

**STANDARD VARNISH WORKS FACTORY OFFICE BUILDING, 2589 Richmond Terrace,  
Staten Island. Built 1892-93; Colin McLean, builder**

Landmark Site: Borough of Staten Island Tax Map Block 1107, Lot 55 in part consisting of the land on which the described building is situated.

On April 10, 2007 the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Standard Varnish Works Office Building and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 11). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Six speakers, including representatives of City Council member Michael McMahon, the Preservation League of Staten Island, the Historic Districts Council, the Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in America, and the Landmarks Conservancy testified in favor of the designation. Three speakers including the owner and a tenant spoke in opposition to the designation. The Commission has received three letters in support and two letters in opposition to the designation.



Summary

Built between 1892 and 1893 as part of what was then thought to be the largest varnish works in the country, the Standard Varnish Works factory office building is an important reminder of the industrial history of Staten Island. The construction of the Standard Varnish Works Elm Park factory coincided with the rapid industrialization of northwestern Staten Island following the opening of a freight rail link to New Jersey in 1889. Colin McLean, the contractor for the new rail system and one of the most prominent builders on the East Coast, built and perhaps also designed Standard Varnish's waterfront factory complex which included this office building. Fronting on Richmond Terrace, the office building reflects nineteenth-century factory design practices in its prominent siting at a corner of the factory works, in the attention given to its architectural detailing, in its two-story form, its use of brick - then the most fire-resistant material available - and in its incorporation of a prominent tower. Like many industrial buildings constructed during this period, it was designed in the American round-arched style, a variant of the German *Rundbogenstil*, and displays such characteristic features of the style as round-arched windows, projecting brick pilasters, patterned brick string courses, and bold corbelled brick ornament. Founded in 1870 by German Jewish immigrant David Rosenberg and headed for over sixty years by members of the Rosenberg family and allied Toch family, Standard Varnish (later Standard Toch) grew to become one of the largest manufacturers of varnishes, enamels, and specialty coatings in the world, with factories in North and South America, Europe, and Australia. It was one of the first companies to specialize in the production of varnish for automobiles and its products were used on the Queen Mary and other ocean liners and on some of the largest skyscrapers in New York. Covering more than seven acres, the Elm Park plant remained the company's largest facility. In 1961 Montgomery Ward & Co. acquired Standard Toch's industrial division which it continued to operate as the Standard T Chemical Company. Varnish and chemical production ended at this site in 1982. This building is currently in commercial use as a warehouse.

## DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

### Elm Park<sup>1</sup>

The Elm Park neighborhood is located in north central Staten Island near the Kill van Kull and the Bayonne Bridge. The neighborhood's shorefront location near Mariner's Harbor, where numerous traces of prolonged occupation by Native Americans have been found, suggests that it was long used by Native Americans for hunting, gathering, and harvesting shellfish. In the colonial period European settlers established farms along the shore road (now Richmond Terrace). Several of the farmers and fishermen who settled in area owned slaves, who labored in the fields, worked on fishing vessels, and performed household chores.<sup>2</sup> By the mid-eighteenth century, a ferry operated from the foot of present-day Morningstar Road across the Kill Van Kull to Bayonne, New Jersey.<sup>3</sup> Subsequently, the ferry and the small enclave that developed around it were known by the name of the ferry proprietor (Decker's Ferry, Ryers' Ferry, and Mersereau's Ferry).<sup>4</sup> The neighborhood eventually came to be known as Elm Park after the estate of Dr. John T. Harrison, a health officer at the Quarantine, who moved to the area in 1805 and built a house facing Newark Bay "surrounded with elm trees."<sup>5</sup>

In the mid-nineteenth century Elm Park was the last stop on the North Shore ferry line and was a popular destination for ferry boat excursions.<sup>6</sup> It had public picnic grounds, provided excellent opportunities for fishing, and had a fashionable hotel. However, the neighborhood was also home to a number of early industries, including clay works, granite quarries, and a chalk factory, that took advantage of local resources. The Arnold & Merritt brickworks, Northfield Brick Company, Parks Brickyard and later National Brick Company "employed hundreds of men digging the clays of Elm Park and carrying them to the factory where they were made into bricks."<sup>7</sup> The Richmond Granite Company had a quarry just east of Morningstar Road and the Staten Island Brick and Granite Company had a gravity-operated rail line which extended from the company's quarry in Granite Village (modern-day Graniteville) to the company's dock located at the foot of Granite Street just west of this building. In the early 1880s, H.F. Taintor, manufacturer of Paris White, whiting, paints, leads, and oils had a factory fronting on Granite Street which produced over 6,000 tons annually. Some companies also built factories on the shorefront with piers extending out into the water. These included the Washoe Tool Factory, between Granite Street and Morningstar Road (destroyed by fire in 1874), and the Jewett Linseed Oil Works (established 1869) at the foot of John Street.

In 1880, William H. Pendleton, president of the North Shore ferry line, established a partnership with a group of investors, headed by Erastus Wiman, to create the Staten Island Rapid Transit system, a consolidated ferry and railway system with its terminus at St. George. In order to capitalize this project, Wiman entered into an agreement with Robert Garrett, president of Baltimore & Ohio Railroad, to make the SIRT a belt line of the B & O. The agreement called for the construction of a railroad bridge (completed 1889) across the Arthur Kill linking Holland Hook in northwestern Staten Island to Elizabeth, New Jersey. Freight terminals were to be constructed at St. George and at Arlington, near Holland Hook. The Pennsylvania Railroad, Reading Railroad, Lehigh Valley, Jersey Central, and Erie Railroads also had access to the bridge and SIRT beltline. With train tracks running along the island's north, east, and south shores, goods could be loaded direct from ocean-going ships to railroad cars and vice versa.

