

# 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: **1634 Walnut Street**

Postal code: **19103-5403**

#### 2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: **The Deaver Building**

Current Name: **Wells Fargo**

#### 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: **Bank**

#### 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): **1927 to 1929**

Date(s) of construction: Mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century; Present Façade: **1927**

Architects: **David Supowitz, Architect**

Builders: **H.J. Homan Company**

Original owners: **John Blair Deaver, M.D.**

Significant person: **Dr. Deaver/David Supowitz, Architect**

**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, Center City Residents Association**

Author: **Oscar Beisert, Architectural Historian**

Date: **4 November 2025**

EMAIL: **KEEPER@KEEPINGPHILADELPHIA.ORG**

Nominator ☐ is ☒ is not the property owner.

**PHC USE ONLY**

Date of Receipt: November 4, 2025

☒ Correct-Complete ☐ Incorrect-Incomplete

Date: December 15, 2025

Date of Notice Issuance: December 16, 2025

Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: 1634 WALNUT ASSOCIATES

Address: 1634 Walnut St Assoc LP

PO Box 1529

City: Boca Raton

State: FL

Postal Code: 33429

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

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Final Action: \_\_\_\_\_

☐ Designated ☐ Rejected

12/7/18

**NOMINATION  
FOR THE  
PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES**



Figure 1. The primary (north) elevation. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2025.

**THE DEAYER BUILDING**  
—  
**BUILT 1927**  
—  
**1634 WALNUT STREET**  
**PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19103-5403**

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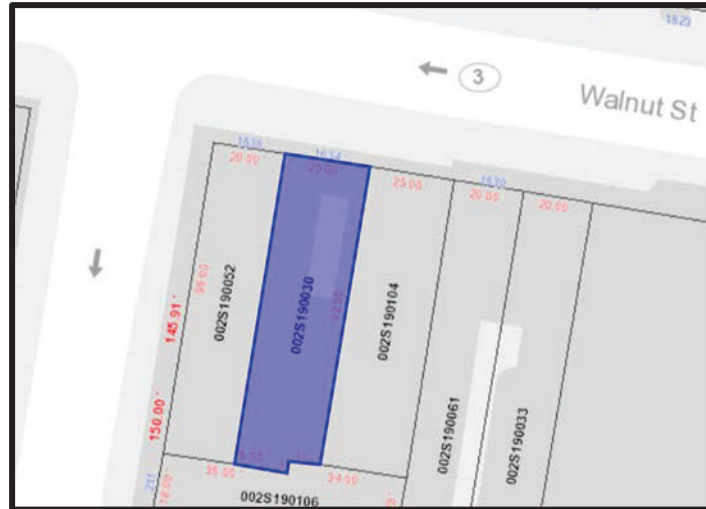


Figure 2. The boundary for the subject property is delineated by the blue line. Source: Atlas, City of Philadelphia, 2025.

## 5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

ALL THAT CERTAIN lot of piece of ground with the buildings and improvements thereon erected, SITUATE at 1634 Walnut Street, beginning at a point located at the northwest corner of the subject property, extending south 96 feet along the western property line to the southwest corner of the subject property, turning 90 degrees to the east and extending sixteen feet along the southern property line that is shared with the building at 211 S. 17th Street, turning 90 degrees to the north and extending four feet along the southern property line, turning 90 degrees to the east and extending nine feet along the southern property line to the to the southeast corner of the subject property, turning 90 degrees to the north and extending 92 feet along the eastern property line to the northeast corner of the subject property, turning 90 degrees to the west and extending twenty-five feet to the point and place of beginning.

Map Registry No. 002S190030

OPA Account No. 882427900



Figure 3. The primary (north) elevation. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2025.

## 6. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The Deaver Building at 1634 Walnut Street is a three-and-one-half-story commercial structure of masonry construction with a limestone and brick façade. The main volume was constructed in the mid-nineteenth century as a residence, while the commercial appearance of the primary (north) elevation dates to 1927. While historically semi-detached, the structure is connected and/or closely adjacent at each elevation, and the primary (north) elevation is attached at both the east and west. The subject building is set within a terraced commercial streetscape.





Figure 4. The primary (north) elevation. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2025.

The primary (north) elevation was built between April and July 1927 as a new commercial façade upon the brick shell of a mid-nineteenth-century dwelling. The design of the 1927 façade represents Modern Classicism of the Composite Era with inspiration from Modernism and Regency Revival. The primary (north) elevation stands three full floors, featuring a parapet that rises a few feet above the low point of the original roofline to disguise the tired old townhouse form. The 1927 façade is comprised of smooth-faced limestone and buff brick. The first floor is an evocative storefront elevation that retains its original fenestration, the apertures of which have been reconfigured in recent years. Designed as a show window, the central opening has been repurposed to serve as the primary entrance, although the fully glazed infill honors the original form. The flanking apertures are single, pedestrian openings that originally served as separate entrances to the first-floor commercial and the upper floors. These doorways have since been converted to windows with fixed glazing. The former storefront window is gracefully delineated

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in continuous limestone relief by a largely simple “inverted shoulder architrave,” the upper corners of which are scalloped with modernized volutes that interpret classical elements. The former pedestrian entrances are also delineated in continuous limestone relief by simple impostes that include round-arch tops. Perhaps the most elaborate components of the façade, each lunette embodies a limestone panel centered on a vertically oriented cartouche that is flanked by individual rosette roundels set upon a scrolled foliated framework of slender stems and leaves in shallow relief. The cartouche is indicative of more elaborate classical designs of the Beaux Arts period, while the other elements are decidedly of Modern Classicism, indicative of the 1920s and 1930s. Classically-inspired ornament is further exhibited in octagonal panels, also seemingly in limestone relief, that rise above each former doorway. A theme often found in Modern Classicism and Regency Revival facades of the era; the simple octagonal frame of each panel is bordered by a shallowly recessed beveled molding that provides visual depth. At the center of the panel is a classical urn with a lid that is surmounted by a stylized finial. The dominance of the urn is softened by draped swags that terminate in tassel-like pendants. A continuous horizontal limestone band serves as an entablature that separates the lower storefront level from the upper façade. This band is ornamented with a repetitive, low-relief pattern, resembling a simplified dentil or triglyph frieze, the execution of which also speaks to the period of construction.

