

PUBLIC NATIONAL BANK OF NEW YORK BUILDING (later Public National Bank & Trust Company of New York Building), 106 Avenue C (aka 231 East 7th Street), Manhattan. Built 1923; Eugene Schoen, architect; New York Architectural Terra Cotta Co., terra cotta.

Landmark Site: Borough of Manhattan Tax Map Block 377, Lot 72.

On October 30, 2007, the Landmarks Preservation Commission held a public hearing on the proposed designation as a Landmark of the Public National Bank of New York Building (later Public National Bank & Trust Company of New York Building) and the proposed designation of the related Landmark Site (Item No. 7). The hearing had been duly advertised in accordance with the provisions of law. Five people spoke in favor of designation, including Councilmember Rosie Mendez and representatives of the Greenwich Village Society for Historic Preservation, Historic Districts Council, Metropolitan Chapter of the Victorian Society in America, and New York Landmarks Conservancy. The building's owner opposed designation. In addition, the Commission received a number of communications in support of designation, including letters from City Councilmember Tony Avella, the Friends of Terra Cotta, Neue Galerie Museum for German and Austrian Art, and City Lore: The New York Center for Urban Folk Culture.

Summary

The Public National Bank of New York Building in the East Village is a highly unusual American structure displaying the direct influence of the early-twentieth-century modernism of eminent Viennese architect/designer Josef Hoffmann. Built in 1923, the bank was designed by Eugene Schoen (1880-1957), an architect born in New York City of Hungarian Jewish descent, who graduated from Columbia University in 1902, and soon after traveled to Europe, meeting Otto Wagner and Hoffmann in Vienna. Although little remembered today other than as a furniture designer (whose objects are highly sought by collectors), Schoen was for the first half of the twentieth century in the forefront of modern American design, a revered contemporary of many well-known colleagues. He practiced architecture primarily from 1904 until 1925, when he was said to have been inspired to become largely an



interior designer after attending the international exposition in Paris, opening his own New York gallery. The *New York Times* at his death stated that "Schoen was regarded as one of the leading exponents of modern architecture and design and as such helped to develop the movement here." This was one of the many branch banks that Schoen designed between 1921 and 1930 for the Public National Bank of New York (Public National Bank & Trust Co. of New York after 1927), which had its headquarters on the Lower East Side. Originally two stories, the structure had a monumental ground-story banking floor and upstairs offices. Clad in light grey granitex (having the color and texture of grey granite) terra cotta (recently painted) above a polished grey granite base, it was designed with an angled corner bay with the entrance, flat capital-less fluted pilasters, and a broad, highly stylized molded cornice with a lower band with bosses, the latter features direct references to Hoffmann's work. The entrance is surmounted by notable polychrome Viennese-inspired terra-cotta ornament in the form of a decorative band above which is a cartouche with a wreath of fruit (which originally held a clock) above an eagle, flanked by curvilinear forms and decorative urns. The building's terra cotta was manufactured by the New York Architectural Terra Cotta Co. Sold in 1954, the building was converted into a nursing home, with the addition of an intermediate floor, and into apartments in the 1980s.

DESCRIPTION AND ANALYSIS

The Nineteenth- and Early Twentieth-Century Development and History of (Today's) East Village Neighborhood¹

The area of today's Greenwich Village was, during the eighteenth century, the location of the small rural hamlet of Greenwich, as well as the country seats and summer homes of wealthy downtown aristocrats, merchants, and capitalists. A number of cholera and yellow fever epidemics in lower Manhattan between 1799 and 1822 led to an influx of settlers in the Greenwich area, with the population quadrupling between 1825 and 1840. Previously undeveloped tracts of land were speculatively subdivided for the construction of town houses and rowhouses. To the east, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, was Dutch Governor Peter Stuyvesant's farm. St. Mark's-in-the-Bowery Church (1799)² was built on a higher, dry piece of land, while the area to the east of today's Second Avenue, known as Stuyvesant Meadows, remained an undeveloped marshy area. In the late eighteenth century, the area east of Second Avenue was the estate of Mangle Minthorn, father-in-law of Daniel Tompkins (1775-1825), governor of New York (1807-17) and U.S. vice president under James Monroe (1817-25). Both Stuyvesant and Minthorn were slave owners. The Commissioner's Plan of 1811, which plotted the layout of streets throughout Manhattan, created Clinton Square, located between Avenues A and B and 7th and 10th Streets, proposed as the site of a farmers' market.

In 1832, the Common Council created the 15th Ward out of the eastern section of the large 9th Ward, its boundaries being Sixth Avenue, Houston and 14th Streets, and the East River. According to historian Luther Harris, "by 1845, 85 percent of the richest citizens living in the city's northern wards resided in the Fifteenth."³ For a brief period beginning in the 1820s-30s, Lafayette Place, including the grand marble Greek Revival style LaGrange Terrace (1832-33, attributed to Seth Geer),⁴ and Bond, Great Jones, East 4th and Bleecker Streets were among the most fashionable addresses, the latter developed with three block-long rows of houses in 1827-31. Both sides of the block of St. Mark's Place (East 8th Street) between Third and Second Avenues were built in 1831 with grand 3-1/2-story Federal style marble-and-brick-clad town houses by speculative real estate developer Thomas E. Davis.⁵ In the early 1830s, Davis became involved with the Stuyvesant family in the development of the former farm to the north of St. Mark's Place as an elite residential neighborhood. Lower Second Avenue and adjacent side streets became fashionable through the 1850s. Clinton Square was renamed Tompkins Square in 1833, and the following year the City began to have it fenced, graded, and landscaped as a park, in part as an effort to encourage development.

