

Historic Review Commission of Pittsburgh

200 Ross Street, Fourth Floor, Pittsburgh, PA 15219

**NOMINATION FORM FOR HISTORIC STRUCTURES, SITES,
OBJECTS, AND DISTRICTS**

1. **HISTORICAL NAME OF PROPERTY** **National Biscuit Company (Atlantic Baking Company/Bake-Line)**

(If applicable)

2. **CURRENT NAME OF PROPERTY** **RIDC Factory Building**

(If applicable)

3. **LOCATION**

Street 6425 Penn Avenue
City, State Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Zip Code 15206-4037

4. **OWNERSHIP**

Name: Regional Industrial Development Corporation of Southwestern PA
Street 425 Sixth Avenue, Suite 500
City, State Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania
Zip Code 15219-1822

5. **CLASSIFICATION**

<u>Category</u>	<u>Accessibility</u>	<u>Ownership</u>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Structure	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Private
<input type="checkbox"/> District	<input type="checkbox"/> Private, Open to the public	<input type="checkbox"/> Public
<input type="checkbox"/> Site		
<input type="checkbox"/> Object		

6. **NOMINATED BY**

Name Lu Donnelly for the Young Preservationists Association
Street 510 South Linden Avenue
City, State, Zip Code Pittsburgh, PA 15208-2847

7. DESCRIPTION

Provide a narrative description of the structure, district, site, or object. If it has been altered over time, indicate the date(s) and nature of the alteration(s). (Attach extra pages if necessary.)

The National Biscuit Company bakery at the northeast corner of Penn and East Liberty Avenues (formerly known as Lambert, then Dahlem Street) in the East Liberty neighborhood of Pittsburgh extends east for nearly two blocks. The original 1917-1918 portion of the building is fourteen bays and seven stories high with eight-story corner towers at the east and west ends of the façade. The towers functioned as open-air stairwells when originally built, since factory workers' biggest risk was being trapped in an enclosed stairwell full of smoke during a fire. The towers extend above the roofline to lend access to a rooftop pavilion where a water tower and the building's mechanical apparatus were housed. A four by four bay ell at the northwest corner of the building faced the Pennsylvania Railroad tracks to the rear.

The building, clad in a soft brownish-orange brick, is steel-frame with fireproof tile surrounding the structural elements. The Penn Avenue façade features triads of large, double sash windows set off by brick pilaster strips and detailed with terra cotta sills and lintels. Cream-colored enameled brick highlights areas below the parapet and around the brick arched doorways. Each of the more elaborate doorways has a terra cotta plaque with the letters "NBC" emblazoned on it, indicating the original owner, the National Biscuit Company. The plaques are set off by an embellished keystone below. Over the years there have been some minor window alterations, the original doors have been altered and four garage-door openings have been added to the Penn Avenue façade.

A 1928 addition, designed by the in-house architects added a four bay brick addition and frame addition along Penn Avenue at the east side of the building. The basic rhythm of the fenestration was retained in these additions and similar materials were used in the brick portion, although there are no elaborate terra cotta details. Again, some window alterations and garage bays have been added, and the frame portion was replaced, but no irreversible damage has been done to the 1928 brick addition.

By the time of the 1948 addition, again on the east elevation, a simpler architectural vocabulary was in vogue. The nineteen bays facing Penn Avenue have triads of large, double sash three pane over three pane windows. The trim is a yellow brick, in keeping with the original detailing, but simpler. A chamfer at the southeast corner is the only decorative touch here.

The rear of the building reveals two power sources. A large yellow industrial brick chimney indicates a coal-burning power source for the original factory. Today, a metallic power grid stands farther to the east. Two one-story additions illustrate clearly the shift from rail supply and distribution to the use of trucks for both. Garage bays dot the rear of the building, some even on the upper stories. Windows continue on the rear elevation indicating a well-lit factory floor within.

8. HISTORY

Provide a history of the structure, district, site, or object. Include a bibliography of sources consulted. (Attach extra pages if necessary.) Include copies of relevant source materials with the nomination form (see Number 11).

