

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: 3836 Mount Vernon St

Postal code: 19104

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: Solomon Burke 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: Residential

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

6. DESCRIPTION

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

7. SIGNIFICANCE

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

Period of Significance (from year to year): from 1940 to 1950

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: 1872

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: _____

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: Doerr Son & Co.

Original owner: William D. and Christian G. Gross

Other significant persons: Solomon Burke, Josephine Moore Burke, Eleanor Moore

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 May 17, 2023

Name with Title Jon Farnham, Executive Director Email jon.farnham@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: May 17, 2023

Correct-Complete Incorrect-Incomplete Date: May 17, 2023

Date of Notice Issuance: May 18, 2023

Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: Melanie D. Dukes

Address: 3836 Mount Vernon St

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19104

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: June 21, 2023

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: July 14, 2023

Date of Final Action: July 14, 2023

X Designated Rejected

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION



Figure 1. The parcel at 3836 Mount Vernon Street. Source: CityAtlas.

ALL THAT CERTAIN lot or piece of ground with the brick message or tenement thereon erected.

SITUATE on the South side of Mount Vernon Street, at a distance of 251 feet 4 inches Westward from the West side of 38th Street, in the 24 Ward of the City of Philadelphia.

CONTAINING in the front or breadth on the said Mount Vernon Street 14 feet and extending in length or depth Southward of that width between parallel lines at right angles to said Mount Vernon Street 72 feet to a certain 3 feet wide alley leading Westward into a 3 feet 8 inches wide alley extending Northward into said Mount Vernon Street.

TOGETHER with the free and common use, right, liberty and privilege of the said alleys as and for passageways and watercourses at all times hereafter, forever.

Being No. 3836 Mount Vernon Street.

Parcel: 57-N11-0112

OPA Account: 242065610

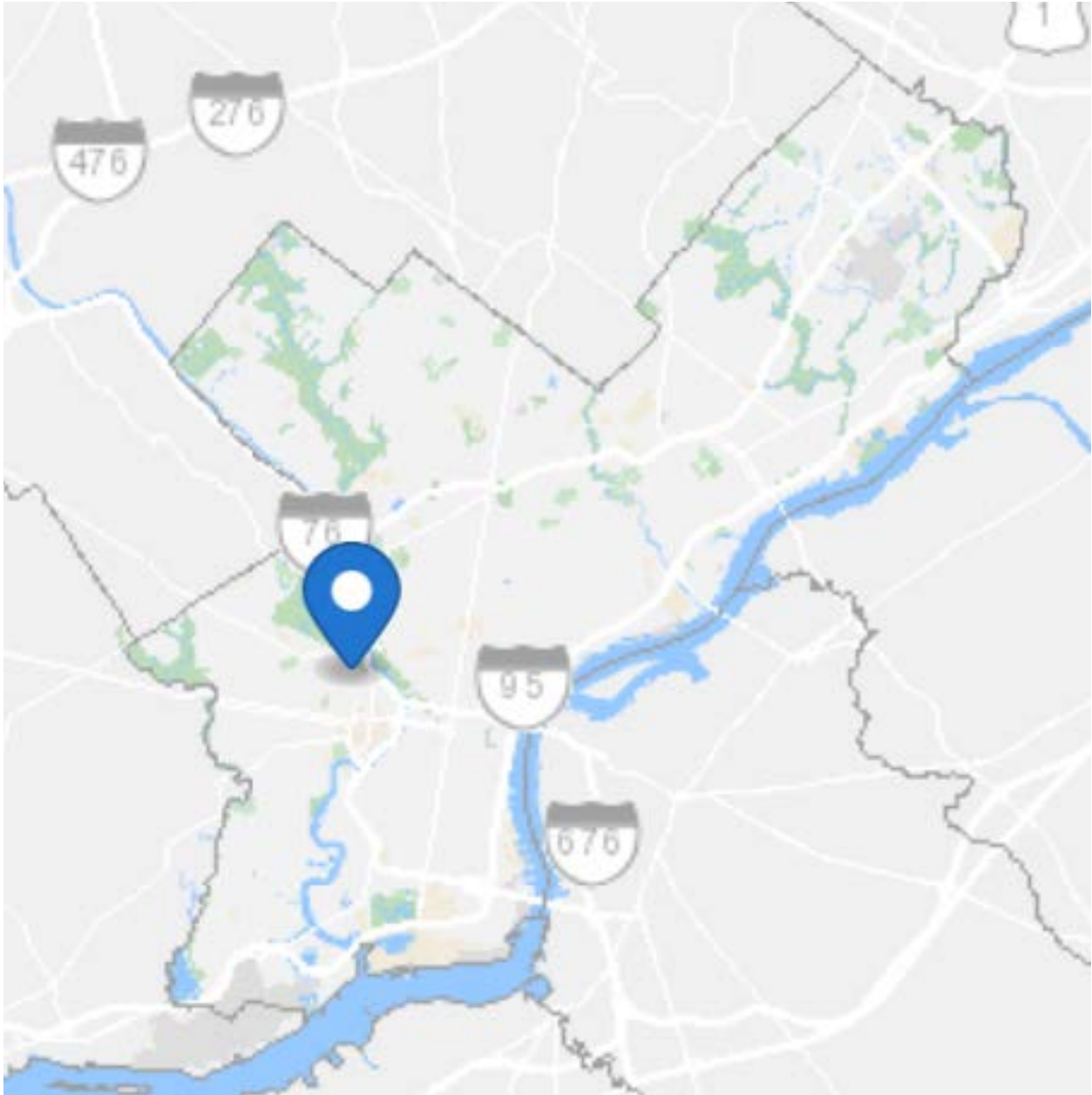


Figure 2. Location of 3836 Mount Vernon Street in the City of Philadelphia. Source: CityAtlas.

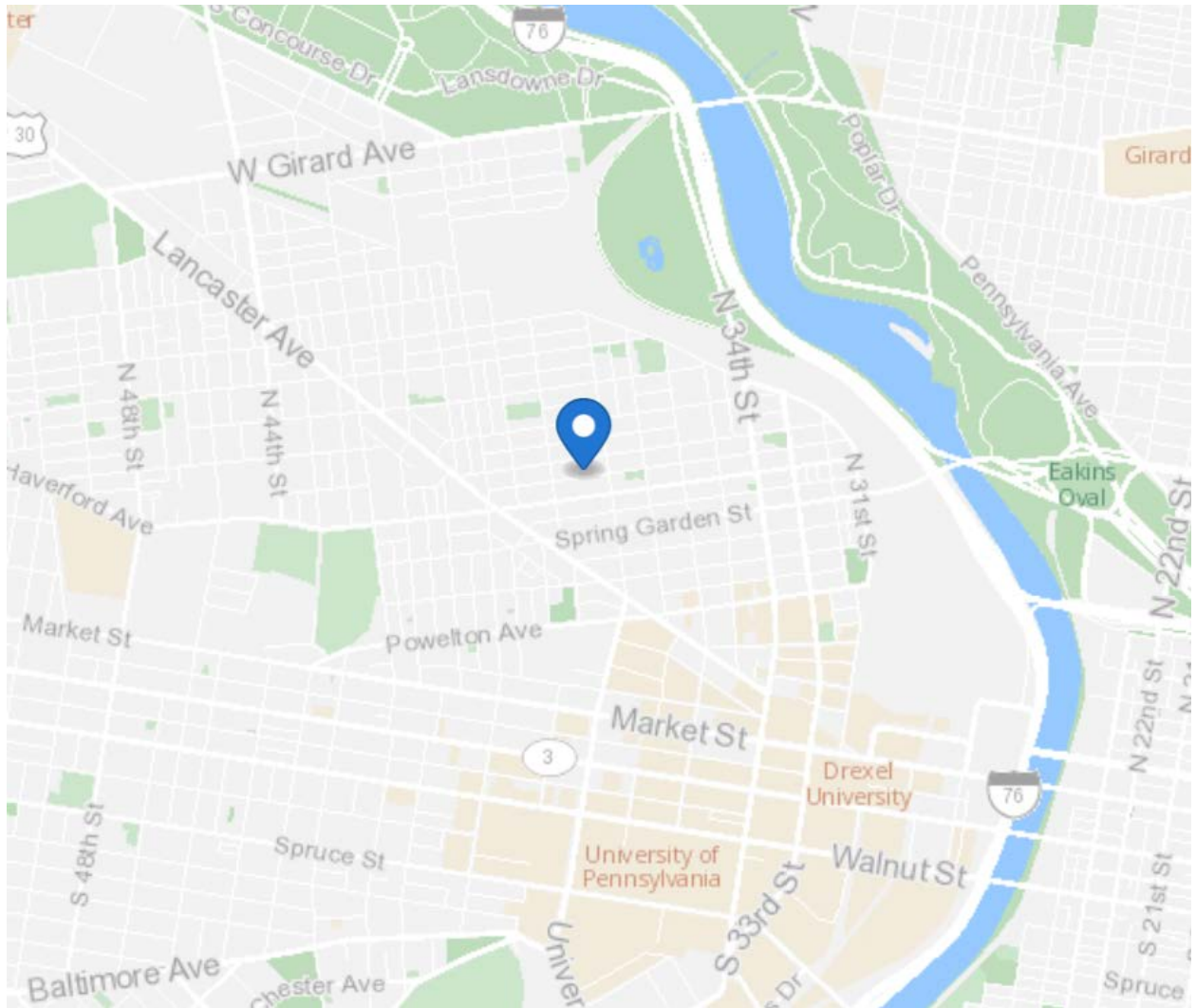


Figure 3 Location of 3836 Mount Vernon Street in the Mantua neighborhood of West Philadelphia. Source: CityAtlas.

6. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

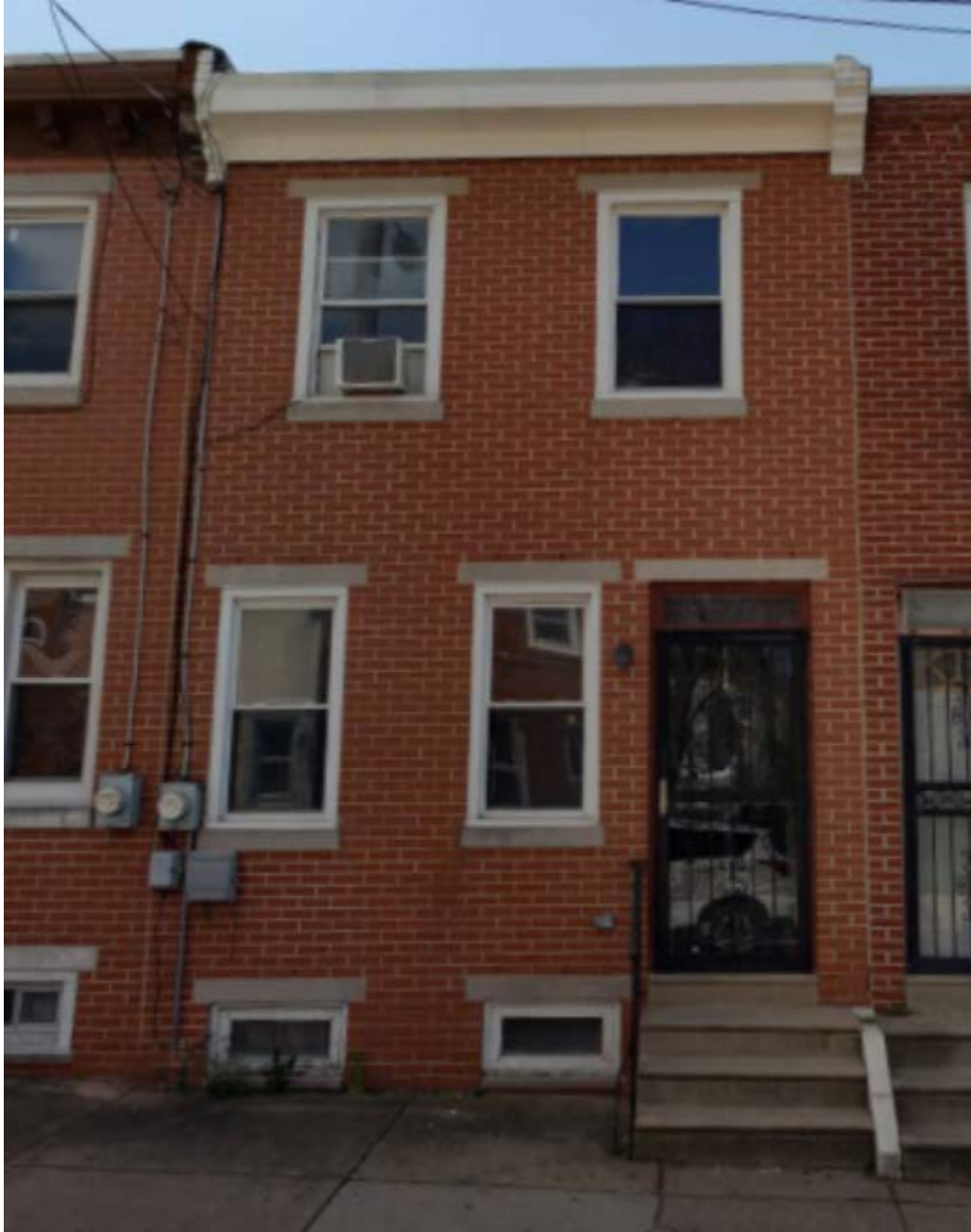


Figure 4. View of 3836 Mount Vernon Street, April 15, 2020. Source: Cyclomedia.

The house at 3836 Mount Vernon Street is a brick rowhouse. The main or front block is two stories in height, 14 feet wide, and 30 feet deep. The one-story rear ell is 10 feet wide and 16 feet deep. The front façade rises from the sidewalk. The front façade was replaced about 1986, but the new brick façade maintained the appearance of the historic façade. It includes two single-light basement windows, two one-over-one, double-hung windows and a door with transom at the first floor, and two one-over-one, double-hung windows at the second floor. The lintels and sills appear to be cast stone. The front steps

are concrete with a metal railing. The original cornice was a wood, bracketed cornice, but it has been replaced or encased with a solid cornice. The roofs are flat.

The building at 3836 Mount Vernon Street stands in a row of similar buildings on the south side of the street. Of the original 22 buildings in the row, which ran west from 3828 to 3870 Mount Vernon Street, seven have been lost.



Figure 5. View of the 3800 block of Mount Vernon Street looking southeast, April 15, 2020. Source: Cyclomedia.

7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The property at 3836 Mount Vernon Street, known as the Solomon Burke House, is historically significant and should be listed individually on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The property satisfies Criteria for Designation A and J as delineated in Section 14-1004(1) of the Philadelphia Code. Satisfying Criterion A, the property is “associated with the life of a person significant in the past,” Solomon Burke, one of the founders of soul music in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Satisfying Criterion J, as the childhood home of Burke and his mother Josephine Moore and grandmother Eleanor Moore, who were religious leaders, the property “exemplifies the cultural and social heritage of the community.”

BACKGROUND ON THE PROPERTY AT 3836 MOUNT VERNON STREET

The Smedley atlas shows the block bound by 38th, Haverford, 39th, and Story (Mount Vernon) all but undeveloped in 1862. A lone building, the twin house of William D. and Christian G. Gross, stood at the southeast corner of the block. A spring was located in the middle of the block (Figure 6). By 1869, the *Inquirer* reported that:

With the exception of some few of the Western cities, where whole blocks of buildings spring up like mushrooms in the night, no city in the Union is extending its built-up limits with such astonishing rapidity as Philadelphia. ... The improvements in the Twenty-fourth and Twenty-seventh Wards, constituting West Philadelphia, are progressing rapidly [including] five new [developments] on Story street, west of Thirty-eighth street.¹



Figure 6. Detail showing that the 3800 block of Story (Mount Vernon) Street was undeveloped in 1862. Samuel L. Smedley, *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia*, Section 6, J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1862.

Father and son William D. and Christian G. Gross were prominent members of the West Philadelphia community, where they ran livestock company.² In *McElroy's City Directory* for 1867, William was listed as a butcher living at 3809 Haverford Avenue and Christian was listed as a [livestock] driver living at

¹ “Growth of the City,” *Inquirer*, July 23, 1869, p. 8.

² “Obituary for Christian G. Gross,” *Inquirer*, March 26, 1923, p. 23.

3811 Haverford Avenue.³ Until train transport superseded driving, livestock was driven to West Philadelphia along Lancaster Pike from agricultural communities in central Pennsylvania and beyond, even as far as Ohio. Cattle drovers rested and watered their cattle at drovers' yards just east of the last tollgate on Lancaster Turnpike around the intersection with Haverford Avenue, before taking them to nearby slaughterhouses, many of which were located along the west bank of the Schuylkill. Known as Greenville, the area was infamous as a rowdy section filled with watering holes for drovers and cattle alike including the Butchers & Drovers Tavern, Lamb Tavern, Ludwick's, and Durham Ox.

The Gross family owned the block bounded by 38th, Haverford, 39th, and Story and likely used it for watering their cattle, perhaps at the spring shown on the Smedley atlas of 1862. The family also owned a property on the north side of Story Street at 39th Street that was likely used as an abattoir. By 1870, open land in West Philadelphia used to rest and water cattle was giving way to residential and commercial development.⁴ On April 4, 1870, the Gross family transferred most of the block of land to William H. Ambler for redevelopment as residences.⁵ Ambler transferred control of the land to Walter and Thomas Mole, builders, the following day, April 5, 1870.⁶ The development plans must have gone awry because the Gross family recovered their land, now subdivided into lots, from the Moles at sheriff sale on June 10, 1871.⁷ The Gross family, it appears, then contracted for the construction of the houses with Doerr Son & Co. The Doerr family was related to the Gross family and operated a lumber yard and planning mill known as the Excelsior Wood-Working Mill. The two-story, 14-foot wide, brick rowhouse at 3836 Mount Vernon Street was constructed about 1872 as part of a row of 22 small houses. The row of small, two-story houses was part of a larger development on the western two-thirds of the block bounded by 38th, Haverford, 39th, and Story that included 20 houses on Haverford and 11 houses on 39th, which were 16 feet wide and three stories tall. The G.M. Hopkins & Co. *City Atlas of Philadelphia, 24th and 27th Wards* of 1872 documents that the rows of the development including the house at 3836 Mount Vernon Street had been erected by the time the map was drawn (Figure 7). In 1873, when the development was complete, Christian Gross sold several of the houses to attorney Nevin H. Fisher, including the house at 3836 Mount Vernon Street.⁸ Fisher presumably purchased the houses as an investment and rented them. The J.B. Scott *Atlas of the 24th and 27th Wards, West Philadelphia* of 1878 shows the development on the western two-thirds of the block as well as the Gross family house at the southeast corner of the block (Figure 8).

³ William and Christian Gross are listed as "drovers" in the U.S. Census of 1870.

⁴ "Greenville: A Gay Old Town That Disappeared," 1963; reprinted on <http://www.uchs.net/Rosenthal/grnvil.html>

⁵ Deed, William D. and Christian G. Gross to William H. Ambler, April 4, 1870, JAH-32-154, Department of Records, City of Philadelphia.

⁶ Agreement, William H. Ambler and Walter and Thomas Mole, April 5, 1870, JAH-32-113, Department of Records, City of Philadelphia.

⁷ Christian G. Gross et. al. regained control of their properties at Sheriff's Sale on June 10, 1871. The deeds are recorded in Sheriff's Deed Book No. 75, pages unknown, Department of Records, City of Philadelphia.

⁸ Deed, Christian G. Gross to Nevin H. Fisher, January 30, 1873, FTW-173-175, Department of Records, City of Philadelphia.