Commercial and institutional intrusions and the continual arrival of immigrants ended the fashionable heyday of the wealthier enclaves, such as St. Mark's Place and Second Avenue, before the Civil War. In the 1850s, Broadway north of Houston Street was transformed from a residential into a significant commercial district. Also beginning in the 1850s, after the political upheavals in Europe of 1848 and the resulting influx of German-speaking immigrants to New York City, the Lower East Side (the area bounded roughly by 18th Street, the East River, the Bowery/Third Avenue, and Catherine Street) became known as *Kleindeutschland* ("Little Germany"). Aside from their presence as residents, these immigrants contributed in significant ways to the vibrant commercial and cultural life of the neighborhood and the city at large. The German community was critical to the American socialist movement and the creation of labor unions. By 1880, this neighborhood constituted one-fourth of the city's population (as one of the most densely populated neighborhoods in the world) and was the first major urban foreign-speaking neighborhood in the U.S., as well as the leading German-American center throughout the century. A massive exodus of Jews from Eastern Europe from the 1880s to World War I led to approximately two million Jewish immigrants settling in New York; most lived for a time on the Lower East Side, establishing their own cultural and religious institutions there.

As wealthier neighborhood residents moved northward, their single-family residences were converted into multiple dwellings or boardinghouses, as well as other uses, such as clubs or community cultural institutions. For instance, of the Federal style houses on the westernmost block of St. Mark's Place: No. 29 became the Harmonie Club, a German-Jewish singing club (1856-59); Nos. 19-21 housed another German musical club, the Arion Singing Society (1870-87), and these buildings, along with No. 23, became Arlington

Hall, a ballroom-community center in 1887; the Children's Aid Society's Girls' Lodging House (by 1871) and its offices (by 1891) were at Nos. 27 and 24; and No. 12 was replaced by the German-American Shooting Society Clubhouse (1888-89, William C. Frohne).⁶ Most of the remaining houses were demolished for denser development with French flats and tenements between 1874 and 1902.

Hastening the changes in the residential character of this section of the Lower East Side after mid-century were a wide variety of major cultural, religious, commercial, and educational institutions, including the Astor Place Opera House (1847; later Clinton Hall/Mercantile Library; demolished), Astor and Lafayette Places; Astor Library (1849-52 Alexander Saeltzer; 1856-69 Griffith Thomas; 1879-81 Thomas Stent), 425 Lafayette Street; Bible House (1852; demolished), Astor Place and Third Avenue, home of the American Bible Society and other religious organizations; Cooper Union (1853-58, Frederick A. Petersen), Astor Place and Third Avenue; and Tompkins Market/ 7th Regiment Armory (1855-60, James Bogardus and Marshall Lefferts; demolished), Third Avenue and East 7th Street.⁷ The New York Free Circulating Library, Ottendorfer Branch, and German Dispensary (1883-84, William Schickel), 135 and 137 Second Avenue, catered to the German community.⁸ Institutions that selected locations around Tompkins Square included the Children's Aid Society, Tompkins Square Lodging House for Boys and Industrial School (1886, Vaux & Radford), 295 East 8th Street, for the education and shelter of destitute working children; Children's Aid Society, Elizabeth Home for Girls (1891-92, Vaux & Radford), 307 East 7th Street, a refuge for homeless girls; Free Public Baths of the City of New York, East 11th Street Bath (1904-05, Arnold W. Brunner), 538 East 11th Street, which provided public bathing facilities; New York Public Library, Tompkins Square Branch (1904, McKim, Mead & White), 331 East 10th Street, which became known for its Polish book collection; and Public School 64 (1904-06, C.B.J. Snyder), 605 East 9th Street.⁹ Cafes and beer gardens, such as Aaron Ligety's Orpheum (c. 1905-06), 126 Second Avenue, and assembly halls such as Webster Hall and Annex (1886-87, 1892, Charles Renz), 119-125 East 11th Street,¹⁰ became important neighborhood social centers. Scattered throughout the area were purpose-built churches and synagogues for wealthier congregations, such as the Memorial Chapel of St. Mark's Parish (1882-83, James Renwick, Jr.)(St. Nicholas of Myra Orthodox Church since 1925), 288 East 10th Street, as well as many religious structures created out of altered rowhouses.

Tompkins Square was used as a parade ground by the Seventh Regiment from 1866 to 1878, then was known through the remainder of the 19th century as a gathering place for public demonstrations. The immediate neighborhood around the Square had become largely populated by the working and middle classes, mostly German-speaking. After the *General Slocum* tragedy of 1904, in which a steamboat burned and over one thousand people perished, mostly Germans from the neighborhood, many of the remaining German residents moved away. The neighborhood was repopulated by Italian, Eastern European, Russian, and Jewish immigrants.

Public and private investment in this area continued into the 1930s, as seen through such examples as the Public National Bank of New York Building (1923, Eugene Schoen), 106 Avenue C; Christadora House (1928, Henry C. Pelton), a settlement house at 145 Avenue B; Industrial National Bank of New York Building (1928-29, Landsman & Smith), 72 Second Avenue; and the First Houses (1935-36), the country's earliest public, low-income housing project, located at 29-41 Avenue A.¹¹

Architect: Eugene Schoen ¹²

Although little remembered today other than as a furniture designer (whose objects are highly sought by collectors), Eugene Schoen (1880-1957) was for the first half of the 20th century in the forefront of modern American architecture and interior design, a revered contemporary of many well-known colleagues. He was born in New York City of Hungarian Jewish ancestry. His father, Jacob Schoen, born in Esperies, Hungary, immigrated to the U.S. in 1878 and was a teacher; as the esteemed Grand Secretary of the Independent Order of B'rith Abraham, his funeral in 1913 was attended by an estimated crowd of 20,000. Eugene graduated from the first class of the Manual Training High School, Brooklyn (the first such school in what became Greater New York City) in 1897, then from Columbia University in 1902, having studied architecture. During the summers, he worked in the architectural office of McKim, Mead & White. From 1901 into the 1910s, he lectured on art and architecture at public schools in Brooklyn and Manhattan. He also became involved in leftist political causes.

