

THE UNION BUILDING (FORMER DECKER BUILDING), 33 Union Square West, Borough of Manhattan. Built 1892-93; architect, John Edelman.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 844, Lot 19.

On May 14, 1985, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Union Building (Item No. 4). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Thirty-four witnesses spoke in favor of designation; one statement supporting designation was also submitted. The Commission received several letters in support of designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Summary

An important example of the Moorish style (with Venetian touches), with a profusion of terra-cotta embellishment that enlivens and adds variety to the facade, the Union Building (originally known as the Decker Building) testifies to the interaction between New York and Chicago architects. Convincingly attributed to John H. Edelman, mentor and friend to Chicago architect Louis Sullivan, the Decker Building was designed by Edelman while employed by New York architect Alfred Zucker. Edelman's most significant extant work, the building, located on Union Square West and built in 1892-93, originally housed the Decker Piano Company, one of many firms devoted to artistic enterprises that were once centered around the square.

The Development of Union Square

The Commissioners Map of 1807-11, which first laid out the grid plan of Manhattan above Houston Street, allowed for certain existing thoroughfares to retain their original configuration. Bloomingdale Road (now Broadway), and the Bowery intersected at 16th Street. The acute angle formed by this "union" was set aside by the Commissioners and named Union Place.¹ Initially Union Place extended from 10th to 17th Streets, on land owned by the Manhattan Bank:

It then presented to the eye of the tourist and pedestrian a shapeless and ill-looking collection of lots, where garden sauce flourished -- devoid of symmetry, and around which were reared a miserable group of shanties.²

In 1815, the state legislature reduced the size of Union Place by making 14th Street its southern boundary.³ As the city expanded northward and land use intensified, the need for open spaces became apparent. A report drafted by the street committee in 1831 states the need for public squares "for purposes of military, and civic parades, and festivities, and ... to serve as ventilators to a densely populated city."⁴ Designated a public space in 1832 at the urging of local residents, additional land was acquired so that the area could be regularized.⁵ Graded, paved, and fenced, Union Place was finally opened to the public in July, 1839. Throughout much of its history, the square has been used for public gatherings, political rallies, and demonstrations.⁶

By the 1850s, Union Square (as it came to be known) was completely surrounded by buildings, including some of the city's most splendid mansions; but, "already by 1860, the dramatic march of commerce had begun."⁷ Theaters, hotels, and luxury retailers predominated in the 1870s.⁸ By the 1890s, the vestiges of the fashionable residential area, as well as the elegant stores and theaters, had been supplanted on Union Square by taller buildings that catered to the needs of publishers and manufacturers who had moved uptown.⁹

The Decker Building was commissioned by John Jacob Decker, then head of Decker Brothers Piano Company, to occupy the lot that he had leased from its owners.¹⁰ Adjacent to architect Bruce Price's Bank of the Metropolis, the Decker Building is prominently situated on Union Square West, considered the most desirable side of the square "probably because for all practical purposes it really was Broadway."¹¹

By mid-century, piano-fortes had become increasingly popular, and, along with other musical instruments, an important source of manufacturing jobs for New York City.¹² Like many other businesses concerned with the arts and requiring skilled craftsmen, a number of piano-makers were situated near and around the square. Decker Brothers appears to have been established by John J. Decker in 1856 at 149 Baxter Street. In May 1863, the firm (which now included David Decker) had relocated to Varick Street. As of May 1, 1870, the Decker Brothers showrooms were located at 33 Union Square West and at 322 West 35th Street; the factory's address was on West 35th Street between Eighth and Ninth Avenues. The firm (apparently taken over by William F. Decker by May 1, 1896), remained at 33 Union Square West until 1913. According to Trow's Directory, the firm was in liquidation in the year ending May 1, 1902, and every year thereafter (with

the exception of the year ending May 1, 1903) until 1913, after which it is no longer listed.¹³

John H. Edelman (1852-1900)¹⁴

Writing about John H. Edelman to his brother Albert from Paris in 1874, Louis Sullivan observed: "You can make up your mind that my reputation as an architect will always be inferior to his."¹⁵ Even when his assessment of Edelman's architecture had changed, a half century later, Sullivan wrote:

And be this said here and now: The passing years have isolated and revealed John Edelman, as unique in personality among fine and brilliant minds. Be assured he will not turn in his grave, unless in bliss, should he hear it said that he was the benefactor and Louis the parasite and profiteer.¹⁶

And yet, until recently, surprisingly little had been pieced together about Edelman's career. He spent his early years shuttling back and forth between Cleveland and Chicago before moving on to New York. A talented architect whose efforts were nonetheless unfocused and who was plagued by ill health, he was absorbed by diverse concerns. During the years 1877-79, Edelman became interested in radical social ideas, including the Greenback, Populist, and single-tax movements, as well as Socialism and philosophical anarchism. He was a founder of the Socialist League in 1892 and contributed to Solidarity, a recently founded anarchist periodical of which he became a publisher in 1893 and which he twice revived (after publication was halted due to lack of funds) in 1895 and 1898. Edelman was also an artist and a sculptor.

