

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service



561-496

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 United States Appraisers Stores

other names/site number Federal Building at 201 Varick Street

2. Location

street & number 201 Varick Street not for publication

city or town New York City vicinity

state New York code NY county New York code 061 zip code 10014

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 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 at the following level(s) of significance:

national statewide local

[Signature] /Federal Preservation Officer 11/18/2016
Signature of certifying official/Title Date
U.S. General Services Administration
State or Federal agency/bureau or Tribal Government

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

[Signature] 11/1/16
Signature of commenting official Date
DBAPO
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] 1-11-17
Signature of the Keeper Date of Action

United States Appraisers Stores
Name of Property

New York County, NY
County and State

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 |
| | | district |
| | | site |
| | | structure |
| | | object |
| 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.)

GOVERNMENT/Custom house

GOVERNMENT/Government Office

7. Description

Architectural Classification
(Enter categories from instructions.)

Materials
(Enter categories from instructions.)

MODERN MOVEMENT/ Art Deco

foundation: Concrete
walls: Brick
Limestone
roof: Synthetics
other: _____

United States Appraisers Stores
Name of Property

New York County, NY
County and State

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 United States Appraisers Stores is located on the west side of lower Manhattan at 201 Varick Street in New York City, New York. The 12 story building is constructed of steel and reinforced concrete, and its exterior is faced with limestone and buff colored brick. Encompassing an entire city block, the building is rectangular in plan, but floors eight through twelve are set back slightly on the north and south elevations to give the building a less massive appearance. Although largely unadorned, the elevations are articulated with continuous piers and a fenestration pattern that reveals the structural skeleton beneath. The minimal art deco decoration is concentrated on the corner pylons of the upper stories, the parapet walls, and the first two levels of the Varick Street elevation. Completed in 1928, the United States Appraisers Stores is a type of industrial office building that developed to accommodate factories in New York City during the early to mid twentieth century.

Narrative Description

See Continuation Sheets 7.1 through 7.4

United States Appraisers Stores
Name of Property

New York County, NY
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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

1928

Significant Dates

1928

Significant Person

(Complete only if Criterion B is marked above.)

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Buchman and Kahn

Alexander D. Crosett, structural engineer

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.

Period of Significance (justification)

The United States Appraisers' Stores Building is significant in the area of Architecture for its association with the noted architectural firm of Buchman and Kahn and for its application of modernist design principles in an industrial building. The period of significance is 1928, the date the U.S. Appraisers' Stores Building was completed.

Criteria Considerations (explanation, if necessary)

United States Appraisers Stores
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Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph (Provide a summary paragraph that includes level of significance and applicable criteria.)

The United States Appraisers Stores meets Criterion C as an industrial office building that embodies the modernist design philosophy of one of New York City's most progressive architectural firms in the 1920s and 1930s. Designed in 1927 by the architectural firm of Buchman and Kahn, the building incorporates the fundamental principles for modern industrial office buildings in New York as developed by Ely Jacques Kahn. Lead designer in the firm, Kahn advocated simplicity and honesty in design, which he considered the core of the modernist style. He experimented with modernism in industrial design with his prolific commissions across Manhattan in the 1920s. Utilizing the characteristic New York setback style and restrained abstract Art Deco motifs, the United States Appraisers' Stores Building is an imposing 12 story brick building defined by corner pylons, corbelled parapets and spandrels, narrow piers, and ascending setbacks.

Narrative Statement of Significance (Provide at least **one** paragraph for each area of significance.)

See Continuation Sheets 8.1 through 8.5

Developmental history/additional historic context information (if appropriate)

See Continuation Sheets 8.1 through 8.5

United States Appraisers Stores
Name of Property

New York County, NY
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9. Major Bibliographical References

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

See Continuation Sheet 9.1

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 _____
 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: General Services Administration

Historic Resources Survey Number (if assigned):

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property Approximately 1.8
acres
(Do not include previously listed resource acreage.)

UTM References

(Place additional UTM references on a continuation sheet.)

| | | | | | | | |
|---|---------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|---------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1 | <u>18</u> Zone | <u>583934</u> Easting | <u>4509070</u> Northing | 3 | <u> </u> Zone | <u> </u> Easting | <u> </u> Northing |
| 2 | <u> </u> Zone | <u> </u> Easting | <u> </u> Northing | 4 | <u> </u> Zone | <u> </u> Easting | <u> </u> Northing |

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

The United States Appraisers' Stores Building is located in the parcel identified as New York City tax block 581, lot 1. The parcel is bounded by Varick Street, West Houston Street, King Street, and Hudson Street.

Boundary Justification (Explain why the boundaries were selected.)

The nomination consists of the property historically associated with 201 Varick Street, New York, New York.

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Andrea Kampinen, Architectural Historian, and Andrew J. Schmidt, Director
organization Summit Envirosolutions, Inc., prepared for the U.S. Date September 2010, rev October 2016
General Services Administration
street & number 1217 Bandana Boulevard North telephone 651-842-4202
city or town Saint Paul state MN zip code 55108
e-mail aschmidt@summite.com

United States Appraisers Stores
Name of Property

New York County, NY
County and State

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.)

