

# ON THE WEST SIDE

THE UNIVERSITY  
CITY HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY

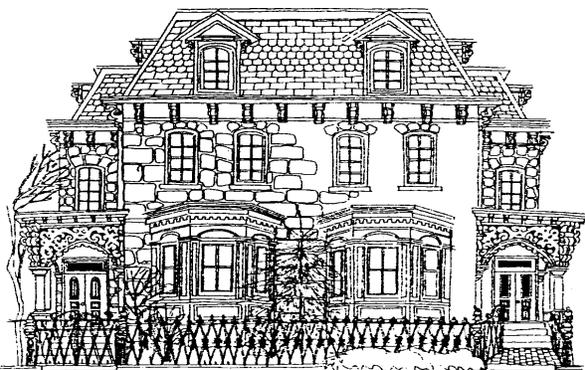


May, 2006

<http://www.uchs.net>

Mike Hardy, Editor

## HISTORIC POWELTON



By Helma Weeks, UCHS Board Member

**Powelton**, a village in the city, will be the June 3<sup>rd</sup> destination of **Philadelphia Open House (POH)**. Between 1 and 5 pm, Powelton homes, two fraternity houses and a student commons, all in historic buildings, two magnificent churches and an art environment, can be toured.

The houses and other buildings illustrate the once “opulent” neighborhood with its wonderful examples of mansions for 19<sup>th</sup> century tycoons and a large selection of **Italianate** and **Second Empire** style houses.

Tour participants will visit restored and “contemporized” houses and see how these century-old dwellings have been imaginatively adapted for today’s lifestyles. While walking from house to house, they will see the tree-lined blocks of twin homes, many with ornate porches and fronted by gardens. They will also visit a converted carriage house and see a lovely “secret” common space.

Two landmark churches will be open. The interior spaces are beautiful and the stained glass windows of one are magnificent. The **Ross Commons**, a 19<sup>th</sup> century mansion, beautifully restored by **Drexel University**, will be on the tour as will be the public first floor rooms of two fraternity houses in former mansions.

Powelton, bordered by 32<sup>nd</sup> and 39<sup>th</sup> Streets

between **Spring Garden Street** and **Lancaster Avenue**, is one of Philadelphia’s early streetcar suburbs and a **National Register Historic District**. While development began prior to the **Civil War**, many of the houses were built from the 1860s to the 1890s. In addition to the residential blocks, the area has a commercial corridor along **Lancaster Avenue** with restaurants, diverse shops and art galleries between 35<sup>th</sup> and 39<sup>th</sup> Street.

**The Powelton House Tour**, jointly sponsored by the **University City Historical Society** and the **Powelton Village Civic Association**, is one of the many tours offered between April 29 and June 11 by Philadelphia Open House, an umbrella of house tours sponsored by the **Friends of Independence National Historical Park**. The general public can order tickets in advance for all of them, using the form in the POH brochure (or downloaded from [www.friendsofindependence.org](http://www.friendsofindependence.org)) with payment made directly to Friends of Independence Park, 143 S. 3<sup>rd</sup> Street, Philadelphia, PA 19106.

However, as a special membership benefit, current and new members of the **University City Historical Society** may order discounted advance sale tickets for the Powelton tour directly from UCHS, using the flyer in this newsletter. Rather than the \$30 advanced sale price for the general public, UCHS members may purchase tickets for \$20 each with checks made payable to UCHS.

All advance sale registrations and payments for the tour must be received prior to Thursday, June 1. Those members purchasing tickets the day of the tour without pre-reservations will be charged a \$5 handling fee in addition to the POH ticket full price of \$30/person.

Come join our members and friends in this very special “**Village in the City**” and enjoy its unique ambiance, gracious architecture and special challenges in urban living.

## A NEW FRANKLIN LINK



With this year's celebration of the 300th anniversary of **Benjamin Franklin's** birth, **West Philadelphia** and **University City** have a new and authentic "connection" with that founding father. Sure, we have the **University of Pennsylvania**, "Franklin's University," but it didn't move here until the 1870's; and we have the **Woodlands**, once owned by **Andrew Hamilton**, "the Philadelphia lawyer" and a Franklin patron, but there is no record of the good Doctor visiting that property.

