

NATIONAL TITLE GUARANTY COMPANY BUILDING

185 Montague Street, Brooklyn

Block 244 / Lot 13

Built: 1929-30

Architect: Corbett, Harrison & MacMurray; Sculptor: Rene Chambellan

Style: Art Deco

Actions: None

Built in 1929-30, the National Title Guaranty Company Building at 185 Montague Street was designed by one of New York City's major proponents of skyscraper design, Corbett, Harrison & MacMurray, and is notable for its strong massing and details as well as the decorative work by one of the city's prominent architectural sculptors, Rene Chambellan. The building is a powerful representative of the many banks and insurance companies that established offices on Montague Street in the vicinity of Brooklyn Borough Hall in the years prior to the Great Depression.

The slender 16-story brick shaft of the National Title Guaranty Company Building rises 13 stories before the central bays extend for another three stories in a series of setbacks. Corbett, Harrison & MacMurray's design emphasizes the building's verticality by means of projecting piers that rise from unusual stepped buttresses at the building's base and the use of a consistent vertical pattern of textured brick in the window spandrels. A central feature of the building is a pierced limestone screen designed by the noted sculptor Rene Chambellan in which stylized elements indicative of security and industry are incorporated into the buttresses and around the building's entrances.



The firm of Corbett, Harrison & MacMurray was established in 1928 and lasted until 1935. The firm's principal designer, Harvey W. Corbett was known as a major proponent of the skyscraper as a modern urban form. Among his designs are One Fifth Avenue (1926, Helmlé & Corbett with Sugarman & Berger, in the Greenwich Village Historic District), the Master Building, 310 Riverside Drive (1928-29, Helmlé, Corbett & Harrison with Sugarman & Berger, associated architects, a designated New York City Landmark), the Metropolitan Life Insurance Company (MetLife) North Building (1929-50 with D. Everett Waid), and the Criminal Courts Building (1939, with Charles B. Meyers). In addition Corbett, Harrison & MacMurray were selected as one of the three firms responsible for the design of Rockefeller Center.

Rene Paul Chambellan was an important architectural sculptor and renowned practitioner of the Art Deco style whose work embellishes Rockefeller Center, the Panhellenic Tower, Chanin

Building, American Radiator Building and Daily News Building (all designated NYC Landmarks) and other buildings throughout the United States.

The National Title Guaranty Company was founded in 1924 and established its offices on the south side of Montague Street. In the first five years of business the company expanded into Queens and Manhattan and established a bank which would share the new office at 185 Montague with the insurance firm and other tenants mostly in the financial services sector. By 1935, the firm was in liquidation.

Over the years the building has been remarkably well maintained. Alterations to the base prior to the 1970s include the conversion of the bank's picture window into a retail entrance with marquee, the redesign of the recessed main entrance to be flush with the building wall and the removal of two sections of the screen which were once attached to the emergency and fire tower exits.

