

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: **124-34 S. 15th Street**

Postal code: **19102-3002**

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: **The Real Estate Trust Company**

Current Name: **Ocean Prime**

3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

☒ Building

☐ Structure

☐ Site

☐ Object

4. PROPERTY INFORMATION

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

Occupancy: ☒ occupied ☐ vacant ☐ under construction ☐ unknown

Current use: Commercial

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

6. DESCRIPTION

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

7. SIGNIFICANCE

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

Period of Significance (from year to year): **1948**

Date(s) of construction: **1946-47**

Architects: **Sidney E. Martin, Architect**

Builders: **John P. Hallahan Co.**

Original owners: **The Real Estate Trust Company of Philadelphia**

Significant person: **Samuel F. Houston**

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: **Keeping Society of Philadelphia**

Author: **Oscar Beisert, Architectural Historian**

Date: **18 August 2026**

EMAIL: **KEEPER@KEEPINGPHILADELPHIA.ORG**

Nominator ☐ is ☒ is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: 8/24/2026

☒ Correct-Complete ☐ Incorrect-Incomplete

Date: 10/16/2026

Date of Notice Issuance: 10/16/2026

Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: GOODSAM 1500 LP

Address: 636 Old York Road

City: Jenkintown

State: PA

Postal Code: 19046

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 south and primary (east) elevations. Source: Keeping Society of Philadelphia, 2026.

THE REAL ESTATE TRUST COMPANY OF PHILADELPHIA

■
ERECTED 1946-47

■
124-34 S. 15TH STREET
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19102-3002



Figure 2. The subject designation is confined to the parcel delineated above in blue. Source: City of Philadelphia, Atlas, 2025.

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundary for the subject designation is as follows:

BEGINNING at a point formed by the intersection of the Southerly side of Sansom Street (40' wide) with the Westerly side of S. 15th Street (50' wide); thence extending Southwardly along the Westerly side of said S. 15th Street, the distance of 95'-0" to a point in the Northerly side of Moravian Street (19'-9" wide); thence extending Westwardly along the Northerly side of Moravian Street, the distance of 99'-9" to a point in the center of a certain 4' wide alley; thence extending Northwardly parallel with S. 15th Street, partly passing through the center of the aforementioned 4' wide alley, and partly through a party wall, the distance of 96'-0" to a point in the Southerly side of Sansom Street; and thence extending Eastwardly along the Southerly side of Sansom Street, the distance of 99'-9" to the first mentioned point and place of beginning.

Tax Parcel No.: 883512500

Deed Registry No.: 001S210185



Figure 3. The primary (east) elevation. Source: Keeping Society of Philadelphia, 2026.

6. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The former Real Estate Trust Company Building, erected in 1946-47, occupies the southwest corner of 15th and Sansom Streets in Center City Philadelphia. The principal (east) elevation fronts 15th Street, while the north elevation faces Sansom Street and the south elevation fronts Moravian Street. The building is a two-story, Colonial Revival-style banking house constructed of red brick with marble and wood trim, comprising a main block and a rear section. The main block features a low-pitched, slate-clad hipped roof, while the rear section is served by a flat roof. Symmetrically composed and monumental in character, the primary façade reflects the conservative classical design employed by some longstanding financial institutions in the years immediately following the Second World War.



Figure 4. The primary (east) elevation. Source: Keeping Society of Philadelphia, 2026.

PRIMARY (EAST) ELEVATION OF THE MAIN BLOCK

Symmetrically composed and monumental in character, the two-story banking house rests upon a brick and marble water table and is capped by a low-pitched hipped roof. A broad pediment centered on the principal elevation projects slightly from the roofline and contains a circular oculus with radial muntins set within a brick tympanum. The pediment is framed by an elaborate cornice enriched with dentils and modillions that extends beyond the pediment across the full width of the primary (east) elevation, extending to the side elevations of the main block.

The principal façade is organized into seven bays, with the three central bays emphasized by a monumental portico composed of four engaged fluted Ionic pilasters rising from molded plinths to support a full entablature integrated into the primary cornice. The central entrance occupies the middle bay beneath an elaborately carved marble and wood surround consisting of a segmental pediment with brackets and dentils. At the base of the pediment is a marble tablet that reads: “The Real Estate Trust Company.” The pediment is supported by fluted pilasters topped by Corinthian capitals. Above the entrance is a carved marble panel bearing the intertwined monogram of the Real Estate Trust Company, while an ornate molded marble surround with scrolling ears and a projecting sill distinguishes the second-story central window.



Figure 5. Above: Detail of the central bay of the primary (east) elevation. Source: Keeping Society of Philadelphia, 2026. Figure 6. Below: Marble signage of the Real Estate Trust Company within the primary (east) elevation. Source: Keeping Society of Philadelphia, 2026.

The flanking bays are uniformly articulated in red brick laid in a Flemish bond with marble and wood trim. Fenestration is arranged symmetrically with rectangular window openings at the second story and round-arched openings at the first. The first-floor windows feature multi-light fanlights set within radiating brick arches above rectangular sash openings framed by marble impost blocks and keystones. At the second story, the windows are rectangular with multi-light wood sash set beneath flat marble lintels and are presently shaded by black fabric awnings. Narrow marble belt courses define the floor levels, while marble quoins are omitted in favor of broad planar brick wall surfaces that reinforce the classical composition.

The entrance remains centrally located and is approached directly from the public sidewalk. The principal doorway consists of a modern glazed opening set within the original marble and wooden enframing. Although the first-floor window openings were enlarged during alterations, they were subsequently restored to their original proportions. The infilled masonry beneath these openings remains subtly discernible upon close inspection, though the historic rhythm and proportions of the façade have largely been reestablished.



