

AHRENS BUILDING, 70-76 Lafayette Street, Manhattan. Built 1894-95; architect George H. Griebel.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 172, Lot 23.

On December 12, 1989, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Ahrens Building and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 23). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Four witnesses spoke in favor of designation. The owner took no position on the designation. The Community Board submitted a resolution in favor of designation.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

Summary

Designed by Manhattan architect George H. Griebel, and constructed in 1894-95, the Ahrens Building is a distinctive example of the Romanesque Revival style successfully adapted to the requirements of a steel-framed elevator building. Griebel's design incorporates a sophisticated arcaded composition, punctuated by unusual and elegant metal-clad polygonal oriel windows in the long Lafayette Street facade, which provides a pleasing balance of horizontal and vertical elements. The design displays a skillful interpretation of the contemporary aesthetic of structural polychromy -- drawn from the writings of John Ruskin and often associated with the work of H.H. Richardson -- pared down to a spare, membrane-like facade treatment. The masonry cladding, composed of a rusticated sandstone base and buff-colored brick trimmed with rock-faced brown brick and Romanesque-inspired terra-cotta details, exhibits particularly fine craftsmanship which accentuates the color and texture inherent in the various materials. The extensive use of brick with curved bull-nose profiles, found in the window reveals and the bartizan-like forms at the upper stories, gives the facades a striking textural quality enhanced by the play of light and shadow. This seven-story store and office building was commissioned by liquor merchant Herman F. Ahrens, whose business had been located on the Lafayette Street blockfront for thirty years; intended as a speculative investment, the construction of the building coincided with a municipal project to widen and improve Lafayette Street as a viable transportation route and commercial thoroughfare. Owned by the Ahrens family until the 1960s, the building is remarkably intact and remains a prominent feature in the civic center area.

History of Lafayette Street and the Site¹

The construction of the Ahrens Building in 1894-95 coincided with a municipal project to widen and reconfigure Elm (now Lafayette) Street and exemplifies the subsequent transformation of the surrounding area. The street was laid out as Ann Street between Reade and Worth Streets sometime prior to 1797; it appears as Elm Street on a map of 1800. At that time the area to the north of Worth Street, where Elm Street had yet to be laid out, was a swamp containing the large Collect Pond. Today, the downward sloping grade from Broadway to Lafayette Street in the blocks near the Ahrens Building is some indication of the swamp's low-lying topography. In the first few decades of the nineteenth century Elm Street was extended northward from Worth Street, eventually terminating at the diagonal intersection of Spring Street and Marion Street (now Cleveland Place, the northern extension of Centre Street).

Throughout most of the nineteenth century Elm Street was narrow and poorly graded, making it an undesirable location for mercantile development. Even late in the century concerns about bad drainage prompted the description of the area in the *New York Times* as "a nursery for diphtheria and scarlet fever."² The construction in 1838 of a prison ("The Tombs," designed by John Haviland) in the block bounded by Elm, Centre, Leonard, and Franklin Streets, and the proximity of the notorious Five Points slum had ensured Elm Street's somewhat unsavory character by the middle of the century. In 1851-53 a large railroad freight depot, oriented toward tracks along Centre Street, was constructed in the block to the north of the Tombs and across Elm Street from the site of the Ahrens Building. Designed by R.G. Hatfield, the depot was shared by the New York & Harlem and New York & New Haven (later New York, New Haven & Hartford) Railroads which operated lines along the east side of Manhattan. To the north of the depot, at the northeast corner of Elm and White Streets, stood the Third Regiment Armory. Iron and lead businesses, such as the New York Lead Company and the Columbia, Ogden & Walters, and J.B. and J.M. Cornell Iron Foundries, constituted an industrial presence along Elm and Centre Streets. A number of builders and hardware and fixtures merchants were attracted to the district surrounding the depot, such as the

American Brass & Copper Company, the Russell Erwin Manufacturing Company, and the Crane Company. While Broadway and the streets to the west were redeveloped in the second half of the nineteenth century with handsome stone- and cast-iron-fronted store and loft buildings associated with the dry goods trade, historic maps indicate that Elm Street and the area to the east remained a development backwater. Apart from the prison, depot, armory, and scattered industrial structures, the blockfronts in the area were lined mostly with modest three-story brick buildings; these were probably dwellings which in some cases had ground-floor stores. In addition, a handful of frame dwellings survived into the twentieth century.

