

ADDRESS: 1520-22 CHESTNUT ST

Name of Resource: S.S. Kresge Store

Proposed Action: Designate

Property Owner: PR Chestnut Associates LP

Nominator: Center City Residents Association

Staff Contact: Ted Maust, theodore.maust@phila.gov

OVERVIEW: This nomination proposes to designate the property at 1520-22 Chestnut Street and list it on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. A two-story masonry commercial building, known as the S.S. Kresge Store, stands on the property. The nomination contends that the S.S. Kresge Store, built in 1934, satisfies Criteria for Designation C, D, and E. The nomination argues that the property reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style and embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, specifically the Art Deco style, satisfying Criteria C and D. The nomination also argues that Silverman & Levy, the architects of the structure, was a firm that significantly influenced the development of the City of Philadelphia, satisfying Criterion E.

The Committee on Historic Designation reviewed a nomination for the property at 1520-22 Chestnut Street at its meeting on 17 April 2024. After that review, the Historical Commission discovered that it had failed to inform the property owner of the restarted review, which had been continued for many months. Therefore, the Historical Commission decided to abandon the ongoing review and start the process over from the beginning with proper notice to the owner. The Committee on Historic Designation will review the nomination anew on 16 October 2024 as though the first Committee review had not happened. The Historical Commission will review the nomination on 8 November 2024.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION: The staff recommends that the property at 1520-22 Chestnut Street satisfies Criteria for Designation C, D, and E and should be designated as historic and listed on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.



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: 1520-22 Chestnut St

Postal code: 19102

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: S.S. Kresge Store

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: 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): from 1934 to 1934

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: 1934

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: Silverman & Levy

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: Samuel H. Levin, Inc.

Original owner: Mrs. H.R. Baker Lewis

Other significant persons: Sebastian Sperring Kresge

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 Center City Residents Association Date July 26, 2022

Name with Title Tim Kerner Email _____

Street Address _____ Telephone _____

City, State, and Postal Code _____

Nominator is is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: July 26, 2022

Correct-Complete Incorrect-Incomplete Date: October 26, 2022

Date of Notice Issuance: October 27, 2022

Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: PR Chestnut Associates LP

Address: PO Box 44131

City: Philadelphia State: PA Postal Code: 19144

Date(s) Reviewed by the Committee on Historic Designation: April 17, 2024

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: _____

Date of Final Action: _____

Designated Rejected

NOMINATION
FOR THE
PHILADELPHIA REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES



Figure 1. The primary (north) elevation of the subject property. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2022.

S.S. KRESGE STORE
IN THE ART DECO STYLE
SILVERMAN & LEVY, ARCHITECTS
—
BUILT 1934
—
1520-22 CHESTNUT STREET
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19102-2707

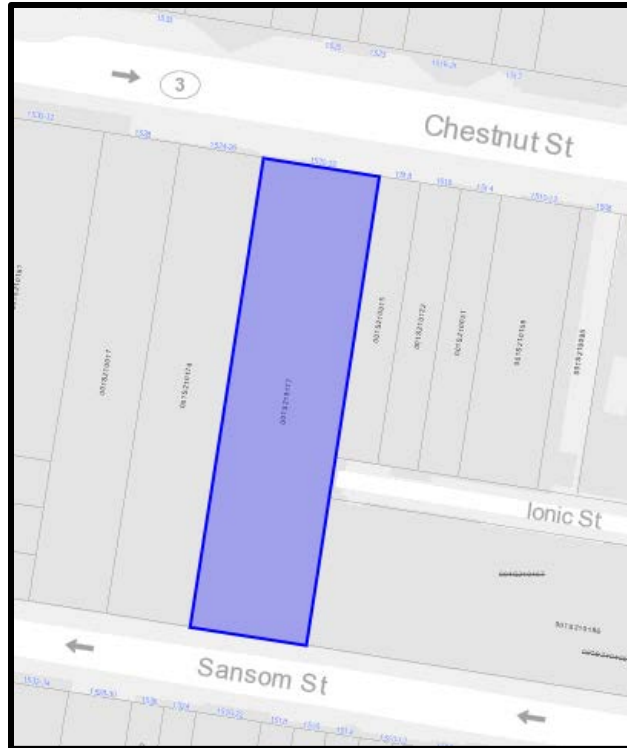


Figure 2. The boundary for the subject property is delineated by the purple line. Source: Atlas, City of Philadelphia, 2020.

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

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

ALL THAT CERTAIN lot of piece of ground with the buildings and improvements thereon erected, SITUATE on the South side of Chestnut Street at the distance of 196 feet westward from the West side of South Fifteenth Street, the boundary begins at the northeast corner of the parcel associated with 1520 Chestnut Street extending 57.5 feet to the west along Chestnut Street to the northwest corner of the said parcel; turning to the south and extending 230.50 feet along the western boundary of the subject parcel to its southwest corner; turning to the east and extending 57.5 feet to the east along Sansom Street to the southeast corner of the subject parcel; and turning to the north and extending 230.5 feet along the eastern boundary of the subject parcel to the point and place of beginning.

BEING known as 1520-22 Chestnut Street.

Map Registry No. 001S210117

OPA Account No. 883422000



Figure 3. The primary (north) elevation of the subject property. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2022.

6. PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

The S.S. Kresge Store at 1520-22 Chestnut Street is a two-story masonry commercial building in Center City Philadelphia. The attached rectangular building form is dictated by its double row-like lot that extends from Chestnut Street at the north to Sansom Street at the south. Not as tall as its neighbors, the flat-roofed structure is set within a row of buildings along one of the city's principal commercial streets. The primary (north) elevation is a façade of smooth-faced limestone, while the building is otherwise composed of brick. Stylistically, the building is a "Modernist" Art Deco style structure with distinctive architectural details.

The first floor of the primary (north) elevation is comprised of a double, contemporary storefront system that occupies much of the said elevation. At the west end of the first floor is a pedestrian entrance, which appears to serve the second floor. This entranceway spans both floors, featuring a large multi-light transom that is comprised of original convex opalescent glass. This window is indicative of Art Deco design and is an important architectural feature of the building. Just above the window, the limestone façade features three-part linear banding that extends upward and turns to the east. The second floor of this elevation contains much of the Art Deco architectural details that characterize the façade and is divided into four sections. Each section contains window openings that are set beneath fields of the continuous limestone. The second-floor fenestration is centered on a five-part mullion window. Each of the five openings contain four-part metal casement, awning window units that appear to be original. The five apertures are delineated by projecting, vertical stainless-steel decorative elements that are individually affixed to circular stainless-steel rosettes near the cornice line. These stainless-steel elements extend vertically from the high point of the façade to the base of each window, forming the face of each mullion and

bookending the entire window grouping. Flanking the central mullion window are two large picture windows which are set beneath stylized fields of the limestone and feature horizontal banding that corresponds across the second-floor façade. The fields of horizontal banding are set beneath geometric detailing at the cornice line. These three sections of the second-floor façade are flanked by smooth-faced limestone pilasters. In addition, each of the second-floor windows feature cove molding with decorative motifs at the top. Above the original limestone portion of the building is a rise in the roof that is clad in metal panels, appearing to be applied to the building in the last five to ten years.



Figure 4. Top: The transom set defined by a ziggurat motif. Figure 5. Bottom: The transom's ziggurat motif and its continuation into the second floor of the primary (north) elevation. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2022.

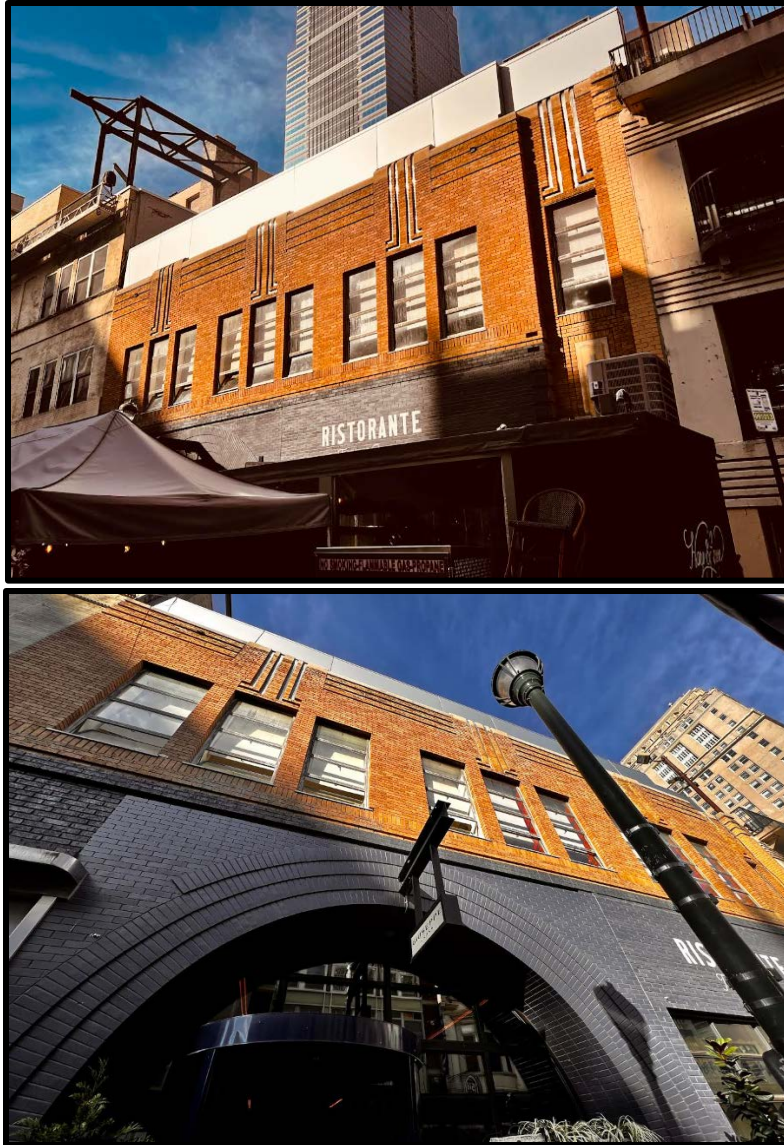


Figure 6. Top: The rear (south) elevation. Figure 7. Bottom: An arched opening within the rear (south) elevation. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2022.

The rear (south) elevation is a façade of buff tapestry brick with the second floor featuring most of this elevation’s Art Deco detailing. The first floor features an irregular fenestration including from west to east: a stainless-steel doorway and window unit that appears to be original; a large archway delineated by three bands of brick corbeling, which appear to have been added in the 1950s; a large storefront opening that has been infilled; and a service entrance that features an original stainless steel header with a vertical plaque rising above to display the rear address: “1521.”

