

# PRESERVATION MATTERS

*The Newsletter of The Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia*

SPECIAL ISSUE  
ENDANGERED  
PROPERTIES



## Sixth Annual Endangered Properties List

CARNEGIE LIBRARIES ♦ CENTRAL DELAWARE WATERFRONT ♦ ELKINS ESTATE ♦ LOWER DUBLIN ACADEMY

JOHN D. MCILHENNY RESIDENCE ♦ PURVIS HOUSE

### Carnegie Libraries

*Various locations, Philadelphia*

**SIGNIFICANCE** Andrew Carnegie (1835 - 1919) was a Scottish-born industrialist, businessman and a major philanthropist. One of his primary altruistic interests was the funding of public libraries. He provided \$40 million for the construction of over 1,600 libraries throughout the United States and about 400 more internationally during the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Motivated by both his own immigrant experience and by his social/political beliefs, Carnegie came to believe in the power of libraries to create an egalitarian society that favored hard work over social privilege.

Carnegie provided grants for individual libraries to many communities across the country. However, he also provided large grants to certain cities to create multiple libraries. His second largest grant—\$1.5 million (equal to \$48 million in 2009)—went to Philadelphia to support 30 libraries. The grant was made explicitly for the construction of public libraries and required, as a condition of the grant, that the City provide land for the libraries and funds for their operation. The libraries were built between 1905 and 1930, with the bulk of them constructed by 1917. Due to rising costs, only 25 libraries were built, 17 of which remained in operation as libraries at the end of 2008. The libraries were designed by a wide range of Philadelphia architects including such prominent architects as John Torrey Windrim, Hewitt & Hewitt, Wilson Eyre, Frank Miles Day and Paul Cret.

**THREAT** In late 2008, Mayor Michael Nutter announced his intention to close 11 branch libraries as part of a series of budget-cutting measures necessary to create a balanced five-year budget in the face of significant declines in City revenue. Four of the 11 proposed branch

closures were Carnegie-funded libraries: Holmesburg (1906-07), Haddington (1913-15), Logan (1917-18) and Kingsessing (1918-19). Patrons of the library and members of City Council brought suit to prevent closure of all 11 libraries and successfully obtained a court-ordered injunction in December 2008. In January, the mayor postponed the closures until at least June 30.

Information produced during the closure discussions suggested that the City had a larger plan to close many more branch libraries and to build two new regional libraries in their place. While no list of other proposed library closings was disclosed, the potential additional budget cuts by the City may result in proposals for further closings that may threaten other Carnegie-funded libraries.

**RECOMMENDATION** The Alliance supports the efforts of the many friends groups of branch libraries, patrons and City Council members to

keep the branch libraries open. However, since our mission is to protect historic resources, our primary focus must be the preservation of the Carnegie-funded branch library buildings. To achieve this goal, the Alliance submitted nominations to list the four Carnegie branch libraries proposed for closure on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Designation would protect only their exteriors, leaving the branches' architecturally distinctive interiors vulnerable. In the absence of passage of the proposed amendment to the historic preservation ordinance to allow designation of interiors, the Alliance urges Mayor Nutter to take two actions: first, by executive order require that any exterior or interior alterations to the 19 intact Carnegie libraries require approval of the Historical Commission and that such a requirement be included in any lease or sale of the properties if they are closed as public libraries. Second, support the listing of those 19 Carnegie libraries on the Philadelphia Register.



Holmesburg Library



Delaware Generating Station

# Central Delaware Waterfront

*from Allegheny Avenue to Oregon Avenue  
Philadelphia*

**SIGNIFICANCE** The plan for the central Delaware riverfront developed by Penn Praxis in conjunction with the Central Delaware Advocacy Group has drawn attention to the potential of this area to become more accessible to the public while at the same time creating opportunities for new residential and other forms of development. Mayor Nutter has committed his administration to implementing the waterfront plan, including reforming the Penn's Landing Corporation. The City Planning Commission is moving ahead with the next stage of planning and intends to hire a consultant team to develop an implementation strategy.

This section of the waterfront was the location of early shipbuilding yards and of some of the great manufacturing companies of the late-19th and early-20th centuries. Past archaeological investigations discovered portions of 18th-century wooden piers beneath what is now a parking lot at Vine Street and North Delaware Avenue. This site has been listed on the Philadelphia Register to protect those archaeological findings, but no way has yet been found to open the site for broader investigation and public view. Recently, environmental impact studies of the Sugarhouse Casino site determined that a small British fort or redoubt once existed on the site, part of a system of fortifications along the Delaware River. Evidence of early Native American occupation of the site was also found.

