Sanitary Acculturation: The Social History of Progressive Era Public Bath Houses in Philadelphia

Sarah Lerner
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Abstract
In 1895 the Public Bath Association of Philadelphia (PBA) was formed for the purpose of, “establishing and maintaining public baths and affording the poor facilities for bathing and the promotion of cleanliness.” In 1898 the PBA opened America’s first public bath house that offered both bathing and laundry facilities. This thesis illustrates how the organizational structure, geographic location, architectural aesthetics, function of space and technology, and advertising of Philadelphia’s public bathhouse embodies the social, cultural, economic, and political of environment of the city at the turn of the century. To properly understand the formation of the Public Bath Association of Philadelphia, this study also includes an exploration of how the morality of cleanliness, and the habituation of hygienic bathing became part of the national American identity.

Keywords
Bathhouse, Progressive Era, Americanization, Sanitation reform, Immigrant

Disciplines
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SANITIZED ACCULTURATION: THE SOCIAL HISTORY OF PROGRESSIVE ERA BATHHOUSES IN PHILADELPHIA

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A THESIS

in

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To my advisor and family. Thank you for your patience, kindness, and encouragement.

And to the women of The Colonial Dames of America Chapter II. Thank you for empowering women to pursue lives devoted to activism and storytelling.
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PART 1: INTRODUCTION

On April 21st, 1898, Congress declared war against Spain, and the Public Baths Association of Philadelphia declared war against uncleanness by opening the doors of the Gas-kill Street baths.1

This thesis began as a term paper for a graduate seminar in public history at the University of Pennsylvania. By the end of the semester it was evident that my subject, public bathhouses in Progressive Era Philadelphia, deserved more attention than I had been able to devote in that project. My interest in the topic continued to grow during a summer internship at the Tenement Museum in New York City. Like the tenement, the bathhouse is a building type once neglected by architectural historians and preservationists because of its unglamorous function and presumed lack of association with leading designers of its day.2 Drawing on the methods of social history, visual studies, architectural history, folklore, sociology, and anthropology, this thesis aims to correct that perspective. Public baths were central to the work of Philadelphia’s social reformers and the lives of those they sought to reform.3 As the first public bathhouses in the United States to offer both bathing and laundry services to patrons, the Philadelphia variant was also a key site of architectural and technological innovation. While exploring this story, I also

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2 The tenement building and its theoretical contexts have been studied in the recent decades by social historians and urban historians such as Andrea Renner, Elizabeth Cromley, Paul Groth, Andrew Dolkart, and Zachary Violette.
3 According to Britannica Academic the Progressive Era in United States is the time of a political and social-reform movement that brought major changes to American politics and government during the first two decades of the 20th century. Through efforts to strengthen the public sphere, progressives “sought to come to terms with the extreme concentration of wealth among a tiny elite and the enormous economic and political power of the giant trusts, which they saw as uncontrolled and irresponsible.” Sidney M. Milkis, “Progressivism.” Encyclopedia Britannica, last modified October 8, 2019, https://www.britannica.com/topic/progressivism.
wish to emphasize the interpretive value of the remaining physical fabric and surviving examples to the field of public history. As the discourse of that field suggests, historic buildings and landscapes should be used as a tool to foster the public’s comprehension of the past. In essence the building is an artifact; in this case, it is an objectification of socio-medico theory and a physical reality that shaped the everyday lives of its patrons. This thesis explores how a group of aristocratic Philadelphians aimed to acculturate, cleanse, and moralize the bodies of the city’s poor and immigrant communities, also known as “The Great Unwashed.” The mechanism for this process was an urban public building type known as the bathhouse.

* * *

The ritualistic practice of bathing existed in the Philadelphia region for thousands of years prior to European colonization. The contemporary Western practice of bathing is a fairly recent phenomenon enabled by architectural and technological advancements (most significantly modern plumbing systems); the dissemination of the germ theory; and the development of an American hierarchical social order based on race, class, and religion. From 1880 to 1890 the immigrant population of Philadelphia increased six fold. In addition to skilled labor and material goods, these new citizens brought new customs, religions, languages, and habits, many drastically different from the established Anglo-

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4 In 1868, English social commentator, Thomas Wright, published his book The Great Unwashed, in reference to the uneducated working class men of society. “The Great Unwashed” has been adopted colloquially to humorously refer to ordinary or common class of society.


7 Fredric M. Miller, “Philadelphia: Immigrant City” from The Balch Institute’s online exhibit Phila Ellis Island, 2015, http://www2.hsp.org/exhibits/Balch%20resources/phila_ellis_island.html
Saxon communities of Philadelphia. Most immigrants settled in older and denser neighborhoods near the docks of the Delaware River in tight knit communities of people with similar cultural heritage. These urban landscapes lacked the resources, such as such as green spaces, libraries, museums, and bathing facilities, of the more affluent parts of the city, like Rittenhouse Square -- a newly developed neighborhood characterized by mansions, large parks, and prestigious institutions. These neighborhoods were inhabited by the socially elite white families of Philadelphia – many concerned with the promise of a democratic society and their threatened American values. Members of these elite white communities united to establish “public” institutions in impoverished immigrant communities as sites of empowerment for the disenfranchised, to promote acculturation into the dominant society, and to foster sympathy and mutual understanding between members of different social classes.\(^8\) In 1904, chief statistician of the United States Bureau of Labor, G. W. W. Hanger, proclaimed that the creation of a nationally standardized public bathhouse at the close of the 19\(^{th}\) century was an effort to tempt “the populace into the practice of bathing as a habit” and establish “the recognition of cleanliness as the essence of true sanitation.”\(^9\)

In 1895 the Public Bath Association of Philadelphia (PBA) was formed by a group of ten elite white Philadelphians for the purpose of, “establishing and maintaining


public baths and affording the poor facilities for bathing and the promotion of cleanliness.”

Between 1898 to 1928 the PBA built and funded six public bathhouses that offered bathing and laundry facilities in five separate lower-class immigrant neighborhoods (Figure 1). These award-winning establishments were both innovative in design and function, and effective in promoting Western standards of bodily cleanliness. The success of the bathhouse was measured by patronage and profitability. By the time of the 1918 flu pandemic, the total number of baths taken at PBA facilities had risen to 386,313, a nearly 180 percent increase in only two decades. Not only were the baths highly patronized, but they were also showing a profit.

The six public bathhouses erected in Philadelphia exemplify a period of national experimentation that aimed to establish an American standard of bodily cleanliness through architecture. The first comprehensive guide to the normative science of public bathhouse design, Modern Baths and Bathhouses, was published in 1908 by the renowned New York based “sanitary engineer” William Paul Gerhard. Summarizing principles that had crystalized in recent medico-scientific thought, Gerhard opined:

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11 In 1905 the PBA was awarded a Gold Medal at the International Exposition in Liege Belgium by the American Institute of Social Services; board member Franklin B. Kirkbride was also awarded a Silver Medal for his personal interest and efficient promotion of the baths. The PBA earned another Gold Medal by the Milan International Exposition in 1906.
13 Marilyn Thornton Williams, Washing "the Great Unwashed": Public Baths in Urban America, 1840-1920 (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1991), 11.
“Bathing can be rendered popular by providing People’s Baths, [...] simple, unpretentious, yet neat, clean, substantial and inviting structures.”¹⁵ The People’s Bath or Volksbad, was designed by German doctor Oscar Lassar and internationally introduced at the 1883 World Hygiene Congress in Berlin. The People’s Bath was the first successful attempt to erect baths solely for lower class use. The design placed the Austrian army’s latest invention, the “shower bath” (or modern-day shower) within a simple corrugated structure designed for the individual bather. The design was functional, economical, easily reproducible, and introduced the concept of efficiency into the practice of public bathing. In 1889, the renowned pubic bath reformer, Dr. Simon Baruch, advocated for the construction of the country’s first People’s Bath which opened in New York City in 1891.¹⁶ The successes and failures of these new establishments informed the design of a Philadelphian variant of the People’s Bath four years later. The innovations and achievements of the PBA attracted the attention of sanitation reformers from St. Louis, Chicago, New York, and Baltimore, looking to improve their public bathing facilities, thus “stimulating the bathing movement throughout the country” according to a Philadelphian journalist.¹⁷ This thesis will examine how the organizational structure, geographic location, architectural aesthetics, function of space and technology, and use of advertising and photography of Philadelphia’s variant of the public bathhouse reflects the dissemination of the ideology of morality and cleanliness aimed to habituate the practice of hygienic bathing in Philadelphia and influence the standardization of a codified bathhouse design.

¹⁵ Ibid, 73.
Figure 1: Map of PBA bathhouses. Originally printed in an annual report distributed to PBA donors. (Image courtesy of Collection 1999, Public Baths Association of Philadelphia Records, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.)
Methodology and Literature Review

To fully understand the significance of the public bathhouse Philadelphia, it was imperative to examine the type though primary documents, secondary sources, and documentation of the existing physical fabric. I have attempted to synthesize and interpret these materials in a manner that highlights the past, present, and potential future value of Philadelphia’s public bathhouses. The majority of my research focused on primary sources, most significantly The Historical Society of Pennsylvania’s Collection 1999, Records of the Public Baths Association of Philadelphia. This collection was donated to HSP in 1972 and consists of five boxes of archival material on the organization. Its contents revealed the public and private facing attributes of the PBA. In 2007 and 2019 the Historical Society of Pennsylvania published articles to highlight the significance of on the collection. Other primary source research aimed to uncover information about the exterior and interior of the individual structures, as well as their surrounding landscapes. An amalgamation of primary resources from the Athenaeum of Philadelphia, Philadelphia City Archives, and The Philadelphia Contributionship provided a detailed understanding of how the aesthetics and materiality of the six bathhouses. Photographs of the PBA’s first bathhouse in the Social Museum Collection of Harvard’s Fogg Museum proved to be especially helpful to visualize the interior spaces of the structures. Maps and

18 The contents of the of the trustees’ minute book, 1902 to 1950; three scrapbooks which document the organization from 1898 to 1944. These scrapbooks contain posters, advertisements, and postcards, and dated newspaper clippings. The collection also contains the organization’s published annual reports and records of the association’s real property from 1890 to 1944.
census data proved essential to understanding both the physical fabric and cultural heritage of the surrounding neighborhoods. It is important to note that the majority of the collected primary source material used in this pertained to the three earliest bathhouses built by the PBA in 1898 and 1903. There are photographs, drawings, descriptive accounts, or remaining fabric of all the bathhouses except for the fifth constructed at the intersection of Passyunk Avenue and Wharton Street in 1922.

Before proceeding, I must address the conflicting nature of this existing primary documentation. The newspaper clippings, bathhouse brochures, architectural blueprints, and promotional photographs, are both revealing and limiting to a proper interpretation of the Philadelphia public bathhouse. The content of these artifacts portrays the perspective of these institutions wealthy Anglo-Saxon sponsors and largely fails to preserve the heritage and memory of those whose lives physically interacted with the public bathhouses, such as the employees and the hundreds of thousands of patrons from 1898 to 1950. This imbalance of documented heritage reflects the inequalities of history making in the United States.

Furthermore, the content of the articles and photographs highlights archetypes and narrations of race, class, gender embedded in the visual and verbal language that Anglo-Saxon Protestants created to categorize those different from themselves. It was these artificial constructs that shaped the language and actions of the social reformers responsible for establishing public bathhouses in Philadelphia.20 There are hundreds of references to

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the patrons of the PBA bathhouses that highlight their stereotyped characteristics: “the street urchin,” “tenement women,” “tramps,” “vagrants” and “drunks” to name a few.\footnote{The American Hebrew, Oct 11, 1901. Newspaper clipping. From Collection 1999, Public Baths Association of Philadelphia Records, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.; Bertha H. Smith, “The Public Bath,” The Outlook 79 (January- April, 1905) 571.} It was especially astonishing for donors and journalists to observe the “coal heaver, black with grime, come in with his newspaper bundle enfolding some clean clothes” and leave clean after his shower, “almost unrecognizable.”\footnote{The American Hebrew, 1901.} The PBA too used descriptive prose to portray the character of their patrons to perspective donors. One particularly detailed account describes the scene of the laundry facility early in the evening, “It was dusk, but the electric lights were not yet on. On a bench in the laundry sat a benevolent looking white-haired man … beside him the white teeth, bright eyes and thin black outline of a stalwart figure — a veritable glimpse into the market of Africa.”\footnote{Fifth Annual Report. Pamphlet. 1902. From Collection 1999, Public Baths Association of Philadelphia Records, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.} The language of this account exemplifies the hidden dialects of racism historically employed by the white gaze which perceives the black body through social semiotics, institutional forces, and various discursive frames of reference, such as the “veritable glimpse into the market of Africa.”\footnote{More on the perception of the black body in George Yancy, Black Bodies, White Gazes: the Continuing Significance of Race (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers), 2008.; Fifth Annual Report. Pamphlet. 1902 From Collection 1999, Public Baths Association of Philadelphia Records, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.}

* * *

My secondary research was twofold. The first objective was to understand how scholars have defined the significance of the public bathhouse in the United States.\footnote{The study of Progressive Era bathhouses first emerged in the 1970s, with the works of David Glassberg, Marylin Williams and Susanne Hand.}
Scholars agree that the public bathhouse is an important building type to study. Their physical presence is a manifestation of the social, political, and medical environment of their time. After reviewing these sources it was also evident that the Philadelphia variant of the bathhouse has been generally overshadowed by other cities like New York and Boston. The most in-depth study of the PBA’s bathhouses was written by Marilyn Thornton Williams, as a chapter of her book *Washing "the Great Unwashed": Public Baths in Urban America, 1840-1920.* This thesis will expand upon William’s scholarship while drawing upon the pedagogy and ideologies presented in literature about other American bathhouses, especially New York City’s.

The second objective was to examine the social, political, and medical environment of Philadelphia during the Progressive Era to contextualize the purpose and ultimately determine the distinctiveness of the Public Bath Association’s six bathhouses. I took specific interest in texts that explored how and why reformers created places and spaces like the public bathhouse, to control and assimilate the immigrant body, and instill a specific American order among these expanding foreign social groups. This research also included studies of the history of Western bathing technology; the history of immigrant and migrant communities in Philadelphia; the history of 18th and 19th century bathing practices in Philadelphia; and the significance of Colonial Revival architecture in Philadelphia.

