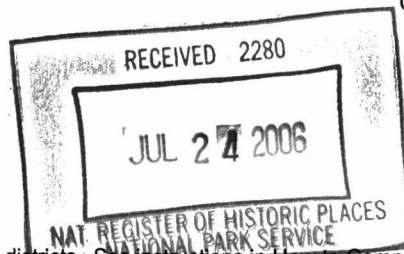


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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
REGISTRATION FORM



This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "X" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name United States Post Office—Main Branch

other names/site number N/A

2. Location

street & number 2970 Market Street not for publication N/A  
city or town Philadelphia vicinity N/A  
state Pennsylvania code PA county Philadelphia code 101  
zip code 19104

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1986, as amended, I hereby certify that this X nomination        request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property X meets        does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant X nationally        statewide        locally. (       See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Andrea McDonald July 20, 2006  
Signature of certifying official Date  
Pennsylvania Historical & Museum Commission

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property        meets        does not meet the National Register criteria. (       See continuation sheet for additional Comments.)

Signature of commenting or other official Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby certify that this property is:

- ☒ entered in the National Register  
See continuation sheet.  
☐ determined eligible for the  
National Register  
See continuation sheet.  
☐ determined not eligible for the  
National Register  
☐ removed from the National Register  
☐ other (explain):

Signature of Keeper  
Patrick Andrews  
                                      
                                      
                                    

Date of Action  
9/5/2006

## 5. Classification

### Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- ☐ private  
☐ public-local  
☐ public-State  
☒ public-Federal

### Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- ☒ building(s)  
☐ district  
☐ site  
☐ structure  
☐ object

### Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

Name of related multiple property listing (Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

## 6. Function or Use

### Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT/post office

### Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

GOVERNMENT/post office

## 7. Description

### Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT/Art Deco

### Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation granite

roof synthetic

walls limestone

other

### Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

See attached.



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The United States Post Office—Main Branch, constructed from 1931-1935, stands prominently at the southeast corner of Market and S. 30<sup>th</sup> Streets (2970 Market Street). The building, measuring approximately 386 feet north to south and 455 feet east to west, extends a full city block south to Chestnut Street and a full block east to Schuylkill Drive which travels along the Schuylkill River. The Schuylkill Expressway runs underground along the eastern boundary of the property just below Schuylkill Drive. The free-standing building occupies a flat lot and is surrounded by concrete pavement. Landscaping features are limited to a small fenced-in garden area at the northeast corner of the property. Block-like in shape with a flat roof, the building was designed in the Art Deco style and stands six stories in height. The Main Branch is a steel frame building predominantly clad in limestone with a granite water table. The Main Branch has integrity, as relatively little has been done to alter the building on the interior or exterior. The overall condition of the building is excellent.

### ***Exterior***

The elevations of the steel frame building are uniform in appearance and materials, covered with smooth limestone, with a Quincy gray granite water table. The north (Market Street) and south (Chestnut Street) elevations provide public access to the building and are nearly identical in design; the east (Schuylkill Drive) and west (30<sup>th</sup> Street) elevations are also very similar, but the west elevation includes a wide loading bay for trucks. The organization of the building is formal, with a clearly defined base, shaft and capital section. All of the elevations are symmetrical or nearly so. Three-story fluted limestone piers articulate the shaft section of the block throughout, with large vertical groupings of recessed bronze windows and polished dark gray Quincy granite spandrels in between. The block-like shape of the Post Office is embellished at the top of the building with two set backs creating a stepped form, a typical element of the Art Deco style. The eastern and western sides of the building feature 30-foot high limestone penthouses stepped back slightly from the face of the building. The north and south ends of the roof are lined with a contemporary metal fence. All of the elevations display two distinct low-relief carved limestone belt courses with different pre-Columbian geometric designs.

### **North Elevation**

The north elevation extends 22 bays along Market Street. Two 6-story high limestone towers pull out from the main block and bookend the center section of the building. The tower sections of the building are divided into six stories, whereas the rest of the building contains five stories in order to accommodate the high ceilings that were created for the workroom floors. Both limestone towers feature monumental three-story carved limestone panels with Art Deco style geometric and organic forms reminiscent of pre-Colombian designs. The patterns introduced here include monumental hexagonal guilloche<sup>1</sup> up the center with scrolled ornamentation filling the openings, and vertical bands of scroll-like forms surrounding rounded teeth-like shapes.

The eastern tower of the north elevation contains a curved one-story granite frontispiece topped by a streamlined carved granite eagle and flanking eaglets. Below the eagle grouping, the words "UNITED STATES POST OFFICE" are carved into the lintel above the entrance to the main postal lobby. The entrance sits at the top of a raised plaza that is surrounded by a granite wall with pierced rectangular

<sup>1</sup> Guilloche is an architectural term that describes an ornament used in classical architecture formed by two or more bands twisted together in a continuous series. The openings between the bands can be filled with ornaments. Definition accessed on the World Wide Web on May 4, 2005, <http://www.ontarioarchitecture.com/Guilloche.html>.

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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

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openings. Wide granite steps lead up to the plaza, which has a floor laid in a granite grid design with limestone infill. The piers flanking these steps contain lanterns with bronze frames and translucent glass. Flag poles sit atop the lanterns. A short flight of gray granite steps at the top of the plaza with granite end walls leads to a recessed public entrance to the postal service lobby. At a right angle to this flight of steps is a non-original granite ramp for barrier-free access that was added in the 1990s. This entrance opening contains two automated single-leaf, glazed bronze doors (one exit, one entrance). A full-height pressed bronze panel featuring seven vertical columns of geometric shapes and curved scrolls surrounds the doors.

Balancing the postal lobby entrance on the east side, the west end tower on the north elevation contains a simplified low-relief granite frontispiece with a slightly recessed window. This window opening is filled with a decorative bronze panel that repeats the motif on the exterior.

Two restricted entrances leading to internal stair towers are located at grade level on the remainder of the north elevation. The first restricted entrance can be found just to the west of the elevated entrance plaza. Gray granite walls frame the path to this double-leaf glazed bronze entrance door. The other stair tower entrance stands near the center of the north elevation, and is filled with a double-leaf glazed bronzed door.

The fenestration of the north elevation at the outermost bays on the 2<sup>nd</sup> through 6<sup>th</sup> stories consists of paired 1/1 double-hung bronze windows. The 1<sup>st</sup> story windows in the center section are 1/1 bronze sash with single-light transoms. The window openings between the two tower features on the 2<sup>nd</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> floors each contain a rectangular grouping of windows comprised of a double-hung 1/1 bronze window flanked by narrow sidelights and topped with a 3-light transom. The 4<sup>th</sup> floor transom windows are narrower than those on the lower stories. The 5<sup>th</sup> story window openings throughout the entire elevation are filled with 1/1 bronze windows.

A private parking plaza extends between the entrance towers front of the post office, buffered from the concrete public walkway by a 6' high wall of gray granite. This wall is pierced with a series of rectangular openings set between raised stone blocks with curved tops. The parking area is paved with Belgian block laid in fanned courses.

### West Elevation

The west elevation, facing 30<sup>th</sup> Street, is 19 bays wide. The center 17 bays on the 2<sup>nd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> stories contain recessed groupings of bronze windows that are identical to those on the north elevation. At the ground level, the outermost bays serve as driveways that lead to or out from the Vehicle Maneuvering Area for loading and unloading mail. The 21 foot driveways have Belgian block floors in a fan design, low granite outer walls shielding the driveway from public view and granite block surrounds. Vertically-oriented bronze signs denoting "DRIVE IN" or "DRIVE OUT" hang above the two garage entrances. The inside walls of the internal driveways have granite bases and glazed ceramic tiled walls. The center of the west elevation at grade level features a series of twenty recessed loading bays sheltered by a cantilevered bronze canopy. The individual loading bays contain contemporary metal roll-up doors and metal roll-down security doors. Two one-story limestone projections with flat roofs flank the loading area, housing restrooms for the staff on the interior.

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### South Elevation

The south elevation extends 22 bays and is a nearly identical, mirror image of the east elevation. The window arrangement and materials are identical to the north elevation. At the eighth bay from the west end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, an elevated metal paneled corridor extends from the Main Branch across the street to the Terminal Annex. A granite ramp with a bronze railing provides barrier-free access to the public lobby entrance at the east end of the south elevation.

### East Elevation

The east elevation is a mirror image of the west elevation, but lacks entrances or garage openings. Instead, the 1<sup>st</sup> floor contains 1/1 bronze windows with single-light transoms. The upper floors are identical to those on the west elevation.

### ***Interior***

The interior of the Main Branch is organized into four distinct areas: public postal service lobby, postal service administrative offices, staff postal service work rooms, and postal service loading docks. The east end of the structure is clearly dedicated to public use on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor with a long postal service lobby. Work rooms consume the larger part of the floors, with loading docks on the west end of the 1<sup>st</sup> floor. The 5<sup>th</sup> floor and 6<sup>th</sup> floor in the tower sections of the building on the east and west ends of the building are devoted to general administration and employee use. The functionality of each area is distinguished by its organization and a hierarchy in the use of architectural finishes.

The building contains eight fire stair towers: four along the north wall and four along the south wall of the building on every floor. In addition to the fire stairs, there are several staircases throughout the building that provide access between different floors in the workroom areas and administration offices.

Toilet rooms for staff are clustered on each floor throughout the building adjacent to the fire stair towers in the corners of the building. The stairs are utilitarian in character, with molded metal risers and concrete treads, pipe railings and glazed ceramic tiled walls.

Eighteen elevators service the Main Branch. The northeast corner of the building contains five passenger elevator cabs; the southeast corner has four passenger elevators and one dumbwaiter. Two elevators on the north end and two on the south end are intended for public use; the remaining elevators are for employee use. An additional passenger elevator can be found near the center of the north wall of the building adjacent to a freight elevator shaft. One other elevator shaft, servicing the first and second floors only, is located just to the west of the northeast corner of the building. There are six freight elevators: two pairs of freight elevators at the west end of the building, servicing the loading area on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor and the work area spaces above; and two freight elevators at the north and south walls near the center of the building.

The public postal lobby distinguishes itself from all other areas of the building with the use of highly ornate architectural finishes and carved detail. The north and the south entrance lobbies are identical. Notable features of the entrance lobbies include: tan travertine floors, gray marble walls and ceilings, pressed metal panels above the entrance doors that feature vertical bands of meandering scrolls and diamond-shaped guilloches, and a shallow inset dome bordered by metal crown molding and covered with blue and green mosaic tiles. The doors in these octagonal-shaped lobbies are aluminum,

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accented with bands of vertical channels and channeled aluminum door trim. The passenger elevators off of the main lobby at the northeast and southeast corners of the 1<sup>st</sup> floor corridor feature elaborate aluminum doors adorned with bands of horizontal geometric hexagonal guilloche and vertical channels of varying width.

