### 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 on CD (MS Word format)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. ADDRESS OF HISTORIC RESOURCE</th>
<th>Street address: 1525 Chestnut Street</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Postal code: 19102</td>
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<td>Councilmanic District: 5th District</td>
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<th>2. NAME OF HISTORIC RESOURCE</th>
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<tr>
<td>Historic Name: A. Pomerantz &amp; Co.</td>
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<td>Common Name: Pomerantz Building</td>
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<th>3. TYPE OF HISTORIC RESOURCE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>☑ Building</td>
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<th>4. PROPERTY INFORMATION</th>
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<tr>
<td>Condition: ☑ excellent</td>
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<td>Occupancy: ☑ vacant</td>
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<td>Current use:</td>
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<th>5. BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION</th>
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<th>6. DESCRIPTION</th>
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<th>7. SIGNIFICANCE</th>
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<tr>
<td>Period of Significance (from year to year): 1917-1942</td>
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<tr>
<td>Date(s) of construction and/or alteration: 1917</td>
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<tr>
<td>Architect, engineer, and/or designer: Edward P. Simon and David B. Bassett</td>
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<tr>
<td>Builder, contractor, and/or artisan: Warren, Moore &amp; Co.</td>
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<td>Other significant persons:</td>
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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

SEE ATTACHED

9. NOMINATOR

Name with Title: Jon Farnham, Executive Director
Organization: Philadelphia Historical Commission
Street Address: City Hall, Room 576
City, State, and Postal Code: Philadelphia, PA 19107

Email: jon.farnham@phila.gov
Date: 22 March 2013
Telephone: (215) 686-7660

Nominator ☐ is ☒ is not the property owner.

PHC USE ONLY

Date of Receipt: ____________________________

☐ Correct-Complete ☐ Incorrect-Incomplete

Date: ____________________________

Date of Notice Issuance: ____________________________

Property Owner at Time of Notice

Name: ____________________________________________

Address: ____________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

City: ____________________________ State: ______ Postal Code: ______

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

Date(s) Reviewed by the Historical Commission: ____________________________

Date of Final Action: ____________________________

☐ Designated ☐ Rejected 3/16/07
5. **Boundary Description**

The boundary of the property at 1525 Chestnut Street, Parcel No. 1S09-0168, begins at a point on the north line of Chestnut Street (sixty feet wide) at the distance of one hundred and fifty-four feet eastward from the east line of 16\textsuperscript{th} Street (fifty feet wide). The boundary runs eastward from the beginning point twenty-two feet along the north line of Chestnut Street; thence northward one hundred and sixty-three feet on a line parallel with 16\textsuperscript{th} Street, to the south line of Ranstead Street (formerly Melloy Street); thence westward twenty-two feet along the south line of Ranstead Street; and thence southward one hundred and sixty-three feet on a line parallel with 16\textsuperscript{th} Street to the beginning point on the north line of Chestnut Street.
6. DESCRIPTION

The A. Pomerantz & Co. Building is located at 1525 Chestnut Street, Parcel No. 1S09-0168, in Center City Philadelphia. It stands on the north side of Chestnut Street in the middle of the 1500 block.

The Pomerantz Building is 22 feet wide along Chestnut Street and 163 feet deep, extending from Chestnut Street north to Ranstead Street. The 70-foot tall, six-story building has a reinforced concrete frame, floors, and roof. The front façade is clad in limestone and terra cotta and includes large expanses of glass. Originally, the storefront area was comprised of a large, projecting, central bulk display window flanked by recessed entry doors and smaller projecting display windows. In 1948, the storefront windows were replaced with flush storefront windows and the storefront section of the façade was clad with masonry tiles. The extant storefront sign was added in 1962. A roll-down storefront gate was added later. The shaft of the building extends up from the storefront base for four floors. Slender pilasters soar upward unbroken by horizontal members from the storefront to the sixth floor. The central pilasters terminate at ornate capitals. Within the pilasters, the four-story voids are fully glazed. Slim metal windows frames hold the glass in place. Some of the original plate glass windows have been replaced with jalousie windows. The sixth-floor front façade and cornice complete the Pomerantz Building like a capital on a classical column. Slender pilasters set on an entablature at the base of the sixth floor frame large sheets of glass at the top floor and terminate in ornate capitals. Above the windows, an unusual cornice cantilevers out over the sidewalk. The fascia below the cornice is incised with the business name "A. Pomerantz & Co." The bracketed cornice is clad in classical ornament cast in white terra cotta. It is topped by red-clay, barrel, roofing tiles.

