

ADDRESS: 1722-24 CHESTNUT ST

Name of Resource: The Peck & Peck Store Building

Proposed Action: Designate

Property Owner: SG National LLC

Nominator: Center City Residents Association

Staff Contact: Alex Till, alexander.till@phila.gov

OVERVIEW: This nomination proposes to designate the property at 1722-24 Chestnut Street and list it on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. A three-story masonry commercial building known as the Peck & Peck Store Building, built in 1929 in the Art Deco style and designed by the architecture firm of Silverman & Levy, stands on the property.

The nomination contends that the Peck & Peck Store Building satisfies Criteria for Designation C, D, and E. It argues that the building reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style and embodies many of the distinguishing characteristics of the Art Deco architectural style as seen on attached commercial buildings, satisfying Criteria C & D.

The nomination also argues that the Silverman & Levy architecture firm, designers of the building, had a significant influence on the development of Art Deco and other modernist styles of architecture in the city of Philadelphia, satisfying Criterion E.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The staff recommends that the nomination demonstrates that the property at 1722-24 Chestnut Street satisfies Criteria for Designation C, D, and E and should be designated as historic and listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.



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: **1722-24 Chestnut Street**

Postal code: **19103**

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: **The Peck & Peck Store Building**

Current Name: **Mattress Firm**

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

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Please attach a narrative description and site/plot plan of the resource's boundaries.

6. DESCRIPTION

Please attach a narrative description and photographs of the resource's physical appearance, site, setting, and surroundings.

7. SIGNIFICANCE

Please attach a narrative Statement of Significance citing the Criteria for Designation the resource satisfies.

Period of Significance (from year to year): **1929**

Date(s) of construction: **1929**

Architects: **Silverman & Levy, Architects**

Builders: **Henry P. Schneider**

Original owner: **Jules and Louis Winkelman**

Significant person: **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 a bibliography.

9. NOMINATOR

Organization: **Historic Building Preservation Task Force of the Center City Residents Association**

Date: **9 September 2022**

Email: **timkerner@gmail.com**

Nominator is is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: September 9, 2022

Correct-Complete Incorrect-Incomplete Date: October 26, 2022

Date of Notice Issuance: October 27, 2022

Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: SG National LLC

Address: 1185 Avenue of the Americas, 10th Floor

City: New York State: NY Postal Code: 10036

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: November 30, 2022

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: January 13, 2023

Date of Final Action: _____

Designated Rejected

NOMINATION
FOR THE
PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES



Figure 1. The primary (north) elevation of the subject property. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2022.

THE PECK & PECK STORE BUILDING
IN THE ART DECO STYLE
SILVERMAN & LEVY, ARCHITECTS
—
BUILT 1929
—
1722-24 CHESTNUT STREET
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19102-2707



Figure 2. The boundary for the subject property is delineated by the purple line. Source: Atlas, City of Philadelphia, 2022.

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

ALL THAT CERTAIN lot or piece of ground with the buildings and improvements thereon erected, SITUATE on the South side of Chestnut Street at the distance of 218 feet westward from the west side of South Fifteenth Street, the boundary begins at the northeast corner of the parcel associated with 1722-24 Chestnut Street extending forty-four feet to the west along Chestnut Street to the northwest corner of the said parcel; turning to the south and extending 145 feet along the western boundary of the subject parcel to its southwest corner; turning to the east and extending forty-four feet to the east along Stock Exchange Place to the southeast corner of the subject parcel; and turning to the north and extending 145 feet along the eastern boundary of the subject parcel to the point and place of beginning.

BEING known as 1722-24 Chestnut Street.

Map Registry No. 001S220217

OPA Account No. 882035000



Figure 3. The primary (north) elevation of the subject property. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2022.

6. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The Peck & Peck Store Building at 1722-24 Chestnut Street is a three-story masonry commercial structure in Center City Philadelphia. Occupying the entire footprint of the lot, the subject building stands on a lot that extends from Chestnut Street at the north to Stock Exchange Place at the south. Slightly less tall than its neighbors, the flat-roofed structure is set within a row of buildings along one of the city's principal commercial streets. The primary (north) elevation is a façade of smooth-faced limestone, while the building is otherwise constructed of brick. Stylistically, the building is a Classically inspired, Art Deco style structure with distinctive architectural details.

The first floor of the primary (north) elevation is comprised of large storefront that occupies much of the first floor. From the eastern most façade across the primary (north), first floor elevation, a glass store front serves as the commercial face of Mattress Firm. The signage is centered on a modern backdrop in the upper portion of the storefront opening, infilling the area that once boasted a large, decorative transom. A pedestrian entrance adjoins the western-most wall of the storefront and extends to the western party wall. The second and third floors are symmetrically designed with three large openings per level. This larger fenestration is delineated by four pilasters of smooth-faced limestone that terminate in muted limestone capitals within the cornice of an incised palmette motif. The three, like-sized second-floor openings feature original show windows that are individually delineated by decorative terra cotta chambranle with classically inspired ornament within a chamfered transverse. Some of the ornament is Grecian-inspired, including what appears to be a palmette at center flanked ceremonially by other details. Each opening features a large, undivided span of glass set beneath three-part transoms. The transoms are delineated by ornate

copper muntin panels. Each of these are identical, being centered on a decorative frame that is set off by an “X” style background, which creates four trapezium openings facing the said central opening. While the space between the pilasters at the upper floors is identical in width, the third-floor fenestration features smaller windows, which are four-part mullion windows, featuring two larger panes of glass at the bottom and two smaller, transom-like windows above. Each four-part window unit features a decorative limestone or terra cotta surround, which is set beneath a stone header, flanked by fluted stone or terra cotta panels and resting on a limestone spandrel, which includes large dentils details. Decorative bands, boasting Egyptian- inspired running ornament, rises above both the stone header and flanking fluted panels, introducing a final course of the third floor. A cornice of limestone or terra cotta includes the capitals of the pilasters set within panels that rise above each bay of the fenestration below. The fluted panels are repeated in the cornice, being joined at the top by a course of rectangular insets that speak to the basic geometric forms employed in architecture of the era. These panels are interrupted by projecting plinths that rise above the roofline providing a backdrop for the classically inspired capitols, extending the verticality of the piers below.

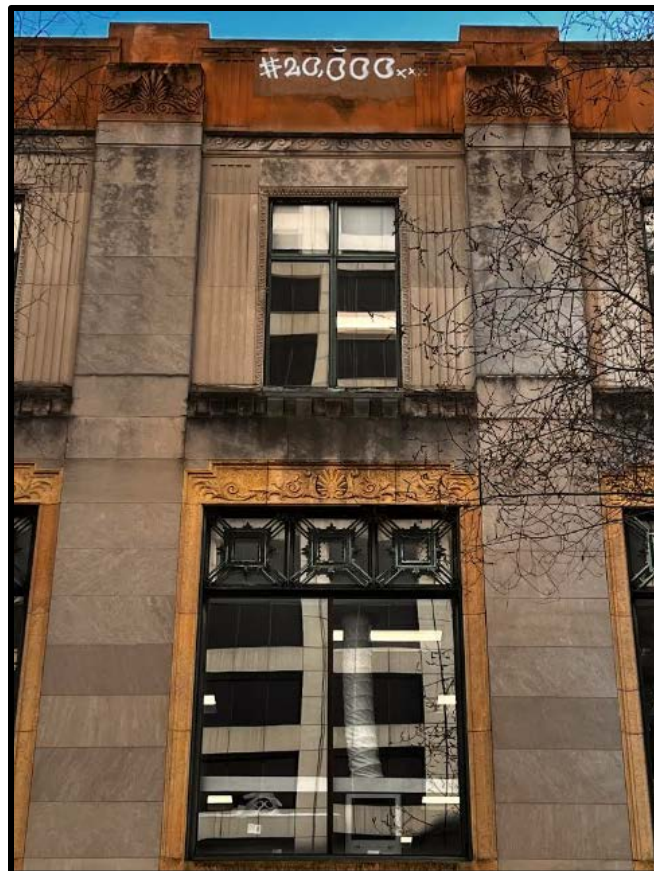


Figure 4. Top: The central bay of the second and third floors of the primary (north) elevation. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2022.