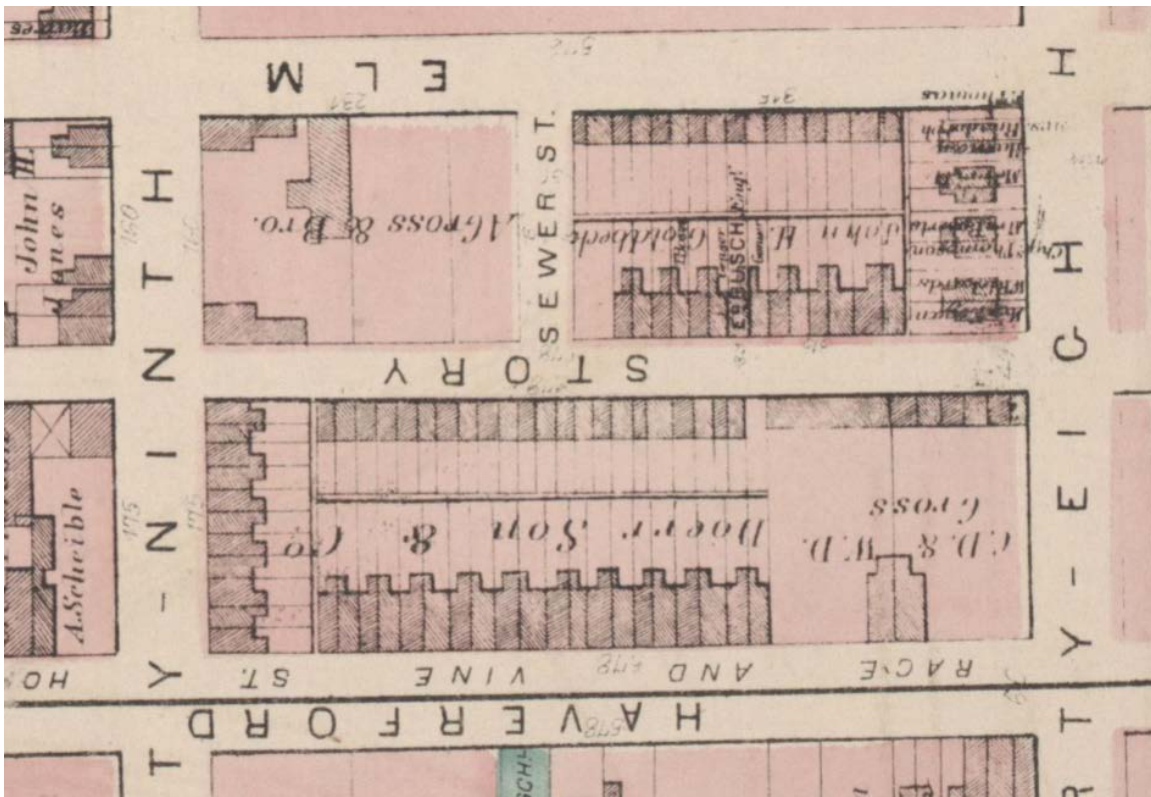


Figure 7. Detail of the 3800 blocks of Story (Mount Vernon) Street and Haverford Avenue, from G.M. Hopkins & Co., *City Atlas of Philadelphia, 24th and 27th Wards, 1872, Plate F.*

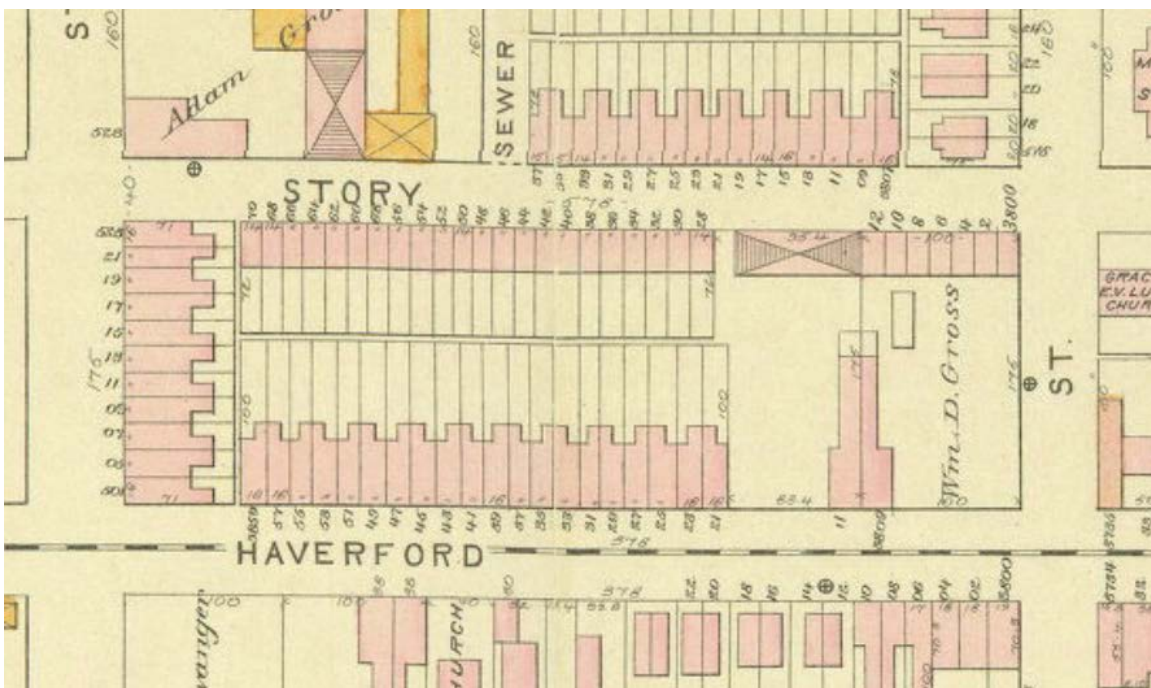


Figure 8. Detail of the 3800 blocks of Story (Mount Vernon) Street and Haverford Avenue, from J.B. Scott, *Atlas of the 24th and 27th Wards, West Philadelphia, Plate D, 1878.*

In the 1870s, the residents of the Mantua neighborhood were primarily of German ancestry, which was exemplified by St. Petri German Lutheran Church, a few blocks away on 42nd Street. William D. Gross had been born in Prussia, his son Christian in Philadelphia. The area changed demographically in the first decades of the twentieth century. Philadelphia's Black population more than doubled between 1900 and 1920, during the Great Migration, rising from 84,000 in 1900 to 134,000 in 1920. By 1930, the neighborhood was transitioning, with Black residents now living on many blocks north of Spring Garden Street. At that time, half of city's Black residents, now some 219,000 strong, had come from just four southern states: Virginia, South Carolina, Georgia, and Maryland. World War II unleashed a Second Great Migration that was larger than the first. Philadelphia's Black population soared from 250,000 in 1940, to 375,000 in 1950, and then peaked at 655,000 residents in 1970.⁹

Solomon Burke's mother, Josephine Moore, was born in Florence, South Carolina on April 1, 1920. His grandmother Eleanor Moore was also born in South Carolina. At some point after 1920, Eleanor, who was widowed by 1940, and her daughter Josephine made their way north to Philadelphia as part of the Great Migration. By 1940, they lived at 3836 Mount Vernon Street. Abraham Apfel, who owned the 3836 Mount Vernon Street property from 1924 to 1952, was their landlord.

In 1934, at the request of the Home Loan Bank Board, J.M. Brewer of the Home Owners' Loan Corporation created color-coded maps of Philadelphia that ostensibly indicated risk levels for long-term real estate investment. Racial composition of the residents was one of the bases for the map grades.¹⁰ In fact, the redlining maps were used to govern the home-lending policies and practices and to justify disinvestment in Black and Brown neighborhoods, a form of systemic racism. Areas populated by Black, Italian, and Jewish people were shown on the maps as red, green, and blue respectively, and were considered risks for investment. The map that includes Mantua showed that the 3800 block of Mount Vernon Street was home to Black residents and had a DE rating, which would disqualify it for federally insured mortgages or housing conservation. By 1940, Eleanor and Josephine Moore were living at 3836 Mount Vernon Street.

⁹ The demographic information is derived from: Charles Hardy III, West Chester University, "Historical Overview of Philadelphia and the Great Migration," <https://greatmigrationphl.org/node/24>

¹⁰ On the map, see Amy Hillier, "Residential Security Maps and Neighborhood Appraisals: The Home Owners' Loan Corporation and the Case of Philadelphia," *Social Science History*, v. 29, no. 2, Summer 2005, pp. 207-233.



Figure 9. Detail of the J. M. Brewer's *Map of Philadelphia, South Section, 1934*, showing that the residents of the 3800 block of Mount Vernon Street were Black and the area was rated as DE, disqualifying it for federally insured mortgages or housing conservation.



Figure 10. Photograph looking southeast at 3836 and 3838 Mount Vernon Street, c. 1985. Source: Philadelphia Historical Commission.

In November 1985, the City of Philadelphia acquired the property at 3836 Mount Vernon Street, which was vacant and dilapidated, at sheriff sale.¹¹ In 1986, a contractor working for the Philadelphia Housing Development Corporation (PHDC), a quasi-public agency affiliated with the City's Redevelopment Authority, obtained a permit to replace the front and rear walls of the house.¹² In November 1995, PHDC agreed to "undertake and complete the rehabilitation and/or improvement of the ... premises within one year."¹³ On June 26, 1996, PHDC sold the rehabilitated house to Melanie D. Dukes, the current owner.¹⁴ While the front and rear facades of the house have been replaced during its rehabilitation in the 1980s and 1990s, the Solomon Burke House at 3836 Mount Vernon Street largely appears today as it did in 1940.

¹¹ Deed, FHS-316-367, Department of Records, City of Philadelphia.

¹² Zoning Permit, Simiano Construction Company, April 23, 1986. Zoning Archive, City of Philadelphia.

¹³ Deed, City of Philadelphia to Redevelopment Authority, November 22, 1995, Document 47507403, Department of Records, City of Philadelphia. Deed, Redevelopment Authority to Philadelphia Housing Development Corporation, November 22, 1995, Document 47509668, Department of Records, City of Philadelphia.

¹⁴ Deed, Philadelphia Housing Development Corporation to Melanie D. Dukes, June 26, 1996, Document 47605271, Department of Records, City of Philadelphia.

SOLOMON BURKE



Figure 11. Solomon Burke in an undated photograph, c. 1962. Source: "Remembering Solomon Burke," *Rolling Stone*, October 10, 2010; <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-lists/remembering-solomon-burke-13359/no-title-1053-84114/>

Solomon Burke, who was born in the small rowhouse that doubled as a church at 3836 Mount Vernon Street in the Mantua section of West Philadelphia, was one of the founders of soul music in the early 1960s and may have even given the genre its name.¹⁵ Drawing on gospel, country, and gritty rhythm and blues (R&B), and mingling of sacred and profane themes in songs like "Cry to Me" (1962), "You Can Make It if You Try" (1963) and "Everybody Needs Somebody to Love" (1964), he developed a vocal style that was nuanced yet forceful that set the standard for soul, an emerging form of music. Steeped in church traditions from a young age, he could make a sermon out of any situation, as in "The Price" (1964), a catalog of the wages of a bad romance. Although he never attained the wide popularity of Otis Redding or James Brown, Solomon Burke had a broad influence on R&B, soul, and rock and was a favorite of people in the music industry, who recognized his special talents. Mick Jagger sang several of his songs on early Rolling Stones albums, and Jerry Wexler, the famous Atlantic Records producer, called Solomon Burke, not James Brown, not Otis Redding, not Wilson Pickett, not Sam and Dave, and not Ben

¹⁵ This biography of Solomon Burke is drawn from many sources, some directly. Few documents from Solomon Burke's childhood survive and the many biographical accounts of his life are primarily based on the dozens, if not hundreds, of interviews that he gave throughout his lifetime. Solomon Burke was renowned as a storyteller and he told the same stories about his beginnings over and over, especially during newspaper and magazine interviews. While researching Solomon Burke's biography for this nomination, every attempt was made to verify his stories with available documents.

