

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 National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. 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.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: Real Estate Trust Building; Continental Trust Building

Other names/site number: People's Life Insurance Company Building; Landmark Building

Name of related multiple property listing:

N/A

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

2. Location

Street & number: 1343 H Street NW

City or town: Washington, D.C. State: _____ County: _____

Not For Publication: Vicinity:

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, 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 at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

X A ___ B X C ___ D

<u>DAVID MALONEY / DC SHPO</u>	<u>11/28/2014</u>
Signature of certifying official/Title:	Date
<u>DC HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE</u>	
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government	

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.	
Signature of commenting official:	Date
Title :	State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:)

Patrick Ardun
Signature of the Keeper

1/20/2015
Date of Action

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

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u> </u>	buildings
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	sites
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	structures
<u> </u>	<u> </u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u> </u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE/Office Building

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE/Office Building

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

20th CENTURY REVIVAL/Beaux Arts

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: Terra Cotta

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

The Real Estate Trust building is a twelve-story commercial office building located in downtown Washington, D.C. at the northeast corner of 14th and H Streets NW. It was constructed in 1913-1914 and designed in a highly ornate Beaux Arts Renaissance Revival-style by the Washington-based architecture firm Milburn, Heister & Company. The Milburn, Heister & Company was responsible for the design of many notable commercial and government buildings in D.C. and in the southern United States during the early 20th century.

The building is a steel and concrete frame structure sheathed in ivory-colored terra cotta made more remarkable by its polychromatic accents found most prominently in the spandrels and at the building cornice. The building has a rectangular plan, with a frontage of 46 feet on 14th Street and 75 feet on H Street, and entrances on both facades. The building retains integrity of design and materials with no significant additions; however, certain exterior alterations have occurred over the course of 100 years, in particularly the remodeling of the building's ground floor and the removal of an elaborate pierced, cast iron crown cornice between 1941 and 1948 and its replacement with one made of brick.

When constructed, the early 20th-century office building rose above its Victorian neighbors; today it is abutted by equally tall and larger office buildings of more recent vintage.

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Narrative Description

Exterior Description

Like other early 20th-century office buildings, the 12-story steel-frame Real Estate Trust building is divided into three principal horizontal parts of base, shaft and top. The double-height base level is sheathed in white replacement marble, while the shaft of the building, corresponding to floors 2-10, and top level (floors 11-12) are characterized by mat-glazed terra cotta tiles. Historically, the top (or attic) level was capped at its height by a broad and pierced metal cornice, but was replaced with a less bold brick one during the 1940s. In 1983, the building was renovated during which time the base of the building had its historic marble cladding replaced with a new marble cladding, door and window archways and surrounds were modified, and the third-story former balcony level was altered. The 1983 renovation largely respected the dimensions of the historic materials, and re-used many of the original materials and features; however other historic elements were lost during the renovation. For instance, the third-story balcony level which was deteriorating was replaced with an 18-inch ledge of pre-cast stone designed to match the historic terra cotta in texture and coloring. Similarly, some of the original *bas relief* sculpture was preserved and re-used, namely the tympanums in the arched openings, while other features, such as *bas relief* panels and architrave surrounds of the rectangular openings were removed and replaced with different treatments.

The building's terra cotta cladding is predominantly ivory-white in color, with accents of gold, green, buff and plum in the spandrels and at the cornice line. The structure has two principal façades: the five-bay elevation facing H Street and four-bay elevation on 14th Street. The H Street façade is defined at its base by three tall, arched windows with *bas relief* tympanums within the arches above plate glass windows. These arched windows are flanked by smaller rectangular openings punched into the bays at either end of the façade with architrave surrounds characterized by exaggerated, but relatively flat central keystones. The opening closest to 14th Street is a window, while that one at the eastern end bay is a single replacement door providing access to the professional offices above the ground floor retail. The surrounds of these rectangular openings are a product of the 1983 renovation. Historic photos show that the original openings had full and projecting architrave surrounds with projecting cornices and rectangular sculptural *bas relief* panels above. The door leading to the professional offices historically had a metal marquise, though this was not an original feature of the building, having been added after 1926 based on historic photos.

The nine-story shaft rises above the base level of the H Street elevation and houses office floors 2-10. Within this shaft, the building's second floor is separated from the building's base by a narrow cornice with modillions, while a more pronounced beltcourse and balcony level rises above this level. Historically, the balcony was a true balcony, providing access from the three central window bays of the building; however, due to deterioration, the 1983 renovation eliminated the working balcony and replaced it with an 18-inch ledge. The ledge is clad with pre-cast stone to match the terra cotta tiles, while the original large polychrome terra cotta urns were re-used along with the stone modillions which support them.

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The building's shaft is defined vertically by five bays of window columns with each bay consisting of pairs of 1/1 windows. The relatively unadorned pairs of windows on the end bays are punched into the solid walls, essentially bookending the central three pairs that are more highly accentuated with spandrels and giant-order pilasters that give the building added verticality. The shaft is capped by a projecting cornice of tightly spaced and continuous acanthus leaf modillions. The cornice surmounts the vertical window bays each of which is itself capped by a frieze decorated with raised and bisected quatre-foil motifs of terra cotta. The end bays of the wall are separated from the three interior bays by pilasters, capped at the top by shields with a recessed and stylized fleur-de-lis pattern.

The top of the building is an ornate, double-height section with five bays of double-height arched openings with superimposed windows within them. The lower level openings are paired, rectangular windows like those in the building's shaft, while the upper level ones are paired, and round-arched giving the building its Renaissance Revival-style character. Gold spandrels separating the superimposed windows and polychromatic reeded moldings framing the arched openings are distinctive.

The Fourteenth Street elevation is treated in the same manner on all levels, but has four window bays rather than five, and its outermost unadorned window columns have single rather than paired double-hung windows. Also, at the attic level, the end bays have round-arched openings rather than segmental-arched ones as elsewhere.

