

PRACTICAL PRESERVATION IN PHILADELPHIA:
THE OCTAVIA HILL ASSOCIATION 1896-1912

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to those who see preservation as a practical method for creating healthy communities and affordable housing. My hope is that this thesis will promote preservation as a feasible tool for city planning, while encouraging support for guiding organizations like the Octavia Hill Association.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The Octavia Hill Association, hereafter the OHA, began in 1896 as a social and housing reform agency for the working class citizens of Philadelphia. The OHA saw the overcrowded, insanitary, and dilapidated dwellings which housed a large portion of the Philadelphia population and endeavored to lift the moral and physical health of the city by providing adequate housing at reasonable rates. Unlike counterparts in other American cities at this time, the OHA chose not to construct high rise tenements but instead improve the individual row home, a traditional form in Philadelphia. The OHA was the first housing reform agency in Philadelphia to embrace practical preservation by choosing to renovate and refit existing small houses instead of demolishing and rebuilding. The first annual report of the OHA, published in 1897, states “the experience of the company already shows that these old houses, when renovated, make very comfortable homes.”¹ The houses were commonly of good brick construction, and once renovated and properly fitted with plumbing, they became ample housing for the working class. This was not preservation for historical significance, but preservation as a logical alternative to demolition and new construction. Preservation became a practical preference by which OHA addressed the housing crisis in turn of the 20th-century Philadelphia.

Today, the OHA still operates as a housing agency with the same mission as professed in 1896. The OHA grew out of the Philadelphia Civic Club and was intended to continue the Civic Club’s mission of working for a higher spirit and better order, with a specific focus on creating adequate living conditions for Philadelphia’s working classes. The OHA was a philanthropic

institution but one based on true business principles.² The goal was to enlist citizens who shared the concern for those less fortunate as stakeholders in a business partnership, that would offer fair investment and a fair rate of interest. The work had a personal element in fostering a beneficial landlord-tenant relationship. The OHA also valued keeping communities intact. The tenants of an OHA property, if law abiding and respectful, were maintained. Tenants would only be removed if dangerous or troublesome to the community.

The strategy of the OHA for the first fifteen years of its operation was to both purchase dwellings which would allow moderately profitable return after renovation, and assume management of privately owned dwellings in need of rehabilitation. Between 1896 and 1912, the OHA concentrated on the oldest part of the city, mainly in the southeastern section of Philadelphia. This area was the district of Southwark. The properties were of three types: small one-family homes on alleys or narrow streets; small existing tenements; and small houses built for one family but converted to tenement use.³ In 1912, the focus of the organization began to shift towards new construction of blocks of model homes in Germantown. Although its work continued in Southwark, the era of practical preservation as the primary tool of the OHA was over.

ORIGINS OF THE OCTAVIA HILL ASSOCIATION

The OHA was formed based on the teachings of its namesake, the English social and housing reformer, Octavia Hill (1838-1912). In 1864, Hill had developed an interest in improving dwellings of the poor in London, England.⁴ The first housing experiment Hill undertook was

the purchase of three houses which she renovated and rented to low income and working class tenants. Hill created a philanthropic self-sustaining endeavor while also creating the role of “the friendly rent collector” as both reformer and landlord.⁵ The relationship of the rent collector and tenant would provide social reform through education and supervision, while fostering responsibility to encourage the tenants to pay their rents on time. The latter was often an issue for landlords, who frequently deferred maintenance because of late rents, resulting in deplorable housing conditions for the poor.

The state of housing in London was similar to conditions in many American cities. Dilapidated structures, lack of drainage or clean water, and extreme overcrowding were common in New York City, Chicago, Boston, Baltimore, Washington D.C., and Philadelphia. Jacob Riis’s work in New York City and Jane Addams’s in Chicago both provide evidence of the conditions of the new immigrants and the inadequate housing they had to occupy. While some cities saw the construction of high rise tenements, London and Philadelphia preferred the abundance of small, separate dwellings. By the late 19th century, Philadelphians began to look towards London and the work of Octavia Hill to solve their own housing crisis.

LIMITATIONS AND PROBLEMS STATEMENT

The purpose of this thesis is to explore the work of the Octavia Hill Association in Philadelphia. The history of Philadelphia’s population, immigration, and housing issues prior to the last quarter of the 19th century are not included. For background information this thesis has

utilized the following sources as the foundation of Philadelphia history: Sam Bass Warner's *The Private City: Philadelphia in Three Periods of Growth*, John F. Sutherland's essay "Housing the Poor in the City of Homes: Philadelphia at the Turn of the Century," and Caroline Golab's essay "The Immigrant and the City: Poles, Italians, and Jews in Philadelphia, 1870-1920."⁶

Industrialization in Philadelphia began in 1830 and resulted in a housing crisis. Foreign immigrants, Black migrants from the South, and the unskilled native-born flocked to Philadelphia's mills and created a population with few housing choices. Philadelphia did not have the housing stock to serve these newcomers, so the working class had to turn to housing of desperation- shacks, shanties, backyard houses, and alley tenements which were all the working class could afford on their low incomes. With no areas of concentrated working class housing readily available, the newcomers dispersed throughout the city to make their homes. This was the "first era of the melting pot," where all trades, nationalities, and religions lived side by side.⁷ Inevitably, it resulted in tension and violence.

Philadelphia's small brick homes were believed superior to the darkness, dampness, and disease found in high rise tenements of other U.S. cities, but they were not. The decaying slums in Philadelphia were just simply well-hidden⁸ By the late 19th century, Philadelphia's original street grid had been bisected with secondary streets and countless alleys. Lots were narrow and deep. As foreign immigrants and Blacks flooded the city, a housing crisis resulted. Even row houses that fronted the major streets once occupied by the upper class, were quickly turned into tenements. The long lots allowed for smaller rear houses to appear in what had once been yards. This

development created a labyrinth of dark and unpaved alleys. So-called “Trinity houses” appeared, small three story houses with one room per floor that rarely faced a major street. Trinities were developed in the rear yards of homes, creating small courts on the interior of the block. While such a house could accommodate a single family, they were often filled with multiple families.⁹

The condition of the working class went unnoticed by many Philadelphians because no one ever ventured behind the facades of the neat brick row houses. The working class occupants were hidden and their housing spread without restriction. The OHA concentrated their efforts in the Fifth, Fourth, Third, and Second Wards, which created the district of Southwark. In 1895, 171 small courts and alleys were identified in the Fifth Ward and 88 in the Fourth. The single block bounded by Lombard Street, South Street, Fifth and Sixth Streets contained fifteen of these courts and alleys.¹⁰



FIGURE 1. Ward Map of Philadelphia, 1899.

The Wards numbered 5, 4, 3, and 2 comprised the district of Southwark

Another cause of the desperate housing conditions among the working class was the lack of assistance by the city. The building and loan associations in Philadelphia did not address the needs of the impoverished classes. By 1874, 400 of these organizations existed in the city. These were advertised as the solution for an “individual of modest means” to purchase his own home, simply by investing his savings in shares and borrowing at a moderate interest rate. Thousands of middle income workers could purchase small houses. However, the building and loan associations could not help the class of unskilled workers who had no security for loans and no means to support the interest. While purporting to target a “wage earner of humble means,” the associations would only accept someone with a wage of at least \$25 a week in 1891. For a large percentage of the Philadelphia working class, such wages were out of reach.¹¹

The housing crisis resulted from an influx of new workers who arrived in Philadelphia because it was a leading industrial city. By the 1870s Southwark witnessed the greatest population increases, though the number of immigrants to Philadelphia was not as large as many other northern cities. Philadelphia’s foreign born population was never over 27%, compared to New York City where it reached approximately 40%. American cities with large Black populations typically had fewer foreign immigrants. Philadelphia had become home to a large Black population after the Civil War, most of whom were unskilled laborers. A large number of Irish immigrants had also arrived around this time, giving Philadelphia a huge workforce for unskilled labor.¹² Other immigrants arriving in Philadelphia observed the lack of available jobs and continued on to other cities.

In addition to the relatively large Black and Irish populations, three other ethnic groups arrived in Philadelphia during the last quarter of the 19th century: Russian Jews, Poles, and Italians. These new immigrants came to Philadelphia with a different set of skills, experience, and intents. The Russians had a high concentration of workers in the garment industry, Italians in construction and labor, and the Poles in semi-skilled metal trades.¹³ These immigrants joined the working class, and like those before them, made their home in Southwark.

As the population rapidly increased, and the concentration of dangerous and unhealthy dwellings became obvious, some citizens of Philadelphia recognized that a housing crisis had been created. Previous attempts at housing reform in Philadelphia had included the new construction by Benevolent Building Association of 1865, an early 1880s effort to reform the St. Mary's Street Settlement in Southwark through education and public institutions, and the demolition of dilapidated houses by Theodore Starr. In the late 1880s, Hannah Fox and Helen Parrish, two wealthy Philadelphian women, bought and improved a series of dwellings. They decided to manage the properties based on the successful plan of Octavia Hill in London. Fox and Parrish brought the methods to the Philadelphia Civic Club. The Civic Club was intended to promote a higher public spirit and a better social order by education and active cooperation in the community.¹⁴ The focus turned to shelter and the need for housing that was affordable, safe, and adequate. The result was an independent organization focused on the issues of housing: the Octavia Hill Association.

The OHA annual reports of 1896 to 1912 contain a wealth of property, tenant and budgetary information. The narrative created by the annual reports forms the foundation of much of the research in this thesis. There are, however, inconsistencies in the data. The annual reports were intended for current and prospective stakeholders, so in certain years the OHA would offer a summary of the overall work. The information presented ranged from property information about certain dwellings, to maps, budgetary information, tenant family size, tenant ethnicity or nationality, and tenant occupation. The addresses chosen for these samples were also inconsistent, with many of the OHA properties never highlighted individually. These inconsistencies created some difficulties when comparing properties for which unrelated types of information were recorded.

The OHA was a late 19th-century social and housing reform agency and, as a result, the language and opinions in the annual reports reflect that era. Although some statements and labels would not be considered politically correct in the 21st century, the information in this thesis uses the terms found in the documents to retain historical accuracy and prevent attaching modern associations of current terminology. The ethnicities and nationalities presented in this thesis are drawn from the following list of OHA terms: Hebrews, Russian Jews, Norwegians, German, English, Scotch, Irish, Polish, Poles, Italians, Colored, Negroes, and Americans, which were used in the time period of 1896 to 1912. In addition to the ethnic labels appearing in the OHA annual reports, there are other terms which need clarification because of the era in which they were used, as explained below.

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

The following terms are defined for their use and intent in the time period of 1896 to 1912 and will be used throughout the remainder of the thesis.

Working class: Prior to industrialization and expansion, class distinction was based on vocation. As factories and new levels of employment expanded, classes were further divided by capability and skill. The middle class was broken into three levels: the new middle class, artisans, and unskilled workers. The new middle class held occupations such as businessmen, downtown retailers, and superintendents of manufacturing. Artisans included skilled factory workers, skilled workers in their own shops, and manufacturers who sold their own goods. Lastly were the unskilled workers, comprised of occupations like laborers, sales clerks, unskilled or semi skilled factory workers, apprentices, and sailors. There were large gaps between each class level, but as the population increased rapidly by the arrival of immigrants and migrant Blacks, the competition for work left many unskilled close to poverty.¹⁵

The class of the unskilled worker will be identified by the term working class. The OHA was not a charity and believed that a working man should be able to pay for his own house. Octavia Hill's philosophy emphasized that charity did not help tenants escape poverty, but that self-supporting work would cultivate a self respect they desperately needed. The tenants were employed, and the OHA would often help them find seasonal work as needed. These were

working class citizens in the most literal sense of the term. They held jobs, received meager salaries, and needed simple housing at fair prices.

Tenements: Many of the OHA properties were described as tenements. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, a tenement is “a room or set of rooms forming a separate residence within a house or block of apartments. Also a tenement house, a house divided into and rented in such separate residences, especially one that is run-down and overcrowded.”¹⁶

Today, most Americans equate the term tenement with a 19th to 20th century high-rise building, a dilapidated structure housing a city’s poorest population. The definition of a tenement as a slum is a result of these conditions which did occur in the 19th and 20th centuries, as illustrated in the work of Octavia Hill and the OHA. The term did not originally hold these negative connotations. Throughout the OHA annual reports, there are many descriptions of “well-built tenements” or “model tenements.” The word as used by the OHA referred to “any house or building, or portion thereof, which is (a) intended or designated to be occupied, or (b) leased for occupation, or (c) actually occupied as a home or residence for three or more families living in separate apartments and doing their cooking upon the premises.”¹⁷

Apartments: An apartment is “a room or suite of two or more rooms occupied or leased for occupation, or intended or designed to be occupied, as a family domicile.”¹⁸ The apartment is a living unit for a single family as a set of rooms. A small house that is inhabited by two families

would have two apartments. Any houses occupied by more than two families would be considered a tenement according to the prior definition.

Basement: A basement, which was often used as a dwelling in Southwark, is the story of a house or tenement that is partly, but not more than one half, below the level of the street or ground.¹⁹

Cellar: A cellar is the story of a house or tenement that is more than one half below the level of the street or ground. In theory, cellars were not used as dwellings, but rather for storage.²⁰

Agency property: The OHA purchased properties and also elected to take over management on properties that were privately owned. Those properties taken into management remained owned by individual landlords, and were referred to as “Agency properties” by the OHA .

The early development of the Octavia Hill Association in the era of practical preservation can be broken into three phases. The first, 1896-1902, was a period of initial development. The methods were evolving while the agency sought sound footing in Philadelphia. A case study used to illustrate this period in Chapter Four is League Street, a neighborhood of eighteen houses just northeast of the intersection between Front Street and Washington Avenue. The second phase, 1903-1908, was one of rapid expansion. The OHA was successful and ready to move forward, especially as an advocate for housing legislation. The case study used to represent this period in Chapter Five is Workman Place, a court bounded by South Front Street to the east, Pemberton

Street to the north, and Fitzwater Street to the south. The third and final initial phase, 1909-1912, was one of an increased political role and a change of focus within the OHA. The case study used to exemplify that period in Chapter Six is 304-308 Lombard Street, a small court which exemplified the average OHA property.