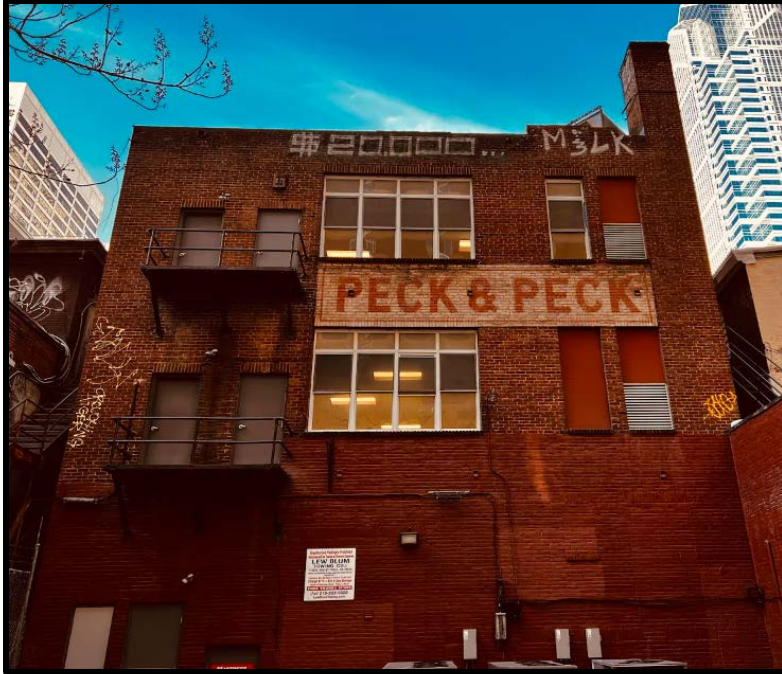


Figure 5. Top: The rear (south) elevation. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2022.

The rear (south) elevation is a utilitarian façade of red brick with an irregular fenestration of apertures. The first-floor features one doorway and several openings that have been sealed with masonry. The second-floor features two doors of like size that previously served a fire escape, but now simply provide balcony access. This is followed by a large opening at the center of the elevation followed by a pair of narrow windows that have been infilled. That same fenestration is repeated on the third floor. Between the central windows on the second and third floors is ghost signage that reads “Peck & Peck.”



Figure 6. The primary (north) elevation in 1983. Source: Jefferson Moak, Philadelphia Historical Commission.

7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Peck & Peck Store Building is a significant historic resource that merits designation by the Philadelphia Historical Commission and inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Located in the Rittenhouse Square neighborhood of Philadelphia, the building satisfies the following Criteria for Designation as enumerated in Section 14-1004 of the Philadelphia Code:

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

The period of significance dates to the time of construction in 1929.



Advertisements for Peck & Peck in the 1930s. Figure 7. Left: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 22 April 1934, 5. Right: Figure 8. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 12 December 1939, 4. Source: Newspapers.com.

HISTORIC CONTEXT: A BRIEF HISTORY OF 1722-24 CHESTNUT STREET

In November 1929, Jules and Louis Winkelman of the Heymann Building, announced that a new “three-story store building” would be constructed at 1722-24 Chestnut Street.¹ The older building on the site was demolished. This planned development was motivated by a lease between the property owner and Peck & Peck, a high-end women’s wear store of 5th Avenue in Manhattan. The deal was engineered by Albert M. Greenfield & Co. and the Cross & Brown Company.² By the time of the announcement, the architectural firm of Silverman & Levy of Philadelphia was engaged in preparing plans, which were described as follows:

[The building] will be modern in every detail. The first floor will be devoted to shops and the second and third floors also planned for the retail trade, with attractive show windows and other suitable features.