According to his son, Lee Schoen, after his parents' marriage in 1902, they traveled through Europe (Eugene Schoen's passport application is dated 1904), ending their tour in Vienna. The founder of Columbia's Dept. of Architecture, William R. Ware, had arranged for a travel stipend and for Schoen to meet architect Otto Wagner, the leader of the Viennese modern movement, who also introduced him to Josef Hoffmann and artist Alphonse Mucha.¹³ Schoen later spent five months in Europe in 1913. According to the monograph *Josef Hoffmann: The Architectural Work* (1985) by Eduard F. Sekler, "Schoen brought back lasting impressions of Hoffmann's work from a tour of study in Vienna and effectively transposed them into designs of his own in New York."¹⁴ Hoffmann (1870-1956), a student of Wagner, was one of the founders in 1897 of the Vienna Secession, a group of painters, sculptors, and architects breaking away from the prevailing conservatism in the arts. He became a professor at the *Kunstgewerbeschule* (Arts and Crafts School) in 1899. In 1903, along with Kolomon Moser, Hoffmann formed the Wiener Werkstatte, initially a branch of the Secession but independent by 1905, which intended to stimulate cooperation among manufacturers and artists. Viennese architects were considered the most influential of professionals in the design fields at this time, with Hoffmann the acknowledged leader.

After his return to New York, around 1904, Schoen entered architectural practice, working briefly in the office of Robert W. Gibson. He was a partner in Hedman & Schoen, with the Swedish-born Axel S. Hedman (1861-), from 1905 to around 1918, during and after which time he practiced independently. Hedman & Schoen designed the First Hungarian Congregation, Ohab Zedek Synagogue (1906-07), 20 West 116th Street, and Bnai Sholaum Synagogue (1913-15), 401 9th Street, Brooklyn; and were associate architects for the remodeling of former Lenox Lyceum as the New German Theatre (1908, Herts & Tallant; demolished 1929), Madison Avenue and East 59th Street. Rudolph Rosenthal and Helena L. Ratzka, in *The Story of Modern Applied Art* (1948), called it "one of the first [American] buildings free of any style influence,"¹⁵ though it was clearly inspired by contemporary Viennese design, with murals by Alphonse Mucha. Schoen was responsible for the design of the Shaari Zedek Synagogue (1909-11), 767 Putnam Avenue, Brooklyn; the reinforced concrete Simms Magneto Co. factory (1914), Watsessing (East Orange), N.J.; Israel Orphan Asylum (1914-17; demolished), 274 East 2nd Street; and the reinforced concrete Nathan Mfg. Co. brass appliance factory complex (1916-17), Flushing, Queens; and participated in the design of houses in Forest Hills Gardens (after 1910). His own residence on Olive Place in that community was where he was said to have held artistic salons. During World War I, he was forced to find other employment, and served as general manager of the firm of his uncle, Emanuel Schoen, the International Oxygen Co., Newark, N.J., which dealt in electrolytic oxygen and hydrogen generating apparatus, cylinders, compressors, etc. In 1921, Schoen received the lucrative patronage of the Public National Bank of New York, which lasted until 1930, and is known to have designed many branch banks, including the neo-Classical style temple at No. 47-49 Graham Avenue (aka 63-73 Varet Street), Brooklyn (1921-23), featuring rusticated columns and corner piers; No. 106 Avenue C (1923); No. 319 Grand Street and No. 896 DeKalb Avenue (c. 1925), Brooklyn; No. 177 East Broadway (c. 1927); and the Art Moderne style No. 503 Claremont Parkway, Bronx (1930-31; altered).

Schoen was said to have been inspired to become largely an interior designer after attending the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes, Paris, and opened his own New York gallery. Christopher Long has described his aesthetic thusly:

*Schoen's designs merged the pure geometries and material sumptuousness he had taken from the Viennese with the elegance and softened contours of the French. His innovative mixture was animated and urbane, its evident refinement immediately won over a number of clients.*¹⁶

After 1928, at his gallery he displayed complete settings of rooms (including furniture, textiles, and rugs). He also participated in a number of influential design exhibitions, including Macy's International Exposition of Art in Industry (1928); The Architect and the Industrial Arts: An Exhibition of Contemporary Design (1929), for which he served on the Co-Operating Committee of Architects (with Raymond Hood, Ely Jacques Kahn, John W. Root, Eliel Saarinen, Joseph Urban, and Ralph T. Walker), and Contemporary American Industrial Art, 1934 (1935), the latter two at the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Schoen was part of the circle of the

leading modernist designer Paul T. Frankl, which also included Kahn, Hood, Urban, as well as Wolfgang Hoffmann (son of Josef) and his wife Pola, architect William Lescaze, designers Donald Deskey, Gilbert Rohde, and Walter von Nessen, and photographer Edward Steichen. Schoen was credited with bringing Bavarian glassmaker/ceramist Marianna von Allesch to the U.S. in 1928, and gave the sculptor Isamu Noguchi his first solo exhibition at the Eugene Schoen Gallery in 1929. In 1931, Schoen became a professor of interior architecture at New York University, and received a medal of honor “in native industrial art” from the Architectural League of New York, for a metal and glass building entrance.