E. King, “the greatest soul singer.”¹⁶ In a genre known for outsized personalities and flamboyant showmanship, Burke stood out for his sheer boldness and eccentricity. A radio disc jockey crowned him the King of Rock and Soul in 1964, and Solomon Burke took the coronation to heart. For the rest of his career, he often performed in full royal habit - crown, scepter and robe - and sat on a golden throne onstage. Later in his life, his genius was recognized more broadly. His early music was featured in blockbuster movies *The Blues Brothers* in 1980 and *Dirty Dancing* in 1987. In 2001, Burke was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame. And in 2003, he won a GRAMMY Award. By the time Mick Jagger and Raphael Saadiq posthumously honored him at the 2011 GRAMMY Awards celebration, Solomon Burke, who had died in 2010, was considered one of the originators of the soul music genre, which had emerged from gospel and R&B in the early 1960s.

Solomon Burke was born in Philadelphia on March 21, 1940. U.S. census data collected on April 16, 1940 listed him as “Sullivan McDonald Moore” and indicated that he was “1/12” year old. He lived with his mother Josephine, grandmother Eleanor, and uncle Henry Rudolph at 3836 Mt. Vernon Street.¹⁷ Eleanor Moore and her daughter Josephine had made their way from Florence, South Carolina to Philadelphia during the Great Migration.

3836 R	18 No	Moore, Eleanor	Head	F	Age 38	W
		Josephine	Daughter	F	Age 18	S
		Sullivan McDonald	1/12	M	Age 1/12	S
		Henry Rudolph	Son	M	Age 4	S

Figure 12. A detail from the 1940 U.S. Census form listing the residents of the Eleanor Moore household at 3836 Mt. Vernon Street, 24th Ward, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Source: Ancestry.com.

In many interviews throughout his life, Solomon Burke recounted that his birth and destiny for greatness had been foretold by his grandmother, Eleanor Moore. He came to her in a dream 12 years before his birth and, in anticipation, she founded Solomon’s Temple: The House of God for All People, a church where he could preach and sing, at her home at 3836 Mount Vernon Street.¹⁸ In an interview in 1994, Burke said of the house at 3836 Mount Vernon Street: “My grandmother had her own home, and that’s where I was born. That’s where the church started, in that house itself. It’s historical. My son wants to purchase the property and restore all that.”¹⁹ In an interview a few years later, Burke elaborated on the circumstances of his birth in the small house on Mount Vernon Street: “They were having church downstairs; I was born upstairs. I don’t even think they heard me, trombones and all that stuff playing in that little house—wasn’t easy to hear a little baby crying.”²⁰ Burke’s grandmother, Eleanor Moore,

¹⁶ In his memoir, Jerry Wexler recounts that he was grilling steaks in his backyard in the late 1960s with Philadelphia deejays Jimmy and Louise Bishop and got into a “philosophical discussion about who the greatest soul singer was - James Brown? Otis Redding? Wilson Pickett? Sam and Dave? Ben E. King?” Jimmy Bishop claimed that Solomon Burke was the greatest soul singer of all time. Wexler agreed, saying “Amen.” Jerry Wexler with David Ritz, *Rhythm and the Blues: A Life in American Music* (New York: Knopf, 1993), p. 149.

¹⁷ 1940 U.S. Census form listing the residents of the Eleanor Moore household at 3836 Mt. Vernon Street, 24th Ward, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Source: Ancestry.com.

¹⁸ See, for example, Joel Selvin, *Here Comes the Night: The Dark Soul of Bert Berns and the Dirty Business of Rhythm and Blues* (Berkeley, CA: Counterpoint, 2014).

¹⁹ “King Solomon: Philly soul star still hopes to make it in home town,” *Daily News*, January 6, 1994, p. 37.

²⁰ “Solomon Burke Brings It Home,” *Philadelphia Weekly*, July 17, 2002.

significantly influenced future soul singer, instilling in him his religiosity and his love of music. As Burke reported in an interview in *Rolling Stone* in 2010: “She was a very powerful spiritual healer. The gift she had was almost unthinkable. My grandmother could sit down with you and tell you your mother’s name, your grandfather’s name, where they were born. This, all before computers. She could tell you whatever you wanted to know. She taught me that God would never fail me.” Eleanor Moore’s powers were so renowned that the devout made pilgrimages to see her. Her home on Mount Vernon Street was a House of Prayer for All People, with the sanctuary downstairs and the living quarters upstairs. “Every day they had a service, and the music never stopped,” Burke reported. “There was always a band with two or three trombones, tubas, tambourines, cymbals, guitars, pianos. When I speak of the music, I get choked up. It was a message to God, something you feel down to your bones and your soul and your heart.”²¹

Burke did not know his biological father. His mother Josephine married Vincent Burke just before his third birthday.²² Vincent, his stepfather, was a black Jew who wore a yarmulke and worked as a pipefitter, carpenter, and chicken-plucker in a kosher butcher shop. “He was a treasure,” says Burke. “He loved me as his own, taught me that God didn’t put no ‘step’ in ‘child.’ God loves us all equally.”²³

Solomon Burke was precocious in the pulpit and at the microphone. In addition to his grandmother, Eleanor Moore, his mother, Josephine Moore, was a musician and preacher.²⁴ Burke recounted: I gave “my first sermon when I was 7, had a radio ministry when I was 12 on WHAT-AM, an R&B and gospel station.”²⁵ He earned the nickname “The Wonder Boy Preacher,” hosted his own gospel radio show, Solomon’s Temple, and travelled up and down the eastern seaboard saving souls with a religious tent show. In high school he led a quartet named the Gospel Cavaliers.

By the 1950 census, Solomon Burke lived with his mother, stepfather, two younger brothers, and a younger sister at 3828 Mount Vernon Street, just a few doors east of his grandmother, who continued to reside at 3836 Mount Vernon Street. Burke recalled in an interview that his mother was very strict and not adverse to corporal punishment. When he would get in trouble, he would “run out the back door and jump over the fence. My grandmother lived about five houses down, and it was a safe haven. So I’d go there and pray that my mother would forget to beat me while I was there. I knew I was in God’s hands.”²⁶

²¹ Charles M. Young, “King Solomon’s Sweet Thunder,” *Rolling Stone*, October 10, 2010.

²² According to Ancestry.com, Josephine Bengonia Moore married Vincent Nathaniel Burke in Wilmington, Delaware on February 20, 1943. Vincent Burke’s occupation is listed as “pipefitter” on the marriage certificate. Josephine Moore’s parents are listed as Charles A. Moore from the East Indies and Eleanor Moore from South Carolina. Josephine Moore’s home address is listed as 3836 Mount Vernon Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

²³ Quoted in Charles M. Young, “King Solomon’s Sweet Thunder,” *Rolling Stone*, October 10, 2010. The 1950 U.S. census indicates that Vincent Burke worked as a “general laborer for a “poultry company.”

²⁴ “Pastor Josephine M. Burke, 70,” *Inquirer*, August 31, 1990, p. 53.

²⁵ “Solomon Burke Brings It Home,” *Philadelphia Weekly*, July 17, 2002. Independent verification of Burke’s radio show has not been possible. However, WHAT-AM was at the forefront of Black radio programming. On February 12, 1944, former radio station WIP salesman William Banks purchased WHAT, 1340 AM. His sister, Dolly Banks, became program director and expanded the programming. As the *Inquirer* reported: “In 1945, WHAT became the first U.S. radio station to hire a full-time black announcer, the first to program a regular show featuring a black woman as hostess and the first station in the city to hire black newscasters. It also was the first in the nation to feature a black as host of a daily talk show.” See, Burr Van Atta, “Obituary of Dolly Banks Shapiro, 71,” *Inquirer*, October 24, 1985, p. 42.

²⁶ Quoted in Charles M. Young, “King Solomon’s Sweet Thunder,” *Rolling Stone*, October 10, 2010.

17	3836	189	no	no	Moore Eleanor Head	neg	F	58	wd	South Carolina
18					Harry Son	neg	m	14	rel.	Penna

Figure 13. A detail from the 1950 U.S. Census form listing the residents of the Eleanor Moore household at 3836 Mt. Vernon Street, 24th Ward, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Source: Ancestry.com.

3	3828	93	no	no	Burke Vincent Head	neg	m	33	mar	Penna
4					Josephine wife	neg	F	30	mar	South Carolina
5					Solomon Son	neg	m	10	rel.	Penna
6					Laurena daughter	neg	F	3	rel.	Penna
7					Elec Son	neg	m	2	rel.	Penna
8					Vladimir Son	neg	m	1	rel.	Penna
9	3826									

Figure 14. A detail from the 1950 U.S. Census form listing the residents of the Vincent Burke household including 10-year-old Solomon Burke at 3828 Mt. Vernon Street, 24th Ward, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Source: Ancestry.com.

When his grandmother Eleanor Moore died in 1954, Burke, then 14 years old, was overcome with grief. He recounted: "I was so depressed that I didn't know what to do except go to church. I ended up at this place that was having a singing contest. I was sitting there crying, and someone asked, 'Would you like to sing a song?' They gave me a guitar, and as I was tuning it to open G, God came to me, and I began singing. The next thing I know, everyone is singing, the congregation, the choir, everyone. And this woman is grabbing me, going, 'You're mine, all mine. Oh, baby, baby.' She had this fur shawl made out of about 15 little foxes or minks. She's hugging me, and all I could see were these little animal faces."²⁷ The woman turned out to be the wife of a prominent disc jockey Kae Williams, who became Burke's manager.²⁸ Williams arranged for Burke to travel to New York to meet Bess Berman at Apollo Records, who put Burke under contract. Not long thereafter, Burke recorded his first hit, "Christmas Presents From Heaven," a song inspired by his grandmother, for Apollo (Figure 15).

"Christmas Presents," the hit record released in December 1955, catapulted Burke to fame. In January 1956, L. Masco Young, a Philadelphia music columnist who wrote a weekly, nationally syndicated column on popular music called "The Lowdown," described Burke as "the 15-year-old with the man-sized voice."²⁹ A few months later, Young extolled "16-year-old Solomon Burke – a guy whose powerful blues-shouting vocal chords are being compared with Wynonie Harris, Arthur Prysock, Billie Eckstine and other blues greats."³⁰ Young continued to sing the praises of Burke in his column, which appeared in newspapers around the country. In July 1956, he reported that "Solomon Burke, the 16-year-old singing sensation discovered by Philadelphia disc jockey Kae Williams of WHAT, is doing so well that his Apollo Records bosses are grooming him to take Roy Hamilton's place in the popular field."³¹ Roy Hamilton, another rising young, Black musical sensation, had shot to stardom on the Ed Sullivan show in 1955, but announced his retirement in mid-1956 after being diagnosed with a serious lung condition. In

²⁷ Quoted in Charles M. Young, "King Solomon's Sweet Thunder," *Rolling Stone*, October 10, 2010.

