

CARSON COLLEGE ~~FROM~~ ^{FOR} ORPHAN GIRLS
(Carson Valley School)
West Mill Road
Flourtown
Montgomery County
Pennsylvania

HABS NO. PA-6043

HABS
PA
46-FLOTO
5-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
P.O. Box 37127
Washington, DC 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

CARSON COLLEGE FOR ORPHAN GIRLS
(Carson Valley School)

HABS NO. PA-6043

HABS
PA
46-FLOTO,
5-

Location: West Mill Road, Flourtown, Montgomery Co., Pennsylvania.

Significance: Carson College for Orphan Girls is an excellent example of architecture inspired by the Tudor Revival and Arts and Crafts movements. The buildings and picturesque landscape plan were designed by Albert W. Kelsey with later additions by W. Pope Barney and Roy W. Banwell. Carson College was one of several privately endowed orphanages established in Pennsylvania in the early twentieth century, and, from 1917 -1960, was administered by Elsa Ueland, a pioneer in the fields of social work and progressive education. Carson's campus offers an idealized childhood environment and remains a successful integration of architecture and social commitment.

Description: The campus of Carson College is a Tudor Revival and Arts and Crafts assemblage of nine red tile-roofed stone cottages situated on nearly one-hundred acres of rolling terrain. Between 1917 and 1920, Albert Kelsey designed the landscape plan as well as the original five buildings, the Mother Goose Cottage, Red Gables Cottage, Stork Hill, Thistle Cottage, and Garage # 1. The center of the campus is identified by the Mother Goose and Red Gables Cottages, each comprised of multiple units which are clustered as if to simulate a sixteenth century English Village. For each of the cottages Kelsey used locally quarried Chestnut Hill stone. He also employed a local craft industry, Enfield Pottery and Tile Works, to produce polychromed tiles depicting flowers and fairy tales. Kelsey commissioned Swiss-born sculptor, J. Otto Sweizer, noted for his statues at Valley Forge and Gettysburg National Parks, to work on the low-relief allegorical sculptures. Ludovici Tiles from Ohio were used to roof the buildings. Kelsey created a picturesque environment oriented toward inspiring the imaginations of children; in 1921, The Architectural Record described Carson College as "the first orphanage in America perhaps the world to employ advanced social theory in its architecture."

Between 1929-32, necessary additions led to the commission of W. Pope Barney and Roy W. Banwell to designed four buildings, including Upper Beech, Lower Beech, Beech Branch, and the shop/storehouse. Barney and Banwell continued Kelsey's Tudor Revival and Arts and Crafts themes and his use of Chestnut Hill stone. Barney, however, specified stock millwork and windows whereas Kelsey had preferred special order elements.

1917-20 - Albert W. Kelsey:

Mother Goose Cottage, completed in 1920, was originally named Cornflower Cottage. It is a steel, concrete and stone multi-unit

CARSON COLLEGE FOR ORPHAN GIRLS
(Carson Valley School)
HABS NO. PA-6043 (page 2)

building ranging from one to three stories. The roofs incorporate exposed steel trusses overlaid with gypsum slabs and Ludovici pantiles. The main block is a "Z" plan with extensions at each end. The main facade looks onto a bi-level forecourt; the public entrance is at grade while a private walled garden is below grade. The principal doorway has four arches with a tiled jamb filled with cornflowers. White-tiled cylinder chimney stacks project from the colorful pantiled roof. The south gable has carved vergeboards and an ornate parged bas-relief of Mother Goose. From the walled garden, one can look through ogee arches to the putti-like Sun Baby sculpture. The windows are mullioned stone casements with wooden double-hung sash, some with arched tops. The interior features stone walls and wainscotting. The plan includes two lounges, a two-story playroom, dining room, scullery, kitchen, office, and second floor bedrooms. The center-piece is a walk-in fireplace in the playroom, where herringbone brick is bordered by tiles which tell the Cinderella story.

Red Gables Cottage, also completed in 1920, was originally called Narcissus Cottage. It is a "C" plan building with walls of Chestnut Hill stone and trim of Princeton stone and limestone. The windows and interior spaces are similar to those at the Mother Goose cottage. The west lounge leads to a porch which in turn leads to a walled terrace. The main (east) entrance is adorned with ceramic images of Narcissi. The east gable has cyprus vergeboards with Narcissus blossoms and the south gable is half-timbered with bird houses attached to the false joists.

Stork Hill, built in 1918, was originally known as Primrose Cottage. It is a two-and-a-half story cottage consisting of a cross-gabled timber main block with stone wings. It has two porches and a walled front garden. Stork Hill was originally built as the Superintendent's cottage and thus only has one lounge and no playroom. The front (west) facade is timbered with pargeted panels depicting storks. A portion of the north porch supports a projecting sleeping porch at the second floor. The pantiled roof is steeply pitched and several gables contain decorative vergeboards. There are single, paired and triple windows with double-hung sash, a shed dormer and a stone chimney.

Thistle Cottage, completed in 1920, is a front gable building with several projecting side gables, originally intended as the mechanics residence. The building faces east and the main entrance is a stone-trimmed door with a tile depicting a thistle. The north facade has overlapping gables; the rear gable is stone with a six-over-six, double-hung window, while the front gable is half-timbered with decorative vergeboards containing nursery rhyme characters and a pair of six-over-six, double-hung windows.

CARSON COLLEGE FOR ORPHAN GIRLS
(Carson Valley School)
HABS NO. PA-6043 (page 3)

The first floor is a projecting bay with three, six-over-six, double-hung windows covered by a shed top. The roof is covered with wonderful red pantiles and a stone and brick chimney extends from the south facade.

