

**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: 920-22 N 19th St, Philadelphia, PA

Postal code: 19130

**2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE**

Historic Name: Bishop Ida B. Robinson House

Current/Common Name: \_\_\_\_\_

**3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE**

Building

Structure

Site

Object

**4. PROPERTY INFORMATION**

Condition:  excellent  good  fair  poor  ruins

Occupancy:  occupied  vacant  under construction  unknown

Current use: \_\_\_\_\_

**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 1923 to 1991

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: c. 1870

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: \_\_\_\_\_

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: \_\_\_\_\_

Original owner: \_\_\_\_\_

Other significant persons: Bishop Ida B. Robinson, Father Divine (George Baker)

**CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION:**

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

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

**8. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES**

*Please attach a bibliography.*

**9. NOMINATOR**

Organization Staff of the Philadelphia Historical Commission Date 5/24/2022

Name with Title Nika Faulkner - Historical & Cultural Research Intern Email nikafaulkner@gmail.com

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

City, State, and Postal Code Philadelphia, PA 19102

Nominator  is  is not the property owner.

**PHC USE ONLY**

Date of Receipt: 24 May 2022

Correct-Complete  Incorrect-Incomplete Date: 6/13/2022

Date of Notice Issuance: 6/14/2022

Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: Center City Real Estate Group LLC

Address: 1420 Walnut Street, Suite 110

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19102

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: 7/20/2022

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: 8/12/2022

Date of Final Action: 8/12/2022

X Designated  Rejected

# NOMINATION

FOR THE

## PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES



**Ida B. Robinson House – 920-922 N. 19<sup>th</sup> St**

Built Ca. 1870  
Francisville  
Philadelphia, PA

## 5. Boundary Description

The property at 920-22 N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street is a single tax parcel (OPA Account No. 881809627) containing two deeded parcels, 920 and 922 N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street, which were historically two separate rowhouses. The parcel description in the 2015 deed is as follows:

All that certain lot or piece of ground with the buildings and improvements thereon erected, situate at the Northwesterly corner of Cambridge Street and 19<sup>th</sup> Street, in the 29<sup>th</sup> Ward of the City of Philadelphia, containing in front or breadth on the said 19<sup>th</sup> Street 16 ft 2 inches and extending of that width in length or depth Westwardly 72 ft, including on the rear end thereof the soil of a certain 3 ft wide alley leading into and from the said Cambridge Street, bounded Northwardly by ground now or late of George R. Wehn, Westwardly by the Westerly line of the said 3 ft wide alley, Southwardly by the said Cambridge Street, and Eastwardly by 19<sup>th</sup> Street aforesaid; Being known as 920 N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street... Also all that certain lot or piece of ground, with the buildings and improvements thereon erected, situate on the Westerly side of 19<sup>th</sup> Street, at the distance of 16 ft 2 inches Northwardly of Cambridge Street... containing in front or breadth on the said 19<sup>th</sup> Street 16 ft 2 inches, and extending Westwardly of that width in length or depth between parallel lines at right angles with the said 19<sup>th</sup> Street 72 ft and including on the rear a 3 ft wide alley; Being known as 922 North 19<sup>th</sup> Street.



Figure 1: Boundary of 920-22 N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street, at the northwest corner of 19<sup>th</sup> and Cambridge Streets, outlined in orange.

## 6. Building Description

### General

The property at 920-22 N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street, also known as the Ida B. Robinson House, is located at the intersection of Cambridge and N. 19<sup>th</sup> Streets in the North Philadelphia neighborhood of Francisville. Francisville is a small neighborhood that sits between Ridge Avenue, 19<sup>th</sup> Street, and Francis Street. It is bordered by the neighborhoods of Fairmount, West Poplar, Cecil C. Moore, and Sharswood, and is a short distance from Temple University and Girard College.

The neighborhood was once famous for the Keystone Watch Case Company, among other factories, which historically provided many of the residents with jobs.<sup>1</sup> The Keystone factory sat just south of the Robinson House on the 800 block of N. 19<sup>th</sup> St. The surrounding blocks of 920 N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street are now primarily residential, with a mixture of old and new construction throughout. Directly across Cambridge Street from this property is a large contemporary apartment complex. Across N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street are some historic rowhouses mixed with some that are modern. Overall, the scale of the neighborhood is consistent, and all structures occupy the majority of their parcels.

The building at 920-22 N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street is a three-story yellow painted brick Italianate pair of rowhouses that has been combined into one structure, constructed circa 1870. An intricate bracketed brown painted wood cornice lines the top of the structure. There is a mixture of windows on the building, from arched to rectangular, most of which seeming to be replacements for their historic counterparts. A chimney rises centrally from the structure but is difficult to notice from the public right-of-way. The window and door surrounds, foundation, and front entry stairs are painted brown to match one another.

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<sup>1</sup> Harry Kyriakodis. "File under: Lost Francisville." Hidden City Philadelphia, September 18, 2012. <https://hiddencityphila.org/2012/09/file-under-lost-francisville/>.



Figure 2: Primary facade along N. 19th St, note the double-wide rowhouse

### Primary Façade

The primary facade of the Robinson House faces east along N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street. The facades of two three-story rowhouses have been combined to create a four-bay wide composition. Star bolts above and below the second-story set of windows indicate that there has been some attempt at resecuring the front façade of this building to the remainder of the structure. These are painted brown to match the rest of the trim on the building. The first level contains only three bays, differing from the four-bay composition of the floors above. The two bays to the south (closest to Cambridge Street) both contain a double hung one-over-one window flanked

by sidelights. At the top of a set of cement painted stairs, the remaining bay includes the front door, which sits just above the foundation line. The door is painted, paneled, with an elliptical window at the top, divided by muntins, and flanked again by sidelights. On either side of the door surround are single metal sconces. An infilled portion above the door implies there may have been a fanlight.

The sills and lintels are simple and likely stone, though their exact material cannot be confirmed, owing to the painted finish. In the foundation at street level is a single basement window infilled with glass block.



Figure 3: View at the corner of N. 19th St & Cambridge St



*Figure 4: Cambridge Street elevation, including rear garage addition & patio*

**Southwest Façade (Along Cambridge St)**

The façade along Cambridge Street is deeper and more irregular than the primary façade. From this view, a rear garage addition with what looks to be a finished room above is visible. This façade is comprised of three sections, the main block, the rear ell, and the secondary garage block.