The wide public corridor that stretches north to south features gray marble floor tiles laid on the diagonal, granite panels on the walls, tan travertine walls and dark green marble baseboard throughout. Dark green and white veined marble borders the gray marble floor. A series of service islands punctuate the center spine of the corridor. The service islands are constructed of tan travertine, topped by an octagonal aluminum counter top; a centered fluorescent light fixture provides light to the desks, supported by embellished aluminum posts and trimmed in aluminum. Green marble shadows the form of the elongated octagonal-shaped service islands on the floor and serves as the base material.

The decorative ceiling in the public postal service corridor is entirely clad in various wood treatments. Channeled wood beams extend across the ceiling at regular intervals and divide the ceiling into a series of rectangular fields. Each field section is comprised of twelve groups of book matched veneered walnut panels. Pierced walnut panels adorn the outer edges of the ceiling with square, scrolled, diamond geometric patterning that repeats the motifs introduced on the exterior.

The walls are divided into a series of sections by tan travertine piers with green marble bases that correspond to the wood beams on the ceiling. Decorative aluminum registers near the floor, containing stylized scrolls, dentils and hexagonal guilloches adorn the piers. Gray marble panels fill in areas between the travertine piers. Postal service windows can be found on the east wall and part of the west wall of the main corridor. The service areas have tan travertine dados of fossiliferous marine limestone breccia, green marble base, aluminum counters, four aluminum teller grilles per section and aluminum trim with regularly spaced projecting blocks above the windows. Showcases fill in the areas between the service grilles. Some of the original teller grilles have been replaced with sliding aluminum windows at the south end, west side. In the center part of the lobby is a postal store with large aluminum storefront windows, green marble base and wide aluminum trim above the windows. The interior of the store features contemporary materials. Opposite the store are several banks of post office boxes with aluminum doors.

The mail work rooms occupy the greater part of the building and are utilitarian in character. Centered between the public corridor and the loading docks, the 1<sup>st</sup> floor work room is the smallest in the building, with an area of approximately 47,250 square feet. The work rooms on the 2<sup>nd</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> floors are substantially larger in size, approximately 134,000 square feet. Despite size differences, the work rooms on the four floors are similar in appearance. Each room consists of a large open space filled with mail sorting and distribution equipment. The work rooms have exposed concrete piers and beams and floors covered with both wood and concrete. Ductwork and additional mechanical equipment remain exposed on the ceiling. The lower half of the concrete walls is clad with glazed yellow tiles, installed for sanitary purposes. Postal inspection viewing windows pierce the large metal shafts that appear along the walls and ceiling in the work rooms on every floor. Situated along the north and south walls of the work areas are rooms with various uses. The employee elevator lobbies found in the southeast and northeast corners of the building have floors clad in gold toned terrazzo, walls covered in glazed gold ceramic tile, flush metal elevator doors and modest metal trim. The internal offices and



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conference rooms relating to the workrooms have contemporary materials: carpeting, dropped ceilings and gypsum board walls.

The loading area on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor consumes the western half of the building and consists of a concrete platform just outside the workrooms on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor and an island platform. A series of double-leaf flush steel doors separate the workroom from the internal loading area. The island platform possesses both interior and exterior loading docks and is separated from the main building platform by a 90-foot wide cobblestone vehicle maneuvering area. Assorted machinery and small offices stand on this island platform.

Administration offices and corridors are located along the east wall of the building on the 2<sup>nd</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> floors. On the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> floors, a north/south corridor separates the administration offices from the mail work rooms. The 4<sup>th</sup> floor administration corridor differs slightly in configuration, as the entire length of the corridor has been subsumed in recent years for office use. These corridors have dropped acoustical tile ceilings or gypsum ceilings with fluorescent light fixtures, plaster walls, tan marble wainscoting and black marble baseboard, and a tan terrazzo floor with a dark green border. The doors on the east wall of the corridor lead to modest offices with contemporary finishes; the doors on the west wall lead to the work rooms. The doors frames are chiefly metal, with flush single-leaf wood doors. The elevator lobbies accessing the administrative areas at the northeast and southeast corners of the 2<sup>nd</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> floors are modest but retain the full-height marble cladding on the walls, tan terrazzo floor with green terrazzo border, green marble base and flush metal elevator doors. The Plant Manager's Office at the southeast corner of the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor retains several historic elements, including paneled wood wainscoting and trim, and parquet floor.

The 5<sup>th</sup> floor differs from the remaining floors, in that the original central work room was divided into a multitude of spaces over the years, including training facilities, maintenance quarters, storage rooms, mechanical systems equipment. The rooms on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor feature modern partitions, carpeting, and dropped acoustical ceilings. The staff cafeteria located in the northeast corner of the 5<sup>th</sup> floor retains its tan terrazzo floor. The corridors retain many of the original materials with the use of glazed yellow tile and gray marble wainscoting on the walls and wood on the floor.

The 6<sup>th</sup> floor, located only in the tower sections on the east and west sides of the building, also is used for administrative offices. The rooms on the 6<sup>th</sup> floor feature modern partitions, carpeting, and dropped acoustical ceilings.

The basement level contains a large open space in the center of the floor that is occupied with postal machinery. A labeling room and training center is located on the south end of the floor. Employee swing rooms, a women's locker room and restrooms are located along the perimeter walls and finished with contemporary materials. The original railroad tracks used to deliver and ship postal mail in the basement level were removed in early 2005.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The information regarding the alterations to the building over the years were supplied by the Facility Activation Team of the United States Postal Service at the Main Branch, telephone conversation with Nicholas Tino, October 14, 2005.

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The roof originally housed a reinforced area that functioned as autogiro roof landing area and was painted for this use. In the 1990s, the roof was covered using a rubber membrane; the landing area is no longer evident.<sup>3</sup> The original roof garden is also no longer evident.

The delivery of mail from the Schuylkill River via boats, while thought of as an option when the building was being planned, was never incorporated into the physical structure.

The United States Post Office Terminal Annex, a contemporary 2-story building clad in brick, limestone and stucco, was constructed in 1962 and is not included in the boundary as a resource. The Main Branch is connected to the Annex by an aluminum-clad elevated walkway that extends from the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor of the south elevation over Chestnut Street. The elevated walkway was also constructed in 1962. The Annex is not included within the boundary as it post-dates the period of significance and is visually separate from the Main Branch building by Chestnut Street.

In summary, the Main Branch retains integrity on the interior and exterior. The essential features of the property that convey its significance include: the limestone and granite Art Deco style exterior design, the bronze windows, the entire ornate public lobby with its many decorative features and materials, the loading docks, the administrative corridors and the postal work rooms, and the stairwells. These areas have been minimally changed from the original construction. The significant changes that have been made to the building consist of new corridor ceilings and new partitions, flooring and ceiling materials in the administration offices on the upper levels. The postal machines themselves have also been replaced many times over the years. In addition, in the early 1990s, sensitive alterations were made to the public lobby: new finishes in the teller areas for security, new lighting, and the creation of a small room that bumps out from the main corridor on the west wall that serves as new mailbox area. The materials in this room match exactly the marble, aluminum and limestone of the rest of the historic finishes in the lobby. The postal service store off of the main lobby also has been changed many times and presently features contemporary materials. However, these changes to the lobby and the upper floors do not affect how the building reflects its historic or architectural significance. The limestone exterior and interior public areas, including the lobbies and corridors, are especially significant to the building. These areas, with the original lavish ceiling materials, wall materials, flooring, elevator doors, teller screens and customer islands, more than adequately convey the richness of the Art Deco style design and its use as a postal facility.

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<sup>3</sup> Facility Activation Team of the United States Postal Service.

## 8. Statement of Significance

### Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing)

- ☒ A Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☐ B Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☒ C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

### Criteria Considerations

(Mark "X" in all the boxes that apply.)

- ☐ A owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ B removed from its original location.
- ☐ C a birthplace or a grave.
- ☐ D a cemetery.
- ☐ E a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- ☐ F a commemorative property.
- ☐ G less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

### Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ARCHITECTURE

POLITICS/GOVERNMENT

### Period of Significance

1931-1955

### Significant Dates

1935

### Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

N/A

### Cultural Affiliation

N/A

### Architect/Builder

Rankin & Kellogg

Tilden, Register & Pepper

Wetmore, James

### Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

## 9. Major Bibliographical References

### Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

See continuation Sheet.

### Previous documentation on file (NPS)

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # \_\_\_\_\_

### Primary Location of Additional Data

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☒ Other

Name of repository: Free Library of Philadelphia  
Temple University Urban Archives



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## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 8 Page 1 United States Post Office—Main Branch, Philadelphia County, PA

The United States Post Office—Main Branch, occupying an entire city block located on the southeast corner of Market and S. 30<sup>th</sup> Streets, Philadelphia, PA, remains an outstanding example of the Art Deco style and is a historically significant federal building in Philadelphia. Designed in 1931 and completed in 1935, this six-story building is significant under Criterion A in the area of Government for its association with the history of postal service in Philadelphia. The US Post Office—Main Branch is also significant under Criterion C in Architecture as a prominent work by the nationally acclaimed architecture firm of Rankin & Kellogg and the associated Philadelphia firm of Tilden, Register & Pepper. The period of significance, which begins in 1931 and ends in 1955, covers the entire construction period of this significant federal building and extends to include its use as the Main Branch.

