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

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

Street address: 5131-37 Walnut St

Postal code: 19139

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2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: Louis G. Groh Building

Current/Common Name: Walnut Supermarket

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3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

☑ Building ☐ Structure ☐ Site ☐ Object

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4. PROPERTY INFORMATION

Condition: ☐ excellent ☐ good ☑ fair ☐ poor ☐ ruins

Occupancy: ☑ occupied ☐ vacant ☐ under construction ☐ unknown

Current use: Supermarket

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5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

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6. DESCRIPTION

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

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7. SIGNIFICANCE

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

Period of Significance (from year to year): from 1929 to 1930

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: 1929-1930

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: Harry Gordon McMurtrie

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: Louis G. Groh

Original owner: Louis G. Groh

Other significant persons:

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: Philadelphia Historical Commission Date: 10/23/2023

Name with Title: Alexander Till, Historic Preservation Planner Email: alexander.till@phila.gov

Street Address: 1515 Arch St, 13th Fl Telephone: 215-686-7660

City, State, and Postal Code: Philadelphia, PA 19102

Nominator ☐ is ☑ is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: 10/25/2023

☑ Correct-Complete ☐ Incorrect-Incomplete Date: 10/25/2023

Date of Notice Issuance: 10/27/2023

Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: 5131 WALNUT PROPERTY LLC

Address: 5131 Walnut St

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19139

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation:

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission:

Date of Final Action:

☐ Designated ☐ Rejected

Louis G. Groh Building, 5131-37 Walnut Street:

5. Boundary Description

Figure 1. The boundary identifying the parcel at 5131-37 Walnut Street. Source: Atlas.

Situate in the 46th Ward of the City of Philadelphia and described according to a survey and plan thereof made by G.L. Martin, Surveyor and Regulator of the Twelfth Survey district, on the 26th day of April, A.D. 1930, as follows, to wit:

Beginning at a point on the North side of Walnut Street (84 feet wide) at a distance of 225 feet Westward from the West side of 51st Street (60 feet wide); thence extending Westward, along said North side of Walnut Street, 60 feet to a point, which point is at the distance of 205 feet Eastward from East side of 52nd Street (80 feet wide); thence extending Northward on a line at right angles to the said Walnut Street 106 feet, 1 inch to a point on the south side of a certain 4 feet wide alley which extends Eastward and Westward, crossing the head of a certain other alley 4 feet wide which extends Northward into Sansom Street; thence extending Eastward on a line parallel with the said Walnut Street and along the South side of the first above-described 4 feet wide alley 30 feet to a point; thence extending Northward crossing the head of the first above-described 4 feet wide alley, 4 feet to a point; thence extending Eastward on a line parallel with the said Walnut Street 30 feet to a point; thence extending Southward on a line at right angles to the said Walnut Street 110 feet, 1 inches to the first mentioned point and place of beginning.

6. Description

Figure 2. Front façade of 5131-37 Walnut Street looking north, December 2022. Source: Cyclomedia.

The Louis G. Groh Building at 5131-37 Walnut Street is a two-story steel and masonry commercial structure located on the north side of Walnut Street between 51st and 52nd Streets in West Philadelphia. The building occupies its entire lot and rises above the rowhouses on either side of it, with which it partially shares party walls. The flat roofed building sits along the arterial Walnut Street and less than half a block away from the neighborhood commercial corridor that is 52nd Street. The primary (south) elevation faces Walnut Street and contains multiple storefronts with plate glass windows and rolling security doors on its first floor set below a tall second story with large steel framed windows and an ornate cornice clad in decorative terracotta tiles. Stylistically, the buildings is a wonderful example of Art Deco commercial architecture with influences from the almost contemporaneous Spanish Colonial Revival style.

The first floor of the primary elevation is comprised of a series of storefronts separated into three bays. The central bay is approximately twice as wide as the two flanking side bays and contains a series of plate glass windows with a pair of metal and glass store entrance doors on its east end. The eastmost bay contains only a plate glass window that opens to the same interior space as the central bay. The westmost bay has a central pair of metal and glass doors with single plate glass windows on either side of it, presumably serving as the entrance to the second floor of the building. All of the doors and windows on the first floor have contemporary rolling metal security doors installed above them and a narrow band of terracotta tile clad masonry sits below the window sections. There is a large vinyl or fabric awning with "Walnut Supermarket" printed on it serving as a store sign set above the windows extending the full width of the central bay. There is an additional rectangular metal and vinyl sign affixed to the building

façade between the central and western bays projecting outward at a perpendicular angle and hanging on steel poles above the sidewalk.

The three bays of the first floor extend upward to the second. The central bay is filled with a wide steel framed window arrangement featuring a central one over one sash window flanked by five rectangular fixed lights on either side – in each of which three are boarded up. There is a thin row of nine narrow rectangular transom windows spanning the width of the bay above the main window arrangement and a flat, blank, rectangular, metal panel set below it in the spandrel above the first-floor awning. Each of the side bays are identical and feature two central rectangular fixed lights with a one over one sash window on either side. A similar set of three narrow transom windows are positioned above this arrangement with a wider central light flanked by two narrower side lights. There is a decorated rectangular bronze spandrel cover below the windows in each bay with molded scrollwork decoration, part of which is missing on the west side, and two additional flat, rectangular bronze spandrel panels below the decorated one which may have held some other decoration in the past.

