



Inappropriateness of Designation of 1039 Chestnut Street

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Overview

As the cover image shows, what is proposed for historic designation at 1039 Chestnut Street is a sad fragment of a much-altered Victorian building, by a minor designer, for a client whose corruption damaged the city, and whose presence has been largely eradicated.

- The alterations to the building have been intentionally destructive, first in an era when Victorian architecture was hated. Instead of rebuilding the Victorian façade when it was removed for the widening of Chestnut Street, a new front façade without the Victorian elements was built in 1918;
- In 1934 fire-safety improvements replaced the entire rear structural bay of the 11th Street façade that contained the main stair and toilet rooms with a crudely detailed fire tower;
- In the 1949 redesign of the building, the remaining brick portions of the 11th Street façade were further eradicated with paint and the first-floor shop windows were replaced with a storefront that extended with stucco to the bottom of the second-floor windows. On the Chestnut Street façade the first-floor shopfront was replaced, the side piers were cut off for shop windows, and the second-floor windows were infilled. The original detail of the building at street level of both facades was eliminated;
- In the 1980s when the rear entrance to the fire tower was closed off for a shop, all access to the upper stories was eliminated, and the original windows and frames were covered with plywood;
- Recently, the original frames and details of the windows on both facades that were underneath the 1980s plywood were removed for modern metal windows and the existing shopfronts were replaced with the most banal of shop window systems.
- Less than 40% of the original building remains.

What is left that relates to the Republican history era is a fragment of the original 11th Street façade, cut off at each end by massive alterations and separated from the street level by a total rebuild using the cheapest shopwindow systems; the 1918 Chestnut Street façade was later drastically altered by removal of the second-floor windows and the second floor spandrel, as well as the first floor piers on either side of the façade; more recently the 1949 street-level shop windows on both facades were all removed leaving a visual ruin at an important corner in a transforming institutional neighborhood.

The question that the Historical Commission must ask itself is why this ruin of a building is the subject of a nomination to the Philadelphia Register. For what purpose are we exhausting our time and the owner's resources? Setting aside that this building is not even a shadow of itself, its shameful historical narrative conveys no story worthy of telling that is a benefit to the city. If this building suggests any story, it is one of corruption and graft. If this were a well preserved and well executed likeness of Nathan Bedford Forrest, who certainly had greater historical impact, we would remove it from the public zone with little thought. The building does not signify a time we should remember and certainly nothing for which we devote time and resources to promote. If the corruption of the Vane machine is important –

we have better and more complete examples, not the least being City Hall that was so hated for the obvious corruption that funded its construction that a generation after it was finished, the city was exploring how to demolish it leaving only its tower, and again half a century after completion again proposed to demolish the entire building to remove that monument to corruption. Only the massive costs of demolition prevented that action.

Regulatory Goals

The nomination for 1039 Chestnut Street fails to demonstrate that this building in its present state meets any of the purposes for, or designation criteria of, the Philadelphia Historical Commission (PHC).

- In order to meet the purposes and criteria of the Philadelphia Historical Commission, the meaning and value of the resource should in some way be evident to the general public and its preservation should, in some way, be beneficial to the city.

By examining how 1039 Chestnut Street fails to meet the purposes of the PHC, this report will address:

- The massive alterations and total removal of the front facade of the building to a depth of four feet that have undermined its integrity;
- the deteriorated physical condition of the building, and its resulting lack of architectural significance;
- the inability of this much-altered building with its resulting loss of integrity to embody the claimed significance of the building's history.

In the case of 1039 Chestnut Street, as detailed below, the totality of the physical changes to the building and the resulting lack of architectural significance of the building in its present condition undercut any potential significance or value to the city.

1) Its deteriorated condition and the extent of alterations of what remains of the west façade facing 11th Street would require that this remaining fragment be of extraordinary importance to overcome the extent of alterations. This fragment does not meet that test.

2) The replaced front or south façade facing Chestnut Street is an undistinguished, significantly bastardized, and massively deteriorated early twentieth century work that again, by virtue of the extent of alteration to the lowest two stories as well as windows and other elements, would require that what remains of this façade to be of extraordinary importance. It does not meet that test.

3) The crudely altered and replaced first floor shop fronts around the entire building undercut the pedestrian experience and together with the other alterations make the building inappropriate for designation.

Given the extent of irreversible alterations and deterioration, 1039 Chestnut Street does not have the capacity to represent the intended narrative and should not be designated.



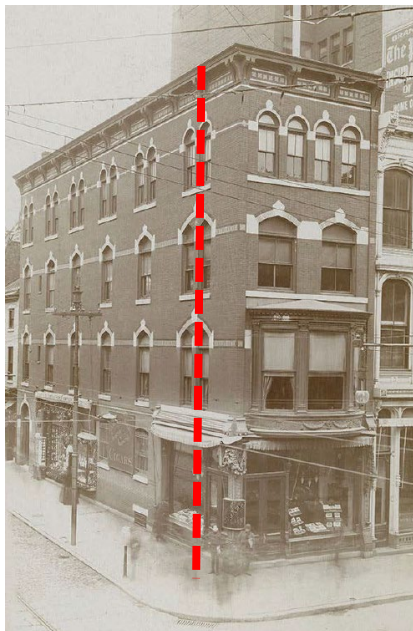
Altered or removed original fabric on both facades



What remains of the 1870s building



UNION REPUBLICAN CLUB.



Chronology of changes: – original 1878, modified c. 1900, cut back and altered, 1918 and 1949



Refaced, altered, and inaccessible above the ground floor – 2024

Existing Conditions: Abandoned Interior



Black rot on roof planking, upper floor; evidence of systemic water damage throughout



Rotted roof planking, rotted roof planks, removed finishes from water damage

Purposes of designation in Philadelphia:

Per the city regulations, the relevant purposes of historic designations in the Philadelphia legislation that might apply to this site would include:

(1) Preserve buildings, structures, sites, and objects that are *important to the education, culture, traditions, and economic values of the City*’.

- Given the extent of corruption embodied in the Republican machine that owned this building that gave Lincoln Steffens the title for his article about Philadelphia as “Corrupt and Contented” this is not a role model that brings value to the city.