### Summary History of the Building

The Main Branch stands on a square block bounded by Market Street and Chestnut Street to the north and south respectively, and Schuylkill Avenue and S. 30<sup>th</sup> Streets to the east and west. From about 1875 to 1930, this area served as the center of operations for the city's stockyards, slaughter houses, and meat packing plants for companies such as Swift's, Amour's, Wilson's, Martin's, and Croft's. The Farmers Schuylkill Wholesale Market also stood in this area.<sup>1</sup> The Pennsylvania Cold Storage Plant was the largest building on the site.<sup>2</sup>

In 1926, the Philadelphia Improvements program planned to remove the wholesale meat industry at the 30<sup>th</sup> and Market Streets location in favor of a new Main Branch. The Philadelphia Improvements, a late-1920s coalition between the Pennsylvania Railroad Company and the city of Philadelphia, sought to revamp the transportation infrastructure within the city.<sup>3</sup> The crux of the improvements dealt with transportation, including the construction of two new large train stations: one at 30<sup>th</sup> and Market Streets to replace the existing station at 32<sup>nd</sup> and Market Streets; and one in a new combination office/station building (now known as Suburban Station) located a block northwest of the then-existing Broad Street Station. In addition to the two train stations, numerous subways, bridges, tunnels, and rail yards were also created. The new Post Office at 30<sup>th</sup> Street was part of this program, as the railroad infrastructure was intended to interface with the new Post Office below ground for mail and package deliveries and service. In addition to rail service, Philadelphia's new Main Branch at 30<sup>th</sup> Street was to be accessible by water, rail, motor, and aerial transportation—a combination not matched anywhere else in the world at the time.<sup>4</sup> The site for a new main branch, to

<sup>1</sup> Leon S. Rosenthal, *A History of Philadelphia's University City*, (Printing Office of the University of Pennsylvania, 1963). World Wide Web site <http://uchs.net/Rosenthal/wphila.html> accessed on April 8, 2005.

<sup>2</sup> "Phila. Post Office to Cost \$11,000,000," *Evening Bulletin*, 20 January 1927. Temple University, Urban Archives.

<sup>3</sup> The formal title of the Philadelphia Improvements is the "Philadelphia Passenger Terminal Improvements Projects." With the onset of the Great Depression, work for The Philadelphia Improvements slowed and finally halted in January 1932, excluding completion of the Main Branch at 30<sup>th</sup> Street. Harry Kyriakodis, "The Pennsylvania Railroad, the Philadelphia Improvements Broad Street Station, the "Chinese Wall," 30<sup>th</sup> Street (Pennsylvania) Station, Suburban Station, Penn Center, and the Underground Pedestrian Concourse Network," World Wide Web site <http://www.phillyblog.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=3040> accessed April 7, 2005.

<sup>4</sup> The water access, while part of the planning of the building, was never physically realized in the design of the building. *Dedication: General Post Office, Philadelphia, May 25, 1935*. Temple University, Pennsylvania Railroad Company Records: Central Office Giles, records of Thomas W. Hulme. The water access, while part of the planning of the building, was never physically realized in the design of the building.

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replace the Italian Renaissance Central Post Office at 9<sup>th</sup> and Market Streets (1884, demolished), was modeled after recommendations made in a 1923 survey by the Joint Commission on Postal Service. This survey of major east coast and mid-west cities revealed that the ideal site for a major post office should be at or near the center of city business activity and adjacent to a railroad center to allow for the most rapid and economical collection and delivery of mail.<sup>5</sup>

The Federal Building Program, approved through the Public Buildings Act of 1926, allocated \$9,750,000 to the construction of the Main Branch at 30<sup>th</sup> Street.<sup>6</sup> However, this funding could not be released until the new Pennsylvania Railroad Terminal at 30<sup>th</sup> Street (a.k.a. 30<sup>th</sup> Street Station) was sufficiently underway. After meeting this criterion in 1929, the Pennsylvania Railroad purchased 250,000 square feet of land occupied by the wholesale meat purveyors for the new post office.

In April 1930, US Secretary of the Treasury Andrew Mellon selected two Philadelphia architecture firms to design the new Post Office: Rankin & Kellogg, and Tilden, Register & Pepper.<sup>7</sup> At the federal level, James A. Wetmore served as the Supervising Architect for the Treasury for the Main Branch in Philadelphia.<sup>8</sup>

The appointment of local architecture firms supposedly resulted from an appeal by Congressman George A. Welsh and other local representatives that the "building across from the new Pennsylvania Station at 30<sup>th</sup> and Market Sts. should be designed by local architects," instead of the Chicago firm of Graham, Anderson, Probst & White, who received the commission to design 30<sup>th</sup> Street Station.<sup>9</sup> Coincidentally, a 1930 amendment to the Public Buildings Act of 1926 permitted the Supervising Architect to hire outside consultants, such as architects, for public buildings.<sup>10</sup> Starrett Brothers & Elken of New York received the contract of \$4.4 million to build the new Post Office.<sup>11</sup> General Bronze Corp. was awarded the contract to provide the decorative bronze work for Philadelphia's new Main Branch.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>5</sup> "To Double Main Post Office Here," *Evening Bulletin*, 24 February 1923, page 1. Temple University, Urban Archives.

<sup>6</sup> The federal program was through the Public Buildings Act of 1926. Additional contemporary post offices in Pennsylvania undertaken through this program include: Allentown, \$820,000; Norristown, \$490,000; Coatesville, \$165,000; Altoona, \$201,000; Clearfield, \$145,000; Greenville, \$175,000; Kittanning, \$145,000; Lewisburg, \$255,000; Nanticoke, \$70,000; Wellsboro, \$80,000; Rochester, \$105,000. In Comparison to the \$9,750,000 used at the 30<sup>th</sup> Street Post Office, \$7,000,000 was allocated to a post office in New York City. "\$9,750,000 for New Phila. Postoffice," *Evening Bulletin*, 23 April 1930. Temple University, Urban Archives.

<sup>7</sup> "Philadelphia Architects to Plan New Postoffice Building," *Evening Bulletin*, 16 December 1930. Temple University, Urban Archives.

<sup>8</sup> James A. Wetmore served as the Acting Supervising Architect for the Treasury from 1915 to 1933. As Supervising Architect Wetmore is credited with overseeing the construction of more than 2,000 post offices and other public buildings across the country. Each building bears his name on the cornerstone.

<sup>9</sup> "Philadelphia Architects to Plan New Postoffice Building." Temple University, Urban Archives.

<sup>10</sup> National Register Nomination for United States Post Office, New York, New York County, Madison Square Postal station (July 1986), 8/2.

<sup>11</sup> "Inquiring Investor," *Wall Street Journal* (1889-Current File); 20 February 1933; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Wall Street Journal (1889-1963), 6.

<sup>12</sup> General Bronze Corp. of Minneapolis, MN cast the bronze doors for the U. S. Supreme Court Bldg. in Washington, D. C. in 1935. World Wide Web, accessed May 6, 2005,

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Construction of the new Main Branch began in 1931, but was not completed for four years as a result of objections that were raised regarding outsourcing work to non-Philadelphia based companies and employing non-US citizen labor. Union strikes also slowed construction.<sup>13</sup>

The new Main Branch at 30<sup>th</sup> and Market Streets was designed to be compatible with the Classical Revival style 30<sup>th</sup> Street Railroad Station<sup>14</sup> across the street designed by Chicago architectural firm Graham, Anderson, Probst & White from 1929 to 1934. In the planning phases, rumors spread that the two buildings were to be similar in appearance. The resulting railroad station had a simplicity and stylized character that suggested modernity, "a compromise between historical and emerging modern styles."<sup>15</sup>

Workers completed the new Main Branch in 1935 for approximately \$10 million.<sup>16</sup> At the dedication on May 25, 1935, Postmaster General James A. Farley noted that "Philadelphia once again has for its Post Office a structure which is second to none in the country."<sup>17</sup>

The Main Branch at 30<sup>th</sup> and Market Streets has continued to function as the main postal center for Philadelphia since its opening, with upgrades to the building and its equipment completed as needed. In 1960 improvements were made to electrical equipment and mail handling machinery in addition to the installation of air conditioning and a concrete parking garage at 31<sup>st</sup> and Chestnut Streets.<sup>18</sup> The US Post Office Terminal Annex was constructed south of the Post Office connected by a bridge over Chestnut Street. Constructed in 1962, outside of the Main Branch's period of significance, the contemporary 2-story building is visually separate from the 1935 Main Branch and is therefore not included in this nomination.

The Main Branch is presently owned by the US Government and still operates as Philadelphia's main branch. However, in March, 2004, the US Government sold the Main Branch building, the Terminal Annex, the Postal Service parking garage at 31<sup>st</sup> and Chestnut Streets and a 14-acre surface lot on Walnut Street to University of Pennsylvania; ownership by the University will not be final until 2007.<sup>19</sup> The building continues to function as a post office until a new USPS Processing and Distribution Center facility located near the Philadelphia airport is finished in June 2006. The University of

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<http://www.supremecourtus.gov/about/bronzedoors.pdf>. "General Bronze Bookings," *Wall Street Journal* (1889-Current File); 22 September 1932; ProQuest Historical Newspapers The Wall Street Journal (1889-1963), 1.

<sup>13</sup> Strikes during the construction period involved the construction of conveyor belts and installation of elevators. "Postoffice Work Ordered Resumed," *Evening Bulletin*, 27 November 1933; "Labor Decision on New P.O. Job Here Under Attack," *Evening Bulletin*, 26 January 1934. Temple University, Urban Archives.

<sup>14</sup> "Plaza to Set off New Postoffice," *Evening Bulletin*, Mar 26, 1930. Temple University, Urban Archives.

<sup>15</sup> John Andrew Gallery, ed., *Philadelphia Architecture, A Guide to the City* (Foundation for Architecture: Philadelphia, 1994), 106.

<sup>16</sup> Albert Churella, "External and Internal Networks on the Pennsylvania Railroad: The Philadelphia Improvements," *Business and Economic History On-Line*, Vol. 2, 2004. World Wide Web site <http://www.thebhc.org/publications/BEHonline/2004/Churella.pdf> accessed April 6, 2005.

<sup>17</sup> *Dedication*.

<sup>18</sup> John T. McNeill, *The Philadelphia Post Office, 1683-1960*, Philadelphia, 1960), 26.

<sup>19</sup> "University of Pennsylvania Finalizes Purchase of US Postal Service Property," World Wide Web accessed on October 14, 2005, <http://www.upenn.edu/pennnews/article.php?id=617>.

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Pennsylvania plans to rehabilitate the Main Branch for use as offices. The USPS will continue to lease a portion of the Main Branch for its administrative offices.

The reason for the sale of the Main Branch by the Postal Service was the desire for a state-of-the-art processing and distribution center. According to the USPS, the new Processing and Distribution Center, located at southwest Philadelphia on Lindbergh Boulevard between Suffolk Avenue and 72nd Street, will become the first urban processing center built to use computer-aided distribution networks. Unlike the current Main Branch, the new facility is readily accessible to nearby Philadelphia International Airport and Interstate 95 which will ease the transportation of mail and packages.

### **Criterion A, Significance in Government**

The Main Branch is significant under Criterion A, in the area of government, as an important center for the distribution of mail and packages within Philadelphia and the surrounding region.

