

# 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: **1036-1038 Crease Street**

Postal code: **19125-4106**

Councilmanic District: **5th**

#### 2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: **Kensington Soup House**

Common Name: **Kensington Soup Society Building; Kensington Soup Kitchen**

#### 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: **Unoccupied**

#### 5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

***SEE ATTACHED***

#### 6. DESCRIPTION

***SEE ATTACHED***

#### 7. SIGNIFICANCE

Period of Significance (from year to year): **1870-2008**

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: **1870**

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: **Thomas S. Levy**

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan:

Original owner: **Kensington Soup Society**

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: Tom Potts, NAC Director

Email: tpotts@nkcddc.org

Organization: New Kensington CDC

Date: September 2, 2011

Street Address: 2515 Frankford Avenue

Telephone: 215-427-0350

City, State, and Postal Code: Philadelphia, PA 19125

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: \_\_\_\_\_

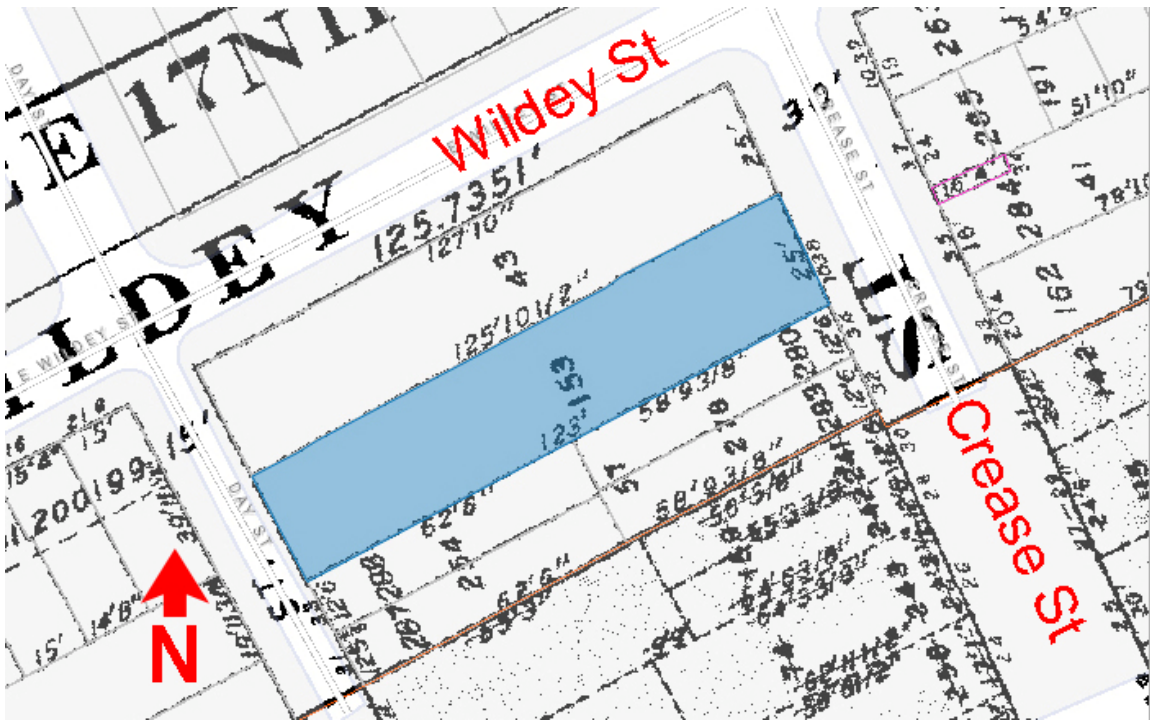
☐ Designated ☐ Rejected

3/16/07

## 5. Boundary Description

Beginning at a point 25 feet south of the southwest corner of Crease Street and Wildey, the property boundary extends 25 feet south along Crease Street, thence west for a distance of 123 feet 11 inches\*, thence north along Day Street a distance of approximately 25 feet\*, thence east a distance of 125 feet 11½ inches\* to the point of origin.

\* These dimensions are taken from the parcel description in Schedule C of Deed #52098529 for 1036-38 Crease Street, dated 7/29/2009. City Registry Map 17N4-153, illustrated below, contains slightly varying dimensions for the northern (125 feet 10½ inches) and southern (123 feet 0 inches) parcel boundaries. Neither source lists an exact dimension for the Day Street boundary.



