



CENTER CITY QUARTERLY



Newsletter of the Center City Residents' Association

Vol. 13 No. 2 Summer 2022

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Our Greene Countrie Towne

Philadelphia's Bird Protection Program Featured in Audubon Magazine

By Bonnie Eisenfeld



Philadelphia city skyline at 2:30 am. It appears that many buildings are in compliance with the appeal to dim lights late at night. (Picture submitted anonymously.)

Most migrating birds travel at night, navigating by the moon and stars. Artificial night-time lights can disorient the birds, causing them to collide with buildings and die. Audubon Magazine reports that Bird Safe Philly, a program started in 2021 to save migrating birds, has proven to be successful in reducing the number of bird deaths.

In early October 2020, to convince high-rise building managers to dim their lights, Audubon Mid-Atlantic volunteers collected window-strike bird victims on Philadelphia streets as evidence of the tragedy. The Audubon volunteers brought the bird victims to ornithologists at Drexel University's Academy of Natural Sciences, who will study them and create a record of what happened to different species. The Academy houses a collection of a quarter-million bird specimens, used for scientific research all over the world.

The following year, from August 15 to November 15, 2021, to protect migratory birds traveling along the Atlantic Flyway, more than 100 commercial, municipal, and residential building managers agreed to dim non-essential lights from midnight to 6 a.m. This year, Bird Safe Philly, a coalition led by the Academy of Natural Sciences of Drexel University, Delaware Valley Ornithological Club, Audubon Mid-Atlantic, and

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two local Audubon Society chapters, instituted Lights Out Philly during peak spring migration period, April 1 to May 31. Lights Out Philly participation is voluntary. Buildings associated with the Building Owners and Managers Association, Liberty Property Trust, and Brandywine Realty, all support the program.

According to Keith Russell, Audubon Mid-Atlantic's Discovery Center Program Manager of Urban Conservation, "Blue and green light is far less attractive to birds migrating at night than white light. We recommend that blue and green light be used in cases where artificial light at night is required.

"Determining the effectiveness of lights out programs is not a simple thing to do because glass can continue to cause birds to collide with buildings independently of lights, and because lights that cannot be extinguished at night can cause collisions even if many other adjacent lights have been extinguished.

"Years of data collection are needed to prove the effectiveness of a lights out program. An independent monitoring organization gathered data in 2021 and concluded that the lights out program is helping to reduce the number of collisions caused by artificial light at night.

"Unfortunately, the number of new buildings in Philadelphia with all glass facades appear to be increasing and will cause

the number of collisions caused solely by glass to increase." Glass exteriors reflect sky and landscape, and are hazardous to birds during the day all year round. Bird-safe buildings install dots or hang cords to decrease reflectivity. Birds collide with low-rise buildings too, so homeowners are encouraged to participate in bird safety.

iNaturalist.org sponsors a web-reporting project to monitor bird-window collisions in greater Philadelphia for BirdSafePhilly. According to the website, "Data collected through this project will help to identify which buildings pose the greatest threats to birds, and provide information on the timing of collision events, and on which species are most affected. This will inform the development of Bird Safe Philly's Lights Out program and other measures to prevent bird deaths, and to assess the effectiveness of these measures." You can join this project and report any findings. Instructions are on this [website](#).

E-Bird, an online database of bird observations, lists notable migrating birds seen so far this season near Rittenhouse Square: Palm Warbler, Black-and-White Warbler, Blue-gray Gnatcatcher, and Ruby-throated Hummingbird, among 13 other species sighted so far.

More details at [Lights Out | birdsafe Philly](#) and in *Audubon Magazine*, Spring 2022 issue.

Our Greene Countrie Towne

Clean Air Action Fund Will Combat Fossil Fuels in Pennsylvania

By Joseph Minott

The Clean Air Council, a nonprofit organization headquartered in Center City Philadelphia, has launched a sister organization, [the 501\(c\)\(4\) Clean Air Action Fund](#), designed to address a major problem: Pennsylvania's elected officials hear too much from fossil fuel lobbyists, and not enough from environmental advocates and the countless environmentalists throughout the Commonwealth.

Clean Air Action Fund is fighting climate change and its impacts throughout Pennsylvania by focusing on four key issues: rapidly and deliberately phasing out fossil fuels; building a green economy; protecting democracy; and influencing state and federal policy.

As a 501(c)(4) group, Clean Air Action Fund is legally permitted to engage in a broader range of activities than Clean Air Council, including election work and increased lobbying activities, using those tools to push climate action and environmental protection to the top of the political agenda in Harrisburg and beyond. Building on the Council's reputation for supporting environmental policies based on sound legal and technical analyses, the Clean Air Action Fund will persuade candidates for office, elected officials, and other policy makers to commit to taking bold action to address the climate crisis, and will hold them accountable.

The Clean Air Action Fund's website will have the latest voting information, endorsements of environmental champions, and information about the most important environmental legislation under consideration in Harrisburg. The site will help you take

action, contact your legislators, and make your voice heard. To get the latest information about climate action in Pennsylvania, go to [cleanairactionfund.org](#).

Joseph Otis Minott, Esq. is Executive Director and Chief Counsel of the Clean Air Council, and has been a force in the Clean Air Council for over 35 years.

Carbon Pollution Regulation Published by PA Dept. of Environmental Protection Links PA with Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative

Pennsylvania has officially taken the most significant policy step to combat climate change in its history. From now on, the costs of carbon pollution emitted by fossil fuel-fired power plants in the Commonwealth will also be borne by polluters, not solely by the residents and taxpayers who suffer the impacts of that pollution. Pennsylvania's program is projected to cut up to 227 million tons of carbon pollution by 2030, deliver billions of dollars in public health benefits, and provide hundreds of millions of dollars annually for reinvestment in Pennsylvania's families and communities.

From a statement by Joseph Otis Minott, Esq., Executive Director and Chief Counsel of Clean Air Council

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President's Letter

CCRA—75 Years Strong

By Rick Gross, CCRA President

WOW! That's the only word that comes to mind when thinking about CCRA's 75th Anniversary Gala. The event commenced with a prelude at the Blatstein home on Rittenhouse Square, where sponsors and \$1000-ticket buyers, more than 40 in all, enjoyed wonderful hors d'oeuvres and endless sparkling wine as they marveled at the beauty of the home. The well-dressed crowd was in a festive mood when, after 45 minutes, the CCRA "Citizen of the Decade" awardee, rock-star maestro of the Philadelphia Orchestra, Yannick Nézet-Séguin, made his appearance. He greeted Bart Blatstein with "Hello Bart. And hello Bart's house." It went uphill from there. Yannick circulated among the guests, stopping to chat with everyone and receive their unanimous praise for his leadership of the Orchestra, the finest in the nation, and the Metropolitan Opera, the finest in the world.



I took a few minutes to welcome the crowd, formally introduce Yannick and thank Jil and Bart for generously hosting the Prelude in their wonderful home. Yannick and I then presented Jil with a medal in B Sharp and Bart with a medal in "Trouble" Clef. We then headed to the Ethical Society for the main Gala celebration.

When we arrived, there were 80 attendees already enjoying a delicious supper from Asian, Mexican, vegetarian and barbecue stations, accompanied again by endless bubbly. Special thanks to CCRA Member Michelle Neff and 12th Street Caterers for the food, and to CCRA members Joan and Bill Goldstein for the wine.

After circulating again through the happy crowd, stopping to chat with everyone, Yannick joined me on the podium to receive his award, a lovely trophy with bronze "flames" and a plaque with a baton. Overjoyed, he spoke warmly to the crowd. He said being recognized by his neighbors in the city he calls home was a special treat, and he announced to great applause that he wasn't going to leave his post anytime soon! It was a joy to have him with us.

When he left, we turned to the program. The highlight consisted of three videos recapping our 75-year history, our present agenda, and our plans for the future. Many people came up to me afterwards, enthused over the breadth of what we showed them, and asked how to get more involved. Councilman Allan Domb gave the only "political" speech of the evening, recognizing the value of our close working relationship with him in addressing the many problems facing us as we emerge from the pandemic and work to rebuild the vibrant neighborhood that is Center City West. We also acknowledged seven of my predecessor presidents in attendance.

The evening ended with a trivia quiz hosted by Billy Penn about items from 1947 or thereabouts. A few knowledgeable people showed their deep awareness of all things Philadelphia in winning the prizes.

We had originally hoped to raise \$75,000 at this event, but nearly doubled that, leaving CCRA in a position to pursue our many ambitious initiatives, including a clean, green, and diverse neighborhood and region.

In the following pages, you will see a photo spread that captures the joy of the evening. But it wasn't just a great time. It was a chance to reflect on where we have been for three-quarters of a century, what we are doing now, and how we plan to expand our agenda and impact in the years ahead. Who knows what CCRA or Philadelphia will look like on our 100th anniversary in 2047? For now, though, I am so thankful for the commitment and generosity of our members, the extraordinary efforts of those who preceded me in this job to get us to our 75th anniversary, and the dedication of all the people who worked so hard to make this event the success that it was!