#### *Brief account of Philadelphia's postal history and the creation of the US Post Office—Main Branch at 30<sup>th</sup> and Market Streets*

The USPS has experienced tremendous growth since the original post office was created by William Penn in Pennsylvania in 1683. Benjamin Franklin became Philadelphia's deputy postmaster in 1737, a post he held until 1753. He also served as the deputy postmaster general of the colonies from 1753 to 1774, when he was dismissed by the British Crown. The members of the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia established the position of Postmaster General of the Post Office Department (the predecessor to the USPS) on July 26, 1776.<sup>20</sup> Benjamin Franklin served as the nation's first post officer and reorganized and improved the postal service in Philadelphia. Since its inception, the USPS has operated from buildings located all over Philadelphia, including private residences, space leased by the government and government-owned buildings.

By the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, Philadelphia supported several large downtown post offices, including the former main Central Post Office located at 9<sup>th</sup> and Market Streets in Philadelphia.<sup>21</sup> Other downtown postal branches in the city included: the Broad Street Station at 15<sup>th</sup> and Market Streets, the "J" Station at 635 N. 19<sup>th</sup> Street, the Mid-City Station at 18<sup>th</sup> and Ranstead Streets, and one in the Land Title Building at Broad and Chestnut Streets. In 1915, an additional post office dedicated to processing parcel post was opened at 2121 Market Street.

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<sup>20</sup> USPS Postal History. World Wide Web site [http://www.usps.com/postalhistory/postal\\_service\\_begins.htm](http://www.usps.com/postalhistory/postal_service_begins.htm) accessed April 25, 2005.

<sup>21</sup> The Post Office and Courthouse at 9<sup>th</sup> and Market Streets was constructed in 1884. In 1935 it was demolished and rebuilt as the William Penn Annex. It is now known as the Robert N.C. Nix, Sr. Federal Building. National Register Nomination Form for the Robert N.C. Nix, Sr. Federal Building, Philadelphia, PA, July 1990. "The New Philadelphia General Post Office," *The Girard Letter*. Temple University, Pennsylvania Railroad Company Records: Central Office Files: records of Thomas W. Hulme.



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With the population in Philadelphia increasing from just over 1.2 million in 1900 to over 1.8 million twenty years later<sup>22</sup>, by 1920 the Central Post Office at 9<sup>th</sup> and Market Streets had become antiquated and could not adequately handle processing mail in a timely manner.<sup>23</sup> In 1927, Postmaster Colonel George E. Kemp declared that a new central post office was "absolutely necessary" as the existing quarters were cramped and congested.<sup>24</sup> Other post offices were planned for the city as well, resulting in the opening of approximately 30 new branches within Philadelphia between 1910 and 1930.<sup>25</sup>

### *Significant features of the US Post Office—Main Branch at completion, 1935*

When it first opened, the 5-story limestone and granite structure provided 23 acres of work space for more than 4,000 employees, a vast improvement over the facilities at the former US Post Office Main Branch at 9<sup>th</sup> and Market Streets which had only 3½ acres of work space.<sup>26</sup> Within its first year of operation, the post office transacted approximately 1/40<sup>th</sup> of all postal business in the country, handling more than 1.25 million pieces of mail daily.<sup>27</sup>

At the time the Main Branch was built, it was the only postal station in the world which could be accessible by auto, truck, train (Pennsylvania Railroad), and autogiro (an early helicopter). Although the designers initially planned for water delivery via boats on the Schuylkill River, this means of delivery was never physically incorporated. Mail trucks picked up or delivered mail at a 90-foot wide island platform on the 30<sup>th</sup> Street side of the building, which, with an additional interior platform, originally accommodated 117 mail trucks simultaneously.<sup>28</sup>

With the advantage of direct access to the rail lines, the Main Branch absorbed the functions of the parcel post station previously handled by the 22nd Street Station at 2121 Market Street (National Register, 2003). Mail delivered by rail traveled directly under the building and was taken to the upper floors via elevator. Conveyor belts beneath passenger platforms once carried sacks of mail under Market Street at the train station to and from passenger trains that did most of the mail hauling until the 1960s, when jet airplanes and interstate highways changed transportation.<sup>29</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Philadelphia ranked as the third largest city in the country from 1900 to 1940. "Population of the 20 Largest US Cities, 1900-1930." World Wide Web site <http://www.infoplease.com/ipa/A0922422.html> accessed on April 22, 2005.

<sup>23</sup> "Philadelphia Companies of Slow Mail Service," *Wall Street Journal*, 17 June 1920, page 7. As an example, in 1920 it would take 36 to 45 hours to deliver mail from Philadelphia to suburban towns around New York City, a distance of only 90 miles with two railroads to complete the service.

<sup>24</sup> "Phila. Post Office to Cost \$11,000,000," *Evening Bulletin*, 17 January 1927, Temple University, Urban Archives.

<sup>25</sup> John L. Kay and Chester M. Smith, Jr., *Pennsylvania Postal History*. (Lawrence, MA: Quarterman Publications, Inc., 1976), 288-295.

<sup>26</sup> "Treasury Dep't Approves Plans for Postoffice Here," *Evening Bulletin*, 1932. Temple University, Urban Archives.

<sup>27</sup> "The New Philadelphia General Post Office," *The Girard Letter*. October 1936, page 5. Temple University Pennsylvania Railroad Company Records, Temple Urban Archives.

<sup>28</sup> "The New Philadelphia General Post Office."

<sup>29</sup> Holcomb, Henry J. "Building a new way to move mail," *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, June 26, 2004. World Wide Web site <http://www.tallahassee.com/mld/inquirer/2004/06/26/business/9016296.htm> Access April 13, 2005

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For a brief time, autogiros delivered air mail to the roof-garden airport on the roof of the Main Branch, the only one in the United States at the time. An innovative heating system on the roof, the first of its kind, insured freedom from snow and ice.<sup>30</sup> There were two routes by air mail: north/south mail was dispatched and received through Camden airport and east/west mail went through Newark airport. Mail received from the autogiro went down a chute to the appropriate floor. The air mail service at the Main Branch ended on July 6, 1940 with the opening of the Philadelphia Airport.<sup>31</sup> The rooftop landing pad and delivery system was removed when the roof was recovered in the early 1990s.

As originally planned, the incoming mail was sent to units consisting of a facing table, two canceling machines, and cases. At the facing table, inspectors sorted the mail and prepared it for the more than 30 canceling machines, which could stamp letters at a rate of 30,000 per hour in 1935. From there the mail went to the cases for further sorting. When an employee sighted a special delivery package or airmail letter, it would be placed on the appropriate overhead conveyor belt.

The Main Branch was equipped with every modern appliance available in the 1930s for the expeditious handling of the mail. Within the building, there were approximately 3.5 miles of conveyor belts and 165 conveyors ranging from 5-inches to 60-inches wide. The conveyor belt system was designed to send mail immediately to the central handling station for treatment regardless of its location in the building. The conveyors carried all mail through a series of workers and machines until it could be bagged. Additional mechanical equipment within the building when it first opened included: three large slides to deliver mail from floor to floor; 13 chutes between various floors; 8 spiral chutes from the 5<sup>th</sup> floor to the track floor; separation units and traveling deflectors; a "selectconveyor" from the 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> floors which automatically loaded and unloaded its trays at various branches; trap doors through which bags could be dropped to the mezzanine floor where they went to the primary separation unit; 3-tiered conveyors that handled packages, letters, and magazines and newspapers on separate levels.<sup>32</sup>

Although the building contained extensive conveyor belts and chutes, automatic sorting machines were not available until the mid-1950s. Initially, mail was crudely sorted and pigeonholed, a holdover from colonial times. With the financial problems of the Great Depression and the interruption of World War II, it was not until the mid-1950s that the Post Office Department took major steps toward mechanization by initiating projects and awarding contracts for the development of a number of machines and technologies.<sup>33</sup>

The Main Branch in Philadelphia contained several specialized offices in the 1930s: a customs office in which mail being sent to foreign countries was inspected; a printing office in which blanks and printed matter for local use were prepared; a financial section to handle stamps and money orders;

<sup>30</sup> "John Miller-1939-First Autogiro Air Mail Route," *Air Mail Aviators*. World Wide Web site <http://free.hostdepartment.com/r/roynag1/airmail6.htm> accessed 13 April 2005.

<sup>31</sup> "John Miller-1939-First Autogiro Air Mail Route," *Air Mail Aviators*. World Wide Web site <http://free.hostdepartment.com/r/roynag1/airmail6.htm> accessed 13 April 2005.

<sup>32</sup> Laura Lee, "New Postoffice Has 6 Mile Belts," *Evening Bulletin*, 27 August 1934. Temple University, Urban Archives.

<sup>33</sup> "History of the Post Office," site for the US Post Office in Victorville, CA. World Wide Web site <http://www.ceol.com/vvpo/history.html#COLONIAL> accessed on April 25, 2005.

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maintenance, storage and supply departments on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor; a shooting gallery in which watchmen, truckmen and clerks practiced daily; a refrigeration room for perishable articles; electric drying rooms in which mail carriers could quickly dry themselves off after a shift in wet weather; and a dead letter office which held undeliverable mail.<sup>34</sup>

### *Comparisons*

The Main Branch has been Philadelphia's largest and most important mail processing center since its completion in 1935. The Main Branch sorted all mail for delivery by letter carrier before being dispatched to the approximately 50 branches in the city. Soon after completion, the Main Branch outranked the US Post Office at 9<sup>th</sup> and Market Streets (the former main branch) in size and mail handling. The new post office could accommodate more than one hundred delivery trucks at one time, while the old building could only serve sixteen. In 1935, all of the mail carried by the Pennsylvania Railroad was processed at the Main Branch, accounting for 70 per cent of the mail delivered by rail in Philadelphia; the remaining 30 percent of the rail mail, carried by the Reading Railroad, was processed at the 9<sup>th</sup> and Market Post Office.<sup>35</sup>

Compared to large post offices in other cities, in the late 1930s Philadelphia's Main Branch was as successful at handling mail as Madison Square Postal Station of New York City, NY (National Register, 1986). In 1936, Philadelphia's Main Branch handled 1.25 million pieces of mail daily, with yearly revenues of \$15 to \$20 million.<sup>36</sup> The Madison Square Postal Station, considered New York City's most important post office when it was completed in 1937, accounted for handling one million letters in 1939, with annual receipts of \$5 million.<sup>37</sup>

In summary, the Main Branch has served as an important part of the Philadelphia community since its inception, handling and distributing the bulk of Philadelphia's mail.

