

NOMINATION OF HISTORIC BUILDING, STRUCTURE, SITE, OR OBJECT

PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES

PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

SUBMIT ALL ATTACHED MATERIALS ON PAPER AND IN ELECTRONIC FORM ON CD (MS WORD FORMAT)

1. ADDRESS OF HISTORIC RESOURCE (must comply with a Board of Revision of Taxes address)

Street address: **2917-19 North Broad Street**

Postal code: **19132**

Councilmanic District: **5th**

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: **Cloverlay Gym; Joe Frazier's Gym**

Common Name: **Joe Frazier's Gym**

3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

☒ Building

☐ Structure

☐ Site

☐ Object

4. PROPERTY INFORMATION

Condition: ☐ excellent ☒ good ☐ fair ☐ poor ☐ ruins

Occupancy: ☒ occupied ☐ vacant ☐ under construction ☐ unknown

Current use: Retail furniture showroom; cabinetry shop

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

SEE ATTACHED

6. DESCRIPTION

SEE ATTACHED

7. SIGNIFICANCE

Period of Significance (from year to year): 1969-2008

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: c.1895; 1969; 1983

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: Unknown (1895); Henry D. Dagit & Sons (1969)

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan:

Original owner: J. Anderson Ross (1895); Cloverlay, Inc. (1968); Joe Frazier (1974)

Other significant persons:

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION:

The historic resource satisfies the following criteria for designation (check all that apply):

- ☒ (a) Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past; or,
- ☐ (b) Is associated with an event of importance to the history of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- ☐ (c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style; or,
- ☐ (d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen; or,
- ☐ (e) Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- ☐ (f) Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation; or,
- ☐ (g) Is part of or related to a square, park or other distinctive area which should be preserved according to an historic, cultural or architectural motif; or,
- ☒ (h) Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City; or,
- ☐ (i) Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in pre-history or history; or
- ☒ (j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

8. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

SEE ATTACHED

9. NOMINATOR

Name with Title: Ben Leech, Director of Advocacy

Email: ben@preservationalliance.com

Organization: Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia

Date: February 4, 2013

Street Address: 1608 Walnut Street, Suite1300

Telephone: 215-546-1146 x5

City, State, and Postal Code: Philadelphia, PA 19103

Nominator ☐ is ☒ is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: _____

☐ Correct-Complete ☐ Incorrect-Incomplete

Date: _____

Date of Notice Issuance: _____

Property Owner at Time of Notice

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Postal Code: _____

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: _____

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: _____

Date of Final Action: _____

☐ Designated ☐ Rejected

3/16/07

Acknowledgements

The nominator would like to acknowledge the contributions of the following individuals and organizations for their contributions in researching this nomination:

Dennis Playdon, Temple University

Ann Dinh, Temple University

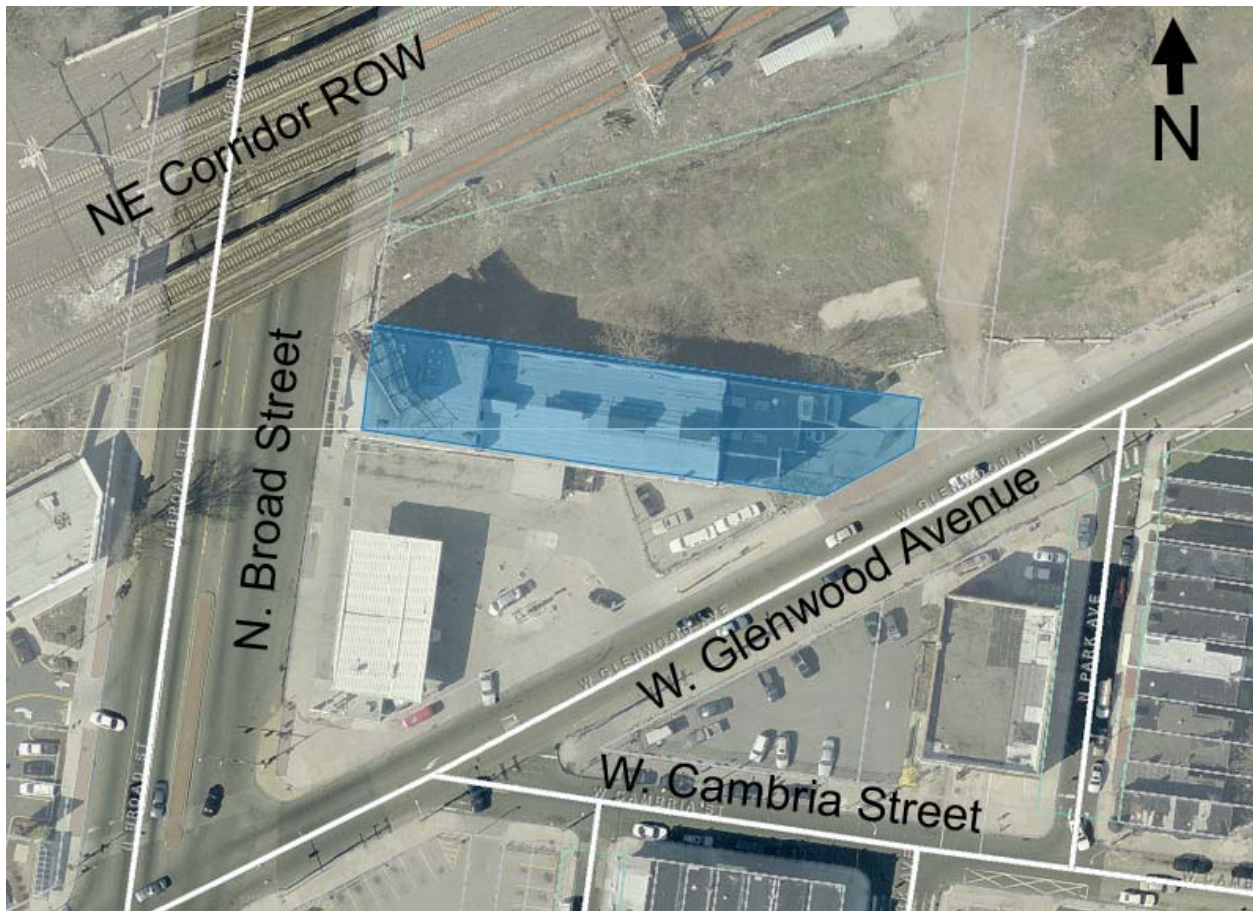
Michael Baker, Temple University

Chelsea Troppauer, University of Pennsylvania/Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia

Molly Lester, Heritage Consulting Group

5. Boundary Description:

Beginning at a point on the east side of Broad Street 134 feet 4-1/2 inches north of the north of the north side of Cambria Street; thence extending north along Broad Street a distance of 50 feet 7-1/2 inches to a point; thence east 265 feet to a point; thence south 22 feet 10-3/8 inches to a point on the northwest side of Glenwood Avenue; thence southwest along Glenwood Avenue 47 feet 11-3/8 inches to a point; thence west 225 feet 10-7/8 inches to the place of beginning.



6. Description

The former Joe Frazier Gym stands at 2917-19 North Broad Street in North Philadelphia. The property is roughly bounded by Broad Street to the west, Glenwood Avenue to the east, a gasoline service station to the south, and a viaduct and embankment of the Northeast Corridor railroad right of way to the north. It stands directly across Broad Street from the former North Philadelphia Station of the Pennsylvania Railroad and the current Amtrak and SEPTA North Philadelphia passenger platforms. The building, a timber-framed structure with load-bearing masonry walls, occupies the full width of its 50-foot-wide plot along Broad Street, and stretches approximately 230 feet in depth. Its massing is composed of a front and a rear section. The front, which faces Broad Street, stands three stories tall and runs approximately 65 feet deep, with a shallow gable roof concealed behind a front parapet. A large rooftop billboard is erected on a steel structure that straddles the roof ridgeline. The rear wing stands two stories tall, and extends an additional 115 feet at full width before tapering into a short series of narrower eels. The rear roof is also a shallow gable and features three raised clerestory monitors.

West Elevation

The primary west elevation of the structure is three bays wide, with a ground floor subdivided into a seven-bay storefront [Fig. 1]. From the sidewalk to the second-floor sill level, the façade is clad in a buff stucco material scored to resemble an ashlar-faced limestone. The remainder of the façade is clad in an orange brick veneer, with the exception of an ornate pressed metal parapet and cornice which appears original to the building's c.1895 construction. Pressed metal sill courses also span the façade at the second and third stories. The façade is symmetrical, with a wide center bay and two narrower side bays.