The OHA was able to adapt the methods of Octavia Hill in London to the courts, alleys, and narrow streets of Philadelphia to create a successful philanthropic effort based on sound financial footing. For the first fifteen years, the OHA used preservation as a key tool to fulfill the mission of providing the working class with adequate and safe housing amid overcrowding and unstable municipal conditions. The Octavia Hill Association was the first Philadelphia housing reform agency to demonstrate practical preservation for the common good.

CHAPTER 2: THE METHODS OF OCTAVIA HILL

The Octavia Hill Association began as an answer to Philadelphia's overcrowded streets and the overall condition of its working class citizens, concerns appearing in many other large cities of the United States and Europe. Each city had issues and struggles, bringing about social reform throughout the 19th-century. Philadelphia, with its many small homes, bore a striking resemblance to the city of London. London was in the midst of its own wave of social reform, but one method combined social and housing reform in a unique way. Social reformer Octavia Hill had begun a housing experiment in 1865 dealing with small homes and personal intervention through re-education. In 1875, she had published "Homes of the London Poor," a pamphlet about her successful methods in housing and social reform in the courts and alleys of London. The pamphlet was published internationally, soon coming to the attention of concerned citizens in Philadelphia. In Hill's work, Philadelphia reformers saw the potential of similar methods applied to their city. The scale, reasoning, and theories of Octavia Hill's work laid the foundation for a revolution of housing reform in Philadelphia.

Octavia Hill was born in 1838 in Cambridgeshire, England. She was the child of a well-to-do-banker, politician, and newspaper publisher, James Hill, and a former governess and published advocate for education reform, Caroline Southwood Smith. She was also the granddaughter of Thomas Southwood Smith, a highly influential physician and sanitary reformer. Both Caroline and Thomas Southwood Smith wrote for James Hill's radically liberal newspaper, creating a family enterprise in social reform. Following Octavia Hill's birth in 1840, James Hill was forced to

declare bankruptcy after a series of bad investments. By 1843, James Hill had suffered a nervous breakdown which tore the family apart. Caroline Hill took her five daughters to the outskirts of London, leaving James Hill behind, and was forced to rely entirely on her father, Thomas Southwood Smith, for financial support. Smith had reached national prominence, but he was not a wealthy man. Octavia Hill and her family were burdened with her father's debt, which they struggled to settle up until 1861. Octavia Hill's unstable childhood resulted in her idealization of what a family should be. Hill believed each individual had his allotted role, and based her future reform work on propagating the ideal stable family unit.²¹

After moving to London, Caroline Hill raised her daughters with an education based largely on literature. Thomas Southwood Smith's escalating professional success opened the Hills to important social circles including the poet Robert Browning, the theologian F.D. Maurice, and the author Charles Dickens. Thomas Southwood Smith's achievements inspired Octavia Hill and her sisters, raising their social consciousness early in their childhood. Thomas Southwood Smith eventually gave up professional practice to join the Board of Health. This resulted in a change in income that prompted Caroline Hill to find a job in central London. The family reached near poverty by the early 1850s, but in 1852 a Society for the Employment of Ladies, largely reflecting the ideals of Caroline Hill, was formed by a group called the Christian Socialists. The Ladies' Guild was a workshop for generally unskilled women and girls to do crafts. Caroline Hill and her daughters became employed, and Octavia Hill was appointed to manage a group of girls. By age fourteen, she was running the business aspect of the Guild, and soon began assisting in the education of the working girls. Octavia Hill quickly learned firsthand the living conditions of the very poor.

The work at the Ladies' Guild brought Caroline and her daughters under the influence of the Christian Socialists.²² In 1853, the Ladies' Guild received a visitor, the influential art critic John Ruskin. In addition to his essays on art and architecture, Ruskin was also concerned with social justice. His exploration of social and moral issues were closely related to the work of the Christian Socialists. By 1855, Ruskin had begun to train the teenaged Octavia Hill, an aspiring artist, as a copyist for old master works of art he used to illustrate his own writings.²³ In 1856, the Ladies' Guild failed financially, and Octavia Hill took its closing as a personal failure. The experience made her more passionate about working for the good of others. She became a paid employee of Ruskin, a position she held for over ten years, resulting in a friendship between the two. Ruskin saw in Octavia Hill an ideal vehicle for his concern with practical reform.²⁴

Octavia Hill had been considering the housing conditions of London since her first experience trying to find rooms for the workers at the Ladies' Guild. Hill created a scheme to purchase a house, fill it with underprivileged tenants, and make their lives happier and healthier.²⁵ She searched for a house to buy, but after the sellers became aware of her intentions, they invariably refused to sell. Hill realized her plan could only work if she found tenanted courts in poor condition, which could be renovated around the current tenants.²⁶ Octavia Hill's discovery of preservation over new construction was one born entirely of necessity.

Ruskin, impressed by Hill's ideas and supportive of her methods, not only encouraged his protégée but offered to fund her experiment entirely through investment. Her research prior to undertaking her plan was to visit lodging houses throughout London. It was during these visits

that Hill noted a distinct lack of effort on the part of the poor tenants to better themselves or their homes. She concluded that a lodging house “needs supervision, which can only be given by a friend.”²⁷ and she decided that the work must be done “by personal contact, that money spent on bricks and mortar alone was money wasted.”²⁸

In 1865, Hill purchased three small houses off of Marylebone High Street in London. Ruskin convinced her that the experiment would be more successful if the houses could be made to pay, meaning a return on investments made. His argument was that not only should a working man be able to pay for his own house, but starting the venture on sound business footing would likely encourage others to follow her example. Hill did not wish to deal with committees or group decisions and thus took the management entirely on herself.²⁹ She enlisted friends as volunteer rent collectors, and thus began her housing experiment.

The Marylebone court was not far from where Hill lived, and was near the elegant terraces of Regent’s Park.³⁰ The houses were repaired rather inexpensively, but these changes were vital to the health of the tenants. Hill described vermin, clogged drains, broken water supplies, and filthy wallpaper hanging in strips.³¹ In 1866, Hill purchased five more houses nearby. This row of cottages faced a yard filled with dilapidated sheds, old timber, and rubbish. These houses were in an even more deplorable condition than the first set, with plaster dropping off the walls, leaky roofs, dark passageways, and a locked wash house the landlord used as a shed. Tenants cooked, ate, slept, and washed in their small rooms without proper drainage.³²

Octavia Hill believed bad tenants created bad housing and wished to remove those bad influences.³³ The tenants who led clearly immoral lives or simply refused to pay their rents were ejected. Her method was to renovate these houses room by room, starting with those which were vacant. Tenants who were considered stable enough to stay then moved into the renovated rooms.³⁴ The rooms they left then were cleaned and repaired. Major renovations included roofs, new plaster, and repaired woodwork. The drains, cisterns, and pumps were put in working order. Layers of papers and rags were removed from windows and glass was installed. The wash house was cleared and opened for the use of the entire court.³⁵

All necessities were put into working order, but Hill did not install the modern appliances that existed elsewhere. Hill identified the two types of families which her work would reach: small families of unskilled laborers who required only one decently-sized room, and the larger families of unskilled workers which also included one or two children old enough to work. These families could afford a second or third room. Tenements in London at the time were intended for artisans, and included more elaborate appliances. The wages of the unskilled worker could not support these appliances, and thus they could not afford rooms there. Hill predicted that by accommodating the unskilled labor class, the crowding in existing houses would diminish. These people needed simple housing at fair prices which Hill recognized was not available on the current market.³⁶

Hill coupled social reform with housing reform by rewarding respectable behavior with increased comforts. Hill decided that the tenants should not have modern appliances until they

proved they were capable of taking care of them. A certain amount of money was set aside for repairs each month. If any money remained in this special account at the end of each quarter, the tenants were allowed to choose what portion would be spent on to add comfort to the houses. Tenants recognized this as an opportunity and began to be more careful that repairs were not needed so that money could be spent on upgrades. Tenants began repairing things themselves instead of asking the rent collector to dip into the communal money. After they moved in, the tenants were entirely responsible for cleaning and upkeep. As responsibility increased, public spaces like the hall and stairways were assigned to tenants for upkeep, for which they received payment.

Tenants were expected to conform to the rules laid out by Hill. Rents had to be paid punctually and visits were consistent. By carrying out the work herself, Hill eliminated the middleman. If rules were disobeyed, tenants would be ejected, without exception. In return tenants who followed the rules were treated with respect. Hill did what she could to provide work to tenants in slack seasons, and tenants were encouraged to start savings accounts. Many of these ideas were explained in a paper published by Hill in 1869, entitled “The Importance of Aiding the Poor without Almsgiving.”³⁷ Hill believed that charity did not help tenants escape poverty, but that work and paying their own way would cultivate the self respect they desperately needed.³⁸ She regularly spoke of the trust built between herself and the tenants, and she stated that she was never met with anything but entire confidence.³⁹

In 1875, Octavia Hill published “Homes of the London Poor,” a pamphlet about her experience with the properties in her housing experiment and the methods she championed for both

housing and social reform. For Hill, the renovation of housing conditions was nothing without the proper re-education of the tenants concerning their duties and responsibilities. She believed most working class homes were bad mostly because of the tenants' habits. As she stated, "Transplant them to-morrow to healthy and commodious homes, and they would pollute and destroy them."⁴⁰ She believed the only way to create lasting housing reform was to first carry out social reform through re-education.

Octavia Hill's plan for reform included sanitary improvements based upon the ability of the tenants to be re-educated and to overcome their poor habits.⁴¹ Another problem Hill identified was the common tyranny of other landlords. A bad tenant-landlord relationship could undermine any reform activity. A common situation in London was that tenants who refused to pay rents unless their requested repairs were completed. However, since the tenants did not pay rent on time, the landlords refused to fix problems. The result was houses that were never repaired and landlords with amassed debts. The desperation of both sides resulted in properties that were unlivable and unhealthy. The idea of the friendly rent collector attempted to reverse this pattern, ensuring consistency and structure on both ends.⁴²

One of Hill's most important policies was that once she overtook a property, the rooms would be let for the same rent as before renovation. She also encouraged large families to rent two rooms, often at discounted rate.⁴³ She wanted to help tenants who hoped to flee ineffective landlords, degraded fellow lodgers, and unlivable conditions. Hill looked instead toward policies which would encourage the tenants to pursue habits of industry and effort. The methods empha-

sized that positive reinforcement was the best education for the tenants. The tenants would gain dignity and pride through positive enforcement of the rules with an undercurrent of sympathy and care. She believed tenants, accustomed to violence and vices, would respect and appreciate the evenness of the rules she set forward.⁴⁴

The social reform of Octavia Hill was governed by four essential principles: 1) strict enforcement of the duties of the tenants, such as rents, upkeep, and respectability; 2) using sympathy and counsel to strengthen individual efforts of tenants, encouraging further improvement; 3) promoting tenant stability through employment opportunities instead of charity; and 4) to remember that each tenant must manage his own life. Her methods were intended to help the individual make the right judgements, rather than allowing the reformer to judge for him.⁴⁵ Hill's experiment succeeded, and she asserted that a self-supporting process was better for the tenants and an extension of the work itself.⁴⁶ Octavia Hill expected some to consider her process only applicable for "small knots" of tenants but unreasonable for the vast masses of poor in large cities. Hill responded with the challenge, "Are not the great masses made up of many small knots? Are not the great towns divisible into small districts?"⁴⁷ Hill's theory of social and housing reform created a network of rent collectors for properties throughout London and inspired reformers elsewhere in England, Europe, the United States. Philadelphia would see in London a reflection of its own situation, and the Octavia Hill Association recognized Hill's reform methods as practical solutions.

CHAPTER 3: HOUSING REFORM IN PHILADELPHIA

As Octavia Hill's methods of housing and social reform began in the streets of London, Philadelphia was becoming aware of its own housing crisis. In 1865, the Benevolent Building Association formed in Philadelphia. This Association began by building a series of small houses and a model tenement near 12th and South Streets. Although they also were concerned with light, ventilation, and healthier conditions, they struggled with the management of the tenants. The Association was based on charity, not business principles. Without a financial plan, the Benevolent Building Association gradually dissolved.⁴⁸

The methods of Octavia Hill spread internationally throughout the 1870s due to her success in London and the distribution of "Homes of the London Poor" in 1875. Henry Bowditch, chairman of the Boston Massachusetts Board of Health was first to apply her methods in the United States. Bowditch purchased an overcrowded and notorious Boston tenement, but he was unable to realize any success.⁴⁹ Ellen Collins, from New York, and Alice Lincoln, from Boston, also attempted to recreate Octavia Hill's methods of housing reform in their respective cities by purchasing neglected properties and turning them into respectable dwellings. While both Collins and Lincoln were firm supporters of the principles Hill had outlined, they struggled with the financial realities of undertaking such an effort. Both attempts suffered from low financial return, which caused the women to respond with stricter qualifications for tenants. They began to turn out any and all potentially troublesome tenants, in essence abandoning the social reform Octavia

Hill had considered irreplaceable. The housing was improved, but the Americans' interpretation of the system lacked Octavia Hill's attempts at moral regeneration.⁵⁰

In the early 1880s Theodore Starr, a concerned Philadelphian, had determined to clear the shanties which crowded the courts and alleys of Southwark. His experiment was based on new construction, much like the work of the Benevolent Building Association, but this time using business principles instead of charity. He created three room houses each equipped for a single family, double houses planned for two families, and two small model tenements near 6th and Lombard Streets. He did not attempt social reform on an individual basis, a key aspect of Octavia Hill's methods. He did create public institutions within the neighborhood, such as a kindergarten, coal club, and savings association.⁵¹ However, tenants of low standards and unused to cooperative housing abused the properties. The result was a constant management struggle for the Starr properties, which would only succeed years later when under management of the Octavia Hill Association.⁵²

