

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY	
RECEIVED	
DATE ENTERED	

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

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

1 NAME

HISTORIC The Woolworth Building

AND/OR COMMON The Woolworth Building

2 LOCATION

STREET & NUMBER
233 Broadway

__NOT FOR PUBLICATION

CITY, TOWN
New York City

CONGRESSIONAL DISTRICT
19th

__ VICINITY OF

STATE
New York

CODE
36

COUNTY
New York

CODE
061

3 CLASSIFICATION

CATEGORY

- DISTRICT
- BUILDING(S)
- STRUCTURE
- SITE
- OBJECT

OWNERSHIP

- PUBLIC
- PRIVATE
- BOTH
- PUBLIC ACQUISITION**
- IN PROCESS
- BEING CONSIDERED

STATUS

- OCCUPIED
- UNOCCUPIED
- WORK IN PROGRESS
- ACCESSIBLE**
- YES: RESTRICTED
- YES: UNRESTRICTED
- NO

PRESENT USE

- AGRICULTURE
- COMMERCIAL
- EDUCATIONAL
- ENTERTAINMENT
- GOVERNMENT
- INDUSTRIAL
- MILITARY
- MUSEUM
- PARK
- PRIVATE RESIDENCE
- RELIGIOUS
- SCIENTIFIC
- TRANSPORTATION
- OTHER:

4 OWNER OF PROPERTY

NAME F. W. Woolworth and Company

STREET & NUMBER
233 Broadway

CITY, TOWN
New York City

__ 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

DATE

__FEDERAL __STATE __COUNTY __LOCAL

DEPOSITORY FOR
SURVEY RECORDS

CITY, TOWN

STATE

7 DESCRIPTION

CONDITION		CHECK ONE	CHECK ONE
<input type="checkbox"/> EXCELLENT	<input type="checkbox"/> DETERIORATED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> UNALTERED	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ORIGINAL SITE
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> GOOD	<input type="checkbox"/> RUINS	<input type="checkbox"/> ALTERED	<input type="checkbox"/> MOVED DATE _____
<input type="checkbox"/> FAIR	<input type="checkbox"/> UNEXPOSED		

DESCRIBE THE PRESENT AND ORIGINAL (IF KNOWN) PHYSICAL APPEARANCE

Various traditional styles used for standard building types such as Renaissance and French Second Empire had been applied to the tall building (Singer Building, 1906, for Second Empire) in an effort to give expression to the new form. Eclectic designers then adopted the Gothic forms to give vertical expression to the height of the structure. Gilbert's Woolworth building was the major achievement of this kind, initiating a considerable range of Gothic skyscrapers including Howell's and Hood's Chicago Tribune Tower of 1923-25. Wide piers around the columns and thin mullions between, accentuated the verticality by subdividing the wide spandrels. The tall tower rose from the main mass to carry the long piers to the summit where they ended as buttresses, carved into Gothic forms, giving the top a rich silhouette in impressively scaled terra cotta ornament. Elaborate Gothic detail of terra cotta also catches the eye of the pedestrian on the street level.

The beauty of the building is not confined to its graceful height and exterior. A three-story-high entrance arcade frames walls of golden veined marble, quarried on the Isle of Skyros off the coast of Greece. Wide marble staircases lead up to the richly decorated second floor balconies with their huge frescoes of "Commerce" and "Labor." The vaulted ceiling is set with brilliantly colored patterns in glass mosaic, that glow with a jewel-like quality. Lace-like wrought iron cornices are covered with pure gold leaf, and soft concealed lighting adds to the Cathedral-like feeling of the interior.

One interesting feature of the arcade is a series of carved figures, half portrait and half caricature, which are nestled high under the supporting cross-beams. These are busts of Frank Woolworth, Cass Gilbert and Louis Horowitz, the builder, Lewis Pierson, President of the Irving Bank and

(continued)

