

**ADDRESS: 4837 GERMANTOWN AVE**

Name of Resource: 4837 Germantown Ave

Proposed Action: Designate

Property Owner: Greg Pronko

Nominator: SoLo/Germantown Civic Association

Staff Contact: Allyson Mehley, [allyson.mehley@phila.gov](mailto:allyson.mehley@phila.gov)

**OVERVIEW:** This nomination proposes to designate the property at 4837 Germantown Avenue and list it on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Jon Kirby and James Kinnier & Sons erected the residential rowhouse in the Second-Empire style in 1870 and 1871. The nomination contends that the rowhouse reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style and embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, the Second Empire style, satisfying Criteria C and D.

In November 2022, the Historical Commission designated the property at 4841 Germantown Avenue based on architectural style, under Criteria C and D. At that time, the Commission recommended nominating the nearly identical buildings at 4837 and 4839 Germantown Avenue.

**STAFF RECOMMENDATION:** The staff recommends that the property at 4837 Germantown Avenue satisfies Criteria for Designation C and D and should be designated as historic and listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.



*4141, 4139, and 4137 (indicated in red) Germantown Avenue.*

**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: **4837 Germantown Avenue**

Postal code: **19144**

**2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE**

Historic Name: **4837 Germantown Avenue (formerly Main Street)**

Current Name: **4837 Germantown Avenue**

**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): **1870 to 1871**

Date(s) of construction: **1870-71**

Architects: **Unknown**

Builders: **Job Kirby, House Carpenter /James Kinnier & Sons**

Original owner: **William Rotch Wister and John Wister**

Significant person: **NA**

**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: **SoLo/Germantown Civic Association (RCO)**

Author: **Keeping Society of Philadelphia**

Date: **19 June 2023**

Address: **1315 Walnut Street, Suite 320  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19107**

EMAIL: **KEEPER@KEEPINGPHILADELPHIA.ORG**

Nominator ☐ is ☒ is not the property owner.

**PHC USE ONLY**

Date of Receipt: 20 June 2023

☒ Correct-Complete ☐ Incorrect-Incomplete

Date: August 2, 2023

Date of Notice Issuance: August 3, 2023

Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: Greg Pronko

Address: 1223 Vernon Rd

City: Philadelphia

State: PA

Postal Code: 19150

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: \_\_\_\_\_

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Final Action: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Designated ☐ Rejected

12/7/18

**NOMINATION**

**FOR THE**

**PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**



Figure 1. The primary (southwest) elevation of the subject property. Source: Keeping Society of Philadelphia, 2022.

**4837 GERMANTOWN AVENUE**  
**BUILT 1870-71**  
**GERMANTOWN**  
**PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19144-3014**

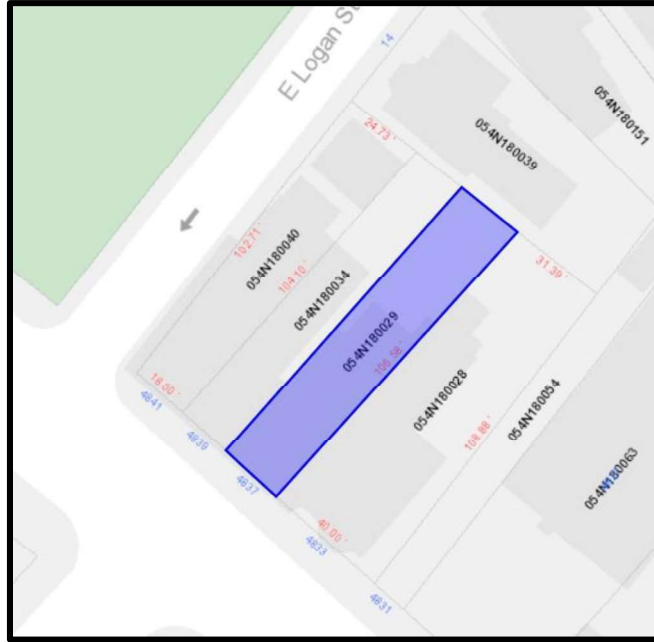


Figure 2. The boundary of the proposed designation is delineated by the blue line. Source: Atlas, City of Philadelphia.

## 5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundary description of the proposed designation is as follows:

Situate on the northeasterly side of Germantown Avenue at a distance of 35'-6" southeastwardly from the southeasterly side of E. Logan Street in the City of Philadelphia. Containing in front or breadth on the said Germantown Avenue 20', 10-5/8" and extending of that width in length or depth northeastwardly at right angles with the said Germantown Ave. on the northwesterly line thereof 101', 2-3/4" and on the southeasterly line thereof 102'-7" to a four-foot-wide alley that extends to the said E. Logan Street

Being known as No. 4837 Germantown Avenue.





Figure 3a. and 3b. The primary elevation (southwest) elevation of 4837 Germantown Ave. Source: Keeping Society of Philadelphia, 2022.

## 6. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Built in 1870-71, the residence at 4837 Germantown Avenue is a two-and-one-half-story masonry row house with a brownstone façade that stands southeast end of a tripartite development. The subject building is designed in the Second Empire style with typical Italianate details. The primary (southwest) elevation features three bays at the ground floor, two bays at the second floor, and a single dormer at the center of the Mansard roof, which is clad in the original fish-scale patterned slate. The façade features rusticated brownstone at the first and second floors. The third floor boasts a distinctive, concave Mansard roof. This roof is pierced by an elegant dormer, featuring an arched gable front with decorative brackets that are textbook variants of the style. The Mansard roof is set off by a cornice that is distinguished by decorative modillions, a common feature employed in both the Second Empire and Italianate styles. The roofline terminates in a period molding.

The side (southeast) elevation is a masonry wall featuring a roughcast finish at the first and second floors. The Mansard roof continues onto this elevation featuring a similar dormer near the south corner. Another dormer is located near the east corner.

The rear ell features two similar dormers within the Mansard area along the side (northwest) elevation.



Figure 4. The primary (southwest) elevation of the subject property in context. Source: Keeping Society of Philadelphia, 2022.



Figure 5. The Dr. Edward F. Rivinus House on the site of what became the Church of Christian Science on Green Street in Germantown, a building form which many twins emulated in the Second Empire style. Source: PhilaLandmarks Collections.

## **7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The residence at 4837 Germantown Avenue in Lower Germantown is a significant historic resource that merits designation by the Philadelphia Historical Commission and inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places satisfying the following Criteria for Designation as enumerated in Section 14-1004 of the Philadelphia Code:

- c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style; and*
- d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen.*

The period of significance dates to the period of construction between 1870 and 1871.



