

CHURCH OF THE ADVOCATE, RECTORY  
18th & Diamond Sts.  
Philadelphia  
Philadelphia County  
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-6672-C

HABS  
PA  
ST-PHILA,  
734C-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
CHURCH OF THE ADVOCATE, RECTORY  
(George W. South Memorial Church of the Advocate, Rectory)

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- Location:** 2120 N. Eighteenth Street, between Diamond and Susquehanna streets, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
- Present Owner/  
Occupant:** Board of Trustees, George W. South Memorial Church of the Advocate
- Present Use:** Vacant
- Significance:** The rectory of the Church of the Advocate is a fine example of high Victorian eclecticism employing a mixture of gothic and classical details. While the residence's function as a rectory necessitated a design fitting with its parochial requirements and context, the building remains a finely detailed example of a late nineteenth-century North Philadelphia row house constructed for Philadelphia's upper middle class. It stands simultaneously as part of an imposing religious complex set apart from the surrounding blocks of rows, as well as an integral part of the urban streetscape. Particularly notable it its complex and well-executed brickwork evident on three sides of the building.
- Historian:** Donna J. Rilling, Summer 2000.

**PART I: HISTORICAL INFORMATION**

**A. Physical History:**

1. **Date of erection:** 1887-1888. The Board of Trustees purchased the property for the Church of the Advocate buildings in November 1886. A contract between the Trustees and Charles M. Burns was executed on February 7, 1887. Announcement of its imminent construction, along with the curacy on church grounds facing Gratz Street, was noted in the *Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* on May 23, 1887.<sup>1</sup> According to the 1888 city directory, the Advocate's first rector, William W. Silvester (also "Silvester"), still resided in a house two streets east of the rectory. That same year, however, the rectory appeared on an insurance atlas, suggesting that the building's exterior, if not the remaining interior finishing, was complete. In 1889, Silvester relocated to the church property.<sup>2</sup>

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2. Architect: Charles M. Burns.
3. Original and subsequent owners: Joseph F. Page, a major area landowner, sold the property to the Board of Trustees in 1886.<sup>3</sup>
4. Original and subsequent occupants: Reverend William W. Silvester and his family were the original occupants of the rectory. Rectors for the Church of the Advocate resided there until June 1987.
5. Original plans and construction: No extant architectural drawings exist for the rectory building. The house is raised two stories over a lighted basement and contains a full-height third story under a mansard roof. Principal access is on the east end. The footprint displays a narrow and deep shape typical of houses constructed on tight urban lots. A garden on the south side of the dwelling allowed for freer articulation of that face and the building's plan.
6. Alterations and additions: The original room arrangement is virtually intact. A doorway between the hall and the back parlor has been sealed with sheetrock. An original wall between the stair passage and the back parlor has been removed. The pantry between the dining room and the kitchen has been eliminated and the space given over to the kitchen; a large pass-through has been opened between the two rooms. The main stairway access to the third floor has been cased-in. Masonite paneling, linoleum, and other modern materials cover much of the original plaster walls and oak, pine and tile floors on the first floor; much of the trim and detail of the original interiors has been stripped away. Entries and openings from the exterior have been closed up for security reasons. Some of the upper level flooring has sustained water damage. On the exterior, the bay over the entry porch has been stripped of its cladding.

B. Historical Context

The history of the rectory is intimately linked to that of the George W. South Memorial Church of the Advocate. When Reverend William W. Silvester, the church's first rector, arrived in May 1887, he found the parish hall, chapel, and rectory underway. Architect Charles M. Burns accorded artisans significant leverage in exercising their craft, encouraging them to experiment with design. Such artistic license must have been evident in the construction process, and is clearly exhibited in the finished masonry of the rectory.<sup>4</sup> Until the ensemble of buildings was completed, however, the Diamond Street Mission operated out of

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the Reid House (also known as the Koehn House), a large Federal-style mansion on the northeast corner of the lot. The mansion was razed around 1889–1890 in order to clear the site for the church. Silvester and his family, meanwhile, lived nearby at 1638 Diamond Street. They moved into the rectory at 2120 N. Eighteenth Street sometime in 1888.<sup>5</sup> Silvester's wife Mary H., their daughter, and two sons, joined the parson in the new house. In 1900—the only year in which the census recorded the Silvesters in the house—the family employed two immigrant women from Ireland as servants. The servants, the rector's position, and the eventual white collar employment of the older son (in a "Clerk Office" in 1900), all signified the upper-middle class status of the Silvester household.<sup>6</sup> The rectory, by having both a civic face toward Eighteenth Street and a parochial face toward the church cloister, evoked Silvester's concurrent status as the head of an upper-middle class family and rector of a prestigious parish.