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27 Williams, “Washing the Great Unwashed,” 100.
Of the six bathhouses under study, half were demolished by the City of Philadelphia in the mid 20th century. Of the three remaining, remnants of the oldest bathhouses have been embedded into newer constructions and two have been rehabilitated as living and learning facilities. For this study I documented both the interior and exterior of the two preserved buildings. The documentation aimed to capture the materiality (plan, spaces, and materials) and remaining architectural features of the bathhouses.

Despite this extensive study, the story of the successful effort to tempt “the populace into the practice of bathing as a habit” and establish “the recognition of cleanliness as the essence of true sanitation” has yet to be uncovered in completion. The biased narrative of currently archived material does not suffice for a proper interpretation of the cultural heritage of Philadelphia’s public bathhouses — it must include input from all stakeholders. Considering the PBA closed in 1950, one can assume a number of patrons are still alive. As a continuation of my research, I would propose an oral history project that collects the memories of those directly affected by the bathhouse movement in Philadelphia. History proves that the bathhouse was a successful agent of habitual change, however, the nuances of this story are unknown. The history of Americanization at the bathhouse suggests a connection to cultural trauma and geographies of injustice, while the opportunity for self-determination provided by the erection of the bathhouses portrays a legacy of empowerment.

28 Building Permits. Philadelphia City Archives.
29 413-415 Gaskill Street is the only bathhouse protected by the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The structure was designated in 1963 as “a good example of the Colonial Revival of that period.” The building’s connection to immigrant heritage or sanitation history of Philadelphia is not mentioned as significant. Since sold by the PBA the building has functioned as a private single-family residence and a preschool. It is currently the Kesher Israel Preschool.
30 Hanger, 1245.
An interpretation of the remaining physical fabric of one, or both of the intact bathhouses is a future possibility. I would recommend to first explore the preservation of East Hazzard Street due to the integrity of the interior finishes and exterior facade. As the larger building of the two, the site could incorporate spaces for learning and communal gathering as well. In light of the current pandemic there is an urgent need to understand how American’s have dealt with health, cleansing, and the urban environment, now more than ever. As an interpreted historic site the PBA bathhouse has the potential to be a place where the people of Philadelphia can convene to make sense of our shared human experience, and play tribute to the “The Great Unwashed” of Philadelphia.
PART 2: HISTORY AND CONTEXT

Early Bathing Practices

The first baths patronized by Philadelphians were located at springs in Chester and Bucks Counties as early as the second decade of the eighteenth century.31 (Figure 2) These baths were influenced by the English precedent of simple structures built around chalybeate springs said to have healing powers.32 These facilities consisted of little more than changing rooms, enclosed pools, and stables, and were only available to those who

Figure 2: Illustration of an early 19th century bath located in Bucks County PA outside of Philadelphia. (Image courtesy of Pennsylvania USGenWeb Archives)

had the time and money to travel far distances for the purpose of relaxation and recreation.\textsuperscript{33} As upper-class Americans became accustomed to bathing in natural springs, they also wished to bathe closer to home, which sparked the establishment of commercially operated public bathhouses in the early 19\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{34} According to a recent Masters Thesis on the subject, there were many different types of commercial bathhouses in 19\textsuperscript{th} century Philadelphia.\textsuperscript{35} The two most common were variants of the Turkish and Russian bath. Unlike the PBA facilities, these commercial bathhouses were designed for pleasure and leisure, not bathing for the purpose of cleanliness.

Those who could afford the costs began to construct private bathing facilities in their homes.\textsuperscript{36} Some families even choose to install showers baths in the backyard of their Philadelphia rowhouses. The innovation of the shower bath enabled bathers to be “wet all over” as opposed to partially submerged in spring water.\textsuperscript{37} According to Marylin Williams, the establishment of municipal water systems which brought running water into the homes of the middle and upper classes and the construction of sewage systems which removed it, as well as the invention of bathtubs with attached plumbing and water heaters, revolutionized bathing at home.\textsuperscript{38}

Early 19\textsuperscript{th} century bathing was further popularized by the curative systems of hydropathy. Hydropathy, also known as “water-cure” is the treatment of an illness through

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{33} Williams, “Washing the Great Unwashed,” 11.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Eberlein, "When Society First Took a Bath," 42.
\item \textsuperscript{37} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Williams, 12.
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
the free administration of two therapeutic agents, cold water taken internally and externally and the excitation of cutaneous perspiration. In the 1840s water-cure establishments, known as “Hydriatic Institutions” and “Hydropathic Institutes” opened throughout Philadelphia. Prominent American domestic reformers, such as Catherine Beecher, promoted the use of these facilities.

Germs, Morality, and Cleanliness

Where previously doctors blamed disease upon a poor general environment, in the mid 19th century scientific proof emerged that specific microorganisms caused illnesses such as typhoid, tuberculosis, cholera, diphtheria, plague and dysentery. The death rate from typhoid fever and tuberculosis in Philadelphia was significantly higher than in other cities. In September of 1872, the American Public Health Association gathered representatives from New York, Pennsylvania, Louisiana, Rhode Island, Connecticut, Ohio, Illinois, and Washington DC to adopt a constitution with the goal of developing “the advancement of sanitary science and the promotion of organizations and measures for the

39 J. A. W, "Hydrosudopathy," The Western Journal of the Medical and Physical Sciences 6, no. 1 (1838), 132.
41 Catharine Esther Beecher, A Treatise on Domestic Economy, for the Use of Young Ladies at Home (Boston: T.H. Webb, 1842), 102-3.
practical application of public hygiene.”

Sanitarians shifted their attention from the environment to the individual as a source of contagion and emphasized the importance an universal understanding of proper personal cleanliness. The immigrant body, a potential carrier of foreign diseases, posed a targetable threat to the health of Americans. According to Alan Kraut’s Silent Travelers: Germs, Genes, and the Immigrant Menace, by 1900 nativists baldly claimed scientific medicine as a weapon that white Anglo-Saxon Protestant civilization could use to defend itself against the intrusion of those it regarded as an inferior breed.

A key attribute of Philadelphian reformers was their belief in the power of environmental causation rather than individual fault in recognition of humanity's collective interdependence, and the stress to establish common goals and policies for collective societal improvement. One Philadelphian reformer publicly addressed these sentiments in 1906: “It is not we who are ‘dirty’ when we give [immigrants] no better chance…? We ask the foreigners to come here — If they spread disease and vice, it is not they who are responsible, but we.”

By the turn of the century laissez-faire seemed an inappropriate

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45 Williams, 24.
social doctrine and a new social truth was proclaimed: social justice through legal regulation and protection. Businessmen, clergy, social scientists, and others began to explore the causes of need and ways to prevent it, taking a systematic, critical view toward developing strategies in a rational way. These included such preventive measures as housing reform, improved sanitation, and the creation of parks and playgrounds, as well as traffic control, improved policing, fire protection, and the establishment of public bathhouses. Many of these improvements, defined by scholar Paul Boyer as “positive environmentalism,” were established to gather the disparate urban groups into one great community and ultimately provide poor city dwellers with a healthier environment.

The growth of public institutions at the turn of the century was also a result of what Daniel Walker Howe describes as a characteristically "Victorian" defense of "threatened" values and beliefs. By 1920, over 80 percent of all Russian, Irish, Italian, and Polish-born people in the United States were residents of urban territory. Public baths were one of the many solutions proposed by nineteenth century American reformers when they were faced with the numerous social problems presented by unprecedented urban growth and congested slums. As science mandated baths as essential to a healthy

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50 Lamuniere, "Sentiment and Science," 47.
54 Williams, 2.
city environment, nativist Anglo-Saxon communities, like the social elite of Philadelphia, began to view the “dirty man or woman” as a “menace” to health.55

As captured in the phrase “Cleanliness is next to Godliness,” coined by John Wesley in the 1780s with reference only to cleanliness of dress, a person’s hygiene not only signified healthiness, but Christian morality as well. This saying was adopted by the progressive’s to include cleanliness in all of its manifestations, especially of the body and home.56 In 1904 the Bureau of Labor Bulletin claimed, “Cleanliness is next to Godliness” as one of the “most powerful sources in all that makes for right living, and the measure of one’s personal cleanliness is usually the measure of his civilization and training.”57 It was believed that “gospel of personal cleanliness” should be “taught by word and example” in all “well-ordered households.”58 The public bathhouse was designed to educate and ultimately Americanize the immense immigrant community. Reformers also referred to classic societies, such as ancient Greece and Rome for inspiration. In 1898, a Philadelphia newspaper stated that the “remarkable health enjoyed by the far East” was due to the “existence of baths” and the “customs and practices” concerning their use.59 Furthermore, guidebooks that aimed to outline the necessities of respectable living, began to celebrate the benefits of regular washing, bathing and toileting practices.

55 Glassberg, 8.
56 Crook, Governing Systems, 265.
58 Ibid.
The Municipal Bathhouse in Philadelphia

By the 1850s groups of Philadelphians recognized the lack of sanitary provisions in Philadelphia’s older neighborhoods and urged the city to construct bathhouses for the poor with a special rate with the municipal water company that would subsidize baths for poor immigrant and black communities in Philadelphia. In 1870, the Department of Public Safety’s Bureau of City Property opened the first “floating river bathhouse” in Kensington free of cost. The facility included a “guarded gallery” and “dressing-boxes.” The structure was “based on layers of heavy logs, lengthwise and crosswise, securely bolted together.” The “floating house” was kept afloat by eighty-six, forty three gallon casks “beneath the flooring.” These river bath facilities were soon replaced by pools approximately 40 by 60 feet in size. The city of Philadelphia erected nine free bathing facilities for the public by 1898. They were described by the PBA as, “simple

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60 Pierce, “Throwing Open the Door,” 53.
62 Williams, 29.
63 Ibid, 1.
pools” that were insufficient when “cleansing was the primary object in view.” Newspaper articles recalled that the baths were most frequented by the “the dirty and ill cared for bodies,” that were “most in need of the action of soap and water” because they were “unable to find personal cleanliness at home.” A 1901 breakout of an unspecified disease provided doctors an impetus to examine the potential threat of large Philadelphia’s municipal bathhouses, thus further proving the need for better, safer bathing facilities in the city.

Figure 3: A bathing beach on the Delaware River off of Orthodox Street. (Image courtesy of PhillyHistory.org, a project of the Philadelphia Department of Records.)

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64 Charter and By-Laws. Public Baths Association of Philadelphia Records.
It took the city over fifteen years to modify the design of the bathhouses. In 1913 the new Board of Recreation assumed responsibility of all municipally funded public bathhouses from the Department of Public Safety’s Bureau of City Property. At this time, the Board of Recreation began taking steps to literally clean up the baths, “securing proper disinfection” for the bathing pools from the Bureau of Health and installing mandatory shower baths for bathers to use before swimming.

In addition to being an unhygienic health hazard, these municipal facilities were also inaccessible. Of the four summer months that they were open, the baths were available to men only four days a week, and only three for women. The vast majority of the patrons were working-class boys who used the baths for summer recreation. In 1895 the PBA proclaimed that nearly nine out of ten bathers were boys while “one woman bathes in [the baths] to every eighty-two men.” The “entire lack of privacy” made them especially “unpopular with the women and older girls.” In the 1930’s the city transitioned to recognize these facilities as swimming pools for recreational use only, rather than sites for proper hygienic bathing.

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71 Charter and By-Laws, Public Baths Association of Philadelphia Records.
The Formation of Habits

The erection of six public bathhouses in Philadelphia exemplified the belief that the long-range strategy of urban moral control could be achieved through the complex process of influencing behavior and modeling character in a consciously planned urban environment. As a philanthropic organization supported by the private sector, the PBA was able to supervise these processes and produce outcomes that aligned to the shared often racist and classist values of Philadelphia’s white elite. As stated by Tom Cook, “Custom supposes an act of the will; habit implies an involuntary movement.” For “habit” is inherently individualized and used principally to refer to a subjective tendency acquired through practice and rooted in the mind and body, rather than in collective laws. Reformers aspired for the case of personal cleanliness to be a matter of personal self-governance, but also habitual, and therefore relied upon in the absence of any state interference and legal regulation. In 1902, W.L Ross, superintendent of the PBA, described the public bathhouses as “not only a boon to the person highly civilized enough to demand bathing as much as food, but it is an inspiration to another class of society, in which the bathing habit is but partially developed.” It is within this discourse, the comparison of the “highly civilized” to the “other class of society” that is “but partially developed,” that the normative social inferiority of early 20th century Philadelphia is most apparent.

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73 Boyer, Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 221.
74 Crook, Governing Systems, 248
76 Ibid.
PART 3: THE ORGANIZATION

Establishing the Public Bath Association of Philadelphia

In the Winter of 1894 Sarah Dickson Lowrie, organizer of the Philadelphia Junior League, conducted a sewing class for girls at a mission located in Southwark, one of Philadelphia’s poorest neighborhoods. During a lesson a student informed Lowrie that there were no public bathing facilities open in the winter months. A shocked Lowrie shared this experience with other prominent Philadelphian philanthropists at a dinner party hosted by Barclay H. Warburton, owner of the Philadelphia Daily Evening Telegraph, and his wife Mary Brown Wanamaker. This conversation was the impetus of a private effort to provide year-round affordable bathing and laundry facilities in Philadelphia’s poor communities and “older parts of the city.”

The Public Bath Association of Philadelphia (PBA) was organized and incorporated in the spring of 1895 “for the purpose of establishing and maintaining public baths and affording the poor facilities for bathing and the promotion of cleanliness.” Between 1895 and 1898 the Board of Trustees scrutinized the successes and failures of bathhouses in large Western cities, with specific interest in charitable organizations that took to the matter of supplying affordable bathing facilities, as the People’s Baths of the New York

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Association for Improving the Conditions of the Poor and the Baron de Hirsch Fund Baths. These studies, along with the unique needs and conditions of poor Philadelphian communities, such as a lack of indoor plumbing and congested alley way dwellings, informed the decision to design and erect America’s first year-round bathhouses equipped with bathing and laundry facility.