Transitioning from the pale, planar surface and solid visual weight of the ground-floor’s limestone storefront, the second floor is a softened, but continuous commercial facade, where the base cladding shifts from limestone to buff brick. However, the limestone reappears in the form of a formal, but restrained architrave for a second tri-partite fenestration that is centered on a show window. While the second-floor openings are smaller, the ensemble maintains the design motif of the floor below. The show window is defined by its segmental arched top. Flanking the central aperture, rectangular side windows feature iron balconettes, adding an ornamental delicacy that represents the Regency Revival. Designed as one continuous composition that incorporates three windows, the limestone surround forms a simplified broken pediment, another interpretation of traditional architecture found in Modern Classicism. A projecting keystone block punctuates the center of the limestone surround, connecting the apex of the segmental arch window to the top of the pediment. The upper portions of the architrave terminate in simple, projecting moldings that serve as entablatures, delineating the limestone from the base brick wall.

The buff brick facade continues as the primary façade material of the third floor, where the pattern of three openings is again repeated in more commonly sized sash window openings with round-arched tops. The third-floor fenestration is symmetrically arranged like a typical commercial or residential façade of Philadelphia’s urban streetscapes. The limestone is reintroduced as the architrave for each window. At the base of each surround is a sill that features a molded bracket. At the apex of each round arch is a projecting keystone. These features continue the motif of Modern Classicism with traditional forms that are simplified. Rising above the third-floor fenestration is a simple, limestone band that indicates the roofline or the base of the parapet, yielding to another field of buff brick, which terminates in a simple, projecting limestone cornice. The cornice is comprised of horizontal bands of limestone blocks. The uppermost course is a flat coping slab that is supported by narrow bands of fillet moldings below. Traditional features of classical design rise from the coping slab, including abstracted acroteria forms, as well as at least two muted figurative elements.

From the northwest corner of Sixteenth and Walnut, looking southeast, one can see the original gable-front dormer rising within the primary (north) elevation of the side gable roof, the often entirely hidden calling card of a traditional Philadelphia house that has been converted to a commercial building. The third and half-stories of the west elevation are visible above the adjacent two-story building at 1636 Walnut Street. The third and half-stories of the east elevation are also visible above the adjacent two-story building at 1632 Walnut Street. Both side elevations reveal the original volume and side-gable roof of the former townhouse. The rear (south) elevation was not accessible.



Figure 5. Left: An historic view of the east elevation of the subject building. Source: Phillyhistory.org. Figure 6. Right: The east elevation of the subject building. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2025.





Figure 7. Looking west in the 1600 block of Walnut Street with 1634 Walnut Street on left in February 1949. Source: Taken by George B. Gay, Phillyhistory.org.

## 7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Deaver Building at 1634 Walnut Street in the Rittenhouse Square neighborhood of Philadelphia is a significant historic resource that merits designation by the Philadelphia Historical Commission and inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The subject 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;
- 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, and Nation; and
- j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

The period of significance is related to the time of its transition from residential to commercial between April and July 1927 and extends to the first year of the first tenancy of the ground floor and basement, which ends in October 1929.



Figure 8. Left: This photograph depicts the twin structures at 1634 and 1636 Walnut Street, specifically capturing the primary (north) elevation of the subject building (on left) on April 14, 1927, during its transformation from residential to commercial. The photo captures the moment when the original façade of the former townhouse had been removed for the construction of a new commercial front. Source: Taken by William A. Gee, Phillyhistory.org. Figure 9. Right: This photograph depicts the same twin at 1634 and 1636 Walnut Street on July 20, 1927, capturing the newly completed façade of the subject building. Interestingly, renovations of 1636 Walnut had begun during the time between the two photographs. Source: Taken by Charles L. Howell, Phillyhistory.org.

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE DEAVER BUILDING

The subject building became associated with the name Deaver in 1895, when the eminent surgeon, John Blair Deaver, M.D., purchased the property for approximately \$30,000. It was then described as a three-and-one-half-story brick building with a side yard. Dr. Deaver commissioned “extensive alterations” to the subject building in July 1896, which were undertaken by C.F. Wells & Son, contractors.<sup>1</sup> Dr. Deaver commissioned the same contractor to enlarge his kitchen in October 1899.<sup>2</sup> In July 1900, the subject building was again enlarged with the addition of a fourth floor at the rear of the structure at \$1,200. Contractor C.F. Wells & Son was again engaged to complete the work.<sup>3</sup> Plans for interior renovations and a one-story rear addition were underway by March 1902.<sup>4</sup> Dr. Deaver commissioned Edward V. Seeler, architect, to complete the plans, and C.F.

<sup>1</sup> *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 6 July 1895, 9.

<sup>2</sup> *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 17 October 1899, 15.

<sup>3</sup> *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 26 July 1900, 12.; and *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 1 August 1900, 499.

<sup>4</sup> *The Philadelphia Times*, 3 April 1902, 10.

Wells & Son were engaged to complete the work at a cost ranging from \$2,000 to \$4,000.<sup>5</sup> In 1920, the same contractor was again employed to complete “general improvements” at \$6,000.<sup>6</sup>

By the late 1920s, the area of the subject property was transitioning from high-end residential to commercial. As a result, in January 1927, Dr. Deaver elected to move from the subject building and enter into a development project. This involved selling the subject property to the H.J. Homan Company for \$10,000 and an annual ground rent of \$12,000, which was subject to a ground rent principal of \$200,000.<sup>7</sup> The project was announced in the form of alterations by *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* on January 26, 1927.<sup>8</sup> Official plans were updated in the same publication in March 1927, when it was announced that the alterations, including the present façade, were designed by David Supowitz, architect.<sup>9</sup> A photograph taken on April 14, 1927, by William A. Gee shows that by that day, construction was well underway, as the original façade of Dr. Deaver's house had been demolished. A photograph taken on July 20, 1927, by Charles L. Howell shows that the building was largely completed at that time with “For Rent” signs in the front windows.



Figure 10. An advertisement for the primary ground floor tenant, Ryser, Graham & Riley in October 1928. Source: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 14 October 1928, 91.

Mirkil, Valdes, and Company obtained commercial leases in the fall of 1928. The ground floor and basement was first leased to Ryser, Graham and Riley, Inc, “Florists & Decorators.”<sup>10</sup> This would be the “Downtown Store” of the firm, which had been operating a successful business in Oak Lane. Additionally, the firm operated conservatories at Elkins Park. The following was published in *The Florists Exchange and Horticultural Trade World* shortly after the store opened:

<sup>5</sup> PRERBG, 27 March 1902, 197.; and PRERBG, 9 April 1902, 233.

<sup>6</sup> PRERBG, 7 January 1920, 8.

<sup>7</sup> “Activities of the Day in Real Estate, Walnut Street Dwelling, Occupied by One Owner Since 1895, Sold,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 21 January 1927, 7.; and *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1 April 1927, 28.

