

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: 6907-11 Torresdale Ave
Postal code: 19135 Councilmanic District: 6

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: Former Tacony Post Office
Current/Common Name: 6907-11 Torresdale Ave

3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Building Structure Site Object

4. PROPERTY INFORMATION

Occupancy: occupied vacant under construction unknown
Current use: Commercial Tenant

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

Please attach

6. DESCRIPTION

Please attach

7. SIGNIFICANCE

Please attach the Statement of Significance.

Period of Significance (from year to year): from 1935 to 1935

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: 1935

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: Morris & Erskine

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: P. E Costello & Sons

Original owner: P.E. Costello & Sons (1935)

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

9. NOMINATOR

Organization _____ Date 6/29/2018

Name with Title Alex Balloon Email _____

Street Address 301 Race St #315 Telephone _____

City, State, and Postal Code Philadelphia, PA 19106

Nominator is is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: 20 August 2018 (revised)

Correct-Complete Incorrect-Incomplete Date: 13 September 2018

Date of Notice Issuance: 14 September 2018

Property Owner at Time of Notice

Name: Diana Kwok and Eugene C Cheung

Address: 9231 Jackson Street

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19114

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: 17 October 2018

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: 9 November 2018

Date of Final Action: 9 November 2018

Designated Rejected

5. Boundary Description

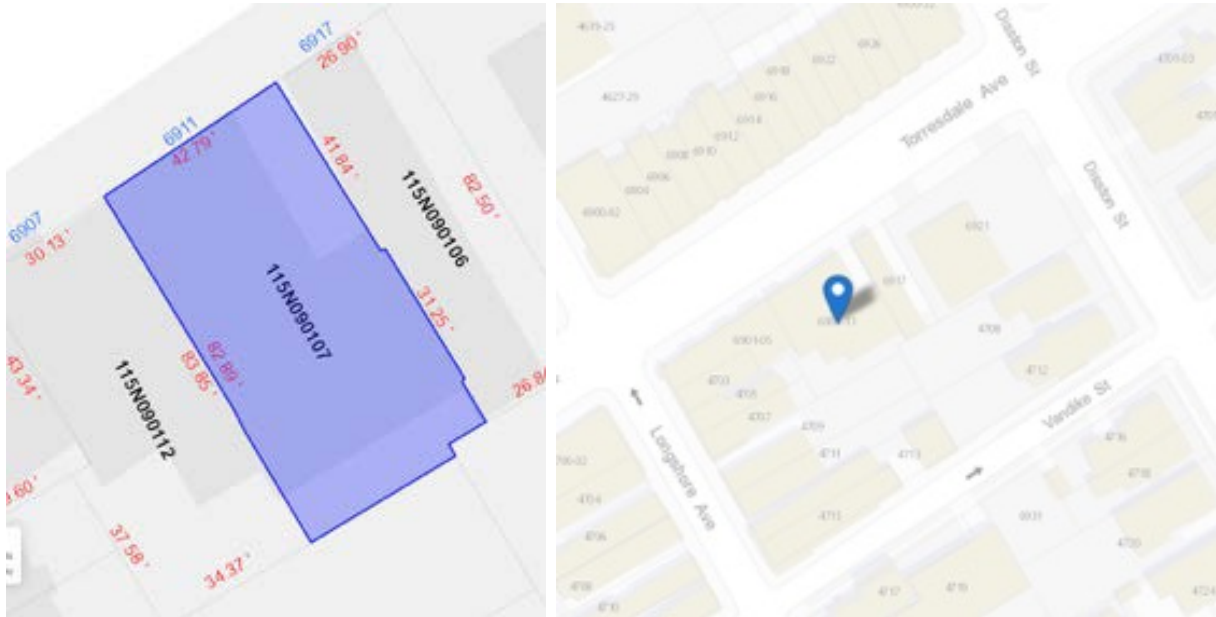


Figure 1. City of Philadelphia Parcel Map (left) and block map (right).

