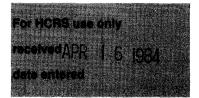
United States Department of the Interior Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form



See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*Type all entries—complete applicable sections

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historic /JOSE	PH LOTH COM	PANY BU	ILDING				, <i>i</i>		
and/or common	YANKEE MET	AL BUII	DING						
2. Loca	tion								
street & number	25 Grand	Street				N/ <u>4</u>	A not	for publication	
city, town	Norwalk		N/A vicini	ty of	congressional d	istrict	4th	£	
state	CT	code	09	county	Fairfield		•	code 001	
3. Clas	sificatio	1							
Category district building(s) structure site object	Ownership public _X_ private both Public Acquisitio in process being conside N/A	on A	tatus X occupied unoccupie work in processible X yes: restr yes: unres	rogress	Present Use agriculture commerci education entertainn governme industrial military	al al nent		museum park private residen religious scientific transportation other:	ce
4. Own	er of Pro	perty	<i>!</i>				*		
name Th	e Daseke Gr	oup Inc							
street & number	3003 Summe	r Stree	t						
city, town	Stamford,		vicini	ty of		state	CT		
5. Loca	tion of L	egal	Desci	ripti	on				
ourthouse, regis	try of deeds, etc.	City	Clerk's	Offic	e, Norwalk	City	Hall	•	
street & number		41 No	orth Mai	n Stre	et				
city, town		South	Norwall	κ.		state	CT		
6. Repr	esentati	on in	Exist	ing	Surveys				
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depository for su	rvey records CT	Histor	ical Cor	nmissi				······································	
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7. Description

Condition		Check one	Check one	•
excellent _X good fair	deteriorated ruins unexposed	unaltered _X_ altered	X original si	te date

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

The Loth Company building, built in 1903, is a Neo-Romanesque, two-story, brick industrial structure which occupies the greater part of a city block on the west edge of Norwalk, Connecticut's older, more densely developed commercial area. X The site, located approximately 1.5 miles west of the business center of Norwalk, is on the last block of a late 19th-century residential neighborhood probably the home of many of the building's early employees. To the west, the area opens onto a broad, view over less densely-built commercial lots to the Route 7 connector. The busy intersection of Main Avenue (Route 7) and New Canaan Avenue (Route 123) is one block to the north. The front of the building faces roughly north, overlooking a parking lot and a two-story, early 20th-century brick office building. The Loth building is the largest in the vicinity and is clearly visible from the Route 7 connector.

This 200-foot square building is a low, horizontal block, broken symmetrically at the front by a central, four-story square clock-tower capped by a pyramidal roof (Photograph 1). The body of the building has a very low, hipped roof not visible from the ground. The factory's original brick, round smokestack ascends from the ground closely behind the building.

The four-story clocktower projects from the mid-point of the front wall. Immediately flanking the tower are two-story, two-bay projections, which are sections of the front wall of the building pulled forward, as it were. The remainder of the front consists of the two-story front wall of the main block, which extends symmetrically from the tower for ten bays on either side (Photograph 1).

The clocktower contains the formal entrance, which is a large archway trimmed with a smooth-cut, brownstone voussoir (Photograph 2). The two metal and glass doors, which replace the original wood panel doors, are recessed and flanked by long sidelights. Above the lintel is a fanlight divided by five radiating mullions intersected by two arc-mullions. A rough-faced brownstone string-course extends across the front of the tower, approximately one-third of the distance from the floor level to the springline of the entry's arch. The upper three stories of the tower are visually linked in a single bay by a tall, three-story blind arch. The second story of the tower is marked by a set of paired windows. Originally one-over-one sash, these, like several of the building's windows, were replaced in the 1940s by industrial sash divided into square lights. All the window sills of the building are rough-faced brownstone. The third story of the tower front has traditionally borne the painted name of the occupant company. At the fourth story the four faces of the tower are exposed, each containing a large clock face set within the blind arch. (Photograph 3). The round, Roman numeral clock faces, which