### **Criterion C, Significance in Architecture**

The Main Branch, completed in 1935, remains an outstanding example of an Art Deco style government building in the city of Philadelphia. The architecture firm of Rankin & Kellogg collaborated with architects Tilden, Register & Pepper to design the Main Branch in Philadelphia.

### *Rankin & Kellogg*

From the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and into the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the architecture firm of Rankin & Kellogg found success designing many public buildings, as well as private commissions, predominately in the Philadelphia region. The firm was founded in 1891 by John Hall Rankin (1868-1952) and Thomas M. Kellogg (1862-1935). From 1903 to 1925, the firm was known as Rankin, Kellogg & Crane when Edward A. Crane, a former employee of the Supervising Architect of the US

<sup>34</sup> "The New Philadelphia General Post Office."

<sup>35</sup> With the sale of the land, the Pennsylvania Railroad received permanent and perpetual use of the area beneath the Post Office. "Phila. Post Office to Cost \$11,000,000," Evening Bulletin, 17 January 1927. Temple University, Urban Archives.

<sup>36</sup> "The New Philadelphia General Post Office," *The Girard Letter*. October 1936, page 5. Temple University Pennsylvania Railroad Company Records, Temple Urban Archives.

<sup>37</sup> National Register Nomination for United States Post Office, New York, New York County, Madison Square Postal station (July 1986), 8/2.



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Treasury, worked for the firm. The name reverted to Rankin & Kellogg after Crane left in 1925, and remained as such until Kellogg's death in 1943. During their 44-year association, Rankin & Kellogg became one of the most successful Beaux Arts architectural firms in Philadelphia, rivaling local architect Paul Cret in the number of commissions. The firm also became known for their Beaux Arts public buildings across the nation.

A native of Philadelphia, Rankin completed the 2-year course in architecture at Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1889. Rankin moved back to Philadelphia after graduating and proceeded to work for two major Philadelphia architecture firms (James H. Windrim and Wilson Brothers) before relocating to New York City for a brief time. He returned to Philadelphia in 1891; shortly thereafter, he met Thomas Kellogg and formed a partnership. Kellogg, born in Laurel, MD, received architectural training at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology for a brief time in the early 1880s, but never graduated from the program. From 1884 through 1891, he worked for the renowned New York City architecture firm of McKim, Mead & White where he received training in the Beaux Arts school of design.

The Pennsylvania State Asylum for the Chronically Insane in Wernersville, PA, hired Rankin & Kellogg for their first commission in 1891. Several government projects ensued, including the Beaux Arts style formal US Courthouse and Post Office in Indianapolis, IN (1900), for which Rankin & Kellogg were accorded a silver medal at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition.<sup>38</sup> The Beaux Arts Department of Agriculture Administration Building in Washington, D.C. (1905/1930) was another important federal commission. The firm also accomplished many local projects, including First Methodist Episcopal Church of Germantown (1898), Philadelphia, PA. With partner Edward Crane, the firm built the Beaux Arts Camden County Courthouse and Jail in Camden, NJ (1906); and the Elverson Building (a.k.a. Inquirer Building) at 400-440 N. Broad Street in Philadelphia (1924; National Register, 1995), a Beaux Arts style high rise with an early stepped Art Deco style form and a sleek white terra cotta skin. After Crane's departure, the firm designed the Georgian Provident Trust Company at 17<sup>th</sup> and Chestnut Streets, Philadelphia (1928); Camden Safe Deposit & Trust Co., Camden, NJ, (1929) in the Italian Palazzo style; and several private residences.

### *Tilden, Register & Pepper*

The architecture firm of Tilden, Register & Pepper practiced in Philadelphia from 1926 through 1936 and included partners Marmaduke Tilden, Jr. (1883-1957), H. Bartol Register (1886-1956) and George Wharton Pepper (1895-1949). With Pepper's inclusion to Tilden & Register in 1926 and his family connections to the Sun Oil Company, the three partners launched a successful campaign to design skyscrapers in Philadelphia in the then-unconventional Art Deco style and later explored the Art Moderne style.<sup>39</sup> One such significant project by the firm is 1616 Walnut Street Building (1929), an important early Moderne skyscraper in Philadelphia.

In an attempt to accentuate the capacity of the firm to handle large projects, Tilden, Register & Pepper sent a letter dated March 25, 1930, to Thomas Hulme (the attorney for the Pennsylvania

<sup>38</sup> "Rankin & Kellogg," Philadelphia Architects and Buildings Database. World Wide Web site [http://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar\\_display.cfm/26268](http://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/26268) accessed on April 6, 2005.

<sup>39</sup> Sandra L. Tatman, "Tilden, Register & Pepper," Philadelphia Architects and Buildings Database. World Wide Web site [http://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar\\_display.cfm/24145](http://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/ar_display.cfm/24145) accessed April 8, 2005.

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Railroad Company who was responsible for managing the Main Branch project with the Philadelphia Improvements). The letter listed the firm's "more important buildings" that they had designed in the past three years, which included the following: a private patient building and administration buildings for Abington Memorial Hospital Group in Abington, PA; the 9-story, Martin Maloney Clinic for the University of Pennsylvania Hospital; the combined 19-story garage and office building at 1609 Walnut Street; the combined 24-story garage and office building at 1616 Walnut Street.<sup>40</sup>

### *Art Deco Style*

By the late 1920s, the Art Deco style became the first widely accepted national architectural style of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to break from the traditional revivalist architecture of earlier decades. The moniker "Art Deco" originated from the Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs Industriels et Modernes, held in Paris, France in 1925. As applied to architecture, the Art Deco style emphasized modernity and speed in the sleek, stripped down forms and fecundity of stylized geometric and floral decoration and ornament. The Art Deco style was extremely eclectic, incorporating motifs that referenced important artistic movements (Fauvism, Cubism, Futurism, and Expressionism) and archaeological interests, such as ancient Egyptian and pre-Columbian art and architecture.<sup>41</sup> The discovery of Tutankhamen's tomb in 1922, as well as archeological digs in Mexico in the 1920s stirred renewed interest in exotic expression. Other attributes of the style included: emphasis on verticality, flat roofed forms often with setbacks, stylized floral and geometric motifs.

The Art Deco style evolved into Art Moderne by the late 1930s and early 1940s, a variation of the style that favored horizontal emphasis and streamlined forms, block-like shapes and flat roofs. Stripped down versions of the Art Deco and Moderne styles were chosen by architects for many Public Works Administration projects in the 1930s. In this capacity, architects employed the Art Deco and Art Moderne styles to express optimism, modernity, progressiveness and nationalism.

The Main Branch represents an important, unique Art Deco style federal building in Philadelphia. The building's symmetrical organization of the fenestration and limestone creates a sense of formality typical of traditional public buildings in Philadelphia. However, the ornamentation and setbacks at the top of the building are Art Deco in character. While not a high rise, tower-like shapes pulled out from the main block embellish the block-like form of the building at each corner, emphasizing verticality. Series of vertical window openings separated by stylized fluted stone piers on all of the elevations also creates a sense of height. The top of the building features several step-like recessions typical of the Art Deco style. The entrance located at the northeast end of the building features a curved, stepped frontispiece that recalls the Art Deco style and the rounded forms of post office mail boxes.

The inspiration for the ornamentation of this building was derived from pre-Columbian art and architecture, specifically the Andean cultures of Peru. Friezes located on all four corner towers and two friezes along the roof line of the Main Branch feature low-relief geometric carvings, interlacing diagonal lines and interlacing scrolls that are stylized versions of the artwork found in ceramics,

<sup>40</sup> Letter from Tilden, Register & Pepper to Thomas Hulme, Esq. for Reading Railroad, 25 March 1930, Temple University, Urban Archives, Reading Railroad Files.

<sup>41</sup> "New Deal Art and Architecture," Kresge Art Museum, Lansing, MI website. World Wide Web site <http://artmuseum.msu.edu/wpa/WPA/pages/vocab.htm> accessed on April 13, 2005.

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textiles and carvings of the ancient South America. The pierced granite walls along the north edge of the Main Branch recall the fortress walls of Machu Pichu in Peru of the mid 15<sup>th</sup> century.

On the interior of the Main Branch, the lavish public lobby repeats stylized Pre-Columbian scroll-like forms that are expressed in machine-era materials that are typical of Art Deco style buildings: steel and chrome, marble, terrazzo, travertine, and wood.

### *Art Deco style Comparisons*

The Main Branch is an important large-scale Art Deco style building in Philadelphia. Of the few Art Deco buildings standing in Philadelphia, the Main Branch remains the only one to employ pre-Columbian ornamentation. Other notable Art Deco buildings in Philadelphia include: Robert N.C. Nix, Sr. Federal Building (1939) at 9<sup>th</sup> and Market Streets; WCAU Building (1931; National Register, 1982) at 1618-1622 Chestnut Street; and the Fidelity Mutual Life Insurance Building (1927; National Register, 1973) at 2501 Fairmount Avenue.

Philadelphia's United States Post Office and Court House at 9<sup>th</sup> and Market Streets (a.k.a. Robert N.C. Nix, Sr. Federal Building, National Register, 1990) serves as an example of a comparable Art Deco/Moderne style federal building in its size and use of streamlined ornament.<sup>42</sup> Designed in 1933 by unconventional Philadelphia architect Harry Sternfeld with Ballinger Company and completed in 1939<sup>43</sup>, Sternfeld's Art Moderne façade design for the US Court House and Post Office Building is a modernistic, restrained variation of the Art Deco style. Both the Main Branch and the Robert N.C. Nix, Sr. Federal Building share the low-relief carved ornamentation and block-long banks of vertical window openings. However, Sternfeld's expression is more streamlined in appearance than the Main Branch at 30<sup>th</sup> Street. The form is simpler, with a single set back at the roof and curved corners at the street level, a feature typical of the Art Moderne style. The streamlined fluted piers and the window bays are taken a step closer to modernism than those of the Main Branch. The entrance at the northeast corner is stepped like the northeast entrance on the Main Branch, but possesses rectangular edges instead of rounded ones.

The Art Deco façade of the WCAU Building, also designed by architect Harry Sternfeld, employs a variety of bold surface decoration much like that found on the Main Branch. However, unlike the Main Branch, the ornament that covers the top half of the WCAU Building is more playful and exuberant, featuring chevrons, zigzags, and discs in a variety of materials like glass and metal. The carved stone and bronze ornamentation of the Main Branch is restricted to controlled panels and friezes on the exterior. The stepped forms found throughout the exterior of the WCAU Building reference Aztec architecture and modernity in a way that is far more exaggerated than the elegant stepped form of the Main Branch.

