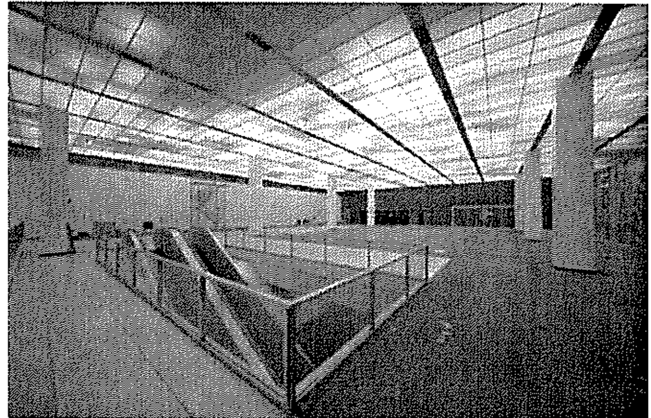
Landmarks Preservation Commission
February 15, 2011, Designation List 439
LP-2467

MANUFACTURERS TRUST COMPANY BUILDING INTERIOR, later Chase Bank Building, first floor interior, consisting of the entrance vestibule and lobby at the corner of Fifth Avenue and West 43rd Street, the former banking room, the 43rd Street elevator lobby, the corridor in front of the vault on Fifth Avenue, and the escalators leading from the first floor to the second floor; second floor interior, consisting of the former banking room; and the fixtures and interior components of both floors, including but not limited to, wall surfaces, ceiling surfaces, floor surfaces, columns, and vault door facing Fifth Avenue; 510 Fifth Avenue (aka 508-514 Fifth Avenue and 2 West 43rd Street), Borough of Manhattan. Built 1953-54; architects Skidmore, Owings & Merrill; Gordon Bunshaft, partner in charge and chief designer.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1258, Lot 40.

On February 1, 2011 the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Manufacturers Trust Company Building Interior (Item 1). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with provisions of law. Fourteen people spoke in favor of designation, including two representatives of the owner, as well as representatives of the Coalition to Save MHT, Docomomo New York/Tristate, the Historic Districts Council, the Landmarks Conservancy, the Modern Architecture Working Group, the Municipal Art Society, and the Recent Past Preservation Network.

Summary



When the Fifth Avenue office of the Manufacturers Trust Company opened in October 1954, bank officials claimed it was "unlike any other financial institution in this country or abroad."[1] A major example of mid-20th century modernism, 510 Fifth Avenue was designated a New York City Landmark in 1997 and is one of Manhattan's most transparent structures, revealing two elegantly spacious banking floors that were planned to be as prominent to passing pedestrians as the glass-and-aluminum exterior. As with many projects designed by the architectural firm Skidmore Owings & Merrill (SOM), it was a collaborative effort, requiring the talent and expertise of various staff members. Gordon Bunshaft was the partner in charge of the building's innovative design, assisted by Patricia W. Swan and Roy O. Allen. At the time, SOM did not have an interior design division and Eleanor H. Le Maire was responsible for the interiors, which were praised for being in "accord with the directness and purity of the architecture."[2] Though interior components and artworks by sculptor Harry Bertoia were recently removed, many distinctive elements remain. On Fifth Avenue, for instance, the celebrated circular stainless steel vault door designed by Henry Dreyfuss in collaboration with engineers at the Mosler Safe Company is visible, as well as most of the white marble piers and the vast luminous ceilings that were intended to minimize glare and shadow. It was one of SOM's first and most ambitious projects to make use of this lighting technology, and though modified, may be the earliest example to survive in New York City. Because the 7,000 square-foot second floor, sometimes called a mezzanine, is recessed from the street, it appears to float, creating the impression that both levels occupy a single, monumental space. Other notable historic features include the twin escalators, which were originally freestanding, as well as the 43rd Street lobby at the west end of the building, which, like the rear wall of the second floor, displays handsome sets of elevator doors set into polished grey marble walls. By conceiving this building and its minimalist interiors as a unified architectural statement, SOM not only produced one of Fifth Avenue's most memorable structures but it created a work that influenced the course of American bank design.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS[3]

When the Fifth Avenue office of the Manufacturers Trust Company opened in October 1954, the facade was praised by critics and journalists for providing "an open view of all of the banking operations from the street and from the neighboring office buildings."[4] At the time, it was arguably Manhattan's single most transparent structure; revealing the elegantly spacious banking floors that were as prominent as the glass-and-aluminum exterior. Writing in *Art Digest*, architectural critic Ada Louise Huxtable observed:

> In a direct reversal of the traditional idea of architecture, which places its emphasis on the nature of heavy, containing masonry, the interiors become the substance of the building itself, once light and glass have effectively dematerialized the outer walls.[5]

The interior components designed by Eleanor H. Le Maire and two sculptures by Harry Bertoia[6] have been removed but many striking elements remain, including the cantilevered second floor[7] with its 18-foot-high ceiling and open plan, the vast luminous ceilings, white marble piers, twin escalators, and the 43rd Street lobby.

Manufacturers Trust Company

The Mechanics Bank of Williamsburgh, the parent organization of the Manufacturers Trust Company, was organized in 1853 to serve the business community in Brooklyn's 14th Ward. In 1865, it reorganized as a national bank under the name Manufacturers National Bank of New York, with offices in lower Manhattan. Following financial reversals in 1867, the bank returned to Brooklyn. After merging with the Citizens Trust Company in 1914, the bank became known as the Manufacturers-Citizens Trust Company, and later, in 1915, the Manufacturers Trust Company. During the next decade, the Manufacturers Trust Company acquired many small banks in Brooklyn and Manhattan. The *New York Times* summarized the bank's success in 1925:

> The trust company has figured in one of the fastest expansions in the city's history. Starting from small beginnings in Brooklyn, it has in the last decade crossed to Manhattan and now rates as among the city's largest banks.[8]

Based at 55 Broad Street (demolished), the Manufacturers Trust Company would pioneer many novel retail services in the late 1930s and 1940s, including personal loans, construction loans, property improvement loans, special checking accounts, and industrial credit for manufacturers. With 67 branches by 1944, the bank's annual report noted optimistically, that "the rapid growth of many of our offices, furthered by the various new services we are extending to our customers and by special services incident to the war effort, will soon call for additional expansion of quarters."[9]

The Fifth Avenue Branch

One of the bank's busiest branches was located in the base of 513 Fifth Avenue (aka Postal Life Building, York & Sawyer, 1915), at the southeast corner of West 43rd Street. Described as "second only to the Head Office in the amount and importance of its business," the branch moved here in the 1920s and was soon operating at full capacity. Despite approaching "its limit" in the 1930s, it continued to accept new accounts, with approximately 17,500 depositors by 1944.[10]

To meet growing customer demand, steps were taken to open a much larger office. In 1941, the bank began negotiations with the Mutual Life Insurance Company of New York to lease a site occupied by two structures at the southwest corner of 43rd Street: a converted four-story dwelling at 508 Fifth Avenue, and the eight-story Ziegler Building (c. 1900) at 510-514 Fifth Avenue. Both parcels were part of a larger zoning lot that extended south to 42nd Street, and development rights from these parcels were used to build a 59-story tower at 500 Fifth Avenue (1929-31, Shreve, Lamb & Harmon, a designated New York City Landmark). In consequence, any building erected on this corner could not exceed 68 feet – the height of 508 Fifth Avenue. Though wartime restrictions on building supplies created delays, in October 1944 Mutual Life agreed to clear the site and construct an $850,000 structure based on specifications proposed by the Manufacturers Trust Company. The State Banking Department approved the relocation of the branch in December 1944.

Walker & Gillette was selected as architect. This prominent firm designed a great number of bank buildings, including offices for the National City Bank of New York at 415 Broadway (1927), East River Savings Bank, at 743 Amsterdam Avenue (1926-27, a designated New York City Landmark) and 26 Cortlandt Street (1931-34). Gillette attended the Ecole des Beaux Arts and most of the firm's work was neo-classical, or in later years, a streamlined variant of the Art Deco style. In 1944, they filed plans for a monumental limestone structure with a curved corner in what was described as the "Federal Classic style," but due to continued government restrictions and difficulties with tenants the project was canceled in 1948.[11] Though the successor firm, Walker & Poor, prepared a substantially modified design with a multi-story glass curtain wall facing 43rd Street in 1951, construction did not proceed due to subsequent restrictions associated with the Korean War. By the time these restrictions were lifted in July 1952, Walker & Poor had been discharged. Not only had there been disagreement over billing, but a new architectural climate had begun to emerge, one in which Skidmore Owings & Merrill became a leading firm.

Skidmore Owings & Merrill

Few firms have been as closely associated with the development and evolution of 20th-century modern architecture as SOM. Founded by Louis Skidmore, Sr. (1897-1962) and Nathaniel Owings (1903-1984) in Chicago in 1936, Skidmore opened the New York office in 1937. John O. Merrill (1896-1975), an architectural engineer, joined the firm as a limited partner in 1939. The first structures Skidmore and Owings (with John Moss) completed in New York City were part of the 1939-40 New York World's Fair: the Venezuela Pavilion, the Gas Industries exhibit, and the Continental Baking-Wonder Bread exhibit. Executed with partial walls of transparent glass, these temporary structures anticipated the minimalist aesthetic – commonly known as the International Style – at which SOM excelled.

Skidmore served on the advisory board of the bank's 57th Street branch and was close friends with Horace ("Hap") C. Flanigan (1890-1978), who became the bank's president in September 1951. According to Gordon Bunshaft (1909-1990), the SOM partner who was in charge of the design, Manufacturers Trust first approached them about their plans in 1953 at the recommendation of Lou Crandall, president of the George A. Fuller Construction Company, who was also a member of the bank's board of trustees. At Lever House (1950-52, a designated New York City Landmark), one of Bunshaft's most celebrated early office building designs, Fuller acted as general contractor. In his role as advisor, Bunshaft told the bank that "it would be

unwise to try to save a small amount of money on engineering fees when a better building might result from a fresh start."[12]

Flanigan approached SOM with three primary goals. Because the current Fifth Avenue branch was overcrowded, he wanted a building that could serve a high volume of retail and commercial clients. It was also important that the structure have an "inviting look,"[13] in keeping with the bank's emphasis on customer service, as epitomized in the advertising slogan "Come See Us, You'll Be Very Welcome." Most interesting, perhaps, was the requirement that it be adaptable for another use. During the 1930s, Flanigan recalled being disturbed by the sight of abandoned branches in Detroit, neo-classical structures that could not attract tenants due to the prohibitive cost of remodeling. "What branch banking needed," he claimed, "was an easily convertible type of branch building."[14] In response, SOM pioneered a new image and building type, one in which familiar materials, ornament, and symbolism traditionally associated with banking were purposely ignored.

As with most SOM projects, the Fifth Avenue office was a collaborative effort, requiring the talent and expertise of various staff members. Owings later recalled:

> Skid, sensing the opportunity for a masterpiece, conceived the idea of a competition among our young and eager designers. Here was an opportunity to shake up the conventional architects' approaches to banking. They were encouraged to come up with whatever popped into their heads, and the history and tradition of banking be damned.[15]

Charles Evans Hughes III (1915-85) placed first with a sketch that contained many elements that were incorporated into the final design. Though Walker & Poor proposed a glass elevation for 43rd Street, Hughes wanted a glass-walled structure in which the vault – "the central drama of the scheme" – would be visible from the street.[16]

Under Bunshaft and the project's administrative partner William S(elsor) Brown (b. 1909), Hughes' vision was refined, creating a cage-like transparent structure. Patricia W. Swan (b. 1924) headed the design team, working with Bunshaft, as well as Roy O. Allen (d. 1992) and Alan Labie, who oversaw construction and served as job captain.[17] At the time, there were relatively few women in the field and she remembered being the third hired by SOM, following Natalie De Blois.[18] A graduate of Columbia University (B. Arch, 1950), Swan's father, G. Dewey Swan, was an architect and friend of Skidmore. She was promoted to associate in 1956 and associate partner in 1970. Swan later worked in SOM's San Francisco and Denver offices, retiring in 1987.[19]

Eleanor H. Le Maire (1897-1970) was responsible for the handsome interiors. At the time, SOM did not have an interior design division and she was identified as a "consultant." Born in Berkeley, Le Maire studied at the University of California and Columbia University and began her career as a stylist in the home furnishings department of Bullocks Wilshire, a recently-opened department store in Los Angeles.[20] Le Maire specialized in hotel interiors and retail spaces; her New York City clients included Macy's Department Store, the New Yorker Hotel, and the New York Savings Bank. She employed a staff of fifty in the 1950s and in subsequent years would oversee the redesign of many of the bank's branches.[21] At 510 Fifth Avenue, Le Maire designed the furnishings and selected the color scheme, which *Interiors* magazine said was in "accord with the directness and purity of the architecture."[22]

The Exterior

Plans were submitted to the Department of Buildings in April 1953. Weiskopf & Pickworth, who frequently collaborated with SOM, served as structural engineer and George A. Fuller was contractor. The glass panels were installed during July 1954 and a press preview was held on September 22, 1954. Over two days at the beginning of October, all bank deposits and "nests of safe deposit boxes" were transported across Fifth Avenue and on October 5, 1954 the new branch office opened for business. The cost of construction was approximately $3 million.

The Manufacturers Trust Building is a major example of mid-20th-century modernism, frequently called the International Style. Located on a prominent corner site, the Fifth Avenue facade is 100 feet long and the 43rd Street facade is 125 feet long. It is a four-story building, with a recessed penthouse and gardens on the roof. Both entrances face West 43rd Street. The main entrance, at Fifth Avenue, provided access to the bank, while the west entrance served the elevator lobby, safe deposit area, and offices on the upper floors.

Prior to the Second World War, nearly all buildings were faced with stone or brick. Manufacturers Trust challenged this tradition and has walls that are almost entirely glass. Each panel is framed by four-inch-wide polished aluminum mullions that project ten inches in front of the glazing. Providing visual "texture and depth," this elegant grid was described by the building superintendent as "more like jewelry than building."[23] To emphasize views into the second floor, the glass panels are significantly larger. Whereas the panels on first, third and fourth floors are square and 9 by 9 feet, on the second floor the panels measure 10 by 22 feet. Manufactured by the Franklin Glass Company of Butler, Pennsylvania, they were said to be the "largest ever made in this country."[24]

Under the influence of the German architect Mies van der Rohe, who immigrated to the United States in 1938, American architecture grew increasingly abstract, minimal and transparent in the late 1940s. The Farnsworth House (Mies van der Rohe, 1946-50), outside Chicago, Philip Johnson's "Glass House" (1949) in New Canaan, Connecticut, and the free-standing lobby of SOM's Lever House, have glass walls that recede and disappear, blurring the distinction between inside and out. Though glass played an important role in modern aesthetics, to diminish heat gain many curtain walls featured colored glass, such as the United Nations Secretariat (1947-52), Lever House, and the Seagram Building (Mies van der Rohe, 1955-58), thus diminishing transparency. At 510 Fifth Avenue, however, the glass is clear and appears almost invisible under specific lighting conditions. Lewis Mumford, architecture critic for the *New Yorker*, commented:

> Happily for the architects of the bank, its location and its purpose greatly reduced the practical objections to an all-glass structure. Because it is surrounded by taller buildings, there is no need for screens or blinds or green heat-ray-glass.[25]

SOM also pioneered various structural innovations, using just eight piers to support the concrete floor slabs. Particularly novel was the design of the cantilevered second floor which does not reach the exterior wall and seems to float. On the north side, facing 43rd Street, the cantilever extends more than the 20 feet beyond the four piers, and on Fifth Avenue, 11 feet. Because the piers are faced with white Vermont marble, when viewed from outside they almost dematerialize against the brightly-lit ceilings. This may indicate the influence of Mies, who recently proposed an immense clear-span structure with glass walls for the Chicago Convention Center (1952-54).

Interior Plan

In early photographs, both banking floors were open and uncluttered. Passing through the glazed vestibule, customers experienced an uninterrupted view of the first floor, with 11-foot tall ceilings, free-standing writing desks, and an L-shaped counter along the south and west walls where tellers performed such routine transactions as check cashing. To enhance the sense of spaciousness, the ebony wood counters had sleek white marble tops and no security grilles. There was little else to break up the view and the walls behind the counters were clearly visible. The south wall (adjacent to the vault) was polished black granite and the west wall (adjacent to the 43rd Street lobby) was painted "sky blue."[26]

Immediately inside the entrance closest to Fifth Avenue are the escalators to the second floor, sometimes described as the main banking floor or mezzanine. Because this level is recessed from the east and north walls, it creates the impression that both floors occupy a single volume of space. With approximately 7,000 square feet of space, the second floor recalls, without imitating, the grandly-scaled halls of earlier banks. The *Architectural Record* described it as having an "almost classic serenity . . . dignified yet lively; ordered but not forbidding."[27] Devoted to commercial accounts, the second floor had a similar asymmetrical configuration to the first floor, but with groups of senior officers desks arranged at center. Behind the counter, near the west end of the south wall, was originally a large clock with metal numerals. This wall was painted white and incorporated much of the building's mechanical system, including electricity, air conditioning ducts, and water pipes. In contrast, the west wall was faced with polished gray German marble that was possibly chosen to create a strong background for the 70-foot-long screen by sculptor Harry Bertoia. Weighing about five tons, it featured more than 800 enameled steel plates supported by a framework of steel rods and braces. Ada Louise Huxtable commented that the screen added a note of "Byzantine splendor in an otherwise austerely elegant interior . . . the perfect accent for the polished surroundings."[28] Removed by the prior tenant (and owner of the artwork) in 2010, this glittery abstract artwork was not only colorful but it disguised a row of desks, as well as service doors and elevators, from public view. The banking floors were also originally enlivened by rectangular flower boxes, placed in rows along the perimeter of the second floor, and near Fifth Avenue, on the first floor.

The Escalators

The former banking floors are linked by escalators. Located on the east side of the building, they were convenient for customers entering from 43rd Street and were positioned to maximize visibility from Fifth Avenue. Rising on a diagonal in open space, without any apparent means of support, passing pedestrians could easily observe the constant the flow of customers, while inside, riders could enjoy changing views of the interiors.[29]

Escalators were first used by American retailers at the start of the 20th century, especially in department stores. In the 1930s, a small number were installed in office buildings, including the Cities Service Building (Clinton & Russell, 1930-32) at 70 Pine Street and the International Building at 630 Fifth Avenue (Associated Architects, 1933-34, a designated New York City Landmark Interior) in Rockefeller Center. One of the first modern skyscrapers in the United States was the Philadelphia Savings Fund Society headquarters (Howe & Lescaze, 1932). This trail-blazing structure featured an impressive double-height banking hall on the second floor, reached by an unusually long escalator. It was, most likely, the first installed by an American bank. Following the Second World War, architects paid greater attention to the aesthetics of circulation, using spiral stairs, curving ramps, and with increasing frequency, escalators, to move

people through buildings. Walker & Poor's earlier design for the Fifth Avenue branch, for example, featured a mezzanine that was reached by escalator.[30]

Le Maire designed the anodized aluminum interior side panels of the escalators, which were finished in a "straw gold color." This color was probably chosen to harmonize with the 33-foot-high gold-tinted curtains,[31] the gilt Bertoia screen, or possibly Bertoia's untitled wire "cloud" construction that was originally suspended above the escalators. Each escalator panel contained numerous small holes, allowing light from "cold cathode continuous tubes" to shine onto the moving treads. She "pioneered" this idea for the Otis Company in 1946 and it was later used in a Dayton, Ohio, department store.[32] The bank's newsletter described the effect: "The escalators gives a friendly glow to the room and strengthens the feeling of unity between the first and second floors."[33] In addition, a grid of nine evenly-spaced recessed lighting fixtures was installed above the east end of the teller's counters on the first floor, close to where the escalators meet the ceiling.[34]

Lighting

Vast "luminous ceilings" hover above both floors, as well as the third and fourth floor offices (not part of this designation). Corrugated "paper thin vinyl sheeting," hung from T-shaped metal channels, gave the ceilings an uncluttered directional character. With none of the lighting fixtures visible, it could easily be seen from both streets and reads as a floating, illuminated grid. On the second floor, the thicker metal channels direct the eye toward the west end of the room where the Bertoia screen was located, today revealing a gray marble wall. The original luminous ceiling has been altered so that a grid of three panels is now located where there was originally a single panel.