Bands of brick corbeling separate the first and second floors. The second-floor fenestration is divided into four sections, three of which are identical and joined by four-part vertical banding that runs below the cornice line. Each of the three identical sections feature three windows that contain

four-part metal, awning window units that appear to be original. Above the central window in each trio are four vertical bands that are recessed within the brick façade, extending to the cast concrete coping along the roofline. Like the front, a new roofline is clad in metal paneling, which matches that of the primary (north) elevation. The fourth section of the rear (south) elevation is at the east and features a single window above the previously described address plaque. This opening contains the same window unit and vertical banding as previously described for the second floor.



Figure 8. Left: The pedestrian entrance of the rear (south) elevation. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2022. Figure 8.5. Right: The rear address in the Art Deco style. Source: Oscar Beisert, 2022.

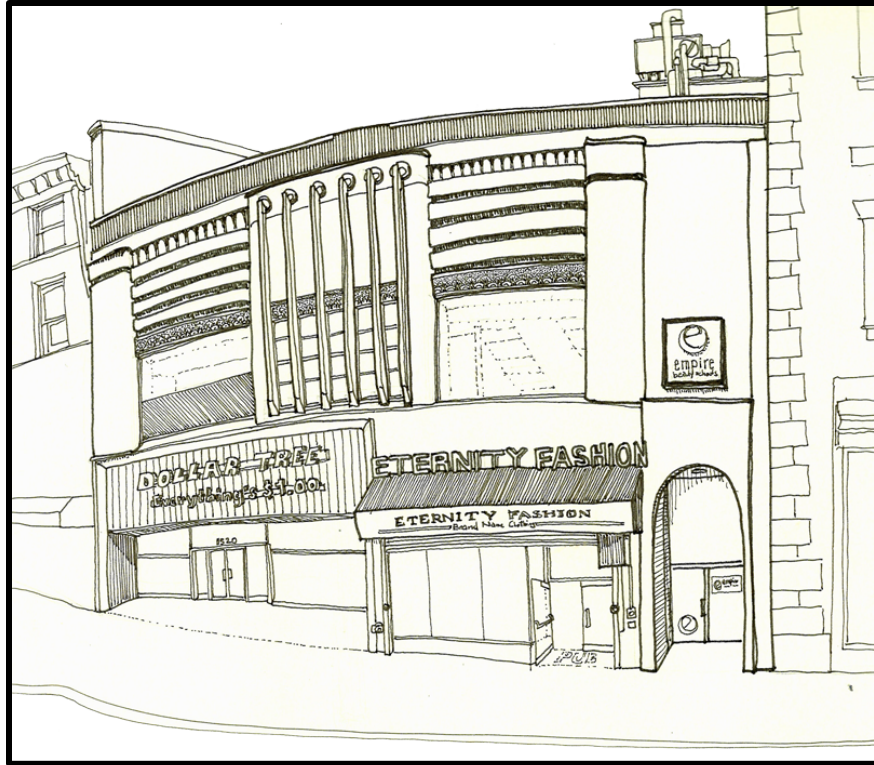


Figure 9. Top: A rendering of the primary (north) elevation by Ben Leech. Figure 10. A rendering of the rear (south) elevation by Ben Leech. Source: Ben Leech.

KRESGE'S 50th ANNIVERSARY SALE
1899-1949

A MONTH OF SPECIAL VALUES

Oilcloth 37¢ yd.
A glad array of patterns just again with bright, clear color. 48" wide. You'll hardly be able to spot them.

CUPS 'n SAUCERS 5¢
We've trimmed the price of these distinctive enameled ivory cups and saucers down to a mere nickel each, for an anniversary special!

COSMA CUPS, 5¢ ea.
A striking pure white pattern with graceful, multicolored edges. Specially priced for this event.

FLO-MOR flat WALL PAINT 69¢ qt.
A quality oil base paint—most a "water paint". Goes on over any previous surface—wall paper, wood, concrete, plaster—anything.

ST. DENNIS CUPS 5¢
Anniversary special! Good useful cups—just the right size for a 8½ oz. cup of coffee. Handly, too. Chip resistant with big, sturdy handles.

KITCHEN BOWLS 5¢
Anniversary special! For mixing and stirring. White-enamel base—handy around the kitchen and home. 6½" in diameter. Get a half dozen now!

MOTH Killers! Plastic GARMENT BAGS \$1.00
64" bag that holds 8 garments without rumpling them. 30" girth. Long wearing. Cherry-Moth-Tight Paper Bags.....7¢ & 9¢

CANNON TOWELS 39¢
Lots of bath towels, so thick and heavy, you'll never want to lay a down. White with flaming, green, blue, yellow or peach shade and stripes.

WASH CLOTHS . . . 3 for 25¢

5-10-51 STORES

KRESGE'S

5-10-51 STORES

Figure 11. An advertisement for the S.S. Kresge Stores in Philadelphia. Source: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 8 May 1949, 80.

7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The S.S. Kresge Co. Store is a significant historic resource that merits designation by the Philadelphia Historical Commission and inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Located in the Rittenhouse Square neighborhood of Philadelphia, the building satisfies the following Criteria for Designation as enumerated in Section 14-1004 of the Philadelphia Code:

- c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style;
- d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen; and
- (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.

The period of significance dates to the time of construction in 1934.

