

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

8-10-77 10

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES  
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS  
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC

Witherspoon Building

AND/OR COMMON

Witherspoon Building

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER

1319-23 Walnut St., at N.W. corner Juniper St.

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN

Philadelphia

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT

3

STATE

Pennsylvania

VICINITY OF

CODE

42

COUNTY

Philadelphia

CODE

101

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH

PUBLIC ACQUISITION

- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- COMMERCIAL
- EDUCATIONAL
- ENTERTAINMENT
- GOVERNMENT
- INDUSTRIAL
- MILITARY
- MUSEUM
- PARK
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- RELIGIOUS
- SCIENTIFIC
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME

Juniper Street Holding Company

STREET & NUMBER

Broad and Walnut Streets

CITY, TOWN

Philadelphia

VICINITY OF

STATE  
Pennsylvania

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE,  
REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.

Department of Records, Registry Unit

STREET & NUMBER

Philadelphia City Hall

CITY, TOWN

Philadelphia

STATE  
Pennsylvania

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE

Philadelphia Historical Commission

DATE

1977

FEDERAL  STATE  COUNTY  LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR  
SURVEY RECORDS

1313 City Hall Annex

CITY, TOWN

Philadelphia

STATE  
Pennsylvania

# 7 DESCRIPTION

## CONDITION

EXCELLENT  
 GOOD  
 FAIR

DETERIORATED  
 RUINS  
 UNEXPOSED

## CHECK ONE

UNALTERED  
 ALTERED

## CHECK ONE

ORIGINAL SITE  
 MOVED DATE \_\_\_\_\_

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

The Witherspoon Building is an eleven-story steel-frame commercial building measuring approximately 75 feet (ten bays) on Walnut Street by 230 feet (thirty-three bays) on Juniper Street. On its three exposures (Walnut, Juniper, and Sansom Streets), its brick curtain walls are faced with coursed polished granite ashlar with terra cotta trim. The facades are divided into three horizontal sections: a three-story lower section with smooth rustication and, along Juniper Street, a third-floor arcade and console cornice, a five-story ashlar center section with its thirty-three rectangular windows groups into eleven sets of three and ending with a plain cornice, and a three-story top section. The top section is divided into four bands, one of ashlar with rectangular windows corresponding to those below and a cornice with rosettes, a second band of smooth rustication and eleven widely spaced windows with pronounced key lintels, a third band of eleven round-arched windows and wide Corinthian pilasters, and at the top a narrow band of stone swags without fenestration below the cornice. (Not the original cornice.)

The focal points of the two main facades, Walnut and Juniper Streets, are the entrances, which are the building's most significant features and help to make it a showcase of sculpture. Each entrance is marked by a giant round arch on Corinthian columns which correspond with the giant arches at each corner. Each entry arch is set within a highly carved frame capped by a steep pediment that rises to the fifth floor. The area within each frame is filled with either windows or carved ornamentation, mostly seals of the various boards and agencies of the Presbyterian Church and of sister Reformed churches. At the base of the pediment is a deeply recessed triple window with engaged Ionic columns; above the center window is a recessed, ornamented blind arch set within engaged Corinthian columns and a console cornice. The resulting five spandrels are filled with cast medallions and rinceau; the largest medallion, the seal of the Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath School Work, is at the peak. Beneath the pediment, serving as architrave, is a band of medallions marked at each end by a winged effigy, or angel. Medallions and urn-and-rinceau bas-relief also fill the recessed pilasters of the entrances' outer frames. An elaborate console with the seal of the City of Philadelphia marks the key of the giant arch, rosettes decorate its coffered voussoirs, and bas-relief angels fill the spandrels. Within the tympanum are four round-arch windows, and figures representing the four gospels are carved in relief from recessed cruciforms. The seal of the Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath School Work and the building's name are carved in relief on the large stone panel above the doors, and directly above the four doors is a notable piece of decorative ironwork with the building's date (1896) cut through a small shield. Cast medallions are also found in a band below the third floor on the Walnut Street front and in the spandrels of the third-story arcade on the Juniper Street facade. The Juniper Street medallions and four of those on Walnut Street are of historic figures representing the United States and various European lands that contributed to the founding of America.

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These medallions were originally complemented with sixteen terra-cotta statues that decorated the building. Nine-foot statues of six men (John Witherspoon, Marcus Whitman, James Caldwell, Francis Makemie, Samuel Davies, John McMillan) prominent in the history of the Presbyterian Church in the United States were cast from sculpture by Alexander Sterling Calder and stood on the entrance pediments, one on each side a third balanced on the peak. Standing on Corinthian caps and flanking the arches at the eighth floor were statues (10 feet, 6 inches high) of ten prophets of the Old Testament modelled by Samuel Murray and Thomas Eakins of Philadelphia. The prophets included Moses, Samuel, Elijah, Deborah, Elisha, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Huldah, and John the Baptist. Concern for the statues' structural integrity led to their removal in 1961.