(2) “Strengthen the economy of the City by enhancing the City’s attractiveness to tourists and by stabilizing and improving property values”

- Given the massive alterations to the building and its largely vacant, altered, and deteriorated condition, the designation of this property clearly does not enhance the city’s attractiveness to tourists, nor does it warrant the economic costs and loss of value to the owner of the designated building.
- A largely ruined building with its upstairs abandoned and its facades massively altered does not stabilize and improve property values.
- Its important corner location in the heart of the city’s downtown area is more valuable than a building that is mostly vacant and derelict. The proposed designation cuts the value of the real estate in half. See below

(3) Foster civic pride in the architectural, historical, cultural, and educational accomplishments of Philadelphia.

- This building cannot be a source of civic pride because of its unimportant and badly altered architectural frame nor does it represent positive historical, cultural and educational accomplishments for which the city can be proud. Instead it would, or at least should, be a point of embarrassment for the city to celebrate political corruption in multiple dimensions.
- If the city’s political corruption were the goal of celebration, other buildings discussed below would better serve that purpose.

Alternative to Designation:

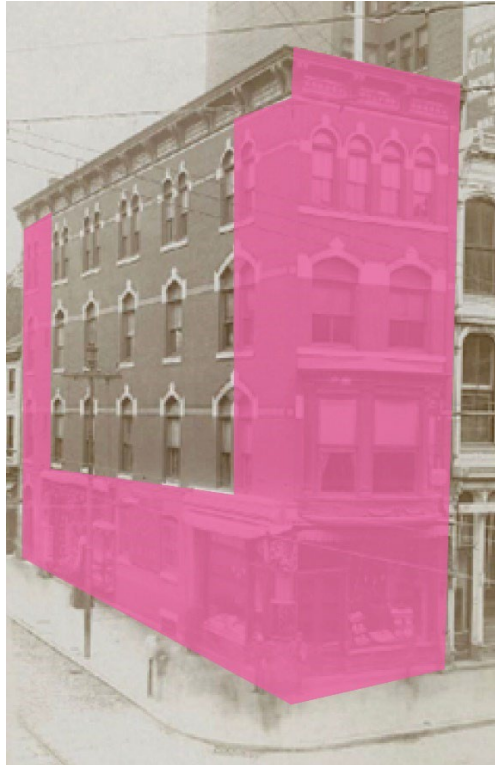
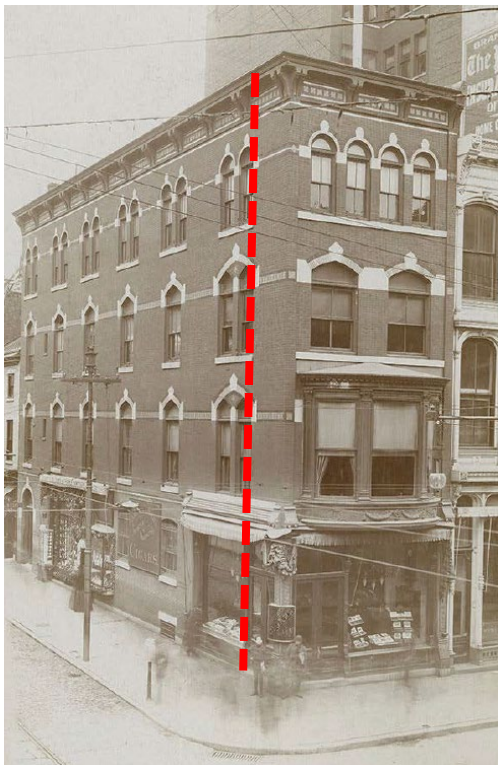
As part of any historical review, determination should be made as to whether the historical importance is adequately represented by the building or would better be represented by an historical marker or other means that is less intrusive on the rights of the owner.

- In the instance of this structure, given its massive alterations and loss of integrity such that its original associations with the post-Civil War Republican Party and its corrupt political machine run by the Vare family are no longer apparent. It is suggested that if historical recognition is sought, an historical marker would be the most appropriate means of representing whatever historic significance the PHC decides that the site may have.

Claimed Designation Criteria by the Nomination: A, C, D, J.

Evaluation of 1039 Chestnut Street to fulfill 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.”

Note, the Criterion does not begin with “Had” – in the past tense but “*Has*” and the framing word is “*significant*”. In its present condition, it is not significant. Because of the condition of 1039 Chestnut Street and its nearly total loss of integrity as described in the nomination, and evident in the attached photographs, this building does not meet the exemplary and contemporary standards that are the heart of each of the designation criteria.



Total removal of features of original Republican Club facades



Original doors on 11th Street to upper level, 1912



Present shop front in place of door: no door to upper levels

The nomination's extensive discussion of the building's role as the headquarters of the Union branch of the Republican Party is irrelevant given the massive changes to the building's façade beginning in 1918. Since that date nearly all of the features of the 19th century façades that represented the period of ownership by the Vare Machine have been removed.

- Its original front façade with its added bay window that offered views of the Republican election crowds up and down Chestnut Street was entirely removed when the street was widened in the early twentieth century.



1890s façade removed in 1918



1918 façade altered in 1949

- Its twentieth century replacement façade was significantly redesigned in 1949 for Tappin's Diamonds to provide interior display space, removing the entire second story windows and lintels, leaving the middle third of the Chestnut Street facade filled in with stucco.
- Its 11th Street access door to the club rooms was removed in the 1930s for a new fire tower with the last rank of windows and the small bathroom windows enlarged and turned into fire doors; recent alterations have removed the fire tower exit which has been replaced by a new shop front leaving the upper stories inaccessible.



Original doors on 11th Street to upper level, 1912



Present condition: shop front



Removed original area

- No one looking at the present building today would have any idea that it represents the period of, or the massive corruption of the city's contractor bosses as discussed below. This central issue is ignored in the nomination.

The nomination fails to place the building in the larger political context of Philadelphia.

A critical quality that Criterion A depends on is whether this building in its present condition would be the best or even a good site to characterize the political and cultural failings of the city's Republican Party and the Vare machine. For that topic, there are many better sites to convey that sad era in the city's history.

