The Abington YMCA: A Case Study of an American Institutional Building Type

Christine Durham Bogrette

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THE ABINGTON YMCA: A CASE STUDY OF AN AMERICAN INSTITUTIONAL BUILDING TYPE

Christine Durham Bogrette

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Introduction

American cities, small towns, and suburban communities share a common building type that has evolved during the past century and a half. It belongs to an institution that is familiar to generations—the Young Men's Christian Association. In many cases, the YMCA has occupied a central location whether it be at the juncture of two main streets in a city or along a main thoroughfare in a small town. Its neighboring buildings have traditionally been the church, the public school, the bank, the court house, and, in some instances, the railroad station. It is a building type that is designed for interaction with the people and for this main reason it can be labeled an American landmark for it is a familiar place regardless of its geographical location.

As a topic, YMCA architecture has been relatively untouched. Since the Y began as an evangelical movement, it is possible that it has been an area deemphasized by academic study. Even though the movement has been a worldwide progressive force, it has had a history that was not always inclusive. These attitudes, reflected in the architecture, evolve with the currents of history. The aim of this study, however, is not to evaluate the practices and programs of the YMCA but to focus on its architecture. Designed by hundreds of different architects, these buildings were intended to reflect an image of permanence yet, most importantly, they had to be socially welcoming. The resulting forms, in most cases, were classically inspired; they
were conceived not as grand architectural statements but as facilities or, to use YMCA terminology, as simply "tools." Since this institution and its buildings have become an integral part of American communities even to the extent of being likened to community centers, a study from an architectural standpoint will contribute towards a better understanding of these familiar places.

This study will focus on the Abington YMCA located about ten miles North of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. (Fig. 1) The building fronts the east side of Old York Road, a major north-south corridor that becomes Broad Street as it enters the City of Philadelphia. Old York Road is one of Pennsylvania's earliest highways running north from Philadelphia to New York. It remained a toll road until 1918, when the State Highway Department purchased the corridor from its operating company. The toll gate, which has since been demolished, was located at the intersection of Old York Road and Susquehanna Road which is the same area where the Abington YMCA is located. Surrounding the YMCA are the local community institutions which include: the Abington Public School, the Abington Bank and Trust Company, the Presbyterian Church, and the Public Library. In 1915, when the Abington YMCA was built, only two of these institutions existed: the Presbyterian Church and the Abington Public School. (Fig. 2).

As a case study, it illustrates two important facets of YMCA history: first, the "great YMCA building movement" which occurred between 1900 and 1920;

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and second, the development of branch, community type YMCA facilities.4

This example also provides an account of a continually operating YMCA building which experienced architectural changes along with the growth and changing needs of the Association and its community. The Abington building, which was completed in 1916, is a brick, two and a half story Colonial Revival style structure with a one-story pool wing attached to the rear facade. A series of additions have since been built, tripling the original square footage, and forming the present L-shaped configuration. When the Y opened it began with a membership of 200, today it serves over 5800 members.5

While representative in many ways, the building is also unique in the history of YMCA endeavors. First, funds were donated and the building was constructed before there were any members; and second, the Y placed equal attention on the interests of both males and females which is evident in the design of the facilities. The Association was established as a branch of the Philadelphia YMCA which leads to the larger subject of the history of the Y in Philadelphia which is credited to be the the first YMCA to establish branches in residential communities.6

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5Abington YMCA, "Y Facts," (Fall 1992), 2.
Figure 1. The Abington YMCA, 1992.

Figure 2. Aerial Photograph of Abington, Pennsylvania. From the Delaware Valley Regional Planning Commission, 1990.
Chapter One:
Overview of YMCA History and Early Building Evolution

The YMCA originated in a London dry goods store in 1844. A group of twelve salesmen, led by George Williams (1821-1905), formed the organization to improve "the spiritual condition of young men engaged in the drapery and other trades by the introduction of religious services among them."^7(Fig. 3) Williams, a farmer from Somerset, had been apprenticed to a dry goods merchant at the age of sixteen. Inspired by the writings of the American evangelist, Charles G. Finney who stressed morality and non-denominational emphasis, Williams developed a life-long mission. The dry goods business was a hard living that entailed long hours, crowded living accommodations, and poor moral conditions. "Competition in business was so keen that in many houses 'a premium was set upon misrepresentation,' and 'intemperance and dissolute living were winked at in the case of a skillful salesman.'"^8 Williams and his friends set up prayer meetings and Bible classes which in combination with fellowship had the effect of raising morale.

The first formal location of the Association was rented in a coffeehouse and later moved to a tavern called Radley's Hotel. As the Association grew, larger and more attractive rooms were rented and branches were opened. Meanwhile in the United States, Thomas Valentine Sullivan, a retired sea captain and lay missionary for the Baptist Church became familiar with the

^7Hopkins, History of the YMCA in North America, 4.
^81bid.
work of the Association from articles in the *Boston Watchman* and *Reflector*. In 1851, he visited the London Association and returned to Boston with the intent of forming an Association. The first YMCA in the United States was officially constituted in Boston in the Chapel of the Old South Church in Spring Lane on December 29, 1851. Their first quarters were in rooms of the fourth floor of a building at the corner of Summer and Washington streets. (Fig. 4)

![Figure 4](image)

**Figure 4.** First Quarters of the Boston YMCA. From Hinding, *Proud Heritage*, 17.

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10 Ibid.
Twenty-five days earlier an Association had been organized in Montreal but no knowledge of this group reached Boston for more than two years. Due to much publicity from the press about the Boston Association, new groups were formed in twenty American cities including New York, Chicago, Washington, Buffalo, New Orleans and San Francisco within the following two years. By the time the nineteenth century was coming to its close, there were five thousand Associations in twenty-four countries with a half a million members.

In 1859, the first association building was erected in the United States in Baltimore, Maryland. The building, which cost $7,000 to erect, was located at the corner of Shroeder and Pierce Streets. The primary space within this simple, brick building was a large two story assembly hall that was surrounded by tall windows. It is described in the International Convention Report of 1865, "We have a fine building, two stories high: the building is thirty-five feet front by seventy feet deep: we have a large hall in the second story which we use for prayer meetings and lectures: on the first floor we have fine rooms, one for a library, the other for business of the Association..."  

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11 Field Work of the Young Men's Christian Associations of North America (New York: Association Press, 1912), 5.
12 Ibid.
13 Hopkins, History of the YMCA in North America, 6.
14 Hinding, Proud Heritage, 21.
15 Hopkins, History of the YMCA in North America, 35.
With the exception of the Baltimore YMCA, all other American associations of the 1850's rented rooms.\textsuperscript{16} Even before the building campaigns started, location played an important role in order to be accessible to the young men whom they hoped to attract to their program -"young men adrift in the new cities."\textsuperscript{17} It was stressed in YMCA literature that the buildings be located on a principal street and near other public buildings. This accessibility, it was hoped, would ultimately result in interest in the libraries,

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., 34.
\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., 15.
lecture courses, and social activities. The fine quarters of the London YMCA in Gresham Street were often emulated in American Associations.\textsuperscript{18}

Two and a half years after the organization of the Boston YMCA, Philadelphia began its involvement with the Association. On June 15, 1854, a group led by George H. Stuart was formed in Sansom Street Hall. Stuart was the first president, and John Wanamaker was the first secretary. The Association began its programs in a large second story room at 162 Chestnut Street which was considered to be a central place at the time.\textsuperscript{19} Three years later, Mr. Stuart notes in a report that the Association occupied, "two rooms on Chestnut Street, near tenth, fitted up in an elegant manner, and comparing favorably with any rooms of this character in the United States;" however, he found these quarters to have limitations and concluded the report with an appeal for a building. \textsuperscript{20} (Fig. 6) He writes, "Art, literature, fashion and trade have their homes; vice in many ways has hers; why should the single exception be in the case of virtue and religion? The Young Men's Christian Association is pre-eminently a social institution and its grand, central idea is that of making a safe and attractive home for every virtuous young man."\textsuperscript{21} In 1865, a building at 1210 Chestnut Street was leased by the Association, and was afterwards purchased in 1868 for the sum of $35,000.\textsuperscript{22} A year later the subject of branch associations was brought up in the President's report, where he remarks, "this, we anticipate as our future work." This action was deferred, however, due to

\begin{footnotes}
\item[18]Ibid.
\item[20]Ibid., 9.
\item[21]Ibid.
\item[22]Ibid., 17.
\end{footnotes}
the substantial cost of the property at 1210 Chestnut Street. It was not until 1885 that any permanent form of branch work was undertaken.