The potential for growth offered by the new transportation system was widely recognized and set off an intensive development of new manufacturing and shipping facilities. According to Charles Sachs' *Made on Staten Island*, in 1880 there were

100 principal manufacturing establishments on Staten Island employing 1,557 persons. By the 1920s, the number of industrial plants had almost tripled, the factory workforce numbered over 15,000, and there were at least two companies employing 1,000 people.<sup>8</sup>

Development and speculation in waterfront properties, which carried with them riparian rights to construct new piers, was particularly intense in northwestern Staten Island in the communities of Holland Hook, Port Ivory (home to a vast Procter and Gamble plant opened in 1907), Mariner's Harbor, and Elm Park, which were close to New Jersey and the Arlington freight terminal. The presence of the Jewett Linseed Oil Works in Elm Park (linseed oil was one of the main components in varnish) may also have made this site particularly desirable for Herman Rosenberg and Max Wolf, president and secretary-treasurer of the Standard Varnish Works, when they began looking for a new location for their factory in 1891-1892.

### The Rosenberg Family and the Early History of the Standard Varnish Works

The Standard Varnish Works, which became a national leader in paint and varnish industry, began as a small sole proprietorship founded by David Rosenberg (1824-89).<sup>9</sup> Rosenberg was a German Jewish merchant who emigrated from Prussia with his wife Henrietta (1824?-1905) and sons Herman and Theodore in the 1850s, settling initially in Georgia and later moving to Selma, Alabama.<sup>10</sup> During the Civil War, Rosenberg served as a purchasing agent for the Confederate Army. While he was in Europe arranging for the production and shipment of uniforms, his wife Henrietta and at least one of her sons (by this time the Rosenbergs had six sons and a daughter) managed to run the blockade, fleeing from the South to New York City. After the war, David Rosenberg also settled in New York where he opened a drygoods business on Pearl Street.

In 1870 Rosenberg established a varnish works with offices on Pearl Street and a factory in Hunters Point, Queens, where a number of other varnish firms also had their works.<sup>11</sup> A fire in the firm's Pearl Street offices in 1879<sup>12</sup> and increasing agitation from the residents of Hunters Point for legislation to control the fumes from neighborhood factories may have been responsible for Rosenberg's decision to move to a new plant and offices at East 14th Street and Avenue D in Manhattan in the 1880s. Eventually most of David Rosenberg's sons and a partner, Max Wolf, joined the firm, which by 1884 was known as D. Rosenberg & Sons. In January 1887, the firm incorporated as the "Standard Varnish Works, D. Rosenberg & Sons" with Herman Rosenberg as president, Theodore Rosenberg as vice-president, and Max Wolf as secretary-treasurer.<sup>13</sup> The incorporation papers indicated that the firm was to manufacture and sell varnishes, lacquers, stains, and japans. Advertisements indicate that the company's products were used for floors and walls, furniture, caskets, pianos, locomotives, wagons and carriages and were distributed nationally. In 1896, a Staten Island Chamber of Commerce publication reported that Standard Varnish Works factory was "the largest varnish works in the United States."<sup>14</sup>

In May 1900, a fire started in a dockside machine shop at the Elm Park works.<sup>15</sup> Sparks set off seven big tanks containing linseed oil and turpentine oil, which began pouring into the Kill van Kull and Newark Bay threatening to set fire to ships and boats in the harbor. Finally, after laboring all night, local firemen were able to contain the blaze and save the buildings facing Richmond Terrace, including this building, but the dock and about a half dozen brick storehouses containing barrels of varnish, linseed oil, and turpentine were destroyed. Insurance covered about half the damages and the company was soon able to rebuild.

### Construction and Design of the Standard Varnish Works Factory Office Building

At Elm Park the Standard Varnish Works constructed an enormous bulkhead which extended over 500 feet into the Arthur Kill and had a frontage of approximately 350 feet along Richmond Terrace. The pier formed the base for a complex of factory buildings and storage tanks, and incorporated a large dock capable of offloading ocean-going vessels, an important feature since many of the raw materials used in the company's products were imported. Across Richmond Terrace land was acquired between Houseman Avenue and Granite Street for additional factory buildings and along Houseman Avenue and Bay Avenue to erect about fifty cottages for the 50 to 100 skilled workmen the company expected to bring to Staten Island. Construction of the new bulkhead began in March 1892 and the factory buildings were largely completed by late August 1893.<sup>16</sup> A Staten Island newspaper reported that "the enterprise has instituted a veritable real estate boom in the vicinity."<sup>17</sup>

The design and construction of the new Standard Varnish Works posed enormous difficulties. In addition to requiring construction under water, the project incorporated miles of underground pipes to connect the various buildings, storage tanks and dockside pumps so that the raw materials used in varnish production could be offloaded at the dock and stored in tanks before being pumped to various buildings for processing, after which the finished products were pumped to storage rooms to be packed for shipment. Because both the raw materials used in producing varnish and lacquers and the finished products were inherently combustible, the factory had to be as fire retardant as possible. While fulfilling its utilitarian purpose, the factory would also be a highly visible corporate symbol, used in company advertising, so an impressive and handsome appearance was also very desirable.