Garage #1, attached on the east to Thistle Cottage, was completed in 1920. It is a six-bay rectangular structure with a imposing gable roof with red tiles. Two copper-clad cupolas serve as ventilators for the attic space which is lit by long shed dormers. The garage is thought to be based on the tithe barns of Medieval England. A three-sided potting shop was added to the west bay in 1942.

1929-32 - Barney & Banwell:

Barney & Banwell's buildings are Tudor Revival cottages featuring cross gables, tall multi-unit casement windows, massive multiple-shaft chimneys, red tile roofs, and heavy board-and-batten doors.

Lower Beech Cottage was completed in 1930. It is a two-and-a-half story stone and frame building which features a stuccoed second floor on the main (north) facade. Most of the windows are multiple-unit casement windows. The gable roof is covered with red tiles and has medieval diamond shaped chimney stacks and small hipped dormers. There is a flagged patio and a play/tool shed which was also built to serve as a play area.

Beech Branch Cottage was completed in 1930 to serve as the infirmary. It is a two-and-a-half story stone building attached to Lower Beech Cottage. It was built to match Lower Beech Cottage and thus has a gable roof covered with red tiles and multiple-unit casement windows.

Upper Beech Cottage was built in 1930 close to a specimen beech tree. The roof is covered with red tiles and the windows are multiple-unit casement windows, many of them projecting out from the plane of the wall. The building features a playroom and a sheltered garden. It has an arcaded porch, now enclosed and serving as an office, and a play/tool shed. The entrance has a pottery plaque depicting a beech tree.

The shop/storehouse was completed in 1932, the last of four buildings designed by Barney and the one most influenced by Roy W. Banwell. The building has an ell-shaped plan and features a jerkin-head roof which intersects a south-end cross-gabled tiled roof. The shop includes a pit for vehicle repair, a forge, a crafts center and storage space. The north cellar houses a boiler.

CARSON COLLEGE FOR ORPHAN GIRLS
(Carson Valley School)
HABS NO. PA-6043 (page 4)

History: Carson College was established by Robert N. Carson, a Philadelphia traction mogul, who, in 1907, bequeathed five million dollars and part of his Erdenheim stock farm for a girl's orphanage. Carson based his will on that of Stephen Girard, who, in 1848, had established Philadelphia's Girard College for orphan boys. In his will, Carson restricted entry to healthy white girls whose parents were deceased, and provided for a "Common English" education consisting of the study of mathematics, natural history, and science as well as dressmaking, nursing, laundering, gardening and woodworking. Reacting to new reformist attitudes in child care, he encouraged decentralized housing and individualism.

Elsa Ueland was appointed as the first executive head. She had taught in the schools of Gary, Indiana where she worked closely with William Wirt and his Gary Plan, a curriculum that emphasized a well-rounded education featuring play, exercise, intellectual study, craft work and special studies. Carson College established a model of progressive education which ultimately enabled the school to serve as a laboratory for the Bureau of Educational Experiments in New York.

The orphanage flourished during the 1920s, increasing its from sixty-eight to 125 between 1920 and 1928. However, in the 1930s, the enrollment began to fall, and therefore, in 1940, the admission policy was broadened from only admitting orphans to include children who could benefit from Carson's group-living program. In 1945, brothers of residents were admitted, in 1949 the name was changed to Carson Valley School, and, in 1965, the school began accepting children regardless of race, color, or gender. Limited public funding was also accepted.

Albert Kelsey won the campus design competition in which five other firms submitted designs. Kelsey worked on campus designs during his early years with Cope & Stewardson, but his best known work was with the City Beautiful movement. At Carson College, Kelsey integrated Arts and Crafts aesthetics with symbolic theories, providing stories in sculpture. He hoped his picturesque environment would stimulate the children's imaginations. Kelsey planned a Collegiate Gothic Administration building, a Superintendent's House, a garage, and five cottages. However, World War I and the subsequent rise in building costs delayed and altered the scope of Kelsey's plan. By 1920, three cottages (Mother Goose, Red Gables, and Thistle), the Superintendent's House (by then Stork Hill and modified for cottage use) and the garage were executed. The administrative building and school were never built.

W. Pope Barney was familiar with planning at both the city and

CARSON COLLEGE FOR ORPHAN GIRLS
(Carson Valley School)
HABS NO. PA-6043 (page 5)

the campus levels. At the time he worked at Carson College, he lived in a house he designed in the Arts and Crafts colony of Rose Valley, Wallingford, Pennsylvania. Barney and Banwell worked together in the Tudor Revival at Swarthmore College in 1930. At Carson College they successfully integrated their designs with those of Kelsey's by using Tudor Revival forms and residential scale in conjunction with Arts-and-Crafts aesthetics. In 1932, Barney designed a "Cottage School" for Carson College but it was never built.

Sources:

Barney & Banwell. Carson College, Schemes "A" & "B" (Upper Beech and Lower Beech Cottages), np 1930, 2 linens, 80 vellum ink, pencil and crayon: plans, elevations, sections, details, plot plan and planting plan. These drawings are located at the Athenaeum, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Colton, Arthur Wills. The Architectural Record. July, 1921.

Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders Guide. Vol. 31, No. 31, p. 510 and 512; and Vol.45, No. 52, p. 766. Both entries provide dimensions and materials to be used for the buildings. Vol. 31, No. 31 names Kelsey as the architect and also provides a list of the contractors bidding for the project. Vol. 45, No. 52 ((December 24, 1930) names W. Pope Barney as the architect and J.P. Hallahan as the contractor.

Schooler, Alice Kent. "National Register nomination form: Carson College for Orphan Girls," National Park Service, 1991. This nomination form provided the dates of construction for the buildings and much of the institution's history.

Tatman, Sandra L. and Roger W. Moss, Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects: 1700-1930, Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1985. Kelsey, Barney and Banwell are all listed with the dates of their designs for Carson College.

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