

424 E WOODLAWN ST

Name of Resource: Smith-Steel-Humphreys House

Proposed Action: Designation

Property Owner: 424 E Woodlawn LLC

Nominator: Oscar Beisert

Staff Contact: Allyson Mehley, allyson.mehley@phila.gov

OVERVIEW: This nomination proposes to designate the property at 424 E. Woodlawn Street and list it on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The nomination contends that the property, known as “Smith-Steel-Humphreys House,” satisfies Criteria for Designation A and J. The nomination states that the property satisfies Criterion A, owing to its significant character, interest, and value as part of the development of the Borough of Germantown, during a period in which it was transformed from a German village to one of the premier suburbs of Philadelphia. It is noted under Criterion A that 424 E. Woodlawn Street is also significant for its longtime association with Phebe Remington Westcott Humphreys (1864-1939), an important and prolific female author, “garden tastemaker,” horticulturist, journalist, and photographer, who occupied the subject house from 1894 to 1939. The nomination also contends satisfaction under Criterion J, as the Smith-Steel-Humphreys House is representative of early suburban, Romantic-era style dwelling types that served prosperous and often prominent Philadelphia families during the third and fourth quarters of the nineteenth century. The proposed period of significance for Criteria A and J is from the time of construction in 1850 through to the occupancy of Phebe Westcott Humphreys in 1939.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The staff recommends that the nomination demonstrates the proposed historic district satisfies Criteria for Designation A and J.



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: **424 E. Woodlawn Street**

Postal code: **19144**

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: **Smith-Steel-Humphreys House aka Phebe Westcott Humphreys House**

Current Name: **NA**

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: Unknown

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): **1850-1939**

Date(s) of construction: **ca.1850-52 to 1939**

Architects: **Unknown**

Builders: **Unknown**

Original owners: **Charles H. Shoemaker, II (Developer)**

Significant person: **Phebe Westcott Humphreys**

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: **424 E. Woodlawn LLC**

Author: **Oscar Beisert, Architectural Historian**

Date: **5 February 2023**

Address: **424 E. Woodlawn Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19144**

EMAIL: **ALEXABERLE@ME.COM**

Nominator is is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: February 5, 2024

Correct-Complete Incorrect-Incomplete Date: March 7, 2024

Date of Notice Issuance: March 7, 2024

Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: 424 E Woodlawn LLC

Address: 6767 Germantown Avenue

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19119

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: April 17, 2024

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: May 10, 2024

Date of Final Action: _____

Designated Rejected

NOMINATION
FOR THE
PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES



Figure 1. The Smith-Steel-Humphreys House, 424 E. Woodlawn Avenue, Primary (Northwest) Elevations. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2022.

THE SMITH-STEEL-HUMPHREYS HOUSE
AKA THE PHEBE WESCOTT HUMPHREYS HOUSE

ERECTED CA. 1850-52
MOVED CA. 1885-89

424 E. WOODLAWN AVENUE
GERMANTOWN
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

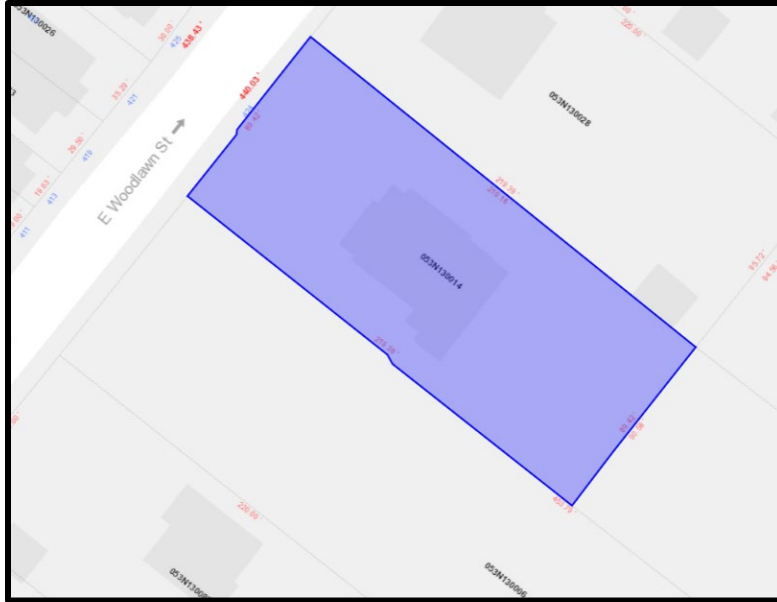


Figure 2. The boundary for the proposed designation is delineated in blue. Source: Atlas, City of Philadelphia.

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundary for the proposed designation is as follows:

Located one hundred and forty-seven feet or thereabouts from the east side of Morton Street, the boundary begins at the west corner of the subject property, known as 424 E. Woodlawn Street, extending to the northeast 89.42 feet along the southeast side of Woodlawn Street to the north corner of the subject property, turning 90 degrees to the southeast, extending in that direction for 220 feet to the east corner of the subject property, turning 90 degrees to the southwest, extending in that direction for 95.72 feet to the south corner of the subject property, turning 90 degrees to the northwest, extending in that direction for 219.39' to the point and place of beginning.



Figure 3. The Smith-Steel-Humphreys House, 424 E. Woodlawn Avenue, Primary (Northwest) Elevation. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2023.

6. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The Smith-Steel-Humphreys House at 424 E. Woodlawn Avenue is a two-and-one-half-story frame cottage that stands on a large lot in the Germantown neighborhood of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

While untended for many decades, the setting of the subject house is a large suburban lot, measuring 89.42 feet in front by 219.36 feet in depth, which extends from the southeast side of E. Woodlawn Street. The houses on this side of the street are all similarly sited, retaining the sense of place associated with a nineteenth-century suburb. The street frontage features an old sidewalk of herringbone brick and the remains of a nineteenth-century hairpin fence and iron gate posts. The house is accessed by a brick sidewalk that extends roughly 70 feet from the street to the subject building. A driveway extends from E. Woodlawn Street near the north corner of the property to the rear of the lot. The site is downhill from a similarly sized lot on E. Locust Avenue.

The Smith-Steel-Humphreys House is comprised of three volumes: the main block, the rear brick addition, and the rear frame addition. The main block is a two-and-one-half-story frame structure. The rear addition is a two-story brick building. The rear frame addition is a one-story structure, which appears to have been a porch that was later enclosed. At the southwest end of the rear addition is the remains of a solarium, which was built early in the Humphreys period of ownership after 1894. The main block is a Romantic-era house of the Gothic Revival and Italianate styles with an oversized gable-front dormer addition within the main roofline. This volume is of frame construction with a stucco finish set upon a foundation of rubble stone. The primary (northwest) elevation features the base of a full-width front porch, which is supported by a foundation of brick

piers and posts. Historically, the porch featured a roof that was supported by double Doric columns that rested upon the said brick plinths and posts. The porch includes a set of steps of a generous width at the center that are set upon brick footings. The porch extends to the side of the house, along the southwest elevation. These improvements were made by the Humphreys.



Figure 4. Top: Looking southeast, the Smith-Steel-Humphreys House, on right, in the context of the 400 block of E. Woodlawn Street. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2023. Figure 5. Bottom: Looking northwest, the Smith-Steel-Humphreys House, on left, in the context of the 400 block of E. Woodlawn Street.



Figure 6. The Smith-Steel-Humphreys House, 424 E. Woodlawn Street, Primary (Northwest) and Side (Northeast) Elevations. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2023.

The primary (northwest) elevation of the main volume is a symmetrical fenestration that is three bays in width. The primary entrance is situated at the center, featuring a single, replacement door with original sidelights and a four-part transom. All but the door appears to be original wooden fabric. The central entrance is flanked by two windows, featuring four-over-four wooden sash units that appear to be original. The architraves also appear to be original. Rising above the front door is a mullion window comprised of two round-arched openings, a pairing of apertures that was occasionally employed in Italianate houses. The central opening is flanked by two windows, which appear to contain replacement units. The side gable roof is interrupted at the center of the primary (northwest) elevation by an oversized gable-front projection that extends from the main roofline in the form of a gambrel roof. This Colonial Revival style addition features a Palladian window, which appears to have replacement units in each of the three openings. The large gable-front addition features a simple wooden cornice with small dentils. This cornice extends to the northeast and southwest along the primary (northwest) elevation. The roof of the gable-front addition is clad in slate. The gambrel projection and the cornice appear to have been added during the Humphrey period of ownership after 1894.



Figure 7. Top: A photograph by Phebe Westcott Humphreys of her plants on the brick supports of the front steps of the subject house in 1905. Source: Phebe Westcott Humphreys Collection, HSP. Figure 8. Bottom: The brick supports of the front steps to the subject house, as shown in the 1905 photograph.



Figure 9. The Smith-Steel-Humphreys House, 424 E. Woodlawn Street, Side (Northeast) Elevation of the Main Block. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2023.

The side (northeast) elevation of the main volume is set beneath the main roof, extending two bays in width. This elevation features the original symmetrical fenestration. The first floor is served by two windows with original four-over-four wooden sash units. A pedestrian door has been cut into this elevation near the east corner of the main block, which is accessed by a long wooden ramp. The second floor features two windows that rise above those on the first floor, featuring replacement units. A two-part mullion window is situated in the third, half-story, which features original four-light casement sashes set within original wooden architraves. This third-floor opening features a segmental arch, which was a popular motif during the Gothic Revival period. The roofline projects over this elevation but is unadorned.



Figure 10. The Smith-Steel-Humphreys House, 424 E. Woodlawn Street, Side (Southwest) Elevation of the Main Block. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2023.

The side (southwest) elevation of the main block is also set beneath the main roof structure, extending two bays in width. This elevation features the original symmetrical fenestration. At the center of the elevation is a replacement brick chimney stack that likely dates to the mid-twentieth century. The masonry stack is flanked by a single window on each side. The first-floor windows feature original four-over-four wooden sash units. The second floor also features two openings, the northerly of which is served by a replacement unit. The southerly opening is served by an original four-over-four wooden sash unit. The roofline projects over this elevation but is also unadorned. The brick foundation of a full-width side porch serves this end of the building and appears to connect to the front porch.



Figure 11. The Smith-Steel-Humphreys House, 424 E. Woodlawn Street, Rear (Southeast) and Side (Northeast) Elevations of the Rear Brick and Rear Frame Additions. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2023.

The rear addition is a two-story brick structure that extends the full width of the main block. From the rear (southeast) elevation, the brick addition spans three bays and features a flat roof, which is differentiated from the brick façade by a heavy wooden cornice. The side (northeast) elevation of the rear addition features two openings on the ground floor, including a multi-light door and a single window. A single window opening serves the second floor. All appear to have replacement units. The rear (southeast) elevation of the rear addition is three bays in width, which is only visible on the second floor, as the first floor is obscured by the rear frame addition. From the southwest to the northeast, the second floor includes a single window with an original four-over-four wooden sash unit; and two two-part mullion windows with replacement units. This elevation is set beneath a projecting wooden cornice. The side (southwest) elevation of the rear brick addition is obscured by a small two-story porch that continues the same heavy wooden cornice, which was added during the Humphreys period of ownership. The porch posts have been replaced, though the brick piers appear to be original.



