

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

DRAFT

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in National Register Bulletin, *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form*. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. **Place additional certification comments, entries, and narrative items on continuation sheets if needed (NPS Form 10-900a).**

1. Name of Property

historic name 821 Broadway
 other names/site number _____
 name of related multiple property listing N/A

Location

street & number 821 Broadway not for publication
 city or town New York vicinity
 state New York code NY county New York code 061 zip code 10003

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended,
 I hereby certify that this X nomination ___ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.
 In my opinion, the property X meets ___ does not meet the National Register Criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant at the following level(s) of significance:
 ___ national ___ statewide X local

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

In my opinion, the property ___ meets ___ does not meet the National Register criteria.

Signature of commenting official Date

Title State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

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

Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

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5. Classification

Ownership of Property
(Check as many boxes as apply.)

Category of Property
(Check only **one** box.)

Number of Resources within Property
(Do not include previously listed resources in the count.)

- private
- public - Local
- public - State
- public - Federal

- building(s)
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	Total

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

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

N/A

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Current Functions
(Enter categories from instructions.)

COMMERCE/TRADE – Office Building

COMMERCE/TRADE – Office Building

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

LATE VICTORIAN – Romanesque Revival

foundation: Concrete

LATE VICTORIAN – Renaissance Revival

walls: Brick

Terra Cotta

roof: Synthetics

other:

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Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current physical appearance of the property. Explain contributing and noncontributing resources if necessary. Begin with a **summary paragraph** that briefly describes the general characteristics of the property, such as its location, setting, size, and significant features.)

Summary Paragraph

The building at 821 Broadway is an eleven-story, Romanesque Revival-style office building at the northwest corner of Broadway and East 12th Street in Manhattan, two blocks south of Union Square. The building stands within the dense urban environment of Lower Manhattan and is surrounded by low- and high-rise commercial buildings primarily from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century, with several from as recently as a few years ago. On the east and south elevations of the building, facing Broadway and 12th Street, respectively, there are concrete sidewalks. The building, constructed of structural steel and faced in reddish-orange brick with accents in contrasting, light-colored limestone and terra cotta, was designed by New York City architect Samuel Sass and built in 1906. A distinctive feature of the building is its rounded southeast corner, which rises to the full height of the building.

Narrative Description

Site: The building stands within in the dense urban environment of Lower Manhattan and is surrounded by low- and high-rise commercial buildings primarily from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century, with several from as recently as a few years ago. On the east and south elevations of the building, facing Broadway and 12th Street, respectively, there are concrete sidewalks.

Exterior: On both the east and south elevations, the first story consists almost entirely of aluminum storefronts that were installed around 2010 ([Photos 1-3](#)). The storefront windows are topped by a historic, painted cast-iron entablature. On the east elevation, facing Broadway, part of the northernmost bay features a retail entrance consisting of aluminum-framed glass double doors with a transom, the doors being recessed into the building. On the south elevation, facing Broadway, there are three additional entrances, all grouped at the western end. Moving from east to west the first (closest to Broadway) consists of aluminum-framed glass doors similar to the east elevation retail entrance; in the middle, the service entrance consists of painted hollow metal double doors; and the final entrance, the main entrance for the upper floors, contains a Romanesque-style, limestone arched portal on a granite base, inside of which is a circa 2010 aluminum-framed glass door with sidelights and a transom ([Photos 4, 5](#)). Level with the metal cornice above the storefronts, the portal is topped by a limestone balustrade.

The second story contains full-height, ca. 2010 aluminum replacement windows, which each have two lights – the shorter, lower light being operable in some cases – and appear in groups of three except at the corner, where they appear as individual units ([Photos 1, 2](#)). Although the windows are not historic, the painted cast-iron pilasters and window mullions, the latter with a rope molding detail, are historic. The only part of the second story that does not contain this type of window is the westernmost bay on the south elevation, directly above the main entrance, where the second story is faced in limestone and has a rectangular opening that currently contains a metal louver. The second-story windows are topped by a limestone entablature on both elevations.

The third and fourth stories are treated identically to each other, with exterior brick walls and punched window openings containing one-over-one, double-hung aluminum replacement units dating to around 2010 ([Photos 1, 6](#)). As on the second story, these windows appear in groups of three except at the corner and in the westernmost bay on the south elevation where individual units appear. The tripartite groups are framed by

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Romanesque-style terra-cotta colonettes and have ornamental brick and terra-cotta spandrel panels between the third and fourth stories. Above the fourth-story windows is a historic, richly ornamented terra-cotta cornice.

The fifth through eighth stories are treated similarly to the third and fourth, but without colonettes framing the tripartite window bays and with less ornamentation on the spandrel panels between them (Photos 1, 6). At the ninth story, the brick piers between the window bays terminate with Romanesque-style terra-cotta capitals. The tripartite windows on the ninth story, which align with those below, are grouped into large arched openings that spring from the pier capitals below. The arches are framed by thin terra-cotta bands. Above the ninth-story windows, there is a terra-cotta cornice.

The tenth and eleventh stories repeat the arcaded treatment of the lower stories, but at a smaller scale (Photos 1, 6). Instead of three primary bays with three double-hung windows each, there are six bays with two double-hung windows each. The brick piers between the windows again serve as pilasters, featuring Romanesque style terra-cotta capitals, and the arches are framed with a thin terra-cotta band. Above the eleventh-story windows, there is a replacement cast-stone cornice that was installed around 2010. The original, much larger terra-cotta cornice, which is visible in historic images, was removed sometime before 1940 (compare Figure 6 to Figure 16).

The north elevation, which is visible only above the sixth story, consists of a plain red brick wall with three single-light aluminum windows that were installed on each floor around 2020 (Photo 7). Prior to 2010, this elevation contained no windows. Toward the west end of the north elevation (right hand side of Photo 7), there is an open metal fire stair that fits within a notch that extends to the ground. The west elevation consists of a plain, red brick wall with no windows.

