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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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

HISTORIC PRESERVATION

received

date entered

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*
Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Name

historic Physicians and Dentists Building

and or common Professional Building

**USE THIS COPY
FOR DUPLICATING**

2. Location

street & number 1831-33 Chestnut Street

N/A not for publication

city, town Philadelphia N/A vicinity of

state Pennsylvania code 042 county Philadelphia code 101

3. Classification

Category	Ownership	Status	Present Use
<input type="checkbox"/> district	<input type="checkbox"/> public	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> occupied	<input type="checkbox"/> agriculture
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> building(s)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> private	<input type="checkbox"/> unoccupied	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commercial
<input type="checkbox"/> structure	<input type="checkbox"/> both	<input type="checkbox"/> work in progress	<input type="checkbox"/> educational
<input type="checkbox"/> site	Public Acquisition	Accessible	<input type="checkbox"/> entertainment
<input type="checkbox"/> object	<u>N/A</u> in process	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> yes: restricted	<input type="checkbox"/> government
	<u>N/A</u> being considered	<input type="checkbox"/> yes: unrestricted	<input type="checkbox"/> industrial
		<input type="checkbox"/> no	<input type="checkbox"/> military
			<input type="checkbox"/> museum
			<input type="checkbox"/> park
			<input type="checkbox"/> private residence
			<input type="checkbox"/> religious
			<input type="checkbox"/> scientific
			<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
			<input type="checkbox"/> other:

4. Owner of Property

name Schindler/Greenfield Co./Professional Building Associates

street & number 128 Chestnut Street

city, town Philadelphia N/A vicinity of state Pennsylvania

5. Location of Legal Description

courthouse, registry of deeds, etc. Department of Records/City Hall

street & number Broad and Market Streets

city, town Philadelphia state Pennsylvania

6. Representation in Existing Surveys

title N/A has this property been determined eligible? yes no

date N/A federal state county local

depository for survey records

city, town state

7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one
<input type="checkbox"/> excellent	<input type="checkbox"/> deteriorated	<input type="checkbox"/> unaltered	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> original site
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> good	<input type="checkbox"/> ruins	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> altered	<input type="checkbox"/> moved date <u>N/A</u>
<input type="checkbox"/> fair	<input type="checkbox"/> unexposed		

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Professional Building, formerly called "The Physicians and Dentists Building", was built in 1896 on the north side of the 1800 block of Chestnut Street as rental offices for the medical professions serving the downtown and the nearby Rittenhouse residential community. Rising ten stories and an attic above the street, it was the western outpost of the tall buildings which formed the new business district around City Hall after 1890. Confined by the long narrow sites of Philadelphia, the building footprint is a modified "T" version of the "barbell plan" providing light courts on both sides of stem, and a broader facade at the street front. The street front was organized along the classic lines of the mature turn-of-the-century skyscraper, with a taller and more articulated base supporting a rising shaft of office floors and crowned by a balcony which separates the tenth story and attic. Contrasting with the limestone street facade are the economical brick sides, articulated only by piers which mark the location of the steel frame. The interior was designed with a central stair and elevator core providing access to office suites at the front and rear. The nominated property contains this one contributing building.

The visual character of the building is dominated by the limestone-clad main facade which was subdivided by a dentilled cornice at the first story from the rising shaft of offices above. That lower story was subdivided into thirds by a projecting entrance portico carried on Corinthian columns which flanked the main door. On either side, shopfronts were further subdivided into thirds, by columns, in antis. Some of this apparatus was covered and other portions were removed in the 1950s for a modern glass shop front, but where the fascia has been removed, the cornice and other original elements including console and dentil courses survive. On either side of the entrance, the larger capitals and pilasters are largely intact as well, though some portions were chiseled back.

