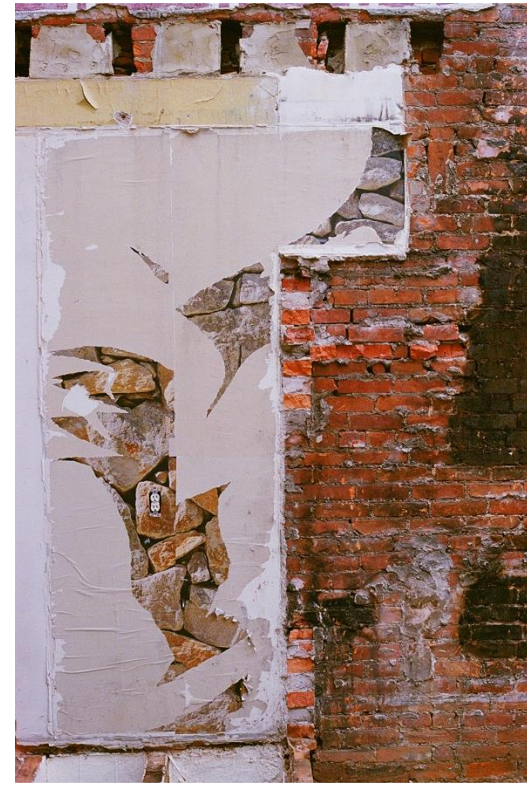


Sarah Lerner
March 2025





My zip code (19146) in South Philadelphia was actively, rapidly, and aggressively gentrifying. My daily strolls through the neighborhood bore witness to the dismantling of the city's constructed heritage: the demolition of 19th-century, three-story brick rowhouses—many the first homes of Irish families—reduced to a muddy chasm, soon to be replaced by plywood, plexiglass, and central air conditioning. But among the wasted wreckage, I discovered remnants of life: centuries-old wallpaper fragments that had fluttered in descent amidst the blow of the sledgehammer. A shimmy through a gap in the chain-link fence: This is when my collection began.

Using primary sources (census records, death certificates, newspaper articles, city directories, birth certificates, and immigration papers), I was able to retrace the lives of the people who lived among this wallpaper, and perhaps the paperhangers themselves. Each layer was a touchstone—a significant moment of transition in the sisters' lives: a fresh coat, creative reconsiderations, the maturation of self-fashioning; or a time of grief, stagnation, and active forgetting.

Two of the five houses were owned by a pair of single sisters: Fannie and Anna Nutt, and Mary and Margaret Carr—the decorative artists of 2019 Fitzwater Street and 2023 Carpenter Street.

There were hundreds of others who called these houses home, but for the purposes of this project their stories are curated around the life lived by these two set of sisters. This project is a composite of their stories, presented through a reconstructed sheet of wallpaper and found late 19th and early 20th century photographs of women – family, friends, life partners.

I have included a glimpse of how archival research and secondary sources can reveal the story of quotidian domesticity, sisterhood, and the character of a neighborhood lost. This is an ongoing project, and hopefully part of a series documenting the change of historic fabric in Philadelphia's constructed environment.