He was named as technical advisor for the New York State exhibit at the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago in 1933-34, which resulted in two exhibition rooms with decorative panels by Urban and photomurals by Steichen. Among Schoen’s significant interior design commissions were the L.C. Smith & Corona Typewriter Co. showroom (1926), Fifth Avenue; Stewart & Co. (1929), Fifth Avenue and 56th Street; the nightclub of the S.S. *Leviathan* (1929); RKO Roxy Theater (1932; demolished) in the Rockefeller Center complex, for which the *New York Times* praised its “grace and sophisticated refinement;”¹⁷ the 3-story Dunhill tobacco/ specialty shop (1933) in the British Empire Building, Rockefeller Center; Café Loyale and Savoy Room (1936), Savoy Plaza Hotel; Lincoln Bar (1937), Hotel Lincoln; Cafritz House (c. 1939), Washington, D.C.; and Sherry-Netherland and Commodore Hotels. His later architectural work included the remodeling of the Soviet Embassy (1933-34), Washington, D.C.; alteration of the former Mark Twain House (1938), 14 West 10th Street (Schoen was president of the ownership corporation); conversion into apartments of the former Netherland Club (1939), 3 Gramercy Park (Schoen was the owner); and Sons of Israel Synagogue (1948-50, with Fritz Nathan), Woodmere, Long Island. Schoen was a member of the Federal Housing Authority during World War II.

Lee Schoen (1907-1994) was involved in the architectural practice by the late 1920s, and by 1937, they were joined by another son, Harold H. (c. 1905-1951), in the firm of Eugene Schoen & Sons. Their work included the National Safety Bank & Trust Co. (1937) in No. 1400 Broadway (Ely Jacques Kahn, architect); Philwold Estates summer house community (1939-40), Sullivan County, N.Y.; Jacques Kreisler Mfg. Corp. factory (1940, with James Rothstein), North Bergen, N.J.; Parke-Bernet Galleries interiors (1949), Madison Avenue; remodeling of the former Tiffany & Co. building as the Amalgamated Bank (1951), 11 Union Square; and Amalgamated Laundry Workers Union Health Center (1953), 226 East 34th Street.

The *New York Times* at his death in 1957 stated that “Schoen was regarded as one of the leading exponents of modern architecture and design and as such helped to develop the movement here.”¹⁸

Public National Bank of New York Building ¹⁹

The Public Bank, organized in 1908, became the Public National Bank of New York in 1917, with its headquarters on the Lower East Side at Delancey and Ludlow-Orchard Streets. The bank was characterized by continual steady growth, achieved without mergers and developing branches solely within the company. The bank advertised resources of approximately \$85 million in 1921, \$101.86 million in 1923, and over \$135 million in 1927. Its branches multiplied from six in Manhattan, two in the Bronx, and three in Brooklyn in 1923, to nine in Manhattan, eleven in the Bronx, and ten in Brooklyn in 1928. The president of Public National Bank from 1922 to 1929 was Alfred S. Rossin. Of German-Canadian descent, he had worked in his father’s tobacco firm, S[amuel]. Rossin & Sons, and married Clara Lewisohn, daughter of Adolph Lewisohn, the wealthy investment banker and philanthropist. In 1927, the firm became the Public National Bank & Trust Company of New York.

In September 1922, the *New York Times* carried an item that the bank had purchased a “three-story business building at the northeast corner of Avenue C and Seventh Street... [which will] be altered early next Spring and used by the bank as a branch office.”²⁰ Instead, the bank constructed a new building. The virtually unknown Public National Bank of New York Building, built in 1923 to the design of Eugene Schoen, is a highly unusual American structure displaying the direct influence of the early-20th century modernism of the eminent Viennese architect/designer Josef Hoffmann. Schoen filed for the structure in May 1923, to cost an estimated \$50,000. Demolition was completed on the site in June, with construction beginning later that

month; the bank building was completed in December 1923. The firm of [John J.] Leddy & Moore was general contractor. Approximately 23 by 49 feet, the 2-story structure housed a boiler room and safe deposit in the basement, tellers in the monumental banking floor on the ground story, and offices and utility rooms on the second story, served by an elevator. Fully fireproof, it was constructed with brick walls clad in 4-inch terra cotta, utilizing steel framing.

The original exterior design featured light grey granitex (having the color and texture of grey granite, with black flecks) terra-cotta cladding above a polished grey granite base; an angled corner bay with the entrance, having a grey granite surround; monumental capital-less fluted pilasters; and a broad, highly stylized molded cornice with a lower band with bosses. The entrance is surmounted by notable polychrome Viennese-inspired terra-cotta ornament in the form of a decorative band above which is a cartouche with a wreath of fruit (which originally held a clock) above an eagle, flanked by curvilinear forms and decorative urns. Originally, large framed rondel panels were located on the ground story. Though recently painted, the building is a major surviving example of the use of granitex terra cotta in this period. Terra cotta expert Susan Tunick has noted that, in contrast to previous usages of terra cotta in the late 19th century as a distinct material,

*at the turn of the century, as new glaze textures and finishes became available, once again the issue of terra cotta as a substitute material arose. This time glazed terra cotta was produced to intentionally mimic other building materials. ... Since terra cotta was cheaper than stone, it was often chosen as an economic substitute and was made to look as much like stone as possible. Company advertisements boasted of new glazes with names like "Granitex" that replicated the texture and color of granite and other natural stones.*²¹

The building's terra cotta was manufactured by the New York Architectural Terra Cotta Co.²² Schoen's interest in terra cotta as a wall material is evidenced by a 1947 letter he wrote to the *New York Times* in tribute to architect Ernest Flagg:

*The use of decorative terra cotta as a filling material between structural steel members was a much greater contribution to modern architecture than either the terra cotta treatments of Otto Wagner in Vienna or the reinforced concrete basic design forms even where executed in brick or even finer materials.*²³

Schoen's overall design for the Public National Bank of New York Building displays the influence of Hoffmann's refined neo-Classical work of the period c. 1909-15 (which Schoen may have seen during his 1913 trip to Europe), specifically such buildings as the Ast Villa (1909-11) and Skywa Villa (1913-15), Vienna, and Austria House (1914), German Werkbund Exhibition, Cologne. Direct references to Hoffmann's designs on Schoen's bank include the flat capital-less fluted pilasters, the highly stylized molded cornice, and the employment of "incrusted" ornament in certain areas, in particular the lower band with bosses of the cornice, and the Viennese-inspired terra-cotta ornament surmounting the entrance.

