

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions.

1. Name of Property

Historic name: The Markel Building

Other names/site number: Enterprise Center (current) ; Markel Service Building; Jiffy Pop Building; Spaceship; Flying Saucer

Name of related multiple property listing:
N/A

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing)

2. Location

Street & number: 5310 Markel Road

City or town: Richmond State: VA County: Henrico

Not For Publication: N/A Vicinity: X

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,

I hereby certify that this X nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:

___ national ___ statewide X local

Applicable National Register Criteria:

___A ___B XC ___D

<p>Signature of certifying official/Title: <u>Virginia Department of Historic Resources</u></p> <p>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>	<p>Date</p>
<p>In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.</p>	
<p>Signature of commenting official:</p>	<p>Date</p>
<p>Title :</p>	<p>State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government</p>

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4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

- entered in the National Register
- determined eligible for the National Register
- determined not eligible for the National Register
- removed from the National Register
- other (explain:) _____

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply.)

- Private:
- Public – Local
- Public – State
- Public – Federal

Category of Property

(Check only **one** box.)

- Building(s)
- District
- Site
- Structure
- Object

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Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	buildings
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	sites
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	structures
<u>0</u>	<u>0</u>	objects
<u>1</u>	<u>0</u>	Total

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE: Business

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE: Business

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7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT: Neoexpressionism

Materials: (enter categories from instructions.)

Principal exterior materials of the property: METAL: Aluminum, Steel; CONCRETE;
GLASS

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance and condition of the property. Describe contributing and noncontributing resources if applicable. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, type, style, method of construction, setting, size, and significant features. Indicate whether the property has historic integrity.)

Summary Paragraph

Designed by local architect Haigh Jamgochian and completed in 1966, the four-story Markel Building employs a visually distinct and unusual Neoexpressionist design noted for its sloping ovaloid shape and crinkled aluminum siding. The building's design combines Neoexpressionist sensibility with economical and practical programmatic solutions. The building's structure consists of a radiating 12-beam steel framing system with cantilevered ends supported by 12 raised concrete piers (or *pilotti*). The piers form an ovaloid parking deck on the ground floor with a central entry vestibule containing a stairwell and 2 elevators. There are 3 internal floors, each comprised of various offices radiating off the circular hallway surrounding the elevator shaft/stairwell. The building still possesses a good degree of material integrity although metal or duct-tape patching is visible on portions of the exterior cladding and most of the original interior doors, which featured metal vents and trim, have been replaced. The office building, now named the Enterprise Center, occupies a .73-acre lot on Markel Road in the highly commercial Willow Lawn neighborhood just outside Richmond City limits in suburban Henrico County, Virginia.

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Narrative Description

The Markel Building appears today much as it did when it was first completed in 1966. The surrounding area, just outside Richmond City limits in Henrico County, remains very similar as well, marked by mid- to late-20th century commercial development and century residences.

The Markel Building is located in a highly commercial area one block south of West Broad Street (Route 250) on the north side of Markel Road between Byrd Avenue on the west and Willow Lawn Drive on the east. Both Broad Street and Willow Lawn Drive feature extensive commercial development, primarily shops and offices. Willow Lawn Shopping Center is on the east side of Willow Lawn Drive and is an outdoor-style mall first built in 1956, preceding completion of the Markel Building by a decade. (It was turned into an enclosed mall in 1986, but renovated back to its original open-air layout in 2005.)¹ West Broad Street almost exclusively features commercial development, primarily chain businesses and strip malls, and there is another major shopping center, Libbie Place, only one block to the west between Byrd Avenue and Libbie Avenue. Several grid-based, rectilinear, International Style office buildings such as the Maryland Building and Willow Circle Office Park are in the immediate vicinity as well, most notably on Willow Lawn Drive and Fitzhugh Avenue, to the south of the Markel Building. Immediately across Markel Road to the south is the Faison School. North of West Broad Street is more commercial development including a newer shopping center. The neighborhoods surrounding Willow Lawn are residential with small single family dwellings mainly dating from the 1940s through 1970s. As a result of its location near a busy, commercial intersection and its contrast with the surrounding architecture, the Markel Building stands out as an eye-catching and unusual design.

The Markel Building occupies all of its parcel's legal building line. The immediate landscaping is kept minimal and neat, consisting of some shrubbery and a few small flowering trees as well as a sign for the Enterprise Center and a Henrico County Historical Marker on either side of the entrance drive into the parking lot. This parking lot is formed by 12 raised concrete piers supporting the cantilevered upper stories and is considered the ground floor of the Markel Building. The piers are covered in a layer of highly textured concrete which not only mimics the building's aluminum crinkles but protects the load-bearing piers from car collisions. The Markel Building's site is traversed by a diagonal drainage ditch which guided the placement of the concrete piers. The parking lot itself consists of two concentric rings of spots with the larger of the two occupying the outer perimeter of the building footprint; the outermost edge of the parking spots extend slightly past the external wall of the floor above. The central ring of parking spots surrounds the circular core of the building, which contains an entry vestibule with glass double doors accessed by a set of concrete steps. There is a loading dock on the exact opposite side of the entry. Inside the vestibule is a circular hallway surrounding two elevators and a stairwell leading to the upper floors.

There are 3 aluminum-clad stories above the parking lot alternating with two narrow bands of fixed metal windows deeply recessed so as to avoid glare.² The topmost floor has no windows

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and instead forms the parapet around the flat roof. The flat roof and the bands of windows layered with the aluminum-clad floors emphasize the Markel Building's horizontality. Each story's diameter is slightly larger than the one below, resulting in an unusual sloping, ovaloid form angled at 15 degrees. The outwardly tapering walls as well as the raised parking deck give the Markel Building a sense of elevation and lightness.³ This circular form not only makes the building visually distinct but, according to the architect, maximized square footage by extending the upper floors past the building line to the legal property line.⁴ The circular form also eliminates side sway and torsion in addition to casting 23 percent less shadow than a rectangular building so that more light can reach the parking lot.⁵ The back of the building contains a projecting, rectilinear emergency stairwell, also clad in crinkled aluminum.