HISTORIC CONTEXT: A BRIEF HISTORY OF 1520-22 CHESTNUT STREET

1520-22 Chestnut Street was formerly the site of a grand, five-story commercial loft known as the Baker Building. The building's owner, Mrs. H.R. Baker Lewis, decided to lease to a new tenant in 1934, a decision that ultimately led to the demolition of the Baker Building and construction of the subject building. With conceptual plans in place early that year, the S.S. Kresge Co. signed a 20-year lease for the first floor and basement of what would be a modern two-story building.¹ Sebastian Spring Kresge (1867-1966), an American businessman, established and owned the S.S. Kresge Co., a chain of five-and-dime stores that would become one of the largest discount houses of its kind in the twentieth century. It was later known as Kresge-Newark and ultimately K-mart. Naturally, Chestnut Street was an ideal location for the growing chain.

The architectural firm of Silverman & Levy of Philadelphia was engaged by February 1934. The design included limestone, stainless steel, bronze, opalescent glass, and an elevator, much of which survives to-date. The project cost was projected at \$250,000.² Demolition of the "historic Baker Building" was set to take place in May with M. Sorrentino completing the work.³ Bids for contractors were due to Silverman & Levy by June 26.⁴ The construction contract was awarded to Samuel H. Levin, Inc. by early July.⁵ Construction began soon after selection and continued through the fall.⁶

Upon completion of the building, the S.S. Kresge Co. Store operated one of its most lucrative five-and-dime locations at the subject site from 1935 through the early 1950s.⁷

¹ "Modern Structure Planned for Site of Baker Building," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 25 February 1934, 63.j

² "New Building," *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 28 February 1934, 65.

³ "New Building For Downtown Section," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 1934.

⁴ "Take Bids Soon," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 29 April 1934, 20.; and "Bidding on Project," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 24 June 1934, 87.

⁵ "Chestnut St. Store Contract Awarded," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 8 July 1934, 18.

⁶ *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 21 October 1934.

⁷ *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 27 October 1950, 16.



Figure 12. Top: The S.S. Kresge Co. Store, Brockton, Massachusetts. Source: Marc Larocque. “Lunch counter memories at Kresge's department store in Brockton,” *The Enterprise*, 7 April 2016. Figure 13. Bottom: The S.S. Kresge Co., 801 E. Main Street Richmond, Indiana. Source: waynet.org.

CRITERIA C & D

The S.S. Kresge Co. Store embodies distinguishing characteristics of the Art Deco style as applied to low-rise commercial buildings of the interwar years in Philadelphia.⁸

CRITERION D: THE ART DECO STYLE (1925-1940)

The Art Deco was a “Modernist” architectural style that was prominently employed in commercial, institutional, and residential design in the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s.⁹ The style is defined by “sharp-edged looks and stylized geometrical decorative details” that were quite distinctive as a complete departure from architectural tradition.¹⁰ Popularization of the style in American architecture initiated “in 1922 when the *Chicago Tribune* held a world-wide competition for a headquarters building in Chicago,” which led the newspaper powerhouse to select a Gothic Revival design. Second place was awarded to the young Finnish architect Eliel Saarinen (1873-1950) for a design in the Art Deco style, which was widely published throughout the architectural community nationwide. This would ultimately help to promulgate widespread employment of the style.¹¹ The style that came to fore was the culmination of many preceding movements, as described by Benjamin Leech, Architectural Historian:

⁸ *Commercial and Government Radio Station of the United States*. (Washington, D.C.: Department of Commerce, 30 June 1930), 196.

⁹ Virginia Savage McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2018), 465-66.

¹⁰ “Art Deco Style (1925-1940),” Pennsylvania Architectural Field Guide. (Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission, 2015). <<http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/portal/communities/architecture/styles/art-deco.html>> Accessed on 3 October 2020. <<http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/portal/communities/architecture/styles/art-deco.html>>

¹¹ Virginia Savage McAlester, *A Field Guide to American Houses* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2018), 465-66.

While French inspiration was indeed prevalent in the American incarnation of the style, so too was the influence of Viennese Secessionism, German Expressionism, Italian Futurism, Beaux-Arts Classicism, and the domestic Arts and Crafts and Prairie School movements of the late nineteenth century.¹²

Popularity of the style was further amplified among architectural professionals after the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in 1925, a Parisian design exhibition where the term “Art Deco” is said to have originated.¹³

As the Art Deco emerged and evolved over time, the following architectural details and features became characteristic of the style, as defined by in *Pennsylvania Architectural Field Guide* published online by the State Historic Preservation Office:

1. Smooth wall surface
2. Sharp edged, linear appearance
3. Stylized decorative elements using geometrical forms, zigzags, chevrons
4. Low relief decorative panels
5. Stepped or set back front facade
6. Strips of windows with decorative spandrels
7. Reeding and fluting around doors and windows

With its public-facing façade on Chestnut Street and its more utilitarian face on Sansom Street, the S.S. Kresge Co. Store contains many of the hallmarks of the Art Deco style. At the primary (north) elevation, the features include a smooth-faced, cast limestone facade; a sharp edged, linear appearance; stylized decorative elements and openings, presenting popular geometrical forms; characteristic horizontal and vertical banding; four-part metal casement, awning windows; opalescent glass; and stainless steel elements delineating a mullion window.¹⁴ At the rear (south) elevation, the features of the Art Deco style include a façade of buff tapestry brick; brick corbeling creating horizontal and vertical banding; four-part metal casement, awning windows; stainless steel features; and various other details.¹⁵

¹² Benjamin Leech. *Philadelphia Register of Historic Places Nomination: Overseas Motor Works, 1501-05 Fairmount Avenue*. (Philadelphia: Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, 2014), 4-5.