Interior Description

As described in period articles on the building's construction, the first floor of the building which served as offices for the Real Estate Trust Company had an open floor plan and a mezzanine gallery along one side. The offices featured mahogany fixtures and floors of white marble and oak parquet. The basement was reserved for a restaurant primarily for the use of the company's agents and client. Since its 1914 opening, the interior of the Real Estate Trust building has been extensively altered, leaving no historic features or fabric. According to the documentation of the 1983 renovation, no interior finishes remained at that time, with the exception of one stair. No attempt was made to retain this stair, or to reproduce historic finishes. The ground floor, historically offices to the trust companies, now houses a sandwich shop.

INTEGRITY

During the mid-20th century, the Real Estate Trust building underwent several alterations. The original ground floor was altered through the successive installation of two or three different storefront claddings, the building's original cornice was removed and replaced with a brick parapet, and interior spaces were altered. In 1983, the building was renovated; the renovation included cleaning and repointing approximately 80% of the terra cotta tiles, and replacement of those beyond repair with new cast stone tiles; redesign and replacement of the "decayed" third-floor balcony with a new 18-inch-deep cast stone ledge; and the replacement of the ground floor with new marble cladding and new openings with new surrounds. The carved marble arches and

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the over-door panels were retained and restored. Similarly, the historic terra cotta urns and portions of the pedestals were re-used at the re-designed third-floor ledge, while portions of the pilaster capitals and architrave were replaced with cast stone. The Real Estate Trust building restoration project received an Award for Historic Preservation from the Washington Chapter of the AIA in 1983.

Although the renovation would not likely qualify for a preservation award by today's standards, the building, despite the removal of certain architectural and ornamental elements on its exterior and the re-cladding of the first floor base and alteration of openings, still retains integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, feeling and association. The office building is prominently sited at an important intersection historically and currently, and clearly stands out from its abutting neighbors as one of the oldest office buildings in the vicinity. It is located across 14th Street from the Bond Building and up 14th Street from the Colorado Building, both early 20th-century Beaux Arts office buildings that together define this area as an important historic business district from the early 20th century. The building retains integrity of design and materials. In particular, its distinctive polychromatic terra cotta cladding distinguishes the Real Estate Trust building from other office buildings of the period. The building's other decorative features, such as the carved *bas reliefs* and the urns, further contribute to its high quality materials and workmanship. The feeling and association of the building as an early 20th century office building are intact.

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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 grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

COMMUNITY PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

Period of Significance

1913-1914

Significant Dates

1913; 1914

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Milburn, Heister & Company

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Real Estate Trust Company was constructed in 1913-1914 and designed in a highly ornate Beaux Arts Renaissance Revival-style by the Washington-based architecture firm Milburn, Heister & Company. The Milburn, Heister & Company was responsible for the design of many high-profile commercial and government buildings in D.C. and in the southern United States during the early 20th century. The building was built to house the offices of the Real Estate Trust Company which was organized in 1912 and specialized in financing real estate development and investment.

The office building was constructed on the site of the "old" Montrose Hotel, representing the transformation of this area of downtown from a residential neighborhood to a financial and business center. Within two years of its 1914 completion, the Real Estate Trust Company was displaced as the building's flagship tenant by the Continental Trust Company, and thus became known as the Continental Trust building. The reasons behind the Real Estate Trust Company's turn of fortune are unclear, although the Federal Reserve Act of 1914 may have played a role in the company's decline. The Federal Reserve Act made it legal for the first time for banks to make loans secured by real estate and fulfill other functions previously restricted to trust companies. With more players in the marketplace, the Real Estate Trust Company may have lost its favored position because of increased competition following passage of the Act.

The Continental Trust Company occupied the building until 1960, including through its 1930 consolidation with Commercial National Bank. After this 1930 consolidation, the building was renamed the People's Life Insurance building. In 1960, when the company sold the building and moved out, the building was renamed the Landmark building.

The Real Estate Trust building merits listing in the National Register of Historic Places at the local level of significance with Architecture and Community Planning and Development as the Areas of Significance. The property meets Criterion C as an excellent example of an early 20th century office building, and more specifically as a unique example of a polychrome terra cotta building in Washington, D.C. Although there are other terra cotta buildings in the city (the McLachlen building at 10th and G Streets NW, the former Lansburgh Department Store at 7th and F Streets, NW, the Southern Building at 15th and H Streets NW, the Warner Theater at 513 13th Street and the Woodward Building at 15th and H Streets NW to name a few), the Real Estate Trust building is distinguished as the only one with extensive use of polychromy. In addition, the Real Estate Trust Company was one of the first purpose-built, high-rise office buildings erected in downtown D.C. in the early 20th century and represents the first phase of the area's transformation from residential to commercial/business.

As such, the Real Estate Trust Company building embodies the distinguishing characteristics of its building type and style, and it is an expression of urban planning, siting and design significant to the appearance and development of the District of Columbia. The building also possesses high artistic and aesthetic value that contributes significantly to the heritage and appearance of the

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District of Columbia. And, the building has been identified as a notable work of an architect whose works are significant to the development of the District of Columbia.

The Period of Significance for the property is 1913-1914, representing the period of time in which the building was designed, constructed, and opened for occupation.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Architecture: The Real Estate is significant in the Area of Architecture as the only significant polychrome terra cotta edifice in Washington, D.C. While polychrome terra cotta was available and promoted in the early 20th century, it was rarely employed in Washington. The *Washington Post* called the building “Prettily Tinted,” writing that the multicolored tiles “make the building distinctive, in that it will be the first time that polochrome [sic] effect has been attempted to any extent on a building in the District.”¹ The Real Estate Trust Building is also significant as a Beaux Arts-style office building designed by private enterprise during the City Beautiful Movement in Washington, D.C.