The building continued to be used as the church rectory until June 1987 when Reverend Paul M. Washington retired. His successors chose not to live in the rectory and its current state of deterioration and vandalism occurred in the subsequent decade.<sup>7</sup>

## PART II: ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION<sup>8</sup>

### A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The Church of the Advocate, Rectory, although technically a freestanding dwelling, is characteristic in plan and siting of a late-nineteenth century urban row house intended for upper middle-class occupancy. Its is a tour de force of brick and stone craftsmanship combining gothic, classical, and other motifs in a highly eclectic manner.
2. Condition of fabric: Poor.

### B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: This masonry residence contains three principal stories over a full basement rising to a height of 36'-7"; the third floor is contained under a mansard roof. The footprint measures approximately 19' x 90' and the house's relatively narrow and deep plan is arranged around a long side passage present on the north side of the interior on all three principal floors.

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2. Foundations: The foundations are of stone with brick coursing above.
3. Walls:

East Elevation: The facade is composed of roughly two bays with a turret on the southeast corner of the second story. Rusticated sandstone laid in irregular courses extends up to the water table. The chapel and the parish house employed sandstone from Beaver County, Pennsylvania and it is probable that the stone for the rectory originated there as well. The first and second stories are faced in red brick laid-up with a variety of bonding patterns including American running bond alternating seven rows of stretchers with a single row of headers and glazed header Flemish bond. Sandstone beltcourses separate the varied brick coursing, and sandstone window sills and porch detailing provide further organization and articulation for the facade.

A front porch justified to the right side of the façade marks the main entrance to the house. It is composed of two sandstone Corinthian columns topped by shallow pointed arches. A single piece of sandstone was employed for the porch ceiling-roof, whose top is further embellished with a denticulated cornice—continuing across the facade and tying the composition together—and a balustrade pierced by quatrefoils. A built-in stone seat and filigreed iron-work in the southern arch (and originally the eastern arch) complete the porch design. Left of the entrance porch is a three-sided bay opening onto the front parlor which contains a large center window flanked by two narrow windows with stone trefoil lintels.

The second-story is dominated by a brick turret laid-up in header bond and resting on a large sandstone Corinthian column, which in turn sits on a battered stone base with chamfered corners. The exquisiteness of the turret is underscored by diapering above the stone beltcourse and fine sandstone window lintels carved in a trefoil pattern. A shallow wooden bay containing two pointed window frames extends out onto the porch roof and provides a sense of balance with the turret. The bay is currently devoid of exterior cladding, although historical photographs suggest metal, perhaps copper. The turret and the bay are separated by a window with a shallow pointed arch. The third floor mansard roof contains a centered bay with two windows.

South Elevation: This wall is divided roughly into three visual zones.

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The easternmost section provides transition from the formal east facade to the more informal garden side of the building. Materials, brick coursing, and detailing present on the front façade reappear in this section, but with a scaled-down articulation providing a bridge to the simpler wall treatments further west along this wall. The denticulated cornice on the facade between the first and second stories continues around the turret and is carried across the south wall to the chimney stack in the form of a simple sandstone band. A wider sandstone beltcourse extends below and above this band corresponds with the sills and arches of the east facade windows. The lower brick courses are laid in American bond with a general 7:1 ratio; the header courses are glazed. On the second story, the brick is laid in a glazed header Flemish bonding pattern.

The second zone is divided from the first by an extruded chimney stack—effectively blocking the extension of the first zone’s stone banding and brick coursing. The chimney stack steps out from the wall plane and is also laid-up in a 7:1 glazed header American bond. Beyond the chimney, the second zone—and indeed, the remainder of the south wall and the entire west wall and stair tower—a glazed header Flemish bond above the first-floor sill line is employed. Major features in this section include a three-sided bay window extending from the lower portion of the wall. Now sheathed in asphalt shingles, its original vertical beaded tongue-and-groove boarding is present under the covering. The other dominant feature is a large triple window at the second story contained under a shallow segmental brick arch. The foundation wall for the easternmost sections and the chimney is of rusticated sandstone.