By 1884, Octavia Hill had published a second edition of her work and had achieved international recognition. Americans were aware of her work, and Philadelphians began to realize the similarities with their city's housing crisis. A Philadelphian named Edith Wright Gifford took up management of her father's properties, an outlying, neglected settlement known as Wrightsville. The property contained sixty-four small houses on unpaved, unsewered streets, which were unprotected by the city. Edith Wright Gifford decided to renovate and rehabilitate the existing

houses, rather than undertake any new construction. The improvements proved to be a financial and social success. The project was an inspiration to future Philadelphia housing reform.⁵³

One Philadelphian who saw promise in this approach was a wealthy young woman named Hannah Fox. The work of Theodore Starr near 6th and Lombard Streets, an area home to the St. Mary Street Colored Mission Sabbath School and known as the St. Mary's Street Settlement, had resulted in the creation of a series of public institutions. In 1884, a woman named Susan Wharton opened the St. Mary Street Library, enlisting the help of her cousins Hannah Fox and Helen Parrish.⁵⁴ Hannah Fox, already aware of Octavia Hill's methods in London, purchased two houses within the St. Mary's Street Settlement in 1887.⁵⁵ She applied the management techniques of Octavia Hill, and enlisted Helen Parrish as a fellow friendly rent collector. Fox and Parrish renovated the houses and began renting them to poor Negro tenants.⁵⁶

Helen Parrish kept a diary of the work in the St. Mary's Street Settlement in the summer of 1888. The diary is a glimpse into the personal perspective of a social reformer working in the worst section of the Philadelphia. Parrish's diaries describe the conditions of the slums, attitude of the tenants, struggles of management, and attempts by reformers to push their own values of thrift, cleanliness, and sobriety on the tenants. She described the application process for new tenants, general responsibilities of current tenants, and the role of the landlord in rent collecting visits.⁵⁷ Parrish, like Octavia Hill and other 19th-century reformers, combined compassion and prejudice. The attitude toward the tenants was a mixture of sympathy, paternalism, comprehension, and misunderstanding.⁵⁸

The Parrish diaries also reflect an awareness of the housing reform that preceded the St. Mary's Street Settlement, including the work of Octavia Hill in London and Alice Lincoln's attempt in Boston. In September 1888, Parrish wrote, "I think Octavia Hill & Mrs. Lincoln must work on very different principles. I think with our class it is Octavia Hill's we need most, and I am beginning to feel that I may have been trying to work as Mrs. L does-the dictatorial, authoritative rather than the non-interfering, silent influence way."⁵⁹ Alice Lincoln's work had abandoned the friendly social reform aspect of Octavia Hill's teachings. Parrish pronounced this harsher type of management as less effective than Hill's insistence of sympathy and counsel. This recognition would shape the policies of the Octavia Hill Association.

Parrish was clearly aware of Octavia Hill's work in London. In 1886, a woman named Ellen Chase left Boston to study under Octavia Hill.⁶⁰ Chase undertook management of some of Hill's properties in London for several years and published accounts of her work.⁶¹ Octavia Hill began welcoming visitors for training or visits to her courts, and it appears Helen Parrish and Hannah Fox were aware of this opportunity because they went to study and work with Octavia Hill for six months, living with her in London.⁶²

The work of Hannah Fox and Helen Parrish in renovating and operating existing houses with Hill's methods was destined to lead to the larger development of a housing reform plan for Philadelphia. The years of management in the St. Mary's Street Settlement had proved the strength and efficiency of this method both financially and from a social standpoint.⁶³ The Philadelphia housing reform effort was encouraged by the reports made by a health officer for the

city, that described the overcrowded and unsanitary living conditions in the neighborhood of St. Mary's Settlement and Southwark. The citizens of Philadelphia were aware of the numbers of immigrants flooding the city, but the report detailed the degrading conditions that raised the city's social consciousness. Citizens looking for an answer were drawn to schemes of a large scale, in order to help the most people. Automatically, citizens were persuaded that the large model tenement would be the most natural solution, as it was the solution of so many other large cities.⁶⁴

By 1893, a tenement project was underway. The Model Dwelling Association published a perspective showing plates of large tenements of other cities. The Association proposed construction of this type as the answer to Philadelphia's housing crisis. However, within two years the Model Dwelling Association was dissolved, and the money was returned to all investors. The Association had faced great difficulty in obtaining sites for their tenements at a reasonable price. Another reason for its demise was the effort of concerned citizens to push for more adequate housing laws in Philadelphia. Already, speculative builders had been building tenement houses of the worst kind. These large tenements were badly arranged, with dark interior courts, inadequate fire protection, and insufficient sanitary conditions. The tenements quickly became overcrowded without any laws to restrict occupancy. In practice, housing codes for single family dwellings were more restrictive than those for tenements, and speculative builders quickly exploited those legislative weaknesses.⁶⁵

The citizen advocacy resulted in Pennsylvania's Tenement Act of 1895 for cities of the first class. The Tenement Act prohibited the erection, alteration, or construction of any tenement

house that did not conform to certain provisions. For example, tenement houses had to have an open space attached, equal to twenty percent of the entire area of the lot without any obstructions other than fire escapes. Adjustments could be made for corner lots on major roads or tenements bounded by three streets provided that windows of living rooms opened directly to open air. The Act stated that every room within a tenement was required to have at least one window facing open space and no less than eight feet from a neighboring wall. Hallways were also required to have a window to prevent dead-end corridors.

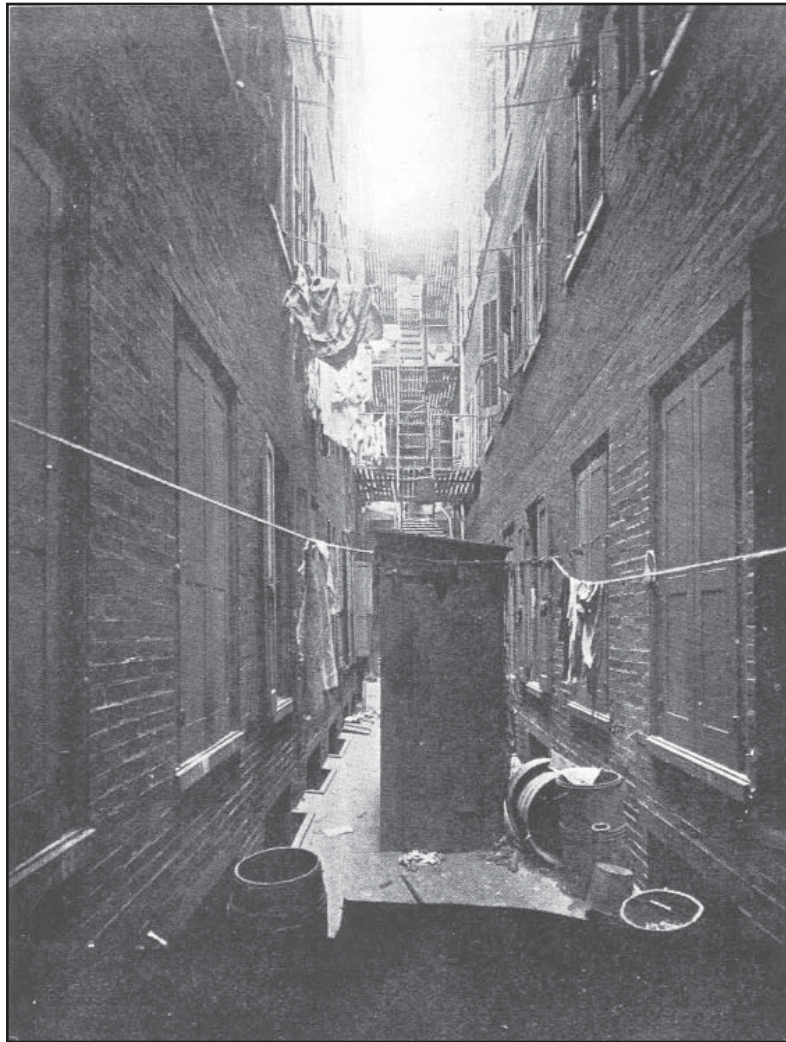


FIGURE 2. Common Philadelphia Tenement Conditions.
The Tenement Act of 1895 battled conditions like this dark, narrow interior court.

The Tenement Act specified that no room in a tenement house could have less than seven hundred cubic feet of air. The window area had to be a minimum of twelve square feet, able to be split into multiple windows if necessary. Ceilings of less than eight feet were prohibited. Tenement houses had to have tower fire escapes enclosed in noncombustible material. All stairways lead directly to the ground floor and had to be at least three feet wide, more so for tenements of over fifteen rooms. All tenement houses of new construction were required to have a water closet for every three rooms while an existing tenement was allowed one per six rooms as long as there was at least one per floor. Additional sanitary measures were outlined, including independent water supplies per water closet, sinks, and suitable receptacles for ashes. Fireproofing was a major concern, and the Tenement Act demanded that any tenement over four stories must be made fireproof throughout. Wooden floor boards and beams were allowed, but had to be imbedded with noncombustible material.

The Tenement Act of 1895 required all proposals must be reviewed by the Bureau of Building Inspection before permits were issued. The builder of a tenement without a permit faced three months imprisonment and a five hundred dollar fine. The Tenement Act of 1895 concluded with a definition of a tenement house as any building occupied by three or more families, living independently of each other and cooking on premises.⁶⁶

The Tenement Act of 1895 made new construction safer and dissuaded speculative developers from many projects. Philadelphia was ready for a new type of housing reform. Hannah Fox and Helen Parrish, backed with the experience with Octavia Hill and success in the St. Mary's

Street Settlement, joined fellow concerned citizens to propose a housing and social reform agency based on Hill's methods. The Philadelphia Civic Club was an established community group already focused on better housing and living conditions with the objective to "promote by education and active cooperation a higher public spirit and a better social order."⁶⁷ It was at a meeting of the Civic Club in 1895, while discussing the needs of the metropolitan poor, that a report was presented. The Octavia Hill Association was formed as an independent organization. The Octavia Hill Association would specialize in the provision of homes of the right sort for families of modest means.⁶⁸

The Octavia Hill Association worked for the same goals as the Civic Club, but developed its own methods and theories for social and housing reform as a commercial agency. The OHA, would be combine sound business principals with philanthropy. The OHA believed that unsanitary, dilapidated, and overcrowded dwellings lowered the physical and moral health of Philadelphia. The OHA strove to enlist fellow Philadelphians who shared those concerns, not for charitable donations but for strict business conditions of sound investment and a fair rate of interest.⁶⁹

The Octavia Hill Association would be a direct, although adapted, version of the teachings of Octavia Hill. Whereas Hill first turned to preservation of neglected buildings out of the necessity of being unable to secure sound housing, the OHA made a conscious decision to promote preservation by refitting old properties and small houses. Its members had seen the success of that work in London, been assured of its feasibility in the work of Edith Wright Gifford, and tested it themselves in the St. Mary's Street Settlement. Their confidence in the approach was not in the

preservation of housing alone, but in the principles of social reform necessary to make the project work. Other attempts in the United States had been unsuccessful, but the OHA of Philadelphia would be the first to fully embrace the social reform component of Octavia Hill's methods in conjunction with housing reform.

In 1896 the OHA was incorporated, and Hannah Fox wrote to Octavia Hill to tell her of the intent as well as the name of the Association. Hill responded that she was honored to be associated with the effort, declaring the OHA "one more link between your country and ours, and a bond between those of us who, with the ocean between us, are yet indissolubly one in our effort to make the lives of the poor better and happier."⁷⁰ The OHA would continue to have direct ties with Octavia Hill through personal correspondence with Fox and Parrish, sharing information and exchanging volunteers, until Hill's death in 1912.⁷¹

CHAPTER 4: THE OCTAVIA HILL ASSOCIATION 1896-1902

The Octavia Hill Association recognized there were two methods for creating affordable, manageable housing for the working class. The first was to demolish old buildings and erect large tenements. Theoretically, the increased rents of the tenements would yield the return needed to pay demolition and construction costs. The alternate method was to rehabilitate structures, refit old properties with modern plumbing, and restore the elements needed to provide safe and healthy housing. The experience of the founders of the OHA had already proven that old houses, when renovated, made very comfortable homes. The size and interior arrangement were practical and feasible for working class families of limited means. Citing the small homes as the spirit of Philadelphia, the OHA firmly decided not to build the large tenement, but to improve the separate house.⁷²

The OHA quickly personalized the methods of Octavia Hill to achieve the practical standards she set forth.⁷³ The strict, though sympathetic, management of the tenants would include responsibilities on both ends of the tenant-landlord relationship. The OHA would be prompt in necessary repairs and watchful of sanitary conditions. It would raise the level of family life and contribute to the efficiency, capacity, and happiness of each individual. The educational and ethical work of the OHA would be carried out in visits from the friendly rent collector, a role created in London and already tested by the St. Mary's Street Settlement management. The tenants would be responsible for paying the rents on time, continuing sanitary upkeep of the home, preventing

unnecessary abuse to the property, maintaining employment, sending the children to school, sustaining neighborly relationships, avoiding vices, and generally exhibiting a respectable lifestyle.

The OHA was not a charity; it believed that a working man should be able to pay for his own house. The record of housing reform in Philadelphia clearly indicated that an agency would need sound business foundations to survive. The OHA would buy, renovate, and rent property in undesirable areas of the city. Its members knew that in order to help, to reform, and to succeed, they would need investment. The investments would be solicited with the promise of fair interest rates and modest return. Following the first year of operation, the OHA published annual reports of its work for the stakeholders to track both their investments and the progress of reform. The annual reports from 1896 to 1912 hold a wealth of information and describe the attitudes, policies, and methods of the OHA as they evolved.

