

ADDRESS: 123 S BROAD ST, UNIT 1

Name of Resource: Main Banking Room, Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Building

Proposed Action: Designation

Property Owner: Unit 1 Partners LP

Nominator: Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia

Staff Contact: Heather Hendrickson, heather.hendrickson@phila.gov

OVERVIEW: This nomination proposes to designate the Main Banking Room of the Fidelity–Philadelphia Trust Company Building, located at 123 S. Broad Street, and list it on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The nomination asserts that the Main Banking Room meets Criteria for Designation C, D, and E. Under Criteria C and D, the Main Banking Room is identified as a significant example of Classical Revival architecture, with its design reflecting early twentieth-century banking institutions’ efforts to restore public trust by evoking classical ideals and employing materials that conveyed restraint, stability, and permanence. Under Criterion E, the nomination emphasizes the importance of the room’s three influential designers and artisans. These include the Philadelphia architectural firm Simon & Simon, responsible for the overall design of the building and the Main Banking Room; the sculptural elements attributed to the renowned Piccirilli Brothers; and the monumental stained-glass window, *History of Philadelphia*, created by D’Ascenzo Studios, one of the most successful and influential stained-glass firms in the United States during the early twentieth century.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The staff recommends that the nomination demonstrates that the Main Banking Room of the Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Company Building at 123 S Broad satisfies Criteria for Designation C, D, and E.

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: _____

Postal code: _____

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: _____

Current/Common Name: _____

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: _____

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): from _____ to _____

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: _____

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: _____

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: _____

Original owner: _____

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 _____ Date _____

Name with Title _____ Email _____

Street Address _____ Telephone _____

City, State, and Postal Code _____

Nominator ☐ is ☐ is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: _____

☐ Correct-Complete ☐ Incorrect-Incomplete Date: _____

Date of Notice Issuance: _____

Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: _____

Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Postal Code: _____

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

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: _____

Date of Final Action: _____

☐ Designated ☐ Rejected

5. Boundary Description

The block bounded by South Broad Street on the west side, Walnut Street on the south side, South Juniper Street on the east side, and Sansom Street on the north side. This parcel, which has the address of 123 South Broad Street, contains two buildings: The Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Company Building, which fronts on Broad Street and covers about two-thirds of the parcel eastward toward Juniper Street; and the Witherspoon Building, which occupies the remainder of the parcel along Juniper Street between Walnut and Sansom Streets. As of 2018, this parcel consists of four condominium units, #1-4. Units #1 and #2 comprise the Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Company Building. Units #3 and #4 comprise the Witherspoon Building. The subject of this nomination, the public interior space of the main banking room in the Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Company Building, is encompassed by Unit #1 (OPA No. 883025610).



Boundary Map showing 123 S. Broad Street (imagery from Pictometry, 2024).

Boundaries of Interior Designation

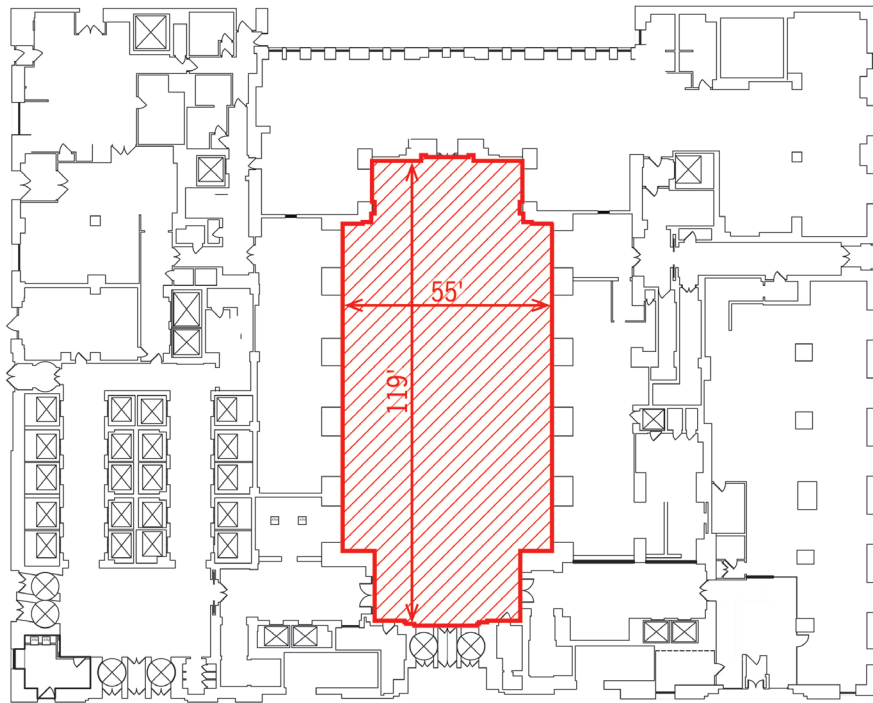


Figure 1: First floor plan showing extent of interior designation. This space consists of the historic main banking floor of the Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Company. Dimensions are approximate.

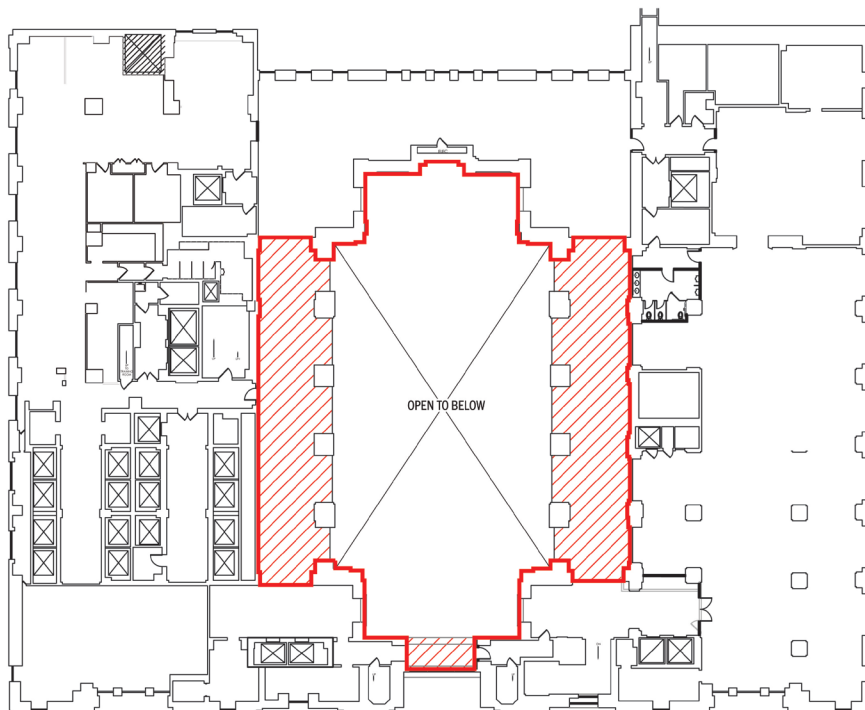


Figure 2: Second floor plan showing the extent of interior designation, which encompasses the mezzanine levels along the north and south sides of the main banking floor.

6. Description

The Main Banking Room of the Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Company Building was designed by the architectural firm of Simon & Simon and built between 1927 and 1928. This public interior space, a large, rectangular two-story volume, occupies the central portion of the first floor of the building at 123 South Broad Street and includes the mezzanine levels along the north and south sides (See [Figures 1 and 2](#)). The space, which was designed in the Classical Revival style and is characterized by its abundant use of marble, measures approximately 55 feet in width, 119 feet in length, and 47 feet in height. Since it was completed in 1928, the Main Banking Room has been well preserved. No significant changes have been made to the space, which remains today one of the grandest and most intact historic bank interiors in Philadelphia.

