

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

**1 NAME**

HISTORIC

Henry O. Tanner Homesite

AND/OR COMMON

Henry O. Tanner Homesite

**2 LOCATION**

STREET & NUMBER

2908 W. Diamond Street

\_\_ NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Philadelphia

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

Second

STATE

Pennsylvania

\_\_ VICINITY OF

CODE  
42

COUNTY

Philadelpha

CODE

101

**3 CLASSIFICATION**

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE
<input type="checkbox"/> DISTRICT	<input type="checkbox"/> PUBLIC	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE <input type="checkbox"/> MUSEUM
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> BUILDING(S)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE	<input type="checkbox"/> UNOCCUPIED	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCIAL <input type="checkbox"/> PARK
<input type="checkbox"/> STRUCTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> BOTH	<input type="checkbox"/> WORK IN PROGRESS	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATIONAL <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PRIVATE RESIDENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> SITE	<b>PUBLIC ACQUISITION</b>	<b>ACCESSIBLE</b>	<input type="checkbox"/> ENTERTAINMENT <input type="checkbox"/> RELIGIOUS
<input type="checkbox"/> OBJECT	<input type="checkbox"/> IN PROCESS	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: RESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> GOVERNMENT <input type="checkbox"/> SCIENTIFIC
	<input type="checkbox"/> BEING CONSIDERED	<input type="checkbox"/> YES: UNRESTRICTED	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRIAL <input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY <input type="checkbox"/> OTHER

**4 OWNER OF PROPERTY**

NAME

Mr. Robert Thornton

STREET & NUMBER

2908 W. Diamond Street

CITY, TOWN

Philadelphia

\_\_ VICINITY OF

STATE  
Pennsylvania

**5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION**

Book JAH, No. 269  
pp. 145-147

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC

Registry of Deeds, City Hall, Room 153

STREET & NUMBER

Broad and Market Streets

CITY, TOWN

Philadelphia

STATE

Pennsylvania 19107

**6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS**

TITLE

None Known

DATE

\_\_ FEDERAL    \_\_ STATE    \_\_ COUNTY    \_\_ LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

## 7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED      DATE _____
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

---

### DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Henry O. Tanner's Homesite is a three-story masonry structure with wood framed bay (front facade) and wood shed (rear facade). Both the bay and cornice have been recently altered and covered with aluminum siding so that their original architectural character is no longer clear.

There is evidence, however, in the base of the front facade as well as the entrance that the architectural mode is Greek Revival Style.

All of the windows in the North facade (front) have been changed from original construction. The South facade (rear) is in poor repair and shows sign of a wood shed being added after original construction.

The entire interior of the building has been altered.

# 8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD		AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN		
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION		
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	<b>Afro-American History</b>	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION				

SPECIFIC DATES **Henry O. Tanner (1859-1937)** BUILDER/ARCHITECT  
**Residency (1872-1888)** **Not Known**

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Henry O. Tanner is one of the best known of black American artists, although he spent most of his life in France and in the Near East. Throughout his career he was honored and received international fame: the National Academy of Design in New York elected him full academician with an associate membership, and his paintings are owned by many prominent museums within the United States, as well as the Luxembourg Gallery in Paris. His wide - spread acclaim in Europe caused the United States to recognize his talents. Tanner's prizes, medals and awards are numerous. He is one of the few American artists to receive the coveted Legion of Honor of France. Some of his artistic achievements include: The Banjo Lesson (1893), The Music Lesson (1894), Daniel in the Lion's Den (1896), The Raising of Lazarus (1897), The Two Disciples at the Tomb (1906) and The Return from the Crucifixion.

Tanner's artistic style defied stylistic categories during his lifetime and even today. Art historical evaluations tend to rely greatly on labels and slots to help identify and define the significance of artistic trends and their creators. Those artists who did not fit into the various stylistic movements were, of course, hard to deal with in critical and comparative terms. It has not been unusual in the course of history that such individuals were unjustly ignored. Thus, we have the plight of Henry Ossawa Tanner whose career was complicated by his Afro-American heritage which stood as a deterrent to his renowned success in the United States. To become a black artist in an American society of the nineteenth century was indeed, hardly ordinary -- on the contrary, it was most unusual. For Tanner it was not enough to become the best of his people, he desired to be a success as an artist in the complete sense of the word and strove diligently to pursue and realize his goal. Holding fast to these ambitions, Henry Tanner proceeded to forge for himself a firm and significant position in the annuals of American art and culture.

BIOGRAPHY

On June 21, 1859 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Henry Ossawa was born to Bishop Benjamin Tucker Tanner and Sarah Miller Tanner. In 1866 the Tanners moved to Philadelphia and by 1872 established what is known as the Tanner House at 2908 Diamond Street, where they subsequently enjoyed the social and religious status of a black middle-class family.