20th Century History of the East Village²⁴

After a period of decline, Greenwich Village was becoming known, prior to World War I, for its historic and picturesque qualities, its affordable housing, and the diversity of its population and social and political ideas. Many artists and writers, as well as tourists, were attracted to the Village. By the 1910s, property owners and merchants attempted to improve the Village's economy and rehabilitate its physical condition, with "shrewd realtors beg[inning] to amass their holdings of dilapidated housing."²⁵ These various factors and the increased desirability of the Village to upper-middle-class professionals lead to a real estate boom – "rents increased during the 1920s by 140 percent and in some cases by as much as 300 percent."²⁶ New York University, particularly after World War II, became a major institutional presence around and to the south and east of Washington Square. During the 1950s, the area south of Washington Square, to Houston Street, was targeted for urban renewal. The surviving historic streets to the west became particularly popular for coffee houses, restaurants, and clubs.

After World War II, the ethnic make-up of the Lower East Side changed again, becoming dominated by Latin American immigrants, especially those from Puerto Rico. Their immigration was encouraged by the

government as a source of cheap labor, particularly for the garment trades, hotels, and small manufacturing. The community named itself Loisaida to symbolize the second generation Hispanic roots that had developed in the context of the African-American and Latino movements for social and economic justice, equality, and identity.

The residential and cultural desirability of the neighborhood that came to be known as the “East Village” increased with the removal of the Third Avenue El in 1955. As indicated by Terry Miller, *the psychological barrier that had marked the eastern boundary of Greenwich Village was gone. Blocks that once had no prestige were suddenly seen as intriguing, and apartments here were less costly than those in Greenwich Village. ... As artists and writers moved east, the blocks from St. Mark’s Place to Tenth Street were the first to hint that the Lower East Side was being transformed. Realtors began marketing the area as “Village East,” and by 1961 as the “East Village,” a name that stuck.*²⁷

From World War I to the 1940s, Second Avenue between East 14th and Houston Streets had been considered the heart of New York’s Jewish community, known as the “Yiddish Rialto” for its role as the world’s center of Yiddish theater. As Yiddish theater declined, the East Village gave rise in the 1950s to “off-Broadway” theater, including the Phoenix Theater (1953-61) in the former Louis N. Jaffe Art Theater (Yiddish Art Theater) building (1925-26, Harrison G. Wiseman), 181-189 Second Avenue;²⁸ the Orpheum Theater (1958), 126 Second Avenue; and Ellen Stewart’s La Mama Theatre (1962), 321 East 9th Street (after 1969 at 74 East 4th Street). In the 1950s, the East Village also became home to a number of key Beat Generation writers, including Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs, Norman Mailer, and W.H. Auden. The neighborhood was renowned for its protest art and politics, galleries, poetry and coffee houses, bookstores, clubs, and the *East Village Other* “underground” newspaper (1965-72).

The Tompkins Square neighborhood experienced a number of demographic and physical changes. The massive area east of Avenue D, between Houston and 14th Streets, was redeveloped for the Lillian Wald and Jacob Riis Houses (1949). In the 1960s and 1970s, as New York City lost over half of its manufacturing jobs as well as a significant part of its population, the East Village (particularly the farther eastern section) suffered during this decline, with deteriorating infrastructure and housing stock, and lack of municipal investment. Following New York’s fiscal crisis of 1975, many building owners in this area walked away from their buildings. Loisaida or “Alphabet City” was often considered one of the rougher Manhattan neighborhoods in the 1970-80s. Arson targeted certain properties, though those local residents and community groups determined to stay began to rehabilitate buildings through sweat-equity.

Later History of the Public National Bank of New York Building²⁹

In 1952, the Public National Bank & Trust Co. opened a new branch bank in the East Village, at 682 Broadway (and 3rd Street). Public National Bank, described as “a retail bank with the fourth-largest branch network in New York City,”³⁰ was acquired in 1955 by the Bankers Trust Co. of New York (incorporated 1903). The Avenue C bank structure was sold in 1954 to the Stuyvetant Realty Corp. (Grand Rabbi Isak Leifer, president, Dr. Bernard Bergman, vice president), and converted in 1954-55 into the Stuyvesant Nursing Home. An intermediate floor was added between the original first and second stories, and an entrance was added at the east end of the 7th Street facade, by architect Henry G. Harris. The nursing home was reported closed by 1975, and became linked to the scandal associated with Dr. Bergman who, with family and associates, operated at least 70 nursing homes in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, most notoriously the Towers Nursing Home, Central Park West and 104th Street.³¹ After several long state investigations into allegations of profiteering and patient abuse, Bergman was indicted in 1975 and convicted of Medicare fraud. This property was conveyed in 1972 to Gizella Malek of Brooklyn, then to 231 East 7th Street Realty Corp. (Malek, president) in 1978. It was foreclosed by the City in 1977-78 for non-payment of taxes, and used in 1977 as a special business assistance center after the city’s power blackout, which was accompanied by looting and vandalism. The former bank building was conveyed in 1980 to the noted artist and furniture craftsman Richard Artschwager (1923-)³² and his wife, nee Catherine A. Kord. It was converted into apartments in the 1980s.

