

**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: 4949 and 4951 Walnut Street

Postal code: 19139

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: 4949 and 4951 Walnut Street

Current/Common Name: Paul Robeson House and Museum

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: 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 1910 to 2015

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: 1910

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: E. Allen Wilson

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: Calvin W. Rogers

Original owner: Calvin W. Rogers

Other significant persons: Paul Robeson; Frances P. Aulston

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 University City Historical Society; Preservation Alliance of Greater Philadelphia; West Philadelphia Cultural Alliance Date 5/19/23

Name with Title Amy Lambert, President UCHS Email info@uchs.org

Street Address PO Box 31927 Telephone (215) 387-3019

City, State, and Postal Code Philadelphia, PA 19104

Nominator is is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: 5/19/2023

Correct-Complete Incorrect-Incomplete Date: June 13, 2023

Date of Notice Issuance: June 15, 2023

Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: West Philadelphia Cultural Alliance

Address: 4951 Walnut Street

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19139

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: July 19, 2023

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: August 11, 2023

Date of Final Action: August 11, 2023

Designated Rejected



NOMINATION OF

4949 AND 4951 WALNUT STREET

THE PAUL ROBESON HOUSE & MUSEUM

TO THE

PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

MAY 2023

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

4949 Walnut Street

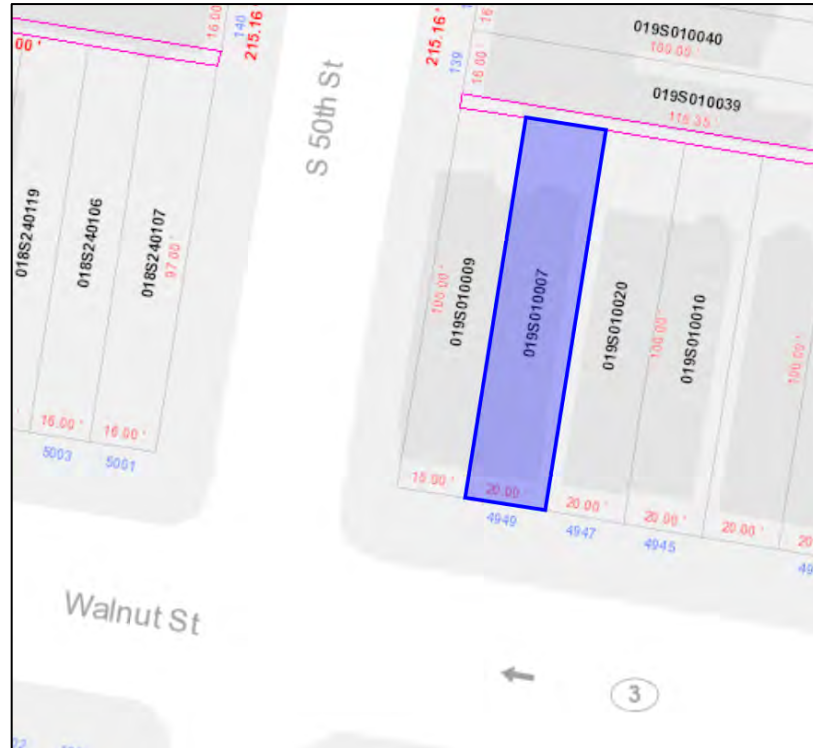


Fig. 1. Parcel map from website of the Office of Property Assessment, City of Philadelphia.

All that certain lot of piece of ground with the buildings and improvements thereon erected, Situate on the North side of Walnut Street, at the distance of Sixteen feet Eastward from the East side of Fiftieth Street in the Forty-Sixth Ward of the City of Philadelphia. Containing in front of breadth on the said Walnut Street Twenty feet and extending of that width in length or depth Northward between lines at right angles to the said Walnut Street One Hundred feet. Being 4949 Walnut Street.

The property is known as Parcel No. 019S010007, Office of Property Assessment Account No. 601048805.

4951 Walnut Street



Fig. 2. Parcel map from website of the Office of Property Assessment, City of Philadelphia.

All that certain lot of piece of ground with the buildings and improvements thereon erected, Situate at the Northeast corner of Walnut Street and Fiftieth Street in the Forty-Sixth Ward of the City of Philadelphia. Containing in front or breadth on the said Walnut Street Sixteen feet and extending of that width in length or depth Northward along the East side of said Fiftieth Street, One Hundred feet. Being 4951 Walnut Street.

The property is known as Parcel No. 019S010009, Office of Property Assessment Account No. 601048950.

