

**ADDRESS: 5151 GERMANTOWN AVE**

Name of Resource: The Major Philip R. Freas House

Proposed Action: Designation

Property Owner: 5147-51 GERMANTOWN AVE LLC

Nominator: SoLo/Germantown Civic Association

Staff Contact: Megan Cross Schmitt, [megan.schmitt@phila.gov](mailto:megan.schmitt@phila.gov)

**OVERVIEW:** This nomination proposes to designate the building at 5151 Germantown Avenue and list it on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The nomination contends that the building satisfies Criteria for Designation A and J.

The nomination argues that the building is a representative dwelling of the eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and early twentieth-century development of Germantown, therefore satisfying Criterion A. Under Criterion A the nomination also suggests that the building is significant as the former dwelling of the prominent journalist, publisher, writer, and newspaperman Major Philip Rapine Freas. He occupied the subject building from around 1830 to 1884, during which time the house was associated with the publication of the *Germantown Telegraph*, the first English-language newspaper in Germantown.

The nomination contends that the building exemplifies the commercial, economic, and political heritage of Germantown Avenue and Germantown, as it evolved from a German village in Philadelphia County to a lush residential suburb and on to a dense residential neighborhood in the consolidated City of Philadelphia, satisfying Criterion J.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** The staff recommends that the nomination demonstrates that the building at 5151 Germantown 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: **5151 Germantown Avenue**

Postal code: **19144**

#### 2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: **The Major Philip R. Freas House**

Current Name: **Zakia's Brow Bar**

#### 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: Commercial/Residential

#### 5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

#### 6. DESCRIPTION

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

#### 7. SIGNIFICANCE

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

Period of Significance (from year to year): **ca.1723-63 to 1919**

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: **ca.1723-63; 1830s (enlarged); 1899 (storefront)**

Architects: **Unknown**

Builders: **Samuel M. W. Kohl, Builder (storefront, 1899)**

Original owner: **Johannes Eckstein, Ropemaker**

Significant person: **Major Philip R. Freas, Editor and Publisher of the *Germantown Telegraph***

**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: **SoLo Germantown Civic Association RCO**

Author: **Oscar Beisert, Architectural Historian  
Keeping Society of Philadelphia**

Date: **11 January 2021**

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: January 11, 2021

☒ Correct-Complete ☐ Incorrect-Incomplete

Date: 1 February 2021

Date of Notice Issuance: 1 February 2021

Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: The business known as 5147-51 Germantown Ave LLC

Address: 26 Oxford Drive

City: Warminster

State: PA

Postal Code: 18974

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

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

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

☐ Designated ☐ Rejected

12/7/18

**NOMINATION**  
**FOR THE**  
**PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**



Figure 1. Looking north at the subject property. Source: Pictometry, Atlas, City of Philadelphia.

**THE MAJOR PHILIP R. FREAS HOUSE**

**BUILT CA. 1726-63**

**5151 GERMANTOWN AVENUE  
GERMANTOWN  
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA**

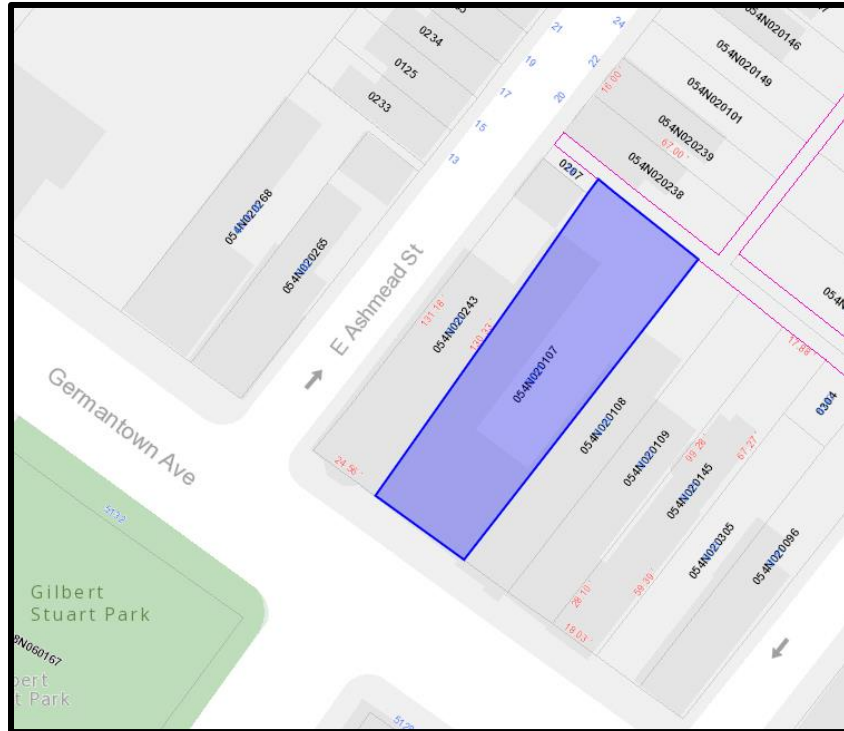


Figure 2. The boundary for the designation of the subject property is outlined in purple. Source: Atlas, City of Philadelphia.

## 5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundary description of the proposed designation is as follows:

ALL THAT CERTAIN lot or piece of ground with the buildings and improvements thereon Situate on the Northeast side of Germantown Avenue,

BEGINNING on the Northeast side of Germantown Avenue or Main Street at the distance of Twenty-four feet Six and Three-quarters Inches Southeastwardly from the Southeast side of Ashmead Street as widened to the width of Thirty feet by the addition of Five feet on the Southeasterly side thereof; thence extending by ground conveyed by Philip R. Freas to James T. Burns North Thirty-nine degrees, Thirty-six minutes, East One hundred Thirty feet Four inches to the Southwest side of a certain Five feet wide alley extending from the said Ashmead Street to Collom or Jefferson Street; thence along said alley South Forty-eight degrees East Forty-two feet Ten inches to other ground of the said Philip R. Freas; thence by the same South Forty-two degrees, Two minutes West and on a line which runs parallel with said Collum or Jefferson Street One hundred Twenty-eight feet Nine and One-half inches to the Northeast side of the said Germantown Avenue or Main Street and thence along the same North fifty degrees, Fourteen minutes West Thirty-seven feet Six and Five-eighths Inches to the place of beginning.

BEING No. 5151 Germantown Avenue.

Tax Account No. 871283000

Philadelphia Deed Registry No. 054N02-0107





Figure 3. Looking north at the primary (southwest) and side (southeast) elevations of the Freas House. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2020.

## 6. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Located just southeast of Ashmead Street on what is colloquially known as the “east side” (actually the northeast side) of Germantown Avenue, the Major Philip R. Freas House at 5151 Germantown Avenue is a substantial semi-detached house that appears to have been built as a free-standing dwelling that was enlarged over time. Records indicate that the building began as a two-story stone dwelling in the eighteenth century, which was enlarged by Major Philip R. Freas soon after he began residing at the property in ca. 1830 to combine elements of the Federal and Greek Revival stylistic periods. It also appears that the building was further upgraded in the mid-nineteenth century with Italianate brackets and the addition of the storefront was added in 1899. Ubiquitous in northwest Philadelphia being of rubble stone schist construction with a side gable roof, the subject building is unusual in that it stands three-and-one-half-stories, defying the normal two-and-one-half-story formula applied to eighteenth and early nineteenth century Germantown. The building features a main block, a side addition, a piazza, and a two-part wing.

The primary (southwest) elevation of the main block features a three-and-one-half-story façade clad in a smooth-faced stucco treatment that spans three bays. The ground floor is comprised of the original pedestrian doorway opening at the northwest followed by storefront that was an historic alteration, though it features modern infill materials today. Faux stone has been added at the base of the first floor to appear as a foundation. The second and third floors each feature three symmetrically placed windows that have been adapted to a smaller size, though the original fenestration pattern remains. Within the half-story a small gabled-fronted dormer stands at the center of the roof, which likely dates to the first half of the nineteenth century. A one-story addition appends the side (southeast) elevation of the main block, extending to the rear. This fenestration features a three-part mullion window and a pedestrian door. The side (southeast) elevation of the main block is entirely visible above the first floor, being a blind stucco-clad wall that terminates

at the roof. The overhang that forms the eaves features roughly sixteen Italianate brackets that appear to date to the mid-century century. The side (northwest) elevation is entirely obscured by an attached three-story structure, though similar Italianate brackets, as well as the projecting eaves of the side-gable roof rise above the building and remain visible to-date.



Figure 4. Top: Looking northeast at the subject property's primary (southwest) elevation. Figure 5. Bottom: Looking north at the subject property's primary (southwest) and side (southeast) elevations. Courtesy Oscar Beisert.

