

HISTORY OF A FAIRHILL BLOCK

Following the break-up of the Norris family's Fair Hill estate under the 1865 Bill of Equity, which allowed for the ownership of its parts in fee-simple, various buyers purchased land with the intent of developing industrial tracts along the railroads, and subsequently, worker housing. The block bounded by Cambria, Ninth, Somerset, and Tenth Streets (now Germantown Ave) was no exception. The 1875 Hopkins Atlas shows that half of the block was still owned by the Isaac Norris estate, but within the next decade, the majority of the land had been sold to two developers, John M. Kennedy and John Loughran (Figure 16). Kennedy would develop the western side of what is now Hutchinson St, while Loughran undertook rowhouse construction on Ritchfield St and the eastern side of Hutchinson.

Described as a "contractor" in the 1880 federal census, Loughran was a first generation American whose parents had emigrated from Ireland. Property development in this emerging section of N. Philadelphia near the Fair Hill Burial Ground became a fruitful career for Loughran; in his mid twenties when he began work on the study block, he continued to buy land and build rowhouse communities in the area for the next two decades. In 1895, Loughran owned two entirely vacant blocks in the Fairhill neighborhood north of Indiana St and west of Marshall St.² These large projects were finished by 1910, as the Bromley Atlas for that year shows them filled with rowhouses. In 1920, the census recorder noted that Loughran was a "builder" living on fashionable N. Broad Street not far from his business concerns.

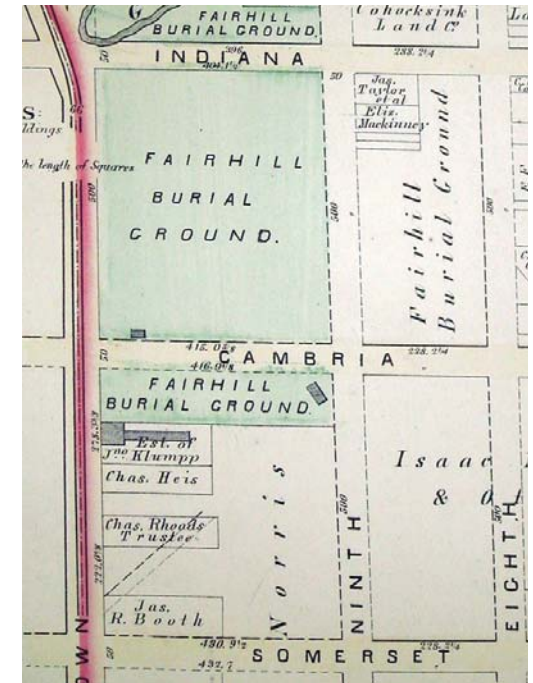


Figure 16: 1875 Hopkins Map of Philadelphia, Free Library of Philadelphia

A 1901 advertisement in the bulletin of nearby St. Bonaventure Church reveals that Loughran was then developing "New Houses with all modern improvements...8 Room Porch Front Houses on 9th and 10th Sts above Clearfield...rent[ing for] \$20.00 [or selling] for \$2800" (Figure 17). He was also constructing "7 Room Porch Front Houses on Percy and Hutchinson Sts above Clearfield...rent[ing for] \$15.00 [or selling] for \$2000."³ The Percy and Hutchinson St rowhouses were located on smaller lots on narrow lanes that Loughran inserted between the main streets of the city grid. Loughran "respectfully invited" prospective renters or buyers to visit the sales office at 10th and Clearfield to "examine my houses."



Figure 17: Typical rowhouses built by John Loughran in the area north of the Fair Hill Burial Ground. Fairhill Studio. 2009.

His main office was to the west at Huntingdon and 18th Sts where he also owned property fronting on Glenwood Ave; it was developed concurrent with the Fairhill parcels.

On the study block, deeds show that Loughran developed all of the rowhouses on Auburn St, a short, thirteen foot wide roadway cut through to connect Ninth St with Hutchinson; in total, there were sixteen homes. Smaller than his Percy or Hutchinson Street houses mentioned above, they probably rented or sold for under \$2000. From the deeds, most of the houses appear to have been ready for the market by 1887. They were rather modest two story, two bay brick structures

approximately thirteen feet wide by thirty-five feet deep for a total square footage of about 585.⁴ The front door of each home featured a transom, and it and the three front windows were capped with masonry lintels (Figure 18).

