

STERLING BANCORP
Form 424B2
April 13, 2009

Filed Pursuant to Rule 424(b)(2)

Registration Statement No. 333-158115

PROSPECTUS

STERLING BANCORP

Common Shares

Preferred Shares

Warrants

Sterling Bancorp (“Sterling Bancorp” or the “Company”) may offer, issue and sell from time to time, together or separately, (i) our Common Shares, (ii) our preferred shares, which we may issue in one or more series, and (iii) warrants to purchase our Common Shares or preferred shares, up to a maximum aggregate offering price of \$100,000,000.

We will provide the specific terms of these securities in supplements to this prospectus. You should read this prospectus and the accompanying prospectus supplement carefully before you make your investment decision. Our Common Shares are listed on the New York Stock Exchange and trade on the exchange under the symbol “STL.” Each prospectus supplement will indicate if the securities offered thereby will be listed on any securities exchange.

This prospectus may not be used to sell securities unless accompanied by a prospectus supplement or a free writing prospectus.

We may offer securities through underwriting syndicates managed or co-managed by one or more underwriters, or directly to purchasers. The prospectus supplement for each offering of securities will describe in detail the plan of distribution for that offering. For general information about the distribution of securities offered, please see “Plan of Distribution” in this prospectus.

Investing in our securities involves risks. You should carefully consider the risk factors referred to on page 2 of this prospectus and set forth in the documents incorporated by reference herein before making any decision to invest in our securities.

None of the Securities and Exchange Commission (the “SEC”), the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (the “FDIC”), the Board of Governors of the Federal Reserve System (the “Federal Reserve Board”) or any state securities commission or any other federal or state bank regulatory agency has approved or disapproved of these securities or passed upon the adequacy or accuracy of this prospectus. Any representation to the contrary is a criminal offense.

The securities offered by this prospectus are not savings accounts, deposits or other obligations of any bank and are not insured or guaranteed by the FDIC, the Bank Insurance Fund or any other government agency.

The date of this prospectus is April 13, 2009.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PROSPECTUS

	<u>Page</u>
<u>About this Prospectus</u>	1
<u>About Sterling Bancorp</u>	1
<u>Forward-Looking Statements</u>	2
<u>Risk Factors</u>	2
<u>Where You Can Find More Information</u>	2
<u>Incorporation By Reference</u>	2-3
<u>Use of Proceeds</u>	3
<u>Ratios of Earnings to Fixed Charges and Preferred Share Dividends</u>	3
<u>Description of Common Shares</u>	4
<u>Description of Preferred Shares</u>	5
<u>Description of Warrants</u>	6-7
<u>Plan of Distribution</u>	7-10
<u>Validity of Securities</u>	10
<u>Experts</u>	10

ABOUT THIS PROSPECTUS

This prospectus is a part of a registration statement that we filed with the SEC utilizing a “shelf” registration process. Under this shelf registration process, we may, from time to time, sell any combination of the securities described in this prospectus in one or more offerings.

The registration statement containing this prospectus, including the exhibits to the registration statement, provides additional information about us and the securities offered under this prospectus. The registration statement, including the exhibits and the documents incorporated herein by reference, can be read on the SEC website or at the SEC offices mentioned under the heading “Where You Can Find More Information.”

We may provide a prospectus supplement containing specific information about the terms of a particular offering by us. The prospectus supplement may add, update or change information in this prospectus. If the information in the prospectus is inconsistent with a prospectus supplement, you should rely on the information in that prospectus supplement. You should read both this prospectus and, if applicable, any prospectus supplement. See “Where You Can Find More Information” for more information.

We have not authorized any dealer, salesman or other person to give any information or to make any representation other than those contained or incorporated by reference in this prospectus or any prospectus supplement. You must not rely upon any information or representation not contained or incorporated by reference in this prospectus or any prospectus supplement. This prospectus and any prospectus supplement do not constitute an offer to sell or the solicitation of an offer to buy any securities other than the registered securities to which they relate, nor do this prospectus and any prospectus supplement constitute an offer to sell or the solicitation of an offer to buy securities in any jurisdiction to any person to whom it is unlawful to make such offer or solicitation in such jurisdiction. You should not assume that the information contained in this prospectus or any prospectus supplement is accurate on any date subsequent to the date set forth on the front of such document or that any information we have incorporated by reference is correct on any date subsequent to the date of the document incorporated by reference, even though this prospectus and any prospectus supplement is delivered or securities are sold on a later date.

