

12 NORTH WARREN STREET (Commercial Building) HABS No. NJ-957  
Trenton  
Mercer County  
New Jersey

HABS  
NJ,  
11-TRET,  
30-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY  
MID-ATLANTIC REGION, NATIONAL PARK SERVICE  
DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR  
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19106

HABS  
NJ,  
11-TRET  
30-

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

12 North Warren Street (Commercial Building)

HABS No. NJ-957

Location: 12 North Warren Street, Trenton, Mercer County,  
New Jersey

Last Owner: Plapinger-Platt Down Town Property

Last Occupant: Sam's Shoe Repair Shop, and Stacy Laundry & Dry  
Cleaning.

Last Use: Commercial

This building at 12 North Warren Street was demolished in  
September 1987 to make way for new commercial construction.

Significance: For much of the 19th century, this building was the  
home of Samuel and Edmund Roberts' jewelry business.  
The two made and sold jewelry, and sold and repaired  
watches, clocks and silverware. After their  
business closed in 1885, the building housed a  
drugstore, and then a barber shop from about 1910 to  
1927, as well as residential tenants on the upper  
floors. A restaurant occupied the building in the  
1930's; after 1946 a laundry and a shoe repair shop  
were located here. This succession of commercial  
uses proves the utility of the Federal style  
building, and reflects the vitality of downtown  
Trenton over the past century and a half.

The Roberts' Jewelry Store building is one of  
only a handful of survivors from before the Civil  
War in downtown Trenton. Despite alterations to the  
storefront and the interior, the building retains  
details characteristic of the urban vernacular  
architecture of the early 19th century, like the  
broad chimney and low arched pedimented dormer at  
the fourth floor.

Part I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. Date of erection: c. 1822
2. Architect: Not known
3. Original and subsequent owners: Chain of Title references from the Mercer County Hall of Records unless otherwise noted.
  - 1821 - Transfer to Israel Carle from Richard Hunt. (Hunterdon County Deed Book). No building noted in deed.
  - 1822 - Transfer from Richard Hunt to Stephen Rose. (Hunterdon County Deed Book). A building was noted on the property in this deed.
  - 1838 - Transfer from Elizabeth Rose (widow of Stephen) to Peter Wikoff. (Hunterdon County Deed Book)
  - 1849 March 31 - Transfer from Peter H. Wikoff and Ann, his wife, to Samuel and Edmund Roberts. Deed book P page 77.
  - 1883 January 12 - Transfer from Barker Gummere and Charlotte A. Roberts, Executors of the Last Will and Testament of Edmund Roberts to Nathaniel Roberts. Deed book 135 page 55.
  - 1885 July 24 - Transfer from Nathaniel H. and Fannie Roberts, husband and wife, to Frank N. Roberts. Deed book 146 page 50.
  - 1885 July 24 - Transfer from Frank N. Roberts to Fannie G. Roberts. Deed book 146 page 52.
  - 1898 September 26 - Transfer from Frank N. Roberts, Executor of Nathaniel Roberts, to Frank S. Katzenbach Jr. Deed book 224 page 232.
  - 1898 September 26 - Transfer from Frank S. Katzenbach Jr. to Frank N. Roberts. Deed book 224 page 234.
  - 1904 July 23 - Transfer from Annie L. Roberts; Mary E. and Richard M. Jones; Augusta R. and Joseph C. Dye; Kate H. and Townsend K. Cheney husband and wife; and Rebecca and Michael Small husband and wife (heirs at law of Frank M. Roberts) to Margaret Cleary. Deed book 272 page 567.
  - 1906 September 1 - Transfer from Margaret and Martin Cleary to Emma H. Kline. Deed book 289 page 355.
  - 1919 April 11 - Transfer from Emma and Samuel Kline her husband to Samuel Lebin. Deed book 422 page 227.