1. The most obvious site is the extravagant and much criticized City Hall in which the city, led by the Republican machine, sunk millions of dollars for a building that became hated for its association with that group. This association underlay social critic Agnes Repplier's hostility to the building in her 1898 survey of Philadelphia history, *Philadelphia: The Place and the People*.¹ After describing the failing marble cladding that left white blotches where the already coal-smoke blackened marble pieces had to be replaced she wrote:

Of the millions expended upon this monument of inefficiency, and of the length of years it must stand in the very heart of Philadelphia to bear witness against the people who erected it, even those who profess a truly American unconcern endeavour not to think. As an illustration of what can be accomplished by an irresponsible building commission, the City Hall is not without interest nor without a moral; but if Experience be the best of teachers, she asks terribly high prices for her tutelage and unambitious citizens are wont to wish that their own town had not selected to take such an expensive course of instruction.

Almost as soon as it was finished, citizens began to call for the demolition of City Hall:

- in the 1920s when only the tower was to be spared, reclad in modern style,
- in Ed Bacon's Cornell University thesis project of 1932;
- again by Bacon when he headed City Planning in the 1950s when the tower would remain and Market Street would be cut through the site to improve traffic.

These attempts reflected the depths of hostility to the building as a representation of that corrupt government. Historian Howard Gillette ties City Hall to the machine politics of the city as a reason for its vast expense in his 2013 essay for the *Philadelphia Encyclopedia*.² In his longer, earlier, 1973 essay on City Hall, Gillette made the point that City Hall, like the buildings commissioned by and benefitting the Tammany Hall mob's control of public construction in New York, made the corruption of Philadelphia visible:

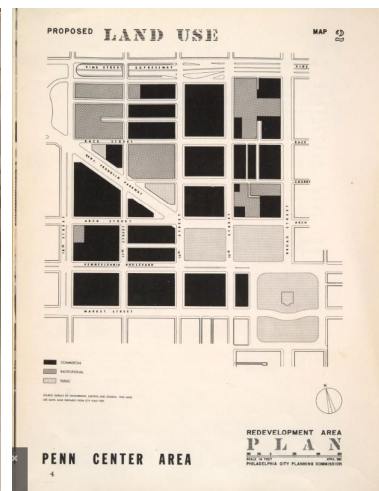
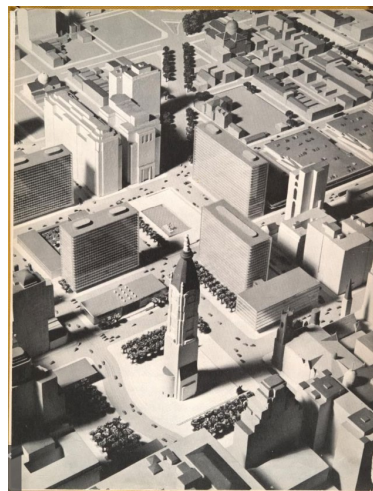
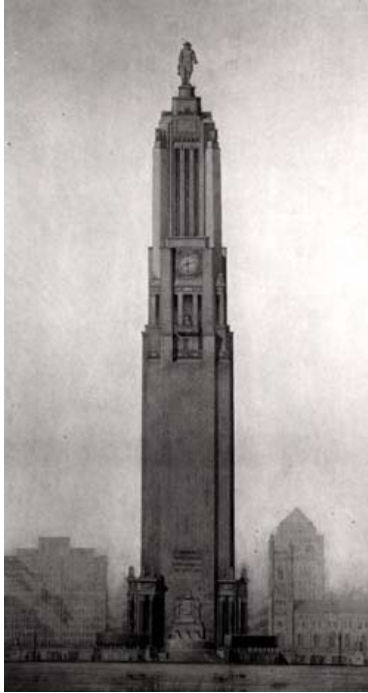
¹ Agnes Repplier, *Philadelphia: The Place and the People* (1898) pp. 374-5

² Howard Gillette, "Philadelphia City Hall," *Philadelphia Encyclopedia* (2013)

<https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/essays/city-hall-philadelphia/> (accessed June 2024)

No longer would political corruption be confined to the acts of dishonest individuals but would instead be consolidated, under law, in the hands of a few people who had mastered the art of utilizing public power for private profit.³

Similarly Thomas Keels places City Hall at the beginning of the corrupt reign of contractor bosses in Philadelphia between 1880 and 1930, the same period as the occupation of 1039 Chestnut by the Republican machine.⁴



1927 scheme to demolish City Hall Ed Bacon's 1952 plan to demolish City Hall for traffic

2. City Hall, however, is not the lone marker to the excesses and criminality of the city bosses. Across the city there are the various buildings by career architects working for the Vare machine, notably Philadelphia's own Phillip H. Johnson who designed the City Hall Annex, now a hotel, and dozens of other public buildings.
 - a. An essay by Adrian Trevisan, "Philip H. Johnson: The Architect That Swindled the City," in *Hidden City* makes it clear that after the completion of City Hall, boss-rule corruption in Philadelphia was well represented by Johnson's career, that was made possible through the largess of his brother-in-law, Israel Durham, head of the city Republican organization. It was Durham who gave the untrained Johnson the title of "architect" with a perpetual contract with the city that lasted until his death.
 - b. Johnson looted the city for his commissions for numerous civic and health-related structures including the now demolished Philadelphia General

³ Howard Gillette, "Philadelphia's New City Hall: Monument to a New Political Machine," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* (April 1973), pp. 233-249. The quote is p. 233.

⁴ Thomas H. Keels, "Contractor Bosses (1880s- 1930s)," *Philadelphia Encyclopedia* (2016) <https://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/essays/contractor-bosses-1880s-to-1930s/> (accessed June 2024).

Hospital, but also fire houses, and the civic center auditorium, often requiring the assistance of other, usually uncredited architects.⁵ City Hall Annex, the children's "House of Detention," and various fire houses represent Johnson's contribution to the city's Republican Party corruption narrative and would be better representations of the boss-era than the mutilated wreckage of 1039 Chestnut Street.