This celebration has only strengthened my commitment to working with CCRA's dedicated board of directors, our colleagues in other organizations, our political leadership, and our engaged and active members to make Center City West the best possible place to live, work, visit and play!

Rick Gross

What a Party!

CCRA Celebrates 75 Years















CCRA recognizes and thanks the following sponsors in their support of our 75th Anniversary



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EXCELLENCE

New Rosenbach Exhibition 18 Reasons to Read Ulysses: A Centennial Celebration

By Rosa Doherty

The Rosenbach announces *18 Reasons to Read Ulysses: A Centennial Celebration*, a new exhibition to commemorate the great Irish novel, 100 years after its publication in 1922, at The Rosenbach Museum and Library.

This year marks a century since the publication of James Joyce’s Modernist masterpiece, *Ulysses*. Home to the only complete manuscript of the novel and the location of Philadelphia’s annual Bloomsday celebration, The Rosenbach marks this occasion with a thematic exploration of the novel’s 18 episodes.

“James Joyce’s *Ulysses* has been called the greatest modern novel,” says Kelsey Scouten Bates, The Rosenbach’s John C. Haas Director, “but it has also inspired scores of writers and readers since its publication in 1922, solidifying its place as one of the most influential novels of all time. The Rosenbach is proud to celebrate this 100th anniversary of the groundbreaking genius and impact of *Ulysses*.”

Challenging the novel’s reputation as a difficult book to read, the exhibition presents 18 highlights from the manuscript, each representing a single theme—along with related objects from The Rosenbach’s collections.

“Each of the exhibition’s 18 sections highlights a central theme for the corresponding episode of the book,” says Judith M. Guston, Curator and Senior Director of Collections. “We walk through the novel, complementing pages from its sole complete manuscript with artifacts from across the collections, suggesting interpretive links across time, geography, and culture.”

Visitors can engage separately with these thematic groupings—nationhood, food, literature, music, identity, and love are just a few—or connect them to the larger nexus of ideas in play in the novel. Enlarged photographs line the walls of three galleries to evoke a feeling of roaming Dublin alongside Joyce’s characters.

The exhibition is enhanced by more than 100 paintings by contemporary artist Heather Ryan Kelley. “Part of what drew me to *Ulysses* was Joyce’s free manipulation of style,” Kelley says. “Joyce used style as an element of composition that was meant to be exploited, and he exploited it thoroughly.”

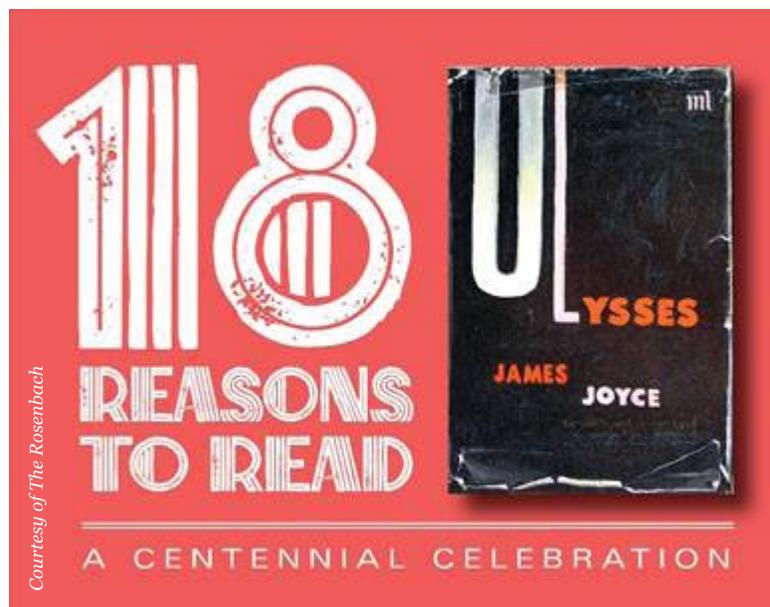
A visual meditation on the themes of *Ulysses*, her paintings range from tight realism to painterly abstraction, gestural expressionism, found-object assemblage and collage, and quotations from art history in what Kelley describes as a “joyous response to [the] great novel.”

18 Reasons to Read Ulysses: A Centennial Celebration will be on view at The Rosenbach Museum and Library through September 18. Full details of the exhibition can be found on The Rosenbach’s website.

The exhibition is presented alongside the Bloomsday festival, a daylong public reading, with musical performances that bring the epic novel to life. Held on June 16—the day that *Ulysses* is set in 1904—the festival returns in person after a two-year hiatus due to the pandemic.

Joyce enthusiasts and novices alike can drop by any time between 11 am and 8 pm Thursday, June 16, to listen to the reading, relax in the beer garden with local food trucks, and enjoy free admission to The Rosenbach. [Bloomsday](#) is FREE and open to the public.

The Rosenbach creates unique experiences for broad audiences through programs inspired by its world-class holdings of literature and history. Located in Center City Philadelphia, The Rosenbach is open to the public, with growing content available at all times on [Rosenbach.org](#). The Rosenbach is affiliated with the Free Library of Philadelphia.



Paul P. Cret and Rittenhouse Square Why Is This Square in a Class by Itself?

By Bill West



Rittenhouse Square, circa 1890.

I'm not a believer in the Great Man theory of history, any more than I believe in the inevitability of progress. But the headlines have their uses.

Take Paul P. Cret. In my imaginary museum of Philadelphia's architecture and urban design, I place his portrait on the wall between Frank Furness and Ed Bacon.

Cret fills a gap for me. I had a sense of Frank Furness and the railroad city after the Civil War, and of Ed Bacon and his struggles after the Second World War to bring the as-yet-unnamed topic of urban design to Philadelphia.

But what happened in between—say from 1903 to 1945? I just didn't have a good sense of it.

Rise to Eminence

Cret arrived from Paris in 1903 to teach architecture at the University of Pennsylvania. He came directly from the renowned Ecole des Beaux-Arts, and as he looked at the state of planning and design across Philadelphia, he saw fertile, well-watered soil that needed the addition of a few seeds. And so he got to work. (David B. Brownlee, *Building the City Beautiful: The Benjamin Franklin Parkway and the Philadelphia Museum of Art*, 2017, p. 8.)

In addition to his teaching duties, Cret pursued a private practice, landing his first major commission—the Pan American Union building in Washington, D.C.—in 1907. Also in 1907, the Fairmount Park Art Association appointed Cret as one of a small group of architects tasked with developing a comprehensive plan for the nascent Benjamin Franklin Parkway. (Brownlee, pp. 22-23.)

As if he didn't have enough to do, Cret also became a patron of the city's T Square Club, where a design workshop offered

advanced instruction to practicing architects and draftsmen in architectural offices. (For a brief but very informative biography of Cret, click [here](#).)

Cret's next step to power and glory in Philadelphia's emerging city-planning structure came in 1911, when he was appointed to the newly formed Art Jury. (Brownlee, p. 51. The Art Jury, now the Art Commission, had and has considerable authority over aspects of the city's built environment. Professor Brownlee kindly directed me to the Art Jury's first annual report, covering 1911, which is available online. See it and subsequent annual reports [here](#).)

City planning was in the air in America, and particularly in Philadelphia. The Third Annual City Planning Conference took place here in 1911, and the city's department of public works prepared a 30-foot model of the Benjamin Franklin Parkway, whose rather turbulent development was still in progress. Frederick Law Olmsted told Philadelphians that their city was "the farthest advanced in the country ... in city planning." (Brownlee, p. 27.)

The Architect and the Square

In the midst of all this, Paul Cret redesigned Rittenhouse Square. He didn't just redesign it, he married it, a relationship of near-constant attention lasting from 1913's initial design process through the first wave of construction in 1914; a lengthy separation during Cret's French army service in World War I; a second wave of construction after the war; and from then on, nearly to the time of his death in 1945.

The square was clearly a pet project, his close and sustained attention made easier by the fact that his practice's office was only three blocks away.

Continued on p.14

Before we dive into some of the nitty-gritty, I'd like to set out three points, to be illustrated in greater detail as we go on.

(If you're interested in all the nitty-gritty, there is a master's essay from the University of Pennsylvania: Eric Anders Baratta, *The Performance of History and Design in Paul Cret's Rittenhouse Square*, 2002. Baratta did an amazing amount of research in some very rich archives, and the story you're reading relies heavily on that work. When it comes to interpretation, as you will see, he and I frequently part company. All the illustrations in this story are from the master's thesis. To see the whole thesis, click [here](#). The photograph at the beginning of this story is figure 33. For the paragraphs above, see particularly pp. 1, 33-36.)

First, Rittenhouse Square is not a French formal garden. I think it is better analyzed as an English garden refracted through a Parisian lens. At any rate, the antecedents for Rittenhouse Square are clearly manifold.

Second, although promotional literature at the time suggested that the 1913 proposed revisions to the square were inspired by the Parc Monceau in Paris, this is simply not true for the physical plan. If there must be a single source of inspiration, Baratta suggests that the Jardin du Luxembourg would probably be a better candidate. (Baratta, pp. 18-19, 39-40.)

