

Central Trust Company Building
1218 11th Avenue
Intown Neighborhood
Altoona
Blair County
Pennsylvania

HABS No. PA-5508

HABS
PA.
7-ALTO,
100-

PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20013-7127

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

CENTRAL TRUST COMPANY BUILDING
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- Location: 1218 11th Ave., Altoona, Blair County, Pa.
- Present Owner: Brett/Central Trust Associates, c/o Leonard S. Fiore, 5506 6th Ave., Altoona, Pa., 16602.
- Present Use: Vacant on the first floor and mezzanine levels; apartments on the third through fifth floors.

Significance: The Central Trust Company Building is a rare, intact example of Altoona's early twentieth-century commercial architecture. Designed by the Pittsburgh architectural firm of Robinson and Winkler, and erected by Altoona's premier contractor, P. W. Finn and Co., the structure was among the more outstanding office buildings produced during the 1900s, a decade of rapid growth and prosperity. The facade, of white glazed brick with brownstone trim, displays both Beaux Arts and Romanesque detailing. Until the 1960s, the building served as the headquarters of an important local financial institution, Central Trust Company, which traced its origins to the Altoona Bank, a private bank founded in 1872.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1905-06. The cornerstone was laid April 8, 1905. The building opened to the public March 5, 1906.
2. Architect: The Pittsburgh firm of Charles M. Robinson (formerly of Altoona) and George Winkler.
3. Original and subsequent owners: In 1979, the building was sold to John Rawlings for \$26,000. It was purchased by the current owner in 1986.
4. Contractor: P. W. Finn of Altoona.
5. Original plans and construction: The building was constructed to house banking activities on the first and mezzanine levels. The third-fifth floors had suites of offices, fifteen a floor. On the exterior, the banking floor is marked by a massive brownstone and granite street-level facade. Except for the changes to the main banking room, the original plan remains intact.
6. Alterations and additions: In 1922-24, the stair tower of the Brett Building was constructed against the northeast facade of the Central Trust Building. Since Brett's was designed with a light well, only the windows in the first and second bays of the Central Trust Building had to be blocked up. Through-passages were cut to connect the upper floors of offices, and new elevators to service both buildings were installed in the stair tower.

The Central Trust building and adjacent Brett Building were the focus of a major restoration project in 1984. In addition to restoring the windows to their original appearance (removing glass block, paint, etc.), the entrance doors were replaced and the inner vestibule altered. On the interior, a drop ceiling was pulled down, revealing an elaborate plasterwork ceiling that was carefully restored with fiberglass castings. All of the tellers' wickets and the original staircase were removed, although the original bank vaults remain in place.

B. Historical Context:

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The Altoona Bank, a private bank, was organized in 1872 by a group of wealthy businessmen. It occupied a three-story brick building erected on this site in 1875. In 1902 the Altoona Bank merged with the Central Pennsylvania Trust Company, and took the name of the latter until 1904, when it became the Central Trust Company. In 1905 the bank began construction of the present building, which was completed in mid 1906.

In the 1920s, the Central Trust Company served as a clearing house for the seven major banks in Altoona. Checks drawn on local banks were sorted, totalled, and presented to the member banks each morning when the clearing house met at Central Trust. Central Trust was one of only three Altoona banks to survive the Depression.

In 1959, the Central Trust Company merged with Altoona Trust Company to form the Altoona Central Bank and Trust Company. When this organization merged with the first Bellefonte Bank and Trust Company in 1966, its name was changed to Mid-State Bank and Trust Company. The Central Trust Building housed some offices of Mid-State Bank until the 1980s.

This building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The facade of the Central Trust Building exhibits the characteristics of both the Romanesque and Beaux Arts styles. The white glazed-brick exterior is complemented by a massive, brownstone facade and brownstone trim.
2. Condition of fabric: Very good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The five-story, rectangular building measures 38' (three bays on 11th Avenue) x 120' (six bays on the side facing 13th Street).
2. Foundations: Granite.
3. Walls: On the 11th Avenue facade, the first story is of smooth-faced brownstone laid in a regularly coursed ashlar pattern. The bays are framed by two large, rusticated brownstone piers with Doric capitals. The piers support a brownstone entablature which arches over the central entry as an archivolte, and is topped by a central, ball finial. A clock sits within the ornamental brownstone wreath that occupies the tympanum above the main entry. Above the first story, the facade is divided into three bays by four pilasters with brownstone bases and capitals. Three round-headed arches spring from the capitals. The arches are ornamented with molded brickwork and prominent brownstone keystones. The fifth story is topped by a brownstone entablature. The side and rear facades are also of white glazed brick. Brownstone beltcourses extend across both of these facades between the first and second floors, and the fourth and fifth floors.
4. Structural system: Steel and reinforced-concrete frame.
5. Openings:
 - a. Doorways and doors: The recessed main entranceway, in the second bay, is flanked by engaged, polished granite columns with Ionic capitals.