6. PROPERTY DESCRIPTION



Fig. 3. South elevation of 4949 & 4951 Walnut Street.

All photos in this section taken by Amy Lambert, 1/27/2023.

The dwellings at 4949 and 4951 Walnut Street are a pair of three-story, semi-detached residences clad in Roman brick with front porches constructed in 1910¹ and designed by noted architect E. Allen Wilson. The primary elevations face south onto Walnut Street. The building is indicative of turn-of-the-twentieth century eclectic, speculative development housing in West Philadelphia, featuring arts and crafts characteristics and Tudor and other classical Revival architectural elements. It has a flat roof with slate-shingled, hipped gables on the south and west elevations. A shared corbelled chimney is located at the party wall of the two properties. The residences are nearly identical in terms of fenestration and architectural detailing and are described individually below.

¹ Philadelphiabuildings.org and other sources indicate that the subject properties and the four properties to the east, all designed and constructed by the same team, are from 1911. Building permits associated with the subject properties are dated June 1, 1909. Construction was likely completed and ready for occupancy by 1910.

4949 Walnut Street



Fig. 4. South & primary elevation of 4949 Walnut Street.

The primary entrance to the building is located on the east side of the south or primary elevation and features a wood and glass door likely added in the mid-twentieth century. To the west of the door is a pair of double hung windows each with a six-light transom window. These two bays are capped by an asphalt-shingled, hipped roof porch which spans the width of both 4949 and 4951 Walnut Street and wraps around the southeast corner of the building. The porch, which has exposed rafter ends, is supported by square, bracketed wooden columns on brick piers. A set of concrete steps with a wrought iron railing leads from the sidewalk to the front porch. The second story features a vinyl-sided single bay window with three nine-over-one double hung fixtures separated by wooden, square pilasters. Separated from the second story by a wooden belt course, the third story has a triple window with the same nine-over-one window fixtures as the second story. This window is capped by a front gable with faux half-timbering.



Fig. 5. South façade at shared porch showing the entry door to 4949.

The east elevation has a red brick exterior as the Roman brick is only visible on the street-facing elevations. It has various window openings on all three stories, some of which are not visible from the public right-of-way due to its proximity to the adjacent building.

The rear or north elevation, since it is not street-facing, is clad in utilitarian red brick instead of the decorative Roman brick found on the south elevation and the west elevation of 4951. The fieldstone foundation is also visible at this elevation. A recently constructed, wooden deck spans nearly the entire length of the first level of both 4949 and 4951. A pedestrian door is located on the first floor, accessible from the deck, along with a one-over-one window and a square casement window to the east of the doors. The second story has an asbestos-sided bay window with two one-over-one windows and a single casement window in the middle bay. The third story has two one-over-one windows.

4951 Walnut Street



Fig. 6. South (primary) elevation of 4951 Walnut Street.

The primary entrance to the building is located on the west side of the south or primary elevation and features the original wood and plate glass door. To the east of the door is a pair of double hung windows each with a six-light transom window. Both bays are capped by an asphalt-shingled, hipped roof porch which spans the width of both 4949 and 4951 and wraps around the southwest corner of the building. The porch, which has exposed rafter ends, is supported by square, bracketed wooden columns on brick piers. A set of concrete steps with a wrought iron railing leads from the sidewalk to the front porch. The second story features a single vinyl-sided bay window with three nine-over-one double hung fixtures separated by wooden, square pilasters. Separated from the second story by a wooden belt course, the third story has a triple window with the same nine-over-one window fixtures as the second story. This window is capped by a front gabled with faux half-timbering.



Fig. 7. South façade at entry porch.



Fig. 8. Southwest corner showing the deep rafters at the porch and roof overhangs.

The west elevation is six bays wide and features basement-level windows. All the windows on this elevation, aside from the central bay window at the second story, have limestone lintels; the first and second story windows also have limestone sills. The predominate window type on this elevation is the nine-over-one window, however the two southernmost windows on the first floor are replacement one-over-one fixtures. The basement windows are three-paned casement windows. A bay window at the second story is the elevation's most prominent feature. This window features some Classical Revival elements such as wooden paneling and a balustrade. This bay window has two nine-over-one windows that flank an eye-level, stained glass window. The wooden belt course separating the second and third levels wraps the entire length of this elevation. A small square corbelled chimney is located on the northwest corner.



Fig. 9. Typical basement windows at west elevation.

