

**The Historic Buildings of the
COMMUNITY ARTS CENTER
in Wallingford, Pennsylvania**



The preservation and adaptation of historic residential architecture for modern use is a unique challenge for the Community Arts Center, founded in 1948 by a group of local artists who wanted to create a place “where people could come to enjoy and learn creatively.” (Nether Providence Township: A History 1687-1987)

The desire to balance the needs of the present with the architectural details of the past has guided the Arts Center’s leaders throughout their stewardship of this remarkable four-acre property. All restoration and renovation of the main building and its associated outbuildings has been done with great respect for the original estate, so that the property may be enjoyed for generations to come.

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The Community Arts Center is housed on an estate built in 1889 by the Henry P. Dixon family. The original mansion, carriage house, and stables are on four acres of landscaped grounds immediately adjacent to I-476 (the “Blue Route”) in Wallingford, Pennsylvania. Southwest of Philadelphia, the property is situated between the boroughs of Swarthmore and Media, the Delaware County seat.



Community Arts Center, 2015



Henry P. and Ida E. Dixon home, circa 1899

The Community Arts Center's property was originally part of a larger parcel owned by Mordecai Lewis, a wealthy mill owner. In 1870 Lewis sold a portion of his property from the Delaware County Turnpike (Baltimore Pike) to Rogers Lane to William Misky. Misky build a house on his property on the site of the Arts Center's main building.

In 1875, Misky began selling off portions of his holdings. The property bordering on Rogers Lane was sold to Charles Godfrey. In 1881, Ida E. Dixon, wife of Henry P. Dixon, purchased the remaining parcel of the Misky property which included the house and land extending to Baltimore Pike.



Above: View looking south toward Godfrey property

The Dixons were an interesting couple. Henry Paschall Dixon (1847-1917), was a Quaker businessman and owner of the Henry P. Dixon Company: “Manufacturers of Grates, Fireplaces, Furnaces, Ranges, and Dealers in Tile.” The company carried “an extensive line of ornamental and plain tiles for hearths, halls, and mantel facings. They also (kept) in stock a large variety of mantels in all modern and antique styles.” (*The Builder and Wood-Worker, 1887*). The 1880 census places Henry P. Dixon in Philadelphia, with occupation listed as “grate & fender.” The 1900 census lists his residence as Wallingford, and his occupation as “gentleman.”

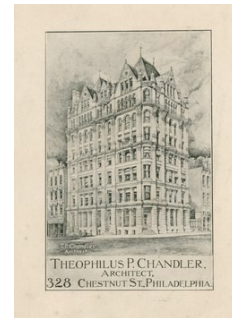
Ida Elizabeth Dixon (1854-1916) is thought to be the first female golf course designer in the United States (perhaps the world). The Dixons were among the founders of the Springhaven Country Club in Wallingford and Mrs. Dixon was the driving force behind the course design.

Both Henry and Ida are buried in Philadelphia’s Laurel Hill Cemetery.



Unknown woman walking toward the water tower behind the house (CAC’s Main Building), circa 1890

In 1886 the Dixons hired Theophilus Parson Chandler, Jr. (1845 – 1923) to design their new home. Chandler’s father was a financial backer of the DuPont company, and his mother was from a prominent Philadelphia family. He attended Harvard and studied with architect Joseph-Auguste-Emile Vaudremer in Paris. He moved to Philadelphia to work with landscape architect Robert Morris Copeland on the Ridley Park planned community, and married Sophie Madeleine duPont, a member of the DuPont family.



In Philadelphia T. P. Chandler was a well-known designer of houses, churches, train stations and other commercial buildings in the architectural tradition of Historical Eclecticism. He was President of the Philadelphia Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, and a national AIA fellow in 1886. In the 1890s he helped create the University of Pennsylvania's Department of Architecture, and was its director in 1890-91.

