooperative flint glass company.⁵² Exemplifying his success, Austin made the subject property his home. The Mansion House became known as *West Hill*—no doubt because of its location on “an eminence – one of the highest in the District” and the connection to the West family.⁵³

⁵¹ This sale was transacted through a strawman. Deed: David Bacon, of Northern Liberties of the City, house carpenter, and Margaret E., his wife, to Jacob Juvenall, of the District of Spring Garden, starch manufacturer, for \$4,500, 22 February 1836, PDBk A.M., No. 74, p. 181; Deed: Jacob Juvenall, of the District of Spring Garden, starch manufacturer, and Sarah, his wife, to Charles B. Austin, of Kensington, glass manufacturer, for \$6,000, PDBk A.M., No. 74, p. 182, CAP.

⁵² Mary Margaret Cheek, “The Cooperative Venture of the Union Glass Works, Kensington, Pennsylvania, 1826–1842,” *Journal of Glass Studies* 39 (1997): 93–140. The subject property may be eligible under Criterion A for its association with Charles Baldrey Austin.

⁵³ Auction broadside, property of John B. Austin, 14 August 1845, Estate of Charles B. Austin Estate, Vol. 39, p. 652, Case Files, Orphans’ Court of Philadelphia.

Unfortunately, Austin's enjoyment of *West Hill* was brief. After his death in 1840, his widow, Ann (Liseter) Austin, struggled to retain the property. Since most of the Charles' wealth was tied to his share of the Union Glass Works, it was hard for Ann to support the costs of life at *West Hill*. In 1845, Ann petitioned the Philadelphia Orphans' Court to grant permission to sell *West Hill* and it went up for auction on 9 September 1845. Fortunately for Ann, her son-in-law John Capewell made the highest bid and acquired the property.⁵⁴ This allowed Ann to continue to live in the house as late as 1849.⁵⁵

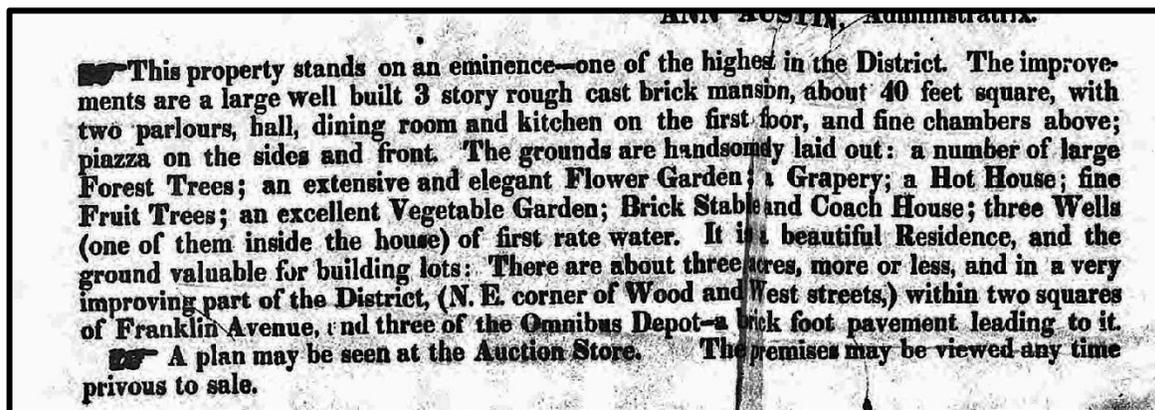


Figure 56. Detail from 1845 auction broadside for the sale of *West Hill* describing the subject property. Source: Estate of Charles B. Austin Estate, Vol. 39, p. 652, Case Files, Orphans' Court of Philadelphia.

The Capewell family held onto *West Hill*, the subject property, for another eleven years. The residential growth of Kensington reached his area by the 1850s and John Capewell decided to divide up the property into several lots. *West Hill* became part of Lot No. 4 in the subdivision and was sold in 1856.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Deed: Ann Austin, of the District of Kensington, administratrix of the estate of Charles B. Austin, late of the same, to John Capewell, of Kaighns Point, Camden County, New Jersey, for \$7,550, 1 October 1845, PDBk R.L.L., No. 51, p. 290, CAP.

⁵⁵ The last year she appears at this location in the Philadelphia city directories is 1849. In 1850 she is enumerated with her daughter and son-in-law in Camden, New Jersey in the Federal Census.

⁵⁶ Deed: John Capewell, of Kaighns Point, Camden County, New Jersey, glass manufacturer, and Sarah L., his wife, to Aaron B. Cooley, of the city of Philadelphia, merchant, for \$5,400, 29 May 1856, PDBk R.D.W., No. 88, p. 165, CAP.

ORPHANS' COURT SALE.

Estate of Charles B. Austin, dec'd.

THOMAS & SON, AUCTIONEERS.