**Founding Board Members**

The twelve founding members of the PBA represented the wealthiest and most prominent social circles of Philadelphia. These were the upper-class citizens who enjoyed the luxuries of yachts, private trains, winter castles and summer cottages. However, despetes their fortunes, compared to the ostentatious upper class of New York City, Philadelphians “paid strict attention to the laws of conformity and convention. Codes of dress and manners and more, even sexual morals.” In addition to Sarah D. Lowrie and Barclay Warburton, the most notable founding members were Edward B. Smith, Honor Charlemagne Tower Jr., and Franklin B. Kirkbride. All of the members lived in the fashionable Rittenhouse neighborhood. (Figure 4)

Edward Smith, President of the PBA from 1903 to 1917, was a prominent Philadelphia banker and financier who headed his own investment banking firm. He was also involved in many charitable enterprises, most notably the Pennsylvania Society to Protect

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82 All twelve of the founding board members lived in the Rittenhouse Square neighborhood, the wealthiest residential area of Philadelphia.
Children from Cruelty and the Tuberculosis Camp, and director of the City Trusts, which managed the Girard Estates.\textsuperscript{84}

Figure 4: This map depicts the location of the residences of the ten founding board members (yellow dots) in relationship to the first bathhouse (blue dot) constructed in the older and denser part of the city near the Delaware River. All of the board members lived in Rittenhouse Square, the most fashionable residential section of the city at the turn of the century located near the Schuylkill River. (Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, Volume 1, 1895, Geo. W. & Walter S. Bromley, Civil Engineers, Published by G.W. Bromley and Co.)
Hon. Charlemagne Tower, the wealthiest of all board members, was a diplomat, author, and lawyer-businessman. In addition to his career in law and business, Tower served as ambassador to Austria, Russia, and Germany between 1897 and 1908, and was the author of a number of historical essays and one book, *The Marquis de Lafayette in the American Revolution*.85

Son of the renowned psychiatrist and early mental health advocate, Thomas Story Kirkbride, Franklin B. Kirkbride, was an outspoken member of the PBA, who wrote several journal articles and lectured on Philadelphia's public baths.86 In 1905 Kirkbride was honored with a silver medal by the Department of State at the Liége International Exposition. Outside of this work with the PBA, Kirkbride was the assistant secretary and then treasurer of the Pennsylvania Company for Insurances on Lives and Granting Annuities in Philadelphia.87

From 1895 to 1910 there were at least three women on the board. Female representation reached its peak with five of the ten members in 1905, but soon declined when Lowrie left the organization in 1908 to lead other social and political organizations such as the Philadelphia League of Women's Voters, The Philadelphia Art Alliance, the Women’s Republican Club of Pennsylvania, the Lady Army Committee of Pennsylvania,

86 Dr. Thomas Story Kirkbride (1809-1883) was a strong advocate of "moral treatment," a philosophy based upon compassion and respect for the insane. He sought to create a humane environment where both rich and poor were treated with dignity. He believed patients responded to greater freedom with better behavior. *Evening Telegraph.* Newspaper clipping. November 2, 1903. From Collection 1999, Public Baths Association of Philadelphia Records, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia.
The Civic Club, and the Lighthouse Settlement. The involvement of women in Philadelphia’s movement to erect public bathhouses existed beyond the confines of the board. 1908, the Bathhouse Committee of the Civic Club aimed to raise $30,000 to “build and equip a model bathhouse and laundry” in co-operation with the PBA. The presence of women in social and political organizations was not uncommon for the time. According to historian Allison Lange, Progressives often argued that women’s political involvements complemented their traditional roles as wives and mothers, caregivers and keepers of virtue. Despite their personal involvement, all married female trustees were discussed under their husbands’ names, such as Mrs. Thomas S. Kirikbride and Mrs. Earl B Putnum. Furthermore, the role of Secretary – held by Lowrie in 1898 – was the only Board Officer not described with the pronoun “he” in the By-Laws. The other board roles were President, Vice president, Finance Chairman, and Treasurer.

**Financials**

Unlike New York City’s bathhouses which were founded as charity organizations, the PBA was chartered as a “corporation” supported by the pockets of city’s white elite citizens. Though the organization was established to serve impoverished communities,

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92 IRS exempted the status of the PBA under Section 231 of the 1918 Revenue Act on July 26, 1920.
the PBA charged patrons for the use of bathhouse’s facilities. Congruent to capitalist economics, the PBA believed in that every “person pays for what he gets.” The bathhouse was intended for the “respectable poor,” a group believed to “unconsciously shrink away from anything that looks like charity.” In the opinion of the PBA the decision to clean one’s body was not a given right, but a personal decision rooted in morality and self-worth.

Patrons of the bathhouse would pay five cents for a shower — with towel and soap — and five cents per hour for laundry. The PBA specifically chose a price that equaled “the price of a glass of beer” to encourage the habit and morality of bathing in place of illicit actives such as the consumption of alcohol. Because patrons were accustomed to bathing in the municipal pools the concept of a shower-bath was quite foreign to most. The PBA implemented special prices and rules to specifically encourage patrons to use the facility showers over baths. For example, a tub bath cost ten cents, twice the amount of a shower bath (preset day shower), and were reserved for the use of the elderly. The PBA admitted all children under the age ten for free, to ensure the instillation of values of bodily cleanliness in Philadelphia’s youngest generation despite the culturally foreign habits and customs of their parents.

The requirement of a fee not only encouraged the habit of bodily cleansing but helped the PBA become financially self-sufficient. (Figure 5) By 1915, the income from

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93 Gerhard, Modern Baths and Bathhouses, 79.
94 Ibid, 72.
96 Williams, 103.
patron fees covered all organizational expenditures. The PBA continued to show a positive net income supported by patron fees until the 1930’s with the onset of the Great Depression. In the twenty years prior to self-sufficiency the PBA depended on individual “voluntary” contributions and member subscriptions to support operational expenses and building campaigns for new bathhouses.\(^{97}\) This source of revenue was a common model implemented by mission driven organizations. As noted by scholars Nathaniel Burt and Wallace E. Davies, elite Philadelphians liked to express themselves not as individuals but in groups: members of something such as an association. Each group had their special character and quality, and most were subtly graded as to social position and superiority or inferiority.\(^{98}\) The individual contributions ranged from a dollar in cash to a five thousand-dollars checks.\(^{99}\) Every individual contribution was published in a public annual report. The aristocracy of Philadelphia was well represented on the report year after year with surnames like Biddle, Harrison, Wannamaker, Chew, and Drexel.\(^{100}\) The PBA also hosted

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\(^{97}\) Charter and By-Laws, Public Baths Association of Philadelphia Records.


\(^{99}\) The PBA received $5,000 from the Estate of Thomas Elkinton and Stephen Girard Donated $150 to demolish wood houses on 413 lot. Letter to Subscribers April 15, 1903, Public Baths Association of Philadelphia Records (Collection 1999), The Historical Society of Pennsylvania

\(^{100}\) Burt and Davies, “The Iron Age,” 522.

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**The Public Baths Association of Philadelphia**

**Comparative Statement of Business for Seventeen Years, Ending December 31, 1914**

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**Figure 5:** Comparative Statement of Business at the PBA for seventeen years, 1914. (Image courtesy of Public Baths Association of Philadelphia Records.)
events were attended by “Philadelphia’s best known society women” and reported on by high profile newspapers.\textsuperscript{102}

Donations to the PBA also came in the form of goods to support the day to day operations and aesthetics of the facilities. Many of these donations came from board members and large Philadelphia corporations such as boxes of soap from Fels Naptha, and brooms, washboards, and mirrors from Lit Brothers.\textsuperscript{103} Other notable donations include an office desk, an American flag for the building, a cash tray, an electric fan, and a record book from Franklin B. Kirkbride; a dynamo machine from Barclay H. Warburton; plants for the windows from Sarah D. Lowrie; and sign space for advertising from Samuel Simpson.\textsuperscript{104} Objects like the American flag, plants, and signs imply the aesthetic influences of the donors were reflected in the fabric of the facility. All donors were invited to an annual Contributors’ Day to “visit and inspect” the PBA facilities.\textsuperscript{105} This was an opportunity for the elite social classes to observe the product of their donations without the distraction of patrons and simultaneously gaze upon the surrounding community who benefitted from their charitable donations. The demographics of the contributors and the location of the fundraisers further support evidence of a social hierarchy embedded in the class structure of Philadelphia. It also illustrates how a movement to cleanse the immigrant body was made possible by the finances and ideologies of the elite.


\textsuperscript{104} First Annual Report. Pamphlet. 1898, 8. From Collection 1999, Public Baths Association of Philadelphia Records, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania. Includes“Additional expenses were provided for by a special donation from Eugene Delano, which made possible the painting of the Men’s department, hallways and waiting-rooms.”

Staffing the Bathhouse

The PBA was an around the clock operation that required a full staff to manage, clean, and maintain. The demographics and responsibilities of the paid staff highlights the gendered and racial hierarchies of Philadelphia’s working-class environment, as well as the sheer man power and strict organizational structure required to successfully run a public bathhouse. The PBA staff included the Superintendent, office clerks, attendants, matrons, engineers, and contracted Philadelphia police officers. Each facility required a different number and variety of employees. The distribution of employees was based on the size, location, mechanics, and function of the bathhouses, as well as the economic health of the PBA. For example, in 1903 the Wood Street bathhouse required two office clerks, and multiple attendants and matrons, while the small female only bathhouse on Gaskill Street, which also opened in 1903, only required one attendant for operations. All of the attendants who worked in the bathing departments were separated by gender.

Unlike the members of the Board, the demographics of the staff represented working-class Philadelphia. The profile of the staff reflects the defined characteristics of working-class Philadelphia as a technically skilled group who had the means to live outside of dense Center City neighborhoods. It was common for the staff to commute from other Philadelphia neighborhoods such as Northeast, West and Southwest Philadelphia. Based on PBA Board records and photographs it is evident that the PBA hired women and people of color. In the 1940s the female staff members were all listed as “matron”


and the staff of color (identified by the PBA as “colored”) were porters and engineers. This signifies the gendered and racial hierarchies of the staff positions at the bathhouse. The matrons were the lowest paid of all the staff members, earning twenty-five to seventy-five present less than the male counterpart, the porter. The porter and engineer were jobs that required physical labor, as opposed to the superintendent who was charged with the management of operations, records, and public relations. (Figure 6)

The superintendent was always a white middle-aged male and earned the highest salary of all the staff. It was imperative for the superintendent to have an education that enabled him to keep diligent records of the visits and cashflow to relay to the board and the press. The most notable superintendent was William “W. L.” Ross was employed

![Figure 6: Staff outside of 410-12 Gaskill Street bathhouse in 1903. (Image courtesy of Public Baths Association of Philadelphia Records)](image)
from 1898 to 1903. Known for his “radical theory and practice,” Ross was the only superintendent recorded to have lived in a PBA property during his employment.\textsuperscript{109} His brother Edwin who worked as the clerk of the PBA lived with him for a period of time as well (image of apartment floorplan and 1900 census).\textsuperscript{110} In addition to record keeping and operational management Ross was tasked with overseeing the build out of the second and third PBA bathhouse in 1902 and 1903.\textsuperscript{111} In 1903, Ross’s younger brother Benjamin replaced him as the superintendent, and served in this role for over thirty years. These family ties and long tenures were not unique circumstances at the PBA. Records show that employees worked at the PBA for an average of seventeen years and could experience

\begin{flushleft}


\textsuperscript{111} Philadelphia Inquirer. Newspaper clipping. April 21, 1898, 2. ProQuest.
\end{flushleft}
multiple promotions throughout their employment. It is evident that the PBA was a socially close-knit organization that valued family units, job security, and the upward mobility of the staff. (Figure 7)

![1944 PBA Staff Inventory](image_courtesy_of_Public_Baths_Association_of_Philadelphia_Records)

**Figure 7**: 1944 PBA Staff Inventory (Image courtesy of Public Baths Association of Philadelphia Records)
PART 4: LANDSCAPES

Defining the Built Environment

The geographic location of the PBA bathhouses were a key factor to the dissemination of a national ideology of morality, cleanliness, and the habituation of hygienic bathing in Philadelphia. As previously stated, many reformers supported the belief of environmental causation rather than individual fault in recognition of humanity's collective interdependence, and stressed society's need to establish common goals and policies for improvement. According to an early 20th century sanitation theorist, “In order to popularize bathing and render People’s Baths useful, serviceable and well patronized, they should be located convenient of access, in the midst of the thickly populated city districts, and preferably near the street forming the main line of traffic.” Although valid and reflective of the PBA, this only addresses the physical practicalities of geography, not the social or ethnographic implications of a cultural landscape.

The PBA facilities were erected in five city wards characterized by poverty and a dominating foreign-born, or non-Anglo-Saxon population: The Second, Fifth, Thirteenth, Seventeenth and Twenty-Fifth Wards. It was these communities that were most recognizably in need of cleansing and exposure to devices of morality. Respectable surroundings, such as a bathhouse, offered a model for emulation and would precipitate the Americanization of the foreigners.

