

Landmarks Preservation Commission
February 8, 2000; Designation List 311
LP- 2052

(Former) Hamilton Theater, 3560-3568 Broadway (aka 559-561 West 146th Street), Manhattan.
Built 1912-13; Architect Thomas W. Lamb.
Terra cotta supplied by the Atlantic Terra Cotta Company.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block Lot 2078, Lot 1 in part consisting of the land on which the described building and alleyway are situated.¹

On December 14, 1999, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Hamilton Theater and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 8). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Ten witnesses testified in favor of the proposed designation, including representatives of Manhattan Community Board No. 9, the Hamilton Heights - West Harlem Community Organization, the Society for the Architecture of the City, the Historic Districts Council, and the New York Landmarks Conservancy. Representatives of the owner testified that they do not object to the proposed designation. There were no speakers in opposition to the designation.

Summary

Constructed in 1912-13 as a vaudeville house during one of New York's theater building booms, the Hamilton Theater is located in the Hamilton Heights area of Manhattan. Designed by the great theater architect, Thomas W. Lamb, the building is one of his significant pre-World War I theaters in New York City. Lamb also designed the Regent and Hollywood Theaters, both designated New York City landmarks. The Hamilton's developers, B.S. Moss and Solomon Brill, were major builders and operators of vaudeville houses and movie theaters in the New York City area. At the time, vaudeville was the most popular form of theater in the United States. The Hamilton's two neo-Renaissance style facades, facing Broadway and West 146th Street, are dominated by large, round-arched windows with centered oculi. The upper stories feature cast-iron and terra-cotta details including caryatids, brackets, and Corinthian engaged columns. In the 1920s, movies eclipsed vaudeville in popularity; in 1928, the Hamilton was sold to the newly-created Radio-Keith-Orpheum (RKO) Radio Pictures, Inc., which converted it to one of the first movie theaters to show "talking pictures" in New York City. The theater's final screening took place in 1958; afterwards, it was used as a sports arena, a discotheque, and a church. The Hamilton Theater's imposing terra-cotta facade is a reminder of the prominent place held by vaudeville houses and movie theaters in New York City's diverse, early twentieth-century neighborhoods, and is a tribute to its talented architect, Thomas W. Lamb.



DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

History and Development of the Neighborhood²

Annexed to New York City in 1873, Harlem developed much of its current residential character during the last quarter of the nineteenth century. With elevated lines serving Second, Third, and Eighth Avenues by 1880, the blocks of central Harlem quickly filled with speculatively-built rowhouses, such as those found in the Mount Morris Park Historic District. Change, however, came more gradually to the hills overlooking the Hudson River to the west.

In the mid-nineteenth century, the area around the Hamilton Theater was known as Carmansville.³ Richard F. Carman began purchasing farm land near what is now West 152nd Street as early as the mid-1830s. He built a summer residence for himself at Fort Washington in the 1840s and then established a village named after himself to the south.

Transportation played a key role in the development of the area, which by the late nineteenth century was called lower Washington Heights.⁴ In the late 1880s, a cable street railway was installed on Tenth Avenue between 125th and 155th Streets, providing a much-needed transit link to the downtown commercial district. Not only had most streets been paved by this time, but with the support of the Washington Heights Taxpayers Association and other civic-minded groups, the city announced plans to construct an iron viaduct at West 155th Street linking the proposed Central (now Macomb's Dam) Bridge with St. Nicholas Place (the viaduct and the bridge are both designated New York City Landmarks). This ambitious scheme was intended to improve vehicular circulation, connecting the Bronx to Harlem and the Upper West Side. Consequently, real estate interest in lower Washington Heights surged after 1890. By the early 1890s, the area had grown to include hundreds of houses. In addition, a number of churches and institutional buildings had been constructed in and around the village, as well as a hotel, a cemetery, a police station.⁵ The neighborhood also had several industrial buildings located on Tenth Avenue (known as Amsterdam Avenue after 1890), such as the Joseph Loth & Company Ribbon Mill between West 150th and West 151st Streets.⁶ Broadway, in this area, was then known as the Boulevard, and later as the Boulevard Lafayette. The opening of the Interborough Rapid Transit subway along Broadway in 1904 ignited another round of speculative development. The area attracted a mix of middle to upper middle-class professionals. Census records document doctors, lawyers, merchants, as well as occasional live-in

servants of various races and ethnicities. Native-born whites tended to dominate the population, but there were also immigrants from Ireland, Italy, and Germany. Accompanying the residential construction were buildings for various religious, educational, and cultural institutions, as well as commercial concerns, including theaters featuring popular entertainment.

Unlike central Harlem, located east of Hamilton Heights, which was transformed by an influx of African-Americans beginning in the 1910s, the population of Hamilton Heights changed much more gradually. Beginning in the 1920s, the first of several area churches were acquired by African-American congregations, including the Lenox Presbyterian Church, now the St. James Presbyterian Church (409 West 141st Street), and the Washington Heights Baptist Church, now the Convent Avenue Baptist Church, located at the southeast corner of Convent Avenue and West 145th Street.⁷ By the mid-1930s, an estimated 25 percent of new residents were believed to be of African-American ancestry. They lived mainly east of Amsterdam Avenue and north of West 145th Street. The African-American population of the neighborhood continued to grow through the 1970s, when the Harlem Task Force characterized the neighborhood's population, from 142nd Street to 165th Street, as "totally black."⁸

Entertainment in Harlem in the Early Twentieth Century⁹

By the late nineteenth century, Harlem had evolved into one of New York City's major entertainment centers, a distinction which lasted well into the twentieth century. As early as 1877-79, the short-lived Pendency's Gayety Theater at 2315 Third Avenue offered drama and variety. In 1885 the "Theatre Comique" opened in a former skating rink on East 125th Street between Lexington and Third Avenues, and operated as the Harlem Theater in 1890-93. Harlem's first major theater was the Harlem Opera House (1889, J.B. McElfatrick & Sons, 207 West 125th Street, demolished), built by Oscar Hammerstein I, an inventor, cigar manufacturer, and Harlem real estate speculator (and later Times Square impresario). Intended to serve Harlem's wealthy elite, the Opera House presented opera, drama, and concerts. Hammerstein also built the Columbus Theater (1890, J.B. McElfatrick & Sons, demolished), 112-118 East 125th Street, for similar entertainments. Both theaters, two of New York's largest at the time, were financial failures; after Hammerstein lost title, the Opera House

became a popular vaudeville theater, while the Columbus was a successful venue for minstrel, vaudeville, and variety shows.