At the ground floor, each side bay features a modern aluminum-framed glass door flanked by glass sidelights and a glass transom, while the center bay features five aluminum-framed fixed-pane windows spaced evenly across the façade. Above these windows are mounted two contemporary backlit vinyl signage panels reading "Home Gallery" and "Furniture & Bedding" that advertise the building's current ground-floor tenant. These signs are installed below a fascia band that supports an earlier sign reading "Joe Frazier's Gym" in lettering

impressed into the stucco façade. Also visible are two pairs of boxing gloves painted and incised into the stucco fascia band, one above each ground-floor entrance [Fig. 2].

At the second floor, the two side bays each feature a pair of tall, fixed single-light windows set into frames clad in textured stucco. The center bay features a three-window grouping of similar design. Each grouping features an applied stucco keystone and simulated soldier-course lintel. Currently, six cloth banners project from the façade at the second-floor window level. The third-floor windows, currently infilled with stucco, stand shorter than the second-floor windows but are of equal width. Each features an arched head and a projecting keystone, the caps of which remain visible over later stucco cladding.

The two end bays are each bracketed by projecting brick pilasters rising from the second-story floor level to the cornice level above the third floor. Each of these bays is capped by a pressed metal pedimented cornice featuring a starburst-patterned tympanum over a narrow band of dentils. The center bay steps up in height and features a flat parapet clad in a metal fascia with barely discernable traces of historic signage. This fascia is bracketed by projecting pressed metal ornament and simple projecting cornice. Above the parapet rises a rooftop-mounted billboard spanning the width of the building at a slight angle relative to the façade plane.

South Elevation

The building's south elevation faces an adjacent gasoline service station and is freestanding except for a small one-story cinderblock shed which abuts it, set back approximately 80 feet from Broad Street [Fig. 3]. The façade stands three stories at the front and two stories at the rear, spanning approximately 180 feet in a straight run perpendicular to Broad Street before angling slightly northward for an additional 30 feet, then stepping back in a series of short rear ells. The façade is composed of common brick, portions of which are stuccoed over. The façade is currently painted yellow up to the level of the second-floor window lintels. A billboard and backlit sign panel are mounted to the front portion of the ground floor, and remnants of historic painted signage exist below the roofline and along the western edge of the facade.

A variety of masonry openings exist in various configurations across the facade. The three-story portion of the façade features six windows at the third floor level, while the lower floors are blank. Five of these windows are currently boarded up, while the sixth has been

altered to accommodate a double-leaf sliding glass door. All feature shallow-arched brick lintels. The two-story portion of the façade features eleven irregularly-spaced bays—seven across the segment of façade running perpendicular to Broad Street, and four along the short segment that angles slightly northward. The ground floor features historic wood-sash windows in the fourth, fifth, and seventh bays (from west to east) and a double-leaf wood and glass door in the sixth bay. At the second-floor level, double-leaf wood loading doors are found in the third, fifth and sixth bays, and wood-sash windows in the seventh and eleventh bays. The fourth bay features a pair of vinyl replacement sashes. The remainder of the south-elevation bays are either blind, infilled, or concealed behind plywood.

North Elevation

The building's north elevation mirrors the general massing of the south elevation, with a three-story front segment and a long two-story rear segment [Fig. 5]. Except for a lone window towards the rear of the building, the elevation is entirely blank. The façade is clad in common-bond red brick with dark header courses. A portion of the façade towards the front of the building is clad in stucco, and remnants of historic painted signage advertising "Millwork" is still legible near the third-story roofline [Fig. 6].

East Elevation

The building's east elevation is composed of three bays formed by a series of rear ell setbacks [Fig. 7]. The southern and central bays each feature a second-floor loading dock accessed by a wide concrete ramp that covers the lower portions of the façade. The southern bays features a single overhead garage door, while the middle bay features a single-leaf metal door and wood infill set into the original garage door opening. The northern bay features a ground-floor garage door and a second-floor window bay that has been partially infilled. The east, rear elevation of the building's three-story front massing is a blind gable wall that is clad in vinyl siding.

Development Chronology

An original building permit has not been found for 2717-19 North Broad Street, but its construction date of circa 1895 has been established through an analysis of historic maps, deed transactions, and city directories. In April 1893, the plot was included in a larger parcel sold to Samuel Alcott and Anderson Ross by Margaret M. Barber.¹ In 1893 and 1894, the *Philadelphia City Directory* lists the Alcott, Ross & Scully millwork company at 18th and Washington Avenue and at 2933 N. Broad Street, a block north of the parcel in question.² In 1895, the *Philadelphia City Directory* lists Alcott, Ross & Scully at 18th and Washington Avenues and at 2717, 2719, and 2721 North Broad Street.³ Likewise, an 1888 map shows the property in question undeveloped, while 1895 maps shows a building of near-identical footprint to the current structure labeled “Sash, Door & Blind Factory.”⁴

The building has undergone a series of modifications since its original construction. It remained under the ownership of Alcott, Ross & Scully until c.1914, when control passed to the successor firm of J. Anderson Ross Company, which continued the building’s use as a millwork factory and warehouse until 1929.⁵ Building permits from the Philadelphia City Archives record a series of minor rear additions built between 1914 and 1917. Though the building changed ownership and tenants numerous times between 1929 and 1968, no significant alterations to the building’s exterior appear to have taken place during this era.

The current exterior appearance of the building’s Broad Street facade is largely the product of three building campaigns: its initial construction as a millwork factory and warehouse c.1895, the ground-floor alterations undertaken during its conversion into the Cloverlay Gym in 1969, and later 1980s-era alterations following its 1975 conversion from the Cloverlay Gym to Joe Frazier’s Gym. Historic photographs of the Cloverlay Gym (1969-1975) confirm that the building’s current fenestration pattern dates to this era, with a five-bay ground-floor storefront

¹ Transfer of deed from Margaret M. Barber to Samuel Alcott and Anderson Ross, April 28, 1893. Deed Book TG 323, p 1.

² *Philadelphia City Directory*, 1893; *Philadelphia City Directory*, 1894.

³ *Philadelphia City Directory*, 1895.

⁴ Baist, George William. *Baist’s Property Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, Penna, Complete in One Volume*. Philadelphia: G. Wm. Baist, 1888. Baist, George William. *Baist’s Property Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, Penna, Complete in One Volume*. Philadelphia: G. Wm. Baist, 1895. Bromley, George W. & Walter S. *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, Complete in One Volume*. Philadelphia, G.W. Bromley and Co., 1895.

⁵ *Philadelphia City Directories*, 1910, 1914. Philadelphia Telephone Directories, 1929, 1930.

flanked by two metal and glass entryways. The original ground-floor alterations featured brick piers set between storefront windows featuring metal spandrel panels. In an undated photograph depicting the lower two floors of the building during the Cloverlay era, one-over-one windows with transom lights appear in the second-floor window openings, and the original brick façade appears intact on the upper floors [Fig. 11]. A zoning permit application dating to 1969 describes ground floor alterations consistent with this configuration and lists Henry D. Dagit & Sons as architects.⁶

The Broad Street façade was further altered during the building's tenure as Joe Frazier's Gym (1975-2008). In 1983, the storefront windows were slightly enlarged and the ground floor masonry was clad in a buff stucco material scored to imitate stone.⁷ This stucco material was also inscribed with the current "Joe Frazier's Gym" sign panel and the boxing gloves above both doorways. Second-floor windows were replaced with single fixed panels in 1986.⁸ The third-floor windows were infilled with a stucco matching the ground-floor cladding and the remainder of the brick façade was faced in a veneer brick during the same era. While the exact date of these last alterations cannot be verified, they likely occurred at some point previous to 1986, when a description of the building in its current configuration appeared in a New York Times article:

From the nearby railroad bridge, it must look to the passing Amtrak commuter like just another old, creaking building in this rundown North Philadelphia neighborhood. The upper floors of the three-story building at 2917 North Broad Street have gray-white stucco patches where windows used to be, and the rest is brown brickface. But the designation on the exterior – "Joe Frazier's Gym" - is a good clue that this place is no candidate for the wrecker's ball. It is instead a kind of boxing landmark, a gym where fighters have been training since 1968, when Cloverlay Inc., the syndicate sponsor of the heavyweight contender, Joe Frazier, bought the gym for him to use.⁹

⁶ *Application for Zoning Permit and/or Use Registration Permit: 2917 N. Broad Street*. Philadelphia Department of Licenses and Inspections, May 13, 1969.

⁷ *Application for Zoning Permit and/or Use Registration Permit: 2917 N. Broad Street*. Philadelphia Department of Licenses and Inspections, March 10, 1983.

⁸ *Application for Zoning Permit and/or Use Registration Permit: 2917 N. Broad Street*. Philadelphia Department of Licenses and Inspections, November 16, 1986.