The roof is flat, consisting of a non-historic roofing membrane. There is a large cylindrical wooden water tank, which is supported by a tall metal platform on the roof. On the west side of the roof, there is a penthouse containing the main stair and elevator machine room.

Interior: The building contains retail space and a lobby on the first floor and full-floor office suites on each of the upper floors. The retail space, which has wood and metal floors, painted brick piers between the windows, drywall ceilings, and historic cast-iron columns, occupies about three-quarters of the first floor, including the entire frontage on Broadway and most of the frontage on 12th Street (Photo 8). The main office lobby is located at the southwest corner of the first floor, consisting of a small rectangular space with non-historic porcelain tile floors, drywall and marble-clad walls, and drywall ceilings, all of which date to 2010 (Photo 9). The building has one passenger elevator, which is accessed on the north wall of the lobby. To the east of the lobby is a small service entrance that has utilitarian finishes and leads to the main stair, fire stair, and freight elevator (the main stair is pictured in Photo 10). The offices on the upper floors consist of large open workspaces, which in some cases are surrounded by private offices along the exterior walls (Photos 11-17). Typical finishes within the offices include replacement wood floors, historic plaster walls with historic painted wood baseboard and window trim, and historic plaster-coated concrete columns and beamed ceilings. Many of the offices also have exposed ductwork and sprinkler lines at the ceilings.

Integrity: Overall, the building at 821 Broadway retains a high degree of integrity. The building's materials, including brickwork, limestone, and terra cotta remain largely intact and convey high-quality workmanship. Defining Romanesque Revival features, especially the arcaded window bays, entrance portal, colonettes, and other features also remain intact and reinforce the building's design intent. Through the building's materials, workmanship, and design, it continues to convey the feeling of a quintessential, early twentieth century loft.

While the storefront windows are replacements dating to around 2010, they match the total height of the original storefronts and the rounded southeast corner as seen in a ca. 1910 photo (Figure 6). As seen in other historic images, the rounded corner was later squared off and the transoms were covered with signage (Figures 15 and 16). Additionally, while the windows on the second story and above are ca. 2010

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replacements, they are compatible in design – primarily double-hung, matching the original windows on the third story and above – and fit within the original window openings on the primary east and south elevations. Therefore, the building's historic fenestration is easily conveyed. At the top of the building, the original cornice was removed before 1940 (see [Figure 16](#)). A replacement cornice was installed around 2010. While the new cornice has reestablished a cap at the top of the building, its profile is smaller and less intricate than the original cornice. The loss of the small, turret-like finial at the southeast corner of the roof – as seen in 1910 in [Figure 6](#) and removed in 1940 in [Figure 16](#) – does not materially affect the integrity of the resource and does not prevent the building from conveying its Romanesque Revival design intent.

Inside, while the first floor has non-historic finishes typical of retail spaces today, its original commercial use has been continuously maintained and the space's historic cast-iron columns and original ceiling heights have been preserved. While the original floor plans do not survive, it is likely that the first-floor space was originally open in plan as it is today.

On the upper floors, while many of the office spaces have been adapted by tenants over the years, this was the nature of the loft building. Historically, it is likely that the upper floors consisted primarily of open spaces with some private offices, much like the current tenant spaces do. Regardless of how the office layouts may have changed, the historic ceiling heights and finishes – consisting of plaster-coated concrete slabs and beams – have been preserved throughout. While the original wood floors no longer exist in many places, they have typically been replaced with hardwood planks similar to those that would have existed in these spaces historically. Therefore, the fundamental historic character of the interior has been largely retained.

In addition to materials, workmanship, design, and feeling, the building remains in its original location, and its setting, primarily consisting of mid- and high-rise commercial buildings from the 1850s through the 1920s, has not significantly changed since the building was completed in 1906. Some new high-rise construction has occurred in the vicinity in recent years, but the area retains much of its early twentieth century character.

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8. Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

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

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

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions.)

Architecture

Period of Significance

1906

Significant Dates

Criteria Considerations

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

Property is:

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

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Samuel Sass

Period of Significance (justification)

The period of significance is 1906, the year the building was completed.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

(Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

The building at 821 Broadway was designed by New York City architect Samuel Sass and built in 1906. The building is significant under Criterion C in the area of architecture both as a major work of Samuel Sass and as a notable example of early twentieth century loft design in the Romanesque Revival style, particularly a transitional, later version of the style that illustrates the growing influence of Classicism and the Beaux Arts. Although his name is not well known today, Samuel Sass was a prolific designer of tenements, apartment buildings, and lofts in New York City between about 1895 and 1925. Sass's loft buildings helped give form and character to the area south of Union Square during this period when Broadway and the numbered streets on both sides were rapidly transforming into one of Manhattan's most important commercial districts. Due to its prominent location at the corner of Broadway and East 12th Street and because of its distinctive Romanesque influence, 821 Broadway is among Sass's most important works. The period of significance is 1906, the year the building was completed.

Narrative Statement of Significance

Samuel Sass, Architect

Born in Russia in 1870, Sass immigrated to the United States with his family in 1872, settling in Manhattan on the Lower East Side. Little is known of Sass's early years, but records show he was educated at the Hebrew Technical Institute, at which he was one of the very first students following its establishment in 1884. Located just blocks from Sass's home, the institute, in addition to providing a general education in English, history, geography, and mathematics, offered specialized courses in mechanical and architectural drawing and other technical subjects to young Jewish men. Sass graduated from the Institute in December 1886 and subsequently entered the New York architectural practice of Schwarzman & Buchman.¹ Primarily known for designing tenement houses, Schwarzman & Buchman occasionally pursued larger, more high-profile projects. In 1886, the firm was one of five to submit a design in the competition for the Freundschaft Club at 72nd Street and Park Avenue, although in this case, they lost out to McKim, Mead & White.²

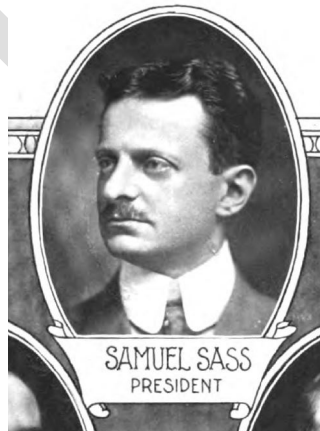


Figure 1: Portrait of Samuel Sass from the *Official Year Book of the New York Society of Architects, 1912*. Sass served as president of the society in 1911 and 1912.