Luminous ceilings were relatively new in the early 1950s. Developed by the electrical engineer Parry Moon and Domina Eberle Spencer for use in offices, this technique produced "an even glow of illumination, without glare or shadow."[35] They collaborated with the Marlux Corporation, of Somerville, Massachusetts, who manufactured the panels. *Interiors* magazine reported:

> Light from the tubes reflects again and again between the plastic panels and the brightly painted structure ceiling until nearly all the light passes through the plastic. This makes the light seem to come from an unbroken plane of light rather than rows of tubes.[36]

It was the first of many SOM interiors to incorporate this type of ceiling and is a defining feature of these interiors.

> Even from the outside, the interiors constitute the major sensation of the building, because they are under luminous ceilings, providing light so brilliant that the interior space is entirely and perfectly revealed ...[37]

Because the banking floors emitted an even glow, reflections were significantly reduced on the exterior and the glass seemed to vanish during daylight hours. *Architectural Forum* interpreted this as a shrewd retailing:

> It is an old merchandizing trick, if you have a store window and you want the contents seen from the outside, you have to put more foot candles inside the glass than there are foot candles of natural light outside the glass . . . It makes a glass wall into something it has not been before, an invisible control instead of a mysterious barrier.[38]

Luminous ceilings also enhanced each floor's minimalist character. Not only did the panels diffuse and disguise the lighting source but they hid such necessary elements as public address systems, air diffusers, and acoustical materials. Though Huxtable criticized the "pale yellow" color in her 1954 review, saying it would never seem pleasant or flattering, this system did produce a powerful and consistent glow that helped publicize the new branch.[39] With electric rates relatively low, management was initially instructed to keep the building "fully lighted" throughout the day and until one o'clock in the morning.[40] Mumford was especially impressed, writing: "Viewed from outside, this building is essentially a glass lantern, and, like a lantern, is even more striking by dark than daylight."[41]

Vault Door

For people strolling Fifth Avenue, the most prominent feature was the circular door to the main vault – open and plainly visible from the street. Traditionally, vaults were placed below ground or at the rear of the banking floor. Instead, this vault was placed in full view, just ten feet from the sidewalk. During banking hours, people could see the door's locking mechanism and circular frame, as well as the gate to the vault and its interior. Though safes had occasionally appeared on banking floors to comfort "wary depositors," it did not become a widely-accepted practice until the opening of this branch.[42]

Various reasons were given to explain the location. According to the architects, aesthetics played an important role:

> It's like sailors and boats. While we were designing the building, the bankers kept taking us down into bank cellars and showing us vault doors; then they would stand around looking at them, and say to each other reverently, 'Isn't it beautiful!" After a while we began to agree.[43]

Flanigan thought the placement would benefit the bank's clients. He told the *New York Times*, that "with our vault at street level, safe deposit customers can use their boxes . . . with maximum convenience."[44] Some writers contended that security was the main motivation and by giving the vault greater visibility, robberies could be deterred. Though this suggestion was dismissed by the bank, a year earlier the notorious bank robber Willie Sutton had been convicted of robbing a Manufacturers Trust Company branch in Sunnyside, Queens.[45]

Lacking conventional sculptural symbols associated with banking – owls, squirrels, lions, and beehives – the gleaming door also served to confirm the building's purpose. Mumford observed:

> By raising the most dramatic physical element in the bank from the cellar to the ground floor, the architects have made the most of a natural advertisement . . . This use of the bank's vault as an expressive and visible feature was truly an inspiration.[46]

Huxtable expressed a similar view in *Art Digest*, calling it "spectacular merchandising this, and good visual drama."[47]

The noted industrial designer Henry Dreyfuss (1904-1971) collaborated on the door's design, which *Industrial Design* magazine included in its annual review of 1954. The unidentified author remarked how the door was "to the bank what a beautiful broach is to a dress."[48] Conceived as a showpiece, the 30-ton, 7-foot diameter, 16-inch thick door was made of "flange quality carbon steel, stainless steel, and chrome laminated steel," as well as architectural bronze.[49] Especially prominent was the bolt wheel and the I-shaped hinge, which was "so delicately balanced it can be swung with one finger."[50] Throughout the 1950s, Dreyfuss worked for the Mosler Safe Company, producing designs for vault doors, vaults, night depositories, and drive-in windows. According to publicity, he helped "develop the "newest look" that's come to banking in 50 years."[51]

The exterior of the vault was faced with Canadian black granite. This polished stone provided an elegant backdrop for the shiny door, as well as for the luminous ceiling and white marble columns in the first floor banking hall.[52] As one of the branch's best-known and most-publicized features, the Dreyfuss door was lit throughout the night, providing Mosler with a "twenty-four hour advertisement." Furthermore, the company took such great pride in this commission that each week an employee was sent to polish it.[53] In a 1997 *New York Times* editorial, the door was called out as "an icon of security, immensely technical, deeply forbidding, almost ironic in its seriousness."[54]

Popular and Critical Reception

The glass branch was an immediate success. *The New York Times, The New Yorker, Life, Saturday Evening Post,* and *Fortune* were among various publications to cover the opening events, which attracted 15,000 visitors to admire the "clear walls, luminous ceiling, open counters, white marble columns, and sprawling main banking area."[55] Tours were offered to the public and by 1957 nearly 100,000 people had visited. *The New York Times* reported in 1955:

> Fashion advertisers have posed models on the escalators and in front of the huge vault door. Some 1,100 pictures of the building have been published. Photographs and information have been supplied to 146 publications . . . When the building was opened Manufacturer's personnel office received requests for transfer from other branches, Moreover, when the building was kept open on holidays, bank employees came with their families to see it.[56]

Buildings, Lighting, Office Management, and *Management Methods* also covered aspects of the bank's design for specialized audiences and *Architectural Forum, Architectural Record*, and *Progressive Architecture* were united in praise. One writer, however, criticized the "ostentatious under consumption of space" in *Harper's Magazine*, calling it the most "uneconomical piece of architecture since the pyramids."[57]

For the bank, the most satisfying response is likely to have come from depositors – nine months after opening *The New York Times* reported that the number of savings accounts had nearly tripled and special checking accounts and commercial accounts had more than doubled. With such strong evidence "that modern banking premises are a strong attraction for new accounts,"[58] Manufacturers Trust stepped up its program of modernizing and redecorating branch offices. Rival banks would open similar glass-walled facilities during the decade that followed, such as the one in the concourse of One Chase Manhattan Plaza (SOM, 1964) and in the headquarters of the Emigrant Savings Bank at 5 East 42nd Street (Emery Roth & Sons, 1969).

The Manufacturers Trust Company Building was awarded the Architectural League's Gold Medal for Architecture and the Municipal Art Society's Plaque of Commendation in 1955,[59] and the Fifth Avenue Association's Award for Excellence in 1956.

Recent History

In 1961, Manufacturers Trust merged with The Hanover Bank, creating the Manufacturers Hanover Trust Company. Three decades later, in 1991, it merged with Chemical Bank. By this time, only the first floor of the Fifth Avenue branch remained open, and the second floor had been converted to offices. Automated teller machines were installed blocking the view of the escalators from Fifth Avenue and the luminous ceilings were altered. Though the east-west channels were retained, the original plastic panels were replaced with square panels divided by thin mullions. The second floor reopened as a bank branch around 1994 and the first floor was divided into two spaces, with a portion serving as the bank entrance and ATM lobby, and the balance as retail space. Chemical Bank became part of Chase Manhattan Bank in 1996.

The building exterior was designated a New York City Landmark in October 1997 and public hearings on the interior were held in 1990. Chase Manhattan sold the building to Tahl Propp Equities in 2000 but retained ownership of the artworks. At that time, Chase continued to operate a branch on the second floor and agreed to keep the Bertoia screen in place "as long as Tahl Prop owns the building."[60] An affiliate of Vornado Realty Trust acquired the building in 2009. When J. P. Morgan Chase closed its branch and vacated the building in 2010, it removed the Bertoia screen and hanging sculpture, as well as the teller's counters.[61] As of January 2011, the second floor is vacant and the west part of the first floor, facing 43rd Street, is occupied by fashion designer Elie Tahari.

Description

The former Fifth Avenue branch office of the Manufacturers Trust Company consists of three main areas: the first floor, second floor, and 43rd Street lobby. The first and second floors are enclosed by walls of clear glass, framed by polished aluminum mullions and horizontal rails. The first floor is divided into three main sections: entrance to the second floor (east), 43rd Street retail space (center), and the 43rd Street elevator lobby (west).

Historic

First floor, east entrance vestibule: three outer doors, three inner doors, east wall with radiator openings in base, north wall with Municipal Art Society plaque; *first floor*: luminous ceiling with wide mullions running from east to west, escalators opposite vestibule, white terrazzo floor divided into rectangles by thin metal channels, aluminum radiator covers with elongated oval pattern along perimeter, piers with white marble facing and black footings, circular stainless steel bank vault door, hinge, and polished granite facing on vault exterior, facing Fifth Avenue. *Second floor*: cantilevered floor slab with horizontal aluminum ventilation grille facing street, luminous ceiling with wide aluminum channels aligned with piers, running east-west, glazed parapet around escalators, escalator landing, piers with white marble facing and black footings, west wall, grey marble, vault door (south), two reddish-orange elevator doors with stainless steel portals and indicator lights (west); *43rd Street lobby entrance vestibule:* glass doors with stainless steel walls, radiators, and ceiling; white terrazzo floor divided into rectangles with thin metal channels, luminous ceiling; *elevator lobby:* luminous ceiling, grey marble on east and west walls, door opening (east wall) to first floor retail space, stainless steel elevator doors with indicator

lights; *foyer to safe deposit area:* luminous ceiling, grey marble facing on east and west walls, stainless steel doors, signage above doors (south wall).

Alterations

Luminous ceilings, both floors, divided into three smooth panels (before 1989, originally single corrugated panels), 43rd Street lobby (c. 1993, originally single corrugated panels), track lighting in retail space, angled glass-and-aluminum ceiling along 43rd Street and most of Fifth Avenue perimeter between first and second floors (c. 1993). *First floor, east entrance vestibule:* divided in two sections; vestibule door handles, west wall with horizontal window; *first floor, east:* glass-and-aluminum wall and doors in front of escalators, partition wall (south) between escalators and exterior of vault (c. 1993), wall (west) between escalators and retail space, aluminum exterior facing on escalators, security cameras, mirrors, signage, cork board with metal trim attached to north pier, terrazzo tiles in front of ATMs. *43rd Street retail space*: east, south and west walls. *Second floor*: damage to original white terrazzo floor where teller's counters, carpeting, and Bertoia screen have been removed, damage to marble wall in northwest corner, glass parapet along exterior (c. 1992), black metal doors between vault and elevators; glass and aluminum enclosure in front of elevators (west), aluminum ventilation grille at top of south wall (before 1989); *43rd Street lobby:* marble panel above doors replaced with back-lit photographs (c. 1993), glass panels with white patterning; sculpture, cantilevered shelf, wood paneling (north wall, west bay).

The interiors are well-documented in contemporary periodicals (copies in LPC files) and were photographed by LPC in 1989, 1993, 2008, and 2011. For information on alterations since the calendaring of the building in 1985, consult LPC files. Historic images and plans are available in *Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore Owings & Merrill* by Carol Herselle Krinsky and *SOM since 1936* by Nicholas Adams, as well as online at http://www.esto.com

Researched and written by
Matthew A. Postal
Research Department

NOTES

[1] "Fortune is Moved Across Fifth Avenue," *New York Times*, October 2, 1954, 6.

[2] "The Manufacturers Trust Company: the interiors are the show in a new glass bank," *Interiors* (January 1955), 133.

[3] The "(Former) Manufacturers Trust Company Building (now Chase Bank)" was designated an individual landmark on October 21, 1997, see Designation Report, prepared by Gale Harris (LP-1968), (New York: Landmarks Preservation Commission, 1997). This report also makes generous use of books by Carol Herselle Krinsky, *Gordon Bunshaft of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill* (Cambridge: MIT, 1988), 49; and Nicholas Adams, *SOM since 1936* (Electra Architecture, 2007).

[4] "New Design Used For Bank Edifice," *New York Times*, August 16, 1953, R1.

[5] Ada Louise Huxtable, *Four Walking Tours of Modern Architecture in New York City* (Museum of Modern Art and Municipal Art Society of New York, 1961), 32-33.

[6] Harry Bertoia (1915-18) was an American sculptor and furniture designer. For the Fifth Avenue branch office, he designed a hanging wire sculpture that was hung above the escalators and a sixty-foot-long gilt metal screen for the west end of the second floor.

[7] An angled aluminum and glass partition (c. 1993) currently separates the first and second floors.

[8] "Gotham National Figures in Merger," *New York Times*, April 16, 1925, 25. These banks included the West Side Bank (1918), Ridgewood National Bank (1921), North Side Bank of Brooklyn (1922), Industrial Savings Bank (1922), Columbia Bank (1923), Yorkville Bank (1925), Gotham National Bank (1925), Fifth National Bank (1925), and Commonwealth Bank of New York (1927).

[9] Manufacturers Trust Company Report, 1945, cited in Designation Report, 3.

[10] Designation Report, 3; Robert M. Fogelson, "A Report on the Historical Significance of 510 Fifth Avenue," submitted by Brown & Wood as part of a "Closing Argument of Manufacturers Hanover Trust Company and Mutual Life Insurance Company of New York in Opposition to Designation As a New York City Landmark, November 2, 1990, 23-24, copy in LPC files.

[11] For an image of the proposal, see "Properties in New Control as the 1944 Realty Market Ends," *New York Times*, December 31, 1944, R1.

[12] Krinsky, 49.

[13] "Money Changing in a House of Glass," *Life Magazine* (October 25, 1954), 12.

[14] J(ack) Alexander, "The Bank Has No Secrets," *Saturday Evening Post* (November 30, 1957), 105.

[15] Nathaniel Alexander Owings, *The Spaces In Between: An Architect's Journey* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973), 103; Krinsky, 50; Adams, 307, fn 10.

[16] Owings, 103.

[17] Alan Labie later worked as project manager on many projects in the metropolitan area, including the Chase Manhattan Plaza and Marine Midland Bank buildings in lower Manhattan. For a list of SOM projects, see Krinsky, 335-37.

[18] By 1960, the *New York Times* reported that SOM employed four women: De Blois, Swan, Jane Eliza Becker, and Norma M. Fairweather. See "Women Gain Role in Architecture," *New York Times*, March 13, 1960, R1.

[19] Patricia W. Swan, phone conversation with author, December 2010; Krinsky, 335; Adams, 323.

[20] "Flair for Interior Decoration Opens Way to Brilliant Career," *New York Times*, January 7, 1940, 56; "Eleanor Le Maire, A Decorator, Dies," *New York Times*, February 11, 1970, 47.

[21] David P. Handlin, "Exhibit H: 510 Fifth Avenue: 1954/1990," submitted by Brown & Wood as part of a "Closing Argument," 2, 6, fn 8.

[22] "The Manufacturers Trust Company: the interiors are the show in a new glass bank," *Interiors* (January 1955), 133.

[23] "Manufacturers Trust Company Builds Conversation Piece on Fifth Avenue," *Architectural Record* (November 1954), 154.

[24] "A Single Pane of Glass," *New York Times*, July 23, 1954, 34.

[25] Lewis Mumford, "The Skyline: Crystal Lantern," *The New Yorker* (November 13, 1954), 203. *The Saturday Evening Post* reported the building received only one hour of direct sun each day.

[26] Mumford, 200.

[27] *Architectural Record*, 152.

[28] Ada Louise Huxtable, "Bankers' Showcase," *Arts Digest* (December 1, 1954), 13. Bertoia produced a similar metal screen for the General Motors Technical Center, a year earlier, in 1953.

[29] An unidentified author wrote: "If the bank's essential qualities are classic dignity and rich, exact elegance, it is at the same time surprisingly approachable. For one thing, the scale is not awesome (except, perhaps, for the great diagonal thrust of the escalators." *Interiors*, 58.

[30] Handlin, "510 Fifth Avenue: An Architectural Analysis" submitted by Brown & Wood as part of a "Closing Argument," November 2, 1990, 25.

[31] The curtains were removed before 1989.

[32] The current panels are silver colored and probably date to the early 1990s. Adams, 77, 307, fn 22.

[33] *The Emteeco*, not paginated, copy in SOM files.

[34] Photo reproduced in *Interiors*, 52.

[35] Wright employed a similar idea in the 1939 SC Johnson Administration Building which combines electric lighting with skylights above a suspended translucent pyrex ceiling.

[36] *Interiors*, 57.

[37] *Interiors*, 52.

[38] "Modern Architecture Breaks Through the Glass Barrier," *Architectural Forum* (December 1954), 104.

[39] Ada Louise Huxtable, "Bankers' Showcase," *Arts Digest* (December 1, 1954), 13.

[40] J(ack) Alexander, 105.

[41] Lewis Mumford, 198.

[42] Carol J. Dyson and Anthony Rubano, "Banking on the Future: Modernism and the Local Bank," 2-47, pdf viewed online, 2010.

[43] "Big Banking and modern architecture finally connect," *Architectural Forum* (September 1953), 136. This article includes Ezra Stoller photographs of the 3/8" scale model built by Theodore Conrad.

[44] "Showcase Bank Holds a Preview," *New York Times*, September 23, 1954, 51.

[45] J(ack) Alexander, 105.

[46] Mumford , 200.

[47] Huxtable, "Bankers' Showcase," 12.

[48] "Annual Review," *Industrial Design* (December 1954), 45.

[49] Ibid; also see "Behind the Steel Door," *New York Times*, April 18, 1999, CY2.

[50] "Manufacturers Trust Company Builds Conversation Piece on Fifth Avenue," 151.

[51] Dreyfuss Collection, Mosler files, Cooper Hewitt Museum. Dreyfuss was frequently employed by banks, designing a model branch for the Bank of America in 1947 and a graphics program for the First National Bank of Oregon in the early 1960s. He also designed the gridded facade and original interiors of the Bankers Trust Building (1963), at 280 Park Avenue.