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are original, are framed by three corbelled courses of brick headers. The spandrels below these courses are filled with three pilaster-like forms produced by short courses of projecting brick. The arched reveal has impost blocks of brownstone cut in classical moldings. In each of the spandrels above the reveal is a single terra cotta ornament featuring a lion's head mounted on an 18" square tile. The cornice of the tower matches that of the main block. This consists of several brick courses laid to form short, vertical drops which, from a distance, appear as elongated dentils. The cornice line is formed by approximately five corbelled brick courses. The hipped eaves of the tower roof extend well beyond the tower shaft. The pyramidal roof is red, terra cotta tile laid in horizontal courses. The roof peak retains its original finial.

The front and sides of the Loth Building are unchanged except for the windows on the front and west side which have been partially filled in from the top, and the replacement of their sash in the 1940s. Despite this alteration, the original sense of the wall, vertically divided into two-story bays containing long windows, is strong. The east side of the building retains its original appearance (Photograph 4).

The building's exterior walls consist of regularly spaced, two-story brick bays. Each bay is recessed and contains first and second story, industrial-size, segmental-arch windows. Most of the upper story windows retain their segmental-arch openings. The brick piers separating the bays are alternately wide and narrow.

The back of the Loth building has been the traditional location for one and two-story appendages not integral to the body of the building. One of these, which dates from 1903, remains near the west corner of the building. Approximately half of the back has been altered by the addition of concrete block wings in 1953 and 1958. The later block extends the east wall of the building approximately 75 feet, and continues toward the back of the building in a series of jogs, terminating beyond the original rear east corner. (Figure 1)

At the center of the Loth building, toward the front, is a 70 x 50 foot courtyard (Figure 2). Until an infill, one-story, sawtooth-roof structure was built in 1934, (Photograph 6, Figure 2) there was originally a second, inner courtyard located toward the back of the building. The two-story connector that linked the east and west sides of the building remains, containing lavatories and stairs. The exterior elevations surrounding the courtyard are similar to those of the public side, and are unchanged (Photographs 5 & 6).

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The interior of the Loth building is utilitarian in its appearance. The greatest change made to the inside was the replacement of the original stairs in the entrance hall with a steel run with straight, iron balusters. Dropped ceilings have been installed in the stair to meet fire code requirements. Old plans of the building reveal that the original stair was in the same position as the present stair.

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The stair leads from the entrance hall to the original display room, an arrangement which was for the convenience of customers. The walls of the entrance hall and display room are covered with stucco. The same material appears in a photograph taken in the 1920s, confirming the early, if not original use of this surfacing in these public areas. The display room features two pointed-arch closet doors with oversize, medieval strap hinges. Behind the entrance hall is the reception area, which retains its original function. The reception area has wainscoting in the halls leading to the front office areas. The ceiling of this room and that of the display room are tin, pressed in a deep, coffer pattern.

While the tower and the section of the building immediately behind it are taken up mainly by the entrance, reception area, the display room and the main stair, the rest of the Loth building is largely open manufacturing space. This space occurs in two stories, stacked on the east and west sides of the building (Figure 1). The original layout remains: a string of offices partly open to the manufacturing areas on the east floors line the courtyard wall. Below grade passages, stairs and bathrooms are confined to the middle of the building. There are elevators located in the shipping areas, or near the northeast corner and on the west wall. The power sources were and remain in the back of the building.

The four main manufacturing areas have wood plank floors, brick walls, and exposed floor construction. Floor to ceiling heights are approximately 14 feet on the first floor and 17 feet on the second. The floors are timber joist and girder construction, supported on rows of timber columns. A bank of skylights, built in a long gable, extends down the center of each of the two upper story spaces (Photograph 7).

