

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

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 *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an 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 entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name 116 John Street

other names/site number _____

2. Location

street & number 116 John Street [] not for publication

city or town New York City [] vicinity

state New York code NY county New York code 061 zip code 10038

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this 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 as set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant [] nationally [] statewide locally. ([] see continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Rudolph A. Pappas D87170
Signature of certifying official/Title

4/30/14
Date

New York State Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property [] meets [] does not meet the National Register criteria. ([] see continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register
[] see continuation sheet
- [] determined eligible for the National Register
[] see continuation sheet
- [] determined not eligible for the National Register
- [] removed from the National Register
- [] other (explain) _____

Pr. Alexis...
Signature of the Keeper

6/20/14
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		buildings
		sites
		structures
		objects
1		TOTAL

Name of related multiple property listing **Number of contributing resources previously**

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

listed in the National Register

N/A

N/A

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE/insurance

COMMERCE/business

COMMERCE/retail

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

DOMESTIC/multiple dwelling

COMMERCE/retail

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

MODERN MOVEMENT/Art Deco

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation

walls BRICK, GRANITE, TERRA COTTA

roof

other ALUMINUM

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets)

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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.)

- [X] A Property 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.
[X] C Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or that represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
[] D Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

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

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

Areas of Significance:

(Enter categories from instructions)

COMMERCE

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance:

1931

Significant Dates:

1931

Significant Person:

N/A

Cultural Affiliation:

N/A

Architect/Builder:

ABRAMSON, LOUIS ALLEN

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- [X] preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested.
[] previously listed in the National Register
[] previously determined eligible by the National Register
[] designated a National Historic Landmark
[] recorded by historic American Building Survey #
[] recorded by Historic American Engineering Record #

Primary location of additional data:

- [] State Historic Preservation Office
[] Other State agency
[] Federal Agency
[] Local Government
[] University
[] Other repository:

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Narrative Description of Property

116 John Street (a.k.a. 225-35 Pearl Street and 1 Platt Street) is a thirty-five-story brick and terra cotta office building located in Lower Manhattan, New York County, NY. The building occupies a corner site that fronts John Street to the north, Pearl Street to the east, and Platt Street to the south. The lot and building are irregularly shaped, extending 123 feet along John Street, 108 feet along Pearl Street, and 83 feet along Platt Street.

The building is composed of three main sections: a three-story base, a nineteen-story shaft, and twelve upper stories that recede in a series of setbacks. The three-story base is faced with ashlar limestone and has a granite watertable. Recessed entrances located on John and Platt streets are framed by monumental Art Deco-style carved stone surrounds. The primary building entrance is located on John Street and is articulated by a double height opening. A secondary entrance is located on Platt Street. Within these entrances, non-historic doors are topped by contemporary decorative stainless-steel transom glass. Fixed-pane storefront windows with louvers and transoms are evenly spaced around the three facades and vary in width according to the pattern of structural bays on the upper stories. The storefronts were installed as part of a rehabilitation project in 2013 and are made of aluminum with applied moldings based on original storefront panels. This includes a cast-aluminum starburst detail that is replicated at the base all of the storefronts. Decorative metal spandrel panels with a chevron pattern separate the first story and the second story. The windows on the second and third story are non-historic aluminum replacement windows.

The nineteen-story shaft is faced in white glazed brick and trimmed in terra cotta. The facades are vertically organized with windows and spandrels recessed between brick piers. Paired pilasters, which stand proud of the piers, extend above the brick cornice above the twenty-second story. The floors are horizontally distinguished by brick spandrels ornamented with simple recessed vertical panels. John Street, the longest facade, is composed of five bays—one bay of five paired windows separated by narrow piers in the center and two bays of paired windows on either end. The Pearl Street facade is similar, save the center bay, which has four paired windows instead of five. Platt Street has the shortest facade with a center bay of four single windows flanked by one bay with paired windows on the west end and two bays of paired windows on the east end. All windows, which were originally one-over-one steel sash, are non-historic one-over-one double-hung aluminum replacement windows. A pair of terra-cotta balconies detailed with a chevron pattern is located on each facade at the twenty-first story, set between the paired pilasters. Set above the balconies are decorative terra-cotta panels at the cornice of the twenty-second story. The paired window bays at the twenty-second story are chamfered at the upper corners.

The building's setbacks occur at the twenty-third, twenty-sixth, twenty-ninth, thirty-second, and thirty-fourth stories. Beginning at the twenty-third story the corners on the Pearl Street facade are chamfered. There are three more terra-cotta balconies with chevron-pattern details in the center window bays on each facade at the twenty-seventh story. Decorative terra-cotta cornices are located at the three uppermost setbacks. The terra-cotta ornament is mostly designed with geometric motifs. Some of the more elaborate panels, notably at the setbacks and at the penthouse and tank room, which cap the building, contain more organic abstractions.