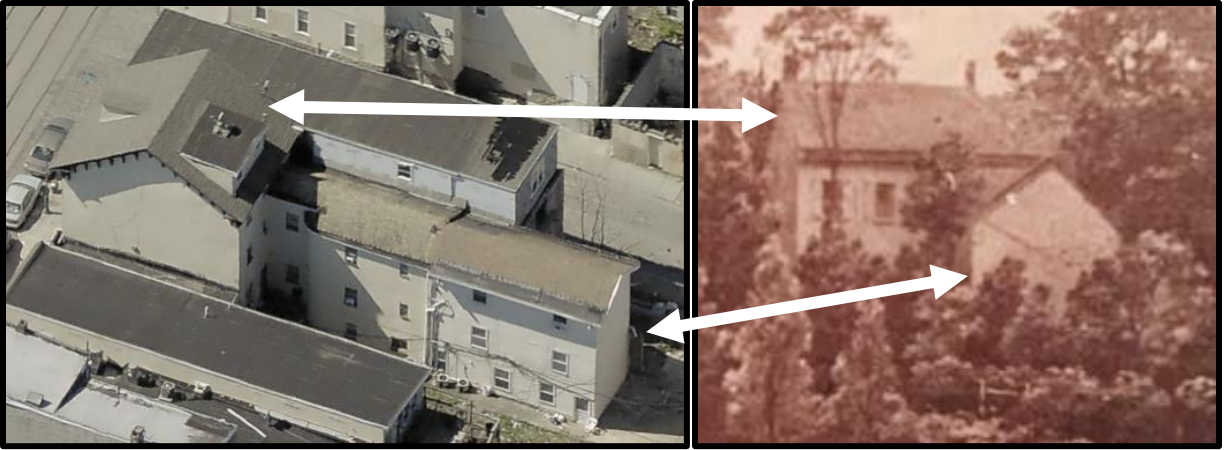


Figure 6. Left: Looking west at the side (southeast) and rear (northeast) elevations of the main block, a piazza, and a two-part wing. Source: Pictometry, Atlas, City of Philadelphia, 2018. Figure 7. Right: A view of the rear (northeast) elevations of the main block and rear wing, showing that there was no dormer historically so that the shed dormer was an historic adaptation to make the upper floor more usable. Source: The Shoemaker Collection, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

The rear (northeast) elevation is largely obscured by the appending piazza and two-part rear wing. Only two bays are visible with a window and pedestrian door at the ground floor, followed by at least one window per each floor above. The rear (northeast) roof elevation features a large shed dormer. The subject building features a typical piazza appending the main block, which slightly narrower than the appending, two-part rear wing. The piazza features two windows on its only visible (southwest) elevation. A low-slung gable roof extends from the rear (northeast) elevation of the main block, serving the southwesterly, earlier rear wing.

The rear wing appends from the piazza in the typical manner found in Philadelphia with a curved wall that extends from the southeast elevation of the piazza to form the southeast elevation of the rear wing that stands three-full floors, an unusual feature for a Germantown house as they typically are. The fenestration is comprised of two windows per floor. The second component of the rear el extends from the first with a break in the two gabled roof structures. The fenestration of the southeast elevation of the second component of the rear wing features four irregularly placed openings, including a door at the northeast. Two symmetrically placed windows per floor rise above. The rear (northeast) elevation is a blind wall clad in smooth-faced stucco.





Figure 8. A receipt for Miss Chew dated 1854 from the Office of the Telegraph, signed by W. F. Smith. Source: The Chew Papers, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

## 7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Major Philip R. Freas House at 5151 Germantown Avenue is a significant historic resource that merits designation by the Philadelphia Historical Commission and inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Located in the Germantown neighborhood of Philadelphia, the building 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.

The period of significance is from ca.1726-63, the period in which the subject house appears to have been first constructed by the Eckstein family through the occupancy and ownership of Major Philip R. Freas from ca.1830 to 1884 to 1919, when the ownership of longtime commercial and residential occupants Edward and Maggie Albert ended.

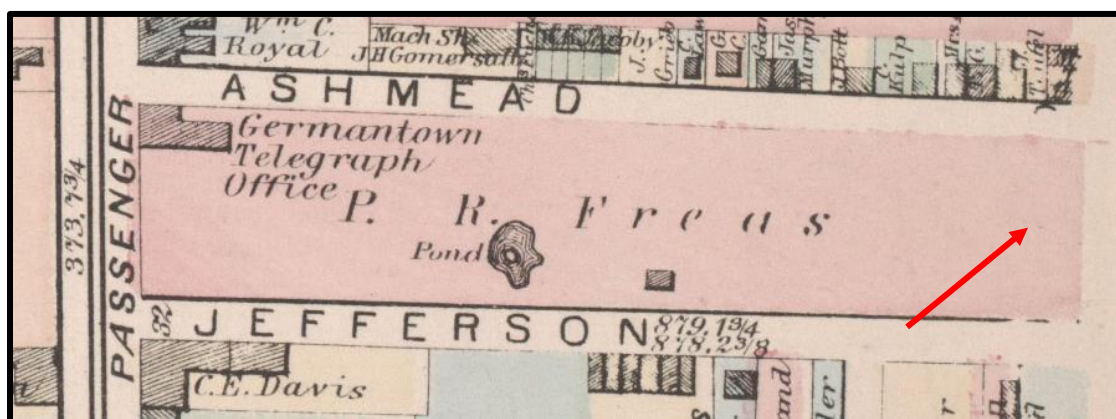


Figure 9. The Major Philip R. Freas House at 5151 Germantown Avenue in 1871. Source: G.M. Hopkins, *Atlas of Germantown, 22<sup>nd</sup> Ward* (1871), Plate II.

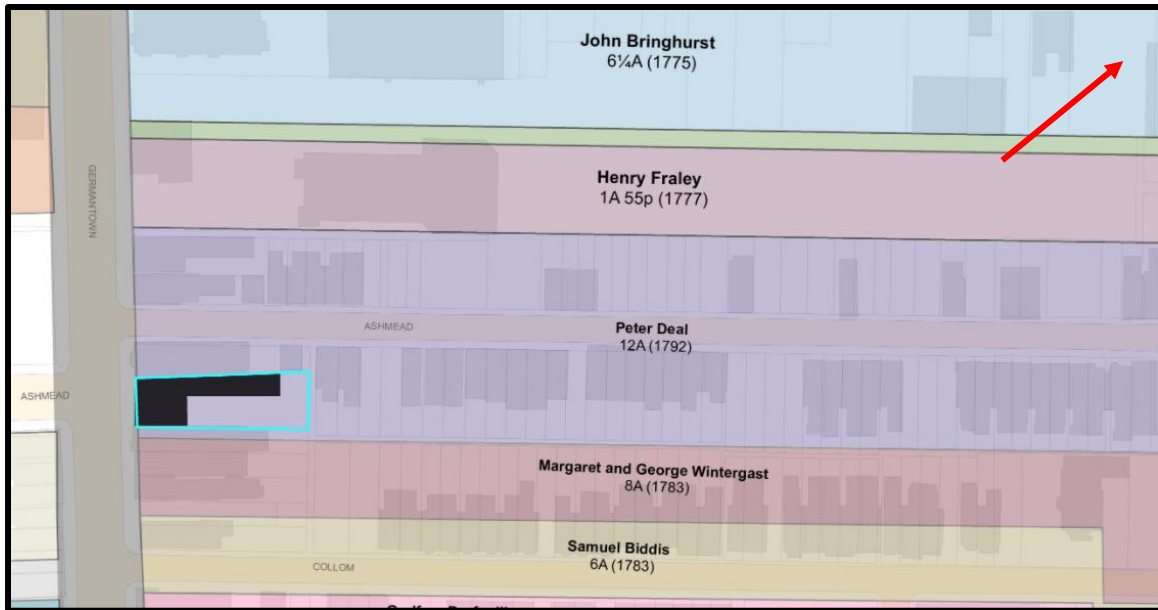


Figure 10. A map of the subject property (highlighted) and its adjacent parcels in 1798 with names of property owners, total area and year of acquisition. Source: J.M. Duffin, 2020.

## CRITERIA A & J

While the subject building could rightfully be called the Eckstein-Townsend-Deal-Ashmead-Freas-Edward House, the Major Philip R. Freas House at 5151 Germantown Avenue is a representative dwelling of the eighteenth-, nineteenth-, and early twentieth-century development of Germantown, satisfying Criterion A. While many of these aged structures have been lost over time, Germantown Avenue's development patterns remain visible through individual examples and vignettes of two- and three-story buildings of rubble schist construction with smooth-faced stucco facades, defined by side-gable roofs, featuring symmetrical fenestrations, and characteristic dormer windows. The subject building also exemplifies the commercial, economic, and political heritage of Germantown Avenue and Germantown, as it evolved from a German village in Philadelphia County to a lush residential suburb and on to a dense residential neighborhood in the consolidated City of Philadelphia, satisfying Criterion J. The subject house stands as part of this vestigial heritage of Germantown and its "Main Street."