Philip H. Johnson, House of Detention, 1907 (Skaler Post Card Collection, Athenaeum of Philadelphia); City Hall Annex (William Gee, photographer, 5.12.27 during construction, Philadelphia Department of Records)

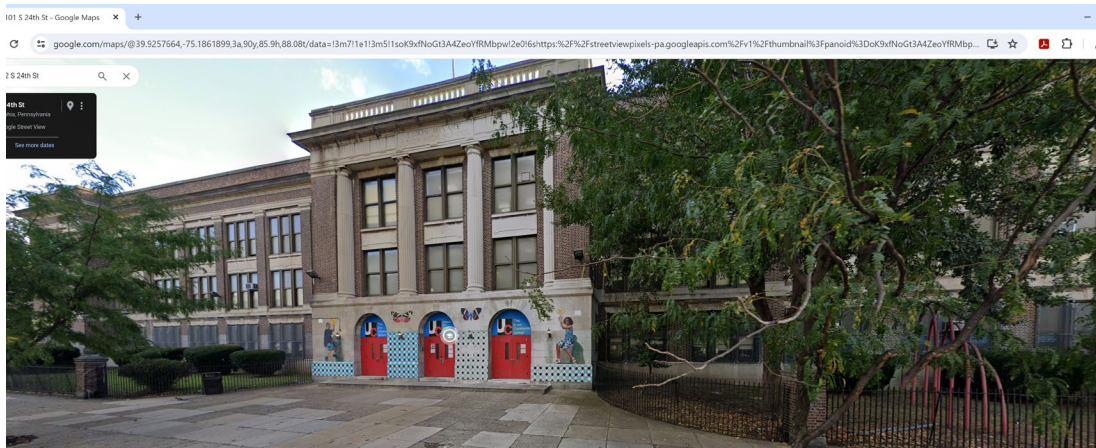
3. Other architectural monuments that represent the Republican machine include the school buildings of the city erected between the 1880s and 1930s that exhibited the venality possible in public works. In the boss era, schools were the work of hack city architects who designed the largest possible classrooms (meaning more students per room and fewer teachers per student) with high ceiling heights to make the buildings seem economical on the corrupt measure of price per cubic foot basis.⁶ In a similar vein they limited the spaces for staff to reduce costs to the school district, again at the expense of education for students.
 - a. Two school buildings, in an added insult to the body politic of the city, commemorated members of the Vare family including their mother Abigail and brother Edwin. Any of these resources would better represent the Vare machine than the ruins of 1039 Chestnut Street.

⁵ Adrian Trevisan, "Philip H. Johnson: The Architect That Swindled the City," *Hidden City* (August, 20, 2021) <https://hiddencityphila.org/2021/08/philip-h-johnson-the-architect-that-swindled-the-city/> (accessed June 2024).

⁶ George E. Thomas, "From Our House to the 'Big House': Architectural Design as Visible Metaphor in the School Buildings of Philadelphia," *Journal of Planning History* 5: no. 3 (August 2006) 218-240. Particular focus on the economics and cost savings are discussed pp. 227 – 230. https://www.academia.edu/10160551/From_Our_House_to_the_Big_House_Architectural_Design_as_Visible_Metaphor_in_the_School_Buildings_of_Philadelphia (accessed June 2024)



1906 view of Abigail Vare Elementary School, Morris & East Moyamensing Street; James Gaw, architect (The school was named for mother of notorious William Scott Vare who was so corrupt that he could not be seated in US Senate). The building survives in good condition today.



Edwin H. Vare Junior High School, (1923) 2104 S. 24th Street; Irwin T. Catherine, architect. This building was named for another of Abigail Vare's children, boss of South Philadelphia

Muckraking journalist Lincoln Steffens's evaluation of political corruption in American cities began his article for the July issue of *McLure's Magazine* on Philadelphia with the title that still serves as a nickname for the city: "Philadelphia: Corrupt and Contented". He charged:

"Other American cities, no matter how bad their own condition may be, all point with scorn to Philadelphia as worse—'the worst-governed city in the country.' St. Louis, Minneapolis, Pittsburg submit with some patience to the jibes of any other

community; the most friendly suggestion from Philadelphia is rejected with contempt. The Philadelphians are “supine,” “asleep”; hopelessly ring-ruled, they are “complacent.”

Steffens continued:

“All our municipal governments are more or less bad, and all our people are optimists. Philadelphia is simply the most corrupt and the most contented. Minneapolis has cleaned up, Pittsburg has tried to, New York fights every other election, Chicago fights all the time. Even St. Louis has begun to stir (since the elections are over), and at the worst was only shameless. Philadelphia is proud; good people there defend corruption and boast of their machine. My college professor, with his philosophic view of “rake-offs,” is one Philadelphia type. Another is the man, who, driven to bay with his local pride, says: “At least you must admit that our machine is the best you have ever seen.”⁷

Philadelphia’s political reform group, The Committee of Seventy, was formed in 1904, the year after the Steffens article, as a response to the totality of the Vare corruption of the city processes.⁸

As is clear from the present condition of 1039 Chestnut Street, the architectural elements of the headquarters of the Republican machine are now long gone. Other examples of boss-era buildings survive. While the Convention Center on Civic Center Boulevard and the Philadelphia General Hospital (both by Phillip Johnson) were demolished for the modern University of Pennsylvania medical complex, the public schools named for the Vare family, City Hall Annex, and City Hall itself are more complete and better representatives of the negative consequences of contractor bossism. In its present condition, the building at 1039 Chestnut Street that was owned by the Vare group no longer tells the story of their contributions to city corruption.

Nor do the architect / builders of the various phases of the building rise to a level of having any local significance as individual designers and thus they do not help it meet Criterion A for their association. Brief overviews of their careers are cited below:

1. Yarnall & Cooper (fl. 1860-1889), the initial designers of 1039 Chestnut Street are unimportant in the history of Philadelphia architecture. No one reasonably would search across Philadelphia for examples of the designs of Yarnall & Cooper, who typically worked as builders and whose designs, as in this case, are at best derivative.⁹
2. Unfortunately, many of the projects that show up in the PAB listings for Yarnall & Cooper on deeper analysis show them only as builders and not as designers. The

⁷ Lincoln Steffens, *The Shame of the Cities* (New York, McClure, Phillips & Co. p. 193, originally published in *McClure's Magazine* 21: no. 3 (July, 1903) 249-263.

⁸ See: <https://seventy.org/about/our-history> and following, <https://seventy.org/our-history/republican-bosses-and-machines> (accessed July 2024).

⁹ Sandra Tatman, “Yarnall & Cooper,” Philadelphia Architects and Buildings, website, https://www.americanbuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/23279 (accessed July 2024).

largest works cited in their biography are documented elsewhere in the PAB website as the work of other architects including Addison Hutton, for Barclay Hall at Haverford College, and the Aldine Hotel; the Croft house is the work of Walter Price.

