Form No. 10-300 (Rev. 10-74)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM

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SEE INSTRUCTIONS IN *HOW TO COMPLETE NATIONAL REGISTER FORMS*
TYPE ALL ENTRIES -- COMPLETE APPLICABLE SECTIONS

1 NAME

HISTORIC
A. T. Stewart Store

AND/OR COMMON
Sun Building, "The Marble Palace"

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
280 Broadway — NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN
New York — VICINITY OF

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
17

STATE
New York

CODE
36

COUNTY
New York

CODE
061

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY	OWNERSHIP	STATUS	PRESENT USE	
__DISTRICT	X PUBLIC	X OCCUPIED	__AGRICULTURE	__MUSEUM
X BUILDING(S)	__PRIVATE	__UNOCCUPIED	__COMMERCIAL	__PARK
__STRUCTURE	__BOTH	__WORK IN PROGRESS	__EDUCATIONAL	__PRIVATE RESIDENCE
__SITE	**PUBLIC ACQUISITION**	**ACCESSIBLE**	__ENTERTAINMENT	__RELIGIOUS
__OBJECT	__IN PROCESS	X YES: RESTRICTED	X GOVERNMENT	__SCIENTIFIC
	__BEING CONSIDERED	__YES: UNRESTRICTED	__INDUSTRIAL	__TRANSPORTATION
		__NO	__MILITARY	__OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME City of New York
Municipal Services Administration
Contact: John T. Carroll, Administrator

STREET & NUMBER
1800 Municipal Building

CITY, TOWN
New York — VICINITY OF

STATE
New York

5 LOCATION OF LEGAL DESCRIPTION

COURTHOUSE, REGISTRY OF DEEDS, ETC.
New York County Hall of Records

STREET & NUMBER
31 Chambers Street

CITY, TOWN
New York

STATE
New York

6 REPRESENTATION IN EXISTING SURVEYS

TITLE Historic American Buildings Survey
New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission

DATE
1962 / 1962

__FEDERAL __STATE __COUNTY __LOCAL

(240)

DEPOSITORY FOR SURVEY RECORDS
Library of Congress; N.Y. Historic Preservation Commission

CITY, TOWN
Washington; New York

STATE
D.C.; N.Y.

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
_EXCELLENT	_DETERIORATED	_UNALTERED	X ORIGINAL SITE
_GOOD	_RUINS	X ALTERED	_MOVED DATE_____
X FAIR	_UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Begun in 1845 and completed a year later, the west-facing A. T. Stewart Store initially rose four stories and extended 90 feet, 3 inches from Reade Street southward along Broadway and 100 feet, 9 inches eastward along Reade. Over the next 40 years additions by Stewart and Hilton expanded the structure 61 feet southward to Chambers Street and 124 feet, 3 inches rearward and projected it to a height of seven stories. Hilton, who purchased the building from Mrs. Stewart for approximately $2 million in 1884, added the top two floors and the rearmost 49 feet and converted the interior for general office use that same year. Externally the structure reveals no significant alterations other than removal of the original entrance doors and most of the street level windows and Corinthian columns along the front and south facades. Still sound structurally, the old store today houses various municipal offices and continues to form an important element of the lower Broadway streetscape.

Until recently historians disagreed about who designed the "Marble Palace." For a long time most scholars attributed it to marble cutter Ottavino Gori, but architectural historian Mary Ann Smith has shown that New York architects John B. Snook and Joseph Trench designed the original section and first enlargement of the store and that Snook drew the plans for the subsequent additions.[11] Stewart himself participated significantly in all aspects of the work, however, specifying the Romano-Tuscan Renaissance Revival design, the use of brick-backed white Tuckahoe marble for exterior walls and plate glass for first floor windows, and the unusual treatment of the interior.