Figure 7. The side (north) elevations of the main block and the rear section. Source: Keeping Society of Philadelphia, 2026.

THE SIDE (NORTH) ELEVATION OF THE MAIN BLOCK AND THE REAR SECTION

The side (north) elevation, fronting Sansom Street, is divided into two distinct sections that reflect the building's internal organization and hierarchy. The western portion of the elevation, comprising approximately the western two-thirds of the façade, corresponds to the main block's principal banking hall and maintains the same formal architectural vocabulary exhibited on the primary (east) elevation. The eastern portion represents a subordinate rear section that is simpler in composition and detailing, reflecting its secondary function.

The main block is constructed of red brick laid in a Flemish bond above a smooth marble water table and is articulated by a projecting cornice enriched with dentils and modillions identical to that of the primary façade. A continuous marble string course extends across the elevation at the

second-floor sill level, visually separating the two stories, while a second, narrower marble belt course marks the spring line of the first-floor window arches. The fenestration is organized into five evenly spaced bays. The first story contains large round-arched window openings with brick archivols, marble impost blocks, and projecting marble keystones. Each opening retains its multi-light fanlight transom above a large rectangular window opening. The second story is punctuated by five evenly spaced rectangular window openings with marble and wood surrounds, projecting sills, and multi-light wood sash. The windows are surmounted by contemporary black canvas awnings that represent reversible modern alterations. Between the first and second stories, the broad expanses of red brick reinforce the Colonial Revival character of the design, while small marble tablets centered above the second-story openings provide subtle decorative accents.



Figure 8. The side (north) elevation of the rear section. Source: Keeping Society of Philadelphia, 2026.

East of the main block, the elevation steps into a subordinate three-story rear section that is differentiated by its reduced architectural ornamentation and more utilitarian composition. Although constructed contemporaneously and employing the same red brick masonry and subtle marble and wood details, this section lacks the monumental proportions and formal symmetry of the principal banking block. In fact, the building appears more domestic, emulating a Georgian or Colonial Revival style townhouse. The projecting cornice continues in a less elaborate form, though uninterrupted across the rear section, visually unifying the composition. However, a brick water or belt course replaces the marble version between the first and second and second and third floors.

The second story of the rear section contains four evenly spaced rectangular window openings with molded surrounds and projecting sills. The first story contains three rectangular window

openings that have been altered to serve as a storefront. Unlike the principal block, these openings are not surmounted by arched fanlights, reflecting the secondary nature of this portion of the building. Near the junction between the principal block and the rear wing is a secondary entrance set within a molded surround consisting of plain jambs supporting a simple entablature. This entrance historically provided access to office and service spaces independent of the principal banking entrance on S. 15th Street.



Figure 9. The side (south) elevation of the rear section and the main block. Source: Keeping Society of Philadelphia, 2026.

THE SIDE (SOUTH) ELEVATION OF THE MAIN BLOCK AND THE REAR SECTION

The side (south) elevation, fronting the narrow cartway of Moravian Street, is nearly identical in composition, massing, and architectural detailing to the side (north) elevation facing Sansom Street, reflecting the building's carefully balanced and symmetrical design. Like the opposite elevation, it is composed of a principal eastern block corresponding to the main block's monumental banking hall and a subordinate eastern rear section associated with the building's office and service functions. Constructed of red brick laid in a running bond above a smooth marble water table, the elevation is unified by a projecting cornice enriched with dentils and modillions, continuous marble belt courses, and consistently detailed marble and wooden window surrounds.



Figure 10. The side (south) elevation of the rear section and the main block. Source: Keeping Society of Philadelphia, 2026.

The eastern portion of the elevation, corresponding to the principal banking block, is the more formal component of the composition and mirrors the fenestration pattern of the north elevation. The first story is organized into five evenly spaced round-arched window openings with brick archivolts, marble impost blocks, projecting marble keystones, and multi-light fanlights above large rectangular window openings. A broad marble string course extends continuously across the façade at the second-floor sill level, while a narrower belt course defines the spring line of the first-floor arches. Above, the second story contains five evenly spaced rectangular window openings with molded marble and wood surrounds, projecting sills, and multi-light wood sash. Small marble tablets centered above each opening provide restrained classical ornament characteristic of the Colonial Revival style.



Figure 11. The rear section of the side (south) elevation. Source: Keeping Society of Philadelphia, 2026.

The western portion of the side (south) elevation comprises the subordinate rear section, which continues the materials and general architectural vocabulary of the principal block while exhibiting a more utilitarian composition appropriate to its secondary function. Here, the fenestration consists of regularly spaced rectangular window openings with molded marble and wood surrounds and sills arranged in a simple, orderly pattern. Ornamentation is restrained, relying upon the continuity of the masonry detailing rather than the monumental treatment reserved for the main block. Secondary service entrances and building utilities are incorporated within this portion of the elevation, reflecting its historic role as the building's support and office wing. The two westernmost openings on the first floor have been infilled and altered.



Figure 12. An advertisement for the Real Estate Trust Company in 1952. Source: 1952 *Year Book, Philadelphia Chapter of the American Institute of Architects*, Atheneum of Philadelphia.

7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The former Real Estate Trust Company at 124-34 S. 15th Street in Center City 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:

- (a) Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation;
- (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 or Nation; and
- (j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

The period of significance dates to 1948, when the building was in full operation and open to the public.