12 North Warren Street (Commercial Building)

HABS NJ-957 (page 3)

- 1920 December 10 - Transfer from Samuel and Mary Lebin husband and wife to William M. and Carrie M. Nutt husband and wife. Deed book 469 page 19.
- 1922 September 27 - Transfer from William M. and Carrie Nutt husband and wife to Albert S. and Eva L. Rogowski. Deed book 499 page 187.
- 1925 April 1 - Transfer from Albert S. and Eva Rogowski husband and wife to John P. Roumanis. Deed book 557 page 225.
- 1932 May 11 - Transfer from John P. and Stella Roumanis husband and wife to Paul Geneas. Deed book 694 page 43D.
- 1934 September 24 - Sheriff's deed. Transfer to The Equitable Life Assurance Society of the United States. Deed book 726 page 108.
- 1943 November 12 - Transfer from the Equitable Life Assurance Society of the United States to Sylvia and Aaron Lavinthal. Deed book 866 page 409.
- 197D July 18 - Transfer from Sylvia and Hyman Lavinthal; Beatrice G. Lavinthal individually and as general guardian for Edwin M. Lavinthal, an infant, and Frederic and Leslie A. Lavinthal husband and wife to JACL, Inc., a New Jersey corporation. Deed book 186D page 916.
- 1974 February 15 - Transfer from JACL, Inc., a New Jersey corporation to Plapinger-Platt Down Town Property, a partnership. Deed book 1962 page 440.
- 1987 September - Transfer from Plapinger Platt Down Town Property to DKM Properties, Corp.

4. Builder, contractor, suppliers: Not known.
5. Original plans and construction: Original plans or drawings are not known to exist.
6. Alterations and additions: The exterior of the upper floors of the building appear not to have been altered over the life of the building. A photograph of North Warren Street about 1893 includes this building, looking very much like its present appearance. The first floor storefront was remodelled twice in the first half of the 2Dth century, according to city tax records. The original building was about 20' x 55', according to a notation in Industries of New Jersey (p. 185), which suggests that a substantial addition was made to the rear of the building between between 1849 and 1881, when city maps show it to have assumed the present size and configuration.

- B. Historical Context: The building best known as Roberts' Jewelry Store was built about 1822, in an era that saw tremendous construction along State and Warren Streets as Trenton emerged as a city with a substantial commercial area. This building is typical of many built in Trenton in the first third of the 19th century; relying on an urban vernacular architecture characteristic of the Delaware Valley from the 18th through the first half of the 19th century. The brick, three story, three bay form accommodated residential as well as commercial uses, and in this building as in many others, the two uses did, in fact, co-exist for years.

The building was apparently constructed as a house about 1822 by Israel Carle, and sold almost immediately to one Stephen Rose. Rose died in 1833, and in his will left his wife Elizabeth a house on the "East side of Warren Street". Elizabeth sold the property a few years later, noting that she received \$12.50 per month in rent from Samuel Roberts.

Samuel and Edmund Roberts were the first tenants of the building, opening their jewelry store there in 1832. They had a small store in front of the first floor and a workroom in back, where they practiced their advertised specialty of repairing watches. They bought the building in 1849 and Samuel lived in the apartment above the store from that date until his death in 1884. The store was quietly successful, and the original proprietors continued in the jewelry business into their old age, operating the store for over fifty years. Their advertisements in the Trenton city directory of 1882 stated: "S & E Roberts, all branches of jewelry and watchmaking". They boasted of having "fireproof safes and handsome showcases", a fine stock of all kinds of jewelry and silverware, and "all the best makes of watches." Upon Edmund Roberts' death in 1883, Nathaniel Roberts was invited into the business; two years later he was the sole proprietor after the death of Samuel Roberts. Nathaniel (a younger brother of Samuel and Edmund) either had little interest in or aptitude for the jewelry business, however, and by 1887 he had dissolved the business, and leased the building to Frank Lalor's Drug Store.

Lalor's Drug Store was notable in the 1888 directory for being the only advertised business "Open All Hours, Day and Night". Frank Lalor was also the Superintendent of Trenton's Public Schools in 1890. The drug store was closed at the turn of the century, just about the time another drug store (Stuckert's) opened for business next door at 10 North Warren Street.

By 1906, the Roberts family had sold off all interests in the building at 12 North Warren Street, and it was purchased in that year by Emma and Samuel Kline. Samuel Kline operated a barber shop here for fifteen years, moving the business from its earlier location at 6 North Warren. After Kline sold the building in 1919, other barbers worked there, the business taking the name National Barber Shop through the 1920's.