Figure 6. Second Home of the Philadelphia YMCA located at 1009 Chestnut Street. From the Campbell Collection. Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Association architecture began to fully take its shape by 1869. What began as a form of church architecture developed into a new type of building that reflected the evolving programs of the YMCA. Although not fully accepted at first, gymnasiums became a part of Y facilities in order to attract the interest of young men. During the same time period, entrepreneurs and municipal governments began to build gymnasiums to meet the demands of the growing middle-class and wealthy urbanites. "The idea of encouraging

\[23\] Ibid., 18.
physical development dovetailed with increasing cultural worries about mentally overtaxing both the young and the mature in an increasingly urban, bureaucratic, and sedentary society."\textsuperscript{24} The earliest YMCA building to have a gymnasium was opened in 1867 in Chicago. Unfortunately it burned down three months later.\textsuperscript{25}

In 1869, the New York City Association produced a prototype building that influenced future YMCA building design. This structure occupied almost one-third of an acre at Fourth Avenue and East Twenty-third Street and cost $487,000.\textsuperscript{26} The Secretary of the New York Association, Robert McBurney, played a key role during the building period from 1865 to 1898. His design of the lobby became influential because it expressed the idea of unity between the executive offices and the program.\textsuperscript{27} From this central area there were seven exits which led to all the departments, including the physical, which had a gymnasium fifty by seventy feet, baths, and a bowling alley. In addition to lecture rooms and lounges, there was a substantial library that had space for 20,000 books; its shelves covered three walls two stories in height, "reached by galleries and light iron stairs"; it was "well lighted and neatly decorated in fresco."\textsuperscript{28} The building was the highlight of the first issue of \textit{Association Monthly} in 1870. Entitled "The Association in Architecture," the article written by Joseph P. Thompson, D.D., Pastor of the Broadway Tabernacle, describes how "the several phases of Christianity have found expression in the

\textsuperscript{24}Harvey Green, \textit{Fit For America: Health, Fitness, Sport and American Society} (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1986), 182.
\textsuperscript{25}Hinding, \textit{Proud Heritage}, 216.
\textsuperscript{26}Hopkins, \textit{History of the YMCA in North America}, 150.
\textsuperscript{27}Laurence Locke Doggett, \textit{Life of Robert R. McBurney} (Cleveland: F.M. Barton, 1902), 85.
\textsuperscript{28}Ibid., 151.
forms of architecture." He approaches the topic of the gymnasium with the following argument: "Nor does this genial, homelike religion, this religion which seeks the best end in the wisest way, disdain to provide for recreation. The young man exposed to the dazzling enticements of vice in a great city has a soul to be won in Christ, and this will be constantly in the thought of those who seek to draw him in their fellowship as an association of Christians." 

The matter of obtaining an Association building became an important topic both from the design and the financial standpoint in YMCA literature during the years following the Civil War. It was a period marked by an acceleration in growth both by the nation and the YMCA. This factor contributed to the interest in New York's Twenty-third Street building which motivated discussion and ambition of other Associations. Articles were published in the various YMCA periodicals such as the *Monthly*, *The Watchman*, and the *Era* that discussed the advantages of owning a building and methods to obtain one. In 1895, I.E. Brown published his *Book of YMCA Buildings* that included many architectural drawings and suggestions. Shortly after the turn of the century, *The Brickbuilder*, an architectural periodical, began to feature articles on YMCA buildings, at which point these buildings became recognized as a form of standardized building.

New York's Twenty-third Street building was the prototype for Philadelphia's new facility as well as approximately 330 other Association structures. A building fund was incorporated by the Board of Trustees of the

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30 Ibid., 107.
Philadelphia YMCA in 1873 after they purchased the corner of Fifteenth and Chestnut Streets. The Board believed that this would be the center of the city, and that "there were strong moral and practical considerations that justified the placing in the midst of the city's greatest commercial structures on its principal business thoroughfare a great building, dedicated to the idea of work of Christianity in daily life and in business circles."\textsuperscript{32} At the time it was built, in 1877, it was one of the largest structures in Philadelphia.\textsuperscript{33} (Fig. 7) Today, the Packard building stands on the site replacing the monumental, Second Empire style YMCA designed by Addison Hutton.

\textbf{Figure 7.} The Philadelphia YMCA Central Building, Fifteenth and Chestnut Street. From Verdict of Time, frontispiece.

\textsuperscript{32}\textit{Verdict of Time}, 107.
\textsuperscript{33}\textit{Ibid.}, 23.
The importance of a building to an association can also be illustrated in an account of the Germantown YMCA, located about six miles northwest of central Philadelphia. In 1889, their monthly publication *The Record* contained an article entitled "Why Should Germantown Have a New Building?" which outlined a range of reasons supporting the proposition. At this time, the Association occupied a building that they had bought from the First Presbyterian Church in 1873 and which they had subsequently outgrown.\(^4\)

The terminology expressed in the article captures the attitude of the period as well as characteristic views of the YMCA. In response to the question of a new building, three reasons were provided; the first, "Because the times demand it."

The text continues:

This is a progressive age, an age of advancement and development... The law of life is improvement. 'Tear down, remodel, reconstruct according to present needs' is the continual cry. And so in our work. The growth, the development demand different surroundings from those of ten years ago. The work itself has grown. New ideas have been developed, new channels have been opened, and in the deepening, the widening, and broadening we are crowded and cramped in our work. When the work only meant the carrying on of a Young Men's Meeting, the building provided amply for our wants. But now we need room for educational classes: Arithmetic, Book-keeping, German, Elocution. We need room for our lyceum, gymnasium. We ought to have a natatorium and room for boys' work, but we are unable to undertake these because of our crowded quarters.\(^5\)

The final two reasons were based on the inadaptability and condition of their present building.

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In a matter of three years, the Germantown Association had a new building. The architect who received the commission was Mantle Fielding, Jr., the same architect who later designed the Abington YMCA.\(^\text{36}\) The Germantown Association was Fielding's first YMCA project and also one that occurred early in his career. Since Fielding was a longtime resident of Germantown and had completed a number of projects in the area, it is assumed that this factor contributed to his acquisition of the YMCA project.

According to Who Was Who in America, 1897-1942, The Germantown YMCA was one of the best known examples of Fielding's work. During the building process, the architectural drawing of the front elevation continually graced the cover of the Germantown YMCA publication, The Record. (Fig. 8) Stylistically, it was an eclectic combination of forms including a Richardsonian arch as part of the front entrance, Gothic second story bay windows, and a steeply pitched terra-cotta tiled roof with dormers. (Fig. 9) Fielding's trademark, Gothic arched windows with tracery, appear on this building as well as his use of clerestory windows. Although less symmetrical than the Abington building, Germantown shared some characteristics such as the division of the front facade into three bays, with the central bay recessed on the second level to accommodate a balcony. Both buildings had varied roof lines in common and a combination of rectilinear and curved forms.

It is apparent that in order to build a structure of this complexity and scale, the Germantown Association must have been an established institution

Figure 8. Drawing for Germantown's New YMCA Building.
Figure 9. Postcard of the Germantown YMCA.
From YMCA Collection, Germantown Historical Society, Pennsylvania.

Figure 10. Reception Room of the Germantown YMCA.
for many years before construction of the new building and that the Association had developed a range of programs and a high membership level. Included in the new building was a library, a lecture room to seat 200, an auditorium with a seating capacity of 850, a reception hall, a kitchen, an amusement room, a correspondence room, offices, and classrooms.37 The reception room with fireplace and staircase was similar to the configuration of the Abington YMCA although larger and more richly appointed with wood paneling and detailing. (Fig. 10) In the description of the new building in *The Record*, there is substantial concentration on the reception hall which was admired for its adjacency with other rooms and offices, so that when one would enter the building, there could be full control from this one area. The praise of the reception room echoes the attention on the lobby of New York's Twenty-third Street building by Robert McBurney.

In terms of the athletic areas there was a gymnasium, 65 by 62-1/2 feet, with a running track six feet wide, suspended ten feet from the floor around the entire gymnasium. (Fig. 11) There was also a swimming pool, 16 by 50 feet, ranging from 4 to 6-1/2 feet in depth of water. Lockers were available to accommodate 600 members.38 In comparison with Abington's building, Germantown's gymnasium was larger by about 1,582 square feet and the pool was considerably smaller by 1600 square feet. A complete article was dedicated to the new gymnasium of the Germantown YMCA in *The Record* shortly before its completion. The writer praised this new feature and quoted the General Secretary of the time, Mr. W.A. Smalley who announced that "in no

38 Ibid.
time of the history of the YMCA has the gymnasium been accorded so large a space in its buildings all over the country, and at no time has it ever received so much sincere thought, with view to harnessing it to the YMCA chariot, as at present."39 The writer of this article also colorfully described the controversy over the addition of the gymnasium to YMCA buildings. He writes, "The old objections to the gymnasium in the YMCA would fill a library with books, and tire the patience of Job and all his descendants to the present day."40

Figure 11. The Gymnasium of the Germantown, Pennsylvania YMCA. From YMCA of Germantown, Pennsylvania, The Record 12 (June, 1892): cover.

40 Ibid.
By 1906, the Philadelphia YMCA had outgrown its building and began the building process again for their new property on the north side of Arch Street, between Broad and Fifteenth Streets. The Year Book of 1906 states, "in preparing plans, the Directors engaged Professor A.D.F. Hamlin, of the School of Architecture of Columbia University, to act as supervising architect, in which capacity Professor Hamlin had served in connection with several of the largest Association buildings."\(^{41}\) Five firms of architects, that had experience in erecting Association buildings, were selected and invited to compete, each firm to receive compensation for their work. The firms included, Peabody & Stearns, of Boston; Parish & Schroeder, of New York; Harding & Upman, of Washington, D.C.; Cope & Stewardson, of Philadelphia; and Horace Trumbauer, of Philadelphia. The latter received the commission for Philadelphia's new Central YMCA.\(^{42}\)

At the time it was built, the new central facility was one of the three largest Association buildings in the world, the other two being the Central of New York City and of Chicago.\(^{43}\) In terms of capacity, Philadelphia could now accommodate four thousand members, doubling the capacity of its former building.\(^{44}\) (Fig. 12)

By the turn of the century, the YMCA had become a part of American cities offering not only religious fellowship for young men, but athletic recreation, game activities, and educational courses. A multi-purpose program had been developed with the introduction of the natatorium and the

\(^{41}\)The YMCA of Philadelphia, Yearbook (1906), 4.
\(^{42}\)Ibid., 5.
\(^{43}\)The YMCA of Philadelphia, Yearbook (1907), 5.
\(^{44}\)The YMCA of Philadelphia, Yearbook (1906), 5.
gymnasium. Future buildings became identified with these features creating the challenge of integrating them with existing programs and traditional floor plans.