The top of the building is crowned in a sophisticated manner with a tall enclosure that discreetly houses the elevator machine room. Cruciform in plan, each of its four main elevations contains steel multi-pane windows with two vertical mullions. On all but the west elevation, the lower half of the opening has been infilled with non-historic louvers set behind the existing historic frame. Each window is framed by two projecting piers, which rise above a simplified terra-cotta cornice, and have terra-cotta capitals. The window is capped by a stylized terra-cotta lintel. A non-historic water tank and cooling tower sits on this enclosure.

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The secondary elevation of the west facade is highly visible from both John and Platt streets, rising above the two low buildings to the west. Due to this fact, the design of the primary elevations wraps around both corners onto the west facade. The facade is broken into three vertical sections: a brick-faced central section, where the building's core services are located, flanked by two sections of window bays filled with double-hung aluminum replacement windows. The north end is composed of four bays of single punched openings, three bays of which project further than the other due to the broken line of the irregularly-shaped lot. The south end has three bays of single punched openings. On each side a single bay of windows, from the fifth to eleventh story, has been sealed with brick. The central section, which houses an interior fire stair, contains openings also sealed with brick. The projecting piers and large steel-and-glass window of the elevator machine room enclosure cap this elevation.

116 John Street's lobby is a significant surviving feature of the building. T-shaped in plan, the lobby includes a central corridor extending between the John and Platt street entrances with a spine connecting to the low-rise and mid-rise elevator banks. Two vestibules with non-historic metal and glass doors lead into the lobby. High-rise elevator banks run along the west wall of the lobby with mid-rise and low-rise elevators facing one another on the north and south sides of the stem of the T. Original interior lobby storefronts are positioned at either ends of each of the high-rise elevator bank.

The lobby is richly decorated with original black gabbro marble walls and verde marble detailing. Nickel silver elevator doors, grills, and mail chutes with Art Deco motifs also decorate the lobby. Original elevator signs indicating local and express elevators hang from the dropped ceiling. The lobby storefronts are composed of single-leaf nickel silver and glass doors and fixed-pane show windows with grills. The doors, almost all of which are original, are surrounded with highly detailed Art Deco motifs including zig-zags, fan shapes, and geometric abstractions of organic forms. Likewise, the window grills are composed of shapes that resemble tree branches. The non-historic finishes include the drop ceiling, whose stepped detailing was modeled after the original detail in one of the historic stairwells, and the white, green and black marble floors.

As part of the 2013 rehabilitation, several elevators were slabbed over to provide additional supporting space (mail room, storage room, etc.) at the ground floor and additional residential space at the upper floors. At the high-rise elevators, the north elevator was discontinued; at the mid-rise (north) elevators, the far west and two east elevators were discontinued; and at the low-rise (south) elevators, the two east elevators were discontinued. In each case, the original elevator doors were pinned back, to be retained in an open position.

In addition to the three elevator banks, the upper floors are accessible via two banks of utilitarian fire stairs behind the west elevator. Access to the basement is available through two other stairs: one near the southwest corner of the building, accessible from an original nickel silver lobby door, and one in the central part of the lobby, also with a nickel silver door. The latter stair is notable for its original verde marble-faced walls and Tennessee pink marble floor and treads. The stair risers and stringer are composed of original black gabbro marble.

On the upper floors, the elevator lobbies and general pattern of circulation are the sole remaining historic features. Many of the elevator lobbies are finished with original terrazzo floors and pink marble wall panels. On the low-rise and mid-rise floors, the original Y-shaped corridor pattern remains. It includes a core area around the low- and mid-rise elevator banks, a service elevator in the high-rise bank, and small secondary corridors to the east and west. At the high-rise floors, the original configuration typically consisted of a north-south spine along the high-rise elevators; as part of the 2013 rehabilitation this has been altered into a Y-shaped configuration similar to the lower floors.

Original elevator lobby features were restored as part of the 2013 rehabilitation, with discontinued elevator shafts incorporated into new apartments. Former elevator openings, now apartment entrances, were infilled with single,

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recessed-panel doors. The functioning original elevator doors are painted metal with a simple inset design. The ceiling in the elevator lobbies is dropped, and its profile mimics the pattern of the drop beams. Some of its detail is based on that found in the original stairwell off of the lobby. Within the apartments, ceilings were restored to their original height, new partitions constructed and hollow metal doors installed as entrances.

116 John Street has retained a high degree of architectural integrity. The exterior of the building has undergone little change over the years and the primary interior spaces are largely intact.

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Statement of Significance:

116 John Street is significant under National Register Criterion A for its association with the development of New York's Insurance District, a sub-section of Lower Manhattan's Financial District. This area began to develop in the 1880s when large insurance companies converged north of Wall Street and grew rapidly through the first decades of the 20th century as tall office buildings were developed there for insurance interests, replacing swaths of older low-rise buildings that had previously defined the downtown city blocks. Completed in 1931, 116 John Street was a speculative office building, designed specifically for insurance companies in the heart of New York City's insurance district, an area strategically located near the New York Board of Fire Underwriters at 85 John Street as well as the financial center of Wall Street. The Art Deco building, designed by Louis Allen Abramson, is also significant Criterion C as a representative example of the final group of skyscrapers erected in New York City after the building boom of the 1920s and before the skyscraper explosion of the post-war period, when corporate modernism became the reigning design aesthetic.