As a youth, Edelman served as an architectural draftsman in his native Cleveland. In 1872, he moved to Chicago and was employed by the firm of Burling, Adler, and Co. The following year, Edelman became foreman of William Le Baron Jenney's drafting room. It was at this time that he first met the young Louis Sullivan, who was also a draftsman in Jenney's office. In 1874, Edelman formed a partnership with Joseph S. Johnston, who had worked with him as a draftsman at Burling, Adler, & Co. That year, the firm was responsible for the design of the Moody Tabernacle Choir, located in Chicago.

Perhaps prompted by a decline in his Chicago practice and by his father's death, in 1876 Edelman returned to Cleveland where he was soon employed as a draftsman. However, illness led to a hiatus in his architectural career. Having regained his health by 1880, Edelman returned to Chicago, acting as office foreman for Adler, who was now practicing without his former partner. In 1881, after insuring that Sullivan would succeed him as Adler's foreman, Edelman returned once again to Cleveland, where he is

said to have designed the pavilion for President Garfield's catafalque. In Cleveland, he joined the firm of Coburn & Barnum as foreman and supervisor of construction, "covering ... [their] buildings ... with Sullivanesque ornament."¹⁷ There he supervised construction of the Blackstone and the Perkins-Power Blocks (1881) which he may have helped design. As architect for J. B. Perkins, Edelman is credited with the design of the Gilman, Wilshire, Stephens and Widlar Buildings (1882-83), structures conceived in the spirit of the new commercial architecture in Chicago. It has been observed that the several buildings he designed for Coburn & Barnum and for Perkins "evolved from polychromatic Victorian toward a Chicago functionalism."¹⁸ By 1883, Edelman had again returned to Chicago where he is said to have helped design the Pullman Building (1884) as an employee of S. S. Beman and where he may have helped to design Sullivan's Auditorium (1886-89).

In the late 1880s and throughout the 1890s, Edelman worked in New York and lived for a time in what is now Kearny, New Jersey, where he designed a house for himself (1894). In 1889-90 he was associated with Lyndon P. Smith,¹⁹ later supervising architect on Sullivan's Bayard-Condict Building (1898), a designated New York City Landmark. In 1891-93, Edelman was often employed by New York architect Alfred Zucker, for whom he apparently designed the Decker Building and the interiors for the Hotel Majestic (1891-92). Edelman is credited with "a certain exotic, Sullivanesque decoration that characterized the work of Alfred Zucker."²⁰ During these years, Edelman may have occupied space in the offices of McKim, Mead, & White²¹, working partly for the firm and partly independently as a designer and as a supervisor of construction.²² From September of 1896 to the end of 1897, Edelman's name appears on the list of McKim, Mead, & White's employees, as a full-time employee; thereafter, Edelman maintained his own office in New York, until his sudden death from a heart attack in 1900.

Chicago and New York: Architectural Interaction

The Decker Building exemplifies the architectural interaction between Chicago and New York, which existed although these important cities rivaled one another in attempting to establish architectural supremacy. As John Zukowsky has noted: "At the simplest level of interactions, Chicago architects have designed New York projects and New Yorkers Chicago ones."²³

Although in municipal building records the architect of the Decker Building is listed as Alfred Zucker, the building's design is now attributed to John Edelman. Mary Kathryn Stroh, in her master's thesis on Zucker, has noted striking differences between other structures designed by Zucker and the Decker Building and two other Zucker commissions, 256 and 119 Fifth Avenue: "different from any of his previous works, ... the imaginative

decoration, especially some of the windows and intricate ornament ... is borrowed from decidedly Islamic sources."²⁴ Donald Egbert and Paul Sprague describe the Decker Building as "the chief extant structure believed to be Edelmann's design."²⁵

The attribution to Edelmann sheds light on the building's ornament, which was not characteristic of the bulk of Zucker's work, but instead exemplifies the principles that concerned both Edelmann and Sullivan. Not surprisingly, many visual similarities between the work of the two architects suggest that early on "Sullivan was inspired, if not assisted in his designs and ornament by his mentor John Edelmann."²⁶ In addition to their shared sporting and cultural activities, Edelmann taught Sullivan aesthetics and German metaphysics and familiarized Louis with his theory of "suppressed functions."²⁷ This influence was, however, reciprocal. From 1873 to 1883, "Edelmann developed a style of decoration that is difficult to distinguish from Sullivan's early ornament."²⁸ During the time Sullivan attended the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, he and Edelmann remained friends, and upon his return, Sullivan "no doubt" occasionally worked for Edelmann's firm.²⁹ The two collaborated for a time on the decorations for the interiors of Moody's Tabernacle Choir (1874-76) and for Mount Sinai Synagogue (ca. 1874-75); sketches that Sullivan sent to Edelmann from Paris survive in Sullivan's papers.³⁰

The flat ornament of the Decker Building clearly relates to that of Sullivan and Edelmann. In his studies in Paris (ca. 1874), Sullivan became concerned with the Neo-Grec decorative principles of Victoire-Marie Ruprich-Robert, professor of the history and composition of ornament at the Ecole des Arts Decoratifs in Paris (1850-87). Even before Sullivan's trip to Paris, both he and Edelmann made use of Jenney's library, and their ornamental design benefited from these studies.³¹ Sullivan was also influenced by the ornament of Owen Jones and of Jones's student Christopher Dresser who "were likewise preaching and demonstrating the functional abstraction of all the historical styles -- and nature as well -- for application in modern design."³² It has also been demonstrated that both Edelmann and Sullivan were influenced by the work of such leading American architects as Richard Morris Hunt and Frank Furness.³³ In 1873, Sullivan (at the suggestion of Hunt) sought and obtained employment (which lasted for a period of five months) with Furness.