Now with **Spruce Hill** resident and artist, **James Peniston**, putting the final touches on a new giant bust of Franklin in his studio in **West Shore**, we have a true "grass roots" link with the man.



Shown are images of James and the model in his studio along with a representation of what it will look like in bronze in its final public setting.

James's website at [www.jepsculpture.com/benfranklin/](http://www.jepsculpture.com/benfranklin/) tells the rest of the story: "The sculpture will stand east of the firehouse at **4th and Arch Streets**, a location suffused with history. The small courtyard that will hold the sculpture is one block east of Franklin's gravesite, where visitors still place pennies on his tombstone. It is one block west of the **Betsy Ross' house**, and three blocks northeast of **Independence Hall**. In the 1750s, the ground was occupied by the city's largest building: the **Philadelphia Academy**, which Franklin helped establish and

which grew to become the **University of Pennsylvania**. (It was also Franklin's idea to hang the city's first fire-alarm bell in the school's belfry.) Today's firehouse is home to **Engine 8**, a descendant of America's first fire department: the **Union Fire Company**, founded in 1736 by Franklin and his friends.

In 2003-04, Philadelphia's city arts council held a competition to replace the "**Penny Franklin**" sculpture that stood next to the firehouse. The work, a six-foot acrylic bust covered with thousands of one-cent pieces, had begun to deteriorate. After sifting through many submissions, the council chose the nine-foot bronze bust proposed by Philadelphia sculptor James Peniston. Key to its selection was James' desire to make the sculpture more than simply a memorial and a thing of beauty; it should be, he said, a touchstone for the surrounding community.

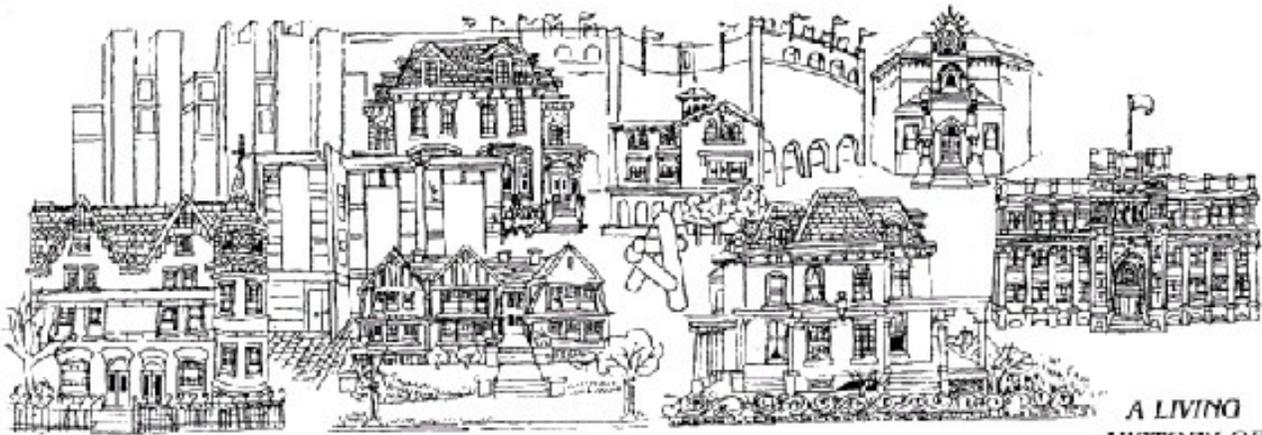
As the sculpting gets underway, the artist will visit local elementary schools to talk to students about Franklin and the new art work that will honor him. Drawing on the famous kite-and-lightning experiment, James will ask the pupils to bring extra keys from home. These will be melted into the bronze that will be cast into the bust, allowing a generation of neighborhood kids to point to the sculpture and say, "I helped make that!"

## UCHS SPRING DESIGN DAYS

Ten UCHS homeowners applied for and will receive technical and design assistance from volunteer design professionals at this year's **Design Days** on May 21 and June 4. These pro-bono professionals will inspect the homeowners' proposals for exterior work, both architectural and landscape, and receive a two hour consultation as to the best approaches, materials and craftspeople to get their jobs done. All this for a \$25 fee for services, and all designed and directed by the **Community Design Collaborative (CDC)** of the local chapter of the **American Institute of Architects (AIA)** as a pilot **Technical Assistance Program (TAP)** for UCHS.