Important industrial buildings of the 19th and 20th century also remain: one of the Cramp Shipyard buildings still stands (listed by the Alliance as an endangered building in 2004) as

does the Delaware Generating Station, one of four power plants along the Delaware River waterfront designed by noted architect John T. Windrim with engineer W. C. L. Eglin.

While the historic resources of this area deserve more careful investigation as part of any master plan, the Delaware Generating Station demands immediate attention. Built in 1917, the massive neoclassical façade symbolized the prestige of the Philadelphia Electric Company. Situated on the river's edge on approximately 10 acres in the Fishtown neighborhood of Philadelphia, directly next to historic Penn Treaty Park, the main building contains a six-story turbine room, six-story boiler room, six-story coal storage room and a five-story office building. Windrim incorporated neoclassical motifs including false columns, a parapeted cornice, elongated window bays, dentiled molding, pilasters and a frieze with triglyphs and dentiled cornice to create a monument to industry.

**THREAT** Two types of threats exist to the industrial artifacts on the waterfront. The industrial and archaeological significance of this

entire area is not well documented. Plans for new development—whether a casino, new housing or public open space along the waterfront—could easily remove important industrial properties (including the Cramp Shipyard building) as well as destroy other historical elements not even known due to the lack of archaeological investigation along the river.

The threat to the Delaware Generating Station is more immediate. In August 2008, its owner, Exelon, demolished a 1954 addition to the plant. Although the company has stated it has no plans to demolish the entire plant, the building is in use only to provide backup generating capacity in times of heavy demand, according to Exelon. Its riverfront location adjacent to Penn Treaty Park makes it a potentially desirable site for new development.

**RECOMMENDATION** Before an implementation plan for the central Delaware riverfront is developed, a broad program of historical research should be undertaken. Historic maps and other documents may yield evidence of historic resources such as the British fort at the Sugarhouse location. Such research should be supported by a systematic and broad archaeological investigation of strategic locations to determine whether there is evidence of past development or settlement that is worthy to preserve or document before new development is planned and undertaken. This should be accompanied by an inventory of industrial properties to determine which ones merit preservation.

More immediate attention should be given to the Delaware Generating Station and the Cramp Shipyard buildings. The successful renovation of the Chester Generating Station—another of the massive plants designed by Windrim—into Class A office space indicates that it is possible to save and reuse such structures. Both the station and shipyard properties merit listing on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.



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## Elkins Estate

Ashbourne Road, Elkins Park  
Montgomery County



**SIGNIFICANCE** The 42-acre Elkins estate in Elkins Park includes two grand mansions designed by architect Horace Trumbauer, one of America's prominent residential designers of the late-19th and early-20th centuries. The magnificent Elstowe, built for oilman, financier and streetcar magnate William L. Elkins, is a beautifully preserved example of the large-scale Gilded Age palaces built at the turn of the century. The Italian Renaissance manor house features 45 rooms, including a grand hall, gallery, billiard room and nine bedrooms. On the same property, the Tudor-style Cheltenham House was built for Elkins's son George. Originally constructed in 1896, the building was struck by lightning in July 1908 and, as reported that day by the *New York Times*, was reduced "to a pile of smoking ruins" in just two hours. The house was rebuilt the following year according to Trumbauer's original plans.

**THREAT** The Elkins family sold the mansion and surrounding acreage to the Dominican Sisters in 1932 after a long period of neglect.

The order used the property as a retreat center and maintained it in excellent condition. Several years ago, the property was nearly sold to a developer who would have subdivided the acreage into multiple housing lots. Fortunately, that plan did not proceed and the property was recently purchased by Food for Life, Inc., a nonprofit social service organization, which intends to continue to use the property as a retreat center and for health-related educational programs. However, Food for Life needs funding to help pay off loans taken to acquire the property and to create an endowment to preserve and protect the two historic buildings and their setting.

**RECOMMENDATION** Food for Life should consider establishing a "Friends of Elstowe Manor" organization to raise funds to contribute to the maintenance and preservation of the two historic buildings and their setting. Such an organization would allow contributions and potentially an endowment to be separate from funding for Food for Life's operating programs. The neighboring community, interested public and philanthropic organizations should be encouraged to support such an organization.

