

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: 5801-03 Germantown Avenue

Postal code: 19144

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: Parker's Hall

Current/Common Name: Parker Hall

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: Hankins and Associates Medical and Community Care LLC, ACES Veterans Museum

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 1900 to 1949

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: 1900 (current building); c. 1800 and 1872 (former buildings)

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: Mantle Fielding, architect

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: William J. Gruhler, builder

Original owner: Joseph Parker

Other significant persons: _____

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 Philadelphia Historical Commission Date 13 July 2022

Name with Title Nika Faulkner, intern, with assistance from Loretta Anne Micola Email preservation@phila.gov

Street Address 1515 Arch St. 13th Floor 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: 13 July 2022

Correct-Complete Incorrect-Incomplete Date: 13 December, 2022

Date of Notice Issuance: 15 December, 2022

Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: Dr. Althea Hankins

Address: 5801-03 Germantown Ave.

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19144

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: 18 January 2023

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: 10 February 2023

Date of Final Action: 10 February 2023. Designated under Criterion J with a Period of Significance of 1900-1949.

Designated Rejected

12/7/18

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



Parker's Hall in 1900, then a stationary shop and hardware store. Source: The Germantown Independent Gazette, May 18, 1900, archived in the scrapbooks of Jane Campbell at the Germantown Historical Society.

**PARKER HALL
5801-03 GERMANTOWN AVE
CONST. 1870
GERMANTOWN
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19144**

Originally written in 2017 by University of Pennsylvania student Sara Stratte. Edited, updated, and expanded by Philadelphia Historical Commission intern Nika Faulkner with assistance from Loretta Ann Micola.

6. Description

The building at 5801-03 Germantown Avenue, known historically as Parker's Hall, is located at the intersection of Germantown Avenue and E. Price Street in the Germantown neighborhood of Philadelphia. Much of the present building dates to construction in the spring of 1900 following a serious fire, though some of the underlying foundations from the building constructed around 1870 remain.¹ The brick building is three stories in height, constructed in the Colonial Revival style, with a non-historic storefront at ground level. Large blue and white painted metal signage, likely from the midcentury, projects from the corner of the primary elevation, advertising the Germantown Medical Center and Pharmacy (visible in Figures 5, 7, and 8; this sign is a legacy of the previous tenant).



Figure 2: An aerial view of 5801-03 Germantown Avenue, indicated by a red rectangle, situates the structure in context of the other commercial buildings on the 5800 block of Germantown Avenue. This view also demonstrates that the building has a shallow hipped roof. (Photo courtesy of Google Maps.)

The primary façade (southwest elevation) along Germantown Avenue, and southeast elevation on E. Price Street are the only exposed external walls. The rear wall is partially visible but inaccessible for proper examination, and the northwest party wall is shared with 5805 Germantown Avenue. The building contains 3,850 square feet in a three-story rectangular plan that is approximately 41' x 94'; this is much larger than the adjacent buildings at 5805 and 5807 Germantown Avenue (Figure 2).

¹ The building permit contains in its description that the fire damaged wall on Germantown Ave was demolished "to line of girders" while the Price Street elevation was refaced (Building Permit no. 788, filed February 21, 1900, City of Philadelphia Municipal Archives). Examination of the interior will yield more exact information. The pre-existing structure was also a storefront and social hall, built by Joseph Parker (Hocker, *Germantown: 1683-1933*, 254).

The visible exterior walls are brick masonry arranged in the Flemish bond style. Brick quoins are evident on both the façade and southeast elevation (Figure 7). A vinyl cornice has been installed, covering the original, but recent photos suggest there are remnants of an older cornice beneath it (Figure 3). There are three brick chimneys seen from the public right-of-way, extending upwards from the southeast elevation along E. Price Street. There is one at either end and one at the center of the elevation. Two brick chimneys are located near the party wall with 5805 Germantown Ave. and three smaller chimneys run along the middle of the roof of 5801-03.



Figure 3: A portion of previous cornice is visible beneath the vinyl cornice.

Primary Façade (Southwest Elevation)

The primary façade along Germantown Avenue is four bays wide on the second and third floors, with a double-hung window in each bay. Historic divided-light windows can be seen behind the



Figure 5a (above): Detail showing divided-light windows on second floor. Image from Cyclomedia.phila.gov

Figure 5 (left): Southwest elevation of 5801-03 Germantown Avenue. Image from Cyclomedia.phila.gov

contemporary replacements in some cases. The historic examples seem to be twelve-over-one on the second floor, and eight-over-one on the third (Figure 5a). The lintels over each window are brick jack arches with terracotta or cast-stone keystones. (Figure 5, 7, and 8). The window sills are the same terracotta or cast-stone material at the third floor, the second-floor sills have been removed.



Figure 6: A photo from 1951 depicts the recently installed structural glass storefront; the storefront windows on Price Street elevation have been extended back to the second window bay (see Figure 8). The black band underneath the second story windows, which is faintly visible now only on the Germantown Ave. elevation (see Figure 5), dates to at least this time. (City of Philadelphia, Department of Records Archives, Collection ID Public Works-40829-9-, Asset ID 19698)

southern corner of the building and around to the first bay of the southeast elevation.

In 1949, the original storefront was replaced with a new structural glass storefront. The entrance was moved from the left side of the façade to the south corner of the structure, and the storefront window expanded on the southeast façade to the second bay (Figure 6, 7). At present, the masonry piers and surrounds flanking the store front windows appear to be faced with concrete and partly covered in sheet metal which conceals where the 1900 storefront

The storefront on the first floor of the façade has been heavily modified since 1900. The entrance had originally been on left side of the façade, surrounded by masonry piers, with windows extending to the



Figure 7: The southern corner of the building shows layers of modifications, including the mid-century sign and stucco covering up scars from the cornice which once ran along the first floor.

cornice was removed. Retractable metal grates have been installed to cover the plate glass windows (Figures 5, 7).

Southeast Elevation

The southeast elevation fronting East Price Street, which is six bays wide, shows more evidence of modification. A circa 2019 construction project repaired and reconstructed a portion of the wall that was cracked, bulged, and beginning to pull away from the structure (Figure 9).² From photos taken during construction, it appears that the rear portion was rebuilt with a wall of concrete masonry units and then clad with a layer of brick replicating the glazed Flemish bond of the rest of the wall (Figures 8, 10). The second and third stories each have six windows, like the window openings on the primary façade.



Figure 8: Price Street (Southeast) elevation of 5801-03 Germantown Ave. Photo by Nika Faulkner. Note the new matching windows, Flemish bond brick veneer that differs in color, and lack of cornice.