⁹ Berger, Phil. "For Marvis Frazier, Does Father Know Best?" *New York Times*, July 21, 1986.

A 1996 photograph of the building published in *Sports Illustrated* confirms that the alterations described are consistent with the current appearance of the building [Fig. 13].¹⁰ The installation date of the rooftop billboard is currently unknown, as records of its installation do not appear in the City's zoning archives. The earliest identified aerial photograph of the property dating from 1992 does appear to include the sign.¹¹

¹⁰ Nack, William. "The Fight's Over, Joe." *Sports Illustrated*, September 30, 1996, p. 54. Photograph by Walter Iooss, Jr.

¹¹ USGS Aerial Survey Photograph, March 28, 1992, accessed via Google Earth.



Figure 1: West (Broad Street) elevation, January 2013



Figure 2: West elevation detail of boxing gloves above doorway.

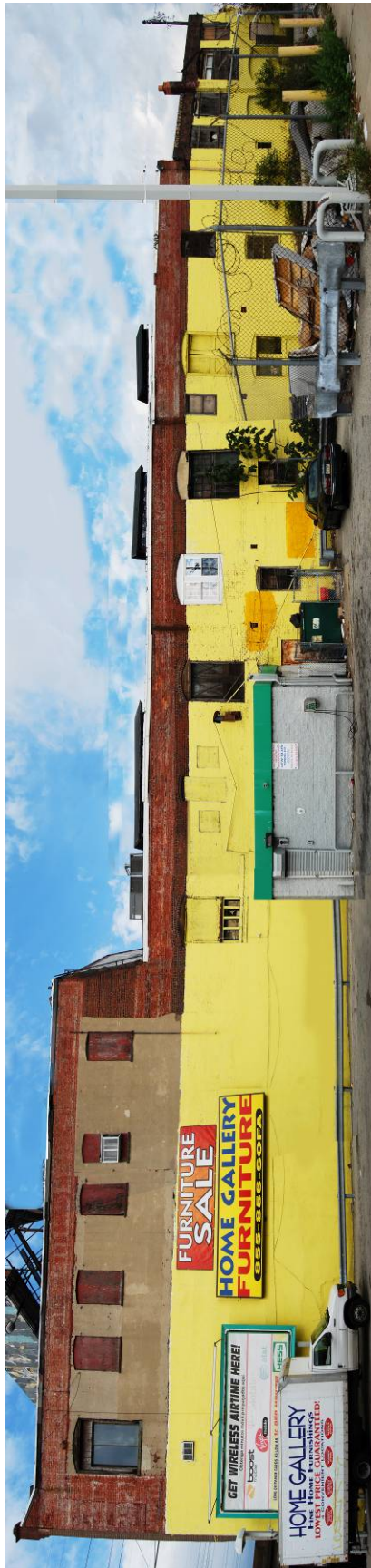


Figure 3 (Left): Composite photograph of south elevation.
Figure 4 (Top Right): South elevation detail
Figure 5 (Bottom Right): North elevation



Figure 6: North elevation detail of historic signage.