The third zone includes the entire rear portion of the house. This section is set back from the plane of the south wall’s eastern zones; it is further set apart by brick foundation walls laid-up in American bond to the sill line, rather than stone. On the first floor, the dominant feature is a rectangular bay sheathed in asphalt shingles. As with the other bay, the original fish-scale shingles are present under the current cladding. A large five-sided bay extends from the southwest corner of the second story; it is also covered in asphalt shingles.<sup>9</sup>

West Elevation: The glazed header Flemish bonding continues around the house to this wall, including the three-story stair tower on the north side. The rear kitchen entry is reached by means of a small flight of

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stairs and is covered by a shed roof with visible, carved structural members. Stairs descend to a basement door located under the porch. The stair tower has a chamfered corner on the southwest, which is slightly recessed from the other two component walls, and contains three small windows on the west side in what is otherwise an unadorned wall.

North Elevation: This elevation is mostly featureless as it faces a three-foot wide alley separating the rectory from the row of attached dwellings to the north. The east end of this wall steps out roughly two feet from the plane of the east facade and is corbeled near the roofline. The east wall's brickwork extends around the northeast corner into the alley. About three feet into this exterior passage, the higher quality bricks and bonding used on the east facade are "keyed into" the inferior bricks of the alley wall which are laid in American bond. Although the row to the north was built after the rectory, its imminent development was likely anticipated, as the north wall was constructed along the lines of a featureless party wall.

4. Structural system, framing: The walls are brick and stone load-bearing. The roof is framed in wood.
5. Porches, stoops, projections: The front porch is of sandstone and is reached by seven stairs from the street to the floor of the porch. The steps and floor, originally stone, have been replaced with concrete. A small service porch is present on the building's west (rear) side. The south facade is framed by a turret at the southeast corner and a five-sided bay at the southwest corner—both at the second story. Two additional bays extend from the south wall on the first story.
6. Chimneys: There are two chimneys. The well-articulated one on the south side of the building services fireplaces in the parlor and the room above. A second stack extends up the interior of the north wall and services the dining room, kitchen, and the room above (and most likely the mechanical systems in the basement). The chimneys are of brick composed in long, slender stacks with corbeled tops.
7. Openings:
  - a. Doorways and doors: The house has four points of access. The front (east) doorway and door (extant behind the present cinder

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block infill) are pointed with shallow gothic arches. This six panel door contains two small triangular fixed glass panels at the top, operable sash panels fronted by decorative iron grills at the middle, and recessed wooden lower panels. The rear exterior door has a standard rectangular head and is topped by a transom. A small door on the west wall leads directly into the stair tower and a fourth access point is located under the rear porch at basement level.

- b. Windows: Typical sash is double hung, however it varies in size and number of lights throughout the building. All of the windows contained in the bays and extending from the mansard roof are contained in wood frames and surrounds. The sash in the eastern second-story bay, the southern first-story bays, and the triple window on the south wall's second story have one-over-one sash with fixed transoms above. The windows on the east facade have sandstone sills and arched lintels and are one-over-one sash. On the south facade, the windows of the easternmost zones have stone sills and brick segmental arched lintels. The windows at the first floor are one-over-one, at the second floor are two-over-two, and the third floor are four-over-one. The rear portion of the south facade contains windows with brick segmental arched lintels and sills of wood. The windows are two-over-two on the first and second stories. In the west wall, the three tower windows, the rear first floor window, and the corner bay windows are all one-over-one sash.

Basement windows on east side and the portions of the south wall with stone foundations are topped with stone lintels; elsewhere they are brick. Extant basement sash is iron-framed and contains two lights with a vertical divider. Some of the windows display the original iron security grills composed of five vertical members articulated with knobs at the center and fleur-de-lis at the tops.

8. Roof:

- a. Shape, covering: A mansard roof contains the third floor and a low attic space above. It extends southward around the building from the northeast corner to the stair tower on the northwest corner. This roof, as well as the conical one on the turret, is

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covered with gray slates. The first-floor bay roofs are sheathed in metal.

- b. Cornice, eaves: A corbeled brick cornice extends across the east facade just under the third floor (mansard roof). On the south and west sides, this corbeled masonry band continues as wood bracketing.

