

NOMINATION OF HISTORIC BUILDING, STRUCTURE, SITE, OR OBJECT
PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL COMMISSION

SUBMIT ALL ATTACHED MATERIALS ON PAPER AND IN ELECTRONIC FORM (CD, EMAIL, FLASH DRIVE)
ELECTRONIC FILES MUST BE WORD OR WORD COMPATIBLE

1. ADDRESS OF HISTORIC RESOURCE (must comply with an Office of Property Assessment address)

Street address: 2527-37 North Broad Street

Postal code: 19132 Councilmanic District: 5

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: The E. A. Wright Bank Note Company

Current/Common Name: The E. A. Wright Building

3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

☒ Building ☐ Structure ☐ Site ☐ Object

4. PROPERTY INFORMATION

Condition: ☐ excellent ☐ good ☒ fair ☐ poor ☐ ruins
Occupancy: ☒ occupied ☐ vacant ☐ under construction ☒ unknown

Current use: Commercial/Industrial

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Please attach

6. DESCRIPTION

Please attach

7. SIGNIFICANCE

Please attach the Statement of Significance.

Period of Significance (from year to year): from 1913-1962

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: Built: 1913

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: Engineer: William Steele & Sons

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: Unknown

Original owner: The E. A. Wright Bank Note Company

Other significant persons: NA

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION:

The historic resource satisfies the following criteria for designation (check all that apply):

- ☐ (a) Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past; or,
- ☐ (b) Is associated with an event of importance to the history of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- ☐ (c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style; or,
- ☒ (d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen; or,
- ☒ (e) Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- ☐ (f) Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation; or,
- ☐ (g) Is part of or related to a square, park or other distinctive area which should be preserved according to an historic, cultural or architectural motif; or,
- ☐ (h) Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City; or,
- ☐ (i) Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in pre-history or history; or
- ☒ (j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

8. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Please attach

9. NOMINATOR

Organization The Keeping Society of Philadelphia Date January 26, 2019
Name with Title Oscar Beisert, Architectural Historian Email Keeper@keepingphiladelphia.org
Street Address 1315 Walnut Street, Suite 320 Telephone 717.602.5002
City, State, and Postal Code Philadelphia, PA 19107
Nominator ☐ is ☒ is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: 26 January 2019
☒ Correct-Complete ☐ Incorrect-Incomplete Date: 7 October 2019
Date of Notice Issuance: 10 October 2019
Property Owner at Time of Notice
Name: 2509 N Broad Street Associates LLC
Address: 2190 Jefferson Lane
City: Huntington Valley State: PA Postal Code: 19006
Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: _____
Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: _____
Date of Final Action: _____
☐ Designated ☐ Rejected

NOMINATION

FOR THE

PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES



Fig. 1. Looking east at the primary (west) elevation of the subject property.
Source: Atlas, City of Philadelphia, 2018.

THE E. A. WRIGHT BANK NOTE CO.

FORMERLY THE LARGEST STEEL ENGRAVING PLANT IN AMERICA.

✦
ERECTED 1913

✦
FOUNDED 1872

✦
**2527–37 NORTH BROAD STREET
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA**

*Nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places
The E.A. Wright Bank Note Company, 2527–37 North Broad Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*

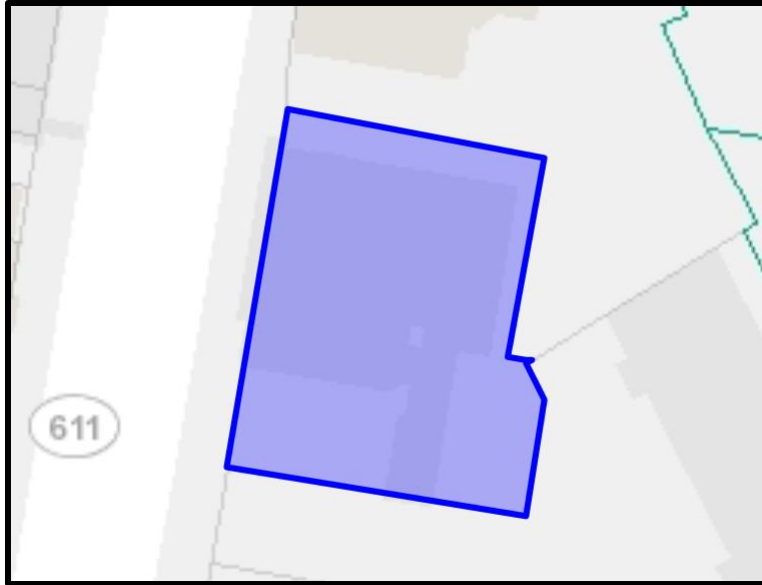


Fig. 2. The boundary for the proposed designation is delineated in blue.
Source: Atlas, City of Philadelphia, 2018.

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundary for the designation of the subject property is as follows:

BEGINNING at a point on the Southeasterly side of Broad Street (113 feet wide) measured Northeastwardly along the said Southeasterly side of Broad Street the distance of 214 feet 3 inches from the Northeasterly side of Cumberland Street (50 feet wide); thence extending North II degrees 21 minutes East along the said Southeasterly side of Broad Street and passing along the Northwesternly end of a driveway which leads Southeastwardly from said Broad Street the distance of 196 feet 0 inches to a point; thence South 78 degrees 39 minutes East passing said driveway crossing a concrete platform and passing through a basement level open area 120 feet 0 inches to a point; thence North II degrees 21 minutes East 0 feet 3 inches to a point; thence South 78 degrees 39 minutes East along the Northeasterly side of said basement level open area 9 feet 0 inches to a point on the Southeasterly side thereof; thence South II degrees 21 minutes West passing through said basement level open area 99 feet 4.5 inches to a point; thence South 78 degrees 43 minutes 30 seconds East 6 feet 11.5 inches to a point; thence South 25 degrees 33 minutes East passing through the wall 123 feet 4.75 inches to a point; thence South 11 degrees 21 minutes West passing through a wall 57 feet 10.375 inches to a point; thence North 78 degrees 39 minutes West passing through a wall 68 feet 10 inches to a point; thence South 11 degrees 21 minutes West 20 feet 3.5 inches to a point; thence North 78 degrees 39 minutes West 81 feet 2 inches to a point on the said Southeasterly side of Broad Street being the first mentioned point and place of beginning.

OPA Property Number 884766800

Philadelphia Deed Registry Number 032N15-0109



Fig. 3. Aerial view of property boundary. Source: City of Philadelphia, Atlas, <https://atlas.phila.gov/>. Accessed 3 October 2019.

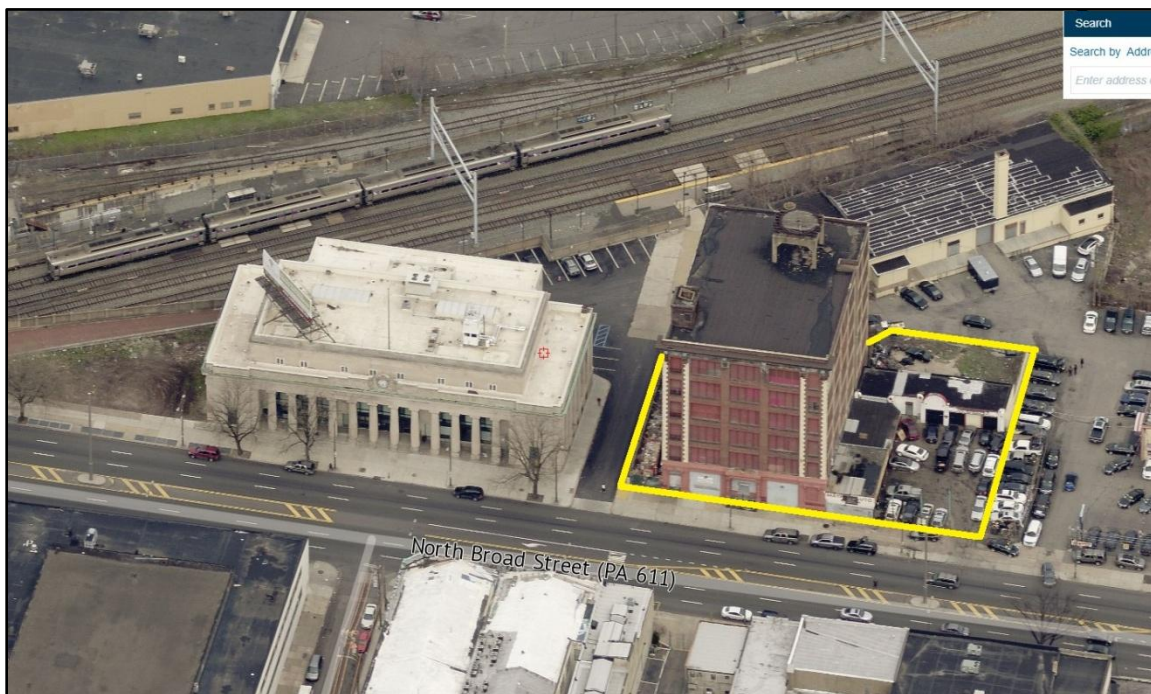


Fig. 4. View looking east showing the front façade of 2527-37 N Broad Street with approximate property boundary. The North Broad Street Station building appears to the left of the subject property.

6. DESCRIPTION

Designed and constructed in 1913, the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company is an impressive industrial building located at 2527-37 North Broad Street in North Philadelphia. The building is located south of W Lehigh Avenue and adjacent to the former North Broad Street Station; to the west of the former Reading Railroad right-of-way; north of Huntingdon Street; and on the east side of North Broad Street.

With a stylized façade of red brick and architectural terra cotta influenced by the Classical and Renaissance Revivals, the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company is a six-story and basement building, measuring 82' by 120', of reinforced-concrete construction with a flat roof. The primary (west) elevation features a single-story base at the ground floor that emulates a rusticated façade with recessed joints articulated in architectural terra cotta. Although the terra cotta on the base level has been painted, it retains its historic integrity. The regularized fenestration features three large central bays of equal size, flanked by single, narrow bays at the north and south ends of the primary (west) elevation.

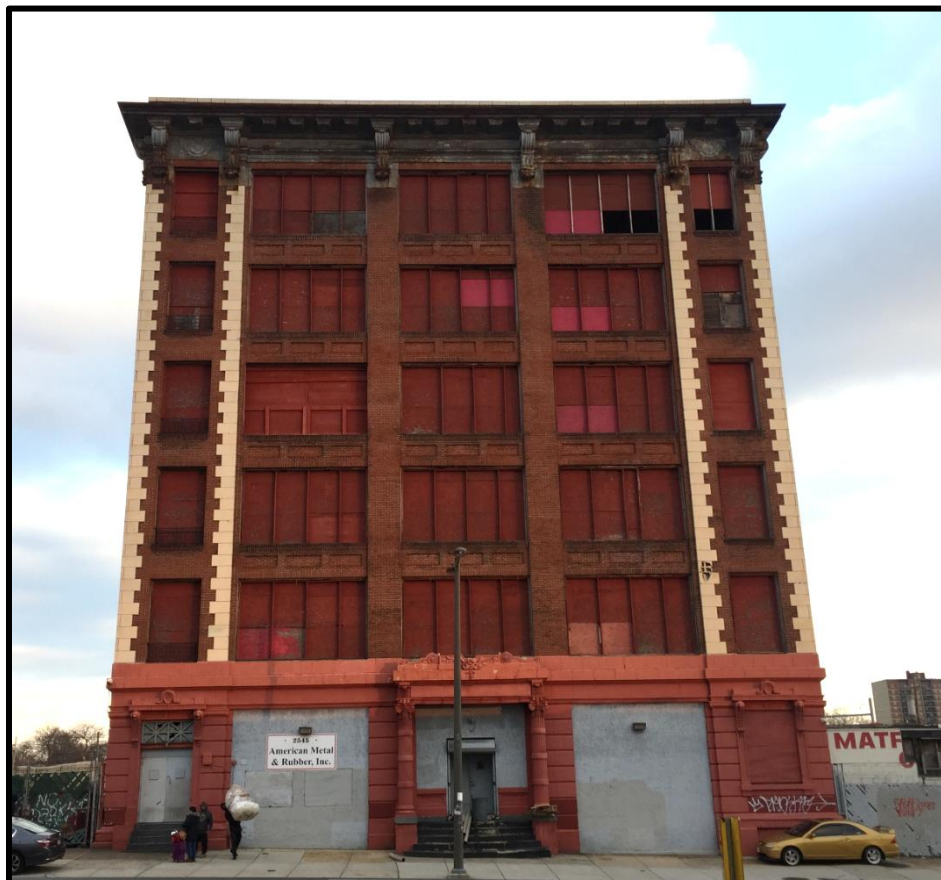


Fig. 5. Above: Looking east at the primary (west) elevation of the subject property.
Source: Oscar Beisert, 2018. Source: Pictometry, Atlas, City of Philadelphia, 2018.



Fig. 6. Looking northeast at the central entrance portico at the primary (west) elevation. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2018.

Returning to the rusticated first floor, finished in architectural terra cotta, this fenestration features a primary, double door entrance (Figure 6). Accessed by a short flight of five steps, a recessed doorway is delineated by a shallow, but still gracious portico, featuring an elaborate entablature with a flat roof that is supported by a pair of impressive banded columns.

Elevated on pedestals that flank the steps, the columns are particularly noteworthy, being of the Ionic order with enriched capitals. The fluted shafts feature tiers of three, equally spaced bands that are molded, but otherwise relatively plain. The upper fourth of the columns features Grecian details within the individual flutes, providing a backdrop for the overhanging features (i.e. volutes and garland) of the capitals. The capitals are also of the Ionic Order, but with scrolls or volutes in the Scamozzi tradition. Extending from the capitals are short strands of garland that form an ensemble of architectural details including the aforementioned flute details. Recessed behind the columns, flanking the entrance, are banded pilasters mirroring the previously described supports with the same tiers of equally spaced bands.

The entablature of the portico features a molded, but relatively simple architrave, followed by a frieze that contains a central blank space that likely once possessed a name: perhaps that of the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company. Within the frieze, flanking the blank portion, are two enriched brackets that provide a visual support for a relatively simple cornice. Extending from and along the front of the corona is an enriched crown or decorated upright slab, emulating the form of an antefix. Articulated in architectural terra cotta, the crown is comprised of a central crest, the upper two-thirds of which has been largely destroyed. The crest is set within an encarpus-like arrangement with ceremonious scroll work at each end. Flanking the central portal are two bays of equal size, delineated by the surrounding rusticated wall; however, the openings once within these sections have been infilled in an unsympathetic manner—an “improvement” that may have led to the removal of the lower portion of the rusticated wall surface.



Fig. 7. Looking east at the northern most bay of the rusticated first floor of the primary (west) elevation of the subject building. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2018.



Fig. 8. Looking east at the south window within the rusticated first floor of the primary (west) elevation. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2018.