We are now in our new building
at the southwest corner
of 15th & Sansom Streets

Today finds us in full operation in our new building at 15th and Sansom Streets. In the Colonial style, it has striven to memorialize the architectural glories that lent so much charm, dignity and friendliness to the Philadelphia of an earlier time. Yet this building is completely modern in its arrangements for efficient banking, and has been planned throughout for the comfort both of our customers and the bank personnel. You are cordially invited to visit us in our new, air-conditioned quarters. We are eager for you to discover the ease and comfort with which banking activities can be conducted, here in the newest and "hottest" of Philadelphia's fine buildings. LISTEN in the famous girl chorus, The Choralens, every Tuesday and Thursday at 6:15 P. M., Station WFFL

THE *Real Estate Trust*
COMPANY OF PHILADELPHIA
SOUTHWEST CORNER, 15TH AND SANSOM STS.

MEMBER • FEDERAL RESERVE SYSTEM • FEDERAL DEPOSIT INSURANCE CORPORATION

New Locations and Enlarged Quarters for Philadelphia Banks

Local Financial Institutions Expand Facilities

Total Bank Deposits Here Double in 7 Years

Newly completed bank building of Real Estate Trust Co. at 15th and Sansom Streets.

Significant of the vigorous development and civic progress of Philadelphia is the continuing substantial expansion of the city's banking and financial institutions. New locations, enlarged quarters and improved facilities for many outstanding banks and trust companies have been making new headlines recently. These activities have been stimulated, in part, by the fact that bank deposits in Philadelphia have risen from a total of \$15,814,000,000 in 1939 to \$32,139,000,000 in 1946. Among recent and forthcoming changes in banking headquarters and expansions of existing structures are:

REAL ESTATE TRUST COMPANY'S new bank building at the S. W. Cor. 15th & Sansom Sts., on the site of the former Stotesbury Building. The

The PENNSYLVANIA COMPANY several months ago bought the nearby former Crozer Building, now the Burlington Arcade Building, at 1420 Chestnut Street, to provide increased facilities, according to announcement at time of purchase.

BROAD STREET TRUST COMPANY recently took over for a new main headquarters the bank building at the S. W. Corner of Market Street and West Penn Square, acquiring this property on a long-term lease. The company's banking office at Broad & Stiles Streets will be continued as a branch bank. Albert M. Greenfield & Co. handled this transaction.

The CENTRAL PENN NATIONAL BANK at 15th & Sansom Streets acquired the adjoining

Figure 13. Left: Advertisement for the Real Estate Trust Company. Source: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 10 May 1948, 5. Figure 14. Right: "New Locations and Enlarged Quarters for Philadelphia Banks," *Real Estate Bulletin* of Albert M. Greenfield & Co., January 1948.

CRITERION A AND J: DEVELOPMENT OF THE REAL ESTATE TRUST COMPANY BUILDING AT 15TH AND SANSOM STREETS, 1945–1948

The construction of the Real Estate Trust Company's new headquarters at the southwest corner of S. 15th and Sansom Streets was the product of a series of major real-estate transactions and institutional decisions that reflected the transformation of Philadelphia's business and financial district in the years immediately following the Second World War. The project represented considerably more than the relocation of a bank. Conceived during the closing months of the war, constructed during the first years of the postwar period, and deliberately presented as an embodiment of the "Philadelphia Tradition," the new headquarters combined modern banking facilities with an architectural vocabulary intended to evoke the city's colonial past and the established character of the institution itself.

The process began in 1945, when the Real Estate Trust Company agreed to sell its longtime headquarters at the southeast corner of Broad and Chestnut Streets to the Western Savings Fund Society. The transaction, negotiated by Albert M. Greenfield & Co., involved a total consideration of approximately \$2.65 million and was described by Greenfield's *Real Estate Bulletin* as

foreshadowing the “great post-war changes” anticipated in Philadelphia’s central business and financial district. The former Real Estate Trust property was an important component of the traditional Broad Street banking and business corridor, but the company elected not simply to move into another existing office building. Instead, it announced plans to construct an entirely new banking headquarters near S. 15th and Sansom Streets.¹



Figure 15. Left: Looking west at the buildings at the southwest corner of 15th and Sansom Streets in 1928. Source: Phillyhistory.org. Figure 16. Right: Looking south at the building at the southwest corner of 15th and Sansom Streets in 1928. Source: Phillyhistory.org.

The company assembled the new site from properties formerly associated with the Edward T. Stotesbury estate. By January 1946, the *Real Estate Bulletin* reported that the site comprised 124–134 S. 15th Street, 1502–04 Sansom Street, and 1503–05 Moravian Street, creating a combined parcel approximately 100 by 95 feet. Demolition of the existing buildings was underway at the beginning of 1946 in preparation for construction.² The relocation therefore constituted a significant investment in a new institutional home, repositioning the Real Estate Trust Company within the evolving commercial and financial district around 15th, Chestnut, Walnut, and Sansom Streets.

The relocation occurred at a moment of considerable activity in Center City real estate. Albert M. Greenfield & Co., which negotiated the Real Estate Trust transactions, was simultaneously involved in the disposition and redevelopment of major properties throughout the central business district. The movement of the Real Estate Trust Company coincided with expansion and modernization by Western Saving Fund Society, Central-Penn National Bank, Girard Trust

¹ “Real Estate Trust Building Sale to Western Saving Fund Society Foreshadows Great Post-War Changes” and “Real Estate Trust Company to Move to 15th & Sansom Sts.,” *Real Estate Bulletin of Albert M. Greenfield & Co.*, September 1945, 1.

² “Real Estate Trust Company to Start New Bank Building January 1, 1946,” *Real Estate Bulletin of Albert M. Greenfield & Co.*, January 1946, 2.