Efforts to widen and reconfigure Elm Street were begun as early as 1881 and formal proposals followed in 1886, although it took two decades of planning and debate through four mayoral administrations before the project saw resolution. Motivated primarily by the desire to relieve congestion through the diversion of commercial traffic from Broadway, the plan had the support of a number of property owners and businessmen. At several hearings before the Board of Street Openings and Improvements, owners testified that the area was economically depressed and that their Elm Street property was underdeveloped; the initiative to improve the street was perceived as a means to make it a viable commercial thoroughfare and thus enhance property values. As the *New York Times* reported:

... there is no question but that the new street will infuse a good deal of life and activity into a large district between Broadway and the Bowery which had lain dormant for many years; that it will enhance the value of real estate in that section and thereby add to the taxable valuation of the city; and that the new street so created will be an important adjunct to any scheme of rapid transit that may be devised.³

Further motivation to widen and extend Elm Street came from proposals, beginning in the early 1890s and spawned by the City Beautiful movement, to expand the "civic center" area surrounding City Hall. The freight depot, which had become obsolete, was replaced in 1894 by a new Criminal Courts Building (Thom, Wilson &

Schaarschmidt, demolished) that was joined to the Tombs by a "Bridge of Sighs" across Franklin Street; the Tombs building was also replaced in 1897 by a new, castellated prison (Withers & Dickson, demolished). The Engine Co. No. 31 Firehouse, designed by N. LeBrun & Sons, was built on the site of the armory in 1895. Other municipal projects to be executed in the surrounding area within the next two decades included the Police Headquarters Building at 240 Centre Street (Hoppin, Koen & Huntington, 1905-09), the Surrogate's Court on Chambers Street (Hall of Records, 1899-1911, John R. Thomas and Horgan & Slattey), and the Municipal Building at Centre and Chambers Streets (McKim, Mead & White, completed 1914).⁴

Final hearings on the Elm Street improvements were held in July of 1895 and work proceeded over the next several years. In brief, the improved Elm Street⁵ began at the newly created triangle at New Chambers Street and City Hall Place (the present location of Foley Square, named in 1926⁶) and extended diagonally through the blocks between Duane and Worth Streets to the preexisting Elm Street. (A southern remnant of the old Elm Street, running on a north/south axis between Chambers and Duane Streets, is known today as Elk Street.)⁷ From Worth Street northward the street was widened from thirty-five to eighty feet, mostly along its east side, necessitating the condemnation and demolition of many structures. The widening interfered with the rear yard of the old Tombs, although the recently erected Criminal Courts Building, across the street from the Ahrens Building, had been designed to allow for the increased street width. Above Spring Street, the new Elm Street merged with the existing diagonal of Marion Street and was extended northward from Prince Street to join Lafayette Place at Great Jones Street. In 1905, the entire length of the street from the present Foley Square to Astor Place was renamed Lafayette Street.⁸

Herman F. Ahrens⁹

Little is known of Herman F. Ahrens (d.1905?), who commissioned the Ahrens Building in 1894, presumably as a speculative venture to capitalize on the anticipated increase in value of his Elm Street property. The property, being located on the west side of the street, was not

redeveloped as a result of the condemnation and demolition procedures associated with the street widening, but rather as an investment opportunity.

Ahrens first appears in *Trow's New York City Directory* of 1864-65 as a liquor merchant located at 84 Elm Street and residing at 95 White Street; these addresses correspond to a three-story brick and frame building once situated at the southwest corner of Elm Street and White Street. Through the 1870s the directories list Ahrens alternately at 84 Elm and 95 White. In 1879 the property at the southern (Franklin Street) corner of the Elm Street blockfront, the site of the Ahrens Building, was conveyed to Ahrens by the executors of the estate of William Briggs whose family had owned the property since 1827. According to the Perris maps of 1853 and 1857, the property had encompassed two frame structures, a larger one at the corner (40 Franklin Street) and a smaller one facing Elm Street (these buildings are shown to be brick on the Robinson map of 1885). Beginning in 1879 Ahrens's liquor business is listed in the directories at 40 Franklin Street, while his home address is given as either 74 or 76 Elm Street. Following the construction of the Ahrens Building, Ahrens maintained his business there, using 40 Franklin Street as its address. Beginning in 1901 Trow's directory also contained listings for the "Ahrens Building (offices)" at 76 Elm Street.