Unless otherwise stated or the context otherwise requires, all references to “Sterling Bancorp,” “the Company,” “we,” “our,” “us” and similar terms refer to Sterling Bancorp and its consolidated subsidiaries, except that such terms refer to only Sterling Bancorp and not its consolidated subsidiaries in the sections entitled “Description of Common Shares,” “Description of Preferred Shares” and “Description of Warrants.”

Unless otherwise indicated, currency amounts in this prospectus and in any applicable prospectus supplement are stated in U.S. dollars.

ABOUT STERLING BANCORP

Sterling Bancorp is a bank holding company and a financial holding company as defined by the Bank Holding Company Act of 1956, which was organized in 1966. Sterling Bancorp and its subsidiaries derive substantially all of their revenue and income from providing banking and related financial services and products to customers primarily in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut (the “New York metropolitan area”). Sterling Bancorp has operations in the New York metropolitan area and conducts business throughout the United States.

Sterling Bancorp owns, directly or indirectly, all of the outstanding shares of Sterling National Bank (the “bank”), its principal subsidiary, and all of the outstanding common shares of Sterling Banking Corporation and Sterling Bancorp Trust I. Sterling National Mortgage Company, Inc., Sterling Factors Corporation, Sterling Trade Services, Inc., Sterling Resource Funding Corp. and Sterling Real Estate Holding Company, Inc. are wholly-owned subsidiaries of the bank. Sterling Trade Services, Inc. owns all of the outstanding common shares of Sterling National Asia Limited, Hong Kong.

Our principal executive offices are located at 650 Fifth Avenue, New York, New York 10019-6108, and our telephone number is 212-757-3300.

FORWARD-LOOKING STATEMENTS

Certain statements contained or incorporated by reference in this prospectus, including but not limited to, statements concerning future results of operations or financial position, borrowing capacity and future liquidity, future investment results, future credit exposure, future loan losses and plans and objectives for future operations, and other statements regarding matters that are not historical facts, are “forward-looking statements” as defined in the Securities Exchange Act of 1934. These statements are not historical facts but instead are subject to numerous assumptions, risks and uncertainties, and represent only our belief regarding future events, many of which, by their nature, are inherently uncertain and outside our control. Any forward-looking statements we may make speak only as of the date on which such statements are made. Our actual results and financial position may differ materially from the anticipated results and financial condition indicated in or implied by these forward-looking statements.

Factors that could cause our actual results to differ materially from those in the forward-looking statements include, but are not limited to, the following: inflation, interest rates, market and monetary fluctuations; geopolitical developments including acts of war and terrorism and their impact on economic conditions; the effects of, and changes in, trade, monetary and fiscal policies and laws, including interest rate policies of the Federal Reserve Board; changes, particularly declines, in general economic conditions and in the local economies in which the Company operates; the financial condition of the Company’s borrowers; competitive pressures on loan and deposit pricing and demand; changes in technology and their impact on the marketing of new products and services and the acceptance of these products and services by new and existing customers; the willingness of customers to substitute competitors’ products and services for the Company’s products and services; the impact of changes in financial services laws and regulations (including laws concerning taxes, banking, securities and insurance); changes in accounting principles, policies and guidelines; the risks and uncertainties described in “Risk Factors” below; other risks and uncertainties described from time to time in press releases and other public filings; and the Company’s performance in managing the risks involved in any of the foregoing. The foregoing list of important factors is not exclusive, and we will not update any forward-looking statement, whether written or oral, that may be made from time to time. You should not put undue reliance on any forward-looking statements.

RISK FACTORS

An investment in our securities involves significant risks. You should carefully consider the risks and uncertainties and the risk factors set forth in the documents and reports filed with the SEC that are incorporated by reference into this prospectus, as well as any risks described in any applicable prospectus supplement, before you make an investment decision regarding the securities. Additional risks and uncertainties not presently known to us or that we currently deem immaterial may also affect our business operations.

WHERE YOU CAN FIND MORE INFORMATION

We are subject to the information requirements of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934. Accordingly, we file annual, quarterly and current reports, proxy statements and other information with the SEC and filed a registration statement on Form S-3 under the Securities Act of 1933 (the “Securities Act”) relating to the securities offered by this prospectus. This prospectus, which forms part of the registration statement, does not contain all of the information included in the registration statement. For further information, you should refer to the registration statement and its exhibits.

