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5/1/19

Capstone Paper: Shopping for History! Allen's Department Store, Germantown

Allen's Department Store is located at the southwest corner of West Cheltenham Avenue and Greene Street. The address of the building is 100 W Cheltenham Avenue. The project aims to take a closer look at the history of the George Allen, Inc. and the preservation of the department store. During the research process, it will be about looking into the background of how the retail business got started in Philadelphia, and how Germantown's business district thrived. I will also research about the architect and materials that were used to build the Germantown store. When all information is put together, it will turn into a nomination for the building to the Philadelphia Historic Commission.

Philadelphia was the birthplace of America's consumer culture. It all started with John Wanamaker, in 1876, when he opened his "Grand Depot" that changed the face of retailing in Philadelphia. Not only did department stores spread around Center City, they also spread into the Philadelphia neighborhoods, including Germantown, home to George Allen, Inc. George Allen, Inc. was established in 1837. Over time, the company decided to keep increasing their stores until it finally reached to Germantown in 1927 at the intersection of W Cheltenham Ave. and Greene St. The store lasted until 1979 due to change of demographics in Germantown.

Germantown was established in 1683, under the leadership of Francis Daniel Pastorius, when early settlers left Europe for religious freedom and economic opportunity. Most of the early settlers were German-speaking immigrants, and there were also German Quakers too. The German Quakers were considered as early opponents of

slavery, and in 1688, four German Quakers wrote the first protest against slavery in North America.<sup>1</sup> On October 4<sup>th</sup>, 1777, the Battle of Germantown began after the British occupied Philadelphia. The battle took place at Benjamin Chew's house, also known as Cliveden, and it was considered the bloodiest battle during the American Revolutionary War.<sup>2</sup> In the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Germantown became industrial, and large numbers of immigrants went to work in the factories and textile mills. During the century, the Philadelphia, Germantown, and Norristown Line was one of the railroads in America that was built in 1832. The Chestnut Hill railroad line was built later in 1854, and it was the same year Germantown, and the German Township, became part of the city of Philadelphia.<sup>3</sup>



Francis Daniel Pastorius<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Callard, Judith. *Germantown, Mount Airy, and Chestnut Hill* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2000), 7.

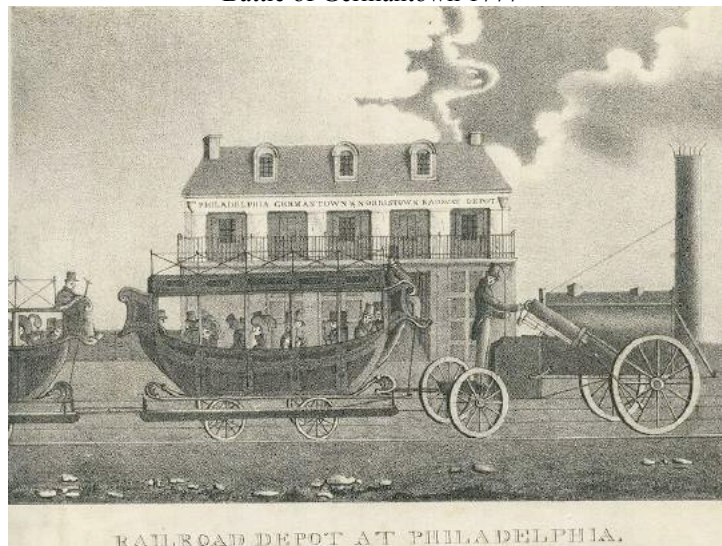
<sup>2</sup> "Battle of Germantown," Cliveden, Accessed March 18, 2019, <http://www.cliveden.org/battle-of-germantown/>.

<sup>3</sup> Callard, Judith. *Germantown, Mount Airy, and Chestnut Hill* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2000), 8.

<sup>4</sup> "Francis Daniel Pastorius." *Historic Germantown, Philadelphia, PA*. Accessed April 26, 2019. <http://www.ushistory.org/germantown/people/pastorius.htm>.



Battle of Germantown 1777<sup>5</sup>



RAILROAD DEPOT AT PHILADELPHIA.