The houses on the north side of the street backed onto a small alley that separated them from the property of St. Bonaventure Church, which by the turn of the century would visually dominate the neighborhood with its eighteen story tower and steeple featuring four clock faces⁵ (Figure 19).

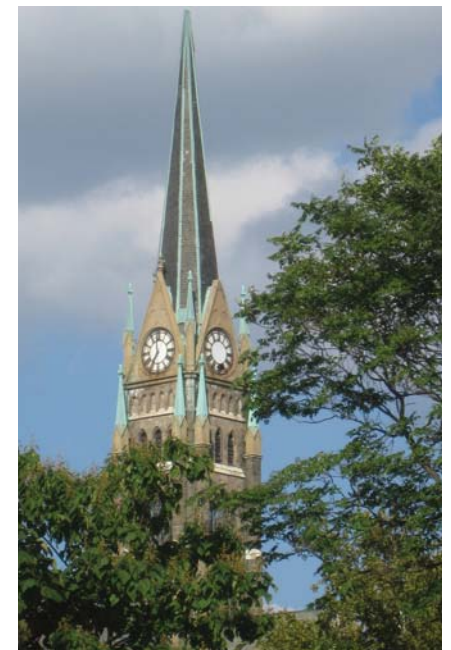


Figure 18 (l): The sole remaining Loughran built rowhouse on Auburn St. Figure 19 (r): The steeple of St. Bonaventure Church towers over the neighborhood. Both images, Fairhill Studio. 2009.

John Loughran sold a large parcel stretching from Ninth St to Hutchinson St to Philadelphia Archbishop John Ryan in October 1889, for the purpose of establishing a new Catholic parish in North Philadelphia.⁶ With the growth of the Fairhill area in the late 19th century, and an influx of Catholic German immigrants settling there to work in nearby factories, the need for a new parish was brought to the attention of the Archdiocese. Robert Schaeffges who lived to the south at Tenth and York Sts had tired of traveling to the German parish of St. Boniface on Norris Square, twelve blocks to the east of his home.⁷ On his own initiative, Schaeffges completed a survey of German families in the blocks to the north of his residence; with the data in hand, he petitioned the Archdiocese to establish another German parish in the vicinity of the Fair Hill Burial Ground.

Fr. Henry Stommel of Doylestown, known as the "Church Builder," was asked to verify Schaeffges' report and to subsequently organize the parish, finding a suitable site for a church building.⁸ The first structure built on the property was a three story red brick, truly multifunctional building at the corner of Auburn and Ninth Sts, and was finished in February 1890 at a cost of \$19,800.⁹ Featuring a mansard roof and belfry, the German Catholic Church of St. Bonaventure was accessed from Auburn St. The church, with space for 500 worshippers, occupied the ground floor, its tall rounded windows looking out on Ninth St. The second and third floors housed classrooms for the parish school, as well as rooms for the priests¹⁰ (Figure 20).



Figure 20: The original St. Bonaventure Church and School Building at Ninth and Auburn Sts, c 1928. The Philadelphia Archdiocesan Historical Center.

The parish established under a solid roof, Fr. Stommel returned permanently to Doylestown, replaced by a native German priest named Hubert Hammeke, who had fled Germany in 1878 during the years of turmoil referred to as the Kulturkampf¹¹ (Figure 21). Under Chancellor von Bismark, the German Empire attempted to curb the power of the Catholic Church, resulting in the closure of seminaries and the arrest of church officials. Hammeke was studying for the priesthood when his seminary was shut down; after struggling to continue his education, he arrived at the American College at Munster where he was ordained in 1878. While there, he was recruited by the Archdiocese of Philadelphia, and agreed to go to America, thinking that he would return to Germany within a few years.¹²

