

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 of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *Guidelines for Completing National Register Forms* (National Register Bulletin 16). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the requested information. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, styles, materials, and areas of significance, enter only the categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. For additional space use continuation sheets (Form 10-900a). Type all entries.

### 1. Name of Property

historic name The Hecht Company Warehouse

other names/site number N/A

### 2. Location

street & number 1401 New York Avenue, NE

not for publication N/A

city, town Washington

vicinity N/A

state District of Columbia code D.C. county N/A

code 001 zip code 20002

### 3. Classification

#### Ownership of Property

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

#### Category of Property

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

#### Number of Resources within Property

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

Name of related multiple property listing:  
N/A

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register 0

### 4. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966, 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 set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Robert L. Mallett

Signature of certifying official STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER

3/21/94

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property  meets  does not meet the National Register criteria.  See continuation sheet.

Signature of commenting or other official

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

### 5. National Park Service Certification

I, hereby, certify that this 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:)

[Signature]

5/25/94

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

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**6. Function or Use**

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Historic Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Commerce/Trade: Warehouse

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Current Functions (enter categories from instructions)

Commerce/Trade: Warehouse

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**7. Description**

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Architectural Classification

(enter categories from instructions)

Art Moderne

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Materials (enter categories from instructions)

foundation below grade - not visiblewalls glazed brick and glass block

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roof built-up, flatother glass block crown

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Describe present and historic physical appearance.

**7. Description of Physical Appearance**

The 440,800 square foot site of the Hecht Company Warehouse is bounded by New York Avenue to the north, Okie Street to the south and Fenwick Street to the west. The historic warehouse complex occupies the western two-thirds of Square 4037. The eastern portion of the square contains warehouse buildings, a parking lot, and loading areas.

The Hecht Company Warehouse consists of the original warehouse building and four additions. The original six-story building, completed in 1937, is located at the corner of New York Avenue and Fenwick Street. The first floor is square in plan and is 246 feet in length on each side, while the upper stories are 225 feet in length on each side. The six-story addition directly to the south of the original building, constructed in 1948, extends the building 344 feet south toward Okie Street. This addition matches the original portion of the building in materials and detailing. In 1961, a four-story addition was constructed east of the main building, also duplicating the original exterior treatment. In the same year, the original building footprint was also extended to the east with construction of a large one-story addition referencing motifs of original structure. A one-story concrete-block loading facility, added in 1986, extends the complex to the south and east.

The 1937 Warehouse

The original six-story portion of the warehouse dominates the site with its massive quarter-round northwest corner which rises to support a unique glass block tower. Originally, the three other corners of the building were slightly rounded. The main facades, on New York Avenue and Fenwick Street, have a pronounced base of black glazed brick and terra cotta with evenly spaced metal casement windows framed with white glazed brick borders. At the base of the tower is a partially concealed show window which retains its channeled hood and flanking glass block trim.

The highly visible original portion of the building is defined by its geometric precision. Alternating running courses of white and black glazed brick separate the base from the upper facade. Floors two through six are boldly horizontal with bands of pale yellow brick alternating with entirely glazed ribbon-like segments of block and casement units. Black brick courses accentuate the visual distinction between the horizontal layers. Soldier courses of black brick are integrated with glass block at the fifth story to form capital letters spelling out the name, "The Hecht Co."

At the northwest corner, the glazed bands curve inward to further emphasize the mass of the rounded tower. The parapet is faced with alternating black and white bands of brick which suggest a cornice. The boldly geometric tower crown is fifteen feet tall and comprised of two successively smaller twelve-pointed cylindrical layers adroitly positioned atop a larger circular base. The glass block tower is illuminated from within and, at night, appears as a giant lucent crown commanding the New York Avenue skyline.

The east facade, partially visible above the 1961 addition, continues the details of the main facade. Mechanical penthouses clad in yellow-buff brick, and a large metal water tower, are also visible.

## 8. Statement of Significance

Certifying official has considered the significance of this property in relation to other properties:

nationally     statewide     locally

Applicable National Register Criteria     A     B     C     D

Criteria Considerations (Exceptions)     A     B     C     D     E     F     G

Areas of Significance (enter categories from instructions)

Architecture

Commerce

Period of Significance

1937-1961

Significant Dates

1937

1948

1961

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Significant Person

N/A

Architect/Builder

Abbott, Merkt & Co.