The influences between Edelmann and Sullivan must have been reciprocal: as Edelmann had previously influenced Sullivan, so the relationship in some measure reversed itself in later years. In his article "The Pessimism of Modern Architecture" (Engineering News, 1892), Edelmann praised Sullivan's architecture.³⁴ When he designed the Decker Building (c. 1892), Edelmann was familiar with Sullivan's recent work. Sullivan's belated wedding gift to Edelmann (who married about 1890) of a

cast from the ornamental frieze on the Wainwright Tomb in St. Louis (1892) is proof of the architects' continuing allegiance and assures us that Edelmann would have been familiar with Sullivan's ornament; Sullivan's gift was hung as a frieze in the living room of the Edelmann home.³⁵ The naturalistic motif on the enframements and moldings employed by Edelmann in his design for the Decker Building is certainly reminiscent of the border on the Wainwright Tomb. The same emphasis, evident in Sullivan's work, on enclosed and articulated areas covered by flat abstracted decoration based on plant types and Oriental sources also characterizes the Decker Building. Particularly characteristic of Sullivan is the emphasis on horizontal spaces embellished or outlined by ornament; this too can be seen in Edelmann's work, such as the enframement of the second and the tenth stories of the Decker Building. Moreover, the treatment of the wide ground-story, center window flanked by smaller apertures evident on the Decker Building as originally completed can be seen as characteristically Chicagoan.³⁶ Similarly, the loggia of the Decker Building is also reminiscent of Sullivan's work. The richness and prominence of Edelmann's spandrel panels between the fourth and fifth stories and between the eighth and ninth stories can be related to Sullivan's on the Wainwright Building in St. Louis (1890-91).

Other buildings attributed to Zucker during the years that Edelmann appears to have worked for him (1891-93) also share "Sullivan-esque" characteristics that separate this group from other works by Zucker.³⁷ These buildings are 139 Fifth Avenue, 256 Fifth Avenue, 18-24 Washington Place, and 236-250 Wooster Street.³⁸

Yet, the Decker Building (and the four related works that are considered part of Zucker's oeuvre) is distinct from Sullivan's works in the way historical style and organic motifs are used. Sullivan employed historical sources but created non-historical works, in which ornament often called out function and structure. Edelmann's use of ornament appears rooted in historical style, in the case of the Decker Building, in the Moorish style combined with touches of the Venetian.³⁹

The Moorish Style

Although recent architectural historians have called aspects of this building Venetian and its tall narrow appearance and balconies call to mind Venetian palazzi, Islamic or Moorish motifs predominate in Edelmann's design for the Decker Building. As can be seen in Bruce Price's published presentation perspective of the Bank of the Metropolis, a domed minaret originally capped the adjacent structure.⁴⁰ The center pair of fifth-story windows is framed by a horseshoe or Arabic arch; the intrados is framed by a contiguous band of smaller horseshoe arches. An alfiz, a rectangular molding which frames a horseshoe

arch, unites the fourth- and fifth-story windows. The central pair of windows on the eleventh story is also surmounted by a horseshoe arch which rests on Moorish columns. Ogee arches (also typical of Islamic architecture) of cast iron frame the second-story side windows. Similarly, the panels of abstracted foliate ornament, called arabesques, which are often enframed in defined geometrical fields (and were also employed by Sullivan⁴¹), are also derived from Oriental sources.

Overall pattern, a hallmark of the Islamic or Oriental style, also characterizes the Decker Building. The Decker Building's shaft is covered with an overall pattern resembling a guilloche with round embellishments. Moreover, the building's intradoses and enframements are ornamented by naturalistic and vegetal motifs that add to the impression of pattern and movement. The circular, pierced multifoils that embellish the balconies further enhance the impression of pattern and opulence, as do the limestone quoins that embellish the shaft and the alfiz, and the pattern created by the loggia's columns (and by the now-demolished balustrade of the minaret's parapet).

The Decker Building exemplifies the "Moorish" look that Louis Comfort Tiffany employed in his designs for the interiors of many nearby Fifth Avenue townhouses.⁴² Nor was Islamic influence new to American architecture. Prompted by increased trade and exploration in the Far East during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Oriental revival and the use of Oriental motifs in America was the "longest lived of the exotic movements."⁴³

Islamic motifs in Western context were used for an architecture and an interior design that suggests relaxation, "above all relaxation from conformity."⁴⁴ The Islamic style was deemed suitable for smoking rooms, cafes, theaters, and public baths, all activities associated with respites from everyday routine and the work-a-day world.⁴⁵ For these reasons, architecture employing Islamic motifs has been called "the architecture of occasions,"⁴⁶ and the transportation from the everyday to pleasurable realms promised by the piano was surely in keeping both with occasions and with relaxation. Such associations might have provided Edelman with an additional impetus to employ the Moorish style.