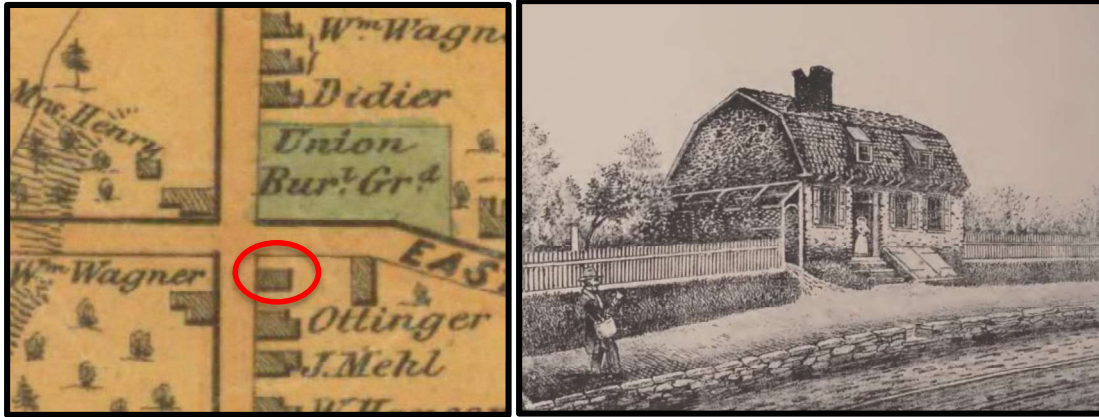


Figure 6. Left: 1851 Germantown Atlas with the Dedier House circled in red. Source: Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network. Figure 7. Right: The Dedier Huse, built ca. 1733, 5137-41 Germantown Avenue, Demolished ca.1869-70. Source: Julius Friedrich Sachse, Litt. D. *Quaint Old Germantown In Pennsylvania; A Series of Sixty Former Landmarks of Germantown and Vicinity; Drawn on Zinc During the Years 1863 – 1888 by John Richards*. (Philadelphia: 1913).

### **HISTORIC CONTEXT: A BRIEF HISTORY OF 4837-39-41 GERMANTOWN AVENUE**

For nearly a century-and-a-half, the ground associated with the buildings at 4837, 4839, and 4841 Germantown Avenue was occupied by the Dedier House (Figure 7/Demolished), a one-and-one-half-story stone dwelling with a gambrel roof. Speaking to the foundational period of Germantown’s built environment, this early house was purportedly built ca.1733 by John Dedier.<sup>1</sup> Throughout its tenure, the Dedier House stood south of the Lower Burial Ground, later known as The Hood Cemetery, separated by Fisher’s Lane, now known as East Logan Street. The Waschmuth-Henry House stood caddy corner in its present form for much of the second half of the Dedier House’ lifespan. Only the Wagner House at the southwest corner of Germantown Avenue and W. Logan Street was removed for a row of houses in the early twentieth century.

Around 1869-70, the Wister family came into possession of the old Dedier place—specifically a transaction that included Sarah L. Dedier. This ultimately led to a subdivision of the Dedier place into three lots, as well as a series of transactions that amounted to Bonus Building, a real estate development pattern and/or system in Philadelphia that replaced that once controlled by the Ground Rent Estate. Both Germantown natives, William Rotch Wistar, a prominent lawyer, and John Wistar, II/III, an iron master of Duncannon, Pennsylvania, partnered in the project. The said subdivision created individual parcels associated with 4837, 4839, and 4841 Germantown Avenue. In 1870, the Wisters deeded the said three lots to Job Kirby, a local house carpenter, which enabled the contractor to finance construction of the planned buildings.<sup>2</sup> While it appears that Kirby finished a portion of the project, the buildings at 4837 and 4839 remained unfinished, which ultimately led to Kirby to transfer the property back to the Wisters in March 1870. In July 1870, the lot at 4837 Germantown Avenue was conveyed to a new builder, a partnership

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Naaman H. Keyser, C. Henry Kain, John Palmer Garber, and Horace F. McCann. *History of Old Germantown*. (Germantown, Philadelphia: Horace F. McCann, Publisher, 1907), 164-65.

<sup>2</sup> William Rotch Wister of the City of Philadelphia, Attorney at Law and Mary E., his wife, to Job Kirby, of the City of Philadelphia, House Carpenter, 19 March 1870, Philadelphia Deed Book J.A.H., No. 29, 264, City Archives of Philadelphia.

between James Kinnier, William Kinnier, and Alexander Kinnier.<sup>3</sup> James Kinnier & Sons was a well-known Germantown construction firm. The precise date of completion for each property remains unclear; however, the 1871 Germantown Atlas indicates that the row was present.

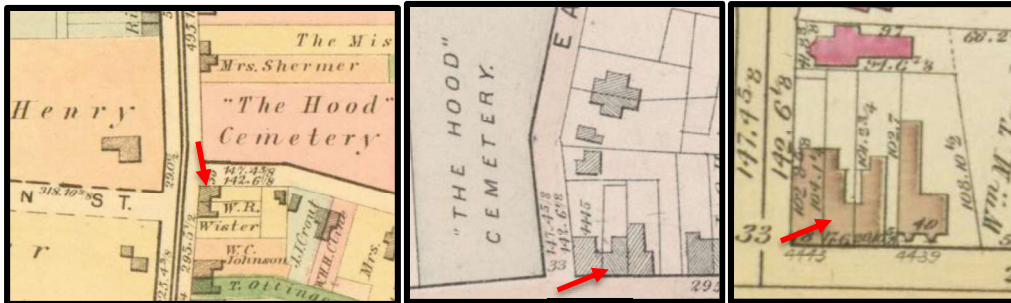


Figure 8. Atlas of the Late Borough of Germantown, 22<sup>nd</sup> Ward, City of Philadelphia, 1871. Source: Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network. Figure 9. Middle: City Atlas of Philadelphia, 22<sup>nd</sup> ward, 1876, Plate O. Source: Free Library of Philadelphia. Figure 10. Right: Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, Vol. 7, 22<sup>nd</sup> Ward, 1889, Plate 7. Source: Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network.

<sup>3</sup> Deed: William Rotch Wister of the City of Philadelphia, Attorney at Law and Mary E., his wife, to James Kinnier, William Kinnier, and Alexander Kinnier of the City of Philadelphia, House Carpenters, 15 July 1870, Philadelphia Deed Book J.A.H., No. 77, 74, City Archives of Philadelphia.



Figure 11. Bottom: The William Adamson Mansion, 4811 Germantown Avenue, Germantown, Pa., ca. 1920s. Source: The Germantown Historical Society.

### **CRITERION D**

One-third of a small Victorian-era development, the residence at 4837 Germantown Avenue embodies distinguishing characteristics of the Second Empire style, as applied to commercial and residential buildings of a domestic scale during the post-Civil War period in the Philadelphia.

According to Virginia & Lee McAlester's *A Field Guide To American Houses* (*McAlester Field Guide*), the Second Empire style enjoyed widespread employment in American architecture from 1855 to 1885, constituting a distinct and significant aesthetic period within the larger realm of the Victorian era. In line with national trends, Pennsylvanians appear to have been particularly fond of the style in all manner of building types. The Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission's Pennsylvania Architectural Field Guide (*PHMC Field Guide*) describes the "Second Empire/Mansard Style" as being popular between 1860 and 1900, which is a slightly longer timespan than is used in the *McAlester Field Guide*, likely related to the widespread popularity of the style in Pennsylvania. The *PHMC Field Guide* recognizes that the Second Empire style became incredibly fashionable in the 1860s and 1870s, as influenced by the "well-attended exhibitions in Paris in 1855 and 1867", becoming a modern architectural movement rather than a revivalist style like so many others. The *PHMC Field Guide* also establishes the most common building types to be executed in the style: commercial, residential, and public/government.<sup>4</sup>

Though some alterations have occurred during the past 150 years, the subject building features a distinctive concave Mansard roof. The Mansard area is pierced by an elegant dormer, which includes an arched gable front with decorative brackets that are present in textbook variants of the style. The Mansard roof is set off from the masonry façade below by a cornice comprised, originally comprised of decorative modillions, which are details

<sup>4</sup> "Second Empire/Mansard Style," Pennsylvania Architectural Field Guide, accessed 28 September 2020. <http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/portal/communities/architecture/styles/second-empire.html>

generally associated with both Italianate and Second Empire styles. While the rusticated brownstone front is less common in Philadelphia than New York City, it was a significant façade material of the Victorian era and its employment here is one of the few surviving examples on Germantown Avenue. The building also features segmental arches with keystones in continuous brownstone as part of the fine window details.