It is likely that Herman F. Ahrens died about 1905; at that time Josephine Ahrens is the name given in the directories in conjunction with the business. In 1909 J. Frederick Ahrens, presumably a son, appears to be the proprietor. The directories further indicate that J.F. Ahrens began to operate a saloon in the building about 1914. Around that same time the small structures which remained along the Lafayette Street blockfront and to the west of the Ahrens Building on Franklin Street were replaced by the existing sixteen-story, L-shaped Hungerford Building, named for the U.T. Hungerford Brass & Copper Company.

George H. Griebel¹⁰

Established as an architect in New York by 1885, George H. Griebel (dates undetermined) worked in general practice at least until 1925. His known work includes both residential and commercial commissions, several executed for members of the Edward S. Clark family. President

of the Singer Manufacturing Company and a prominent member of the West Side Association, Edward S. Clark (1811-1882) was the developer of the pioneering Dakota Apartments on Central Park West and rowhouses in the adjacent blocks. Clark's son, Alfred Corning Clark, carried on his father's real estate enterprises; he awarded Griebel a number of commissions including a row of fourteen houses on the north side of West 85th Street between Central Park West and Columbus Avenue (the ten surviving houses are located within the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District). Built in 1886-87 and designed in the Queen Anne style, these houses are notable for their large tripartite windows with molded brick surrounds and fine brick and stone decorative trim. Griebel also designed a commercial structure for Alfred Clark, a six-story store and office building at 167 Third Avenue (1890-91, within the boundaries of the Stuyvesant Square Historic District) which displays a late version of the Romanesque Revival style. For Frederick Ambrose Clark (who was a child at the time and thus represented by his father, Alfred), Griebel designed the dry goods store at 289-295 Columbus Avenue, at the corner of West 74th Street (also in the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District); built in 1902-03, it was designed in the neo-Renaissance style and features broad metal-clad bays. Griebel executed other commissions nearby: in 1890-91 he designed a row of nine houses at Nos. 28 to 44 West 73rd Street for developer F.G. Pourné (also located in the Historic District). Faced in rich materials and embellished with Renaissance and Romanesque-inspired ornamental details, the houses in the row are given a varied polychromatic treatment. In addition, the architect designed a number of tenements in Upper Manhattan as well as the Majestic Apartments (1899-1900, location undetermined), and executed interior alterations on the Clark-owned Dakota Apartments in 1894 and 1903.

The Ahrens Building does not resemble any of Griebel's other known buildings; however, a survey of the architect's work illustrates his skill in combining various materials and in carefully integrating ornamental details into pleasing compositions. Designed in a number of contemporary architectural styles, both the residential and the commercial buildings are distinguished by their fine craftsmanship in

masonry, pressed and molded brick, terra cotta, and ironwork. Griebel's commercial work also demonstrates a straightforward and rational approach to architectural design. This approach is displayed in the Ahrens Building by the sophisticated arcaded composition of the facades and by the use of distinctive metal-clad polygonal oriel windows to maximize the amount of light in the interior.

Design of the Ahrens Building

Constructed with a steel and cast-iron skeleton and provided with an elevator,¹¹ the seven-story Ahrens Building was characteristic of up-to-date commercial architecture of the period. Both the elevator and skeleton construction had been in sporadic use since before the Civil War; however, it was not until the 1890s that the tall elevator building gained widespread acceptance. Steel-frame construction was only officially adopted into New York City's building laws in 1892, just two years prior to the construction of the Ahrens Building. The steel-framed skeleton was a revolution in the development of commercial architecture; this construction method allowed walls to be lighter and permitted large window openings, while the elevator made it feasible (and profitable) to rent floors higher than the standard six stories. The ground story of the Ahrens Building contains large openings intended for storefronts; Ahrens probably maintained his liquor salesroom in most or all of the ground story when his business was located in the building. Access to the upper floors, which could be divided into rentable loft and office space, is through a handsome stone portal in the northernmost bay of the long Lafayette Street facade.