The first phase of the OHA was one of development, structure, and experimentation. The social and housing reform methods of Octavia Hill were a strong foundation, but the actual implementation in Philadelphia was a massive undertaking. Prior housing reform attempts of this type had been small in scale, but the OHA wanted to transform the worst section of Philadelphia at a time of municipal weakness and social struggles. By 1897, the OHA had already expanded its scope. At first, the intent was to purchase, renovate, and manage properties. After a year of experience, the OHA also began to accept the management of properties owned by individual landlords.⁷⁴ The OHA recognized early on that this type of management would allow the OHA to reach more properties, and consequently many more families, than by purchase alone.

The OHA, as a business, could only purchase properties which were financially feasible to rehabilitate, which meant that many severely dilapidated dwellings requiring extraordinary investment were beyond the scope of the Association's capabilities. However, by extending OHA into independent management, individuals could purchase the properties and give the renovation and responsibility to the OHA. The OHA charged a small percentage of the return, making the situation modestly lucrative for the private property owner. This system enabled the OHA to extend its reform outreach and to attract sympathetic landlords who did not wish to undertake the renovation and management responsibilities themselves. The OHA quickly increased their holdings, influence, and footing in Philadelphia housing with the introduction of these "agency properties."⁷⁵

The early properties were clustered between 7th and 5th Streets, near Lombard Street. This area was home to the St. Mary's Street Settlement and the properties of Theodore Starr. Recognized in 1880 as the one of the one worst neighborhoods in an already struggling Southwark, the properties and tenants were a challenge for the still young reform agency. The Starr Estate, which included dwellings on Reese, Rodman, and Naudain Streets, came into the OHA as agency properties in 1899.⁷⁶ These were the same properties abused by a class of tenants with low standards and unused to cooperative housing in the early 1880s.⁷⁷ Fairhill Street was a group of eight small houses purchased by the OHA in 1897, which proved to be a test to the social reform intentions of the OHA. Located near 6th and Lombard Streets, the single family homes consisted of three to four rooms per house.⁷⁸ This neighborhood, adjacent to the Mother Bethel Church, was in the heart of the Negro section of Southwark. The tenants, forty-nine in all, severely tested the

methods of the OHA in its effort to raise both the moral character and the rent-paying capacity of the neighborhood.⁷⁹ The early days of development of the OHA were a trial by fire. The working classes had previously lived in houses simply neglected by their landlords, thus having complete freedom to do as they wished. Suddenly, the OHA was not just renovating the buildings but applying rules and restrictions. Tenants who rebelled were removed, and those who stayed had to conform to new regulations, new habits, and entirely new lives. Social reform was needed, but it was not always welcome.

As the agency expanded, the OHA annual reports reflected a change in the type of information presented. The diversity of the tenants began to interest both current and potential stakeholders. The sixth annual report included a chart containing a cross-section of OHA properties at the close of 1902. The properties were a sampling of owned, not agency, properties throughout Southwark. Some were clusters of houses while other were small tenements, as indicated by the number of rooms and number of families inhabiting the dwellings. The inclusion of total number of persons gives a glimpse into family structure and size. The relative economic standing of the residents can be gleamed from the size of a family and the number of rooms it occupied as well as the rent per month of each site. Comparisons of overcrowding and housing can be made between nationalities and ethnicities as well. The chart includes the information on rents, stating the OHA generally charged 50¢ to \$1.10 per week for a single room and \$6.50 to \$10 a month per small house, according to location.⁸⁰ Southwark was the least desirable section of Philadelphia, but even among the slums, some areas fared better than others.

Name of Property	Number of Houses	Rooms in each House	Number of Families each House	Total Number of Persons	Race or Nationality	Maximum Rental Per Month
518 South Seventh Street and 705 to 711 Rodman Street	1 4	Store and 7 rooms 4	5 1	14 16	Store, Hebrews ; Rooms, Negroes Hebrews	\$81.08
Fairhill Street (near Sixth and Lombard Streets)	9	3 or 4	1	49	Negro Norwegian, Ger- man, English,	\$83.41
League Street (near Front Street and Washington Avenue)	18	5	1	82	Scotch, Irish, Polish Catholic and American	\$139.50
514 South Seventh Street, with houses in rear	1 2	Store and 6 rooms	6 1	10 4	Store, Hebrews Rooms, Negroes Negro	\$44.00
725 Lombard Street	1	9	4	19	Hebrews	\$28.00
Perth Street Addison Street	2 2		Repairs begun			

NOTE.—A single room rents for from 50 cents to \$1.10 a week; a small house from \$6.50 to \$10 per month, according to size and location.

FIGURE 3. Sample Chart of OHA Owned Properties, 1902.

The chart enabled stakeholders to see a sample of tenant nationalities, property sizes, and rental rates.

The benefit of this chart is to gain perspective on the types of properties the OHA undertook and the living conditions of the tenants experiencing reform. The properties of 518 and 514 South Seventh Street and 725 Lombard Street were tenements; 518 had five families in seven rooms, 514 had six families in six rooms, and 725 Lombard had four families in nine rooms. In contrast, the cluster of dwellings on Fairhill Street and eighteen small houses of League Street were separate houses of one family each.

The comparison of rents per family indicates that location was a primary consideration within the Southwark housing market. In the chart, the tenement of 518 South Seventh Street is grouped with the adjacent houses of 705-711 Rodman Street, which would skew averages of both rent and family size. With no explanation of why these properties were grouped, this information

will not be considered. Focusing on the other properties listed, Fairhill Street with nine families in separate homes and a rent of \$83.41, resulted in the highest rent per family at \$9.27. League Street had eighteen families with a total rent of \$139.50, a total of \$7.75 per family. The tenement of 514 South Seventh Street had eight families at \$44, averaging \$5.50 a family. The property at 725 Lombard Street, also a tenement, was home to four families with a rent of \$28, resulting in \$7 per family.

Based on the information provided, the most expensive rents per family were on Fairhill Street. Fairhill Street offered houses with 3-4 rooms, necessary arrangements considering the families also averaged nine people per house. The two tenements listed, 514 South Seventh and 725 Lombard, had the two lowest rents at \$5.50 and \$7 respectively. These tenements averaged 1-2 rooms per family. As expected, the separate houses of Fairhill Street would be more desirable, and therefore more expensive, than tenement rooms.

The property that stands apart on this list is the League Street neighborhood. In the case of Fairhill Street, the average family was nine people for 3 to 4 rooms paying \$9.27 a month. On League Street, families were a smaller size of about 4 to 5 people, but they lived in larger houses, at 5 rooms each. However, the rent was drastically cheaper, at only \$7.75 a month. The indication from this comparison is that Fairhill Street, by 6th and Lombard, was a more desirable place to live than League Street which was located at the northeast corner of South Front Street and Washington Avenue. Based on the OHA report of Fairhill Street being the most challenging site for social reform, one can assume this was not the best location socially. League Street,

although farther way and probably inconvenient, offered both larger homes and cheaper rent.

One must consider the tenants of each neighborhood and social conditions that may have been associated. Fairhill Street was a neighborhood of entirely Negro tenants within the Negro section of Southwark. Philadelphia was one of the major American cities that experienced an influx of Negro migrants during the second half of the nineteenth century. Philadelphia's population was 6% Negro in 1910, the largest of any northern city.⁸¹ The Negro population also comprised a large proportion of the unskilled working class, with the fewest options for housing because Russian Jews had flooded the Fifth Ward, the major Negro section of Southwark.⁸² Consequently, the Negro population was pushed farther west as the Russian Jews competed for housing. So while it seems the location of Fairhill Street was the cause of driving the rent up, it was more because of the desperate competition for housing by the Philadelphia working class.

LEAGUE STREET: A CASE STUDY

League Street was a neighborhood of much different conditions than other OHA properties at the time of its purchase in 1899. This neighborhood of small houses was located between Front and Water Streets, just north of Washington Avenue. The largest undertaking of the OHA at the time, this site exemplifies the work, process, methods, and development of the OHA as it entered the public sphere. In 1902, Helen Parrish published a tract titled, “The Improvement of a Street,” highlighting and explaining the work of the reform agency. Used as an advertisement to solicit more investment, the League Street property was chosen for its ability to at once show the benefits of Octavia Hill’s methods and promote rehabilitation as a feasible housing solution. For these reasons, League Street will be explained in this thesis as a case study for the development, structure, and experimentation of the OHA from 1896 to 1902.

In 1879, Maggie and James Bard purchased a small private street from Amanda, Virginia, and Hannah Reckless. Reckless Street, as it was known, consisted of ground divided into ten lots on the north side and six on the south. Each lot was thirteen feet wide and twenty-nine feet deep.⁸³ Each lot had a small house of five rooms, numbers 4, 6, 8, 10, 12, 13, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 25, 27, 29, and the northwest corner lot held 955 South Front Street. In 1899, the Bards sold the property, then called League Street, to the Octavia Hill Association for \$8,500.

The OHA saw potential in the neglected neighborhood. Since League Street had been a privately-owned street, it was not included on the city plan. The OHA immediately applied

for incorporation so that the city would install a sewer. The process took more than a year before completed. Upon inspection, the Association found that improperly installed old-fashioned wells extended not only into the yards of the small houses but under their meager foundations. The kitchens, presumably attached at the rear, had rafters beneath them which had rotted out in almost every instance. The OHA invested just over \$1500 on improvements and repairs of the League Street houses. The rotted rafters were removed, and the entire back of each building had to be raised to restore the level of the floor. Each house also included pointing of the brickwork and carpentry as needed. The houses were entirely re-plastered and repainted. Each League Street property was also underdrained and refitted with new plumbing. Rehabilitation was completed with the paving of League Street.⁸⁴



FIGURE 4. Elevation of League Street from Water Street, Post Renovation.
This sketch shows the League Street properties from the east, enabling an approximation of size and scale of the houses.

The houses were bare, dirty, and badly managed prior to rehabilitation. The tenants were mostly Irish families, averaging five people per household. The men were primarily longshoreman who worked at the nearby wharves. This type of work was irregular, leaving finances unstable and tenants more vulnerable to vice. The OHA found early in management that the tenants felt little obligation to pay their rents, another scenario of lax prior management creating a lack of responsibility. The rent collectors of the OHA struggled to engender thrift and order among the tenants, and it was apparently only with great reluctance that tenants made any changes. The largest social issue among the adults was hard drinking. The irregular patterns of work probably caused the men to turn to alcohol, but Parrish notes in her study that the women were also heavy drinkers. Because of this, the women did not maintain any pretense of keeping house. Even more alarming, the children of League Street were entirely without restriction. Many did not attend school and the boys had formed a gang, known for stealing lead pipe and damaging vacant houses.⁸⁵ The OHA still saw promise in the tenants and was confident the methods of sympathy, council, and strict enforcement would bring beneficial change. The OHA annual report of 1899 stated that the “boys and men of the neighborhood, under firm, helpful guidance would develop fine qualities as citizens.”⁸⁶

Rents ranged between \$6.50 and \$10 a month, and frequent visits by the rent collector were needed in order to produce responsibility. The first three years of the management were a struggle for the OHA. The houses were seldom all occupied, and the OHA had to remove some tenants for continued bad behavior. One Irish widow, who had lived in the house for many years, had raised her large family entirely on the profits from an illegal liquor store she ran out of the

house. After she refused to stop selling, she was removed for the good of the rest of the tenants.

The OHA continually pushed for tenant reform, meeting rebellion from tenants so destructive that constant repairs were necessary.⁸⁷

Table 1. League Street Census, 1900

Unit	Name	Number of Tenants	Nationality	Occupation
4	William Pricpits*	7	American	Laborer
6	Not listed	-	-	-
8	David Price	6	American	Laborer
10	William Davis	5	American	Laborer
12	Not listed	-	-	-
13	Not listed	-	-	-
15	Anne Churchill	10	Irish	Servant
17	James Healey	4	Irish	Laborer
19	Joseph Dougherty	4	American	Laborer
21	M. Leeman*	9	French/Irish	Rigger
23	David Greens*	12	American	Sail maker
25	M. Tobin*	3	Irish	Brakesman
27	Charles Strom*	9	Swedish	Laborer
29	Michael Heanly*	6	Irish	Printer

Note: * means approximation, handwriting on Federal Census indecipherable

The tenants of League Street battled the OHA efforts of social reform. In 1900, three of the fourteen houses of League Street were vacant. The table included has the names, occupations, nationalities, family size and makeup of the League Street residences. The nationalities included five families identified as native born Americans, four families of Irish immigrants, one of French and Irish background, and one family of Swedish immigrants. These tenants were poor but not unemployed. Occupations included six laborers, a printer, a brakesman, a sail maker, and a rigger. Of particular interest is Anne Churchill, with her eight children, who was the only widow of

League Street. She was listed as a servant, while her children were laborers, sailors, wire makers and hat makers.⁸⁸ It is assumed that Anne Churchill was the widow with a large family who operated the illegal liquor store that Parrish reported in 1902.

The OHA eventually saw success with reforming the unruly and irresponsible tenants. The change was gradual, but it was an early and monumental success for the young Association. The tenants paid more regularly, the debts decreased, and the families learned to take pride in their homes. The OHA had not turned out the majority of the tenants, but allowed them to remain, confident they had potential. The changes in tenant behavior was the result of regular visits by a compassionate rent collector, often multiple times a week. The increased respectability of the neighborhood was noticed by the Civic Club of Philadelphia. The Civic Club began a kindergarten and the Southwark Mother's Club within the neighborhood.⁸⁹

In 1902, the OHA purchased 957 South Front Street, a house on the southeast corner of South Front Street and League Street. The house was fitted out as a club house and rented to the Philadelphia Civic Club, the Working Women's Society, the Seamen's Mission, and the National Boy's Club organization.⁹⁰ The property had been sold with an adjacent vacant lot of twenty by eighty feet.⁹¹ The site was cleared, graded, fenced, and turned into a playground for the children of League Street. The playground had been entirely from donations from supporters of the OHA.