The main block and rear ell at this façade are five bays wide. Starting closest to N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street, the first two bays each include a single, small arched window at ground level. The arched shape has since been infilled and the window replaced with a small, more contemporary, double-hung one-over-one window. The first two bays at the remaining levels are blank, painted brick walls. The third bay at the first story is also simply brick. Above, at the second and third stories, a simple, double-hung, one-over-one window exists at both levels. These were most likely added later, and are comparable to the arched window replacements towards N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street.



The fourth bay is complex, containing a double-hung window with sidelights at ground level (matching the first story of the primary façade) and a projecting bay window above at the second level. At the first level, a one-story brick portion of the facade which is flush with bays 1-3 supports the bay window above. About half of the bay window's depth cantilevers out over the sidewalk. The lower portion of the bay seems to be finished with a panel of brown painted metal cladding decorated with a single pressed "x" design. Above this panel on each side is a ribbon of double-hung one-over-one windows, with three on the front of the bay and two on each side. It is topped with a hipped roof with asphalt shingles. At the third level, the façade is set back at the rear ell, which is reflected across the rest of this block. Here, this bay finishes out with another double-hung one-over-one window. This window is repeated in all bays on the third level.

The fifth bay is irregular as well. At the first story, it looks as though a window was infilled and painted over. At the second level, a ribbon of two, smaller one-over-one double-hung windows is aligned closely to the bay window. The sixth bay is slightly more regular, breaking the pattern of a single one-over-one double-hung window on each story at the first level, where the same ribbon of two smaller double-hung windows exists yet again.

At the pedestrian level, a waist-high brick wall topped with a metal security fence extends from the protruding fourth bay parallel to Cambridge St. The wall continues to the end of the house block where it becomes a full-height chain-link fence with a central gate sitting in front of the garage block's patio entrance.

### **Garage Block, c. 1920**

Constructed between 1919 and 1923, the two-story addition at the rear, which previously functioned as a garage, is unfinished red brick on the second level and painted stucco on first level.<sup>2</sup> It is two bays wide, with a small shed roof at the cornice. At the first level, a large steel beam lintel divides the levels. We can assume this beam once supported the second floor above a large garage door opening below. If this is the case, it has since been

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<sup>2</sup> City of Philadelphia, *JMH Beed Book 1741*, p 165-16, Oct 19, 1923. Department of Records, City Archives.

infilled and converted into a more residential back entry with a windowless, brown-painted metal door bordered to the east by another one-over-one double-hung window. At the second story, two sets of the double-hung ribbons previously described can be seen side-by-side. Above these ribbons is a brick soldier course. The cornice is a simple layered brick design with a rowlock course at the top. Two taller portions extend upwards slightly on either side of the roofline above the rowlock course.

At the end of the property is a small three-foot alley only accessible to the tenants.



Figure 5: View along Cambridge Street towards N. 19th Street, note the projecting bay window at the second story

## 7. Significance

Located in the Francisville neighborhood of Philadelphia, the property at 920-22 N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street is significant under Criterion for Designation A as delineated in Section 14-1004(4) of the Philadelphia Code, the City's historic preservation ordinance. The property (A) *Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past*, being associated with two significant and prolific religious figures in Philadelphia's history, Bishop Ida B. Robinson, and Father Divine of the International Peace Mission.

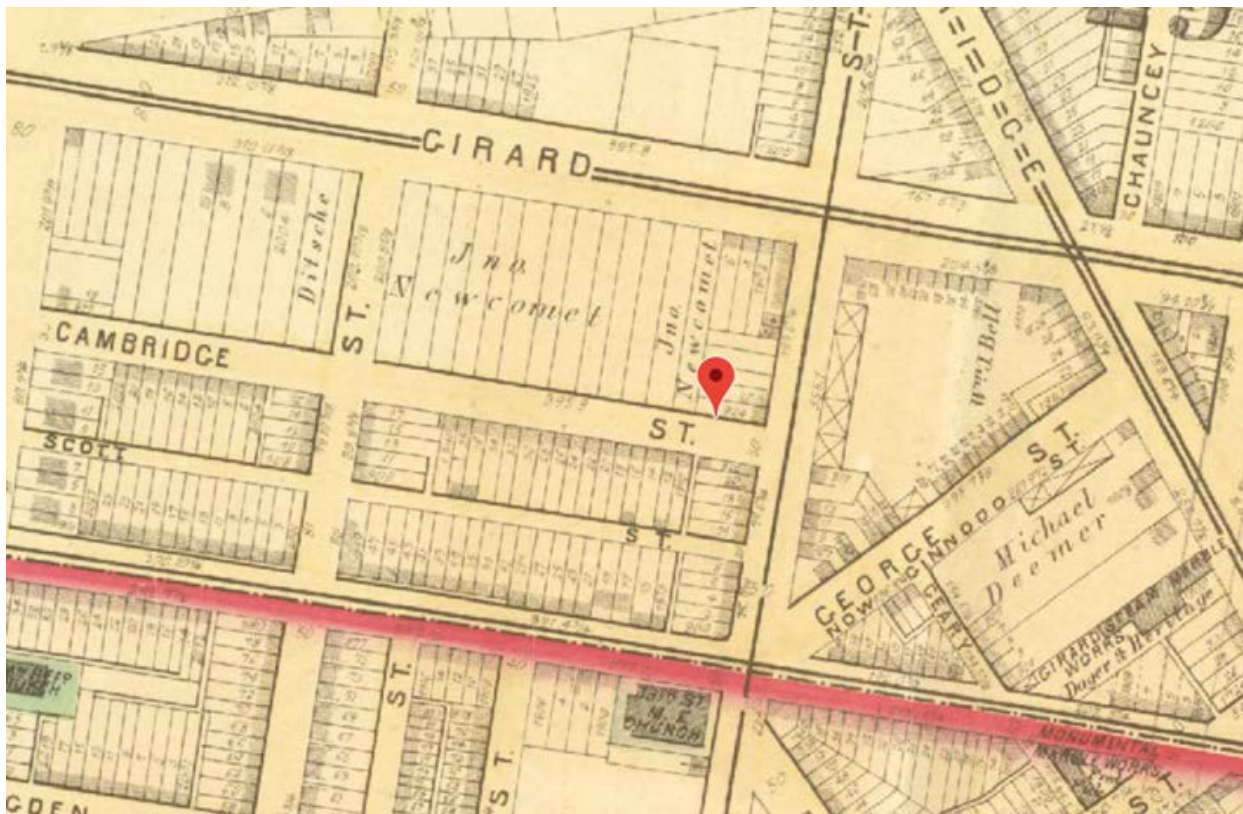


Figure 6: 1875 map, 920 (formerly 924) and 922 (identified as 926) are present.