(continued on Page 4)

**UCHS HISTORIC HOUSE TOUR, Saturday, June 3, 1-5 p.m.  
POWELTON – A VILLAGE IN THE CITY**



*A LIVING  
HISTORY OF  
ARCHITECTURE  
1789 - 2000*

*THE UNIVERSITY CITY HISTORICAL SOCIETY*

**June 3, 1 – 5 p.m. - Explore homes and other sites in this walkable, small, diverse neighborhood in University City just west of the Schuylkill River. One of Philadelphia’s “first suburbs,” Powelton is home to landmark buildings, Italianate and Victorian on the outside and imaginatively adapted inside for contemporary living. It is a neighborhood with a vibrant artist community; a neighborhood with tree-lined streets and gardens - a great place to spend a June afternoon.**

**UCHS MEMBERS ADVANCED SALE TICKETS, \$20 EACH. ORDERS AND PAYMENT MUST BE RECEIVED BY THURSDAY, JUNE 1 TO PERMIT CONFIRMATIONS TO BE RETURNED**

**ALL TICKETS ON THE DAY OF THE TOUR WILL BE \$35/EACH**

**USE FORM BELOW, SEND TO UCHS, P.O. BOX 31927, PHILADELPHIA, PA, 19104**

**UCHS  
P.O. BOX 31927  
PHILADELPHIA, PA 19104**

**\_\_\_ I WANT TO JOIN UCHS AS \_\_\_ A HOUSEHOLD MEMBER (\$20) \_\_\_ A SENIOR/STUDENT MEMBER (\$10). MY CHECK TO “UCHS” IS ENCLOSED.**

**\_\_\_ AS A UCHS MEMBER, PLEASE RESERVE \_\_\_ TICKETS FOR THE UCHS HOUSE TOUR AT THE DISCOUNTED RATE OF \$20/EACH. MY CHECK TO “UCHS” FOR THE FULL AMOUNT IS ENCLOSED.**

**NAME** \_\_\_\_\_

**ADDRESS** \_\_\_\_\_

**CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE** \_\_\_\_\_

**EMAIL** \_\_\_\_\_

Those applying to have their plans analyzed represent a good cross section of University City's neighborhoods with 4 from **Cedar Park/Squirrel Hill**, 3 from **Spruce Hill**, 2 from **Garden Court** and 1 from **Powelton**. Only one of these is not in one of the **National Register Districts of University City**.

UCHS hopes to make this service a regular opportunity for property owners to supplement the advisory services available through the **Philadelphia Historical Commission** and organizations like the **Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia**.

## FIRST WORKSHOPS COMPLETE

The first four **Homeowners Workshops** developed by the **Preservation Alliance** and run concurrently in **Germantown** and **West Philadelphia** in April were well-attended and great successes in both locations. These free programs covered **Working with Architects and Contactors; Roofing on Historic Buildings; Historic Windows** and **Masonry & Pointing**.

The Alliance is considering other approaches in the Fall to provide more opportunities for owners of historic properties to learn and ask about the practical details of historical preservation and maintenance. As soon as these plans are fixed, we will report them to you.

## RECOMMENDED CONTRACTORS LIST

The **Homeowners Workshops** and **TAProgram** will also need help from our members to identify and evaluate those contractors/architects/suppliers they have used on projects connected with their properties. In this newsletter you will find a mail-back questionnaire designed by **UCHS Board Member Ray Perkins** to solicit names and evaluations of these businesses.

Please send us your recommendations for the on-going and ever-changing list that we can make

available to you and others in the area who are grappling with many of the same problems. Just make copies of the form for additional submissions to UCHS..

## WHICH DISTRICT?

At two recent convocations of local community, preservation and historical organizations hosted by the **Preservation Alliance**, **Laura Spina**, late of the staff of the **Philadelphia Historical Commission** and now with the staff of the **Planning Commission**, gave presentations focused on comparative analyses of the objectives and operations of local **Historic Districts** and the planned **Conservation Districts** now being developed for the city. Her assessments are reproduced in this newsletter as **Conservation Districts or Historic Districts: Which one to use?**

Laura summarized the essential difference in the two arrangements in this succinct way: "Local historic districts are designed to recognize and preserve existing historic 'fabric' (surviving historic sites and buildings and their materials), while local conservation districts allow communities to control the basic design characteristics of new construction." While mutually independent, they are tools appropriate to local communities based on the community's existing resources and shared vision of what they want their communities to look like in the future."