The Southwark Neighborhood House, as the club house had been called, outgrew 957 Front Street in 1903.⁹² The decision was made to tear down 957 South Front Street in 1904, al-

lowing the popular playground to be expanded to twenty by one hundred and twenty four feet. In 1905, the League Street tenants paid \$1432 out of the \$1445 due, a remarkable transformation from the irresponsibility of the first years.⁹³ League Street had been completely reformed. A promotional pamphlet was published in 1908 for the League Street playground, by then called the Hector McIntosh playground after the former president of the OHA. The images of the pamphlet provide a glimpse into League Street and the life of the tenants. It was considered the epitome of the successful effort of the Octavia Hill Association.⁹⁴



FIGURE 5. View of League Street Playground, Houses in Rear.

This view shows some of the League Street houses, including partial facades to the left side of the image, and a house in the center made of brick with a frame shed addition.

Table 2 below shows the tenant information in the Federal Census of 1910. There were no longer vacancies, as the houses within the neighborhood were in constant demand, and the average occupancy by a tenant was seven years.⁹⁵ The diversity of nationalities had increased, with only two native born Americans, two German immigrants, four German/Polish, one Polish, two Russian/Polish, one Austrian/Polish, a Norwegian and one family of Norwegian/Hungarian nationality. Occupations in 1910 included three laborers, a packer, a waiter, a box maker, a carpenter, a huckster, two stevedores, a rigger, and two cigar makers.⁹⁶ What began as a neglected and disorderly private street had transformed into a neighborhood of respectable tenants. The OHA strove to create a sense of thrift, honor, self respect, and community spirit among the tenants, and in this it succeeded.

Table 2. League Street Census, 1910

Unit	Name	Number of Tenants	Nationality	Occupation
4	Caroline Gurb*	3	German	Laborer
6	Ester Ledan	5	German/Polish	Cigar maker
8	K. Komishinsky*	4	German/Polish	Cigar maker
10	William Rivotsky	5	Austrian/Polish	Laborer
12	Frank Smith	5	Russian/Polish	Laborer
13	Charles Underburger	7	German/Polish	Rigger
15	Adam Johndekasitz	7	German/Polish	Laborer
17	John Shinbolsky*	4	Russian/Polish	Stevedore
19	John Coyle	8	American	Stevedore
21	John Tanter*	6	German	Stevedore
23	Joseph Gruby*	8	German/Polish	Huckster
25	Akcel Strom	4	Norwegian	Box maker
27	Andres Strom	7	Norwegian	Carpenter
29	Hardy Griffin	5	American	Waiter

Note: * means approximation, handwriting on Federal Census indecipherable

The tract, “The Improvement of a Street,” highlighted and explained the work of the reform agency. The 1902 publication concluded with the statement that the success of League Street represented similar work that could be done in Philadelphia.⁹⁷ League Street served as an example for all future OHA work on the neighborhood scale as a successful format for keeping a community intact, creating a healthy neighborhood, maximizing open space, and developing community outreach programs. The feasibility of simple rehabilitation leading to a healthy community was proven in League Street, and it became the foundation for the start of practical preservation in Philadelphia. In 1911, the Philadelphia Playground Association took over management of the Hector McIntosh Playground.⁹⁸ The OHA would purchase the five remaining houses on League Street in 1916.⁹⁹ League Street was demolished in the construction of I-95 in the 1960s. Although it no longer stands as a testament to practical preservation, the successful experimentation of the OHA in its early years guided its work for years to come.

CHAPTER 5: THE OCTAVIA HILL ASSOCIATION 1903-1908

The early development of the Octavia Hill Association united social and housing reform in Philadelphia as a feasible solution to the housing crisis. The housing experiments of the first six years had proven the sound business tactics of the methods of the OHA, and united Philadelphia in accepting practical preservation of the agency as a model to be trusted. With supporting evidence of success in the Southwark community, the OHA gained confidence to expand its mission of purchasing, renovating, and renting adequate housing to the working class. The OHA's decision to add the management of agency properties had propelled them to a larger forum for reform than they first thought possible. By the close of 1902, with the publication of "The Improvement of a Street," the OHA had entered the public arena. The work was recognized as worthwhile and exceeded the possibilities of most charities in both financial independence and investment security. Portrayed as a financial endeavor for the sake of philanthropy, the OHA opened the possibilities for middle class Americans to invest. Charitable philanthropy's role had always been a part of upper class life, but a return on investment made this endeavor accessible to a larger range of incomes. Philadelphians who were financially more secure than their working class brothers, but who had less funds than the wealthy, were able to participate in social and housing reform without straining their own lives. The OHA began to gain a following of true support, and with that the housing reform agency pushed into a new arena- politics.

The first organization to recognize the political potential of the OHA was the Academy of Political and Social Science in 1902. At its request, the OHA prepared a paper describing the

neglected districts of the city, by highlighting neighborhood blocks of Southwark. The more thorough exploration was concentrated on one Negro block, one Italian block, and one block of Hebrew tenants.¹⁰⁰ This paper was met with great interest by social and housing reform circles, triggering a desire for further investigation into the housing conditions of working class Philadelphia. The OHA hired Emily Dinwiddie, the City Inspector for the Tenement House Department of New York to prepare the report in conjunction with the Philadelphia Bureau of Building Inspection and the Board of Health. With this undertaking, the OHA hoped to focus public attention on the imperative need for municipal inspection of housing conditions.¹⁰¹

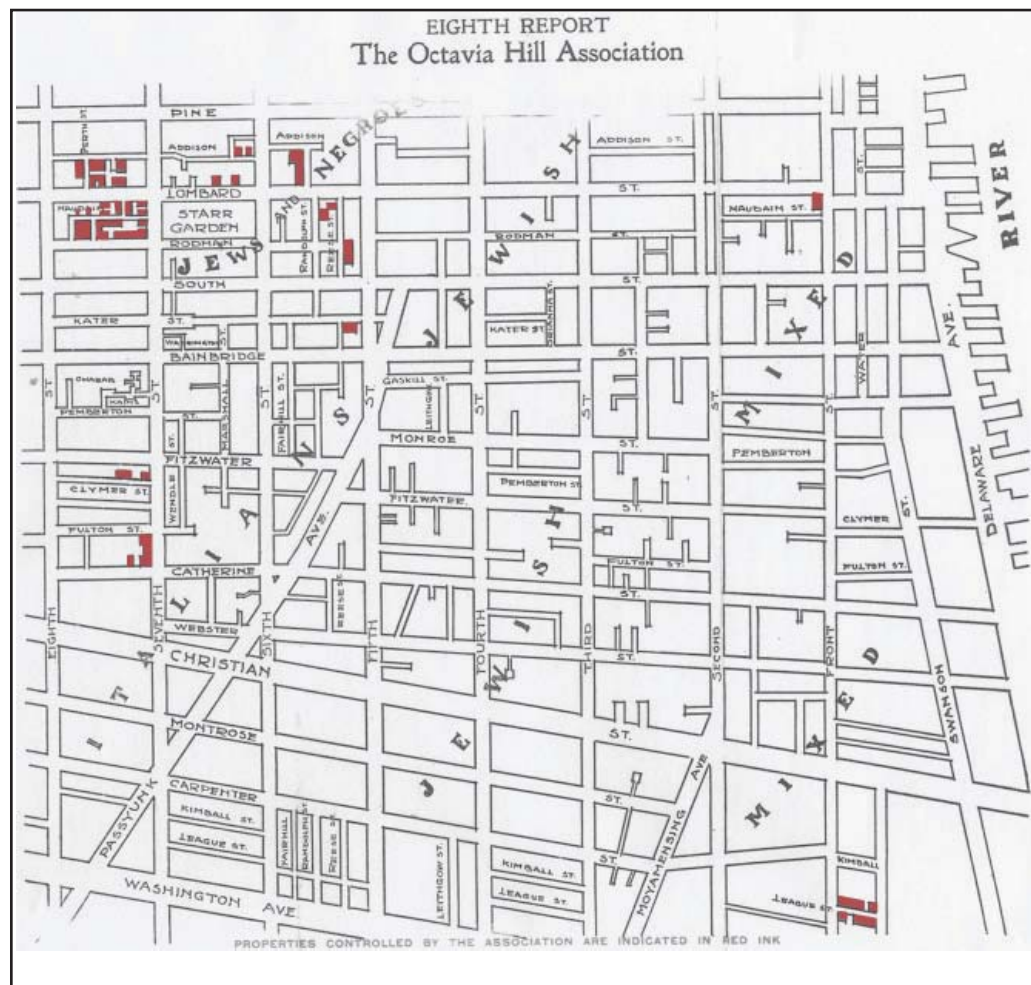


FIGURE 6. Map of OHA Owned Properties, 1904.

This map is labeled to show the location of nationalities in the district of Southwark. Those indicated are “Jews and Negroes,” “Italians,” “Jewish,” and “Mixed.”

The report, “Housing Conditions in Philadelphia,” was released as a pamphlet to stakeholders, city officials, community organizations, and the Philadelphia public in 1904. The conditions described were startling to most Philadelphians, as Dinwiddie used detailed descriptions as a scare tactic to call the public to action. The OHA had gathered the evidence it needed to prove that the city needed stronger legislative enforcement of housing inspection. The goal of the investigation was to ignite public outcry to push the municipal government into action.

The report states that while the Tenement Act of 1895 prevents new tenements, there were no laws or regulations governing the adaptation of old buildings when alterations were too small to need a building permit. The report was designed to be a guide for outlining remedies for the housing conditions and to influence all future work. Dinwiddie explored the small houses of Southwark, stating that the rear dwellings nearly doubled the front dwellings. The courts and alleys of small houses were categorized as the “horizontal tenement,” as the tenants of the alleys often shared a water supply, privies, and passageways much like a large tenement house would. Conditions of neglect escalated in the same manner.¹⁰²

The report also called attention to the fact that the destructive habits of the lower class tenants were in direct correlation to their environment. The environment on a neighborhood scale, which was the responsibility of the city, lacked the proper utilities. Without those utilities, the tenants did not have the means to maintain their houses. Dinwiddie asserts that it was difficult to keep rooms clean if one court hydrant was the sole water supply of seven houses, and the water would often be cut off for months at a time.¹⁰³ The lack of city regulations and reliable infrastruc-

ture in the district was directly affecting the patterns of neglected housing. The OHA used the “Housing Conditions in Philadelphia” investigation to secure public support for its advocacy. When the community believed that wholesome, well-repaired houses were essential, only then would the OHA finally reach its full capacity for community work.¹⁰

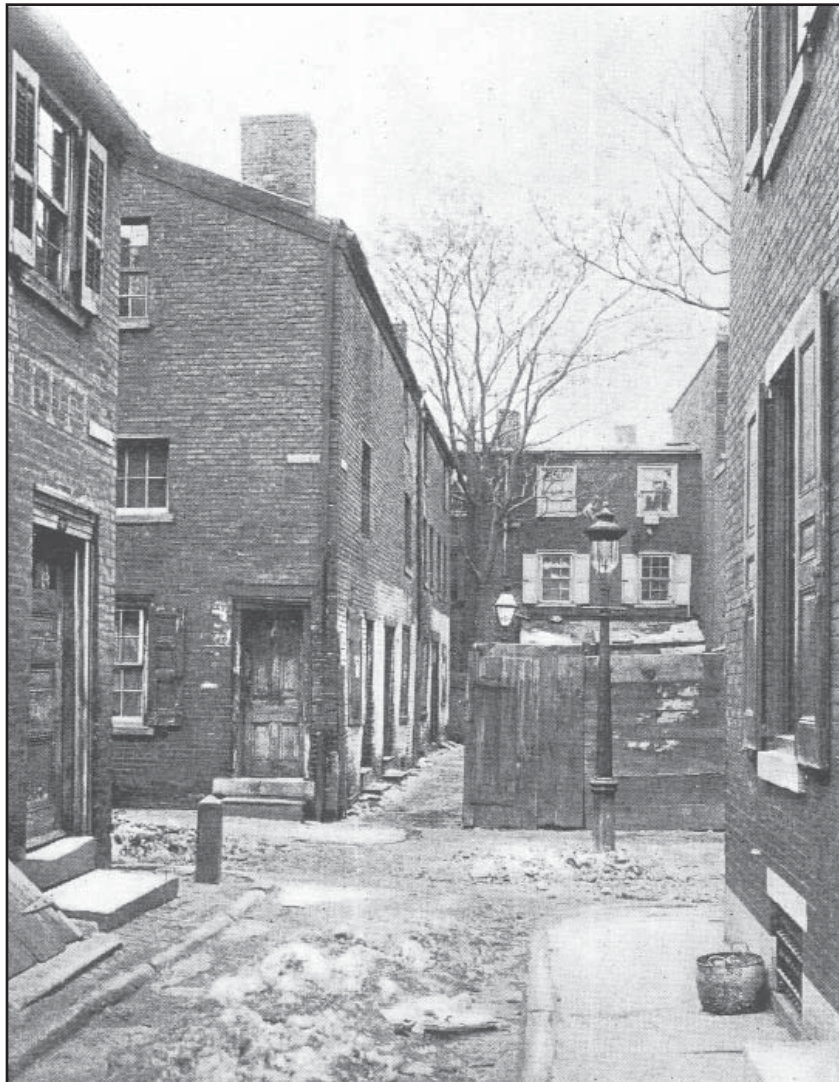


FIGURE 7. Brown's Court, Prior to Renovation.

Purchased in 1904, the court was located near 7th and Lombard Streets.

The severely dilapidated houses were home to tenants described as unruly and abusive.

As the Octavia Hill Association was creating a new platform for municipal action, the rehabilitation work in Southwark continued. The OHA had undertaken courts of separate houses and small tenements for eight years by 1903, and had become confident in its ability to take on larger, more complex projects. Two properties acquired in 1904 highlight the spectrum of OHA properties and indicate the future direction of the housing reform agency. One purchased property was 722 -724 Lombard Street, on a lot measuring twenty-five by seventy-eight feet. Each consisted of five rooms and a shop. Also included was a small court of four dilapidated houses hidden between the rear walls of a church and an adjacent larger court of nine houses. The larger court had been renovated by the OHA, but suffered from being so close to this small cluster of structures notorious for their unlivable conditions. Known as “Brown’s Court,” it was home to gambling, drinking, and rioting that was reported to the Board of Health time and time again, while the landlord made no effort to control it.¹⁰⁵ When the OHA finally purchased the property, it evicted all tenants. The tenements were re-rented to a more respectable class, but the OHA inspections found that the four small houses were beyond rehabilitation, having been neglected and abused for too long. The OHA demolished the four houses, and built two brick dwellings, 717 and 719 Naudain Street.¹⁰⁶ This was the first instance of the OHA reporting new construction. Having been founded with a mission of renovating and rehabilitating Philadelphia’s small houses, the OHA was faced with a scenario in which that was not possible. Recognizing the practical limitations, the OHA had opened a new chapter in its housing reform plan.