[52] The vault's north wall is currently part of the retail space and is not visible.

[53] "Glass Bank Lures Tourists, Deposits, *New York Times*, February 13, 1955, 149.

[54] "Three New Architectural Landmarks," *New York Times*, November 13, 1997, A26.

[55] "15,000 Ooh and Ah at Opening of Dazzling, 'New fangled' Bank," *New York Times*, October 5, 1954, 29.

[56] "Glass Bank Lures Tourists, Deposits."

[57] Cited by J(ack) Alexander, 106. See John Fischer, "For deposit, to the account of," *Harper's Magazine* (December 1954), 73.

[58] Cited in the Designation Report, 7.

[59] This plaque is displayed inside the main bank vestibule on the north wall.

[60] "Done: Building is Sold and the Artwork Is Staying," *New York Times*, January 3, 2001, B6.

[61] Ada Louise Huxtable, "A Landmark Jewel Box Loses Its Biggest Gem," *Wall Street Journal*, November 4, 2010, viewed online.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

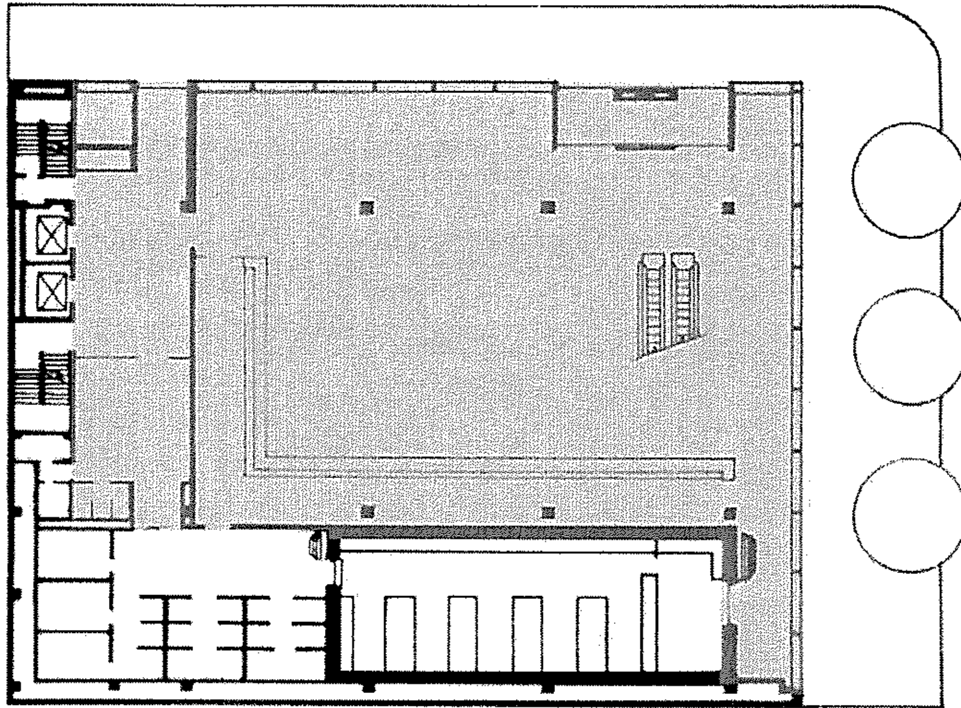
On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Manufacturers Trust Company Building Interior has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that when the Fifth Avenue office of the Manufacturers Trust Company opened in October 1954, bank officials rightly claimed it was "unlike any other financial institution in this country or abroad;" that this interior is a major example of mid-20th century modernism; that 510 Fifth Avenue was designated a New York City Landmark in 1997 and is arguably Manhattan's most transparent structure, revealing two elegantly spacious banking floors that were carefully planned to be as prominent to passing pedestrians as the glass-and-aluminum exterior; that many projects designed by the architectural firm of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill were collaborative exercises, requiring the talent and expertise of various staff members; that partner Gordon Bunshaft was in charge of the project and was assisted by Patricia W. Swan, Roy O. Allen, and interior designer consultant Eleanor H. Le Maire; that these handsome uncluttered spaces were praised for being in "accord with the directness and purity of the architecture;" that although some interior components and artworks by sculptor Harry Bertoia were recently removed from the premises, many distinctive elements remain, including the celebrated circular stainless steel vault door designed by Henry Dreyfuss in collaboration with engineers at the Mosler Safe Company, as well as the white marble piers and luminous ceilings that were intended to minimize glare and shadow; that this may be the earliest example of this lighting technology to survive in New York City and was among SOM's first and most ambitious interiors to use it; that the 7,000 square-foot second floor, sometimes called a mezzanine, is recessed from the street perimeter of the building and appears to float, creating the impression that the first and second floors occupy a single volume of space; that other notable historic features including the twin escalators and 43rd Street lobby, featuring a handsome set of elevator doors set into polished grey marble walls; that this building and its minimalist banking floors were designed as a unified architectural statement, and that not only did SOM produce one of Fifth Avenue's most dramatic structures but that this building and its public interiors changed the course of American bank design.

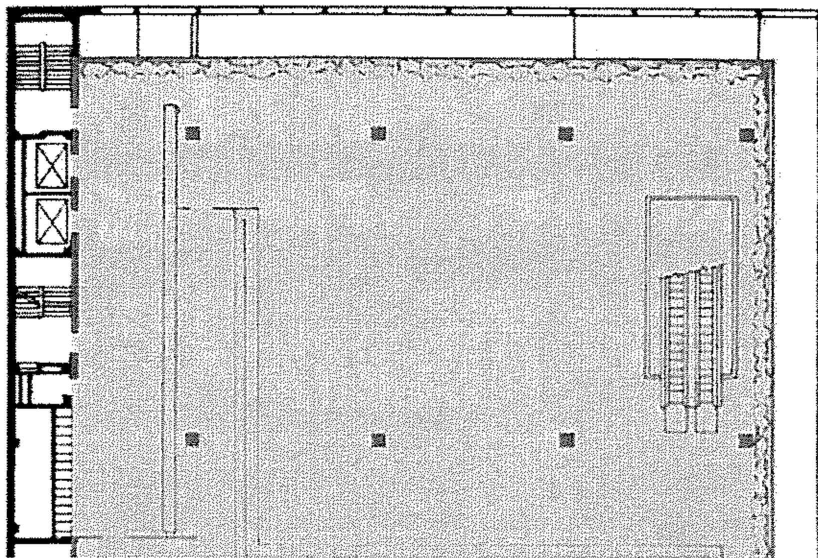
Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 (formerly Section 534 of Chapter 21) of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Manufacturers Trust Company Building, later Chase Bank Building, first floor interior, consisting of the entrance vestibule and lobby at the corner of Fifth Avenue and West 43rd Street, the former banking room, the 43rd Street elevator lobby, the corridor in front of the vault on Fifth Avenue, and the escalators leading from the first floor to the second floor; second floor interior, consisting of the former banking room; and the fixtures and interior components of both floors, including but not limited to, wall surfaces, ceiling surfaces, floor surfaces, columns, and vault door facing Fifth Avenue; 510 Fifth Avenue, aka 508-514 Fifth Avenue and 2 West 43rd Street, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map 1258, Lot 40, as its Landmark site.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair
Pablo Vengochera, Vice Chair
Frederick Bland, Diana Chapin, Michael Devonshire, Joan Gerner,
Michael Goldblum, Christopher Moore, Margery Perlmutter, Elizabeth Ryan, Commissioners

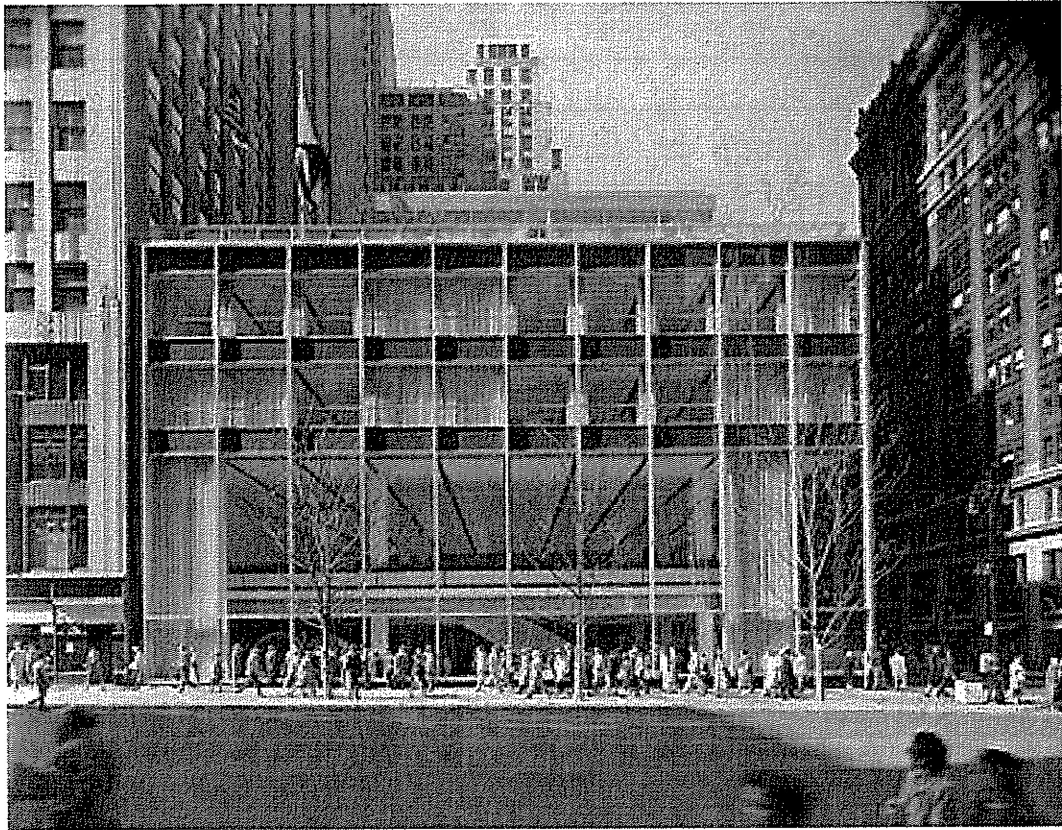
First floor

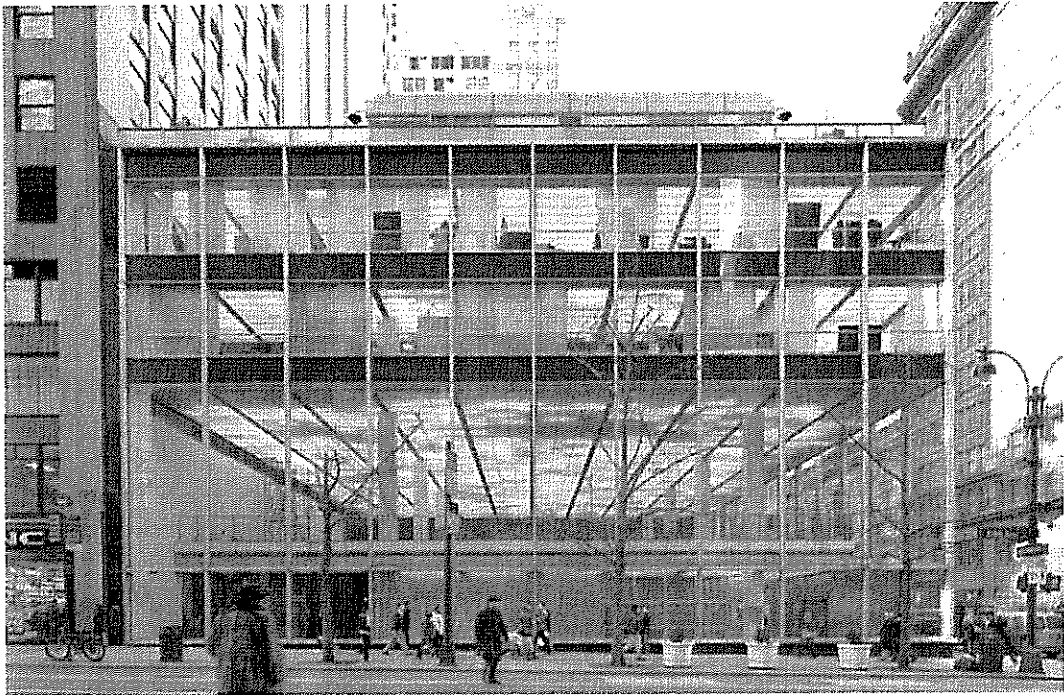


Second floor

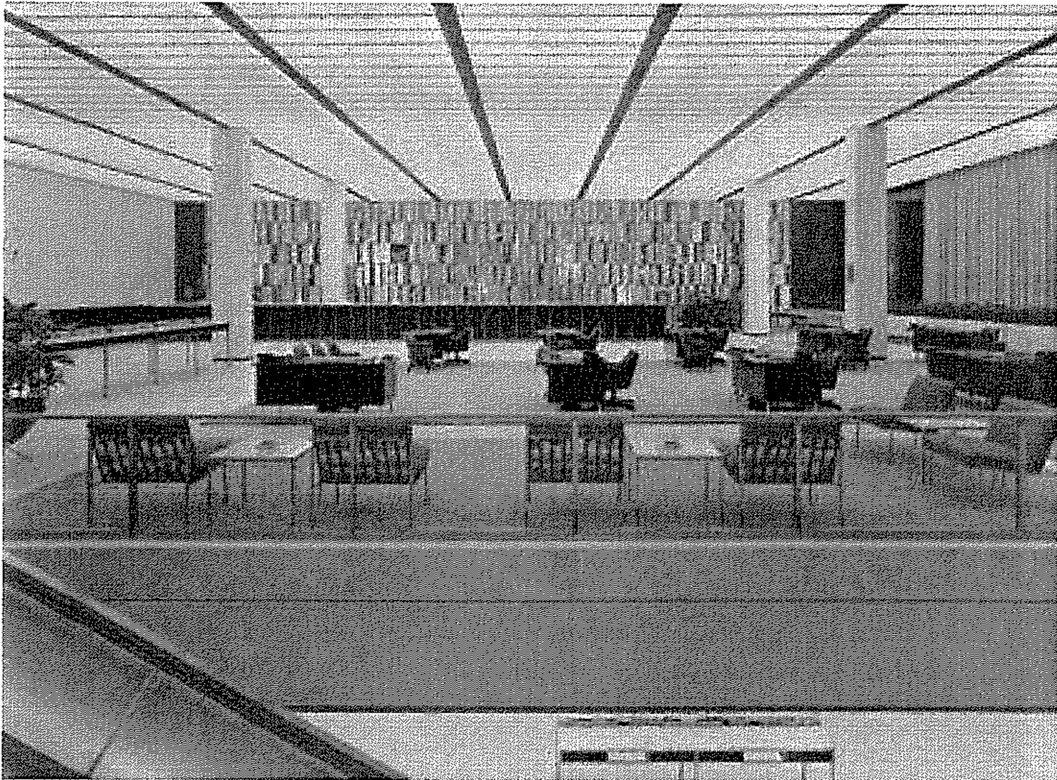


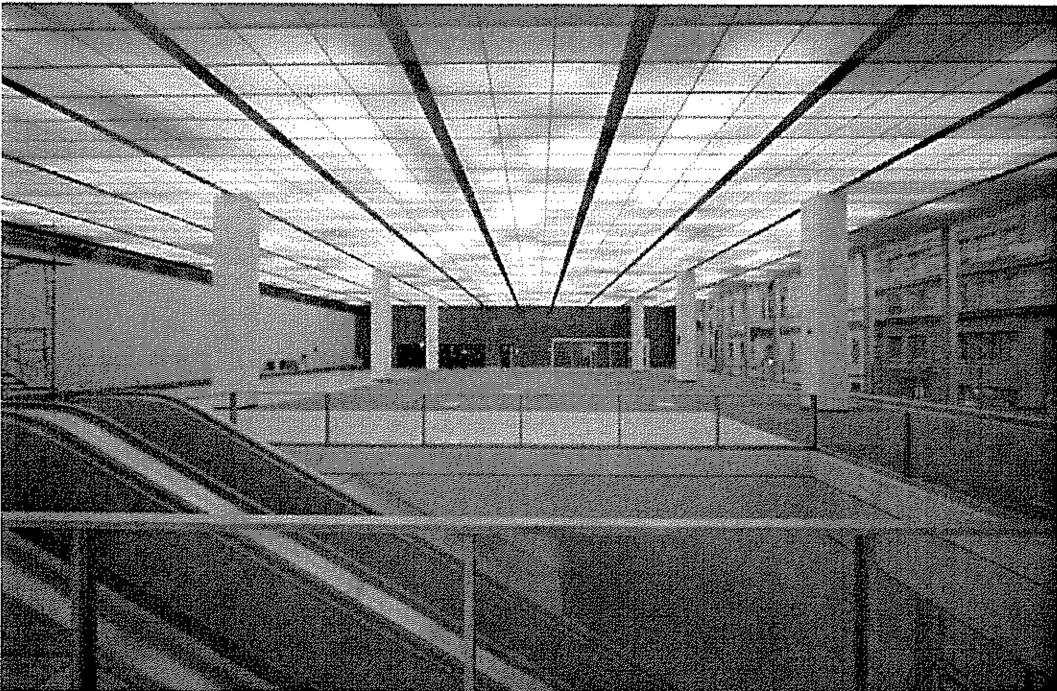
Manufacturers Trust Company Building Interior
510 Fifth Avenue (aka 508-14 Fifth Avenue and 2 West 43rd Street)
Fifth Avenue on left (east), 43rd Street above (north)
Courtesy: Vornado Realty Trust, 2011