<sup>8</sup> PRERBG, 26 January 1927, 53.

<sup>9</sup> PRERBG, March 1927.

<sup>10</sup> *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 10 October 1928, 11.



The central city store of Ryser, Graham & Co. was opened on Monday last at 1634 Walnut st. This is a commodious shop with a large show window. The interior is well fitted up. This will be run in connection with the York road store and the greenhouses at Elkins Park, where are large stocks of decorative plants.<sup>11</sup>

While firms like Ryser, Graham & Riley did provide a quality service and product, many did not survive the Crash of 1929, which is true of this first primary tenant. The second floor was leased to H. Grayson Martin.<sup>12</sup> The “third floor front” was leased to the Society of Pi Sigma, Inc.<sup>13</sup>

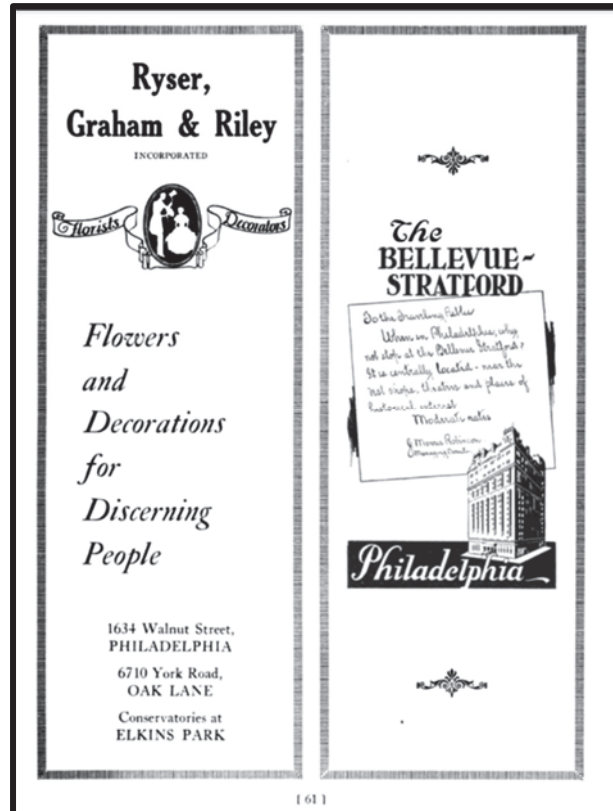


Figure 11. An advertisement for Ryser, Graham & Riley in the *Official Horse Show Blue Book* in 1929. Source: *The Official Horse Show Blue Book*. (J.W. Waring, 1929), 61.

In July 1931, the subject property was conveyed by the H.J. Homan Company to Dr. Deaver. The eminent doctor then conveyed the property to his daughter E.D. Thompson.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>11</sup> *The Florists Exchange and Horticultural Trade World*, 20 October 1928, 744.

<sup>12</sup> *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 11 October 1928, 19.

<sup>13</sup> *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 29 September 1928, 21.

<sup>14</sup> “Activities of the Day in Real Estate,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 24 July 1931, 26.



Figure 12. The primary (north) elevation in July 1927. Source: Taken by Charles L. Howell, Phillyhistory.org. Figure 13. Right: The primary (north) elevation of the subject building. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2025.

## CRITERION D

The Deaver Building at 1634 Walnut Street is a distinguished specimen of Modern Classicism in the context of Philadelphia's terraced commercial streetscapes. This era of aesthetic expression emerged in the early twentieth century, reinterpreting classical architecture through the lens of modern simplicity and proportion. Architect David Supowitz's design is executed with a refined sense of proportion, material control, and ornamental restraint that embodies the sophisticated urban architecture of the late 1920s. The presentation is rigorously ordered, featuring a monumental limestone base articulated with arched openings, classical relief panels, and stylized urn motifs that characterize the tripartite fenestration with its prominent central show window. The traditional details employed convey the gravitas of traditional architecture, while avoiding the excesses of Beaux-Arts exuberance. Additionally, this strong limestone base establishes a sense of permanence and dignity appropriate to the building's commercial function, as well as its premier address near Rittenhouse Square. Delineating the first and second floors, a restrained horizontal cornice serves as a clean transitional band between the substantial limestone base and mixture of brick and limestone above. This demarcation is an essential hallmark of Modern Classicism, where hierarchy and visual clarity are emphasized over decorative complexity. This sense of order is continued on the second floor, where a secondary commercial fenestration is introduced. The symmetrical window ensemble framed in limestone with a subtly curved arch and precise geometric lines reflects the disciplined refinement of Modern Classicism. The same objective is achieved in the employment of simple limestone architraves on the third floor. The façade terminates in a parapet that is characterized by a strong, but restrained cornice, featuring traditional, but simplified details.

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The Deaver Building, 1634 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19103-5403*





Figure 14. Left: Details of the first floor of the primary (north) elevation of the subject building in 1949. Figure 15. Right: Details of the second floor of the primary (north) elevation of the subject building in 1949. Source: Taken by George B. Gay, Phillyhistory.org.

Additionally, the subject building incorporates elements of the Regency Revival style, adding a note of delicacy and grace to its otherwise formal composition. The wrought iron balconettes, with their scrollwork and floral rosettes, echo the decorative metal work of early 19th century English design, while the urn and swag leaf panels and foliate scroll work in the arched transoms evoke Regency ornament interpreted through a modern hand. The limestone window surround's elegant segmental arch and projecting keystone lend the facade a sense of lightness, recalling the Regency era's preference for fluid curvilinear forms. Even the parapets rhythmic coping blocks and stylized acroteria express a blend of restraint and refinement completing the building silhouette with a classically inspired, yet distinctly modern crown. The result is a rare and sophisticated composition that unites the compositional order of modern classicism with the refined ornament and graceful poise of the Regency Revival, rendering the subject building with a quietly distinguished presence within Philadelphia's early 20th century architectural landscape.



Figure 16. Looking east, the south side of the 1600 block of Walnut Street in the 1930s, showing the subject property second from the right. Source: Boies Penrose Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

## CRITERIA C AND J

The Deaver Building at 1634 Walnut Street is significant under Criteria C and J. The subject building embodies distinctive characteristics of Modern Classicism in an elegant commercial façade with Regency-inspired details, standing as a compelling example of the evolution of Philadelphia's built environment through the adaptation of a 19th-century domestic structure for a new use with a relevant Composite Era commercial presentation. The adaptation of the Philadelphia townhouse for commercial use is a trend almost as old as the city itself. The most common type of conversion was achieved through altering the ground floor and replacing two or three bays of a residential fenestration with a storefront. In the late nineteenth century, the trend of replacing an entire façade of an existing building became increasingly common. This trend was particularly common along Chestnut Street when the municipal government mandated a recession of the building line to widen the important thoroughfare. This is discussed in more detail in the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places Nomination: Chestnut Street East Commercial Historic District.<sup>15</sup> In addition to new construction, the employment of Modern Classicism in the design of rehabilitated structures in the Quaker City was a popular aesthetic and business trend that emerged as residential streets were commercialized as part of the city's ongoing development. The most evocative examples of these buildings were commissioned along Chestnut and Walnut Streets west of S. Broad Street and in the vicinity of Rittenhouse Square.