In the early twentieth century, theaters featuring legitimate, vaudeville, burlesque, variety, and motion picture entertainment proliferated in Harlem, particularly along 116th and 125th Streets, as well as Seventh Avenue (now Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard) and Broadway.¹⁰ Harlem theaters constructed specifically for vaudeville included the Alhambra, the Lafayette, the Victoria, and the Hamilton. With the migration of African Americans to central Harlem in the 1910s, many theaters began to cater to African-American audiences; the first to do so were the Lincoln Theater (before 1909; 1915, Jardine, Hill & Murdock, 58-66 West 135th Street) and the Crescent Theater (1909, Maximilian Zipkes, 36-38 West 138th Street, demolished). In 1913, the Lafayette Theater was the first major theater to desegregate, becoming a premiere Harlem showplace for black performers.¹¹

Vaudeville¹²

The term “vaudeville” refers to that type of theatrical entertainment in which a variety of performances, such as comedy and magic acts, were interspersed with song and dance.¹³ The movement originated in 1840s London by tavern owners who wanted to emulate the musical programs offered by local pleasure resorts. At first they erected a simple stage at one end of the saloons, moving the usual chairs, tables and bar to the other side. Success bred greater sophistication and led ultimately in the 1880s to the construction of actual music halls, each with a fully equipped stage, proscenium arch, and multiple tier auditorium.

In America, “concert saloons” began appearing in New York City in the early 1850s, offering customers a variety of entertainments drawn from minstrel shows and circuses as an inducement to buy alcoholic refreshments. By the late 1850s, concert saloons, honky-tonks, and free-and-easies, as they were called, had sprung up from coast to coast. The largest and most elaborate of these boasted a regular auditorium and stage as well as a commodious bar or “wine room” serviced by “waiter girls.” The entertainment in such places tended to be boisterous and lewd, catering to the tastes of an almost exclusively male clientele.¹⁴

Beginning in the mid-1860s, however, a number of concert saloons began to advertise alcohol-free, smoke-free matinees suitable to women and children. At the forefront was Tony Pastor, the innovative impresario, who saw the opportunity to extend the patronage of

variety theater by making it acceptable for the whole family.

In the 1880s, a number of other impresarios followed Pastor’s lead, notably Benjamin Franklin Keith, his partner Edward Albee, and the Albany showman, F.F. Proctor. As vaudeville evolved, its programs moved progressively away from the excessive slapstick of earlier comedy toward more genteel entertainments, including performances by stars of the legitimate stage in dramatic sketches and excerpts from current productions. Keith and Albee opened the first of many theaters in the city on Union Square in 1893 and were among the first to plan nationwide tours, establishing a national booking system in 1900 with headquarters in the city. From the 1880s to the 1920s vaudeville was the most popular form of theater in the United States and New York City was its capitol. In 1913, Times Square became the heart of New York City vaudeville after Albee opened the Palace Theater (1912-13, Kirchhoo & Rose, a designated landmark) at Seventh Avenue and 47th Street; the theater became the center of Keith’s operations with a booking office located upstairs. In addition to the celebrated theaters in Times Square, a “subway circuit” took shape along subway lines to the outskirts of the city, running from the Bronx to Brooklyn. Nationally-known performers, such as Eddie Cantor and Sophie Tucker, could tour within the city for weeks.

During the early 20th century especially, it created its own irresistible glamor and nurtured its own famous – and extremely well-paid – stars. The mid-1920s saw the consolidation of vaudeville as an important part of contemporary culture, but it was already showing signs of decline. Radio and motion pictures began to drain vaudeville of its strength, wooing its audiences with their technologically novel, more accessible, and less expensive entertainments.¹⁵ By 1932, theatrical vaudeville in New York had ceased. Former vaudeville performers such as Groucho Marx, Fanny Brice, James Cagney, and Eubie Blake adapted their routines to musical theater, radio, film, and later, television.¹⁶

B.S. Moss and Solomon Brill, Theater Developers and Operators.¹⁷

A major New York City vaudeville and motion picture operator, Benjamin S. Moss (c.1878-1951), raised in the Yorkville section of Manhattan, began his career with entertainment giants William Fox and Marcus Loew, before establishing his own circuit. Moss organized the syndicate that built the Washington Theater (1910-11, Thomas Lamb with V. Hugo Koehler), an early movie theater at 1801-1807 Amsterdam Avenue, and later presided over a chain of

eight vaudeville and movie theaters which bore his name (including the Hamilton), as well as sixteen other theaters with which he had booking arrangements. As a producer of silent films (c.1914-18), Moss was also a pioneer in the transition of the motion picture business in New York from nickelodeons, which were small storefront theaters that showed movies, to large theaters designed specifically for this purpose. Moss's partner in the Hamilton Theater was Solomon Brill (c.1878-1932), a New York City native, who was an early proprietor of movie theaters. Brill built his first motion picture theater in 1904 - Brooklyn's Broadway Theater, which was also that borough's first movie theater. In the 1910s and 20s, Brill built many more theaters in the New York metropolitan area. Brill's association with Moss and the Hamilton Theater ended in 1915 when he abandoned vaudeville to concentrate on motion picture theaters. At the time of his death, Brill owned fifteen movie theaters, located in Staten Island, Brooklyn, Long Island, New Jersey, and upstate New York.

In 1920, Moss merged his theater interests with the Keith & Proctor vaudeville chain, which was operated by E.F. Albee. The new circuit was known as the "Keith-Moss-Proctor." Moss retired from vaudeville in 1928 when he sold his theater interests to the newly-created Radio-Keith-Orpheum (RKO) Radio Pictures, Inc.¹⁸ He went on to build and operate movie theaters in New York, New Jersey, and Long Island, to produce television programs,¹⁹ and to own several local real estate companies until his death in 1951.