You may read and copy the registration statement and any document we file with the SEC at the SEC’s Public Reference Room at 100 F Street, N.E., Washington, D.C. 20549. Please call the SEC at 1-800-SEC-0330 for further information on the operation of the Public Reference Room. You can also review our filings by accessing the website maintained by the SEC at <http://www.sec.gov>. The site contains reports, proxy and information statements and other information regarding issuers that file electronically with the SEC. In addition, to the foregoing, we maintain a website at <http://www.sterlingbancorp.com>. Our website content is made available for informational purposes only. It should neither be relied upon for investment purposes nor is it incorporated by reference into this prospectus. We make available on our internet website copies of our Annual Reports on Form 10-K, Quarterly Reports on Form 10-Q, Current Reports on Form 8-K and any amendments to such document as soon as practicable after we electronically file such material with or furnish such documents to the SEC.

INCORPORATION BY REFERENCE

The SEC allows us to “incorporate by reference” information that we file with the SEC into this prospectus, which means we can disclose important information to you by referring you to another document. The information incorporated by reference is considered to be part of this prospectus from the date on which we file that document. Any reports filed by us with the SEC after the date of this prospectus and before the termination of the offering of the securities by means of this prospectus will automatically update and, where applicable, supersede information contained in this prospectus or incorporated by reference into this prospectus. We incorporate by reference the following documents:

Edgar Filing: STERLING BANCORP - Form 424B2

- our Annual Report on Form 10-K for the year ended December 31, 2008;
- our Current Reports on Form 8-K filed on January 5, 2009, January 28, 2009 (other than information “furnished” and not “filed”), February 17, 2009, March 27, 2009 and April 8, 2009 (other than information “furnished” and not “filed”);
- our definitive Proxy Statement on Schedule 14A filed on April 8, 2009;
- the description of our Common Shares contained in our Registration Statement filed with the SEC pursuant to Section 12 of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934, including any amendment or report filed for the purpose of updating such description; and
- any documents filed with the SEC pursuant to Section 13(a), 13(c), 14 or 15(d) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 after the date of this prospectus and before the termination of the offering of the securities offered hereby.

You may request a copy of these filings, at no cost, by writing or calling us at the following address:

Sterling Bancorp

650 Fifth Avenue

New York, New York 10019-6108

Attn: Investor Relations

(212) 757-3300

USE OF PROCEEDS

Unless otherwise set forth in a prospectus supplement, we intend to use the net proceeds from the sale of the securities for general corporate purposes. We may temporarily invest funds that we do not immediately need for these purposes in short-term marketable securities or use them to make payments on our borrowings. We may set forth additional information on the use of proceeds from the sale of securities offered by this prospectus in the applicable prospectus supplement.

RATIOS OF EARNINGS TO FIXED CHARGES AND PREFERRED SHARE DIVIDENDS

The following table sets forth our consolidated ratios of earnings to combined fixed charges and preferred share dividends for the periods shown. For purposes of computing the ratios, earnings represent the sum of income from continuing operations before taxes plus fixed charges and preferred share dividend requirements. Fixed charges represent total interest expense, including and excluding interest on deposits. Preferred share dividend requirements represent the amount of pre-tax income required to pay the dividends on preferred shares. Before we issued the Fixed Rate Cumulative Perpetual Preferred Shares, Series A, par value \$5.00 per share (the “Series A Preferred Shares”), on December 23, 2008, we had had no preferred shares outstanding since February 2004 and had not paid any dividends on preferred shares since 2003. Therefore, the ratio of earnings to combined fixed charges and preferred share dividends is (i) identical to the ratio of earnings to fixed charges for the periods from 2004 to 2007 set forth below, and (ii) substantially the same as the ratio of earnings to fixed charges for the year ended December 31, 2008.