Description

Located on Union Square West between 16th and 17th Streets, the Decker Building is a narrow eleven-story structure. The building is three bays wide; single windows flank a central bay of two windows (all having unusually deep reveals), thus creating an "A-B-A" rhythm underscored by the placement of much of the terra-cotta ornament, which enlivens and adds variety to the facade. The building has brick sidewalls, a facade of limestone,

brick and terra cotta, and a gravel and tile roof. Combining Venetian touches with the Moorish style, this early skyscraper with masonry bearing walls and a combination of cast-iron and steel cage⁴⁷ and skeleton construction conforms to the lot line at the front and rear being 30' 5 1/4" at the front and 30' 6" to the rear; the lot is 150' deep, the building, 138'.

The classic tripartite columnar skyscraper division is employed. The first two stories form a base; the third story serves as a transition into the six-story shaft which is further articulated by the terra-cotta pattern of intertwining curved lines with circular infills. This shaft is capped by the tenth-floor loggia which serves as a transition into the "capital," a Moorish tower. The facade is enlivened not only by the rich ornament and patterning but by its organization as a series of horizontals. The rich enframing at the second story, which unifies the side and central windows, inaugurates the pattern, which is emphasized by the profusion of moldings extending the width of the facade. This pronounced horizontality is continued by the tenth-story loggia. The railing of the balcony above the loggia (now largely demolished) was pierced by a continuous band of multifoils. The interrupted cornice above the eleventh story continues the horizontality as did the balustraded parapet that once circled the base of the dome. A late nineteenth-century and an early twentieth-century photograph document the building as originally completed.⁴⁸

Although the ground story and top of the building have been substantially altered, the majority of the eclectic and exuberant terra-cotta ornament survives. At the second story, on three sides a border of half-shells encloses a handsome terra-cotta molding embellished with sunflowers at the top and artichokes at the sides and bottom. The sunflowers (one of the decorative hallmarks of the Queen Anne movement) are separated from one another by semicircular arches. The artichokes, evocative of the Aesthetic Movement, are contained within a guilloche formed by its own leaves. Enclosed and recessed within this rich enframing are two side and a central pair of windows, all surmounted by a narrow cast-iron filigreed molding. Cast-iron columns with elaborate capitals separate the central pair from the single side windows, which are framed by ogee arches with ornate filigree spandrels.

Above the second story, brackets support a wide beltcourse that bows out into a shallow balcony at its center. Above, a group of three Sullivanesque foliated panels frames each side of the beltcourse's central portion, which takes the shape of a rectangular panel. The name UNION BUILDING appears on this panel (one "N" is missing); an early twentieth-century photograph indicates that the panel originally bore the name DECKER BUILDING.

Serving as a transition, the third story incorporates the limestone that is used plentifully for the quoining and the stringcourses above with the elaborate naturalistic terra cotta featured in the enframing below. The top and sides of the single side windows and the pair of central windows are surrounded by small indented rectangles. Rich vegetal moldings ornament the intradoses of the side and central windows. A bead molding separates the third story from a frieze that incorporates an arabesque scroll pattern with stylized plants. This embellished frieze is contained within the space defined by the foliated panels on the beltcourse below the third story and by the outer rims of the third- and fourth-story windows. By virtue of its placement beneath the windows, this frieze links the ornament of the second-story enframing, the ornament covering the intradoses, and capping the building. The placement of the terra-cotta ornament gives added impetus to the "A-B-A" rhythm of the facade with its three bays and serves as a transition to the six-story shaft.

The fourth story is the first of six that form the structure's midsection and is covered with an unusual terra-cotta pattern of intertwining curved lines with circular fruit-like infills. The corners are articulated by limestone quoins that are at various points linked by limestone bands. The center pair of windows at the fourth and fifth stories are framed by a double-height horseshoe arch which is framed by the alfiz, itself ornamented both with rich foliate moldings and with Moorish tracery.

A spandrel panel between the fourth and fifth stories is indicated by a wide rectangular sill ornamented by terra-cotta plaques with naturalistic ornament and central cartouches bearing the letter D for Decker. Console-like brackets spring from the top of the alfiz and support a balcony pierced by multifoil apertures. The limestone bands that extend across the tops of the fourth- and fifth-story single side windows (and thus link the quoins) are ornamented by lines of small incised diamonds that emphasize the width of the openings below. They are typical of the many fine details which enliven and add variety to the facade.

The windows of the sixth to the ninth stories are interestingly treated and have unusually deep reveals. The transoms are so pronounced and deep that the transom windows above are distinctly separated from the windows. Above the windows on each story, a limestone band joins quoins on either side of the building, thus further highlighting and separating the transom from the sash windows. At the top of each side window a band of indented diamonds appears. The sill of the central pair is underscored by a limestone band that extends from one side of the facade to the other, as do two other bands that separate

the transoms from the main bodies of the windows. This motif is evident on the seventh, eighth, and ninth stories.