A search of Staten Island newspapers and trade publications from the period has not revealed the name of an architect for the project, if indeed one was employed,<sup>18</sup> but two newspaper accounts record that the builder for the project was Colin McLean,<sup>19</sup> one of the most prominent contractors on the East Coast, who specialized in "the most difficult construction work and large enterprises presenting perplexing problems."<sup>20</sup> McLean seems to have had considerable technical expertise (a book on one his projects, the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad roundhouse, refers to him as a field engineer)<sup>21</sup> and given the size and complexity of the projects his firm handled it seems likely that he had an extensive technical

department. Moreover, it is probable that the Rosenbergs would have had considerable input into the design of the specialized buildings required for their business.

In constructing a factory that would use its monumental and attractive design to help market its products, the Standard Varnish Works took advantage of the complex's prominent site. Particular attention was paid to the buildings fronting on Richmond Terrace, one the island's main thoroughfares and the route for a popular horsecar (after 1895 electric) trolley line. There, two one-story storage buildings and the two-story corner office building were linked by connectors to create a streetwall shielding the factory yard from view. The three buildings were given a similar decorative treatment with the principal focus on the office, which featured a prominent tower capped by a hipped roof. In her book on American factory design, *The Works*, architectural historian Betsey Bradley indicates that factory offices were usually small two-story structures accommodating general offices in the ground story and more specialized functions requiring a well-lighted space free of factory dust and vibrations in the upper floor. The siting of the office at a corner of the factory complex facing onto a main street was common during the mid-to-late nineteenth century.<sup>22</sup> Towers were also a typical feature of factory design having their origin in the cupolas of late-eighteenth-century English and early-nineteenth century New England textile mills. Originally used as bell towers to call workers to their tasks, by the 1830s these cupolas were often placed atop towers that were attached to their buildings' facades and contained staircases. The exterior tower, which would come to house water tanks, sprinkler systems, and other equipment, "would become standard in the fully developed nineteenth-century factory,"<sup>23</sup> playing not only a functional role but also providing a civic presence. On Staten Island the George Bechtel Brewery building, Stapleton (1871, demolished), Rubsam & Horrmann's Atlantic Brewery building, Stapleton (1878, demolished), S. S. White Dental Manufacturing Company plant, Princes Bay (demolished), and the Kreischer-owned New-York Anderson Pressed Brick Company factory building, Kreischerville (1876, demolished), also incorporated towers.

Brick was the material of choice for most industrial buildings. It was inexpensive, durable, and easily supplied. More important, machine-pressed brick remained "the most fire-resistant building material available prior to the widespread use of concrete."<sup>24</sup> Here the building's facades are almost entirely of deep red Roman brick (now painted) with stonework used only for the window sills. The windows are round-arched, relatively small and widely spaced helping to create an impression of strength and massiveness. The large arched entry at the base of the tower (now modified), which originally opened onto a vaulted passage leading to the factory yard, also enhanced the sense of monumentality. Pilasters with buttresses at the first story frame the corners of the façade and separate the window bays. In addition to providing a rhythmic articulation for the façade the pilasters serve a utilitarian purpose, reinforcing the walls to control vibrations and supporting the heavy roof-framing members. Horizontal accents are provided by the string course that extends beneath the first story windows and by the projecting brick courses that cap the first and second stories and the tower. This decorative detailing is typical of the American round-arched style, a variant of the German *Rundbogenstil*, a progressive architectural style developed during the 1830s and 1840s, based on Roman, Byzantine and Romanesque architecture, particularly the round-arched elements of those styles. Brought to the United States by German immigrant architects and builders and pictured in pattern books and architectural periodicals, the style was particularly well-suited to industrial and commercial buildings because of its reliance on brick and locally available stones, simplicity of detail, and structural expressiveness. The style was widely employed in the United States for factories, breweries, warehouses, etc., including the Estey Piano Company Factory 112-28 Lincoln Avenue, Bronx (A.B. Ogden & Son, 1885-86, a designated New York City Landmark) and the Havemeyers & Elder Filter, Pan & Finishing House, 292-314 Kent Avenue, Brooklyn (Theodore Havermeyer and others, 1881-84, a designated New York City Landmark), and the Joseph Loth & Company Silk Ribbon Mill, 1828 Amsterdam Avenue, Manhattan, (Hugo Kafka, 1885-86, a designated New York City Landmark). The Standard Varnish Works office is a particularly fine example of the style and is distinguished by its handsome detailing, bold corbelling, and carefully proportioned tower.

#### Colin McLean (1844-1916)<sup>25</sup>

A native of Nova Scotia who ran away from home as a teenager to go to sea, Colin McLean began his career in building as a sandhog and rigger on the Brooklyn Bridge (John A., Washington, and Emily Roebling, 1867-83, a designated New York City Landmark). After establishing his own contracting firm, he secured a commission from the Long Island Railroad to build an extensive system of piers on the East River together with several large railroad-operated hotels. He then moved on to the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad where he served as Superintendent of Bridges and Buildings for eight years.