On the ground level, there had been three windows of a similar shape and configuration as those on the third floor; two of these were removed when the storefront expanded sometime between 1900 and 1951 (Figure 6) and the third has been filled in with brick though the historic lintel is still visible. There were also two doors at the eastern end of the elevation, both of which were infilled with brick by 2017, but by the 2019 repairs, the easternmost door was reopened. A fire escape,

² Caitlin McCabe, "Germantown Pins Renovation Hopes on 'Vote Your Main Street' Contest." Philadelphia Inquirer, October 19, 2017. https://www.inquirer.com/philly/business/real_estate/residential/germantown-avenue-philadelphia-vote-your-main-street-contest-parker-hall-john-trowers-20171019.html.

added in 1900 during renovations, is no longer extant.³

At the base of the southeast elevation is evidence of a historic concrete masonry unit foundation, perhaps original to the structure previously at this site which was erected about 1870 by Joseph Parker. Sometime after the construction of the present building in 1900, however, the light wells for the basement were infilled. The foundation of the southwest façade has been completely altered, likely when the storefront was modified before 1951 (Figure 6).



Figure 9: A 2017 photograph of the eastern side of the southeast elevation features the dramatic bend of the structure's east corner that demanded structural remedy, seen below. The foundation may date to the 1870s and is presumed to be a contributing factor to the structural instability. (Photo by Sara Stratte.)



Figure 10: This photo from Google Streetview shows the stabilization and reconstruction efforts underway in 2019. The rebuilt portion uses concrete masonry units clad in brick.

³ "The Latest News in Real Estate," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 15; Building Permit no. 788, filed February 21, 1900.

7. Statement of Significance

The establishments that were located at 5801-03 Germantown Avenue exemplify the shifts and trends in Germantown during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, during a time when industrialization and suburbanization wrought major social and economic changes in Philadelphia at large.⁴ Owing to the property's location on Germantown Avenue and its proximity to the Germantown Railroad and the Main Street Railroad Station, the establishments located at 5801 Germantown, first a hotel then a combination store and social hall, uniquely represent the socioeconomic and demographic shifts in the surrounding community. The building, constructed in 1900, known as Parker's Hall and the Parker's Combination Store, therefore satisfies Criterion for Designation J:

(J) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

Historical Context: Introduction

Germantown was founded by Francis Daniel Pastorius, who was granted land by William Penn to settle this area at the northwestern edge of what is now the City of Philadelphia. Thirteen families emigrated from Germany to lay out the beginnings of a village and, despite its proximity to Philadelphia, this area remained largely isolated from the city through the 18th century. In 1832, railroads significantly improved the connection between Germantown and the city and the world beyond. The development of transportation by rail lit the fire of industry: goods were shipped, mills developed, and shops opened, developing a town center along Germantown Avenue. In 1854, Germantown was consolidated into the City of Philadelphia.⁵

In 1900, the building at 5801-03 Germantown Avenue was constructed atop the remains of a structure originally built around 1870. Between 1810 and 1868, a succession of roadhouses and hotels operated at the site in a two-story stone structure, built circa 1800, including the Wunder's Hotel (1810-1835), the Railroad Hotel (1844-1854), and Reeder's Tavern and Inn (1854-1868). The first hotel catered to travelers and horse-cart teamsters traveling through Germantown, but when the railroad laid tracks to the corner of Price Street and Germantown Avenue in 1835, business shifted to catering to train passengers. Parker's Combination Store was erected on the site about 1870, demonstrating further changes in the economy of the surrounding neighborhood.

⁴ Also referred to as Main Street in several earlier deeds, the name "Germantown Avenue" was introduced in 1854 but was not regularized until the 1890s (see Edward Hocker, *Germantown*, 210). Even deeds after 1854, as with the Sheriff's deed that grants the parcel to Joseph Parker in 1869, refer to the street as Main rather than Germantown.

⁵ Nika Faulkner, Interview with Alex Bartlett.

Hotel use: 1810-1868

Germantown in the nineteenth century underwent a dramatic social and economic transition. By the end of the eighteenth century, many inhabitants were upper-class seasonal visitors to the countryside.⁶ At the time, the area featured estates for the wealthy, some commercial development along Germantown Avenue, and sparse structures and farms on either side of the avenue. It remained this way until the 1820s and 1830s, when two critical factors shaped the course of Germantown's history, the rise of industry in lower Germantown and the development of rail transportation. The Philadelphia, Germantown and Norristown (PG&N) Railroad Company established lines with service to Germantown in 1832 to provide easy transportation of materials, such as marble and lime from Montgomery County and the products of mills along the Wissahickon and Wingohocking Creeks, to Philadelphia.⁷

In the mid-nineteenth century, an influx of seasonal visitors and new residents, enabled by the increasing ease of transportation between Philadelphia and Germantown, cultivated a flourishing service industry in the area.⁸ Frontage along Germantown Avenue offered commercial success and the established shops and public houses along this corridor, which had originally catered to horse and cart travelers, created a foundation for future development. Between 1810 and 1835, Jacob S. and Caroline W. Wunder owned and occupied a two-story stone structure on this parcel on Germantown Avenue in which they operated a tavern and inn.⁹ It was a modest structure, but it provided board for the early seasonal visitors of lesser means coming from Philadelphia by road.¹⁰ The Wunders' clientele shifted abruptly in 1835 when the PG&N completed a railroad branch that terminated on Germantown Avenue just to the south of the hotel: until the depot for the station was completed in 1855, their tavern served as waiting room and ticket office.¹¹ This use continued after the title for the Wunder's Hotel had transferred to John Webb, a tailor from the City of Philadelphia.¹²

⁶ Nancy Holst, "Pattern books and the suburbanization of Germantown, Pennsylvania, in the mid-nineteenth century" (PhD diss., University of Delaware, 2008) 172.

⁷ *Ibid*, 174.

⁸ *Ibid*, 74.

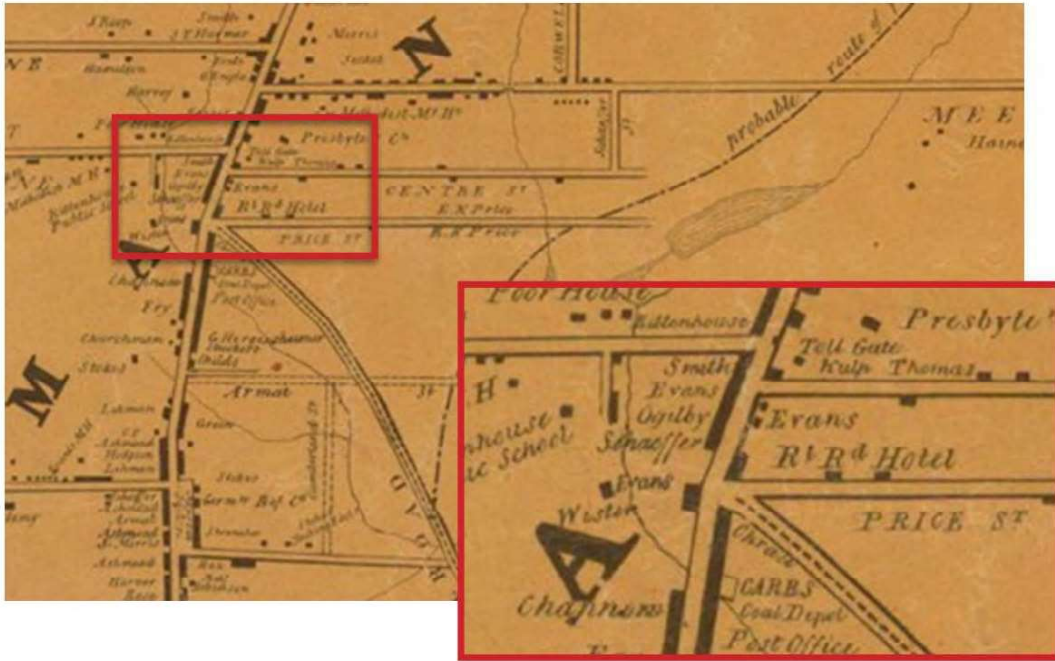
⁹ "#5801 Reeder's Hotel; Parker's Hall," *The Germantown Crier*, Fall 1991, p. 104.