## **6. Description**

The former Kensington Soup Society building is located at 1036-38 Crease Street, near the southwest corner of Crease Street and Wildey Street in the Fishtown neighborhood of Philadelphia. The building is brick, with a three-story, three-bay primary east elevation which fills the width of its 25-foot Crease Street lot. A two-story rear el extends westward for the majority of the parcel's 125-foot depth. The roofs over both the three-story and two-story portions are shallow-pitched flat roofs without parapets. The rear el terminates in a one-story shed-roofed frame addition connected by a short enclosure to a small brick outbuilding, possibly an original outhouse. The rear of the lot fronts on Day Street and contains a stone-capped brick wall with an iron gate enclosing a small rear yard. The building shares a party wall on the south with a two-story rowhouse. The adjacent lot to the north contains a series of one-story garage bays fronting along both Crease and Wildey Streets.

### **East Elevation**

The primary east elevation features two ground-floor entrances flanking two central windows. The principal entrance sits to the south, above a small concrete stoop. The doorway features a painted wooden double-leafed three-panel pair of doors with heavy molding profiles and historic porcelain-knob hardware. A shallow-arched glass transom features the building address, "1036," in gold leaf. The entrance is topped by a shallow-arched lintel with an exaggerated keystone detail—a form repeated for each of the elevation's windows and doors. These lintels appear to be composed of scored, brownstone-hued concrete, as explained in greater detail below. The secondary entrance sits on grade, and features a single-leaf panel door that matches the molding profiles of the primary entrance, though the top panel has been modified with the addition of a flat board and modern security grill. Windows on the east elevation are one-over-one aluminum sashes that replaced original wood two-over-two sashes, though historic brickmolds and shutter hardware survive (though the shutters themselves do not). Sills are square and slightly projecting. A scored and embellished brownstone-hued cement

water table extends the full width of the ground floor, which also features two small basement windows featuring ornamental iron grills. Between the second and third stories, three incised brownstone tablets are set into the façade, centered along the axes of each window bay. They read, from left (south) to right (north): “1844,” “Kensington Soup House,” and “1870,” the former being the date of the Soup Society’s founding, and the later being the date of the building’s construction. The building also features a painted wood cornice with paired brackets and stepped molding details. Overall, the façade maintains a good deal of integrity, with much of its historic detail surviving. However, photographic and physical evidence suggests alterations to the building’s masonry façade at some point in the past. An undated historic photo from early in the building’s existence appears to show white marble lintels and sills along with a shorter marble watertable (the building inscriptions also appear to be marble, but this might have been an alteration to the photograph itself to increase their legibility). The existing scored and tinted concrete is possibly a parge coating over the original materials. While the date of these alterations is unknown, a second historic photograph from c.1950 depicts the building as it currently appears (minus the historic two-over-two windows).

### **North Elevation**

The north elevation of the main three-story mass is a blind brick façade. Between the second and third stories, the wall steps back one brick wythe and is capped with flashing. The low-pitched roofline slopes down from left (east) to right (west), terminating in a horn-like brick projection supported by an inset, flat marble bracket. This “horn” caps the end of a projecting wood cornice and box gutter that runs along the west elevation. The two-story rear el portion of the north elevation, set back approximately six feet from the northern parcel boundary, features a regularly-spaced string of seven window openings. Each opening features a pair of very slender double-hung windows separated by a broad wood mullion. The sashes are vinyl or aluminum replacements, though the existing wooden frames are original. There are simple wooden sills (some no longer extant) and no lintels. The el is capped by a projecting wooden cornice and box gutter. The ground floor is not visible from the public right-of-way, concealed behind the neighboring garage property, though the top portion of what

appears to be a covered exterior stair is visible below the easternmost two window bays. This features a sloping brick end wall capped by terra cotta coping tiles.

### **West Elevation**

The west elevation of the building features the aforementioned one-story shed addition and connected outhouse-like structure at ground level. The shed and connector are clad in vinyl siding, while the smaller outbuilding is brick. The west elevation of the rear el features a single second-story window opening with replacement sash. Directly above this window is a marble plaque with the inscription, “Kensington Soup Society / Instituted 1844 / Incorporated 1854.” A wood cornice and box gutter wraps the el’s northwest corner and is terminated by a second marble and brick “horn” at the southwest corner. The rear (west) elevation of the building’s main three-story section contains one second-story window along the southeast corner of the building exposed by the setback of the rear el. The third story features three irregularly-spaced windows: one centered above the second-story window, and a pair set farther to the south. All four are one-over-one replacement sashes set in wood framed, with no lintels and simple wood sills (some no longer extant). The aforementioned covered exterior stair occupies the ground floor of the setback, though it is largely concealed from the public right-of-way.