Downtown Manhattan's Insurance District

Prior to its status as the center of the insurance industry, John Street was part of the jewelry district, a neighborhood of four-and five-story buildings on small lots concentrated in and around Maiden Lane. By the first decades of the 20th century, however, new business interests began to move into the area between Broadway and Pearl Street, north of Pine Street. These financial and insurance companies were attracted by the convenient subway access of the IRT Broadway and Lexington subway stops at Fulton Street as well as the new long-term leases available from large land-owning institutions such as the Reformed Dutch Church, which made possible new large and profitable modern buildings. The *New York Times* reported that insurance companies preferred John Street because of the broadness of the street and the high ground, conditions conducive for the construction of office buildings.¹ By 1920, the steady northward expansion of the financial and insurance districts started to displace the jewelry center businesses and prompted the jewelers to relocate en masse to maintain the concentration of the industry's business.² Ultimately, the downtown jewelry and allied trades moved to midtown, to the area between 44th to 48th streets and Fifth and Sixth avenues.

By the 1920s, the insurance industry was firmly settled on John Street. Several of the new skyscrapers constructed there during this decade were designed by the architect Ely Jacques Kahn in his role as principle in the firm of Buchman & Kahn. These included several influential Art Deco-style commercial buildings such as the Insurance Center Building at 80 John Street (1925-27; extant) and the Insurance Building at 111 John Street (1928-29; extant). The Insurance Center Building is located on a site bounded by John, Platt and Gold streets. According to Robert A.M. Stern, the twenty-six story tall building was, with its clean lines, syncopated bulkheads, and Cubist-influenced ornament, "a daring attempt to conjure both the energy of jazz and the pragmatism of American capitalism."³ Kahn used carved ornament and carefully placed ribs to draw the eye upward, past setbacks without cornices, giving the building a sense of dematerialization. Additionally, Kahn's design for 111 John Street featured a cascading setback mass with a broken facade treatment covered with textile-inspired ornamental forms. Another significant building of the district is 99 John Street, formerly home to the Insurance Company of North America, designed by Shreve Lamb & Harmon and built in 1932-33 (NR-

¹ "First of New Building on Dutch Church Holdings," *New York Times*, 1908 January 19, pg. 12; "Old John Street Houses to Go For Big Insurance Building," *New York Times*, 1910 March 20, pg. X12.

² "Gem Centre May Be Moved," *New York Times*, 12 May 1920, pg. 10.

³ Robert A.M. Stern, Gregory F. Gilmartin and Thomas Mellins, *New York 1930: Architecture Between the Two World Wars*, (New York: Rizzoli, 1994), 555.

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99001425, listed in 1999). This building made use of a simple, restrained vocabulary that emphasized the verticality of skyscraper massing.

116 John Street

In early 1930, Julian Kovacs began assembling parcels of land on John and Pearl streets. The site, which consisted of eight four and five-story buildings, was assembled so that it could be improved by a tall office building. Kovacs, owner of the Platt Holding Corporation, planned a new thirty-three-story building for insurance interests, public utility companies and attorneys, to be built to the designs of architect Louis Allen Abramson.⁴ By May of 1930, Kovacs was able to enlarge the planned building by acquiring several more lots on Platt Street, creating a new parcel that fronted on to John, Pearl, and now Platt Street. The new commercial structure was consequently raised from thirty-three stories to thirty-five stories and was set to cost \$3,000,000.⁵

Although the stock market had just collapsed the previous year, real estate development was active in the Insurance District in 1930. In October alone, nine new structures were under way in the Wall Street area, four of those in John Street ranging from twenty to thirty-five stories each nearing completion. Additionally, leasing activity in the Insurance District was reported by the *New York Times* as being “one of the brightest spots in the activity downtown.”⁶ Before 116 John Street was even completed, the Marine Office of America, a group of seven insurance company’s marine departments, leased four floors in the new building, consolidating various departments that had previously been in three locations into one building.⁷ The Firemen’s Fund Indemnity Company and the Atlantic Marine Department of the Firemen’s Fund Insurance Company leased four floors in the yet unfinished building and the Fidelity and Casualty Company leased five floors. The owner, Julian Kovacs, noted that the companies had options to expand and that within three years it was expected they would occupy 75% of the rentable area in the building.⁸

The Marine Office of America, an insurer of ocean vessels and cargo, was a noteworthy tenant of 116 John Street. This marine insurance company was formed shortly after World War I by the America Fore Group, a forerunner of today’s Continental Cooperation, a major holding group of insurance companies. In 1929 the Marine Office of America purchased the United States Protective and Indemnity Agency, which had been formed in 1916 by the United States Shipping Board to underwrite and insure government vessels. By selling the U.S. Protective and Indemnity Agency to the Marine Office of America, the Shipping Board gave a private insurance company the chance to develop and take a measure of control of the marine insurance industry.⁹ The Marine Office of America, which grew substantially through acquisition in succeeding decades, left 116 John Street in 1957 for a new space in 123 William Street.¹⁰ In 1968 the company merged with Appleton & Cox to become the Marine Office of America Corporation, the nation’s largest underwriting organization.¹¹

⁴ “John St. Site Sold for Tall Offices,” *New York Times*, 2 April 1930, pg. 57.