C. Description of the Interior

1. Floor plans:

- a. Basement: A full basement is present under the entire house.
- b. First floor: A small interior vestibule opens onto a narrow side hall along the north wall. A pocket door on the left opens onto the front parlor which has a canted fireplace set into its southwest corner. The now contiguous back parlor (almost certainly a separate space as originally constructed) contains a blocked-up door opening onto the north hall. This space has also been opened to the stair hall containing the main stairs and a closet below. The long entry passage terminates with the dining room pocket door; this room has a canted fireplace in its northwest corner and currently communicates with the kitchen through a large pass-through. Behind the dining room is the kitchen which originally was shielded by a small pantry. The kitchen contains access to the rear (service) stair.
- c. Second floor: As with the first floor, a long, narrow hall extends along the north wall and terminates with doorways opening onto the two largest rooms—a bedroom at the front above the parlor and an expansive space to the rear possibly used as the rector's library or office above the kitchen and dining room. Both of these rooms contain fireplaces and the rear room includes access to the service stair. Smaller spaces along the south wall open onto the circulation passage. A bathroom can be accessed from both the front room (by means of a passage behind a closet opening onto the hall) and the hall itself; it is located above the back parlor. On the west side of the main stairs is another small room of uncertain function.

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- d. Third floor: Like the floors below, a long hall extends from east to west along the north wall, however, the remaining area is subdivided into a greater number of smaller rooms. The ceilings are approximately 9' high—lower than the second- and third-floor spaces, but still generous. The presence of well-finished moldings, paneled doors, and carved bannister posts, indicate that part of the third floor, probably the front (eastern) rooms, was intended as family space. There are no fireplaces on the third floor. A narrow closet contains ladder access to the attic crawl space.
2. Stairways: There are two stairways, one in the center of the house on the south wall, and one in the rear stair tower. The main paneled stair has quatrefoil motifs carved into the upper posts and enjoys generously-sized runs and landings. It was originally open to the third floor and was later cased above the second floor early in the twentieth century. In the tower at the house's rear, the service stair extends upward from the basement to the third floor in a tight spiral.
3. Flooring: The first and second floors were laid with oak planks 2 ½" to 3" wide. The third floor is of similarly sized pine boarding. Terra cotta and glazed tiles cover the vestibule floor and (originally) the hearth beds.
4. Wall and ceiling finish:

The walls and ceiling are wood lath covered in plaster. There is conventional bulls-eye molding throughout the house in the door and window surrounds. Extant recessed wood paneling in the front parlor bay suggests that this room and perhaps other walls in at least the public areas may have been similarly paneled.
5. Openings
  - a. Doorways and doors: On the first floor, doors and doorways have pointed gothic arch tops similar to the front door and east facade windows. The interior vestibule door repeats the design of the front exterior door except that its middle glass panels are fixed. Pocket doors originally closed-off the front parlor and the dining room from the first-floor hall. A standard door once opened from the back parlor into the hall. The nature of the

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room divisions/former openings between the back parlor and front parlor and stair hall are unknown. The remainder of the doors—kitchen and second and third stories—are in almost all cases standard rectangular hung five panel doors with one horizontal panel at the top and two pairs of vertical panels below (the upper pair are longer than the lower pair).

- b. Windows: See exterior description.
6. Decorative features: The parlor fireplace surround is made up of Charleston green-black tiles. The hearth tiles for the dining room fireplace were manufactured by J. and J.G. Low Art Tile Works of Chelsea, Massachusetts, which flourished from 1877–1907. "[W]ithout question one of the outstanding American tile manufacturers of the 1880s," the company combined cutting-edge design influenced by the American Aesthetic movement with mass production for widespread national and international consumption. These tiles gained both domestic and international praise.<sup>10</sup>
7. Architectural furniture: A built-in cupboard in the kitchen (originally in the butler's pantry) extends from floor to ceiling. The dining room bay contains a built-in buffet under the windows. This storage unit was originally topped by a triple-arched piece of wood framing whose hinged (and perhaps stained-glass) openings corresponded with the three bay windows of the bay. The framing survives, but no longer sits in front of the windows. The second story bedrooms at the front and rear show remnants of built-in wardrobes.
8. Hardware: Square machine-made nails were used in the frame of the dining room bay. Door knobs and door hinges are standard for the period.
9. Mechanical systems: There are two unattached decorative radiators, one on the first and one on the second floor, that appear to be part of the original or an early heating system.

D. Site

The rectory and the curacy property behind the dwelling on Grazt Street are the northernmost buildings in the parish complex. The east (i.e., main) façade engages the urban street and the secular world beyond the Advocate's

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boundaries. A garden lot to the south creates a clear but unimposing barrier between the private life of the rector's family and his vocational responsibilities to the church.