### Early Site History

Early maps and deeds, as well as the Italianate style of the property, suggest that the rowhouses at 920 and 922 N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street were constructed circa 1870. In 1862 when the Samuel Smedley Atlas of the City of Philadelphia was published, the majority of the block between 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> and Cambridge and Girard Avenue was open land, but it is clear that the general

neighborhood of Francisville at this point is beginning to substantially develop. Residential lots are being built up, interspersed with churches, factories, and stables.<sup>3</sup> In 1869, two vacant lots subdivided from a larger parcel by the executors of the estate of Nathan Davidson were sold to builder Lewis Snyder.<sup>4</sup> By the 1875 G.M Hopkins map, a development including both 920 and 922 N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street appears.<sup>5</sup> The deed registry for parcels 09-N-04-111 (920) and -112 (922) shows that the parcels were sold jointly from 1869 through 1879, when Lewis Snyder conveyed the property at 922 to George H. Wehn.<sup>6</sup> Snyder conveyed the corner property, 920 N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street, to Frank Snyder in 1884. A construction date of circa 1870 coincides with a period of Italianate rowhouse development in the mid-to-third quarter of the 19th century in other parts of Philadelphia, including the nearby neighborhood of Spring Garden.<sup>7</sup> The properties at 920 and 922 N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street were conveyed separately until 1930, when Ida B. Robinson and her husband Oliver Robinson, who had purchased the corner property at 920 N. 19<sup>th</sup> in 1923, purchased 922 N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street as well.<sup>8</sup>

**REAL ESTATE FOR SALE.**  
**CITY.**

**C. HARRY SHOWAKER, N. E.**  
corner Seventeenth and Oxford streets,  
offers the following described property for sale:

N. E. cor. 18th and Jefferson sts.....	\$70,000
1614 N. 16th st., house and stable.....	20,000
1518 Green st.....	16,000
1718 N. 18th st.....	15,000
Handsome property at Oak Lane.....	12,500
N. W. corner Willington and Oxford.....	12,500
1343 N. 13th st., side yard.....	10,500
1906 Tioga st., Tioga.....	10,000
1535 Poplar st., elegant.....	11,000
1716 N. 15th st.....	10,000
1502 N. 18th st.....	10,000
1705 Jefferson st, bargain.....	9,500
1117 Beacon st.....	2401 N. 18th st.
1532 N. 4th st.....	2389 Colorado st.
1422 N. 20th st.....	1417 N. 6th st.
2308 N. 17th st.....	1501 Oxford st., bargain.
1329 N. 12th st.....	2404 Bouvier st.
2361 N. 18th st.....	2408 N. 18th st.
1420 Bouvier st.....	1526 French st., cheap.
2324 Colorado st.....	1527 Edgeley st.
1803 Master st.....	2529 Jefferson st.
1731 Montgomery avenue, elegant, only.....	\$8,600
1629 N. 17th st.....	9,000
3641 and 3652 N. Broad, new.....	8,500
1402 N. 17th st.....	8,000
1937 N. 18th st., cor. store.....	7,000
1220 N. 15th st.....	7,000
2468 Bouvier st.....	2301 N. 18th st.
2421 Redner st.....	3527 N. 17th st.
1802 Bucknell st.....	2346 Colorado st.
2342 N. 17th st.....	1506 Montgomery ave.
1637 N. 12th st.....	2017 Columbia ave.
2463 Bouvier st.....	2238 Oxford st.
866 N. 41st st.....	2021 N. 17th st.
2423 N. 18th st.....	2025 Ridge ave.
1412 Dauphin st.....	2343 N. 18th st.
2366 Colorado st.....	1727 Master st.
2316 Lambert st.....	618 Norris st.
920 N. 19th st.....	1730 Columbia ave.
2444 Bouvier st.....	4101 Spruce st.
1507 Tioga st.....	2333 N. 18th st.
1712 N. 17th st.....	6,000
1714 Park avenue, bargain.....	7,000
1515 Bouvier street.....	5,000
2423 and 2425 Redner street, each.....	2,250
2340 and 2342 Dean street, each.....	2,000
2340 Oxford st.....	3,800
1813 Park ave., bargain.....	6,900
1623 N. 18th st.....	6,500

Or a hundred new houses for sale, neighborhood Seventeenth and York, from \$2,100 up.

Figure 7: 1891 real estate listing, Philadelphia Inquirer.

<sup>3</sup> Samuel L. Smedley, *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, 1862*. (J. B. Lippincott & Co., Library of Philadelphia: Philadelphia, PA.)

<sup>4</sup> Philadelphia Deed Book JTO 249, pages 45 etc. And 70 etc, Sarah Davidson et al, executors of the estate of Nathan Davidson, to Lewis Snyder, bricklayer, 5/1/1869. At this time, the lots were vacant.

<sup>5</sup> G.M. Hopkins & Co. *City Atlas of Philadelphia, 2nd to 20th and 29th and 31st Wards, 1875*. (Printer, Busch, Edward (Engraver) - Engraver, Hopkins (G.M.) & Company. Free Library of Philadelphia: Philadelphia, PA. Publisher, F. Bourquin.)

<sup>6</sup> The deed registry map for 09-N-04-111 and -112 and 1869 deed show that vacant parcels were conveyed by Sarah Davidson et al to builder Lewis Snyder in 1869. The properties subsequently went up for sheriff's sale and were reacquired by Snyder in 1879. City of Philadelphia, *LW Deed Book 31*, p 126-128. June 3, 1879. Department of Records, City Archives.

<sup>7</sup> Sheryl Jaslow, Powers & Company, Inc, *Spring Garden Historic District*, Philadelphia Register of Historic Places Historic District Form. Philadelphia, PA. April 7, 2000. Philadelphia Historical Commission.