113 Gerhard, 74.
The PBA was one of many organizations devoted to the improvement of sanitation in these neighborhoods. The Octavia Hill Association (OHA) was formed in the 1890s to “promote by education and active cooperation a higher public spirit and a better social order.”\textsuperscript{115} The OHA believed that a combination of sympathy and paternalism, based on the faith that better homes, especially clean and orderly homes, could make better citizens.\textsuperscript{116} In 1904 the OHA published a detailed report called, \textit{Housing Conditions of Philadelphia}, on the “living conditions in congested districts in Philadelphia” which shed light on the lack of bathing facilities in certain neighborhoods.\textsuperscript{117}

Despite being “the City of Homes,” the “older and more densely crowded portions of [Philadelphia]” often lacked the “comforts and conveniences” of adequate bathing facilities.\textsuperscript{118} According to the 1900 census, Philadelphia as a whole had a larger proportion, as well as a larger number of single-family homes than any other city in the United States with a population of 500,000 or more. In one slum district, of the 378 houses only 67 had bathrooms.\textsuperscript{119} In 1894, the United States Commission of Labor reported that 83 percent of families in tenements had no bathrooms on a typical tenement block of Philadelphia and there was only one tub to 155 people.\textsuperscript{120} A canvas of the Southwark neighborhood, one of the oldest and densest in the city, disclosed that for every nineteen hundred persons, there were only eleven bathtubs and of these only four were

\textsuperscript{117} Emily Dinwiddle, \textit{Housing Conditions in Philadelphia}, (Philadelphia: Octavia Hill Association, 1904).
\textsuperscript{118} \textit{Charter and By-Laws}, Public Baths Association of Philadelphia Records.
\textsuperscript{119} Dinwiddle, \textit{Housing Conditions in Philadelphia}, 21.
\textsuperscript{120} Williams, 29.
used for bathing. In *Housing Conditions of Philadelphia* the bathing facilities of these districts were described in detail:

Many bathtubs were not used for bathing purposes, others were reported to be used only in the summer. This appeared to be due to their location and condition… One tub, for example, was in a large bedroom, without enclosures of any kind. In another instance the bath faucet was the sole water supply fixture for two families. In still another case a family of either had one room and bath; they naturally used the bath compartment as a sleeping room, the tub serving as a sink in the absence of other water supply. One tub, neatly covered with boards and a cloth was used as a table. Here it was reported that about a year previously the bath pipe had sprung a leak, and the landlord, looking upon baths in the light of an unnecessary luxury, had refused to have it repaired.121

Although housing was gradually improved, a block by block survey made by the City of Philadelphia in 1942 showed the number of dwellings without private bathing facilities as high as 69,681.122 (Figure 8)

Through the 19th century, Philadelphia redeveloped its original grid system based on the Act of Consolidation in 1854 and the introduction of the electric street car in the 1890s. The city was marked by large houses for the well-to-do, smaller ones for the skilled workers and middle classes, and back alley “bandbox,” or "father, son, and holy ghost" houses for the poor.123 These smaller, often brick, street facing dwellings — originally built as comfortable single row family homes — were often referred to as “adapted

121 Dinwiddle, 18.
123 Sutherland, *Peoples of Philadelphia*, 181; In 1895 reformers pushed a bill through the state legislature which practically ensured the “exclusion of high-rise tenements with narrow air shafts, poor lighting, and insufficient ventilation.”
to the tenement house method of life” by cramming three or more families under a single roof.\textsuperscript{124} The back alleys, situated behind brick row homes and shops, created dense court neighborhoods, often invisible from the street.\textsuperscript{125} This development facilitated the proliferation of invisible rear courts and alleys that were usually unpaved, without sewers, and serviced by court hydrants and foul, rotting privies, and shared with large stables for various animals. \textsuperscript{126}

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{124} Although referred to as “tenement” these houses were different in architectural design from the typical New York City tenement described in Andrew Dolkart’s \textit{Biography of a Tenement House in New York City: An Architectural History of 97 Orchard Street}; Nathan Kushin, \textit{Memoirs of New American} (New York: Block Publishing Co., 1949), 49.
\end{itemize}
Figure 8: A page of a pamphlet distributed by the PBA in 1933 to illustrate the housing conditions of patrons to potential donors. (Image courtesy of Public Baths Association of Philadelphia Records)
The Cultural Character of Neighborhoods

As the population of foreign-born residents increased, segregation by income, race, or ethnic group became the rule in Philadelphia.\(^{127}\) Donors of the PBA who had most likely “not been in those regions before,” or even been aware of the existence of the alley facing court neighborhoods, were encouraged by the organization to “take the trouble to thread through the streets” to observe the “crooked dreary houses” and “filth” surrounding the bathhouses.\(^{128}\) These landscapes were equally as foreign and distressing as the “othered” non-Anglo-Saxon Protestant body.

Philadelphia was home to a small immigrant population compared to other major American cities. Nevertheless, the composition of these groups were distinctive, if not revealing.\(^{129}\) Philadelphia's foreign born population possessed distinct ethnic and racial traits that characterized the city’s development well into the 1980s.\(^{130}\) Different ethnic groups arrived in the city during different periods of its development; each group — because of language, religion, or race — faced a different reception and therefore a somewhat different environment.\(^{131}\) Each immigrant and migrant group, such as African Americans from the South, concentrated in low rental areas where work was available and places of employment could be reached without the cost of transportation.”\(^{132}\) The

\(^{127}\) Davis, The Peoples of Philadelphia, 7.


\(^{130}\) Ibid.


characteristics of the five neighborhoods with PBA bathhouses exemplify the racial and cultural groups targeted by the elite Anglo-Saxon members of the PBA as the most need of moral and physical cleansing: The Jews of Wards of Five and Seventeen; the Italians of the Second Ward; the drunken, homeless, and prostitutes of the Thirteenth Ward, also known as the “Tenderloin;” and the mill and factory workers of Kensington in the Twenty-fifth Ward. Although photos and publications depict Black patronage at the bathhouses, the PBA never erected a bathhouse in a predominantly Black neighborhood.

Jewish Neighborhoods

Half of the PBA facilities were erected in neighborhoods characterized by their Eastern European Jewish population and cultural background: Southwark of the Fifth Ward and Northern Liberties of the Seventeenth Ward. In 1894 the Jewish population of South Philadelphia has risen from 300 to an estimate 3,000. The first and third bathhouses to be erected were located in the Southwark neighborhood, known as “one of the vilest Jewish immigrant neighborhoods.” Publications referred to Southwark as a “slummy” urban landscapes that consisted of “ramshackle brick houses” with “cramped quarters […] absent of hygienic living,” and “reeked with odors.” (Figure 9)

133 Ibid, 246.
134 Report for 1898. Pamphlet. 8-11. Public Baths Association of Philadelphia Records. Historic maps reveal that there were three synagogues and two Jewish social halls within a block of the bathhouse; Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, Volume, 5 Ward, 1889, Geo. W. & Walter S. Bromley, Civil Engineers, Published by G.W. Bromley and Co.
Figure 9. A photograph of the backyard of 313 Lombard Street (left) and the back alley of 330 South Street with an outhouse and laundry. (right.) Both locations are one block north of the Gaskill Street bathhouses, taken by the Octavia Hill Society, circa 1900-1905. (Images courtesy of the Special Collections Research Center, Temple University Libraries)
In 1901, Southwark was defined by “multitudinous courts and alleys” of “hot and dirty tenements” that sheltered two or more families.\textsuperscript{136} The two bathhouses, were embedded in this landscape on Gaskill Street (formerly Lethigow street), a narrow one-way street, nestled between Lombard street, South street, Fourth street and Fifth street, on Gaskill Street.\textsuperscript{137} (Figure 10)

\textbf{Figure 10:} 1916 Sanborn Map featuring the two Gaskill Street bathhouses, located in dense blocks characterized by alleys and culturally Jewish sites. (Sanborn Map Company. Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania, Volume 1, 1916. Published by Sanborn Map Company: New York.)

\textsuperscript{136} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{137a} The New York Evening Telegram, 1902. Public Baths Association of Philadelphia Records.
The main thoroughfare of Southwark was South Street. The street was characterized by sights of makeshift stands made of barrels and boxes where barter and trade were carried on. (Figure 11) Fourth Street, which intersected South Street, was home to Philadelphia’s pushcart curb trade, much like New York City’s Lower East Side. The semiotics of Hebrew, Russian, Polish and Yiddish advertisements for kosher food and ritual bathing, known as the mikvah, emboldened the neighborhood’s cultural heritage.¹³⁸

In 1912, the PBA erected a bathhouse in the Seventeenth Ward, a section of the Northern Liberties neighborhood, home to the second largest concentration of Russian

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¹³⁸ Five private bathing establishments were operated and patronized by Jews in this part of South Philadelphia. Whiteman, *The People of Philadelphia*, 238.
Jews outside of Southwark.139 (Figure 12) The Jewish population flowed into lower Kensington and swept along historic Germantown Avenue. Second Street, the main north-south thoroughfare, cut through the heart of the Liberties, which at one time was the center of colonial Philadelphia Jewry. Later it bristled with the largest concentration of German Jews. With the coming of Eastern European Jews in the late 19th century, the residential pattern extended to the areas north of the original settlement.140

The bathhouse was located at 1203-1205 Germantown Avenue, just off Girard Avenue and North Second Street. The surrounding blocks were a patchwork of large industrial warehouses and factories, residential row houses, small commercial enterprises, and railway infrastructure. (Figure 13) The main commercial avenue was North Second Street, which had its own vast market place and head-house that corresponded to the one on South Second Street; to the Jews of Northern Liberties these streets held the same social and economic importance as the lively corner of Fifth Street and South Street.141 It noted that it was common for residents to be seen wearing scheitel (ritual wigs worn by married women) and men with “matted beards, and their Talmudized customs.”142

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139 Ibid, 246.
141 Ibid.
Figure 12: Map of 1203-05 Germantown Avenue bathhouse and its environs. (Sanborn Map Company. Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania, Volume 8, 1917. Published by Sanborn Map Company: New York.)
In June 1898, a short six weeks after opening the first Gaskill Street bathhouse, the PBA began to notice that Friday evening, the beginning of the Jewish Sabbath, brought the majority business. It is a Jewish ritual for men to bathe oneself before the sunsets on the Sabbath. Board member Franklin B. Kirkbride publicly addressed the significant Jewish patronage at the Gaskill Street baths during a speech to John Hopkins University School of Medicine:

It is surprising at times to find in what large numbers our Hebrew citizens patronize the baths, and to see how strict many of them are in observing the provisions of the Mosaic law in this respect. On Sept. 14, only 18 persons bathed; but two days later, the eve of the Hebrew new year, more
than 400 Israelites presented themselves to take their New Year’s bath, though the day was raw and cold and many of them clearly did not come from a mere sense of pleasure.\textsuperscript{143}

Although the ritual bath is a practice of Jewish culture, the PBA bathhouses were technically not Kosher, thus deemed illegitimate within Jewish law. The use of the Gas-kill Street bathhouses on the Sabbath exemplify early reforms of Philadelphia’s Jewish population. Furthermore, these circumstances highlight how the PBA homogenized the purpose of the bath as an object of hygienic practice not, not ritual cleansing.

**The Italian Market**

The Second Ward, known today as the “Italian Market” has been home to the heaviest concentration of Italians in Philadelphia since the early 20th century. According to the records of the U.S. Census, the number of first and second-generation Italians in Philadelphia area was 76,734 in 1910 and grew to be 136,793 by 1920.\textsuperscript{144} This did not go unnoticed by the PBA. In 1922 the PBA erected a bathhouse to address the need to assimilate the ever-increasing presence of Italian immigrants in Philadelphia.

The bathhouse was located in a triangular lot at the intersection of two main thoroughfares, Passyunk Avenue and Wharton street, less than half a mile from Ninth and Christian Streets, the commercial center of Italian settlement. (Figure 14) This section of the city was described as “a wholly foreign appearance” that could be mistaken for “the

heart of Italy.” The streets were characterized by reformers as a calamity of “black-eyed children, rolling and tumbling” amongst the “gaily colored dresses of women and the crowd of street vendors.” (Figure 15 and 16) It was noted that “goats wandered the streets” and “rag pickers” at “work in many of the alleys” were also common sights. In 1904, it was reported that the Italian district had “the most inadequate bath provisions” of all of Philadelphia’s slum neighborhoods. In addition to addressing the habits of the Italian population, the PBA hoped that the location of this bathhouse would relieve “the congestion” at the Gaskill Street bathhouses.

145 Dinwiddie, 31.
146 Ibid, 2.
147 Ibid.
148 Ibid, 18
Figure 14: Map of 1300 Passyunk Ave bathhouse and its environs. (Sanborn Map Company. Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania, Volume 13, 1927. Published by Sanborn Map Company: New York.)
Figures 15 and 16: Images of the Italian Market neighborhood (Images courtesy of the Special Collections Research Center, Temple University Libraries)
The Tenderloin

The second PBA facility was erected in 1903 in Philadelphia’s Thirteenth Ward. The Thirteenth Ward, also known as the “Tenderloin” or “Skid row” district, differed from the previously described neighborhoods in the sense that its population and surrounding landscape was not defined by a particular race or cultural heritage group. Rather, this neighborhood was known as Philadelphia’s vice district, home to many cheap amusements such as pool rooms, gambling resorts, saloons, opium dens, and brothels. (Figure 17)

Figure 17: Map of Philadelphia’s Skid Row, from the Philadelphia Health and Welfare Council’s report What About Philadelphia’s Skid Row?, 1952. (Image courtesy of Special Collections Research Center, Temple University Libraries)
The PBA’s decision to erect the second bathhouse in a district defined by class and immoral activities, reflects the parallel status of the poorest Americans and the generalized immigrant body. The bathhouse was one of many charity organizations established in the Tenderloin to “reach the thousands of human derelicts who frequent the neighborhood.”

The Tenderloin attracted transient “unmarried foreigners and vagrants.” Those who could afford it stayed in the area’s many lodging houses for around five cents a night or cheap hotels for around thirty-five cents. By the late 19th century the Tenderloin was home to Philadelphia’s largest homeless population. A 1904 survey of the neighborhood reported there to be a mixed population of Austro-Hungarian Jews and Christians, Germans, Poles, Irish, and “negro” Americans. The report also noted that, “huge breweries and stables stand out conspicuously” amongst “fairly large tenement houses and small alley dwellings, many very old and some in so dilapidated a condition as to be unfit for habitation.”