Steel, Gilbert V. (architect)

State significance of property, and justify criteria, criteria considerations, and areas and periods of significance noted above.

### 8. Statement of Significance

Originally constructed to serve the retail activities of a major local merchant, the Hecht Company Warehouse is an outstanding example of Art Deco (Streamline Modern) style which stands as one of the major triumphs of inter-war Modernism in Washington. The large complex warehouse consists of five sections constructed in 1937, 1948, 1961, and 1986. A major transportation corridor and railroad routes historically have served the property and the numerous low-scale warehouses, commercial structures, and light industrial buildings nearby.

The significance of the Hecht Company Warehouse is tied to its innovative Streamline Modern architecture, early and extensive use of glass block, and importance to the city's economic heritage.

The period of significance of the Hecht Company Warehouse extends from 1937 through 1961, with three key dates: 1937, the year of completion of the original portion of the building; 1948, the year of completion of the first addition matching the original building; and 1961, the year of completion of two subsequent additions reflecting the design of the earlier portions of the structure. A one-story addition was constructed in 1986.

#### The Hecht Company and Its New Warehouse

The Hecht Company, one of Washington's major retailing firms, evolved from a family general store founded in Baltimore, Maryland, by Samuel and Babbett Hecht (Washington Star, March 25, 1955). The Hechts opened three more stores in Baltimore during the 1870s and 1880s, and by the 1890s had decided to enter the market in Washington, D.C. Two of the Hecht's sons, Moses and Alexander Hecht, opened the family's first Washington store in 1896. The Hechts opened a major downtown department store at 7th and F Streets in the 1920s with great success. Despite the Depression, the sales increased from \$7.6 million in 1933 to \$9.2 million in 1934 (Washington Star, March 25, 1955).

While many businesses suffered from the effect of the Great Depression, The Hecht Company motto was "full stem ahead." By 1936, the Hecht Company had developed a program to celebrate the firm's fortieth anniversary in Washington, D.C. and in recognition of the improving local economy. Press reports noted that the celebration consisted of three elements: installation of air conditioning in the Company's main store, institution of a six-month budget plan, and construction of a new warehouse. The new warehouse was to be designed to increase stock capacity, improve delivery preparation, and speed handling of merchandise, as well as to add efficiency and centralize operations by replacing three other warehouses. The New York Avenue site was selected for access to truck and rail transportation routes.

See continuation sheet

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

**9. Major Bibliographical References**

Architecture, December, 1983.

"A Department Store Builds a New Warehouse," Architectural Record, June, 1937.

Bush, Donald. The Streamlined Decade. New York, New York: 1975.

Cheney, Sheldon, and Martha Cheney. Art and the Machine: An Account of Industrial Design in Twentieth-Century America. New York, New York: 1936.

District of Columbia, Historic Preservation Review Board. "Decision, Case No. 91-4: The Hecht Company Warehouse, 1401 New York Avenue, NE, (Square 4037, Lot 804)," February 19, 1992.

See continuation sheet

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

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

Primary location of additional data:

- State historic preservation office
- Other State agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Specify repository:

Owner - The May Department Stores Company, St. Louis, Missouri

**10. Geographical Data**

Acres of property 10.12

UTM References

A 18 327900 4308950  
 Zone Easting Northing

C         

B           
 Zone Easting Northing

D         

See continuation sheet

**Verbal Boundary Description**

The property occupies all of Lot 804 and a portion of Lot 805 within Square 4037 as shown on the accompanying map entitled, "Hecht Co. Warehouse Boundaries, 1993."

See continuation sheet

**Boundary Justification**

The boundaries of the subject property include the physically and functionally unified warehouse complex and correspond to those of former Lot 6.

See continuation sheet

**11. Form Prepared By**

name/title Jerry G. Stockbridge, President, and Deborah Slaton, Senior Architectural Conservator  
 organization Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc. date November 24, 1993  
 street & number 330 Pfingsten Road telephone 708-272-7400  
 city or town Northbrook state Illinois zip code 60062

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The reinforced concrete structural system of the original portion of the building consists of slabs carried by mushroom columns. The large, unobstructed interior spaces accommodated furniture-finishing workshops, sales area, and stock storage. With railroad spurs entering the building from the east, deliveries to this part of the building were originally made by train cars as well as trucks. When constructed in 1937, the lower levels of the building were completely air conditioned.