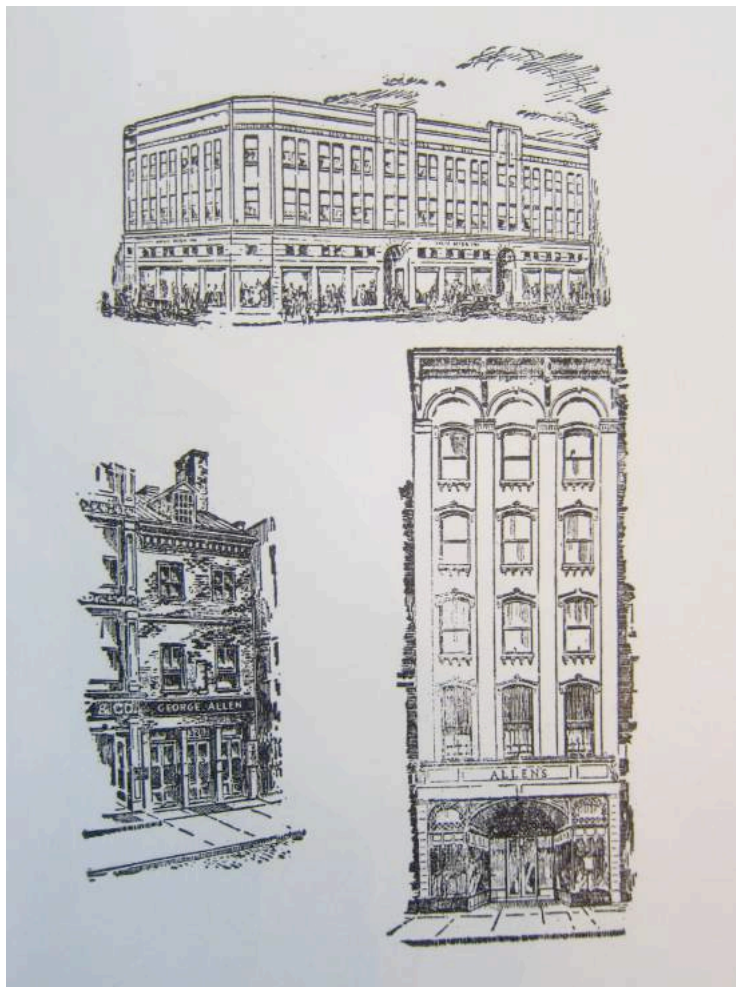
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George Allen, Sr. established the George Allen, Inc. in 1837, at 326 High Street, which it's now Market Street. Most of the customers who shopped at the store were hoop-skirted ladies. During the time, the wearer designed the clothes, and the sewing was done at home. They go inside shops like George Allen, Inc. to match the thread and materials they have. Since the company was focused on fashion, the company was always

<sup>5</sup> "Battle of Germantown." *BritishBattles.com*. Accessed April 26, 2019. <https://www.britishbattles.com/war-of-the-revolution-1775-to-1783/battle-of-germantown/>.

<sup>6</sup> "Philadelphia Germantown & Norristown Line." *Free Library of Philadelphia*. Accessed April 26, 2019. <https://libwww.freelibrary.org/digital/item/44798>.

on alert for bringing in the latest designs and fabrics to Philadelphia. Even with the success of his little shop, Allen, Sr.'s customers demanded a more modern store with more space for the selections the company offered. In 1857, Allen, Sr. accepted the customers' request and built a new, four-story building at the former 270 Chestnut Street. George Allen, Jr., nephew of George Allen, Sr., became president in 1880 after his uncle retired. The company moved once again to 1214 Chestnut Street in 1896, and stayed there for 56 years.<sup>7</sup>



George Allen, Inc. Stores<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Stramara, Pauline A. "One Hundred and Fifteen Years of Allen Service." *Germantown Crier* 4, no. 4 (1952): 19.

<sup>8</sup> Germantown Historical Society, Philadelphia, PA.

It was a decade after America gained its independence from the British in 1876, and Philadelphia was celebrating America's independence with the Centennial Exposition. It was the first official World's Fair in the United States. In that same year, it was when John Wanamaker changed the face of retailing in Philadelphia as well as America forever. Wanamaker presented the Grand Depot, which was converted from an abandoned railroad depot, as being the "new kind of store." Back in late 1860s, there was no such thing as a one-stop or one-price shopping. For clothing stores like George Allen, Inc., it was considered as the dry goods store. Other dry goods stores adapted Wanamaker's practices in their own ways. Wanamaker's store was located on 13<sup>th</sup> and Market Streets, and it was far away from other major retail hubs at 8<sup>th</sup> and Market Streets. Philadelphia was the third largest city in the United States, and it kept Wanamaker's and other major stores buzzing, thanks to the people and the wealth of the city.<sup>9</sup>



Wanamaker's<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Arrigale, Lawrence M. and Thomas H. Keels. *Philadelphia's Golden Age of Retail* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2012): 8.

<sup>10</sup> "John Wanamaker." *The Department Store Museum*. Accessed April 26, 2019. <http://www.thedepartmentstoremuseum.org/2010/06/john-wanamaker-philadelphia.html>.



In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Germantown's central business district was booming. With the introduction of the "crosstown" Cheltenham Avenue streetcar railway in 1892, the intersection of Germantown and Cheltenham Avenues became the main focus of the business district. In 1904, there was a major expansion of small family businesses that signaled the boom of other businesses. Germantown had an advantage of having affluent suburban and new middle-class housing, large commercial and industrial employers, and independent and locally controlled banking community, and an excellent public transportation system. With all of what Germantown had, it resulted the rise of businesses coming into the town that offered a variety of goods and services.<sup>11</sup> With so many people moving into Germantown at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, large estates have to be subdivided for apartment buildings and houses, new schools needed to be built, and the requested for green spaces that lead to the creation of Vernon Park, which is diagonally across from the Cheltenham Ave and Greene St intersection.<sup>12</sup>



