

American Life Insurance Company
(The Manhattan Building)
330-336 Walnut Street
Philadelphia
Philadelphia County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-1064

HABS
PA
51-PHILA,
257-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia 6, Pennsylvania

AMERICAN LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY
(THE MANHATTAN BUILDING)HABS
PA
51-PHILA
257-

Address: 330-336 Walnut Street, Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania.

Present Owner: Manhattan Building Corporation and then the Philadelphia Redevelopment Authority for demolition.

Present Use: Now being demolished by the City to be transferred as a vacant lot to Federal Government ownership as part of the Independence National Historical Park.

Last Use: Office building.

Significance: A good example of exuberant and picturesque architecture of the later 19th century, illustrating the transition from bearing wall to metal frame in its use of cast iron columns and rolled beams with stone bearing walls.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Physical History

A. Original and Subsequent Owners:

July 27, 1854

286-21

former: John Waseltine
to: American Life Insurance and Trust Co.
SE cor 4th & Wal

"All that certain three story brick messuage or tenement and lot or piece of ground situate on the south side of Walnut Street and east side of Delaware Fourth Street in the city of Philadelphia aforesaid, containing in front or breadth on the said Walnut St. 26'-9" & extending in length or front along the said Fourth Street 100'-11"

April 8, 1891

former: The Real Estate Title Ins. & Trust Co. receiver for the American Life Ins. Co.
to: Manhattan Life Insurance Co.

Description: 5th ward S cor 4 & W. Thence E. on Walnut 49'-6" - thence S 65'-7" thence W 15'-7" thence S

35'-8" thence N 33'-3" to E side of 4th, thence N 101'3"
to beginning

Dec. 26, 1919

former: Manhattan Life Ins. Co.
to: Louis Green

April 10, 1920

Former: Louis Green, Annie h/w
to: William Lipkin

April 10, 1920

former: William Lipkin, Lena h/w
to: Basil S. Walsh

Oct. 6, 1921

former: William Lipkin, Lena h/w
to: The City Investment Co., Cor. of Penna.

Dec. 31, 1921

former: Basil S Walsh & Margaret H. h/w
to: City Investment Co., Inc.

Jan. 15, 1929

former: City Investment Co.
to: Raymond Gleadall

Jan. 19, 1930

former: Raymond Gleadall, Nora M. F. h/w
to: City Investment Co., Inc.

Jan. 31, 1931

former: City Investment Co.
to: William J. Gibbons

SE cor 4th & Walnut . . . etc. as before

Also one sit on S. side of Walnut S. 49' 6" E of 4th St.
Thence S. 69' 7 3/4" Thence W. 15'-8 1/4" Thence S. 35'-7 1/4"
Thence E. 40' 5 1/4" Thence N 101'3" Thence W 24'9" to beg
No. 330 Walnut

Mar. 6, 1931

former: William J. Gibbons
to: City Investment Company

Oct. 21, 1931

from: City Investment Co.
to: Margaret M. Fox.

Oct. 22, 1931

from: Margaret M. Fox (Single woman)
to: Anne Loughran (single woman)

July 31, 1935

from: Anne Loughran
to: William J. Gibbons

July 31, 1935

from: William J. Gibbons
to: Anne Loughran

June 2, 1947

from: Anne Loughran
to: The Home Life Insurance Co. of America

Mar. 5, 1955

from: The Home Life Insurance Co. of America
to: Manhattan Bldg. Corp.

Oct. 5, 1959

from: Manhattan Bldg. Corp.
* to: Redevelopment Authority of the City of Philadelphia
for \$315,000.00 damages.

n.d.

286-52

from: Harry McCall, trustee
to: John Thornley

S. side Walnut. 49'6" E of 4th
thence S 65' 4 3/4"
" W parallel Wal. 15'-S 1/4"
" S 35' 7 1/4" to N. side of 3' 1" wide thence E
15'3 1/4" thence S 70' 5" Th E 24'8" Th N parallel 4th
171'8" to S side Walnut, th W by same 24'9" to beg.

Dec. 8, 78 [118]

from: Mary Thornley widow of John Thornley
to: William Heaton

April 19, 1880

from: William Heaton
to: Charles P. Miller

" 3 story Brick message or tenement-backbuildings . . ."

April 19, 1880

from: Charles P. Miller
to: The Philadelphia & Reading RR. Co.
3 story brick message or tenement

Mar. 24, 1881

from: The Philadelphia RR Co.
to: G. Van Rensselaer Cruger

Apr. 6, 1881

from: G. Van Rensselaer Cruger, Irene G h/w
to: Trustees of the Commercial Union Assurance Co.
of America.