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: United States Appraisers Stores

City or Vicinity: New York

County: New York County

State: NY

Photographer: Andrea Kampinen

Date Photographed: September 2009

Description of Photograph(s) and number (24 photographs total):

1. Varick Street elevation, facing northwest.
2. King Street elevation, facing east.
3. King Street elevation, facing northwest.
4. King Street setback detail, facing northwest.
5. Hudson Street elevation, facing northeast.
6. Hudson Street entrance detail, facing east.
7. Varick Street and West Houston Street corner detail, facing northwest.
8. West Houston Street elevation, facing southwest.
9. West Houston and Hudson Street corner detail, facing southeast.
10. West Houston Street window detail, facing south.
11. Varick Street entrance detail, facing northwest.
12. First Floor Postal Sorting area.
13. West Houston Street entrance and loading detail, facing southwest.
14. Second Floor office space.
15. Third Floor typical hallway corridor.
16. Third Floor Veterans Affairs lobby.
17. Fifth Floor corridor.
18. Sixth Floor corridor.
19. Sixth Floor freight elevator.
20. Ninth Floor vacant space.
21. Tenth Floor office space showing open plan.
22. Twelfth Floor renovated office space.
23. Basement mushroom column.
24. Roof penthouse structures.

United States Appraisers Stores
Name of Property

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Property Owner:

(Complete this item at the request of the SHPO or FPO.)

name U.S. General Services Administration, Northeast and Caribbean Region
street & number One World Trade Center telephone 212-264-1575
city or town New York state NY zip code 10048

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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Description

Measuring approximately 200 feet by 400 feet, the United States Appraisers Stores occupies the block bounded by West Houston Street on the north, Varick Street on the east, King Street on the south, and Hudson Street on the west. All four streets are public thoroughfares, and loading facilities are along the West Houston Street and King Street elevations. The concrete sidewalk encircling the building is wider along Varick Street and West Houston Street than the other two elevations. A series of modern, concrete planters surround the building adjacent to the public streets. A subway station is adjacent to the northeast corner of the building.

The United States Appraisers Stores is currently known as the Federal Building at 201 Varick Street and provides space for the United States Department of Homeland Security, the National Archives Regional Facility, the United States Department of Energy, the United States Department of Labor, the United States General Services Administration, and the United States Postal Service. The interior spaces generally circulate around an I-shaped double-loaded corridor that runs the length of the building and extends along the width at both ends; however, the spaces vary among the different floors according to the tenants. The main entrance lobby fronts on West Houston Street and private entrance lobbies access Varick Street and Hudson Street. All office space, warehouse space, lab space, and entrance lobbies have been remodeled, most recently in 2009. Other than the basement, the interior has lost most of its historic fabric.

The United States Appraisers Stores was originally a United States Customs Service facility with ample storage and warehouse space, nearly 300 offices, three courtrooms, and a laboratory. Within a year of its completion, the building was recommended for remodeling to improve security in the vaults, but the work was not carried out until 1936. The first renovations to the building occurred in the mid-1950s when large portions of the building's relatively open plan were converted into office space to accommodate the U.S Atomic Energy Commission, which moved into the building in 1959. Other alterations followed as additional federal agencies moved in and out of the building, such as the United States Public Health Service, the United States Department of Agriculture, the United States Post Office, and the United States Government Printing Office.

The building was altered between 1978 and 1981. The upper brick parapet above the corner pylons on Varick Street was removed. The industrial metal sash windows were partially replaced and openings were filled in. Interior entries, lobbies, as well as offices on the upper floors, were given new finishes, partitions, doors, and suspended ceilings with integral lighting fixtures.

Additional renovations have been completed every several years since 1981 as tenants have occupied and vacated office space. The building was renovated to install modern HVAC equipment and passenger and freight elevators were replaced. Modifications were made for Americans with Disabilities Act compliance. The main entrance was moved from Varick Street to West Houston Street and the interior lobbies were renovated. A private entrance was added along Hudson Street, and the Varick Street entrance was replaced with a modern, metal and glass storefront.

Exterior

Spare in details and illustrative of the purpose of the building, each of the four elevations reflects a design scheme typical for a combined industrial office building that draws from influences of the New York setback style as well as Art Deco. The heavy corners of the building frame an open interior by means of ascending setbacks near the upper stories. The massing is unified by the design and detail of the exterior surfaces where vertical and horizontal elements are woven together. Although more prominent on the Varick Street elevation, the walls are divided into three sections with a limestone and brick base, brick shaft, and rusticated brick crown. Vertically continuous piers and horizontal continuous spandrels separate the fenestration and break up the immense visual weight of the buildings' façades. All of the windows on the building have been replaced with a modern sash configuration glazed with reflective tinted glass. Many of the windows on three elevations are covered with metal panels or

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metal louvered panels. Brick geometric ornamentation, reflecting stylized Art Deco motifs, provides texture to the wall surfaces on all twelve stories of the building, and is concentrated at the upper section.

Each of the four corner pylons are subtly stepped away from the wall surface and differentiated by their brick surface decoration and fenestration pattern. The pylons to the east along Varick Street are more ornate and feature one bay of paired windows on the east and two bays of paired windows on the west. The smooth brick surface in the middle section becomes more decorative in the upper section by means of arcades, corbelled brickwork, limestone string courses, and chevron-patterned brick spandrels. The pylons to the west along Hudson Street are less intricate and feature one bay of triple windows. The first two stories are clad with smooth brick, transitioning to three corbelled horizontal bands separating each story all the way to the uppermost section, which displays four horizontal bands. Thin limestone string courses separate each story in addition to the horizontal brick banding.

The Varick Street (east) elevation is nine bays wide and includes the former main entrance to the building. The top story is stepped back between the corner pylons, which terminate vertically with limestone parapet walls adorned with slightly projecting arcades and denticulated cornices. The majority of the elevation is buff brick, except for the first two stories, which are sheathed in a smooth gray limestone. Each bay between the pylons is defined by a narrow pilaster, recessed spandrels, and four narrow windows. The pilasters extend the full height of the building and terminate in a corbelled Art Deco motif and limestone cap at the 11th floor before the wall plane is stepped back. The brick spandrels are divided by the same thin brick mullions that divide the windows and include corbelling below the limestone sills of the windows. The limestone spandrels between the first and second stories display decorative recessed square panels, while the brick spandrels in the upper section feature the chevron-like corbelling pattern seen on the corner pylons. Both stories of the limestone entrance have been replaced with a modern metal and glass storefront on the first story and with windows and concrete on the second story.