When completed in 1846 the first block of the A. T. Stewart Store displayed a front facade of three almost identical three-bay sections with the center one projecting forward 15 inches from the main mass. At groundlevel of each section four Corthinian columns--round and fluted on the center section and square and smooth on the two outside sections and all topped by capitals featuring a cornucopia intertwined with the caduces of mercury, god of commerce--supported a continuous, balustraded Tuscan entablature and framed three openings. Plate glass windows filled eight of these openings, while the main store entrance filled the center one. On the upper levels quoins set off the corners of the building and defined the three three-bay sections.

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Mary Ann Smith, "John Snook and the Design for A. T. Stewart's Store," The New-York Historical Society Quarterly, LVIII (January 1974), 20-22.

8 SIGNIFICANCE

IMPORTANTLY RELATED TO BOTH COMMERCE AND ARCHITECTURE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW				
__PREHISTORIC	__ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	__COMMUNITY PLANNING	__LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	__RELIGION
__1400-1499	__ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	__CONSERVATION	__LAW	__SCIENCE
__1500-1599	__AGRICULTURE	__ECONOMICS	__LITERATURE	__SCULPTURE
__1600-1699	X ARCHITECTURE	__EDUCATION	__MILITARY	__SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
__1700-1799	__ART	__ENGINEERING	__MUSIC	__THEATER
X 1800-1899	X COMMERCE	__EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	__PHILOSOPHY	__TRANSPORTATION
__1900-	__COMMUNICATIONS	__INDUSTRY	__POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	__OTHER (SPECIFY)
		__INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1845-1876

BUILDER/ARCHITECT John B. Snook & Joseph Trench
Stonework by Ottavino Gori

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

Historians disagree about the precise origin of the department store, but according to scholar Alex Groner, "the man generally conceded to be the operator of the first department store in the United States was Alexander Turney Stewart."1 Scholars Tom Mahoney and Leonard Sloane call him "America's leading merchant in the middle of the nineteenth century," and Harry E. Resseguie considers him the "first individual to institutionalize the function of retailing and make it Big Business."2 Stewart pioneered the one-price system and departmentalization of merchandise and became the first American retailer to establish his own buying organization in Europe. He was also the first to lure women shoppers with a commodious yet functional and well-stocked store. Potter Palmer, John Wanamaker, Marshall Field, and others emulated his policies, and consequently the status of retailers rose from "monger" to "merchant," a designation reserved previously for shipowners and importers.

The A. T. Stewart Store is the only extant property prominently associated with Stewart's chief commercial achievements. It has been labeled appropriately "the cradle of the department store."3 When the original section of the building was erected in 1845-46, it made both architectural and merchandising history. One of the earliest Romano-Tuscan Renaissance Revival structures in the United States, it was the first commercial building to have marble exterior walls and plate glass windows. Both this style and this use of marble and plate glass were

1 Alex Groner, The American Heritage History of American Business (New York: American Heritage Publishing Company, 1972), 236.

2 Tom Mahoney and Leonard Sloane, The Great Merchants: America's Foremost Retail Institutions and the People Who Made Them Great. Updated edition (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1966), 10; Harry E. Resseguie, "A. T. Stewart's Marble Palace--The Cradle of the Department Store," The New-York Historical Society Quarterly, XLVIII (April 1964), 132.

3 Resseguie, "A. T. Stewart's Marble Palace," 135.

9 MAJOR BIBLIOGRAPHICAL REFERENCES

Ferry, John William, A History of the Department Store (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1960).

Groner, Alex, The American Heritage History of American Business and Industry.(New York: American Heritage Publishing Company, 1972).

(continued)

10 GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

ACREAGE OF NOMINATED PROPERTY Less than one acre

UTM REFERENCES

	ZONE	EASTING	NORTHING
A	18	583,140	4,507,300
B			
C			
D			

VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundary of the nominated property coincides with the boundary of the legal lot known as 280 Broadway, New York, New York.