The side and rear walls are 12-inch, red brick curtain walls. The upper floors of the west façade are exposed above the adjacent, shorter building and are pierced with openings for windows and air conditions. A faded painted Pomerantz sign is located in the upper, southern corner of the west façade. The upper floors of the east façade are exposed above the adjacent, shorter building and are unfenestrated brick. At the rear along Ranstead Street, the rear façade is brick and includes a loading area at the ground floor and a Philadelphia fire stair with metal balconies and windows at the upper floors. The roof is flat.
South or Chestnut Street façade of the Pomerantz Building looking northeast.
South or Chestnut Street façade of the Pomerantz Building looking north.
South or Chestnut Street façade of the Pomerantz Building looking northwest.
Faded painted sign on the west façade of the Pomerantz Building.
West façade of the Pomerantz Building.
East façade of the Pomerantz Building.
North or Ranstead Street façade of the Pomerantz Building looking southeast.
North or Ranstead Street façade of the Pomerantz Building looking southwest.
Detail of the cornice of the Pomerantz Building.
Storefront area of the Pomerantz Building.
Storefront sign on the Pomerantz Building.
7. **STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

Designed by the architectural firm of Simon & Bassett for A. Pomerantz & Co., a stationary, printing, and office furniture firm, the Pomerantz Building is a significant historic building that merits designation by the Philadelphia Historical Commission and inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. Located at 1525 Chestnut Street in Center City Philadelphia, the Pomerantz Building, a diminutive, innovative skyscraper, satisfies Criteria for Designation d and f as enumerated in Section 14-1004 of the Philadelphia Code; it “embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style” and “contains elements of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship that represent a significant innovation.”

**AMEN POMERANTZ**

Amen Pomerantz, a Russian Jew, was born in 1866 or 1867 and immigrated to the United States in the early 1880s.¹ He opened his first stationary store in 1888; it was located at 129 S. 8th Street in Philadelphia’s original business district.² Sensing a major shift westward in commercial activity with the construction of City Hall at Penn Square, Pomerantz relocated in 1898 to 21 S. 15th Street in the city’s nascent new business center.³ Celebrating the relocation of A. Pomerantz & Co. to Philadelphia’s burgeoning new business district adjacent to City Hall, the stationer adopted “In the Heart of Philadelphia” as the company’s slogan.⁴ An astute businessman, Pomerantz steadily expanded his stationary firm, moving to larger quarters at 22 S. 15th Street about 1903 and at 34-36 S. 15th Street a few years later.⁵ Trade journals publicized “the remarkable growth” of the firm,” acclaiming A. Pomerantz & Co. as “a successful and fast-growing house.”⁶ At the end of 1906, *Walden’s Stationer and Printer* reported that:

> The business of A. Pomerantz & Co. has grown so heavy that it has been found necessary to place an order with a Philadelphia firm for a number of delivery wagons, especially built for quick delivery service. In addition to the usual marks of the trade, the wagons will bear the firm’s private mark, “In the Heart of Philadelphia.” During the last four months, business has been the best in its history.⁷

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Amen Pomerantz, from *Walden’s Stationer and Printer*, 25 June 1906, p. 14; and *The American Stationer and Office Outfitter*, 16 September 1922, p. 9.
Amen Pomerantz’s personal life progressed as quickly as his professional life during this period. In 1891, he lived at 240 S. 8th Street, not far from his stationary shop at 129 S. 8th Street. By 1896, he lived at 518 Spruce Street. In 1900, Pomerantz was 32 years of age, unmarried, and boarding at 2931 N. Camac Street, the house of clothing manufacturer Sollis Cohen of Cohen & Bachenheimer (339 Market Street). Ten years later, in 1910, Pomerantz was married to Clova M. Goldberg, a 24-year-old German Jew, had two young children, employed two live-in servants, and owned a home at 3550 N. 21st Street in the Tioga section of Philadelphia. In 1916, when he celebrated his 50th birthday, Amen Pomerantz lived at 2053 W. Tioga Street. By 1920, Amen and Clova Pomerantz resided in a large, new, suburban house at 624 W. Cliveden Street in the W. Mt. Airy neighborhood with their four children, Clova’s mother, and a live-in chauffeur. Pomerantz epitomized the oft-told, turn-of-the-century, rags-to-riches tale of the immigrant in the New World.

“THE FINEST STATIONARY STORE IN AMERICA”

By about 1915, Pomerantz had concluded that the building at 34-36 S. 15th Street was inadequate for his growing office outfitting business and he began searching for a site in the heart of the business district to erect a building designed specifically to accommodate his stationary and office outfitting firm. His search led him to the lot around the corner at 1525 Chestnut Street, where he could demolish an obsolete three-story commercial building and construct a building to his precise specifications.
On 30 December 1916, Pomerantz leased the property at 1525 Chestnut Street for one dollar from Frank Delong, who owned the property with the estate of his deceased sister, Ida Delong. Pursuant to a perpetual ground lease, Pomerantz agreed to pay an annual ground rent of $11,250 plus all taxes. He also agreed to erect a new building within one year costing not less than $60,000 and to maintain at least $40,000 in fire insurance on the building. Finally, Delong agreed to sell the property fee simple to Pomerantz at any time for a pre-negotiated price of $225,000.13

While negotiating with Delong for the property, Pomerantz commissioned the architectural firm of Simon & Bassett to design a new building to house his business on the lot at 1525 Chestnut Street that would meet the lease requirement to erect a $60,000 building within one year. On 14 October 1916, the Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide reported that Simon & Bassett were preparing plans for the new building for Pomerantz.14 The same day, The American Contractor reported that Simon & Bassett had “nearly completed” plans for a $60,000, six-story, 22' by 163', steel frame, brick, and hollow tile building.15 On 18 November, The American Contractor advised construction companies that bids for the new Pomerantz Building were due to the architects by 22 November. Significantly, the notice advised that the design documents now called for a reinforced concrete frame in place of the initially proposed steel frame. The notice also advised that the building would be clad with brick, limestone, cut stone, and terra cotta, and topped by slag roofing.16