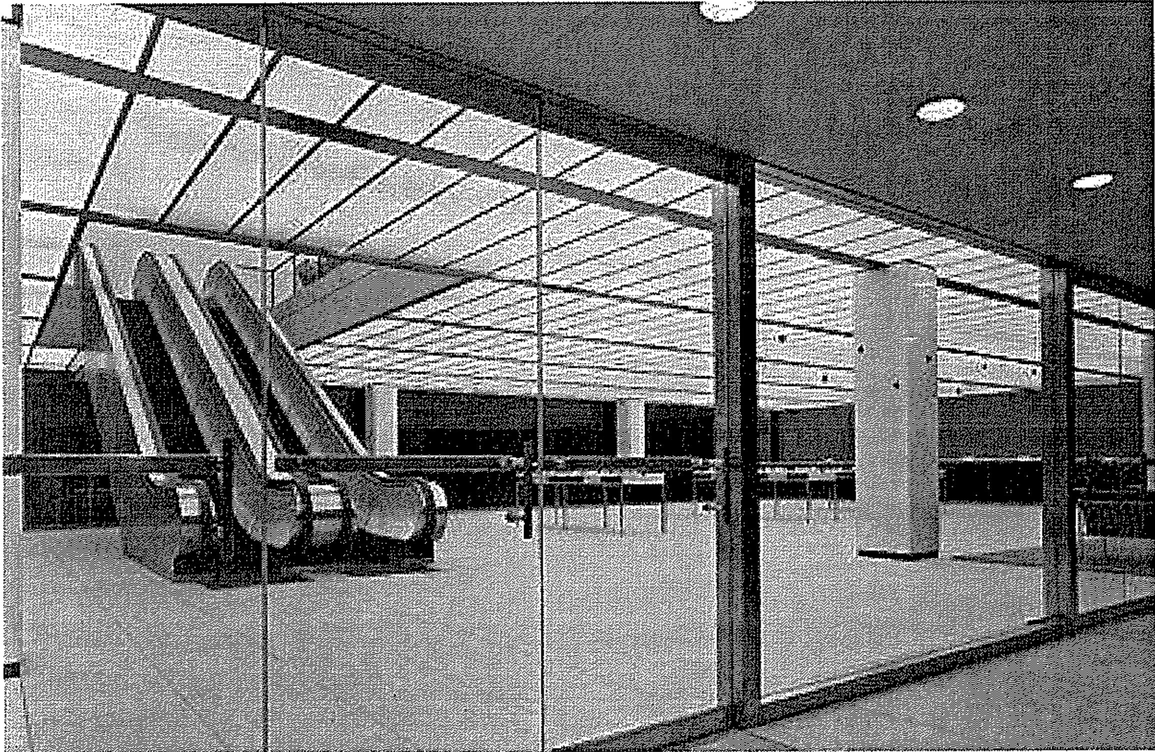


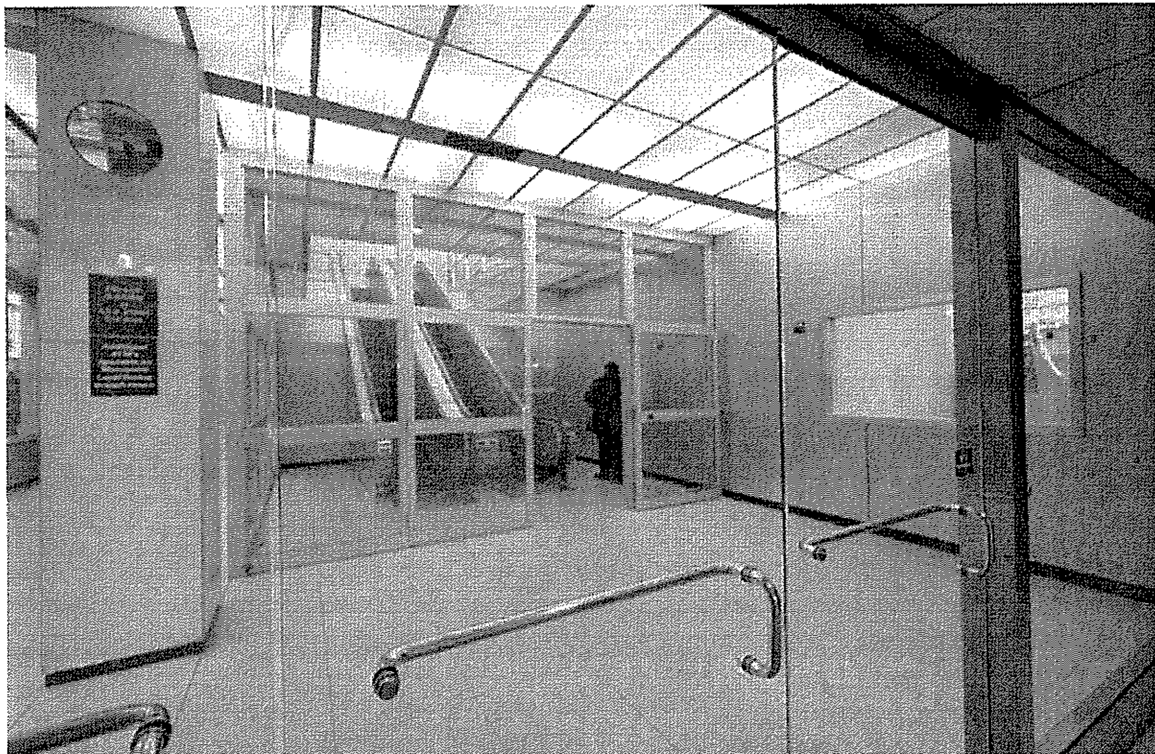
Fifth Avenue facade
Manufacturers Trust Company Building Interior
510 Fifth Avenue (aka 508-14 Fifth Avenue and 2 West 43rd Street)
Photo: Ezra Stoller, 1954 © Esto (upper)
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2011(lower)



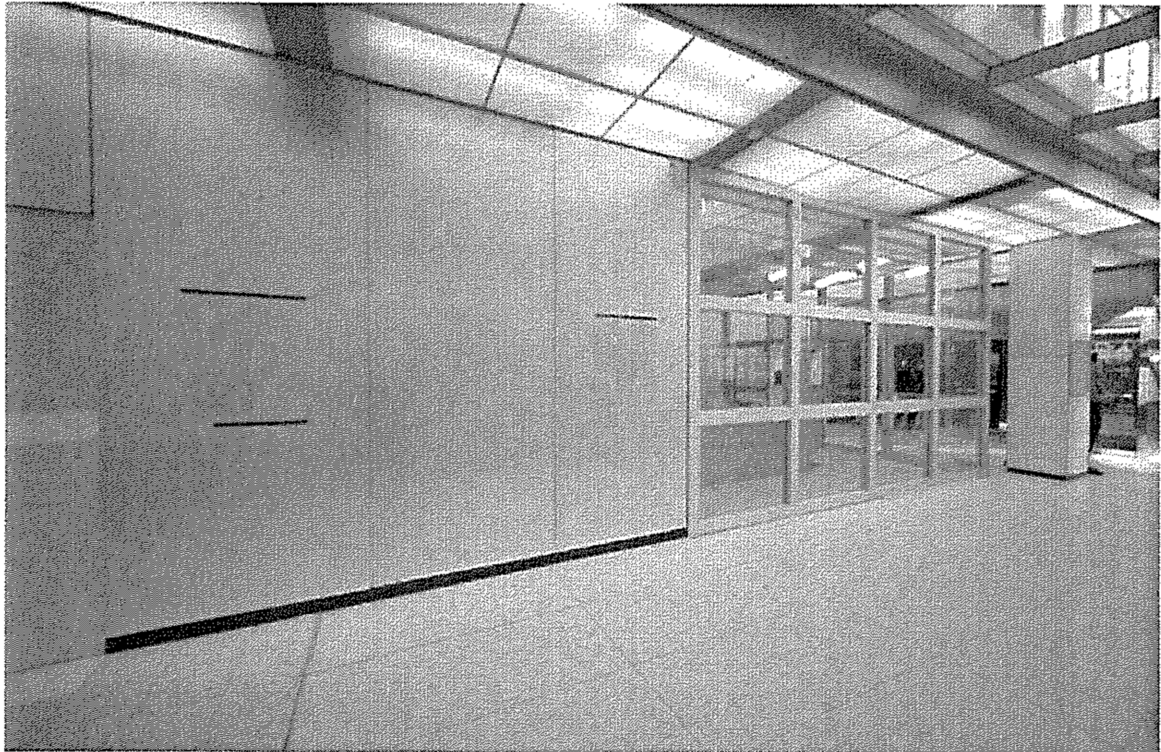


Second floor, view west
Photo: Ezra Stoller, 1954 © Esto (upper)
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2011 (lower)

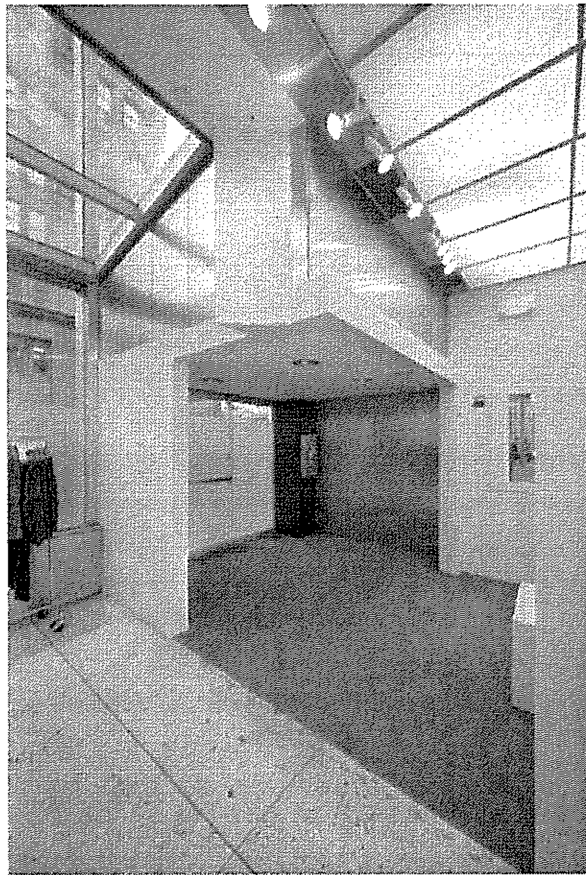


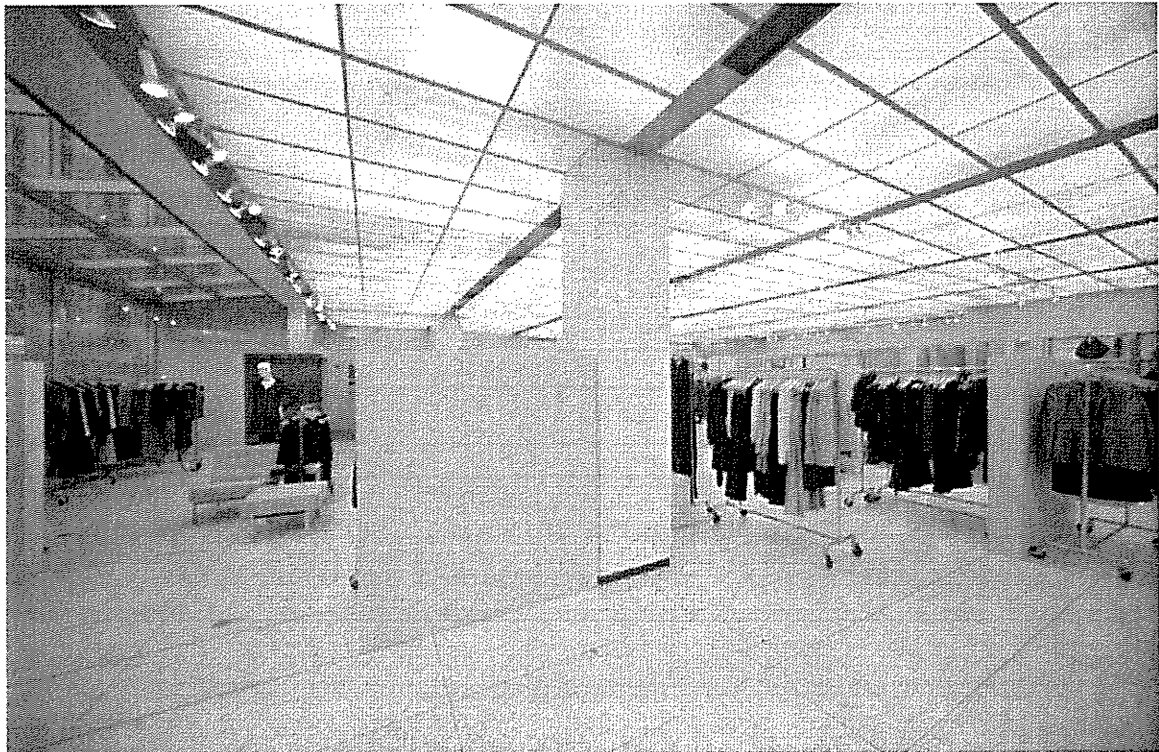


First floor, east entrance
Photo: Ezra Stoller, 1954 © Esto (upper)
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2011(lower)

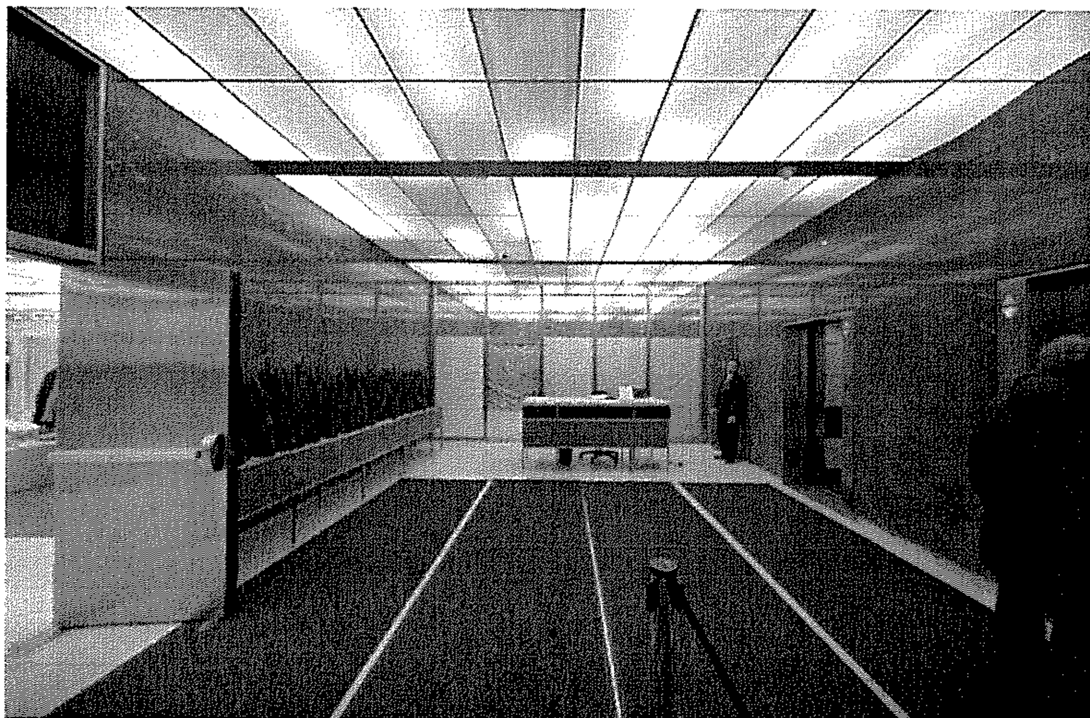


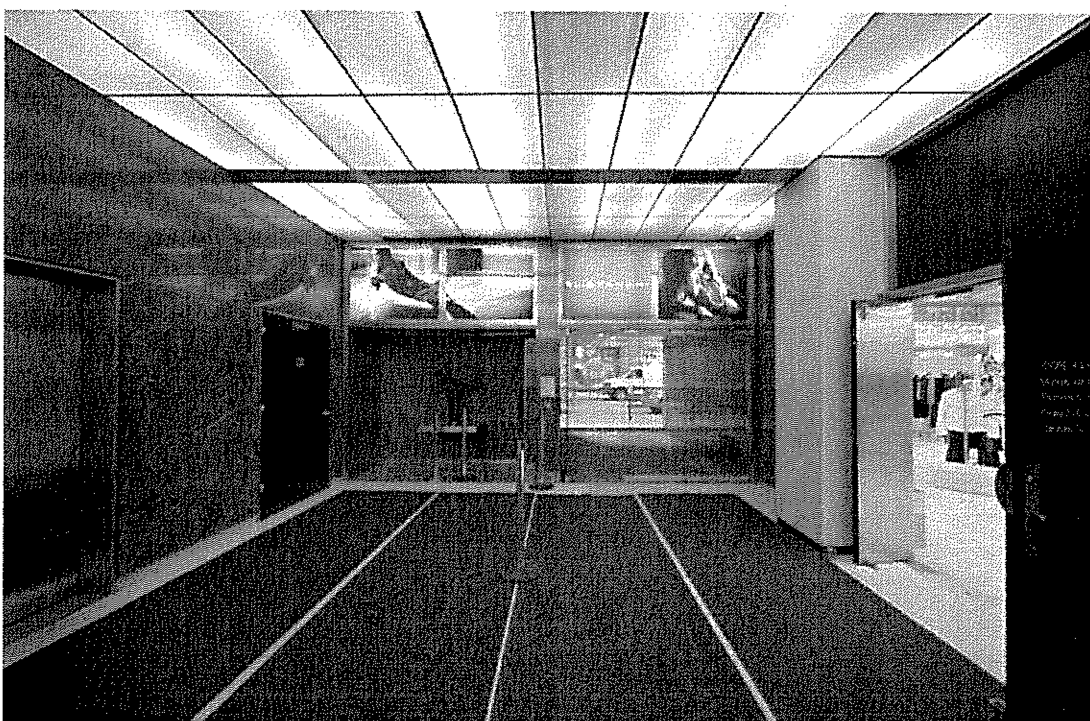
First floor, adjoining Fifth Avenue
South and North sides
Photos: Christopher D. Brazee, 2011