The upper levels continued the subdivision of the facade into thirds with shallow three-sided bays denoting the offices rising unbroken for eight stories like giant engaged columns, supporting the entablature-like balcony. The central wall plane in between the bays is subdivided into thirds like the lower shop fronts, repeating the compositional theme of the facade. The fenestration of the projecting bays has been simplified. Early twentieth century photographs indicate that the windows of the projecting bays were originally transomed and the central, larger windows were divided vertically by a central mullion. The present windows are double hung with one-over-one fixed sash. At each story, a frieze band continues across the facade, marking each level, while the vertical subdivision of the facade reflects the central corridor and offices on either side. The attic rises two stories from its balcony to its bracketed cornice, and is divided horizontally by an intermediate cornice. Each of these two upper stories is articulated in nine window bays separated by columns; these columns are paired between each group of three openings to form three larger groupings. The windows of the tenth story are full height French windows opening onto the balcony from the banquet

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hall; those of the half-story above it are oculi set in square recessed panels. The attic retains the florid iron grille work of the balcony as well as the richly molded brackets with their floral ornament that carry the projecting cornice. The horizontal cornice above the shops at the first level, eight stories of offices and the balcony and elaborate design of the tenth floor banquet rooms are similarly representative linking it to Victorian descriptive theory which continued in the work of the Wilson Brothers despite the change to a more modern classically derived style.

Because neighboring property owners were free to build to any height, the side party walls are blank brick, articulated only by shallow pilaster strips where the steel frame is located. A corbel table forms a transition between the cornice and the wall plane. At the rear, the building steps back from the property line to provide light and air to all offices. Again the walls are articulated by regularly spaced piers marking the position of the steel frame, and containing two segmentally arched windows within each bay. The north wall returns to the bay treatment of the front, with pairs of three-sided bays rising to a projecting cornice.

The plan of the building responded directly to the building function. A central door opens into a marble sheathed lobby which contains a short flight of stairs leading to the main level. There the architects designed a central core containing the freight and passenger elevators on the west, and the firestair and toilets across the corridor. That scheme permitted the upper stories to be separated into front and rear suites which could be further subdivided according to the needs of the tenants. Apart from the marble of the entrance vestibule, all of the interior finishes were of utmost simplicity, with simple millwork around windows and contemporary five-panel doors scarcely different from domestic architecture, completing the finishes.

The basement and the attic, which are unfinished and nearly industrial spaces, are of particular interest in describing the character of early steel construction. In the basement, giant riveted steel columns supported on pyramidal brick foundations carry immense girders. Where the girders meet the columns, triangular steel sections show the location of the windbracing which the Wilson Brothers pioneered. Another feature that remains from the origins of the building, though no longer in use, is the immense coal fired boiler emblazoned with "Physicians & Dentists Building" across its top.

In the attic, other elements of the construction can be seen. Terra cotta cladding was used to fireproof most of the steel. In sections where the ceiling has been cut, hollow terra cotta piping can be seen that lightened the floor slab while also serving as the formwork. Described as "steel skeleton and hollow-ware", it is a rare survivor of a transitional fireproof building system. Finally, the attic still contains the water tanks that pressurized its sprinkler and water system, emphasizing the purpose of the attic on skyscrapers of the late nineteenth century.

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Despite the alteration of the first floor of the Chestnut Street facade, and the successive and intended remodelings of the interior, the Professional Building retains both the principal design elements and the original structural and cladding systems and thus possesses sufficient integrity to warrant listing on the National Register.

8. 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 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 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/
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> art	<input type="checkbox"/> engineering	<input type="checkbox"/> music	<input type="checkbox"/> humanitarian
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> commerce	<input type="checkbox"/> exploration/settlement	<input type="checkbox"/> philosophy	<input type="checkbox"/> theater
<input type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> communications	<input type="checkbox"/> industry	<input type="checkbox"/> politics government	<input type="checkbox"/> transportation
		<input type="checkbox"/> invention		<input type="checkbox"/> other (specify)

Specific dates 1896

Builder/Architect Wilson Bros./architects

Geo. Payne/builder

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

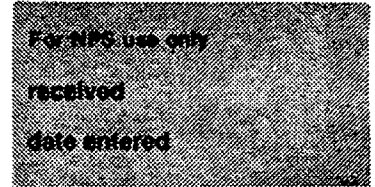
The Professional Building is significant as the work of the Wilson Brothers, the most innovative architectural/engineering firm working in Philadelphia at the end of the nineteenth century.¹ Though remembered for railroad bridges and other structures, they had importance as the designers of many of the structural features of modern tall building construction, including windbracing of steel frames, and the modern system of shelf angles for carrying non-loadbearing masonry curtain walls which were utilized in this building. The building is of further note as one of the earliest erected to serve a specialized client group -- doctors and dentists -- a fact which the *Builder's Guide* felt was worth noting in their description.² Finally, it is one of the few surviving tall office buildings erected in Philadelphia during the final decades of the nineteenth century. Although tending to be more stylistically conservative than their progressive counterparts in Chicago and New York, Philadelphia's tall buildings nevertheless demonstrated innovative planning solutions and structural systems. Most of these early tall buildings have vanished from the city's skyline; the Professional Building is among the best-preserved of those that survive.