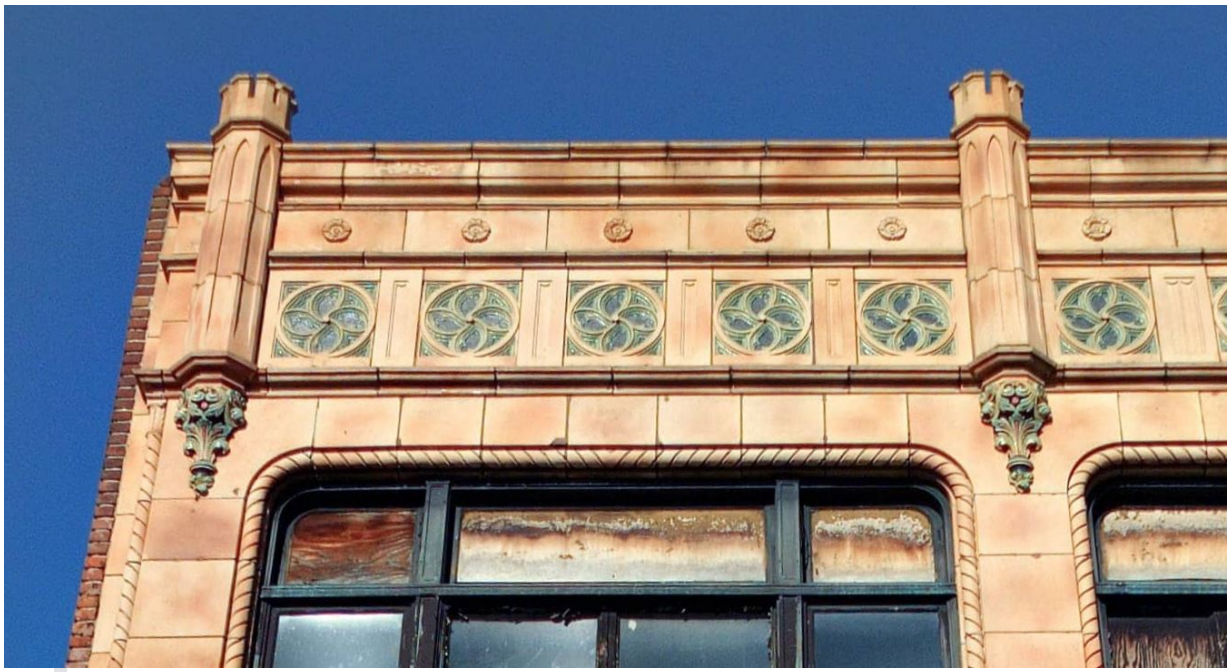


Figure 3. Cornice and tile details on 5131-37 Walnut Street, December 2022. Source: Cyclomedia

Figure 4. Window detail on 5131-37 Walnut Street, December 2022. Source: Cyclomedia

The bays are separated from each other and the ends of the building by four thin vertical bands of masonry clad with flat buff colored terracotta tiles with a reed or rope pattern at their edges outlining the window bays and the side edges of the building. Above the second-floor windows, there is a prominent cornice made with the same terra cotta tiles. It features three primary bands of decoration - a slightly projecting molded edge along the top of the building set above a row of mostly flat tiles with small rosettes in their centers. Below this is a wider second row of tiles consisting of an alternating pattern of tiles containing incised green and blue colored rosettes and narrower incised rectangular geometric tiles. Additionally, the cornice is pierced in four places - at the edges of the building and above the spaces between the bays - by projecting piers clad with the same buff colored terracotta. The piers each have carved light green leaf motifs at their bases, and they extend upward from the top of the second-floor window bays piercing the cornice and projecting about a foot above the roofline. They are faceted into three panes that project outward slightly from the façade and are topped with crenelated crowns that somewhat resemble castle towers.

Each side elevation is brick and mostly covered by adjoining rowhouses, but it projects upward a few feet higher and outward toward the street compared it its neighbors. The rear elevation is landlocked and not visible from a public right of way.

Figure 5. East and West side views of 5131-37 Walnut Steet looking north, December 2022. Source: Cyclomedia

7. Statement of Significance

The Louis G. Groh Building is historically significant and should be listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The property satisfies Criteria for Designation C: "Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style," and D "Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen." Specifically, the property is an excellent example of the Art Deco architectural style as represented on commercial buildings in Philadelphia. The period of significance dates from the time of construction, 1929-30.

Historic Context:

By the time the city of Philadelphia incorporated many of its surrounding communities in 1854, West Philadelphia featured a mixture of industry, commerce, residential homes, and rural farms with access across the Schuylkill steadily improving. Over the latter half of the 19th century, the area gradually emerged as a suburb of the city proper and was connected to it via various stagecoach and later streetcar and train lines. Developers and speculators followed the developing transportation infrastructure and built rows of fashionable twin and townhouses to appeal to the growing professional classes of the city who wanted to live in a more open area and could commute to the city center for work. By the 1870s and '80s, these developments gradually began to be scaled down and aimed to attract a more working-class population and signified that the growth of commerce and industry in the region supported the construction of homes for workers near their places of business. By the end of the century, West Philadelphia had developed into an urban neighborhood that could stand on its own separate from Center

City with a variety of residences, businesses, schools, churches, and everything else that the community could need.[1][2]