FIGURE 8. Brown's Court, Post Renovation and New Construction.

Two frame houses were beyond repair and were demolished. The OHA undertook new construction for the first time, creating these brick houses.

The other unusual project at this time was the management of the agency property, Casa Ravello, a large and well built tenement. Occupying the entire block of Seventh Street between Catherine and Fulton Streets, Casa Ravello was home to a staggering thirty-three families. The tenement was a brick, four story building located in the densely populated Italian section of Southwark. The first floor held space for ten shops, while the upper floors consisted of thirty apartments of two to four rooms each.¹⁰⁷ Although it was a large tenement, of the type shunned by the OHA, Casa Ravello was of safe construction. The courtyard allowed light and air to travel through the building, and the staircases were constructed of iron and located in fireproof towers, all according to the Tenement Act of 1895.¹⁰⁸ As the largest piece of work undertaken by the OHA

to that time, issues that arose as a result of so many tenants under one roof were new to the management. The OHA adjusted accordingly to the needs of the group, and was careful in its selection of all new tenants.¹⁰⁹ The success of Casa Ravello resulted in the expansion and improvement in OHA management techniques. The OHA also continued the community outreach that was an outgrowth of the playground so successful on League Street. Casa Ravello was outfitted with a rooftop garden.¹¹⁰ The operation of Casa Ravello was an indication of a rising trend in the Octavia Hill Association. As early as 1903, the portion of agency properties had surpassed the number of purchased properties. The OHA had come to understand that the greatest influence of social and housing reform would be to convince property owners to place their properties in OHA control.¹¹¹ This reflected a shift in the mission of the OHA.



FIGURE 9. Casa Ravello, a Large Tenement.
Four-story tenement of ten shops and thirty apartments, home to thirty-three families.

The OHA declared 1905 the “year of great municipal awakening.”¹¹² The OHA had made monumental strides in public awareness and was recognized not only on a national, but an international level. The American Institute of Social Service had created an exhibit on the Octavia Hill Association and had presented it at both the St. Louis Exposition and the International Exposition in Belgium. The exhibit had won prestigious awards at both showings, and officially gained recognition for successful housing reform.¹¹³

The goals of the OHA had been extended to include the agency’s desire to elevate housing standards throughout all districts of Philadelphia. The OHA recognized the monumental importance of the Tenement Act of 1895 to check the growth of potentially dangerous new large tenement houses in Philadelphia which had threatened to invade the city.¹¹⁴ As early as 1903, the OHA realized its role in housing reform gave it the responsibility to battle the municipal authorities for housing regulation on behalf of the masses of working class tenants continuing to struggle in Philadelphia. The OHA created a supplement to the Tenement Act of 1895, which dealt with the alteration of houses that had not been built as tenements, but were later converted to hold three or more families. These converted houses needed regular sanitary inspections by the Bureau of Health, which required stronger legislation. Approved by the Governor of Pennsylvania in 1903, this supplemental bill added requirements to the role of the Bureau of Health in the Department of Public Safety created in the Tenement Act of 1895.

The proposed new regulations demanded an immediate end to converting cellars or basements into separate dwellings. Any dwelling existing within a basement was subject to the examination of the Bureau of Health, and if found damp or unfit, it had to be instantly abandoned. The requirements of the Tenement Act of 1895 had been adjusted so that ceilings had to measure eight and half feet instead of eight, window area had to be one eighth of the floor area of a room, and a water closet had to be created adjacent to each and every room or apartment. Prior requirements for seven hundred cubic feet of air per room could be maintained in existing tenements, but rooms should not be so overcrowded as to allow less than four hundred cubic feet of air per tenant over the age of twelve and two hundred cubic feet of air per child twelve or younger. Also added were set requirements that every tenement house must be kept repaired, clean, and free from any accumulation of dirt, filth, or garbage, which included yards, courts, passages, and alleys in addition to the buildings themselves. Though it was not stated in 1895, the 1903 supplement prohibited keeping horses, cows, swine, sheep, goats, or poultry anywhere within the tenement house. Also prohibited was storage of any item that could be considered dangerous, detrimental to health, explosive, or combustible.¹¹⁵

The most important addition of the 1903 supplement was the requirement that the Bureau of Health must employ one or more Special Tenement House Inspectors, whose duty it was to regularly inspect the tenement houses for violations of the stated laws.¹¹⁶ Instead of performing inspections only during applications for licenses or permits, the Board of Health had to perform those inspections regularly. Too often, tenements had avoided inspections simply because there was no construction or alteration being done; this included the neglected tenements throughout

Southwark with which the OHA had become so familiar. The OHA began a unprecedented push for the 1903 supplemental bill to be brought to legislation. The publication of the investigations performed by Emily Dinwiddie created waves of public support in 1904. The bill was brought to the state legislature in 1905, but was defeated there by political committees unfazed by the living conditions of such a large percentage of Philadelphia's population. The bill was not put forward again until 1907, and OHA lamented the situation in its annual report of 1906, citing that the lack of any action in working class housing could be blamed on the "corrupt rule of the city bosses."¹¹⁷

Disappointed yet not discouraged, the Octavia Hill Association continued to push for municipal reform through other measures. The reputation of the OHA had continued to grow through its participation in public forums such as the Exposition of 1906 in Italy, the National Conference on Charities and Correction, and the Exhibition of Industrial Conditions.¹¹⁸ To encourage support in Philadelphia, especially in pushing for the supplemental bill again in 1907, the OHA published a pamphlet titled "Distinctive Features of the Octavia Hill Association" in 1906. The publication reiterated the mission of the OHA and included further exploration of the intent of its work. The OHA emphasized that the housing and social reform performed was not meant for the well-paid wage earner. The citizens of Philadelphia who made a comfortable living were able to afford the respectable housing which was unattainable by the working class of the lowest wage earners. The OHA confined its work to those districts of the city which held the least desirable, and therefore cheapest, housing in Philadelphia. The amount of such housing available was wholly inadequate

for the number of foreigners, Negroes, and least skilled classes of the native born who lived in Philadelphia. For these particular groups, the goal was to make proper living conditions as cheap as possible.

Therefore, the OHA purchased only old properties which were reasonably priced, and where repairs were feasible. The work allowed the tenants to be retained, unlike large development schemes which wiped out blocks at a time. The tenants were permitted to remain as long as they lived decent lives, a factor which the OHA had maintained since the inception of the agency. Practical preservation, the primary tool of housing reform, was also explained in further detail for the first time by the OHA. "Under present conditions of the building trades, new material is expensive but even so, if walls, joists and rafters are good, many an old building may be made sound and comfortable with but a modest outlay."¹¹⁹ Preservation by rehabilitation remained the logical focus of the Octavia Hill Association.

The OHA asserted that the problems which arose in certain neighborhoods were a result of ineffective municipal regulation. Private residences were constantly converted to tenements without the city being made aware. The houses had no regular supervision by inspection through which the city could learn of problems. If no obvious new construction or alteration was made to the building, the landlord was not forced to apply for a permit. The only way to keep converted houses in check was a mandatory system of tenement registration upon inspection.¹²⁰ The OHA used this pamphlet to outline the conditions which occurred because of the lack of mandatory inspection, which was the ultimate goal of the supplemental bill awaiting legislative action. The

advocacy of the Octavia Hill Association proved successful with the passing of the Bill for Municipal Licensing and Inspection of Tenement Houses in 1907. “In securing the law which makes the licensing and inspection of tenements part of the regular program of municipal duty, this Association has rendered a service to our city which no one else even dreamed of attempting.”¹²¹ The Tenement Act of 1895 had protected Philadelphia against the pressure for large tenements, but the Bill for Municipal Licensing and Inspection protected housing of all stature from the unhealthy, dangerous, and degrading conditions which had plagued the working class districts. The OHA declared that the influence of the legislation could not be over estimated.¹²²

WORKMAN PLACE: A CASE STUDY

During this phase of public support and municipal advocacy, the Octavia Hill Association finally acknowledged what so many of their properties had already created stable communities. This goal had not been mentioned in the annual reports and publications preceding 1906, when the OHA began to describe how its management of properties had evolved. The OHA strove to maximize potential of their renovations by undertaking groups of houses large enough that they could become the focus of neighborhoods. By renovating and reforming larger sections, the influence was felt over a much larger area.¹²³ As agency properties came to make up the bulk of the OHA work, more neighborhood centers were able to be created. The Association could not financially support the purchase of large tracts of houses throughout Southwark but instead took over management of entire blocks which were put in its care. A property which combined the most important aspects of agency management, community creation, and practical preservation was Workman Place.

Workman Place was a court of well-built brick houses located along South Front Street in the eastern portion of the block between Pemberton and Fitzwater Streets. The block was originally part of the Mifflin Estate, and one of the houses contained glazed brick along its side, reading "G.M. 1748." Development of the court started in 1810, when a Mr. J. Mifflin sold the northwest corner of the block to the Estate of Mr. Workman. In 1812, records stated John E. Mifflin sold the adjacent land just west of that to the Estate of John Workman. In 1821 the property was extended southward, with the first mention of a three story brick house or tenement, sixteen

and a half feet wide, on a lot two hundred feet deep. By 1854, members of the Workman family had extended their property to the southern corner. The information on the deed listing mentioned the dwellings facing Front Street, but a deed from 1899 first mentioned the court. The court was referred to as both Nesbit Place and Workman's Court, but does not give the number of houses it contained, only that it was accessible by the property of 748 South Front Street. Edward Walter Clark purchased 742, 744, 746, 748, 750 in 1906, and acquired 752, 754, and 756 in 1909.¹²⁴



FIGURE 10. The Court of Workman Place.

An agency property of thirteen brick houses surrounding a large court. Formerly the estate of George Mifflin, dating from 1748.

In 1906, the OHA took over the management of Workman Place soon after Edward Walter Clark gained ownership. A total of thirteen brick houses, with six serving as tenements, surrounded a large central courtyard. The OHA had recognized this area as one of unusual interest.¹²⁵ As the houses once belonged to the estate of George Mifflin, it was known the area was of historical significance. The OHA reported many of the interior details were still intact in two of the tenements facing Front Street, described as wainscoted halls, carved balustrades, and six carved mantelpieces with depictions of grapes and ships. Even the windows were fitted with mahogany.¹²⁶ These elaborate details were masked by the extreme deterioration of the houses. Though they were neglected and abused, the OHA still recognized the unique details and significance. Workman Place underwent extensive renovation, including complete installations of plumbing and an adequate water supply.¹²⁷ The interior court had been sectioned off with solid board fences and scattered with poorly dug wells. The OHA cleared the rubbish and re-graded the surface, creating an open courtyard for the use of all tenants. The transformation was impressive, as recognized by both the stakeholders and owners themselves. The Clarks chose not seek an income from their property, instead donating all returns back into the funds of the OHA. This gesture further proved the importance of agency properties and the potential they held for the future of the OHA. Additional houses would be improved with the return, continuing the cycle of OHA care.¹²⁸

The OHA began management in 1906, but a comparison of tenants at the Federal Census in 1900 and again in 1910 serves to show how an undertaking of this magnitude could influence a neighborhood. A comparison of both the 1900 and 1910 Census reveals that in the tenements of 742, 744, 746, 748 and 750 a similar number of families and total number of tenants lived. In the

1900 Census, Workman Place held five rear houses on the court. In these there was one family per house, with family size ranging from two to ten people. In the 1910 Census, the court had eight houses with a similar range in family size.¹²⁹ There were no instances of new construction so the data indicates that at the time of the 1900 Census, three of the small houses stood vacant.