It is as the work of the Wilson Brothers that the building gains immediate importance. Though long ignored by architectural historians who have been too concerned with form, the Wilson Brothers were national figures whose work was regularly reported in the *Engineering News Record*. Joseph M. Wilson (1838 - 1902) was a member of the fifth successive generation of Wilsons to serve as engineers, and after receiving an education at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute entered the engineering department of the Pennsylvania Railroad, where he joined his father and later two brothers.³ The brothers, Joseph, John and Henry, and two architects, Fred Thorn and Henry Macomb, formed the architectural/engineering firm of the Wilson Brothers in 1876 after their triumph in designing and completing on schedule the main exhibition building of the Centennial celebration. Their office gained a national practice, working from New York to Denver, and from Vermont to British Guyana, and Joseph Wilson became a nationally known consultant, as well as an important theoretician and writer.⁴ It was because of those latter skills that he was asked to prepare the Centennial volume on art and engineering and later served as Vice President and board member of the American Society of Civil Engineers.

The Wilson Brothers' contribution to the development of modern steel construction was summarized in *Minutes of the Proceedings of the Institute of Civil Engineers*, vol. 1896-7, pt II, pp. 54-55, where Joseph Wilson recalled the firm's innovations. In 1880, they designed the Pennsylvania Railroad's first Broad Street Station, the first instance in which fireproofed iron framing carried masonry curtain walls. By 1887, in their design of the Drexel Building at Fifth and Walnut streets the Wilson Brothers had arrived at the

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first true skeleton construction with windbracing, while permitting great flexibility in interior planning.⁵ For these achievements, Carl Condit gave them a high position in the pantheon of American engineers, writing: "Although Wilson's primary concern was functional, with emphasis on empirical form, [he] anticipated three cardinal doctrines of modern architectural theory -- simplicity, volume rather than mass and free flowing space."⁶

These notions were clearly expressed in the Wilson Brothers' office buildings, including the Drexel Bank at Fifth and Walnut streets, the Physicians and Dentists Building, the great train sheds for the Philadelphia and Reading Railroad and the Pennsylvania Railroad, and the vast exhibition halls for the Centennial. Few of these buildings survive and only the UGI Building at Broad and Arch streets (1898) is comparable to the Professional Building in scale and ingenuity of planning in the context of a large office building. It is the Professional Building, however, which is the earliest extant example of the constructional system which the Wilson Brothers first developed in their Drexel Building.

As in the Drexel Building, the core of the Physicians and Dentists Building is the steel skeleton which was laid out to provide absolute flexibility in planning from one floor to the next. That idea had been developed in the Drexel Building where Wilson noted in connection with the first of these buildings that, "The skeleton construction sustained the floors and division walls independently in each storey, thus allowing any arrangement of rooms without reference to their disposition in other storeys."⁷ This solution was applied in the Physicians and Dentists Building as well, with large suites to the front and rear of the central service core. Each suite could then be subdivided as the tenants required in a striking anticipation of modern architectural practice. It was presumably this intended flexibility which caused the initial simplicity of the finishes and millwork.

The Physicians and Dentists Building is of further interest in retaining a number of features that mark the maturation of modern construction. The triangular steel infilling web of the windbracing which the Wilson Brothers pioneered in the Drexel Building is clearly visible in the basement. Equally original is the use of hollow terra cotta pipes to lighten the concrete slab floors of the fireproof construction. It is an idea that recalls the early use of concrete in ancient Roman buildings such as the Pantheon, whose concrete vault is similarly lightened through the insertion of a system of voids between the areas of solid masonry.⁸

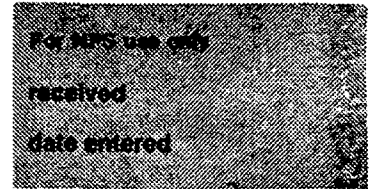
Besides the importance of the Physicians and Dentists Building in the history of American architecture and engineering, it is also of interest as one of the first buildings devoted to a single tenant type. Previously, the standard office building of the nineteenth century consisted of undifferentiated space that was available for rental by any interested tenant.⁹ The Physicians and Dentists Building, Philadelphia's "first office building for physicians ...,"