Figure 7: East elevation

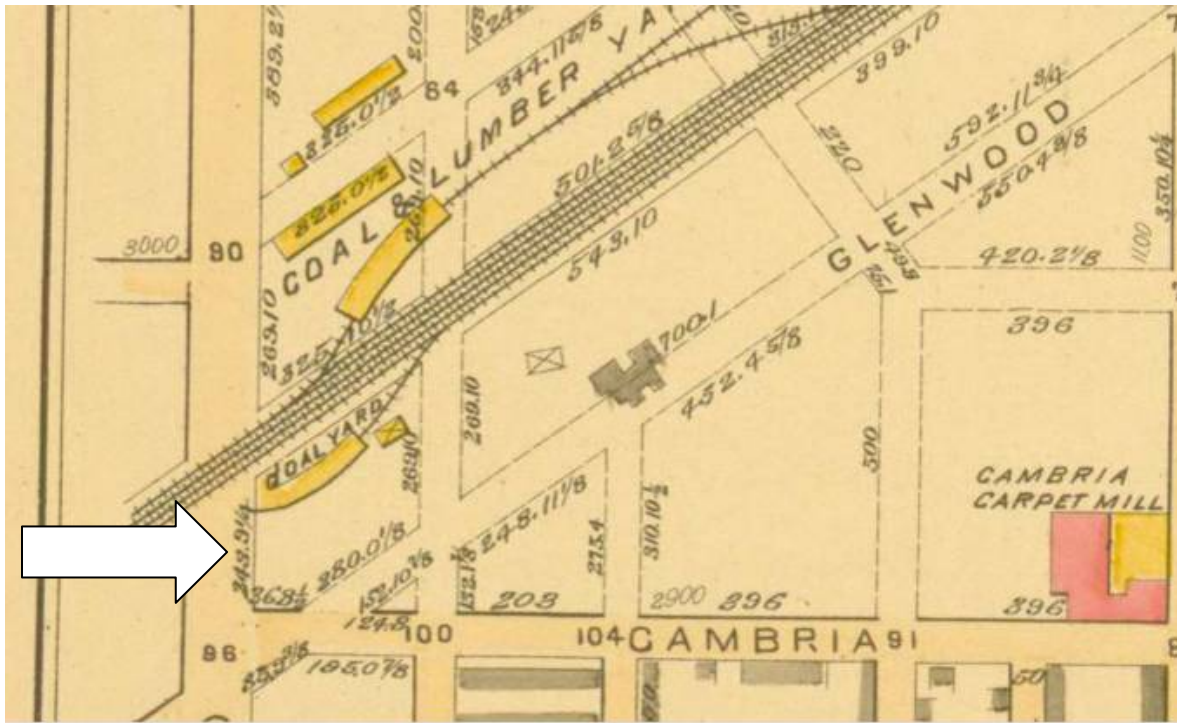


Figure 8: 1888 Baist Atlas

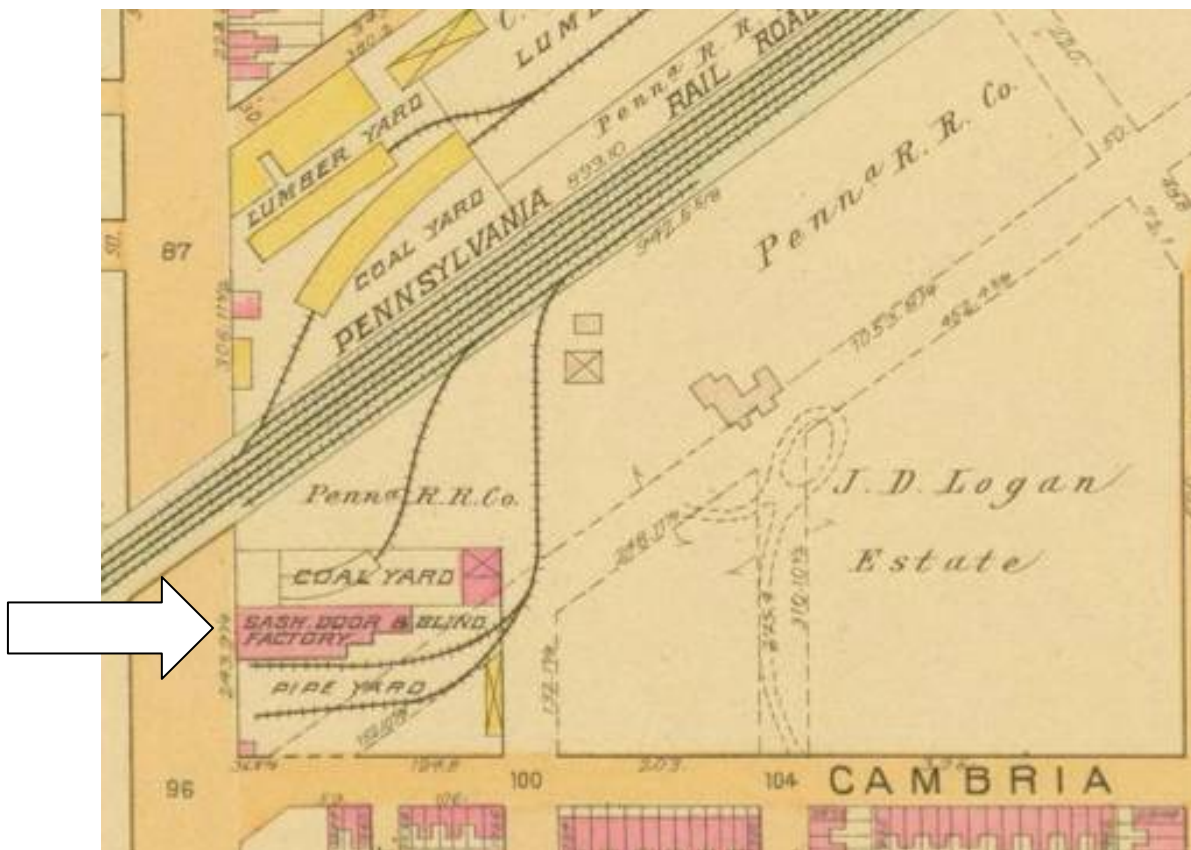


Figure 9: 1895 Baist Atlas

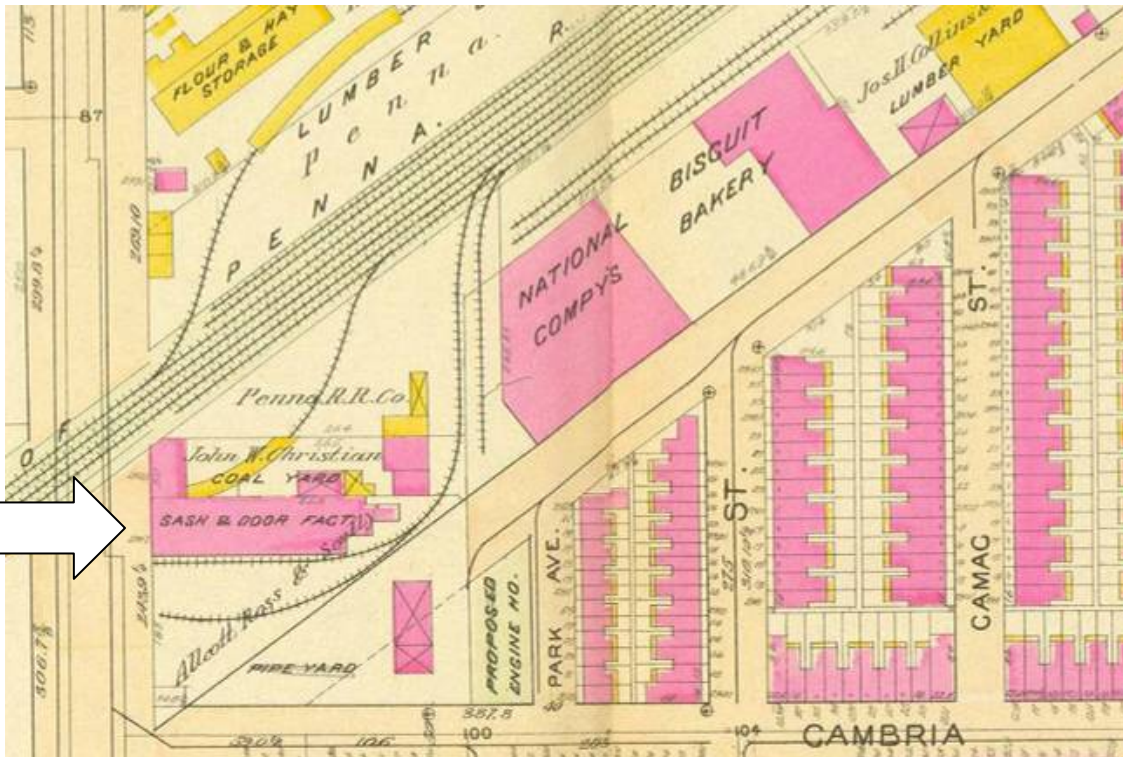


Figure 9: 1901 Baist Atlas

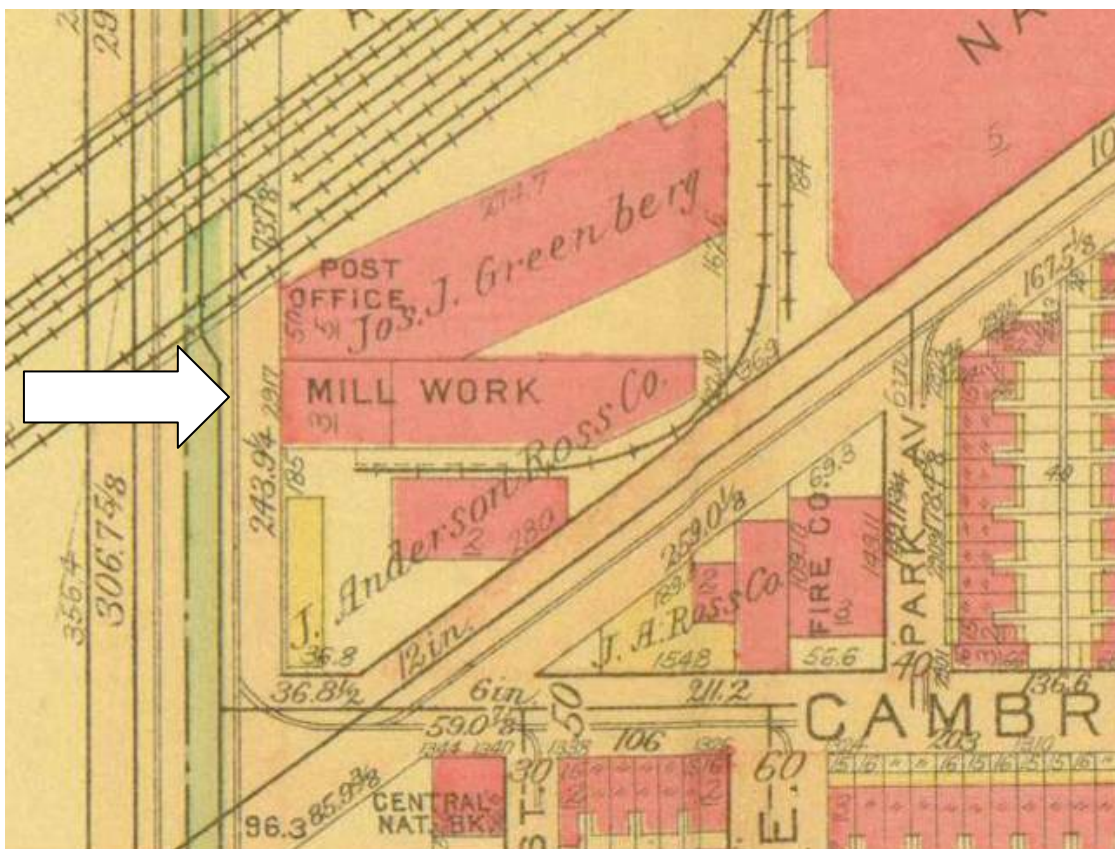


Figure 9: 1925 Bromley Atlas

C APPLICATION FOR ZONING PERMIT AND/OR USE REGISTRATION PERMIT CITY OF PHILADELPHIA DEPARTMENT OF LICENSES & INSPECTIONS			NOTE: The requirements for this permit are in addition to all others required by law or regulation. The issuance of this permit does not imply that a building permit or other permits will be issued if the specifications do not conform with the Building Code, Plumbing Code, Housing Code, Fire Code and all other pertinent laws or regulations.			
Application is hereby made for the permit or permits required by the Philadelphia Zoning Ordinance before commencing the use or the work described herein, and as shown on accompanying plan.			APPLICATION NO. 99507 H DISTRICT DESIGNATION _____			
LOCATION OF PROPERTY (Street and House Number) 2917 N. BROAD STREET			ZONING MAP NO. _____ SUB. _____ P. A. VOL. PL. _____ WARD _____			
situated on _____ side of _____ Street at the distance of _____ feet _____ inches from _____ side of _____ Street Front _____ feet _____ inches. Depth _____ feet _____ inches.			PREVIOUS APPLICATION CALENDAR NO. _____ ZONING REFUSED _____ USE REFUSED _____ APPEAL _____			
If lot is irregular in shape, give deed description below: <div style="text-align: center;"> RECEIVED DEPT. OF LICENSES AND INSPECTIONS MAY 13 1969 </div>			APP. GRANTED _____ CERT. _____ APP. REFUSED _____ CERT. _____ REF. TO B. OF A. _____ REF. GRANTED _____ CERT. _____ REF. REFUSED _____ CERT. _____			
PERMIT ISSUANCE						
EXPLAIN ANY ALTERATIONS OR PROPOSED CONSTRUCTION REMOVAL OF EXISTING WOOD COLUMNS & INSTALLATION OF NEW STEEL BEAMS. INSTALLATION OF NEW BOXING RING ON FIRST FLOOR, NEW WOOD STAIRS, NEW OFFICE, TRAINING ROOM, LOCKER ROOM, SHOWER & TOILET RMS., SAUNA & DRYING ROOM ON MEZZANINE. EXISTING WALLS TO BE paneled. NEW METAL GRILLE ON BROAD ST. ELEVATION. REMOVAL OF WINDOWS & INSTALLATION OF INSULATED METAL PANELS (BROAD ST. ELEVATION)			THIS SPACE FOR OFFICIAL STAMP (Do not write in this space) DEPT. OF LIC. & INSPECTIONS CITY OF PHILADELPHIA USE REGISTRATION PERMIT NO. _____ DATE: _____ <input type="checkbox"/> PERMIT GRANTED IN ACCORDANCE WITH ZBA CERTIFICATE NO. _____			
STORIES AND HEIGHTS FROM GROUND TO ROOF						
HEIGHT	EXISTING BUILDING			PROPOSED ADDITION, ALTERATION OR NEW BUILDING		
	FRONT	SIDE	REAR	FRONT	SIDE	REAR
In Feet						
In Stories						
TABULATION OF USES						
FLOOR NO.	PRESENT USE			LAST PREVIOUS USE		DATE LAST USED
1ST	FRONT AREA VACANT REAR PACKING					
2	CARPENTER SHOP REAR CABINETS					
3	CARINET WAREHOUSE					
4	VACANT					
FLOOR NO.	PROPOSED USE OF PRESENT BUILDING			PROPOSED USE OF ADDITION OR NEW BUILDING		
1	GYMNASIUM			PERIL		
MEZZANINE	OFFICE, TRAINING RM., LOCKERS, SHOWERS & TOILETS					
	SAME					
Additional use information, if required _____						
OWNER	CLOVERLAY INC.			ADDRESS	1306 PHILA. NATIONAL BANK BUILDING	
ARCHITECT OR ENGINEER	HENRY D. DAGIT & SONS			ADDRESS	1329 RACE STREET, PHILA. PA. 19107	
CONTRACTOR				ADDRESS		
APPLICANT	LOUIS SMANIOTTO			ADDRESS	1329 RACE STREET	
				PHONE	561 2231	
				PHONE	203 5731	
				PHONE	203 5731	