The West Houston Street (north) elevation and the King Street (south) elevation are both 18 bays wide, and similar in composition. The central six bays above the seventh floor are stepped back. The elevations are primarily clad in buff brick with limestone window sills and string courses. The fenestration consists of a continuous band of windows devoid of the brick mullions that divide the windows on the Varick Street elevation. The openings have limestone sills with brick dentils and are separated vertically by smooth brick spandrels. Brick pilasters extend the height of the building and are unadorned until they reach the uppermost two floors where they display a corbelled Art Deco motif and terminate in a limestone cap.

The first two floors differ slightly between the four elevations in their arrangement of loading facilities, some of which have been filled in with brick. The West Houston Street elevation contains two modern entrances, nearly side by side. The Veterans Affairs entrance to the east is polished granite with a semi-arched glass and metal storefront. The other entrance, three bays to its west, is the current main entrance to the building and consists of a simple glass and metal storefront.

The Hudson Street (west) elevation is nine bays wide and displays a central, modern entrance. This is the only elevation without setbacks, as the wall plane is uninterrupted from the ground to the parapet. The bays between the corner pylons are similar to those of the West Houston Street and King Street elevations with regard to their materials and composition. The flat brick pilasters ascend to the top of the building and display the same corbelled Art Deco motif on the uppermost two stories as the other elevations. Portions of the first story have been infilled with brick and metal work for mechanical equipment. Within the center two bays, a modern metal entrance features a flared metal canopy and two sets of glass entry doors.

Interior

The Varick Street and West Houston Street first floor entrance lobbies are among the few public spaces in the building. Rectangular in plan, the West Houston Street entrance lobby is wider than the Varick Street lobby.

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These lobbies were reconfigured to close off the adjacent loading platforms along West Houston Street and King Street. There are a total of seventeen passenger elevators in these lobbies but both the cabs and doors have been replaced. Renovated in the early 1990s, the lobbies are finished with vinyl floors, concrete wall tiles, suspended acoustical tile ceilings, and metal enclosures around the mushroom columns.¹

A large portion of the building’s first floor southeast corner serves the United States Postal Service facility. Originally a loading area, the Village Station Post Office was established at this location circa 1974. Closed off with partition walls, the space maintains its open plan within and has evenly spaced exposed mushroom columns. The original concrete floors and ceilings remain, only slightly obscured by mechanical equipment. An elevated, metal mezzanine viewing corridor was built along the 1974 cinder block walls for United States postal inspectors’ access. The remainder of the building’s first floor features offices along the outside walls.

Because much the building has been converted from warehouse space to office space, multiple renovations to the interior have resulted in different corridor and office configurations for each floor. Prior to the renovations, the floors displayed open plans with exposed mushroom columns and a few offices along the outside walls. Currently, a double-loaded corridor generally circulates in a U-shaped plan around the floors. In addition, there are spaces where transverse corridors cross the double-loaded corridor.

The corridors are finished with suspended acoustical tile ceilings, vinyl floors, and hollow metal partition walls. Office space is located along the exterior walls for natural light and generally remains open in plan. Many of the mushroom columns have been encased in metal. Room finishes vary depending on when the space was renovated, with the most recent alterations completed in September 2009. Storage and mechanical equipment rooms are concentrated in the center of the floors near the elevator shafts. Upper floors have less square footage because of the building’s setbacks. The 12th floor space planning includes few walls for the National Archives’ needs and a cafeteria.

The United States Department of Veteran Affairs space on the second and third floors near the northeast corner of the building includes a small public lobby. Modern escalators access this second floor lobby from the ground floor and their separate entrance off West Houston Street. The lobby’s modern vinyl floor tiles mimic terrazzo and its mushroom columns are encased.

The only floor with a different configuration and finishes is the fifth floor, which formerly held the laboratories for the United States Department of Energy. The double-loaded corridor is much narrower with several of the partition walls constructed of concrete block. The ceilings are completely obscured by mechanical equipment and its various small rooms include many pieces of lab equipment either built into the walls, ceilings, or floors.

The basement originally housed the boiler and garbage incinerator rooms, work rooms, and various open storage spaces. A double-loaded corridor circulates the floor in a U-shaped plan and two freight elevators rise to the 12th floor.

The foundation walls are concrete block and the partition walls are brick. The reinforced-concrete mushroom columns and ceilings are exposed, but they are largely obscured by mechanical equipment. The sub-basement includes the four power generators, and a sub-sub-basement contains the original garbage incinerator. Most of the original basement concrete floors and hollow metal doors and frames remain intact. The floor now provides space for maintenance staff, storage rooms, and mechanical equipment.

The roof contains three brick penthouse structures and multiple HVAC equipment. One to two stories in height,

1. In reinforced concrete construction, a mushroom column is a structural column suggestive of a mushroom shape that flares at the top to counteract sheering stresses. They are a significant feature indicative of the building’s construction method.

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the penthouse structures are centrally located in a linear pattern along the asphalt roll roofing surface and flanked by the modern equipment. The structures are faced with a buff-colored brick that matches the exterior cladding of the main building, and display their original industrial metal sash windows with limestone lintels. A metal pole guardrail is placed along the perimeter of the parapet wall.