It appears that between 1726 and 1763, Johannes Eckstein first constructed a component of the subject building on the site. In order to contextualize the subject building, one looks to the associated deeds starting in 1726, as well as tax assessments and other records. The 1798 tax records provide dimensions for the subject building, showing that the stone house situated on Eckstein's property in 1798 was of the same width. This established touchstone allowed for a comparison with other surviving buildings of a similar size to tax records for Germantown in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. The house no doubt appeared like other known eighteenth century buildings on Germantown Avenue, including the Detwiler House (ca.1760) at 8220 Germantown Avenue (twenty-seven-feet, nine-inches-front); the Detwiler House (ca.1796-97) at 8226 Germantown Avenue (twenty-six-feet, seven-inches-front); the Frederick Mehl House (ca.1763) at 4821 Germantown Avenue (thirty- by twenty-nine-feet in 1798); the Sorber-Royal House at 5011 Germantown Avenue (twenty-five-feet, three-inches-front) and the Sproegell

House at 6358 Germantown Avenue (twenty-six-feet-front). Following two other subsequent owners, John Ashmead purchased the subject property in 1813, which he most likely used as a tenant house. In about 1830, Major Philip Rapin Freas (1809–1886) married Eliza Ashmead (1810–1880), the daughter of John and Hannah Ashmead, after which time it is assumed, they began living in the subject house. The house became home to one of the significant weekly newspapers of the period—the *Germantown Telegraph*, which Freas published on the site for fifty years. He also appears to have added a third floor, architectural embellishments, additional acreage to the property, and an attached two-story office (demolished).

In 1899, after the larger property was subdivided, the subject house was sold to Edward and Maggie Albert.<sup>1</sup> The Alberts operated a fruit and produce store on the site, at which time the residential purity of the first floor was altered to accommodate a storefront.<sup>2</sup> The commercial aspect of the Major Philip R. Freas House has endured for over 120 years to-date. While the building has changed over time, losing architectural details over the years and undergoing modernization, the overall form, cladding type, and fenestration pattern survives to-date and is representative of more than 250 years of Germantown heritage.



Figure 11. The Major Philip R. Freas House at 5151 Germantown Avenue in 1913, when it served as Edward Albert's produce store. Source: The John C. Bullock Lantern Slide Collection, The Library Company of Philadelphia.

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<sup>1</sup> Deed: Walter J. Crowder, Coal Merchant, and Alice B., his wife, to Maggie Albert, wife of Edward Albert, 16 September 1899, Philadelphia Deed Book J.V., No. 81, 364.

<sup>2</sup> A 1913 photograph of the subject property as Edward Albert's produce shop was found in the John C. Bullock Lantern Slide Collection of the Library Company of Philadelphia.







Early images of the Mehl House. Figure 13. Top: An “Old Drawing of Mehl and Lorain (demolished) Houses,” by John Richards, published in 1914 in an unknown local newspaper. This shows a somewhat confused depiction of the two houses, but imparts the message that the Frederick Mehl House was enlarged over time. Figure 14. Bottom: The Ottinger, Mehl, and Lorain (demolished) Houses in the late nineteenth century. Source: The Thomas Shoemaker Collection, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

The early history of the Major Philip R. Freas House can be traced back to the first fourteen lots surveyed and apportioned by the original settlers of Germantown in October 1683. This property was part of a 50-acre lot assigned to Mennonite linen weaver Jan Lensen, who acquired the right while still living in Krevelt, Germany in June 1683. The lot had a frontage on Germantown Avenue of 235 feet, beginning at the present-day southeast line of the subject property and a depth that extended from Germantown Avenue to East Wister Street. Lensen and his wife, Mercken Peters Schmitz, settled here with their family. The Lensens sold the property in 1721 to Thomas Potts, a



Germantown butcher, though his period of ownership was short-lived. The next owner was Johannes Eckstein, the said ropemaker, who purchased the property from Potts in 1726.<sup>4</sup>

2	Henry Bart				
10	Barbra Eckstein				
	8 1/2 Acs and Dwelt	£15	9		
	1 Horse, 1 Cow		1		
	£5 of Henry Bart		3		
		£	13		
7	Elizabeth Eckstein's Estate				
	£12 of Jacob Trout		7	4	

	Frederick Mehl			7	10	8
12	8 Acs and Dwelt	£16	9	12		
	2 Horses, 1 Cow		1	13	4	
	1 Servant		1	10		
		£	12	15	4	

Figures 15. and 16. U.S. Tax & Exoneration List for 1769 in Germantown, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, comparing the subject property to the Frederick Mehl House. Source: Tax & Exoneration Lists, 1762–1794. Series No. 4.61; Records of the Office of the Comptroller General, RG-4. Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

Known throughout the Pennsylvania German community as a Separatist, Eckstein settled on the site in what was likely a one-story wooden house. He had ties to the Moravians and even traveled south to Georgia with Nikolaus Ludwig, the Imperial Count of Zinzendorf und Pottendorf.<sup>5</sup> For a period, two of his children belonged to the Ephrata Cloister in Lancaster County. While his religious beliefs were somewhat unorthodox, Eckstein was still fairly prosperous, owning the subject property and a valuable meadow and woodland along a branch of the Wingohocking Creek just outside of Germantown in Bristol Township at the time of his death in 1763. Johannes Eckstein's last will and testament enumerates two houses on his Germantown lot. The northwest most third of the lot had what he referred to as "the small House wherein we at present live and which I give to my beloved Wife [Barbara] to be her Widow Seat during her Life." The middle third of the lot which he devised Barbara had a "large House and Barn."<sup>6</sup> Based on tax records, it appears that the latter is the subject house. In 1767, Barbara Eckstein leased the subject house to Henry Bart.<sup>7</sup> In 1769, the tax assessment for the subject house and its associated eight-and-one-half-acres was fifteen pounds; the slightly larger Frederick Mehl House and its associated eight-

<sup>4</sup> Deed: Barbara Eckstein, of Northern Liberties of the City of Philadelphia, spinster, to Noe Townsend, of Germantown, coach maker, for £1,100, 17 October 1778, PDBk D., No. 16, p. 119, CAP. Barbara bought the rights of her siblings to this property the year before (Deed: Christian Eckstein, of Ephrata, Lancaster Co., practitioner in physic, and Elizabeth Eckstein, of the same place, spinster, to Barbara Eckstein, of Bristol Township, Philadelphia Co., 26 August 1777, for £50, PDBk D., No. 17, p. 96, CAP).

<sup>5</sup> Martin Brecht, Paul Peucker, *Neue Aspekte der Zinzendorf-Forschung* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2006), 92.

<sup>6</sup> Will of John Eckstein, 1 June 1763, proved 7 November 1763, Will Book N, p. 64, Philadelphia Register of Wills. Eckstein devised to his children Elizabeth, Barbara and Christian each one-third part of the Germantown property. beth to have the northwest most third, Barbara the center portion and Christian the southeast most third (which would include the subject property). The children chose not to divide the property according to the will and all joined in the sales of the original lot.

<sup>7</sup> Tax & Exoneration Lists, 1762–1794. Series No. 4.61; Records of the Office of the Comptroller General, RG-4. Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

acres was taxed at sixteen pounds.<sup>8</sup> In August 1777, three of Eckstein's heirs sold a portion of the property with the "small House" to Henry Fraley.<sup>9</sup>

Property	Value
20 Dwelling	12,000
Noah Townsend Chairma	
12 Two Dwellings	14,000
Horse	400
Cow	140
Occupation	7200
Henry Frely Carpenter	1,800

Property	Value
Frederick Mehl	
Farmen	4020
21 and Dwelling	18000
Meat	320
Two Cows	240
Chair	320
<b>Total</b>	<b>22,900</b>

Figures 17. and 18. State Tax Assessment List for 1780 in Germantown, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, comparing the Eckstein properties to the Frederick Mehl House. Source: Germantown Township, State Tax Assessment Ledgers (1.8), Office of City Commissioners Records, Record Group 1, City Archives of Philadelphia.

A little more than a year later in October 1778, Barbara Eckstein sold the frame house, the subject house, and the remainder of her father's Germantown lot to Noe/Noah Townsend, a chair or coach maker.<sup>10</sup> In 1780, at the height of inflation related to the American Revolution, Townsend's property, which included the frame house, the stone house, and twelve acres, was valued at 14,000 pounds; the Frederick Mehl House, which included the stone house and twenty-one-acres was valued at 18,000 pounds.<sup>11</sup> The values in Germantown declined in the 1780s, as Townsend was again assessed for taxes in 1781, at which time the two houses and the associated twelve-acres were valued at \$450. The same value endured in 1782 and 1786.<sup>12</sup> The subject property was valued at \$500 in 1787.<sup>13</sup> Townsend sold the property to Peter Deal, a butcher, in 1792.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Tax & Exoneration Lists, 1762–1794. Series No. 4.61; Records of the Office of the Comptroller General, RG-4. Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

<sup>9</sup> Deed: Christian Eckstein, of Ephrata, Lancaster Co., practitioner in physic, Elizabeth Eckstein, of the same place, spinster, Barbara Eckstein, of Bristol Township, Philadelphia Co., spinster, to Henry Frely, of Germantown, carpenter, for 1 acre 55 perches, 26 August 1777, Philadelphia Deed Book D., No. 10, p. 81, CAP. This property formed what is today the St. Stephan's Methodist Church property.