152 Ibid.
153 Dinwiddie, 3.
Figure 18: Photograph of an alley dwelling behind commercial store fronts on Fairhill Street two blocks southeast of the Wood Street bathhouse in 1911. (Image courtesy of PhillyHistory.org, a project of the Philadelphia Department of Records.)
The PBA inserted a bathhouse in epicenter of this district at 718 Wood Street, a street once described as, “filled with dens of the vilest character” where “women call to passers-by on the street and invite them in” and “inhabitants of the houses call out […] using some of the vilest language.”\(^{154}\) An insurance survey of the bathhouse stated there to only be a single foot between the rear wall of the bathhouse and the north wall of the factory of a five-story hat factory at 305-7 N 8th Street, thus highlighting the compact built environment of the neighborhood.\(^{155}\) (Figure 19 and 20)

In an Annual Report the PBA portrayed the character of the Wood Street bathhouse patrons through a narrated account between Superintendent Ross and man who lived in the Thirteenth Ward. When the Ross asked the man on his opinion of the bathhouse, the man replied,

‘[The bathhouse’s] just illigant, but its a long way down. Now if yes only has this place [a laundry department] at Wood Street, but I suppose te’re too poor to have a big place up there where land’s so expensive. Ye see, boss, I live up town an’ when I want a bath I goes to Wood Street, but when me duds must be washed its here I have to come. But divil-a-bit do I mind the walk, for faith it’s all right when I do get here.’\(^{156}\)

By writing in a vernacular dialect the PBA is able to portray the lack of sophistication and intellect associated with the “Great Unwashed” of Philadelphia to past and potential donors. This interaction further portrays the social hierarchies of Philadelphia and


\(^{156}\) Fifth Annual Report 1903, Public Baths Association of Philadelphia Records.
the establishment of a dominantly racist and classist narrative disseminated through media and marketing to the public.

Figure 19: Map of 718-720 Wood Street bathhouse and its environs. (Sanborn Map Company. Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania, Volume 15 1916. Published by Sanborn Map Company: New York.)
**Figure 20:** Detail of Wood Street bathhouse and surrounding blocks. (Sanborn Map Company. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania County, Pennsylvania, Volume 15 1916. Published by Sanborn Map Company: New York.)
East Kensington

The sixth and final PBA bathhouse opened in 1928 in the Twenty-fifth Ward at 1808 East Hazard Street as an effort to “relieve” the Germantown Avenue bathhouse located around two miles south.\footnote{Twenty-fifth Annual Report. Pamphlet. 1922. From Collection 1999, Public Baths Association of Philadelphia Records, The Historical Society of Pennsylvania.} The Twenty Fifth Ward, better known as the neighborhood of East Kensington, was a landscape defined by significant industrial sites, such as machinery and textile mills, surrounded by small workers row housing.\footnote{Sutherland, Peoples of Philadelphia, 176.} (Figures 21) By 1928, with five bathhouses already up and running, the PBA was less concerned with targeting the habits of a specific cultural heritage group, but rather, serving the maximum number of patrons, many who work “grimy” industrial jobs. (Figure 22) The Kensington

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\end{figure}
bathhouse was the largest of all PBA facilities to date and tactically located on the northern end of East Hazard Street, between Kensington Avenue and Frankford Avenue, two main arteries that connected some of Philadelphia’s northern most communities to the denser City Center by the newly popularized automobile.

Figure 22: An advertisement for the PBA facilities was designed to attract the men working dirty manual labor at the various industrial sites in the Kensington neighborhood. (Image courtesy of Zumper.com)
Racial Mixing

Although the PBA’s facilities were located in economically and ethnically distinct neighborhoods, it is important to note that the PBA patrons were diverse. According to one observer, they ran the gamut, from “the clerk following the street urchin” to “the shabby and the well-dressed” in line for a bath — anyone willing to pay the five cents for admissions was welcome.\(^{159}\) (Figure 23) An article in The Women’s Section of The New York Evening Telegram elaborated,

> Within five city blocks, packed in small, ramshackle brick houses, are thousands of negroes, Chinamen, Italians, Germans, Poles, and Hebrews, with a liberal sprinkling of all other nationalities. There is scarcely any color line in Philadelphia, especially in trade, and from the outset the baths and washroom were thrown open alike to whites and colors. It would have caused a race riot in such a neighborhood had the management trained to do otherwise. Women of every creed and color stand at adjoining tubs, and often there are not two women in the room who speak the same language.\(^{160}\)

Despite its white elitist roots of the American public bath movement, the PBA bathhouses were places that had “a tendency to break down race prejudice” through equal treatment and accessibility.\(^{161}\) Although this statement may be true in theory, the bathhouse was not a place of socialization. It was a controlled place of cleansing fueled by hybrid imperatives of Americanization and the push for urban sanitation.

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Figure 23: Group of men waiting for the Gaskill Street bathhouse to open. This image was featured in a letter sent to donors of the PBA. (Image courtesy of Public Baths Association of Philadelphia Records)
PART 5: ARCHITECTURE

The Colonial Revival

If Philadelphia’s slum districts were ruinous, vile, cramped, filthy and foreign, then the public bathhouses were designed as the conceptual negation: modern, tasteful, and sanitary. All six bathhouses were red brick, externally symmetrical structures designed to mimic the appearance of a fashionable Georgian Colonial Revival house. (Figures 24-28) Although rooted in different origins, the bathhouse movement and the proliferation of Colonial Revival architecture in Philadelphia at the turn of 20th century both reflect the push for a standardized American aesthetic that reflected the values of the white elite. The Colonial Revival was most popular in the United States from 1900 to 1920.162 Proponents of progressivism and advocates of colonial revival architecture were seeking to recreate a time distinguished by "plain living, high thinking, and sober acting” associated with the foundations of American culture, and abide to the distinctly Philadelphian elite social codes of conformity and convention.163 As historians Nathaniel Burt and Wallace E. Davies observe, “Nowhere were the rich richer or the poor poorer, but nowhere did they all more seem to be striving towards the same ends: a respectable family, nestled in a respectable house at least as decorously comfortable as the neighbors’, whether the house had three or thirty windows.”164

164 Burt and Davies, Philadelphia: A 300 Year History, 523.
Furthermore, according to historian, Kenneth L. Ames, architects and their patrons viewed colonial revival architecture as a strategy to cope with America’s social and cultural diversity.\textsuperscript{165} In Philadelphia, non-residential buildings were erected by wealthy patrons in the colonial revival style as an effort to reinterpret the local historic vernacular, in light of new standards of comfort, taste, scale, and building technology.\textsuperscript{166} Two outstanding examples are the Racquet Club, an exclusive social club constructed in 1906, and redesign of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania in 1910. Both of these facilities served the elite sponsors of the PBA. The PBA’s impulse to build the bathhouses in the colonial revival reflects the organization’s intent to acculturate the immigrant body through systematic exposure to American tastefulness.\textsuperscript{167}

**Exterior Design**

According to Gerhard’s *Modern Baths and Bathhouses*, the People’s Bath was to be a “simple, unpretentious, yet neat, clean, substantial and inviting” structure.\textsuperscript{168} Although most PBA bathhouses were on average over 2,000 square feet (over twice the size of the typical late 18th century row house) they were not monumental, nor overtly pretentious buildings.\textsuperscript{169} Unlike New York City’s elaborate Roman-Styled municipal bath-

\textsuperscript{168} Gerhard, 78.
houses, the Philadelphia variant was designed to conform to the spirit of the Philadelphia’s “City of Homes” self-image with “morally conscious, materially comfortable homogeneity.” Without the large signs announcing their function, the facilities might have been mistaken for grand colonial revival rowhouse. See for instance Figures 25, 26, and 28 where two entrances clearly indicate sex-segregated institutional buildings. Like other Georgian Revival structures, the exterior detailing of the bathhouses was derived from eighteenth and early nineteenth-century prototypes. All bricks visible from street elevation of the three earliest bathhouses were laid in Flemish bond and finished with dark mortar -- a standard of refined Colonial buildings. The informed observer would “notice the pleasant effect of the black headers that break the monotony of the plain red bricks of the façade,” as well as, “the white stone trimmings.” Building specifications indicate that all “high quality bricks” were to be salvaged from the demolition of the former structures and used for the construction of the new brick bathhouses. The reuse of building materials, some of which dated back to the 18th century, ensured an aesthetically unified streetscape. The exteriors were strictly symmetrical in design, and stylistically accented with gabled dormers, Palladian windows, double hung sash windows, large dentils, brick quoins, fanlights, and broken pediments. In contrast to the design of the facade, there were no specifications for the decorative elements of the non-street facing walls, a standard practice for rowhouses in Philadelphia. For example, all

170 Burt and Davies, 522.
172 Philadelphia Medical Journal 1, no. 17 (April 23, 1898), 717.
street facing roofs shingles were made of “Vermont Free” slate while those in the back were to be tin, and all facade masonry was to be made of “blue stone” or King of Prussia marble, not White Georgia marble that was used throughout the rest of the design.\textsuperscript{174}

\textbf{Figure 24:} The first public bathhouse in Philadelphia, located at 410-12 Gaskill Street. Completed in 1898. (Image courtesy of Harvard Art Museums)

\footnotesize\textsuperscript{174} Building Specifications, 1902. From 26-SP-040, folder 1, Cornell Collection, Athenaeum of Philadelphia.
Figure 25: The second bathhouse to be completed at 718-20 Wood Street. Completed in 1903. (Image courtesy of Public Bath Association of Philadelphia Records)
Figure 26: The women’s bathhouse at 413-15 Gaskill Street. Located across the street from the bathhouse at 410-12 Gaskill Street. Building completed in 1903. (Image courtesy of The Philadelphia Contributionship)
Figure 27: The bathhouse located at 1213-05 Germantown Ave. Completed in 1912. (Image courtesy of Archives.org)
Figure 28: The last bathhouse to be constructed by the PBA. Located at 1808–20 East Hazzard Street. Completed in 1927. (Image courtesy of Bright MLS Inc.)
Interior Design

Because the bathhouse served as a place for bathing and laundry, the application of the domestic colonial revival style was limited to the ornamentation of the two public spaces, the entrance halls and the waiting rooms. Regardless of one’s purpose of visit, all PBA patrons would spend some amount of time in the facility’s waiting room. The design of the waiting room is an adaptation of a large Georgian living room. (Figure 29) The majority of the waiting rooms were only accessible through the passage of a narrow entrance stairway or a “wide entrance hall,” that mimicked the function of the Georgian style hall. These spaces were always finished with painted walls and varnished wood flooring, both considered “essential elements” of colonial revival house interiors. Both

Figure 29: Interior of men waiting room at 410-12 Gaskill Street. The photo shows men and children sitting on benches as they wait for a shower. There are Fels Naptha advertisements on the wall and a drinking fountain next to the office where patrons would receive a towel and soap for the price of 5 cents. (Image courtesy of Public Bath Association of Philadelphia Records)

May, "Progressivism and the Colonial Revival," 117.
wood and white paint were revered for their simplistic aesthetic, as well as their hygienic and sanitary advantages in comparison to earlier Victorian trends of carpet and wallpaper. In addition to the interior walls, all doors, windows trimmings, exterior woodwork, galvanized, and iron work, as well as all interior exposed pipes were to be painted three coats of “spotless white” paint. Although the period descriptions generally portray all of the interior walls as “tastefully finished in white paint,” the original finishes of the hall and waiting rooms in the first three bathhouses were exceptions. The waiting room walls of bathhouse at 410-12 Gaskill Street were described as finished with “tinted cream with a wooden wainscoting of green,” a floor of “painted pine,” and equipped with “long wooden benches tastefully finished in white pine.” The women’s bathhouse, which opened in 1903, was also described as having green wainscotting, but “peach-toned calcimine on the walls and ceiling.” (Figure 30) In 1903 an article in The Brooklyn Eagle noted that the walls and built-in benches in the Wood Street bathhouse waiting rooms were painted “a cool olive green.” In the early 20th century, trend setting magazines claimed that light colors -- like cream, peach, and olive green -- were best suited for small spaces such as a living room or a waiting room because they made a room appear to be larger. The horizontal division of walls through a wainscot was also recommended to produce “an illusion of space.”

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176 Ibid.  
179 Philadelphia Record, March 27, 1903 Public Bath Association of Philadelphia Records.  
All of the PBA waiting rooms were furnished with a wrap-around wooden benches and ice water fountains built into the perimeter walls (the pipe conveying the water to the tank was laid in an ice-box which was set in the floor). According to historian Bridget A. May, built-in furniture was considered a staple of Colonial Revival interiors. Such furnishings were implemented to increase the functionality of multipurpose rooms, make housekeeping easier, and employ better hygienic practices. The office used built-in shelving to organize the towels and soap for distribution. (Figure 31) Photographs

Figure 30: Interior of women’s waiting room at 410 Gaskill Street. A woman sits with her towel next to an entrance to the bathing facility. The photo shows the combined towel chute and closet situated between the two doorways that led to the bathing department. (Image courtesy of Harvard Art Museums)

show that other decorative elements of the waiting rooms were Fels Naptha soap advertisements and metal pendant and sconce light fixtures. The aforementioned American flag and window plants were most likely displayed in the waiting rooms as well.

![Figure 31: Interior of office and clerk with built in shelving for towels. The men’s department is on the left, and the women’s department is on the right. (Image courtesy of The Philadelphia Contributionship)](image)

**Aesthetics of Health and Sanitation**

According to building plans, the majority of interior space was designated for bathing and laundry. (Appendix A) Unlike the hall and waiting room, the design of these utilitarian spaces reflected the modern sanitation and health standards for public spaces at
the turn of the century. In her dissertation on social reform photography, Michelle Lamuniere comments on the “modern, private, light-filled, and, of course, sanitary” PBA bathing facility captured in a photograph, illustrates the organization’s “invitation to the poor to uplift themselves through the cleansing of their physical bodies.”

One of the most coveted aspects of the PBA facilities was the use of natural light. Advocates of Colonial revival architecture insisted that sunlight was necessary for good health and that it dissipated the dark and gloomy atmosphere associated with late nineteenth-century rooms. Similarly, new studies in public health revealed the positive health effects of fresh air and ventilation, specifically concerning the spears of tuberculosis in dense urban communities. In light of these sentiments, all six of the PBA facilities were designed with one or more large skylights to illuminated the whole interior of the bathing departments. The bathhouses constructed between 1912 and 1927 featured skylights with greenhouse sash openers to circulate fresh air through the department. All of the bathhouses were also illuminated with large double hung sash and casement windows that could be opened during the day for ventilation. To aid ventilation, the structures were built with systems of airshafts connected with a heating apparatus, which was arranged to supply hot air in the winter, cold air in the summer, and rid of “foul air” year round.