Company, Provident Trust Company, and other Philadelphia financial institutions. Contemporary accounts treated these projects collectively as evidence of a substantial reorganization of Philadelphia's banking facilities during and immediately after the war.³

The institutional character of the Real Estate Trust Company itself provides important context for understanding the architectural character selected for its new headquarters. The bank was closely associated with Philadelphia's established financial and civic elite, and its directors represented a social and institutional world deeply rooted in the city. Particularly representative was Samuel F. Houston (1866-1952), chairman of the board, who in January 1948 celebrated fifty years as a director of the Real Estate Trust Company. First elected to the board on January 6, 1898, at the age of thirty-one, Houston subsequently became first vice president and served as president from 1928 until 1943, when he was named chairman. A native Philadelphian and son of Henry Howard Houston, he was a senior trustee of the University of Pennsylvania and an executor and trustee of the H. H. Houston estate. His numerous affiliations included the American Philosophical Society, the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, the Geographical Society of Philadelphia, historical organizations, and prominent Episcopal institutions; he had also been made a Chevalier of the Legion of Honor by France in 1927.⁴

The deeply rooted Philadelphia character of the bank's leadership gives particular meaning to the architectural program adopted for the new building. The Colonial Revival design was not merely an interchangeable historical style applied to a modern commercial structure. Rather, it corresponded closely with the institutional identity that the Real Estate Trust Company wished to project in the post-war era: stability, longevity, civic respectability, and continuity with an older Philadelphia. These themes would become explicit in the bank's own advertising as construction proceeded.

³ "New Locations and Enlarged Quarters for Philadelphia Banks," *Real Estate Bulletin of Albert M. Greenfield & Co.*, January 1949, 4.

⁴ "Houston Director for Fifty Years," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 6, 1948, 31.

Meet Real Estate Trust's

Trust Department

... in whose hands you can expect your estate—and your dependents—to fare better than they would without professional estate planning.

That is not an exciting headline. No lure, no emotional appeal. But the claim made therein is proved, every day, in the Trust Department of this bank.

We urge people, with estates large or small, to get the benefit of group thinking, group planning, in the arrangement of their estates.

We care mightily that your wishes, your real desires, are carried out. We want to help you avoid the penalties of the layman's natural lack of knowledge of state and federal taxes and estate administration—and many, many more considerations that people with property face if they don't know the facts.

You simply cannot afford to be too busy with your business to neglect your own personal business—which is, making your estate do for you and your family precisely what you want it to do.

Come in and let our Trust Department tell you what it can do for you. No obligation, naturally.

New home of The Real Estate Trust Company being erected at 15th and Sansom Streets

THE *Real Estate Trust* COMPANY OF PHILADELPHIA
SOUTHEAST CORNER, BROAD AND CHESTNUT STREETS

Let our growth symbolize yours; open an account at this friendly bank

MEMBER • FEDERAL RESERVE SYSTEM • FEDERAL DEPOSIT INSURANCE CORPORATION

Figure 17. An advertisement for the Real Estate Trust Company's Trust Department showing the new building before its completion. Source: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 27 October 1947.

Even before completion, the Real Estate Trust Company incorporated the proposed building into its public identity. Advertisements published while the company continued to operate at Broad and Chestnut Streets included architectural renderings identified as the “New home of The Real Estate Trust Company being erected at 15th and Sansom Streets.”⁵ Advertisements promoting the bank's Trust Department, commercial lending, and other services repeatedly reproduced the prospective headquarters, prominently displaying its symmetrical brick façade, central pediment, monumental classical order, and arched first-floor windows.⁶ The building consequently became a corporate symbol before it was occupied, visually linking the established institution at Broad and Chestnut with its anticipated future at 15th and Sansom.

⁵ *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 3 January 1947.

⁶ Real Estate Trust Company of Philadelphia advertisements for its Trust Department and commercial loan services, 1947–48, illustrating the “New home of The Real Estate Trust Company being erected at 15th and Sansom Streets.” Source: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 3 January 1947.

Following an extended period of planning and construction, the building opened to the public in the spring of 1948. This date is confirmed by a May 1948 advertisement that noted, “Today finds us in full operation in our new building at 15th and Sansom Streets,”⁷ and an October 1948 advertisement that recalled, “Last spring, the doors shown above were thrown open to the public for the first time.”⁸ The advertisement invited customers to visit what the company called Philadelphia’s newest and “homiest” bank building. The language is revealing: the Real Estate Trust Company was deliberately distinguishing its headquarters from the monumental and sometimes imposing character traditionally associated with urban banking architecture. Its new home was intended to project dignity without intimidation and historical associations without appearing technologically antiquated.

The company’s contemporary publicity explicitly explained the architectural concept. One advertisement stated that the building had been erected in the colonial style “to memorialize the architectural glories that lent so much charm, dignity and friendliness to the Philadelphia of an earlier time.”⁹ Another, prominently headed “In the Philadelphia Tradition,” described the new headquarters as a “completely modern banking structure” whose modern interior was matched by the “simplicity and beauty” of its colonial exterior. The advertisement went still further, asserting that the building typified “the best in early Philadelphia Colonial Architecture.”¹⁰ These descriptions are important because they demonstrate that the association with historic Philadelphia was intentional and contemporary rather than a later interpretation imposed upon the building.

⁷ “We Are Now in Our New Building at the Southwest Corner of 15th & Sansom Streets,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 10 May 1948, 5.

⁸ “New Doorway . . . to a Friendly, Efficient Banking Home,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 18, 1948, 7.

⁹ “We Are Now in Our New Building at the Southwest Corner of 15th & Sansom Streets,” *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 10 May 1948, 5.