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- b. **Windows:** The central entranceway is flanked by two segmentally arched windows with archivolt moldings and pronounced keystones. The second-fourth stories have three-part windows with brownstone sills. The fourth-story windows are round-arched. The fifth story has three pairs of flat-arched windows. On the side facade, the windows have segmentally arched openings and brownstone sills. The first-story windows are also topped by archivolt moldings of brownstone. The windows on the rear facade have flat arches and brownstone sills.

6. **Roof:**

- a. **Shape:** Flat.
- b. **Cornice:** The facade is crowned by a brownstone cornice and a cartouche with the initials "C.T.C."

C. **Description of Interior:**

1. **Floor plans:**

- a. **First:** The main banking floor comprises most of the first floor. Tellers' wickets, since removed, apparently lined the left side of the room; evidence of their presence remains on the marble floor. There are two smaller meeting rooms in the rear of the building.
- b. **Mezzanine:** Several smaller rooms, now unfinished, and a restroom, are located in the rear of the building.
- c. **Third-fifth:** The upper stories consist of double-loaded corridors with apartments on each side.

2. **Stairways:** In addition to the main stairway, which was removed in 1922-24, there are two smaller stairways leading to the mezzanine rooms. Both have brass handrails, cast-iron balusters, and marble treads.

3. **Flooring:** Marble in the inner vestibule and banking floor; carpeting in the small rooms nearest the Brett Building. The upper floors have marble hallways.

4. **Wall and ceiling finish:** Plaster on lath. The banking floor has a marble wainscot with three marble pilasters on each of the side walls. The ceiling of the main banking floor has an elaborate cornice with an egg-and-dart motif.

5. **Openings:** The typical interior doors have one rectangular panel and simple, Neoclassical surrounds.

6. **Mechanical systems:**

- a. **Heating:** Steam.
- b. **Lighting:** All original fixtures have been replaced by new brass fixtures.

D. **Site:** The building faces southeast on 11th Avenue.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

- A. Original architectural drawings: None located.
- B. Early views: Postcard view of the Central Trust Building from the east, showing the northeast facade before the Brett Building was constructed. Collection of the Main Street Manager, Altoona, Pa.
- C. Interview: Leonard Fiore, Jr., contractor for the 1984 restoration and present owner, interview by Nancy Spiegel, July 20, 1989.
- D. Bibliography:
1. Primary sources:
Insurance Maps of Altoona, Pennsylvania. New York: Sanborn-Perris Co., 1894.
Insurance Maps of Altoona, Blair County, Pennsylvania. New York: Sanborn Map Co., 1909.
 2. Secondary sources:
Clark, Charles B. Illustrated Altoona. Altoona: Privately printed, 1896.
Mid-State Bank 1901-1976. Altoona: Mid-State Bank and Trust Company, 1976.
O'Bannon, Patrick W. National Register Nomination for the Central Trust Company Buildings, 1984.
Wolf, George A., ed. Blair County's First Hundred Years: 1846-1946. Altoona: The Mirror Press, 1945.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This report was part of a larger project to document the city of Altoona, Pennsylvania. The project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey/Historic American Engineering Record (HABS/HAER), Robert Kapsch, chief, at the request of America's Industrial Heritage Project (AIHP), Randy Cooley, director. An overview of the history of the city (HABS No. PA-5784) and an overview of the downtown (HABS No. PA-5789) provide context for these buildings as well as a comprehensive list of sources. See also additional HABS reports on buildings in the city and other neighborhoods.

This report was prepared by Nancy Spiegel in the summer of 1989 under the supervision of HABS historian Alison K. Hoagland and Kim E. Wallace, supervisory historian. Spiegel's and other project historians' work was published as Railroad City: Four Historic Neighborhoods in Altoona, Pennsylvania (Washington, D.C.: HABS/HAER, National Park Service, 1990), edited by Kim E. Wallace and Sara Amy Leach, HABS historian.