

CENTRAL SAVINGS BANK, 2100-2108 Broadway, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1926-28, architects, York & Sawyer.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 1165, Lot 36.

On May 30, June 25, July 23, October 8, and November 26, 1974, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a series of public hearings on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Central Savings Bank and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site. The hearings had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. A total of eighteen witnesses spoke in favor of designation at these hearings. Although the representative of the Central Savings Bank spoke in opposition to designation at the first four hearings, he stated that the Bank would accede to the designation at the last hearing.

#### DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Central Savings Bank, built in 1926-28, was designed by the architectural firm of York & Sawyer in the manner of a grand Italian Renaissance palace. When the bank celebrated its 75th anniversary in 1934, the president proudly proclaimed: "The Central Savings Bank...is housed in a truly noble building, its lofty interior and its massive exterior typifying all that the Bank has represented in the past...all that the future may bring to us in the way of health and happiness."

The Central Savings Bank is one of the most impressive and dominant features of upper Broadway, complemented by Verdi Square which adjoins it to the south. The design of the bank, which takes unique advantage of the trapezoidal site, is similar in form. The building is six stories high including the monumental story of the banking room, and it is faced with exceptionally handsome blocks of rusticated limestone. As a freestanding building, it is visible from all four sides, and three sides are accented by the tall arched windows which light the main banking room.

The boldly rusticated base of the bank is crowned by a deeply recessed frieze beneath a rolled molding inscribed on all four sides with the phrases, "Central Savings Bank, Chartered MDCCCLIX, Erected MCMXXVIII," although the order of the phrases varies. Among the most striking features of this base are the entrances on the 73rd, 74th and Broadway sides. All have bold enframements and are crowned by cornices. Above the 73rd Street entrance is a clock flanked by two lions. The doors are protected by massive wrought-iron gates designed with intricate foliate motifs.

Rising two stories above the base are the tall arched windows of the main banking room with a series of smaller windows above them. Rusticated stonework also enhances this high section of the building and the arches above the windows. Emphasizing these arches at the ends of the building are shields containing the caduceus motif with snakes twined around a vertical staff. The enframed inscription "Central Savings Bank, 1859-1928", flanked by paired shields with swags, enhances each of the long sides of the building above the tall arched windows. Intricate wrought-iron grilles terminating in gargoyle heads protect the bases of these windows. All the wrought ironwork on the exterior was executed by the studio of Samuel Yellin of Philadelphia, a well-known master craftsman in that medium.

The two-story section above the rustication is handled like a loggia with windows separated by pilasters set against rusticated piers. These vertically paired windows are separated by handsome spandrel panels and have balustrades at their bases. Crowning the loggia is a modillioned cornice, above which rises a classical attic floor with paired windows set above those of the loggia. The handsome Spanish tile roof is very much in keeping with the Renaissance prototypes of the building.

The bank was founded in 1859 as "The German Savings Bank in the City of New York", with its first quarters in the Cooper Union Building. In 1864 the bank moved into the remodelled Napier House at Fourth Avenue and 14th Street, and a new bank building was constructed on that site in 1872. The bank changed its name to the Central Savings Bank during World War I. Because of the bank's steady growth the trustees decided to extend its services to the West Side--"that newly-developed section of business and residential activity, while retaining a downtown office at its old location.

The building at Broadway and 73rd St. was built in 1926-28 to fill that need.

The firm of York & Sawyer, architects of the bank, was founded in 1898 by Philip Sawyer and Edward Palmer York, both of whom had worked for the firm of McKim, Mead & White, receiving valuable training in the tradition of classical design. The firm gained a reputation in the design of large office buildings, banks, and hospitals in New York and other cities. Among their commissions were the Bowery Savings Bank on 42nd Street, the Federal Reserve Bank of New York on Liberty Street, and the Flower Fifth Avenue Hospital.

In the Central Savings Bank, as well as in many other banks designed by the firm, the Renaissance style was used to great advantage to create truly grand and imposing structures. Benjamin Moscovitz of the firm was in charge of the drawings for the Central Savings Bank.

The unique shape of the building, its handsome setting, and its finely-executed architecture all contribute to the creation of this imposing neo-Italian Renaissance building.

#### FINDINGS AND DESIGNATIONS

On the basis of a careful consideration of the history, the architecture and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Central Savings Bank has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Central Savings Bank is one of the outstanding neo-Italian Renaissance buildings in New York City, that it is exceptionally well adapted to the shape of its site, that it is set off to advantage by Verdi Square to the south, that it displays rusticated stonework embellished by handsome detail, that its dignified exterior and great windows are expressive of the bank for which it was built, and that it is a distinguished architectural and environmental adornment to the neighborhood located on its conspicuous site.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 63 of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 8-A of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Central Savings Bank, 2100-2108 Broadway, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 1165, Lot 36, Borough of Manhattan as its Landmark Site.

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