Figure 12. The Smith-Steel-Humphreys House, 424 E. Woodlawn Street, Rear (Southeast) Elevation of the Rear Brick and Rear Frame Additions. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2023.

The rear frame addition may have been built as an open porch that was later enclosed. It is clad in faux siding. The side (northeast) elevation features two openings, one window and a door. The window retains an original two-over-two wooden sash unit. The rear (southeast) elevation of the features seven openings. From the northeast to the southwest, the fenestration contains two windows with original two-over-two wooden sash units; an early wooden door—with three panels at the bottom and a four-light opening at the top; two additional windows with replacement units; an additional door—a four-panel wooden door that dates to the mid-nineteenth century; and a two-part mullion window with replacement units. The side (southwest) elevation features a solarium that dates to the Humphreys period of ownership. The solarium is comprised of multi-light windows, essentially forming three sash walls.



Figure 13. Top: The side (southwest) and rear (southeast) elevations of the solarium of the subject building. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2024. Figure 14. Bottom left: Looking east at the two-story porch and the solarium of the subject house. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2024. Figure 15. Bottom right: The side (southwest) elevation of the solarium of the subject house. Source: Oscar Beisert.



Figure 16. Left: The primary (northwest) and side (southwest) elevations of the subject house in 1905, taken by Phebe Westcott Humphreys. Source: Phebe Westcott Humphreys Collection, HSP. Figure 17. Right: The primary (northwest) and side (southwest) elevations of the subject house. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2024.



Figure 18. The suburban streetscape of the Smith-Steel-Humphreys House at 424 E. Woodlawn Street with the Gibson House in the background. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2023.

7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Smith-Steel-Humphreys House at 424 E. Woodlawn Street in the Germantown neighborhood of Philadelphia is a significant historic resource that merits designation by the Philadelphia Historical Commission and inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The building satisfies the following Criteria for Designation as enumerated in Section 14-1004 of the Philadelphia Code:

- 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 a person significant in the past; and*
- j) *Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.*

The period of significance for the subject property dates to the time of construction in ca.1850-52 through the occupancy of Phebe Westcott Humphreys in 1939.

CRITERIA A AND J

The Smith-Steel-Humphreys House at 424 E. Woodlawn Avenue has significant character, interest, and value as part of the development of the Borough of Germantown, during a period in which it was transformed from a German Village to one of the premier suburbs of Philadelphia, satisfying

Criterion A. The Smith-Steel-Humphreys House is representative of early suburban, Romantic-era style dwelling types that served prosperous and often prominent Philadelphia families during the third and fourth quarters of the nineteenth century, satisfying Criterion J.

CRITERIA A AND J: HISTORIC CONTEXT AND SUMMARY

The subject property is located in a mid-nineteenth-century suburban neighborhood, which was developed as “Linden Place.”¹ For much of its history, the parcel was associated with frontage on Wingohocking Creek and an associated mill building that was used for various industrial purposes over the years. In 1763, this parcel and all the properties on the 400 blocks of both E. Woodlawn Street and E. Locust Avenue were part of a larger 23-acre tract that was purchased by Jacob Coleman, who had obtained the “Old Fulling Mill” and the said acreage from Moses Hall.² After roughly sixteen years, Coleman sold the property to George Bringhurst in 1779, who also owned an adjacent 13.75-acre tract.³ In 1794, the “Old Fulling Mill” became known as the “Chocolate and Powder Mills.”⁴ This mill building would later be repurposed as a cowshed, serving a private residence.



Figure 19. The vicinity of “Linden Place,” including the future site of E. Locust Avenue and E. Woodlawn Street, as it appeared in 1851. Source: Map of the Township of Germantown, Philadelphia County, Penna., 1851.

Nevertheless, the story of the subject property began in 1848 when the larger tract was purchased by Charles H. Shoemaker, II, of Cheltenham Township, and Robert H. Thomas of Germantown from the Franklin Fire Insurance Company (FFIC).⁵ Between 1848 and 1850, Shoemaker and Thomas subdivided their 1848 FFIC purchase, which was done according to a survey completed by Thomas, who planned and surveyed many of the suburban streets in Germantown. This process appears to have been completed by March 1850, when Thomas conveyed certain subdivided lots

¹ “The Ancient Hills of Germantown, A Tribute of Appreciation of Local Heights, Part XIX, Wingohocking Hill (Continued),” *Germantown Guide*, 16 June 1921.

² Woodlawn Street was originally known as Woodbine Avenue.

³ Mapping West Philadelphia Landowners in 1777, University of Pennsylvania Archives.

⁴ “The Ancient Hills of Germantown, A Tribute of Appreciation of Local Heights, Part XIX, Wingohocking Hill (Continued),” *Germantown Guide*, 16 June 1921.

⁵ Deed: Robert H. Thomas to Charles H. Shoemaker, 13 March 1850, Philadelphia Deed Book G.W.C., No. 52, p. 341. Source: City Archives of Philadelphia (CAP).

to Shoemaker. Between 1850 and 1852, Shoemaker commissioned the subject house, a suburban cottage of frame construction, which first stood at 461 E. Locust Avenue. With the newly created lots and houses came restrictions on future development along both E. Woodlawn Street and E. Locust Avenue, including a required forty-foot setback and limitations to one single-family dwelling per lot. As previously stated, this new suburban development was known as “Linden Place,” which generally included Church Lane and Locust Avenue between Morton Street at the west and Chew Avenue at the east. The area also included sections of Magnolia and Woodlawn Streets.