Figure 12. Postcard of the Philadelphia YMCA Central Branch. (circa 1913) From the YMCA Collection, Temple University Urban Archives, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.
The establishment of branch associations created the need for a scaled down building that offered many of the same programs as the central YMCA. In Philadelphia, the first branches were organized in 1885 and by 1889 there were a total of five including a railroad department branch. These new associations were usually located in areas adjacent to the center of cities in industrial, working class areas. These associations, therefore, reflected the ethnicity of their area. For example, Philadelphia had a German branch as well as the Southeast branch, otherwise known as "the colored branch." By the early twentieth century, there were a number of different types of YMCA branches which were designated under the following classifications: student branches, rural branches, railroad branches, and camps.

In order to fully understand the genesis of the Abington YMCA, it is necessary to place it in the context of the greater YMCA movement of the first quarter of the twentieth century. It was during this period (1900-1920) that the "great YMCA building movement" took place, creating 290 buildings in the first sixteen years of that period. To a greater degree than in the past, an Association's identity was tied to its building.

An account of the Abington YMCA begins with John Milton Colton, a longtime resident of Abington, who realized the need for organized youth activities in the area through discussions with a group of men from the Abington Presbyterian Church. His daughter also played an important role in this realization after starting a youth center in the family barn.

The Colton home, "Wyndhurst," stood at the present site of the Strawbridge and Clothier building on Old York Road. Built in 1899-1900 and designed by the Philadelphia architect, Horace Trumbauer, the house was Elizabethan in style with a combination of stone and half-timbering. The property is described in 1904 in the Biographical Annals of Montgomery County Pennsylvania as "laid out in a beautiful and artistic manner with trees and shrubs in abundance thus making it one of the most handsome and

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46 Hopkins, History of the YMCA in North America, 457.
desirable pieces of property in that section of the state."48 (Fig. 13) The house and stable were demolished in 1931 when the department store began construction.


Colton, born in Philadelphia in 1849, was for many years a member of the banking firm E.W. Clark & Company on Fifth and Chestnut Streets, Philadelphia.49 (Fig. 14) During his lifetime, he was active in religious and charitable work which primarily centered around the Abington Presbyterian Church. After his death on June 5, 1913, he left two-thirds of his estate for

49Ibid.
Figure 14. John Milton Colton.
charities which were detailed in his will. The following excerpt outlines his intentions for the establishment of the Abington YMCA: "Three parts go to the executors and trustees of the will for founding and endowing a Young Men's Christian Association at Abington and the erection of a building on Old York Road opposite the Abington Presbyterian Church, to be known as 'Colton Hall,' to be conducted by a board of seven managers, four of whom shall be elected by the Abington Presbyterian Church and three by the adult members of the association. Not over $30,000 shall be expended on buildings and improvements. He donated four acres of ground for the building site. He expressed the desire that some way be devised for girls and women to share in the use of this association, and that a room be devoted for the use of women for meetings pertaining to the welfare of the neighborhood."\(^5\)

Another factor which may have contributed to John Colton's interest in establishing a YMCA may have been his association with John Wanamaker who was a leader of Presbyterian activities in the Philadelphia area and president of the YMCA of Philadelphia. Wanamaker also maintained a summer home on Old York Road near the southern limits of Abington Township.\(^5\)

The first meetings for the formation of the YMCA were held in the chapel of Abington Church in order to develop a constitution and by-laws.\(^5\)

It was later learned that the stipulation in Colton's will that four of the association's seven directors must be members of Abington Presbyterian Church conflicted with the rules of the YMCA forbidding more than a third of the directors of any association from belonging to the same religious

\(^{51}\) East Montgomery County (PA) Realtor (Winter 1957), 7.
\(^{52}\) Jenkintown (PA) Times Chronicle, Oct. 25, 1913 and Nov. 1, 1913.
denomination. In 1915, with the approval of the heirs and the Orphans' Court, the $50,000 was turned over to the Philadelphia Central YMCA, which then erected the YMCA building and continues to conduct it as a branch of the Philadelphia Association. Before the building was constructed, the Association secured space in the Abington High School gymnasium and in one class room in order to hold meetings and sports activities.

Response was positive about the new addition to the "village" of Abington. An article in the Times Chronicle illustrates the local reaction, "Abington will enjoy it (the YMCA) in time as an evidence to the kindly respect and esteem which John Milton Colton felt for the village. He exhibited a great deal of foresight and wisdom in this bequest, for it is about the only thing needed in the York road section today." By March 1914, a new double diamond baseball field was planned to be built on the YMCA's grounds, as well as one or two tennis courts. When ground was broken on May 22, 1915 for Colton Hall, the Times Chronicle proclaimed that, "It will be one of the most elaborate public buildings in the entire Old York road section." The additional gift of $10,000 from Colton's widow, Mary Roberts Colton and her two daughters, for the construction of a swimming pool added to the anticipation for the new building. (Fig. 15)

54 Jenkintown (PA) Times Chronicle, Jan. 3, 1914.
55 Jenkintown (PA) Times Chronicle, Oct. 11, 1913, 4.
56 Ibid.
57 Jenkintown (PA) Times Chronicle, March 24, 1914.

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Figure 15. Mary Roberts Colton.
From the Abington YMCA Collection.
There seems to be no public mention of the architect of the Abington YMCA, Mantle Fielding, Jr. It can be assumed that he received the commission through his experience with two earlier YMCA projects; the Germantown Association in 1891, and the Coatesville Association in 1893. Both these Associations were similar in scale to Abington and were located in small towns. Abington, however, is the only detached building situated adjacent to a cemetery and athletic fields. The Germantown building, once located on 5849 Germantown Avenue, has since been demolished due to the growth of the Association. (Fig. 16)

Figure 16. Mantle Fielding's First YMCA Building in Germantown, Pennsylvania. From YMCA of Germantown, The Record 7 (October 1892).

Interestingly, their current building, is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The Coatesville building, located on Main Street, has since been sold by the YMCA and has been renovated to accommodate office space. (Fig. 17) Today, the YMCA continues to operate in Coatesville, but is located outside the center of town.

Figure 17. Mantle Fielding's Second YMCA Building which is Located in Coatesville, Pennsylvania. (completed in 1893).
Although Fielding completed a great many projects during his architectural career, he is best known for his expertise on colonial painting. After graduating from Germantown Academy, he completed a year of architectural studies at MIT, and returned to Germantown where he resided for the duration of his career. In 1889, he began an independent practice located at 110 S. 4th Street, later moving in 1906 to 578 Walnut Street to accommodate an expanding firm. He began to write on the subject of Art History around 1904, but it was not until 1922 that his first book (co-authored with Edward Biddle), Life and Works of Thomas Sully, was published. It was his book, Dictionary of American Painters, Sculptors and Engravers, which was first published in 1926, that became his best known, highly acclaimed reference work.

In the early 1900's, a number of his architectural projects were published in American Architect and Building News and also in Margaret T. Priestman's work, Artistic Homes. Fielding's architectural practice, which concentrated mostly on residential design, continued through 1938. Some of his better known projects in the suburbs of Philadelphia include his own home, a renovated barn in the Colonial Revival style, that was part of the Wyck estate in Germantown, as well as the Robert S. Newhall house in Germantown, the James N. Stone house in Chestnut Hill and the Robert L. Strawbridge house in Bryn Mawr. (See Appendix G)

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60 Tatum and Moss, Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects, 266.
62 Tatum and Moss, Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects, 266.
63 Ibid.
64 Ibid.
Many months before the completion of the building, the new Executive
Secretary and his wife came to Abington in order to begin organizing the
Association and to run programs in the High School gymnasium. The local
newspaper, meanwhile, began to feature "YMCA Notes" periodically on the
cover page. Building progress would be described as well as schedules for
classes and events. Shortly before the opening of the building, the newspaper
carried an article discussing the merits of a swimming pool. "Now is the time
of year when so many boys get drowned by swimming in rivers and brooks or
ponds, because of the coldness of water or whatever may be hidden below the
murky surface of the water. Here is a place where a boy or girl may quickly
learn to swim in a 'clear lake of filtered water' where everything can be easily
seen, and a competent instructor always in charge. This is a safer place than
the 'old swimming hole' ever was or could be." (Fig. 18 & 19)

A great deal of emphasis was placed on the subject of accommodating
both sexes in the design of the facilities. The opening of the YMCA building
was featured on the cover page of the Times Chronicle with a photograph and
detailed description of the building features. It began with the subject of the
new inclusive design, "A great deal of time and attention and thoughtful
planning was given to making the equipment equally useful for both sexes, to
give them separate locker and shower arrangements efficiently situated yet
distinctly set apart for the definite use of one or the other, as has been so
admirably accomplished in this case." The article continues with a full

Figure 18. The Abington YMCA Swimming Pool Facing West. (circa 1946)

Figure 19. The Abington YMCA Swimming Pool Facing East. (circa 1946)
description of the new building and grounds. "The equipment consists of a swimming pool 20 x 60 feet (4 feet to 9 feet deep); 9 shower baths (two groups of four and a single one); locker rooms for men and women; gymnasium, 40 x 42 feet, with a 22-ft. ceiling and plenty of light; a social lobby, in which are two billiard tables, reading tables and other games; public and private offices; class rooms for educational or Bible class uses or for various community club meetings of all descriptions; a kitchen to interest the inner person at various times; a big athletic field of four acres on which can be found three tennis courts, baseball field, 120 yard straightaway running track; 220 yard circular track, out-door basketball court, jumping pits, etc. A very complete equipment for a new enterprise."68 (Fig. 20, 21, 22, & 23)

Figure 20. The Abington YMCA. (circa 1924)

68Ibid.
Figure 21. Lower Level Plan of Colton Hall in 1916.

