

ADDRESS: 756 N 43RD ST

Name of Resource: Laura Wheeler Waring House

Proposed Action: Designation

Property Owner: Lauren Mae Wingert

Nominator: Philadelphia Historical Commission Staff

Staff Contact: Alex Till, alexander.till@phila.gov

OVERVIEW: This nomination proposes to designate the property at 756 N. 43rd Street and list it on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. A two-story brick rowhouse, the home of Laura Wheeler Waring from 1927 to 1948, stands on the property. The nomination contends that the property satisfies Criterion for Designation A for its association with Laura Wheeler Waring, a notable Black female artist who gained international recognition for her portraits of prominent Black figures and her association with the Harlem Renaissance.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The staff recommends that the nomination demonstrates that the property at 756 N. 43rd Street satisfies Criterion for Designation A .



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: _____

Postal code: _____

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: _____

Current/Common Name: _____

3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

☐ Building

☐ Structure

☐ Site

☐ Object

4. PROPERTY INFORMATION

Condition: ☐ excellent ☐ good ☐ fair ☐ poor ☐ ruins

Occupancy: ☐ occupied ☐ vacant ☐ under construction ☐ unknown

Current use: _____

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 _____ to _____

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

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: _____

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: _____

Original owner: _____

Other significant persons: _____

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION:

The historic resource satisfies the following criteria for designation (check all that apply):

- ☐ (a) Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past; or,
- ☐ (b) Is associated with an event of importance to the history of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- ☐ (c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style; or,
- ☐ (d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen; or,
- ☐ (e) Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- ☐ (f) Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation; or,
- ☐ (g) Is part of or related to a square, park or other distinctive area which should be preserved according to an historic, cultural or architectural motif; or,
- ☐ (h) Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City; or,
- ☐ (i) Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in pre-history or history; or
- ☐ (j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

8. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Please attach a bibliography.

9. NOMINATOR

Organization _____ Date _____

Name with Title _____ Email _____

Street Address _____ Telephone _____

City, State, and Postal Code _____

Nominator ☐ is ☐ is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: _____

☐ Correct-Complete ☐ Incorrect-Incomplete Date: _____

Date of Notice Issuance: _____

Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Postal Code: _____

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

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: _____

Date of Final Action: _____

☐ Designated ☐ Rejected

5. Boundary Description



Figure 1. The boundary identifying the parcel at 756 N. 43rd Street. Source: City of Philadelphia, Atlas.

All that certain lot or piece of ground with the brick messuage or tenement thereon erected. Situate on the West side of 43rd Street at the distance of 84 feet 4.5 inches Southward from the South side of Brown Street in the 60th (formerly part of the 24th) Ward of the city of Philadelphia, County of Philadelphia and the commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Containing in front or breadth on the said 43rd Street 16 feet 1.5 inches and extending in length or depth Westward of that width between lines at right angles with the said 43rd Street 90 feet to a certain three feet wide alley extending Northward into the said Brown Street.¹

¹ Philadelphia Deed 53653712.

6. Description



Figure 2. Front façade of 756 N. 43rd Street. Source: Cyclomedia.

The property at 756 N. 43rd Street is a two-story Queen Anne-style brick rowhouse located in the Belmont neighborhood of West Philadelphia between Brown Street to the north and Aspen Street to the south. The building shares party walls with similar two-story brick row houses on either side.

The front façade faces east on 43rd Street and the brick front is painted a light tan color. It is set behind a small front yard enclosed by an original wrought iron fence and features five concrete steps that lead up to a one-story front porch supported at each end by turned posts with ornamental brackets along with a non-historic iron railing along the front. There is a single low rectangular basement window set in the tan painted raised foundation below the porch. The first story features a non-historic door with transom

on the northern bay and a single arched masonry window opening with two rectangular vinyl windows separated by a wood mullion in the south.

The second story extends above the porch roof and features two evenly spaced sash windows with arched openings, wood frames and sills, and vinyl sashes. There is a cornice made up of decorative brick corbeling and there are additional projecting decorative corbeled brick brackets topped with finials at each end of the roof that extend from just above the roofline down to the porch roof.

The sides of the building share party walls with the rowhouses to either side and are not visible. The rear façade faces an empty lot and is obliquely visible from nearby Brown Street. It is clad with tan stucco and features a two-story ell with a small one story shed addition. There is a door and a small vinyl sash window set in the first floor and two rectangular vinyl sash windows on the second floor.

The building is set in a row of nine matching homes that extend most of the length of the west side of the block with some larger houses at either end.