The rear or north elevation, since it is not street-facing, is clad in utilitarian red brick instead of the decorative Roman brick found on the south and west elevations. The fieldstone foundation is also visible at this elevation. A wooden deck spans nearly the entire length of 4949 and 4951 Walnut Street. Two pedestrian doors (one of which provides access to the top-story apartment) at the first level are accessible from the deck; there is a one-over-one window between the two doors and a square casement window above the doors. The third story has two one-over-one windows.



Fig. 10. West elevation of 4951 along S. 50th Street.



Fig. 11. Close up of second story window bay at west elevation.



Fig. 12. Typical 9/1 double hung window at the west elevation.



Fig. 13. Northwest corner of building showing rear of both properties and west elevation.



Fig. 14. North or rear elevation of both properties showing ground conditions including smoothly paved concrete where a 1923 garage once stood behind 4951.

7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE



Fig. 15. Paul Robeson in 1974 in Philadelphia. Source: Evening Bulletin Photograph Collection, Temple University. Accessed January 28, 2023.

The twin dwellings at 4949 and 4951 Walnut Street, henceforth known as the Paul Robeson House & Museum, are significant historic resources in Philadelphia and meet Criteria A, D, and E for designation on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, as enumerated in Section 14-1004 of the Philadelphia zoning code. The dwellings meet Criterion A through its association with acclaimed African American activist and entertainer Paul Robeson. It meets Criterion D as a representative example of middle-class, speculative development in an eclectic mix of revival styles at the turn of the last century. It meets Criterion E through its association with prolific rowhouse architect E. Allen Wilson. 4951 Walnut Street was previously listed on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion B for its associations with Robeson. The Period of Significance extends from 1910, the year the buildings were constructed to 2015, the year Frances

Aulston, the founder of the West Philadelphia Cultural Alliance and champion of the Paul Robeson House and Museum, died.

Paul Leroy Robeson, American Icon

The properties at 4949 and 4951 Walnut Street are significant for their association with the American civil rights champion and prodigiously talented, American cultural icon Paul Robeson (1898-1976). The residence at 4951 Walnut Street was his final home; the property was owned by his sister Marian Robeson Forsythe who purchased the property as a widow in 1959 for herself and her daughter Paulina. Robeson lived here during his retirement from 1966 until his death in 1976. The website of the Paul Robeson House, the nonprofit curated by the West Philadelphia Cultural Alliance (WPCA) who owns the subject properties, says that the house at the corner of South 50th and Walnut Streets today “sits among the people for whom Robeson agitated.”² The house at 4949 Walnut Street was purchased by the WPCA in the 1990s from Evelyn Bennett and is associated with Paul Robeson through frequent visits during his residence at 4951 as well as having been absorbed with 4951 as the home of the Paul Robeson House nonprofit house museum and cultural center, which is committed to interpreting the life and legacy of Robeson. The house retains a high degree of integrity from the time of Robeson’s residence, where his bedroom was located on the second floor.

Paul Robeson was one of the most important African American actors and singers of the twentieth century and a pioneering civil rights and peace activist. According to the National Register nomination from October 2000, the significance of the Robeson residence “stems from Paul Robeson’s symbolic importance to the civil rights movement during the critical period in which he resided in Philadelphia. Dozens of prominent civil rights leaders, particularly those who favored a more aggressive posture than that advocated by the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. and other church leaders, and those willing

² History of Paul Robeson House,” *Paul Robeson House and Museum*, paulrobesonhouse.org, accessed 2/12/2023.

to point out the contradictions between American foreign and domestic policy, came to this property seeking Robeson's blessing and endorsement."³

"During the years that he lived in this house Robeson remained, after nearly two decades of enforced silence and government harassment, and despite his retirement and ill health, a powerful symbol of the African American fight for equality and civil rights. Robeson lived in this house longer than he did at any other location. The fact that Robeson, sick and in retirement, remained a powerful symbolic touchstone for the civil rights movement, despite the best efforts of the government to discredit him, is perhaps the most powerful evidence of his significance and of the significance of this, his last residence."⁴

Robeson was born in Princeton, New Jersey, to Rev. William Drew Robeson who had escaped slavery and served in the Union Army. Robeson's mother died when he was a young child. He received an academic scholarship to Rutgers University where he excelled athletically and was a member of Phi Beta Kappa. Robeson graduated from Columbia Law School in 1923 as the school's third black graduate, passed the bar, and joined a New York law firm. However, he soon quit the firm citing racial insults and a growing love with the theater.

