

**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: 1330-36 Chestnut St

Postal code: 19107

2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE

Historic Name: Woolworth

Current/Common Name: Lucky-Strike Bowl/West Elm/Dick Blick

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: Retail/Entertainment

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 1948 to 1960

Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: Built 1948-1949; Altered 1960, 1970, 2007-2008

Architect, engineer, and/or designer: Harry W. Hakes, Architect

Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: Turner Construction

Original owner: _____

Other significant persons: _____

CRITERIA FOR DESIGNATION:

The historic resource satisfies the following criteria for designation (check all that apply):

- (a) Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past; or,
- (b) Is associated with an event of importance to the history of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- (c) Reflects the environment in an era characterized by a distinctive architectural style; or,
- (d) Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style or engineering specimen; or,
- (e) Is the work of a designer, architect, landscape architect or designer, or engineer whose work has significantly influenced the historical, architectural, economic, social, or cultural development of the City, Commonwealth or Nation; or,
- (f) Contains elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship which represent a significant innovation; or,
- (g) Is part of or related to a square, park or other distinctive area which should be preserved according to an historic, cultural or architectural motif; or,
- (h) Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City; or,
- (i) Has yielded, or may be likely to yield, information important in pre-history or history; or
- (j) Exemplifies the cultural, political, economic, social or historical heritage of the community.

8. MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Please attach a bibliography.

9. NOMINATOR

Organization Philadelphia Historical Commission Date August 3, 2023

Name with Title Mr. Daniel Shachar-Krasnoff Email daniel.Shachar-krasnoff@phila.gov

Street Address 1515 Arch Street, 13th Floor Telephone (215) 832-2130

City, State, and Postal Code Philadelphia, PA 19102

Nominator is is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: August 2, 2023

Correct-Complete Incorrect-Incomplete Date: August 3, 2023

Date of Notice Issuance: August 3, 2023

Property Owner at Time of Notice:

Name: Treeco/Manor Limited Partnership

Address: 10 E Palisade Ave

City: Englewood State: NJ Postal Code: 07631

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

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: December 13, 2024

Date of Final Action: December 13, 2024

Designated Rejected

5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

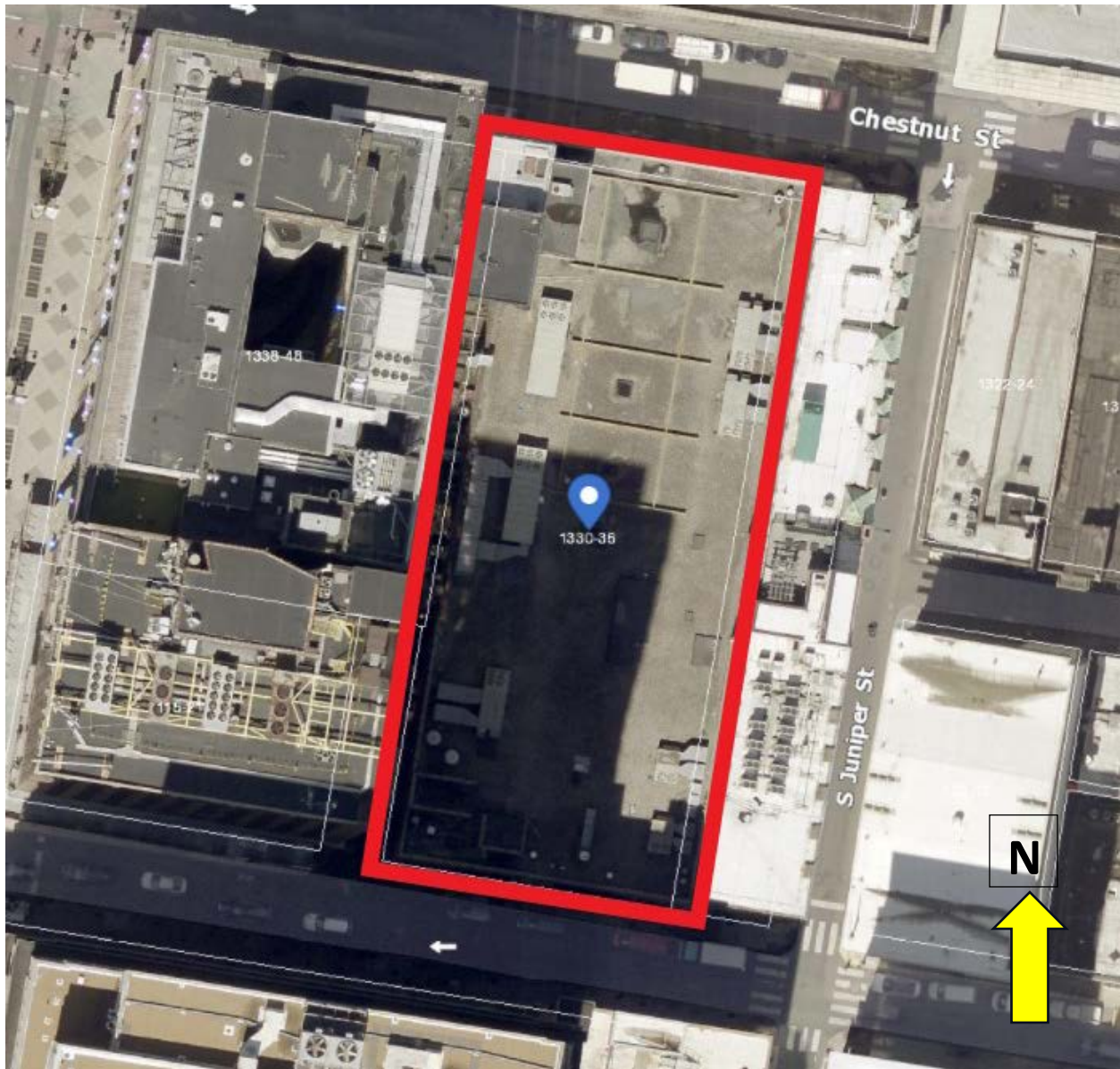


Figure 1. Boundary outline of 1330-36 Chestnut Street. Source: Atlas.