<sup>10</sup> Deed: Barbara Eckstein, of Northern Liberties of the City of Philadelphia, spinster, to Noe Townsend, of Germantown, coach maker, for £1,100, 17 October 1778, PDBk D., No. 16, p. 119, CAP. Barbara bought the rights of her siblings to this property the year before (Deed: Christian Eckstein, of Ephrata, Lancaster Co., practitioner in physic, and Elizabeth Eckstein, of the same place, spinster, to Barbara Eckstein, of Bristol Township, Philadelphia Co., 26 August 1777, for £50, PDBk D., No. 17, p. 96, CAP).

<sup>11</sup> Tax & Exoneration Lists, 1762–1794. Series No. 4.61; Records of the Office of the Comptroller General, RG-4. Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

<sup>12</sup> Tax & Exoneration Lists, 1762–1794. Series No. 4.61; Records of the Office of the Comptroller General, RG-4. Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

<sup>13</sup> Tax & Exoneration Lists, 1762–1794. Series No. 4.61; Records of the Office of the Comptroller General, RG-4. Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

<sup>14</sup> Deed: Noe Townsend, of Germantown, Philadelphia County, coach maker, to Peter Deal, of Germantown, butcher, for two houses and a lot of 12 acres for £750, 4 March 1792, PDBk E.F., No. 14, p. 699, CAP.

<i>Peter Deal</i>		<i>Frederick Mehl</i>	
<i>Permal</i>	<i>5-67</i>	<i>22 Acres Dwelling</i>	<i>500</i>
<i>12 Acres Land</i>	<i>640</i>	<i>2 Horses</i>	<i>14</i>
<i>1 Two Story Dwelling</i>	<i>467</i>	<i>1 Cow</i>	<i>3</i>
<i>1 One Story Frame H.</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>1 Riding Chair</i>	<i>6</i>
<i>1 Frame Barn</i>	<i>40</i>		
<i>1 Stone Slaughter House</i>	<i>21</i>		
<i>6 Acres Back Land</i>	<i>192</i>		
<i>4 Horses</i>	<i>85</i>		
<i>2 Cows</i>	<i>21</i>		
	<i>1506</i>		
		<i>Martin Mehl</i>	
		<i>Head</i>	<i>137</i>

Figures 19. and 20. State Tax Assessment List for 1796 in Germantown, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, comparing the subject property to the Frederick Mehl House. Source: Ancestry.com. *Pennsylvania, U.S., Tax and Exoneration, 1768–1801* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011; Germantown Township, State Tax Assessment Ledgers (1.8), Office of City Commissioners Records, Record Group 1, City Archives of Philadelphia.

Peter Deal was assessed for taxation in 1796, at which time the twelve acres was valued at \$640, the subject building at \$467, and the one-story frame house at \$40. The property also included a frame barn, a one-story stone slaughter house, six acres of back land, four horses, and two cows. The total value was \$1,506. The Frederick Mehl House was valued at \$500.<sup>15</sup> It is during Deal's ownership that a clearer picture emerges regarding the buildings on the property. The 1798 U.S. Direct Tax assesses Deal for the following buildings:

- 1 two-story stone dwelling house, 27 by 27 feet, with 12 windows and 225 lights
- 1 one-story frame dwelling house, 12 by 30 feet, with 4 windows and 48 lights (6 by 8) in "bad repair"
- 1 frame "Chear House" (carriage house), 15 by 10 feet
- 1 frame barn, 35 by 16 feet "In bad Repair"
- 1 stone slaughter house, 15 by 20 feet<sup>16</sup>

The Frederick Mehl House was similarly valued.

<i>2 Peter Deal</i>	<i>Peter Deal</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>27 by 27</i>	<i>Stone</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>225</i>	<i>80</i>	<i>1300</i>
<i>22 Peter Deal</i>	<i>Peter Deal</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>12 by 30</i>	<i>frame</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>48</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>bad Repair</i>
<i>Peter Deal</i>			<i>Chear House 15 by 10</i>	<i>frame</i>			<i>648</i>		<i>200</i>
<i>3 Martin Mehl</i>	<i>Martin Mehl</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>30 by 29</i>	<i>Stone</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>318</i>	<i>80</i>	<i>1400</i>
			<i>Hitchon</i>	<i>Stone</i>	<i>2</i>				<i>1500</i>
			<i>Chear house</i>	<i>frame</i>					<i>200</i>
			<i>15 by 10</i>						

Figures 21. and 22. U.S. Tax & Exoneration List for 1798 in Germantown, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, comparing the subject property to the Frederick Mehl House (owned by his son Martin). Source: *United States Direct Tax of 1798: Tax Lists for the State of Pennsylvania*. M372, microfilm, 24 rolls. Records of the Internal Revenue Service, 1791–2006, Record Group 58. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

<sup>15</sup> Ancestry.com. *Pennsylvania, U.S., Tax and Exoneration, 1768–1801* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011.

<sup>16</sup> *United States Direct Tax of 1798: Tax Lists for the State of Pennsylvania*. M372, microfilm. Records of the Internal Revenue Service, 1791–2006, Record Group 58. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C.

In 1800, Deal's assessment is slightly less, though similar, than it was in 1796. With a total value of \$1,485, the acreage is valued again at \$640, the subject house at \$500, and the frame house at \$40. By comparison, the Frederick Mehl House, then owned by his son Martin Mehl, a skinner, was part of an estate valued at \$1,080. The house itself was valued at \$500. With the exception of the carriage house, Deal was assessed for the same set of buildings as late as 1811.

<p><i>Peter Deal Butcher</i></p> <p><i>Personal</i> . . . . . 75</p> <p>2 Acres Land . . . . . 640</p> <p>two story dwelling . . . . . 500</p> <p>one do do . . . . . 40</p> <p>frame Barn . . . . . 40</p> <p>stone slaughter house . . . . . 25</p> <p>1 Acres Land . . . . . 180</p> <p>2 Horses . . . . . 50</p> <p>1 Cow . . . . . 10</p> <p><i>John Deal</i></p> <p><i>Personal</i> . . . . . 75</p> <p>1485</p>	<p><i>Martin Mehl skinner</i></p> <p><i>Personal</i> . . . . .</p> <p>1 Acre Land . . . . . 80</p> <p>2 two story dwelling . . . . . 500</p> <p>1 Stone shop . . . . . 40</p> <p>do Barn . . . . . 140</p> <p>3 Acres front Land . . . . . 180</p> <p>2 do back do . . . . . 100</p> <p>1 Horse . . . . . 30</p> <p>1 Cow . . . . . 10</p> <p>1080</p>
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Figures 23. and 24. State Tax Assessment List for 1800 in Germantown, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, comparing the subject property to the Frederick Mehl House. Source: Germantown Township, State Tax Assessment Ledgers (1.8), Office of City Commissioners Records, Record Group 1, City Archives of Philadelphia.

In 1813 Deal sold the same property with “two messuages or tenements” to John Ashmead (1764–1847), a coach maker.<sup>17</sup> Since John and his wife Hannah lived further up Germantown Avenue (next to the Deshler-Franks-Morris House), it seems fairly certain that the subject property was a tenant house.<sup>18</sup> However, by June 1830, Major Philip R. Freas was occupying the subject property—only four months before his marriage to Eliza Ashmead.<sup>19</sup>

Shortly after John Ashmead’s death in 1847, the family divided up the estate among his heirs. One asset, the subject property, which still included the entire Deal property along Germantown Avenue, was divided in half between Dr. Thomas Ashmead at the northwest (with a frontage of 75 feet, one inch) in 1847 and Philip R. Freas at the southeast (also 75 feet, one-inch front) in

<sup>17</sup> Deed: Peter Deal, of Germantown, victualler, to John Ashmead, of the same place, coach maker, for \$5,066.67, 10 April 1813, PDBk IC 12, p. 515, CAP.

<sup>18</sup> Deed: George Righter, of Germantown, yeoman, and Mary, his wife, Michael Righter, of the same, yeoman, and Catharine, his wife, William Zoll, of Reading, Berks Co., inn keeper, and Margaret, his wife, Christopher Hergesheimer, of Germantown, blacksmith, and Eva, his wife, Elizabeth Bower, of Reading, Berks Co., widow, George Rex, of Pottstown, Montgomery Co., blacksmith, and Susanna, his wife, Levi Rex, of the same, wheelwright, and Catharine, his wife, to John Ashmead, of Germantown, coach maker, and Hannah, his wife, 11 April 1796, PDBk E.F., No. 9.636, CAP. This property is located at present-day 5432–34 Germantown Avenue.

<sup>19</sup> Germantown Township, Philadelphia County, p. 97, Fifth Census of the United States, 1830 (NARA microfilm publication M19), Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29.



