

ADDRESS: 1439 N 15TH ST

Name of Resource: William Ivins and Hamilton Disston Houses

Proposed Action: Designation

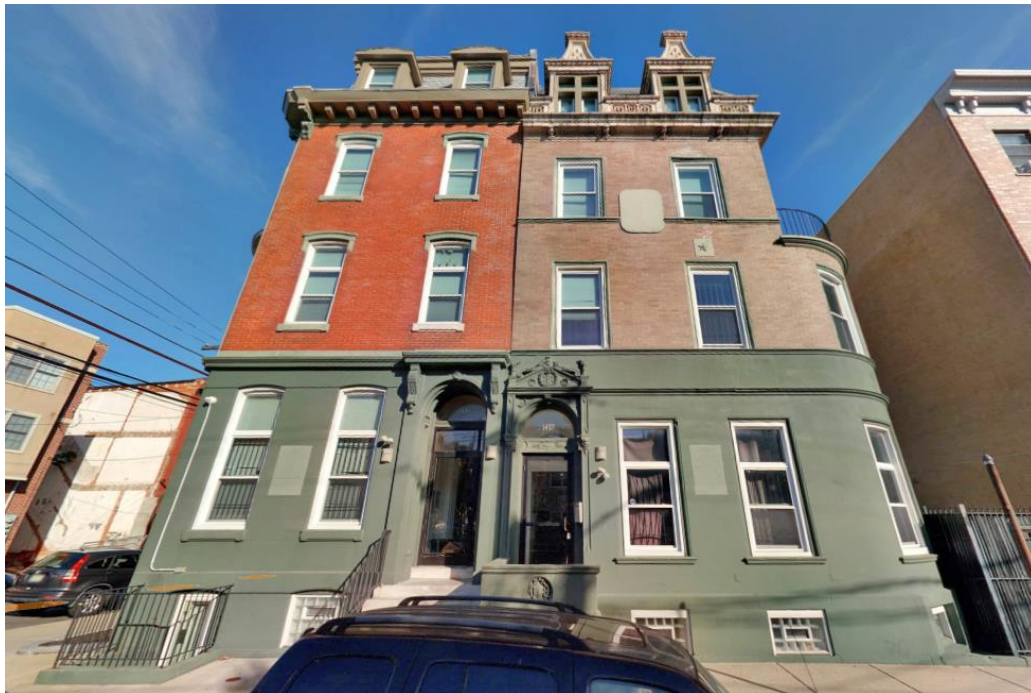
Property Owner: 15th St Partners LLC

Nominator: Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia

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

OVERVIEW: This nomination proposes to designate the property at 1439 N. 15th Street and list it on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The property is comprised of two four-story late nineteenth-century twin houses that historically were two separate properties at 1437 and 1439 N. 15th Street, that were consolidated. The building at 1437 N. 15th Street, known as the William Ivins House, was constructed in the early 1860s and modified to into the Chateausque style in 1899 by industrialist William Ivins. The building at 1439 N. 15th Street, known as the Hamilton Disston House, was constructed about 1872 as a Second Empire style dwelling by industrialist Hamilton Disston. The nomination contends that the property satisfies Criteria for Designation A, C, D, and J. Both houses exemplify the late nineteenth-century development of Lower North Philadelphia by families of industrial wealth including Ivins, co-founder of one of the city's largest carpet mills at the time, and Disston, the second president of the Disston Saw Works, the largest saw manufactory in the world at that time; they thereby satisfy Criteria A and J. Both houses also represent the evolution of house construction and architectural style in Lower North Philadelphia during the late nineteenth century; the Ivins house is a significant example of the Chateausque style, and the Disston House is a significant example of the Second Empire style, satisfying Criteria C and D.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The staff recommends that the property at 1439 N. 15th Street satisfies Criteria for Designation A, C, D, 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: 1439 N. 15th Street

Postal code: 19121

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: William Ivins and Hamilton Disston Houses

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 c. 1860 to 1904

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: Original Houses (c. 1860/1872). Ivins House altered 1899

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: Unconfirmed

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: Unknown

Original owner: William Ivins and Hamilton Disston

Other significant persons: N/A

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 Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia Date March 17, 2025

Name with Title Kevin McMahon, consultant Email hstark@preservationalliance.com

Street Address 1608 Walnut Street, Suite 1702 Telephone 215-546-1146

City, State, and Postal Code Philadelphia, PA 19103

Nominator ☐ is ☒ is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: March 18, 2025

☒ Correct-Complete ☐ Incorrect-Incomplete Date: 4/11/2025

Date of Notice Issuance: 4/17/2025

Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: 15th St Partners LLC

Address: 1417 N. 15th St

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19121

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

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5. Boundary Description

Situate at the southeasterly corner of 15th Street and Jefferson Street; Containing in front or breadth on said 15th Street 67 feet, 7 inches and extending of that width between parallel lines at right angles to said 15th Street and along the southerly line of Jefferson Street 100 feet 0 inches.



Property Boundary Map (Imagery from atlas.phila.gov)

OPA Account# 881146137

6. Physical Description

The William Ivins and Hamilton Disston Houses are four-story, late-nineteenth century dwellings at the southeast corner of 15th and Jefferson Streets in North Philadelphia ([Figure 1](#)). Historically, the two buildings were situated on separate parcels, 1437 and 1439 N. 15th Street, respectively. The parcels were consolidated in 1988 when the buildings were joined and rehabilitated as a multi-family residential property with a single address: 1439 N. 15th Street. Despite being internally connected, the houses still read as separate buildings from the exterior and will be described as such below.



Figure 1: William Ivins and Hamilton Disston Houses (right and left, respectively) at 1439 N. 15th Street.

William Ivins House

Historic address: 1437 N. 15th Street

The William Ivins House is a four-story brick house with a rear ell. Built as a three-story house in the early 1860s, Ivins acquired this property in 1882 and quickly added a fourth story in the form of a mansard roof, which extended from the west elevation to the rear ell.¹ In 1899, Ivins completely rebuilt the front of the house, resulting in the Chateausque-style facade that remains today.² Except for the main entrance door and the windows, which consist of non-historic, vinyl replacements, all existing features on the west elevation and the western end of the south elevation were installed in 1899. The designer responsible for the 1899 alterations may have been architect William H. MacCollin.

The west or 15th Street elevation, which is three bays wide, rises from a granite water table and is faced in limestone on the first story, mottled, light brown brick on the second and third stories, and architectural terra cotta on the fourth story. The stonework is currently painted a dark green color. Within the water table, there are several glass block windows. On the first story, the

¹ Philadelphia Recorder of Deeds, Deed of sale to William Ivins, August 1, 1882, Book J.O'D. 59, p. 35; "Building Permits," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 25, 1882.