The 1948 Addition

The six-story addition constructed in 1948 extends the original portion of the building to the south lot line with precisely matching surface detail and material on its Fenwick Street elevation. The Okie Street facade of the 1948 addition is defined by a series of eight steel doors on the ground level loading bays with evenly spaced casement window units within unglazed pale yellow brick above.

The 1961 Additions

In 1961, four-story and one-story additions were constructed on lands which were previously occupied by several small industrial buildings. Their New York Avenue facades strongly echo the design motifs of the 1937 construction in material and detail.

The 1986 Addition

In 1986, a utilitarian, one-story concrete block addition was constructed along the Okie Street side of the site. This structure contains 23, steel-door loading bays along its Okie Street facade, and lacks architectural distinction due to its utilitarian simplicity.

The original warehouse and its 1948 and 1961 additions can be clearly distinguished from the one-story warehouse and truck loading dock structure of 1986.

1992 Rehabilitation

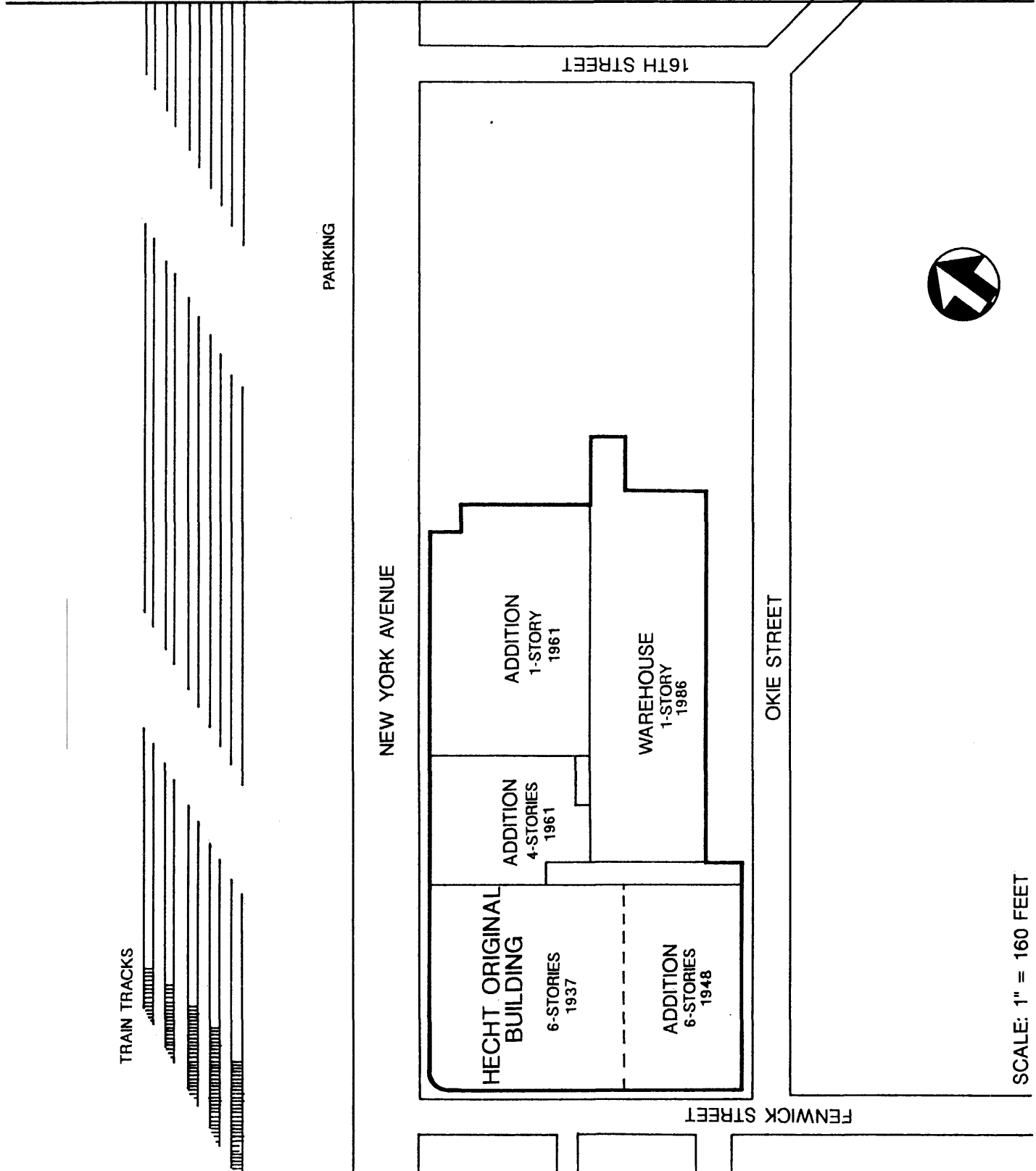
The five-part Hecht Company Warehouse complex was extensively rehabilitated in 1992 through cleaning, repair, and some replacement of historic material. Where replacement was needed, replicas of the original materials were used. As a result, the historic integrity of the entire property has been restored.