1848.<sup>20</sup> Both deeds reference improvements on the lots. Dr. Ashmead's portion included the Owen Wister Birthplace at 5203-05 Germantown Avenue, which includes a main block with frontage of twenty-five feet and a depth of twenty feet.<sup>21</sup> The subject house has a frontage of between twenty-six and twenty-seven feet and a depth of around thirty-seven-and-one-half feet with a basement footprint that indicates that the house has been enlarged over time.<sup>22</sup>



Figure 25. Looking north at the Philip R. Freas House, when it occupied the entire block. The original label of this photograph was “Telegraph Farm, November 1, 1858, C.J.W., Jr. Figure: John Knight.” Source: The Shoemaker Collection, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

An 1863 newspaper account of Freas' divorce reported when Major Philip R. Freas began residing the property around about 1830, it was valued at approximately \$8,000 and he increased that value with improvements by nearly fifty percent to \$12,000 over three decades.<sup>23</sup> A third floor was added, as well as a piazza and rear wing. Major Freas also enlarged the acreage of the property and cultivated its grounds. He also built a two-story building (Figure 39) to house the operations of the *Germantown Telegraph*, which included a passage from his second-floor bedroom in the subject house to the upper story of the office. As previously stated, Major Freas had apparently

<sup>20</sup> Deed: Albert Ashmead, Philip R. Freas and Eliza, his wife, and Abraham Rex and Hannah, his wife, all of Germantown, to Theodore Ashmead, of the same place, doctor of medicine, for \$3,994, 19 July 1847, PDBk T.H., No. 127, p. 172; Deed: Albert Ashmead, Theodore Ashmead and Catharine, his wife, and Abraham Rex and Hannah, his wife, all of Germantown, to Philip R. Freas, of the same place, editor, for \$4,394, 19 July 1848, PDBk A.W.M., No. 41, p. 542, CAP. This partition of the former Deal property also included the opening of 200 and 300 of East Ashmead Street and creation of lots split between Ashmead and Freas.

<sup>21</sup> Application for Zoning Permit 5203-05 Germantown Avenue, Permit No. 112716, 1964, 5203-05 Germantown Avenue, Philadelphia Zoning Archive.

<sup>22</sup> Existing Uses Key Plan, MTA Architect, 2019, 5151 Germantown Avenue, Philadelphia Zoning Archive.

<sup>23</sup> “Divorce of Philip R. Freas and Wife,” *Daily Legislative Record*, 1863, 275.



been leasing the property from the Ashmeads since around 1830, as his official sale did not go through until 1848.<sup>24</sup> He retained ownership of the property until after his retirement in 1885, when it was sold to furniture dealers.<sup>25</sup> It appears that this was the first commercial use of the subject house.



Figure 26. The Major Philip R. Freas House during the ownership of Edward and Maggie Albert at which time it was converted to a store. Source: The Germantown Historical Society.

Altering the residential appearance of older houses on Germantown Avenue was a common economic and social trend throughout the history of the area, but it became especially popular in the last quarter of the nineteenth century and onward into the twentieth. This was primarily achieved through the addition of a storefront at the ground floor (compare Figures 25 and 26). The Philip R. Freas House was certainly not the earliest specimen nor would it be the last, but it does exemplify the architectural and commercial trend that occurred as Germantown Avenue's built environment evolved to serve increased suburbanization in some places, as well as rowhouse development on densely built semi-urban streets.

In 1899, the Major Philip R. Freas House was sold to Edward and Maggie Albert.<sup>26</sup> Samuel M. W. Kohl of 93 Collom Street was commissioned to make "alterations and additions" to the subject building, which appears to have altered the residential appearance of the building with the installation of a new storefront.<sup>27</sup> The Alberts operated a fruit and produce store on the site.<sup>28</sup> Aside

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<sup>24</sup> Deed: Albert Ashmead, Theodore Ashmead and Catharine, his wife, and Abraham Rex and Hannah, his wife, all of Germantown, to Philip R. Freas, of the same place, editor, for \$4,394, 19 July 1848, PDBk A.W.M., No. 41, p. 542, CAP.

<sup>25</sup> Deed: Philip R. Freas, editor and publisher, to Jacob Bardsley, and Abraham W. Birtwell, furniture dealers, 23 February 1885, PDBk G.G.P., No. 10, 640.

<sup>26</sup> Deed: Walter J. Crowder, Coal Merchant, and Alice B., his wife, to Maggie Albert, wife of Edward Albert, 16 September 1899, Philadelphia Deed Book J.V., No. 81, 364.

<sup>27</sup> *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 26 July 1899, 481.

<sup>28</sup> A 1913 photograph of the subject property as Edward Albert's produce shop was found in the John C. Bullock Lantern Slide Collection of the Library Company of Philadelphia.

from the subject house, many other dwellings on Germantown Avenue were commercialized over the years. One of many early examples of more simple commercial alterations may be found in the King-Green House (ca.1740s) at 5112–14 Germantown Avenue (Figures 27 and 28), an early house that was minimally altered during the nineteenth century to accommodate a small storefront for its owners, who were well-known hatters.<sup>29</sup> Other similar commercial conversions occurred all up and down Germantown Avenue.



The transition of the King-Green House (ca.1740s) at 5112–14 Germantown Avenue. Figure 27. Top left: The King-Green House as depicted by John Richards. Source: The Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Figure 28. Top right: Taken in the late nineteenth century, the King-Green House during the Charles U. Green period of ownership with a small storefront addition. Source: The Castner Scrapbooks, The Free Library of Philadelphia. The drastic transition of the Channon House (ca.1818–1857) at 5708 Germantown Avenue. Figure 29. Bottom left: The Channon House in the 1870–80s. Source: The Shoemaker Collection, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Figure 30. Bottom middle: The Channon House as converted to serve as Vernon Groceries in 1894, including a full storefront across the entire first floor. Source: The Germantown Historical Society. Figure 31. Bottom right: Mitchell, Fletcher, & Co. ca.1898 after a major renovation from its appearance as Vernon Groceries. Source: The Germantown Historical Society.

<sup>29</sup> Oscar Beisert and J.M. Duffin. *Philadelphia Register of Historic Places Nomination: King-Green House, 5112–14 Germantown Avenue, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19144*. (Philadelphia: Keeping Society of Philadelphia, 2017).



Figure 32. Left: Chester A. Asher's Confectionary was installed in a typical dwelling on Germantown Avenue below Cheltenham, which had undergone first floor alterations to include a storefront on the first floor. Source: Jane Campbell Scapbooks, The Germantown Historical Society. Figure 33. Right: Dwellings with storefront alterations stood at 5419 and 5412 Germantown Avenue, just below the Masonic Hall. Source: The Germantown Historical Society.

At what would be known today as 5419 and 5421 Germantown Avenue were two early houses that both had storefront alterations at the time they were demolished to enlarge the property of Saint Luke's Episcopal Church. Another specimen is the Channon House (ca.1818–1857) at 5708 Germantown Avenue (Figures 29, 30, and 31) that was first altered to accommodate Vernon Groceries between 1894 and 1895 by Hiram C. Himes. The building was later dramatically altered on designs by architect Addison Hutton to serve the high-end grocers Mitchell, Fletcher, & Co. in 1898.<sup>30</sup>



Former dwellings near the subject property that underwent similar commercial conversions in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Figure 34. Left: The Dr. Theodore Ashmead House, also known as the Owen Wister Birthplace at 5203–05 Germantown Avenue, which was one part of the subject property. Figure 35. Right: The west side of Germantown Avenue below Queen Lane shows the commercial transition that was occurring at the turn of the twentieth century with storefront alteration on left followed by an intact house with a new, one-story store on right in place of a two-and-one-half-story stone dwelling that defined the rest of the block. Source: The Germantown Historical Society.

<sup>30</sup> Oscar Beisert and J.M. Duffin. *Philadelphia Register of Historic Places Nomination: Mitchell, Fletcher, & Co., 5708 Germantown Avenue, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19144*. (Philadelphia: The Keeping Society of Philadelphia, 2020).





The commercialization of the Engle Block, 5932 to 5954 Germantown Avenue, Germantown. Figure 36. Top: A late nineteenth century view of the Engle Block, showing the Engle House at 5932-40 Germantown Avenue; the Albertus Engle House at 5942 Germantown Avenue; and an early Engle family house at 5944-46 Germantown Avenue. Figure 37. Bottom: Taken in 1906 after a commercial transition, including the Charles Building (1906) at 5932-42 Germantown Avenue; an early Engle family house at 5944-46 Germantown Avenue, which has undergone a storefront alteration like the subject property; and the Engle Building at 5948-54 Germantown Avenue. Source: The Germantown Historical Society.

Illustrated above in Figures 36 and 37, the block north the Germantown Town Hall was one that saw intense commercialization in the first years of the twentieth century. The age-old Engle family of Germantown propelled the development, first with the building at the corner of Germantown Avenue and Harvey Street, known historically as the Engle Building, 5948 Germantown Avenue. However, the most significant change came when the famous old Engle House was moved by its resident descendants to the rear of the lot to accommodate the Charles Building, a row of one-story brick stores at 5932-42 Germantown Avenue. This also necessitated the demolition of the Albertus Engle House, a wooden house and store that stood directly above the Engle House at what was

likely 5942 Germantown Avenue. The Albertus Engle House had long since been converted to a store. It appears that this development was completed by Charles Chipley, the son of Thomas L.M. Chipley and Isabella M. Engle. The before and after of the block shows a largely residential block that transitioned to one dominated by storefronts. As part of the evolution, the house at 5944–46 Germantown Avenue also lost its original first floor to a storefront, which mimics the commercial transition that occurred at the subject property.<sup>31</sup>

These are just a few of many examples of the commercialization of dwellings to store buildings on Germantown Avenue, during the eighteenth, nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.