## 9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Mathews, Marcia M. Henry Ossawa Tanner. Chicago 1969.

Pincus-Witten, Robert. "Washington: Long Overdue Retrospective," Artforum.  
October 1969.

(continued)

## 10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY less than one acre

UTM REFERENCES

A	1,8	4,8,4	4,9,0	4,4	26	1,9,0	B					
	ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING				ZONE	EASTING		NORTHING	
C							D					

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Henry O. Tanner Homesite at 2908 Diamond Street sits on the south side of Diamond Street facing north. A connected row house, boundaries on the east and west sides are the walls of the house. On the north side the curb of Diamond Street and on the south side (rear) an access alleyway form the limits of the property.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

## 11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE

Lynne Gomez Graves, Historical Projects Director

ORGANIZATION

Afro-American Bicentennial Corporation

DATE

3 February 1976

STREET & NUMBER

1420 N Street, N.W. Suite 103

TELEPHONE

(202) 462-2519

CITY OR TOWN

Washington,

STATE

D.C.

## 12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL

STATE

LOCAL

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE

DATE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST:

DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
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Henry's decision to become a painter was made rather impulsively at an early age. Walking with his father through Philadelphia's Fairmount Park he recalled seeing an artist at work on a painting. Hardly more than twelve or thirteen years old, Tanner described the initial experience which spawned his decision to become an artist:

The subject the artist had chosen was a middle distance hillside with a magnificent elm in bold relief . . . It was this simple event that, as it were, set me on fire . . . But, after seeing this artist at work for an hour, it was decided on the spot, by me at least, that I would become one, and I assure you it was no ordinary one I had in mind.<sup>1</sup>

Immediately following Tanner's experience in the park, he set about to fashion a palette from an old geography book, placed a hole through it for his thumb, cut a piece of awning from a window and began to paint with house paintbrushes. Thereafter and throughout his teens, he would sketch, paint, draw and model landscapes and animals. These were crucial years in Tanner's development. Bishop Tanner was a cultured and intelligent man who sought to expose his family to many educational opportunities. He had a favorable attitude toward Henry's early preoccupations with artistic expression, however, he feared for his son's future success as a black artist.

Henry Tanner's aspirations were not without motivation and examples. In 1876, the Philadelphia Centennial was held in the same Fairmount Park where Tanner had seen the painter working in his youth. Two black artists were included in that exhibition--Edmonia Lewis (c. 1843-1900), a sculptress and Edward Bannister (1828-1901), a landscape painter who had won a first prize medal for his work Under the Oaks. Both of these individuals had received national recognition by the time of this exhibition and their success at the Centennial confirmed the importance of their contributions to American and Afro-American art and culture. Their success also reaffirmed Henry Tanner's own convictions in studying art.

In 1880 Tanner enrolled at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Art and studied under the noted American painter Thomas Eakins. It was at the Academy that Tanner received his first lessons in "unflinching draftsmanship." Eakins was a demanding and radical instructor who sought to train his students in a forthright manner using nude models as well as cadavers.

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Tanner thrived under Eakins' instruction and learned important lessons in the use of light, sensitivity of structure, weight and volume, and how to translate these forms within two dimensional space. By 1882 Tanner left the Pennsylvania Academy. For the next six years he sold illustrations to New York Publishers, and held exhibitions at the Pennsylvania Academy and the National Academy of Design in New York.

In 1888 Tanner decided a change was necessary and moved to Atlanta. He opened a photography studio which would enable him to establish himself while providing support while he painted.

The project was abandoned after Tanner obtained a teaching position at Clark College in Atlanta. That same year he sold the photographic gallery and traveled to the mountains of North Carolina where he began painting, drawing and photographic work before beginning his appointment at Clark. In North Carolina, Tanner found newer and more interesting subject matter to inspire him. The small mountain cabins of blacks who lived on the Blue Ridge Mountains intrigued him and he made numerous drawings of the locale and its people. One of his most famous canvases, apparently done a few years later, was an outgrowth of his experience in the Mountains. The Banjo Lesson (1893), executed while in Paris, is remarkable in its play of lights and harmonies. It caused much excitement in France as well as the United States. Black intellectuals had hoped for an artistic savior of sorts, someone to project positive black images with which a newly freed black population could relate and identify. W. S. Scarborough, then the Vice President of Wilberforce University described the emotional and intellectual climate of that time:

When The Banjo Lesson appeared many of the friends of the race sincerely hoped that a portrayal of Negro life by a Negro artist had arisen indeed. They hoped, too, that the treatment of race subjects by him would serve to counterbalance so much that has made the race only a laughing stock subject for those artists who see nothing in it but the most extravagantly absurd and grotesque. But this was not to be.<sup>2</sup>

Instead, this specific type of subject matter would become a part of a large grouping of genre motifs.