### **South Elevation**

The south elevation is largely concealed from the public right of way. The building shares a party wall with an adjacent two-story row house. The exposed portions of facade above the neighboring property are blind.



**Figure 1: East (Crease Street) elevation and partial north elevation**



**Figure 2: North and partial west elevations**





**Figure 3: West (Day Street) elevation**



**Figure 4: Partial south elevation (via Google Street View from 1-95)**





**Figure 5: East elevation main door**



**Figure 6: East elevation auxiliary door**



**Figure 7: East elevation cornice and window detail**



**Figure 8: East elevation lintel, brickmold, and window detail**

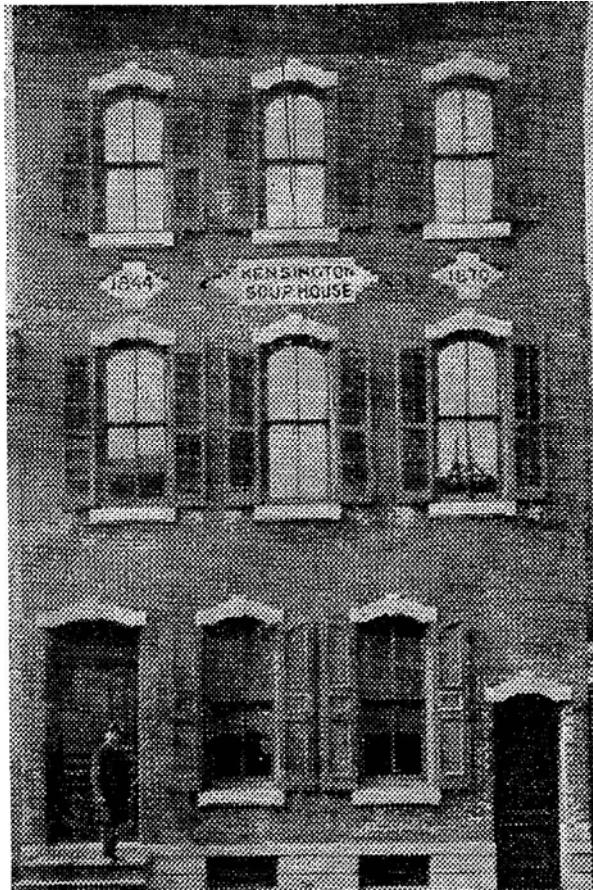




**Figure 9: East elevation basement window grill detail**



**Figure 10: West elevation rear outbuilding detail**



**Figure 11: Undated historic photo, c. 1900** (source: Kensington Soup Society Archives via Kenneth W. Milano, *The History of The Kensington Soup Society*. Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2009.



**Figure 12: Undated historic photo, c. 1950** (source: [www.phillyhistory.org](http://www.phillyhistory.org))

## 7. Significance

### Introduction

In an era before government assistance programs were commonplace, private philanthropic organizations were fundamental components to the social and physical fabric of America's early industrial cities. In Philadelphia, these organizations often took the form of neighborhood "Soup Societies," private organizations devoted to providing food and other assistance to the "worthy poor."<sup>1</sup> The former Kensington Soup House building at 1036-38 Crease Street served as the headquarters of the Kensington Soup Society from its construction in 1870 to its closure and sale in 2008. As such, the building is intimately linked to the neighborhood's social and architectural history, meeting the following criteria for historic designation as set forth by the Philadelphia Historic Preservation Ordinance, Section 14-2007(5), of the Philadelphia Code:

- (a) Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City;
- (c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style;
- (i) Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in pre-history or history;
- and*
- (j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social, or historical heritage of the community.

**Criterion A: Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage, or cultural characteristics of the City,**  
*and*

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Milano. *The History of the Kensington Soup Society*. Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2009, p. 60.