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SITE PLAN

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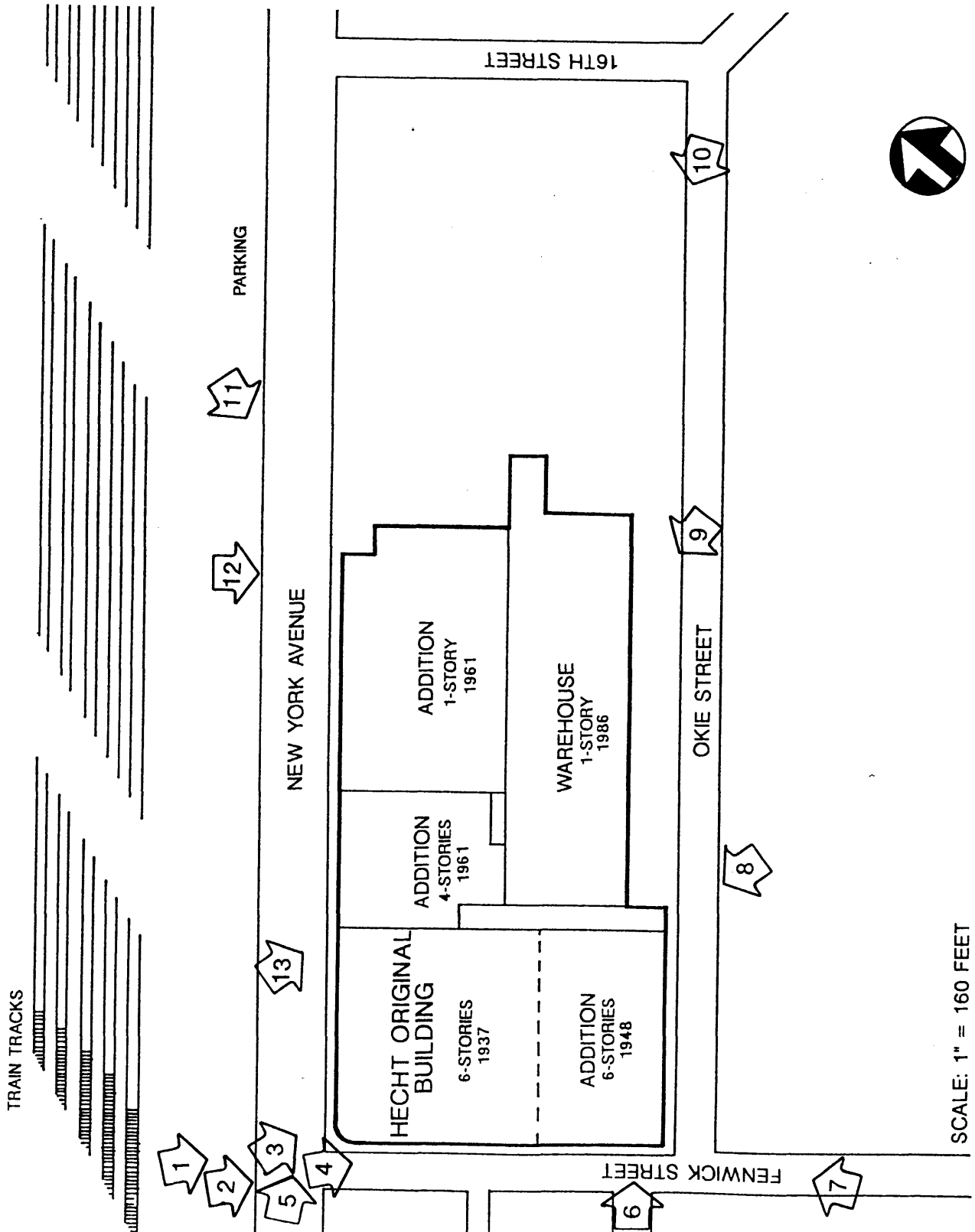