Samuel Sass first appeared as an architect in *The Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide* in 1894. Most of Sass's early projects consisted of minor alterations, such as the installation of a new storefront, or small

¹ Hebrew Technical Institute, *Annual Report, 1889* (New York, 1889), 40.

² "Out Among the Builders," *The Record and Guide* (October 23, 1886), 1297.

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additions to existing buildings. Starting in 1896, Sass started to win larger commissions for five- and six-story tenement buildings on the Lower East Side and elsewhere in Manhattan, some housing as many as forty families. A product of the tenements himself, Sass would go on to design over 100 tenements and apartment buildings in neighborhoods across Manhattan, the Bronx, and Brooklyn over the next twenty years. Between 1899 and 1905, Sass was joined in practice by partner Max J. Smallheiser (1872-1905), a fellow graduate of the Hebrew Technical Institute, forming the firm of Sass & Smallheiser. An informal count of notices in *The Record and Guide* and local newspapers has Sass, both working alone and with Smallheiser, winning as many as fifty commissions for well over 100 individual tenements and apartment buildings between 1896 and 1915. Working primarily with brick, limestone, and terra cotta, Sass's and Sass & Smallheiser's residential projects were highly characteristic of the period in their florid and richly textured Beaux Arts treatment, which often featured classical details – pediments, lintels, and cornices, in particular – that were boldly articulated and sometimes exaggerated in size. Typical examples, all of which survive today, include the two five-story buildings at 18-20 East 116th Street, built in 1898; 45 Ludlow Street (Contributing, Lower East Side Historic District, NRHP 2000), built in 1898; and 211-229 East 33rd Street, built in 1904 ([Figure 2](#)).



Figure 2: Tenements designed by Samuel Sass. From left to right: 18-20 E 116th Street (1897), 45 Ludlow Street (1898), and 211-229 East 33rd Street (1904). Photos from the 1940s NYC Tax Department photograph collection.

Sass did not design tenements simply to profit from the intense demand for housing the working poor. Rather, Sass became involved in the movement to reform the tenements and improve living conditions within them. In February 1902, Sass was part of a Manhattan delegation, led by Tenement House Commissioner Robert W. DeForest, that traveled to Albany to speak at New York State Senate and Assembly hearings against a proposed amendment to the Tenement House Act of 1901.³ The amendment would exempt three- and four-story tenements from the 1901 law's minimum requirements for lighting, ventilation, fire escapes, and indoor plumbing. Although the 1901 law had elicited strong opposition from builders and architects across the city, Sass & Smallheiser demonstrated in a six-story tenement project at the northwest corner of Broome and Mulberry Streets (Contributing, Chinatown and Little Italy Historic District, NRHP 2010) – the very first of the

³ "Tenement House Safety," *New York Tribune*, February 28, 1902.

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so-called New Law Tenements – that a project could still be built under the new regulations (Figure 3).⁴ This building remains standing.



Figure 3: Tenement building at the northwest corner of Broome and Mulberry Streets, designed by Samuel Sass in 1901. The first of the New Law Tenements.

While most of his commissions were for tenements, beginning in 1906 Sass became increasingly occupied with high-rise loft projects, particularly in the blocks south and west of Union Square where by the end of the decade he had completed at least eight buildings between ten and twelve stories tall. This area, encompassing the easternmost portion of Greenwich Village and the western reaches of the East Village, first developed as a residential district during the early to mid-nineteenth century. Many Greek Revival and Italianate row houses from the mid-1830s and late 1850s remain here today. Beginning around the time of the Civil War, however, the area increasingly became commercial, especially on Broadway, where merchants built stores and warehouses in the Italianate style in cast iron and stone. These commercial buildings, many of which survive, were “among the grandest and most important in New York at the time,” in the words of historian Anthony W. Robbins.⁵ Toward the end of the nineteenth century, as advances in steel-frame construction made it possible to build taller, the high-rise loft, a quintessential downtown building type, became the focus of development in the area. It was during this period, which lasted until about 1920, that Sass designed some of his largest and most architecturally distinctive projects in the city.

Sass completed his first high-rise project, the eleven-story Kensington Building at 73 Fifth Avenue (NYC Landmark, Ladies’ Mile Historic District, 1989) in 1906, when he was again practicing independently following Smallheiser’s death in 1905. Built by the Richman Realty & Construction Company, the Kensington Building is a high-quality work in the Beaux Arts style (Figure 4). Employing limestone and brick, the building’s rusticated piers and facade, highly ornamented terra-cotta detailing at the upper stories, and imposing metal cornice are highly characteristic of downtown lofts and office buildings during this period.

⁴ “Building Under the New Tenement House Law,” *Carpentry and Building* (October 1901), 260; Richard Plunz, *A History of Housing in New York City* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 101-102.

⁵ Anthony W. Robbins, *Finishing the Job: The Unprotected Architecture and History of Greenwich Village & the East Village below Union Square* (NY: Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, n.d.)

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Figure 4: The Kensington Building East 15th Street and 5th Avenue, designed by Samuel Sass and built in 1906 (NYPL).