3. For the most part, Yarnall & Cooper's work consisted of minor industrial buildings and additions; few of their projects reach the typical level for the period and there is no evidence of any work that sets a standard or influences the age.

Given the removal of the large portions of the 11th Street façade and the entire Chestnut Street façade, together with the loss of the later monumental bay across the second story of the original façade that gave the building something of a public presence, the paint remnants that damage the surviving brick, and the removal of the entire first floor shop front system that formed the street presence of the building, this building has no standing as an important building by Yarnall & Cooper.

The probable designer for the 1918 front façade, John V. Speth (1876-1969) is even less important than Yarnall & Cooper.

1. After working in the minor Koelle / Speth & Co. firm that was listed as architects and contractors, Speth apparently returned to contracting at the time of the new façade in 1918 coinciding with the time of his work for 1039 Chestnut Street.
2. Despite at times terming himself a civil engineer, in the Philadelphia Architects and Buildings site, Speth is listed as a contractor.¹⁰
3. In the 1930 and 1940 censuses Speth listed himself as a builder and described himself as not having attended college. In the 1940 census it was noted that he had only completed the first year of high school.¹¹
4. Again there is nothing in Speth's record that recommends him as having design significance and there is no evidence of any work including this building that was influential.

The focus of the research in the nomination on the Republican history meant that little of the readily obtained information for the significance of Yarnall & Cooper was found, nor did it make a case about Speth. Since George E. Thomas's discovery of the *Builder's Guide* in 1972, it has been a simple matter to find references to most of the buildings of the city, and today, with the *Builder's Guide* and most newspapers now also online and machine searchable, a documentary trail can be found for nearly anyone in the building trades.

The paucity of information in the *Builder's Guide* on both firms is evidence of their lack of consequence.

Evaluation of 1039 Chestnut Street to meet Criterion C. "Reflects the environment in an era characterized by an architectural style."

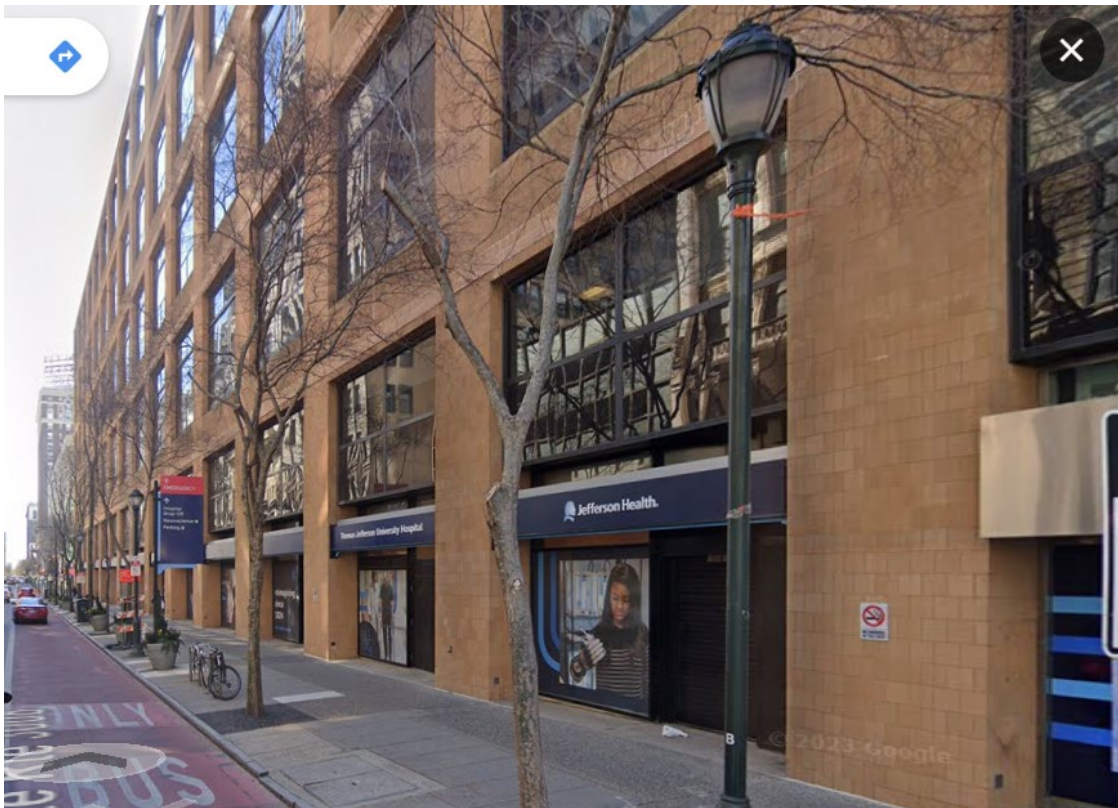
¹⁰ Sandra Tatman, "Jonathan V. Speth, fl. 1897 – 1927)" https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/25647 (accessed July 2024).

¹¹ https://www.ancestry.com/discoveryui-content/view/16105207:2442?tid=&pid=&queryId=6adebccc-97ce-4cbc-95da-17f82eead7b9&_phsrc=Flu21&_phstart=successSource (accessed June 2024)