A balcony with elaborate tracery comprised of multifoil apertures appears before the central pair of windows at the eighth story. An elaborate frieze embellished with naturalistic motifs and surmounted by a band of horseshoe arches is placed on the spandrel panel between the central windows of the eighth and the ninth stories. A border of naturalistic motifs beginning at the base of the eighth-story windows runs along the sides and top of the ninth-story windows, thus joining the eighth- and ninth-story windows. Each pair is separated by a column. The transoms of the eighth-story pair are capped by ogee arches, and the sides are ornamented by incised half shells. The transoms above the ninth story are simple rectangles. The mullions between the eighth- and ninth-story transoms include a vertical band of pierced bezants. A band of indented diamonds surmounts the paired central ninth-story windows. The ninth story is capped by a band of limestone blocks and by a small corbel table.

The tenth story is a loggia bordered by an elaborate terra-cotta frame with highly naturalistic ornament reminiscent of the flowers featured in William Morris's textiles and wallpapers.⁴⁹ Within this frame, a band of limestone, pierced at the inner edge by indented semi-circles, encloses a loggia. Nine columns with Moorish capitals alternate with eight deeply recessed sash windows. Above the tenth story, projecting brackets support what remains (the floor) of the original elaborately pierced balcony.

Flanking the central tower are paired horseshoe or Arabic arches. Each pair is ornamented with terra-cotta arabesques and rests on two engaged columns and a central freestanding column. A bead molding separates the arches below from a rectangular expanse of terra-cotta arabesques which is capped by a corbel table.

As it survives, the intervening tower is two stories in height. On the smooth wall-surface, applied bosses create a geometric border of crosses alternating with diamond-shaped outlines. At the eleventh story, the central pair of windows is surmounted by an ornamented horseshoe arch which rests on engaged Moorish columns. The spandrels above contain naturalistic ornament. Shaped transoms are capped by embellished terra-cotta cartouches in the shape of ogee arches or domes. The whole is outlined by a bead molding and a molding of continuous beads. An illusionary window and balcony pierced by open, bent-leaf shapes and ornamented by naturalistic forms rests on brackets lead to the final flourish. The horseshoe arches with smaller sculpted horseshoe arches are surmounted by roundels pierced by Islamic stars. Again, the window is framed by bands of running ornament.

As originally built, this tower was surmounted by a balustraded parapet that led to a domed minaret. At the juncture of the dome and the tower, an elaborate cornice flared upward; the tower sported balconies, imitating those from which the faithful could be called to prayer.

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NOTES

1. I. N. Phelps Stokes, The Iconography of Manhattan Island, 1498-1909 vol. 5 (New York, 1915), s.v. 1808.
2. David Thomas Valentine, ed., Manual of the Corporation of the City of New York (New York, 1857), 480.
3. Stokes, s.v. 1815 Apr. 11; Sophia Schachter and Elsa Gilbertson, "Union Square," (unpub. manuscript submitted to the Program in Historic Preservation, Columbia University, A8790, June 1982), 3.
4. Stokes, s.v. 1831 Nov. 7.
5. Valentine, 480; Schachter and Gilbertson, 5.
6. Stokes, s.v. 1833 Apr. 4,; 1833 Apr. 20; 1833 Nov. 12; 1834 Jan. 14; 1834 May 30; 1835 May 14; 1836 Aug. 3; 1839 July 19; 1842 Oct. 11, 13; on use of the term "Union Square" see: Schachter and Gilbertson, 7.
7. M. Christine Boyer, Manhattan Manners: Architecture and Style, 1850-1900 (New York, 1985), 45; for the development of this area, see: Charles Lockwood, Bricks and Brownstones: The New York Row House, 1783-1924: An Architectural and Social History (New York, 1972), 132, 135-136; Charles Lockwood, Manhattan Moves Uptown (Boston, 1976), 165-171.
8. A History of Real Estate, Building, and Architecture in New York City (1898; rpt. New York, 1967), 129.
9. The section above is based on research by Gale Harris and Lisa Koenigsberg, which was revised by Elisa Urbanelli.
10. "Lot 19, No. 33 Union Square West," Research Report on Ladies' Mile Submitted to M. Christine Boyer, Preservation Program, Columbia University, 1982, np [1].
11. Schachter and Gilbertson, 30.
12. "Notable Manufactures: An Outline History of Some Preeminent Industries Carried on or Represented in New York," King's Handbook of New York City (Boston, 1893), 849.
13. Trow's New York City Business Directory (New York, for the Years Ending May 1, 1856, 1863, 1870, 1896, 1902-13).
14. Recently scholars have rediscovered Edelmann's work. Donald Egbert and Paul Sprague are responsible for the major research on Edelmann. For additional discussion of Edelmann's life, see: Donald Egbert and Paul Sprague, "In