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Figure 10: 1969 Zoning Permit Application for conversion to gym.



Figure 11: Undated photograph from 1969-1975 (still from DVD *Joe Frazier: When the Smoke Clears*).



Figure 12: Ground floor detail, 1971. John Shearer—Time & Life Pictures/Getty Images.
<http://life.time.com/culture/muhammad-ali-and-joe-frazier-fight-of-the-century-photos-1971/#10>



Figure 13: Joe Frazier and the gym in 1996. Walter Iooss, Jr.—Sports Illustrated/Getty Images. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/09/05/us/saving-joe-fraziers-gym-and-his-philadelphia-legacy.html>

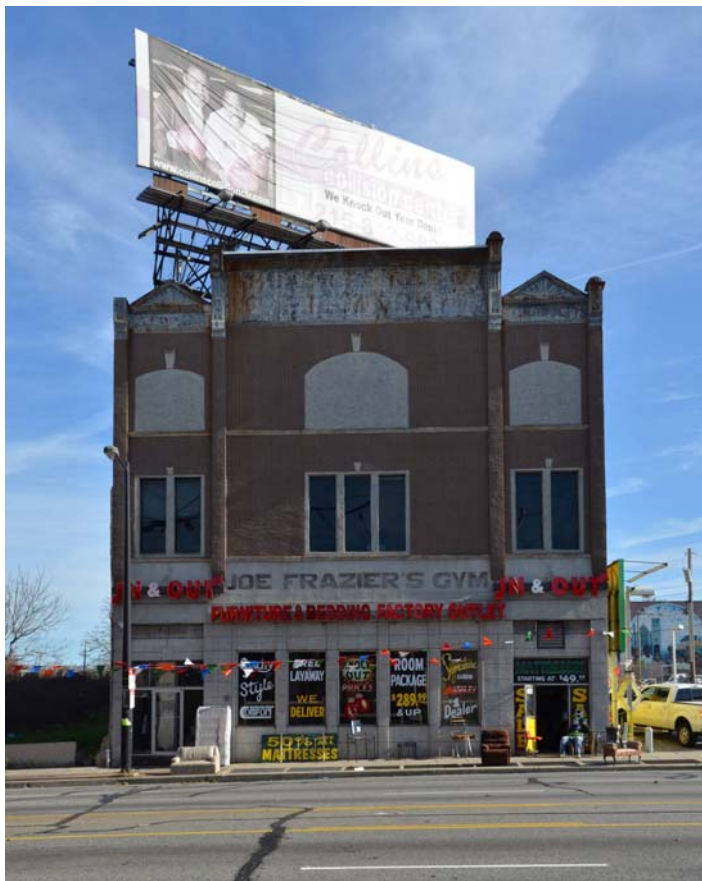


Figure 14: Broad Street elevation in 2011. Note Frazier-themed billboard advertisement and earlier iteration of commercial signage.

7. Significance

Former world heavyweight champion boxer Joseph William (“Smokin’ Joe”) Frazier (1944-2011) is widely regarded as one of the most celebrated Philadelphia athletes of all time and one of the city’s most famous twentieth-century public figures. Joe Frazier’s Gym, his former training facility and occasional residence at 2917-19 North Broad Street in North Philadelphia, played a central role both in Frazier’s career and in the vitality of the city’s active boxing scene in the later decades of the twentieth century.

The building housing Frazier’s Gym was originally constructed circa 1895 as sash and blind factory and warehouse by the Alcott, Ross & Scully Company in an industrial area of North Philadelphia directly opposite the Pennsylvania Railroad’s newly-constructed Germantown Junction (now North Philadelphia) Station. In 1968, the building was purchased by Cloverlay Inc., a group of local investors formed in 1965 to manage Frazier’s professional boxing career. In early 1969, the building was converted into Cloverlay Gym, a private training facility that served as Frazier’s headquarters for the duration of a career that included some of the most celebrated heavyweight bouts of the era, including the 1971 “Fight of the Century” victory over Muhammad Ali. Following his eventual retirement in 1975, Frazier purchased the building from his former management company and renamed it Joe Frazier’s Gym, opening its doors to aspiring professional fighters and local amateurs. It remained an active gym and de-facto community center until its eventual closure in 2008. Frazier passed away in 2011.

The building at 2917-19 North Broad Street stands today as a prominent reminder of the legacy of Joe Frazier in the cultural heritage of Philadelphia and the nation, and as such, merits listing on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places by meeting the following three criteria for historic designation as stated in the Philadelphia Historic Preservation Ordinance, Section 14-1004 of the Philadelphia Code:

- a) Has significant character or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth and Nation; and is associated with the life of a person significant in the past;
- h) Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or city;

and

- j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

Criterion A: Has significant character or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth and Nation; and is associated with the life of a person significant in the past.

Joe Frazier's Gym is highly significant for its association with the life of boxer Joe Frazier, former heavyweight champion of the world and one of the most famous athletes in the history of Philadelphia. Frazier's rivalry with Muhammad Ali is celebrated as one of the greatest rivalries in the history of American sports, elevating the stature of both men to the level of major cultural icons. Though Ali defeated Frazier in two of their three bouts and is commonly considered the greatest boxer of all time, Frazier is rightfully remembered as Ali's most formidable opponent. Their rivalry, and their public personas that emanated from it, was an intense and bitter one that reflected many of the complexities of American society, African American identity, and the culture wars of the Vietnam War era.

Joe Frazier was born in Beaufort, South Carolina in 1944 into a family of sharecroppers. The second-youngest of thirteen children living in a four-room farmhouse, Frazier was introduced to the sport of boxing at an early age through televised bouts that neighbors and family regularly gathered together to watch on a shared television set. As a young boy, Frazier was large for his age, leading an uncle to compare him to famous heavyweight boxer Joe Louis. This compliment inspired him to fashion a makeshift punching bag by filling a burlap sack with bricks, corncobs, rags and Spanish moss. "For the next six, seven years, damn near every day I'd hit that heavybag for an hour at a time," Frazier recalled in his 1996 autobiography. "I'd wrap my hands with a necktie of my Daddy's, or a stocking of my Momma's or sister's, and get to it."¹²

As a teenager, Frazier chafed at the poverty and segregation of Jim Crow-era Southern society. Like millions of other southern African Americans that joined the "Second Great Migration" to the northern and western states, Frazier followed an older brother to New York City at the age of fifteen after a race-related altercation with white farmhands in Beaufort. A

¹² Frazier, Joe and Berger, Phil. *Smokin' Joe: The Autobiography*. New York: Macmillan General Reference, 1996, p. 9.

second move to Philadelphia followed shortly thereafter, landing Frazier in the city that would remain his adopted hometown for the duration of his life.