Third, the park as you see it today does not exactly reflect the park that Cret built in 1914. If you want things exactly the way they were, you're going to have to bring back a lot of gravel.

One final thought about Cret: His own vision for the park clearly evolved over time—for instance, the 1914 construction plan was not his first plan (p. 36). One of Cret's strengths was his flexibility. Another was fidelity to what really matters.

The Lay of the Land

Let's have a quick look at Rittenhouse Square and its development before Cret came on the scene.

The Southwest Square was one of the five squares in William Penn's 1682 plan of Philadelphia, but for the first century or so nothing much happened. Then an expanding city came closer, and the pace of change picked up.

In 1816 a wooden fence was built around the square; in 1825 Southwest Square was renamed for David Rittenhouse, a versatile engineer and scientist best known as an astronomer and first director of the U.S. Mint. In 1852 the wooden fence was replaced by one made of iron. (Pp. 8-9.)



Map of the square from around 1862.

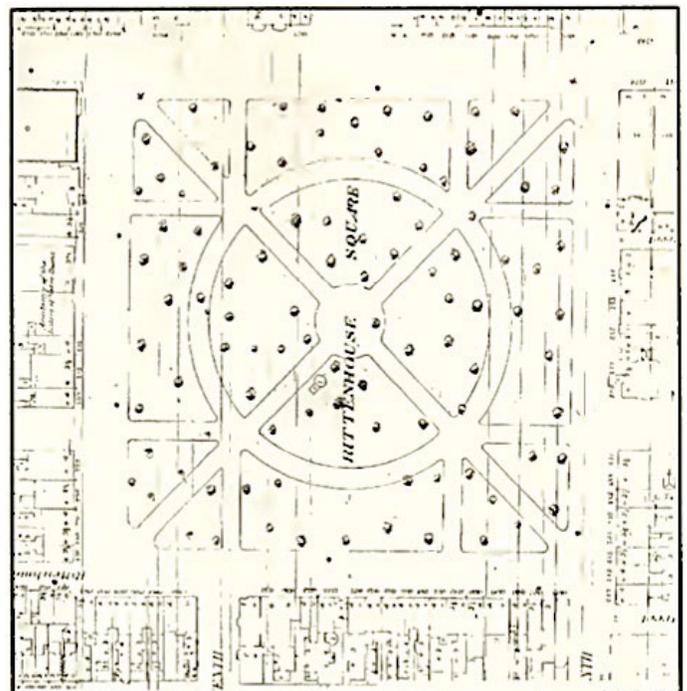
An 1862 map (see Baratta, figure 6) shows the layout of Rittenhouse Square: two concentric circular paths, along with a series of radiating paths extending from the inner circle out to the corners and the sides of the square. These radiating paths are not straight; they curve—or possibly meander—quite a bit, suggesting that people came here for a walk in the park and were not seeking the shortest path from one side of the square to the other.

By 1875 (fig. 28) it appears that the radial paths have been straightened a bit, but the overall layout seems the same.



1875.

By 1887 (fig. 29) the peripheral access paths have been reorganized into something more like what we have today, aligning them better with the surrounding street grid—at least at Locust Street. And the diagonal paths have been turned into direct shortcuts, as they are today.



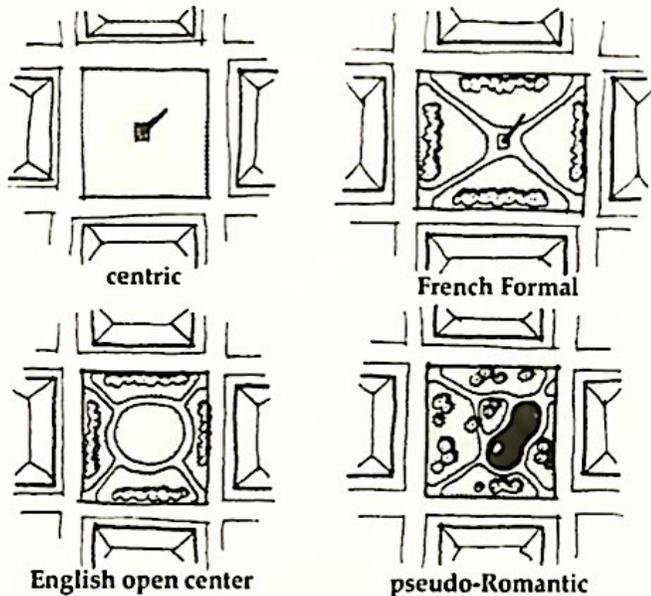
1887.

Historical Models

Baratta suggests that Rittenhouse Square is best analyzed as a residential square, and he describes the four models (below) that were available to Cret (fig. 1). First is Centric, top left. It is essentially a flat, open space with a statue in the center.

This is what the Place des Vosges in Paris looked like when it was created in the 17th century. (The statue was of Louis XIII.) Place des Vosges evolved to a more complex design, similar to that shown at top right—the French formal square. (P. 4.)

Additionally, there was the English open design, bottom left, and the Romantic, bottom right.



The four models.

The pre-Cret Rittenhouse Square clearly has nothing to do with French formal design and fits comfortably within the English tradition.

Parc Monceau

So what happens when Cret shows up? I would suggest that Cret respected what was there and deftly modified it to produce a little gem that is still largely intact today.

How does he do this? He's a well-trained Beaux-Arts architect, so he will start with the existing conditions and the client and then try to develop a workable program.

A comprehensive review of existing conditions in 1913 might well have noted the surrounding neighborhood and its residents, many of whom were quite affluent, and a significant number whom took a strong and sustained interest in the welfare of the square. So the client was not an individual; it was a group.

This was the sea in which the square found itself swimming; I think it's important to note that none of the other 1682-era squares have had such a base of support steadily throughout the years.

Members of the Rittenhouse community had been doing their own thinking about the square. In 1913, "Mrs. J. Willis Martin and Dr. J. William White, two Rittenhouse residents and prominent

social figures, formed the Rittenhouse Square Improvement Association (RSIA) to bring about wide-scale changes in the park." (Pp. 16-17.)

In 1912, Mrs. Martin had visited Paris and taken a particular interest in the Parc Monceau. With help from Jacques Greber, she photographed the park. (Greber was a landscape architect educated at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts who was already building a reputation in the United States. A few years later, he was largely responsible for the final design of the Benjamin Franklin Parkway. Mrs. Martin used her pictures of Parc Monceau to promote her ideas for Rittenhouse Square. (For Mrs. Martin's exploits, see Baratta, p. 18. For Greber and the design of the parkway, see Brownlee, pp. 30-39.)

Rittenhouse Square looks nothing like Parc Monceau, but what she was selling was not so much the plan of Parc Monceau as the spirit of the place. As Baratta puts it, "Parc Monceau provided an ideal example of a small urban park which combined elements of the playground, park, garden and museum enrobed in a landscape with formal variety and classical, if not sentimental, historical referent." (P. 19.)

The Diagonals

As for the actual design of the new and improved Rittenhouse Square, I think the main thing Cret did was to reinforce the already existing diagonal pathways: give them the Beaux-Arts treatment, if you will. We've already seen these paths evolve in the late 19th century, to the point where the park was no longer just a place for a midday ramble but also able to accommodate pedestrians with a destination.

Cret gave the two diagonals very different treatments. For the southwest-to-northeast diagonal, called the promenade, he created a dual-carriageway pedestrian highway, with plantings in the median. This median, along with the trees flanking the pathways, creates the effect of walking through a garden.

In his design for the promenade, I suspect Cret is responding to increased commuter traffic; I think we can also see a response to increased commuting traffic in the evolution of the square's plan before 1900.

Today, it's a really nice walk to work, not just in the park but also on leafy blocks of largely 19th century townhouses leading to the park from the southwest, and then out of the northeast corner, where the commuter is immediately in the city's commercial center and walking along some of the most attractive retail blocks in the city.

A lot of people "commute" to work this way in Philadelphia. I used to hand out election flyers at the northeast corner; the best time was the morning rush hour, and it was busy. I probably spent too much time chatting with friends passing by on their way to work, but I still managed to unload a lot of campaign lit. And you know what? People were almost invariably friendly, even if they didn't want a flyer.

As I mentioned, the other diagonal received a very different treatment. Baratta (p. 37) argues that "the Parisian heart of the design was the plaza," which runs southeast to northwest through the center of the square (the promenade tiptoes through the center, basically disappearing into the plaza for a moment before it resumes its independent identity).

Continued on p.16

On this diagonal, Cret created a large open space at the center, which he intended for events. To the southeast we have the fountain and reflecting pool, presided over by the [Duck Girl](#) (which, by the way, did not come to the square until 1960. To the northwest we have Antoine-Louis Bayre's [Lion Crushing a Serpent](#), presiding over a central planting bed. (The first sculpture in Rittenhouse Square, the Lion arrived in 1892. According to Baratta [p. 47], it was originally located along the northern edge of the square.