¹³ Bevis Hillier, *Art Deco of the 20s and 30s*. New York: E.P. Dutton and Co., 1968, 13.

¹⁴ “Art Deco Style (1925-1940),” Pennsylvania Architectural Field Guide. (Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission, 2015). <<http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/portal/communities/architecture/styles/art-deco.html>> Accessed on 3 October 2020.

¹⁵ “Art Deco Style (1925-1940),” Pennsylvania Architectural Field Guide. (Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission, 2015). <<http://www.phmc.state.pa.us/portal/communities/architecture/styles/art-deco.html>> Accessed on 3 October 2020.



Figure 14. Right: WCAU Building, 1618-20-22 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia. Source: The George D. McDowell Philadelphia Evening Bulletin Collection, Temple Digital Collections, Temple University.

Despite being the most evocative feature of the façade, the employment of the decorative metal elements within the primary (north) elevation comprises a relatively uncommon characteristic for a modest size commercial building. The metal work takes its cue from some of the era's greatest specimens of Art Deco design. In fact, just a few blocks west, WCAU commissioned Gabriel B. Roth, architect, to design a fabulous, high style Art Deco tower at 1618-20-22 Chestnut Street to serve as a radio station building. Completed in 1928, the skyscraper features highly decorative metal work, greatly amplifying the material composition and quality of the design (Figures 14).¹⁶ While the WCAU Station (1928) was a more significant project, the metal work employed six years later in the subject building clearly illustrates the architect's intent to design in the Art Deco style. Another important building of the era with similar stainless-steel elements is the Kansas City Municipal Auditorium at 211 W. Thirteenth Street in Kansas City, Missouri. The building employs linear metal work in its primary elevation, which relates to the vertical metal elements employed in the subject property. Flanking the large, central section of the Kansas City Municipal Auditorium's façade are two groups of three stainless steel flag poles that protrude from the façade like sets of antennas might on the side of a peculiar radio.¹⁷ One the most fabulous, high style buildings with metal work in its façade is the Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation building, a six-story buff brick structure, designed by Bley & Lyman, in 1930. Located at 300 Erie Boulevard

¹⁶ "Broadcast Pioneers of Philadelphia," <<https://www.broadcastpioneers.com/wcauhistory.html>> Accessed on 8 October 2020.

¹⁷ Clara Breeze. *American Art Deco, Architecture and Regionalism*. (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), 151.

West in Syracuse, New York, the building features vertical bands of metal work upon all its elevations.¹⁸



Figure 15. Top: The Niagara Mohawk Power Corporation in Syracuse, New York. Source: Reddit. Figure 16. Bottom: Kansas City Municipal Auditorium, Kansas City, Missouri. Source: Living New Deal.

Additionally, the architectural details, materials, and overall design of the subject building echoes some of the most significant Art Deco buildings of the era. Well-known and significant buildings of the period were defined by smooth-faced, limestone facades with restrained geometric details and occasional low-relief limestone panels, including the Boston Avenue Methodist Church (1926-29), Tulsa, Oklahoma; the Bronx County Courthouse (1931), Bronx, New York; the Louisiana State Capitol (1930-31), Baton Rouge, Louisiana; the United States Court House and William Penn Branch Post Office (1940) (Figure 17), Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; and the United States Federal Building and Courthouse (1932), Wichita, Kansas.¹⁹ In relationship to the rear (south) elevation, many well-known and significant buildings of the period featured facades of buff tapestry brick with detailing comprised of corbeling, including the Asheville City Building (1926-

¹⁸ Clara Breeze. *American Art Deco, Architecture and Regionalism*. (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), 72-73.

¹⁹ Clara Breeze. *American Art Deco, Architecture and Regionalism*. (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), 67-69, 82-83, 130-131, and 134-135.

27), 70 Court Plaza, Asheville, North Carolina; Bloom High School (1931) at 101 West Tenth Street, Chicago Heights, Illinois; Cranbrook (1929-31), 1221 North Woodward in Bloomfield, Michigan; the Fairgrounds Pavilion (1933), Tulsa, Oklahoma (Figure 19); the Fred F. French Building (1927), 551 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York; the Kennedy-Warren Apartments (1930-31), 3133 Connecticut Avenue, N.W., Washington, D.C.; the Metropolitan Building (1926), 117 North Fifteenth Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; St. Andrew Avellino Church (1940), 157-01 Northern Boulevard, Queens, New York; Two Park Avenue (1927), New York, New York; the Union Trust Building (1927-28), 500 Criswold Street, Detroit, Michigan; Wichita High School (1929), 1437 Rochester Avenue, Wichita, Kansas; Will Rogers High School (1938), 3909 East 5th Place, Tulsa, Oklahoma; and Will Rogers Memorial Auditorium (1934-36), 3301 West Lancaster Avenue, Fort Worth, Texas (Figure 18).²⁰ These examples demonstrate that the features found in the subject building were employed in important Art Deco style buildings across the country.



Figure 17. Left: The United States Court House and William Penn Branch Post Office, 9th and Chestnut Streets, Philadelphia. Source: Oscar Beisert Collection.

²⁰ Clara Breeze. *American Art Deco, Architecture and Regionalism*. (New York & London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), 38, 45, 48-49, 64, 92-93, 131-133, 138-141, 164-167, 176-179, and 202-203.