8. Significance

1500-1599 1600-1699 1700-1799 1800-1899	• • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • • •		law literature military music	re religion science sculpture social/ humanitarian theater transportation other (specify)
Specific dates	1903	Builder/Architect Po	ssibly Samuel M.	Green

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Joseph Loth Company Building is significant as an unusually well-preserved example of turn-of-the-century industrial architecture (Criterion C). Remarkably intact in its structure, plan, and interior and exterior elevations, the Loth building has unusual architectural interest for an industrial structure, both from functional, stylistic, and esthetic points of view. For example, the plan of the building is notable for its central courtyard, which allows all areas of the interior ample, natural light and cross-ventilation. The Loth building is also outstanding for the design of its exterior. This industrial building has graceful proportions, a Neo-Romanesque style clocktower, and well-integrated architectural detail. The pyramidal-roof clocktower, visible from the surrounding area, has made the Loth Company Building a neighborhood landmark and vivid reminder of Norwalk's industrial heritage.1

The Loth building has been the site of several manufacturing concerns, two of which have contributed significantly to Norwalk's 20th-century economy. Between 1903 and 1945 the building served Norwalk's leading industry, hatting, in housing the manufacture of silk ribbon and felt hats. In 1945 the building's second owner, the American Hat Company, sold the structure to the Yankee Metal Products Corporation, makers of automobile safety parts. This business remains the building's only occupant.

ARCHITECTURAL ASSESSMENT

The Loth building has outstanding physical integrity. None of the occupants, whether owner or tenant, has made any alterations destructive to the exterior or interior of the building, except for removal of walls for constructing additions. Because the additions made have been to the back and east side of the building (the latter not easily visible from a major public way), the sense of the whole building as it appeared originally is very strong. While most of the window openings on the front and west sides have been partially blocked in, these changes are not readily apparent owing to the generally dark appearance of the windows. The replacement of the glazing in these windows also has only a slightly altering effect on the building's exterior design, and is a reversible change.

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation sheet

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Additions that have been made to interior sections of the building are confined to the courtyard and to below grade, and thus are largely out of sight. The interior public and manufacturing spaces retain practically all their original fabric, as described in Item 7, page 3.

The architect of the Loth Building is unknown, although responsibility for its design may lie with Samuel M. Green, whose professional title in 1902 and 1903 correspondence between he and Loth is "Consulting Engineer." Green's name is the only major consultant appearing in these and related papers found in the building. His name is also given in the title block of a 1902 measured drawing of the building's entrance and a typical window. The 1912 New England Business Directory advertises "Samuel M. Green Inc., Engineers and Architects, American Society of Civil Engineers, American Society of Mechanical Engineers...Plans, Specifications, Estimates, Reports...Appraisals and Systematising." By 1916 Green's advertisement in the same publication lists three partners, and reads "Plans and Specifications for Industrial Buildings, Hotels, Schools, Office Buildings, Steam and Hydro-Electric Power Plants." Additions made to the Loth Building in 1931 and 1934 were planned by another engineer-architect, Harrison G. White, and Fletcher Thompson Inc., the Bridgeport, Connecticut, architectural firm.

The significance of the Loth Building lies in the remarkable survival of its many distinguishing architectural features, which are peculiar to its period and specialized building type: interior courtyard, skylights, open plan, and industrial-grade, timber joist construction. The adaptability of the structure to a variety of industrial operations, a feature well-considered by its engineers and architects, remains apparent in the well-lit, open, and functional quality of the manufacturing spaces. The open plan allowed the smooth, logical progression of processes in a circular movement from one end of the building to the other. For example, the various stages in the manufacture of hats are still well imagined in these spaces. According to a 1940 fire insurance map prepared when the American Hat Company occupied the east side of the building, the fabrication process began near the front of the structure on the first floor in the shipping and fur storage department. The first two processes, mixing of the fur for felt and forming the hat, were carried out on heavy belt-and-pulley machines in the mid-section of the space. The crude hat forms were then moved to the rear addition to be shrunk and dyed in vats of boiling water. Next the hat forms were sent back into the body of the building for stiffening. Here the forms were treated with a shellac solution to ensure the durability of their shape. The treated hats were then transferred to the drying rooms located in a rear addition built in 1917 (Figure 1).