LIST ALL STATES AND COUNTIES FOR PROPERTIES OVERLAPPING STATE OR COUNTY BOUNDARIES

STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE
STATE	CODE	COUNTY	CODE

11 FORM PREPARED BY

NAME / TITLE George R. Adams,
Director, Historic Landmarks Project

DATE December 1976

ORGANIZATION American Association for State and Local History

STREET & NUMBER 1400 Eighth Avenue South

TELEPHONE

CITY OR TOWN Nashville

STATE Tennessee

12 STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICER CERTIFICATION

THE EVALUATED SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS PROPERTY WITHIN THE STATE IS:

NATIONAL ___ STATE ___ LOCAL ___

As the designated State Historic Preservation Officer for the National Historic Preservation Act of 1966 (Public Law 89-665), I hereby nominate this property for inclusion in the National Register and certify that it has been evaluated according to the criteria and procedures set forth by the National Park Service.

FEDERAL REPRESENTATIVE SIGNATURE

TITLE DATE

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I HEREBY CERTIFY THAT THIS PROPERTY IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER

DATE

DIRECTOR, OFFICE OF ARCHEOLOGY AND HISTORIC PRESERVATION

ATTEST: DATE

KEEPER OF THE NATIONAL REGISTER

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
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All windows were one-over-one sashes set in rectangular architraves, but at each succeeding story from the second to the top, the height of the window openings diminished. At the second-story level the windows rested on the marble balustrade of the first story's Tuscan entablature; on the third they stood on decorated marble lugsills connected by a stringcourse; and on the fourth they featured individual lugsills. Most second- and third-floor windows exhibited entablatures, but the second-floor openings in the center section displayed pedimented caps with carved keystones. Fourth-story windows received entablatures when Stewart added a fifth floor in 1850-52. Except on the streetlevel these features of the store remain unchanged and are repeated on the original portion of the Reade Street facade as well as on the exteriors of each pre-1884 addition.

Inside, Stewart had the store divided generally into departments featuring various categories of goods, but the main entrance opened into an oblong rotunda that extended the width of the building and drew light from a dome 70 feet in circumference. The ceilings, which were supported by thin cast-iron pillars imported from Scotland, and the walls were painted in fresco by Signor Bragaldi, who decorated each panel with some symbol of commerce. Opposite the entrance one stair rose to a promenade gallery, and near the Chambers Street side another mounted to the second floor.

Stewart's enlargement of the store, begun in 1850 and completed in 1853, amounted almost to a rebuilding. To the front facade he added two three-bay sections, expanding the structure southward along Broadway to Chambers Street; to the rear he attached an approximately 100-foot-long extension; and above the entire mass he erected a fifth story.[12] To preserve the light, airy entrance Stewart apparently enlarged the dome and

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12 This rearward extension did not include a 25-foot Chambers Street lot next to the new 100-foot, 9-inch frontage on that thoroughfare. Unable to buy or rent this plot until 1872, Stewart built around it in 1852 and filled it in 20 years later.

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moved it to the building's new center. On the fifth-floor exterior, which remains unchanged, he installed rectangular windows like those on the fourth story, where he added entablatures to create an impression of greater height. On the new floor's exterior he also connected decorative lugsills with a string-course similar to, but simplier than, the one on the second story. Finally he crowned the entire structure with a dentiled cornice and balustrade.

When Hilton bought the "Marble Palace," he immediately added two stories and extended the building rearward. He retained the fifth-floor cornice and added a simlar one with a new balustrade atop the seventh story, but he deviated from the pattern of three-bay sections, using instead alternating sections of three, five, and nine bays. Hilton also removed the interior dome and constructed in the center of the building an open gray-brick-walled court 26 feet by 130 feet. This feature remains intact, but Hilton's office partitioning has been altered to fit the needs of subsequent owners.

The best known of these occupants was the New York Sun, which bought the structure in 1917. Designating the edifice "The Sun Building," the paper put the new name in bronze letters across the second-story center of the Broadway Street facade, where it remains today along with the recently restored bronze Sun clock. In 1966, several years after the Sun folded, the City of New York purchased the building with the intention of demolishing it to create additional space for a civic center development. Now, with plans for the center shelved at least temporarily, the city utilizes the structure for various administrative offices. Many original fluted cast-iron supporting pillars, most with Cortinthian caps, remain in the public halls and larger rooms of the edifice.