The Main Banking Room is primarily accessed through three sets of exterior doors – a pair of glazed bronze revolving doors with glazed double doors in between – on the Broad Street side. Although generally rectangular in plan, the westernmost and easternmost bays of this eight bay-long space are narrower than those in between.

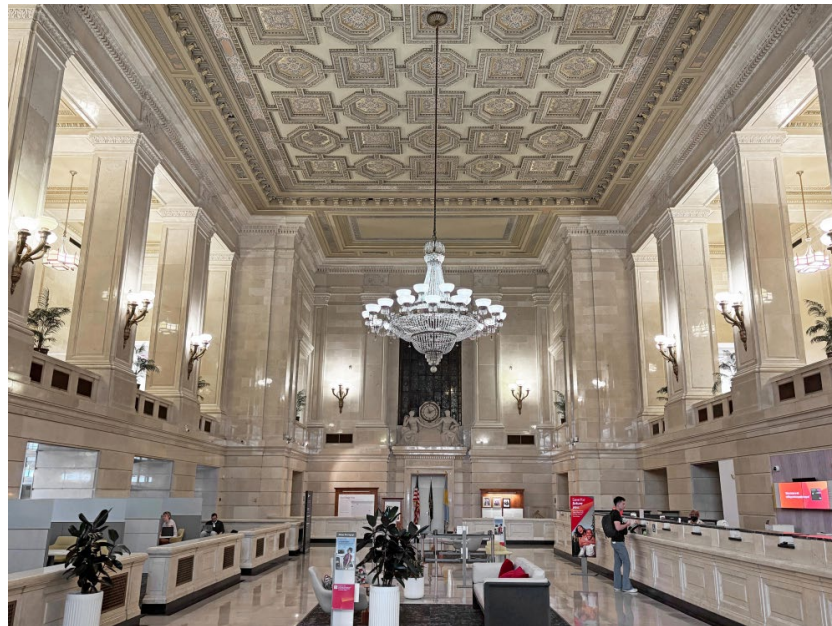


Figure 3: Main Banking Room, looking east from the Broad Street entrance.

The defining aspect of the Main Banking Room is its dignified classical grandeur, which is achieved through a symmetrical plan, extensive employment of marble, soaring piers and pilasters, and a coffered ceiling ([Figures 3 and 4](#)). The perimeter walls, which consist almost entirely of light gray Tavernelle Claire marble, are rusticated at the lower level and contain various openings into adjacent interior spaces, including the building's main lobby at the northwest corner of the first floor. Along the north and south sides of the space, four Tuscan Order square piers *in antis*, also clad in Tavernelle Claire marble, rise from the rusticated lower level to an entablature along the ceiling. The piers create five large openings into the mezzanine on both sides. On the floor between the piers, there are low knee walls of Tavernelle Claire marble, which contain metal registers with vertical louvers. On the walls east and west of each row of piers, there are matching pilasters. The piers and pilasters support a large entablature with a

denticulated cornice, again in Tavernelle Claire marble. Above the entablature is the ornamental plaster coffered ceiling, which has alternating square and octagonal cells. The ceiling is painted with various classical foliate motifs, and though partially gilded, is relatively muted in its overall effect.



Figure 4: Main Banking Room, looking west toward Broad Street from near the east end of the space.



Figure 5: Main Banking Room, looking east from the Broad Street entrance.

The floors of the Main Banking Room are of gray Tennessee marble. Along the south and north sides, there are teller stations and the former bank officers' spaces, respectively. Both areas are enclosed with low, paneled walls of Tavernelle Claire marble with bases of black Belgian marble. The low walls around the officers' spaces feature original bronze heating registers. The teller stations are still used for their original purpose, and the officers' spaces are used for private consultations with bank customers. The latter area is separated into multiple private offices by modern cubicle partitions. Additional officers' spaces at the eastern end of the Main Banking Room are enclosed by matching marble knee walls.



Figure 6: Typical view of the marble teller stations along the south side of the Main Banking Room.



Figure 7: Typical view of the marble knee walls along the north and east sides of the Main Banking Room.

The most significant historic features within the Main Banking Room are found on the east wall, where a large doorway – now infilled, although its marble surround remains fully intact – once provided access into the bank directors’ private offices. The doorway is topped by a marble cornice, which serves as a base for a large sculptural group executed in Tennessee Tavernelle marble by the Piccirilli Brothers of New York City. In this composition, Night and Day are represented by female and male figures to the left and right, respectively. From their seated positions, the two figures join hands in front of an octagonal clock, which is centered between and above them.



Figure 8: East end of the Main Banking Room.

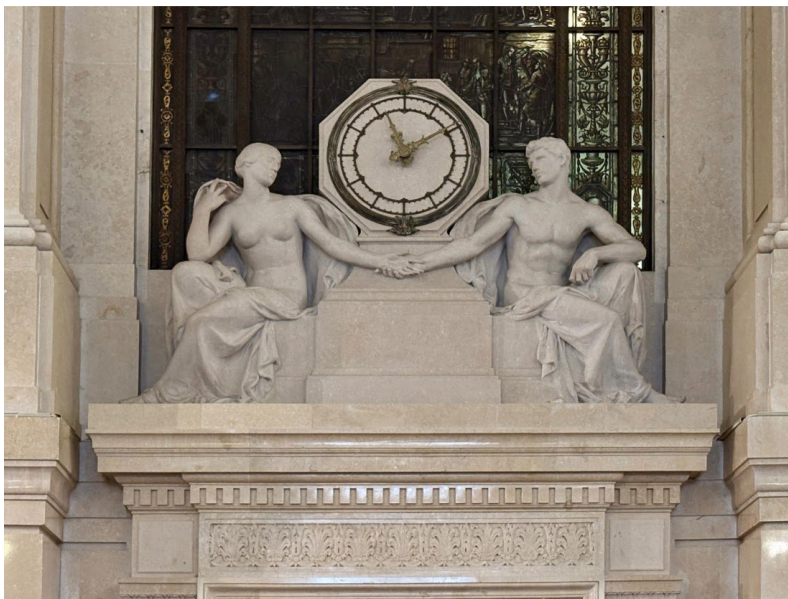


Figure 9: Sculptural group by the Piccirilli Brothers on the east wall of the Main Banking Room.

On the wall directly behind the sculptural group is a large stained-glass window, which is framed in bronze, rises twenty-five feet high, and has an arched top. Executed by the D'Ascenzo Studios of Philadelphia in collaboration with the architects, Simon & Simon, the window depicts various scenes and figures significant in the Colonial, Revolutionary War, and Early Republic eras of Philadelphia history.



Figure 10: At left, a current photo of the stained-glass window by the D'Ascenzo Studios behind the sculptural group on the east wall of the Main Banking Room. At right, a photograph of the completed window prior to installation (from the D'Ascenzo Studio Archives, Athenaeum of Philadelphia).

Architect Edward P. Simon himself gave a detailed description of the window:

Medallion portrait busts of famous Philadelphians are contained in the decorative border of this window. The men included are David Rittenhouse, 1732-1796, noted as a pioneer American Astronomer and Treasurer of Pennsylvania from 1777 to 1789, also professor of Astronomy, University of Pennsylvania; George Clymer, 1739-1801, signer of the Declaration of Independence and member of the Constitutional Convention of 1789; John Bartram, famous as the founder of America's first botanical gardens; James Wilson, signer of the Declaration of Independence, an ardent advocate of the Constitution and member of the convention which drafted it in 1787, also an associate justice of the U. S. Supreme Court from 1789 to 1798; Dr. Benjamin Rush, 1745-1813, another signer of the Declaration and a noted physician and surgeon; Robert Morris, financial genius of the young Republic as superintendent of finance from 1781 to 1784, founder of the Bank of North America and also a signer of the Declaration of Independence and a delegate to the Continental Congress.