According to the National Register of Historic Places Statement of Significance, "in 1924, Robeson was introduced to the playwright Eugene O'Neill, who promptly enlisted Robeson in his experimental theater group, the Provincetown Players. Robeson's singing career took flight in 1925, when he teamed with arranger Lawrence Brown to create a program of African American spirituals and folk songs. This collaboration proved artistically fruitful and historically significant. It represented one of the earliest and most successful efforts to gain mainstream respect for African American spiritual music."⁵

³ O'Bannon, Patrick W., National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Paul Robeson Residence, on file, Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

Robeson continued to act, appearing in 1928 in the ground-breaking musical *Show Boat* which features Robeson's bass-baritone voice singing *Old Man River*, a song whose lyrics Robeson continued to change depending on the occasion and socio-political environment. In the late 1930s, Robeson was increasingly disillusioned by the absence of roles for black characters and gravitated more and more to overt social activism. He supported the Spanish loyalists in their civil war against fascism and continued to work in the United States for freedom and equality.

His tours in the 1940s for a production of *Othello* were hugely successful, but Robeson refused to perform in the South because of segregation policies; he elected to perform in non-traditional venues like prisons. In 1946, he served as part of the Anti-Lynching Crusade and spoke with President Truman to demand the government act to end lynchings in the South.

“By 1948, Robeson's uncompromising political and social stances and his continued affection for the Soviet Union caused him to be labeled a Communist and un-American. He received death threats. In 1950, the State Department cancelled his passport to prevent him from criticizing American policy while abroad. The 1950s were therefore a period of enforced silence for Robeson. He was a victim of both McCarthyism and racism. He sold his Connecticut property and bought a house in the Washington Heights section of Manhattan in 1955, continuing his social activism. In 1958, after regaining his passport, Robeson gave a farewell concert at Carnegie Hall before moving to Europe for the next five years. He lived in New York after returning to the United States in 1963 and announced his retirement from performing and public affairs.”⁶

After his wife Eslanda died in 1965, Robeson visited Marian the following summer at her home. But after his return to New York to live with his son Paul, Jr., a retired Philadelphia schoolteacher, he returned to Marian's house that fall to live permanently with her. According to Charlotte Turner Bell, “Paul had missed her and the warm, happy

⁶ *Ibid.*

surroundings of her home.”⁷ Robeson himself wrote of Marian in his 1958 biography, “the thought of Sis always brings an inner smile... As a girl, she brought to our household the blessing of laughter, so filled is she with warm, good humor.”⁸

In this house, Marian arranged great care and entertainment for her brother – often sitting with him on the porch waving to passers-by (who certainly didn’t always know who was waving to them) – and fiercely protecting her younger brother from intrusions of privacy. She allowed mostly only old friends to visit but also arranged for informal recital for him. Charlotte Bell often stopped by to play the piano while Paul sang including the “Battle Hymn of the Republic,” while Robeson recited Lincoln’s Gettysburg Address. Robeson visited with longtime friends and civil rights leaders from the entertainment world in this house, including most prominently, Harry Belafonte and Ruby Dee & Ossie Davis.⁹ Many civil rights activists sought Robeson’s symbolic blessing; a recognition of the pioneering nature of his militant stand against racism and the price he had paid for his political beliefs.¹⁰

According to the National Register nomination form, Robeson “wrote and recorded his taped message for the 1973 celebration honoring his seventy-fifth birthday, held at Carnegie Hall in New York City, while living in his sister’s house. While too ill to attend the ceremonies, which were attended by such dignitaries as James Earl Jones and Coretta Scott King, Robeson’s recorded message reaffirmed his activism, declaring “I want you to know that I am the same Paul, dedicated as ever to the worldwide cause of humanity for freedom, peace, and brotherhood.”¹¹

⁷ Bell, Charlotte Turner, *Paul Robeson’s Last Days in Philadelphia*. Bryn Mawr, PA: Dorrance & Co., 1986, 11.

⁸ Robeson, Paul *Here I Stand*. New York: Othello Associates, 1958.

⁹ History of Paul Robeson House,” *Paul Robeson House and Museum*, paulrobesonhouse.org, accessed 2/12/2023.

¹⁰ O’Bannon, Patrick W., National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Paul Robeson Residence, on file, Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

Robeson was admitted to Presbyterian Hospital in Philadelphia in late 1975. He died on January 23, 1976. Marian passed away a year later, and left 4951 Walnut Street to her daughter Paulina, who sold the house in 1994.¹²

At that time, the West Philadelphia Cultural Alliance (WPCA) was outgrowing its office in the basement of the Community Education Center in nearby Powelton Village. The organization was founded in 1984 by Frances Aulston, “to stimulate community participation in the arts by cultivating an interest in, understanding of, and appreciation for the arts in the greater Philadelphia region.”¹³ WPCA conducted a feasibility study, facilitated by the Wharton School of Business at the University of Pennsylvania, on the possibility of purchasing the Robeson site.¹⁴ The community was supportive of the site turning into a cultural destination, as it combined an organization that supported the arts, with the home of a highly acclaimed singer, actor, and Civil Rights activist.