	Year Ended December 31,				
	2008	2007	2006	2005	2004
Ratio of earnings to fixed charges and preferred share dividends: Including interest on deposits	1.72x	1.49x	1.61x	2.32x	2.74x

Edgar Filing: STERLING BANCORP - Form 424B2

Excluding interest on
deposits

2.85x

3.34x

2.82x

4.82x

5.13x

3

DESCRIPTION OF COMMON SHARES

The following is a description of our Common Shares and certain provisions of our Certificate of Incorporation and Bylaws and certain provisions of applicable law. The following is only a summary and is qualified by applicable law and by the provisions of our Certificate of Incorporation and Bylaws, copies of which have been filed with the SEC and are also available upon request from us.

General

Under our Certificate of Incorporation, as amended, we have authority to issue up to 50,000,000 Common Shares, par value \$1.00 per share. As of March 6, 2009, 18,106,491 of our Common Shares were issued and outstanding.

Our Common Shares are listed on the New York Stock Exchange. Outstanding Common Shares are validly issued, fully paid and non-assessable.

Voting Rights

Holders of Common Shares are entitled to one vote per share on all matters submitted to a vote of shareholders. Holders of Common Shares do not have cumulative voting rights.

Dividend Rights

Holders of our Common Shares are entitled to dividends when, as, and if declared by our Board of Directors out of funds legally available for the payment of dividends. Holders of Series A Preferred Shares have (and other series of preferred shares may in the future have) a priority over holders of Common Shares with respect to dividends.

Until the earlier of December 23, 2011 and the date on which The United States Department of Treasury no longer holds any Series A Preferred Shares, we may not declare or pay any dividend or make any distribution on the Common Shares, other than regular quarterly cash dividends of not more than \$0.19 per share, as adjusted for any stock split, stock dividend, reverse stock split, reclassification or similar transaction; dividends payable solely in Common Shares; and dividends or distributions of rights or junior shares in connection with a shareholders' rights plan.

Liquidation and Dissolution

In the event of the liquidation, dissolution and winding-up of the Company, the holders of our Common Shares are entitled to receive ratably all of the assets of the Company available for distribution after satisfaction of all liabilities of the Company, subject to the rights of the holders of any of the Company's preferred shares that may be issued from time to time.

Other Rights

Holders of our Common Shares have no preferential or preemptive rights with respect to any securities of Sterling Bancorp and there are no conversion rights or redemption or sinking fund provisions applicable to our Common Shares.

Restrictions on Ownership

The Bank Holding Company Act requires any "bank holding company," as defined in the Bank Holding Company Act, to obtain the approval of the Federal Reserve Board prior to the acquisition of 5% or more of our Common Shares. Any person, other than a bank holding company, is required to obtain prior approval of the Federal Reserve Board to acquire 10% or more of our Common Shares under the Change in Bank Control Act. Any holder of 25% or more of our Common Shares, or a holder of 5% or more if such holder otherwise exercises a "controlling influence" over us, is subject to regulation as a bank holding company under the Bank Holding Company Act.

Certain provisions included in our Certificate of Incorporation, our Bylaws, as well as certain provisions of the New York Business Corporation Law and federal law, may discourage, delay or prevent potential acquisitions of control of us, particularly when attempted in a transaction that is not negotiated directly with, and approved by, our board of directors, despite possible benefits to our shareholders. These provisions are more fully set forth in the documents and reports filed with the SEC pursuant to Sections 13(a), 13(c), 14 or 15(d) of the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 that are incorporated by reference into this prospectus.

Transfer Agent

Edgar Filing: STERLING BANCORP - Form 424B2

The transfer agent and registrar for our Common Shares is BNY Mellon Shareowner Services, 480 Washington Boulevard, Jersey City, New Jersey 07310-1900.

DESCRIPTION OF PREFERRED SHARES

Our Board of Directors has the authority, without further action by the shareholders, to issue preferred shares in one or more series and to fix the number of shares, dividend rights, conversion rights, voting rights, redemption rights, liquidation preferences, sinking funds, and any other rights, preferences, privileges and restrictions applicable to each such series of preferred shares.

Under our Certificate of Incorporation, as amended, we have the authority to issue up to 644,389 preferred shares, par value \$5.00 per share. Of such number of preferred shares, 42,000 Series A Preferred Shares have been issued and are outstanding as of the date of this prospectus.

Prior to the issuance of a new series of preferred shares, we will amend our Certificate of Incorporation, designating the number of shares of that series and the terms of that series. Each series of preferred shares that we issue will constitute a separate class of stock. The issuance of any preferred shares could adversely affect the rights of the holders of Common Shares and, therefore, reduce the value of the Common Shares. The ability of our Board of Directors to issue preferred shares could discourage, delay or prevent a takeover or other corporate action.