¹⁰ Holst, 75.

¹¹ Hocker, *Germantown*, 171.

¹² According to *The Germantown Crier*, Webb himself did not tend the tavern and inn but instead hired Clayton and Joseph Richardson to operate the tavern and inn ("#5801. Reeder's Hotel; Parker's Hall," 48(4): 102). Transfer of title occurred February 27, 1835, enumerated in Philadelphia County Deed Book A. M. 58, page 393 and following.

Until the mid-1840s, train transportation to Germantown had catered primarily to industrial needs rather than public transportation.¹³ When passenger service did begin to pick up, it did so in a limited way. Architectural historian Nancy Holst contends that in the early years of the PG&N service to Germantown, the railroad company only advertised day trips for tourists and notes that, at the time, extended middle class excursions to the countryside were commonly seen as frivolous.¹⁴



An

Figure 11: Excerpts from the “Map of the Township of Germantown, 1848 (circa)” by J. C. Sidney, showing the early Railroad Hotel. At this time, the hotel was owned by Eli K. Price, who also developed a speculative real estate section along his eponymous street.

increasing middle-class commuting population in the area just off Germantown Avenue in the 1840s and 1850s (see, for example, the development of residential lots along Price Street, Figure 12) led to shifting clientele for the railroad and the businesses at 5801-03 Germantown Avenue. Enos Reeder bought the parcel in 1854 and maintained operation of the Rail Road Hotel and the “popular road house,” then known as Reeder’s Tavern, located at the site.¹⁵ In 1860, the title transferred to Amos Phillips, but the Reeder family continued to manage the establishment until 1868 when Amos Phillips sued Edward Reeder, the manager of the Rail Road Hotel between 1863 and 1866, over a debt.¹⁶

¹³ Holst, 77.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 74-75.

¹⁵ Philadelphia County Deed Book T. H. 142, page 408 and following. This is mentioned in “Zero Weather Had No Fears for Brave Fire Fighters. Crews of Many Companies Defeated the Flames While Coated with Ice,” (*Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 2, 1900, accessed November 17, 2016, <http://www.newsbank.com/>). The *McElroy’s Philadelphia Directory* (Philadelphia: Edward C. & John Biddle) for the year 1856 confirms that Enos Reeder presides over the Railroad Hotel.

¹⁶ Deed Book A. B. D. 141, page 94 and following. Following transfer of title to Phillips, *McElroy’s Philadelphia Directory*

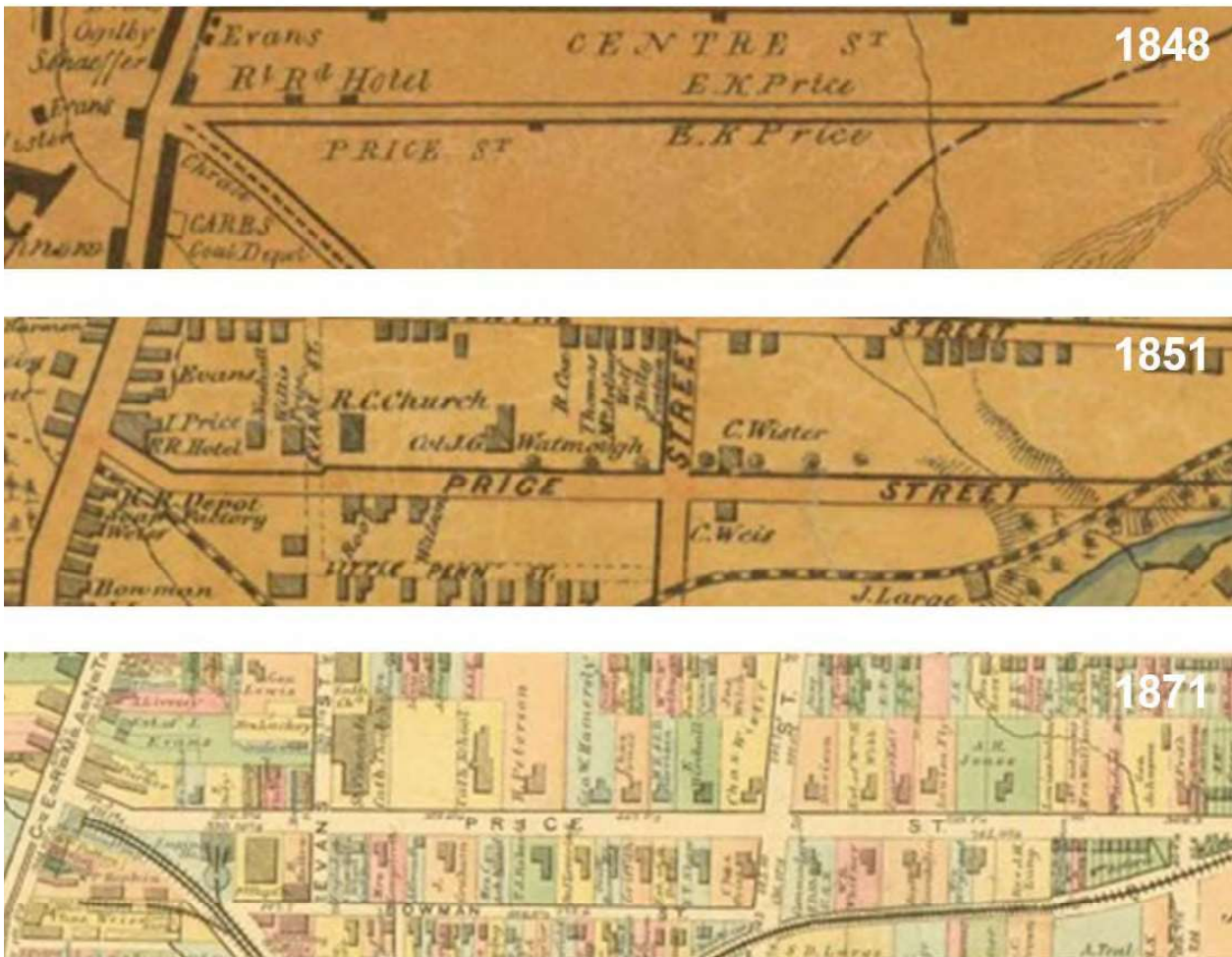


Figure 12: An evolution of Price Street over time. The progress Eli Price's venture is an interesting reflection of the increasing business at the Main Street Railroad Station, the Rail Road hotel, and Germantown at large. Top: J. C. Sidney, "Map of the Township of Germantown, 1848 (circa)" (Philadelphia: R. P. Smith, 1848)

Middle: A. E. Rogerson and E. J. Murphy, "Map of the Township of Germantown, Philadelphia County, Penna., 1851" (Philadelphia: John Flynn, 1851)

Bottom: G. M. Hopkins, "Atlas of the Late Borough of Germantown, 22nd Ward, City of Philadelphia, 1871" (1871); although it should be noted that the structure depicted here could be the one built by Joseph Parker in 1870.