During that time he was responsible for constructing nearly all the railroad's improvements, including wharves, machine shops, an enormous grain elevator at Locust Point, the B & O Roundhouse (1883-84) and Annex Building (1884), both designed by Ephraim Francis Baldwin and now part of B & O Railroad Museum, Baltimore, and the Philadelphia Terminal Building (Frank Furness, 1886-88, demolished). McLean was in charge of all of the B & O improvements on Staten Island including the Arthur Kill Bridge (1885-89). In 1889 he established his own contracting firm in New York City and was involved in the clean up of the Johnstown flood. In addition to the Standard Varnish Works his projects in the New York metropolitan region during the 1890s included new ferry houses and slips for the Staten Island & Bay Ridge ferry, a new sea wall at Tottenville, and projects on Hoffman, Swinburn and Rikers Islands for New York City and State. In 1897, he secured the commission to build the foundations for the Brooklyn side of the Williamsburg Bridge. He continued his railroad construction projects, building trestles for the Atlantic and North Carolina Railroad between Beaufort and Moorehead City and for the Norfolk-Southern Railroad over the Albemarle Sound, the latter "the longest timber railroad bridge spanning navigable waters in the world."<sup>26</sup> He was also responsible for the Norfolk and Western, Southern, Atlantic Coast Line, Chesapeake Steamship, and Virginia Railway Companies' piers in Norfolk and Newport News and for building the five mile sea wall in Charleston (for which he used stone quarried on Staten Island). In 1903 McLean merged his company with the Degnon Construction Company to build the first sections of the New York City subway system. During the last years of his career he returned to Baltimore to take a leading role in the development of the harbor in anticipation of additional commerce stemming from the opening of the Panama Canal. The McLean Construction Company remains in business in Maryland and continues to specialize in large-scale harbor projects and bridges.

#### Later History of the Standard Varnish Works and Subsequent History<sup>27</sup>

In the twentieth century Standard Varnish was one of the first companies to specialize in the production of varnish for automobiles. In addition to its traditional product lines the company also produced coatings for agricultural equipment, architectural armatures, refrigerators, baking equipment, marine purposes (including insulating compounds for wires used on ships), painting inks, metallic coatings for plastics, and "practically any protective-type finish."<sup>28</sup> Standard Varnish Works products were used on the Queen Mary and other ocean liners, on some of the largest skyscrapers in New York, and on the New York State Thruway restaurants and gas stations. As the company's business grew, it expanded its Staten Island works and added facilities in other cities. By 1912, the Staten Island plant covered over seven acres, incorporated forty-five buildings and sheds, and was "one of the largest manufactories of varnishes and enamels in the world."<sup>29</sup> There were also large factories in Chicago, Toronto, London, and Paris and branches in Berlin, Brussels, Zurich, and Melbourne. Later, the company opened plants in Milan, Barcelona, Havana, South America, Los Angeles, Dearborn, Michigan, and Linden, New Jersey. The corporate offices remained in Manhattan at 29 Broadway until 1917, then moved to 90 West Street, and to the Fourth Avenue in 1930.<sup>30</sup> This building was the first office for the Staten Island factory and was extended at the rear from four bays to eight bays by 1898. Around 1912 a new office building was constructed at Houseman and LaSalle Streets and this building was used for storage and labeling. Later the offices were moved to the center building at 2589 Richmond Terrace and windows were cut in the façade to light the space.<sup>31</sup> In the 1950s the offices were located in 2600 Richmond Terrace.

During the first decades of the twentieth century Standard Varnish remained largely in control of the Rosenberg family.<sup>32</sup> In the 1910s the board of directors was enlarged to include some younger members of the family, notably Herman's son Arthur D. Rosenberg (aka Arthur D. Robson), Max and Pauline Wolf's son, James S. Wolf, who succeeded his father as treasurer of the corporation, and William's son, J. William Rosenberg (aka J. W. Robson), who became president of the Standard Varnish in the 1920s. In 1914, Arthur D. Rosenberg married Constance Toch, the daughter of the distinguished chemist Dr. Maximilian Toch, a partner in Toch Brothers, one of Standard Varnish's leading competitors. Twelve years later, in 1926, Standard Varnish purchased the capital stock of Toch Brothers, Inc. The two corporations merged with the existing Standard Varnish officers taking a corresponding role in the operations of Toch Brothers and Maximilian Toch taking charge of development for both product lines.<sup>33</sup> In 1930 Standard Varnish also acquired the National Varnish Works.<sup>34</sup> Eventually Toch became Chairman of the Board of Standard Varnish. Over the years, as the company grew, and the younger generation of the Rosenberg/Robson family pursued different careers, outside businessmen and chemists were brought into the business. Milford H. Corbin, who became president of the firm in 1949, was responsible for reorganizing the firms' various branches into a new parent company known as Standard-Toch Chemicals, Inc.<sup>35</sup> In the 1950s the company remained "one of the nation's leaders in its field,

ranking about 15<sup>th</sup> among paint and chemical manufacturers.”<sup>36</sup> The Elm Park facility remained the largest of its remaining three factories (the others were in Chicago and Linden, New Jersey).

During the 1950s many of Staten Island’s major industries began to move their plants to New Jersey where taxes were lower and land was readily available for expansion.<sup>37</sup> In 1960, Standard Toch purchased a nine building plant on a sixteen acre tract in Kearny, New Jersey, from the Congoleum-Nairn corporation.<sup>38</sup> When Standard Toch had problems financing the move to its new site, the corporation’s directors opted to sell its industrial division to Montgomery Ward & Co. and its trade sales division to the Velspar Company, using the proceeds to eliminate all corporate debt and to acquire “firms in growth.”<sup>39</sup> Montgomery Ward continued to operate the industrial division of Standard Toch as the Standard T Chemical Company and this plant remained in operation until 1982. In 1983, this building and the rest of the factory complex north of Richmond Terrace were acquired by Drury Enterprises.<sup>40</sup> This building is currently in commercial use as a warehouse.