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## Purvis House

1601 Mount Vernon Street  
Philadelphia

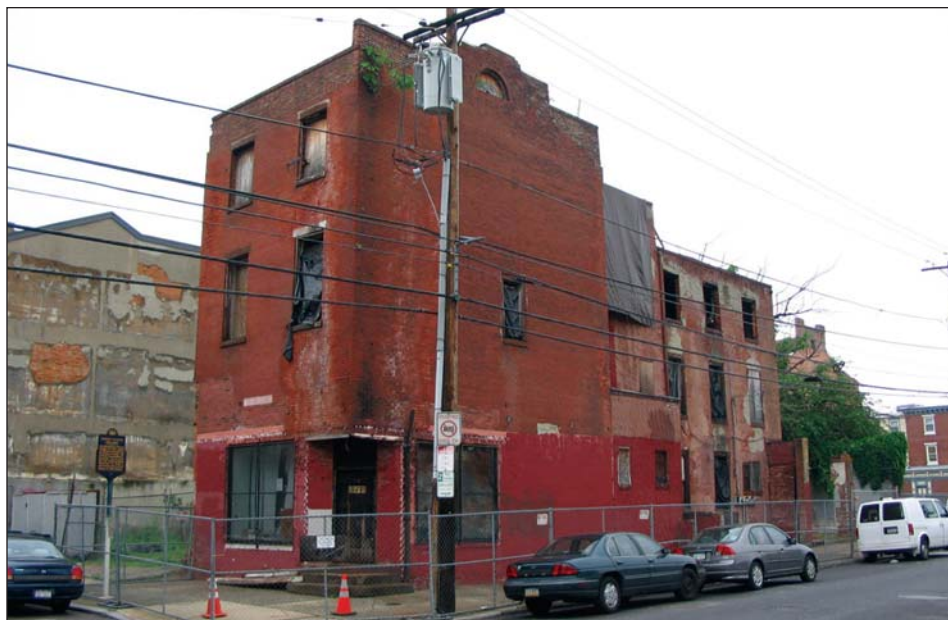
**SIGNIFICANCE** Robert Purvis (1810-1898), one of the 19th century's leading African American abolitionists and orators, lived at 1601 Mount Vernon Street from 1873 until his death in 1898. The house, built in 1859, is the only extant residence associated with Purvis, who is often referred to as the "president" of the Underground Railroad. Purvis once estimated that the Philadelphia Vigilant Committee, which he founded, helped one slave a day journey north to freedom. Active until the end of his life, he served as commissioner of the Freedman's Bank, participated in city politics and fought for civil rights and women's suffrage from his Mount Vernon residence. He is buried in the Fair Hill Burial Ground in North Philadelphia, resting place of other notable abolitionists and women's rights activists.

**THREAT** The Purvis house is vacant, graffiti-covered and so significantly deteriorated that it is now surrounded by a chain link fence to protect passersby. The house is in the Spring Garden Historic District and therefore cannot be altered or demolished without the approval of the Historical Commission. Although the current owner received approval for restoration plans from the Historical Commission in 2003, no

work has been done on the property, which today is three years' delinquent on real estate taxes. Plants sprout from cracks in the masonry and water damage is plainly evident as the building is not sufficiently sealed against the elements.

**RECOMMENDATION** Although there are many house museums in Philadelphia, very few interpret the 19th-century African American experience in Philadelphia. The Purvis house

would serve well as an interpretive center from an African American perspective dedicated to this period of history and the issues Purvis worked on throughout his life: freedom for enslaved African Americans, civil rights and women's suffrage. The property could be acquired by the City for delinquent taxes and sold or donated to an existing museum or nonprofit entity to restore, or a new nonprofit could be established to highlight this underrepresented period of history.





## John D. McIlhenny Residence

Parkgate, 6340 Wayne Avenue  
Philadelphia

**SIGNIFICANCE** Parkgate was built in 1899 for John Dexter McIlhenny and his wife Frances. It remains as a significant legacy of a renowned family noted for its ties to art and art collecting. From 1918 until his death in 1925, John McIlhenny served as the first president of the Philadelphia Museum of Art and bequeathed his art collection to the museum.

Frances McIlhenny served as a museum trustee until her death in 1943. The McIlhenny children, daughter Bernice and son Henry, were also collectors. Henry McIlhenny, who lived at Parkgate until 1950, served the museum in a number of capacities, including as curator of decorative arts. He amassed a world-famous art collection and became a glamorous personality in Philadelphia, entertaining notables from Brooke Astor to Andy Warhol at his Rittenhouse residence.

Designed by the firm of Duhring, Okie & Ziegler in an eclectic English Tudor style, Parkgate highlighted the McIlhennys' impressive collection of art and antiques, yet its infor-

mal interiors were intended to integrate art with daily family life. Ziegler personally oversaw construction, and chose local stone to make the building fireproof. Parkgate serves as an excellent example of the eclectic-styled "country houses" that characterized northwest Philadelphia neighborhoods and the emerging suburbs at the turn of the century. In a 1920 issue of *The American Architect*, a critic wrote "it is to be hoped that Mr. McIlhenny's example may find many followers, and that we may find more specimens of truly great art brought into closer contact with our daily life."

**THREAT** The Lingelbach Elementary School was built on the site of what were once extensive formal gardens surrounding the house. The School District's stewardship of Parkgate has not been beneficial for the property: the original stables were demolished for a parking lot and in the past two decades the house has been allowed to decline. At present, an overgrowth of trees and lack of maintenance have compromised the house, though it appears to be in stable condition. The School District has no current plans for the building.

**RECOMMENDATION** Parkgate should be listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places so that the property is protected from demolition and adverse alteration. The School District needs to recognize the distinctive nature of this historic property and evaluate whether it fits into its long-term needs. If not, the School District should place preservation easements on the property, including the distinctive interior rooms, and seek a buyer to restore the structure and return it to an active function.

## Lower Dublin Academy

3322 Willits Road  
Philadelphia

**SIGNIFICANCE** The site for Lower Dublin Academy dates back to Thomas Holme, who served as surveyor-general to William Penn and laid out the 1682 plan for Philadelphia. The site is part of land granted to him by Penn. Under direction of his will, a log schoolhouse was built on the site and by 1794 fundraising began to build a bigger school. Completed in 1808, the structure's masonry walls, nearly 20-inches thick, were built with stone from the nearby Holmesburg quarry.

**THREAT** The building served as a school until 1925 and then as a private residence until the 1990s when it was purchased by a law firm and renovated for offices. In 2006, arson gutted the building, which now sits vacant and unsecured. The owner wishes to sell and real estate trends in the area suggest that the building might be torn down so the site (less than half an acre) can be redeveloped.

**RECOMMENDATION** The site needs to be matched with a sympathetic new owner who values the connection with Thomas Holme and the lineage of the building. The Lower Dublin Academy building enjoys enthusi-



astic community support, including a "Friends of" nonprofit organization dedicated to its survival, the Holmesburg Civic Association, the Historical Society of Frankford and the Trustees of Lower Dublin Academy.

## CURRENT STATUS

### Boyd Theater

*Philadelphia*

#### Fifth Endangered Properties List

The 1928 Boyd Theater, the last of Philadelphia's great movie palaces, was successfully placed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places in August 2008. Subsequently, ARC Wheeler entered into an agreement of sale to purchase the theater to restore it as the centerpiece of a planned \$95 million hotel and entertainment complex.

### Hasserick/Sawyer House

*East Falls, Philadelphia*

#### Fifth Endangered Properties List

This mid-century modernist treasure by architect Richard Neutra was purchased by a new owner who intends to restore the house, which has been nominated for listing on the Philadelphia Register.

### Stephen Girard Building

*Philadelphia*

#### Fifth Endangered Properties List

This building, designed by James Windrim and possibly the earliest extant skyscraper in Philadelphia, was nominated by the Preservation Alliance to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places and designated by the Historical Commission in November 2008.

### Chestnut Street

*Philadelphia*

#### Fourth Endangered Properties List

To protect some of the significant 19th- and 20th-century buildings along Chestnut Street, the Preservation Alliance is preparing nominations for four historic buildings situated from 7th to 12th streets.

### Church of St. James the Less

*Philadelphia*

#### Fourth Endangered Properties List

The c. 1846 church is one of the most historically significant churches in Philadelphia. After being vacant for several years, the Episcopal Diocese is currently creating a plan for restoring the site to active use for a combination of community-related activities.

### Fort Washington Hotel

*Whitemarsh Township, Montgomery County*

#### Fourth Endangered Properties List

This former hotel was rescued from demolition and successfully renovated for office space and a restaurant.

### Queen Village

*Philadelphia*

#### Third Endangered Properties List

The Queen Village Conservation District was approved by City Council in February 2008.

### Dilworth House

*Philadelphia*

#### Second Endangered Properties List

In September 2008, the L&I Board of Review sustained the appeal brought by the Society Hill Civic Association and adjacent neighbors, preventing demolition of the rear portion of the Dilworth House. The developer has appealed that decision to the Court of Common Pleas.

### Nugent Home for Baptists and Presser Home for Retired Music Teachers

*Mount Airy, Philadelphia*

#### Second Endangered Properties List

A proposal was submitted to the Pennsylvania Housing Finance Agency in fall 2008 for renovation of the c. 1913 Presser Home to provide 45 units of senior housing. A decision on the application is due in May 2009. There are currently no plans for the Nugent Home.

### Provident Mutual Life Insurance Building, Philadelphia

*Philadelphia*

#### Second Endangered Properties List

The 1926 building has been proposed as the new location for the Philadelphia Police Headquarters.

### North Philadelphia Historic Neighborhood Blocks

*Philadelphia*

#### First Endangered Properties List

The Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority sold its properties on the 1500 block of N. 17th Street to a developer who has restored them and reversed years of neglected maintenance. Additionally, the Preservation Alliance provided a grant through its Historic Properties Repair Program to a homeowner in the row to fund repairs and restoration of the façade.

### Uptown Theatre

*Philadelphia*

#### First Endangered Properties List

The Uptown completed Phase I of its program which began in 2007 to stabilize the building and repair terra cotta roof tiles. The Uptown is seeking matching funds for Phase II and hopes to begin work as soon as possible to create an arts and education center in the office tower.

### Available – From Our 2005 Endangered Properties List

Modernist architect Oskar Stonorov designed and built two steel houses on family property in Chester County, circa 1946, as prototypes for pre-fab housing for returning veterans. The Preservation Alliance rescued one of these (which stood in the way of a suburban development) and offers the dismantled house at no cost to anyone committed to rebuilding it. For more information, contact Randy Cotton at [randy@preservationalliance.com](mailto:randy@preservationalliance.com).



## STATUS UNCHANGED

The following properties remain in the same condition as they were when listed on the Endangered Properties List.

### Fifth Endangered Properties List

#### Castleway Development

1900 Block of Sansom St, Philadelphia

#### Family Court

19th & Vine Streets, Philadelphia

#### Germantown Avenue Street Paving

Philadelphia

### Fourth Endangered Properties List

#### Surplus City Properties

Philadelphia

#### 26th District Police HQ

Philadelphia

#### Hatfield House

Philadelphia

#### Cramp Shipyard, Machine Shop #2

Philadelphia

#### 1791 John Lewis House

Montgomery County

#### Downtown Coatesville

Chester County

### Third Endangered Properties List

#### Bouvier Building

Philadelphia

#### Burk Mansion

Philadelphia

#### Chester Heights Camp Meeting

Delaware County

#### Mt. Moriah Cemetery

Philadelphia & Delaware Counties

### Second Endangered Properties List

#### Philadelphia Historic School Buildings

Philadelphia

#### Upper Roxborough National Register Historic District

Philadelphia

#### Madison Square

Philadelphia

#### Chester Avenue Historic Street Paving

Philadelphia

#### Dolington Village

Bucks County

### Heidelberg (Kerlin Farm)

Montgomery County

### First Endangered Properties List

#### Christ Temple Church

Philadelphia

#### Germantown Town Hall

Philadelphia

#### Historic Farmhouse

Philadelphia

#### Lynnewood Hall

Montgomery County

#### Sleighton School Campus

Delaware County

#### The Lazaretto Quarantine Station

Delaware County

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*“Community character is  
lost one building  
at a time.”*

Ed McMahon, THE CONSERVATION FUND



Is there an historic property  
in your neighborhood that you would miss if it were demolished?  
Don't wait for it to appear on the next Endangered Properties list—  
tell us about it NOW and let us help you find a way to protect it  
through historic designation or other means.

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