

Recommended Reading

Eccel, Josephine. *City Sights: A History of Rodney Square, Wilmington*. January 2010:18-19.

Hoffecker, Carol. *Corporate Capital: Wilmington in the Twentieth Century*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983.

Maynard, William Barksdale. *Buildings of Delaware*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2008.

McNinch, Marjorie. *The Changing Face of Rodney Square*, Delaware History 21. Spring-Summer 1985: 139-163.

Rodney Square Historic District National Register Nomination, 2011.

Silver, Robert T. *Outdoor Sculpture in Wilmington*. Wilmington: Wilmington Arts Commission, 1987.

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A GUIDE TO

Rodney Square

The Heart of Downtown Wilmington

Rodney Square has been considered as the heart of downtown Wilmington since the early 20th century, when the DuPont Company began to realize their long-range plans for this part of the city. Beginning with construction of their new headquarters in 1905, the company used their extraordinary vision, community influence, connections and financial investments to achieve an attractive and complete landscape by 1937.

Rodney Square is a unique example in Delaware of a collective public and private development venture that evolved out of the late 19th century City Beautiful movement, which sought to improve social order by including more beauty in the urban landscape. It is also a significant, unified collection of revivalist style architecture (including Italian Renaissance, Classical Revival, Beaux Arts and Moderne) designed for primarily public use. The Square has become the symbolic center of the City, providing open space and excellent architectural backdrops for a wide range of activities, both planned and casual. In 2011, the Rodney Square landscape and buildings, the Caesar Rodney Equestrian Statue and the Nemours Building were placed on the National Register of Historic Places. The district was recognized for contributions to community planning and development, and to civic architecture from the period 1905, with the purchase of the land for the Dupont Building, to the beginning of the final phase of the original construction of the Nemours Building in 1941.



Cover photo: Brad Glazier, June 1980

Photo next page: Postcard view ca. 1918 showing the Dupont Building. The New Castle County Court House (1881-1919) on the right side of the image is situated where the open space of Rodney Square is now.



Dupont Building

1007 North Market Street

1907; 1910; 1913; 1916; 1919; 1930; 1937

Architects:

Charles A. Rich (theatre); Frederick Godley, J. Andre Fouilhoux, Joel Barber and Raymond M. Hood (hotel); Robeson Lea Perot (10th Street offices)

The Dupont Building was constructed in 1907 as a twelve-story office building in the Italian Renaissance Style and was Wilmington's tallest building. In addition to providing office space for 500 Dupont Company employees, the building also provided space for 2,000 other tenants, including Wilmington Trust employees. The space was nearly doubled in 1910, and the 1913 expansion provided space for the Hotel DuPont, with 150 rooms and the DuPont Playhouse, with 1,256 seats. In 1937 two stories were added. The most opulent interior spaces are within the hotel, featuring Italian marble, Caen stone, mosaics, terrazzo, oak paneling, bronze railings and intricate plaster details. One of the most notable rooms is the Gold Ballroom, which was designed to evoke 18th century France and has a 29-foot ceiling. The ornate public spaces were designed to be world class, proclaiming the importance of the Dupont Company and the City of Wilmington. The hotel lobby, restaurants and retail spaces are open to the public.



Rodney Square

Market, King, 10th and 11th Streets

1915-1921

Architects:

Zantzing, Borie and Medary (Philadelphia)

Beginning in the 1790s, the land that is now the green space of Rodney Square was assembled by the Borough of Wilmington for the purpose of establishing a reservoir for drinking water. The reservoir was in use from 1827 until 1877, when the new reservoir at Cool Spring Park was placed in service. In 1881, the former reservoir space became the site of the New Castle County Court House, which stood until 1919. Since the site of the old court house was adjacent to the primary elevation of arguably the most important building in Wilmington, the Dupont Company was naturally invested in what was to be constructed. They felt that the best use for the location—and for themselves – would be to transform the 1 ½ acre site and the surrounding area into the civic center of Wilmington, complete with open space and design features that would serve to unify the envisioned buildings into a “single scheme of civic adornment.”

Dupont Vice President, Pierre S. duPont, chose his personal assistant, John Jakob Raskob, to execute his vision for the Square. Not only did Raskob wish to adhere to the tenets of the City Beautiful movement, he also desired to create a more impressive Wilmington. Raskob initiated a juried competition in 1916-17, largely funded by Irénée duPont. The process was guided by the Park Commission and chaired by Warren P. Laird, the first dean of the School of Fine Arts at the University of Pennsylvania.

Rodney Square presently includes green space with landscaped borders, paved, perimeter walkways, cast stone walls, stairs and balustrades, and 12 bronze lanterns. Two concrete fountains flanking the west steps serve as a memorial to William Poole (1853-1918), a descendant of an early Quaker family and former head of the Wilmington Fountain Society.