Simon & Bassett’s sudden shift from a steel frame to reinforced concrete frame between October and November 1916 can be explained by the impact of the war raging in Europe on the United States building materials market. Although the United States did not declare war on Germany until 6 April 1917, almost three years after the outbreak of hostilities on 28 July 1914, American manufacturers had been supplying the allies with munitions and materials since the start of the conflict, straining the U.S. steel market and making it expensive and difficult to obtain the material for construction. At the time, the trade journal Concrete eloquently advocated for employing reinforced concrete in construction while preserving steel for the war effort, advice that architects Simon & Bassett heeded.

Unfilled demands for steel have for some time held up construction and this situation promises to become acute through the increased necessities of war. The Chamber of
Commerce of the U.S. sounds an alarm and urges the substitution of other materials wherever it is possible to do so. … Concrete has repeatedly urged more consideration by designers, of reinforced concrete for many structures where the steel habit persists but where concrete can be used to ultimate profit. … The steel for reinforcing is relatively small in tonnage and goes through the mills in shorter time and requires no fabrication. Save the steel. Use concrete.17

The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide reported on 6 December 1916 that Simon & Bassett had awarded contracts for the new Pomerantz Building.18 A few days later, The American Contractor provided the contracting details. Simon & Bassett awarded the general contract for the Pomerantz Building, now valued at $125,000, to Warren, Moore & Co., a construction company headquartered at the Commercial Trust Building. The heating contract was let to S. Faith & Co. located at 2427 Penn Avenue. The contract for the electrical wiring was let to United Electrical Construction Co. located at 1727 Sansom Street. F. Dickinson Shaw was retained as the consulting engineer to design the reinforced concrete frame. Shaw’s office was located in the nearby Perry Building at the southeast corner of 16th and Chestnut Streets.19 She and his partner, Otto H. Genter Jr., had recently designed and constructed one of the largest and most complex reinforced concrete frames ever attempted, that of the second phase of the Traymore Hotel in Atlantic City, New Jersey.20 By 23 December 1916, when The American Contractor reported that roofing contract had been let to William J. Byrd of 1427 Catharine Street, work had begun on the Pomerantz Building.21 The City of Philadelphia issued the building permit for the project, No. 8809, to Simon & Bassett on 29 December 1916, one day before Delong and Pomerantz signed the lease agreement. The permit application indicated that Warner Reinforced Concrete, also known as the Charles Warner Co., headquartered in Wilmington, Delaware with facilities in Philadelphia, provided the concrete itself.22 The City issued a second permit for the project on 2 January 1917, No. 25, to Jump House Wrecking Co., 217 Parkway Building, for the demolition of the existing building to clear the site for the new building.23 On 4 August 1917, the American Contractor reported that all Philadelphia Electric Co. work for the building had been let to Sterling Bronze of 16 E. 40th Street in New York City.24

The American Stationer and Office Outfitter reported that construction progressed quickly “regardless of the shortage of labor and difficulty in getting steel and other materials” resulting from the expanding war.25 Completed on schedule and within the requirements of the lease, A. Pomerantz & Co. opened its doors to the public on 1 October 1917, only nine months after construction began.26 Critics hailed the Pomerantz Building as “the finest stationary store in America,” a “magnificent new building,” “one of the finest stationary and office outfiting stores of its kind in the country,” and “magnificently equipped with all the modern devices for efficiency and comfort.”27 They called it “modern,” a “new, unusual store, which is located in the finest retail section of the city of Philadelphia,” and “a handsome structure, built especially for the company.”28

Simon & Bassett’s Pomerantz Building at 1525 Chestnut Street is 22 feet wide and 163 feet deep, extending from Chestnut Street north to Ranstead Street. The 70-foot tall, six-story building has a reinforced concrete frame, floors, and roof. The front façade is clad in limestone and terra cotta and sports large expanses of glass. The side and rear walls are 12-inch brick curtain walls.29 Originally, the storefront area was comprised of a large, projecting, central bulk display window flanked by entry doors and smaller display windows.
We invite you to visit the finest stationery store in America

The new Pomerantz store at 1525 Chestnut Street opens to-day. A model of its kind, this store is arranged, first of all, for convenience in buying, the various departments from basement to sixth floor being laid out primarily with this in view. Arranged on the various floors are the newest and most complete stocks, whether in stationery, office furniture, printing and engraving, or the other departments that go to make a complete stationery establishment, as follows:

First Floor:  
Retail Stationery — Blank Books, Loose Leaf, Fancy Goods — Novelties, Fountain Pens, Cutlery—Social Stationery and Engraving

Mezzanine:  
Printing Sales Office — Telephone Order Department

Second Floor:  
Office Furniture in Oak—Filing Cabinets in Steel and Wood — Business Systems and All Steel Safes

Third Floor:  
Office Furniture in Mahogany — Fine Period Suites — Library and Directors’ Tables

Fourth Floor:  
Accounting Office — Mail and Country Order Departments

Fifth Floor:  
Engraving, Ruling, Bookbinding

Sixth Floor:  
Printing

We invite you to inspect this new store which we now occupy.