Both the *McAlester Field Guide* and the *PHMC Field Guide* describe identifying features, principal subtypes, variants, and details of the Second Empire style, which are attractively aligned with those present in the subject building. As a result, the residence at 4837 Germantown Avenue embodies distinguishing characteristics of the Second Empire style.<sup>5</sup>

---

<sup>5</sup> Virginia & Lee McAlester. *A Field Guide To American Houses*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 240-243.





Figure 12. A Second Empire Style row of three once stood at 4925-29 Germantown Ave., which included the same configuration as the subject development in the middle of a row. The store-and-dwelling at 4925 Germantown Ave. has been demolished, leaving the two purely residential buildings. Source: Historic Resource File – H001384-1365-D, Germantown Ave. Historic District, 1982, PennDOT.

### **CRITERION C**

In Philadelphia and, specifically, in Germantown, the Second Empire style, including its prominent Mansard roof, was decidedly influential in shaping the built environment during the second half of the Victorian era and onward into the twentieth century.<sup>6</sup> Just after Richard's Row, a dozen Italianate houses with occasional storefronts, was developed nearby in the summer of 1869, a Second Empire triumvirate, including the subject property, was erected between 1870 and 1871 by aforementioned members of Wister family. The development included, a semi-detached store-and-dwelling at 4841 Germantown Avenue; the subject property, an attached single-family house at 4839 Germantown Avenue; and a semi-detached single-family house at 4837 Germantown Avenue. This small, but attractive project was designed in the Second Empire style with typical Italianate details. The corner building included an elegantly appointed commercial component to serve the growing suburban population of Germantown. While other parts of the Main Street were commercialized in the decades prior, Lower Germantown retained much of its eighteenth century and rural, village character until the post-Civil War period. With an increase in Germantown's railway services in mid-nineteenth century, the area became more and more attainable for middle class Philadelphians seeking desirable suburban domicile with a means to commute to their workplaces. As this transition occurred, the new buildings constructed in the 4600, 4700, 4800, and 4900 blocks of Germantown Avenue were

---

<sup>6</sup> "Second Empire/Mansard Style," Pennsylvania Architectural Field Guide, accessed January 24, 2017. <http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/portal/communities/architecture/styles/second-empire.html>

designed in the romantic styles that came to define the built environment during the third quarter of the nineteenth century, including both Italianate and Second Empire. While these developments included plentiful attached and semi-detached single-family twins and rowhouses, there were also largely residential blocks that included a small commercial component.

As demonstrated above, the residence at 4837 Germantown Avenue is representative of an era characterized by the Second Empire style, satisfying Criterion C.

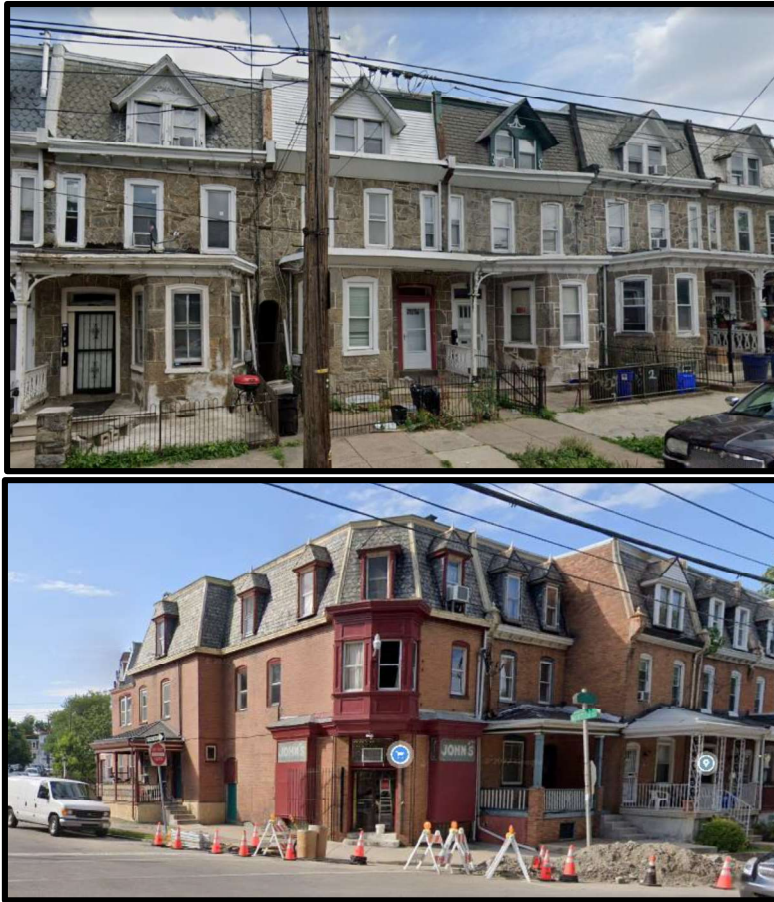


Figure 13. Top: This row of Second Empire style dwellings is one of several in the 500 block of High Street in Germantown, representing a purely residential version of the subject development. Source: Google, 2018. Figure 14. Bottom: A row of domestic buildings at the corner of Church Lane and Belfield Avenue in Germantown. Source: Google.



Figure 15. Public Ledger Building, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, ca. 1867. Source: The Library Company of Philadelphia.

## **HISTORIC CONTEXT:**

### **EVIDENCE OF THE SECOND EMPIRE STYLE IN PHILADELPHIA**

Philadelphia's built environment features a wide variety of buildings designed in the Second Empire style. Perhaps the most significant example in America, Philadelphia's City Hall was designed by John McArthur Jr., architect, being constructed between 1871 and 1901 at a cost of \$24 million.<sup>7</sup> Built earlier, in 1865, just south of Center Square, the Union League of Philadelphia was another Second Empire style building.<sup>8</sup> It was designed by leading Philadelphia architect John Fraser (1825-1906), and still stands at 140 S. Broad Street.<sup>9</sup> Unlike Philadelphia City Hall, the original portion of this private club resembles a mansion rather than a public building. On the commercial and industrial frontier, the *Public Ledger* constructed "their new and splendid building" (Figure 15) at the southwest corner of Sixth and Chestnut Streets in 1867, which was also designed by John McArthur, Jr. The *Scientific American* said the following about the building:

The new *Ledger* building is one of the largest printing houses in the Union, very beautiful in architecture, located on the corner of Sixth and Chestnut Streets. Every portion of the establishment is complete with regard to light, heating, ventilation, and other comforts. The office and editorial rooms are furnished splendidly. The composing room is on the upper floor, which, by aid of a Mansard roof, has a height of twenty-one feet.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Russ F. Weigley (editor). *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History*. (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982).