Independence Hall is depicted in the arched top of the window. Below it is recorded the signing of the Declaration of Independence. On the level below it are two scenes from the life of William Penn, the one, his first landing in his province at New Castle, Delaware, the other, showing his treaty with the Indians. Between the Penn incidents portrayed, is a representation of George Washington addressing Congress as first President of the United States. Still lower are depicted in order, the Proclamation of the Declaration; the Constitutional Convention of 1787; the meeting of the First Continental Congress in Carpenters' Hall; the Drafting of the Declaration of Independence; Benjamin Franklin in the office of his printing house; Betsy Ross exhibiting the first U. S. flag; Caesar Rodney's ride from Wilmington to Philadelphia, which assured the adoption of the Declaration of Independence. The window is painted throughout on antique glass, and is the only one in Philadelphia, and one of the very few in the country, devoted exclusively to the portrayal of secular history.¹

Although the window remains fully intact and appears to be in good condition, the lack of sufficient backlighting makes it somewhat difficult to discern many of the scenes described here. The window is mirrored on the west wall by a leaded glass window of similar dimensions, also by the D'Ascenzo Studios, but features no figural scenes, only a colored glass border with a classical foliate pattern. As both an interior and exterior feature, this window is already protected by the building's existing historic designation.

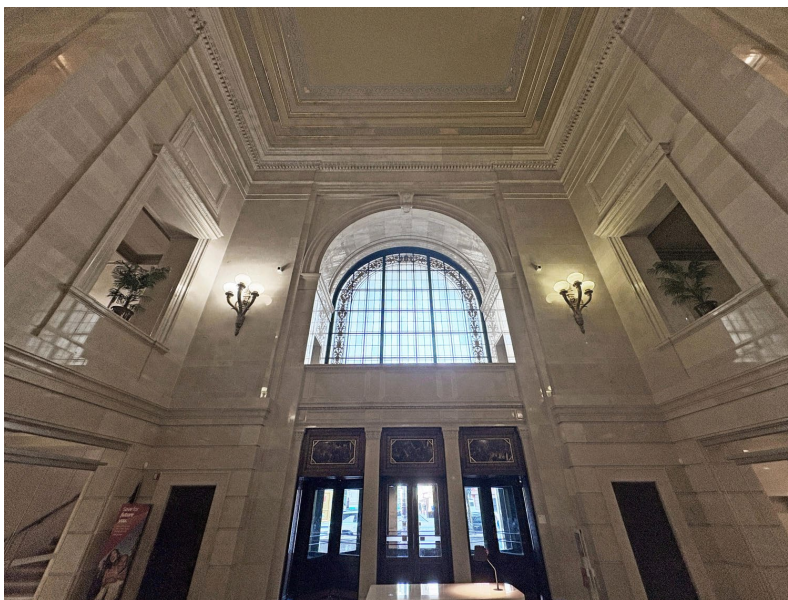


Figure 11: West end of the Main Banking Room, showing the entrance from Broad Street and the leaded glass window by the D'Ascenzo Studios.

On the interior side of the west window, directly above the entranceway, is a balcony connecting the two sides of the mezzanine (see Fig. 11). Below the balcony, which has a low marble wall serving as a guardrail, are three historic doorways separated by marble pilasters and topped by ornate cast bronze

¹ Edward P. Simon, "The Fidelity-Philadelphia Building," *Engineers & Engineering*, January 1929, 10-11.

transom panels inset with polished marble, which is black with white veining (see Fig. 12). The sides of the doorways feature cast bronze grilles with a classical foliate pattern.



Figure 12: West end of the Main Banking Room, close-up view of Broad Street entrance.

Mezzanines

The mezzanines along the north and south sides extend one structural bay back from the Main Banking Hall. They have marble floor and wall treatments and coffered plaster ceilings similar to those found in the latter. Although the mezzanines lay just outside this primary volume, they are closely related to the architectural treatment, spatial arrangement, and lighting of the Main Banking Room, and therefore are effectively an extension of the larger public space. The transparency made possible by the four piers on each side of the Mezzanine, as well as the depth of the Mezzanines themselves, make the upper volume of the Main Banking Room feel lighter and more expansive. In this way, too, the Mezzanines, per Simon & Simon's original design intent, become an important source of indirect lighting within the Main Banking Hall. In these ways, the Mezzanines reinforce Simon & Simon's intended effects of airiness and, in a certain sense, ethereality, rather than an overbearing classical grandeur, within the Main Banking Room.

Lighting Fixtures

Included among the various intact historic features in the Main Banking Room are numerous lighting fixtures, the most prominent being the large crystal chandelier, which hangs from the center of the coffered ceiling. The chandelier was made by the Greene Brothers of New York City in 1962 and installed in the Main Banking Room that year. Other lighting fixtures include twelve bronze sconces, each with three arms topped by translucent glass globes, which appear on all four walls (two on the east wall, two on the west wall, and one on each of the eight piers along the north and south sides of the space). Made by the Sterling Bronze Company of New York City, the sconces are original to the space. Additionally, there are ten bronze and glass hanging pendant fixtures within the mezzanines (five on each side). The pendants are not original to the space, but appear to date to the 1930s. The maker of the pendants is not known.



Figure 13: Clockwise from top left: The crystal chandelier within the Main Banking Room (1 fixture), the bronze sconces on the four walls of the space (12 fixtures total), and the hanging pendant fixtures on the mezzanine (10 fixtures total).

7. Inventory of Features and Finishes

Contributing*

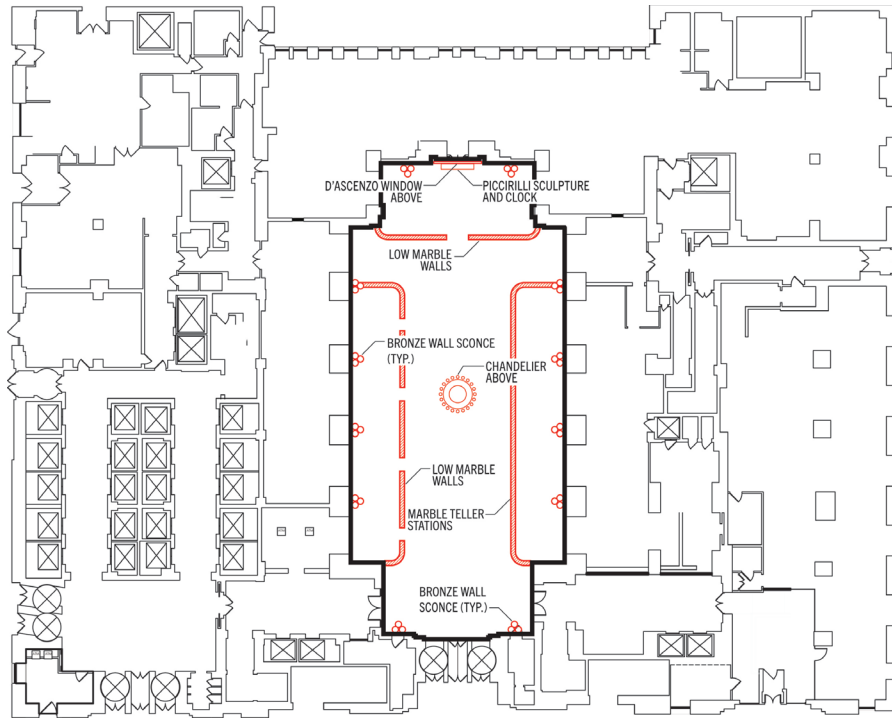
1. Marble floors and walls (all horizontal and vertical surfaces).
2. Ornamental plaster ceiling, including all painted finishes and gilding.
3. Marble knee walls along the north and east walls, including bronze registers.
4. Marble teller stations along the south wall.
5. Marble sculptural group and clock by the Piccirilli Brothers on the east wall.
6. Stained glass window by D'Ascenzo Studios behind the sculptural group on the east wall.
7. Crystal chandelier (1 total).
8. Bronze sconces (12 total).
9. Mezzanine pendant fixtures (10 total).