Figure 22. First Floor Plan of Colton Hall in 1916.
The building, although only two and a half stories high, seems larger in height due to its siting on Old York Road. It is set back from the road approximately 55 feet with only a small grass yard in front maintaining a close relationship with the streetscape. A sidewalk leads directly to the centrally located front door, which is reached by a substantial half-story stair. This combination of factors, including the parapet roof design which visually creates additional height, produce a building that instills the impression of importance and permanence. To a child entering through the front door, the scale is enhanced to an even greater degree. (Fig. 24)

Stylistically, Colton Hall is a cross between academic and ecclesiastical design. The design reflects the prevalent style of Colonial Revival that began to be popular in the late nineteenth century and continued to be so in the
Figure 24. Front Door of Colton Hall. (1993)
early twentieth century. The symmetrical, three-bay, front facade is more academic in appearance with a large, double front door, a half story above grade, gracing the center bay. A Gothic limestone arch frames the front door and is carved with a naturalistic pattern and the inscription, "Young Men's Christian Association." (Fig. 24) Above the doorway, there is a balcony parapet that is ornamented with four limestone clover shapes within square recessed spaces. All the ornamented limestone is limited to the central section of the front facade around the door area. Limestone, however continues to be used as trim around windows and as horizontal banding. The brickwork, which comprises the majority of the exterior, is an English bond pattern with alternating courses of headers and stretchers. A hallmark of the building is its large amount of glazing on the west and north facades. On the west facade, all three bays contain large windows divided into four long rectangular windows with transom windows above. In the case of the two side bays, the panes are divided into an 8 over 15 pattern. The multitude of square panes created by the heavy, white mullions is a dominate feature of this facade. Another prominent element occurs at the roofline where the center bay has a shaped, three-quarter round gable and the two side bays have triangular gables, each with a long rectangular window.

The north facade is strongly ecclesiastical in appearance due to the five two-story windows with intersecting tracery in the upper portion of them. Perhaps this style of window was chosen to create a relationship with the building context; the Abington Presbyterian cemetery is located adjacent to

the north side of the YMCA. (Fig. 25) In contrast to the front facade, all the others have flat rooflines that are occasionally punctuated with a vertical chimney shaft.

Figure 25. The North Facade Showing Windows into the Gymnasium.

On the opposite, south facade, a small one story area, which was once a porch, was later enclosed and expanded the length of the facade. Also part of the south facade is the one-story, rectangular, swimming pool area that is attached to the east side of the main building. Four large rectangular windows, now filled with glass block, comprise this facade. (Fig. 27 & 28) The most substantial changes have occurred to the rear, east facade due to the later additions that are now attached to its walls. Before the additions, however, the rear facade appeared to be a combination of the north and south walls with
three Gothic arched, two-story windows on the main building and simple large rectangular windows on the pool building. (Fig. 26)

Figure 26. The East Facade Before Additions were Built. (circa 1946)
Figure 27. The South Facade Showing Enclosed Porch.

Figure 28. The South Facade Showing Pool Windows.
In plan, there are three floors; the first floor being a half-story above grade with the main entrance, on the west facade reached by a series of stairs (today, the main entrance is on the East end of the building complex). The first floor is comprised of a front vestibule, a recreation room with a fireplace and stairway (now converted into a child care facility that extends into the enclosed porch area), and a two-story gymnasium that was often used as an auditorium space. This area is filled with light from the tall Gothic arched windows that line two of the walls in addition to the windows of the front facade. The pool area is connected to the east end of the recreation room; an interior window (now removed) between the spaces provided supervision from the recreation room. The tiled pool area is filled with light and has a small spectator's gallery (added in 1958) along its north side. On the ground floor, there were the locker rooms for both men and women (now also converted into a child care facility). The second floor contains a kitchen, lavatory, meeting room and activity room (the latter, now a nursery room). (Fig. 29 & 30)

For the most part, Colton Hall (the original building) remains similar to the day it first opened its doors to the public in 1916. The most significant physical change was the removal of the locker rooms from the ground floor after the new addition was built in 1961. Other areas, although changed minimally, are much different spaces today such as the recreation room and the porch. A partition, built in 1989, now divides the recreation room in half and the fireplace opening has been closed creating an area more commercial than residential in appearance. The enclosure of the porch to accommodate offices also resulted in a similar effect. Many of the finishes have been changed such as the wood flooring to carpeting and the plaster ceilings to
Figure 29. Second Floor of Colton Hall in Southeast Room.  (circa 1954) From the Harry J. Utzy Collection, Old York Road Historical Society, Jenkintown, Pennsylvania.

Figure 30. Second Floor of Colton Hall in Southeast Room.  (1993)
suspended acoustical ceilings. A sprinkler system, throughout the building, is also a very evident addition. What changes have occurred are the result of the need to conform the building to its main function today - child-care. Remarkably, the pool area (which has a new mechanical filter system) continues to be used as it was 77 years ago, even though new Olympic size pools proliferate Montgomery County. Today, however, there is less natural light in this pool area because of the removal of seven windows when additions were built.

A description of the dedication ceremonies reveal the purpose of the Abington YMCA and its role in the community before the era of child-care. The ceremonies lasted three days in May of 1916 with an orchestra and local soloists such as William F. Yerkes of Noble, Mrs. Paul R. Kline of Abington, and the Abington Presbyterian Quartette. Some of the speakers were: Hon. Charles A. Ambler, Speaker, Pennsylvania House of Representatives; John Gribbel, president of the Union League; the Rev. Floyd W. Tompkins of Holy Trinity Church, Philadelphia; and Edward S. Ling, then Abington Township Superintendent of Schools. The program for the dedication of the Abington Association clearly set the tone for the future of the organization with the following statement, "It is not an exclusive club for the benefit of the few, but a haven of inspiration and helpfulness for all - young and old, far and near - It will seek to entertain, inform and inspire every one who enters its doors." 70

A month earlier a similar statement was written in the Directors' Bulletin of the Young Men's Christian Association of Philadelphia entitled Some Results

70"Colton Gift Launched Branch of YMCA In Abington Area," Jenkintown (PA) Times Chronicle, October 2, 1969, 38.
from Philadelphia's Investment in the YMCA. The report likened association buildings to community centers stating:

To those citizens whose generous contributions have made possible the various branch buildings of the Association, it should be gratifying that these buildings have quickly become not exclusive club houses for select groups of members, but, while serving members, have also become in a very marked way community centers. Religious, educational, social and civic groups frequently assemble in the buildings where temporary headquarters of numerous community movements with purposes in harmony with those of the Association are sometimes established. In addition to the facilities of convenient meeting places for community groups in the Association buildings, the Association is rendering a large service to numerous church, educational, recreative and business groups through the council, assistance and leadership given by the various employed officers of the Association throughout the city. Increasingly, the public is recognizing each Association as almost a semi-public or civic agency of large helpfulness in strengthening the better elements of community life.71

Woodrow Wilson, in a speech before the Pittsburgh Association in 1914, expressed a similar notion: "You can test a modern community by the degree of its interest in its YMCA."72

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72Hopkins, 484.
By the time the Abington YMCA was constructed in 1916, the building movement had gained a vast amount of experience through the planning, design and construction of their facilities. The design of Abington’s building reflects many of the characteristics established during the early years of the building movement, while also indicating a new direction of Association architecture. This new direction was the formation of community type buildings in residential areas outside of cities. Before this point was reached, however, the building movement refined their designs to meet the needs of current programs and developed a much more organized system to achieve efficient and lasting buildings.