² Bureau of Building Inspection, Building Permit No. 2165, April 26, 1899; see also: "Building and Real Estate Notes," *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, May 3, 1899, p. 277.

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entrance is found in the northernmost bay where there is an aluminum-framed glass door with a semi-circular transom. The door and transom are set within a French Renaissance-style door surround. The entrance is reached by a partially painted granite stair, which is situated parallel to the façade and rises to a small landing in front of the door. The landing is surrounded by a short granite wall, which contains an ornamental, carved circular panel on the street-facing side.



Figure 2: West elevation of the William Ivins House, first story, looking east.

South of the entrance, the first story contains three one-over-one, double-hung vinyl windows with single-light transoms, which completely fill the historic openings. The southernmost of the three windows is located within a large, two-story, semi-circular bay, which curves around to the south elevation on the first and second stories and continues the material treatments of the west elevation. The upper of the two string courses serves as a sill for the second-story windows.



Figure 3: West and south elevations of the William Ivins House, looking northeast.

The second story has three one-over-one, double-hung vinyl windows, which have painted limestone surrounds. At the top of the semi-circular bay, there is a painted limestone cornice and

a non-historic painted metal railing. The third story has two one-over-one, double-hung vinyl windows, which align with those on the second story.

The third-story windows rest on a painted limestone stringcourse that spans the full width of the west elevation and have painted limestone surrounds matching those on the second story. A painted metal panel is attached to wall between the windows, covering a hole that existed in the façade prior to the rehabilitation of the building in 1988. On the south elevation, the westernmost bay on the third story has an arched-top door opening, which provides access to a balcony on the roof of the two-story circular bay.

At the front of the building, the fourth story consists of a steeply pitched gabled roof, which slopes up from the west elevation and back down toward the rear ell (the gable end wall is on the south elevation). The gabled roof replaced the westernmost portion of the mansard roof that William Ivins added to the house in 1882 (as discussed below, the mansard roof remains intact east of the gabled roof). The building's most characteristic Chateausque detailing, which is primarily executed in light-colored architectural terra cotta, is found along the front and side of the gabled roof. At the base of the roof, there is a prominent molded cornice. Rising from the cornice are two wall dormers, each containing a four-light *croisette* window, a standard Chateausque element (in each dormer, the two lower openings have one-over-one, double-hung vinyl windows while the openings above, which are shorter, have fixed, single-light windows). The dormers are built of terra cotta, have richly ornamented egg-and-dart cornices, and are topped by French Renaissance-style pinnacles. A similarly ornate terra cotta parapet exists between and on the other sides of the dormers. The cornice, fenestration, and parapet treatments continue around into the western portion of the south elevation. Here, however, the terra cotta window surround (there is only one), is integrated into to the end wall of the gabled roof rather than serving as the front of a dormer. Along the gabled roofline, there is terra cotta coping.



Figures 4 and 5: West and south elevations of the William Ivins House, fourth story, looking east and northeast, respectively.

Beyond the semi-circular side bay and the gabled roof, it is not possible to see the side of the building. Aerial imagery shows that the south elevation has brick walls, regularly spaced rectangular window openings with vinyl replacement windows, several metal-clad bay windows,

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and a mansard roof that extends from the rear of the gabled roof built in 1899 to the rear ell. The mansard comprises the fourth story added in 1882.

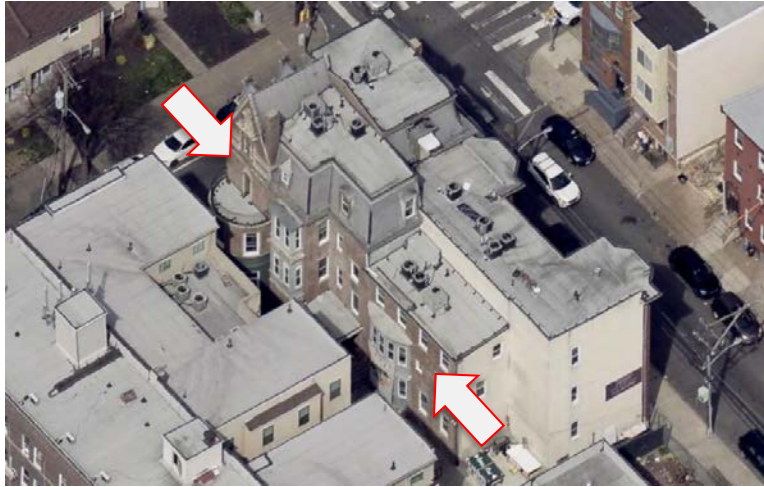


Figure 6: Aerial view showing the south elevation of the William Ivins House (Pictometry).

Hamilton Disston House Historic address: 1439 N. 15th Street

The Hamilton Disston House is an attached, four-story brick house with a rear ell. Built around 1872 – possibly to the design of the well-known architectural firm of Collins & Autenrieth – this Second Empire-style house has a characteristic mansard roof at the fourth story. The primary elevation faces 15th Street, but the much longer north elevation is fully visible along the Jefferson Street side due to the building's prominent corner location.



Figure 7: West elevation of the Hamilton Disston House, looking east.

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On the west elevation, the first story is entirely faced in white marble, which is currently painted in a dark shade of green. The main entrance, which currently consists of an aluminum-framed glass door with a side light and semi-circular transom, is the southernmost of three openings on the first story. The door and transom are set within an original painted marble surround, which has a cornice supported by console brackets on each side. An original (unpainted) marble stoop with a non-historic metal picket railing provides access from the sidewalk to the entrance. North of the entrance, the first story has a pair of one-over-one, double-hung vinyl windows with single light transoms, which fill the original window openings with segmental arched heads. Below and aligned with the first-story windows, there are two original window openings within the water table. The one immediately north of the stoop is currently infilled with glass block. The one closer to 15th Street currently has a vinyl casement window, which opens to a window well surrounded by a non-historic metal picket railing.