Situate on the South side of Chestnut Street at the distance of thirty-two feet four inches West of Juniper Street, thence extending South a distance of two hundred and thirty feet to the North side of Sansom Street, thence extending ninety-three feet ten inches to the East side of Watts Street (opened twenty feet but not on the City Plan) thence extending North along said side of Watts Street seventy-six feet to a point on the on the South side of a four foot wide alley, thence extending North parallel with Juniper Street, crossing the head of said alley and through a wall partly erected on the premises the distance of one hundred and fifty-four feet to the South side of

Chestnut Street, thence extending East along the South side of Chestnut Street ninety-two feet six inches to the place of the beginning. Being 1330-36 Chestnut Street.

6. ARCHITECTURAL DESCRIPTION

Primary Façade – Chestnut Street



Figure 2. Chestnut Street façade of 1330-36 Chestnut Street, July 2023.

The former Woolworth Building at 1330-36 Chestnut Street is a three-story steel frame structure with concrete floors and a basement. The primary (north façade) on Chestnut Street has a glass and metal storefront on the first story. Contemporary newspaper reporting, the building permit and original drawings, and academic literature differ on the building's exterior cladding:

Alabama marble, structured glass, or manufactured stone is listed as the material, depending on the source. There are long, narrow horizontal metal windows on the second and third stories.

The glass storefront is not the original configuration. It is asymmetrical with a longer east section than west section. Like the original design, the glass storefront angles away from the front of the façade creating an overhang at its deepest point where the doors to the current tenant, a furniture store, is located.

At the east end of the first floor is a non-historic entry to a basement-level art supply store. The door is metal and above is a projecting base supporting an internally lit sign with channel letters. The west end of the first floor is an entry to a second story bowling alley. The bowling alley

entry is non-historic and has a metal and glass door. Above the door is a projecting base supporting a large, internally lit white bowling pin. Atop the glass storefront is a horizontal steel band composed of three stacked, rounded sections. Above the metal banding is a large quarter round of inset masonry which originally framed the large WOOLWORTH sign and now has a much smaller sign for the furniture store.

The second story has a long horizontal window which originally stretched between simple rectangular quoins on the east and west ends of the second and third stories. There are seven such windows separated by mullions, and each has three symmetrical, horizontal metal muntins. The entire band of windows is surrounded by stainless steel that flares out at the east end. Alteration of the second story in the 2000s has reduced the length of these banded windows on the west end. Also, the quoins on the east end are covered with applied tiles and those on the west end are covered with applied tiles and metal windows.

The third story is mostly unaltered, with eight horizontal windows and the metal surround as on the second story. The only alteration at the third story is a two-sided narrow vertical sign inserted over the quoins at the east end of the façade. A metal parapet tops the building.

Rear Façade – Sansom Street



Figure 3. Sansom Street façade of 1330-36 Chestnut Street, July 2023.

The Sansom Street (south) façade is three stories in height and is clad in buff brick. Each story is differentiated with horizontal bands of concrete that extend across the façade. The first story has

been altered from the original design with a centered doorway flanked by three narrow, vertical windows. Three door openings are located west of the vertical windows. There is a rectangular area of black metal shingles that encase the center door and vertical window openings. The second story features four symmetrical window openings at the center of the façade. The two middle openings are vertical while the flanking windows are slightly rectangular. The third story includes three former window openings that are evenly spaced. All the openings have been infilled. A simple concrete band serves as the parapet.

West Side Façade – Watts Street

A truncated west façade extends from Sansom Street about half of the distance to Chestnut Street. This is referred to as Watts Street on the legal description but is not on the City plan. Most of this façade is a plain brick wall extending three stories to the height of the building. The concrete banding of the south façade wraps this corner for approximately twenty feet. The second and third stories have a vertical window with industrial sash. Most of the height of the first story on this façade is painted black.



Figure 4. West facade of 1330-36 Chestnut Street, August 2023.

7. STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Background

The Philadelphia Inquirer on January 18, 1948, included an understated article noting that Turner Construction had been awarded the contract to build a Woolworth's at 1330-36 Chestnut Street that would be three-stories in height and cost \$1 million to build. There was no mention of the store's design, only that it would be air conditioned, with escalators and two elevators.¹

Although the article noted the new store would open before the end of 1948, it did not open until April 6, 1949 (Figure 5).