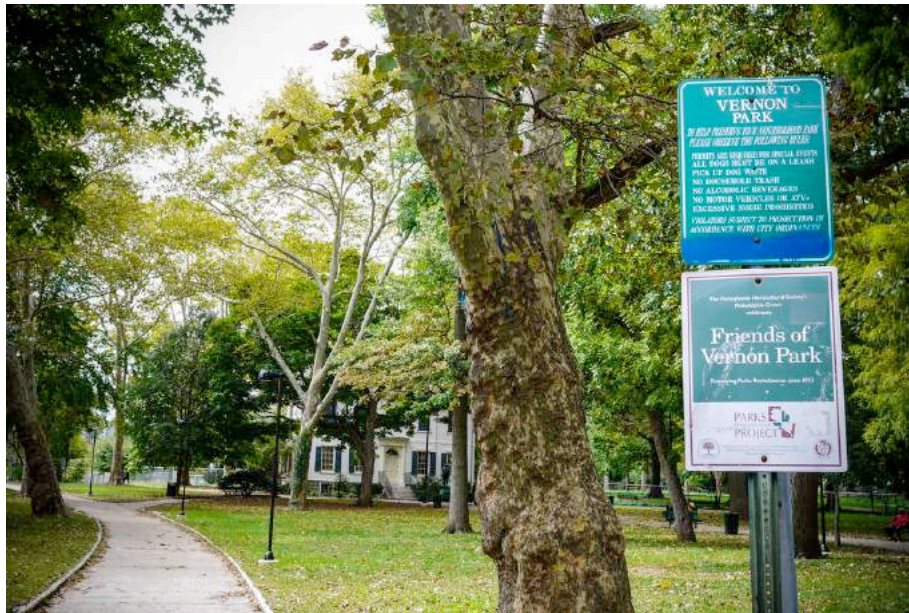
"Crosstown" Cheltenham Avenue Streetcar<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> "1904-1962: 'City' within a City." *Germantown Crier* 35, no. 1 (1983): 15.

<sup>12</sup> Callard, Judith. *Germantown, Mount Airy, and Chestnut Hill* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2000), 9.

<sup>13</sup> Callard, Judith. *Germantown, Mount Airy, and Chestnut Hill* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2000), 54.



Vernon Park<sup>14</sup>

Real estate prices increased as businesses moved into the town near the crossroads of Germantown and Cheltenham Avenues. In the 1920s and 1930s, large buildings such as the George Allen department store and the Barker Building were constructed in Germantown.<sup>15</sup> In 1927, George Allen, Inc. made a study, revealing that many of their customers were from Germantown and other suburbs. The company noticed the trend of suburban business sections. They concluded to build their store at the intersection of Cheltenham Ave and Greene St in the same year. They built the store that would be fireproof with structural steel and Indiana limestone.<sup>16</sup> Ever since the company moved their store to Germantown, Allen's became the pioneers in breaking away from the business section on Germantown Avenue.<sup>17</sup> Before George Allen, Inc. decided to move their store at the

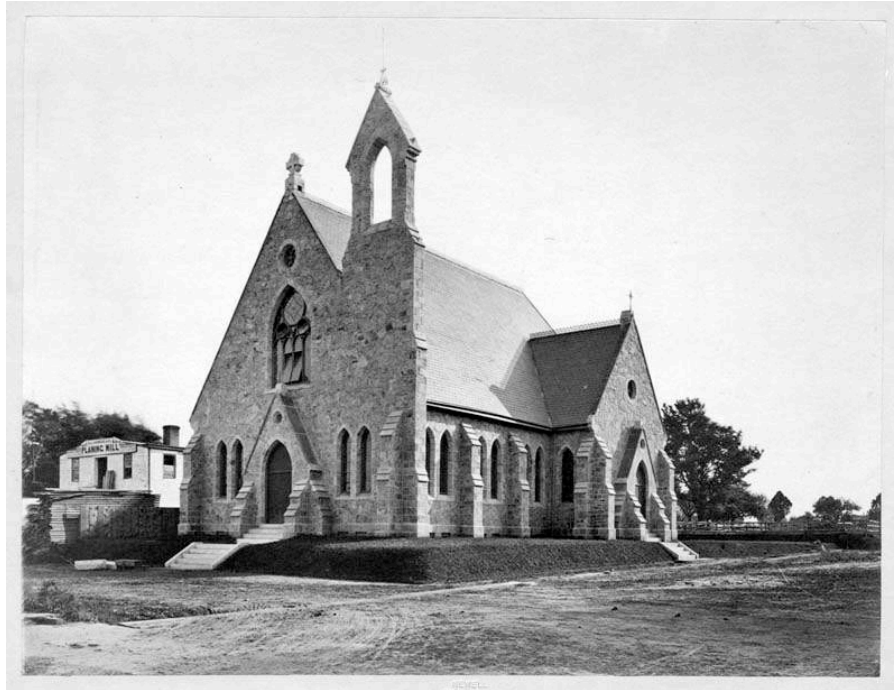
<sup>14</sup> "Vernon Park." *This is Germantown*. Accessed April 26, 2019. <http://thisisgermantown.com/attractions-amenities/vernon-park>.