Following the tradition of most American artists, Tanner decided in 1891 to travel to Europe. His original destination was Rome via London, however, upon his arrival in France he was

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completely captivated by Paris. At last Tanner felt comfortable and secure in his new surroundings. Henry Tanner was an extremely sensitive person and the racial climate of the United States in the late nineteenth century was so harsh that it literally forced him to seek a new life with a far more congenial environment in which to live and work. Circumstances which drove him to Europe are intensely described as Tanner related how a white artist, C. H. Shearer (then a well-known painter) comforted the depressed young black artist:

... his kindly nature and gentle disposition helped to reduce the bitterness I (at times) had in my life ... Every time any incidents (racial) came into my mind ... I was anew tortured by the thought of what I had endured almost as much as by the incident itself.<sup>3</sup>

Tanner was to live out the rest of his life permanently in France, making intermittent trips to the United States for visits and exhibitions.

During the 1890's Tanner studied with Jean-Joseph Benjamin-Constant and Jean Paul Laurens at the Academie Julien. Later he developed a close friendship with Benjamin Constant. After a few hard lean years of study, success came his way with the acceptance of The Music Lesson (1894) for exhibition in the Paris Salon. In 1896 Daniel in the Lion's Den, one of his first religious paintings, won an honorable mention; and in 1897 The Raising of Lazarus was awarded a third-class medal and was subsequently purchased by the French government for the Luxembourg Gallery. Two have ones works accepted for exhibition much less to be awarded any honors in the Paris Salons was almost the only way an artist could gain recognition in nineteenth century Europe. Thus, Henry Ossawa Tanner had established himself and his talent as a major force to be observed.

The years of 1897-1898 were spent in extensive travel to the Holy Land. He painted, sketched and drew in and around Jerusalem, Palestine and the Dead Sea. Some of Tanner's finest paintings were created as a result of this travel.

Blue and blue-green hues pervade his works as does a certain enamel-glaze like technique which left a thick and textured impasto surface to his paintings. Not only had Tanner succeeded with a style atypical of that period, but he also developed a technique with which to complement his creative imagery.

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In 1899 Henry Tanner and Jessie M. Olssen (who had once modeled for The Annunciation (1898) were married. Four years later their son Jesse was born. Throughout the following years Tanner continued to win numerous awards and exhibited widely. These active years were interrupted by World War I when he and his family fled to England in 1914. Returning to France a year later he began to work with the Red Cross from 1917-1918. Tanner's two most coveted prizes were awarded in 1923 and 1927. First he was elected Chevalier of the Legion of Honor in 1923, and then in 1927 the National Academy of Design in New York elected him full academican. He was the first American black to ever receive such awards.

The bulk of Henry Tanner's oeuvre were religious motifs. But they were more than just Biblical tales and visual narratives. Tanner's religious imagery had to do more with an introspective spiritualism and mysticism struggling within each canvas to transcend the ordinary in order to meet some common denominator of inner unity and peace.

Much of the total impact of Henry Tanner's efforts were in a large part usurped by the modernist movements set forth by Picasso and Braque. His position and significance in western art is best summed up in a 1969 review of a retrospective exhibition of his work:

The sources of Henry Tanner's art are often not obvious, but they are permeating--pre-Raphaelitism, a hard factual strain developed under Eakins, an early predilection for genre, begun in Philadelphia and intensified in the studio of Benjamin-Constant, a mystical and Symbolist propensity that tells of the influence of Ryder, Redon and Whistler, a passionate attachment to Rembrandt. Yet for all this absorption, Henry Tanner cannot be dismissed as a turn of the century "pasticheur." Indeed, several of his works equal the achievements of many of the masters I have mentioned and, in the case of Benjamin-Constant at least, unquestionably surpasses them.<sup>4</sup>

On May 25, 1937, Henry Ossawa Tanner died in France having returned to the United States only once after his departure in 1891. Fortunately with the advent of a much needed reappraisal of American artists, especially those of Afro-American descent, the image of Henry O. Tanner and his contributions to American art will rise to the stature he so earnestly strived for and so rightfully deserved.



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CONTINUATION SHEET Homesite ITEM NUMBER 8 PAGE Six (reference notes)

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1. Henry Ossawa Tanner, "The Story of an Artist's Life, " World's Work (June & July 1909), vol. 18, p. 11662.
2. "Henry Ossian (sic ) Tanner, " Southern Workman (December 1902), p. 663.
3. Henry Ossawa Tanner, "The Story of An Artist's Life, " World's Work (June & July 1909), vol. 18, p. 11663.
4. Robert Pincus-Witten, "Washington: Long Overdue Retrospective, " Artforum (October 1969), p. 71.

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PAGE Two

Southern Workman. "Henry Ossian (sic) Tanner." December 1902.