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The United States Appraisers Stores is eligible under Criterion C as an industrial office building that embodies the modernist design philosophy of one of New York City’s most progressive architectural firms in the 1920s and 1930s. Designed in 1927 by the architectural firm of Buchman and Kahn, this building incorporates the fundamental principles for modern industrial office buildings in New York as developed by Ely Jacques Kahn. Lead designer in the firm, Kahn advocated simplicity and honesty in design, which he considered the core of the modernist style. He experimented with modernism in industrial design with his prolific commissions across Manhattan in the 1920s. Utilizing the characteristic New York setback style and restrained abstract Art Deco motifs, the United States Appraisers Stores is an imposing 12-story brick building defined by corner pylons, corbelled parapets and spandrels, narrow piers, and ascending setbacks.

Despite the mid- and-late 20th century alterations, the building’s form is intact and sufficient character defining features of the exterior and interior retain its historical integrity. The fenestration pattern and window openings are character defining features of the exterior, and although the sashes have been replaced, they do not significantly diminish the historical integrity because the pattern of the openings is intact. Although the main entrance has been altered, the significance of the building is derived primarily from its simple form, and remaining ornamentation on the façades conveys the original Art Deco stylistic influence. The interior of the building has been altered, but the original interior finishes were not a notable feature of the building. The arrangement of its mushroom columns are a character defining feature of the interior and many of the columns remain visible.

United States Appraisers Stores in Lower Manhattan

Established in 1624 as a commercial trading post, New York has been the largest city in the United States since 1790. Immigration and industrial development in the 19th century contributed to New York City’s rise to become the foremost manufacturing, industrial, and commercial center in the country by 1900. Modern New York City was created in 1898 with the consolidation of the five boroughs, including the island of Manhattan. Lower Manhattan is generally located south of 14th Street and includes some of the oldest development sites in the city as well as the financial, commercial, and industrial core.

Portions of the west side of lower Manhattan were owned by Trinity Church through a very large land holding granted to the church in perpetuity by Queen Anne of England in 1703.² Differing from the rest of the city, the historic street pattern remains irregular in the Greenwich Village, West Village, SoHo, and Tribeca neighborhoods. Development in the west side of lower Manhattan during the 19th century included the construction of tenement houses, small scale commercial buildings, and light industrial and manufacturing lofts in part due to nearby shipping docks to the west along the Hudson River. By 1899, an earlier United States appraisers stores building was completed near the shipping docks at 641 Washington Street as a warehouse for imported goods awaiting customs approval.

Beginning in 1920, the construction of the Holland Tunnel greatly affected the west side of lower Manhattan. An initial concept for the tunnel was conceived as early as 1906, but work on the present structure began in 1920. First deemed the “Hudson River Vehicular Tunnel,” the tunnel was designed to link New Jersey and Manhattan beneath the Hudson River.³ The lower west side became an important terminus for traffic west of the Hudson River, and offered better shipping and receiving capabilities for businesses and industries. In anticipation of the tunnel’s completion, many businesses and government agencies, including the federal government, invested in commercial and warehouse development in the surrounding vicinity in lower Manhattan.

In the vicinity of Varick Street (later known as the Varick Street Industrial Area), light industrial construction surged during the 1920s as a result of the Holland Tunnel. Prior to 1920, this area was dominated by small rowhouses, tenements, and warehouses. The Holland Tunnel project widened streets in the area, including Varick Street, to

2. “Trinity Church Wall Street,” n.d. Web, Aug 2016 <<http://www.trinitywallstreet.org/blog/news/unearthing-our-past>>.
 3. “Holland Tunnel,” *Time*, 21 November 1927.

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improve access to shipping and rail facilities. Trinity Church still owned much of the land, but began selling off portions in 1925 for speculative development. The area quickly transformed into a small district of semi-tall industrial and office structures that were designed to accommodate modern industry and business, including nationally known printers, publishers, machinery dealers, and wholesalers. Demand was high for office and industrial space, resulting in very few vacancies after a new building was completed.⁴

By the time the Holland Tunnel was under construction, New York City was rapidly growing and quickly approaching seven million inhabitants. The volume of imports to the city grew along with the population, and the existing United States appraisers stores building on Washington Street soon proved to be too small for adequate public storage of goods. The Merchant’s Association and other business and civic interests complained about delays in customs activities and lobbied for a new facility.⁵

Louis Adler was among the early developers in the Varick Street Industrial Area who bought land from Trinity Church. In 1926, Adler leased a full city-block of land from the church on the southwest corner of Varick Street and West Houston Street with an option to purchase. In early 1927, he proposed to build a 12-story building and sell it, including the land, to the federal government for \$8,000,000. Working in conjunction with funds from the Public Buildings Act of 1926, the federal government agreed to purchase the building from Adler and ultimately received the title from Trinity Church. The United States Treasury Department awarded Adler the contract in October 1927 and approved the design plans as presented by the prominent New York City architectural firm of Buchman and Kahn. The contract included, however, a strict stipulation that the building must be completed and ready for occupancy by January 1, 1929. The new United States Appraisers Stores was planned for 300 offices, three customs courtrooms, a laboratory, eight freight elevators, six high-speed passenger elevators, and two mixed freight and passenger elevators. At the time, it was to be the largest building in the Varick Street Industrial Area and construction commenced in August 1927.⁶

Louis Adler and the United States Appraisers Stores made headlines in the New York Times when it was completed over a month earlier than required, with Adler returning \$410,000 of the \$8,000,000 back to the federal government. The building and land were officially sold to the federal government in November 1928.⁷ The purpose of the United States Appraisers Stores was to warehouse uncollected goods from abroad or goods seized by the United States Customs Service. Merchandise was often highly valuable and needed strict security. Fines collected through the courts for this activity made it highly profitable, with average daily revenue of \$1,100,000, at the Washington Street building in 1928. The New York Times deemed the Varick Street Building the finest Appraisers’ Stores Building in the country when it was completed.⁸ It was the largest industrial building in the Varick Street Industrial Area until the completion of the Holland Tunnel Plaza Building by Buchman and Kahn in 1930.