<sup>15</sup> "1904-1962: 'City' within a City." *Germantown Crier* 35, no. 1 (1983): 15.

<sup>16</sup> "Ground Broken for New Store of George Allen, Inc., in Germantown" *The Independent Gazette* (Germantown, PA), June 1927.

<sup>17</sup> Stramara, Pauline A. "One Hundred and Fifteen Years of Allen Service." *Germantown Crier* 4, no. 4 (1952): 19.

southwest corner of W Cheltenham Ave. and Greene St., there was a Unitarian Church that occupied that lot space, and it was designed by Frank Furness. The church was built in 1867, and it was demolished in 1926, a year before the department store was built.<sup>18</sup>



Unitarian Church (1862-1926)<sup>19</sup>

There was so much competition at Market Street that there was a motto for Philadelphia department stores that said, “innovate or die.” The key weapons every department store used to gain more customers were elaborate window and in-store displays, fashion shows, bargain basements, special sales, art exhibitions, contests, movies and television tie-ins, international festivals, point-of-sale marketing, radio advertising, and in-house television.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> “Our History.” Unitarian Society of Germantown, Accessed March 18, 2019. <https://usguu.org/about-us/our-history/>.

<sup>19</sup> Maule, Bradley. “Name The Nameless on Lincoln Drive.” Hidden City Philadelphia. February 5, 2016. <https://hiddencityphila.org/2016/02/naming-the-nameless-on-lincoln-drive/>.

<sup>20</sup> Arrigale, Lawrence M. and Thomas H. Keels. *Philadelphia’s Golden Age of Retail* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2012): 8.



Compared to the stores on Market Street, the George Allen Department Store was the only store on Cheltenham Avenue since opening, so they didn't worry about competitions around them. They continued to expand their store in Germantown to Ardmore. They added a separate men's clothing in 1946, and furnishings shop that adjoin the main store in 1957.<sup>21</sup> The company opened their store in Ardmore, in 1950, after looking into suburban shopping instead of keeping the trend in downtown. In the same year, Allen's closed their Chestnut Street store to focus more on their Germantown and Ardmore stores.<sup>22</sup>

During the 1950s, Philadelphians moved into the suburbs as well as department stores opening their suburban branches and mall stores to keep their companies alive. That was what Allen's did. Meanwhile, unfortunately, the sales and revenues were dropping from the Market Street department stores, and began to deteriorate. They couldn't compete with other discount outlets like K-Mart and Walmart. During the 1970s and 1980s, the Gallery was built to help revive Market Street as a commercial center.<sup>23</sup> Between 1954 and 1956, there were a large number of lower-income African Americans living in Germantown.<sup>24</sup> It resulted in decreased property values and a stir of "white flight" in the suburbs. For Allen's Department Store, it faced the change of demographics, and it was the result of the store closing down in 1979.

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<sup>21</sup> George Allen Incorporated. Germantown Historical Society. Accessed March 18, 2019.

<sup>22</sup> Stramara, Pauline A. "One Hundred and Fifteen Years of Allen Service." *Germantown Crier* 4, no. 4 (1952): 19.

<sup>23</sup> Arrigale, Lawrence M. and Thomas H. Keels. *Philadelphia's Golden Age of Retail* (Charleston: Arcadia Publishing, 2012): 8.

<sup>24</sup> Countryman, Matthew. *Up South: Civil Rights and Black Power in Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006): 72.

After the store was closed down, the building itself wasn't used until in 1999, the Imani Education Circle Charter School decided to occupy the building. In 1995, the Jackson Hewitt Tax Service, Inc. occupied the former rear entrance building of the department store.<sup>25</sup> In 2008, the Mary Moragne Shule Preschool used the building that use to be the men's store from the Allen's main building.<sup>26</sup> In 2015, Payless ShoeSource took the middle part of the first floor.<sup>27</sup> There were two instances when the first floor was used: there was a Christian center called "Acts of Random Kindness" that used the building for some time, and not too long that the Rainbow Shop occupied the same space.<sup>28</sup> In 2016, unfortunately, the Imani Education Circle Charter School closed its doors, and the Camelot Therapeutic Day School of Philadelphia was the next to occupy the space the year after, and they still occupy the building today.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> "Jackson Hewitt Tax Service." Yellow Pages. Accessed March 23, 2019. <https://www.yellowpages.com/philadelphia-pa/mip/jackson-hewitt-tax-service-470080476?lid=470080476>.

<sup>26</sup> "Shule Mary Moragne." Yellow Pages. Accessed March 23, 2019. <https://www.yellowpages.com/philadelphia-pa/mip/shule-mary-moragne-9214329?lid=9214329>.

<sup>27</sup> "Payless ShoeSource." Yellow Pages. Accessed March 23, 2019. <https://www.yellowpages.com/philadelphia-pa/mip/payless-shoesource-8212496?lid=8212496>.