<sup>8</sup> Walter L. Fleming. *Documentary History of Reconstruction: Political, Military, Social, Religious, Educational, and Industrial, Vol. 2*. (1906), 1-20.

<sup>9</sup> Russ F. Weigley (editor). *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History*. (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982).

<sup>10</sup> "A Philadelphia Newspaper Establishment," *Scientific American* (1845-1908). (New York: 6 July 1867), 10.



Another important public building was the Court House and Post Office (Figure 16/Demolished), also designed in the Second Empire style, by Alfred B. Mullet (1834-1890), architect. Completed in 1874, it featured a complex, multi-level Mansardic roof structure at the center and a smaller, low-slung Mansard roof atop the vast four-story building.



Figure 16. Court House and Post Office, facing onto S. Eighth Street between Chestnut and Market Streets in Philadelphia, ca. 1874. Source: Oscar Beisert.

Commercial and other private for-profit establishments styled both their buildings and their advertisements in response to what might be called a “Mansard mania.” Known to shy away from modernity—especially in style, even Old Philadelphians warmed to the Mansard roof. No doubt their inherent Quaker conservatism was satiated by the prospect of a low-cost addition that allowed them to keep the existing building yet update and even formalize its appearance. No greater specimen can be found than the Philadelphia Contributionship. The “Oldest Continually Operating Fire Insurance Company in America” commissioned Thomas U. Walter (1804-1887), a darling of Philadelphia architecture, to design a commodious building for the establishment, which was completed in 1836.<sup>11</sup> It had the appearance of a large Greek Revival house with Georgian antecedents. Later in the nineteenth century, the fourth, half-story was enlarged to accommodate a full floor—an improvement that was achieved politely with a Mansard roof.

By 1883, Hagar & Campbell’s “New Dime Museum” was proudly advertised as opening on “Monday September 3d.” at the corner of Ninth and Arch Streets (Figure 17/Demolished). The advertisement illustrates their distinct four-story, Second Empire

---

<sup>11</sup> “Company History,” The Philadelphia Contributionship. Accessed 25 January 2017. <<http://www.contributionship.com/history/tour.html>>



style edifice that is largely concealed by advertisements for the museum.<sup>12</sup> Just in time for the Centennial Exhibition, the Second Empire style was so popular that companies like Cunningham & Hill, Manufacturers and Retailers of Flags and Shields, published an advertisement (Figure 18) for their product in which a Second Empire style building is shown draped in their products.



Figure 17. Top: Advertisement Card: “Hagar & Campbell’s Dime Museum, Ninth & Arch Streets. Opens Monday September 3d. 1883.” (The Stobridge Lithograph Co., 1883). Source: The Library Company of Philadelphia. Figure 18. Bottom: Advertisement of Cunningham & Hill, 204 Church Street, Philadelphia, ca.1876. Source: The Library Company of Philadelphia.

<sup>12</sup> Advertisement Card: “Hagar & Campbell’s Dime Museum, Ninth & Arch Sts. Opens Monday September 3d. 1883.” (The Stobridge Lithograph Co., 1883). Source: The Library Company of Philadelphia.

The Second Empire style was particularly popular in its application to Philadelphia's domestic architecture with continual use in detached, semi-detached buildings—including twins, and rowhouses from the 1860s into the early twentieth century. Yet we understand that the French influence in local domestic architecture appeared earlier, if not just for brief moment. Purported to be the first Mansard roof in America, Robert Morris, known as the “Financier of the American Revolution,” commissioned the éminent French architect, Pierre Charles L’Enfant (1754-1825), to design a mansion for him around 1794. However, after the project was well underway, Morris suffered major financial losses that prevented him from finishing the house. As a result, the building became known as “Morris’ Folly,” standing as an incomplete masonry shell on a large parcel bound by Chestnut Street at the north, 7<sup>th</sup> Street at the east, Walnut Street at the south, and 8<sup>th</sup> Street at the west (Figure 19)—the block is known today as Jeweler’s Row.<sup>13</sup>



Figure 19. Detail of “The Morris Mansion, Philadelphia, As It Was.” Source: PhiladelphiaBuildings.org.

---

<sup>13</sup> Charles Rappleye. *Robert Morris: Financier of the American Revolution*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010).

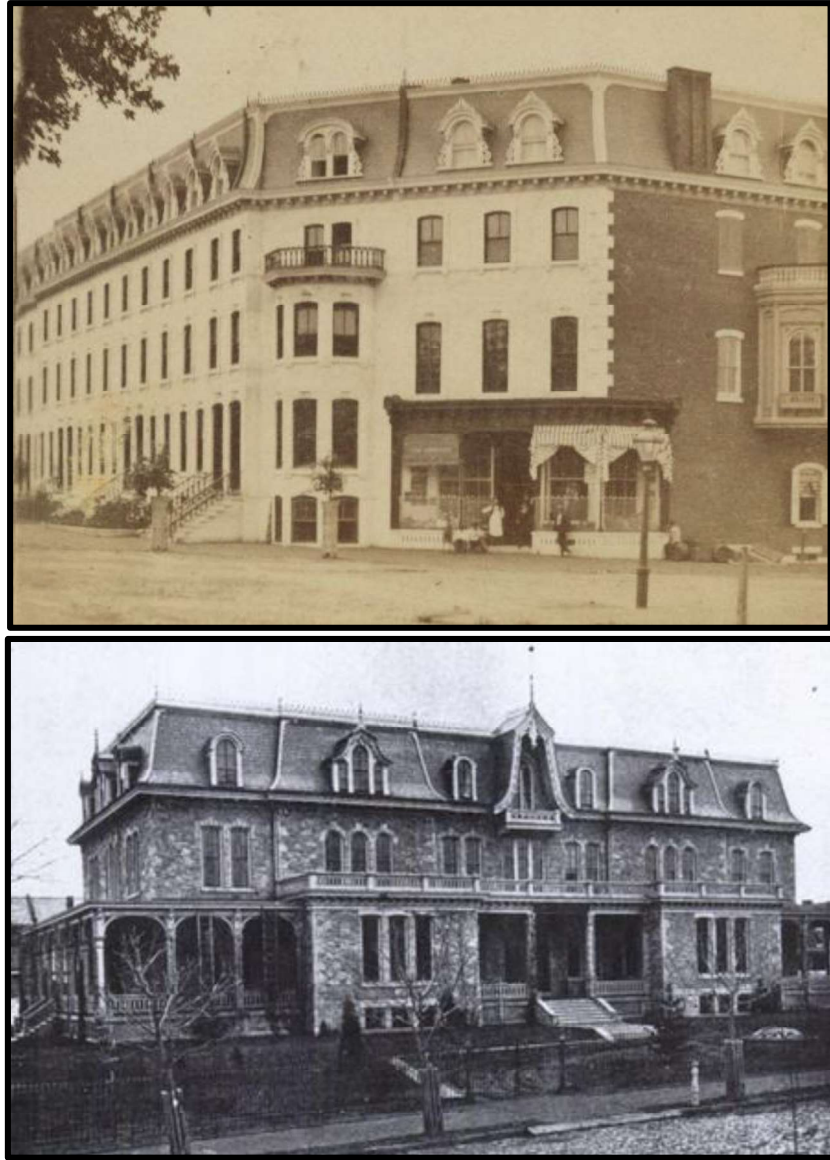


Figure 20. Top: Marble Terrace, 3200 Block of Chestnut Street, West Philadelphia, ca. 1872. Source: The Library Company of Philadelphia. Figure 21. Bottom: The Old Man's Home on Powelton Avenue between Saunders Avenue and 39<sup>th</sup> Street, designed by Hewitt Brothers, architects, in 1897. Source: Robert Morris Skaler. *West Philadelphia: University City to 52<sup>nd</sup> Street*. (Arcadia Publishing, 2002).