The Fidelity Mutual Life Insurance Building, designed by Zantzinger, Borie & Medary in 1926, shares with the Main Branch a limestone-clad exterior and a Classical style formality that is overlaid with

<sup>42</sup> In 1933, the Italian Renaissance style Central Post Office (former Main Branch) at 9<sup>th</sup> and Market Streets, constructed in 1884, was torn down and replaced with the US Post Office and Court House in the same location.

<sup>43</sup> "United States Post Office and Courthouse," *Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, v. 48, n. 23, p. 177, 6/7/1933, Philadelphia Architects and Buildings Database. World Wide Web site [http://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/pr\\_display.cfm/21014](http://www.philadelphiabuildings.org/pab/app/pr_display.cfm/21014) accessed on April 11, 2005,

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bronze Art Deco style ornamentation. The style of the ornamentation imitates historic Assyrian decoration, with curvilinear forms, figures and animals of bronze.

Philadelphia's Main Branch also serves as an important national example of the Art Deco style. While Art Deco became a popular style for Public Works Administration buildings in the 1930s, rarely were these buildings as lavish or as large as Philadelphia's Main Branch. The United States Post Office (1934) at 901 Broadway in Nashville, Tennessee, (National Register, 1984) is a notable comparison. The Nashville architecture firm of Marr & Holman designed the building in the early 1930s. Like Philadelphia's Main Branch, this stone-clad block-shaped building also occupies an entire city block, but is somewhat smaller in scale than Philadelphia's Main Branch with only two stories and a raised basement. Both buildings share the block-long series of recessed vertical window openings filled with bronze windows and panels; low-relief stylized geometric ornamentation; and stylized fluted piers between the tall, narrow window openings. Like Philadelphia's Main Branch, stylized carved stone eagles adorn the building. However, while both display Art Deco-influenced decoration, the ornamentation of Nashville's United States Post Office features floriated and wave shapes that are very different from the pre-Columbian style scrolls and guilloches of Philadelphia's Main Branch. The buildings also differ slightly in form: the set backs at the corners and roofline on Philadelphia's Main Branch are far more pronounced than the simple block-like form and modest projecting frontispieces on the front elevation of Nashville's US Post Office.

The Post Office and Federal Building (1932), in downtown Terre Haute, IN, is another important example of the Art Deco style adapted for use a government building. This 3-story limestone-clad building has a symmetrical façade with entrances at the end bays. The form of the building lacks the step backs of the Philadelphia Main Branch and the simplified Art Deco style ornamentation is more restrained, suggesting a proclivity towards the stripped Classical Revival style.

In summary, the Main Branch is significant in the area of Government for its importance as the main processing and delivery facility in the city during the period of significance. Its innovative design incorporated the most modern technologies for mail processing and sorting available at the time of construction. The Main Branch also represents an important example of the Art Deco style. This outstanding work by Rankin & Kellogg and Tilden, Register & Pepper stands out in the region as unusual expression of an Art Deco design inspired by pre-Columbian ruins.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 1 United States Post Office—Main Branch, Philadelphia  
County, PA

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United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 9 Page 2 United States Post Office—Main Branch, Philadelphia  
County, PA

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## 10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property approximately 5 acres

### UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet)

1 18 484378 4422658  
Zone Easting Northing

2 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

3 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

4 \_\_\_\_\_  
Zone Easting Northing

\_\_\_\_ See continuation sheet.

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

## 11. Form Prepared By

name/title Sheryl Jaslow

organization Powers & Co., Inc. date July 27, 2005

street & number 211 N. 13<sup>th</sup> Street, 5<sup>th</sup> Floor telephone 215-636-0192

city or town Philadelphia state PA zip code 19107

## Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

### Continuation Sheets

### Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A **sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

### Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional Items (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

## Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name \_\_\_\_\_

street & number \_\_\_\_\_ telephone \_\_\_\_\_

city or town \_\_\_\_\_ state \_\_\_\_\_ zip code \_\_\_\_\_

**Paperwork Reduction Act Statement:** This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

**Estimated Burden Statement:** Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including the time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Project (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.



United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number 10 Page 1 United States Post Office—Main Branch, Philadelphia County, PA

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**Verbal Boundary Description:**

The boundary includes only the footprint of the building. The tax parcel for the Main Branch, #271000400, is the same boundary.

**Boundary Justification:**

In 2004, the Main Branch was included in a 24-acre parcel of land that was sold to the University of Pennsylvania.<sup>1</sup> Up until this sale, the properties associated with the Main Branch included: the Terminal Annex, a contemporary 2-story building clad in brick, limestone and stucco constructed in 1962 at 2970 Chestnut Street; a concrete parking garage at 31<sup>st</sup> and Chestnut Streets, constructed in 1960; and a 14-acre surface lot in the 2900 block south of the Walnut Street Bridge.<sup>2</sup> The nominated property includes the only the above-mentioned tax parcel associated with the United States Post Office—Main Branch building, as the construction dates of the other buildings formerly owned by the USPS fall outside the period of significance and they are no longer affiliated with the post office.

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<sup>1</sup> "University of Pennsylvania Finalizes Purchase of US Postal Service Property," World Wide Web accessed on October 14, 2005, <http://www.upenn.edu/pennnews/article.php?id=617>.

<sup>2</sup> John T. McNeill, *The Philadelphia Post Office, 1683-1960* (Philadelphia, 1960), 26.

United States Department of the Interior  
National Park Service

## National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Section number Photographs Page 1 United States Post Office—Main Branch, Philadelphia County, PA

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The following information pertains to every photograph:

**United States Post Office—Main Branch**  
**Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania**  
**Robert Powers**  
**April 2005**  
**Powers & Company, Inc.**  
**211 N. 13<sup>th</sup> Street, Suite 500**  
**Philadelphia, PA 19097**

<u>Photograph #</u>	<u>Description of Photograph</u>
1	North and west elevations, view SE
2	West elevation loading docks, view SE
3	South elevation, view NE
4	South and east elevations, view NW
5	South elevation, detail of stonework, view N
6	North elevation, detail of entrance into north public lobby, view S
7	1 <sup>st</sup> floor south public lobby, view W
8	1 <sup>st</sup> floor north public lobby, detail of mosaic ceiling, view N
9	1 <sup>st</sup> floor main public corridor from north public lobby, view S
10	1 <sup>st</sup> floor main public corridor, view S
11	1 <sup>st</sup> floor main public corridor, detail of wood ceiling
12	1 <sup>st</sup> floor main public corridor, detail of metal pilaster grille, view E
13	1 <sup>st</sup> floor vehicle maneuvering area, view S
14	2 <sup>nd</sup> floor north administration corridor, view E
15	2 <sup>nd</sup> floor mail work room, view S



United States Post Office--Main Branch - Site Plan and Exterior Photograph Locations, n.t.s.

Philadelphia County, PA  
 Robert Powers  
 July 2005  
 Powers & Company, Inc.







9/2/2006

NOTE TO FILE - NOMINATION REVIEW

United States Post Office – Main Branch  
Philadelphia, PA

The nomination for the United States Post Office – Main Branch building has been checked at the National level of significance by the PA State Historic Preservation Officer. While the building is clearly of historic and architectural importance, the nomination focuses almost exclusively on the local (Philadelphia) context. While some reference is made to other federal buildings in other cities, a more detailed national context would need to be developed in order to consider whether the United States Post Office – Main Branch is of national importance.

Patrick Andrus  
Historian  
National Register of Historic Places

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY United States Post Office--Main Branch  
NAME:

MULTIPLE  
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: PENNSYLVANIA, Philadelphia

DATE RECEIVED: 7/24/06 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 8/08/06  
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 8/23/06 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 9/06/06  
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 06000782

REASONS FOR REVIEW:

APPEAL: N DATA PROBLEM: N LANDSCAPE: N LESS THAN 50 YEARS: N  
OTHER: N PDIL: N PERIOD: N PROGRAM UNAPPROVED: N  
REQUEST: N SAMPLE: N SLR DRAFT: N NATIONAL: Y

COMMENT WAIVER: N

☒ ACCEPT ☐ RETURN ☐ REJECT 9/5/06 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

*Historically & architecturally significant 1930s Art Deco  
Style building which served as Philadelphia's main post office*

RECOM./CRITERIA Accept AEC

REVIEWER Patrick Andrews DISCIPLINE Historian

TELEPHONE \_\_\_\_\_ DATE 9/5/2006

DOCUMENTATION see attached comments Y/N see attached SLR Y/N

If a nomination is returned to the nominating authority, the  
nomination is no longer under consideration by the NPS.