<sup>28</sup> "L&I Property History: Permit Number: 619804" City of Philadelphia. Issued May 27, 2016. <https://li.phila.gov/#details?entity=permits&eid=619804&key=77951&address=100-26%20W%20CHELTEN%20AVE>

<sup>29</sup> "Imani Education Circle Charter School will close next month." Philadelphia Public School: the notebook. May 25, 2016. <https://thenotebook.org/articles/2016/05/25/imani-education-circle-charter-school-will-close-next-month/>.



Allen's Men's Store Before and After



Allen's Rear Entrance Before and After

The architect behind the main Allen's Department Store building was Clarence Edmond Wunder. Wunder was born on November 14, 1886 in Philadelphia. After he graduated from Central Manual Training School in 1905, he entered into the office of his uncle, Kurt W. Peuckert, whose work is more towards brewery and industrial architecture. Five years later, Wunder elevated his status as partner to his uncle, and the firm was renamed to Peuckert & Wunder. It wasn't long until Wunder decided to become

<sup>30</sup> "Allen's Department Store- Men's Store." Circa 1940. Catalog Number 2010.307.11. Germantown Historical Society, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>31</sup> "Allen's Department Store, rear view." Catalog Number 2010. 307.17. Germantown Historical Society, Philadelphia, PA.

independent of Peuckert & Wunder in 1914.<sup>32</sup> His most famous buildings he designed from his independent firm in Philadelphia were the Bonwit Teller, Co. Department Store, Pennsylvania Hotel, and the Temple Stadium that was demolished in 1997.<sup>33</sup> Wunder died of a heart attack at his daughter's wedding on October 19, 1940.<sup>34</sup>



Clarence E. Wunder (1886-1940)<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Witney, Henry F. and Elise Rathburn Withey. *Biographical Dictionary of American Architects (Deceased)* (Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, Inc., 1970): 674.

<sup>33</sup> *Who's who in Pennsylvania: a biographical dictionary of leading living men and women of the states of Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Delaware, Maryland and West Virginia*. Compiled and Edited under the direction of Albert Nelson Marquis (Chicago, The A.N. Marquis Company, 1939).

<sup>34</sup> "C.E. Wunder Dies at Wedding Fete." 20 October 1940. Box 3872, Philadelphia Evening Bulletin Clippings, Temple University Special Collections Research Center, Philadelphia, PA.

<sup>35</sup> "Clarence E. Wunder." 14 November 1936. Box 3872, Philadelphia Evening Bulletin Clippings, Temple University Special Collections Research Center, Philadelphia, PA.





Pennsylvania Hotel (now Chestnut Hall)<sup>36</sup>



Bonwit Teller, Co. Department Store<sup>37</sup>



TEMPLE UNIVERSITY STADIUM

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<sup>36</sup> “Chestnut Hall Apartments.” *Abodo*. Accessed April 26, 2019. <https://www.abodo.com/philadelphia-pa/chestnut-hall-apartments>.

<sup>37</sup> Rittenhouse. “Delorean Time Machine: Bonwit Teller.” OCF Realty. April 16, 2016. <http://www.ocfrealty.com/naked-philly/rittenhouse/delorean-time-machine-bonwit-teller>.

<sup>38</sup> Szilagyi, Mike. “Unearthing A Lost Temple.” Hidden City Philadelphia. December 16, 2015. <https://hiddencityphila.org/2015/12/unearthing-a-lost-temple/>.



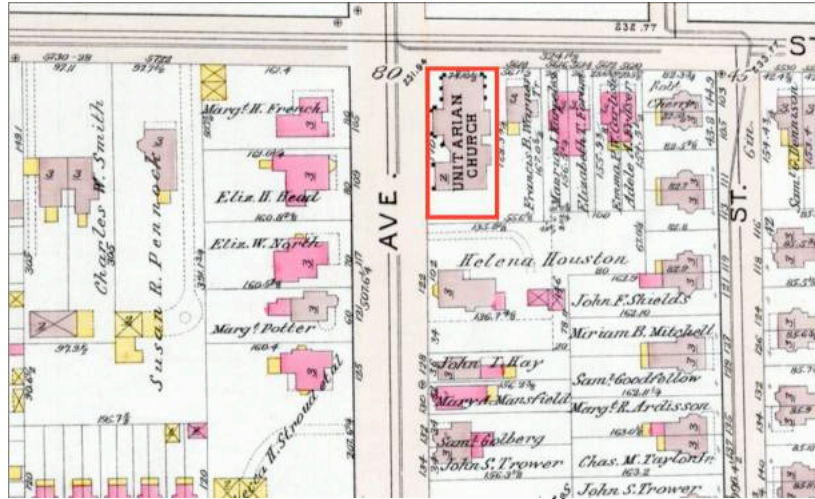
The Allen's Department Store's architectural style is Art Deco. Some of the features on the building that are considered as Art Deco are the smooth wall surface, linear appearance, stylized decorative elements, and moldings around the doors. There were two buildings designed by Wunder who used Art Deco style in them: the Bonwit Teller, Co. Department Store and the Hajoca Corporation Headquarters and Showroom, which is now the World Café Live owned by the University of Pennsylvania. Coincidentally, both department stores were built in the same year, and used the same elements as each other's. Today, with the Payless ShoeSource and the Imani Education Circle Charter School's occupancy, they altered the exterior doorways, and they are still visible to see them. The Mary Moragne Shule Preschool, meanwhile, took away the entire look of the original Art Deco-style men's store of Allen's.