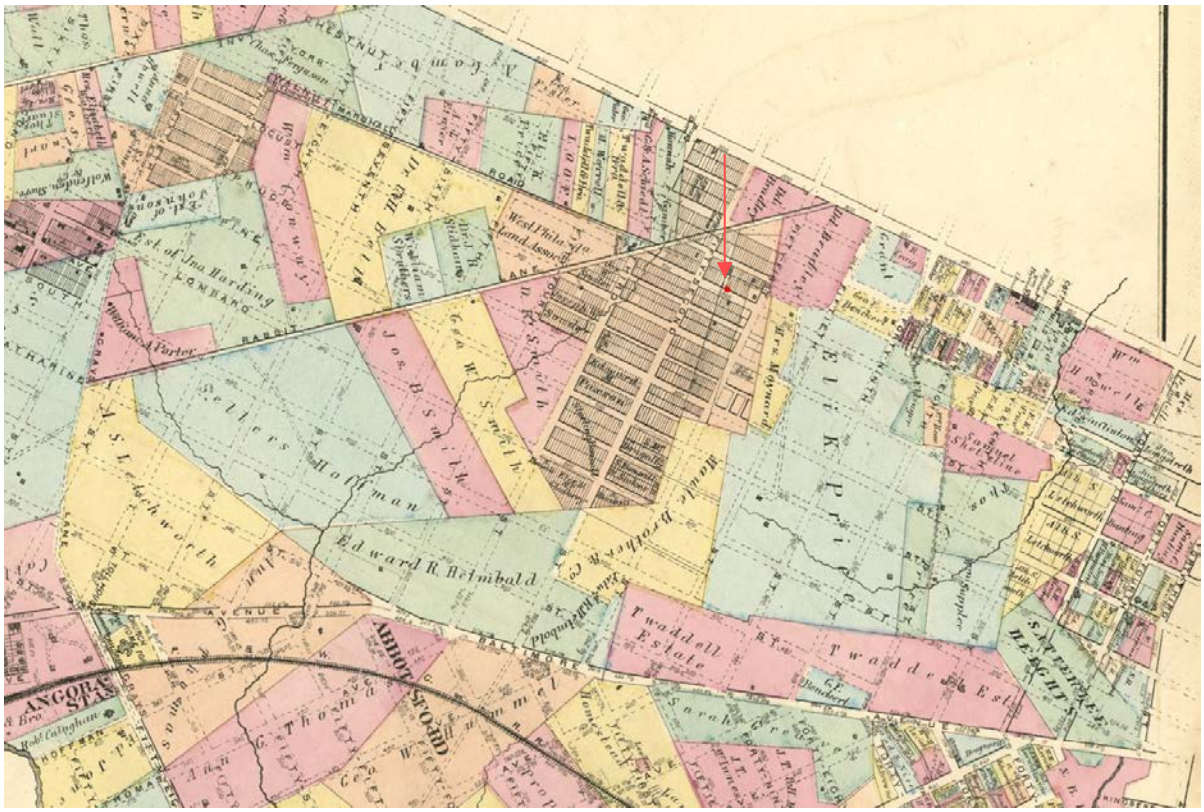


Figure 6: Hopkins 1872 Atlas showing the location of the Louis G. Groh Building in red and the lot ownership in the area prior to its development. North at top of image. Source: University Archives, University of Pennsylvania

[1] Philadelphia Register of Historic Places Nomination for 4800-14 Lancaster Ave, Our Mother of Sorrows Catholic Church.

[2] Most of this history was taken from the West Philadelphia Community History Center hosted online by the University of Pennsylvania https://westphillyhistory.archives.upenn.edu/history

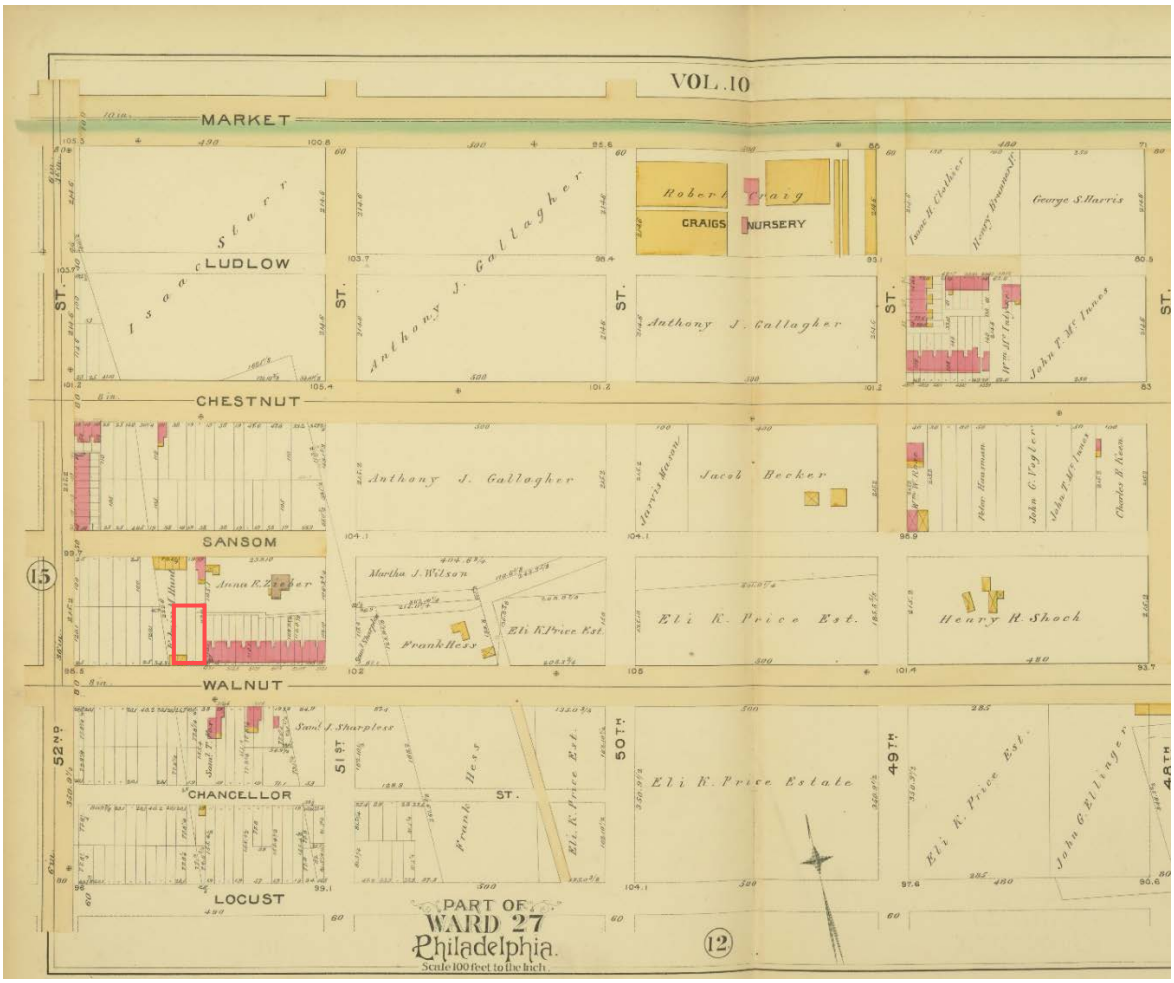


Figure 7: G. W. Bromley 1892 Atlas showing the location of the Louis G. Groh Building in red and the initial development on the block. North at top of image. Source: University Archives, University of Pennsylvania