The highly textured aluminum cladding is arguably the most notable element of the Markel Building. The 9' wide, .0321" thick, 500' to 700' long, uncoated aluminum rolls were custom-made by Richmond-based Reynolds Metals (now Alcoa) and are believed to be the longest such aluminum siding in the world.⁶ The architect chose this material, its texture and the general building form after he was inspired by a baked potato wrapped in tinfoil served to him at an American Institute of Architects dinner.⁷ The wrinkles in the uppermost floor were created with a rubber mallet by architect Haigh Jamgochian himself to demonstrate his desired effect to the work crew who then completed the lower 2 floors. The cladding and shape have made the Markel Building idiosyncratic and have resulted in equally quirky local nicknames such as "the Jiffy Pop Building" and "the Spaceship." However, the choice of crinkled cladding served practical needs as well as aesthetic. The stiff folds allow the aluminum to "absorb differences in expansion and contraction between itself and the [building's] structure."⁸ The use of a large roll of aluminum versus multiple smaller panels not only allowed for the desired "freeform texture and pattern" but also made application of the cladding more economical. The single sheet was secured in place using interior screw nails at the top and bottom by use of a moving platform (see Additional Documentation). This method eliminated the need for far more expensive scaffolding required to attach individual panels.⁹ The building's exterior overall retains good integrity of design, materials, and workmanship, but some portions of the aluminum skin have spalled off and metallic or duct-tape patching is visible in several spots.

The building's interior is notably less quirky than the exterior and largely resembles a typical mid-twentieth century office. The interior of the ground floor consists of just the aforementioned entrance vestibule with 2 elevators and a stairwell. The elevator indicates the parking level as G and the next 3 floors are 1, 2 and PH (penthouse). The 2nd and 3rd floors are extremely similar with restrooms and offices radiating off the circular hallway surrounding the elevators and stairwell. The largest office in the building belongs to an insurance company that now owns the building (S.I.L. insurance) and is on the 3rd floor. The interior offices are separated into cubicles with movable partitions while private offices and conference rooms are along the outer perimeter. Although the outermost interior walls are curved, the effect is subtle and most easily perceived where the curved outer wall intersects with a rectilinear interior wall. Most of the original interior doors, which feature metal vents and trim, have been replaced although one representative example remains in the building.

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The topmost (penthouse) floor of the Markel Building differs from the two below. There is no band of windows and no real offices. Instead, the 4th floor contains a large worker's lounge/storage area, a small maintenance office and a large boiler room. Due to the site's tendency to flood, all utilities had to be located above ground. Equipment and pipes in the boiler room have been brightly painted so as to make it easier to differentiate the various components. A small set of stairs from this room lead up to a door which opens onto the rooftop. The center of the roof contains large, boxy HVAC equipment and the built-up roofing (or felts) with an aggregate ballast. The parapet surrounding the roof is about 3' high. Because of the Markel Building's height relative to the mostly 2-story development nearby, the rooftop provides clear views of the surrounding neighborhood.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A. Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B. Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C. Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D. Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

- A. Owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes
- B. Removed from its original location
- C. A birthplace or grave
- D. A cemetery
- E. A reconstructed building, object, or structure
- F. A commemorative property
- G. Less than 50 years old or achieving significance within the past 50 years

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Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1966

Significant Dates

November 16, 1966

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Jamgochian, Haigh

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance, applicable criteria, justification for the period of significance, and any applicable criteria considerations.)

The Markel Building is an unusual Neoexpressionist style office building commissioned by brothers Lewis and Irvin Markel of the Markel Insurance Corporation in 1964 and completed on November 16, 1966.¹⁰ For their ambitious project, the Markel brothers specifically chose controversial local architect Haigh Jamgochian because they sought an unusual, eye-catching building and had been impressed by Jamgochian's previous design for an unbuilt but widely published apartment building known as the Treehouse. Jamgochian only had two of his designs ever built, of which the Markel Building is the only one still extant; the other, known as the "Moon House," was demolished in 2005. The Markel Building is significant at the local level under Criterion C in the area of Architecture due to its unique, mid-twentieth century design and the relative rarity of Neoexpressionist architecture in Virginia. The property's period of significance, 1966, coincides with its construction date.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

Biographical Sketch of the Architect

The following biographical sketch is based on interviews with Haigh Jamgochian conducted by Melina Bezirdjian in February, 2016.

Haigh Jamgochian, or "Jam" as he likes to be called, was born in Richmond, Virginia, in 1924 to Armenian immigrant parents. Growing up in Richmond's historic Fan neighborhood, he began experimenting with art and the built environment as a young boy. He says he was "born to draw" and has continued to work with various artistic media throughout his life, including sculpture and painting. By age 9 he built an elevated chicken coop and an elaborate model train town. Although he struggled academically throughout school, perhaps due to a learning disability¹¹, he graduated high school in 1942 and enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps. After serving in World War II's Pacific Theater, he used the GI Bill of Rights to enroll in college. He began his education at Dartmouth College in the fall of 1947 before transferring to Virginia Polytechnic Institute (now Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University or Virginia Tech) the following year. He graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Building Construction in 1950 and a Master's degree in Architecture in 1951. Jamgochian attended Princeton University on a full scholarship from the fall of 1951 through spring 1952, during which time he competed for the prestigious Paris Prize. Although a finalist, he did not win and Princeton discontinued his scholarship. Also while at Princeton, Jamgochian worked for the firm of Lucius Read White, Jr. and obtained his architectural certification. He returned to Richmond in 1952 and was hired by notable local Modern architect Frederick "Bud" Hyland, who studied under Frank Lloyd Wright at Taliesin and at Taliesin West. In 1955, he left Hyland's office and began teaching architecture at Richmond Professional Institute (now Virginia Commonwealth University). In 1958,

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Jamgochian left teaching to work for another local architect, John Stafford Efford, then by 1960 he went to work independently.

Shortly thereafter, Haigh Jamgochian became a notable but controversial local figure beginning with his proposed “Treehouse” apartment building design. After a very realistic image of the model multi-story Treehouse superimposed on a Richmond low-scale 19th century streetscape was published in the *Richmond Times Dispatch* and picked up by the Associated Press, his Treehouse design gained international publicity through various publications. However, Richmond officials did not consider the building’s design to be appropriate for the city. Despite a protracted battle and notable press, the building was denied a permit and was never built. The press coverage, however, did impress brothers Irvin and Lewis Markel of the Markel Insurance Corporation, who commissioned Jamgochian to design their new office building, which was completed in 1966. In 1968, Jamgochian completed the “Moon House,” a private dwelling for a local used-car dealer. This unusual, crescent-shaped house on the south bank of the James River was demolished in 2005.