By 1961, Frazier found work at the Cross Brothers Meat Packing Company in Kensington and began boxing at the 23rd District Police Athletic League gym at 22nd and Cecil B. Moore Avenue. The two routines intertwined when Frazier began using sides of beef at the packing plant as makeshift punching bags-- a practice appropriated by Sylvester Stallone in his 1976 film *Rocky*, which filmed the famous scene at the same Cross Brothers slaughterhouse.¹³ At the PAL gym, which was a mecca of sorts for up-and-coming boxers from across the city, Frazier caught the attention of Yancey “Yank” Durham, a welder for the Pennsylvania Railroad who moonlighted as a trainer at the gym.¹⁴ By 1964, under Durham’s dedicated training, Frazier had become one of the city’s top amateur fighters and competed for a spot on the United States Olympic Team.

Though Frazier lost his qualifying bout to Buster Mathis, Durham convinced Frazier to remain with the team as a sparring partner and Olympic alternate. This decision proved fortuitous when Mathis broke a thumb during training, allowing Frazier to compete as a heavyweight in the 1964 Tokyo Games. Despite breaking his own left thumb in a quarterfinal bout, Frazier concealed the injury from his coaches and won both that fight, against Vadim Yemelyanov of the Soviet Union, and the final against Hans Huber of Germany, taking home the only U.S. boxing gold medal in the Tokyo Games. The feat was doubly significant given the fact that his signature punch was a left hook.

Frazier returned to Philadelphia to discover that his broken left thumb required surgery and six months to heal; the injury led to his termination by Cross Brothers. Both he and Durham were members of Bright Hope Baptist Church, a middle-class African American congregation in the Yorktown neighborhood of North Philadelphia whose new church and youth center had just opened in September 1964 (Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke at the groundbreaking in October 1963). Frazier was offered a janitorial position at the church by Rev. William H. Gray, a prominent civic figure with connections to many of Philadelphia’s leading businessmen and politicians. As a result of these connections, Frazier was eventually introduced to F. Bruce

¹³ Stone, Debbie. “Fire Decks Frazier’s First ‘Gym,’ Slaughterhouse in ‘Rocky’ Film,” *Philadelphia Daily News*, December 28, 1990.

¹⁴ “Heavyweight Joe Frazier: A Stockholder’s Dream,” *Ebony Magazine*, November 1967, pp. 136-142.

Baldwin, president of the Horn & Hardart Baking Company.¹⁵ Baldwin was a boxing fan and looking to lend financial backing to a “clean-cut, up-and-coming heavyweight.”¹⁶ Frazier and Durham were looking for backers after entering the professional circuit in August 1965 (Frazier won his first four bouts that year by knock-out). Baldwin assembled a group of investors to purchase stock in a company whose sole purpose was Frazier’s sponsorship. The company was called Cloverlay (a playful merger of “Clover” for luck, and “Overlay,” a gambling term for good odds). Eighty shares were sold at \$250 a share. Among the first investors were Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce president Thacher Longstreth, Gimbel’s Department Store president Arthur Kaufman, and Jack Kelly, Jr., brother to Princess Grace of Monaco [Fig. 14].¹⁷

Frazier signed a three-year contract in early 1966 guaranteeing a \$100 weekly salary and 50% of his fight winnings, with Cloverlay stockholders taking 35% Durham earning 15% plus full managerial control. The agreement was mutually beneficial; with Frazier and Durham concentrating full time on his training, Frazier’s professional career quickly took off. He fought matches at Convention Hall and the Arena in Philadelphia, Madison Square Garden in New York City, the Olympic Auditorium in Los Angeles, and Boston Garden in Boston. In 1967, he headlined the first boxing match held at the new Philadelphia Spectrum. By early 1968, his record had grown to 20-0 and he had claimed the New York State Athletic Commission’s heavyweight title with a win over old rival Buster Mathis. Cloverlay’s original \$250 shares were now worth \$5,600 each.¹⁸

With these winnings, and eyeing a serious shot at the world heavyweight title recently stripped from Muhammad Ali in 1967 for his refusal to fight in the Vietnam War, Cloverlay purchased the former warehouse at 2917-19 North Broad Street for \$87,500 on November 4, 1968 and converted it into a training facility for Frazier, investing an additional \$85,000 in renovations. The main gym area with a boxing ring and heavy bags was installed on the ground floor of the three-story building, behind a new Broad Street storefront. Showers, lockers, an office and a sauna were built behind the gym area, with additional offices on the second floor. All of the Broad Street windows were replaced, and structural steel beams installed to create a clear span area for the boxing ring and to carry the weight of the new equipment. The rear of the

¹⁵ Arkush, Michael. *The Fight of the Century: Ali v. Frazier March 8, 1971*. Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley & Sons, 2008, p. 68

¹⁶ “Heavyweight Joe Frazier: A Stockholder’s Dream,” *Ebony Magazine*, November 1967, pp. 136-142.

¹⁷ Arkush, p. 68.

¹⁸ Grady, Sandy. “It Would Stun Oldtimers,” *Philadelphia Sunday Bulletin*, March 17, 1968.

long building remained industrial warehouse space.¹⁹ It opened as the Cloverlay Gym in early 1969 and would remain Frazier's headquarters for the duration of his career. As Joe Hand, one of the original Cloverlay investors, recalled in a 2012 interview, "[The gym] was great, and it was good for business, for the Cloverlay people. We knew where Joe was all the time, and we kind of knew what he was doing."²⁰ Eventually, an auxiliary apartment for Frazier was also constructed on the building's third floor (Frazier's primary residence was in suburban Lafayette Hills).

In February 1970, Frazier defeated Jimmy Ellis to become the heavyweight champion of the world. But because Muhammad Ali remained undefeated when he was stripped of his title and boxing license, many felt that Frazier's title was illegitimate. When the United States Supreme Court overturned Ali's conviction for draft evasion and his boxing license was reinstated in 1971, the stage was set for an unprecedented match-up between undefeated heavyweights.

The Frazier-Ali bout, scheduled for March 8, 1971 at Madison Square Garden in New York City, was instantly billed "The Fight of the Century." Each boxer was guaranteed a record-setting \$2.5 million for the event, and in the months leading up to the fight a frenzy of media attention surrounded both men. Frazier's training regimen at Cloverlay Gym became something of a media spectacle. Movie star Burt Lancaster, the fight's television announcer, visited Frazier at the gym for a *New York Times* photo shoot.²¹ Ali himself also visited in a pre-fight confrontation immortalized by photographer John Shearer in *Life Magazine* [Figs. 12, 15].²²

The significance of the match-up transcended the sports pages. Ali was one of the most recognized--and polarizing--public figures in America at the time. His conversion to Islam and refusal to serve in Vietnam were hallmark events in the pitched culture wars of the late 1960s. He was idolized in some circles and reviled in others—one of the era's surest political litmus tests was whether one called him "Muhammad Ali" or "Cassius Clay."

By most accounts, Frazier and Ali had been cordial in the past; Frazier loaned Ali money during his years of exile from the ring, and had even lobbied President Richard Nixon to

¹⁹ *Application for Zoning Permit and/or Use Registration Permit: 2917 N. Broad Street*. Philadelphia Department of Licenses and Inspections, May 13, 1969.

²⁰ Hand, Joe and Hochman, Stan. "Joe Frazier: His Life, Career, and the City of Brotherly Love." Interview with Marty Moss-Coane, Radio Times, WHYY Philadelphia, September 13, 2012.

²¹ Anderson, Dave. "Lancaster Turns Down Sparring Role," *New York Times*, February 23, 1971.

