

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: **122 S. 19th Street**

Postal code: **19103**

Councilmanic District: **5**

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: **Sophy Curson**

Current/Common Name: **Sophy Curson**

3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

☒ Building

☐ Structure

☐ Site

☐ Object

4. PROPERTY INFORMATION

Occupancy: ☒ occupied ☐ vacant ☐ under construction ☐ unknown

Current use: **Sophy Curson—a high-end women's clothing boutique.**

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Please attach

6. DESCRIPTION

Please attach

7. SIGNIFICANCE

Please attach the Statement of Significance.

Period of Significance (from year to year):

1950-1951

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration:

Designed: 1950/Constructed: 1951

Architect, engineer, and/or designer:

Beryl Price, Architect

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan:

Shandler, Contractor

Original owner:

Sophy Curson

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: KEEPING SOCIETY OF PHILADELPHIA

Author: Oscar Beisert, Architectural Historian
 Edited by the staff of the Philadelphia Historical Commission

Telephone: 717.602.5002

Email: keeper@keepingphiladelphia.org

Address: 1315 Walnut Street, Suite 320
 Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19107

Date: 14 August 2019

Nominator ☐ is ☒ is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: 14 August 2019

☒ Correct-Complete ☐ Incorrect-Incomplete

Date: 5 November 2019

Date of Notice Issuance: 5 November 2019

Property Owner at Time of Notice

Name: Susan J. Schwartz

Address: 122 S 19th Street

City: Philadelphia

State: PA

Postal Code: 19103

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: 10/20/2021

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: 11/12/2021

Date of Final Action: 11/12/2021. Designated under Criteria C and D.

☒ Designated

☐ Rejected

3/12/18

NOMINATION

FOR THE

PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES



Figure 1. Looking south at the signage on Sophy Curson's north elevation. Source: Brad Maule, 2019.

Sophy Curson

BUILT 1951

122 S. 19TH STREET

PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

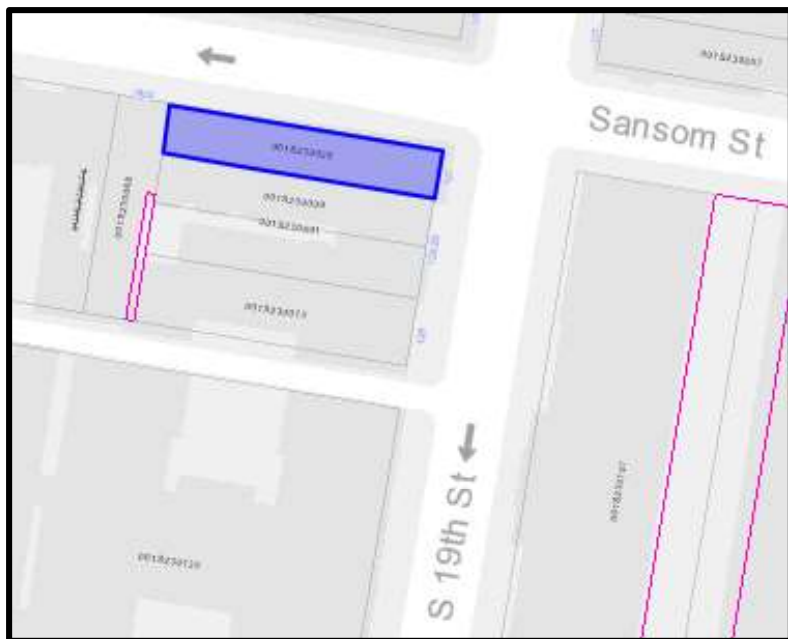


Figure 2. The boundary for this designation is delineated in blue. Source: Philadelphia Water.

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

CONTAINING in front or breadth on the said Nineteenth Street Eighteen feet and extending of that width in length or depth Westward, the North line thereof along the said South side of Sansom Street, One hundred feet; bounded Northward by said Sansom Street, Eastward by said Nineteenth Street, Southward by ground now or late of William H. Wilson, and Westward by ground now or late of Samuel Lynch.

Map Registry No. 001S230028

OPA Account No. 882466000



Figure 3. The east elevation of Sophy Curson, showing the original doorway and shopfront. Source: Brad Maule, 2019.

6. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

122 S. 19th Street, located at the southwest corner of S. 19th and Sansom Streets, is a purpose-built, one-story Mid-Century Modern commercial building. The primary (east) elevation consists of an asymmetrical storefront with a pedestrian entrance framed by beige cast stone to the south side of a large display window. Occupying much of the façade, the display window appears to be comprised of large sections of fixed plate glass, which are smooth and uninterrupted, extending vertically from just above the floor to a height of nearly six feet, allowing full-size models for clothing display to be placed in the window. The display window extends to the northeast corner of the building and beyond to the side (north) elevation. Lining the bottom of the eye-catching, large display window is a flower box framed by Verde Antique marble, which is original to the design of the building. The entrance to the shop, located to the south of the display window, is a single pedestrian door with a simple cast stone architrave typical of the period. Beyond the apertures, what little façade there is appears to be clad in beige Roman brick that is typical of the mid-twentieth century. Above the said apertures the brickwork is the backdrop for elegant signage, reading “*Sophy Curson*” at center in large, cursive gold font. The east elevation is shaded by a sweeping roof clad in deep redwood that projects from the façade by several feet, acting as a storefront canopy. Obscuring the steps of the adjacent property to the south is a low masonry wall clad in beige Roman brick lines.



Figure 4. The east elevation of Sophy Curson, showing the original doorway, shopfront, and flower box. Source: Brad Maule, 2019.



Figure 5. The east elevation of Sophy Curson, showing the larger streetscape and the subject building in context. Source: Brad Maule, 2019.



Figure 6. The north elevation of Sophy Curson, showing the entire façade and the secondary signage and display window. Source: Brad Maule, 2019.