7. Statement of Significance

The property at 756 N. 43rd Street is historically significant and should be listed individually on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The property satisfies Criterion for Designation 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.” Specifically, the property is associated with the life of Laura Wheeler Waring, as her home for much of her adult life from 1927 until her death in 1948. Waring was a notable female Black artist who gained international recognition for her portraits of prominent Black figures and her association with the Harlem Renaissance. In addition, she had significant connections to the Philadelphia area and along with her artistic accomplishments, she founded and taught in the art and music departments at the State Normal School at Cheyney (now Cheyney University of Pennsylvania), the nation’s first historically Black college and university (HBCU). The period of significance dates from 1927 to 1948, reflecting Waring’s years of occupancy in the house.

Neighborhood Context:²

West Philadelphia grew at a relatively slower rate compared to city neighborhoods east of the Schuylkill River and remained largely rural until the middle to later parts of the 19th century. For quite some time the area served as the location for the country retreats of some of the city’s elite, who would escape their comparably crowded townhomes for the fresh air of the country on the other side of the river. The Schuylkill River itself acted as a major barrier that slowed the growth west of the city as the only way across it was at three ferry points which connected with main roads headed for distant locales such as Lancaster and Baltimore. Floating bridges were first constructed at Schuylkill crossings during the American Revolution and the beginning of the 19th century saw the roads in the area improved by various turnpike corporations which led to a permanent bridge being constructed at Market Street in 1805. Small trade centers popped up around the end of the 18th century and, for the first time, brought

² Most of this history was adapted from the West Philadelphia Community History Center hosted online by the University of Pennsylvania <https://westphillyhistory.archives.upenn.edu/history>

a small amount of commercial activity to the area around the turnpikes. At the same time, certain types of manufacturing that favored less crowded neighborhoods located themselves in the area and steadily grew over time. During the first half of the 19th century, some of the large landowners began development of small residential “villages” such as Hamilton Village and Mantua, though these were still targeted at a more upper-class clientele. At the same time, both educational institutions and charitable organizations saw the space west of the city as an ideal place to locate themselves. The Blockley Almshouse was built in 1836 on land overlooking the river and the Pennsylvania Hospital’s Institute for the Insane was located on land just to the north of Market Street. The Woodlands Cemetery was established in 1841 on the old estate of William Hamilton as part of the rural cemetery movement that sought to bring more space and fresh air to the practice of mourning. By 1844, the area around the Market Street bridge was incorporated as the Borough of West Philadelphia and featured numerous taverns, inns, and other businesses that reflected growing urbanization.

By the time the City of Philadelphia and County of Philadelphia consolidated in 1854, West Philadelphia featured a mixture of industry, commerce, residential homes, and rural farms and access across the Schuylkill River was steadily improving. Over the latter half of the 19th century, the area gradually emerged as a suburb of the city proper and was connected to it via various stagecoach and later streetcar and train lines. Developers and speculators followed the expanding transportation infrastructure and built rows of fashionable twin and rowhouses to appeal to the growing professional classes of the city who wanted to live in a more open area and could commute to the city center for work. By the 1870s and 80s, these developments gradually began to be scaled down and aimed to attract a more working-class population and signified that the growth of commerce and industry in the region supported the construction of homes for workers near their places of business. The less prestigious workers were generally pushed to the fringe areas in neighborhoods like Belmont and Mill Creek and by the end of the century, West Philadelphia had developed into an urban area that could stand on its own with a variety of residences, businesses, schools, churches, and everything else that the community could need.³

The lot at 756 N. 43rd Street was occupied by a building as early as 1862, likely the same house owned by George R. Dykeman as depicted on an atlas from 1878.⁴ By 1886, that lot and building were occupied by the Pennsylvania Homeopathic Hospital for Children.⁵ The property changed hands several times in 1886 and 1887 until eventually being purchased in October 1887 by a builder, Charles Cruser, along with “the brick messuage or tenement thereon”.⁶ By 1895, Cruser had constructed a row of 17 brick houses on the west side of 43rd Street, including the house at 756 N. 43rd Street.⁷

³ Bevan, Josh, *Philadelphia Historical Register Nomination for 4800-14 Lancaster Ave, Our Mother of Sorrows Catholic Church*, 2018.

⁴ Smedley, Samuel L., *Smedley’s Atlas of Philadelphia...*, Lippencott, J.B. & Company, 1862.

⁵ Scott, James D. *Atlas of the 24th & 27th Wards. West Philadelphia...*, 1878 and Baist, Wm. G., *Atlas of West Philadelphia, 24th and 27th Wards*, 1886.

⁶ Philadelphia Deed Book GGP 311 p 240.

⁷ Bromley, G. W., *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia complete...*, G. W. Bromley and Company, 1895.