<sup>15</sup> Oscar Beisert. *Philadelphia Register of Historic Places Nomination: Chestnut Street East Commercial Historic District*. (Philadelphia: Keeping Society of Philadelphia, 2020).



Figure 17. The south side of the 2000 block of Chestnut Street, showing 2028 and 2030 Chestnut Street, featuring Modern Classical commercial facades in the 1930s. These facades were built upon the existing townhouses, the dormers of which are still seen above the parapets. Source: Boies Penrose Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Erected in the mid-19th century as a substantial, semi-detached brick, Federal-inspired townhouse, the subject building was transformed in 1927 when Dr. Deaver, the longtime owner, appears to have engaged in a development project with the H.J. Homan Company. The scope of work included extensive renovations, including the construction of a new Modern Classical façade to serve as the commercial front of the old-fashioned domestic structure. Despite the overhaul, the masonry shell of the original volume appears to have been maintained, including the front roofline with its central, pedimented dormer, a ubiquitous feature of most pre-Civil War townhouses in Philadelphia. This transformation reflects a broader pattern in Center City, when modern commercial facades were grafted onto earlier residential forms along principal streets, like Chestnut and Walnut, to accommodate the emergence and formation of premier business and retail corridors. The 1927 façade is an evocative composition, as described in the section on Criterion C.





Figure 18. Left: The primary (south) elevation of 1523 Walnut Street in May 1948. Source: Parker & Mulligan, Free Library of Philadelphia. Figure 19. Center: The primary (south) elevation of 2015 Chestnut Street. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2025. Figure 20. Right: The primary (south) elevation at 1921 Chestnut Street. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2025.

Under Criteria C and J, the subject building is one of many similar structures that were developed along the same lines. Under Criterion J, this development trend represents the economic and social history of the community, characterized by the attractive conversion of existing buildings from residential to commercial use. In many cases, especially along Chestnut Street, this meant adhering to the new building line when constructing a new façade. Under Criterion C, the following buildings represent the employment of Modern Classicism with architectural treatments that reflect the Regency Revival, as well as the Colonial and Spanish Revivals: 1322 Locust Street; 1523 Walnut Street (Altered); 1921 Chestnut Street; 2015 Chestnut Street; 2028 Chestnut Street; 2030 Chestnut Street; and 2033 Chestnut Street. Other transformations led to Modern Classical designs with more purely Neoclassical origins: 322 S. 16<sup>th</sup> Street; 1807 Chestnut Street; 1909 Chestnut Street; and the Shimwell & Logan Building at 1935 Chestnut Street.<sup>16</sup>

The transformation of the subject property, specifically its gorgeous new façade, was purposeful, attracting premier tenants. In October 1928, the firm of Ryser, Graham & Riley leased the ground floor and basement. Successors to John G. Ryser & Son, the concern were high end “Florists & Decorators” with their successful retail venue at Oak Lane and greenhouses at Elkins Park. A recent merger included John G. Ryser; William Graham, formerly of J.J. Habermehl’s Sons, “in charge of Decorations;” Godfrey Ryser, also formerly associated with J.J. Habermehl’s Sons; and Thomas Burke, “formerly of H.H. Battles,” “in charge of the designing and arranging of cut flowers.”<sup>17</sup> The earliest advertisement for their Walnut Street shop carefully exhibited these details, which were no doubt important to potential clients. The firm was engaged in providing flowers and decorative services for events at the Bellevue Stratford Hotel and other venues. In the first year, they were commissioned to design and build floats for the “Historic Day” pageant at Trenton, New Jersey.<sup>18</sup> According to *The Florists Exchange and Horticultural Trade World*, the new tenant was one of five “good sized flower shops to have recently opened” in the area in the

<sup>16</sup> *Real Estate Bulletin of Albert M. Greenfield & Co.*, September 1950, 3.

<sup>17</sup> *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 14 October 1928, 91.

<sup>18</sup> “How’s the Celebration Coming Along?” *Trenton Business-Civic-Service News*, September 1929.

fall of 1928. The new retail establishments included the Leary Shop at 16<sup>th</sup> Street above Walnut; Victor Ridenour on 17<sup>th</sup> Street below Walnut; etc.<sup>19</sup> While many of these businesses would fall due to the Crash of 1929, firms like Ryser, Graham, & Riley represent the type of retail establishments that required both a prime location and an elegant façade.

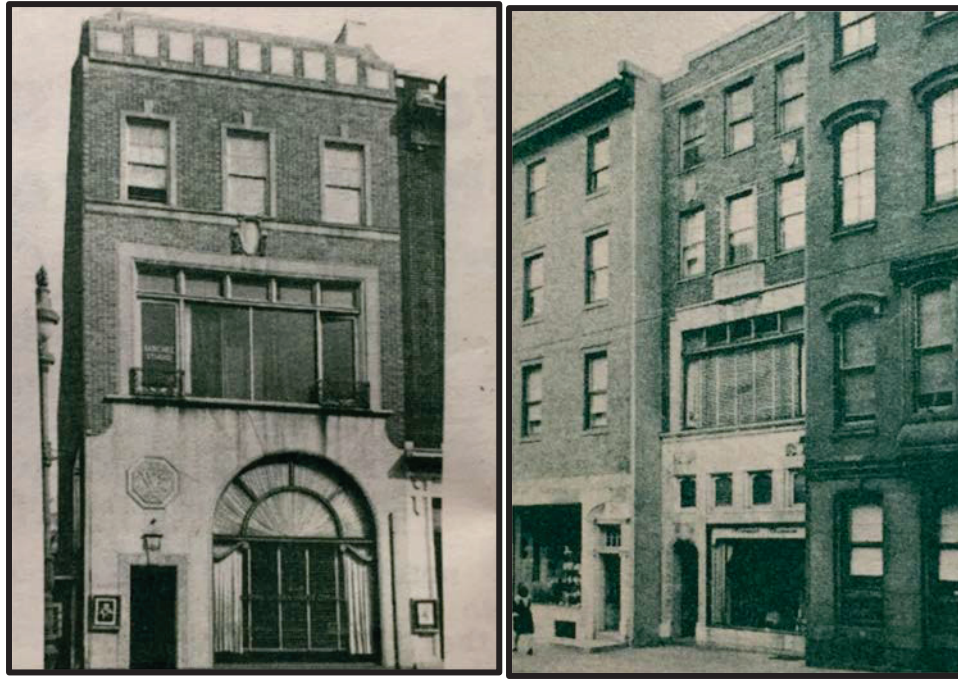


Figure 21. Left: Another view of the primary (north) elevation of 2015 Chestnut Street in 1945. Source: *Real Estate Bulletin of Albert M. Greenfield*, May 1945, 2. Figure 22. Right: The primary (north) elevation at 2033 Chestnut Street in 1947. Source: *Real Estate Bulletin of Albert M. Greenfield*, March 1947, 2.