Community Planning and Development: The Real Estate Trust Company is significant in the area of Community Planning and Development. Formerly a residential neighborhood home to many sizeable Victorian dwellings owned by established Washingtonians, the McPherson Square area was reborn as a financial district in the early 20th century, where the once-fashionable mansions fell to make way for new office buildings. The construction of the Real Estate Trust Building, as one of the first major office buildings in the vicinity, heralded the rapid commercial development that this section of the city. Its construction contributed to the growth of the city’s 20th century downtown area, and represents the first phase of the area’s transformation from residential to commercial/business.

Development History/additional historic context

The Growth of Modern Banking in Washington and the Rise of Trust Companies²:

The early history of banking in Washington, D.C. is largely defined by loosely structured Congressionally chartered banks vs. unchartered private banks. The modern banking system with greater controls and regulations did not develop until the last decades of the 19th century, during a time of great expansion in the city’s economy. Between 1880 and the establishment of the Federal Reserve in 1914, the number of banks in the city tripled, while the number of assets increased in even greater numbers. During this period, several distinct types of banks operated in the city, including national banks, private banks, savings banks, state-chartered banks, and trust

¹ “New Type of Building,” *The Washington Post*, October 12, 1913, R2

² This information has been taken from the Financial Historic District National Register nomination (draft, 2014) form.

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companies. These different types of banks were all important in shaping the city's banking industry and in defining the physical development of the city's financial centers, though it is the trust companies that are relevant here.

Trust companies began operating in the city after 1890 when Congress empowered the District to charter them. Trust companies were intended to respond to a different economic need, and performed a different function from that of national or savings banks. They served primarily as a depository for investment capital held by corporations, trustees of estates, or wealthy individuals. They made primarily long-term loans and loans to finance real estate development, neither of which commercial banks were allowed to do. Trust companies were subject to the same supervision by the Comptroller of the Treasury as national banks, but were required to maintain higher levels of capital stock. Because of their intended purpose and the strictness of the laws governing them, trust companies became a select group of institutions catering to a wealthier and better established clientele.³ Trust companies helped to fuel the real estate boom in the city and its suburbs, providing the capital for developers to undertake major land purchases and build the infrastructure necessary to encourage residential settlement. Although there was competition between the trust companies and the large national banks, there was less overlap between the trust companies and the smaller savings and local neighborhood banks.⁴

In addition to licensing trust companies, the 1890 legislation provided the first regulation of storage companies which were often associated with trust companies. Storage companies represented a logical extension of the safe deposit business, which by this time was often included as part of the expected services of a financial institution. American Security and Trust Company for instance rented out storage space for trunks, boxes, and other valuables, as well as operating a large storage warehouse for bulkier items. Similarly, the Union Trust Company (originally the Union Trust and Storage Company) provided warehousing services.

Washington's booming real estate market was one of the major reasons for the rise of trust companies in the city. The number of federal employees grew significantly in the late 19th-century, and with low taxes and land prices on the rise, Washington's residential neighborhoods developed rapidly and attracted affluent residents. Before 1914, as national banks could not accept loans secured by real estate, trust companies and building and loan associations, therefore, were well situated to take advantage of these real estate opportunities. The first two D.C. trust companies—the Washington Loan and Trust and the American Security and Trust—were organized in 1889. Between 1895 and 1914, the number of trust companies in the city doubled, illustrating the success of the Washington trust company as a financial institution.⁵

³ Hooper, Carol. "Banks and Financial Institutions of Washington, D.C., National Register of Historic Places Multiple Property document, 1993, p. 23-24.

⁴ Hooper, Survey of Banks and Financial Institutions in Washington, D.C., p. 31.

⁵ Hooper, 21-24.

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The Real Estate Trust Company and Construction of 1343 H Street, NW

The Real Estate Trust Company was organized in 1912 by persons associated with the United States Trust Company and the Chevy Chase to Great Falls Land Company. The company named H. Bradley Davidson as president, H.G Hamilton as vice president, and Ellis Donaldson as general counsel. The company was primarily involved in underwriting corporations in the Washington area, but also loaned money on real estate and developed property.⁶ The Real Estate Trust Company became a prominent land developer in Washington, notable in particular for its residential development of Bradley Hills in Bethesda.

The company began its existence at 1414 F Street, but within one year had selected Milburn, Heister & Company to design a new headquarters building at 1343 H Street. The “old” Montrose Hotel—a three-story Second Empire-style Victorian building—was torn down to make way for the new structure. A building permit, applied for in June 1913, was issued, and by January of 1914, the exterior of the structure was complete and the finishing of the interior had begun. Almost all of the office space was rented before the building was finished. The Real Estate Trust Building was outfitted with the latest technology, including “rapid-transit electric elevators.”⁷ Given its considerable size and height, the structure received a good deal of publicity when it was finished. Even ten years after its construction, the Real Estate Trust Building was still being proclaimed as one of the largest office buildings in Washington.

The Real Estate Trust moved into its newly completed headquarters in June of 1914 and occupied the lower floors. According to descriptions in the press, its new offices were furnished with mahogany fixtures and had floors of white marble and oak parquetry. The first floor had an open floor plan and a mezzanine gallery along one side. The company fashioned the basement as a restaurant primarily for the use of its agents and clients.⁸

At the time of its construction, the building was hailed for its unique design. Indeed, the Real Estate Trust building is the only significant polychrome terra cotta edifice in the city. While polychrome terra cotta was available and promoted in the early 20th century, it was only rarely used in Washington, D.C., a city dominated by traditional classically inspired architecture during the Beaux-Arts period. In 1913, the *Washington Post* called the building “Prettily Tinted,” writing that the multicolored tiles “make the building distinctive, in that it will be the first time that polochrome [sic] effect has been attempted to any extent on a building in the District.”⁹ While several terra cotta facades of the same vintage remain in the city, the Real Estate Trust Building is the only one with extensive use of polychromy.