<sup>8</sup> The garage addition



### Ida Bell Robinson – Early Life

Ida Bell Robinson was born in Hazelhurst, Georgia in 1891.<sup>9</sup> She and her parents Annie and Robert Bell soon relocated to Pensacola, Florida, where she would spend the rest of her childhood. Ida was the seventh of twelve children, and had high expectations placed on her by her mother and father. At the age of seventeen, she was inspired to pursue of a life in evangelism after experiencing a street meeting conducted by the Church of God, an encounter that would change both the course of her life and later, the narrative of women in leadership positions in the church in the United States.<sup>10</sup> She went on to lead her own prayer services in private homes in her later

teenage years.<sup>11</sup> In 1909 at the age of eighteen years old, she married Oliver Robinson, who was about four years her senior and working as a deck hand at the time.<sup>12</sup> In 1917<sup>13</sup>, during the Great Migration, the couple relocated to 1137 S. 11<sup>th</sup> Street in South Philadelphia in pursuit of better employment opportunities.<sup>14</sup> Between 1900 and 1920, Philadelphia’s Black population

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<sup>9</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910 - Population*. (Escambia County, Fl. April 26, 1910.)

<sup>10</sup> Mt Sinai Holy Church, *Founder, Senior Bishop & First President*, (Mt Sinai Holy Church. Accessed May 13, 2022.) <http://mtsinaiholychurch.org/images/Ida.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Priscilla Pope-Levison, *Ida Bell Robinson (1891-1946)*. (Black Past, December 2, 2020.) <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/robinson-ida-bell-1891-1946/>.

<sup>12</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Thirteenth Census of the United States: 1910 - Population*. (Escambia County, Fl. April 26, 1910.)

<sup>13</sup> Mount Sinai Holy Church, *Founder, Senior Bishop & First President*

<sup>14</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Fourteenth Census of the United States: 1920 - Population* (Philadelphia, PA. January 12, 1920.)

more than doubled as migrants like the Robinsons arrived in search of better jobs, better education, and an escape from the overt racism of the South.<sup>15</sup>

### **Black Churches in Philadelphia – Ida Robinson & Beyond**

Philadelphia's rich African American religious history began developing over a hundred years before the Robinson's move. The city's first Black churches emerged in the late 18th century, including the Free African Church of St. Thomas, ministered by Absalom Jones, and the Bethel Methodist Episcopal Church, organized by Richard Allen. These churches were a product of the Christian beliefs among Black communities, coupled with a frustration over the racism that Black congregants experienced while attending predominantly white congregations. They sought their own spaces and community institutions to survive a racially divided and often hostile Philadelphia. Philadelphia's early Black Christian leaders established these churches to provide havens of refuge guided by spiritual programming. These early churches flourished in the beginning of 19th century, spurring off-shoot churches, and inspiring many Black Christians to found their own independent congregations. Black churches in the 18th and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries served as sanctuaries and places for community building in an otherwise often oppressive city.<sup>16</sup>

When Ida Robinson arrived in Philadelphia, she would have had a selection of congregations from which to choose. Philadelphia's African American churches had continued to expand and multiply since the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Robinson ultimately chose a small congregation at 17th and South Streets, pastored by Elder Benjamin Smith. Here she gained popularity, sometimes filling in for the Pastor, and furthering her public presence. Her speaking and singing skills became well-known among the community. In 1919, a situation described as "uncomfortable" led her to leave Smith's congregation and join the United Holy Church of America (UHC). She began doing street services for UHC, singing, and preaching for the public. She was consecrated to the ministry through public ordination by Bishop Henry L. Fisher the

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<sup>15</sup> Lloyd M. Abernethy, *Progressivism, 1905-1919*, (Weigley) 531.

<sup>16</sup> Matthew Hopper, *From Refuge to Strength: The Rise of The African American Church in Philadelphia, 1787-1949* (Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia) <https://www.preservationalliance.com/wp-content/uploads/aachurches1.pdf>. p 1.

same year.<sup>17</sup> He and other officials of the UHC recognized Ida Robinson's ability as a "gospel preacher," and appointed her the pastor of a small mission called Mount Olive.

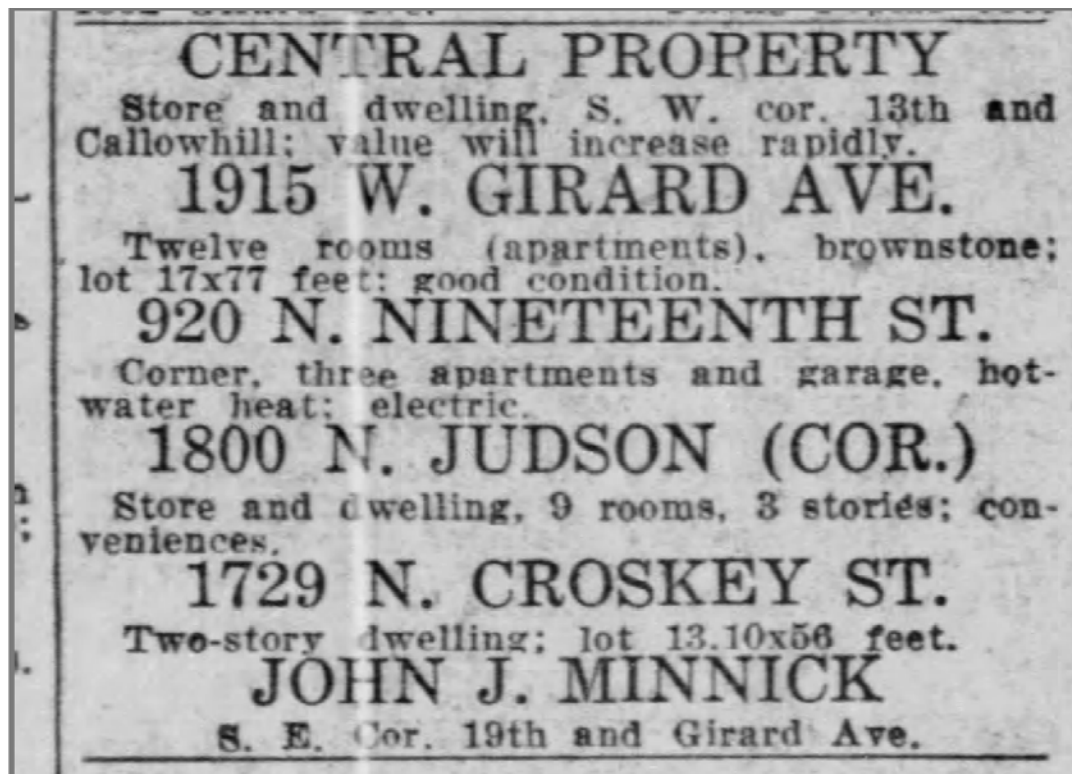


Figure 9: Real Estate Listing, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 20, 1923, p 54.