Workman Place was in a Polish neighborhood of Southwark. In 1900, the tenants reported a range of nationalities but were primarily immigrants. Two families were listed as native born American, with the others divided into six Russian, four Irish, four Austrian, two German and one family of Spanish immigrants. A large majority of the men described their occupation as laborers. A sailor, two shoe makers, a machinist and a cabinet maker were also listed. Two tenants reported no occupation.¹³⁰

Table 3. Workman Place Census, 1900

Unit	Name	Number of Tenants	Nationality	Occupation
742	Anthony Gurkaes*	5	Austrian	Laborer
	Mike Micklasy*	2	Austrian	Laborer
744	Fred Wagner	6	Russian	Shoe maker
	Dave Subransky*	8	Russian	None listed
	Anna Hackhaus*	2	Irish	None listed
	John Sedler	2	Russian	Cabinetmaker
746	Manuel Gondalus*	5	Spanish	Sailor
748	Bernard Keys*	2	Irish	Laborer
	Jacob Fredosky*	5	Austrian	Laborer
	And Berry*	2	Austria	Laborer
Rear 1	John Kelkos	7	German	Laborer
Rear 2	John Murphy	2	Irish	Laborer
Rear 3	John Stana*	3	American	Machinist
Rear 4	William Warrington	5	American	Laborer
Rear 5	James Droham*	10	Irish	Laborer
750	Marko Suska	2	Russian	Laborer
	Zedolf Rellenmuck*	2	Russian	Laborer
	A. Mazenerski*	3	German	Shoe maker
	Fran Nesnskie*	4	Russian	Laborer

Note: * means approximation, handwriting on Federal Census indecipherable

By 1910, Workman Place had seen a surge of Polish occupation. Eleven of the families were listed as either Russian/Polish or Austrian/Polish. Five native born Americans had become tenants along with three English, two Swedish, and one German immigrant family. The occupations reported had become more diverse. Rather than “laborer,” there were four stevedores, three laborers, a rigger, an ironworker, a carpenter, a machinist, a baker, a painter, a driver, a steward on a tug, a conductor of a street car, a fisherman, a building watchman, and a department store salesman. Two families were headed by females who reported occupations as laundress and dress-maker respectively. Again, two tenants reported unemployment.¹³¹

Table 4. Workman Place Census, 1910

Unit	Name	Number of Tenants	Nationality	Occupation
742	Roman Florkowski	4	Russian/Polish	Stevedore
	Kate Yella	2	Austrian/Polish	Laundress
	John Ripinska*	3	Austrian/Polish	Carpenter
744	John Sokol	2	German	Stevedore
	Anthony Pritrowich*	4	Russian/Polish	Machinist
	S. Scheataki*	3	Russian/Polish	Stevedore
	Vasvau Avenik	3	Russian/Polish	Baker
	Stanislaus Makowski	5	Russian/Polish	Laborer
746	John Schenatski*	5	Russian/Polish	Stevedore
	Francis Gretoch*	5	Russian/Polish	None listed
748	Tony Yankowski*	5	Russian/Polish	Laborer
Court 1	Frank Summary*	5	American	Salesman
Court 2	Thomas Cosana*	6	English	Conductor
Court 4	Paul Kramtzski	5	Russian/Polish	Laborer
Court 5	George Hall	4	English	Steward on Tug
Court 6	Edward Higgins	2	American	Driver
Court 7	Charles Wilson	2	American	Bldg. watchman
Court 8	Andrew Carlson*	2	Swedish	Iron worker
Court 9	Charles Delaine*	4	Swedish	Rigger
750	William Brown	4	American	House painter
	Joseph Doyle	2	American	Fisherman
	John Flemming	1	English	None listed
	Agnes Rvpasheska*	2	Russian/Polish	Dressmaker

Note: * means approximation, handwriting on Federal Census indecipherable

The comparison of the Census data offers a glimpse into actual families touched by the work of the OHA and also what types of people constituted the Philadelphia working class. Often housing and social reform was only considered to be relevant for the very lowest classes, but the OHA understood early on that the working class was actually a very large percentage of the city. These people held jobs, earned wages, and needed simple housing that could offer healthy living conditions for their families. Workman Place is a perfect vignette of the working class at the turn of the twentieth century.



FIGURE 11. Working Class Housing, Workman Place.

The Workman Place property had both tenements and single-family houses, attracting a range of occupations and incomes.

Workman Place had successfully become a neighborhood center, and it spread its influence to the surrounding area. In 1910, the OHA took management responsibilities for seven new agency properties surrounding Workman Place. These included 103, 105, 115, 117, 123 and 125 Fitzwater Street, as well as the corner property of number 756 South Front Street.¹³² More than simply a series of houses, Workman Place had also created a community. The large open courtyard followed the example of League Street and Casa Ravello before it, becoming a successful playground and gathering space for OHA tenants. Together, they planted vegetable and flower gardens within, and the owners even initiated a kindergarten on the site.¹³³ In the management of Workman Place, the OHA had combined the most successful aspects of agency management, community creation, and practical preservation. These renovations have not only served the purpose of practical preservation as feasible and responsible housing, but they are examples of the earliest historic preservation of modest rowhouses in Philadelphia. They remain today, owned as well as managed by the OHA as successful examples of affordable housing. They also maintain the historic fabric of eighteenth century Philadelphia. Workman Place is an unrivaled example of what practical preservation could attain. Even in its earliest stages, the little court of houses was recognized as one the most inspiring examples of the work of the Octavia Hill Association.¹³⁴

CHAPTER 6: THE OCTAVIA HILL ASSOCIATION 1909-1912

The Octavia Hill Association had secured its place as a considerable force in Philadelphia housing with its championing of the Bill for Municipal Licensing and Inspection of Tenement Houses in 1907. The method of combining housing and social reform had proved a feasible and successful solution for affordable housing for the working class and also a formidable opponent for the speculative builder and landlord unconcerned with the welfare of his tenants. Once decrepit properties in Southwark had become comfortable, simple housing for 389 working class families by the close of 1908. The OHA had increased its reach by focusing not only on its own properties, but offering specialized management of scores of privately owned small houses and tenement buildings. Houses were rehabilitated, communities were created, and tenants could afford homes they could take pride in. The OHA had also created a network of stakeholders invested not only financially, but with a social consciousness for the importance of the work being done. So, when the economy took a turn for the worse in late 1908, the OHA had the support and flexibility most other philanthropic organizations lacked.

The working class felt the full force of the economy in the loss of work, lack of steady labor, or cuts to already low wages. The OHA recognized that as a direct result, the tenants would struggle to pay their rents. The amount of losses and vacancies in the OHA properties was unprecedented.¹³⁵ The Board of Directors formed an Aid Committee for the tenants of the OHA. Aid had been administered in the past, in cases of tuberculosis and other illnesses, but it would now also assist in securing work. The OHA had found ways to reclaim the most dilapidated houses while

fostering individual reform in the tenants. At the close of 1908, the OHA was looking to expand that work in a way which could restore families burdened by unemployment.¹³⁶

The Octavia Hill Association faced a crossroads in 1909. The economy had affected the tenants ability to pay and the real estate market was proving to be difficult as well. Since incorporation, the OHA had focused its work on the district of Southwark, a section of the city struggling with population growth and a stock of older housing. However, thirteen years later, the ability to acquire buildings at a rate which would create a profit was increasingly difficult. The OHA found that in order to continue its philanthropic work on sound business principles, the organization would need to expand its scope of work.¹³⁷

Even in the face of a change in operations, the OHA did not abstain from continuing its quest for municipal reform. The Association joined forty other social work organizations to form the Philadelphia Housing Commission. Although the Bill for Municipal Licensing and Inspection of Tenement Houses of 1907 required the Bureau of Health to employ one or more Special Tenement House Inspectors to regularly inspect the tenement houses for violations, the city government was struggling to perform this duty as often as specified.¹³⁸ The Philadelphia Housing Commission was intended to aid public authorities in the enforcement of existing housing laws. The Commission would also serve as the flagship agency in advocating or promoting the enactment of any new housing conditions.¹³⁹

Not long after the creation of the Commission, the OHA joined to support of legislative bills, 863 and 864. Bill 863 would provide individual water supply for small dwellings. The law would restrict shared water sources, except in the case of a court, in which not more than three houses could share a supply. Bill 864 authorized the Department of Public Health and Charities to make sanitary inspection of all dwellings as often as deemed necessary. Current legislation had secured inspections for tenements, but as of 1910 there were no laws to mandate inspections of the small house. The Octavia Hill Association had won protection for some of their tenants in 1907 and was determined to secure protection and regulation for the rest in 1910. According to the OHA, 567 applications for licenses for tenement houses had been rejected in the previous year. However, the owners of these buildings had found ways to cheat the system, by converting these unsanitary and unfit structures into “boarding houses” instead. In other cases, the landlords just converted them to two family houses, thus escaping the title of a tenement building. These loopholes in the regulations avoided inspections. The OHA, along with the Philadelphia Housing Commission and the other thirty-nine organizations which it comprised, sought to close these gaps in regulation by having all buildings subject to inspection.¹⁴⁰

The OHA continued to operate both owned and agency properties, but by 1910, the shift in focus of the organization was becoming more apparent. A recently acquired property, 427, 429 and 431 Montrose Street, was a six hundred square foot site in the crowded Italian quarter. A total of fourteen houses stood on the lot, all in extreme stages of neglect.¹⁴¹ The dwellings surrounded a large open space, which had become a dump at the time of purchase. Reminiscent of Workman Place, the lot was cleared and re-graded to serve as a central yard. Twelve of the existing

houses were underdrained, refitted with plumbing, and entirely renovated. For the first time since Brown's Court, the OHA reported that two frame houses on the site were beyond repair and had to be demolished. In their place, and as the second instance of new construction, the OHA built two brick houses of two stories fitted with a total of four apartments.¹⁴²



FIGURE 12. The Property of 427, 429, and 431 Montrose Street.

A total of fourteen frame houses at time of purchase, two were found to be beyond repair. The brick houses shown above are OHA new construction replacements.

The idea of new construction had sparked interest among the Board of Directors of the Octavia Hill Association. In particular, a proposal had been made in 1910 which considered the construction of a block of model, two-family houses. Considering the struggle to acquire buildings at a rate which would create a profit, the OHA was already looking for ways to expand its scope. The stakeholders also supported the proposal, offering considerable funds to get the project off the ground. The Board of Directors decided in 1910 that the OHA was not yet ready to take on the responsibility such an endeavor would require.¹⁴³ However, just one year later with pressure from the stakeholders, the OHA announced plans for a large scale new construction project of sixteen houses.¹⁴⁴

The announcement of such a change in operations came in the wake of a geographic shift in focus. In 1911, the OHA had purchased thirty-eight houses holding forty-three families in the district of Germantown and twenty houses holding twenty-one families on the 1300 block of North Front Street.¹⁴⁵ For fifteen years, the Octavia Hill Association had concentrated its housing and social reform in Southwark, and now it took a huge geographic leap. The new construction project was also proposed in the Germantown district. Faced with the difficult real estate prospects of the time and a need to broaden the scope of work to grow as an organization, the OHA decided to change the tactics which had defined it previously. Practical preservation, which had led the housing reform fight in Philadelphia, was replaced as the primary tool of the Octavia Hill Association.

304-308 LOMBARD STREET: A CASE STUDY

This change of focus by the Octavia Hill Association shaped the future of housing reform in Philadelphia. However, new construction eclipsed rehabilitation gradually, and the small dwellings and tenement buildings of Southwark would remain a large percentage of OHA holdings for years to come. Practical preservation had been developed in the small courts and alleys of Philadelphia. The OHA's purchase of 304-308 Lombard Street was an example of the typical conditions the OHA faced in the rehabilitation of small houses and tenements in the heart of the Southwark district. While the other case studies of League Street and Workman Place were successes of great significance to OHA development, 304-308 Lombard Street is an example of the usual and unremarkable. Within these studies, the range of OHA housing and social reform be fully understood. Purchased in 1910, amid an era of great change in the organization, 304-308 Lombard Street is also a study in the application of practical preservation before it was abandoned as the solution to housing reform.

The property at 304-308 Lombard Street consisted of two large tenements, one containing a store at street level. The tenement numbered 308 was first mentioned in 1867 in a deed as a three story brick building with a brick piazza.¹⁴⁶ The lot at 304 is not described until 1886, in a deed that named five three story brick tenements.¹⁴⁷ At the time of purchase by the OHA in 1910, the lot was said to contain two large tenements, adjoined with an archway seven feet in width. The arch led to an open court containing four small dwellings. The tenement at number 308 contained the commercial front, home to a grocer, with the four small houses lined up behind the

tenement.¹⁴⁸ The property had been coveted by the OHA for years, but the landlord had refused to accept the offer of the OHA until the conditions became so unlivable, he was forced to repair or sell. More often than not, the disinterested landlord would rather give up his property than repair the consequences of years of neglect.



FIGURE 13. The Archway of 304-308 Lombard Street, shown in 1961. The archway is seven feet wide, leading between the tenements to the court of small houses within the block.

As with many other OHA properties, 304-308 Lombard Street consisted of a combination of tenements and small houses. The tenants of small houses were usually of a slightly higher class than those living in tenements, according to the experience of OHA management. Tenements which were adjacent to small houses were more desirable than those which were not, as the small houses often acted as steadying influences, ensuring social stability and strengthening financial returns. Tenants of small houses tended to be more permanent than those in the tenements, and they were more invested in the upkeep of their home.¹⁴⁹ At the time of acquisition, an inspection of the tenants revealed that, in this instance, tenants in the tenements were of the same class as those in the small houses. The tenement had a couple of vacant rooms, but the OHA was forced to eject some of the occupying tenants for bad reputation. The houses in the court were occupied by Austrian and Russian Jews, with two families notably living in the house for nine and thirteen years respectively.¹⁵⁰

FIGURE 14. Plan of 304-308 Lombard Street.

A comparison of the court based on Census information from 1900 and 1910 reveals the type of tenants the court had seen prior to OHA management. In 1900, five families lived in tenement number 304, six families occupied number 308, and two families lived in the small houses. In 1910, 304 still had five families, 308 had dropped to only four families, and the court was home to three. The 1900 Census also reveals that all but two families were Russian, the others being Austrian/Polish and German. The 1910 Census is slightly more diverse, with six Lithuanian/Russian, one Russian, one Russian/Polish, two Austrian, two Austrian/Polish, and one Romanian family. Occupations in 1900 included three peddlers, two laborers, two pants makers, a shirt packer, coat finisher, a tailor, a confectionary and a teacher.¹⁵¹ In 1910 the occupations appear more specialized, including a candy store proprietor, pickle shop proprietor, salesman at a furniture store, ,commercial salesman at a novelty house, shipping clerk, carpenter, seamstress, tailor, shoemaker, two laborers, and coal wagon driver.¹⁵² Another glimpse into the working class targeted by the OHA once again reveals that the class was comprised of common crafts and not associated with poverty. In 1910, the shoemaker owned his own shop, and in 1900 one tenant even described himself as a gentleman. Knowing that the tenants were wage earners with respectable work, it is difficult to connect these people with the deplorable conditions they were forced to live in.