The building on the exterior will be treated in a modified modern style, with the entire first floor framed in bronze and glass, and the upper stories faced in polished granite.³

While the initial description mentions polished granite for the façade, later descriptions and a visual observation indicates that limestone was employed in the final plans. By mid-December 1929, Silverman & Levy, then at the northeast corner of 13th and Chestnut Streets, were accepting

¹ “New Building To Rise At 1722-24 Chestnut,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 10 November 1929, 88.; and *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide*, 6 November 1929, 707.

² “Peck & Peck Rent in Philadelphia.” *New York Times*, 12 November 1929, 61.

³ “New Building To Rise At 1722-24 Chestnut,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 10 November 1929, 88.

bids from construction firms with a due date of December 30.⁴ Henry P. Schneider of 3713 Old York Road was selected as the contractor, filing the *Application For Permit For Erection Of New Buildings* on January 17, 1930.⁵ Construction soon began and the building was completed much as it appears today.

Peck & Peck, the longtime tenant and namesake of the building, was founded in 1888 by brothers Edgar Wallace Peck and George H. Peck in Manhattan. Originally located near Madison Square, the firm specialized in hosiery, eventually becoming a retailer of classic women's wear. The Peck & Peck Store at 1722-24 Chestnut Street became one of twenty or so locations owned by the firm in the late 1920s. In fact, the store was so well-known for its established look in New York City that Joan Didion, the celebrated American author, forever memorialized the retailer in an essay *On Keeping a Notebook* (1968). The original drawing for the Chestnut Street building shows that Peck & Peck appears to have occupied the smaller storefront at No. 1722; however, in 1941, they announced their intended removal to No. 1724, likely the larger space on the ground floor.⁶ The high-end retailer of ladies wear would remain at the subject property for several decades, while the second and third floors had a variety of tenants over the years.⁷ Peck & Peck operated in the subject building until the larger corporation filed for bankruptcy in 1974.⁸



Advertisements for Peck & Peck in the 1940s. Figure 9. Left: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 5 December 1940, 5. Figure 10. Right: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 2 December 1945, 48. Source: Newspapers.com.

⁴ *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 11 December 1929, 787.

⁵ City of Philadelphia Application For Permit For Erection of New Buildings: Store Building, 1722 Chestnut Street, 17 January 1930. Source: City Archives of Philadelphia.

⁶ *Chain Store Age*, May 1941, 145.

⁷ *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 21 November 1963, 27.

⁸ Isadore Barmash. "71-Store Peck & Peck Seeking Reorganization," *The New York Times*, 23 July 1974.; and *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 8 August 1976, 62.



Figure 11. A rendering of the subject property at the time it was designed. Source: Albert M. Greenfield Company Photo Collection, Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

CRITERIA C & D

The Peck & Peck Store Building at 1722-24 Chestnut Street embodies distinguishing characteristics of the Art Deco style, as articulated with traditional classical details, and applied to two- and three-story commercial buildings of the interwar years in the United States.⁹

CRITERION D: THE ART DECO STYLE (1925-1940)

The Art Deco was a “Modernist” architectural style that was prominently employed in commercial, institutional, and residential design in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s.¹⁰ The style is defined by “sharp-edged looks and stylized geometrical decorative details” that were quite distinctive as a complete departure from architectural tradition.¹¹ Popularization of the style in American architecture initiated “in 1922 when the *Chicago Tribune* held a world-wide competition for a headquarters building in Chicago,” which led the newspaper powerhouse to select a Gothic Revival design. Second place was awarded to the young Finnish architect Eliel Saarinen (1873-1950) for a design in the Art Deco style, which was widely published throughout the architectural community nationwide. This would ultimately help to promulgate widespread employment of the

⁹ *Commercial and Government Radio Station of the United States*. (Washington, D.C.: Department of Commerce, 30 June 1930), 196.