* For items 3-9, refer to [Figure 14](#) for locations.

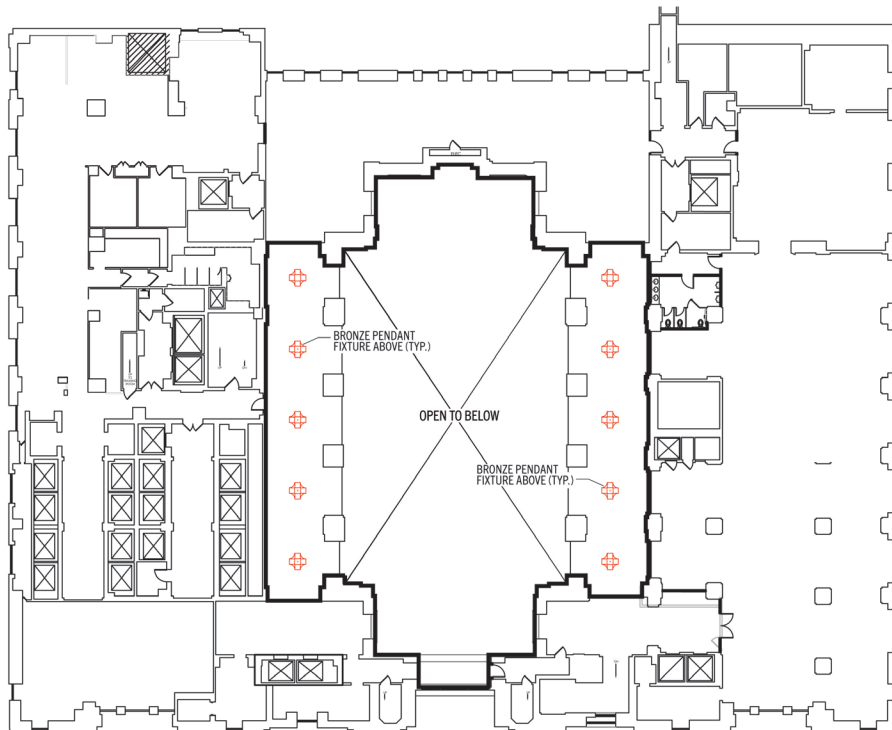
Non-contributing

- a. All furniture, signage, and non-structural partitions.
- b. Infill within historic openings.

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Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Company, Main Banking Room, 123 S. Broad Street, Unit #1, Philadelphia, PA



1st Floor



2nd Floor

Figure 14: Contributing features location plans.

8. Significance

The Main Banking Room of the Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Company Building is the primary interior public space in this landmark bank and office tower designed by the architects Simon & Simon and completed in 1928. At the time of construction, which began in 1927, the Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Company was by nearly every measure the largest financial institution in Philadelphia, with hundreds of millions of dollars in cash and investments on its books. Decades after many of its competitors had departed the city's old banking district on Chestnut Street east of 5th and built grand new headquarters along South Broad Street, Fidelity followed suit. In 1926, the company hired Simon & Simon to begin designing their new home. Reflecting Fidelity's preeminent position in Philadelphia banking, the project took on a monumental scale. When the thirty-story building was completed in 1928, it was not only the largest office building ever erected in Philadelphia but also featured one of the largest and most architecturally distinguished public banking rooms in the city, one that remains virtually entirely intact today. As a landmark example of a Classical Revival-style public interior, and as a career-defining work of the architects Simon & Simon, the Main Banking Room is an architecturally significant public interior space. The Main Banking Room merits listing on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places by satisfying the following criteria as established in the Philadelphia Historic Preservation Ordinance §14-1004 (1):

CRITERION C

Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style;

CRITERION D

Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering Specimen; and

CRITERION 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.

A Brief Overview of the Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Company

The Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Company Building and its Main Banking Room represent the merger of two of the city's most prominent financial institutions of the early twentieth century: the Fidelity Trust Company, established in 1866, and the Philadelphia Trust Company, founded in 1869. By the early 1920s, both banks were among the largest in the city. Still located in the old financial district on Chestnut Street below 5th Street, the two trust companies wished to relocate to South Broad Street, where the Girard Trust, Land Title and Trust, and Real Estate Title and Trust companies had already built impressive headquarters, creating a new hub of banking in Philadelphia for the twentieth century. The mutual desire to move 'uptown' and to build a banking house to rival those of their competitors led the Fidelity and Philadelphia trust companies to begin exploring a merger in early 1926. Just as important, the increase in capital resulting from the consolidation would allow the new bank to increase its limit on loans, which would draw in more customers. The merger, which was approved by the shareholders of both banks, took effect on July 10, 1926, creating the single largest institution of its kind in Philadelphia. In its combined

books, what was now called the Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Company had \$6.7 million in capital, \$80 million in deposits, a surplus and undivided profits approaching \$25 million, and over \$600 million in trust funds.²

Following the consolidation, Fidelity-Philadelphia proceeded with the construction of a new headquarters on South Broad Street between Walnut and Sansom Streets. Even before the merger - as early as 1919, in fact - Fidelity had begun acquiring property at this location. In 1925, Fidelity hired the local architectural firm of Simon & Simon to begin designing a new building for the site. Design work was still in progress in 1926 when the Fidelity-Philadelphia merger occurred. As it happened, at Fidelity's direction, the architects had already made provision for the future expansion of the building, which minimized changes brought by their client's increased space requirements. By the end of 1926, the architects had largely completed the plans for the new banking house. Simon & Simon proposed a massive 30-story tower designed in the Beaux-Arts style and faced primarily in Indiana limestone. Occupying the entirety of its 220' by 175' site, the new Fidelity-Philadelphia headquarters promised to be the largest office building ever constructed in Philadelphia, and reportedly the ninth largest in the world. Work proceeded rapidly. The bank awarded the construction contract to Irwin & Leighton in late January 1927. Demolition of the existing buildings, which included the old Forrest Theatre, began shortly after, on March 1st.³



Figure 15: Photo by William N. Jennings of the Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Building shortly after it was completed in 1928 (Library Company of Philadelphia).

² "2 Financial Houses Announce Merger," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 13, 1926; "Annual Report of Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Co." Trust Companies (March 1927), 442.

³ Edward P. Simon, "The Fidelity-Philadelphia Building," *Engineers & Engineering* (January 1929), 2-4.

The Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Company Building was completed with “remarkable speed,” as Edward P. Simon wrote, toward the end of June 1928.⁴ The following month, Fidelity began to occupy its new home, which encompassed nearly all of the first six above-ground floors as well as the building’s two basement levels. Aside from the monumental Main Banking Room at the center of the first floor, Fidelity occupied much of the second and third floors for its trust and tax departments, the fourth floor for its various clerical departments, the fifth floor for the executive boardroom, dining rooms, and its comptroller and auditors’ departments, and the entire sixth floor for its real estate department. The seventh floor and above were leased to other office tenants. In this model, first pioneered in American cities during the 1890s, Fidelity leased much of its new building to office tenants as a way to bring in revenue and to pay for construction.⁵ The vast size of the Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Building and its impressive architectural treatment conveyed a prestige which attracted many well-known office tenants, among whom were the Morgan, Lewis & Bockius law firm, the Baldwin Locomotive Works, the local branch of the Pittsburgh-based Aluminum Company of America (ALCOA), and a host of stockbrokers, insurance companies, and real estate firms, among others.⁶

Fidelity’s Main Banking Room as a Work of Classical Architecture

The Main Banking Room is a significant work of Classical Revival architecture as designed by Simon & Simon. Writing in *Architectural Forum* in 1929, Edward P. Simon himself explained the factors which led to this stylistic choice:

The problem was to design a building in keeping with neighboring structures and in accord with Philadelphia’s conservative traditions and at the same time afford a dignified style of decoration suited to the character of the banking institution which occupies the dominant position in the structure. Classical design was clearly indicated.⁷

In fact, the Classical Revival style had been a popular one for financial institutions since the 1890s. The Panic of 1893 led to the failure of hundreds of banks across the United States, shattering confidence in the nation’s banking system. Soon, the architectural exuberance and frivolity that had characterized Victorian bank buildings came to symbolize the freewheeling speculation and unsound economic policy that produced the financial crisis. As explained by architectural historian Charles Belfoure, bankers “surmised that one way to instill confidence again was through the physical appearance of the bank itself. After seeing the buildings at the [Chicago] fair, they realized that a bank designed in the classical manner could do just that.”⁸ Bankers now understood that the bank building, as Belfoure continues, “should be a dignified, magnificent structure that stands for solidity, strength, and above all trust.” Classical and Renaissance architecture, viewed as more noble and chaste, accomplished all these things. In addition, the bankers recognized that the use of Greek and Roman temples as treasuries in antiquity, and the origins of banking in Renaissance Italy, made the architecture of these eras suitable for use in modern bank buildings. Finally, the Classical Revival style seemed to

⁴ Edward P. Simon, “The Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Building,” *Architectural Forum* (August 1929), 176.

⁵ Charles Belfoure, *Monuments to Money: The Architecture of American Banks* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2005), 164-65.

⁶ “Activities of Day in Real Estate,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 30, 1928.

⁷ Simon, *Architectural Forum*, 173-74.

⁸ Belfoure, 127.

represent the imperial ambitions of a United States that was becoming increasingly powerful on the world stage, “matching the hopes and ambitions for world leadership which were stirring in the American people,” as written by architect Charles B. Young.⁹

As the third largest city in the United States and a major financial center, Philadelphia would witness a wealth of bank construction between about 1900 and 1930. During this period, both the major financial institutions of Center City and the ubiquitous neighborhood banks, located in virtually every corner of the city, would all embrace the Classical Revival, a style which, in the words of Belfoure, “would cement the image of a bank in the public’s mind forever.”¹⁰ Among the earliest and still most prominent examples is the Girard Trust Company building at the northwest corner of South Broad and Chestnut Streets in Center City, designed by the Philadelphia firm of Furness & Evans with McKim, Mead & White in 1907 (Fig. 16). Faced in white marble reminiscent of the monuments of Ancient Rome, Girard Trust has “all the characteristics of a classical temple,” in the words of city planner and preservationist John Andrew Gallery.¹¹ With its pedimented temple front and dome, the building is one of the more direct interpretations of a classical monument – in this case, Rome’s Pantheon – to appear in Philadelphia during the early twentieth century. Inside, too, the architects capture the grandeur of classical architecture with a voluminous domed banking room, the dome resting on two-story colonnaded walls, all in white marble.



Figure 16: Girard Trust Company Building at the northwest corner of Broad and Chestnut Streets, exterior and main banking room (extant). Designed by Furness & Evans with McKim, Mead & White in 1907. Both images from the Kennesaw State University of Georgia’s Georgia Marble Company Records.

Other major examples include the Beneficial Saving Fund Society at the southwest corner of 12th and Chestnut Streets, designed by the office of Horace Trumbauer and built 1915-18; and the Integrity Trust Company at 717 Chestnut Street, designed by Paul Cret and his firm and built 1923-24 (Figs. 17 and 18). In both cases, the architects compress the classical temple form into two much smaller sites. Despite being comparatively small in relation to Girard Trust, Beneficial

⁹ Charles B. Young, “Bank Buildings for a Century,” *Bankers’ Magazine* (November 1936), 407

¹⁰ Belfoure, 120.

¹¹ John Andrew Gallery, *Philadelphia Architecture: A Guide to the City*, Second Edition (Philadelphia: Foundation for Architecture, 1994), 96.

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Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Company, Main Banking Room, 123 S. Broad Street, Unit #1, Philadelphia, PA

and Integrity still achieve a certain visual impact through their exterior form and within their primary interior spaces. In both buildings, the architects effectively capture the formality, proportions, and detailing that became hallmarks of the Classical Revival-style bank during this era.

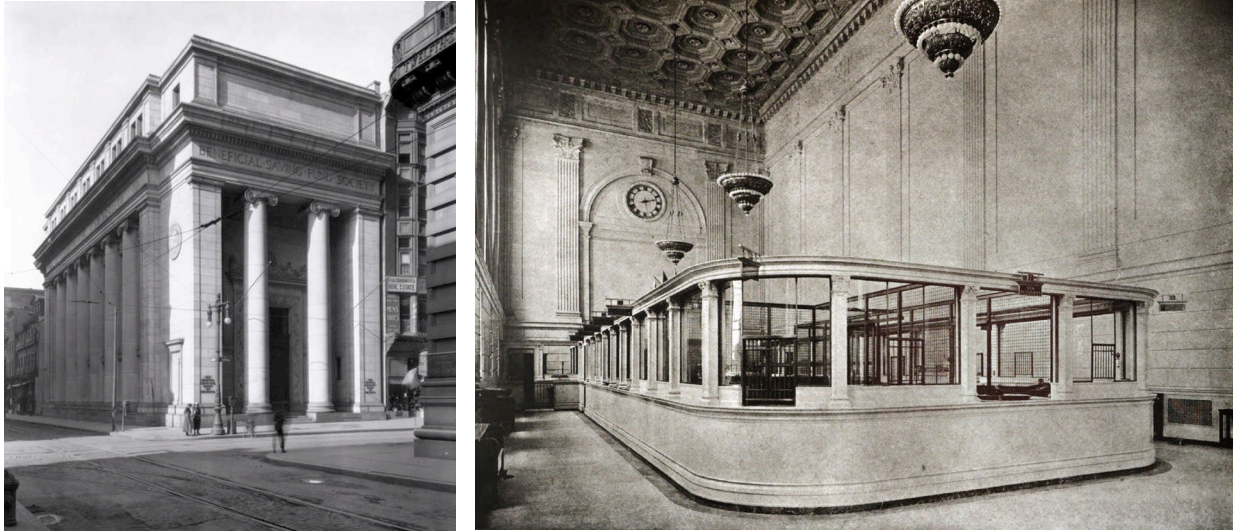


Figure 17: Beneficial Saving Fund Society at the southwest corner of 12th and Chestnut Streets, exterior and main banking room (extant but altered). Designed by the firm of Horace Trumbauer and built in 1915-18. Both images from *Architectural Forum*, May 1919.



Figure 18: Integrity Trust Company at 715 Chestnut Street, exterior and main banking room (extant but altered). Designed by the firm of Paul Cret and built 1923-24. Both images from *Architecture*, August 1924.

Despite the wealth of Classical Revival-style banks completed in Philadelphia between 1900 and 1930, few had interior banking rooms comparable to that of the Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Company Building. Exceptions may include Girard Trust, as discussed above, as well as the banking room within the Packard Building at the southeast corner of 15th and Chestnut Streets. Designed by the architects Ritter & Shay for the Pennsylvania Company for Insurance on Lives and Granting Annuities, the Packard Building is a 27-story office tower with a large banking room

on the first floor (Fig. 19). Although similarly grand in its classical architectural treatment, and even slightly larger in terms of floor area than Fidelity's Main Banking Room, with thirty-foot ceilings it lacks the soaring height which is so effective in conveying a sense of monumentality within the latter.