After Morris' Folly, the employment of the Mansard roof was almost entirely dormant at Philadelphia until the Second Empire style came into vogue. In the 1860s, one of the most impressive blocks to be constructed in the Quaker City was known as Marble Terrace, ca. 1870 (Figure 20/Demolished). Located in the 3200 block of Chestnut Street, the development was described in real estate advertisements as: "Handsome Modern Four-story Marble Front," a property that was, in fact, four stories in height—the fourth floor being a Mansard roof with a variation of dormers typical of high style designs of the 1860s and 1870s.<sup>14</sup> A similar marble-front development was completed in the same manner on the northeast side of Ridge Avenue just below Girard, the last vestiges of which were more

<sup>14</sup> "M. Thomas & Sons. Auctioneers," *Legal Gazette*. (15 May 1874), 160.



recently renovated beyond recognition. In West Philadelphia, the style was employed in detached, semi-detached, and row houses. Further into West Philadelphia, the development of streetcar suburbs led to the construction of enumerable detached and semi-detached twin buildings. Many of the residences were designed in the Second Empire style, which may be found on the fringes of University City in Powelton Village, Spruce Hill, and West Powelton. Located in Spruce Hill, the Satterlee Heights Development (Figure 22) began in 1871, which included several houses in the 4300 block of Osage Avenue that were all of the Second Empire style.<sup>15</sup>

This historic context on the history of the Second Empire in Philadelphia provides a brief overview of the style and its influence on this fair city.

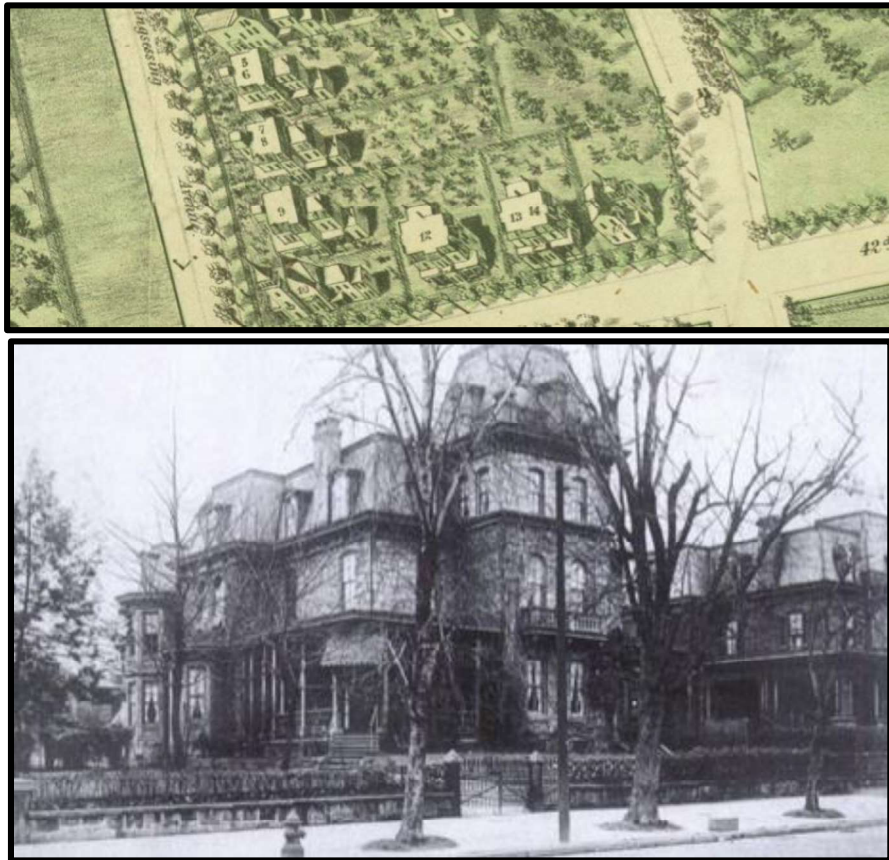


Figure 22. Top: Detail from Satterlee Heights. Satterlee Hospital Grounds, 27<sup>th</sup> Ward. West Philadelphia., n.d. Note: The large detached house facing onto 42<sup>nd</sup> Street is labeled “12” and was the home of Samuel Sloan. Immediately to the north, a twin is labeled with two numbers, “13” and “14,” being the homes John F. Bush and Mrs. M. Harding. Each of these houses appear to be designed in the Second Empire style. Source: Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network. Figure 23. Bottom: Large Second Empire style houses in the 4200 block of Chester Avenue, which are no longer extant. Source: Robert Morris Skaler. *West Philadelphia: University City to 52<sup>nd</sup> Street*. (Arcadia Publishing, 2002), 52.

<sup>15</sup> Oscar Beisert. *Philadelphia Register of Historic Places Nomination: 4300-03 Osage Avenue*. (Philadelphia: Oscar Beisert, 2015).



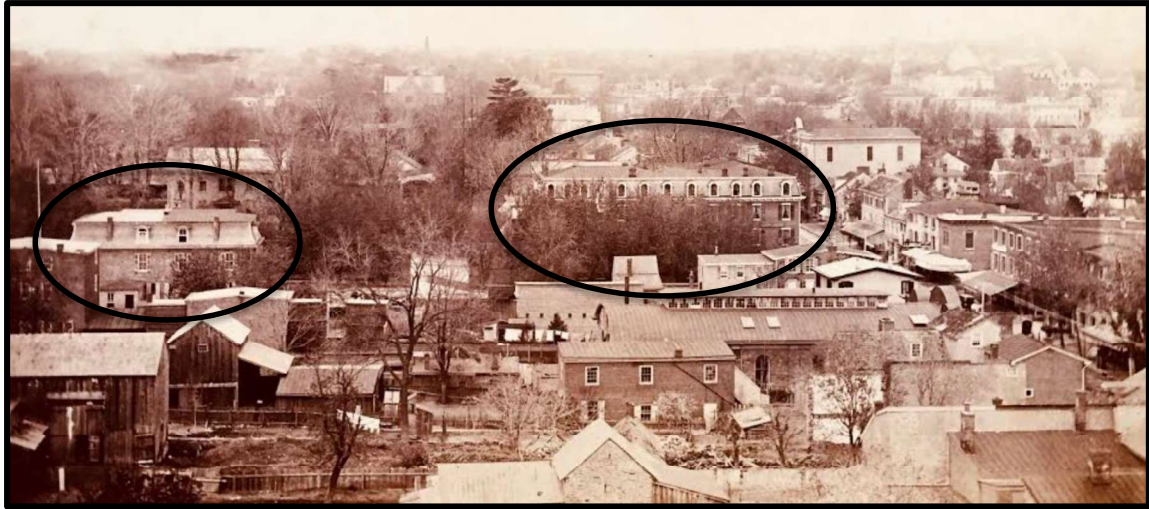


Figure 24. A view north from the tower of Trinity Lutheran Church in Germantown, showing the rise of several Second Empire style building that would have been relatively new at the time this photograph was taken. Source: The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