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widely copied.[4] Although enlarged and converted to an office building, the city-owned A. T. Stewart Store is sound structurally and continues to form an important element of the lower Broadway streetscape.

Biography

Alexander Turney Stewart was born in Lisburn, Ireland, on October 12, 1803. His father, Alexander Stewart, died either shortly before or soon after the boy's birth, and his mother, Margaret Turney, succumbed a short time later. Reared by his maternal grandfather, who expected A. T. to become a clergyman, young Stewart received his education at a Belfast academy.

Other details of Stewart's youth remain sketchy, but sometime after the death of his grandfather, A. T. decided to visit America. He arrived in New York about 1820 and for the next 2 or 3 years supported himself by teaching school. Eventually he inherited between $3,000 and $5,000 from his father's estate. Returning briefly to Northern Ireland, Stewart invested a sizeable portion of these funds in Irish laces, which he hoped to market in New York.

This was an era of small specialty shops, and the floor space in Stewart's first store, which he opened in 1823 at 283 Broadway, measured only twelve by thirty feet. Expansion of both his business and his facilities came rapidly, however. According to Resseguie, Stewart "had a natural instinct for retailing and a genius for organization."[5] He added new lines of dry goods and sold both wholesale and retail. Within a year or two he moved into a bigger store at 262 Broadway, and in 1830 he transferred to still larger quarters at 257 Broadway. By the end of 1837 Stewart had become a millionaire. During that year's financial panic he marketed high-priced merchandise at cut rates and with the proceeds bought, at auction, the stocks of merchants who failed. Later he used this same tactic to capitalize on the panics of 1857, 1860, and 1873.

By the early 1840's Stewart once more needed additional space, and in 1845-46 he erected the first section of his historic "Marble Palace." It rose at 280 Broadway on the southeast corner of the Reade Street intersection, the former site of Washington Hall, longtime headquarters

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[4] Ibid., 132.

[5] Ibid., 135.

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of the Federalist Party. Many New Yorkers thought the site unsuitable as a retail location. It seemed too far uptown and stood on the less fashionable east side of the street where the afternoon sun supposedly discouraged genteel shoppers and allowed sale of only the cheapest goods. Stewart was convinced, however, that his new store would render these apparent shortcomings meaningless.

Having studied store buildings throughout Europe and America and considered ways to make his own beautiful as well as functional, Stewart contributed much to its design. The tradition-breaking store made both architectural and merchandising history and marked Stewart as "not just a great merchant," but in Resseguie's view "one of the greatest innovators in the history of retailing."[6] In addition to being one of the earliest Romano-Tuscan Rennaissance Revival structures in the United States, the new four-story store was the Nation's first commercial building with marble exterior walls and plate glass windows. Both the style and materials gained wide acceptance. In fact, says Resseguie, from the A. T. Stewart Store "sprang a vogue for marble which in the next several decades brought an end to the long depressing reign of granite, brownstone, brick, and frame."[7] Subsequent commercial builders also copied Stewart's use of a spacious central rotunda to create a light, airy atmosphere.

After moving into the "Marble Palace", then the largest retail structure in New York, Stewart wasted little time perfecting the organization and policies of the departmentalized dry goods store, which according to Ressequie "formed the basis of the modern department store."[8] Stewart maintained a centralized management but divided his stock and his retail activities according to categories of goods. He bought items in large quantities and sold them at a small markup, and he pioneered the fixed or one-price system. He allowed no misrepresentation of his merchandise, gave his customers the then uncommon privilege of unrestricted shopping, and used his attractive store and fascinatingly large and diverse stock to appeal especially to female buyers. In time Potter Palmer, John Wanamaker, Marshall Field, and other merchants emulated these practices and thereby elevated the status of retailers from "monger" to merchant," a designation reserved previously for shipowners and importers.

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[6] Ibid., 137

[7] Ibid., 132.