PHOTO LOCATIONS

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## Photograph Inventory

- 1 The Hecht Company Warehouse, 1401 New York Avenue, N.E.  
Washington, District of Columbia  
Michael Violette  
August, 1993  
Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc., 330 Pfingsten Road, Northbrook, Illinois, 60062  
Northwest view with north elevation of the 1937 building, camera facing southeast  
Photograph number 1
- 2 The Hecht Company Warehouse, 1401 New York Avenue, N.E.  
Washington, District of Columbia  
Michael Violette  
August, 1993  
Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc., 330 Pfingsten Road, Northbrook, Illinois, 60062  
Northwest view with west elevation of the 1937 building, camera facing southeast  
Photograph number 2
- 3 The Hecht Company Warehouse, 1401 New York Avenue, N.E.  
Washington, District of Columbia  
Michael Violette  
August, 1993  
Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc., 330 Pfingsten Road, Northbrook, Illinois, 60062  
Detail of the northwest corner, top four floors and crown of the 1937 building, camera facing southeast  
Photograph number 3
- 4 The Hecht Company Warehouse, 1401 New York Avenue, N.E.  
Washington, District of Columbia  
Michael Violette  
August, 1993  
Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc., 330 Pfingsten Road, Northbrook, Illinois, 60062  
Detail of the northwest corner and west elevation, top four floor windows of the 1937 building, camera facing southeast  
Photograph number 4



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- 5     The Hecht Company Warehouse, 1401 New York Avenue, N.E.  
Washington, District of Columbia  
Michael Violette  
August, 1993  
Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc., 330 Pfingsten Road, Northbrook, Illinois, 60062  
Overall view from the northwest, with the north elevation of the 1937 building, camera facing southeast  
Photograph number 5
- 6     The Hecht Company Warehouse, 1401 New York Avenue, N.E.  
Washington, District of Columbia  
Michael Violette  
August, 1993  
Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc., 330 Pfingsten Road, Northbrook, Illinois, 60062  
West elevation of the 1948 addition at the south end of the building, camera facing east  
Photograph number 6
- 7     The Hecht Company Warehouse, 1401 New York Avenue, N.E.  
Washington, District of Columbia  
Michael Violette  
August, 1993  
Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc., 330 Pfingsten Road, Northbrook, Illinois, 60062  
Southwest view with south elevation of 1948 addition, camera facing northeast  
Photograph number 7
- 8     The Hecht Company Warehouse, 1401 New York Avenue, N.E.  
Washington, District of Columbia  
Michael Violette  
August, 1993  
Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc., 330 Pfingsten Road, Northbrook, Illinois, 60062  
Southeast view the south elevation of the 1948 addition, camera facing northwest  
Photograph number 8

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- 9 The Hecht Company Warehouse, 1401 New York Avenue, N.E.  
Washington, District of Columbia  
Michael Violette  
August, 1993  
Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc., 330 Pfingsten Road, Northbrook, Illinois, 60062  
South elevation of the 1986 building, camera facing northwest  
Photograph number 9
- 10 The Hecht Company Warehouse, 1401 New York Avenue, N.E.  
Washington, District of Columbia  
Michael Violette  
October, 1993  
Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc., 330 Pfingsten Road, Northbrook, Illinois, 60062  
South elevation of the 1986 building and truck docks, camera facing northwest  
Photograph number 10
- 11 The Hecht Company Warehouse, 1401 New York Avenue, N.E.  
Washington, District of Columbia  
Michael Violette  
August, 1993  
Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc., 330 Pfingsten Road, Northbrook, Illinois, 60062  
Northeast view of 1961 and 1937 building, camera facing southwest  
Photograph number 11
- 12 The Hecht Company Warehouse, 1401 New York Avenue, N.E.  
Washington, District of Columbia  
Michael Violette  
October, 1993  
Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc., 330 Pfingsten Road, Northbrook, Illinois, 60062  
North elevation of the 1961 one-story addition, camera facing south  
Photograph number 12
- 13 The Hecht Company Warehouse, 1401 New York Avenue, N.E.  
Washington, District of Columbia  
Michael Violette  
October, 1993  
Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc., 330 Pfingsten Road, Northbrook, Illinois, 60062  
North elevation of the 1961 additions, camera facing southeast  
Photograph number 13