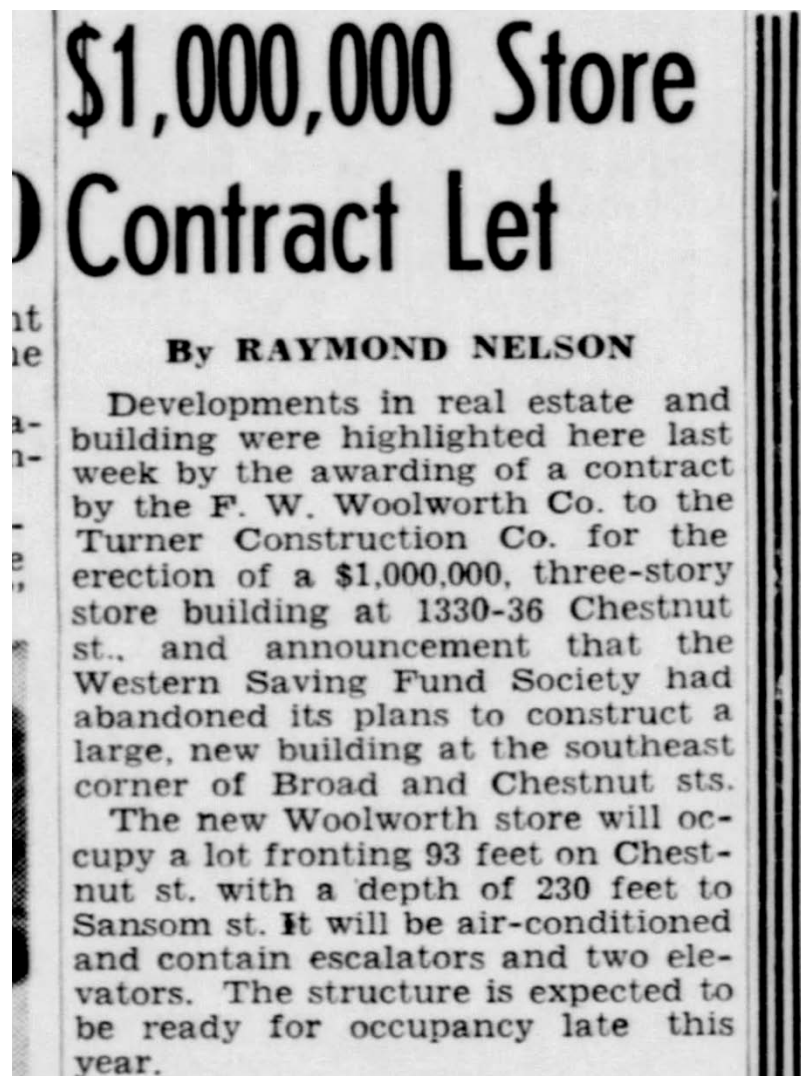


Figure 5. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 18, 1948, p. 18. Source: newspapers.com.

¹ "\$1,000,000 Store Contract Let," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, January 18, 1948, p. 18, newspapers.com.

The lead-up to the opening of the store included want ads for “Salesladies,” more specifically, “young women with selling experience preferred.” (Figure 6). These ads identified the new Woolworth’s as a “modern store.”²

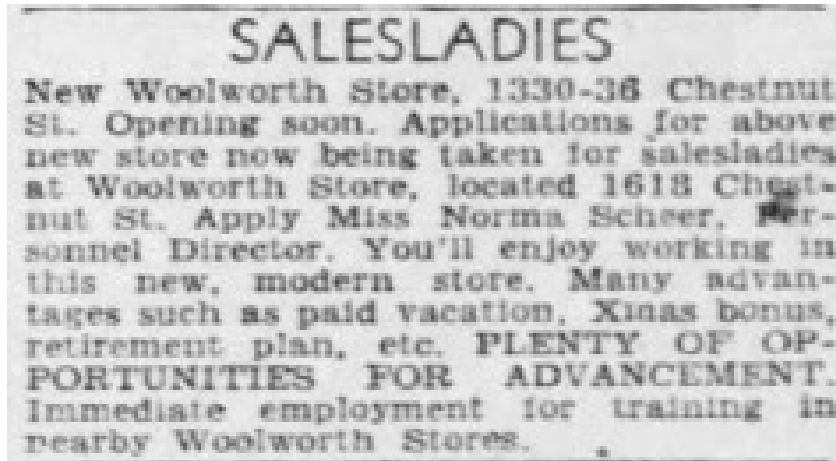


Figure 6. Advertisement for Woolworth’s, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 6, 1949, p. 105. Source: newspapers.com.

The opening of the new store was aggressively advertised. A large ad in *The Philadelphia Inquirer* of April 5, 1949, the day before the store’s opening, imagined, “William Penn was astounded! The Founder sneaks a preview of The New Woolworth’s.” (Figure 7). The fantasy continues that Penn had been atop City Hall and tells the Woolworth’s manager he’s been “keeping my eye on this growing city for some time,” and, “one of the most amazing things I’ve seen is the new Woolworth Building and now I want to see the interior.”³ The advertisement included an illustration of the front façade and its prominent WOOLWORTH sign above the angled glass storefront.

² F.W. Woolworth, Co., “SALESLADIES.” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, March 6, 1949, newspapers.com.

³ F.W. Woolworth Co., “William Penn was Astounded!” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 5, 1949, p. 16, newspapers.com.

William Penn was astounded!

The Founder sneaks a preview of

The New Woolworth's



When William Penn, tapped the manager of the new Chestnut Street Woolworth's on the shoulder the other day, the man was understandably shaken.

"Hey!" Our Manager stammered. "Seems to me you left these parts some time ago!"

"Haven't you seen me perched on top of City Hall?" snorted Mr. Penn. "I've been up there keeping my eye on this growing city for some time, and one of the most amazing things I've seen is this new Woolworth Building and now I want to see its interior."

"Well", said Our Manager, blushing modestly, "You know it's Philadelphia's biggest, most modern, finest—"

"That's outside!" snapped Mr. Penn. "I'm here to see if it's as smart inside!"

So, still bewildered, Our Manager showed William Penn the well-stocked counters, the air-conditioning, the moving stairs (he had a little trouble coaxing Mr. P. away from these) and even the modern electric kitchen that produces delicious snacks, lunches, and baked goods.

Then he explained. "You see, Woolworth's is quite an institution all over America—but this store is pretty unusual. We have a lot of things here most people don't expect to find in Woolworth's—and finding these things is easier because they're arranged in departments—each one a complete store in itself."

"We've lamps and shades for every room and phonograph records for all ages, infants' wear and imported ceramics, plants and luggage, goldfish and pet supplies—as well as all the things people are used to buying in Woolworth's."