Ms. Aulston used her life savings and creative fundraising by the WPCA to make a down payment on 4951 Walnut Street in 1994. In the same year, Ms. Evelyn Bennett, who owned 4949 Walnut Street died leaving the first right of refusal on the house to the WPCA, which humbly accepted the offer by her two sons.¹⁵ The WPCA began a multi-year effort to rehabilitate the pair for use in interpretation and community programming inspired by Robeson’s spirit. Under the direction of Ms. Aulston, the driving force behind WPCA, the Alliance secured funding from a variety of sources for the restoration of 4951 Walnut Street as a tribute to Robeson.¹⁶

Today WPCA keeps Paul Robeson’s story alive at the properties, his legacy intertwined with his former home as a tangible symbol of this towering figure in American arts and

¹² Coles, Kelli R., "Interpretation & Design: The Last Residence of African-American Activist Paul Robeson" (2005). Thesis, University of Pennsylvania

¹³ West Philadelphia Cultural Alliance, *Paul Robeson House and Museum*, paulrobesonhouse.org,

¹⁴ “Meet Frances Aulston, the Woman Behind Philly’s Paul Robeson House,” *National Trust for Historic Preservation*, <https://savingplaces.org/stories/qa-frances-aulston-woman-behind-philly-paul-robeson-house>

¹⁵ ¹⁵ Coles, Kelli R., "Interpretation & Design: The Last Residence of African-American Activist Paul Robeson" (2005). Thesis, University of Pennsylvania

¹⁶ History of Paul Robeson House, *Paul Robeson House and Museum*, paulrobesonhouse.org,

civil rights. Following Ms. Aulston's passing in 2015, 4949 Walnut Street was renamed the Frances P. Aulston Annex. Her pivotal contributions the preservation of Mr. Robeson's legacy cannot be overstated. The WPCA seeks to capture Robeson's spirit and his life's work by making the pair of houses a place where art and activism come together to inspire the community.

Architect E. Allen Wilson

E. Allen Wilson (c.1875-1936) was a prolific Philadelphia architect who designed tens of thousands of houses throughout the growing city including the subject properties in 1911. Sandra L. Tatman notes that Wilson appeared in city directories between 1895 and 1929, presumably the term of his professional career term.¹⁷ By 1896, he is recorded in the *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide (PRERBG)* as a sole practitioner and appears in the publication regularly for the next few decades. Mid-way through his career, he was contracted for office buildings, apartment houses, and other commercial fit-outs. His many buildings, particularly in West and North Philadelphia where new construction was prolific during the peak of Wilson's career, form the backdrop to neighborhood life without leaving traces of name recognition.

Despite his name appearing over 20,000 times in the PRERBG, Wilson's name is not widely associated with the story of architecture in the city. At least, his most lasting publicity came in 1893 when his design for a 3 story "Workingman's Rowhouse" was constructed at the World's Columbian Exhibition in Chicago. It was a design that set the course for new house construction in the outer stretches of twentieth century Philadelphia, yet its architect managed to escape attributable design notoriety even while populating the emerging western neighborhoods of the city with significant new buildings. These residential and commercial buildings are largely intact throughout West Philadelphia, from around 40th Street all the way to Cobbs Creek.

¹⁷ Tatman, Sandra L. "E. Allen Wilson (b. ca. 1875-fl.1936)", *Philadelphia Architects and Buildings*, philadelphiabuildings.org. Accessed January 4, 2023.

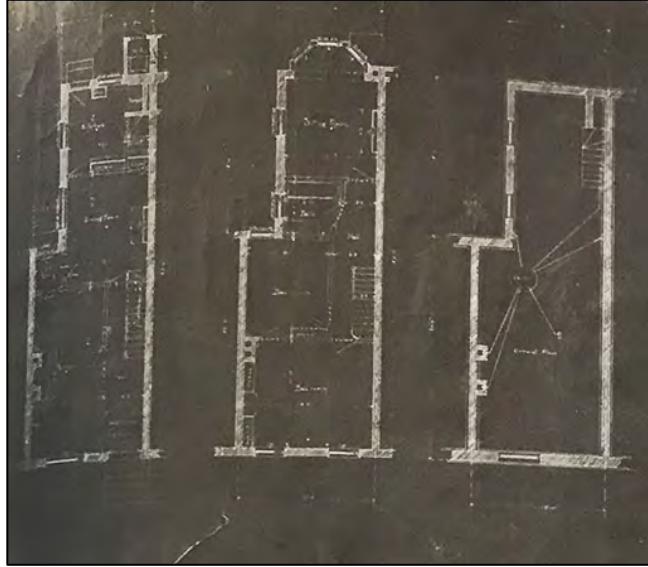


Fig. 16. Plans by E. Allen Wilson for a “Workingman’s Rowhouse.”