### Description

The Standard Varnish Works factory office building is located at the southeast corner of the former Standard Varnish Works complex.<sup>41</sup> Originally almost square in plan, the building is now L-shaped due to a late 1890s extension that left a small court between this building and a neighboring structure to the west. The building has a four-bay-wide front along Richmond Terrace and is eight bays deep. It is two stories tall save for the small three-story tower at the southwest corner of the Richmond Terrace façade. The tower has a hipped roof, the main section of the original building has a flat roof, and the rear addition has a slightly pitched gabled roof. The facades are constructed of dark reddish Roman brick (now painted) with stone/iron trim used for the window sills and a copper cornice (painted) capping the third story of the tower. Many of the round arched windows have been sealed with wood boards. The visible windows appear to retain their original wood frames. From the early engravings of the building it appears that the windows originally had one-over-one lights but over the years many of the lights were subdivided into smaller units. The windows on the west side of the tower retain their historic metal fire shutters.

The Richmond Terrace façade is articulated into four bays by pilasters, which are buttressed at the first story with setbacks at the level of the water table and the springing of the arches. The water table is marked by a plain projecting brick course. A projecting dogtooth course caps the first story and the second story is terminated by a boldly modeled corbel table with square corbels employed for the tower and tapering corbels employed for the other bays. The small parapet that crowns the façade is also enriched with corbels with a dentil course used on the tower. The decorative corbelling supporting the tower cornice also incorporates denticulated and dogtooth bands. The windows are emphasized by brick archivolt. The original arched entrance at the base of the tower was also set off by a keystone. This bay has been modified to create a trabeated loading dock with a non-historic roll-down gate with an exterior housing. The easternmost bay, which originally was a window bay, has also been modified to create a trabeated loading dock with a non-historic roll-down gate. The two center bays retain their original arched window openings. Both appear to have their historic wood frames. Bay 2 (reading west to east) has an operable window that has non-historic multi-pane sash in its upper light. Bay 3 retains its frame for one-over-one lights but appears to be sealed. There is a non-historic fixed awning over the window in bay 2 and a non-historic boxed vinyl awning extending over bays 3 and 4. A non-historic advertising sign has been installed to the east of the window in bay 3. At the second story the tower window has non-historic multi-pane lights in its bottom light. The outer frame of the top light appears to be original but the framing of the central mullion seems awkward and non-historic. The window glass has been painted. The three third-story tower windows have non-historic storm windows or replacement sash topped by non-historic infill.

Only the upper story and tower of first four bays (reading south to north) of western façade are visible from Richmond Terrace. The pilaster and corbel decoration is carried over from the façade onto the side of the tower but the rest of the wall is treated as a secondary façade with decoration restricted to brick archivolt setting off the window and a stepped parapet capping the façade. The windows retain their original wood frames though most have historic though not original multi-pane lights. The third story tower windows retain their original one-over-one frames though they have been divided into multiple lights and retain their original shutters.

The upper story of the eastern façade is also visible from Richmond Terrace. The original four bays have round arched windows set off by decorative brick archivolt and stone/iron sills. The windows appear to retain their original frames but have a variety of non-historic sashes. The original portion of the building is capped by a stepped parapet. The four rear bays which were added to the building in the late

1890s have square-headed windows containing historic multi-pane sash. This section of the façade is capped by a flat parapet. The windows on the east wall of the tower appear to retain their original iron shutters.

Report researched and written by  
Gale Harris  
Research Department

### NOTES

---

<sup>1</sup> This section on the history of Elm Park is based on Charles W. Leng and William T. Davis, *Staten Island and Its People: A History, 1609-1929* (New York: Lewis Historical Publishing Co., 1930), v. 1, 162, 341; v. 2, 625-626, 743, 904; 922, John- Paul Richiuso, "Elm Park," Charles Sachs, "Staten Island," *Encyclopedia of New York*, ed. Kenneth Jackson (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1995), 374,1113-1115; Ira K. Morris, *Memorial History of Staten Island*, (New York: Memorial Pub. Co, 1898-1900), v. 2, 443-444, 471-474; *Holden's Staten Island: The History of Richmond County* edited and compiled by Richard Dickenson (New York: Center for Migration Studies, 2002); Charles L. Sachs, *Made on Staten Island* (New York: Staten Island Historical Society, 1988), 60; J.J. Clute, *Annals of Staten Island* (New York: Charles Vogt, 1877), 233.

<sup>2</sup> On slave life in Staten Island see the appendix in *Holden's Staten Island*, 475-79. The Taylor and Skinner Map of 1781 shows the owners of houses in the future Elm Park neighborhood. Many of these owners or their children are listed as slave owners, including Daniel Garobarance (five slaves), Sebastian Ellis (2 slaves), Cornelius Mersereau (1 slave), Joshua Mersereau (1 slave), in the United States Census, 1790, Richmond County, New York, Northfield, 243-244. Joshua Mesereau and David Mesereau both willed slaves to family members in the 1780s. See Richard Dickenson, "Extracts Slavery in Wills, 1679-1786, Richmond County/Staten Island, New York," *Proceedings of the Staten Island Museum*, v. 37, no. 1 (2005-2006), 27.