At the time of its move in June of 1914 into the Real Estate Trust building, the Real Estate Trust Company had built a large real estate, insurance and investment business in the city. The statement of its assets and liabilities in the spring of 1914 was over 1.3 million dollars and the

⁶ “Real Estate Trust Company Organized,” *The Washington Star*, March 26, 1912, p. 20.

⁷ “Hotel Will Be Razed,” *The Washington Post*, February 2, 1913, p. 8.

⁸ “Company in Its New Home,” *The Washington Post*, June 28, 1914, p. R3.

⁹ “New Type of Building,” *The Washington Post*, October 12, 1913, p. R3.

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company was capitalized at 1.5 million.¹⁰ In just two years after construction of the building, however, the Real Estate Trust Company moved out, and was replaced by another financial institution. The reasons behind the company's turn of fortune are unclear, although the Federal Reserve Act of 1914 may have played a role in the company's decline. The Federal Reserve Act made it legal for the first time for banks to make loans secured by real estate and fulfill other functions previously restricted to trust companies. With more players in the marketplace, the Real Estate Trust Company may have lost its favored position because of increased competition following the passage of the Act.¹¹

By 1919, the building at 1343 H Street NW was known as the Continental Trust Building. A Milburn, Heister & Company publication of 1922 refers to the structure as Continental Trust Company building.¹² By 1927, according to a Washington Board of Trade advertisement, the building was then the home office of the Peoples Life Insurance Company. Three decades later when the Peoples Life Insurance Company built a new headquarters, the structure was sold and renamed the Landmark Building.¹³

Historical and Architectural Significance of the Real Estate Trust building

The Real Estate Trust Building was built during the early 20th-century wave of commercial development in this section of downtown Washington. Before the turn of the 20th century, this part of downtown, especially around McPherson Square, was a wealthy residential neighborhood. However, as the once-fashionable mansions were demolished in the early 20th century to make way for new office buildings, it was reborn as an important business and financial district. The construction of the Real Estate Trust Building heralded this rapid commercial development.¹⁴ In 1913, the *Washington Post* commented on the importance of the new building, writing that because of its construction, "the corner of Fourteenth and H streets will become one of the most important in the city" and that the area would develop to be "One of the Prominent Trade Centers of the Capital."¹⁵

The radical transformation of the city's downtown area followed the unveiling of the McMillan Plan which itself began with Daniel Burnham and McKim, Mead, and White's "White City" at the Columbian Exposition of 1893. The exposition inspired architects and civic leaders throughout the nation; when the Senate Park Commission (the McMillan Commission) was established in 1901 to evaluate the development of the city and improve the capital, many of the same architects were involved. In 1902, the McMillan Commission released its proposals to apply the ideals and principles of the City Beautiful movement to the design of Washington, DC.

¹⁰ "Company in Its New Home," *The Washington Post*, June 28, 1914, p. R3

¹¹ Hooper, p. 27.

¹² "Selection of the Latest Work of Milburn, Heister & Company, Architects, Washington, D.C., 1922." <http://www.archive.org/details/selectionsfromla00milb>

¹³ "New Homes for Banks," *The Washington Post*, December 20, 1916, p. 4. "Notes," *The Washington Post*, June 17, 1960, p. B13.

¹⁴ Susan Tunick. *Terra Cotta Skyline*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997, p. 69.

¹⁵ See "Modern Office Structure," *The Washington Post*, September 7, 1913, p. R1 and "Erected for Business," *The Washington Post*, August 10, 1913, p. R3.

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While the McMillan Commission's recommendations focused on the monumental core and its federal office buildings, private developers recognized a "shared imperative to commission work that would adequately reflect the expansive mood and rising aspirations for a national capital."¹⁶ Architectural historian Richard Longstreth argues that "the business community, as champions of civic improvement, harbored the goal of making their city one of distinction."¹⁷ The importance of the Real Estate Trust building in terms of civic pride and the City Beautiful is clear from press accounts that celebrated the unique character of the building's design.

Milburn, Heister & Company: Architects of the Real Estate Trust Building

Milburn, Heister & Company was one of the most prominent architectural firms operating in the southern United States during the first quarter of the 20th century. Frank P. Milburn, an extremely successful architect and businessman, designed over 250 major government and commercial buildings by the time of his death. Of the many buildings his firm completed in Washington, the Real Estate Trust Building is one of only a handful that remain today.¹⁸

Initially working under the name Frank P. Milburn & Company, Milburn relocated his architectural practice to D.C. in 1907 to form Milburn, Heister & Company in 1907 with Michael Heister, a former draftsman in his company. While in D.C., Milburn capitalized on his talents as a businessman to expand the firm's operations, relegating much of the design work to Heister. Developing into one of the first architectural firms with a regional practice, the firm became widely known in southern states, where it designed a variety of high-profile structures. In addition to banks, hotels, and residences, Milburn, Heister & Company designed prominent public buildings, including statehouses, courthouses, and asylums. Milburn's ability to win government commissions was a major factor in his success—he and his firm designed at least 59 courthouses during his career. In addition, Milburn enjoyed the position of official architect of the Southern Railway Company and designed many of its stations. These high-profile projects enabled him to expand his practice across the South.¹⁹

In D.C., Milburn, Heister & Company designed various banking, federal and commercial buildings. At the time of his death in 1926, Milburn was given credit for designing more than half of the largest business buildings in the city along with substantial government buildings. The firm's major commissions included the six thousand-seat Washington Auditorium (1922-24) and the World War I Victory Arch (1919).²⁰

Milburn, Heister & Company was the preeminent builder of Washington office buildings in its day and designed more than 15 between 1910 and 1920. Only three of these tall office buildings

¹⁶ Richard Longstreth, "The Unusual Transformation of Downtown Washington in the Early twentieth Century," *Washington History*, Fall/Winter 2001-2002, p. 63.

¹⁷ Longstreth, p. 63.

¹⁸ Vivian, Daniel J. "A Practical Architect: Frank P. Milburn and the Transformation of Architectural Practice in the New South, 1890-1925." *Winterthur Portfolio*, 40:1 (2005), p. 17.