Lack of representation for women in the church did not slow her success, and her career continued to develop positively in the early 1920s.<sup>18</sup> By 1920, her husband Oliver Robinson had found work as a laborer for a local contractor.<sup>19</sup> The two were a busy, hard-working couple, and by October of 1923, they were able to purchase the single rowhouse at 920 N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street from James J. Finley.<sup>20</sup> Though she had no biological children, she and Oliver would go on house family members and foster children throughout their lives.

Ida Robinson had no formal education aside from that of the church, but her talents and intelligence transcended her Biblical knowledge. She harnessed her gifts in singing and speaking

<sup>17</sup> Mount Sinai Holy Church, *Founder, Senior Bishop & First President*

<sup>18</sup> Estrela Alexander, *Black Fire: One Hundred Years of African American Pentecostalism*. (United States: InterVarsity Press, 2011.) Pp 305-307

<sup>19</sup> U.S. Census Bureau, *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 – Population Schedule* (Philadelphia, PA. April 7, 1930.)

<sup>20</sup> City of Philadelphia, *JMH Beed Book 1741, p 165-16, Oct 19, 1923*

alongside her sharp leadership skills, carving out the success she wished to see for herself. She travelled, ministering up and down the East Coast, captivating her audiences, and regularly filling the churches she visited. Robinson's travels and services quickly expanded the congregation in large numbers, and her reputation as a revivalist became well known among the Black Pentecostal congregations on the East Coast and beyond.<sup>21</sup>

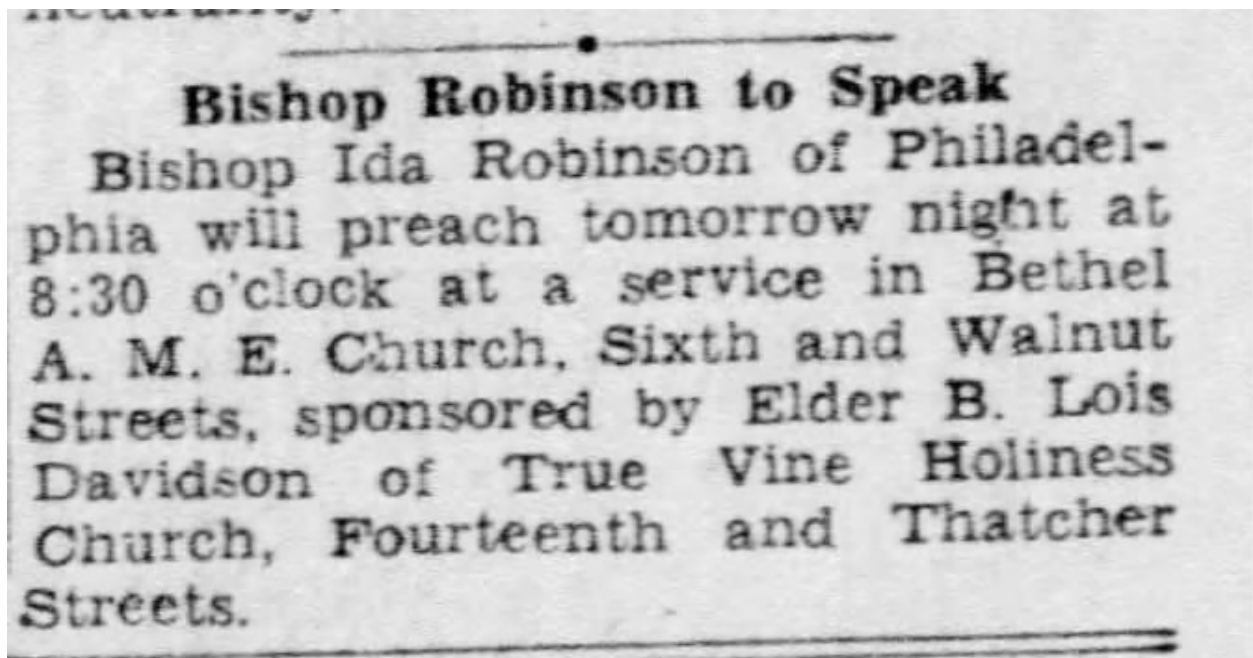


Figure 10: "Bishop Robinson to Speak", *The Morning News*, Wilmington, Delaware, 25 July 1939, p 7.

Though Robinson had been publicly ordained, at-large, men in positions of power within UHC were not keen on women in leadership roles within their church. It was announced that women could no longer be ordained, and those who were already ordained would be restricted to lower levels of power. Robinson would not have fully lost her position, but she would have lost a level of autonomy, thereby compromising her goals within the church.<sup>22</sup> She made the choice to leave UHC, refusing to relinquish her freedom.

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<sup>21</sup> Alexander, *Black Fire: One Hundred Years of African American Pentecostalism*, 305-307.