The terms of any particular series of preferred shares will be described in the prospectus supplement relating to that particular series of preferred shares, including, where applicable:

- the designation, stated value and liquidation preference of such preferred shares and the number of shares offered;
- the offering price;
- the dividend rate or rates (or method of calculation), the date or dates from which dividends shall accrue, and whether such dividends shall be cumulative or noncumulative and, if cumulative, the dates from which dividends shall commence to cumulate;
- any redemption or sinking fund provisions;
- the amount that shares of such series shall be entitled to receive in the event of our liquidation, dissolution or winding-up;
- the terms and conditions, if any, on which shares of such series shall be convertible or exchangeable for shares of our stock of any other class or classes, or other series of the same class;
- the voting rights, if any, of shares of such series;
- the status as to reissuance or sale of shares of such series redeemed, purchased or otherwise reacquired, or surrendered to us on conversion or exchange;
-

Edgar Filing: STERLING BANCORP - Form 424B2

the conditions and restrictions, if any, on the payment of dividends or on the making of other distributions on, or the purchase, redemption or other acquisition by us or any subsidiary, of the Common Shares or of any other class of our shares ranking junior to the shares of such series as to dividends or upon liquidation;

- the conditions and restrictions, if any, on the creation of indebtedness of us or of any subsidiary, or on the issuance of any additional stock ranking on a parity with or prior to the shares of such series as to dividends or upon liquidation; and
- any additional dividend, liquidation, redemption, sinking or retirement fund and other rights, preferences, privileges, limitations and restrictions of such preferred shares.

The description of the terms of a particular series of preferred shares in the applicable prospectus supplement will not be complete. You should refer to the applicable amendment to the Certificate of Incorporation for complete information regarding a series of preferred shares.

The preferred shares will, when issued, be fully paid and nonassessable. Unless otherwise specified in the applicable prospectus supplement, each series of preferred shares will, upon issuance, rank senior to the Common Shares and on a parity in all respects with each other outstanding series of preferred shares. The rights of the holders of our preferred shares will be subordinate to that of our general creditors.

DESCRIPTION OF WARRANTS

General

We may issue, together with other securities or separately, warrants to purchase our Common Shares or preferred shares. We may issue the warrants under warrant agreements to be entered into between us and a bank or trust company, as warrant agent, all as set forth in the applicable prospectus supplement. The warrant agent would act solely as our agent in connection with the warrants of the series being offered and would not assume any obligation or relationship of agency or trust for or with any holders or beneficial owners of warrants.

This section, along with the description in the applicable prospectus supplement, is a summary of certain provisions of the forms of warrant agreements and warrant certificates and is not complete. We urge you to read any applicable warrant agreements and warrant certificates, because those documents, and not these descriptions, define your rights as a holder of warrants. We will file copies of the forms of the warrant agreements and warrant certificates as exhibits to the Registration Statement of which this prospectus is a part or an amendment thereto or as exhibits to a Current Report on Form 8-K.

The applicable prospectus supplement will describe the following terms, where applicable, of warrants in respect of which this prospectus is being delivered:

- the title of the warrants;
- the designation, amount and terms of the securities for which the warrants are exercisable and the procedures and conditions relating to the exercise of such warrants;
- the designation and terms of the other securities, if any, with which the warrants are to be issued and the number of warrants issued with each such security;
- the price or prices at which the warrants will be issued;
- the aggregate number of warrants;
- any provisions for adjustment of the number or amount of securities receivable upon exercise of the warrants or the exercise price of the warrants;
- the price or prices at which the securities purchasable upon exercise of the warrants may be purchased;
- if applicable, the date on and after which the warrants and the securities purchasable upon exercise of the warrants will be separately transferable;

Edgar Filing: STERLING BANCORP - Form 424B2

- if applicable, a discussion of the material U.S. federal income tax considerations applicable to the warrants;
- any other terms of the warrants, including terms, procedures and limitations relating to the exchange and exercise of the warrants;
- the date on which the right to exercise the warrants shall commence and the date on which the right shall expire;
- the maximum or minimum number of warrants which may be exercised at any time;
- whether the warrants are to be issued in registered or bearer form;
- whether the warrants are extendible and the period or periods of such extendibility; and
- information with respect to book-entry procedures, if any.