The property is located at 6911 Torresdale Avenue in the Tacony neighborhood of Philadelphia. It is identified by OPA Account #778299805. The parcel number is 115N090107. The proposed parcel is highlighted in blue, and corresponds to Premises "B" in the following boundary description¹:

PREMISES "A"

ALL THAT CERTAIN lot or piece of ground, situate in the 41st Ward of the City of Philadelphia, described as follows, to wit:

BEGINNING at a point on the Southeasterly side of Torresdale Avenue (50 feet wide) which point is measured Northwestwardly along the said Southeasterly side of Torresdale Avenue the distance of 90 feet 6 inches from a point formed by an intersection of the said Southeasterly side of Torresdale Avenue and the Northeasterly side of Longshore Street (50 feet wide); thence extending from said point of beginning Northeastwardly along the said Southeasterly side of Torresdale Avenue the distance of 30 feet 1-5/8 inches more or less to a point; thence extending southeastwardly the distance of 82 feet 10-3/4 inches to a point; thence extending Southwestwardly the distance of 34 feet 4-1/2 inches more or less to a point; thence extending Northwestwardly the distance of 37 feet 7 inches to a point; thence extending Northeastwardly the distance of 4 feet 3-5/8 inches to a point; thence extending Northwestwardly the distance of 43 feet 4-1/8 inches to a point on the said Southeasterly side of Torresdale Avenue, being the first mentioned point and place of beginning.

BEING No. 6907-09 Torresdale Avenue.

¹ Fee Simple Deed File No. BSA1260A Doc Id:51639405; Recorded 02/26/2007 p.2-3 City of Philadelphia Department of Records

PREMISES "B"

ALL THAT CERTAIN lot or piece of ground, situate in the 41st Ward of the City of Philadelphia, described according to a Survey and Plan of Property made for Barton Realty Company, Inc., by Edward J. McGettigan, Jr., Surveyor and Regulator of the 8th Survey District dated December 12, 1978, as follows, to wit:

BEGINNING at a point on the Southeasterly side of Torresdale Avenue (80 feet wide) which point is measured Northwestwardly along the same North 57 degrees 48 minutes 25 seconds East 120 feet 7-5/8 inches from its point of intersection with the Northeasterly side of Longshore Street (50 feet wide); thence extending from said point of beginning along the Southeasterly side of Torresdale Avenue North 57 degrees 48 minutes 25 seconds East 42 feet 9-1/2 inches to a point; thence extending along the Southwest face of a certain wall South 28 degrees 26 minutes 25 seconds East 41 feet 0-5/8 inches to a point; thence extending North 61 degrees 33 minutes 35 seconds East 0 feet 4 inches to a point in the center line of the aforesaid wall; thence extending along the center line of the aforesaid wall South 28 degrees 25 minutes 25 seconds East 31 feet 6 inches to a point; thence extending South 61 degrees 33 minutes 35 seconds West 0 feet 4 inches to a point on the Southwest face of the aforesaid wall; thence extending partly along the same South 28 degrees 26 minutes 25 seconds East 8 feet 2-1/4 inches to a point;

thence extending South 61 degrees 33 minutes 35 seconds West 8 feet 7/8 inches to a point; thence extending South 28 degrees 26 minutes 25 seconds East 4 feet 11-1/2 inches to a point; thence extending South 61 degrees 33 minutes 35 seconds West 34 feet 7-1/2 inches to a point; thence extending partly along the center line of a certain wall North 28 degrees 26 minutes 25 seconds West 82 feet 10-3/4 inches to a point on the Southeasterly side of Torresdale Avenue (80 feet wide) said point being the first mentioned point and place of beginning.

BEING No. 6911 Torresdale Avenue.

BEING INTER-ALIA THE SAME PREMISES which Ian Cooper and Frances Cooper, his wife by Deed dated 12/29/1992 and recorded 1/11/1993 in the County of Philadelphia in Deed Book VCS 223, Page 567 conveyed unto Maranatha Baptist Church of Philadelphia.