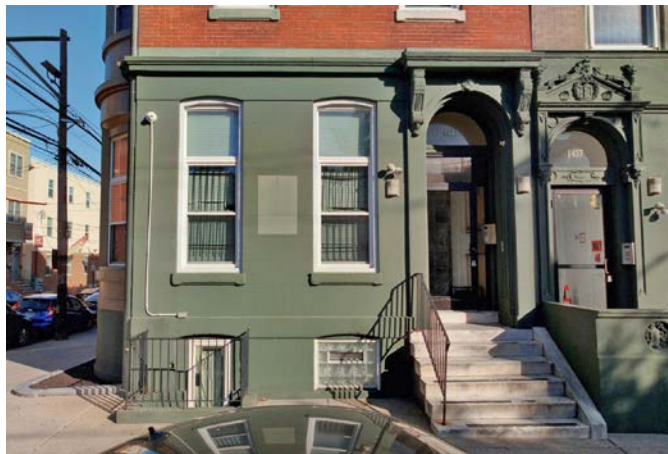


Figure 8: West elevation of the Hamilton Disston House, first story, looking east.

The second and third stories, which have exterior walls of red brick, each have a pair of one-over-one, double-hung vinyl windows (as well as transoms on the second story) with painted marble sills and lintels. Between the third and fourth stories, the original wood modillioned cornice has been covered with aluminum sheet metal in recent years or decades, although the profiles of the individual modillions have been maintained and the scrolled end brackets preserved and uncovered at the corner of the building.

The fourth story consists of a mansard roof, which is currently covered in asphalt shingles. On the west elevation, there are two metal clad dormers with one-over-one, double-hung vinyl windows. The mansard roof is topped by a painted metal cornice.

On the north elevation, the first thirty feet of the building comprise the four-story main block of the original 1872 house. At the far western end of this section (closest to 15th Street), there is a two-story, semi-circular, metal-clad bay, which has three one-over-one, double-hung vinyl windows on each story. The date of the bay window is not known but it was likely added sometime in the late-nineteenth century. On the third story, above the two-story bay window, is an original window opening, which currently has a one-over-one, double-hung vinyl window and original painted marble sill and hood. Beyond the westernmost bay, the first through third floors of the original

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main block each contain two more double-hung vinyl windows: a very small one in the center (added in 1909) and a much larger one in an original opening with painted marble sill and hood. Between the third and fourth stories, the cornice from the west elevation continues across the north elevation of the main block, as does the mansard roof. The mansard roof has two original dormers matching those on the west elevation; between them, there is a smaller dormer (added in 1909) and an original brick chimney, which has been truncated.



Figure 9: North elevation of the Hamilton Disston House, looking southeast.

The next section of the north elevation consists of a one bay wide, three-story addition. Built on the north elevation of the original rear ell in 1909, the addition has red brick walls and stacked, metal-clad bays facing 15th Street, each containing four one-over-one, double-hung vinyl windows. Below each group of windows are metal spandrel panes. Above, there are cornices, including the main cornice at the top of the addition.



Figure 10: North elevation of the Hamilton Disston House, looking south.

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The third section of the north elevation – the only visible part of the original rear ell – is slightly recessed behind the two sections on either side. At grade, the first three bays east of the 1909 addition contain a painted, hollow metal door, a one-over-one, double-hung vinyl window, and another painted metal door. In front of these three openings, a non-historic metal picket fence encloses the area between the north elevation and the sidewalk (the property line). Just east of this area is a non-historic concrete stair, which leads from the sidewalk up to an entrance – a painted, hollow metal door with a single-light transom – in the easternmost bay on the first story. All remaining openings on the first through third stories have one-over-one, double-hung vinyl windows with painted marble sills and lintels.

The fourth and final section of the north elevation consists of another three-story brick addition built in 1909. At ground level and on the first story, there are two one-over-one, double-hung vinyl windows with painted stone sills and lintels. The second and third stories have stacked metal-clad bay windows matching those in the other 1909 addition to the west. At the top of the addition is an original pressed metal cornice. On the west elevation of the addition, the first story has a one-over-one, double-hung vinyl window as well as a painted, hollow metal door, which is reached via the concrete stair described above. The second and third stories of the west elevation each have another one-over-one, double-hung vinyl window.

The east elevation of the building is entirely clad in stucco and has a single one-over-one, double-hung vinyl window on each story.

7. Statement of Significance

The William Ivins and Hamilton Disston Houses exemplify the development of lower North Philadelphia as a residential enclave for families of industrial wealth during the late nineteenth century. Starting around 1870, many of the city's wealthiest manufacturers built grand homes on or near Broad Street north of Girard Avenue. The architectural historian George E. Thomas has defined the most intact portion of this zone as the North Broad Street Mansion Historic District, which was listed in the National Register of Historic Places in 1985 (NRHP Ref. No. 85000674). Ivins and Disston, who represented two of the city's foremost industrial firms of the era, were among the most prominent manufacturers to build homes in this area between 1870 and 1900. Ivins was a co-founder of one of the city's largest carpet mills at a time when Philadelphia led the nation in carpet manufacturing, and Disston was the second president of the Disston Saw Works, the largest and best-known saw manufactory in the world. The vast fortunes Ivins and Disston accumulated through manufacturing allowed them to build large, opulent houses in the city's most desirable neighborhood for the industrial elite. Standing side-by-side at the southeast corner of 15th and Jefferson Streets, the Ivins and Disston houses are among the best surviving examples of how wealthy manufacturers created a new residential enclave for themselves during the late-nineteenth century, one that was purposely set apart from the more socially exclusive confines of Rittenhouse Square.

For these reasons, the Ivins and Disston Houses merit listing in the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places by satisfying the following criteria as established in the Philadelphia Historic Preservation Ordinance §14-1004 (1):

Criterion 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.

Criterion J: Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

Additionally, the Ivins and Disston houses represent the evolution of the built environment in their lower North Philadelphia neighborhood during late-nineteenth century. Among the houses that remain within this former elite enclave, the Ivins and Disston houses are "especially noteworthy," Thomas writes.³ The Disston House, which was built around 1872, is a highly characteristic example of the Second Empire style, which was the most common architectural treatment in the surrounding neighborhood during its first phase of development, between about 1870 and 1880. The Ivins House, which was largely rebuilt in 1899, is a significant example of the Chateausque Style in Philadelphia and illustrates a shift toward a more individualistic and expressive form of architecture in the neighborhood after 1880.

For these reasons, the Ivins and Disston Houses also merit listing in the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places by satisfying the following criterion:

³ George Thomas, North Broad Street Mansion District, National Register Nomination, 1985 (NRHP Ref. No. 85000674).

Criterion C: Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style.

Lastly, the William Ivins House is a significant local example of the Chateausque style of architecture, which was heavily influenced by the chateaux of the Renaissance era in sixteenth-century France. Popularized in the United States by the architect Richard Morris Hunt in the 1880s and 1890s, the Chateausque or Francis I style was a transitional one, blending gothic and Italian Renaissance forms and detailing. Although relatively short lived – few examples were built after 1900 – the Chateausque style appeared in the homes of numerous wealthy Philadelphians during the 1890s and even had an impact on the design of commercial, public, and institutional buildings here.