²⁸ Kae Williams also managed the Silhouettes, who recorded the doo wop hit "Get A Job." Jim Nicholson, "Kae Williams, Black Radio Disc Jockey," *Daily News*, December 29, 1987, pp. 49-50.

²⁹ L. Masco Young, "The Lowdown," *Miami Times*, January 21, 1956, p. 11. On Young, see his obituary, "L. Masco Young, 66; journalist, teacher," *Pottsville Republican*, January 12, 1989, p. 3.

³⁰ L. Masco Young, "The Lowdown," *Minneapolis Spokesman*, June 22, 1956, p. 6.

³¹ L. Masco Young, "The Lowdown," *Miami Times*, July 14, 1956, 6.

September 1957, Young informed teenagers across the country about “Solomon Burke, the red hot Apollo recording artist whose ‘Walking in a Dream’ is literally walking up the hit charts.”³²



Figure 15. Label from 45 rpm record, Solomon Burke, “Christmas Presents/When I’m All Alone,” Apollo Records, 1955.

In late 1956, Solomon Burke’s career took another leap forward when he collaborated with heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis on a recording (Figure 16). Nicknamed the Brown Bomber, Louis is widely regarded as one of the greatest and most influential boxers of all time. He reigned as the world heavyweight champion from 1937 until his retirement in 1949. He was victorious in 25 consecutive title defenses, a record for all weight classes and the longest single reign as champion of any boxer in history. After retiring from boxing, Louis was the one of the first African Americans to play golf in a PGA Tour event, the San Diego Open in 1952. In the mid-1950s, Louis was an enormous celebrity. Louis co-composed a song titled “You Can Run, But You Can’t Hide,” which was adapted from a remark that he made before a fight with boxer Billy Conn. Burke recorded the song for Louis on Apollo Records, which was released in December 1956 (Figure 17). Burke appeared with Louis and sang the song on Steve Allen’s nationally broadcast *Tonight* show on January 4, 1957 (Figure 18).³³

³² L. Masco Young, “The Lowdown,” *St. Paul Recorder*, September 7, 1956, p. 6.

³³ David Shallenberger, “Platter Chatter,” *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette*, December 29, 1956, p. 7.

Joe Louis, Songwriter



NEW YORK—Joe Louis, former world's heavyweight champion is giving young Solomon Burke of Apollo Records some fine pointers on the art of "hitting." In this case the art of hitting with records. Louis recently turned song writer and penned, with Mari Horton, "You Can Run, But You Can't Hide," based on his famous reply to the fight experts who asked him how he planned to cope with the speed and agility of Billy Conn when they met for the world's title. Said Louis, "He can run but he can't hide." Burke recorded the Louis tune on the Apollo label.

Figure 16. Heavyweight boxing champion Joe Louis and 16-year-old singer Solomon Burke, 1956. Source: Unknown.



Figure 17. Label from 45 rpm record, Solomon Burke, “You Can Run, But You Can’t Hide,” Apollo Records, 1956.

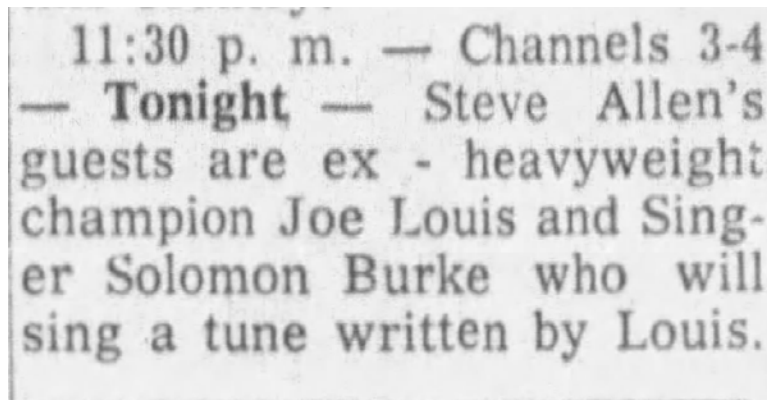


Figure 18. Television listing for the *Tonight* show, January 4, 1957, *Mansfield, Ohio News-Journal*, January 4, 1957, p. 18.

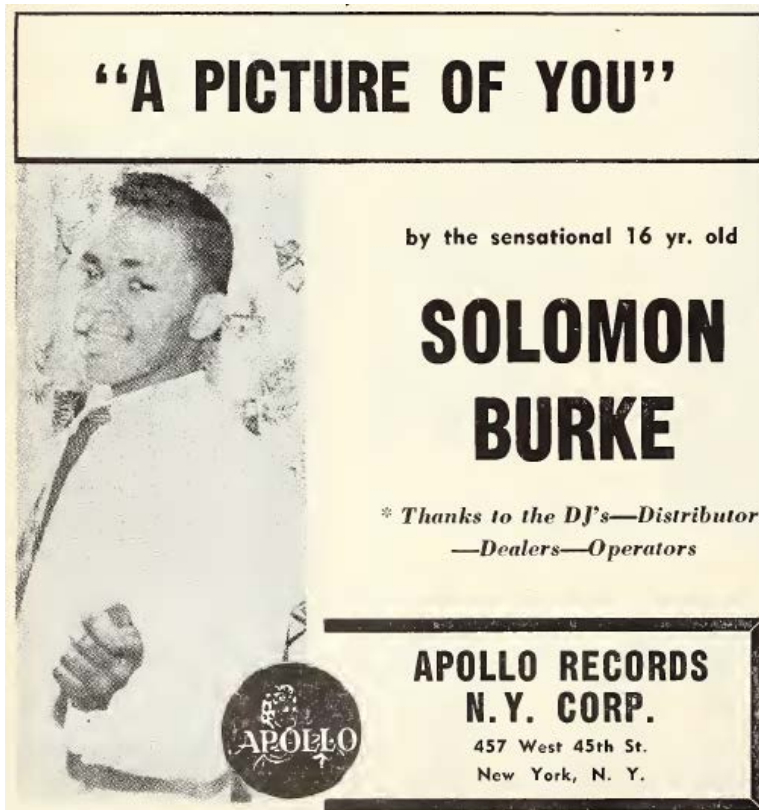
On the heels of his *Tonight* show appearance, Burke and his career seemed to be on an upward trajectory in early 1957. Apollo Records promoted his latest single, “A Picture of You” (Figure 19). Burke performed in a traveling Rock & Roll Revue staged by his manager Kae Williams with Little Richard, The Cadillacs, and other rhythm and blues stars (Figure 20).³⁴ In April 1957, Young, the music columnist, reported to enthusiasts across the country that “teenage vocal sensation Solomon Burke is very much excited over his nine-day engagement over the Easter holidays at the Palms in Hollandale, Fla.”³⁵ In the summer of 1957, Burke appeared on Kae Williams’ *Cavalcade of Stars* with Johnnie & Joe and other regional stars (Figure 21).³⁶ Burke had his first of many children in September 1957, a daughter named

³⁴ Advertisement for the Rock & Roll Revue, *Inquirer*, February 3, 1957, p. 84.

³⁵ Masco Young, “New York Lowdown,” *St. Paul Recorder*, April 5, 1957, p. 7.

³⁶ Advertisement for the Kae Williams’ *Cavalcade of Stars*, *Inquirer*, June 28, 1957, p. 27.

Valerie with Doris P. Williams.³⁷ In 1958, Burke married Williams, but their marriage was annulled after two months. He also reportedly, momentarily converted to Islam in 1958.³⁸



The advertisement is a rectangular poster with a yellow background and a black border. At the top, a black box contains the text "A PICTURE OF YOU" in white, bold, sans-serif font. Below this, on the left side, is a black and white photograph of a young man, Solomon Burke, smiling and looking slightly to the right. He is wearing a light-colored suit jacket and a dark tie. To the right of the photograph, the text "by the sensational 16 yr. old" is written in a small, black, sans-serif font. Below this, the name "SOLOMON BURKE" is printed in large, bold, black, sans-serif capital letters. Underneath the name, the text "* Thanks to the DJ's—Distributors —Dealers—Operators" is written in a smaller, italicized, black, sans-serif font. At the bottom of the advertisement, there is a black box containing the text "APOLLO RECORDS N.Y. CORP." in bold, white, sans-serif capital letters. Below this, the address "457 West 45th St. New York, N. Y." is written in a smaller, white, sans-serif font. In the bottom left corner of the advertisement, there is a circular logo with the word "APOLLO" in a stylized font.

Figure 19. Apollo Records advertisement, *Cash Box*, v. 18, no. 16, January 5, 1957, p. 14.

³⁷ See an entry in Ancestry.com for Valerie Doris Burke Grisham.

³⁸ Both the annulled marriage and conversion to the Muslim faith are noted in: "New York Beat," *Jet*, v. 14, no. 14, August 7, 1958, p. 63. A death notice for Michelle D. Burke notes her mother Doris Williams and stepfather Solomon Burke. "Death Notice, Burke, Michelle D.," *Inquirer*, March 4, 2008, p. 30.

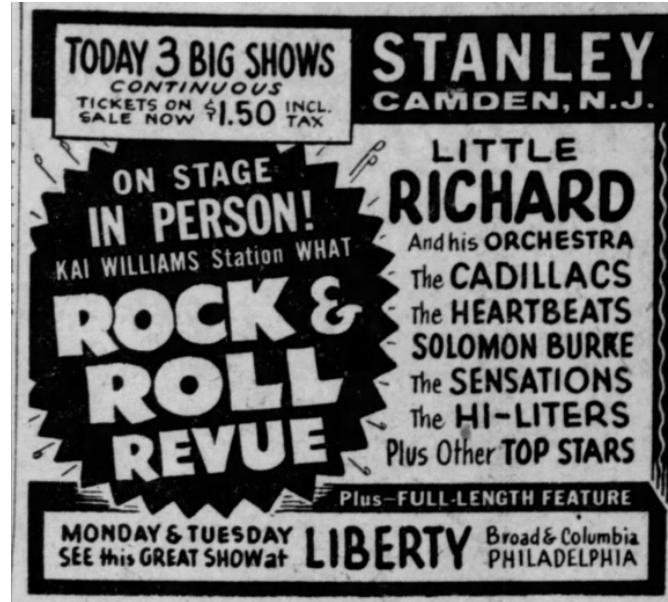


Figure 20. Advertisement for the Rock & Roll Revue, *Inquirer*, February 3, 1957, p. 84.

