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## NATIONAL NEWS

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### FINAL CHAPTER OF THE CONVERSION OF THE WESTERN UNION BUILDING IN PHILADELPHIA TO CONDOMINIUMS – FRANK SENNER

“Those who came were: Louise Bordihn, Mary Lou Burns, Cathy “KC” Chavis, Walt Garvin, Sarah & Larry Lowe, Elmer McIlhenney, Charles Robinson, Barbara & Frank Senner, Frances & Virginia Smith and Al & Eileen Vaillancourt.

“On Monday, July 14th, a group of former WU Co-workers who attend the Philly WU luncheons took a tour of the converted Main (Reperforator Center) Office in Philly. The building was initially built with 4 floors but was built to increase the height of the building at some future time. Well that time has arrived.

“It is being converted into expensive Condos and is now Eleven Stories tall. On the first floor was the Delivery Department (handled counter service for the public and delivery of telegrams by messengers and had an entrance at 230 S. 11th St.). That area was torn down, as was the adjacent Savoy Restaurant, which also housed the Union Office (United Telegraphers Workers which became part of the CTW). In its place is now a Walgreens Pharmacy.

“As the tour started we entered through the double doors on Locust Street and made an immediate left up a short hallway to a receptionist. She made a telephone call to a Real Estate Rep. that we had scheduled the tour with and said “The CREW is here,” meaning us old timers. The double doors we entered originally led to the Delivery Department from inside the building, also to the elevators which were next to a small snack counter run by Walt Duglin that had sandwiches, beverages and snacks. Gone are the good ole days.

“We toured 3 Condos starting with 2 on the 4th floor which was the Area Office during the days of Western Union. The condos were not furnished and with the ceilings at the height they were during the WU occupancy, the walls appeared very tall and the rooms seemed “boxy.” The 2nd condo had a balcony about 20 feet long that overlooked Locust Street. Then we went up to the 7th floor and that condo was furnished and also had a smaller balcony that overlooked Quince St. which is not much more than a small alleyway. The views were not really anything to talk about from the 3 condos we visited but one did have a view of City Hall and the statue of Billy Penn on top. We didn’t get to tour the most expensive condos as they were still having the interior constructed. The first four floors had tall ceilings that were kept at that height by the builder, and the hallways to the condos appeared very narrow and it was not like walking down hallways in a hotel or motel. (Hotel and motel hallways seem much wider) The rooms had some very nice features, such as lighting, marble bathrooms, cherry wood floors and marble kitchen counters, but at the prices they were asking (\$350,000 to 3.5 Million) they really didn’t impress us too much. No one in our group put a deposit down on a condo. Then we went down to the basement that was actually dug much deeper to accommodate a parking garage that you entered off of Quince St. They had hydraulic lifts so that the first car in a parking spot is lifted up and another car can park below the first car. Parking is in addition to the cost of the condos. They do have an attendant to park your car, though. There is also a restaurant on the first floor behind the reception area but it was closed the day of our tour.

“Our guide Tom, from the real estate agent for the building, was very accommodating to us. Tom was surprised when we told him that at least one in our group started working at the WU Building in 1941. Tom told us that 75% of the condos were purchased and they expected to sell the remainder within the next 6 months, so for those who would like to see the building, just call or go and take a tour with the real estate people before they close down the real estate office. Tom was also asked regarding the large letters that were removed from the building above the Locust Street entrances that spelled “The Western Union Telegraph Company.” They were removed so they wouldn’t be damaged during construction or stolen. Well, they were stolen but they will be replaced and installed in the near future.

“Everyone enjoyed going through the building even though it has gone through extensive changes. After we exited the building, most of us went to lunch together before heading home and some remarked that we would be getting together real soon as the October luncheon was not that far off.

“On the way home on a SEPTA train, one of our co-workers (who will remain nameless – had a bad Senior moment) unfortunately dropped a wallet as he/she exited the train. Fortunately they realized it when they got home, cancelled the credit cards and notified SEPTA. And then a surprise. They received a telephone call that the wallet was found on the train platform and that person checked the name and address on a card in the wallet, found their telephone number and called and met and returned the wallet. Unfortunately that probably was the 2nd person who found the wallet, since \$70 that was in the wallet was missing, but the wallet and all of its other contents were returned.”