52nd Street below Market Street developed as a commercial corridor at the beginning of the 20th century. By 1872, Hopkins' Atlas (Figure 6) shows no buildings in the vicinity of 52nd and Market streets and by 1892, the Bromley's atlas (Figure 7) shows a sole brickyard at the northeast corner of the intersection.[3] By the first decade of the 20th century, the area around the subject property began rapidly expanding following the construction of the Market Street Elevated Railway, opened in 1907, with a prominent station at 52nd and Market Streets. Atlases from 1909 and 1911 show the above-mentioned brickyard being replaced by at least 56 rowhouses and storefronts. Even more buildings appear on other corners of the intersection and the Market Street Title & Trust Company appears on the southeast corner by 1910[4]. Many of the blocks along 52nd Street south of Market also filled in with numerous rowhouses, stores, schools, commercial buildings, and other structures typical of city life by 1910, establishing this area of West Philadelphia as its own distinct commercial community within the larger city. At this point, the lots

[3] Hopkins, H.W., "Atlas of West Phialdelpiha including the 24th & 27th Wards of the City of Philadelphia from actual surveys & official records," 1872; Bromley, Walter S., "Atlas of the City of Philadelphia. From actual surveys and official plans of the Survey Department," Volume 11, 1892. Both University Archives, University of Pennsylvania.
[4] Smith, Elvino V. "Atlas of the 27th & 46th wards of the city of Philadelphia: from private plans, actual surveys & official records," 1909, Free Library of Philadelphia; and Bromley, Geo. W & Walter S., "Atlas of the City of Philadelphia 1910", Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

comprising 5131-37 Walnut Street were occupied by 4 rowhouses, which would be replaced by the property in this nomination by 1930.

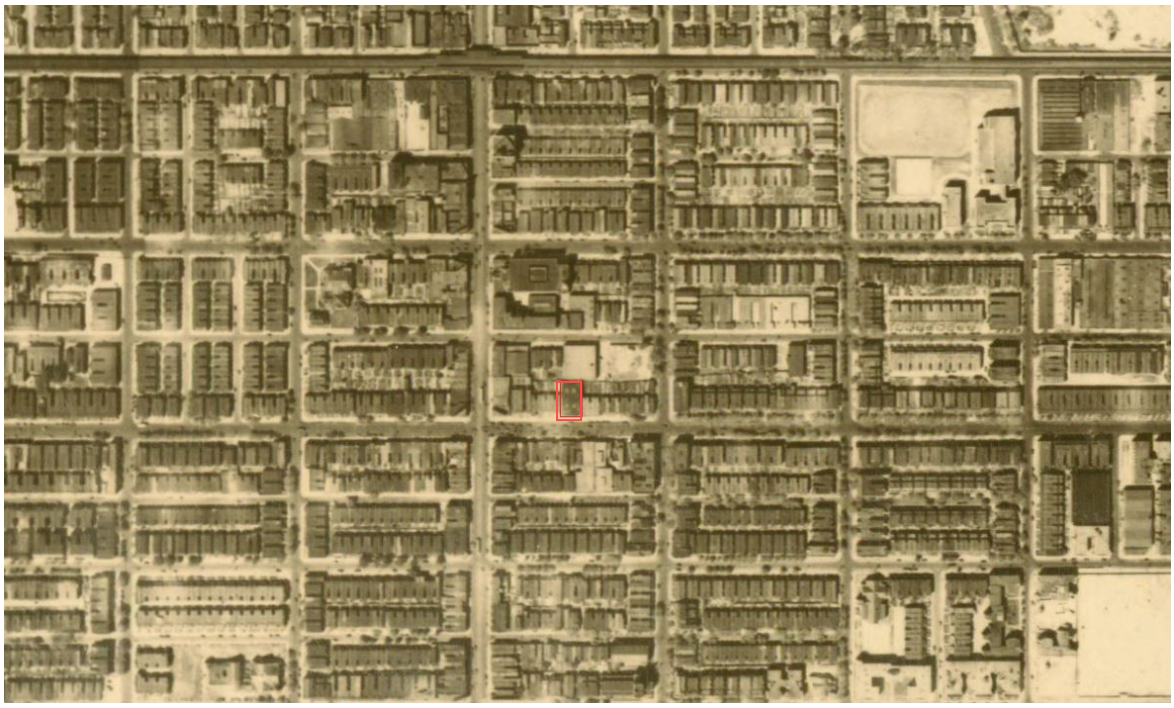


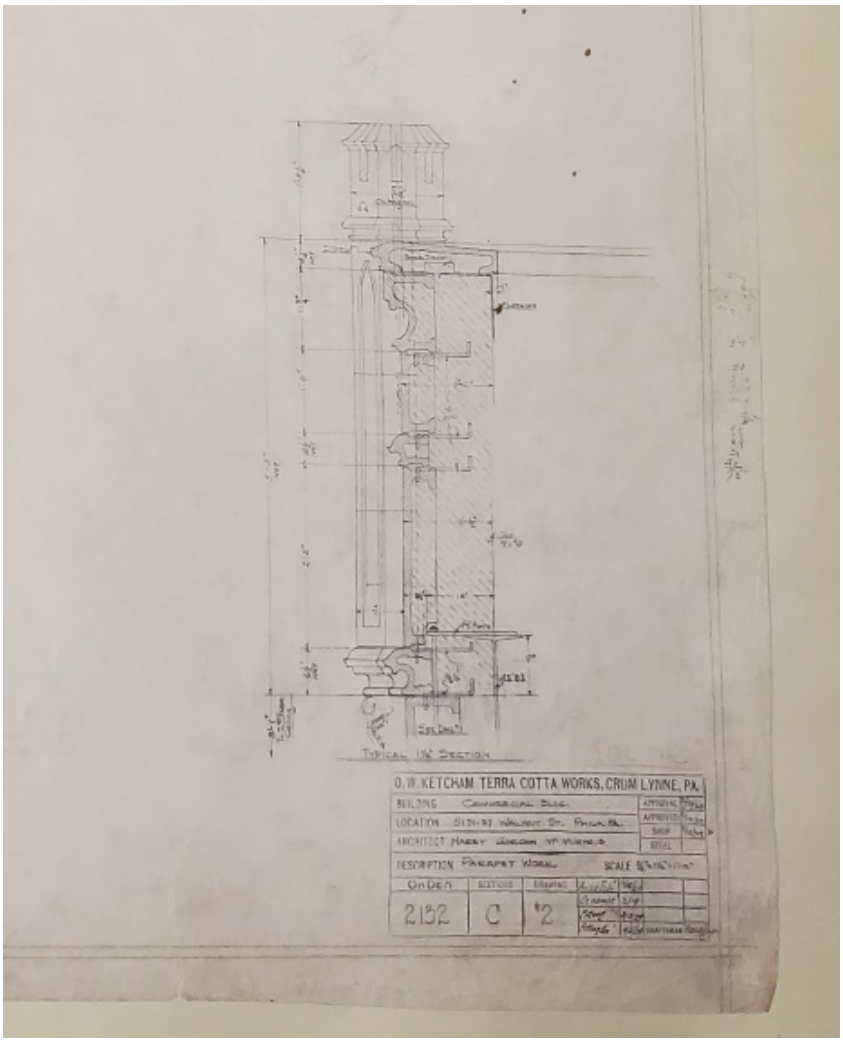
Figure 8: Aerial Survey of Philadelphia, showing the Louis G. Groh Building highlighted in red, c. 1930. North at top of image. Source: Map Collection, Free Library of Philadelphia[5]