Following World War II, the United States Appraisers Stores handled a very large amount of imported goods and generated substantial revenue for the United States Treasury Department. In 1954, the Varick Street location levied an annual \$300,000,000 in United States duties.⁹ Changing practices forced the United States Appraisers Stores to give up two floors of its warehouse space in 1955 after a new “on-the-dock” inspection method of cargo required less federal government warehousing. Within a few years, other federal agencies, such as the United States Atomic Energy Commission and the United States Food and Drug Administration initiated plans to occupy

4. “Varick Street Industrial Centre is Expanding Rapidly,” *New York Times*, 10 November 1929.
 5. “Real Estate Transaction No. 1,” *New York Times*, 6 November 1927.
 6. Ibid.
 7. “Saves Government \$400,000 on record-time job,” *New York Times*, 2 Dec 1928.
 8. Ibid.
 9. “Flynn, 74, About to Retire Again, This Time as U.S. Appraiser Here,” *New York Times*, 28 Oct 1953; Joseph Ryan, “Half US Imports Appraised Here,” *New York Times*, 28 Jan 1954.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

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| United States Appraisers Stores |
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the building, prompting an intensive conversion of the space from warehousing to offices. Housing a variety of federal agencies, the building was still the largest federal structure in New York City in 1958.¹⁰

Reaching New Heights: New York City Skyscrapers and the Setback Style

Advances in engineering and construction in the late 19th century made it possible to build safer steel-frame structures, and after the New York City Building Code approved steel cage construction in 1889, the skyline began to increase. The narrow geography of Manhattan produced increased land costs and premium rents for buildings built to house a growing business sector in the early 20th century. Prior to its first zoning law in 1916, New York City imposed no restrictions on height or lot coverage of buildings and, as a result, buildings grew taller. By the time the Woolworth Building reached 792 feet in 1913, height regulations were imminent.¹¹

New York's first zoning legislation dictated the design of taller buildings after 1916. Intended to protect a measure of light and air in Manhattan, the law required that a building must be stepped back as it rose in accordance with a fixed-angle drawn from the center of the street, but a tower could be permitted over one-quarter of the site. The resulting practice by architects was to step back the mass at regular intervals that usually related to the depth of the structural bay. Towers were often incorporated into designs, depending on the needs of the client.¹²

As architects began to define what was known as the "setback style," by the mid-1920s the zoning law affected the aesthetics of tall building design as well. By reducing the number of setbacks and emphasizing the pyramidal mass, simple massing became the benchmark of progressive design. Ely Jacques Kahn, one of the most prolific skyscraper designers of the period, mentioned that the New York City zoning laws, "encouraged a new art by the very restrictions they contain."¹³ Plan and program as determined by form, as well as function of the building, were concerns circulating among architects at the time.

By the late 1920s, buildings in New York City regularly reached 50 to 60 stories in height. Skyscrapers utilizing the setback massing became a distinctive type of New York building in the 1920s. Vertical elements were emphasized, and individualization was achieved through material choice, fenestration pattern, and ornamentation.

Exterior cladding was often limestone, brick, terra cotta, metal, and later, structural glass. Generally, windows were evenly spaced or paired, and could be composed with patterns of texture, color, or ornament.¹⁴ The setback style was used in New York City from the 1920s through the 1950s before codes were reformed in 1961.

Buchman and Kahn: New Ideas in Modern Industrial Office Building

The architectural firm of Buchman and Kahn was established in 1917 and lasted until 1930. Trained at Columbia University and the Ecole des Beaux Arts, Ely Jacques Kahn joined the firm of Albert Buchman as a draftsman in 1917. Buchman, who specialized in commercial design, was on the verge of retirement. Within six months, Buchman turned responsibility over to Kahn, who assumed leadership of the firm as designer and responsible head.¹⁵ Although the firm was a partnership, Kahn was the driving creative force behind the firm's designs, which in large part included warehouse, industrial, and loft buildings for the clothing, fur, and furniture trades as well as other light industries in New York City. He became a leader in the New York architectural circle during the 1920s

10. John P. Callahan, "US as Landlord," *New York Times*, 9 Feb 1958; Charles Grutzner, "Site Here Sought for US Govt," *New York Times*, 3 May 1956.

11. Carol Willis, *Form Follows Finance: Skyscrapers and Skylines in New York and Chicago* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1995), 34-35.

12. Willis, *Form Follows Finance*, 67.

13. *Ibid.*, 79.

14. *Ibid.*, 102.

15. Jewel Stern and John A. Stuart, *Ely Jacques Kahn, Architect* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 2006), 53.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
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Section number 8 Page 4

and 1930s for his work in the emerging Garment District and for championing modernist design after the 1925 Paris Exposition.¹⁶

During the early to mid 20th century, architecture in New York mingled diverse ideas and styles, and Ely Jacques Kahn was among the most prolific and progressive designers of the period. From the mid 1920s to the New York World's Fair in 1939-1940, Kahn produced some of his best work while searching for solutions to the city's architectural challenges, such as the large, urban industrial building and the tall, setback office building. In the late 1920s, Kahn developed a design concept for an industrial office building in New York, which incorporated an innovative decorative scheme that helped pave the way toward American modernism.¹⁷