Because of the building's elongated E-plan and its consequent light wells, the stairways and nearly every room in the building receive natural light. The large, domed second-floor Witherspoon Hall was remodeled into offices in 1961 and its symbolic statuary and stage mural by William B. Van Ingen of New York were destroyed. During the same renovations by George M. Ewing of Philadelphia, fast elevators were installed and red marble and fluorescent lights replaced the Vermont marble and incandescent bulbs in the lobby.

# 3 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> RELIGION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER	
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION	
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)	
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION			

SPECIFIC DATES      1895-97

BUILDER/ARCHITECT      Joseph M. Huston

## STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

"The Witherspoon Building was an attempt to tell the story of the Organization of the Presbyterian Church in this country in Architecture, Painting and Sculpture,"<sup>1</sup> wrote the building's architect, Joseph M. Huston, thirty-two years after its completion. In successfully telling this story, the architect, sculptors, and patron produced a notable piece of architecture which gracefully integrated sculpture into its monumental design, and although the terra cotta statues have since been removed, the many medallions and carved details remain to make it a striking example of early skyscraper design by prominent artists.

Since the Presbyterian Church intended the Witherspoon Building to be an ornament to the city that would express the strength and influence of the sect, the building committee of the Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath School Work chose its artists and artisans from among the city's most promising. Even the building's name was carefully chosen for the fullest historic significance; John Witherspoon (1723-1794) was the first president of Princeton University (then College of New Jersey) and the only Presbyterian minister to sign the Declaration of Independence.

Ironically Princeton was the alma mater of the building's architect, Joseph M. Huston (1866-1940), Huston was a promising young architect only three years out of college and working for the noted architectural firm, Furness, Evans and Co., when he received the commission for the Witherspoon Building in the fall of 1895. It was his first significant work and catapulted him into prominence as a skillful architect. He would later become architect of the Pennsylvania State Capitol, become mired in its odious scandal, but would quickly regain acceptance by both his professional colleagues and his well placed social peers.

Alexander Sterling Calder (1870-1945), sculptor of the six statues of prominent Presbyterians and some of the medallions, was the second of the three sculpting Calders. He was the son of Alexander Milne Calder (1845-1923), sculptor of the burgeoning statuary on Philadelphia City Hall, the father of Alexander (Sandy) Calder (1898-1976), famous for his graceful mobiles and stolid stables, and one of the most gifted young sculptors in the city at the time the Witherspoon Building was erected.

<sup>1</sup>Joseph M. Huston to Rev. William P. Finney, 1 October 1929, MSS, Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia, Pa.

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Samuel Murray (1870-1941) was a contemporary of young Calder and in 1894, only two years before he began his work on the Witherspoon Building, he had received the gold medal of the Philadelphia Art Club, an indication of his emerging talents. Murray's teacher, Thomas Eakins (1844-1916), who worked with him on the prophets, is now regarded as one of America's great artists and a precursor of modern painting. The statues were removed from the building for safety reasons in 1961. The six figures by Calder were saved and later placed in front of the new headquarters of the Presbyterian Historical Society, 425 Lombard Street, Philadelphia, but the prophets were given to whomever would take them and are now scattered across the land.

The noted mural painter William B. Van Ingen (1858-after 1934), who did the stage mural for Witherspoon Hall, had professional ties to both Eakins and Huston. Philadelphia-born, Van Ingen had been a student of Thomas Eakins at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts and later would follow Huston to Harrisburg where he painted murals for the State Capitol that Huston designed.

In summary, the Witherspoon Building is a notable example of early skyscraper design, enriched with sculptural elements by noted artists. As such it bridged the gap between the symbolic architecture of the nineteenth century, in which styles were consciously chosen for their historic and literary associations, and the non-objective architecture of the twentieth century in which the building's form reflected the function of its modern materials.

Built for the Presbyterian Board of Publication and Sabbath School Work at a cost of more than \$1,018,400, the Witherspoon Building housed the offices of many Presbyterian Church facilities, including the Presbyterian Historical Society, between the building's completion in December 1897 and its sale to the Juniper Street Holding Company in December 1973. During that time, particularly before 1960, it was a decision-making center for the United Presbyterian Church in the United States, and its Witherspoon Hall was the site for innumerable meetings, religious drama, and concerts, including one by Marian Anderson in September 1958.

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Report of the Building Committee, Presbyterian Board of Publication  
and Sabbath School Work, 11 April 1899, Presbyterian Historical Society,  
Philadelphia, Pa.

Andrew Johnstone, "Building the Witherspoon Building," paper presented  
to Westminster Club, Philadelphia, 29 May 1929, copy at Presbyterian  
Historical Society.

Joseph M. Huston to Rev. William P. Finney, 1 October 1929, Presbyterian  
Historical Society.

Insurance Maps of Philadelphia (New York: Sanborn Map Co., rev. 1954), 2:  
pl. 131.

Today: The Philadelphia Inquirer Magazine, 20 September 1959, pp. 6-7.

Press release of Board of Christian Education, The United Presbyterian  
Church in the United States of America, to Presbyterian Life Monday  
Morning, 2 May 1961, Presbyterian Historical Society.