[8] Ibid.

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While the "Marble Palace" was earning a reputation as the finest commercial building of its day, and the phrase "I got it at Stewart's" was becoming a common expression of value and satisfaction, Stewart continued to expand the business.[9] He had been taking annual buying trips to Europe since 1839, but in 1845 he took on a partner, Francis Warden, and put him in charge of a permanent purchasing office in Paris. It was the first established in Europe by an American retailer.[10] Later Stewart opened offices in England, Germany, and Switzerland, and by 1850 he stood foremost among the Nation's importers. That same year he expanded his New York store the full width of the block between Reade and Chambers Streets and added a fifth story. By the sixties, however, he had outgrown the building again, and in 1862 he erected a new cast-iron store farther up Broadway at Astor Place. Like the older store, this one also included a number of innovative features. Known as the "Cast-Iron Palace," it stood as one of the first examples of the kind of construction utilized in the modern skyscraper. Stewart moved his retail business to the new address, making it the fashionable shopping center of the city, but kept his wholesale operations at 280 Broadway.

Despite his success Stewart had several shortcomings, both professionally and personally. He used plentiful and widespread advertising, but almost always it proved undistinguished and uninformative. Moreover he failed to see the potential value of merchandise displays in his show windows. Associates often considered him hard and ungenerous to the point of meanness, and his employee's wages ranked among the lowest in New York.

In 1847 Stewart sent a shipload of provisions to famine-stricken Ireland, but it was not until the Civil War that he showed a significant interest in activities beyond the confines of his wholesale-retail business. During that bloody conflict he reportedly contributed $100,000 to the U.S. Sanitary Commission and $10,000 for the relief of

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[9] Mahoney and Sloane, The Great Merchants, 10.

[10] Harry E. Resseguie, "The Decline and Fall of the Commercial Empire of A. T. Stewart," Business History Review, XXXVI (Autumn 1962), 259.

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starving Irish mill workers. He also secured lucrative clothing contracts from the Army and Navy, enjoyed an annual income of nearly $2 million, and invested heavily in textile mills in New Jersey, New York, and several New England States. A War Democrat, Stewart became increasingly involved in politics after 1861. He worked for Lincoln's reelection in 1864 and 4 years later followed Albany editor Thurlow Weed in supporting first Andrew Johnson and later Ulysses S. Grant. Eventually Stewart became a Republican, and he and Grant developed a close but brief friendship. Following his election Grant wanted to appoint Stewart Secretary of the Treasury, but as an importer he was ineligible for the post. He offered to place his holdings in a trust with the proceeds going to New York charities, but Grant felt that the appointment still would violate the spirit, if not the letter, of the law. Miffed, Stewart broke with the President and in 1872 backed Horace Greeley for the White House.

During his later years Stewart divided his time between his plush Fifth Avenue mansion, where he entertained guests ranging from millionaires and diplomats to struggling artists and musicians, and his myriad business enterprises, which he continued to expand. The total sales of his wholesale and retail stores in the three years immediately preceeding his death in 1876 totaled an estimated $203 million.

Although Stewart demonstrated remarkable ability in amassing his fortune, he showed poor judgment in selecting a chief executor for his estate. In his will he left $1 million to his attorney and closest friend, Henry Hilton, and instructed him to liquidate the estate. In a letter to his wife of 53 years, the former Cornelia Mitchell Clinch, Stewart suggested that much of the proceeds go to charity. Mrs. Stewart, however, transferred her husband's company to Hilton for a mere $1 million, and following a period of mismanagement he was forced to liquidate them himself in 1882. This marked the end of A. T. Stewart's wholesale-retail business, but his accomplishments continue to be commemorated by his "Marble Palace."

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Resseguie, Harry E., "The Decline and Fall of the Commercial Empire of A. T. Stewart," Business History Review, XXXVI (Autumn 1962), 255-286.

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A. T. Stewart Store File, Records of the New York City Landmarks Preservation Commission, New York, New York.

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