¹⁹ Vivian, p. 17-29. "Skilled Architects," *The Washington Post*, February 24, 1907, p. 24.

²⁰ Vivian, p. 31-32.

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remain: the Interstate Commerce Building (1912) at 1319 F Street NW, the Continental Trust Building (1913-14) at 1343 H Street NW, and the Federation of Labor (1915-16) at 901 Massachusetts Avenue NW, a National Historic Landmark.

In 1922, Milburn, Heister & Company published a catalogue of its major commissions, most of which were Beaux Arts-inspired buildings. Before 1910, however, Milburn did not contain himself to an individual style. Milburn's patrons in the New South sought to imitate Northern architecture, and Milburn met this demand by competently designing buildings in nearly every popular style of the period. However, by the 1910s and 1920s, the firm abandoned eclecticism in favor of a more coherent mode of Beaux-Arts classicism. Yet, the Real Estate Trust building is somewhat of an aesthetic departure from the more Classical office buildings in the city. Of the many buildings designed by the firm in D.C., a few remain, including Lansburgh's Department Store at Eighth and E Streets NW, the Holy Comforter School Building at Fifteenth and East Capital Street SE, and the Milburn Apartment Building at 1016 Sixteenth St NW.

The firm's standard stylistic approach to the office building emphasized horizontality and borrowed elements from traditional classical architecture. Major D.C. works such as the Southern Railway Office Building, the United State Department of Commerce Building, and the Powhatan Hotel (all demolished) had broad, unbroken brick facades ruled by strong unembellished projecting cornices. They were capped with heavy and ornate overhanging cornices that further underscored the buildings' horizontality. In contrast, the Real Estate Trust Building has a highly ornamented façade divided into thin vertical elements reaching towards its expressive polychrome crown. The Real Estate Trust's imaginative, even playful adaptations of classical motifs further distance the structure from most of the firm's designs of the period.

The Lansburgh Department Store, 1916, appears to have been Milburn, Heister & Company's only other major terra cotta-clad building in the city and remains today as the only other substantial terra cotta edifice remaining in the downtown area. Lansburgh's is studded with elaborately detailed white terra cotta tiles featuring abstract classical motifs. Again, Real Estate Trust stands apart—its polychrome aesthetic makes for an entirely different composition to Lansburgh's unified white façade. Out of Milburn, Heister & Company's work in other cities, few buildings compare to the Real Estate Trust Building.

Real Estate Trust Building
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

“Buys Trust Building,” *The Washington Post*, February 20, 1914, p. 2.

“Company in Its New Home,” *The Washington Post*, June 28, 1914, p. R3.

Design Forum Architects. “DC Downtown Office Building Survey, Phase II Final Report: Historic Context Statement,” 1992.

“Erected for Business,” *The Washington Post*, August 10, 1913, p. R3. Hooper, Carol.

“National Register Nomination Form: Banks and Financial Institutions of Washington, D.C.,” 1993.

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“John H. Nolan Dead; Funeral Thursday,” *The Washington Post*, February 19, 1924, p. 5.

Longstreth, Richard. “The Unusual Transformation of Downtown Washington in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Washington History*, Fall/Winter 2001-2002.

“Modern Office Structure,” *The Washington Post*, September 7, 1913, p. R1.

“New Building is Sold,” *The Washington Post*, March 1, 1914, p. R3.

“New Homes for Banks,” *The Washington Post*, December 20, 1916, p. 4.

“New Type of Building,” *The Washington Post*, October 1

“Notes,” *The Washington Post*, June 17, 1960, p. B13.

“Real Estate Trust Company Organized,” *The Washington Star*, March 26, 1912, p. 20.

Selection of the Latest Work of Milburn, Heister & Company, Architects, Washington, D.C., 1922. <http://www.archive.org/details/selectionsfromla00milb>

“Skilled Architects,” *The Washington Post*, February 24, 1907, p. 24.

“Skyscraper Nearly Ready,” *The Washington Post*, January 4, 1914, p. R3.

Tunick, Susan. *Terra Cotta Skyline*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1997.

Real Estate Trust Building
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
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Vivian, Daniel J. "A Practical Architect: Frank P. Milburn and the Transformation of Architectural Practice in the New South, 1890-1925." *Winterthur Portfolio*, 40:1 (2005), p. 17.

Witham, Larry. "Terra Cotta's Revival Mainly in Renovation," *The Washington Times*, October 27, 1983.

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 # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
 - Other State agency
 - Federal agency
 - Local government
 - University
 - Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of Property less than one acre

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

Real Estate Trust Building
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 38.900187 | Longitude: -77.031016 |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

- | | | |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The Real Estate Trust building at 1343 H Street occupies part of Lot 46 in Square 250. The boundary line is drawn to include only this building on the lot; it does not include the more recent office building abutting it on the east side.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The Real Estate Trust building has occupied this site since its construction in 1914.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Adam Irish, Volunteer, D.C. Preservation League and Kim Williams, DCHPO
organization: D.C. Historic Preservation Office
street & number: 1000 4th Street SW
city or town: Washington state: DC zip
code: 20024
e-mail kim.williams@dc.gov
telephone: 202 442-8840
date: May 2010; revised November 2014

Real Estate Trust Building
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
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Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Real Estate Trust Company

City or Vicinity: Washington, D.C.