As on the promenade, the walking paths split around the various medians, and unite in the open central space. (As the diagonals approach the gates at the four corners of the park, all are single-lane.

To my eye, the plaza diagonal is not intended to have as much foot traffic as the promenade. Among other things, there are stairs behind the fountain that cover an almost imperceptible slope. I suspect this difference in approach is probably guided by the existing volume of foot traffic, which I assume was not nearly as large as for the promenade.

The fearsome Chinese Wall was still in existence. A railroad viaduct that ran from the Schuylkill River to City Hall two blocks north of the square, it restricted passage to the north, where the Benjamin Franklin Parkway was just getting under way.

Let me digress for a moment. Demolition of existing structures in the path of the new parkway began February 22, 1907, when "a modest three-story house at 422 North Twenty-Second Street" was pulled down. (Brownlee, pp. 21-22. Demolition of the Chinese Wall did not begin until 1952. (See this [story in Hidden City](#). And if you've ever wondered why there's no stop on the Market-Frankford Line between 15th and 30th streets, this [story](#) is for you.

The Gravel

Back to the plaza. It's important to note that Cret didn't always get what he wanted in Rittenhouse Square.

For instance, Cret loved gravel. It was a traditional material in the parks of Paris, and he brought it to Rittenhouse Square. In the plaza, he used it to form the outer perimeter, next to the balustrades.

In Philadelphia, the gravel turned out to be problematic. Children playing near the reflecting pool would scoop up gravel from the beds near the balustrades and throw it into the water, wreaking havoc with the circulation pumps. In a 1942 [letter to Eli Kirk Price](#), Cret vented a bit:

"The children at the square are anything but co-operative, and apparently it is impossible to enforce any decent behavior as would have been done in peace-times, in Paris, or any other city of the Old World. The children deliberately through [sic] handfuls of pebbles and any refused [sic] at hand into the pool—one child carried successive handfuls of pebbles and emptied them into the scum gutter when its mother stood nearby giggling. When the caretaker expostulated, this mother flew into a temper and said she was a taxpayer and that the children could do what they wanted...."

In 1943 a city councilman ordered that the perimeter gravel be replaced with asphalt, and so it was done. (Baratta, pp. 46-47.)

Life After Cret

Since Cret left us in 1945, the biggest changes to the square

over the years have continued to focus on the plaza, which was also his most important innovation.

In 1976, landscape architect George Patton undertook a project (pp. 59-61) that resulted in the repaving of the plaza and the promenade, introducing the familiar "banding pattern resulting from the strips used to separate panels of the primary surface material." Baratta just hates this. As he notes, "the strips replace the continuous planar flow of Cret's design with a rigid geometric surface of individual panels."

Frankly, I'm not in love with Patton's pavement scheme. I don't hate it, but it doesn't move me. Kinda boring, actually. But that's just my opinion, and I wouldn't suggest spending money to rethink the whole thing.

The other thing Patton did, which I like quite a lot, was replace the asphalt that replaced the gravel around the plaza's perimeter. The new paving is the Belgian block you see today, set in circular patterns around the tree pits. Baratta doesn't like this either. He'd like to go back to gravel, which I just don't see happening.

However, Baratta may have a point. The systematic deployment of large, uniform surfaces—light concrete and dark gravel—must have been very dramatic. I don't think I would have found it boring.

Pros and Cons of Restoration

In addition to bringing back gravel, Baratta offers a number of ways to restore the park to be more in line with Cret's vision (pp. 61-65. Here are three ways some action might be taken.

Stop hanging Christmas lights. The use of heavy equipment—not just for the hanging of Christmas lights—compacts the soil and harms the trees and other plantings. But rather than cancel Christmas, I suggest we make the illumination of the trees permanent. For quite a few years the trees lining the blocks of Addison Street from 17th to 19th have been wrapped with a permanent year-round display of lights (recently upgraded to LEDs. A photographer friend of mine, visiting from Virginia, said the scene looked like a Scotch ad.

I say what's good for Addison would be good for Rittenhouse.

Remove the guardhouse. I have a conflict here—a friend designed the guardhouse, and I think it's very nice. Baratta is correct in stating that the placement of the guardhouse in the center of the plaza violates Cret's conception of this space as completely open and available for a wide variety of uses.

There is also an issue of semiotics—what does putting a cophouse in the middle of the square say about the square? Its location is very similar to the central [panoptic](#) station that Jeremy Bentham developed for his model prison in the late 18th century. Unfortunately, the range of vision from our central cophouse is quite limited because of barriers like balustrades and shrubs, and M. Bayre's *Lion*. (Hint: Surveillance cameras and a bank of TV monitors work much better.)

On the other hand, there is a tradition of marking the central spot in a square. Place des Vosges had a statue of Louis XIII at its center until the French Revolution.

I'd leave the guardhouse, but perhaps ask the occupants to be a bit more attentive to their housekeeping.

Remove the new path in the northeast corner. This path started life as a muddy desire line. It extends from a park gate on 18th Street, near Chancellor, and runs to a gate on the north side of the square. Commuters from New Jersey were getting off Patco on Locust Street, walking to the square, and looking for the quickest way to their offices in the rapidly developing Market West area. I watched this desire line develop.

The path is foreign to Cret's design. On the other hand, it gives these two gates a purpose, something they didn't have before.

And, if you remove the path, you will simply find yourself with another muddy desire line.

Bigger Buildings, More People

My basic problem here is that I don't believe in the restoration of a historic golden age. I think it's a wrong way to look at history in general, and a wrong way to look at the history of Rittenhouse Square. Paul P. Cret was a very good architect who made creative use of existing materials and was open to changing his plans as circumstances dictated. He made good use of Bayre's *Lion* by moving it from a peripheral location to an important, and logical, place in the central plaza. And if he had been alive in 1960, when *Duck Girl* showed up to grace his fountain and reflecting pool, I think he would have cheered

As Baratta points out on page 34, it's just possible that Cret's genius in Rittenhouse Square lies less in the hardware than in the software:

"Cret's design takes into account the many uses and users of the square, anticipating the variety of both during different times of the day, week and year. It creates spaces for the activities of groups, both large and small, while at the same time allows places for individual recreation and relaxation. It is defined by what many people consider the formality of its intersecting plaza and promenade, yet its real success is proven in the extemporaneous social theatre of the diverse users of these spaces."

Maybe Mrs. Martin wasn't so far off when she held up Parc Monceau as an example for Rittenhouse Square. To repeat what Baratta has to say on the subject: "Parc Monceau provided an

ideal example of a small urban park which combined elements of the playground, park, garden and museum enrobed in a landscape with formal variety and classical, if not sentimental, historical referent." (P. 19).

Still, I think there is an ongoing tendency to focus on the protection and maintenance of a nonexistent French formal garden, and that this focus distracts us from other challenges that are more pressing and more important.

Rittenhouse Square has always been a creature of its neighborhood, and just now that neighborhood is changing rapidly. The density of our built environment is increasing with every new high-rise, and along with it the number of people who live here, come to work here, or just plain visit because it's a really cool place and why not go there.

All this increases pressure on the fabric of the square, which is most easily seen in the heroic efforts required to keep the lawns in respectable shape. We need to start thinking about how to relieve some of that pressure, and that involves thinking outside the box of the square.

In my opinion, we need more open space scattered around the neighborhood. When Society Hill was redeveloped, it received a whole series of parklets, walkways, and other bits of open space woven into the new fabric of the area. We don't have that and, given the price of local real estate these days, I don't think we're going to get it.

But we do have a lot of little streets. I think we should look at pedestrianizing a whole bunch of them. This doesn't mean excluding cars and delivery vehicles, but it does mean allowing the streets to have new primary uses. In residential areas they could be play streets, and in more commercial areas they could be used for commerce: I'm thinking lattes and croissants at little tables with red checkered tablecloths in the 1700 block of Moravian Street. Retail shops on Walnut could redo their Moravian frontages as entrances; in many cases there are existing doorways and windows that could be unblocked. I think the people around Moravian have the imagination to pull this off.

Call it turning trash alleys into gold.



The square around 1880 (figure 9)

My Center City Rocked in the Sixties

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

When I tell people I have lived in Center City since the mid-Sixties, they usually say, “Oh you must be so excited by all the wonderful changes since then.” Yes, I love all the new restaurants now, and the truth is I thought Center City was pretty great back then.

We had a lively social scene, with Friday after-work happy hours and weekend apartment parties where people met in person and then phoned each other on landline telephones. There were no answering machines or voicemail; if we weren't home, the caller just tried again later. Dates resulted from friends' introductions (sometimes blind dates and meeting people at work).

We had noteworthy traditional restaurants including two named Bookbinder's, each claiming to be the original; Arthur's, where tuxedoed waiters made fresh Caesar salad tableside; the Three Threes, housed in a rowhouse at 333 S. Smedley Street; the Happy Rooster with its French flavor; two Pubs serving London broil, baked potato, and a wedge of iceberg lettuce topped with Russian dressing; the Pub-Tiki, offering Polynesian ambience, wonton soup filled to brim with meat and vegetables, and a pu pu platter of appetizers to share; and Da Vinci (gourmet Italian).