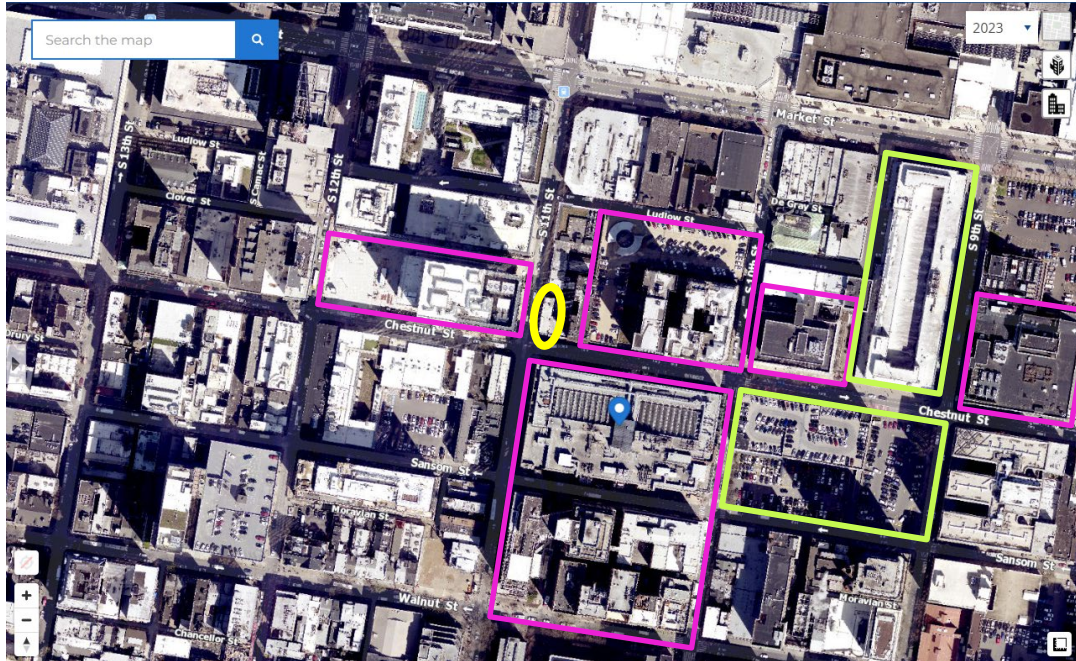
Again the criterion begins with a term meaning in the present moment and not the past – “*Reflects*” not “Reflected.” The late 18th to late 19th century character has been erased by the expansion of Jefferson Health; further because of its extensive alterations, the building no longer reflects a coherent architectural style.



Looking west past 1039 Chestnut toward 1100 Block of Chestnut, new Jefferson Health building (Google Street view, March 2023)



Looking East along Chestnut Street, block-long Jefferson Health complex; street level offices (Google Street view, March 2023)



Aerial view of site: 1039 Chestnut (yellow oval); large institutional buildings, Federal buildings and medical buildings now form the essence of Chestnut Street between 9th and 12th Streets. (Philly Atlas): Jefferson Health properties in red; other medical and federal facilities in green. This is no longer a primarily commercial corridor.



Jefferson Health Care site map with 1039 Chestnut located in red oval

“A Commercial Corridor”?

The environment in which 1039 Chestnut Street is located was discussed in the nomination as surviving remnants of a commercial corridor that was part of the extension of the old downtown in the vicinity of the former site of the city hall, then located in Independence Hall at 6th and Chestnut Streets. As such it was an extension of the city's banking and retail zone. With the new location of City Hall at Broad and Market Streets, a new banking and office district began to be built along Broad Street when this building was being constructed.

- While a few remnants of the commercial district can be found in the vicinity, the present character of the environment today is the ever-more concentrated center of the large institutional buildings of Jefferson Hospital and Medical College.
- These include a parking garage and various offices for Jefferson Healthcare on the same block as well as the full block-sized buildings on the south side of the 1000 and 900 blocks of Chestnut Street. Across 11th Street on the north side, directly across from 1039 Chestnut Street is the Honickman Center, a new skyscraper serving Jefferson Health Care.
- What was a commercial district is now mostly a modern institutional district with massive buildings and sites being maintained for future institutional expansion.

To characterize the block on which 1039 Chestnut Street stands as part of the “Chestnut Street Commercial Corridor” in the nomination ignores the actuality of a rapidly changing institutional zone of the city. It is zoned CMX-5, one of the highest density categories of the city code. Per the code, **CMX-5 districts** are primarily intended to accommodate mixed-use development of up to 12 stories in the central core area of Center City.

- While this area once was a commercial district, it has been transformed into a new urban / institutional district, one that is undermined by 1039 Chestnut Street in its present condition.

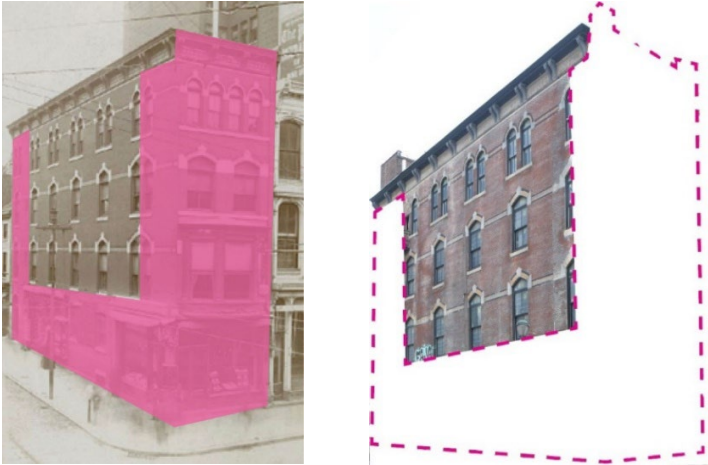
As such, this property in its deteriorated condition is contrary to its present institutional setting and does not meet Criterion C.

Evaluation of 1039 to meet Criterion D: *Embodies Distinguishing Characteristics* of an architectural style or an engineering specimen

1. Embodies (in the present tense) requires that the resource continue to represent the Distinguishing Characteristics for which it is designated. Most of the focus of the nomination is on the design of the building at the time of the original use of the building between its construction in the 1870s and the sale of the building by its owner, the Republican Committee in 1934.
2. In the twentieth century, the physical evidence that might suggest a role of the building in the politics of the city has been systematically removed, first in the early twentieth century when the front façade and first few feet of the side façade were redesigned and rebuilt to accommodate a city-mandated setback of four feet that

widened Chestnut Street, and second in the removal of and or damage to most of the architectural features of both facades for later commercial tenants.

3. The net result of these changes is a building that is mute, having lost its original critical design features and then having been altered in an unsympathetic, even hostile refacing of the building.
4. Even were it possible or economically reasonable to carefully “restore” the remaining fragments of the existing building, in its present condition it would not tell a story of any consequence to the city or its history.



A third of the 1878 building remains.

5. While the nomination goes into great lengths to explain the building’s various styles, there is no getting around the mangled 11th Street elevation with its 1930s fire tower and upper level platforms and doors that remove distinguishing features of the facade; the termination of the Victorian façade short of the corner with the return plane in white terra cotta of the conflicting Chestnut Street front; or the defaced, deteriorating, and badly altered Chestnut Street façade missing major elements including the masonry piers at street level and with its second story infilled with masonry; and finally the tacky shops and grossly altered shop fronts on both elevations.