<sup>22</sup> Mount Sinai Holy Church, *Founder, Senior Bishop & First President*



## Mount Sinai Holy Church of America (MSHC)

The year following the purchase of her home on N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street, Ida Robinson founded the Mount Sinai Holy Church, serving as its first bishop and president, positions she would hold for the remainder of her life. On May 20, 1924, the State of Pennsylvania granted her a charter for the church.<sup>23</sup> While preaching in Burgaw, North Carolina, she established the first church of her new denomination outside of Philadelphia, appointing a woman by the name of Malinda Cousins as pastor.<sup>24</sup> This church would be the first of many. Ida Robinson created this denomination with the goal that women could freely participate in all levels of ministry. She promoted gender equality and offered opportunity to anyone who wished to pursue it, men included. Robinson was still beloved by the members of the UHC, and women and men who were sympathetic to her cause followed her, often bringing their congregations with them, and solidifying a new membership base at Mount Sinai Holy Church. UHC attempted to change her mind about establishing her own denomination, but Ida had made her choice, citing that God had instructed her to “come out on Sinai and loose the women.” In her newly self-appointed position, she trained and educated women and placed them in positions of authority.<sup>25</sup> She once asked, “If Mary the mother of Jesus could carry the Word of God in her womb, why can’t women carry the word of God in their mouth?”<sup>26</sup> Mount Sinai Holy Church of America would go on to become the largest African American Pentecostal denomination established by and consistently headed by women.<sup>27</sup>

Bishop Robinson embraced the metaphor of birthing and mothering in MSHC’s churches. She used the position of “pastor” as a symbol of motherhood, a notion that helped Robinson create the thematic and organizational structure for the church. Robinson aimed to create a space where church leadership was more than just management and maintenance.<sup>28</sup> She focused on nurturing her congregations, giving special attention to fostering personal and

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<sup>23</sup> Mount Sinai Holy Church, *Founder, Senior Bishop & First President*

<sup>24</sup> Priscilla Pope-Levison, *Ida Robinson (1891–1946)*. (Turn the Pulpit Loose, 2004), 205–12.

<sup>25</sup> Alexander, *Black Fire: One Hundred Years of African American Pentecostalism*, 305-307.

<sup>26</sup> *Sixtieth Annual Convocation Bulletin of the Mt. Sinai Holy Church of America, Inc.*, (1984) 33.

<sup>27</sup> Alexander, *Black Fire: One Hundred Years of African American Pentecostalism*, 305-307.

<sup>28</sup> Grant, Goff & Wacker, *Portraits of a Generation: Early Pentecostal Leaders* (University of Arkansas Press: Fayetteville, 2002) 315.

communal growth. She saw her new converts as children to be raised in holiness at MSHC. At her sermons, Robinson would close with a song: “This is the church of Mt. Sinai. Oh you can’t join it. You’ve got to be born in it. This is the church of Mount Sinai.”<sup>29</sup> The metaphors of motherhood and rebirth aimed to help guide members of MSHC towards a fresh start and good life.<sup>30</sup>

From 1924 to 1936 Robinson continued to expand MSHC. She returned to her travels up and down the coast, continuing her revival services under the auspices of the denomination she had built, converting new members, and opening new congregations headed by specifically selected and often female pastors. Though Robinson had moved on to MSHC, UHC often asked her to return and provide ministry. Her success inspired other women to demand more public presence and opportunity within their own denominations.

By 1930, Ida Robinson was flourishing in her position as a Bishop while her husband Oliver pulled in a secondary income working as a chauffeur for private parties.<sup>31</sup> Much of the working-class white population in Philadelphia had become increasingly antagonistic in the first decades of the 20th century, a sentiment centered around economic competition with free Black people. Tensions between social and racial groups would remain well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century and beyond, especially in moments of national economic hardship. Though Francisville had a plenty of factory jobs, Black people were generally excluded from industrial work. Like Oliver Robinson, they had to find work as coachmen, carters, barbers, cooks, craftspeople, washerwomen, and more. The white community considered these jobs to be low status, but

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<sup>29</sup> Goff & Wacker, *Portraits of a Generation: Early Pentecostal Leaders*, 315.

<sup>30</sup> Antipas L. Harris, *The Ordination of Women: An Issue among 'Spirit-Filled' Churches from the African Diaspora*. (Boston University).

<sup>31</sup> U.S. Census Bureau. *Fifteenth Census of the United States: 1930 – Population Schedule*, (Philadelphia, PA. April 7, 1930)

the landscape of racism and economic competition between social groups still left them bitter that Black folks had any opportunity at all.<sup>32</sup>

Though Oliver Robinson worked what many Philadelphians considered a lesser job, in 1930, with the Robinson's combined incomes, they were able to purchase the adjacent property at 922 N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street, doubling their space by combining the two parcels.<sup>33</sup> The



Figure 11: "Bishop Ida Robinson Obituary." *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 25, 1946.

Robinsons remained at this property, working, living, and supporting their relatives until the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. On April 6, 1946, Ida Robinson left Philadelphia with a group of missionaries to visit some of the organization's locations in Florida. During a visit to Winter Haven on April 20, 1946, Bishop & Mount Sinai Holy Church First President Ida B. Robinson passed away suddenly.<sup>34</sup> At the time of her death, Mount Sinai Holy Church of America consisted of 84 churches.<sup>35</sup> She was 54 years old, survived by her husband and foster-daughter, Ida Mae.<sup>36</sup>

In Philadelphia, her funeral procession included half a dozen men and women leading a hearse and a line of cars, interspersed with a handful of police officers. Hundreds of Black men, women, and children lined the sides of the street. It was a ceremony not to be missed for both members of Mount Sinai Holy Church and the greater Black community.<sup>37</sup> Services were held at

<sup>32</sup> Dana Dorman, *Philadelphia's African American Heritage: A Brief Historic Context Statement for the Preservation Alliance's Inventory of African American Historic Sites* (Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia. October 03, 2009.)

<sup>33</sup> City of Philadelphia Department of Records, *9 N4 book 111,112, Grant No. 505-S* (City Archives, May 6th, 1991.)

<sup>34</sup> Alexander, *Black Fire: One Hundred Years of African American Pentecostalism*, 323.

<sup>35</sup> *Presiding Prelates Through History*, (Mount Sinai Holy Church of America Inc. Accessed May 13, 2022.) <http://mtnsinaiholychurch.org/history/presidents.html>.

<sup>36</sup> *Bishop Ida Robinson Obituary*, (The Philadelphia Inquirer, April 25, 1946.)

<sup>37</sup> *Funeral Procession of Bishop Ida Robinson Former Pastor of Mt. Olive Holy Temple, Phila., Pa. April 29, 1946... Title Written in the Negative by Ida Robinson, Bishop on William Reese Company*, (William Reese Company. Standard Photo Service Co. Accessed May 13, 2022.)

her original congregation, the Mount Olive Holy Temple on Broad and Oxford Streets. Her death marked the end of an era for the denomination, but her legacy would be honored by the Black female Bishops who followed in her footsteps.