Thomas W. Lamb, Architect²⁰

The Hamilton Theater was designed by one of America's great theater architects, Thomas W. Lamb (1871-1942), who created over three hundred theaters of all types in the United States and around the world. Born in Dundee, Scotland, Lamb moved with his family by 1883 to New York City, where his father worked as an engineer. Lamb opened an architectural office around 1892, prior to having any particular architectural training. He enrolled in general science at the Cooper Union in 1894 (his studies included mechanical drawing and acoustics), graduating in 1898, and worked for a time as a building inspector and plan examiner.

Lamb's earliest-known theater project was the 1904 alteration of the Gotham Theater at 165 East 125th Street (demolished). Theaters became his specialty, and he worked on a number of renovations as well as new theater projects. Notable early theater commissions by Lamb include the 2,267-seat City Theater (1909-10, demolished) for William Fox, which housed both vaudeville and motion pictures (and was

one of the first large theaters to show movies in New York City), 114 East 14th Street; and the National Theater/National Winter Garden Theater (1911-12, demolished), a Yiddish theater/vaudeville house at East Houston and Chrystie Streets. Lamb is best-known both for his designs for monumental movie theaters and for small neighborhood houses for the leading chains of the day, such as Loew's, Proctor's, Keith's, RKO, and Trans-Lux.

Lamb's theaters fall into three design categories. The first group, designed before 1920 (including the Hamilton), were generally neo-classical or classically derived. In general, Lamb's most elaborately detailed theaters during his early period were the expensive, often larger, theaters located in the midtown Manhattan area, such as the Strand (1914, Broadway and 47th Street, demolished). Many of his modest neighborhood theaters, including Loew's Avenue B (c.1912, 343 Avenue B, demolished), B.F. Keith's 81st Street (1913, Broadway and 81st Street), and the Hamilton shared various similarities, such as three-story facades of terra-cotta, arched bays, and prominent cornices.²¹ By the 1920s, Lamb was inspired by the French Rococo, and the Spanish and Italian Baroque. In the 1930s, Lamb turned toward Hindu, Chinese, Moorish, Mayan, and Romanesque influences.

The Hamilton Theater is one of Lamb's significant pre-World War I theater buildings in New York City. Lamb's other remaining early theaters in New York include: the Washington (1910-11, with V. Hugo Koehler), 1801-1807 Amsterdam Avenue; the Eltinge (later Empire, 1911-12), 236-240 West 42nd Street; the Audubon Theater and Ballroom (1912, front facade partly extant), 3940-3960 Broadway; the Regent (1912-13), 1906-1916 Seventh Avenue;²² Loew's Boulevard (1912-13), 1032 Southern Boulevard, the Bronx; the Cort (1912-13), 138-146 West 48th Street;²³ Loew's Bedford (1913, altered), 1362-1372 Bedford Avenue, Brooklyn; and the 81st Street (1913-14, auditorium demolished), 2248-2258 Broadway.

Lamb received commissions for some of the most prominent and enormous movie theaters on Broadway in the vicinity of Times Square in the 1910s and 1920s. These included the Strand (1914), the Rialto (1916), the Rivoli (1917), the Capitol (1918-19, the first American movie theater with over 5,000 seats), and the Loew's State Theater Building (1921), now all demolished.

Although best known for his theaters, Lamb designed other types of buildings. Among the more notable of these buildings are the Pythian Temple (1926-27), 135-145 West 70th Street, a private club;²⁴ the Paramount Hotel (1927-28), 235-245 West 46th

Street; and the second Madison Square Garden (1925-29, demolished), Eighth Avenue and West 49th Street.

Construction of the Hamilton Theater²⁵

On February 27, 1912, vaudeville operator Benjamin S. Moss and theater developer Solomon Brill formed the Bradhurst Amusement & Building Company “to engage in the theatrical business in all its branches, including to develop lands, to maintain a theatrical and vaudeville agency, to engage in moving picture enterprise, to employ artists, [etc],” with an initial capital stock of \$50,000.²⁶ On March 5th, the company entered into a twenty-one year lease with an option of three renewals with Florence A. Acker²⁷ for ten unimproved building lots located at the northeast corner of Broadway and West 146th Street, with two additional lots extending through the block to West 147th Street. A few days later, the *Real Estate Record and Guide* announced that the theatrical firm of Moss & Brill would soon build a 2,500 seat theater on the site, and that the building would also include ground-story stores, a roof garden, a basement rathskeller, and assembly rooms and offices on the upper floors. Later in March, architect Thomas W. Lamb filed plans with the Department of Buildings for theater and loft building to cost \$150,000.²⁸

Moss & Brill’s new theater was at first named the “Lafayette,” perhaps as a historical link to its location along the stretch of Broadway that was called the Boulevard Lafayette until 1899. Before its completion, however, the theater was renamed “Moss & Brill’s Hamilton Theatre,” possibly to avoid confusion with a nearby theater also named the “Lafayette” that was under construction at the same time.²⁹ Lamb’s plans for the Hamilton’s terra-cotta facade consisted of a polished granite base with cast-iron bulkheads, plate-glass show windows with prism-glass transoms, terra-cotta balustrades and cast-iron caryatid columns at the second story, elaborate third-story fenestration with cast-iron mullions and centered oculi, and a prominent terra-cotta cornice with masked finials. The elaborate entryway to the theater featured an arched transom, central medallion with an outstretched eagle flanked by winged angels and urns, and a scrolled copper marquee with a central mask and glass pendants. Brass eagles holding suspended globes at the corners and center of the facade were later eliminated from the plans.³⁰

The Hamilton Theater was built during a period when New York was experiencing, according to the *Real Estate Record and Guide*, “one of the greatest theatre building booms in its history.”³¹ Thirty-six theater projects were underway in 1912, eleven of which had been designed by Lamb, including the

Hamilton. The demand for new theaters reflected the rapid growth of the city’s neighborhoods and the increasing popularity of vaudeville and motion pictures. The escalating price of admission to downtown theaters, and the time and expense associated with traveling downtown from outlying residential areas encouraged the construction of neighborhood theaters. In addition, the cheaper and more accessible neighborhood theaters attracted a new audience of teenage patrons who resided and attended school nearby.