The side (north) elevation is another asymmetrical façade, featuring the continuation of the display window from the primary (east) elevation, an expansive brick façade with signage, another display window, and an even wider expanse of blind brick masonry. The north elevation of the display window that largely occupies the east elevation is a simple continuation. The blind brick wall to the west of the corner display window is the backdrop for another bit of elegant signage, reading “*Sophy Curson*” in large, cursive gold font. Beneath the dramatic branding in smaller, block print gold font are the two locations: Philadelphia, PA and Fort Lauderdale, FL. Beyond this section of the façade is a wide display window, composed of what appears to be plate glass, that extends vertically from the floor to just below the ceiling, being a taller window than that occupying the east elevation. Beyond the display window to the west is a continuous blind brick wall. The entire north elevation is shaded by the sweeping, flat roof clad in deep redwood that projects from the façade by several feet, acting as a canopy. A series of inset, circular lights illuminate the east elevation and the signage and display window on the north elevation. While not apparent from the east elevation, a full view of the north elevation shows that the building features an angled roof that starts from the east wall of the adjacent building to the west at its lowest elevation, including to a higher elevation at the east front. A chimney stack rises from the center of the building climbing partly up the adjacent wall to the south.

While an integrity analysis is not required by the Philadelphia Code, it should be said that the building bears a nearly identical resemblance to its original appearance in 1951.

Original painted signage exists on the party wall of the adjacent buildings to the south and west. Both sets of signage to be read as follows: Sophy Curson, Sizes 2 – 16.



Figure 7. This circa 1952-53 photograph, possibly taken by Courtland V.D. Hubbard, shows the primary (east) elevation of Sophy Curson by night, just after it was completed. Storefronts of this period were often photographed to show the appeal created by the new building and/or storefront improvements, and those taken at night inform us of the advances in lighting that made this possible. Source: Bershad, Jacqueline F. "A Chat with David Schwartz of Sophy Curson," *Center City Quarterly*. (Philadelphia: Center City Residents Association, 7 September 2012), 27.

7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Completed in mid-1951, the Sophy Curson store at 122 S. 19th Street is a one-story commercial building designed and constructed in the Mid-Century Modern style. Architect Beryl Price (1921-1989) created the building's distinctive design in 1950 for the original owner Sophy Curson (1904-2004). Commissioned to serve Curson's growing retail clothing business, the building was a purpose-built shop that embodied mid-twentieth century modernism and stood out among the older, more traditional architecture of the Rittenhouse Square neighborhood.

In its architectural style, as well as its building form and materials, Sophy Curson is a significant local example of a Mid-Century Modern commercial building that exhibited "sleek new materials" and "glassy open storefronts."¹ Among the most intact Mid-Century Modern buildings in Center City, Sophy Curson merits listing on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, satisfying the following criteria established in Philadelphia's Historic Preservation Ordinance, Section 14-1004 (1):

- (c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style;
- (d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen.

¹ Dyson, Carol J. AIA, "Midcentury Commercial Design Evaluation and Preservation: An Opportunity for Commissions," *The Alliance Review: A Quarterly Journal of the National Alliance of Preservation Commissions*. (Spring 2017), 4.

The Period of Significance for 122 S 19th Street is 1950-1951.



Figure 8. Left: Sophy Curson in an undated photograph (circa 1920s/30s). Source: *Philadelphia Inquirer*.

Figure 9. Right: Sophy Curson in an undated photograph taken during her ownership of the S. 19th Street store. Source: *WWD.com*, accessed on 7 Aug 2019.

CRITERIA C & D

122 S. 19th Street is a Mid-Century Modern commercial building located in Center City Philadelphia. Associated with the comprehensive transformation of commercial buildings and storefront design in the late 1940s and early 1950s, 122 S. 19th Street was constructed at a time when architects and builders were incorporating elements of modern architecture into the face of American retail.²

Historic Context: The subject property is a commercial building that was designed in 1950 to house the growing retail establishment of Sophy Curson, which was and continues to be a high-end women's boutique that was founded by its namesake in the Rittenhouse Square neighborhood of Philadelphia.³ A native of Philadelphia, its founder, "Miss Sophy Curson," (as referred to in various publications) started her career in retail working for her parents, Adolph and Annie (Rosenthal) Curson, who were Russian-Jewish immigrants with a shop in South Philadelphia that

² An advertisement on page 82 of *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, dated 3 June 1951, indicates that the new building was recently completed at that time.; and Mid-Century Modern Commercial Corridors, Central Northeast District. Philadelphia City Planning Commission, 2014. <http://chconservancy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/MidCentury-Modern-Commercial-Corridors-CNE.pdf>. Accessed 29 July 2019.

³ Zoning Permit Application No. 34145B was submitted by Contractor Samuel A. Shandler of Philadelphia on behalf of Sophy Curson and her brother-in-law, Architect Beryl Price, and was received by the City of Philadelphia on December 11, 1950. The permit described the building generally as it was constructed.; and Marcus, Noreen, "Sophy Curson, clothier, 100," *South Florida Sun Sentinel*, 22 July 2004.; and "Always in Fashion," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2 October 2016, E06.

was eventually known as Curson's Dept. Store.⁴ Starting with the opening of her father's "dry goods store" in 1914 in the 1300 block of Point Breeze Avenue, the Cursons represented the success story that embodies the "American Dream"—i.e. the United States as a place for emigrants seeking prosperity.⁵

Sophy Curson was petite—barely clearing five feet in height—and found that none of the ladies clothing stores in downtown Philadelphia carried designs for her stature. During one of her shopping expeditions, one retailer allegedly told her, "Our clothes are not for you, you have a childlike figure, not fully developed." This inspired her to establish "Sophy Curson," a retail clothing business founded in 1929. In the early decades of her business, Sophy Curson's merchandise focused on petite women. In the 1960s she diversified her business to women's clothing of all sizes.⁶

Some of Sophy Curson's early advertisements in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* date to April 1930, marking one year in business or what was referred to as "My First Anniversary Sale." Located on the second floor of 124 S. 19th Street, she also advertised for her specialized clientele: "For the Miss of small dimensions, sizes 11 to 17."⁷ In 1942, the founder ventured to open a branch store "in a small white clapboard shop" or cottage on Las Olas Street in Fort Lauderdale, Florida.⁸ The newly established Fort Lauderdale store was one of the first to bring high end fashion to this seasonal retreat for a well-to-do and sometimes famous clientele, catering to the likes of actress Gloria Swanson among others. In 1943, Pearl Curson Goldner (1908-2011) joined her sister in business and soon after Rosemond Curson Price (1910-2009) completed the retail trio of sisters.⁹