Flanking these bays are elaborate portal-like openings that are within canton-like sections of the elevation, necessitated by being at the corners or ends of the primary (west) elevation. The northern bay (Figure 7) features a doorway that is also delineated by the surrounding rusticated wall surface and an elaborate chambranle. Articulated in architectural terra cotta, the chambranle is comprised of paneled ascendants terminating in lion-headed brackets and a transverse that is cornice-like, featuring a crown at center, which includes a crest, containing the initial “W” for Wright, set in garland. Accessed by a short flight of five steps, the double door entrance features replacement metal doors, but retains the original copper hypaethrum, occupying the place of a transom.

At the southernmost bay is an elaborate opening (Figure 8) containing a window that is shuttered with painted plywood. This opening is set opposite the doorway in the northernmost bay, but with the same characteristic and impressive architectural treatment. Also articulated in architectural terra cotta, the window is delineated by the surrounding rusticated wall surface and an elaborate chambranle. This elaborate structural surround is comprised of paneled ascendants, terminating in ornate lion-headed brackets, and a cornice-like transverse, featuring a frieze with a Triglyph motif and the same crown with a Wright-themed crest set in garland. The first floor features a simple entablature, also articulated in architectural terra cotta.



Fig. 9. Looking upward at the second through sixth floors of the primary (west) elevation of the subject building. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2018.

Rising above the ground floor, the upper five floors form a shaft that is clad at the primary (west) elevation in red brick, appearing to be of the tapestry variety, which was often used on commercial and industrial buildings for decoration during this period. The building, which is five irregular bays wide, features a grouped fenestration in regularized grid, recessed behind shallow brick piers that define the upper five levels of the primary (west) elevation.

Set within the projecting brick piers, each of the said three central bays feature one large opening, which originally contained windows typical of the period and building type. These openings are delineated by lintels of solider brick and similar sills. Further defining the openings in the central bays are spandrel-like sections of brick paneling, comprised three equal rectangular recessions in the brick wall surface. The sections of brick paneling are below the openings in the central three bays at the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth floors.

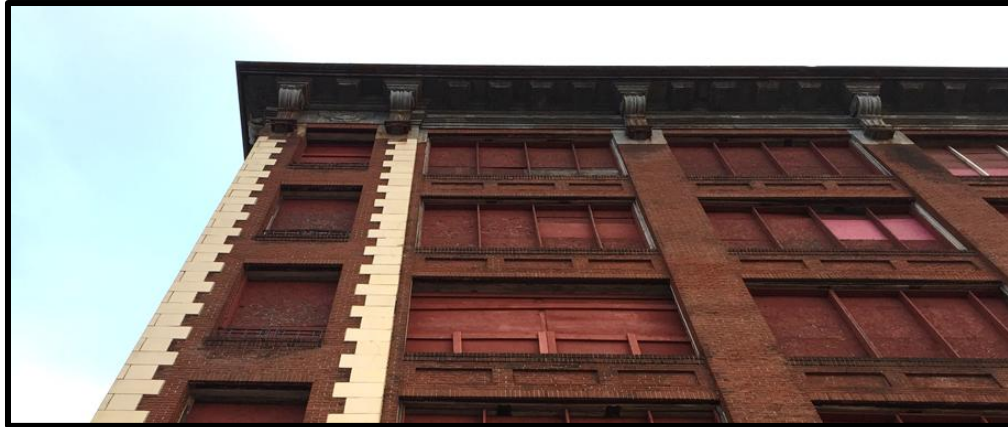


Fig. 10. Looking upward at the third through sixth floors of the primary (west) elevation of the subject building, which shows the various features described—the brick paneling and the iron balustrades. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2018.

The northern and southern most bays of the upper five floors feature one large opening per floor, each of which is delineated by lintels of solid brick and similar sills. Likely related to an open shaft way, the openings in the northern most bay feature decorative iron balustrades atop the brick sills. Framing both the northern and southern bays and the apertures within are vertical strands of quoins that begin above the cornice at the second floor and terminate at the baseline of cornice near the top of the sixth floor. Emulating stone, the quoins appear to be articulated in a lightly-colored architectural terra cotta.

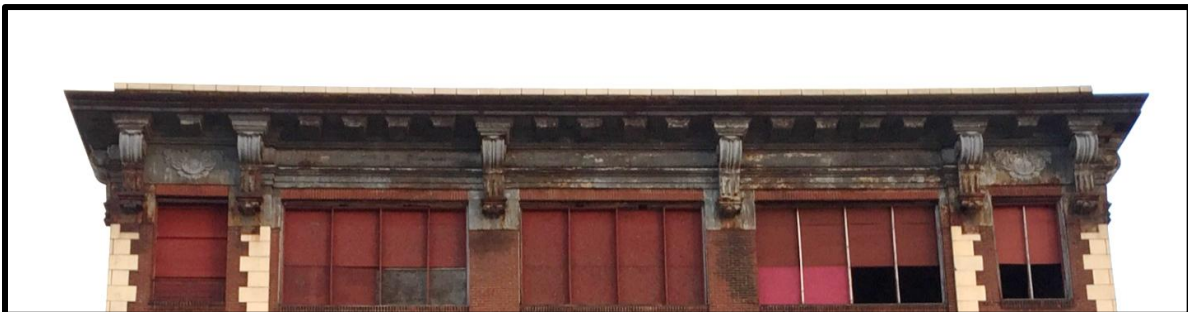


Fig. 11. Looking east at the sixth floor and cornice of the primary (west) elevation of the subject property. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2018.

The building features an elaborate, classical-inspired cornice (Figure 11) that is set off from the façade by six massive brackets, each of which are situated at the termination of each brick pier. Within in the three central bays of the primary (west) elevation is a frieze that features molding and other indiscernible details set between the brackets. Flanking the central section, the northern and southern most bays feature large medallions in the place of the previously-described molding and other details. Supported by the brackets, the cornice projects from the building making room for substantial dentils, four within each of the central bays and one at the center of the northern and southern bays. The cornice is limited to the primary (west) elevation, aside from a slight return that extends a few feet from the west to the side (north and south) elevations. The brick shaft that embodies the bulk of the building appears to rise just above the cornice line and features a simple coping. The stone-like coping also appears to be articulated in the same lightly-colored architectural terra cotta.



Fig. 12a. Left: Looking northwest at the side (south) and rear (east) elevations. Fig. 12b. Right: Looking northwest at the side (south) elevation. Source: Atlas, City of Philadelphia, 2018.

Beyond the primary (west) elevation, the side (north and south) and rear (east) are entirely unadorned, being representative of typical reinforced-concrete construction of the period (Figure 12a and 12b). In all three of these elevations, the reinforced-concrete structure forms grids, within which are partly-lit and blind walls of red brick masonry, and large industrial window openings. Six bays in width, the side (south) elevation is an unadorned wall of brick and concrete with only a few small windows interspersed.

The rear (east) elevation is four bays in width, the southernmost bay being a fenestration of three or four openings per floor that serve a fire escape. The other three bays consist of a fenestration defined by large industrial window openings. Most of the windows have been removed or are in very poor condition. At the center of the rear (east) elevation, between two windows, is a large stack made of yellow masonry units. Near the top of the stack the name Wright is spelled out.

The side (north) elevation is six bays in width, the first three bays from the east are defined by a fenestration of large apertures of equal size on each floor, being designed for large industrial window units, some of which are present on the second floor. The fourth bay from the east was a loading bay at each floor with a central loading egress flanked by windows. The fifth bay from the east is a blind red brick walls on each floor. The final, sixth bay is a brick wall with a single aperture at center, some of the windows of which may be original.

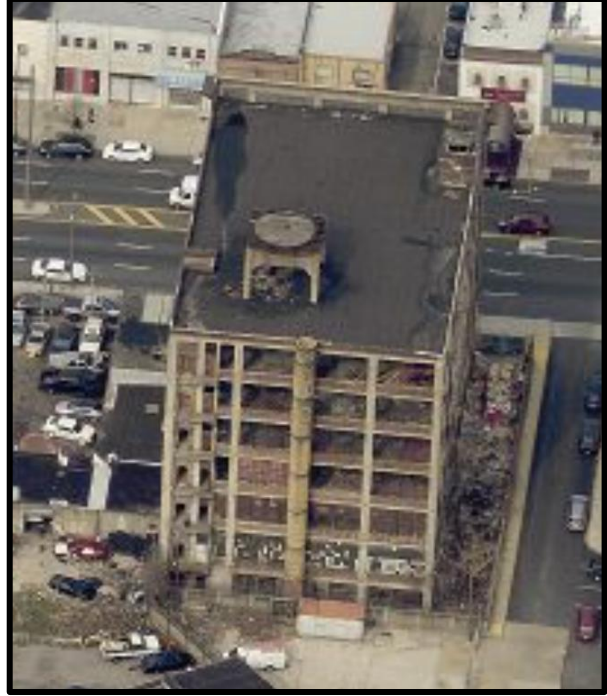
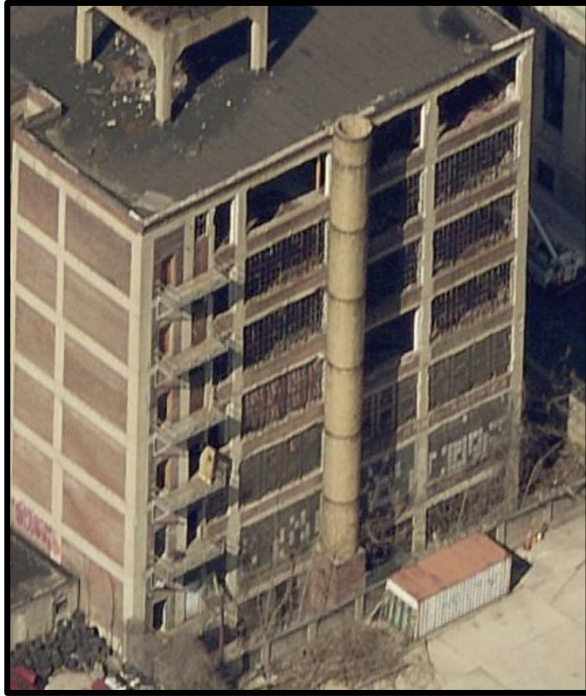


Fig. 13a. Left: Looking northwest at the rear (east elevation of the subject building). Fig. 13b. Right: Looking west at the rear (east) elevation of the subject building. Source: Atlas, City of Philadelphia, 2018.



Fig. 14. Looking southwest at the rear (east) and side (north) elevations.

7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The E.A. Wright Bank Note Company at 2527-37 North Broad Street is a significant historic resource that merits designation by the Philadelphia Historical Commission and inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The subject property satisfies the following Criteria for Designation, as enumerated in Section 14-1004 of the Philadelphia Code:

- (d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen;
- (e) Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; and
- (j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

The period of significance dates from the time the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company commissioned the building in 1913 to 1962, the year the company sold its diploma printing business and no longer had a business presence in Philadelphia.

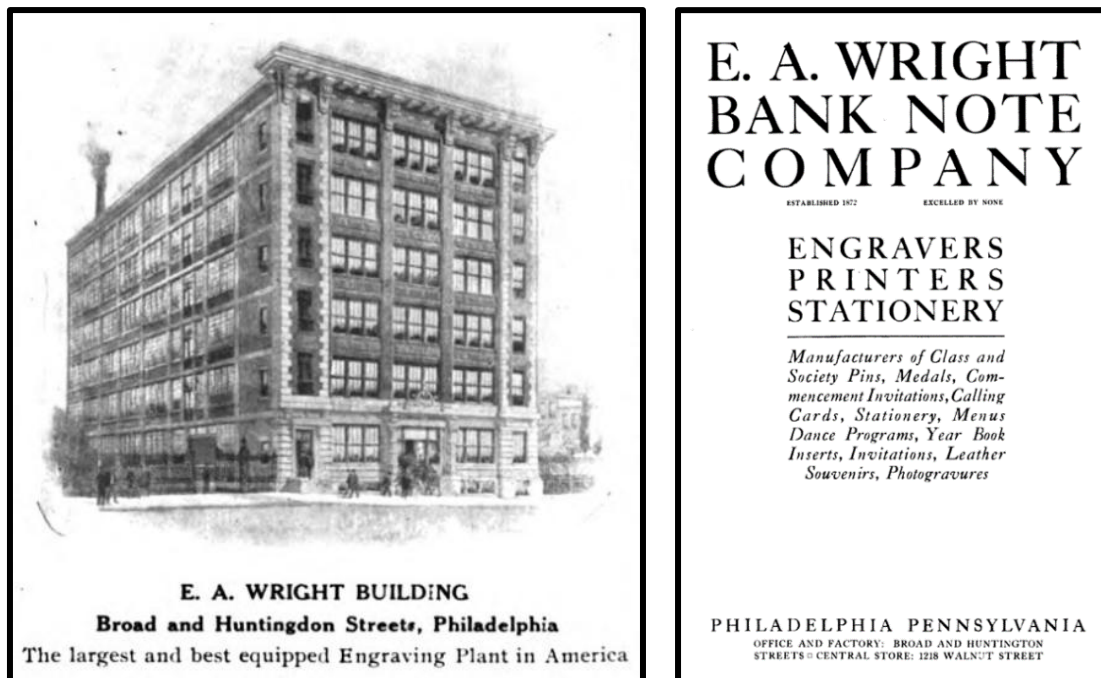


Fig. 15a. Left: Rendering of the subject building, as published in *Walden's Stationer and Printer* in 1915. Fig. 15b. Right: An advertisement in the *Michiganensian* in 1915.

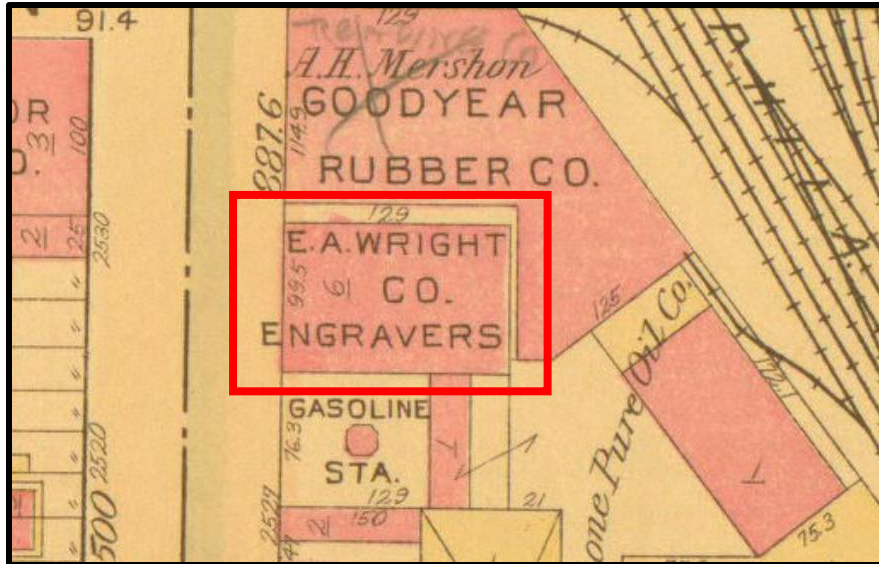


Fig. 3. *Atlas of the City of Philadelphia (Central)*, 1922, by G.W. Bromley. The subject building is delineated in red. Source: Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network.