Construction of Moss & Brill’s Hamilton Theater, which began on June 26, 1912, proceeded at a very fast pace; it opened on January 23, 1913, a little more than six months after building commenced.³² On opening night, there were performances by the theater’s resident orchestra, a series of short dramas, several comedians, an acrobatic act, and short motion pictures. Besides a schedule of performances, a list of admission prices, and the hours of operation, the printed program for the evening included a comprehensive description of the theater’s interior and systems, including dimensions, materials, and decoration. Inexplicably, George Keister, another prominent theater architect, was credited with its design, but no evidence connecting him with the Hamilton’s construction has been found.³³

Many of the construction and contracting firms that produced the Hamilton took advertising space in the opening night program, including the Vogel Cabinet Company - architectural woodwork and building trim; Fostaria Incandescent Lamp Works - lighting; William Dauphin - bronze and ironwork; Cassidy & Son Manufacturing Company - light fixtures; Superior Cornice Works - roofing; and Strauss & Company - signage. The general contractor was Cramp & Company, which also built the Palace and Jefferson Theaters. The terra cotta was supplied by the Atlantic Terra Cotta Company, one of the major suppliers of building material at that time.³⁴

Subsequent History³⁵

When Solomon Brill ended his association with the Hamilton in 1915, Moss & Brill’s Hamilton Theater was renamed simply the “B.S. Moss Hamilton Theatre.”³⁶ In 1920, Moss and E.F. Albee of the Keith & Proctor vaudeville chain combined their interests into the Greater New York Vaudeville Theaters Corp., which assumed management of the Hamilton and renamed it “B.F. Keith’s Hamilton Theater.” Moss continued to showcase vaudeville acts and current photo-plays at the Hamilton until he retired in 1928, selling off his theater interests, including the

Hamilton's leasehold, to Radio-Keith-Orpheum(RKO) Radio Pictures. RKO eliminated vaudeville from the Hamilton, installed a sound system, and converted it to one of the first movie theaters to show "talking pictures" in New York City. Under RKO's ownership, the theater's interior was redecorated in 1943 and its lobby modernized in 1954. That year, RKO purchased the underlying land from the Acker estate. RKO closed the Hamilton in 1958, leasing it for use as a sports arena and then as a discotheque. An evangelical church purchased the building in 1965, selling it to investors in the mid-1990s; the theater auditorium has remained vacant since that time, although the storefronts have been continually occupied. The marquee was removed in 1995, when the lobby was converted to retail space.

Description

The Hamilton Theater, located at the northeast corner of Broadway and West 146th Street, is composed of two buildings connected by a one-story passageway across an alley between the buildings. The alley, which runs parallel to Broadway, is entered from 146th Street through a non-historic metal gate. The three-story west building has stores at ground level and commercial space on its upper floors. It has two neo-Renaissance style facades, dominated by two-story, arched bays, facing Broadway and West 146th Street. The facades are five and four bays wide, respectively. The facades feature terra-cotta columns at ground-level with granite bases and molded capitals. They flank arched openings, with scrolled keystones, containing non-historic storefront infill consisting of masonry, aluminum, and glass, with security gates and projecting box awnings/signs. The entrance to the theater lobby and the theater marquee, originally located at the center bay on Broadway, have been removed. The second bay from the corner, facing 146th Street, retains historic masonry infill at ground level.

The upper facades feature two-story arches with wide architraves and scrolled, foliate keystones. The center arch on Broadway has a prominent keystone decorated with a wreath and festoons. The arches contain elaborate cast-iron, wood and glass infill, consisting of balustrades and caryatids at the second floor, wide spandrels with prominent wave moldings, and large, round-arched windows with molded and curved enframements and centered oculi at the third floor. The bays are flanked by terra-cotta piers and Corinthian engaged columns supporting entablatures, urns and scrolled brackets with masks. The original, elaborate terra-cotta cornice, which featured paired, scrolled brackets dentils, and surmounting masks, was replaced with a paneled brick parapet wall in the 1930s. There is a non-historic projecting sign at the south corner of the Broadway facade.

The east building, facing West 146th Street, which contains the theater itself, has a brick elevation containing fire exits from the orchestra and stage entrances at the ground story, and additional exits from the balcony and boxes onto covered, iron balconies with stairs and a ladder leading to the sidewalk. Some of the exits have non-historic security gates. There is a single window at balcony level. The north elevation, partially visible through the lot facing West 147th Street (not part of this designation) has plain red brick without ornamentation, random fenestration, non-historic sash, and fire exits located similarly to those that face 146th Street. The brick elevations of both the east and west buildings, which face the alley, have random fenestration, historic and non-historic sash, and non-historic security grilles. There is a wooden water tower on the roof.

Report prepared by
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NOTES

1. This excludes the parking lot at the northern end of the lot.
2. This section was adapted from LPC, *Nicholas C. and Agnes Benziger House Designation Report* (LP-2030) (New York: City of New York, 1999), prepared by Matthew A. Postal; LPC, *Former 30th Police Precinct Station House Designation Report* (LP-1389) (New York: City of New York, 1986), prepared by Nancy Goeschel; LPC, *Hamilton Heights Historic District Designation Report* (LP-0872) (New York: City of New York, 1974) and draft report of proposed extension, prepared by Matthew Postal, 1999; LPC, *Joseph Loth & Company Silk Ribbon Mill Designation Report* (LP-1860) (New York; City of New York, 1993), prepared by Betsy Bradley; *Mount Morris Bank Building Designation Report* (LP-1839) (New York: City of New York, 1993), prepared by Andrew S. Dolkart; LPC, *Regent Theater (now First Corinthian Baptist Church)*

Designation Report (LP-1841) (New York: City of New York, 1994), prepared by Jay Shockley; and Robert W. Snyder, "Washington Heights," *Encyclopedia of New York City*, ed. Kenneth W. Jackson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 1242.