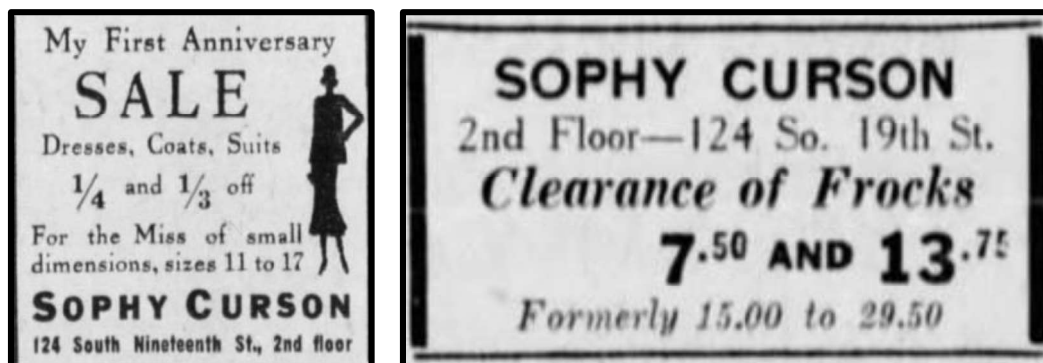


Figure 10. Left: Advertisement for Sophy Curson in 1930. Source: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 27 April 1930, 3. Via Newspapers.com. Figure 11. Right: Advertisement for Sophy Curson in 1931. Source: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 21 January 1941, 3. Newspapers.com.

⁴ *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 21 April 1918, 37.

⁵ "Police Surprise Intruders In Store," *The Morning Post*. (Camden, New Jersey: 2 March 1916), 1.

⁶ "Always in Fashion," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2 October 2016, E06.

⁷ *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 27 April 1930, 3.

⁸ "Goldner," *South Florida Sun Sentinel*. (Fort Lauderdale: 22 June 2011), 6.; and "Retailer Pearl Curson Goldner," *South Florida Sun Sentinel*, (Fort Lauderdale: 25 June 2011), 32.

⁹ "Retailer Pearl Curson Goldner," *South Florida Sun Sentinel*, (Fort Lauderdale: 25 June 2011), 32.

In 1950, Sophy Curson officially coined the slogan: “Junior is a size...not an age.” In use by her business since 1935, Curson applied for a trademark with the U.S. Patent & Trademark Office.¹⁰ This official slogan accompanied a decidedly modern image, as the boutique continued to grow and prosper over the years at 124 S. 19th Street, first capitalizing on its specialized clientele and eventually being one of the select retailers of high-end women’s fashion in Philadelphia.

In 1950, Sophy Curson commissioned her brother-in-law, architect Beryl Price, to design a one-story shop for her at 122 S. 19th Street. The new building would be located at the corner lot directly adjacent to her existing shop. The zoning permit was filed on December 11, 1950 by contractor Samuel A. Shandler. Shandler completed construction of the new Sophy Curson store the following year in 1951.¹¹ The design was an unusual one-story modernist building set into the traditional architectural context of Rittenhouse Square. This building and the name Sophy Curson would become a unified and distinctive symbol of women’s high-end fashion in Philadelphia’s most fashionable neighborhood. *Charette* magazine featured the new Sophy Curson store in its November 1952 issue, describing its founder and her new venue:

Miss Sophy Curson, owner of one of Philadelphia’s swankiest Junior Miss Shops, has a novel arrangement for combing business and art.

Situated in the famed old tree-lined district of Rittenhouse Square, this dress shop is an uncomplicated one story and basement building, topped by a sweep of flat roof with deep redwood overhangs. The exterior is of beige brick, with a solid walnut 3” thick door. A flower box fronts the display window and is framed by Verde Antique marble. The interior, decorated by Rosemond [Curson] Price, is intimate and frankly luxurious. All selling is done in the dressing room and merchandize is stored away from sight in adjacent long, well-lighted rack rooms.¹²

¹⁰ *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 26 December 1951. Source: Newspapers.com. Though the outcome is not known at this time, the slogan “Junior is a size...not an age,” appears to have been subject to a trademark application Sophy Curson in Ser. No. 603,519, Philadelphia, Pa. Filed September 14, 1950. Section 2(f). Official Gazette of the United States Patent Office, Volume 683.

¹¹ Zoning Permit No. 34145B, Bureau of Engineering, Surveys, and Zoning, Department of Public Works, City of Philadelphia, issued 12 December 1950. Source: City of Philadelphia; and *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 3 June 1951, 82.

¹² “Sophy Curson Shop, 124 South 19th St., Philadelphia, Pa., Beryl Price, Architect,” *Charette*, November 1952. 12.

Architect Beryl Price also designed the Sophy Curson store in Fort Lauderdale in the 1950s, when development pressures led to the procurement of a new shop venue at 1508 East Las Olas Boulevard. The Florida branch was of a similar design to the Rittenhouse Square shop.¹³

Sophy Curson continued working actively in her retail clothing business until around 1968, when she retired and scaled back her involvement in the business. Sophy Curson died in 2004 but her namesake clothing store remains in operation at 122 S 19th Street and is a well-known fixture of the Rittenhouse Square neighborhood.



Figure 12. Left: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 7 November 1943, 42. Figure 13. Middle: Advertisement for Sophy Curson's new store. Source: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 3 June 1951, 82. Figure 14. Right: Advertisement for Sophy Curson's "Holiday Sale" in their new store at 122 S. 19th Street. Source: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 26 December 1951.

¹³ The Fort Lauderdale branch has discontinued operation in its sister storefront.



Published in *52 Designs to Modernize Main Street with Glass* in 1935, the above designs for “The Apparel Store” are decidedly Art Moderne, using glass panels, open fronts, and distinctive signage to attract the customer. Figure 15. Left: Design No. 652 by Herbert L. Rodde. This design features what was considered “an exceptionally attractive exterior and at the same time...a novel yet not quite practical window.”¹⁴ Figure 16. Right: Design No. 183 by Irwin A. Sugarman. This design features an “abundance of window display,” an “unusual sign arrangement...equally effective day or night,” and “sign lettering and exterior metal trim” known as Aluminum in a “Coloral” Black finish.”¹⁵ Source: Archive.org.