Pomerantz

Everything for Your Office

1525 Chestnut Street

Around the corner from our old location

Opening Day Announcement, from the Philadelphia Inquirer, 1 October 1917, p. 1.
Rendering of Pomerantz Building, from AIA/T-Square Yearbook, 1917, p. 32.
The north side of the 1500-block of Chestnut Street, Elvino V. Smith, *Atlas of the 6th, 9th, and 10th Wards of the City of Philadelphia*, 1921, pl. 18.

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*View of the First Floor Looking Toward the Entrance of A. Pomerantz & Co.*

Sales Floor, from *The American Stationer and Office Outfitter*, 13 October 1917.
Inside the A. Pomerantz & Co. building, the stationary and office outfitting stock was stored in the basement, which was linked to all floors by an electric dumbwaiter. The grand first floor, with a 19'-6" ceiling height, was devoted to retail sales of general stationary products. The shipping department was located in the rear, on Ranstead Street. A mezzanine with the executive offices overlooked sales floor, allowing Pomerantz and his management staff to monitor the clerks. The second and third floors were devoted to the display and sales of office furniture. On the third floor, office furniture was arranged in model rooms. The fourth floor housed the accounting and mail order departments. The fifth floor housed the engraving, ruling, and book binding facilities. And the printing shop occupied the sixth floor. The building boasted modern equipment including a pneumatic tube communications system and a passenger elevator.\(^{30}\)

The Pomerantz Building was more than a structure to house the company’s activities; it became the company’s logo, the essence of its brand. Upon the completion of the building, its front façade immediately became the public face of the company, representing it in all advertising. The façade epitomized the company; it presented a face that was simultaneously traditional and modern, sophisticated and scientific, and appealing to customers and potential customers.\(^{31}\)

Blotter featuring the Pomerantz Building, from *The American Printer*, 5 August 1919, p. 40.

Detail from an A. Pomerantz and Co. advertisement featuring the Pomerantz Building, from the *Evening Public Ledger*, 27 June 1920, p. 4.
A. Pomerantz & Co. sales catalogue featuring the Pomerantz Building, from The Inland Printer, May 1919, p. 188.

Detail from an A. Pomerantz and Co. advertisement featuring the Pomerantz Building, from the Evening Public Ledger, 23 May 1921, p. 4.
SIMON & BASSETT, ARCHITECTS

Architect Edward P. Simon was born in Philadelphia on 1 June 1878, the son of Frederick Paul and Mary Ann (Miles) Simon. He graduated from Central High School in Philadelphia in 1895 and received a diploma in Architectural Drawing from Drexel Institute's day school and certificate in Building Construction from Drexel's night school, both in 1900. He worked from 1900 to 1903 as a draftsman for Dull & Coates, an architectural and engineering firm. From 1903 to 1906, he partnered with Francis G. Caldwell. After working as a sole practitioner, Simon partnered with David B. Bassett as Simon & Bassett from 1908 to 1919.

Architect David B. Bassett, the son of Walter S. and Emma S. Bassett, was born on 6 September 1879 in New Jersey and attended the Bacon Academy in Woodstown, New Jersey and high school in Swedesboro, New Jersey. By 1902, Bassett was listed in Hendrick's Commercial Register of the United States as an architect in New Jersey. Bassett studied architectural design at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in 1902 and 1903. By about 1904, Bassett was working as a draftsman for Edward Simon, who promoted him to head draftsman and then full partner in the firm of Simon & Bassett in 1908.

In 1908, Edward P. Simon and David B. Bassett formed their eponymous architectural firm, with offices at 1112 Chestnut Street. During its first year, Simon & Bassett constructed residences for the Oak Lane Park Building Company. In 1909, the firm erected a Neo-Classical mansion for Alfred E. Burk at 1500 N. Broad Street in Philadelphia; in 1911, Simon & Bassett designed the Manufacturers Club at 150 S. Broad Street; in 1912, the firm constructed the Garden Pier in Atlantic City, NJ; and in 1914, the firm designed a police and fire station for the City of Philadelphia at 22nd Street and Hunting Park Avenue. In 1916, Simon's younger brother Grant Simon joined the firm. During World War I, Simon & Bassett collaborated with architect G. Edwin Brumbaugh on a residential development for the Chester Shipbuilding Co. (Emergency Fleet Corporation) in Chester, Pennsylvania, which included 227 dwellings, a boarding house for 25, a hotel, and 23 apartments. In 1918 or 1919, Bassett left the Simon brothers, who changed the firm's name to Simon & Simon.