Figure 38. Once standing at 5030–32 Germantown Avenue, the building shown above on left, featuring two doors, reflects the design and/or conversion of the building to a shop. Source: *Old Landmarks of Germantown and Vicinity* by John Richard, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

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<sup>31</sup> This information was gleaned from an album of the Chipley family, which is at the Germantown Historical Society.





Figure 39. The Germantown Telegraph Office and the Major Philip R. Freas House in ca. 1860. Source: The Germantown Historical Society.

## CRITERIA A & J

The former dwelling at 5151 Germantown Avenue is a significant property in Germantown and Philadelphia, as associated with the prominent journalist, publisher, writer, and newspaperman Major Philip Rapine Freas (1809–1885)—shown in Figure 46.<sup>32</sup> He occupied the subject building from around 1830 to 1884, during which time the house was associated with the publication of the *Germantown Telegraph*. The publication was at one time “the only paper in Philadelphia county outside of the city,” the “First English Newspaper” in Germantown, and “one of the oldest, if not the oldest, agricultural papers in this country.”<sup>33</sup> Major Freas understood that a journal of this type had marketability in Germantown and beyond. At the time of its founding, he endeavored to create “a first-class family and agricultural newspaper.”<sup>34</sup> Publication started in March 1830 as *The Village Telegraph* but quickly changed to *The Germantown Telegraph* in May 1830.<sup>35</sup> The *Germantown Telegraph* was published weekly, every Wednesday morning. Its pages included an Agricultural Department and Farmer’s Pursuit, as well as items on “Practical Horticulture,

<sup>32</sup> Anna Margaretta Archambault, ed. *A Guide Book of Art, Architecture, and Historic Interests in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania*. (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1924), 149.

<sup>33</sup> *Seen & Heard by McGargue*, 1 April 1903, 2289; Edward W. Hocker, *Germantown 1683–1933* (Germantown: Published by the Author, 1933), 157.

<sup>34</sup> John Wien Forney, *Anecdotes of Public Men* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1881), 213–16.

<sup>35</sup> Pennsylvania Historical Survey, WPA, *A Checklist of Pennsylvania Newspapers*, vol. 1, *Philadelphia County* (Harrisburg: Pennsylvania Historical Commission, 1940), 90. There was another brief title change from 1831 to 1839 when the newspaper was called the *Germantown Telegraph and Philadelphia and Montgomery Advertiser*. In 1840 the paper reverted back to just the *Germantown Telegraph* (without the article “The”) which it held for the result of its publication.

Pomology, and Gardening.” The publication was also a “Literary and News Journal,” including items of national, statewide, and local import and note.<sup>36</sup> Overcoming a partial hearing impairment since childhood, as well as other personal, familial adversities, Freas succeeded in publishing his successful *Germantown Telegraph* for more than half a century, becoming well-known across the nation.<sup>37</sup>



Figure 40. The *Germantown Telegraph*, October 20, 1858. Source: Oscar Beisert.

Speaking to the economic, political, and social heritage of the community, the trajectory of both Germantown and its associated *Germantown Telegraph* is described rather succinctly by John Wien Forney in a piece he penned on Major Freas alongside the prominent editor Horace Greely in *Anecdotes of Public Men* of 1881:

Germantown has outgrown its village small clothes, and is a lovely suburban city of twenty-seven thousand inhabitants, while *The Telegraph*, originally fourteen by twenty-two inches, and five columns per page, is now thirty-one and a half by forty-eight inches, each page of nine columns, in forty years changing its size six times.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> *Bellevue Gazette*, 9 July 1857, 4.

<sup>37</sup> “Philip R. Freas, Editor ‘Germantown Telegraph,’ *The Gardeners’ Monthly and Horticulturist*, May 1886, 156–57.

<sup>38</sup> Forney, *Anecdotes of Public Men*, 213–16.

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**PHILIP R. FREAS,**  
Editor and Proprietor.

**Major Freas' Valedictory.**

MAJOR PHILIP R. FREAS, the founder of the "*Germantown Telegraph*," and editor and owner of the paper for more than half a century, having sold his establishment takes leave of his readers and friends in the following Valedictory which appears in this week's number of that print:

**Valedictory.**

In a very few lines we beg to announce to the subscribers of the GERMANTOWN TELEGRAPH that with the present number our connection with the paper, as owner and editor, terminates. Severe ill-health for a protracted period obliges us to eventually withdraw, as we do so most reluctantly, from the chosen business of our life, and to seek that rest which more than half a century of ceaseless duties call upon us to desire as a hope for.

We separate ourselves—at least partially—from many warm and devoted friends with that degree of regret which these only placed in our position for so extended a period can understand and feel.

We made Germantown our residence on the twenty second day of February, 1830, and on the seventeenth day of March ensuing the first number of the GERMANTOWN TELEGRAPH made its appearance. We came here an entire stranger, without friends, and without encouragement from any one; but by unremitting industry, and a resolute determination not only to pursue honesty as the best policy, but as a solid, indispensable principle, we are enabled to retire to-day with that measure of realization which establishes the truth of the maxim.

For our contemporaries, without exception, we entertain no feeling other than the warmth of unmixed friendship and good will. Each and all of our brethren of the profession we part from without a memory of an unpleasantness, offering them in words as fervent as we can express them, our most cordial wishes for their individual prosperity and welfare.

To our Subscribers altogether we most respectfully introduce our successor, Mr. HENRY W. RAYMOND, of New York, son of the late Hon. HENRY J. RAYMOND, founder of the present *New York Daily Times*, who was one of the ablest writers and most prominent statesmen of the country, with the fullest confidence that he will not only prove acceptable to one and all of them, but that he will, by his sterling abilities and experience, add to the excellence of the paper by broadening its general usefulness as the leading Family and Agricultural Newspaper of the country. Our deepest sympathies will always attend the fortunes of the paper; and anything that we can do to advance and promote its interest, we shall feel it to be a matter of duty, as well as of pleasure freely to give.

—Maj. Freas takes with him in his retirement the good wishes of all his contemporaries of the press. He is probably the oldest newspaper publisher in Pennsylvania, and his career has been throughout a great success. He has made the "*Germantown Telegraph*" a household word through all the Middle States. He has richly earned by fifty years of earnest and faithful work the rest and competence to enjoy it that is so grateful to declining years. In retiring from the active duties of the profession he will not be lost sight of by the Editorial fraternity. He will be heard from still, no doubt, as an occasional contributor to the columns of the *Telegraph*, and always with pleasure by his old readers and friends.

Figure 41. Left: An advertisement for the *Germantown Telegraph* in the *American Citizen* on January 6, 1864. Figure 42. Right: An article about Major Philip R. Freas at the time of his retirement in the *Reading Times* on July 27, 1883.

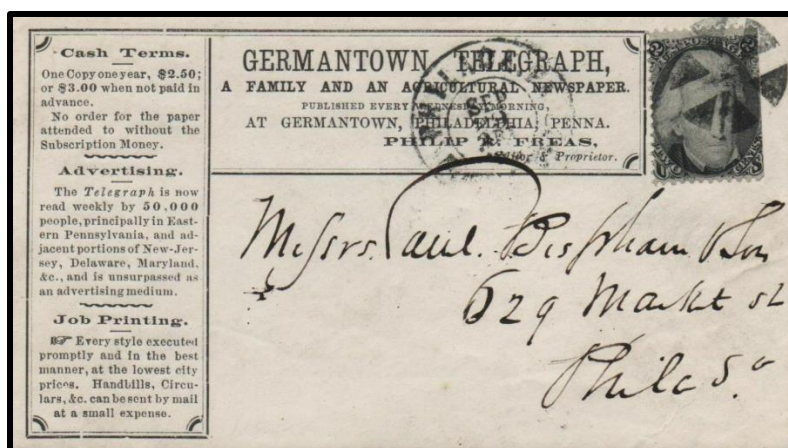


Figure 43. An envelope with advertisement from the Germantown Telegraph. Source: www.ebay.com.

During the development of both Germantown and the *Germantown Telegraph*, Major Freas created a publication that was not only locally known and serviceable but was revered across the country for imparting agricultural and horticultural knowledge. He cultivated roughly two acres of ground that was once associated with the subject building, where he advanced the practical experience required to make his publication a successful reference point for practical gardening and farming.<sup>39</sup> Forney also illustrated Major Freas' property:

The limited spot from which it was first issued has increased into a splendid country seat, where the kindly owner cultivates the soil, indulging his tastes as a gentleman farmer and horticulturist, and where he points with just pride to his manifold varieties of fruits, from the luscious grape to delicious pears, peaches, and apples. The gold-fish in his pond are the wonder of the neighborhood; and his fine collection of shade and ornamental trees, including specimens from every clime, attest alike his own success in business, and prove the theories intelligently discussed in his columns by these practical evidences on his own premises. There is no publication which I read with more pleasure than *The Telegraph* (and this with thousands of others), because it is the work of a gentleman, and, certainly, there is no place near Philadelphia more beautiful than the ground of its hospitable proprietor.<sup>40</sup>

While only the subject house survives, the above description provides a better understanding of how Major Freas wielded influence in agriculture and farming nationwide from his so-called "Telegraph farm" (Figures 25 and 47) in Germantown. Despite being bedridden off and on for the last twenty years of his career, he managed, with the help of his faithful son, John Adams Freas, to continue publishing the paper from his bedchamber in the subject house.<sup>41</sup>

Freas' national influence can be measured in how frequently the articles (primarily horticultural and agricultural) were quoted in other newspapers throughout the entire country. For example,

<sup>39</sup> "Philip R. Freas, Editor "Germantown Telegraph"," *The Gardeners' Monthly and Horticulturist*, May 1886, 156–57.