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<sup>19</sup> *The Florists Exchange and Horticultural Trade World*, 20 October 1928, 744.





Figure 23. Left: David Supowitz in 1915. Source: Ancestry.com. Figure 24. Middle: David Supowitz in 1963. Source: *Jewish Exponent*, 20 December 1963. Figure 25. Right: Architect David Supowitz on left with WHYY-TV leaders after a successful fundraiser led by Supowitz in 1963. Source: *Jewish Exponent*, 23 August 1963. These images were provided by the University Archives of the University of Pennsylvania.

### **CRITERION E: DAVID SUPOWITZ, ARCHITECT**

The Deaver Building is significant as an early work of David Supowitz (1893-1961), a prolific Jewish architect, who is responsible for the design and renovation of over 500 buildings in the Philadelphia Region. While engaged in design since the 1910s, the subject building is significant as one of Supowitz's distinctive works during a period when he was establishing his own architectural practice and experimenting with modernism in late 1920s. This commission, along with two other similar buildings completed the same year on Chestnut Street, demonstrated Supowitz's skill at renovating an existing building, which would become a major aspect of his career as an architect. Satisfying Criterion E, the subject building is the work of an architect that greatly impacted the built environment of the Philadelphia Region.

Born in 1893 at South Philadelphia to Russian Jewish immigrant Max Supowtiz (1864-1937), a prominent grain and feed merchant, and Jennie Yaverowitz (1872-1956), David Supowitz graduated from South Philadelphia High School in 1911 and attended Southern Manual Training School. He earned a B.S. in Architecture in 1915 and an M.S. in Architecture in 1916 from the University of Pennsylvania. Supowitz was also awarded the Architecture Alumni Society Scholarship.<sup>20</sup> While a student, he worked for John T. Windrim, the eminent Philadelphia architect, as well as Magaziner & Potter, another important Philadelphia firm. By early 1920, he had entered a partnership with Stanley Neubauer, a Jewish architect in Philadelphia.<sup>21</sup> Neubauer & Supowitz endured until 1925, designing residences, apartment houses, and other buildings.<sup>22</sup> In 1926, David Supowitz is regularly associated with projects, like the subject building, individually rather than in partnership. As early as 1945, Supowitz began sharing an office with Israel Demchick and

<sup>20</sup> Ancestry.com. *U.S., School Yearbooks, 1900-2016* [database on-line]. Lehi, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2010.

<sup>21</sup> *PRERBG*, 4 February 1920, 88.

<sup>22</sup> *PRERBG*, 28 October 1925, 677.

Shander Berger. Near the end of his life Supowitz entered a partnership with Demchick to form Supowitz & Demchick.



Figure 26. Top left: The former Brith Israel Congregation on Roosevelt Boulevard, Philadelphia. Source: isjm.org. Figure 27. Top right: The Collingswood Theater at Collingswood, New Jersey. Source: Google. Figure 28. Bottom left: The Hollywood Theater at 1525 Atlantic Avenue, Atlantic City, New Jersey in 1936. Source: Atlantic City Press, November 1936. Figure 29. Bottom middle: The Campus Theatre at Lewisburg, Pennsylvania. Source: Google. Figure 30. Bottom right: The Goldman Theater at Philadelphia. Source: Facebook. Source: ISJM.org.

In 1927, at the same time he was working on the Deaver Building, Supowitz completed designs for similar commercial transformations with elegant new facades at 2015 Chestnut Street and 2030 Chestnut Street. That same year, he completed plans for 76 residences and garages at Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania.<sup>23</sup> Supowitz also designed a synagogue for the Brith Israel Congregation on Roosevelt Boulevard between D and E Streets in 1928.<sup>24</sup> All of these early commissions exhibit a strong skill at combining elements of traditional architectural styling with the principals of modernism. He would ultimately gain an important reputation for theater design in the larger region and beyond, which included both new buildings and renovations. One important specimen from the era was his plans for the Collingswood Theater, a 1,197-seat, Venetian style structure with polychromatic brick and terra cotta details, which was completed in 1928. Supowitz would go on to design more than two dozen theaters, including the Hollywood Theater at Atlantic City, New Jersey in 1936; the Campus Theatre at Lewisburg, Pennsylvania in 1941; and the Goldman

<sup>23</sup> PRERBG, 6 April 1927, 218.

<sup>24</sup> PRERBG, 19 September 1928, 596.



Theater at Philadelphia in 1946. As is the case with these examples, his buildings became more and more streamlined in the 1930s and 1940s. Additionally, he became well known for his theater renovation projects, which included the modernization of existing structures. His improvements occasionally involved new façades, but more often the employment of a more attractive marquee, an improved lighting scheme and modern interiors and seating. Supowitz was commissioned to renovate the Westmont Theater; the Benn Theater in West Philadelphia in 1936; the Hill Theater at Philadelphia in 1940; Westmont Theater in 1949; The Irwin Seating Company of Grand Rapids, Michigan engaged him in their advertisements: “Take the Case of David Supowitz,” who they described as “one of America’s foremost designers of beautiful theaters and nationally famed for the success of his numerous remodeling projects.”<sup>25</sup>

*In Line with  
Thoughts on  
Designing and  
Remodeling*

## Take the Case of David Supowitz

David Supowitz is one of America's foremost designers of beautiful theatres and nationally famed for the success of his numerous remodeling projects.

No one more completely appreciates the value of matching the utmost in eye appeal with the ultimate in planned comfort as a stimulus to box-office receipts.

Significant, therefore, is the fact that more than 80% of all Supowitz designed theatres are equipped with IRWIN seating.

Before you reseat or select the chairs for your new theatre, be sure to look over the IRWIN line. It's thoroughly complete, with a range of styles to harmonize with any scheme of decoration and each model is replete with "neck to knee comfort"—the most important contact you have with the public. See the samples at the National Theatre Supply Show-rooms, or write for complete information.