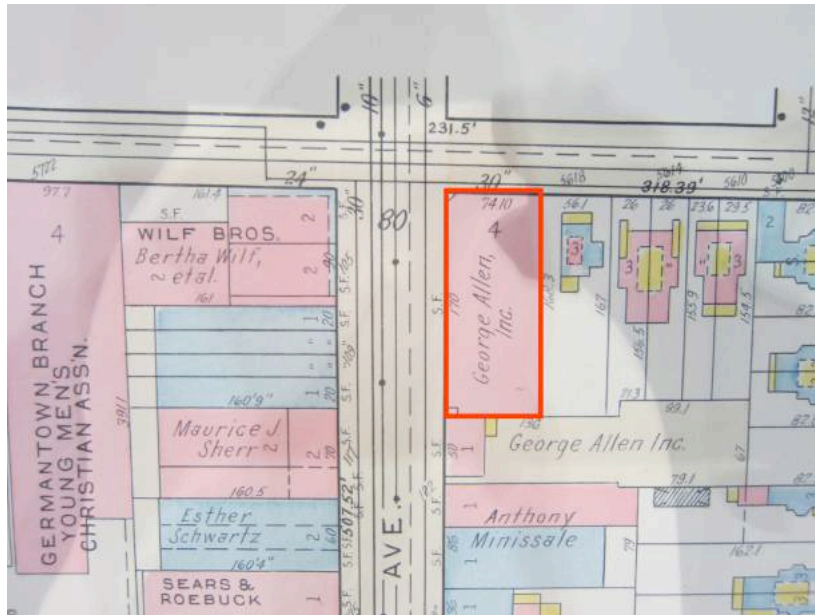
West Side View

Following the nomination form of the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, there's a section where the boundary description must be described: Beginning at the southwestern corner of the intersection of West Cheltenham Avenue and Greene Street, the

main property extends along West Cheltenham Avenue for 170 feet, and extending along Greene Street for 74 feet 10 inches. Parallel to West Cheltenham Avenue from Greene Street from the end point extends 168 feet 8 ¼ inches. Parallel to Greene Street from West Cheltenham Avenue from the end point extends 43 feet 6 ⅝ inches. Overall, the perimeter of the main property is 455 feet 1 ⅜ inches.



Detail of Unitarian Church<sup>39</sup>



Detail of Allen's Store<sup>40</sup>

<sup>39</sup> Plate 012, *Philadelphia 1911 Ward 22*, G.W. Bromley and Co.

<sup>40</sup> Plate 12, *Atlas of Twenty Second Ward: Philadelphia, Penna. Volume II*, Franklin Survey Company (Philadelphia, 1955).

The physical description is also required to describe the building: It is a three story, multi-purpose building, with a simple rectangular-shaped building footprint, and with a diagonal cut on the northwest corner of the building. The building's architectural style is Art Deco, with Indiana limestone covering all the facades and minimal decorative floral ornaments.



Satellite View



Decorative Detail

On the northwest façade, there are reedings bordering around the two entrance doorways. The first entranceway was altered into a square for the Payless ShoeSource while the second doorway maintained the original reeding and interior detail of the



entranceway, but glass doors and windows, as well as a gate, were added for the former Imani Education Circle Charter School. The most important feature that is still imprinted on the northwest and southeast façade was the original name of the company that owned the building: George Allen Inc.



Doorway Detail

On the second and third story, the façade is formed in a pattern: there are rows of double-hung windows with different width-size pilasters in between each window. On both story, the pattern becomes different. It created a broader look to stand out from the

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<sup>41</sup> Sexton, R.W. *American commercial buildings of today; skyscrapers, office buildings, banks, private business buildings, stores and shops*. New York: Architectural Book Publishing Company, Inc., 1928: 151.

rest: there are two thicker pilasters on each end, and a skinnier pilaster in the center. On the very top, there are two empty niches with the decorative ornaments underneath them. It repeats for the second one. Also, the decorative ornaments are continuous around the top part of the building until it reaches the end. Then it continues once more, and it repeats.



Northwest Façade

On the north façade, specifically the diagonal cut corner piece section, the first story maintained its bay window from the original design of the building as well as the original name of the company, but with “Allen’s” imprinted over where the window grille use to be at. On both second and third story, they contain only one double-hung window. In between them, the sign for the former Imani Education Circle Charter School is still there.





North Façade

On the northeast façade, there were four retail windows on the first story, but they were completely removed and the façade was left blank. Other elements that were removed from the first story were window grilles with vertical bars. Oddly, there is currently a window-less grille that runs continuous from one end of where the first retail window was, to the other end of the fourth retail window. The window pattern continues from the northwest side of the building, but with only different width-size pilasters. The door on the far left of the northeast façade is still there, but it's currently not in use. Directly above the unused door, each story contains one double-hung window. That whole section was pushed back a few inches.



Northeast Façade

On the southeast façade, its original look is almost blank: the first story is blank, but both second and third story contain different numbers of double-hung windows. On the second story, from the far left, there are only three windows along with four vents unequally separated. The third story only has ten windows, but only one of the windows was isolated from the rest. Interestingly, it shows a different brick color separation with a vertical rectangular zigzag pattern in between. On both top left and right-hand corners, “Allen’s” was printed largely. Today, both “Allen’s” prints were removed by paint and a new addition was added for the former Imani Education Circle Charter School right in front of the taller section of the building.



Southeast Façade

On the southwest façade, there is only one taller building section inserted between the front building and the back building. Located at the very top of the tall building section it contains two double-hung windows. East of the taller building section, there are two openings on the top two story, and two double-hung windows were located facing the southeast. Similar to the southeast façade, a vertical rectangular zigzag pattern was inserted in between the two different-colored bricks. The building with the dark brick colors has rows of three windows on each of the top two story. West of the tall building section, the top two story contain a “three-over-three” window and a balcony with two doors. “Allen’s” was printed on the very top of the building with a similar format from the southeast façade. Today, the sign was removed with paint. The difference between the northwest façade and the southwest façade is the brick size.



Southwest Facade

In the nomination form, there are ten criteria listed, and only three criteria that fit for the Allen's Department Store: C, H, and J. Criteria C states that it "reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style." Criteria H states that "owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City." And finally, criteria J states that it "exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community."

For criteria C, this is the only building that represents the early 20<sup>th</sup> century with its Art Deco style on Cheltenham Avenue. Art Deco was part of the Modern Movement during the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, and it was the first style that moves away from the past.<sup>42</sup> During the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the idea of using reinforced concrete became a phenomenon in the United States. That was when Henry Turner, along with DeForest Dixon, was intrigued with so many possibilities of using reinforced concrete. In 1902, the

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<sup>42</sup> "Art Deco Style 1925-1940." *Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission*. Accessed April 11, 2019. <http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/portal/communities/architecture/styles/art-deco.html>.

Turner Construction Company was established, and used reinforced concrete in their constructions, including Allen's Department Store.<sup>43</sup> During the 1920s, architect of Allen's, Clarence E. Wunder, designed both the Bonwit Teller, Co. Department Store and the Hajoca Corporation Headquarters and Showroom, with Art Deco style. Coincidentally, the Bonwit Teller, Co. Department Store has similar architectural features as Allen's, and both were built in the same year.



Allen's Store Before and After

For criteria H, the building was located where rows of small businesses lined up along Cheltenham Avenue. Along with businesses, the street had the “crosstown” Cheltenham Avenue streetcar. The features Cheltenham Avenue had, like transportation and small businesses, are similar to the main streets around the Philadelphia suburbs: Ambler, Manayunk, West Chester, Jenkintown, Ardmore, etc. Back in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Cheltenham Avenue was the “main street” of Germantown, but today, Germantown Avenue became more of the “main street” than Cheltenham Avenue due to demographic changes.

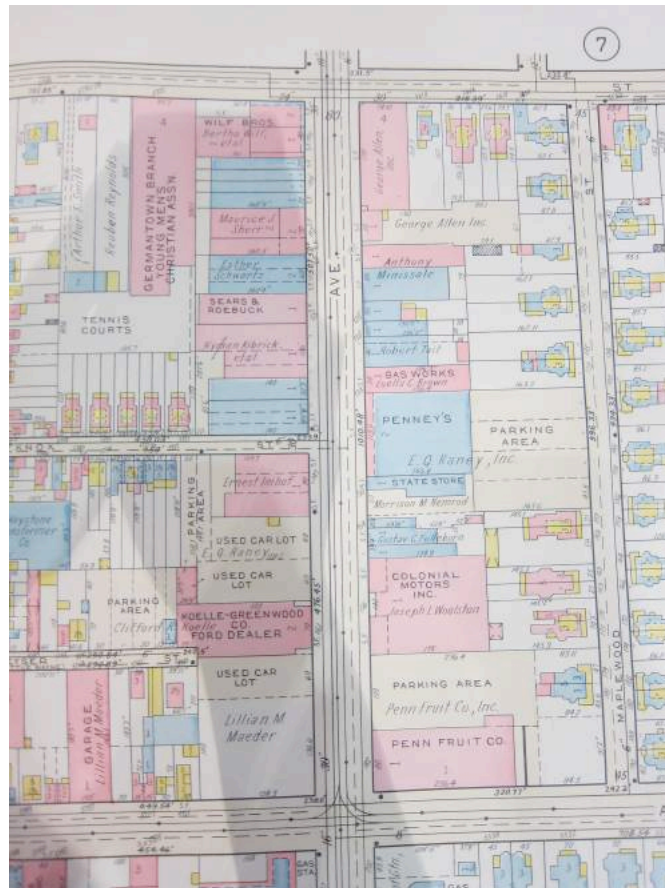
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<sup>43</sup> Turner Construction Company. *50 Years of Buildings by Turner* (New York: Turner Construction Company, 1952): 9.