The design of the exterior of the Ahrens Building, which draws upon the Romanesque Revival style, reflects the contemporary trend of adapting historical architectural styles to the steel-framed elevator building. Architects of the late nineteenth century experimented with a variety of different solutions to the problem of how to "dress" the steel skeleton of modern commercial buildings; indeed, this challenge was among the most heated topics of architectural debate at the time. The paradoxical union of modern technology and historical architectural references produced rich and highly inventive designs. As stated by the noted architectural critic of the

period, Montgomery Schuyler, "it is in 'elevator architecture' . . . that the test of the applicability of a style to commercial uses must be sought . . ."¹²

Schuyler demonstrated a preference for Romanesque-inspired design over that of the Renaissance Revival style which became prevalent in the 1890s, stating

*. . . [the Romanesque Revival] has not been conventionalized or formalized so as no longer to be expressive, but is still free and flexible, and affords ample opportunity for a designer to manifest his scholarship and his individuality, if he have any.*¹³

The critic nonetheless acknowledged that the Romanesque model posed problems for the designer of steel-framed elevator buildings. The open, lightweight construction and shallow reveals in the facades of such buildings belied the massiveness and structural expressiveness of Romanesque architecture, particularly as it had been interpreted in the work of influential architect H.H. Richardson, in which the arcaded load-bearing wall was given emphatic treatment. Richardson's robust, Romanesque-inspired commercial buildings, such as the Cheney Block (1875-76, Hartford), the well-known Marshall Field Wholesale Store (1885-87, Chicago, demolished), and the F.L. Ames Store (1886-87, Boston, demolished) were transitional buildings in terms of their construction methods and therefore did not fully portray the non-load-bearing quality that was to be seen in the walls of steel skeleton buildings.¹⁴ Seeking an appropriate architectural expression for the steel-framed elevator building, architects began to pare down the wall surface of their designs and use the skeleton as the basis for a more planar composition, subordinating ornament to the overall structure yet often giving it an historical treatment.

The Romanesque idiom used in the ornamental details of the Ahrens Building also suggests Richardson's pervasive influence, as does the polychromatic palette of the materials. In the second half of the nineteenth century, various architectural theories evolved, particularly drawn from the writings of John Ruskin, which favored a polychromatic articulation on the facade of a building's structural characteristics employing clearly differentiated materials. For example, Richardson's polychromatic designs are typically executed in roughly dressed stone laid so that the

structural components of the facade, such as the voussoirs of the arches, are highlighted by darker stone than that used for the walls. The design of the Ahrens Building is similarly expressive, yet it employs a combination of stone, brick, and terra cotta -- rather than rusticated stone -- to provide striking contrasts of color and texture. In this manner Griebel adapted the contemporary aesthetic of structural polychromy into a pared down cladding appropriate to the steel-framed structure. Above a rusticated stone base marked by piers with intricately carved capitals, the light field of the buff brick walls is set off by darker, rock-faced brown brick keys and by earth-toned terra-cotta impostes and arch moldings. The curved brick profiles of the window openings, which accentuate the shallowness of the wall surface, suggest the membrane-like quality of the cladding. This spare and elegant cladding, with its integrated materials and complex arcaded bay organization, skillfully imply the building's underlying skeleton construction.

While the use of arcades as a device to unify the multiple stories of tall buildings can be identified with Richardson's work and is often associated with Louis Sullivan's vertically-articulated skyscrapers of the 1890s, it can be argued that the arcading scheme for the facades of commercial buildings in New York derived from local traditions, such as the cast-iron-fronted buildings of the 1850s and 1860s, and developed further in the work of such architects as Richard Morris Hunt and George B. Post.¹⁵ Associated with the development of arcaded buildings was the vertical, tripartite "column" formula -- in which the facade is articulated as a base, a tall shaft, and a crowning capital -- which became the codified solution for skyscraper design in the 1890s.¹⁶ Griebel's solution for the Ahrens Building was to organize the building's two facades with tall arcades in the midsection topped by single-story tiers set off with horizontal elements, the attic story forming a crowning arcade in which the bay rhythm increases. This composition gives the design a pleasing balance of horizontals and verticals.

The refined arcading scheme employed in the Ahrens Building bears comparison to other buildings of the era in New York City, notably the Corbin Building (1888-89) at John Street and Broadway, designed by Francis H. Kimball, and the McIntyre Building (1890-92, in the Ladies' Mile

Historic District) at 874 Broadway, designed by R.H. Robertson. Within the context of the evolution of arcaded buildings in the late nineteenth century, the Ahrens, Corbin, and McIntyre Buildings -- all embellished with Romanesque-inspired ornament -- are classic examples of how a layered arcaded solution could be successfully employed in commercial buildings of moderate height.