⁵ “Builder Enlarges Downtown Plot,” *New York Times*, 20 May 1930, pg. 57; “Tall Building in Pearl Street Planned to Cost \$3,000,000,” *New York Times*, 20 June 1930, pg. 46.

⁶ “Wall St. District Showing Activity,” *New York Times*, 26 October, 1930, pg. RE1.

⁷ “Review of the Day in the Realty Field,” *New York Times*, 10 September 1930, pg. 42.

⁸ “John Street Floors Leased,” *New York Times*, 4 December 1930, pg. 49; “To Occupy Five Floors,” *New York Times*, 15 April 1931, pg. 53.

⁹ “Shipping Board Sells Insurance Subsidiary,” *New York Times*, 20 June 1929, pg. 51.

¹⁰ “3 Floors Leased in New Building,” *New York Times*, 5 September 1957, pg 47.

¹¹ “2 Ship Insurers to Merge Jan. 1,” *New York Times*, 16 December 1968, pg 93.

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But more than being just a hub for insurance companies, 116 John Street was also a shrewd speculative investment. This was far from unusual for the late 1920s and early 1930s. According to Carol Willis, author of *Form Follows Finance: Skyscrapers and Skylines in New York and Chicago*, overheated speculative development made up a significant percentage of building during this period.¹² Easy financing and the effort to produce an acceptable rate-of-return on expensive land led to taller and taller buildings, precipitating a glut of office space at the beginning of the Depression, which in turn resulted in high vacancy rates and serious losses for many building owners. Furthermore, Willis argues that the skylines of both these cities were shaped to a large degree by these speculative developments, which reflected local land use patterns, municipal regulations, and the zoning code. In a typical case, building lots were aggregated and a logical floor plan chosen. Then, floors were stacked to fill the allowable building envelope. For instance, the external form of the Empire State Building (Shreve, Lamb & Harmon, 1930-31), was “a direct expression of the requirements of its interior layout.”¹³ The resulting buildings, in order to stay in conformance with the 1916 zoning code, resembled “wedding cakes” or ziggurats because of their many setbacks at the upper levels. Applied ornament often became a secondary concern.

Images from Berenice Abbot’s seminal work, *Changing New York*, which documented the city in the 1930s, show how the speculative development of New York played a significant role in the evolution of the city’s urban fabric. Views across the East River or from the tops of other skyscrapers illustrate how the confluence of the narrow, winding streets of downtown with the setback requirements of the 1916 Zoning Resolution produced a skyline of verticality and density. Many of Abbot’s photos illustrate 116 John Street’s place in this urban fabric (see historical photographs on pages 11-13).

The style of the building, however, was not irrelevant. Art Deco skyscrapers were considered an elegant and stylish form of Modernism and became increasingly popular during the early years of the Depression. As with many Art Deco skyscrapers, 116 John Street’s design reflects the geometric influences of Cubism and Futurism. The building is geared towards simplicity, but it’s bold use of stepped forms and range of ornament and motifs, including chevron patterns and organic abstractions, make it a representative model of the building type. Other downtown buildings which utilized this stripped-down Art Deco style were 7 Hanover Street (1931, Chester B. Storm) and 90 John Street (1931, Springsteen & Goldhammer). Influenced by increasingly abstracted designs for skyscrapers such as the Daily News Building (Raymond Hood, 1929-30) and the Empire State Building, architects increasingly accepted the financial and aesthetic pragmatism of uncomplicated design as filtered through the city’s zoning code.

Zoning Dispute with 111 John Street

Just as the building’s construction was beginning to move ahead, a law suit was filed by the building’s neighbor, the 111 John Street Corporation. The suit alleged that the height of 116 John Street violated the zoning resolution and should never have been approved by the Superintendent of Buildings. According to the plaintiff, 116 John Street was located in a “two-and-a-half-times district,” which meant that the building could only rise up two and a half times the width of the street. Under this rule the first setback must be at a height of approximately 130 feet, whereas 116 John Street’s plans called for a height of 250 feet at the street wall without a setback. To achieve this zoning feat, the developers of 116 John Street had convinced the Buildings Department authorities that the site bordered on a “public place,” that is, the 600-foot wide Burling Slip.

¹² Carol Willis, *Form Follows Finance: Skyscrapers and Skylines in New York and Chicago*, (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1995), 85-88.

¹³ Willis, 96.