Tanner, Bishop Benjamin Tucker. "Day Book" manuscript. Library of Congress,  
Manuscript Division, Washington, D. C.

Tanner, Henry Ossawa. "The Story of An Artist's Life," World's Work, vol. 18  
1909.

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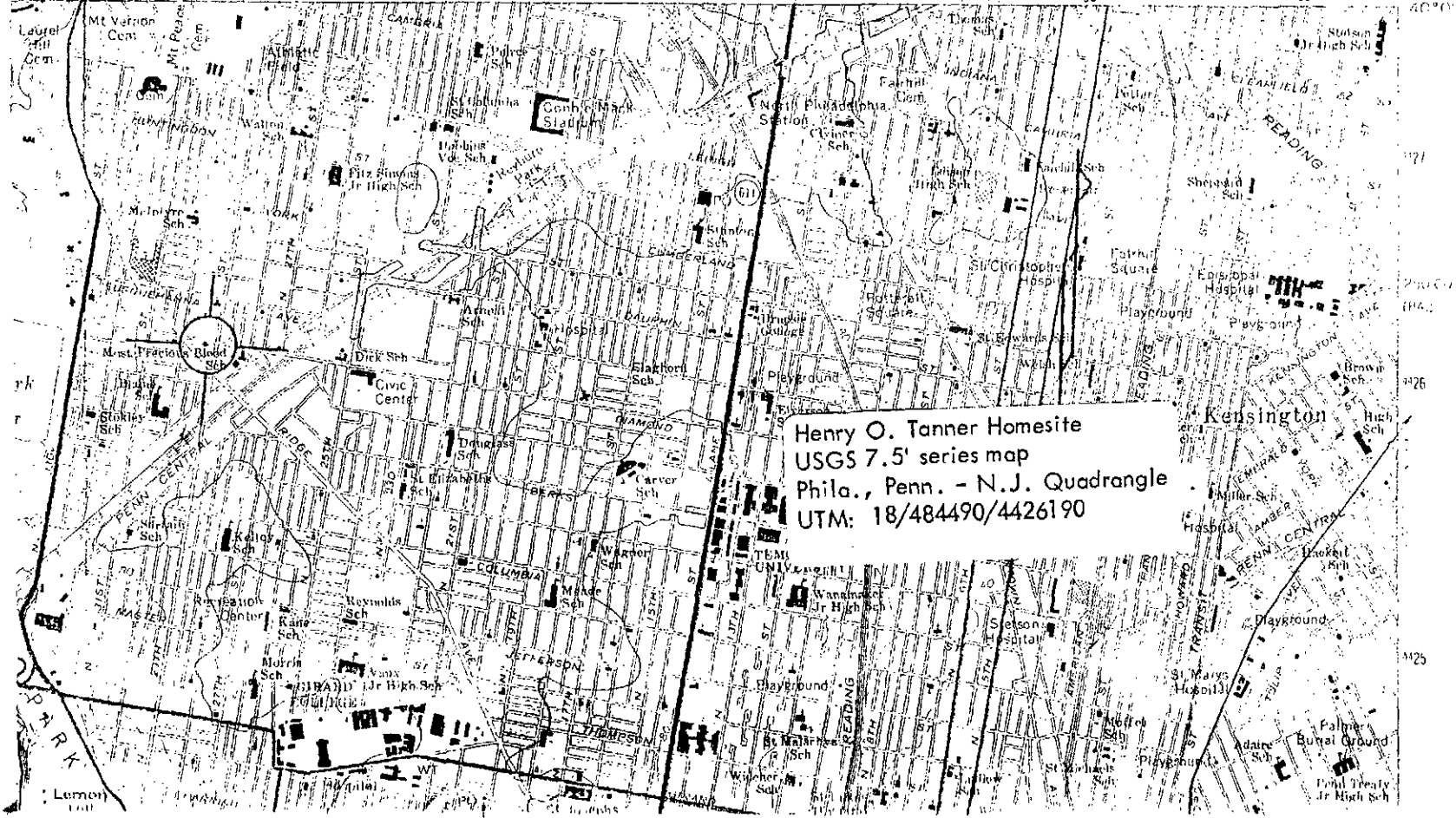
PAGE Two (researcher)

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Leslie King Hammond, Ph.D.  
Art Department  
Maryland Institute College of Art  
Baltimore, Maryland

PHILADELPHIA QUADRANGLE  
PENNSYLVANIA-NEW JERSEY  
7.5 MINUTE SERIES (TOPOGRAPHIC)

5964 11 SW (GERMANTOWN) #85 10' #86 LASTON 54 MI JENKINTOWN 7 MI 2 730 000 FEET (PA.) #88 189 75° 07' 35" W



Henry O. Tanner Homesite  
USGS 7.5' series map  
Phila., Penn. - N.J. Quadrangle  
UTM: 18/484490/4426190

PHILADELPHIA