<sup>3</sup> Henry Holland (1704-1782), a member of a wealthy New York family, who had represented Richmond County in the Colonial Assembly from 1761-68, owned the dock and ferry as well as a country house and estate of sixty acres named "Morning Star," which was sold at auction in 1787. Leng & Davis, v. 2, 243.

<sup>4</sup> In the early nineteenth century this enclave was called Jacksonville (c. 1830) for President Andrew Jackson and later Lowville (c.1850) for Daniel Low, who owned considerable property in the neighborhood.

<sup>5</sup> Leng & Davis, v. 2, 904.

<sup>6</sup> On Elm Park as a resort see "Summer Resorts," *New York Times*, July, 6, 1868, 3; "On Staten Island," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Aug. 1, 1870, 2; "An Hourly Excursion," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Aug. 17, 1877, 1; "Staten Island Enterprise," *New York Times*, July, 29, 1872, 4; "Children's Excursions," *New York Times*, July, 6, 1873, 8; S. C. Judson, *Illustrated Sketch Book of Staten Island* (New York, S.C. Judson, 1886), 125; "Spring and Summer Travel," *New York Times*, Apr. 4, 1865, 2.

<sup>7</sup> Leng & Davis, v. 2, 625.

<sup>8</sup> Sachs, *Made on Staten Island*, 67.

<sup>9</sup> This section on David Rosenberg and his family is based on United States Census, 1860, Chambers County, Alabama, Southern Division; United States Census, 1880, New York City, Nineteenth Ward, T9-895, 557B; "William Rosenberg" *New York Times*, July, 31, 1931, 17; Leslie D. Jensen, "A Survey of Confederate Central

---

Government Quartermaster Issue Jackets,” The Company of Military Historians @ <http://military-historians.org/company/journal/confederate/confederate-1.htm>.

<sup>10</sup> The Federal census for 1860 shows only family members residing in Rosenberg’s household suggesting that he did not own slaves.

<sup>11</sup> The factory was illustrated in *Long Island & Where to Go: a Descriptive Work Compiled for the Long Island Railroad* (New York: LIRR, 1877), 232. On the varnish industry in New York City see William Thompson Bonner, *New York, the World’s Metropolis* (New York: R.L. Polk, & Co., 1924), 505-506; David B. Sicilia, “Paints, Dyes, and Varnishes,” *Encyclopedia of New York*, 875-876. For other varnish works in Hunter’s Point see “Disastrous Fire at Hunter’s Point - The Foreman of a Factory Burned to Death,” *New York Times*, Aug. 11, 1868, 8; “Local Fires,” *New York Times*, May, 30, 1874, 1. Because the Long Island City post office was in Hunter’s Point some sources refer to the Rosenberg factory and other varnish works as being located in Long Island City.

<sup>12</sup> “Fire on Pearl Street, New York,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Mar. 25, 1879, 4.

<sup>13</sup> New York County Clerk, Old Records Division, Incorporations File 556-1887; “Notes,” *American Architect and Building News* 21 (Feb. 5, 1887), adv. suppl., 3.

<sup>14</sup> Staten Island Chamber of Commerce, *Staten Island, New York: Property, Commercial Shipping, and Industrial Interests* (West New Brighton, NY: Advance Steam Press, 1896).

<sup>15</sup> For the fire see “The Great Varnish Fire,” *Staten Islander*, May 9, 1900, 8; “Varnish Works Burned,” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, May 5, 1900, 18; “Staten Island’s Big Fire,” *New York Times*, May 6, 1900, 8.

<sup>16</sup> “Work is in Progress,” *Richmond County Standard*, Mar. 19, 1892; “Varnish Works to Move In,” *Staten Islander*, Aug. 23, 1893.

<sup>17</sup> “For a New Village,” *Staten Islander*, Mar. 30, 1892, 1.

<sup>18</sup> During this period, building owners, carpenters and contractors were responsible for the design and construction of many factory buildings. McLean’s vast experience in marine construction and in building industrial buildings for railroads [see the biographical section below] probably was enough for him to have taken on this project without the involvement of an architect. On the role of architects, builders, engineers, and manufacturers in the design of factories in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries see Betsy Hunter Bradley, *The Works: the Industrial Architecture of the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 14-24.

<sup>19</sup> “Varnish Works to Move In,” “Who Colin McLean Is” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June 10, 1897, 16.

<sup>20</sup> “His Death Great Shock,” *Baltimore Sun*, Apr. 30, 1916, 9.

<sup>21</sup> William B. Rockey and Pamela S. Coleman, *Tragedy to Triumph: Rebuilding the Majestic B & O Roundhouse* (Baltimore: Baltimore & Ohio Railroad Museum, 2004), 10.

<sup>22</sup> Bradley illustrates ten examples from various parts of the country in her book.

<sup>23</sup> William Harvey Pierson, Jr., *American Buildings and their Architects: Technology and the Picturesque, The Corporate and Early Gothic Styles* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1980), 61.

<sup>24</sup> Bradley, 136.

<sup>25</sup> This biographical section on Colin McLean is based on “Who Colin McLean Is” *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, June 10, 1897, 16; “His Death Great Shock,” *Baltimore Sun*, Apr. 30, 1916; Richard Henry Spencer, *Genealogical and Memorial Encyclopedia of the State of Maryland* (NY: American Historical Society, 1919), v. 2, 466-469; “News of the Day in the City by the Sea,” *The State* [Columbia, S C], Dec. 20, 1909, 3; *The Williamsburg Bridge* (Brooklyn: Eagle Press, 1903), 93, 96-97; Interborough Rapid Transit Company, *Interborough Rapid Transit: the New York Subway, Its Construction and Equipment* (New York: IRT Co., 1904).