- Search of John Edelman: Architect and Anarchist," AIA Journal 45 (Feb. 1966), 35-41; Theodore Turak, "Edelman, John," Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects, ed. Adolf K. Placzek, vol. 2 (New York, 1982), 7; Paul Sprague, "Sullivan, Louis H.," Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects, ed. Adolf K. Placzek, vol. 4 (New York, 1982), 152-164; Robert Twombly, Louis Sullivan: His Life & Work (Chicago, 1986), 51-2, 70-1, 76, 82-8, 92-6, 99, 143, 215, 269, 400.
15. Quoted in Egbert and Sprague, 41.
 16. Louis H. Sullivan, The Autobiography of an Idea (New York, 1924), 210.
 17. David Van Zanten, "Sullivan to 1900," in Louis Sullivan: The Function of Ornament, ed. Wim de Wit (New York and London, 1986), 34.
 18. Turak.
 19. Dennis Steadman Francis, Architects in Practice, New York City, 1840-1900 (New York, 1980), 28:
 20. Van Zanten, 34 and note 68.
 21. Egbert and Sprague, 40.
 22. See Francis, Architects in Practice, New York City, 1840-1900, 28: Edelman's address is listed as 149 Church for 1889-91 and 14th and 5th Avenue for 1892. During these years McKim, Mead & White was at 57 Broadway and 1 West 20th Street.
 23. John Zukowsky, "The Capitals of American Architecture: Chicago and New York," Chicago and New York: Architectural Interactions (Chicago, 1984), 12.
 24. Mary Kathryn Stroh, "The Commercial Architecture of Alfred Zucker in Manhattan," Master's Thesis (Pennsylvania State University, 1973), 66, 69.
 25. Egbert and Sprague, 39; Van Zanten, 59; Turak; and John Sweetman [The Oriental Obsession: Islamic Inspiration in British and American Art and Architecture, 1500-1920 (Cambridge, 1988), 238] have accepted this attribution.
 26. Sprague, 157.
 27. For more information on these activities, see, for example: Van Zanten, 34-35; Twombly, 50-52; Sullivan, 206-13.
 28. Sprague, 157.

29. Sprague, 155.
30. The Sullivan papers containing these drawings are located in Avery Library, Columbia University and are cited by Twombly, 70-71, 85, 143, 269.
31. Turak.
32. Van Zanten, 17.
33. Sprague, 157.
34. Cited in David Van Zanten, "The Nineteenth Century: The Projecting of Chicago as a Commercial City and the Rationalization of Design and Construction," Architectural Interactions, 38.
35. Egbert and Sprague, 39.
36. For an image of the ground story of the Decker Building as originally completed, see: King's Photographic Views of New York (Boston, 1895), 522.
37. Both Edelman and Zucker (for whom Edelman designed the building) were of German extraction, Zucker (1852-?) being actually born in Freiburg, Prussian Silesia. According to Joy M. Kestenbaum, "Zucker, Alfred," Macmillan Encyclopedia of Architects, ed. Adolf K. Plazcek, vol. 4 (New York, 1982), 476: After journeying to New York in 1873, Zucker worked in Washington, as a draftsman in the Office of the Supervising Architect of Treasury. Zucker practiced in the South from 1876-82, serving as architect for public buildings in Mississippi and as consulting architect for the Vicksburg & Meridian Railroad. Returning to New York in 1883, Zucker maintained a successful practice with a particular emphasis on "tall commercial buildings of eclectic and ornate design."
38. For an image of 256 Fifth Avenue, see: Stroh, figure 22, 71; for an image of 139 Fifth Avenue, see: Stroh, figure 23, 73; for an image of 18-14 Washington Place, see: Stroh, figure 20, 65; for an image of 236-250 Wooster Street, see: Stroh, figure 25, 78.
39. In The City Observed: New York, A Guide to the Architecture of Manhattan (New York, 1979), 93-94: Paul Goldberger is intrigued by Edelman's solution: "it is wildly eclectic, almost hysterical in its stylistic swings and absurd excesses, yet it retains a certain slender poise in spite of itself." He continued: "If 33 Union Square is anything, it is a mix of Moorish and Venetian Gothic. But there are pieces of ornament, like the framing around the large

second-story window, that prefigure Art Nouveau. There is every kind of lintel, molding, spandrel, colonnade, and balcony; it gets very Venetian Gothic for a part of the way up, and then, in an arcade near the top, suddenly classical. The top itself bursts into a wild fury of every style that came before." See also: Egbert and Sprague, 39.

40. "Metropolitan Bank Building," Real Estate Record and Guide (June 11, 1904), 1407; this presentation perspective also appeared in Architectural Record 12, no. 2 (June 1902), 235.
41. On Sullivan's use of Islamic or Oriental motifs, see, for example: Sweetman, 237-38; William H. Jordy, "The Tall Buildings," in Louis Sullivan: The Function of Ornament, 108.
42. Sweetman, 232-33 and "Goodbye to Union Square?" Village Views 1, no. 2 (Sept. 1984), 27-28.
43. Virginia and Lee McAlister, A Field Guide to American Houses (New York, 1984), 231-34; Sweetman, 220-21.
44. Sweetman, 253.
45. Theaters incorporating Islamic motifs in their design include Kimball & Wisedell's Casino Theatre (1880-82, New York City) and H. P. Knowles's City Center of Music and Drama (originally the Masonic Mecca Temple, 1923-24, New York City); movie theaters, such as the Fox Theatre and Cinema in Atlanta by Marye, Alger, & Vinour (1929), continued the use of the Islamic style; see, also: Joy Kestenbaum and Jill Cowen, "Notable New York Buildings with Islamic Influence," Middle East Studies Association Bulletin 14, no. 2 (Dec. 1980), 30-32.
46. Sweetman, 254.
47. For a discussion of "cage" versus "skeleton" construction, see: A History of Real Estate, Building, and Architecture in New York, 464-465.
48. King's Photographic Views of New York (New York, 1895), 522. Photograph of Union Square West, 16th to 17th Streets, early twentieth century, in the collections of the New-York Historical Society.
49. Elizabeth Aslin, The Aesthetic Movement: Prelude to Art Nouveau (1969; Am. ed. New York, 1981), plates 26 and 29.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