In November 1852, Shoemaker sold the property at 461 E. Locust Avenue, including the subject house, to Dr. Theodore S. Williams for \$3,500.⁶ Less than two years later, in 1854, Dr. Williams sold the property at 461 E. Locust Avenue, including the subject house, to Edmund Smith, a Civil Engineer, of Philadelphia for \$5,000.⁷



Figure 20. Edmund Smith. Source: “Edmund Smith Dead,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1 August 1895, 1.

The residents of “Linden Place” were largely of prominent and wealthy stock, and the occupants of the subject house were no exception. The first longtime owner, Edmund Smith (1829-1895),

⁶ Deed: Charles H. Shoemaker, et. al., to Theodore S. Williams, 23 November 1852, Philadelphia Deed Book T.H., No. 47, p. 370. Source: CAP.

⁷ Deed: Theodore S. Williams, et. al., to Edmund Smith, 1 May 1854, Philadelphia Deed Book T.H., NO. 140, p.571. Source: CAP.

spent more than forty years as an employee of the Pennsylvania Railroad Company (P.R.R.). Smith was in his late teens when on June 1, 1847, he entered employment with the P.R.R. According to *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, at the time of his death, “Mr. Smith was one of the few officers or employees of the company who were in its service when the line was laid out.” As an engineer, he first worked “on the engineering corps that surveyed, located, and constructed the road from Huntingdon to the summit of the Allegheny Mountains.”⁸ By the 1850s, Smith was moving up the corporate ladder in Philadelphia. After leading the construction of the P.R.R.’s shops and freight and passenger stations, he was elected Secretary of the P.R.R. in 1855. His ascension included Third Vice President in May 1869; Treasurer in March 1873; and Second Vice President in June 1874. On September 13, 1882, he succeeded Alexander J. Cassatt as First Vice President, a position he held until his retirement in June 1888. It was during his time rising in the ranks of the P.R.R. that Smith purchased the subject house, at which time he was married to Arabella Barnes Smith (1827-1898) with whom he had five children.⁹ Edmund Smith and his family represent the type of professionals and their associated families that settled in prominent suburbs like “Linden Place” in Germantown, satisfying Criterion J.

TRUST AND SAFE DEPOSIT COMPANY.

THE PENNSYLVANIA COMPANY
FOR
INSURANCES ON LIVES AND GRANTING ANNUITIES
No. 431 CHESTNUT STREET.

INCORPORATED MARCH 10, 1812—CHARTER PERPETUAL.

CAPITAL.....	\$2,000,000
SURPLUS.....	\$1,000,000

Chartered to act as Executors, Administrators, Trustees, Guardians, Assignees, Committees, Receivers, Agents, etc.; and for the faithful performance of all such duties all its Capital and Surplus are liable.

All Trust Investments are inscribed in the names of the owners of the property held in trust and are kept separate and apart from the assets of the Company.

INCOME COLLECTED AND REMITTED. INTEREST ALLOWED ON MONEY DEPOSITS. SAFES IN THEIR BURGLAR-PROOF VAULTS FOR RENT.

The protection of their vaults for the preservation of wills offered gratuitously. Gold and silver plate, deeds, mortgages, &c., received for safe keeping under guarantee.

LINDLEY SMYTH, President
JARVIS MASON, Trust Officer.

LILBURN H. STEEL, Secretary and Treasurer.

DIRECTORS:

Lindley Smyth,	Alexander Biddle,	Anthony J. Antelo,
Charles Dutilh,	J. B. Lippincott,	Charles S. Lewis,
William S. Vaux,	Chas. H. Hutchinson,	Henry Lewis,
Adolph E. Borie,	George A. Wood,	Jacob P. Jones,
	Henry M. Phillips,	

Figure 21. An advertisement for The Pennsylvania Company, *The Philadelphia Times*, 17 May 1875, 3.

⁸ “Edmund Smith Dead,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1 August 1895, 1.

⁹ The family of Edmund Smith is enumerated with the appropriate records in the Barnes_Doughty_Roy_Ward_Family_Trees of Ancestry.com.

After fourteen years, in August 1868, Smith sold the property at 461 E. Locust Avenue, including the subject house, to Lilburn H. Steel for \$7,500.¹⁰ In the same way as the previous owner, Lilburn Harwood Steel (1828-1885) was highly placed in an important Philadelphia institution, which afforded him with the resources to purchase the subject house. Steel was the son of Canby Steel and Amelia Pierson, the former being an official in the Farmers and Mechanics Bank. Steel was a longtime employee of the Pennsylvania Company for Insurance on Lives and Granting Annuities (The Pennsylvania Company), the first life insurance company in America. During his tenure, the Pennsylvania Company shifted from an insurance company to a bank and trust company.¹¹ By the time the subject house was purchased, Steel worked in the “clerical department” of The Pennsylvania Company.¹² By 1874, he was serving as Treasurer, one of four officers.¹³ Just one year later, Steel was serving as Secretary and Treasurer of The Pennsylvania Company.¹⁴ He would retain this position until April 1885, when he suffered a paralytic stroke. While there was initially some hope for a full recovery, a second paralytic stroke led to Steel’s death on Saturday, May 23, 1885, in the subject house, where his funeral was held on Wednesday, May 27.¹⁵

Upon purchasing the subject house in 1868, Steel was newly married to Susanna “Sue” Hagy Roberts (1837-1922), the daughter of Spencer Roberts (1811-1885) and Elizabeth Yerkes Hagy (1813-1842)—the proprietors and operators of Roberts’ Mill.¹⁶ Sue Steel was reared near the subject house on Church Lane—then known as Mill Street, where her family lived next to the ancient mill. The 1870 United States Federal Census records the Steels at 461 E. Locust Avenue, a household which included: Milburn H. Steel, age 41; Susann a Steel, age 32; George P. Steel, age twelve; Helen Steel, age two; Canby Steel, six months of age; Catharine Rogers, age thirty; and Mary O’Neil, age fourteen.¹⁷ Of the three children mentioned, the oldest, George P. Steel, was the product of Lilburn H. Steel’s first marriage to Jane Ann Leedom (1830-1862).