BEING No. 6907-11 Torresdale Avenue

ST. CODE/HOUSE NO.: 77600-06907 (Premises "A")
77600-06911 (Premises "B")

CITY REGISTRY: 115N9-112 (Premises "A")
115N29-107 (Premises "B")

This nomination is for Premises "B" being 6911 Torresdale Avenue.



Figure 2. Aerial view of subject block, with red star over 6911 Torresdale Avenue. Source: Pictometry

6. Physical Description

The former Tacony Post Office is a prominent building on the east side of Torresdale Avenue in Tacony. It is located between Disston Street and Longshore Avenue. It is located within the boundaries of the Tacony Disston Community Development National Register Historic District.² The structure occupies nearly the entire lot at two stories. The primary elevation faces west onto Torresdale Avenue. The building is masonry construction.³ The building is anchored by four pilasters and topped with a curved pediment. The pilasters are capped with shells and decorative scrollwork. This shell and scroll motif is repeated in the building pediment above the Greek dentil lintel. Between the pilasters are large windows and the building’s ground floor entrance.

² Tacony Disston Community Development Historic District Nomination [https://www.nps.gov/nr/feature/places/pdfs/16000257.pdf] Note: This property falls out of the period of significance for the district which is from 1872-1918.

³ Nominator’s preliminary investigation of the masonry suggests the facade material may be concrete or cast stone.



Figure 3. Looking northeast. Credit: Alex Balloon, 2018.



Figure 4. Front façade of 6911 Torresdale Avenue. Credit: Alex Balloon, 2018.



Figure 5. Looking towards Disston Street. Credit: Alex Balloon, 2018.



Figure 6. Detail of façade meeting party wall. Credit: Alex Balloon, 2018.

7. Statement of Significance

The former Tacony Post Office located at 6911 Torresdale Avenue in the Tacony neighborhood of Philadelphia is a significant historic resource in Philadelphia and should be listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Pursuant to Section 14-1004(1) of the Philadelphia Code, the property satisfies Criteria for Designation C and D. The former post office was constructed in 1935, during the time when Art Deco architecture was commonly used for commercial buildings. The building's façade is an excellent example of Art Deco Classicism, incorporating classical elements of architecture, including pilasters, pediments, and capitals, in a stylized and streamlined form.

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

D) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen

Building History

The former Tacony Post Office was constructed in 1935 during the popular period of the Art Deco in American architecture.⁴ The Philadelphia firm of Morris & Erskine (fl. 1909-1942) designed the building.⁵ The structure was built speculatively by P.E. Costello & Son, Inc., a prolific Tacony builder and real estate developer in Northeast Philadelphia.⁶ While constructed speculatively, the United States Postal Service entered into a 20-year lease as a classified station beginning in 1935. A classified station meant that the location was staffed by postal employees versus contractors. In the 1930s, most postal facilities were leased, which remains true today. When this post office opened in 1935, there were 1,492 classified stations and branches nationally, and only 39 of those were located in government-owned buildings.⁷ In 1955, the Tacony Station post office relocated to the corner of Longshore Avenue and Marsden Street, just two blocks away from the subject building.

⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/art/Art-Deco>

⁵ *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, v. 50, n. 18, p. 85 (5/1/1935) [https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/pr_display.cfm/29851].

⁶ Peter E. Costello, the head of P.E. Costello & Sons, was a former Congressman and City Councilman, who died one month after the opening of the Tacony Post Office. "P.E. Costello Dies; Ex-Congressman," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, October 24, 1935, p. 2.

⁷ *1935 Annual Report of the Postmaster General*, provided via email from Jennifer M Lynch, Historian and Corporate Information Services Manager for the United States Postal Service.

TACONY DEDICATES NEW POSTOFFICE

Just 252 years ago William Penn commissioned Henry Waddy, a resident of Tacony, to establish the first postoffice in Pennsylvania.

Yesterday the residents of Tacony turned out in full force to attend the dedication of the handsome new postoffice which has been completed to serve the needs of that district of Philadelphia.