Property History:

The existing commercial architecture along and around 52nd Street south of Market in West Philadelphia was primarily built during the first few decades of the 20th century and features a mixture of architectural styles from that time period. The properties at 5131-37 Walnut St, just a half block away from 52nd, were first occupied by a series of rowhouses. Before 1890, the land in the area was left largely open and successively owned by a variety of landholders as part of larger tracts that were eventually subdivided at the end of the 19th century. The lot comprising 5131 was sold, along with 12 others on the same block, to a Joseph Carter in 1890.[6] The deed recording this transaction mentions a recent survey of the lots and "the buildings or improvements" on them. This survey is then continuously referred to in deeds between 1890 and 1926, often referencing a "two story brick messuage or tenement" on it.[7] The three other lots comprising 5133-37 appear empty as of 1892, but by 1910, they too were occupied by rowhouses.[8] The four lots were purchased by Louis G. Groh in June 1926 and by 1929, Groh had awarded the contract to build a new commercial structure on these lots to architect H.G. McMurtrie, plans for which were drawn up by 1928.[9] McMurtrie designed a two-story Art Deco commercial building with large glass windows and

[5] "Aerial Survey of Philadelphia, PA," Dallin Aerial Survey Co., c. 1930, Map Collection of the Free Library of Philadelphia.
[6] Philadelphia Deed Book 656, page 386, 1890.
[7] Philadelphia Deed Book 2371, page 149, 1926.
[8] G.W. Bromley Atlases for 1892 and 1910.
[9] *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide,* v.44, 1929, pg. 36; "New Plans for Structure", *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 16 Dec 1928, pg. 69.

walls clad in decorative terracotta tiles. The large windows, decorative bronze spandrels, and molded elements on the tiles all contribute to the Art Deco character of the building. It also has a prominent decorative cornice lined with off-white tiles that are further decorated with green and blue glazed rosettes and four projecting crowned piers. The tiles used were manufactured by the O.W. Ketchum Terra Cotta Works in Crum Lynne, PA, and surviving plans from the company show the planning and execution for their installation and layout (Figure 9).[10] Typical of commercial Art Deco structures of the time, the new building displayed a flat, vertical façade to the street with large expanses of windows and modern new materials cladding it, setting itself apart from the brick rowhouses around it.



[10] "Plans for tile work at 5131-37 Walnut St," O.W. Ketchum Terra Cotta Works, 1929. Ketcham Collection, Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