<sup>26</sup> “His Death Great Shock,” 9.

<sup>27</sup> This section on the latter history of the Standard Varnish Works is based on New York City Directories, 1900-21; *Directory of Directors in the City of New York* (New York: Directory of Directors Company, 1917-21); *Picturesque Staten Island and Its Prominent Citizens* (New York: Turpisch-Hampton Publishing Co., c. 1915); *Staten Island Illustrated* (Staten Island: Staten Island Chamber of Commerce, 1911); *American Paint and Varnish Manufacturers Association Yearbook* (New York: American Paint and Varnish Mfrs’ Asso., 1927), 8, 13, 57; *Howard’s Blue Book: The Only Index-Catalogue of the Paint, Oil, & Varnish Industry* (Chicago, O. McG. Howard); Staten Island Chamber of Commerce, *Annual Report*, 1913; “History Told of Old Industrial Unit,” *Staten Island Advance*, May 17, 1951; Raymond A. Wittek, “Standard-Toch Puts Out Variety of Products,” *Staten Island Advance*, Sept. 17, 1958.

<sup>28</sup> Wittek, “Standard-Toch.”

<sup>29</sup> *Picturesque Staten Island and Its Prominent Citizens*.

<sup>30</sup> “Business Leases,” *New York Times*, Oct. 15, 1930, 46.



---

<sup>31</sup> Those offices were further modified and the bathrooms at the rear of this building were enlarged in 1938 under an alteration filed by James Whitford. See Alt. Application 563-1938, in Staten Island Dept. of Buildings, Block and Lot folder, Block 1107, Lot 55.

<sup>32</sup> Herman Rosenberg (aka Herman Robson) served as president until at least 1912; his brother Oscar ran the Chicago plant and succeeded Herman as president of the firm, and their brother Theodore headed the English operations. A younger brother, William, served as secretary, became a vice-president in 1912, and president in 1917.

<sup>33</sup> "Merger in the Varnish Trade," *New York Times*, Mar. 7, 1926, E14; "Varnish Industries Combine," *Industrial and Engineering Chemistry*, Mar. 1926, 297.

<sup>34</sup> "Standard Varnish Buys National," *New York Times*, Sept. 23, 1930, 44.

<sup>35</sup> The new company was formed from Standard Varnish Work, New York; Standard Varnish Works, Illinois; Standard Varnish Works of California; Standard Varnish Works of Michigan; Toch Brothers, Inc.; R.I.W. Waterproofing Corporation and the National Varnish Company, Inc. "Varnish Companies Form New Concern," See *New York Times*, Aug. 25, 1951, 23.

<sup>36</sup> Wittek, "Standard-Toch."

<sup>37</sup> Sachs, *Made on Staten Island*, 105.

<sup>38</sup> "16-Acre Factory Bought in Kearny," *New York Times*, Aug. 12, 1960, 31.

<sup>39</sup> "Standard Toch Industries," *New York Times*, May 12, 1961, 39. See also Raymond A Wittek, "Montgomery Ward Buys Standard Toch," *Staten Island Advance*, May 8, 1961, 13; "Remaining Standard-Toch Divisions Sold," *Staten Island Advance*, May 18, 1961, 7.

<sup>40</sup> Richmond County, Deeds and Mortgages, reel 20, 8212, 8215, November 20, 1983.

<sup>41</sup> The factory lot extends 341 feet eastward from Housman Avenue along Richmond Terrace and is bounded on the north by the Kill van Kull. Only the portion of the lot on which the described building is situated is included in this designation.

## 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 Standard Varnish Works Factory Office Building 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 Standard Varnish Works Factory Office Building is an important reminder of Staten Island's rich industrial heritage; that the construction of the Standard Varnish Works Elm Park factory in 1892-93, then thought to be the largest varnish works in the country, coincided with the rapid industrialization of northwestern Staten Island following the opening of a freight rail link to New Jersey in 1889; that the new factory was built and probably designed by Colin McLean, the contractor for the new rail system and one of the most prominent builders on the East Coast; that the design of this office building reflects nineteenth-century factory planning practices in its prominent location fronting on Richmond Terrace at a corner of the factory works, in the attention given to its architectural detailing, its two-story form, its use of brick, then the most fire-resistant material available, and in its incorporation of a prominent tower; that like many industrial buildings constructed during this period, it was designed in the American round-arched style, a variant of the German *Rundbogenstil*, and displays such characteristic features of the style as round-arched windows, projecting brick pilasters, patterned brick string courses, and bold corbelled brick ornament; that the Standard Varnish Works (later Standard Toch), founded in 1870 by German Jewish immigrant David Rosenberg and headed for over sixty years by members of the Rosenberg family and allied Toch family, grew to become one of the largest manufacturers of varnishes, enamels, and specialty coatings in the world with factories in North and South America, Europe, and Australia; that it was one of the first companies to specialize in the production of varnish for automobiles and its products were used on the Queen Mary and other ocean liners and on some of the largest skyscrapers in New York; that covering over seven acres, the Elm Park plant remained the company's largest facility; that in 1961 Montgomery Ward & Co acquired Standard Toch's industrial division which it continued to operate as the Standard T Chemical Company; that varnish and chemical production ended at this site in 1982; and that this building is currently in commercial use as a warehouse..