After the dissolution of Simon & Bassett, Simon & Simon designed and constructed many important buildings. Bassett, on the other hand, appears to have been involved in a handful of minor designs before disappearing from Philadelphia's architectural scene about 1930. Simon & Simon completed numerous significant commissions in Philadelphia including several buildings for the Lit Brothers Department Store, 701 Market Street; the Municipal Stadium on S. Broad Street (1925); Rodeph Shalom Synagogue at 607 N. Broad Street (1926); the Fidelity-Philadelphia Trust Building at 123 S. Broad Street (1928); and the Strawbridge & Clothier Department Store at 801 Market Street (1928). Outside the city, Simon & Simon are known for their monument to General George Gordon Meade with sculptor Charles Grafly in Washington, DC (1927) and the First Camden National Bank in Camden, New Jersey (1929). Although Grant Simon withdrew from the firm about 1927, Edward P. Simon continued to use the name Simon & Simon until 1936. He then practiced briefly on his own before establishing a partnership with architect Lyle F. Boulware, which endured under the name of Simon & Boulware until Simon's death in 1949. Grant Simon served as the first chair of the Philadelphia Historical Commission, leading the preservation organization from 1956 until his death in 1967.
A Significant Innovation

Section 14-1004(1)(d) and (f) of the Philadelphia Code authorize the Philadelphia Historical Commission to designate a building for preservation if it embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style and contains elements of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship that represent a significant innovation. Embodying distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style and containing elements of design that represent significant innovations, the Pomerantz Building qualifies for and merits designation as historic and listing on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places.


By all accounts, Amen Pomerantz’s brilliant business success resulted from his deft integration of the qualities of a refined, Old World gentleman with those of the quintessentially modern efficiency expert. He was part aesthete and part engineer, an interior decorator and an information technologist. Celebrating the grand opening of his store in 1917, The American Stationer and Office Outfitter reported that “Mr. Pomerantz has found the happy medium between what has been called ‘soul-less efficiency’ - which allows for no deviation from perfection - and what might be called the old happy-family system, which is so hard to find today.”

By the second decade of the twentieth century, Scientific Management, the efficiency philosophy first enumerated by Philadelphian Frederick Winslow Taylor, had permeated the organization of offices and design of office furniture as business owners sought to maximize productivity and profits from their white-collar workers. Pomerantz and his colleagues in the office outfitting industry marketed furniture and other equipment that was not only aesthetically pleasing but also ruthlessly efficient. By 1917, the office outfitter was more than a salesman of paper, pens, and desk chairs; he was also an efficiency expert, who provided highly specialized
forms and filing systems, tabulators and copiers, and office furnishings and layouts to promote the scientific production, processing, and dissemination of information. With his new store, Pomerantz sought to present his own business as the paradigm of the attractive, efficient, modern office.

In their design for Amen Pomerantz, architects Simon and Bassett drew inspiration from the dichotomy characterizing their client and his business and deftly integrated vocabularies and elements to create a building that is simultaneously beautiful and efficient, classical and modern, quiet and audacious, poised and dynamic. The Pomerantz Building, a diminutive skyscraper, is the Kritios Boy of early twentieth-century architecture. Like the Kritios Boy, the famed sculpture that marks the transition from the Archaic to the Classical Period in ancient Greek art, the Pomerantz Building marks a transition in skyscraper design. And like the Kritios Boy, which first exhibited the canonical concept of contrapposto, the Pomerantz Building exhibits a “delicate balance of movement” effected by the tension between the beautiful and efficient, the classical and modern, on the front façade.

The Pomerantz Building evidences a significant innovation, but one that is aesthetic, not technological, even though its curtain wall and reinforced-concrete skeleton frame were technologically advanced. Architectural historians disagree about the identity of the first true curtain-wall skyscraper. Some argue that William Le Baron Jenney’s Home Insurance Building, built in Chicago in 1885, was the first. Others contend that Burnham & Atwood’s Reliance Building, built in Chicago in 1895, was the first. However, all agree that the steel-frame, curtain-wall skyscraper had emerged in its mature form by 1896, 20 years before Simon & Bassett designed the Pomerantz Building, when Daniel Burnham completed the Fisher Building in Chicago. Burnham’s Land Title Building of 1897, which stands at the corner of Broad and Chestnut Streets, less than two blocks from the Pomerantz Building, was Philadelphia’s first Chicago-style skyscraper.

The reinforced-concrete skeleton frame was likewise fully-developed many years before the Pomerantz Building was constructed. Designed by architect A.O. Elzner and engineer Henry Hooper and constructed in 1902, the Ingalls Building in Cincinnati is considered the first concrete-framed skyscraper. The Ingalls Building, which is 16 stories and 210 feet tall, is a hybrid building, combining a reinforced-concrete frame with load-bearing concrete walls. Concrete pioneer Ernest Ransome is credited with devising engineering advances between about 1900 and 1902 that led directly to the pure reinforced-concrete skeleton frame, which did not rely on load-bearing walls. As early as 1903, several factory buildings claimed reinforced-concrete skeleton frames and curtain walls including a building for the Kelly & Jones Company in Greensburg, Pennsylvania; the Foster-Armstrong Piano Company in Rochester, New York; the United Shoe Machinery Company in Beverly, Massachusetts; and a building at the Pacific Borax complex in Bayonne, New Jersey. By 1908, more than 150 reinforced-concrete framed buildings over 85 feet in height had been constructed in the United States.