As the YMCA was experiencing its largest period of growth in the form of buildings between 1900 and 1920, there was minimal information available in the professional magazines regarding the planning and design of YMCA buildings. On the other hand, the YMCA publication, *Association Men,* was almost obsessive on the topic of building construction. Every issue contained a section with varying headings: "For More and Better Buildings," "Nation Wide Building Campaigns," "Buildings For Character-Building," "The Strengthening Building Movement," and "Still More Buildings," but these articles concentrated more on building construction statistics such as costs, fund raising campaigns, and reporting the growing number of buildings than on design. (see Appendix C) In 1919, an article in *Architectural Record* highlights this void in information by contrasting the lack of published
material with the bulk of executed work. Between 1904 and 1919, over 500 new buildings had been erected, aside from a number of renovated buildings.\textsuperscript{73} During this time, more than two-thirds of this work was completed by as few as a dozen architectural firms that specialized themselves almost exclusively in this field.\textsuperscript{74} Due to the complexity of YMCA programs and building requirements, an architectural firm had to have access to a wide range of specialized information, sources, and related trades. For the general architect it was difficult to gain the necessary information or to even have the opportunity to compete for YMCA projects.

In response to this issue, the YMCA established the Building Bureau in 1917 to act as a central repository or clearing house into which the experiences of the movement could be gathered and implemented for the benefit of each new building project. After the formation of the Bureau, a large amount of data was collected and analyzed such as sketch plans and photographs of the best typical buildings in the country, detail drawings of the best construction for standardized parts, information on maintenance and operating costs and earning capacity of revenue producing features. The Bureau then became a source from which an architect could easily draw knowledge and which would ultimately benefit the organization and its membership. Because the Bureau was composed of both architects and engineers, it was able to offer two types of services: full design service and advisory service. When the Bureau was involved as designers, they prepared

\textsuperscript{73}Charles C. May, "A Post-War Construction Program: The Building Bureaus of the International Committee of the YMCA," \textit{Architectural Record} 45 (March 1919): 217. \textsuperscript{74}Ibid.
preliminary studies in their own drafting room. In the advisory service the architect submitted sketches for approval by the bureau.

The Building Bureau (later renamed as the Building and Furnishings Service) was not involved in the construction of Colton Hall because the Bureau did not become fully active until after World War I, but it did serve an advisory role when additions were planned. Today, the Building and Furnishings Service continues to be a resource for new construction as well as renovation projects.

When reviewing the overall building movement, it is evident that a number of design changes took place which responded to both past precedence and future trends. The primary catalyst of these new developments was the physical program that brought the gymnasium and the swimming pool into the forefront of building planning. No longer was the term "YMCA hall" applicable, for the auditorium ceased to be included in building programs and in the case of older facilities, they were often converted into gymnasiums. Libraries continued to be a part of the program although clearly secondary to the trend towards more active pursuits. A significant new addition to the facilities was the dormitory due to its income producing ability and its popularity. The best example of its incorporation occurred in Chicago in the grand form of an eighteen-story YMCA Hotel with 1,821 rooms rented at thirty to fifty cents a night when it opened in 1916.75

In the case of the Abington YMCA, there was little need for a dormitory in a small community with only a population of approximately 9,000.76

75Hopkins, History of the YMCA in North America, 457.
was also little need, nor the means, for a large, complex structure. At the time it was built, Abington was an anomaly in the greater field of YMCA buildings, yet it proved to be an indication of the direction of the movement. In 1919, this trend was recognized in an article in Architectural Record that summed up the direction of the building movement as such:

...then there is the influence upon future construction, of a new conception of the YMCA in relation to its work in large cities and in moderate sized ones having satellite communities more or less closely allied with them. Under such conditions it is proposed, instead of maintaining a single large central plant, to recognize the neighborhood tendency as it is being more and more expressed in community life. There will still be a Central Branch YMCA building, but somewhat smaller in size, and there will be, in addition, a number of buildings of the new 'community' type, located at strategic points, preferably adjacent to athletic fields.\(^{77}\) (Fig. 31 & 32)

This latter description directly applies to the Abington branch and came four years after its opening.

Ten months before the above article was featured in Architectural Record, an article in Association Men addressed the same subject in a less specific manner. The author writes, "A city is no longer a homogeneous mass of people to whom the Association may minister from a single center. Rather it is a consolidation of communities to each of which the Association owes a debt of personal service to be paid in terms of locality needs... All of which spells buildings!"\(^{78}\) At this time, it seems the author recognized the widening

\(^{77}\)May, "A Post-War Construction Program," 221.

Figure 31. Community Type YMCA Building Suggested by the Building Bureau. From May, "A Post-War Construction Program," 218.

Figure 32. Suggested Floor Plan of a Community Type YMCA Building. From May, "A Post-War Construction Program," 219.
role of the YMCA beyond the city, but did not associate a new architectural form with this change.

A number of influences in American culture contributed to the suburbanization of the YMCA. As the population around large urban areas continued to spread farther away from the centers, residential communities grew tremendously. It was common for this growth to occur along major transportation routes that connected city and suburbs such as Old York Road. The automobile was clearly a significant factor that encouraged growth away from the cities. The Abington YMCA, therefore, came into being at a time when this trend was becoming instilled in American culture. It, consequently, proved to become much less of an anomaly after World War I. Ironically, although the Abington example was an early indication of the direction of the movement, its formation was not a meditated forethought on behalf of the Philadelphia Central YMCA but, instead, the result of a conflict between a stipulation in Colton's will and YMCA rules regarding the religious affiliations of directors. Only through this conflict did the Abington Association become a branch of the Philadelphia Central YMCA and a true community type in relation to its urban counterpart.

In design, the Abington YMCA both reflected and deviated from common practices of the time. Stylistically, Colton Hall maintained an image established by the Association since its earliest buildings and which continued to be reinforced in YMCA literature after the turn of the century. In 1903, an article in Association Men entitled "The Modern Association Building" provided a brief retrospective view of Association architecture and continued to define its contemporary role. It was perhaps one of the earliest writings to elaborate on the architecture beyond the outlining of programmatic considerations and
to view the building as an evolving reflection of the YMCA. In describing the features of a modern Association building, the author begins with the exterior appearance by stating that it should be "plain but pleasing" and "devoid of extravagance" with "a broad and inviting entrance." Another article, written in 1905, repeated the same notion that "while the building should not be too plain to lend dignity to the work done in it, it should not bear the marks of extravagance." A later article states, "the exterior should be substantially built of materials not too rich in effect, but of best quality. The building should have a club-like appearance; not that of an apartment house. Good red brick, terra-cotta, or limestone in the hands of an artist will be more satisfying than in marble badly detailed and poorly cut." Although vaguely phrased, this approach toward design proved to be widespread through the duration of the building movement.

Talbot Hamlin briefly addressed the subject of YMCA architecture in his book, *The American Spirit in Architecture*, six years after the building movement had come to a close. He writes, "the buildings of the Young Men's Christian Association and Young Women's Christian Association throughout the country are similar combinations of residential and club buildings, but an extreme rigidity and uniformity of program has produced, frequently, a rather dull and mechanical whole." He cites the Baltimore YMCA building as an exception due to its design characteristics, which in combination "escapes

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80 "Buildings of the Young Men's Christian Association," *Brickbuilder* 14 (1905): 266.
this too common spiritlessness and achieves a dignified and simple formality." Mantle Fielding can be credited of having achieved three spirited YMCA buildings that also adhered to the character of association architecture.

The clearest deviation in the design of Abington's building was the inclusion of locker rooms for females at a point when most YMCA facilities were stressing another issue; the importance of having separate locker rooms for men and boys. This feature can be attributed to the small town location and the freedom of such an Association to establish its own program without the constraints imposed by the issues faced by its urban counterpart. Abington's new building was tailored to serve as a community youth center which recalls John Colton's daughter who had earlier converted the family barn to serve a parallel role. This novel addition of locker rooms for both sexes did not substantially differentiate the configuration of the building from other Y buildings. It was customary to raise the first floor (main entry area) about five or six feet above grade in order to allow natural light and ventilation into the ground floor where the locker rooms, swimming pool, boiler room, and machinery rooms were located. Although it was considered optimal to have the pool area and the locker rooms on the same level, the Abington building was designed with the pool area above on the first floor. This layout provided the possibility for supervision from the recreation room into the pool area through an interior window but created a negative circulation pattern. In order to access the locker rooms from the pool area, one had to descend a

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83Ibid.
staircase into the ground level which would subsequently become exposed to water. Although there was more than one staircase, water eventually was carried from the pool area to the locker rooms because there was not space to allow drying. The locker room addition to the east side of the pool eliminated this problem, many years later, in 1961.

A traditional feature that was prominently included in Abington's building was a large fireplace in the first floor recreation room. When discussed in architectural writings, an "ample" fireplace was considered to be a necessary feature in social rooms. In 1906, an article in The Brickbuilder recommended that the "atmosphere of the entire social portion of the building be that which surrounds the home just as far as at is possible to produce that atmosphere by arrangements, proportions and furnishings." It was also common for a staircase to be located in the same room as the fireplace instead of concealed in a hallway. The reception hall in Fielding's Germantown YMCA is demonstrative of this configuration. (Fig. 10)

A study of suburban homes built between 1877 and 1917. by Mary Corbin Sies, provides an explanation for the design of the living room as the single gathering place in the home. She writes, "to many suburbanites, the institution of the family seemed gravely threatened by the rapid social and economic changes occurring after the Civil War." The living room, therefore, was designed to "foster family unity." Sies also notes that the fireplace was often the central feature of this space. It is understandable the

86 Ibid.
88 Ibid.
YMCA would create gathering spaces, similar to that of the home, in order to encourage social interaction and promote Christian traditions and values. The new community-type YMCA, as demonstrated in the case of Abington, further develops the parallel between residential and YMCA architecture.