8 SIGNIFICANCE

PERIOD	AREAS OF SIGNIFICANCE -- CHECK AND JUSTIFY BELOW			
<input type="checkbox"/> PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-PREHISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNITY PLANNING	<input type="checkbox"/> LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> RELIGION
<input type="checkbox"/> 1400-1499	<input type="checkbox"/> ARCHEOLOGY-HISTORIC	<input type="checkbox"/> CONSERVATION	<input type="checkbox"/> LAW	<input type="checkbox"/> SCIENCE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1500-1599	<input type="checkbox"/> AGRICULTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> ECONOMICS	<input type="checkbox"/> LITERATURE	<input type="checkbox"/> SCULPTURE
<input type="checkbox"/> 1600-1699	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> ARCHITECTURE	<input type="checkbox"/> EDUCATION	<input type="checkbox"/> MILITARY	<input type="checkbox"/> SOCIAL/HUMANITARIAN
<input type="checkbox"/> 1700-1799	<input type="checkbox"/> ART	<input type="checkbox"/> ENGINEERING	<input type="checkbox"/> MUSIC	<input type="checkbox"/> THEATER
<input type="checkbox"/> 1800-1899	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> COMMERCE	<input type="checkbox"/> EXPLORATION/SETTLEMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> PHILOSOPHY	<input type="checkbox"/> TRANSPORTATION
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 1900-	<input type="checkbox"/> COMMUNICATIONS	<input type="checkbox"/> INDUSTRY	<input type="checkbox"/> POLITICS/GOVERNMENT	<input type="checkbox"/> OTHER (SPECIFY)
		<input type="checkbox"/> INVENTION		

SPECIFIC DATES 1911-1913

BUILDER/ARCHITECT

Cass Gilbert

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Woolworth Building stands today as a monument, not only to Frank W. Woolworth, who commissioned it, but to Cass Gilbert, who designed it. Gilbert won the acclaim of the city with this building, completed in 1913, for his use of Gothic forms and detail, which at the time seemed well adapted to the soaring verticality of the skyscraper. From 1913 until 1930 it reigned as the world's tallest building and remains today a monument to Woolworth and American enterprise as well as an important step in the development of the skyscraper, a truly American contribution to architecture.

HISTORY

Frank W. Woolworth, who originated the variety chain-store, dreamed of erecting a Woolworth Building long before one was built. When completed in 1913, the multi-million dollar tower pleased him greatly and now appropriately memorializes his name.

The early years of the man who eventually paid \$13,500,000 in cash for the Woolworth Building were spent in poverty. Born on April 13, 1852, on a farm in Rodman, New York, Woolworth moved with his family to Great Bend, New York when he was seven. He left public school at the age of sixteen after which he attended two winter sessions of a commercial college in Watertown, New York. He then worked for about two years as a clerk in a village store for no salary to gain experience in business.

Between 1873 and 1879, Woolworth's income continued to consist largely of experience and little money. He secured a job with Augsburg and Moore, dry goods merchants in Watertown, in March 1873. He earned nothing for the first three months, and then began to receive \$3.00 a week. About two and a half years later he had advanced to \$6.00 a week. He then joined another store at \$10.00 a week.

Woolworth married Jennie Creighton on June 11, 1876. Shortly after this his salary dropped to \$8.00 a week causing Woolworth to suffer a nervous collapse. A brief attempt at farming followed, but by 1877 he had returned to his first firm, now Moore and Smith. That firm's several successful sales of five cent items in 1878 aroused Woolworth's interest. So much so, that Woolworth accepted Moore's support in opening a nickel store in Utica, New York.

(continued)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 2

a first tenant, and other famous figures who played a part in the creation of the Woolworth Building. Edward Hogan, the renting agent, is seen closing a deal; Gunvald Aus, the steel engineer, is measuring a girder; Mr. Gilbert, the architect, is holding a miniature model of the building in his arms; and Mr. Woolworth is counting his nickels and dimes.

There is also statuary outside. At the second story are bas relief heads representing Europe, Africa, Asia and America. High above at the 26th, 49th and 51st floors, curious carved gargoyles of bats, frogs, owls, pelicans, etc., crouch gazing at the view.

Indoors, the Gothic theme is repeated in every corridor, with polished terrazzo floors, Italian marble wainscoting, and gilded ornamental work. Each elevator bank is fronted by an elaborate cast iron and gilded facade. An additional characteristic of the building is its high ceilings, which add to the enjoyment of the structure. If it had not been for the high ceilings, the building would have had 79 or 80 stories.