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182 Lamuniere, “Sentiment and Science” 47.
183 May, "Progressivism and the Colonial Revival," 120.
185 Building Specifications, 26-SP-040, Cornell Collection.
glass in all interiors sash doors, transoms, and office partition windows.\textsuperscript{187} Although the basement laundry facilities were at least five feet below grade, they, too, were “light and airy” spaces designed with window wells, electric lights, and high ceilings.\textsuperscript{188} (Figure 33)

As previously mentioned the exterior of the PBA bathhouse was designed to conform to the surrounding landscape as to not appear overtly pretentious. The majority of the PBA bathhouses were either the same height, or slightly taller than the neighboring buildings. However, the bathhouses had fewer stories than the neighboring buildings, their height testifying to lofty ceilings that reached as tall at 16 feet -- another attribute designed to facilitate the circulation of air and bring in natural light through large windows.

According to William Paul Gerhard, public bathing facilities were to be constructed out of “water tight” materials of the “highest degree of sanitary cleanliness.”\textsuperscript{189} All floors, walls, partitions and ceiling were to be made of “non-porous materials,” that are not readily destroyed by the action of soap, warm water, dampness and steam vapors, such as cement, asphalt, terrazzo, marble mosaic, and glass tilling.\textsuperscript{190} The PBA facilities were no exception to this rule. All of the floors in the laundry and bathing departments were made of waterproof materials, first being concrete and later linoleum beginning in second decade of the 20th century. (Figure 34) By 1912 even the wood surfaces were to

\textsuperscript{187} Building Specifications, From 26-SP-040, Cornell Collection.
\textsuperscript{189} Gerhard, 79.
\textsuperscript{190} Ibid.
be filled, stained, and varnished with three coats of Liquid Granite to prevent water damage and be easier to clean for sanitary purposes. In addition to the walls and floors, all doors, fronts, cap and pin rails of bathing and water closet stalls were finished with white porcelain enamel paint to create a more sanitary environment.¹⁹¹ (Figure 35)

Figure 32: Interior of men’s bathing department at 410-12 Gaskill Street. The towel chute is located in the right side of the frame. This photo clearly illustrates the ventilation system and the presence of natural light in the bathing departments. (Image courtesy of Harvard Art Museums)

¹⁹¹ Building Specifications, 26-SP-040, From Cornell Collection, The Atheneaum of Philadelphia.
Figure 33: This photograph portrays the laundry department located in the basement floor of 410 Gaskill Street. The women in the photographs are using the ironing table, the wringer, and the drying closet. There is a police officer monitoring activity of the room next to the stairs which lead to the waiting room. There is another male employee in the room. The soap boiler and washer are located in the lower right-hand corner of the photograph. (Image courtesy of Harvard Art Museums)
Figure 34: An example of a water-tight finish at the bathhouse -- slip glazed iron spotted white terracotta bricks used in the interior of the Hazzard Street bathhouse. (Image by the Author)
The Architects of the PBA

The PBA worked closely with some of Philadelphia’s most prominent architectural firms to bring the bathhouses to life:

Furness, Evans & Co; John T. Windrim; and Cope & Stewardson (later known as Stewardson & Page after the early deaths of both in 1912). These firms were nationally recognized for the diversity and significance of their commissioned work. The three
firms all designed structures for Philadelphia’s wealthy institutions and individuals, from the University of Pennsylvania to the Franklin Institute and the Wanamaker family. The social stature of these firms illuminates the PBA’s desire for quality structures and the depth of their financial resources.

The PBA commissioned Louis E. Marié, a Philadelphia architect of the firm of Furness, Evans & Co., to design the first bathhouse in 1898 on the corner of Gaskill Street and Leithgow Street. PBA finance chairman, Barclay Warburton had previously used Louis E Marié to design his stable at 2058 Sanson street.192 Marié's plan of the building was the result of a careful study of public bathhouses in New York — such as the People’s Bath and the Yonkers Municipal — and New York’s mandatory bath law.193 Contrary to the New York precedent, Marié’s design incorporated space designated for laundry. Out of all six bathhouses, this design was the most stylistically eclectic and non-conforming to the scale and forms of the surrounding built environment.

In 1902, the PBA commissioned John T. Windrim to design two additional bathhouses (718 Wood Street and 413-15 Gaskill Street). In addition to his architectural career, Windrim maintained an active public and professional life. As president of the Evening Telegraph, he, too, was previously acquainted with Warburton. While working with the PBA, Windrim was simultaneously designing a series of five power generating stations for the Philadelphia Electric Company in classical revival styles. Like the power

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193 Williams, 102.
stations, Windrim’s two bathhouses represented the push to construct City Beautiful landmarks in lower-class and industrial Philadelphia neighborhoods. Windrim expertly implemented well-detailed classical designs to mask the utilitarian function of these commissions. Unlike Marié’s vernacular design, Windrim honed into the mission and values of the PBA through a literal adaptation of Georgian domestic architecture in his bathhouse designs. The three proceeding PBA bathhouses echoed Windrim’s effort to design straightforwardly Georgian Revival structures.

These final three bathhouses – 1203-05 Germantown Avenue, Passyunk Avenue and Wharton Street, and 1808-20 East Hazard Street -- were designed by Walter Cope and John Stewardson of Cope & Stewardson, one the nation’s leading collegiate architectural firms. They are remembered for their refined “collegiate Gothic” style that set the tone of campus building at the University of Pennsylvania, Bryn Mawr, and Princeton, for the next half century. Philadelphians appreciated their work for its nostalgic sense of stylistic authenticity, thus considered by historians, the “true anglophile ‘Philadelphia taste’ of the Progressive Era.” Folks lauded Cope and Stewardson for their ability to articulate the intentions and ideologies of their clients through architecture, such as demonstrated in the PBA bathhouses. Their attention to stylistic authenticity is exemplified in the Specifications of the Workmanship and Materials of the Bathhouse for the construction of the bathhouse on Germantown Avenue.

195 Burt and Davies, Philadelphia: A 300 Year History, 507.
196 Ibid.
PART 6: SYSTEMS, MECHANICS, AND HABITS

System of Operations

According to Historian Lindy Biggs, engineers and industrial architects in search of the "rational" workplace during the age of mass production at the turn-of-the-century, recast the factory itself in the image of the machine. The factory was considered "master machine," containing and coordinating all of the machinery within. The PBA bathhouses were “master machines” as well, designed with all of the proper mechanisms to efficiently clean bodies at a massive scale. Philadelphia’s variant of the public bathhouse was a successful enterprise because the organization recognized the benefits “perfect equipment and their arrangement” to maximize the quality of their product. The PBA utilized the distribution of space and mechanization of sanitation technology to systematically regulate and supervise the cleansing of bodies. All bathhouse floorplans are located in Appendix A.

Due to the novelty of the shower bath at the turn of the century, a visit to the PBA was most likely a patron’s first private, upright, bathing experience mechanized with hot and cold water. A newspaper article published in July of 1898 vividly depicts this common unfamiliarity,

The unlimited hot water thrills the women especially. They never saw so much before. ‘Oh, my! So much hot water!’
Gasped one in delight. Unfortunately, they are so glad to

201 Crook, Governing Systems, 245.
indulge in this hot comfort that they fairly have to be watched lest they scald themselves. Some are quite at sea as to the management of faucets, and one woman got the hot water running so bountifully that she had to scream for help: ‘Lady, lady, I can't schtop Der water!’ And, bless your soul, instead of jumping out, there she sat, neatly up to her shoulders in blistering liquid, and quite as crimson as the same treatment makes a lobster.\textsuperscript{202}

From the moment a patron entered the building, the PBA enforced a strict system of operations to regulate an efficient flow of bodies through the bathhouses. This began by separating patrons by gender through a designated front entrance that lead to the waiting rooms. An office was located between the men's waiting room and women's entrance. There was a bay on each side of the office where patrons in both waiting rooms would purchase a ticket for a shower, bath, or laundry services. The spatial placement of the office also enabled the office clerk to surveil the activity of patrons in both waiting rooms. (Figure 36) The PBA hired police officers to monitor the entrances, waiting rooms, and bathing and laundry departments to further control the systematic flow of patrons through the space and surveil their activity.

As previously discussed, the bathhouses at 410-12 Gaskill Street and 718 Wood Street were designed with “comfortable living quarters” on the third floor for the superintendent.\textsuperscript{203} This space consisted of a 240 square foot “Living Room” and a 285 square foot “Bed Room” equipped with two small closets, a sink, and four circular windows that faced the main streets. By living at the bathhouse, the superintendent was able to truly get

\textsuperscript{202} The Philadelphia Record, July 9 1898. PBA Records.
\textsuperscript{203} “Public Bath Association of Philadelphia” Bulletin of the Bureau of Labor 54, (September 1904), 1355.
to know the surrounding neighborhood and monitor the activity both inside and outside the facility.

Besides its strict gender-based distributions of space and methods of surveillance, the PBA also relied on chalk boards, tickets, and wall-mounted clocks to help manage the flow of people.\(^{204}\) Upon purchasing a ticket, patrons would receive a towel, a piece of soap, cut fresh from a long white bar, and a number that corresponded to their turn in line.\(^{205}\) As soon as a bathing stall was empty, a patron’s number would be called by a staff member. On especially busy days, the PBA hired a police officer to escort men from the waiting room into the bath department.\(^{206}\) The patron would then enter into the changing room — a four-foot square space that provided with a seat and hooks on which to hang clothes. The attendant would record the time they entered into the changing room on a slab of slate that hung in the corridor outside of the stall. (Figure 37)

Male patrons were allowed twenty minutes to undress, shower, and use the toilet; women were given thirty minutes.\(^{207}\) Once the patron had vacated the stall, the PBA attendant mopped the floor, and collect remnants of soap and the soiled towels. The floors and gutters leading to the drains were “scrubbed” and then “flushed with carbolic acid solution” throughout the day.\(^{208}\) Every floor of the bathhouses had a “towel chute” that lead into a disinfectant tank in the basement. The towels would then be transferred to a boiler,

\(^{204}\) Crook, Tom. *Governing Systems*, 264.
\(^{205}\) *The North American*, March 2, 1902, PBA Records.
\(^{208}\) *The Philadelphia Poly Clinic*, 333.
where live steam destroyed “the last vestiges of disease germs that [may have] lurked in their folds.” The remnants of soap were never redistributed to patrons, but collected and sold in bulk to factories.

The flow of patrons from the waiting room to the laundry department was regulated in a similar fashion. An observation from the Philadelphia Telegram describes the system of operations, “Everything is done on a strictly cash basis. When the women go in they leave 25 cents in the superintendent’s office and are given a card baring the number of their dryer and time of entrance and departure.” Unlike the bathing department, the only enforced rules of the laundry department were the “discouragement of intemperance, quarreling, and improper language.” One reporter noted that, “the washerwomen sing and talk as they toil” and even “bring their luncheons” to eat, or “take a bath,” as they waited for their clothes to dry. It was recorded that the “average stay” in the laundry department was four hours, which was significantly shorter than a day’s work done at home.

There was some trial and error regarding these systems of operations and the discipline of patrons. In 1898, when the first bathhouse opened, all of the doors to the individual bathing stalls “had locks which could be fastened from the inside” to ensure the privacy of the bather. After less than a year the PBA decided to remove all said locks,
due to the actions of a few “bolder bathers” with “combative and monopolistic tendencies” who would lock themselves in the bathing stall and refuse to come out when their time had expired.216 On some occasions the attending police officer had to “punch through the wire screen over the top of the compartment with a broomstick” and “force the patron to leave the shower.”217 Other examples of documented misbehavior by patrons at the bathhouses included disguising boys in kilts as “small children” for free admission, and patrons of all ages “regarding [the bathhouse] as a playhouse” instead of a “serious matter of getting clean.”218 These observations were often racially charged claiming that “the Hebrews are hardest to manage” and tended “not to understand [the rules].”219

216 Ibid.
217 Public Ledger, 1899, PBA Records.
218 Record Philadelphia, July 9 1898, PBA Records.
219 Ibid.
Figure 36: Photograph of the office clerk (presumably Superintendent W.L. Ross) interacting with a patron behind a mesh partition. The image illustrates the interior organization of the office. (Image courtesy of Public Bath Association of Philadelphia Records)
Privacy and Gendered Spaces

The layout of the bathing department enforced the practice of bathing as a private and solo endeavor. In the eyes of the American social reformer, public nudity was an eminent threat to standards of decency, modesty, and morality.\textsuperscript{220} As pithily stated by Shelia

Cavanaugh, in her book *Queering Bathrooms: Gender, Sexuality, and the Hygienic Imagination*, “Men and women come together in a marital bed and are kept apart in a public lavatory. What happens in each room is a public curiosity – a secret engendering ideas about bodies, sexual practices, genitals, and clandestine desires.” Through the strictly gendered spaces the PBA was able to eliminate the potential of heterosexual interactions within the facility. Furthermore, the PBA designed the bathing department with compartmented stalls separated by seven-foot-tall iron partitions, to eliminate the visibility of the naked body altogether. The design of these stalls enabled patrons to undress, bathe, and redress in privacy. These stalls consisted of a four by four-foot changing room separated by a swinging door from the three by four-foot bathing area. As previously mentioned, the changing rooms were equipped with hooks for the hanging of clothes and a bench for the comfort of patrons as they undressed. The doors of these stalls made with “outer latticed” screens to enable air flow but provide the bather with “perfect privacy.” The stall was covered by “a network of heavy wire” to mitigate the threat of left and voyeuristic activity. (Figure 38) In addition to the promotion of modesty, the spatial design of the bathing department underscored that bathing was an individual routine of bodily hygiene, as opposed to a communal activity synonymous to recreational swimming.

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224 Ibid.
A study of the systems of operations and distribution of space within the PBA facilities also reveals perceptions of gender roles associated with work. The symmetry of the Georgian facades suggests an equal distribution of space and amenities for men and women. However, the building plan reveals that men required space for bathing their bodies, while women needed space to do laundry. [Floor plans in Appendix A] Over the fifty years of operation the PBA constructed three times more shower stalls for men than women. At the turn of the century Philadelphia was the center of heavy industry, of iron

**Figure 38:** Drawing of the interior of the standard PBA bathing department. (Image courtesy of Public Bath Association of Philadelphia Records)
and steel, coal and oil, “America’s foundry.”