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The issue for the owners of 111 John Street was that they believed the new building at 116 John Street was going to deprive their twenty-seven story building of light and air.¹⁴ The Board of Standards and Appeals, whom the lawsuit had been directed at for denying to take action in the case, found that the Platt Holding Corporation, the developers of 116 John Street, had “proceeded with the project in good faith to such an extent that a revocation of the permit would have involved irreparable loss of upward of \$2,000,000.”¹⁵ 116 John Street had already excavated and laid their foundation, contracted out 90% of their steel, and signed a number of leases. The alternatives of creating a “makeshift, patched up building,” or starting completely anew were unfair in the eyes of the Board of Standards and Appeals. Ultimately, the New York Supreme Court judge dismissed the case, stating that the plaintiff’s appeal was not timely and the burden would be too great on the defendant. The judge did note, however, that “the law should be rewritten to clarify a situation like the present one before another arises.”¹⁶

As historian Christopher Gray explains in a *New York Times* article reflecting on the history of zoning disputes—focusing on the situation at 108 East 96th Street, which was going through one such dispute in 1988—the whole case was an illustration of larger problems plaguing New York City’s political machine and the real estate development industry in the early 1930s.¹⁷

*Louis Allen Abramson*¹⁸

Louis Allen Abramson was born in 1887. He began his architectural career as a draftsman, in the office of John Duncan, a renowned New York architect, where he helped design several neo-French Classic townhouses in midtown Manhattan. From Duncan’s office he traveled West and worked for several years in and around Seattle, before returning to New York City to set up the practice in which he continued until his retirement in 1973.

Abramson’s architectural practice focused on hospitals and restaurants. Among the former are several post-World War II buildings for the Long Island Jewish Hospital. His restaurants were Art Deco and Moderne creations designed in the 1930s and 1940s. For Horn & Hardart, Abramson designed an automat at West 181st Street in Washington Heights, which opened shortly after construction of the George Washington Bridge, and had a glass ceiling with images of the Bridge, the New York skyline, and allegorical figures. He also was responsible for six elegant Longchamps restaurants in Manhattan; a number of restaurants for the Brass Rail, including their outlets at the 1939 World’s Fair; and Ben Marden’s Riviera, a night-club/restaurant perched on the Palisades near the George Washington Bridge, overlooking the Hudson, with a retractable ceiling so that the restaurant was opened to the sky on clear nights.

Abramson also designed the Jewish Center, an eleven-story midblock neo-Renaissance structure built in 1917 and located in the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District (NR Certified # 82001189, added 1982), as well as the East Midwood Jewish Center, located at 1625 Ocean Avenue in Brooklyn (NR #06000478, added 2006).

¹⁴ “Building Height Subject of Suit,” *New York Times*, 21 December 1930, pg. 141.

¹⁵ “Board Files Reply in 111 John St. Suit,” *New York Times*, 22 February 1931, pg. 135.

¹⁶ “Court Dismisses Suit on Building Height,” *New York Times*, 10 March 1931, pg. N8.

¹⁷ See Christopher Gray, “Déjà Vu in Zoning Dispute,” *New York Times*, 31 July 1988, pg. R8.

¹⁸ Partially excerpted from the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, *Upper East Side Historic District Report*, (LP-1051) (New York: City of New York, 1981), pg 1176, where information was gathered from a personal interview with Abramson. Also see New York City Landmark Preservation Commission, *Upper West Side/Central Park Historic District*, (LP-1647) (New York: City of New York, 1990), pg A1.

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Julian Kovacs and the Platt Construction Company

Little is known about Julian Kovacs (b. ? - d. 1965), a real estate developer who worked in the Bronx and Manhattan. Kovacs began working in real estate in the 1910s with the Kovacs Construction Company, possibly a family business. In 1915 he was listed as the president of the 204th Street Corporation, the owner of a 5-story tenement building in the Bronx.

During the 1920s he began to develop property in Manhattan—notably 10-14 West 47th Street and 22-24 West 48th Street. In 1924, the *New York Times* noted that Kovacs planned to demolish five-story dwellings there and build a twenty-story building at 22-24 West 48th Street for the jewelry, watch and diamond trades.¹⁹ The jewelry trade, as detailed above, moved to midtown from downtown during the 1920s, when insurance interests began moving into the area around Maiden Lane, the former jewelry center of New York. 10-14 West 47th Street and 22-24 West 48th Street were both designed for Kovacs by architects Irving Margon & Charles Glaser.

Kovacs was also a prominent member of the Federation for the Support of Jewish Philanthropic Societies, and a part of their Real Estate Club. Many of his contemporaries, including Frederick Brown, from whom he often bought property for his new developments, were a part of the club.²⁰ Brown was the Associate President.