¹⁰ Deed: Edmund Smith, et. al., to Lilburn H. Steel, 6 August 1868, Philadelphia Deed Book J.T.O., No. 164, p.496. Source: CAP.

¹¹ “Pennsylvania Company for Insurance on Lives and Granting Annuities.” Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Accessed on 25 January 2024. <[Pennsylvania Company for Insurances on Lives and Granting Annuities | exhibits.hsp.org](https://www.hsp.org/exhibits.hsp.org)>

¹² “An Improvement. A Granite Edifice on Chestnut Street for the Pennsylvania Company for Insurance on Lives and Granting Annuities.” *The Evening Telegraph*, 6 April 1871, 8.

¹³ *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 24 February 1874, 6.

¹⁴ *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 5 May 1875, 3.

¹⁵ “Obituary.” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 27 May 1885, 4.

¹⁶ Ancestry.com. *Geneanet Community Trees Index* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2022.

¹⁷ Ancestry.com. *1870 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2009. Images reproduced by FamilySearch.

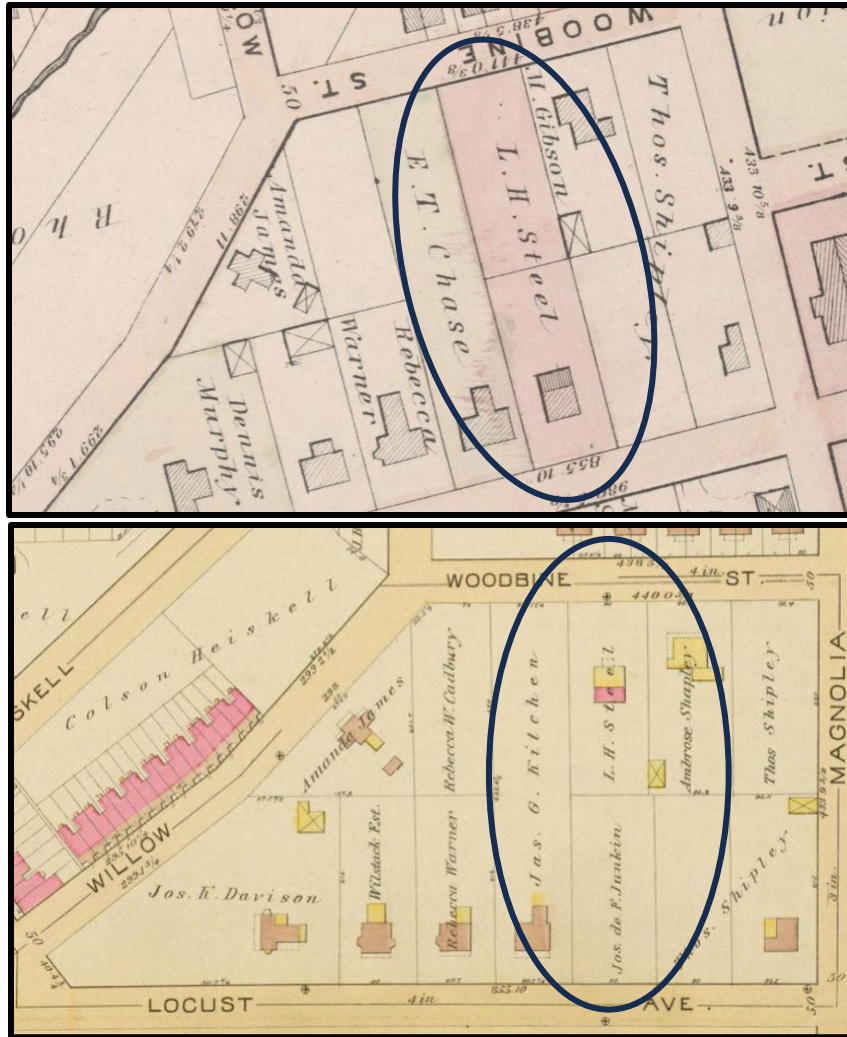


Figure 22. Top: The Smith-Steel-Humphreys House at 461 E. Locust Avenue in the 1876 Hopkins Atlas. Source: City Atlas of Philadelphia, 22nd Ward, 1876, Plate S, via Free Library of Philadelphia. Figure 23. Bottom: The Smith-Steel-Humphreys House at 424 E. Woodlawn Avenue in the 1889 Bromley Atlas. Source: Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, Volume 7, 22nd Ward, 1889, via Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network.

After the untimely death of her husband, Sue Steel appears to have faced financial challenges, resulting in the sale of the property at 461 E. Locust Avenue to Joseph de F. Junkin on October 4, 1886, at which time the property where her husband had died was essentially described as a vacant lot.¹⁸ It appears that the subject house was moved northwest to an adjacent lot at 424 E. Woodlawn Street—the subject property. The footprint of the subject house is illustrated in G.M. Hopkins’ Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, 22nd Ward, Plate S in 1876. This shows a footprint of a dwelling that is akin to the main block and the rear brick addition of the subject house when it stood at 461 E. Locust Avenue. The precise footprint is illustrated again in Geo. W. and Walter S. Bromley’s Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, Volume 7, 22nd Ward in 1889, when the subject building stood at 424 E. Woodlawn Street. The likeness of the two building footprints is identical. Additionally, the main block and the rear brick addition form an unusual combination given that both structures are

¹⁸ Deed: Suzanna R. Steel to Joseph de F. Junkin, 4 October 1886, Philadelphia Deed Book G.G.P., No. 195, p.290. Source: CAP.

of the same width, as most rear additions to houses in Philadelphia are narrower than the main volume.