**IRWIN**  
*Seating Company*  
Grand Rapids, Michigan  
Distributed by  
NATIONAL THEATRE SUPPLY COMPANY

*Below: The "President," another Philadelphia Theatre, Supowitz designed and IRWIN Seated.*

*Above: The "Mayfair Theatre," Philadelphia, designed by David Supowitz, furnished with IRWIN Seating.*

*It's  
NECK to KNEE  
COMFORT  
that keeps them coming.*

Figure 31. This advertisement was published in an unknown trade publication in 1937. Source: Cinema Treasurers.

At the time of his death in 1964, David Supowitz was described as having “specialized in designing theaters, but also planned stores, synagogues, schools, and hospital buildings.”<sup>26</sup> He was also

<sup>25</sup> This advertisement was taken from an unknown trade publication in 1937, as per Cinema Treasurers website.

<sup>26</sup> “David Supowitz Dies, Noted Architect, 70,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 18 May 1964.

known as a philanthropist, serving on the boards of numerous Jewish charities. Ultimately, Supowitz was known for both his new buildings, as well as his successful renovation projects, making the subject building an important example of his work as an architect, satisfying Criterion E.

### **HISTORIC CONTEXT: FROM NEOCLASSICISM TO MODERN CLASSICISM<sup>27</sup>**

The Composite Era saw the rise of historicism in the Classical architecture of the United States, a trajectory epitomized by architectural firms like Peabody & Sterns of Boston; McKim, Mead, & White of New York; and that of Horace Trumbauer (1868-1938) of Philadelphia. This revival was employed in varying waves of popularity, starting with the advent of the Neoclassical movement following the World's Columbian Exposition at Chicago in 1893, until as late as 1950.<sup>28</sup> In a country defined increasingly by diverse populations of immigrant communities, the United States was, in some ways, without an "identifiable culture," devoid of cohesive national traditions. In the built environment, Classicism promised an impressive and tangible sense of history and legacy—an "heroic fiction of a well-ordered, stable society."<sup>29</sup> This appears to have been the aim of many architects and their patrons, especially in the American urban environment.

The literal historicism of the Composite Era was perhaps the greatest period of pure monumentality on this side of the Atlantic, eclipsing and, in many cases, replacing the landmarks created during the Victorian era. Naturally, this transition occurred in the most fashionable parts of American cities and, in Philadelphia, would ultimately begin to transform the blocks that faced Rittenhouse Square. From a prominent Philadelphia (and New York) family, Alexander Van Rensselaer (1850-1933) and his wife Catherine Ledyard (1811-1882), commissioned Peabody & Sterns to design a Palazzo in 1896 at the northwest corner of South Eighteenth and Walnut Streets, replacing a handsome and similarly sized, but somewhat craggy Victorian-era mansion. While the name Van Rensselaer is one long associated with old American stock, not all of the city's impressive Classical style structures were commissioned by this elite realm of society. Wealthy industrialist, Alfred Edward Burk, a German-born immigrant, commissioned Simon & Bassett to design his fully detached Gilded Age mansion in 1907 at North Broad and Jefferson Streets. Of course, even after the monumental residence was completed, most Philadelphians likely had no idea that it worked to edify society through its Italian Renaissance antecedents; however, those passing by no doubt understood Burk's position of importance and wealth in their city.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> This historic context on Modern Classicism was previously deployed in a Philadelphia Register of Historic Places Nomination by the author of this nomination.

<sup>28</sup> Schuyler, Montgomery. "Last Words About the World's Fair," *Architectural Record* 3 (1894): 292–295.

<sup>29</sup> Robert A.M. Stern, Gregory Gilmartin, and Thomas Mellins. *New York 1930: Architecture and Urbanism Between The Two World Wars*. (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, Inc., 1987), 20.

<sup>30</sup> Historic American Buildings Survey, Creator. *Alfred E. Burk House, North Broad Street, Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, PA*. Documentation Compiled After. Photograph. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, <[www.loc.gov/item/pa1124/](http://www.loc.gov/item/pa1124/)>.

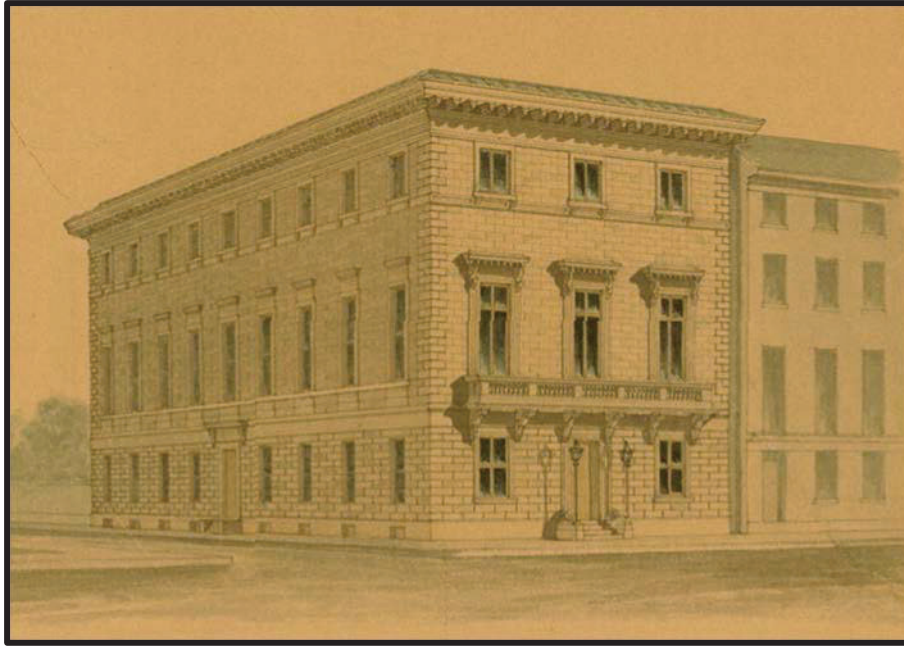


Figure 32. The Athenaeum of Philadelphia. Source: The Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

Commercial, institutional, and public establishments also asserted, reinforced, and/or solidified their integrity and significance through the inherent monumentality of the Classical-inspired buildings that they commissioned. After all, the country's first Palazzo was built between 1845 and 1847 at 219-21 South Sixth Street on Washington Square for the Athenaeum of Philadelphia. Known as "America's oldest subscription library," the National Historic Landmark was designed by the eminent Philadelphia architect John Notman.<sup>31</sup> After hundreds of other buildings were designed and constructed in the Italian Renaissance style all across the city following the Athenaeum of Philadelphia, the Palazzo style culminated in the impressive and striking five-story edifice at 1435-41 Walnut Street, a high style Italianate Renaissance pile commissioned by Drexel & Company in 1925-28. The building was designed by Day & Klauder, Architects, and built by Doyle & Company.<sup>32</sup> Both of these examples are corner buildings, while many more of Philadelphia's Palazzos stood in a row with other attached buildings.