Description

Originally two stories, the bank structure had a monumental ground-story banking floor and upstairs offices. An intermediate floor was added between these original stories in 1954-55. Clad in light grey granitex (having the color and texture of grey granite, with black flecks) terra cotta (painted in 2007) above a polished grey granite base (pierced by basement windows with grilles on the Avenue C facade), the design featured an angled corner bay with the original entrance (with double doors, now filled in) set within a grey granite surround, capital-less fluted pilasters, and a broad, highly stylized molded cornice (now painted) with a lower band with bosses. The original corner entrance is surmounted by curved tile band (now painted) that originally held the name of the bank, which is surmounted by polychrome Viennese-inspired terra-cotta ornament in the form of a decorative band above which is a cartouche with a wreath of fruit (which originally held a clock) above an eagle, flanked by curvilinear forms and decorative urns. The building's terra cotta was manufactured by the New York Architectural Terra Cotta Co.

Original sash was one-over-one double-hung wood. There was originally a secondary entrance to the east of the corner entrance (now filled in). An entrance was added at the east end of the 7th Street facade in 1954-55. With the insertion of the intermediate (now second) story, a number of alterations occurred. On the ground story, original large framed rondel panels were removed and painted concrete panels and glass-block windows were installed (c. 1954-55). The second story has painted concrete spandrel panels (c. 1954-55) and replacement one-over-one double-hung sash (c. 1980s). The third story has original tile spandrel panels (now painted) and replacement one-over-one double-hung sash (c. 1980s).

Report prepared by
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NOTES

1. LPC, *New York Public Library, Tompkins Square Branch Designation Report* (LP-1998) (N.Y.: City of New York, 1999), prepared by Mary Dierickx, *Children's Aid Society, Tompkins Square Lodging House for Boys and Industrial School Designation Report* (LP-2055) (N.Y.: City of New York, 2000)), prepared by Eric Washington, and *Hamilton-Holly House Designation Report* (LP-2157)(N.Y.: City of New York, 2004), prepared by Jay Shockley; "Mangle Minthorn," U.S. Census (New York, 1800).
2. The church is a designated New York City Landmark.
3. Luther Harris, *Around Washington Square: An Illustrated History of Greenwich Village* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Pr., 2003), 35.
4. Of the original nine houses, Nos. 428-434 are extant and are designated New York City Landmarks.
5. Two houses on this block, Nos. 4 and 20 (Hamilton-Holly and Daniel LeRoy Houses), are intact and are designated New York City Landmarks.
6. It is a designated New York City Landmark.
7. The Astor Library and Cooper Union are designated New York City Landmarks.
8. Both buildings are designated New York City Landmarks.
9. All of these buildings are designated New York City Landmarks.

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10. It is a designated New York City Landmark.
 11. First Houses is a designated New York City Landmark.
 12. LPC, architects files; James Ward, *Architects in Practice, New York City 1900-1940* (N.Y.: Comm. for the Pres. of Archl. Recs., 1989); New York Architectural Terra Cotta Co., archives; "Board of Education Lectures," *New York Times (NYT)*, Jan. 13, 1901, 10; "Free Lectures," *NYT*, Oct. 19, 1901, BR12; "Manual Training High School," *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, Nov. 17, 1901, 28; "Eugene Schoen," U.S. passport application (1904); "The Building Department," *NYT*, May 18, 1906, 15; "Synagogue of the First Hungarian Congregation, Ohab Zedek, West 116th Street, New York, N.Y.," *American Architect & Building News*, Sept. 28, 1907, 104, pl. 1657; "New Home Uptown for German Theatre," *NYT*, Mar. 1, 1908, 9; "The German Theatre in New York," *Architectural Record*, Dec. 1908, 408-416; "The Decoration of the New German Theatre," *Architects' & Builders' Magazine*, Dec. 1908, 89-92; Bill Morrison, "The Theaters of Herts & Tallant," *Marquee* (No. 4, 1990), 15, 17, 20; "Latest Dealings in Realty Field," *NYT*, May 15, 1910, X11; "Four New Lecture Centres," *NYT*, Sept. 25, 1910, 16; "Shaari Zedek Synagogue, Brooklyn, N.Y.," *American Architect & Building News*, Feb. 22, 1911, pl. 1835; "Factory for the Simms Magneto Co., Watsessing, N.J.," *American Architect & Building News*, June 14, 1911, 232-233; "20,000 at Funeral of Jacob Schoen," *NYT*, June 30, 1913, 7; "Art at Home and Abroad," *NYT*, Jan. 4, 1914, SM15; *American Jewish Yearbook* (1916), 98; "The Real Estate Field," *NYT*, May 24, 1916, 19; "Manufacturing Building for Nathan Manufacturing Company, Flushing, Long Island, New York," *American Architect*, Oct. 24, 1917, 293-296, 303-305; "Eugene Schoen," World War I draft registration card (1918), U. 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- “Eugene Schoen,” www.greenbriarwoodworks.com website (2007).
13. Lee Schoen, in Rigdon, 2.
 14. Eduard F. Sekler, *Josef Hoffmann: The Architectural Work* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Pr., 1985), 189.
 15. Rosenthal and Ratzka, 158.
 16. Long, 61.
 17. Jan. 1, 1933.
 18. Eugene Schoen obit.
 19. New York County, Office of the Register, Liber Deeds and Conveyances; NYC, Dept. of Buildings (NB 233-1923); Jaffray Peterson, *Sixty-five Years of Progress and a Record of New York City Banks* (N.Y.: 1935), 105; C.E. Unterberg & Co., *An Analysis of the Public National Bank & Trust Company of New York* (N.Y.: 1934); “New Bank Buildings,” *NYT*, Feb. 1, 1921, 27; “J.E. Reynolds Heads 1st National Bank,” *NYT*, Jan. 11, 1922, 37; “The Brooklyn Market,” *NYT*, Sept. 13, 1922, 42; Public National Bank, advertisement, *NYT*, Apr. 11, 1923, 34, and May 16, 1927, 35; “Latest Dealings in Realty Field,” *NYT*, Aug. 16, 1924, 16; Alfred Rossin obit., *NYT*, June 6, 1947, 23.
 20. Sept. 13, 1922.
 21. Susan Tunick, *Terra-Cotta Skyline* (Princeton: Princeton Archl. Pr., 1997), 62.
 22. New York Architectural Terra Cotta Co., Job files (Job No. 6777). This information is courtesy of Susan Tunick, president of the Friends of Terra Cotta. The New York Architectural Terra Cotta Co. was established in 1886 by Orlando B. Potter (with Asahel Clarke Geer) after his experience in the construction of his Potter Building (1883-86, Norris G. Starkweather), 35-38 Park Row, which used extensive architectural terra cotta. The only major architectural terra cotta firm in New York City, it became one of the largest such American manufacturers, producing ornament for such notable structures as Carnegie Hall (1889-91, William B. Tuthill), Montauk Club (1889-91, Francis H. Kimball), West End Collegiate Church and School (1892-93, Robert W. Gibson), Ansonia Hotel (1899-1904, Paul E.M. Duboy), and Plaza Hotel (1905-07, Henry Hardenbergh). The Montauk Club is located within the Park Slope Historic District; the other buildings are all designated New York City Landmarks.
 23. Schoen, “Architectural Work of Ernest Flagg.”
 24. LPC, *Public School 64 Designation Report* (LP-2189) (N.Y.: City of New York, 2006), prepared by Virginia Kurshan, and *Hamilton-Holly House Designation Report*.
 25. Jan S. Ramirez, “The Tourist Trade Takes Hold,” in Rick Beard and Leslie C. Berlowitz, edit., *Greenwich Village: Culture and Counterculture* (New Brunswick: Rutgers Univ. Pr., 1993), 388.
 26. Jan S. Ramirez, “Greenwich Village,” in Kenneth T. Jackson, ed., *The Encyclopedia of New York City* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Pr., 1995), 508.
 27. Terry Miller, *Greenwich Village and How It Got That Way* (N.Y.: Crown Publs., 1990), 258.
 28. This building is a designated New York City Landmark and Interior Landmark.