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The next step, pouncing, was the smoothing of the hats on a revolving lathe. This process took place on the second floor toward the back of the building. From here the hats were moved toward the front to the finishing department for refining of their shape and trimming.

Another exceptional feature identifies the Loth building as a structure with a specialized industrial capacity. The building's original water tank is located in the fourth story of the clock This unusual arrangement appears to have answered the need to have water pressure greater than that which the city's water line could generate, and also a supply for fire protection. There are two reasons to believe that the tank is original to the tower. is that the structural engineering of the tank's support system is, for obvious reasons, more likely integral to the tower than a subsequent installation. The other is that the process of silk manufacturing requires tremendous amounts of water, suggesting the need for a powerful and steady supply at the outset. The tank would certainly have been considered an asset by American Hat as the fabrication of hats also involves extremely heavy water use. By 1940, however, the company was no longer using the tank. this time, buried water lines connected to the public main were serving the plant. 2

Apart from its function as an elevated container for a water tank and clock, the centered tower serves to identify the front and the formal entrance of the building, a design consideration not always addressed in the construction of industrial structures. In itself, the tower is a noteworthy piece of Neo-Romanesque style architecture. The arched reveals on each face of the shaft, the use of voussiors and impost blocks in conjunction with the arches, and the pyramidal roof form are features characteristic of medieval European church architecture. The tower is gracefully integrated into the body of the building by the projections of the front wall for two bays on either side.

The Loth building is equally outstanding for its exterior architecture, which exceeds most existing comparable structures in its grace of design and sheer visual interest. That its exterior and interior remain so close to their original appearance enhances the architectural value of the building. The structure's architectural merit lies in the massing and proportioning of its simple forms to produce a structure that is attractive as well as functional. The design and careful integration of the exterior architectural detail is also exceptional.

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The brickwork of the arched reveal in the tower and in the cornice reflects the careful attention to detail usually reserved for contemporaneous, non-utilitarian buildings. The detailing works to reduce the scale of the factory, thereby suiting it to the two-story residential neighborhood adjacent to the east.

Finally, the gracefully conspicuous clocktower has a striking architectural presence in the area, and is popularly regarded as a local landmark. 3 However, it is the architecture and integrity of the Loth building as a whole which make this an outstanding and significant structure.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Norwalk's industry at the time of Joseph Loth's arrival in the city in 1902 was diversified, with hatting the largest single industry. Danbury, 15 miles via rail to the north, was already the center of hat manufacturing in the Northeast. Hence, there existed in the region an extensive and convenient market for hat manufacturing supplies. By 1900 Norwalk was the home of 11 hat and cap factories⁴, as well as a growing number of related industrial concerns, such as hat trim, corset, shirt and shirt waist manufacturers.

The presence of a ready market, a skilled labor base, and industries complementary to his own, ribbon manufacturing, certainly prompted Loth's decision to expand his operations to Norwalk in 1903. Loth's relocation, according to the 1904 Connecticut Bureau of Labor Statistics report, allowed Loth to build a plant which could accommodate 200 workers over the number he employed in New York.

It was probably the same economic and industrial setting that encouraged the establishment of the American Hat Manufacturing Company in Norwalk in 1916. In July of 1917, this firm, which had begun a few years earlier in a building on Raymond Street in South Norwalk, began leasing approximately 30,000 square feet on the two floors on the south side of Loth's building. Loth was simultaneously renting out space in other parts of the building to various businesses, including, the Imexport Company, machine dealers, the Raymond-Bliss Tool Company, and Samuel Buyer and Company, makers of garters. By 1922 American Hat was leasing the major portion of the Loth building, and had opened a showroom on Washington Place in New York City.