During the 1890's cracker companies in the East, headquartered in New York and the Midwest, headquartered in Chicago, went to war, lowering prices and combining ever larger bakeries in their camps. In 1898 the two sides combined, creating the National Biscuit Company, headquartered in Chicago, a corporation of 114 bakeries, ten of them located in Pennsylvania. At the incorporation meeting in Chicago February 3, 1898, there were two powerful Pittsburgh bakers, Sylvester S. Marvin of the Marvin Baking Company and president of the United States Baking Company (bakeries in Ohio, Indiana, Pennsylvania and Michigan); and Cornelius E. Rumsey representing the American Biscuit & Manufacturing Company (New Jersey). The National Biscuit Company from its founding understood the importance of branding its products and revolutionized their packaging, moving the sale of crackers from barrels to individual cardboard boxes lined with waxed paper and sealed for freshness. They hired a Philadelphia advertising firm to help design the packaging and guide the distribution. The N.W. Ayer & Son advertising firm was paid \$7,000,000, the largest ad budget ever committed at that time (Cahn, 90). It is clear that the fledgling company also understood the value of architecture as advertisement.

The National Biscuit Company's first headquarters was in the Home Insurance Company Building, an eight-story early skyscraper designed by William LeBaron Jenney at LaSalle and Adams Streets in Chicago's Loop (now demolished). Adolphus Green, the lawyer behind the merger and the company's first Chairman of the Board, chose to have his law offices in the architecturally cutting-edge building and was conscious of the necessity of having the appearance of the buildings match the quality of the products produced there (Cahn, 58).

The success of Nabisco's branding and advertising caused demand to exceed supply and the company launched a building campaign to provide enough bakeries for their popular crackers. The buildings commissioned by now company president Adolphus Green were different from the common manufacturing buildings of the World War I era. Green hired an architect full-time to design factories that would have enough style and dignity to inspire loyalty from the workers and act as shining models of modernity to the communities in which they stood (Cahn, 125). He hired Chicagoan Albert G. Zimmermann (1866-1947) to design the buildings using a soft colored brownish-orange brick with cream-colored brick trim and ranging from three to eleven stories. Zimmermann's earlier practice had consisted mostly of residences and apartment buildings until his work for Nabisco. His Nabisco designs were featured in the *American Architect* magazine in both 1912 and 1916.

During this time of corporate mergers before the Depression, the formerly family-owned businesses, worked to convince a wary public that corporations could have hearts and a paternalistic atmosphere reigned. Each of the new plants included shower and locker rooms for the employees and fireproof stairways and other up-to-the-minute fire-proofing techniques. This was a progressive era when companies offered factory tours to convince the public that all efforts were being made to keep the food pure and wholesome. Housewives needed to know that the new pre-packaged convenience foods were safe for their families. New factories often opened with a parade and speeches honoring the company's intention of making the best products in the most efficient places. But they were factories after all and so the first building on the new Nabisco factory site was a railroad warehouse owned by the Pennsylvania Railroad and

designed by their Division Engineer H. H. Russell. The raw materials needed to produce cookies and crackers were stored here after delivery by rail.

The United State's entry into World War I after April 6, 1917 delayed the building of Pittsburgh's new factory and led to food rationing and the National Biscuit Company's commission to produce ½ pound loaves of hard tack bread sealed in metal cans impervious to poison gas. After the war, between 1918 and 1925 new bakeries were built in Pittsburgh, Detroit, Los Angeles, Chicago, and New York. The new factories had a consistent look, similar reddish brick, multiple stories and stair towers increased the company's ability to transport products to the grocer and people's homes. (Cahn, 196) Pittsburgh's factory embodied the classical symmetry the company prized, the signature of this post-war wave of building.

Ten years later Nabisco expanded its offerings by buying a bread bakery in Pittsburgh and naming the subsidiary the National Bread Company. Expansion to the factory building in 1928 was most likely supervised by Zimmermann or his successor Louis Wirsching, Jr. Later, after another delay in expansion due to World War II, a second wave of building was needed at Nabisco factories across the nation to accommodate a bakery innovation called "band ovens." These consisted of long conveyor belts on which the dough was evenly spread, cut and baked in a continuous motion. The band ovens could be the length of football fields. The second addition to the plant was designed by Benno Janssen's successor firm, Hoffman & Crumpton (Roy L. Hoffman and Kenneth R. Crumpton) who had an active architectural practice based in Pittsburgh from c. 1940 to 1960.