Over the new few decades, Jamgochian continued to attract controversy but not commissions; he never had any other designs built. His lack of success as an architect can be attributed to “several factors such as lack of business experience...., the conservative artistic sensibilities of Richmond, and simple bad luck.”¹² In 1971 Jamgochian purchased a property on the south side of the James River, known as the Rockfalls estate, which contained a quarry, a large International style house (based on architect Edward Durrell Stone’s magazine-disseminated design) and a Civil War-era cottage in which Jamgochian continues to live today.¹³ In the early 1970s, he and his first wife, Revonda (whom he married in 1964), ran a Montessori-type school from the property. However, the school and his marriage did not survive past the late 1970s; Jamgochian remains estranged both from Revonda and their son. The Rockfalls property and buildings fell into a state of disrepair and in 1979 Jamgochian was indicted by a grand jury for “permitting a common nuisance” but was not prosecuted after making the necessary improvements.¹⁴ Four years later in March 1983, a fire on the property inflicted Jamgochian, then 58, with severe burns on his face and hands as well as smoke inhalation; he survived the blaze but required hospitalization.¹⁵

While the architect did not receive commissions after the Moon House, he remained busy with projects such as the aforementioned private school and personal building projects on his own property. In the 1980s, Jamgochian began to build for himself a residence he called the “Amoeba House” due to its unusual curved form, but sold the land with the unfinished house after receiving a very generous offer.¹⁶ In 1980, he married Betty Cunningham. Although they divorced in 1992, the two remain good friends who live nearby and see each other often. Jamgochian continues to experiment with buildings and sculptures at his Civil War-era cottage, which was subdivided from the larger Rockfalls estate in 2014; Rockfalls (DHR #127-7044) was listed in the National Register on February 21, 2017.

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The Markel Building: Commission and Construction

Although it was never built, Jamgochian's aforementioned Treehouse apartment design garnered enough publicity to attract the attention of the Markel Service Corporation, which then commissioned the architect to design their new office building. The "young, spirited and forward thinking"¹⁷ company, led by brothers Irvin and Lewis Markel, wanted a building so unique and distinctive that it would serve as "a sign [in and of] itself."¹⁸ The company commissioned Jamgochian in 1964. His initial design was inspired by the mushrooms growing on the swampy site near Willow Lawn Shopping Center and consisted of a series of interconnected concrete pods with glass domes (a model for this version is at the Library of Virginia in Richmond).¹⁹ However, the proposed budget for the building was severely reduced and Jamgochian was forced to create a different, more economical design which resulted in the Markel Building as it is seen today. While there has been speculation that its circular form was inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright's Guggenheim Museum in New York, Jamgochian has adamantly refuted this claim.²⁰ Instead, he cited his main inspiration as a baked potato wrapped in tinfoil served at an Architecture Institute of America dinner.²¹

Jamgochian was notably hands-on during construction of the Markel Building, which began in 1964. He personally used a mallet to texturize the aluminum cladding on the entire topmost floor within 4 hours as a demonstration for the workers who then completed the lower stories.²² As was previously described in Section 7, the 700' long, .03211" thick and 9' wide roll of aluminum was applied using a moving platform which eliminated the need for costly scaffolding. (A 1965 drawing by the architect which illustrated the application method has been included on the attached continuation sheet.) Alexander Building Construction Company was the builder while William B. Blanton and Associates is credited as the structural engineer.²³ The building was completed on November 16, 1966,²⁴ and garnered both local attention and international publicity as a unique Richmond landmark. In the late 1980s, the Markel Service Corporation moved to a new office further west in Henrico County (at Innsbrook), and sold the building to a different insurance company, Straus, Itzkowitz & LeCompte (S.I.L.) Insurance Agency, which renamed the building as Enterprise Center. Although S.I.L. Insurance Agency occupies the majority of the building now, there are a few smaller offices and a hair salon inside as well.

Reception of the Markel Building, Then and Now

Due in large part to its unusual form and cladding, the Markel Building immediately attracted local, national and international publicity. Local newspapers and magazines such as the *Richmond Times Dispatch*, *Richmond News Leader*, *Virginia Record* and *Commonwealth* featured articles on the Markel Building during and immediately following its construction.²⁵ *Virginia Record* described the building shortly after its completion as "a bold statement in mass and texture" and praised the ways in which the building addressed the programmatic needs of its site/owner.²⁶ An issue of *Commonwealth* published less than a year after the Markel Building's completion indicates the office building's early visual prominence and singular appearance, stating that the "crinkled layer cake gleaming in the sun... will never need a sign... because it is

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known too well to need one.”²⁷ In fact, the building was distinctive enough, in both its construction and appearance, to gain attention outside of Virginia as well as within.

Much of the national press coverage of the Markel Building focused on its use of materials as well as its futuristic appearance. From 1965 through 1968, the Markel Building was featured in several American trade publications such as *Metal Lath News*, *Engineering News Record*, *Building Progress*, *Illuminating Engineering*, *Progressive Architecture*, *Architectural Record*, and the *A.I.A. Journal*. Because these periodicals were already focused on the technical/material aspects of architecture, their coverage of the Markel Building focused on its material components and/or construction techniques, often accompanied by illustrative photos of the building in progress. For example, an issue of *Progressive Architecture* from March 1966 detailed the then still in progress Markel Building’s combination of form and function, describing not only how the aluminum was applied but also how the material’s intrinsic properties allowed the architect to “achieve a free form, textured pattern while staying within the budget” and is accompanied by an image of Jamgochian hammering the aluminum.²⁸ The Markel Building was also featured in a national 1966 advertisement for Bethlehem Steel²⁹ and named an “outstanding building” of the year by the *BOCA (Buildings Officials Conference of America, Inc.) News* the following year.³⁰ The June 1967 issue of *Popular Science* also highlighted the building’s unusual, futuristic aesthetic, describing how the “saucer shaped building’s... aluminum façade gives it the look of a vehicle from outer space,”³¹ indicating that the building had already earned its science-fiction monikers such as “the Flying Saucer” and “the Spaceship.”