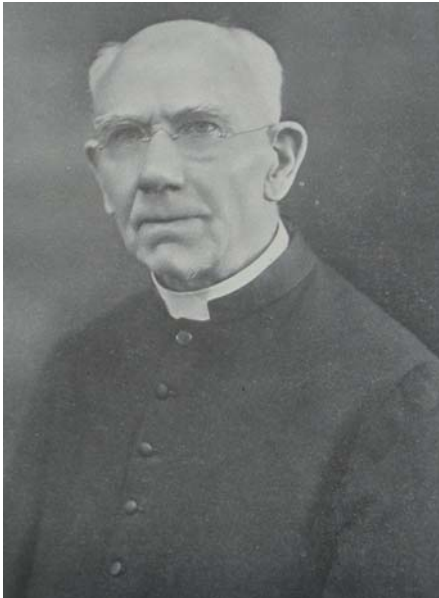


Figure 21(l): Father Hubert Hammeke, c 1928. The Philadelphia Archdiocesan Historical Center; Figure 22: The St. Bonaventure Complex (l-r: 1895 Rectory, 1906 Church, 1891 Convent, and 1890 Church/School/Priests' Quarters). Fairhill Studio. 2009. Figure 23: Close-up of the Auburn St Convent. Fairhill Studio. 2009.

Following his motto of "Man proposes, but God disposes," Hammeke remained in Philadelphia for the rest of his life, which had taken an unexpected turn. Upon his return from a visit to Germany in 1892, Hammeke wrote, "When I landed for the second time...I decided to live and die in America, and that in the parish of St. Bonaventura, where there are so many good people."¹³ Named rector of the parish in 1890, he remained there until his death in 1937.

The church, school, parish house, and convent complex that stands today is a memorial to the determination and hard work of Hammeke and his parishioners, who, "few in numbers, were not possessed of worldly goods"¹⁴ (Figure 22). One of the first undertakings was the erection

of a \$3000 convent for the nuns, located adjacent to the church and school on Auburn St; this allowed them in 1891 to move out of rented quarters at 925 Auburn St¹⁵ (Figure 23).

By 1894, the quick growth of the neighborhood and parish encouraged Hammeke to consider the construction of a larger and more impressive church to the north of the original 1890 structure. Plans were drawn up by the firm of Edwin Durang, a prominent Philadelphia architect who worked extensively on projects for the Catholic Church.¹⁶ The design, a Latin cross layout featuring a façade with three prominent Gothic inspired portals, was punctuated by a central tower and high steeple, similar to Durang's earlier designs for St. Agatha's in



Figure 24: The three Gothic portals of St. Bonaventure Church. Fairhill Studio. 2009.



Figure 25(l): St. Bonaventure's steeple. Fairhill Studio. 2009. Figure 26(r): 1895 Rectory. Philadelphia Archdiocesan Historical Center. 2009.

West Philadelphia and St. Joachim's in Frankford; the multiple finials present at the base of the steeple resemble those of St. Laurentius in Kensington¹⁷ (Figures 24-25). The primary building material was granite laid in random ashlar with some details of the tower done in cast concrete, then a relatively new application. Twelve copper finials marked the beginning of the steeple, which was to rise seventy-two feet on top of the tower's one hundred and twelve foot base; a gilded cross crowned the entire composition.¹⁸ The north and south facades' upper stories featured large Gothic inspired windows with elaborate tracery; the exterior was clad in copper sheeting stamped into decorative panels.

Due to limited resources, the great church was constructed in increments, the first portion being the basement, which was begun in 1894. It was finished in conjunction with the Rectory located on Hutchinson St (Figure 26). The topography of the site meant that access to the basement church was at street level on Hutchinson St, with no access from the principal Ninth St facade.

Here the parish worshipped until 1906 when the upper church was completed.¹⁹ The main sanctuary started to rise in 1901, and to save money, Hammeke acted as project manager, buying materials and contracting work. Two to three carloads of granite were shipped over the Pennsylvania Railroad to the station at Broad St and Glenwood Ave, and then carted to the site. In all, the entire structure cost \$132,000, and the priest estimated that he had saved \$20,000 by taking on

the extra work.²⁰ Although Durang officially designed the building, his name is not as strongly connected to it as with his other projects. Part of this stems from the assumption that Hammeke and his workmen may have altered the plans as they built the entire structure over twelve years. Durang scholar Gregory Oliveri notes, "The church bears a stronger resemblance to the kinds of axial tower Gothic churches then prevalent in Germany than [to] Durang's Philadelphia work..."²¹