¹⁰ Virginia Savage McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2018), 465-66.

¹¹ “Art Deco Style (1925-1940),” Pennsylvania Architectural Field Guide. (Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission, 2015). <<http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/portal/communities/architecture/styles/art-deco.html>> Accessed on 3 October 2020. <<http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/portal/communities/architecture/styles/art-deco.html>

style.¹² The style that came to fore was the culmination of many preceding movements, as described by Benjamin Leech, architectural historian:

While French inspiration was indeed prevalent in the American incarnation of the style, so too was the influence of Viennese Secessionism, German Expressionism, Italian Futurism, Beaux-Arts Classicism, and the domestic Arts and Crafts and Prairie School movements of the late nineteenth century.¹³

Popularity of the style was further amplified among architectural professionals after the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in 1925, a Parisian design exhibition where the term “Art Deco” is said to have originated.¹⁴

As the Art Deco emerged and evolved over time, the following architectural details and features became characteristic of the style, as defined by in *Pennsylvania Architectural Field Guide* published online by the Pennsylvania State Historic Preservation Office:

1. Smooth wall surface
2. Sharp edged, linear appearance
3. Stylized decorative elements using geometrical forms, zigzags, chevrons
4. Low relief decorative panels
5. Stepped or set back front facade
6. Strips of windows with decorative spandrels
7. Reeding and fluting around doors and windows

With its primary street-facing elevation on Chestnut Street, the Peck & Peck Store Building contains many of the hallmarks of an attached commercial building executed in the Art Deco style. The character-defining features include a smooth-faced, cast limestone facade; a sharp edged, linear appearance in part; stylized decorative elements and openings, beautifully detailed classical motifs in a simplified, geometrical manner; characteristic decorative panels recessed within the façade; windows set within horizontal and vertical banding; and fluting as a primary detail within window surrounds and spandrels.¹⁵

¹² Virginia Savage McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2018), 465-66.

¹³ Benjamin Leech. *Philadelphia Register of Historic Places Nomination: Overseas Motor Works, 1501-05 Fairmount Avenue*. (Philadelphia: Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, 2014), 4-5.

¹⁴ Bevis Hillier, *Art Deco of the 20s and 30s*. New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1968, 13.

¹⁵ “Art Deco Style (1925-1940),” *Pennsylvania Architectural Field Guide*. (Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission, 2015). <<http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/portal/communities/architecture/styles/art-deco.html>> Accessed on 3 October 2020.



Figure 12. The Wyoming Bank & Trust Company (1924) at the southwest corner of 5th Street and Wyoming Avenue. Source: Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

THE RISE OF MODERNISM IN PHILADELPHIA, 1924 TO 1929

With the advent of the Art Deco, as well as Modern Classicism and Stripped Classicism, Philadelphia became home to numerous modern commercial buildings, wherein the designers worked to both simplify and distinguish the architecture of banking houses, offices, and stores. The city's earliest Modernist buildings were primarily designed with basic structural forms, which were most commonly clad in smooth-faced limestone with strikingly simple fenestrations that were decorated with restrained classical and/or geometric architectural details. As old fashioned as Philadelphia was even in the 1920s, the city was home to new ideas in local design. In 1924, a year prior to the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes, McLanahan & Bencker, Architects, designed an early streamlined banking house for the Wyoming Bank and Trust Company (Figure 12). With the symmetrical fenestration and poise of a detached building, the chaste, one-story limestone-clad edifice still stands at 5th Street and Wyoming Ave, retaining a basic degree of integrity despite being whitewashed.¹⁶ Just one year later, in 1925, Willing, Sims, & Talbutt, Architects, designed a banking house for the Western Savings Fund Society's North Philadelphia Office (Figure 13), adhering to the ideals of Stripped Classicism. Its three-sided façade is comprised of smooth-faced limestone cladding with the primary entrance in the corner, delineated by a classical architrave.¹⁷ The next year, in 1926, the Philadelphia Saving Fund commissioned Mellor, Meigs, & Howe, the eminent architectural firm, to design a modernist banking house at 4947 N. Broad Street (Figure 14).¹⁸ This building too featured a smooth-faced limestone façade with minimal architectural details, including a large central entrance with a restrained classical architrave. While perhaps not textbook examples of commonplace architectural