Figure 3: Map showing location of 756 N. 43rd Street before the house had been built. Much of the surrounding area is undeveloped, but there is a single building at the corner of 43rd Street and what would become Brown St. *Smedley's Atlas of Philadelphia 1862*. North at top of image.



Figure 4: Detail of an 1886 atlas showing property prior to subdivision and development. *Baist, Wm. G., Atlas of West Philadelphia, 24th and 27th Wards*. North at top of image.



Figure 5: Detail of an 1895 atlas showing property after the row was built. Bromley, G. W., *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia*. North at top of image.

Laura Wheeler Waring:⁸



Figure 6: Laura Wheeler Waring. *Source: Sartle.com.*

Laura Wheeler Waring was born Laura Wheeler in Hartford, Connecticut in 1887. Her father Robert was the pastor of Talcott Street Congregational Church, the first all-Black church in Connecticut, and her mother Mary was a teacher and amateur artist.⁹ Her father attended Howard University and her mother, Oberlin College. During a time when relatively few Black women attended school, Waring's artistic talent was noted early on by her teachers, and she graduated high school with honors and was encouraged to pursue higher education. In 1907, she took a position at the Institute for Colored Youth outside of Philadelphia, a school that taught employment skills to Black youth, and which eventually

⁸ Much of the biography of Laura Wheeler Waring was taken from several sources including: the website for the Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame, the website theartstory.org, and the website blackpast.org. See bibliography for more details.

became the Cheyney Training School for Teachers and today, Cheyney University of Pennsylvania. In 1908, she enrolled in the prestigious Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts in Philadelphia where she studied under Henry Bainbridge McCarter, an illustrator and painter whose work influenced various modern art movements. McCarter encouraged Waring to study and appreciate Impressionism and Post-Impressionism. After graduating in 1914, she was awarded the William Emlen Cresson Memorial Travel Scholarship—an award given to Academy students for artistic excellence which allowed recipients to study art at the Louvre. Waring was the first Black woman to receive the award and, with it, she traveled to Paris to further her artistic studies. She remained in Europe until the outbreak of World War I.

Upon her return from Paris, she continued her work at Cheyney where she founded and taught in the new art and music departments, which she would go on to chair for 30 more years. While teaching, she also pursued her own painting career and continued to travel to Europe to further her studies. Waring's second trip to France in 1924 is regarded as a turning point in her style and career. While there she expanded her work in portraiture and studied painting in the Academie de la Grande Chaumiere and her work was also exhibited in Parisian art galleries for the first time. Although she learned the techniques of Romanticism and Impressionism during this trip, her own work tended towards Realism. *The Houses at Semur, France* (Figure 7) which she painted while abroad in 1925, gained acclaim on both sides of the Atlantic and has been noted by art historians as the work that marked Waring's change in style. The painting's vivid color, light and atmosphere established hallmarks of her repertoire.



Figure 7. *The Houses at Semur*, 1925.

The latter half of the 1920's saw Waring's reputation as an artist grow substantially. She was asked to curate the Negro Art section at the Sesquicentennial Exposition in Philadelphia in 1926 and her works were displayed at several notable institutions, including the Smithsonian Institution, Art Institute of Chicago, and perhaps most significantly, the Harmon Foundation, where she was commissioned to paint portraits of prominent Black figures for the first exhibition of Black Art in the country in 1928. In June 1927, she also married Walter E. Waring, a professor at Lincoln University, and together they purchased the house at 756 N. 43rd Street on October 28th, 1927¹⁰.



Figure 8. *Anna Washington Derry*, 1925, Smithsonian American Art Museum.

The Harmon Foundation was established by real estate developer Walter E Harmon in 1922 as a wide-ranging philanthropic organization that is best known for its promotion of the work of Black artists and its impact on the Harlem Renaissance.¹¹ It offered awards for achievement in different fields ranging

¹⁰"Marriage Licenses Issued". *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 21 Jun 1927, Tue, p. 25. and Philadelphia Deed Book JMH 2741 p 111.

¹¹Evenhaugen, Anne, *African American art and the Harmon Foundation*, <https://blog.library.si.edu/blog/2013/02/22/african-american-art-and-the-harmon-foundation/>, accessed 3.6.2025.

from various arts to other humanities and sciences and it sponsored traveling art exhibitions as well. Waring's association with the organization and its annual salon in New York introduced her to a number of important artists and other intellectuals associated with the Harlem Renaissance including painter Henry Ossawa Tanner, sculptor Augusta Savage, and poet Langston Hughes. Waring juried the organization's annual award in the fine arts category in 1926 and won it in 1927 for her portrait, *Anna Washington Derry* (Figure 8). Waring also frequently contributed illustrations to *The Crisis*, the monthly magazine of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), where her drawings appeared both on the cover and inside the magazine at least twenty times between 1917 and 1932.

