

**ADDRESS: 1517 W GIRARD AVE**

Name of Resource: Pyramid Club

Proposed Action: Designation

Property Owner: ADIR Holdings LLC

Nominator: Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia

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

**OVERVIEW:** This nomination proposes to designate the property at 1517 W. Girard Avenue as historic and list it on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.

Under Criterion A, the nomination argues that the subject property was the home of the Pyramid Club from 1940-1965, and as such possesses “significant character, interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of Philadelphia’s black elite, and especially that community’s participation in and contribution to the city’s art world.” Under Criterion E, the nomination contends that the renovation done by celebrated architect William Lightfoot Price in 1901 is “historically significant insofar as it helps to further document his career and professional network.”

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** The staff recommends that the nomination demonstrates that the property at 1517 W. Girard Avenue satisfies Criteria for Designation A and E.



**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: 1517 W. Girard Avenue  
Postal code: 19130

**2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE**

Historic Name: The Pyramid Club  
Current/Common Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE**

Building       Structure       Site       Object

**4. PROPERTY INFORMATION**

Condition:     excellent     good       fair       poor       ruins  
Occupancy:     occupied     vacant       under construction       unknown  
Current use: Hair salon, apartments.

**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 1863 to 1965  
Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: Construction, circa 1863-1875; Renovation, 1900.  
Architect, engineer, and/or designer: Renovation, William L. Price (architect)  
Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: Contractor, R.C. Ballinger & Co.  
Original owner: Charles F. Norton  
Other significant persons: Joseph E. Gillingham, Ferdinand Keller.

**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 Preservation Alliance for Greater Phila. Date April 6, 2021

Name with Title Dr. Kevin P. Block / Mr. Patrick Grossi Email kevinpblock@gmail.com / patrick@preservationalliance.com

Street Address 1608 Walnut Street, Suite 1702 Telephone 215-546-1146

City, State, and Postal Code Philadelphia, PA 19103

Nominator  is  is not the property owner.

**PHC USE ONLY**

Date of Receipt: 4/6/2021

Correct-Complete  Incorrect-Incomplete Date: 6/18/2021

Date of Notice Issuance: 6/21/2021

Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: Adir Holdings LLC

Address: P.O. Box 56092

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19130

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  
January 2021



**The Pyramid Club**  
1517 W. Girard Avenue  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

Nominator:  
Kevin P. Block, Ph.D.

On behalf of the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia  
1608 Walnut Street, Suite 1702  
Philadelphia, PA 19103

## 5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Based on the deed record for 1517 W. Girard Avenue (see Appendix 1):

“ALL THAT CERTAIN lot or piece of ground with buildings and improvements thereon erected. SITUATE on the north side of W. Girard Avenue at the distance of one hundred and sixty five feet eight inches Westward from the Northwest corner of Fifteenth Street...Containing in front- or breadth on the said Girard Avenue forty feet and extending in length or depth northward between parallel lines at right angles with the said Girard Avenue one hundred and fifty feet to a certain twenty-nine feet wide street called Flora Street” (Figure 1).



Figure 1. Aerial image of 1517 W. Girard Avenue, with property boundary in red. Image from Google Earth.



## 6. DESCRIPTION

The former Pyramid Club building at 1517 W. Girard Avenue is a four-story Italianate-style brick building faced in brownstone that connects to a series of backbuildings. The original time of construction is between October 1863, when a deed describes the lot as undeveloped, and May 1875, when a deed describes the lot as including a “three story brick dwelling with brown stone front and double three story back buildings” (for deed records gathered from the Philadelphia City Archives, see Appendix 1). Comparing the property records to Philadelphia city atlases suggests that the “double three story back buildings” were added sometime around 1875, given that the 1875 G.M. Hopkins Atlas represents the lot without the additions of that year. The 1895 G.W. Bromley Atlas, in contrast, illustrates the increased depth of the building complex in the direction of Flora Street (previously Wallis Street; Figures 2 and 3). In 1901, William L. Price, then one of the leading architects in Philadelphia, was hired by Ferdinand Keller to renovate the property. Renovations included interior and exterior alterations, a first-floor west-facing bay window, and a two-story addition.<sup>1</sup>

The two-story addition of 1901 to the original three-story structure requires some clarification, since the building is clearly not five stories. It is likely that the original building was assessed as including a half-story basement, two stories, and a half-story attic (i.e. the height of three stories), or else it was actually three stories, not including the basement. In the former scenario, Price’s renovation would have involved the removal of the original attic and the addition of both a third story and a new attic story. Because of the building’s large eave and the setback of the attic story, the facade reads from the sidewalk as three stories, but the extended height of the basement and the first floor makes 1517 W. Girard proportionately larger than the other three-story buildings on the 1500 and 1400 blocks of W. Girard Avenue.

Several renovations were completed subsequent to the 1901 Price renovation. Around 1920, the building was bought by the Woman’s Benefit Association of the Maccabees, an auxiliary of the Knights of the Maccabees fraternal organization, which renovated the town house to serve as offices and lodging rooms. Renovation work likely involved the subdivision of the interior to create additional bedrooms and less common space, but no structural interventions to the floor plan. In 1940, the Pyramid Club acquired the property and completed a \$9000 renovation.<sup>2</sup> This likely involved the removal of bedroom subdivisions to create galleries and assembly rooms. In 1965, when the proposed period of significance for this nomination ends, the Philadelphia YWCA acquired 1517 W. Girard Avenue and adapted the building to its purposes without notable alterations.<sup>3</sup> Currently, the front of the

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<sup>1</sup> The earliest notice of construction on record is the following: “Estimates are about to be invited for alterations to the residence at 1517 Girard avenue, under the direction of Architects W.L. Price & Bro, 731 Walnut street. The plans have been finished, and contractors are about to ask sub-bids.” *Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide* 15, no. 5 (January 30, 1901). A second notice of construction appeared a month later: “Contractors R.C. Ballinger & Co. will start at 1517 Girard avenue, for Ferdinand Keller, to cost \$8000. The permit for the work granted recently, provides for both interior and exterior alterations, a new brick bay window, 6.6x18 feet, and a two-story brick addition, 18x18 feet. Architect William L. Price, 717 Walnut street, made the plans.” *Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide* 16, no. 5 (February 27, 1901): 133.

<sup>2</sup> “Club Opens,” *Norfolk Journal and Guide*, October 12, 1940.

<sup>3</sup> Jacob Sherman, “Pyramid Club Sold to YWCA: Will Not Mean End of Social Elite’s Mecca, Hope to Set Up Headquarters in Gtn. Prexy Says,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, November 13, 1965.

building serves as a hair salon and the backbuildings in the complex serve apartment units. The part of the structure pertinent to this nomination appears to be in good condition. The only superficial indication of structural deterioration is two first-floor tie rods that one can see protruding from the western edge of the front facade.

Alterations completed after the period of significance ends should, however, be noted. Except for the rusticated basement level and two panels beneath the first-floor windows, the original brownstone facing and window moldings are no longer visible; they are now covered in a clean, but minimally textured brown or cream-colored painted stucco. The cornice and attic of the building has also been changed since the early 1940s. Then, there was a molded architrave with a dentil course and side brackets around the top corner of each side, as well as three round-arched rooftop dormer windows (Figure 4). Now, there is an unarticulated architrave with no top-corner bracket pairs and a single-gable dormer in the center of the attic (Figure 5). The triangular Pyramid Club plaque to the left of the entrance has also been removed.



Figure 2. Extension of building depth between 1875 (left, G.M. Hopkins Philadelphia Atlas) and 1895 (right, G.W. Bromley Philadelphia Atlas). Digitized images from the Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network, Athenaeum of Philadelphia.



Figure 3. Additions to the original building footprint: (far left) rear ell, (center-left) semi-closed breezeway from the original building to the rear ell, and (center-right) two apartment structures that were likely constructed after the proposed period of significance for this nomination. The rear apartment structures are hardly visible from the sidewalk (far right). All images by Kevin Block, January 2021.



Figure 4. 1517 W. Girard Avenue in the early 1940s. Photograph by John Mosley, Blockson Afro-American Collection, Temple University Library.





Figure 5. 1517 W. Girard Avenue. Image from Google Maps, August 2019.

The style of the building is Italianate. The most conspicuous features of this style include the building's large eave hanging over the cornice line, the eleven angular brackets that support the eave in a 2-1-2-1-2-1-2 rhythm, and the proportions of the rectangular window units, which are elongated on the first floor, standard-sized on the second on the second floor, and compressed (i.e. nearly square) on the third floor. The composition of the facade is regular if not symmetrical, due to the building's siting (which originally included a side yard on the western edge of the property line) and the offset location of the entryway. The composition of the facade relies more on proportion than elaborate ornamentation to give the building its formal character and it relies on differences in window height to help differentiate public from private spaces. 1517 W. Girard Avenue is an example of Italianate architecture that is more classically-leaning and austere than the picturesque, older, and more conscientiously suburban Italianate homes that one finds, for example, throughout West Philadelphia in the vicinity of Hamilton Village and the Woodlands.

The building sits atop a rusticated basement and horizontal belt course (Figure 6). In two of the three bays of the basement there are sliding basement windows in segmental arch openings. In the remaining bay, concrete steps with decorative iron handrails frame seven risers that curve upward to the main entry landing. The side yard on the western edge of the property is enclosed by decorative iron fencing with a brownstone base that opens between two brownstone gate posts ornamented with ball finials.

The three bays of the first floor consists of a main entrance and two oversized framed window moldings. The main entrance, now the most ornamental feature of the building facade, is marked by pilasters that support a round-arched hooded door molding with a decorative keystone and spandrels. A paired door with an arched transom window encloses the door opening (Figures 7a and 7b). Within the framed window moldings are double-hung windows with two panes in each sash and arched transom windows (Figure 8a). Beneath the sill of each first-floor window are brackets separated by panelled brownstone. The window molding surrounds were once more finely detailed--with spandrels and distinguishable crowns, aprons, and side casings--but the use of stucco makes the surrounds appear monolithic (compare Figure 4 to Figure 5). On the western side of the building there is a bay window on concrete slab that was added during the 1901 Price renovation (Figure 8b). Unlike the metal two-story front bay windows used for speculative housing erected elsewhere in the vicinity of 1517 W. Girard Avenue (see Rilling, 2018), this single-story bay window is wooden. The bay repeats the bracket and panel window motif from the front of the facade and the opening is also enclosed by double-hung windows with two panes in each sash and an arched transom window. There is a dentilled cornice line and crown molding atop the bay.

The window treatments of the second and third stories are the same as the first, notwithstanding differences in proportion (see Figure 5). The second story window openings are of standard rectangular height; the third story window openings are compressed to almost squarish proportions and do not include arched transom windows. Beneath the second and third-story windows are angular brackets that are much shorter than the curved brackets of the first floor.

The large eave of the building extends almost to the beginning of the entrance stair below and is held up by 11 angular brackets (See Figure 9). As previously noted, the architrave is now completely flat. A small central gable dormer protrudes from the top of the attic story, above the eave.