(j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

The E.A. Wright Bank Note Company at 2527–37 North Broad Street in North Philadelphia is a significant historic resource that exemplifies the cultural, economic, social, and historical heritage of the printing and engraving industry in Philadelphia—specifically, the manufacture of bank notes, stock certificates, and diplomas. Printing and engraving was one of the age-old and preeminent industries of the Quaker City, and Ernest A. Wright, a late comer in the trade, founded his company about 1872 and rose to the top of his field, eventually incorporating as the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company.

During the last decade of the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, the firm became one of the premier producers of diplomas, as well as a leading printer of certificates for banks, securities. The E.A. Wright Bank Note Company competed with the very best of the bank note companies worldwide, including, but not limited to, the American Bank Note Company (ABN), which operated from 1858 to 1990; the Columbian Bank Note Company, which was a Chicago firm founded in 1904, merging with the Security Bank Note Company to become the Security-Columbian Bank Note Company in 1957, surviving until 1990, when purchased by the United States Bank Note Company; the Hamilton Bank Note Company, founded in New York about 1880 and liquidated in 1949, producing foreign stamps and ornate post cards, as well as stocks and bonds; the Northern Bank Note Company, starting as a lithographic printing company in Chicago, printing engraved securities by the 1930s, and serving as a contractor to the Columbian Bank Note Company and the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company, surviving until 1995; the Republic Bank Note Company, based in Pittsburgh, forming in 1904, and merging with the Security Bank Note Company in 1942; and the Security Bank Note Company, founded in 1884 with plants in Philadelphia and Pittsburgh.

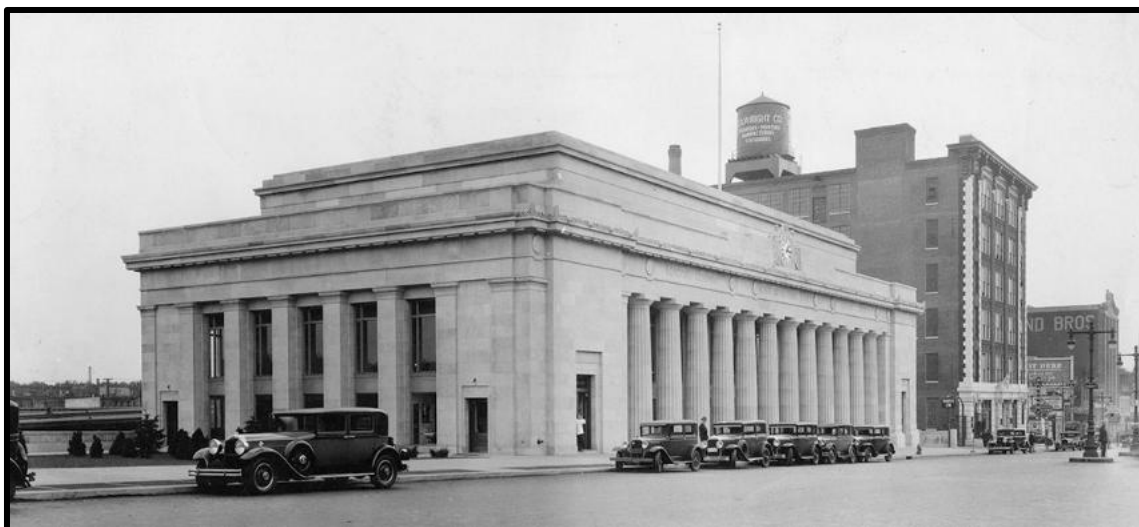


Fig. 4. This view of the North Broad Street Station at 2601 North Broad Street also depicts the E.A. Wright Banknote Company on right. Source: Wikimedia Commons.

The E.A. Wright Bank Note Company's business had become so successful by 1912 that at upon the death of Ernest A. Wright, his heirs acquired the subject parcel and commissioned the erection of a "large modern factory," a six-story building of reinforced-concrete construction.¹ The building, located prominently on North Broad Street, was lauded as "one of the finest buildings in America devoted to the steel and copper plate engraving business."²

The E.A. Wright Bank Note Company manufactured foreign currency during World War II for a number French colonies; postage stamps for a number foreign countries, such as Costa Rica, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Haiti; securities, stocks and bonds for a variety of companies, such as General Motors and R.G. Reynolds, as well as government bodies; checks: such as those for the Philadelphia City Treasurer; and other products including national political convention tickets. These are just a few examples of the products of the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company.

The firm, through its factory—the subject building, produced all of manner of certificates and other products with the employment of modern methods with the most up-to-date equipment and machinery. In 1922, the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company was the second largest electroplating and engraving company the state of Pennsylvania employing 141 people, and by 1934 had 70% of the diploma printing business in the United States.³ While undoubtedly of great local significance, the subject building represents the city's legacy in engraving and printing that served a national and international market until the 1960s.

¹ "E.A. Wright Bank Note Co.'s New Line," *Walden's Stationer and Printer* (25 January 1916): 78.

² "E.A. Wright Bank Note Co.'s New Line," *Walden's Stationer and Printer*.

³ *Industrial Directory of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg: J.L.L. Kuhn, 1922), 1264; "Off the Record: Diplomas," *Fortune*, 1 June 1934.

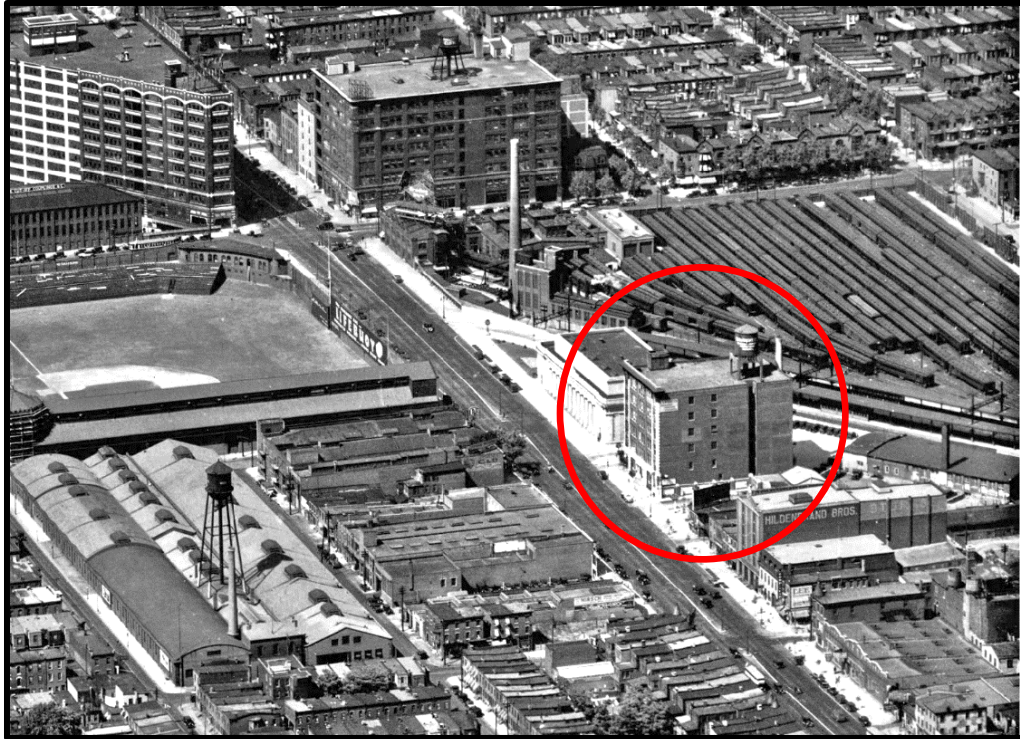


Fig. 18. Top: Looking northeast at the environs of the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company, 1931. Source: J. Victor Dallin Aerial Survey Collection, Hagley Museum and Library

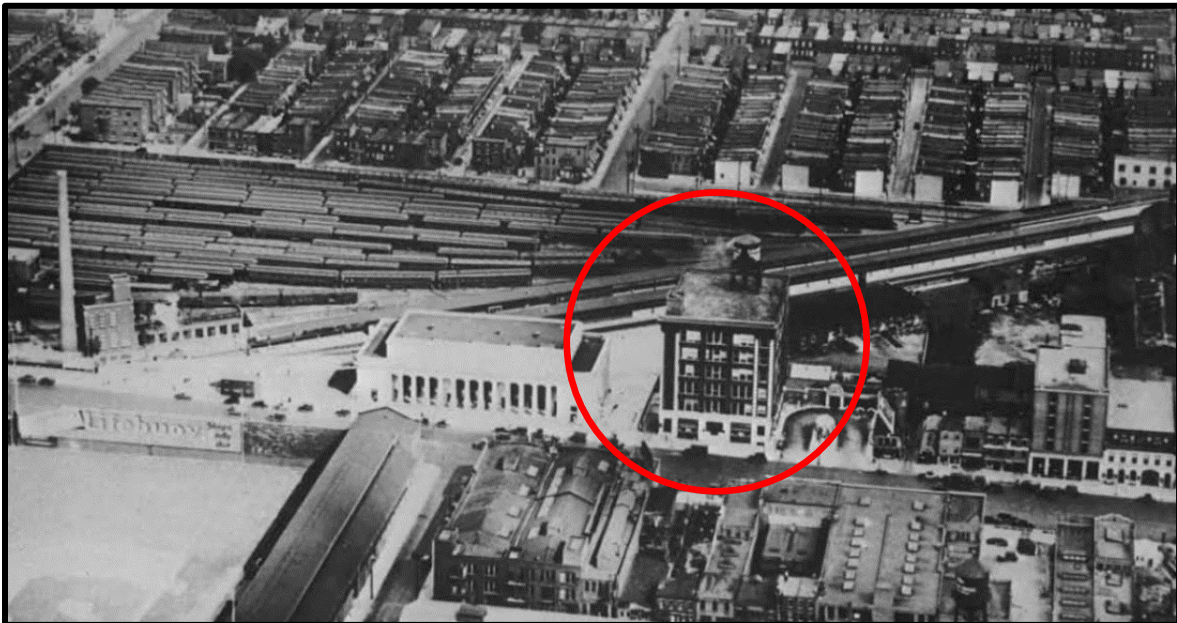


Fig. 19. Bottom: Looking east at the environs of the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company. Source: Fredric Miller, *Still Philadelphia* [Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011], 55.



Fig. 20a. Top: A Participation Certificate of The Sesqui-Centennial Exhibition Association produced by the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company. Source: Google. Fig. 20b. Bottom: Bank Note for Morocco, c. 1943–44, printed by the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company, Philadelphia. Source : <http://www.banknote.ws/COLLECTION/countries/AFR/MRQ/MRQ0024.htm>).

Historic Context: The History of Bank Note and Security Printing

The printing of paper money and bank notes in the United States has its origins in the chronic shortage of coin in British North America. Without a plentiful and reliable medium of exchange the economy of the colonies would never have been able to grow beyond a very basic stage. To combat this issue, many of the colonies resorted to printing their own paper money. Massachusetts was the first to print money of its own in the 1690s.

The practice quickly spread throughout the colonies, and continued during the Revolution with the Continental Congress printing money as well.⁴ Pennsylvania first printed its own money in 1721. As the practice was popularized, the problem of counterfeiting arose. These early bills were mostly products of letterpress printing that were embellished with basic graphic designs in woodcut or copper engraving. Even though a number of ingenious methods were devised – such as Benjamin Franklin’s use of leaf prints as a unique graphic – the problem of counterfeit currency persisted. During the Revolution, the British set up a press in New York that actively counterfeited Continental bills by the thousands.⁵

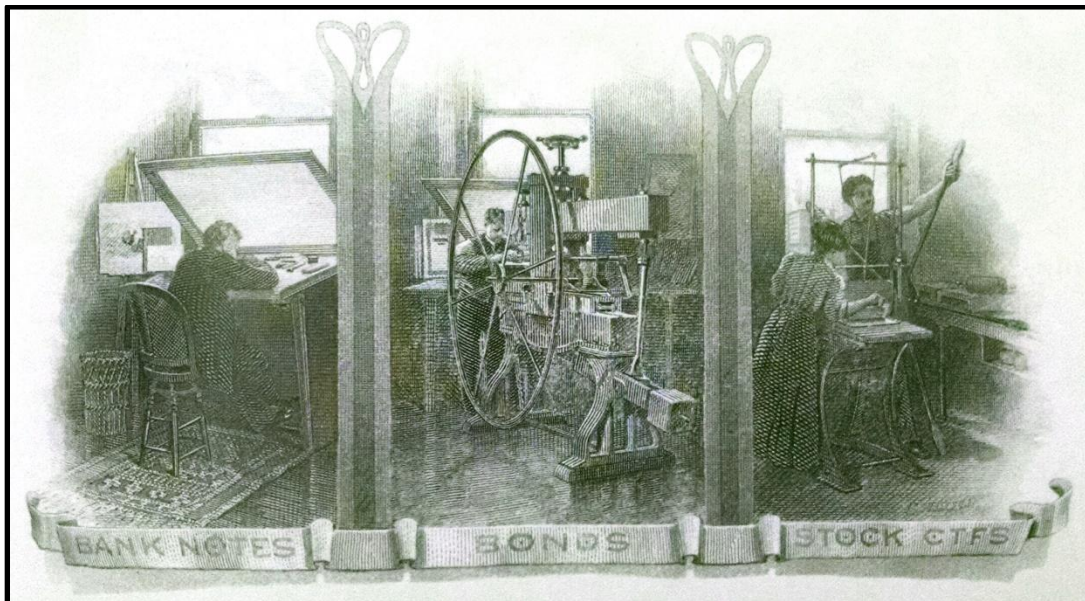


Fig. 21. Illustration depicting the different stages of the bank note engraving process from 1909 starting on the left with the engraving on steel, then the creation of the steel die to create printing plates, and finally the printing process. Source: Mark D. Tomaso, *The Feel of Steel: The Art and History of Bank-Note Engraving in the United States* [New York: The American Numismatic Society, 2012].

⁴ In addition to providing a basic means of exchange, paper money actually was considered more reliable than coin because the value printed on it was the value of the money whereas coins could be shaved and clipped such that the face value did not always match its true value – determined by its weight and type of metal.