3. *Appleton's Dictionary of New York and Its Vicinity* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1886) defined Carmansville as extending from West 135th Street to West 160th Street.
4. Modern Washington Heights is considered to be bounded on the south by 155th Street and on the north by Dyckman Street, from the Hudson to the Harlem Rivers. The area south of 155th Street, including the location of the Hamilton Theater, is now referred to as Hamilton Heights.
5. A police precinct station house had been situated at Tenth Avenue (now Amsterdam Avenue) and West 152nd Street since 1864; it was replaced in 1871-72 by the 30th Precinct Station House, designed by Nathaniel D. Bush. A designated New York City Landmark, it is no longer in police use.
6. Designed by architect Hugo Kafka, it was built in 1885-86 and is a designated New York City Landmark.
7. Both of these churches are located in the Hamilton Heights Historic District.
8. *A Profile of Harlem: Findings of the Harlem Task Force* (The Harlem Urban Development Corporation), 28-29.
9. This section was adapted from: LPC, *Apollo Theater Designation Report* (LP-1299) (New York: City of New York, 1983), prepared by Jay Shockley, and LPC, *Regent Theater (now First Corinthian Baptist Church) Designation Report* (LP-1841) (New York: City of New York, 1994), prepared by Jay Shockley.
10. Among these were the Alhambra Theater (1905, J.B. McElfrick & Sons) 2114 Seventh Avenue; the Lafayette Theater (1912, Hugo Koehler, subsequently re-surfaced), 2223-2237 Seventh Avenue; Hurtig & Seamon's New (Burlesque) Theater (later the Apollo Theater, 1913-14, George Keister, a designated New York City Landmark and Interior Landmark), 253 West 125th Street; and Loew's Victoria Theater (1917, Thomas W. Lamb), 235 West 125th Street. The Regent Theater (1913, Thomas W. Lamb, a designated New York City Landmark), 1906-1916 Seventh Avenue, was one of the first deluxe theaters in the United States built for the purpose of showing motion pictures.
11. African-Americans were restricted to the balconies in the many theaters.
12. This section was adapted from: LPC, *Palace Theater Designation Report* (LP-1367) (New York: City of New York, 1987), and includes the following sources: Douglas Gilbert, *American Vaudeville: Its Life and Times* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1940); Claudia C. Hart, "The New York Theaters of Thomas Lamb" (Columbia University Master Thesis, 1983), 13, 18; LPC, *Apollo Theater Designation Report* (LP-1299) (New York: City of New York, 1983), prepared by Jay Shockley; *Regent Theater (now First Corinthian Baptist Church) Designation Report* (LP-1841) (New York: City of New York, 1994), prepared by Jay Shockley; LPC, Research files; "Music-Hall," *Oxford Companion to the Theatre*, ed. Phyllis Hartmoll, 4th ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1983), 575; Robert W. Snyder, "Vaudeville," *Encyclopedia of New York City*, ed. Kenneth W. Jackson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 1226; Marian Spitzer, *The Palace* (New York: Atheneum, 1969), 7, 65-70; "Vaudeville," *Oxford Companion*, 859; "Vaudeville, American," *Oxford Companion*, 859-861; *Webster's New World Dictionary*, David B. Gurlanik, Ed. In Chief (New York: Prentice Hall Press, 1979), 529; and Parker Zellers, *Tony Pastor: Dean of the Vaudeville Stage* (Ypsilanti, Michigan: Eastern Michigan University Press, 1971), xiii-xix, 41-42.
13. The word itself seems to have derived from the French region of Vau de Vire (valley of the Vire River) where residents gathered in the 15th century to sing satirical songs about their British invaders. Another possible source was Revolutionary Paris where scathing political ballads were sung in the "voix de ville" (voice of the city). Whatever its origin, the term "vaudeville" ultimately came to be applied in the late 19th and early 20th centuries to the successor of variety entertainment in America.
14. At the time, entertainment in New York City was divided along class lines: opera was chiefly for the upper middle and upper classes, minstrel shows and melodramas for the middle class, and variety shows in concert saloons for men of the working class and lower middle class.

15. Vaudeville theaters began showing films as part of their programs as early as 1896 from makeshift projection booths; by 1905, however, new vaudeville theaters were being built with projection rooms and the older theaters were being retrofitted with permanent booths.
16. For the last years of vaudeville, see Joe Laurie, Jr., *Vaudeville: From the Honky-tonks to the Palace* (New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1953).
17. This section was adapted from LPC, *Regent Theater (now First Corinthian Baptist Church) Designation Report* (LP-1841) (New York: City of New York, 1994), prepared by Jay Shockley, and includes the following sources: Sol Brill obit, *New York Times*, Jan. 27, 1932, p. 21; Sadie Vergesslich Brill obit, *New York Times*, Jan. 2, 1960, p. 13; B.S. Moss obituary, *New York Times* and *New York Herald Tribune*, Dec. 13, 1951; Anthony Slide, *The American Film Industry: A Historical Dictionary* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 49-50, 289-290; Douglas Gilbert, *American Vaudeville* (New York: Whittlesey House, 1940), 383; and Liz-Anne Bawder, ed., *Oxford Companion to Film* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 595-596.
18. RKO had its origins in the formation of the Film Booking Office of America (FBO) in 1922. Acquired by Joseph F. Kennedy in 1926, FBO was later joined with interests of David Sarnoff of the Radio Corporation of America (RCA). In 1928 (the year after sound was introduced in American films), FBO merged with the Keith-Albee-Orpheum vaudeville circuit to form RKO Radio Pictures, a production and distribution company, which was for the next two decades one of the five major Hollywood studios. By 1930 RKO owned around 200 vaudeville houses which showed movies along with variety programs.
19. Moss also presented the first New York stage presentation on television from the Broadway Theater in 1931.
20. This section was adapted from: LPC, *Regent Theater (now First Corinthian Baptist Church) Designation Report* (LP-1841) (New York: City of New York, 1994), prepared by Jay Shockley, and includes the following sources: Claudia C. Hart, "The New York Theaters of Thomas Lamb" (Columbia University Masters Thesis, 1983); Thomas W. Lamb Job Book and Index, Avery Library, Columbia University; Thomas W. Lamb obituary, *New York Times*, Feb. 27, 1942; LPC, Thomas W. Lamb file; and Hillary Russell, "An Architect's Progress: Thomas White Lamb," *Marquee* 21 (1989).
21. In addition, all three occupied corner sites and had ground-level stores flanking the lobby entrances. The Hamilton and the 81st Street both consisted of two buildings, separated by an alley containing a one-story passageway connecting the lobbies in the front to the auditoriums at the rear (the 81st Street's auditorium was subsequently demolished); however, the 81st Street's interior was more elaborately ornamented than the Hamilton's.
22. The Regent is a designated New York City Landmark.
23. The Cort is a designated New York City Landmark and Interior Landmark.
24. The Pythian Temple is in the Upper West Side/Central Park West Historic District.
25. This section was compiled from the following sources: *Atlas of the City of New York, Borough of Manhattan* (New York: G.W. Bromley & Co., 1898-1908), v. 5, pl. 3; Thomas W. Lamb Job Book and Index, Avery Library, Columbia University; "Moss & Brill's Hamilton Theater Programme," opening night, January 23, 1913; New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds, Conveyances, and Leases; New York County, Old Records Division, Surrogates Court, Certificates of Incorporation, Consolidation, and Dissolution; The New York Architectural Terra Cotta Archive, Avery Library, Columbia University; *Real Estate Record and Guide*, March 9, 1912, pp. 130, 482, 497; March 30, 1912, p. 661; June 15, 1912, p. 1310; August 31, 1912, p. 410; October 5, 1912, p. 640; Hilary Russell, "An Architect's Progress: Thomas White Lamb," *Marquee* 21, (1989).
26. The corporation's capital stock was increased to \$100,000 in April. "Bradhurst Amusement & Building Co. Certificate of Incorporation," New York County, Old Records Division, Surrogates Court, Certificates of Incorporation, Consolidation, and Dissolution.
27. The Acker family acquired the land in 1900 and retained ownership until 1953.