Figure 12: Funeral Procession of "Bishop Ida Robinson" Former Pastor of Mt. Olive Holy Temple, Philadelphia, PA. April 29<sup>th</sup>, 1946.



Figure 13: Standard Photo Service Co. (Philadelphia, Pa.), Robinson, Ida, The body of Bishop Ida Robinson, lying in state at the Mt. Olive Holy Temple, also founder of St. Sinai Holy Church of America, May 19, 1924, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, April 29, 1946 [photographer: Standard Photo Service Co., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania], April 29, 1946, Robert Langmuir African American Photograph Collection, Stuart A. Rose Manuscript, Archives, and Rare Book Library. <https://digital.library.emory.edu/purl/81937pvmfd-cor>

<https://www.williamreesecompany.com/pages/books/WRCAM56894/ida-robinson-bishop/funeral-procession-of-bishop-ida-robinson-former-pastor-of-mt-olive-holy-temple-phila-pa-april-29>.

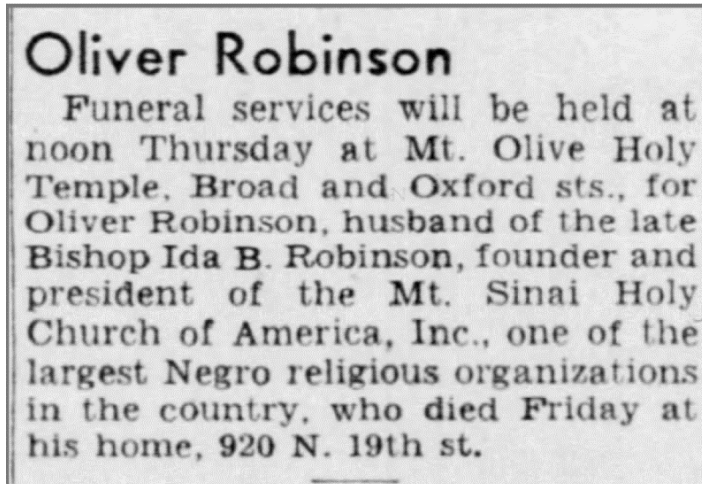


Figure 14: Oliver Robinson's Obituary, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 5, 1947. p 1.

Oliver Robinson remained at their joint property until his death a year later in 1947.<sup>38</sup> By will, the property was left to his half-brother, Clay Robinson, who lived at 920-22 N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street, and his nephew, Ira Rice, who lived at 1515 Brown Street.<sup>39</sup> The story of 920-922 N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street shifted with Clay Robinson's subsequent 1948 sale of the property to a surprising twenty different people,

including a Rebecca Etheredge and Eleanor Kindstrom.<sup>40</sup>

### International Peace Mission Movement

The same year Clay Robinson sold the Robinson residence on N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street, the Lorraine Hotel on Broad Street was acquired by the controversial religious leader Father Divine. This hotel would later become the Divine Lorraine Hotel. Father Divine, legally named George Baker, was born circa 1880. Like Ida Robinson, he seems to have been born in the South, preaching at a smaller scale before moving north. His life and activities prior to becoming a publicly known preacher in 1919 are unknown, but his activity in Brooklyn, NY after this moment is clearer. After relocating to New York, he founded the Divine Peace Mission



Figure 15: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, April 23, 1948. p 16.

<sup>38</sup> *Oliver Robinson Obituary*, (*Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 5, 1947.)

<sup>39</sup> *Deed Transfers, 9 N 4 E*, (City of Philadelphia Department of Records, City Archives, 1948.)

<sup>40</sup> *Deed 9 N4 book 111,112, Grant No. 505-S*, (City of Philadelphia Department of Records, City Archives, May 6th, 1991.)

Movement, and married one of his followers, a much older woman who went by “Peninnah.” She became known as Mother Divine and was believed to be the reincarnation of the Virgin Mary.

George Baker was a highly charismatic man, considered almost superhuman among his followers who publicly accepted him as God. While his legacy is often reduced to that of a cult leader, much of Father Divine’s work was centered on civil rights. He pursued anti-lynching campaigns, social justice initiatives, and preached about the tenants of personal responsibility. In 1919, Father Divine and his organization relocated to Long Island, a move that was not well received by the public. While his base of followers continued to grow, they were met with continued antagonism by the public. In 1932, Father Divine was sentenced to one year in jail on a public nuisance violation. After being released, he persisted and continued to be active through the next decade.

In 1942, the International Peace Mission Movement moved to Philadelphia to create distance between the group and Father Divine’s legal troubles in New York. The Peace Mission Movement initially moved into a former hotel at 764-772 S. Broad Street, at the corner of Broad and Catharine Streets. The organization completely renovated the building and made it their official headquarters. Accommodations were made for long-term visitors, such as leaders from the Peace Mission Movement’s outposts in other countries.<sup>41</sup> Father Divine and his followers continued to acquire properties along N. Broad Street and beyond. They sought out sites that could be ideal locations for creating coworking and living spaces for members of the organization. Many Black Philadelphians were employed in the businesses they established, which reached from Broad Street to West Philadelphia.<sup>42</sup> Racial integration and separation of gender were to be expected in households of the Peace Mission Movement, creating an interesting historic landscape at the center of socio-politics and religion.

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<sup>41</sup> Dennis Carlisle, *Broad Street’s Original Divine Hotel* (Hidden City Philadelphia, March 6, 2017.) <https://hiddencityphila.org/2017/03/broad-streets-original-divine-hotel/>.

<sup>42</sup> George E. Thomas, *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for the Lorraine Apartments*

## Circle Mission Church – 920-22 N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street

The buildings at Broad Street and Catharine Street were acquired by a group of followers and set aside for the use of their new project, the Circle Mission Church. The International Peace Mission movement had been branded as a cult by the public, but they saw themselves as a spiritual, community group. The establishment of the Circle Mission Church was therefore an assertion of the Peace Mission Movement's religious significance.<sup>43</sup> The Circle Mission Church began to expand their list of properties, opening co-working and living locations that functioned as kitchens or meeting spaces. These sites were usually acquired and operated cooperatively. Money would be pooled by a group of followers who would work towards creating a place that contributed to the greater organization.