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

The Kensington Soup Society was founded in 1844. The majority of its founders were prominent members of the Kensington Methodist Episcopal Church, a major institution in what was then known as the Kensington District, a self-governing municipality until Philadelphia's 1854 Act of Consolidation and an area today known generally as Fishtown. Modeled after similar organizations operating elsewhere in Philadelphia, the Society collected contributions from churches, businesses, and civic leaders in order to provide for the "worthy poor" of the area. The form of this aid was principally soup, distributed from a soup kitchen six days a week during the winter service season (generally December to March), though other forms of aid (bread, potatoes, coal, etc.) were also occasionally distributed.<sup>2</sup> Beneficiaries were limited to residents of a specific geographic area, following "service area" boundaries agreed upon by the city's various autonomous soup societies.<sup>3</sup> From its inception, the Kensington Soup Society served one of the city's most vital working-class neighborhoods, an area bounded roughly by Norris Street to the north, Laurel Street to the south, Front Street to the west, and the Delaware River to the east.<sup>4</sup> Though the nature of impoverishment changed over the course of the Society's operation, from the Civil War and rapid industrialization to the Great Depression and postwar urban disinvestment, the Kensington Soup House remained a prominent institution throughout much of the neighborhood's—and the city's—history.

At the height of the Soup House's popularity, over 140,000 pints of soup were being prepared and distributed in a single season, along with almost 26,000 loaves of bread. More than 5,000 families—nearly 28,000 individuals—visited the kitchen during the winter of 1876-77, at an average rate of nearly 400 a day.<sup>5</sup> Though the volume of distributed soup fluctuated from year to year, the imperative need for charitable

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<sup>2</sup> Milano, p. 72.

<sup>3</sup> In addition to Kensington, the other known societies operating in 1862 were the Philadelphia Society for Supplying the Poor With Soup (aka Old Southern Soup Society or Green's Court Soup House, the Northern Soup Society of Philadelphia, the Western Soup Society, the Moyamensing Soup Society, the Southwark Soup Society, the Spring Garden Soup Society, and the Central Soup Society. Milano, p. 43.

<sup>4</sup> Milano, p. 45.

<sup>5</sup> Milano, p. 87.



intervention within the neighborhood remained consistent. Those served included families widowed or crippled by war, accident, or disease; the unemployed; and even workers whose wages could not cover the expenses of providing for their families. “Bummers,” single men without fixed residence, were actively denied aid, as were those suspected of “double-dipping” from soup kitchens elsewhere in the city. Interestingly, many of those served were current or former employees of the same businessmen that comprised the Soup Society’s leadership, highlighting the extent to which the Society was integral to the economic and social fabric of industrial Philadelphia.

Many of Kensington’s most prominent institutions had direct or indirect ties to the Soup Society. As noted previously, the Society’s formation was an outgrowth of the Kensington Methodist Episcopal Church, the neighborhood’s oldest congregation (founded in 1801) whose 1854 “Old Brick” church house is today one of Fishtown’s most important historical landmarks (listed on the Philadelphia Register in 1967). Likewise, much of the Society’s board members were shared in common with Kensington National Bank, the Kensington Building Association, and other influential organizations in the vicinity. Board members and officers included a number of notable area businessmen, including shipbuilder William Cramp, William C. Williamson of the Williamson Bros. Company ironworks near York and Aramingo Streets, iron baron Alexander H. McFadden, and Edward Corner of the eponymous marine supply business at Delaware and Shackamaxon Streets.<sup>6</sup>

The existing structure at 1036-38 Crease Street was the organization’s first purpose-built facility, erected in 1870 after three decades of operation in a series of rented quarters. Financed through loans made by Alexander McFadden, the building allowed the Society to expand their kitchen facilities and serving areas, as well as provide quarters for a full-time resident steward.<sup>7</sup> It served the community in this capacity virtually uninterrupted from 1870 to 2008, when decades of dwindling demand, caused in part by changing neighborhood demographics and the rise of Federal welfare programs and other social service providers, led to its eventual closure. Of the eight Philadelphia

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<sup>6</sup> Milano, pp. 98, 110 and “Founders of the Kensington Soup Society,” <http://kennethwmilano.com/page/Encyclopaedia/KensingtonPortraitsBiographies/FoundersoftheKensingtonSoupSociety/tabid/461/Default.aspx>, accessed 9/1/11.