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 Union Building 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 Union Building (originally known as the Decker Building) is an important example of the Moorish style (with Venetian touches), with a profusion of terra-cotta embellishment that enlivens and adds variety to the facade; that the Union Building testifies to the interaction between New York and Chicago architects; that convincingly attributed to John H. Edelmann, mentor and friend to Chicago architect Louis Sullivan, the Decker Building is Edelmann's most significant extant work and was designed by him while employed by New York architect Alfred Zucker; and that the building, located on Union Square West and built in 1892-93, originally housed the Decker Piano Company, one of many firms devoted to artistic enterprises that were once centered around the square.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 21, Section 534, of the Charter of the City of New York and Chapter 3 of Title 25 of the Administrative Code of the City of New York, the Landmarks Preservation Commission designates as a Landmark the Union Building, 33 Union Square West, Borough of Manhattan and designates Tax Map Block 844, Lot 19, Borough of Manhattan, as its Landmark Site.

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The Union Building (originally the
Decker Building)
33 Union Square West

Architect: John Edelman
for Alfred Zucker
Photo credit: Carl Forster



The Union Building (originally the
Decker Building)
Second story enframement

Photo credit: Carl Forster



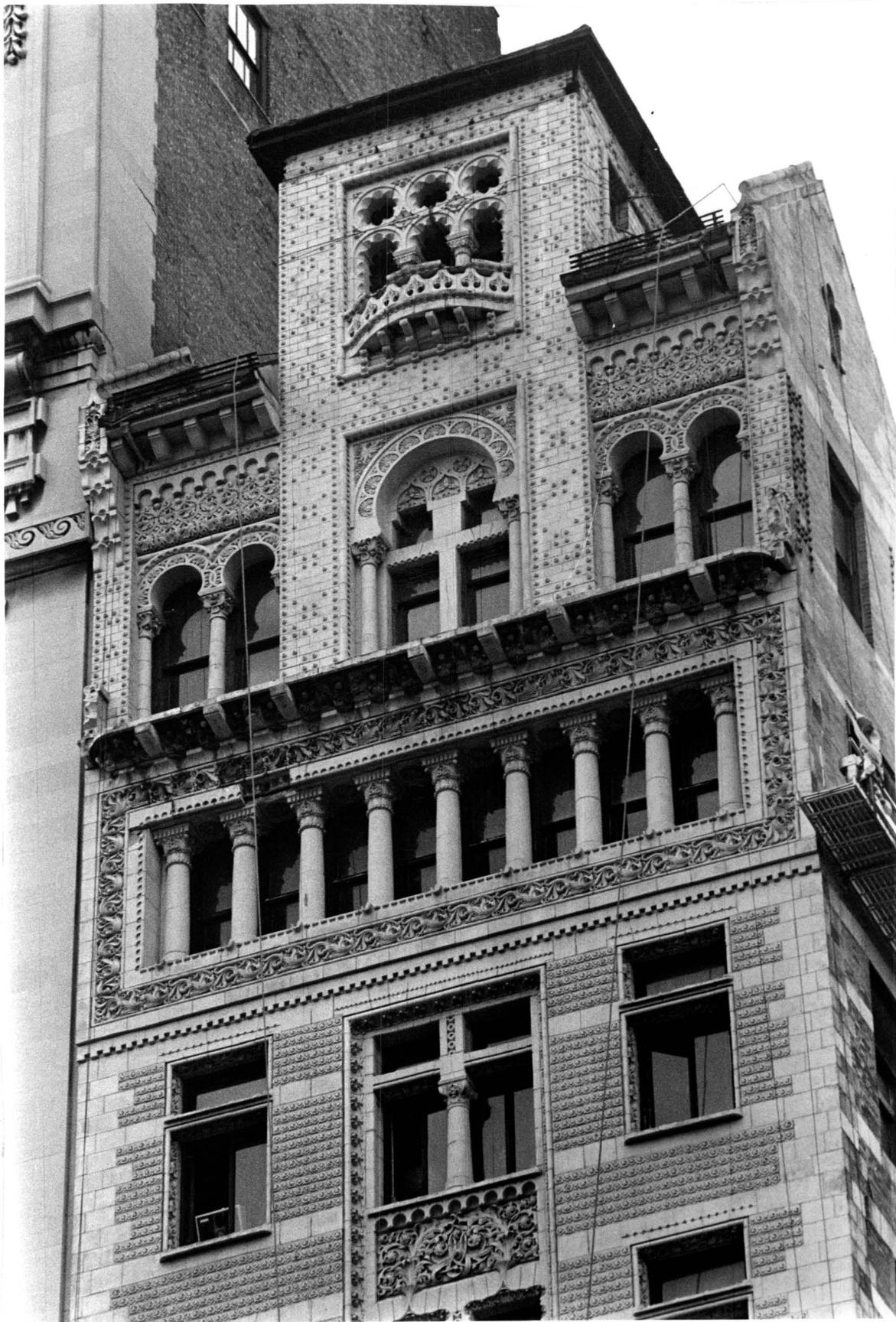
The Union Building (originally the Decker Building)
Detail, fourth and fifth story alfiz

