

ALBRECHTS FLOWER SHOP
701 Montgomery Avenue
Narbeth
Montgomery County
Pennsylvania

HABS NO. PA-6039

HABS
PA
46-NARB,
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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

ALBRECHT'S FLOWER SHOP

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Location: 701 Montgomery Avenue, Narberth, Montgomery County, Pennsylvania.

Significance: Albrecht's Flower Shop, erected in 1929-30, is an Exotic Revival building whose facade was inspired by the design of the Taj Mahal.

Description: Albrechts Flower Shop is an Exotic Revival style structure with Moorish influence. The front facade faces southwest and consists of a wide two-story center bay flanked by one-story bays and attached three-bay glass enclosed wings (originally greenhouses). It is constructed of masonry, covered in plaster and Zenetherm (a precast tile used on the interior walls), and decorated with tile, brick and limestone details. The center bay has a large ogee arch framed by decorative tiles in flower designs. Behind the arch is a rectangular doorway that leads into the shop. One-story sidelights with leaded glass flank the large ogee arch. The "Albrecht" name is centered above the main entrance in tile lettering. Engaged limestone columns frame the center bay and an elaborate balustrade with geometric tile designs crowns the stone cornice. The two side bays are recessed from the center bay. They each have large ogee-shaped arch window openings; the bottom portion is a single light while the top portion has divided lights. The side bays are framed in stone and also have balustrades that match that of the center bay. The tiles are vibrant shades of blue, red, yellow and green. Two one-story, three-bay wings with large plate glass walls and standing seam metal roofs flank the main block. They originally served as greenhouses.

The interior space consists of a large rectangular room that rises two stories in the center and has smaller rectangular rooms extending off to the east and west. The floor consists of a multicolored mixture of broken marble over a poured concrete foundation. Most of the original furnishings, including the light fixtures, plant stands and hardware, are made of decorative ironwork. On the east wall of the main room there are two staircases that lead to a balcony. The balcony contains a decorative iron rail and overlooks a Moorish-inspired octagonal fountain in the center of the room.

History: Albrecht's Flower Shop was designed by Louis S. Adams in 1929. Adams was a local architect from Radnor, Pennsylvania, yet little is known about his practice and no other Exotic Revival style buildings have been attributed to him. The building is of interest for its Moorish-inspired design as well as its success in advertising the shop.

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The flower shop was established by Jacob Albrecht, a German immigrant who came to the United States shortly after the Civil War. He arrived in Virginia and worked as a gardener on a large riverside estate. When he was appointed head gardener, he sent back to Germany for his wife and children. His son John was also interested in gardening, and when he turned 18, he took a gardening position at West Laurel Cemetery near Pencoyd (now known as Bala Cynwyd). In the late 1880s, John began his own flower business, building his first greenhouse from materials left from the Centennial Exhibition of 1876. In 1921, after returning from the war, John Albrecht and his sons bought five acres on both sides of Montgomery Pike (a toll road), including the tollhouse. (This was the site of Washington Army's encampment in September 1777.) In 1930, the new building was completed, including several large greenhouses in the rear. Five generations of Albrechts worked for the flower shop until it was sold in the 1980s.

The building is currently being redesigned and enlarged for use as a farmer's market and small shopping plaza. The main room will continue to be used as a flower shop, however, the greenhouses have been dismantled.

Sources:

Adams, Louis S. Albrecht Flower Shop drawings. File No. 104, June 1929. Plans, elevations and sections. Located at the Lower Montgomery Township building.

Athenaeum Files: Louis S. Adams.

Doebley, Carl E. Lower Merion: A Portrait. Montgomery County, Pa.: Lower Merion Historical Society, 1976.

Kidder, Frank E. Kidder-Parker Architects' and Builders' Handbook: Data For Architects, Structural Engineers, Contractors, and Draughtsmen. New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc. Eighteenth Edition, 1936. This hand book contains the following definition for "Zenitherm": a precast tile or board made by the Zenitherm Company, Inc., Kearny, N.J., is a combination of selected wood fiber with the magnesium oxide treated with a weatherproof binder and subject to hydraulic pressure in steel molds ... The material is highly fire-resistive, poses a low coefficient of thermal conductivity, and is, furthermore good sound-insulator. It can be used for both interior and exterior walls.... It is of moderate cost and can be erected by a competent carpenter...., p. 1087.

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Lacy, D. Cameron III. Interview with project historian. August 2, 1994. Cam Lacy, principal of DCL Architects, is serving as project architect for the restoration and expansion of Albrecht's Flower Shop, which is currently taking place. He has done research on the building and provided me with a copy of the original plans.

McManus, B. "Albrecht's: A Dream Fulfilled." Main Line Times, February 26, 1987, p. 15.

Historian: Janet G. Blutstein, HABS Historian, 1994.