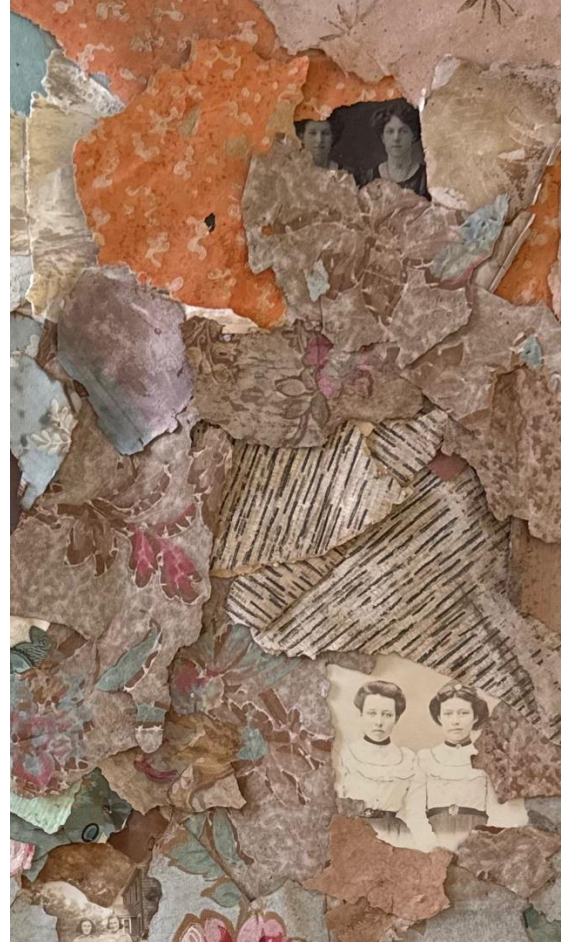


19146

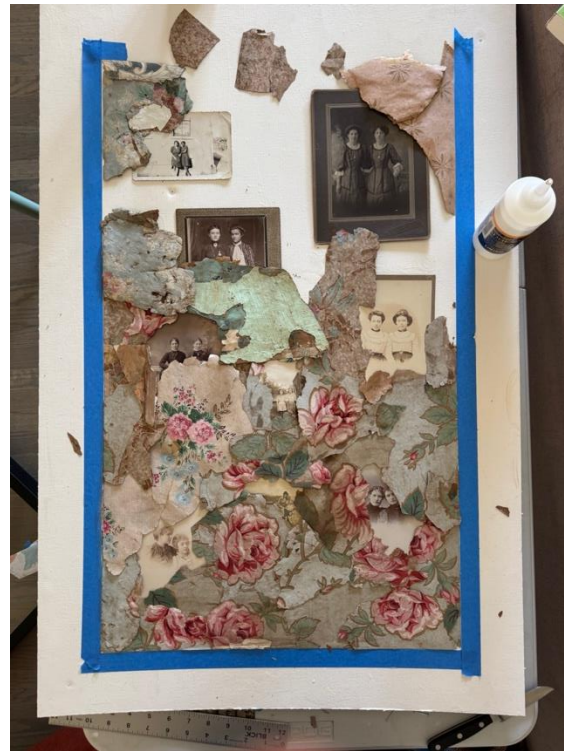
Found wallpaper on painted board

24"x36"

Details



Process



Primary Resources
The Nutt's and The Carr's

2019	45	11	Nutt Fannie	Head	W	77
			Anna	Sister	W	78

2033	14	14	Carr Mary	Head	W	77
			Margaret	Daughter	W	78
			Louise	Servant	W	77

Cash
Watch
Wearing apparel
.10 1. .25 2.
Pocket-book, grip, umbrella, couch

One half interest in personal property contained in premises No. 2035 Carpenter Street, Philadelphia, consisting of household effects, piano, &c. &c. total value, \$88.55

One half interest in policy of fire insurance No. v8121, Perpetual Fire Insurance Company, of Philadelphia, surrender value, \$27.

Fannie Nutt

Miss Fannie Nutt, a teacher in the W. S. Pierce Public School, 24th and Christian sts., for nearly 50 years, died yesterday at her home, 1017 Weller ave., Brookline, following a long illness. She was 91.