Several of Sass's other loft projects display a similar Beaux-Arts influence, such as the twelve-story buildings at 10-14 and 8 East 12th Street, designed for the Master Builders' Realty and Construction Company in 1906 and 1908, respectively; the ten-story building at 88 University Place (an L-shaped building that also fronts on 24-26 East 12th Street), designed for the Middleboro Realty Company in 1906; the twelve-story building at 143-145 West 20th Street, designed for the Eugatnom Realty Company in 1909; and the twelve-story building at 106-110 7th Avenue, designed for the 106 Seventh Avenue Company in 1910 (Figures 5A-5E).

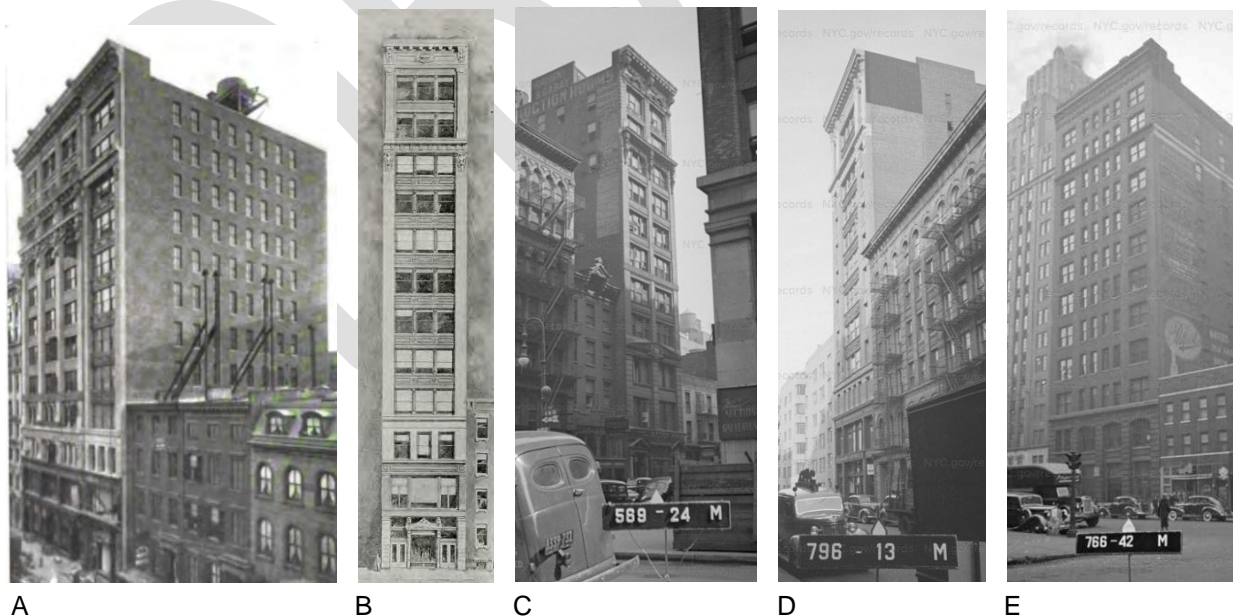


Figure 5: A) 10-14 and 8 East 12th Street; B) drawing of 8 East 12th Street; C) 88 University Place; D) 143-145 West 20th Street; E) 106-110 7th Avenue, all designed by Samuel Sass between 1906 and 1909. Image A is from Edison Monthly, September 1908, B is from the Record and Guide, and C through E are from the 1940s Tax Department photograph collection

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Another of Sass's early high-rise loft projects was 821 Broadway, which, like the Kensington Building, was commissioned by the Richman Realty & Construction Company in 1906. While 821 Broadway is unique among Sass's work due to its distinctive Romanesque Revival style, it nonetheless has a base-shaft-capital composition and other classical features that were essential components of the Beaux-Arts high-rise (Fig 6).



Figure 6: 821 Broadway as it appeared shortly after construction. This image shows the original cornice. Image from Raymond Concrete Pile Company, *Concrete Pile Construction*, 1910.

These six projects, which all remain standing and retain a high degree of integrity, helped to define the look of the area south of Union Square as it evolved into one of Manhattan's most important commercial districts between about 1890 and 1910. On 12th Street, in particular, Sass's projects were among the most prominent in what the *AIA Guide to New York City* describes as "a big and bold 'Beaux Arts meets 1890s High-Tech' row, each multi-story loft competitively outdoing the other. Look up at rich stone and brickwork...an effort by conservative Beaux Arts architects to enter the new mainstream."⁶ The loft buildings designed by Sass near Union Square between 1906 and 1910 remain essential components of the area's architectural and visual character and continue to convey its early twentieth century commercial history.

⁶ Norval White and Elliot Willensky, *AIA Guide to New York City* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2000), 136.

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Sass's work was not limited to Lower East Side tenements and downtown lofts. One of his best-known works in the Lower East Side is the Bank of the United States at 77-79 Delancey Street (Contributing, Lower East Side Historic District, NRHP 2000), which was built in 1913 and remains standing today. This imposing, seven-story limestone edifice, with tall Corinthian columns three stories above street level, displayed Sass's knowledge of the Classical orders and set the building apart from the sea of brick tenements that surrounded it (Figure 7).⁷ Farther north, Sass also designed numerous commercial buildings in Midtown Manhattan, one of the best examples being the twelve-story headquarters of R.J. Horner & Company, later known as Flint & Horner, the well-known makers and importers of fine furniture. Located at 20-26 West 36th Street, Sass designed the building in 1911 as a simpler variation on the Beaux Arts lofts he had built downtown a few years prior (Figure 8). Even farther north, Sass continued to design residential buildings – though slightly more upmarket than his Lower East Side tenements – in the upper reaches of Manhattan and the Bronx. Benefiting from the rapid growth of these areas after 1900, Sass won commissions to design dozens of five- and six-story apartment houses, such as The Burlington Apartments at 505-517 West 134th Street in 1907, Hawarden Hall at 129th Street and Fifth Avenue in 1908, and The Minerva and The Itonia at 703-709 West 178th Street in 1909. Photographs and floor plans of all three properties were featured in *Apartment Houses of the Metropolis*, a well-known guide, published in 1908 and supplemented in 1909, to recently completed middle- and upper-class apartment buildings in New York City.⁸



Figure 7 (left): Early postcard view of the Bank of the United States at 77-79 Delancey Street, designed by Samuel Sass and built in 1913 (Columbia University Library).