Company architect, Louis Wirsching, Jr. became convinced after World War II that the new bakeries needed to be long, low and close to the ground like automobile plants. The company began moving its operations across the nation to the next generation of suburbs where land was cheaper and more available. As the distribution system came to rely more and more on trucks rather than trains, and parking for employees' cars became an issue, city factories became less desirable. Yet Nabisco continued to manufacture cookies and crackers at the East Liberty factory until 1998. At that time, it was among their oldest functioning bakeries. The building was purchased by the Atlantic Baking Company in 2001, but closed again in 2004.

Sources:

The American Architect, "The Buildings of the National Biscuit Company," by W. F. Wilmoth, Volume 101, June 19, 1912, part 2 number 1904, pp. 270-272.

The American Architect, "Building for the National Biscuit Company," Volume 109, March 22, 1916, part 1, number 2100.

The Builders' Bulletin, Volume 1, #37 (Supplement), May 12, 1917: Building Permit issued "National Biscuit Co., Owners; Turner Construction Co., Contractors; Foundation, Penn & Lambert St., 12 Ward." Other relevant issues 1917-1919.

Cahn, William, *Out of the Cracker Barrel: The Nabisco Story From Animal Crackers to Zu Zu's*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1969.

Capperis, Sean. Paper on the Nabisco Factory for University of Pittsburgh course 1910 in the *History of Art and Architecture: Introduction to Historic Preservation*, Spring 2004. With input from Charlie and Lauren Uhl.

Illinois Society of Architects, Monthly Bulletin, Volume 31, #'s 9 and 10, March-April 1947, p. 8 Obituary for Albert G. Zimmerman [sic] died 2/20/1947. "for a period of years architect for the National Biscuit Company."

Kidney, Walter, *Pittsburgh's Landmark Architecture: The Historic Buildings of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County*. Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh History & Landmarks Foundation, 1997, p. 415.

9. SIGNIFICANCE

The *Pittsburgh Code of Ordinances, Title 11, Historic Preservation, Chapter 1: Historic Structures, Districts, Sites and Objects* lists ten criteria, at least one of which must be met for Historic Designation. Describe how the structure, district, site, or object meets one or more of these criteria. (Attach extra pages if necessary.)

The National Biscuit Company bakery meets the following criteria for designation as a "historic structure" in accordance to section 1.4 of the Pittsburgh Historic Preservation Ordinance.

2. *Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the cultural, historic, architectural, archaeological, or related aspect of the development of the City of Pittsburgh, State of Pennsylvania, Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States.*

The collaboration of Adolphus Green (1843-1917), first chairman of the board and later president of the National Biscuit Company, and his architect Albert G. Zimmermann produced a series of state-of-the-art bakeries across the nation, substantially changing the way cookies and crackers were manufactured and marketed. A 1912 article in *The American Architect* stated: ". . . the consolidation and concentration in many lines of business which have been effected in recent years is bringing a different class of men into control - - men who brush aside the makeshift methods of the past and construct solidly and permanently for the future as far as it is possible for human foresight to provide." (270) Adolphus Green, a lawyer by training, became involved with the consolidation of 114 bakeries and went on to run the National Biscuit Company for nearly twenty years. Although he died two months before the building permit was issued for the Pittsburgh factory, his policies prevailed in its building.

3. *Its exemplification of an architectural type, style or design distinguished by innovation, rarity, uniqueness, or overall quality of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship.*

The factories resulting from the above collaboration were twice published for their trend-setting fire safety measures including the steel framing and fireproof tiling, and their use of one and one-half inch maple flooring and architectural embellishments above and beyond the normal requirements for factory buildings.