Buchman and Kahn's commissions in the Garment District allowed Kahn to extensively experiment with the setback style for designs of commercial and industrial buildings. In the mid-1920s, Kahn used a basic scheme of a relatively plain building resting on a two- to four-story base and crowned by an ornamented upper section. The 21 story Arsenal Building, built in 1925 at 463 7th Avenue, shows this design scheme in its elaborate four story base, plain middle section, and set back uppermost section with a Romanesque arched parapet. In the Edward Pinaud Factory, a small manufacturing building built in 1927 at 214 East 21st Street, Kahn varies from his basic scheme to an integrated building design where the wall surface unites the elements of the building through classical proportions and texture. The design scheme of the Pinaud Factory Building is one that Kahn further developed in larger structures, which became the prototype of the modern commercial and industrial office building in New York City.¹⁸

Kahn discusses his design philosophy of modern industrial office buildings in a 1929 article in *Architectural Forum*. Kahn addresses his industrial buildings as experiments in modern design to solve a characteristically New York problem. The industrial building type emerged with the early use of steel, concrete, and large glass wall surfaces as an engineering solution for the problems of inadequate light, ventilation, and space. New York City, however, suffered from problems in space and planning where trades, both manufacturing and supplying, concentrated densely in districts where rents were high and loading capabilities were compromised due to the street traffic. Furthermore, the 1916 zoning law resulted in taller industrial buildings for which improved elevator and freight facilities were needed. Thus, Kahn stated, the modern industrial office building in New York, with its specialized equipment needs and zoning requirements, needed an economy of plan, sufficient fenestration for light, and adequate ventilation and mechanical capabilities. In addition, Kahn stressed the need for an appropriate aesthetic scheme that reflected the function of the building.¹⁹

Kahn stated that since the industrial building was primarily a machine for the production of a commodity, the structure needed to reflect its purpose in form and aesthetics. In form, the building suited its particular industry in the design of its elevators and freight halls, loading facilities, floor loads, and column arrangement in order to maximize the most efficient use of space. The columns fit the lines of machines, windows were arranged for sufficient light, and electric power and ventilating shafts were incorporated. The more challenging problem for the designer, Kahn acknowledged, was in the aesthetics for an industrial building where fine proportion, balance of mass, and agreeable color of material were difficult to achieve.²⁰

Kahn resolved this issue with his concept for modernism as "an honest kind of style," in that all detail and ornament must be a direct expression of a building's function. Instead of delicate ornament, aesthetic appeal was

16. Ibid., 57; Arnold Lehman, "The New York Skyscraper: A History of its Development, 1870-1939," (Doctoral Dissertation, Yale University, 1974), 289.

17. Françoise Bollack and Tom Killian, *Ely Jacques Kahn, New York Architect* (New York: Acanthus Press, 1995), VII-VIII.

18. Bollack and Killian, *Ely Jacques Kahn*, IX

19. Ely Jacques Kahn, "The Architecture of Industrial Buildings," *Architectural Forum* 51 (September 1929), 274-276.

20. Ibid., 276-277.

**United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**

**National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet**

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| United States Appraisers Stores |
| Name of Property |
| New York County, New York |
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Section number 8 Page 5

achieved through proportion, symmetry, rhythm, color, and texture. The setback style was ideal for carrying out this purpose in its receding surfaces and large glass area requirements. To illustrate his philosophy of the modern industrial building, Kahn cited his very tall factory types in the Garment District and the printing buildings developing along Varick Street. The United States Appraisers Stores at 201 Varick Street was listed among his works that reflected this design philosophy in the *Architectural Forum* article.²¹

The United States Appraisers Stores is a model of Kahn’s design concepts for modern industrial buildings. In form, the setback style is used to frame an open center around the imposing mass of the large 12 story building. The mushroom columns on the interior were carefully arranged and the fenestration designed to allow maximum light into the large warehousing space for federal customs officials. The building displays what would become one of Kahn’s favorite Art Deco design schemes: a building’s center and its edges are articulated, and the horizontal and vertical elements of the exterior walls are woven throughout the façade to unite the building visually. The materials and arrangement of the façades are simple in rhythm, texture and color. The narrow piers are broken by the arrangement of setbacks, the abstract brick dentils and corbelling in the uppermost section heighten the building, and the muted buff hues of the brick and limestone evoke the function of the industrial office building.

Following his 1927 commission for the United States Appraisers Stores Kahn, through his partnership with Albert Buchman, continued to design industrial office buildings throughout Manhattan. The Holland Plaza Building was completed in 1930 in the Varick Street Industrial Area and is considered his industrial masterpiece.²² Although larger and more imposing, the Holland Plaza Building closely resembles the modernist design scheme Kahn used on the United States Appraisers Stores.

In 1930, Kahn formed his own firm using just his name, until he took another partner in 1940. His later designs throughout the 1930s typically were Art Deco commercial skyscrapers using the setback style and other variations of the modernist design approach he used on the United States Appraisers Stores.

21. Kahn, “The Architecture of Industrial Buildings,” 273-276.
22. Stern and Stuart, *Ely Jacques Kahn*, 144.

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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places
Continuation Sheet

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| United States Appraisers Stores |
| Name of Property |
| New York County, New York |
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| N/A |
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Section number 9 Page 1

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US APPRAISERS
STORES BUILDING
NEW YORK
NEW YORK
COUNTY, NY
18/583934/4509070