¹⁰ “In the Philadelphia Tradition . . . It’s a Tribute to the Workmen,” Real Estate Trust Company/John P. Hallahan Company advertisement, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 10, 1948, 8.

The doorway of our new building at 15th and Sansom Streets, inspired by the old Philadelphia Library Company and the Alexander Hamilton House.



New doorway
...to a friendly, efficient banking home

EAST SPRING, the doors shown above were thrown open to the public for the first time, showing all that's new and modern in the conduct of banking. But we have, besides, the spirit of friendliness, the spirit that makes a banking connection pleasant and makes a bank grow.

Come in and see Philadelphia's newest and "hottest" bank building. If you are only "looking," be sure you're welcome. And if you're looking for a banking home, we hope you'll look no farther.

Personal Loans? Yes Indeed!
Make yours here, where banking is personal, friendly and efficient. Loans made up to \$5000 . . . unpaid balance up to \$2500 covered by life insurance at no cost to you . . . low interest rate . . . convenient monthly repayments . . . prompt service, no embarrassment.

THE Real Estate Trust
COMPANY OF PHILADELPHIA



SOUTHWEST CORNER,
15TH AND SANSON STREETS

MEMBER • FEDERAL RESERVE SYSTEM • FEDERAL DEPOSIT INSURANCE CORPORATION

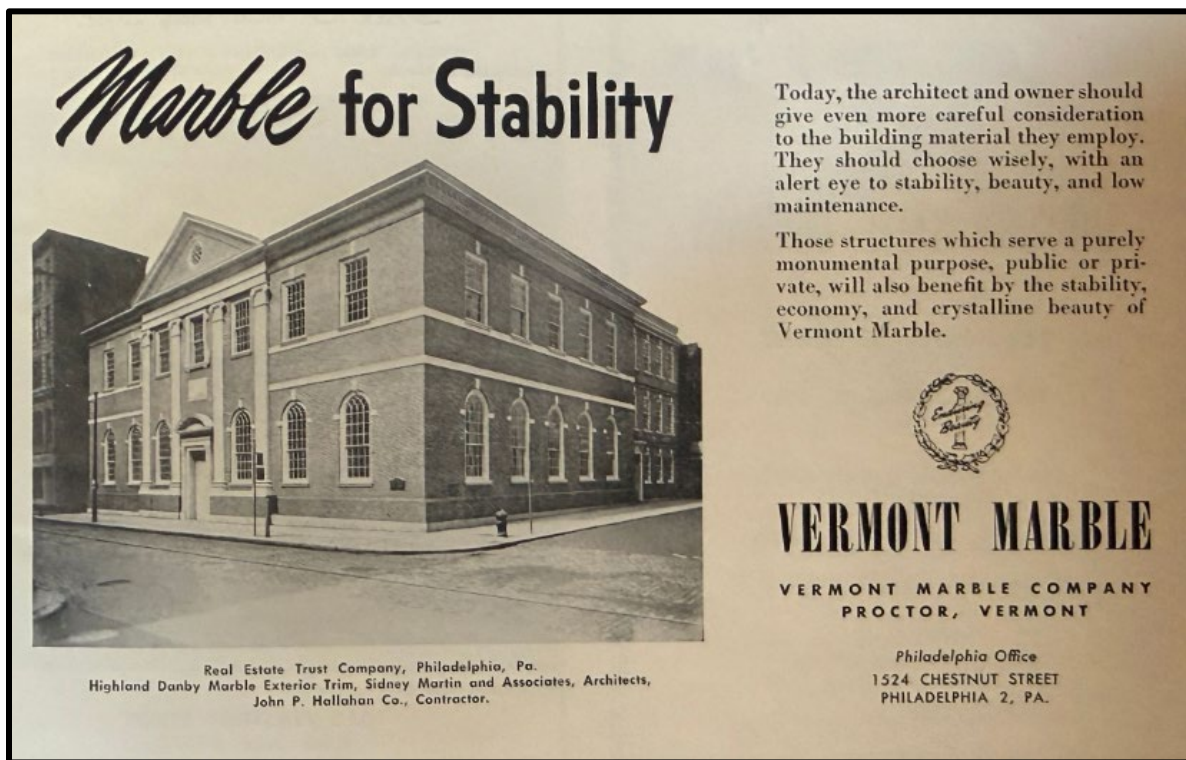
Figure 18. An advertisement for the Real Estate Trust Company shows the new doorway. Source: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 18 October 1948.

The historical references extended to individual architectural features. An advertisement focusing specifically on the principal entrance explained that the old Philadelphia Library Company and the Alexander Hamilton House inspired the doorway at 15th and Sansom Streets.¹¹ The entrance was therefore conceived through reference to recognized examples of early American architecture rather than simply through generalized Georgian or Colonial Revival motifs. The choice reinforced

¹¹ "New Doorway . . . to a Friendly, Efficient Banking Home," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, February 4, 1948, 41.

the larger message promoted by the company: the building was intended to be recognizably modern in function but consciously rooted in Philadelphia's architectural heritage.

At the same time, the Real Estate Trust Company repeatedly emphasized that the traditional exterior concealed a thoroughly modern banking facility. Contemporary advertisements described daylight lighting, complete air conditioning, efficient banking arrangements, and facilities designed for the comfort of customers and employees. The juxtaposition was deliberate. Colonial architecture supplied the associations of stability, familiarity, and civic tradition expected of an established trust company, while modern mechanical systems and banking facilities demonstrated efficiency and progress. In this respect, the headquarters represented a characteristic mid-twentieth-century solution to institutional architecture: modernity was accommodated within an architectural language calculated to reassure the public through historical continuity.



