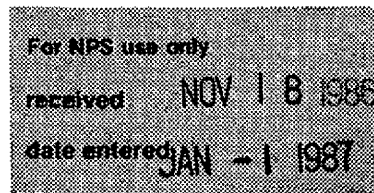


**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

Market Street MBA



Continuation sheet *Wilmington, New Castle Co., DE* Item number

Page

Property Name: F. W. Woolworth Company Building
839 North Market Street

The F. W. Woolworth Company Building was designed in 1939 and built in 1940. A third story, which had been planned in the original design, was added in 1959.

Verbal Boundary Description:

Quadrangle Name: Wilmington South
Quadrangle Scale: 1:24,000
UTM Coordinate: 18-452980-4399340

Description and Justification: The area nominated includes parcel 26 035.20 082, which is .25 acres, and is described as follows: Beginning at a point on the southwest corner of North Market Street and West Ninth Street; thence easterly along property line 117.5 feet; thence northerly along North market Street 91 feet to beginning point.

Owner: F. W. Woolworth Company
P. O. Box 1665
Milwaukee, Wisconsin 53201

Description:

Location: 839 North Market Street
CRS No.: N.3879
Built: 1940

The F. W. Woolworth Company Building is a three-story commercial building with a square plan built of steel frame construction with a masonry curtain wall. The Market Street facade has a black granite foundation with large display windows with non-structural metal frames. Two recessed doorways with metal frame glass doors are on the facade and a canvas awning is over storefront. A wide orange terracotta band with the store's name in brass colored letters divides the first-floor display windows from the second floor terracotta facade. The second floor of the facade features recessed peach colored tiles capped with a stylized lotus flower relief above metal casement windows and cream colored tile pylons on either side of the windows. The building has a flat roof with one central and two flanking parapet walls with setbacks. The rear section is a three story tan brick wing. The third story, which was added in 1959, has a lighter colored brick than lower levels. The Ninth Street entrance, which is bricked over, features black granite vertical surrounds with a horizontally fluted polished metal lintel. Metal frame casement windows occur at the second floor level and are double hung. Two-over-two windows exist on the third floor. This section has a flat roof with a parapet wall. The interior consists of plain walls with a cavetto cornice and structural square posts with flared capitals. It has reinforced concrete floors covered with tile. The escalator to the lower level is in the center of main floor and a stairway with a plain metal railing is located toward the rear of the building.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only	
received	NOV 18 1986
date entered	JAN - 1 1987

Continuation sheet

Item number

Page

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE:

The F. W. Woolworth Building, located on the southwest corner of Ninth and Market Streets, is being nominated under Criterion C, for embodying the distinctive characteristics of the Art Deco style of architecture. While this building is not unique in design, it is significant within this context. The period of popularity of Moderne architecture, occurring between approximately 1925 and 1945, is little represented in the City of Wilmington and the State of Delaware as a whole. No truly high-style examples exist and of those buildings which have been identified, most have been altered.

The original portion of the F. W. Woolworth Building is extremely intact on the exterior and, thus, clearly displays the original concept of the company architect, H. W. Stakes. Eager to present a contemporary image, Woolworth Stores adopted the French Moderne style popularized by the 1925 Paris Exposition of Industrial and Decorative Arts. This style, often referred to today as "Art Deco," was a self-conscious attempt to break away from traditional architectural expression. The creators of the style drew from various movements in art and architecture, including Art Norweau, Cubism, and African and American primitive art.

With the standardization of this new peach and cream glazed terracotta design, Woolworth stores were meant to appear uniformly clean, efficient and modern. While Woolworth was not the first company to use a distinct building style to promote individuality within the marketplace, it was one of the most devoted to the concept of "architecture as billboard" with the urban environment.

The principal elements in the design of the store are the use of color, material, simple geometry and stylized ornament. The basic massing of the structure is enlivened at the second floor by the use of alternating bands of color and height. Unlike the storefront level, the second floor is strongly vertical in character. This setback motif was drawn from popular interpretation of Aztec forms. The conventionalized ornament in low relief, confined to bands or blocks within the facade, were inspired by Egyptian decorative works.

A wide darker peach band of terracotta, containing the name and logo of the store, makes a strong horizontal break between the first and second floors and represents the distinction in function between the retail and office use of the building.

When the store was completed in 1940, it was a two-story building with the basement and second floor which was used for storage. However, it was designed to be expanded in the future if needed. The basement could be opened up for additional sales area and the structure could support a third story. As a result of increased business, these alterations were undertaken in 1959.

The interior of the building reflects the marketing philosophy of the company. Woolworth was the first store to place merchandise out on counters where customers could select what they wanted without the help of salespeople. The

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National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Inventory—Nomination Form**

For NPS use only	
received	NOV 18 1986
date entered	JAN - 1 1987

Continuation sheet

Item number

Page

building has a large amount of open floor space on two levels which are connected by two wide stairways. In addition to the sales area, the store has a lunch counter and a bakery, which is no longer in use. The interior is very plain, reflecting Woolworth's emphasis on low cost, "no frills" merchandise.

The building has been in continuous use by the same company since it was opened in 1940. A second Woolworth Store, also built in 1940, is located at 504 Market Street (N.4000.12). No other Woolworth stores of this era or design exists in the State of Delaware.

By: Susan Chandler
Historical Architect
BAHP
Old State House
Dover, DE
Oct, 1986