The inclusion of fireplaces in building designs continued long after the completion of Abington's building but to a much lesser extent and the staircase became commonly relegated to the fireproof stairwell. The later closing of Abington's fireplace opening, in 1989, marked a point of great change in the building's use and American culture. A schematic plan for the renovation of Colton Hall in 1955 included the removal of the main existing staircase and the installation of two enclosed stairwells. (Fig. 33) This design was never implemented.

Another important feature of Colton Hall was the porch. (Fig. 34, 35 & 36) This, however, was not a common part of most YMCA buildings although some included roof gardens and balconies. As displayed in the 1919 article of Architectural Record, which included architectural plans for a community type YMCA building, a porch was allocated a large amount of square footage on the first floor. (Fig. 32) This new addition to an otherwise standard Association building seems to reflect a conscious effort to emulate suburban residential buildings. In the case of the Abington community, porches were an integral part of the community homes and residential life.

By 1947, the Abington YMCA needed more space for indoor activities and decided to enclose the porch to accommodate these needs. Since it was an area that was only enjoyed for a few months a year, it was not considered practical to have a porch. Both the demise of the fireplace and of the porch illustrate a break from historical YMCA and community forms.
Figure 33. Proposed First Floor Renovation Plan for Colton Hall. Note the removal of the main staircase and the addition of two enclosed stairwells. From YMCA of Philadelphia and Vicinity, "An Investment in Youth and A Dividend for the Community: The $500,000 Building Expansion Fund for the YMCA at Abington," 1955.
Figure 34. Activities in the Porch Area. (circa 1946). From the Harry J. Utzy Collection, Old York Road Historical Society, Jenkintown, Pennsylvania.
Figure 35. View of Porch Facing East. (circa 1946).
From the Harry J. Utzy Collection, Old York Road Historical Society, Jenkintown, Pennsylvania.
Figure 36. View of Porch Facing West.
From the Harry J. Utzy Collection, Old York Road Historical Society, Jenkintown, Pennsylvania.
When Mantle Fielding designed Colton Hall, the program for the Abington YMCA had to be determined without the advantage of a history of Y activities in Abington. Both the building and the program developed in a simultaneous manner without knowledge of the number of members that would join once it was opened. The result was a building with a simple floor plan and few spatial divisions. In contrast, when Fielding designed the Germantown YMCA building an extensive program had been established through years of Y activities in the area as well as a stable membership level. It is impressive that Abington's building remained unchanged for at least thirty years, accommodating the next generation of families.
Chapter Four:
Expansion and Adaptation: 1945-1993

The subject of expanding the Abington YMCA was initiated by a variety of interrelated factors after 1945. The primary reason was the need for more space, due to a 650% increase in membership (by 1955) since the construction of the original building. At the time, Abington and its adjoining communities comprised the greatest area of population growth in suburban Philadelphia. By 1950, Abington had a population of approximately 28,988. Often, the YMCA facilities were used by outside groups for meetings and programs. In the year 1955, 268 groups utilized the building including business, religious, and community organizations. After years of hard use, it was realized that Colton Hall needed materials replaced and an overhaul of mechanical systems, especially in the pool area.

As early as 1947, a building study was conducted by the Building and Furnishings Service which made a number of recommendations regarding the development of a master plan. The report begins with a review of the existing building, "Although the building is of non-fireproof construction, it is still substantially good, attractive in appearance and in a fairly good state of preservation. Minor repairs are needed on the interior, but in so far as its physical properties are concerned, it should still be good for many years to

89"Abington 'Y' Campaign Off to Good Start," Achieving Public Support (June, 1955),1.
come."\(^92\) The report also states that the building had outgrown its capacity and that the character of the YMCA program had changed considerably since the building's construction. In general, the master plan recommended the building be divided into two main areas, recreational and social. The social areas would occupy the original building and the recreational activities would be located in the proposed new rear additions. An emphasis was placed on the need for more than one entrance and lobby in order to separate juniors and seniors when they entered the building.

During the period of the 1940's, the Philadelphia YMCA began to evaluate the condition of their buildings. With the exception of the Fifteenth Street dormitory building that was completed in 1928, all the buildings were built before 1916. At this time, there were seven branches affiliated with the Metropolitan Association: Central, Army and Navy, Christian Street, North, West, Abington and Main Line. Others such as the Germantown YMCA and student and railroad associations were independent. A report, written in 1945 by the director of the Philadelphia YMCA, studied each of the branch buildings in terms of plan arrangement, circulation, administration, materials, personal hazards, state of repair, and aesthetic quality. In summary, the report illustrated a number of problems such as the crossing of wet and dry paths, lack of supervision, slippery concrete floors, situations of moisture damage in pool areas, and worn out surface finishes and furniture. A program of modernization was highly recommended in order to maintain the interest of its members.

\(^{92}\)John W. Ogg to Abington YMCA Board of Management, 12 March 1947, Abington YMCA Files, Abington, PA.
In 1955, the board of managers launched a $500,000 expansion fund with a detailed promotional booklet outlining plans for new additions and renovations with floor plans, renderings and photographs. (Fig. 37)

Figure 37. Rendering of Proposed Addition in the Promotional Booklet. From YMCA of Philadelphia and Vicinity, "An Investment in Youth and A Dividend for the Community," 1955.

Basically, all of the recommendations from the earlier study were implemented in the booklet. The first project outlined was to build a new gymnasium, since the original one was not large enough for official junior high school basketball games. Its low plaster ceiling also made it difficult for volley ball and basketball games. The second project listed was for new locker and shower rooms due to the undesirable location of the original locker rooms and situation of a constantly wet floor. There was also a shortage of lockers since the existing space only had ninety. Third on the list was the addition of two
new handball courts followed by a businessmen's health club. Instead of building a new pool, the plan recommended modernizing the existing pool by replacing the filters, installing an acoustical ceiling and building a spectators' gallery. A number of specialized rooms were described such as new club and meeting rooms, a new youth canteen, a new senior social lounge, a modernized junior social lounge and game room. Space for these new areas was allocated in Colton Hall by removing the lower level locker rooms and expanding the second floor by dividing the two story gymnasium space. The final project described was a new administration control center or, in other words, a lobby area.

During the next few years, only a few of these projects were completed. Between 1947 and 1980, a large project was undertaken about once every ten years.

Figure 38. Construction for the First Addition. From the Abington YMCA collection.
The South gymnasium, completed in 1957, was the first major addition and was built 57 feet away from the south wall of the swimming pool building with the intent of later building locker room facilities in the space between the two buildings. The new gymnasium is almost twice the square footage of the original gym and stylistically much different. (Fig. 39) Davis & Dunlap, the architecture firm, chose to materially coordinate the new building with its existing counterpart by using red brick, but applied it to a modernist form. It is structurally honest with the columns present on the exterior of the building.

Figure 39. Colton Hall with the South Gymnasium Addition. (circa 1962). From the Harry J. Utzy Collection, Old York Road Historical Society, Jenkintown, Pennsylvania.
This column placement also serves a practical purpose, so as to remove any projections from the interior walls. (Fig. 40) In contrast to the earlier gym, there is minimal fenestration except for a band of windows along the ceiling plane. Fielding's first gymnasium in Germantown with its elaborate trusses, elevated perimeter running track, and ornate fenestration provides an even greater contrast to the new modernist gym. (Fig. 11) A year after the construction of the south gymnasium, a spectators' gallery was built in the pool area. (Fig. 41) A 136 foot corridor along the north side of this gallery links the two buildings.

Figure 40. Interior of South Gymnasium. (circa 1957). From the Harry J. Utzy Collection, Old York Road Historical Society, Jenkintown, Pennsylvania.
Following the gymnasium came the locker room addition, designed by Dunlap & Rienzi, that freed the lower level of the original building for social rooms. (Fig. 42 & 43) As the original locker room, the new facility is located below pool level necessitating the need for staircases, although the new situation provides a better circulation pattern. At this point, the parking lot was enlarged and the main entrance of the complex shifted from the original building to the space above the new locker rooms. During the same time period, the subject of parking was emphasized in a report by the director of the Building and Furnishings Service, who stated that the success of any YMCA building project is influenced by the ability to park cars on the site.93

Figure 42. Colton Hall Locker Room Before Renovation of Lower Level. (circa 1962). From the Harry J. Utzy Collection, Old York Road Historical Society, Jenkintown, Pennsylvania.

Figure 43. New Locker Room. (circa 1962). From the Harry J. Utzy Collection, Old York Road Historical Society, Jenkintown, Pennsylvania.
Ten years later, two racquetball courts were built along the corridor that connects the original building to the new gymnasium. The new structure is a simple rectangular form with no fenestration and a flat roof (as the adjacent pool building). This building also marks the introduction of a new exterior material to the complex: white painted concrete block. For the small scale and unobtrusive location of the building, the choice of this economical material is understandable. Thus begins the white concrete block phase.

The largest and most recent addition was built in 1980 and designed by architect, Paul Remus. (Fig. 44) Connected to the north wall of the 1957 gymnasium, the new, white concrete block structure expands the Y complex into an L-shaped configuration. A new lobby and office area is now situated between the 1957 gym and a new, larger, 65 by 100 foot, gym. The lower level of this addition includes a fitness center and men's and women's locker rooms. Many years after the master plan, the YMCA finally received a lobby area, one that is on the opposite end of the complex from the original building, in order to be adjacent to the parking lot. The necessity for the centralization of administrative control marks the point when Abington's building has more in common with its urban counterpart, and where it maintains less of the qualities of the early community type building.