Figure 8 (right): The R.J. Horner (later Flint & Horner) Building at 20-26 West 36th Street, designed by Samuel Sass and built in 1911 (Flint & Horner advertisement in *House and Garden*, May 1919).

⁷ In December 1930, the building was the site of what was at the time the largest and most consequential bank failure ever to occur in the United States, a result of the stock market crash of 1929. The failure of the Bank of the United States set in motion the failures of many other banks across the country, severely worsening the Great Depression.

⁸ *Apartment Houses of the Metropolis* (New York: G.G. Hesselgren Publishing Co., 1908); *Supplement to Apartment Houses of the Metropolis* (New York: G.G. Hesselgren Publishing Co., 1909).

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In addition to his prolific design work, Sass worked to support the development of the architectural profession in New York City. In 1906, Sass was among a small group of architects who founded the New York Society of Architects, not to be confused with the New York Society of Architects that Richard Upjohn and others founded in 1857 and soon after became the American Institute of Architects. The society, of which Sass served as president in 1911 and 1912, became one of the largest independent organizations of its kind in the United States. During Sass's tenure as president, one of the society's primary goals was the pursuit of a state licensing requirement for architects, which ultimately became a state law in 1915. The society also published the "authoritative" *Manual of New York Buildings Laws*, which was updated on an annual basis starting around 1910 and became "a widely accepted reference book on the most used laws."⁹ The society remained active until the mid-2010s.

In 1915, Sass partnered with George W. Springsteen (1851-1920) to form the new architectural firm of Sass & Springsteen.¹⁰ The firm continued to produce apartment buildings as Sass had done independently for years, but for unknown reasons, commissions slowed to a trickle starting in 1916. By 1918, Sass & Springsteen decided to dissolve their partnership with the *Record and Guide* reporting in February that Sass "discontinues the profession of architecture."¹¹ Sass's departure from practice at the relatively young age of forty-seven cannot be explained, and little is known about his activities after February 1918. In the 1920 United States census, Sass was listed as the manager of a storage warehouse in Brooklyn.¹² Around 1924 or 1925, Sass reentered the architectural field, forming a new partnership with William C. Sommerfeld (1876-unknown) who, like Sass, was an early graduate of the Hebrew Technical Institute and became a prolific designer of tenements, apartment buildings, and lofts. The pair designed several large apartment houses over the next few years, including the nine-story, Colonial Revival-style example at 321 West 78th Street (NYC Landmark, West End-Collegiate Historic District Extension, 2013) in 1925. The partnership was short-lived, however. In 1927, Sass died of lung cancer.¹³

821 Broadway and the Romanesque Revival Style

Samuel Sass primarily designed in the Beaux Arts style, reflecting the growing popularity of the Classical and Renaissance-era architectural styles at the beginning of the twentieth century. At 821 Broadway, however, Sass chose the Romanesque Revival, a holdover from the late nineteenth century when medieval styles, including both Romanesque and Gothic, were popular influences in American architecture. Sass's choice of the Romanesque may have originated in a desire, either on his part or his client's, the Richman Realty & Construction Company, to differentiate the building from the other loft project, the Beaux Arts-style Kensington Building at 73 Fifth Avenue, that Sass was completing for Richman at the same time.

The Romanesque Revival style was briefly popular in the United States during the mid-nineteenth century, but only became a lasting influence in American architecture with the work of architect Henry Hobson Richardson (1838-1886). Between the early 1870s and his death in 1886, Richardson's projects – churches, homes, courthouses, and commercial buildings – exploited the Romanesque style for its adaptability and clarity of form. Characterized by heavy masonry walls and imposing round arches, Richardson's version of the Romanesque more importantly made the relationship between function and form more logical, relying on mass, proportion, and texture rather than applied ornamentation to create visual interest. In a country that often

⁹ "New York Society of Architects," *Empire State Architect* (Jan-Feb 1962): 20.

¹⁰ "Personal and Trade Notes, *Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, February 27, 1915.

¹¹ "Sass & Springsteen," *Real Estate Record and Builders' Guide*, February 23, 1918, 244.

¹² United States Census, 1920; Brooklyn Assembly District 2, Kings, New York; Roll: T625_1147; Page: 13A; Enumeration District: 122

¹³ Department of Health of the City of New York, Standard Certificate of Death, Samuel Sass, Manhattan, Certificate 16671, July 8, 1927.

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sought an architectural expression free from historical constraints and European influence, the Romanesque Revival style of H.H. Richardson became a fitting model.

During the 1880s, the Romanesque Revival style became especially popular in large, downtown commercial buildings. In Richardson's Marshall Field Wholesale Store (1885-87) and Adler & Sullivan's Auditorium Building (1886-90), both in Chicago, the form of each building is distilled into a straightforward rectangular mass simply articulated with rhythmic, arcaded window bays and subtle variations in the texture of the masonry (Figures 9 and 10). While these two buildings and others widely influenced the design of large commercial buildings in cities across the country, few subsequent examples displayed the same kind of sharp geometry and lack of ornamentation. Rather, by the early 1890s the Romanesque Revival was beginning to show the influence of the increasingly popular Beaux Arts style, which looked to Classical and Renaissance-era models while still relying on heavy masonry arches as the primary exterior feature.