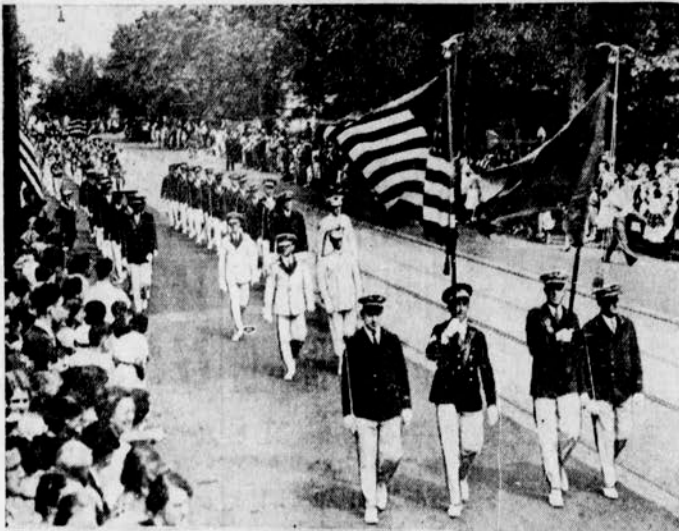
A parade, in which all local organizations joined, preceded the dedication exercises. Following the invocation, which was delivered by Rev. J. Marshall Linton, of Disston Memorial Presbyterian Church, Frank L. Stricker, commander of William D. Oxley Post, American Legion, introduced Frank J. Clarke, of the Lions Club, who turned the key of the main entrance and then handed the key to Joseph F. Gallagher, postmaster of Philadelphia.

Gallagher in a brief speech emphasized the new act of Congress which puts into force the 40-hour week for postal employees throughout the country. "Some 12,000 regular employees will be added to the postal payroll in the United States," he said, "and Philadelphia will receive its proportionate share of this added employment. The new law also makes provision for a restoration of full salaries and credit for automatic promotion. It allows extra pay for overtime. The new act is in keeping with the idea that modern machinery which has for its purpose throwing men out of work is no good for this or any other Nation. If, however, the machinery may be used to the advantage of the worker, then it has merit from an economic and social standpoint."

Congressman Frank J. G. Dorsey and Smith W. Purdum, assistant postmaster general of the United States, also spoke. The benediction was pronounced by Rev. James Rosica, of Our Lady of Consolation Church.

PLAN JEWISH CAMPAIGN

NEW POSTOFFICE DEDICATED AT TACONY



At the top are seen members of Mooseheart Legion, No. 3, marching in the colorful parade through Tacony that preceded the dedication of the new postoffice for that district. Below, Frank J. Clarke, of the Lions Club of Tacony, turns the key in the lock of the front door and then presents the building to Joseph F. Gallagher, postmaster of Philadelphia.

U. OF P. GROUP URGES FORD FOR PRESIDENT

G. O. P. Executive Committee to Discuss Coalition, N. Y. Times Says

NEW YORK, Sept. 7 (A. P.).—A Washington dispatch to the New York Times says a coalition ticket to oppose President Roosevelt will be discussed informally by the Executive Committee of the Republican National Committee late this month and the most prominent names so far advanced are Henry Ford for President and Lewis W. Douglas, former Budget Director, for Vice President.

This combination was suggested recently to Republican leaders, the dispatch says, by a group of University of Pennsylvania professors. They urged the chieftains to weigh the advantage of such a coalition or a similar one, as the most practical way to win dissatisfied Democrats and influence the return to the party of independents who deserted in 1932.

Figure 7. "Tacony Dedicates New Postoffice," The Philadelphia Inquirer, September 8, 1935, p. 28.

Criteria C and D

The building's façade is an excellent example of Art Deco Classicism incorporating classical elements of architecture, including pilasters, pediments, and capitals, in a stylized and streamlined form. The use of shells and scrollwork on the building as well as the abstraction of traditional classical elements found in the building's pediment are pronounced, creating a façade that looks both to the past and the future. The combination of styles is somewhat unique, as Art Deco was a conscious break with past revival precedents in architecture. Yet, the façade incorporates classical elements which most certainly draw from the past. Constructed on the later end of the popularity of the Art Deco style, the design of the façade seeks to utilize Art Deco in a manner which was likely more familiar to Morris & Erskine, a firm which appears to have been more comfortable with residential design rather than storefront design.