Musicians such as Dizzy Gillespie, Maynard Ferguson, and Lou Rawls performed at jazz clubs—Pep's and the Showboat. We had a choice of many movie theaters, the Theater Guild series of first-run plays at the Forrest, the Philadelphia Orchestra performing at the Academy of Music, and “little theater” at Plays and Players. On special occasions, we went to the Latin Casino nightclub at 13th and Walnut.

Although most places frowned upon unescorted women sitting at the bar, a few places were known to attract singles: McGillin's Olde Ale House (still there), the Venture Inn, and the Bellevue Court. The Gilded Cage coffeehouse featured folk music and no alcohol.

We had authentic Jewish delis with interesting characters staffing the counter; Taylor's Country Store with a pianist

performing during lunch; Kelly's on Mole Street (later the Oyster House); and Chinatown. On Sunday morning my friends and I would eat brunch at Day's Deli, 18th and Spruce. On a work day, we often ate a quick lunch at Woolworth's five-and-dime-store counter. We would shop for food at Great Scot (now Rittenhouse Market), and buy fresh tomatoes, corn, and cantaloupes from New Jersey farmers' trucks parked on the street.

On summer weekends, there was a mass exodus to the Jersey shore, and Center City seemed like a ghost town if you were unlucky enough to be left behind. For those not exiting the city, Fairmount Park offered live music at the Robin Hood Dell and theater-in-the-round at Playhouse in the Park.

We shopped in person for clothing and household items at four department stores: Wanamaker's, Gimbels, Lit Brothers, and Strawbridge & Clothier. We would go from department to department, trying on, charging, and sending. Other retail stores included Peck & Peck, Bonwit Teller, Blum's, and the exclusive Nan Duskin for women; and Brooks Brothers (still open) and Jacob Reed for men. Each retail store had its own charge card, good only at that store. If we didn't pay our monthly bill on time, the store would close the account.

We received news through newspapers, radio, and network TV. At that time, Philadelphia had a second daily paper, the *Evening Bulletin*. We also had the weekly *Welcomat*, covering local news and the arts.

There were no ATMs so we had to cash checks at banks or supermarkets. If we ran out of money by Sunday when neither of those was open, we would amuse ourselves by going to the Art Museum and walking along Boathouse Row, or staying home listening to music on large vinyl platters played on turntables attached to multi-part stereo systems with huge speakers, and reading the Sunday papers. Those were the good old days!

A version of this article was first published in the [Summer 2019](#) issue of The Center City Quarterly.



Easter fashion show in Rittenhouse Square, 1969. “Semifinalists for fashion excellence in the teen-age young lady group included two pants suits and twins in identical outfits in the Rittenhouse Square Easter Promenade. Pants suits are, judges decided, ‘not really appropriate’ for Easter Sunday,” reads a contemporaneous caption. (Photo courtesy of Temple University Libraries Urban Archives.)

Quiara Alegría Hudes and Miles Orvell Win Athenaeum Literary Awards

Quiara Alegría Hudes and Miles Orvell won the prestigious Athenaeum of Philadelphia Literary and Art and Architecture Literary Awards for 2021. The Literary Award, in its 73rd year, honors the year's most outstanding literary work by a Philadelphia-area author or a work that is about Philadelphia. Hudes's memoir, *My Broken Language*, is the Free Library of Philadelphia's 2022 One Book One Philadelphia choice.

Franklyn L. Rodgers, former Chairman of Warner Publisher Services and current member of the Literary Award Committee, said the jury chose *My Broken Language* because "the prose is sparkling, the cast of characters engaging, and reading it, one gets a sense of the rich family life in neighborhoods that have daunting and protracted challenges."

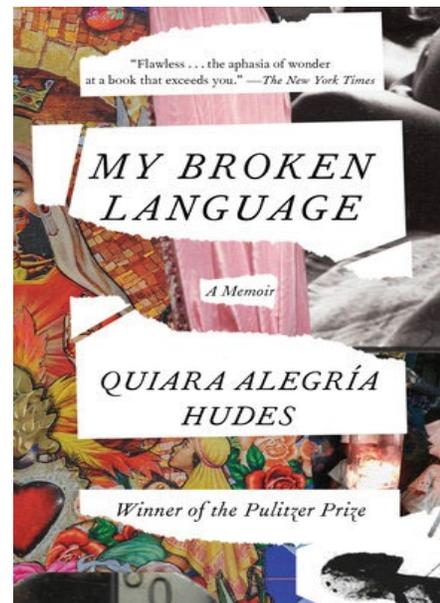
In a video statement, Hudes said, "Now my Perez family, agrarian migrants from Puerto Rico, are part of Philly's paperbound time capsule." The literary award comes with a \$1,000 cash prize. The recipient is invited to speak at a public lecture at The Athenaeum.

Temple University Professor Miles Orvell received the Art and Architecture Literary Award for his book *Empire of Ruins: American Photography and the Spectacle of Destruction*. The Art and Architecture Literary Award jury hailed Orvell's work as an "eminently readable book that demonstrates the significant role made by the arts, especially photography, in shaping Americans' attitudes toward the destruction of the American landscape, both natural and human-made."

Rodgers announced the awards on April 4 at the Athenaeum's 207th Annual Shareholder Meeting. Winners are chosen by a volunteer panel of Athenaeum shareholders.

The Athenaeum of Philadelphia, founded in 1814, is a member-supported circulating library, research archive and cultural forum housed in a National Historic Landmark building on Washington Square. Much of its programming is open to the public, and new members are welcome.

For more information about The Athenaeum and the Literary Award, please contact Beth Hessel at bhessel@philaathenaeum.org.



From the book cover

Summer of Wonder at Philadelphia City Institute Library

By Erin Hoopes

Children, teenagers, and adults are invited to enjoy an enriching Summer of Wonder at the Philadelphia City Institute Library (1905 Locust Street

From Monday, June 6, through Friday, August 12, stop by the library to sign up for summer reading. The Library will be handing out Summer of Wonder gameboards and stickers for children, and prize raffle cards for teens and adults.

You can also sign up for Summer Reading at our Pop-Up Library events throughout the neighborhood in June:

- Thursday June 16, 4:30-5:30 pm at Markward Playground
- Thursday June 23, 4:30-5:30 pm in Rittenhouse Square
- Thursday June 30, 4:30-5:30 pm in Fidler Square

PCI will be offering outdoor storytimes for babies and preschoolers. Please stop by the library, call 215-685-6621, or check the Free Library Calendar of Events for dates and times.

Take-and-make activity kits will be distributed each week (while supplies last) with fun, creative activities for children and teens.

Also offered for checkout this summer—small book-club kits for middle schoolers or middle schoolers and their families. Each kit will include four copies of the book, discussion questions, and ideas for enrichment activities related to the book's content. Please stop by the library or call 215-685-6621 for details.

Funding generously provided by the Philadelphia City Institute Board of Managers.

Center City's Centuries-old Clubs and Societies

Create, Perform, Preserve, Promote Arts and Sciences

By Bonnie Eisenfeld

Center City's centuries-old clubs and societies boast many "America's firsts" and "America's oldests"—oldest men's singing group, first women's club, oldest amateur opera company, oldest professional theater company, first art club for women. Some lay claim to being the oldest continuously operating club in their category, or one of the oldest. What follows is a tour of historic clubs and societies dedicated to the arts, literature, science, and preservation, with some highlights about each one, focused on Center City West. (For other areas of Center City—east of Broad, Midtown, and Independence area—please see the original expanded article, published in the *Center City Quarterly*, [Summer 2015](#).) For information about membership and public hours, please contact the organizations.