Accordingly, pursuant to the 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 Standard Varnish Works Factory Office Building, 2589 Richmond Terrace, Borough of Staten Island and designates Borough of Staten Island Tax Map Block 1107, Lot 55, in part consisting of the land on which the described building is situated as its Landmark Site.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair  
Diana Chapin, Joan Gerner, Roberta Brandes Gratz,  
Christopher Moore, Margery Perlmutter, Elizabeth Ryan, Commissioners



Standard Varnish Works Factory Office Building  
2589 Richmond Terrace, Staten Island  
Photo: Tara Harrison



Standard Varnish Works Factory, c. 1914  
Source: *Staten Island, Borough of Richmond, New York City*



Standard Varnish Works Factory Office Building  
View from the southwest  
Photo: Tara Harrison



Standard Varnish Works Factory Office Building  
Detail of first story  
Photo: Tara Harrison

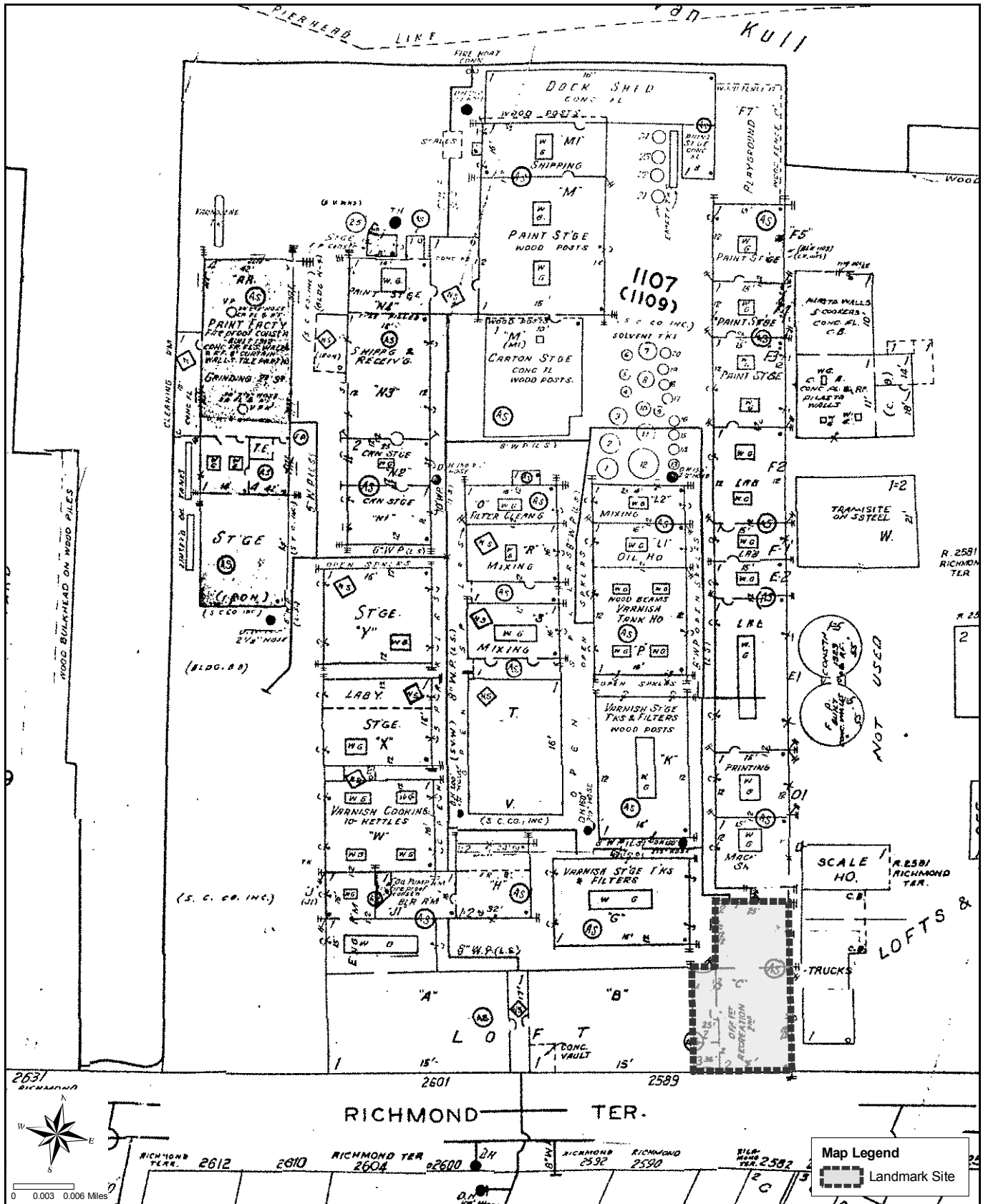


Standard Varnish Works Factory Office Building  
Detail of second story  
Photo: Tara Harrison



Standard Varnish Works Factory Office Building  
Tower  
Photo: Tara Harrison





STANDARD VARNISH WORKS FACTORY OFFICE BUILDING (LP-2250), 2589 Richmond Terrace.  
 Landmark Site: Borough of Staten Island, Tax Map Block 1107, Lot 55 in part, consisting  
 of the land on which the described building is situated.

Designated: October 30, 2007