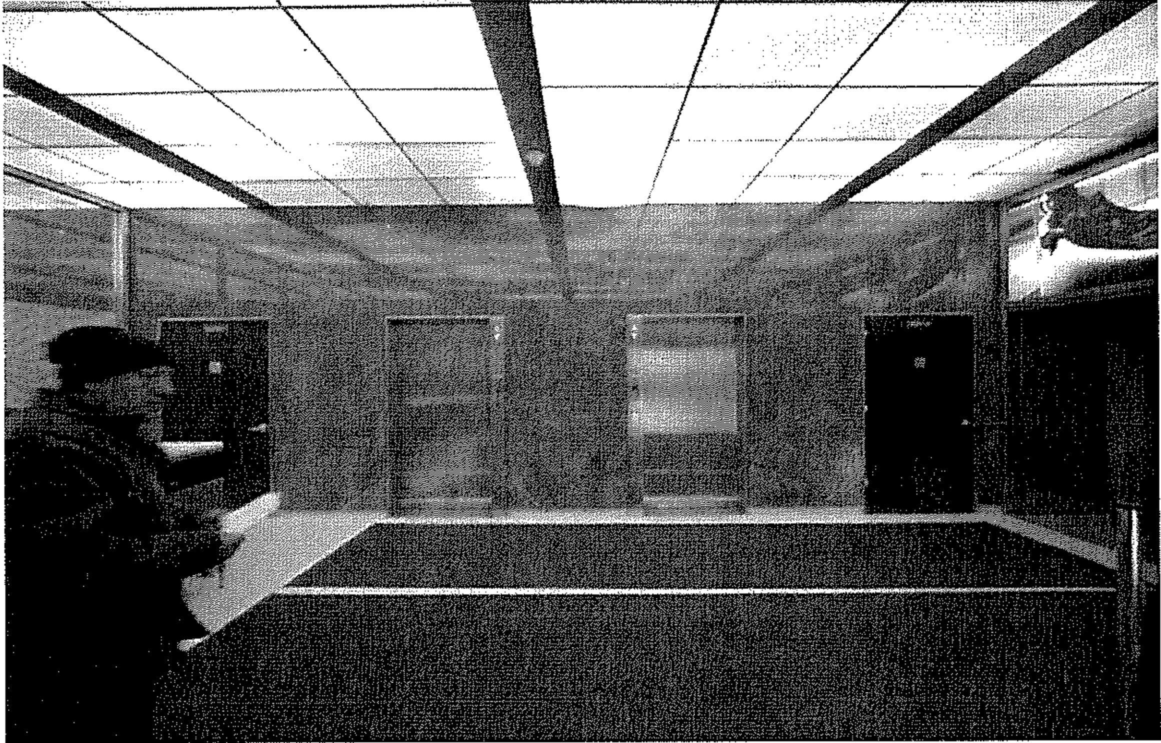


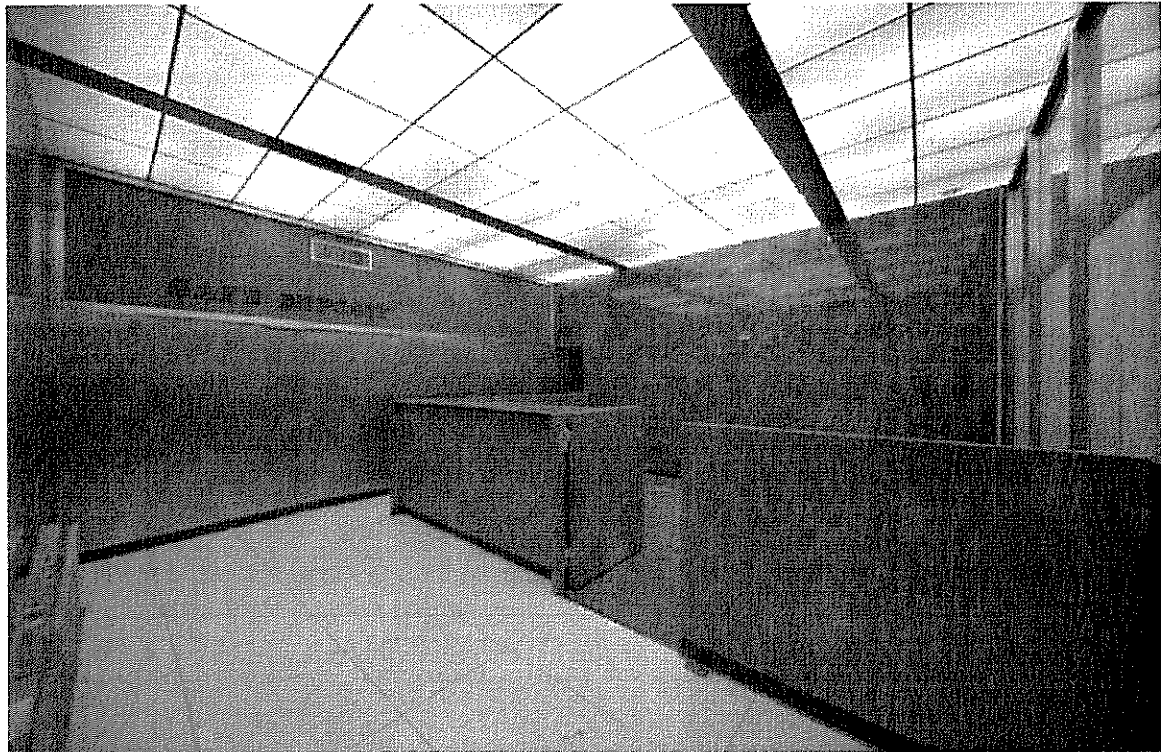
First floor retail space
43rd Street entrance, northeast corner (upper)
View east (lower)
Photos: Christopher D. Brazee, 2011





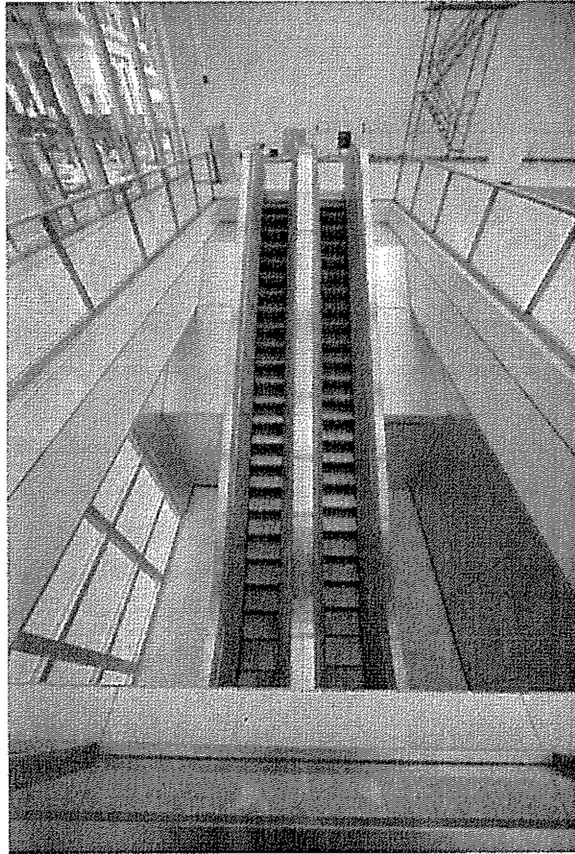
43rd Street lobby
View south (upper); View north (lower)
Photos: Christopher D. Brazee, 2011

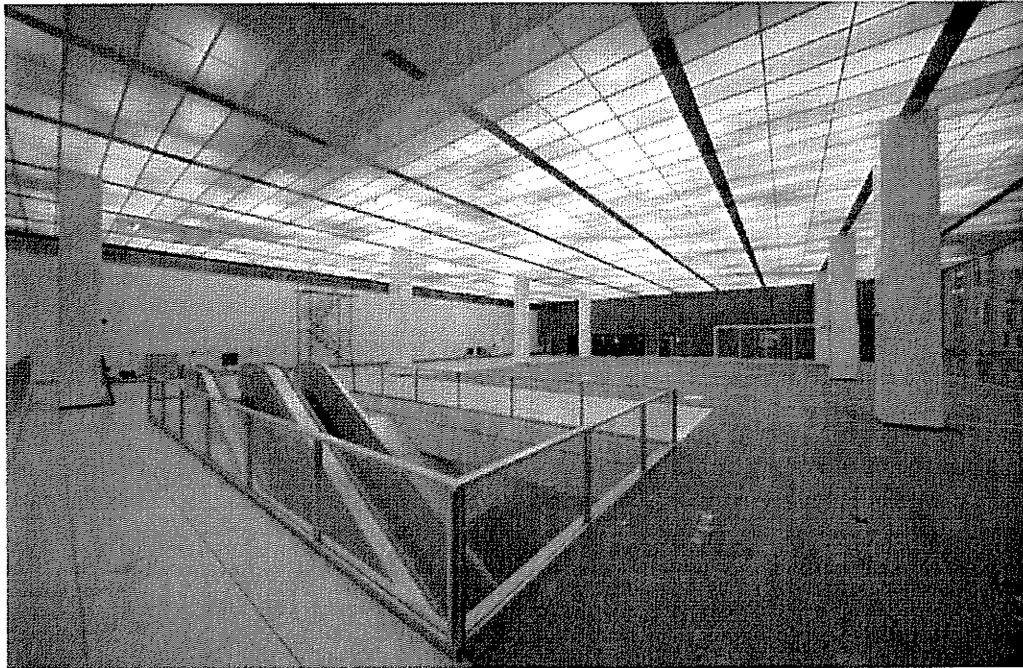




West wall of 43rd Street lobby (upper)
Foyer to safe deposit area, south and west walls (lower)
Photos: Christopher D. Brazee, 2011

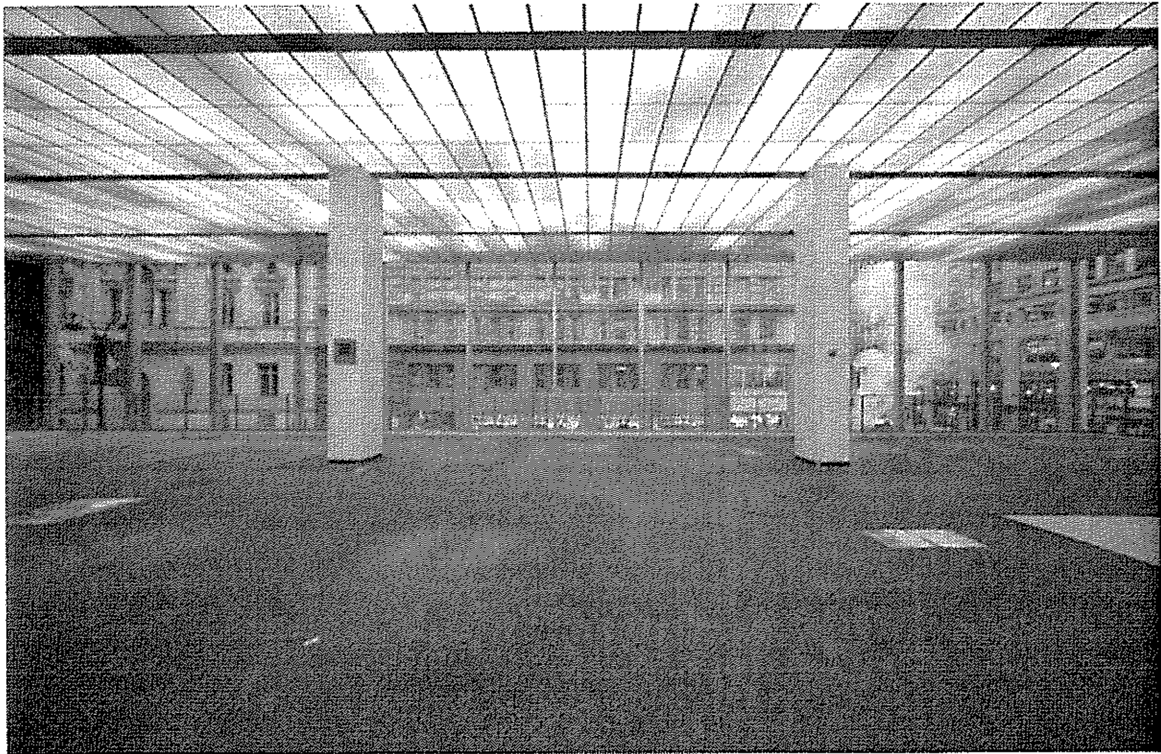
First floor, escalators, view south
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2011

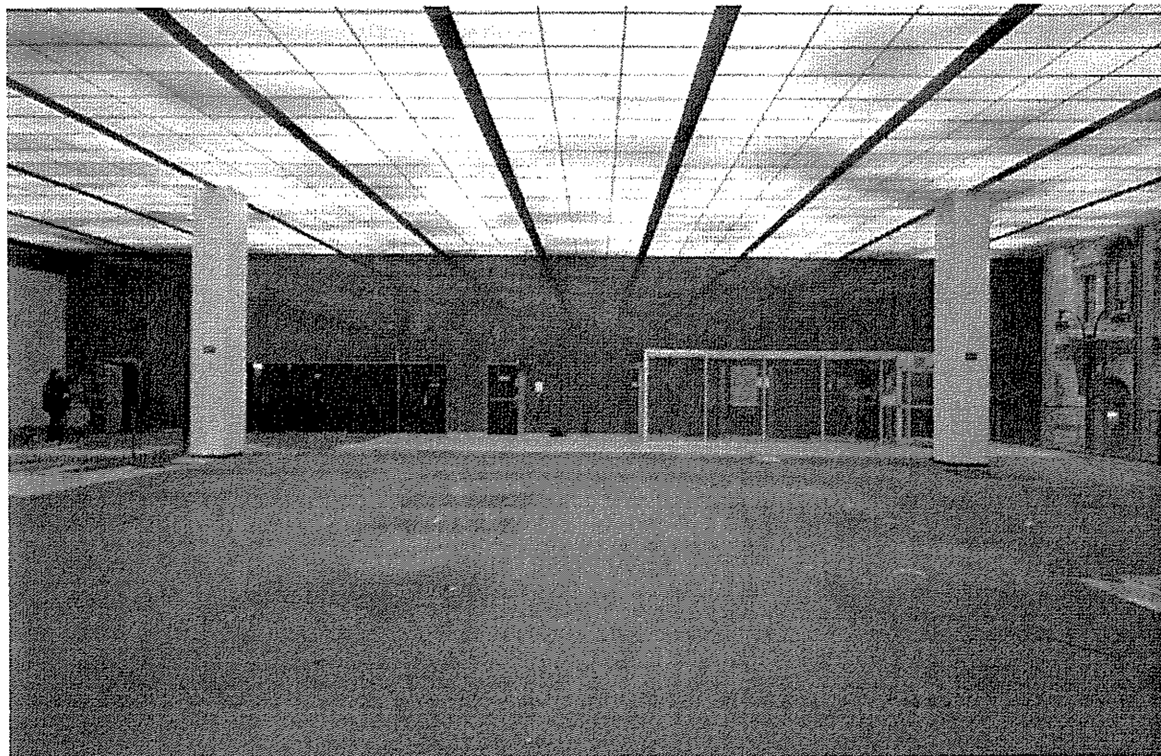




Second floor
View of escalators (upper); View to southwest (lower)
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2011

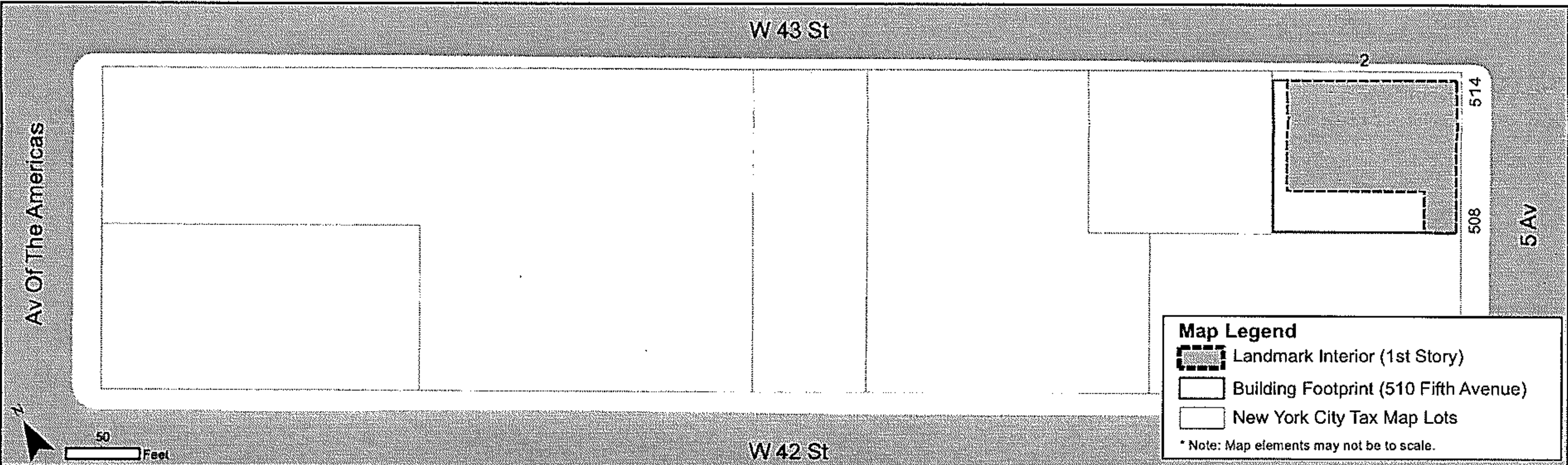
Second floor
View east toward Fifth Avenue (upper); view northeast (lower)
Photo: Christopher D. Brazee, 2011



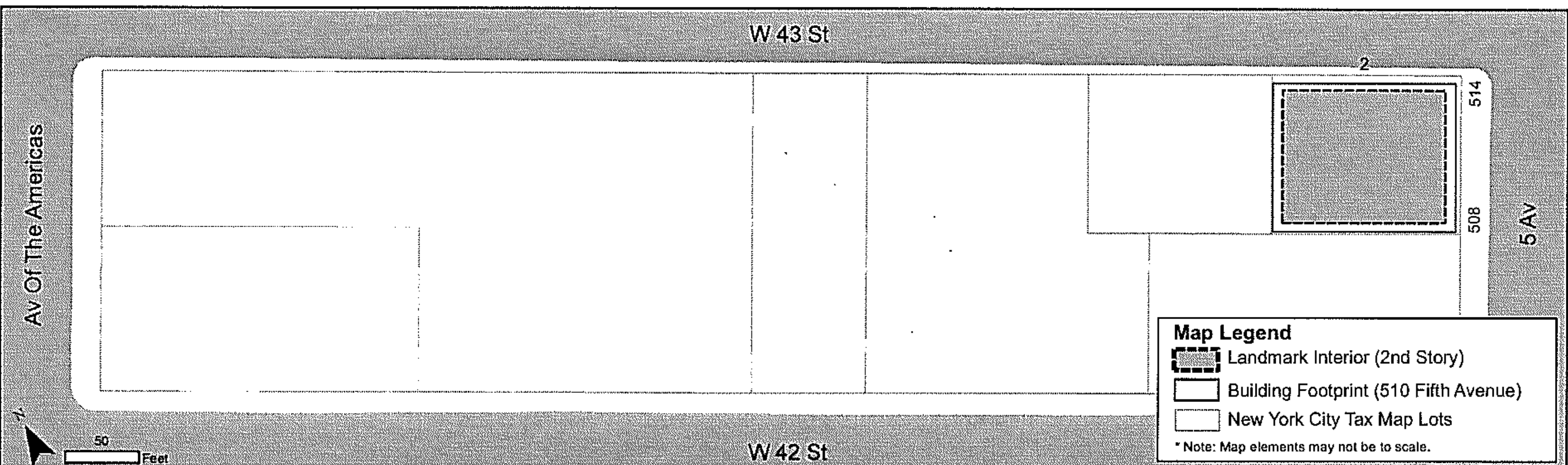


Second floor
View north to 43rd Street (upper); West wall (lower)
Photos: Christopher D. Brazee, 2011

First Floor



Second Floor



MANUFACTURERS TRUST COMPANY BUILDING INTERIOR, LATER CHASE BANK BUILDING (LP-2467), 510 Fifth Avenue (aka 508-514 Fifth Avenue; 2 West 43rd Street), Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 1258, Lot 40, first floor interior, consisting of the entrance vestibule and lobby at the corner of Fifth Avenue and West 43rd Street, the former banking room, the 43rd Street elevator lobby, the corridor in front of the vault on Fifth Avenue, and the escalators leading from the first floor to the second floor; second floor interior, consisting of the former banking room; and the fixtures and interior components of both floors, including but not limited to, wall surfaces, ceiling surfaces, floor surfaces, columns, and vault door facing Fifth Avenue.

Designated: February 15, 2011

Landmarks Preservation Commission
February 1, 2011, Designation List 438
LP-2414

REVEREND ISAAC COLEMAN and REBECCA GRAY COLEMAN HOUSE, 1482 Woodrow Road, Staten Island; Built before 1859: Architect: Not determined

Landmark Site: Borough of Staten Island Tax Map Block 7020, Lot 123

On August 10, 2010, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Reverend Isaac Coleman and Rebecca Gray Coleman House and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 4). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. There were 6 speakers in favor of designation including Yvonne Taylor representing the family of Rebecca Gray Coleman, which still owns the property. Other speakers in favor included representatives of the Society for the Architecture of the City, the Preservation League of Staten Island, the Historic Districts Council, the Sandy Ground Historical Society, and the Butler Manor Civic Association. There were also letters in favor of designation from Yvette Taylor Jordon, the great granddaughter of Rebecca Gray Coleman, and from the Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in America. There were no speakers in opposition.