For these reasons, the Ivins House also merits listing in the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places by satisfying the following criterion:

Criterion D: Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen.

Lower North Philadelphia and the Homes of the Industrial Elite, 1870-1900

Although wealthy families had been building homes along North Broad Street since the 1840s, the development of lower North Philadelphia only gained momentum in the years after the Civil War. Early in the 1860s, horsecar service was first introduced into the area. Now more accessible by transit, the blocks in the immediate vicinity of the new Fifteenth Street line became attractive to speculative builders who erected hundreds of large, three-story brick houses between the end of the Civil War and the mid-1870s.⁴ Architecturally, these developer-built rows were similar to those found elsewhere in the city, featuring plain, red brick fronts with marble or brownstone trim, and bracketed wood cornices.

Even as speculative development transformed the area, the 1400, 1500, and 1600 blocks of North Broad, 15th, and 16th Streets remained comparatively untouched until the 1870s. Early in that decade, wealthy industrialists started to transform this small pocket of North Philadelphia from mostly undeveloped land into one of the city's grandest residential districts. Socially excluded from Rittenhouse Square where many of Philadelphia's patrician, old money families had established themselves, manufacturers increasingly chose to live in this area, which was much nearer their North Philadelphia factories and mills. After 1870, the area gradually filled in with dozens of imposing, Second Empire-style houses, which were mostly individually commissioned and often architect-designed (Fig. 11). Contrasting with the repetitive and relatively plain architecture of the speculative rows built on nearby streets, the first houses built in this area were generally larger and more opulent, with fronts of marble or brownstone rather than brick. Notably, many stood on spacious properties with side yards, which provided space for gardens and gave their occupants more access to fresh air than was ever possible in a rowhouse.

⁴ "City Improvements," *Public Ledger*, January 16, 1866; "Improvements," *The Press*, April 10, 1868; "Growth of the City," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 23, 1869.

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Among the earliest of the houses built by manufacturers in this nascent residential enclave were those of the wealthy Disston family, including Hamilton Disston (1844-1896). The Disstons gained their fortune through the Disston Saw Works, originally known as the Keystone Saw Works, which family patriarch Henry Disston (1819-1878) had established in Philadelphia around 1840. Relentlessly committed to quality, precision, and innovation, Disston became the first saw maker in the United States to produce his own tool-grade steel and pioneered new manufacturing techniques that made his saws among the best in the world within only a decade or two. By the time of Disston's death in 1878, the Disston Saw Works had become a vast enterprise. In its eight-acre complex on Laurel Street in Northern Liberties, the Disston operation required as many as a thousand men to produce over a million saws annually and distribute them to customers across the globe.⁵

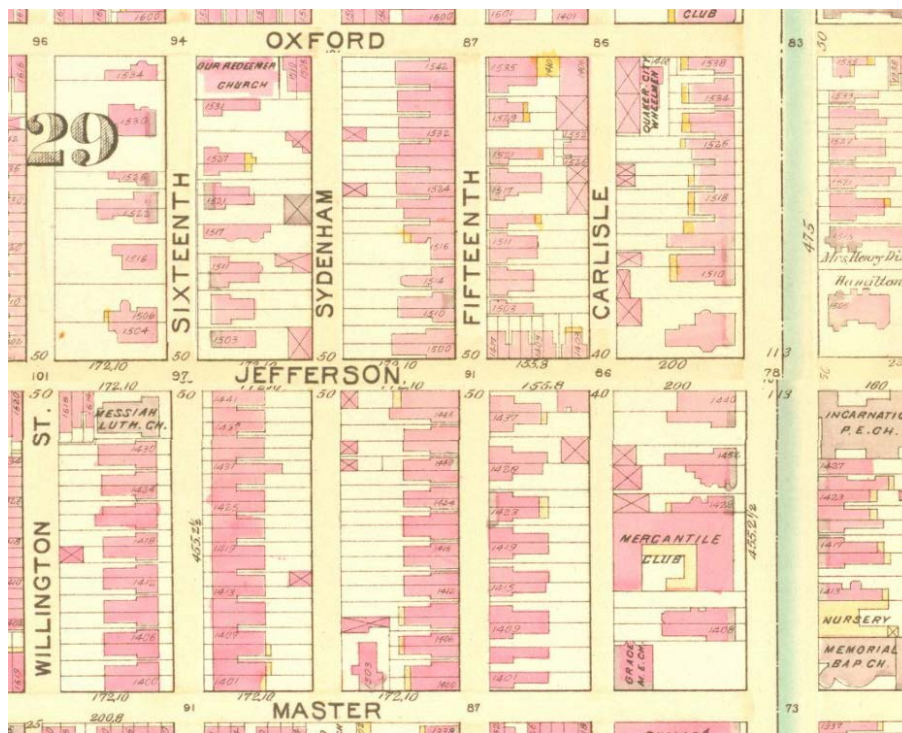


Figure 11: The neighborhood as it appeared in 1895 (from Bromley's Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, 1895).

Henry Disston was the first member of the family to establish his residence on or in the vicinity of Broad Street north of Girard Avenue. In 1865, Disston acquired an existing three-story house at 1515 N. Broad Street, which he replaced in 1872 with a large, Second Empire-style mansion ([Fig. 12](#)).⁶ Around the same time as the latter, Hamilton Disston built his own house at the southeast corner of 15th and Jefferson Streets.

⁵ An overview of Disston's early years as a saw manufacturer is available from many sources, including Harry C. Silcox, *A Place to Live and Work: The Henry Disston Saw Works and the Tacony Community of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: The Pennsylvania State University Press) and Philip Scranton and Walter Licht, *Work Sights: Industrial Philadelphia, 1890-1950* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1986), 170-181).

⁶ "Among the Architects," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 17, 1872, p. 2.



Figure 12: The Henry Disston House at 1515 N. Broad Street, designed by Collins & Autenrieth and built in 1872, replacing an earlier building (from *Philadelphia and Its Environs*, 1876).