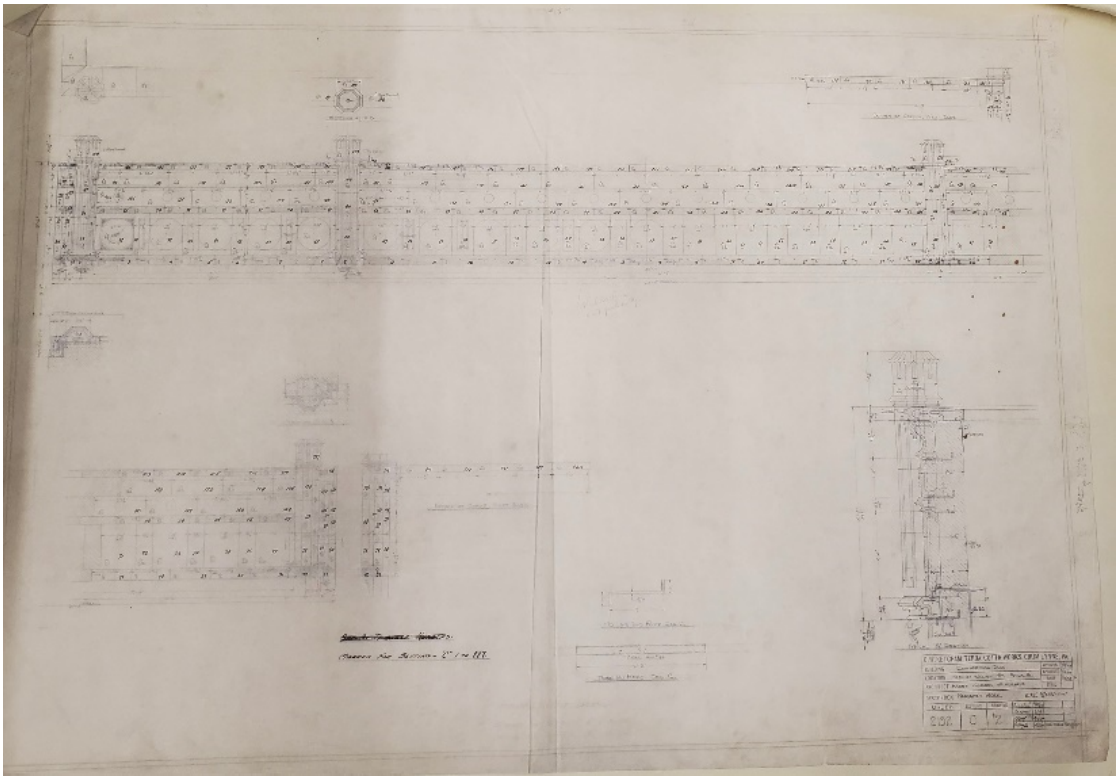
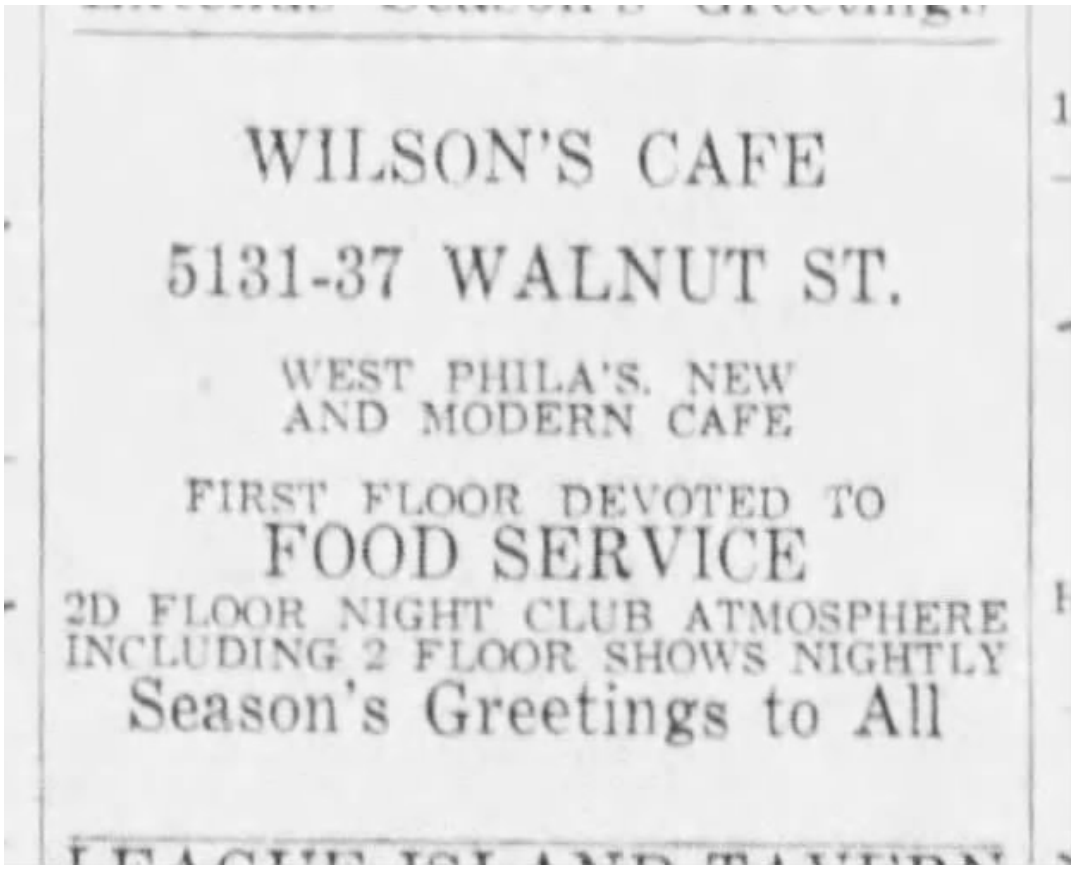


Figure 9: Plans for tile installation at 5131-37 Walnut St, O.W. Ketchum Terra Cotta Works, 1929. Source: Athenaeum of Philadelphia

It is uncertain what the first use of the new building was, but by 1936, it housed Wilson's Café, which featured a restaurant on the first floor and a nightclub on the second (Figure 10). Wilson's Café persisted into the 1940s, as shown through a variety of newspaper advertisements for new staff and for performances being hosted at the venue, but it closed down in 1950.[11] By 1980, the building contained "general and private office areas" and by 2000, the building hosted a supermarket that still exists in the space today.[12]

[11] *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 25 Dec 1936, pg. 13; 27 Feb 1942, pg. 14; 24 Jun 1950, pg. 21.
[12] *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 16 Mar 1980, pg. 46; 21 May 2000, pg. 214.


WILSON'S CAFE

5131-37 WALNUT ST.

WEST PHILA'S. NEW
AND MODERN CAFE

FIRST FLOOR DEVOTED TO
FOOD SERVICE

2D FLOOR NIGHT CLUB ATMOSPHERE
INCLUDING 2 FLOOR SHOWS NIGHTLY

Season's Greetings to All

Figure 10: Newspaper advertisement for Wilson's Café, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 25 Dec 1936, pg. 13.

Louis G. Groh:

Louis G. Groh, who purchased the properties in 1926 and constructed the subject building on the lot, appears to have been a small-scale real estate developer in the city in the early 20th century. His name appears associated with a handful of projects throughout the 1910s, '20s, and '30s. He purchased a property at Wood and 7th streets in 1910[13] and in 1913, he erected a three-story brick factory at Croskey and Vine Streets at the cost of $24,000, also designed by H. G. McMurtrie.[14] Groh purchased the properties at 1519-25 Parrish Streets and constructed a garage there in 1921, also using McMurtrie as his designer.[15] He was also selling and renting properties during this period – a beach house in Wildwood is advertised by him in 1925 and he placed an advertisement for several rental properties including a "strong building," store, and service station in 1928.[16] Groh passed away in 1935.

H.G. McMurtrie:

[13] *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide,* v.25, 1910, pg. 366.
[14] *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 30 Mar 1913, pg. 23; 19 Feb 1913, pg. 11.
[15] *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 15 Oct 1921, pg. 8; *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, v.36, 1921, pg. 602.
[16] *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 29 Mar 1925, pg. 72; *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 25 Mar 1928, pg. 71.