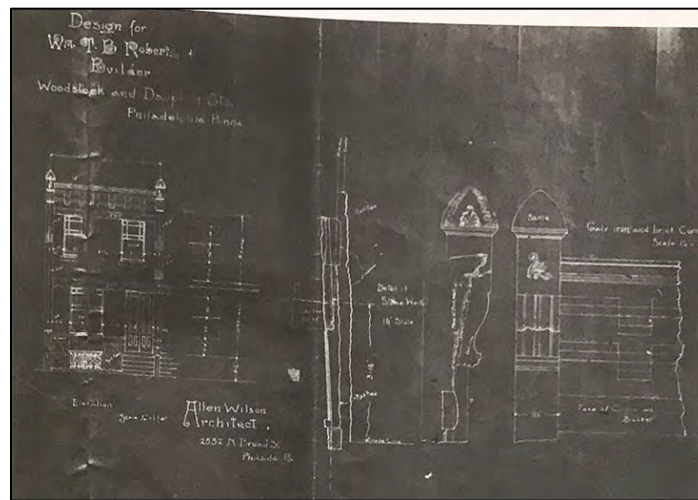


Fig. 17. Details by E. Allen Wilson for Wm. T. B. Roberts, Builder.

While Wilson’s designs are scattered across West Philadelphia in buildings of all types and sizes, there is one concentration of his designs that stands out. Wilson was the Architect of Record of most of the contributing resources that comprise the small but delightful Haddington National Register Historic District (1998) in West Philadelphia. The district is a two-block collection of commercial and residential buildings that constitute the core of one the eight subcenters of the sea of houses which developed near the stations of the Market Street Elevated transit lines simultaneously with its construction in 1903-07. According to the National Register nomination, “unlike the other station

neighborhoods, Haddington was largely the creation of a single developer, investor William Smith, who acquired the entire square between Market and Chestnut Streets, subdivided it, established a bank to fund the development and commissioned over three quarters of the buildings from the principal architect of the western expansion of the city, E. A. Wilson.”¹⁸

Wilson’s designs for Haddington include the temple-front for the former Haddington Title and Trust at 6014-16 Market. Constructed in 1911, on a granite base with terra cotta façade, the design here was meant to stimulate a feeling of security and confidence. According to George Thomas in the National Register of Historic Places nomination, “massive Tuscan columns in antis carrying a full entablature and pediment recall the formula of the Grecian treasury in the fashion of city banks of the era, while its name cut in large letters was the first to carry the Haddington name.”¹⁹



Fig. 18. North elevation of the former Haddington Title and Trust building on Market Street. Later an Armenian church (see script in entablature), now a Baptist church. Photo by A. Lambert, 2/11/2023.

¹⁸ Thomas, George (Clio Group), National Register of Historic Places Nomination Form, Haddington National Register Historic District, 1998, on file Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office, Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

Also in the Haddington Historic District, around the corner from the Title and Trust building is the 1912 monumental apartment building (“flat house” in the nomination), “The Von Louhr.” Wilson designed this five-story building with a footprint of 100’ x 120’ and constructed with a stone foundation, Pompeian brick up to the fourth floor and stucco at the fifth floor, and mannerist window embrasures of curvaceous terra cotta elements. There is a deep roof overhang and bracketed entry overhangs that are reminiscent of “California Bungalow” or Mission character. Considered significant to the district, the Von Louhr retains high integrity and still functions as a well-maintained apartment building.



Fig. 19. The “Von Louhr” apartment house, S. 61st Street. Photo: A. Lambert, 2/11/2023.

E. Allen Wilson is also notable as the architect of the former George Institute, a snub-nose, flatiron building at North 52nd Street just below Lancaster Avenue. The 1914 Colonial Revival building was constructed by the George Institute’s new leader Thomas Wynne, another great Philadelphia family like the Georges whose estate chartered the institute. In 1928, it became a branch of the Free Library of Philadelphia until it closed in 2001. The building has remained vacant since.



Fig. 20. A c1940s photograph of the George Institute, later a branch of the Free Library.
Source: WPA.