The Pennsylvania Horticultural Society, 1827

Established to promote horticulture, the society originally had 80 members and now has 13,000, and 300,000 supporters. The first Flower Show, held in 1829, introduced the poinsettia, and has continued annually to the present. PHS has involved thousands of city residents in restoration of public landscapes and neighborhood parks. 100 N. 20th St. #5; 215-988-8800 <http://phsonline.org/>

The Orpheus Club of Philadelphia, 1872

This club is the oldest men's singing group in America. The Euredice Chorus—a choral group for women formed in 1886—sang many concerts with the Orpheus Club. Currently membership consists of 80 singers, and Orpheus Club performs concerts at various venues in the Delaware Valley as well as members-only concerts in their clubhouse. Their repertoire includes classical, jazz, and pop. Members perform upon request for hospitals, retirement centers, schools, and charitable events in the Delaware Valley. 254 S. Van Pelt St.; 610-644-9125 <http://www.orpheusclub.org/>



The Orpheus Club

The Acorn Club, 1889

The first women's club in America, its purpose was to promote art, literature, music, and social enjoyment. Today, members are active in the arts, culture, medicine and nonprofit organizations. 1519 Locust St.; 215-735-2040 <http://www.acornclub.org/>

Colonial Dames of America, 1891

This is a national organization that promotes our country's heritage through historic preservation, patriotic service, and educational projects. The Pennsylvania Headquarters, completed in 1921, hosts numerous programs, events, and private functions. 1630 Latimer St.; 215-735-6737 <http://nscdapa.org/>

Pen & Pencil Club, 1892

A place for writers and editors to socialize, this is the oldest continuously operating press club in America, and the second oldest in the world. It maintains a strict "off the record" policy on its premises. At the time it was founded, Philadelphia had seven morning and six evening newspapers. Pen & Pencil combined the Stylus Club, the Journalist Club, and the Reporters Club. 1522 Latimer St.; 215-731-9909 <http://www.penandpencil.org/>

The Savoy Company, 1901

The oldest amateur opera company in the world dedicated to Gilbert and Sullivan, Savoy has a large volunteer chorus and crew, and has performed on professional stages and with professional orchestras. The company also performs for charitable organizations and has social events for members. P.O. Box 59150, Philadelphia PA 19102-9150; 215-735-7161 <http://www.savoy.org/>

Plays and Players, 1911

Founded as a social club devoted to new theater experiences for and by its membership, Plays and Players is one of the oldest professional theater companies in America. Originally called Little Theatre of Philadelphia, it opened in 1913, and the company bought the building in 1922. In the 1960s, productions were opened to the entire community. At present, the mission of Plays and Players is to support and nurture the work of local artists, as well as to provide rehearsal space, workshops, classes and events to members. Other local companies also use the space. 1714 Delancey Pl.; 215-735-0630 <http://www.playsandplayers.org/>

The Print Center, 1915

Originally known as The Print Club, this was one of the first venues in America dedicated to the appreciation of prints. The Annual International Competition is the oldest of its kind in the country. In 1942, The Print Club donated its collection to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. In 1996, the name was changed to The Print Center to indicate its commitment to the community. The Print Center mounts solo and group exhibitions in its galleries, in public locations, and in traveling shows, and provides educational programs to artists and art enthusiasts. The Artists-in-Schools Program brings visual-art education to disadvantaged populations in underserved Philadelphia public schools. Open to the public. 1614 Latimer St.; 215-735-6090 <http://www.printcenter.org/>

More Fame Coming for World-Famous Nora the Piano Cat

Betsy Alexander, local artist, music educator, composer, and proud “purrsonal” assistant to the world-famous Nora the Piano Cat, is working with a Philadelphia creative team on a web-based musical series about Nora and her inspiring journey.

Nora is a real-life piano-playing cat and internet star whose combined YouTube videos have garnered more than 40 million views. “Nora, the Musical,” will be an episodic musical web series performed by Broadway and Off-Broadway performers, singing and dancing their way through Nora’s extraordinary life. Alexander is creating the series in collaboration with lyricist Michael Biello and producer/arranger Dan Martin.

“We are thrilled to come together,” Alexander says, “to explore and celebrate the intense bond between humans and their pets, the rise of social media and its profound influence on all our lives, and the joyful, magical, healing power of music and art.”

You can support this project by donating to the [Fractured Atlas Fundraiser](#), a nonprofit umbrella organization providing assistance to artists developing new work. Donations will be used for filming the first episode. For more information, go to Betsy Alexander on Facebook.



Nora the Piano Cat

Granny Peace Brigade Rallies for Ukraine

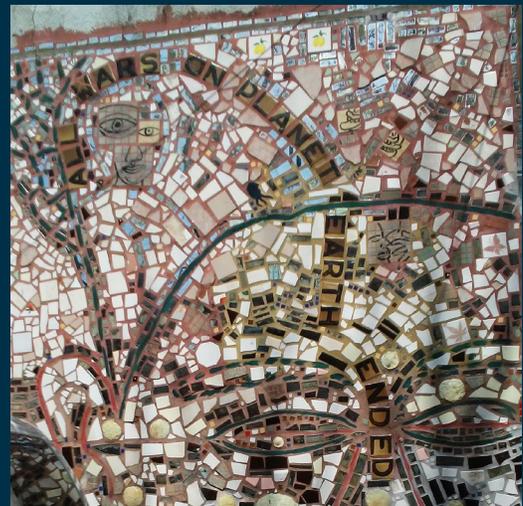
As part of the March 6th International Day of Action called for by Code Pink and World Beyond War, more than 200 people attended the Granny Peace Brigade Philadelphia Rally in support of the people of Ukraine at the People’s Plaza on Independence Mall.

Organizer Jean Haskell led Granny Peace Brigade Philadelphia members and representatives from Brandywine Peace Community, Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom Philadelphia, Coalition for Peace Action NJ and PA, and Physicians for Social Responsibility Pennsylvania.



A Hopeful Message

Spelling out the words “ALL WARS ON PLANET EARTH ENDED,” Isaiah Zagar’s mosaic, “All Wars Ended,” is located at 4th and Gaskill, and was completed in 2003.



Bonnie Eisenfeld

Greene Towne Montessori School Reflects on Commitment to Center City

By Nicole Leapheart

Greene Towne Montessori School is on the move. In Fall 2021, Greene Towne suffered the devastating loss of the West campus, located at Arch and Croskey Streets, due to Hurricane Ida. All four classrooms and four offices were lost to more than four feet of flooding. Temporarily housed in the Hallahan Catholic School for Girls building, Greene Towne began a search for a new home.

In Fall 2022, Greene Towne will move into a newly outfitted, purpose-built facility at 2140 Arch Street, on the southeast corner of 22nd and Arch Streets, formerly the site of Science Leadership Academy. This move will allow Greene Towne to become one unified school at this new location within two years

This is not the first time Greene Towne has been on the move, as the school has outgrown every space it's ever had. When the Greene Towne School opened in St. Clement's Church in the Fall of 1966, the founding parents were clear about the kind of school they wanted to have. They were committed to Philadelphia, and wanted a city school for their children in the heart of Logan Square. For many years, this space was home, but Greene Towne was growing.

In Fall 2001, doors opened at 2121 Arch Street with additional classrooms. A year later the school opened its first toddler classrooms. In 2007, the Toddler program expanded to the Croskey location, and that was further expanded to include the All Day Montessori Toddler and Primary classrooms, providing a true Montessori program for students from 8 am to 6 pm, year round.

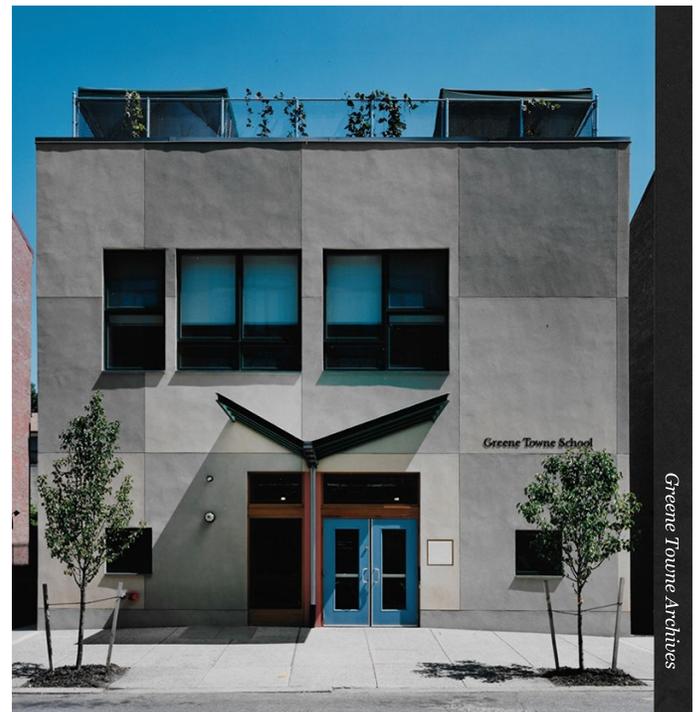


Founding parent and teacher Portia Sperr in the classroom.

While Ida sped up the timeline to find a unified space for the school, it had been a long-term strategic goal for the community, and the commitment to a Center City location has never been in question. "The school has long dreamed of being united in one campus," says Sarah Sweeney-Denham, head of school.

"The thing that's made Greene Towne stand out to me is a long history of commitment to Montessori," says Brandon Och, a lead teacher at the school and one of 11 lead teachers who were sponsored for Montessori certification by Greene Towne.

As Center City Residents' Association celebrates 75 years, Greene Towne is likewise celebrating 55 years in Logan Square. Over its 55-year history, Greene Towne has helped thousands of young children grow into lifelong learners and leaders. The only Montessori school in Philadelphia that is fully accredited by the American Montessori Society and the Pennsylvania Association of Independent Schools, Greene Towne Montessori School serves children 18 months old through Kindergarten. Now enrolling for 2022-23; visit www.gtms.org to learn more.