**PART III: SOURCES OF INFORMATION**

A. Early views:

\* Executed before the church was built, this is the only known unobstructed view of the south side of the parish house and chapel. The rectory, however, is not shown. Shinn, George Wolfe. King's Handbook of Notable Episcopal Churches in the United States. Boston, 1889.

\* A photographic album executed by a woman resident in the area in the first two decades of the twentieth century offers neighborhood context, as well as photographs of the church and church events. Photograph Album, 1890-1931. 2 volumes. Gift of Delphine F. Darley [or Darby]. Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

\* Taken in 1977 and 1979, several photographs capture the exterior of the rectory before deterioration and vandalism. File reference materials, 2100 North 18<sup>th</sup> Street, Aug. 19, 1985, Philadelphia Historical Commission.

B. Bibliography

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

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2. Secondary and published sources:

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The Autobiography of Father Paul M. Washington. Philadelphia, 1994.
- Weigley, Russell F., ed. Philadelphia: A 300-Year History. New York, 1982.
- Westcott, Thompson. Official guide book to Philadelphia. Philadelphia, 1875.
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3. Likely sources not yet investigated:

The Church of the Advocate reputedly still holds archival material from its early history. Susan Glassman used these sources intensively for the National Historic Landmark Nomination in 1995. The records were either lost or inaccessible at the time of the HABS project.

#### PART IV: PROJECT INFORMATION

The documentation of the Church of the Advocate, Rectory was undertaken during the summer of 2000 as part of a larger program to record historic landmarks and historically significant structures in North Philadelphia. The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), E. Blaine Cliver, Chief of HABS/HAER, and Paul D. Dolinsky, Chief of HABS; funding was made possible through a congressional appropriation for documentation in Southeastern Pennsylvania and supplemented by a William Penn Foundation grant to the Foundation for Architecture for educational purposes. The project was planned and administered by HABS historian Catherine C. Lavoie and HABS architect Robert R. Arzola. The project historian was Donna J. Rilling (Professor, State University of New York at Stony Brook). Large format photography was undertaken by Joseph Elliott. The measured drawings were completed by a team of architects: Project Supervisor Matthew Crawford (The School of the Art Institute of Chicago), and architectural technicians Kwesi Daniels (Tuskegee University), Caroline LaVerne Wright (Tulane University), and Kenneth William Horrigan (ICOMOS-Sydney, Australia).

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1. *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* 18:20 (23 May 1887): 230.
2. Susan Glassman, "Church of the Advocate National Historic Landmark Nomination," Jun. 23, 1995; George W. and Walter S. Bromley, *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia*, vol. 6 (Philadelphia, 1888); *Gopsill's Philadelphia City Directory*, (Philadelphia, 1887-1889); see also *Boyd's Philadelphia Bluebook, 1891-1892* (Philadelphia, 1891). Both Gopsill's and Boyd's list Silvester's address as "2100 N. 18th Street." The Church did not as yet stand, and Silvester's was a lone house on the west side of the street.
3. Glassman, sect. 8; Michael Lewis, Register of Historic Places, Philadelphia Historical Commission, Aug. 19, 1985 (Lewis notes the transaction as 1887); G. M. Hopkins, *City Atlas of Philadelphia by Wards*, (Philadelphia, 1875); see also Deed Books and Real Estate Transfer Files 29 N3-60, 61, 72, and 73, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania.
4. Glassman, sect. 8.
5. "Diamond and 18th Streets, The Koehn House," Samuel Castner Scrapbook Collection, vol. 4: 63, Prints and Pictures, Free Library of Philadelphia; Hopkins; *Gopsill's Philadelphia City Directory* (Philadelphia, 1887, 1888, 1889).
6. U.S. Census of Population, 1900, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Enumeration District 814.
7. In 1983, the chapel building, having shown serious signs of deterioration in the masonry, was demolished.
8. Additional summer 2000 photographs of the rectory are located in the field notes file.
9. In the time since this structure's survey and measurements were taken, this bay feature has fallen off the building (August 2000).
10. Doreen Bolger Burke, et al., *In Pursuit of Beauty: Americans and the Aesthetic Movement in America*, (New York, 1986), 449-450, quotation at 449; the chimney tile in the dining room bears the name of the company.