Photo: Brad Glazier, June 1980



Caesar Rodney Statue

1000 Block of Market Street

1923; 1925

Artist:

James E. Kelly, 1923; 1925

Caesar Rodney (1728-1784) entered public service at a young age, serving as High Sheriff of Kent County, President of Delaware, a member of the Continental Congress, and as a leader in the Colonial militia. The monument commemorates Rodney's ride from Dover to Philadelphia on July 1-2, 1776 to cast a tie-breaking vote for the Delaware delegation, and thus ensuring Delaware's support of the Declaration of Independence. Rodney later signed the Declaration. The bronze sculpture is considered an achievement in configuration and balance, as the weight of both figures appears to be balanced on the back feet of the horse in full stride. Kelley accomplished the feat by heavily weighting the horse's tail and by positioning Rodney erect and towards the rear. The statue has become the very symbol of Wilmington and Delaware in the intervening years, with the image appearing on the Delaware quarter in 1999.



Wilmington Public Building

1000 North King Street

1916; 1960; 1980; 1999; 2012

Architects:

Palmer, Hornbostel and Jones (New York) and John Dockery Thompson, Jr. (Wilmington)

Also known as the City-County Building, this was the first civic building to be built as part of the Dupont vision for Rodney Square. Originally intended to be an addition to the old courthouse, Raskob convinced residents and city and county officials to jointly fund a building to house their offices behind a single, unified façade on the east side of the square. A juried competition was initiated and was chaired by Warren P. Laird, who would later chair the Rodney Square competition. The Classical Revival style building is clad in granite and distinguished by a colonnaded façade with Corinthian capitals and pedimented entrance pavilions. Major interior renovations in the latter half of the 20th century left only the prominent marble staircases intact. Rear additions were made in 1960 and 1980, and a major renovation in 2012 fitted the building for law offices.

Photo: Postcard view of the Public Building ca. 1918

Wilmington Institute Free Library

10 East 10th Street

1923; 1971; 2014

Architects:

Edward Lippincott Tilton and Alfred Morton Githens

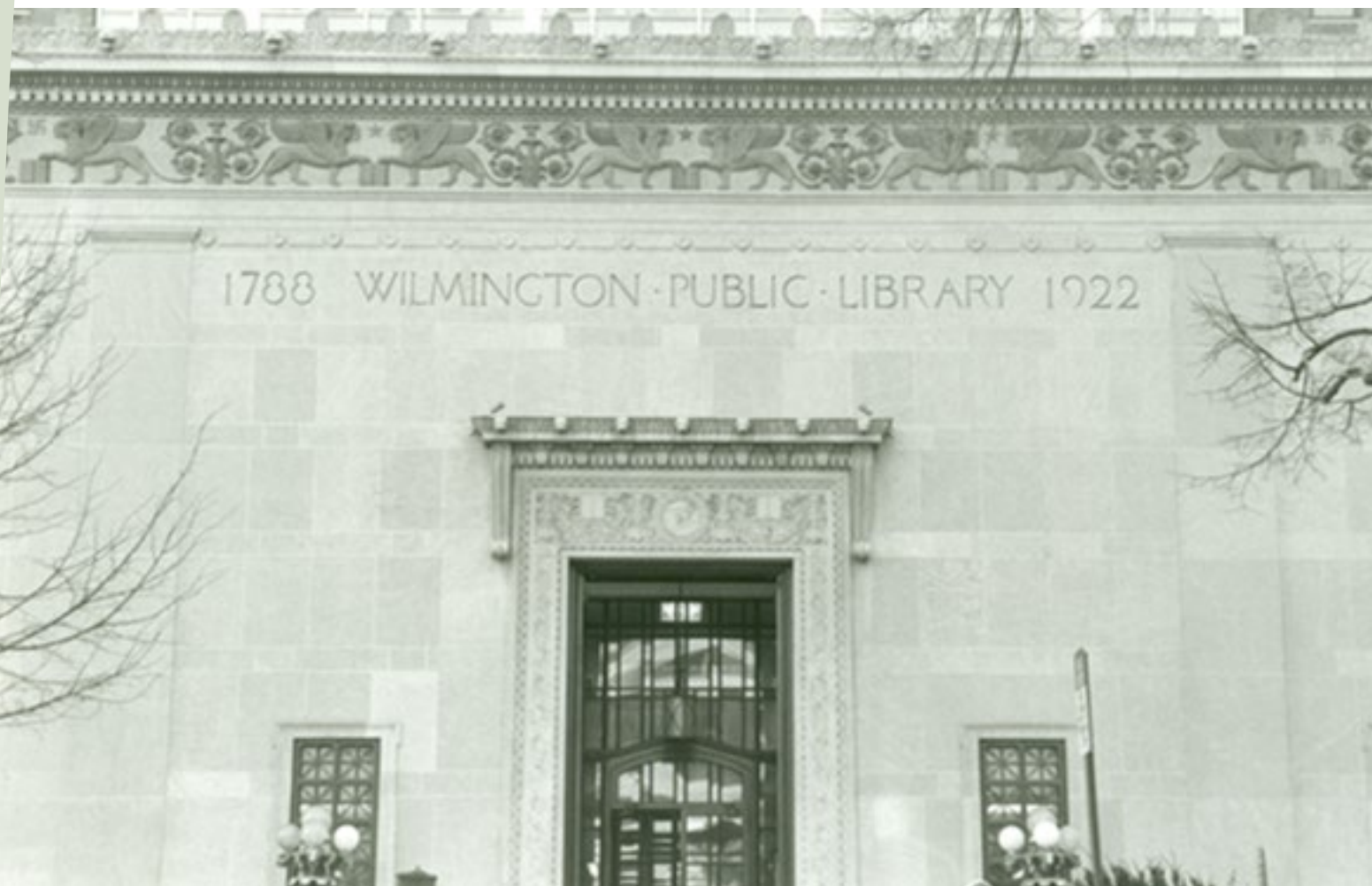
In 1915, Dupont purchased land on the south side of the square for a library, stipulating that the building would conform to the character of the new City-County building (which was under construction) and be an ornament to the city. The Dupont-influenced building committee reviewed the designs of the architects, and Dupont provided the engineering services. Edward Lippincott was considered the foremost library architect in the country, and he and Alfred Morton Githens had worked on libraries for Andrew Carnegie.