It was the patrons of the PBA, the city’s poor and working-class communities, who worked in these factories, freight yards, and warehouses, some of which belonged to PBA sponsors. The PBA recognized these men with “grымy jobs” that “make them dirty from head to heels” as the most in need of the organization’s provisions. An astonished journalist once observed the “coal heaver, black with grime come in with his newspaper bundle enfolding some clean clothes” leave clean after his shower, “almost unrecognizable.” The men’s bath departments were all easily accessible, located on the same floor as the ticket office, while the women’s bathing department was usually up or down a flight of stairs, or in the case of the all-women’s facility on, across the street.

Newspapers and photographs portray the “long line of sweltering men… from the doors of the Gaskill Street bathhouse down into Fourth Street” waiting to take a bath in the early morning. There are no such images or descriptions of women. With the exception of a couple of photographs that show women idly standing with a group of children outside and one of a woman sitting in what appears to be an empty waiting room, all of the photographic documentation of women at the PBA bathhouses show them washing and ironing laundry. (Figures 39 and 40)

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225 Burt and Davies, Philadelphia: A 300 Year History, 471.
228 At 410-412 Gaskill Street the women’s department was located on the second floor (later across the street) and at Wood street it was located down stairs.
While the men worked at large industrial sites, women were expected to stay home and perform a variety of household tasks, also known as “women’s work,” one of the most time and energy consuming being household laundry. Many lower-class women even worked as “washer women” for middle-class families to make extra money. The PBA laundry department was initially only accessible to women. The Association assumed that “if men were admitted to the washroom the very class of women for whom it was intended would stay away. Despite these claims, after a month men finagled their way into using the laundry facilities as well. By 1901, the laundry department was reserved for men on Fridays and Saturdays. (Figure 41) This “unexpected success” of the laundry facility was described by Superintendent W.L. Ross:

One day a colored boy came in, removed his clothing, washed and dried it. He was the forerunner of dozens of men, most of whom have only the one suit of underclothing and shirt which they wear. They come now every week to wash their clothing. A room is given to them in the men’s bathing department where they remove their shirt and underclothing, slip on their over clothing and proceed to do their washing.

It was also noted that men who visited the laundry department were commonly out of employment and would “wash while their wives went out to earn money.” By 1903, with overcrowding and complaints of “vagrant men,” the PBA purchased a single lot directly across the street from the original Gaskill Street facility and constructed a women

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231 *Social Service*, 1901, 109.
232 Ibid.
only bathhouse.\textsuperscript{234} 410-412 Gaskill Street was subsequently designated as a male only facility. Out of the six bathhouses, the female only facility had the most unique floor plan: A third of the entire building was designated to the laundry facility and there were only five shower baths (See Appendix A for floorplans). Thus, despite men doing their own laundry, it is evident that in Philadelphia women’s work was the washing, while men’s work required a bath.

\textsuperscript{234} Ibid.
Figure 39: Women ironing laundry in the laundry department at 410-12 Castile Street. (Image courtesy of Public Bath Association of Philadelphia Records)
Figure 40: A photograph of women doing their laundry in a light filled room at the read of 413-15 Gaskill Street in 1903. (Image courtesy of Public Bath Association of Philadelphia Records)
Figure 41: Men washing laundry at 410-12 Gaskill St around 1903. (Image courtesy of Public Bath Association of Philadelphia Records)
Mechanization of Sanitation Technology

In 1877, in an address on cleanliness, English social reformer, Sir Edwin Chadwick stated: “The provision of mechanical conveniences and appliances must precede and facilitate the formation of habits.”235 All of the PBA facilities were equipped with the most modern bathing and laundry technology, equivalent to any exclusive “clubhouse” in Philadelphia.236 These appliances were mechanized for an efficient, simple, hygienic, and comfortable experience for both the patron and the PBA staff who were tasked to maintain the facilities.

The most critical mechanism of the PBA was the shower bath, or modern-day shower. As Brenner argues, “The use of showers instead of traditional bathtubs brought progress and efficiency to the bathhouse.”237 Shower baths were more hygienic, easier to maintain, less expensive to construct, and more compact than tub baths. Above all, the shower bath cleaned bodies more efficiently than its precedent. The PBA version of the shower bath was designed with sloping floors that lead to a drain and gutter along the back of the stall, hence the bather was only exposed to the clean water from the shower head above that descended upon them to “instantly wash off all dirt, soap and waste matter from the skin.”238 Furthermore, the partitions between the stalls were three to six inches above the concrete floor to enable the bathing department to be flushed out with ease.239 (Figure 42)

235 Crook, 248.
236 W.L. Ross, PBA Records.
238 The Philadelphia Medical Journal, 717.; Gerhard, 76.
239 The Philadelphia Medical Journal, 718.
In addition to their efficiency, the PBA shower bath was mechanized to be a comfortable experience: the temperature of the water was determined by the patron “simply turning a slight according to the marks on a small dial.” This was the case for the bath tubs as well, however, the two bathhouses on Gaskill Street were the only facilities to even provide the option of the tub bath, in an effort to promote the shower bath as the most hygienic and proper means of bathing.

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Half of the PBA bathhouses were built with “commodious” laundry departments, or wash-rooms, that were equipped with “everything needed for quick and effective work.” All of the laundry departments had multiple sets of tubs, drying closets, ironing tables, a gas stove for the heating of irons, a soap-boiler, a power-washer, and wringers. As illustrated in the floorplans located in Appendix A, the largest laundry department was at the female only bathhouse on Gaskill Street. This department had eighteen galvanized iron tubs arranged against the walls with spigots for hot and cold water and a wringer. They were separated from each other by slabs of slate.

A highly innovate mechanism of the laundry department were the drying closets. The drying closets were engineered to accelerate the drying of clean clothes and linen through steam coils along the wall that subsequently produced hot air. Each closet was around nine feet long to accommodate the drying of multiple large items. (Figures 43 and 44) It was noted that the drying closets had the tendency of making the laundry department uncomfortably hot. All of the towels used at the PBA were cleaned and dried in the laundry department in addition to patron’s items.

The technological aspects of the PBA did not end here, for the establishment of sanitary habits required plumbing, power, hot water, and ventilation, which in turn required a range of further technological innovations that extended much beyond the

242 Philadelphia Public Ledger, August 30 1903, PBA Records.
243 Ibid.
244 Ibid.
246 Philadelphia Medical Journal, 718.
shower bath.\textsuperscript{247} Although Philadelphia was the first American municipality to construct a waterworks system, the water itself was not clean and sewage disposal was lamentable. No respectable person would drink the city water, which came from the polluted Schuylkill, and everyone who could bought spring water from private companies.\textsuperscript{248} Prior to the opening of the Torresdale filtration plant in 1908, which marked a great leap forward in the city’s efforts to purify the water supply, the facilities designated attic space to store at least two clean water tanks each with a 3,000 gallon capacity.\textsuperscript{249} The water was heated in a hot water-generator located in the basement floors and distributed through the facility with Worthington-pumps. All of the mechanisms to power the bathing and laundry departments such as multiple boilers, coal-pits, ash-pits, a furnace for heating purposes, a feed water heater, and an electric-light plant, were also located in the basement floor. The disposal of waste water was done through pipes that connected to the municipal water system.\textsuperscript{250}

Even simple provisions such as a bar of soap for cleaning, towels for drying, and the iron for laundry were crucial to the operations of the PBA and formation of bathing habits. As previously noted, every PBA patron would receive a bar of soap and a towel upon purchasing a ticket. This signaled the important nature of both objects for the proper practice of hygienic bathing. These tools enabled a patron “entering grimy and black” to “come forth sweet and wholesome, giving forth the perfume of good soap and freshly

\textsuperscript{247} Crook, 257.
\textsuperscript{249} Abernathy, Philadelphia: A 300 Year History, 526.; Philadelphia Medical Journal, 718.
ironed clothes” – a testament to and embodiment of the transformative powers of the bathhouse facilities.\textsuperscript{251}

\begin{figure}
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{figures/figure43.png}
\caption{Women utilizing the mechanisms of the laundry department at 410 Gaskill Street. The dryer closets, wash tubs, and wringers are all shown in these photographs. (Images courtesy of Public Bathhouse Association of Philadelphia Records)}
\end{figure}

PART 7: VISIBILITY

Advertising, Marketing, and Photography

In 1904, after the PBA had gained national acclaim, Philadelphia’s Charity Organization Society published a brief article titled “Cleanliness and its Advertising” written by the PBA’s Superintendent W.L. Ross. In the article Ross attributes the growth of patronage to the organization’s “liberal policy of advertising.” From 1898 to 1903, Ross implemented targeted advertising campaigns in Southwark and the Tenderloin to market the resources of the PBA and promote morality and cleanliness.

The largest marketing scheme was the distribution of cards that provided information about the bath’s accommodations, hours of operation, and location through text, maps, calendars, and illustrations. (Figure 45a and b) During the hot summer months over 50,000 cards were distributed on the streets, and 25,000 during colder months. Over 10,000 of these cards were translated to German, Hebrew, and Italian to meet the needs of the residents of the neighborhoods. (The bathhouses were also advertised in non-English newspapers, such as, Il Vesuvio, who published an article about the new bathhouse at Germantown Ave on March 3, 1911). (Figure 46) These cards were distributed from house to house and by the cooperation of barbers, saloon keepers and other charitable organizations, as well as delivered to restaurants, dispensaries, and hospitals. The PBA would also distribute the cards and free bath tickets in dense commercial areas near the

252 Ross, Charities, 335
253 Brooklyn Eagle, Newspaper Clipping, July 9, 1899, Public Bath Association of Philadelphia Records.
254 It was known as the “The most Influential Italian Newspaper in the United States,” located at the Vesuvio Building at 738 South 8th street.
bathhouses like the Bainbridge street market near Gaskill Street to further encourage new patronage.\textsuperscript{256} In April of 1904 alone, over 10,000 perforated admission tickets were given out free of charge.\textsuperscript{257}

To supplement the cards and free tickets, the PBA used more elaborate methods of advertising such as billboards and posters. (Figure 47) In 1899, they even contracted “an advertising wagon with descriptive signs and a large bell attached” for thirty days during the early summer.\textsuperscript{258} Unlike the cards and billboards that advertised the PBA solely through text, the posters used illustrations to communicate the objectives of the organization and ideologies of cleanliness. Since many of the bathhouse patrons spoke languages other than English, it was imperative to have illustrations with didactic content. The posters were distributed among the “grocery stores, barber shops, saloons, dry goods stores, hospitals and small shops in the southeastern part of the city.”\textsuperscript{259} Some posters were designed by local artisans and sold as souvenirs to donors at benefactor dinner for fifty cents.\textsuperscript{260} The first advertised poster, designed in 1901 by Miss Ellen Macauley, a graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts of Philadelphia, depicts a young woman, presumably a mother figure, with an infant and two young children. All of the figures are dressed in fashionable attire and appear to be jauntily walking.\textsuperscript{261} This image, along with the text

\textsuperscript{256} Ross, Charities, 335.  
\textsuperscript{257} Ibid.  
\textsuperscript{259} “A Review of Social and Industrial Betterment” Social Service, January 1, 1901.  
\textsuperscript{261} “Philadelphia Has Model Public Bath and Wash House” Social Service, January, 1, 1901, 106.
“Baths for Everybody” is an inviting scene that suggests the quality and positive experience to be had for folks of all ages at the bathhouse. (Figure 48) A year later the PBA printed posters to advertise the new Wood Street bathhouse. In addition to “Baths for Everybody” the poster also reads, “For Comfort; For Health; For Cleanliness.” The message is personified by an illustration of two ethereal women beneath large flowers to suggest the purity and beauty of cleanliness. (Figure 59)
Figure 45a: Two examples advertisement cards distributed by the PBA to the public. (Images courtesy of Public Bath Association of Philadelphia Records)
Figure 45b: Two more examples of advertisement cards with calendars and baseball schedules distributed by the PBA to the public. (Images courtesy of Public Bath Association of Philadelphia Records)
Figure 46: Non-English advertisement cards distributed by the PBA throughout Philadelphia. (Images courtesy of Public Bath Association of Philadelphia Records)
Figure 47: Billboard advertising the PBA bathhouses on Gaskill Street. (Images courtesy of Public Bath Association of Philadelphia Records)
Figure 48: PBA poster by Ellen McCauley (Images courtesy of Public Bath Association of Philadelphia Records)

Figure 49: PBA poster (Image courtesy of Charities, 1904)
The PBA also used advertising schemes to attract sponsorships and donations from Philadelphia’s wealthier communities. Borrowing something of Jacob Riis's photographic style, Philadelphian reformers, such as the Octavia Hill Society, used photography of people in and around the city’s built environment to articulate the living conditions and lacking resources of “The Other Half.”²⁶² In 1897 and 1902, the PBA hired a professional photographer to document and illustrate the progress and impact of the organization. Considering the first round of photographs were taken in 1897 (before the first bathhouse was even opened), they are likely all posed photographs, curated through lighting, angling, and the positioning of figures to communicate ideologies of cleanliness, neatness, and order, as well as the technological innovations of sanitation reform, available in the facilities. These photographs were disseminated globally in newspapers, brochures, lantern slide lectures, and public exhibitions, thus gaining the PBA international acclaim.