June 18, 1888

from: Trustee of the Commercial Union Assurance Co.
of America
to: Joseph Storm Patterson

June 18, 88

from: above
to: Abraham S. Patterson

Feb. 8, 1897

from: above
to: The Commonwealth Guarantee Trust and Safe Deposit Co.

April 7, 1897

from: Joseph S. Patterson and Abraham S. Patterson
to: Charles S. Gurnney

Jan. 10, 1899

from: Mary Emma Gurnney et al
to: The hospital of the Protestant Episcopal Church in Phila.

Oct. 1, 1902

from: above
to: The Fidelity & Casualty Co. of N. Y.

July 8, 1921

from: above
to: Daniel J. Walsh Sons, Inc.

Feb. 2, 1922

from: above
to: City Investment Co.

July 31, 1935

from: Anne Loughran
to: William J. Gibbons

July 31, 1935

from: William J. Gibbons
to: Anne Loughran

10/5/59

from: Manhattan Bldg. Corp.
* to: Redevelopment Authority

May 2, 1887

236 93

from: John Kean & Lucy h/w
to: The American Life Insurance Co.

& with other Cor. prop. finally to Philadelphia
Redevelopment Authority, 10/5/59

* (to be transferred to the National Parks Service, Independence
National Historical Park)

B. Date of Erection: Jennings, Arthur Seymour, "Philadelphia
Notes," The Architectural Era, II (July, 1888), vii.

P. VII "On fourth and Walnut streets is a large structure,
now up to the second story for the American Life Insurance
Company. Thomas P. Lonsdale is the architect."

C. Notes on Alterations and Additions

MANHATTAN LIFE INSURANCE COMPANY

"The extensive branch offices in this city of the Manhattan Life
Insurance Company of New York, were recently removed to the company's
handsome building, Fourth and Walnut streets. For two months past
a large number of mechanics have been employed making radical

alterations and improvements in the building, and as a result, it is now one of the best equipped and most convenient of the big office structures of the city. Nearly all the large cities of the country owe much to the wealthy insurance corporations for architectural features and real estate improvements. The handsome piles which these institutions have put up, mainly as investments, have contributed very largely to the beauty and character of the buildings of American cities. Experience has proved that they are a very attractive form of investment, and some of the larger structures, like that of the Manhattan Building, yield handsome returns.

The apartments which the Manhattan has reserved on the fourth floor for its local headquarters have been fitted up in a style commensurate with the position and rapidly expanding business of the company. Exquisite taste has been shown in the arrangement and furnishing of the rooms. The art of the upholsterer has been employed with most felicitous effect in setting off the highly polished oak wood work, which forms a chief feature of the offices.

"Of late the big companies have found handsome headquarters essential factors in the promotion of their business interests, and inasmuch as their buildings are remunerative investments, this is not an incident of extravagance; it is simply a stroke of business policy."

Philadelphia and Popular Philadelphians (Philadelphia: The North American, 1891), p. 97, with an illustration showing the conical roofs over the second level windows in the mansard roof and the recarved head at corner in its final form.

Some sources say that Will Decker, Philadelphia architect, was responsible for the alterations.

- D. Important Old Views: Castner Scrapbook, Print Room. Free Library of Philadelphia. Print with title "The American Life Insurance Company Building." (Reproduction included in photo-data book).

Philadelphia & Popular Philadelphians (Syracuse, New York), p. 97 with recarved head.

- E. Sources of Information: Architectural Era, Vol. II. (July 1888), p. vii.

Philadelphia and Popular Philadelphians. Philadelphia: The North American, 1891.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. Architectural character: Eight story plus three-story tower, four-bay by nine-bay stone and iron office building with massive, rusticated stone bearing walls and copper-roofed turrets and dormers, articulated by molded belt courses and engaged columns.
2. Condition of fabric. Demolished in fall and winter of 1960-61. Before demolition, structure was sound and most of exterior seemed to be original.

B. Technical Description

1. Over-all dimensions: 49'6" (Walnut Street) x 101'3" (Fourth Street).
2. Construction. Bearing walls of massive, rusticated, gray stone, and interior columns of tubular cast iron supporting girders of rolled H-section iron and of heavy timber. Joints are bolted. Engaged columns frame projecting corner bays and the west-elevation, center-stair bay. Molded belt courses at second, third, sixth and seventh floor levels. Flat, basket-shaped capitals are carved with fan-like leaf forms and intermittent small (6" high) male and female faces in relief. Capitals at seventh floor level have rampant dragon motif with leaves. The corner is supported by a free-standing round column on the first floor which bears a large (about 5' high), stone, Indian face at the belt course, integral with the stone of the belt course. He wears a low feather headdress, loop earrings and a claw necklace.