Figure 9: The Marshall Field Warehouse in Chicago, designed by H.H. Richardson and built 1885-87 (Chicago Architectural Photographing Co.)



Figure 10: The Auditorium Building in Chicago, designed by Adler & Sullivan and built 1886-90 (HABS).

In New York between about 1890 and 1910, the Romanesque Revival style became one of the most popular stylistic treatments for large commercial buildings, probably surpassed only by the Beaux Arts style. Some

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early examples, such as the Puck Building (NRHP 1983; NYC Landmark 1983) at 293 Lafayette Street, designed by Albert & Herman Wagner in 1886 and enlarged in 1893, echo the straightforward and overall rectilinear forms of Richardson and Adler & Sullivan (Figure 11).



Figure 11: The Puck Building at 293 Lafayette Street in Manhattan, designed by Albert & Herman Wagner in 1886 and enlarged in 1893 (Wikipedia).

Most later examples, however, begin to show the increasing influence of Classical and Beaux Arts design. Some of the most important examples, all in lower Manhattan, include the eight-story, brick and stone Roosevelt Building, 841 Broadway (NYC Landmark 2019), designed by Stephen D. Hatch in 1893, just one block north of 821 Broadway; the seven-story loft at 72 5th Avenue, an all-stone example built in 1893; the seven-story, brick and stone Ahrens Building, 70 Lafayette Street (NYC Landmark 1992), designed by George H. Griebel in 1896; and the seven-story, brick and stone loft at 244 West 23rd Street, built 1900 (Figures 12 and 13).



Figure 12: Left) The Roosevelt Building at 841 Broadway, designed by Stephen D. Hatch and built in 1893 (Wikimedia Commons), and Right) 72 5th Avenue, built in 1893 (Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation).

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Figure 13: Left) The Ahrens Building at 70 Lafayette Street, designed by George H. Gribel and built in 1896 (Elisa Urbanelli), and Right) 244 West 23rd Street, built in 1900 (newyorkitecture.com).

In all four examples, deeply set arched windows, which are sometimes framed by characteristic colonettes, as well as rusticated or otherwise textured masonry surfaces, are the defining Romanesque features. But the four buildings also display a host of other features more typical of Beaux Arts-style commercial buildings of the same period, such as Classical pilasters, Greek-style friezes, elaborately ornamented spandrel panels, and large, denticulated or modillioned cornices.

Like these examples, the overall look of 821 Broadway is distinctly Romanesque Revival and illustrates the influence of the Beaux Arts style through its base-shaft-capital composition and employment of Classical features like the cornice. But the building relies less on ornate surface ornamentation than the earlier works. Rather, 821 Broadway emphasizes the formal qualities of Romanesque architecture through its arcaded window bays and characteristic rounded corner, both of which are also found in the Roosevelt Building, one block to the north. While the building also features a typical Romanesque-style portal at the main entrance on the first story, as well as thin colonettes framing the windows on the third and fourth stories, these decorative flourishes are somewhat secondary to a composition that is much purer in form than its predecessors. The building's slightly more functional appearance may have been an attempt by Samuel Sass to reference earlier, more straightforward works in the Romanesque Revival style, those that were built before the Beaux-Arts took hold on American architecture. Regardless of his motivation, 821 Broadway remains an important example of the Romanesque Revival-style loft building, particularly from the post-1900 period.

821 Broadway: Tenants and Later History

For much of its early history, 821 Broadway was occupied by a variety of dry goods, textile, and apparel merchants, providing full-floor spaces for companies like Gimbel Brothers, the Philadelphia-based department store that had their New York office in the building while they built their massive new store on Herald Square. The building also served as the New York offices for companies as far away as Atlanta and Indianapolis. A ca.1908 photograph shows several painted signs on the north side of the building advertising I. Caplan, junior and misses suits; S. Slimowitz & Co., manufacturers of embroideries; and Russell Embroidery Co., infants

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wear (Figure 14). On the Broadway side, the photo also shows a Gimbel Brothers sign attached to the building just below the tenth-story cornice. A later photo, dating to 1913, shows Goodyear waterproof garments store in the retail space on the first floor (Figure 15).



Figure 14: Broadway, west side between 12th and 13th Streets around 1908, with 821 Broadway at far left (NYPL).



Figure 15: The first through third stories of 821 Broadway in 1913 (NY Historical Society Museum and Library).

Between the 1910s and the 1950s, the building's tenants remained primarily from the textile and apparel industries. Apart from the removal of the building's cornice and replacement of the original storefronts, both of which occurred before 1940 (Figure 16), few major alterations have occurred. During the 1970s and 80s, the upper floors of the building were largely vacant, but the first-floor retail space was home to a popular science fiction and fantasy bookstore, Forbidden Planet, from 1981 until the late 1990s. In more recent years, the building has been rehabilitated and most floors are occupied by office tenants. In 2010, new storefronts and a cornice were installed.

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Figure 16: This circa 1940 Tax Department photo shows that the building's original cornice and storefronts had been removed by this point.

The Skyscrapers of New York (1906)

In 1906, while 821 Broadway was under construction, a silent film entitled *The Skyscrapers of New York* was made high up on the building's rising steel skeleton. Produced by the American Mutoscope and Biograph Company and filmed by Frederick A. Dobson, this "stunt-filled melodrama" told the story of a steel worker who was fired for fighting and nearly causing another worker to fall to his death.¹⁴ In many of the scenes, Union Square is visible in the distance, and nearby buildings that still exist today, such as the eight-story Roosevelt Building at Broadway and East 13th Street, where American Mutoscope was headquartered, are visible. The film has been archived by the Library of Congress and is viewable online.¹⁵

¹⁴ Library of Congress, "America's Story from America's Library: Progressive Era (1890-1913)": https://www.americaslibrary.gov/jb/progress/jb_progress_dobson_2.html. Accessed April 25, 2023.