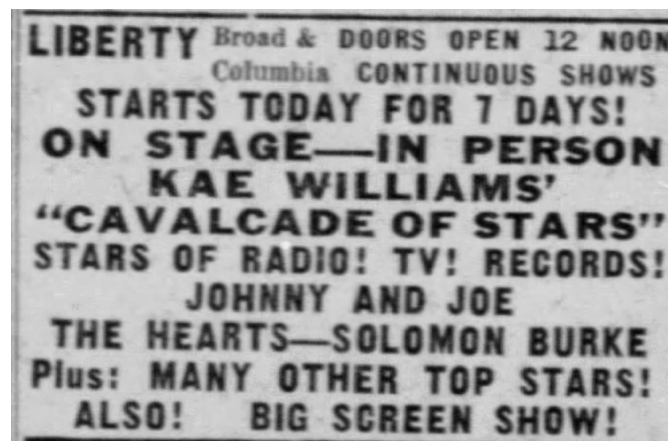


Figure 21. Advertisement for the Kae Williams' Cavalcade of Stars, *Inquirer*, June 28, 1957, p. 27.

However, despite the success, Burke's career took a turn for the worse in late 1957. Young, the Philadelphia music columnist who was likely associated with Burke's manager Kae Williams, offered a veiled threat to the young soul singer in September 1957, when he wrote in his syndicated column: "Here's a tip to Solomon Burke, the teenage singing sensation: If you can't straighten up and fly right, kid, you might find yourself in the clutches of New York's Sixth Avenue wolves. And you can believe us Sol when we say they won't be as kind as your present manager, Kae Williams has been."³⁹ For about a year from 1956 into 1957, Burke had been making what seemed to be a huge amount of money for a teenager, maybe \$65 for concerts around Philadelphia and New York. Then one night after a show, a promoter happened to pay Burke directly for his performance. He got many hundreds of dollars, and quickly confronted his manager, Kae Williams, about the unfair division of money. According to Burke, Williams dropped him on the spot and blacklisted him, getting his songs banned from the radio. Still a teenager, he was without money, career and, suddenly, a home. "My mother was so angry. She threw me out of the house. My dad stood by me, would meet me down the street and give me \$10. But that's

³⁹ Masco Young, "New York Lowdown," *St. Paul Recorder*, September 20, 1957, p. 8.

where I lived for a year or two. In abandoned cars. There was no place I could turn. I was shamed. I was a bum.”⁴⁰ In December 1957, the newspapers reported that a “gang of teenage hoodlums” were “out to get ... teenage singer Solomon Burke. ... Sol, the 17-year-old boy with a man-sized voice says he was jumped twice by the young hoodlums, who attempted to beat him up on two different Philly street corners.”⁴¹ Burke recalled that during this low period in his life, someone contemptuously threw some change into the street for him one night outside of a bar, reportedly at N. 16th Street and Ridge Avenue.⁴² He went to pick it up and recalls distinctly hearing a disembodied voice say, “If you pick up that quarter, you’ll be doing that for the rest of your life.” He stood up and was hit by a car driven by a woman, who took him home and nursed him back to health. After that traumatic event, Burke vowed to turn his life around. He attended mortuary school at Eckels College of Mortuary Science and took a job as an apprentice mortician at the nearby Anna R. Barkley Funeral Home.⁴³ “I loved the work,” says Burke. “At a moment when there is no hope for a family, a mortician can give them hope. My daughter Victoria is in the funeral business now, and she’s brilliant at it.”⁴⁴ As he got back on his feet and tried to restart his music career, Burke married Delores Clark Perkins, the niece of the woman who hit him with her car. Burke would remarry twice years later. He reportedly had 21 children, 90 grandchildren and 19 great-grandchildren. “I got lost on one of the Bible verses that said, ‘Be fruitful and multiply,’” he once said. “I didn’t read no further.”⁴⁵

In the late 1950s, Burke was briefly signed to Herb Abramson's Triumph Records but could not record for the label because his contract with Apollo had not yet been dissolved. By 1959, with the emergence of singers like Ray Charles, Burke realized that the strength of his style and its potential for commercial success lay in revealing, not concealing, his gospel music roots. That year, Philadelphia businessman Marvin Leonard "Babe" Chivian, a “body-and-fender man” and real estate speculator, gave Burke a red Lincoln Continental convertible in exchange for a management contract. Chivian arranged for Burke to be signed to Singular Records, a Philadelphia-based label that was owned by WPEN disc jockey Edwin L. "Larry" Brown and vocal coach Arthur "Artie" Singer, who had a distribution deal with Chess Records. One of his records for Singular Records, "Be Bop Grandma," was a fiery rock 'n' roll song three years out of date but another, "It's All Right," borrowed closely from Ray Charles gospel-derived hits (Figure 22). Neither record sold but Burke’s genuine style was evident in “It’s All Right.”⁴⁶

⁴⁰ Quoted in Charles M. Young, “King Solomon’s Sweet Thunder,” *Rolling Stone*, October 10, 2010.

⁴¹ “The Gang of Hoodlums,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, December 14, 1957, p. 14.

⁴² Scott Cohen, “Everybody Needs Somebody to Love,” *Spin Magazine*, v. 2, no. 10, January 1987, pp. 64-65.

⁴³ Burke worked at the Anna R. Barkley Funeral Home, located at 634 N. 38th Street. Anna took over the business when her husband Adolphus Von Barkley died in 1954. Prior to his death, it was known as the A.V. Barkley Funeral Home. Ann Barkley’s original surname was Shorter and she was from Wilmington, Delaware. Burke called Barkley his aunt, but it is unclear whether they were blood relatives. In an interview in England in 1965, Burke claimed that he owned the funeral home with his aunt and wife. See Maureen Cleave, “Disc Date,” *Evening Standard* (London), June 19, 1965, p. 7.

⁴⁴ Quoted in Charles M. Young, “King Solomon’s Sweet Thunder,” *Rolling Stone*, October 10, 2010.

⁴⁵ Quoted in: Ben Sisario, “Solomon Burke, Influential Soul Singer, Dies at 70,” *New York Times*, October 11, 2010, sec. B, p. 8.

⁴⁶ Delores Burke is credited with co-writing some of Burke’s songs recorded for Singular Records.

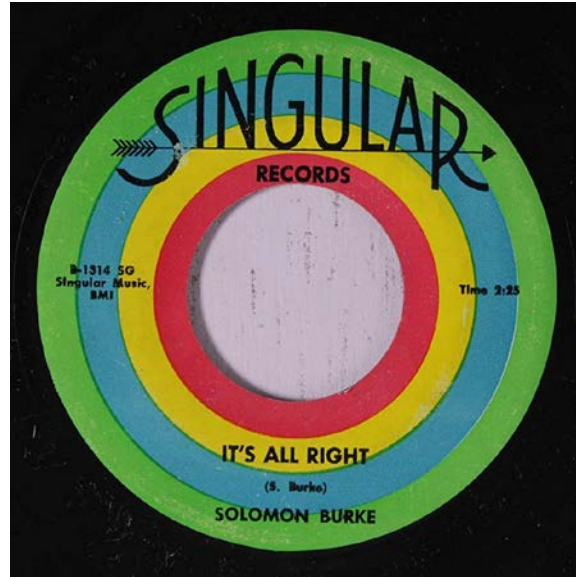


Figure 22. Label from 45 rpm record, Solomon Burke, "It's All Right," Singular Records, 1959.



Figure 23. Solomon Burke in an undated photograph, c. 1960. Source: Jim White, "Sweet soul music: Solomon Burke was a defining force in its creation," *Blues Roadhouse*, January 26, 2022; <https://bluesroadhouse.com/2022/01/26/sweet-soul-music-solomon-burke-was-a-defining-force-in-its-creation/>

In November 1960, Burke, who had worked his way back into the music business after his difficulties with manager Kae Williams, hit the big times when he signed with Atlantic Records.⁴⁷ Ray Charles had

⁴⁷ Atlantic Records, which was founded in 1947, was considered the nation's premier rhythm & blues label in the 1950s and then soul label in the 1960s. In addition to Solomon Burke, many great artists including Aretha Franklin, Ray Charles, Wilson Pickett, Sam and Dave, Ruth Brown, and Otis Redding recorded for Atlantic.

just left the label and Atlantic was looking for a replacement. As Jerry Wexler, famed Atlantic producer, recounted:

At the same time, the gods were merciful: as Ray slipped away, Solomon slipped in. "There's a Solomon Burke out here," my secretary, Noreen Woods, said over the intercom. "He doesn't have an appointment, but wants to see you." "Solomon, have I been waiting for you!" I said, practically leaping over my desk and busting through the door. "You're home. I'm signing you up today." And I did."⁴⁸

According to music critic Alex Halberstadt:

Salvation [for Atlantic Records] arrived in the person of Solomon Burke, a soul singer of overwhelming charisma and remarkable stylistic range. Starting with "Just Out of Reach," a country song recorded as a soul ballad, Wexler and Burke created a string of hits that carried the label financially and represented the first fully realized examples of the classic soul sound. Unusually inventive large ensemble arrangements - just listen to the tuba obbligato on "Down in the Valley" - accompanied Burke's soulful, yet precisely controlled singing. It was the full realization of what Wexler calls his "devotion to the bel canto tradition," and remains the epitome of the Atlantic ideal.⁴⁹

Beginning in 1961 with "Just Out of Reach (of My Two Open Arms)," a country song he sang with Elvis Presley-like inflections, Burke had a string of hits with Wexler for Atlantic (Figure 24 and Figure 25). His career really took off when he found his authentic soul voice the following year with the release of all-time great soul classics, "Cry to Me," "Down in the Valley," "If You Need Me," "Goodbye Baby" and the wildly rambunctious "Everybody Needs Somebody to Love" (Figure 27). Noting Burke's genius, Wexler explained that "in the fade to 'Cry to Me,' for example, listen to his ad-lib licks: 'cra...cra...cra...cra-cra-cra-cra-cra-crying' - a staccato stutter turn that, in a few years, would become Otis Redding's vocal logo."⁵⁰ Fellow soul vocalist Joe Tex exclaimed: "Solomon Burke knock you dead from the bandstand. Then he gift-wrap you for the trip home."⁵¹ Capitalizing on his reemergence as a national artist, Apollo Records, Burke's original record label, reissued his songs from the mid 1950s as a greatest hits album in 1962 (Figure 28). A bona fide star, Burke appeared on nationally broadcast television shows like *American Bandstand* (Figure 29). By 1963, "The Wonder Boy Preacher" from Mantua had become a household name.

⁴⁸ Jerry Wexler with David Ritz, *Rhythm and the Blues: A Life in American Music* (New York: Knopf, 1993), p. 150.