At present, the Planning Commission is working with the **Queen Village** community on what could become the city's first conservation district. The community was particularly concerned with the development phenomenon of builders adding additional floors to the residential standard in the neighborhood along with curb cuts, sidewalk garages, and street level parking spaces for new condominiums. Tear-downs were also a problem. A historic district was not a practical option in the area.

As **UCHS** and the **Spruce Hill Community Association** press the case with the **Philadelphia Historical Commission** to begin review of our long-standing (some 25 years!!) nomination for a local **Spruce Hill Historic District**, these distinctions become particularly relevant.

(continued on Page 9)

### University City Historical Society (UCHS) Contractor/Supplier Questionnaire

UCHS invites you to take a few minutes to complete the questionnaire below, providing recommendations for contractors, architects and/or suppliers you have used for projects, large and small, in and around your home. By submitting your recommendations and comments, UCHS will be able to develop a listing of reputable, knowledgeable craftspeople and suppliers familiar with historic old neighborhoods and homes.

The information provided will allow the UCHS board to create an easily accessible listing of contractors and suppliers used by other homeowners in our community. Those using the list must, of course, check out their references.

**Name of contractor/architect/supplier** \_\_\_\_\_

**Contact telephone #, email** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email** \_\_\_\_\_

**Briefly describe the type of work performed.**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Please circle the one that best describes your experience.**

Project cost appropriate for project size.	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Job started and completed on time.	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Work area cleaned or tidied after each day.	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Construction material removed after project's end.	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Clear communication regarding project expectations.	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Professional handling of unforeseen problems.	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Flexibility with homeowner's schedule.	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent
Overall satisfaction with the work performed.	Poor	Fair	Good	Very Good	Excellent

**Additional Comments**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

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**University City Historical Society**  
**P.O. Box 31927**  
**Philadelphia, PA 19104**

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# Conservation Districts or Historic Districts: Which one to use?

## Fact Sheet

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### Introduction

The role and the nature of city planning as an activity of local government continue to evolve. New importance has been given to physical development as a result of environmental concerns, interest in historic preservation, the increasing complexity and magnitude of development proposals, and the special emphasis placed on humanizing the scale of the City through urban design.

Neighborhood groups have also evolved, becoming more knowledgeable and involved in the development process. As you look at your neighborhood and evaluate your individual needs to guide changes and new development, you should consider two important tools which the **Philadelphia Code** offers.

### Conservation Districts

#### Overview and Objectives

- created by **City Council** in 2004 for residential areas only
- recognize that neighborhoods have integrity of form and streetscape that warrant conservation
- regulate significant work to a building façade that is visible from a public right-of-way, demolition of existing buildings and construction of new structures
- do not regulate interiors or use
- overall goal is to maintain the public streetscape (i.e. setbacks, cornice lines, landscaping) and visual qualities of the district
- cannot overlap with an existing or proposed municipal historic district

#### Application process

- require initiation by neighbors or a community group with proof of interest by the affected residents (either minutes from a public meeting of the group or signatures from 30% of the affected property owners).
- process includes the creation of community- based design guidelines for the proposed district
- guidelines address such items as materials, setbacks, massing, colors
- guidelines are written by the community in conjunction with the **City Planning Commission**
- once guidelines and boundaries of district are set, **City Council** votes to create district
- any work to properties within district must receive **Certificate of Compliance** from the **Planning Commission** before building permit can be issued
- in its reviews of permit applications, **Planning Commission** uses the guidelines approved for that particular district
- implementation and administrative procedures are in development as this is a new program. **Queen Village** will be the demonstration area for conservation districts.