The interior was created through the work of German immigrant-owned firms and with the purchase of decorative pieces in Germany, such as statues and stained glass, some of which Hammeke ordered on return visits to see family and friends. Two story marbleized columns carrying ribbed Gothic arches supported the deep vaults of the nave (Figure 27). Above each arch was a plaque of a saint; the arches and vaults were set off by gold leaf stenciling. Below, marble wainscoting paneled the lower perimeter walls. The main altars and communion rail by T.G. Schrader and Sons of St. Louis were constructed of Italian white marble and green onyx for a total cost of \$10,000.²² The elaborate pieces tapered into delicate finials and tracery that framed the candles placed upon them; the communion rail was punctured by quatrefoils (Figure 28).

Perhaps one of the most brilliant features of the church was the extensive stained glass produced by three leading makers including the German-American firm of Wilhelm Reith of



Figure 27: The nave framed by Gothic arches. The Philadelphia Archdiocesan Historical Center



Figure 28: The main altar flanked by two side altars. The Philadelphia Archdiocesan Historical Center

Philadelphia, Glasmalerei Gassen Blaschke of Dusseldorf, Germany, and the Tyrolese Art Glass Company of Innsbruck, Austria (Figure 29). Many of the prominent European firms of the day had American offices to service the growing religious communities in the United States. St. Bonaventure's windows were produced in the Munich Pictorial Style then popular among the Catholic establishment. It was characterized as "Romantic narrative... composed of painting on relatively large glass panels held in a leaded framework...[subjects were] attired in jeweled tone and richly embroidered fabrics..."²³ As the parish had funds, plain glass windows were replaced with finer pieces; even the project manager, Hammeke recalled that "With the windows I fared badly, as 'Uncle Sam' collected about \$2000 as duty."²⁴



Figure 29: "St. Elizabeth of Hungary Feeds the Poor" by Glasmalerei Gassen and Blaschke decorated St. Bonaventure until it closed in 1993. St. Joseph's University Press.

Even from its inception, St. Bonaventure was an active parish with numerous religious clubs, a literary society, and activities for children.²⁵ When the school opened above the church in 1890, it had an initial enrollment of 150 pupils in grades 1-8. Emphasizing the background of the founding German parishioners, the Sisters of St. Francis taught German literature and language so that the children would retain part of their cultural heritage.²⁶ Apart from lessons, the academic year was sprinkled with parades around the neighborhood and festivals and picnics held in local parks and at Batley Hall, located a block away from the school at Germantown Ave and Somerset St.²⁷ Hammeke valued the school highly, as his own education had been disrupted in Germany. The nuns recorded, "The boys and girls...furthered their educations and thus many became professional people... [those] that did not continue their education went to City Hall for their working papers to work in factories or for other employments."²⁸ As the school grew, so too did the number of nuns working in the parish, so that by 1910, Hammeke purchased the lot to the north of the new church and erected a larger convent with a back garden and prayer niche.²⁹ Consequently, the old convent next to the school could be used to accommodate classrooms.

By 1913, a bigger school building was needed, and Hammeke simply looked out his rectory window, buying 3 houses on Hutchinson and three lots behind them for \$6500; the cornerstone was laid in 1915. A modern two story edifice with an English basement was constructed with brown

tapestry brick and terracotta detailing; grouped windows allowed much light to enter the classrooms, and the roof even had a garden.³⁰ The additional classroom space allowed a kindergarten to be added³¹ (Figures 30-32).