Additionally, the Markel Building was featured in a few international trade publications during the mid-to-late 1960s. In 1967, an Australian journal, *Building*, echoed the sentiments of the aforementioned *Popular Science* article, stating that the Markel Building was “already known as the flying saucer.”³² In 1965, French magazine *La Technique des Travaux* featured the in-progress Markel Building as part of a photojournalistic essay celebrating futuristic Modern architecture alongside buildings such as the Culver City College Auditorium in California and L’Eglise St. Jean in Grenoble, France. Another French publication, *Batir*, included an article on the Markel Building’s structural and cladding system once in 1965 and again in 1968.³³ The British journal *Building with Steel* also featured the building twice, once in 1965, and again in 1967 when the Markel Building was featured on the cover. Both articles focused primarily on the steel framing system for obvious reasons.³⁴

Despite the surge in press coverage the first few years after the Markel Building’s completion, architect Haigh Jamgochian himself was unable to secure commissions after his 1967 Moon House. Publicity surrounding the controversial architect diminished but never disappeared completely. In 1970, Jamgochian’s work was the subject of an M.A. thesis at Virginia Commonwealth University by Barbara Ross Luck titled *The Architecture of Haigh Jamgochian*. His models, including the Markel Building and the Treehouse, were also featured in a 1977 architecture textbook published by McGraw Hill, *Architecture Drafting and Design*. In recent decades, the Markel Building has remained a unique local landmark, albeit of mixed opinion, and has been the subject of newfound appreciation.

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Although the Markel Building has been argued to be both one of Richmond's most interesting buildings and one of its ugliest, the aluminum-clad insurance office is inarguably one of the most distinct local buildings. While esteemed Virginia architectural historian Richard Guy Wilson considers the Markel Building not only "charismatic" but "one of the most eye-catching, idiosyncratic modern buildings on all of Broad Street, maybe all of Richmond,"³⁵ *Digital Journal* named it one of the 10 ugliest buildings in the world in 2009.³⁶ Previously, in 1999, it was voted "worst looking building" by *Richmond Magazine*.³⁷ Highlighting the divergent opinions about the Markel Building, in 1995, *Richmond* magazine asked a variety of local architects for their opinions, asking if the building was a "Modern beauty or retro beast?" Most local architects shared positive views, describing the Markel Building as "a bold statement" which has "soul." However, one architect was less than impressed, describing the Markel Building as merely a "standard, everyday suburban office building on stilts... just like the others [around it] but with different wallpaper."³⁸ In recent decades, appreciation seems to have grown for the Markel Building and Jamgochian's vision overall. The building has been featured favorably in national architecture blogs as well as one *Wall Street Journal* blog devoted to "office buildings with character."³⁹ In 2006, Henrico County erected a local historical marker for the Markel Building with an unveiling dedication featuring the priest from Jamgochian's church, a Marine Corps salute and a speaker from the Virginia Department of Historic Resources.⁴⁰ Shortly thereafter, Jamgochian was candidly profiled in *Style Magazine* as the cover story.⁴¹ The Markel Building now stands as a unique testament to the Neoexpressionist style and mid-twentieth century architecture.

The Markel Building in Context: Neoexpressionist Architecture in the New Dominion

Due to its Neoexpressionist style, the Markel Building represents a rare resource within the context of Virginia architecture. Although Jamgochian has never explicitly identified himself nor the Markel Building as belonging to the Neoexpressionist movement, his design and own words closely follow trends associated with the style. Originating in the mid-1950s as part of the Modernist movement, Neoexpressionism rejected the tenets of the International Style, eschewing the rectilinear modular grid in favor of curved lines and dramatic forms executed in contemporary materials such as plastics and concrete. Neoexpressionism is sculptural instead of geometric and tends to be used mostly for public and religious buildings.⁴² The Markel Building employs several of the character defining elements of Neoexpressionism through its curved, dramatic form, irregularly textured exterior and use of modern materials. Jamgochian, who paints and sculpts, has stated that "the arts [are] hardly divisible and... should blend into one...; the Markel building is an example of this philosophy."⁴³ He has gone on to say that "the architect's role as a sculptor dates back to Michelangelo... sculpture is the most natural of arts to the architect" because it allows for three-dimensional composition without restrictions. In both disciplines, "the designer has a powerful ally in the texture of his materials... the architect can... integrate sculptural technique [into] his building design."⁴⁴ This sculptural approach to texture is plainly evident in the Markel Building; its crinkled cladding is arguably its most notable feature. In her master's thesis, Barbara Ross Luck describes the Markel Building as possessing "an

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overall sculptural effect... more characteristic of romantic naturalism” than the International Style.⁴⁵

Despite the futuristic aesthetic of his designs, Jamgochian also cited nature as his major inspiration, dovetailing with Neoexpressionism’s focus on organic forms. The architect “has found the forms of nature... an inspiration” in part because natural forms “have evolved through the struggle for survival.”⁴⁶ Following the logic that natural forms exist through this struggle for survival, form must follow function in manmade designs which seek to recreate the organic process. Jamgochian felt that a truly successful building is one which employs “structural elements and useful spaces in a design which reflects the building’s purpose” thereby creating the “closest likeness to nature.”⁴⁷ While the Markel Building’s aluminum cladding has the immediate aesthetic sensibility of a futuristic machine, its functional practicality which allows for inevitable expansions and contractions with the weather reflects the adaptability of organic entities which must change and develop to suit their environment.

The Markel Building is made even more distinctive due to how rare Neoexpressionism is in Virginia. It is “one of a rare few Expressive Modern buildings” ever built and one of even fewer to survive to the present day.⁴⁸ Only a handful of Neoexpressionist buildings have been identified in Virginia, with the Hampton Colosseum and Dulles International Airport being the prime examples. Two more examples in the Richmond area are the Buford Road Baptist Church and St. Joseph Catholic Church in Chesterfield County. The only other example of this style in Henrico County known at this time is a private residence that was designed specifically for its owners who are well-known patrons of culture and the arts.⁴⁹ There are no known examples of Neoexpressionism in the City of Richmond. Therefore, the Markel Building is easily the most prominent Neoexpressionist building in the Richmond metropolitan area.

Although Jamgochian was not the only mid-twentieth century Richmond-area architect to embrace an ahistorical Modernist idiom, his use of Neoexpressionism remains unusual as other notable regional Modern architects employed the International Style instead. Jamgochian’s previous employer, Frederick “Bud” Hyland, was well known for his elegant yet simple residences which eschewed historic reference and applied ornament in lieu of functional honesty. However, his buildings did not embrace the irregular, dramatic forms of Neoexpressionism, instead relying on the angles and grids typical of Wright’s Usonian buildings. Similarly, Richard Neutra’s Rice House (NRHP 1999; DHR #127-5810) and Gordon Bunshaft’s Reynolds Metals Company Headquarters (NRHP 2000; DHR #043-0242), although ground-breaking and unusual for Richmond, are executed in the International Style. The latter building is even clad in aluminum, but the building’s form and use of aluminum panels illustrates the reliance on the modular grid in the International Style.