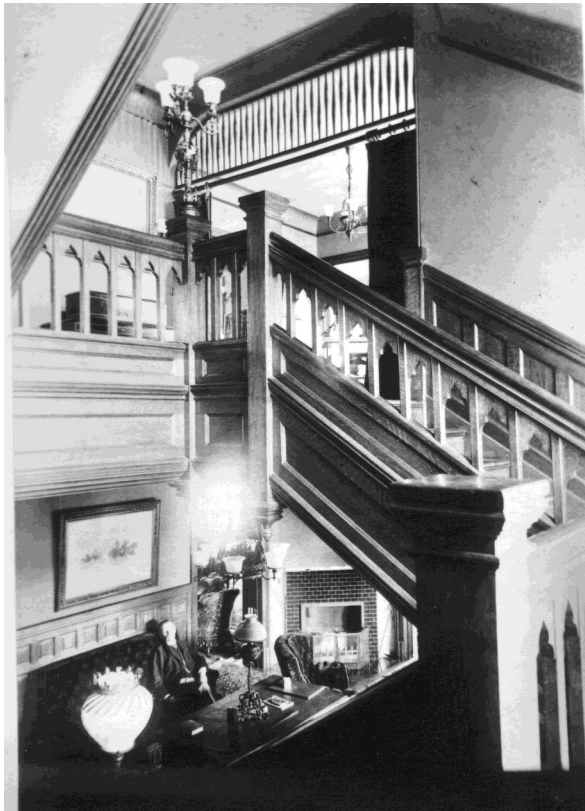
In 1886 Chandler began work on “The Gables,” as CAC’s property was originally known. Work on the large house (now known as the Main Building) was completed in 1889, with a wing containing a music room (now known as the Ballroom), kitchen and greenhouse added in 1892. The three-story stone mansion with full basement was elegantly constructed with a wide wood staircase, gas lamps throughout, and fireplaces – with different grates, mantels and tile surrounds – in every room. (It is reasonable to assume that Henry P. Dixon wished to show off his company’s products and expertise to anyone who came to visit.) Wood paneling was used throughout the house, and most windows had interior “pocket” shutters integrated into the elegant window trim. A maid’s quarters and a summer kitchen also were part of the house.

Many of T. P. Chandler’s residential structures have been demolished, making the Community Arts Center’s home a significant architectural treasure.



Front of the Dixon home as it appeared in 1889, and today.





The Main Building: Interior

Left: The front hall (unfinished) in 1889, from the landing between the first and second floors. Note gas lamps on the staircase and walls, and the unfinished fireplace.

Below: The completed fireplace as it still looks today, and another view of the front hall in 1889.



Right: Living room circa 1890. Doorway to right leads to sitting room (now the *BeaDazzled* gift shop); large window leads to side porch, now enclosed storage space.



Below: Living room circa 1890 looking through to dining room. The living room currently is CAC's lounge, and the dining room houses the main office.





Left: Dining room circa 1890, now CAC's main office. Door to left leads to the butler's pantry, now the Executive Director's office.



Right: Sitting room circa 1890, now the Beadazzled artisans' gift shop.

Throughout its stewardship of this historic property, the Community Arts Center has worked hard to preserve the architectural integrity of its elegant home, while adapting the property for contemporary use.



Second and third floor hallways circa 1890.



In 1892 the Dixons added a wing housing a music room on the second floor, and a kitchen and greenhouse on the first floor. The music room, now known as the Ball-room, has vaulted ceilings, two fireplaces, leaded glass windows, wood wainscoting, built-in window seats and pocket shutters.

Below: *The music room, circa 1898, view from the back.*



Right: *same view of the Ball-room as it looks today. This room is used for a wide variety of classes and small events.*



Right: The music room circa 1898, view from front to back. Note the large pipe organ on the left.



Left: Ballroom looking front to back, 2015.

Two outbuildings were also part of the Dixon property. The U-shaped Tudor style building now known as Smith Court housed Mr. Dixon's workshop and horse stables, a billiards room, and sleeping quarters for staff. The unique single story building at the front of the property was used as a carriage house. On land across Plush Mill road, the Dixons built a nine-hole golf course, complete with a gazebo on the ninth hole.



Above: Tudor-style outbuilding circa 1890

Right: Smith Court today houses the caretaker's cottage and workshop, the ART Start pre-school, a children's gallery, the Lego room, sculpture room, and original billiards room that is now used for a wide variety of classes for children and adults.



The Main Building: Exterior

The entire property was beautifully landscaped. The unique cucumber magnolia tree beside the front parking lot is well over 100 years old. In the garden behind the greenhouse, the Dixons had a small grape arbor, the remnants of which are still visible behind the current ceramic studio.



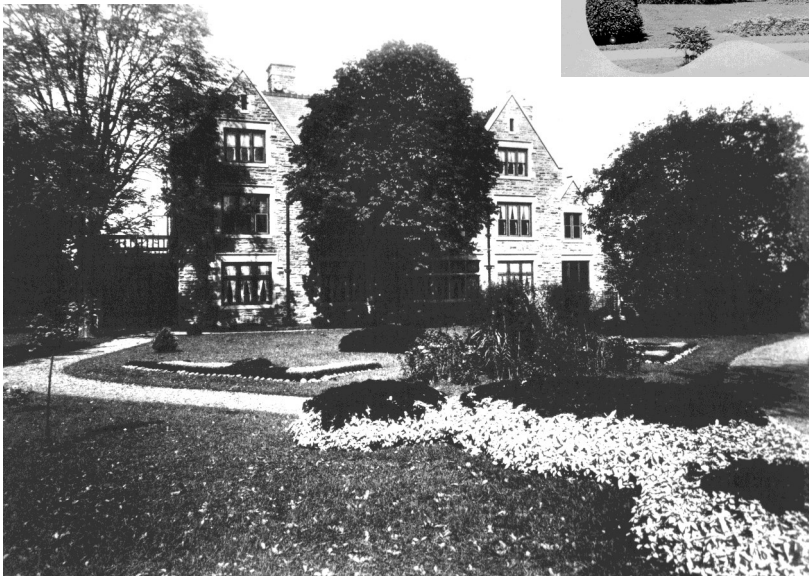
Above: back of main house circa 1890 including greenhouse.