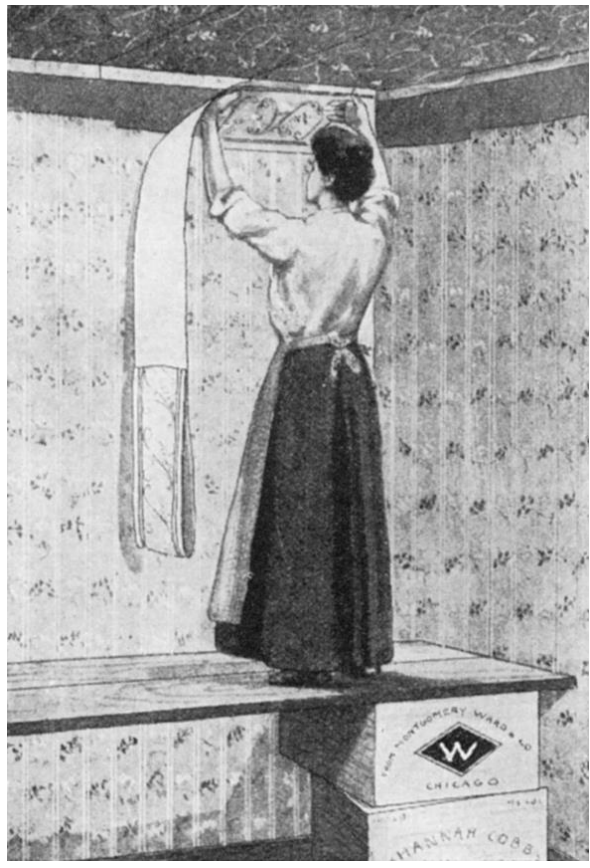
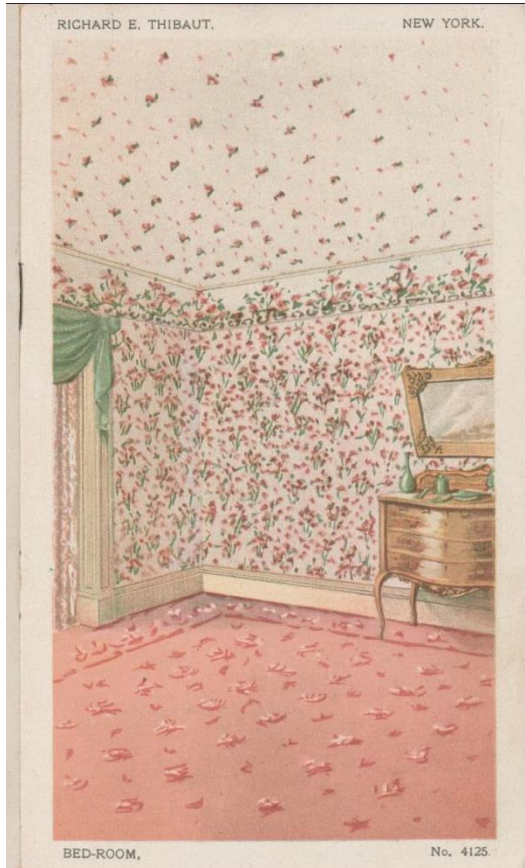
Miss Nutt retired from teaching in 1924. She was a member of the Llanerch Presbyterian Church. Funeral services will be held at 2 P. M. Tuesday at 1820 Chestnut st. Burial will be in Mt. Moriah Cemetery.

00
3-460

5254

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
CERTIFICATE OF DEATH

1. PLACE OF DEATH: Philadelphia
2. USUAL RESIDENCE: Philadelphia
3. CITY OF DEATH: Philadelphia
4. CITY OF USUAL RESIDENCE: Philadelphia
5. FULL NAME OF DECEASED: Fannie Nutt
6. STREET ADDRESS: 1017 Weller Ave.
7. NAME OF HUSBAND: Charles J. Nutt
8. DATE OF MARRIAGE: 12/18/77
9. DATE OF DEATH: 12/18/77
10. AGE: 91
11. SEX: F
12. OCCUPATION: Teacher
13. FATHER'S NAME: Charles Nutt
14. MOTHER'S NAME: Mary Nutt
15. INFORMATION ON SIGNATURE: Fannie Nutt
16. CAUSE OF DEATH: Disease of unknown origin
17. MEDICAL CERTIFICATION: Dr. J. H. ...
18. DIRECTLY LEADING TO DEATH: ...
19. DATE OF DEATH: 12/18/77
20. PLACE OF INQUIRY: ...
21. TIME OF DEATH: ...
22. HOW DID INJURY OCCUR: ...
23. I hereby certify that I am a duly qualified physician and surgeon and that I am duly licensed to practice medicine and surgery in the State of Pennsylvania and that I am duly qualified to issue this certificate of death.



The Nutt's
2019 Fitzwater Street, Philadelphia PA 19146

LAYER 1 – c. 1867-1869 // Annie and John Nutt decorate their new house.

- The Nutt family moves from a denser older neighborhood in the Southeast section of the city into a recently constructed 3 story brick row house in Southwest Philadelphia located at 2019 Fitzwater Street.
- South Philadelphia neighborhood was developed in the years following the Civil War David Nutt (b. 1822 in Ireland) is listed as a salesman living at 2019 Fitzwater Street in 1867 Philadelphia City Director.
- David is married to Annie Mackey b. 1825 in Ireland. The couple has four children, all born in Philadelphia: Elizabeth (b. 1855), Fannie (b. 1856) John Michael (b. 1858), and Anna (b. 1864). Annie's older sister Rebecca, lived with the family prior to the move.