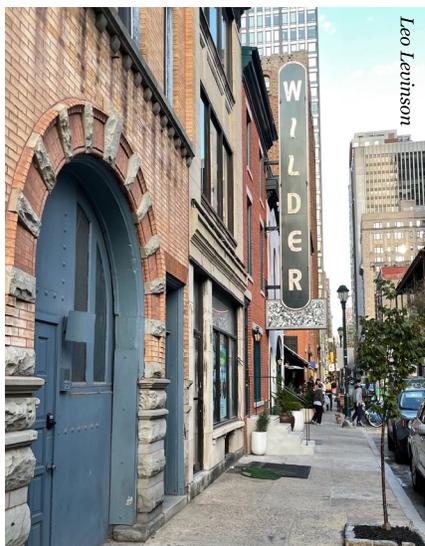


2121 Arch in 2001, its first year of operation

2009 Sansom Street Wilder

By Leo Levinson—*The Center City Foodie*

In an exuberant display of optimism, Wilder opened. Can one even imagine the passion and confidence it takes to plan, build and open a large, three-story, 150+-seat restaurant during the years 2020-22 in America? But that is just what Chef Brett Naylor and his wife and partner, Nicole Barrick, did. I'd support them for their gumption alone, but their food and service are pretty great, too.



Wilder is the new, new in the neighborhood, having just opened March 21, with Executive Chef Bob Truitt (El Bulli, Corton and the Altamarea Group directing the restaurant's smart contemporary cuisine. And Wilder seems to be just what our neighborhood needed, as evidenced by how busy it is for dinners, seven days a week.

The vibe at Wilder is fun and neighborly. Its menu encourages stopping in for a drink and a bite to eat on the way to a concert, as well as settling in with friends for a delicious gourmet dining experience.

On entering, guests walk in to a large lively bar and casual dining area where one can enjoy imaginative cocktails, a stylish wine list, eight craft beers on tap, and more.

On the second floor is the main dining area (a little quieter, where we sat in a nice spot in a plant-filled atrium. Although dishes are meant to be shared, I liked the way our savvy waiter asked us about the pacing of the dishes we selected, which showed experience, insight and commitment to our having the best experience possible.

Wilder puts fresh seafood front and center, with its lively seafood station featuring a display of food preparation, including the shucking of five different types of oysters, several crudos, two sizes of seafood towers, mackerel tartare and more. I have to admit, the scallops in buttermilk with roe was a bit bland and without texture, but every other dish was exceptional.

On the meaty side, Wilder's steak tartare is yummy, especially with their house-made crisps. We also liked the foie gras with sour-cherry jelly.

All the salads looked interesting, but I'm a sucker for beets, and the beet and rhubarb salad satisfied every craving. The beets and rhubarb were paired nicely with burrata for just the right balance of crunch and creaminess against the wildflower honey vinaigrette and pistachios.

Wilder's second course offers house-made pastas. From their new Spring menu (menus change with the seasons, we ordered the cavatelli—which tasted like "springtime"—coated with a sprightly pesto of basil, mint, and lemon zest, and dotted with fresh goat cheese. Even more spring flavors followed in the pansotti stuffed with spring pea and ricotta, and served with asparagus and lemon—it was like biting into delightful pasta pillows—delicious!

I haven't mentioned pizza at this point because I didn't want to give the impression that Wilder is a pizza place, but I have to say, their pizzas are amazing, and in the running for best pizza in Philadelphia, especially if you like thin, crispy crust, which I do. We loved the Sicilian pizza, with anchovies and pecorino, their flavors sharpened by a subtle hint of lemon zest. We're dreaming about this pizza!!

Not to be outdone was the artichoke and Yukon potato pizza with caramelized onion, *sottocenere* ("under the ash" Italian cheese with a subtle rind and slivers of truffle and fresh mozzarella—incredible! Wilder has a wood-burning pizza oven that is also a focal point in the restaurant.

Wilder has a number of imaginative dinner entrees, but we were already on the way to dessert when it came to entrée-time, so we ordered only one—the grilled octopus—and were very glad we did. Grilled to perfection—not too chewy or dry—the octopus was delicious, with its incredible mole of charred eggplant, olives, pine nuts and a little spice, for a flavor palate that was truly original—not to miss.

As good as the first three courses are, you must save room for dessert at Wilder. We ordered the "Infance Homage to Room 4." We're not sure what that means but it came on a plate, covered by an enormous cloud of strawberry cotton candy. Pulling the cotton candy back revealed some delightful treats—PB&J bonbons, s'mores with marshmallow meringue, strawberry cream puff gougère—FUN and delicious!

If we had a rating system, we'd give Wilder one of our higher ratings, but why quantify? Just go and have delicious fun in the neighborhood.

Wilder is now open for Saturday and Sunday brunch, too, with lunch service planned for the near future.

Leo Levinson, our roving food writer, is a board member of Philadelphia's premier gourmet club, The Chaine Des Rotisseurs, former chair of the Union League's Grand Cru Society wine club and accomplished amateur cook. As an active foodie, resident and public relations guru in Center City West, he'll give us the inside track, from pho to foie gras. Follow Leo on Instagram @theleolevinson

Manage Insurance Risk through Proactive Pipe Replacement Common Pitfalls and Guidance for Condo Association Boards and Property Managers

By Carol Shenk and David Velasco

As pipes begin to fail in condo and co-op communities, water damage and related hazards can become more frequent and severe. And as incidences increase, so do community association insurance costs and risk.

Often, to recoup the costs of repair, community associations and their property managers will file insurance claims and eventually see their premiums go up. They may even lose coverage altogether if they don't move early to implement proper remedies.

If the pipes in your community are failing, you can actually reduce annual insurance bills and save money in other ways by moving early to replace your piping system.

A Leak Is More than a Leak

Consider this all-too-common scenario:

A unit owner sees paint bubbling and water running down the wall from her bathroom ceiling. Maintenance discovers a pinhole leak behind the bathroom sink in the unit above that's been slowly misting water into the wall cavity. They shut off water to the building and hire a plumber, drywall, and painter to replace the damaged pipe, repair the walls in both units, and replace the upstairs sink.

What does this all add up to?

- A building-wide water outage for four to five hours which angers residents.
- Three days during which the upstairs unit owner has no bathroom sink and two days when both unit owners have walls open.
- Plumbing and drywall/painting costs totaling more than \$7,000.
- Delays in routine maintenance across the community.
- Possible health and financial risk since the association responds to the emergency without assessing or addressing hazardous substances like mold, or asbestos in the existing walls.

Clearly, a leak is more than what you might expect.

The Ongoing Challenges of Aging Pipe

Unfortunately, the story doesn't end here. In this scenario, the leak has occurred in an older building, meaning it's just one of many. On average, piping systems start failing at around 30 years old* and often need to be replaced within the next 20 years—sometimes sooner.

As the number of incidents and damages to unit owners' personal property multiply, the board decides to file for eligible losses in addition to pulling from maintenance and reserve budgets. After repeated claims, the insurance company informs the community that it will face increased premiums and deductibles when the policy renews.

The board discusses its options, one of which is to replace the piping system. The board obtains a rough estimate and decides a repipe is too expensive; it chooses to pay the increased insurance costs.

The board's decision might mean:

- Increasing complaints from residents disgruntled over repeated water shutoffs.
- Long-lasting negative effects on insurability and unforeseen association costs. For example, carriers typically won't cover water that leaks or seeps over time, which leaves the association to pay for damages and repairs.
- Possible board liability and litigation for neglecting fiduciary responsibility to maintain the building(s).

And It Continues

Less than two years after the board decides to delay pipe replacement, it happens: the worst-case scenario. A massive leak from a larger-diameter pipe floods an elevator shaft. Repairs cost more than \$200,000; the elevator is down for almost two months; and the insurance company notifies the board that they will lose their coverage when their policy term runs out.

Finding a new carrier with affordable rates will be nearly impossible since insurance carriers won't issue a new policy without seeing loss run sheets that reveal the leak history. In fact, it's not uncommon for deductibles to rise to \$25,000 or even \$50,000 per unit when there's a history of repeated leaks.

Worse still, the board must now raise condo fees even higher than if they had proceeded with replacing the piping earlier.

How to Avoid High Insurance Costs for Pipe Problems

So what can you do to avoid these issues? Get proactive.

- *Make sure you've implemented and are keeping up with a regular maintenance plan.* If you aren't doing so already, use an incident-tracking tool like a Leak Log so you can detect when leak patterns indicate systemic piping failures.



Hidden leaks can be needlessly costly.

Continued on p.25

- **Understand your circumstances.**
 - With the help of your legal counsel, review your governing documents to know the responsibility of the community versus that of the unit owner when pipes fail.
 - Include your insurance broker in the meeting so that you also learn what is covered and not covered by the master policy.
 - Compile your leak and loss histories. Pull the leak history from your Leak Log or preferred tracking tool and request a five-year loss history from your insurance provider, which will detail water-damage claims. Combined, this data will help you and your broker better identify if your community's pipes are failing, and the extent of the problem.
- **Work together with your broker to develop a proactive service plan/written service timeline.** Allow at least 10 months before your next policy renewal and repeat periodically. Key activities include:
 - Conduct an independent on-site inspection with a loss-control specialist. You'll learn the strengths and weaknesses in your piping system.
 - Inform residents about pipe health. For example, deliver periodic education seminars for new board members on topics such as insurance vs. maintenance responsibility, and publish newsletter articles about community vs. unit-owner responsibilities.
 - Meet six months before your policy renewal to discuss capital-improvement projects like pipe replacement, maintenance projects, and insurance-market conditions that can affect your policy.
- **Look to replace pipes early.** How do you know the right time to replace your pipes? In our experience, it's earlier than most boards realize. We suggest you do it when it costs less per year to finance a loan than the annual cost of damages, deductibles, and increased insurance rates. That's not always easy to know, but a proactive service plan and scenario planning will help.