Photo credit: Carl Forster



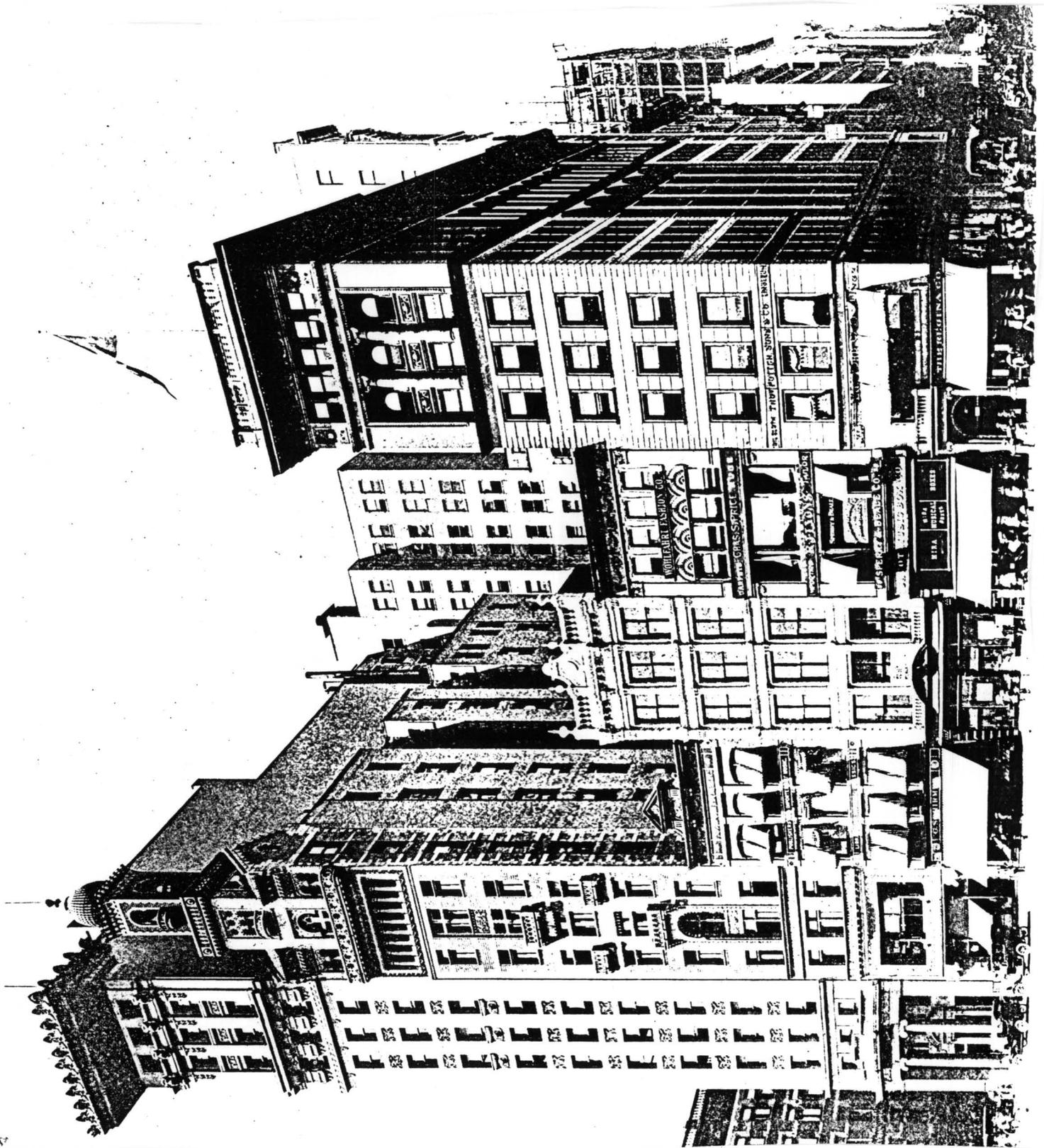
The Union Building (originally the
Decker Building)
Facade, sixth through ninth stories

Photo credit: Carl Forster



The Union Building (originally the
Decker Building)
Facade, upper stories

Photo credit: Carl Forster



The Union Building (originally the Decker Building)
Historical photograph, early twentieth century