The lack of significance of the architecture:

- If as suggested in the nomination, one values Victorian polychromy such as survives in areas on the 11th Street façade there are many better contemporary sites in Philadelphia – including the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, or the Centennial Bank, or the Hockley house, all by Frank Furness, an architect of consequence, and in each case in a condition that tells that design story.
- If there is interest in early twentieth century commercial building facades, there are numerous shopfronts in the immediate vicinity with their own identity and a degree of architectural completeness that lets them be appreciated and are vastly superior to this drab and much altered front.

- In the context of the modern shopfront, there even might have been some interest in the mid-century modern shopfront of Tappin's— but that too has been replaced with the most banal of shopfronts. As noted below, there was not enough interest by the nominator to find the 1949 architect, though that information was readily available.



Mid-century Modern shopfront, 1039 Chestnut Street, with Tappin's set into terrazzo floor (Philadelphia Department of Records, 1959), now demolished; present condition on right

Conclusion

The two principal façades of 1039 Chestnut Street are so altered, so deteriorated, and so lacking in design integrity as to make it impossible for this building to communicate its history and meaning.

- In its present condition, its core narrative is one of decline and deterioration.
- This building in its present condition is a disjointed mashup of multiple design modes, none of which are exemplary as examples of an architectural style.
- With each later style overlay undermining the earlier, this building does not meet Criterion D.

Evaluation of 1039 Chestnut Street to meet Criterion J: Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community

Again, features that demonstrate the narrative are required to “exemplify” in the present. Given the removal of most of the architectural features of the building that could have told the story of the Republican Party headquarters more than a century ago and the systematic alterations and dismembering of the building in the intervening century including the removal of the entrance to the upper club levels and the painting out of most of the features of the building in the 1949 renovation, together with the physical deterioration of façade features such as the delaminating Victorian tile bands, this building does not exemplify the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

If it is desired to tell the story of Republican corruption at this site, an historical marker would better tell the story without damaging the value of the property.

Other Rejected Criteria

Typically when architectural style is selected, its architect is also selected as exemplifying Criterion E.

- 1039 Chestnut Street does not meet criterion E because its designers were minor and not among those “whose work has influenced” anything.
- Nor is it claimed under Criterion F that the building represents significant “elements of design ... or craftsmanship” or “innovations.”
- Further the building is not claimed to meet Criterion G as a part of a “distinctive area;” nor does it meet Criterion H in having a “unique location” such that it is an “established and familiar visual feature;”
- Finally no effort has been made to ascertain whether the site meets Criterion I in containing likely archaeological information.

The rejection of each of these criteria is telling and makes clear the paucity of historical evidence in its present condition in which less than a third of the original building exists.

Conclusion: On every basis that underlies the purpose of the commission and on each of the Philadelphia criteria, this building does not meet any standard that makes it worthy of designation.

Impact of Designation on the Neighborhood and the Owner

Designation of this ruin of a building undermines the potential economic development of an important corner of a major downtown city block – to what end? As noted in the appendix, the real estate agent’s evaluation of the property, were it to be designated, it would lose most of its value and it would be nearly impossible to renovate, given current construction costs, leaving the building a ruin in the midst of a growing institutional district.



Altered or removed original and early twentieth century renovations fabric



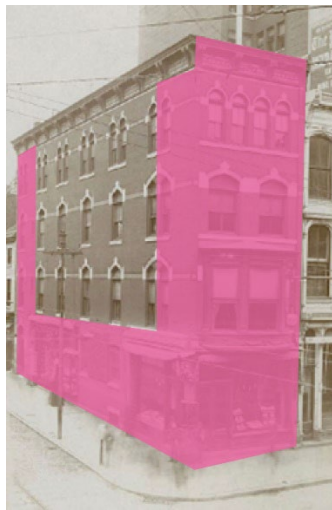
1878



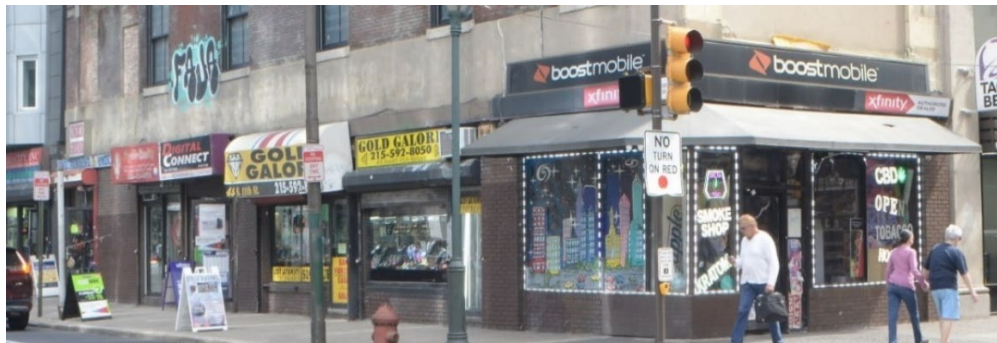
1900



2024



Bits and pieces of various facades and styles do not make a landmark.



Undistinguished shopfronts that undercut the pedestrian experience

Alterations to 1918 Chestnut Street façade



2024: 1st and 2nd floor facades removed



Pre-1952: brick painted, 2nd floor elements removed and 1st floor redesigned (Athenaeum, George Thomas donation, Stelman Collection)

Impact of failure to designate on Historic Districts

The structure is in neither the East Center City Historic District nor the Wash West District – (designated 2024).

Not listing this building will not affect either the existing or the new historic district in the vicinity. Although historic integrity is the phrase used to justify historic districts, its underlying basis in the literature lies in the National Register program which references integrity as the capacity of a resource to communicate its history and significance. The National Register, which underlies the power of a community to manage its historic resources further defines integrity through seven qualities and characteristics. In the case of 1039 Chestnut Street, the building no longer meets the integrity criteria.

Inaccuracies of the Nomination

The Philadelphia Commission requires “accurate and complete categorizations of the resource’s condition and use.”