Hamilton Disston and His House

Hamilton Disston, Henry's first son, became a full-time apprentice in his father's saw works around 1859. After serving in the Union Army during the Civil War, Hamilton returned to the factory in 1865 and became a partner in the business – his father's first – in 1869.⁷ That year, the company was renamed Henry Disston & Son. As a partner and senior manager, Hamilton would have helped oversee the gradual relocation of the saw works from Northern Liberties to a sprawling site on the Delaware River in Tacony beginning in 1872. The younger Disston played an even greater role in this project after his father's death in 1878, when he became president of the company. Under Hamilton Disston's leadership, the new Disston Saw Works grew into a massive complex of twenty-one buildings across more than thirty acres by the early 1890s (Fig. 13). Requiring as many as two thousand employees at this time, the operation was capable of turning out over 1.5 million handsaws, 50,000 circular saws, 250,000 saws of other types, and three million files annually, making it by far the greatest saw manufactory in the world.⁸ Equally as notable, Hamilton Disston oversaw the development of Tacony as a company town for his employees, building a complete community with hundreds of homes as well as a schoolhouse, churches of different denominations, a bank, a music hall, a police station, a firehouse, waterworks, and a park, all for the benefit of those who worked in the saw works.⁹ Hamilton Disston remained president of the Disston Saw Works until his death in 1896. In one obituary, Disston was hailed as "One of Philadelphia's foremost citizens, an extensive manufacturer, and prominent politician."¹⁰

⁷ "Copartnership Notices," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 26, 1869, 3.

⁸ *Fourth Annual Report of the Factory Inspector of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania for the Year 1893* (Harrisburg, PA, 1894), 121; "A Great Industry," *The Times*, May 28, 1893, 20.

⁹ Silcox, 30.

¹⁰ "Disston Passes Away," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 1, 1896, 1.

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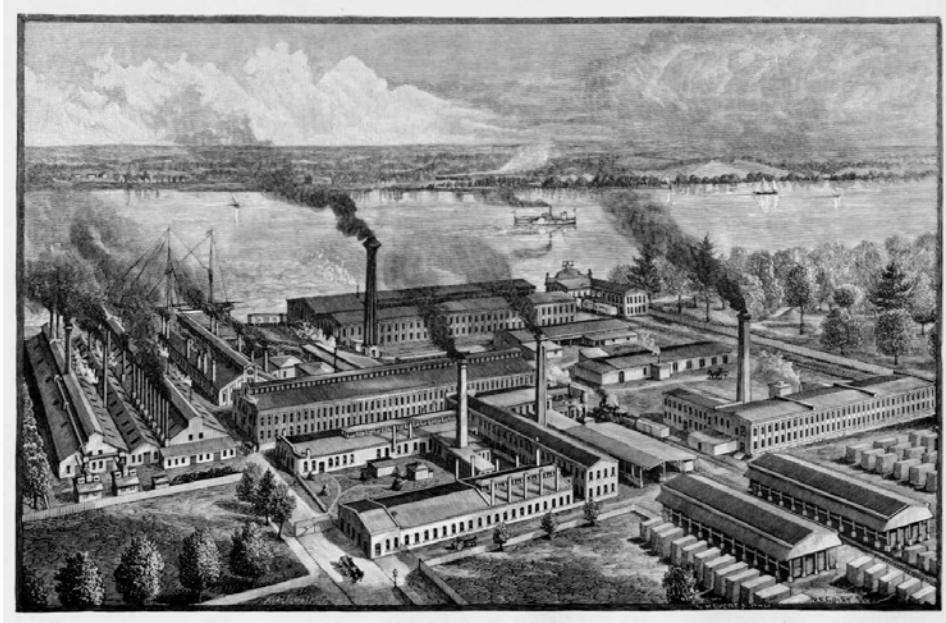


Figure 13: The Henry Disston & Sons plant in Tacony, the construction of which was largely overseen by Hamilton Disston during his tenure as president of the company, 1878-1896 (from Scharf & Westcott's *History of Philadelphia, 1609-1884*, Vol. 3).

Prior to 1872, Hamilton Disston resided at 1522 Park Avenue, in a developer-built house directly behind his father's Broad Street residence. Reflecting his growing stature as a wealthy and prominent manufacturer in his own right, Hamilton required a larger dwelling in a more prominent location by the early 1870s. The spacious lot at the southeast corner of 15th and Jefferson Streets fit the bill. At the time, this property was owned by Henry Disston, who acquired it in 1871 and transferred it to his son two years later.¹¹ In period directories, Hamilton does not appear at this address until 1873, suggesting that the house was built while the property was still under his father's ownership, sometime in 1872 or early 1873. The architect responsible for the house has not been identified, but Collins & Autenrieth are known to have designed the senior Disston's new house on Broad Street, a larger but similarly detailed Second Empire house, more or less concurrently.¹² Having established their firm around 1850, partners Edward Collins and Charles M. Autenrieth were among the most prolific designers of residential and commercial buildings in nineteenth-century Philadelphia, their work representing a "sophistication of detail and style."¹³ The firm became a favorite of Henry Disston, who not only hired them to design his home, but also several buildings at the Disston Saw Works. While Collins & Autenrieth have not yet been

¹¹ Philadelphia Recorder of Deeds, Deed of sale by sheriff to Henry Disston, Book J.T.O 73, p. 488, May 13, 1871; Philadelphia Recorder of Deeds, Deed of sale to Hamilton Disston, Book F.T.W. 54, p. 195, June 10, 1873.

¹² "Among the Architects," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 17, 1872, p. 2.

¹³ Sandra L. Tatman, "Collins & Autenrieth," *Philadelphia Architects and Buildings*, https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/23008, accessed March 7, 2025.

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linked to 1439 N. 15th Street, this evidence, along with the stylistic similarities between this house and the elder Disston's Broad Street residence, suggest their involvement.

In terms of its style, material treatments, and scale, the Hamilton Disston House is highly characteristic of the homes built in the surrounding neighborhood during the 1870s. Among other notable surviving examples are the homes of J. Bolton Winpenney, textile manufacturer, at 1432 N. Broad Street (c. 1868); Peter A. Jordan, partner in MacKeller, Smith & Jordan, a major type foundry, at 1438 N. Broad Street (c. 1868), Joseph D. Thornton, a well-known builder and real estate speculator, at 1517 N. 15th Street (c. 1870); and Joseph E. Smaltz, proprietor of the city's largest and best-known bootmakers, at 1522 N. 16th Street (J.C. Sidney & Sons, archs., 1880). Similar to these other opulent dwellings, the Hamilton Disston House was made imposing through the presence of a fourth story, which takes the form of a full-height mansard roof. Although the primary exterior material is common red brick, the first story is clad in white marble (currently painted green), which sets it apart from most of the developer-built rows of the era.