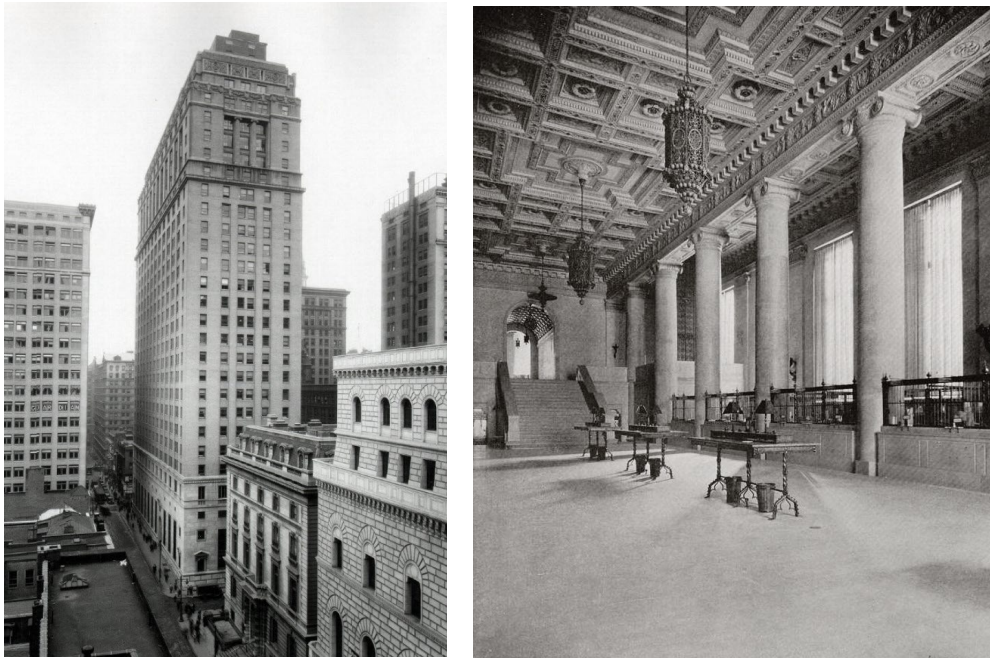


Figure 19: Packard Building at the southeast corner of 15th and Chestnut Streets, exterior and main banking room (extant but altered). Designed by the architects Ritter & Shay and built 1923-24. Both images from the James L. Dillon Collection at the Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

Fidelity's Main Banking Room was among the grandest public banking spaces built in Philadelphia during the early twentieth century. By expanding the scale of the typical banking room, emphasizing the monumentality of classical architecture, and imbuing the space with a ceremonial quality – the latter by way of a long center aisle leading to the sculptural and artistic focal point of the east wall – Simon & Simon elevated the public space of the Main Banking Room to one of almost civic importance (Figs. 20-23). The employment of only the highest quality materials – most especially the 20,000 cubic feet of Italian Tavernelle Claire marble used throughout the space – only reinforces this effect, which was an achievement fitting for the largest financial institution in the country's third largest city.

Nomination of Public Interior Portion of Building, Philadelphia Register of Historic Places
Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Company, Main Banking Room, 123 S. Broad Street, Unit #1, Philadelphia, PA

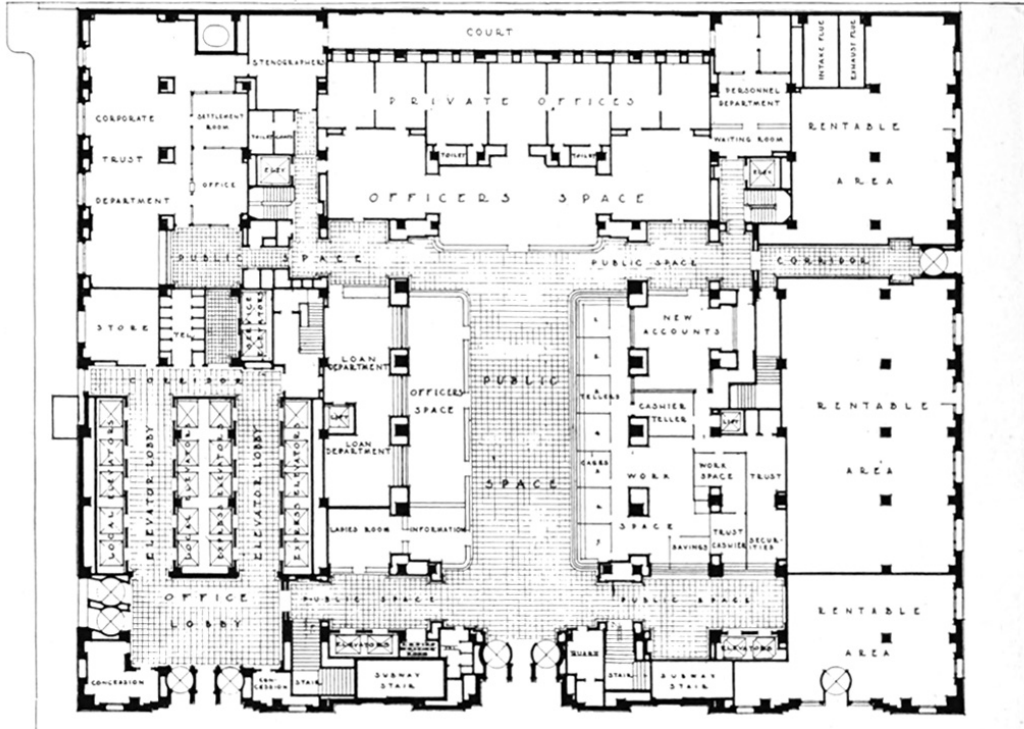


Figure 20: First floor of the Main Banking Room, from *Architectural Forum*, August 1929.



Figure 21: Postcard view of the Main Banking Room, photo by William N. Jennings (from a private collection).



Figure 22: East end of the Main Banking Room showing the sculptural group by the Piccirilli Brothers and the stained-glass window by the D'Ascenzo Studios, photograph by William N. Jennings (Library Company of Philadelphia)



Figure 23: View of the Main Banking Room, looking east, etching by Anton Schutz (Athenaeum of Philadelphia).

The Main Banking Room: Architecture and the Allied Arts

On the completion of the Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Company Building in 1928, the project was praised for the way in which Simon & Simon incorporated art and the decorative arts into its design. In the journal *Stone*, a national trade publication, one writer claimed that “Art in the architecture of a skyscraper was never more faithfully carried out, or more beautifully depicted than in the new...office and bank erected by the Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Company.”¹² In the *Public Ledger*, another observer wrote of how “Art work in marble, bronze, limestone and stained glass incorporated in the structure represent a distinct modern advance in the application of allied arts to the architecture of skyscrapers.”¹³

Many of the building’s art features are found on the exterior. On the Broad Street elevation, various allegorical reliefs sculpted in marble adorn the spandrels above the arches of the three main entrances on Broad Street, as well as the windows of the boardroom on the fifth floor. Additionally, there are carved marble medallions representing early American coins appearing at the second story on all three visible elevations. More accessible to the public because they are at grade are the ornately sculpted bronze door panels found in the three entrances on Broad Street. The sculptural work was completed by the Piccirilli Brothers of New York City, who are discussed in greater detail below.

The artwork and decorative finishes within the Main Banking Hall were no less important to achieving Simon & Simon’s goal of melding architecture and art. Two of the most significant features in this primary public space are the marble sculptural group and the large stained-glass

¹² “Philadelphia’s New Skyscraper of Stone Decorated With Profusion of Marble,” *Stone*, November 1928, 676.

¹³ “City’s Skyscraper Combines Utility With Artistry” (Rotogravure Pictorial Section), *Public Ledger*, August 19, 1928.

window on the east wall, which create an immediate focal point for visitors entering the space from Broad Street. Both objects are described in detail on page 5 and 6. As explained there, the sculptural group and stained-glass window represent major achievements by some of the most significant artisans (and their associated studios) working in the United States during the early twentieth century: the Piccirilli Brothers of New York City, sculptors; and the D'Ascenzo Studios of Philadelphia, stained-glass artisans and decorative painters.