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29. New York County; NYC, Dept. of Buildings; "Bankers Trust New York Corp.," Lisa Mirabile, ed., *International Directory of Company Histories 2* (Chicago: St. James Pr., 1990), 229-230; "At Opening of Public National Bank Branch," *NYT*, Mar. 25, 1952, 37; "Manhattan Transfers," *NYT*, Aug. 10, 1954, 33, and Oct. 18, 1955, 61; "Building Plans Filed," *NYT*, Nov. 2, 1956, 45; "Recreation Plan for Aged Mapped," *NYT*, June 22, 1958, 42; "10 Homes in Connecticut Are Linked to Bergman," *NYT*, Jan. 31, 1975, 48; "City Help for Stores Damaged in Blackout," *NYT*, July 25, 1977, 24.
30. "Bankers Trust New York Corp."
31. Originally the New York Cancer Hospital, it is a designated New York City Landmark.
32. "Artschwager's 'Climate of Ambiguity,'" *NYT*, July 22, 1979, D27; "Art: Sculptures of Richard Artschwager," *NYT*, Oct. 17, 1986, A1; "He Furnishes Objects to Fit a World Gone Awry," *NYT*, Jan. 17, 1988, H27; "Art: Works by Richard Artschwager," *NYT*, Jan. 29, 1988, C32.

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 Public National Bank of New York Building (later Public National Bank & Trust Company of New York Building) has a special character and a 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 Public National Bank of New York Building in the East Village is a highly unusual American structure displaying the direct influence of the early-twentieth-century modernism of eminent Viennese architect/designer Josef Hoffmann; that, built in 1923, the bank was designed by Eugene Schoen (1880-1957), an architect born in New York City of Hungarian Jewish descent, who graduated from Columbia University in 1902 and soon after traveled to Europe, meeting Otto Wagner and Hoffmann in Vienna; that, although little remembered today other than as a furniture designer (whose objects are highly sought by collectors), Schoen was for the first half of the 20th century in the forefront of modern American design, a revered contemporary of many well-known colleagues, with the *New York Times* at his death stating that “Schoen was regarded as one of the leading exponents of modern architecture and design and as such helped to develop the movement here”; that this was one of the many branch banks that Schoen designed between 1921 and 1930 for the Public National Bank of New York (Public National Bank & Trust Co. of New York after 1927), which had its headquarters on the Lower East Side; that, originally two stories with a monumental ground-story banking floor and upstairs offices, the structure is clad in light grey granitex (having the color and texture of grey granite) terra cotta (recently painted) manufactured by the New York Architectural Terra Cotta Co., above a polished grey granite base, and was designed with an angled corner bay with the entrance, flat capital-less fluted pilasters, and a broad, highly stylized molded cornice with a lower band with bosses, the latter features direct references to Hoffmann’s work; that the entrance is surmounted by notable polychrome Viennese-inspired terra-cotta ornament in the form of a decorative band above which is a cartouche with a wreath of fruit (which originally held a clock) above an eagle, flanked by curvilinear forms and decorative urns; and that, after its sale in 1954, the building was converted into a nursing home, with the addition of an intermediate floor, and into apartments in the 1980s.