The city tax assessor's office records that in 1925, \$600 worth of renovations were made to the building. At that time, not only was the National Barber Shop operating there, but Frank Cahill, a dentist, had an office in the building, and Mary Lane, a dressmaker, also worked there.

More extensive alterations were made to the building in 1934, when the tax records report the addition of a steel girder and a facade covering of stainless steel. The Central Restaurant occupied the building at that date, and perhaps the stainless steel was an attempt to emulate the popular diners in a downtown setting. The restaurant closed its doors during World War II. After the War, the building contained Sam's Shoe Repair Shop, the Stacy Laundry & Dry Cleaners, and a tailor.

The rapid succession of small businesses as well as the rapid sale and resale of the building in the 1920's and '30's reflects the changing nature of this part of downtown Trenton. The large hotels which had stood nearby in the 19th century, providing a well-heeled clientele for a jewelry store, had been supplanted by newer, larger hotels to the south and east. The service businesses that operated here in the 20th century served the growing population of state office workers in downtown Trenton.

## Part II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

### A. General Statement

1. Architectural Character: A Federal era commercial building with mid-19th century bracketed cornice and a storefront altered in the mid-20th century.
2. Condition of fabric: The building is in fair condition with significant deterioration on the roof, gutters, and attic level.

B. Description of Exterior

1. Overall dimensions: The North Warren Street facade is 21.8' long; the building extends into the block for 99.5'. It occupies all of Block 4B Lot 20 in downtown Trenton.  
The building has three full stories plus an attic under the gable roof. It is articulated into three regularly spaced bays on the upper stories of the facade; the first floor contains a storefront with side entry.
2. Foundation: Fieldstone and creek-bed cobblestones are laid in lime mortar. The foundation is not visible from the building exterior.
3. Walls: The exterior walls are made of red brick laid in a Flemish bond pattern. The brick has been painted light yellow in the 20th century. There is no surface detailing or ornamentation.
4. Structural systems: Load-bearing brick walls with wooden interior framing and wooden roof trusses. The heavy timber framing is supported with diagonal bracing at the corners. The connections are mortised and tenoned.
5. Storefront: Recessed side entry with a tile floor of red and white hexagonal tiles bordered by red square tiles. The street address "12" is set into the tile floor. The rest of the storefront is covered with painted metal panels. The large wood-framed display window occupies half of the first floor area; it is boarded below a tripartite transom.
6. Chimneys: One tall rectangular section brick chimney extends from the north side of the building.
7. Openings:
  - a. Doors: The painted wooden doors to the shopfront have large glass windows set in them. The adjacent street door to the upper floors of the building is a replacement, but the original wooden-framed transom survives above it.
  - b. Windows: Replacement wood sash 1/1 windows have been installed in all openings on the facade. Plain stone lintels and sills border the windows. The upper floor

windows are flanked by modern molded plastic shutters attached to the wall surface. Original louvered wood shutters are shown on the building in historic photographs; they are now gone. A single light metal framed skylight was added to the front of the gable roof over the south bay. The attic dormer window, original but in poor condition, is a wooden six-over-six sash with round-arched top sash.

7. Roof: The building has a gable roof covered with asphalt shingles. The extensive rear addition is covered by a low pitch asphalt roof. A round-arched dormer with broken pediment above is centered on both the front and rear of the gable roof. The dormer is framed by narrow fluted pilasters. At the building's cornice, large paired wooden brackets alternate with smaller modillions below the extended eaves. The molded eave contains a built-in gutter, connected to a modern aluminum downspout which leads down the south side of the building.

### C. Description of Interior

#### 1. Floor plans:

- a. First floor: The first floor has been greatly altered in the 20th century. It is now a single open space, with marks clearly visible on the floor indicating the location of partition walls made of 2x4 lumber and wallboard.
- b. Second floor: The second floor has had much of its interior partitioning removed; however, it is possible to discern from marks on the floor and ceiling that the space was originally divided into a hall parallel with the south wall of the building and two large rooms, front and back. An extensive rear addition was put onto the building in the 19th century, which was divided into a long hall with rooms opening off one side of it.
- c. Third floor: The third floor is only over the front (original) portion of the building, measuring roughly twenty feet by fifty five feet. It contains a small apartment of three rooms.
- d. The fourth floor, attic level, was inaccessible at the time of recording.