The polygonal metal-clad oriels and large arched windows which fill the broad openings of the major arcade on Lafayette Street are particularly distinctive elements of the Ahrens Building's design which give it a special quality. This form of fenestration was used tentatively for commercial architecture in New York during that period; the polygonal bay is commonly found in contemporary buildings in Chicago, notably in the work of Daniel Burnham's firm.¹⁷ In the work of Burnham's firm, the oriels are treated as extensions of the wall surface; this is a different treatment than that found in the Ahrens Building where the polygonal metal oriels contrast with the masonry facade in which they are set. The mullions and spandrels of the oriels are richly embellished with historicizing details. Though uncommon in New York, a similar oriel treatment to that of the Ahrens Building is also found in the Corbin Building.

The Ahrens Building is especially notable for its fine materials, as well as for its display of excellent craftsmanship. The patterned oriels and the deep cornice are exceptional examples of crisp, bold metalwork. The extensive use of brick with curved "bull-nose" profiles gives the facades a striking textural quality enhanced by the play of light and shadow. These bricks are found in the reveals of the arched and square-headed windows (instead of conventional applied moldings), in the rock-faced keyed corners which are intended to imitate stone, and in the bartizan-like forms at the upper stories.

Decorative brickwork emerged as a popular building material in American architecture during the late nineteenth century, as new processes and machinery were developed that allowed for the production of a wide variety of brick colors, textures, and profiles. The expanded selection of brick products during this period coincided with the revival of ornate ornamental forms based on historic prototypes; such forms were costly to produce in stone and prefabricated brick and terra-

cotta components offered an alternative.¹⁸ Inventive uses of brick were much discussed in the architectural press and notable manufacturers, such as the Eastern Hydraulic-Press Brick Co., published catalogs illustrating many specially shaped and molded pressed bricks which could be integrated into decorative patterns. These catalogs not only described the vast inventories of brick products available but also provided suggestions for the proper use and combination of pressed and ornamental components.¹⁹ The *Brickbuilder* promoted the brick arch to its readership:

*Only since the revival of brick architecture have architects given much attention to the construction of moulded brick arches . . . The improved manufacture of moulded brick and terra cotta has led a few of the more advanced to step out of the beaten track and employ moulded brick for their arches, carrying out in a more complete and satisfactory manner the idea of brick architecture.*²⁰

In this period there was also much experimentation in the combination of brick with other materials such as terra cotta and iron; the design of the Ahrens Building, which displays careful attention to the inherent qualities of its various materials, is a significant example of this trend.

Description

Occupying a narrow, slightly irregular lot at the northwest corner of Lafayette and Franklin Streets, the Ahrens Building is a seven-story store and office building extending twenty-five feet along Franklin Street and eighty feet along Lafayette Street. The building is two bays wide on Franklin Street; the main facade, on Lafayette Street, is six bays wide. At the ground story, the building has rusticated sandstone piers with delicately carved foliate capitals which support a wide masonry beltcourse (now partially concealed by signage). Above the base the building is faced in buff-colored pressed brick highlighted with brown rock-faced brick keyed corners and earth-toned terracotta ornamental details.

The entrance to the building is through a massive, richly carved arched portal in the northern end bay of the Lafayette Street facade (the door infill has been replaced). The portal is embellished with bartizans, rock-faced grids in the

spandrels, foliate carving, and a frieze bearing an interlaced pattern and "No. 76," the building's address. The two northernmost bays (adjacent to the entrance) retain historic storefront infill consisting of wood-framed show windows, bulkheads, and trim. The storefronts at the south end of the building have been replaced and the corner pier has been boxed in.

Above the base, the windows are organized into pairs; all of the openings have curved bull-nose brick reveals, and those which are square-headed have inset stone lintels. Most of the one-over-one wood sash windows survive. The most dominant feature of the Lafayette Street facade is a three-bay arcade, with the openings framed by rock-faced brown brick keys. The arcade contains three-sided metal oriel windows at the second through the fourth stories, set below large arched windows with arched mullions at the fifth story. The slender colonnettes of the oriels terminate in finials, and the spandrel panels are ornamented with lattices (between the second and third stories) and shields and bezants (between the third and fourth stories). The two-bay arcade on Franklin Street is filled with double square-headed windows separated by metal mullions. (A fire escape, which breaks the cornice, spans the facade.) The arched windows at the fifth story are unified on both facades by a terra-cotta sill course and trim at the impostes and archivolt. The impostes serve as the bases for bartizan-like forms which extend through the molded sill course of the sixth story and terminate at the sill course of the seventh (attic) story. The paired and tripled arched windows at the attic story are also outlined with terra-cotta moldings. The building is crowned by a pressed-metal cornice with modillions and a decorated fascia.