Summary

The Reverend Isaac Coleman and Rebecca Gray Coleman house is a vernacular frame structure that can be documented to the mid 19th century. The earliest section is probably older than that and is possibly the earliest extant building surviving from the period when Sandy Ground was a prosperous African-American community on Staten Island.[1] The area's first African-American residents purchased property in 1828. Their numbers were bolstered in the 1840s and 50s by the arrival from Snow Hill, Maryland on the Chesapeake Bay, of numerous families who were involved in the oyster trade and came to New York to escape harsh laws passed in this slave state prior to the Civil War. Sandy Ground is located in the southern part of Staten Island, not far from the shipping port of Rossville on the Arthur Kill to the north and the prime oyster grounds of Prince's Bay on the south, and most of its residents were employed in the oyster trade or in farming. Beginning in the 1840s through the early 20th century, this area, called Woodrow, Little Africa, or (more commonly) Sandy Ground, was home to a group of free African Americans who resided here in more than 50 houses. The Sandy Ground community thrived for many years, creating institutions such as the Rossville A.M.E. Zion Church and a local school.

It is unclear when the Coleman-Gray House was originally constructed, although it is identified on one of the earliest surviving maps of the area, from 1859. It was occupied at that time by Ephraim Bishop, who arrived from Maryland in 1851. The house was purchased by Isaac Coleman and his wife Rebecca Gray Coleman when he came to Sandy Ground to serve as pastor of the Rossville A.M.E. Zion Church in 1864. Although Isaac Coleman probably lived in the house only one year, the building has been in the possession of descendants of Rebecca Gray Coleman since that time. The house was likely built as a 1 ½ story structure, with a single room

on each story. The shed roof addition to the east, probably used as a kitchen, was added at some point early in its existence and the two-story, two-bay addition was made on the western side, possibly sometime around the Coleman's purchase. It is likely that the most recent section of the house, the two-story section on the western side, was added during the late 1880s to accommodate a growing extended family. Throughout this time, the basic form of the house has remained, although these later additions have enlarged the space. More recently, the house has been sided with contemporary materials and the window sash replaced. Its massing, fenestration pattern and siting on a large lot helps it stand out in this recently-developed part of Staten Island and its survival is a remarkable and rare reminder of this very early African-American community.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Development of the Community of Sandy Ground[2]

The Sandy Ground community was founded on a section of high ground near the center of the southern part of Staten Island, halfway between the well-known oyster beds of Prince's Bay on the south and the port of Rossville on the Arthur Kill to the north. This area has been known by various names through the years, such as Woodrow, Harrisville or Little Africa, and its center was at the confluence of what is now Woodrow and Bloomingdale Roads. Since this area is located inland, rather than along the shore, and was still wooded in the mid 1800s, it was not seen as desirable and therefore was not expensive. The name Sandy Ground first appears on records dating to 1779 and refers to the sandy soil of the area, particularly good for growing certain crops such as strawberries and asparagus.[3]

Staten Island was inhabited for thousands of years by Native Americans.[4] Archaeologist Alanson B. Skinner reported finding evidence of a Woodland Period (2700BP-AD 1500) Native American village at the center of what would become Sandy Ground. While most Native Americans left the island by 1700, a few remained and their descendents could be found on Staten Island as late as the early 1900s. At Sandy Ground, several black families claimed Native American descent and Skinner observed that the Native American tradition of grinding corn with wooden mortars and pestles continued at Sandy Ground into the 1890s.

During the colonial period, Staten Island was largely settled by Dutch and Huguenot families with a scattering of English and other Europeans.[5] Many settlers brought white indentured servants or black slaves to the island, with slaves making up between 10 to 23 percent of the population. During the first half of the 19th century Staten Island's African-American population continued to grow. Some of these people were previously slaves of local residents, while other free blacks chose to settle on Staten Island because land was available and inexpensive.[6] Land ownership records show African-American residents purchased land in Sandy Ground before 1830. John Jackson bought 2 ½ acres of land in 1828 while he and Thomas Jackson (relationship unknown) purchased eight acres in 1835. Apparently John Jackson operated the ferry *Lewis Columbia* between Rossville and Manhattan, the only direct method of access at this time.[7]

In the 1840s and 50s, these first settlers were joined by several other African American families who came from an area of Maryland on the Chesapeake Bay called Snow Hill.

Although Maryland was still a slave state in these years before the Civil War, it also had a large number of free blacks, many of whom were involved in the oyster trade.[8] Their existence proved to be a bad example for those still living in slavery and during the 1830s, the state passed a series of restrictive laws to control and limit the activities of free black people. These new laws forbade free blacks to captain their own oyster boats or to own guns (which limited their ability to procure food for their families). In response, several African-American families involved in the oyster trade moved to Staten Island. The waters off Staten Island were also well known for the fine and numerous oysters they produced and the oyster industry was an important source of jobs for many people on Staten Island throughout the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. As the oyster beds off Staten Island started to become depleted, a constant stream of maritime traffic developed between these two areas, allowing familiarity and an easy movement of people as well as products. Family names of some of these African Americans who came to Sandy Ground from Maryland at this time included Bishop, Henman, Landin, Purnell, Robbins and Stevens, while others, including the Harris and Henry families, came from elsewhere in New York and New Jersey.[9]

The area attracted more and more free residents of color and established its own distinct community in this period before the Civil War, creating at Sandy Ground a very early neighborhood within (what is now) New York City where free African Americans owned their own property.[10] Even before the abolition of slavery in New York in 1827, there had been free blacks in the city, and they tended to live together in small enclaves in different parts of each county, but it is not clear whether these people owned their own homes. It was generally difficult for newly freed people to earn enough money to purchase land, or to find individuals willing to sell it to them if they could afford it. Only two other communities of land-holding African Americans have been documented in New York at this time. The first was probably Seneca Village, begun around 1825 when John Whitehead sold off small parcels of his land near what later became Central Park, between 79th and 86th Streets, and Sixth and Seventh Avenues.[11] By 1855, the census listed 264 people at this location, consisting mostly of blacks but also including some whites (mostly Irish and German immigrants), and at least three churches, a school and a cemetery. Against the wishes of the residents the village was destroyed as part of the construction of Central Park by the end of the decade. Another settlement of free blacks began in the 1830s, but was firmly established in 1838 when James Weeks purchased property from the Lefferts family estate in what was (then) the outskirts of Brooklyn, now Bedford-Stuyvesant. More than 100 people lived in this stable African-American community throughout the rest of the 19th and early 20th centuries.[12]

Sandy Ground was the third New York community where African Americans were able to own property and start their own institutions, such as churches and schools. By 1850, several residents of Sandy Ground met to found the AME Zion Church, an activity which indicates a thriving and stable community. At a meeting in December, 1850 (which was later recorded at the local Register's office[13]) trustees were elected for the church. On December 11, 1852 this group purchased land on Crabtree Avenue for a church and a "plain wooden structure" was erected there by 1854. The building could accommodate 150 persons, and a cemetery was established on land to its west (the Rossville AME Zion Church Cemetery, a designated New York City Landmark). Other institutions, such as the local school, run by African-American teacher Esther Purnell, accommodated the children of both black and white residents. Local businesses also began, to supply what the community needed, such as the Bogardus general store and the blacksmith shop of William Bishop (begun 1888).

There have often been rumors that Sandy Ground was used as a stop on the Underground Railroad. This was a logical conclusion, since people from here traveled regularly between New York and southern slave states. Additionally, AME churches were often known for their willingness to help escaping slaves. However, since there are so few remaining structures from the original Sandy Ground community, and no written records documenting any occurrence have surfaced, this cannot be conclusively proven.

Oysters and Oystering[14]

Oysters have been an important source of food and commerce in New York since before the white explorers arrived. The Lenapes were harvesting and eating oysters when Hudson arrived (shown by the huge piles of oyster shells or middens they left)[15] and the mollusks helped sustain the early settlers. Oysters were already well-known in Europe, having been popular since the Roman empire. The Dutch, French and British were great lovers of oysters when they arrived in the New World and this food figured prominently in European (and hence American) cuisine of the 17th and 18th centuries, with recipes for oysters included in most cookbooks of that time.[16]

Oysters grow best in "warm, brackish water in intertidal and sub-tidal areas along shorelines."[17] Oysters are quite adaptable and can survive cold winters by hibernating and can also live in water up to 90 degrees Fahrenheit. They are found all along the Atlantic coast, although they grow faster and bigger in warmer water.

In Europe the traditional method of gathering oysters was to wade into the water at low tide with rakes, picking them up by hand. The Lenape showed the settlers how to row out into deeper water and use long-handled rakes with two sets of teeth, called tongs, to grab the oysters and fill their boats. This faster and more efficient gathering process was important since New Yorkers would eat as many oysters as were available. They were popular with all classes of people and large numbers of oysters were served at fancy banquets as well as in the poorest slums of the cities. New York's first oyster cellar opened in a basement of a building on Broad Street in 1763.[18]

Since oysters lay their eggs in spring, oyster harvesting was initially restricted to the fall or winter months, or months with the letter "R" in them. A law to this effect, implemented by the colonial government by 1715, was an early attempt at conservation.[19] New Yorkers, however, were not content to restrict their oyster consumption and before long, they learned to pickle oysters to make them available throughout the year. In 1807, under pressure from local businessmen, New York stopped limiting the gathering of oysters to the colder months and in 1819, in order to be able to eat oysters any time and place, the first oyster cannery opened. The advent of steamships and then the opening of the Erie Canal allowed access to more markets, with purveyors demanding more and more oysters. In response, fishermen harvested more and more of the animals.

The oyster beds around New York had begun to show signs of depletion as early as the mid 18th century, both from overfishing and from pollution. New York City's trash and waste were washed into nearby rivers and streams, befouling waterways, groundwater, wells and beaches. By around 1750, malaria from mosquitoes and cholera from tainted water had become commonplace. Since oysters feed on the organic matter in the water in which they live, they and other creatures that depended on this habitat began to suffer. In the 19th century, with the progress of industrialization, local rivers and bays were also used for dumping industrial waste, a situation that worsened the condition of local oysters.

The system of "planting" young oysters had been practiced in several parts of the world for many years. It had become common in Europe which had already experienced a drop in production of their oyster beds. Even though fishermen did not understand much about oyster reproduction, they had known for some time that oysters could be grown more successfully in habitat that was different from where they were spawned. There were still plenty of oysters to be gathered in the Chesapeake Bay off Maryland and Virginia, and New York fishermen realized that tiny oysters from these areas could be brought to the barren beds off Staten Island and Long Island that were known for their excellent oyster-growing conditions. Oysters that began life in the warmer waters of the Bay seemed to mature at a faster rate and once fishermen provided appropriate material for the oysters to attach themselves, they would reach an acceptable size for harvesting in one year.

Such tiny oysters were first brought for planting from the Chesapeake Bay in 1820. A schooner with a captain and four-man crew could travel from Prince's Bay in Staten Island to the lower Chesapeake, load 2,500 to 3,500 bushels of seed oysters onto their boat and return in less than six days. Upon his return to Staten Island the captain would hire an additional 12 men to shovel the seed oysters overboard onto a specified area that was leased from the state for this purpose. Staten Island oystermen soon developed special wooden trays or "flats" for the oysters to adhere to while other locals developed the skill of making the wood splint baskets that became the standard unit of measure for the oyster trade. In this way, the oyster trade employed many people and by the 1830s was the most important economic activity on Staten Island.[20]

Sandy Ground Oystermen

While some African-American residents farmed their own land and others traveled to Manhattan to work for whites, many in Sandy Ground earned their living from the oyster industry. Working on board oyster boats and collecting and transporting oysters provided an unusually fruitful method of making a living for blacks in these early days. Even before the end of slavery, it was not unusual for African Americans (both slaves and free) to work aboard ocean-going ships, where there seemed to be harmony with white seamen who apparently were willing to work with multiracial shipmates.[21] Since oystering did not become a major commercial industry with an established hierarchy until the 19th century, African Americans were able to become involved and gain a place in this developing field.[22] It required very little capital investment, yet returned a decent living, allowing the free blacks in the Chesapeake Bay area, as well as those on Staten Island, to create comfortable lives for themselves. In the 19th century the oyster industry was such an important part of the economy of Staten Island that some of those who pursued it became wealthy, while others were able to support their families in a comfortable manner for many years. Work was available at many levels of the operation: on the boats, planting the seed oysters, collecting them, opening and packing them for shipping as well as selling them. Several residents of Sandy Ground were able to purchase their own boats for dredging oysters, while others worked aboard the boats of others. This activity, as well as oyster shucking and processing employed many Sandy Grounders for a long time. The 1880s and 90s were the "Golden Age" of Sandy Ground's African American community and the area had as many as 50 homes.

Indications of severe pollution in the waters off Staten Island began in the early years of the 20th century. The oyster beds were officially closed in 1916, after several outbreaks of typhoid due to eating polluted oysters. The community of Sandy Ground, so dependent on this industry, gradually declined. Some residents were able to find work in local factories or

commuted to Manhattan or New Jersey for jobs. Others relied on small farms to feed their families and supply markets in Manhattan. Eventually however, this stable community of free and prosperous African American families declined. Severe fires in 1930 and in 1963 destroyed many houses and much property, although a recognizable community continues to exist in Sandy Ground today. It consists of descendents of people who have lived in the area for more than 100 years.

History of the Coleman-Gray House

This house, although modified through the years, is one of the earliest structures from the original Sandy Ground community that is still extant, and may well be the oldest. It probably appears on the earliest known 18th century maps of the area (such as that compiled from the Taylor & Skinner Map of 1781 and the Hessian Map of 1777), as well as on the 1853 map compiled by James Butler,[23] along with a number of other houses near what is now the intersection of Woodrow and Bloomingdale Roads. Since none of the buildings are identified, it is impossible to be certain, however.

The house is first positively identified on the 1859 map of H.F. Walling as the home of Ephraim Bishop, an oysterman, and his wife Ann. Bishop was an African-American oysterman who had moved to Staten Island in 1851 from Maryland.[24] It is unclear when the house was constructed or when it was purchased by Bishop. Ephraim Bishop died by 1862 and his wife then attained full ownership of the property.[25] She sold it in 1864 to Isaac Coleman who had come to Sandy Ground to serve as the sixth pastor of the AME Zion Church. Little is known about his background, but Isaac Coleman had been a pastor in western Pennsylvania since at least 1848.[26] At some point shortly before he moved to Sandy Ground, he married Rebecca Gray, a widow (originally from North Carolina) who was living in the 1850s and early 1860s in New York City with her children.[27] Isaac and Rebecca moved to Sandy Ground in 1864 and in 1865 he was transferred to Williamsburgh, Brooklyn. By 1870, Isaac Coleman had died and Rebecca Coleman was living in Manhattan with her son Stephen Gray, a waiter, his wife Martha and their four children. In 1871, Stephen Gray and his family moved to Sandy Ground with his mother, Rebecca Coleman. The house has remained under the ownership of descendents of Rebecca Gray to this day.

In 1881, Stephen and Martha's daughter Rebecca Gray (1863-1955) married Robert H. Landin (1854-1934), another oysterman who had come to Sandy Ground from Talbot County, Maryland.[28] Rebecca and Robert Landin continued to live in the house and had five children of their own.[29] Rebecca Coleman was still living in the house according to the 1880 census records, but died sometime thereafter. In the early years of the 20th century the house was occupied by Robert and Rebecca Landin, their children, and Rebecca's father, Stephen Gray (until he died in 1906, a widower). By 1910, the next generation had moved in: the Landin's oldest daughter Arlene (or Alina) and her husband Abram Decker. They had children of their own, so that in 1910, the house was occupied by 12 people, including members of three nuclear families and one boarder. There were 10 people living in the house in 1920, but by 1930 there were only six people there.[30] In recent years the house has been rented as a two-family home and is no longer occupied by members of Rebecca Gray's family.

Architecture of the Coleman-Gray House[31]

The earliest part of this house appears to be the 3-bay, 1½ story section with a shallow pitched roof near the eastern end of the building. The fact that the walls of the second story rise

somewhat above the ground story appears to express the external form of H-bent construction seen on 18th century, wooden, Dutch-American farmhouses in Brooklyn and elsewhere. This type of framing, in which heavy timbers extend beyond the first story, part-way into the second story to allow for a shallow second-story living space has been documented on these early buildings that relate to Dutch architecture, but have developed into a uniquely American version.[32] Additionally, these Dutch-American farmhouses were often built with a one-room plan in which an interior staircase against the wall led to a small upper room. Both of these elements exist in this house. In the western bay at the front of this section is the door, probably the original main entrance to the house. At the rear of this part of the house is the only section of rubble stone foundation that is visible on the exterior. Also in the rear and extending from this section is a double-door storm hatch, another common element on these early Dutch-American farmhouses.

To the east of this 1½-story section is a one-story, shed-roof extension that probably was originally built for a kitchen Old photos show a brick chimney extending from the wall between these two sections, indicating the presence of a fireplace there.[33] This type of addition was the most common early extension of these houses. It has not been possible to determine when this room was added.

To the west of this earliest section is a two-story, flat-roofed portion. It is likely that this part was added after 1870 when Stephen Gray and his family moved there, since they had five children and would have needed more space.

The western-most part of the house is the most recent section. It was added by Rebecca and Robert Landin during the late 19th century when they needed more living space.[34] The Landins were married in 1881 and raised many children in the house.[35] In the early 20th century Rebecca Landin's father and brother also lived in the house, and by 1910, the Landin's oldest daughter Alina and her husband Abram Decker were also in residence there. In 1910 there were 12 people residing in the house.

This part of the house displays characteristics of a very late vernacular Greek Revival style, seen in its clean lines and simple massing. Although the Greek Revival style was used primarily in the early to mid 19th century, its use extended much later in rural areas such as Sandy Ground. It was adapted in a highly simplified manner for vernacular buildings such as this house, and was more often represented by its classical leanings such as its regularly-spaced bays, side-gable roof with returns (no longer extant but seen on early photographs) and symmetrical chimneys.

Description

Wood-framed house; clapboard-siding; rubble stone foundation; composed of series of sections arranged horizontally, that reflect the various additions over time; house set parallel to, but back from Woodrow Road.

Sections from east to west: 1-story shed roof section; a 1½-story, 3-bay section with a shallow, side-gable, pitched roof and door in western bay; a 2-story, 2-bay section with a flat roof; a 2-story, 3-bay section with a side gable roof and a brick chimney on the eastern end and door in eastern bay.

Extant original material: at rear of earliest portion of building, small section of rubble stone foundation and basement storm cellar hatch with two metal doors; brick chimney on eastern side of westernmost section of house; original fenestration pattern.