In 1930 Kovacs chartered the Platt Holding Corporation, which would ultimately build 116 John Street. This was the last major project Kovacs would work on until his death on June 2, 1965.²¹

Later History

In 1933, 116 John Street was sold at foreclosure for failing to pay a mortgage of \$2,800,000 to the Manufacturers Trust Company and the Creek Holding Corporation took over the building.²²

In 1961, efforts were made to “modernize” the lobby space—this included replacing the floor with travertine and dropping the ceiling. The building was purchased in 1964 by a group of investors headed by Lawrence A. Wien from the Manufacturer’s Hanover Trust Company, which had held the building since the early 1930s. It was then leased from Wein’s group to Harry B. Helmsley, the president of Helmsley-Spear Inc., for 100 years.²³

In the early 1980s the building was bought by Williamson Picket Gross, Inc., who acquired the building from Helmsley and Wein for \$10 million.²⁴ At that time the building underwent a major renovation project including facade rehabilitation. Today, the building continues to function as an office building and is owned and managed by Metroloft Management, LLC.

¹⁹ “To House Jewelers,” *New York Times*, 9 February 1924, pg. 24.

²⁰ “Real Estate Men and Jewish Drive,” *New York Times*, 9 November 1925, pg. 21.

²¹ “Obituary,” *New York Times*, 5 June 1965.

²² “Skyscraper Sold on \$2,801,000 Bid,” *New York Times*, 27 April 1933, pg. 32. The building was sold to Creek Holding Corp. in 1933 for \$2,801,000 in foreclosure.

²³ “Wein Group Buys 35-story Parcel,” *New York Times*, 6 August 1964, pg. 47.

²⁴ Alan S. Oser, “Rebirth on Lower Broadway,” *New York Times*, 24 September 1980, pg. D21.

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116 John Street
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New York, New York
County and State

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116 John Street

Name of Property

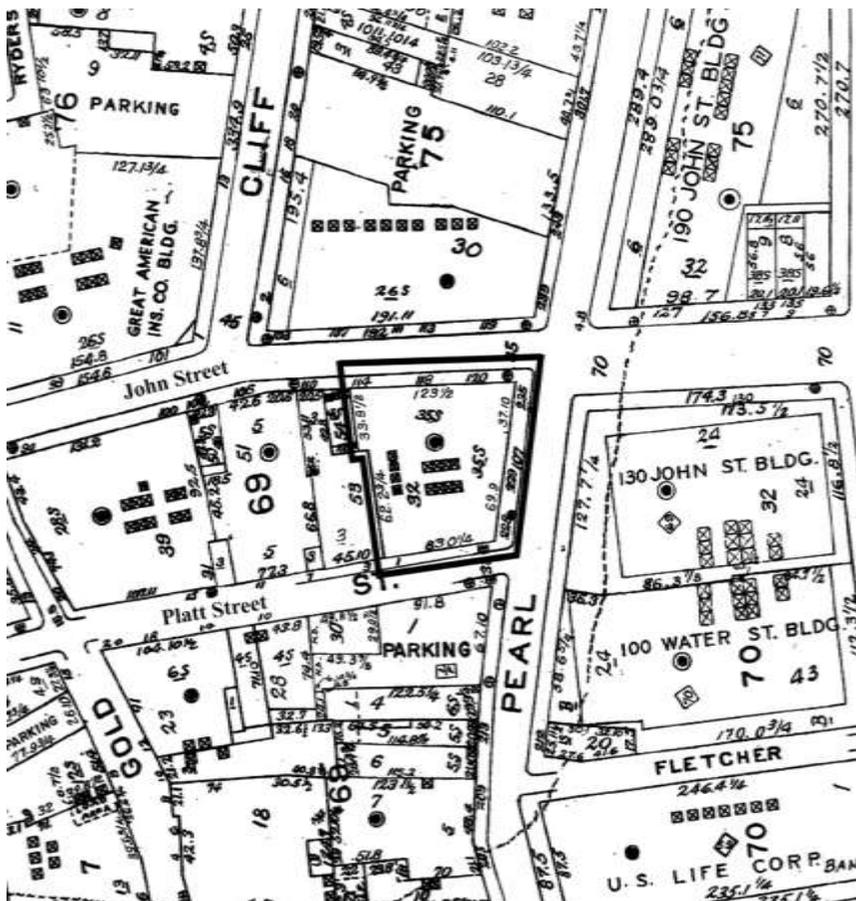
New York, New York

County and State

Section 10 Page 1

Verbal Boundary Description

The boundary of this nomination includes the entire lot, as outlined on the accompanying ca. 1985 Sanborn Fire Insurance Map.