CRITERION D

Originating in Europe, the modernization of commercial architecture and a “transformation in storefront design” firmly took hold in the United States in the late 1920s and the 1930s.¹⁶ The introduction of new design was the beginning of the modern movement on this side of the Atlantic, which created two distinct periods of commercial architecture: Art Deco and Art Moderne styles from the late 1920s through the 1940s and the International Style from 1945 through the 1960s.¹⁷ Sophy Curson, the subject property, fits into the second period, which is generally categorized today as commercial architecture in the Mid-Century Modern style. Also indicative of the built environment found in the Philadelphia region, modern architects like Beryl Price (1910-1978) who designed the subject building, incorporated regional elements as opposed to designing something completely alien to its surroundings. Of all the examples illustrated in this nomination, Sophy Curson is the most responsive to its immediate surroundings with its use of Roman brick, marble, and wood. These features work to ameliorate and harmonize the introduction of the International style and streamline modernism of the early 1950s into the context of the more traditionally styled Rittenhouse Square neighborhood.

The stylistic shift that embodied the modern movement was a departure from traditional architecture that had previously defined commercial buildings and storefronts. In the first period, the Art Deco and Art Moderne styles were articulated in new facades and storefronts that were comprised of structural glass, metal, porcelain-enamel panels, etc. Some designs departed from bronze and copper trimmings, choosing extruded aluminum, among other newly developed material types, instead.

¹⁴ *52 Designs to Modernize Main Street with Glass*. (Toledo, Ohio: Libbey-Owens-Ford Glass Co., 1935), 58.

¹⁵ *52 Designs to Modernize Main Street with Glass*. (Toledo, Ohio: Libbey-Owens-Ford Glass Co., 1935), 60.

¹⁶ Jackson, Mike, “Modernism on Main Street: The Dilemma of the Half-modern Building,” *APT Bulletin, Journal of Preservation Technology*. (2017), 29.

¹⁷ “The Modern Movement (those two words together, with capital letters) is an architectural category that generally refers to European-influenced buildings from the 1920s through the 1950s.” Reference: Clendenin, Malcolm, Ph.D., and Emily T. Cooperman (Ed.), *A Complicated Modernity: Philadelphia Architectural Design 1945-1980*, Modern Design Thematic Historic Context Essay, Philadelphia Preservation Plan Phase 1, 2008—09, 24.

Advancements in lighting technologies also contributed greatly to the overall appearance and advertising purpose of these new building facades and storefronts, increasing exposure of the establishment and its products to twenty-four hours per day, seven days per week.¹⁸ Many daytime photographs of new and/or improved buildings and storefronts are accompanied by impressive night shots, providing incredible insight into the total purpose of these designs and the material employed.

While certainly employed in designs and generally known in American architectural circles, the open front—a glass storefront that occupies much of the principal elevations—was popularized on a national level through a design competition sponsored by Libbey-Owens-Ford in 1935.¹⁹ The meritorious designs were published in *52 Designs to Modernize Main Street with Glass*, which assisted in the advancement of this design precedent for commercial buildings and storefronts across the country. The publication also categorized commercial designs as follows: The Food Store, The Drug Store, The Automobile Sales and Service Station, and The Apparel Shop.²⁰ The winning works were largely influenced by the Art Deco and Art Moderne styles although some works had elements of the International Style as it influenced commercial architecture of the period.



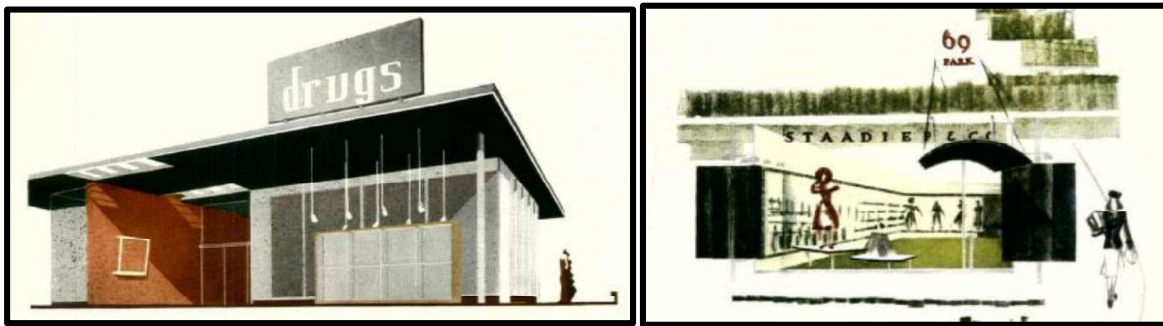
Figure 17. Left: The Davis Company at 704 Chestnut street (to the far left in the photograph) featured a façade of glass panels, which was somewhat unusual in that it covered a three-and-one-half-story elevation—basically rising to the full height of an existing townhouse (c1800). While this façade was listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, it was destroyed c2013. Figure 18. Right: Louis J. Shapian Furs, featuring a storefront alteration at the first and second floors, exhibiting the results of modernizing older residential buildings with the open front without standardized designs and motifs. The date of this alteration is unknown to the author at this time, but the photograph was taken in 1949.

¹⁸ Jackson, Mike, “Modernism on Main Street: The Dilemma of the Half-modern Building,” *APT Bulletin, Journal of Preservation Technology*. (2017), 30-31.

¹⁹ Leech, Benjamin, Nomination for the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places: Ott Camera, 6901 Castor Ave. Philadelphia, PA: Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, 2017.

²⁰ *52 Designs to Modernize Main Street with Glass*. (Toledo, Ohio: Libbey-Owens-Ford Glass Co., 1935), 60.

One of the most influential contests occurred when the architectural and design publication *New Pencil Points* sponsored the “Kawneer Store Fronts of Tomorrow” competition in 1942.²¹ The contest “encouraged designers to look beyond the War into the wonderful new world that might lie ahead.”²² The open front was further advanced and popularized by the designs shown in this publication.²³ In the Post-World War II period, the aesthetics of commercial buildings and storefronts were evolving or transitioning to less discernable styles, some of which were derivative of the Art Deco and Art Moderne. Many new commercial buildings and shopfronts of the late 1940s were certainly stylized, but there was less architectural clarity, and the styles shown in designs being somewhere between the Art Moderne and International styles. By the late 1940s and the first years of the 1950s, the International Style had effectively infiltrated the built fabric of American retail, most of which was related to development projects and new construction.



Part of the *Pencil Points—Kawneer Store Fronts of Tomorrow* competition in 1942, the designs shown above are stylistically evolved beyond the Art Deco and the Art Moderne, embracing many of the characteristics that were associated with the International Style and its influence on Mid-century Modern Commercial Architecture.²⁴ Figure 19. Left: Honorable Mention: Lawrence J. Israel, Architect, Richmond, Va. Figure 20. Right: Commended: Donald Barthelme, AIA, Houston, Texas. This design for an “Apparel Shop” is also evocative of the International Style prior to its predominance in commercial architecture.²⁵ Source: www.usmodernist.org. Accessed 30 July 2019.