### **HISTORIC CONTEXT:**

#### **EVIDENCE OF THE SECOND EMPIRE STYLE IN THE GERMAN TOWNSHIP**

In the German Township, the Second Empire style and its distinctive Mansard roof were popularized in similar building types—primarily commercial, institutional and residential. The lithograph, *Germantown, Viewed from the Town Hall Tower, 1884*, illustrates the local prominence of the style. It showcases numerous buildings that employed Mansard roofs and other details. These buildings were added to the Germantown landscape between 1860 and 1880 and featured hallmarks of the Second Empire style. This transition is illustrated above in the bird’s eye view taken from the tower of Trinity Lutheran Church (Figure 24), where several Mansard roofs have emerged in the neighborhood along Germantown Avenue below Church Lane. Numerous other buildings were constructed on the commercial streets of Germantown that employed the style. At 5706 Germantown Avenue, the Savings Fund Society of Germantown and Its Vicinity erected a three-story stone building with a Mansard roof in 1868—it later became the site of John S. Trower’s Restaurant (Figure 26). Another building that was renovated to have the same appearance once stood at the corner of Germantown Avenue and Armat Street. The Mutual Fire Insurance Company of Germantown (Figure 27/Demolished) had “improved” a Federal style building to appear in the Second Empire Style, adding a brownstone façade and a Mansard roof.



Figure 25. Top: Detail views from the lithograph, “Germantown, Viewed from the Town Hall Tower, 1884,” including William Conner’s Pharmacy at the corner of Germantown and Cheltenham Avenues (Demolished); Greenwood’s “Opposite Cheltenham Avenue Depot”, which appears to be extant at 153 E. Cheltenham Avenue; and Albert Smith’s Building, including his Pharmacy, at the corner of Germantown Avenue and E. Coulter Street (Demolished). Source: The Scrapbook Collection of John B. Harting (in possession of the descendants). Figure 26. Bottom left: On left is John S. Trower’s Building (formerly the Savings Fund Society of Germantown & Its Vicinity). ca. 1890. Source: The Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Figure 27. Bottom right: Mutual Fire Insurance Company of Germantown, c. 1880. Source: The Germantown Historical Society.

Emulating the architecture of Philadelphia’s City Hall, prominent institutional buildings throughout Germantown were also prime candidates for a Second Empire treatment. Immaculate Conception Church and St. Vincent’s College (Figure 30) comprise a large complex of buildings that includes specimen of the subject style. Another like building was that of the Little Sisters of the Poor in Church Lane below Chew Avenue (Figure 31/Demolished). Designed by Ballinger & Perot, architects, this building also featured a fully articulated Mansard roof and other predictable details.<sup>16</sup>

Even some of the industrial buildings at Germantown included Mansard roofs. The Consumer’s Brewing Co. (Figure 29/demolished) featured a large Mansard roof constituting the fourth floor of the brewery. One smaller company, the Shirland Knitting

<sup>16</sup> Postcard: “Little Sisters of the Poor, Germantown, Pa.,” The Library Company of Philadelphia. (1900-20).

Mills (Figure 28/demolished), 5239-43 Wakefield Street, also featured an adorable Mansard roof along its side elevations, a wonderful merger with a gambrel roof.

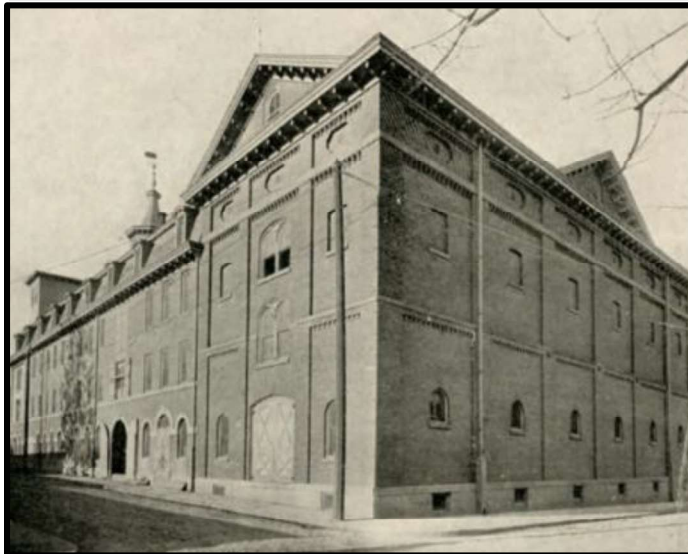
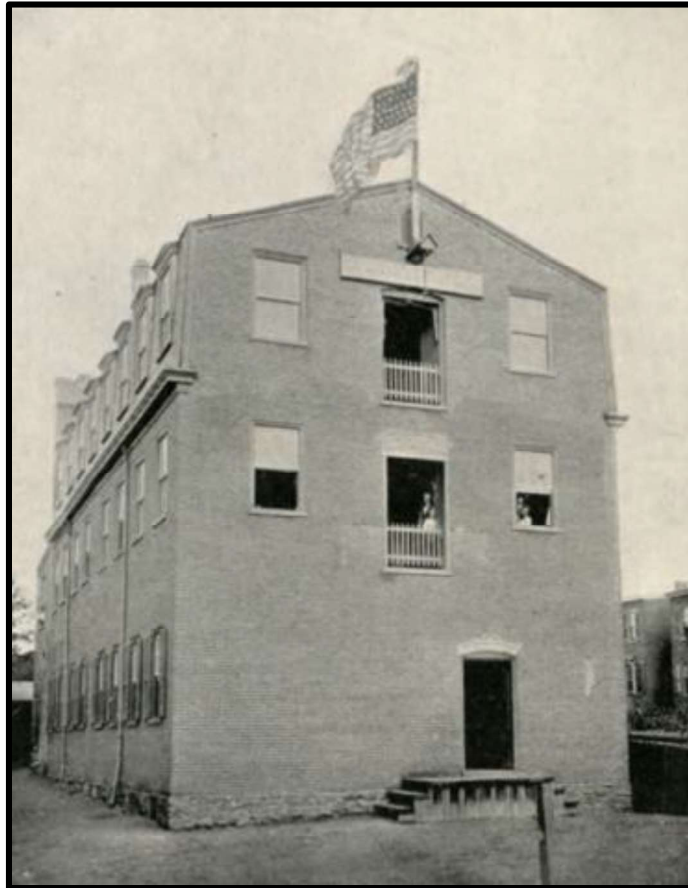


Figure 28. Top: The Shirland Knitting Mills, 5239-43 Wakefield Street, Germantown. Figure 29. Bottom: The Consumer's Brewing Co., Germantown. Source: *Handsome Homes of Germantown, Chestnut Hill, Mt. Airy and Pelham*. (Press of Germantown Independent, 1899).