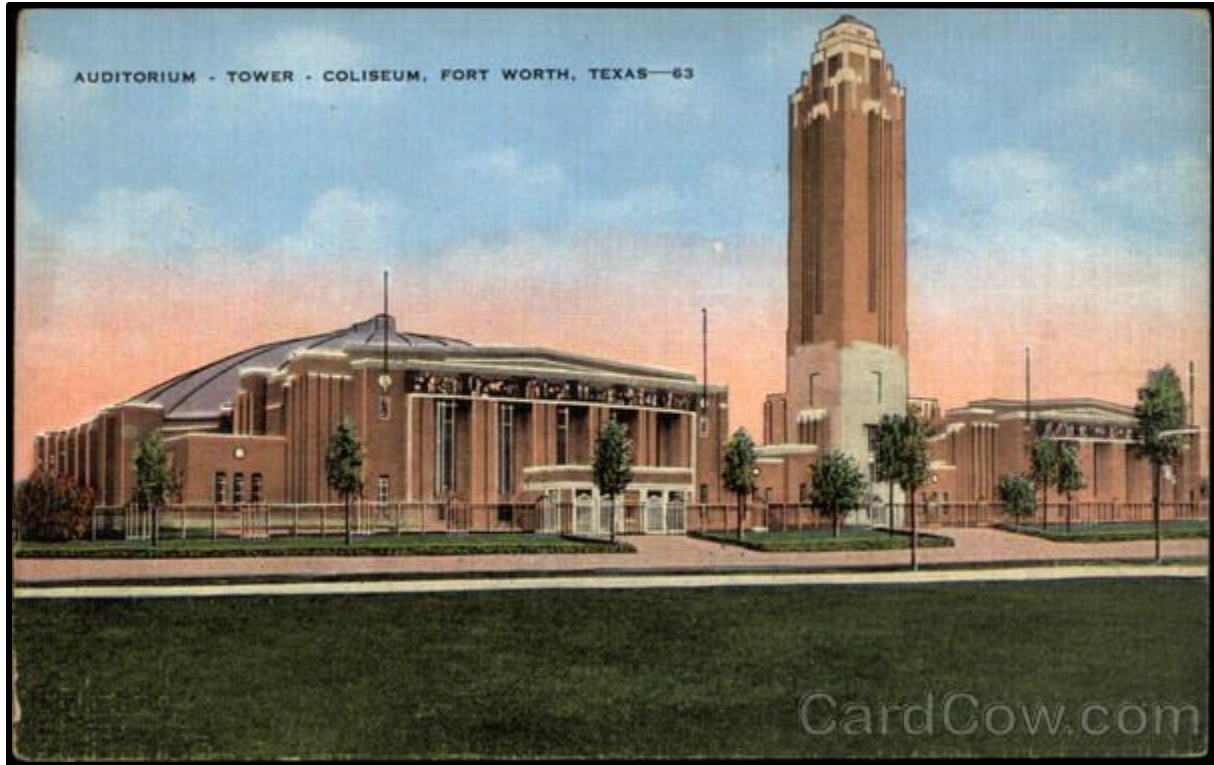


Figure 18. Top: The Will Rogers Memorial Auditorium in Fort Worth, Texas, built almost entirely of buff tapestry brick. Source: CardCow.com. Figure 19. Bottom: Fairgrounds Pavilion at Tulsa, Oklahoma. Source: roadarch.com.



Figure 20. The S.S. Kresge Co. Store on South Kickapoo Street in Lincoln, Illinois. Source: Ebay.

CRITERION C: THE S.S. KRESGE CO.'S ART DECO, MODERNIST AESTHETIC

The S.S. Kresge Co. Store at 1520-22 Chestnut Street reflects the environment of commercial architecture, specifically the context of S.S. Kresge Co. stores during the interwar years, when such buildings were characterized by the Art Deco and other Modernist styles. This is demonstrated through numerous examples illustrated in this section of the nomination.

While it may be hard to fathom the justification for demolishing the ornate, five-story Baker Building only to construct a two-story modernist commercial structure, the Baker Estate clearly found the 20-year commitment of the S.S. Kresge Co. to be reason enough to make such a profound development and real estate investment that ultimately led to the construction of the subject building. Even though some large retail establishments of today may often install their stores in historic buildings when convenient and/or required to enter the urban marketplace, most major corporations prefer to follow a specific brand and model that comes down to details as specific as the architecture and design of their space, usually purpose-built, over simply finding a building with sufficient square footage. Such corporate practices and traditions remain as true in 2022 as it was in the 1920s and 1930s. Like many corporations of the interwar years, the S.S. Kresge Co. established a modern aesthetic through the incorporation of Art Deco and other Modernist designs for their new stores in cities across the country.²¹ These Modernist designs complimented the company's economically-driven cultural evolution like when it transitioned from a five-and-dime to a $\phi 5$ - $\phi 10$ - $\phi 25$.²² By 1928, the retail magnate commissioned Albert Kahn (1869-1942), one of America's most important industrial architects, to design an impressive Art Deco style headquarters building at 2727 Second Avenue in Detroit, Michigan (Figure 21).

²¹ *Baltimore City Landmark Designation Report: Kresge's Building (1938)*. (Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation, 2008), 2.

²² "Are the Five and Ten Cent Store Stocks Over-Rated?," *The Magazine of Wall Street*, 27 September 1924, 859.
Nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places, Summer 2022 - 18
S.S. Kresge Store, 1520-22 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania



Figure 21. Top: S.S. Kresge Headquarters (1938) in Detroit, Michigan. Source: Andrew Jameson. Figure 22. Bottom: The S.S. Kresge Co. Store in Baltimore, Maryland. Source: *Baltimore City Landmark Designation Report: Kresge's Building (1938)*. (Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation, 2008), 2.