With the development of residential suburbs in the post-World War II period, there was energy for new trends in commercial design, firmly diverging from traditional aesthetic motifs towards streamlined architecture. Mid-Century Modern commercial architecture was especially prevalent in the newly created suburbs after the War II; along established, changing, and expanding main streets; and in growing town centers. However, the old and established cities of the United States also ushered in development and modern architecture, resulting in many large projects like Penn Square and the Society Hill Towers. However, buildings like Sophy Curson were part of both national and local trends. Departing somewhat from the glass and porcelain paneled facades of the recent past, the widespread desire and need for new, purpose-built commercial buildings led to the employment of materials more traditionally associated with new construction. These materials included unit masonry of rough stone or brick, among others. Masonry units made a sharp but

²¹ Jackson, Mike, “Modernism on Main Street: The Dilemma of the Half-modern Building,” *APT Bulletin, Journal of Preservation Technology*. (2017), 29-36.

²² “Store Fronts of Tomorrow,” *New Pencil Points*. (February 1943), 41.

²³ Jackson, Mike, “Modernism on Main Street: The Dilemma of the Half-modern Building,” *APT Bulletin, Journal of Preservation Technology*. (2017), 29-36.

²⁴ “Store Fronts of Tomorrow,” *New Pencil Points*. (February 1943), 38.

²⁵ “Store Fronts of Tomorrow,” *New Pencil Points*. (February 1943), 41.

attractive contrast with the open fronts, usually composed of plate glass or panels in curtain walls.²⁶ This new combination of materials was articulated in designs that were inspired by the best examples of the International Style. While by no means equivalent to the major architectural and development projects of the era, Sophy Curson is a prominent example of Philadelphia Modernism in terms of its architectural style, building form, and period.



Figure 21. *Sophy Curson*, photographed by Cortlandt V.D. Hubbard in 1952, and featured in the *AIA/T-Square Yearbook*, exhibiting the work of Beryl Price, Architect. Source: *Athenaeum of Philadelphia*.

Sophy Curson possesses distinguishing characteristics of commercial architecture in the Mid-Century Modern style, including the following features, as defined by the Philadelphia City Planning Commission's study *Mid-Century Modern Commercial Corridors*:

- **Façade Geometry:** Sophy Curson "is characterized by smooth, simple geometry and intersecting angular planes." The subject building features these characteristics as well as an asymmetrical fenestration.
- **Modular Materials:** Sophy Curson's "design embraced elements that could be pre-fabricated and assembled on site, such as bricks, curtain walls, and tiles." The building features distinctive brick of the period, which is used in both elevations, serving as a backdrop for signage.
- **New Glazing Technology:** Sophy Curson's design "embraced new technologies such as the manufacturing of plate-glass," which appears to be used in both of the display windows. The building also adheres to the open front with a primary display window that extends from the pedestrian door to the northeast corner of the building and into the side (north)

²⁶ Jackson, Mike, "Modernism on Main Street: The Dilemma of the Half-modern Building," *APT Bulletin, Journal of Preservation Technology*. (2017), 29-36.

elevation. An even larger, secondary display window is present near the center of the north elevation also appearing to be of plate-glass.

- Storefront Canopies and Projecting Roofs: The redwood-clad roof of Sophy Curson projects at the primary (east) and the side (north) elevations, doubling as a canopy.
- Signage: the name Sophy Curson is the focal point of both the east and north elevations, articulated in large, cursive font that is finished in gold, achieving both distinction and elegance.²⁷

A remarkably intact, purpose-built retail shop of its time and place, located in an established and historic urban setting, Sophy Curson is a one-story commercial building that is a distinctive example of Mid-Century Modern style in Philadelphia. In addition, the subject building is in an impeccable state of preservation with minimal to no changes since the time of its construction. This building is among the most intact examples of its architectural style and period of construction in Philadelphia, and, in its quiet, but elegant nature, is emblematic of its original, retail purpose through its lasting physical appearance and design.



A Drug Store or Pharmacy at Varree Road and Ripley Street has maintained much of its original character. Figure 22. Left: Varree Road and Ripley Street in 1956. Figure 23. Right: Varree Road and Ripley Street in 2013. Source: Mid-Century Modern Commercial Corridors, Central Northeast District. Philadelphia City Planning Commission, 2014. <http://chconservancy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/MidCentury-Modern-Commercial-Corridors-CNE.pdf>. Accessed 29 July 2019.

²⁷ Mid-Century Modern Commercial Corridors, Central Northeast District. Philadelphia City Planning Commission, 2014. <http://chconservancy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/MidCentury-Modern-Commercial-Corridors-CNE.pdf>. Accessed 29 July 2019.

CRITERION C

Around the time Sophy Curson was built, the commercial corridors and principal streets all throughout Philadelphia were changing and developing to accommodate new buildings and revised facades that adhered to the prevalent ideas about commercial buildings and mid-twentieth century design. The following photographs and associated descriptions are provided to further contextualize the subject property in the realm of mid-century commercial architecture articulated in Philadelphia Modernism.



The taller, old fashion building that originally housed Allison's "Brand New Clothing" was replaced by Crawford's Clothing at 920 Market Street, a building described as both "Crawford's beautiful new store," as well as "Crawford's newest and biggest"—the key word being new. Purportedly "one of America's Largest Apparel Chains," the design was a step beyond the Art Moderne Style, embracing a new, open front and streamline modernism.²⁸ Figure 24. On left is the design drawing that was published as part of the advertisement of the new store in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* on March 5, 1947.²⁹ Figure 25. On right is a photograph of the building in 1948, shortly after it was constructed, showing it vibrant due to the simple, but distinctive signage that was illuminated due to the advancement of lighting technologies. Source: Jacob Stelman Collection, Athenaeum of Philadelphia. While this building is very different than the subject property, it is also of a streamline modernism that is akin to the aesthetic criteria used to create Sophy Curson. The similarities between Crawford's and the subject property includes the removal from traditional architectural styles; the emphasis of the open front at the primary and side elevations; projecting canopies, and distinctive signage.