The majority of mid-twentieth century buildings in the immediate surroundings of the Markel Building adhere to the rectilinear grid typical of the International Style. Several such office buildings, such as the Maryland and Executive Buildings, are located within a block of the Markel headquarters. Although ahistorical, they do not employ expressive forms, curves or textures but are modular rectangles. Local architecture critic and architectural history professor

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Edwin Slipek details the singularity of the Markel Building against its surroundings: “in the midst of [a] banal office and retail muddle... [this] building is a refreshing and honest delight to the eye in an area where imagination and wit seem to be in short supply.”⁵⁰ Newer construction in Willow Lawn, dating to the 1990s through 2010s, similarly lacks the expressiveness and idiosyncrasy of the Markel Building despite sometimes employing Post Modern motifs.

The Markel Building is even more unusual and distinctive when taken in the larger context of mid-twentieth century Virginia architecture outside the immediate Willow Lawn area due to the overwhelming prominence of the historically-inspired styles and conservative architectural tastes. While a variety of revival styles (particularly from the 19th century) are abundant in Virginia, the Colonial Revival style is easily the most ubiquitous, even today. In several published articles Jamgochian expressed his preference for ahistorical styles and frustration with Richmond’s reliance on traditional styles/revivals. “I cannot understand why people here cling so to everything old and reject everything new,” he bluntly stated in a 1967 interview.⁵¹ It is worth noting, however, that Jamgochian’s master’s thesis, *A Neighborhood for Richmond, Virginia*, included many drawings of a variety of historical styles found in the city, indicating that although he was uninspired by historic architecture, he was knowledgeable on the subject.⁵² A photo essay in the May 1975 issue of *New Dominion Lifestyle* titled “Richmond, Virginia—a Colonial City? Not Necessarily” echoes Jamgochian’s sentiment.⁵³ Although the photographs have no accompanying text, the title alone speaks to how historical styles dominate the city to the near exclusion of other styles. In the aforementioned poll of area architects’ opinions of the Markel Building, one stated that the building would not be notable if it were located in a more architecturally adventurous/progressive state like California, but “in Richmond, the building is a species unto itself.”

Conclusion

Whether considered eye-catching or an eyesore, the Markel Building undoubtedly remains one of the Richmond area’s most unusual and distinctive designs. Technologically the building made use of innovative materials executed in an economical but visually striking manner. It is the only extant building by controversial but forward-thinking local architect Haigh Jamgochian and a rare example of Neoexpressionist architecture in Virginia.

The Markel Building
Name of Property

Henrico County, VA
County and State

9. Major Bibliographical References

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The Markel Building
Name of Property

Henrico County, VA
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Name of Property

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Wilbur, The Commonwealth: The Magazine of Virginia. February 1967, pg. 44.; "Disorder,
Ugliness Held Major Fault of Cities," Richmond Times Dispatch, June 26, 1966.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of repository: Library of Virginia and Virginia Department of Historic
Resources (both in Richmond, VA)

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): DHR No. 043-0715

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property .73

Use either the UTM system or latitude/longitude coordinates

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

Datum if other than WGS84: _____
(enter coordinates to 6 decimal places)

The Markel Building
Name of Property

Henrico County, VA
County and State

- | | |
|-----------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 37.58421 | Longitude: -77.49991 |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

Or

UTM References

Datum (indicated on USGS map):

NAD 1927 or NAD 1983

- | | | |
|----------|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 2. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 3. Zone: | Easting: | Northing: |
| 4. Zone: | Easting : | Northing: |

Verbal Boundary Description (Describe the boundaries of the property.)

The historic boundary is drawn to conform to the property's parcel boundary, which is recorded by Henrico County as Parcel ID 772-737-8894. The true and correct historic boundaries are shown on the attached Sketch Map.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundaries are drawn to conform to the .73-acre tax parcel which has been associated with the building since it was constructed. All historic resources associated with the property are entirely contained within these boundaries.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title: Melina Bezirdjian
organization: Virginia Department of Historic Resources
street & number: 2801 Kensington Avenue
city or town: Richmond state: VA zip code: 23220
e-mail: melina.bezirdjian@dhr.virginia.gov
telephone: (804) 367-2323
date: September 2, 2016

The Markel Building
Name of Property

Henrico County, VA
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Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

- **Maps:** A **USGS map** or equivalent (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.
- **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO, TPO, or FPO for any additional items.)

Photographs

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels (minimum), 3000x2000 preferred, at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map. Each photograph must be numbered and that number must correspond to the photograph number on the photo log. For simplicity, the name of the photographer, photo date, etc. may be listed once on the photograph log and doesn't need to be labeled on every photograph.

Photo Log

Name of Property: Markel Building

City or Vicinity: Henrico County

County: Henrico

State: VA

Photographer: Melina Bezirdjian

Date Photographed: August, 2016

Description of Photograph(s) and number, include description of view indicating direction of camera:

1 of 13: Primary elevation, camera facing northeast

2 of 13: Primary elevation, camera facing northwest

3 of 13: Rear elevation with emergency stairwell, camera facing southwest

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- 4 of 13: Parking lot entrance, camera facing north
- 5 of 13: Detail view of entry vestibule, camera facing northeast
- 6 of 13: Detail of interior hallway inside the entry vestibule, camera facing east
- 7 of 13: Interior view of boiler room, camera facing northeast.
- 8 of 13. Interior view of curved hallway on upper floor.
- 9 of 13. Interior view of corridor at emergency stairwell.
- 10 of 13. Representative view of semi-open workspaces on upper floors.
- 11 of 13. Representative view of conference room on perimeter wall and of band of windows.
- 12 of 13. Representative view of conference room on perimeter wall and of band of windows.
- 13 of 13. View of the utilities and roof with the camera facing northwest.

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and to amend existing listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.460 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 100 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.