4. *Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Pittsburgh, the State of Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States.*

The Nabisco factory represents the work of Albert G. Zimmermann (1866-1947) whose practice expanded from Chicago to New York when he was hired as the in-house architect for the National Biscuit Company. National corporations were in their ascendancy at the turn of the century and architectural uniformity was a new concept for the time. There were architects who designed bakeries locally such as the Bartberger & Fisher firm and C. D. Cooley (later the McCormick Company) and they also began to branch out across the country, but neither was associated with a national brand as powerful as Nabisco.

Benno Janssen's successor firm, Hoffman & Crumpton, authors of the 1948 addition, was known locally for their parking garages and other industrial buildings.

7. Its association with important cultural or social aspects or events in the history of the City of Pittsburgh, the State of Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States.

The products made by Nabisco illustrate a major change in the way households were run between 1898 and the first World War. Pre-packaged food in sizes appropriate for an individual family revolutionized the way food was delivered in the United States and set the scene for the self-serve supermarkets of today.

The National Biscuit Company became a powerhouse in the sales of packaged cookies and crackers by combining some of the best regional bakeries into a national corporation in 1898. By 1917 when the East Liberty factory was constructed, Nabisco was a household word, especially its Uneeda Biscuit brand that catapulted the bakeries into a much-needed expansion.

And

10. Its unique location and distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the City of Pittsburgh.

The Nabisco factory faces Mellon Park and Reizenstein School in the East Liberty/Point Breeze section of the city. As such, it has a large "front lawn" and acts as a good neighbor to the nearby residential areas. Thousands of Pittsburghers spent their careers working at the factory with the American flag perched on the rooftop. It also supplied the best "olfactory pollution" (baking cookie smells) in the city and has been a neighborhood landmark for nearly ninety years.

10. NOTIFICATION/CONSENT OF PROPERTY OWNER(S)

Lu Donnelly
510 South Linden Avenue
Pittsburgh PA 15208-2847

May 27, 2004

Mr. Robert Stephenson, President
Regional Industrial Development Corporation of Southwestern PA
425 Sixth Avenue, Suite 500
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15219-1822

Dear Mr. Stephenson:

I would like to inform you that I have submitted a nomination for the National Biscuit Company facility (formerly the Atlantic Baking Company/Bake-Line) at 6425 Penn Avenue to the list of historic structures maintained by the Historic Review Commission of the City of Pittsburgh. As owners of record I am certain you realize that the building has a fascinating history and landmark standing in the East Liberty/Point Breeze neighborhoods, making it eligible for city historic structure status under the Pittsburgh Code of Ordinances, Title 11, Historic Preservation, Chapter 1: Historic Structures, Districts, Sites and Objects. It is eligible under the following criteria:

- 2) Its identification with a person or persons who significantly contributed to the cultural, historic, and architectural development of the City of Pittsburgh, State of Pennsylvania, Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States.
- 3) Its exemplification of an architectural type, style or design distinguished by innovation, uniqueness, or overall quality of the design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship.
- 4) Its identification as the work of an architect, designer, engineer, or builder whose individual work is significant in the history or development of the City of Pittsburgh, the State of Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States.
- 7) Its association with important cultural or social aspects or events in the history of the City of Pittsburgh, the State of Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic region, or the United States.
- 10) Its unique location or distinctive physical appearance or presence representing an established and familiar visual feature of a neighborhood, community, or the City of Pittsburgh.

I look forward to seeing the former Nabisco factory listed on the City register of Historic Places.

Sincerely,

Lu Donnelly
Advisory Board Member
Young Preservationists Association

11. NUMBER AND SUBJECTS OF PHOTOGRAPHS INCLUDED WITH THE NOMINATION FORM

Photo 1:



South or Penn Avenue façade, looking west.

Photo 2:



Entry on Penn Avenue showing terra cotta plaque and embellished keystone.

Photo 3:



West elevation (East Liberty Avenue) and façade (Penn Avenue).

Photo 4:



Penn Avenue façade, looking east from East Liberty Avenue.

12. LIST OF SUPPORTING DOCUMENTS SUBMITTED WITH THE NOMINATION FORM

NOMINATION FORM PREPARED BY:

Name Lu Donnelly for the Young Preservationists Association

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Pittsburgh PA 15208-2847

Telephone 412/622-5597