¹⁶ Edward Teitelman and Richard W. Longstreth. *Architecture in Philadelphia: A Guide*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1974), 149

¹⁷ *Philadelphia Register of Historic Places Nomination: The Western Savings Fund Society's North Philadelphia Office (1925)*, 3547 Germantown Avenue. (Philadelphia: The Keeping Society of Philadelphia, 2018).

¹⁸ Edward Teitelman and Richard W. Longstreth. *Architecture in Philadelphia: A Guide*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1974),

style, the three above-referenced banking houses embrace modernism, while also employing elements of classical and/or traditional design.



Figure 13. Top: The Western Savings Fund Society's North Philadelphia Office at 3547 Germantown Avenue in 1925. Figure 14. Bottom: The Philadelphia Savings Fund Society's Logan Branch at 4947 N. Broad Street in 1926. Taken by Philip B. Wallace, Photographer. Source: Building a Nation: Limestone Photograph Collection, Indiana University Bloomington.



Figure 15. Fidelity Mutual Life Insurance Company Building, 1926, Zantsinger, Borie, & Medary, 26th and Fairmont Avenue. Source: Building a Nation: Limestone Photograph Collection, Indiana University Bloomington.

Creating one of the most beautiful buildings in Philadelphia, Zantsinger, Borie, & Medary designed a magnificent office building for the Fidelity Mutual Life Insurance Company at 26th Street and Fairmont Avenue (Figure 15) in 1926. The design combines the simplicity of a smooth-faced, Indiana limestone with traditional architectural details that were employed in a prominent three-sided, corner building. The Quaker City's growing palette of modernist buildings was further increased in 1927. Perhaps the highest style of all the buildings mentioned is the Lasher Printing Company building, a behemoth Art Deco industrial building at 1309 Noble Street (Figure 16), which features fantastic characteristic architectural details. That same year the Pennsylvania Railroad commissioned the restrained, yet monumental Neoclassical style 30th Street Station (Figure 17), which was finally completed in 1933.¹⁹

Located near the subject property, WCAU commissioned Gabriel B. Roth, architect, to design a fabulous, high style Art Deco tower at 1618-20-22 Chestnut Street to serve as a radio station building. Completed in 1928, the skyscraper features highly decorative metal work, greatly amplifying the material composition and quality of the design.²⁰

¹⁹ Edward Teitelman and Richard W. Longstreth. *Architecture in Philadelphia: A Guide*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1974).

²⁰ "Broadcast Pioneers of Philadelphia," <<https://www.broadcastpioneers.com/wcauhistory.html>> Accessed on 8 October 2020.



Figure 16. Top: The Lasher Printing Co. at 1309 Noble Street. Source: [The Rail Park And My Attraction To Industrial Design \[Being Ron \] \(triloquist.net\)](#). Figure 17. Bottom: The U.S. Post Office Building (1930). Source: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*.



Figure 18. The U.S. Naval Hospital (1929), Pattison Avenue and 16th Street, designed by Karcher & Smith, Architects. Source: Library of Congress.

In 1928, the eminent French-born Philadelphia architect and designer, Paul Cret was commissioned to design the Integrity Trust Co. Building at 1528 Walnut Street. Trained in the Beaux Arts, he practiced in that milieu for two decades, when he used his training to influence the stylistic shift to Modern Classicism and Stripped Classicism. The following designs reflect this transition: World War I Memorial (1929), Providence, Rhode Island; the Folger-Shakespeare Library, Washington, D.C. (1929-32); the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia (1932); etc.²¹ Resulting in one of the finest and most impressive buildings of the era, Karcher & Smith were commissioned to design a massive facility in the Art Deco style to serve as the U.S. Naval Hospital on Pattison Avenue between South Broad and 16th Streets (Figure 18).²² Construction began in 1929 and ended in 1933. As a companion to 30th Street Station, the Federal government commissioned the massive and modern U.S. Post Office Building (Figure 17) in West Philadelphia in 1930.