The Markel Building
Name of Property

Henrico County, VA
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ENDNOTES

- ¹ “About,” Willow Lawn Official Website, <http://willowlawn.com/about/>.
- ² *Architectural Forum*. January/February 1966.
- ³ Luck, Barbara Ross. “Architecture of Haigh Jamgochian.” Master’s Thesis for Virginia Commonwealth University, June 1970.
- ⁴ Interview with Haigh Jamgochian by Melina Bezirdjian.
- ⁵ *R.S. Reynolds Memorial Award Identification Form*, 1968.
- ⁶ Henrico County Historical Marker text.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*
- ⁸ “A Bang Up Job” in *Progressive Architecture*, March 1966, p. 54.
- ⁹ “Markel Service Building” in *Virginia Record*, Nov. 1966, p. 45.
- ¹⁰ *R.S. Reynolds Memorial Award Identification Form*, 1968.
- ¹¹ Interview with Haigh Jamgochian by Melina Bezirdjian.
- ¹² “Biographical Information,” *A Guide to the Haigh Jamgochian Papers*.
- ¹³ Chesterfield County Deed Book 381, page 539. Chesterfield County Courthouse, Chesterfield, VA.
- ¹⁴ *Richmond Times Dispatch*, March 8, 1983.
- ¹⁵ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁶ Interview with Haigh Jamgochian by Melina Bezirdjian.
- ¹⁷ “Markel Service Building,” *Virginia Record*, November 1966, pg. 45.
- ¹⁸ Harry Kollatz, Jr. “Markel Building: Modern Beauty or Retro Beast?”, *Richmond Magazine*, April 1995, pg. 22.
- ¹⁹ Interview with Haigh Jamgochian.
- ²⁰ Wagner, Marc. Henrico Historical Marker Dedication Speech, 2006. and Interview with Haigh Jamgochian by Melina Bezirdjian.
- ²¹ Henrico County Historical Marker and Interview with Haigh Jamgochian by Melina Bezirdjian.
- ²² Interview with Haigh Jamgochian by Melina Bezirdjian.
- ²³ “Markel Service Building” *Virginia Record*, November 1966. pg. 45.
- ²⁴ *R.S. Reynolds Memorial Award Identification Form*, 1968.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*; Wilbur, *The Commonwealth: The Magazine of Virginia*. February 1967, pg. 44.; “Disorder, Ugliness Held Major Fault of Cities,” *Richmond Times Dispatch*, June 26, 1966.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷ *Commonwealth: Magazine of Virginia*, February 1967.
- ²⁸ “A Bang Up Job” *Progressive Architecture*, March 1966. pg. 54.
- ²⁹ *Architectural Record*, May 1966.
- ³⁰ *BOCA News*, March 1967.
- ³¹ *Popular Science Monthly*, June 1967.
- ³² *Building: Australia’s National Building Journal*, September 1967.
- ³³ *Batir*, December 1965 and April 1968.
- ³⁴ *Building with Steel: Journal of the British Constructional Steel Work Association*. November 1965 and February 1967.
- ³⁵ Richard Guy Wilson & Contributors. *Buildings of Virginia: Tidewater and Piedmont*. Oxford University Press. Chicago: 2002.
- ³⁶ Bob Gordon. “List of World’s 10 Ugliest Buildings Released.” *Digital Journal*. November 21, 2009. Accessed at <http://www.digitaljournal.com/article/282484> on February 22, 2016.
- ³⁷ “Best and Worst.” *Richmond*. August 1999.
- ³⁸ Harry Kollatz, Jr.. “Markel Building: Modern Beauty or Retro Beast?” *Richmond* April 1995. Pg. 22

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- ³⁹ Rachel James, Editor. "The Markel Building." *Atlas Obscura*. Accessed at <http://www.atlasobscura.com/places/the-markel-building> on February 22, 2016.; Don O'Keefe. "Markel Building." *Architecture Richmond*, posted December 7, 2013. Accessed at <http://architecturerichmond.com/inventory/markel-building/> on 02/11/2016. ; and "Office Buildings with Character." *Wall Street Journal Developments Blog*. May 8, 2012. Accessed at <http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424052702303916904577376190144026020> on February 22, 2016.
- ⁴⁰ "Markel Building". *Henrico County, County Markers*. Visited in person as well as digitally at <http://henrico.us/about-henrico/history/landmarks/county-markers/markel-building/> on February 22, 2016.
- ⁴¹ Brandon Walters. "The Visionary." *Style Weekly*, April 5, 2006. Accessed at <http://www.styleweekly.com/richmond/the-visionary/Content?oid=1378451> on 08/12/2016.
- ⁴² Virginia Department of Historic Resources, *New Dominion Virginia, Architectural Style Guide*. Published in April 2014. Accessed on August 17, 2016, at: <http://www.dhr.virginia.gov/newdominion/newdomstylgdeapril2014version.pdf> .
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- ⁴⁷ *Ibid*.
- ⁴⁸ Wagner, Marc. *Markel Building Henrico County Historical Marker Dedication Speech*. June 14, 2006.
- ⁴⁹ Fieldwork by Melina Bezirdjian in support of the *New Dominion Virginia, Architectural Style Guide*.
- ⁵⁰ Slipek, Edwin. "The 10 Greatest (Survivable) Buildings in Richmond (We Think)" *Richmond Guidebook*, 1981.
- ⁵¹ Lanhan, Rosemary. "The Moon is His House," *Home Furnishing Daily*. November 29, 1967.
- ⁵² Jamgochian, Haigh. *A Neighborhood for Richmond, Virginia*. Master's Thesis presented to Virginia Polytechnic Institute. August, 1951.
- ⁵³ "Richmond, Virginia—a Colonial City? Not Necessarily" *New Dominion Lifestyle*. May 1975.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