Consider a National Register-listed building in Philadelphia from the same era, the United States Custom House at 200 Chestnut Street, designed by Ritter & Shay and built from 1932-1934 (Figure 8). While much grander in scale, the North main entrance of the building uses much of the same Art Deco design principles. The limestone façade has a heavy rusticated base, fluted pilasters with simpler implied capitals and a stepped parapet. The parapet has symbols of United States government, including an eagle and seal of the United States.⁸

When set against the grandeur of the United States Custom House, the former Tacony Post Office is relatively vernacular with simpler materials; however, the Art Deco design and details reveal a strong similarity when considered from a neighborhood commercial scale.

⁸ National Register Nomination for the US Custom House Philadelphia
[https://www.nps.gov/Nr/feature/weekly_features/2011/USCustomhouse-Philadelphia.pdf]



Figure 8. North entrance of the United States Custom House. Source: Google Street View.



Figure 9. The lobby of the Old Customs House uses similar decorative elements. Source: General Services Administration gsa.gov.

By virtue of its style and prominent position in Tacony on Torresdale Avenue, the building is a familiar feature of the neighborhood. The building's large footprint and distinctive façade make it an anchor. As late as 1965 the building was actively marketed in newspapers as the "Former Tacony Post Office Bldg" (Figure 10). There are no other strong examples of Art Deco commercial buildings in the Tacony Disston Community Development District.

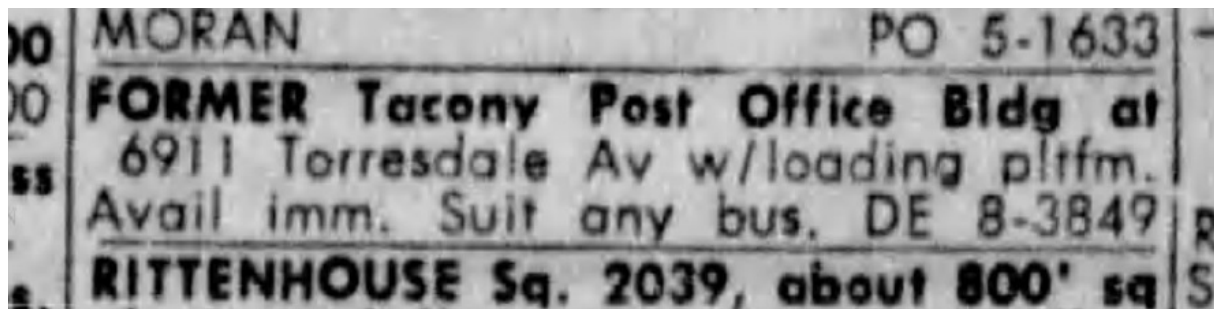


Figure 10. The Philadelphia Inquirer, Sun, Jan 24, 1965, p. 130.

The former Tacony Post Office at 6911 Torresdale Avenue is a historic building in the Tacony neighborhood of Philadelphia which merits listing on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The building's façade embodies distinguishing characteristics of Art Deco architecture with the incorporation of classical elements of architecture, and was constructed in 1935 at a time when Art Deco was utilized for commercial buildings both large and small.

8. Bibliography of Major Sources Cited

Encyclopedia Britannica: Art Deco Art Movement, <https://www.britannica.com/art/Art-Deco>.

National Register Nomination for the United States Custom House Philadelphia,
https://www.nps.gov/Nr/feature/weekly_features/2011/USCustomhouse-Philadelphia.pdf

Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission, Pennsylvania Architectural Field Guide: Art Deco Style
1925 – 1940, <http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/portal/communities/architecture/styles/art-deco.html>.

Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide, v. 50, n. 18, p. 85 (5/1/1935),
https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/pr_display.cfm/29851.

Tacony Disston Community Development Historic District Nomination,
<https://www.nps.gov/nr/feature/places/pdfs/16000257.pdf>