<sup>40</sup> Forney, *Anecdotes of Public Men*, 213–16.

<sup>41</sup> "Sheriff Sells Out Old Newspaper," *Germantown Independent*. 17 November 1911.



between 1830 and 1910, the *Germantown Telegraph* is referenced 2,578 times in Kansas newspapers, 683 in Vermont, 535 in Wisconsin, 512 in Nebraska, 460 in Ohio, 432 in Massachusetts, 348 in Illinois, 253 in Tennessee, 244 in North Carolina, and 188 in California.<sup>42</sup> The *Telegraph*'s reputation was not restricted to the United States. There are many examples of articles and news items seen in Canadian, British, and even Australian newspapers during this period.<sup>43</sup> Perhaps the greatest sign of Freas' national reputation was his appointment by President Ulysses S. Grant in June 1871 to the cabinet post of United States Secretary of Agriculture. Unfortunately, because of "personal and business reasons" as well as his "long-long determination not to take office" he declined the appointment.<sup>44</sup>

During his fifty-year career, Major Freas was involved in many agricultural and horticultural organizations of the city and commonwealth. He founded the Germantown Farmer's Club.<sup>45</sup> He was an officer and member of the Philadelphia Agricultural Society and the State Horticultural Association of Pennsylvania, which ultimately honored him with a memorial resolution at the time of his death in 1886.<sup>46</sup> News of Major Freas' retirement in 1883, and, later, his death in 1886 was published in journals, newspapers, and other publications nationwide.<sup>47</sup> An advertisement for the

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<sup>42</sup> Results of doing a search on the phrase "Germantown Telegraph" for the period between 1830 and 1910 on Newspapers.com.

<sup>43</sup> For selected Canadian examples see: "Not Bad At All," *Kingston Chronicle*, 19 February 1831, 2; "Feeding Mowing Lands in Autumn," *The British Colonist* (Halifax), 5 October 1854, 2; "Moldy Peas, Beans, and Grain," *The British Colonist* (Halifax), 1 December 1857, 2; untitled article on hens, *Canadian Statesman* (Bowmanville), 8 April 1869, 8; "When to Cut Wheat," *Daily British Colonist* (Victoria), 18 August 1872, 5; "Kill the Weeds in August," *The Amherstburg Echo*, 16 August 1878, 5.

For British examples see: "The Locusts Again," *The Caledonian Mercury* (Edinburgh, Scotland), 29 May 1834, 8; "Oyster Shells for Fruit Trees," *The Preston Chronicle and Lancashire Advertiser* (Preston, England), 4 June 1853, 3; "A Virginia Farm," *The Blackburn Standard* (Blackburn, England), 29 October 1856, 4; "Steam Exploded!," *The Hampshire Advertiser* (Southampton, England), 15 February 1851, 7; "Another Native of Leicester Killed in the American War," *Leicester Chronicle* (Leicester, England), 25 October 1862, 5; "Cleanse Your Premises," *The Nottinghamshire Guardian*, 28 August 1868, 10.

For selected Australian examples see: "Blacksmiths' Work," *Adelaide Observer* (Adelaide), 1 January 1848, 8; "Advice and Medicine," *The South Australian* (Adelaide), 2 February 1849, 4; "Another Great Discovery," *The South Australian* (Adelaide), 26 June 1851, 4; "Discovery of a Great New Motive Power," *The Argus* (Melbourne), 4 July 1851, 4; "Fattening Turkeys With Charcoal," *The Maitland Mercury* (Maitland), 28 April 1855, 5; "Paying for a Newspaper in America," *The Banner* (Melbourne) 2 December 1858, 12; "How to Have Mealy Potatoes," *The Goulburn Herald and Chronicle* (Goulburn), 5 October 1867, 3; "How to Get Plenty of Free Eggs," *The Maitland Mercury* (Maitland), 28 October 1871, 3; "Damp Feet," *New South Wales Agriculturist and Grazer*, 1 November 1879, 11.

<sup>44</sup> "Commissioner of Agriculture," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 30 June 1871, 1; "Telegraphic Brevities," *New York Times*, 30 June 1871, 1; "Political Items," *New England Farmer*, 8 July 1871, 2; "The Vacancy in the Department of Agriculture," *The Sun* (Baltimore), 30 June 1871, 1. Another Pennsylvania, Frederick Watts, took the position Freas turned down.

<sup>45</sup> "What Two Acres Can Do," *American Farmers' Magazine* 5 (1853): 341–42.

<sup>46</sup> *The Cultivator*, 1863, 65.; *Report of the State Horticultural Association of Pennsylvania*, 1886, 38–39.

<sup>47</sup> *The Times*, 8 June 1883, 2; *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, 23 June 1883, 4; "Personal," *Knoxville Daily Tribune*, 28 June 1883, 1; *The Davenport Weekly Gazette*, 4 July 1883, 12; *The Cairo Bulletin*, 26 July 1883, 3; "Major Freas' Valedictory," *Reading Times*, 27 July 1883, 2; *Mineral Point Weekly Tribune*, 28 June 1883, 3; *Harper's Weekly*, 7 July 1883, 419; *Lancaster Daily Intelligencer*, 26 July 1883, 2; *The Semi-Weekly New Era*, 28 July 1883, 4; *The Daily City News*, 6 August 1883, 3; *The Bucks County Gazette*, 30 August 1883, 3; *Farm Journal*, November 1883; "An Old Editor Dying," *Daily Republican*, 1 April 1886, 2; "Death of a Venerable Editor," *Lancaster New Era*, 1 April 1886, 1; "A Pennsylvania Editor Dead," *The Courier-News*, 2 April 1886, 1; *Harrisburg Daily Independent*, 1; *The*



sale of the subject property was published in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* on June 20, 1883. Major Freas sold the *Germantown Telegraph* to Henry W. Raymond, son of H.J. Raymond, the former editor of the *New York Times*, for \$25,000.<sup>48</sup> The *Telegraph* continued publication in Germantown until 1948 when it merged with the *Germantown Courier*.<sup>49</sup>

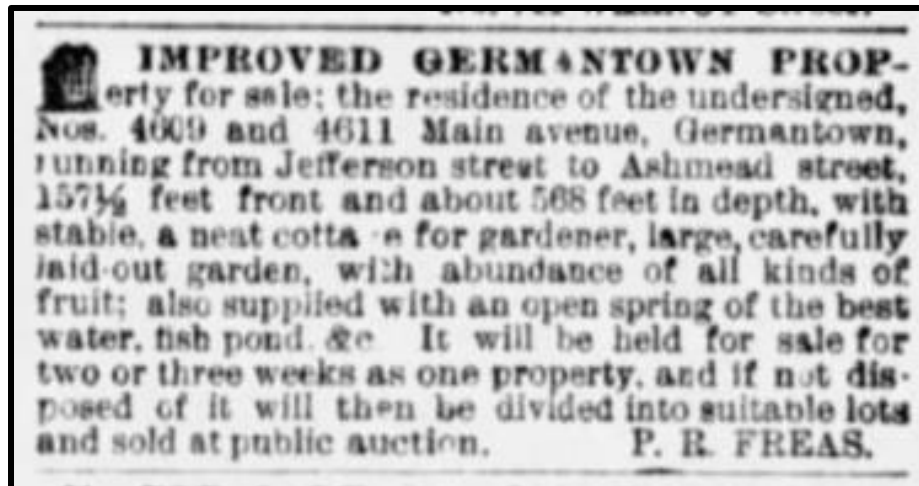


Figure 44. An advertisement for the Philip R. Freas House. Source: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 20 June 1883, 5.

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*Fitchburg Sentinel*, 2 April 1886, 4; *The Boston Globe*, 2 April 1886, 1; *The Daily Republican*, 2 April 1886, 2; *The Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, 2 April 1886, 4; *The Morning News*, 2 April 1886, 1; *The York Dispatch*, 2 April 1886, 1; "Death of Venerable Editor," *The Semi-Weekly New Era*, 3 April 1886, 1; *The Sunday Leader*, 4 April 1886, 1; *Juniata Sentinel and Republican*, 7 April 1886, 3; *The Central News*, 8 April 1886, 3; *The Southern Cultivator and Dixie Farmer*, July 1886, 299.

<sup>48</sup> *The Gardener's Monthly and Horticulturist*, October 1883, 316–17; "Sheriff Sells Out Old Newspaper," *Germantown Independent*, 17 November 1911.

<sup>49</sup> "Black Ink Shortage Kills Paper," *Philadelphia Daily News*, 20 December 1978, 8.