Store and Hall Use Begins: 1870-1900

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, business at 5801-03 Germantown Avenue shifted from satisfying passengers and traveling salesmen to accommodating the burgeoning local middle class. This reflected the greater social changes occurring in Philadelphia at large, in which working and skilled classes had greater resources to spend on material goods and social functions. By the end of the nineteenth century, members of the middle class were heavily involved in progressive

(Philadelphia: Edward C. & John Biddle) still lists Enos Reeder as working at the Railroad Hotel until 1862; Philadelphia Country Sheriff's Book 68, page 484 and following.

politics and fraternal organizations. As working-class Philadelphians moved up into the lower-middle class, the social hall at 5801-03 Germantown Avenue offered a cheaper alternative to more established social clubs.

Following Amos Phillip's 1866 lawsuit, the property including the Rail Road Hotel went to Sheriff's Sale and was purchased in 1869 by Joseph Parker.¹⁷ Parker was a successful merchant who had for nearly twenty years operated a store at what is now 275 Rittenhouse Street. He also simultaneously owned and operated a business from 1865 to 1873 in a nearby mill building and storefront on East Cheltenham Avenue near Lena Street, now known as the Whosoever Gospel Mission. Parker's other business endeavors were successful enough that he was able to pay \$18,100 to purchase the hotel at the corner of Germantown Avenue and Price Street.¹⁸

Parker was already established in Germantown in 1851 as an importer of cricket goods and bicycles from England, the first in the area, which he sold alongside Germantown wool and other "fine" household items.¹⁹ The chief audience for these goods were the growing middle class of Germantown; accessories and furniture that had previously been restricted to those with larger incomes



Figure 13: The Parker's Combination Store at 5801 Germantown Avenue (then 4960 Main Street) opened in 1872. This excerpt from "Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, Volume 7, 22nd Ward, 1889" shows the structure which Parker erected sometime around 1870. Business card accessed at the Germantown Historical Society.

became significantly more affordable in the 1830s and 1840s, owing to industrialization and larger-scale production.²⁰ This is particularly true of the locally produced wool and textiles. In the mid-century, Germantown had been a significant contributor to Philadelphia's reputation as one of the leading producers in the nation.²¹

¹⁷ Philadelphia Country Sheriff's Book 68, page 484 and following.

¹⁸ A substantial markup over the \$3000 paid by Amos Phillips to Enos Reeder just ten years earlier. Deed Book A. B. D. 141, page 94 and following.

¹⁹ "Germantown's First Combination Store," *The Beehive*, IV(2): 4-5. Also seen on Joseph Parker's business card (The Germantown Historical Society archive, accessed November 3, 2016).

²⁰ Stuart M. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 141.

²¹ Holst, 6.

At 5801-03 Germantown Avenue, Parker demolished Reeder's Hotel and Tavern and about 1870 he erected a large building for a store and hall. The first story provided an expanded space for Parker's combination store business, in which he would continue to conduct his business until 1890.²²

Parker's investment in the site came during a period when Germantown was experiencing significant growth. In the south end of Germantown, industry at Wayne Junction ramped up in 1884 with the addition of the

Pennsylvania Railroad. A bedroom community grew in proximity, and the population began to quickly grow. The density of the landscape increased, with new construction filling in previously untouched sites. The farmland initially settled by those thirteen German families was disappearing. Makers, builders, and merchants of all sorts made Germantown their home, including the Parker family. Parker's Combination Store would have fit seamlessly into the burgeoning commercial corridor along Germantown Avenue, which extended from Cheltenham Avenue northward to Vernon Park, across the street from 5801-03 Germantown Avenue. Parker's establishments, adding both public space and shopping options to the active streetscape, were part of this changing social and economic landscape, serving the increasingly mixed middle and working classes.²³

In the late nineteenth century, social engagement as an expression status became more accessible for the working class, and Joseph Parker, among others, saw an opportunity. He built an entertainment hall on the second floor of the building at 5801-03 Germantown Avenue, which proved to be a prominent gathering place for events including dance lessons and soirées as well as a meeting place for various social clubs.²⁴ The appeal of these groups and events was



Figure 14: The 1889 G. W. Bromley map of Philadelphia's 22nd Ward shows Parker's property at the corner of Germantown Avenue (at left, running North-South) and Price Street (running East-West).

²² Joseph Parker died in 1890, but his sons Hiram and John Parker continued business at 5801 Germantown Avenue until 1904.

²³ David Young, "The Battles of Germantown: Public History and Preservation in America's Most Historic Neighborhood During the Twentieth Century," (PhD diss., the Ohio State University, 2009) p. 13.

²⁴ Ella Wister Haines recalls this fondly in a "Memories of a Victorian Child" from *Germantown Crier*, Winter 1954. Indeed, articles and advertisements for summer lessons for children, or searching for teachers, appear regularly in the periodicals of the time ("Entertainments," *The Times*, April 21, 1889; "Professor Asher," *Germantown Guide*, November 20, 1880, Germantown Historical Society archive). For the adults, these social events are reported in the

encapsulated by the Germantown Workingmen’s Club which, in 1880, celebrated their third anniversary at the Parker’s Hall:

“[A] club was to furnish to the workingmen of Germantown a place of pleasant evening resort, where they might amuse themselves with innocent games and improve their minds by social intercourse, reading and study.”²⁵