Site Development

The subject properties sit on land once owned by the influential real estate lawyer and land developer Eli Kirk Price (1797-1884). Price was influential in the development of West Philadelphia between the area's initial emergence from farmland to the city's earliest streetcar suburbs and the period of massive growth and expansion at the turn of the last century as more middle class and working-class neighborhoods developed. Price was a key shepherd for the 1854 Act of Consolidation as it made its way through the Pennsylvania legislature. The Act united and organized the individual townships, villages, districts, and settlements outside of William Penn's original two-mile city into today's 130 square mile city boundary. For West Philadelphia, this meant that the former Blockley Township, founded by William Warner prior to Penn's arrival in 1682, could now be administratively swept into the City of Philadelphia as the Industrial Revolution continued apace. The Act acknowledged that the population growth of the city (by nearly 30% in the

decade before Consolidation) was centered outside of the original boundaries of Philadelphia and was draining the city of much needed revenue.

At some point before 1909, Price sold the property to Calvin W. Rogers who contracted with E. Allen Wilson (whose listed address is 815 Lafayette Building) to develop six semi-detached residences on the north side of Walnut Street. A building permit application dated June 1, 1909, states that two, one-family residences are to be erected at the northeast corner of Walnut Street and South 50th Street. The permit lists Calvin W. Rogers as owner and contractor, and E. Allen Wilson as architect and describes the buildings as having 18" foundation walls on natural hard clay soil with three stories of 9" thick brick walls, including the party wall that divides the dwellings vertically. The cost of each dwelling is listed on the permit as \$7,000 each. Typical of West Philadelphia, a front setback of 144 square feet of yard space was included. Both properties have a one-story front entry porch at their south elevations that face Walnut Street. The overhang at this porch mimics the roof overhang at the corner property (4951) with some depth and exposed eaves; it is evocative, albeit at a smaller scale, of the roof overhang at the Von Louhr apartments on South 61st Street in the Haddington Historic District.

If a Wall or part of a Wall already built is to be used, fill up the following:

The undersigned give notice that _____ intend to use the _____ wall of building _____ as party wall in the erection of the building hereinbefore described, and respectfully requests that the same be examined and a permit granted therefor. The foundation wall _____ built of _____ inches thick, _____ feet below curb; the upper wall _____ built of _____ inches thick, _____ feet deep, _____ feet in height.

(Sign here) _____

Owner, Calvin W. Rogers Address, 317 Reed Bldg
 Architect, E. Allen Wilson " 710-2nd St. Bldg
 Contractor, Calvin W. Rogers " 317 Reed Bldg
 Applicant, " " " " " "

STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA, }
 COUNTY OF PHILADELPHIA, } SS.

Personally appeared before me the Subscriber, a Notary Public for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, residing in the City of Philadelphia, _____ Calvin W. Rogers the applicant above named, who being duly sworn according to law, deposes and says that the facts above set forth are true to the best of his knowledge and belief. Deponent further says that the foregoing are all the alterations or repairs he proposes to make to the building above described.

Sworn to before me this 74 day of June 1909 } Calvin W. Rogers
John S. ...
 Notary Public, Phila. Co.
 Commission Expires March 20th 1912

Fig. 21. Building permit application from June 1, 1909 listing Calvin W. Rogers as the land owner and contractor, and E. Allen Wilson as the architect.

According to the 1910 Bromley Atlas, the three sets of semi-detached houses by Rogers and Wilson appear surrounded by land owned by Eli K. Price. The same land development configuration appears on the 1916 G. W. Bromley Atlas, illustrating the transitional period of West Philadelphia from farmland to bustling city: new streets, growing housing density and an adjacent cluster of wood frame buildings with ownership attributed to J. R. Shock. By 1918's Bromley Atlas, the neighborhood development is complete, with the entire 4900 block of Walnut Street filled with new housing.