Large and Superior
RESIDENCE,
WITH ELEGANT GARDEN,
Large Lot of Ground, &c.
N. LIBETIES.

Pursuant to an order of the Orphans' Court for the City and County of Philadelphia,

WILL BE SOLD AT PUBLIC SALE,

On TUESDAY, September 9, 1845,

AT HALF SEVEN O'CLOCK IN THE EVENING.

At the Philadelphia Exchange,

The following described property, late of CHARLES B. AUSTIN, deceased:

as sh
All that certain messuage or tenement, and lot or piece of ground thereunto belonging, situate in Kensington, in the County of Philadelphia; beginning at the north-east corner of Wood and West streets, thence extending by the said Wood street, north 20 degrees and four minutes, west eighteen perches and $\frac{1}{10}$ of a perch, thence by land of John Bomb, north 42 degrees and a half, east nine perches and four-tenths of a perch, thence by land of Joseph Parker Norris, Esq., south 50 degrees and 1/2 minutes, east about 25 perches and 82 hundredths of a perch to the said West street, thence extending by the said West street south sixth-eight degrees fifteen minutes, west about 2 1/2 perches to the place of beginning; together with the buildings and improvements thereon.

By the Court, JACOB LEVVIS, Clerk O. C.

ANN AUSTIN, Administratrix.

This property stands on an eminence—one of the highest in the District. The improvements are a large well built 3 story rough cast brick mansion, about 40 feet square, with two parlours, hall, dining room and kitchen on the first floor, and fine chambers above; piazza on the sides and front. The grounds are handsomely laid out: a number of large Forest Trees; an extensive and elegant Flower Garden; a Grapery; a Hot House; fine Fruit Trees; an excellent Vegetable Garden; Brick Stable and Coach House; three Wells (one of them inside the house) of first rate water. It is a beautiful Residence, and the ground valuable for building lots: There are about three acres, more or less, and in a very improving part of the District, (N. E. corner of Wood and West streets,) within two squares of Franklin Avenue, and three of the Omnibus Depot—a brick foot pavement leading to it.

A plan may be seen at the Auction Store. The premises may be viewed any time previous to sale.

M. THOMAS & SON,

Phila, August 14, 1845. Auctioneers, 93 Walnut St

Figure 57. 1845 auction broadside for the sale of *West Hill* describing the subject property. Source: Estate of Charles B. Austin Estate, Vol. 39, p. 652, Case Files, Orphans' Court of Philadelphia.

and panels below and pilaster with turned flutes to doors &
 windows, wood pilaster mantel & side closet, dresser with doors &
 drawers, 9 ft story; a plain back door frame panel door in staining
 and a portico over it, an 18 light of 10 ft window over the first landing
 and a 9 light ditto over the second; Open newell stair open story,
 return noys, turned newell foot balluster, mahogany rail, a
 flight of plain Cellar stairs,
 The second story is in 4 room Hall & Stairway in the Center,
 a doorway front in the Hall on to a balcony front, dark door inside &
 outside double shutters to it, 4 18 light of 10 ft windows front,
 4 ditto on the south side, 2 ditto back, and 2 windows north
 side, 1/2 double locked passage & single closet doors, Marble pilaster
 mantel in 2 rooms, 2 closets in each room, precious Oak moulding
 wallboard, 9 ft story. The third story is in 4 rooms with
 windows the same 9 lights of 10 ft glass in each, dark single hung,
 story 5 ft 3 high on the low side, Ceiling partly to rafters, single
 locked closet & double locked passage doors, closets in 3 rooms;
 a precious portico front & south end 8 ft 6 in wide with fluted columns
 to it, neat balustrade and surmounted with a ballustrade turned
 balluster to it white pine floor, ceiling lined with planed boarding,
 and a portico or shed with turned posts and single pitched roof
 on the north side,
 D. H. Flickner Surveyor

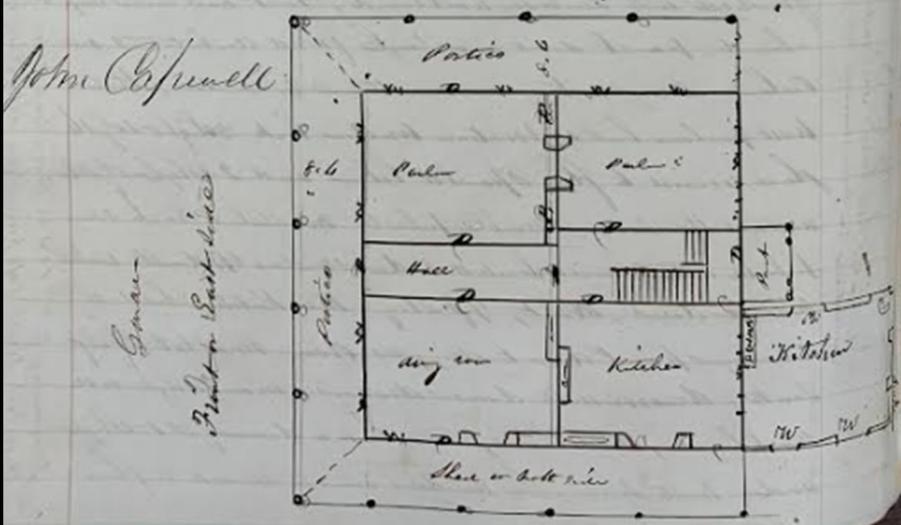


Figure 59. Policy No. 7970, Franklin Fire Insurance, August 7, 1847. Source: The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