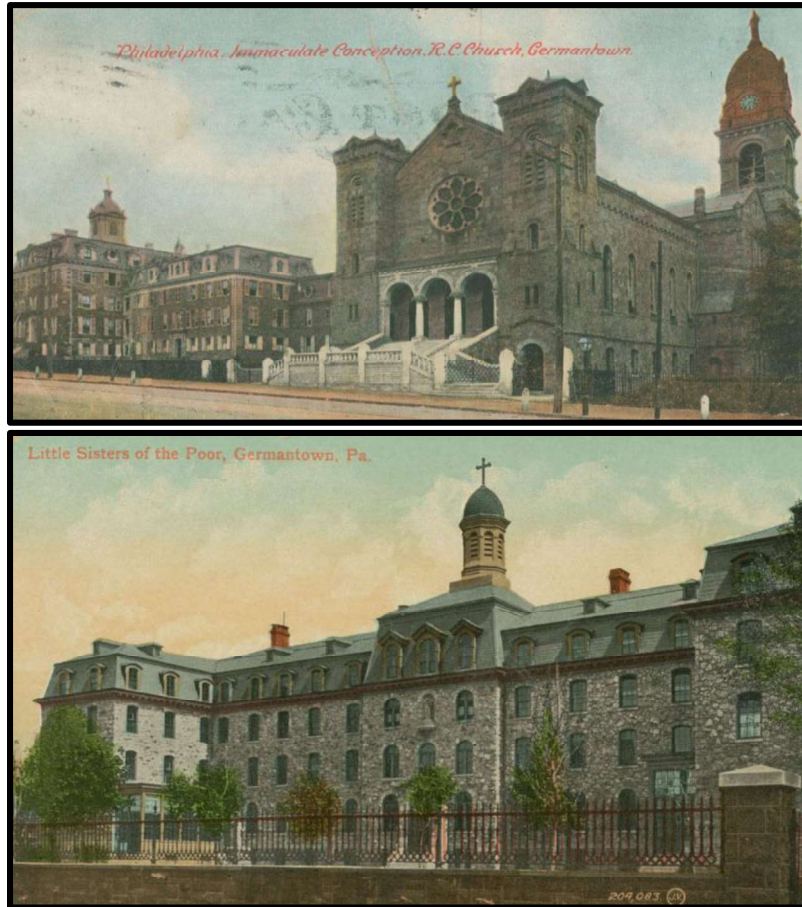


Figure 30. Top: Immaculate Conception Church and St. Vincent's College, Germantown, Pa., ca. 1900-20. Source: The Library Company of Philadelphia. Figure 31. Bottom: Little Sisters of the Poor, Church Lane, Germantown, Pa., c. 1900-20. (Demolished). Source: The Library Company of Philadelphia.

While the style influenced the design of many building types, the most common was that of a domestic scale, as shown in the earlier discussion of West Philadelphia. Residential buildings ranged from mansions to large, detached houses, semi-detached twins, and row houses, including those with a commercial component. Even some stables and outbuildings of domestic capacity were completed with Mansard roofs and bracketed cornices. A large percentage of the houses in Germantown were designed in the Second Empire style, being largely constructed of brick or Wissahickon Schist. However, the subject property is faced in rusticated brownstone, a chocolate sauce ubiquitous in New York City, though a rare application in Germantown. One of the grandest of the style erected at Germantown was perhaps the mansion of William Adamson (Figure 11), which still stands nearby at 4811 Germantown Avenue. Built in 1874, after the subject property, this substantial house features a Mansard roof on the main structure that is further dominated by a tower that once featured its own Mansard roof.<sup>17</sup> A rival in size and scale, the Ebenezer Maxwell Mansion

<sup>17</sup> Photograph: "The William Adamson Mansion," The Germantown Historical Society. (Philadelphia: 1920).



was built earlier in 1859 at 200 W. Tulpehocken Street, employing an eclectic mixture of Victorian-era features, among them a Mansard roof.<sup>18</sup>



Figure 32. The Butler Mansion, ca. 1890. Source: The Historical Society of Pennsylvania (Demolished).

At the site of what is now Germantown High School, the Butler Mansion (Figure 32/Demolished) was erected on the “Old Rose Property,” at least in part, by 1868. The house is rather a hodgepodge of architectural styles and features, but among those components is a distinctive Mansard roof and the typical dormers and cornice details associated with the Second Empire style.<sup>19</sup> Nearby is the familiar Germantown Music Settlement at 6128 Germantown Avenue (Figure 33). Originally a private residence, this institutional building features a fully articulated Mansard roof, a bracketed cornice, and a smooth-faced stone façade with quoins.<sup>20</sup> Further up the Avenue in Mt. Airy was a famous old dwelling known as “The Steamboat House” (Figure 34), named for the profession of its former occupant, Erasmus James Pierce, a sea captain. It had a flat roof, which was “framed into the appearance of the hurricane deck of a steamer.”<sup>21</sup> This could only be achieved in Victorian times with its Mansard roof.

---

<sup>18</sup> *National Register of Historic Places Nomination: The Ebenezer Maxwell Mansion*. (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission, 24 February 1971).

<sup>19</sup> Photograph: “The Butler Mansion,” The Historical Society of Pennsylvania. (c. 1890s).

<sup>20</sup> Photograph: “Germantown Settlement Music School,” The Germantown Historical Society. (1914).

<sup>21</sup> Samuel Fitch Hotchkiss. *Ancient and Modern Mt. Airy and Chestnut Hill*. (Philadelphia: P.W. Ziegler & Co., 1889), 353.

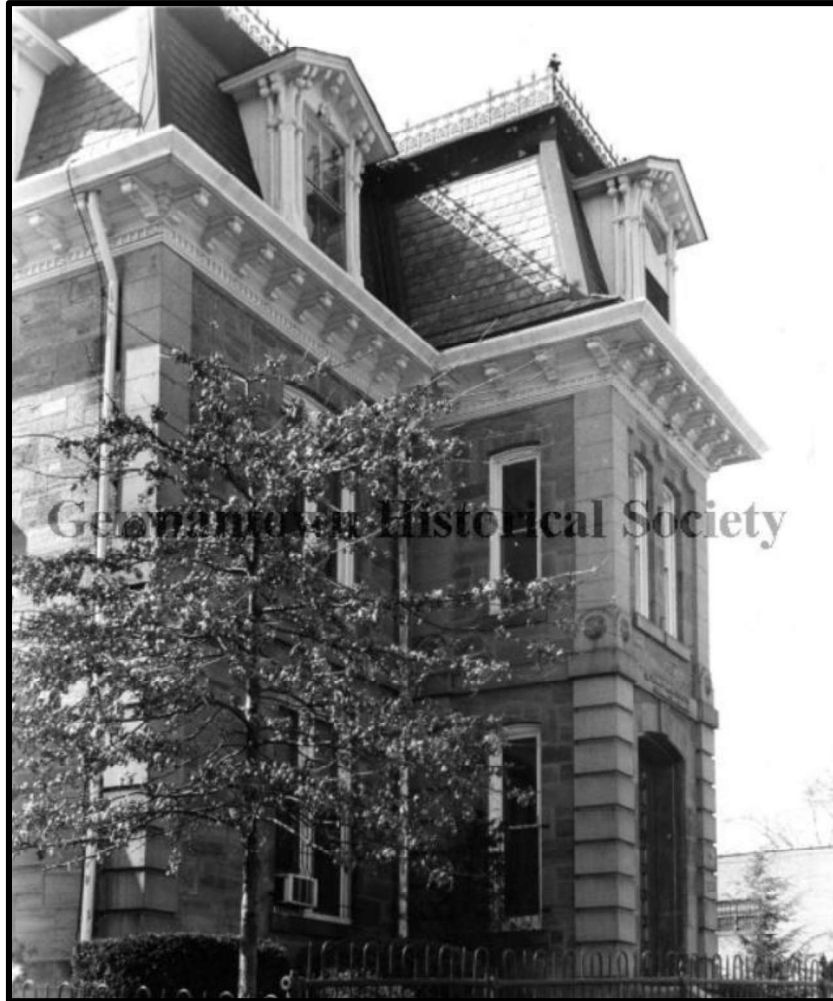


Figure 33. Top: The Germantown Music Settlement. Source: The Germantown Historical Society. Figure 34. Bottom: The Steamboat House, Mt. Airy, ca. 1900. Source: The Germantown Historical Society.

