

TACONY

MARY DISSTON SCHOOL
(St. Josephat's Ukrainian Catholic School)
Tacony
North side of 4500 block of Longshore Ave. between Glenloch & Ditman streets
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-6692-F

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C St. NW
Washington, DC 20240

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

Tacony, MARY DISSTON SCHOOL (St. Josephat's Ukrainian Catholic School)

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NOTE: Tacony's street grid does not lie true to the compass. For the purpose of locating buildings in this report, the roads running NE to SW (ex. Keystone Street and Torresdale Avenue) will be the N-S axes and those running SE to NW (ex. Longshore Avenue and Disston Street) will be E-W axes.

Location: 4500 block of Longshore Avenue, north side between Glenloch and Ditman streets, Tacony neighborhood, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Significance: Now housing St. Josephat's Ukrainian Catholic School, the Mary Disston School was the third public school building constructed in Tacony. It was named for the wife of Henry Disston, who was the founder of the Keystone Saw Works. The Disstons worked to establish and nurture a model company town linked to the saw works that included provisions for housing, leisure, religion, and education.

Description:

The Mary Disston School is a two-story structure whose walls are laid-up with rock-faced ashlar blocks organized in random courses. The rusticated stone walls are softened by dressed stone trimming and arched window and porch openings. The building's detail is tied to the then popular Colonial Revival—most evident in arcaded porch, the Palladian window above the porch, the arch and lintel keystones, and in the pilasters and scrolled pediment of the single attic dormer window.¹ The building remains in excellent condition. While lacking the multi-pane sash in the originals, aluminum replacement windows are non-obtrusive. A chain-link fence has replaced portions of the original one of iron.

History:

See the historical report for Tacony, HABS No. PA-6692 for more detailed information about Tacony's general development.

From its earliest mid-nineteenth-century development, largely under the auspices of the Tacony Cottage Association, Tacony has hosted a school.² With the arrival of Henry Disston and his Keystone Saw Works, Tacony was transformed from a bucolic collection of rural farms and country houses to a well-planned company town. Educational opportunities were central to this endeavor and sometime in the early- to mid- 1880s the Henry Disston

¹See Louis M. Iatarola and Siobhán Gephart, *Images of America: Tacony* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2000), 93, for an early image of the building.

²Samuel L. Smedley, *Smedley's Atlas of the City of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott & Co., 1862).

Memorial School opened, augmenting or replacing classroom space in the original public school building located between the railroad tracks and the Tacony Plank Road (later Aramingo/State Road, and still later Interstate 95).³ The two-story Henry Disston School was still standing in 1928, however it was taken down sometime shortly after that year.⁴ The growth in Tacony's population—from 200 in 1875 to 12,000 in 1906—necessitated the construction of more public classroom space, the Mary Disston School was likely built directly across Longshore Avenue from the Henry Disston Memorial School early in the twentieth century.⁵ The property was purchased late in the 1950s by St. Josephat's Ukrainian Catholic Church for use as a school, a function it continues to serve.⁶

Historian: James A. Jacobs

Sources:

Atlas of the 23rd, 35th, & 41st Wards of the City of Philadelphia: Compiled from Private Plans, Actual Surveys & Official Records in the Bureau of Surveys. Philadelphia: J. L. Smith, 1910.

Baist's Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, Complete in One Volume. Philadelphia: G. Wm. Baist, 1888.

City Atlas of Philadelphia by Wards, Complete in 7 Volumes, vol. 3. Philadelphia: G. M. Hopkins, 1876.

The History of Tacony, Holmesburg, and Mayfair: An Intergenerational Study, ed. Harry C. Silcox. Philadelphia: Brighton Press Inc., 1992.

Iatarola, Louis M., and Siobhán Gephart. Images of America: Tacony. Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2000.

Sanborn Map Company. Sanborn Maps for Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, vol. 27. New York, 1928.

³The Henry Memorial Disston School was not present on an 1876 city atlas, not surprising as Henry Disston died in 1879. *City Atlas of Philadelphia by Wards, Complete in 7 Volumes*, vol. 3 (Philadelphia: G. M. Hopkins, 1876). It is present on an 1888 atlas and given that Mary Disston was financing the Disston Memorial Presbyterian Church only two blocks away by 1883, it is likely that she might have also been associated with school construction at the same time. *Baist's Atlas of the City of Philadelphia, Complete in One Volume* (Philadelphia: G. Wm. Baist, 1888).

⁴Sanborn Map Company, *Sanborn Maps for Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*, vol. 27 (New York, 1928), 2655.

⁵The Mary Disston School is depicted on a 1910 city atlas. *Atlas of the 23rd, 35th, & 41st Wards of the City of Philadelphia: Compiled from Private Plans, Actual Surveys & Official Records in the Bureau of Surveys* (Philadelphia: J. L. Smith, 1910); Iatarola, 93, suggests a post-1900 construction; Harry C. Silcox, "Chapter 1," *The History of Tacony, Holmesburg, and Mayfair: An Intergenerational Study*, ed. Harry C. Silcox (Philadelphia: Brighton Press Inc., 1992), 4, for figures.

⁶Iatarola, 93.

Smedley, Samuel L. Smedley's Atlas of the City of Philadelphia. Philadelphia: J. B.
Lippincott & Co., 1862.