



# THE SOCIETY OF ARCHITECTURAL HISTORIANS PHILADELPHIA CHAPTER



## THE HISTORY OF NEON IN PHILADELPHIA

by Len Davidson, Curator of the Neon Museum of Philadelphia

**NEW DATE - Wednesday, March 24, 6:00 p.m.**

*(originally scheduled for Thursday, February 25)*

**Philadelphia Center for Architecture, 1218 Arch Street**

From McGillin's Old Ale House to Levis Hotdog--neon signs have helped illuminate many Philadelphia landmarks. The city has been a major manufacturer of creative neon signage since the 1930s. During the middle of the 20th century, neon signs turned North America's cities and roadsides into a luminous wonderland. Add in the magic of animation, and signs became spectaculars. These unforgettable depictions of exploding bowling pins, crashing cars, baton twirling majorettes, and lassoing cowboys were fodder for legend and lore.

Encouragingly, some cities across the United States and Canada are trying to preserve their few remaining neon treasures. Philadelphia has been at the forefront of this movement, and there are several initiatives to create a sign district in the city, as well as to display more of the museum's collection. Unlike 19th-century wooden and metal shop signs that have overwhelmingly disappeared, it is hoped that our 20th-century neon treasures can be saved. Len Davidson will discuss the history of this electrifying folk art.

Len Davidson began collecting neon in the 1970s and has collected and/or preserved more than 200 vintage signs, including The Reading Terminal Market, Pat's Steaks, Levis Hotdog, and McGillin's Old Ale House. He started an award-winning custom sign business in 1979 and the Neon Museum of Philadelphia in 1985. The Museum's mission is to preserve, restore and display classic neon signs for the public to enjoy. About 100+ neon pieces in the collection date to the 1950's and earlier. He publishes a line of neon postcards and is the author of *Vintage Neon*, Schiffer Press, 1999. Thirteen of Davidson's signs are on display at the Center for Architecture and others also pictured at [www.DavidsonNeon.com](http://www.DavidsonNeon.com).

Cost: \$5.00 for members of Phila SAH, Oliver Evans SIA and Philadelphia AIA; \$10.00 for all others. Participants can pay at the door either in cash or by check payable to Philadelphia Chapter SAH. Questions: call Len Davidson at 215-232-0478 or email [Len@DavidsonNeon.com](mailto:Len@DavidsonNeon.com)

*co-sponsored by the AIA Phila Historic Preservation Committee*