A center of research into concrete, Philadelphia was at the forefront of the development of concrete construction techniques at the turn-of-the-century. Evidencing this movement, Emile G. Perrot presented a paper and led a discussion on reinforced concrete in building construction at the Engineers’ Club of Philadelphia on 20 February 1904, just after Ransome provided a path to the true reinforced concrete skeleton frame. Numerous reinforced concrete frame buildings were constructed in Philadelphia prior to the Pomerantz Building in 1917. Albert Kahn’s Packard Motor Car Company (1910) on N. Broad Street is one of the most remarkable. Less remarkable and more typical is eight-story apartment house designed by architects McIlvain & Roberts for the northwest corner of Juniper and Spruce Streets in Philadelphia in 1906.
COMPLEXITY AND CONTRADICTION

At the Pomerantz Building, Simon and Bassett availed themselves of the recent technological advances in skeletal-frame and curtain-wall design, but, rather than following their predecessors, instead rethought the skyscraper type to create a building that precisely fit their client’s branding needs. The Pomerantz Building exhibits the so-called columnar theory of skyscraper design advocated by famed Chicago architect Louis Sullivan. Satisfying the Aristotelian requirement that every work of art have a beginning, middle, and end, which Sullivan promoted, the front façade is organized like a classical column with a base, shaft, and capital. However, all three elements of the columnar façade are reimagined as both traditional and modern, creating a visual tension at the façade through complexity and contradiction that is analogous to the Kritios Boy’s contrapposto. The reinforced-concrete frame frees the façade from bearing any load, allowing it to become a mere curtain responsible for keeping the weather out, letting light in, and, most importantly, representing the business and its owner to potential customers. Liberated from its supporting role, the façade is a star, acting out the story of A. Pomerantz & Co. for all who pass by.
The base, which one expects to be solid and supporting, is a dematerialized, glazed void made possible by the advanced structural system. Although surrounded by a traditional limestone frame, the unexpected void at the base undermines expectations and bestows the building with dynamism. At the nearby Manufacturers’ Club Building, which Simon & Bassett had completed a few years earlier, the massive stone columns at the base appear to support the masonry above, even though the stone cladding hangs from the steel frame, which does the real work. Despite its advanced skeletal structure, the Manufacturers’ Club Building is clad in a traditional frock; at the Pomerantz Building, the traditional frock is pulled aside, playfully revealing the modern store behind.


At the Pomerantz Building, the shaft of the skyscraper, which extends up from the storefront base for four floors, is likewise dynamic. Slender pilasters, which represent structure, but are not structural, soar upward unbroken by horizontal members from the base to the capital, accentuating the diminutive skyscraper’s verticality. A reviewer in 1917 observed that it is “a six-story building with a white stone front, a landmark because of the classic lines of the pillars that extend from the second floor to the top.”41 Within the pilasters, the four-story voids are fully glazed. Slim metal windows frames hold the glass in place, but do not disrupt the verticality. More significantly, the spandrels panels that cover the floor plates where they meet the front facade are identically glazed, creating unbroken spans of glass. With these unabashedly modern curtains of glass, Simon & Bassett abandoned the traditional punched window, which is native to the masonry load-bearing wall, but not the skeletal frame. The windows at the Manufacturers’ Club Building are punched in a traditional fashion into the masonry curtain wall even though the masonry hangs from the steel frame; at the Pomerantz Building, where the masonry is condensed from wall to border, the windows are modern glass curtains.
The sixth-floor façade and cornice complete the Pomerantz Building like a capital on a classical column. Slender pilasters set on an entablature at the base of the sixth floor, the only horizontal element above the storefront, frame large sheets of glass and continue the upward thrust of the lower floors. Above the windows, an unusual cornice cantilevers out over the sidewalk. Clad in archaeologically-accurate, classical ornament cast in white terra cotta and topped by red-clay, barrel, roofing tiles, the Vitruvian bracketed and coffered cornice is the most overtly traditional element on the façade. However, the radical projection of the cornice, which extends more than seven feet out from the plane of the façade and almost appears to float above the sidewalk,
challenges the traditional styling of the cornice. Such a projection would be impossible with a trabeated, masonry, load-bearing construction system found in a Greek temple, upon which this ornament would be at home. Simon & Bassett used the daring projection of the cantilevered cornice as a reminder that the building’s structure is modern, technologically-advanced reinforced-concrete skeleton. Like the base and shaft of the façade, its capital is complex and contradictory. A tense balance of traditional and modern, the façade is quietly dynamic. Interestingly, Simon & Bassett topped their more traditionally styled Manufacturers’ Club Building with a similar projecting cornice, perhaps as a nod to the steel frame behind the stone façade. Sadly, that cornice has been removed.

The Pomerantz Building embodies distinguishing characteristics of the Neo-Classical architectural style and, in its rethinking of that style, contains elements of design that represent significant innovations.