Prosperous families followed the villa model as an established fashionable statement in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. One example stands at the corner of East Johnson and Morton Streets—originally owned by the Cummings family, it was later the residence

of J. Henry Dunn (Figure 35). This house features a Mansard roof with dormers and a full veranda.<sup>22</sup>



Figure 35. “Residence of J. Henry Dunn” at the corner of E. Johnson and Morton Streets (1910). Source: The Germantown Historical Society.

Similar versions of the detached house or villa may be found throughout the German Township at the following addresses: 5321 Knox Street, Germantown (ca.1875); the Emory House at 14 Summit Street, Chestnut Hill (ca.1862); and the John Allen House at 314 Wister Street, Germantown (ca.1870). A narrower version of this house type, much similar to the aforementioned commercial examples, stand at the following addresses: 11 W. Walnut Lane, Germantown (ca.1860); 114 W. Coulter, Germantown (ca.1880); 348 W. Allens Lane, Chestnut Hill (ca.1870); 410 E. Locust Avenue, Germantown (ca.1875); 6115 McCallum Street, Germantown (ca.1875); 6119 McCallum Street, Germantown (ca.1875); 6121 McCallum Street, Germantown (ca.1875); 6845 Germantown Avenue, Mount Airy (ca.1875).<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>22</sup> Photograph: “Residence of J. Henry Dunn” at the corner of E. Johnson and Morton Streets. (1910) Source: The Germantown Historical Society.

<sup>23</sup> Joseph Minardi. *Historic Architecture in Northwest Philadelphia*. (Schiffer Publishing, Limited, 2012).





Figure 36. The Rev. George Bringhurst House at 524 Locust Avenue, which is one side of a Second Empire style twin. Source: Wyck House & Garden.

Semi-detached twin dwellings are also among the common house types in the area, often executed in the Second Empire style. The deceptive designs of many twins represent the appearance of a single house that upon closer inspection have two entrances, often symmetrically placed bay windows, porches, and other features. The following are examples of the Second Empire style as applied to twins in the area: 500-06-508, 501-05-507, and 522-524 Locust Avenue, Germantown (Figure 36); 311-313, 319-321, and 327-329 E. Walnut Lane, Germantown; 324-326 Springfield Avenue, Chestnut Hill (1886); 330-332 Springfield Avenue, Chestnut Hill (1886); 202-204 and 210-212 High Street, Germantown; 34-36 and 42-44 W. Coulter Street, Germantown; 120-122 W. Penn Street, Germantown (ca.1875); and 51-53 W. Walnut Lane, Germantown (ca.1860). These are just a few of countless examples of Second Empire style twins in Germantown.<sup>24</sup>

The second half of the nineteenth century saw entire streets developed with twin houses featuring Mansard roofs, such as Maplewood Avenue and Wingohocking Terrace. Row houses too were also designed in the Second Empire style and many more simply employed Mansardic roof features. Early examples include: 4857-61 Germantown Avenue, Germantown (ca.1870); and a row of houses in E. School House Lane, Germantown.<sup>25</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Joseph Minardi. *Historic Architecture in Northwest Philadelphia*. (Schiffer Publishing, Limited, 2012).

<sup>25</sup> Joseph Minardi. *Historic Architecture in Northwest Philadelphia*. (Schiffer Publishing, Limited, 2012).





Figure 37. Showing the intended glimpse of middle to upper middle-class grandeur of the period, this unidentified Second Empire style twin was likely in Germantown, ca.1860-70s. Source: The Germantown Historical Society.

## 8. BIBLIOGRAPHY

### MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHIC REFERENCES

- “A Philadelphia Newspaper Establishment,” *Scientific American* (1845-1908). (New York: 6 July 1867), 10.
- Advertisement Card: “Hagar & Campbell’s Dime Museum, Ninth & Arch Sts. Opens Monday September 3d. 1883.” (The Stobridge Lithograph Co., 1883). Source: The Library Company of Philadelphia.
- Charles Rappleye. *Robert Morris: Financier of the American Revolution*. (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2010).
- “Company History,” The Philadelphia Contributionship. Accessed 25 January 2017. <http://www.contributionship.com/history/tour.html>
- Deed: William Rotch Wister of the City of Philadelphia, Attorney at Law and Mary E., his wife, to James Kinnier, William Kinnier, and Alexander Kinnier of the City of Philadelphia, House Carpenters, 15 July 1870, Philadelphia Deed Book J.A.H., No. 77, 74, City Archives of Philadelphia.
- Deed: William Rotch Wister of the City of Philadelphia, Attorney at Law and Mary E., his wife, to Job Kirby, of the City of Philadelphia, House Carpenter, 19 March 1870, Philadelphia Deed Book J.A.H., No. 29, 264, City Archives of Philadelphia.
- Dr. Naaman H. Keyser, C. Henry Kain, John Palmer Garber, and Horace F. McCann. *History of Old Germantown*. (Germantown, Philadelphia: Horace F. McCann, Publisher, 1907), 164-65.
- Joseph Minardi. *Historic Architecture in Northwest Philadelphia*. (Schiffer Publishing, Limited, 2012).
- “M. Thomas & Sons. Auctioneers,” *Legal Gazette*. (15 May 1874), 160.
- National Register of Historic Places Nomination: The Ebenezer Maxwell Mansion*. (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission, 24 February 1971).
- Oscar Beisert. *Philadelphia Register of Historic Places Nomination: 4300-03 Osage Avenue*. (Philadelphia: Oscar Beisert, 2015).
- Oscar Beisert. *Philadelphia Register of Historic Places Nomination: 4841 Germantown Ave*. (Philadelphia: Keeping Society of Philadelphia, 2022).
- Reg. Plan: 54-N-B-18-A, City Archives of Philadelphia.
- Russ F. Weigley (editor). *Philadelphia: A 300-Year History*. (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1982).
- Samuel Fitch Hotchkin. *Ancient and Modern Mt. Airy and Chestnut Hill*. (Philadelphia: P.W. Ziegler & Co., 1889), 353.
- “Second Empire/Mansard Style,” Pennsylvania Architectural Field Guide, accessed January 24, 2017. <http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/portal/communities/architecture/styles/second-empire.html>
- Virginia & Lee McAlester. *A Field Guide To American Houses*. (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1998), 240-243.
- Walter L. Fleming. *Documentary History of Reconstruction: Political, Military, Social, Religious, Educational, and Industrial, Vol. 2*. (1906), 1-20.