In 1905, the PBA was awarded a Gold Medal by the American Institute of Social Services at the Liége International Exposition for their “excellent exhibit” of photographs, drawings, and posters.²⁶³ Upon viewing the exhibit, a student of Professor Francis Greenwood Peabody, Harvard’s Plummer Professor of Christian Morals and founder of the Social Museum of Harvard University – an institution established to “to promote investigations of modern social conditions and to direct the amelioration of industrial and social life”— procured the reproductions of the photographs of the PBA to be part of the

Social Museum’s “Health” collection. Today these photographs are archived as part of the Social Museum Collection at Harvard Art Museums as an exemplary model of public bathing establishments. (Figure 50)

Figure 50: An exhibit display board from Harvard’s Social Museum Collection collected by Professor Francis Greenwood Peabody that both describes the PBA and depicts the interior of the bathhouse through photographs. (Image courtesy of Harvard Art Museums)

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264 Lamuniere "Sentiment and Science," 2.
PART 8: CONCLUSION

Within the first year of operation the PBA recorded a total of 21,656 patrons to have used the bathing facilities. By 1927, the PBA maintained six bathhouses which contained a total of 452 shower baths. With multiple facilities across the city, met the sanitary needs of a significant proportion the urban masses. In 1926 a record 560,098 bathes were taken (an average of over 1,500 cleaned bodies in a day) and the organization has a surplus revenue of over $20,000.265 In the words of Superintendent W.L. Ross, “Where formerly the great majority only bathed when the spirit moved them, and the spirit only seemed to appear in the warm weather, now there is a large number who bathe regularly, showing that the habit is largely a question of education.”266

To further encourage the formation of moral behavior and habits outside of the bathhouse, the PBA made a “special effort” to model proper “cleanliness and discipline.”267 For example, Superintendent W.L. Ross noticed that the “keeping of [the PBA] sidewalk clean has gotten all the people in the neighborhood into the habit of keeping theirs clean.”268 By 1905, instead of sitting “idly on their marble steps” it was a common scene in the neighborhood of the Philadelphia baths to see “the residents get out with brooms and scrub their sidewalks” when the Street-Cleaning Department “bring their hose and flood their narrow alleys.”269

266 Brooklyn Daily Eagle Sunday. July 9, 1898. Public Bath Association of Philadelphia Records. To be “moved by the spirit” is a Quaker allusion.
267 Ibid.
268 Ibid.
269 Social Services, 109.
A photograph from 1903 reveals that next door to the Wood Street bathhouse was Max Levin’s grocery store. Levin’s store featured large signs that read “Get Fels Naptha Here.” This was the same soap distributed at the bathhouse next door. Since the soap was collected after their shower bath, patrons had begun to invest in their own soap to practice hygienic cleaning elsewhere. 270 (Figure 51) Residents of the bathhouse neighborhoods were even rigging their own “inventive” and “genius” shower baths made of clothes props covered with fragments of carpet and burlap equipped with a hose running from the hydrant to a colander as the shower head. 271 The habituation of bathing informed by a new consciousness of personal hygiene was clearly underway. (Figure 52)

However, in the eyes of the PBA their work would not be finished “until slum clearance was completed, and proper housing conditions were established for the poor.” 272 This goal never came to fruition, for in late 1946, after closing both of the Gas- kill Street and East Hazzard Street locations, the organization voted to cease all operations. The quick demise of the PBA was a consequence of “the continued widespread unemployment” in Philadelphia during the Great Depression. By 1938 the “number of paid attendance” had “reduced to an unprecedented rate,” thus requiring the PBA to provide “more and more free baths.” 273 Although sponsor donations subsidized the cost of free baths, the funds to replace machinery and properly staff the bathhouses were nonexistent.

270 1902, Philadelphia Directory.
Relatedly, plans to level the Wood Street bathhouse, along with the whole Tenderloin neighborhood were already underway through plans to widen Vine Street.274

Figure 51: A detail from Figure 25 that shows advertisements for Fels Naptha soap at Max Levin’s grocery store adjacent to Wood Street bathhouse. (Image courtesy of Public Bath Association of Philadelphia)

Figure 52: These are two photographs of the Gaskill Street scape in 1897 (top) and 1903 (bottom) after the women’s facility opened. Both of the photos were likely posed and taken by a professional photographer Superintendent W.L. Ross is standing on the stoop of the bathhouse in both images. (Images courtesy of Harvard Art Museums and Public Bath Association of Philadelphia Records)
Today the five wards, that once hosted Philadelphia’s bathhouses, the Second, Fifth, Thirteenth, Seventeenth, and Twenty-Fifth, are largely gentrified and redeveloped. The physical structures of only two of the six facilities still stand today, one just off of South Street (on Gaskill Street) and the other in Kensington. Like their surrounding landscapes, their historic function has been erased by trendy adaptive reuse projects, thus underscoring the massive demographic changes that have occurred in these areas over the last century. However the example that they set found its way into the behavior of all aspects of society.

* * *

This thesis began as an exploration of the history of Philadelphia’s public bathhouses. In doing the work it became clear that these buildings were not only historic, but culturally significant to the heritage of the city. This thesis illustrates how the organizational structure, geographic location, architectural aesthetics, function of space and technology, and advertising of Philadelphia’s public bathhouse embodies the social, cultural, economic, and political of environment of the city at the turn of the century. To properly understand the formation of the Public Bath Association of Philadelphia, this study also included an exploration of how the morality of cleanliness, and the habituation of hygienic bathing became part of the national identity. This study shows that the contemporary Western practice of bathing is a fairly recent phenomenon for much of society. The bathhouses bolstered by architectural and technological advancements (most significantly

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modern plumbing systems); the dissemination of the germ theory; and the rise of Sanitarian discourse were the vehicle that brought these virtues to the masses.

The establishment of public bathhouses in cities like Philadelphia reflected the attitudes of the American social reformers who advocated for the power of environmental causation rather than individual fault. They recognized humanity's collective interdependence and pushed to establish common goals and policies for collective societal improvement. As stated in Part 1, from 1880 to 1890 the immigrant population of Philadelphia increased six-fold. In addition to skilled labor and material goods, these new citizens brought new customs, religions, languages, and habits, many drastically different from the established Anglo-Saxon communities of Philadelphia. Most immigrants settled in older and denser neighborhoods near the docks of the Delaware River in tight knit communities of people with similar cultural heritage. Reformers recognized that these urban landscapes lacked the resources readily available in their affluent neighborhoods, such as such as green spaces, libraries, museums, and bathing facilities.

The Public Bath Association of Philadelphia was organized and incorporated in the spring of 1895 “for the purpose of establishing and maintaining public baths and affording the poor facilities for bathing and the promotion of cleanliness. The PBA was an around the clock operation that required a full staff to manage, clean, and maintain. The demographics and responsibilities of the paid staff highlights the gendered and racial hierarchies of Philadelphia’s working-class environment, as well as the sheer man power and strict organizational structure required to successfully run a public bathhouse. As a philanthropic organization supported by the private sector, the PBA was able to supervise
these processes and produce outcomes that aligned to the shared, sometimes racist and often classist, values of Philadelphia’s white elite.

The PBA facilities were erected in five city wards characterized by poverty and a foreign-born, or non-Anglo-Saxon population: The Second, Fifth, Thirteenth, Seventeenth and Twenty-Fifth Wards. It was these communities that were most recognizably in need of cleansing and exposure to devices of morality. Respectable surroundings, such as a bathhouse, offered a model for emulation and would precipitate the Americanization of the foreigners. The characteristics of the five neighborhoods with PBA bathhouses exemplify the racial and cultural groups targeted by the elite Anglo-Saxon members of the PBA as the most need of moral and physical cleansing: The Jews of Wards Five and Seventeen; the Italians of the Second Ward; the drunken, homeless, and prostitutes of the Thirteenth Ward, also known as the “Tenderloin;" and the mill and factory workers of Kensington in the Twenty-fifth Ward.

As stated in Part 5, If Philadelphia’s slum districts were ruinous, vile, cramped, filthy and foreign, then the public bathhouses were designed as the conceptual negation: modern, tasteful, and sanitary. Unlike New York City’s elaborate Roman-Styled municipal bathhouses, the PBA buildings were not monumental, nor overtly pretentious. They were designed to conform to the spirit of the Philadelphia’s “City of Homes” self-image with “morally conscious, materially comfortable homogeneousness.”276 All six bathhouses were red brick, externally symmetrical structures designed to mimic the appearance of a fashionable Georgian Colonial Revival house. The bathhouse movement and

276 Burt and Davies, 522.
the proliferation of Colonial Revival architecture in Philadelphia at the turn of 20th century both reflect the push for a standardized American aesthetic that reflected the values of the white elite. The interior design of the bathing and laundry facilities reflects the most modern sanitation and health standards for public spaces at the turn of the century. One of the most coveted aspects of the PBA facilities was the use of natural light and water tight materials of the highest degree of sanitary cleanliness. Furthermore, all of the bathhouses were designed by Philadelphia’s most renowned architecture firms: Furness, Evans & Co; John T. Windrim; and Cope & Stewardson. The fact that the PBA hired such elite firms illuminates the institutional values of reputability and contemporary style.

With the likeness of a factory, the PBA bathhouses were machines designed to efficiently clean bodies at a massive scale. The PBA utilized the distribution of space and mechanizations of sanitation technology to systematically regulate and supervise the cleansing of bodies and habituate the morally appropriate practice of hygienic bathing. From the moment a patron entered the building, the PBA enforced a strict system of operations to regulate an efficient flow of bodies through the bathhouses. The layout of the bathing department enforced the practice of bathing as a private and solo endeavor. In the eyes of the American social reformer, public nudity was an eminent threat to standards of decency, modesty, and morality. A study of the systems of operations and distribution of space within the PBA facilities also reveals the PBA’s perceptions of gender roles associated with work. The symmetry of the Georgian facades suggests an equal distribution of space and amenities for men and women.

All of the PBA facilities were equipped mechanized for an efficient, simple, hygienic, and comfortable experience for both the patron and the PBA staff who were
tasked to maintain the facilities. The most critical mechanism of the PBA was the shower bath, or modern-day shower. In addition to their efficiency, the PBA shower bath was mechanized to be a comfortable experience: the temperature of the water was determined by the patron “simply turning a slight according to the marks on a small dial.277 Half of the PBA bathhouses were built with commodious laundry departments, or wash-rooms, that were equipped with “everything needed for quick and effective work.”278 At a macro scale the establishment of sanitary habits required plumbing, power, hot water, and ventilation, which in turn required a range of further technological innovations.

The many advertising campaigns of the PBA which aimed to increase patronage and donors showcase the various forms of mass communication available at the turn of the century and the visual language of cleanliness, illustrated through writing, drawings, and photography. The largest marketing scheme to attract patronage was the distribution of cards that provided information about the bath’s accommodations, hours of operation, and location through text, maps, calendars, and illustrations. To supplement the cards and free tickets, the PBA used more elaborate methods of advertising such as billboards and posters. The illustrations of the posters were designed to communicate the values of the PBA such as beauty, family, and cleanliness. Another advertising tactic was the use of photography to showcase images of the poor living conditions the PBA patron in stark contrast to the pristine facilities and innovative technologies of the PBA bathhouses. These photographs were disseminated globally in newspapers, brochures, lantern slide

lectures, and public exhibitions, thus gaining the PBA international acclaim and an increase of donations.

The Philadelphia variant of the public bathhouse preceded the first comprehensive guide to the normative science of public bathhouse design, Modern Baths and Bathhouses, by over a decade. The text of this publication suggests that the author, New York based “sanitary engineer” William Paul Gerhard, looked to the organizational structure, architectural design, and bathing mechanism of the PBA facilities as exemplar versions of the modern bathhouse, and the embodiment of a national ideology of morality, cleanliness, and a success means to habituate the practice of bathing in the daily lives of “The Great Unwashed.”

In the end I have learned that the bathhouse movement and their buildings, were more than just a place for people to become clean: They were the concrete manifestations of social transformation that would eventually change the habits and lifestyle for the residents of Philadelphia for decades to come. The public bathhouse was, in part, positive environmentalism at work – a place that provided poor city dwellers access to modern and high-quality sanitation technologies. On the other hand, the bathhouse was a solution to the numerous social problems presented by a growing immigrant population that ran counter to the nativist values of the elite class of Philadelphia. Despite this, the impact of the Public Bath Association of Philadelphia on the city is one that cannot be disputed – it promoted cultural changes that helped make Philadelphia what it today.
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APPENDIX A: BUILDING INFORMATION

410–412 Gaskill Street
Date completed: 1898
Number of shower baths: 81
Notes: Included a laundry department; facility was designated for men in 1903.

Figure 53: Drawing of the first PBA bathhouse. See Figure 24 for a photograph of the bathhouse. (Image courtesy of Public Bath Association of Philadelphia Records)
Figure 54a: Floorplans of 410-412 Gaskill Street bathhouse. (Images courtesy of Public Bath Association of Philadelphia Records)
Figure 54b: Floorplans of 410-412 Gaskill Street bathhouse. (Images courtesy of Public Bath Association of Philadelphia Records)
Figure 54c: Floorplans of 410-412 Gaskill Street bathhouse. (Images courtesy of Public Bath Association of Philadelphia Records)
718-20 Wood Street

Date completed: 1903
Architect: John T. Windrim
Number of shower baths: 82
Notes: Included a laundry department; Renovated in 1915

Figure 5: Elevation and section drawings of Wood Street bathhouse. See Figure 25 for exterior photograph of bathhouse. (Images courtesy of Philadelphia Contributionship)
Figure 56: Floorplans of Wood Street bathhouse. (Image courtesy of Philadelphia Contributionship)
413-15 Gaskill Street

Date completed: 1903
Architect: John T. Windrim
Number of shower baths: 16
Notes: Included a laundry department; Women only; Listed on Philadelphia’s Historic Register; currently used as The Schwartz Preschool

Figure 57: Elevation of women’s bathhouse on Gaskill Street. See Figure 26 for an exterior photograph of the bathhouse and Figure 40 for an interior photograph of the laundry department. (Image courtesy of Public Bath Association of Philadelphia Records)
Figure 58: Floorplan of women’s bathhouse on Gaskill Street. (Public Bath Association of Philadelphia Records)
1203-05 Germantown Avenue

Date completed: **1912**
Architect: **Cope & Stewardson**
Number of shower baths: **70**
Notes: *Building specifications at Atheneaum of Philadelphia* See Figure 27 for exterior photograph

Passyunk Avenue and Wharton Street

Date completed: **1922**
Architect: **Stewardson & Page**
Number of shower baths: **96**
Notes: *There are no photographs or architectural drawings of this bathhouse*
1808-20 East Hazzard Street

Date completed: 1927
Architect: Stewardson & Page
Number of shower baths: 107
Notes: Building still intact with high level of integrity; currently used as loft apartments

Figure 59a: Floorplan of bathhouse on East Hazzard Street. See Figure 28 for a photograph of the exterior. (Public Bath Association of Philadelphia Records)
Figure 59b: Basement and Second Floor of E Hazzard Street bathhouse. (Public Bath Association of Philadelphia Records)
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