Figure 14: The J. Bolton Winpenney House at 1432 N. Broad Street (left) and the Peter A. Jordan House at 1438 N. Broad Street (right), both built around 1868.



Figure 15 (left): The Joseph D. Thornton House at 1517 N. 15th Street, built around 1870.

Figure 16 (middle): The Joseph E. Smaltz House at 1522 N. 16th Street, designed by J.C. Sidney & Sons and built in 1880 (*American Architect and Building News*, March 20, 1880, 124).

Figure 17 (right): The Hamilton Disston House, built in 1872.

The Disston family's presence in the neighborhood was reinforced when second son Albert H. Disston built his own house, a grand, Italianate-style mansion in white marble at 1530 N. 16th Street, in 1881-82. This property remains largely intact and was individually listed in the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places in 1982. Even as some members of the family began to relocate to the more suburban confines of Chestnut Hill in the 1880s, numerous Disstons remained in the neighborhood well into the twentieth century. In 1880, Hamilton Disston himself acquired a large house at the northeast corner of Broad and Jefferson Streets, directly adjacent to the house his father had built and where his mother still lived. Hamilton continued to live in this house, a large, Second Empire style residence built around 1860, until his death in 1896. Hamilton's daughter, Mrs. A. Sydney Carpenter, lived at 1505 N. Broad Street until 1933, when the property was sold and the house was demolished to make way for a gas station (1515 N. Broad Street had previously been demolished in 1924, replaced by an automobile showroom).¹⁴ The Progress Plaza shopping center, built by the Rev. Dr. Leon H. Sullivan in 1968, now occupies the sites where the Disstons' Broad Street mansions once stood.

Even before his father's death, Hamilton Disston held senior positions and an ownership stake in the Disston Saw Works. In this way, the founder's first son was one of Philadelphia's best-known businessmen, not to mention a growing force in city Republican politics. After 1878 – while he was still living at 1439 N. 15th Street – Hamilton took leadership of one of the city's largest manufacturing concerns, developing its new Tacony plant into a vast saw-making operation that had no equal anywhere in the world. During the same period, Hamilton Disston also became the greatest land speculator of the nineteenth century in the United States when, in 1881, he acquired and attempted to drain four million acres of south Florida wetlands. It was in 1877, while he was still in residence at 1439 N. 15th Street, that Disston first envisioned and starting planning for this endeavor, which later failed but is credited with kicking off a decades-long Florida land boom.¹⁵ The Hamilton Disston House at 1439 N. 15th Street remains a monument to the significant achievements of this major Philadelphia manufacturer and businessman, and to the Disstons' role in transforming lower North Philadelphia into a desirable residential enclave for families of similar backgrounds. To echo Thomas, "As the home of a prominent industrialist and developer of the region, the house is important."¹⁶

The Hamilton Disston House after Hamilton Disston

After Hamilton Disston relocated to 1505 N. Broad Street in 1880, he sold his house at 1439 N. 15th Street, which remained a private home until about 1910. Around that time, the building was converted into an apartment house and the rear ell was enlarged to accommodate this use.¹⁷ The

¹⁴ "Disston Mansion to Be Demolished," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 12, 1933.

¹⁵ Disston's activities in Florida are extensively covered in Michael Grunwald, *The Swamp: The Everglades, Florida, and the Politics of Paradise* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006).

¹⁶ Thomas, 7:10.

¹⁷ "Permits Issued Yesterday," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, November 27, 1909.

building remained a multi-family one for many years but became vacant by the 1980s. In 1988, the former Hamilton Disston House was rehabilitated in conjunction with the William Ivins House next door. In this project, overseen by Campbell Thomas & Co. Architects, the houses were renovated as a single, interconnected apartment building.¹⁸ This use continues today.

William Ivins and His House

Born in Philadelphia in 1833, William Ivins was a partner in Ivins, Dietz & Metzger, one of the largest and most important carpet manufacturers in nineteenth-century Philadelphia. Established shortly after the Civil War, the company was originally known as Ivins & Dietz, becoming Ivins, Dietz & Magee in 1873, and then Ivins, Dietz & Metzger in 1892. After relocating their manufacturing operation to the southeast corner of 7th Street and Lehigh Avenue in 1884, the Ivins, Dietz & Metzger mill became one of the largest in the city, this at a time when Philadelphia led the nation in carpet manufacturing (Fig. 18).

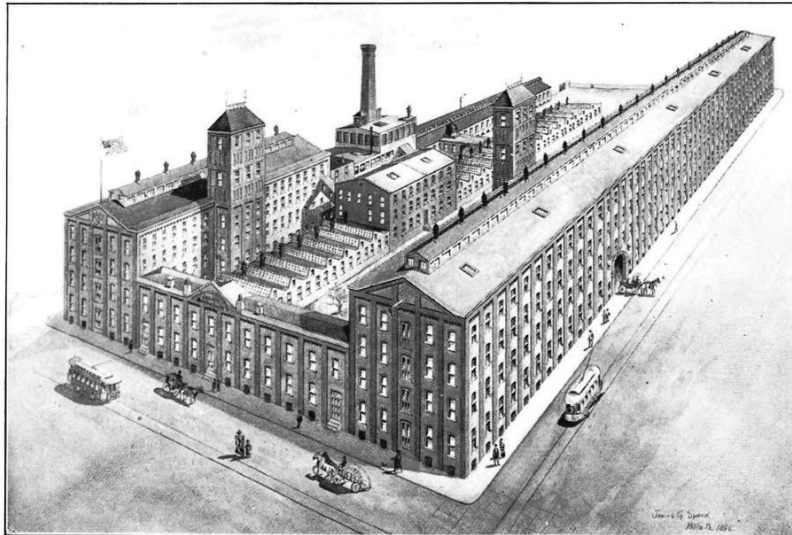


Figure 18: The vast Ivins, Dietz & Metzger plant at 7th and Lehigh as it appeared around 1900 (from *Philadelphia and Notable Philadelphians*, 1901).

Widely known for their quality and design, the Brussels, Wilton, and ingrain carpets produced by Ivins, Dietz & Metzger were shipped throughout the United States and were sold in most major department stores, including those in cities as far away as Seattle and San Francisco. The company also sold carpets directly to consumers through their Philadelphia store, which retained the name of Ivins, Dietz & Magee even after 1892. In 1888, the firm replaced their showroom, then on 2nd Street in Old City, with a new store at 1217 Market Street. In 1894, this too was replaced when Ivins, Dietz & Magee built a new six-story building at 1220-22 Market Street, which they and their successor, Hardwick & Magee, would occupy for the next forty-five years (Fig. 19).