The general richness and style of the Woolworth Building is epitomized by Woolworth's Office. Located on the twenty-fourth floor, the 30-foot square chamber looks to the south and east. Its walls are richly veined dark marble. Molded cornices and a decorated ceiling originally enhanced the beauty of the office, but they have been removed. When Woolworth used the office, it contained furniture of the Empire period. Some of the original furniture is now displayed in the receptionist's area on the twenty-fourth floor. The chairman of the Woolworth Company's board now uses the office.

Because of its unusual height, the Woolworth Building presented many unique construction and engineering problems. First, in order to give the structure a sturdy foundation, the builders used a pneumatic caisson process to sink metal tubes, some 19 feet in diameter, through soil, mud, silt and water to bedrock. They forced water and dirt from the caisson tubes by pneumatic pressure, and gradually filled them with concrete. The caissons average 110 feet in depth, and each column carries a load of 24 tons per square foot. The estimated weight of the building itself is 223,000 tons. The steel beams and girders used in the framework were so heavy that surveyors had to test the streets to make sure that no cave-ins would occur on the routes they were to be carried along.

(Continued)

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 7 PAGE 3

For further protection against the stresses of wind pressure, the tower is constructed with portal braces, much like those at the ends of bridges, which conduct the wind down to the ground instead of head-on into the building. The copper roofs are connected by means of copper cables with the structural steelwork of the building. This grounds the building against lightning, much in the manner of a lightning rod.

The Woolworth Building was the first to have its own power plant. Four engines generated enough electricity for a city of 50,000 people, thus making a self-contained unit which could supply all the building's light, heat, ventilation and elevator power.

The general offices of the F. W. Woolworth Company occupy several floors of the building. Great banking institutions, the executive and clerical staffs of several industries and many professionals have offices here. A health club and swimming pool, medical and dental facilities, restaurant, barber shop and retail stores are available for employees of the more than 300 organizations in the building.

The intended and achieved effect was to create a distinctive commercial building, one whose height readily proclaimed its position in the city, a function it continue to fulfill today.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 8

PAGE 2

Even though the store in Utica failed, Woolworth refused to be discouraged. He opened a new store in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, in June 1879. Its success caused him to open two new stores, which failed. Nevertheless, he opened still another store in Scranton, Pennsylvania, and by 1882 it and the Lancaster store had a total gross income of \$24,125. Within about four years, Woolworth owned seven stores whose sales in 1886 totaled \$100,000.

The customer responded to Woolworth's merchandizing and his business continued to grow. By 1895 he had 25 stores and their sales totaled more than \$1,000,000 for the first time. By 1900 he had 59 stores and a gross sale of over \$5,000,000. He opened a chain in England in 1909 of "3d and 6d" stores and it was highly successful. Two years later, Woolworth's merger with some similar stores raised his company's chain to 596 stores. Further mergers increased the number of stores to 1,050 by spring 1919. When the company's founder died on April 8, 1919, he left an estate of \$27,000,000.

The former clerk who had once worked only to gain experience also left the Woolworth Building, then the world's tallest building. When the 792 foot building was completed, President Woodrow Wilson pressed a button in Washington, D.C. lighting the sixty-story structure.

The Woolworth Building remained the world's tallest until 1930 and remains today one of America's architectural classics. In 1915 the Panama-Pacific Exposition awarded it a gold medal as the "most beautiful building in all the world erected to commerce." The Woolworth Building remains a fitting monument to the industry of one man and the business he built at well as a landmark in the development of the skyscraper.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

CONTINUATION SHEET

ITEM NUMBER 9 PAGE 1

Buchard, John and Bush-Brown, Albert, The Architecture of America, Boston, 1966.

Hitchcock, Henry-Russell, Architecture: Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, Baltimore, Maryland, 1971.

Jennings, Walter Wilson, 20 Giants of American Business, New York, 1953.

Lebhar, Godfrey M., Chain Stores in America, 1859-1950, New York, 1952.

Weisman, Winston, "A New View of Skyscraper History" The Rise of an American Architecture, New York, 1970.

Winkler, John K. Five and Ten, The Fabulous Life of F. W. Woolworth, New York, 1940.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

**NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
INVENTORY -- NOMINATION FORM**

FOR NPS USE ONLY

RECEIVED

DATE ENTERED

CONTINUATION SHEET John Ward House ITEM NUMBER #10 PAGE #2

to the point of beginning, as indicated in red on the plat map.