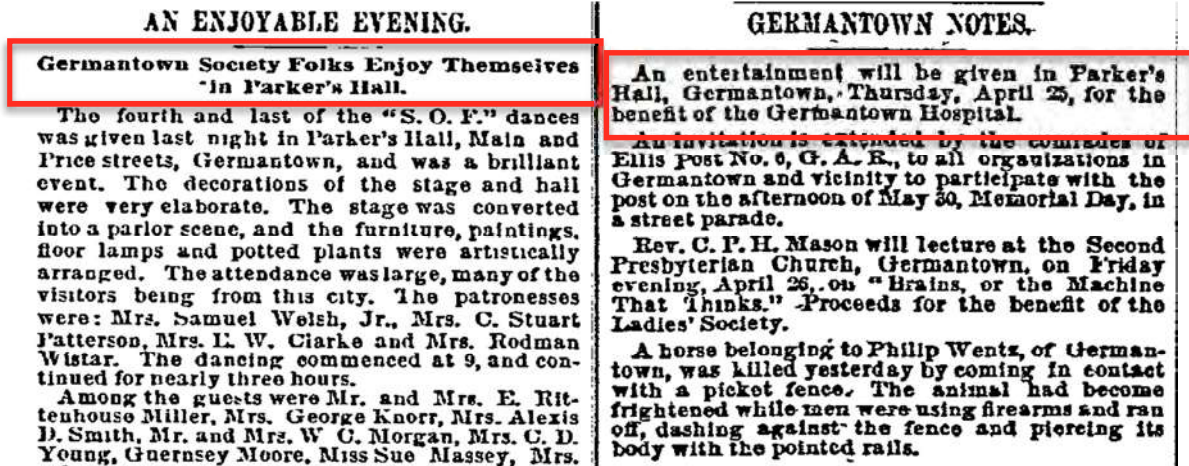
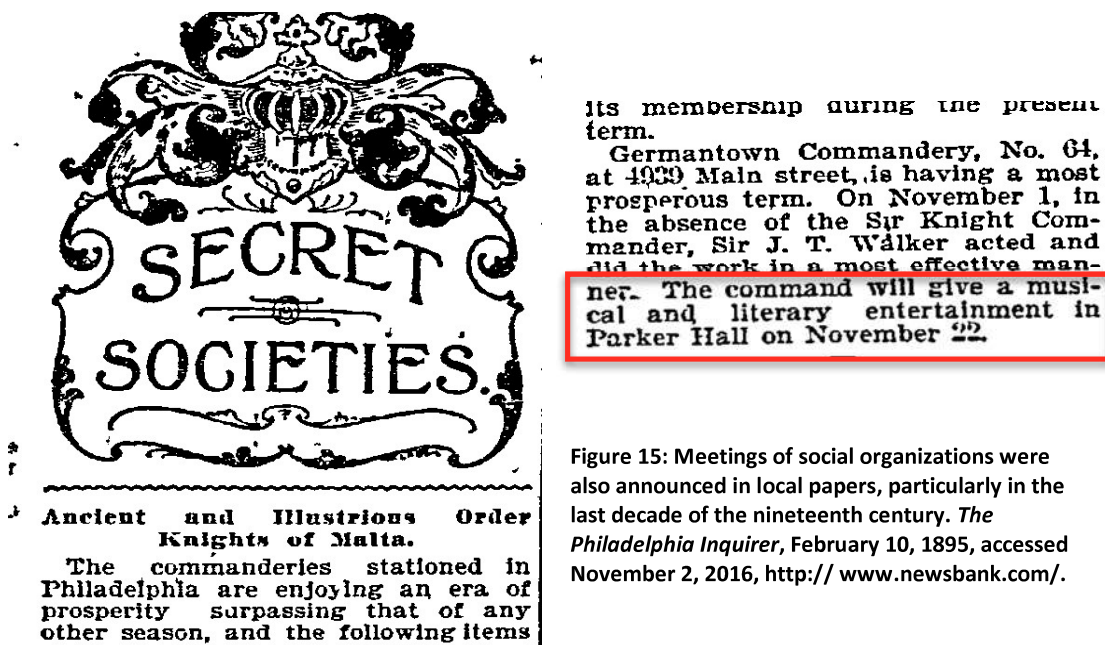


Figure 16: Articles from *The Philadelphia Inquirer* reported on several social events occurring in the late nineteenth century.



its membership during the present term. Germantown Commandery, No. 64, at 4939 Main street, is having a most prosperous term. On November 1, in the absence of the Sir Knight Commander, Sir J. T. Walker acted and did the work in a most effective manner. The command will give a musical and literary entertainment in Parker Hall on November 22.

Figure 15: Meetings of social organizations were also announced in local papers, particularly in the last decade of the nineteenth century. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 10, 1895, accessed November 2, 2016, [http:// www.newsbank.com/](http://www.newsbank.com/).

During the 1870s and 1880s, the clubs hosting social events in the second-floor space shifted to local sports and hobby clubs, but it is not clear if any single organization consistently rented the hall.²⁶ A variety of uses continued until the mid-1890’s, when the opening of other event spaces

“Entertainments” and events sections of both the Times and The Philadelphia Inquirer between 1875 and 1895 but thereafter dropping off with some frequency.

²⁵ “Workingmen’s Club: annual festival in Germantown,” *The Times*, May 11, 1880.

²⁶ These are the Germantown Horticultural Society, the Germantown Glee Club, the Tulphocken Tennis Club, and so

like the Manheim and Belfield Country Club Houses in 1894 led to more consistency of users at Parker's Hall.²⁷ The groups that began to use the event space more repeatedly can be separated broadly into voluntary clubs and labor-based political groups. The former category included the fraternal orders of the Knights of Pythias and the Knights of Malta.²⁸ Historian Stuart Blumin describes such groups as a novel platform for the socializing of white-collar workers with the skilled workers of the lower-middle class. This was the case particularly at clubs in Philadelphia's periphery, where skilled laborers of means were the "most ambitious to rise in the world, most comfortable with middle-class values, and least interested in maintaining plebeian loyalties."²⁹



Figure 17: A depiction of Hiram T. Parker from his obituary. Courtesy Germantown Historical Society.

The latter group of social organizations at Parker's Hall included the Junior Order of United American Mechanics, a nativist club founded in 1853 for the purpose of protecting American workers in manufacturing and industry from immigrant competitors.³⁰ This group is particularly significant in illustrating the broadening

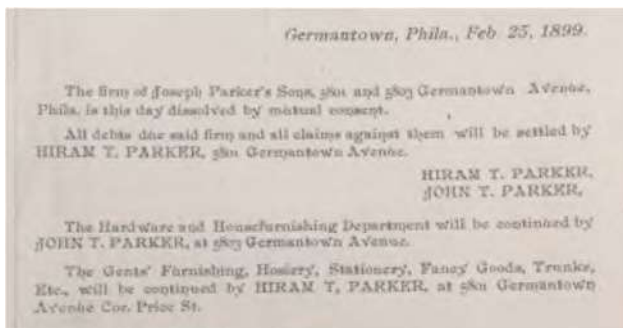


Figure 19: Public notice of the dissolution of the Parker brothers' joint enterprise. Courtesy Germantown Historical Society.



Figure 18: Advertisement for Hiram Parker's store at 5801 Germantown Avenue. Courtesy Germantown

on, reported in *The Times* and *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.

²⁷ "Zero Weather Had No Fears for Brave Fire Fighters. Crews of Many Companies Defeated the Flames While Coated with Ice," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 2, 1900, accessed November 2, 2016, <http://www.newsbank.com/>. In his survey of Germantown, Edward Hocker discusses the founding of such organizations

²⁸ The earliest of these is reported in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* ("Secret Societies. Ancient and Illustrious Order Knights of Malta," November 11, 1894, <https://www.newspapers.com/>). The final reference is from April 25, 1909. ("Week's Happenings in Secret Orders Loyal Faith Lodge of Manchester Unity," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, accessed November 17, 2016, <http://www.newsbank.com/>)

²⁹ Stuart Blumin, *Emergence of the Middle Class*, 225.