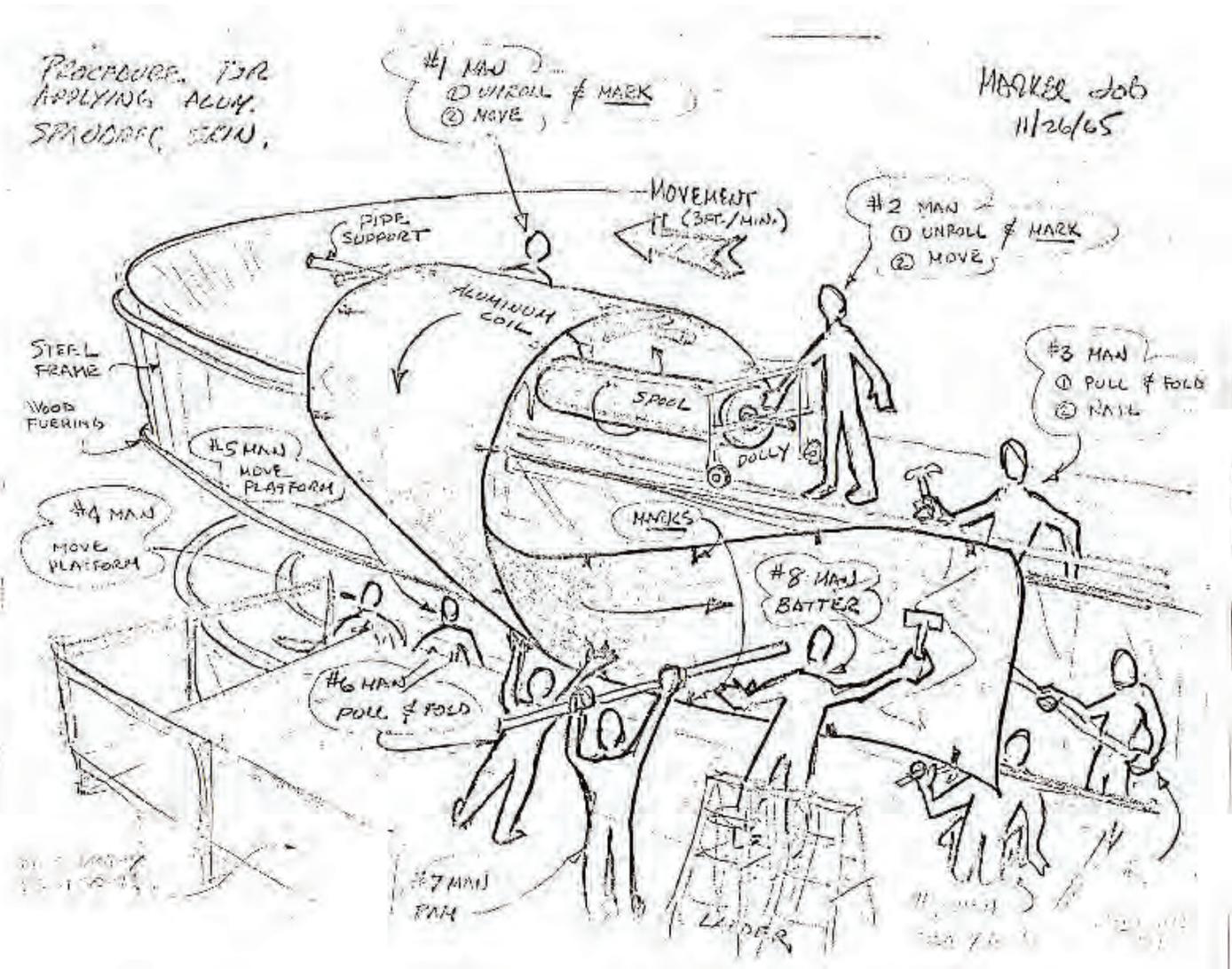
The Markel Building
Name of Property
Henrico County, VA
County and State
N/A
Name of multiple listing (if applicable)

Section number Additional Documentation Page 1

Introduction

This drawing by architect Haigh Jamgochian, dated to November 26, 1965, was used to illustrate the application method for the roll of aluminum cladding.