⁵ The history present in this section is drawn primarily from: Mark D. Tomaso, *The Feel of Steel: The Art and History of Bank-Note Engraving in the United States* (New York: The American Numismatic Society, 2012); W. Handsel Griffiths, *The Story of the American Bank Note Company* (New York: 1959); and Gene Hessler, *The Engraver’s Line: An Encyclopedia of Paper Money and Postage Stamp Art* (Port Clinton, Ohio: BNR Press, 1993)

Despite efforts to thwart these criminal acts, the problem of counterfeit currency persisted, as the limitations of printing technologies made it impossible to produce like bills with pinpoint precision. At the time printers of currency utilized a copperplate engraving process, which was problematic because the copperplate would wear away during production, and required producing a new plate. The solution was to use steel plates, which proved to be much more durable and precise, allowing for finer lines and marks. It was not until the beginning of the nineteenth century that the technology of steel plate engraving evolved to meet the challenges faced by bank note and security printers.

Philadelphia is where the first applications of steel plate engraving for bank notes and security printing occurred. With the presence of the Federal government from 1790 to 1800, the establishment of the first U.S. Mint in 1792, the establishment of the Bank of North America in 1781, and the First Bank of the United States in 1791, there was great demand in Philadelphia for highly skilled printers who could produce notes and securities that were difficult to recreate illegally. Robert Scot (1745–1825), the first engraver of the U.S. Mint, was one of those individuals. Scot helped to popularize the use of designs on steel plates that were then copied exactly onto other steel plates, which was the discovery of the Massachusetts inventor Jacob Perkins (1766–1849). This process ensured that new steel plates for printing notes and securities could easily once the original deteriorated.

Philadelphia's first modern bank note printing establishment, Murray, Draper, Fairman & Company, was formed in 1810. The partners, George Murray (c.1770–1822), John Draper (1779–1865), and Gideon Fairman (1774–1827), had work experience with several Philadelphia printers, where they learned engraving. Draper was an assistant to Robert Scott. The firm employed all of the latest techniques to create fine steel engravings that provided the necessary security for printing bank notes.⁶ The firm's reputation was such that two of its members went to England at the urging of the British Minister in Washington, D.C., to present their sophisticated printing process to the Bank of England to combat problems they were experience with counterfeit.⁷ Though they were ultimately unsuccessful in securing a contract with the Bank of England, Gideon continued the business, which eventually spawn four different Philadelphia firms by the 1850s.⁸

Though Philadelphia's standing as the financial capital of the United States ended in the 1820s the Quaker City served a large market for bank note production. Before the Federal government printed its own paper money in 1861, all the currency in circulation came from private or state banks. The advent of printing money created a strong demand for the skilled printing of bank notes. The growth of the business coupled with the relatively limited market of skilled engravers of the period, led to the eventual consolidation of the business.⁹ In 1858 seven companies, four of them with roots in Philadelphia, combined to form the American Bank Note Company in New York. This company dominate the bank note market for the much of the nineteenth and

⁶ *The Numismatist*, Volume 33, p. 191-92.

⁷ Toppan, G.W., 100 Years of Bank Note Engraving, (Brown & Brown), 1-10.

⁸ These were Danforth, Perkins & Co., Bald Cousland & Co., Toppan, Carpenter & Co., and Draper, Welsh & Co. (*Story of the American Bank Note Company*, 31).

⁹ Griffiths, William H., *The Story of American Banknote Company*. (William E. Rudge's Sons, 1959).

twentieth centuries. Smaller firms, however, such as the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company, were able to flourish by creating their own niche market within the industry.¹⁰

Prior to Civil War, the main business of bank note companies was the printing of paper money for banks.¹¹ After the introduction of the U.S. “greenback” in 1861 and an 1866 Federal law effectively ended state bank notes, requiring bank note engraving companies to find a new market, which was ultimately stock certificates and bonds. In 1874 the New York Stock Exchange required all companies trading at the exchange to have stocks and bonds engraved “by some responsible Bank Note Engraving Company.”¹² This led to a major increase in the bank note business. Until the 1980s, the physical exchange of stock certificates was required to complete a transaction, paper stock certificates were in many ways like paper money, requiring sophisticated anti-counterfeiting devices. One of the key devices that developed from the bank note era was the use of pictures or vignettes in addition to elaborate and intricate borders.

¹⁰ American Bank Note Company Records, undated, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

¹¹ Generally speaking, the term bank note printing after the Civil War came to mean a company that did intaglio printing (i.e. printing of paper pressed onto an incised metal plate) and lithograph printing.

¹² Quoted in Tomasko, *The Feel of Steel*, 25.

The E.A. Wright Bank Note Company

The E.A. Wright Bank Note Company of Philadelphia was founded in 1872 by Ernest Appelles Wright, a native of England, who arrived in the Quaker City as a young man, “where he had not a single acquaintance.”¹³ Born in the parish of Grappenhall, Cheshire, England on September 16, 1851, Wright grew up in Toronto, Canada and at age fifteen left his family for New York City, where he apprenticed in the engraving trade.¹⁴ Three weeks after finishing his apprenticeship, Wright came to Philadelphia, where he started his business at 919 Chestnut Street in “one room with one apprentice.”

The first three years were a struggle for Wright, however, “during the Centennial year his prospects began to brighten,” when he made a small steel engraving of Memorial Hall. This engraving “accidentally came to the notice of” the famous Philadelphia artist and engraver John Sartain (1808–1897), “then general manager of the art department of the Centennial Exposition. Sartain was so pleased with Wright’s engraving that he purchased the rights to use it on his personal cards.”¹⁵ Wright was awarded a gold medal for this work at the Centennial Exhibition.¹⁶

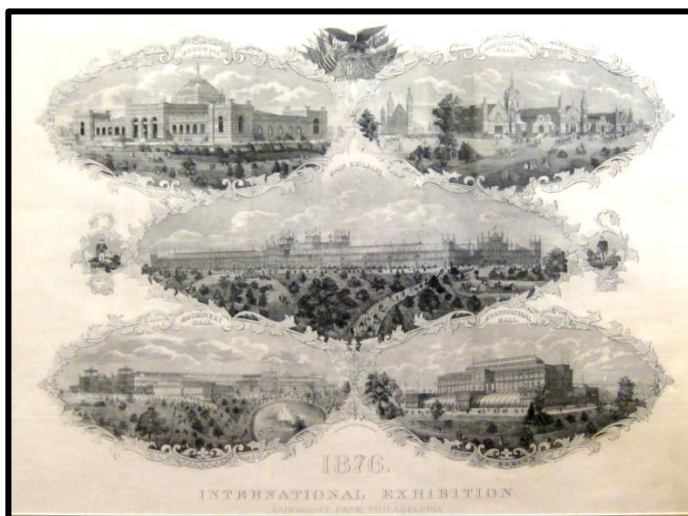
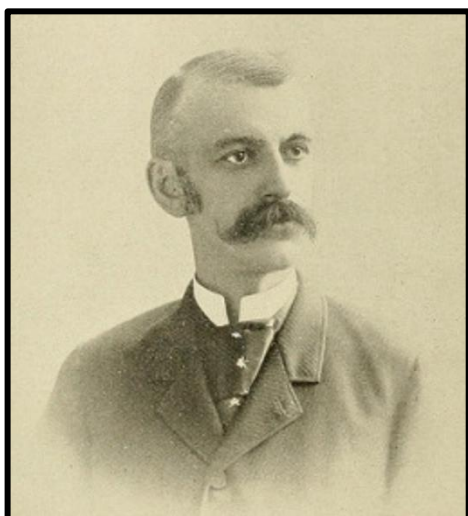


Fig. 22a. Left: Ernest A. Wright, c. 1891. Source: *Philadelphia and Popular Philadelphians* [Philadelphia: The North American, 1891], 230. Fig. 22b. right: Engraving of the 1876 International Exhibition at Fairmont Park, Philadelphia by E.A. Wright. Source: Philadelphia Print Shop.

¹³ *Philadelphia and Popular Philadelphians* (Philadelphia: The North American, 1891), 230.

¹⁴ “Death of E.A. Wright,” *Walden’s Stationer and Printer* v. 35, n. 10 (June 10, 1912), 14.

¹⁵ *Philadelphia and Popular Philadelphians*, 230.

¹⁶ “Founder of Banknote Co. Dead,” *The Printing Trade News* (1912): 43.



Fig. 23a. Left: Trade Card of E.A. Wright, Philadelphia, c. 1891. Source: The Library Company of Philadelphia. Fig. 23b. Right: The building that housed E.A. Wright & Co. at 1108 Chestnut Street (Demolished), Philadelphia Source: *The Official Office Building Directory and Architectural Handbook of Philadelphia*. [Philadelphia: The Commercial Publishing and Directory Co., 1899], 724.

After the Centennial, Wright's business increased exponentially, requiring, by 1891, additional presses, and 150 employees, an operation which filled the upper floors of a five-story loft at 1108 Chestnut Street (Figure 23b). Wright advertised as a "Bank Note Engraver," "Lithographer," and "Plate Printer" on his trade card, and the building on Chestnut Street included the following signage related to his services and products: "Engraver," "Printer," and "Stationer."¹⁷ The products his company created were typical of the smaller steel plate engraving firms of the period, which produced checks and securities, as well as job-printing for invitations, cards, tickets, diplomas and calendars.¹⁸

The book *Philadelphia and Popular Philadelphians* illustrated Wright's job-printing business in 1891:

No similar hive of industry outside of the Bank Note companies can be seen in this country. Society, with its peculiar customs and "fads" has furnished a large share of work to this establishment. The use of handsomely engraved visiting cards has become so general that, during the holiday season especially, Mr. Wright with his force of engravers has often been obliged to work night after night and to call into requisition the resources of other plate printers, so as to avoid disappointing delays.¹⁹

¹⁷ Trade Card of E.A. Wright, Philadelphia, c. 1891, The Library Company of Philadelphia; *The Official Office Building Directory and Architectural Handbook of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: The Commercial Publishing and Directory Co., 1899), 724.

¹⁸ Tomasko, *The Feel of Steel*, 40.

¹⁹ *Philadelphia and Popular Philadelphians*, 230.

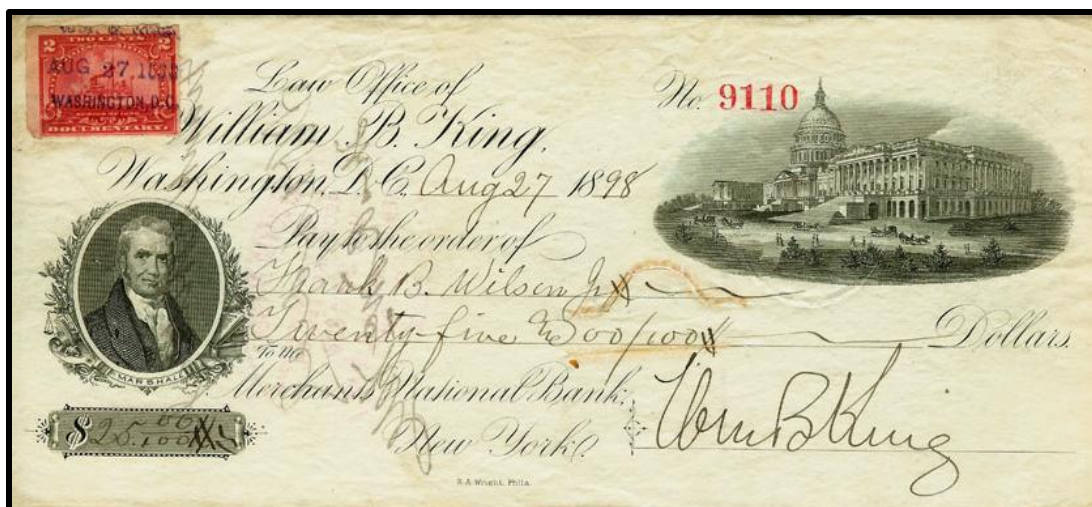


Fig. 24. Bank Check of the Law Office of William B. King, Washington, D.C., August 27, 1898, an early Bank Note type document created by "E.A. Wright, Philadelphia, engravers." Source: <http://www.mtgothictomes.com/checks.htm>.

The extent of his business and embarking on a critical expansion into steel plate engraving and printing in 1891 is also described in *Philadelphia and Popular Philadelphians*:

Commerce has followed in the footsteps of society in its demand upon the engraver. Merchants of the higher class and large manufacturers now use engraved business cards, letter, note and bill heads; and jewelers, merchant tailors and art furniture dealers have found advantage in using beautifully engraved trade announcements. Mr. Wright has now travelling salesmen and resident agents in nearly every city of the United States, Canada, Mexico and South America, and his daily mail averages over two hundred letters during the busy season. Recently [1891] he has embarked largely in the manufacture of the finer grades of envelopes and now supplies business houses with stationery of the best quality. His ambition has also led him to expend many thousands of dollars in the machinery required in bank note engraving, transferring and printing, and he has now a plant sufficient to execute Government contracts, and also railroad, bank and other corporation work.²⁰

²⁰ *Philadelphia and Popular Philadelphians*, 230.



Fig. 25. 1108 and 1110 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, c. 1900, by Frank H. Taylor.
Source: Free Library of Philadelphia.

Over a period of more than three decades Wright “built up a large and successful trade,” which was nationally and internationally known. In 1906, a charter was issued for the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company with a capital stock of \$250,000, which marked a removal from the earlier name. This meant that “another Chestnut Street firm” was “spreading out” to include the bank note engraving business.²¹

STEEL PLATE TRANSFER PRESS
For Transferring Impressions from Hardened Steel Plates or Rolls

USED BY THE FOLLOWING CONCERNS

Bureau of Engraving & Printing, Washington	20 Machines
American Bank Note Co., New York	12 "
John A. Lowell Bank Note Co., Boston	1 "
Western Bank Note Co., Chicago	2 "
Thos. MacDonald, Genoa	2 "
E. A. Wright Bank Note Co., Philadelphia	1 "
Richter & Co., Naples	1 "

GOULD & EBERHARDT
HIGH SPEED SHAPERS
AUTOMATIC SHAPING AND BARK CUTTING MACHINERY
ESTABLISHED 1862

The Waite Die and Plate Press

USERS' OPINIONS

"If we were to order another press today we would order the 'Waite.'"
CLARKE & COURTS, Galveston, Texas.

"We freely express the utmost satisfaction, getting the best of results as to quality of work together with output. Contrary to reports, the machine is not complicated and we can, without hesitation, recommend the 'Waite' to any prospective purchaser."—THE CARGILL CO., Houston, Texas.

"In our opinion the 'Waite' is the best press in the market. It has the best wiper of any of the presses, owing to the fact that it wipes more like the human hand would wipe a plate, while others presses have a flat wipe."—AMERICAN STATIONERY COMPANY, Buffalo, N. Y.

"The above (Plaza Hotel) letter head plate has had 85,000 impressions at a speed of 30 a minute on our 4" x 8" Waite Die Press."—CAMERON & BULKLEY, New York, N. Y.

"We are pleased to state that our 6" x 10" Waite Die Press is giving us good service. This press is running dies the full limit of the die box on a high grade of close color stamping with excellent results."—GEO. C. WHITNEY CO., Worcester, Mass.