This sampling of early major examples of the Art Deco, Classical Modernism, and Stripped Classicism styles in Philadelphia influenced more modest examples like the subject property, providing contextual information on the local built environment.

²¹ Edward Teitelman and Richard W. Longstreth. *Architecture in Philadelphia: A Guide*. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1974), 87.

²² Historic American Buildings Survey, Creator, et al., photographer by Elliott, Joseph. *Naval Hospital, Pattison Avenue between Broad & Twentieth Streets, Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, PA*. trans by Price, Virginia Barrettmitter Documentation Compiled After. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <www.loc.gov/item/pa3812/>.



Figure 19. Left: The Philadelphia gas Works Store Building, 5230-32 Chestnut Street, West Philadelphia. Source: Google 2022. Figure 20. Right: The Rebecca Gratz Club (1928), 534 Spruce Street, designed by Silverman & Levy. Source: Hidden City Philadelphia.

CRITERIA E: SILVERMAN & LEVY, ARCHITECTS, OF PHILADELPHIA

The Peck & Peck Store Building is the work of Silverman & Levy, an architectural firm of the past in Philadelphia, the work of which significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, and cultural development of the city. The firm was established in 1925 by University of Pennsylvania classmates Edwin H. Silverman and Abraham Levy, both of whom were Jewish American architects that would practice in Philadelphia for the duration of their careers.

First located at 313 S. Smedley Street, the firm’s earliest projects appear to have been limited to alterations and additions to commercial buildings. However, even in the second year of their inception as a firm, Silverman & Levy were designing small apartment houses and twin residences, three of which were announced in a single issue of *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record & Builders’ Guide* in September 1926.²³ While these early works were relatively modest commercial endeavors, the firm was soon completing ambitious projects, designing and managing construction for developers like Mastbaum Bros. & Fleisher, an important Jewish American development firm that greatly impacted the trajectory of real estate in Philadelphia during the interwar years. In 1926, Silverman & Levy were commissioned by Mastbaum Bros. & Fleisher to design a commercial building at the northeast corner of N. 5th Street and Olney Avenue, a location that would come to fore as the commercial center of the Olney neighborhood.²⁴ As part of their real estate portfolio, Mastbaum Bros. & Fleisher commissioned several buildings that were subject to long-term leases with the Philadelphia Gas Works, which led to several handsome buildings designed by Silverman & Levy. The first of these quasi-municipal projects was the “Store Building” at 5230-32 Chestnut Street in 1927 (Figure 19).²⁵

As one would expect, Silverman & Levy’s earliest clients comprised a largely Jewish clientele, including developers and investors like Mastbaum Bros. & Fleisher. They designed innumerable commercial buildings, apartment houses, and parking garages. Even as nascent designers, the firm was engaged by major Jewish commercial and cultural establishments in Philadelphia, including

²³ *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide*, 30 September 1925, 618.

²⁴ *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide*, 16 June 1926, 373.

²⁵ *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide*, 3 August 1927, 494.

the Jewish Hospital, Old York Road; Phi Beta Delta, a Jewish fraternity; and Gimbel Bros., the eminent department store, founded by Bavarian-Jewish immigrant, Adam Gimbel.²⁶ In fact, one of the jewels of their oeuvre was the 1928 redesign for the Rebecca Gratz Club at 534 Spruce Street (Figure 20).²⁷ Despite the cultural and religious segregation that Jewish professionals experienced in the early twentieth century, one of Silverman & Levy's early commissions in 1926 was a new store building for the W.T. Grant Company in Wilmington, Delaware. William Thomas Grant's ancestors were puritans from New England, his 25-cent store chain ultimately grew to 1200 locations.²⁸ This commission represents an early vestige of social progress, as this specific firm diverged from a client base dictated entirely by cultural and religious community associations.



