

TACONY
TACONY MUSIC HALL

Tacony

4815 Longshore Avenue, northwest corner of Longshore Ave. & Edmund St.

Philadelphia

Philadelphia County

Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-6692-J

HABS

PA-6692-J

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

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Tacony, TACONY MUSIC HALL

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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: 4815 Longshore Avenue, northwest corner of Longshore Avenue and Edmund Street, Tacony neighborhood, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

Significance: Constructed in 1885, the Tacony Music Hall anchored Longshore Avenue, Tacony's most important street late in the nineteenth and early in the twentieth century. Over time, it provided vital space for a variety of civic and commercial ventures.

Description:

This brick building with stone trim remains an excellent example of high-Victorian notions of what a public building should look like. On the ground floor along the principal street are three commercial storefronts.¹ These are surmounted by a lofty second story—indicated by tall arched windows—that originally housed the music hall.² The top of the structure originally held a number of “community rooms,” one of which housed the local library for a period of seven years, between 1885 and 1892.³ Aside from its imaginative brickwork that includes quoined window frames and an elaborate corbelled cornice, the building's dominant presence on Longshore is most underscored by a fanciful, rounded parapet gable containing abstracted foliate patterns in low relief.

The recently rehabilitated structure has seen few changes made to its exterior. When compared with historic photographs, the most evident alterations are seen in some of the window sash and the elimination of a roof over the sidewalk along Longshore Avenue.

History:

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

¹Sanborn Map Company, *Sanborn Maps for Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*, vol. 27 (New York, 1928), 2637, for site location.

²Louis M. Iatarola and Siobhán Gephart, *Images of America: Tacony* (Charleston, SC: Arcadia Publishing, 2000), 14–15, for information about room use.

³S.F. Hotchkin, *The Bristol Pike* (Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs & Co., 1893), 74.

An early history of the Tacony area noted that there was an “Old Hall” into which the public library moved on January 1, 1880.⁴ A number of church histories relate that the congregations met in “Tacony Hall” prior to the construction of permanent church structures. The hall to which these references refer is likely a two-story frame structure in “old Tacony,” east of the railroad tracks that ultimately housed the *New Era* newspaper in Tacony.⁵ (Iatarola, fig. 58) Regardless, in 1885 Frank W. Jordan, a Tacony businessman, constructed a new community hall building on what then was Tacony’s commercial and civic main street—Franklin Street (Longshore Avenue).⁶ Jordan’s venture was a multiuse structure housing stores, a music hall, and rooms for club and associational meetings. A local “talent agent” James J. McGowen often booked acts there and shows were offered on Wednesdays, Fridays, and Saturdays. Not surprisingly, such an important community building was well-articulated and its size and embellishment far surpassed most structures in Tacony for a number of years.

Unfortunately, its twentieth-century history was not so glorified. The building was challenged as an entertainment center by motion pictures, particularly after a movie house was opened two blocks west on Longshore Avenue early in the twentieth century.⁷ The reorientation of Tacony’s commercial heart along Torresdale Avenue after 1900 also contributed to both Longshore Avenue and the Music Hall’s decline.

The structure was recently rehabilitated and programmatically altered. It is currently occupied by real estate offices and the local historical society.

Historian: James A. Jacobs

Sources:

Hotchkin, S. F. The Bristol Pike. Philadelphia: George W. Jacobs & Co., 1893.

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.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Iatarola, 58.

⁶All information related to the function of the Music Hall is drawn from Iatarola, 14–15.

⁷Iatarola, 48.