Figure 6. (Left) The rusticated basement level of 1517 W. Girard Avenue. (Right) Side view of the concrete steps showing decorative iron handrails, one being slightly curved (west side) to match the curve of the steps, that feature spiral medallions. Both images by Kevin Block, January 2021.



Figure 7a. (Left) The concrete steps and main entrance to the building, enclosed with recently installed paired metal doors. Figure 7b. (Right) Detail of pilasters and round-arched molding to the building's main entrance, including a decorative keystone and spandrels. The upside-down pyramidal light fixture in the foyer, seen through the arched transom window, may be original. Both images by Kevin Block, January 2021.





Figure 8a. (Left) A first-floor window of elongated proportion, with brackets framing a stuccoed panel. Figure 8b. (Right) The one-story bay window on the western side of 1517 W. Girard Avenue that was added during the 1901 Price renovation. Both images by Kevin Block, January 2021.



Figure 9. Extended eave and angular brackets of 1517 W. Girard Avenue. Compared to the more traditionally Italianate S-curve brackets and dentiled architrave of 1515 W. Girard Avenue, the brackets and architrave of 1517 W. Girard Avenue is austere. Image from Google Maps, August 2019.

## 7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

### 7-1. INTRODUCTION: The Urban Development of Girard Avenue

This nomination proposes that the building located at 1517 W. Girard Avenue satisfies two criteria for designation on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places (§14-1004), Criterion A and Criterion E, in a period of significance from 1900-1965. As the home of the Pyramid Club from 1940 until 1965, the site has significant character, interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of Philadelphia's black elite, and especially that community's participation in and contribution to the city's art world. Criterion A is the primary reason for the preservation of this site and was the original motivation for assembling the nomination. A secondary reason, discovered in the process of researching the property, is that 1517 W. Girard Avenue is partially the work of William Lightfoot Price, an architect who has significantly influenced the architectural, social, and cultural development of Philadelphia and the surrounding metropolitan region, thereby satisfying Criterion E. While Price's 1901 renovation of the building was not a major commission for him, it is historically significant insofar as it helps to further document his career and professional network. Price is best known for his suburban residential work, his promotion of the Arts and Crafts movement, his affiliation with experimental communities in Arden, Delaware and Rose Valley, Pennsylvania, and his resort architecture in Atlantic City.<sup>4</sup> What 1517 W. Girard Avenue helps to demonstrate, then, is his competency working in Philadelphia's turn-of-the-century urban vernacular and his relationship to a professional collaborator.

Since the applicability of both criteria to 1517 W. Girard Avenue is related to the building's site, some discussion of the historical development of this area of North Philadelphia is relevant prior to considering the criteria separately. Understanding the historical development of the area also helps to explain why it was attractive and suitable for the founders of the Pyramid Club. The 1500 block of W. Girard Avenue is part of what architectural historian George E. Thomas deemed the "Girard Avenue Historic District," which stretches from the western side of North Broad Street westwards, through the intersection with Ridge Avenue, around Girard College (one of the city's major architectural landmarks), and into the Girard Bridge entrance to Fairmount Park.<sup>5</sup> In his National Register nomination, Thomas describes this district as "one of Philadelphia's most visually impressive collections of late-nineteenth-century houses and institutions."<sup>6</sup>

Girard Avenue urbanized during the latter half of the nineteenth century. In the 1840s, prior to the consolidation of Philadelphia's neighboring districts, boroughs, and townships into the city municipality, the area north of Eastern State Penitentiary was part of Francisville, a rural village that was home mainly to Scotch-Irish and English immigrants who worked as artisans and laborers. Green Hill Presbyterian Church, designed by John Notman in the Gothic Revival style, opened in 1847--its name a

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<sup>4</sup> George E. Thomas, *William L. Price: Arts and Crafts to Modern Design*, 1st edition (Princeton Architectural Press, 2000). For the property record of 1517 W. Girard Avenue, see Appendix 1.

<sup>5</sup> George E. Thomas, "Girard Avenue Historic District," Nomination (Philadelphia, PA: National Register of Historic Places, National Park Service, United States Department of Interior, May 13, 1985).

<sup>6</sup> Thomas, 1. Much of the following introductory section borrows from Thomas's district nomination.

reflection of its bucolic setting.<sup>7</sup> The neoclassical campus for Girard College opened in 1848. St. Joseph's hospital acquired its property at W. Girard Avenue and 17th Street in 1849, just as a wave of Irish immigrants arrived in Philadelphia after escaping the Great Famine. Hospital reports stressed the "salubrity and ample Room" of the location.<sup>8</sup> St. Matthews Episcopal Church, another Gothic Revival building, was constructed in the early 1850s.

A critical transformation occurred in the area in 1859, when the Richmond and Schuylkill River Passenger Railway installed and operated a horsecar line on Girard Avenue, which continues to this day as SEPTA's Route 15 trolley line. The old village of Francisville thus became, like parts of West Philadelphia, a streetcar suburb (see Figure 10 for the state of development in the area circa 1862), especially after the Girard Avenue Bridge opened in 1874 to increase access to the Centennial Exhibition. Unlike the streetcar lines of West Philadelphia, however, which brought the majority of passengers from homes near the Woodlands and Hamilton Village across the Schuylkill River to offices and shops in Center City, the streetcar lines of Girard Avenue carried commuters across Frankford Avenue (where W. Girard becomes E. Girard) and northwards to the heavy industry of the Aramingo Canal (originally, the Gunner's Run Canal) and the docks and piers of the Delaware waterfront. The development of W. Girard Avenue as a respectable neighborhood in North Philadelphia and the industrial development of the city's waterfront were thus interrelated.

The career of Joseph E. Gillingham (1830-1900) helps to illustrate W. Girard Avenue's reciprocal relationship to E. Girard Avenue in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Gillingham acquired 1517 W. Girard Ave in 1863 and built the original "three story brick dwelling with brown stone front and double three story back buildings" on the lot between then and 1875 (See Appendix 1). Gillingham was an extraordinarily successful lumber merchant and founding partner of Gillingham & Garrison, which in 1855 began operations on Richmond and Norris streets at the easternmost edge of Girard Avenue, adjacent to the Cramp & Sons Shipbuilding Company (see Figure 11). Gillingham & Garrison owned huge swaths of forest in Cambria and Clearfield counties in western Pennsylvania. The company floated timber from these stands along the Juniata River to the Susquehanna River, down the Susquehanna through the Chesapeake and Delaware Canal, and then up the Delaware River, where the timber dried until it was suitable for milling into lumber. One can imagine that Gillingham regularly commuted from his home at 1517 W. Girard Avenue to his lumber yard along the Aramingo Canal.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> James A. Jacobs, "Green Hill Presbyterian Church," Historic American Buildings Survey Form (Washington, D.C.: National Park Service, U.S. Department of Interior, Summer 2000), <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/master/pnp/habshaer/pa/pa3800/pa3861/data/pa3861data.pdf>.

<sup>8</sup> Gail Farr Casterline, "St. Joseph's and St. Mary's: The Origins of Catholic Hospitals in Philadelphia," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 108, no. 3 (1984): 300.

<sup>9</sup> For a description of Gillingham & Garrison, see I-95 Archaeology Center, "Historic Context," Digging I95, Undated, <https://bit.ly/3jG2TV5>. See also Harrold Edgar Gillingham, *The Gillingham Family, Descendants of Yeamans Gillingham* (Philadelphia: Patterson & Whitecompany, Printers, 1901), <http://archive.org/details/gillinghamfamil00gillgoog>. For a relevant description of Philadelphia's lumber industry in the antebellum period, see Donna J. Rilling, "Sylvan Enterprise and the Philadelphia Hinterland, 1790-1860," *Pennsylvania History: A Journal of Mid-Atlantic Studies* 67, no. 2 (2000): 194-217.





Figure 10. The 1862 Samuel L. Smedley Atlas, with the 1500 block of W. Girard Avenue outlined in red. Note, near the bottom-center, that the area was still known as “Francisville.” The area’s anchor institution was Girard College, major institutions were then located along what is now the 1600 and 1700 blocks of W. Girard Avenue, including St. Joseph’s Hospital, Green Hill Presbyterian Church, and St. Matthews Episcopal Church. The horse car lines along Girard Avenue, shown in this image as parallel lines down the center of Girard Avenue, were installed in 1859.

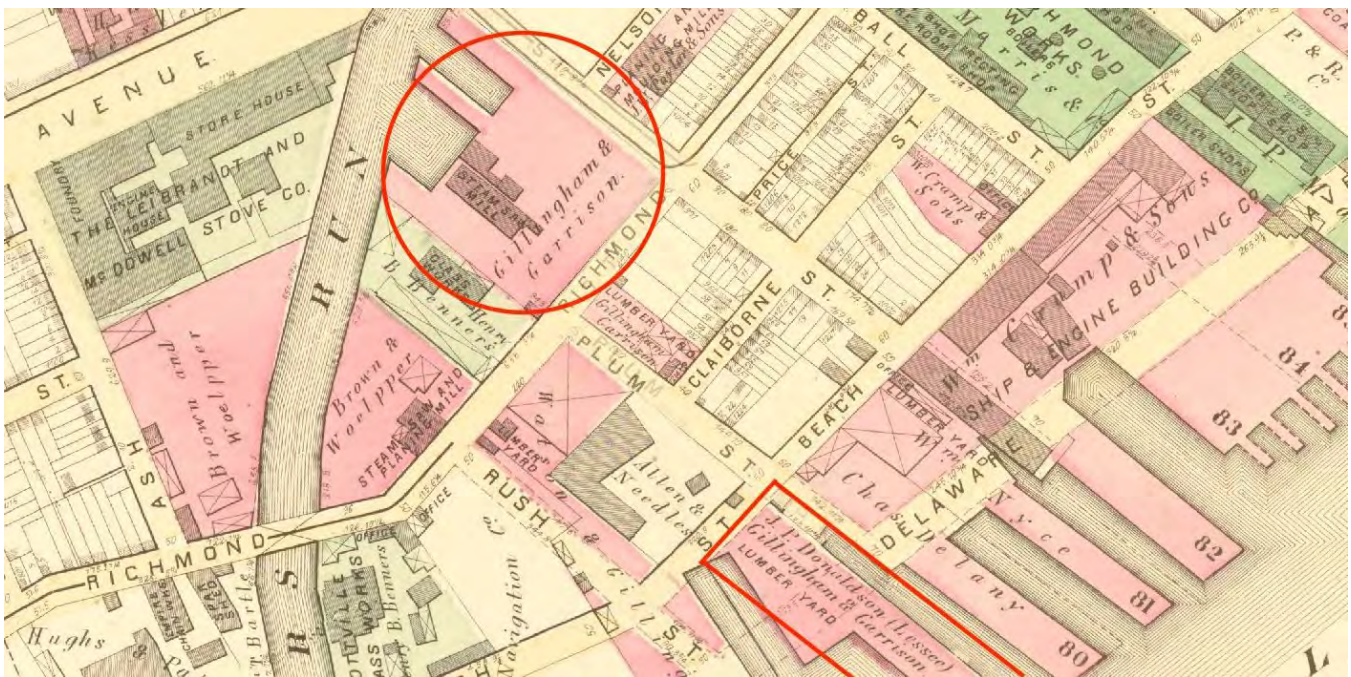


Figure 11. The eastern terminus of Girard Avenue at the Gunner’s Run Canal (later, Aramingo Canal). Gillingham & Garrison’s steam mill was along the canal and its lumber yard was along the river (in red).