THE POMERantz BUILDING IN CONTEXT

The innovations at the Pomerantz Building can only be perceived when the building is placed in context. Simon & Bassett’s glass curtain wall for the Pomerantz Building was not the first of its kind, but it was innovative. Architectural historians usually attribute the first glass curtain walls to British architect Peter Ellis, who constructed Oriel Chambers and 16 Cook Street, both in Liverpool, in 1864 and 1866 respectively. Both innovative buildings share similarities with the Pomerantz Building, especially in the large glazed areas separated by thin vertical members that allude to the underlying structures, but are not structural. However, in both cases, the windows are also separated by masonry spandrels at the floor levels, suppressing the verticality. Although both buildings are well known today by architects and historians, it is unlikely that Simon and Bassett were aware of them when they were designing the Pomerantz Building.

Architect Peter Ellis, Oriel Chambers (1864) and 16 Cook Street (1866), Liverpool, England.
Louis Sullivan, Gage Building, Chicago, 1898-99; Purcell, Feick & Elmslie, Edison Building, Chicago, 1912.

Although it is unlikely that the Ellis-designed buildings influenced Simon and Bassett as they designed the Pomerantz Building, it is very likely that a series of buildings designed by Chicago architects during the preceding decades did influence the Philadelphia architects. At the turn of the twentieth century, Chicago architects were leaders in architectural innovation, especially in the design of skyscrapers. Louis Sullivan's Gage Building at 18 S. Michigan Avenue in Chicago, built in 1898-99, likely served as an inspiration for Simon & Bassett's design. Like the Pomerantz Building, Sullivan's eight-story building, which is composed like a classical column with a base, shaft, and capital, achieves a soaring verticality with the superposition of slender pilasters over a curtain wall within a bordering frame. Like the Pomerantz pilasters, the Gage plasters reference the underlying structure without actually supporting the building. Also, at both buildings, the pilasters terminate in ornate capitals. Unlike the Pomerantz Building’s, the Gage Building’s curtain wall is not entirely glass, but is comprised of glass and solid panels, mitigating the vertical thrust with horizontal elements. Architect George Grant Elmslie worked on the Gage Building as an associate in Sullivan's architectural office. More than a decade later, he and his firm, Purcell, Feick & Elmslie, designed the Edison Building for 229 S. Wabash Avenue in Chicago. Like the façades of the Pomerantz and Gage Buildings, the façade of the Edison Building is organized like a classical column with a base, shaft, and capital. And like the Pomerantz Building, the Edison Building sports a tripartite front façade that is bounded by a thin masonry border framing a void at the base, a window wall articulated with slender vertical pilasters at the shaft, and a bold masonry parapet at the capital. However, like the Gage
Building, the window wall at the shaft is also articulated with masonry spandrel panels at the floor levels, offsetting the primary verticality with a secondary horizontality. The true innovation at the Pomerantz Building is the unbroken, four-story-tall, spans of glass separated by slender piers that bear no load. Eschewing any horizontal lines between the second and fourth floors, the Pomerantz Building is an early but fully-realized modern building. The front façade not only carries no load; it also frankly admits that it carries no load.

Although not similar in form or appearance to the Pomerantz Building, a third building by a Chicago architect, Frank Lloyd Wright, the Larkin Company Administration Building, which was constructed in Buffalo, New York in 1907, must have influenced Simon & Bassett as well as Pomerantz as they planned the Chestnut Street building. Lauded in the architectural, office outfitting, and popular presses as the perfect office environment, Wright’s Larkin Building and its custom office furnishings were optimized in every possible way including technologically and aesthetically to enhance the administrative activities they facilitated. Unlike anything that preceded it, the Larkin Building epitomized the newly-theorized scientific office inside and out. For example, The Business Man’s Journal, a trade magazine devoted to the scientific management of offices, extolled that “This building is complete in every detail of construction and unique in nearly every feature of its arrangement and equipment. In its planning and building, adaptability to the peculiar work to be carried on within its walls was the paramount consideration. From this … the building derives its general character.” For Wright, Larkin, and other proponents of scientific office management, the modern office building was a large piece of modern office furniture, scientifically and aesthetically optimized for its tasks. Like Wright, Simon & Bassett strove to create the scientifically optimized environment precisely suited to the operations of A. Pomerantz & Co. They strove to create a building that would promote A. Pomerantz & Co. as both aesthetically sophisticated and technologically advanced. The façade was an urbane, subtle billboard for the business within the walls. In the Pomerantz Building, A. Pomerantz & Co. practiced the religion of scientific office management that it preached, and promoted. The Pomerantz Building was a groundbreaking structure.

Frank Lloyd Wright, Larkin Administrative Building and clerk’s desk, Buffalo, New York, 1907.
The Pomerantz Building served the needs of the stationary and office outfitting company for many decades. Simon & Simon, the successor firm to Simon & Bassett, altered the building for Pomerantz in 1920; the nature of the alterations is unknown, but they were likely rather minor. In 1926, *Office Appliances: The Magazine of Office Equipment* reported that Pomerantz had leased the lot to the west of the building at 1527 Chestnut Street, where he planned to build a second six-story building “harmonizing with the present structure.” Of course, Pomerantz never built the second building. The failure to construct the new building on Chestnut Street was not an indication of a lack of success at A. Pomerantz & Co., which grew into one of the nation’s largest distributors of office furniture and supplies.