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is noteworthy for being planned from the outset to serve the members of one particular profession.¹⁰ That idea would become increasingly common in the twentieth century as various manufacturers, architects, jewelers and other tradesmen shared buildings and, in the process, created a concentration of clients by which all benefitted. The Physicians and Dentists Building is an important document of the changes which the medical profession was undergoing during the 1890s, a decade of professional ferment which saw both the formation of the American Medical Association as well as of the first private group clinic, the Mayo Clinic.¹¹ The modern walk-in medical clinic, composed of a cooperative of doctors and increasingly successful as an alternative to individual practice or hospital practice, is a building type and a medical institution whose origin is prefigured in the Physicians and Dentists Building.

The creation of buildings devoted to a particular client type was made possible by the sense of self-awareness and solidarity that increasingly characterized American professionals and tradesmen during the course of the nineteenth century; it had its corollary in the formation of trade associations and professional business societies.¹² In Philadelphia, the single function office building began with the Master Builders' Exchange on Tenth below Market Street of 1888; significantly, this building was also designed by the Wilson Brothers. The circle about the Wilson Brothers also was influential in developing the idea of the Physicians and Dentists Building. The company was organized by Drs. John W. Croskey (a medical doctor) and C.H.S. Littleton (a dentist), in conjunction with Joseph M. Wilson and John Converse (president of the Baldwin Locomotive Works and a major Wilson Brothers client) who were on the board of directors. They acquired the property from Littleton, suggesting that it was he who came up with the initial idea. A forerunner of Littleton's scheme is to be found in Chicago, where Daniel Burnham's Reliance Building reserved two floors for medical offices with central staff provided.¹³ It was the achievement of Littleton, however, to project an entire building dedicated to medical practice. Littleton's project was a response to the professionalization of medicine at the turn of the century at a time when doctors increasingly sought to elevate their status in the public eye. It dramatized the shift from the practice of front parlor medicine to one of modern professionals in modern buildings. Littleton's scheme was facilitated in this by the progressively flexible planning which Wilson's structural system permitted. By 1900, some thirty doctors and dentists were listed in the **Gopsill's Business Directory** at 1831-3 Chestnut Street and, nearly a century later it remains a professional office.¹⁴ Philadelphia's building was very likely the first to be planned for the exclusive use of doctors. The Physician's Directories of New York, Chicago, Boston and Baltimore show no comparable concentration of doctors in an office building as late as 1902.¹⁵

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In the thirty years after the completion of the Physicians and Dentists Building, several additional medical buildings were constructed, including the Medical Arts Building at Sixteenth and Walnut streets (1924), and the Medical Tower at 255 South Seventeenth Street, also from the mid-1920s. Not only is the Physicians and Dentists Building the first and oldest survivor of this series, but it is probably also the oldest single clientele building remaining in the city.

As a work which represents the engineering and architectural achievements of the Wilson Brothers, and as an early example of an important office building type, the Professional Building warrants being placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Notes

1. The Wilson Brothers are discussed in numerous contemporary sources; the most reliable obituary is that of Joseph M. Knap, AMSCE, in the Transactions of the American Society of Civil Engineers, June 1903, Vol. 1, pp. 504-506. In addition, Wilson is discussed in G. Thomas, "Wilson Brothers, 1876-1902", in Drawing Towards Building, Philadelphia Architectural Graphics, 1732-1986, Philadelphia, 1986, p. 140. A listing of their commissions can be found in R. Moss and S. Tatman, Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects 1700 - 1930, (Philadelphia, 1985), pp. 868-71. The Wilson Brothers published two catalogues of their ongoing projects including A Catalogue of Work Executed, Accompanied by Illustrations, (Philadelphia, 1885), and Architectural Work of the Wilson Brothers and Co., (Philadelphia, 1897), which illustrates the Professional Building.
2. Philadelphia Real Estate Record and Builders Guide. (Hereafter, PRER&BG), 26 Feb. 1896 (Vol. XI, No. 9).
3. Knap, op. cit., p. 504.
4. The extensive Joseph Wilson contributions to the literature of engineering have not been assembled but are referred to in Carl Condit, American Building Art, Vol. I, the Nineteenth Century, (New York, 1960), p. 218, and p. 329, and others are referred to in the Knap obituary. The expert testimony of the firm is listed in Wilson Brothers, A Catalogue of the Work Executed, Accompanied by Illustrations.
5. The Drexel Building is discussed in George B. Tatum, Penn's Great Town, (Philadelphia 1961), p. 114, and in Joseph M. Wilson, Minutes of the Proceedings of the Institute of Civil Engineers, Vol. 1896-7, pt II, pp. 54-55.