From 1860 until roughly the turn of the century, W. Girard Avenue from Brewerytown to Broad Street became a middle-class, mostly German enclave. St. Joseph's College, under the direction of Swiss-born Jesuit Father J. Burchard Villiger, moved to Stiles Street in 1866 and later constructed its impressive Roman baroque Church of the Gesu (1879-1888, designed by E.F. Durang). In 1872, the German Hospital relocated to Girard and Corinthian avenues. After 1884, Lutheran deaconesses imported from Germany staffed the facility. After 1875, Amish and Mennonite farmers speaking Pennsylvania Dutch could be found selling their products in the Ridge Avenue Farmers Market. Like the area's institutional buildings, the residential housing stock in the area was architecturally impressive, including the work of Otto C. Wolf, Charles M. Autenrieth, William L. Price, and Willis G. Hale. Development in the area reached its peak in the late 1890s, shortly after Hale completed Peter Widener's mansion (1887) at the intersection of Girard Avenue and N. Broad Street. In the final decade of the century, during which the streetcar line was electrified, some of the city's most fashionable *nouveau riche* called the neighborhood home.<sup>10</sup>

W. Girard Avenue became more ethnically diverse in the years following World War I and Prohibition, as Philadelphia's breweries shut down and German Americans sought to assimilate more fully into Anglo-American society.<sup>11</sup> By the 1920s, some of the larger residences had been converted into boarding and lodging houses for more transient residents, a subtle indication of the neighborhood's slowly declining status. The Women's Benefit Association of the Maccabees, an auxiliary to a popular fraternal association, acquired 1517 W. Girard Avenue in 1920 to use as staff offices and lodging for single women who were new to the city or visiting. A year later, the Improved Order of Red Men--a Native American-themed, white-only fraternal association--acquired 1521-1523 W. Girard Avenue. Later, this address became a Masonic lodge and, in 1957, the headquarters of Fellowship House, an interfaith and interracial organization that was crucial to forwarding the Civil Rights Movement in Philadelphia.<sup>12</sup>

The presence of middle-class African Americans became more prominent around W. Girard Avenue in the 1920s, when many migrated uptown from the Seventh Ward, the traditional center of black life in Philadelphia. The opening of the Broad Street Subway's Girard Station in 1928 helped to facilitate the intracity or "secondary" migration of the black middle class.<sup>13</sup> Soon the 1700 block of Jefferson Street was known colloquially as "Strivers' Row," a moniker that the editors of the *Philadelphia Tribune*

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<sup>10</sup> For a good description of the development of W. Girard Avenue in this period, see Laura DiPasquale, "1535 W Girard Avenue - The Charles Yerkes House," Nomination of Historic Building, Structure, Site, or Object (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Historical Commission, December 13, 2019), <https://www.phila.gov/media/20191220122835/1535-W-Girard-Ave-nomination.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Russell A. Kazal, *Becoming Old Stock: The Paradox of German-American Identity*, First edition (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2004). Kazal focuses his analysis on different German neighborhoods in Philadelphia.

<sup>12</sup> On the Fellowship House and its move to 15121 W. Girard Avenue, see Stanley Keith Arnold, *Building the Beloved Community: Philadelphia's Interracial Civil Rights Organizations and Race Relations, 1930-1970* (University Press of Mississippi, 2014), 59. On the Improved Order of Red Men, see Philip J. Deloria, "Fraternal Indians and Republican Identities," in *Playing Indian*, Revised edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 38-70.

<sup>13</sup> On the term "secondary migration," see Marcus Anthony Hunter, *Black Citymakers: How The Philadelphia Negro Changed Urban America*, Illustrated edition (Oxford University Press, 2015), 14.

borrowed from one of the most exclusive areas in Harlem.<sup>14</sup> New institutions catering to the black middle-class consumers, such as the Pearl Theatre (2047 Ridge Avenue), were opening to serve a growing black community. By 1937, however, W. Girard Avenue was already redlined in Home Owners' Loan Corporation maps. Over the next three decades, the population of North Philadelphia from Poplar to Lehigh and 10th to 33rd streets would become increasingly segregated by race and impoverished.

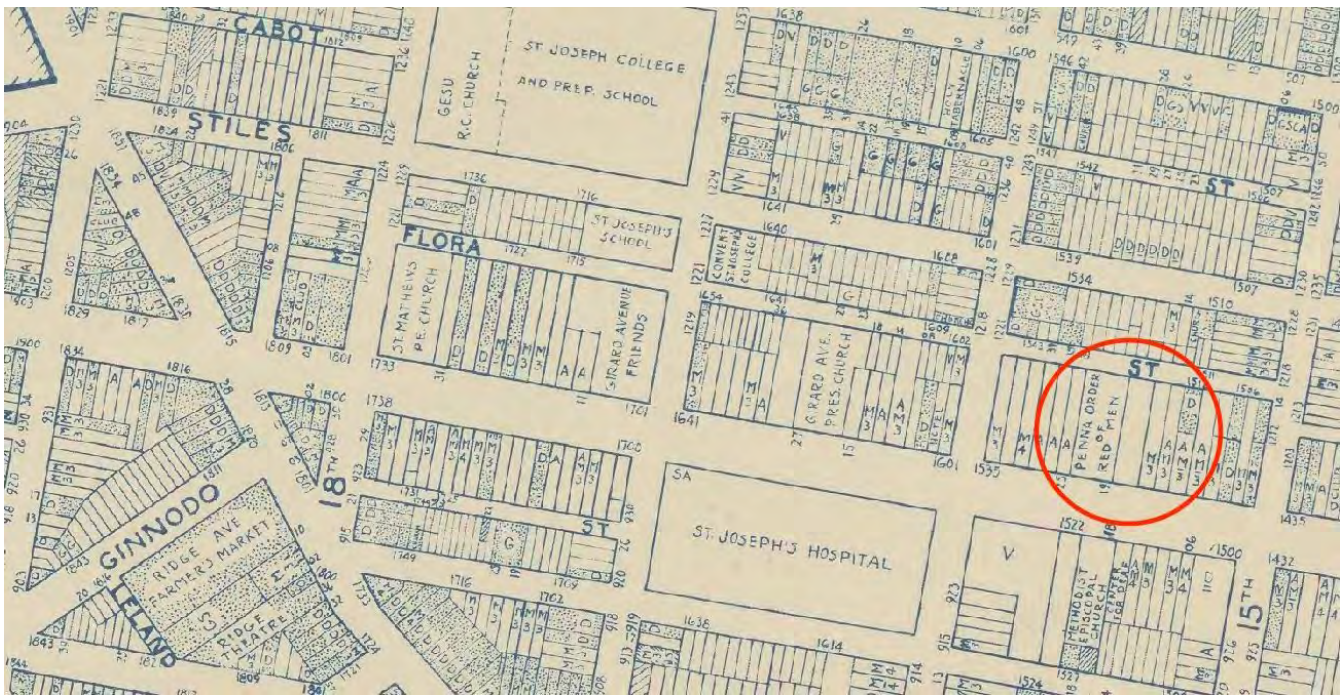


Figure 12. 1942 WPA Atlas, with 1517 W. Girard Avenue encircled in red. In 1942, the Pyramid Club's neighbor was the "Penna Order of Red Men," an Indian-themed fraternal organization open only to white men. Commercial development in the neighborhood was most advanced around the intersection of Girard and Ridge, where the Ridge Avenue Farmer's Market, the Ridge Theatre, and the Northwestern National Trust and Girard Avenue Title and Trust banks were located. Note that St. Joseph's College and Prep School had not yet expanded across Stiles and Flora streets.

<sup>14</sup> "Prior to and shortly after World War 2, the 1700 block of Jefferson St. was known as 'Strivers' Row.' In that so-called exclusive area lived the Raymond Pace Alexanders, John P. Turners, Joseph H. Rainey, Rev. C.M. Smiths, to mention a few. In the next block lived Dr. Oscar J. Cooper and his wife. He and his wife still live there. C. Percy White operated a thriving real estate business and the LaSalle Hotel on Ridge Ave., between Jefferson and Master sts. While he still operates those businesses, assisted by his sons, Donald and Charles, he now lives in Germantown. Theodore O. Spaulding, now County Court Judge Spaulding, and his family lived on Master St. So did the Joseph Trents, known of building contracting fame. The late Dr. John W. Sullivan held forth on the southeast corner of 17th and Jefferson sts. His dental offices attracted patients from all sections of Philadelphia and many parts of New Jersey. Dr. Eric Clarke had medical offices on north 18th st. above Columbia ave. Dr. George Ward and Dr. Arthur Thomas had medical offices on 12th St. above and below Girard Ave. Dr. Lawrence D. Christmas had his dental offices on Girard Ave., near the Pyramid Club, and he still does. The Pyramid Club, at 1517 Girard Ave., was the cultural and social mecca of negro Philadelphians before World War 2 and for a few years afterwards. Every negro that was supposed to be 'somebody' belonged to the Pyramid Club, and they attended in droves nightly. But today, the Pyramid Club is but a 'shadow' of its old self. It is still standing, and there is a small membership. Chances are, however, it will never again claim the glory it once had." "Top Negroes Resided in N. Philly: Majority Now Living in Gtn., Mt. Airy, Etc.," *Philadelphia Tribune*, July 20, 1965, sec. A6.

7-2. CRITERION 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.*

**The “Mecca” of Philadelphia’s Black Middle Class: The Pyramid Club**

The idea for the Pyramid Club began to take shape in 1937, through excited discussions in living rooms, the legal office of Lewis Tanner Moore, and in the basement of the Christian Street Y.M.C.A. The designers of the idea were a group of black professionals from Philadelphia, “men of vision” who, according to their own account, “sensed the temper of the times and keenly felt the need of their people.”<sup>15</sup> That they were black professionals in the 1930s and from Philadelphia was equally important. There was a rich tradition of private social, literary, and athletic clubs, ethnic societies, and other voluntary and fraternal institutions in the city.<sup>16</sup> Philadelphia’s black elite was part of this tradition, having established or joined such vibrant, secular organizations as the Free African Society (1787; the first formal black society in the United States), the Prince Hall Masons (1797), the Banneker Institute (1854), the Citizens Republican Club (1884), the Octavia V. Catto Lodge of the Improved Benevolent Protective Order of Elks of the World (IBPOEW; 1897), and the Grand United Order of Odd Fellows.<sup>17</sup> From the 1870s until the 1890s, some of these “aristocrats of color” or “upper tens” joined the Crescent Club and, after 1910, the Philadelphia chapter of the Bachelor-Benedict “Pleasure” Club, which included members of the Abele, Warrick, Stevens, Dorsey and other “old families.”<sup>18</sup>

As a group of black professionals who had reached their socioeconomic position through the university, the founders of the Pyramid Club were part of a truly national landscape of black organizational life. Walter Jerrick, a dentist who was elected the first president of the Pyramid Club in 1938, was a member of the Rho Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha, the first black collegiate fraternity (founded at Cornell University

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<sup>15</sup> *Pictorial Album of the Pyramid Club: First Anniversary*. (Philadelphia: The Pyramid Club, 1941).