The Piccirilli Brothers

The six Italian-born Piccirilli Brothers – Ferruccio (1864-1945), Attilio (1866-1945), Furio (1868-1949), Masaniello (1870-1951), Orazio (1872-1954), and Getulio (1874-1945) – came to the United States in 1888 and settled in New York City. All six learned stone carving from their father, Giuseppe Piccirilli (1844-1911), who came from a long line of stone carvers that could be traced back to the Renaissance era in Italy. Shortly after their arrival, some of the Piccirillis found work in the architectural terra cotta business while others became engaged in stone carving for a funerary monuments firm. By the mid-1890s, the brothers had set up their own shop in Manhattan, primarily working as architectural modelers and carvers of other sculptors' works. Attilio and Furio, who had received formal education in Rome, also became well-known sculptors in their own right and went on to produce many original works. It was Attilio, in fact, whose skills were first noticed by the famous sculptor Daniel Chester French (1850-1931), who is largely responsible for launching the long and storied career of the Piccirilli Brothers and their studio. Not only did the Piccirillis carve “every last statute, bust, bas-relief, and monument French designed, including the colossal figure of Abraham Lincoln in the Lincoln Memorial in the nation's capital,” but also produced work for a host of other renowned sculptors French had introduced to them.¹⁴

By the time Simon & Simon commissioned the Piccirilli Brothers to complete the sculptural work at the new Fidelity building in 1927, they were already widely acclaimed in their field and considered among the most skilled stone carvers and sculptors in the United States. Apart from the Lincoln Memorial, the best-known work by the Piccirilli Brothers includes, for architect Stanford White (with sculptor Frederick MacMonnies), the sculptures on the Washington Square Arch in New York City (1895; extant); for architect George P. Post (with sculptors John Quincy Adams Ward and Paul Wayland Bennett), the sculptural group in the pediment atop the New York Stock Exchange Building in Manhattan (1903; extant); for architects Carrere & Hastings (with sculptors George Grey Barnard, Paul Wayland Bartlett, and Edward Clark Potter), much of the sculptural work adorning the New York Public Library in Manhattan, including the famous lions (1911-17; extant); for architect Joseph M. Huston (with sculptor George Grey Barnard), multiple sculptural groups for the Pennsylvania State Capitol (1911; extant); and, for architect Lorimer Rich (with sculptor Thomas Hudson Jones), the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington National Cemetery (1931; extant). For these projects and many others, the Piccirillis have been widely admired not only for their meticulous craftsmanship in marble, but also for masterfully capturing the artistic vision of the sculptors they worked for.¹⁵

¹⁴ Joseph Vincent Lombardo, *Attilio Piccirilli: Life of an American Sculptor* (New York: Pitman Publishing, 1944), 56-57.

¹⁵ Jerome G. Daneker, *Romance of Georgia Marble* (Georgia Marble Company, 1922), 65-66; “How Six Brothers Became Sculptors,” *The Sunday Star* (Washington, DC), January 22, 1933; John Bellardo, “The Piccirilli Family: A Stone Carving Dynasty,” in *Sculpture Review* (September 2022), 15-22.

At the new Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Company Building, the Piccirillis were tasked not with translating another sculptor's model into stone, but with producing their own original sculptural work throughout the building. Attilio Piccirilli has been credited as the primary creative mind behind the Fidelity project, although the entire Piccirilli studio would have played a role in executing the various sculptures. In this way, the Fidelity building contains one of the most significant collections of original work by Attilio, at least outside of New York City, where most of his original work is found. Like many of his allegorical works, Attilio's *Night and Day* at the east end of the Main Banking Hall displays many of the qualities which earned him such wide acclaim during his life and since, including simplicity and restraint, a "refreshing idealism," and a love for the human body as a sculptural form.¹⁶

The D'Ascenzo Studios

The backdrop of Attilio Piccirilli's *Night and Day* is a large, 25-foot-high stained-glass window depicting important figures and scenes from early Philadelphia history (a full description of the window is provided in [Section 6: Description](#)). The window, entitled *History of Philadelphia*, is a significant work by the D'Ascenzo Studios, the Philadelphia-based workshop which became one of the most successful and renowned producers of stained-glass windows in the United States during the early twentieth century.

The D'Ascenzo Studios was founded by Nicola D'Ascenzo (1871-1954) in Philadelphia in 1905. Born in the Abruzzo region of Italy in 1871, D'Ascenzo came from a family of artists and metalworkers. After emigrating to the United States in 1882 and settling in Philadelphia with his family, D'Ascenzo found work as a mural painter and started attending night classes at the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. Later, D'Ascenzo also studied at the Pennsylvania Museum and School of Industrial Art, where he eventually taught classes in mural painting. After marrying in 1894, D'Ascenzo continued his education at the Scuola Libera in Rome before returning to Philadelphia and establishing an interior decorating firm in 1896. By this point, D'Ascenzo had become an accomplished mural painter and mosaic artist, and his skills attracted a number of major clients. It was not until about 1900 that D'Ascenzo first became seriously interested in stained glass, which he may have studied under John Lafarge at the New York School of Design.¹⁷

After he returned to Philadelphia around 1902, stained glass began to figure much more prominently in D'Ascenzo's work. D'Ascenzo's mastery of this craft soon earned him wide acclaim as an artist. As stained-glass commissions began to flow in, D'Ascenzo opened his eponymous Studios in 1905. There, he employed a group of skilled artisans working under his artistic direction to produce a wide range of stained-glass windows, both ecclesiastical and secular, for projects across the United States. Among D'Ascenzo's best-known commissions are the windows in the Washington Memorial Chapel at Valley Forge (1911-1921); the Congregation Rodeph Shalom Synagogue in Philadelphia (1927-28); the Folger Shakespeare Library (1931) and Washington National Cathedral (1935-37) in Washington, D.C. As these windows and many others illustrate, D'Ascenzo's work reflected both traditional craftsmanship

¹⁶ Lombardo, 2. Also see: Donna J. Hassler, "Attilio Piccirilli (1866-1945)," in *American Sculpture in the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Vol. 1, A Catalogue of Works by Artists Born Before 1865*, ed. Thayer Tolles (New York: Metropolitan Museum 1999), 482.

¹⁷ Lisa Weilbacker, "A Study of Residential Stained Glass: The Work of Nicola D'Ascenzo Studios from 1896 to 1954," M.S. thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1990.

and a fresh, twentieth-century take on what a stained-glass window should be. D'Ascenzo's windows, even those intended for a religious setting, often expressed modern themes that were understandable to contemporary society. Much of D'Ascenzo's work is also characterized by its use of rich colors, reliance on lighting (both natural and artificial) to create different visual effects, and harmonious relationship with its architectural surroundings. These qualities, for which D'Ascenzo and his studio became internationally renowned, are present in the window they produced for the Main Banking Room in the Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust building in 1927. As one of the largest surviving windows produced by D'Ascenzo and his studio in their home city, the Fidelity window is significant.

The Main Banking Room as a Public Space

Since it opened in 1928 and even to this day, the Main Banking Room in the Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Company Building has been freely accessible to established bank customers, to members of the public intending to become customers, and even to those simply wishing to admire the impressive interior space and its many artistic features. The public uses of the space do not end there, however. From the very beginning, Fidelity encouraged the broader public – including those unaffiliated with the bank – to visit the Main Banking Hall, where they held frequent week-long art exhibitions, charitable drives, and even an annual Christmas caroling event. The latter became a beloved Center City tradition, which began in 1928 – the bank's first year at Broad and Walnut Streets – and lasted at least into the 1960s (Fig. 24).¹⁸



Figure 24: Christmas caroling in the Main Banking Room in 1962, an annual tradition since 1928 (George D. McDowell Philadelphia Evening Bulletin Photographs, Temple University Library).