Far from being in “Good” condition, the building is, as evidenced in the nomination photographs and from a site visit, at best is in “Poor” condition. While the first-floor shops are rented, the upper three stories are and have been vacant for generations, meaning that “mainly vacant” would be a more accurate description of the condition. Beyond the removal of the south four feet of the building and its Chestnut Street façade that required removal of the large windows at the south end of the 11th Street facade, the removal of the entire

shop front system at street level as well as the final rear bay containing the entrance door and upper level windows at the rear of the building, the removed masonry to the base of the second story windows, and the modern metal replacement windows of the upper stories, visual examination makes it clear that the façade has no integrity and communicates nothing of consequence.

- The glazed tiles of the Victorian portion of the façade are losing color and their original patterning to delaminating caused by weathering.
- The brick of the 11th Street façade remains clouded by the remnants of paint from the 1940s Tappin's store front redesign.
- All of the original windows and frames have been removed, some for the 1930s fire tower, others when the upper levels were closed off.
- The replacement windows do not match the original in material or detail on the 11th Street façade and are significantly different than the original wood 1 / 1 windows of the 1918 shop front.
- Major changes have occurred to the shop fronts of the first story and their masonry frame, leaving none of the original, c. 1878, c. 1900, or c. 1949 systems.

Similarly the front façade is also badly altered and deteriorated.

- There are cracks in many of the terra cotta blocks of the facade that mark underlying problems that are not discussed in the nomination.
- The bay window of the second story of the new Chestnut Street façade was removed, apparently as part of the 1949 Tappin's Diamonds redesign. It was gone in the 1952 Jacob Stelman photograph in the nomination.
- The decorative spandrel below the third-floor windows was also removed after the Stelman photograph
- The tile transition between the new terra cotta façade and the roof parapet has been replaced with asphalt shingle.
- The replacement windows do not match the originals in material or detail.
- With these changes, most of the façade is altered and nothing that remains is of significance.

“Poor Condition” would more accurately capture the condition of the building.

Other Errors in the Nomination

The nomination errs in assumptions about the roles and design of the windows of the 1878 building. The small, elevated windows next to the second and third floor stair windows (all since removed for the 1935 stair tower) were certainly toilet rooms as was typical in Philadelphia street facades and not a means of lighting the stair.

Also telling is the failure of the nomination to fully describe the portion of the building that is the most important aspect of the street experience, the first story. This is barely discussed despite its total replacement. In various renovations the ground floor has been excised to the sills of the second story windows, removing in the process a band of polychromed brick

with dark, light and dark stretchers, visible in the 1920 photo of the removed rear door to the upper levels. That band continued above the cigar store sign in the Frank Taylor photograph. The Taylor photograph also includes segmental-headed windows on the first floor flanking the cigar sign, suggesting that they were part of the vocabulary of the original façade and hence, the turn of the century shop window system with pressed metal trim was also an alteration.

The later stucco frame of the Tappin's shop front where the Victorian trim was removed was concealed by paint after the 1949 rehab. With 24 years of weathering, it now appears as an unfortunate plain cement band filling from the top of the post-1980 shop windows to just below the sills of the second-floor windows. That work appears to have been initiated when the building was acquired by Tappin's jewelers and redesigned with its oversized shop windows that were part of the mid-century modern shop window system – all elements of which have since been removed.

Inappropriateness of Proposed Building Name

The nomination title given to the building, “The Union Republican Club” is no longer accurate given that its use ended in 1934, now 90 years past. Its present condition largely represents its former use as Tappin's Jewelry store, but with the removal of its large sign and its redesigned and totally replaced 1949 mid-century modern shop fronts, that meaning is also lost too. For the last forty years it has been a commercial structure, utilized only on the first story, with the upper levels inaccessible and vacant. None of the businesses have any significance so that the property should properly be listed only by its address.

Missing Information

It also should be noted that there is additional information that can be found readily that documents the designer of the transformation of the building in 1935 into a commercial structure with the new fire tower and elevator. And there is information on the architect for the redesign of the entire façade as a part of the Tappin's Jewelers renovation in 1949-50. It is not the role of the reviewer to improve an inadequately researched nomination. The main problem for the nomination was the subject building, a ruin that is now mute, incapable of telling the story of its history.

Present Situation – offered for sale and impact of designation

To fully communicate the issues of the building, the nomination should have mention readily found documents that show the building listed for sale in 2022 and is now presently for lease because the real estate agent believes that with historic designation, the property loses more than half its value. (<https://www.colliers.com/en/properties/for-lease-east-chestnut-corridor-corner-location/usa-1039-chestnut-street-philadelphia-pa-19102/usa1095545>)

The Why of the Nomination

Given the condition and the loss of historic fabric of 1039 Chestnut Street, what could be the reason to designate this building?

- Is it being nominated as a form of spot zoning to hold on to buildings of a certain size and some age for a desired “Chestnut Street Commercial Corridor” scheme?
- It is certainly not because of the value of the building – which if designated will remove whatever economic value the building has as confirmed by the attached letter from the real estate agent to the owner.

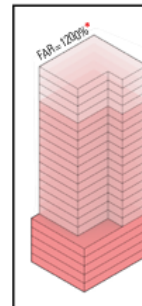
CMX COMMERCIAL MIXED-USE

CMX-5

Table 14-701-3: Dimensional Standards for Commercial Districts



Max. Occupied Area	Buildings ≤ 5 stories with 1 or more dwelling units 90%; Others 100%	
Min. Side Yard Width	If used: Buildings ≤ 4 stories with three of fewer dwelling units = 5 ft.; Others = 8 ft.	
Max. Floor Area Ratio	1200%* With additional bonuses	1600%** For certain lots within Center City University City, with additional bonuses



BROKER OPINION OF VALUE

1039 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, PA

Colliers has been tasked by the Owners of 1039 Chestnut Street to determine values for the potential sale of 1039 Chestnut Street. The two variables of this sale were presented as an As-Is sale or a sale with Historical designation.

We have determined that a Historical designation will reduce the potential price of a sale. The highest and best use for this property would be a knock down and rebuild according to the CMX 5 zoning classification that is currently in place. Floor Area Ratio for CMX 5 is 1500%, thus allowing for 15 floors by right. This would be the height allowed without any extra credit obtained for height that the City has provided.

A Historical designation would not allow for new construction that would take advantage of the CMX 5 - F.A.R. The property would have to be utilized in its present form as either an office or residential conversion.

In conclusion, this property’s value would be considerably greater without a Historical designation.

By:

Larry Steinberg

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