Before exercising their warrants, holders of warrants will not have any of the rights of holders of the securities purchasable upon such exercise, including the right to receive dividends, if any, or payments upon our liquidation, dissolution or winding-up or to exercise voting rights, if any.

Exercise of Warrants

Each warrant will entitle the holder thereof to purchase for cash the amount of shares of Common Shares or preferred shares at the exercise price as will in each case be set forth in, or be determinable as set forth in, the applicable prospectus supplement. Warrants may be exercised at any time up to the close of business on the expiration date set forth in the applicable prospectus supplement. After the close of business on the expiration date, unexercised warrants will become void. Warrants may be exercised as set forth in the applicable prospectus supplement relating to the warrants offered thereby. Upon receipt of payment and the warrant certificate properly completed and duly executed at the corporate trust office of the warrant agent or any other office indicated in the applicable prospectus supplement, we will, as soon as practicable, forward the purchased securities. If less than all of the warrants represented by the warrant certificate are exercised, a new warrant certificate will be issued for the remaining warrants.

Enforceability of Rights of Holders of Warrants

Each warrant agent will act solely as our agent under the applicable warrant agreement and will not assume any obligation or relationship of agency or trust with any holder of any warrant. A single bank or trust company may act as warrant agent for more than one issue of warrants. A warrant agent will have no duty or responsibility in case of any default by us under the applicable warrant agreement or warrant, including any duty or responsibility to initiate any proceedings at law or otherwise, or to make any demand upon us. Any holder of a warrant may, without the consent of the related warrant agent or the holder of any other warrant, enforce by appropriate legal action its right to exercise, and receive the securities purchasable upon exercise of, that holder's warrant(s).

PLAN OF DISTRIBUTION

Initial Offering and Sale of Securities

We may sell the securities being offered hereby, from time to time, by one or more of the following methods:

- to or through underwriting syndicates represented by managing underwriters;
- through one or more underwriters without a syndicate for them to offer and sell to the public;
- through dealers or agents; and
- to investors directly in negotiated sales or in competitively bid transactions.

In addition, we may issue the securities as a dividend or distribution or in a subscription rights offering to our existing security holders. In some cases, we or dealers acting with us or on our behalf may also purchase securities and reoffer them to the public by one or more of the methods described above. This prospectus may be used in connection with any offering of our securities through any of these methods or other methods described in the applicable prospectus supplement.

Any underwriter, agent or dealer involved in the offer and sale of any series of the securities will be named in the prospectus supplement.

Edgar Filing: STERLING BANCORP - Form 424B2

We may distribute the securities from time to time in one or more transactions:

- at fixed prices, which may be changed;
- at market prices prevailing at the time of the sale;
- at varying prices determined at the time of sale; or
- at negotiated prices.

Each prospectus supplement will set forth the manner and terms of an offering of securities including:

- whether that offering is being made to underwriters or through agents or directly;
- the rules and procedures for any auction or bidding process, if used;
- the securities' purchase price or initial public offering price; and
- the proceeds we anticipate from the sale of the securities.

Edgar Filing: STERLING BANCORP - Form 424B2

In addition, we may enter into derivative or hedging transactions with third parties, or sell securities not covered by this prospectus to third parties in privately negotiated transactions. In connection with such a transaction, the third parties may sell securities covered by and pursuant to this prospectus and an applicable prospectus supplement or pricing supplement, as the case may be. If so, the third party may use securities borrowed from us or others to settle such sales and may use securities received from us to close out any related short positions. We may also loan or pledge securities covered by this prospectus and an applicable prospectus supplement to third parties, who may sell the loaned securities or, in an event of default in the case of a pledge, sell the pledged securities pursuant to this prospectus and the applicable prospectus supplement or pricing supplement, as the case may be.

Sales Through Underwriters

If we use underwriters in the sale of some or all of the securities covered by this prospectus, the underwriters will acquire the securities for their own account. The underwriters may resell the securities, either directly to the public or to securities dealers, at various times in one or more transactions, including negotiated transactions, at a fixed public offering price or at varying prices determined at the time of sale. The obligations of the underwriters to purchase the securities will be subject to certain conditions. Unless indicated otherwise in a prospectus supplement, the underwriters will be obligated to purchase all the securities of the series offered if any of the securities are purchased.