At the end of the tour, Mr. Penn was speechless. Reluctantly fingering the handle of the big glass door, his eyes roaming wistfully over the spacious main floor, he managed to say, "Well, you've come a long way from Philadelphia's first Woolworth's back in 1888—the front of that store was only 15 feet wide! But there's one thing—the thing I like best—that's just the same . . . those thrifty prices!"

We have a feeling you are going to be just as amazed and just as pleased as William Penn when you come inside this brand new modern store. That's why we want you to visit us Wednesday through Saturday, the Festival Opening Days, and see for yourself Philadelphia's biggest, most modern Woolworth's!

The New Woolworth's

1330 Chestnut Street—1329 Sansom Street

OPENS WEDNESDAY APRIL 6th 11 A. M.

J. V. LOUGHRAN, Manager

Store Hours: 9:30 to 5:30 Wednesday: 11:00 to 9:00

Figure 7. Advertisement for Woolworth's, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 5, 1949, p. 16. Source: newspapers.com.

The Philadelphia Inquirer article of April 6, 1949, the day the store opened, read more as a press release. It noted that the design... “was planned from the foundation up to be distinctive among Woolworth stores and yet to harmonize,” according to Woolworth’s Assistant District Manager, J.S. Davidson, “with the Chestnut St tradition.”⁴ The article identified the size of the store, 41,397 square feet.⁵ This made it significantly larger than the neighborhood stores for which Woolworth’s was known. Not only was it much larger than a typical Woolworth’s, but pricing also distinguished the store from a typical five-and-dime. Woolworth’s abandoned its fixed prices for all goods in November 1935.⁶ The top price for goods at the 1330-36 Chestnut Street store would be \$22.95 (\$292.98 in today’s dollars). The *Inquirer* article also noted the diversity of products that included “sporting goods, lamp and shade bar, luggage department, flower shop and gift shop.”⁷



Figure 8. *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 6, 1949, p. 35. Source: newspapers.com.

⁴ “Woolworth Store To Open Today,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 6, 1949, 35, newspapers.com.

⁵ “Woolworth Store To Open Today,” 35.

⁶ *Woolworth’s First 75 Years, 1879-1954*, (New York, F.W. Woolworth Co., 1954), 29.

⁷ “Woolworth Store To Open Today,” 35.

The opening was an event. Mayor Bernard Samuel was there to speak and “cut the silken ribbon across the entrance.” In addition to the mayor, “several leading businessmen would speak, including Dr. James Cook, president of the Chestnut Street Association.”⁸ It was covered on television by WFIL-TV (now WPVI, Channel 6).⁹

**WFIL-TV
CHANNEL 6**

- ★ **5:45 P. M. SALUTE TO ARMY DAY.**
This is Army Day—ceremonies honoring the Army and its service branches.
- ★ **7:15 P. M. INQUIRER TV NEWSREEL.**
On-the-spot news and films of today's news today! DuMont Television Dealers.
- ★ **7:40 P. M. MEET FRANCES McGUIRE.**
Homemaker and women's commentator has news and views of interest to men, too. Dif — Avoset — Fashion Frocks.
- ★ **9:00 P. M. GRAND OPENING.**
Film of opening of the world's most fabulous five and dime store, Woolworth's in Philadelphia.

**The Philadelphia
Inquirer Stations**

Figure 9 Advertisement for WFIL-TV, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 6, 1949, p. 34. Source: newspapers.com.

⁸ “Woolworth Store To Open Today,” 35.

⁹ “WFIL-TV Channel 6” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, April 6, 1949, 34. <https://www.newspapers.com/image/172630241/>

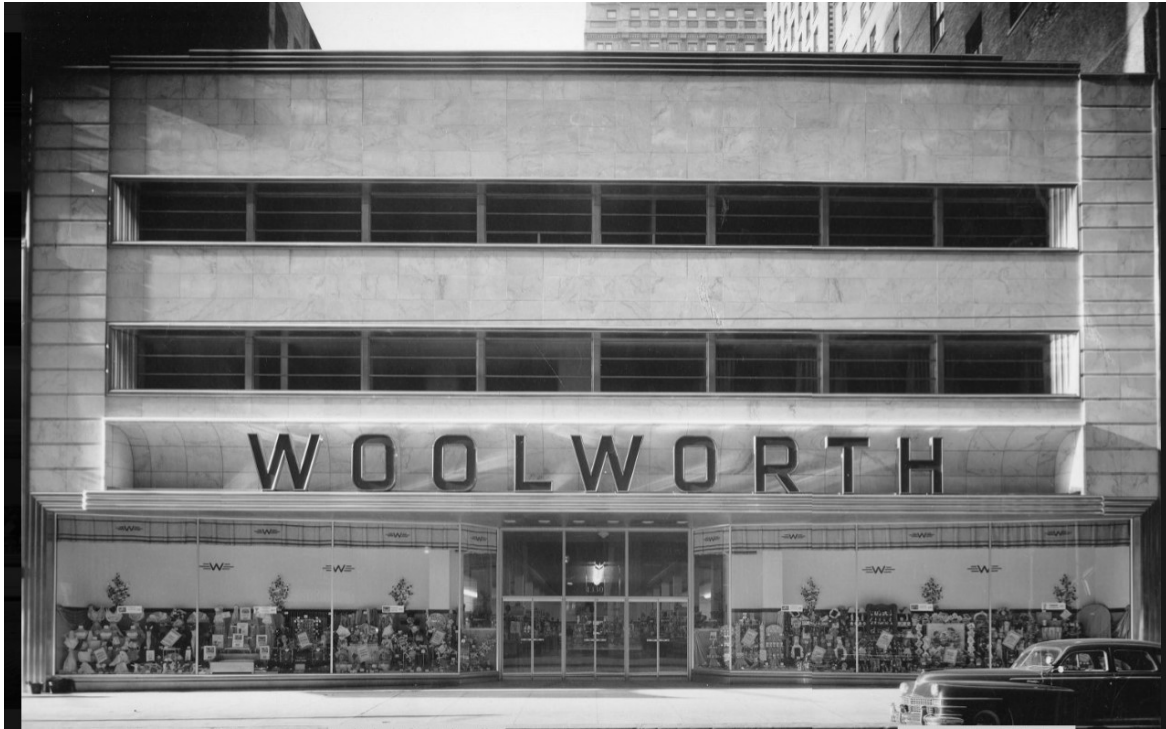


Figure 10. Woolworth store at time of opening in 1949. Source: Temple University Urban Archive.