¹⁵ The film can be viewed here: <https://www.loc.gov/item/00694391/>

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9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography (Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form.)

Apartment Houses of the Metropolis. New York: G.G. Hesselgren Publishing Co., 1908.

“Building Under the New Tenement House Law.” *Carpentry and Building* (October 1901).

Hebrew Technical Institute. *Annual Report, 1889*. New York, 1889.

Plunz, Richard. *A History of Housing in New York City*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1990.

The Real Estate Record and Builders’ Guide (see footnotes for specific citations).

Robbins, Anthony W. “Finishing the Job: The Unprotected Architecture and History of Greenwich Village & the East Village below Union Square.” New York: The Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, 2019.

Supplement to Apartment Houses of the Metropolis. New York: G.G. Hesselgren Publishing Co., 1909.

White, Norval, and Elliot Willensky. *AIA Guide to New York City*. New York: Crown Publishers, 2000.

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67 has been requested) NPS #46977
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey # _____
- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record # _____
- recorded by Historic American Landscape Survey # _____

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other
- Name of repository: _____

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned): _____

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 0.08
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

Latitude/Longitude Coordinates

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

- | | |
|------------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Latitude: 40.733475 | Longitude: -73.991378 |
| 2. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 3. Latitude: | Longitude: |
| 4. Latitude: | Longitude: |

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

The boundary is indicated by a heavy line on the enclosed map with scale.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The boundary conforms to the historic and current parcel.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Kevin McMahon, Senior Associate
organization Powers & Company, Inc. date July 6, 2023
street & number 1315 Walnut Street, Suite 1717 telephone 215-636-0192
city or town Philadelphia state PA zip code 19107
e-mail kevin@powersco.net

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

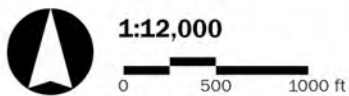
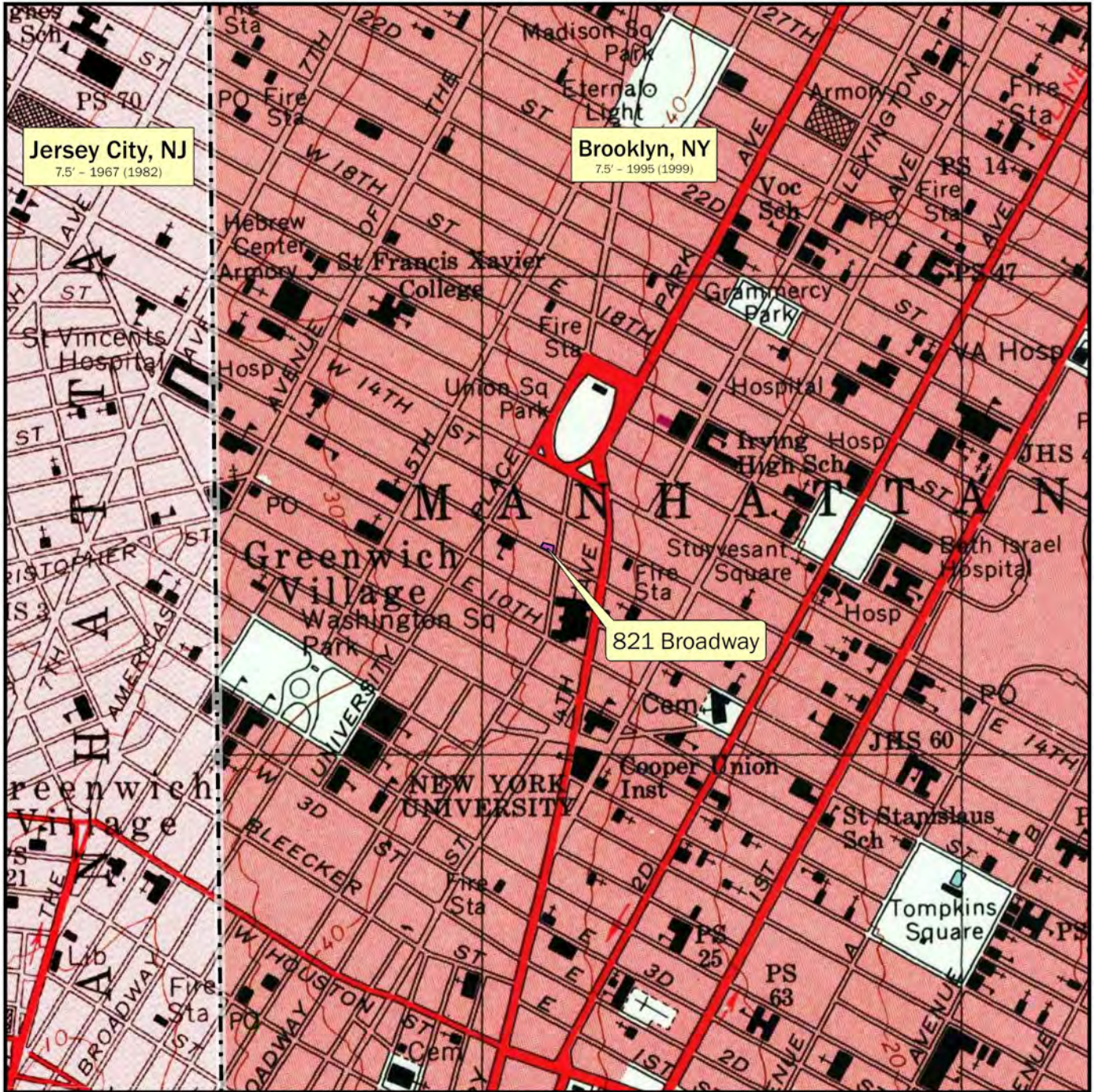
- **Maps:** A **USGS map** (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.