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The cornerstone of the new warehouse was laid on November 23, 1936 (Washington Star, November 23, 1936). At the cornerstone-laying ceremony, speakers included firm president Alexander Hecht, District of Columbia Commissioner Melvin C. Hazen, and U.S. Senator Millard Tydings of Maryland. Senator Tydings "praised the company officials for the 'do and dare' philosophy that led them to build the huge new warehouse which, he said, will stand as a monument to the business genius which has made America the country it is" (Washington Star, November 23, 1936). Alexander Hecht sealed the cornerstone, which contained newspapers, photos of the city, and names of store officials and employees, and dedicated the building "to the people of Washington, in the spirit of service" (Washington Star, November 23, 1936).

The local press actively followed the construction and opening of the innovative warehouse with special emphasis on the boldly confident corporate image that its modern imagery conveyed. The building was completed in June, 1937, at a cost of one million dollars, and housed 200 employees (Washington Post, January 12, 1936, Washington Star, November 23, 1936). The warehouse was representative of a trend among major retailers of the 1930s who built large warehouses on cheaper land to facilitate the expanded consumer services of their downtown stores. American department stores had become instrumental in promoting modern design during the 1920s through exhibitions and the display of merchandise in a contemporary fashion. The Hecht Company Warehouse initially had ten acres of floor space for merchandise stock and workrooms with two delivery systems for furniture and small packages. The basement contained a heating plant and mechanical equipment; the ground floor consisted of loading docks, an automotive repair facility, and delivery areas; and the upper floors housed storage areas and workrooms. In addition to its uniquely modern aesthetics, the warehouse was unusual for its fireproof construction, in-house automotive repair garage, air-conditioning system for the basement and first two floors, two-way loudspeakers, and three special railroad track spurs for loading and unloading shipments of merchandise (Washington Star, June 12, 1936).

**The Architects/Engineers and the Design**

Abbott, Merkt, & Company was founded in 1921 by engineers Hunsley Abbott and Otto Merkt. The firm was primarily involved in engineering, and advertised its work in the design of industrial buildings, power plants, warehouses, piers, docks, wharves, foundations, and other commercial, industrial, transportation, and maritime commissions throughout the United States. The firm's earlier buildings in Washington included warehouses in the late 1920s for the major retailers Palais Royal, Woodward & Lathrop, and Kann Sons Company. The warehouse was the first Hecht Company commission for the firm and was followed by stores in suburban Silver Spring, Arlington, and Prince Georges Plaza. The progressive design of the 1937 Hecht Company Warehouse was among the firm's most recognized projects and numerous articles regarding it appeared in professional journals and local newspapers at the time of the building's completion. Abbott, Merkt & Company also designed the Hecht Company's facility in Marlow Heights, Maryland, which was published in Architectural Record in May, 1961.

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Although little is known about the principal designer of the building, Gilbert V. Steel, PE, of the New York-based engineering and architecture firm of Abbott, Merkt & Co., the design of the Hecht Company Warehouse was executed with great authority and appears to draw form the well-known reductivist American and Continental examples of the 1920s and 1930s. The machine-age aesthetic was established early in Germany, and by the mid-1930s, seminal modernist work in the United States and abroad had spawned much mainstream activity. The Starett-Lehigh Building in New York City (Russell G. Cory and Walter M. Cory, with Yasuo Matsui, 1930-1931) and the May Company Department Store in Los Angeles (Albert C. Martin and S.A. Marx, 1940) are two nationally significant examples of Streamline Modernism which display several architectural features similar to those of the Hecht Company Warehouse.

The Art Deco styling of the 1937 and 1948 portions of the Hecht Company Warehouse exemplifies the American industrial design aesthetic of the 1930s. As the presence and potential of the machine gained acceptance between the wars, design trends reflected the influence of technology. The principles of aerodynamics, or streamlining, were applied to architecture and mass-produced consumer goods. Whereas machines were historically adorned with two-dimensional applied art, Depression-era industrial designers, who sought to stimulate the market, often abstracted three-dimensional form to suggest, and frequently exaggerate, the actual function and modernity of consumer goods and machinery.

The trend towards streamlining and machine expression achieved popular acceptance and succeeded in bringing more efficient, well designed, and commercially viable products to the marketplace. As the imagery of the past was abandoned for the streamlined aesthetic of a highly technological future, the partnership between artist and machine was strengthened. The great architectural symbol of this period, the skyscraper, often sheathed its unprecedented structural technology with exuberantly stylized exterior treatments which drew from Art Deco and Modernist currents.