Subsequent History

The Ahrens Building remained associated with the Ahrens family until 1968 when Morris and Herbert Moskowitz acquired the property from the Ahrens Realty Corporation. The Ahrens saloon was the first of several bars and restaurants to occupy the ground floor of the building. In the 1940s, while the upper stories were being used for storage and manufacturing, the ground story was leased to Peter's Bar & Grill. Beginning in the 1960s, Doyle's Corner Pub operated in the building, and installed a glass sidewalk cafe enclosure (since removed) along the Lafayette Street facade. After acquiring the building in 1968, the Moskowitz partners undertook interior alterations to convert the third through the seventh stories, which had been used as commercial lofts, back to office space. Currently, the southern portion of the ground story is occupied by a deli; storefront alterations were undertaken to accommodate that tenant. The northern portion of the ground story along the Lafayette Street facade, where a stationery store is located, retains an historic storefront. The building is remarkably intact and remains a prominent feature in the civic center area.

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*Report Edited by Marjorie Pearson,
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NOTES

1. This section of the report is based on the following sources: I.N. Phelps Stokes, *The Iconography of Manhattan Island* 6 vols. (New York: Robert H. Dodd, 1915-1928), vol. 3, 998-999; "The Future of Elm Street," *New York Times*, Jan. 6, 1895, p. 21; Carl Condit, *The Port of New York: A History of the Rail and Terminal System from the Beginnings to Pennsylvania Station* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 23-31; William Perris, *Map of the City of New York* (New York: William Perris, 1853), vol. 3A, pl. 28 and (New York: William Perris, 1857), 3rd ed., vol. 1, pl. 15-16; *Atlas of the Entire City of New York* (New York: Geo. W. Bromley and E. Robinson, 1879), pl. 4; *Atlas of the City of New York and Part of the Bronx* (New York: E. Robinson, 1885), pl. 4; *Atlas of the City of New York, Borough of Manhattan* (Philadelphia: G.W. Bromley & Co., 1899), vol. 1, pl. 8; and *Atlas of the City of New York, Borough of Manhattan* (Philadelphia: Geo. W. Bromley, 1923-present), vol. 1S, pl. 34.

2. "The Future of Elm Street," p. 21.
3. Ibid., p. 21.
4. All extant buildings mentioned in this paragraph are designated New York City Landmarks.
5. "The Future of Elm Street," *New York Times*, Jan. 6, 1895, p. 21, includes a map which illustrates the changes in the street pattern. Photocopy in LPC Research File.
6. Henry Moscow, *The Street Book* (New York: Hagstrom Co., 1978), 50.
7. Condit, in Note 6, p. 360, speculates that "Elm" Street was a typographical error in Stokes's *Iconography...* and in the *New York Evening Post* (Oct. 2, 1851). The preponderance of evidence suggests that this is incorrect; it is likely that "Elk" survives as a modification of the name "Elm."
8. "Elm Street Off the Map," *New York Times*, Apr. 26, 1905, p.1.
9. The information in this section is based on: New York City, Tax Assessment Records, Municipal Archives and Records Center; New York County, Office of the Register, "Block Index to Conveyances," Block 172, and Liber Deeds and Conveyances, Liber 1479, pp. 268, 271, (Feb. 15, 1879); and *Trow's New York City Directories* (New York: John F. Trow, 1860-1920).
10. Information on Griebel is based on the following sources: Dennis Steadman Francis, *Architects in Practice in New York City, 1840-1900* (New York: Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records, 1979); James Ward, *Architects in Practice in New York City, 1900-1940* (New York: Committee for the Preservation of Architectural Records, 1989); LPC, *Central Park West - West 73rd - 74th Street Historic District Designation Report* (LP-0964), 1977; LPC, *Stuyvesant Square Historic District Designation Report* (LP-0893), 1975; and LPC, *Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District Designation Report* (LP-1647), 1990.
11. The New Building Application (NB 1029-1894) specified that the store and office building was to have dimensions of twenty-five feet by eighty feet and be seven stories in height. The estimated cost of the project was given as \$60,000. The recorded date of completion was July, 1895. New York City, Department of Buildings. Plans, Permits, and Dockets. [Block 172, Lot 23]
12. Montgomery Schuyler, "The Romanesque Revival in America," *Architectural Record* 1, no. 2 (Oct.-Dec., 1891), 186.
13. Schuyler, "The Romanesque Revival in New York," *Architectural Record* 1, no. 1 (July-Sept., 1891), 38.
14. See Jeffrey Karl Ochsner, *H.H. Richardson, Complete Architectural Works* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1982), 153-155, 380-384, and 418-420. According to the author, the floors of the Marshall Field store were supported with a combination of iron and heavy timber columns. Of the Ames store, which was articulated on the exterior by masonry piers separating broad, metal-framed window bays, Ochsner states "it seemed to presage the possibilities that Sullivan would work out for metal skeleton construction in the next decade," 418.
15. See Sarah Bradford Landau, "The Tall Office Building Artistically Reconsidered: The Arcaded Buildings of the New York School, c. 1870-1890," in Helen Searing, ed., *A Tribute to Henry-Russell Hitchcock* (New York: Architectural History Foundation and M.I.T. Press, 1982), 136-164. Landau argues that the arcading device was developed by New York architects before its potential was fully recognized by