⁴⁹ Alex Halberstadt, "Jerry Wexler: The great Atlantic Records producer gave us rhythm and blues - as well as just about every R&B legend - and retooled the very foundations of music producing," Salon, September 5, 2000; https://www.salon.com/2000/09/05/wexler_2/

⁵⁰ Jerry Wexler with David Ritz, *Rhythm and the Blues: A Life in American Music* (New York: Knopf, 1993), p. 153.

⁵¹ Gerri Hirshey, *Nowhere To Run: The Story of Soul Music* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1994).

SOLOMON BURKE

Recording on the Atlantic label, Solomon Burke has solid chart item with "Just Out of Reach" (Of My Two Open Arms). In his mid-'20's, Burke comes from Philadelphia where he was brought up in an extremely religious atmosphere. His mother delivered church sermons and sang in their church choir, but it was his uncle, a pastor of a Philadelphia congregation, who was the main influence on Burke's vocal career. The young lad was encouraged by his uncle to join the choir, and by the time Burke was 12 years old he was known as the "child minister" for his singing and preaching.


A black and white portrait of Solomon Burke, a young man with short, dark hair, wearing a light-colored shirt and a dark tie. He is looking slightly to the right of the camera with a gentle smile.

Figure 24. A short biography with photograph of Solomon Burke, *Billboard*, December 11, 1961, p. 16.



Figure 25. Solomon Burke and record producer Jerry Wexler during the recording of "Just Out of Reach" in 1961. Jerry Wexler with David Ritz, *Rhythm and the Blues: A Life in American Music* (New York: Knopf, 1993), p. 151.



Figure 26. Publicity photograph of Solomon Burke, c. 1961. Source unknown.

Burke had struggled from an early age with his attraction to secular music on the one hand and his allegiance to the church on the other. When he was signed to Atlantic Records, he “refused to be classified as a rhythm-and-blues singer,” owing to a perceived “stigma of profanity” by the church, and R&B’s reputation as the devil’s music.⁵² Burke explained in 2005: “I told them about my spiritual background, and what I felt was necessary, and that I was concerned about being labeled rhythm & blues. What kind of songs would they be giving me to sing? Because of my age, and my position in the church, I was concerned about saying things that were not proper, or that sent the wrong message.”⁵³ To mollify Burke, Atlantic decided to market him as a singer of “soul music” after he had consulted his church brethren and won approval for the term.⁵⁴ When a Philadelphia disc jockey said to Burke, “You’re singing from your soul and you don’t want to be an R&B singer, so what kind of singer are you going to be?,” Burke shot back: “I want to be a soul singer.”⁵⁵ Burke is credited with coining the term “soul music,” which he confirmed in a 1996 interview.⁵⁶

⁵² Teresa L. Reed, *The Holy Profane: Religion in Black Popular Music* (Lexington, Kentucky: University Press of Kentucky, 2003), pp. 124-125.

⁵³ Kurt B. Reighley, “Solomon Burke: The Return of the King: Solomon Burke’s Grand Comeback Becomes a Whole New Beginning,” *The Long Way Around*, v. 57, May–June 2005.

⁵⁴ “King Solomon,” *Sydney Australia Morning Herald*, December 27, 2002; <https://www.smh.com.au/entertainment/music/king-solomon-20021227-gdg12o.html>

⁵⁵ James Porter, “Songs of Solomon: Solomon Burke Interview,” *Roctober*, v. 33, 2002.

⁵⁶ Richard Younger, *Get a Shot of Rhythm and Blues: The Arthur Alexander Story* (Tuscaloosa, Alabama, University of Alabama Press, 2000), p. 108; Roger Catlin, “Newport R & B Fest is Just Delightful,” *Hartford Courant*, July 29, 1996, p. A4.



Figure 27. Labels from 45 rpm records, Solomon Burke, Just Out Of Reach (Of My Two Open Arms), 1961; and Cry To Me, 1962.



Figure 28. Dust jacket for 33 rpm record of Solomon Burke's songs recorded in the mid 1950s for Apollo Records, issued in 1962, when he was achieving success with Atlantic records.



Solomon Burke Guest Star On American Bandstand



S. Burke

Atlantic Recording Artist, Solomon Burke, will guest star on Dick Clark's American Bandstand (Tuesday, March 20 at 4 p.m. EST) on ABC-TV. The 250-pound entertainer from Philadelphia was recently at New York's Apollo Theatre, and drew the largest crowd ever at the South Mole Street night club in Philadelphia. He will open at Chicago's Regal Theatre, March 23, and then on to a string of one nighters in the South. His latest recording is *Cry To Me*. Burke has really made a step forward since his first recording in 1954 when he was only 14. Others appearing on radio and television this week include:

Figure 29. Announcement of Solomon Burke's appearance on *American Bandstand* in 1962. Source: *Jet*, v. 21, no. 22, March 22, 1962, p. 66.

After Burke recorded a string of hit records in the early 1960s, disc jockey Fred Robinson, known professionally as "Rockin' Robin," crowned Burke the "King of Rock 'n' Soul" in a ceremony at the Royal Theatre in Baltimore (Figure 30).⁵⁷ The ceremony was repeated every night for a week while Burke performed in Baltimore. Burke accepted the appellation the "King of Rock 'N' Soul," proclaiming that "without soul, there'd be no rock and without rock, there'd be no soul."⁵⁸ Rockin' Robin adorned Burke with a crown, scepter, and cape, which Burke subsequently wore on stage for many years. After James Brown achieved success with "Papa's Got a Brand New Bag" in late 1965, Brown attempted to steal the title of "King of Soul" from Solomon Burke. Brown hired Burke to appear on stage with him for one night in Chicago, expecting Burke to surrender his title and crown once he witnessed Brown's showmanship. According to Burke, "He paid me \$7,500 to stand onstage and hand him my robe and crown. It was a great gig: I got paid and I didn't have to sing a note."⁵⁹ Burke accepted Brown's money but retained his title and regal garb.

⁵⁷ *Jet*, v. 25, no. 14, January 23, 1964, p. 37.

⁵⁸ *Jet*, v. 25, no. 6, November 28, 1963, p. 42.

⁵⁹ "King of rock and soul, minister dies on plane," *Chicago Tribune*, October 11, 2010, p. 1-42.



Rock 'N' Royalty: Dubbed the “King of Rock 'n' Soul” at the Royal Theater in Baltimore, regally-garbed former boy-preacher Solomon Burke is made a member of rhythm’s royalty by disc jockey Rockin’ Robin as special guard Edward Nelson keeps near to repulse fans.

Figure 30. Solomon Burke dubbed King of Rock ‘n’ Soul in Baltimore in late 1963. Source: *Jet*, v. 25, no. 14, January 23, 1964, p. 37.

Despite his financial success in the music industry in the early 1960s, Solomon Burke was notorious for various money-making schemes. For example, he would sing a show at the Apollo Theatre in New York and then set up a stand outside the auditorium to sell “Solomon’s Magic Popcorn” to his fans. Jack Schiffman, who managed the Apollo Theatre in New York City, recounted that, “back in 1966, we booked Solomon Burke, a singer, as headliner. I sent him a contract, and when it came back someone had typed in a clause reading ‘Solomon Burke shall have the right to sell popcorn in the theater during this performance.’”⁶⁰ On bus tours in the segregated South, Burke totes a large ice chest full of sandwiches. “I had a busload of hungry musicians, and it was hundreds of miles between restaurants that would serve us,” Burke explained. “So I’d just sit in back, whipping up the mustard and mayonnaise and bologna. They all had to buy from me eventually.” Sam Moore of the famous soul duo Sam and Dave recounted: “Yeah, I had one of his meals. He used to cook on a hot plate in his hotel room after a show when the restaurants were closed. And let me tell you, he didn’t give you that much. He gave me one pork chop, one scoop of macaroni and cheese, and one spoonful of gravy. I said, ‘Is that it?’ And he’d say, ‘That’s it, brother. I’m doing you a favor, so take it or leave it.’ But there will never be another Solomon Burke. When I first saw him, I couldn’t believe that one man could have a voice that big. He

⁶⁰ Jack Schiffman, *Uptown: The Story of Harlem’s Apollo Theatre* (Chicago: Cowles Book Company, Inc., 1971), p. 107.

could rock a house. He was that good.”⁶¹ Record producer Jerry Wexler described Burke as “a piece of work – wily, highly intelligent, a salesman of epic proportions, sly, sure-footed, a never-say-die entrepreneur.”⁶² Burke reportedly owned funeral parlors in California, Pennsylvania, and North Carolina, and two of his children turned the mortuary business into a franchise. He also reportedly owned and operated a limousine service. Burke continued to operate companies that supplied theaters and stadiums with his own brand of fast food, Soul Dogs and Soul Corn, until at least 2004.

Solomon Burke continued to live in Philadelphia in the mid 1960s, despite having achieved considerable success at Atlantic Records and spending much of his time touring as well as recording in New York and Los Angeles. However, the address of his residence in Philadelphia at this time is unknown. A review of Philadelphia deed records for the years 1960 to 1970 did not reveal any real estate purchases in his or his wife’s name. In March 1964, the *Alabama Tribune* reported that Burke hurried home to Philadelphia “to greet a newborn son” from an engagement in Baltimore.⁶³ In an interview with a London newspaper in June 1965, the reporter noted that he “divides his time between the singing and the Berkeley (sic) Funeral Home [in West Philadelphia]. ... His wife runs the business when he’s away, and when he’s there he does a spot of embalming.” About the embalming, Burke specified, “Just the special cases. ... At the moment, it’s 75 percent show business.”⁶⁴ Burke, apparently, was thinking about moving out of Philadelphia at the time. In June 1965, Masco Young reported in “The Grapevine,” a syndicated gossip column, that Solomon Burke “can’t make up his mind about which home to buy with royalties ... a 10-room house in South Jersey or a 22-room mansion in Miami.”⁶⁵

In 1966, Solomon Burke created the Soul Clan, a supergroup of male soul singers that included Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett, Don Covay, and Joe Tex, all of whom were signed to the Atlantic label. Ben E. King and Arthur Conley later replaced Redding and Pickett. Burke created the Soul Clan, a union of sorts, to concentrate the power of the soul singers and compel the record label, which was generating considerable income from their hits, to fund economic development projects in the Black communities that the singers called home. About the project, Burke recounted:

I remember one time we walked in [to the Atlantic Records offices] and asked for a million dollars. It was Otis Redding, Joe Tex, Wilson Pickett, Don Covay, Ben E. King and myself. We all went in together. We were all on the charts. We all asked for a million dollars for a real estate project, as an organization, as a soul clan. We intended to buy up a lot of property in the South, in the ghetto areas and re-remodel them and build homes. And, we needed a million dollars to put this project together. We walked into Atlantic asking for that.