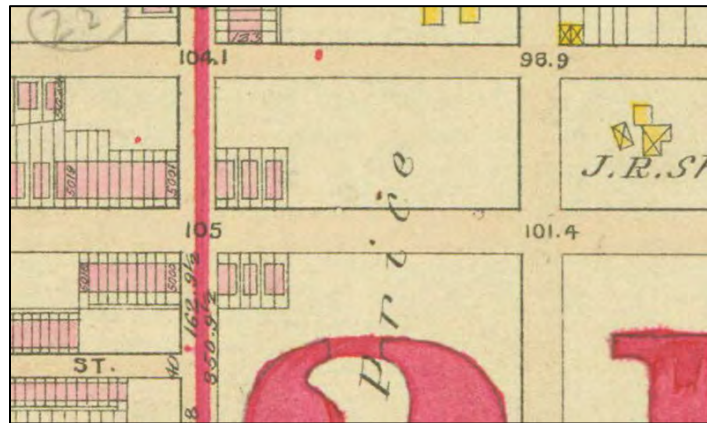
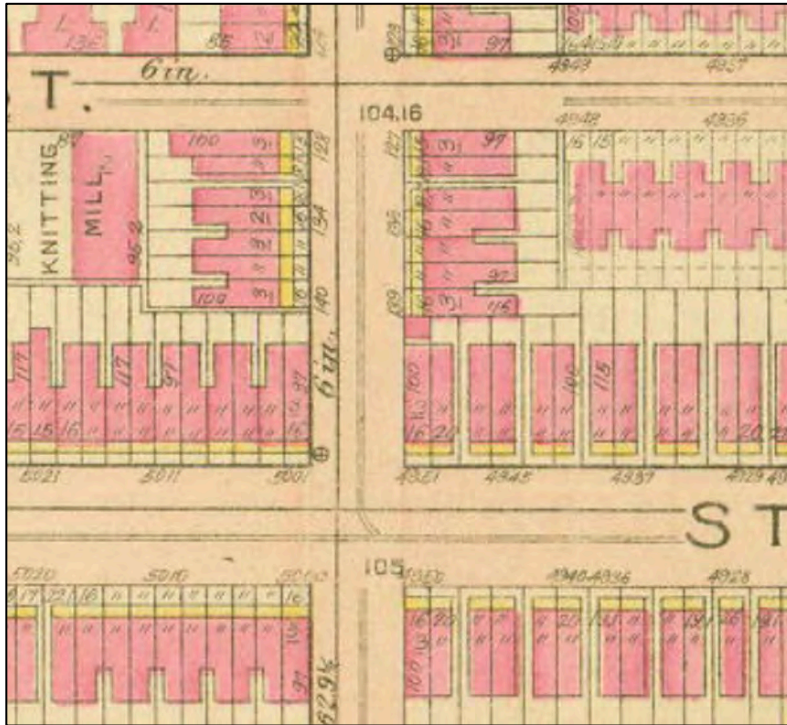


Fig. 22. 1916 Bromley Atlas showing the subject properties surrounded by increasing development on what had just recently been farmland.

In 1923, a building permit was pulled for a small, brick garage to be erected behind 4951 Walnut. The owner of the property is listed as Dr. Nathan B. Hammond and the architect as W. George. The 1927 George Bromley Atlas shows the small masonry garage construction. The garage is no longer extant, having been demolished at some point after the National Register nomination of the property from 2000, which references the small building.



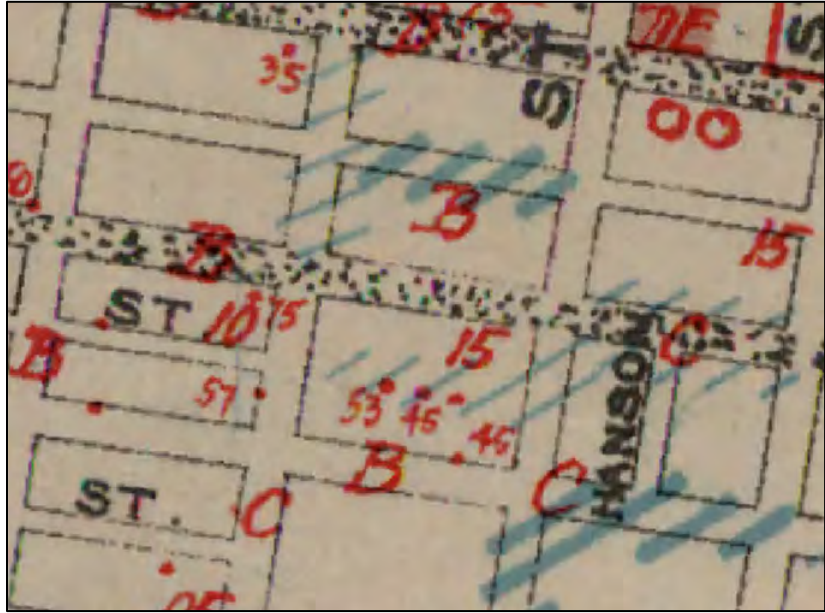


Fig. 24. J. M. Brewer Appraisal Map of Philadelphia, 1934. "B" indicates "Upper middle class residential" and the blue hatches indicate Jewish residents.

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