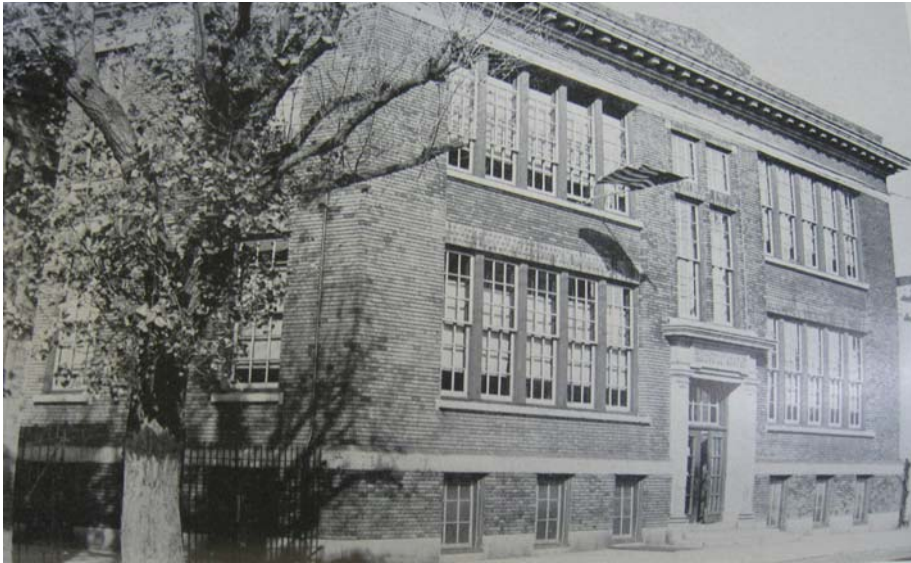


Figure 30: St. Bonaventura School, c. 1928. The Philadelphia Archdiocesan Historical Center.



Figures 31 and 32: Students at St. Bonaventure Parish School. Sisters of St. Francis, Aston, Pennsylvania.

With the school at the end of the road, Auburn St. would have been a bustling place in the morning and afternoon as children walked to and from classes, or played at recess in the street, watched over by the Sisters. Lothar Braunger, who lived at 919 Auburn, must have enjoyed the activity of the church complex, as he and his wife were listed as "Patrons" of Fr. Hammeke's Golden Jubilee Celebration in 1928. A first generation American whose parents had emigrated from Germany in 1878, Lothar Braunger lived among a diverse group of immigrants and first generation Americans who had strong ties to their German heritage (Figures 33-35).

Lothar Braunger was the first person to own the rowhouse at 919 Auburn after it was first purchased by James Ballantine in November 1887; Ballantine would rent it out until 1920 when it was sold to Braunger (Figure 36). Prior to the Braungers, the census data shows that there were a few renters at 919, the first noted being Joseph Baker in 1900. Baker was an English immigrant who had arrived in America in 1881, but had since been naturalized. He lived with his wife Selma and they had two sons, Raymond and Charles. Baker was a "card stamper," an occupation also followed by fifteen year old Raymond while thirteen year old Charles was still at school. It is likely that Baker brought his son into his own field of employment.³²

By 1910, the Bakers had moved on, and Walter Shambouh and his wife Mabel occupied the house. Quite possibly this was the Shambouh's "starter house," as they had only married in 1906.



1900 FEDERAL CENSUS

Interior Block Population

Hutchinson St: 133

Auburn St: 70

Total: 203

Birthplace of Head of Household



St. Bonaventure Complex



1910 FEDERAL CENSUS

Interior Block Population

Hutchinson St: 111

Auburn St: 59

Total: 170

Birthplace of Head of Household



St. Bonaventure Complex



1920 FEDERAL CENSUS

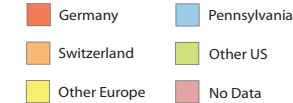
Interior Block Population

Hutchinson St: 122

Auburn St: 48

Total: 170

Birthplace of Head of Household



St. Bonaventure Complex

Figure 33-35: 1895 Bromley Atlas of the City of Philadelphia overlaid with 1900, 1910, and 1920 Federal Census Data. Fairhill Studio. 2009.



Figure 36: A Studio member stands at approximate location of 919 Auburn St. Fairhill Studio. 2009.