On a local level, the S.S. Kresge Co. appears to have stipulated their new, long-term leases on the construction of new commercial buildings, almost always in the Art Deco and/or other modernist styles. Not only were Kresge stores au courant in big cities like Philadelphia, but the company also installed their chain locations in all corners of the country from Augusta, Maine to Grand Rapids, Michigan. As at the subject property, it was not uncommon for the S.S. Kresge Co. to replace existing buildings and build new ones to achieve a modern aesthetic and presence. A smattering of examples nationwide illustrates the establishment of a brand of unique $\phi 5$ - $\phi 10$ store designs that differed throughout the country, but always in a modernist package. In 1920, S.S. Kresge Co. Store opened an Art Deco style store in Reading, Pennsylvania, which included a façade of buff tapestry brick completed with corbeling (Figure 24). A similar building was built in 1925 at Salem, Ohio,

employing the Art Deco style in buff tapestry brick replete with corbeling (Figure 27).²³ During this period the company opened a new store in an Art Deco style building of buff tapestry brick on Kickapoo Street in Lincoln, Illinois (Figure 20). In 1930, the S.S. Kresge Co. opened a store in an Art Deco style building in Hamilton, Ontario, Canada (Figure 29).²⁴ In 1932, the S.S. Kresge Co. opened an Art Deco style store comprised of buff tapestry brick at 241-249 Water Street in Augusta, Maine (Figure 23). The new, two-story commercial building replaced a larger Italianate style structure.²⁵ In 1936, the S.S. Kresge Co. opened in a store in a growing suburb of Detroit, Michigan (Figure 26). Built in the orbit of their hometown, the new building emulated many of the new stores nationwide.



Figure 23. Top left: S.S. Kresge Co. Store in Augusta, Maine. Figure 24. Top right: S.S. Kresge Co. Store (1920) in Reading, Pennsylvania. Source: GoBerksReading.com. Figure 25. Bottom left: S.S. Kresge Co. Store (1945) in Brockton, Massachusetts. Source: ATT Yahoo. Figure 26. Bottom right: S.S. Kresge Co. Store (1936) in Detroit, Michigan. Source: steamcommunity.com.

By the late 1930s, new S.S. Kresge Co. stores being opened reflected an evolving aesthetic from Art Deco to Streamline Modern, including buildings throughout the United States and in Canada (Figure 30). In 1938, the S.S. Kresge Co. opened a store in a newly constructed Modernist style building at the corner of West Lexington and Park Avenue in Baltimore, Maryland (Figure 22). The sleek new edifice was a two-story masonry structure with a white terra cotta façade.²⁶ By 1945, the S.S. Kresge Co. Store opened a new store in a one-story Moderne style building in Brockton, Massachusetts (Figure 25).

²³ mall hall of fame. [MALL HALL OF FAME \(mall-hall-of-fame.blogspot.com\)](http://mall-hall-of-fame.blogspot.com) Accessed on 26 June 2022.

²⁴ *The Hamilton Spectator*, 14 June 2017.

²⁵ *National Register of Historic Places Nomination: S.S. Kresge Co. Store, Augusta, Maine.* (2010).

²⁶ *Baltimore City Landmark Designation Report: Kresge's Building (1938).* (Commission for Historical and Architectural Preservation, 2008), 2.



Figure 27. Top: The S.S. Kresge Co. Store (1925) in Salem, Ohio. Source: Salem Public Library. Figure 28. Top middle: S.S. Kresge Co. Store in Pontiac, Michigan. Source: Ebay. Figure 29. Bottom middle: S.S. Kresge Co. Store (1930), Hamilton, Ontario, Canada. Source: *The Hamilton Spectator*, 14 June 2017. Figure 30. Bottom: S.S. Kresge Co. Store (ca.1940-50) at Yong and Carlton Streets, Toronto, Canada. Source: Lost Toronto.



Figure 31. Left: The Philadelphia gas Works Store Building, 5230-32 Chestnut Street, West Philadelphia. Source: Google 2022. Figure 32. Right: The Rebecca Gratz Club (1928), 534 Spruce Street, designed by Silverman & Levy. Source: Hidden City Philadelphia.

CRITERIA E

The S.S. Kresge Co. Store is the work of Silverman & Levy, an early-twentieth century Philadelphia architectural firm, the work of which significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, and cultural development of the city. The firm was established in 1925 by University of Pennsylvania classmates Edwin H. Silverman and Abraham Levy, both of whom were Jewish American architects that would practice in Philadelphia for the duration of their careers.

With offices first located at 313 S. Smedley Street, the firm's earliest projects appear to have been limited to alterations and additions to commercial buildings. However, even in the first year of their inception as a firm, Silverman & Levy were designing small apartment houses and twin residences, three of which were announced in a single issue of *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record & Builders' Guide* in September 1926.²⁷ While these early works were relatively modest commercial endeavors, the firm was soon completing more ambitious projects, designing and managing construction for developers like Mastbaum Bros. & Fleisher, an important Jewish American development firm that greatly impacted the trajectory of real estate in Philadelphia during the interwar years. In 1926, Silverman & Levy were commissioned by Mastbaum Bros. & Fleisher to design a commercial building at the northeast corner of N. 5th Street and Olney Avenue, a location that would come to fore as the commercial center of the Olney neighborhood.²⁸ As part of their real estate portfolio, Mastbaum Bros. & Fleisher commissioned several buildings that were subject to long-term leases with the Philadelphia Gas Works, which led to several handsome buildings designed by Silverman & Levy. The first of these quasi-municipal projects was the "Store Building" at 5230-32 Chestnut Street in 1927 (Figure 31).²⁹

As one would expect, Silverman & Levy's earliest clients comprised a largely Jewish clientele, including developers and investors like Mastbaum Bros. & Fleisher. They designed enumerable commercial buildings, apartment houses, and parking garages. Even as nascent designers, the firm

²⁷ *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 30 September 1925, 618.