2. **Stairways:** The staircase to the upper floors runs along the south wall of the building toward the front. They are entered through a door leading directly from the street. The wooden stairs are enclosed. The square-section stair balusters and the wooden handrail are early 20th century replacements of original fittings.
3. **Flooring:** The floors are wooden throughout the building. On the first floor, it is covered with a succession of linoleum and vinyl tile. On the second and third floors, pine floorboards, approximately five inches wide, are visible. The rear addition of the second floor has narrower (2 1/2" wide) floorboards.
4. **Walls and ceilings:** Most of the interior walls have been torn out of the building on all three floors. Surviving fragments indicate that it was made of plaster over wooden lath.
5. **Openings:**
  - a. **Doorways and doors:** No interior doors survive in the building. Doorways which remain in the rear of the second floor are framed by plain surrounds with simple square corner blocks.
  - b. **Windows:** The windows on the facade wall of the second floor retain their molded frames and circle-in-square motif corner blocks.  
There are two skylights above the second floor rear addition. Each light well is finished with tongue and groove woodwork.
6. **Decorative Features:** None. The mantle on the second floor fireplace was removed.
7. **Mechanical systems:**

The building was constructed with a fireplace on the second floor; the first and third floors have been so altered as to preclude speculation on the existence or use of fireplaces there. Iron radiators are the visible heat source for the second floor rear addition. A bathroom with toilet, tub, and sink was installed on the second floor. It is in a room raised up a step from the level of the rest of the floor, presumably to accommodate the plumbing.

D. Site

1. General siting and orientation: The building is sited in the middle of the east side of the block of North Warren Street between State Street and East Hanover Street. This block was known in the 20th century as the "Dunham Block" for a large downtown department store which occupied much of the block. The building has a western facade elevation and no other exposed elevations.
2. Historic landscape design: None
3. Outbuildings: None

Part III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original architectural drawings: Not known.

B. Early views:

1. Picture File - Warren Street Photograph  
"Warren Street from State Street" (ca. 1893) in the  
Trentoniana Collection of the Trenton Free Public  
Library.

C. Interviews: None.

D. Bibliography

1. Primary and unpublished sources:
  - a. Real Estate Transactions, Mercer County Hall of Records, Trenton, New Jersey.
  - b. Real Estate Transactions, Hunterdon County Hall of Records, Flemington, New Jersey.
  - c. Record of Wills and Inventories, Mercer County Hall of Records, Trenton, New Jersey.
  - d. Record of Wills and Inventories, Hunterdon County Hall of Records, Flemington, New Jersey.
  - e. Tax assessment records, Tax Office, City of Trenton.

12 North Warren Street (Commercial Building)

HABS NJ-957 (page 10)

2. Secondary and published sources:

a. Books

Directory of Trenton, New Jersey. Trenton, N.J.  
[title and publisher varies], 1854-1976.

Industries of New Jersey. Part I: Trenton, Princeton,  
Hightstown, Pennington, and Hopewell. New York, Newark,  
New Jersey and Philadelphia: Historical Publishing  
Company, 1882.

Robins, Ellwood P. Trenton Illustrated. [Trenton, N.J.?]:  
H. R. Page & Co., 1891.

Trenton, City of. North Ward Historic Resource Survey.  
Vol. I, City of Trenton, N.J. 1980.

b. Maps

Combination Atlas Map of Mercer County, New Jersey.  
Philadelphia: Everts & Stewart, 1875.

Gordon, Thomas. Map of the City of Trenton and Its  
Vicinity. Philadelphia: J.F. and C.A. Watson  
Lithographers, 1836.

Insurance Maps of Trenton, New Jersey. New York:  
Sanborn-Perris Map Co., 1890.

Insurance Maps, Trenton New Jersey. Vol I. New York:  
Sanborn Map Company, 1908.

Sidney, J. C. comp. Map of the City of Trenton,  
New Jersey From Actual Surveys. Philadelphia:  
M. Dripps, 1849.