County: State:

Photographer: Kim Williams

Date Photographed: Fall 2014

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

View looking northeast at 14th and H Streets showing south and west elevations
1 of 9

View looking east at shaft and top of west elevation
2 of 9

View looking east showing general view of west elevation
3 of 9

Real Estate Trust Building
Name of Property

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View looking east showing top of west elevation
4 of 9

View looking east showing altered ledge detail between 2nd and 3rd story of east elevation
5 of 9

View looking skyward from south side of building showing shaft and polychromatic terra
cotta tile
6 of 9

View looking north showing south elevation
7 of 9

View looking northwest showing south elevation
8 of 9

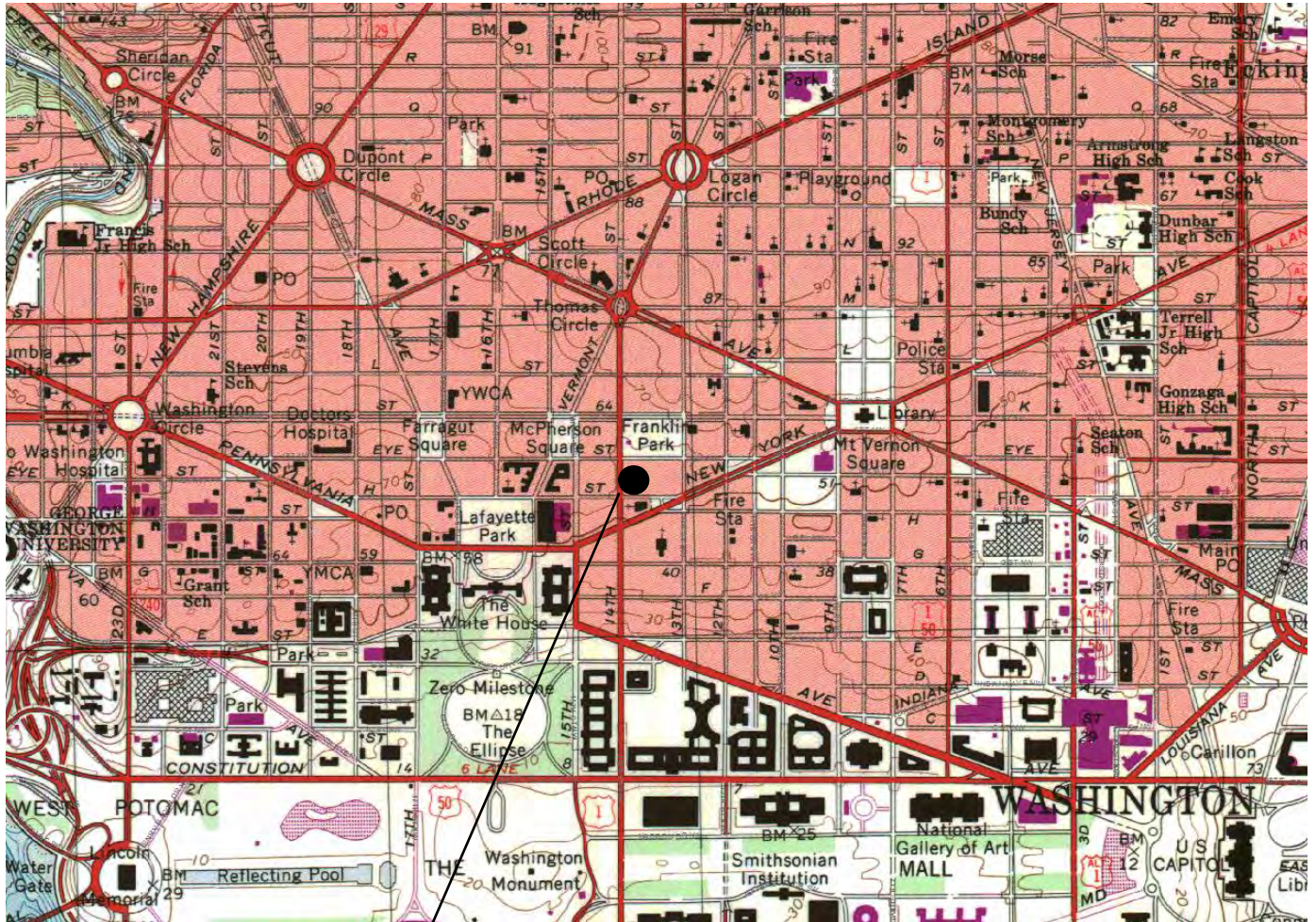
View looking skyward from south showing top level of south elevation
9 of 9

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.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including 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 Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