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Notes (Continued):

6. Condit, op. cit., p. 210.
7. Wilson, op. cit., p. 55.
8. The Pantheon was the subject of current interest at the turn of the century and was looked at for insight about contemporary design. It is discussed, for example, in the Transactions of the American Society of Civil Engineers, Vol. XLIX, December 1902, pp. 84 - 88.
9. Perhaps the first single function office building was Richard Morris Hunt's Studio Building in New York (1854-55) built to serve architects and artists. Unlike the Physicians and Dentists Building, however, this was a modest three-story structure.
10. Chestnut Street Philadelphia Thomson Printing Co., Phila. (1904) p. 44. Collection of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania (No. Wd/21R).
11. The Social Transformation of the American Physician, Paul Starr, (New York: Basic Books, 1982). See p. 79 ff; pp. 209-212.
12. See Joseph F. Bradley, The Role of Trade Associations and Professional Business Societies in America (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1965) pp. 18-24.
13. Early Chicago office buildings are discussed in "Recent Chicago Tall Buildings", Engineering News, Vol. XXXIV, No. 16, 17 October 1895, pp. 250, ff.
14. Gopsill's Business Directory of Philadelphia, for 1901, Philadelphia, 1901.
15. Polk's Medical Register and Directory of the U.S. and Canada. (Detroit and Baltimore: R.L. Polk and Co.) published annually, see 1896-1902. Flint's Medical and Surgical Directory of Physicians of the United States and Canada, A.L. Chatterton, ed. (New York: J.B. Flint and Co., 1897).

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet.

10. Geographical Data

Acreeage of nominated property 1/10 acre
Quadrangle name Philadelphia Quad

Quadrangle scale 1:24,000

UTM References

A

1	8	4	8	5	3	4	0	4	4	2	2	2	0	0
Zone		Easting						Northing						

B

Zone		Easting						Northing						

C

Zone		Easting						Northing						

D

Zone		Easting						Northing						

E

Zone		Easting						Northing						

F

Zone		Easting						Northing						

G

Zone		Easting						Northing						

H

Zone		Easting						Northing						

Verbal boundary description and justification

See Continuation Sheet.

List all states and counties for properties overlapping state or county boundaries

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

state N/A code N/A county N/A code N/A

11. Form Prepared By

name/title George E. Thomas, Ph.D.

organization Clio Group, Inc.

date Revised June 16, 1987

street & number 3961 Baltimore Avenue

telephone (215) 386-6276

city or town Philadelphia

state Pennsylvania

12. State Historic Preservation Officer Certification

The evaluated significance of this property within the state is:

national state local

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

State Historic Preservation Officer signature

Brent D. Glass

title Brent D. Glass, State Historic Preservation Officer

date 9/16/87

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I hereby certify that this property is included in the National Register

date

Keeper of the National Register

Attest:

date

Chief of Registration

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Bradley, Joseph F. The Role of Trade Associations and Professional Business Societies in America. University Park: Penn State University Press, 1965.

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Starr, Paul. The Social Transformation of the American Physician. New York: Basic Books, 1902.

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Wilson, Joseph M. Minutes of the Proceedings of the Institute of Civil Engineers. Vol. 1896-7, pt II, pp. 54-55.

Wilson Brothers and Co. A Catalogue of Work Executed, Accompanied by Illustrations. Philadelphia: 1885.

Wilson Brothers and Co. Architectural Work of the Wilson Brothers and Co. Philadelphia: 1877.

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Boundary Description and Justification:

Extending from a point 59'11 1/2" from the east side of 19th Street, continuing east 40'3 1/2" on the north side of Chestnut Street to a point, then north 100' to a point on an alley, then west 40'3 1/2" along said alley, then south 100' to Chestnut Street, being the site of the Professional Building. The nominated property contains the contributing building and all historically associated land, including the light courts on either side.



Physicians and Artists
 Building
 Philadelphia County
 Zone 18
 Philadelphia Gaudrangle
 E485340 N4422200

11
 (CAMDEN)
 5963 / NE