Any initial public offering price and any concessions allowed or reallocated to dealers may be changed intermittently.

Sales Through Agents

Unless otherwise indicated in the applicable prospectus supplement, when securities are sold through an agent, the designated agent will agree, for the period of its appointment as agent, to use its best efforts to sell the securities for our account and will receive commissions from us as will be set forth in the applicable prospectus supplement.

Securities bought in accordance with a redemption or repayment under their terms also may be offered and sold, if so indicated in the applicable prospectus supplement, in connection with a remarketing by one or more firms acting as principals for their own accounts or as agents for us. Any remarketing firm will be identified and the terms of its agreement, if any, with us and its compensation will be described in the prospectus supplement. Remarketing firms may be deemed to be underwriters in connection with the securities remarketed by them.

If so indicated in the applicable prospectus supplement, we will authorize agents, underwriters or dealers to solicit offers by certain specified institutions to purchase securities at the public offering price set forth in the prospectus supplement pursuant to delayed delivery contracts providing for payment and delivery on a future date specified in the prospectus supplement. These contracts will be subject only to those conditions set forth in the applicable prospectus supplement, and the prospectus supplement will set forth the commissions payable for solicitation of these contracts.

Direct Sales

We may also sell offered securities directly as principal for our own account. In this case, no underwriters or agents would be involved.

Sales Through the Internet

We may from time to time offer securities directly to the public, with or without the involvement of agents, underwriters or dealers, and may utilize the Internet or another electronic bidding or ordering system for the pricing and allocation of such securities. Such a system may allow bidders to directly participate, through electronic access to an auction site, by submitting conditional offers to buy that are subject to acceptance by us, and which may directly affect the price or other terms at which such securities are sold.

Such a bidding or ordering system may present to each bidder, on a real-time basis, relevant information to assist you in making a bid, such as the clearing spread at which the offering would be sold, based on the bids submitted, and whether a bidder's individual bids would be accepted, prorated or rejected. Other pricing methods may also be used. Upon completion of such an auction process, securities will be allocated based on prices bid, terms of bid or other factors.

The final offering price at which securities would be sold and the allocation of securities among bidders would be based in whole or in part on the results of the Internet bidding process or auction. Many variations of the Internet auction or pricing and allocation systems are likely to be developed in the future, and we may utilize such systems in connection with the sale of securities. The specific rules of such an auction would be distributed to potential bidders in an applicable prospectus supplement.

If an offering is made using such a bidding or ordering system you should review the auction rules, as described in the prospectus supplement, for a more detailed description of such offering procedures.

General Information

Broker-dealers, agents or underwriters may receive compensation in the form of discounts, concessions or commissions from us and/or the purchasers of securities for whom such broker-dealers, agents or underwriters may act as agents or to whom they sell as principal, or both (this compensation to a particular broker-dealer might be in excess of customary commissions).

Underwriters, dealers and agents that participate in any distribution of the offered securities may be deemed "underwriters" within the meaning of the Securities Act, so any discounts or commissions they receive in connection with the distribution may be deemed to be underwriting compensation. Those underwriters and agents may be entitled, under their agreements with us, to indemnification by us against certain civil liabilities, including liabilities under the Securities Act, or to contribution by us to payments that they may be required to make in respect of those civil liabilities. Various of those underwriters or agents may be customers of, engage in transactions with, or perform services for, us or our affiliates in the ordinary course of business. We will identify any underwriters or agents, and describe their compensation, in a prospectus supplement.

We will file a supplement to this prospectus, if required, pursuant to Rule 424(b) under the Securities Act, if we enter into any material arrangement with a broker, dealer, agent or underwriter for the sale of securities through a block trade, special offering, exchange distribution or secondary distribution or a purchase by a broker or dealer. Such prospectus supplement will disclose:

- the name of any participating broker, dealer, agent or underwriter;
- the number and type of securities involved;
- the price at which such securities were sold;
- any securities exchanges on which such securities may be listed;
- the commissions paid or discounts or concessions allowed to any such broker, dealer, agent or underwriter where applicable; and

- other facts material to the transaction.