Consider our example above, where the repipe project was estimated to cost \$2 million. The community would have paid ~\$14,000 per month to pay off a loan that was financed over 15 years at a little over 3% annual interest. That means \$168,000 per year, which is far less than the \$200,000 it cost for the one leak that ruined the elevator. In addition, the repipe would have netted further savings from reduced insurance rates and deductibles, and lower maintenance costs and water bills.

The Benefits of Proactive Pipe Replacement Are Clear

The calculations above don't even factor in the full benefits that come with a new piping system, like a new plumbing warranty, improvements to building functionality and life safety, and code upgrades. You'll also avoid liability issues that can arise when you defer maintenance. Plus, you'll enjoy happier residents, fewer maintenance calls, and less stress.

Aging pipes are inevitable, but severe condo-fee increases and insurance risk don't have to be. Stay proactive with your building's piping systems. You'll realize significant monetary savings, a safer, happier community, and overall peace of mind.

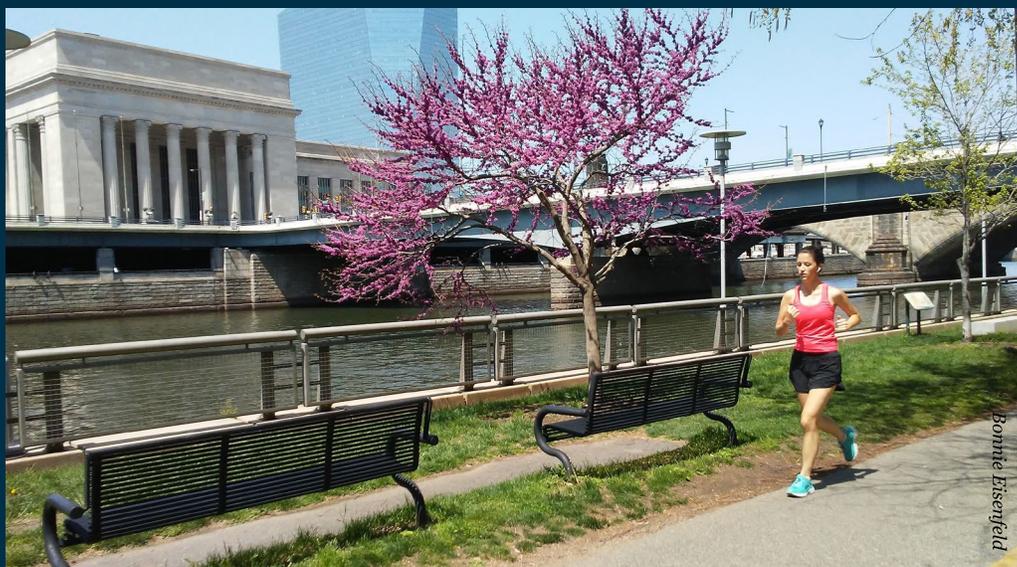
*Estimated Useful Life Tables:

https://www.fanniemae.com/content/guide_form/4099f.pdf
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Carol Shenk (cshenk@sagewater.com) is Director of Regional Accounts at SageWater, North America's leading pipe replacement contractor. SageWater is headquartered in Alexandria, Virginia, with offices nationwide. Over the past 30 years, they have replaced more than 35 million feet of pipe in over 100,000 occupied residential units. [Download the free Leak Log](#) to easily begin your record-keeping.

David Velasco is Assistant Vice President of Community Association at JGS Insurance a Baldwin Risk Partner. David and JGS are specialized in Condo and Co-Op Insurance and bring a radically different approach to Risk Management

Our Greene Countrie Towne



A runner enjoys the Schuylkill River Trail on a sunny spring day.

Bonnie Eisenfeld



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CCRA looks back on 75 years.
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A History of Center City Residents' Association



CCRA in the present



The Future of CCRA

CCRA Summer Calendar—A Feast for the Senses

Philadelphia Flower Show

Philadelphia Horticultural Society
FDR Park, Broad Street and Pattison Ave.
Through Sunday, June 19
<https://phsonline.org/the-flower-show>

Bloomsday Festival: 100th Anniversary of Ulysses

The Rosenbach
Outdoors, 2008-10 Delancey Place
Thursday, June 16
Daylong public reading of James Joyce's Ulysses by literati, artists, public figures, and familiar personalities along with musical performances.
<https://rosenbach.org/bloomsday/>

Philadelphia Chinese Lantern Festival

Franklin Square
200 N. 6th St.
Lights, lanterns, performances, Dragon Beer Garden
Wednesday, June 21 to Sunday, August 7

Extreme Deep: Mission to the Abyss

Academy of Natural Sciences
1900 Benjamin Franklin Parkway
Through July 24
<https://ansp.org/exhibits/extreme-deep/>

Philadelphia Young Pianists' Academy Summer Piano Festival

Chung-Yun Hu, Concert Pianist, PYPA Founder & Artistic Director Performances by internationally renowned pianists. Open to the public.
Young pianists attend master classes, panel discussions, and lectures, and participate in the Philadelphia International Piano Competition.
New: Free daily 30-minute meditation classes taught by teachers from Heart Chan.
Saturday, July 30 to Sunday, August 7
Live at the Academy of Vocal Arts, 1920 Spruce St.
<https://www.pypa.info/festival-events>

Center City District Sips

Dozens of bars and restaurants offer discount drinks and appetizers at happy hour, Wednesdays, 5 – 7 pm
Through August 31
<https://centercityphila.org/news/center-city-district-sips-returns-for-summer-2022>

Rodin Garden Bar Pop-Up Happy Hour

Rodin Museum
2151 Benjamin Franklin Parkway
Summer cocktails, small plates, music
Kids and leashed pups welcome
Fridays, 4 – 8:30 pm
Through September 30. Weather permitting.

Harry Potter: The Exhibition

Franklin Institute
222 N. 20th Street
Through September
<https://www.fi.edu/exhibits/harry-potter>

Rittenhouse Square Fine Art Show

Rittenhouse Square
Friday, September 16 to Sunday, September 18

Schuylkill River Rowing Events

Races and regattas till November
<https://boathouserow.org/schuylkill-river-schedule>

Schuylkill Banks RiverBoat Tours Cruises

Walnut Street Dock, east side of Schuylkill River
Beneath Walnut Street Bridge
Select Thursdays, Saturdays, and Sundays, May through October
<https://www.schuylkillbanks.org/events/riverboat-tours-1>

Architectural Tours

Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia
<https://www.preservationalliance.com/architecture-walking-tours/>
Center for Architecture and Design
<https://www.philadephiacfa.org/architecture-tours>

Museums

<https://www.discoverphl.com.org/philadelphia-museums-that-are-now-open/>

Trails for Walking, Running, or Biking

<https://www.visitphilly.com/things-to-do/attractions/the-circuit-trails/>

Center City District

For the latest news about events in Center City Philadelphia, go to Center City District <https://centercityphila.org/explore-center-city/events>
Sign up for (IN) Center City, the e-newsletter of the Center City District <https://www.centercityphila.org/incentercity/signup.php>

America's Garden Capital

30+ gardens, arboreta, and historic landscapes within 30 miles
<https://www.discoverphl.com/blog/americas-garden-capital/>

VisitPhilly

To get the latest news about events in the Greater Philadelphia area, go to VisitPhilly <https://www.visitphilly.com/>

What's Going On

Friends on the Square Summer Party Rescheduled

Friends of Rittenhouse Square has announced that it is rescheduling its Friends on the Square Summer Garden Party to September to accommodate "added surprises." Friends are encouraged stay tuned for more information by subscribing to their newsletter.

All ticket holders for the original June 16th date will be automatically reissued tickets for the September date. More information coming soon.
Contact rod@friendsofrittenhouse.org



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City Lit

Ulysses Turns 100 Bloomsday Returns to Delancey Place Thursday, June 16

Every year, the world celebrates Bloomsday on June 16, the date that James Joyce's epic novel *Ulysses* is set in 1904. After a two-year hiatus, the annual Bloomsday Festival returns to Delancey Place—just in time for the publication's centennial celebration.

Ulysses was published 100 years ago on February 2, 1922. The Rosenbach will commemorate this milestone with the Bloomsday Festival on Delancey Place, with a daylong public reading featuring literati, artists, public figures, and familiar personalities, along with musical performances that will bring the novel's tavern songs and arias to life.