UNITED STATES POST OFFICE  
PHILADELPHIA COUNTY, PA

PHOTO # 1





UNITED STATES POST OFFICE  
PHILADELPHIA COUNTY, PA  
PHOTO # 2





UNITED STATES POST OFFICE  
PHILADELPHIA COUNTY, PA  
POTO # 3



UNITED STATES POST OFFICE  
PHILADELPHIA COUNTY, PA  
PHOTO #4





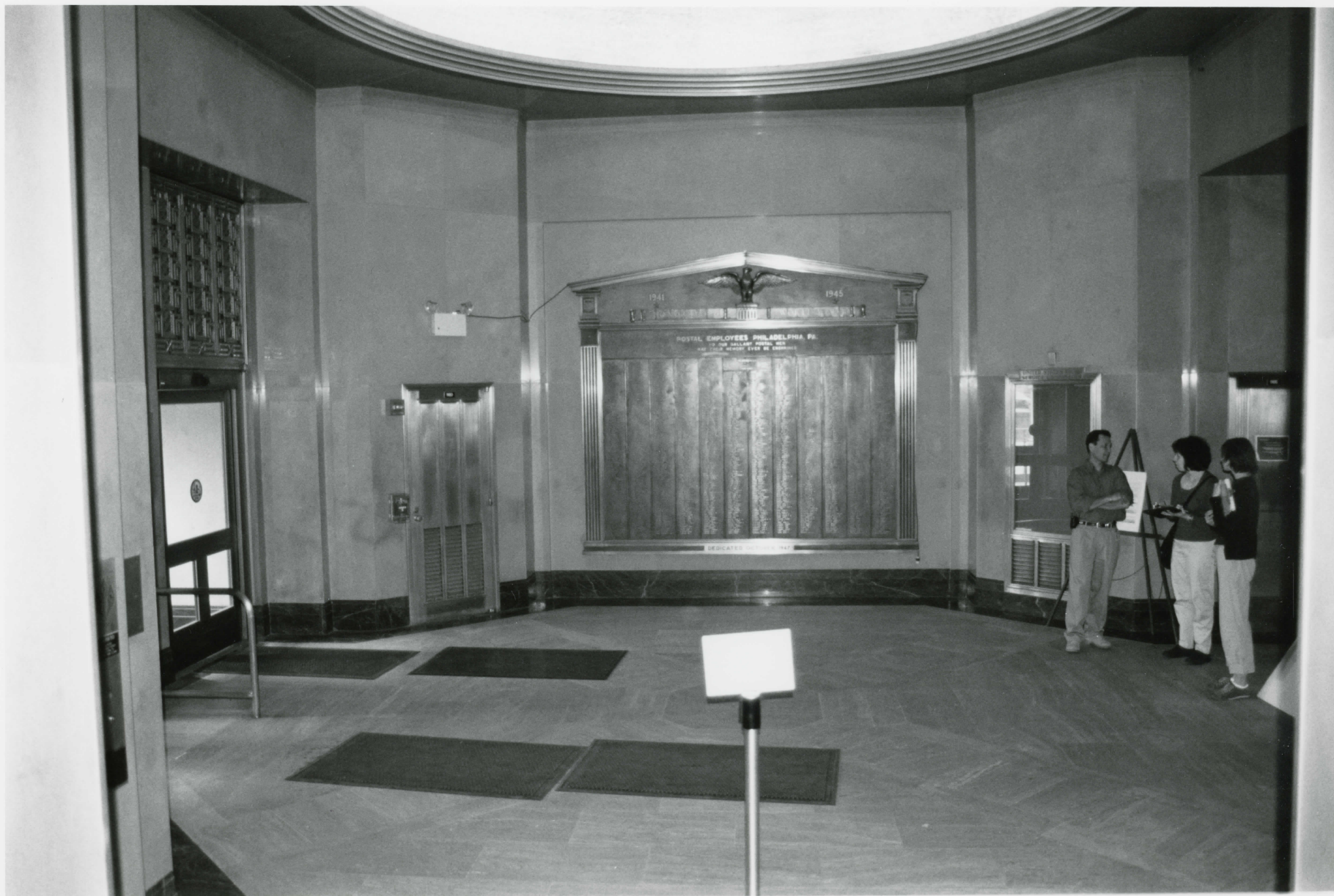
UNITED STATES POST OFFICE  
PHILADELPHIA COUNTY, PA  
PHOTO #5





UNITED STATES POST OFFICE  
PHILADELPHIA COUNTY, PA  
PHOTO # 6





UNITED STATES POST OFFICE  
PHILADELPHIA COUNTY, PA  
PHOTO #7







UNITED STATES POST OFFICE  
PHILADELPHIA COUNTY, PA  
PHOTO # 8



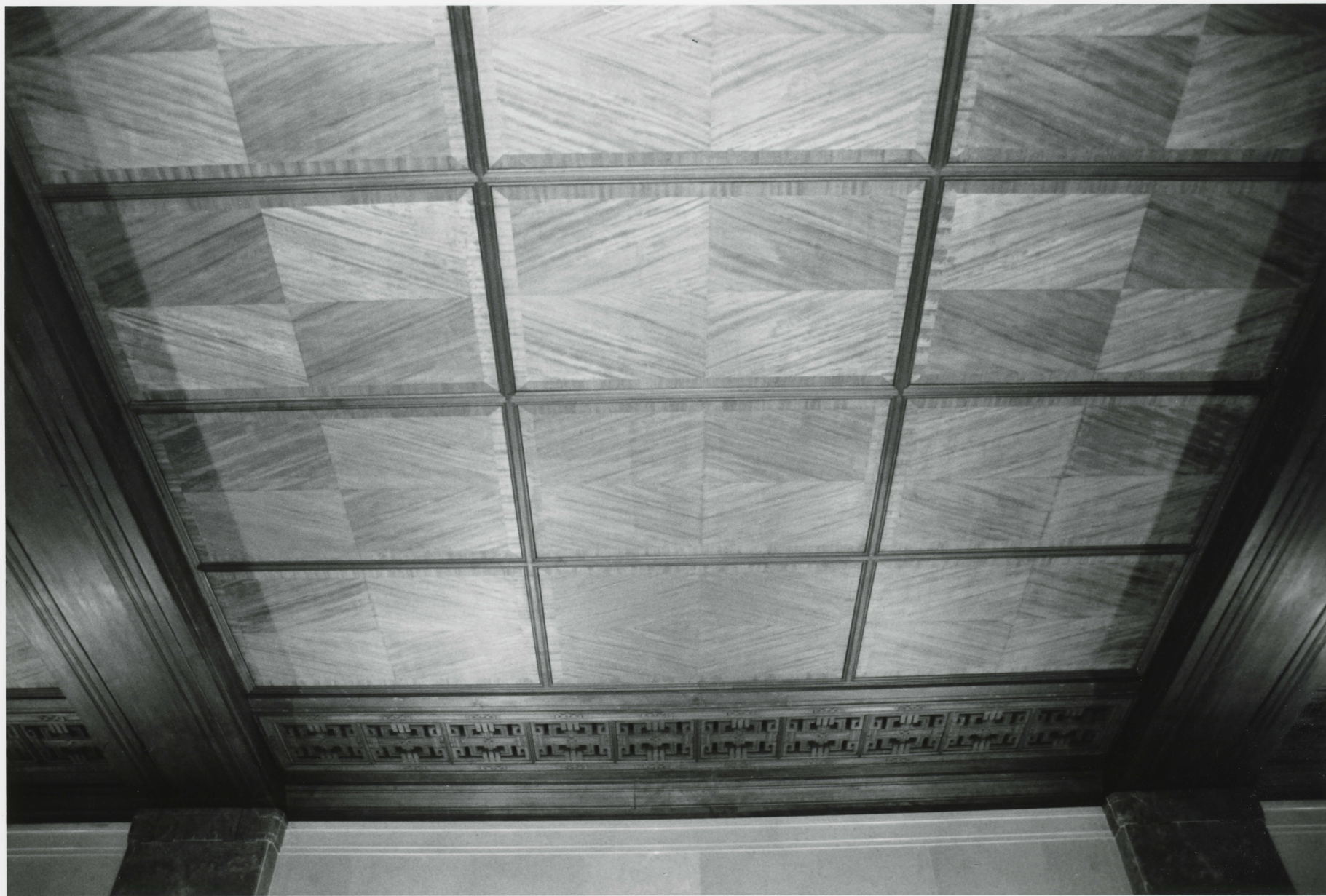
UNITED STATES POST OFFICE  
PHILADELPHIA COUNTY, PA  
PHOTO # 9





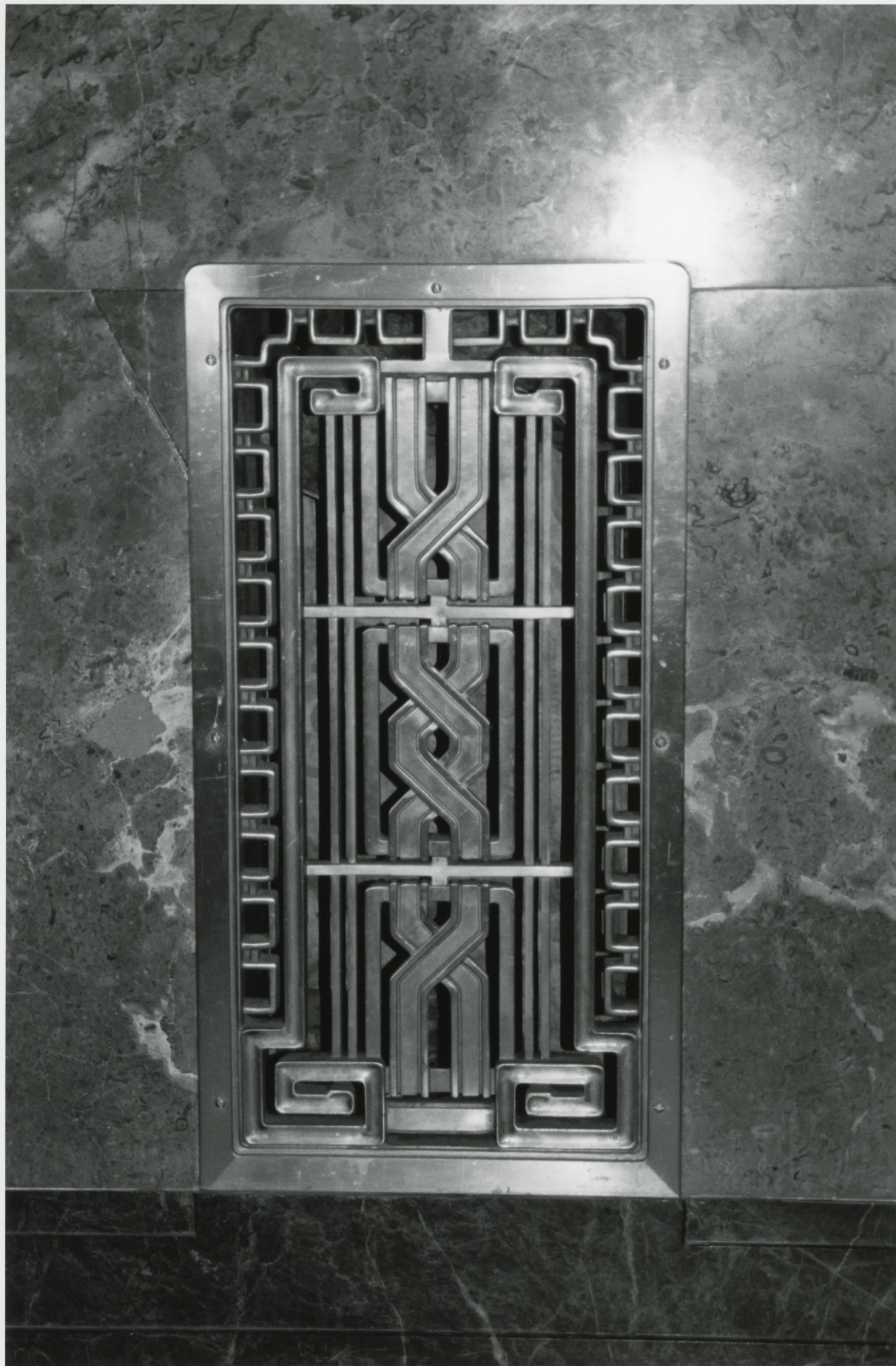
UNITED STATES POST OFFICE  
PHILADELPHIA COUNTY, PA  
PHOTO #10





UNITED STATES POST OFFICE  
PHILADELPHIA COUNTY, PA  
PHOTO #11





UNITED STATES POST OFFICE  
PHILADELPHIA COUNTY, PA  
PHOTO # 12







UNITED STATES POST OFFICE  
PHILADELPHIA COUNTY, PA  
PHOTO #13



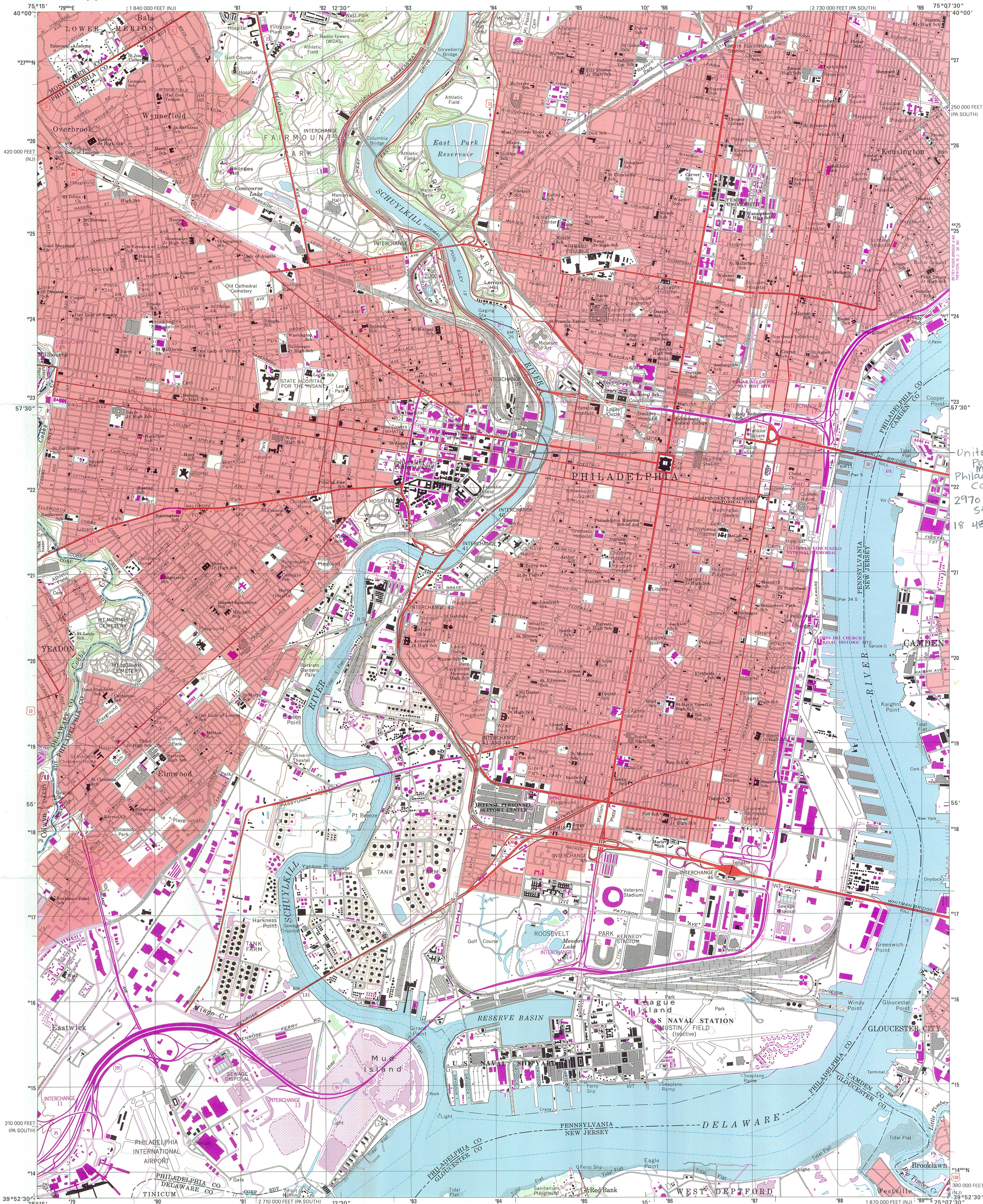
UNITED STATES POST OFFICE  
PHILADELPHIA COUNTY, PA  
PHOTO #14





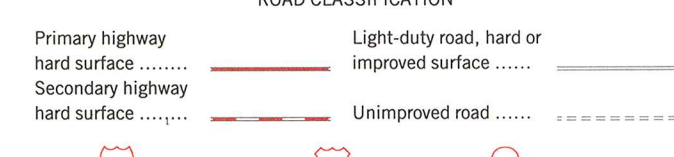
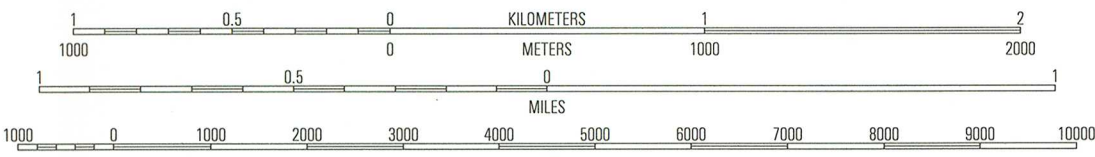
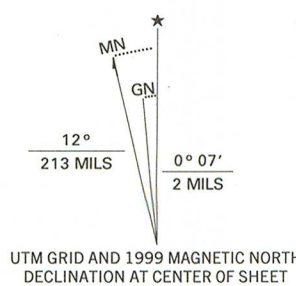
UNITED STATES POST OFFICE  
PHILADELPHIA COUNTY, PA  
PHOTO #15





United States  
Post office -  
Main Branch  
Philadelphia  
County, PA  
2970 market  
street  
18 484378 4422658

Produced by the United States Geological Survey  
Topography compiled 1965. Planimetry derived from imagery taken 1990 and other sources. Photomaps using imagery dated 1995; no major culture or drainage changes observed. Survey control current as of 1967. Boundaries, other than corporate, revised 1999  
North American Datum of 1927 (NAD 27)  
Projection: Pennsylvania coordinate system, south zone  
(Lambert conformal conic)  
10 000-foot ticks: Pennsylvania coordinate system, south zone and New Jersey coordinate system  
1000-meter Universal Transverse Mercator grid, zone 18  
North American Datum of 1983 (NAD 83) is shown by dashed corner ticks. The values of the shift between NAD 27 and NAD 83 for 7.5-minute intersections are obtainable from National Geodetic Survey NADCON software  
There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of the National or State reservations shown on this map  
Information shown in purple may not meet USGS content standards and may conflict with previously mapped contours



1	2	3
4	5	6
7	8	9

PHILADELPHIA, PA-NJ

1995

NIMA 5963 1 NW-SERIES V831

THIS MAP COMPLIES WITH NATIONAL MAP ACCURACY STANDARDS  
FOR SALE BY U.S. GEOLOGICAL SURVEY, P.O. BOX 25286, DENVER, COLORADO 80225  
A FOLDER DESCRIBING TOPOGRAPHIC MAPS AND SYMBOLS IS AVAILABLE ON REQUEST







Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission  
Bureau for Historic Preservation  
Commonwealth Keystone Building, 2nd Floor  
400 North Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-0093  
www.phmc.state.pa.us

**FILE**

December 9, 2005

Tina Norwood  
Facilities Headquarters  
U.S. Postal Service  
4301 Wilson Blvd., Ste. 300  
Arlington, VA 22203-1861



Re: U. S. Post Office, 2970 Market Street, Philadelphia, Philadelphia County

Dear Ms. Norwood:

Please find a final copy of the National Register of Historic Places Form and a Resource Inventory sheet for the above referenced property. The building is currently owned by the U. S. Postal Service. The nomination will be reviewed by the Pennsylvania Historic Preservation Board at its March 7, 2006, meeting. There is a U.S. Post Office at 2970 Market Street that is considered contributing to the district.

Your comments on this nomination are invited. They should be returned to my attention at this address:

Bureau for Historic Preservation  
Commonwealth Keystone Building  
400 North Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-0093

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at (717) 787-4215.

Sincerely,

*Andrea L. MacDonald*

Andrea L. MacDonald, Chief  
Division of Preservation Services

Enclosure

ALM/hj



## CITY OF PHILADELPHIA

25 January 2006

Andrea L. MacDonald  
Chief, Division of Preservation Services  
Bureau for Historic Preservation  
Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission  
Commonwealth Keystone Building, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor  
400 North Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-0093



PHILADELPHIA HISTORICAL  
COMMISSION

Room 576, City Hall  
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania 19107  
Tel: 215.686.7660  
Fax: 215.686.7674

Michael Sklaroff, Esq.  
Chair

Jonathan E. Farnham, Ph.D.  
Acting Historic Preservation Officer

Re: U.S. Post Office Building, 2970 Market Street, Philadelphia County

In response to your request for an official Certified Local Government recommendation on the significance of the United States Post Office Building at 2970 Market Street in Philadelphia, the Philadelphia Historical Commission convened to review the National Register nomination on 13 January 2006. At that meeting, the Commission voted unanimously to recommend to the Pennsylvania Historic Preservation Board that the building satisfies National Register Criteria A (It is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history) and C (It embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values). Designed by the important architectural firm of Rankin & Kellogg and built between 1931 and 1935, the Art Deco building is significant for both its architectural and technological innovations and served as a key hub in the nation's mail distribution system from its opening to the present. Most notably, it was uniquely designed to ship and receive mail by boat, train, truck, and auto-giro.

Thank you for the opportunity to review the National Register nomination.

Yours truly,

Jonathan E. Farnham, Ph.D.  
Acting Historic Preservation Officer





Commonwealth of Pennsylvania  
Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission  
Bureau for Historic Preservation  
Commonwealth Keystone Building, 2nd Floor  
400 North Street  
Harrisburg, PA 17120-0093



July 20, 2006

Jan Matthews, Keeper  
National Register of Historic Places  
U.S. Department of Interior  
National Park Service  
National Register of Historic Places  
1201 "I" (Eye) Street, NW, 8th floor  
Washington D.C. 20005

Re: NR nomination form

Dear Ms Matthews:

The following National Register form is being submitted for your review:

United States Post Office—Main Branch, Philadelphia County

The proposed action is listing in the National Register.

If you have any questions regarding the nominations please contact Carol Lee at 717-783-9918.

Sincerely,

Andrea L. MacDonald, Chief  
Division of Preservation Services

Enclosures

ALM/cl