Figure 21. The Durham & Co. Radio Showroom, Philadelphia W3XM Radio Station, 2006 Chestnut Street. Source: Oscar Beisert. *Philadelphia Register of Historic Places Nomination: The Durham & Co. Radio Showroom, Philadelphia W3XM Radio Station, 2006 Chestnut Street (1928)*. (Philadelphia: The Keeping Society, 2020).

During their tenure, Silverman & Levy would become prominent designers of commercial buildings and spaces, including both new construction and renovations. Their works included a considerable number of projects along Chestnut Street, like the subject building: Alterations and Additions (1927), southwest corner of Ninth and Chestnut Streets;²⁹ Store Building (1927), 5230-32 Chestnut Street;³⁰ Store Building (1928), 2006 Chestnut Street;³¹ Store Building (1929), 1720-22-24 Chestnut Street;³² Schrafft's Candies (1932), 1216 Chestnut Street;³³ S.S. Kresge Co. Store

²⁶ *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 29 September 1926, 618.; *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 21 September 1927, 599.

²⁷ *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 6 June 1928, 355.

²⁸ Franklin Spencer Edmonds. *Ulysses S. Grant*. (1915), 13.; and *The American Magazine*, March 1924, 45.

²⁹ *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 15 June 1927, 379.

³⁰ *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 20 July 1927, 457.

³¹ *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 2 May 1928, 278.

³² *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 11 December 1929, 787.

³³ *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 4 May 1932, 97.

(1934), 1520-22 Chestnut Street;³⁴ Alterations to a Store Building (1935), southeast corner of 16th and Chestnut Streets;³⁵ Alterations to Show Room (1937), 5542 Chestnut Street;³⁶ Alterations to Store (1938), 1214 Chestnut Street;³⁷ Store Building (1938), 1718 Chestnut Street;³⁸ etc. The firm learned to apply variants of the Colonial and other revivalist styles to their buildings early on, examples of which often have a decidedly modernist flavor. This is certainly apparent in their design for the Rebecca Gratz Club, which is a building with Neoclassical and Colonial Revival stylistic details of an institutional character.

The firm also excelled greatly in the Art Deco style, designing rather distinctive facades for commercial buildings of a modest scale. In addition to the subject property, three notable examples in the general vicinity include The Durham & Co. Radio Showroom, Philadelphia W3XM Radio Station (1928), 2006 Chestnut Street (Figure 21); S.S. Kresge Co. Store (1934), 1520-22 Chestnut Street; and a Store Building (1938), 1718 Chestnut Street (Figure 22).³⁹ A stylistic comparison of these structures with the subject building shows the breadth of the firm's skill in Art Deco design, as each specimen represents a distinctive aspect of the period.

The Peck & Peck Store Building is an important specimen of the oeuvre of Silverman & Levy, an architectural firm that greatly influenced the City of Philadelphia and its built environment.



Figure 22. Left: A Store Building at 1718 Chestnut Street.

³⁴ *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 28 February 1934, 65.

³⁵ *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 3 July 1935, 105.

³⁶ *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 27 January 1937, 17.

³⁷ *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 6 July 1938, 129.

³⁸ *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 23 November 1938, 251.

³⁹ Oscar Beisert. Philadelphia Register of Historic Places Nomination: The Durham & Co. Radio Showroom, Philadelphia W3XM Radio Station, 2006 Chestnut Street (1928). (*Philadelphia: The Keeping Society*, 2020).

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This nomination was completed for the Historic Building Preservation Task Force of the Center City Residents Association by the Keeping Society of Philadelphia with the primary author as Oscar Beisert, Architectural Historian and Historic Preservationist with support from Tim Kerner, Architect and Chair of the Task Force.

The following sites were used to create the nomination:

Athenaeum of Philadelphia

Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network

Newspapers.com

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