³⁰ An extended history of the JOUAM for the Germantown area can be found in *Official History of the Junior Order United American Mechanics and American landmarks or Our country's Patriotic Shrines* (ed. Edward S. Deemer, Boston: The Fraternity Publishing Company, 1897, 17).

middle class in Germantown, where, around the year 1900, the working classes, including the populations who patronized Parker's Hall, represented over half of all Germantown residents.³¹ After Joseph Parker's death in 1890, business at Parker's Combination Store was conducted jointly by Joseph Parker's sons, Hiram T. and John T. Parker until 1899, when the brothers dissolved their partnership and divided the storefronts into a stationary store operated at 5801 Germantown Avenue by Hiram Parker and a hardware store operated by John Parker at 5803 Germantown Avenue. In February of 1900, the structure built about 1870 was destroyed by a fire (Figures 20, 21).³²

Figure 20: Newspaper coverage of the blaze which engulfed 5801-03 Germantown Avenue on February 1st, 1900. "Parker Hall, Germantown, Completely Destroyed by Early Morning Fire," *The Philadelphia Times*, February 2, 1900.

PARKER HALL, GERMANTOWN, COMPLETELY DESTROYED BY EARLY MORNING FIRE

Four Firemen Hurt by Falling From Third to Second Floor.

RESCUED BY COMPANIONS

FIGHTING FIRE AT 10 ABOVE

With the mercury lower than it has been this year the city's firemen were compelled to fight several dangerous fires yesterday. At no time was it warmer than 18 degrees above zero and during the greater part of the day thermometers registered less than 10 degrees. Ice formed on the coats and helmets of the fire-fighters and water played on the burning structures was transformed into ice of fantastic shapes. Under these difficulties the members of the department did their work, as usual, fearlessly and well.

Parker's Hall, at Main and Price streets, Germantown, was completely destroyed by fire early yesterday morning. Four firemen were seriously hurt. They are:

JOHN CALLON, hoseman, Engine Company No. 42, cut about the head and face.

FRANK COOLEY, hoseman, Engine Company No. 19, kneecap injured and general contusions.

FRANK GAFNER, hoseman, Engine Company No. 37, internal injuries and a broken shoulder.

William Helker, hoseman, Engine Company No. 42, contusions of body and lacerations of the head and face. All of the men were taken to their homes, none of them being fatally injured. The loss on the building amounts to about \$45,000, most of which is covered by insurance.

Building Was Guttled.

Parker's Hall extended seventy-five feet in Price street and sixty-two feet in Main street. On the first floor were three stores, the contents of all of them being almost completely destroyed. The auditorium, which was on the second floor and extended partly through the third floor, was gutted. Although all of the walls are still standing the third and second floors fell and most of the first floor was broken in.

As the Germantown night car was passing up Main street at 4:15 o'clock yesterday morning, the motorman noticed a small flame issuing from a window on the second floor, at the northeast corner of the hall. With the exception of the motorman and the conductor there was no one on the car. The one rushed to the fire box, at Main street and Chestnut avenue, and turned in an alarm. The other ran to the Germantown police station and gave the alarm there before the box was pulled. Engine Companies Nos. 19, 42 and 37 responded to the alarm. On account of the slippery streets they made slow progress to the fire and when they reached it the flames had gained considerable headway.

On account of the large number of valuable buildings in the vicinity there are four fire plugs in the square. Each of these were tried in turn, but all of them were

slightly frozen. For more than fifteen minutes the firemen endeavored to get a stream, but were unable to do so. Meanwhile the fire was eating its way through the whole building and by the time a hose was connected with the plug at Chestnut avenue and Main street the hall was hopelessly lost.

Fortunately the wind was blowing directly toward the northeast and the fire was hemmed in by the walls on the west, sparks and occasionally huge burning timbers were torn from their places and blown over Price street, falling in the vacant space owned by the Reading Railway, where they burned themselves out without further harm.

By the time the water was started from the plug in Chestnut avenue the flames had eaten almost through the first floor and were licking their way into the auditorium above. They had made a hole through the roof, which acted as a fire, and the fire shot up a hundred feet or more. For more than a mile the streets were lighted as in the day, and thousands of persons, who had been awakened by the passing engines, came rushing to the scene.

A hose was run into the front of the building and for about fifteen minutes played steadily upon the ground floor and the back of the auditorium. In the interim two of the other plugs had been thawed out. One hose was run in, on the second floor, and another was carried to the roof by Callon, Helker and Cooley. The hose worked successfully, but on account of the extreme cold the firemen were retarded, and the water which splashed on their clothes and faces was instantly frozen.

Men Suffered From Cold.

The men on the roof were suffering terribly, but bravely held their own, playing their hose through the hole while the fire was eating away the supports of the roof. The men on the second floor were slowly beaten backward and finally were forced down the ladders. Before those on the roof could be warded all of the supports suddenly gave way, and the men were thrown more than twenty feet to the second floor. Their comrades, who had seen the accident, quickly ran to their assistance. Fighting their way through the falling flames and smoke, they finally reached the men, all of whom were powerless to aid themselves. One by one they were carried safely out. Hardly had the last man been laid upon the sidewalk when that part of the floor upon which they had fallen gave way, and the whole of it fell with a deafening crash to the ground.

Barely Escaped Death.

The men who were working there barely escaped with their lives, and all of them were forced to the street. As none of the other buildings nearby were in any danger the streams were confined to the lower part of the hall. The whole structure was hopelessly lost except the part of the store on the first floor. By 5:30 o'clock the fire was under control and a few minutes later was entirely extinguished.

The front of the building was occupied by H. T. Parker, who kept a hardware store; John T. Parker, who kept a furnishing store; and Mrs. A. E. Heilig, who kept a jewelry store. Almost all of their stock was destroyed. The building was owned by Mrs. Joseph Parker. The loss on the building is estimated at \$15,000; on H. T. Parker's store, \$15,000; on John T. Parker's store, \$10,000, and on Mrs. Heilig's store, \$5,000. Almost all of the loss is covered by insurance. The building will be replaced by a new one as soon as possible.

Origin is a Mystery.

How the fire started is a mystery. At 9:30 o'clock Wednesday evening Mr. and Mrs. H. T. Parker left their store. There are no electric wires of any sort in the building, and Parker was careful to examine all of the windows and also the furnace, which is in the cellar, directly under the middle of his store. The fire was very small and he smothered it before going upstairs. The windows were all securely bolted and it would have been almost impossible for anyone to have gained an entrance through them. The front door was locked when the firemen arrived, but the back door had been burned, and it could not be determined whether it had been opened or not. From the appearance of the rear of the store the fire started either in the rear of the cellar or on the floor above. It is believed to have been the work of an incendiary.

Parker Hall was a plain, three-story, brick building, built about thirty years ago by Joseph Parker, who kept a book, stationery, toy and variety store on the lower floor. The second floor was for many years the most popular hall in Germantown for dances and amateur theatricals.

FIGHTING FIRE AT PARKER'S HALL

³¹ Young, "The Battles of Germantown," 13.

³² "Parker Hall, Germantown, Completely Destroyed By Early Morning Fire," *The Philadelphia Times*, February 2, 1900.

The Current Building: 1900-Present

In the wake of the fire, the Parker brothers rebuilt quickly, erecting a three-story mixed-use building upon the wreckage by the end of the spring.³³

The new building, which still stands today, was designed by architect Mantle Fielding and built by William J. Gruhler.