In order to facilitate the offering of certain securities under this prospectus or an applicable prospectus supplement, certain persons participating in the offering of those securities may engage in transactions that stabilize, maintain or otherwise affect the price of those securities during and after the offering of those securities. Specifically, if the applicable prospectus supplement permits, the underwriters of those securities may over-allot or otherwise create a short position in those securities for their own account by selling more of those securities than have been sold to them by us and may elect to cover any such short position by purchasing those securities in the open market.

In addition, the underwriters may stabilize or maintain the price of those securities by bidding for or purchasing those securities in the open market and may impose penalty bids, under which selling concessions allowed to syndicate members or other broker-dealers participating in the offering are reclaimed if securities previously distributed in the offering are repurchased in connection with stabilization transactions or otherwise. The effect of these transactions may be to stabilize or maintain the market price of the securities at a level above that which might otherwise prevail in the open market. The imposition of a penalty bid may also affect the price of securities to the extent that it discourages resales of the securities. No representation is made as to the magnitude or effect of any such stabilization or other transactions. Such transactions, if commenced, may be discontinued at any time.

In order to comply with the securities laws of certain states, if applicable, the securities must be sold in such jurisdictions only through registered or licensed brokers or dealers. In addition, in certain states the securities may not be sold unless they have been registered or qualified for sale in the applicable state or an exemption from the registration or qualification requirement is available and is complied with.

Rule 15c6-1 under the Securities Exchange Act of 1934 generally requires that trades in the secondary market settle in three business days, unless the parties to any such trade expressly agree otherwise. Your prospectus supplement may provide that the original issue date for your securities may be more than three scheduled business days after the trade date for your securities. Accordingly, in such a case, if you wish to trade securities on any date prior to the third business day before the original issue date for your securities, you will be required, by virtue of the fact that your securities initially are expected to settle in more than three scheduled business days after the trade date for your securities, to make alternative settlement arrangements to prevent a failed settlement.

This prospectus, the applicable prospectus supplement and any applicable pricing supplement in electronic format may be made available on the Internet sites of, or through other online services maintained by, us and/or one or more of the agents and/or dealers participating in an offering of securities, or by their affiliates. In those cases, prospective investors may be able to view offering terms online and, depending upon the particular agent or dealer, prospective investors may be allowed to place orders online.

Other than this prospectus, the applicable prospectus supplement and any applicable pricing supplement in electronic format, the information on our or any agent's or dealer's website and any information contained in any other website maintained by any agent or dealer:

- is not part of this prospectus, the applicable prospectus supplement and any applicable pricing supplement or the Registration Statement of which they form a part;
- has not been approved or endorsed by us or by any agent or dealer in its capacity as an agent or dealer, except, in each case, with respect to the respective website maintained by such entity; and
- should not be relied upon by investors.

There can be no assurance that we will sell all or any of the securities offered by this prospectus.

Unless otherwise indicated in the applicable prospectus supplement or confirmation of sale, the purchase price of the securities will be required to be paid in immediately available funds in New York City.

This prospectus may also be used in connection with any issuance of Common Shares or preferred shares upon exercise of a warrant if such issuance is not exempt from the registration requirements of the Securities Act.

VALIDITY OF THE SECURITIES

Unless otherwise indicated in the applicable prospectus supplement, the validity of the securities offered hereby will be passed upon for us by Sullivan & Cromwell LLP, New York, New York. If the validity of the securities offered hereby in connection with offerings made pursuant to this prospectus are passed upon by counsel for the underwriters, dealers or agents, if any, such counsel will be named in the prospectus supplement relating to such offering.

Sullivan & Cromwell LLP has represented and continues to represent Sterling Bancorp on a regular basis and in a variety of matters.

EXPERTS

The consolidated financial statements of Sterling Bancorp and subsidiaries (the "Company") as of December 31, 2008 and 2007, and for each of the years in the three-year period ended December 31, 2008, and management's assessment of the effectiveness of internal control over financial reporting as of December 31, 2008, have been incorporated by reference herein and in the registration statement in reliance upon the reports of KPMG LLP, independent registered public accounting firm, incorporated by reference herein, and upon the authority of said firm as experts in accounting and auditing. The audit report covering the aforementioned consolidated financial statements refers to the adoption, in 2006, of SEC Staff Accounting Bulletin No. 108, "Considering the Effects of Prior Year Misstatements when Quantifying Misstatements in Current Year Financial Statements."

STERLING BANCORP

Common Shares

Preferred Shares

Warrants

PROSPECTUS