Woodlawn Street is a thoroughfare that starts and stops in various places on the east side of Germantown Avenue. The subject portion is one block in length between Morton and Magnolia Streets. It was originally developed as Woodbine Avenue, as it was known during the Steel family's time in Germantown. The street was opened and developed as part of the aforementioned partnership between Shoemaker and Thomas. When the Steels took ownership of the property at 461 E. Locust Avenue, they also purchased the subject property from William H. Rotan, a wharf builder, of Philadelphia, for \$1,250 on November 30, 1868. At the time of purchase, the subject property was essentially described as a vacant lot.¹⁹ The ownership and residency of the Steel family speak to the economic, social, and historical heritage of Germantown, satisfying Criterion J.

The subject property remained in the Steel family until December 29, 1890, when Sue Steel sold it to Isaac Kiker, a mutton butcher on Chew Avenue, for \$1,000, it being subject to a mortgage.²⁰ Kiker's tenure of ownership extended to September 4, 1894, when it was transferred to Thomas Bradley. The next month, on October 29, 1894, Bradley sold the subject property to Phebe W. Humphreys, the wife of S. Walter Humphreys.²¹ The property would remain in the Humphreys family until 1941.

¹⁹ Deed: William H. Rotan to Lilburn H. Steel, 30 November 1868, Philadelphia Deed Book J.T.O., No. 196, p.257. Source: CAP.

²⁰ Deed: Susanna R. Steel to Isaac Kiker, 29 December 1890, Philadelphia Deed Book G.G.P., No.706, p.520. Source: CAP.

²¹ Reg. Plan No. 53-N-B-13-A. Source: New Historical Index, Department of Records, City of Philadelphia.



Figure 24. Phebe Westcott Humphreys collecting specimens. Source: Phebe Westcott Humphreys. “Studying Poetry with a Camera,” *The Booklovers*, June 1903, 71-72.

CRITERION A

The Smith-Steel-Humphreys House—or the Phebe Westcott Humphreys House—is significant for its longtime association with Phebe Remington Westcott Humphreys (1864-1939), an important and prolific female author, “garden tastemaker,” horticulturist, journalist, and photographer, who occupied the subject house from 1894 to 1939. She researched, wrote, and published more than 400 articles on various subjects, including landscape architecture and gardening. Among her publications were several books, the most important of which was *The Practical Book of Garden Architecture* in 1914. In recent years, she has been named a “Pioneer” by The Cultural Landscape Foundation.²²

²² “Sophie Westcott Humphreys, Pioneer Information,” The Cultural Landscape Foundation, <[Phebe Westcott Humphreys | TCLF](#)> Accessed on 26 January 2024.

Humphreys was a pioneer in writing and journalism for landscape architecture and gardening in a period in which women were just establishing a foothold in an industry that had previously been entirely dominated by men. One of the most important women to make strides in this field was Beatrix Farrand (1872-1959), who became one of America's most celebrated landscape architects. A contemporary of Humphreys, Farrand was "renowned for the private estate gardens she designed for East Coast society as well as her work as a landscape consultant at some of the country's most prestigious private universities and colleges. Dumbarton Oaks, the Abby Aldrich Rockefeller Garden (Maine), and the old campus at Princeton University are among her most visible masterpieces today."²³ A contemporary of both Humphreys and Farrand, Mary B. Coulston (1855-1904), a native of Philadelphia, was an early female editor, becoming involved in landscape architecture in 1887, when she became an editorial assistant for *Garden and Forest*. She would remain in the field for many years, serving in various roles.²⁴

The following women were contemporaries of Humphreys: Marian Cruger Coffin (1876-1957), a landscape architect; Julia Lester Dillion (1871-1959), a landscape designer; Alice Earle (1851-1911), author; Helena Rutherford Ely (1858-1920), author of *A Woman's Hardy Garden*; Harriet Risley Foote (1863-1951), author, journalist, and gardener; Jane Bowne Haines (1869-1937), founder of the Garden Club of Philadelphia and co-founder of the School of Horticulture for Women; Mary Rutherford Jay (1872-1953), garden architect; Louisa Yeomans King (1863-1948), a leading figure in the garden club movement; Annette McCrea (1858-1928), a pioneer in civic landscape; Rose Standish Nichols (1872-1960), author and garden designer; Frances Griscom Parsons (1850-1923), a leader in the national garden school movement; Elsa Rehma (1886-1946), author; Edna Augusta Sutermeister (1878-1929), landscape architect; and Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer (1851-1934), author. This fairly short, yet somewhat comprehensive list of Humphreys' contemporaries illustrates the importance of these women in the field of landscape architecture and gardening, which included Phebe Westcott Humphreys.

Phebe Westcott Humphreys was an important female figure in the realm of landscape architecture and design as a writer and journalist in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, satisfying Criterion A.

²³ "Beatrix Farrand, Pioneer Information," The Cultural Landscape Foundation, <[BeatrixFarrand | TCLF](#)> Accessed on 26 January 2024.

²⁴ "Mary B. Coulston, Pioneer Information," The Cultural Landscape Foundation, <[MaryBCoulston | TCLF](#)> Accessed on 26 January 2024.