Marble for Stability

Today, the architect and owner should give even more careful consideration to the building material they employ. They should choose wisely, with an alert eye to stability, beauty, and low maintenance.

Those structures which serve a purely monumental purpose, public or private, will also benefit by the stability, economy, and crystalline beauty of Vermont Marble.

VERMONT MARBLE

VERMONT MARBLE COMPANY
PROCTOR, VERMONT

Philadelphia Office
1524 CHESTNUT STREET
PHILADELPHIA 2, PA.

Real Estate Trust Company, Philadelphia, Pa.
Highland Danby Marble Exterior Trim, Sidney Martin and Associates, Architects,
John P. Hallahan Co., Contractor.

Figure 19. An advertisement for Vermont Marble showing its use in the newly built Real Estate Trust Company. Source: 1949 Year Book, Philadelphia Chapter of the American Institute of Architects, Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

The building was designed by a well-known local architect, Sidney E. Martin, who would go on to design other Colonial Revival style buildings in the mid-century era. The building's construction also represented the work of a substantial group of Philadelphia-area builders, craftsmen, manufacturers, and specialty contractors. John P. Hallahan Company served as builder and principal construction contractor. Buckley & Company performed excavation and foundation work, while the Robert G. Hoffer Company was responsible for concrete construction. Alex. Guerrina & Sons, Inc. performed masonry work; John Hagan Co., Inc. served as granite contractor; William Armstrong & Sons, Inc. undertook the lath and plaster work; and the William C. Kulzer Company performed roofing and sheet-metal construction. The Vermont Marble

Company provided exterior and interior marble, while John A. Yohn Co. was responsible for millwork and cabinet work.¹²

The building's modern mechanical and specialized banking systems involved another group of contractors. General Piping & Equipment Co. performed heating, power, and plumbing work; John A. Connelly Co. installed the Westinghouse air-conditioning system; Electro Construction Co. handled electrical construction; and Wilkinson Equipment Co. provided metal bank counters and equipment. Wood-Stretch Company served as painting contractor, while Atlantic Metal Products, Inc., represented in Philadelphia by Victor Smith, supplied metal products. B. M. Wolfe installed Atchley metal weatherstripping; Western Waterproofing Company performed Ironite waterproofing; and Ace House & Window Cleaning Company contributed to completion of the project.¹³

The Real Estate Trust Company and its builder made the workmanship itself part of the building's public presentation. A large advertisement celebrating the new headquarters was headed "A Worthy Accomplishment!" and characterized the building as a tribute to the builders, subcontractors, and workers whose craftsmanship had produced it. The advertisement explicitly connected the quality of contemporary construction with the historic architectural tradition the building sought to evoke.¹⁴ In this way, the project was presented simultaneously as an achievement of modern Philadelphia's construction industry and as a continuation of the city's historic building tradition. Philadelphia's broader financial establishment also recognized the opening of the new headquarters. A congratulatory advertisement dated May 10, 1948, extended the "compliments and best wishes" of the city's "banking fraternity" upon completion of the Real Estate Trust Company's "distinguished new building." The participating institutions constituted an impressive cross-section of Philadelphia finance, including Broad Street Trust Company, Brown Brothers Harriman & Co., Central-Penn National Bank of Philadelphia, City National Bank of Philadelphia, Corn Exchange National Bank and Trust Company, Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Company, First National Bank of Philadelphia, Land Title Bank and Trust Company, Liberty Title and Trust Company, Market Street National Bank, Pennsylvania Company for Banking and Trusts, Philadelphia National Bank, Provident Trust Company of Philadelphia, and others.¹¹ The collective advertisement indicates that completion of the building was regarded as an event within Philadelphia's established banking community rather than merely the opening of another commercial office.

¹² "A Worthy Accomplishment! New Home of the Real Estate Trust Company of Philadelphia" and "In the Philadelphia Tradition . . . It's a Tribute to the Workmen," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 10, 1948, 8.

¹³ "A Worthy Accomplishment! New Home of the Real Estate Trust Company of Philadelphia" and "In the Philadelphia Tradition . . . It's a Tribute to the Workmen," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 10, 1948, 8.

¹⁴ "A Worthy Accomplishment! New Home of the Real Estate Trust Company of Philadelphia" and "In the Philadelphia Tradition . . . It's a Tribute to the Workmen," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 10, 1948, 8.

The Real Estate Trust Company's physical and administrative relocation was formally completed in 1948. In May of that year, the company amended its articles of incorporation to change its registered principal place of business from the southeast corner of Broad and Chestnut Streets to the southwest corner of Fifteenth and Sansom Streets.¹⁷ The legal change provides a clear documentary marker for the institutional transfer that had begun with the 1945 sale of the old headquarters and culminated in occupation and promotion of the new building.

Meanwhile, the disposition of the former Broad and Chestnut headquarters produced further changes in Philadelphia's financial district. Western Saving Fund Society initially intended to demolish the former Real Estate Trust Company building and construct a new headquarters on the site. Those plans subsequently changed. After acquiring the adjoining seventeen-story Hallowell Building, Western elected instead to retain and substantially alter the former Real Estate Trust structure as part of an enlarged banking complex. A November 1948 account specifically recalled that Western had acquired both the Hallowell Building and the former Real Estate Trust Company property through transactions negotiated by Albert M. Greenfield & Co.¹⁸