¹⁸ Michael Martin Mills, "Recycling a N. Phila Mansion," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 22, 1989.

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Figure 19: The Ivins, Dietz & Magee store at 1220-22 Market Street as it appeared around 1900 (from the Frank H. Taylor Collection, Free Library of Philadelphia). The store was designed by the architect William N. MacCollin and built in 1894.

The breathless expansion of Ivins, Dietz & Metzger and its retail branch, Ivins, Dietz & Magee, was in large part the work of William Ivins himself. As managing partner of the business throughout the late-nineteenth century, Ivins not only became an extremely wealthy man, but played a significant role in the development of one of Philadelphia's most important industries. After Ivins' death in 1904, the company, which became Hardwick & Magee in 1910, continued to thrive, remaining one of the best-known carpet manufacturers and retailers in the region until 1971, when the business finally went bankrupt and closed down.¹⁹

Like other men who had made their fortunes in industry, William Ivins chose to live in North Philadelphia; in 1882, he bought an existing three-story house at 1437 North Fifteenth Street, just one block west of Broad. That year, Ivins added a fourth story, but appears not to have made any significant alterations to the building for nearly two decades. In 1899, Ivins had the front of the house rebuilt in the Chateaufesque style, resulting in the building as it appears today. By transforming the front of what had been a Second Empire style house, Ivins was following a trend of individuality that reshaped the built environment of the surrounding neighborhood beginning in

¹⁹ "The Ivins, Dietz & Metzger Company, Philadelphia," in *American Carpet and Upholstery Journal* (February 1903): 84-85. See also: "Local Brevities," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 2, 1873, p. 3; "Carpet Men to Consolidate," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 16, 1892, p. 1; "Fine Stock of Carpets," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 2, 1894, p. 2; "Big Carpet House to Reincorporate," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 25, 1910, p. 5; and "Hardwick & Magee Files for Bankruptcy," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 27, 1971, p. 7.

the 1880s and lasted into the early 1900s. By the turn of the twentieth century, the comparative uniformity of the 1870s had been replaced with a stylistic eclecticism that reflected each individual owner's taste and introduced an architectural variety that remains evident today.

The architectural transformation of lower North Philadelphia between 1880 and 1900 is represented both by ground-up, newly built houses and major alterations to existing houses. Among the former, one of the best examples was the now-demolished P.A.B. Widener Mansion at the northwest corner of Broad Street and Girard Avenue. Built in 1887, this work by Willis G. Hale, in his extravagant and idiosyncratic German Renaissance revival style, was a stark departure from the comparatively sober Second Empire houses that preceded it ([Fig. 20](#)). An excellent surviving example is the home of streetcar magnate Charles Ellis Mansion at 1530 N. Broad Street, designed by William Decker and built in 1890. The Ellis House is notable not just for its richly executed Romanesque Revival treatment in brownstone, but also for its more three-dimensional form, composed of various projecting window bays and pointed roofs ([Fig. 21](#)).



Figure 20 (left): The P.A.B. Widener Mansion at the northwest corner of Broad and Girard, designed by Willis G. Hale and built in 1887 (from the Free Library of Philadelphia).

Figure 21 (right): The Charles Ellis House at 1430 N. Broad Street, designed by William Decker and built in 1890.

Among the existing houses that were significantly altered by later owners, the best examples are those of gas company head Edward C. Markley at 1521 N. 16th Street, designed by Thomas P. Lonsdale and rebuilt in 1893; of Fannie Brown, widow of textile machinery manufacturer George Brown, at 1417 Jefferson Street, rebuilt in 1895; and the William Ivins House at 1437 N. 15th Street, designed by built in 1899 ([Figs. 22-24](#)). These three houses, which were designed in the Queen Anne, Gothic/Flemish Revival, and Chateausque styles, respectively, illustrate the incredible variety of architectural forms and material treatments – brick, stone, terra cotta – that appeared after 1880 and continue to define the neighborhood today. The William Ivins House, in particular, Thomas writes, "...is a major period house of a sort now largely gone in North Philadelphia."²⁰

²⁰ Thomas, 7:10.

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Figure 22 (left): The Edward C. Markley House at 1521 N. 16th Street, the front rebuilt according to the design of T.P. Lonsdale in 1893.



Figure 23 (middle): The Fanny Brown House at 1417 Jefferson Street, rebuilt in 1895. Architect unknown.



Figure 24 (right): The William Ivins House at 1437 N. 15th Street, the front rebuilt in 1899. Architect unknown.

Nearly all of the grand houses built in the neighborhood after 1880 were architect-designed. While the architect responsible for the William Ivins House has not been positively identified, evidence suggests it may have been William H. MacCollin (1864-1936). Little is known about MacCollin's early years except that he had become head draftsman to Willis G. Hale sometime in the 1880s.²¹ In 1890, MacCollin began to practice on his own and within a few years had "done much important work both in connection with public works and expensive business and residential properties."²² MacCollin's best-known projects included an "immense extension" to the N. Snellenburg & Co. department store at 12th and Market Streets, built in 1893, the Philadelphia Inquirer's new seven-story building at 1109-11 Market Street, built in 1894, and the Ivins, Dietz & Magee store at 1220-22 Market Street, built in 1895 (all demolished). MacCollin also became well-known as a residential designer, completing four large houses for the Snellenburg family at 2123-2129 N. Broad Street in 1893 (all demolished), his own house at 325 S. 20th Street in 1896 (extant), and numerous other commissions in Center City, Germantown, and Overbrook between 1890 and 1900. While none of these projects were designed in the Chateausque style as it later appeared in the William Ivins House, they nonetheless demonstrate how MacCollin was comfortable designing houses in a range of revival styles. This, along with his established relationship with Ivins as designer of his Center City store, suggests MacCollin may have been responsible for Ivins' house at 1437 N. 15th Street.

²¹ "The Inquirer in Its New Home," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, December 16, 1894, 43.

²² "The Inquirer in Its New Home," 37 and 43.