APPENDIX B: THE WOMEN FOUNDERS OF THE PENN WIDOWS' ASYLUM

The Penn Widows' Asylum was founded in 1852 by four local Kensington (today Fishtown) women: Elizabeth Van Dusen, Margaret Creamer, Elizabeth Keen, and Ann Lee. Below are biographies for each of the founders authored by Rich Remer, Historian:

Elizabeth Van Dusen was born in Kensington ca.1800, the daughter of John Crist (or Christ) and his wife, Ann Theiss. Elizabeth's grandfather, Michael Crist, had emigrated from Germany to Pennsylvania in the mid-1700's. He was a farmer "near Kensington" when the American Revolution broke out, and served in the local militia unit. Tragically, he was shot by British troops encamped on his farm while drawing water from his own well. Elizabeth married Matthew van Dusen Jr. on May 3, 1817 at Kensington Methodist ("Old Brick") Church. The Van Dusens were prominent Kensington shipwrights, and lived in the old Fairman mansion on Beach Street until its demolition in 1825. Elizabeth was the mother of nine children, and was a widow herself when she died at her residence, 1312 Beach Street, on February 8, 1868.⁵⁷

Margaret Creamer (or Kramer) was born in Kensington ca.1798. She, and her sister Elizabeth Keen, were the daughters of another prominent shipwright, Thomas Vaughan (1757-1842), and his wife, Mary Bryan (1759-1843).⁵⁸ Their five brothers were all shipwrights as well; the family and their descendants practiced shipbuilding down through the twentieth century. Margaret married Matthias Creamer (1787-1853) at Kensington Methodist, in March of 1817. The Creamers, like the Crists, were an old Kensington family of German descent. Matthias Creamer was a ship carpenter and active member of "Old Brick," where he served as Class Leader and Sunday School Superintendent.⁵⁹ Margaret was the mother of eight children and, like Elizabeth Van Dusen, a widow in her old age, residing for many years at 1029 Marlborough Street. She died on April 10, 1886.⁶⁰

Elizabeth Keen, the sister of Margaret Creamer, was born February 5, 1793, the daughter of Thomas and Mary Vaughan. She married Jacob Keen, a shipwright, on September 10, 1812, at Kensington Methodist Church.⁶¹ Her husband was a member of the prolific Keen family, who traced their ancestry back to Joeran Kyjn, one of the original Swedish settlers of the Delaware Valley. The Keens, like the Vaughans, had been involved in shipbuilding for generations, both in Southwark and Kensington.⁶² Elizabeth Keen was the mother of two daughters. Sadly, she died shortly after helping found The Penn Widows' Asylum on September 23, 1855.⁶³

Ann Lee is the least known of The Penn Widows' Asylum founders. She was born ca.1795 in Kensington, possibly the daughter of James Brusstar and his wife, Ann Cheesman.⁶⁴ The Brusstars and Cheesmans were New York shipwrights; shortly before the Revolution, the four Brusstar

⁵⁷ "Pennsylvania, Philadelphia City Death Certificates, 1803–1915." Index. FamilySearch, Salt Lake City, Utah, 2008, 2010. From originals housed at the Philadelphia City Archives. "Death Records."

⁵⁸ *Find A Grave*. Find A Grave. <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi>.

⁵⁹ *Find A Grave*. Find A Grave. <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi>.

⁶⁰ Ancestry.com. *Pennsylvania, Wills and Probate Records, 1683-1993* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2015.

⁶¹ *Historic Pennsylvania Church and Town Records*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁶² *Find A Grave*. <http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi>.

⁶³ *Historic Pennsylvania Church and Town Records*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

⁶⁴ *Historic Pennsylvania Church and Town Records*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

brothers moved to Kensington, where they became shipwrights and mastmakers. Ann Brusstar married (Edward) George Lee at Kensington Methodist Church on July 8, 1830. He was an Englishman by birth, and a ship rigger by occupation.⁶⁵ Ann Lee was living at Marlborough and Allen Streets, close by her own family's homes on Brusstars Alley, when she died on August 20, 1859.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Seventh Census of the United States, 1850; (National Archives Microfilm Publication M432, 1009 rolls); Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29; National Archives, Washington, D.C.

⁶⁶ *Historic Pennsylvania Church and Town Records*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Historical Society of Pennsylvania.