28. Lamb re-filed the application in June; the estimated cost had increased to \$170,000, although the size of the theater was reduced to 1,835 seats.
29. Located at 2223-2237 Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Boulevard (Seventh Avenue), its facade, designed by Victor Hugo Koehler, was replaced in the early 1990s.
30. On the interior, a longitudinal lobby, entered from Broadway, led to a short flight of steps up to the theater, which features a large balcony, numerous boxes, a stage behind a proscenium arch, and fire exits on three sides of the auditorium. The theater also has a mezzanine containing smoking rooms, lavatories, lounges, etc. The orchestra held 1094 seats, plus 36 box seats, while the balcony contained 605 seats and 100 box seats. The theater auditorium and the lobby are located in two separate buildings on the same lot, that are connected via a one-story enclosed passageway across the alley between the buildings. Several fire doors exit from the auditorium into the alley, which leads to West 146th Street and the unimproved lot facing West 147th Street. Additional fire doors exit directly onto West 146th Street and into the lot. This configuration of exits may have been incorporated into the theater's plan, in part, to satisfy the provisions of the city's building law governing fire safety, which the Hamilton's opening-night program boasted had been exceeded with regard to egress and also ventilation.
31. "New Theatres a Boon to Real Estate Values," *Real Estate Record and Guide*, March 16, 1912, pp. 525-526.
32. Apparently its construction was phased to enable the theater to open as soon as possible, and well advance of the completion of the entire complex, which did not occur until December 23, 1913, according to Department of Buildings records.
33. The appearance of the theater, both inside and out, conforms to Lamb's design, of which a large number of drawings survive. However, Keister did file the building's first alteration in June 1913 for minor work on the building's interior.
34. Firms that worked on the interior include the Rambusch Decorating Company - interior decoration; New York Studios - scenery painting; Vogel Cabinet Company - architectural woodwork; Fostaria Incandescent Lamp Works - lighting; Michael Nocenti, Inc. - artificial marble and stone; William Dauphin - bronze and ironwork; and The McGowan & Connolly Company - interior marble.
35. This section was compiled from the following sources: "B.S. Moss' Hamilton Theatre," program, c.1915; New York City, Department of Buildings, Alteration docket and Buildings Information System (BIS); New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds, Conveyances, and Leases; New York County, Old Record Division, Surrogates Court, Certificates of Incorporation, Consolidation, and Dissolution; *New York Times*, Dec. 23, 1928, VIII, p.5; and Hillary Russell, "An Architect's Progress: Thomas White Lamb," *Marquee*, 21 (1989), p.22.
36. In conjunction with this, the marquee was replaced. New York City, Department of Buildings, ALT 2375-1915.

FINDINGS AND DESIGNATION

On the basis of careful consideration of the history, the architecture, and other features of this building, the Landmarks Preservation Commission finds that the Hamilton Theater has a special character and 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 Hamilton Theater was constructed in 1912-13 for Benjamin S. Moss and Solomon Brill; that it was designed in the neo-Renaissance style by the great theater architect Thomas W. Lamb; that the terra cotta was supplied by the Atlantic Terra Cotta Company, one of the major suppliers at that time; that it was constructed as a vaudeville house during one of New York's theater building booms; that the building is one of Lamb's significant pre-World War I theaters in New York City; that the developers, B.S. Moss and Solomon Brill, were major builders and operators of vaudeville houses and movie theaters in the New York City area; that, at the time, vaudeville was the most popular form of theater in the United States; that the Hamilton's two neo-Renaissance style facades, facing Broadway and West 146th Street, are dominated by large, round-arched windows with centered oculi; that the upper stories feature cast-iron and terra-cotta details including caryatids, brackets, and Corinthian engaged columns; that the Hamilton was sold to the newly-created Radio-Keith-Orpheum (RKO) Radio Pictures, Inc, which converted it to one of the first movie theaters to show "talking pictures" in New York City in 1928; that the theater's final screening took place in 1958 and was later used as a sports arena, a discotheque, and a church; that the Hamilton Theater's imposing terra-cotta facade is a reminder of the prominent place held by vaudeville houses and movie theaters in New York City's diverse, early twentieth-century neighborhoods; and that it is a tribute to its talented architect, Thomas W. Lamb.

Accordingly, pursuant to provisions of Chapter 74, Section 3020 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 Hamilton Theater, 3560-3568 Broadway (aka 559-561 West 146th Street and 538-540 West 147th Street), and designates Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 2078, Lot 1 in part consisting of the land on which the described building and alleyway are situated, as its Landmark Site.