A **Sketch map** for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources. Key all photographs to this map.

- **Continuation Sheets**
- **Additional items:** (Check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items.)

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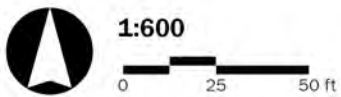


Projection: WGS 1984 UTM Zone 18N



Mapped 12/14/2023 by Matthew W. Shepherd, NYSHPO

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Projection: WGS 1984 UTM Zone 18N

 Nomination Boundary (0.08 ac)  Tax Parcels

New York County Parcel Year: 2021




Mapped 12/14/2023 by Matthew W. Shepherd, NYSHPO

821 Broadway
Name of Property

New York County, New York
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 Nomination Boundary (0.08 ac)



Projection: WGS 1984 UTM Zone 18N

New York State Orthoimagery Year: 2021

Mapped 12/14/2023 by Matthew W. Shepherd, NYSHPO

821 Broadway
Name of Property

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County and State

Photographs:

Submit clear and descriptive photographs. The size of each image must be 1600x1200 pixels at 300 ppi (pixels per inch) or larger. Key all photographs to the sketch map.

Name of Property: 821 Broadway

City or Vicinity: New York

County: New York

State: NY

Photographer: Kevin McMahon

Date Photographed: April 26, 2023

Description of Photograph(s) and number:

- 01 of 16: South and east elevations facing northwest
- 02 of 16: East elevation facing west
- 03 of 16: Close-up view of storefronts facing northwest
- 04 of 16: South elevation, first story, facing northeast
- 05 of 16: South elevation, main entrance, facing north
- 06 of 16: South elevation, upper stories, facing north
- 07 of 16: North elevation facing south
- 08 of 16: First floor, commercial space, facing southeast
- 09 of 16: First floor, main lobby, facing north
- 10 of 16: First floor, stairway, facing northwest
- 11 of 16: Third floor, typical office, facing southwest
- 12 of 16: Third floor, typical office, facing southeast
- 13 of 16: Fifth floor, typical office, facing east
- 14 of 16: Fifth floor, typical office, facing west
- 15 of 16: Seventh floor, typical office, facing east
- 16 of 16: Eleventh floor, typical office, facing southwest

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

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Office of Planning and Performance Management, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, 1849 C. Street, NW, Washington, DC.



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Powers & Company, May 2023

821 Broadway, New York, NY

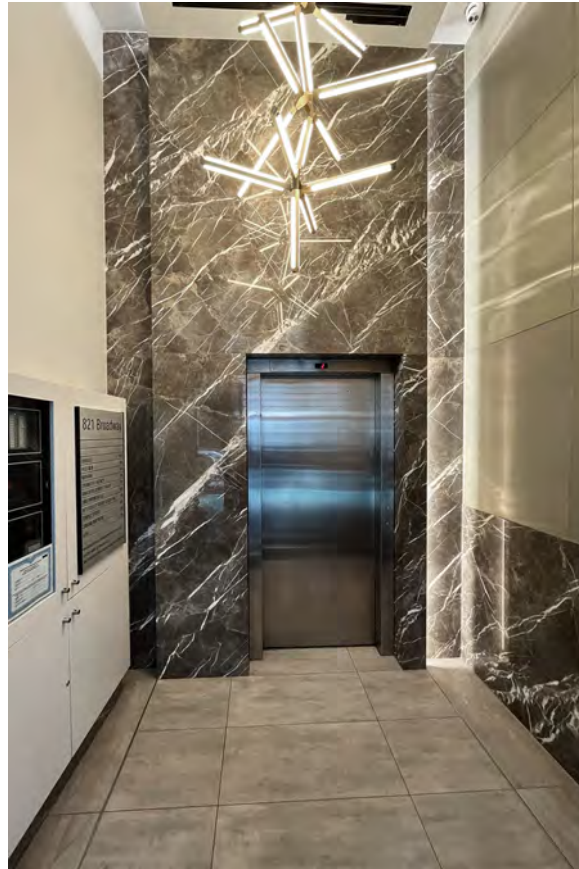


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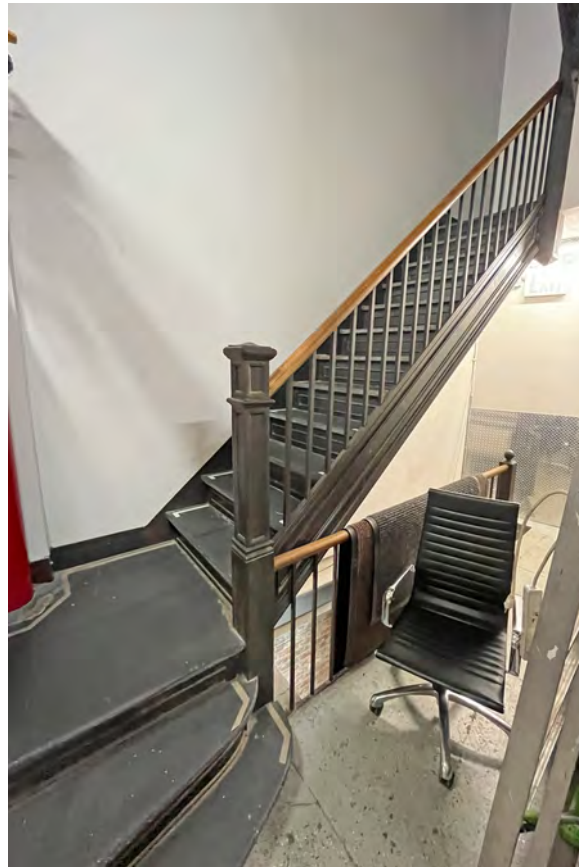


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Powers & Company, May 2023



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