<sup>16</sup> For a description of Philadelphia’s men’s and women’s private clubs, see E. Digby Baltzell, *Philadelphia Gentlemen: The Making of a National Upper Class*, First Edition (New Brunswick: Routledge, 1989); Nathaniel Burt, *The Perennial Philadelphians: The Anatomy of an American Aristocracy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007). For a comprehensive overview of voluntary organizations in Philadelphia, see Jean Barth Toll and Mildred S. Gillam, eds., *Invisible Philadelphia: Community Through Voluntary Organizations* (Philadelphia: Atwater Kent Museum, 1995).

<sup>17</sup> Anne S. Butler, “Black Fraternal and Benevolent Societies in Nineteenth-Century America,” in *African American Fraternities and Sororities: The Legacy and the Vision*, ed. Tamara L. Brown, Gregory S. Parks, and Clarendia M. Phillips (University Press of Kentucky, 2005), 67–94; Emma Jones Lapsansky, “Voluntary Organizations Among Philadelphia Afro-Americans,” in *Invisible Philadelphia: Community Through Voluntary Organizations*, ed. Jean Barth Toll and Mildred S. Gillam (Philadelphia: Atwater Kent Museum, 1995), 33–36; Roger Lane, “The Web of Organization: Religion, Race, Class, and Recreation,” in *William Dorsey’s Philadelphia and Ours: On the Past and Future of the Black City in America*, Illustrated edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 231–336. See also the work of Julie Winch, *Philadelphia’s Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787-1848*, First Edition edition (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988); *The Elite of Our People: Joseph Willson’s Sketches of Black Upper-Class Life in Antebellum Philadelphia* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2000).

<sup>18</sup> Willard B. Gatewood, “The ‘Upper Tens’ in the Northeast,” in *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880–1920* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000), 97–116.

in 1906). Raymond Pace Alexander was also a Pyramidian and a member of Alpha Phi Alpha. Through relationships established in the university, as well as travel or from reading the black press, the founders of the Pyramid Club would have kept up with the happenings of other black social clubs, including the Iroquois Literary and Social Club in New Orleans; the Manhattan Club, Acanthus Club, and Mu-so-lit Club in Washington, D.C.; the Society of the Sons of New York in New York City; the Appomattox Club in Chicago; the Nacirema Club in Detroit; the Eclectic Club in Trenton; and the Loendi Club in Pittsburgh. In short, the idea for the Pyramid Club was not original; there were plenty of models available for the founders to follow. What black club life reflected in the 1930s was a basic, widespread need for sociability and social distinction, as well as the belief, articulated even in DuBois's *The Philadelphia Negro* (1899), "that the largest hope for the ultimate rise of the Negro lies in this mastery of the art of social organized life."<sup>19</sup>

In the 1930s, that need for social distinction that the Pyramid Club aimed to satisfy was also a reaction to the Great Migration. In the largest "black metropolises" across the country--New York, Chicago, Philadelphia, Detroit--the community split along class lines. In the case of Philadelphia, newly arrived migrants from the South tended to crowd together in the Seventh Ward while members of the black elite, descendants of the city's free black community and new professionals, slowly moved to West and North Philadelphia.<sup>20</sup> To be sure, there were charitable and benevolent organizations administered by members of the black elite that supported the assimilation and well-being of the migrants. The Quaker City Lodge in South Philadelphia, which provided families with food, fuel, and clothing, was one such organization. Other black fraternal and reform organizations, however, including the Philadelphia office of the NAACP, were marked by this division between the elite and the masses.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, Drake and Cayton noted in their canonical study of black urban life in this period that the organizational form as *such*, no matter what its ultimate purpose, reinscribed an ethical contrast with the supposedly disorganized life of the poor. Middle-class blacks were organized whereas lower-class blacks were atomized, or so the popular belief held.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Philadelphia Negro: A Social Study*, Reprint edition (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1995), 233.

<sup>20</sup> St Clair Drake and Horace R. Cayton, *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, Enlarged edition (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 2015). On the Great Migration to Philadelphia, see Robert Gregg, *Sparks from the Anvil of Oppression: Philadelphia's African Methodists and Southern Migrants, 1890-1940*, First Edition edition (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1993); Charles Ashley Hardy, "Race and Opportunity: Black Philadelphia During the Era of the Great Migration, 1916-1930" (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI, Temple University, 1989). Gatewood writes, "Blacks who had lived in these cities, often for generations, and had carved out privileged places for themselves resented the influx of southern migrants, whom they blamed for the spread of anti-Negro prejudice among whites. Convinced that the uncouth, loud, and unkempt 'riff-raff' from the black belt of the South flowing into Philadelphia, Boston, Chicago, and other cities was responsible for the erection of racial barriers which had not existed previously, the old residents withdrew into exclusive organizations in an effort to place distance between themselves and the new arrivals 'who happened to have some ancestors of the same race.'" *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880-1920* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000), 344.

<sup>21</sup> H. Viscount Nelson, "The Philadelphia NAACP: Race Versus Class Consciousness During the Thirties," *Journal of Black Studies* 5, no. 3 (1975): 255-76.

<sup>22</sup> "These clubs express and reinforce the middle-class ideals of restrained public deportment and 'respectability.'" *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City*, Enlarged edition (Chicago ; London: University of Chicago Press, 2015), 689.



On the one hand, the founding of the Pyramid Club reflected this social division between the elite and the masses. On the other hand, the founders of the Pyramid Club were fully aware of the division and tried to use their organization as an instrument of reconciliation and reform. “The Pyramid Club becomes no little island of selfishness in the midst of a sea of humanity but rather a movement representing the persistence of idealism in a materialistic world,” the club founders wrote in their first anniversary album, responding to and anticipating their critics.

It is no attempt of a few to withdraw from the many, but the drawing together of many into firm fellowship to the end that all will profit thereby; it is no denial of reality in favor of the fancied, but instead the application of implemented vision to the possibilities inherent in realities. And, just as the vision of the founders and the leadership of our beloved president moves us increasingly toward real objectives, and just as the club draws continually unto it new men, inspired imagination and fresh vigor out of the spirit wells of our race, the club and what it stands for will thrive and flourish. The target of our ambitions, the tactical finesse of our development will ever be fellowship, cultural excellence, pride of race, spiritual rectitude and service to our fellow man.<sup>23</sup>

This vision was a mixed ideology of a transitional generation, an elite of “new men” who were more individualistic than their church-centered forebears. Along with an older sense of *noblesse oblige* and racial uplift ideology, the first anniversary statement expressed a commitment to “cultural excellence” in the arts that the Harlem Renaissance and the experience of the Roaring Twenties surely helped to stimulate. Interest in culture was connected to the club’s explicit commitment to pleasure and leisure, which one finds less frequently in nineteenth-century black organizations that were often oriented around the inculcation of self-discipline and self-improvement (the Banneker Institute is in this sense representative). Fittingly, the Pyramid Club’s official motto was *Dum Vivimus Vivamus*, “While We Live, Let Us Live.” Conspicuously absent from the statement and from later activities was any identification with a particular political party. In a moment when the majority of African Americans in Philadelphia, encouraged by Roosevelt’s New Deal, were beginning to switch allegiance from the Republican Party to the Democrat Party, the club tried its best to avoid any specific political orientation.

The realization of the Pyramid Club’s ambitious vision depended in large part on the acquisition of adequate facilities, a process that was completed in January 1940 when the club acquired the deed to 1517 W. Girard Avenue for \$5500, with financing provided by the Philadelphia Branch of the North

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<sup>23</sup> *Pictorial Album of the Pyramid Club*. I thank Margaret N. Sly, Temple University Special Collections, for providing me with access to this document despite Covid-19 restrictions on the Temple campus. Dr. O. Wilson Winters responded to criticism of the Pyramid Club that appeared in *The Philadelphia Tribune* as follows: “If the Pyramid Club will bring together in close apposition one-tenth of the brain power, creative imagination and collective cooperation that is lost among the race because of ignorance of the other’s existence or because of the lack of contiguity, let us have bigger and better Pyramids just as the name implies. Let us have a palace, even if it is ‘ultra,’ where the intelligentsia as well as the socialite can meet and evaluate the other, warm in the enthusiasm that such an environment could give. In such a medium the political lieutenants could meet in sportsmanlike joviality and smoke and, indeed, even drink of the bitter dregs of a hard political campaign just as (not because) the Cookes and the Kelleys do at the Racquet and the Poor Richard and other ultra clubs, just as they do while their respective Negro lieutenants continue their carbon copy feud ad infinitum.” “Official Defends Pyramid Club on \$100 in Strong Answer to Tribune Guest Columnist,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, April 4, 1940.

Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company (then located at Broad and Lombard streets). “Scholley” Pace Alexander, a lawyer and real estate broker who would later become a member of the Philadelphia Housing Commission and the Citizens Committee on City Planning, led the building search committee.<sup>24</sup> It would take another \$9000 and eight months to renovate the building, which had not been in use for ten years, and install new hardwood floors, gilt panels, new meeting and games rooms, and a new bar--all decorated in the Egyptian theme (See Appendix 2, especially Figures 13-22). The opening of the Pyramid Club in October 1940 was hailed by the black press as a national event, not just in the *Philadelphia Tribune* but also in the *Pittsburgh Courier* and the *Norfolk Journal and Guide*.<sup>25</sup>

The heyday of the Pyramid Club was the 1940s and early 1950s, a period of relative economic prosperity for Philadelphia's black middle class and one in which nearly every newspaper article about the club referred to it as “the Mecca.” Membership grew quickly, to 164 by 1941 and to a maximum of 350 by 1944. There was also a women’s coordinating group, the Wives of the Pyramidians, which ensured round-the-clock usage of the clubhouse. The different spaces of the building served a range of activities. The upper “gallery” floors hosted formal events: fraternity and sorority reunions, marriage and conference receptions, lectures, professional gatherings and meetings of the Shriners and the Elks, art exhibitions, and concerts. When the Eastern Regional Conference of the NAACP was held in Philadelphia in the spring of 1952, for example, Thurgood Marshall and other attendees assembled during the day at the Philadelphia Fellowship Commission Building at 260 S. 15th Street and then reconvened at the Pyramid Club for an evening reception. The venues were, in a sense, symbolic: one belonged to an interracial organization and the other was black-owned and operated.<sup>26</sup> The basement bar, attic billiards rooms, and sitting rooms in contrast, supported the community’s daily, more informal get-togethers. Wives of the Pyramidians might use the clubhouse on a weekday to meet for coffee and play a game of bridge or euchre. And on any given Saturday night, Pyramidians gathered at the Crystal Bar to drink, smoke, play poker, dance, and watch a ballgame or boxing match. At a time when many Philadelphia establishments remained *de facto* segregated, even these informal gatherings were significant. One photograph (Appendix 2, Figure 22) taken by John Mosley, the Pyramid Club’s unofficial photographer, is particularly revealing in its totally quotidian portrayal of club life: well-dressed black men drink and catch up with each other at the Crystal Bar, with any tips going to the local chapter

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<sup>24</sup> “The selection of the club site was a nerve wracking and back breaking task. Factors considered were cost, site, adaptability without extensive alterations, and availability by street car transportation to all sections of the city. More than 125 possible locations were carefully checked and examined and it was not until the latter part of 1939 that a place admirably suitable for all of its purposes, and meeting the unanimous approval of the membership was found. This is the new house of the club at 1517 W. Girard Avenue, which was purchased at a cost of fifty-five hundred (\$5500) dollars on January 31, 1940. The only reason the building was purchased at this extremely low price was because its size and previous use as a club house made it impracticable for private use...Funds necessary for reconditioning and payment of a balance due on the purchase price have been provided through mortgage loan from the newest Philadelphia Negro business adjunct, the North Carolina Mutual Life Insurance Company. The future is thus doubly assured by retailing all finance matters within the racial group.” Theodore Spaulding, “Pyramid Club to Ignore All Political Ties in Accepting New Members,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, May 23, 1940.

<sup>25</sup> Margot Brent, “‘While We Live Let Us Live’: Motto of New Pyramid Club,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, September 26, 1940; Eve Lynn, “Seaboard Society Swishes By...!,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, July 13, 1940; “Club Opens.”

<sup>26</sup> “NAACP Program To Be Discussed At State Meet Here,” *Philadelphia Tribune*, April 1, 1952. On the Philadelphia Fellowship Commission and interracialism, see Stanley Keith Arnold, *Building the Beloved Community: Philadelphia’s Interracial Civil Rights Organizations and Race Relations, 1930–1970* (University Press of Mississippi, 2014).

of the NAACP. At almost any other Philadelphia bar, one would not have found the tip jar earmarked for a political action group.

Mosley's collection of photographs documenting the life of the Pyramid Club is the best evidence of the organization's mid-century engagement with the visual politics of glamor, celebrity, and the staging of black identity. Unlike the genteel performances of Philadelphia's traditional black elite, Mosley's photographs demonstrate the onset of a new, "cooler" cultural ideal that one might also see in the magazine spreads of *Ebony* (first issue in 1945) or *Jet* (first issue in 1951). The club was the backdrop to a prestige system.<sup>27</sup> To be photographed alongside Sammy Davis Jr., Billie Holiday, Josephine Baker (Appendix 2, Figure 28), Adam Clayton Powell, W.E.B. Du Bois, Mary McLeod Bethune, J. Robert Oppenheimer, or Harold Ickes and see the photograph published in the *Tribune* was one of the many perquisites of club membership. The relationship between the Pyramid Club and the black press was in this way circular: the Pyramid Club provided the staff of the *Philadelphia Tribune* with events to cover and the *Philadelphia Tribune* provided the Pyramid Club with exposure that made club membership especially valuable. For a critic of the black middle class such as the sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, the Pyramid Club was part of a bourgeois "world of make-believe" in which blacks tacitly accepted the values of middle-class whites.<sup>28</sup> At one point, the club did, in fact, commercially exploit the visual reproduction of its own activities.<sup>29</sup> For others, appearing in a photograph alongside a beloved celebrity was nothing more than a fun and exciting opportunity for public recognition.

Of all the activities that the Pyramid Club facilitated, the exhibitions that art director Humbert Howard mounted between 1941 and 1957 left the greatest legacy. According to David Brigham, for black graphic and fine artists in and around Philadelphia these exhibitions "provided a significant bridge of opportunity between the WPA [Federal Art Project] funding and associated exhibitions of the 1930s and early 1940s and the Civil Rights Era of the 1960s."<sup>30</sup> While special attention was given to black artists and the depiction of the "black theme," the list of exhibited artists was interracial, including Horace Pippin, Dox Thrash, Laura Wheeling Waring, Julius Bloch, Beauford Delaney, Jack Bookbinder,

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<sup>27</sup> On the "prestige system" of clubs, see Drake and Cayton, *Black Metropolis*, 689.

<sup>28</sup> E. Franklin Frazier, *Black Bourgeoisie* (New York: Free Press, 1957).

<sup>29</sup> Bettye Collier-Thomas writes, "As the organization sought new ways to fund its activities, it began to produce programs in cooperation with such commercial entities as the Schaefer Brewing Company. Recognizing the economic potential of the black community, cigarette and alcohol distributors actively sought black organizations with high profiles whose images could be used in the promotion of these products to the African American community." "Creating a Place for Ourselves: Humbert Howard, Black Art, and the Pyramid Club of Philadelphia," in Humbert Howard, *Philadelphia Painter: January 17-February 29, 1996*, ed. Leslie King-Hammond (Philadelphia, Pa.: Levy Gallery for the Arts in Philadelphia, Moore College of Art and Design, 1996), 8.

<sup>30</sup> "Breaking the 'Chain of Segregation': The Pyramid Club Annual Exhibitions," *The International Review of African American Art* 22, no. 1 (2008): 3. See also David R. Brigham, "Dox Thrash and the Pyramid Club," in *Dox Thrash: An African American Master Printmaker Rediscovered*, ed. John Ittmann (Philadelphia, PA: Philadelphia Museum of Art, 2002), 53–63. On career challenges that black artists in Philadelphia faced and the need for exhibition opportunities that the Pyramid Club helped to address, see Arthur R. Jarvis, "Opportunity, Experience, and Recognition: Black Participation in Philadelphia's New Deal Arts Projects, 1936-1942," *The Journal of Negro History* 85, no. 4 (2000): 241–59; Bettye Collier-Thomas, "Creating a Place for Ourselves: Humbert Howard, Black Art, and the Pyramid Club of Philadelphia," in *Humbert Howard, Philadelphia Painter: January 17-February 29, 1996*, ed. Leslie King-Hammond (Philadelphia, Pa.: Levy Gallery for the Arts in Philadelphia, Moore College of Art and Design, 1996), 1–10. I thank Dr. Diane Turner, Dr. Bettye Collier-Thomas, Leslie Willis-Lowry, and Dr. William Dodd, the owner of Art Around Gallery, for corresponding with me about the Pyramid Club's art exhibitions.

Romare Bearden, Jacob Lawrence, E. Simms Campbell, Henry O. Tanner, and also Howard. Having transformed the upper levels of the club largely through the heavy use of picture rail mouldings, exhibition openings became major affairs. Prominent intellectuals such as Alain Locke and directors of large and esteemed collections such as Fiske Kimball of the Philadelphia Museum of Art (Figure 19), Joseph T. Faser Jr. of the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, and Albert C. Barnes (Figure 24) attended them and lectured on topics relevant to the progress of African American artists. That the Pyramidians initially supported Howard's exhibitions was significant given that, regardless of race, art appreciation and other forms of cultural improvement were traditionally associated more with women's clubs than men's clubs. Such support might reflect the long-term influence of the Harlem Renaissance and the growing popular enthusiasm for the visual artist in American culture after World War II. Howard also made special efforts to encourage fellow members to attend the exhibitions. An editor of the *Philadelphia Tribune* reported, "With the assistance of formally gowned girl guides, all of whom are members of the Club Dee Vees, laymen whose technical art knowledge is somewhat limited were able to grasp many an artistic fine point."<sup>31</sup>

After 1955, the Pyramid Club fell into a decline that was almost as precipitous as the organization's ascent. By the end of that year, financial troubles caused by failure to collect membership dues forced club officers to open the dining room to the general public.<sup>32</sup> Membership fractured along lines that were at once generational and political. At one point in 1958, a younger faction of members alleged in the press that "the club is being run by a group of old men who are 'still living in the past' and who are not interested or physically capable of promoting the type of program required to maintain its status as Philadelphia's foremost organization for Negro business and professional men."<sup>33</sup> In 1963, the Internal Revenue Service padlocked the clubhouse because of tax delinquency.<sup>34</sup> To at least one *Tribune* editor, the club had become "an aging showgirl whose glamour is gone but whose reputation lingers on."<sup>35</sup> In 1965, with club debts having grown to \$18,000, the Pyramid Club's controlling officers sold 1517 W. Girard Avenue to the YWCA for use as a community and after school center. They vowed to reopen the club somewhere in Germantown or Mt. Airy, where a number of former members had settled, but that never occurred.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> "Perfect!!! The Art Exhibit At The Pyramid Club," *Philadelphia Tribune*, March 6, 1941. On the differences between male and female organizations, see Willard B. Gatewood, *Aristocrats of Color: The Black Elite, 1880–1920* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2000), 245.

<sup>32</sup> "Pyramid Club Opens Dining-Room To Public," *Philadelphia Tribune*, December 10, 1955.

<sup>33</sup> Art Peters, "Irate Pyramid Club Members Demand Younger Men Be Given Leadership Reins," *Philadelphia Tribune*, November 29, 1958.

<sup>34</sup> "The Internal Revenue Department has padlocked the formerly swan Pyramid Club of 1517 Girard Ave. for failure to pay delinquent admission taxes...The amount due is \$472.70 for the third and fourth quarters of 1961 and the first quarter of 1962, the department spokesman said. He explained that the tax action is a levy, which means the padlock will be removed upon payment of the taxes, with no penalty involved." "U.S. Padlocks Pyramid Club for Tax Debt," *The Baltimore Afro-American*, April 27, 1963.

<sup>35</sup> "Proud, Exclusive Organization Fading like Memories of Showgirl," *Philadelphia Tribune*, November 16, 1963.

<sup>36</sup> Jacob Sherman, "Pyramid Club Sold to YWCA: Will Not Mean End of Social Elite's Mecca, Hope to Set Up Headquarters in Gtn. Prexy Says," *Philadelphia Tribune*, November 13, 1965. On the migration of Philadelphia's black middle-class out of North Philadelphia and the continuation of racial liberalism where they settled, see "Top Negroes Resided in N. Philly: Majority Now Living in Gtn., Mt. Airy, Etc.," Abigail Perkiss, *Making Good Neighbors: Civil Rights, Liberalism, and Integration in Postwar Philadelphia* (Ithaca, N.Y: Cornell University Press, 2014).



The rapid decline of the Pyramid Club coincided with a shift in the power and social structure of its surroundings. Ravaged by the effects of deindustrialization and white flight, North Philadelphia in 1965 was no longer the middle-class, professional community that it was in the 1940s. That much was clear after simmering racial tensions erupted into a full-blown riot along Columbia Avenue during the summer of 1964. Symbolic of the neighborhood's transformation was Cecil B. Moore's purchase of Raymond and Sadie Pace Alexander's townhouse near 17th and Jefferson, along the old "Strivers' Row." Moore was a self-styled populist and racial separatist who had become president of the Philadelphia Chapter of the NAACP in 1962. In Thomas Sugrue's assessment, he "represented a real shift in civil rights politics--from the quiet, respectable tactics of the 1950s liberals to the more militant tactics of the 1960s, from the nearly anonymous, behind-the-scenes politics of black moderates to the flamboyant, personality-driven politics that would become increasingly important in black America."<sup>37</sup> As part of his working-class, straight-talking persona, Moore delighted in ridiculing members of Philadelphia's black middle class as self-serving, ineffectual stooges. When he stated, "I run a grassroots group, not a cocktail-party, tea-sipping, fashion-show attending group of exhibitionists," he wasn't speaking in mere generalities.<sup>38</sup> He was referring to the Pyramid Club and the ideals of reformism and uplift that the organization embodied.

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<sup>37</sup> Thomas Sugrue, "The Goddamn Boss," in *Dixie Redux: Essays in Honor of Sheldon Hackney*, ed. Raymond O. Arsenault and Vernon Burton, 1st edition (Montgomery, Alabama: NewSouth Books, 2013), 266–67; Paul Lermack, "Cecil Moore and the Philadelphia Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People: The Politics of Negro Pressure Group Organization," in *Black Politics in Philadelphia*, ed. Herbert Ershkowitz (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 145–60. On the rise of black power politics in Philadelphia, see Matthew J. Countryman, *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006).

<sup>38</sup> Sugrue, "The Goddamn Boss," 255.

### 7-3. CRITERION E

*Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth, or Nation.*

#### **William L. Price's Urban Vernacular**

The renovation of a townhouse in North Philadelphia was not a large commission for William L. Price (1861-1916; Figure 31) when he received it in 1901, but it was for a special client. By 1901, Price had already entered the middle stage of his career, one that began twenty years earlier when he established an architectural partnership with his older brother, Frank L. Price.<sup>39</sup> From 1881 until around 1900, the Price brothers designed speculative real estate developments in the suburbs of Wayne and Overbrook Farms. They also designed sprawling mansions for members of the Philadelphia elite, commissions that they received through family connections in the Quaker community and from their affiliation with the offices of Frank Furness and Addison Hutton. Soon, the scale of the Price brothers' work was growing well beyond the normal country house. In 1891, for example, Price & Price completed the Kenilworth Inn in Asheville, North Carolina, a romantically picturesque resort hotel near Vanderbilt's newly constructed Biltmore estate (Figure 32). In 1892, Price and his older brother Frank completed Woodmont, a 32-room, steel-framed French Gothic chateau in Conshohocken (now Gladwyne) for the steel manufacturer Alan Wood Jr. (Figure 33). Both the Kenilworth Inn and Woodmont demonstrated the ability of the Price brothers to successfully manipulate the historical styles of academic eclecticism. Evidently, however, completing such large projects was not personally satisfying for William L. Price, whose interest in progressive social reform led his thinking toward the Arts and Crafts movement and the Philadelphia Single Tax Society. In 1900, Price helped to found the experimental, single-tax community of Arden in northern Delaware. In 1901, he established with developer M. Hawley McLanahan the Arts and Crafts community of Rose Valley. These two communities and the personal transformation that preceded them marked the middle stage of his career. In a third and final stage, Price & McLanahan completed the Marlborough-Blenheim and Traymore Hotels in Atlantic City, the Hotel Clarendon in Florida, and a number of stations and terminals west of Pittsburgh for the Pennsylvania Railroad. These were truly monumental, innovative projects. Why, then, a townhouse in North Philadelphia? How does 1517 W. Girard Avenue fit into the arc of his career?

Ferdinand Keller was not only the owner of 1517 W. Girard Avenue, he was also one of Price's collaborators and an important supplier to Philadelphia architects. Keller was the largest importer of Old World antiques to Philadelphia for roughly a half-century, from around the time of the Centennial until the 1920s. Born to a family of antiquarians in Germany, he immigrated to the United States and settled in the city's large German community. In addition to his import business, he became a collector of Americana at a time when the Colonial Revival was gaining in popularity, specializing in authentic Colonial-era objects from throughout the Delaware Valley (Figures 34 and 35).<sup>40</sup> It is likely that Keller supplied at least some of the antiquities that filled Woodmont and Price's other mansions along the Main Line. What is clear is that Price was himself a great admirer of the kinds of antiquarian

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<sup>39</sup> All information about Price's biography and career comes from Thomas, *William L. Price*.

<sup>40</sup> "Mr. Ferdinand Keller, the head of the firm, is a member of a family that for many years dealt in antiques in Europe. He has not only collected abroad but has long been a frequent visitor to New England and the southern States in search of Colonial examples of fine furniture and other interesting objects, and he has also bought largely from the Old Quaker family of Pennsylvania. For years his Galleries have been visited by hundreds of collectors from all parts of the country, and particularly by New Yorkers, who have entire confidence in his judgment and integrity." *Art Collection Made by the Firm of Ferdinand Keller of Philadelphia* (New York: Anderson Galleries, 1916), <http://archive.org/details/artcollectionmad00ande>.

objects that Keller collected and sold. Kelty, Price's home in Overbrook, was filled with such objects, as was the office that he later shared with McLanahan (Figures 36 and 37).

In 1895, during a brief period of solo practice, Price designed Keller's home at 1609 W. Girard Avenue. One of the most expressive facades on the street that has unfortunately fallen into nearly complete disrepair, the Keller home is a florid, limestone-trimmed French Gothic Revival townhouse that features a loggia-style porch beneath a prominent segmental arch (Figure 38). The home recalls Wilson Eyre's design for the larger Moore townhouse at 1323 Locust Street, completed in 1890 (Figure 39). In both cases, the architects raised a rusticated limestone groundcourse to the height of the entire first floor, as if to emphasize through visual separation the home from the street. In December of 1900, Keller acquired 1517 W. Girard Avenue and immediately transferred the deed to his son, Ferdinand K. Keller. Notices for Price's renovation of the property ran in the *Real Estate Record and Builders Guide* a month later. Keller Jr. did not stay on W. Girard Avenue for long, though. By 1910, there are records that he and his family were living in Powelton Village. Keller Sr. was living in his son's home by 1920, when the deed for 1517 W. Girard Avenue transferred to the Women's Benefit Association of the Maccabees.<sup>41</sup>

Without having inspected the interior of 1517 W. Girard Avenue, it is difficult to determine the full scope of Price's work. Given that the property was described under Gillingham's ownership as a "three story brick dwelling with brown stone front," making no mention of architectural style, it is at least within the realm of possibility that the Italianate features of the facade, in addition to the bay window, can be attributed to Price.

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<sup>41</sup> Michael Jones, "210 N. 33rd St., Philadelphia," Powelton Village Civic Association, accessed February 9, 2021, <http://old.poweltonvillage.org/interactivemap/files/210n33rd.htm>.

#### 7-4. CONCLUSION

1517 W. Girard Avenue satisfies Criteria A and E on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places in a period of significance from 1900-1965. As the former home to the Pyramid Club, it is a monument to the collective aspiration of Philadelphia's black elite. It is preservation-worthy not because it memorializes a supposed "Golden Age" in the history of African Americans in Philadelphia, but because it helps to concretize the complicated intersection of race and class that is an important part of that history. It is also worthy of designation because it is a site that helps to diversify the history of Philadelphia's art world as an exhibition space that supported the emergence of the city's black arts community. Finally, the building is partially the work of William L. Price, one of Philadelphia's most important architects. Taken all together, 1517 W. Girard Avenue is an asset that can contribute to the further revitalization of W. Girard Avenue.

*All errors, omissions, and interpretations in the above Statement of Significance belong to the author, who prepared this nomination on behalf of the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia. To make a correction and/or provide feedback, please write to him at [kevinpblock@gmail.com](mailto:kevinpblock@gmail.com).*



7-5. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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## **Appendix #1:**

### **Deed Record for 1517 W. Girard Avenue During the Period of Significance**

The following unpaginated photocopies are deeds (1863-1940) collected from the Philadelphia City Archives, 548 Spring Garden Street. I thank Joshua K. Blay, Collections Manager, for providing me with copies of the deeds while the City Archives was closed to researchers because of COVID-19 restrictions. Transcriptions of the deeds follow the photocopies.

PRESENT OWNER.	FORMER OWNER.	DATE OF DEED.	No of House.
<i>Jos E. Gillingham</i>	<i>Chas P Norton</i>	<i>Oct. 23, 1863</i>	

(Bring Deed with this that it may be endorsed.)

17

**DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY,**

Which must be an exact Copy, in the wording of the Deed.

All that lot of ground situate on the north side of Girard Ave. at the distance 165 feet 8 inches westward from the Northwest corner of 15<sup>th</sup> Street 20 yards containing in front on Girard Ave. 40 feet and extending in length northward between parallel lines at right angles with Girard Ave. 150 feet to a certain 29 feet wide street called Wallis Street

Signature of Owner or Agent, .....



3-164

*Wm. S. Billingham*

Entered *Oct. 19* 1865.

Plan Book No. *9*, page *19*

No. *Birma and* Street,

*20* Ward.

*7/20.7*

PRESENT OWNER

FORMER OWNER

DATE OF DEED

NO. OF HOUSE

Josiah Kiegel Joseph E. Gillingham May 1-1875-

Bring Deed with this, that it may be endorsed

17

## DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY

Which must be an exact copy, in the wording of the Deed

All that certain lot or piece of ground with the Three Story Brick Dwelling with Brown Stone Front and Double Three Story Back Buildings thereon erected Situate on the North side of Girard Avenue at the distance of 165 feet 8 inches Westward from the North West Corner of Fifteenth Street in late the 20<sup>th</sup> (now the 29<sup>th</sup>) Ward of the City of Philadelphia. Containing in front or breadth on the said Girard Avenue 40 feet and extending in length or depth Northward between parallel lines at right angles with the said Girard Avenue 150 feet to a certain 29 feet wide Street called Wallis Street.

TRANSFER.

Signature of Owner, or Agent,

Harry P. Bruel

*Gerard Regel*

Entered *May 1* 18*95*

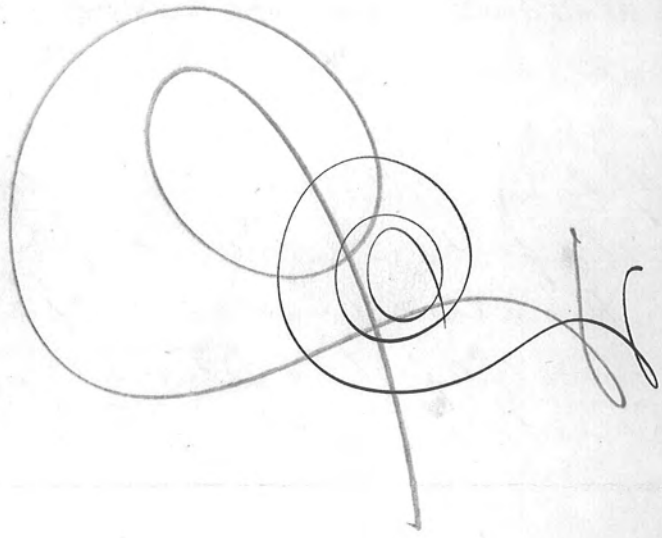
Lot No. \_\_\_\_\_

Plan Book No. *9 W* page *19*

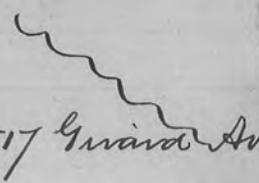
No. *29* *Gerard Ave* Street

Ward \_\_\_\_\_

Alphabetical Index No. *3* page \_\_\_\_\_



TRANSFER

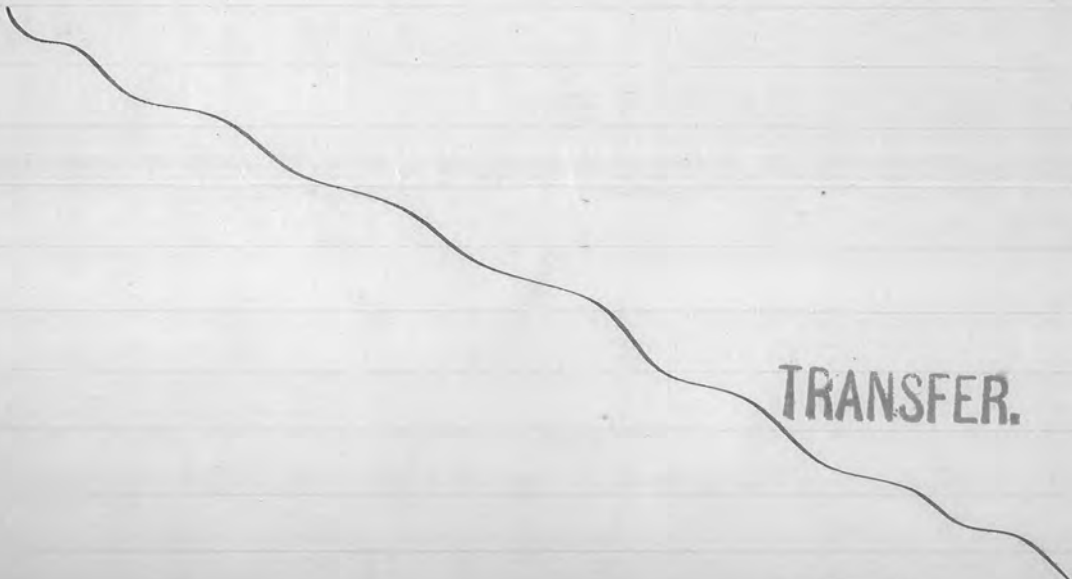
PRESENT OWNER.	FORMER OWNER.	DATE OF DEED.	No. OF HOUSE.
<i>Barclay Walton</i>	<i>Ella Riegel</i> <i>administ<sup>r</sup> of Josiah</i> <i>Riegel &amp; said -</i>  <i>Ella Riegel</i> <i>widow of said Josiah</i> <i>Riegel -</i>	<i>Nov: 27. 1883</i>	 <i>1517 Girard Ave.</i>

**BRING DEED WITH THIS, THAT IT MAY BE ENDORSED.**

DESCRIPTION OF PROPERTY.

Which must be an exact copy, in the wording of the deed.

All that certain lot or piece of ground and premises situate on the North side of Girard Avenue at the distance of one hundred and sixty-five feet eight inches Westward from the North West corner of Fifteenth Street in the Twenty-ninth Ward of the City of Philadelphia containing in front or breadth on the said Girard Avenue forty feet <sup>and</sup> extending in length or depth Northward between parallel lines at right angles with the said Girard Avenue one hundred and fifty feet to a certain twenty-nine feet wide street called Walter Street (late Wallis Street)



**TRANSFER.**

Signature of Owner or Agent,

*Edward Jonsell*



*Rayley Walton*

Entered *Mar 28 1883*

Lot No. *7*

Plan Book No. *9* or page *19*

No. *1517* *Grand Ave* Street;

*29<sup>th</sup>* Ward.

Division No. *3* page *7*

*7*



PRESENT OWNER.	FORMER OWNER.	DATE OF DEED.	No. of House.
<i>Amelia Bournoville.</i>	<i>Barclay Walton.</i>	<i>28<sup>th</sup> of February. 1888</i>	<i>1517.</i>  <i>7</i>

*All that certain lot or piece of ground with the three story brick Dwelling with Brown stone front and double Three story back building thereon erected Situate on the north side of Girade Avenue at the distance of One hundred and sixty five feet eight inches. Westward from the North West corner of Fifteenth Street in the Twenty ninth Ward of the City of Philadelphia containing in front or breadth on the said Girade Avenue Forty feet and extending in length or depth Northward between parallel lines at right angles with the said Girade Avenue One hundred and Fifty feet to a certain Twenty nine feet wide street called Walter street*

**TRANSFER.**

Signature of Owner or Agent,

*Thomas Longcope  
per B. A.*

*Amelia Bownorville*

Entered *Weds. 3* 188 *8*

Lot No. *7*

Plan Book No. *9* Page *19*

No. *Grand Ave* Street.

*29* Ward.

Division No. *3*

TRANSFER

Description of properties must be an exact copy of the wording of the deed, giving boundaries and reciting all rights and privileges to use of streets, roads and alleys.

FORM 141-10-1900-25000.

PRESENT OWNER	FORMER OWNER	DATE OF DEED	NO. OF HOUSE
<i>Ferdinand Keller</i>	<i>Augustus C. Bournoville Samuel H. Crawford Annie L. his wife</i>	<i>17 Dec 1900</i>	<i>1517</i>

*All that certain lot or piece of ground*  
*Charles M. Wilson* *7*

*Henry B. Bartow*  
*Guardian of the estate*  
*of Edmund Graham Wilson*

*N side Grand ave 165 ft 8" W*  
*from the NW corner of 15<sup>th</sup> St 29<sup>th</sup> W*  
*Front 40 ft*  
*Depth 150' to Walter W*

*Amelia Bournoville*  
*to Descend*  
*Augustus C. Bournoville*  
*his Caretaker*  
*Annie L. Crawford*  
*Chas. M. Wilson*  
*Edmund Graham Wilson*

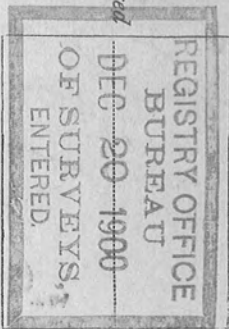
Registry Dep't,  
 Bureau of Surveys.  
 Transfer.

Signature of Owner or Agent

*Stack*

RECORDS OF DEEDS OFFICE

*Richard Keller*



Entered

DEC 20 1900

ENTERED.

Lot No.

*7*

Plan Book No.

*916*

Page

*19*

No.

*Grand St 15*

Street,

*29*

Ward.

Division No.

*3*

*Bartholomew*

*of Set 28 88*

*Amelia Bonnycastle*

*of*

*18*



Description of properties must be an exact copy of the wording of the deed, giving boundaries and reciting all rights and privileges to use of streets, roads and alleys.

FORM 141-10-1900-25000.

PRESENT OWNER	FORMER OWNER	DATE OF DEED	NO. OF HOUSE
Ferdinand Keller Jr	Ferdinand Keller and Mathilde his wife	Dec 17/1900	

All that certain lot or piece of ground sit on N side of Girard av. 165 ft. 8 in W. from N. W Cor 13<sup>th</sup> & 29<sup>th</sup> ward front 40 ft- depth. N. 150 ft. to Walter St.

Registry Dep't,  
Bureau of Surveys.  
Transfer.

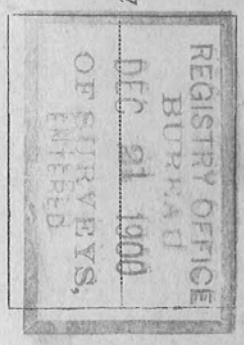
Signature of Owner or Agent, .....

*Brown*

RECORDER OF DEEDS



*J. Bellamy*



Entered

Lot No. 7

Plan Book No. 9 N Page 19

No. Ward Street,

19 Ward.

Division No. 3

*WMS*

Description of properties must be an exact copy of the wording of the deed, giving boundaries and reciting all rights and privileges to use of streets, roads and alleys.

FORM 141-10-1900-25000.

PRESENT OWNER	FORMER OWNER	DATE OF DEED	NO. OF HOUSE
Mathilde Keller wife of Ferdinand Keller	Ferdinand Keller Jr.	Dec 7/1900	1577

All that certain lot or piece of ground Sit on N. side of Girard av. 165 ft. 8 in. W from N. W Cor. 15<sup>th</sup> at 29<sup>th</sup> ward. front 40 ft. depth N 150 ft. to Walter St

Registry Dep't,  
Bureau of Surveys.  
Transfer.

Signature of Owner or Agent, .....

Brown

RECORDER OF DEEDS OFFICE

*Matilda Keller*



Entered

Lot No. 7

Plan Book No. 9K Page 19

No. 212 Street,

29 Ward.

Division No. 3

*John*

Only one property to be described on this blank, unless properties are contiguous or in the same block. Description of properties must be an exact copy of the wording of the deed, giving boundaries and reciting all rights and privileges to use of streets, roads and alleys.

1-1920. 9,000

PRESENT OWNER	FORMER OWNER	DATE OF DEED	No. of HOUSE
Woman's Benefit association of the maccabees	Ferdinand Keller  29 <sup>th</sup> wd	Jan'y 15/20	

All that certain lot or piece of ground N Girard ave 165' 8" W<sup>7</sup>  
from N W corner 15<sup>th</sup> st -  
Front 40' -  
Depth N. 150' to Waller st

7

TRANSFER

Signature of owner or agent.....

Leathem



Map 3

*Thomas Donaldson*  
*of the Macomber*



Lot No. *7*

Plan Book No. *9 N* Page *19*

No. *Strick Ave.* Street

*29* Ward

Division No. *6*

ENTERED

JAN 27 1920

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR



BUREAU OF ENGINEERING, SURVEYS AND ZONING

Only one property to be described on this blank, unless properties are contiguous or in the same block. Description of properties must be an exact copy of the wording of the deed, giving boundaries and reciting all rights and privileges to use of streets, roads and alleys.

PRESENT OWNER	FORMER OWNER	DATE OF DEED	NO. OF HOUSE
John Griswold	Womans Benefit Ass'n	29 Ward Jan. 18. 1940.	

All that certain lot or piece of ground

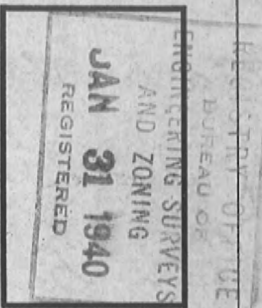
of R. Girard Ave 165 ft 8 in  
 W. of 15th St.  
 Front 40 ft.  
 Depth n. par. lines L. to Girard Ave.  
 150 ft. to Flora St.  
 Bd. n. by Flora St. E. by grd Jos. Kimes  
 W. by grd John Dallas. S. by Girard Ave  
 1517 W. Girard Ave

7  
 m s

Signature of Owner or Agent \_\_\_\_\_

TRANSFER

*[Handwritten signature]*



Lot No. \_\_\_\_\_

Plan Book No. \_\_\_\_\_

Page \_\_\_\_\_

No. \_\_\_\_\_

Street \_\_\_\_\_

Ward \_\_\_\_\_

Division No. \_\_\_\_\_

ENTERED

FEB - 1940

IN PLAIN BOOK

Only one property to be described on this blank, unless properties are contiguous or in the same block.  
Description of properties must be an exact copy of the wording of the deed, giving boundaries and reciting all rights and privileges to use of streets, roads and alleys.

PRESENT OWNER	FORMER OWNER	DATE OF DEED	NO. OF HOUSE
Thomas J. Campbell	John Griswold + Sarah R. his wife	29 Ward Jan 23. 1940.	

All that certain lot or piece of ground  
 of R. Girard Ave. 165ft 8in  
 W. of 15th St.  
 Front 40ft.  
 Depth n. par. lines L. to Girard Ave.  
 150ft to Flora St.  
 Ba n. by Flora St. E by grd Jos. Kimes  
 W. by grd John Daceas. S. by Girard Ave.  
 1517 W. Girard Ave.

7  
 n S

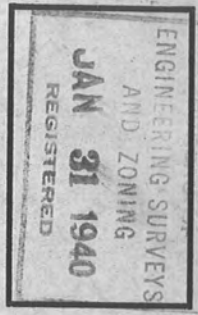
Signature of Owner or Agent \_\_\_\_\_

TRANSFER



M

REGISTRY OFFICE



Lot No. \_\_\_\_\_

Plan Book No. 7 Page 919

No. \_\_\_\_\_ Street \_\_\_\_\_

29 Ward

Division No. \_\_\_\_\_

ENTERED

FEB - 1940

IN PLAN BOOK

BUREAU OF ENGINEERING, SURVEYS AND ZONING

3

Only one property to be described on this blank, unless properties are contiguous or in the same block. Description of properties must be an exact copy of the wording of the deed, giving boundaries and reciting all rights and privileges to use of streets, roads and alleys.

PRESENT OWNER	FORMER OWNER	DATE OF DEED	NO. OF HOUSE
The Pyramind Club Inc	Thomas Campbell and Batherine his wife	Jan 23. 1940  29 Wd.	

All that certain lot or piece of ground 15<sup>th</sup> St. Sit on N side Girard Ave 165' 8" W of 7<sup>th</sup> St. 40' North N. bet p.l. L to Girard Ave, 150' to Gloria St. Bounded N. by said Gloria St E by ground now or late of Joseph Kimes W by ground now or late of John Dallas S by Girard Ave

7

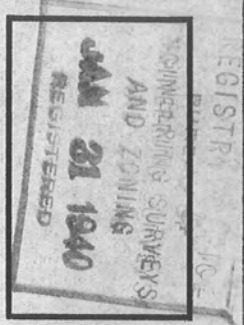
1517 W Girard Ave

Signature of Owner or Agent J. M. True

TRANSFER



W



Lot No. \_\_\_\_\_

Plan Book No. 7 Page 2919

No. \_\_\_\_\_ Street \_\_\_\_\_

29 Ward

Division No. 5

ENTERED  
FEB--1940  
IN PLAY BOOK

## Appendix #2:

### John W. Mosley's Photographs of the Pyramid Club

All of the following photographs are contained within the Charles L. Blockson Afro-American Collection, Temple University Library. If no date is provided in the caption, the photograph is undated.



Figure 13. Exterior of the Pyramid Club "around the 1940s."



Figure 14. John W. Mosley, the unofficial photographer of the Pyramid Club. This is the cover image of Charles L. Blockson's collection of Mosley photographs. See Blockson (1992).





Figure 15. Entrance to the Pyramid Club.





Figure 16. The Nile Room or Alexandrian Court, first floor.



Figure 17. Sitting room, first or second floor.



Figure 18. The Armstrong Association meeting in the Mecca Dining Room, first floor. The Philadelphia chapter of the New York-based Armstrong Association was founded in 1908 as an interracial social services organization for African Americans who had migrated to Philadelphia from the South. See Blakney (2017).



Figure 19. A panel discussion in the Sahara Room, second floor. Likely from the 1944 Annual Art Exhibition since Fiske Kimball of the Philadelphia Museum of Art (second from right) and Julius T. Bloch (second from left) are present.



Figure 20. A ladies luncheon in the Pharaoh's Temple Gallery, third floor.





Figure 21. Pyramidians enjoying cigars in the billiards room, fourth floor.



Figure 22. Pyramidians drinking at their Crystal Bar, basement. Note that the tip jar, lower right, contains donations for the Philadelphia Branch of the NAACP.





Figure 23. Dox Thrash (far left) and Humbert Howard (far right), longtime Art Director for the Pyramid Club, at an exhibition in the 1940s.



Figures 24 and 25. Albert Barnes (left) and Horace Pippin (right) at the Pyramid Club's 1944 Art Exhibition, where Julius T. Bloch's *Pippin* (Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Philadelphia) was on display.



Figure 26. Unidentified ladies inspecting the Pyramid Club's pictorial album at the 1947 Art Exhibition.



Figure 27. A cooking demonstration organized by the Wives of the Pyramidians. Note the fresco wall murals of the Egyptian landscape.





Figure 28. Wives of the Pyramidians and Josephine Baker, one of the many black celebrities to attend a function at the Pyramid Club. Photo from the 1950s.



Figure 29. Joseph S. Clark Jr. (second from left) with Raymond Pace Alexander (second from right) in the 1940s. Clark would go on to be mayor of Philadelphia from 1952 to 1956 and United States Senator from Pennsylvania from 1957 to 1969. Alexander was a lawyer, civil rights leader, and would go on to become a Philadelphia City Council Member and the first African American judge appointed to the Pennsylvania Court of Common Pleas.



Figure 30. Members of the Pyramid Club, sometimes during the early 1940s.



### Appendix #3:

#### 1517 W. Girard Avenue and the Architectural Career of William L. Price



Figure 31. William L. Price. From the Philadelphia Architects and Buildings database, Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

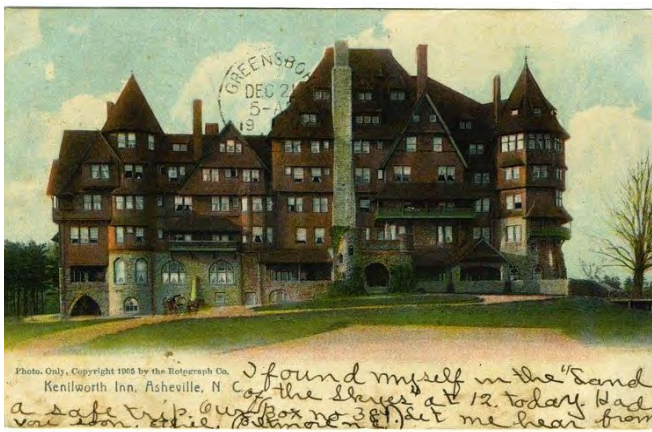




Figure 32 (Left). Kenilworth Inn, 1891, Asheville North Carolina. Durwood Barbour Collection of North Carolina Postcards (P077), North Carolina Collection Photographic Archives, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill.



Figure 33 (Right). The Woodmont Mansion. From Moses King's, *Philadelphia and Notable Philadelphians* (New York: Blanchard Press, 1901): 92. Available in the Philadelphia Architects and Buildings database, Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

  
**FERDINAND  
KELLER**  
 216-224 SOUTH NINTH  
 Philadelphia, Pa.

Reproductions  
 Antique Furniture  
 Old Clocks  
 Old Brass  
 Old Silver  
 Old Armor  
 Old Glass  
 Rock Crystals  
 Ivories  
 Ship Models  
 Old China  
 Old Jewelry  
 Old Paintings



MAKE A LITTLE  
 JOURNEY TO KELLER'S

A typical Sheraton Dining-room Suit, reproduced with extreme precision of detail from an authentic Old English set. Characteristic appointments from the KELLER Collection are seen in the Silver Adam's Mirror over the Sideboard, English Bell's Eye Mantel Clock, Bird Cage Fender and Fireplace fittings. Complete furnishings by FERDINAND KELLER, Philadelphia, including harmonious Wall Covering, Woodwork and Electric Fixtures. The KELLER Galleries specialize in furnishing rooms in any period desired, either with reproductions or original pieces, and complete in every detail of Draperies, Decorative Objects, Woodwork, Wall Coverings, Electric Fixtures, Rugs and Carpets.

Figure 34. An advertisement for Keller's "Sheraton Dining Room Suit" and other antiques from 1922. From <https://www.periodpaper.com/products/1922-ad-ferdinand-keller-antique-furniture-sheraton-dining-room-household-decor-124470-col2-771>.



Figure 35. A "Glimpse of the Furniture Department" in Ferdinand Keller's Antique Shop, 216-222 South Ninth Street. From George Washington Engelhardt, *Philadelphia Pennsylvania, The Book of Its Bourse & Co-Operating Bodies* (Philadelphia, Lippincott Press, 1898-99: 91).





Figure 36 (Left). The “Great Room” of Kelly, Price’s home in Overbrook. From Thomas (2000).

Figure 37 (Right). The antiquity-filled office of McLanahan and Price at 1624 Walnut Street, Philadelphia circa 1903. “The space was decorated as befitted its dual role as architectural office and showroom for the Rose Valley shops. A massive oak mantle, carved and constructed by the shops, accented the front room which was also ornamented with pieces of furniture from the shops, Will’s collection of medieval weapons, Turkish carpets, and bookcases, holding the numerous volumes of the firm’s architectural library. It was, in short, the bohemian counterpart to the artist’s studio and calculated to attract the right sort of client (Thomas, 2000: 119). .Image from Thomas (2000).



Figure 38 (Left). Ferdinand Keller’s home at 1609 W. Girard Avenue. Thomas (1985) attributes the French Gothic design to William L. Price circa 1895. Image from Google Maps, August 2019.

Figure 39 (right) the HABS photograph of the Clarence B. Moore house (1890) by Wilson Eyre, an earlier example of French Gothic architecture in Philadelphia. Image from Wikipedia, “Clarence B. Moore House.”