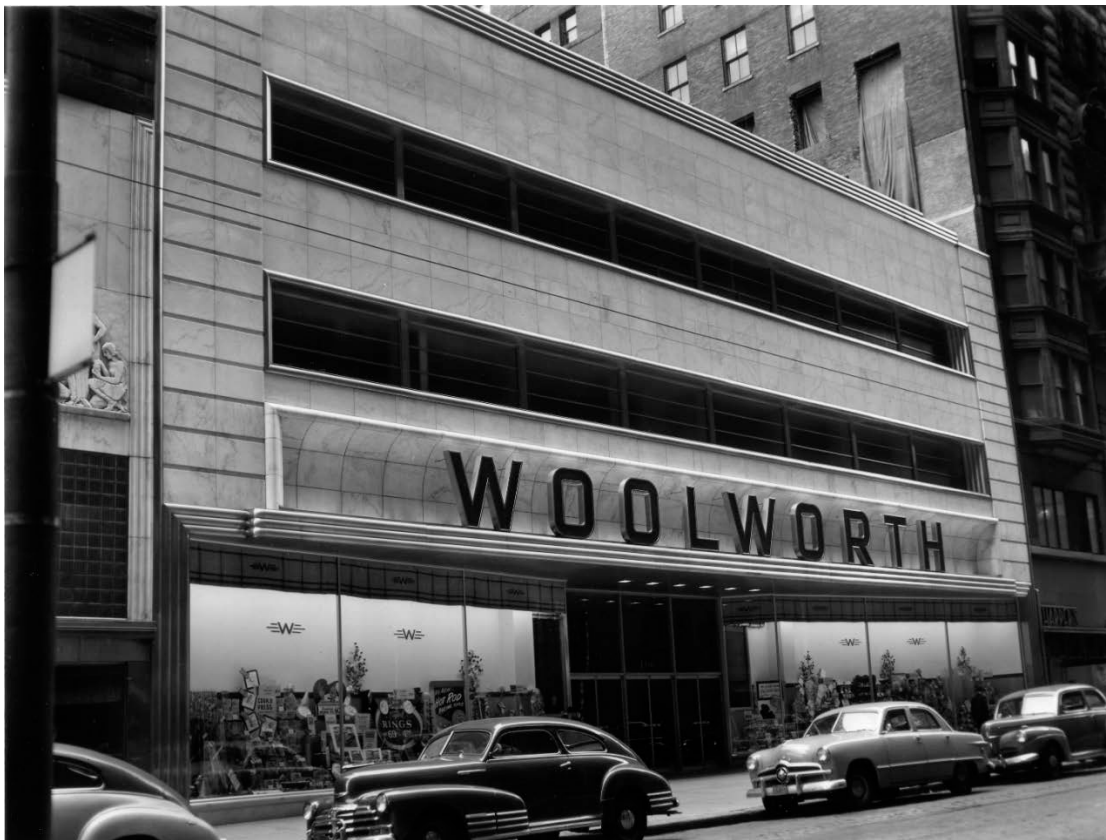


Figure 11. Woolworth store at the time of opening in 1949. Source: Parker & Mullikin, Free Library of Philadelphia Print and Picture Collection, via <https://why.org/articles/mid-century-philly-1300-block-of-chestnut/>.

Harry W. Hakes designed this store and several other Woolworths' in Southeast Pennsylvania and New Jersey:¹⁰

- Jenkintown Borough, Montgomery County, PA (Altered)
- Lancaster City, Lancaster County, PA (Demolished)
- Princeton, Mercer County, NY (Status Unknown)
- Trenton, Mercer County PA (Extant)

No additional information regarding Mr. Hakes was identified in preparation for this nomination. If not for the building permit and the listing of his name in Turner Construction's 1952 book promoting its projects, he would be unidentifiable as the building's designer.

Unlike many individually designated buildings constructed in the 20th century, the architects of Woolworth stores were not in the spotlight. For example, the National Register nomination for the Woolworth's in Renton Washington, built in 1954, states that the architect could not be identified.¹¹ The nomination to the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places for the former Woolworth's store at 5607-13 Germantown Avenue, built in 1939, identifies the architect as Henry E. Curtis but provides no further information about him. Woolworth's design needs were substantial enough that the corporation had architects on staff at the time of the development of 1330-36 Chestnut Street. The address listed for Mr. Hakes on the building permit is identical to Woolworth's regional office in Philadelphia at the time, 123 S. Broad Street.¹²

¹⁰ *Turner Construction Company: 50 Years of Building by Turner*, (New York, Turner Construction Company, 1962)

¹¹ National Register of Historic Places, F.W. Woolworth Co. Store, Renton, WA, #15000880, p. 11.

¹² Building Permit #528. 1330-36 Chestnut Street, February 17, 1948. City of Philadelphia Municipal Archives.



Figure 12. Woolworth store in 1955. Source: PhillyHistory.org.

In 1960 the first change to a character-defining feature of the building is documented when Licenses and Inspections approved the removal of the iconic red channel letter WOOLWORTH sign. It was replaced with a neon panel sign, the appearance of which was unable to be found by the author.¹³ Therefore, the period of significance for this nomination is 1948 through 1960. The new panel sign must have covered the quarter-round cut-out where the WOOLWORTH sign stood front-and-center. In 1970 a new sign with blue letters and new logos replaced the neon sign from 1960.¹⁴ (Figure 13).