LAYER 2 – c. 1870-1889 // Aunt Rebecca Mackey papers the bedroom she moves into after her sister's death.

- South Philadelphia neighborhood was developed in the years following the Civil War David Nutt (b. 1822 in Ireland) is listed as a salesman living at 2019 Fitzwater Street in 1867 Philadelphia City Directory.
- Annie Nutt, wife and mother of four passes away, in 1869 from tuberculosis
- Annie's older sister Rebecca Mackey moves in with the Nutt family after her sister's death.
- Anna, the youngest daughter, is five years old when her mother dies. She spends a handful of months living with the Whitten family in North Philadelphia. John Nutt and William Whitten are both salesmen from Ireland.

LAYER 3 – c. 1889-1925 // Fannie (33 yrs) and Anna Nutt (25 yrs) repaper the entire house after their father, David Nutt, passes away at 66 years old.

- After David Nutt's death Fannie, Anna and Aunt Rebecca Mackey (b. 1812) are the only three left living in the house. Elizabeth and John have both married and moved out.
- Fannie is a teacher at the local public school, Anna and Aunt Rebecca both do housework. Aunt Rebecca dies in 1907.
- Fannie and Anna continue to live together at 2019 Fitzwater Street until her retirement in 1924. Fannie has lived in the house for fifty-seven years.

LAYER 4 – c. 1925 // Fannie and Anna move to the Philadelphia suburbs (1037 Weller Ave, Havertown, PA) after Fannie retires from teaching in 1924.

The wallpaper is painted/plastered/drywalled over by the proceeding owners of the house.

- Anna passes away in 1939 at 75 yrs old. Anna has lived with and been financially supported by her sister (except for the brief time at the Whitten's after her mother's death) for the entirety of her life.
- She is buried in the same plot as her mother and father at Mt Moriah Cemetery. The funeral is paid for by her older sister Fannie.
- Fannie continues to live in her suburban home until her death in 1947. She is 91 yrs old when she dies.

1. 1860 + 1870 Census, 1862 Philadelphia Atlas, Samuel L. Smedley; 2. Pennsylvania and New Jersey, U.S., Church and Town Records, 1870 census; 3. David Nutt death certificate, The Philadelphia Inquirer, 1900 US Census, Rebecca Mackey death certificate.; 4. Fannie's Obituary in the Philadelphia Inquirer, 1930 US Census, Anna's death certificate and burial record, Fannie's death certificate.

The Carr's 2033 Carpenter Street, Philadelphia PA, 19146

***LAYER 1 – November 1897 - Spring 1898** // Mary and Margaret move into 2033 Carpenter Street and repaper the walls of the former boarding house.

- On October 16, 1897, sisters Mary G. Carr (23 years old) and Margaret E. Carr (20 years old) purchased 2033 Carpenter Street at a sheriff's sale. The previous owners of the house, Peter and Martha Peterson, lost their home while in debt and running a boarding house for young men and women. The house had been on the market for several months before the Carr's called it their own.
- Mary and Margaret's parents had both passed in recent years. They immigrated from Ireland to Philadelphia before having their two daughters in the 1870s in their new city. The sisters chose this South Philadelphia neighborhood because it was one block away from their church at St. Charles Borromeo Parish at 20th and Christian Streets—where they were active members of the women's society, Sodality of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Mary worked as a stenographer, and Margaret was an umbrella maker at a nearby factory in South Philadelphia.

LAYER 2 – Spring 1898 - January 1901 // The Carr's new housemate, Mary Cavanaugh, decorates her bedroom.

- After moving into the neighborhood, the Carr sisters developed a close relationship with an older Irish woman at church named Mary Cavanaugh (b. 1850). Ms. Cavanaugh immigrated to the United States from Ireland in 1860. The Carr sisters invited Ms. Cavanaugh to live with them and help take care of the house while they worked their full-time jobs. By the summer, Mary and Margaret had saved enough money to purchase a piano for their home.
- Without warning, Mary became ill—and by October 1899, she knew her remaining days were numbered. She passed away on December 21, 1900, at 25 years old. Her possessions at the time of her death included a watch, wearing apparel, a pocketbook, a grip, and an umbrella. Her 22-year-old sister, Margaret, became the sole owner of 2033 Carpenter Street.