As Amen Pomerantz reached old age, he and his wife Clova sold their large suburban house at 624 W. Cliveden Street on 13 January 1940. About this time, Pomerantz turned the office outfitting company over to his three sons, Richard, Austin, and Lester. Richard, the eldest son, ran the company for more than two prosperous decades, during which time he expanded the business. Amen Pomerantz died in 1942. On 3 September 1941, A. Pomerantz & Co. purchased the property with the Pomerantz Building at 1525 Chestnut Street for $110,000 from the heirs of Frank and Ida Delong, which it had leased since 1916. In 1948, the Pomerantz brothers altered the original storefront, replacing the elegant storefront windows with recessed entrances with “new flush bulk windows.” It is likely that the extant stone tiling that hides the original limestone storefront was installed at that time as well. In 1962, the Cutler Sign Advertising Company installed the extant signage above the entrance at the storefront.

The company continued to expand and prosper over the next decades, purchasing warehouse and manufacturing plants in Philadelphia, despite some setbacks. On 29 May 1944, Richard Pomerantz signed the sales documents when A. Pomerantz & Co. purchased properties at Ranstead and Mole Streets, behind the Chestnut Street building, for additional storage. In December 1946, the new warehouse at Ranstead and Mole suffered a minor fire. The main Pomerantz Building suffered a minor fire on the sixth floor in 1957. All 175 Pomerantz employees escaped without injury and the fire caused little damage. Fire again struck the Pomerantz Building in 1984; it sustained fire and water damage to the third, fourth, fifth, and sixth floors.

Lester Pomerantz, the youngest son of Amen and Clova, took over from his older brother Richard in the 1960s and ran the business until he was tragically killed in an automobile accident in Yugoslavia in 1982. Louis Applebaum, the vice president of A. Pomerantz & Co. at the time of Lester’s death in 1982, took the reins, marking the first time someone other than a Pomerantz family member had run the business. In 1983, Applebaum purchased A. Pomerantz & Co. from the family, ending the family’s 95-year association with the firm. After presiding over
significant growth, Applebaum sold the business to investors in 1988, but continued to manage it until retiring in 1990. Richard Pomerantz died in 1993. Austin Pomerantz, the last of the three sons, died in 2002. A. Pomerantz & Co. went through a series of consolidations and mergers after the Pomerantz family sold its interests in the office outfitting business. It was known as Pomerantz & Company, International Business Interiors Corporation, Boston Office Products, Inc., and Philadelphia Discount Office Supplies, Inc. before reverting back to A. Pomerantz & Co. In December 1994, Garry Maddox, retired center fielder for the Philadelphia Phillies, purchased the firm, which he still operates, but not from the building at 1525 Chestnut Street. At the time of the writing of this nomination, the Pomerantz Building is vacant.

CONCLUSION

The Pomerantz Building at 1525 Chestnut Street is a significant historic building that merits designation by the Philadelphia Historical Commission and inclusion on the Philadelphia Register of Historic Places. A diminutive, innovative skyscraper with four-story glass curtain walls, the Pomerantz Building satisfies Criteria for Designation d and f as enumerated in Section 14-1004 of the Philadelphia Code; it “embodies distinguishing characteristics” of the Neo-Classical architectural style and, as is evidenced by its pioneering window system and other façade features, “contains elements of design … that represent a significant innovation.”
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City of Philadelphia Permit Applications
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Application for a Street Advertising Device, 23 January 1962.
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28 “ELDORADO Liberty Loan Window Displays,” Graphite, v. 20, no. 6 (June 1918), 4334-4335; “A. Pomerantz & Co. to Move into New Building,” The Inland Printer, v. 59, no. 6 (September 1917), 827.

29 Structural details are provided by the Sanborn Fire Insurance Map Company, 1950.


31 See A. Pomerantz & Co. advertisements in the Evening Public Ledger: 28 May 1920, p. 11; 27 June 1920, p. 4; 29 June 1920, p. 11; 16 September 1920, p. 20; 28 September 1920, p. 4; and 23 May 1921, p. 4. See also The American Printer, v. 69, no. 3 (5 August 1919), 40; The Inland Printer, v. 63, no. 2 (May 1919), 188.


44 The Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide [v. 35, no. 7 (18 February 1920), 128; and v. 35, no. 9 (3 March 1920), 177] reported that Simon & Simon had received bids and awarded the contract for the work to H.M. Irwin.


46 Philadelphia Department of Records, Deed DWH 971-341.


49 See zoning permit application No. 10599B to the Philadelphia Department of Licenses & Inspections, submitted by contractor Haverstock-Borthwick and approved on 13 September 1948.

50 See Application for a Street Advertising Device, Philadelphia Department of Licenses & Inspections, with various dates from 23 January 1962 to 1 February 1962.


52 Philadelphia Department of Records, Deed CJP 550-593.


55 See zoning permit application No. 76411 to the Philadelphia Department of Licenses & Inspections to repair the fire and water damage, submitted by contractor F.B. Davis & Sons and approved on 3 April 1984.