¹³ Application for Street Advertising Device, Submission 7503 for 1336 Chestnut St., Approved March 31, 1960.

¹⁴ License & Inspections Review, Findings & Opinion, Appeal No. 9643 for 1330 Chestnut St., April 1, 1970.



Figure 13. Woolworth store with panel sign, 1979. Source: Temple University Urban Archive.

It is noteworthy that in 1977 a new Woolworth opened in Center City at 11th and Market Streets (Figure 14). It was the first Center City Woolworth store to open since the 1330-36 Chestnut Street store's ribbon was cut by Mayor Bernard Samuel in April 1949. The Woolworth at 1330-36 Chestnut Street remained in operation through late-1997, about the time when F.W. Woolworth ceased operations.¹⁵

¹⁵ "Its Greatest Sale Ever?" *Philadelphia Daily News*, August 25, 1997, p. 25, newspapers.com.



Figure 14. Woolworth store at 11th and Market Streets, 1977. Source: Temple University Urban Archive.

Criteria for Designation

The store's history provides insight regarding comprehensive planning and development of one of the largest retailers in the United States and Canada during the 20th century. It also is revelatory regarding changes in commercial design aesthetics in the middle period of the 20th century. The Woolworth store at 1330-36 Chestnut Street therefore satisfies Criteria for Designation A, C, D, and H as delineated in Section 14-1004(1) 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 or is associated with the life of a person significant in the past.

The construction of the Woolworth store at 1330-36 Chestnut Street is significant as part of a comprehensive nation-wide construction effort to develop large flagship stores in downtowns across the United States and Canada.

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

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

The Woolworth store is significant as a design based in the Modernist, International Style, with some references to the Art Deco/Streamline Modern styles.

H. Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City.

The building's horizontality, minimal aesthetic and stark white color sets it apart from surrounding structures making it a distinctive feature in Center City generally and the 1300 block of Chestnut Street in particular.

CRITERION A

Has significant character, interest or value as part of the development, heritage or cultural characteristics of the City, Commonwealth or Nation.

F.W. Woolworth's Center City Locations

The first F.W. Woolworth store was founded by Frank Winfield Woolworth in Utica, New York in February 1879. The store was unsuccessful. However, his second store that opened in Lancaster, PA, June 1879 did succeed.¹⁶ Between 1880 and 1911 a loosely affiliated group of owners of "dime stores" who had developed from F.W. Woolworth's original store incorporated as the F.W. Woolworth Company. Upon incorporation in 1912 the organization had 631 stores in the United States and Canada. By 1930 it had grown to 1,881 stores, and even though the number of stores peaked in 1940 at 2,027, there were 1,938 stores in the annual report for 1949, the year in which the Woolworth's at 1330-36 Chestnut Street opened.¹⁷

The construction of the 1330-36 Chestnut Street Woolworth's was the culmination of decades of operations by Woolworth's in Center City Philadelphia. Center City was the first location of Woolworth's in Philadelphia, at 43 N. 8th Street.¹⁸ As of 1914 there were two Woolworth locations in Center City, 1020 Market Street and 43 N. 8th Street.¹⁹ By 1935 there were three

¹⁶ *Woolworth's First 75 Years, 1879-1954*, (New York, F.W. Woolworth Co., 1954), p. 5.

¹⁷ F.W. Woolworth Co., 1949 Annual Report, p.4.

<https://archive.org/details/woolworthvenatorfootlockerannualreports/woolworth1949/page/n5/mode/2up>

¹⁸ *Gopsill's Philadelphia Business Directory 1897*. Germantown Historical Society.

¹⁹ Philadelphia White & Yellow Pages 1914, Bell Telephone Company of Philadelphia, p.359. Library of Congress U.S. Telephone Directory. <https://www.loc.gov/resource/usteledirec.usteledirec08081/?sp=190&st=image>

locations in Center City: 1020 Market, 1210 Chestnut and 1618 Chestnut.²⁰ About the time the store at 1330-36 Chestnut Street opened, the 1020 Market Street store closed, as did the 1210 Chestnut store.²¹ From 1949 until 1960 the 1330-36 Chestnut Street and 1618 Chestnut Street stores remained. Between 1960 and 1965 the 1618 Chestnut Street store closed, leaving only the 1330-36 Chestnut Street store in operation until 1977.²² The 1330-36 Chestnut Street Woolworth store ultimately closed with the dissolution of Woolworth stores in the 1990s.

National Building Campaign

Two important decisions by the Woolworth's leadership in November and December 1935 impacted the future development of the store at 1330-36 Chestnut Street. First, it was decided to eliminate the fixed pricing policy of the chain and allow the prices for items to exceed a predetermined limit. Second, store enlargement and modernization policies were adopted guiding the reconstruction/expansion of existing stores and the creation of new stores.²³ Most of the stores created and enlarged by this policy were those in city neighborhoods and smaller towns. These stores typified the Woolworth brand for much of its existence. When the 1330-36 Chestnut Street Woolworth store opened in 1949, the company had thirty-five stores in Philadelphia of which only two were in Center City.²⁴

Despite the quantity of neighborhood stores, the chain developed very large stores in downtowns in major cities across the United States and Canada. From 1939-1962, fifteen such new stores were constructed in cities from Montreal to San Francisco and New Orleans to Minneapolis. Woolworth's Annual Reports documented this construction and prominently pictured the new buildings.

²⁰ Philadelphia White & Yellow Pages 1935, Bell Telephone Company of Philadelphia, p. 626. Library of Congress, U.S. Telephone Directory.

