

WALKING DOWN MEMORY LANE ON... *CATHARINE STREET*

By Marie-Line Germain, Ph.D.

In the not-so-distant past, ships loaded with immigrants from Europe docked at the foot of Washington Avenue, which was the port of entry of thousands into the U. S. To some extent, it was Philadelphia's Ellis Island (New York). That's a known fact.

What is not well known is how some of Bella Vista streets acquired their names. In this newsletter series, *Walking Down Memory Lane On...*, we try to shed light on the history of our Bella Vista street names based on the records available.

To kick off this series, we'll focus on **Catharine Street**.

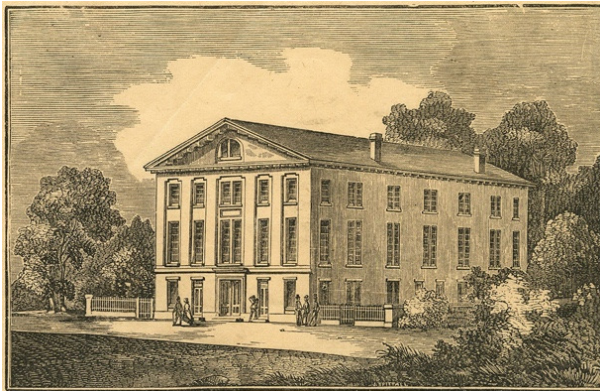
Catharine Street seems to have been opened in 1787, extending from the Delaware River to Passayunk Road. In 1796, the "road jury" confirmed the street from Passayunk to the present-day 15th Street.

Did you know that Catharine Street was first called Kansas Street?

When Kansas Street was renamed Catharine Street in 1895 (or 1897 according to the City of Philadelphia's records), the street achieved its present length, from the Delaware River to the Cobbs Creek Parkway.

Why "Catharine" street? It appears that several streets in the area, Catharine, Christian and Queen streets were named for Catharine, Queen of Sweden. Historian Bob Alotta (1990) believes that Catharine was the daughter of Swen Shute who settled the Swedish Southwark area from an early grant from Queen Christina.

Notable property on Catharine Street, Bella Vista: **The House of Industry** (formerly at 714 Catharine Street).



As aforementioned, as America's second largest port city, Philadelphia was a mecca for foreign-born immigrants and native workers. Despite its rapidly expanding manufacturing economy, the city was experiencing an alarming growth in the number of people living in poverty, homelessness, alcoholism, diseases, and crimes.

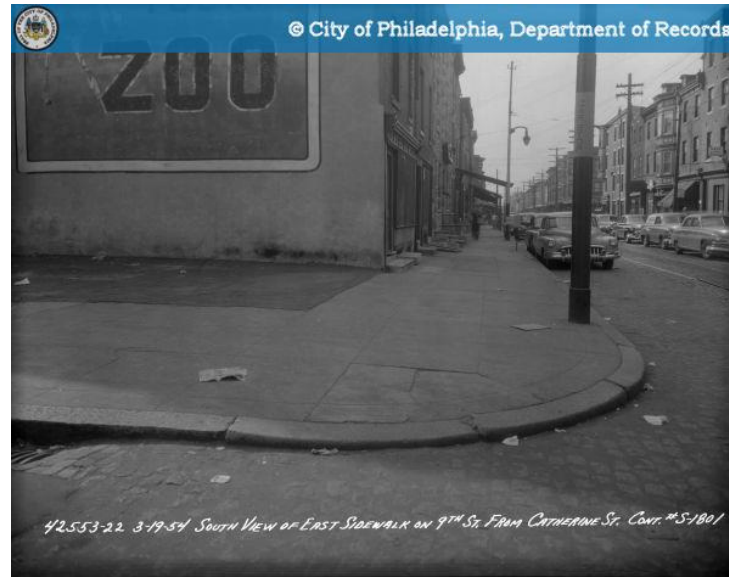
Founded in 1846 by the Philadelphia Society for the Employment and Instruction of the Poor, the House of Industry sought to aid the impoverished citizens of the city unable or unprepared to make their own way --natives and newcomers/immigrants— to move out of poverty and into the social mainstream with temporary shelter, food, job training, English-language courses, welfare programs and other practical programs. At first, its clients included Irish and German immigrants, but by the turn of the twentieth century, the House was also serving the growing number of

Southern- and Eastern-European immigrants, including Italians, Poles, Slovaks, Jews, and African Americans. As neighborhoods changed, so too did the client base. The House of Industry predated many of the settlement houses which would arise in the U.S in the coming decades.