"We are enabled to do a class of work on it that cannot be done on any other die press in our plant, and we have several of various makes."—E. A. WRIGHT, BANK NOTE CO., Philadelphia, Pa.

Auto Falcon & Waite Die Press Co., Ltd.
New York Life Building, 346 Broadway, New York
Factory: Dover, N. H.

Fig. 26. Advertisements for equipment used by the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company around the time the subject property was acquired in 1912. Fig. 26a. Left: *The Inland Printer* 47 (1911): 30. Fig. 24b. Right: *The Printing Art* 18 (1911).

²¹ "The Quaker City," *The American Stationer* (9 June 1906): 34.

By the 1910s, the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company employed between 350 and 400 people at any given time, occupying a 35,000 square foot building. At the time of his death in May 1912, E.A. Wright was “one of the leading experts and authorities upon engraving matters in both the United States and foreign countries.”²² The Engravers’ Club of Philadelphia described Wright as the “father of engraving in Philadelphia,” and commemorated their esteem for him with the resolution shown below.²³

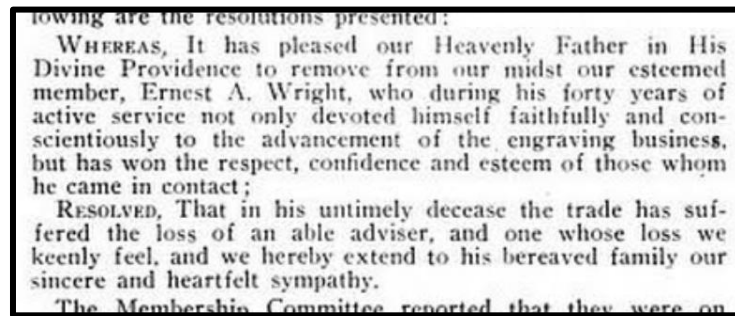


Fig. 27. Resolution for Ernest A. Wright from the Engraver's Club of Philadelphia, 1912.

Under his father's leadership Ernest A. Wright, Jr. was made the “active directing head” of the company, a position he continued to occupy until after his father's death. The company continued under the same corporate name with Joseph A. Wright as vice-president, E.J. Lafferty as sales manager and second vice-president; and Ernest A. Wright, Jr. as secretary and treasurer—the two Wrights being the sons of E.A. Wright.²⁴

The death of E.A. Wright also marked the imminent expansion of the company, as well as the acquisition of the subject property in June 1912.²⁵ The printing and publishing trades in Philadelphia were then valued at an estimated \$45,000,000 with a minimum of 10,000 employees.²⁶ *The Printing Trade News* announced that the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company had taken over the subject project “at 2529–2549 North Broad Street” for a factory to be designed and constructed by William Steele & Sons, Co., a proud fact widely published in journals like *Engineering News*.²⁷ In its August 1913 publication, *The Printing Trade News* projected that the subject property would include a “\$100,000 factory,” which began construction in August 1913.²⁸ Other publications estimated that the six-story factory of reinforced-concrete

²² “Death of E.A. Wright,” *Walden's Stationer and Printer* (1912): 14.

²³ “Engraver's Club of Philadelphia,” *Walden's Stationer and Printer* (1912), 16.

²⁴ While Ernest A. Wright was his father's “acting directing head,” his title remained secretary and treasurer until after his father's death.

²⁵ Deed: John F. Fox, of city of Philadelphia, and Mary F.H. Fox, his wife, and William Francis Hort, widow, of city of Bridgeton, New Jersey, to Joseph Wright, of city of Toronto, Canada, for \$25,000, 25 June 1912, Philadelphia Deed Book (hereafter PDBk) E.L.T., No. 22, p. 422; Deed: Joseph Wright, of the city of Toronto, Canada, widower, to the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company, for \$1, 22 May 1913, PDBk E.L.T., No. 278, p. 14, City Archives of Philadelphia (hereafter CAP). The Joseph Wright in these transactions is the brother of E.A. Wright who was one of the executors of his will. It is likely E.A. Wright entered in to the agreement of sale for this property but his death in May 1912 required his brother to complete the transaction before the company was prepared to take title.

²⁶ “The Printing Industry in Philadelphia,” *The Printing Trade News* (11 June 1912).

²⁷ “Will Erect A 100,000 Plant,” *The Printing Trade News* (9 July 1912): 39.

²⁸ “Work On New Wright Building Started,” *The Printing Trade News* (12 August 1913): 70.

construction with brick and terra cotta details would cost roughly \$125,000. By the time the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company's factory was completed and in full operation, it was said to be "the largest steel engraving plant in the world," being "a model in construction and equipment."²⁹

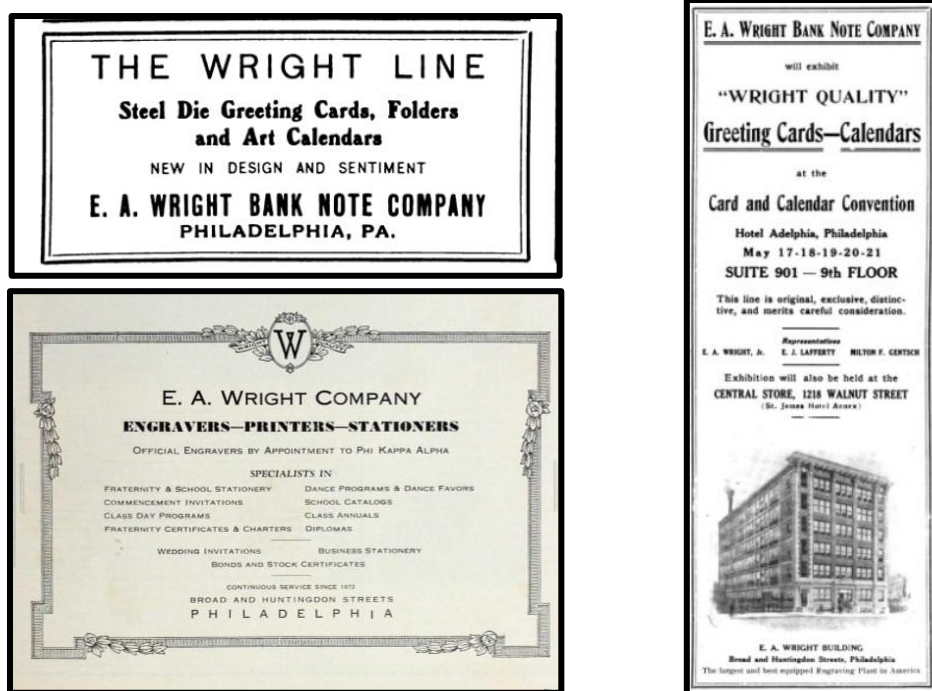


Fig. 28a. Top left: an advertisement for "The Wright Line" by the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company. Fig. 28b. Bottom Left: an advertisement for the "E.A. Wright Company Engravers—Printers—Stationers" with reference to the subject property. Source: *The Shield and Diamond* [October 1930]: 1. Fig. 28c. Right: an advertisement for the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company's "exhibit" of greeting cards and calendars of the "Wright Quality," depicting the subject property as the largest steel plate engraving plant in America. Source: *Geyer's Stationer* [11 May 1916]: 686.

In early 1914 the *Printing Trade News* announced that E.A. Wright, Jr. had return from a six-week trip, during which time he established branch offices in Cuba, Memphis, Tennessee, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Richmond, Virginia, San Francisco, California, and Seattle Washington.³⁰ In 1916 the Wrights started the E.A. Wright Company which existed for a portion of the business alongside the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company.³¹

²⁹ "A New Line Of Greeting Cards,," *Geyer's Stationer* (6 May 1913): 56.

³⁰ "Returned from Extensive Business Trip," *The Printing Trade News* (12 May 1914): 22.

³¹ Recited in: Deed: E.A. Wright Company to the United Cerebral Palsy Association of Philadelphia and Vicinity, Inc., 24 April 1967, PDBk C.A.D., No. 964, p. 546, CAP.

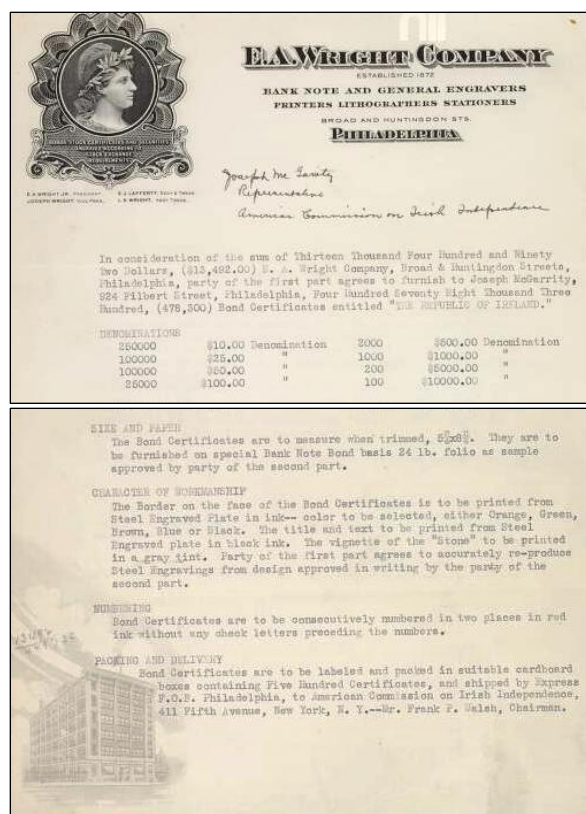


Fig. 5. Contract between E.A. Wright Bank Note Company and Joseph McGarrity for the issue of 478,300 bond certificates titled "The Republic of Ireland," 1920. Source: National Library of Ireland.

The subject property served as the firm's headquarters and production center for almost five decades during which time it greatly expanded to national prominence. The new, larger space enabled the firm to further enlarge its customer base. In 1920 the company acquired the much coveted right to print stock certificates and bonds for companies listed on the New York Stock Exchange.³² The Agricultural Trust and Savings Company, the Lehigh Valley Transit Company, General Motors and R.J. Reynolds were among the company's clients. In 1922, the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company was the second largest electroplating and engraving company the state of Pennsylvania employing 141 people.³³

During World War II, the company produced notes for a number of French colonies: the French West African and Guadeloupe in 1942; and Morocco, French Guiana and Martinique in 1943 (figure 35).³⁴ From the 1930s to the 1950s postage stamps were printed for Costa Rica, El Salvador, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Haiti, Indonesia, Liberia, Nicaragua, and Yeman (figure 35).³⁵ Expanding business led to additional locations. Around 1940 it took over the operations of the Central Banknote Company, which had operations in Chicago and New York. By 1959, E.A. Wright Company had offices or plants in Philadelphia, New York, Chicago, Boston and Detroit.³⁶

³² Tomasko, *The Feel of Steel*, 38.

³³ *Industrial Directory of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania* (Harrisburg: J.L.L. Kuhn, 1922), 1264.

³⁴ Hessler, *The Engraver's Line*, 318.

³⁵ Tomasko, *The Feel of Steel*, 38.

³⁶ Letterhead from: Letter, E.A. Wright Company to John C. Hetherston, Secretary of the University of Pennsylvania, March 2, 1959, Box 91, Office of the Secretary Records, UPA 8, University Archives and Records Center, University of Pennsylvania (hereafter UARC).

The job-printing business was continued at the subject property, which included the production of engraved letter head for corporations and institutions as well as programs and invitations. The company also continued to produce tickets. Some events included the Republican National Convention in 1900 and the Democratic National Convention in 1952 (figure 28). Smaller jobs also continued with the production of pamphlets and booklets, including publications for the Committee of Twelve for the Advancement of the Interests of the Negro Race in 1908 and 1910.³⁷³⁸



Fig. 30. Example of tickets printed by E.A. Wright Bank Note Company, 1900. Source: Tomasko, *The Feel of Steel*, 115.

One of the largest markets of the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company was educational, a wise business decision as that market growing with the enlargement and establishment of colleges and universities, the early days of graduate level education, and the beginning of the high school movement. With 80% of American children graduating from high schools by 1955, there was a huge market for diplomas. It is estimated that by 1933, E.A. Wright had at least 70% of the diploma printing business in the United States.³⁹

³⁷ The Committee of Twelve for the Advancement of the Interests of the Negro Race was started by W.E.B. DuBois and Booker T. Washington, which was eventually led by Washington and affiliated with what is today Cheney University.

³⁸ Some examples are: Booker T. Washington, *The Negro and the "Solid South"* (Cheyney, Pa: Committee of Twelve for the Advancement of the Interests of the Negro Race, 1909); Charles Simpson Butcher, *Some Examples in Self-help and Success Among Colored People and Co-operation and Cordial Relations Between the Races in America* (Cheyney, Pa.: Committee for the Advancement of the Negro Race, c. 1910); Charles L. Coon, *Public Taxation and Negro schools: Paper Read before the Twelfth Annual Conference for Education in the South held in Atlanta, Georgia, April 14, 15, and 16, 1909* (Cheyney, Pa.: Committee of Twelve for the Advancement of the Interests of the Negro Race, [1909]); James H.N. Waring, *Work of the Colored Law and Order League, Baltimore, Md.* (Cheyney, Pa.: Committee of Twelve for the Advancement of the Interests of the Negro Race [1908]).

³⁹ "Off the Record: Diplomas," *Fortune*, 1 June 1934; Tomasko, *The Feel of Steel*, 146 n. 37 (referencing an article in *Fortune Magazine* in 1933).

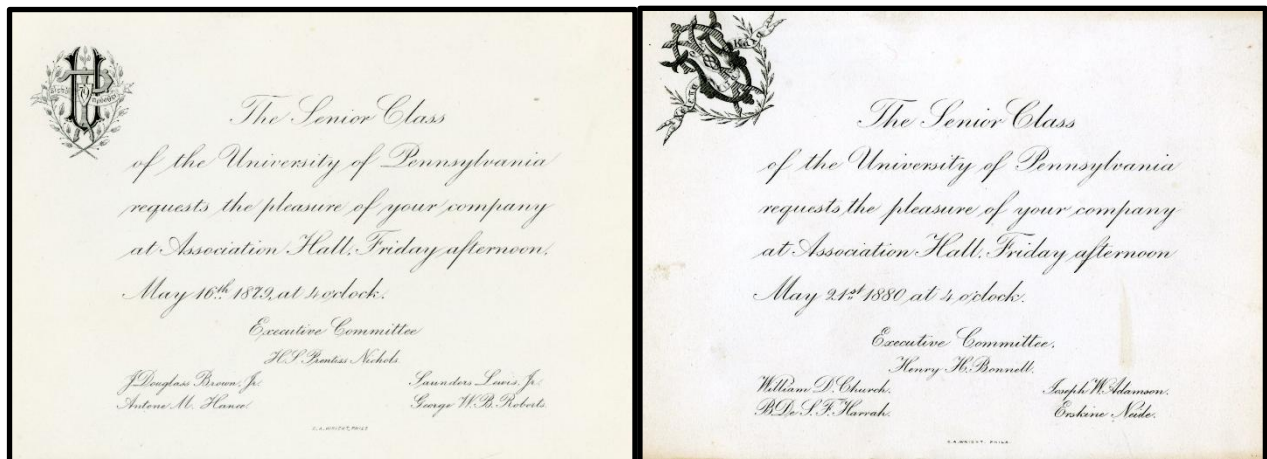


Fig. 31. University of Pennsylvania Senior Class Day invitations printed by E.A. Wright, left 1879, right 1880 (Class Collections, University Archives and Records, Center University of Pennsylvania [hereafter UARC]).