A preliminary drawing of the Hecht Company Warehouse which was published in January, 1936, shows a six-story structure typical of contemporary utilitarian warehouses. Early in 1936, the designers revised the scheme completely and, upon its completion in 1937, the Hecht Company Warehouse received much attention from the local press and professional journals for its pioneering design. As a superb and fully-realized example of machine-age aesthetics, the property remains comparable to the best examples of 1930s Modernism in the nation.

The use of glass block in Washington followed the introduction of the material by Owens-Illinois at the 1933 Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago. The earliest local appearance may have been on a lightwell of the former Junior League Headquarters Building at 2001 Massachusetts Avenue, NW, which was completed in 1936. According to the architect, Gertrude Sawyer, the nascent material provoked a union dispute between glaziers and masons as to which trade was qualified to install it. Local examples of early glass block include Manhattan Laundry (1936) and 4801 Connecticut Avenue (1938).

The 1937 portion of the Hecht Company Warehouse, and the additions which were constructed to match the original building in materials and style, incorporate glass block for its function as well as its role as an aesthetic element of the entire facade composition. In promotional material, the architect explained that Insulux Glass Block was employed to "produce a striking architectural effect and carry out the fundamental features of our exterior design (which) gave us a uniform and satisfactory lighting...with much lower heat losses than window glass; and the low cost per square foot of the wall area was little more than brick

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construction." Shortly after its completion, the building received a prize in a national competition sponsored by the Pittsburgh Glass Institute and was cited in Architectural Forum as a "vigorous demonstration of the potentialities of glass block which functions as wall and window."

The glass block used in the 1937 section was fabricated with a lead seal between the two faces of each unit, and were subject to leakage and clouding as the lead seals deteriorated. By 1948, when the addition was constructed, Insulux blocks were produced by fusing two glass faces of each unit together. This provided a more translucent glass. Owens-Illinois ceased production of glass block in 1962, just after completion of two 1961 additions which incorporated extensive glazing of this type.

When opened, the warehouse was hailed as "symbolic of an arresting type of architecture that is destined to precipitate a revolutionary transformation in the appearance and utility of the buildings..." (Washington Herald, June 30, 1937). Contemporary reviewers also noted that "The color scheme of buff, green, and black is unusually pleasing by day, and at night, with inside illumination, the whole structure and tower offer an architectural treat for the eyes unsurpassed anywhere in this country" (Washington Herald, June 30, 1937).

The new warehouse made a strong impression on the general public, and received attention among the architectural profession. In addition to the Pittsburgh Glass award acknowledged in Architectural Forum, the June, 1937, issue of Architectural Record published a four-page feature on the warehouse. The warehouse was also recognized in a national survey of Art Deco architecture published in Architecture magazine in December, 1983, and was featured on the cover of Washington Deco (Hans Wirz and Richard Striner. Washington Deco. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1984).

The Hecht Company Warehouse is composed of five sections dating from 1937 to 1986 which, collectively, form a functionally and physically linked complex. As a compound property, the Hecht Company Warehouse remains a superb and fully realized Streamline Modern design embodying the machine-age aesthetic, and is among the finest examples of the style in America. Its innovative architectural qualities have been recognized for their importance, locally and nationally. As one of the earliest and most significant examples of glass block construction in Washington, D.C., it has received national recognition for its use of the material. And as a major and innovative warehouse that has evolved over time to its present form, the Hecht Company Warehouse is a very important element of local commercial heritage.

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"Hecht Company Warehouse: One of the East's Best," Washington Herald, June 30, 1937.

"Hecht's Dedicate New Warehouse," Washington Star, November 23, 1936.

"Hecht Company's New Warehouse," Washington Times, March 10, 1936.

"Hecht Opens Budget Plan," Washington Times, March 10, 1936.

"Pittsburgh Glass Institute Announces the Winners in its 1937 Competition for Executed Examples of the Use of Glass in Architecture, Decoration and Related Subjects - Honorable Mention, Warehouse, The Hecht Company, Washington, D.C." Architectural Forum, August, 1937.

"Plans Drawn for Hecht Co.'s New Warehouse," Washington Post, January 12, 1936.

Wirz, Hans, and Richard Striner. Washington Deco. Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1984.