Today one enters the YMCA into the new lobby space off the parking lot. The experience of entering the building is much different than when one entered into Colton Hall. The scale is reduced because one enters at ground level into the one-story part of the new addition (the adjacent new gymnasium is over two stories in height). The double doorway vestibule projects from the
Figure 44. North Gymnasium Addition Completed in 1980. (1993)

Figure 45. New Main Entrance into Lobby Completed in 1980. (1993)
plane of the facade which further reduces the scale. (Fig. 45) It is a less formal entrance than Colton Hall and also very separated from Old York Road. This transformation resembles a feature of the suburban house that has a relatively unutilized formal front door and a commonly used side, or garage door. Upon entering the YMCA, there is a large receptionist desk located in the center of the lobby, near the new gymnasium and many administrative offices. The Colton Hall entrance vestibule with an adjacent recreation room with staircase and fireplace is replaced by a space very different from that of a home. The new lobby continues to serve as a gathering place, but it is a place that is used, to briefly wait, before progressing to a specialized activity within the building complex.

The design of entrance areas is discussed in Mary Corbin Sies' study of suburban homes built between 1877 and 1917. She describes that the model suburban home embodied "values of family, community, and individuality." She continues to clarify that, "family unity and individuality were not to be purchased at the price of community involvement; reestablishing communal interaction with like-minded people was an important reason for moving to the suburbs. Accordingly, houses projected a neighborly visage, fences were rare, and floor plans were open and hospitable so that visitors were welcomed immediately into the family spaces without being screened in a reception area and greeted in a parlor." This approach toward the design of entrance areas is evident in the planning of Colton Hall which was built during the same time period as the suburban homes in Sies' study. The discontinuation of Colton

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95 Ibid.
Hall's entrance after the new lobby area was built illustrates a shift from a residential form to a more commercial one that today's society expects when entering a public place.

Shortly after the construction of the last addition, Colton Hall was renovated into a day-care center with the cooperation of Abington Memorial Hospital. In order to accommodate this new use only a few changes were made to the existing structure. In addition to finish changes, a partition was built dividing the recreation room into two spaces and the fireplace opening was closed. (Fig. 48 & 49) The lower level, where the locker rooms were once located, is also part of the child-care facilities. Instead of using the front door entrance, a new entrance was created on the rear, east facade into the lower level. This entrance enables the parent to park or drop off their child close to the door. (Fig. 50) The gymnasium remains very much the same and is used primary for gymnastics.

After these many additions the role of the original building changed dramatically. In the 1950's the building's space was in constant demand even to the point of being described as bursting at the seams. There are numerous photographs of the rooms filled with children and adults engaged in a wide range of sports and activities. (Fig. 46 & 47) It was a bustling place in the community of Abington and one in which many families spent a great deal of time. The enlargement of the facility provided much needed space and altered the way in which the buildings were utilized. Spaces are now specialized to accommodate certain athletic functions or social activities. For example, the gymnasium in the original building is used specifically for gymnastics where
Figure 46. World Affairs Circus in Colton Hall Gymnasium. (circa 1952). From the Harry J. Utzy Collection, Old York Road Historical Society, Jenkintown, Pennsylvania.

Figure 47. Swimming Pool Activity. From the Abington YMCA Collection.
Figure 48. First Floor of Colton Hall Facing East Showing New Partition and Closed Fireplace Opening. (Both photographs taken in 1993).

Figure 49. First Floor of Colton Hall Facing Northwest Showing New Partition.
Figure 50. East Facade of Colton Hall Showing New Child-Care Entrance with Parking. The racquetball addition is the structure on the left side of the photograph. (1992)
as it functioned formerly for a range of athletics and functions. (Fig. 51) In general, Colton Hall is now a completely specialized space in contrast to its multi-use past.

Figure 51. Colton Hall Gymnasium Facing Northwest. (1992)

The Abington YMCA continues to be a lively place filled with much activity. At times the present facility seems to be outgrown and the topic of expansion is once again brought to the table. There are some acknowledged drawbacks to the current configuration of the complex. Mainly, there are long corridors linking the various buildings adding up to approximately 255 feet in length on the first floor alone. The pool's small size is sometimes considered a drawback but this same quality is beneficial for swimming instruction. (Fig. 52)
The future of the Abington facility was recently addressed in an article in the local newspaper written by Edward Rothschild, Chairman of the Board of Managers. His vision portrays an expanded facility that would include a range of new programs and community services far beyond those traditionally offered by the YMCA. He describes a facility that would serve as a community center which might include, "An enlarged public library, a township building, a hospital dispensary where minor accidents could be taken care of, relieving the hospital of time consuming matters where more attention could be spent on accidents of a more serious nature."96 The only other facility change mentioned in the article is the addition of an outdoor swimming pool.

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These are revolutionary and exciting prospects that would closely link this institution with the both historical Y roles (in the case of the library) and very new roles with the inclusion of a township building and a hospital dispensary. An architectural form that could creatively express this duality of past and future roles of the Abington YMCA would maintain an element of continuity within the community. Colton Hall, due to its siting on Old York Road and relation to the genesis of the Abington association, could serve a vital role in establishing this important connection.

The Philadelphia YMCA has grown to include eleven branches within a fifteen mile radius of the central branch. Today, the oldest building, built by the YMCA, is the Central Branch on Arch Street (circa 1912) and the second is the Abington Branch built three years later. When the Abington Branch was built, it was located the farthest from the Central Branch marking the advent of the community type YMCA branch facility. In 1960, this radius was once again enlarged to include another branch in Hatboro, located about five miles north of Abington. A large, existing house was renovated to accommodate this new association and, since then, a number of additions have been built. Five years later another branch was built in Ambler, a suburban community, located as distant from the Central Branch as Hatboro. A gymnasium addition was recently completed in the fall of 1992. Clearly, the community type YMCA building has become a part of the Philadelphia suburbs and is continuing to be modified constantly to meet the future. (see Appendix F)
Figure 53. Site Plan of the Abington YMCA Showing Dates of Additions.
Figure 54. Block Plan of the Abington YMCA Showing Uses of Buildings in 1993.
Figure 55. Lower Level Plan of Colton Hall in 1916.

Figure 56. Lower Level Plan of Colton Hall in 1993.
Figure 57. First Floor Plan of Colton Hall in 1916.

Figure 58. First Floor Plan of Colton Hall in 1993.
Figure 59. Second Floor Plan of Colton Hall in 1916.

Figure 60. Second Floor Plan of Colton Hall in 1993.
Conclusion

An account of one YMCA merely skims the surface when attempting to convey the building patterns of the American YMCA movement, although Abington's building is remarkably revealing as a single case study. Many of the patterns are closely fused with American architectural history, religious attitudes, cultural patterns, economic trends and technological advances. The buildings of the YMCA are responses as well as influences, in part, because their programs serve this dual role in their relationship with the public. When it was realized that gymnasiums attracted youth, the Y incorporated this feature into their buildings while shaping their physical program to conform to their established mission. Later fitness centers evolved and now we see the addition of child-care facilities. According to various surveys conducted around 1990, the national network of 959 Y's and their 1,101 branches operate the country's largest child-care program.97

The great YMCA building movement at the beginning of the century solidified the presence of YMCA buildings in the urban American landscape. The earlier period before 1900 had developed a general building program and form leaving the next period with the task to refine and apply their buildings and programs to a wider range of population centers. In response to the need for building information, the Building Bureau was established furthering the proliferation of standardized YMCA designs.

As the Abington YMCA demonstrates, a new community building became the direction of the movement between 1915 and 1920, reducing the urban building to a compact, simple form. Elements from earlier YMCA buildings endured the transition, such as the overall understated exterior appearance and the use of simple materials and architectural details. The reception hall with staircase and fireplace remained a common feature as did its adjacency to the main entrance. With the new community building also came some new elements such as the porch and horizontal expansion of new additions. In the past seventy-eight years, Abington's building has grown incrementally, just as suburban sprawl has extended far beyond Philadelphia city limits.

The wide angle approach to the study of Abington's YMCA related its characteristics to the overall building history of the YMCA. The research and data included in this study serve as a framework which further studies may utilize and could possibly develop to a greater extent and wider analyses. The goal of this study, to capture the building trends within a large movement as evidenced in a single case study, may become an introduction for a range of related studies which are complete topics within themselves. Further research would greatly contribute toward a more complete understanding of this important American institutional building type.

In a Historic Preservation thesis, it is important to highlight Abington YMCA's ability to apply a compatible adaptive reuse to their seventy-seven year old building. Buildings are not static, they should represent and serve the needs of its users. The YMCA realized the need for change in its early years as stated in the case of the Germantown Association in 1870 when they began to plan for a new building. Abington's original building may be viewed as an obstacle due to the cost of maintenance and other related factors common
to older buildings. These are serious considerations for a non-profit institution yet this building should continue to be a tool and through an analysis of its condition and the development of maintenance and renovation plans, its future may continue to be a viable one. Many YMCA's are facing these same decisions related to renovation of older facilities, since a great many were originally constructed near the turn of the century. According to the Building and Furnishings Service, fifty percent of their work today are renovation projects. The YMCA's staying power and ability to appeal to different generations is evident through their willingness to change, yet they have also adhered to their basic mission, creating programs that promote a healthy mind, body and spirit. Colton Hall is a visual reminder of that mission and the many years it has served its community.