The architect who designed the subject building was Harry Gordon McMurtrie, who was active in and around Philadelphia from around 1904 to 1936. He studied architectural design at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts from 1904 to 1907 and first appears in city directories as a draftsman in 1905.[17] His first projects as an independent architect appear around 1911 in the Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders; Guide when he is listed as the designer of a club house at the Falls of the Schuylkill and his illustration of a residence at Sedgewick Farms is included in the same publication.[18] His name is associated with various projects in the Philadelphia suburbs including homes in Montgomery and Bucks counties as well as larger projects including stores, apartment complexes, municipal buildings, and schools in Conshohocken, Norristown, and other nearby areas. McMurtrie appears to have moved his residence to Norristown in 1917 and his office there in 1930.[19]

McMurtrie appears to have been well versed in the revivalist architectural styles of the early 20th century and many of his designs are in the Colonial Revival, Classical Revival, and Tudor Revival styles including the Morel Residence in Langhorn, PA and the Garrett Residence in Norristown, PA (Figure 11). He also worked on governmental buildings as well as schools, designing new buildings, additions, and renovations including projects for the Norristown City Hall and the Norristown and Conshohocken High Schools.[20] His name also appears as the designer for various apartment buildings and smaller stores and commercial buildings in and around Philadelphia and its western and northwestern suburbs. For example, he designed an apartment building called the Hardie in the Spanish Revival style at 1 Oakland terrace in Bala Cynwyd (Figure 12) and designed Art Deco alterations and additions to the stores and apartments nearby at 54th Street and City Avenue.[21] McMurtrie seems to also have had a repeat relationship with Louis G. Groh. In addition to designing the subject property in 1929, the pair also worked together on a factory at Crosskey and Vine in 1913 and a garage at 311 N 16th Street in 1921.[22] Overall, McMurtrie seemed to gravitate more toward working in the city's western suburbs over the course of his career and while Art Deco designs seem to make up a minority of his work, he seemed well versed in other period revival styles that intersected with Art Deco in the late 1920s and 30s.

[17] McMurtrie, Harry Gordon", *Philadelphia Architects and Buildings*. https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/27109, accessed 9/20/23.
[18] *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, v. 26, 1911 pg. 184; and pg. 243.
[19] "McMurtrie, Harry Gordon", *Philadelphia Architects and Buildings*. https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/27109, accessed 9/20/23.
[20] *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, v. 52, p. 30, 1937 and n. 12, p. 50, 1937.
[21] "Apartment Buildings in Lower Merion, 1900-1970," Lower Merion Conservancy website, https://lmconservancy.org/apartment-buildings-in-lower-merion/; and *Philadelphia Architects and Buildings,* https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ho_display.cfm/449413, both accessed 9/27/23.
[22] *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, v. 36, 1921, pg. 657.

Figure 11: Garret Residence by H.G. McMurtrie, Norristown, PA, c. 1913;[23] Morell Residence by H.G. McMurtrie, Langhorn, PA, c. 1912[24]

Figure 12: The Hardie apartment building by H.G. McMurtrie, Bala Cynwyd, PA, 1928[25]

Criteria C & D:

The Louis G. Groh Building at 5131-37 Walnut Street embodies the distinguishing characteristics of the Art Deco architectural style as applied to two- and three-story commercial building in the interwar years in the United States. Furthermore, The Louis G. Groh Building at 5131-37 Walnut Street reflects the environment of Philadelphia in an era characterized by the Art Deco style as employed on commercial buildings.

[23] "Garrett Residence", c. 1913*, American Country Houses of Today*. New York Architectural Book Publishing Co., p. 74 (1913)
[24] "Morell Residence", c. 1912, *American Country Houses of Today*. New York: Architectural Book Publishing Co., p. 106 (1912)
[25] "Apartment Buildings in Lower Merion, 1900-1970," Lower Merion Conservancy website, https://lmconservancy.org/apartment-buildings-in-lower-merion/, accessed 9/27/23

Art Deco in America, 1925-1940:[26]

In the United States in general and Philadelphia in particular, Art Deco was an architectural style popular primarily for commercial, institutional, and multiunit residential/hotel buildings roughly between the years 1925 and 1940. The style's adoption in America is generally traced back to the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes, the 1925 Parisian design fair that historian Bevis Hillier cited in coining the term "Art Deco" in 1968.[27]

Art Deco buildings tend to feature a number of distinct visual features that define the style. They often have a sleek linear appearance with styled, geometric decoration and their facades frequently feature a series of setbacks that create a stepped appearance or have otherwise conspicuous rooflines. Panels with low relief decoration are found around doorways and windows and along the edges of the buildings. Finish materials are often smooth and include stucco, concrete blocks, glazed bricks, or in the case of the subject property, terracotta tile. Other decorative details display various simple motifs such as chevrons, zig zags or other geometric forms, and are often arranged in simplified renditions of classical forms. The style can be seen as an attempt to create buildings with a modern, clean, and streamlined appearance that still incorporates some historic decorative elements in new and innovative ways.

The Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission's Pennsylvania Architectural Field Guide (PHMC Field Guide) published online by the State Historic Preservation Office lists some of the identifiable features of the Art Deco style as:

> 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 façade; 6. Strips of windows with decorative spandrels; 7. Reeding and fluting around doors and windows

It also establishes the most common building types for the style to be theaters, commercial buildings, offices, and apartments, among others and includes everything from tall skyscrapers to modest smaller scale commercial buildings. The Groh Building, in particular, represents one of these smaller commercial buildings executed in the style. The building features a sharp, linear appearance, wide expansive strips of windows with decorative spandrels below, a largely smooth terracotta tiled facade with molded relief decorative elements, and molded reeding around its doors and windows. All elements that highlight the building as a distinct example of Art Deco.[28] The cornice and its associated decorative tilework also appears to take some inspiration from the Spanish Colonial Revival style, also popular in the interwar years and a style that architect H.G. McMurtrie appears to have been fluent in, though it is somewhat rare to see in the Philadelphia area. The PHMC Field Guide states that buildings in the Art Deco style begin appearing around 1925 and last through the end of the 1930s. In *The Field Guide to American Houses*, Virginia and Lee McAlester state that the style was common in public and commercial buildings in the

[26] This discussion of the Art Deco Style is partially drawn from the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places Nomination for 1501 Fairmount Ave, the Overseas Motor Works.
[27] Hillier, Bevis, *Art Deco of the 20s and 30s*. New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1968, 13.
[28] "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 9/1/23.

1920s and early 1930s.[29] Both sources also state that the Spanish Colonial Revival/Spanish Eclectic style is seen from 1915 to 1940.