Alterations: Single-story, shed-roof addition on the rear; entire house faced with vinyl siding; all windows replaced with one-over-one sash (original windows replaced by 1980; windows on westernmost section had 2/2 wood sash, all others had multi-light, double-hung wood sash); windows on oldest and most recent sections originally had wooden shutters; roof covered with asphalt shingles; original foundation mostly covered by concrete; original brick chimneys removed from east side of original 1 ½ story section, and from west side of westernmost section; front porch rebuilt on concrete pad and expanded to front both doors (originally only over westernmost doorway); doors replaced (originally wood-paneled).
Site: Large lot with some mature trees and bushes; paved areas behind house; driveway on eastern side of lot, non-historic wooden storage building behind house on the western side of the lot.
Site is within the National Register Sandy Ground Archaeological District, designated to recognize the Free Black community founded in the mid 19th century; designation included archaeological resources as they could illuminate the evolution of the community.

Report researched and written by
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Research Department

NOTES

[1] The Sandy Ground Historic Archaeological District is listed in the National Register of Historic Places to recognize the free black community founded in the mid 19th century. The listing included archaeological resources as they could illuminate the evolution of the community. In addition, the area has documented Native American sites and the potential to contain significant archaeological resources related to Sandy Ground and to Native American occupation. Sandy Ground Historic Archaeological District (AO85-01-2258-DO3) National Register of Historic Places Inventory-Nomination Form for the United States Department of the Interior, National Park Service prepared by the New York State Office of Parks and Recreation and Historic Preservation on August 1, 1982. The Native American sites are listed with New York State Museum, Site Number NYS 7272, described as "traces of occupation" and Site Number NYS 8497 described as a "village."

[2] This section on the early development of Sandy Ground is based on Lois A.H. Mosley, Barnett Shepherd, et. al., *Sandy Ground Memories* (Staten Island: Staten Island Historical Society, 2003); Joseph Mitchell, "Mr. Hunter's Grave," *The New Yorker* (Sept, 22, 1956); Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Rossville A.M.E. Zion Church Cemetery Designation Report* (LP-1399) (New York: City of New York, 1985), prepared by Shirley Zavin;

William Askins, *The Sandy Ground Survey Project: Archaeological and Historical Research in Support of a National Register Nomination* (New York: City College, City University of New York, 1980); William Askins, *Sandy Ground : Historical Archaeology of Class and Ethnicity in a Nineteenth Century Community on Staten Island* (New York: PhD Dissertation, Graduate Center, City University of New York, 1988); Minna C. Wilkins, "Sandy Ground: A Tiny Racial Island," *Staten Island Historian* 6 (Jan.-Mar. 1943) 1-3, 7 (Oct.-Dec. 1943), 25-26, 31-32; *Holden's Staten Island: The History of Richmond County*, edited and compiled by Richard Dickenson (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 2002).

[3] *Holden's Staten Island*, 481.

[4] This information on Native Americans on Staten Island is based on Askins, *Sandy Ground: Historical Archaeology*, 143; *Indian Notes and Monographs* (New York: Museum of the American Indian, Heye Foundation, 1919), 317; Alanson Skinner, "The Lenapé Indians of Staten Island" in *The Indians of Greater New York and the Lower Hudson*, edited by Clark Wissler (New York: American Museum of Natural History, 1909), 37.

[5] On the European settlement of Staten Island and early slaveholding see Phillip Papas, *That Ever Loyal Island* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 9, 19.

[6] Many came because they felt they were being pushed out of other low-priced homes by the large numbers of poor German and Irish immigrants who flooded into New York at this time.

[7] *Holden's Staten Island,* 482.

[8] According to Askins, *Sandy Ground: Historical Archaeology*, 3, there were about 150,000 free blacks in Maryland by1860.

[9] National Register nomination, sec 8.

[10] The earliest example of landholding among African Americans in New York was probably in the 17th century when the Dutch West India Company gave farms north of the city to some of their "half-freed" slaves. "Gideon and the Great Dock," http://maap.columbia.edu/place/8.html, accessed 12/8, 2010.

[11] The first purchase of land happened between 1825 and 1827 by Diana and Elizabeth Harding. Information about Seneca Village comes from Ray Rosenzweig and Elizabeth Blackmar, *The Park and Its People, A History of Central Park* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1992), 66-73.

[12] Today there is only a small physical remnant of this community, the four houses known as the Hunterfly Road Houses (a designated New York City Landmark).

[13] Richmond County Register, Liber 25, page 513.

[14] The information on the oyster trade comes primarily from Mark Kurlansky, *The Big Oyster* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2006) as well as numerous newspaper clippings in the LPC research files.

[15] Several hundred shell piles or middens have been identified in the New York City area. Kurlansky, 14.

[16] In spite of the similarities, European oysters are from a different genetic family (Ostrea edulis) from those grown off the coast of the United States, which are known as Ostreidae. European oysters look different, reproduce differently and have fewer offspring. Kurlansky, 49-50.

[17] Kurlansky, 63.

[18] Kurlansky, 82.

[19] Kurlansky, 83.

[20] Kurlansky, 118-124.

[21] According to Jeffrey W. Bolster, *Black Jacks: African American Seamen in the Age of Sail* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1997), xvi and 6. Bolster reports that by 1803 black men (mostly freemen) formed approximately 18% of seamen's jobs in America.

[22] University of South Carolina, "The Conference on Historic Site Archaeology Papers, 1972," V7 (Institute of Architecture and Anthropology, Columbus, SC 1974), 18.

[23] Available at the Staten Island Institute of Arts and Sciences.

[24]The 1855 census notes that Ephraim Bishop arrived in Staten Island in 1851, although his wife Ann M. Bishop attended the founding meeting of the A.M.E. Zion Church, in December, 1850.

[25] Richmond County Register, Liber 58, page 73.

[26] Since it is the custom of the AME Church to change ministers each year, he had probably lived in many places.

[27] She appears in New York directories in the 1850s and early 1860s as a widow and a washer woman (colored), living on Laurens Street, in a black enclave in what is now Greenwich Village.

[28] It is not known whether this Robert Landin was related to another Landin family already in Sandy Ground. According to his daughter, Robert Landin was also ordained as a minister.

[29] According to Charles W. Leng & William T. Davis, *Staten Island & Its People, A History 1609-1929*, Vol. I (NY: Lewis Hist. Publ. Co., 1930), 478, Robert H. Landin also served as head of the Sunday school of the Rossville AME Zion Church.

[30] This history has been reconstructed on the basis of census records from numerous years.

[31] The observations here are based on the forms that are currently visible in the house. There have been many alterations to the house over the years and without further investigation of the framing and earliest materials that are not currently visible, the dates and timeline presented here cannot be confirmed.

[32] David Steven Cohen, *The Dutch-American Farm* (New York: New York University Press, 1992), 33-64.

[33] The fireplace and chimney were removed at an unknown date.

[34] This information was supplied by Rebecca Landin's granddaughter, Yvonne Taylor.

[35] According to Rebecca Landin's granddaughter, Yvonne Taylor, the Landins had twelve children, six of whom died early.

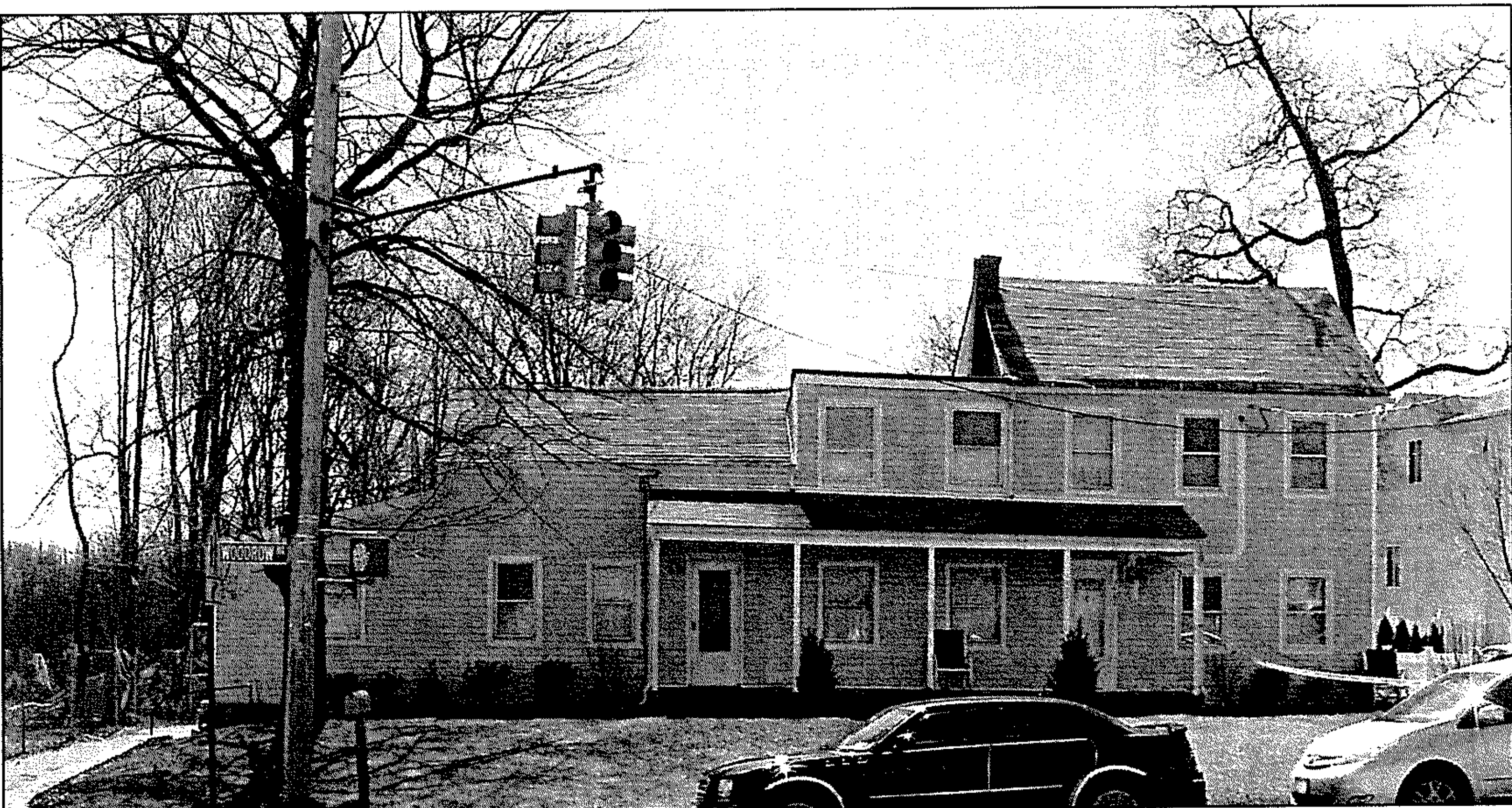
FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of the building and site, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Reverend Isaac Coleman and Rebecca Gray Coleman House has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest, and value as part of the development, heritage, and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Reverend Isaac Coleman and Rebecca Gray Coleman House is one of the oldest surviving farmhouses in one of New York's earliest African-American communities, Sandy Ground; that the rural community of Sandy Ground, located in southern Staten Island, was started before 1840 by free African Americans, many of whom came from Maryland and were employed in the oyster industry; that activities related to oysters provided Staten Island's largest sources of employment during the 19th century; that several families came from Maryland to join other free blacks already in residence here to found a community that continued to survive through much of the 20th century; that Sandy Ground thrived as long as the oyster industry thrived on Staten Island, allowing many members of this community to flourish economically; that the community continued even when the oyster beds off Staten Island were closed in the early 20th century due to pollution; that the Coleman-Gray House was purchased by Isaac Coleman and his wife Rebecca Gray Coleman in 1864 when he was appointed to be the sixth pastor of the Rossville AME Zion Church; that Isaac Coleman lived in the house for only one year before his next assignment, but that the house has continued to be owned and occupied by descendants of Rebecca Gray Coleman since that time; that while documentation has not been found, physical evidence suggests that the house probably was constructed early in the 19th century as a one-room and loft frame farmhouse in a style that relates to early Dutch residents of Staten Island; that various additions occurred through the years as the family grew and needed more space; that this is supported by the existence of a rubble stone foundation and angled storm hatch in the rear, the massing of the various sections and the original fenestration pattern; that despite additions and changes through the years, this house is a rare survivor of an important early African-American community that thrived in Sandy Ground on Staten Island.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Reverend Isaac Coleman and Rebecca Gray Coleman House, 1483 Woodrow Road, Staten Island, and designates Borough of Staten Island Tax Map Block 7020, Lot 123, as its Landmark Site.

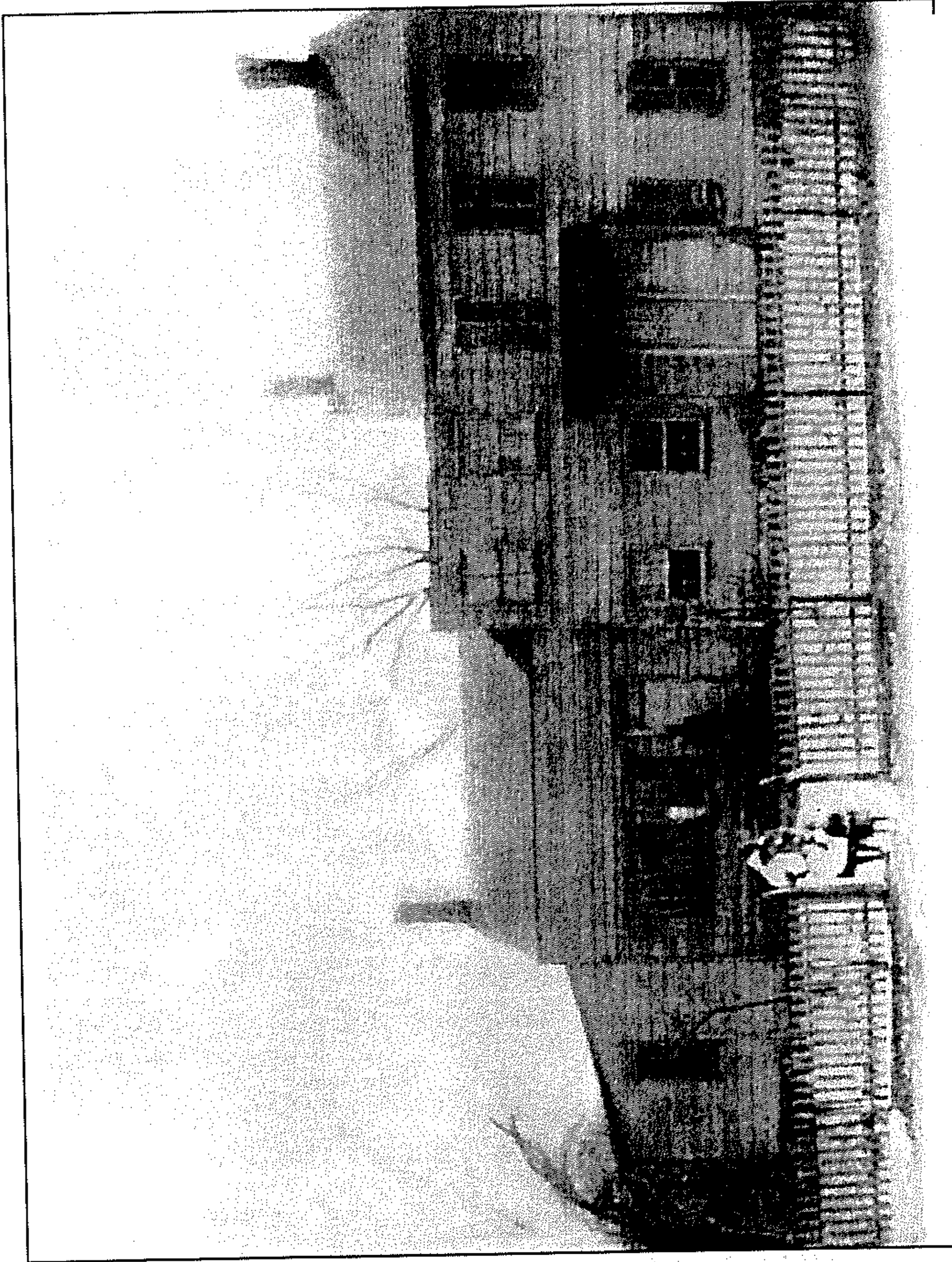
Robert B. Tierney, Chair
Pablo E. Vengoechea, Vice-Chair
Frederick Bland, Michael Devonshire,
Joan Gerner, Michael Goldblum,
Christopher Moore, Margery Perlmutter, Elizabeth Ryan,
Roberta Washington, Commissioners



Reverend Isaac Coleman and Rebecca Gray Coleman House
1482 Woodrow Road, Staten Island
Tax Map Block 7020, Lot 123
Photo: Marianne Percival, 2010

Reverend Isaac Coleman and Coleman and Rebecca Gray Coleman House
New York City Tax Photo, c. 1980

Reverend Isaac Coleman and Rebecca Gray Coleman House
New York City Tax Photo, c. 1939

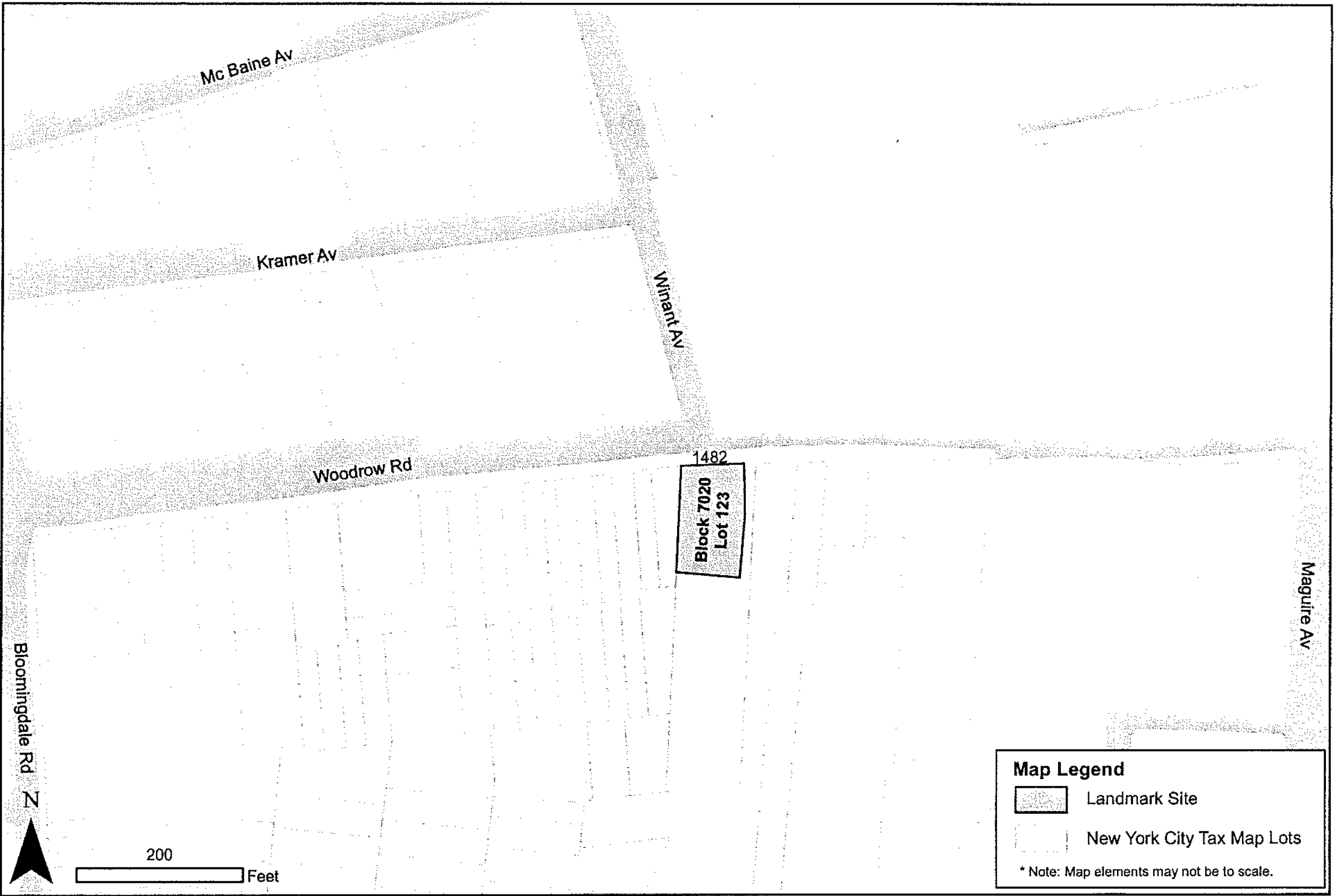


Reverend Isaac Coleman and Rebecca Gray Coleman House
Family photo, c. 1900

Reverend Isaac Coleman
Family photograph

Reverend Isaac Coleman and Rebecca Gray Coleman House
Details of front facade, Woodrow Road
Photos: Virginia Kurshan, 2010

Reverend Isaac Coleman and Rebecca Gray Coleman House
Photo: Cindy Danza, 2007



REV. ISAAC COLEMAN AND REBECCA GRAY COLEMAN HOUSE (LP-2414), 1482 Woodrow Road
Landmark Site: Borough of Staten Island, Tax Map Block 7020, Lot 123

Designated: February 1, 2011

Graphic Source: New York City Department of City Planning, MapPLUTO, Edition 09v1, 2009. Author: New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, JM. Date: February 1, 2011

TESTIMONY OF THE LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND MARITIME USES ON THE DESIGNATION OF THE ADDISLEIGH PARK HISTORIC DISTRICT IN QUEENS.