Mantle Fielding was born in 1865 and graduated from the Germantown Academy in 1883. He studied architecture for one year at

the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, moving back to Philadelphia shortly after, and offering his architecture services in the Philadelphia city directories by 1886. Fielding was likely working in the office of a more established architect as both a designer and draftsman, but in 1889, he opened his own office at 110 South 4th Street, where he worked through at least 1938.



Figure 21: Parker's Hall after a fire that gutted the building, ultimately leading to its demolition and the reconstruction of a new building on the remaining foundation (the building which stands today.) "Parker Hall fire," erroneously dated 1899. Germantown Historical Society. <https://germantownhistory.catalogaccess.com/photos/8815>.



Figure 22: Germantown Cricket Club, const. 1889-1900. Image from Moses King, *Philadelphia and Notable Philadelphians*. (New York: Blanchard Press, Isaac H. Blanchard Co., 1901), p. 55.

Fielding worked on many residential projects, often designing in the Colonial Revival style, as he did with Parker's Hall.³⁴ His work can be found across the greater Philadelphia area, but nearby notable examples include the Germantown Cricket Club³⁵ (Figure 22), the Douglas Residence in Chestnut, and the English & German Headmaster's Houses at Germantown Academy.³⁶

³³ This is the present-day structure. Building Permit 788, February 21, 1900, accessed at the City of Philadelphia Archives.

³⁴ Sandra L. Tatman, *Fielding, Mantle, Jr. (1865 - 1941) ARCHITECT; AND ART HISTORIAN*. Philadelphia Architects and Buildings. The Athenaeum of Philadelphia. Accessed August 2, 2022. https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/26050.

³⁵ Also known as the Manheim Club.

³⁶ Also known as Germantown Union School; Germantown Lutheran Academy (1965-1973), and the Germantown-Stevens Academy (1973) https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/pj_display.cfm/12289

His achievements were not limited to the built environment. Mantle Fielding was also a researcher and historian, compiling an important source of biographical information regarding American artists entitled *Dictionary of American Painters, Sculptors and Engravers*. It was first published in 1926 and has been published again in multiple revised editions.³⁷ Fielding died in 1941.



Figure 24: *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* excerpt from 1900 describing the rebuilding of the fire damaged Parker's Hall at Germantown Avenue and E. Price Street by builder "W J Gruhler." Source: Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

William J. Gruhler, the builder on the project, had a quarry on E. Johnson Street about a mile away, immediately adjacent to the northwest side of what is now Awbury Arboretum. Gruhler was the contractor behind many exceptional buildings in Germantown and Mount Airy. A good number of his projects exist within the nearby Awbury Historic District and French Village Historic District.³⁸ Some include the J.M. Sharpless-Ewing House & Artist Studio, the George Williams II and Eleanor C. Emlen House, and the Alfred G. and



Figure 23: A photo of the newly renovated Parker's Hall, stationary shop, and hardware store in 1900. Source: *The Germantown Independent Gazette*, May 18, 1900, archived in the scrapbooks of Jane Campbell at the Germantown Historical Society.

Mary Emlen Scattergood House. On the Scattergood House, he worked with the famous architecture firm of Brockie & Hastings. After a successful career, his quarry was filled circa 1950.³⁹

³⁷ Weitzman School of Design Architectural Archives, *Fielding, Mantle, Architect, 1865-1941*. University of Pennsylvania. Accessed August 2, 2022. <https://www.design.upenn.edu/architectural-archives/collections/fielding-mantle>.

³⁸ Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia, *Awbury Historic District; Nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places*. Philadelphia Historical Commission. July 8, 2008.

³⁹ Alexander Bartlett, Archivist/Librarian at the Germantown Historical Society.

In their newly constructed building, the Parker brothers continued business on the first story while a new social hall opened on the third, rather than the second as in the previous building. Use of the new second floor is unclear. A building permit from 1932 lists the use of the building as “store and dwelling,” while census data from 1930 does not include residential occupants.⁴⁰ By 1904, however, both brothers discontinued their work at these respective locations.

Following the Parkers’ management, a successful hardware store called F. C. Goodwin used the storefront between 1910 and 1940, apparently weathering the Great Depression.⁴¹ Throughout the mid-twentieth century, 5801-03 Germantown Avenue remained a commercial building on the first floor. Following Goodwin’s tenancy, a shoe store occupied the first floor and in 1949, the property left the Parker family after 80 years. It was purchased by the Vernon Shops and used as one of their menswear stores through at least 1970 (Figure 25). At some point in the next few years, the building sat vacant before being repurposed by the Germantown Medical Center in 1974.⁴²

The story above the first floor is less clear. Between 1910 and the Parker family’s sale of the parcel in 1949, social events at Parker’s Hall became less frequent.

Only a small number of documented events occurred after 1910, including some during the years leading up to the United States’ entry into World War II. During this period, events were often geared toward rallies and war veterans.⁴³ The decline and lack of variety in the events held at Parker’s Hall during this period are likely attributable to the simultaneous waning of Progressivism

THE Vernon SHOPS

Value Days Sale

MEN'S SPORT COATS & SUITS
ODDS & ENDS VALUES TO \$30 **\$9⁹⁰**
5614-5801 GERMANTOWN AVE.

MEN'S WASH SLAX
ODD SIZES VALUES TO \$5 **\$2⁰⁰**
5614 GERMANTOWN AVE.

MEN'S SUITS
ODD SIZES INCLUDES SOME PALM BEACH VALUES TO \$50 **\$19⁹⁰**
5614 GERMANTOWN AVE.

MEN'S ASSORTED KNITS
VALUES \$13 **\$4⁹⁹**

BOYS' KNITS & SPORT SHIRTS
VALUES TO \$6 **\$1⁵⁹**
5614 GERMANTOWN AVE.

MEN'S and BOYS' SPORT SHIRTS
VALUES TO \$5 **99^c**

CHARGE IT!
BANKAMERICARD UNICARD MASTERCHARGE
OPEN WEDNESDAY & FRIDAY 'TIL 9 P.M.

THE Vernon SHOPS APPAREL FOR MEN AND BOYS
MEN'S 5614 GERMANTOWN AVE.
5801 GERMANTOWN AVE.
BOYS' 5614 GERMANTOWN AVE.

Figure 25: *Philadelphia Inquirer*, Sun, May 17, 1970

⁴⁰ Building Permit 3971, September 12, 1932, accessed at the City of Philadelphia Archives.

⁴¹ This is the last time the store appears in a reverse directory, according to Philadelphia Reverse Telephone Directories, 1940. McElroy's Philadelphia Directory. Philadelphia: Edward C. & John Biddle, 1904.

⁴² Application for Zoning Permit #33646, 9/18/1974.

⁴³ "Orators Recall Days of Idleness Tell of Distress of Unemployed Here before the European War," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 27, 1916, accessed November 7, 2016, <http://www.newsbank.com/>; "Events of the Week in G. A. R. Circles Medal of Honor Veterans Forty of Whom Reside in Pennsylvania: Spanish War Veterans," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 13, 1913, accessed November 7, 2016, <http://www.newsbank.com/>.

and a wartime hiatus on such events.