12 North Warren Street (Commercial Building)

HABS NJ-957 (page 11)

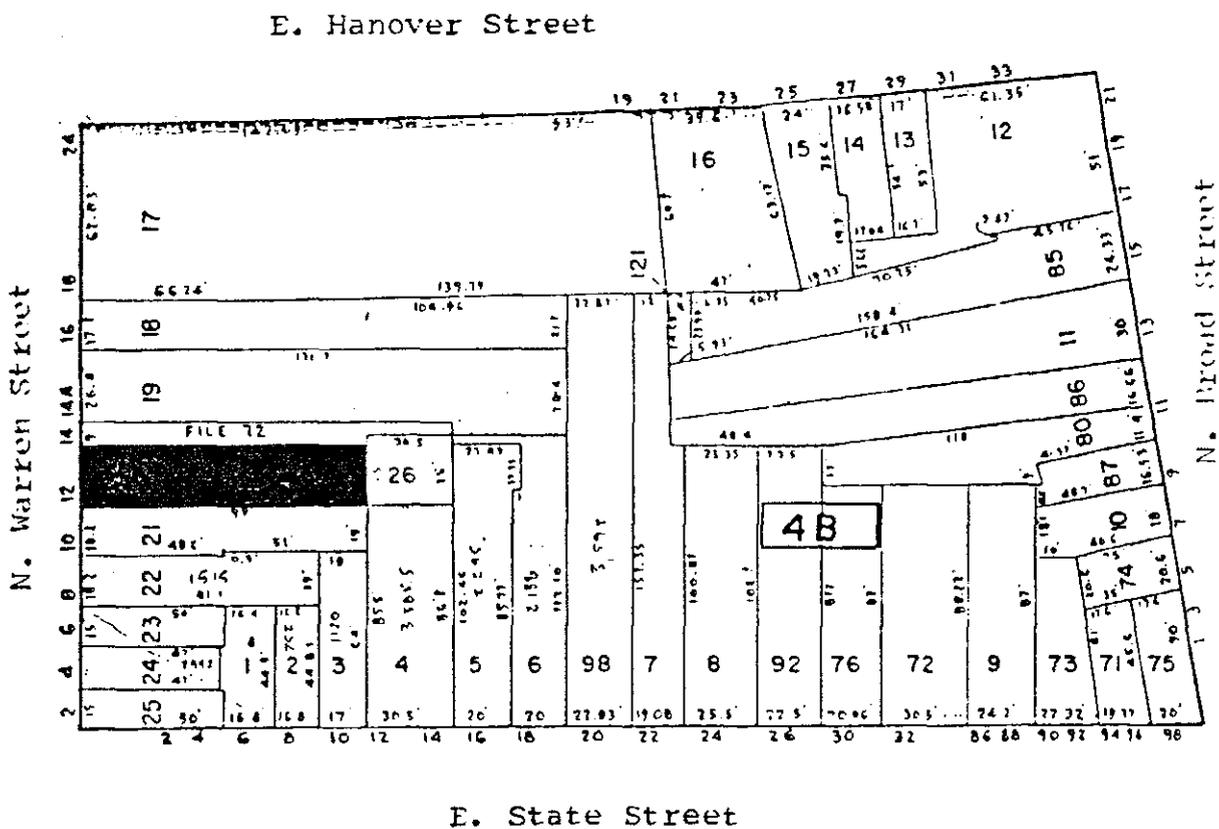
Part IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

Documentation for the Roberts' Jewelry Store at 12 North Warren Street, Trenton, was prepared for DKM Properties Corp. under an agreement with the City of Trenton, the Office of New Jersey Heritage, and DKM Properties Corp. The site was recorded to HABS standards to mitigate the loss of historic buildings, impacted by a project utilizing funds from HUD through an Urban Development Action Grant. The site is under development by DKM Properties as the Capital Center project, a mixed retail and office building containing 331,000 square feet. It is scheduled for completion in 1989.

Prepared by: Janet W. Foster  
Title: Historic Preservation Consultant  
Affiliation: ACROTERION  
45-A Macculloch Avenue  
Morristown, N.J. 07960

August - December 1987

Site Plan



Floor Plan