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The decade of the 1920s was prosperous for the company and for Norwalk. Hatting remained the city's principal industry. In 1925, 18 hat factories, several of them newly-established, were operating in Norwalk. Among the 18, American Hat was the third largest employer at the time, having 250 workers. The leading hat firm in Norwalk was Crofut and Knapp, which had a labor force of approximately 1800.7

On the eve of the Stock Market Crash, American Hat grossed over \$200,000 for 1928 and had offices in Springfield, Massachusetts, Chicago, Dallas, and Los Angeles.8 In 1929, Charles C. Haas, who had been managing the company, purchased American Hat for \$1 million. Under his direction the business remained in operation throughout the Depression. Norwalk, with its diversified economic base, its numerous small businesses, and the new construction of the Merrit Parkway to New York, fared relatively well during the Depression years.9 Norwalk's cheaper rents, lower taxes, and pool of skilled workers had attracted several New York businesses to settle within its city lines.10

One of these newcomers was the Yankee Metal Corporation, to which American Hat began leasing space in 1934. Yankee had been founded in 1915 in New York by Benjamin Putterman for the manufacture of kerosene lamps for automobiles. The firm grew rapidly, relocating twice before moving to Norwalk. With the proliferation of the automobile, Yankee was able to continue expanding its product line and production, and to finally purchase the Loth building from American Hat in 1945. The company constructed two additions on the back of the building, including a plating room, in 1954 and 1958. Since its arrival, Yankee Metal Products Corporation has been an important employer in Norwalk. However, the slump in the American auto industry of the past half-decade has forced Yankee Metal to decrease its production and halt replacement hiring.

While not the largest firms of their trades, the Loth, American Hat, and Yankee Metal Products Companies, manufacturers of silk products, soft hats, and hardware, respectively, were members of industries central to Norwalk's, and indeed Connecticut's, 20th-century economies.

End Notes

- 1. Ralph Bloom, Norwalk Historic Resources Inventory, 1978
- 2. Associated Factory Mutual Fire Insurance Companies, Insurance Survey May, 1940
- 3. Bloom, op cit.

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- 4. Elsie N. Danenburg, The Romance of Norwalk, p. 270
- 5. Norwalk Land Records
- 6. Norwalk City Directories
- 7. Danenberg, op cit. p.290
- 8. "Hat Life" magazine, 28 July, 1928, p. 35
- 9. Deborah Wing Ray and Gloria P. Stewart, Norwalk: Being an Historical Account of that Connecticut Town, p.192
- 10. Ibid. p. 192

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Associated Factory Mutual Fire Insurance Companies. Survey Map for the Joseph Loth Building. Index No. 20530. Boston, MA:1940 Connecticut Bureau of Labor Statistics, Annual Report, 1904. Danenburg, Elsie N. The Romance of Norwalk. The States History Company, New York:1929

New England Business Directory, Vols. 1912, 1916, 1928. The Murdock Co., Boston MA.

Norwalk City Directories. Vols. 1902 - 1945. The Price and Lee Co., New Haven CT.

Norwalk City Land Records, City Clerk's Office, Norwalk City Hall. Yankee Metal Products Corporation files: correspondence and architectural drawings.

Interviews:

Ralph Bloom, Director, Lockwood House Museum, Norwalk, CT. 11-14-83

George Metz, former manager, Yankee Metal Products Corp., 11-17-83

William Patterson, Director of Personnel, Yankee Metal

Products Corp., 11-14-83
Milton Putterman, President, Yankee Metal Products

Corporation, 11-7-83

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BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The boundaries of the Loth Company Building presented for nomination were drawn to include only that area containing structures contributing to the architectural significance of the property, or Criterion C. Hence, houses in the adjacent 19th-century residential neighborhood were excluded because they do not relate to the importance of the Loth building as a significant example of its architectural period and building type.

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OF ADDITIONS