The Major Philip R. Freas House, Built ca. 1723-63  
5151 Germantown Avenue, Germantown, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania  
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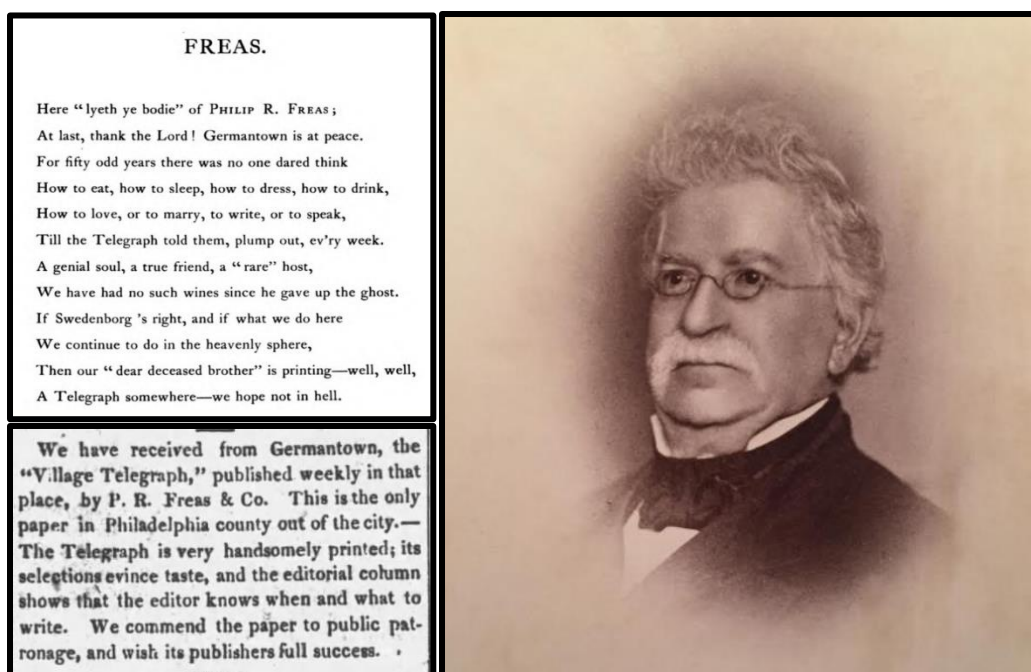


Figure 45. Left: *The United States Gazette*, 2 April 1830, 4. Figure 46. Right: Charles J. Peterson, *Monody on Certain Members of the "Press Club."* (Philadelphia: Privately Published for F.J. Dreer, ca.1900), 7.

### A BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF MAJOR PHILIP R. FREAS

Born at Marble Hill in Montgomery County, Pennsylvania to Simon Freas (1766–1827) and Margaret Rapine (1773–1853), the young Major Freas "...studied under Mr. Morris two or three years..." before entering the newspaper office of the *Norristown Herald*, where he apprenticed for roughly five years.<sup>50</sup> The *Norristown Herald* was then published by David Saur/Sower, Jr. (formerly Sauer), the grandson of Christopher Sauer, who is credited as printing the first European language Bible in British North America at Germantown.<sup>51</sup> Despite being offered a position by Saur in Norristown, Freas moved to Germantown in February 1830, where he immediately founded the *Village Telegraph* on March 17, which was to become a weekly paper that would be renamed the *Germantown Telegraph*. The publication began with 429 subscribers, including prominent Germantown men such as Rev. John Rodney, Samuel Nice, and Henry Freas.<sup>52</sup>

Major Freas' removal to Germantown was fortuitously timed with his marriage to Eliza Ashmead (1811–1880), the daughter of John Ashmead (1764–1847) and Hannah Riter (b.1770), who then owned the subject property, which had been used as a tenant house. In fact, despite his marrying into the Ashmead family, it appears that Major Freas was considered a lessee at the subject property and it was not until his father-in-law died in 1847 that he became the owner.<sup>53</sup> The Freas-Ashmead union produced the following children: John Adams Freas (1836–1899), Emma Quintilla

<sup>50</sup> *Life of Gen. Hancock*. (Chicago: Rhodes & McClure, 1880), 24.

<sup>51</sup> J. Thomas Scharff and Thompson Westcott, *History of Philadelphia, 1609 – 1884* (Philadelphia: I.H. Everts & Co., 1884), 1995.

<sup>52</sup> John Palmer Garber, Naaman Henry Keyser, C. Henry Kain, and Horace Ferdinand McCann, *History of Old Germantown* (Philadelphia: H.F. McCann, 1907), 451–53.

<sup>53</sup> Deed: Albert Ashmead, Theodore Ashmead and Catharine, his wife, and Abraham Rex and Hannah, his wife, all of Germantown, to Philip R. Freas, of the same place, editor, for \$4,394, 19 July 1848, PDBk A.W.M., No. 41, p. 542, CAP.

Freas (1840–1845), Imogene Nathalia Freas (1845–1909), Hannah Freas (d.1845), and Adelaide Freas (d.1845).<sup>54</sup> By 1850, the subject house was home to the Freas family (including son John and daughter Imogene) and the following household and newspaper staff: servants Lucy Keyser and Eliza McAmees; and printers Ira C. Tyson, Walter H. Hibbs, William Malcolm, and William Dubree.<sup>55</sup> Along with the death of several minor children, Eliza Ashmead Freas suffered from health issues that were broadly categorized as “insanity” in the nineteenth century. By 1860, she resided in the Friends’ Insane Asylum near Frankford, where she remained until her death in 1880.<sup>56</sup> Her illness was described later as “Dementia.”<sup>57</sup> Imogene Freas appears to have also suffered from similar health issues, as she too was institutionalized by 1860, when she resided at the Pennsylvania Hospital for the Insane. She eventually moved to the Friends’ Asylum for the Insane from 1880 through 1900.<sup>58</sup> Imogene Freas was eventually transferred to the State Hospital for Insane in Norristown, Pennsylvania, where she died in 1909.<sup>59</sup>



Figure 47. Looking east from Wakefield Street, the rear of the Major Philip R. Freas House, showing the landscape and pond with the subject house on the back right. Source: The Shoemaker Collection, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

<sup>54</sup> This information came from a family tree at Ancestry.com.

<sup>55</sup> Seventh Census of the United States, 1850; (National Archives Microfilm Publication M432); Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29; National Archives, Washington, D.C.

<sup>56</sup> “Divorce of Philip R. Freas and Wife,” *The Legislative Record*, 1868, 275–277; *1870 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2009. Images reproduced by FamilySearch; *U.S., 1880 Federal Census Schedules of Defective, Dependent, and Delinquent Classes* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010.

<sup>57</sup> *U.S., 1880 Federal Census Schedules of Defective, Dependent, and Delinquent Classes* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010.

<sup>58</sup> Tenth Census of the United States, 1880. (NARA microfilm publication T9). Records of the Bureau of the Census, Record Group 29. National Archives, Washington, D.C.; and United States of America, Bureau of the Census. *Twelfth Census of the United States, 1900*. Washington, D.C.: National Archives and Records Administration, 1900. T623, 1854 rolls.

<sup>59</sup> Pennsylvania (State). Death certificates, 1906–1968. Series 11.90. Records of the Pennsylvania Department of Health, Record Group 11. Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

From 1830 onward, Major Freas worked to improve Germantown, the *Germantown Telegraph*, and the subject property. As an outsider, he immediately suggested formal incorporation of Germantown, which followed soon after his arrival.



Figure 48. "What Two Acres Can Do.," American Farmers' Magazine, 1853, Vol. 5, Issue 6, Part 2, 341-42.

Major Freas conducted the *Germantown Telegraph* for a period of fifty-three years and fourteen days. During a great portion of the last twelve years of his career, he was an invalid, during which time he was assisted by his son John A. Freas. As previously stated, he retired in 1883, at which time he sold the paper. Afterwards, he sold the subject property. He died in 1886.





A silver cup presented to the Germantown Blues “as an Annual Premium for Skill in Shotting” by Major Philip R. Freas on May 6, 1844. Source: Jeffrey S. Evans & Associates.

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The following sites were used to create the nomination:

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Deed: Christian Eckstein, of Ephrata, Lancaster Co., practitioner in physic, Elizabeth Eckstein, of the same place, spinster, Barbara Eckstein, of Bristol Township, Philadelphia Co., spinster, to Henry Frely, of Germantown, carpenter, for 1 acre 55 perches, 26 August 1777, Philadelphia Deed Book D., No. 10, p. 81, CAP. This property formed what is today the St. Stephan's Methodist Church property.

Deed: George Righter, of Germantown, yeoman, and Mary, his wife, Michael Righter, of the same, yeoman, and Catharine, his wife, William Zoll, of Reading, Berks Co., inn keeper, and Margaret, his wife, Christopher Hergesheimer, of Germantown, blacksmith, and Eva, his wife, Elizabeth Bower, of Reading, Berks Co., widow, George Rex, of Pottstown, Montgomery Co., blacksmith, and Susanna, his wife, Levi Rex, of the same, wheelwright, and Catharine, his wife, to John Ashmead, of Germantown, coach maker, and Hannah, his wife, 11 April 1796, PDBk E.F., No. 9.636, CAP.

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