The William Ivins House and the Chateausque Style

The William Ivins House is a significant local example of the architectural style commonly known as the Chateausque (also known as the Francis I or chateau style), which was popularized in the United States by Richard Morris Hunt in the early 1880s. While a student at the École des Beaux Arts in Paris before the American Civil War, Hunt witnessed an architectural revival based on the monumental chateaux of the Francis I era in sixteenth-century France. These buildings frequently combined Gothic and increasingly popular Italian Renaissance elements and detailing, forming a transitional style that most commonly featured steep roofs, wall dormers with elaborately sculpted surrounds and pinnacles, turrets and towers, and *croisettes* or cross-shaped windows, all in an asymmetrical composition.²³ Although Hunt had been familiar with and admired the French chateau form since the 1850s, its extravagance prevented it from being widely adopted in the United States until later in the nineteenth century, when families like the Vanderbilts – those of the first great American fortunes – demanded an architecture expressive of their vast wealth, social position, and power. Answering that call, in 1878 Hunt designed a townhouse for William K. Vanderbilt on Fifth Avenue in New York City, one modeled on the French chateaux of the sixteenth century. Completed in 1882, the Vanderbilt house is widely considered the first major Chateausque house in the United States. It was not until the early 1890s, however, when Hunt completed the vast Biltmore Estate in North Carolina – also a Vanderbilt commission – that the Chateausque style made a real impact on American domestic architecture.²⁴

In Philadelphia during the early 1890s, the impact of Hunt's chateau style was immediate. One of the first major domestic projects in the region influenced by Biltmore was Woodmont, the vast house in suburban Gladwyne designed by William L. Price for manufacturer Alan Wood, Jr. in 1892 (Fig. 25).



Figure 25: Woodmont (the Alan Wood, Jr. House), designed by William L. Price and built in 1892 (Frederick Gutekunst, photographer, copy in the Athenaeum of Philadelphia).

²³ Marcus Whiffen, *American Architecture Since 1780: A Guide to the Styles* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992), 141-145.

²⁴ David Chase, "Superb Privacies: The Later Domestic Commissions of Richard Morris Hunt," in *The Architecture of Richard Morris Hunt*, edited by Susan R. Stein (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 151-172.

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As explained in the National Historic Landmark Nomination for Woodmont, the house and others like it represented a synthesis of late gothic and early Renaissance forms and “provided a way of striking a balance midway between medieval picturesqueness and classical discipline and repose.”²⁵ The effect was similar in numerous other projects, both suburban and urban, across the region between 1892 and 1900.

Within the City of Philadelphia, the best domestic examples of the Chateausque style include the twin Conkling-Armstrong Houses at 2224 and 2226 W. Tioga Street, designed by Edgar V. Seeler for the wealthy terra cotta manufacturers Ira L. Conkling and Thomas F. Armstrong and built in 1898, and the William Ivins House at 1439 N. 15th Street ([Fig. 26](#)). The former was listed in the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places in 2019.²⁶ In both cases, wall dormers with highly ornamented surrounds and characteristic pinnacles in terra cotta are the features that most closely identify these houses as works in the Chateausque style. While the Conkling-Armstrong Houses are more highly embellished with terra cotta ornamentation, the William Ivins House is, by way of its asymmetrical massing – created by the semi-circular “tower” on the south elevation – more closely related formally to the French chateaux it was modeled on.



Figure 26: The Conkling-Armstrong Houses at 2224 and 2226 W. Tioga Street as they appeared around 1898 (from the *Catalogue of the Architectural Exhibition by the T-Square Club*, 1898).

Other Philadelphia houses influenced by the sixteenth-century French chateau were those of the builder Allen B. Rorke at 131 S. 18th Street (William Bleddyn Powell, arch., 1895) and of the textile manufacturer James A. Connelly at 3910 Chestnut Street (Horace Trumbauer, arch. 1896). Like the Conkling-Armstrong Houses, the latter was successfully listed in the Philadelphia Register in 2018, based in part for being an excellent examples of the Chateausque style.²⁷ However, because of their constrained sites, neither the Rorke nor Connelly house attempts to

²⁵ Susan Glassman, Woodmont, National Historic Landmark Nomination (NRHP Ref. No. 98001192), 1998.

²⁶ Amy Lambert and Casey Weisdock for the Keeping Society of Philadelphia, Nomination of 2222-24 W. Tioga Street to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, November 13, 2018 (listed March 8, 2019).

²⁷ Staff of the Philadelphia Historical Commission, Nomination of 3910 Chestnut Street to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, March 14, 2018 (Listed May 11, 2018).

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emulate the asymmetrical nature of a real French chateau in the way that the William Ivins House does on its more generously sized lot.



Figure 27 (left): The Allan B. Rorke House at 131 S. 18th Street, designed by William Bleddyn Powell and built in 1895.

Figure 28 (right): The James A. Connelly House at 3910 Chestnut Street, designed by Horace Trumbauer and built in 1896.

As in other cities, the Chateaufesque style also influenced the design of large commercial, public, and institutional buildings in Philadelphia during the 1890s and early 1900s. Among the most notable examples are the twelve-story Harrison Building at 15th and Market Streets (Cope & Stewardson, archs., 1893-95); the Nugent Home for Baptists at 221 W. Johnson Street (J. Franklin Stuckert, arch., 1895); the twelve-story Crozer Building at 1420-22 Chestnut Street (Frank Miles Day, arch., 1896-98), and the North Philadelphia Station of the Pennsylvania Railroad at 2900 N. Broad Street (T.P. Chandler, arch., 1896-1901). All but the Harrison Building remain standing and are excellent examples of how the Chateaufesque style made an impact on architecture in the city and region at the end of the nineteenth century.

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Figure 29 (left): Harrison Building at 15th and Market Streets, designed by Cope & Stewardson, 1893-95 (from the Library of Congress).

Figure 30 (right): Nugent Home for Baptists, designed by J. Franklin Stuckert, 1895 (from the Library Company of Philadelphia).



Figure 31 (left): Crozer Building at 1420-22 Chestnut Street, designed by Frank Miles Day, 1896-98 (Frank Miles Day Collection, Athenaeum of Philadelphia).

Figure 32 (right): North Philadelphia Station of the Pennsylvania Railroad, designed by T.P. Chandler, 1896-1901 (from the files of the Philadelphia Historical Commission through www.philadelphiabuildings.org)

The William Ivins House after William Ivins

After William Ivins died in 1904, his home at 1437 N. 15th Street remained in his family for about 10 more years. In 1915, like the former Hamilton Disston House next door, the building was converted into apartments.²⁸ The building remained a multi-family one for many years but became vacant by the 1980s. In 1988, the former William Ivins House was rehabilitated in conjunction with the Hamilton Disston House next door. In this project, overseen by Campbell Thomas & Co. Architects, the houses were renovated as a single, interconnected apartment building.²⁹ This use continues today.

²⁸ "Advance Construction News," *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders Guide*, July 28, 1915, 475-76.

²⁹ Mills, "Recycling a N. Phila Mansion."

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