Maped, edited, and published by the Geological Survey
Revised in cooperation with New York Department of Transportation
Control by USGS, NOS/NOAA, USCE, New Jersey Geodetic Survey,
and City of New York Board of Estimate and Apportionment
Planimetry by photogrammetric methods and from NOS charts T-5171,
T-5277, T-5332, T-5450, T-5453, T-5454, T-5460, T-5461, T-5466, T-5468,
T-5469, and T-5470
Topography by photogrammetric methods from aerial photographs taken
1954 and planimetric surveys 1955. Revised from aerial photographs
taken 1956. Field checked 1967
Selected hydrographic data compiled from NOS charts 285, 287, 541,
and 745 (1966). This information is not intended for navigational purposes
Polyconic projection, 10,000-foot grid ticks based on New Jersey coordinate
system, and New York coordinate system, Long Island zone, 1000-meter
Universal Transverse Mercator grid ticks, zone 18, shown in blue, 1927
North American Datum. To place on the predicted North American Datum
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by dashed corner ticks
There may be private inholdings within the boundaries of
the National or State reservations shown on this map

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NATIONAL GEODETIC VERTICAL DATUM OF 1929
DEPTH CURVES AND SOUNDINGS IN FEET—DATUM IS MEAN LOW WATER
THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TWO DATUMS IS VARIABLE
SHORLINGS SHOWN REPRESENTS THE APPROXIMATE LINE OF MEAN HIGH WATER
THE MEAN RANGE OF TIDE IS APPROXIMATELY 4.4 FEET IN
UPPER BAY AND 4.8 FEET IN NEWARK BAY

ROAD CLASSIFICATION
Primary highway, all weather, hard surface
Secondary highway, all weather, hard surface
Light duty road, all weather, improved surface
Unimproved road, fair or dry weather
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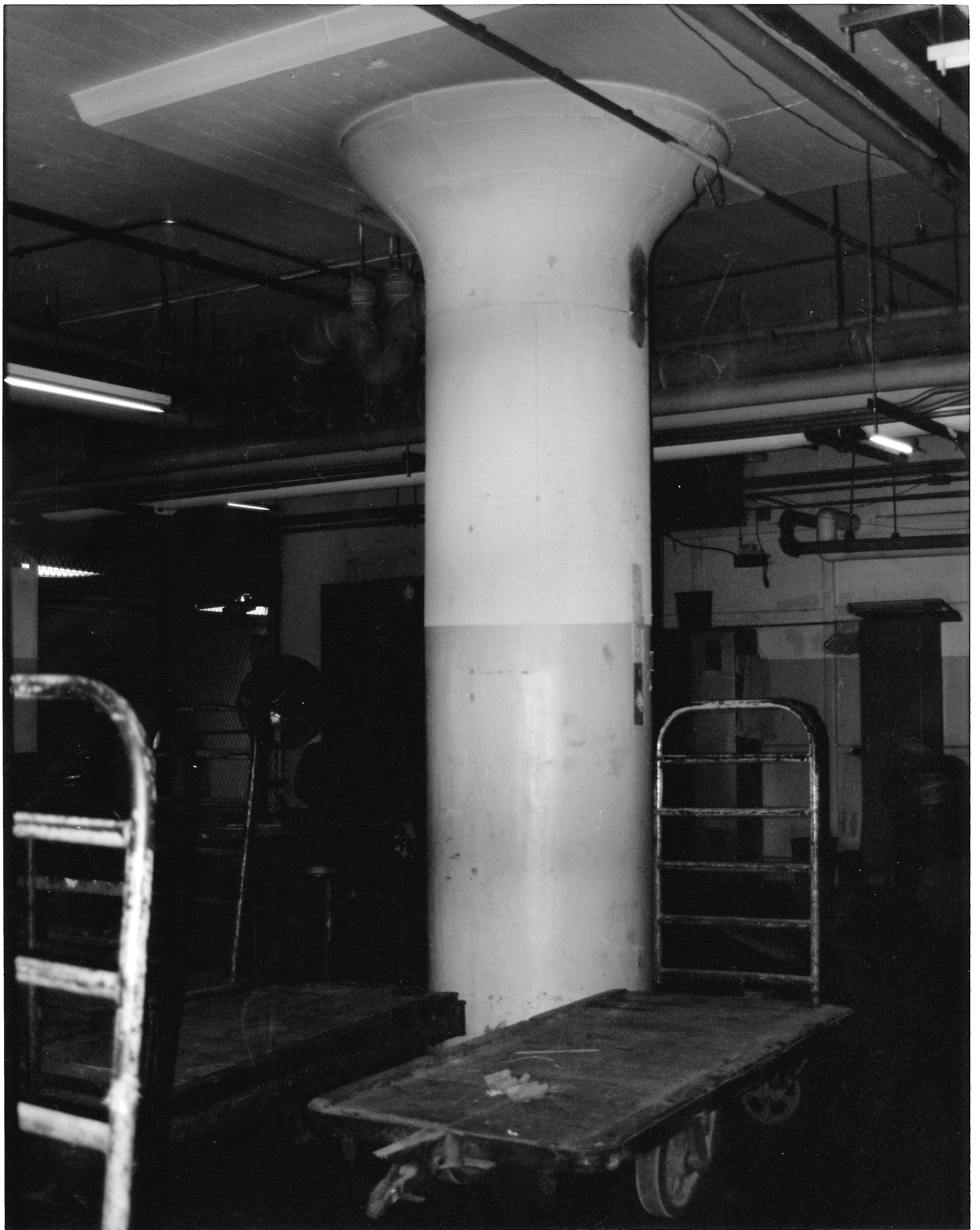
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UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action:

Property Name:

Multiple Name:

State & County:

Date Received: 12/2/2016 Date of Pending List: 12/27/2016 Date of 16th Day: 1/11/2017 Date of 45th Day: 1/17/2017 Date of Weekly List: 1/17/2017

Reference number:

Nominator:

Reason For Review:

Accept Return Reject 1/11/2017 Date

Abstract/Summary
Comments:

Recommendation/
Criteria

Reviewer Alexis Abernathy Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2236 Date _____

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : No see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.