<sup>31</sup> Constance M. Greiff. *John Notman, Architect, 1810-1865*. (Philadelphia: The Athenaeum, 1979), 90-102.

<sup>32</sup> Richard J. Webster. *Philadelphia Preserved*. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976), 127, 128, and 348.



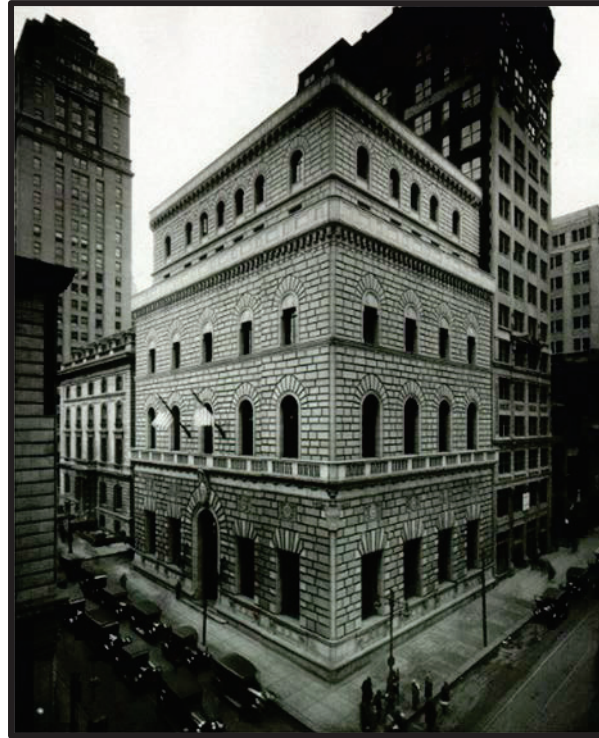


Figure 33. Drexel & Company (1928). Source: James Dillon (Photographer) Collection, Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

The interwar years led to an “Ideological Battle of Styles,” making archaeological Classicism a decided choice for old-fashioned architects and their patrons rather than an aesthetic moral imperative. While the “rigid historicism” that defined the Composite Era was passing away from the norm, Modern Classicism was developing as a major, if not preferred, alternative that architects understood as reflective of the past rather than as built history lessons. Nevertheless, some Philadelphia businesses and institutions, like their preferred architects, continued a more traditional approach to design, as had Drexel & Company. The so-called “oldest auction house in America,” Samuel T. Freeman & Co., was one such business—a local institution—that commissioned architects Tilden & Register in 1923 to design a new auction house for their firm.<sup>33</sup> Despite the rising popularity of Modern Classicism and the impending Art Deco, Freeman’s Palazzo was articulated in a manner that did not completely diverge from historicism, presenting a Second Renaissance Revival style façade with less architectural restraint than many of its contemporaries. This is not to say that the building did not possess some undeniable hallmarks of the era, as the new auction house was perhaps more chaste than it might have been a decade earlier. The interior, while stylized, was decidedly modern and equipped to serve the old auctioneer with new amenities.

The epic of technology in buildings of the 1920s is inseparable from the modernization of Classical architecture. While some architects and their clients alike clung to traditional forms, they were

<sup>33</sup> Meredith Keller, Staff of the Philadelphia Historical Commission. *Philadelphia Register of Historic Places Nomination: Samuel T. Freeman & Co. Auction House, 1810 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*. (Philadelphia: Philadelphia Historical Commission, 14 March 2019).

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unduly influenced by the shift in social norms and expectations.<sup>34</sup> Not far from Freeman's new auction house, The Roosevelt, a large hotel at 2025-29 Chestnut Street, was remodeled, upgraded and became the Stephen Girard Hotel.<sup>35</sup> A definite product of Modern Classicism, the building features a smooth-faced limestone façade, restrained classical details, and other elements of the style. Extant to-date, it speaks to the shift that had occurred in the employment of the Modern Classical style.

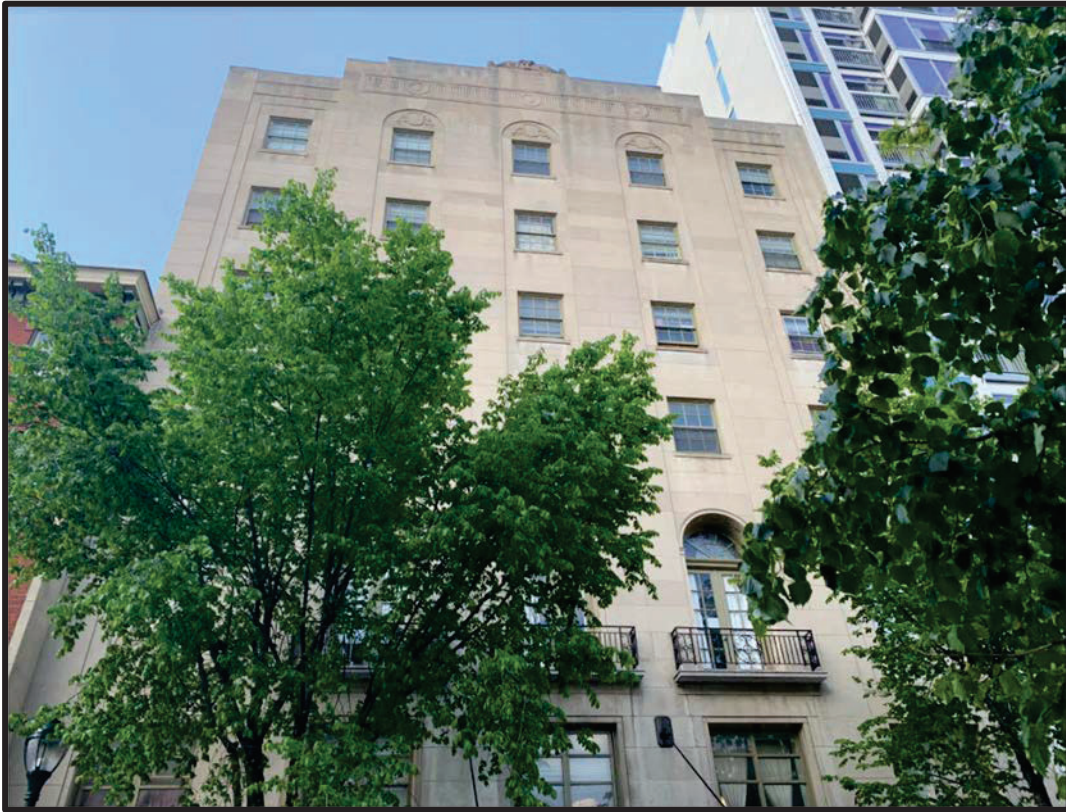


Figure 34. The Modern Classical façade of the Stephen Girard Hotel at 2025-27 Chestnut Street. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2020.