Shambouh was a railroad brakeman, and might have worked on one of the lines bordering the neighborhood. Their young daughter Dorothy, only a year and a half old, probably enjoyed watching the school children walk by in the morning or playing with her widowed Grandmother Curtis, Mabel's mother.³³

In early 1920, the Braungers were still renting 919 Auburn, as they did not purchase it until a few months after the census worker had visited them.³⁴ Lothar Braunger grew up on the north side of the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad tracks, less than a mile from 919. Before Braunger turned ten years old, his father had died, and he lived with his mother Catherine and older sister Caroline. By 1910, Braunger had moved to 3045 Ninth Street on

the north side of the Fair Hill Burial Ground. He was one of two boarders in a house owned by Elizabeth Fretz, who cared for her son Charles. Fretz was a German immigrant, and Braunger probably fit in well with the household. Braunger worked as a shipping clerk in a hosiery mill, possibly the same company that he was employed with ten years later when the 1920 census was recorded. Interestingly, due to World War I, Lothar Braunger had to fill out a draft card, which gives one some idea of his physical appearance: "Tall, medium build, brown eyes, dark hair".³⁵

Lothar B. Braunger

The Braungers only owned the house for nine years, transferring it to Lothar's sister Caroline in 1929; she promptly sold it to Otto Frieese the next month. Frieese was a recent German immigrant who came to America in 1927. At the 1930 census, the house was valued at \$3500, which Frieese could apparently afford to own on his salary as a tool maker for a wood manufacturing company. The couple did take in one boarder, another German immigrant the same age as Otto—27 years old—who worked as a machinist.³⁶

By the 1950s-1960s, Fairhill began to see a change in its residential population. Lehigh Ave had long been considered the racial barrier between African-American districts to the south, and the predominantly Caucasian areas to the north.³⁷ At this point, that line gave way, and African-Americans moved into Fairhill. The Puerto Rican population, in place since the early twentieth century, had also grown,

making its presence in Fairhill better known. The annals of the Sisters of St. Francis recall, "Gradually the German people of St. Bonaventure Church were moving elsewhere and the Porto Ricans making their homes east of Germantown Ave came in large numbers... the Carino Center...for children who could speak in Spanish only...opened in 1975 [in the old Auburn St. school building]...and the first Spanish Mass was initiated...in 1975."³⁸

By the early 1990s, the school had over three hundred students and was ninety percent Puerto Rican, with the remainder African-American; the German cultural origins of the institution had been lost in practice.³⁹ Both the church and school closed in 1993 due to declining membership; the interior furnishings were sold and dispersed, the memories of the German immigrant community scattered to parishes across the Philadelphia region.

Much of the world that Lothar Braunger knew is now gone, including his house on Auburn St, which was torn down a few years ago by the city.⁴⁰ John Loughran's legacy has also disappeared; most recently, the majority of his remaining rowhouses on the block above the Burial Ground were torn down to make way for the WCRP complex. Part of this Studio's mission is to recognize the diverse layers of history in Fairhill, although they may not be physically present. Recalling the stories of past residents like Braunger, Fr. Hammeke, and others allows the neighborhood to better understand its roots and place within the greater Philadelphia story.

1 Auburn St was called Richfield St until about 1900.

2 Philadelphia GeoHistory Network, 1895 Phila Atlas G.W. Bromley. Accessed 25 Nov 2009 at <http://www.philageohistory.org/tiles/viewer/>

3 St. Bonaventura's Church Bulletin (Philadelphia: Private Press, 1901).

4 The Philadelphia Board of Revision of Taxes. "Property Information for 910 W. Auburn St," Accessed 20 Nov 2009 at <http://brtweb.phila.gov/brt.apps/Search/SearchResults.aspx?id=1404000910>. Measurements are based on the one remaining rowhouse on the street, 910 Auburn.

5 The Church is referred to as both St. Bonaventure and St. Bonaventura.

6 City of Philadelphia, "Property Deed for 2846 N. 9th St." The Archbishop was named as property owner as he was the "head" of the Church in Philadelphia. 7 The Parish of St. Bonaventura's, 1889-1949: 60 Years of Church and School in St. Bonaventura's Parish Philadelphia (Philadelphia: Private Press, 1949), 11.

8 St. Martin of Tours Roman Catholic Church, "St. Martin's Parish History," Accessed 16 Nov 2009 at <http://www.stmartinoftours.org/Content/history.php>.

9 The Parish of St. Bonaventura, Souvenir Book of the Golden Jubilee, May 12-14, 1928 (Philadelphia: Private Press, 1928), pages unmarked.