In the twentieth century, the House of Industry underwent several changes and mergers with other settlement houses and similar organizations. United Communities Southeast Philadelphia, a successor of these groups, continues this anti-poverty and community-building work today. 714 Catharine street, where the House of Industry was located, is now a parking lot adjacent to the DaVinci Art Alliance.

Some (rare) old photos of Catharine Street

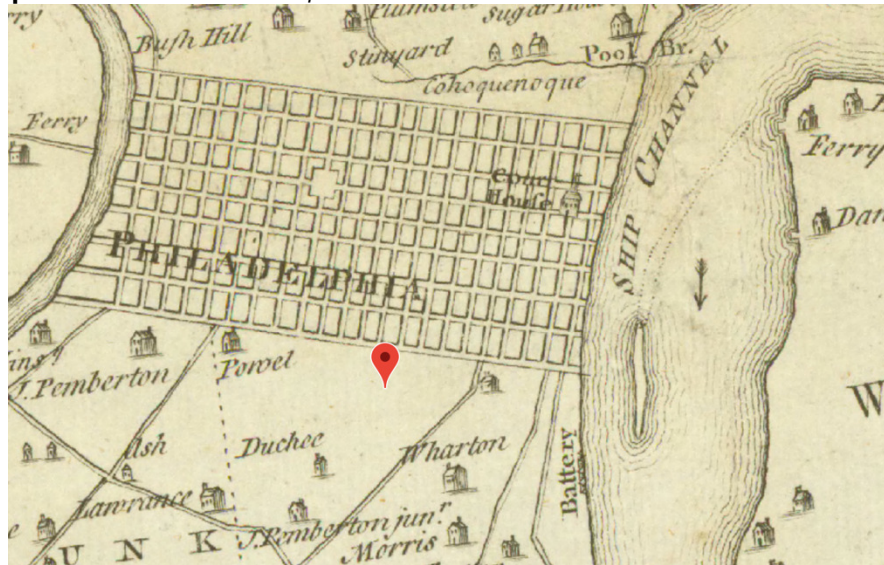
1954 - South view of east sidewalk on 9th St. & Catharine Street



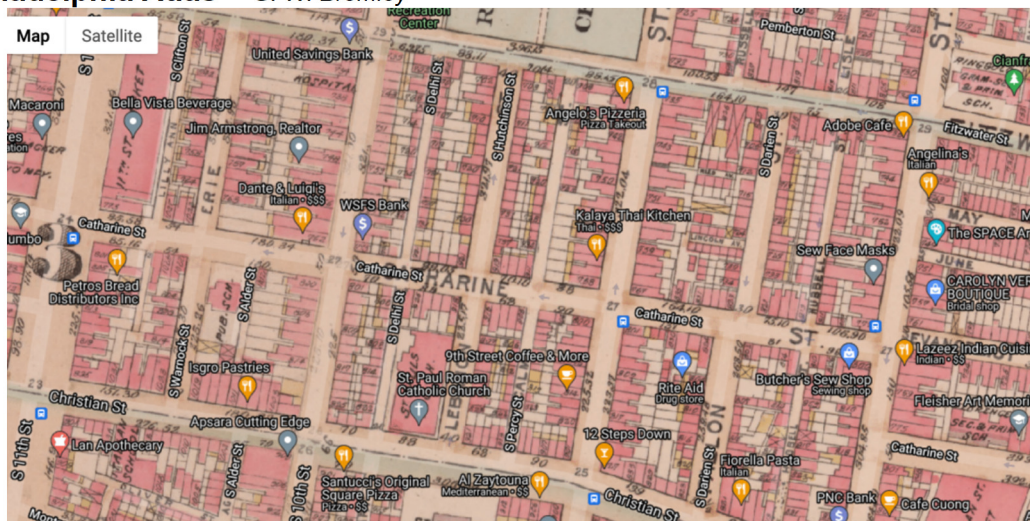
September 1958 - N.W. corner of 10th & Catharine Street



c. 1750 Philadelphia N. Scull and G. Heap



1895 Philadelphia Atlas G. W. Bromley



References

Alotta, R. I. (1990). *Mermaids, Monasteries, Cherokees and Custer. The stories behind Philadelphia street names*. Bonus Books.

<https://theclio.com/entry/130890>

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https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:House_of_Industry_Schools_for_Colored_Children_712-718_Catharine_Street_Philadelphia_PA.jpg

O'Leary, D. F. (1966, June 19). *Profile of Queen Village in Philadelphia*.

http://www.phillyh2o.org/backpages/QueenVillage_BulletinREAdvts_1966.htm

If you have some historical facts about a Bella Vista street (and perhaps even some vintage photos!), we'd love to feature it in our next newsletter. Please email Marie-Line Germain at mgermain99@hotmail.com with the subject line, "Bella Vista Street History".