(Former) Hamilton Theater, 3560-3568 Broadway, Manhattan

Photo: Carl Forster, 1999



(Former) Hamilton Theater, 3560-3568 Broadway, Manhattan, c . 1928.
From *Billy Rose Theater Collection*, New York Public Library of the Performing Arts.



(Former) Hamilton Theater, 3560-3568 Broadway, Manhattan, c. 1928.
From *Billy Rose Theater Collection*, New York Public Library of the Performing Arts.



(Former) Hamilton Theater, 3560-3568 Broadway, Manhattan.

Photo: Carl Forster, 1999



(Former) Hamilton Theater, 3560-3568 Broadway, Manhattan.
Broadway storefront detail.

Photo: Carl Forster, 1999



(Former) Hamilton Theater, 3560-3568 Broadway, Manhattan.
Detail at second story.

Photo: Carl Forster, 1999



(Former) Hamilton Theater, 3560-3568 Broadway, Manhattan.
Detail at second story.

Photo: Carl Forster, 1999



(Former) Hamilton Theater, 3560-3568 Broadway, Manhattan.
Detail at third story.

Photo: Carl Forster, 1999



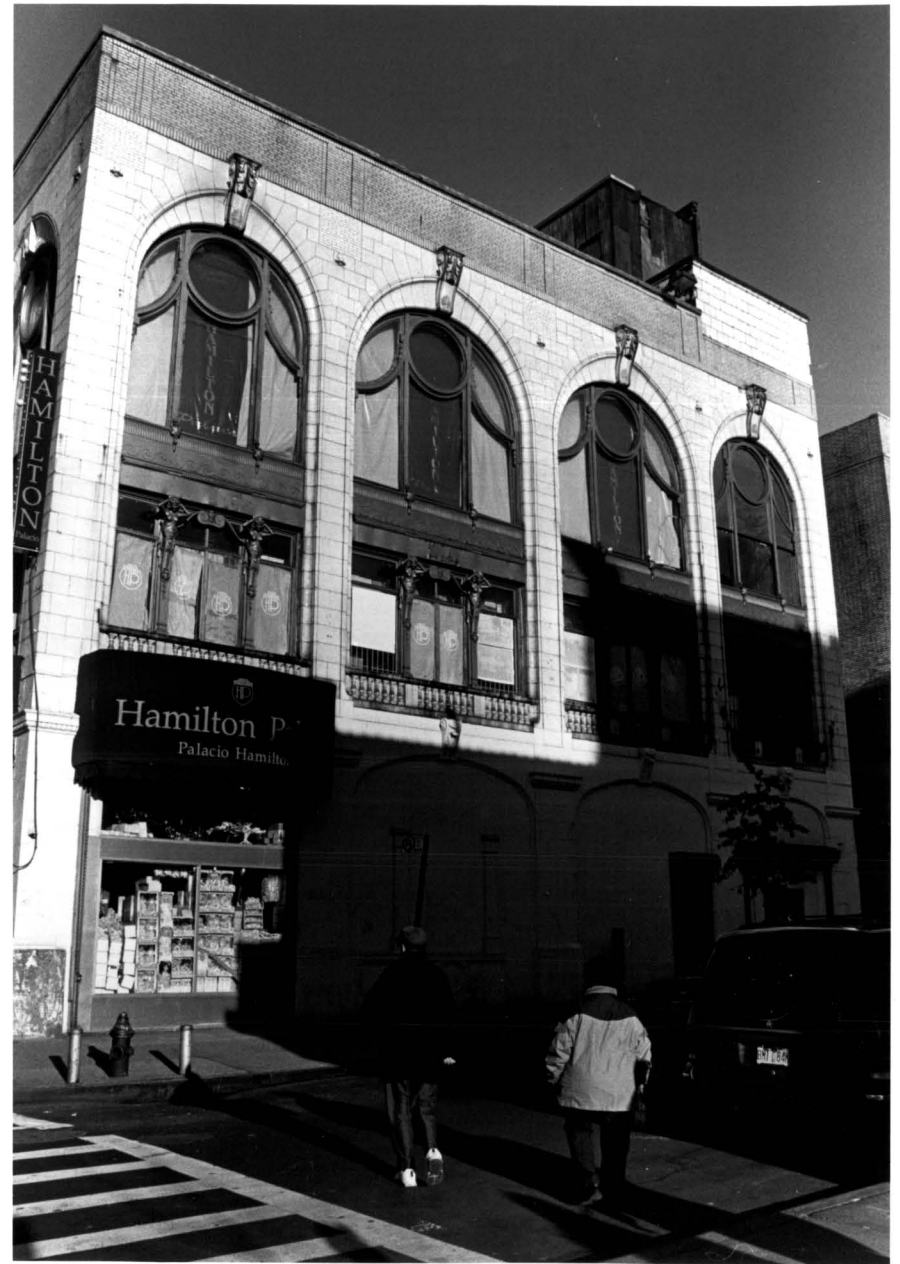
(Former) Hamilton Theater, 3560-3568 Broadway, Manhattan.
Broadway detail. *Photo: Carl Forster, 1999*



(Former) Hamilton Theater, 3560-3568 Broadway, Manhattan.
Terra cotta detail. *Photo: Carl Forster, 1999*



(Former) Hamilton Theater, 3560-3568 Broadway, Manhattan.
Detail at third story. *Photo: Carl Forster, 1999*



(Former) Hamilton Theater, 3560-3568 Broadway, Manhattan.
West 146th Street facade. *Photo: Carl Forster, 1999*



Benjamin S. Moss

From *Billy Rose Collection*, New York Public Library for the Performing Arts.