10 The Parish of St. Bonaventura's, 1889-1949: 60 Years of Church and School in St. Bonaventura's Parish Philadelphia (Philadelphia: Private Press, 1949), 16-17 and Sisters of St. Francis, "Notes on St. Bonaventure School, Philadelphia," (Aston, Pennsylvania: Sisters of St. Francis, c 1990), 1.

11 The Parish of St. Bonaventura, Souvenir Book of the Golden Jubilee, May 12-14, 1928 (Philadelphia: Private Press, 1928), pages unmarked.

12 Ibid.

13 Ibid.

14 Ibid.

15 Ibid and The Parish of St. Bonaventura's, 1889-1949: 60 Years of Church and School in St. Bonaventura's Parish Philadelphia (Philadelphia: Private Press, 1949), 15.

16 Athenaeum of Philadelphia and Partners, "Edwin Durang," Philadelphia Architects and Builders. Accessed 10 November 2009 at <http://www.philadelphiabuildings>.

org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/23154

17 Author's observation based on pictures of these churches found in a 1900 Monograph of Edwin F. Durang's work held at the Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

18 The Parish of St. Bonaventura's, 1889-1949: 60 Years of Church and School in St. Bonaventura's Parish Philadelphia (Philadelphia: Private Press, 1949), 56.

19 The Parish of St. Bonaventura, Souvenir Book of the Golden Jubilee, May 12-14, 1928 (Philadelphia: Private Press, 1928), pages unmarked.

20 Ibid and The Parish of St. Bonaventura's, 1889-1949: 60 Years of Church and School in St. Bonaventura's Parish Philadelphia (Philadelphia: Private Press, 1949), 59.

21 Gregory Oliveri, Building a Baroque Catholicism: The Philadelphia Churches of Edwin Forrest Durang (Unpublished thesis, 1999), 56-57.

22 The Parish of St. Bonaventura, Souvenir Book of the Golden Jubilee, May 12-14, 1928 (Philadelphia: Private Press, 1928), pages unmarked.

23 Buffalo as an Architectural Museum, "Munich Pictorial Style Stained Glass Windows in Western New York." Accessed 22 Nov 2009 at <http://www.buffaloah.com/a/DCTNRY/stained/munich.html>.

24 The Parish of St. Bonaventura's, 1889-1949: 60 Years of Church and School in St. Bonaventura's Parish Philadelphia (Philadelphia: Private Press, 1949), 29.

25 The Parish of St. Bonaventura, Souvenir Book of the Golden Jubilee, May 12-14, 1928 (Philadelphia: Private Press, 1928), pages unmarked.

26 Sisters of St. Francis, "Notes on St. Bonaventure School, Philadelphia," (Aston, Pennsylvania: Sisters of St. Francis, c 1990), 1.

27 The Parish of St. Bonaventura's, 1889-1949: 60 Years of Church and School in St. Bonaventura's Parish Philadelphia (Philadelphia: Private Press, 1949), 21.

28 Sisters of St. Francis, "Notes on St. Bonaventure School, Philadelphia," (Aston, Pennsylvania: Sisters of St. Francis, c 1990), 1.

29 The Parish of St. Bonaventura, Souvenir Book of the Golden Jubilee, May 12-14, 1928 (Philadelphia: Private Press, 1928), pages unmarked.

30 Ibid.

31 Sisters of St. Francis, "Notes on St. Bonaventure School, Philadelphia," (Aston, Pennsylvania: Sisters of St. Francis, c 1990), 1.

32 1900 United States Federal Census, "919 Auburn St., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania." Accessed online at www.Ancestry.com

33 1910 United States Federal Census, "919 Auburn St., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania." Accessed online at www.Ancestry.com

34 City of Philadelphia, "Property Deed for 919 W. Auburn St."

35 United States Draft Board, "Draft Card for Lothar Braunger, 1918." Accessed online at www.Ancestry.com

36 1930 United States Federal Census, "919 Auburn St., Philadelphia, Pennsylvania." Accessed online at www.Ancestry.com

37 Comment made by Prof. Dominic Vitiello of the Department of Regional and City Planning of the University of Pennsylvania.

38 Sisters of St. Francis, "Notes on St. Bonaventure School, Philadelphia," (Aston, Pennsylvania: Sisters of St. Francis, c 1990), 2.

39 Ibid, 3.