²⁸ *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 29 January 1902, 6.

²⁹ *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 5 March 1947, 16.

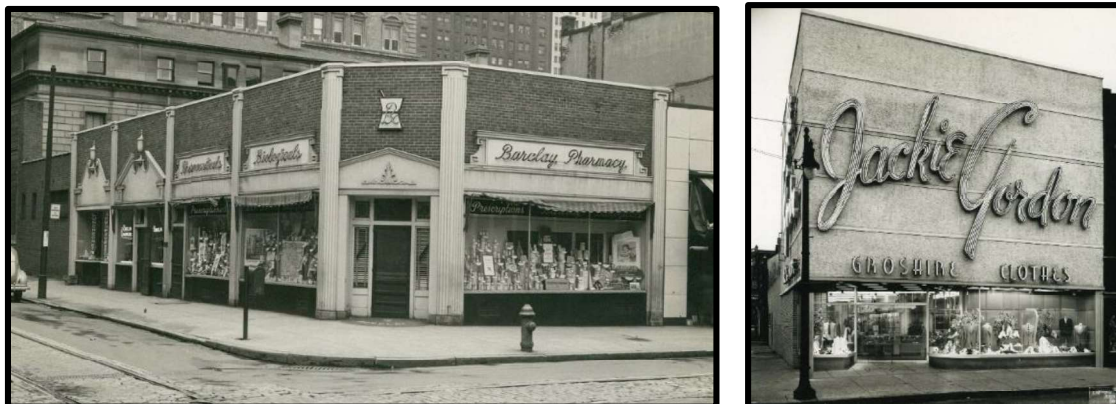


Figure 26. Left: Pre-dating the subject property, the Barclay Pharmacy is akin to the subject property in its placement at a corner, and as a one-story building in the Rittenhouse Square neighborhood. While the subject building is designed in the Colonial or Georgian Revival style, its features are decidedly modern with open fronts across both elevations, and exaggerated features, including the broken pediments at the side elevation and the pilasters that further delineate the display windows. Figure 27. Right: Jackie Gordon, a rather crude façade with an open front and signage that while on a much larger scale is similar to the subject property. The precise date of this building and/or façade revision is unknown; however, the photograph dates to 1948. Source: Jacob Stelman Collection, Athenaeum of Philadelphia.



Founded in 1887, the Stein family were florists at 2223 N. Front Street for many years prior to opening a second location at 7059 Frankford Avenue (extant).³⁰ Between 1950 and 1951, the local landmark, Stein Flowers was built at Frankford and Princeton Avenues in Mayfair. While very different overall from Sophy Curson, the two buildings share a streamline quality that adheres to Main Street Modernism, with distinctive signage, the use of unit masonry, and varying, but definitive forms of open fronts. Like the subject property, Stein Flowers retains a high degree of physical integrity. The above photographs show its original character that is apparent both by night (on left - Figure 28) and by day (on right - Figure 29). Source: pahistoricpreservation.com. Accessed 30 July 2019.

³⁰ *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 26 October 1955, 42.



Figure 30. Left: Linton's Lunch, a restaurant chain owned by Jesse Linton, was apparently a somewhat successful establishment, as *The Philadelphia Inquirer* announced in 1949 that "10 new units" were planned "in the next five years." The building shown above was likely one of the two locations opened in 1949, perhaps the building that once stood at Castor Avenue and Hellerman Street (demolished). The photograph, taken at night, shows similarities between Linton's and Sophy Curson, primarily the roof doubling as a canopy; the use of unit masonry; and the overall scale of the one-story building with an open front, all of which is completed in a crisp Mid-century Modern Commercial Architectural Style that is decidedly influenced by the International Style. Figure 31. Right: While not akin to the subject property in form in the same way as Linton's, Dewey's new restaurant at 15th and Arch Streets (extant/alterd) was also relative to Main Street Modernism, as articulated in 1950. The building featured an open front and no traditional details, being pure in its streamline quality. Source: Jacob Stelman Collection, Athenaeum of Philadelphia.



Figure 32. Left: Located at 500 South Street (extant/alterd), Al Berman's Haberdashery, with his Ambassador and Stylized Clothes, is the low budget conversion of a pre-existing corner building into a modern storefront with features of the Art Deco Style, as well as other less discernable features, including the signage. Berman has chosen to mimic Art Moderne and International Style designs with the blind façade affordably created with "pizza shop stucco," making the signage and the open front, which spans the entire façade. The date of these façade alterations is unknown at this time, but the photograph dates to 1952. Source: Jacob Stelman Collection, Athenaeum of Philadelphia. Figure 33. Right: Two years after Figure 32 was taken, Berman opened a new store at 6424 Castor Avenue (extant/alterd), taking out an entire page in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* with an advertisement that even showed a picture of his new storefront.³¹ This building appears to have been relatively new, which was more appropriately scaled to the aesthetic associated with Main Street Modernism—also being similar in form and size to the subject property. Source: Newspapers.com.

³¹ *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 24 March 1954, 54.



The Baltimore Markets were proud to show off drawings of their new building at N. Broad Street and Cheltenham Avenue (extant/alterd) in 1952, the same year that they commissioned professional photographs of their new building. "Open Late Every Night," the building was featured the same year as *Sophy Curson*, and, though a much, much larger building with a parking lot, the Baltimore Markets featured a canopy similar to the subject building; an open front; unit masonry; and distinctive signage—all of which was articulated in a commercial building influenced by the International Style much like the subject building. Figure 34. Left: this photograph was taken in 1952. Source: Jacob Stelman Collection, Athenaeum of Philadelphia. Figure 35. Right: An advertisement published in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* in 1952.³² Source: Newspapers.com.

³² The Philadelphia Inquirer, 8 January 1952, 17.

SACHS STORE, FRANKFORD, PHILADELPHIA, PA.

Beryl Price, Architect

This smartly merchandised and departmentalized women's store in the northeast section of Philadelphia caters to factory workers and office stenographers.

The exterior is in blue and grey structural glass with 10" channel neon double tube stainless steel letters. The structural glass below the sign is in a suede finish with window bases in pink terrazzo. Window backgrounds are filmy glass curtains in three layers which can be pulled to increase the depth of the window and open up the first floor to window shoppers or, when all three are drawn, create a completely closed-back effect.