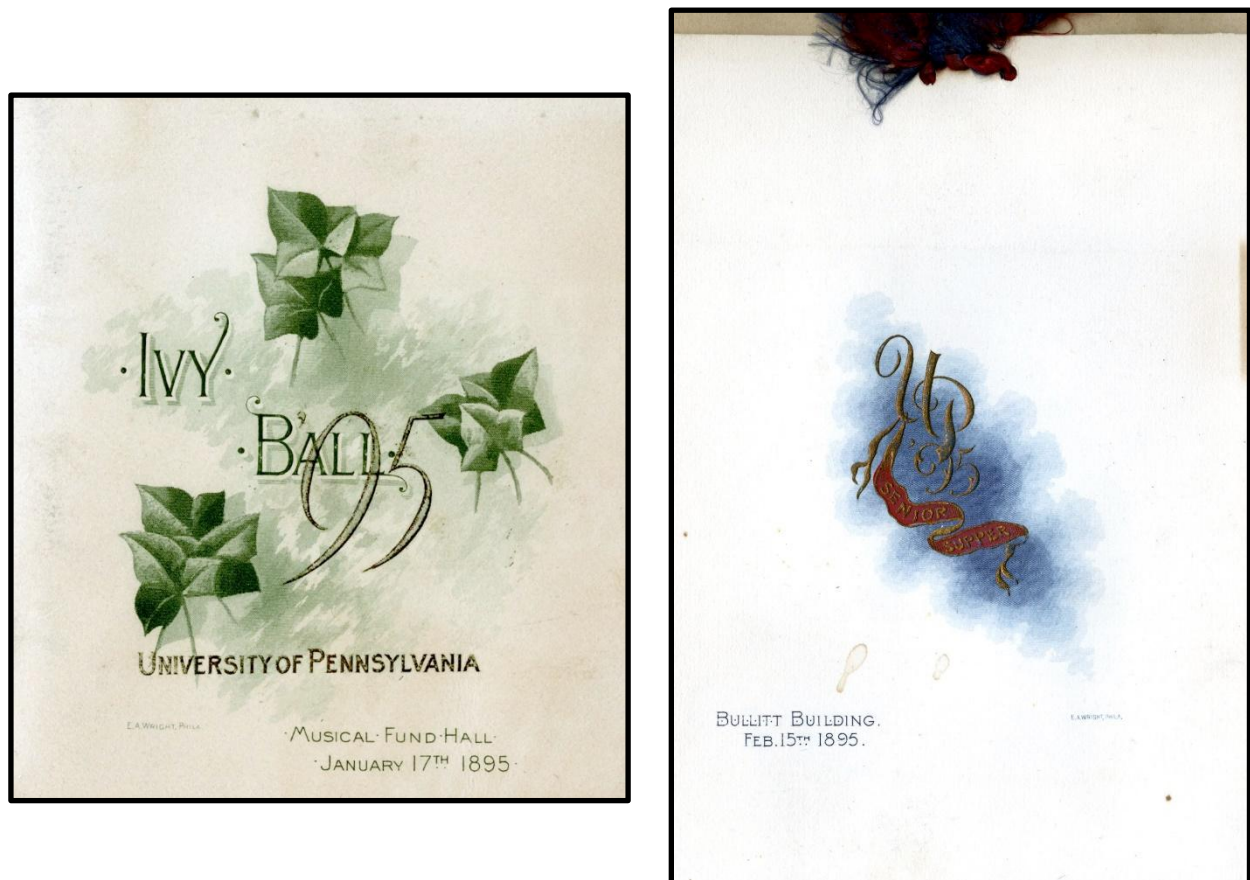


Fig. 32. University of Pennsylvania Class of 1895 invitations published by E.A. Wright in 1895
Source: Class Collections, UARC.

The evolution of Wright's prominence in the diploma business can be traced through his contracts with the University of Pennsylvania. The earliest example was a commission to print Senior Class Day invitations in 1879 and 1880 (figure 29). Throughout the 1880s and 1890s the mark of "E.A. Wright, Phila." can be seen on a variety of invitations, menus and cards for student events (figure 30). In 1891 the first appearance of an engraving—an inset illustration of a fraternity—by Wright appears in the University's yearbook (figure 31). Through the 1890s and 1900s, Wright's presence in the undergraduate yearbooks grew as did fraternity inset illustrations and frontispiece portraits of well-regarded faculty members, literary figures, as well as the dean of the College of Arts (figure 31).

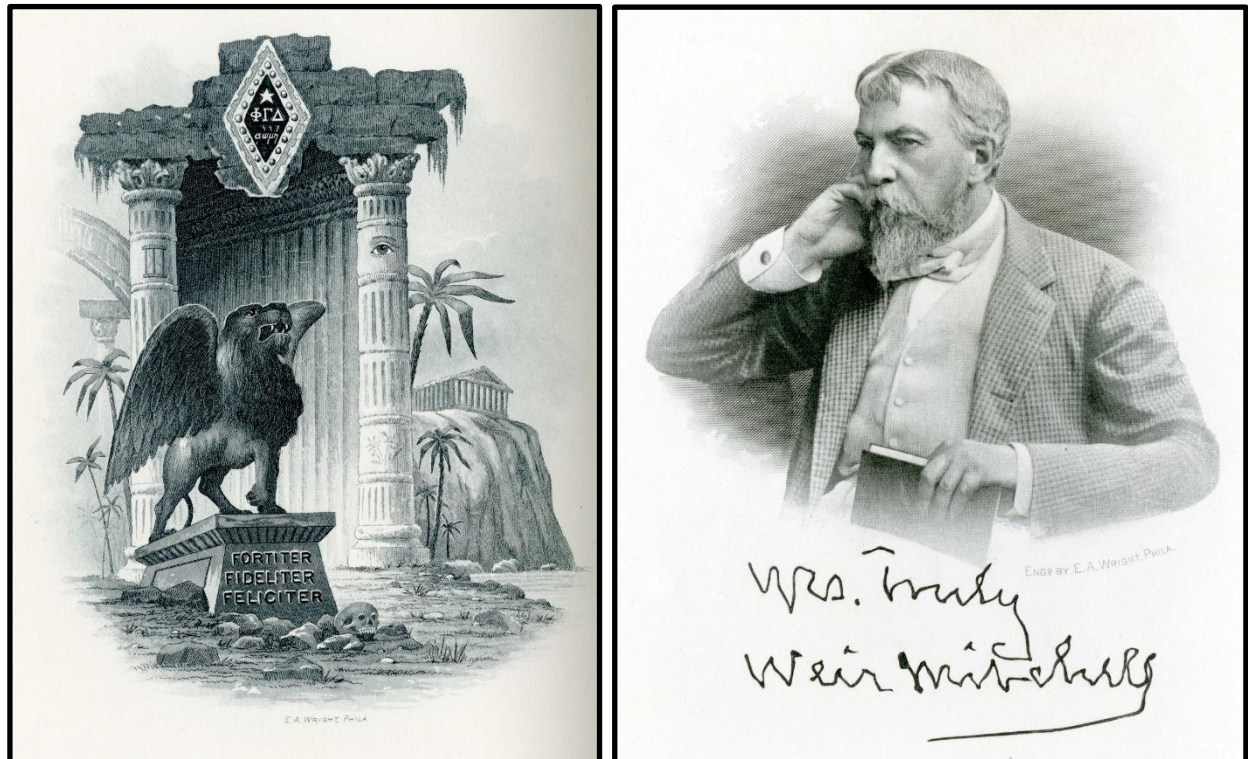


Fig. 33a. Left: Inset illustration for Phi Delta Gamma fraternity, 1891. Source: *The Record of the Class '91 of the University of Pennsylvania* [Philadelphia: Class of '91, 1891]. Figure 33b. Right: Frontispiece illustration of the famous Philadelphia physician and author S. Weir Mitchell, 1903. Source: *Record of the Class of 1903 College, University of Pennsylvania* [Philadelphia: Class of 1903, 1903].

After nearly twenty years doing print jobs commissioned by students, the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company succeeded in the competitive bidding process to gain the contract print commencement invitation for the University of Pennsylvania in 1897.⁴⁰ Wright produced invitations for roughly a decade and on a few occasions may have also printed the commencement program. The final step in cementing a relationship with Penn came in 1907 when Wright succeeded in another competitive bidding process, being contracted to print the

⁴⁰ Letter, J. Hartley Merrick, Assistant Secretary of the University of Pennsylvania, to Ernest A. Wright, March 18, 1897, Letter Press Book, February–November 1897, Box 38, folder 4, Office of the Secretary Records, UPA 8, University Archives and Records Center, University of Pennsylvania (hereafter UARC).

University of Pennsylvania's diplomas.⁴¹ After a trial period of one year, Penn retained Wright through the late 1950s and beyond into the 1980s with its successor firm, Jostens.

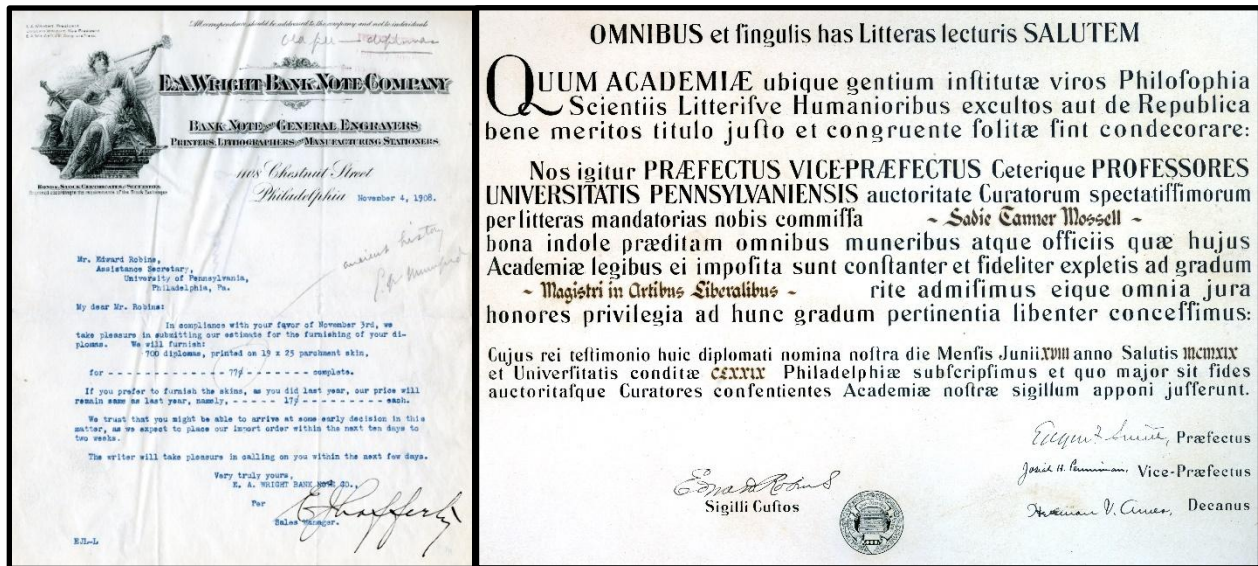


Fig. 34a. Left: E.A. Wright Bank Note Company's successful bid for printing University of Pennsylvania diplomas starting in 1908. Source: Archives General Collection, UPA 3, Post-1820, UARC. Fig. 34b. Right: Example of University of Pennsylvania Master of Liberal Arts Diploma printed by Wright in 1919. Source: Alexander Family Papers, UARC.

The E.A. Wright Bank Note Company had a wide and varied client base for diplomas, including Temple University, LaSalle University, Hahnemann Medical School, Muhlenberg College, and Lafayette College.⁴² By 1934, the company printed diplomas for the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis, U.S. Military Academy at West Point, Tulane University, Goucher College, Sweetbriar College, University of Michigan, DePauw University, Yale University, and Columbia University.⁴³ In addition to diplomas, E.A. Wright also printed certificates for professional associations, as well as for commemorative events.

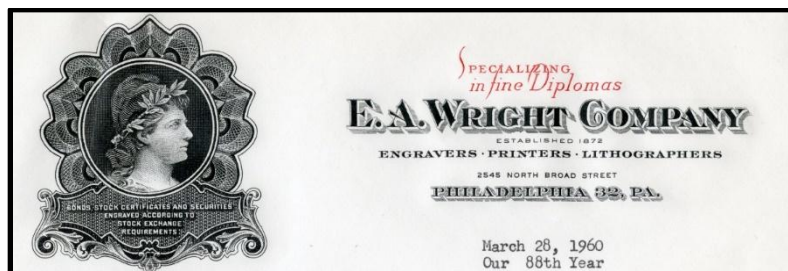


Fig. 35. Letter of company in 1960.
Source: Office of the Secretary Records, UARC.

⁴¹ Letter, Edward Robins to Mr. Lafferty, E.A. Wright & Co., November 25, 1907 and December 31, 1907, Letter Press Book, June 1904–1909, Box 38, folder 10, Office of the Secretary Records, UPA 8, UARC. Wright took over the contract from Dreka Company at 1121 Chestnut Street who had done much of the Penn yearbook engraving of the 1880s and 1890s.

⁴² Examples of all these diplomas are the Diploma Collection, UARC.

⁴³ "Off the Record: Diplomas," *Fortune*, 1 June 1934.

E.A. Wright Bank Note Company's presence in Philadelphia came to a close in 1962, when the company sold its diploma printing business to Jostens, a Minneapolis-based leading publisher of yearbooks, memorabilia and school related products.⁴⁴ In 1964, E.A. Wright III sold the security printing component to Thomas de la Rue's Federated Bank Note Company, which continued to print stocks certificates and bonds in the subject building through 1969.⁴⁵ The ownership of the 2527-37 N Broad Street passed out E.A. Wright Bank Note Company's hands in 1967.⁴⁶ The final end of security printing on North Broad Street came around 1970 when the Federated Bank Note Company moved its operations to the Philadelphia Industrial Park in northeast Philadelphia.⁴⁷



Fig. 36a. Top: Stock Certificate for the Philadelphia Bourse (Philadelphia Stock Exchange), c. 1918, printed by the E.A. Wright Bank Note Co. Source: <https://scripophily.net/phbope19.html>. Bottom left: Fig. 36b. Left: French Guiana Currency, c. 1942 by the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company. Bottom right: Fig. 36c. Right: Liberian Postage by the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company. Source: Old-Stamp.com.

