

SC 2756



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 National Trust Life Insurance Company Building

Other names/site number National Burial Insurance Company Building

Name of related multiple property listing N/A
(Remove "N/A" if property is part of a multiple property listing and add name)

2. Location

Street & Number: 2701 Union Ave. Extended

City or town: Memphis State: TN County: Shelby

Not For Publication: N/A Vicinity: N/A Zip: Need

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this 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 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 local

Applicable National Register Criteria: A B C D

Claudette Stager 6/14/18
Signature of certifying official/Title: Date
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer, Tennessee Historical Commission
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): _____

James Salter
 Signature of the Keeper

8.2.2018

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

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

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6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/Financial

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: STONE/Marble; BRICK; CONCRETE; GLASS; METAL

Narrative Description

The 1963 National Burial Insurance Building is a five-story, T-shaped, mid-rise building designed by Memphis architect Charles Jen. Sited on a raised perimeter concrete plaza, the Late International style building has the hallmark design features such as a pilotis effect seen in a two-story base of vertical window bands accented by travertine-clad columns and dark green marble spandrels; large unadorned wall surfaces of brick; and a flat roof. Other defining exterior details include crushed marble pre-cast panels and the concrete fins that border the windows. The National Burial Insurance Building was the first commercial building in the city to have rooms with individually controlled heating and cooling. The five-zone system compensated for the sun heating the various elevations during the summer months and the windows had a defrosting system for the winter months. The building retains its integrity retaining original materials, interior plan, and public spaces.

The symmetrical main building measures sixty-two by 100 feet and has a slightly recessed two-story base. This base features banks of metal frame, hopper style windows separated horizontally by dark veined green marble spandrel panels and vertically by projecting white travertine marble clad columns (photos 3-6). The

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upper three floors are faced with pre-cast, crushed white marble aggregate concrete panels accented by thin bands of green marble at their tops and bases and by projecting concrete bands between each bank of four windows. The window banks are broken up by projecting concrete mullions between each unit. These mullions have flared tops and bottoms and originally served as sunscreens (photo 15). The main entrance is set underneath a broad, white concrete canopy. (photo 14).

The six-story south wing measures forty-feet wide and projects twenty-four-feet from the center of the main section. It contains the service core. The main entrance is set at the base of the west elevation of the buff brick south wing. Above the entry the fenestration is banks of four windows on each floor separated by green marble spandrel panels. The south face of this wing is a blank brick wall. The east side of the south wing has a vertical band of green marble with brushed aluminum louver panels at each level. The raised basement features windows on the west and north sides.

Windows on the building are single-glazed, three-feet by six-feet, and have brushed aluminum frames. Tall fixed sections are set above operable hopper windows. The slight recessing of the first and second floors also performed the role of sunscreens.

As with most International style buildings, the use of high quality and unique materials is concentrated on the exterior, main entries, and lobbies. Secondary floors of the building exhibit an International style free-floor plan with only the hallway pattern being an important feature (photos 8-12).

The first floor has a twenty by twenty- four-foot lobby with brown veined marble panels on its east wall. Its northeast corner leads to an eight-foot elevator lobby. There are two elevators on the north side framed with identical brown marble panels (photo 9). The lobby has a suspended acoustical tile ceiling with recessed lighting. The main lobby floor has off-white terrazzo floor; all upper floor lobbies have new floor coverings.

South of the elevator lobby and behind the elevators are two staircases. These simple units rise from the basement to the roof and form cantilevered concrete steps with painted tubular steel railings. The railings have upper and lower members that follow the pitch of the steps and vertical steel posts attached to the concrete at intervals. Inside are open office spaces with a series of smaller offices along the perimeter. Dropped acoustical tile ceilings with recessed lighting are found throughout.

The main office space on the first floor, and on all of the upper floors, is open plan that allowed for non-structural drywall partitions to be added and removed for tenant requirements. The second floor has a sizeable vault, related to its use as an insurances building. The third floor housed executive offices and has some walls forming offices covered with walnut plywood panels and trim (photo 11). The smaller space on each floor has restrooms in its northwest quadrant with mechanical space to the south, while the western half is a single large space. The ceiling heights are fourteen-feet or twelve-feet. Dropped ceilings set just atop the windows create interior heights of ten feet.

The basement is the largest floor and features a series of open spaces plus non-original offices lighted by small windows (photo 13). The northeast area was a large open space and the northwest area was originally a mechanical space, but later converted into a broadcast studio. The southwest space has a raised floor for electrical lines. The southeast corner had three large bays originally for covered parking but has been enclosed and remodeled for office usage.

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The building is surrounded by surface parking on all sides, but that to the east is fenced off (photos 1-7). On the south and east sides are large circular microwave broadcasting units (photos 4, 6, 7). A tall metal tower is directly east of the building and has broadcast equipment at its top (photo 7).

This office building is located at the southeast corner of Poplar Avenue and Union Avenue Extended. It has little frontage on Union Ave. Extended, except for its main boulevard, which extends behind properties facing onto that street (photo 1). The general area is a mixture of single-family houses on the side streets and commercial uses along the major avenues.

The building retains a high degree of integrity with no noticeable exterior changes, other than infilling of the canopy entrance and the southeast corner parking spaces on the ground floor. Interior changes include newer drywall partitions and the removal of previous partitions in places. The ceilings are at the same height and have the same grid spacing and recessed lighting, although the panels, light fixtures and some of the grid work may have been changed to suit past tenant's needs.

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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.)
 Property is:

N/A

- 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.

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1963-1969

Significant Dates

1963

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Jen, Charles, architect

Thayer, Jr., F.T., contractor

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

The National Trust Insurance Company Building is eligible for listing in the National Register under criteria A and C for its local significance in commerce and architecture. Constructed in 1963, the building is significant under Criterion A as an example of an expanding commercial enterprise that changed focus from a burial insurance company into an important burial and life insurance company in Memphis. Begun in 1931 by Alvin Wunderlich, Sr., the company expanded as the population grew. When the current building was constructed, the company's focus changed towards providing regional life insurance service beyond the City of Memphis. The building was sold out of the family in 1969, which ends the Period of Significance. Under criterion C the building is significant for its late International style design by internationally-known architect Charles Jen. The building design incorporates the plaza first used in Jen's design of the United States Embassy, Manila, Philippines, and displayed early environmental building techniques including passive solar design. This building was Jen's last design before his early death.

Narrative Statement of Significance

Background

Burial insurance is typically a small life insurance policy that provides the money to cover funeral and burial costs when the insured dies. This type of policy is desirable for people who want to leave their loved ones with immediate funds to cover their burial costs, as well as associated funeral expenses. Because the death benefit is typically small, premiums are very affordable and appeal to consumers unable to save enough money that will be eventually needed to cover funeral expenses.

The concept of burial insurance has its origins in ancient Rome when burial clubs or associations covered the costs of member's funeral expenses and provided financial assistance to survivors. During the Middle Ages, medieval guilds also provided for member's funeral costs. The first insurance company of modern times was organized in London in 1706. In Colonial America, some clergy banded together for a similar purpose, founding what was known as "death insurance" which soon became known as life insurance. These first life insurance policies were offered as early as the 1760s.¹ To avoid the ignominy of a pauper's funeral, which saw people buried in a common pauper's grave without a headstone, local churches, trade unions and other associations formed benefit societies to provide insurance to members. Such societies include Woodmen Life (officially Woodmen of the World Life Insurance Society) a not-for-profit fraternal benefit society founded in 1890, based in Omaha, Nebraska, that still operates a large privately held insurance company for its members.²

For many years, most funeral directors felt their profession should not be involved in the pre-collection of funds and did not sponsor these plans. However, after World War I, some funeral directors in parts of the United States started offering "burial insurance."

¹ U.S. Department of Interior, National Park Service. *Burial Customs and Cemeteries in US History*. https://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb41/nrb41_5.htm, accessed November 30, 2017

² Robert Uzell. "Joseph Cullen Root, Giant of American Fraternalism." Srjarchives.tripod.com.

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National Trust Life Beginning

Alvin Wunderlich, Sr. (1892-1963) was born in Swanwick, Illinois. The family moved to St. Louis and had businesses in St. Louis and Arkansas. Wunderlich worked in the family business from around 1910 to 1929. In December of 1929 Wunderlich, his brother Walter C., Charles M. Bryan, and Blan R. Maxwell opened the National Funeral Home, Inc. in Memphis.³ In 1930, the company added burial insurance that could only be used at their funeral home. This was done through a new company, the National Burial Association

The onset of the Great Depression greatly reduced the National Burial Association's revenue. By 1931 Wunderlich faced the decision to either dissolve his fledgling, undercapitalized burial association or become a licensed insurance company which could offer additional services. The partners raised a \$100,000 reserve and began the National Burial Insurance Company which was located in an office on Monroe Avenue managed by Walter C. Wunderlich.

Wunderlich's innovation was to separate burial insurance from direct sale by funeral homes, where there was more opportunity for fraud and insolvencies, and incorporate it into the life insurance business, which was more regulated and required reserve securities. He claimed this was the first such business in the Mid-South. The National Burial Insurance Company introduced weekly premium life insurance policies for funeral services locally.⁴

The National Burial Insurance policies for funeral services were exclusively for use at their mortuary, the National Funeral Home. Business was booming and in 1933 the company relocated the funeral home to a larger home at Union and Pasadena Avenues. They also opened a National Funeral Home in Chattanooga. In 1934, Wunderlich and his family moved to Memphis where he served as the first president of the new company.⁵

The first sales office of the National Burial Insurance Company was in the old office of the National Burial Association in the Sterick Building (N.R. 10/02/78). They had two secretaries and fifteen agents. The sales agents made weekly visits to customers' homes to pick up the premiums in cash. At this time, African Americans were segregated by race and thus concentrated in south Memphis, so National Burial established a separate branch office on Crump Avenue to handle sales and collection activities for its Black clients. The Universal Life Insurance Company (NR 7/24/2007), a Memphis-based African American life insurance firm established in 1923 also focused on door-to-door sales and weekly premium payments.

In 1948, National Burial Insurance expanded the weekly policy plan to cover emergencies and unexpected family expenses at time of death. They also created the National Fire Insurance Company which offered fire insurance to homeowners. In 1955, Alvin Wunderlich, Jr. took over the role of president, and the elder Wunderlich became chairman. At the same time their industry came under public scrutiny, and Tennessee legislature passed Chapter 195 of the Public Acts of 1955, which separated the life insurance business from

³ "Alvin Wunderlich, Sr.," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, Memphis, TN, August 26, 1963.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ "Insurance for Burial Grows." *Memphis Press Scimitar*, November 10, 1938.

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the undertaking business by requiring life insurance companies to pay beneficiaries under their policies in money instead of in funeral merchandise and services.

After passage of the Public Acts 1955 bill that changed how insurance companies operated, predictions were made that the then National Burial Insurance Company would fold. Despite the changes brought by the new law, Wunderlich, Sr. successfully led the company through it. A few years later, the company experienced controversy when a \$15 million class action lawsuit was filed against it by three Tennessee African American funeral homes. Filed under the Sherman and Clayton Anti-Trust Acts on behalf of "similarly situated funeral directors in the state of Tennessee," the suit argued that the defendants "engaged in a wrong conspiracy to eliminate and suppress competition, control prices and otherwise create a monopoly."⁶ The defendants argued that their businesses were not interlocking but rather had stockholders with interests in both. When the lawsuit was settled in May 1862, the funeral home monopolies were ordered to break up. National Burial Insurance Company said the company would now write burial insurance policies which were in effect life insurance policies that could be used to pay expenses of burials at any funeral home. The National Funeral Home was restructured as the Memphis Funeral Home in 1962. The new burial insurance could be used for funeral expenses, emergency fund money for other expenses surrounding death and burial, adjustment fund money to assist with living expenses after the death of the bread winner, family income, mortgage cancellation insurance, an education fund and a retirement fund. These products proved immensely popular. By the end of 1962, they had 476,000 policy holders served by a sales force of 187 agents.⁷

In essence, Wunderlich not only led the company through controversies and change, but set it on a trajectory of growth as a multi-faceted insurance company, a development symbolized by the construction of the new \$1 million, 49,000 square foot headquarters in 1963. By the time they moved into their new corporate headquarters, the company had become the largest full-line life insurance company in Memphis. The death of Alvin Wunderlich, Sr., barely a week after this building opened on August 16, 1963, resulted in his son's becoming chairman of the firm where he had served as president since 1955.⁸

Architects

The company's board commissioned Martin and Jen, a short-lived but prominent firm active in residential and hospital architecture, to design the new headquarters. building. The partnership had formed in 1960 between Robert Thomas "Buddy" Martin and Charles Jen. Martin was a native Arkansan who practiced architecture in Memphis after graduating from the University of Texas. He gained a reputation in residential design and had also designed apartment buildings, commercial buildings and hospitals.⁹

⁶ "\$15 Million Anti-trust Suit". *Kingsport Times*, February 2, 1961.

⁷ "Funeral Trusts Broken by Court". *The Nashville Tennessean*, May 31, 1962; "Memphis First Opens Today," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, August 11, 1963.

⁸ "Burial Insurance Chairman Dies." *Memphis Press Scimitar*, August 23, 1963.

⁹ "Martin, Jen Form New Partnership". *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, January 17, 1960

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Charles Jen received an undergraduate architecture degree from Kung Chang University in China and a master's in Architecture from Yale University School of Design. He worked as a researcher for the division of Hospital Facilities of the United States Public Health Service, and a member of the design jury of Carnegie Institute of Technology. While at Yale, he won the Magnus T. Harper Fellowship in hospital planning. Memphis architect A. L. Aydelott, (considered by locals to be "The Father of Memphis Modernism") was on the fellowship jury and hired Jen to work at his firm. Jen, along with architect Charles Stone and Aydelott, designed the 1961 Central Hospital in Lima, Peru. He was also associated with the design of the 1961 United States Embassy, Manilla, Philippines (Figure 2).

During the eight years he was associated with the Aydelott firm, Jen helped design the Tennessee Psychiatric Hospital (no longer extant), the Sears Building at Laurelwood (no longer extant) (Figure 5), the Memphis Federal Building, and the 1952-56 Immaculate Conception High School. The award-winning high school was described in Dr. Eugene Johnson's *Memphis: an Architectural Guide* as echoing both Mies van der Rohe's and Eero Saarinen's designs and as one of the Aydelott's firm most pleasing works.¹⁰ Jen's last project before he left Aydelott was the 1959 Shelby County Office Building (old Memphis Federal Building) which was described by *Memphis: an Architectural Guide* as one of Memphis's finest examples of New Formalism.¹¹

One of Jen and Martin's first projects together was the International-style Seagle House (Figure 1).¹² During the three years before his death from lymphoma in 1962, Jen designed St. George's Episcopal School in Germantown (significantly altered), the subject property, and the Emmons Building (4745 Poplar Ave, Memphis). During his career Jen designed twenty-eight hospitals and was the winner of Progressive Architecture's annual award and the Gulf States Regional Council of Architects.

Jen's design for National Trust Insurance Company incorporated features to make the building easier to heat and cool. It was the first commercial building in the city to have offices with individually controlled heating and cooling. It also had an innovative five-zone system for each of the compass points plus a central zone. During the day, the rooftop HVAC system would automatically compensate for the solar heating and winter cold of the various elevations. (Figure 4) Additionally, the windows had a defrosting system for the winter months. Hazardous cigarette smoke was out filtered by static electricity when the air rose to the ceilings.¹³

Jen's interpretation of the late International Style shows a transition from the style's hallmark features of stark simplicity, devoid of ornamentation, to using modern materials to create ornament-like crushed marble pre-cast panels and the concrete fins that border the windows. Other important elements of the late International style exhibited in the National Trust Life Insurance Company Building include a pilotis effect from a two-story base of vertical window bands accented by travertine-clad columns and dark green marble

¹⁰ Eugene J. Johnson and Robert D. Russell, *Memphis: an Architectural Guide*, Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press. 223-224.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹² Keith S. Kays, Lee Askew, et al, *A Survey of Modern Public Buildings in Memphis, Tennessee from 1940- 1980*. (Memphis: AIA), 10.

¹³ "Memphis First Opens Today," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, August 11, 1963.

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spandrels; large unadorned wall surfaces of brick; and a flat roof. The National Trust Life Insurance Company Building is significant as an example of architect Charles Jen's interpretation of the late International style.

In downtown Memphis, the thirty-eight story One Hundred North Main Building is listed in the National Register as a significant example of the late International Style (NR 04/24/15). Built three years after the National Trust Life Insurance Building, One Hundred North Main is of a much larger scale, but used features found in Jen's design including a pilotis, vertical panels with marble chip sheathing, and vertical ribbon-style windows. Jen's National Trust building takes advantage of its open space in its suburban rather than downtown setting.¹⁴ Of a similar scale as the National Trust building is the 1963 Sterick North Garage and Hotel (NR 03/26/18), which was designed by Memphis architect Merrill G. Ehrman. The Sterick North's reinforced concrete beams are covered in varied aluminum and concrete panels, and it does not provide as cohesive an overall design as executed in Jen's National Trust Life Insurance Building.

The National Trust Life Insurance Company Building

The new five-story building had the insurance firm occupying the basement and bottom three floors. They rented out the upper two floors to other tenants as well as housing new divisions of their growing company. By 1964, the company had district offices operating in Mississippi, Tennessee, Arkansas, and Georgia. It advertised that the "company is paying over five thousand dollars per day in benefits to its policy owners."¹⁵

A year after moving to the new building, the company name changed to National Trust Life Insurance Company to better reflect their varied offerings.¹⁶ The company also took over the rental space on the upper floors, occupying the entire building. By then, according to company reports, six out of ten Memphians held policies from the company. By 1965, the company increased its assets over \$3.2 million from the prior year and was ranked in the top twenty percent of all life insurance companies in the United States.¹⁷

According to the 35th Annual Report of National Trust Life Insurance Company published in 1965, the District 1 office was decentralized and the Main Offices at 2701 was joined by Branch offices on Union Avenue in the Medical Center, on Crump Boulevard and a branch in East Memphis.¹⁸ By 1966, the company had eleven branch offices, expanding into Missouri and throughout Tennessee. In 1967, Advertising for the company announced the firm's "best year ever," and featured their modern building and logo (see below).

¹⁴ Judith Johnson, One Hundred North Main Building, National Register of Historic Places Nomination, Tennessee Historical Commission, 2015. The nomination for One Hundred North Main provides an architectural context for other Memphis skyscrapers.

¹⁵ "Introducing T.M. Scott, District Manager, National Burial Life Insurance Co." *Clarion-Ledger* (Jackson Mississippi, 21 March 1964.

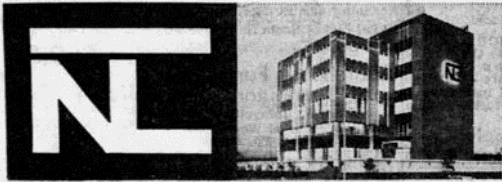
¹⁶ "Growth Retires Company Name". *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, August 14, 1964.

¹⁷ "35th Annual Report of National Trust Life Insurance Company," available at Memphis Room, Memphis Public Library.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

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REPORT TO POLICYOWNERS Thanks To You—Our Best Year Ever!


- Total insurance in force increased 20%
- Ordinary insurance (premium paid monthly or less often) increased 175%
- Reserves for protection of policy owners increased over \$2,750,000.00 million

- New Offices To Serve You:
 Dalton, Georgia
 Jackson, Mississippi
 Jackson, Tennessee
 Memphis, Tennessee
- New Plans To Serve You:
 Hospital Income
 Insured Savings
 Executive Special Whole Life
- New Services To Serve You:
 Established Group & Pension Trust Dept.
 Increase in Manpower—30%
 Electronic Estate Analysis

HIGHLIGHTS OF 1966	1966	1965	INCREASE
TOTAL INS. IN FORCE	\$279,414,162.00	\$232,691,900.00	\$46,722,262.00
INS. IN FORCE—ORDINARY	\$113,591,671.00	\$ 70,400,560.00	\$43,191,111.00
INS. IN FORCE—INDUSTRIAL	\$165,822,491.00	\$162,291,340.00	\$ 3,531,151.00
RESERVES	\$ 39,318,873.00	\$ 36,680,199.00	\$ 2,638,674.00
ASSETS	\$ 45,314,235.00	\$ 42,147,904.00	\$ 3,166,331.00
PREMIUM INCOME	\$ 9,709,896.00	\$ 8,613,431.00	\$ 1,096,465.00

OFFICES

BLYTHEVILLE, ARK. 528 W. Chickasawba PO3-7923	CHATTANOOGA, TENN. 1724 McCallie Avenue 624-3355	MEMPHIS CENTRAL 2011 Union 275-1206	MEMPHIS NORTH 3407 Summer Ave. 324-2133
MEMPHIS, Branch 997 Jackson Avenue 525-7857	CLEVELAND TENN. Merchants Bank Bldg. 472-3346	MEMPHIS CRUMP 966 Crump Blvd. 527-1434	MEMPHIS SOUTH 3300 Commercial Pkwy. 397-7521
DALTON, GA. 220 North Pentz 278-2632	JACKSON, MISS. 325 Woodland Hills Bldg. 362-8871	MALDEN, MO. 110 Howard Street 276-2895	JACKSON, TENN. 212 Highland Avenue 424-4545



National Trust Life

INSURANCE COMPANY
 HOME OFFICE / MEMPHIS, TENNESSEE
 2701 Union Avenue Ext. / 452-6221

THE COMPANY YOU COUNT ON FOR PERSONAL ATTENTION

Advertising Report from *Jackson Sun*, Jackson, Tennessee April, 11 1967

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Under Alvin Wunderlich, Jr., the firm continued to prosper. Wunderlich Jr. was engaged in Memphis civic life, serving on boards of area charities, banks, and supporting his local alma mater Rhodes College.¹⁹ Wunderlich, Jr.'s leadership contributed to the continued growth of National Trust Life until its sale to Capital Holding Company of Wilmington, Delaware in 1969. It was a tribute to his business acumen that they retained him as president.²⁰

The company continued to operate as a separate division with Wunderlich continuing as president until it was merged into Commonwealth Life Insurance Company of Louisville, Kentucky in 1980. The same year the building was sold for use as a multi-tenant office building and was eventually used as a radio station. In 1970 Memphis Funeral Home was acquired by Service Corporation of America and continues in business today at a different location.

Insurance in Tennessee and the National Register

Due to its strategic location on the Mississippi and eventual location as a rail hub, Memphis was long a shipping and industrial powerhouse with Nashville serving as both the political and financial center of Tennessee. A 1940 promotional guide *Memphis In Pictures* documents this well with photos of countless plants that include cotton oil, Firestone tires, and "quality vinegars" along with gleaming office towers that include the Memphis Cotton Exchange. Although not one photo includes an insurance company, there were definitely innovators in the insurance industry in Memphis.²¹ Treadwell and Harry Insurance, opened in 1910, was the first insurance company to be owned and founded by women. They were among the first to specialize in automobile insurance and the boutique firm remains open today.²² In 1947, Universal Life (NR 7/24/2007) was the first African-American company in the South to gain million-dollar capital status, and one of the top Black-owned businesses in the world during its peak.²³ It served customers nationwide and was definitely a competitor to National Trust Life. With a much broader client base and without the Jim Crow-era limitations on a Black-owned business, National Trust Life was able to grow and expand very quickly.

Two prominent firms would make Nashville one of the South's leading insurance centers during the mid-twentieth century. Financier Sam Fleming described Nashville in 1963 as "more like Hartford Connecticut than any other city I know. It is hard to meet very many people here before you run into someone connected with an insurance company."²⁴ One of these firms was Life and Casualty Insurance Company founded in 1903 and originally focused on offering health and accident insurance to working-class blacks, eventually

¹⁹ "Alvin William Wunderlich, Jr." accessed April 20, 2018. <https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/memphis-tn/alvin-wunderlich-jr-7012124>

²⁰ "Delaware Firm Acquires NTL in \$ 19 Million Transaction." *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, July 9, 1969.

²¹ *Memphis in Pictures: Welcoming You to Memphis and the New South*, (Memphis: Don Lancaster Company, 1940, reprint 1985).

²² Carole Standford Bucy "Treadwell and Harry Insurance Company" Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture, <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/treadwell-and-harry-insurance-company/> [accessed 01 April 2018]

²³ Reavis L. Mitchell, Jr., "Universal Life Insurance Company" Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture, <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/universal-life-insurance-company/> [accessed 01 April 2018].

²⁴ Quoted from Carroll Van West "Life and Casualty Insurance Company" Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture, <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/life-and-casualty-insurance-company/> [accessed 01 April 2018].

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shifting focus to life insurance for the middle-class like the National Trust Life in Memphis. The Life and Casualty Company's 1957 headquarters designed by prominent architect Edwin Keeble was Nashville's first skyscraper and has been determined to be NR eligible by the SHPO. The competing Nashville insurance firm National Life and Accident Insurance Company created the radio station WSM (touted as We Shield Millions) in 1925. It's extremely popular Grand Ole Opry radio show spread country music throughout the nation. Three locations of the Grand Ole Opry are listed in the NR: the auditorium at the Tennessee War Memorial (NR 11/16/17), the Ryman Auditorium (NHL 01/03/01), and the Grand Ole Opry House (NR 01/27/15). At each location, National Life and Accident Insurance was the producer of the Grand Ole Opry and used its large national audience to advertise its insurance products.

By 1980, both the competing Nashville based firms National Life and Accident and Life and Casualty had been acquired by a single national corporation ending the era of insurance as an important part of the Nashville economy. It was the same year that Memphis' National Trust Life was removed from the local Wunderlich family management, making the transition begun with the firm's sale in 1969 to national corporate-led insurance complete.

The National Trust Life Insurance Building is eligible for its commercial significance in commerce as a prominent regional insurance company that evolved from a small local purveyor of burial insurance into a highly successful regional provider of many types of insurance. The National Trust Life Insurance Building is also eligible under Criterion C as an example of the work of Memphis modern architect Charles Jen. Presently the building stands vacant. The new owner hopes to rehabilitate it into senior housing.

National Trust Life Insurance Company
Building

Shelby County, Tennessee

Name of Property

County and State

9. Major Bibliographic References

Bibliography (Insert bibliography here- cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

“\$15 Million Anti-trust Suit”. *Kingsport Times*, February 2, 1961.

"Announcing New Home Offices for National Burial Insurance Co." *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, 8-13-63.

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"Funeral Trusts Broken by Court". *The Nashville Tennessean*, May 31, 1962.

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"Insurance for Burial Grows." *Memphis Press Scimitar*, November 10, 1938.

"Introducing T.M. Scott, District Manager, National Burial Life Insurance Co." *Clarion-Ledger*, Jackson Mississippi, March 21, 1964.

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Kays, Keith S., Lee Askew, et al, *A Survey of Modern Public Buildings in Memphis, Tennessee from 1940-1980*. Memphis: AIA, 2010.

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"Martin, Jen Form New Partnership". *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, January 17, 1960

"Memphis First Opens Today," *Memphis Commercial Appeal*, August 11, 1963.

National Trust Life Insurance Company
 Building _____
 Name of Property

Shelby County, Tennessee

 County and State

Memphis in Pictures: Welcoming You to Memphis and the New South. Memphis: Don Lancaster Company, 1940, reprint 1985).

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U. S. Department of Interior, National Park Service. Burial Customs and Cemeteries in US History. https://www.nps.gov/nr/publications/bulletins/nrb41/nrb41_5.htm, accessed November 30, 2017

Uzell, Robert L. Joseph Cullen Root, Giant of American Fraternalism. Accessed January 1, 2018. <http://srjarchives.tripod.com/1998-09/UZZEL.HTM>.

West, Carroll Van. "Life and Casualty Insurance Company" Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture, <https://tennesseeencyclopedia.net/entries/life-and-casualty-insurance-company/> [accessed 01 April 2018].

Previous documentation on file (NPS):		Primary location of additional data:	
X	preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested)		State Historic Preservation Office
	previously listed in the National Register		Other State agency
	previously determined eligible by the National Register		Federal agency
	designated a National Historic Landmark		Local government
	recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey #		University
	recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #		Other
	recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey #	Name of repository:	
Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):			

National Trust Life Insurance Company
Building
Name of Property

Shelby County, Tennessee
County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 2.7 **USGS Quadrangle** Northeast Memphis, TENN

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

1. Zone: 16 Easting: 329140 Northing: 3892120

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

The property is located on Shelby County Tax Assessor Parcel ID 028050 00019, an irregularly shaped lot measuring approximately 50 by 240 feet and is bounded on the north by Poplar Avenue, the west by Union Avenue Extended, a railroad line on the east and respective property lines on the south.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

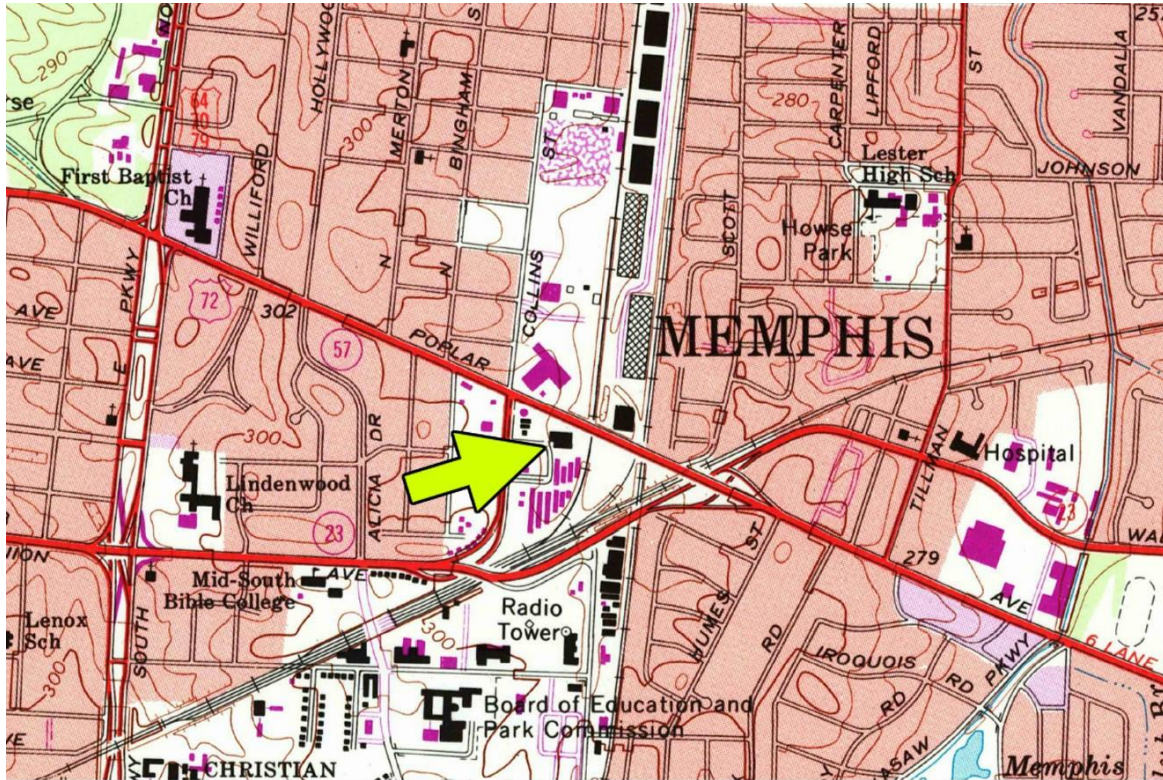
The boundaries of the National Trust Life Insurance Company Building include those historically associated with the building and defined by the Shelby County Tax Assessor.

National Trust Life Insurance Company
Building

Shelby County, Tennessee

Name of Property

County and State



NORTHEAST MEMPHIS, TENN.

NW/4 BARTLETT 15' QUADRANGLE
35089-B8-TF-024

1965
REVISED 1993
DMA 3054 III NW - SERIES V841

Location Map, Northeast Memphis USGS Topographic Map

National Trust Life Insurance Company
Building
Name of Property

Shelby County, Tennessee
County and State



Boundary Map

The boundary is defined by the legal boundaries of Shelby County Tax Assessor Parcel ID 028050 00019

National Trust Life Insurance Company
Building
Name of Property

Shelby County, Tennessee
County and State

11. Form Prepared By

Name Judith Johnson and Steve McQuillin

Organization _____

Street & Number 150 E. Main St., P.O. Box 4 Date January 2018

City or Town Hayesville Telephone 440-899-1200

E-mail stevemcquillin@aol.com State Ohio Zip Code 44838

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 map.
- **Photographs** (refer to Tennessee Historical Commission National Register *Photo Policy* for submittal of digital images and prints)
- **Additional items:** (additional supporting documentation including historic photographs, historic maps, etc. should be included on a Continuation Sheet following the photographic log and sketch maps)

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.

National Trust Life Insurance Company
Building

Shelby County, Tennessee

Name of Property

County and State

Photo Log

Name of Property: National Trust Life Insurance Company Building

City or Vicinity: Memphis

County: Shelby

State: Tennessee

Photographer: Steve McQuillin, Judith Johnson

Date Photographed: August 22, 2017; January 17, 2018

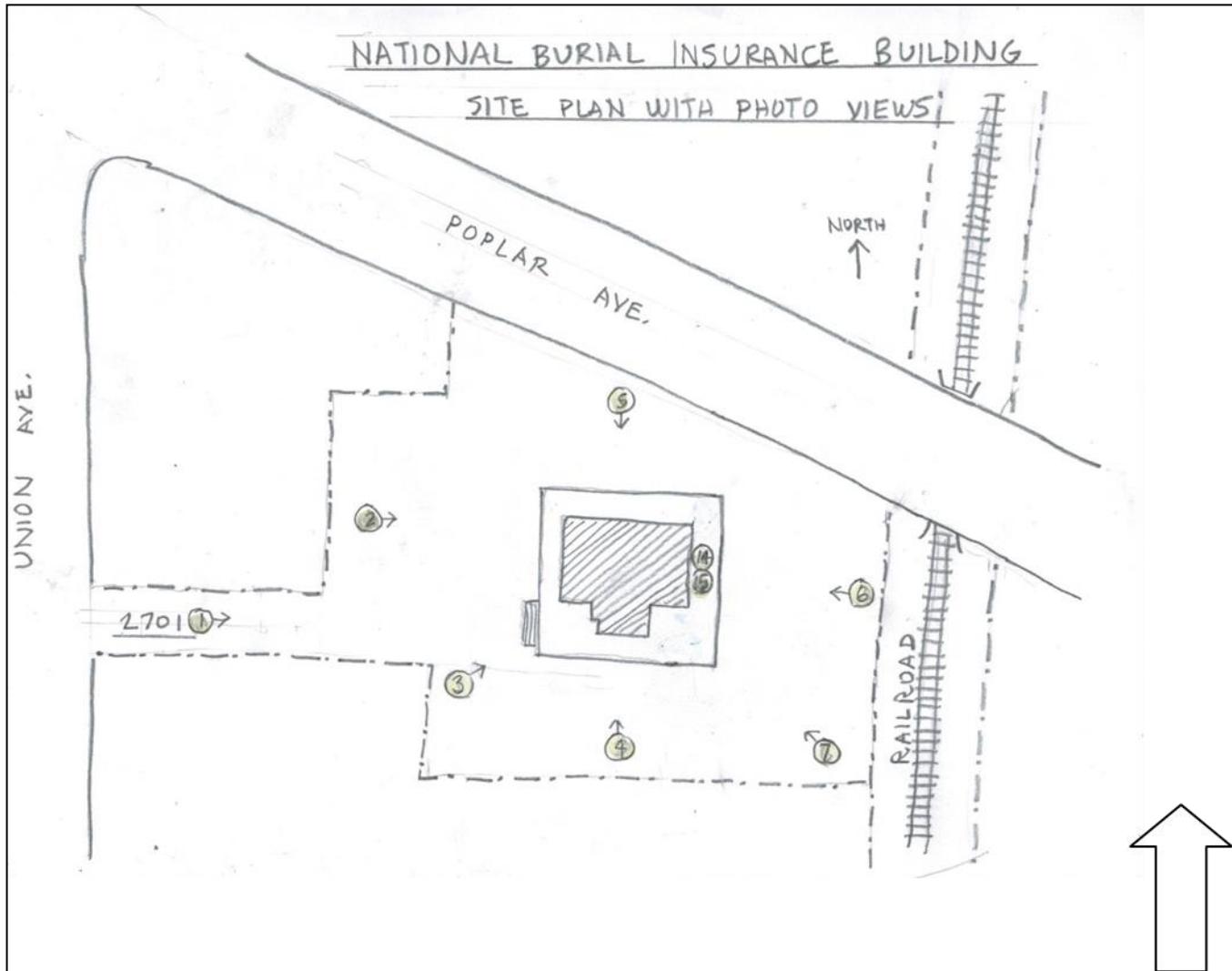
Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

- 1 of 15 Site West entrance onto site with National Burial Insurance Building façade in background, photographer looking east.
- 2 of 15 West parking lot with building in background front and south side, looking southeast
- 3 of 15 West façade and south elevation east side, photographer looking northeast
- 4 of 15 South elevation, photographer looking north
- 5 of 15 North elevation, photographer looking south
- 6 of 15 East elevation, photographer looking west
- 7 of 15 Southwest oblique, photographer looking northwest
- 8 of 15 Interior, first floor main space, photographer looking north
- 9 of 15 Interior, first floor elevator lobby, photographer looking west
- 10 of 15 Interior, second floor. Photographer looking northwest
- 11 of 15 Interior, third floor executive office, photographer looking west
- 12 of 15 Interior, third floor elevator lobby, looking southeast
- 13 of 15 Interior, basement main hall, photographer looking southwest
- 14 of 15 Exterior detail-façade entrance and patio
- 15 of 15 Exterior detail, typical window and mullion detail

National Trust Life Insurance Company
Building
Name of Property

Shelby County, Tennessee
County and State

Site Plan (Photo locations keyed to plan)



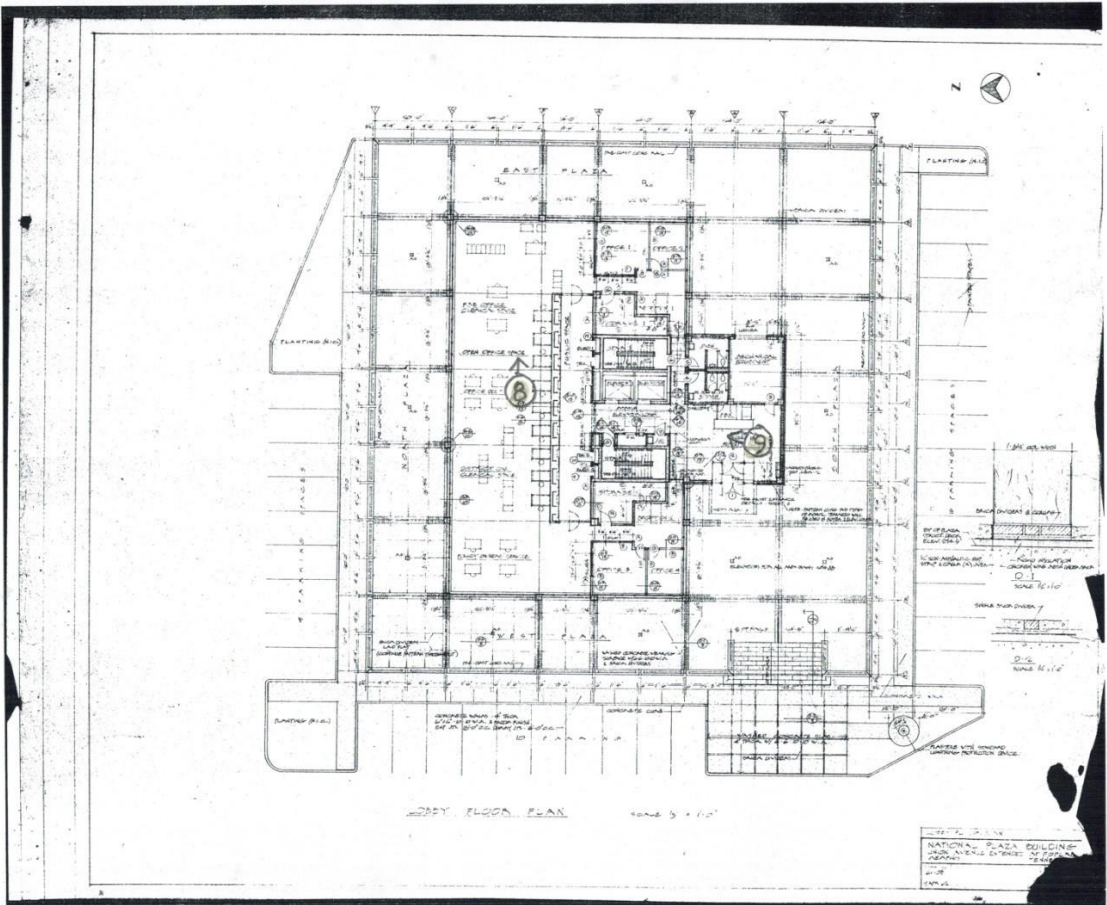
National Trust Life Insurance Company
Building

Shelby County, Tennessee

Name of Property

County and State

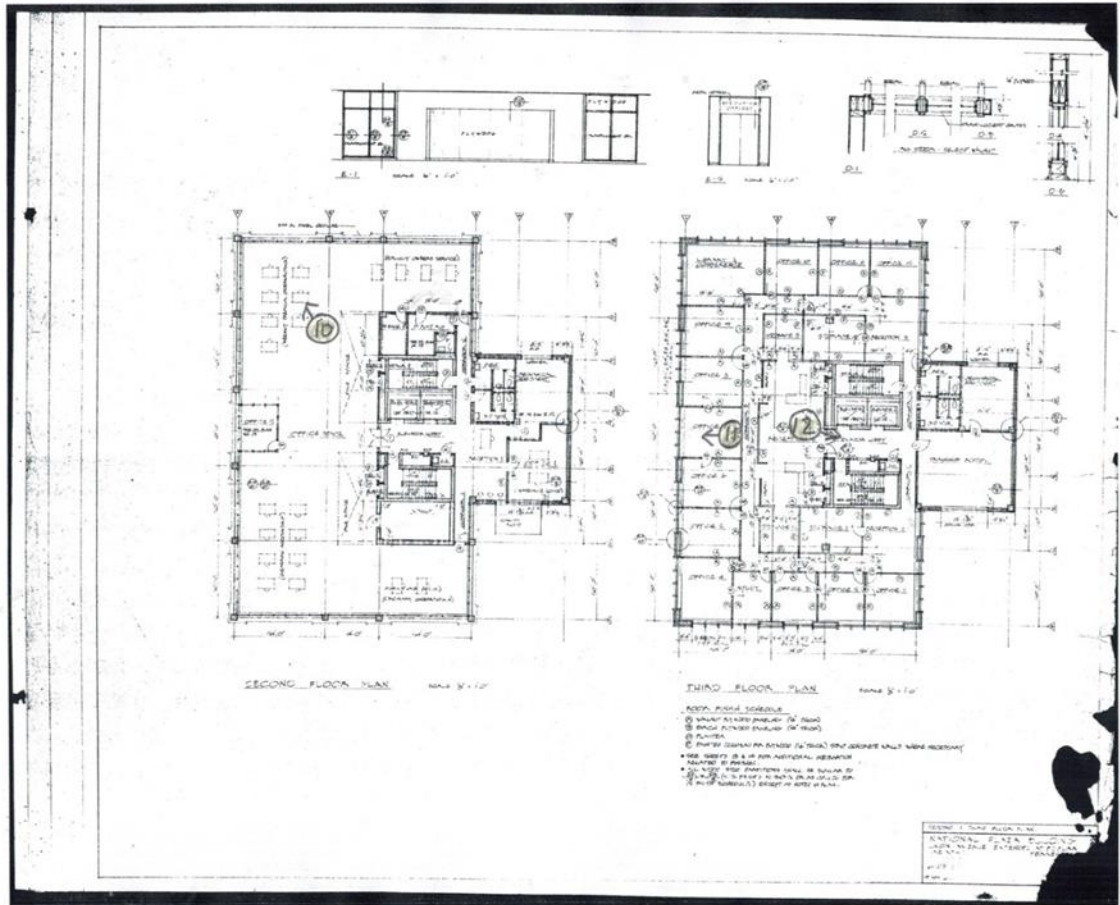
Lobby Floor Plan (photos keyed to plan)



National Trust Life Insurance Company
Building
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Sample Upper Floors Plan (Second and Third Floor; Photos keyed to plan)



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

National Trust Life Insurance Co. Building
Name of Property
Shelby County, Tennessee
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N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number _____ Figures _____ Page _____ 26

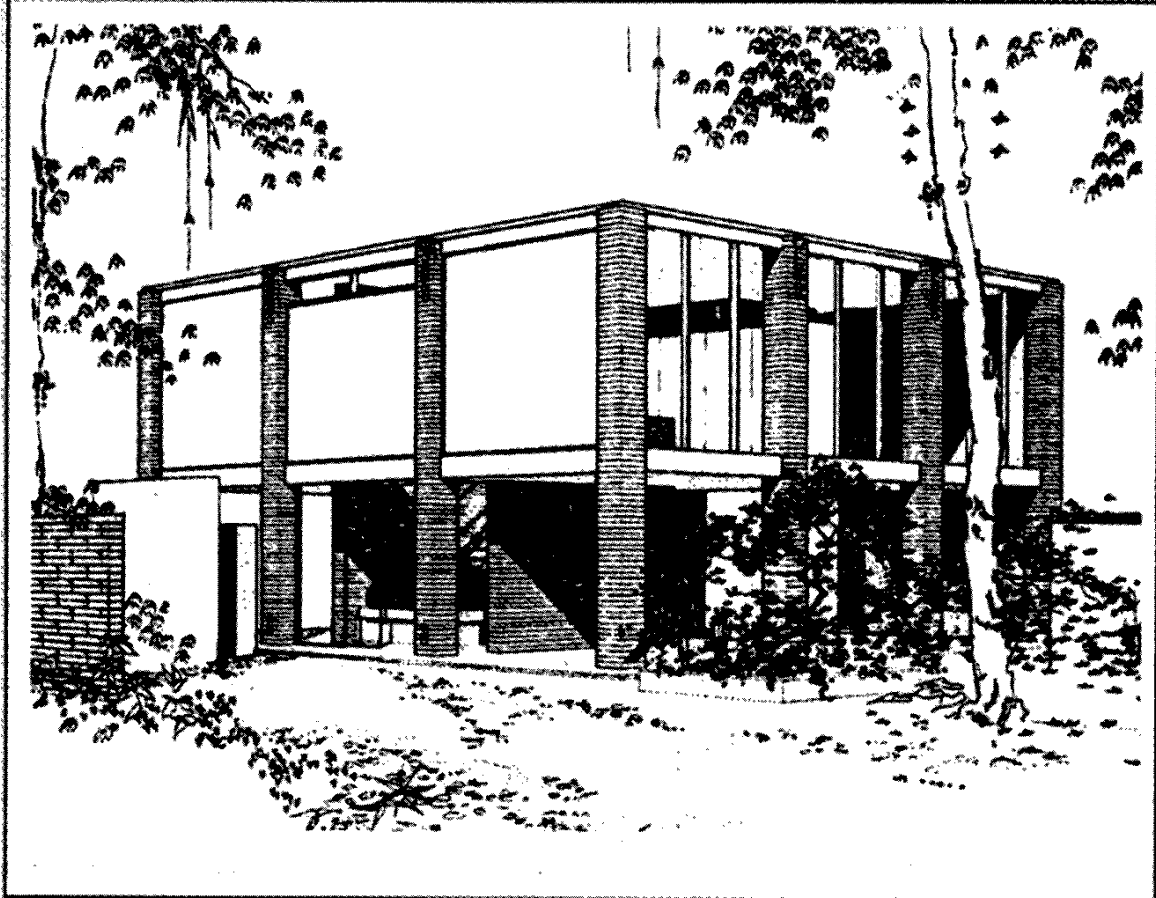


Figure 1. Seagle House, built 1955 with a Charles Jen design

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

National Trust Life Insurance Co. Building

Name of Property

Shelby County, Tennessee

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N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Figures Page 27



Figure 2. 1961 United States Embassy, Manila, the Philippines, designed by Charles Jen

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

National Trust Life Insurance Co. Building
Name of Property
Shelby County, Tennessee
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N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Figures Page 28



Figure 3. 1959 Shelby County Office Building (Old Federal Building), a Charles Jen design.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

National Trust Life Insurance Co. Building
Name of Property
Shelby County, Tennessee
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N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number _____ Figures _____ Page 29

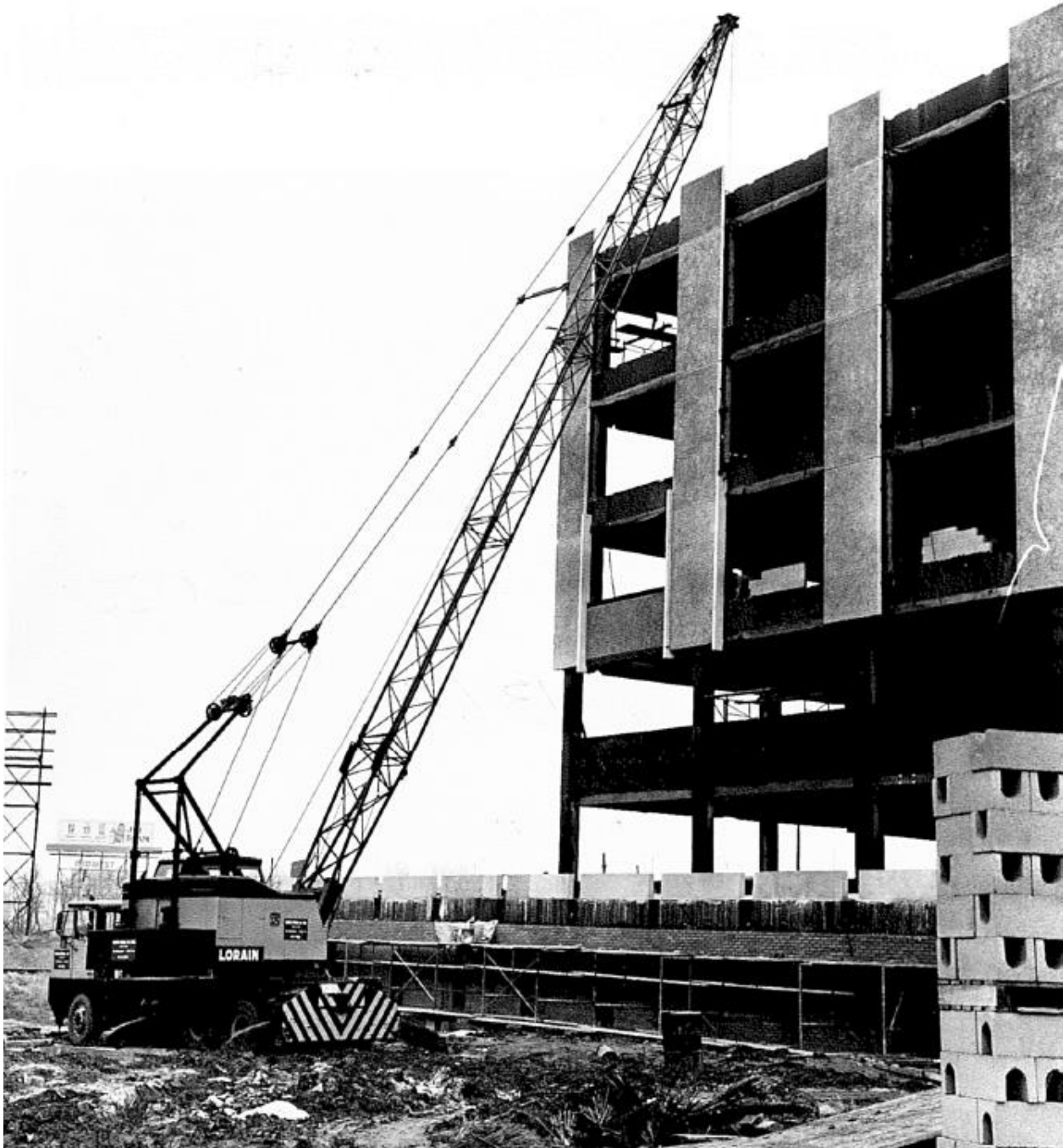


Figure 4. Construction of National Life Insurance Building, 1963.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

National Trust Life Insurance Co. Building

Name of Property

Shelby County, Tennessee

County and State

N/A

Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number _____ Figures _____ Page 30

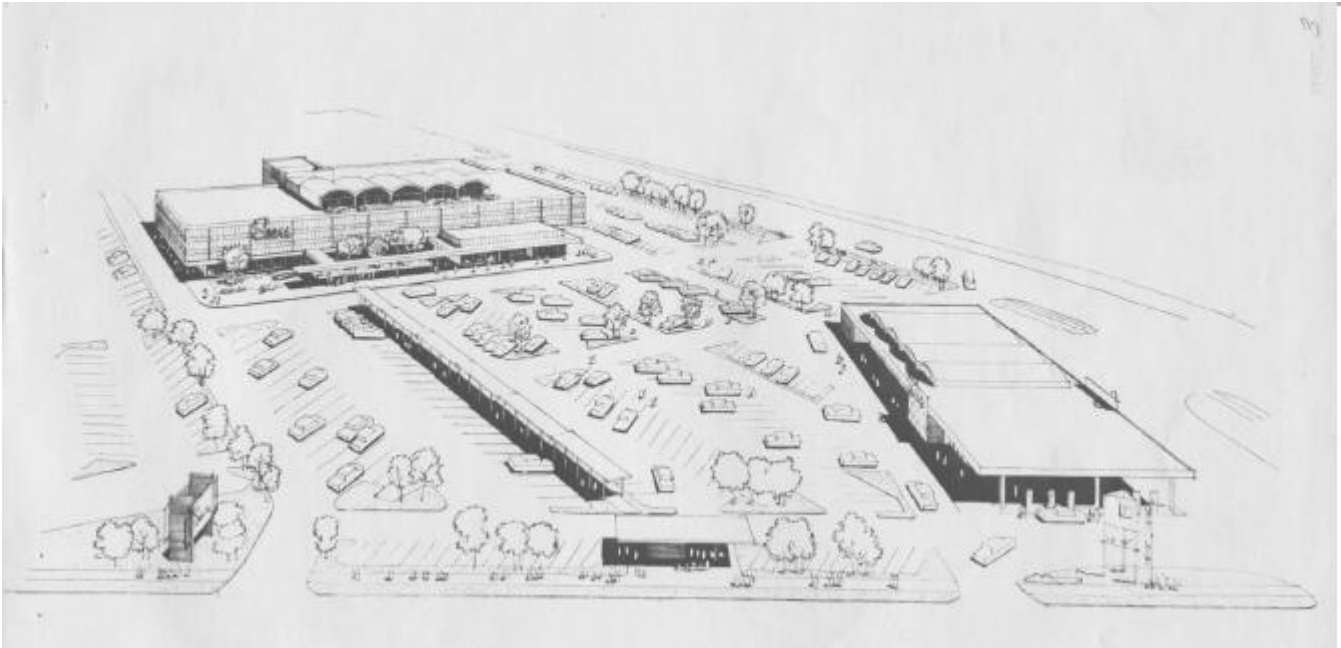


Figure 5. Architect Charles Jen's rendering of Sears Laurelwood with Auto Service Center (no longer extant), 1956.









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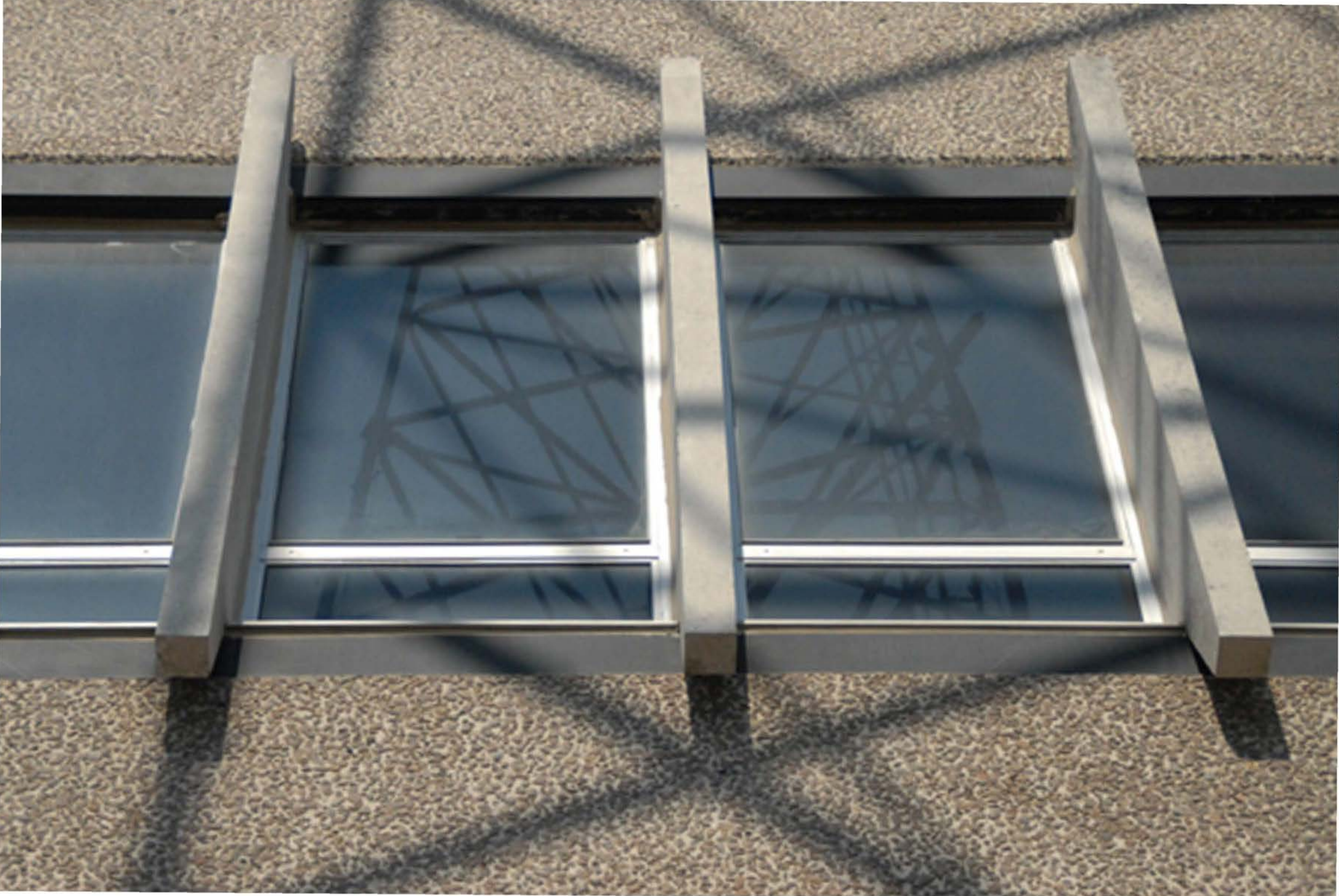




EXIT







UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action:

Property Name:

Multiple Name:

State & County:

Date Received: 6/18/2018 Date of Pending List: 7/9/2018 Date of 16th Day: 7/24/2018 Date of 45th Day: 8/2/2018 Date of Weekly List:

Reference number:

Nominator:

Reason For Review:

- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appeal | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> PDIL | <input type="checkbox"/> Text/Data Issue |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SHPO Request | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape | <input type="checkbox"/> Photo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Waiver | <input type="checkbox"/> National | <input type="checkbox"/> Map/Boundary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resubmission | <input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Resource | <input type="checkbox"/> Period |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other | <input type="checkbox"/> TCP | <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 50 years |
| | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> CLG | |

Accept Return Reject 8/2/2018 Date

Abstract/Summary Comments:

Recommendation/ Criteria:

Reviewer Jim Gabbert Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2275 Date _____

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : No see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.

Lee Harris
Senator

29th Senatorial District
Shelby County

Committees
Energy, Agriculture, and Natural Resources
Judiciary



Senate Minority Leader
State of Tennessee

Lauren Agee
Senior Policy Advisor

David Aguilera
Research and Policy Analyst

Shirley A. Frierson
Executive Assistant

March 11, 2018

RECEIVED
APR 18 2018
TN. HISTORICAL
COMMISSION

E. Patrick McIntyre, Jr.
Tennessee Historical Commission
State Historic Preservation Office
2941 Lebanon Road
Nashville, TN 3721

Dear Mr. McIntyre:

Thank you for informing me that National Trust Life Insurance Company and American Snuff Company Historic District will be considered for the National and Tennessee Registers of Historic Places. While I am unable to attend the board meeting on May 16, please let this letter serve as support for the properties placement on the Register. These properties are both well deserving of this status.

All the best,

Lee Harris

CERTIFIED LOCAL GOVERNMENT NATIONAL REGISTER

CLG: Memphis, TN
PROPERTY: National Trust Life Insurance Company Building
ADDRESS: 2701 Union Ave. Extended

HISTORIC PRESERVATION COMMISSION EVALUATION

NAME OF COMMISSION: Memphis Landmarks Commission


DATE OF MEETING: Thursday, April 26, 2018

HOW WAS THE PUBLIC NOTIFIED OF THE MEETING? Memphis Daily News Publication and USPS Mailed Public Notices

- ELIGIBLE FOR THE NATIONAL REGISTER
 NOT ELIGIBLE FOR THE NATIONAL REGISTER

REASONS FOR ELIGIBILITY OR NON-ELIGIBILITY:

The Memphis Landmarks Commission held its regularly scheduled meeting on Thursday, April 26, 2018 and reviewed the notification of the listing for property located at 2701 Union Avenue Extended for nomination to be placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The vote was unanimous for recommending the property listing on the National Register due to its historical significance to Commerce becoming the largest full line life insurance company in Memphis and ranked nationally in the top twenty (20) percent of all life insurance companies in the United States and in Architecture for its innovative green technology incorporated design by internationally-known architect, Charles Jen. The National Trust Insurance Company was the first commercial building in the city to have offices with individually controlled heating and cooling systems and an innovative five (5) zone system for each of the compass points plus a central zone. In addition, the building's design incorporates the plaza, first introduced in Jen's design of the United States Embassy, Manila, Philippines.

SIGNATURE: 
TITLE: Brian S. Bacchus, Memphis CLG Coordinator

DATE: May 15, 2018

THC STAFF EVALUATION

- ELIGIBLE FOR THE NATIONAL REGISTER NOT
 ELIGIBLE FOR THE NATIONAL REGISTER

REASONS FOR ELIGIBILITY OR NON-ELIGIBILITY:

The National Trust Insurance Company Building is significant locally under Criterion A in the area of Commerce. After passage of a 1955 bill outlawing burial insurance in Tennessee, predictions were made that the then National Burial Insurance Company would fold. Wunderlich navigated the company through controversies and set it on a trajectory of growth as a multi-faceted insurance company, a development symbolized by the construction of the new \$1 million, 49,000 square foot headquarters in 1963. The company was the largest full line life insurance company in Memphis by the time they moved into their new corporate headquarters. By 1965, the company was ranked in the top twenty percent of all life insurance companies in the United States. Under Alvin Wunderlich, Jr., the insurance firm continued successfully until its sale to Capital Holding Company of Wilmington, Delaware in 1969.

The National Trust Insurance Company Building is also significant under Criterion C in the area of Architecture for its innovative green technology incorporated into the design by internationally-known architect Charles Jen. Jen's design for National Trust Insurance Company was the first commercial building in the city to have offices with individually controlled heating and cooling. It also had an innovative five zone system for each of the compass points plus a central zone. As the sun orbited during the day, the rooftop HVAC system would automatically compensate for the solar heating and winter cold of the various elevations.

SIGNATURE: 
TITLE: Historic Preservation Supervisor

DATE: March 28, 2018

PLEASE COMPLETE THIS FORM AND RETURN BEFORE: January 8,

RETURN FORM

HOLLY BARNETT
TENNESSEE HISTORICAL
COMMISSION 2941 LEBANON PIKE
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37243-
0442 HOLLY.M.BARNETT@TN.GOV



TENNESSEE HISTORICAL COMMISSION
STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE
2941 LEBANON PIKE
NASHVILLE, TENNESSEE 37214
OFFICE: (615) 532-1550
E-mail: Claudette.Stager@tn.gov
(615) 770-1089



June 7, 2018

J. Paul Loether
Deputy Keeper and Chief,
National Park Service
National Register of Historic Places
1849 C Street, NW, Mail Stop 7228
Washington, DC 20240

National Register Nomination

- *National Trust Life Insurance Company Building, Shelby County, Tennessee*

Dear Mr. Loether:

The enclosed disks contain the true and correct nomination for listing of the *National Trust Life Insurance Company Building* to the National Register of Historic Places. We received CLG comments and one comment in support of the nomination.

If you have any questions or if more information is needed, please contact Holly Barnett at (615) 770-1098 or Holly.M.Barnett@tn.gov.

Sincerely,

Claudette Stager
Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer

CS:hb

Enclosures(2)