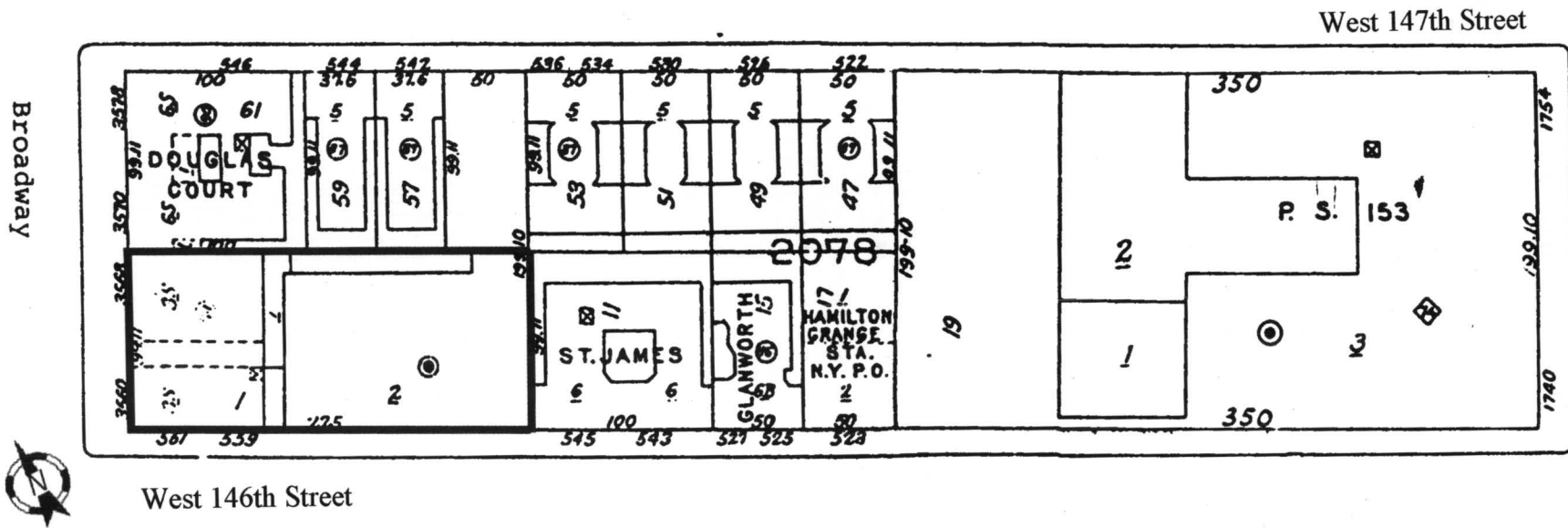
(Former) Hamilton Theater, 3560-3568 Broadway, Manhattan.
Photo: Carl Forster, 2000

West 146th Street facade.

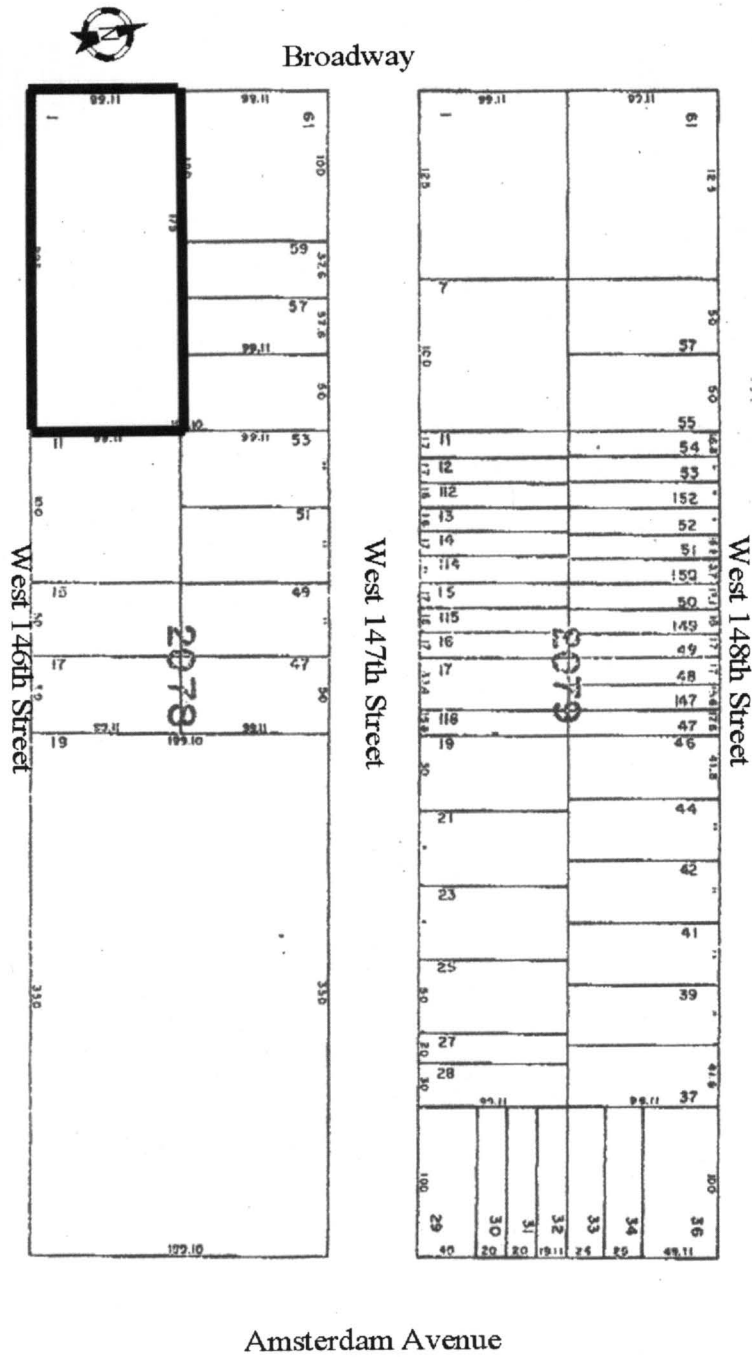


(Former) Hamilton Theater, 3560-3568 Broadway, Manhattan. North elevation.
Photo: Carl Forster, 2000

For Illustrative Purposes Only



(Former) Hamilton Theater, 3560-3568 Broadway, Manhattan.
Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 2078, Lot 1,
consisting of the land on which the described building and alleyway are
situated. Graphic Source: The Sanborn Manhattan Land Book of the City of
New York, 19th ed. (Weehawken, NJ: First American Real Estate Solutions,
1998), Plate 157.



(Former) Hamilton Theater, 3560-3568 Broadway, Manhattan. Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 2078, Lot 1, consisting of the land on which the described building and alleyway are situated. Graphic Source: New York City Department of Finance, City Surveyor, Tax Map.