In 1944, the Harmon Foundation organized a traveling exhibition of 50 *Portraits of Outstanding Americans of Negro Origin*. Included in the traveling exhibition were eight of Waring's portraits, including portraits of subjects such as sociologist, historian, and activist W.E.B Du Bois (Figure 10), writer James Weldon Johnson, and opera singer Marian Anderson (Figure 9), among others.¹² Over time, her work has been collected by and displayed at prominent American institutions including the Corcoran Gallery in Washington D.C., the Brooklyn Museum, the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and The Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery.



Figures 9 and 10. *Marian Anderson*, left, 1944 and *W. E. B. Du Bois*, right, 1944, both National Portrait Gallery.

¹² "Negro Artists Give Exhibition". *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 14 Nov 1945, Wed, p. 11.

Waring died on February 3, 1948, at the age of 60, in her Philadelphia home after a long illness and was buried at Eden Cemetery in Collingdale, Pennsylvania. Along with her artistic accomplishments and long tenure as a teacher at Cheyney, Waring was also a member of Mayor Bernard Smith's UNESCO Committee and served on numerous other committees and boards in both the Philadelphia area and nationally.¹³ In 1949, Howard University Gallery of Art in Washington, D.C. held a posthumous exhibition of art in her honor. Her paintings were also included in the 2015 exhibition *We Speak: Black Artists in Philadelphia, 1920s-1970s* at Philadelphia's Woodmere Art Museum.

Conclusion:

Laura Wheeler Waring's contributions to the world of fine art through her expressive portraits and paintings clearly distinguishes her as a significant person deserving of recognition. She was included in some of the most important exhibitions of Black artists in the country including the first ever held in 1928 by the Harmon Foundation. Author and critic Nancy Churnin stated that Waring's greatest legacy "[was her] desire to see representation and inclusion on museum walls. At the time she was painting, America was segregated, and it was unusual to see Black faces as subjects in portraits. She felt that if people saw inclusion in art, it would open hearts and minds to the importance of inclusion in all aspects of life".¹⁴ In addition, Waring dedicated much of her life to education through her 40-year career at Cheyney, the oldest HBCU in the United States. For her legacy, the Laura Wheeler Waring House at 756 N. 43rd Street is eligible for inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places under Criterion A.

¹³ "Mrs. Waring, Noted Artist, Dies". *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 05 Feb 1948, Thur, p. 13.

¹⁴ *Laura Wheeler Waring*, <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/waring-laura-wheeler/>, accessed 3.6.2025.

8. Bibliography

- Baist, Wm. G., *Atlas of West Philadelphia, 24th and 27th Wards*, 1886.
- Bevan, Josh, *Philadelphia Historical Register Nomination for 4800-14 Lancaster Ave, Our Mother of Sorrows Catholic Church*, 2018.
- Bromley, G. W., *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia complete...*, G. W. Bromley and Company, 1895.
- Evenhaugen, Anne, *African American art and the Harmon Foundation*, <https://blog.library.si.edu/blog/2013/02/22/african-american-art-and-the-harmon-foundation/>, accessed 3.6.2025.
- Iacurci, Louisa Talucci, *Laura Wheeler Waring*, Connecticut Women's Hall of Fame, <https://www.cwhf.org/inductees/laura-wheeler-waring>. Accessed 3.6.2025.
- *Laura Wheeler Waring*, <https://www.theartstory.org/artist/waring-laura-wheeler/>, accessed 3.6.2025.
- "Marriage Licenses Issued". *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 21 Jun 1927, Tue, p. 25.
- Mennenga, Lacinda, *Laura Wheeler Waring (1887-1948)*, <https://www.blackpast.org/african-american-history/waring-laura-wheeler-1887-1948/>, accessed 3.6.2025.
- "Mrs. Waring, Noted Artist, Dies". *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 05 Feb 1948, Thur, p. 13.
- "Negro Artists Give Exhibition". *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 14 Nov 1945, Wed, p. 11
- Philadelphia Deed 53653712.
- Philadelphia Deed Book JMH 2741 p 111.
- Philadelphia Deed Book GGP 311 p 240.
- Scott, James D. *Atlas of the 24th & 27th Wards. West Philadelphia...*, 1878.
- Smedley, Samuel L., *Smedley's Atlas of Philadelphia...*, Lippencott, J.B. & Company, 1862.
- *West Philadelphia Community History Center* hosted online by the University of Pennsylvania, <https://westphillyhistory.archives.upenn.edu/history>, accessed 3.5.2025.