Simon & Simon, Architects

The Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Company Building is a major work by the architects Simon & Simon, a firm which had a significant impact in shaping the built environment of Philadelphia

¹⁸ Advertisements announcing these frequent public events in the space can be found in local newspapers from 1928 through at least the early 1960s if not later.

during the 1920s and 30s. Established in 1918, Simon & Simon was a partnership between brothers Edward Paul Simon (1878-1949) and Grant Miles Simon (1887-1967). Both men were born in Philadelphia.

Edward P. Simon graduated from Central High School in 1895 and earned a diploma in architectural drawing from Drexel Institute's Day School in 1900 as well as a certificate in building construction the same year from Drexel's night school. After completing his education, Simon partnered with Francis G. Caldwell, creating the office of Caldwell & Simon, although this firm lasted only a few years. By 1905, Simon had partnered with David B. Basset in the new firm of Simon & Basset, which completed a string of notable projects, including the twelve-story Manufacturers' Club Building at the northwest corner of Broad and Walnut Streets (1914; extant) and the A. Pomerantz & Company Building at 1525 Chestnut Street (1916; extant). With these projects and numerous others, Simon demonstrated the skillful handling of Classical form and detailing which would define many of his and his brother's projects during the 1920s.¹⁹

Grant M. Simon graduated from the Northeast Manual Training School in 1904. After studying architecture through a number of non-degree programs in Philadelphia and working in the firm of Kelsey & Cret, Simon earned both a B.S. and M.S. in architecture from the University of Pennsylvania in 1911. After working briefly in the offices of both John T. Windrim and William L. Price, Simon moved to Paris in 1913 to study at the École des Beaux Arts where he remained until the following year. Upon his return to Philadelphia in 1914, Simon began to collaborate with his brother, a working relationship which was formalized in 1918 when the pair established the firm of Simon & Simon.²⁰

The Simon brothers went on to complete some of the most important architectural commissions in Philadelphia and the surrounding region during the 1920s and early 1930s. Among the firm's best-known projects are the Philadelphia Municipal Stadium in South Philadelphia (1925-26; demolished), the thirty-story Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Company Building at Broad and Walnut Streets (1927-28; extant), the ten-story Blum Store at the southwest corner of 13th and Chestnut Streets (1927-28; extant), the offices of the Baldwin Locomotive Works in suburban Eddystone, Pennsylvania (1927-28; extant), the Congregation Rodeph Shalom Synagogue at the southeast corner of North Broad and Mount Vernon Streets (1928; extant), the 13-story Strawbridge & Clothier Stores at 8th and Market Streets (1928-31; extant), and the Van Rensselaer Dormitory at the Drexel Institute (1930-31; extant). With the exception of the Municipal Stadium, which was demolished in the early 1990s, these works remain standing as major landmarks within their respective neighborhoods, demonstrating the significant impact Simon & Simon had on Philadelphia's built environment during the 1920s and 30s.

¹⁹ Sandra L. Tatman and Roger W. Moss, *Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects: 1700-1930* (Boston: G.K. Hall & Co., 1985), 721-22.

²⁰ Tatman and Moss, 723-24.

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Figure 25: View of the Municipal Stadium in South Philadelphia sometime during the 1930s; Karl F. Lutz, photographer (Athenaeum of Philadelphia).

Figure 26: View of the Blum Store at 13th and Chestnut Streets around 1930, from the “Office of Simon & Simon Photo Album” (Athenaeum of Philadelphia).



Figure 27: View of the Baldwin Locomotive Works Headquarters around 1930, from the “Office of Simon & Simon Photo Album” (Athenaeum of Philadelphia).

Figure 28: View of the Congregation Rodeph Shalom Synagogue at North Broad and Mount Vernon Streets around 1930; James L. Dillon, photographer (Atheneum of Philadelphia).



Figure 29: View of the Strawbridge & Clothier Store at 8th and Market Streets around 1931; James L. Dillon, photographer (Atheneum of Philadelphia).

Figure 30: View of the Van Rensselaer Dormitory at Drexel University around 1931, from the “Office of Simon & Simon Photo Album” (Athenaeum of Philadelphia).

Apart from Rodeph Shalom, which Simon & Simon designed in a Byzantine-Art Deco hybrid style, Simon & Simon’s major projects demonstrate the firm’s adept handling of Classical form and detailing, especially when applied to immense buildings like Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust. The architectural historian Sandra L. Tatman has written that Simon & Simon’s designs “display a Beaux Arts correctness devoid of the abstraction sometimes seen in other practitioners.”²¹ This assessment, however, does not fully capture the way in which their work prioritized the compositional and formal principles of the Beaux Arts style over its ornamental tendencies. Although not quite the “stripped classicism” of some contemporaries, such as Paul Cret, Simon & Simon’s work successfully conveyed the visual impact of the Beaux Arts without the overwrought decorative treatments common in earlier decades. This legacy has been preserved in Simon & Simon’s many intact projects in Philadelphia, including those discussed above. The firm’s handling of Beaux-Arts form in tall buildings, reflected in the setback massing of the Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust and Strawbridge & Clothier buildings, is an especially notable contribution to the city’s built environment.

Although Grant Simon left the partnership around 1927 or 1928, his brother Edward continued to operate the firm under the name Simon & Simon. Tatman writes that following the younger Simon’s departure, the architect W.R. Morton Keast, chief designer in the office of John T. Windrim, may have been loaned to Simon & Simon for the Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust project, although the evidence supporting this claim is anecdotal. During the 1930s, Simon & Simon’s work, which included a mixture of industrial, commercial, and academic buildings, became decidedly more modern in character. During the 1930s, Edward P. Simon became the director of the Federal Housing Administration for the Eastern District of Pennsylvania. Later, in the 1940s, he partnered with Lyle F. Boulware, establishing the new firm of Simon & Boulware. Edward P. Simon died in 1949.²² Grant M. Simon later became actively involved in the planning of

²¹ Tatman and Moss, 723-24.

²² “Edward P. Simon, Architect, Was 70,” *New York Times*, May 10, 1949.

Independence National Historical Park as well as chair of the Philadelphia Historical Commission. In 1959, Simon was cited by Mayor Richardson Dilworth for his leadership of the Historical Commission, which under his tenure designated 1149 buildings. Grant M. Simon died in 1967.²³

Later History of the Main Banking Room

The Main Banking Room continued to be used by Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust, which was renamed simply as Fidelity Bank in 1964, until 1988 when the company became part of First Fidelity Bancorp.²⁴ A few years prior to this change, in 1983, the Main Banking Room was prominently featured in *Trading Places*, a major motion picture starring Dan Aykroyd and Eddie Murphy. The architectural grandeur of the space made it an appropriate theatrical setting for the headquarters of Duke & Duke, a brokerage firm run by the film's main antagonists, the evil billionaires Randolph and Mortimer Duke (Fig. 31). As one of the most successful comedic films of the 1980s, *Trading Places* further reinforced the Main Banking Room's status as a significant public interior space in Philadelphia. Since the 1980s, the Main Banking Room has continued to serve as a branch bank through a succession of later tenants, which have included First Union Bank (2000), Wachovia (2003) and, most recently, Wells Fargo (2018).²⁵ The space continues to be publicly accessible today.



Figure 31: The Main Banking Room appearing as the headquarters of Duke & Duke in *Trading Places*, the 1983 film starring Dan Aykroyd and Eddie Murphy.

²³ "Grant M. Simon Dies, Noted Architect, 79," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 5, 1967.

²⁴ Terry Bivens, "1st Fidelity Picks Lawrenceville...," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, July 7, 1988.

²⁵ Jacob Adelman, "Wells Fargo Building Has Gotten a New Owner," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 27, 2018.

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