LAYER 3 – January 1901 - 1905 // Margaret Carr and Mary Cavanaugh repaper the entire house and sell the piano.

- A few weeks after they buried Mary Carr, Mary Cavanaugh appointed Margaret Carr as executor of her will.
- In 1903, Margaret Carr married Joseph A. Coyle. He moved into 2033 Carpenter Street with his new wife, Mary Coyle, and Mary Cavanaugh.
- Two years later, Mary Cavanaugh passed away—her funeral was held at "The residence of Mr. Joseph A. Coyle, 2033 Carpenter Street."

LAYER 4 – 1905 - c. 1910 // Margaret refurnishes the extra bedroom as a nursery. The Coyles' first child is born in 1905. They name her Margaret.

- Over the next five years, they welcome three more children: Joseph Jr. (b. 1906), Regina (b. 1909), and Cornelius (b. 1910).

LAYER 5 – c. 1911-1918 // With another child on the way, Joseph and Margaret sell their house to a local Irish family, James D. O'Neil and Martha E. O'Neil. Martha repapers the house.

- In 1918, the O'Neil's sell 2033 Carpenter Street to a Black family from Virginia, **Lewis and Sicily Dangerfield**. By 1920, the block is 50% Black and 50% Irish. In 1930, all of the houses are either owned or rented by Black families. The house remains in the Dangerfields' name for the next sixty-five years.

1. Property ad in *The Philadelphia Times*, *Mary Carr Will*, *Mary Carr obituary*, 1900 Census. 2. *Mary Cavanaugh Will*, *Mary Carr Will*, *Mary Carr Obituary* in the *Philadelphia Times*, 1900 Census. 3. *Mary Carr Will*, *Marriage certificate*, *Mary Cavanaugh's obituary* in *The Philadelphia Times*. 4. 1930 Census. 5. 1918 Property Deed, 1920 Census, 1930 Census, 1940 Census, 1950 Census, 1983 deed.

*Unlike the Nutt's, the Carr's were not the first owners of the house – LAYER 1 represents the wallpaper the Carr sisters pasted when they moved into the house in 1897. There were at least three other owners in the thirty-five preceding years.

Examples of Secondary Resources

Jennings, Jan. "Controlling Passion: The Turn-of-the-Century Wallpaper Dilemma." *Winterthur Portfolio* 31, no. 4 (1996): 243-264.

"Changes in cultural norms and in the production and marketing of consumer goods in the 1890 to 1910 period allowed women to assume moral guardianship for their homes. Women's magazines, mail-order catalogs, and advice books disseminated suggestions for the decoration of the home interior. Manufacturers recognized housewives as a primary target for sales, and new marketing strategies helped to fill American mid- and working-class homes with ready-made, mass-produced objects." (243)