The first floor, featuring the jewelry department as an island in the center of the area, leads back to a glass screen, cut into 30" modules by walnut separators, behind which are the dressing rooms and over which is positioned the air conditioning system. A broad staircase, of birch with aluminum brackets, mounts to the second floor sales area. Administrative offices are located on the balcony level. Stock rooms are concealed behind cases on both sides of the store. Wallpaper is deep green and pink, with carpeting in soft grey-beige.



CHARENTE—November, 1952

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Figure 36. Another design by Beryl Price was completed around the time of Sophy Curson. The feature shown above from Charette, dated November 1952, shows the modest one-story building design for Sachs at 4646 Frankford Avenue in Kensington (extant/alterd). The one-story building stands out much like the subject property with the employment of distinctive signage, modern lighting, and a unique interior. Source: Carnegie Mellon University Library.

WEISS FURNITURE STORE, RIDGE PIKE, N. WEST PHILADELPHIA, PA.

Beryl Price, Architect

Located in Northwest Philadelphia, this furniture store contains more than 25,000 square feet of floor space with the rear parking area entered from a very lightly trafficked street. The front exterior of the building is in beige stone Greek brick with a deep struck horizontal joint every third course. Letters are 10" deep channels of 20G stainless steel filled with four tubes of pink neon, all other metal work being extruded aluminum. Window bases are pink and green terrazzo. Lighting throughout is a combination of bare tube slimline and Hi-Hat incandescent. Louvres over fixtures were omitted as a last minute economy by the owner.

Decorated by Rosemond Price, the color scheme is beige, lemon yellow and orange with lemon yellow wallpaper in bamboo. Ceiling colors, as in most Price projects, are in dark, raw umber tones.



THE CUTLER PAINT STORE, 3500 GERMANTOWN AVE., PHILADELPHIA, PA.

Beryl Price, Architect



This sleek, eye-catching remodelling job on the Cutler Paint Store is Architect Price's prescription (heartily endorsed by the owner) for the malaise of neighborhood deterioration. They both hope it will start a rash of sprucing up and face-lifting for adjoining run-down buildings, with the ultimate result of lifting the whole area out of its present business doldrums.

A beige brick building, with an almost entirely plate glass front, interrupted by extruded rectangular sectioned aluminum supports, the Cutler Paint Store comprises a first floor for paint sales, a balcony used as a special display area and a rear second floor, turned over to office space.

Signs are deep channel stainless steel with pink neon.

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CHARENTE—November, 1952

Figure 37. Two other designs by Beryl Price were also completed around the time of Sophy Curson. The features shown above from Charette, dated November 1952, show Weiss Furniture Store on Ridge Avenue in northwest Philadelphia and the Cutler Paint Store at 3500 Germantown Avenue (demolished). Both buildings relate to the subject property with their open fronts, and use of signage and lighting for a distinctive and alluring appearance. Source: Carnegie Mellon University Library.