²² Thompson, Thomas. "The Battle of the Undefeated Giants," *Life Magazine*, March 5, 1971, pp. 40-51.

reinstate Ali's boxing license.²³ But in the months leading up to the fight, Ali began casting Frazier as an "Uncle Tom" and the "white man's champion." While much of the acrimony was theatrical (Ali later insisted his taunts were only intended to drive up ticket sales), an obliging American public eagerly took sides. A March 1971 *Ebony Magazine* cover story titled "The Biggest Fight in History" distilled the dichotomy thusly:

Ali is the people's champion.... He is greatly admired by militants, liberals and by philosophical and moral idealists. Ali connotes anti-establishment. He is black pride out-loud, its fury unleashed in a salvo of fistic lightening and in poetry and dramatic antics.... Frazier is the official champion, recognized by the establishment boxing commissions. He would be equally appreciated by the conservative blacks and, though probably not to his liking, by many Caucasians who see him, ironically, as some kind of 'Great White Hope.' They want to see Frazier whip that 'uppity loud n---r Clay!'²⁴

Ali's portrayal of Frazier as the "establishment" fighter was not entirely unfounded; Frazier was publically supportive of both the U.S. military and the Philadelphia police (in part out of gratitude for his formative years at the Police Athletic League gym), and his Cloverlay backers included many of Philadelphia's leading white businesspeople. But the irony of Ali, a lighter-skinned African American who enjoyed a relatively privileged middle class upbringing, publicly questioning the "blackness" of Frazier, who fled the poverty and racism of the Deep South for an unforgiving working class life in Philadelphia, was particularly bitter for Frazier and would fuel an intense rivalry between the two men that far outlived their boxing careers. "A lot of black people are hung up on Clay telling them how black he is and what a Tom I am," Frazier wrote in a *Ebony Magazine* article at the time. "Look at my corner; its all black. All the guys associated with me are black; my whole band is black. But that doesn't mean I'm for separation. It just means I'm giving black brothers a break to earn a little money without doing a lot of whooping and hollering about it."²⁵

The fight itself would prove to be the pinnacle of Frazier's fame and professional success. After fifteen rounds, Frazier won a unanimous decision to retain the world heavyweight title in a fight that cemented his reputation as a legitimate champion. *Life Magazine* published a 10,000 word post-fight feature by Norman Mailer, accompanied by a nine-page photo spread

²³ Nack, William. "The Fight's Over, Joe." *Sports Illustrated*, September 30, 1996, p. 59.

²⁴ Banks, Lacy J. "The Biggest Fight in History," *Ebony Magazine*, March 1971, pp. 134-142.

²⁵ Frazier, Joe. "Cassius Who?" *Ebony Magazine*, May 1972, pp. 68-76.

shot ringside by Frank Sinatra.²⁶ After the fight, which saw Ali knocked down in the final round for only the third time in his career, both fighters were hospitalized (Ali for a broken jaw, Frazier for liver damage).

The following year, Frazier successfully defended his title with knockout victories over Terry Daniels and Ron Stander, extending his record to 29-0. But in 1973, Frazier lost the title to George Foreman in a lopsided defeat that saw him knocked down six times in the first two rounds. His highly-anticipated rematch with Ali in January 1974, now no longer a title bout, also resulted in a loss. Ali regained the championship title with an upset victory over Foreman nine months later, setting up a third and final Ali-Frazier bout in October 1975.

Ali-Frazier III, known as the “Thrilla in Manila,” is widely remembered as one of the greatest boxing matches of all time. The heavily-favored Ali continued his tradition of belittling Frazier in the lead-up to the fight, mocking him as a “gorilla” and predicting an easy victory. But Frazier proved more formidable than Ali expected, lasting fourteen brutal rounds before a swollen eye forced his trainer to end the bout. Though Ali retained his title, he later called the experience “the closest thing to dying that I know of” and, in typical Ali fashion, called Frazier “the greatest fighter of all time, next to me.”²⁷

Frazier fought and lost one last bout against George Foreman in 1976 before retiring from boxing with a career record of 32-4 (a brief one-fight comeback in 1981 resulted in a draw against Floyd “Jumbo” Cummings). Twenty-seven of his victories came by knock-out, and he only lost to two men-- Ali and Foreman-- over the course of his eleven-year professional career.

With his earnings from the Thrilla in Manila, Frazier purchased the Cloverlay Gym from his investors in October 1975 and rechristened it Joe Frazier’s Gym.²⁸ After his retirement, Frazier turned to training and managing up-and-coming fighters, including his son Marvis, a 1980 Golden Gloves heavyweight champion who amassed a respectable 19-2 professional record. The gym also housed offices for a number of Frazier’s side-enterprises, including a limousine service his long-standing musical project, Joe Frazier and his Knockouts. In addition, Frazier resided in a third-floor apartment at the building for a number of years in the 1990s and

²⁶ Mailer, Norman. “Ego,” *Life Magazine*, March 19, 1971, pp. 18-36.

²⁷ Gregory, Sean. “Joe Frazier, Former Heavyweight Boxing Champ, Dies at 67.” *Time Magazine*, November 8, 2011.

²⁸ Deed of Sale from Cloverlay, Inc. to Smokin Joe Frazier Inc., October 28, 1975. Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania. Deed Book DCC, page 977, Philadelphia City Archives

early 2000s, after a divorce from his wife Florence.²⁹ In 2008, financial difficulties led to the gym's closure and eventual sale. After a brief bout with liver cancer, Frazier passed away in Philadelphia on November 7, 2011 at the age of 67.

Though Joe Frazier's Gym was converted to a furniture showroom in 2011, the building retains a strong association with Frazier, both in the gym signage that remains visible along Broad Street, and in the collective memories of Philadelphia's residents. The building is unquestionably the most significant site associated with the former champion in Philadelphia, and one of a surprising few that remain standing. The 23rd District Police Athletic Gym at 22nd Street and Cecil B. Moore Avenue has been demolished, and the Cross Brothers slaughterhouse at Front and Venango Streets burned down in 1990. Most of the Philadelphia venues that witnessed the rise of his professional career—the Philadelphia Arena, Convention Hall, and the Spectrum—have also been torn down. By virtue of its unique and exceptional association with the life of Joe Frazier, an iconic figure in the history of sports and popular culture, the former gym at 2917-19 N. Broad Street survives as a site worthy of historic designation by the Philadelphia Historical Commission.

Criterion H: Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or city.

Situated across North Broad Street from SEPTA's and Amtrak's North Philadelphia Station (formerly the Pennsylvania Railroad's Germantown Junction Station), the building at 2917-19 N. Broad Street is a prominent structure passed daily by thousands of pedestrians, drivers, and rail passengers. It retains the basic exterior appearance of its primary period of significance, the four-decade era from 1969 to 2008 when its primary occupant was the boxing gym associated with Joe Frazier (Cloverlay Gym from 1969 to 1975, Joe Frazier's Gym from 1975 to 2008). In addition, the site possesses secondary significance as a relatively intact example of late nineteenth-century industrial development along this portion of North Broad Street adjacent to the former Pennsylvania Railroad right-of-way now serving SEPTA regional rail and Amtrak's Northeast Corridor. The building was constructed circa 1895 by the Alcott, Ross & Scully Company as a wood sash and blind factory and warehouse, and was operated as such by J. Anderson Ross Co. (a descendant company) until 1929. It survives as the only

²⁹ Nack, William. "The Fight's Over, Joe." *Sports Illustrated*, September 30, 1996, p. 54.

building fronting the 2900 block of Broad Street (not withstanding an adjacent Hess service station and a strip-mall development across the street) and one of a handful of historic industrial and commercial buildings between Lehigh Avenue and the railroad viaduct north of Glenwood Avenue. These include the aforementioned North Philadelphia Station at 2900 N. Broad Street (1896), the Joseph Cohen & Sons Building at 2700 N. Broad (c.1910), a Goodyear Rubber Company warehouse at 2750 N. Broad (c.1920), and a city fire station at 1323 W. Cambria Street (c. 1910). It has outlived a number of other prominent industrial and commercial buildings in the immediate vicinity, including the original National Biscuit Company (later Nabisco) factory immediately east of the property along Glenwood Avenue, as well as a three-story commercial structure immediately to the north along Broad Street.

The building is a prominent and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, retaining character-defining features from both its original period of construction (including the pressed metal cornice on the west elevation and ghost signage for the millwork company still legible on the north and south elevations) and its later incarnation as a boxing gym (the extant “Joe Frazier’s Gym” signage and the ground-floor storefront configuration dating to 1969 and 1983). The building’s prominence is further accentuated by the extant roof-mounted billboard that for many years advertised companies endorsed by Joe Frazier (the most recent advertisement for an auto repair shop, recently removed, featured a photograph of Frazier along with the slogan, “We Knock Out Your Dents”) [Fig. 14]. Though the date of the billboard structure is unknown, it was likely installed during the building’s ownership by either Frazier or Cloverlay Inc. Overall, the building’s visual prominence and its recognizable ties to Joe Frazier constitute a singular physical characteristic that represent an established and familiar feature of North Broad Street.

Criterion J: Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

Joe Frazier’s Gym exemplifies the cultural and social significance that the sport of boxing represents in history and heritage of Philadelphia. From the inception of professional boxing in the early twentieth century, Philadelphia has been widely considered one of the nation’s preeminent “fight towns,” a reputation earned mainly through the strength of the city’s

neighborhood gyms.³⁰ Until its closure in 2008, Joe Frazier's Gym was one of the largest, most well-known, and longest-operating gyms in the city. The gym produced amateur Golden Glove champions, an Olympic bronze-medal winner and a number of successful professional fighters, including Joe Frazier's son Marvis. Heavyweight contender Duane Bobick moved to Philadelphia in 1975 specifically to train at the gym, as did boxer-turned-actor Randall "Tex" Cobb in 1976.