⁴⁴ “Josten Acquires Wright Concerns,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 25 April 1962, 37. Jostens set up a plant in Telford, PA in 1964 to print diplomas (“Midwest Firm Buys Telford Plant,” *The Morning Call* (Allentown, Pa), 15 September 1964, 22).

⁴⁵ Fred Schwam, *The Paper Money of the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company* (Portage, Ohio: BNR Press, 1978); Classified advertisement for offset pressman, *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 8 May 1969, 47.

⁴⁶ Deed: E.A. Wright Company to the United Cerebral Palsy Association of Philadelphia and Vicinity, Inc., 24 April 1967, PDBk C.A.D., No. 964, p. 546, CAP.

⁴⁷ “Major Industrial Parks in the Tri-State Area,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 23 May 1971.

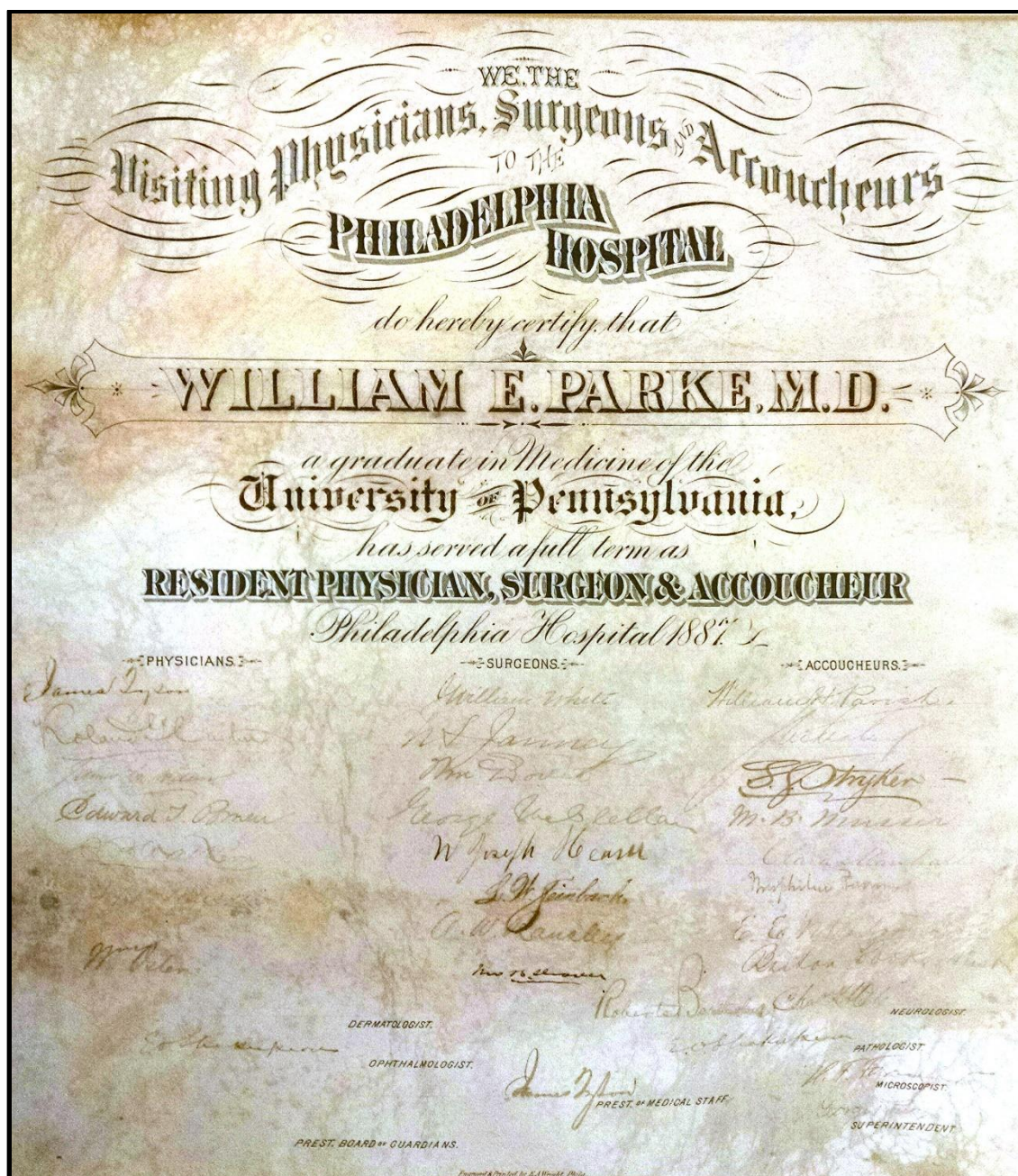


Fig. 37. Early example of a certificate – a residency certificate for Pennsylvania Hospital – printed by the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company in 1887. Source: Diploma Collection, UARC.

(d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen.

Built in 1913, the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company is a six-story, reinforced-concrete factory building with a stylized facade on North Broad Street. The subject building was constructed during the formative period of reinforced-concrete construction. In fact, it was during this time that Albert Kahn, “one of the most significant and prolific American architects of the 20th century,” was refining and popularizing the reinforced-concrete factory as a popular building type.⁴⁸ And in time “the functionalist reinforced-concrete factory” came to “dominate American industrial landscapes in the twentieth century.”⁴⁹

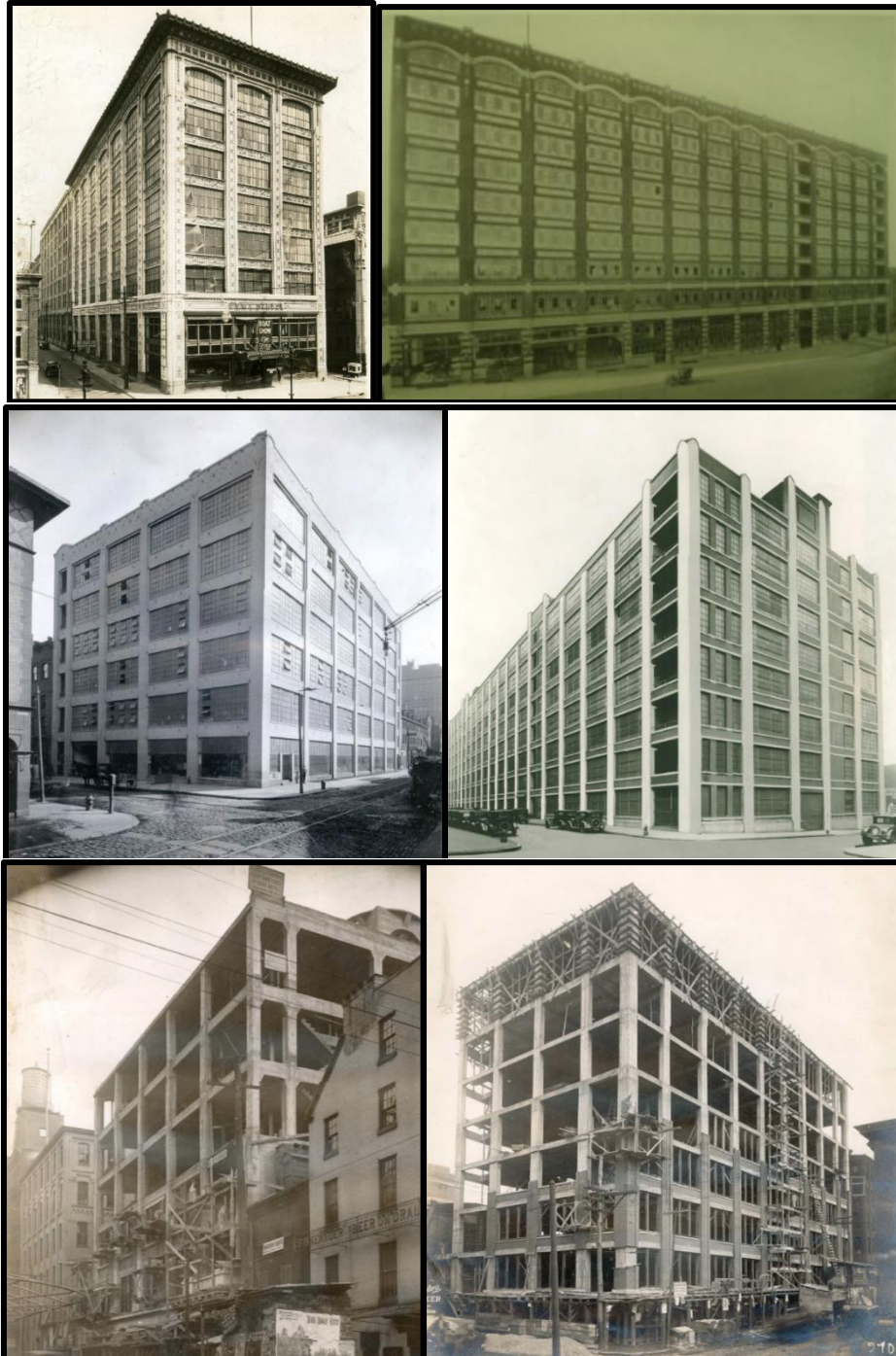
Reinforced-concrete construction became “the subject of intensive science-based testing and inspection,” leading to the creation of “huge numbers of technical standards and specifications” that formed “the actual handling of this scientifically controlled material on the modern construction site.” The E.A. Wright Bank Note Company reflects the environment of industrial buildings in an era characterized by reinforced-concrete construction, being also among the early architectural and engineering specimens of reinforced-concrete factory buildings in Philadelphia. This prominent building was one of many such buildings constructed in Philadelphia for commercial and industrial use, several examples of which are illustrated below.



Fig. 6. Hugo Bilgram's machine shop, c. 1905, said to be the first reinforced-concrete building in the city, by Ballinger & Perrot. Source: Michael Bixler, via Hidden City Philadelphia.

⁴⁸ Charles K. Hyde. “Assembly-Line Architecture: Albert Kahn and the Evolution of the U.S. Auto Factory, 1905–1940,” *IA. The Journal of the Society for Industrial Archaeology* 22, n. 2 (1996), 5.

⁴⁹ Amy E. Slaton, *Reinforced Concrete and the Modernization of American Building, 1900–1930* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).



Figures. 39. All constructed in the period between 1900 and 1930, the above buildings show the prominence of reinforced-concrete construction for commercial and industrial buildings in Philadelphia. Fig. 39a. Top left: Packard Motor Car Building at 317–21 North Broad Street was designed by Albert Kahn in 1910. Fig. 39b. Top right: Service Building of the Ford Motor Company at 2700–34 North Broad Street was designed by Albert Kahn and completed in 1915 Source: eBay. Fig. 39c. Middle left: Manufacturers Realty Co. Building, c. 1917. Fig. 39d. Middle right: a warehouse designed by Ballinger & Perrot Source: Ballinger Collection, Athenaeum of Philadelphia. Fig. 39e. Bottom left: Commissioned by J.C. Buck, the Buck Building was completed c. 1909 at Fifth and Appletree Streets on designs by Ballinger & Perrot. Fig. 39f. Bottom right: Designed by Ballinger & Perrot, the Goodman Loeb Building in North 13th Street near Callowhill, completed c. 1909–15. Source: Ballinger Collection, Athenaeum of Philadelphia.



Fig. 40a. Top: The General Electric Switchgear Plant at 421 North 7th Street was built in 1916 by the William Steele & Company for the manufacture of electric switchboards. Source: Wikipedia. Fig. 40b. Bottom: Completed in 1930 by William Steele & Son Company, the Terminal Commerce Building at Broad and Callowhill is of reinforced-concrete construction, being over 30 acres of floor space. Source: Michael Bixler, Hidden City.

- (e) Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation.

Unlike the Packard Motor Company based in Detroit, who hired Albert Kahn to design their Philadelphia plant, the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company commissioned a local firm, the William Steele & Sons Company, to design and construct their six-story, reinforced-concrete plant. Constructed in 1913, this commission was completed by the William Steele & Sons Company at during a period of great success for the firm. Several years earlier in 1908–09, the Steeles were commissioned for the construction of Shibe Park, later known as the Connie Mack Stadium, which was purported to be “the nation’s largest and most luxurious” ball park in the United States.⁵⁰

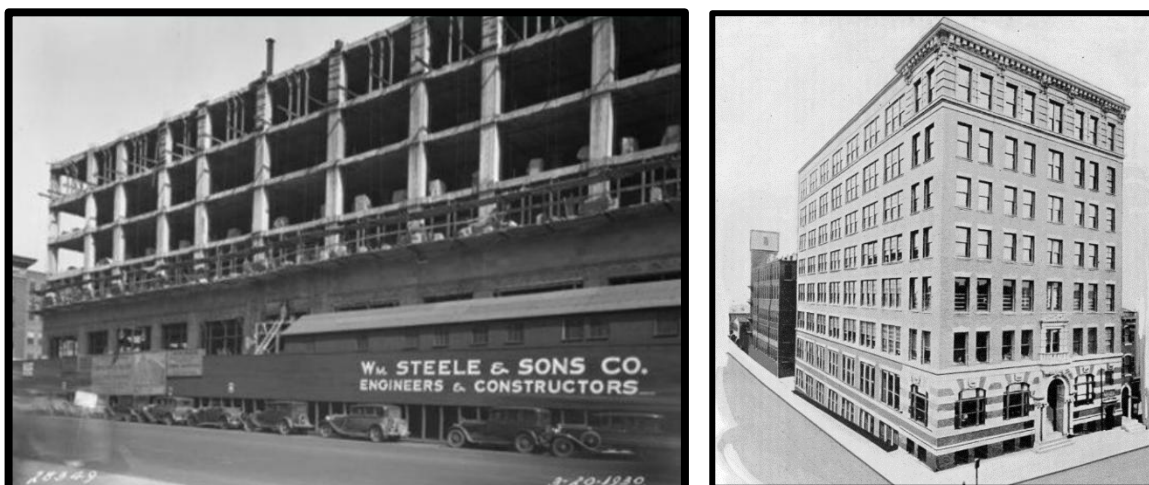


Fig. 41a. Left: A construction project of the William Steele & Sons Company, Engineers & Constructors, showing, specifically, their expertise in reinforced-concrete construction in 1930. Source: Phillyhistory.org. Fig. 41b. Right: Constructed by the William Steele & Sons Company, the Frank Schoble & Company, Hat Manufacturers. Source: “Projects Then,” Wm. Steele & Sons Co, <http://www.wmsteeleandsons.com/>.