The abstraction of classical design in architecture gave rise to subcategories of Modern Classicism such as the Stripped Classical or Modern style. Architects like Paul Phillippe Cret, the French-native in Philadelphia, among others nationwide, popularized these contemporary movements with avant-garde prototypes. This architectural and stylistic transition can be seen in the evolution of banking and stock brokerage house designs in Philadelphia, including the Integrity Trust Company (1923-1929) at 717 Chestnut Street by Paul Cret and the Stock Brokerage House of Hano, Wasserman & Co. (1929) at 1516 Chestnut Street, designed by Grant Simon.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Belfoure. *Monuments To Money*, 212–213.

<sup>35</sup> Atlas of the City of Philadelphia (Central), 1922.; and Atlas of the 5<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup> Wards of the City of Philadelphia, 1927, revised 1931, Plate 19. Source: Greater Philadelphia GeoHistory Network.

<sup>36</sup> Oscar Beisert. *Philadelphia Register of Historic Places Nomination: The Stock Brokerage House of Hano, Wasserman, & Co., 1615 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania*. (Philadelphia: Center City Residents' Association/Keeping Society of Philadelphia, 2019).

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Two examples of Modern Classicism on Chestnut Street. Figure 35. Left: the Becker Store (1929) at 1516 Chestnut Street, designed by Alvin Chester Bieber, Architect. Figure 36. Right: Child's Restaurant Building (Demolished), 1425-27 Chestnut Street (ca.1926/Demolished), designed by Dennison & Hirons, Architects. Source: © Indiana Limestone Company. Courtesy, Indiana Geological and Water Survey, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

The application of Modern Classicism was employed in several other nearby buildings, including the 1425-27 Chestnut Street (ca.1926/Demolished), designed by Dennison & Hirons; the Becker Store (1929) at 1516 Chestnut Street, designed by Alvin Chester Bieber; the building at 1807 Chestnut Street; the Mills Building (ca.1929) at 1909 Chestnut Street, designed by Mills & Van Kirk; the Store & Office Building of Shimwell & Logan (1921) at 1935 Chestnut Street, designed by Ernest Howard Yardley; 1113 Walnut Street; etc.<sup>37</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Historically, the subject building, with its brick and limestone façade, imposed a distinguished break in the red brick facades that dominated much of the city's-built environment, including the 1600 block of Walnut Street. David Supowitz's design for the subject building employed smooth-faced limestone and buff brick, deviating from the immediate context, as shown in Figure 9. The traditional design is restrained with limited ornamentation of the Composite Era. While this is not evident today with the neighboring red brick buildings demolished, Figure 9 shows the original context and the visual effects of the new façade.

<sup>37</sup> AIA/T-Square Yearbook, p. 82 (1929); *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record & Builders' Guide*, 5 January 1921, i.



Buildings in Philadelphia with designed influence of Modern Classicism. Figure 37. Left: Built in 1927, The Masonic Temple (Demolished) at Broad and Race Streets in Philadelphia, designed by Horace W. Carter. Figure 38. Right: The Doyle & Tegan Building (1924) at 5909 N. Broad Street in Philadelphia, designed by Architects, Gleeson, Mulrooney & Burke. Source: © Indiana Limestone Company. Courtesy, Indiana Geological and Water Survey, Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

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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 assistance from Tim Kerner, Architect.

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## APPENDIX A THE SIGNIFICANCE OF DR. DEEVER



Figure 39. Left: A portrait of John Blair Deaver by Adolphe Borie. Source: Ethicon Suture Laboratories, Great American Surgeons series, No. 1 in the series, Great American Surgeons. Source: Google Books. Figure 40. Right: A 1921 photograph of John Blair Deaver conducting surgery in an amphitheater. Source: University of Pennsylvania Archives.

The Deaver Building is associated with the life and career of John Blair Deaver, M.D. (1855-1931), an eminent American surgeon, who was a significant person of the past in Philadelphia. Dr. Deaver ranks in the annals of American medical history for his important contributions to abdominal surgery, specifically the appendectomy, and as the inventor of the “Deaver Retractor,” a widely used surgical instrument. He achieved great prominence in the medical profession, developing specialized surgical fields and contributing greatly to surgical education. As a practitioner, he was known for his remarkable surgical prowess, conducting as many as twenty-five operations per day and an estimated 100,000 procedures throughout his career.<sup>38</sup> As an innovator, Deaver was considered a “radical” in the field of abdominal surgery, being an early advocate for immediate surgical intervention, employing his own special method involving a vertical incision and medial retraction of the rectus muscle. As an inventor, he devised the Deaver Retractor, a surgical instrument that was widely used to retract the organs during abdominal and thoracic surgeries. As an educator and researcher, he was head of surgery at the German Hospital.<sup>39</sup> He also taught off and on at the University of Pennsylvania, where, for a time, he held the John Rhea Barton Professorship of Surgery. A prolific writer and author, Deaver authored influential surgical textbooks and more than 250 articles.<sup>40</sup>

The zenith of Dr. Deaver’s career, the prime of his prowess in surgery, occurred during his residency in the subject building. As referenced earlier, the eminent surgeon sold the property in 1927 for redevelopment, and it was conveyed back to him in 1931 after its conversion to a commercial building.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> Isadora Deal and Michael Moran. “John Blair Deaver’s War on the Prostate,” *The International Journal of Urologic History*, Fall 2024, 2.

<sup>39</sup> Timothy E. Newhook, M.D., Charles J. Yeo, M.D., and Pinckney J. Maxwell, M.D. “John Blair Deaver, M.D., and his marvelous retractor,” *The American Surgeon*, February 2012, 155.

<sup>40</sup> Isadora Deal and Michael Moran. “John Blair Deaver’s War on the Prostate,” *The International Journal of Urologic History*, Fall 2024, 2.

<sup>41</sup> *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1 April 1927, 28.; and *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 24 July 1931, 26.