<sup>44</sup> “Allen's Department Store c. 1930.” Circa 1930. Catalog number 2010.307.1. Photo Record, Germantown Historical Society, Philadelphia, PA.



Back then, Cheltenham Avenue had not only Allen's, but also J.C. Penney's and Sears and Roebuck. It was the street where many people who lived in Germantown shopped.



45

For criteria J, not only was the Germantown store successful with their sales, the store was also successful with their annual Christmas Parades along Cheltenham Avenue. Department stores were competing against each other with their advertisings, and hosting a holiday event was the method every store used to advertise their stores. During Christmas, Allen's had Santa Claus ride on the float as well as climbing down the top floor of Allen's by using the fire truck's ladder. There were Germantown residents who remembered shopping at Allen's when they were young, and remembered watching Santa

<sup>45</sup> Plate 12, *Atlas of Twenty Second Ward: Philadelphia, Penna. Volume II*, Franklin Survey Company (Philadelphia, 1955).

in the parade. Dennis McGlinchey, born and raised in East Germantown, had a picture with Santa from Allen's back in 1958 when he was two years old, and he witnessed Santa climbing down through the store's window. He also remembered the other big-name stores on Cheltenham Avenue, but he stated that Allen's was the store he liked to shop at. Erda, who was from West Norriton, also remembered witnessing Santa climbing down through Allen's window. She liked riding the elevator to Allen's toy department and got excited when she saw Santa there.<sup>46</sup> A lot of people remembered Santa climbing down the fire truck ladder from Allen's window, and that was the biggest highlight of that Christmas parade.<sup>47</sup>



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<sup>46</sup> "Your Thoughts Archive November 2007." *Historic Germantown, Philadelphia, PA*. Accessed April 11, 2019.

<http://www.ushistory.org/germantown/thoughts/archive2007h.htm>.

<sup>47</sup> "Your Thoughts Archive December 2007." *Historic Germantown, Philadelphia, PA*. Accessed April 11, 2019.

<http://www.ushistory.org/germantown/thoughts/archive2007i.htm>.

<sup>48</sup> "Allen's Department Store- Santa at top of ladder." 1959. Catalog Number 2010.307.60. Germantown Historical Society, Philadelphia, PA.

Another Germantown resident, Irvin Miller, lived in the area since the 1940s, also remembered Allen's Christmas Parade and Santa climbing down the ladder. He shopped at Allen's during the 1950s, and he bought an overcoat from Allen's men's store. He still has the overcoat, and kept it in his closet ever since. He said that Germantown was, indeed, a thriving community because of Allen's and the other department stores like Rowell's, on Cheltenham and Germantown Avenues. He even missed the environment Germantown had before all the department stores around Cheltenham Avenue closed down. He said Allen's was a great place to shop at. He remembered how nice the store looked at the time, and how nice the employees at Allen's were to their customers. He didn't know about what happened to Allen's after the store closed down since he moved to Mount Airy around that time. But, he knew it turned into a charter school.<sup>49</sup>



Irvin Miller's Overcoat from Allen's

Germantown was lucky to have the Allen's building still standing today; representing what the building used to be and the time period it was built in. Whenever people like Irvin remembered Allen's, look at the building, it brings them back in time when Allen's was in operation. Allen's was one of the reasons why Cheltenham Avenue was

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<sup>49</sup> Phone interview with Irvin Miller, April 23, 2019.

the “main street” of Germantown. Comparing Philadelphia’s suburbs, both Germantown Avenue and Cheltenham Avenue “main streets” have businesses that make lots of money and provide public transportation for those who want to walk around and see what both of those districts have. It’s what makes the community alive. Even at a certain time the store was facing sales declines from 1958 to 1963, Hess Kline, president of Allen’s at that time, was able to bring the store back into business.<sup>50</sup>

With the building still intact, it tells a story about the growth of department stores around Philadelphia. For Allen’s, it’ll forever be a story everyone in Germantown will remember. Typically, when people think about Germantown, they would immediately think about its founding, and its role in the American Revolutionary War. No one in Germantown thought about the social impact it had, and that’s because of the current conditions of the neighborhood today, and the different use of the former Allen’s building. It’s important to acknowledge every history of Germantown. It doesn’t matter if it didn’t play a big role in the most common events in history. It’s about the positivity and excitement in the environment that Germantown is a thriving community. Even with how the building is used today, the company’s name is still attached on the exterior. It’s a reminder about what the building used to be. If the building were adaptively reused instead, then the generation of department stores in Germantown, or Philadelphia in general, would’ve continued on as well as the Allen’s name.

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<sup>50</sup> Siegel, Richard D. “Fortune Backs Faith in Germantown.” *The Philadelphia Inquirer: North/West Delaware Valley* (Philadelphia, PA), October 21, 1965.

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