<sup>7</sup> Milano, pp. 55, 70.



soup societies active in 1862, the Kensington Soup Society was the last to cease operations—one, the Spring Garden Soup Society, still exists as an organization, but closed its soup kitchen and reorganized into a fiscal charity in the 1930s.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, most comparable organizations disbanded in the middle twentieth century, and only a few historic structures associated with these organizations are still standing. In addition to the Kensington Soup House, the former Southwark Soup House at 833 S. Hancock was listed on the Philadelphia Register in 1958, and the former Spring Garden Soup House at 1329-31 Buttonwood Street was listed on the Philadelphia Register in 1969.

**Criterion C: Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style.**

The Kensington Soup House is a modest but elegant example of Italianate-influenced rowhouse architecture, notable for its use of residential form and scale in what was essentially an institutional building. It was likely designed by Philadelphia architect Thomas S. Levy, whose best-known surviving work is the Philadelphia Register-listed Eighth National Bank at 1201 N. 2nd Street. Eighth National Bank is commonly cited as Levy's only surviving work, though historian Kenneth Milano cites a payment of \$3000 to Levy by the Kensington Soup Society in 1870, strongly suggesting his involvement in the design of the Kensington Soup House, as well.<sup>9</sup>

The character-defining features of the three-story masonry structure survive mostly intact. An ornate bracketed wood cornice lends the building an air of distinction within its surrounding context of mostly smaller, more humble rowhomes. Its surviving box gutter is an increasingly rare example of a once-common, though deterioration-prone, building technology. Though it has lost its historic window frames and shutters, it also retains its historic front doors and, though modified, its ornamental window and door lintels. Historic stone inscriptions on both the front and rear facades attest to its historical function as a soup house.

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<sup>8</sup> "Spring Garden Soup Society History," <http://johndallasbowers.com/sgsshhistory.html>, accessed 9/1/11.

<sup>9</sup> Milano, p. 58.

**Criterion I: Has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in pre-history or history.**

Over the last three years, as PennDot has begun its 95 Revive project, archeologists have conducted multiple digs at sites around I-95. Their digs have focused on the narrow strips which will be disturbed by the work on the highway, including a number of sites in Fishtown. In October 2010, they presented their findings to the public.<sup>10</sup> Among their substantial finds were 3,000 year-old native American artifacts and ceramic and glass work from the colonial period.

These digs were limited in scope, but they raised the possibility that many sites in the neighborhood could yield similar archeological riches. The vast majority of the artifacts were found in pits which were once the latrines of rowhomes in the neighborhood. Latrines doubled as garbage disposals; unwanted artifacts were simply tossed in. Thus despite the Soup House's relatively recent vintage, its proximity to the significant sites uncovered by the 95 Revive team and its undisturbed back yard (where the latrine would have been) all point to the possibility of archeological resources.

**Conclusion**

Philadelphia has a long philanthropic history. The city's many attempts to alleviate poverty have become part of the city's culture and heritage. The Kensington Soup House is a major landmark of Philadelphia philanthropy and Fishtown culture. Its cultural and architectural significance is widely appreciated in its neighborhood, but since its 2008 closure, has sat unused and prone to development pressures. The loss of the Soup House would be a major blow to the neighborhood's sense of self-identity. It is a landmark in the neighborhood, and a visceral reminder of the neighborhood's history. Preserving the Kensington Soup House thus presents the opportunity to protect a monument of the city's culture, an intact example of a forgotten building type, and a

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<sup>10</sup> "Before and Below 95." <http://www.95revive.com/news-releases.aspx?niid=215>, accessed 9/1/11.

source for a neighborhood's historical sense of identity, at a moment when that identity is experiencing rapid change.

Today, Fishtown is in danger of losing its industrial heritage as the civic memory of past eras recede, new people move into the neighborhood, and its physical monuments are lost to redevelopment. The Kensington Soup House, with its hundred and fifty year history of fighting industrial poverty, is intimately linked with that heritage. It is a monument to the neighborhood's history, and a visceral reminder of the complexities of industrial urban society.

## 8. Major Bibliographic References

Milano, Kenneth W. *The History of the Kensington Soup Society*. Charleston, SC: The History Press, 2009

“Founders of the Kensington Soup Society”

<http://kennethwmilano.com/page/Encyclopaedia/KensingtonPortraitsBiographies/FoundersoftheKensingtonSoupSociety/tabid/461/Default.aspx> [Accessed 9/1/11]

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