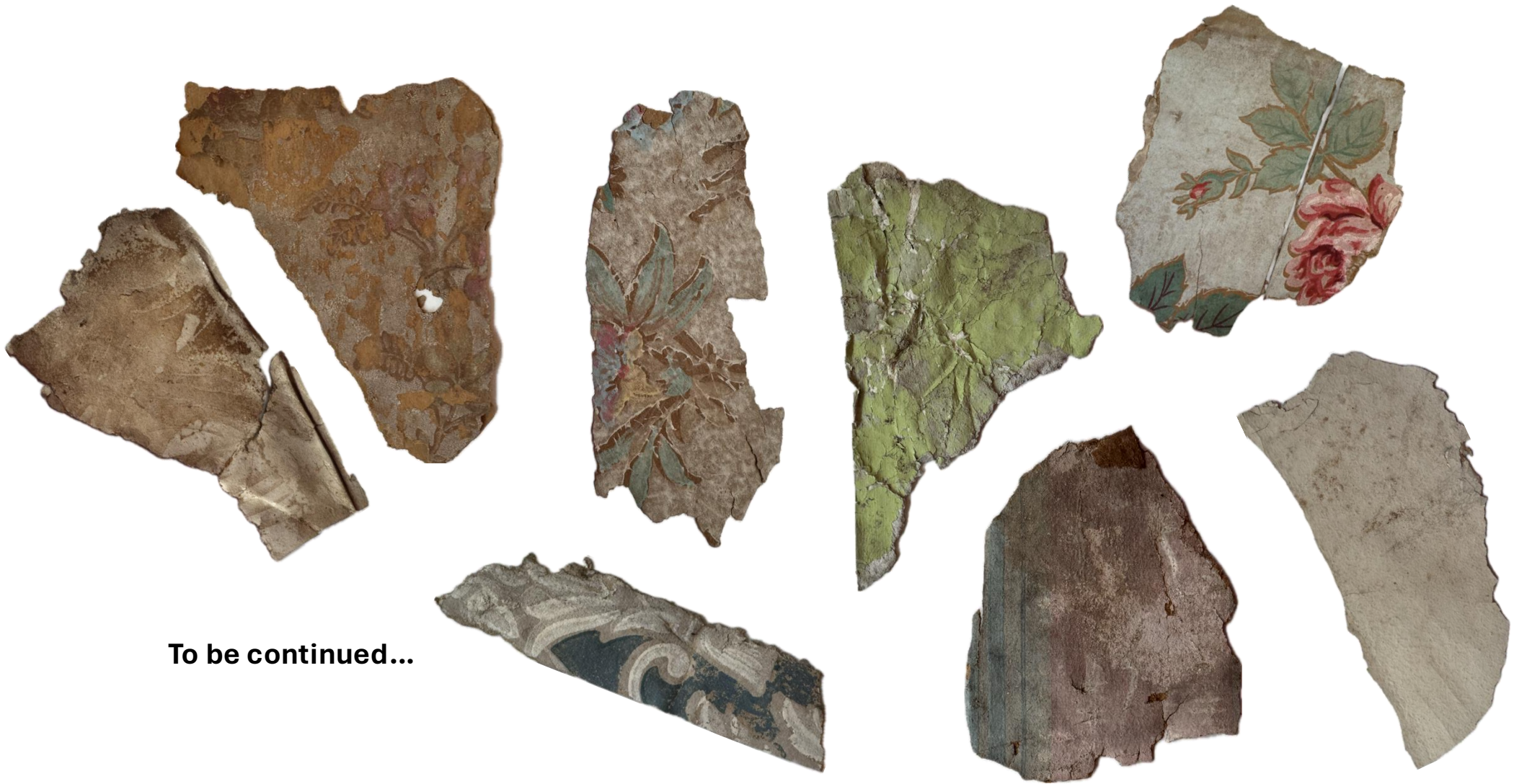
"Wallpaper was a powerful material; it expanded the opportunity for women to experiment with the architectural and spatial perception, expanding or shrinking a room's dimensions. Through wallpaper, a woman could make her own internal landscape, and it could be as wild and colorful as she liked because she was expressing a vitality of her own spirit. The act of shopping, sifting through myriad designs, making decisions, and installing wallpaper empowered women to experiment with their own houses in ways that were impossible with furnishings that could not be easily purchased or replaced. A woman learned that walls created an area she could control by deciding how animated, how personal, or how modest she wanted them to be." (264)

Burke, Bobbye J. "St. Charles Borromeo Parish South Philadelphia 1868-1993." *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* 104, no. 1/4 (1993): 91-116.

"The peak of Irish immigration to Philadelphia occurred in the 1850s; by 1860 the Irish-born numbered 94,443, 16.7% of the city's population. By 1880 only 11.9% of the city's population was born in Ireland, by 27% of the population (approximately 227,000 of the total of 840,584) was recorded by the census taker as of Irish stock, either Irish born or second generation." (95)

Burstein, Alan. "Immigrants and Residential Mobility," in *Philadelphia: Work, Space, Family, and Group Experience in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

"Primarily residential in character, the city directories indicate that the area was laced with small business establishments and services, usually owned by individuals of Irish surname, whereas industry was located on the periphery of the area, within walking distance but removed from the residences. While clearly an area characterized by an Irish presence, the southwest did not house the Irish immigrants of the lowest socio-economic status. Rather, the Irish in the southwest tended to be relatively older, more skilled, more literate, and more likely to own property than were the Irish settling north of the central district. The area was typified, then, by immigrants who had achieved some degree of social stability. It can be shown, in fact, that the immigrants who most typically moved to the southwest were skilled craftsmen, slightly older than the mainstream of Irish adult males, who appear to have been in the process of family formation and child raising." (199)



To be continued...