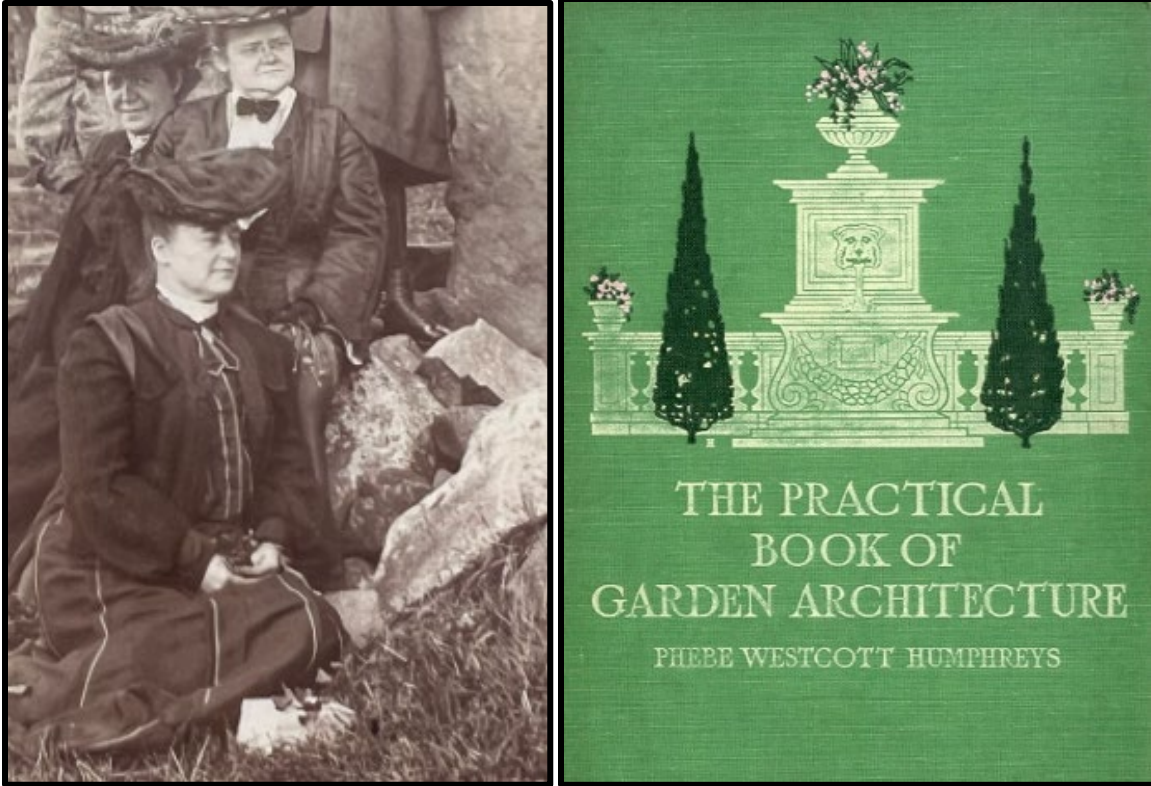


Figure 25. Left: Phebe Westcott Humphreys with a tour group. Source: Phebe Westcott Humphreys Collection, HSP. Figure 26. Right: The cover of *The Practical Book of Garden Architecture* by Phebe Westcott Humphreys. Source: Ebay.

HISTORIC CONTEXT: PHEBE REMINGTON WESTCOTT HUMPHREYS (1864-1939)

Born on January 28, 1864 near Greenwich, New Jersey, Phebe Remington Westcott Humphreys was the daughter of Enos Westcott (1835-1865), a farmer, metalsmith, and shopkeeper, and Lydia Martha Mason Westcott (1837-1931).²⁵ After the untimely death of her father in 1865, Lydia Mason Westcott remarried Ephraim Bacon, a farmer, which led her daughter to be raised in a large, blended family.²⁶ Phebe Westcott studied at the South Jersey Institute, a private high school, and, eventually, at the Philadelphia School of Design for Women—later renamed Moore College of Art & Design.²⁷

About 1887, Phebe Westcott married Samuel Walter Humphreys (1864-1932), a food manufacturer, who was born and raised in Philadelphia by Samuel Humphreys and Margaret Freed Humphreys.²⁸ In 1889, they had their only child: Westcott Humphreys.²⁹ According to The

²⁵ Ancestry.com. *New Jersey, U.S., Births and Christenings Index, 1660-1931* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2011.

²⁶ Ancestry.com. *1870 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2009. Images reproduced by FamilySearch.

²⁷ “Sophie Westcott Humphreys, Pioneer Information,” The Cultural Landscape Foundation, <[Phebe Westcott Humphreys | TCLF](#)> Accessed on 26 January 2024.

²⁸ Ancestry.com. *Pennsylvania, U.S., Death Certificates, 1906-1970* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2014.

²⁹ Ancestry.com. *1900 United States Federal Census* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2004.

Cultural Landscape Foundation, Phebe Westcott Humphreys began writing about garden and landscape design in the early 1890s for periodicals, including *Harper's Bazaar*, *House Beautiful*, and *House and Garden*. This would lead to more than 400 articles, including features and columns, bearing her byline, as well as her photography.³⁰



Figure 27. A photograph of the garden of the subject property, likely taken by Phebe Westcott Humphreys. Source: Phebe Westcott Humphreys Collection, HSP.