Section 8





LOCATION MAP

The Markel Building

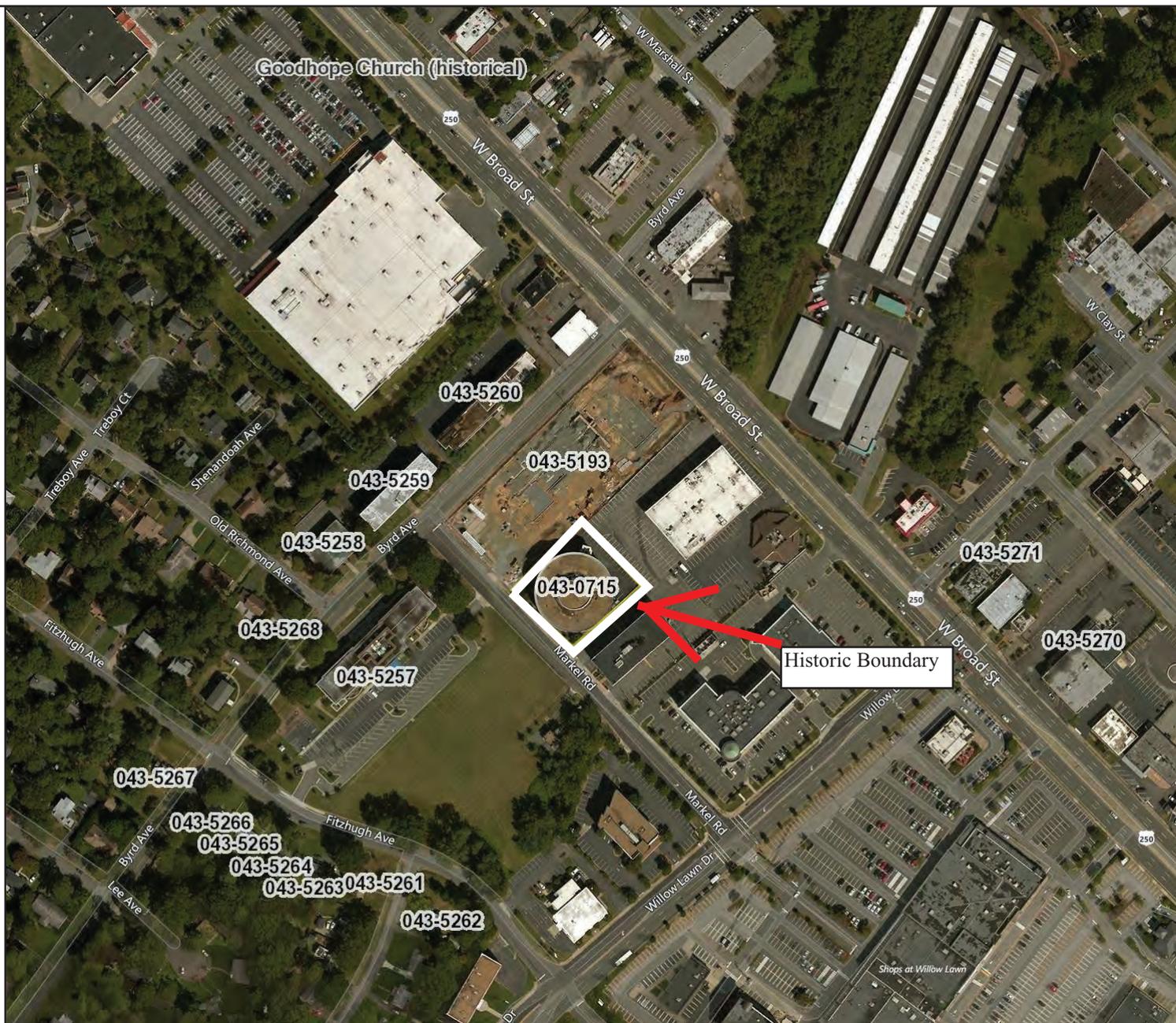
Henrico County, VA

DHR No. 043-0715

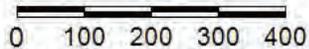
Latitude/Longitude Coordinates:

Latitude: 37.58421

Longitude: -77.49991



Feet



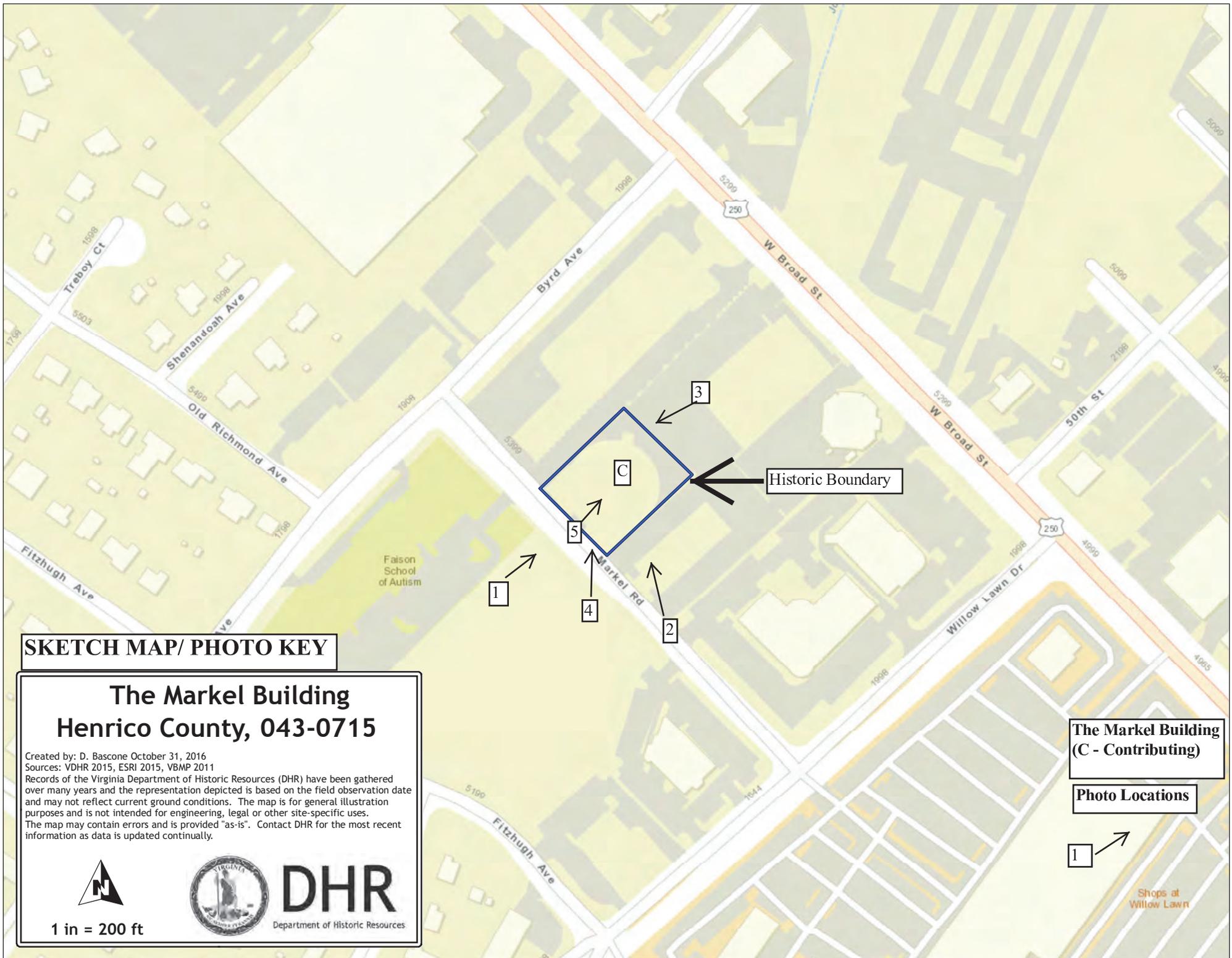
1:4,514 / 1"=376 Feet

Title: The Markel Building (Lon. -77.49991 Lat. 37.58421)

Date: 8/29/2016

DISCLAIMER: Records of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) have been gathered over many years from a variety of sources and the representation depicted is a cumulative view of field observations over time and may not reflect current ground conditions. The map is for general information purposes and is not intended for engineering, legal or other site-specific uses. Map may contain errors and is provided "as-is". More information is available in the DHR Archives located at DHR's Richmond office.

Notice if AE sites: Locations of archaeological sites may be sensitive the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA), and the Archaeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) and Code of Virginia §2.2-3705.7 (10). Release of precise locations may threaten archaeological sites and historic resources.



SKETCH MAP/ PHOTO KEY

**The Markel Building
Henrico County, 043-0715**

Created by: D. Bascone October 31, 2016
 Sources: VDHR 2015, ESRI 2015, VBMP 2011
 Records of the Virginia Department of Historic Resources (DHR) have been gathered over many years and the representation depicted is based on the field observation data and may not reflect current ground conditions. The map is for general illustration purposes and is not intended for engineering, legal or other site-specific uses. The map may contain errors and is provided "as-is". Contact DHR for the most recent information as data is updated continually.



1 in = 200 ft

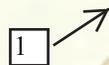


DHR

Department of Historic Resources

**The Markel Building
(C - Contributing)**

Photo Locations



Shops at Willow Lawn