By the end of the decade, contemporary observers could therefore view the Real Estate Trust Company's relocation as part of a broader transformation of Philadelphia banking. The *Real Estate Bulletin* noted the construction, enlargement, or relocation of facilities by the Real Estate Trust Company, Western Saving Fund Society, Central-Penn National Bank, Girard Trust Company, Provident Trust Company, and other institutions.¹⁹ The new headquarters at 15th and Sansom occupied a distinctive place within this movement. Rather than expressing postwar modernization through an overtly modernist architectural vocabulary, the Real Estate Trust Company consciously clothed modern banking technology in an architecture derived from Philadelphia's Colonial past. The development of the Real Estate Trust Company Building between 1945 and 1948 consequently illustrates several intertwined aspects of Philadelphia's immediate postwar history: the reorganization of the central business and financial district, the modernization of established financial institutions, the strength and specialization of the city's construction industry, and the continuing importance of colonial architecture to Philadelphia's civic identity. Most importantly, contemporary evidence demonstrates that these associations were intentional. The bank's directors belonged to an institutional culture deeply connected with old Philadelphia; its architects and builders produced a building consciously modeled upon the city's historic architectural tradition; and an extensive advertising campaign repeatedly explained those associations to the public.

The building was therefore not simply a Colonial Revival bank erected in the postwar period. From renderings published while construction was underway, through the publicity surrounding its opening, to advertisements appearing throughout its first year of occupancy, the Real Estate Trust Company used the new edifice to articulate its institutional identity. Its headquarters was presented as simultaneously new and old, efficient and familiar, technologically modern and historically Philadelphian. In that carefully cultivated duality, the building embodied the Real Estate Trust

¹⁷ "Notice Is Hereby Given That Articles of Amendment to the Articles of Incorporation of The Real Estate Trust Company of Philadelphia," legal notice, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 1948.

¹⁸ "Western Saving Fund Acquires Adjoining 17-Story Hallowell Building," *Real Estate Bulletin of Albert M. Greenfield & Co.*, November 1948, 1.

¹⁹ "New Locations and Enlarged Quarters for Philadelphia Banks," *Real Estate Bulletin of Albert M. Greenfield & Co.*, January 1949, 4.

Company's attempt to reconcile the modernization of postwar banking with the continuity, prestige, and civic identity of one of Philadelphia's established financial institutions.



Figure 22. A rendering of the Real Estate Trust Company in 1947. Source: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 3 January 1947.

CRITERION D

Constructed in 1946-47, the Real Estate Trust Company Building is a highly intact and distinguished example of the Colonial Revival style as applied to a mid-twentieth-century institutional building. While much postwar commercial architecture embraced the emerging International Style and stripped modernism, banks and financial institutions frequently continued to employ the Colonial Revival style to project permanence, stability, and public confidence.²⁰ The Real Estate Trust Company adopted a restrained yet monumental interpretation of the style, drawing upon the architectural vocabulary established by Philadelphia's eighteenth-century Georgian and Federal civic buildings rather than reproducing a specific colonial precedent. Its symmetrical composition, red brick masonry walls, marble and wood trim, classical proportions, and low-pitched slate-clad roof collectively evoke the city's rich colonial architectural heritage while employing modern construction methods appropriate to the postwar era. In particular, the building belongs to a long tradition of monumental brick institutional architecture established by such Philadelphia landmarks as the Library Company of Philadelphia (1789–90), designed by Dr. William Thornton; Carpenters' Hall (1770–74); Christ Church (1727-1744); Pennsylvania Hospital (1755–1805); and Independence Hall (1732–1753).²¹ Like these celebrated civic buildings, the Real Estate Trust Company employs balanced proportions, finely detailed masonry, restrained

²⁰ Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. "Colonial Revival Style 1880-1960." *Pennsylvania Architectural History Project*, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2015.

²¹ Frank Cousins and Phil M. Riley. *The Colonial Architecture of Philadelphia*. (Little, Brown, and Company, 1920).

classical ornament, and a formal, centrally emphasized entrance to convey permanence, dignity, and civic responsibility.



Figure 23. William Birch's depiction of the original Library Company of Philadelphia. Source: Library Company of Philadelphia.

The building incorporates numerous character-defining features associated with the Colonial Revival style while reinterpreting the architectural language of Philadelphia's colonial public architecture. The principal façade is rigorously symmetrical, organized around a monumental central entrance framed by an Ionic portico supporting a full classical entablature. Above, a projecting pediment containing a circular oculus serves as the visual focus of the composition, recalling the pedimented pavilions of eighteenth-century civic buildings, including the original Library Company of Philadelphia and Carpenters' Hall.²² Throughout the building, finely executed marble, wood, and other detailing—including denticulated cornices, continuous belt courses, molded window surrounds, elaborately enframed entrances, keystones, and radiating fanlights—reinforces the classical vocabulary characteristic of Philadelphia's Georgian and Federal traditions. The use of evenly spaced multi-light wood sash windows, red brick masonry relieved by marble and wood trim, and restrained ornamental carving reflects the Colonial Revival movement's emphasis on symmetry, proportion, craftsmanship, and permanence rather than exuberant decoration. Rather than copying a single historic building, the design synthesizes architectural characteristics associated with Philadelphia's most distinguished eighteenth-century civic

²² Frank Cousins and Phil M. Riley. *The Colonial Architecture of Philadelphia*. (Little, Brown, and Company, 1920).

institutions into a cohesive twentieth-century composition that expresses both monumentality and restraint.²³

The Real Estate Trust Company Building also illustrates the continued popularity and adaptability of the Colonial Revival style in Philadelphia during the years immediately following the Second World War. In the 1940s, Colonial Revival architecture remained closely associated with civic responsibility, financial security, and institutional respectability, making it an appropriate choice for one of Philadelphia's established financial institutions. Rather than adopting the sleek forms and minimal ornamentation characteristic of contemporary Modernist architecture, the building consciously reaffirmed Philadelphia's architectural identity by referencing the city's celebrated colonial landmarks through its massing, materials, and classical detailing. This traditional architectural expression conveyed continuity and public confidence during a period of significant economic and social transition while reinforcing the longstanding association between classical architecture and financial stability. As one of the latest and most sophisticated institutional expressions of the Colonial Revival style in Center City Philadelphia, the Real Estate Trust Company Building represents the culmination of a design tradition that began with the city's eighteenth-century civic monuments and continued to shape institutional architecture well into the twentieth century. Its exceptional degree of integrity distinguished architectural execution, and direct relationship to Philadelphia's colonial architectural legacy establish it as one of the city's finest surviving postwar Colonial Revival commercial buildings and a significant contributor to the architectural history of Philadelphia.