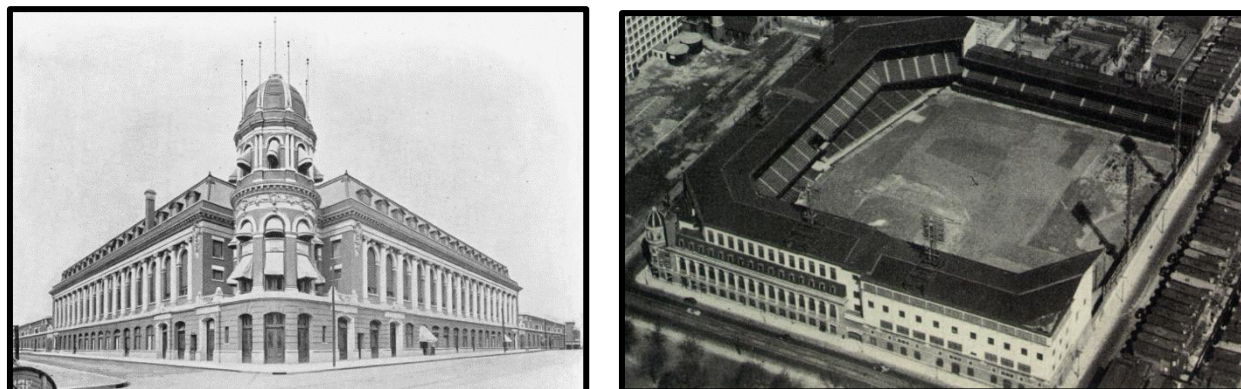


Fig. 42. Shibe Park, later known as the Connie Mack Stadium, c. 1908, constructed by the William Steele & Sons Company. Source: Karl Lutz Collection, Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

⁵⁰ “Projects Then,” Wm. Steele & Sons Co, <http://www.wmsteeleandsons.com/>

Among their major commissions, the firm designed or constructed a number of important buildings and plants that had a significant impact on architectural, economic, industrial, and the social development of the City of Philadelphia: the American Insulation Company Buildings at Stokley Street and Roberts Avenue; the Brown Hosiery Company Factory in Westmoreland Street near Hancock; C.C. Kempton & Sons Loft Building in Randolph Street near Vine; the David Lupton Sons Company Building No. 15 in E. Allegheny Avenue near Janney Street; Delong Hook & Eye Company Factory & Power House in North 21st Street near Clearfield; Model Mills Company Carpet Manufactory in I Street near E. Estaugh Street; N. Snellenburg & Company Store at 1006–08 Market Street; North American Lace Company Factory in Glenwood Avenue near Allegheny; the Orinoka Mills Building in Ruth Street near Somerset; Powers, Weightman & Rosengarten Company Factory in 9th Street near Parish; the Reading Company Warehouse at the northwest corner of North 13th Street and Callowhill; the Snellenburg Clothing Factory and Warehouse at 642–48 North Broad Street; the Ralph Stewart & Company Store at 917–19 Arch Street; the Terminal Commerce Building, also known as the North American Building, at 401 North Broad Street; etc.⁵¹ These are just a few examples of the major buildings designed by this important firm of architects, engineers, and constructors, providing a glimpse of an oeuvre of great significance.



Fig. 43. Constructed by the William Steele & Sons Company, the Lincoln Furniture Company. Source: “Projects Then,” Wm. Steele & Sons Co, <http://www.wmsteeleandsons.com/>.

While any number of these buildings designed and/or constructed by the William Steele & Sons Company may be worthy of designation as a representative of the firm’s eminence and influence, the subject property was lauded as a largest steel and copper plate engraving plant in the United States. While the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company’s success was the primary motivation of the building, the directors of the company no doubt selected the William Steele & Sons Company because of their skill and mastery in the design and construction industry.

⁵¹ *Philadelphia Architects and Buildings*, s.v. “William Steele & Sons (fl. 1908–1934), Projects.” accessed December 2018, https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display_projects.cfm/62822

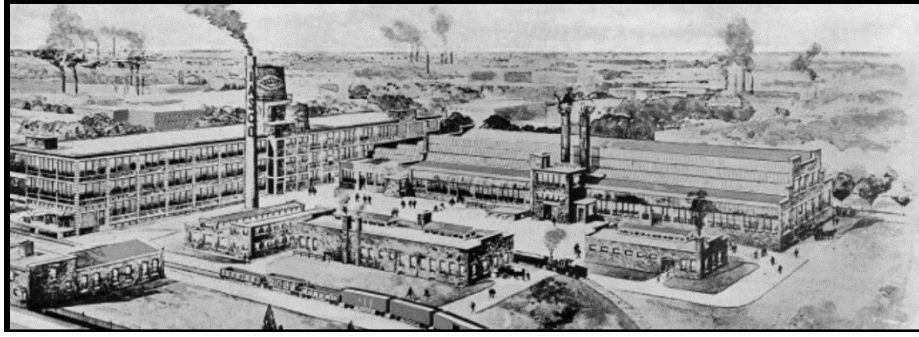


Fig. 44. Constructed by the William Steele & Sons Company, the plant of the Isaac A. Sheppard Company. Source: "Projects Then," Wm. Steele & Sons Co, <http://www.wmsteeleandsons.com/>.

Historic Context: A native of Ulster, Ireland, William Steele (1839–1908) arrived in America about 1846 with his mother Rachel Steele and several siblings. By the mid-1860s, William Steele was "flourishing as a carpenter and house builder whose business was based on work in North Philadelphia."⁵² By 1881, his son Joseph M. Steele (1865–1957) had officially joined his father in business as William Steele & Son, "Carpenters and Builders." In 1900, John Lyle Steele (1871–1948) joined the family business to form William Steele & Sons. After the death of William Steele, the founder, in 1908, the family-owned business incorporated the William Steele & Sons Company. The William Steele & Sons Company was one of the great local firms of the period.



Fig. 45a. The above buildings were designed and constructed by the William Steele & Sons Company. Left: C.C. Kempton & Son, Shoe Lasts. Fig. 45b. Right: Drueding Brothers, Chamois. Source: "Projects Then," Wm. Steele & Sons Co, <http://www.wmsteeleandsons.com/>.

⁵² *Philadelphia Architects and Buildings*, s.v. "Steel, William (1839–1908)," by Sandra L. Tatman, accessed December 2018, https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/62820



Fig. 46. Stock Certificate for the Farnsworth Television & Radio Corporation (Philo Taylor Farnsworth invented Television) in Delaware, printed in 1945 by the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company. Source: <https://scripophily.net/fateracode.html>.

Conclusion

The E.A. Wright Bank Note Company at 2527–37 North Broad Street in North Philadelphia is a significant historic resource that exemplifies the cultural, economic, social, and historical heritage of the printing and engraving industry in Philadelphia. In 1913, the company commissioned a local firm, William Steele & Sons Company, to design and construct their six-story, reinforced-concrete plant during a period of great success for the firm. 2527–37 North Broad Street was constructed during the formative period of reinforced-concrete construction that would in time dominate American industrial landscapes in the twentieth century. 2527-37 North Broad Street is a significant historic resource that merits designation by the Philadelphia Historical Commission and inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, satisfying Criteria for Designation, D, E, and J.

8. BIBLIOGRAPHY

Through generous sponsorship of a friend, this nomination was completed by the Keeping Society of Philadelphia with the primary author as Oscar Beisert, Architectural Historian and Historic Preservationist with assistance from J.M. Duffin, Archivist and Historian, and Kelly Wiles, Architectural Historian.

The following sites were used to create the nomination:

Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network

Newspapers.com

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Appendix

The nomination for 2527-37 N Broad Street was originally submitted to the Philadelphia Historical Commission with documentation to support the Criterion G (in addition to the other named Criteria). After review, the Historical Commission staff recommended the nomination be revised to focus on Criteria for Designation D, E, and J. The text below is the documentation related to Criterion G.

(g) Is part of or related to a square, park or other distinctive area which should be preserved according to an historic, cultural or architectural motif.

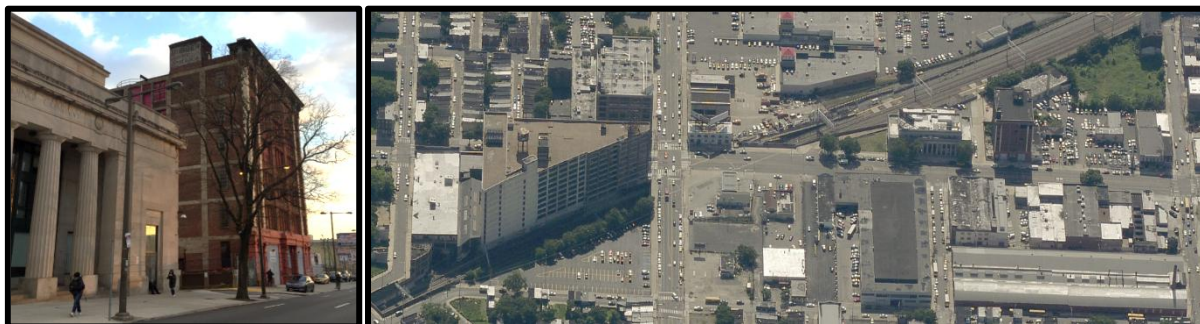


Fig. 7. Left: the North Broad Street Station at 2601 North Broad Street on left and the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company at 2545 North Broad Street on right. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2018. Fig. 14b. Right: the environs of North Broad Street and Lehigh Avenue, a distractive non-residential section of North Philadelphia. Source: Atlas, City of Philadelphia, 2018.

The commercial, industrial, and transit-related buildings located in the vicinity of North Broad Street and Lehigh Avenue, as well as the juncture of the former Pennsylvania Railroad and Reading Railroad right-of-ways, forms one of the most coherent non-residential sections of North Philadelphia. This surviving environment of distinctive and significant buildings of former companies, establishments, and public services, including the 13th & 15th Street Passenger Railway Company Block at 2501–61 North 15th Street; the Ford Motor Company at 2700–34 North Broad Street; the Keystone Pure Oil Company's Gasoline Station at 2527–37 North Broad Street, situated just south of the subject property; the International Harvester Company at 2905 North 16th Street; the J. Anderson Ross Company's Mill Work Building, better known as Joe Fraizer's Gym, at 2917–19 North Broad Street; the North Broad Street Station, built by the Reading Railroad, at 2601 North Broad Street; the North Philadelphia Station, built by the Pennsylvania Railroad, at 2900 North Broad Street; early buildings of the Philadelphia & Reading Railway Company at 1326–56 W. Lehigh Avenue; the Traylor Building at 2701 North Broad Street; the Vim Motor Truck Company at the southwest corner of North Broad Street and W. Huntington Street; and several others. The said resources include large multi-story factory and mill buildings; sprawling low-rise auto- and transit-related garages, offices shops, and sheds; and railroad and transit-related buildings, both formal station houses and utilitarian sheds; etc., which comprise a distinctive commercial, industrial, and transit-related area that should be preserved according to an architectural, cultural and historical motif. E.A. Wright Bank Note Company at 2545 North Broad Street is an important physical and visual component of this distinctive area, being a one of the largest, fully detached buildings that stands at the lower end of this historic built environment.

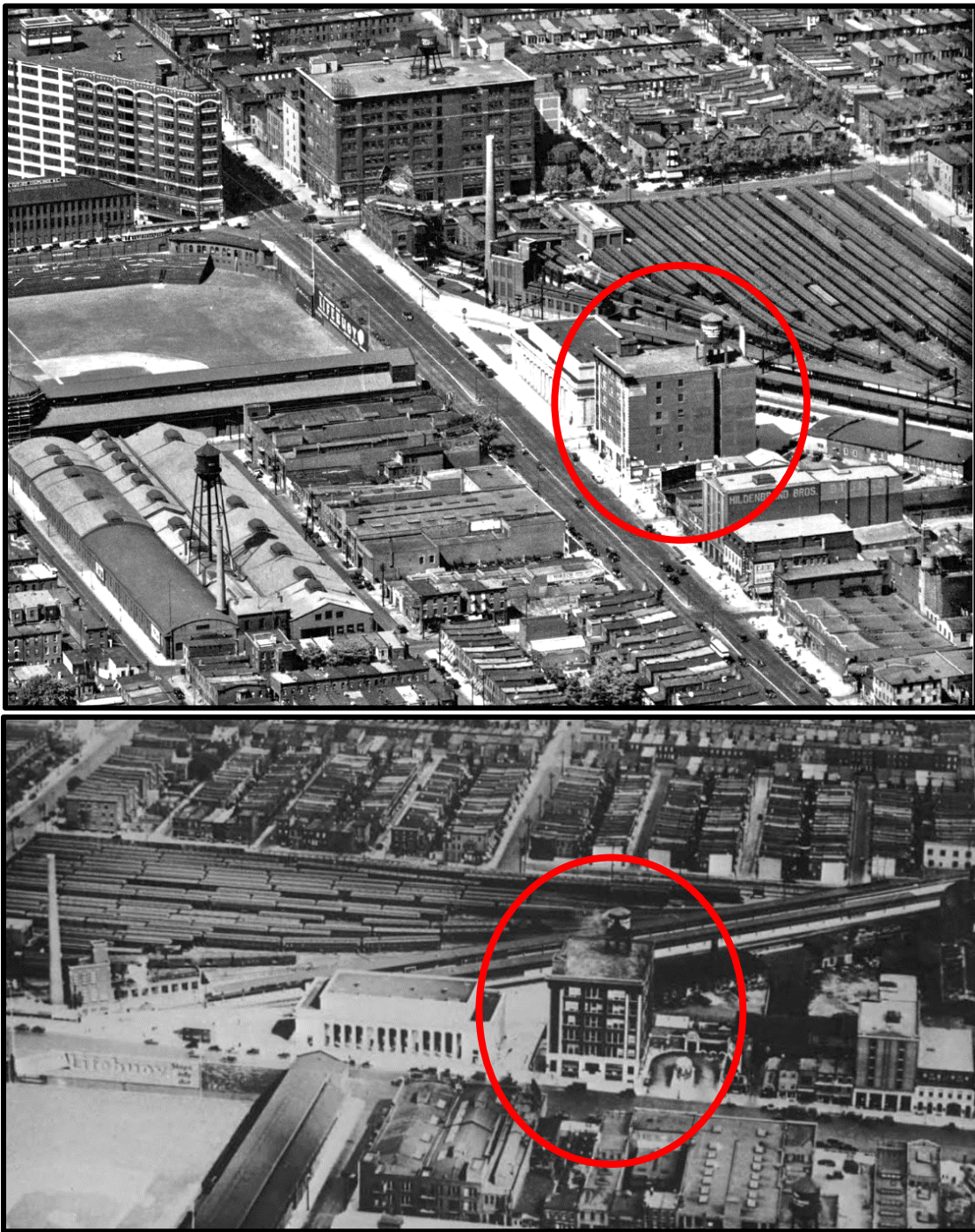


Fig. 8. Top: Looking northeast at the environs of the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company, 1931. Source: J. Victor Dallin Aerial Survey Collection, Hagley Museum and Library. Fig. 15b. Bottom: Looking east at the environs of the E.A. Wright Bank Note Company. Source: Fredric Miller, *Still Philadelphia* [Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011], 55.