Below: the grape arbor, 2015.





All three of these photographs show the back of the Dixon mansion and gardens circa 1900



A fascinating and unique feature of the Dixon home was the stone water tower built at the rear of the property. The stone tower was constructed around a wooden tank that held the water used in the house. It is now one of the best-loved features of our beautiful property, popular with both children and adults.

Right: water tower under construction in 1889



Below: the tower in all seasons, 2015



“The Gables” after the Dixons

In 1913 the Dixon family sold their property to Samuel Crothers, who lived in the home with his family. He built several houses in the area below Plush Mill Road for his extended family.

In 1968 the Community Arts Center purchased the property, which had been condemned to make way for Interstate 476 (the “Blue Route”). Through the efforts of the Board of Directors led by President John Cramp, the Arts Center had the two outbuildings (carriage house and stables) declared “of historic significance” and had the proposed Blue Route moved, saving the entire property.

Thus began the work of preserving the architectural and historic details of all the buildings on the property, while converting them for use as busy classrooms, studios, exhibition areas and gathering spaces.

The Beatrice S. Dallett Ceramic Arts Building, designed by Jonathan Stone Sutton and built in 1995, was the first major addition to the property since 1892. It is connected to the main building at the location of the old greenhouse. Interior windows that divide the classroom space were salvaged from the old greenhouse structure, as were some parts of the granite exterior.





Left and above: the Beatrice S. Dallett Ceramic Arts Building (named for CAC's first Executive Director) connects to the main building at the location of the former greenhouse.

Below: old greenhouse windows were re-used inside.



In 2000, the Arts Center completed the restoration of the U-shaped stable/workshop building, now known as Smith Court. This restoration included the renovation of the caretaker's apartment and children's classroom next to the courtyard in the north wing of the building, the workshop and storage areas on the lower floor of the south wing, the billiards room and sculpture room in the second floor of the south wing, and the bridge area. The leaded glass windows, original flooring and brick fireplace were maintained. The space was air-conditioned and made fully accessible.



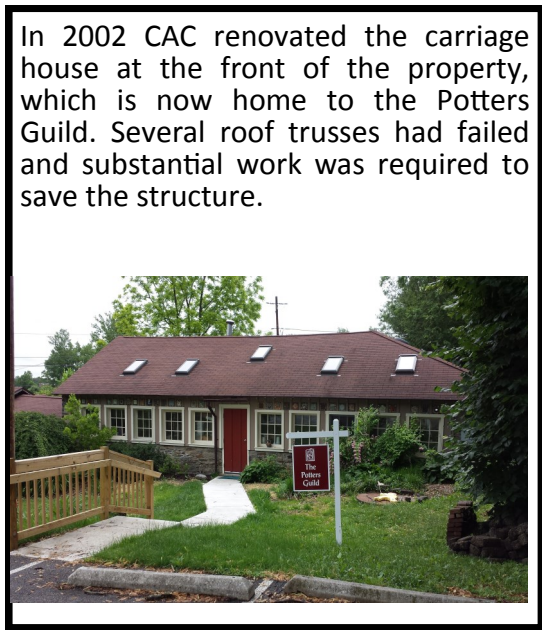
Right: Smith Court
north wing and
Bridge Rom, 2015

Below: Smith Court
south wing (exterior
of Billiard Room)





Below and left: Billiards Room, 2015



Right: Bridge Room



The Community Arts Center celebrated its 60th anniversary in 2008 and achieved a tremendous milestone: the construction of a beautiful new gallery. This project made CAC's historic home fully accessible for the first time, and the 3,100 square-foot gallery has become known as a premier exhibition space in the Philadelphia region. It is also an increasingly popular venue for concerts, workshops and rental events.

Below: old meets new. The Duke Gallery, designed by Jonathan Stone Sutton, was added at the rear of the main building so as not to disturb its imposing front façade. The addition includes an elevator serving all floors of the main building as well as three restrooms, a mezzanine, and a small 3rd floor classroom.



Above: Groundbreaking 6/14/07



Above: the Duke Gallery interior



The gallery's elegant design allows for all kinds of exhibitions and events.



The Community Arts Center thanks the many individuals, businesses and foundations who have contributed to the preservation and creative adaptation of our historic property.

*These buildings are a valuable resource for the entire community. We invite you to come and enjoy our extraordinary surroundings. Take a class; attend a Friday Night Live concert; come to a holiday or Potters Guild sale; view an exhibit. Discover all the ways that the Community Arts Center is **Bringing ART to LIFE.***



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