²³ Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. "Colonial Revival Style 1880-1960." *Pennsylvania Architectural History Project*, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, 2015.



Figure 24. Sidney Errington Martin, Architect. Source: University Archives and Records Center. "Sidney Errington Martin 1883-1970." Penn People, University of Pennsylvania, 2020.

CRITERION E

The Real Estate Trust Company is significant as an important work of Sidney Errington Martin (1883-1970), a distinguished Philadelphia architect of Sidney Martin and Associates, whose work substantially influenced the architectural character of Philadelphia during the second and third quarters of the twentieth century. Completed in 1946-47, the building represents one of Martin's earliest and most accomplished postwar institutional commissions and exemplifies a sophisticated interpretation of the Colonial Revival style. At a time when many commercial buildings were embracing the emerging International Style and other Modernist trends, Martin instead looked to Philadelphia's eighteenth-century architectural traditions, designing a financial institution that conveyed permanence, dignity, and public confidence through carefully proportioned classical architecture. Its symmetrical composition, monumental Ionic portico, pedimented central pavilion, red brick masonry, marble and wood trim, denticulated cornice, and finely detailed classical ornament demonstrate Martin's mastery of adapting Philadelphia's Georgian and Federal architectural vocabulary to the needs of a modern banking institution.



Figure 25. Top: The primary (east) and side (south) elevations of the First Pennsylvania Banking and Trust Company Building in ca.1950-60. Source: Phillyhistory.org. Figure 26. Bottom: The primary (west) elevation of the American Philosophical Society's Library Hall, a replica of the original Library Company of Philadelphia. Source: Eric Kilby.

Born in Fox Chase section of Philadelphia, Martin graduated from Central Manual Training School in 1902 and earned a B.S. in architecture from the University of Pennsylvania in 1908. His early work was completed under the employment of Thomas, Churchman & Molitor and, later, Day &

Klauder. In 1914, he went into partnership with Donald M. Kirkpatrick to form Martin & Kirkpatrick. The firm expanded in 1919 when Walter H. Thomas came into the partnership to form Thomas, Martin & Kirkpatrick, which endured until 1931. From that time until 1941, the firm was just Thomas & Martin. Martin worked independently after that, eventually forming Sydney Martin & Associates. It was during this time that Martin designed the subject building. In 1954, associates Harry Gordon Stewart and Robert Warren Noble entered into a partnership with Martin to form Martin, Stewart & Noble, which added Robert Allan Class to the fold in 1962. Martin retired in 1965.²⁴

The Real Estate Trust Company Building established an architectural language that Martin would continue to refine in several of Philadelphia's most distinguished institutional commissions over the following decade. In 1951, Sidney E. Martin designed the First Pennsylvania Banking and Trust Company Building opposite Independence Hall, another prominent financial institution that employed a restrained classical and colonial revival vocabulary carefully scaled to its historic surroundings. Three years later, Martin completed the American Philosophical Society's Library Hall (1954), a scholarly reconstruction inspired by the original eighteenth-century Library Company of Philadelphia that stood on the site, which was originally designed by Dr. William Thornton. In 1956, Martin designed the new Acorn Club at 1519 Locust Street, another fine Colonial Revival building distinguished by its symmetrical composition, red brick masonry, marble and wood trim, multi-light sash windows, and refined Georgian detailing. Collectively, these commissions demonstrate Martin's enduring commitment to interpreting Philadelphia's colonial architectural heritage through carefully executed institutional commissions.



Figure 27. An advertisement for Irwin & Leighton, Inc., showing the Acorn Club, designed by Sydney E. Martin. Source: *1956 Year Book, Philadelphia Chapter of the American Institute of Architects*, Athenaeum of Philadelphia.

Viewed together, the Real Estate Trust Company Building, the First Pennsylvania Banking and Trust Company Building, Library Hall, and the Acorn Club reveal a coherent and highly

²⁴ Sandra L. Tatman. "Sydney Errington Martin (1883-1970)." *Philadelphia Architects and Buildings*, The Athenaeum of Philadelphia, 2026.

recognizable architectural philosophy rooted in Philadelphia's historic civic architecture. Each building draws upon the design principles established by landmarks such as Carpenters' Hall, the Library Company of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania Hospital, and Independence Hall, employing red brick masonry, marble and wood trim, symmetrical planning, classical entrances, and restrained ornament to evoke permanence, stability, and civic responsibility. Rather than producing literal reproductions of colonial buildings, Martin synthesized these historic precedents into a refined twentieth-century architectural vocabulary that became a defining characteristic of his practice. The Real Estate Trust Company Building is particularly significant because it represents the earliest surviving mature expression of this approach and established the architectural direction that would characterize Martin's most important commissions during the following decade. As an exceptionally intact example of his institutional work, the building embodies the distinctive characteristics of Sidney E. Martin, architect of Sidney Martin and Associates and reflects the firm's significant contribution to the architectural and cultural heritage of Philadelphia.

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