But perhaps more significantly, the gym also served as a de-facto community center for hundreds of poor and working class North Philadelphia youth, just as the 23rd District Police Athletic League gym played a significant role in Frazier's early years in Philadelphia. In this capacity, Joe Frazier's Gym exemplifies the cultural status of boxing gyms as informal neighborhood institutions. Gyms have long been part of the social fabric of Philadelphia's working-class neighborhoods, providing recreational, social and financial opportunities not available elsewhere in the community. Often occupying makeshift spaces in low-rent, low-profile buildings, gyms like Champs, the Harrowgate Boxing Club, the Front Street Gym, and the Eastside Gym have nevertheless attained a certain iconic stature in the folk histories of Philadelphia's neighborhoods. By virtue of its association with a world-famous heavyweight champion and its relatively high-profile location, Joe Frazier's Gym was exceptional among the city's dozens of neighborhood gyms operating in the middle and late twentieth century, but its less-celebrated and more typical role as a neighborhood recreational facility is equally significant to the story of boxing in Philadelphia.

After Frazier purchased the gym from his Cloverlay backers in 1975, he opened the facility to the general public. By 1981, the 125-member gym was the largest in the city. "I can remember when you couldn't walk from Lehigh to Allegheny without getting mugged and that isn't true now," Frazier noted in a 1980 *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin* interview at the gym. "One gym like this does more than a whole squad of cops, 'cause as good a job as the policeman does, he don't see the boy 'til there's been trouble. Young people have lots of energy and some of 'em don't have much else. But a kid who comes in here and takes his energy out on a punchin' bag and a few rounds in the four squares, he sweats the trouble right out of them.

³⁰ Callis, Tracy; Hasson, Chuck; DiLisa, Mike. *Philadelphia's Boxing Heritage*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Press, 2002, p. 7.

Boxin' teaches the boys to be in control of themselves, too, and that's an important thing for a man's whole life."³¹

Joe Frazier's own biography is a testament to the opportunities the sport of boxing presented to working-class African Americans in Philadelphia in the 1960s, who followed the Irish, Italian and Jewish immigrant communities earlier in the century in embracing the sport as a vehicle for social assimilation and upward mobility.³² The physical legacy of this tradition has proven to be mercurial; in contrast to other sports like baseball, basketball or football, the sport was generally not practiced in publicly-sanctioned or purpose-built facilities, but rather in makeshift gyms with low public profiles and short life-spans. Even at the professional level, boxing venues were likely to be converted theaters or auditoriums, very few of which survive from the sport's earlier eras (the Legendary Blue Horizon at 1314 N. Broad Street, while no longer an active boxing venue, is rare as a surviving building with strong links to boxing). In this context, the status of Joe Frazier's Gym as a recognized neighborhood landmark with strong ties to Philadelphia's boxing heritage only amplifies its historic significance as a site worthy of listing on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.

³¹ Wright, Bob. "Financially, Wright Still a Heavyweight," *Philadelphia Evening Bulletin*, June 25, 1980.

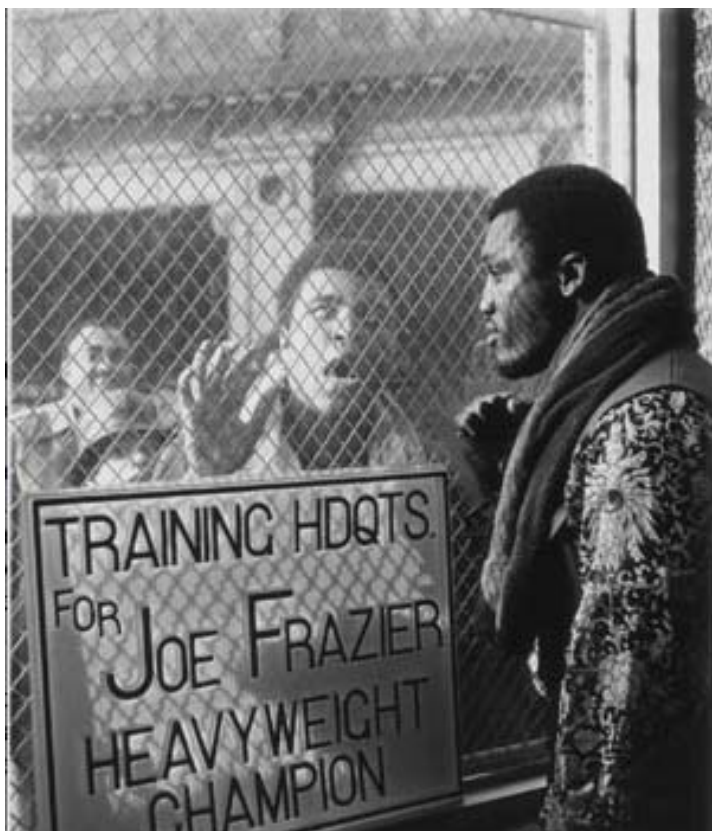
³² Callis, Tracy; Hasson, Chuck; DiLisa, Mike. *Philadelphia's Boxing Heritage*. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Press, 2002.

A Stockholders' Dream

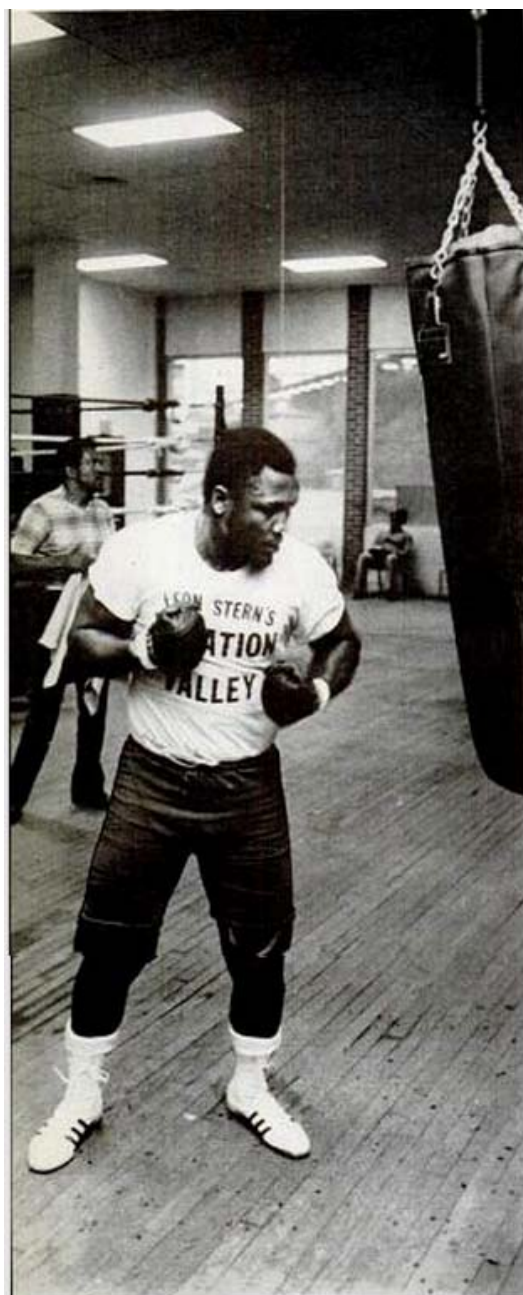


Philadelphia parking lot is site of meeting between Joe and a group of the 231 stockholders who have bought shares in him. Heavyweight Eddie Machen once said of him: "This boy has no defense, but the way he keeps punching and stays on top of you and doesn't give you any room to hit him, he don't need any defense."

Figure 14: Frazier and the stockholders of Cloverlay, Inc. in a promotional photograph published in *Ebony Magazine*, November 1967.



Expressions on faces of three boys, who stopped by gym and demanded to see the champ, leave no doubt as to who in their book is the greatest. "How come you cats ain't in school," the champ wanted to know. "'Cause there ain't no school today," was the reply.



Frazier (above) works out on punching bag in Cloverlay's gym in Philadelphia. New gym, which cost about \$100,000, is also used by aspiring young black fighters from surrounding North Philly ghetto. Below, Frazier talks business with his personal secretary, Mrs. Jean Pyle.

Figure 15 (top left): Muhammad Ali and Joe Frazier meet at Cloverlay Gym in a pre-fight promotion in 1971. The adjacent railroad viaduct is clearly visible in the background (George Kalinsky).

Figure 16 (bottom left): Frazier meets with local children at Cloverlay Gym in 1972 (*Ebony Magazine*, May 1972).

Figure 17 (right): Frazier training at the gym in 1971 (*Ebony Magazine*, March 1971).

8. Resources

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