Boundary Justification

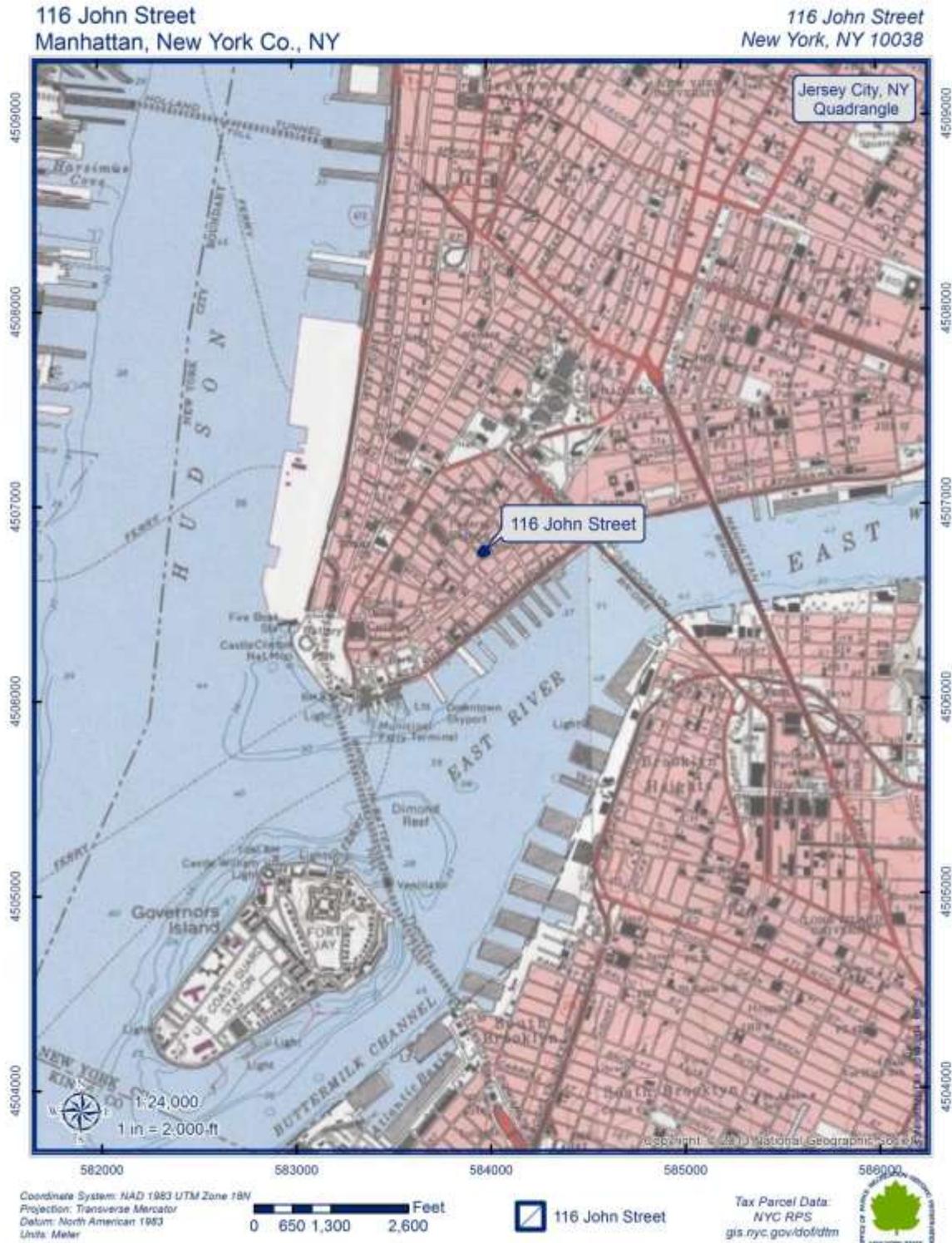
The boundary includes the entire lot on John Street, Platt Street and Pearl Street on which the original building was erected.