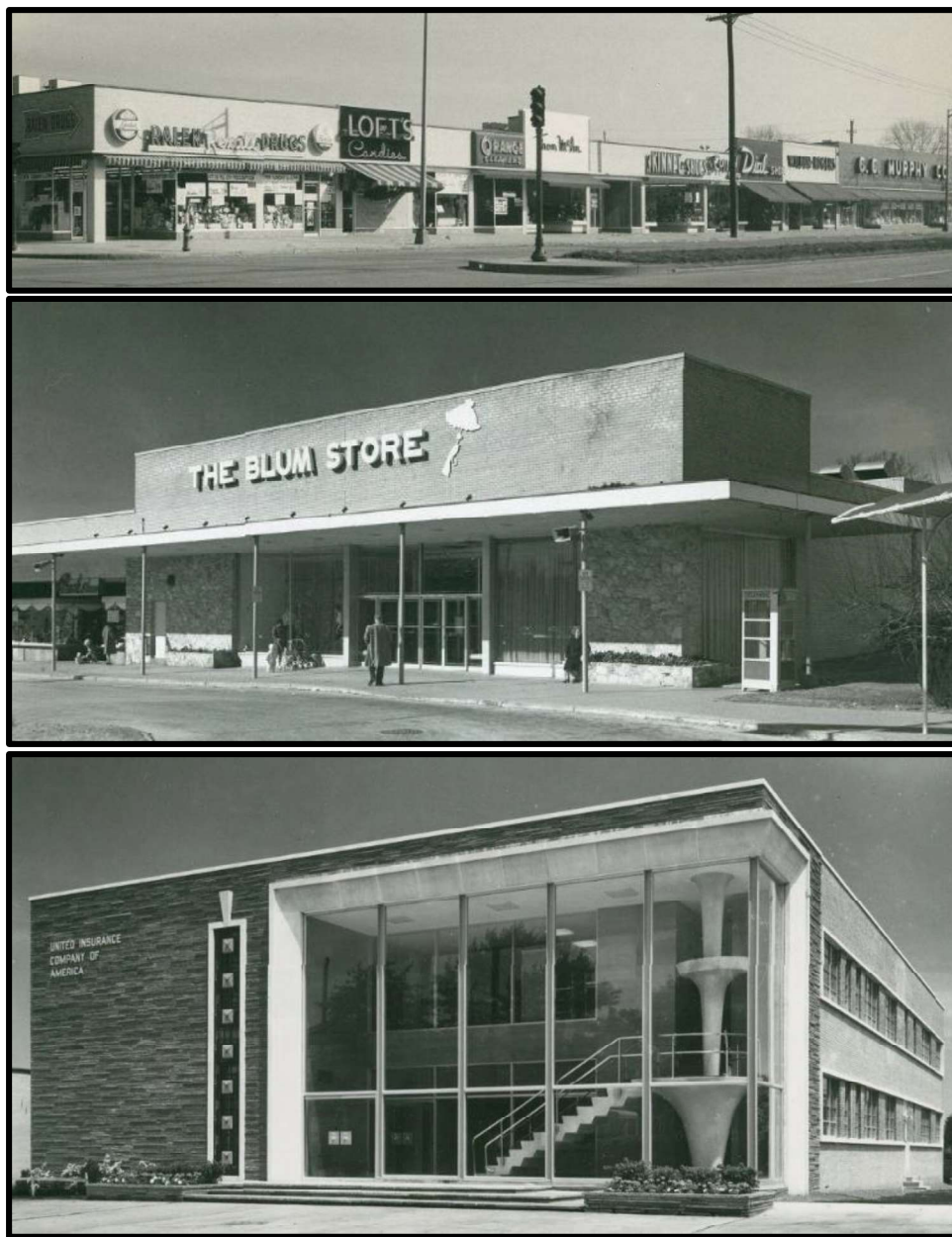


Figure 38. Top: A photograph showing a streamline modern development that is a relatively unremarkable example of Mid-Century Commercial Architecture. This photograph was taken in 1955. Figure 39. Center: The Blum Store on City Avenue (extant/alterd) opened a 40,000-square foot branch at the newly built Bala Cynwyd Mall. While opposite in size and scale, this building is stylistically akin to the subject property with its low-slung appearance; being purpose-built, new construction; the projecting canopy; the primary elevation that partly open front and partly unit masonry; and the way in which the signage is displayed. The whole feeling of the building, like Sophy Curson, is indicative of the International Style. Figure 40. Bottom: The United Insurance Company of America, built c1958, at 1355 Cheltenham Avenue (extant), is also representative of the evolution of Mid-Century Modern Commercial Architecture. While this building is not a retail space like the other examples and the subject property, it too is evocative of the International Style, sharing characteristics with Sophy Curson in its use of masonry; its open front; its relatively flat roof; the architrave of its open front, which is similar in design to the architrave of the pedestrian door at the subject property; and the overall feeling of the design. Source: Jacob Stelman Collection, Athenaeum of Philadelphia.



W.T. Grant Co., Inc., “operators of a chain of 495 retail stores” purchased the property at the southeast corner of 11th and Market Streets in 1944. Early in 1953, the company displaced numerous tenants, including the Brothers Theaters. Grant’s immediately announced their plans to demolish the Earle Theater Building, a six-story building of “offices, several shops, a basement restaurant, and what was once considered the finest vaudeville house in America.” “Planned along ultra-modern lines,” the new building was to offer of 28,100 square feet, being one of the top four stores in the chain.³³ A rendering of the new W.T. Grant Co. store (extant), designed by Thalheimer and Wietz, architects, was published in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* in December 1953.³⁴ Figure 41. Top: A rendering of W.T. Grant Co.’s new store as published in *The Philadelphia Inquirer*. Source: Newspapers.com. Figure 42. Bottom: “W.T. Grant’s 5 & 10,” built in 1954, at the southeast corner of 11th and Market Streets. Source: Jacob Stelman Collection, Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

³³ “Earle Theater To Be Torn Down,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 10 February 1953, 10.

³⁴ *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 17 December 1953, 11.

Modest examples of Philadelphia Modernism examples of commercial buildings influenced by the International Style include 7267 Rising Sun Avenue, featuring plate glass windows; buildings in the 1800 and 2200 blocks of Cottman Avenue, featuring projecting roofs; 7311 Elgin Street, featuring an angled roofline; 8720 Bustleton Avenue, featuring an angular, geometric storefront; 6428 Rising Sun Avenue, featuring an asymmetrical storefront; and 6425 Rising Sun Avenue, featuring a curved façade element. All of these buildings were called out in the Philadelphia City Planning Commission's study, *Mid-Century Modern Commercial Corridors, Central Northeast District*, however, not one of these buildings retains the impressive original condition that has been maintained at Sophy Curson due to its excellent state of preservation.



Figure 43. A well-known example of a mid-century storefront designed by Beryl Price can be found in the first-floor façade “improvements” of Lauria’s Jewelers at 118 S. 8th Street at the northwest corner of Sanson on Jeweler’s Row. The open front, signage, and employment of green marble at the base are all features akin to the subject property. Source: Google.

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Through generous sponsorship of a friend, this nomination was completed by the Keeping Society of Philadelphia with the primary authors as Oscar Beisert of Germantown in Philadelphia, Architectural Historian and Historic Preservationist. Advice, editing, and research was graciously provided by Allee Davis of Philadelphia, Architectural Historian, and Jay Farrell of Philadelphia, local Historian and Social Media Extraordinaire. Additional assistance was provided by J.M. Duffin, Archivist and Historian. The following repositories and sites were used to create the nomination: Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network, the Hathi Trust, Newspapers.com, Phillyhistory.org, Proquest Historical Newspapers, the Jacob Stelman Collection at The Athenaeum of Philadelphia, etc.

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APPENDIX A: BERYL PRICE, ARCHITECT

The subject property may be eligible for listing in the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places as the work of a designer who influenced the built environment of the city, commonwealth and/or nation. However, additional research, beyond the scope of this nomination, would be required to determine the significance of Beryl Price, Architect.

The following biography was written by Sandra L. Tatman and Emily T. Cooperman and published in the Philadelphia Architects and Buildings Database, hosted by The Athenaeum of Philadelphia:

Born in Philadelphia and a product of South Philadelphia High School for Boys, Beryl Price was the son of David and Fannie (Bearint) Price. He received his B.Arch. from the University of Pennsylvania in 1933, but had begun studying architecture in high school. Price's practical training began in the office of [Simon & Simon](#) (1928-1930) and also with [Philip H. Johnson](#) (1931-1933). During the lean years of the Depression, Price found employment outside of architectural offices: first for the Pennsylvania State Rehabilitation Bureau (1933-6) working with the disabled, and then with the Nevins Drug Company, designing and supervising all building projects for this store chain (1936-7). In 1936 he was awarded a teaching certificate by the University of Pennsylvania's School of Education and the City of Philadelphia for high school vocational architectural training, although he is not known to have pursued this line of work. In 1938, he launched his own architectural office.

During World War II, Price served on the War Production Board's Construction Division as a Senior Engineer, supervising and approving material requests. After the war, Price resumed his practice in Philadelphia, and eventually would maintain offices in Philadelphia, Florida and New Jersey.

Price was active in the profession and in many organizations. He joined the national AIA in 1942, and was named a fellow in 1961. He chaired that organization's Chapter Affairs Commission in the early 1950s, and was the Philadelphia Chapter's first Vice President in 1951. He was also a member of the RIBA, of the Architectural League of New York, and of the Gray's Ferry Community Council. In addition, he was on the board of the mid-Atlantic region Anti-Defamation League, was a member of the Foreign Legion, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the Jewish War Veterans.

Clubs and Membership Organizations: Philadelphia Art Alliance, Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, Pennsylvania Society of Architects, American Institute of Architects (AIA). Philadelphia Chapter, AIA, and Architectural League of New York.

School Affiliations: University of Pennsylvania