Art Deco in Philadelphia:[30]

Philadelphia became home to numerous Art Deco and other modernist buildings during the 1920s and '30s as architects and designers applied the style to everything from grand skyscrapers and offices to smaller scale commercial buildings, stores, and apartments. Many early examples of modernist designs feature buildings clad with smooth limestone and featuring simple forms and decoration featuring classically inspired or geometric details. Art Deco elements can be found on several early bank buildings in the city such as the Wyoming Bank and Trust Company building, designed by McLanahan & Beckner architects, and located at 5th Street and Wyoming Avenue. It features a symmetrical façade with large windows and a smooth limestone front (Figure 13) .[31] The style was employed on numerous other smaller scale commercial buildings through the city that are comparable to the Groh Building. In particular, the style can be seen along commercial corridors outside of Center City; in North Philadelphia, near the subject property in West Philadelphia, and in the Northwest neighborhoods of Germantown and Mt Airy. The Peck and Peck Store building at 1722-24 Chestnut Street was built in 1929 and designed by architects Silverman & Levy (Figure 14).[32] Featuring a limestone façade with detailed classical motifs and other Art deco details, it was constructed and used as the home of the Peck & Peck clothing store for much of its life. The former F.C. Woolworth store building at 5607-13 Germantown Avenue is similarly scaled two-story commercial building to the subject property located in the Germantown neighborhood also designed in the Art Deco style in 1938 (Figure 15).[33] It features a smooth façade clad with off-white and yellow terracotta tiles, similar to those on the subject building, and focuses its design on linearity, with reeding and other simple, geometric decorative details found along the edges of windows and the cornice. The Sedgewick Theater was built in 1928 at 7133-43 Germantown Avenue in Mt. Airy and designed by William Harold Lee (Figure 16).[34] It also features a facade partially clad with decorative Terracotta tiles, emphasizing an elaborate stepped central bay that extends vertically above the marquee. The tilework on the theater is elaborately formed featuring a variety of geometric designs, reminiscent of the cornice tilework on the subject building. The McClatchy Building located at 69th and Market Street only a few miles away from the subject building in Upper Darby is a striking example of Art Deco commercial architecture (Figure 17). Designed by George C. Nimmons of Chicago in 1926, it features a complex façade clad with highly detailed off-white and yellow terra cotta tiles and bronze accented stained-glass windows.[35] Like that featured on the Groh Building, the tile work takes inspiration from popular revival designs of the time including Mayan, Heraldic, and Egyptian motifs.

[29] McAlester, Virginia and Lee, *The Field Guide to American Houses,* Alfred A. Knopf, Inc, 1984.
[30] Portions of this discussion of the Art Deco and early Modernist Styles in Philadelphia are drawn from the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places Nomination for 1722-24 Chestnut St, the Peck & Peck Store Building.
[31] Edward Teitelman and Richard W. Longstreth. *Architecture in Philadelphia: A Guide*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1974, 149.
[32] Philadelphia Register of Historic Places Nomination for 1722-24 Chestnut St.
[33] Philadelphia Register of Historic Places Nomination for 5607-13 Germantown Ave.
[34] Philadelphia Register of Historic Places Nomination for the Central Mount Airy Historic District.
[35] Thomas, George E., "John H. McClatchy Building," *Society of Architectural Historians Archipedia*, https://sah-archipedia.org/buildings/PA-02-DE31. Accessed 10/23/23.

Figure 13: The Wyoming Bank & Trust Company, 4654 N 5th Street, 1924. Source: Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

Figure 14: Peck and Peck Store building, 1722-24 Chestnut Street, 1929, Silverman and Levy. Source: Cyclomedia

Figure 15: F.C. Woolworth building, 5607-13 Germantown Avenue, 1938. Source: Cyclomedia

Figure 16: Sedgwick Theater, William Harold Lee, 7137 Germantown Avenue, 1928. Source: Cyclomedia

Figure 17: The McClatchy Building, George C. Nimmons, 2 S 69th Street, Upper Darby, PA, 1926. Source: Google Streetview

Art Deco design was employed for much larger and more elaborate buildings in the city as well, for example, at the Fidelity Mutal Life Insurance Company building at 26th Street and Fairmount Avenue, designed by Zatsinger, Borie, & Medary in 1926 (Figure 18). Once again featuring a smooth limestone façade with a variety of classically inspired architecture details, this prominent corner office building showcases the increased popularity of Art Deco themes used on buildings constructed in the city during the latter half of the 1920s. Similar elaborate Art Deco style can be seen at the US Naval Hospital built on Pattison Avenue between 16th and Broad Streets. Designed by the firm of Karcher & Smith, this large facility began construction in 1929 and was finished in 1933. Other elaborate large scale Art Deco designs can be seen at other notable Philadelphia buildings such as the US Post Office building at 2970 Market Street in West Philadelphia (1931-35)(Figure 19), and the building housing SEPTA's Suburban Station (c. 1930) at 1601-29 John F. Kennedy Boulevard (Figure 20). Both examples showcase a larger scale version of the style that was often employed on public and governmental buildings designed during the 1920s and '30s.

Conclusion:

The Louis G. Groh Building at 5131-37 Walnut Street stands as an important example of Art Deco architecture as seen on commercial buildings in Philadelphia. The city has a rich history of Art Deco design and while many of the large-scale office buildings and impressive public structures located in and near Center City have been recognized as such, the more human scale buildings found along smaller commercial corridors in other neighborhoods of the city tell a more intimate story of the design on another scale and deserve recognition as well. For both its importance to the history of the design in the city and its extant decorative features, the Groh building merits designation on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.

Figure 18: Fidelity Mutal Life Insurance Company building, 2525 Pennsylvania Avenue, Zatsinger, Borie, & Medary, 1926. Source: Cyclomedia

Figure 19: US Naval Hospital, Pattison Avenue between South Broad Street and 20th Street, Karcher & Smith, 1929, demolished 2001. Source: Library of Congress

Figure 20: US Post Office building, 2970 Market Street, 1931-35. Source: Cyclomedia

Figure 21: Suburban Station, 1601-29 John F. Kennedy Boulevard, 1930. Source: Cyclomedia

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