Table 5. 304-308 Lombard Census, 1900

Unit	Name	Number of Tenants	Nationality	Occupation
304	Harry Slutz	7	Russian	Confectionary
	Hynan Dovalatsky	2	Russian	Gentleman
	Issac Suskey	6	Russian	Pants maker
	Carenia Denmitre*	6	Russian	Laborer
	Nalensted Kolinin	3	Russian	Laborer
Court 2	Harry Gerson*	7	Russian	Pedler
Court 3	Israel Carpel	7	Russian	Shirt packer
308	Jacob Blum*	3	Russian	Teacher
	Rachel Weisman	5	Polish/Austrian	Finisher on coats
	Samson Sevinsky*	4	Russian	Tailor
	Samuel Brown	7	German	Peddler
	Nathan Herkowitz	2	Russian	Pants maker
	Abraham Goldman	7	Russian	Peddler

Note: * means approximation, handwriting on Federal Census indecipherable

Table 6. 304-308 Lombard Census, 1910

Unit	Name	Number of Tenants	Nationality	Occupation
304	Harry Coopelan*	5	Lith./Russian	Candy proprietor
	George Rosse*	3	Austrian	Laborer
	John Schwartz	1	Lith./Russian	Tailor
	Mahetr Lugvet	1	Russian/Polish	Laborer
	Dominick Grems*	7	Lith./Russian	Salesman
306	Jacob Watenmaker	9	Lith./Russian	Pickle proprietor
	Manuel Wagner	10	Austrian	Carpenter
	Abraham Goldman	8	Lith./Russian	Salesman
308	Joseph Sobel	6	Romanian	Shipping clerk
	Annie Epstein	7	Lith./Russian	Seamstress
	Samuel Feldman	3	Russian	Shoe maker
	Peter Belowich	3	Austrian/Polish	Coal wagon
	Alexander Hetman*	7	Russina/Polish	Barbershop
	Joseph Shanihos*	5	Russian/Polish	Laborer

Note: * means approximation, handwriting on Federal Census indecipherable

The conditions of 304-308 Lombard Street in 1910 were examples of the typical environment the working class inhabited. A renovation undertaken in all OHA managed properties was the refitting of plumbing. Even if the building was not particularly old, the neglect over time almost always caused problems in the plumbing first. This property was no exception, with a lack of convenient water supply, sinks, or toilet compartments for the families of both the tenements and houses. One hydrant was located in the court for the four houses, and the tenements had one rusty sink per floor. The pipes for the tenement sinks were so inadequate that water would not reach the upper floors. The only toilets on site were ten compartments at the very back of the court. Not only did these lack privacy, but for tenants of the top floors of the tenements, they were terribly inconvenient. The OHA began its renovation by installing separate sinks in each of the four houses as well as in each of the eleven sets of rooms. One small room of the tenement at 308 was turned into a bathroom with four toilets for the six sets of rooms in the building. The smaller tenement had two toilets installed. The toilet compartments in the court were reduced to six, meant to serve both the houses and first floor rooms of the larger tenement.¹⁵³

The OHA discovered that interior walls of the dwellings had six or more layers of floral wallpaper, hiding successive layers of dirt. The paper also hid the broken plaster which in many cases had rotted out. Such conditions bred disease and insect infestation, a common plague in neglected houses. The OHA did not support the use of paper in its renovations for just that reason, but felt that paint and whitewash were a cleaner look with much easier upkeep. The rooms of 304-308 Lombard were scraped and plaster was repaired and made solid. The ceilings received

an application of color wash while the walls were painted in oil paints of good, strong color.

The OHA painted the woodwork in a contrasting color, and added a chair rail eight inches wide around the perimeter of the room to protect the paint and plaster from damage.¹⁵⁴



FIGURE 15. Interior of a Lombard Street Tenement, 1914.

This is an example of a common working class room in a tenement. A single room could be the living, sleeping, cooking, and bathing quarters for an entire family.

The windows of the tenements and small houses were described as old-fashioned with upper sashes which could not be moved. The OHA did not replace them, as they were of good quality and appearance. The edges were simply loosened so the windows could be let down by hinged strips of wood. Described as a “makeshift” solution, it was because the old fashioned

sashes prevented the use of window cords. The chimneys of the building had become fire hazards through years of neglect, and the OHA had them cleaned of accumulated soot. Stove pipes were installed as needed, and all wooden fireboards were replaced with ones made of iron.¹⁵⁵

The renovation of 304-308 Lombard also included installation of closets within the rooms when possible, and open shelves when not. Each set of rooms as well as the four houses were piped for gas and fitted with its own meter. The OHA would no longer allow the use of oil stoves because of their dangerous nature. Additionally, roof work, repointing of exterior walls, and carpentry was completed as needed. The tenement of 308 had cellars under three of its ground floor rooms, but the fourth rested on the ground, creating notoriously damp conditions. The OHA dug out an air chamber below the floor, added a cellar window, and covered the lower half of the interior walls with waterproof tar paint. Padlocked coal bins were added and assigned to each tenant. Finally, the yard was cleared of the trash and debris. A large fence that had cordoned off one of the tenements was removed, and a new brick pavement installed. The one small tree that survived was described as battered and broken. The improvements allowed for more light and air, creating a usable yard for the children.¹⁵⁶

The site of 304-308 Lombard was a typical property, one of the many small courts located in Southwark exhibiting many of the common conditions addressed. The work described on these dwellings comprised much of the work undertaken by the OHA in its rehabilitations of small houses in the era of OHA practical preservation. 304-308 Lombard Street still exists as a small court today, although the tenement structure of 304 Lombard has been replaced with new construction.

CHAPTER 7: ANALYSIS

The period of preservation as a tool for housing reform in the Octavia Hill Association can be viewed in three phases, describing its development, expansion, and eventually demise. The first phase was one of experimentation and adaptation, which solidified public trust in preservation as a feasible method of housing reform. The second phase was of great success, with the OHA becoming an influential player in the reforming of housing in Philadelphia. The final phase reflected the effect of economic change and a fluctuating housing market on the role of preservation in the city. While preservation continued to be supported, it was replaced with new construction as the primary tool of the OHA. The OHA had outgrown Southwark and found it increasingly difficult to maintain profit margins and investor interest in the boundaries it had identified fifteen years prior. Submitting to stakeholder pressure, the OHA had to restructure its priorities. Preservation became a supplemental tool instead of the primary one. The era of preservation as the key to housing reform for the OHA had passed, but not before securing an influential and lasting position for preservation in the city of Philadelphia. The OHA proved that preservation was a logical, feasible, and realistic tool for city planning.

The Octavia Hill Association adapted the methods of Octavia Hill in London to fit the physical, political, and social context of Philadelphia. Whereas Octavia Hill had discovered rehabilitation out of necessity, the Octavia Hill Association made a conscious and bold decision to preserve Philadelphia's housing stock as the primary tool of housing reform. The methods of the OHA were the first in the United States to fully embrace Octavia Hill's methods of social reform

as an integral aspect of housing reform. The OHA was a self-supporting, a philanthropic effort based on sound financial footing. The OHA took the role of the landlord: enforcing the duties expected of the tenant, encouraging change through sympathy and counsel, promoting stability through employment, and educating the tenants to help them manage their lives. The OHA was clear in its expectations of the tenant, and also of its intent to maintain a stable environment. The OHA promised prompt repairs, secure sanitary conditions, and contributions to the efficiency, capacity, and possibly the happiness of each individual. In return for the reasonable rents, respect, and counsel, the OHA demanded a new level of behavior from the tenants. Tenants were allowed to reap the benefits of the OHA housing only as long as they paid their rents on time, maintained sanitary upkeep, prevented unnecessary abuse of the property, maintained employment, sent their children to school, remained respectful of their neighbors, avoided vice, and generally upheld respectable lifestyles.

Octavia Hill maintained that housing reform required personal contact to succeed and that money spent solely on bricks and mortar was not enough.¹⁵⁷ Housing reform needed social reform to be sustainable. Charity would not help the working class escape poverty because it would not demand a change in their behavior. The OHA method adhered to the belief that a working man should be able to pay for his housing, which would, in turn, cultivate the self respect so desperately needed. A new self respect would give working class citizens confidence in pursuing greater opportunities, thus pulling themselves out of inadequate conditions. The result would be a more industrious, motivated, and useful citizen, who would benefit the city. The Civic Club had created the Octavia Hill Association to further the mission to “promote by education and active

cooperation a higher public spirit and a better social order.”¹⁵⁸ Through education, supervision, and encouragement, the OHA was able to produce citizens beneficial to that higher public spirit. Octavia Hill’s methods of social reform were instrumental in forming the basis of housing reform of the Octavia Hill Association.

The focus on rehabilitation and adaptation of social reform methods converged in a successful model of housing reform in Philadelphia. The OHA mission was to purchase, renovate and manage the old housing stock, in order to create safe and healthy housing. However, by 1899 the OHA had extended its capacity to also accept management roles in properties owned by individual landlords.¹⁵⁹ These agency properties were a turning point in the work of the OHA. The business model of the OHA meant that it could only select properties which were financially feasible to rehabilitate. After all, the solicitation of investment promised a fair return on the properties. As a result, many extremely dilapidated structures, or ones whose owners asked inordinately excessive prices, were not able to be taken under OHA ownership. The decision to begin management of agency properties quickly increased the number of properties the OHA could undertake. Private owners did not have to worry about immediate financial return the way the OHA had to, so they could buy up those properties the OHA had passed on. The owners would then turn over the property to the management of the OHA, and the same renovations and social reform efforts would occur. By 1903, the number of agency properties the OHA managed exceeded the number of properties the OHA owned. In developing the agency effort, the Octavia Hill Association had quickly maximized its reform efforts.

Although the OHA eventually turned to new construction, practical preservation was a breakthrough in affordable housing, as proven by the fifteen years of OHA success. Prior to 1912, new construction had been undertaken only twice: in Brown's Court of 1904 and at 427, 429 and 431 Montrose Street of 1910. In both instances, the property was mostly renovated. Small, new construction projects were built where it was deemed absolutely necessary, because the rehabilitation of particular structures was not feasible. In comparison, there were no instances of new construction in the agency properties prior to 1912. Agency properties were not restricted to the same financial returns that the purchased properties were, which allowed for an uninhibited use of preservation. Agency properties allowed for a farther reach of OHA reform, and they secured the role of practical preservation as the primary tool of the OHA.

With more properties rehabilitated, the OHA was able to increase the number of neighborhood centers created. The OHA could not purchase entire blocks of housing, but it could manage them. The extension of the OHA business model to include agency properties resulted in an overwhelming surge of influence within Philadelphia. Community creation was the result of an evolution in method. The original mission specified the rehabilitation of the single house, but the OHA soon discovered that management of larger areas caused a wider range of influence through the neighborhood. The OHA strove to maximize potential of its renovations by undertaking groups of houses large enough that they could become neighborhood centers. By renovating and reforming larger sections, the influence was felt over a much larger radius.¹⁶⁰ The creation of communities furthered the efforts of social reform, as tenants had grown from the guidance of a single rent collector to working with other tenants in similar circumstances. Through community

creation, tenants founded an intricate web of support, increasing the possibilities of social reform. The small houses, rather than high rise tenements, encouraged the familiar neighborhood dynamic.

The Octavia Hill Association recognized there were two methods of affordable housing at the turn of the 20th century. The popular choice was to demolish neglected buildings and build new large scale tenements to house a great number of people. The second was to rehabilitate existing housing, refitting and restoring it to create healthy and respectable housing for the working class. The OHA blazed the trail of rehabilitation by improving the many small, well built houses that had been Philadelphia's primary fabric for generations. Based upon precedent of London, the Octavia Hill Association was confident that old houses could be renovated to become comfortable homes. This method of housing reform was a massive undertaking in a city plagued by municipal weakness and social struggles. The OHA was able to garner support by presenting reform as a financial endeavor for the sake of philanthropy. The investment promised return, quickly drawing the interest of the middle class of the city. Philanthropy as charity was the territory of the upper classes, but by offering philanthropy as a business, the middle class could participate. The OHA recognized that its role as a housing reform agency called for a responsibility to fight for housing regulations, but it was only through the wide base of middle class support that the OHA was able to take effective political action.

The Octavia Hill Association proved that preservation was a logical solution to housing reform. Three legacies of the reform work were the Bill for Municipal Licensing and Inspection

of Tenement Houses in 1907 which mandated tenement regulations, Bill 864 which authorized the Department of Public Health and Charities to make sanitary inspection of all dwellings, and the role of the OHA in forming the Philadelphia Housing Commission. By advocating for a class of citizens Philadelphia had ignored, the OHA had created a public consciousness about living conditions. Municipal reform was a direct result of the housing reform done in this era.

The work of the Octavia Hill Association would influence change outside Philadelphia as well. The OHA had enlisted Emily Dinwiddie, the City Inspector for the Tenement House Department of New York, to lead the housing investigations described in the 1904 publication of “Housing conditions in Philadelphia.” Early in her career, Dinwiddie had seen the practical preservation and social reform work in Philadelphia. She returned to New York City and by 1910 had become supervisor of New York’s Trinity Church properties, the largest owner of low-income housing in the city. She consciously patterned her work on that of the OHA. The methods were successful again, and by 1918, Trinity Church was a model corporate landlord in New York City.¹⁶¹ The Octavia Hill Association had become an influential force in American housing reform.

Today, the OHA continues as a successful housing agency, still maintaining affordable housing for Philadelphia’s working class. The friendly rent collector has become the association property manager based in an on-site office. The agency continues to strive to help Philadelphians live in better conditions than they could otherwise afford, a mission conceived over 115 years ago. The work of the OHA today still reflects the foundation created in those first fifteen years, with concentration on job training, access to programs and information, and assisting tenants to

help themselves end dependency on welfare.¹⁶² Although the agency has expanded and continues new construction, the undercurrent of practical preservation remains. The property of Workman Place, a thriving property of the OHA still, is a testament to its preservation principles. The model homes undertaken in the years after 1912 also remain in OHA care. Once the symbolic turning point in OHA priorities, this block is now preserved as historic fabric of Philadelphia as well. The Octavia Hill Association at the turn of the 20th century had created the first reform agency to secure practical preservation as an influential and lasting housing solution in the city of Philadelphia. The Octavia Hill Association of today has maintained a role in the development of preservation for logical, feasible, and practical purposes.



FIGURE 16. Workman Place, 19th-century and 21st-century.

The top image is an undated 19th-century view of the interior court of Workman Place. The bottom image is the same view in present day. Workman Place remains a model of practical preservation in the OHA.

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