Some of the last recorded events on the third floor before a lengthy hiatus show changes occurring in Germantown during the mid-twentieth century. The *Philadelphia Tribune*, a local African American newspaper published eight advertisements for jazz events at 5801 Germantown Avenue between January 1919 to November 1920 reflecting changing racial demographics of the neighborhood.⁴⁴

BEST DANCE FLOOR IN PHILA.
Parker's Hall, - **Main and Price Streets**
19th or 23rd Car.
Regular Monday Night Dance
Tues., April 27, WUNDER & PHARAM'S Big Dance
PROF. ALIEN YOUNG'S JAZZ ORCHESTRA
Wed., May 5, Wunder & Geo. Harelds
May Hop, 5 Prizes, Mme. Keene
 I have a few open dates for May and June for Clubs.

Figure 27: Advertisements for Black community events at Parker's Hall. *The Philadelphia Tribune*, April 20, 1920, page 4.

Big Basket Ball Game and Dance
BALTIMORE Y.M.C.A. VS. WISSAHICKON SCHOOL CLUB
Monday Night, February 16, 1920
 GAME AT **WISSAHICKON SCHOOL CLUB** **DANCE AT**
Coulter St. and Pulaski Ave. **PARKER'S HALL**
Main & Price Sts.
MADAME KEENE'S ORCHESTRA **SOME "JAZZ" MUSIC**
TICKET admits to game and dance, war tax included, 35 cents
Don't miss seeing the Wissahickon "Speed Marvels" in action.
The same machine that defeated The Jamaica "Big Five," New York's fastest colored team.

Figure 26: *The Philadelphia Tribune*, February 14, 1920, page 4.

⁴⁴ These bands were Madame Keene's Orchestra and Andrew Pharam, but other references to these acts have proved difficult to find.

In the first decades of the century, the Black population in Germantown grew significantly. According to historian David Young, between 1900 and 1915 the number of African Americans in Germantown doubled from 2,000 to 4,000 and continued to grow in the following decades.⁴⁵ Germantown's total population was growing too. By the 1930s, Germantown experienced an overall population increase of nearly 31,000 people. The neighborhood had made a name for itself in business and industry, drawing newcomers with the promise of job opportunities, white and Black alike.

Unfortunately, as the Black population increased, so did racialized fear. The convergence of Germantown's new and growing Black population and a period of deindustrialization and job loss during and following World War II fed racism in the white community. Economic stress was intensified by the opening of highways and expressways in the mid-century, pulling traffic and business away from Germantown. Real estate companies preyed on the fear of the white community, branding Germantown as dangerous and offering alternates like the nearby Mount Airy and King of Prussia. The phenomenon of blockbusting became rampant during this period and concentrated a Black community in Germantown, a community that the former Parker Hall continues to serve today.⁴⁶

Revival of the Hall, 2000-Present

In 1991, ownership of 5801-03 Germantown Avenue was transferred from the Germantown Medical Center, Inc., to Dr. Althea Hankins, who opened her own business, Hankins and Associates Medical and Community Care LLC. Her medical practice continues there today.⁴⁷ Alongside her clinical work, she has revived the long-lost social function of the Hall. In 2000, one-hundred years after the building was constructed, Dr. Hankins was on a flight seated next to an individual who happened to have a connection to Germantown. By coincidence, in his bag he had an old flier that read "Negro Solider Party, 5801 Germantown Avenue." Dr. Hankins was shocked; it was the same address as her practice. At this moment, she was unaware of the event space

⁴⁵ Young, 16.

⁴⁶ "Blockbusting" was a strategy employed by real estate developers in the 20th century which used racialized fear of non-white residents to encourage white homeowners to sell property at below-market value. Developers would then resell the property to non-white families at inflated prices.

⁴⁷ Philadelphia County Deed Book D.B. 1831, page 140 and following.

concealed within her property, let alone one which had hosted an event for Black soldiers.



Figure 28: A photo (on display at the ACES Museum) of a World War II-era dance, reportedly held at 5801-03 Germantown Avenue. *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 4, 2008.

Upon returning to Philadelphia, Dr. Hankins removed a wall, erected sometime in the preceding decades, and revealed the large third-floor space that had previously housed community events.⁴⁸ She now believes that in the 1940s, the hall functioned as something like a USO (United Service Organization) facility.⁴⁹ Since 2001, Hankins' clinic has partitioned its space to accommodate the ACES Veterans Museum, a "non-profit organization committed to preserving and celebrating the

⁴⁸ The Hyphen: Marketing-Entertainment, "Aces Museum – teaser": https://youtu.be/IOYpuggH_pg; "Aces Museum," Historic Germantown, <https://freedombackyard.com/aces-museum/>

⁴⁹ The Hyphen, Virtual Tour - Aces Museum Teaser. Vimeo. Aces Veterans Museum, 2022. <https://vimeo.com/710088345>.

history, culture, and contributions of America's minority veterans.”⁵⁰

The historic event space at 5801-03 Germantown Avenue, now often called Parker Hall, honors minority members of America’s armed services, and continues to serve its community. Events are hosted semi-regularly on the street between 5801-03 Germantown Avenue and Vernon Park and visitors are welcomed into Parker Hall to view murals and artifacts related to United States military service and veteran history.⁵¹ After being concealed in the late twentieth century, the space is once again connected with its social position in the community.



Figure 29: Interior of Parker Hall. Recent photo via ACES Museum Facebook page.

In conclusion, the property at 5801-03 Germantown Avenue exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social, and historical heritage of the Germantown community. The current building, constructed after a fire in 1900, has served the community as a combination store and social hall, and more recently as a medical care facility, and as a museum dedicated to telling the story of minority veterans. The extant building from 1900 carries the legacy of the Parker family businesses and those that came before them. The portions of the 1870s foundation beneath this twentieth-century structure connect the building to its previous chapter in a newly industrialized late nineteenth-century Germantown, and rests atop the same earth as the 1800 roadhouse and hotel that served the blossoming railroad and transportation industry. In each iteration, the property at 5801-03 Germantown Avenue embraced the shifting socio-economic landscape and continued to serve the surrounding community despite changing demographics, a legacy which it continues to honor today. The property at 5801-03 Germantown Avenue satisfies Criterion for Designation J and merits listing on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.

⁵⁰ “About,” Aces Museum, <http://www.acesmuseum.online/about.html>.

⁵¹ Caroline Hanamirian and Christopher Lake, “Limited services on Memorial Day - City's main attractions to stay open for biz,” *Philadelphia Daily News*, May 29, 2009, accessed November 8, 2016. p. 20.

Notice of Authorship & Collaboration

The historic evidence and narrative presented in this nomination was primarily compiled in 2017 by University of Pennsylvania student Sarah Stratte in a class taught by Assistant Professor of Landscape Architecture Aaron Wunsch and Assistant Professor of City and Regional Planning Francesca Ammon in the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate Program in Historic Preservation.

This document was updated with additional research, photographs, and editing in 2022 by Philadelphia Historical Commission intern, Nika Faulkner, with assistance from community member Loretta Ann Micola, who revived interest in pursuing a nomination for 5801-03 Germantown Avenue to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.

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