architects of the Chicago School. See also Winston Weisman, "A New View of Skyscraper History," in Edgar Kaufman, Jr., ed., *The Rise of an American Architecture* (New York: Praeger, 1970).

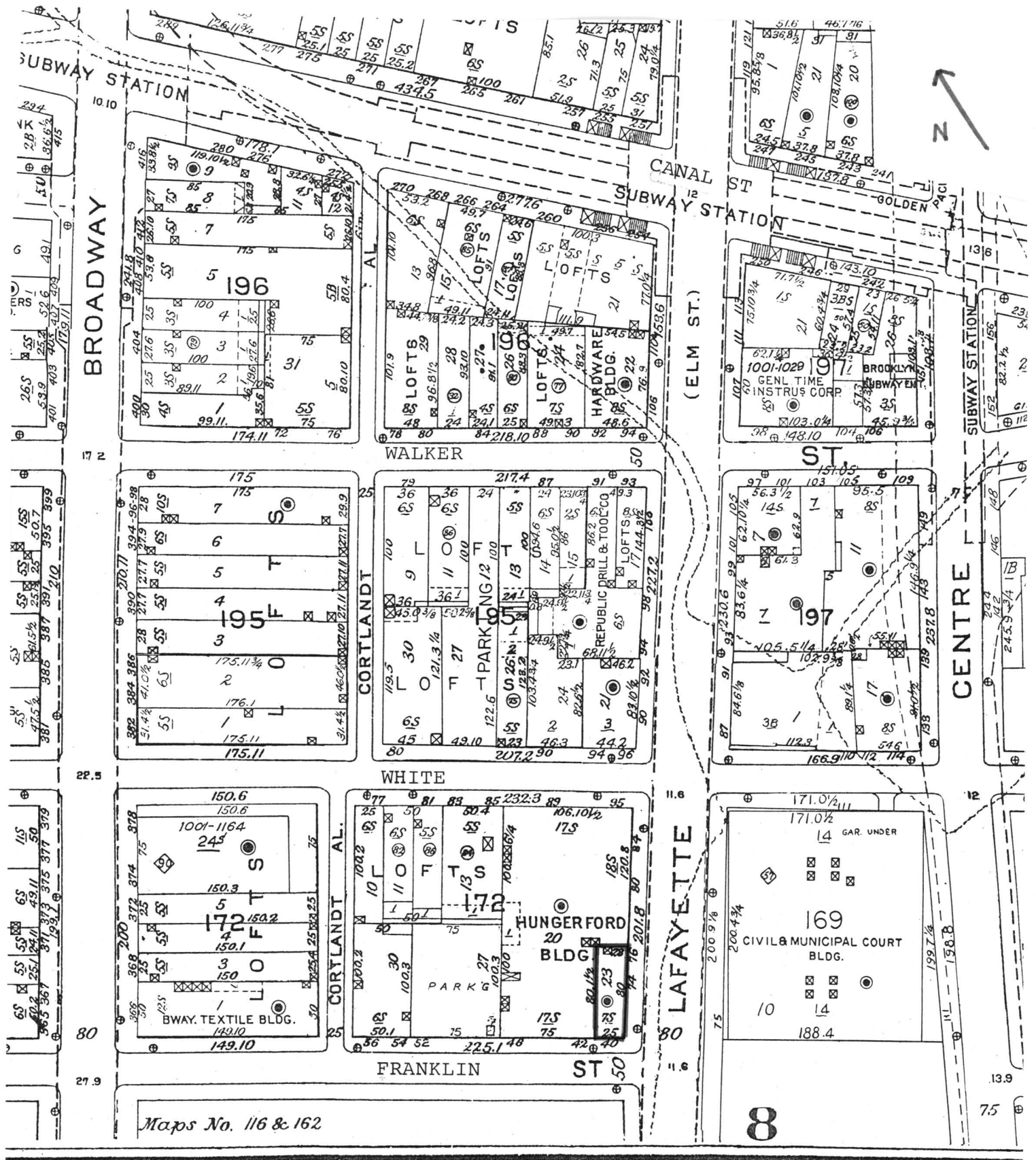
16. Schuyler cites Post's Union Trust Building (1889-90, demolished) in New York as the first use of the column formula, "The Skyscraper Up-to-Date," *Architectural Record* 8 (Jan.-Mar., 1899), 233-34. Landau, 157, points out that the tripartite scheme had been used earlier in New York, although not consistently until about 1888.
17. The polygonal bay can be considered a hallmark of Burnham's work. See Carl W. Condit, *The Chicago School of Architecture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964): for example, the Monadnock Building (Burnham & Root, 1889-91), pl. 28-30; the Majestic Hotel (D.H. Burnham & Co., 1892-93, demol.), pl. 66; the Reliance Building (1894-95), pl. 67; and the Fisher Building (1895-96), pl. 68.
18. For a brief history of decorative brickwork in the late nineteenth century, see James Stokoe, *Decorative and Ornamental Brickwork* (New York: Dover Publications, 1982).
19. See, for example, Eastern Hydraulic-Press Brick Co., *Suggestions in Brickwork* (Philadelphia, 1895). This catalog is organized into categories of architectural components, such as "arches," "jambs," "bases," "cornices," etc.
20. "Ornamental Arches," *Brickbuilder* 1, no. 1 (June, 1892), 29. While the article addressed the objection sometimes raised as to the cost and delay associated with using molded bricks -- which sometimes had to be custom made -- it also pointed out that molded brick was still less expensive than carved ornamental work and could be quite economical if a repetitive form is used, such as arches of the same radius in an arcade.