May 3, 2011

Good morning Council Members. My name is Jenny Fernández, Director of Intergovernmental and Community Relations for the Landmarks Preservation Commission. I am here today to testify on the Commission's designation of the Addisleigh Park Historic District in Queens.

On March 23, 2010 The Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Addisleigh Park Historic District. Twenty people spoke, nineteen in favor of designation including New York City Council Member Leroy G. Comrie, Jr., representatives for State Senator William Perkins, as well as current and former presidents of the Addisleigh Park Civic Association, representatives for Central Queens Historical Association, Historic Districts Council, New York Landmarks Conservancy, Society for the Architecture of the City, Louis Armstrong House, and numerous residents of the district. Several were in favor of landmarking the district, with the exclusion of the church. One person spoke in opposition to the proposed designation. In addition, the Commission also received many letters and e-mails regarding this designation, including Queens Borough President Helen Marshall and American Institute of Architects Queens Chapter. The majority has been in favor of designation. On February 1, 2011, the Commission voted to designate the neighborhood a New York City historic district.

The Addisleigh Park Historic District consists of approximately 422 primary buildings including attached and freestanding houses constructed largely between the 1910s and 1930s. It also includes the 11 acre St. Albans Park. Centered along Murdock Avenue, and the adjoining streets, the houses are sited back from the street, many on large landscaped lots, and have a consistent scale that gives the neighborhood a suburban feel. Built in brick, stucco, wood, and stone, the homes reflect the predominant architectural styles of the early part of the 20th century: English Tudor Revival, Colonial Revival, and the Arts and Crafts styles. In the 1930s and 1940s, racially restrictive covenants were introduced that prohibited the sale of property to African Americans. During the 1940s the New York State Supreme Court upheld covenants in two lawsuits where homeowners were sued by their neighbors for selling their homes to African Americans.

While he ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, the judge in the case of Kemp v. Rubin (1947) acknowledged that Addisleigh Park already was home to 48 African-American families, including both Lena Horne and Count Basie who had purchased their homes in 1946.This was also notable for the number of organizations that filed amicus briefs supporting the right to sell to African Americans, making Kemp v. Rubin a significant case in the struggle for African Americans to own their own land. Following the United States Supreme Court decision in Shelley v. Kraemer (1948), which ruled that state judicial enforcement of racially restrictive covenants was a violation of the equal protection under the Fourteenth Amendment, the demographic make-up of Addisleigh Park changed as more African-Americans moved to the area. By 1952, an article on the neighborhood in the magazine Our World noted that it was home to the "richest and most gifted" African Americans, among them Count Basie, Lena Horne, Milt Hinton, Jackie Robinson, Roy Campanella and Ella Fitzgerald, as well as the many middle-class residents of the area. Among the earliest of the prominent African American residents was Thomas W. "Fats" Waller, who lived on Sayres Avenue at the time of his death in 1943.

Today Addisleigh Park remains a distinctive enclave with a remarkable sense of place due to its period revival style houses that are set back from the street on spacious well- landscaped lawns and its remarkable history that illuminates African Americans' struggle for and achievement of the basic civil right of home ownership.

The Commission urges you to affirm this designation.

TESTIMONY OF THE LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND MARITIME USES ON THE DESIGNATION OF THE ADDISLEIGH PARK HISTORIC DISTRICT IN QUEENS.

May 3, 2011

Good morning Council Members. My name is Jenny Fernández, Director of Intergovernmental and Community Relations for the Landmarks Preservation Commission. I am here today to testify on the Commission's designation of the Addisleigh Park Historic District in Queens.

On March 23, 2010 The Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation of the Addisleigh Park Historic District. Twenty people spoke, nineteen in favor of designation including New York City Council Member Leroy G. Comrie, Jr., representatives for State Senator William Perkins, as well as current and former presidents of the Addisleigh Park Civic Association, representatives for Central Queens Historical Association, Historic Districts Council, New York Landmarks Conservancy, Society for the Architecture of the City, Louis Armstrong House, and numerous residents of the district. Several were in favor of landmarking the district, with the exclusion of the church. One person spoke in opposition to the proposed designation. In addition, the Commission also received many letters and e-mails regarding this designation, including Queens Borough President Helen Marshall and American Institute of Architects Queens Chapter. The majority has been in favor of designation. On February 1, 2011, the Commission voted to designate the neighborhood a New York City historic district.

The Addisleigh Park Historic District consists of approximately 422 primary buildings including attached and freestanding houses constructed largely between the 1910s and 1930s. It also includes the 11 acre St. Albans Park. Centered along Murdock Avenue, and the adjoining streets, the houses are sited back from the street, many on large landscaped lots, and have a consistent scale that gives the neighborhood a suburban feel. Built in brick, stucco, wood, and stone, the homes reflect the predominant architectural styles of the early part of the 20th century: English Tudor Revival, Colonial Revival, and the Arts and Crafts styles. In the 1930s and 1940s, racially restrictive covenants were introduced that prohibited the sale of property to African Americans. During the 1940s the New York State Supreme Court upheld covenants in two lawsuits where homeowners were sued by their neighbors for selling their homes to African Americans.

While he ruled in favor of the plaintiffs, the judge in the case of Kemp v. Rubin (1947) acknowledged that Addisleigh Park already was home to 48 African-American families, including both Lena Horne and Count Basie who had purchased their homes in 1946.This was also notable for the number of organizations that filed amicus briefs supporting the right to sell to African Americans, making Kemp v. Rubin a significant case in the struggle for African Americans to own their own land. Following the United States Supreme Court decision in Shelley v. Kraemer (1948), which ruled that state judicial enforcement of racially restrictive covenants was a violation of the equal protection under the Fourteenth Amendment, the demographic make-up of Addisleigh Park changed as more African-Americans moved to the area. By 1952, an article on the neighborhood in the magazine Our World noted that it was home to the "richest and most gifted" African Americans, among them Count Basie, Lena Horne, Milt Hinton, Jackie Robinson, Roy Campanella and Ella Fitzgerald, as well as the many middle-class residents of the area. Among the earliest of the prominent African American residents was Thomas W. "Fats" Waller, who lived on Sayres Avenue at the time of his death in 1943.

Today Addisleigh Park remains a distinctive enclave with a remarkable sense of place due to its period revival style houses that are set back from the street on spacious well- landscaped lawns and its remarkable history that illuminates African Americans′ struggle for and achievement of the basic civil right of home ownership.

The Commission urges you to affirm this designation.

TESTIMONY OF THE LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND MARITIME USES ON THE DESIGNATION OF THE ROSSVILLE AME ZION CHURCH ON STATEN ISLAND.

May 3, 2011

Good morning Council Members. My name is Jenny Fernández, Director of Intergovernmental and Community Relations for the Landmarks Preservation Commission. I am here today to testify on the Commission's designation of the Rossvile AME Zion Church on Staten Island.

On August 10, 2010, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Rossville AME Zion Church. There were six speakers in favor of designation including a member of the Board of Trustees of the Rossville AME Zion Church who read a letter of support from Rev. Janet Jones. Other speakers on behalf of the designation included representatives of the Sandy Ground Historical Society, the Preservation League of Staten Island, the Society for the Architecture of the City, and the Historic Districts Council. The Commission has received two letters in support of the designation, including one from the Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in America. There were no speakers or letters in opposition. On February 1, 2011, the Commission voted to designate the building a New York City individual landmark.

The 1897 Rossville AME Zion Church is a rare and important surviving building from the period when Sandy Ground was a prosperous African American community on Staten Island. Sandy Ground is located is the southern part of Staten Island, not far from the shipping port of Rossville on the Arthur Kill to the north and the prime oyster grounds of Prince's Bay on the south. The Sandy Ground community thrived for many years, built substantial houses and established successful businesses and institutions, chief among them the Rossville AME Zion Church.

The founder and first minister of the church was William H. Pitts, a Virginia-born African Methodist Episcopal Zion minister who purchased land in Sandy Ground in May 1849 and began holding prayer services in his home. The African Zion Methodist Church in the Village of Rossville, now Rossville AME Zion Church, was formally established in December 1850. By 1890, the congregation had outgrown its first church and purchased this site and constructed the present building in 1897. Originally a simple clapboarded vernacular frame structure with a gabled entrance porch, the building survives as a tangible and visible link to the rich history of the Sandy Ground community. The church remains in use and descendants of the original founders are still members of the congregation.

The Commission urges you to affirm this designation.

TESTIMONY OF THE LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND MARITIME USES ON THE DESIGNATION OF THE 565 AND 569 BLOOMINGDALE ROAD COTTAGES ON STATEN ISLAND.

May 3, 2011

Good morning Council Members. My name is Jenny Fernández, Director of Intergovernmental and Community Relations for the Landmarks Preservation Commission. I am here today to testify on the Commission's designation of the 565 and 569 Bloomingdale Road Cottages on Staten Island.

On August 10, 2010, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the 565 and 569 Bloomingdale Road Cottages. There were five speakers in favor of the designation including a member of the Board of Trustees of the Rossville AME Zion Church, the owner of the property. Other speakers on behalf of the designation included representatives of the Sandy Ground Historical Society, the Preservation League of Staten Island, the Society for the Architecture of the City, and the Historic Districts Council. The Commission has received two letters in support of the designation, including one from the Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in America. There were no speakers or letters in opposition. On February 1, 2011, the Commission voted to designate the buildings a New York City individual landmark.

Constructed between 1887 and 1898 as rental properties by Robert E. Mersereau, the small, frame houses at 565 and 569 Bloomingdale Road, traditionally known as the "baymen's cottages," are rare surviving buildings from the period when Sandy Ground was a prosperous African-American community on Staten Island. Typical examples of the small cottages erected in late 19th century and early 20th century to house workers in the rural areas of New York, these two houses were nearly identical: two story one-room deep, peaked-roofed frame structures with central chimneys and side hall entrances with shallow stoops and porches. No. 569 Bloomingdale Road, the northernmost of the two houses was occupied from about 1900 to 1930 by William D. Landin, son of Robert Landin, one of the most prominent and successful of the Maryland oystermen who settled in Sandy Ground around 1850. The Trustees of the A. M. E. Zion Church of Rossville (aka Rossville A. M. E. Zion Church) purchased the property in 1981. Today the houses survive as a tangible and visible link to the rich history of the Sandy Ground community.

The Commission urges you to affirm this designation.

TESTIMONY OF THE LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND MARITIME USES ON THE DESIGNATION OF THE REVEREND ISAAC COLEMAN AND REBECCA COLEMAN HOUSE ON STATEN ISLAND.

May 3, 2011

Good morning Council Members. My name is Jenny Fernández, Director of Intergovernmental and Community Relations for the Landmarks Preservation Commission. I am here today to testify on the Commission's designation of the Reverend Isaac Coleman and Rebecca Coleman House on Staten Island.

On August 10, 2010, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Reverend Isaac Coleman and Rebecca Gray Coleman House. There were 6 speakers in favor of designation including Yvonne Taylor representing the family of Rebecca Gray Coleman, which still owns the property. Other speakers in favor included representatives of the Society for the Architecture of the City, the Preservation League of Staten Island, the Historic Districts Council, the Sandy Ground Historical Society, and the Butler Manor Civic Association. There were also letters in favor of designation from Yvette Taylor Jordon, the great granddaughter of Rebecca Gray Coleman, and from the Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in America. There were no speakers in opposition. On February 1, 2011, the Commission voted to designate the building a New York City individual landmark.

The Reverend Isaac Coleman and Rebecca Gray Coleman house is a vernacular frame structure that is possibly the earliest extant building surviving from the period when Sandy Ground was a prosperous African-American community on Staten Island. The area's first African-American residents purchased property in 1828. Their numbers were bolstered in the 1840s and 50s by the arrival of numerous families from Snow Hill, Maryland who were involved in the oyster trade and came to New York to escape harsh laws passed in this slave state prior to the Civil War. Beginning in the 1840s through the early 20th century, this area, called Woodrow, Little Africa, or (more commonly) Sandy Ground, was home to a group of free African Americans who resided here in more than 50 houses. It is unclear when the Coleman-Gray House was originally constructed, although it is identified on one of the earliest surviving maps of the area, from 1859. The house was purchased by Isaac Coleman and his wife Rebecca Gray Coleman when he came to Sandy Ground to serve as pastor of the Rossville A.M.E. Zion Church in 1864. The building has been in the possession of Rebecca Gray Coleman's descendants since that time. Its survival is a remarkable and rare reminder of this very early African-American community.

The Commission urges you to affirm this designation.

TESTIMONY OF THE LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL SUBCOMMITTEE ON LANDMARKS, PUBLIC SITING AND MARITIME USES ON THE DESIGNATION OF THE MANUFACTURERS TRUST COMPANY BUILDING INTERIOR.

May 3, 2011

Good morning Council Members. My name is Jenny Fernández, Director of Intergovernmental and Community Relations for the Landmarks Preservation Commission. I am here today to testify on the Commission's designation of the Manufacturers Trust Company Building Interior in Manhattan.

On February 1, 2011 the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Manufacturers Trust Company Building Interior. Fourteen people spoke in favor of designation, including two representatives of the owner, as well as representatives of the Coalition to Save MHT, Docomomo New York/Tristate, the Historic Districts Council, the Landmarks Conservancy, the Modern Architecture Working Group, the Municipal Art Society, and the Recent Past Preservation Network. On February 15, 2011, the Commission voted to designate the building's interior a New York City individual landmark.

When the Fifth Avenue office of the Manufacturers Trust Company opened in October 1954, bank officials claimed it was "unlike any other financial institution in this country or abroad." A major example of mid-20th century modernism, 510 Fifth Avenue was designated a New York City Landmark in 1997 and is one of Manhattan's most transparent structures, revealing two elegantly spacious banking floors that were planned to be as prominent to passing pedestrians as the glass-and-aluminum exterior. Though interior components and artworks by sculptor Harry Bertoia were recently removed, many distinctive elements remain. Because the 7,000 square-foot second floor, sometimes called a mezzanine, is recessed from the street, it appears to float, creating the impression that both levels occupy a single, monumental space. Other notable historic features include the twin escalators, which were originally freestanding, as well as the 43rd Street lobby at the west end of the building, which, like the rear wall of the second floor, displays handsome sets of elevator doors set into polished grey marble walls. By conceiving this building and its minimalist interiors as a unified architectural statement, SOM not only produced one of Fifth Avenue's most memorable structures but it created a work that influenced the course of American bank design.

The Commission urges you to affirm this designation.

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. ______ Res. No. ______
☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 5/3/11

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: STEVE ROBERTS

Address: 114-56 176 ST. ADDISLEIGH PK.

I represent: ADDISLEIGH PARK

Address: ______

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. ______ Res. No. ______
☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: ______

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Jenny Fernandez

Address: ______

I represent: LPC

Address: ______

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card 379

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. ______ Res. No. ______
☐ ~~in favor~~ ☒ in opposition

Date: MAY 3, 2011

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: MICHAEL PATRICK SMITH

Address: 112-39 176 STREET, JAMAICA, N.Y. 11433-4109

I represent: HERMAN J. & LUCY V. SMITH

Address: 112-39 176 STREET, JAMAICA, N.Y. 11433-4109

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. ______ Res. No. LU-379

ADDISLEIGH PARK ☒ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: 05-3-2011

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: JOHN KRAWCHUK

Address:

I represent: NYC PARKS & RECREATION

FLUSHING MEADOWS CORONA PARK

Address: FLUSHING, NY 11368

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

LU 376
LU 377
LU 378

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. ______ Res. No. ______

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Sandy Ground

Date:

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Linda Eskenas

Address: 1674 Richmond Terrace

I represent: Greenway Committee CB1

S.I. Preservation League / West Brighton Restoration Society

Address:

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

376
377
378

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. ______ Res. No. ______

☑ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date:

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Yvonne Taylor

Address:

I represent: 1482 Woodrow Rd & Rossville AME Zion Church

Address:

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 438/LR-2415 Res. No. ______

☑ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: ______

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Yvonne Taylor

Address: 15 Elmbank St.

I represent: ______

Address: ______

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL LU 384
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. P.S. 313Q Res. No. ______

☑ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: May 3, 2011

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: Gregory P. Shaw

Address: 30-30 Thomson Ave L.I.C. NY 11101

I represent: NYC School Construction Authority

Address: 30-30 Thomson Ave L.I.C. NY 11101

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

LU384

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. ______ Res. No. ______

☐ in favor ☐ in opposition

Date: May 3, 2011

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: KENRICK OU

Address: 30 30 THOMSON AVENUE, LIC, NY, 11101 LU 384

I represent: NYC SCHOOL CONSTRUCTION AUTHORITY

Address: ______

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. Hooklyn Park HD Res. No. ______

☑ in favor ☐ in opposition 379

Date: ______

(PLEASE PRINT)

Name: SIMEON BANKOFF

Address: ______

I represent: HDC

Address: 232 East 11 Street

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms