

# PRESERVATION MATTERS

The Newsletter of The Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia

2013  
ENDANGERED  
PROPERTIES

## Eleventh Annual Endangered Properties List

BOYD THEATRE ♦ THE LEGENDARY BLUE HORIZON ♦ NINETEENTH STREET BAPTIST CHURCH ♦ ENGINE 46 FIREHOUSE  
SHAWMONT STATION ♦ ROBINSON STORE ♦ HADDINGTON HISTORIC DISTRICT ♦ PHILADELPHIA SCHOOL BUILDINGS

The Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia publishes its Endangered Properties List every December to highlight important historic resources throughout the region that face uncertain futures. In 2013, serious threats arose to some of Philadelphia's most unique architectural and cultural landmarks, and the coming year will present significant challenges and opportunities to preservationists dedicated to finding new life for these irreplaceable buildings. To learn more about these properties and those from past lists, and what you can do to help protect their future, visit our website at [www.PreservationAlliance.com/Endangered](http://www.PreservationAlliance.com/Endangered).

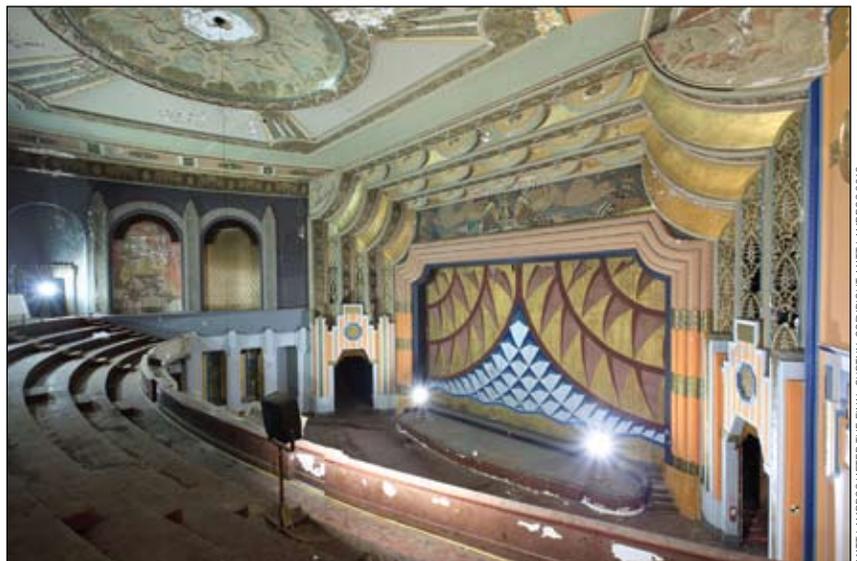
### Boyd Theatre

*Hoffman-Henon Company, 1928  
1910 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia*

**SIGNIFICANCE** Center City's last surviving motion picture palace is also one of Philadelphia's preeminent examples of Art Deco architecture. Behind a diminutive Chestnut Street façade stand opulent lobbies and a soaring auditorium unmatched in the city. According to its opening program from Christmas Day 1928, the theater's lavish and whimsical murals, mosaics, etched glass mirrors and bas relief sculpture celebrated the "Triumph of the Modern Woman."

**THREAT** Though the theater's interiors are remarkably intact, an application to demolish everything but the Chestnut Street façade was submitted to the Philadelphia Historical Commission in September 2013 by the theater's owner, Live Nation Worldwide, Inc. In its place, the national theater chain iPic seeks to build an eight-screen luxury multiplex.

**RECOMMENDATIONS** Philadelphia deserves a creative and forward-thinking restoration plan for the Boyd Theatre and its one-of-a-kind auditorium and lobbies. Any plan that proposes the complete demolition of these spaces is a short-sighted approach to one of Center City's most potentially transformative sites. Demolition requires the approval of the Historical Commission, which must first conclude that the theater cannot be adapted for any other use. Numerous examples of successful theater conversions across the country can be studied for viable alternative reuse proposals that would preserve the Jazz Age splendor of the theater.



MATT LAMBROS/AFTER THE FINAL CURTAIN, COPYRIGHT: MATT LAMBROS 2013



ROB BENDER, COPYRIGHT: FRIENDS OF THE BOYD, INC.

# The Legendary Blue Horizon

Carl Berger, 1917 (auditorium); 1865 (front facades)  
1314-16 N. Broad Street, Philadelphia

**SIGNIFICANCE** For nearly fifty years, the Legendary Blue Horizon hosted boxing matches in a former Loyal Order of Moose auditorium built in 1917 behind a row of Civil War-era brownstones. The crown jewel in Philadelphia's once-extensive arena circuit, "The Blue" was celebrated for its unpolished and intimate atmosphere, gaining a national reputation as a boxing mecca. It was named the best boxing venue in the world by Ring Magazine in 1999. Its comprehensive 2004 restoration received a Grand Jury Achievement Award from the Preservation Alliance.

**THREAT** The Blue Horizon abruptly closed in 2010. A hotel proposal announced in 2011 by Mosaic Development and Orens Brothers was initially lauded by city officials for its plans to preserve the recently-restored auditorium as a hotel ballroom and event space. However, in June 2013 the developers revealed new plans that would demolish the entire rear of the structure, preserving only the Broad Street facades of the original 1865 brownstones. In the place of the auditorium, a parking garage and new hotel construction are now proposed. The plan requires over \$6 million in public financing. The building is not listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, so the Philadelphia Historical Commission currently has no authority to prevent its demolition.



G. WIDMAN FOR VISIT PHILADELPHIA

**RECOMMENDATIONS** The viability of a hotel at this location and on this site is questionable, and the plan's dependence on public funds is wholly inappropriate considering the proposed destruction of a major cultural asset on North Broad Street. The City of Philadelphia, which has been postponing a pending sheriff's sale in order to facilitate the hotel project, should instead be actively encouraging rehabilitation proposals which preserve and reuse the auditorium.

# Nineteenth Street Baptist Church

Furness & Hewitt, 1874  
1249-53 S. 19th Street, Philadelphia

**SIGNIFICANCE** Constructed in 1874 as the Memorial Church of the Holy Comforter, Nineteenth Street Baptist Church was designed by renowned architects Frank Furness and George W. Hewitt. Even without its original corner spire, the striking green serpentine stone building is one of the pair's most colorful and original church designs, reflecting the fashionable tastes of the High Victorian Gothic period. The church has been home to its current congregation since 1944.

**THREAT** Serpentine stone is a notoriously fragile building material, and slow deterioration reached a critical tipping point in 2011 when a partial wall collapse led to the building's condemnation. Emergency stabilization by parishioners and volunteers has kept the building standing, but comprehensive repairs are beyond the current means of the congregation.



PETER WOODALL, HIDDEN CITY DAILY

**RECOMMENDATIONS** A University of Pennsylvania conservation studio studied the building in the fall of 2013, and its forthcoming report will be used to help raise funds towards the church's long-term stabilization and rehabilitation. While church buildings across the

region are being lost at an alarming rate, Nineteenth Street Baptist illustrates the importance of a dedicated congregation in engaging the support of a broader preservation community to protect both an architectural landmark and a neighborhood anchor.

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## Engine 46 Firehouse

*John T. Windrim (attributed), 1894*  
1401 S. Water Street, Philadelphia

**SIGNIFICANCE** Engine 46's Flemish Revival façade and castle-like tower make it one of the most iconic buildings in the Pennsport neighborhood of South Philadelphia. It is a rare survivor from an era of flamboyantly-designed municipal buildings erected by the City of Philadelphia in the late nineteenth century. Its high-style trappings, likely the work of noted architect John T. Windrim, reflect the progressive ambitions of a city celebrating the rapid expansion of its schools, parks, and police and fire departments.

**THREAT** The fire station was abandoned in the 1960s and used as an auto repair shop for two decades before undergoing a successful restaurant conversion in 1994. It has been vacant since 2006, and in 2013 Cedar Realty Trust received a permit to demolish the building. Widespread neighborhood opposition to the demolition persuaded Cedar to postpone the demolition in hopes that a new tenant for the building can be found.

**RECOMMENDATIONS** A number of other former firehouses across Philadelphia have been successfully reused. The building is an ideal location for a new restaurant or brewpub, but could also house a retail or office tenant in a neighborhood that has benefitted from significant investment over the past five years.



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## Shawmont Station

*William Strickland (attributed), 1834*  
7700 Nixon Street, Philadelphia

**SIGNIFICANCE** Shawmont Station is the oldest surviving passenger railroad station in the United States, built in 1834 by the Philadelphia, Germantown and Norristown Railroad, the city's first rail company. At the time of the station's construction, the chief designer for PG&N was the famous Philadelphia architect William Strickland, whose other works include the Merchants' Exchange and the Second Bank of the United States. The modest Greek Revival station still stands in its original location in Upper Roxborough near the Montgomery County border, along side what is now SEPTA's Manayunk-Norristown line.

**THREAT** SEPTA assumed ownership of the station in 1981 when the former PG&N line became the R6. Passenger service at the station was discontinued in 1991, but a caretaker resided on site until this year. The station and a small Victorian rear addition are now vacant



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and mothballed awaiting rehabilitation and a new use. Without regular monitoring and maintenance, the site's isolated location leaves it prone to vandalism and the elements.

**RECOMMENDATIONS** The station's modest physical stature should not overshadow its profound significance in railroad history. In recent

years, SEPTA has undertaken a number of commendable historic preservation projects, often in partnership with community organizations, small businesses, or other government agencies. Recent improvements to the Schuylkill River Trail along the adjacent Manayunk Canal towpath provide an opportunity for the station to serve a new generation, and a new mode, of travelers.

# Robinson Store

Victor Gruen and Elsie Krummeck, 1946  
1020 Market Street, Philadelphia

**SIGNIFICANCE** Victor Gruen was one of the most influential commercial architects of the twentieth century, credited with the invention of the modern shopping mall. Early in his career, he and partner Elsie Krummeck designed eleven ultra-modern storefronts across the country for the California-based Grayson-Robinson chain of budget womenswear. One of the first major post-war buildings in Center City, their Philadelphia branch is the last surviving example of a building campaign that epitomized the use of architecture as advertisement and helped inspire a radical re-shaping of the American commercial corridor.

**THREAT** Another important modern storefront in Center City, the former Coward Shoes designed in 1949 by Louis I. Kahn and Oskar Stonorov at 1118 Chestnut Street, is slated for demolition in early 2014. Both buildings suffer from character-obscuring alterations and deferred maintenance, leading to a general lack of appreciation of their significance. With development pressure rising around Market East, the Robinson Store's relative obscurity is a serious threat to its survival.

**RECOMMENDATIONS** Restoration of the building's façade would be a major preservation victory and could anchor any number of redevelopment plans for the rest of the block. The building is located within the new Market East digital signage district, which incentivizes major façade improvements. The building should also be evaluated for tax credit eligibility and local historic designation.



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LIBRARY OF CONGRESS, PRINTS & PHOTOGRAPHS DIVISION, GOTTSCHO-SCHLEISNER COLLECTION

# Haddington Historic District

Bounded by 60th, Market, 61st & Chestnut Streets, Philadelphia

**SIGNIFICANCE** The Haddington Historic District was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1988, recognized as the best-preserved of the early twentieth century developments that followed the construction of the Market Street Elevated Line in West Philadelphia. The majority of buildings in the district were designed by E. Allen Wilson, a prolific architect who gave shape to many of West Philadelphia's speculative development projects.

**THREAT** Reconstruction of the El tracks in the 2000s triggered a wave of commercial vacancies which the district is still struggling to overcome. The 6000 block of Market Street retains its architectural integrity, but is growing increasingly blighted. A major new transit-oriented development is proposed for an adjacent block at 59th and Market Street, and the 60th Street corridor to the south is slated for an ambitious infill construction campaign. Yet reinvestment in the



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existing historic building stock remains elusive, and misguided calls for wholesale demolition are gaining traction.

**RECOMMENDATIONS** Multiple owners control the district's iconic Market Street commercial

block. Coordinated parcel consolidation could facilitate a major federal rehabilitation tax credit project for this row, just as ACHIEVEAbility CDC used historic tax credits for their award-winning restoration of the Von Louhr Building, also within the Haddington Historic District.

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# Philadelphia School Buildings

Citywide

**SIGNIFICANCE** The School District of Philadelphia owns and operates nearly 300 school buildings, from imposing Colonial Revival, Gothic, and Art Deco high schools to modest postwar elementary schools. Beyond their architectural significance, each of these buildings is a true neighborhood asset that contributes to community identity and stability. The majority of these schools were constructed before 1938, and more than 150 are currently listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

**THREAT** The District shuttered 23 schools in 2013 and is currently marketing 30 vacant properties for sale, with plans to close and sell up to 60 schools over the next five years. Neighbors fear that these closures will lead to abandonment and blight; the recently-demolished Edison High School attracted squatters and vandals for years before a four-alarm blaze gutted its interior. In addition, the District's ongoing funding crisis has severely impacted upkeep of the schools which remain open, compounding a deferred maintenance challenge that officials already estimate at over \$4 billion.

**RECOMMENDATIONS** Adequate maintenance is essential for operating schools to provide a safe and healthy learning environment and for vacant schools to be successfully rehabilitated. Multiple examples of successful school conversions, some aided by historic tax credits, should help guide school disposition policies and strategies. Schools built after 1938 should also be evaluated for National Register eligibility to help incentivize their adaptive reuse.



SMALLBONES VIA CREATIVE COMMONS

Robert Vaux Junior High School



BRADLEY MAULE, HIDDEN CITY DAILY

Germantown High School



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Strawberry Mansion High School/Leslie P. Hill Elementary School

Nugent Home For Baptists



CINDY HAMILTON, HERITAGE CONSULTING GROUP

Since its inception in 2003, 80 historic buildings, sites and resources have been added to the Preservation Alliance's Endangered Properties List. The past year has seen significant change at a number of these sites, both positive and negative. For more updates and a look at the program's past eleven years, visit [www.PreservationAlliance.com/Endangered](http://www.PreservationAlliance.com/Endangered).

**SAVED**

**Nugent Home for Baptists (listed 2004)** Grand opening celebrations are scheduled for March 2014 at Nolen Properties' new Nugent Senior Apartments, a 62-unit affordable senior housing development in Germantown. The \$16 million project included the complete restoration of the palatial Nugent Home, an 1895 Chateausque landmark that stood abandoned for over a decade.

**St. Peter's Episcopal Church (listed 2009)** The Waldorf School of Philadelphia is partnering with developer Ken Weinstein on a \$5 million restoration of this landmark Furness & Hewitt-designed church complex, slated to open in 2015. Work is now underway on structures that engineers estimate would have collapsed within two years if left in their abandoned state.

**LOST**

**St. Bonaventure (listed 2009)** Complete demolition of this 1894 church designed by Edwin Forrest Durang is now underway after its owner was unable to address a number of code violations. The \$1 million demolition was contracted by the City of Philadelphia, which will put a lien against the cleared parcel.

**Ortlieb's Brewery (listed 2012)** Ortlieb's brew house and stock house, two of the last major buildings that made up the historic Ortlieb's Brewery complex, have been demolished after

lying abandoned since 1981. Two other buildings, the former bottling plant and tavern, both remain standing and in productive use.

**STILL THREATENED**

**Church of the Assumption (listed 2009)** In November 2013, Pennsylvania's Commonwealth Court nullified the demolition permit issued to the church's former owner in 2010, ruling that current owner John Wei must submit a new hardship application to the Historical Commission to seek demolition. Wei's plans for the church remain unknown.

**Royal Theater (listed 2011)** Universal Companies has announced new plans to develop 30 rental units, six townhouses, and 7,000 square feet of retail at the Royal Theater site. The plan would preserve the theater's South Street facade, but demolish the historic theater where Bessie Smith, Fats Waller, and other greats performed.

**Gretz Brewery (listed 2012)** Multiple code violations led to the demolition of the Gretz Brewery's distinctive corner tavern building in October 2013. One of 12 structures that made up the historic complex, the corner tavern was in an advanced state of disrepair. Demolition revealed the rest of the complex to be structurally sound, and neighbors continue to advocate for its adaptive reuse.

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**YOU CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE!**

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The Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia actively promotes the appreciation, protection, and revitalization of the Philadelphia region's historic buildings, communities and landscapes.