United States Appraisers Stores – Photo log [201 Varick Street, New York, New York
Provided for ease of reference when reviewing photographs and descriptions in nomination

*NPS - not part of the submission
only for ease of reference of
photos on disk - Thankyou.*



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JERSEY CITY QUADRANGLE
NEW JERSEY - NEW YORK
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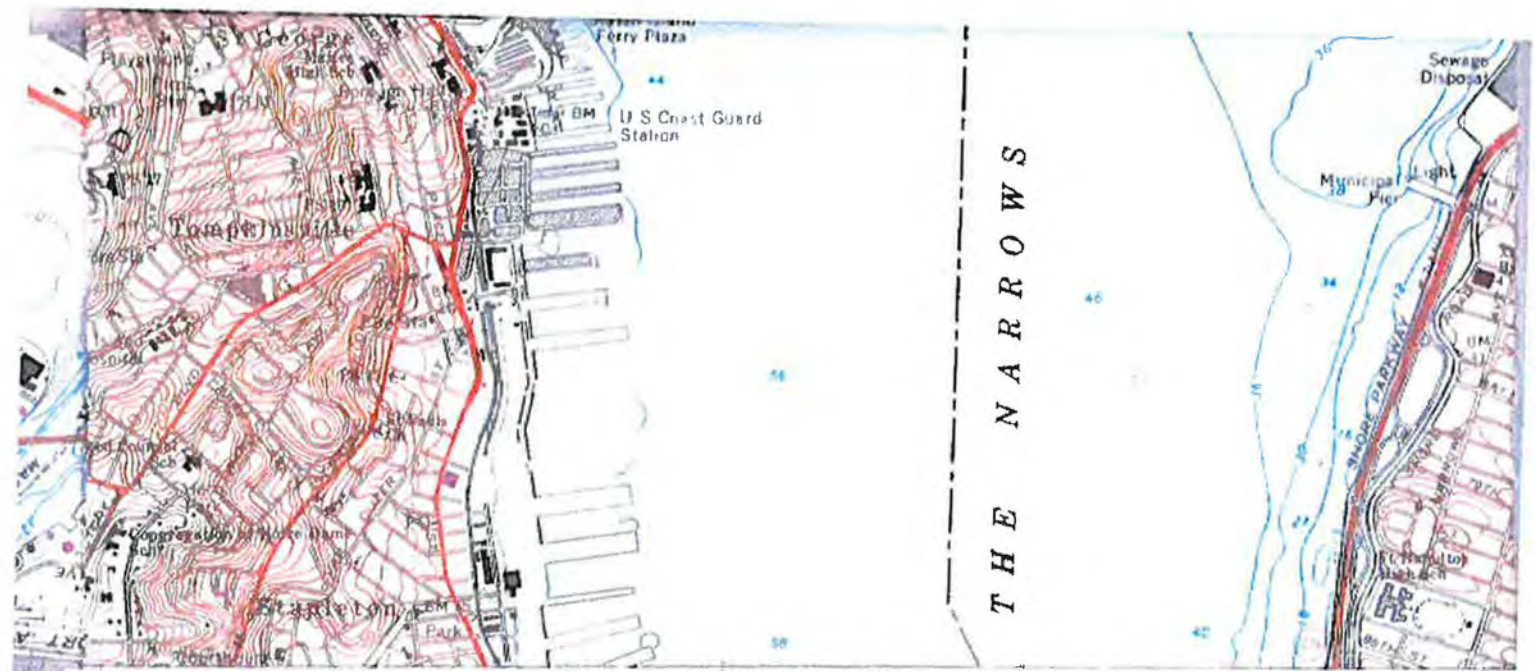
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US APPRAISER'S
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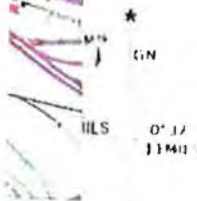
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 THE MEAN RANGE OF TIDE IS APPROXIMATELY 4.4 FEET IN
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November 18, 2016

Mr. Paul Loether
Chief, NRHP & NHL Program
National Park Service
1201 Eye Street, NW (2280), 8th Floor
Washington, DC 20005

Dear Mr. Loether: 

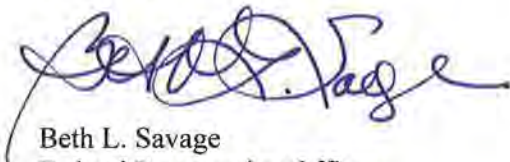
The U.S. General Services Administration (GSA) is pleased to nominate the United States Appraisers Stores (current name: Federal Building) located at 201 Varick Street, New York, NY, for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places. The nomination is hereby submitted on disk in accordance with the May 6, 2013 guidance and includes the following:

- Signed original first page of the National Register of Historic Places nomination form;
- Disk 1 - The enclosed disk contains the true and correct copy of the nomination for the United States Appraisers Stores located in New York, NY, to the National Register of Historic Place; and,
- Disk 2 - The enclosed disk contains the .tif image files for the above referenced nomination.

In accordance with 36 CFR Part 60.9(c), the appropriate State and local elected officials were notified of GSA's intent to nominate the above referenced property to the National Register of Historic Places and received as response the signed nomination.

If for any reason any nomination package that GSA submits needs to be returned, please do so by a delivery service as items returned to our offices via regular mail are irradiated and the materials severely damaged. Should you have any questions or concerns regarding this nomination package, please contact Claire Hosker at (202) 501-1578 or claire.hosker@gsa.gov.

Sincerely,



Beth L. Savage
Federal Preservation Officer
Director, Center for Historic Buildings

Enclosures

cc: David Anthone, GSA Regional Historic Preservation Officer