The building was designed in the Beaux Arts style and is distinguished by a polychrome, terracotta frieze, limestone owls on the second story window sills, and an ornate central entry. The design repeated references to Greco-Roman architecture – motifs from Pompeii, the frieze from the Parthenon at the Acropolis, the Library at Alexandria, the Frieze from the Temple of Antoninus and Faustina in Rome – in keeping with revivalist tenets of the City Beautiful movement. The interior featured a centered, double-height, sky-lit atrium and polychrome, plaster columns. In 1925 the design received the American Institute of Architects Exhibition Medal for first place in the Public Building Group principally for its implementation of uninterrupted interior space. Renovation in 1969 added a mezzanine level for stack space and made other changes that dramatically changed the award-winning interior. Renovations completed in 2014 reversed some of those changes, repaired historic features, and added a carefully integrated access ramp and community space.

The library is open to the public.

Top Photo: Postcard view ca. 1930 of the library with the former Delaware Trust Building in the background

Bottom Photo: Patricia Maley, March 1982





Nemours Building

1007 North Orange Street

1937; 1941; 2001

Architects:

Frederick Godley and Huber Sheldon Stees

Beginning in 1935, this 14-story building was constructed for the Dupont Engineering Department on the block located to the west of the Dupont Building. The Moderne style of the building matched that of the 1930 addition to the Dupont Building, and the two buildings were once connected by a tunnel and a bridge.

The reinforced concrete structure was faced with brick and limestone, and at the time of construction was said to be the largest building in the country ever to be air conditioned. Major renovations completed in 2002 removed much of the original interior fabric but added residential space, retail space and a public theatre.

The lobby, restaurants and movie theatre are open to the public.

Photo: Robert Powers, August 2010



United States Post Office, Court House, Custom House

1100 North Market Street

1937; 1983

Architects:

Edwin William Martin; Brown and Whiteside; Robinson, Stanhope and Manning

In 1932, the city received \$1.6 million dollars from federal emergency relief funds for a new federal building. Construction began in 1935 on the north side of Rodney Square, and would complete the final piece of the Rodney Square vision. The symmetrical, three-story, limestone and rusticated granite building was in keeping with the other two public buildings on the square, and again drew from the Beaux Arts style. The lobby was adorned with notable murals by Works Progress Administration artist Herman H. Zimmerman, entitled “Chemistry and Industry” and “Chemistry and Agriculture.” A third mural, “Landing of the Swedes” by Albert Pels, which once adorned the primary courtroom and then the post office, was moved to the new post office on Delaware Avenue in 2006. In 1983, a towering 14-story addition was constructed at the rear to accommodate the offices of Wilmington Trust. The first floor lobby of this office building is open to the public.



Exterior Photo:
Robert Powers, August 2010

Interior Photo:
Chemistry and Industry, mural by Herman H. Zimmerman for the Works Progress Administration. Robert Powers, August 2010



A postcard view of the former U.S. Post Office and Custom House (left side of image).