BEING the same premises which Clay Robinson, and wife and others by Deed dated 4/21/1948 and recorded 4/26/1948 in Phila. County, in Deed Book CJP 2016 page 287 conveyed unto Rebecca Etheredge, siglewoman, Patience Job, True Love, siglewoman, Wonderful Love, Gladness Sincere, siglewoman, Joy Sunshine, siglewoman, Mary Sunshine, siglewoman, Sunshine Happiness, siglewoman, Angel Peace, siglewoman, Charity Bell, singelwoman, Baby Love, siglewoman, Simon Peter, singleman and Blessed Quietness, singleman and Eleanor Kindstrom, siglewoman, Radiance Hope, siglewoman, Hemble Love, siglewoman, H. S. Wallace, singleman and Niels Jessen, singleman and Mary W. Dove, siglewoman, and Elizabeth Holly, siglewoman, as joint tenants with the right of survivorship.

And the said Patience Job, True Love, Wonderful Love, Gladness Sincere, Joy Sunshine, Mary Sunshine, Sunshine Happiness, Angel Peace, Charity Bell, Baby Love, Simon Love, Blessed Quietness, Radiance Hope, Humble Love, H. S. Wallace, Niels Jessen, Mary W. Dove and Elizabeth Holly have since departed this life, wherein title to the said

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Figure 16: Detail of the 1948 deed listing the individuals who collaboratively purchased 920-922 N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street. Members of the Peace Mission Movement would often adopt new names that conveyed values of the church.

The Robinson residence at 920-22 N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street went up for sale following Oliver Robinson's death in 1948, the same year the Peace Mission Movement purchased the Lorraine Hotel on Broad Street, which he renamed the Divine Lorraine Hotel. The twenty-person group of grantees who collectively purchased the Robinson residence were indeed affiliated with the

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<sup>43</sup> Thomas, *National Register of Historic Places Registration Form for the Lorraine Apartments*

International Peace Mission Movement, intending to use the space under the auspices of the Circle Mission Church.<sup>44</sup> They converted the Robinson residence into a community kitchen while retaining and subdividing several living spaces, likely separated by male and female. In 1959, the address had been split into 10 separate lodging units.<sup>45</sup>

When Father Divine passed away in 1965, the Peace Mission Movement pushed onwards, now led by the second Mother Divine. The movement, though weakened by his death, continued to be active, as did the Circle Mission Church. In 1990, 920-22 N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street seems to have remained mostly the same, still functioning as a combination residence and community kitchen.<sup>46</sup> The group held ownership of the property until 1991 when Eleanor Kindstrom and Rebecca Etheredge sold it to Sigrid H. Berkner, who had resided across the street at 923 N. 20<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>47</sup> The building at 920-22 N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street has remained a private residence ever since, now offering apartments under the name Royal International House. It is presently owned by the Center City Real Estate Group.<sup>48</sup>

It was happenstance that the International Peace Mission Movement, a religious group concerned with progressive civil rights values, acquired the address already connected to the rich, progressive religious history of Bishop Ida Robinson. Francisville and the nearby neighborhoods surrounding Broad Street are deeply intertwined with that of the greater socio-political religious Black history in Philadelphia. Criticisms of Father Divine as a cult-leader aside, he and Bishop Ida Robinson transcended the sexism and racism of their eras in a valiant attempt to create positive change in the City of Philadelphia and beyond, ultimately inspiring others to do the same.

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<sup>44</sup> City of Philadelphia, *Application for Permit to Erect, Register or Maintain a Street Advertising Device, Oct 7, 1948*, Bureau of Highways and Street Cleaning Department of Public Works. Philadelphia Atlas, accessed May 1, 2022.

<sup>45</sup> City of Philadelphia, *Application for Zoning Permit and/or Use Registration Permit, July 7, 1959*, Department of Licenses and Inspections. Philadelphia Atlas, accessed May 1, 2022. <https://atlas.phila.gov/920%20N%2019TH%20ST/li>.

<sup>46</sup> City of Philadelphia, *Memorandum, Dec 7, 1990*. Department of Licenses and Inspections. Philadelphia Atlas, accessed May 1, 2022.

<sup>47</sup> *U.S., Phone and Address Directories, 1993-2002* (Philadelphia, PA. Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2005. [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2005.)

<sup>48</sup> *920 N 19th St: Property Assessments* (Philadelphia Atlas. City of Philadelphia. Accessed May 10, 2022. <https://atlas.phila.gov/920%20N%2019TH%20ST/property>.)



## Conclusions - Statement of Significance

The property at 920-22 N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street is associated with two iconic religious leaders that contributed substantially to Black history in Philadelphia. From 1923-1946, it was the home of Bishop Ida Robinson, a prominent figure in the history of Black churches in Philadelphia who changed what was possible for women in ministry. She was the first Black woman to start a denomination (Mount Sinai Holy Church of America) with the specific goal of ordaining women.<sup>49</sup> When she died, the denomination consisted of 84 churches, more than 160 ordained ministers (125 of which were women,) a school in Philadelphia, ongoing mission work in Cuba and Guyana, and a farm in South New Jersey which was offered as a haven for her congregation members.<sup>50</sup> Today, 117 churches are affiliated with Mount Sinai Holy Church of America, with locations across the East Coast, making it one of the largest African American churches in the country.<sup>51</sup> Ida B. Robinson paved the way for women in ministry positions in the Black Pentecostal church, challenging history, and appointing other women in positions of power.

The association with people of religious significance at 920-922 N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street continues with the connected history of the International Peace Mission Movement. Members purchased the property from the Robinson family in 1948. It functioned as a location of the Circle Mission Church under the guidance of Father Divine, continuing to play an important role in Philadelphia's religious history until its sale in 1991.

The property at 920-22 N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street satisfies criteria (a), being associated with two significant and prolific religious figures in Philadelphia's history, Bishop Ida B. Robinson, and Father Divine.

*(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.*

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<sup>49</sup> Tamera Lynn Kraft, *Ida B. Robinson – the Woman Preacher Who Ordained Women* (Word Sharpeners, May 20, 2017.) <https://wordsharpeners.wordpress.com/2016/03/18/ida-b-robinson-the-woman-preacher-who-ordained-women/>.

<sup>50</sup> Pope-Levison, *Ida Bell Robinson (1891-1946)*

<sup>51</sup> Wayne Warner, *Bishop Ida Robinson: A Woman of God* (Charisma Magazine)

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