In 1894, Phebe Westcott Humphreys purchased the subject property, where she would live until the time of her death in 1939. It was here that she and her husband raised their son. She also used the grounds of the subject property to practice gardening, horticultural, and landscape pursuits. The Cultural Landscape Foundation describes the following about her time at the subject property:

Some early writing focus on her experiments at home, trellising vines on umbrella frames, grafting cacti, and making pesticides out of tobacco stems. She published step-by-step advice on building greenhouses, propagating seeds and cuttings, and forcing winter blooms. Humphreys stocked the Germantown grounds and the house's second-floor conservatory with tulips and other bulbs by the hundreds, plus lilies, roses, geraniums, alyssum, vines such as honeysuckles, and hardy flowering shrubs.³¹

³⁰ Phebe Westcott Humphreys, Pioneer Information," The Cultural Landscape Foundation, <[Phebe Westcott Humphreys | TCLF](#)> Accessed on 26 January 2024.

³¹ Phebe Westcott Humphreys, Pioneer Information," The Cultural Landscape Foundation, <[Phebe Westcott Humphreys | TCLF](#)> Accessed on 26 January 2024.

Just two years after purchasing the subject property, *The Philadelphia Times* published the following: “Mrs. P. W. Humphreys is said to have one of the most artistic homes in Germantown.”³² One year later, *The Philadelphia Times* states that her “blooming lawn is the envy of her neighbors.”³³



Figure 28. Top: A photograph of the garden of the Germantown Cricket Club, taken by Phebe Westcott Humphreys. Source: Phebe Westcott Humphreys, HSP. Figure 29. Bottom: A photograph of a gatehouse of an estate, taken by Phebe Westcott Humphreys. Source: Phebe Westcott Humphreys, HSP.

³² *The Philadelphia Times*, 15 March 1896, 22.

³³ “The Feminine Observer,” *The Philadelphia Times*, 26 June 1897, 7.



Figure 30. A photograph of the landscape of Lynnewood Hall, the estate of Peter E.B. Widener, taken by Phebe Westcott Humphreys. Source: Phebe Westcott Humphreys Collection, HSP.

Humphreys explored, experienced, and experimented with the following topics, leading to an impressive bibliography of articles and publications: architectural history; architecture and design; floriculture; horticulture; housekeeping and associated modern appliances; historic buildings and places; interior decoration and design; landscape gardening and design; travel and tourism; etc. A Wikipedia article on Phebe Westcott Humphreys provides a footnoted list of the publications that featured her work: “*American Homes and Gardens* (1906-1912), *American Kitchen* (1899), *American Motherhood* (1900-1907), *Arthur’s Home Magazine* (1892-1895), *Birds and Nature* (1900-1907), *Booklovers* (1904), *Country Gentleman* (1900-1919), *Country Life in America* (1912-1913), *The Delineator* (1899-1901), *Demorest’s Family Magazine* (1899-1900), *The Designer* and the *Woman’s Magazine* (1900-1904), *Farm and Fireside* (1899-1919), *Farm and Home* (1907-1908), *Floral Life* (1903-1908), *Garden Magazine* (1905), *Good Housekeeping* (1897-1905), *Harper’s Bazar* (1899), *Home Queen* (1895-1897), *House Beautiful* (1906-1914), *House and Garden* (1903-1910), *Household* (1900), *Housekeeper* (1905), *Ladies Home Journal* (1893-1908), *Ledger Monthly* (1899-1902), *Mayflower* (1893-1900), *Park’s Floral Magazine* (1893-1900), *Pictorial Review* (1904), *Puritan* (1899), *Rambler Magazine* (1905), *St. Nicholas* (1904), *Strand Magazine* (1903), *Suburban Life* (1907-1911), *Success With Flowers* (1891-1901), *Table Talk* (1899-1914), *What to Eat* (1899), and *Woman’s Home Companion* (1899-1900).”³⁴ Newspapers and other organs syndicated her articles. *The Times* (1892-1894), a Philadelphia newspaper, published her articles on gardening.³⁵

³⁴ “Phebe Westcott Humphreys,” Wikipedia, Published in 2020 and edited through 2023. < [Phebe Westcott Humphreys - Wikipedia](#) > Accessed on 29 January 2024.

³⁵ Phebe Westcott Humphreys. “Flowers for Windows,” *The Times*, 24 July 1892, 23.



Figure 31. Phebe Westcott Humphreys and a local woman below a hill garden in Cherbourg, France, taken by Mr. Humphreys. Source: Phebe Westcott Humphreys Collection, HSP.

An online biography of Phebe Westcott Humphreys, drafted and published by The Cultural Landscape Foundation, characterizes the nature of her work and influence from the 1890s through the 1910s.³⁶ Her articles and publications over the years indicate a significant amount of travel and exploration, which she conducted largely in her motorcar. This led to her book, *The Automobile Tourist*, published by Ferris & Leach in 1905. This attractive volume is essentially a *Lonely Planet* of the period in certain regions, highlighting historic buildings, and places, including landscapes and gardens. Humphreys' experience and expertise in landscape gardening culminated in *The Practical Book of Garden Architecture*, which was published by the J.B. Lippincott Company in 1914. The book includes both practical advice on garden architecture and design, as well as related photography taken by the author.

By the 1920s, Humphreys had largely retired as an author; however, she remained a member of the National League of American Pen Women. On the evening of Wednesday, June 14, 1939, she was struck by a trolley on E. Girard Avenue near Palmer Street and would remain unconscious at St. Mary's Hospital until she died on the evening of Saturday, June 17, 1939. At the time of her death, *The Philadelphia Inquirer* described Humphreys as an "authority on garden Architecture and care and widely known Germantown woman," stating that "she was the author of 27 books and numerous articles appearing in many magazines."³⁷

³⁶ Phebe Westcott Humphreys. *The Practical Book of Garden Architecture*. (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1914).

³⁷ "Mrs. Humphreys Dies of Injuries," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 20 June 1939, 7.

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