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 Ahrens Building has a special character, special historical and aesthetic interest and value as a part of the development, heritage and cultural characteristics of New York City.

The Commission further finds that, among its important qualities, the Ahrens Building, designed by Manhattan architect George H. Griebel, and constructed in 1894-95, is a distinctive example of the Romanesque Revival style successfully adapted to the requirements of a steel-framed elevator building; that Griebel's design incorporates a sophisticated arcaded composition, punctuated by unusual and elegant metal-clad polygonal oriel windows, which provides a pleasing balance of horizontal and vertical elements; that the design of the Ahrens Building displays a skillful interpretation of the contemporary aesthetic of structural polychromy -- drawn from the writings of John Ruskin and often associated with the work of H.H. Richardson -- pared down to a spare, membrane-like facade treatment; that the masonry cladding, composed of a rusticated sandstone base and buff-colored brick trimmed with rock-faced brown brick and Romanesque-inspired terracotta details, exhibits particularly fine craftsmanship which accentuates the color and texture inherent in the various materials; that the extensive use of brick with curved bull-nose profiles, found in the window reveals and the bartizan-like forms at the upper stories, gives the facades a striking textural quality enhanced by the play of light and shadow; that this seven-story store and office building was commissioned by liquor merchant Herman F. Ahrens, whose business had been located on the Lafayette Street blockfront for thirty years; that the construction of the building coincided with a municipal project to widen and improve Lafayette Street as a viable transportation route and commercial thoroughfare; and that the Ahrens Building, which was owned by the Ahrens family until the 1960s, is remarkably intact and remains a prominent feature in the civic center area.

Accordingly, pursuant to the provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 (formerly Section 534 of Chapter 21) 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 Ahrens Building, 70-76 Lafayette Street, Borough of Manhattan, and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 172, Lot 23 as its Landmark Site.



Ahrens Building, 70-76 Lafayette Street
 Landmark Site: Manhattan Tax Map Block 172, Lot 23
 Source: Sanborn, *Manhattan Land Book* (1990-91), pl. 11.



Ahrens Building, 70-76 Lafayette Street
George H. Griebel, architect
(1894-95)

Photo Credit: Elisa Urbanelli



Ahrens Building, 70-76 Lafayette Street
Lafayette Street facade

Photo Credit: EU



Ahrens Building
detail of oriel windows

Photo Credit: EU

Ahrens Building
entrance portal

Photo Credit: EU