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 Public National Bank of New York Building (later Public National Bank & Trust Company of New York Building), 106 Avenue C (aka 231 East 7th Street), Borough of Manhattan, and designates Manhattan Tax Map Block 377, Lot 72, as its Landmark Site.

Robert B. Tierney, Chair; Pablo E. Vengoechea, Vice Chair

Fred Bland, Stephen F. Byrns, Diana Chapin, Joan Gerner, Roberta Brandes Gratz, Christopher Moore, Commissioners



Public National Bank of New York Building, 106 Avenue C

Photo: Christopher D. Brazee



Public National Bank of New York Building, 106 Avenue C

Photo: NYC, Dept. of Taxes (c. 1939)



Public National Bank of New York Building, 106 Avenue C

Photo: LPC, Albert J. Winn (c. 1983)



Public National Bank of New York Building, 106 Avenue C

Photo: Caroline Pasion (2006)



Public National Bank of New York Building, 106 Avenue C

Photo: Caroline Pasion (2006)



Public National Bank of New York Building, 106 Avenue C

Photo: Christopher D. Brazee



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Public National Bank of New York Building, 106 Avenue C

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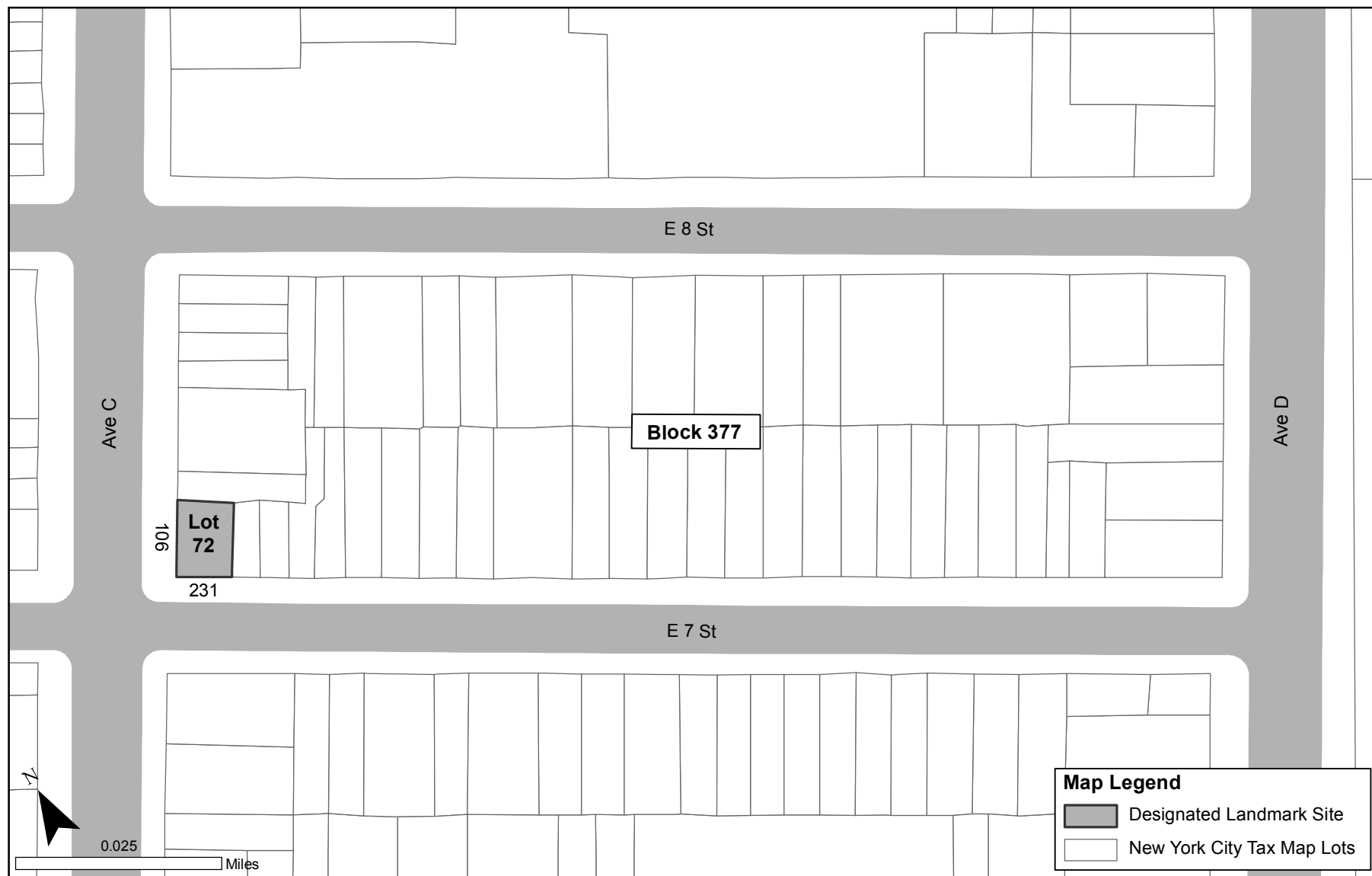
Public National Bank of New York Building, 106 Avenue C

Photo: Christopher D. Brazee



Villa Skywa (1913-15, Josef Hoffmann), Vienna

Photo: Jay Shockley



PUBLIC NATIONAL BANK OF NEW YORK BUILDING (later Public National Bank & Trust Company of New York Building),
106 Avenue C (aka 231 East 7th Street). Borough of Manhattan, Tax Map Block 377, Lot 72.

Designated: September 16, 2008

Graphic Source: New York City Department of City Planning, MapPLUTO, Edition 06C, December 2006.
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