## Municipal Historic Districts

### Overview and Objectives

- **Historical Commission** was created by **City Council** in 1955, and local historic districts were created when the **Historic Preservation Ordinance** was revised in 1984
- recognize historic, cultural, and architectural importance of a neighborhood or area
- regulate any work that requires a building permit or alters the exterior appearance of a property – jurisdiction is entire building envelope
- do not regulate interiors or use
- overall goal is to preserve the historic fabric that makes up the district

### Application process

- initiated by a community group
- nominations are submitted to the **Philadelphia Historical Commission**, which votes on the districts' creation
- work to a property, including demolition, within an historic district must receive approval from the **Historical Commission** before a permit can be issued
- in its reviews of permit applications, **Historical Commission** uses the *Secretary of the Interior's Standards and Guidelines for the Treatment of Historic Properties*. These guidelines adopt the hierarchy that calls for the preservation of historic material; if preservation is no longer feasible, the repair that would save as much material as possible; if replacement must occur, the element should be replaced in kind. The Standards do allow for additions and alterations that are considered part of modern living, such as roof decks.

### Conservation District or Municipal Historic District?

If a neighborhood is concerned about the effect of new construction and wants to preserve the overall visual appearance of the area, a conservation district would be a better tool. Conservation districts provide a framework in which a neighborhood can evaluate new development and new construction, yet does not forbid the demolition of existing buildings. In a conservation district, the area may have many new buildings, yet the overall visual character of the area is retained.

If residents are concerned about preserving buildings and the neighborhood's historic fabric, a municipal historic district should be used. In historic districts, a demolition may only happen when a building cannot feasibly be reused or if a profound public interest exists. Any changes to the properties within an historic district are viewed through the lens of protecting the existing building fabric.

## FULLY PACKED MAY



**Saturday, May 6, 9:30 to 12 noon - Botanic Heritage Gardening Day, Baltimore and Woodland Avenues** between 39th and 40th Streets. **UC Green** invites you to a community gardening day to learn about and refresh these historic theme garden beds for the upcoming season. Meet on Baltimore Avenue side. Tools and refreshments provided. Refreshments provided by the **University City Garden Club**. For more information on this event and many others, check out [www.ucgreen.org](http://www.ucgreen.org) or contact **Winnie Harris**, [wharris@ucgreen.org](mailto:wharris@ucgreen.org) 215-573-4684.



**Saturday, May 6, 10 am to 3 pm – Native Plant Sale at Bartram’s Garden** – A complete selection of native, trees, woodies and perennials, **Bartram’s Garden, 54th and Lindbergh Boulevard**. For best selection, attend the member’s preview on Friday, May 5, 3 to 7 pm. Join or renew today! Call 215-729-5281 ext. 103. Check out [www.bartramsgarden.org](http://www.bartramsgarden.org).

**Saturday, May 13, 11 a.m. to 4 p.m – Spruce Hill May Fair in Clark Park, 43rd and Baltimore Avenue** – Join **UCHS** and other community organizations at this annual community fair. We will be selling books, reproductions of historic area maps, soliciting recommendations for contractors, announcing the house tour, etc.



During the day, tours of the **USP Lower Mill Creek Garden at 43rd and Chester** (above) will be announced. To volunteer for the USHC table, call (215) 387-3019 or [info@uchs.net](mailto:info@uchs.net).



**Sunday, May 14th (Mother’s Day) 1 pm & 3 pm** and **Sunday, May 28th (Memorial Day weekend) 1 pm & 3 pm - Bartram’s Garden Cruises on the Lower Schuylkill River**. One-hour, round-trip cruises depart from a new dock at 54th St. and Lindbergh Blvd. and travel to the [Fairmount Water Works](http://www.fairmountwaterworks.com). Cruises run rain or shine. \$20 per person (\$15 for Bartram’s Garden members). To reserve, call **Alison McDowell** at 215-729-5281 ext. 103.

## AND THANKS TO

Those who recently renewed their membership dues and made generous extra contributions as **Sustainers of UCHS: Genie & David Hochman; Michael Levin**; and additional contributions as **Friends of UCHS: Carol A. & Richard J. Betts; Scott Winds & Martin Bodtmann; Haward Deck & Marvin Brown; Mary H. McGettigan & Larry Caputo; Anthony West & Diane Cloutier; Robert P. Thomas & Nancy Adams Drye; Libby Rosof & Murray Dubin; Conrad & Lois Johnson Hamerman; Guy Laren; Carolynne & Iman Kalifa Martin; Greg Montanaro; Thad & Kristen Metzler Wilson.**

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