Figure 61. Colton Hall in 1946. From the Abington YMCA Collection.
APPENDIX A:
An Architect's Advertisement in Association Men (1904)

Like to Know Your Bible?

Yes? Read this.
Scotfield Bible Correspondence Course.

"Brings a Bible Institute to every door."

Analyze entire Scripture. Bible sole text-book. Diploma after examination. "Every student a pupil of Dr. G. E. Scotfield, the noted Bible Teacher." Begin at any time. Inquiries solicited.

Information and Prospectus furnished Free by

FRANK E. FITCH, Publisher,
Room No. 58, 47 Broad St., New York.

Agents Wanted Everywhere.

THE H. THANE MILLER SCHOOL FOR GIRLS

THE ILLUMINATED LESSONS
ON THE LIFE OF JESUS

DR. WILLIAM BYRON FORBUSH, author of "The Boy Problem," has worked out, by actual experience with his famous class, an original, inspiring Bible Study course.

Accompanies Davis', Murray's and all Sunday-school and personal Bible Study courses, or may be used independently. Solves these problems: Attendance, order, interest in Bible, real religious education. It introduces an entirely new method and apparatus, which makes an addition of permanent and constant value to the equipment for Bible Study classes.

The Plan of the Sunday-School Travel Lessons is to teach the life of Christ while the student is in the very atmosphere of the places where that life was spent.

Governor John L. Bates, Massachusetts: "So realistic and natural is the scene made that one feels as if he is beholding the actual scenery—he obtains the inspiration that actual sight gives."

The Sunday-School Times: "Dr. Forbush is proving in his own Sunday-school that it is possible to get a class of twenty-five healthy, restless American boys as much interested in studying the life of Christ as they are in the football scores."

MR. EDWIN F. SEE, General Secretary Brooklyn Y. M. C. A.: "I have examined with great care and used in class work stereoscopes and stereographs suggested for the use of Bible courses by Dr. Forbush through Underwood & Underwood. It gives what is very much needed—reality to the persons and scenes of the Bible."

Now in use at the West Side, Central and Bedfod Branches, and decided upon for the Twenty-third Street Branch, New York.

Send for Dr. Forbush’s free descriptive circular to UNDERWOOD & UNDERWOOD, Bible Study Dept., Fifth Avenue and 19th Street, New York City.

Please mention Association Men when answering advertisements.

APPENDIX B:

Bequest Announcement for the Abington YMCA (1913)

270  ASSOCIATION MEN

Buildings Going Up

THE building movement has by no means stopped. Just at present there is over $12,000,000 in hand pledged, or being spent, for new equipment in ninety cities. And there is more coming. Governor Whitman lays the cornerstone on January 24th of the greatest of these—Brooklyn Central, which will cost $1,500,000 and open about October 1st, free from debt. It will be thirteen stories high, facing three streets, 192 by 126 by 111 ft. It will provide 250,000 square feet of floor space entirely devoted to Association purposes. The gymnasiums (main 185 by 70 ft., auxiliary 55 by 50) are on the fifth floor. On the eighth floor the educational department for 1,500 men. On the four upper floors there will be 510 rooms for young men. It will provide for 7,000 members.

The Santa Fe Railroad company has given a 99-year lease at the cost of $5 a year on the best site in the city for a new $75,000 building at Albuquerque, N. M. As good as a gift outright.

James J. Hill, of the Great Northern, made a Christmas gift of $5,000 to the Superior building fund.

Several building propositions are on foot in the central West where but little financial embarrassment has been felt.

Philadelphia is to have another well equipped branch at Abington, made possible by the bequest of J. Milton Colton of $65,000.

A start on a building fund has been made at Rockland, Me., by a gift of $5,000 from the Hon. Nelson B. Cobb. A campaign to follow later.

The entire plant at Payette, Idaho, has been entirely remodeled from bottom to top since the fire which did $5,700 damage.

With funds raised to meet every dollar of expense Warren, Pa., opened its new building Jan. 2nd.

C. S. Ward to “keep his hand in” is handling a campaign for $1,350,000 for Stevens Institute of Technology, starting with two pledges of $250,000 and others. Mr. Ward has not yet been defeated.

The Brooklyn Association has taken title to three parcels of land adjoining the Prospect Park Branch site, expecting to use the same when the new building for that Branch is erected.

M. C. Williams is turning his hand to raising completion funds and debts; over $27,000 was pledged by 2000 people in six days at Danville, Ill., with enthusiasm.

A strategic site on the corner of Elm and Canal streets in Cincinnati has been secured for the new Central building at the cost of $100,000.

Clemson College, S. C., will have a $75,000 building made possible by the gift of $50,000 from Mr. Rockefeller, $15,000 from the trustees and $10,000 lately raised by the student body.

A mortgage which had a 12-year grip on the throat of the Scranton Association was burned with great rejoicing on New Year’s night, following the New Year’s reception and celebration, when the building was teeming with people. This was the climax—five programs run. “This is the most satisfactory fire we ever had,” remarked the president. Three times the building had been burned or injured by fire. In five years the debt of $64,000 has been wiped out and the membership increased from 940 to 2,491; attendance at meetings from 12,442 to 22,477, and current expenses decreased from $42,600 to $40,000.

The Jamestown, Pa., building so impressed a visitor on New Year’s Day that he sent a check for $100.

Connellsville, Pa., has sold its old building for $38,000 to the Maccabees. The building will undoubtedly be replaced by another better suited to the Association’s needs.

A contributor of many years to the Eastern District Branch, Brooklyn, in renewing his annual contribution of $100 sent with it two $1,000 5 per cent. interest-bearing bonds with these words: “Use these to endow my annual contribution.” He was one of that type of splendid Scotchmen who at 85 wanted to perpetuate the work he had had a hand in, with his heart back of it, for years.

From Association Men 40 (Feb. 1915): 270.
APPENDIX C:

The Association Building Record (1915)

The Association Building Record for 1915

The Buildings opened in 1915 cost $8,663,171, a gain of $1,390,371 over last year. Amount pledged and to be expended for buildings is $6,165,345

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<tr>
<td>Name</td>
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<td>Chicago, West Side</td>
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<tr>
<td>Charleston, Mo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Presidio, Cal. Army</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fort Dodge, Iowa (Indian)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Antonio, Texas (add.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lexington, Ky. (for boys)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bath, Me. (improvements)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Germantown Pa. (add.)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Logan, W. Va. (R. R.)</td>
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FOR INDUSTRIAL, BAYONNE, N. J.

| Name                     | Cost   |
|--------------------------|
| Heleaa, Mont             | 117,000 |
| Freeport, Ill            | 115,000 |
| Cincinnati, Ohio (colored) | 109,000 |
| Petersburg, Va.          | 101,500 |
| Beloit, Wis.             | 100,000 |
| Chicago, Ill., Wilson Ave. (dorm. annex) | 100,000 |
| Muskingum, Ohio          | 100,000 |
| Waynesboro, Pa.          | 85,000  |
| Cortland, N. Y.          | 80,000  |

YOUNGSTOWN, OHIO

| Name                     | Cost   |
|--------------------------|
| Streator, Ill.           | 80,000 |
| Warren, Pa.              | 80,000 |
| Emporia, Kan.            | 75,000 |
| Alton, Ill. (rebuilt)    | 75,000 |
| Clemson College S. C.    | 75,000 |

TONKERS, N. Y.

| Name                     | Cost   |
|--------------------------|
| Biabee, Ariz. (add.)     | 10,000 |
| Phoenix, Ariz. (add.)    | 10,000 |
| Charlotte, N. C. (add.) | 10,000 |
| University of Oklahoma   | 10,000 |
| LaCrosse, Wis. (add.)    | 5,000  |

RAILROAD DEPARTMENT

| Name                     | Cost   |
|--------------------------|
| Buildings completed      |       |
| Marshalltown, Iowa (City and R. R.) | $100,000 |

90
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APPENDIX D:

Map of Philadelphia YMCA Branches (1938)

APPENDIX E:
Typical Plan for YMCA Building (1990)

APPENDIX F:

Community Type Branches of the Philadelphia YMCA (1993)

There are eleven branches of the YMCA of Philadelphia: Abington, Armed Services, Ambler, Central, Christian Street, Columbia North, Hatboro, Main Line, Northeast, Roxborough, and West. Four branches, Abington, Hatboro, Ardmore and Ambler can be classified as community type branches because they are located the farthest from the Central Branch and are also located outside of Philadelphia city limits. Although each of these buildings are much different in terms of architectural design, they conform to many of the characteristics of community type YMCA buildings in respect to planning, siting, and response to suburban influences.


APPENDIX G:

Examples of Mantle Fielding's Residential Projects

Note: Examples Listed in Chronological Order.


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Maps and Atlases

All maps are listed chronologically. All map information was obtained from the Map Collection of the Free Library of Philadelphia.


Aerial Photography


Other Resources

Documents, Records, Architectural Drawings, and Photographs of the Abington YMCA.