<https://www.loc.gov/resource/usteledirec.usteledirec08090/?sp=324&r=0.161,0.079,0.879,0.43,0>

²¹ Philadelphia White & Yellow Pages 1949, Bell Telephone Company of Philadelphia, p.1185 Library of Congress, U.S. Telephone Directory. <https://www.loc.gov/resource/usteledirec.usteledirec08137/?sp=320&st=image>

²² "New Market St. Woolworth's even features a delicatessen." Philadelphia Inquirer, May 4, 1977, p. 42, newspapers.com.

²³ *Woolworth's First 75 Years*, 29.

²⁴ Philadelphia White & Yellow Pages 1949, Bell Telephone Company of Philadelphia, p.1185 Library of Congress, U.S. Telephone Directory. <https://www.loc.gov/resource/usteledirec.usteledirec08137/?sp=320&st=image>

Following are images from the Annual Reports:

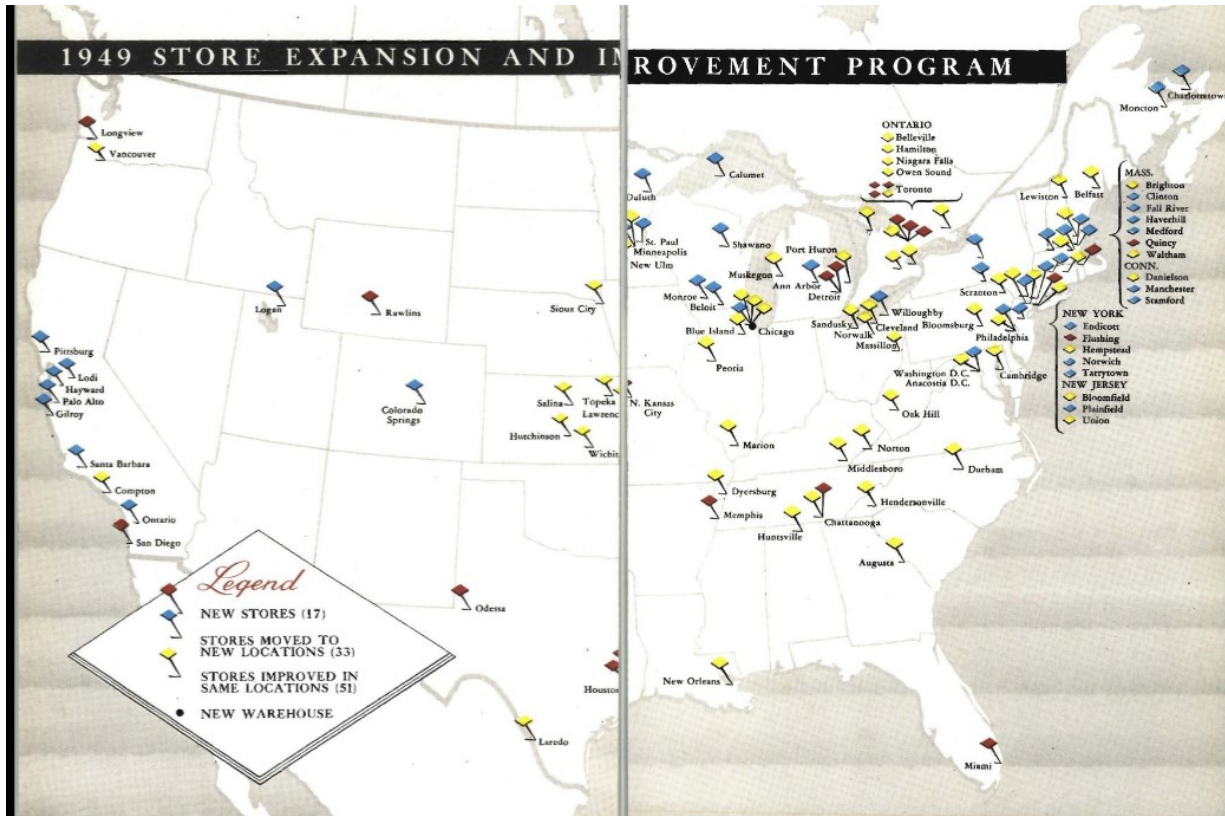


Figure 15. Map of store expansion program from the 1949 Annual Report. This is the year that the 1330-36 Chestnut Street store opened. Source: <https://archive.org/details/woolworthvenatorfootlockerannualreports/woolworth1949/page/n19/mode/2up>.



Figure 16. (Left) New York Woolworth store, 1939. (Right) Houston Woolworth store, 1949. Source: <https://archive.org/details/woolworthvenatorfootlockerannualreports>.



Figure 17. (Left) Cleveland Woolworth store, 1950. (Center) Seattle Woolworth store, 1951. (Right) San Francisco Woolworth store, 1952. Source: <https://archive.org/details/woolworthvenatorfootlockerannualreports>.



Figure 18. (Left) New York 34th Street Woolworth store, 1953. (Center) New Orleans Woolworth store, 1954. (Right) St. Louis Woolworth store, 1956. Source: <https://archive.org/details/woolworthvenatorfootlockerannualreports>.

CRITERIA C AND D

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

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

The primary façade of the Woolworth building at 1330-36 Chestnut Street reflects the International Style of the Modern design movement which became a major force in commercial building from the mid-1940s through the 1960s. Elements that reflected this Modernistic aesthetic at the 1330-36 Chestnut Street Woolworth store were stark white masonry façade cladding, long horizontal banded windows, the “Woolworth” sign in bold, simple lettering and the angled glass storefront. Restraint and simplicity are apparent as the guiding principles of the

store's design. "Modern" is a word used in articles and want ads for the store. Rounded metal framing of the windows and storefront openings, and the quoins at the edges of the façade were design elements from the past. However, these are secondary aspects to the original design.