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116 John Street
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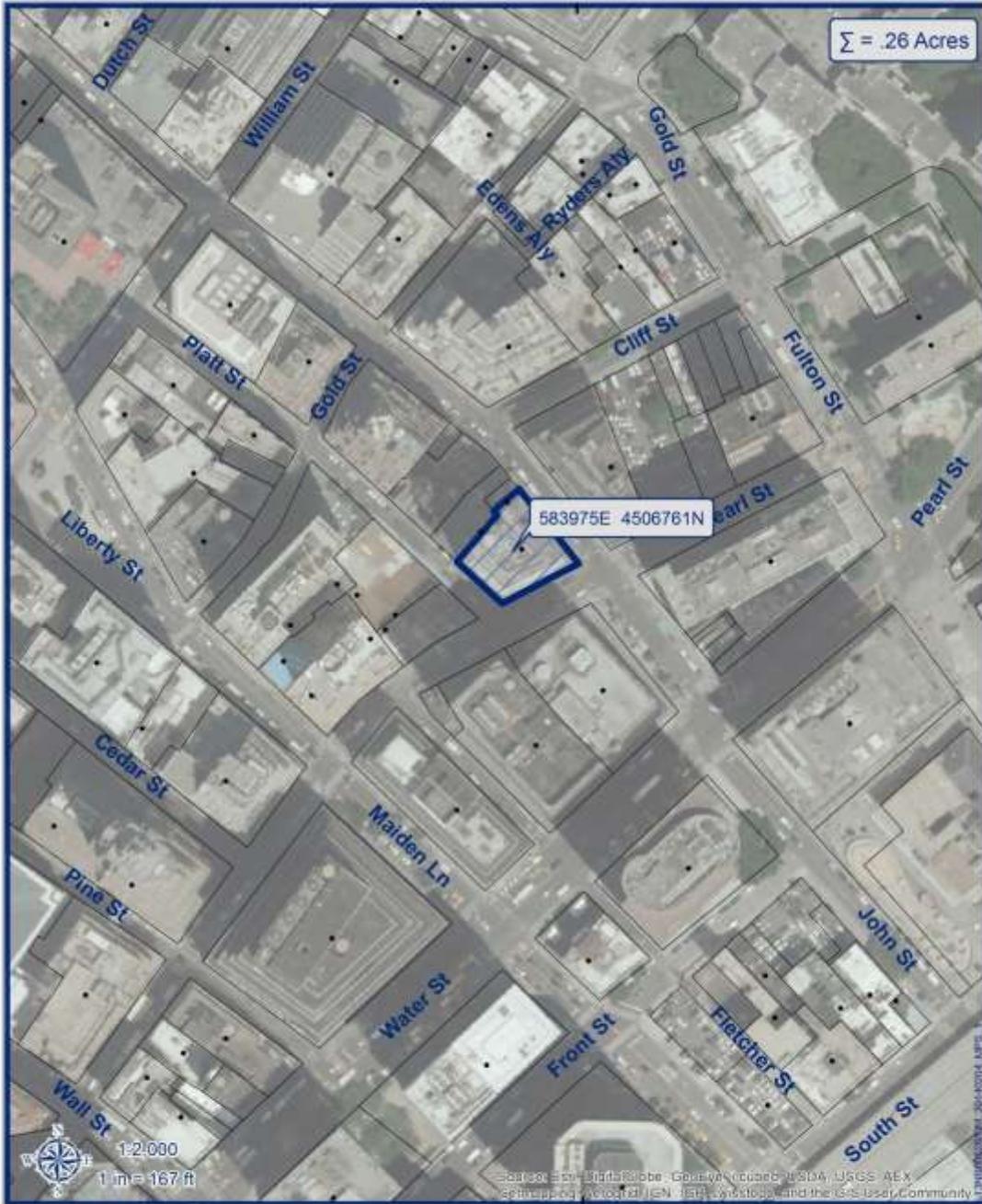
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116 John Street
Name of Property
New York, New York
County and State

116 John Street
Manhattan, New York Co., NY

116 John Street
New York, NY 10038



Coordinate System: NAD 1983 UTM Zone 18N
Projection: Transverse Mercator
Datum: North American 1983
Units: Meter



 116 John Street

Tax Parcel Data:
NYC RPS
gis.nyc.gov/dot/dtm



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Continuation Sheet**

116 John Street **x**
Name of Property
New York, New York
County and State

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Additional Information

Name of Property:	116 John Street
City or Vicinity:	New York
County:	New York County
State:	NY
Name of Photographer:	Lindsay Peterson, Jenn Cappeto
Location of Original Digital Files:	11 Hanover Square, 16 th Floor, NY, NY, 10005.
Number of Photographs:	20

Photo 1

View of exterior looking north on Pearl Street.

Photo 2

View of exterior looking southwest on Pearl Street.

Photo 3

John Street storefronts and entrance.

Photo 4

Cedar Street and Pearl Street storefronts.

Photo 5

John Street storefront detail.

Photo 6

John Street spandrel detail between first and second stories.

Photo 7

General view of lobby looking north.

Photo 8

Typical storefront within lobby.

Photo 9

View of lobby elevator bays, looking west.

Photo 10

Elevator lobby on the ninth floor.

Photo 11

View of the secondary corridor on the ninth floor.

Photo 12

View of typical apartment on the ninth floor.

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116 John Street x
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Historical Photographs



Image 1

View of 116 John Street looking west from Water Street, 1951. Note the presence of the elevated train, which ran along Pearl Street. (Acker Collection, New York Public Library)

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Image 2

Circa 1935 aerial view showing 116 John Street from the top of 70 Pine Street. This image, by the renowned photographer Berenice Abbot is titled "City Arabesque." (From Bonnie Tochelton, *Changing New York* (1997), sec. Wall Street, pg. 7).

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Image 3

Circa 1935 view of the downtown skyline from a waterfront pier showing 116 John Street center right. (From Bonnie Tochelson, *Changing New York* (1997), sec. Wall Street, pg. 43).





United States
Post Office



116
JOHN
STREET
LUXURY RENTALS
METROLOFTNYC.COM
212.344.6363

116 JOHN STREET



PEARL ST

PLATT ST

RESTAURANT
RENTAL

RESTAURANT
RENTAL

RESTAURANT
RENTAL

Person walking on sidewalk

Person walking on sidewalk

Person walking on sidewalk

Truck on street

7913
PX



Peck Slip Retail Unit
New York, NY



United States
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