On the Fourth street side the center-bay entrance is framed by a round arched opening which forms a deep, recessed stoop, the voussoirs carved with a swirling leaf pattern; the keystone, with a feminine face with wildly flowing hair. Under the face is a waving banner reading "PRUDENCE" in raised letters. Over this stoop on the second floor is a curved, projecting stone balcony bearing the words "MANHATTAN BUILDING." The two words are separated by a plain stone plaque, which has had a carved word removed and posts directly on the keystone.

In this same bay, from the second floor through the seventh, is a recessed fire escape framed between the two projecting pilasters and enclosed by a metal screen

of flat thin straps interwoven into squares about 6" x 6" with the intersections riveted. This is interlaced with wrought metal round bars in a simple, large-scale pattern of vines and tendrils, with applied rosettes and leaves. The screen disregards intermediate floor levels. The enclosed fire escape is constructed of I-section iron or steel riveted at the intersections. The sixth floor has stone parapeted balconies at each of the three corner bays and at the center fire-escape bay.

At the seventh floor level belt course, the projecting bays continue as towers, rising two, three and four stories to be capped by steeply-pitched roofs. The roofs are covered with copper imitating Roman roofing tiles and are capped with copper ridge covers. All the pointed roofs seem to have had knobs on top but only that on the corner turret survived. The columns of the northeast bay (bay A) end at the seventh floor with conical stone caps, but the bay is continued by two stories of round-projecting stone with small windows, and then a one-story copper-sheathed round tower with steep conical roof and miniature dormer.

The northwest corner bay (bay B) continues above the seventh floor belt course for four stories as a square tower with engaged columns on all corners, surmounted by a pyramidal copper roof. The top floor here is an open lookout with stone balustrade on all four sides. On the outer corner of the square tower the corner column increases in diameter to become a four-story round turret with conical roof and copper cap and knob, the cave occurring at the same level as that of the tower.

Projecting from the turret at the ninth floor is a small balcony decorated with a winged gargoyle. The center, west bay (fire escape bay or bay C) interrupts the seventh story belt course, raising its columns two stories to terminate in stone pyramids, embracing the bay's hip roof. The southwest bay (bay D) terminates the same as bay A. Elsewhere above the last belt course, there are two stories of mansard roof sheathed with vertically striated copper and pierced on the lowest level by square windows with raised copper jambs and crests, and on the next floor by square windows hooded with semicircular, copper-tiled roofs (flat on top at time of demolition but probably conical originally) as shown in the drawing from the Castner Scrapbook reproduced herein, supported by brackets. The south (back) and east (side) walls are red brick laid in common bond.

3. Porches: There are four porches altogether, in bays A, B, C, and D.
 - a. The northeast porch is entered by six stone steps, three projecting beyond the face of the building, the remaining three enclosed between the engaged columns.
 - b. The triangular northwest or corner porch which is formed in the interstices of three round columns, is entered by six stone steps, two of which project beyond the columns, turn the corner and have rounded corners.
 - c. The Fourth street entrance, which is the major one, has five stone steps, two projecting and rounded, which decrease in length as they mount into the splayed opening.
 - d. The southwest porch is similar to the northeast one.
4. Openings:
 - a. Doors: In the northeast and southwest corner bays are double wooden doors with windows in the upper halves and with single-light transoms. The corner doors are set diagonally in plan and are otherwise like those in the end bays. The arched west center bay has modern steel and glass double doors replacing a pair of wooden ones with glass above and panels below. The old door hinges are large, flat, curlicued metal which make decorative use of the many screw heads.
 - b. Windows: Paired, double-hung, wood sash, one-over-one light with fixed transom lights. Second floor pairs of windows have masonry arches, one per pair, whereas the other pairs have masonry lintels including those on the sixth floor where the individual windows within each pair have arched wood heads. Windows on the ground floor are now plate glass. Masonry window openings in the corner tower are in groups of threes with either arched or flat heads, and with double-hung, one-over-one light sash. There are three small openings just below the lookout on each side, spanned with a shallow arch.
5. Floor plans: No drawings have been located. The plan is L-shaped with a central three-run-per-story stair,

mounting counter-clockwise around an elevator shaft. The original elevator was probably the open cage type. The fire escape described above occurs just to the outside of the center stair. The remaining floor area is divided into office spaces.

6. Site: Street corner in downtown area where there are numerous other insurance company buildings. The immediate area is being razed to be included in the Independence National Historical Park to provide an open area for St. Joseph Catholic Church. The building was flanked by lower buildings.

Prepared by Robert Edward Cooper, Architect
National Park Service
December 1963