Real Estate Trust Building
Name of Property

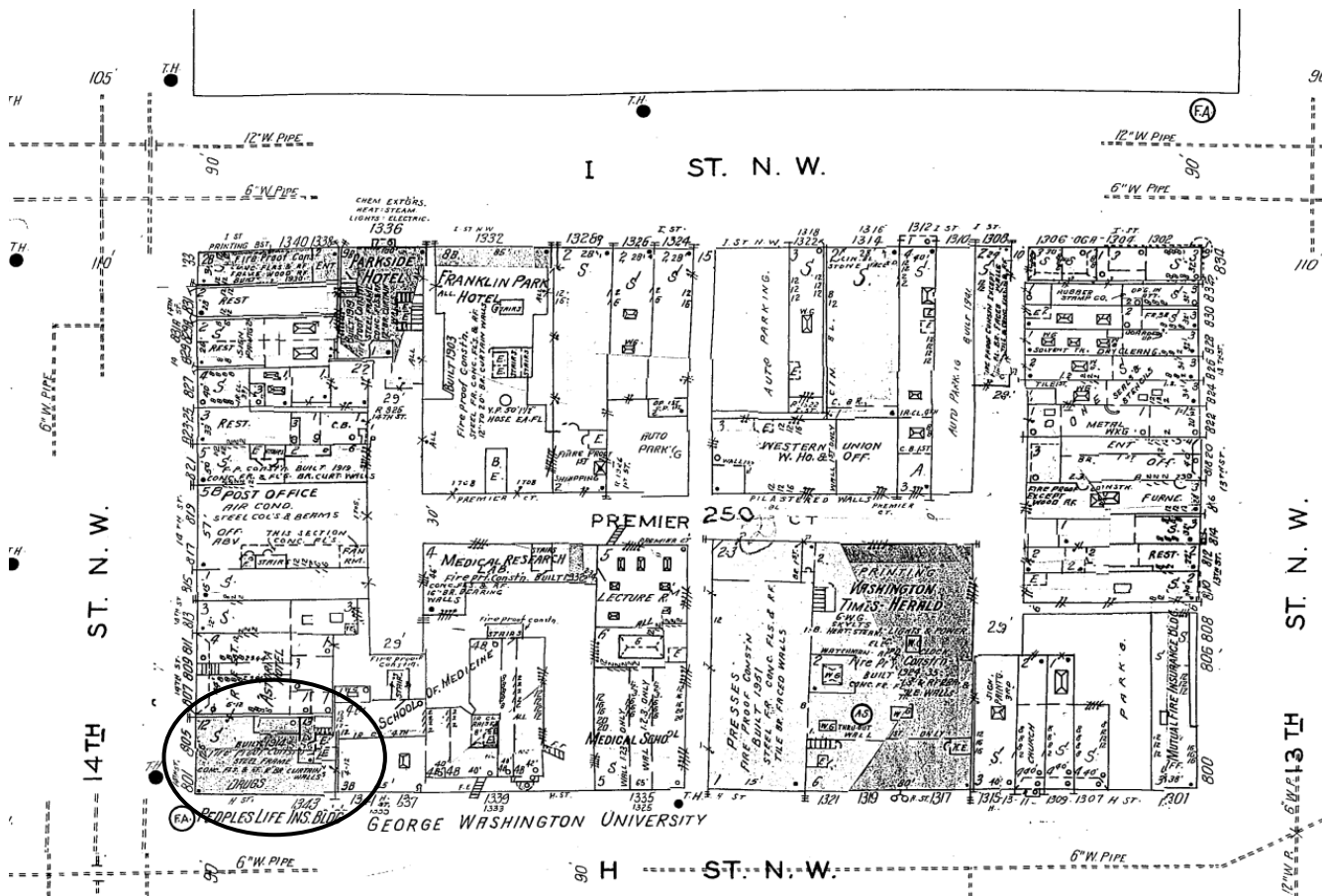
Washington, D.C.
County and State



Real Estate Trust Building
1343 H Street, NW
Washington, D.C.

Real Estate Trust Building
Name of Property

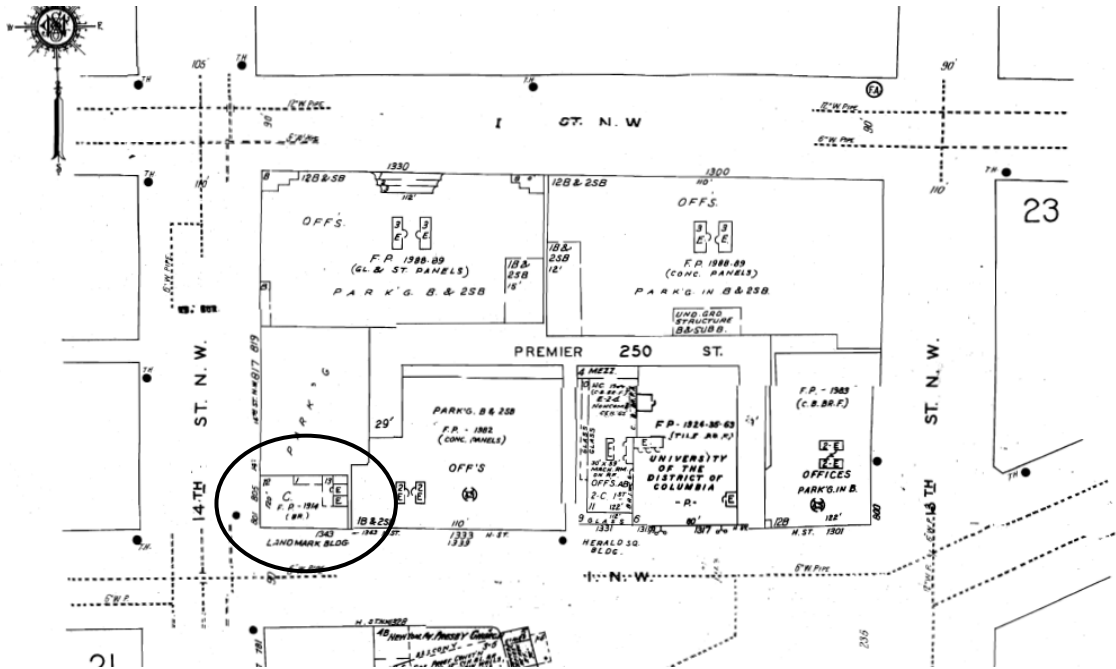
Washington, D.C.
County and State



Historic map showing Real Estate Trust Building (then People's Life Insurance Building), 1959
(From Sanborn Fire Insurance Maps)

Real Estate Trust Building
Name of Property

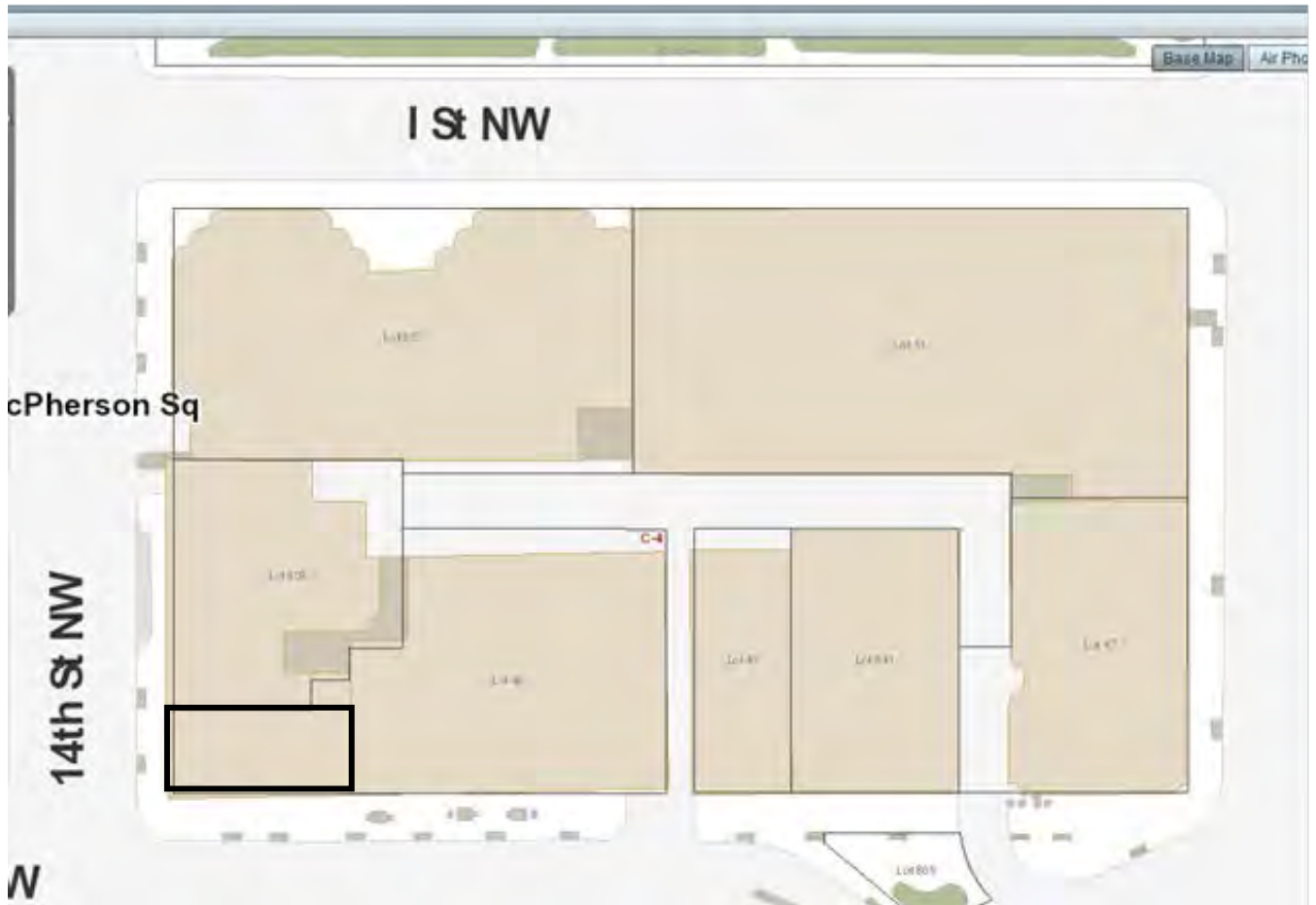
Washington, D.C.
County and State



Map showing Real Estate Trust building (Landmark Building), 1998
(From Sanborn Fire Insurance Company)

Real Estate Trust Building
Name of Property

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Map Showing National Register Boundaries of Real Estate Trust Building
(From DC Office of Planning GIS Maps, 2014)

Real Estate Trust Building
Name of Property

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County and State



Real Estate Trust Building, historic photo, ca. 1926. (Note that the photo shows building without entry marquise on east end of south elevation.)
(From Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-npcc-27486)

Real Estate Trust Building
Name of Property

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Real Estate Trust Building, historic photo, after ca. 1926. (Note the entry marquee on east end entry bay of south elevation)
(From Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, LC-DIG-hec-20573)

Real Estate Trust Building
Name of Property

Washington, D.C.
County and State

PEOPLES LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY WASHINGTON, D. C.



HOME OFFICE BUILDING. 14th and H Sts. N.W.

OFFICERS

W. W. CHISWELL, President

F. F. LEITH, Vice President

H. A. KITE, Vice President and Treasurer

M. H. CHISWELL, Secretary

W. S. HALL, Asst. Treasurer

V. R. RUDD, Mgr., Ordinary Dept.

LAMBERT & YEATMAN, Counsel

J. ROZIER BIGGS, M.D.

J. R. TUBMAN, M.D.

Medical Directors

“Peoples Life Insurance Building,” (Real Estate Trust building)
(From *The Book of Washington*. Washington, D.C.: Cleland C. McDevitt, 1927)

Real Estate Trust Building
Name of Property

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View looking north on 14th Street, 700-800 block east side showing Real Estate Trust building, ca. 1949 (From Historical Society of Washington, D.C. #ZSI-43.)

Real Estate Trust Building
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View of Real Estate Trust building (then known as Landmark Building), ca. 1968
(From Historical Society of Washington, #PR1661B)















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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

REQUESTED ACTION: NOMINATION

PROPERTY Real Estate Trust Building--Continental Trust Building
NAME:

MULTIPLE
NAME:

STATE & COUNTY: DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, District of Columbia

DATE RECEIVED: 12/05/14 DATE OF PENDING LIST: 1/05/15
DATE OF 16TH DAY: 1/20/15 DATE OF 45TH DAY: 1/21/15
DATE OF WEEKLY LIST:

REFERENCE NUMBER: 14001166

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: N

COMMENT WAIVER: N

ACCEPT RETURN REJECT 1/20/2015 DATE

ABSTRACT/SUMMARY COMMENTS:

RECOM./CRITERIA Accept c

REVIEWER Patricia Anderson

DISCIPLINE Historian

TELEPHONE _____

DATE 1/20/2015

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.

GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE



MEMO

DATE: December 1, 2014

TO: Patrick Andrus

FROM: Kim Williams *KW*

RE: Transmittal Letter for Real Estate Trust Building National Register nomination

The enclosed disk, Disk 1 (of 2) contains the true and correct copy of the nomination for the REAL ESTATE TRUST Building to the National Register of Historic Places. The enclosed Disk 2 (of 2) contains the REAL ESTATE TRUST Building NR photos as per the NR photo requirements.