²⁸ *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 16 June 1926, 373.

²⁹ *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 3 August 1927, 494.

was engaged by major Jewish commercial and cultural establishments in Philadelphia, including the Jewish Hospital, Old York Road; Phi Beta Delta, a Jewish fraternity; and Gimbel Bros., the eminent department store, founded by Bavarian-Jewish immigrant, Adam Gimbel.³⁰ In fact, one of the jewels of their oeuvre was the 1928 design for the Rebecca Gratz Club at 534 Spruce Street (Figure 32).³¹ Despite the cultural and religious segregation that Jewish professionals experienced in the early twentieth century, one of Silverman & Levy's early commissions in 1926 was a new store building for the W.T. Grant Company in Wilmington, Delaware. William Thomas Grant's ancestors were Puritans from New England, his 25-cent store chain ultimately grew to 1200 locations.³² This represents an early vestige of social progress, as this specific firm diverged from a client base dictated entirely by cultural and religious community associations.



Figure 33. The Durham & Co. Radio Showroom, Philadelphia W3XM Radio Station, 2006 Chestnut Street. Source: Oscar Beisert. *Philadelphia Register of Historic Places Nomination: The Durham & Co. Radio Showroom, Philadelphia W3XM Radio Station, 2006 Chestnut Street* (1928). (Philadelphia: The Keeping Society, 2020).

During their tenure, Silverman & Levy would become prominent designers of commercial buildings and spaces, including both new construction and renovations. A considerable number of projects were along Chestnut Street, like the subject building: Alterations and Additions (1927), southwest corner of Ninth and Chestnut Streets;³³ Store Building (1927), 5230-32 Chestnut Street;³⁴ Store Building (1928), 2006 Chestnut Street;³⁵ Store Building (1929), 1720-22-24 Chestnut Street;³⁶ Schrafft's Candies (1932), 1216 Chestnut Street;³⁷ S.S. Kresge Co. Store (1934),

³⁰ *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 29 September 1926, 618.; *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 21 September 1927, 599.

³¹ *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 6 June 1928, 355.

³² Franklin Spencer Edmonds. *Ulysses S. Grant*. (1915), 13.; and *The American Magazine*, March 1924, 45.

³³ *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 15 June 1927, 379.

³⁴ *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 20 July 1927, 457.

³⁵ *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 2 May 1928, 278.

³⁶ *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 11 December 1929, 787.

³⁷ *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 4 May 1932, 97.

1520-22 Chestnut Street;³⁸ Alterations to a Store Building, southeast corner of 16th and Chestnut Streets (1935);³⁹ Alterations to Show Room (1937), 5542 Chestnut Street;⁴⁰ Alterations to Store (1938), 1214 Chestnut Street;⁴¹ Store Building (1938), 1718 Chestnut Street;⁴² etc. The firm learned to apply variants of the Colonial and other revivalist styles to their buildings early on, examples of which often have a decidedly modernist flavor. This is certainly apparent in their design for the Rebecca Gratz Club, which is a building with Neoclassical and Colonial Revival style details of an institutional character.

The firm also excelled greatly in the Art Deco style, designing very distinctive facades for commercial buildings of a modest size. In addition to the subject property, three notable examples include The Durham & Co. Radio Showroom, Philadelphia W3XM Radio Station (1928), 2006 Chestnut Street; Winkleman & Brothers (1929), 1722-24 Chestnut Street (Figure 35); and a Store Building (1938), 1718 Chestnut Street (Figure 34).⁴³ A stylistic comparison of these structures with the subject building shows the breadth of the firm's skill in Art Deco design, as buildings individually represent distinctive examples of the Art Deco style, as applied to modest commercial buildings of the 1920s and 1930s.

The S.S. Kresge Co. Store is an important specimen of the Art Deco style buildings designed by the architectural firm of Silverman & Levy, a professional practice in design that greatly influenced the City of Philadelphia and its built environment.



Two modernist buildings designed by Silverman & Levy. Figure 34. Left: A Store Building at 1718 Chestnut Street. Figure 35. Right: Winkleman & Brothers, 1722-24 Chestnut Street (1929). Source: Google.

³⁸ *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 28 February 1934, 65.

³⁹ *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 3 July 1935, 105.

⁴⁰ *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 27 January 1937, 17.

⁴¹ *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 6 July 1938, 129.

⁴² *The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, 23 November 1938, 251.

⁴³ Oscar Beisert. *Philadelphia Register of Historic Places Nomination: The Durham & Co. Radio Showroom, Philadelphia W3XM Radio Station, 2006 Chestnut Street (1928)*. (Philadelphia: The Keeping Society, 2020).

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KRESGE'S
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Figure 36. An advertisement for Kresge's. Source: *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 27 October 1950, 16.

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This nomination was completed for the Historic Building Preservation Task Force of the Center City Residents Association by the Keeping Society of Philadelphia with the primary author as Oscar Beisert, Architectural Historian and Historic Preservationist, with assistance from Kelly E. Wiles, Architectural Historian.

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