As writer Jonathan Bernstein has explained, Burke had the largest dreams, conceiving of the Soul Clan group as a grand experiment in black autonomy and entrepreneurship that could help shift some of the power, money, and influence away from the white-run music industry. He dreamed that the Soul Clan would buy land, invest in black-owned businesses in the South, and create trust funds, scholarships, and foundations to help support future generations of black musicians.⁶⁶ Soul Clan recorded one album, *Soul*

⁶¹ Quoted in Charles M. Young, “King Solomon’s Sweet Thunder: One of the last great soul singers makes peace with his past,” *Rolling Stone*, October 10, 2010.

⁶² Jerry Wexler with David Ritz, *Rhythm and the Blues: A Life in American Music* (New York: Knopf, 1993), p. 150.

⁶³ “Solomon Burke Finds Newborn Son At Home After Baltimore Date,” *Alabama Tribune* (Montgomery, Alabama), March 6, 1964, p. 2.

⁶⁴ Maureen Cleave, “Disc Date,” *Evening Standard* (London), June 19, 1965, p. 7.

⁶⁵ Masco Young, “The Grapevine,” *Pittsburgh Courier*, June 5, 1965, p. 5.

⁶⁶ Jonathan Bernstein, “Soul Meeting,” *Oxford American*, Issue 98, Fall 2017, September 5, 2017; <https://oxfordamerican.org/magazine/issue-98-fall-2017/soul-meeting>

Meeting, before disbanding in 1969. While the album did fairly well on the charts, Atlantic Records did not embrace the economic and political project. Burke attributed the failure of the project to the fact that "we were going against the grain of what black entertainers are supposed to do. We were all just supposed to go out and buy red Cadillacs. We weren't supposed to go out and start talking about spending millions of dollars on building and developing... We were supposed to talk about having parties and good times and eatin' barbecue ribs. You know, pork chops." Soul Clan briefly reunited in 1981, but never achieved its goals.



Figure 31. Soul Clan in New York City on July 23, 1981. From left to right, Ben E. King, Joe Tex, Don Covay, Wilson Pickett, and Solomon Burke. Source: "Remembering Solomon Burke," *Rolling Stone*, October 10, 2010; <https://www.rollingstone.com/music/music-lists/remembering-solomon-burke-13359/no-title-1053-84114/>

In 1968, Burke made his last record for Atlantic. His brand of soul music, which he had developed in the late 1950s and early 1960s, was being eclipsed by new types of music in the late 1960s, as American culture was quickly changing. He was also disillusioned by Atlantic's failure to support Soul Clan and his philanthropic plans. Burke signed with Bell Records in 1968 and recorded the album *Proud Mary* in 1969, which was boosted by the chart success of its title track, written by John Fogerty, and later a hit for Ike and Tina Turner. At some point in the early 1970s, Burke left Philadelphia and resettled in Los Angeles, where he concentrated on his ministerial duties and charitable work, but still participated in the music business. Burke recorded for several record labels during the 1970s, including MGM, Dunhill, and Chess, but could not recapture his previous magic (Figure 32). He scored soundtracks for the movies *Cool Breeze* and *Hammer* in 1972, and recorded the theme song for the U.S. version of the British television situation comedy *Love Thy Neighbour* in 1973, about a Black family living next door to a bigoted family. Burke even attempted to join the Jackson Five and the Osmonds in the world of sibling pop, enlisting seven of his children into the Sons and Daughters of Solomon, which recorded an unsuccessful album for MGM in 1972 (Figure 33).



Solomon Burke (r) pauses near billboard with brother, Edward.

Figure 32. A photograph of Solomon Burke and his brother Edward under a billboard for Burke's album *Electronic Magnetism* on Sunset Boulevard in Los Angeles, 1971. Source: *Jet*, v. 40, no. 16, July 15, 1971, p. 63.



Figure 33. Phonograph recording of “Everybody’s Got Fingers” by the Sons and Daughters of Solomon, MGM Records, 1971.



Figure 34. Solomon Burke at the pulpit in Los Angeles in 1985. Source: Don Snowden, “Four Souls: From Music to the Ministry,” *Los Angeles Times*, August 4, 1985, p. 338.

In the 1980s, Burke began a comeback in music. He recorded a powerful and inspired live album *Soul Alive!* For Rounder Records in 1985. The comeback continued with *A Change is Gonna Come* in 1986, which one critic described as “one of the decade’s great soul statements.”⁶⁷ In 1987, he made his movie debut as Daddy Mention in the crime drama *The Big Easy*. His comeback was aided by Hollywood when his early music was featured in two hit movies. “Everybody Needs Somebody to Love” was featured

⁶⁷ Adam Sweeting, “Solomon Burke obituary,” *The Guardian* (London), October 10, 2010.

in *The Blues Brothers* in 1980, and “Cry to Me” in *Dirty Dancing* in 1987. In 1994, the Philadelphia Music Alliance placed a plaque for Solomon Burke on the Walk of Fame along South Broad Street (Figure 35).⁶⁸ Burke was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame in 2001. The following year, 2002, he released the acclaimed album *Don’t Give Up On Me*, which won a GRAMMY for best contemporary blues album and featured songs by Elvis Costello, Bob Dylan, Tom Waits, Brian Wilson, and Van Morrison. In 2004, he appeared in the blues documentary, *Lightning in a Bottle*, which included performances at the Royal Albert Hall in London. His country-soul album *Nashville* of 2006 featured guest appearances by several artists including Emmylou Harris, Dolly Parton, and Buddy Miller. In 2008, Burke released the album *Like A Fire* as a prelude to a European tour. Always keen to the end to improve and broaden his craft, Burke joined famed R&B producer Willie Mitchell in 2009 at Mitchell’s Royal Studio in Memphis to work together on a new recording, *Nothing’s Impossible*, which is a masterly recapitulation and reinterpretation of his entire oeuvre. Between 1980 and 2010, Burke recorded 18 albums, from soul to country to blues to rock.

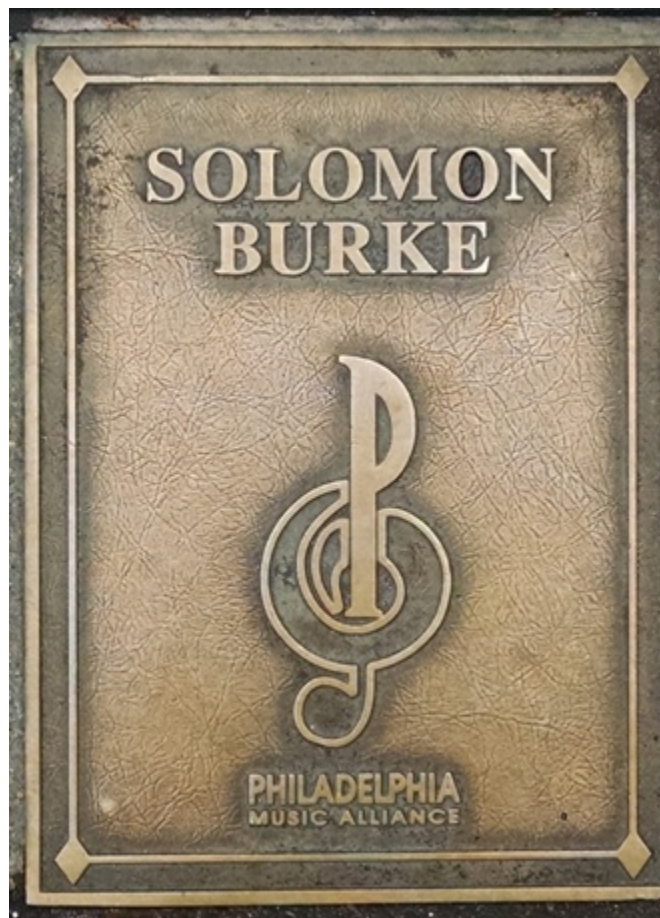


Figure 35. Plaque celebrating Solomon Burke on Philadelphia’s Walk of Fame on S. Broad Street, installed in 1994. Source: <https://phillyjazz.us/2015/01/27/solomon-burke/>

Solomon Burke died at age 70 on a plane at Schiphol Airport in Amsterdam, Netherlands on October 10, 2010, after a fourteen-hour flight from Los Angeles, California. He had come to Amsterdam to launch *Hold On Tight*, a joint album with the Dutch rock band De Dijk. At the time, he was on his way

⁶⁸ Kevin L. Carter, “Alliance will honor 9 musicians on the Walk,” *Inquirer*, January 24, 1994, p. 55. See also: <https://www.philadelphiamusicalliance.org/walk-of-fame/solomon-burke/>

to a sold-out performance in Amsterdam. Burke was buried at Lot 4037, Space 1, in the Murmuring Trees section of the Forest Lawn Memorial Park in the Hollywood Hills in Los Angeles.

Soon after his death, Mick Jagger and Raphael Saadiq posthumously honored Solomon Burke at the 2011 GRAMMY Awards celebration. Neil Portnow, the president of The Recording Academy, which advocates for musicians, promotes music, and awards the GRAMMYS, praised Burke:

GRAMMY-winning soul singer Solomon Burke was revered as one of music's greatest vocalists and a pioneer of the genre. A deeply spiritual man, his love and passion for his craft kept him touring and performing to sold-out audiences right up to his final days. Few artists have had careers as long, rich and influential as his, and he leaves a larger-than-life legacy as powerful and soulful as he was. The music industry has lost one of its most distinctive voices.⁶⁹



Figure 36. Photograph of Solomon Burke, which accompanied his obituary. Source: <https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/westlake-village-ca/solomon-burke-4415837>

⁶⁹ Neil Portnow, Press release by The Recording Academy, Facebook, 2010.

CONCLUSION

In summary, the property at 3836 Mount Vernon Street merits listing on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, satisfying Criteria for Designation A and J. Satisfying Criterion A, the property is “associated with the life of a person significant in the past,” Solomon Burke, one of the founders and greatest voices of soul music in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Satisfying Criterion J, as the childhood home of Burke, “The Wonder Boy Preacher,” and his mother and grandmother Josephine and Eleanor Moore, who were religious leaders, the property “exemplifies the cultural and social heritage of the community.” Solomon Burke, who merged gospel and R&B to create soul, recognized the significance of the modest two-story, brick rowhouse at 3836 Mount Vernon Street in Mantua during an interview in 1994, when he observed that “my grandmother had her own home, and that’s where I was born. That’s where the church started, in that house itself. It’s historical.”⁷⁰

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⁷⁰ “King Solomon: Philly soul star still hopes to make it in home town,” *Daily News*, January 6, 1994, p. 37.

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