Jeffrey L. Baumol's "A Study in Postwar Architecture in Center City Philadelphia" is a detailed examination of International Style development in Center City on Chestnut and Sansom streets, between 10th Street to 23rd Street. Baumol identified 1945 through 1954 as the "Early Postwar Modern" period during which the Woolworth's at 1330-36 Chestnut Street was constructed.²⁵ Buildings during this period have varying degrees of the pre-war Art Deco/Art Moderne and Georgian Revival inspired expression and post-war Modern/International style design.

The Woolworth and Swartz Furniture stores (1106 Chestnut Street, Figure 19) are identified as having greater influences of the Modern/International Style than those from the pre-war period. Like the Woolworth's, Swartz Furniture is forward looking, in this case with large areas of glass and minimal adornment. Like Woolworth's, it is looking back in its use of masonry and rounded metal elements that serve to separate each story of the design.²⁶



Figure 19. Swartz Furniture store, 1106 Chestnut Street, 1946. Source: Philadelphia Architects and Buildings: https://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/pj_display.cfm/176213.

²⁵ Baumol, Jeffrey L., "A Study in Postwar Architecture in Center City, Philadelphia" MA thesis, University of Pennsylvania, 1992), 33.

²⁶ Baumol, "A Study in Postwar Architecture," 44.

By 1949 the International Style was being reflected in commercial design. World War II brought much domestic construction to a halt as resources were diverted for the war effort. The Woolworth building at 1330-36 Chestnut Street was one of the first large development projects in Center City after World War II.

There are two elements that reference pre-war design at the 1330-36 Chestnut Street Woolworth store. Baumol notes that rounded metal elements which frame window openings, and the storefront are referential to Streamline Moderne design.²⁷ It is also evident that the quoins forming the ends of the façade above the storefront, evoke a design aesthetic atypical of the International Style.



Figure 20. Streamline Moderne metal casing design detail, July 2023.

However, more design aspects reference International Style. The unembellished stark white masonry cladding in International Style suffices for ornament, rather than attaching components designed as “ornament.”

²⁷ Baumol, “A Study in Postwar Architecture,” 40.

Historical Precedent of International Style

The most prominent design elements of the Woolworth store were percolating in architectural development long before its construction in 1948-49. Narrow horizontal windows such as those on the 1330-36 Chestnut Street Woolworth's gradually became prominent in Modern architecture in the first few decades of the 20th century. Frank Lloyd Wright's 1909 National City Bank & Hotel (Park Inn) in Mason City, Iowa is an early example and contributed to the horizontality of his Prairie Style aesthetic.²⁸ (Figure 21).



Figure 21. National City Bank & Hotel (Park Inn), 1909. Source: Sharp, Dennis, *Twentieth Century Architecture: A Visual History. Facts on File*, New York, NY, 1991, p. 35.

A precedent for the narrow horizontal windows comes from European Modernism. Le Corbusier's Les Terrasses (Villa Stein) building, built in 1928, places narrow windows divided by stark black mullions across the entire façade. (Figure 22).

²⁸ Sharp, Dennis, *Twentieth Century Architecture: A Visual History* (New York: Facts on File, 1991), 35.



Figure 22. *Les Terrasses (Villa Stein)*, Le Corbusier, 1928. Source: Australian National University <http://rubens.anu.edu.au/htdocs/laserdisk/0233/23358.JPG>.

Edward Durell Stone's and Philip Godwin's Museum of Modern Art in New York City (Figure 23) is another example of precedence for the horizontal windows of the Woolworth's store.



Figure 23. *Museum of Modern Art*, New York, NY, 1939. Source: National Academy of Design <https://nationalacademy.emuseum.com/objects/10739>.

CRITERION H

H. Owing to its unique location or singular physical characteristic, represents an established and familiar visual feature of the neighborhood, community or City.

The visual impact of the Woolworth building at 1330-36 Chestnut Street is striking. The building's minimalism, white color and long horizontal windows are a combination that are not found together in adjacent structures. Immediately to the east of the building is the castle-like Hale Building. Even the construction of a contemporary storefront does not diminish the stark difference between the flamboyant Victorian, Hale Building with its rough stone façade and unusual roofed balconies and the minimally designed Woolworth building. The simple geometry and smooth surfaces of the Woolworth building are also accentuated by the contrast with the Chicago-style 1338-48 Chestnut Street building's corner bay windows, punched windows, and pier-and-spandrel system, located west of the Woolworth's. (Figure 24).



Figure 24. The Hale Building (left) and the 1338-48 Chestnut Street office building (far right) reinforces the visual features of the Woolworth building between them.

The Woolworth building's singular appearance is also pronounced in contrast with the Widener Building across Chestnut Street (Figure 25). The Widener's Beaux Arts inspired, columned lower stories are markedly different from the Woolworth's International Style inspired aesthetic.



Figure 25. Woolworth's minimalism is apparent in contrast with the Widener Building's traditional columned design across the street. Source: Google.

Conclusion

The property at 1330-36 Chestnut Street, constructed in 1948-49 as a purpose-built store for Woolworth's, is historically significant and should be listed individually on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. The property satisfies Criteria for Designation A, C, D, and H as delineated in Section 14-1004(1) of the Philadelphia Code. The construction of the Woolworth store at 1330-36 Chestnut Street is significant as part of a comprehensive nation-wide construction effort to develop large flagship stores in downtowns across the United States and Canada, satisfying Criterion A. The building is significant as a design based in the Modernist, International Style, with some references to the Art Deco/Streamline Modern styles, at a time when the International Style of the Modern design movement was a major force in commercial

building, satisfying Criteria C and D. Finally, the building's horizontality, minimal aesthetic and stark white color sets it apart from surrounding structures making it a distinctive feature in Center City generally and the 1300 block of Chestnut Street in particular, satisfying Criterion H.

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